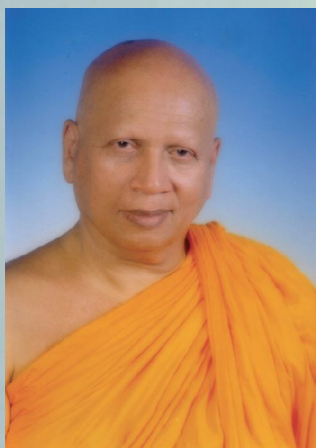
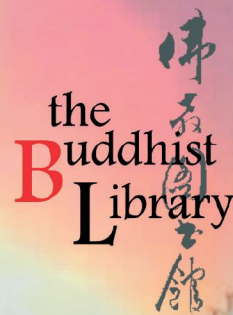


The Path of Joy

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Bhante Says

The Buddhist approach to 'gods' is something important for us to learn.

People normally put religions in different categories.

When people discuss religion, they often call Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism the world's 'main religions' because a large proportion of the world's population believe in them.

But there's another way to categorise religions.

Except for Buddhism, all the world's main religions belong to one category. They are theistic. They believe in a Creator God and they hold that salvation is gained only with the help of the Creator God. In short, the Creator is a saviour and the teachings of theistic religions can generally be called theology.

However, Buddhism is different. The Buddha is not God, nor a messenger of God. He is not a Creator. The Buddha has never talked about a Creator God.

The Place of 'Gods' in Buddhism

So people call Buddhism 'atheistic'. And Buddhists are dubbed 'atheists'. Buddhism, in this sense, falls into a separate category all by itself.

But is this classification accurate? Is it correct to call Buddhism atheistic and Buddhists atheists?

Atheists are people who object to religion on 2 main grounds. They believe that there's no God and that there is no life after death. In his best-selling 'The God Delusion', Professor Richard Dawkins called a belief in life after death 'wishful thinking'.

But what does the word 'atheist' actually mean?

The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines an 'atheist' as 'someone who believes that God or gods do not exist'.



MICA (P) 003/10/2009

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Email: joyeditor@gmail.com
Fax 67417689
Telephone 67468435 BL's website: <http://buddhlib.org.sg>
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Here, it's important to bear in mind that, although the Buddha did not talk about a Creator God, he did talk about 'gods'.

Indeed, it's easy to forget that Buddhism as a religion and Buddhists as a group of religious practitioners may not even exist in the world today if not for a god called Brahma Sahampati.

Soon after the Buddha's enlightenment, he wondered whether he should teach the Dharma to the world. After all, the Dharma that he had realised is *'profound, hard to see, hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, to be experienced by the wise. But this population delights in attachment, takes delight in attachment, rejoices in attachment.'* (Translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *'In the Buddha's Words'*).

It was then, as the story goes, that Brahma Sahampati appeared before the Buddha and persuaded him to teach. Although the vast majority of humankind is ignorant and difficult to teach, there are a few, according to Brahma Sahampati, with *'little dust in their eyes'* who could benefit from the Buddha's teachings.

And so, fortunately for us, the Buddha relented.

One of the things that the Buddha taught is that there is life after death. Not only one life but countless lives.

According to Buddhism, until they gain enlightenment, sentient beings migrate in *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, in 6 realms of existence - the realms of the gods, *asuras* (sometimes called *'titans'* or *'demigods'*), human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and hell.

Here, I'm talking only about gods.

Buddhist texts mention 3 different types of 'gods'.

In Pali and Sanskrit, the term used for 'gods' is *deva*.

The 1st type of gods is *upattideva*. *Upatti* means birth. *'Upattideva'* is therefore a god by birth.

Who are these gods by birth?

Here, we wander into a bit of culture or popular belief in which life after death is accepted. Generally, Buddhists and non-Buddhists believe in heavens.

But 'heaven' here does not have the same

meaning as in other religions. In Buddhism, heaven is nothing but another world or universe. The Buddhist world is very big. The Buddha talked about thousands and thousands of universes.

In those universes, there are plants like we have here on earth but maybe even better. People live happily. They experience happiness, better health and long life. And so, compared to our earth, these planets seem like heavens.

And so those who are born in such higher planes of existence are considered gods by birth.

The 2nd category of gods is *sammutideva*. These can be termed *'accepted gods.'* Certain kinds of beings are accepted or recognised by people as gods. Some people use the words *'conventional gods'* or *'local gods'*.

Chinese people will find this very easy to understand. In China, there are many gods. If we go back in history, these gods were once people who lived in certain provinces. They did good things for the benefit of people. They worked very hard to develop the areas in which they lived. They sacrificed themselves for the benefit of people. As a result, even though many people may have forgotten the origins of these accepted gods, they still respect or worship them as gods after many centuries. This is common not only in China, Japan, Sri Lanka and Tibet but even in Singapore today.

The 3rd category of gods is *visuddhideva*.

Visuddhi means *'purification'*. If you have studied Buddhism, you would know that there is a book called *Visuddhimagga – The Path of Purification* – written by the great 5th century monk, Buddhagosa. This is the meaning of the title of the book, the path towards enlightenment.

Visuddhideva is a person who has become a god as a result of purification. By purification, one can become a god. Purification is the process of getting rid of all the defilements - ignorance, greed, anger and so on. In Buddhism, we purify our minds by practising the precepts, the 10 Perfections and meditation.

So the Buddha attained the highest purification by getting rid of all his defilements. He became a god by purification, by getting rid of all the defilements. So did all Buddhas, bodhisattvas and arahants.

In contrast, the first 2 categories of gods – *upattideva* and *sammutideva* are what in Buddhism are called *'worldly gods'*.

What is the difference?

Briefly, we can say that *visuddhideva* – Buddhas, bodhisattvas and arahants – have attained or are on the verge of attaining enlightenment whereas *upattideva* and *sammutideva*, the worldly gods, have not.

Many people pray to worldly gods to receive blessings for better lives, money, better grades for their children, safety and long lives.



But worldly gods are not able to guide us towards enlightenment and so, from a Buddhist point of view, praying to them is rather short-sighted or pointless.

The Buddha has become an icon of compassion and tolerance even to non-Buddhists around the world. There is no better illustration of this than the story of Upali.

Upali was a millionaire who wanted to be a disciple of the Buddha. The problem was that he already had a religious teacher who relied on him for financial support. Twice he made the same request and twice the Buddha refused. Only when, on his 3rd attempt, after the Buddha was assured that Upali's religious teacher would not lose his financial support, did the Buddha agree to make Upali a disciple.

And so, it is not surprising that the Buddha, in his compassion and tolerance, did not ban or prohibit practices such as worshipping of worldly gods by his followers.

Still, if we take our Dharma practice seriously, we should not lose sight of the fact that only the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) are effective and genuine refuges.

There is a famous sutra in which the Buddha was engaged in a conversation with a curious man. The man was impressed with the calm and serene demeanour of the Buddha and wanted to know who or what the Buddha was. Was he a celestial being or a god? A magician, a wizard or a man?

The Buddha declined all these descriptions. He was simply, in his own word – *awake*.

This encounter is usually related by people to illustrate the enlightenment of the Buddha. As always, when replying, the Buddha was precise.

'Awake' is a simple description but it's a very meaningful one. Because if the Buddha was a supernatural being, then we, as ordinary human beings, could never hope to be enlightened like him.

If, on the other hand, the Buddha was 'awake', then we are all merely 'asleep'. And being merely asleep, we can all wake up from our ignorance by following the footsteps of the Buddha.

And once human beings realise their full potential and become arahants or Buddhas, they surpass even the worldly gods who are still trapped in *samsara*. This is the great beauty and promise of Buddhism.

Reading the Buddha's answer to the curious man's question, a question may crop up in your mind – *If the Buddha was a visuddhideva, a god by purification, why did he deny that he was a god?*

The sutra did not directly answer this question.

But my own educated guess would be that the Buddha knew that the curious man was not well acquainted with the Dharma. (If he was well acquainted with the Dharma, he would not have asked the question in the first place.)

What would have happened if the Buddha had agreed that he was a god? What impression would the curious man have gone away with?

The curious man would have gone away confused that the Buddha was no different from worldly gods.

And that would not have been very helpful in guiding the curious man on the path towards enlightenment.

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

***'If my sickness is of benefit
to living beings,
then let me be sick.
If my death would benefit them,
may I die.
But if my recovery would help,
may I be cured.
Bless me to accept whatever
happens with JOY
and use it as my PATH.'***

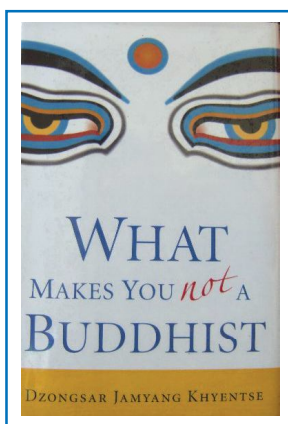
Gyelsay Togmay Sangpo
(author of *The Thirty Seven
Practices of a Bodhisattva*)

Editorial

What It Means to be Buddhists – Seeing the Grime on Dirty Windows

'I cannot emphasise enough that understanding the truth is the most important aspect of Buddhism.'

Dzongsar Khyentse Jamyang Rinpoche



Sanitsuda Ekachai is a feature writer with the Bangkok Post who also blogs on social issues and Buddhism.

Recently, in an article entitled 'And we still call ourselves Buddhists?' Sanitsuda condemned the Thai government's policy of repatriating migrant workers back to Myanmar unless, by February 28, 2012 (Makha Bucha Day, a popular Buddhist holy day in Thailand), they prove their right to remain in the Kingdom. How could the government be so heartless? she wondered.

'If we have no second thoughts about hurting the weak even on Buddhist holy days, we should use the upcoming Makha Bucha Day to seriously consider whether we can still call ourselves Buddhists.'

Sanitsuda's article assumes that people who behave badly, especially on Buddhist holy days, don't deserve to be called 'Buddhists'.

But the title begs an even more fundamental question - *Who or what is a Buddhist?*

Does he or she, by definition, have to behave well?

Perhaps we could rephrase the question another way. *What differentiates a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist?*

Now it becomes obvious that being moral or ethical is not the litmus test. There are, after all, good and bad Buddhists, just as there are good and bad Christians,

Muslims and Hindus, not to mention atheists and agnostics. So being moral or ethical does not necessarily have anything to do with being a Buddhist.

So what does?

In his book, *What Makes You Not a Buddhist*, Dzongsar Khyentse Jamyang Rinpoche gives the answer.

Buddhists are people who accept the truth of the Four Seals.

So just as a Christian is someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the son of God who was sent to this world to save us from our sins and a Muslim is somebody who believes that there's only one true God and that Muhammad is his Prophet, a Buddhist is someone who subscribes to the truth of the Four Seals.

What are these Four Seals?

Rinpoche lists them as follows –

*All compounded things are impermanent
All emotions are pain
All things have no inherent existence
Nirvana is beyond concepts.*

And then he explains –

'The message of the Four Seals is meant to be understood literally, not metaphorically or mystically – and meant to be taken seriously. But the seals are not edicts or commandments...

(T)here is nothing moralistic or ritualistic about them. There is no mention of good or bad behaviour. They are secular truths based on wisdom and wisdom is the primary concern of a Buddhist.'

The Four Seals, in effect, encapsulate wisdom in Buddhism.

Wisdom is the ability to see the universe, as it really is. Because the characteristics of the universe are what the Four Seals tell us.

The Four Seals were promulgated more than 2,500 years ago. Yet, despite the advance of science, they remain as valid today as when the Buddha taught them.

And so to be wise is to have the 'right view'.

'Ultimately it is this view that determines our motivation and action. It is the view that guides us on the path of Buddhism.'

Thus it is no accident that 'right view' is the first of the 8 steps that constitute the Noble Eightfold Path leading to enlightenment.

Without wisdom, even our well-intended actions can cause enormous harm because we're deluded. And that delusion

colours all our actions. Just look at the horrendous acts of a typical suicide bomber and you will see what I mean.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Buddhists too, like anyone else, can make mistakes or commit crimes.

Like Santisuda, I live and work in Thailand, where more than 90% of the population consider themselves Buddhists. Political struggle continues to engulf the country after 4 years as I write this article.

While the political factions squabble about who should lead the country, little attention is paid to a more fundamental and serious problem that threatens the long term future of the Thai nation, namely, the gradual but steady erosion of the moral fibre of the country.

In a poll conducted some time back, college students were asked whether they would be happy to support a politician who's corrupt or who breaks the law so long as that politician delivers what he promises during the election.

More than 50% of the students polled said that they had no problem supporting such a politician.

For a Buddhist country, this is truly astounding. But, perhaps not so surprising.

Corruption has become so endemic here that some Thai politicians don't seem to care that they're known to be corrupt. They fear the criminal sanctions of the law. But feel no shame. Corruption, after all, has been the order of the day for successive administrations. It has become the norm.

An editorial in the Nation newspaper on December 19, 2009 describes how talented these Thai politicians have become in this regard.

They 'make big bucks for themselves through overpricing, commissions and well-thought-out and well-organised fraud and corruption that skims the cream off the top.' At the same time, the poor 'feel indebted' to them believing their claim to be 'champions of (the poor's) plight, even with the crumbs with which (the poor) are actually left.'

'We live at a time when instant gratification is the password. It numbs our senses and clouds our minds. After a while, dirty windows no longer look dirty, as we can no longer see the grime. (I)t doesn't matter if we cannot see anything through it. People are brainwashed to live happily in cocoons created by layers of lies and deception.'

Then there are the bizarre, often dangerous, tactics that people employ to defeat their opponents.

They hurl abuses at each other, with a grenade or two thrown in for good measure. They conduct ceremonies to bless themselves and curse their enemies. They sacrifice animals to propitiate worldly gods. They splatter their own blood (reportedly infected with HIV and other diseases) to spook their opponents.

And they proudly display amulets and antique Buddha images to prove that they are good Buddhists.

How, I wonder, would the Buddha respond if he were to see his 'followers' indulging in these activities?

A friend once asked me, "Why do Buddhist countries have so many problems?"

I wish I knew the answer, assuming that the premise is valid.

But if it is, perhaps it has something to do with tolerance. Or rather the misapplication by often well-intentioned people of tolerance to sloth, laziness, misconduct, even crimes like corruption. They forget that compassion should be directed at the offender, not the offence.

In reality, the Thai people have all they need to resolve their problems. They have the Dharma. All they need to do is to apply it.

The Dharma cuts through labels, propaganda, spin, deception and more. With it, they can see through the dirty windows, clean them, even replace the window cleaners.

Of course, in Singapore, we don't face the same problems that the Thais do. Nor in the same magnitude.

We are indeed more fortunate in that respect.

But we do have our own set of worries particular to a small population living in a highly competitive and compact, multi-racial and multi-religious environment.

We need the wisdom of the Dharma for those too.

In any event, besides wisdom, Buddhism also cherishes compassion, tolerance and unconditional love for everyone, regardless of language, race or religion.

In one other respect too, Singaporeans are luckier than Thais.

Unlike Thailand, Singapore is a Dharma supermarket. So we have the whole array of Buddhist traditions to choose from to suit our own needs and temperaments.

But no matter what tradition of Buddhism we belong to, we should never lose sight of our basic obligation as practising Buddhists.

As Rinpoche reminds us –

'...as a Buddhist, you have a mission to refrain as much as possible from harming others, and to help others as much as possible. This is not a huge responsibility because if you genuinely accept and contemplate the truths, all these deeds flow naturally.'

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor



BL's SPECIAL CHINESE NEW YEAR 2010 CELEBRATION

BL members celebrate Chinese New Year with elderly residents of Tai Pei Old People's Home on Feb 27, 2010.

Photo Credit : Yew Beng

BL
Event



BOOK REVIEW

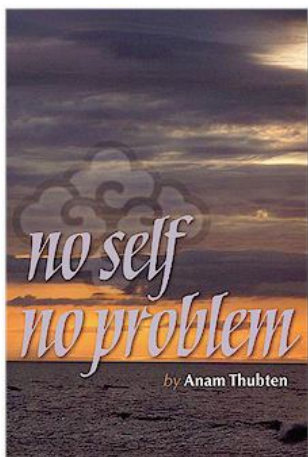
No Self, No Problem

by Anam Thubten

Published by Snow Lion Publications (2009)

134 pages

Reviewed by Jeremy



Anyone serious enough to confront suffering should read this book.

We can find great assurance when suffering comes to us simply by practising the way of the Buddha or bearing in mind the mantra of 'No Self, No Problem' as the title of this beautiful book implies.

Before encountering Buddhism, the self meant a great deal to me. Others around me constantly affirmed it with a sense of belonging, pride and power. Many a time, I actually believed in them, causing me even more suffering.

However, careful analysis reveals that the self is constantly perpetuating itself with all sorts of forms and identifications, likes and dislikes, fears or attachments. It never abides nor rests. It is always attempting to make sense of the truth. But what is the truth? The suffering of a painful event or loss seems so real and repetitive.

According to Anam Thubten, the self is illusory, clinging with complicated notions of a false reality. The ultimate truth awaits, transcending all concepts. This can be realised through meditation.

Great teachers have achieved this realisation. So can we. Needless to say, this is no easy task. We need to cultivate spiritual confidence and mindfulness of our actions by killing the ego attached to the self to be awakened.

Stories, metaphors and the author's own experience make this book an excellent read.

I found humour when a devotee questioned a monk during a retreat, "Are you asking us to die?"

"Yes!"

The monk bowed towards her in reverence acknowledging her claim that the self is illusory, cautioning her not to literally or ignorantly take its meaning. In essence, an all-pervading truth, reality, transcends self.

Of course, we can carry on with our lives without renouncing the world. Renunciation is not possible for many people anyway, especially in a place like Singapore.

"Everything that is to be sought is already there", as the author puts it. I couldn't have agreed more.

I feel the core emphasis here is to just rest. Rest our fears, our attachments. But most importantly, train our minds to rest our ego. Tame it with a wise and open heart, realise what there is to be searched for is already present before us. Therefore there is no need to search beyond the 'self'.

I would like to end this review with a beautiful quote extracted from the *Bhaddekaratta Sutra* -

*'Do not go after the past
Nor lose yourself in the future.
For the past no longer exists
And the future is not yet here.
By looking deeply at things just as they are
In this moment, here and now
The seeker lives calmly and freely.'*

'Anyone serious enough to confront suffering should read this book.'

ARTICLE

The Paradise in the Moon-like Desert

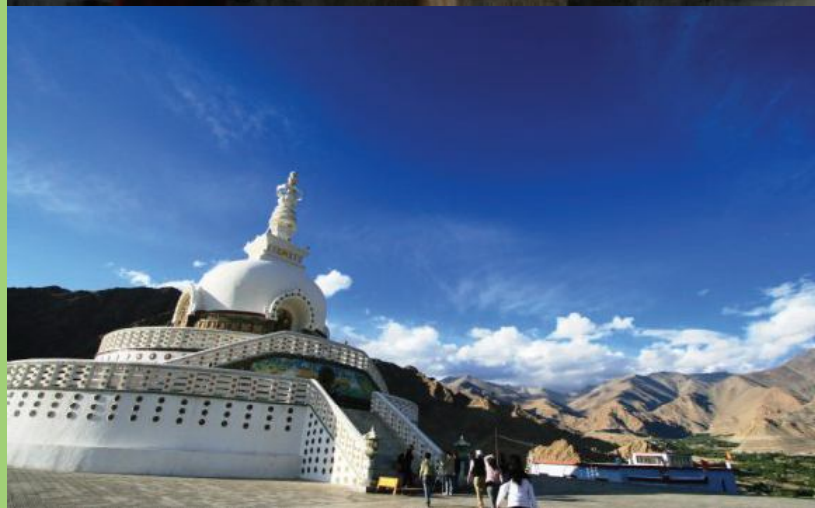
A Visit to Ladakh

20 Aug – 30 Aug 2009

by Tiger

Sunrise at MIMC campus

View from Thiksay's Monastery

An Image of Total Devotion
at the Mahabodhi Home for
the Aged and DestituteShanti Stupa, built by a Japanese
order and dedicated by HH 14th Dalai Lama in 1985Meditation Kutis Himalayan style - The
Milarepa cave chambers

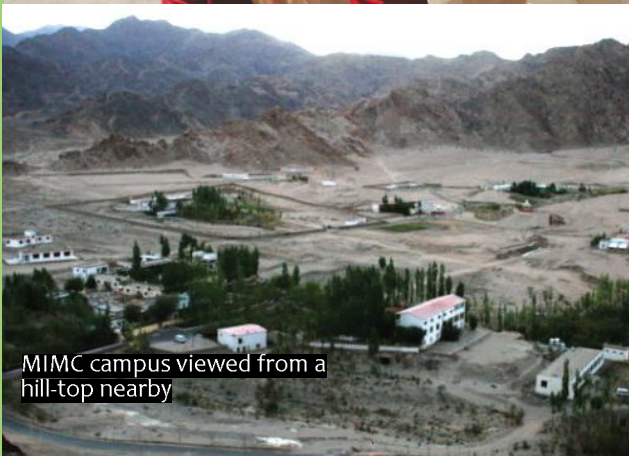
Devachan novices



Some 40 'Himalayan-charity-driven' people mainly from Malaysia but also a few from Singapore, Thailand and US were thrilled by the extraordinary welcoming reception by the staff and residents of Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre (MIMC).

The main MIMC campus, also known as Devachan campus, is a jewel in the desert-like landscape of Choglamsar, just outside Leh. Founded in 1986 by Venerable Sanghasena, MIMC is now home to monks, nuns, the elderly and destitute, and disadvantaged and visually impaired children.

MIMC campus viewed from a hill-top nearby



Enveloped in the gorgeous Himalayan range, Devachan campus came alive with the enchanting songs and dances performed by the children. The children and the elders were in turn treated with loads of goodies (stationery, soft toys and the like) donated by our group.

MIMC students close-up



Our visit to the village school (Mahabodhi Tingmosgang Branch School) was also an unforgettable one. In Leh, we visited some of the main Tibetan monasteries such as Thiksay, Hermis and Likir Monasteries and the famous Shanti Stupa.

It was a trip full of touching tears and hugs. I will definitely come back! Julley! (meaning in Ladakhi 'thank you', 'good bye', 'good day').



You gave me these goodies



Welcome - teachers and students of MIMC

BL Event

Photo Credit : Tiger



**BL celebrates Mother's Day
at Hotel Royal on May 9, 2010.**

BOOK REVIEW

White Collar Zen

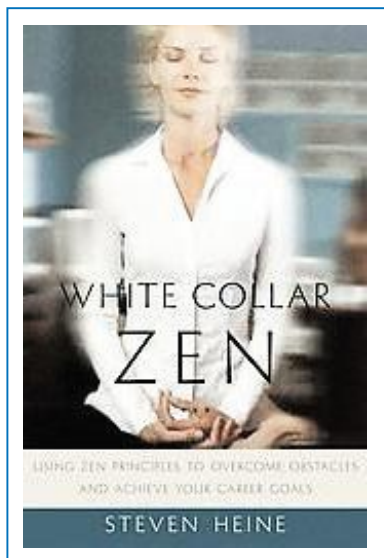
- Using Zen principles to overcome obstacles and achieve career goals

by Steven Heine

Published by Oxford University Press (2005)

198 pages

Reviewed by Evelyn



It was love at first sight for me when *White Collar Zen* landed in my hands last year. Although it is primarily a guidebook on bringing Zen principles into the workplace, I was thrilled upon realising that it also welds together my 2 interests – Japanese Culture and Buddhism.

When I read that Steven Heine, the writer and professor, is himself a 'well-known authority on Buddhism and Japanese culture', my child-like excitement could only soar.

However, we all know falling head over heels is risky business. All those great expectations are bound to plummet like the financial markets 2 years ago. Indeed, the similarity between the writer and me came to an end at the beginning of page one.

It might have been love at first sight for the book but it took me more than 3 readings to fully grasp the content. This is because the writing style initially appeared to be rather convoluted, nothing simple and direct as one would expect of anything 'zennish'. I suppose when one melds the complexities of a white collar profession with 'simple, before-thinking' Zen,

there has to be a compromise. It felt a lot like being taken on a long meandering road as in *Alice in Wonderland*. Except that, in my case, I began to wonder when I would land. Little did I know that wading through this book was actually sending me on an inner odyssey.

White Collar Zen can be billed as the secret manual for those who are hell-bent on achieving professional excellence. Then again, who isn't? It is replete with practical advice based on 'timeless Asian wisdom', often presented antithetically, if not bewilderingly – ideas like *Hermit versus Warrior*, *Fox vs. Buddha*, *Speech vs. Silence* and *Structure vs. Anti-Structure*.

Even as a reader, my feelings for the book swung back and forth - Love versus Hatred.

From the outset, the writer leaves nothing to romanticise about. He emphatically stresses that '*this book is not about Zen...this book is from Zen*'. It adapts traditional ideals and styles of training to the goal of improving interpersonal relations in the professional sphere.

But it is not just about fostering good work-relations so that you are spared from the ordeal of a lonely lunch hour. It is much more. It provides guidelines on '*how to present yourself more effectively to the outside world...*' to get the promotion you deserve, ensuring a fulfilling and meaningful career that blossoms from a harmonious and mutually benefiting work culture.

Business does not have to be war. Although the book is like a contemporary version of Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, it embodies a Buddhist twist which I really like.

While the *Art of War* '*suggests how to manipulate through delay... and heightening conflict*', *White Collar Zen* teaches how to '*overcome challenges and achieve common goals through simplicity and harmony*'. For example, the *Art of War* saying '*Know yourself and know your enemy, and win one hundred battles*' is replaced by *White Collar Zen*'s wisdom – '*Know yourself and know your colleagues, and accomplish one hundred goals together.*'

Without doubt, the book lays much stress on the Unmoving Mind and of course, how to get it. *'Founded on an inalterable certitude, it remains steady in the midst of constant change. Facing high stakes and great doubts, there is no force that can budge its commitment to principles.'*

The Unmoving Mind sharpens the professional's ability to act appropriately, without being rigid, in a 'turf-hungry' corporate world.

Upon reading that, I surprised myself by gaining insight into my own predicament. To cruise rather than wade through the book, all I needed to do was to *'root out the weeds of bias'* and read *'objectively... from a thoroughly impartial standpoint.'* My great expectations and mental proliferation were the culprits for my initial love-hate affair with White-Collar Zen.

Armed with an Unmoving Mind, one knows when to switch internally between a *Hermit-and-Warrior* mindset, between being actively conservative and creatively active, in order to take on life's vicissitudes.

Externally, the clarity of such a Mind enables one to draw the line between a Fox and a Buddha, metaphorically of course. The interesting definition of a Fox by the writer might ring a familiar bell for many of us. *'A Fox poses as a supporter to get what she wants. The greater the Fox's ambition, the more she tries to appear like a helpful Buddha.'* For those ladies out there, do try to overlook the gender-reference and not be overwhelmed by emotions.

This brings me to the next highlight of the book – the process of *'Elevation-Purification- Activation (EPA)'*. The important thing is not to be daunted by the 3 *'-tions'* which was what happened to me at the beginning. In layman's terms, it is simply about elevating and purifying one's feelings from the raw emotions that arise from conflicts. It is a preventive measure to any hasty and regrettable action. By staying balanced and objective, the transformation of conflict into opportunity becomes a reality.

White Collar Zen is nothing like the dry, humour-less secret manuals the disciple is drilled with by the Master in Kung-Fu dramas. It is not hard to find a healthy dose of wit, humour and light-heartedness in most parts of the book, not to mention, baffling

koans, engaging Zen stories and contemporary examples of Hollywood movies to provide the readers a fuller picture - literally. Then again, as the classic saying goes, life is like a stage or...in today's world, Kodak Theatre.

This book is in itself a journey of the mind. It is a very structured book that lives up to its aim as a practical manual for white collar professionals. The nine chapters are divided into sections of 3. The first 3 chapters go into great length about the roots of everyday stress, topping it with the classic Zen phrase *'Mountains Are Mountains'*. The following 3 chapters are about converting conflict into opportunities, with the phrase *'Mountains are Not Mountains.'* The final 3 chapters, as expected, are on mountains being mountains again – that is, seeing things are they really are and acting spontaneously, creatively and flexibly – from *'structure to anti-structure'*.

The most humane survival manual like no other, *White Collar Zen* encourages good teamwork and beneficial cooperation. Even when the going gets really tough one day, maybe we will find ourselves saying, *'I love my competitor; he brings out the best in me.'*

'This book is in itself a journey of the mind.'

Invitation

'The Gift of Truth Excels all other Gifts.' – The Buddha.

We invite you to join us in sharing the Dharma.

If you are a Buddhist, there is no other activity more important than sharing the Dharma with people who are keen to learn or understand it.

You can join our editorial team, write articles or reviews or donate money to defray the cost of printing POJ. You will find our contact details on page 1.

编者之语

身为佛教徒的意义——看透肮脏窗口上的污垢

“我必须强调，明了真谛是佛教中最重要的一环。”——宗萨蒋扬钦哲仁波切

桑妮苏达是《曼谷邮报》的专栏作家，她同时也在博客上发表有关社会和佛教课题的意见。最近她在所发表的一篇名为《我们还自称为佛教徒？》的文章中，谴责泰国政府将在2012年2月28日以前（此日是万佛节，是当地重要的佛教节日），遣返缅甸的外籍劳工，除非他们能证明自己有权居住在泰国。桑妮苏达质疑，泰国政府怎么能如此无情呢？

“如果我们在佛教节日中还能毫不犹豫的伤害弱小，我们应该在来临的万佛节中认真思考是否还配被称为佛教徒。”

桑妮苏达的文章提出一个假设，也就是如果人们的行为不检，特别是在佛教节日中，就不配被称为“佛教徒”。

文章的题目其实引发一个更基本的问题，什么人或者什么是佛教徒？

是不是身为佛教徒就必须行为检点？

也许我们应该换另一个角度来问这个问题。佛教徒和非佛教徒有什么不同？

显而易见的，品行端正或有道德的人并不是区分两者的试金石。佛教徒也有分好坏，就如信仰其他如基督教、回教和印度教的信徒一样，更别说那些无神论者或不可知论者了。也就是说，品行和道德并不一定同身为佛教徒有关。

那区别在哪呢？

在他的著作《近乎佛教徒》（What Makes You Not a Buddhist）简体版译为《正见》）中，宗萨蒋扬钦哲仁波切为这个问题提供了答案。

佛教徒就是接受四法印的人。

就如基督教徒笃信耶稣是上帝的儿子，并派遣他来拯救世人，以及回教徒相信只有一个真主，而默罕默德是先知一样，佛教徒是信奉四法印见地的人。

什么是四法印呢？

仁波切把它们列为以下：

一切和合事物皆为无常（诸行无常）

一切情绪皆苦（诸漏皆苦）

一切事物皆无自性（诸法无我）

涅槃超越概念（涅槃寂静）

然后他解释：“四法印的意旨，原本就是要让人直接了解，而非隐喻或神秘性的。它不应该像餐后幸运饼干里的字条一样，看看就算了。然而，法印也不是教令或圣诫... 其中没有任何道德性或仪式性的内容，也没有提到善或恶的行为。它是根据智慧而来的实际真理，而佛教徒最关注的就是智慧”

四法印基本上概括了佛教的智慧。

智慧是看透宇宙本质的能力，因为宇宙的特性就如四法印所述。

尽管科技先进，传扬自2千5百多年前的四法印，其有效性至今还如佛陀所教导的一样，亘古不变。

因此持有“正见”是明智的。

“最终，这将是决定我们动机和行为的观点，同时也在修行的道路上，指导我们。”

也因如此，“正见”也是引导我们到涅槃的八正道之第一道。

如果没有智慧，就算我们好意的行为也会因为自己的迷倒（迷惑而颠倒事理），导致巨大的伤害。这个迷倒将误导我们所有的行为。看看那些进行自杀式恐怖袭击的人，你就明白我的意思了。

其实，佛教徒就如其他人一样，也会犯下错误或罪行。

和桑妮苏达一样，我在泰国居住和工作，这里超过百分之90的人自认为佛教徒。就在我撰写这篇文章的同时，现在的政治斗争和过去四年一样充斥整个国家，局势动荡不安。

在各个政治派系争论着该由谁领导国家的同时，一个更为基本和严重，并威胁泰国长期未来的问题，也就是当地道德品质逐渐败坏的问题，却甚少被人关注。

在一个较早前进行的民意调查中，大学生被询及他们是否会支持一个贪污或是违法，但履行竞选承诺的政客时，超过百分之50的受访学生表示，他们觉得支持这样的政客，没有问题。

对一个佛教国家来说，这是非常惊人的。不过，也许这是预料中事。

这里的贪污已如此猖獗，导致一些政客已经不再在乎他们因为贪污而恶名昭彰。尽管他们担心可能被法律对付，但他们一点羞耻之心也没有。贪污，不断在历届政府中发生，并已经成为理所当然。

去年12月19日刊登在本地英文报纸《民族报》的文章指出，一些有才干的泰国政客也开始同流合污。

“他们通过抬高物价、佣金和其它精心策划的诈骗和贪污，谋取暴利。与此同时，尽管所获得的微不足道，但贫穷的人民会因为这些政客自称为穷人斗争，而觉得“亏欠”这些政客。”

“我们居住在一个以追求马上获得满足为关键的年代。它麻痹了我们的感官和钝化了我们的思维。随之而来的，肮脏的窗口看来不再肮脏，因为我们不再看到污垢。能不能从窗口看透另一边已经不再重要，因为人民已被层层谎言和骗局洗脑，而快乐的停留在一个蚕茧里头。”

此外，人们还使用一些奇怪和危险的技巧，来击败他们的对手。

他们暴力相向、并不时抛掷手榴弹。他们举行仪式来为自己祝福，并诅咒敌人。他们牺牲动物来供养神明。他们喷洒自己的鲜血（一些据说感染了爱之病病毒和其他病菌）以吓唬对手。

与此同时，他们自豪的展示护身符和古佛的图像，以证明自己是优秀的佛教徒。

我在想，佛陀在看到这些“佛教徒”的举动后，会如何反应呢？

一个朋友曾经问我，“为什么佛教国家有这么多问题？”

我希望我有答案，前提是，所设下的假定是有根据的。

如果真是如此，也许这同容忍有关。抑或许，一些用意良好的人会以容忍的态度忍受懒惰、行为不检、或是如贪污等罪行。他们忘了，慈悲应该是用在包容罪犯，而不是罪行。

事实上，泰国人能解决他们所有问题。他们有佛法，只要他们肯应用。

佛法透视所有标签、宣传运动、瞎掰和骗局。通过佛法，他们就能透视肮脏的窗口，并把它们清洗干净，甚至是取代清洁工。

当然，我们在新加坡所碰到的问题和泰国不同，问题也没有它们那么重大。我们确实是比较幸运的。

但居住在人口密集、高度竞争、多元种族与宗教的小国，我们也有自己的问题。

我们需要佛法的智慧来解决这些问题。

因为除了重视智慧，佛教不分语言、种族或宗教，对所有人一概提倡慈悲、容忍和无条件的爱。

在另一方面，新加坡人也比泰国人幸运。

新加坡是个佛法超级市场，因此人们可以根据自己的需求和个性，选择不同的佛教传承。

不过，不论是哪一种佛教传承，我们绝不能忘记身为实修佛教徒的义务。

就如仁波切的提醒：

“作为佛教徒，你应该自我克制，不伤害众生，并竭尽所能协助他人。这不是个很大的责任，因为如果你真诚地接受和思考真谛，这些善举就会自然而然的流露。”

如同以往，我祝愿你阅读愉快。

编辑
Chwee Beng
Editor

第一种天神是“乌帕提天神”（Upattideva）。乌帕提的意思是“出生”。乌帕提天神指的是“出生为神”的天神。

谁是这一类天神呢？

在此让我们进入一点民间信仰，相信并接受有来世。一般上，佛教徒和非佛教徒都相信有天堂。

但是这里指的天堂和其它宗教里的天堂不同。在佛教中，天堂不过是另一个世界或宇宙。佛教的世界观是很广大的。佛陀就提过为数众多的宇宙。

在那些宇宙中，生长着像我们地球上的植物，也许还更美好。人们快乐的生活。他们享受快乐、更好的健康及长寿。所以在和我们的地球相比之下，这些星球就好像天堂。

因此那些生长在如此优越空间的就是出生为神的天神。

第二种天神是“撒姆提天神”（Sammutideva）。他们可说是“被接受的天神”。某一些众生被人们接受或尊奉为天神，也可被称为“传统的神”或“当地的神”。

这对华人来说应该很容易理解。在中国有很多神明。如果我们追溯历史，这些神曾经是居住在某些省份的人。他们为了他人的福利而付出，为了发展当地设施而努力。他们为了别人的利益而牺牲自己。因此，即使很多人或许已经忘了这些神明的来历，但是在这许多世纪以后，人们仍然尊敬或膜拜这些神明。这在中国、日本、斯里兰卡和西藏都很普遍，在现今的新加坡也是如此。

第三种天神是“比苏迪天神”，“又作“清净天人”（Visuddhideva）。

“比苏迪”，意思是“净化”。如果你研究过佛教，你将知道 Visuddhimagga 这本书 - 《清净道论》 - 由第五世纪大论师觉音尊者所著。本书标题的含义是朝向觉悟之道。

清净天神是通过净化而成为天神的一个人。通过净化，人也能成为天神。净化是除去所有杂染的过程，例如贪、嗔、痴等。在佛教里，我们通过修持戒律、十善业和禅修来净化我们的心。

佛陀因除去所有杂染而得到了最高的净化。他因净化而成为“神”。一切诸佛、菩萨及阿罗汉也是如此。

相比之下，前两者 - 乌帕提天神和萨姆提天神在佛教中被称为“世间神”。

差别在哪儿？

扼要的说，清净天神 - 诸佛、菩萨和阿罗汉 - 已得到证悟或是即将证悟。而乌帕提天神和萨姆提天神，这些世间的神，还未觉悟。

很多人向世间神明祈求加持，以得到较好的生活、钱财、孩子能考到好成绩、平安和长寿。

但是这些世间神明并不能引导我们觉悟，因此从佛教徒的观点来看，向他们祈求是相当短见或无谓的。

佛陀已成为了慈悲及容忍的代表，即使是对全世界的非佛教徒来说也是如此。再也没有比优婆离的故事更能阐明这一点。

优婆离家财万贯，他想要成为佛陀的弟子。问题是他已经有一位宗教老师，而这位老师需要依靠优婆离的金钱支助。优婆离向佛陀做出两次的请求都被拒绝。直到第三次佛陀得到优婆离的承诺，不会中断他对原本那位老师的供养，佛陀才接受他为弟子。

因此，佛陀在他的慈悲和容忍之下，并没阻止或禁止他的跟随者崇拜世间神明，这也不足为奇。然而，如果我们认真修持佛法，我们不应该忽视只有佛、法、僧三宝是有效及真实的皈依处。

有一部著名经文纪录了佛陀和一位好奇者的对话。此人对佛陀平静祥和的举止留下了深刻印象。他想知道佛陀是谁，是什么？他是一位天人还是神明？一位魔术师、巫师还是人？

佛陀婉拒这所有的形容词。他说他就只是一个觉醒者。

这个故事通常被用来形容佛陀的证悟。每当佛陀在回答问题时，他都是如此精确。

“觉醒”是一个简单的形容词，但却意义深厚。因为如果说佛陀是一位超人，那我们这些平凡人就永远都不能渴求会像佛陀一样觉悟。

然而，如果说佛陀“觉醒”了，那我们就只是还在“沉睡”中。既然只是在沉睡，那通过跟随佛陀的步伐，我们就能从无知中觉醒。

一旦人们发掘了自身圆满的潜能并觉悟成佛，那他们也就超越了那些还受困于娑婆世界中的世间神明。这是佛教的优美之处，也是一个承诺。

当你读到佛陀回答那个好奇者的问题时，另一个问题或许会在你心中升起 - 如果佛陀是清净天神，一个经过净化的天神，那为什么佛陀否认他是神呢？

经文中没有直接回答这个问题。

但是我个人的推测是佛陀当时知道那位好奇者对佛法并不熟悉。（如果那位好奇者熟悉佛法，那他也不会对佛陀提出这个问题。）

如果当时佛陀同意他就是神，那会是怎么样的局面？那位好奇者会抱着什么样的印象离开？

好奇者也许会感到混淆，觉得佛陀和其他世间的神没有两样。

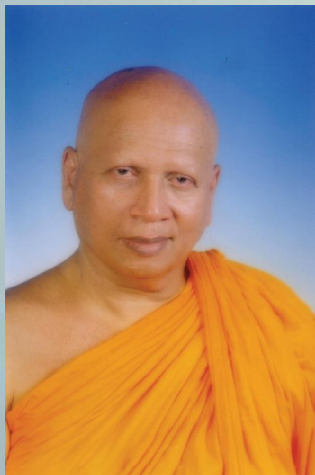
这对引导好奇者朝向觉悟之道就没有多大的帮助了。

达摩拉达那法师
宗教顾问
佛教图书馆

法师法语

“神”在佛教中的地位

MICA (P) 003/10/2009



无神论者基于两个理由而反对宗教。他们不相信有神和来世。在他的最畅销著作《神的妄想》(The God Delusion)中,理查道金博士(Professor Richard Dawkins)宣称相信来世是“一厢情愿的想法”。

那“无神论者”到底是什么意思?

《剑桥高阶学习字典》将“无神论者”定义为“不相信有上帝或神存在的一个人”。

在此须记得一个重点。虽然佛陀没提到造世主,他确实提过“神”(也称“天人”)。

事实上,我们很容易忘了当初要不是因为梵天王这位天神,佛教这个宗教和佛教修行者也许不会存在于现今的世界上。

在佛陀证悟后不久,他考虑是否应该在世间教导佛法。毕竟他所觉悟的佛法“深奥、难以‘见到’、难以理解、平静而崇高、只有智者才能体会到。然而人们取乐于执取,随喜于执取。”(英文由菩提比丘翻译自《佛陀法语》)

就在那时,梵天王出现在佛陀面前并劝他传法。虽然大部分的人类被无明遮蔽,难以调教,梵天王说有那么小一部分的人“眼中只有些许尘埃”,他们将能从佛陀的教导获益。

因此我们很有幸的,佛陀答应了。

佛陀所教导的其中一点是有来世,而且不只一世,而是无数世。

根据佛教,众生在未觉悟之前将一直流转于娑婆世界的生死轮回中,也就是六道——天人道、阿修罗道(也称“提坦神”或“半神”)、人道、畜牲道、饿鬼道及地狱道。

在这儿我只讨论天人或神。

佛教经典中提到三种不同的“神”。

在巴利文和梵文中,“神”一词是“德瓦”(deva天神)。

佛教徒对于“神”的态度,是我们应当学习的关键。

人们一般上将宗教分类。当人们在讨论宗教时,他们通常将基督教、回教、兴都教和佛教称为世界上的主要宗教,因为世界上有大部分的人信仰这些宗教。但是有另一种方法能将宗教分类。

除了佛教,世界上的所有主要宗教都属于同一种类型——有神论。这些宗教相信有造世主,而要获得拯救只能通过造世主的支援。简而言之,造世主也是救世主。有神论的教义一般上可被称为神学。

然而佛教并非如此。佛不是上帝,也不是上帝的使者。佛陀不是造世主,他也从没提过有这样一个造世主。

因此人们称佛教为“无神论”。佛教徒也被套上“无神论者”的称号。佛教因而成为另一个完全不同的类别。

但是这种分类准确吗?称佛教为无神论,佛教徒为无神论者正确吗?

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宗教顾问
达摩拉达那法师

编辑
Chwee Beng
Tjiej Hoe

中文翻译
汇莹
汝钰
辉煌

协调
Leila

排版
Blueprint Design