

Now.....

the Path of Joy

brings you...

Singapura Maithri Gama (Singapore Village of Compassion)



Completion of Tsunami Project in Sri Lanka

by David Ee



After 18 months, the Buddhist Research Society (BRS) Tsunami Housing Project in Sri Lanka was finally completed, culminating with the Second and Final Handover Ceremony on 26 Dec 2006, exactly 2 years after the Boxing Day tsunami first struck.

The housing project named *Singapura Maithri Gama* (Singapore Village of Compassion) exemplified one of the few Singaporean efforts in tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka. It was co-funded by the Tidal Waves Asia Fund of the Singapore Red Cross Society (SRCS) and BRS. The completion of the project saw a total of 150 houses equipped with furnishings, and a Community Hall as well as a modern Children's Playground being handed over to the recipients at Siribopura, Hambantota, in the southeastern part of Sri Lanka.

During the 1st year of construction, we of course faced many challenges owing to uncertainties like price escalations, changes to housing specifications and local red tape which required constant attention and liaisons by Bhante and our BRS volunteers, as well as closer supervision by Ven Wilmaratana and other Bellanwilla representatives in Sri Lanka.

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ALL ABOUT CANKERS



Bhante Says

start to dominate our minds. They become like stains. That is why certain negative emotions are called *kilesa* or *asava*.

When we talk about pollution, we tend to think of the pollution of our external environment but not our internal environment, our mind. When the external environment is polluted, we find difficulty in breathing or maintaining our health.

For example, I recently visited India. Compared to 10 years ago, many parts of the country are fast developing. Road conditions are getting better and there are more highways. However, the unfortunate thing is that some places are so polluted that they do not seem habitable.

Unlike external pollution, which we can see very clearly, we have to pay special attention before we're able to see internal pollution. Environmental pollution is a very good example of how internal pollution can result in external pollution. There are many countries where the economy is booming and fast developing, and that is a good thing.

However, the greed in people is also increasing, together with selfishness. They think only about their own houses and families. Whatever rubbish they generate, they throw outside or into the river. They not only pollute the environment, they also destroy it by excessive logging and deforestation.

Where do all these problems originate? When we're internally polluted with greed, we end up polluting the whole world.

In the *Asava Sutta*, the Buddha mentioned 6 ways to get rid of internal pollution.

Control

When defilements arise in our mind, we have to learn to control our 5 senses. For example, when we see an object, and attachment arises, we have to be mindful by thinking - '*Attachment is arising - I should not let my eyes go with attachment towards the object.*'

Today, I would like to talk about a sutra called the Asava Sutta. This discourse has been traditionally translated as the Sutta of Cankers. Another Pali term used to describe cankers is kilesa, which means stain, dirt or dust.

Stains on a cloth can sometimes be very difficult to remove. In the same way, *kilesas* which, in this context, can be taken as referring to mental defilements may be very difficult to remove once they

Stains on a cloth can sometimes be very difficult to remove. In the same way, kilesas which, in this context, can be taken as referring to mental defilements may be very difficult to remove once they start to dominate.

When we taste something, we have to make a distinction between appreciating food and developing greed towards the taste. This is particularly difficult in a place like Singapore which can be considered a food paradise.

Sometimes, we may eat tasty food and other times, we may not. There's no point getting upset with the chef or with the restaurant when the food we're served is not so tasty. Instead of looking for the cause of our unhappiness outside, we should locate it where it truly lies - in our own mind. As the great 8th century Indian Buddhist philosopher, Shantideva, once famously said -

Where would I possibly find enough leather

With which to cover the surface of the earth?

Yet, wearing leather just on the soles of my shoes

Is equivalent to covering the earth with it

We have to be aware that unhappiness is a subtle manifestation of anger. And so the Buddha taught the monks to reflect as they eat '*I have given up my lay life in order to practise the Dhamma and attain freedom from*

suffering. I'm taking this food to survive and to maintain my health. Without energy, I cannot practise the Dhamma or progress on with my spiritual journey.

These are refined thoughts for any person, not just for monks, to develop. If we can cultivate such thoughts, we can be happy that we're able to have some food,

whether they're tasty or not.

Using daily necessities wisely

There are certain basic necessities that we require in order to live a comfortable life. If our lives are uncomfortable, or miserable, we'll find it difficult to practise the Dhamma.

However, we have to be mindful when using these necessities. The Buddha advised the monks to think - '*I use a robe simply for warding off the cold, for warding off the heat, for warding off the touch of gadfly (and) simply for the sake of covering my nakedness.*'

Of course it's not wrong to want to look pleasant and to have clean clothes, especially for lay people. We should however be mindful not to overdo it.

One advantage of this practice is that it helps us to avoid unnecessary spending. Whether we're dressing, eating, using our shelter or buying furniture, we should maintain a certain level of awareness that we use these items because they're necessary in our lives and not so much because we want to beautify ourselves or to demonstrate our affluence.

Endurance or patience

Defilements such as anger can easily arise if we do not have endurance. Take driving, for example. How do we react when another driver cuts in front of us? We sometimes get irritated and some people even use very harsh words to scold the other

driver, or press the horn many times to express our anger. In this way, we sometimes even become road bullies.

But, of course, we can't always avoid anger. But, if we get angry, we should (afterwards) think '*Today, I got angry in such a situation. I should be more mindful in future*'. We may get angry again when encountering the same situation, maybe (for) another 3, or 4 times. We should not worry about that or give up our effort to improve our mind. We should be patient with others, and also with ourselves. After some time, we'll be able to prevent anger from arising. This is controlling defilements by endurance.

Avoidance

This is one of the safest ways to live. We should try to avoid people who are '*evil friends*' - '*evil friends*' are actually not friends - and places associated with vice. If we feel that we do not have enough confidence to handle certain people, or situations, the best way out is to avoid them.

There's no need to be a hero. If you think - '*I'm strong enough to look after myself*' - you may be wrong - and suffer unfortunate consequences.

Evil places are usually very attractive. Out of curiosity, people may go to these places, thinking that they're going there just to watch, but they may end up getting involved with vices and then create lots of problems for themselves.

Elimination

When thoughts of anger arise, we should try to expel or to let go of such thoughts. However, the nature of our mind is such that when negative thoughts arise, we like to go on and on with them like dreamers. Instead of that, we should try to eliminate these dangerous thoughts the moment they arise. As one famous Buddhist text says -

Once you become accustomed to mental afflictions

They are hard to cure with antidotes

Therefore, with the remedies of mindfulness and awareness

Eliminate mental afflictions the moment they arise

How do we use these antidotes of mindfulness and awareness? One way is to try and choose some other - more positive - object to think about when temptations based on greed, hatred or ignorance arise. In this way, we will hopefully be able to distract our mind from its tendency towards engaging in unskillful thoughts.

This practice requires us to be mindful of the thoughts as soon as they arise in our minds. We must constantly guard our minds, eliminate negative thoughts and replace them with wholesome objects.

Developing equanimity

Many people confuse equanimity with indifference. Indifference is the lack of care or love towards other beings, a state of being only engrossed with our own selfish needs and ends and ignoring those of other beings.

On the other hand, equanimity is the development of love and compassion for all beings, without discrimination of any kind. It's the highest form of love and compassion, untainted by attachment and aversion.

Equanimity therefore actually means maturity. We can learn to develop a matured attitude towards events happening around and inside our lives. Many things can go wrong with our lives, but with equanimity, we do not have to be negatively affected when such events take place.

For example, our health is not permanent and cannot remain good forever. Our strength and energy also cannot remain good all the time. The same goes for our wealth.

Sometimes, certain unforeseen events can happen that affect our health or wealth. When such things happen and we cry over them, get very worried, upset, stressed, and eventually fall sick, life becomes meaningless.

We need to adopt a matured attitude and understand that certain things are not within our control. We can try to overcome the situation with patience and tolerance. This is very important. If we can view things in a matured way, we may not be able to stop the unwanted events from

happening but at least we can try to prevent too many defilements from arising in our minds which will make us suffer more than we need to.

So these are the ways taught by the Buddha in the *Asava Sutta* to overcome defilements. As usual, the Buddha's presentation is systematic and

logical.

Nevertheless, I'm not saying that it is easy to develop or maintain mindfulness and awareness. Certainly not. But neither is it easy for that matter to get a good degree, win a gold medal in the Asian Games or succeed in business or professional life. Yet, people realise the need to strive to attain these mundane goals.

If we put the same degree of effort to achieve our spiritual goals as we do for our material goals, there's no doubt that we can grow spiritually and lead a more matured and happy life. [Joy](#)

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LEARNING FROM AN AGNOSTIC

'I see myself as an average Thai, who was raised a Buddhist. I was taught to know right from wrong and be moral.

But like many people of my generation (I am in my 20s), I am often disillusioned with the state of Buddhism in Thailand - so much so that I have claimed to be an agnostic.'

So began a letter to the forum page of a leading English newspaper in Thailand. It's symptomatic of what's happening in one of the few Buddhist countries left in the world.

One evening, not so long ago, I approached the reception desk of the condominium in which I live. A short, middle-aged man stood up. I asked him whether the wireless internet service that I subscribed to was working.

'No,' he replied.

Somehow, the conversation then turned to amulets. Like a magician popping a rabbit from a hat, he pulled out from beneath his tee-shirt a string of 5 amulets dangling from his neck.

'This one,' he said, pointing with obvious pride to an image encased in a large, round plastic container *'is more than 1,000 years old. It was given to me by my grandfather.'*

Then, gesturing towards a slight bulge in the right side of his waist, he continued - *'And this one protects me from hooligans. You know, during the Vietnam War, many Thai soldiers fought with the Americans against the Vietcong. Many American soldiers died but nothing happened to the Thai soldiers. Like magic.'*

Like magic! Indeed, Thailand has a multi-million dollar amulet industry.

Amulets are cherished not only because they supposedly afford protection but also for their investment value which increases the older and rarer they become, somewhat like Ming vases.

Indeed, the strength and pervasiveness of this belief in amulets in Thailand surprised me when I first learned about it. Until at least a few centuries after the Buddha's passing away, no images of the Buddha were ever made as the Buddha forbade them.

This reliance on amulets is perhaps one reason young Thais abandon their religion in despair. But there are probably many other reasons too. The excessive reliance on merit making (*tum boon*) by lay people almost to the exclusion of other, more spiritually meaningful, practices, for one. And the preoccupation of Thai Buddhist temples with rites and ceremonies, for another.

Not least, the religion is dogged by scandals which, from time to time, grab centre stage in the local media.

One involved a monk notorious for his bizarre practices in the past such as sleeping in a coffin. A few months ago, he issued lottery ticket numbers to his followers who caused serious traffic jams when they flocked to see him. Unfortunately - or fortunately - the numbers he issued did not square with the winning ones. But no matter. The

indefatigable monk was prepared with his answer. It was the government lottery office who botched it. The last I heard, he's facing the music from the Thai authorities, I'm glad to say.

It's no wonder then that increasingly, Thais feel that the religion of their birth and culture has become superstitious, irrelevant and meaningless. As a consequence, they turn to other religions or give up religion altogether. There's no starker illustration of this than the very letter that I've quoted.

The sad irony, of course, is that within the Buddha's teachings themselves can be found all the answers that people yearn for, if only they do not allow themselves to be distracted by malpractices and scandals (which, incidentally, afflict all religions from time to time, as well).

I'm reminded of the often told Buddhist story of a rich man who gives his poor friend a jewel to provide for his friend's future. But, to prevent the jewel from being stolen, the rich man hastily sews it into this friend's robe and duly forgets to inform his friend about it. As a result, the poor man, not realising that he already possesses a priceless treasure, undergoes great hardship, ending up on the street as a beggar.

More resilient and creative people would have stayed within the system to reform it. A shining example of such a great man is the late Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, whose birth centenary was celebrated in Thailand not so long ago. Another is Lama Tsong Khapa, the great 15th century Tibetan reformer-monk who founded the Gelug order to which the Dalai Lama belongs, doing so to fix many of the problems that he saw in the then existing *sangha*.

If our young letter writer cared to look, he would surely have discovered that in Thailand itself, many monks, though they do not seek to reform their religion, do a huge amount of good work - helping the poor, especially children who would not otherwise get a decent education, the socially disadvantaged, AIDS patients, even stray dogs. Of course, their worthy efforts do not attract as much media attention as the colourful shenanigans of their wayward colleagues.

And if he had reflected upon the Buddhist teachings that he no doubt received in school or in the temple before agnosticism set in, the young man would have realised that the experience of Thai Buddhism is but a manifestation of the way that things naturally operate.

Impermanence, inter-dependence, cause and effect and, not least, how greed, hatred and delusion can stoke the engine of ego to make the world go round - these pearls of wisdom were all taught by the Buddha. As were the twin weapons of wisdom and compassion with which all our problems can be transcended. Though we may not understand those teachings fully or at all, the fact remains that they're there for those willing to learn.

What our Thai correspondent could also have realised is that these fundamental teachings of the compassionate Buddha constitute the common foundation of all forms and schools of Buddhism - from Theravada to Tantric Buddhism - even though superficially they appear to be as different as night is from day.

Unfortunately, even in this globalised world of the internet, Buddhists of one school remain largely, often even totally, ignorant of the teachings and practices of other Buddhist traditions. Some Buddhists claim to be more compassionate than others. The others, in turn, cling to their cherished 'purer-than-thou' attitude.

Fortunately, they do not fight and kill each other but the fact remains that this pervasive worm's-eye view has no place in the religion of enlightenment.

Indeed, how can Buddhists, of any ilk, face people of other religions in the eye and meaningfully contribute to inter-religious dialogue if they're so ignorant of the teachings and practices of their own fellow Buddhists?

And so, in this issue, we're happy to bring you an article

by Professor Y Karunadasa entitled '*The World of Buddhism - Unity in Diversity*' in which he addresses this very issue of sectarianism in Buddhism.

Professor Karunadasa, as usual, writes with authority and conviction. In his article, he roundly deplores the sectarian outlook. '*From the Buddhist perspective, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies, even if they are right, is much more dangerous than inordinate attachment to material things. For, it is this warped attitude of mind that leads to spiritual dogmatism and religious fundamentalism.*'

As usual, I wish you all pleasant reading. [Joy](#)

Chwee Beng
Editor

Book Review

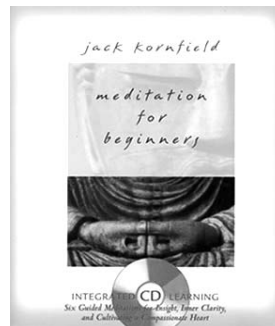
MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

by Jack Kornfield

Published by Sounds True, Inc (2004)

Reviewed by Sin Tho

For a beginner to meditation Jack Kornfield's book offers '*the central training and teachings found in the best Buddhist monasteries translated for western society*'. A CD with 6 guided meditations for insight, inner clarity, and cultivating a compassionate heart comes with the book and serves as an extremely useful audio guide as one puts into practice what one reads. The author, Jack Kornfield (b. 1945) met the revered Thai Buddhist monk, Ajahn Chah, in the late 60s. Kornfield studied under the master for many years.



advice: '*It does not matter what kind you choose. What is important is that after you choose a form of meditation you stay with it, and practice it regularly ... Meditation takes discipline... it grows with perseverance, patience, and systematic training... Work with it every day... work with a teacher if you can... or find circumstances where you can sit together with other people.*'

This book presents the most important basic exercises for mindfulness meditation, the heart of Buddhist meditation. '*This practice emphasises mindful attention, developing an immediate awareness of one's experience in all spheres of activity... (T)hrough mindfulness we discover a way to develop a stillness in the midst of activity. Then, even the most mundane, repetitive experiences can be drawn into the field of meditative awareness, included in the practice of mindfulness. In this way, our meditation is not an exercise that we do every once in a while, but rather a way of being that we can carry with us every moment of our days.*'

Kornfield also delivers the Buddha's teachings in a most non-intrusive and subtle way, like so many students of Ajahn Chah. The Buddha's important teachings of the Three Characteristics of Existence - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and selflessness - are presented and communicated ever so subtly to beginners to meditation to help them to discover their essence through their own meditation practice.

Any person interested in finding out more about meditation and wants to be inspired to discover its benefits should pick up Kornfield's '*Meditation for Beginners*'. Kornfield's easy style is a great help to sustain a reader's interest. If you are still unconvinced, visit soundstruestore.stores.yahoo.net to listen to an audio excerpt.

Jack Kornfield has helped awaken millions of people to develop a Buddhist mindfulness meditation practice. '*He has touched us with his intelligent, warm and entertaining methods.*' [Joy](#)

Upon returning to the United States in 1972, Kornfield co-founded the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts, with fellow meditation teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein. Kornfield has become one of the key teachers who introduced Theravada Buddhist practice to the West. He holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. He is also a founding teacher of the Spirit Rock Center in Woodacre, California, where he currently lives and teaches. His other books include '*Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*', '*Stories of the Spirit*', '*Stories of the Heart*', a US bestseller '*A Path with Heart*' and '*After the Ecstasy the Laundry*' as well as a number of meditation and Dharma audiotapes.

Kornfield has consciously written this book for everyone regardless of religious affiliation or inclination. The book has '*(n)othing to do with becoming a Buddhist....What is important is that ... (Kornfield) ...wants the reader to learn how to work with meditation in order to find benefits from it in your life.*'

Kornfield effectively addresses many key issues and concerns that commonly bother beginners to meditation. The book prepares them not to expect 'no' hindrances. A good meditation practice, according to Kornfield, '*is any one that develops awareness or mindfulness of our body and our senses, of our mind and heart.*'

As for the choice of a meditation method, Kornfield has this

THE WORLD OF BUDDHISM: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

by Professor Y Karunadasa



The purpose of this article is to show that, although there are a large number of Buddhist schools and sub-schools, sects and sub-sects, we can speak of a transcendental unity of Buddhism, a unity that transcends the seeming differences and apparent disparities in sectarian

Buddhism.

Today, as you are perhaps aware, in the continent of Asia we find 3 Great Buddhist Traditions. There is Theravada Buddhism in South Asia, Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia, and Vajrayana Buddhism in North Asia. In the case of Mahayana and Vajrayana, the situation becomes even more complex because what we call Mahayana and Vajrayana embrace a wide variety of schools and sub-schools within each tradition.

In this situation, the question arises - *When we are thus exposed to a number of Buddhist traditions, what position should we take? How should we respond?*

We could be easily tempted to follow one of 2 alternative positions. One is to adopt an exclusivist attitude. The other is to follow an eclectic approach.

What do I mean by the exclusivist attitude?

In this approach, we tenaciously attach ourselves to the teachings of our own school of Buddhism, while excluding the teachings of all other schools as false. We consider that what we believe in truly represents the original teachings of the Buddha and that the teachings of other schools are a later fabrication.

This attitude, I must say, is not at all desirable, not at all salutary. It's certainly not in consonance with the spirit of Buddhism. It is this attitude that Buddhism describes as '*ditthi-paramasa*', that is, dogmatic adherence to one's own ideology. From the Buddhist perspective, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies, even if they are right, is much more dangerous than inordinate attachment to material things. For, it is this warped attitude of mind that leads to spiritual dogmatism and religious fundamentalism.

Then what about the other alternative, what I call the '*eclectic approach*'?

This is an attempt to select from each Buddhist tradition what seems to satisfy us and build up a form of Buddhism of our own. In point of fact, there is a movement afoot today to develop such a form of Buddhism. It's called transcendental Buddhism because it seeks to transcend all sectarian differences. This approach, I must say, is equally unsatisfactory and equally undesirable.

The problem is this - *On what basis are we going to validate*

it? On what basis are we going to authenticate it? The very validity of this so-called Transcendental Buddhism can be easily challenged and repudiated.

Another problem is that an eclectic approach could give rise to many schools of Transcendental Buddhism, depending on the whims and fancies of the people involved in the exercise. Thus rather than solving the problem, it gives rise to the same problem, the problem of having a number of Buddhist schools.

But there is another approach to the whole problem. It's the one I would like to approve and recommend. I would like to call it the *Buddhist approach*, because it's the one that is entirely consistent and consonant with the spirit of Buddhism.

When you adopt the 3rd approach, you continue to remain where you are. If you are a Theravadin you continue to be a Theravadin. There is no need to cross borders. The same situation applies to the other Buddhist traditions and schools as well.

However, while you remain where you are, you try to expose yourself to the teachings of other Buddhist schools.

From the Buddhist perspective, dogmatic attachment to views and ideologies, even if they are right, is much more dangerous than inordinate attachment to material things.

What is necessary is mutual understanding, and not mutual exclusion. Furthermore, when you know the teachings of other Buddhist schools, you begin to understand better the teachings of your own school.

I can even argue that if you do not expose yourself to the teachings of other Buddhist schools, you will not correctly understand the teachings of your own school. This reminds me of a well known saying by Max Muller, the father of Comparative Religion: '*He who knows one, knows none*'.

What I introduce as the 3rd approach is based on the fact that all Buddhist schools have a common base, a common starting point, and that they all lead to the same goal. This is what I would like to call the transcendental unity of Buddhism. I adopt the term from the writings of the Venerable Sangharakshita, the Head of the Western Buddhist Order. What this means is that despite the seeming differences, despite the apparent dissimilarities, there is a unity that unites all Buddhist schools.

I draw your attention to an important characteristic of the Dhamma, that is, the body of the teachings delivered by the Buddha. What I want to say here is that the Dhamma is not the goal. Rather it is a means to the realisation of the goal. The Dhamma has instrumental value. Its value is relative, relative to the realisation of the goal.

In the *Discourse on the Parable of the Raft*, for instance, the Buddha compares his Dhamma to a raft, which is used to cross a vast reservoir of water. After crossing the water, it's not necessary for one to carry the raft on one's head.

In the same fashion, the Dhamma is there to be made use of. If the Dhamma is called a means, it's because it leads us from ignorance to wisdom, from bondage to freedom, from suffering to supreme happiness.

There is another way of looking at the Dhamma. This is in relation to the nature of reality. What we need to remember here is the difference between the Dhamma and the nature of actuality or reality (*yathabhuta*, *paramattha*). The Dhamma is not reality or actuality. Rather it is a description of the nature of reality. Take, as an illustration, the world and a map of the world.

A map of the world is not the world; it's an illustration of the world. A road map is not the road; it's a guide to the journey. In the same way, the Dhamma is not reality; it is a description of reality and a guide to action.

Hence the Buddha himself says that his Dhamma should be regarded as '*pariyaya-sesito*'. This means that, as a description, the Dhamma is relative to the nature of actuality and the final goal. This, in other words, means that the Dhamma can be stated and presented in many ways. There is no one fixed way of presenting the nature of reality. It can be presented in manifold ways (*aneka-pariyayena*).

One conclusion that we can draw from the above statement is that the Dhamma is a conceptual model or a conceptual framework, presented through the symbolic medium of language. What I want to emphasise here is that there can be many conceptual models and that the validity of each conceptual model is to be determined by its ability to lead us to the goal. For example, take different kinds of medicine. There is allopathy, homeopathy, Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine. The validity of each medical system is determined by its ability to cure. There is no other criterion, there is no other test.

We can thus consider different schools of Buddhist thought as different conceptual models. They all have the same purpose, that of leading us from bondage to freedom, from ignorance to wisdom, from our present human predicament to emancipation.

The presence of different conceptual models means that what is true can be re-stated in many different ways. Therefore we can consider the different schools of Buddhist thought as different re-statements of the same truth in different ways.

The best way to illustrate this situation is the well-known Chinese Buddhist saying that the Dhamma is like a finger pointing to the moon (the goal). This analogy has many important implications.

One is that any finger can be pointed out to show the moon. What matters is not the kind of finger that is pointed out but whether the finger is properly pointed so that we can really see the moon.

Another important implication is that if we focus our attention only on the finger we will never realise the Truth. It will only

make us erudite scholars on Buddhism.

At this juncture, you may raise an important question. If different schools of Buddhist thought are different conceptual models presenting the same truth and upholding the same goal in different ways, can we extend this statement to embrace all religions, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist. In other words, can we make a case for the transcendental unity of religion?

This, in fact, is the view maintained by those who advocate what is called Perennial Philosophy or the Continuous Tradition.

Perennial Philosophy or the Continuous Tradition is an intellectual and spiritual movement which started in the middle of the 19th century. Its main thesis is that all religions are different expressions of an Eternal Truth. All religions, they say, believe in a transcendental reality, which they call by different names. The theistic religions call it God, Hinduism calls it Brahman or the Cosmic Soul, and the Buddhists call it Nirvana. This idea that all religions have the same message is also shared by the Theosophical Movement, which also arose at the turn of the last century.

In my own opinion, and my opinion is completely based on Canonical Buddhist Scriptures, we cannot agree with this view. In the context of Buddhist teachings such a statement turns out to be a simplistic over-statement.

What I want to say here in support of my view will become clear if I draw your attention to the most fundamental doctrine of Buddhism. This, as most of you already know, is the Buddhist doctrine of non-self, that is the Buddhist denial of a self-existent entity which is called soul, the ego.

This doctrine of non-self, or no-soul is the doctrine that is unique to Buddhism. It's also the doctrine that unites all Buddhist schools, because it is commonly accepted by all Buddhist schools, whether they come under Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana.

In Buddhist books the erroneous belief in a soul, or a permanent self is sometimes called *sakkaya-ditthi*. It is usually translated as Personality View or the Embodiment View.

Now, according to Buddhism, the belief in a soul or an independent self is due to psychological factors. In the Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination it is clearly stated that what leads to the wrong notion of the soul or a permanent self is some kind of subtle attachment, some kind of craving.

What is most significant about this observation is that according to Buddhism, the belief in a soul or an independent self is not due to any intellectual exercise but purely due to subtle form of craving. What we find here is a psychological diagnosis of ideologies. This is something unique to

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We can thus consider different schools of Buddhist thought as different conceptual models. They all have the same purpose, that of leading us from bondage to freedom, from ignorance to wisdom, from our present human predicament to emancipation.

MODERN BUDDHIST HEALING

A spiritual strategy for transforming pain, disease and death

by Charles Atkins

Published by Sounds True, Inc (2004)

Reviewed by Sin Tho

Charles Atkins' *Modern Buddhist Healing* shows that *'with hope, faith, and prayer, nothing is impossible'*. Atkins was inspired to share with others the healing techniques he had experienced, having survived an affliction of Hodgkin's disease, a cancer that affects the lymph nodes, and undergone *'the ravages of chemo- and radiation therapy'*.

One cannot help but feel compassion for Atkins and all those afflicted by cancer when reading his account of his traumatic experience. Finishing the book one can only feel a sense of appreciative joy - rejoicing in the remission and eventual victory Atkins achieved over what he labeled as the *'inner coward'*.

Atkins notes that, in retrospect, he saw clearly *'that the inner coward has many manifestations. It takes the form of self-doubt, guilt, self-pity, remorse, escapism, and self-destructive urges.'* He recognised it as *'nothing more than the fundamental darkness that is inherent in human life.'*

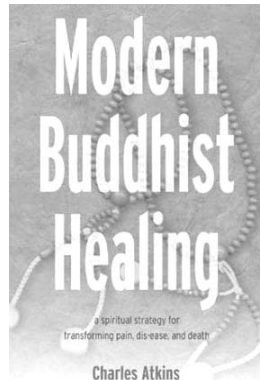
The core of Buddhist healing, according to Atkins, is the *'empowerment of the human spirit'* and is experiential. Charles Atkins however cautions and alerts the reader that *'the foremost step'* before even considering Buddhist healing is to *'get the best medical treatment available'*.

Atkins's inclination toward Buddhism and deep spiritual faith is evident throughout his book as well as his desire to share his experience in overcoming cancer. He notes that even merging Western and Eastern approaches to cures will not cure the *'fundamental cause that produce the illness in the first place'*. The only cure is found in the *'realm of faith, prayer, consciousness, and karma (action). Buddha taught that negative karma can and does manifest as illness of the body, mind, and spirit.'*

Atkins found his inspiration from the Japanese Buddhist master, Sensei Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282). Atkins' technique is based on the *'healing teachings... as laid out in the Lotus Sutra'* and explains how the mantra *'Nam-myoho-enge-kyo'* can be used to *'undo'* karma that has damaged our health.

Atkins discovered that the *'Lotus Sutra contains powerful medicine for the illness of all people.'* That *'medicine'* is the mantra *'Nam-myoho-enge-kyo'*. *"Changing karma in the 'alaya-vijnana' is a function of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and is the means by which even diseases such as advanced cancer can possibly be overcome."*

Alaya-vijnana, is the 8th of the *'nine levels of consciousness associated with all life'* identified in (the Yogacara school of) Mahayana Buddhism. It is identified with Carl Jung's *'collective unconscious'*. It has been interpreted as *'limitless storehouse of perceptions, conceptions, words, and actions that we experience or create in life'*.



The 8th and 9th levels of consciousness are *'fused with the universe at death to be reborn'*. The 9th level of consciousness being the *amala-vijnana* or *'cosmic consciousness'* or *'true entity of life, fundamentally pure, and impervious to time, space, suffering, or death'*.

Atkins introduces us to the *"principle of the oneness of body and mind, 'shiki-shin funi', one of the most compelling concepts in Nichiren's Buddhist healing. More accurately, 'shiki-shin funi' is the essential oneness of the material and spiritual."*

I would not do justice to Atkins' explanation of the efficacy of *'shiki-shin funi'* if I do not quote him verbatim -

'When the mind is disturbed, there is a corresponding depression in the immune system, whereas faith, happiness, and encouragement seem to bolster the immune system. The integrating force of the oneness of body and mind is the life-dynamic of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. This knowledge and power is especially valuable for children stricken by cancer and debilitating disease, as well as for their parents, because chanting offers tremendous hope for the innocent and it is easy for them to master.'

Atkins in *'Modern Buddhist Healing'* takes great pains to explain the mantra, *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*, that he advocates as the *'secret'* to healing. It expresses the true entity of life that allows each individual to directly tap his or her enlightened nature. Only its invocation can reveal its deepest meaning, but the literal meaning of *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* is *'devotion, the fusion of one's life with the universal (Nam); the entity of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations is the Mystic Law (myoho); the simultaneity of cause and effect (represented in the lotus, rengo, which is the only known flower to bear seeds and blossom at the same time); and all phenomena and activities in life (kyo, Buddha's teaching).'*

Atkins' descriptive skill is best revealed when he shares his personal experience including a very detailed description of the *'nimita'* he experienced during meditation. *'I was so enraptured by the vision that I was drawn into the light, completely immersed in pulsing energy.... I saw huge streamers of vivid red and purple gently rippling to a peaceful wind.... They were visions of immeasurable purity.'*

We can experience the dire predicament Atkins and his immediate family were in from his description of cancer as *"a ravenous monster that backs you up against death's door. ... Within a few months, we were on the verge of bankruptcy, and the Inland Revenue was threatening us with seizure of what little assets we had. ... We were under siege. ... Adding to our obstacles, my father-in-law suffered what was first thought to be a heart attack and was hospitalised. ... It became clear to us that we couldn't*

(Continued on Page 12...)

Visit to Tai Pei Old People's Home

24 Feb 2007



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Buddhism. When others give intellectual reasons for the origin of views, Buddhism assigns psychological causes.

The other important thing that we need to remember here is that, according to Buddhism, the erroneous belief in a soul or permanent self is the root cause of all other erroneous views which seek to explain the nature of self and the universe.

In Buddhism, the term '*ditthigata*' is used to denote all speculative metaphysical views which attempt to explain the nature of self and the universe. The first discourse of the first Nikaya of the Buddhist Canon enumerates some 62 such views. All these views, it is maintained, is due to the erroneous belief in a separate selfhood.

What is interesting to note here is that none of the 62 views is rejected as wrong. All that the discourse intends to do is to show how these views arise due to psychological reasons, why they prevail in the world, and how they can be transcended. Thus we can see that the Early Buddhist critique of views and ideologies is mainly based not on logic, dialectics, and epistemology but purely on psychological diagnosis.

Now according to Buddhism, all views and ideologies can be subsumed under 2 main headings:

One is called *sassatavada* and the other *ucchedavada*.

Sassatavada is the Buddhist term for all religions or spiritual ideologies which recognize a permanent self or soul which is distinct from the physical body. *Ucchedavada* is the Buddhist term for all forms of materialism or materialist ideologies which maintain that the self and the physical body are identical. Thus we can say that all spiritualist ideologies are based on the theory of the metaphysical self whereas all materialist ideologies are based on the theory of the physical self.

According to Buddhism all spiritualist ideologies, that is, all spiritualist religions which maintain that the soul is different from the body and that the soul is eternal are due to the desire for eternal life, the desire for immortality, the desire to perpetuate oneself into eternity.

And all materialist ideologies that maintain the identity of the self and the body and thus establish the reality of the physical body are due to the desire for annihilation at the time of death.

In this connection there is another important observation made by Buddhism. It is that all metaphysical, speculative views relating to the nature of the self and the universe can be brought under these 2 streams of thought namely the spiritualist and the materialist.

It is also observed that both the spiritualist and the materialist views are due to the erroneous belief in a separate, individualized, independent self.

Why is the belief in a separate independent self responsible

for all erroneous metaphysical views whether they are spiritualist or materialist? The reason is that when one bases oneself on the self-view, he looks at the world with the egocentric perspective. The egocentric perspective creates a duality between the self and the non-self. This duality is not actual; it is something that we superimpose on reality.

Now, according to Buddhism, all religions other than Buddhism are based on the belief in a soul or permanent self. Hence from the Buddhist perspective there cannot be a base to consider that all religions in the final analysis maintain the same truth.

Thus if there's a doctrine that unites all schools of Buddhist thought, it's this doctrine of non-self. And if there's a doctrine that sets Buddhism off from all other religions it is also this Buddhist doctrine of non-self.

The doctrine of non-self which is unique to Buddhism has many other major implications. One is that unlike all other religions, Buddhism does not recognise a transcendental reality in the form of a personal God or impersonal Godhead.

What I have mentioned so far should show that it's not possible to say that Buddhism and all other religions are based on the same truth and that they all have a common message and a common goal. The Buddhist goal is not some kind of communion with God or absorption with some kind of eternal reality. What we call *Nibbana* is not a metaphysical reality but the highest level of spiritual experience which can be achieved in this very life.

What I have said so far amounts to what I would like to call Buddhist Pluralism. By pluralism I mean diversity and multiplicity. When we survey world religions we notice that Buddhism is the most pluralistic religion in the world. No other religion exhibits so much pluralism as does Buddhism. This is true whether we examine Buddhism as a religion or as a culture.

We can see the best example of Buddhist pluralism in the Buddhist idea of the Buddha.

Many other religions speak of one saviour or one prophet. Take Christianity, for example. Christianity recognises only one Saviour, Jesus Christ. Islam, of course, recognises a number of Prophets who preceded Mohommed. But according to Islam Prophet Mohommed is the last to appear. He represents the latest in a number of Prophets.

On the other hand, consider the Buddhist idea of the Buddha. According to Buddhism, there had been an infinite number of Buddhas in the past, that is before the appearance of Sakyamuni Buddha. Similarly, there will be an infinite number of Buddhas in the future.

What is the idea behind this? It's the idea that Truth is not the monopoly of one particular Buddha. Buddhahood is accessible to all. It assures us that there is continuity in the discovery of Truth. It also provides us with a rational

explanation that living beings in the past as well as in the future have the opportunity of realising emancipation. Another example of Buddhist Pluralism can be seen in the Buddhist idea of the Dhamma. By Dhamma, I mean what the Buddha taught. It's this aspect that I discussed at the beginning of this article.

Pluralism in the Dhamma means the presence of a number of Buddhist schools. As I said earlier, they all can be considered as different ways of stating what the Buddha taught. They are all different fingers pointing to the same moon.

We can also see Buddhist pluralism in the *Sangha*. The *Sangha*, as you all know, is the Buddhist monastic organisation. It could perhaps be the oldest social organisation in the world. If the Buddhist monastic organisation exhibits many elements of pluralism the reason for this is not far to seek.

The *Sangha* is not a pyramid-like organisation, a hierarchical organization where at the top you find a supreme head. It's not centralised. It's decentralised. In other words, the principle of organisation is not perpendicular or vertical, but horizontal. This allows for pluralism and diversity within the *Sangha* organisation.

Another area where you will find Buddhist Pluralism is in the Buddhist Scriptures or the Buddhist Canon, what we call the *Tripitaka*. This should become very clear if I refer here to other religions.

Take Hinduism for example. It has one principal canonical work called the *Bhagavatgita*. Similarly in Christianity we have the *New Testament*. In Islam we have the *Koran*. In Sikhism we have the *Grantha*.

When we come to Buddhism the situation is entirely different. We cannot point to one particular book as containing the teachings of the Buddha.

If a Buddhist were asked, what is the canonical scripture of Buddhism he would say it's the Tripitaka. Since there are 3 Tripitakas, one in Pali, one in Chinese, and one in Tibetan, he would have to specify to which Tripitaka he's referring. If he were to say, for example, it's the Pali Tripitaka, again the reply would not be specific enough because the Pali Tripitaka has many volumes containing the teachings of the Buddha.

If he were asked to specify one particular volume in the Pali Tripitaka which contains all Buddhist teachings in a summary form, he would be unable to identify such a volume or book.

Thus we see that Buddhism is the only religion with no single canonical work which contains all that the Buddha taught.

In conclusion, I would like to focus your attention on Buddhist culture as another good example of Buddhist pluralism.

What I want to stress here is that when Buddhism was introduced to a particular country, it did not level down cultural diversity in order to develop some kind of mono-culture. The various Buddhist countries in the continent of Asia bear evidence to what I maintain.

The Buddhist culture in Japan, for example, is different from Buddhist culture in Thailand, or Sri Lanka. There are what are called regional variations in Buddhist culture.

The reason for this is that Buddhism is not a culture-bound religion, like Hinduism and Islam.

When Buddhism is introduced to another country, that country need not assimilate and adopt the culture of the particular country from which Buddhism was introduced. If a person from a western country adopts Buddhism as his religion, he need not change his cultural norms. He can be a Buddhist while retaining his western culture.

This is not always so in the case of other world religions. Take Islam, for example. If someone embraces Islam as his religion, it's necessary for him to make a radical change in his external behaviour and cultural patterns as well.

If Buddhism did not level down cultural diversity leading to some kind of mono-culture, there is another important reason for this.

It is that the Buddhist social philosophy does not interfere with the personal life of the follower. We never hear of a Buddhist Food, Buddhist Medicine, Buddhist Dress, or Buddhist Marriage, or a Buddhist way of disposing the dead. These are things that change from time to time and from country to country.

Therefore, Buddhism does not superimpose on the individual a rigid and totalitarian social philosophy. Take marriage, for example. Buddhism does not single out monogamy as better than any other form of marriage, say polygamy or polyandry.

Nor does Buddhism consider that marriage is a sacred contract which must not be breached. Therefore, divorce and re-marriage are not '*problems*' from a Buddhist perspective. Nor does Buddhism say that the only purpose of sexual union is procreation, to create children.

All these examples should show that as a religion Buddhism does not interfere with our personal life. It does not impose on us a rigid and totalitarian social philosophy. This is another reason why Buddhism was able to promote cultural pluralism. [Joy](#)

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Lanka. The frequent trips to the project site were simply necessary and sometimes squeezed into day trips. A BRS volunteer once said, 'a typical day trip by road from Colombo starts at 5.00 am and we normally reach the project site by 11 am (some 6 hours) with one or two stops in between. The rest of the day is spent at the site and then back to Colombo by late evening.'

To help reduce the cost of the housing project, Bhante resorted to using recycled HDB doors for the houses in Sri Lanka. We have lots of them in Singapore due to our frequent HDB Upgrading Programmes. This proved to be an instant hit with the recipients as well as the Sri Lankan press. The recycled HDB doors are solid, heavy and durable and the different designs and shades provided some variety and unique identities for each house. These doors were shipped from Singapore by containers and our BRS volunteers spent many weeks in Sri Lanka re-sizing the doors as well as teaching the local hired help how to do it.

When the first 50 houses were completed, they were immediately given out during the First Handover Ceremony on 26 Dec 2005. That occasion was graced by the President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Mahinda Rajapakse, in a tight security atmosphere but nevertheless fun-filled as the children enjoyed the programmes and activities that were planned for them.

Later, in April 2006, another 25 houses were handed over to the recipients together with the household furnishings. Each householder received a dining set (a table with 5 cushioned chairs), a metal cupboard, a bed, mattress and pillow and a fan, yes, a large table fan to cope with the notorious Hambantota heat. The cost of the furnishings for each house was about 3-4 times the average monthly salary of the householders.

By the middle of the year, there were already signs of a growing and vibrant community at the project site as the supply of water and electricity had become more stable and some houses were converted to provision shops, a hair saloon, a motor mechanic workshop and even a village shrine.

The final stretch of the construction in the 2nd year was relatively smoother, except for a slight delay due to the exceptionally rainy season of November 2006, which saw flooding in many parts of Asia (including Singapore). Just

before the completion of the 150 houses, the BRS approached the SRCS to jointly develop a Community Hall and a Children's Playground.

The Community Hall was built in just over a month and was designed to seat 200 people indoors. The Children's Playground comprised a brightly coloured fibreglass playset equipped with swings and a merry go round and was a truly a 'modern concept' in Sri Lanka. It proved to be irresistible to the children as, when the chance came, hordes of them just piled into the playground to have their first feel of this modern plaything, even before it was fully completed. Just watching the children play was simply delightful as, with the wide smiles and laughter, it was hard to imagine that they were actually tsunami victims and for that very rare moment, their sheer joy made them and us oblivious of the plight of the village.

The Final Handover ceremony was held on 26 December 2006 in a fully relaxed and fun filled atmosphere. It was witnessed by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Chamal Rajapakse and the usual suspects like Bhante, Ven. Wilmaratana, Prof. Wong Weng Fai, representatives from the SRCS and Bellanwila Vihara devotees and delegates from the Buddhist Library. It was a great day for the householders and the children as besides their fun at the playground, they participated in activities like painting, paper art and watching DVD movies on the new television set that was installed as a fixture in the Community Hall.

There were gifts everywhere. The children were given gift packs consisting of a stationery set, cloth for school uniform, toys and lots of sweets and candies. The adults received foodpacks of rice, *dhal* and other dried food items.

All in all, the entire tsunami housing project cost some S\$1,382,000, took nearly 18 months of undivided attention and resulted in Bhante looking more tanned! The sad and painful memories of the tsunami tragedy can never be erased from the minds of those who suffered the loss of their families and properties but hopefully, this gift from the tsunami housing project will enable the homeless to pick themselves up and continue with their lives. Looking back, for us, this project was indeed a significant milestone for the BRS and BL which our members can and will cherish as we approach the celebrations of our 25th anniversary in 2007. [Joy](#)

Book Review

(Continued from Page 8)

escape our karma, and it was closing in on us daily. We had no choice but to continue chanting 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo', no matter how badly we felt."

'With each passing day, I was challenged with the opportunity of moving forward or giving in to defeat. I looked for inspiration and strength in my faith. I studied and chanted as much as my strength and will power would allow me. ...With the excellence of medical science and my visualisation, anything was possible. Even in the face of death, which could happen at any moment, I felt confident in my faith and my future afterlife.'

Atkins' story is all about faith and a commitment to persevere

to overcome 'a ravenous monster'. [Joy](#)

Here are excerpts of other reviews of Atkins' *'Modern Buddhist Healing'*:

S Rouvray - 'It is an honest, clear account of how anyone can change their lives and free themselves from disease.'

Robert W Conroy - 'No matter what your religious upbringing is, this book is for anyone seeking a spiritual path in the modern world.'

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不止如此，教内也被丑闻困扰，而且不时被当地媒体重点报导。有一则是有关一个因先前有古怪的修行法，如睡在棺材里，而臭名昭著的出家人。几个月前，他出彩票号码给他的信徒们。大家都蜂拥去见他，造成了交通大阻塞。幸亏，或不幸的，他出的号码都没中奖。不过没关系，这个不罢休的出家人准备了答辩，那就是因为政府的彩票公司搞鬼。我最后听闻，他正受泰国警方调查。

难怪现在有很多的泰国人感到自己的宗教和文化已经变得越来越迷信，不切实要和毫无意义可谈。结果，他们不是改信别的宗教，便是完全放弃了宗教信仰。我所引用的这封信赤赤裸裸的说明了这一点。

当然，可悲的讽刺是人们渴望的全部答案，都可在佛陀的教诲中寻获，只要他们不让那些（不时都会发生在种种宗教中的）失态和丑闻弄到自己分心。

我常常想起一则常被引用的佛教故事。内容是描述一个富人送了一些昂贵的宝石给他的一个贫困的朋友，以为将来能够帮助他。不过因为怕宝石被人盗窃，富人匆忙地把珠宝缝进贫困朋友的衣裳里，但却忘记告诉他这件事情。结果这个穷人不知道本身其实有无价之宝，继续过着穷苦潦倒的生活，而且最后成了乞丐。

一个比较会变通和有创意的人，就会留在体制里进行改革。一个很明显的例子就是已故佛使比丘，他的诞辰一百年没多久在泰国被庆祝。另一个例子是现在达赖喇嘛所属的格鲁派的十五世纪的宋喀巴大师。他的改革解决了很多僧团里的问题。

如果那位投函青年多留心的话，他一定会发现，现在的泰国其实也有很多的僧侣们，虽然不想革新他们的宗教，却也做了很多有益的事——如帮助贫困的人，特别是那些本来没机会受教育的孩童、社会的不幸一群、爱之病患者、甚至是流浪狗。显然的，他们的善举却不能象他们的教内那些五花八门，走邪门的同修们更能引起媒体的注意。

还有如果他在决定自己是个无可知论者之前，能反省他在学校或寺庙里所学到的佛法，他就会了解到如今泰国佛教所经历的一切也不过是显现一切事物的自然运作而已。

无常法、缘起法、因缘法和贪、憎和无知是如何可以强化让我们执著的驱动力而让整个地球运转。这些智慧都是佛陀珍贵的教诲。还有是智慧和慈悲，使我们超越了我们所有的困境。虽然我们不能完全了解这些教诲的真正意义，实际上那些教诲都摆在那里给有意学习的人。

那位投函青年或许也能了解到慈悲的佛陀的基本教诲也是所有一切佛教宗派的基本教义——从南传佛教到密宗——虽然表面看起来，它们有如昼夜的差别。

很不幸的是，就在这全球互联网的时代，还是有某个佛教宗派对其他佛教宗派的教义和修行法门大半甚至完全无知。有些佛教徒自称他们比其他人更有慈悲心；另一边却紧抱着自己比他人“更纯正”的态度。

庆幸的是大家都没有为此而互相残杀，不过实际上这种小心眼在征悟的宗教里是站不住脚的。

说实在的，无论那个宗教派的佛教徒，如果对佛教其他宗派的教义和修行法门都不了解，又怎么能去面对其他宗教的信徒而为跨宗教课题对话做出贡献呢？

所以，我们很高兴在这期英文版中能刊载卡努那达沙博士针对佛教宗派分歧的文章「佛教的世界——差异的统一」。卡努那达沙博士以它一贯有根据和说服力的作风，悲叹佛教宗派分歧的前景。文章中他提到：“从佛教的观点，顽固地执著于某种看法和理想（即使它们是正确的），比过度执著于物质更为危险。因为，就是这种歪曲的态度才会导致精神独断主义和宗教极端主义。”

再次，我祝大家阅读愉快。

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我们没有必要去当英雄。如果你以为：“我有足够能力照顾自己。”，你所能判断错误，而必须遭受不幸的后果。

邪恶的场所通常都很吸引人。人们有时因为好奇而去这些地方，本来以为只是去看看而已，可是他们有可能后来跟不道德活动扯上关系，而给自己制造很多的问题。

灭除

当愤怒的念头生起时，我们应该驱除或放下这念头。然而我们的心的本性却是一旦负面念头生起，我们会反复的想它，有如做梦一般。其实我们应该在这些危险念头生起那一刻，试图灭除它们。如一部知名的佛教经典里说到：

“一旦苦恼变习气
难有救药
自觉和警惕
灭除无明”

我们该如何运用这自觉和警惕的方法呢？一个方法是当基于贪婪、憎恨或者无明的诱惑生起时，尝试选择思维一些其他比较正面的事物。这样，我们将可望能够转移我们倾向负面念头的心。

培养清静心

许多人把清静心跟冷漠混淆。冷漠是缺乏对众生的关怀和爱心，是一种只沉迷于自己并忽略其他众生的要求和目的的状态。

另一方面，清静心是开发我们对一切众生的爱心和慈悲心，同时也没有任何形式的歧视。这是不被执著和厌恶污染，是最崇高的爱心和慈悲心。

所以清静心其实是成熟心的意思。我们可以学习培养一个成熟的态度对待我们生活周围和其中所发生的事。我们生活中会有许多不如意的事情，不过有了清静心，我们不会因这些事情的发生而消极。

举个例子，我们的健康不是永恒的，而也不可能永久完好。我们的气力和精力也不能够常常充足。财富也是如此。

有时，某些意想不到的事件会发生而影响我们的健康或财富。当这些事件发生时，我们会因它们哭泣，感到忧虑，心烦，有压力，并且最终病倒了，生活变成没有了意义。

我们应该采取一种成熟的心态并理解有些事情是我们无法控制的。我们可以尝试用耐心和耐力应付这些情况。这是很重要的。如果我们能够以成熟的心态来对待事情，也许我们不能制止不想要的事件发生，但我们至少可以避免内心生起太多那些会令我们受不必要的苦的心垢。

这些就是佛陀在心垢经典所教导如何克服心垢的方法。一贯的，佛陀呈现的方式是有条理和合乎逻辑的。

尽管如此，我不是说培养或保持自觉心和警惕心是容易做到的。绝对不是。但是，要考到好学位，要在亚运会赢得金牌或者在商场上或专业领域上得意，也是不容易的。然而，人们却能够明白必须努力去争取去达到这些庸俗的目标。

如果我们用想要达到物质目标同样程度的努力去修行，无疑的我们精神本质也会提高，并合过着比较成熟和幸福的生活。

达摩拉达那法师
佛教图书馆宗教顾问

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编辑说

无可知论者

“我视自己是个普通的泰国人，在一个佛教家庭长大，从小就被教导要懂得是非分明和要有道德。不过，象很多跟我同年代的年青人（我二十来岁），我对泰国国内佛教的状况感到失望，甚至我认为自己是个无可知论者。”

泰国一份主要英文报章的言论版就刊登了这么一封读者来函，以上是这封来函的开头。这现象发生在世界仅剩的几个佛教国家之一。

不久前的一个傍晚，我到我住的公寓的接待处，一位身型矮小的中年男子即刻站了起来。我问他关于我订阅的无线网络服务是否操作正常。

他回答：“不行。”我和他闲聊了一阵子，不知不觉，话题转到护身符上去。此时，他象魔术师似的，从衬衫里面掏出了挂在脖子上一串有五个护身符的项链来。

“这个呀！”他神气地指着一个镶在一个大圆形的塑胶盒子里的塑像，“它有超过一千年了。这是我爷爷传给我的。”他继续指着右腰间微凸的地方，说道：“而这个保护我提防流氓。你知道吗？在越战期间，有许多泰国士兵跟美军一同打越共。很多美军都阵亡，但泰国士兵却安然无恙。真象魔术呀！”

是的，真象魔术呀！泰国有个值几百万元的护身符工业。

人们喜爱护身符除了它可用来护身之外，它也有投资的价值。有如明朝花瓶一样，它的价值可随着它的年龄和稀有度增加。

其实，当初我知道了护身符对泰国是那么地具有强大的影响力和普遍性的时候，确实感到非常地惊讶。至少在佛入灭的几个世纪里是未曾有佛像的，因为佛陀不允许如此的做法。

也许因为人们太过依赖护身符，导致年青的泰国人对宗教失望，因而放弃了自己的信仰。不过也可能还有许多其他的因素。在家人大量地依赖做功德，远远超过了比较有意义的修行。泰国佛寺也花太多时间在举行法事和庆典上，这也造成了其中的一个因素。

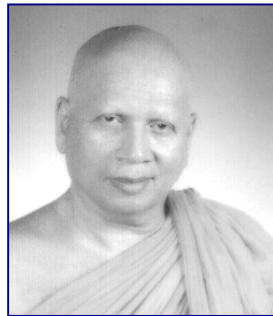
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极乐之程



法师说



关于心垢

今天我要和大家谈一部叫心垢的经典。这个论说一直以来都被译成疮痍经。另一个巴利文形容它为“染污”，意思是污迹，污垢或是灰尘。

布料上的污迹有时候是很难除掉的。同样“染污”在这里的含义是一旦我们的心被无明所污染了，就很难被排除掉。无明变成如污迹一般。因此某些负面的情绪也被称为“染污”或“心垢”。

当我们谈到污染，大都是倾向于外在的环境污染，而不会想到我们的内在，我们的心。当外在的环境被污染了，我们会觉得呼吸困难，或者难以维持我们的健康水平。

拿个例子来说，我最近去了印度。比起十年前，很多的地方都在快速的发展中。道路情况也有改善，而且快速公路也增加了许多。然而不幸的是，有些地方污染严重，显得不宜居住。

不象显而易见的外在污染，内在污染需要我们特别的留意才能觉察到。环境的污染是一个因内心污染而导致外在污染的好例子。有很多国家经济蓬勃并发展迅速，可说是件好事。不过，人们的贪婪和私心也同时加剧。他们只关心自己的房子和家人。他们什么垃圾都抛往屋外或注河内仍。他们不止污染环境，还过度砍伐及清除树林的破坏环境。

这些问题源自何处？我们一旦内心被贪婪污染，我们最终会污染全世界。

在心垢经典里，佛陀提到六道消除内心污染的法门。

自制

当我们心中有污垢的生起时，我们要学习抑制我们的五蕴。比如说，当我们见到一件物品，而开始执著时，我们应该静心地想：“执著要生起了一我不该让眼睛随着执著注那件物品去。”

当我们品尝某样东西时，我们必须能把握享用食物和对那种味道产生贪念分清楚。这在象新加坡这样的食物天堂，显然是格外困难的。

有时，我们会吃到美味的食物；其他时候，可能吃不到。

当我们的食物没那么好味时，对厨师或餐馆感到不满是没有用处的。与其在外头寻找不愉快的原因，倒不如去找出它的起源处——在我们心里。第八世纪印度伟大的佛学哲学家山提迦瓦曾说过：

“去寻找天下的皮革
盖覆大地
然而穿上装上皮革的鞋子
却如如是地盖覆大地。”

我们应该自觉到烦恼是由愤怒而生起的。所以佛教比丘们在进食时应该如是反省：「我舍弃了世俗生活，出家学习佛法，以便得解脱，我吃这些食物是为了活下去和保持健康。没有气力，我不可耽学习佛法或者在修行道上有成就。」

这些细腻的思维法不止限于僧侣们，而是任何人都可修持的。如果我们可以这样思维的话，只要有一点食物，我们就会很开心，而不会计较食物的美味了。

善用日用品

我们需要某些基本的生活日用品来过舒适的生活。如果我们生活不舒适或是难受，就很难学佛了。

然而，在使用这些日用品时，我们必须留心。佛陀告诉比丘们：「我用这袈裟是为了抵挡风寒、避暑、防牛蝇还有只是为了遮盖赤裸的身体罢了。」

当然，想要仪表整洁，尤其是在家人，是没有错的。不过我们应该注意不要过分装扮。

学习这样的好处是它帮忙我们避免无谓的挥霍。无论我们在装扮、饮食、住宿或购买家具时，我们应该保持某个程度的自觉性，了解我们使用这些物品是因为生活上需要的，而不是因为我们要美化自己或者是在夸富炫财。

耐力或耐心

如果我们不会容忍，有如发怒这样的心垢就会容易生起。拿开车为例，当另一个司机把车子割进我们的车前，我们会如何反应呢？我们有时会被激怒，而有些人则言词苛刻，破口大骂另一位司机，或者猛按车笛来表达自己的愤怒。这样，我们有时甚至会成为路霸。

当然，我们不能每次都避免发怒。但是，如果我们发怒，我们应该事后回想：“今天，我在这种情况下发怒。以后，我该多多留意这一点。”我们可能遇到同样的情况而再发怒，或许会重复三、四次。对此，我们不应该担心，或者放弃修我们的心的努力。我们应该对他人还有对自己有耐心。过了一段时间，我们就可以避免怒气再生起。这是用耐力来控制心垢。

回避

这是生存最安全的方法之一。我们应该避免和“坏朋友”交往——“坏朋友”其实也不算是朋友——还有避免去那些跟不道德活动有关系的场所。假如我们觉得自己没把握应付某些人或情况，最好的方法就是回避他们。

(第14页续)

Then.....

Tsunami

26 Dec 2004

A day many would never forget.....



... a lesson for all to remember...