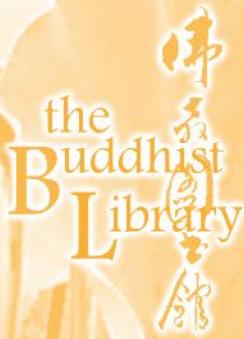


THE Path of Joy

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Bhante Says Practising Buddhism – the Easy Way

When we observe Buddhists who want to practise Buddhism, we can see quite clearly that they have different approaches.

Some people take it as a very difficult thing to do. It requires so much effort on their part.

Others practise Buddhism as and when they feel like it. They can even forget about Buddhism from time to time.

Then there are Buddhists who think that Buddhism is not something to put into practice at all. It's just good for chanting prayers or asking favours from the Buddha when they face difficulties.

Nevertheless, Dharma practice is indeed very important. So important that we can say it is the essence of what being a Buddhist means.

Simply put, a Buddhist is someone who practises, or at least tries to put into practice, in body, speech and mind, what the Buddha taught.

In the *Dharmapada*, the Buddha said –

Even though one recites the scriptures only a little, but lives in accordance with the teachings –

giving up greed, aversion and delusion, rightly knowing, with mind truly freed, not clinging to this realm or another realm – one thus shares in the religious life.

(*Dharmapada*, verse 20)

So now I'm going to talk about the right way to practise the Dharma.

The crucial thing is not to make Buddhism a burden.

Instead, we should make it easy for ourselves. In other words, we should *not try too hard*. This is especially true for beginners.

Making it easy and not trying too hard, we'll be able to practise Buddhism with joy. Indeed, if people feel miserable when they practise the Dharma, chances are they are doing it wrongly.

So how do we cultivate this relaxed and joyful attitude?

We must first take care to avoid

Exclusive interview with author/ translator/
meditation teacher B Alan Wallace - see pages 8 & 9

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We welcome contributions which we may edit, if accepted. Write to - The Editor, The Path of Joy, Buddhist Library, Nos. 2 & 4 Lorong 24A Geylang, Singapore 398526 Email - joyeditor@gmail.com Fax 67417689 Telephone 67468435 BL's website - http://buddhilib.org.sg Please include name and contact details. We may publish letters of general interest, subject to editing.

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being too choosy about things in life. Of course, we do make choices everyday. But we should not be too fussy about food, clothes and things like that.

Some people even fuss about what happens to them after death. What kind of coffin they need, how much to spend on their funerals and so on. Isn't it better to pay more attention to how we lead our lives while we're still alive?

Next, we have to learn to accept life with its ups and downs. If we expect life to be upbeat all the time, we won't be able to practise Buddhism well.

On the other hand, there are people who think that they are victims of karma and it's useless to try and improve their lives because it's 'fated'. That's also wrong. If you think in this

way, you can't practise Buddhism as well.

In his very first sermon soon after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha talked about the 2 extremes to avoid in life.

One extreme is self-mortification. To make spiritual progress, some people inflict pain on their own bodies and minds.

The Buddha rejected this. He said that nobody has ever achieved their goal in that way.

The other extreme is self-indulgence. These people adopt a hedonistic lifestyle, trying to satisfy every desire, whether for food, sex, fame, fortune, whatever.

Worse still, we may end up feeling guilty when we make mistakes. And guilt is not a very helpful thing for spiritual development. But if we live in a relaxed manner, mindful and aware, practising loving kindness and compassion not only for others but also for ourselves, even when we make mistakes, we'll be able to view things in their proper perspective.

The Path of Joy

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Eightfold Path which includes 'right effort'.

Thus effort can be right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, skillful or non-skilful. We should adopt the former and avoid the latter.

Take, for example, practising the 5 precepts.

This requires physical and mental effort because we have to be intelligent, diligent and mindful. But if we think, "Oh, I must practise the 5 precepts perfectly", we already start on the wrong footing. We're just making life more difficult for ourselves than necessary.

However, when I say that we should not try too hard, I don't mean that effort is not necessary. Effort (*viriya*) is indeed needed, even for worldly progress, let alone spiritual development.

But exerting effort does not mean we have to go to extremes.

During the Buddha's time there was a man called Cakkupala who was ordained as an adult. He thought he had very little

time to practise the Dharma and attain enlightenment. So he tried extremely hard.

He practised sitting and walking meditation all the time. He refused to lie down to avoid falling asleep and eventually gave up sleeping altogether.

In time, he contracted an eye disease and became blind.

There are many cases like this even today. These people fail because they push themselves beyond their capacity.

Of course, in a materialistic society like Singapore, telling people not to work too hard isn't exactly welcome news.

But if we work too hard for long periods of time, instead of achieving our goals, we may end up with health problems. We may also inflate our egos.

On the other hand, if we face serious financial or health problems, we should not be disheartened. We should do our best to overcome our problems. But having done our best, we should then learn to accept the outcome, good or bad, graciously.

If we understand the nature of life, we will know that there's a kind of rhythm in life. It's like day and night. Day follows night and night follows day.

It's also important to view the broad picture rather than get caught up in the heat of the moment.

step back to fully appreciate its beauty.

Similarly, in life, it's only when we take a step back that we're able to reflect clearly and dispassionately on what we've done and where we're heading.

People sometimes talk to me about their problems. They're worried about not getting enough sleep. Why can't they sleep for 8 hours like they used to do when they were young? Now they can only sleep for 3 to 4 hours.

But it's a well-known fact that older people need less sleep than younger people. Our bodies simply need less rest as we grow older and become less active.

Or there could be a medical reason. If this is the case, we should consult the doctor.

Finally, we may have a moral issue, in which case, Dharma practice will help.

Whatever the case may be, it is best not to worry unnecessarily.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

of a banyan tree. They are attached to sense desires like a maluva creeper which overgrows the jungle.

Sutta Nipata, verses 21-2

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time to practise the Dharma and attain enlightenment. So he tried extremely hard.

He practised sitting and walking meditation all the time. He refused to lie down to avoid falling asleep and eventually gave up sleeping altogether.

Accepting life's ups and down means taking life with a pinch of salt and not taking ourselves too seriously.

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Editorial

Trying to Balance the Mind – a Samatha Retreat

"With all the demands upon our time, the prospect of taking more time from the day to devote to meditation can appear to be just one more burden. But I would claim that the reason so many people find no time to meditate is not that they're too busy... How we fill our days is simply a matter of our priorities." B Alan Wallace

In this issue, our Bhante B Dhammaratana shows us how to practise the Dharma easily, yet most effectively. He reminds us of the Middle Path taught by the Buddha in his first sermon which avoids the 2 extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence.

One of the best ways to develop this crucial mindset of dispassion and equanimity is to practise samatha as 'a path of attentional development that culminates in an attention that can be sustained effortlessly for hours on end.'

Last May, I attended a meditation retreat.

The very term 'retreat' evokes an image of a quiet place up in the mountains somewhere in India or Nepal, austere accommodation, simple food, white clothing – and silence.

Held in a beautiful centre in the Blue Mountains, outside Sydney, Australia, we had every modern convenience we could wish for to ward off the cold of late autumn, even electric blankets and under-carpet heating.

Food was plentiful, even at times, delicious, and we were free to wear anything we liked within reason.

But silence was prescribed and largely observed.

There were 60 of us in all including many non-Buddhists. Some

were health professionals like psychologists, physiotherapists, doctors and nurses.

As Alan explains –

"We are all aware of the way the body heals itself. Physicians don't heal abrasions, and surgeons don't mend bone fractures. Instead, they do whatever they can to allow the body to heal itself – by keeping the wound clean or setting the broken bone, and so on."

We practised samatha meditation.

In his book, *The Attention Revolution*, on which he closely based the retreat, Alan defines samatha as 'a path of attentional development that culminates in an attention that can be sustained effortlessly for hours on end.'

Alan taught us 3 techniques – mindfulness of breathing (awareness of tactile sensations throughout the whole body, at the abdomen or the nostril), settling the mind in its natural state and samatha without signs.

Why so many techniques?

Well, for one thing, no single technique will be suitable for everybody.

For another, when the time comes when we can breathe out but not breathe in anymore, meditation based on breathing will not be very useful.

Instead, mind-based meditation would be more appropriate.

suffered aches on the left side of her head on the 1st day. On the 2nd day, the pain moved to the right side. And on the 3rd day, her entire head throbbed.

The diagnosis? She was simply trying too hard.

Alan advised her to try the supine position which is ideal for promoting relaxation.

'Meditation is a balancing act between attention and relaxation.'

To achieve this balance, we focus on the meditation object while breathing in and relax when we breathe out. Thereby, we release tension and avoid grasping.

Grasping, of course, is a perennial problem in meditation. Beginners tend to control their breath, not realising that, in Alan's words, "the body knows how to breathe better than we do." And seasoned meditators cling to signs of progress like bliss.

Speaking with such conviction and passion, Alan makes samatha practice sound so simple, particularly when he explains, step by step, the 10 stages outlined by the 8th century Indian master, Kamalashila in his text 'Stages of Meditation'.

The truth is, of course, that it's not simple at all.

And a clear mind is pivotal to everything we do, at work or play.

Samatha develops our 'capacity for attention to its fullest. When attention is impaired, it detracts from everything we do, and when it is well focused, it enhances everything we do.'

Progress, even if we can manage it, undulates like the graph in a stock index chart on a turbulent market day. The only thing we can be certain of is to be taunted by laxity and exaltation throughout.

Still, samatha is attainable. But the price is steep.

The 1st huge obstacle is commitment.

The 2nd barrier is ethics.

The Buddhist path to liberation is outlined by the Buddha in the Noble Eightfold Path which comprises ethics, concentration

and wisdom.

Ethics supports 'the cultivation of focused attention, which has the function of balancing the mind, thereby elevating it to higher, more serene, blissful, and radiant states of consciousness. Such purification is not possible without ethical discipline, in which mental imbalances are reduced through restraint from unwholesome physical, verbal, and mental behavior. As a result of training in ethical discipline, the mind is imbued with self-confidence: absence of remorse, fearlessness, and inward purity and serenity, which makes it suitable for the second training, concentration.'

Living and working in a compact, pressure-cooker environment with tight work and family commitments, the vast majority of us find it difficult, if not impossible, to commit to sincere and sustained meditation practice, even if the heart is willing.

So what do we do? A young corporate lawyer wanted to know.

Alan made 2 suggestions.

Firstly, we can snatch any opportunity that comes our way for centering the mind. Moments such as waiting for a taxi or that all-important business meeting to start. Just breathing in and out with mindfulness that whiskers away all the tension and distractions, paving the way for a clear and focused mind, even if it's just for a while.

Secondly, we can try to cultivate thoughts of loving kindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity whenever possible.

We watch television. We witness the devastation of the China earthquake or the Jamaican sprinter, Usain Bolt, breaking the 100 metres world record.

We can generate compassion for the earthquake victims. And we can rejoice that another human being has attained his much cherished ambition.

In this manner, we support our meditation efforts day by day.

On returning to Chiangmai, I sent a copy of *The Attention Revolution* to a good friend of mine, Peter Robinson, ex-Phra Pannapadipo, author of *Phra Farang and Little Angels* and more importantly, the founder of the SET Foundation which he still administers.

The Foundation has helped, and continues to help, thousands of students escape the cycle of poverty and illiteracy that would have been their lot if help had not arrived in good time.

"You're really impressed with Alan Wallace, aren't you?" Peter teased me when he received the book.

Of course, I am. That's why I sent him the book.

And now I want to share the privilege of receiving such great teachings, guidance and inspiration with you as well.

Now, that's something to look forward to, isn't it?

In the meantime, here's something to whet your appetite.

In this issue, we also bring you an exclusive email interview with B Alan Wallace.

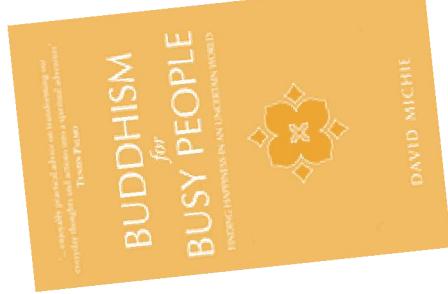
As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

Mother's Day Celebration

at the Grand Court Vegetarian Restaurant
on 11 May 2008

Book Review



concerns and goals are not very far removed from mine and probably yours. Of course, he's in all likelihood much further along the 'path' than I am, but then again, most people are!

By the time I got to page 36 of the book and read the objective and dedication before beginning a meditation session, I was hooked.

In fact, I think that it's so good and simple that I reproduce it here for the benefit of readers -

By the practice of this meditation I am becoming increasingly calm and relaxed

More efficient and happier in all that I do

Both for my own sake and for others

In fact, I found this pre-meditation dedication so appropriate that I now use it every time I meditate. It may not be as elegant or 'correct' as the standard dedication for the benefit of all sentient beings but it's more reflective of our aspirations and, speaking for myself, pertinent to my progress and situation on the path as a relative beginner to meditation.

To say that I enjoyed reading *Buddhism for Busy People* is probably an understatement. Indeed, much more than enjoying the book, I found that it was, to me personally at least, one of the most useful Dharma books that I have read.

The author, David Michie, is also neither a famous spiritual leader nor a meditation master. He's a man with a career and a wife, someone who does not live in a forest or on a remote mountain.

Therein lies the key - he's but an ordinary man just like me and, I presume, you. His perspective,

relevant to this day and age. For instance, Michie gives examples of detachment and attachment in terms of family, friends and career - things which ordinary people can identify with without any difficulty whatsoever.

Michie also answers the perennial question - *What makes a person a Buddhist?* - and many other FAQs in a way that ordinary people can relate to.

The book also has quotes from the Buddha, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and other great teachers but I personally found the practical advice on meditation and integrating Buddhist practice into our everyday life the most useful.

And finally, the chapter headings are typical of beginners' Dharma books - the Three Refuges, the Four Noble Truths, Karma, Compassion, meditation and so on - and are very helpful too.

I recommend this book very highly to all ordinary Buddhists and, yes, even to seasoned Dharma practitioners. There's nothing like a back-to-basics refresher course that serves as an alarm bell in case we get carried away and stray too far from the straight and narrow, as we tend to do from time to time, being ordinary human beings.

There are no ground-breaking concepts or methods in this book, but the explanations of Buddhist concepts are down-to-earth and

Buddhism for Busy People

Written by David Michie

Published by Snow Lion

Reviewed by Tjep Hoe



Interview



Email Interview with B Alan Wallace

11 June 2008

Interviewed by Chwee Beng
(with additional questions
volunteered by Sin Tho)

In this interview, B Alan Wallace, the noted translator of Tibetan Buddhist texts, interpreter of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama, author, scholar and, not least, teacher of Dharma and meditation answers questions on a wide range of issues including meditation, monks' vows, mind science research, genetic engineering and Buddhism's role in the on-going debate between religionists and atheists.

You were born into a Judeo-Christian environment. How did you first become interested in Buddhism?

I first became interested in Buddhism out of my yearning to find a spiritual path that would integrate my spiritual longings for a more meaningful life, with less suffering and greater insight into the nature of reality, with my interests in science and philosophy. In Buddhism I found a world view, a wide range of meditative practices and a way of life that thoroughly integrates all my spiritual, scientific, and philosophical aspirations. Here, the ideals of the pursuit of understanding, virtue,

and genuine happiness are utterly fused into one, rather than being fragmented, as they so commonly are in the modern world.

At the Sydney retreat this year, you related an amazing personal story about how you first met a Buddhist monk. Please repeat that story for the benefit of our readers and the point that you were making in telling it.

While hitch-hiking around Europe during the summer of 1970, I picked up a book on Buddhist meditation by the Indian master Padmasambhava that explored the very nature of consciousness itself, and this aroused in me great faith to pursue this path of contemplative inquiry. But the more I read, the more it became apparent to me that I needed to find a teacher - someone to give me personal guidance - rather than relying on books alone. By the time I arrived in the city of Bergen, Norway, I felt an urgent need to meet such a teacher, whom I envisioned as a wise old man, and I wrote this in my daily journal. The next morning, as I set out on the long road through the wilderness between Bergen and Oslo, an old man gave me a ride, and within minutes I learned that he was a Theravada Buddhist monk named Sugata who had lived for years in Nepal, together with Tibetan refugees. During the winter each year, he would lecture on Indian culture and Buddhism throughout Europe. He learned of my great yearning to study and practice Buddhism, and gave me quintessential advice, which set me on the path that I have followed ever since. At that time, you could probably count the number of Buddhist monks in Europe on the fingers of one hand, so I took this as a blessing from the Buddhas in response to my prayer to find a guide on the path. Never since then have I been without a teacher to guide me further.

You were ordained a Buddhist monk by H.H. the Dalai Lama and you returned your vows after you obtained your undergraduate degree. What was the Dalai Lama's advice to you when you decided to disrobe?

The Buddha set an example for the ordained Sangha, who received their food by going for alms, by humbly accepting whatever food was offered, whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian. There were 3 circumstances under which he told his monastic followers not to accept meat: if they saw, heard,

I returned my vows after living as a fully ordained monk for 12 years, the last 6 of which were spent in the United States. I felt at the time that I could best serve the Dharma and sentient beings by continuing to live in the West, but since there was virtually no support of any kind for the monastic way of life, I felt it would be better for me to return my vows and devote myself wholeheartedly to the Dharma as a lay person. H. H. the Dalai Lama wrote to me that he fully understood and sympathized with my situation and gave me permission to return my vows, and also to take them again in the future if I ever wished to do so. I found his advice to be deeply understanding and compassionate, and my faith in him and in the Buddhadharma grew.

Many Mahayana and Tibetan monks eat 3 meals a day like lay people. Are they breaking any vows?

Ordained Tibetan monks follow the Sarnavatiava school of Vinaya, for which full ordination entails 253 precepts, including not eating after noon. Some Tibetan monks strictly follow this precept, while many do not. When I was living as a fully ordained monk in a Tibetan monastery in Switzerland in the 1970s, there were 17 Western monks studying and practicing very diligently, and our abbot actually encouraged us to eat in the evening if this would help support our health and vitality. The Tibetan Buddhist position is that if a monk's reason for eating after noon is based on health considerations, then he is not breaching his vows; but if he is eating simply for the enjoyment of food, he is breaching his vows.

Was the Buddha historically speaking, a vegetarian? Is it necessary or helpful to be vegetarian in order to practise meditation?

The Buddha set an example for the ordained Sangha, who received their food by going for alms, by humbly accepting whatever food was offered, whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian. There were 3 circumstances under which he told his monastic followers not to accept meat: if they saw, heard,

or suspected that the animal was killed specifically for the sake of providing meat as an offering to the Sangha. In such cases, the monk or nun was not to accept the meat, but otherwise, one was simply to accept what one was given. This implies that it is not necessary to be a vegetarian in order to practice meditation. Generally, though, it is clearly better, more compassionate, to eat food that does not entail killing other sentient beings. This means that it is also better to eat fruits, grains, and vegetables that were grown without the use of pesticides, which kill millions of insects. On the other hand, if one is altruistically dedicated to spiritual practice and one has a physical condition that requires the consumption of meat in order to maintain one's health and vitality, then eating moderate quantities of meat, as if it were medicine, might actually support one's meditative practice.

You are a prolific writer and busy teacher. Yet, when you were invited to teach at the Buddhist Library, you accepted the invitation without hesitation. What is it that drives you to sacrifice so much of your time and energy to others?

I feel a deep sense of gratitude toward all my Buddhist teachers, who have so generously, selflessly shared their understanding of the Buddhadharma with me, and many of them have asked me to teach. So in order to begin to repay their kindness, I am happy to share what little I have understood with others, with the aspiration that it may be of benefit to them. In this way I see my life as having meaning, though I do feel a constant, gentle tension between my wish to devote myself to solitary meditation and my wish to be actively of service to others.

Next year, your new book on Buddhist and Christian meditation is due for publication. There are differences in approaches and experiences with respect to meditation in these 2 traditions. To what extent can these differences be explained on the basis that Buddhists practise non-grasping while meditating whereas Christians reflect on a supreme creator God whom they should love and worship.

While it is true that the Buddhist ideal is to practice meditation with non-grasping, there is also a profound role for faith and devotion in Buddhist practice. Even though the Buddha is not viewed as a supreme creator God, he is the Awakened One who devoted

himself tirelessly to alleviating the suffering of the world and to bringing sentient beings to ultimate liberation and enlightenment. For this, he is truly deserving of our love and worship, and devout Buddhists throughout the world view him with such reverence, which may be similar to the love of God experienced by devout Christians. This is not to overlook the significant differences between Buddhist and Christian meditations, which must certainly be taken into account. But I believe it is equally important not to exaggerate the differences between them.

What practical benefits do you envisage that mind science research can contribute to the world?

For the first time in 2500 years, Buddhism has spread throughout the entire world, which is now deeply influenced by science and technology. This means that Buddhist theories and practices must take these aspects of modernity very seriously, and to some extent, traditional practices must be adapted to the modern world. The core themes of Buddhism are evident: the cultivation of a wholesome, virtuous way of life; the cultivation of enhanced mental balance and well-being by way of the development of samadhi, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and so on; and the cultivation of contemplative insight into the nature of reality such that our minds are forever freed from the afflictive tendencies of delusion, craving, and hostility. Mind science research may help us, from its third-person perspective, to recognize which practices, and which variations of traditional practices, are most effective in freeing the mind from its destructive tendencies and helping us cultivate virtues that lead to our own and others' genuine happiness. Buddhism identifies ignorance as the root of suffering, implying that knowledge and understanding are the way to freedom. Science is a discipline focused on understanding the world as it is, so it is a natural ally to Buddhist practice.

There's an on-going, often heated, debate between religionists and secularists on the role and value of religion. Buddhism is caught in the middle of this debate being neither a theistic religion nor a secular ideology. What should Buddhism's role be in this debate, if any?

I believe that a major contribution that Buddhism can make in this regard is to encourage everyone to return to experience, rather than getting caught up in religious and materialistic ideologies. There is a reality of suffering from which we all - religious people and non-religious people alike - wish to be free. It is important for us to explore and thoroughly understand the extent of suffering to which we are all prone. There is a reality of the source of suffering. The Buddha's challenge in this regard is for us to identify and do our best to eliminate the root causes of suffering, which he identified as craving, hostility, and delusion. There is a reality of freedom from suffering, and we have the possibility to realize this by dedicating ourselves, heart and mind, to this lofty ideal. And there is a reality of the path to such freedom, comprised of ethics, mental balance, and wisdom. These are universal truths, and they are relevant to everyone, regardless of our ideologies and metaphysical beliefs about the existence or non-existence of God.

Theistic religions unambiguously oppose cloning and stem cell research. The Buddhist stand seems more muted. What in your view should the Buddhist standpoint be based on the teachings of the Buddha commonly accepted by all Buddhist traditions?

The Buddhist stand point is rooted in ethics: the intention to avoid harming sentient beings and to be of service

whenever this is possible. From what I have understood, cloned animals are often especially vulnerable to diseases, and the long-term effects of eating the flesh of such creatures is not known. Therefore, I believe the Buddhist standpoint would be to approach this issue with great caution, asking: What potential benefits (and for whom) are there in pursuing such research? Is it really necessary? And if great benefits are likely, what are the likely disadvantages from such research? Due to the rapid development of technology, our power over nature has grown more rapidly than our wisdom and compassion, and this is a dangerous trend. As for stem cell research, the same questions must be posed. If one destroys a growing fetus in order to acquire such cells, one has killed a sentient being. Was that really necessary in order to acquire the hoped-for benefits from such research? Or might such cells be acquired in other ways that are not injurious to any sentient being? In all cases, one must judge: Wherein lies the greatest potential benefit for all sentient beings, not just humanity?

编 篇

想要达到内心奢 的摩他闭关禅修

艾伦教了我们三个技巧：专注于呼吸的感受，尤其是本然状态或鼻孔的感受；以及在没有造作的情况下进入他的状态。

为什么有这么多技巧呢？

由于繁杂事缠身，成了一般人理应承担的额外的负担。他们太忙...善用时间的问题。B·艾伦·华勒士如何以般若法来修持。他提醒我们：“佛陀初辟时所开示的残和自我放纵的极端。”

“闭关”，这个词汇给予人一个印象：在印度或尼泊尔的深山野岭、庄重的生处、俭朴的饭食、白色的衣衫和寂静。

去年五月，我参加了禅修闭关。这一年，我必须严格强调和遵守禁语。

“食物充足，有时还美味可口，而且我的衣服也能在合理的情况下，进穿喜爱的衣服。”

但是，我们必须严格强调和遵守禁语。

我们共有60人，包括佛教徒与非佛教徒，有些是身心健康工作者、医生和护士。

我们的老师是B·艾伦·华勒士(B·Alion Wallace)，他是多本传佛教书及禅修书籍的作者，他以多年来为尊者达摩喇嘛担任翻译者。

我们作“奢摩他”或“止”的禅修。

在艾伦·华勒士所著作的书《专注力：禅修的主要参考文献》里，也是这次闭关的主要参考文献。

“奢摩他”禅修是一种专注力最终甚至可以轻易地维持数小时之久。

“禅修”是有关专注力和平衡的。要达到这个效果，我们在吸气时，要集中在这个物体，在呼气时，保持放松。这样，我们就能减轻压力和避免执取。

当然，执取是禅修中常见的问题，初学者通常会说：“我们的身体更知道如何呼吸。”而资深的禅修者则执取进阶第《序章》专注力。

艾伦以坚信和热情的口语，将着魔他禅修描述得简明易懂，圣者莲花生以十一个阶段循序开发专注力。

当然，实事却不如想象中简单。即使我们可以掌握进步，它仍然犹如急流汹涌的股票交易。我们将会不断地受到放纵与激动的嘲弄。

当然，奢摩他禅修端地是可以到达的，但需要付出很高的代价。

第一个巨大障碍是决心。

艾伦在著作里估计，大约需要二万个小时的禅修练习，才能进入奢摩他的禅定。

第二个障碍是道德规范。

佛教的解脱之道包含在佛陀八正道的开示里，包括戒、定、慧。

集中的练习可以平衡心智，将智慧推向更高、更平和、幸福和明亮的意识状态。如果没做到，净化的心是在规律恶使不净的身、口、意的生起。规律恶使心不净、自信心不足、以及内心的嗔恨、勇敢不惧以及内心的清净与祥和。这将促进第二个阶段的修习—专注力。

与此同时，先为您端上一道开胃菜。

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《经集》二十一·二

业会议开始之前，我们只须用专注力和纫心来吸气和呼气，就能去除紧张和专注，只是让心儿也值得。

其次，只要有礼会，我们都可以尝试培养慈悲、悲、欢喜和平等的念头。从电视上，我们目睹了四川大地震的灾害，或牙买加短跑选手乌塞恩·博尔特(Usein Bolt)打破了100米的世界纪录。

我们可以对地震灾民生起慈悲心。我也可以为其他达人达成愿望而感到欢喜。

就这样，我们日复一日不断地精进修习。

回到清迈，我把《专注力：禅修10阶段》送给了一位好友，彼得·罗宾森(Peter Robinson)，彼得·罗宾森之前的名字是Phra Peter Pannapadipati，也是Phra Peter Forang and Little Angels的作者，更是SET基金的创始人。

基金会从不间断地为许多贫困学生伸出援手，帮助他们摆脱贫苦和文盲的厄运。

“你真的对艾伦·华勒士先生有好感，不是吗？”彼得收到书后取笑我。

当然，否则我就不会把书送给他了！现在，我也想和您分享这个伟大的教学、指导和启发所带来的好处。

因为在达摩拉达那法师的邀请下，艾伦已答应于今年十二月，在佛教图书馆举办一个禅修座谈会。这的确是一件令人向往的事情，不知这是何？

与此同时，先为您端上一道开胃菜。

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《经集》二十一·二

这样，我们可以避免责备我慢。而且，当我们拥有辉煌的事业、兴隆的生意时，不应该生起傲慢心，而必须以恭敬心来惜福。

换言之，要是遇到经济或是身体健康问题时，不应该自弃。我们应该尽力克服困难与否，应该坦然接受。

如果我们理解了生命的缘起，我们就会知道生命是一种规律的，就像日夜一样，相互更替。

学习宏观看待事物，而不是受困于一时的想不开。

打个比方，当我们正在欣赏一幅画作时，我们会不自觉地退一步观看全貌，才能欣赏它的美。

同样的，在生命中学习后退同步，才能公正清楚地反思我们的行为，从而看清未来的方向。

有些人会和我诉说心事。他们担心自己的睡眠不足，为何不能像年轻时那样睡足八个小时呢？现在他们只能睡三到四个小时而已。

然而，比较年长的人士的睡眠时间比年轻人少。这是因为随着年龄的增长和事活动量的减少，需要的休息时间也相对减少。

另一方面，我们可能会在家或公司里遇到问题。在这种情况下，只有解决问题，心灵安定之后，才能确保一夜高枕无忧。

如果有关健康上的问题，我们可以征询医生的意见。

最后，我们也可能碰到道德上的问题，奉行佛法能帮助你。

无论如何，最好就别为琐事忧心重重了。

这需用智慧、勤奋和注意力。因为我们需要身心的努力，因为我们要完美地修持五戒。

更糟的是，我们可能会因此犯错误而感到内疚，而内疚对于精神的修持无益。

这能使我们迅速地纠正错误、决心不再重犯，并积极向前迈进。

在佛陀的时代，有一个名叫Clarkuccio的人，由于他成年才出家，唯恐自己修持佛法的时日无多，他便选择了极端苦修。

他无时无刻进行盘坐和步行静修。不肯躺下，因为他怕睡着，最终他连睡觉也免去了。

后来，他患有眼疾而瞎了。今天，仍有很多这类例子。这些人的失败，是因为把自己推向了能力范围以外。

当然，叫人不要太拼命似乎又说不太紧，不但不能达到目的，甚至会引发疾病，我们也可能变得贡高我慢。

但要是我们长时间地把自己逼得太紧，不但不能达到目的，甚至会引发疾病。

不请激情和嗔恨从小我而生。不清满、执著和恐惧也如此。它们从个人的贪欲开始，犹如嫩枝在榕树枝上开枝。它们执著于五欲之中，宛如蔓藤繁衍整个森林。

如常祝大家阅读愉快。

Chwee Beng
编辑

极乐之程

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法师说 修持佛法-简单方法

当佛教徒有意修持佛法时，你会发现他们基于不同的出发点来修持。

有些人把它当成是一件很困难的事情。他们须要付出很大的努力。

其他随意地修持佛法。不时，甚至完全忘了佛法的存在。

此外，有些佛教徒认为佛法无法日常奉行。只适合用来诵经或是在遇到困难时，向佛陀请求帮助，就可以了。

无论如何，修行佛法是非常重要的。佛法应该是佛教徒本身必需具备的核心。

简而言之，佛教徒是那些在身、

语、意，奉行或者尝试奉行佛陀教诲的人。

在《法句经》里，佛陀诫言：
即使一个人只咏诵经文的一小部分，但以佛法相应奉行，灭除贪、嗔、痴，有正确的知见，心灵自在，不受六道我见束缚——这个人将共享宗教生活。

《法句经》二十品

因此，我现在将谈论修持佛法的正确方法。

重要的是不要把佛教当成是一种负担。

相反的，我们应该把它当成是件轻松的事。换言之，我们不应该过分强迫自己尝试，尤其是初学者更应该注意这点。

由于觉得简单又不过分强迫自己，我们就可以安乐自在地修持佛法。的确，倘若有人在修持佛法时觉得痛苦，那么他们可能没有正确地依法奉行。

那么我们应该如何培养这安乐自在的态度呢？

我们首先必须先避免对世间物过于挑剔。当然，我们时时在选择，但我们不应该对食物、衣服等，过于挑三拣四。

有些人甚至为了死后的自己而烦恼。他们需要怎么样的棺材，丧礼应该花多少钱等。为何不把重点放在当下的生活呢？

接着，我们必须接受生命的起起落落。如果我们一意认为生命永远处

在高峰，我们就无法把佛法学好。

此外，有些人认为他们是业障的受害者，并觉得无论再怎么努力，还是无法改变“命数”。这也是错误的。如果你们这么想，你们就无法把佛法学好。

在佛陀成道后的初转法轮，他提到了生命中必须避而远之的两个极端。

一个极端是自我摧残。为了提升精神境界，有些人刻意把痛苦加重于自己的身心上。

佛陀否定这一点。他表示没有一个人能因此达到目标。

另外一个极端是自我放纵。这些人过着放纵的生活，努力满足所有的欲望，无论是在食物、性爱、名利等。

然而，极端只能导致压力和紧张。我们或许可以如愿以偿，或许无法达到所执著的目标，但我们不可能获得长久的快乐。我们最终将陷入抑郁。

然而，虽然我说不应该过分强迫自己，但并非表示不需要付出努力。即使是世俗事物的追求，精进 (Viriya) 仍然是必要的，更何况是精神上的提升。

但是，精进不表示我们应该走极端。

在初转法轮时，佛陀教导我们中道超越两个极端。中道既是八正道，当中包括“正精进”。

因此，精进可归纳为正确、恰当和得体，或者是错误、不恰当和不得体。我们应该选择前者而不是后者。

(第11页续)

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