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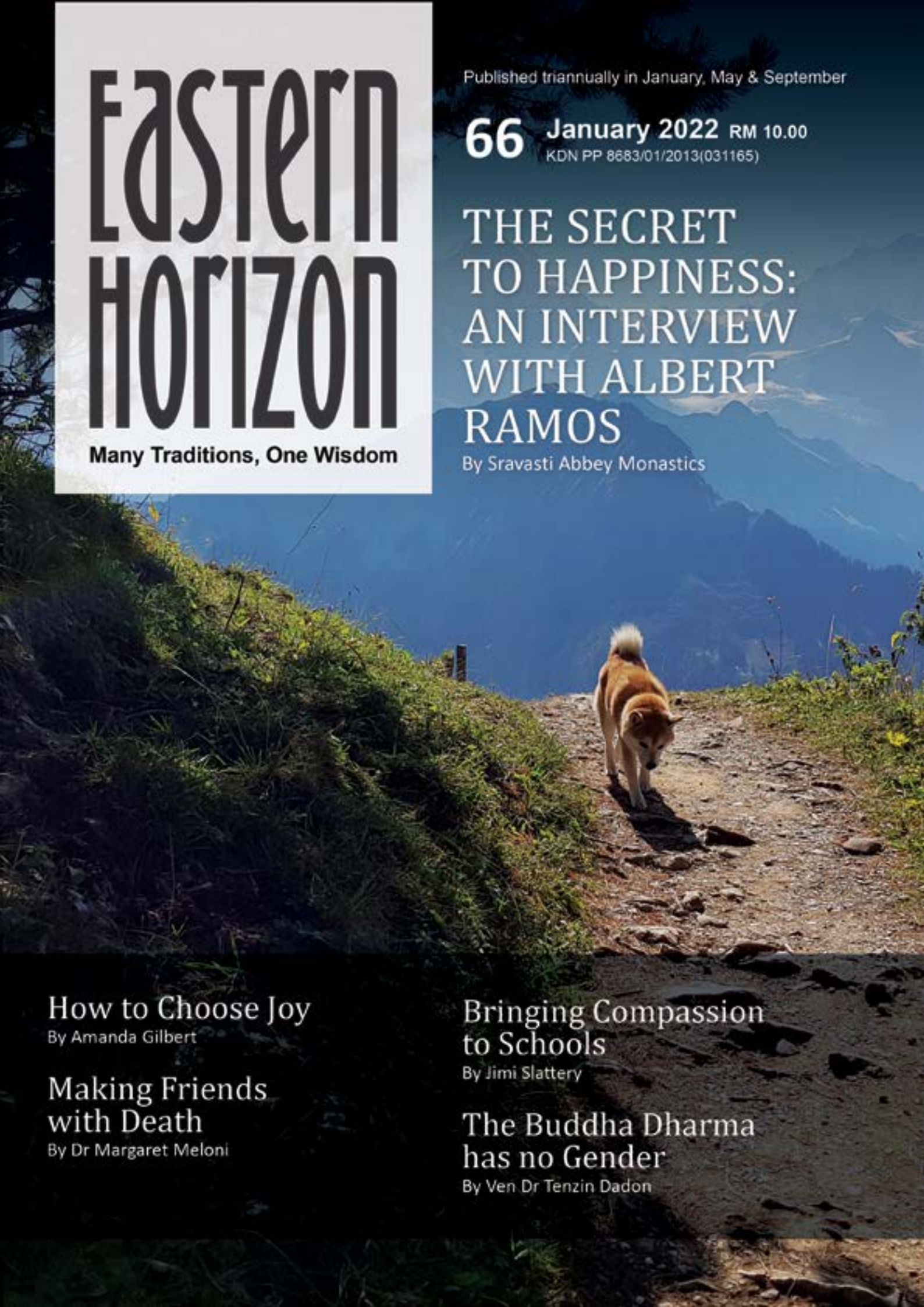
Eastern Horizon

Many Traditions, One Wisdom

THE SECRET TO HAPPINESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH ALBERT RAMOS

By Sravasti Abbey Monastics



How to Choose Joy

By Amanda Gilbert

Making Friends with Death

By Dr Margaret Meloni

Bringing Compassion to Schools

By Jimi Slattery

The Buddha Dharma has no Gender

By Ven Dr Tenzin Dadon

‘Resurgence of Amendments to Act 355’ Online Forum

Date: 09.10.2021 & 10.10.2021 Time: 8:00PM – 10:00PM Venue: Youtube & FB Live

YBAM National Council and committee members having an online interactive session with Professor Dr. Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi before the forum.

The Forum was co-organized by YBAM, Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies, and Persatuan Belia Xiang Lian Malaysia. The speakers of the English Forum were Professor Dr. Mohamad Tajuddin Mohamad Rasdi (right) and Siti Zabedah Kasim (center), a lawyer and activist. Eow Shiang Yen (left) was the moderator.

Professor Dr. Mohamad Tajuddin explaining his concerns about the issue of religious freedom.

Siti Kasim shared her views from the legal perspective.

Gan Ping Sieu (top right), co-President of Centre of a Better Tomorrow (CENBET) and Hu Pang Chaw (bottom), Central Committee member of Parti Amanah Negara, sharing their views in the Mandarin forum. Ong Yee Hong (top left) was the moderator.

Gan Ping Sieu elaborated the difference between secular regime and Islamic regime.

Editorial

Living with the Pandemic in the New Normal

It's been two years now since the first known case of Covid-19 was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. The disease has since spread worldwide, leading to an on-going pandemic. To date, over 5 million people have died world-wide. But after two years, is an end of the pandemic in sight? Experts say that Covid-19 will likely lose its pandemic status sometime next year, due largely to rising global vaccination rates and developments of antiviral Covid pills that could soon become more readily available worldwide, despite the spread of the new variant Omicron. The virus will likely become "endemic," eventually fading in severity and folding into the backdrop of regular, everyday life. Yet, the uncertainty and fear of being infected with Covid-19 remains.

As practitioners of the Buddha Dharma, we realize that uncertainty is a fact of life and a characteristic of our existence. It is therefore good to be reminded what the Buddha said about living with uncertainty.

The first teaching is from the Upajatthana Sutta, AN 5.57, where the Buddha taught us to contemplate that whoever is born will be subject to aging, illness, and death; hence, eventual separation from those we love. This reminds us that uncertainty is natural to ordinary life. With right understanding, we learn to make peace with our reality, no matter what, by expecting impermanence, lack of control, and unpredictability. For us to think otherwise will only add unnecessary suffering.

In a related teaching found in the Sallatha Sutta, SN 36.6, the Buddha explained that when we experience something painful - being infected with Covid-19 or news that a close relative has died – this is as if the world has shot an arrow into us. With understanding, we acknowledge that the pain we feel is normal. But if we lack the understanding that such suffering is a result of our being, then we will be shot by a second arrow. In life, we often cannot control the first arrow but the pain from the second arrow is caused by our reaction to the first. While we cannot control our external environment, we can control our attitude by recognizing that while we don't have a choice with the first arrow, we do have an option not to be affected by a second arrow.

Another important Buddhist teaching to understand during this pandemic is the nature of inter-connection between everything. We can clearly see this during the pandemic. When we are mindful of our actions, by taking care of our own health such as washing our hands, social distancing, etc., we are protecting ourselves as well as others. It actually breaks down the dualistic view of separateness between self and other, or self and society. This is the Buddhist meaning of interconnection.

As we are inter-connected to all sentient beings, the suffering of others is also our own suffering. Therefore, we put into practice the four sublime mental states: loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. Such noble qualities help us transform our fears and worries about the pandemic into motivation to change our life and perspectives of the world, and to radiate the same qualities towards others. We can therefore view obstacles such as the enduring Covid pandemic as part of the spiritual path, and use them as our commitment to live a more spiritual life for the benefit of oneself and others.

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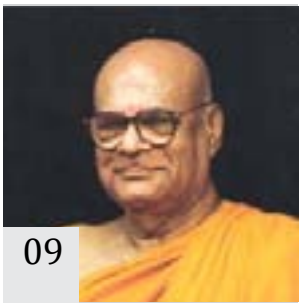

EASTERN HORIZON

Many Traditions, One Wisdom.

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We welcome constructive ideas, invite fresh perspectives and accept comments. Please direct your comments or enquiries to:

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The Secret to Happiness: An Interview with Albert Ramos

By Albert Ramos

Albert with Venerable Thubten Chodron

Hermits meditating in high mountain caves. Masters giving empowerments to thousands of devotees. Erudite scholars translating sutras and writing commentaries. These might be some images that come to mind when we think of great Dharma practitioners, but some of them are engaging in deep and sincere practice where we least expect it—in prison.

Albert Ramos—also known as "Al" for short—is a Dharma student behind bars who has been corresponding with Buddhist nun Venerable Thubten Chodron for many years. He has just written his first children's book, *Gavin Discovers the Secret to Happiness*, edited by Venerable Chodron and published by Sravasti Abbey in August 2021. Through an engaging story about a puppy named Gavin who befriends Bodhi, an older dog with cancer, Al shares with children and their parents what he has learned first-hand about love, compassion, and what truly brings joy in life. Delightful illustrations by volunteer Miguel Rivero bring scenes from the story to life.

Venerable Thubten Chonyi and Venerable Thubten Damcho, disciples of Venerable Thubten Chodron, wrote to Al to find out more about his Dharma practice and his inspiration for writing this book, and were moved to learn how he is applying the Buddha's teachings and maintaining a happy mind through the challenges of Covid. Here's their interview with Al conducted via snail mail, in his own words for Eastern Horizon.

Chonyi & Damcho: **How did you meet the Dharma?**

Al: In 2007 or 2008 an acquaintance named Jerry offered to let me read a copy of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki. The Buddhist concepts were completely foreign and I didn't even finish the book. In fall of 2009 I received a copy of *The Teaching of Buddha* by the Buddhist Promoting Foundation. That little orange book stirred something inside me. Soon, I would begin to order Dharma-rich books.

Please share with us what your Dharma practice is like.

My daily Dharma practice includes a morning meditation. Sometimes I do *tonglen* [taking and giving meditation] and I enjoy Chenrezig or Vajrasattva mantra recitation. Then I write in my gratitude/ happiness journal, followed by setting good intentions for the day. Also, I like to read from a Dharma book before heading out to class. Lately, I've been reading *Don't Believe Everything You Think* by Thubten Chodron. It is a great commentary on Togmay Zangpo's "The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas" filled with wonderful examples.

How has the Dharma helped you in life?

The Dharma has helped me to transition from being a sad and angry person to a happy, compassionate, empathy-filled, and outgoing person. Despite being in prison, my heart and mind are liberated from depression and hostility. Dharma has given me peace, balance, and rationality.

How is your mind different now that you have met the Dharma?

Through Dharma practice and meditation, I am much more mindful of my thoughts, speech, and actions. My mind no longer festers on objects, which causes suffering. Awareness of the Dharma allows me to think things through before acting from negative impulses.

Tell us about some situations you encountered while incarcerated and how you practiced the Dharma to deal with them in a good way.

Starting in late January, my block became overwhelmed by Covid-19. Within 25 days, I moved locations five times. At one point I stayed in the gym and showered using a water hose in a janitor's closet. The Dharma helped keep my mind calm as I understood the fleeting nature of each and every situation. There had been many days, months, and years of stability. It is only natural that change will come. Sharing with others the reality of change helped defuse our anger and frustration. Encouraging others that the uncomfortable situation would pass and that we still have it much better than others helped to some degree as well.

What would you like people to know about you and what it is like to practice the Dharma in prison?

I like to make people laugh. I like to welcome new people because even though we seldom admit it, it can be scary when moving to a new prison where we don't know anyone. There are not many Dharma practitioners in North Carolina's prisons. However, everyone has the buddha nature. I like to view everyone as fully capable of buddhahood. My Dharma practice involves sharing kindness with everyone.

What was your inspiration for writing the book *Gavin Discovers the Secret to Happiness*?

Initially, a psychologist I knew had a dog that suffered from and eventually overcame cancer. In addition, I do not have children, but view a children's book as a way to reach and teach many children. Most of the characters are based on my family and friends. For example, Bodhi is based on my own Norfolk Terrier named Turtle. Gavin is a well-meaning dog, but he was taught to be mean to cats by other dogs. Sometimes children are taught at an early age to dislike and to hate other people for nothing more than looking different. I aim to help children think about their own biases and beliefs before acting on them.

How has writing supported your Dharma practice?

Writing with a positive and healthy motivation helps me to stay centered on the Dharma. Thinking of ways to talk creatively about the Dharma and how to make wise choices through fictional characters gives a fresh face to the compassion-driven voice of Buddhism.

What message do you hope people will take away from reading *Gavin Discovers the Secret to Happiness*?

After reading *Gavin Discovers the Secret to Happiness*, I hope that it helps people to be happy and content in any situation. Children and parents don't have to be wealthy in order to be satisfied. True happiness comes from within and from spending quality time with others. It feels good to have spontaneous compassion.

Are you working on your next book or books? Please tell us more about them.

Yes, I am working on another family story that involves animals. The story I am working on is specifically for children with incarcerated parents. Perhaps the book can be used as a tool in helping children to better understand their parents' situation and their own.

A copy of this book is available on Amazon.
Al not only writes for children, he writes poems about his Dharma insights while practicing in prison too. Here's a poem he wrote about contentment.

Big Piece

By Albert Ramos

Why is it that we always feel as if
we always get the short end of the stick?
It seems as if everyone else
has it better.
They get the fancy car,
win the lottery,
have the big piece of cake . . .

Recently in the chow hall I was in line for lunch.
Someone in a wheelchair approached
and I told him to skip in front of me.
They thanked me and I responded, "You're welcome."

I noticed that everyone seemed to have a huge,
fluffy, dark, decadent piece of chocolate cake.
And I said to myself, "now watch how small
my piece will be."

What optimistic anticipation I had!

And sure enough, my piece seemed to have
been mauled, trampled on, and dropped from
a ten story building.

Just my luck! As I walked to the table
I told myself, "Take it easy. Isn't complaining what
you're supposed to steer away from?"
Isn't contentment a rich enough nutrient to curb
this passing desire?

Would I rather have a crumbing tiny piece of cake
with two abled legs to walk and run on my own?

Or would I rather have a slab of cake too heavy
for one hand, falling off all sides of a tray,
and be confined to a wheelchair with one leg?

In that moment, the confinement of complaining was
lifted.

The crumbling desire was abandoned.
There is a flavor far more rich than chocolate cake.
A bliss which has no doors for the six misleading senses.

It is a vision that understands
the eight mundane concerns.
Delicious nectar from the Three Precious Jewels
whose path can be walked
with two legs or not.


Venerable Thubten Chonyi and Venerable Thubten Damcho are resident bhikshunis at Sravasti Abbey, a Tibetan monastery for English speakers founded by Venerable Thubten Chodron in Newport, Washington, USA. The Abbey's Prison Dharma Program offers spiritual counseling and sends Dharma books, DVDs of teachings, and prayer beads to hundreds of incarcerated people each year. The Abbey also publishes and mails a quarterly prison Dharma newsletter. Learn more at https://thubtenchodron.org/buddhist-approach/04-buddhism-in-prison/ **EH**

Dharma Student Qualities: How to Listen to Dharma

By Khenpo Gyaltsen

Khenpo Gyaltsen was born in Nepal on May 10, 1973. He is a direct descendant of the family of the illustrious Tibetan King Trisong Deutsen. At the age of nine, he entered Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling monastery, in Boudhanath, Nepal, established by Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. There he studied philosophical and ritual texts until the age of twenty-five. During these years he received many initiations and transmissions from his principal guru, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. Notably, Khenpo received the precious "instructions on the mind." Additionally, he received many texts and empowerments from Tsikey Chokling Rinpoche and Kyabje Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche.

Khenpo Gyaltsen traveled to India in 1997. There he studied the Buddhist tradition of logic for three years in the great Thekchen Choling. In 2000, he entered the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute where he completed his ninth and final year. Thereafter, he received the Acharya degree from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. After graduation, he remained in India, continuing to teach for four years. In 2011, Karma Kuchen Rinpoche bestowed on him the title of Khenpo. This title is equivalent to a PhD in modern academic systems. In 2012, he returned to live and teach at Ka-nying Shedrub Ling monastery.

Khenpo Gyaltsen is a popular teacher at the Sangye Yeshe Monastic Shedra at Ka-Nying Monastery. International students also enjoy his philosophy classes at Rangjung Yeshe Institute, allied to the University of Kathmandu. Khenpo wrote an introductory volume on the Buddhadharma, A Lamp Illuminating the Path to Liberation, which Phakchok Rinpoche requested be translated into English by the translation team at Lhasey Lotsawa.

Developing Qualities of a Dharma Student

A Dharma student may enter the Buddhist path through a number of different doorways. We may be searching for some stress relief, some quiet space, or some deeper meaning in life. From that sense of unease or curiosity, we may decide to examine meditation or mindfulness training. Then, as we begin to explore our minds, we may become interested in learning more about Buddhism. Another way we begin engaging is by noticing and responding positively to pithy quotes from Buddhist teachers.

From that initial spark, we might read some Buddhist books or listen to a few podcasts. A friend could recommend a few websites and we might then spend some time listening to brief snippets of

New Monks and Nuns at Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling Monastery, May 15, 2016

Main Temple of Ka-Nying Shedrub Ling

teachings. Or we gradually find ourselves attending a few talks and retreats. Eventually, we may even enroll in some weekend seminars or sign up for some on-line Buddhist courses. We have become a Dharma student.

Yet, do we know how to make the most of this opportunity? We may not be sure of how we should approach learning. Now we have a unique opportunity and we might want some practical advice. Here, we can turn to classic Buddhist texts for suggestions on how to be the best type of Dharma student.

In this excerpt from Khenpo Gyaltsen's *A Lamp Illuminating the Path to Liberation: An Explanation of Essential Topics for Dharma Students,* Khenpo examines quotes from classic Mahāyāna texts. This practical advice from a lama using authentic sources benefits our listening and studies. For example, we can learn the importance of framing our practice with the best motivation. And once we know the proper approach for a Dharma student, we can make swift progress!

The Way the Student Listens to the Dharma: The Qualities of the Student

The qualities of the student, the listener, are as taught in the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:
An unprejudiced, intelligent, and interested Listener is called a vessel.

As explained there, if you listen to the dharma whilst holding your own view to be supreme, then even if the speaker gives an excellent discourse it will not be of any benefit to you. This being so, we first of all need to have an unprejudiced attitude. This is a very important point. The student should have the following four qualities.

Regarding the first quality, an unprejudiced attitude, it is taught in *The Essence of the Middle Way*:
By being biased, the mind is anguished
And peace will never be attained

[Aryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way, translated by Ruth Sonam (Snow Lion Publications, 2008), p. 239]

The second quality is to be intelligent; the student needs a natural intelligence through which he can understand the words and meaning of the teaching that is being explained.

The third quality is that the student needs to have the interest that wishes to understand the words and meaning of the teaching.

The fourth quality is that the student needs to have respect and be free of pride.

The Manner in which the Student Listens to the Dharma

At the outset, the manner in which the student listens is the most important factor, and his motivation even more so. For, as it is said:
What makes an action good or bad?
Not how it looks, nor whether it is big or small,
But the good or evil motivation behind it.

[*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Sacred Literature, 1998), p. 8]
And:
Everything is circumstantial
And depends entirely on one's aspiration.

[*The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul Rinpoche, translated by the Padmakara Translation Group (Sacred Literature, 1998), p. 9]

In this way, if your motivation is to gain status and reputation for yourself then, no matter how much dharma study and practice you may do, it will not be authentic. Therefore, at the very outset it is crucial to correct your motivation. The vast mind-set, the motivation of bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment) is to think as follows:

"All sentient beings here in samsara, without a single exception, have been my parents. When they were my parents, they gave me the best of the food that they had, they lovingly clothed me, and they raised me with intense love and care. They were extremely kind. These kind parents long for happiness but do not know how to engage in the causes of happiness – the ten virtues. They do not want to suffer, yet they do not know how to abandon the causes of suffering – the ten non-virtues. In this way, their most basic wish and their actions are in contradiction. They have stumbled onto a

mistaken path and are in a state of utter confusion, just like a blind person stranded in the middle of a plain. These poor sentient beings! I will now listen to the sacred dharma and put it into practice and accomplish their aims. I will purify the karmic appearances and habitual tendencies of each of the six classes of sentient beings. I will do this for all my parent sentient beings, tormented as they are by the sufferings of the six classes, and I will establish every single one of them at the level of ultimate omniscience, enlightenment."

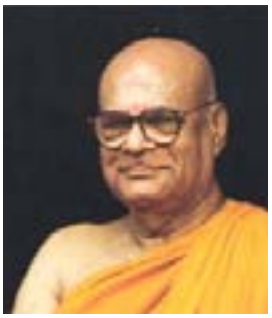
This motivation is of utmost importance in all contexts, whether you are studying, reflecting upon, meditating, or practicing the dharma.

This Teaching is an excerpt from:

A Lamp Illuminating the Path to Liberation: An Explanation of Essential Topics for Dharma Students by Khenpo Gyaltsen (translated by Lhasey Lotsawa Translations, Nepal: 2014, pp. 10-12). For more information, please visit https://lhaseylotsawa.org/books/a-lamp-illuminating-the-path-to-liberation. **EH**

Human Life

By Venerable K Sri Dhammananda Maha Nayaka Thera



K Sri Dhammananda (1918-2006) was the late abbot of Buddhist Maha Vihara in Kuala Lumpur and the most prominent Buddhist monk and scholar in Malaysia and Singapore during his half a decade of selfless missionary work to educate the communities in both countries about the importance of study and practice of Buddhism. He was also a prolific writer, having authored hundreds of pamphlets and books to explain the teachings of the Buddha in a simple and practical manner that is easily understood by the population.

"Dear devotees actually I never thought I would have the chance to see and talk to you. You see half of my body is dead, but my heart, my mind still has energy. What is this diseased body?

Is it life? No, it's not life. It's the house. Life is the energy, mental, kammic and cosmic all joined together as "energy ". That is life.

Body is decayed and life goes away. Actually we must be happy when time comes to depart without suffering. To crave so much for the body, we spend our whole life decorating, looking after it, and one day it decays and when energy and the elements dissipate, then mental energy will build another house. Life started with mental energy and then birth occurs. Every single child cries, none smiles after birth. Life is suffering; we are using whole amounts of energy tomaintain this physical body, but one day we have to depart. Then leaves solidity and fluidity ~ two elements only, heat and motion has gone.

Christians and Muslims are particular about the body as they believe in resurrection; we do not believe that there is anything in this physical body. Spend thousands on funerals, but the departed never get anything! The only way to support the departed, you must know how to make use of this life. That is why religion is needed to help us to cultivate compassion, sympathy and kindness and supporting others.

David Morris sent me a letter, he said there are 2 reasons to be happy as an old man:(1) he will soon be free from pain and suffering, (2) ever since he became a Buddhist he has tried his best to maintain and uphold the 5 precepts, if there is another life it won't be an unfortunate one as he departs with confidence.

In the end the dying man takes no solace in dancing and singing, only in meritorious deeds will you get confidence and this will support the kammic energy in the rebirth. You must know how to handle life, by doing service to others to help release their suffering. Many die with fear and confusion in mind; can't take rebirth in upper realm. Meditation is important to maintain purity. Prince Siddharta, when he was born, there were 5 astrologers invited to predict his fate. Four of them said that he would either grow up to be a sage or monarch, and one said definitely a sage.

When craving and attachment is completely removed, the mind is then completely pure. This body is not life. It's a house built by energy and 4 cosmic elements.

Unfortunately in the past 2,500 years, Buddhists in Asia have introduced a lot of rites and rituals, never introduced by the Buddha. Just keep away from evil by reducing anger, jealousy, enmity, and try to do meritorious deeds, and try to develop the mind through understanding. Try to purify the mind.

If you are cruel, hot tempered, or stingy, try your best to take this out. If you pray to God to take this out do you think God can do that? Buddha can't also, but he can tell you how to do that. Waris declared by the human mind, peace also comes from our our minds, not from heaven nor from God.

First by understanding without believing, when you develop a right understanding, then you can carry on a religious way of life. When you doubt, you think, investigate, then accept or reject.

Others say if there is doubt, then God will punish you. All over the world different schools have sprung up and they follow their own traditions which they have maintained for a long time. Buddha had rejected old traditions, but it was introduced to the primitive narrow minded people. People in Asian countries don't study the dharma.

Next do Good. Reduce the anger and do something to train the mind through right understanding. Change the mind - through your own experience you can understand right and wrong.

I have been in Malaysia for 53 years, used to have even no room to sleep. The Chinese were the main Buddhists here and through Buddhist societies we made them understand what Buddhism is.

My mind mental and life energy is still active but I am half way dead. Although the end of my life is now near, I have no fear. Arahants can disconnect mind from body to experience nibbanic bliss and at that time you cannot tell if they are dead or alive, their bodies are still warm and their complexions will remain ruddy. They can do that for 1 week at the most.

Remember there are 4 kinds of happiness:

1. Happiness of Possession - in owing your own property, your house, land, business, bank account.
2. Happiness of Enjoyment - using what you have earned you can enjoy good food, nice house, nice dress, without abusing, bluffing, cheating others.
3. Happiness of Debtlessness - try best not to borrow from others, spend within your means; you gain self respect.
4. Happiness of Blamelessness - try to lead life without doing harm to anybody.

These 4 kinds of happiness must be with you. Don't be lazy; do some work, do not neglect whatyou have earned, maintain and protect what you have earned, then you can decide what to do including adopting a Buddhist way of life up to arahant, know how to adjust your way of life, how to associate with others. Associate with good people, not harmful, wicked people. Support your father and mother, look after your spouse and children, don't neglect relatives, help them. Develop your mind to the extent that you are not shaken by the 8 winds of change: praise/blame, fame/shame, gain /loss, pleasure/ pain, and treat all the same, then at this stage nothing will affect you."

All meetings end in partings. That which rises must fall. That which is collected will be dispersed. Birth ends with death."

This was the last Dhamma Talk by the late Most Ven K. Sri Dhammananda at Buddhist Maha Vihara on July 7, 2006.* **EH

How to Choose Joy

By Amanda Gilbert

Joy is an intentional practice. So often our minds are running on autopilot when it comes to happiness, with all-too-familiar story lines. Have you ever thought, "I'll feel good when I get that new cute fall jacket or finally get this work project done" or "I'll be happy when I have a certain amount of money in my bank account" or "I'll be happy when I have a specific number of followers on social media or get recognized in my career"? We can unearth these grooves in our brains with the intention to show up in joy and rejoice for others.

The Buddha talks a lot about joy for this reason. Why? *Mudita* (appreciative joy) gives us a way to dismantle the usual habit loops of negativity and close-mindedness and do something different, something more life-affirming and expansive. Responding with joy can activate a host of more wholesome alternatives, such as meeting our own greatest hits of comparing, competitive, and envy-filled mind with the antidote of noticing what is working in our lives and what brings us joy, as well as finding happiness and delight in other people's good fortune. Most wonderfully, choosing joy takes the sting out of hearing or seeing our usual triggers.

To cultivate appreciative joy, you must first touch down into the boundless joy available to you in your own life. Thich Nhat Hanh says, "How can we feel joy for another person when we do not feel joy for ourselves? Joy is for everyone." Awakening to your own joy can be as simple as taking delight in a gorgeous blooming flower, hearing the sound of your beloved's voice, or noticing the way your favorite song soothes your heart. Waking up to your own joy asks you to investigate your past and present relationship with what brings you happiness and joy.

As you will find out, there are many different flavors to joy. Dr. Paul Ekman, a world-recognized emotions researcher at the University of San Francisco, California, writes that joy can be expressed through a variety of ways.

Here are some of the ways to joy from his list:

- The pleasure of the five senses—like taking a lick of your favorite ice cream flavor or seeing a beautiful sunset
- Amusement and humor—the felt-sense experience of your own laughter after a healing joke
- Contentment—a subtle satisfaction where you are relaxed and at ease
- Excitement—the most intense kind of joy in response to novelty or change
- Relief—the feeling after a strong emotion occurs and then subsides
- Wonder—the enjoyable feeling of being overwhelmed by the incomprehensible
- Ecstasy or bliss—a high frequency form of joy, a state of self-transcendent rapture
- Exultation—the feeling following the completion of a great challenge or difficult task
- Radiant pride—when someone you love experiences a special moment of success
- Elevation—"the warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness, kindness, and compassion"
- Gratitude—the appreciation of a selfless act that you may have benefited from

Matthieu Ricard, the cellular geneticist turned Buddhist monk, has added three more facets of joy to this list: rejoicing—in someone else's happiness; delight or

enchantment—a shining kind of contentment; and spiritual radiance—a serene joy born from deep well-being and benevolence.

When we start to open up to the ways in which we feel joy, we realize that joy is so often readily available at our fingertips. Even when we are at rock bottom or within a spell of depression, to train the mind in joy means we take notice and attend to just how much joy may still be present amid our darkest of moments. In this way, joy becomes a subtle way back to the fundamental pleasure that's always there in the present moment.

Meditation: What Brings Me Joy?
You are going to begin to create your new habit of recognizing what miracles of joy you have available to you right here in this moment.

Start to settle in. Take a few natural breaths. Softly close your eyes. Spend these next few moments scanning your body with a gentle warmth and tender care. Lightly guide your attention to the natural inflow and outflow of the breath. Let any thoughts cross through your mind, smiling at them if that feels helpful, and release them one by one.

Now center your attention in your heart and start to ask today's mudita mantra, "What brings me joy?" Wait for the answer. Recognize it. Relish it. And ask again: "What brings me joy?" Notice the blessing of joy that comes to mind. Recognize it, savor it, then repeat again, "What brings me joy?" Keep repeating the mantra and reflecting on all the ordinary and extraordinary occurrences that bring you joy. Give yourself permission to feel good and see your life through the eyes of joy. Continue this practice until you feel complete. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Adapted from Kindness Now: A 28-Day Guide to Living with Authenticity, Intention, and Compassion *by Amanda Gilbert. Copyright © 2021 by Amanda Gilbert. Out now with Shambhala Publications.*

Amanda Gilbert is a meditation teacher, lecturer of mindfulness at the University of Southern California, speaker, and author. **EH**

The Making of Abiding Heart: Beyond Contemplative Education

By Dr. Meyrav Mor October 2021

In 2000, a nascent Abiding Heart Education began its journey with the establishment of my first school in Nepal, Tashi Waldorf School, which integrated Waldorf methodology with Himalayan cultural heritage. Tibetan Buddhism was central to the school's curriculum due to the primary importance of supporting and nurturing the connection between displaced Tibetan and high Himalayan students and their linguistic and cultural heritage. Many families had fled to Kathmandu from the other side of the Himalayas and from the Maoist insurgents that controlled many parts of the Nepali high Himalayas. At Tashi Waldorf school I developed a Tibetan Buddhist curriculum that encompassed meditation, Buddhist morning prayers and offerings, contemplative and Buddhist education, Buddhist festivals such as Sagadawa and also featured Tibetan language, music, folklore and drama. From this, and later postgraduate research, emerged the foundation for Abiding Heart Education, described in my publication of 'Preserving the Past Reserving the Future: A Foundation

My first pupils at Tashi Waldorf School- Kindergarten, Kathmandu Nepal 2000

The shrine at Tashi Waldorf school class 1, 2001, Kathmandu, Nepal

for Kindergarten Curriculum for Tibetan Exile Schools', in 2003.

In 2004, myself and 15 other experts were invited by the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile Prime Minister to advise on a new education bill that was being presented to the exile parliament. The education bill sought to integrate Tibetan language, culture and dharma into the curriculum with the explicit goal of sociocultural integration and preservation of children's linguistic and cultural heritage and dharma. Such an educational approach can validate and foster children's positive identities as well as providing a resource for learning. I rejoiced in the knowledge that the Exile government's concerns and actions were aligned with my own in relation to heritage language and cultural preservation and most importantly, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasised, to ensure that the Buddha dharma continues to support inner development towards liberation.

I subsequently embarked on a PhD at The University of Bath in England to continue this work of cultural heritage preservation within the curriculum in order to maintain the essential connection between global communities and their dharma and heritage language and culture, whilst also meeting the demands of the 21st century. From my fieldwork, working with Buddhist communities in Nepal, the need for a Buddhist transformative experiential education for children age 3 to 14 or from kindergarten to class 8 became clear and propelled my work both during and after my doctorate studies. By the beginning of 2016 the development of a Buddhist education became my main focus, and what a joy it was!

A Buddhist Children's Pedagogy

A new pedagogical approach developed from the fundamental understanding of the aim of education as progression along the pathway towards liberation. The knowledge, experience and expertise gathered over years of the aforementioned research and practice, become precious tools in constructing a new educational framework and content. While Buddhism provides the educational lense for my work, it is essential that this worldview is embedded within a children's pedagogy that is also Buddhist. However, here lies the gap; Buddhist learning and teaching methodology has been predominantly developed for adults.

A Buddhist children's pedagogy needs to be transformative, experiential, and developmentally appropriate to nourish children's beings towards freedom. As a former teacher at a Waldorf school with 30 years of experience in education (also in teacher training and curriculum development), I identified the Waldorf transformative educational approach as providing such a pedagogy, with it's deeply holistic understanding of child development, and integrated this with the Buddhist contemplative and meditative (experiential) methodology. This synthesis became a new educational approach, termed 'Abiding Heart Transformative Experiential Buddhist Education'. It is founded on a sound philosophy of education and a view of a profound path towards inner freedom.

I reside in Boudha, the heart of Buddhist Kathmandu, where many of the great teachers were questioning how to integrate Buddha dharma into the Nepali children's curriculum in monastic schools. It became

apparent that the Buddhist educational approach and curriculum that I was developing addressed this issue, so I initiated a dialogue with several Buddhist masters. The great masters had a profound understanding of the future directionality of Buddhist children's education and I was able to discern the subtleties of the various global pedagogies.

One master, Mingyur Rinpoche, listened deeply and asked many questions about such pedagogies. I described the nesting system of conforming type education, progressive and transformative education, and the placement of both Waldorf and Buddhist pedagogy within transformative learning. Both aim, in their individual ways, towards inner freedom– enlightenment. This includes but moves beyond human flourishing. The aim of Buddhist education is to progress on the path towards liberation or at the very least sow the seeds to enable this process. This includes children's Buddhist education, starting in kindergarten, through to high school. Everything in Abiding Heart Education becomes part of the path towards inner freedom.

The essence, which I explained to Mingyur Rinpoche, is the approach to teaching; the teaching methodology, and the assumptions from which an array of methodologies arise, including an understanding of the human being. As practitioners, it is important to identify our positioning and assumptions or paradigm from the outset. Without such reflection, tensions and contradictions between the educational content and teaching and learning methodologies can arise and potentially compromise the effectiveness of curriculum delivery. A transformative Buddhist education can only arise from an education philosophy and pedagogy that supports pupils progressing on the path of inner development towards liberation or Buddhahood. I propose that the Waldorf methodology is the only methodology that is capable of delivering a deeply immersive Buddhist education for children while also teaching a comprehensive children's curriculum.

Intrigued by my work, Mingyur Rinpoche shared that he was planning to set up another school in Kathmandu and that such a curriculum would be of great benefit to his schools. Thereafter, we met reguraly to discuss the content that I was developing and to ensure that it was accurate from the Buddhist perspective. In turn, I was able to offer educational expertise in relation to his other monastic school in Bodhgaya, India. And so, for several years, Mingyur Rinpoche and I have met; me sharing my knowledge and understanding of education methodologies, transformative and experiential teaching and learning, and the need for child development to underpin curriculum delivery; and Mingyur Rinpoche ensuring that the Buddhist content and curriculum I developed is authentic and accurate. How precious!

I have been exceptionally fortunate to also be advised by other accomplished Buddhist teachers. Lama Shenpen's insights over the years have been invaluable, guiding me in relation to integrating Buddhism across year groups in primary education. She even wrote a class 5 play for us about Guru Rinpoche's life story! Khenpo Sonam Tsewang, a great Buddhist scholar, from the Nyingma tradition, has also been closely working with me for the past 7 years, explaining Buddhist texts and advising on the Buddhist aspect of our teacher training courses. Both Lama Shenpen Hookham and Khenpo Sonam Tsewang and other Buddhist scholars have been checking the Buddhist curriculum content for accuracy. There are many more experts that have been involved in advising and supporting Abiding Heart education, some of which I will mention below. After many years, Abiding Heart's transformative experiential Buddhist education has registered training organisations in both Nepal and the USA.

The Pillars of Abiding Heart Education

Abiding Heart Education comprises four foundational components:

1. Experiential Buddhist Foundation Studies;
2. Buddhist and developmental science-based Child Development from Birth to Rebirth;
3. Learning theories: Buddhist learning methodology, Steiner pedagogy and other contemporary learning theories and methodologies leading to the Abiding Heart Education learning and teaching approach;
4. Abiding Heart's transformative experiential curriculum for kindergarten through to class 8.

I have developed courses to encompass each of these areas, which form the pillars of Abiding Heart Education's transformative experiential Buddhist learning approach on which our teacher training courses and Buddhist imbued curriculum rests. The curriculum includes an array of subjects taught in kindergartens and schools, from literacy and numeracy, to cultural studies, sustainability and arts and crafts, all of which are immersed directly and indirectly in the Buddhist view and meditation, with the aim of nurturing the development of wisdom and compassion. Contemplative education, Buddhism, prayers and rituals, are integrated into every lesson and throughout the daily, weekly and monthly rhythms of the school year. The curriculum is rich, purposefully wholesome and true to my ideal of educating the head, heart and hand.

Abiding Heart Education's comprehensive teacher training courses aim to have a global reach and to work at the depth of things through the four foundational components. The first pillar of Abiding Heart Education is Foundation Buddhist Studies and the inner development of the trainee teacher. Trainee teachers must first dedicate time to understanding, contemplating and meditating the Buddhist view. This involves guidance and instruction on how to meditate. Although such insight and skills require many years of practice, trainee teachers are grounded in a foundational understanding of the Buddhist view and meditation. In our view, this is essential, as being a teacher is less about what we teach but who we are.

The first pillar of Abiding Heart Education formed the Foundation Buddhist studies course - a 16 week full-time course - a full semester! Experiential arts are also part of this course to enrich the process of learning and to enable exploration of inner landscapes and reflection on how the Buddhist view and meditation can be applied in the journey of self-transformation. The combination of daily philosophy classes together with meditation and transformative and expressive arts, modelling, Himalayan arts and crafts and movement, are a fantastic way of applying the Foundation Buddhist studies into our lives.

The second pillar of Abiding Heart Education is Child Development from Birth to Rebirth. This is a 10 week full time course that similarly follows a daily rhythm of lectures, meditation, artistic exercises and personal development group work. This course progresses from exploring our own inner landscape to understanding the nature of the human being and in particular the developing child. It does so from multiple perspectives; encompassing Buddhism, scientific theory and a holistic philosophy of education. By the second semester of our full-time two-year teacher training courses, our trainees have acquired the knowledge and understanding to enable them to explore Buddhist psychology, developmental science, psychology and neuroscience. By the end of this course, our trainee teachers have an in-depth understanding of the developing child from birth to adulthood and how it relates to our teaching methodology and content for each year group. However, our child development course does not stop at the end of childhood, for it is anchored in Buddhist psychology and understands human development from the moment or bardo of death through the other stages of the bardos of death to conception and prenatal development.

Understanding the importance of Aiding Heart Education's methodology is key to building children's resilience and opening both heart and mind, where attention is given to supporting children's spiritual, physical, socio-emotional and cognitive development from birth to rebirth. This is the process of transformative experiential learning and has been developed in collaboration with a global and multidisciplinary team of experts. Dr Robert Roeser (see below, second line second from left) has brought incredible knowledge of developmental science linked with Buddhist psychology. Dr David Vago has contributed an understanding from the perspective of neuroscience and how it relates to aspects such as the aggregates. Dr Tawni Tidwell brings an understanding of child development from a Buddhist and Tibetan medicine worldview. Khenpo Sonam Tsewang and Mingyur Rinpoche explained Buddhist psychology and the nature of reality while I, (see below, first line second from left) have woven Buddhist psychology, science and pedagogy together in relation to applying a transformative experiential Buddhist pedagogy that is Abiding Heart.

End of semester 1 exhibition, 2019. Experiential Foundation Buddhist Studies.

Painting Tara- Thangkha painting lesson, semester 2, 2020 Kindergarten teacher training.

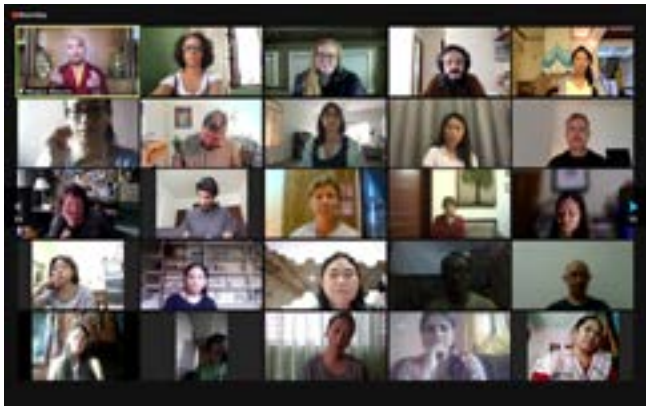
The third pillar of Abiding Heart Education is our 3 week course on Learning Theories and Methodologies: Buddhist Pedagogy, the Transformative Learning Approach of Steiner and other Contemporary Learning Theories. This course provides a synthesis of the three components (Buddhist, taught by Khenpo Sonam Tsewang, Steiner, and other contemporary learning theories, taught by myself) and forms the Abiding Heart Education learning and teaching approach. Here again, the course follows the same pattern of daily lectures, meditation and artistic exercises.

The fourth pillar of Abiding Heart Education is the curriculum content. This is introduced to trainee teachers in the final part of semester 2 when we feel they have the depth of knowledge and understanding, both of heart and mind, and are at a stage when they can immerse themselves in learning how to teach the Abiding Heart Curriculum. The course is delivered over two and a half semesters and focuses on thorough training on how to teach each individual subject to each specific year group.

Curriculum delivery requires trainee teachers to learn an array of new skills in a multifaceted role; to develop confidence as speakers, writers, artists, meditators; to train in child observation, and this is all anchored in contemplative practice and the Buddhist view. I teach this course myself, with the wonderful support of Waldorf colleagues from around the world. Our trainees receive the full curriculum content and are trained in how to teach using transformative learning and teaching skills and tools.

The process of teaching and learning should be a lived experience, so we provide many handouts and supporting resources that we created rather than a single document. When a concept is crystallised into a selection of lesson plans with accompanying instruction on teaching, the process of education becomes that of imparting abstract concepts. We believe this can hinder the dynamic inner processes within the child and becomes something that is imparted onto the child from the outside. The right education at the right time using the right approach, considers the developing child and how they learn in relation to each phase of development. This can make a difference to how a child receives knowledge and whether this brings healing or becomes detrimental to their well-being. For us, education is an art; it is a responsive and creative process!

Abiding Heart Education currently has a team of



Child Development from Birth to Rebirth module 1, 2020-2021. Understanding Buddhist psychology, developmental science and transformative experiential Buddhist pedagogy

Khenpo Sonam Tsewang and 2019 students

over twenty experts who advise and teach Shamata and vipassana meditation, Buddhist philosophy and psychology and neuroscience, as well as experienced teachers of progressive and transformative pedagogies, contemplative education, experiential arts, sculpture, craft and handwork, Buddhist Himalayas dance and thangka painting, music and drama, sustainability education, and science.

So far, the results of Abiding Heart teacher training courses have exceeded our expectations and predicaments beyond imagination. I have observed the trainee teachers' growth as they become reflective practitioners and develop a deep inner relationship to each subject they teach. It is not only their confidence to teach that develops daily, but the courage to use the knowledge they have gained to develop and adapt our curriculum in relation to their own culture and Buddhist traditions (also non- Buddhist tradition for some of our trainee teachers).

Abiding Heart Education teacher training courses are open to teachers and aspiring teachers from all over the world. Candidates can apply to become either a kindergarten teacher or a primary teacher (class 1-8). The training is full time over two years. We aim to keep the tuition fees as low as possible to make it accessible to as many people as possible from all backgrounds.

The training and curriculum content is designed to be adapted to any Buddhist community around the world. We also include in our training how the Buddhist content can be mostly taught in a contemplative way (secular) for non-Buddhist or mixed Buddhist and non-Buddhist school communities. This training can greatly support teachers in the context of progressive and contemplative based schools around the world; for those who teach children dharma holiday camps and in dharma centres globally as well as Buddhist monastic schools and Buddhist based lay schools in Asia.

I feel deep gratitude for having the good fortune to walk the path this lifetime of developing such a rich and wholesome education that can nurture and bring healing to children. May it be of benefit to all children and beings. **EH**

A story for young children based on the Heart Sutra and turned into a puppet show. The trainees learn how to make these beautiful sewn and felted puppets, created the backdrop and choreograph the puppet show. Kindergarten curriculum and teacher training 2020.

The Magpie Robin and the Monks, a story by Yuya Mon, year 1 primary teacher training student, 2021. The trainees learn to write nature stories that describe natural phenomena in a pictorial way as part of the science curriculum. This is integrated with arts, and teaching literacy skills such as writing, spelling and reading. Primary teacher training Class 1 curriculum studies.

Handwork and mindfulness primary education curriculum; plant dyeing, weaving and weaving 2019.

Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple: The Forgotten Sacrifices of Buddhist Monks by the Korean Catholics

By Emi Hayakawa, BTN Korea

Emi Hayakawa is the Head of Global Operations at Buddhist Television Network (BTN) headquartered in Seoul, Republic of Korea. She is also involved in BTN WORLD, a registered non-profit religious organization which propagates Korean Buddhist teachings globally. She has contributed a chapter, 'South Korea: Compassionate Approach to Journalism - Buddhist True Network', in the book, Mindful Communication for Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Asia, edited by Kalinga Seneviratne (2018, New Delhi, India: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd).

Currently at the Cheonjinam memorial site located in Toechon-myeon Village in Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do (Gyeonggi Province) a large statue of the Virgin Mary stands at the entrance, with the inscription "The Statue of Virgin Mary for World Peace," by Pope John Paul II, and the grand tombs of five Catholic martyrs exalted where the Buddhist dharma hall of Cheonjinam hermitage once stood.

The information board that explains the origin and history of Cheonjinam to the public only states that this is the birthplace of Catholicism in Korea, that great Confucian scholars extensively studied Catholicism at this site.

There is no trace or inclusion of the Buddhist monks who were ruthlessly executed for treason to protect the group of young Catholic scholars, nor the mention of the Buddhist temple complex which was burnt down as it was labeled as an illegal site of anti-governmental ideologies.

Even the original Chinese character of Cheonjinam Hermitage, which portrays "*hermitage*" (庵) has been mis-recorded to (菴), which means "*shrine*." Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple, the ancient Buddhist hermitage and temple now exists only in historical documents and ancient maps of the mid-Joseon Dynasty.

Sowing the Seeds of Korean Catholicism in the Joseon Dynasty

From the early Joseon Dynasty, even long before

Catholicism arrived in Korea, the Joseon Government exercised "*Sungyooukbul*," literally the thriving of Confucianism and suppression of Buddhism. Neo-Confucianists who established the Joseon Dynasty believed that one of the reasons for the fall of the Goryeo Dynasty was because of the excessive growth of Buddhist orders. They criticized the lax system of Buddhism and excessive growth of the Buddhist sangha. The Joseon Government exerted harsh pressure on Buddhist orders and implemented policies to restrict the number of Buddhist monks and temples. Moreover, with the strong Government suppression of ideologies outside of Neo-Confucianism, many Buddhist temples were closed or forcibly relocated into the remote areas of the country.

Catholicism was first introduced in the 17th century during the turbulent religious environment and was often referred to as Western Studies, "*Seohak*." Yi Su-gwang (1563-1628), an intellectual and diplomat, compiled the earliest Korean encyclopedia, "*Jibong Yuseol*" (芝峰類說) after visiting the Ming Dynasty in China. Yi Su-gwang also included in his encyclopedic collection of short essays a brief discussion of things Western, including the text, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, or "*Tianzhu shiyi*" (天主實義), by Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). However, it was not until late 18th century that Catholicism, or "*Seohak*" had a great impact in Joseon amongst young and progressive scholars.

To the Joseon Government and the orthodox Neo-Confucians, Catholic doctrines appeared to be rooted towards the individual rather than the community, and if Catholicism continued to spread, the Government feared that the people would turn their backs on their parents, their ancestors, their communities, their society, and their Government to seek personal salvation which outright challenged the Joseon royalty.

Despite the turbulent atmosphere, young Catholic scholars continued to sow the seeds for Korean Catholicism. Joseon intellectuals and scholars debated Catholic doctrines and further propagated Catholicism in Buddhist temples and associated hermitages under a conference called the *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group. They gathered secretly, avoiding the eyes of the

The grand tombs of five Catholic martyrs exalted where the Buddhist dharma hall of Cheonjinam hermitage once stood.

The information board that explains the origin and history of Cheonjinam to the public only states that this is the birthplace of Catholicism in Korea, that great Confucian scholars extensively studied Catholicism at this site.

Government. Furthermore, a group of scholars from the southeastern suburbs of current Seoul organized their *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group at Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple, a Buddhist temple in Toechon-myeon Village in Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do (Gyeonggi Province)

The Seed of Korean Catholicism is Sowed within the Rich Soil of *Korean Buddhism*

The monks of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple shared their place of practice for the *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group to take place. Despite the grave danger and great risk to their own lives and the temple itself, the monks opened their hearts and embraced these devoted and faithful *Seohak* intellectuals. Dasan Jeong Yakyong (1762-1836), one of the great intellects of the late Joseon Dynasty, also attended the *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group

at Cheonjinam Hermitage in 1779 and composed various poems of himself and his brothers frequenting Cheonjinam Hermitage.

In a poem from the text, "Saseok" (寺夕) *Evenings of the Temple* written in 1797, it states:

誰將好丘壑
留與數僧專
…
鍾動隨僧粥
香銷伴客眠

The rocks steadily surround the temple
And incense and Buddhist sutras are all embedded deep within
The Buddhist monks eat their porridge with the sound of the bell
And they lay their heads to sleep as the incense burn out into the night

This poem serves to refute the recent Catholic claim that "Cheonjinam Hermitage had already been in ruins by 1779," and at the same time shows the friendship between Dasan Jeong Yakyong, his brothers, and the Buddhist monks of Cheonjinam Hermitage.

Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple became a place of practice for meditation, debates, and explored the search for truth by both Buddhist monks and the Catholic intellectuals.

There was a clear *historic unity* between the Catholics and Buddhists, where two different faiths came to practice in one place. It was an interfaith union by both the Catholics, who passionately wanted to preserve their own faith, and the Buddhists, who compassionately embraced them with their wisdom of altruism, or *Bodhicitta.*

The *Bodhicitta* (菩提) Path – Empathetic Altruism of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple Sangha

Bodhicitta is a core concept of Mahayana Buddhism, meaning the compassionate aspiration to reach enlightenment for the benefit of others. It is the enlightened mind that purely aspires for the well-being of other sentient beings, without expecting any rewards. Its trademark is a strong commitment to profound compassion or love for others. It's not passive — and not empathy alone — but rather an empathetic altruism that actively strives to free others from suffering.

The seeds of Korean Catholicism began to take root and sprout at Cheonjinam Hermitage where it enjoyed protection of Korean Buddhism. However, while the Korean Catholic community, including Dasan Jeong Yakyong, devotedly organized the *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group and expanded their studies at Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa temple, the Joseon Government also began full-fledged persecution of Catholics.

The Buddhist stupa which remained at the Jueosa temple site until recently, was moved to the Jeoldusan Memorial Hall managed by the Korean Catholic community.

A group of scholars from the southeastern suburbs of current Seoul organized their Kanghakhoe academic seminar group at Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple, a Buddhist temple in Toechon-myeon Village in Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do (Gyeonggi Province)

The Catholic Diocese of Suwon announced a new cathedral that will represent Korean Catholicism, is set to be constructed at the Cheonjinam hermitage site aimed to be completed by 2079 in celebration of the 300th anniversary of Catholicism in Korea.

In 1801, King Sunjo, the 23rd king of the Joseon Dynasty, implemented a policy where Catholicism was conceptualized as an evil learning, or "*sahak*" (邪學) and Catholic religious practices were prohibited. The edict began the Shinyu persecution of 1801, where the Government pushed ahead with the nationwide persecution of Catholicism and many Catholics were ruthlessly executed. According to the Annals of Sunjo, "*Sunjosilok*" states,

監司、守令, 仔細曉諭, 使爲邪學者, 飜然改革, 不爲邪學者, 惕然懲戒, 無負我先王位育之豐功盛烈。而如是嚴禁之後, 猶有不悛之類, 當以逆律從事。

The former king always said that if orthodox learning was illuminated then evil learning (sahak/邪學) would disappear on its own. But, as we have heard, this so-called evil learning, which is the same as it always has been, has spread from the capital to the provinces of Kyŏnggi and Honam, and its adherents grow daily in number. As for a person being a person, it is a matter of morality (illyun/人倫). As for a country being a country, it is a matter of civilization (kyohwa/敎化). This so-called evil learning is without father and king, destroys morality, interferes with the spread of civilization (kyohwa), and causes people to degenerate into barbarians, birds, and beasts (ijŏk kŭmsu/夷狄禽獸). And so the foolish people are infected with these errors (chŏmyŏm kwaeo/漸染註誤) and led astray. If a child fell into a well, how could we not take pity on it and be heartbroken?[11] *Local officials, carefully admonish your people. Those who are followers of evil learning will reform in an instant, and those who are not will fearfully rectify their lives. In this way, the abundant merit built up by our former king will not be diminished. If, now that evil learning has been strictly forbidden, there is still a gang of people who do not mend their ways, then it is right to treat them as rebels (yŏgnyul/逆律)…·*

-《Annals of the Sunjo》Volume 2, 1st year of King Sunjo (1801), Decided on January10th, Article 1

At the conclusion of the Shinyu Persecution, over 300 Catholics and those who protected the Catholic community were charged as the enemy of the state and beheaded. Dasan Jeong Yakyong and many Joseon intellects who accepted the Catholic faith were interrogated and tortured and sent into exile further away into the very remote areas of the province.

The Cheonjinam Hermitage and the Jueosa Temple sangha, who have compassionately embraced and protected the Catholic scholars during the nationwide persecution, were taken in as prisoners for treason and presumably executed alongside the captured Catholics. Cheonjinam hermitage and Jueosa temple were set on fire and cast aside for destruction.

The Shinyu Persecution was not only a persecution

of Catholics, but consequently the persecution of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple that protected the Catholic community.

The Forgotten Buddhist Roots of Korean Catholicism

The Buddhist temple complex of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple, where the essence of Bodicitta was practiced, had been burnt to ashes and blown away completely by the winds of time.

The nameless Buddhist monks who compassionately embraced the Catholic scholars and executed for protecting the Catholics were known as "*chunjugyo bihosaeryuk"* and deemed as enemies of the state. And in present time Korea, the very existence of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple and the sacrificed lives of monks who protected the Catholic scholars have been completely disregarded, distorted, and hidden away by the Catholic community that they protected.

All mentions of the monks and remains of the site are almost wiped off from history, but fortunately a small fragment remains in Dasan Jeong Yakyon's compilations of *Analects of Dasan* (*Dasanmunjib*), the *Journal of the Royal Secretariat* (*Seungjeongwon ilgi*), written by the Royal Secretariats of the Joseon Dynasty, and ancient maps of the mid Joseon era.

In 1818, Dasan Jeong Yakyong, who was tortured during the Shinyu Persecution and exiled to the provinces, returned to his hometown of Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do after 18 years of exile. In 1827, Dasan Jeong Yakyong (at age 66) composed a poem about Cheonjinam Hermitage, where he participated in the *Kanghakhoe* academic seminar group, in his poetry compilation, *Cheonjinseoyojib*.

In this poem, he descriptively narrated his return to the site of Cheonjinam Hermitage after 30 years, where the hermitage had been burned down and destroyed.

…
前躅凄迷不可求
黃黧啼斷綠陰幽
朽筒引滴涓涓水
破瓦耕翻壘壘丘
…

I can't recall the past as it is blurry
The water flows out of the rotting container
And broken pieces of roof tiles scattered across the hill

Dasan Jeong Yakyong, who was sincerely grateful to the monks of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple for hiding them, continued to write during his exile. Dasan's most famous text, "Admonitions on Governing the People," (*Mongmin Simseo*), completed in 1818, contained his core ideologies. This epic text reflects the pure intentions of the young Catholic scholars that pursued their search of truth for a society that is comfortable for all people of Joseon, and the compassionate and altruistic spirit of Korean Buddhism that continued to pray for the end of suffering for the people, despite the strong policy of "*Sungyooukbul*" that lasted 500 years.

Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple: The Site of Religious Harmony

In August 2021, Gwangju, Gyeonggi-do signed an agreement with the Catholic Diocese of Suwon to create a Catholic pilgrimage route from Cheonjinam Hermitage to Namhansanseong Fortress. The purpose of this project was expressed to honor the Korean Catholic martyrs along with the regional characteristics as the birthplace of Korean Catholicism.

There was no mention regarding the sacrificed lives of the monks of Cheonjinam Hermitage. Furthermore, the historical value of Namhansanseong Fortress, built and defended by Buddhist soldier-monks and a symbol of National Protection Buddhism was also disregarded.

Moreover, the Catholic Diocese of Suwon announced a new cathedral that will represent Korean Catholicism, set to be constructed at the Cheonjinam hermitage site by 2079 in celebration of the 300th anniversary of Catholicism in Korea. There was no trace of the nameless monks who had been persecuted and executed; Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple that were burned down and destroyed for protecting the Catholic community are both erased by the Catholic community. Even the Buddhist stupa which remained

at the Jueosa temple site until recently, was moved to the Jeoldusan Memorial Hall, managed by the Korean Catholic community.

Only after receiving strong criticism from the Korean Buddhist community, did the Korean Catholic community formally apologized and declared a reexamination to the project. However, the Cheonjinam Hermitage Holy Land project has been in progress for more than 40 years by the Korean Catholic Diocese of Suwon.

The compassion and altruism of the monks of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple played a major role of the birth of Korean Catholicism. By virtues of the Buddha dharma, the monks embraced a different faith and provided the young Catholic scholars a sanctuary to explore, contemplate and meditate on their faith, providing the fertile soil for the seeds of Korean Catholicism.

The Korean Catholic community must coexist with Korean Buddhism and acknowledge and honor the sacrifices of the monks and Korean Buddhism. To do so, they should restore and preserve Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple in its original form.

It should be clarified to the World that Cheonjinam Hermitage is the cornerstone of religious harmony between Korean Buddhism and Korean Catholicism. Thus, the Korean Catholic community's holy land project should precede with the "Restoration of Cheonjinam Hermitage and Jueosa Temple," and the "Reproduction of the Lecture Scene of Young Catholic Scholars such as Jeong Yak-yong."

The Korean Catholic community should acknowledge this important piece of history and show sincere homage, respect, and appreciation to Korean Buddhism.

Korean Catholicism should continue the union and harmony for peace of mankind, the basic spirit of all religions. Furthermore, they should not forget the spirit of bodhicitta, loving kindness, and compassion that the Buddhist monks sacrificed their lives for.

In this way, the Korean Catholic community should portray Cheonjinam Hermitage as the pilgrimage site of authentic union and harmony and to present the pathway for all World religions towards religious harmony and peace that is still unprecedented today. **EH**

Are you searching for a spiritually challenging work?

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In every issue of EASTERN HORIZON, we publish special chat sessions with leading Buddhist personalities, essays on all aspects of Buddhism, book reviews, and news and activities that are of interest to the Buddhist community. We need someone to help us in all these projects. If you are keen to be part of this exciting magazine, please e-mail to the editor at Bennyliow@gmail.com, and we will put you in touch with what's challenging for the next issue!

Let us share the dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings!

A Journey Between Lives

How I found my way back to my ancestors through The Tibetan Book of the Dead

By Ann Tashi Slater

On a rainy morning in 1919, Walter Evans-Wentz walked a winding mountain path into Gangtok, Sikkim, in northeastern India. An American scholar, he was seeking to translate the *Bardo Thödol*, a Tibetan Buddhist guide for the after-death *bardo* journey to rebirth. Through a letter of introduction from my Tibetan great-grandfather, Evans-Wentz met Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup, a well-known translator and the headmaster of a government boarding school. They began working together and—with Dawa-Samdup translating and Evans-Wentz editing—completed the first English version of the *Bardo Thödol*, entitled *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Oxford University Press, 1927).

The translation ignited an enduring fascination in the West with the 8th-century teaching said to have been written by Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), the Indian spiritual master who brought Buddhism to Tibet. Inspired by *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*'s depiction of individual transformation, Carl Jung said the volume was his "constant companion." It was also embraced by counterculture figures like Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert (later Ram Dass), the co-authors of *The Psychedelic Experience*: *A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964), a guide to the psychedelic drug trip as a bardo journey from death of the ego to rebirth into greater self-awareness. The popularity of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* has continued unabated; including subsequent translations, over a million copies have been sold.

Almost eighty years after Evans-Wentz and Dawa-Samdup met, I began to study their translation of the *Bardo Thödol* for a novel I was writing based on my Tibetan family history, about three generations gathered in Darjeeling (my mother's hometown) for the funeral of the patriarch. I felt drawn to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* because my novel related to death, my great-grandfather had helped make the English translation possible, and—thinking over the plot for my book—I was intrigued by the fact that Guru Rinpoche's guide was intended to benefit not only the dead but the living.

The author (second from right) with her family, including (from left) her grandmother, sister, and mother | Photo courtesy the author

It took me years to understand *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. I thought I'd just read it and see what it was about, but the words felt impenetrable. How to make sense of statements like, "If the instructions

be successfully applied to the deceased… then, by the meeting of the Mother-Reality and the Offspring-Reality, *karma* controlleth not." And, "The aggregate of thy principle of consciousness, being in its pure form—which is the Mirror-like Wisdom—will shine as a bright, radiant white light, from the heart of Vajra-Sattva."

Part of the challenge arose from my lack of familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism. Born to a Tibetan mother and an American father, I'd grown up in '60s and '70s suburban New Jersey and California, watching *Bewitched* and eating cream cheese and jelly sandwiches, celebrating Christmas and the Fourth of July, hiking in the Sierras and rocking out at Santana, Heart, and Fleetwood Mac concerts. Because my mother wanted me and my siblings to feel like we fit in, she didn't talk to us about Tibet or Buddhism. Also, as a girl she'd felt bored by family prayers in the altar room, by arcane ceremonies carried out in dim monasteries, and had been thrilled to leave behind the old country for the bright, modern world of medical school at Columbia University. She referred to Buddhist ritual as "mumbo jumbo" and "all that hocus pocus." As for my father, a psychiatrist from New Jersey, he was attracted to Tibetan culture but not the religion, and tended to view Western interest in Buddhism as "woo-woo" New Age spirituality.

In college, I majored in comparative literature (the French and Latin American novel) and planned to make my life in Paris as a writer. But when I graduated, I found I wanted to explore my missing half and went instead to Darjeeling to live with my grandmother. Chatting with her over tea, hearing her stories, initiated an exploration of my family history and Buddhist philosophy that I've been engaged in for more than three decades now.

As I visited my grandmother through the years with my mother and my daughter, the idea for my multigenerational novel took shape. Studying *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, I realized the after-death interval can be viewed as divided into three stages—with our actions in each determining the nature of our journey and rebirth—and I decided to structure my book in this way. The first part of Guru Rinpoche's guide is about coming to see we are dead. "When the consciousness-principle getteth outside [the body, it sayeth to itself], 'Am I dead, or am I not dead?'" the text explains. "It cannot determine. It seeth its relatives and connexions as it had been used to seeing them before." The deceased might take up to four days to acknowledge her death; she may hover about, calling to her relatives: *Why are you weeping?*

In the second stage, we encounter frightening visions of deities and demons, projections from our subconscious that are like our dreams when we sleep. This is an opportunity for us to recognize that these apparitions, our perceptions, have no independent existence. "Whatever…terrifying visions thou mayst see," *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* instructs, "recognize them to be thine own thought-forms." In his introduction, Evans-Wentz says that these thought-forms are "airy nothings woven into dreams" and that "complete recognition of this psychology by the deceased sets him free into Reality."

The third part of the voyage is about judgment and rebirth. We appear before Yama, Lord of the Dead, who holds a mirror (our memory); good deeds are weighed against bad on Yama's scale (our conscience), and the nature of our existence going forward is decided. "If the scale weighs you're full of sin," my grandmother used to tell me, "in hot, boiling oil you're thrown and your body is roasted! With all the burns, you're finished."

Even as I gradually understood more about *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, though, its essence eluded me. Talking with my husband one day about how the novel was going, I said I was having a hard time getting hold of the deeper wisdom of Guru Rinpoche's book. "It all feels very abstract."

"An 8th-century teaching about traveling from death to rebirth feels abstract?"

We laughed. "I know, I know!" I replied. "Still, there's something I'm missing."

Then two things happened that changed my understanding of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as well as my view of how to live my life.

The author lights a butter lamp with her grandmother before her altar in Darjeeling, India. | Photo courtesy the author

Not long after the conversation with my husband, my grandmother died, at the age of 100. I left home in Tokyo for Darjeeling and after three days of travel arrived at my grandmother's house in the Himalayan foothills. Her body had been laid out on cushions in the altar room and covered with white silk *khada* blessing scarves; five lamas seated at her side read aloud from the *Bardo Thödol*, playing horns, ringing bells, and banging a drum. On the old wooden altar painted with Tibetan lucky symbols, butter lamps burned beneath the statue of Guru Rinpoche that generations of our family had prayed to. Condolence callers filed in, offering incense and khadas.

In the days leading up to the cremation, we sat with the lamas next to my grandmother's body. I'd never quite grasped the concept underlying the literal translation of *Bardo Thödol*— "Liberation in the Intermediate State Through Hearing"—but, as the lamas spoke to my grandmother, the idea became clear: hovering in the after-death bardo, my grandmother could hear Guru Rinpoche's teachings, be enlightened by their wisdom, and move on to her new life.

Another point I hadn't fathomed but now understood was how *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* could benefit both the dead and the living. The lamas urged my grandmother to face reality, saying things like this: "O nobly-born, that which is called death hath now come. . . . Do not cling, in fondness and weakness, to this life."

Listening to the lamas, my family members and I could think about our own situations. We were encouraged not only to let go of my grandmother so we could carry on with our lives, but to make the most of our precious human existence by considering other ways that attachment and denial might be hindering our path forward—were we clinging to a dead marriage, a meaningless job? I found myself reflecting on how hard it can be to acknowledge "what is" even as we know reality is there whether or not we choose to face it. And I was moved to realize that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is 8th-century tough love powered by compassion: at the same time, we're told to rip off our blinders and confront reality, the lamas offer us companionship and support. "We are like a spiritual friend to your grandmother," one lama explained. Day and night they stayed by her side so she was never alone and, as I grieved, their presence reassured me.

The second thing happened in Tokyo six years later, in 2010, when I contracted a life-threatening heart infection called endocarditis. Bacteria proliferated in my mitral valve; possible complications included a heart attack, stroke, catastrophic organ damage, intracranial hemorrhage, and neurological failure. Stunned and terrified, staring day after day at the white walls and ceiling of my hospital room, I thought about how the term *bardo* also refers to intervals when ordinary life is suspended—like during illness or an accident—and I remembered a story about my great-grandfather. Riding his pony back down to India from Tibet after a diplomatic mission in 1912, he got caught in an avalanche. "The whole party including the mules was buried," my grandmother had told me over tea one afternoon in Darjeeling, twilight falling on the peaks of Mount Kanchenjunga. "Only my father survived! Praying with his prayer beads, *Save me, Guru Rinpoche, save me*, he waved his arm up through the snow. The search party saw his hand with the beads and he was saved."

I'd heard many stories from my grandmother about her father's devotion to Guru Rinpoche. A police officer, diplomat, and Buddhist scholar who worked

with the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, my great-grandfather, S.W. Laden La, translated excerpts from Guru Rinpoche's biography into English (published in Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation*). Every winter he led a group of Buddhists on pilgrimage from Darjeeling to Tso Pema, the lake in northern India where Guru Rinpoche is said to have been born from within a lotus. On the lake was an island that moved in your direction if you were a good Buddhist; it always floated toward my great-grandfather as he approached. Wonderful as these stories were, I'd never felt they held personal weight, since I wasn't Buddhist. As I lay gravely ill, though, they took on new meaning for me.

Tormented by excruciating joint pain and unremitting headaches, violent chills and horrific nightmares, I longed to return to my ordinary existence as a wife and mother, writer and literature professor. *Things probably aren't that bad*, I told myself as—like the traveler in the after-death bardo who refuses to accept what's happened—I fantasized about spontaneous remission. I wondered if, trapped in the snow, my great-grandfather had wished he were riding down to Darjeeling as usual on a sunny winter day in the Himalayas and assured himself things weren't that dire.

Then the bacteria in my heart valve traveled to my brain, lodging in the occipital lobe and obstructing the flow of blood to the surrounding tissue. It was likely, the doctors said, that I'd end up paralyzed or in a vegetative state, or die. Overwhelmed by despair, I realized that my great-grandfather had survived because he didn't turn away from the truth of his predicament. He could have expended his dwindling energy and time on denial, clinging to the life he'd known even though it no longer existed. Instead, he acknowledged the bardo he was in and saved himself. In the most profound way possible, as I confronted death, my great-grandfather's story helped me sustain hope by illuminating the wisdom at the heart of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*: accept reality but don't give up. And as I faced the reality of my situation, I understood that, whether or not I survived, I could determine how I journeyed through the bardo; I saw how Guru Rinpoche's guide inspires us to embrace our role as the creators, the artists, of our lives. These insights brought me a new feeling of integration, a sense that my ancestral past and my outlook as a Westerner were coming together.

Legend says that when Guru Rinpoche was traveling around Tibet, he concealed *terma* ("treasure") teachings—including the *Bardo Thödol*—in caves, rocks, lakes, the sky, the mindstream, to be found at the right time by later generations. Like one of these termas, my great-grandfather's lesson was hidden in our family mindstream and revealed to me when I needed it most. Evans-Wentz said in *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* that my great-grandfather "was one of the really true Buddhists of our generation, who not only fostered but also practically applied the Precepts of the [Buddha]." My great-grandfather's faith had felt distant since I wasn't Buddhist, but I discovered that it encompassed a dedication to living by Buddhist principles that was of vital relevance to me.

In his introduction to my great-grandfather's translation of Guru Rinpoche's biography, Evans-Wentz wrote, "Nothing is known either of the origin or of the end of [Guru Rinpoche]. According to tradition, [he is] believed never to have died." The same can be said for the wisdom in the *Bardo Thödol*, which lives on as Guru Rinpoche intended, for me and for all those it has encouraged and guided through the centuries. I'm reminded of this continuity by one of the family heirlooms I keep next to my desk for inspiration: my grandmother's prayer beads, with which she prayed every morning and evening to Guru Rinpoche. They originally belonged to my great-grandfather and were given to her when he passed away in 1936, the same prayer beads he waved up through the snow that winter morning in Tibet.

Ann Tashi Slater contributes to the New Yorker, the Paris Review, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Catapult, Guernica, the Huffington Post, and others. She recently finished a memoir. Find her at www.anntashislater.com.

Published with the permission of the author. The essay first appeared in the Summer 2021 issue of Tricycle (www.tricycle.com). EH

A Cry for Mother Earth

By Cynthia Trone

Cynthia Trone lives in Camden, Maine. She is the owner of Symmetree, Provisions for the Conscious Explorer, a small business that features her son's creative designs, environmentally friendly products and a meditation studio. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in English Literature from Colby College in 1983, and her Master's Degree in Mindfulness Studies from Lesley University in 2017. A mother of three children, she is the former manager of paddleboarding outfitters in Jupiter, Florida, and the former Director of Education at Lighthouse ArtCenter in Tequesta, Florida. Returning to Maine to care for her parents in their final years, she developed youth programs at the Langlais Sculpture Preserve in Cushing, Maine, and is involved in teaching and learning at her local sangha, The Dancing Elephant, in Rockland, Maine. Her work as local coordinator for the Drepung Gomang Monastery's Sacred Arts Tour in Florida and Maine continues to foster a deep connection with Tibetan Buddhism in local communities. Benny Liow reached out to Cynthia on what we can learn from Buddhism regarding the environment and sustainability of planet earth.

The author and the Tibetan monks

Benny: You wrote about Buddhism and the environment for your MA thesis. How did you get interested in Buddhism?

Cynthia: I was deeply inspired when I hosted the Sacred Arts Tour in 2014, with a group of Tibetan Buddhist monks from Drepung Gomang Monastery. Their sense of peace and compassion, along with a global awareness of unity and collaboration, spoke to my heart. I traveled to Tibet in 2017 to see for myself the oppression that these kind people have endured, and then I attended His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 2018 Kalachakra teaching in Bodhgaya to better understand my commitment to Buddhism. My academic pursuit of a Master's Degree in Mindfulness Studies was motivated by the curiosity of how Buddhist wisdom applies to current environmental crises. I have always had a deep love for, and connection to, the natural world. Even as a child, I loved to wander alone in the woods. The joy of the vibrant mystery that flourishes in the natural world, along with the attunement of the senses on outdoor adventures, is very similar to the clarity I feel when I meditate. Focusing on this love of our planet in a way that is full of the compassion and poetry, became the focus of my thesis. *Poetics of the Wild* explored how ancient Buddhist texts celebrated the natural world, while my own poetry is a way for me to express the deep connection and concern I feel for our planet and future. The ongoing exploration of my beginner's mind, especially as it relates to my responsibility for caring for all sentient beings, including the earth, continues to open a pathway for joy and connection. Being a part of a sangha has supported my path, and created opportunities to explore Buddhism with curiosity and community. I am

Sacred Arts Tour, Cushing, Maine, USA

World Peace Mandala

inspired daily by being a voracious reader of Buddhist texts, and my daily meditation practice truly sustains me. I am motivated by many people, ancient and modern voices, and the beauty of the natural world here on the coast of Maine. These words of poet Gary Snyder often shine a light on my journey: "Meanwhile, be lean, compassionate, and virtuously ferocious, living in the self-disciplined elegance of the wild mind."

You mentioned the Buddhist concept of interdependence where sentient beings are all connected may at first seem like an important solution to climate change but you said it may be exactly what is adding to the global dilemma. Can you explain further on this?

Inherent in our existence is an interdependence with all beings, and the embodied awareness of this is what creates a respectful and balanced living system. Yet in our modern culture, the technology we have come to rely on seems to create a world of instant gratification and mindless connection. The connections between people are becoming increasingly remote, and the supply chain is a mysterious and quick appearance of material satisfaction…rather than a conscious awareness of where and how products are made. The global pandemic made many of us realize how connected we are as a species, but I am not sure that the impact of our inequities made a lasting impression. Interdependence, to me, means fully respecting, and caring for, all beings. As Christiana Figueres wrote in *The Future We Choose*, "To survive and thrive, we must understand ourselves to be inextricable connected to all of nature. We need to cultivate a deep and abiding sense of stewardship. This transformation begins with the individual." This is the moment in time where we must emerge from the pandemic with knowledge and kindness to make the changes urgently needed to reduce our carbon emissions, while working together on solutions for long-term sustainability of future generations on this precious earth. In 2019, His Holiness the Dalai Lama wrote, "We need a sense of universal responsibility as our central motivation to rebalance our relations with the environment and with our neighbors. Appreciating the oneness of humanity in the face of the challenge of global warming is the real key to our survival." I think the concept of interdependence is the thread that weaves together our path towards a sustainable future, but we all have much work to do to realize that way of being.

But if we truly understand the teaching of interdependence, wouldn't we then cultivate compassion for mother earth because every human being – in fact, all sentient beings - need this planet to survive?

Yes, of course! That is the very heart of how I understand the benefit and value of serving as a Buddhist practitioner. It is with an open heart and open mind that we must navigate the unknown. As our fragile planet is crying out for help, it is only with clear attention, intention and love that we can slow down enough to cultivate the deep compassion that is urgently needed. As I write this, I am surrounded by unprecedented flooding from the small lake where I live in coastal Maine. I am struck not only by the imminent destruction of the climate crisis, but also by

Sailing with family

Children with the Tibetan monks

the kindness of neighbors. Only today, when the fear of the power of natural disaster came to our doorstep, did people come together in helpful community. I see this as a sign of hope: we are truly connected to each other and this earth in ways that are far beyond our individual needs. As the earth calls for our attention, we become aware of our own insignificance…but together, we can create solutions and new ways of being that will benefit the survival of all sentient beings, including the future of this fragile planet. We are all born with hearts and minds that are capable of compassion and kindness, and the cultivation of compassion is at the heart of our way forward. In her new book, *You Belong*, Sebene Selassie writes of the simple paradox of our intrinsic connection to one another: "Although we are not one, we are not separate. And although we are not separate, we are not the same. Human survival depends on understanding this truth. At the heart of not belonging is what I refer to as 'the delusion of separation' – the belief that you are separate from other people, from other beings, and from nature itself. And it is a delusion. You are not separate. You never were. You never will be." Finding our way to belonging in a state of embodied awareness is a key to a compassionate understanding of the suffering of the earth and all the living beings who call her home.

Can you explain how an awareness and practice of Environmental Mindfulness can be a solution to global warming?

In my sitting practice, I turn my attention to all of my senses. Feeling myself rooted in the place where I sit, I open up to all that I feel…including bewilderment at the changing climate, sadness at injustice, discomfort in knowing all that needs to shift, and acceptance that my love for the natural world must guide me to do all I can for the planet. This sense of awareness begins a ripple effect that touches many people in my small circle on the earth…but from there it continues to grow. Being involved in an active sangha, co-facilitating study groups, and running my business from an ethically and environmentally conscious state of mind is what I can do. Engaging "environmental mindfulness" in daily conversation is like a pilot light that I keep on. Since we are in a moment in time that no one has ever experienced before, we have the unique opportunity to shift the course of events that will sustain our planet. I choose to be open and hopeful, even with the great sadness of the loss of so many species and landscapes across the planet. With a warm heart, boundless gratitude, deep listening, and caring for the anguish around us, I can envision a growing movement towards hope, global community and positive, sustainable, regenerative solutions. Keeping the urgency of our global climate crises in daily conversation is key… climate change is here, and is obvious in the devastating and extreme weather events that are occurring around the world. Realizing that we are in the midst of a pivot point on our planet requires a calm and kind mind to move forward with strength and optimism.

It is said that there is great benefit to the environment if more people were to follow a vegetarian diet. Just how do we go about encouraging this among the millions who are not vegetarians, or have no plans to be vegetarians?

It is so vitally important that more of the global

Wheeler Bay, Maine, USA

population follow a vegetarian diet. Of course, spreading awareness of the harm that raising animals for human consumption is critical. Here in the US, I see a growing trend toward vegan and vegetarian diets. Encouraging restaurants and grocery stores to provide healthy alternatives to meat is so crucial, and supporting local farms and markets by letting them know how important their produce is. I am heartened by inner-city community garden programs, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs in communities like mine. I also think that if there was a louder cry for change, perhaps the huge corporations that provide chicken and beef might be impacted. Food production, especially livestock, accounts for about a quarter of total carbon emissions. This is one of the biggest challenges we face as we look to the future, and raising awareness of the reality of what eating meat is doing to our planet is where to begin the shift. Raising healthy children on a vegetarian diet could shift our impact on climate disaster in one generation.

I understand you were involved with the Sacred Arts Tour where Tibetan monks from Drepung Gomang Monastery were invited to perform in the US. What's the objective of this program?

The Sacred Arts Tour travels throughout the USA to spread awareness of Tibetan culture. I have been thrilled to welcome groups in both Florida and Maine, where they created a sand mandala over the course of week on each annual visit (pre-Covid!). During their time with us, I introduced them to the community in elementary schools, elder facilities, churches and arts venues as they performed traditional Tibetan pageants, fire pujas and culinary events. Every year, I have seen their gentle and compassionate ways affect hundreds of people. The blessing of their presence is felt by everyone, and there remains a true sense of hope and peace wherever they visit. I have hosted Dharma Talks where the monks answer questions from curious participants…and often, the bridge of cultures is fascinating. The way that the monks choose to move through the world with respect, joy and ease, has a lasting impact on the communities they visit across the US.

What other activities do you organize to raise greater awareness of Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism?

Through my local sangha, I have helped to facilitate study groups that focus on Buddhism in accessible and joyful ways. Sharing the wisdom of many teachers, including the participants, creates a circle of deep listening and compassionate conversation. I have helped to offer wisdom from books including *Discovering Joy* (HH Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu), *Active Hope* (Joanna Macy), *You Belong* (Sebene Selassie), as well as works by Pema Chodron and Thich Nhat Hanh. In my work with youth programs, I always begin our time together with a mindfulness circle, often outside. Tuning in to the world around us makes us love it and want to protect it! Children are eager to explore and learn, and their innocence inspires a new sense of urgency to shift the status quo, for their future. I also love to share the deep value of meditation with women's circles, which seemed especially important during the isolation of the pandemic.

What other environmental awareness projects are you currently involved with now?

I am currently opening Symmetree with my son, in Camden, Maine, where the focus is environmentally sustainable products. It is a shop that provides 'Provisions for the Conscious Explorer.' With every product sold, I work with Eden Reforestation project to plant 8 trees. Finding a way to offset our carbon footprint, and waking up to the reality of how our actions impact the planet, is something that I will invite people to think about every day. I have set up a meditation studio in this beautiful space, and invite the community to spend time there

while enjoying my lending library of Buddhist literature. Since I wrote my thesis in 2017, I am heartened by the fact that there is so much more attention to mindfulness. At Symmetree, I am offering mindfulness and environmental books including *The Future We Choose* (Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac), *All We Can Save* (edited by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson), *Drawdown* and *Regeneration* (Paul Hawken), and *Love Letter to the Earth* (Thich Nhat Hanh), and invite visitors to calculate their carbon footprint on the Global Footprint Network and The Nature Conservancy websites.

I live in gratitude, and deeply appreciate this opportunity to share my words and thoughts. I hope it serves the readers in some way that might shift their perspective and caring for our planet and all sentient beings. **EH**

Acadia Earth, NY City

Making Friends with Death

By Dr Margaret Meloni

Margaret Meloni is a businessperson, Buddhist practitioner, and an advocate for what she calls Death Dhamma. The practice of inviting the awareness of death into your life. She has seen how Buddhism, combined with a healthy respect for the Grim Reaper, has helped her create a life with more peace and less suffering.

One day, while navigating the demands of everyday life: family, friends, work, and studying for her Ph.D.; she realized that more significant challenges were coming her way.

She began to realize that the people she loved were going to die. Her mother-in-law, Lee, was in her nineties, her parents were approaching their eighties, and her husband, Ed, had already outlived his father. She had already said goodbye to others.

She began to wonder, "How can I handle losing the people I love the most?"
She knew that death would come but was fearful that she would be unprepared. She used to tell herself that she was not afraid of her death but did not want to be left behind by the ones she loved. She knew that she was unrealistic.

Death did come, and it was her Buddhist practice that sustained her as she grappled with the loss of her closest family members. She began to envision death as a friendly companion. The Grim Reaper was doing his job. And now that she has made friends with death, her goal is to help all of us to accept death as an essential part of life.

Margaret earned her Ph.D. in the field of Buddhist Studies.

Margaret is a dynamic speaker who combines inspiration, common sense, and a dash of humor.

Margaret responds to several questions that Benny Liow asked regarding how she came to practice Buddhism, develop a healthy sense of death, and the relevance of mindfulness in today's modern life.

Benny: Can you share with us what brought you to be interested in Buddhism?

Margaret: I never felt at home with my family's religion. I was always that kid who would ask the question that a kid was not supposed to ask. From an early age, I also had a belief in rebirth. There was no place for this in the Catholic catechism.

When I left home at the age of nineteen, I left the church. I would attend Easter and Christmas services with my parents. But I became comfortable being an agnostic. My late husband, Ed and I came together as a former Jew, and a former Catholic, both non-believers who became Buddhists together. I do not really recall how I became more fully aware of Buddhism, but during one of our bookstore visits, I purchased a copy of *Buddhism for Dummies*. This basic overview really resonated with me. And when I learned about the Four Noble Truths, I knew I had found my belief-system. Now, it became about learning about the different Buddhist traditions, and spending some time with each to find a home. To me, this seems like a true case of karma. During my childhood, I had no exposure to Buddhism. Yet somehow, as an adult, I was pulled toward Buddhism, and felt an instant connection. And the good news, was that when that occurred, Buddhism had grown significantly within the United States, and specifically in Southern California, providing me access to many teachers and traditions.

As a successful businesswoman with a MBA, what made you choose to study for a Ph.D. in Buddhism, and what's your area of specialization?

Moving from an MBA to a Ph.D. in Buddhism was certainly not in any career guide that I ever read. This path represents the integration of my desire to work toward an advanced degree and an understanding that an advanced degree within my field of work (Project Management education), was not a requirement. Knowing, that it would take significant effort, I spent quite a bit of time contemplating what kept me intrigued? What would keep my concentration and motivation during challenging times? Additionally, an underlying theme within my own work was the human side of business interactions. A true desire to see people bring compassion to the workplace – no matter where they found their source of compassion. There I was, seeking to understand the different Buddhist traditions, finding my place as a Buddhist, being a bit of an analytical thinker, and wanting to pursue an advanced degree. All of this came together, and the end result was a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, with an emphasis in Buddhist Studies, focusing on compassion in early Buddhism.

You regard yourself as an advocate of *Death Dhamma* which is the practice of inviting an awareness of death into one's life. As humans generally do not entertain the idea of contemplating their own death because of our biological survival instinct, how can we begin to be more aware of death?

Start small. You do not have to immediately go right to, "I am going to die!" Although some of you might. Many of us, can benefit from truly reflecting upon the truth that there is suffering and the source of that suffering. Wanting things, people, and outcomes. And also, from not wanting other things, or people, or outcomes. Now consider impermanence. Things are always changing. And the more we hang on to perceptions of how things must be, the more difficult our lives become. You can start by looking at your plans for the day. Sometimes things go exactly as you imagined, and other times the entire day is a disaster. Or is it? When our plans fall apart, we are presented with an opportunity to embrace impermanence.

Those broken plans are a representation of death. Something you relied upon goes away. An assumption becomes invalid, a cherished thing breaks, a relationship ends. Pay attention to your emotions as you watch your

plans die. Pay attention to your emotions as you begin to watch your plans die – with acceptance. As you begin to become comfortable with how uncertainty is always a part of your daily life. You can begin to project beyond your daily plans.

The plans you have made for your week, your month, your year – all of this is built on a perception of control, and an illusion of certainty. Yet, plans help us navigate our lives. Keep making plans, and as you do, acknowledge that there will be impermanence. Some of your plans, or elements of your plans will die. And when this happens, call it death. Remind yourself, that this is a type of death. Now, you are living with death.

As soon as you can, move from the death of things and ideas to the recognition that you and your loved ones are also subject to impermanence. Allow yourself to entertain the thought, "One day I will die." Or "Today could be my last die." Bring these thoughts to your meditation and notice how it feels. Be aware of the emotions that arise, and work to study those emotions. Try to be nonjudgmental. You think what you think, you feel what you feel. Just be with it. Consider reading and chanting the Five Recollections each day. As you spend time following impermanence all the way through a natural progression from plans that died to your death, and the death of your loved ones, eventually you will develop more ease. You will find peace in your awareness of death.

In Buddhism, meditation on death (maraṇasati) is meant to help us develop a sense of spiritual urgency (saṃvega) and renunciation. Do you think this is applicable only for monastics or relevant even for the laity?

There are definitely times when the Buddha was teaching specifically to his monastics. The *Vinaya* is a good example. And there are teachings that he gave to laypeople. The Sigālovāda Sutta, is one of the most common examples of a discourse that is specifically meant to help laypeople.

What I appreciate about this question, is that this really does help me to ponder, when the Buddha taught and only his monks were present, does that mean that laypeople need not be concerned with these teachings? If these lessons were only for the monastic community, why then, did his monastics travel and share the teaching that they had committed to memory? With all of the collaboration and agreements that came from the early councils, if these lessons were not meant to be shared, it seems that there would have been stricter controls around keeping the teachings secret, or definitively segregating monastic teachings from teachings for the laity.

Where I land is that the Buddha taught, suffering and the liberation from suffering. We are all going to die, we will all benefit from having a peaceful death. And to be born into the human realm is a rare gift, not to be squandered. And to me, this means, that yes, we can all access the teachings of maraṇasati and saṃvega.

Mindfulness practice is the current craze in the modern world. How can mindfulness of death be incorporated into the many mindfulness practices now taught, especially for those who are not religious?

First, let's consider why mindfulness has become such a craze. As a secular practice, it would seem that the goal of mindfulness is to help individuals improve their well-being. And often what that represents is to help alleviate stress, depression, and anxiety. Mindfulness is also used to build concentration, and to improve athletic performance or on the job productivity. And this leads me to answer your question with a question. Does mindfulness of death belong in a secular mindfulness practice? It would be very interesting to open this question up to secular mindfulness teachers and practitioners.

Right now, I think, it depends. My apologies, I know that is not a definitive answer. I come back to, what is the reason that an individual is engaging in mindfulness practice? You noted that I am an advocate of *Death Dhamma,* and I do believe that embracing our own impermanence leads us to a peaceful life and death. I think this is true for us all, no matter our religious beliefs or lack thereof. Before inserting mindfulness of death into a secular practice, it would be wise to consider the timing and the placement of the message.

Buddhism has often been accused of being a pessimistic religion and life negating because of its emphasis on suffering. How can we change the perception

that reflecting on death is not pessimistic but realistic?

There are people who say to me, "Why are you always about death?" Or "You went through the deaths of your loved ones, why would you purposefully think about that again?" The analogy I use is that of preparing to run a marathon. You can just get up the day of the marathon, throw on your running shoes and give it a try. If you have not trained, you are probably going to have a very difficult, and very painful experience. But with preparation, your experience will be different. I would never suggest that running a marathon will be easy, but the more you prepare, the better your outcome will be. Your training is not pessimism, it is realism.

This might be a fine point, is Buddhism about suffering, or the alleviation of suffering? When you go to the doctor for back pain, do you pretend that pain does not exist, or do you openly acknowledge the pain in the hopes of finding ways to decrease the pain? Some people are afraid of doctors, and afraid of what changes they must make. Those people opt to live with the pain.

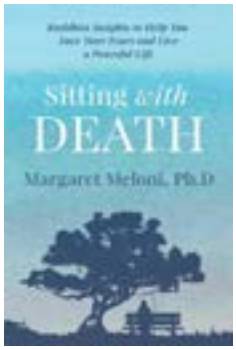
Buddhism is about recognizing that there is suffering, for the purpose of transcending that suffering. To recognize this is to be open to looking for a way out.

You wrote "Carpooling with Death" about how living with death can make us stronger, wiser, and fearless about death and dying. Can you tell us briefly the focus of this book and how we can get a copy of it?

Thank you for asking about *Carpooling with Death: How Living with Death will make You, Stronger, Wiser and Fearless*. Perhaps the best description of this book is that it is part memoir and part self-help, as it covers my journey to make friends with death, what I encountered while dealing with the death of my loved ones, and how Buddhism gave me the strength I needed. And in sharing my story, my goal is to help others, and to show what it can be like to navigate the deaths of your loved ones.

https://www.amazon.com/Carpooling-Death-Living-Stronger-Fearless-ebook/dp/B07KFRHGY9

If I may, I would like to introduce you to *Sitting with Death: Buddhist Insights to Help You Face Your Fears and Live a Peaceful Life.* This is a continuation of my work and is based on interviews with twelve Buddhist teachers. Monks, nuns, and laypeople. With the goal of helping us understand what their experiences with death and grief have been like, in order to give all of us insight into how we can train for death.



https://www.amazon.com/Sitting-Death-Buddhist-Insights-Peaceful/dp/1953596207/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=
Both books are available on Amazon and be ordered from your favorite bookseller.

Perhaps in a nutshell, can you share with us the main benefits of contemplation of death on a daily basis?

When you live with an awareness of death you become more discerning in how you spend your time and your energy. Understanding the preciousness of each moment helps you to place your focus on what is most important to you. And as you live side-by-side with the idea of death, you can replace fear with a peaceful acceptance of the impermanence of all living things. And from that peaceful acceptance can come the ability to live and love without attachment. And that is a release from suffering.

Thank you so much for asking such insightful questions, and for allowing me to share with your audience. May you all be well, may you all be happy, at ease, and free from suffering. **EH**

Buddhist Leadership Development and Continuity

By Tan Huat Chye

Tan Huat Chye is the Founding Director of the Centre for Research & Dhamma Leadership Enhancement (d'CRADLE), a strategic initiative started by the Theravada Buddhist Council of Malaysia to transform the Buddhist community through enhancement of leadership based on Buddhism. He is also the Program Designer and Lead Facilitator of the Great Leadership Awakening with Dhamma (GLAD) program, and DhammaWorks Mini Workshop Series. Huat Chye gives talks on Buddhism in various Buddhist centers, and at Buddhist Conferences and Inter-faith Forums on various aspects of Buddhist practices and leadership. He is also an accomplished English and Chinese Buddhist Song-writer, with many tunes and albums to his credit. Benny has asked Huat Chye to share his broad insights into leadership and Buddhism for the Buddhist community.

Benny: You are a well-known Buddhist leader in the community and many would know you for your dharma talks and Buddhist music that you compose over the years. What inspires you to be so active in Buddhist missionary work after so many decades?

Huat Chye: Yes, it has been a long 45 years of Dhammaduta service work so far. Looking back, the journey has been filled with challenges and was not completely smooth sailing. Whether it is delivering Dhamma talks, setting-up and running Buddhist organizations or simply writing Buddhist music, it takes lots of patience and resilience; thankfully supported by wisdom and compassion that I learnt from the Buddha and his teachings.

What inspires my involvement in Buddhist missionary work over all these years is the feeling of gratitude that I deeply felt towards the Buddha. In learning more about his life and the footsteps that he has taken before us, I am motivated to do my small part in areas where I can contribute best. The Buddha's great compassion in giving his remaining 45 years of his life (after enlightenment) to help individuals to find joy, happiness, and liberation in life is indeed incomparable. To me, the Buddha didn't have to do so but he did it out of compassion for the good of gods and men. I must say I drew a lot of wisdom and inspiration from the Buddha's vision in spreading the Dhamma to "beings with little dusts in their eyes" (Mahāvagga I.10–11: Vinaya I.20–21). Without his great Compassion to reach out, we will be groping in the darkness of ignorance.

As a management consultant yourself, I understand you have started programs to train Buddhist leaders. What is the difference between the Buddhist concept of leadership as compared to the Western theory of leadership? Are there similarities?

I always consider good leadership is the pulse of any inspiring organization. For that, Buddhist organizations are of no exception.




The rise and fall of any organization depend a lot on how an organization is being led by their leaders. Great Buddhist organizations usually have leaders who are virtuous, visionary, exercise good judgements and lead with clear directions whilst providing a strong sense of purpose (mission). Over the years of my active involvements, I found these leadership traits to be sorely lacking in our Buddhist Community. I often asked myself what we could have done differently and significantly? The reflection led me to the idea of setting up the Centre of Research & Dhamma Leadership Enhancement (d'CRADLE) back in 2018. With the initiative, we embarked on a series of programs to develop and enhance the leadership capability of our Dhamma leaders. Time has changed. So must our Dhamma leaders' mindset and skillsets. So must the way we look at the issue of leadership in the context of Dhammaduta.

As to the question of whether there are fundamental differences between Western model of leadership and Buddhist Leadership; I found that fundamentally, the traits and skills required to be a leader are somewhat similar in nature. I guess the key difference lies in the motivation or purpose of leadership.

The Buddha's leadership to me is called "Enlightened Leadership" which embodies two great complimentary qualities of wisdom and compassion. While most leadership models advocate the importance of leading a team of people for achievement of a shared goal, Buddhist leadership ultimately is about individual's transformation (and liberation from suffering). We can lead a "successful" Buddhist organization with variety of activities and have active participation of members. But at the end of the day, if all these well-participated activities do not lead individuals to undergo self-transformation (with less greed, less hatred and less delusion), we would have failed as a Dhamma leader.

In what ways would you say the Buddha displayed great leadership qualities which we could emulate or apply in the development of today's Buddhist leaders?

The Buddha is the embodiment of all qualities that a great leader should have. He is wise, compassionate, visionary and yet down-to-earth in his approaches. His concern is not about making himself great (which he already is with his enlightenment) but in ensuring his people are equally wise and compassionate. As Tom Peters, the Guru of Transformation says: "Leaders don't create followers. They create more leaders". While leading a big "organization" called Sangha (with proper rules

& regulations called Vinaya) like any Transformational leader, he is always in-touch with his disciples to ensure behavioral and mindset changes happen individually. This leadership philosophy is well clarified in Dhammapada 183. As a great leader, he wants us to not just be successful but also living a happy life filled with blessings.

The Buddha advocates the roadmap to self-transformation by asking us to abandon unskillful habits, build skillful habits and most importantly; a shift of our paradigm in life. By believing and practicing these 3 things, he led many individuals to great worldly and spiritual heights. To me, these are hallmarks of great leaders.

Can you share some of the programs you have developed to coach Buddhist leaders?

I believe the development or making of a great Buddhist leader begins with right mindset (Right View & Right Intention). Without a right mindset, no amount of skills training can be of any benefit to the individuals and our community. Hence, in training or developing our Dhamma leaders, re-framing and reshaping their minds to understand their leadership roles and instilling a stronger sense of Mission will be our key focus.

To achieve this, we designed a signature program called Great Leadership Awakening with Dhamma (GLAD) based on the verses of Dhammapada 182: "Rare is the birth as a human being, Hard is the life of mortals; Hard is the hearing of the Dhamma, Rare is the Appearance of the Buddha".

Like the Buddha, every good Dhamma leader must learn to appreciate life and empathize the pains of mortal being. Being a leader is not about being busy to run activities. Our success as Dhamma leaders is not measured by the quantity of things we do. Our leadership role is to facilitate the awakening of Buddha-nature in the lives of people we encounter. With that, we hope to see them riding above the waves of Samsara with a simple realization that: "Suffering is Optional, Happiness is always a Choice".

Apart from GLAD, there are many other skill-based programs that we designed to ensure Dhamma leaders' capability & competencies are enhanced. Dhamma leaders need to learn to be good Influencers, Social-media savvy and in the fore-front of latest methodology of outreach. In d'CRADLE, programs such as Digital Dhammaduta, Dhamma Influencing through Story-telling, Host as Influencer Program (HIP), Compassion in Action, Reach and Engage (CARE) program, Building Dhamma-Inspired Teams program and many more are made available for the development of our leaders.

How and where do you identify Buddhist leaders to be developed?

In developing our Community Dhamma leaders, I always take a stand that we should not do "piece-meal" work. Our effort to develop Dhamma leaders must be well thought-through, systematic and sustainable. Our focus should not just be developing the existing leaders, but also the emerging leaders of the next decades. Hence, we need to be actively scouting for leadership talents, identifying them and subsequently developing them for the future.

To do this, d'CRADLE was conceptualized in collaboration with Theravada Buddhist Council of Malaysia (TBCM) as a strategic initiative for the Buddhist Community. If the Christians have the Bible College and Christian Training Centre (CTC) to train pastors, Christian leaders and Christian Workers, what do we have in our Dhamma Community? I personally feel that we should not leave to mere chance in identifying and developing our Dhamma leaders.

Taking the Buddha as our role-model, we should make conscious effort in making choices to develop our leaders well. The Buddha personally chose his disciples, developed, mentored them and eventually made them into leaders of their own rights. In the Sangha Order; great monastic individuals like Ven. Ananda, Ven. Sariputta, Ven. Moggallana and Ven. Maha Kassapa are leaders of their own rights, each with his own unique capabilities and strengths.

What is the biggest challenge (or major challenges) facing the Buddhist community today which

as Buddhist leaders they should urgently address?

In my opinion, there are many issues and challenges that our Dhamma leaders must urgently take into consideration and address. I guess the biggest challenge is the complacency attitude of our leaders. For the last few decades, we have stopped being self-critical in the way we run and manage our Buddhist organizations. We are quick to be "contented" with the so-called "proven and run-of-the-mill" type of activities, which could be outdated. In many areas of Dhamma outreach work, we have stopped innovating to stay relevant with the changing times. For example, the Sunday School model that we used, had been around for the past 60 years or more. Sadly, very little concerted efforts had been made by our community leaders to review and revamp it.

The other glaring challenge that I noticed is the inability of our leaders to continue learning and upgrading themselves so that they can stay relevant in serving the Buddha-Sasana better. Serving the Sasana is indeed noble, but leaders must also set priorities to learn, practice the Dhamma and enhance their professionalism. Without that, it's hard to see the desired progress and outcomes.

Can you share some success stories which can be attributed to the leadership training that Buddhist leaders have gone through?

Well, it may be too premature to claim success in our efforts. However, there have been some notable progress that we have made in the leadership development work.

For the last few years, we have conducted 10 GLAD Programs with about 180 participants attendees and many of them (GLADians) have either stepped-up to be the EXCO of Buddhist societies or started to be more actively involved in Dhammaduta work. Take for example, Wong Suh Chean of Kinrara Metta Buddhist Society who went for the Presidency after completing her GLAD 1 program. Dr Gun Suk Chyn of Sudhamma Seremban disclosed that her renewed sense of mission to serve the Buddha-Sasana came right after her GLAD 7 and JEDI programs. Another person worth mentioning is Lee Weoi Li from Klang. Apart from being the key technical person behind most of the on-line Dhamma talks, he has found a renewed spirit to step forward to be the new President of Mudita Buddhist Society.

Team-wise, the Johor GLADians (from GLAD 5) under the mentorship of Dr. Punna Wong are instrumental in the successful run of "Breaking Myths" series and MettaNet Cell Group. This similar development is also seen elsewhere in Seremban, Taiping and in some of the Buddhist groups in the Klang Valley.

Another notable success story is the increased digital savviness of our Dhamma leaders and workers. Recognizing the power of social media in Dhammaduta work, we introduced the Digital Dhammaduta program way back in 2019 (facilitated by Koh Mui Han) and later 2 more sessions in 2020 and 2021 (Johor Bahru).

In fact, when the pandemic happened in early 2020, some of the key participants of Digital Dhammaduta program pioneered the usage of on-line platform via Zoom, StreamYard and Facebook live-stream for their respective Buddhist societies; thereby garnering more viewers than actual physical capacity during pre-covid times.

In general, the seeds we planted have brought about a renewed commitment and a greater awareness for many Buddhists to be Mission-focused. We definitely like to see this rekindled Dhammaduta spirit spread far and wide as we intensify our Dhamma Leadership development initiatives in the coming years. **EH**

Bringing Compassion to Schools

By Jimi Slattery

Jimi Slattery is the Executive Director of the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion (DLCC) at Oxford, bringing an ethics education grounded in compassion and related values into UK schools.

Prior to joining the DLCC, Jimi was Head of Widening Access and Participation at the University of Oxford. In this role he was responsible for the University's outreach work with young people across the UK.

Whilst working for Oxford, Jimi has overseen and undertaken widening participation projects in a number of areas including; engaging with primary schools, mentoring, coaching, mental health, digital education and enabling young people to develop skills through research.
Jimi also has experience in the commercial, public and charity sector for a number of training and education related organisations in the UK and worldwide. Jimi has designed and managed educational programmes in several countries including Sri Lanka, Guyana, China and Thailand. He has also worked in vocational education promoting the value of practical qualifications to employers and young people.

Ziyi Wong, a graduate student at Oxford University, met up with Jimi on October 7, 2021 and asked him about his interest in Buddhism, his vision for DLCC and the importance of compassion in today's world.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Ziyi: Can you tell us a bit more about your background?

Jimi: Before joining the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion (DLCC), I was the Head of Widening Access and Participation at the University of Oxford for about ten years. I was involved in various things including admissions, equity, and diversity within student body. I was interested in understanding why students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds were not achieving academically. For a long time, I focused on work around academic attainment, for example why certain children were not achieving levels that were expected and what was holding them back.

I have taught mindfulness in children for about ten years. In fact, my life intersected with Buddhism, in particular, meditation when I was 18 years old. I lived in a Buddhist monastery in Sri Lanka for over a year, as part of the overseas volunteering scheme. My day-to-day job was teaching in a very small mountain village school. The school, like many parts of the subcontinent was run by priests. They put a roof over my head and fed me, and I repaid them by working at the school. They also very kindly taught me Dharma and meditation.

As my career progressed, I realised that children were struggling to achieve in schools. Rather than it being to do with the academic instructions they were receiving or systematic issues, it was as much to do with their ability to manage their social and emotional self within the educational setting. When I got back to the UK, I was particularly interested in a secular form of meditation. And it was around that time that Jon Kabat-Zinn was developing mindfulness mainly for adults. I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if we had something like this for children. I was connected with some of the founding members of 'Mindfulness in Schools' project. Mindfulness is quite a common phrase in this country now and it has become quite a regular intervention in helping children develop emotion regulation skills.

How do you come to know about HH The Dalai Lama and eventually became the executive director of the centre?

He was a very influential person when I was growing up. The first time I heard about the Dalai Lama was actually watching Martin Scorsese's film in the 1990s. I became very interested in Buddhism when I was in my late teens. His books were really accessible, useful and instructive especially to Westerners, and they were incredibly popular. That was my introduction to him. Also, he used to travel a lot. Once or twice a year, he would be offering teachings in the UK, and I remember going to see him at Hyde Park, London when I was 20. It was hugely inspiring to hear someone talking in terms of kindness at the time of bludgeoning global conflicts. It has shaped the way I thought about what happiness means in life and the approach to life I want to have. We can foster greater peace within ourselves through service to others. The opportunity to engage with that in my working life has been a massive gift. To work for a project directly under the patronage of His Holiness is something special because I get to work with people who are connected to him and have similar ethos, which is altruism.

After ten years at Oxford, I have reached a point in my career where I have done a lot of things and I was looking for something new. It so happened that I was aware of the centre because I had been there for a talk, but I had not engaged with them at a deeper level. The centre shifted its focus 3 years ago and I was employed because of my background in education and history engaging with meditation and mindfulness, and I have been working for the DLCC for 3.5 years. I was brought in to run a new area of work for the centre focusing on creating an ethics and compassion programme for UK schools, in collaboration with Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning programme developed by Emory University in Atlanta, USA. Alongside them, we have been developing materials for compassion education which are available for schools because I think we are lacking some of the life-changing educational experiences that the children could go through to gain values and ethical element as well as social and emotional skills. His Holiness has seeded many programmes around the world and we can draw the lessons from compassion training at Stanford, MIT and Emory University and condense them into accessible, engaging and fun activities so that the children can use them as a foundation to develop internal awareness, resilience towards life challenges, and flourish.

What is the purpose of the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion? What are the major activities of the centre?

The centre was founded in 2016. The initial 3-4 years of work was focusing on research related to ethics such as funding research about compassion. That was a particular area of interest with His Holiness The Dalai Lama at the time. He was interested in a deeper exploration of universal human ethics. The centre engaged many philosophers and ethicists around the world to do some interesting work around compassion and related values. Some of these wonderful resources are on DLCC UK website and YouTube channels if people are interested. Compassion is the primary area where His Holiness is interested in now, and the reason for that is drawn from all the work he has seeded around the world over the last 20 years, especially at Stanford and Mind Life Institute, also Richard Davidson's and other neuroscientists' work, showing for example that adult compassion training can be incredibly impactful in terms of making a difference to people's wellbeing. This is very timely because there has been a lot of concerns regarding community segregation and individuals' wellbeing. What mindfulness has achieved is wonderful but probably quite narrow. For me, compassion training not only offers

His Holiness the Dalai visits Oxford in 2015 to launch the Dalai Lama Centre for Compassion. He engages with the students on the importance of compassion in one's daily lives.

emotional regulation but also the development of other skills as well, like deeper conscious awareness of others and the world around you.

At the moment, we are helping children to manage their emotional states so that they can develop personally and academically by training them to be proactive rather than reactive. We want to make this a universal programme that schools offer, so that the children from the age of 5 can learn these important skills which allow them to move forward with life with greater awareness and resilience. This is our area of focus, and the project is called 'Compassion Matters'. Along with SEE Learning, all the materials are free.

What kind of inspiration have you got from the Dalai Lama and what impact has this had on your life?

I think tolerance is probably quite prominent now because it is a modern phenomenon that lines are drawn very hard in terms of politics, culture, and nationalism. He helps me to stay in a place of non-judgement. He is able to maintain relationships even with controversial people. For example, he always says that George Bush is his friend. His Holiness manages to find the humanity within people, even people who are very difficult to deal with. This is the hardest part of compassion practice – being compassionate towards people you don't like or don't agree with, but it is really important. If we are cutting these people out of our world, then we are not really engaging with our world. And we are not growing in our understanding or ability to be kind to others. That to me is hugely inspiring. As the nature of my work is focused on compassion, he has made me think a lot every single day about

the intention of what I am doing especially in relation to others, and the importance of having the deeper awareness of my actions and ensuring that what I do is from a place of compassion every time.

His Holiness is not just a nice old man. He thinks compassion is very revolutionary and I do agree with that. I admire his ability to not only being kind, but he also has a lot of courage as bringing happiness and kindness into people's lives is about being courageous enough to stand up doing justice and know when to be brave. He embodies these messages, which is inspiring.

I read that one of the centre's key missions is to promote compassion and related values. Why do you think kindness and compassion are so important in our society today? And how do you achieve that?

There is a lot of discussion about young people being less compassionate, but I don't think that's true. I find teenagers and children are incredibly compassionate. People have a natural capacity to compassion and when they see adversity it just fires up. I think my generation and the generations before are the ones that fuel the ecological and societal issues that the young people are facing now. My generation was the generation of mass production and consumption; the generation before mine was the generation of extreme wealth but failed to invest in a sustainable way. So, kindness and compassion are important because we need to teach those generations not to make the same mistakes the older generations have made, and not just turning compassion to adversity but also making it a natural way of engaging with the world. For me, it's helping young people to learn about what is right and wrong, when to be courageous and stand up for things and to be wise. These things circle around compassion. If you are a wise and compassionate person, courageous when you need to be, you will find happiness.

There is a reason that millions of people watch TED talks because they are seeking wisdom and life lessons, which are not taught in the classrooms. We want to make these lessons accessible and engaging for children.

At the moment, the centre is quite a small operation. We do work in partnership with other Dalai Lama Centres in Atlanta, Toronto, Switzerland, and Germany. We have evolved gradually from funding research to focusing on educational projects. It will be interesting to see where we would be in 3-4 years' time as the focus might move to another area. For instance, there is a growing interest in compassionate leadership skills in the corporate world.

As compassion is such an important value, how do you think each and every one of us, who has read this interview, can advance and promote this value in our day-to-day lives apart from outreach and school projects?

I think spending a small amount of time every day doing some contemplative exercise or meditation is really beneficial. There are both secular and non-secular resources available for free. We could focus on practices drawn from the Buddhist tradition which is being compassionate to yourself and wishing others well, including the very difficult persons. Creating that mindset within yourself is really an important part of our every day life. There is a lot of neuroscience evidence showing that if you practise compassion, a part of your brain grows bigger and stronger, and you become better at being altruistic, compassionate, and empathetic.

Kindness can be very simple; we can start by bringing someone a cup of tea, listening to someone, or offering someone a smile. That's the beginning, but to develop that onwards, the intention and awareness need to be deeper. We can achieve that by doing compassion training. Then, compassion starts to infiltrate everything you do. Rather than it being an action, it becomes your purpose and that is really powerful. It transforms your intentions and directions. I believe that's how people do transformative things.

You could also support compassion in your community by recommending some of the educational programmes I mentioned for the schools. **EH**

The Road Less Travelled

By Ven Dr Jue Wei

Venerable Dr. Juewei is an active member of the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist order and was tonsured under Venerable Master Hsing Yun. She is Head of Program for Humanistic Buddhism ("HB"), Director of the Humanistic Buddhism Centre, and Senior Lecturer at Nan Tien Institute (NTI) in Australia. Venerable Juewei holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies, a Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies, a Master of Business Administration, and a Master of Science in Computer Science and Engineering. She has worked on Artificial Intelligence systems and has held management positions in Singapore's statutory bodies. She leads or co-leads international teams in projects such as Buddhism in the Sea of Islands, NTI Visualiser, Journal on HB, Communities of Practice, Turning Points stories, Buddha's Birthday Education Project, as well as mobile apps and podcasts. Her latest project is co-organizing an international Symposium on Humanistic Buddhism. In this interview with Benny Liow for Eastern Horizon, Venerable Dr. Juewei shares her inspiring thoughts and adventures with loving-kindness.

Benny: Can you share what attracted you to Buddhism that you choose to become a monastic instead of being just an ordinary lay practitioner?

Jue Wei: Thank you for this reflective question which helped me to realize that my upbringing in Singapore should not have led me to Buddhism, let alone monasticism. I grew up in meritocratic Singapore and was a product of its education system. International scholarships bought my way to the USA to study Computer Science and Engineering and then to the UK for an MBA. My career matched with my love of all things new and innovative. My favourite subjects were all secular, physics, mathematics, and any kind of physical sciences. I performed worst in English, art, literature, and anything to do with the humanities.

I found Buddhism later in life when I entered a tea house and discovered that all the books on display were written by a certain Venerable Master Hsing Yun. About a year later, I found myself going on a pilgrimage to India where I took the Five Precepts in Bodhgaya. In 2000, I enrolled in a Buddhist College in the Fo Guang Shan ("FGS") headquarters in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. There I took the bodhisattva precepts but to my horror, discovered that I had to commit to vegetarianism. I remembered arguing with my teachers that nothing in the vows said that I had to be a vegetarian but the damage was done. So, when an ordination opportunity arose in FGS, I decided that there was no other place that could cook better vegetarian meals than FGS and so, I decided that I had to leave home. So, what made me a Buddhist and a nun? Food!

On a more serious note, why would an achievement "addict" with doting parents give up everything to become a Buddhist monastic? After hearing Venerable Thubten Chodron describe her path to Buddhism, I think that, like her, it has to be past life karma. Under normal circumstances, I would have put together a cost-benefit analysis and done lots of planning which would

likely tell me that Buddhist monasticism could not be a profitable path. But all I did was to pray to Guan Yin Bodhisattva to reveal my destiny. I also realized that it was in my karma to love the road less trodden. Let me share these lines from the poet Robert Frost:

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference."

You are ordained in the Fo Guang Shan Order founded by Dharma Master Hsing Yun. What did he teach that inspired you?

Between 2000 and 2008, I was very fortunate to be able to approach the Venerable Master on a regular basis. There was an extraordinary humanness about him, larger than life, and yet, not disempowering the individual. His accomplishments read like *Mission Impossible* and yet, he does not place himself above others. If there is one thing that inspired me most, it was his big heart.

Once I was in the city of Yilan in northeast Taiwan, saying good-bye to the Venerable Master and his entourage of two cars of elder nuns traveling with him back to Taipei. Soon after departing, Venerable Master's car returned to the front door to collect a recently ordained novice nun who was late and had not boarded. Speak of "leave no one behind"!

The more I learn about the Humanistic Buddhism (HB) that Venerable Master promoted, the more I realized the depth of his teachings and practice. As he said to me once, it is very difficult for anyone to understand HB if he or she does not practise it. Now, I have come to touch the edge of what he means: unless we mindfully walk the path, bring out the best in ourselves (whatever the conditions) by building a culture of care and realizing the power of the gift, we won't be living life as a humanistic Buddhist. Venerable Master's teachings are truly about living life, embracing all possibilities (some of which we did not think feasible), and building wholesome conditions for the future.
About two years ago, I arrived at a catchphrase for HB which I think not only captures the essence of HB

but also what inspires me. It is "Everyday Dharma for Everybody", i.e. it is so ordinary and yet extraordinary because it is about enabling ourselves and everyone else to live life to its fullest in every moment.

Humanistic Buddhism talks about transforming our planet into a Pure Land of peace and bliss. How is this possible when all of history has always been about warfare and conflict?

Venerable Master Hsing Yun said that life is made up of halves and halves. So, ALL of history is not warfare and conflict and all of history is not "living happily ever after."

In a Cherokee tale from the United States, an elder tells his grandson that inside each of us are two wolves in

battle: one is Evil, representing anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies, and ego. The other is Good, depicting joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, and truth. And the winner of the battle is the wolf we feed.

Hence, we can transform our planet into a Pure Land of peace and bliss by feeding the good wolf inside each of us. And if every one of our good wolves wins the battles inside us, then we will have a pack of good wolves to build the Pure Land. We all have the Buddha nature; it is up to us whether we want to access it.

It is said that we can find peace and happiness by letting go of our attachments. How do we do that if we have family, work, and worldly commitments?

The story of the life of the Buddha contains an important message carried by three messengers who represent old age, sickness, and death. These messengers tell us that because we live, we will age, fall ill, and die. When these messengers arrive at our doorstep, there will be no room or time for us to carry our family, work, money or even mobile phone with us. There are times when it makes sense for us to pick up the tasks of building a family, a career and service to the community. But there are also times when we have to let go. The trick is in HOW we go about picking up and letting go.

Last November, with the death of my father, I became an orphan. I thought I had let go of my parents since I was convinced that they are in Amitabha's Pure Land. With news of some recent deaths, grief returned to me. I realized that I had not let go because the void was too big. There is in me a wish to be loved unconditionally. My parents fulfilled my need for over 50 years. With their departure, they left behind a huge void. The problem lies within me and not them. When I realized that this hole could never be filled again, I decided that it was now time for me to love others the way my parents had loved me. That is the secret of a regenerative power source: to be able to give to others unconditionally, knowing that everyone else, like me, also has that wish to be loved unconditionally. So, peace and happiness can be found amidst our family, work, and worldly commitments. Peace and happiness can also be found when we transition from one commitment to another.

The image of a solitary monastic meditating peacefully in the forest or cave is often perceived as representing real Buddhism. Is that a true reflection of Buddhism?

Yes, people can be imaginative and romantic: creating an image of our Utopia. I don't know what percentage of the world's population of 7.9 billion people are meditating peacefully in a forest or cave. Perhaps under lockdown, we hope that more people are meditating while sheltering in place. Our inner peace is the best starting place. The *Dhammapada* begins with

"Mind precedes all knowables,
mind's their chief, mind-made are they."

I know that my default state of mind should be one of peace and I should be aware when that mood is disturbed. However, it is not enough that I alone am the most peaceful and contented person in my family. If I live with a quarrelsome family, then my peace cannot last very long. The bodhisattva will find ways to bring peace to the people he or she lives with. This may be through skilful means, such as playing soft music, dedicating time to use NTI's Mindful Check-In app together, or setting up a quiet corner in the family room. Allow peace and happiness to permeate through one corner at a time, one moment at a time, with lots of patience, and supported by inner peace.
Of course, during the day, we meet colleagues, classmates, friends, or even strangers through Zoom™ and perhaps, even on the streets. The goal is to let our inner peace and joy permeate our conversations and respectfully engage with everyone. Perhaps send a birthday greeting or a care package to someone you know or someone in need.

Recently, I was rather upset with the inequitable access to vaccines causing so much suffering globally. Despite the rapid development and clinical success of Covid-19 vaccines, patents and trade secrets prevent the widespread distribution of these vaccines to poorer countries. There are now more than 4.5 million deaths related to the Covid-19 pandemic and 120 million more people pushed into extreme poverty while billionaires are growing richer. We know that countries which have access to vaccines are likely to recover more rapidly. But fretting about such social turmoils will do little good. Instead, I can ensure to keep as many people as possible in my prayers, in my daily chanting, and support as many noteworthy causes as possible.

This is how I have tried to interpret and put into practice the Five Harmonies teachings of Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

What are some examples of spiritual practice in daily life as taught in Buddhism?

The biggest lesson that Buddhism has taught me is our intrinsic equality. The pandemic has shown me the First Noble Truth of universal suffering: we are all equally vulnerable. And we are all equally fearful for our mortality. That thought makes me much less disturbed by the selfish decisions of the corporate shareholders or national leaders turning a blind eye to climate crises. We are all equal in suffering. So, I will still send prayers to them when they fall sick and die. But I also know that they will have to bear the karma of their deeds, and they are responsible for their own awakening.

From this equanimous position, what Japanese Zen master Dogen calls "ceaseless practice" is possible. This is what Venerable Master Hsing Yun calls daily life practice. The practice is to maintain a certain attitude of equanimity guided by non-attachment to thoughts, concerns, and desires. Beware that non-attachment does not mean absence of goals but rather not being overly attached to those goals. One should still take the activity or assigned task seriously but not seek any praise for one's acts when the goals are accomplished.

In a Chan Monastery, a cook is taught to "put your awakened mind to work, making a constant effort to serve meals full of variety that are appropriate to the need and the occasion, and that will enable everyone to practice with their bodies and minds with the least hindrance." And so, in the "Pure Conduct" chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, a practitioner recites prayers to guide his or her thoughts in every action or encounter from the moment of waking up to sleeping.

Another big lesson from Buddhism is our interconnectedness. Recognizing that my lack is everybody's lack, I empathize with every suffering being. Recognizing that my accomplishment comes from the support of everyone else, I respect everyone. This I believe can be practiced in everyday life: a sense of humility, compassion, and respect. This year, Hugh Mackay, Australia's well-known social psychologist and prolific author published *The Kindness Revolution*. In it, he advocates wondrous forms of kindness and interconnectedness to spur our practice forward. Practice means we need to train ourselves and build our mental muscles. Hence, the Communities of Practice in Nan Tien Institute runs weekly 30-minute Sunday Check-In sessions to help

one another develop the habit of a reflective pause and share how we (could) have exercised humanistic values in the past week. I believe that Humanistic Buddhism is a silent revolution, a revolution that starts with building our inner clarity and inner power, for the benefit of others and we will inevitably benefit from such actions.

The Buddha taught the importance of both study and practice. How does Nan Tien Institute inculcate the spirit of both an academic understanding of Buddhism and its practical applications?

You and I live in troubled times, contending with issues such as climate change and mental disorders. How can we build our own inner strength and thrive under such conditions? This is the time to turn to ancient sages who confronted similar situations successfully. This is why we invest in Buddhist education.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun embraces the teachings of the Buddha by emphasizing study and practice. Hence, he persisted in building NTI as an institution of higher education modelled after the bodhisattva values of compassion, wisdom, committed service, and practice. For example, students who enrol in the Graduate

Certificate in Humanistic Buddhism will critically reflect on humanistic values in a subject on 'Foundational Texts' and put them into practice in another subject focused on 'Principles of Professional Engagement' as bodhisattvas.

Learning takes place in an NTI classroom through what the students do, individually and together. Buddhist mindfulness guides NTI's contemplative pedagogy, offering all students a safe space to reflect on their learning journey. Group activities ensure students appreciate our interconnectedness and work collaboratively. The 'Buddhist Ethics' subject examines how Buddhist moral values guide our decision-making. Students are encouraged to reflect on the nuances of practising one precept and the result is often a long-term behavioral change, such as kindness towards insects.

NTI now stands as the only institution of higher education in Australia that offers courses in Buddhism. Our unique courses in Applied Buddhist Studies, Health and Social Wellbeing, Humanistic Buddhism, and Mental Health include Buddhist values and wisdom. Hence, we offer subjects such as "Compassion at Work" and "Mindful and Compassionate Leadership."

Students tell us that education in NTI is transformative, from the inside out. Education at NTI is not ivory tower talk but rather develops the humanistic skills and values that will serve each student for a long time to come. I see how our graduates move on to pursue PhDs worldwide and volunteer in community organisations with a greater sense of mission. They

inform us how the education at NTI has inspired them to serve as bodhisattvas of a troubled world.

What's your parting words of advice for us during this Covid-19 pandemic so that we can maintain peace and calm in our daily lives?

I wonder how many people lived in peace and calm pre-Covid? In *The Symbolic Life*, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung writes,

"it is becoming ever more obvious that it is not famine, not earthquakes, not microbes, not cancer but man himself who is man's greatest danger to man, for the simple reason that there is no adequate protection against psychic epidemics, which are infinitely more devastating than the worst of natural catastrophes."

The pandemic is reshaping how we live and work and how we relate to one another. We are working from home, schooling our children from home, and attending funerals from home. As restrictions ease, there is a lot of uncertainty and anxiety building up but also opportunities. It is the perfect time for us to build a culture of care based on our intrinsic Buddha nature so that we do not let psychic epidemics take over our lives.

So, please allow me to end with two quotes. First is an extract from "Go to the Limits of Your Longing," a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke:

"Let everything happen to you: beauty and terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final."

Yes, no feeling is final – Covid has taught us that no mutation is final and so, we cannot expect to abide by any form or feeling. Finally, an extract from David Whyte's "Coleman's Bed":

"Live in this place
as you were meant to and then,
surprised by your abilities,
become the ancestor of it all,
the quiet, robust and blessed Saint
that your future happiness
will always remember."

Take heart that you are always sowing the seeds of your future happiness. Have faith in your quiet, robust, and blessed Buddha nature! **EH**

The Buddha Dharma has no Gender

By Ven Dr Tenzin Dadon

Receiving the Outstanding Buddhist Women Award, Bangkok, Thailand, 2012

Venerable Tenzin Dadon (Sonam Wangmo) was born in Bhutan in 1977. She became a novice nun at the age of 16 in 1993 and received her sramaneri ordination from HH The 14th Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1999. Venerable Tenzin holds a B.A. in Buddhism from Jamyang Choling Institute, India, M.A. in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University, India and International Buddhist College, Songkhla, Southern Thailand, and Ph.D. in Gender and Religion from University of Malaya, Malaysia. She has participated in many Sakyadhita International Conference for Buddhist Women, as presenter, translator and moderator. She received the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Awards on 2 March 2012 at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, for her contribution to Buddhist women in the Himalaya region. Benny Liow interviewed Venerable Tenzin about her life as a Buddhist nun and her projects to help Buddhist women, including nuns, in Bhutan and in the Himalayan region.

Puja for devotees at the Thrangu Dharma Retreat centre, Ipoh, 2017.

Delivering a Dharma talk at the Selangor and Kuala Lumpur Paramita Buddhist Society, 12 Oct 2019

Benny: You chose to become a nun at the young age of 16 when other teenagers your age would be more attracted in movies, dating, and other worldly attractions. What motivated you to renounce at such a young age?

Tenzin Dadon: Yes, I became a nun at the age of 16 but I was a nun from heart since I was six or seven years old. I used to tell my mom I wanted to be a nun but she never allowed me to. Since young I never had interest in worldly matters. I prefer to wear dark colored clothes like the elders, visit temples and do prayers during school holidays. I was very happy with such activities and never thought of dating or going to the movies. When I was 16 years old, I heard some Zanskari nuns in Bhutan talking about going to India to study in a nunnery, and I asked if they could take me along. They then spoke to a Bhutanese nun leading a nunnery in North India who said I could join them. After I made up my mind, I told my parents and siblings about my decision as I needed money to travel to India.

Both your B.A. and M.A degrees were on Buddhism, and your Ph.D. was on gender and religion. How did your academic study help you in your spiritual practice as a Buddhist nun?

I have progressed much in my understanding and practice of Buddhism after obtaining my academic qualifications, which also helped to broaden my horizon.

Doing Pre-survey of a Nuns Retreat Centre, 2013

Recipients of scholarship from Bhutan.

Care for needy animals, including kittens.

Nuns from Jamyang Choling Institute, Dharamsala, India, receiving free Ipads for their on-line study preparing for the Geshema exams during the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020.

Prayer for the deceased father of a friend, Kuala Lumpur 2019, with Ven Dr Karma Tashi Choeden of Malaysia

With this knowledge, I now have the confidence to support others in various ways, including teaching. Although both my degrees were on Buddhism, the focus was different. For my M.A. degree, I learnt about different Buddhist traditions which gave me a wider perspective of the vastness of Buddhist teachings. I hope that by getting a Ph.D. as a nun, this recognition of academic achievement will inspire and spur other nuns to have the confidence to study and progress despite their gender. In the current environment, nuns in Bhutan mainly serve the monks or the monasteries and are not given much opportunity to study nor teach others even if they have the qualifications and knowledge. So I hope to be the catalyst for this change of mind-set of the nuns.

My academic learning in a secular university also allows me to understand not just other Buddhist traditions, but other religions as well, and the real-life challenges that we face in the world today. It is important for us to apply modern methods to overcome the problems we face in society today.

You have a deep interest in animal welfare, the environment and climate change, and women's rights issues, especially among female monastics in the Himalayan region. What projects have you initiated to put these interests into action?

I don't have any particular projects on hand yet but I try to help wherever necessary. I plan to establish a retreat center for nuns but due to some regulatory restrictions by the Government and the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is now put on hold. Nevertheless, I am helping nuns and children from underprivileged families to pursue their education with the support of fellow Dharma friends. There are a few nuns who are preparing for the highest degree of *Geshema* introduced for the first time for nuns in 2016. Some children are just starting a pre-university study and some nuns are preparing to go for long term retreat, hence I try to help them fulfil their dream. However, I am still looking for sponsors for these good causes. Once the pandemic is over, I hope to re-start the retreat center for nuns and at the same time help educate the children and women in and around the village. In terms of animal welfare, I help stray animals by feeding them, especially if they are malnourished. If they are injured or sick, I would take them to the vet and sometimes rehome them through the help of social media as we do not have our own animal shelter. I also wish to educate people to be kind to animals and raise an awareness of animal welfare. By participating in seminars and conferences, I also highlight the water crisis, climate change, and global warming. Most importantly, I hope to empower women to be educated as this is the only way to rise above the problems they face in life.

Can you share a bit more about your retreat center for nuns and the type of support you need right now?

Teaching Buddhism to children and parents, Maha Karuna Buddhist Society, Selangor, 2018

A Talk on Animal Care and Protection Forum, Palace of the Golden Horses, 5 Oct 2019

For the time being, I have stopped collecting funds for the retreat center for the nuns. However, for the children's education, I need to sponsor a few children to further their studies as they cannot afford to pay the enrolment and travel expenditures. Some nuns have also approached me for financial support but I couldn't meet their needs as many of my sponsors are also affected financially by the Covid-19 pandemic. If I have enough funds, I would like to support the pre-university education of the children, the Geshema examination of the nuns sitting for it, and various retreat accommodations for the nuns doing retreats.

Most Buddhist teachers are male. Are there any prominent female Dharma masters in Bhutan (or in Tibetan Buddhism) who have strongly influenced society and culture?

A: Yes, there were and there are still a significant number of female Dharma teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. I mentioned them in the thesis of my second M.A. degree from the International Buddhist College, Thailand, titled "Soteriological Androgyny and Eminent Buddhist Women Masters in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism". I am also co-authoring with Venerable Dr. Karma Tashi Choedron a forthcoming book titled "I can be Enlightened Too" about female Buddhist masters in Tibetan Buddhism. Currently, we do have many contemporary women masters in Bhutan and Tibet or in other parts of the world. In the case of female masters, their stories have not been documented, and their teachings remained in oral form and known only to local communities where they lived. However, a few reliable full biographies and liberation stories (hagiographies) have been translated into English, but there are hardly any biographies of 20th century illustrious female masters. Moreover, most of the biographies documented are of female masters from Tibet even though Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism is practiced in Bhutan, Nepal, India, Mongolia and Buryatia. Precious little is known of female masters outside of Tibet. Almost all female personalities mentioned are portrayed through androcentric lens, i.e. from the perspective of male religious personalities, whereby the female adept is almost always portrayed as an emanation of a ḍākinī, never an ordinary woman, which contrasts with the accounts in autobiographies. There are only four autobiographies by female masters in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism. There is a marked difference in the way the life and liberation stories are told, if written by females.

Can you highlight some teachings from the scriptures, especially from the Tibetan canon, where the Buddha categorically spoke against gender discrimination, and that enlightenment can be attained by both men and women?

A: The Buddha declared that men and women have equal spiritual potential to attain liberation from saṃsāra. In the same vein, race, caste and social standing are not to be taken as barriers to pursue the highest spiritual goal in Buddhism. According to the Buddha, spiritual progress depends on the quality of one's actions rather than traits inherited at birth (Gross, 1996).

In Highest Yoga Tantra, even the first step of receiving empowerment is possible only on the basis of the presence of a complete assembly of male and female deities as stated by HH the 14th Dalai Lama in "Survey of the Paths of Tibetan Buddhism". The female role is strongly emphasized in Highest Yoga Tantra. According to HH the Dalai Lama, "To despise a woman is a transgression of one of the root tantric vows. Also, in the actual practice of meditating

Robe offering at Zilukha Nunnery, Bhutan, 28 Oct 2015

on mandala deities, the deity concerned is often female, such as Vajra Yogini or Nairatmaya". Failure to keep the vows properly results in a root tantric downfall. The rationale behind this vow is that women symbolize wisdom and emptiness. As the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa affirmed (as cited in Simmer- Brown, (2002: 182):
Woman is essentially wisdom,
Source of spontaneous prajñā and subtle-body.
Never consider her inferior;
Strive especially to see her as Vajravārāhī.

Biernacki (2006: 192) explains that the tantric pledges are not about worshipping supramundane female deities but rather, it is about "venerating ordinary living women".

Highest Yoga Tantra such as Guhyasamaja explicitly and clearly explains that a practitioner can become totally enlightened in this lifetime as a female. The Mahāyāna doctrine of nondualism based on Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamaka view of emptiness which reasons that since nothing exists inherently, then, even femininity, which is the basis of discrimination against women, does not exist. Thus, women cannot be disqualified from spiritual practice and attainments simply because emptiness transcends gender (Gross, 1996). A Tibetan proverb clearly illustrates this point: "In the enlightened thought there is no male and female. In the enlightened speech there is no near and far" (Gutschow, 2004: 5). The śūnyatā doctrine essentially espouses that "dharma is neither male nor female", i.e. beyond all dualistic conceptions.

In the Mahāyāna Mahasukhavati Vyuha Sutra, it is mentioned that in the Pureland of Buddha Amitābha, known as Dewachen in Tibetan, there is no man or woman, meaning that beings born in the Pureland are androgynous. Dualistic notions such as man and woman are not present in the Pureland of Buddha Amitābha.

In the practice of tantra and especially in Highest Yoga Tantra, since all males and females do have the same faculty equally, there is no difference in their ability to attain Buddhahood. So, the Buddhist position on the question of discrimination between the sexes is that from the ultimate point of view, there is no distinction at all.

Although the Prajñapāramita is synonymous with the feminine principle in Vajrayāna Buddhism, ultimately, there is no gender in the realm of absolute truth. Simmer-Brown quotes Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso's spontaneous song on this matter:
Between ḍāka and ḍākinīs there's a difference
In how their bodies may seem in apparent reality,
But for Mahāmudrā, luminous clarity,
There's not an atom of difference in their essential nature.

Changchub and Nyingpo assert that the first ever Tibetan to attain complete enlightenment was a woman, Yeshe Tsogyal.

Guru Padmasambhava proclaimed to Yeshe Tsogyal that when a woman practices the path with pure bodhicitta, her potential for enlightenment is greater than that of men because she is the very embodiment of wisdom:
Kyema Ho!
Yogīni seasoned in the Secret Mantra! The ground of Liberation
Is this human frame, this common human form —
And here distinctions, male or female,
Have no consequence.
And yet if bodhichitta graces it,
A woman's form indeed will be supreme!

According to Changchub & Nyingpo, Guru Padmasambhava, in his final teaching to Yeshe Tsogyal explicitly states that Yeshe Tsogyal gained enlightenment in a female body:
In reply to her impassioned pleas,
the Guru sings to her his final
teaching, in the course of which
he says. In the supreme body
of a woman, you have gained
accomplishment;
Your mind itself is Lord; request
him for empowerment and blessing.
There is no other regent of the
Lotus Guru.

Women in Vajrayāna Buddhism are eminent in various capacities. There is documented evidence of the high spiritual accomplishments of women in all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Many of these women's names were not recorded in history but according to Bokar Rinpoche:

Their rank was then equal to that of men. They could teach, give empowerments, and accomplish all the activities of the dharma.

Apart from having great realizations, these women played crucial roles as teachers, founders and lineage holders of special transmissions and practices as treasure-revealers. Most of these women were renowned yogīnis practicing in retreat and were not part of the monastic institution, but there were great yogīnis who were also Buddhist nuns. These nuns all demonstrated high levels of attainments and some even attained rainbow bodies despite encountering numerous obstacles in their monastic career.

What more needs to be done to overcome the gender discrimination against women, especially nuns, in a traditional society like the Himalayan region, including Bhutan?

A: My Ph.D. thesis revealed that the roles of nuns are largely gendered in a manner which denies nuns opportunities for personal development, empowerment and subsequently, opportunities to be able to be more socially engaged. Nuns play a minimal role in shaping the cultural and religious values of the communities they interact with because they are confined to doing simple prayers and are not yet empowered to teach, perform rites and rituals which can be of maximum benefit to the laypeople. Nuns in many nunneries are still denied access to systematic monastic education which is largely available to monks and have issues with basic needs. Nuns also have a low status in society which is linked to their being traditionally denied a monastic education and full ordination. It is largely due to such obstacles and lack of opportunities that nuns are still not fully empowered to propagate Buddhism in the communities where they reside.

This study also uncovered various reasons for the subordination of nuns but the primary and underlying contributing factor is the patriarchal monastic body which has traditionally focused on developing men's spiritual potential to the highest level while neglecting female Buddhist practitioners, especially nuns.

The nuns rationalize that if they had been empowered with the knowledge and skills the monks possess, then issues pertaining to finances and misogyny would eventually disappear. Once nuns receive equal opportunities for spiritual development, only then can the gender barriers be broken down. Therefore, empowering the women, especially nuns, is the only way out to overcome the gender discrimination.

Can you tell us what has been the happiest moment in your life?

First and foremost, I am very happy that my childhood dream of becoming a nun has been fulfilled. I had the opportunity to go to school when I was a child and after becoming a nun, I again had the opportunity to pursue monastic study of Buddhist Philosophy, debates, languages, and literature, something many can only dream of in the Himalayan region as a female. With my studies, I am now able to reach out to many people around the world. I can now share my knowledge of the Dharma through lectures, seminars and conferences on meditation, Tibetan language, counselling, and even simple yoga. I am also happy that I am able to fulfil requests for prayers, meditation, and short retreat courses from devotees. So, when I see that others are happy, I feel happy for them too. — **EH**

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Buddhism and Justice

Justice is a noble idea as it would lead to fairness and peace in this world. The Buddha in his teachings over 45 years provided very clear standards for right and wrong, and of skillful and unskillful ways of engaging in the world. He also spoke of actions that would lead to harmony and true happiness in the world. But did the Buddha speak about "justice" as it is now understood in the modern world? In this issue of *Eastern Horizon*, we asked our three Buddhist teachers for their response.

The Buddha rejected all forms of discrimination and unfair treatment of people in society, and was therefore against the caste system in India during his time. How did the Buddha respond to the injustice of the caste system?

Aggacitta: He did not attempt to change the caste system politically, but he redefined a Brahmin as an arahant and disregarded caste distinctions when accepting disciples into his monastic order. Although respect for seniority within castes as well as in general was the norm of the day, he created a new standard by defining seniority in the Saṅgha in terms of ordination rather than biological age or even spiritual attainments. So, an arahant sāmaṇera must still pay respect to a newly ordained bhikkhu without any spiritual attainments.

Min Wei: Buddha preached for a casteless society for he did not believe in lineage, class or race distinctions. Therefore, he allowed the admission of all castes into the Sangha so that everyone could attain enlightenment through practicing the Buddha Dharma without any discrimination.

He sincerely believed that society should accept that all human beings are born equal and the Sangha provides them equal opportunities for self-realization and self-fulfillment. Thus, the Buddha's teaching is pure and objective - making no discriminations between men and women, boys, and girls, rich and poor, or the powerful and lowly.

Geshe Dadul: During the Buddha's time, people adhered strongly to the caste system. The brahmins would not touch the bodies of lower-caste people, eat with them, or use the same utensils. The Buddha opposed the caste system and the notion of a "pure self" that was its basis. His opposition to it is reflected in his doctrine. He taught that there is no pure, eternal, monolithic self that is separate from the aggregates. Additionally, all saṃsāric aggregates—no matter what caste people belonged to are 1) impermanent (*anitya*), 2) unsatisfactory by nature (*duḥkhatā*), 3) empty (*śūnya*) [of a separate 'pure' selfhood], and 4) selfless (*nairātmya*). Buddha taught that the actual purity or freedom from misery and suffering is accessible to all without discrimination, but only through the practice of Dhamma.

In Buddha's teachings, one often finds this analogy of rivers and ocean when referencing the experience of joining his Order: just as the great rivers such as Ganga, Jamuna, Aciravati, Saryu, and Mahanadi lose their name and identity after falling into the ocean and are recognized as just the ocean, so do the ones inducted into the Buddha's Order shun their caste and clan and are subsequently known as spiritual members of one sangha community.

What practical lessons can we learn and apply from the Buddha's approach to handling injustice not just in the social, but also economic and political arenas in the context of our modern society?

Aggacitta: The notion of moral injustice would be contrary to the Buddha's teachings based on the principle of causality. According to the law of kamma, all moral actions will eventually lead to their corresponding results—good actions will give pleasant experiences and evil ones unpleasant experiences. So, moral justice will always prevail in the long run. If a social injustice is intentionally perpetrated, the perpetrator will have to pay for it eventually, whether in this life or later ones. Of course, one should strive to correct any injustice, but

sometimes (or perhaps often), this may not be successful due to the influence of those in power. Hence, belief in the law of kamma will help to mitigate any feelings of indignation or resentment.

Knowing that renunciants are at the mercy of the rulers, the Buddha did not interfere with politics and discouraged his monastic disciples from close association with political leaders and government officials. Once when asked for political advice by Vassakāra the chief minister of Magadha, he replied by asking Āyasmā Ānanda, who was standing behind fanning him, a series of questions and commenting on his answers. Thus he indirectly listed general principles to Āyasmā Ānanda instead of giving specific instructions to the enquiring chief minister.[1] The story of the Buddha physically interfering in the near battle between the Sakyans and the Koliyans over the Rohiṇī River comes from the commentaries and has no canonical basis. The Buddha gave several discourses on good governance[2] and basic financial management for the family[3] which are still applicable today.

Min Wei: Far from being a religious thinker, the Buddha was preeminently a philosopher and social thinker, rational and dialectical rather than idealist in his basic approach. His contributions in political philosophy as well as in political institution or establishments can best be seen by studying the Sangha community, which itself was not simply a religious body but instead embodied democratic principles on self-realization and on the other side of the spectrum even some communistic elements for the greater good of the Sangha community.

The Buddha considered politics as important, not so much for its intrinsic value but specifically more for its emphasis on a virtuous Government, the duty of care for others and environmental sustainability values. It is part of an external environment that can facilitate or hinder an individual's self-realization; defined as spiritual advancement and achievement of wisdom about the true nature of oneself and the world. Buddhist political and economic theory is based on its unique understanding of the nature of reality.

Geshe Dadul: We need to remind ourselves of our fundamental aspiration and purpose behind all of our human endeavors including those of our economic and political measures, i.e., just so that I, we, our group, or even everyone will be genuinely better off, in the short and/or long term. We need to stay connected with this rightful aspiration, be purposeful in our endeavors, and clear about which causes and conditions bring which results, not just follow our impulses or incomplete knowledge. This may also require us to rethink politics and economy and to broaden our perspective with a more long-term view of consequences in line with this shared aspiration of us all.

Some people have the perception that there is no gender equality in Buddhism and females are regarded as second class. Do we have scriptural sources as evidence that the Buddha was not gender bias, especially towards females?

Aggacitta: I'm not sure whether we can say that he was gender-biased based on his statements about the nature of women at that time. People are all products of their environment, so the patriarchal social system then would have shaped the behaviors and mind-sets of both men and women. Moreover, women and men are obviously biologically different, so why should their psychological and emotional dispositions not be so? Nonetheless a well-known scriptural source of the Buddha's high regard for womankind can be found in the Kosalasaṁyutta (Discourses connected with the King of Kosala)[4] in which he consoled King Pasenadi who was disappointed when Queen Mallikā gave birth to a baby girl.

Min Wei: Strictly speaking, the Dharma has no gender biasness. That is why, in the Mahayana tradition, the Buddha says: "All sentient beings possess the Buddha Nature; all can become Buddhas."

1 Vassakāra Sutta (AN 7.22)
2 Mahāhaṃsajātaka (KN 15.534), Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN 5) Cakkavatti Sutta (DN 26)
3 Siṅgāla Sutta (DN 31), Parābhava Sutta (Sn 1.6)
4 SN 3.16

In the teachings of the Buddha, women have as much right to enlightenment as men. Indeed, it is not because whether you are woman or a man that determines your attainment of enlightenment. No matter who you are, if you follow the teachings of the Buddha and practice them, you can become enlightened.

In Buddhism, differences in gender have no impediment to the attainment of the highest perfection. Referring to the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha compares it to a chariot and observes: "And be it woman, be it man for whom. Such chariot does wait by that same car into Nirvana's presence shall they come." Therefore, women are regarded as equally capable of enlightenment as men are.

Geshe Dadul: As someone who fully embodied compassion, there was no reason for, nor were there any anecdotal incidents of Buddha harboring any gender bias against anyone, much less women. Historical writings, such as that of the 17th century Tibetan historian and spiritual master Taranath's record of the life events of the Buddha, reveal that long before the Buddha had female members into his Sangha Order, he had stated both in public teachings as well to individuals, including Maha Pajapati Gotami, that women were equally able to attain liberation and become arhats and fully awakened buddhas. Besides, His teachings on Buddha nature and universal compassion reflected this principle all along.

One might wonder why then it took so long for him to formally admit women into his Order and, had them agree to additional guidelines and precepts over those of men when he did admit them? One could understand that the Buddha would know what is best for women and their protection in that particular social milieu. That the larger society needed more convincing evidence demonstrated by the women themselves about their capabilities for the society to more easily let go of the long-held belief about women's inferiority and inability. This strategic planning by Buddha is widely reflected in the way he taught different topics even doctrinally. He reveals bigger and fuller truths in progressive ways as presented to disciples with more refined intellects, or with more informed trust in the teacher. One may sense a similar strategy being employed in his handling of the question of the status of women in his sangha. Although everyone has equal potential to attain Buddhahood, the Sūtrayāna and even the three lower tantras state that one has to have a male body in the final preceding lives to attain Buddhahood. But then, in the highest yoga tantra, the final system of his teachings representative of Buddha's actual intent, not only both genders are equally capable of attaining full awakening but are also equally able to do so in any body irrespective of gender. Additionally, in his highest yoga tantra circle of teachings, Buddha particularly emphasizes restoring dignity and respect for women, and thus institutes, among the root tantric precepts, equally binding for its male and female practitioners, a specific precept to avoid disparaging women on the ground of their gender.

Also, while bhikṣuṇīs are governed by more precepts, they are for their protection. Because women were more prone to being victimized or bullied than men, Buddha established precepts that prevent women from encountering dangerous situations. He also expressed his vision for the fourfold assembly, bhikṣuṇīs and upāsikās and their male counterparts, to exist and flourish and said that these four saṅghas harmoniously practicing the Buddhadharma will make his teachings last a long time in this world.

Buddha always wanted his saṅgha to move at pace with the sensibility and sensitivity of cultural attitudes of the time. Since modern societies, as well as the United Nations, stress the importance of gender equality and respect for women, we Buddhists must do so as well in all ways possible.

Some Buddhists take to the streets to demonstrate against war, acts of cruelty against certain ethnic communities, as well as engage in high-profile protests and activism campaigns opposing massive development projects which threaten widespread ecological destruction. How can one engage in such activities in a mindful way based on fundamental Buddhist precepts of non-harming and kindness?

Aggacitta: From the kammic perspective, as long as one is abiding by the 5 precepts and the law of the land and one's intentions are wholesome, e.g. genuinely accompanied by non-harming and kindness, then such social engagement is alright. However one also needs to carefully consider the possible repercussions of such actions for one's own safety and life advancement as well as those of one's loved ones. Will the negative consequences be worth the time and effort expended?

Min Wei: Some people will assume that compassion and kindness would never win against war, injustice, violence etc. However, from a Buddhist perspective, any meaningful protest for peace must be carried out in accordance with the practices of mindfulness, compassion, and kindness. Mindfulness as a practice will help us to understand what true happiness is - one which is not dependent on objects of craving like power, wealth and sensual pleasures but is obtained through understanding and compassion.

Anger is never a solution but would only bring about suffering; which is why the Buddha says conquer anger with non-anger. Conquer evil with virtuousness. Conquer spitefulness with kindness. Therefore, non-violence is more effective and serve as a powerful tool in the fight against war and injustice rather than using violent means or resort to acts of cruelty.

Geshe Dadul: One should approach circumstances from a place of genuine compassion and care, without harmful intent towards any group or party, while remaining open to let the outward expression of one's activity take whatever form is most appropriate to the situation. Always check that the motivation behind the action is only to serve and benefit all concerned, without bias. Don't get fixated into a group mentality, rather always be principle-driven and compassion-guided. Remember, at the prātimokṣa practice level, Buddha goes to the extent of advocating the so-called Four Dharmas of Śramaṇas, viz., not returning insult for insult, hatred for hatred, blow for blow, and slander for slander, while at the advanced bodhisattva level, the same Buddha teaches how there might be occasions when engaging in the first seven 'non-virtues' of body and speech, may even be permissible, if it benefitted. It is the initial motivation and the state of mind that sustains the actions in the moment that ultimately matters and rules. However, the latter is not something initial practitioners can pull off naturally. It requires earnest training and persistent endeavor.

Climate change is a critical problem for the world today. What should Buddhist leaders and practitioners, out of kindness and compassion for future generations, do to ensure ecological sustainability instead of creating conditions for future human suffering?

Aggacitta: Ideally they should have more awareness of the situation, try to live an ecologically sustainable lifestyle and encourage their followers to do likewise. By walking their talk, they are teaching by precept and example and they would not be unduly criticised for hypocrisy. E.g. they could try to

- reduce the usage of plastic products, starting with single use plastics
- pick up non-biodegradable trash during their morning or evening walks
- conserve vegetation
- use more green products, e.g. bamboo toothbrushes
- use Ecosia as a default search engine in their web browser.

Min Wei: The topic of climate change or global warming has widely been discussed by many leaders throughout the world. We need to wake up and realize that the Earth is our mother as well as our home.

Without doubt, overdevelopment is one of the key factors causing climate change. With regards to this, the Buddhist teachings of the Noble Eightfold Path can guide us as to navigate this unprecedented era of human and environmental suffering. The Buddha advised his disciples to follow this Path to avoid the extremes of sensual pleasures. The Noble Eightfold Path are Right View and Right Intention (wisdom), Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood (ethics), and Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration (cultivation or meditation).

Right View and Right Intention represents wisdom that will lead us to good and moral conduct. Then there are three elements under moral conduct of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. There are also three elements for the development of wisdom through the purification of the mind, i.e. Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are.
Geshe Dadul: I think it is high time for everyone, especially spiritual leaders and practitioners of all religions, to become well versed in the fields of climate and other related secular sciences that have immense practical impact on the quality of life on the planet we share. They could then be influential players who could also bring the angle of long-term common good of the global community to bear on those decisions.

The general perception of Buddhist practice is that it involves personal liberation from suffering. But one of the defining characteristics of engaged Buddhism is its shift in focus from individual suffering and individual liberation to structural forms of suffering and collective liberation. Do you see this as a departure from the original aim of the Buddha, or is this an expression of the Buddha's compassion for society?

Aggacitta: I would say it certainly is a departure from the original aim of the Buddha. Evidence for this can be found in the account of the newly awakened Buddha being encouraged by Brahma Sahampati to propagate his profound Dhamma of liberation because there were still some beings with a little dust covering their eyes and who could therefore be similarly awakened.

Although the Buddha started his missionary career by propagating the sublime Dhamma of liberation to renunciants and potential renunciants, he soon had to adopt a more worldly approach as his lay followers increased. Knowing the limitations of the household life for the practice of liberation, he realistically taught another set of teachings oriented towards mundane peace, harmony, morality, success and prosperity. While the essential teachings for renunciants are oriented towards total liberation in this very life, those for the laity are oriented towards making merits and faring on well in amsara. Nonetheless this second set of teachings is not the *summum bonum* of Buddhist practice, but is just a fringe benefit resulting from the appearance of a sammāsambuddha whose primary goal is to help sentient beings liberate themselves from all forms of suffering.

Min Wei: Engaged Buddhism is about liberation of suffering for oneself and others, in contrast to the primary doctrines of Buddhism which focuses mainly on self-liberation. Both personal liberation and collective liberation are not a deviation from the viewpoint of Buddhist practice because the original intention of Buddhism is to liberate all sentient beings from samsara.

From the Mahayana perspective, Bodhisattvas are beings devoted to both individual transformation and collective liberation from suffering; who has vowed to guide the world with compassion and wisdom towards liberation as well as to carry out their vows to benefit all beings. Therefore, the Mahayana Buddhist goal of liberation includes both personal and social transformation.

Geshe Dadul: Broadly speaking, Buddha taught two vehicles of practice, that of prātimokṣayana and bodhisattvayana. The former is for those pursuing personal liberation and the latter for those inclined to work for full awakening for the sake of others. In either case, the actual form of practice involves cultivating oneself to rise to the task at hand. The latter vehicle involves cultivating the ten far-reaching practices of generosity, ethics, patience, etc., all geared towards benefitting others here and now while pursuing them to a state of complete self-competence, perfection. Ideally, what the latter vehicle purports to achieve is nothing short of what engaged Buddhism movement envisions and aspires to achieve. The question is how practically competent one is, besides the aspiration, in working for society in the present situation. For the bodhisattvas, out of the three trainings, the training of morality itself has three sub-divisions, 1. the ethical conduct of refraining from negative actions, 2. the ethical conduct of cultivating virtue, and 3. the ethical conduct of [specifically] benefiting sentient

beings. In this way, serving others in an engaged way is built into the ethical conduct for bodhisattvas and thus can be embraced by others similarly inclined.

The principle of non-violence is central to Buddhist teachings, but in certain countries where Buddhism has been the dominant religion, we read of the military and sometimes monastics stirring up hostility and even violence towards other faiths and ethnic minorities. Their hard line is causing increasing concern. How do we explain why centuries of Buddhist teachings of love, compassion, and mindfulness have not filtered into the social culture of these countries?

Aggacitta: Whatever they call themselves—Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Atheists; or whatever occupations they profess—politicians, armed forces, monks, religious leaders, social activists—all humans are subject to the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion. Until and unless these mental defilements are understood and tamed, the world will always be in turmoil as humans sway under their influence.

Nowadays this issue is exacerbated by the ubiquitous influence of social media that can quickly and drastically erode the established social and cultural norms of a society.

History has repeatedly shown us that empires fell when their ruling elites slid into corruption and neglect of their citizens, while countries led by upright leaders with genuine concern for their citizens flourished in peace and prosperity. This clearly testifies to the folly of corruption rooted in greed and selfishness and to the fruits of morality, love and compassion.

Min Wei: As a matter of fact, there is no problem regarding the religion or the teachings itself as all these conflicts and violence are due to human issues. According to Buddhism, the origin of conflict or violence amongst us comes from our own desire, greed, hatred and attachment. Only loving kindness and understanding can solve our problems and conflicts. The source of problems basically stems from the lack of understanding and selfishness.

However, the Buddha gave us many teachings which are conducive to our happiness in this world and hereafter. These teachings include the four immeasurables which are loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. The aim of learning Buddhism is to overcome our desires, hatred and ignorance until we attain realization and enlightenment - not to increase or accumulate more wealth, seek out more pleasure, higher position, greater power or to chase for honor.

Thus, we should really put the teachings into practice, stop fueling anger and hatred. Instead, we should start cultivating the seed of compassion and understanding.
Geshe Dadul: The practice of love, compassion, mindfulness, etc. is not something to be expected to naturally occur in an individual's mind by sheer association with such teachings, or by being in the company of practitioners, unless one purposefully and regularly takes them to heart. At times, affiliation with a particular religion by whatever means, or even becoming knowledgeable in the Dharma may only serve to fuel and enhance afflictions such as in-group biases or arrogance when the understandings stop short of integrating with one's mind and taming it. After all, society is made up of individuals.

Written by Geshe Dadul Namgyal and edited by Martha Leslie Baker.

Venerable Āyasmā Aggacitta is the founder of the Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) in Taiping, Perak, a Pāli scholar and a meditation teacher.

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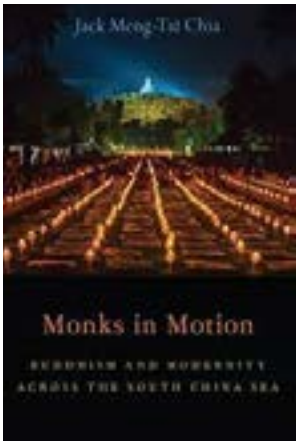
Ven. Min Wei is a teacher of e-learning at the International Buddhist College (IBC) and an independent translator of Buddhism. **EH**

Book Review

By Benny Liow Woon Khin



Monks in Motion Buddhism and Modernity across the South China Sea, by Jack Meng Tat Chia. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. pp 275.) Hardcover

As the title of the book indicates, this is a study of three Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia: Chuk Mor (1913-2002), Yen Pei (1917-1996), and Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923-2002). While most books on Buddhism in Southeast Asia have focussed on Theravada Buddhism in countries such as Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, Jack Chia's pioneering work featured the maritime countries of Southeast Asia – Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia - where the main Buddhist tradition is Mahayana.

The opening chapter explored the histories of Chinese Buddhist migration, settlement, integration, and networks in the 20th century. The author made a connection between Buddhist communities in China and Southeast Asia; hence, he coined the term "South China Sea Buddhism". Secondly, he explored the role of Chinese diasporic monks in the making of Buddhist modernism in Maritime Southeast Asia, and three of them are featured in this study – Chuk Mor in Malaysia, Yen Pei in Singapore, and Jinarakkhita in Indonesia.

The author explained Chuk Mor's transnational life and career, starting with his education in China and association with Venerable Tai Xu where he was deeply influenced by his ideas of Human Life Buddhism. Chuk Mor then became a strong advocate for Tai Xu's call to reform Buddhism for the modern world. Thus, when Chuk Mor arrived in Malaysia in 1954, he spent the next 50 years reforming Chinese Buddhism in the country. He was also a close associate of Master Yin Shun, another strong advocate of Humanistic Buddhism. When Chuk Mor passed away in 2002, he left behind 127 monastic disciples and more than 50,000 lay disciples. Today Chuk Mor is recognized as the father of Chinese Buddhism in Malaysia.

Chuk Mor was an influential writer. His writings, published in newspapers, magazines and books helped many people to practice the correct form of Buddhism and discard their superstitious beliefs. His lectures touched upon the issue of religious orthodoxy based on the Buddhist scriptures. He aimed to correct the superstitions and misguided understanding of Buddhist beliefs and practices in the minds of most Malaysians during the period.

For instance, he set up the Triple Wisdom Hall in Penang in 1965 where besides the usual temple activities, he organized a Dharma Study Centre, Free Sunday School, and Youth Group. He wanted Buddhists to take refuge in the Triple Gem to be considered a true follower of the Buddha. Thus, he pointed out that all Buddhists must undergo the refuge taking ceremony at least once in their life time. He also wanted to unite all Chinese-speaking Mahayana temples, organisations, Sangha and laymen into a national body through the Malaysian Buddhist Association (established in 1959) where he served as its President for 12 years.

However, as Jack Chia explained, Buddhism was really not in decline in Malaysia but what Chuk Mor did with his reforms was to displace the existing forms of Buddhism in post-colonial Malaysia with his interpretation of Human Life Buddhism.

Venerable Yen Pei, originally from China, was a respected scholar-monk and social activist in Singapore.

He spent well over 30 years building a Buddhist community in post-colonial Singapore; first as abbot of Leng Foong Bodhi Institute (1964-1979), and as a social activist and founding chairman of the Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services (1980-1996). His monastic education, which he acquired from several prominent Buddhist learning centers in China greatly influenced his subsequent religious ministry in Singapore where he migrated in 1964. He played a pivotal role in the development of Chinese Buddhism in Singapore.

Yen Pei's approach to Buddhism was heavily influenced by Master Yin Shun who promoted Humanistic Buddhism. He believed that one should strive to follow the example set by Sakyamuni Buddha, by practicing the Dharma and achieving Buddhahood in the human realm.

Although most Singaporeans claim to be Buddhists, Venerable Yen Pei realized that they had little knowledge and understanding of basic Buddhist teachings. He encountered the same problem as Venerable Chuk Mor in Malaysia. Most Singaporeans who consider themselves Buddhists only knew the ritualistic aspects of Buddhism such as lighting of joss sticks or chanting. He realized that the temples needed to be restructured so that Buddhism could be taught properly. Among his many initiatives, he invited prominent Buddhist monks from all over the world to deliver lectures on Buddhism, especially on Humanistic Buddhism and how local people could relate to the Buddha's teachings in their daily lives.

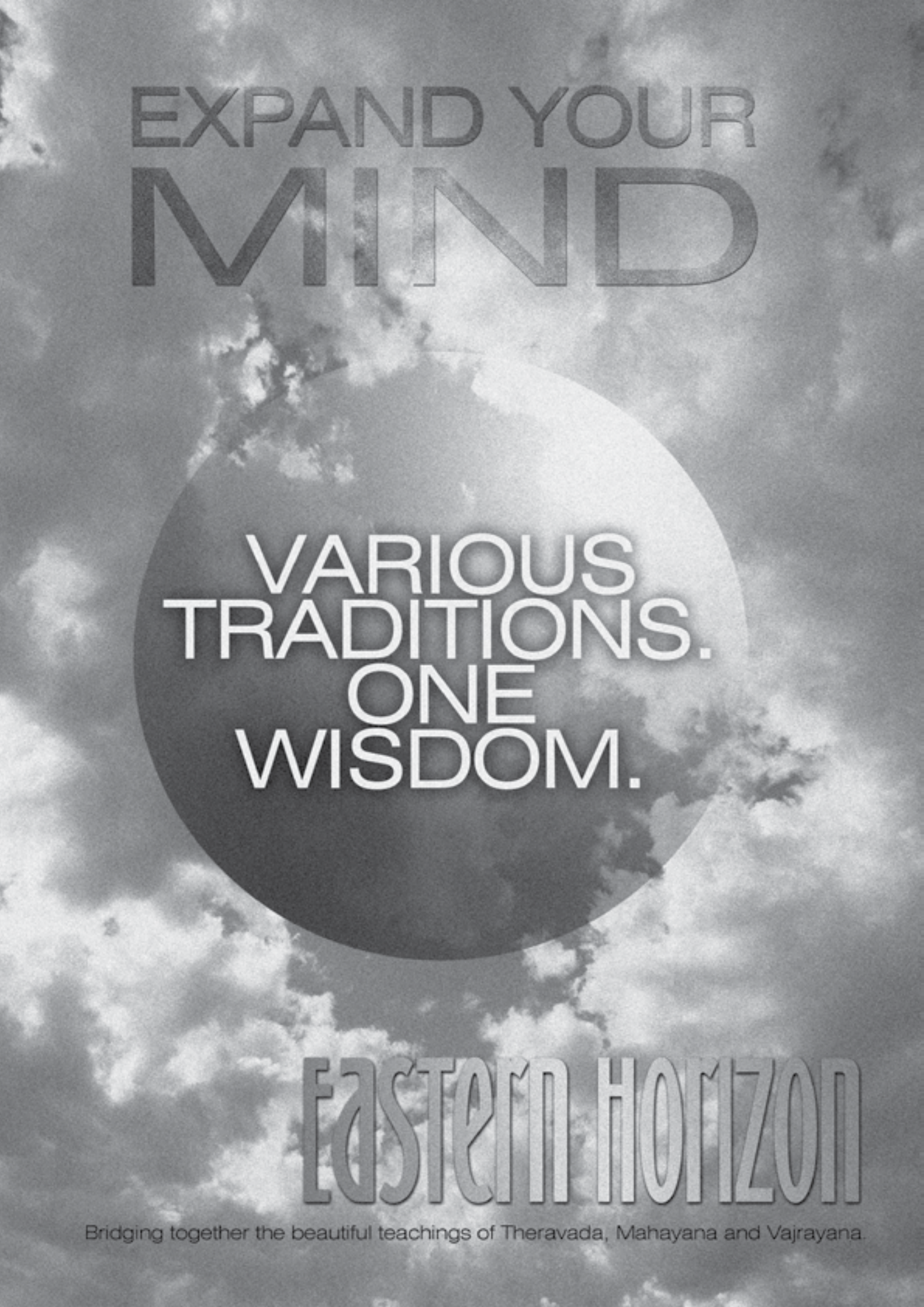
Besides educating Singaporeans on Buddhist teachings, Venerable Yen Pei also realized that the country's rapid economic growth had led to inequalities in society. As such, he began to promote welfare services to help those of lower socioeconomic status. It was easy for him to be both a scholar monk as well as a social activist. This is also an aspect of Humanistic Buddhism which emphasizes kindness and compassion for others. Other areas he was remembered for were his social welfare programs on filial responsibility, organ donation, and drug abuse rehabilitation. His welfare and community programs were well endorsed by the Government.

Unlike Venerable Chuk Mor and Venerable Yen Pei who were both born in China, Ashin Jinarakkhita was born in Indonesia. He is best depicted as an ethnic Chinese monk, dressed in a Theravada saffron robe and wearing a beard in the Chinese Mahayana style. He was instrumental in the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia.

He realized that Buddhism had to adapt to Indonesian culture to survive, otherwise it would remain a foreign religion. In 1965, after a coup attempt, Buddhist organizations had to comply with the first principle of the Indonesian state ideology - Pancasila- the belief in one supreme God. All organizations that doubted or denied the existence of God were outlawed. As this posed a problem for Buddhism which doesn't have God as its central belief, Jinarakkhita presented Nibbana as the Theravada "God", and Adi-Buddha, the primeval Buddha of the region's previous Mantrayana Buddhism, as the Mahayana "God". According to Jinarakkhita, the concept of *Adi Buddha* was found in the 10th century Javanese Buddhist text *Sang Hyang Kamhayanikan*.

Besides forming the first Indonesian Buddhist lay organisation, Persaudaraan Upasaka Upasika Indonesia (PUUI), he also initiated Perbudi where both Theravada and Mahayana monastics were united. Subsequently, he formed the Sangha Agung Indonesia, a community of monastics from the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. His movement came to be called Buddhayana. It promoted non-sectarian doctrines and practices to be in line with the national discourse of the Government's "unity in diversity". In this way, he tried to make Buddhism in Indonesia less Chinese to ensure its survival as a minority religion in a predominant Muslim nation.

In his Conclusion, the author explained that Buddhist modernism, as exemplified by the three monks in this study, was shaped by a combination of transnational circulations and local circumstance. He explained how Buddhist modernism in these three countries incorporated notions of orthodoxy from the ideas of the Buddhist reform movement in China and Taiwan and from the concerns of modern nation states. All three monks in this study played a stabilizing role in a rapidly changing socio-political environment. **EH**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Courtesy Visit of Deputy Minister of National Unity to YBAM

Date: 20.10.2021 Time: 2:00 PM – 4:30 PM Venue: YBAM AT

Eow Shiang Yen explaining to the Deputy Minister of National Unity Wan Ahmad Fayhsal (left) about the development of Buddhism in Malaysia.

Dialogue session with the Deputy Minister after the briefing.

Yong Kuei Yoong (right) and Ch'ng Kok Sheng (left) having a discussion with Wan Ahmad Fayhsal.

The deputy minister having a tour of YBAM Head office.

Wan Ahmad Fayhsal (left) receiving a souvenir from Yong Kuei Yoong.

YBAM representatives in a photo session with the Deputy Minister.

YBAM

Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia

www.ybam.org.my

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Provides guidance to students to establish Buddhist societies in schools, colleges and universities

Conducts regular training courses on Buddhist teachings, missionary techniques and leadership building

Arranges lectures on Buddhism by both local and visiting foreign Buddhist scholars and teachers

Assists in conducting the annual Malaysian Buddhist Examination

Organises various welfare, cultural and education activities for the benefit of the Buddhist community at local, state and national levels

Publishes Eastern Horizon, Buddhist Digest, Berita YBAM and other Buddhist books and pamphlets in English, Chinese and Bahasa Malaysia

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