

Bhante Says

Today, I will talk about gratitude in Buddhist teachings.

One of the ways we show gratitude these days is to celebrate Mother's Day. BL also celebrates this day. But actually this practice originates from the west just like Father's Day, Teacher's Day or Valentine's Day.

Generally, human beings tend to be forgetful, especially if we lead busy or hectic lives. So it helps if we dedicate a certain day for doing something we consider important. In that case, we may find it easier to remember the occasion. That's probably the psychology behind this kind of practice.

The 2 Pali terms that are relevant to a discussion on gratitude are *Katannyu* and *Katavedi*.

Nyu means knowing. *Katannyu* means knowing what others have done for our benefit. But, of course, this does not extend to bad things others have done to us.

Gratitude in Buddhism

Katavedi means doing something for others in return for what they have done for our benefit.

The Buddha said, "In this world, people who know what others have done for their benefit and remember to do something in return are very rare." In other words, the practice of gratitude is not common.

Nevertheless, I can generally say that human beings as a general rule are grateful people but what the Buddha means is that in the *real* sense of gratitude, we cannot find many people who practise it.

Photo Credit : Huei Hong



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For example, we often try to show our gratitude in terms of giving material things. Of course, giving material things can be important too. But people tend to give too much priority to material things. Consequently, in our minds, the virtue of gratitude is not growing.

Sometimes, the way we neglect people who have done good things for our benefit can be very hurtful.

Take parents, for example. Sometimes, the way children behave towards their parents can even be described as lacking. Because these same children can invite parents to Mother's Day lunch or dinner and, having done so, they may think or feel that they need not do anything more.

If they give a monthly allowance to their parents, they think they are already showing gratitude in that way so there's no need to do more.

Photo Credit : Huei Hong



But no amount of money can compensate for the love and attention their parents have showered on them over the years. Their respect and appreciation should extend more than that.

That is why the Buddha said that people who practise gratitude in the *real* sense are few and far between.

If we look at the Buddha's life, he practised what he preached to the highest level. He never told his followers to practise things that he did not himself practise.

Nevertheless there is only one instance where someone may argue that the Buddha did not practise gratitude.

When Prince Siddhartha was 29 years old, he left the palace, his father and step-mother,

even his wife and child, to become an ascetic.

So someone can ask, "*Is that gratitude?*"

To me, this is not a problem. But perhaps you may think that I'm a monk and I've done something like that too!

But in actual fact, the Buddha did not leave his relatives and neglect his duties. He had to neglect some simple duties, of course, such as attending to them on a day-to-day basis and making them happy in a worldly sense.

But his mind worked in a different way. He reflected - *'These people expect happiness from me and so want to see my success and progress. But that happiness is fragile and can last only for a short while. All of them have to die some day. I have to find happiness which is lasting.'*

Lasting happiness can only be found by eradicating suffering or discomfort. If we can get rid of this suffering, that is lasting happiness.

And so Prince Siddhartha resolved to find lasting happiness for the benefit of himself, his family, his relatives and the whole world, limitless or countless people.

Thus if we look at things in their proper context, we cannot say that he was irresponsible and had forgotten his duties when he renounced the world. In fact, he was responding to a much larger duty – the *bodhisattva's* duty to find permanent happiness for not only all of humankind but all sentient beings.

That's why we call his renunciation the *Great Renunciation*, not an ordinary one.

The Buddha gained enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree which sheltered him from the elements. So after he gained enlightenment, the Buddha paid respect to the Bodhi Tree by standing and gazing at it with concentration for one week.

Consequently, until today, Buddhists continue this practice of paying respect to the Bodhi Tree.

And so we can see that the Buddha showed gratitude even to nature. Today, we are facing an environmental crisis because we have failed to show gratitude to nature. Instead, we abuse it and create problems for ourselves such as global warming.

Furthermore, during the Buddha's 6-year search for enlightenment, he studied under 2 great teachers. Even though they did not succeed in teaching him the way to enlightenment, when he finally became

enlightened on his own, he did not forget them. Unfortunately by that time they had both passed away.

Then he thought of his 5 companions who had helped him when he was searching for enlightenment. These companions had left the Buddha when they saw him giving up self-mortification, thinking that he had given up the struggle for enlightenment. He found them in Varanasi and helped them to attain liberation.



There are also other touching events in his life as well.

When his step-mother died, the Buddha was far away. He had to walk all the way. When he arrived, the Sakyan people were about to cremate his step-mother. The Buddha made 3 rounds clockwise around the crematorium. Thus he paid the highest respect in Indian culture.

After the cremation, he asked his relatives to put the ashes in an urn which he carried to a place where he paid his respect and buried them. Although he had attained perfection, he still paid respect to his step-mother. Not only that but when she was alive, he also helped her to receive ordination and practise the Dharma to attain liberation.

Another important occasion was when his father was very sick. He visited his father many times. When he heard his father was critically ill, he saw him and stayed near the King's death bed during his last moments. He guided the Sakyan people in the cremation process. So we can see very clearly that the Buddha not

only talked about gratitude but fully practised it as well.

As far as we ourselves are concerned, although we may not be very ungrateful people, we seldom pay attention to this important virtue. Living in a fast changing, materialistic world affects our sense of gratitude. We have less time to pay attention to people who have helped us.

That is why we resort to the convenient way of showing our gratitude in the form of material things and money only. But we can and should do more than that.

If we don't show gratitude properly to others, the reaction will come to us. Many people don't see this. And then we suffer.

But when we appreciate others' kindness towards us, others will show appreciation towards us in the same way. This is also important.

Once the Buddha was asked - *What is the greatest happiness?*

The Buddha gave very clear examples of what constitute the greatest happiness in the *Mangala Sutta*.

I would like to end by quoting some relevant verses from the *Mangala Sutta* -

*Serving one's father and mother
Providing for one's wife and children
Being orderly in one's occupation
This is the greatest happiness*

*Sharing and being righteous
Helping relatives
Avoiding harmful actions
This is the greatest happiness*

*Showing respect and being humble
Content and grateful
Hearing the Dhamma at the proper time
This is the greatest happiness.*

*Being patient
Speaking kind and gentle words
Discussing Dhamma at the proper time
This is the greatest happiness.*

Bhante B Dhammaratana
Religious Advisor
Buddhist Library

'Sometimes, the way we neglect people who have done good things for our benefit can be very hurtful.'

Editorial

Being Present – A Meditation Retreat at Wat Ram Poeng

Chieftain, for one who truly sees the pure and simple arising of phenomena and the pure and simple continuity of conditioned things, there is no fear.

When with wisdom one sees the world as just like grass and wood, not finding any selfishness, he does not grieve with the idea, 'It is not mine.'

Theragatha, vs 716 - 17
(The Essential Teachings of Buddhism –
Ed. Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien)



Nestled in the south-western corner of Chiangmai, not far from the airport, is a medium-sized monastery called Wat Ram Poeng (WRP).

From the outside, it looks very ordinary, no different from the thousands of Thai temples that dot this Buddhist kingdom. But a closer look tells a different story.

Daily, white-clad meditators, some foreign but mostly Thai, sit under trees or tread up and down ever so deliberately in silent contemplation. Inside the auditorium, more meditators contemplate neatly in rows. Most, however, simply meditate unseen in their own individual rooms or *kutis*.



WRP is home to the Northern Insight Meditation Centre (NIMC).



NIMC offers 2 on-going meditation courses lasting 10 days and 26 days.

'On-going' means that anyone from anywhere can apply any day to practise meditation there free of charge. If accepted, they come on the agreed day and are allocated a *kuti* each to do their practice.

The object of the meditation is to see that life has 3 universal characteristics - *impermanence, suffering and non-self*. That 'everything in this world is transient, subject to suffering and uncontrollable. Thus the mind abandons the desire to acquire, to have and to be' (NIMC's meditation booklet).

The tool is mindfulness as taught by the Buddha in *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* - contemplation of the body, feelings, mind and objects of mind.

2 aspects of the practice are important.

Whatever thoughts, feelings or sensations – positive, negative or neutral - occur, meditators are taught not to reject or accept them but just to acknowledge their presence and let them be. They are mere impermanent phenomena.

If meditators can apply this in their daily lives, they can better handle life's ups and downs, enjoy the ups without attachment and endure the downs without fear or aversion.

It's also necessary to have continuity or consistency of concentration. Because when mind gets distracted, momentary concentration weakens.

Thus, external stimuli are kept to the minimum. No talking, no eye contact, no reading. - not even Dharma books - and mobile phones are banned.

On the 1st day, except for a short briefing on the basics of walking and sitting meditation, students are thrown into the pool, so to speak, right away. They swim, float or struggle. In any case, they dictate their own pace of progress.

Each day, they report to the master, Phra Ajahn Suphan (the Abbot of WRP) and brief him on their progress and problems, if any. (Phra Ajahn means Venerable Teacher).

In return, they get advice, further instructions, sometimes a yogurt drink or a tangerine, but always a smile or a chuckle.



(From WRP website)

(One day)

"Sawasdi krab, Phra Ajahn Supahn.

"Sawasdi, how are you today?"

"I'm fine, thank you, Ajahn."

"How was your meditation?"

"It was very bad. I was very sleepy."

"That's okay. It's impermanent. Do your best." (smiles)

(Another day)

"How was your meditation?"

"Much better than before."

"That's okay. It's impermanent. Do your best." (smiles)

(Another day)

"How was your meditation?"

"It was very bad."

"Good or bad, be mindful." (smiles)

All meditators observe the 8 precepts which include avoiding 'incorrect speech' and 'eating at the wrong time.'

Avoiding 'incorrect speech' requires that we answer the master's questions truthfully. 'How many hours did you meditate?' 'How many hours did you sleep?' And being truthful also means that that we stay faithful to our precepts.

To eat at the right time is to have only breakfast (6 am) and lunch (10.30am). No solid food after 12 noon. We chant before meals to remind us that we eat to sustain our bodies, not to beautify them or to replace hunger with constipation.

Still, some meditators overeat. Because they fear hunger and the food (vegetarian and non-vegetarian) is plentiful and tantalising.

Meditation begins with 15 minute sessions, alternating between walking and sitting, for a total of 6 hours per day. This builds up gradually to one hour sessions for 12 or more hours each day.

In the 26 day course, meditators even undergo

a process called 'determination' in which they meditate, without sleeping, during the last 3 days. But, when tired, they're allowed to lean against the wall.

It would be fair to say that if a retreat is like being in prison, determination is akin to solitary confinement.

Not surprisingly, this style of meditation has drawn its fair share of criticism. Some even claim that this is not the Buddha's 'middle path'.

Maybe.

But then again the Buddha did resolve not to move from his seat under the Bodhi Tree until he'd achieved enlightenment. And he did also tell his followers as he lay dying, "Strive with diligence."

In any event, pushing people beyond their normal limits is not that uncommon in daily life, in the classroom, work place and in sports. Isn't it remarkable then how we're prepared to sacrifice sleep, time with family, even risk life and limb, to get that medal, promotion, client or title but we hesitate or balk, when it comes to spiritual practice?

A great benefit of this stringent regime is that it expels us out from our comfort zone, cutting our normally overblown ego down to size.

Ego can be insidious. At times, like Julius Caesar, we may not even realise that it's the boss.

'But when I tell him he hates flatterers, he says he does, being then most flattered.'

William Shakespeare – Julius Caesar

And because meditating for days on end goes against the grain, our mind resists it. We start questioning what we're doing there. Or we imagine problems, even symptoms of illnesses.

But if we commit to the practice and remain mindful, all this will pass.

Of course, if we need medical attention, we should speak to Phra Ajahn and get it. That's also mindfulness. And refusing to quit when it's time to quit is also ego.

And so if the meditation regime at NIMC is stringent, there's probably a good reason for it. For while we are bombarded by mental pollutants every day of our lives, we spend only a short time in retreat.

'A great benefit of this stringent regime is that it expels us out from our comfort zone, cutting our normally overblown ego down to size.'

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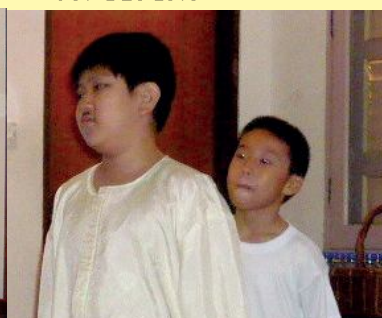


BL Event

Photo Credit : Yeow Foo

BL celebrates Vesak Day on
May 28, 2010





BL Event

Photo Credits : Yeow Foo and Yew Beng

On May 28, 2010, the BL Dharma Sunday School commemorated Vesak Day with a special play. 'Siddhartha to Buddha' comprises 4 scenes lasting 15 minutes each. The 4 scenes are the *Prince's life in the Palace*, *Strolling in the Streets* (where he met the *Four Sights*), *Asceticism* and *Gaining Enlightenment*. The play is a silent one, with the actors acting and conveying messages through body language, accompanied by music and narration. Thank you Shamla for directing the play, and Shannon, Agatha, Sindy, Wendy, Guan Ming, Reynold, Spencer, Ryan, Samuel and Hui Yun for acting in the play. (Hui Yun)





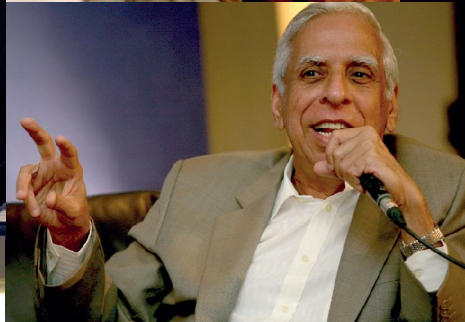
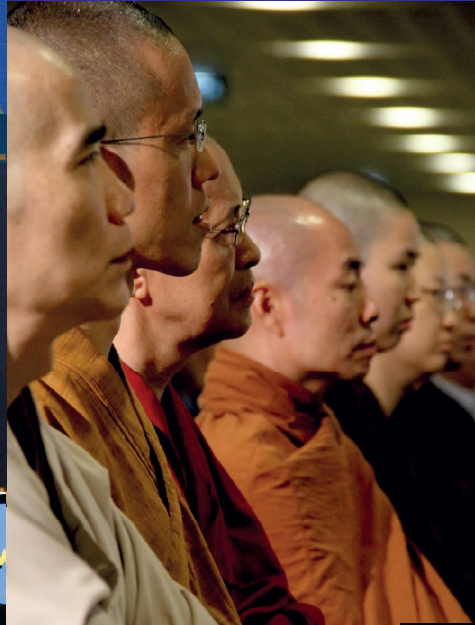


BL Event

Photo Credit : Ro Nie and Yeow Foo

Science and Buddhism Symposium on Emotional Awareness: Cultivating Mental Balance and a Good Life.

Held at Suntec Convention Centre on July 15, 2010. Sponsored by Ean Keng Si Buddhist Temple, Khoon Chee Vihara, Po Ming Tse Temple and Buddhist Library.



BOOK REVIEW

What makes You Not a Buddhist

by Dzongzar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

Published by Shambala Publications (2007)

128 pages

Reviewed by Tjiep Hoe

The title of this book grabbed my attention the moment I set eyes on it principally because I had always wanted to know whether I was a 'qualified' Buddhist.

I was 'born' into a traditional Buddhist family and undertook the customary visits to the temples on festival days but never formally took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. *Was I a Buddhist in the real sense of the word? Would it have mattered if I had taken refuge formally?*

This book gives a clear, unambiguous answer. To be a Buddhist, a person must subscribe to the Four Seals of Buddhism elaborated by the author as –

1. All things are impermanent and there is no essential substance or concept that is permanent.
2. All emotions bring pain and suffering and there is no emotion that is purely pleasurable.
3. All phenomena are illusory and empty.
4. Enlightenment is beyond concepts. It's not a perfect blissful heaven but instead a release from delusion or ignorance.

These 'simple' points are not so simple for me and I struggled with some their aspects.

Nevertheless, I ploughed on, encouraged by the author's statement that we need not wear robes or shave our heads to be Buddhists. Even if we eat meat, drink alcohol, fool around, idolise Eminem and Paris Hilton, we can still legitimately call ourselves Buddhists.

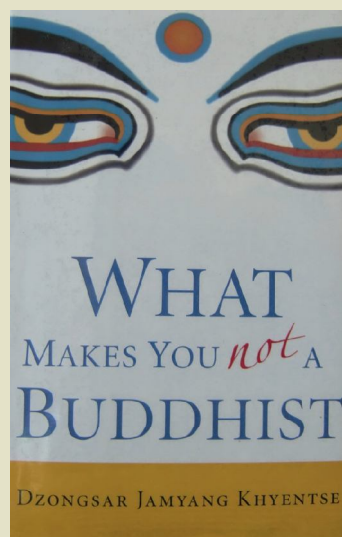
I laboured through the author's well-written, witty, if somewhat irreverent, American style. Somewhere towards the later part of the book, his message finally dawned on me. Being a Buddhist is just a label, and it is not what matters. As the author says - *'If you are a Buddhist, you are not a Buddha'*.

Buddhism is beyond labels, outward appearances and rules. The essence of Buddhism is the quest for liberation through enlightenment and dispelling ignorance and delusion.

The Four Seals were essentially taught by the Buddha as the hallmarks of reality as realised by enlightened beings. They are universal characteristics of the universe as it exists and are not ideas or concepts created or invented by the Buddha. Rules, precepts and teachings are just guides to help us stay the course as we attempt to traverse the Noble Eightfold Path, the path that leads to enlightenment.

For example, virtuous actions are good and performing them will enable us to reap good results. But if we do not understand, even at a superficial level, the truth of emptiness, that all compounded phenomena do not exist on their own power but are dependent on causes and conditions for their existence and demise (the 3rd Seal), we can do all the good in the world but they will enable us to achieve material goals only, not spiritual ones.

In short, what distinguishes a Buddhist from a non-Buddhist is a particular mindset that comprises acceptance of the Four Seals. Nothing else matters - at least as far as the litmus test of being Buddhist is concerned.



But, of course, when it comes to the remaining and more important issue of whether we are practising Buddhists or only Buddhist in name, that depends on whether we take the Buddha's teachings seriously enough to put them into practice. As Rinpoche says –

'As long as you accept and practice these four truths, you are a 'practicing Buddhists'. You might read about these four truths for the sake of entertainment or mental exercise, but if you don't practice them, you are like a sick person reading the label on a medicine bottle but never taking the medicine.'

'What makes you not a Buddhist' is a question that all Buddhists owe a duty to themselves to explore and answer for themselves. Not because the label is important but because in trying to answer this question we may understand a little more about the essence of the religion we call our own and what really matters.

In the process, we may very well manage to re-orientate ourselves in the right direction to achieve our spiritual goals as Buddhists and thereby save ourselves a lot of time and suffering. In this regard, the Four Seals can act as our infallible guide along the spiritual path that we are trying to travel, in much the same way that mariners in the past who did not have radar to guide them on the high seas relied on the North Star to reach their destination.

This is not a book for everyone because of the author's language, writing style and the way he challenges the reader to engage him in the issues he discusses. It certainly was not an easy read for me. But ultimately in spite of all that, but perhaps *because* of all that, I found that reading it was very meaningful and beneficial for me.

If you would like to read this book, I suggest reading it in the following order - introduction first, then the conclusion, and when you come across each of the Seals in the conclusion, go back and read the chapter that is dedicated to the respective Seal.

'What makes you Not a Buddhist is a question that all Buddhists owe a duty to themselves to explore and answer for themselves.'

Editorial (Continued from page 5)

I therefore readily recommend NIMC's retreats to anyone with the appropriate motivation for spiritual practice and who's physically and mentally fit.

Meditators who complete their courses often emerge from the experience with a better understanding of themselves, especially their weaknesses, and feel lighter and happier.

One final word about WRP.

The vast majority of practitioners here are women and girls. This augurs well for the future of Buddhism in Thailand because mothers influence children more than fathers.

As one China-born *mae-chi* and interpreter for Mandarin-speaking meditators said, "*Phra Ajahn Suphan treats men and women equally.*" (A *mae-chi* is a white-clad female 8 preceptor).

Buddhism is sometimes criticised in Thailand for discriminating against women because women here are not allowed to be fully ordained nuns or *bhikkhunis*. They can only become *mae-chis*, usually confined to the monastery's kitchens.

But in WRP, *mae-chi*'s perform all kinds of duties including teaching the Dharma and meditation. There's even a *bhikkuni* ordained in China who acts as an English interpreter.

In April 2010, when I went for my retreat at WRP, I met Phra Lim, an affable Brunei-born monk who nevertheless keeps meditators on their toes when it comes to Dharma etiquette and practice. Mandarin and English-speaking Phra Lim also assists Phra Ajahn Supahn with foreign meditators.

He welcomed me heartily and said, "*Do you realise how lucky you are to want to practise meditation? People in Singapore and Brunei are so comfortable, they won't want to meditate.*"



As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng
Editor

BOOK REVIEW

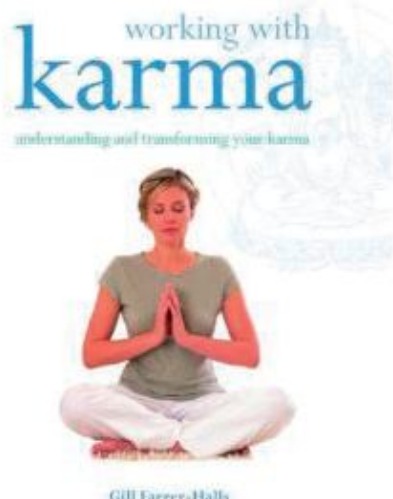
Working with Karma – Understanding and transforming your karma

by Gill Farrer-Halls

Published by Octopus Publishing Group (2007)

128 pages

Reviewed by Kim Li



This book makes for a very interesting read. I don't mean just the contents of the book but my reaction to the contents. The contents were definitely informative and well presented. But as I read the book, I was aware of how my reactions changed. And that to me is very interesting since I usually don't face such distinctive differences when I read.

As I read through the book, there were moments when I thought to myself that the subject at hand was nicely presented with a focus on making it relevant to current world culture. The chapters describe what karma is, how it works and how it relates to our lives. They also include instructions on how to do some short meditations for each chapter and each meditation technique differs from point to point.

However, there were also moments when I noted feelings of displeasure arising as I read the book. I think what I felt was that as the book tried to make it relevant, it also tried to explain the essence of the subject in a simplified manner that is also suitable for a variety of audience who may not be Buddhists. While I feel that there is nothing wrong with this approach, I find myself questioning the accuracy of the portrayal for some of the paragraphs and ideas as I feel that the idea may be too simplified or related in a manner that is too vague.

What is interesting about my reaction is that sometimes I find the topics discussed have a depth that is more advanced instead of just a cursory description. It visits different aspects of the topic and relates each back to the topic discussed in an in-depth manner. However, sometimes I find that the topic discussed is very superficial and the terms used seem to be generalised for too wide a spectrum of readers.

I've always had this preconception that Buddhist books in general lack the ability to explain the topic with that "oomph".

Perhaps it is the style of writing or maybe it is just the presentation. However, I feel that this book examines karma in a pretty unique manner. The author's style of writing is engaging and, I find, refreshing.

Each chapter deals with a different aspect of karma and its influence on the different aspects of one's life, such as careers and relationships. Each chapter is relevant to an aspect of our daily lives.

Inside each chapter, there are various key points that relate to the chapter on hand. For instance, in the chapter 'How does karma work?', the author chooses points like 'Cause and Effect' and 'Individual, Collective and Universal Karma' to illustrate the complexity of how karma works and how interdependent we are on each other. The essence of the chapter is well emphasised and each key point works to enhance the message that the author tries to bring across.

Of the different sections of the book, the one that I enjoy the most is the meditation that follows the points of a chapter.

The meditations that are described are exercises that the reader can do even after he or she has finished the book. The meditation relates back to the topic and re-iterates the focus points of that topic.

The meditations guide the reader through a series of steps, slowly focusing on different aspects of the meditation and doing some reflections on the feelings that arise and so forth. This is done skillfully to get the reader to focus and to relax at the same time and also learn how to handle the emotions that might arise during the meditation. The steps capture the essence of the topic and highlight them in a gentle manner, making the actual meditation a relaxing process.

There are also pages that describe certain yoga steps that help the reader to be in touch with nature and with himself or herself. The yoga poses are described in a generic manner with emphasis on being in contact with one's feelings, being present in the moment.

Despite some of the misgivings I may have, I still feel that the book is very well-presented in a manner that makes it relevant to our lives. It takes an ancient topic and melds it with the present almost effortlessly.

'However, I feel that this book examines karma in a pretty unique manner. The author's style of writing is engaging and I find, refreshing.'

题。“你禅修了几个小时？”“你睡了几个小时？”诚实，也意味着我们遵守戒律。

“不非时食”即只在早上6时吃早餐，并在早上10时30分吃午餐。中午12时过后，不吃固体食物。我们在进食前先诵经，以提醒我们吃东西是为了维持体力，而不是美化身体，或以便秘取代饥饿。

不过，一些禅修者还是吃过量了。因为他们害怕饥饿，而且无论是素食或非素食它们都很丰富和诱人。

刚开始的时候，每次禅修时长15分钟，以经行和禅坐的形式交替，每天禅修6个小时。渐渐地，就将禅修时长增加至1个小时，每天禅修12个小时或更久。

在为期26天的课程里，禅修者甚至需要经历一个称为“决心”的过程，即在课程的最后3天不眠不休地连续禅修。不过，如果他们累了，可以靠在墙上休息。

如果说禅修犹如坐牢，那“决心”就类似单独囚禁。

这样的禅修方式会引起一定的批评，并不令人感到意外。有些人甚至认为这有违佛陀的“中道”教义。

也许吧。

不过，佛陀在得道之前，坚持不从菩提树下离开。他在入灭之际，也告诉弟子们要“精进”。

其实，在日常生活中、在教室里、在职场和运动场上，将人类推至极限并不是罕见的事。我们可以为了争取奖牌、升职、客户或衔头而牺牲睡眠以及与家人共处的时间，甚至危及生命和受伤，但涉及禅修时，为何却犹豫和却步呢？

这个严格制度的好处是，让我们走出舒适区，大大降低我们一般过于膨胀的自我意识。

自我可以是很阴险的。有的时候，就如凯撒大帝，我们甚至没有察觉它在主宰着我们。

“但当我告诉他，他讨厌马屁精，他说是的。当时他极其被奉承。”
威廉莎士比亚——凯撒大帝

同时，持续的禅修有违本意，我们的心抗拒它。我们开始质疑为何要来这里。又或许，我们开始幻想问题，甚至出现疾病的症状。

不过，只要我们坚持禅修，保持正念，这一切都会过去。

当然，如果我们需要医药护理，就应该告诉师父，并进行治疗。那也是正念的表现。在该放弃的时候拒绝放弃，也是一种自大的表现。

因此，如果北部内观禅修中心的禅修过程非常严厉，或许是有充分理由的。毕竟，我们的心每天都被严重污染，但花在禅修的时间却非常少。

因此，对任何有正当禅修动机、身心健康的人，我会推荐北部内观禅修中心的禅修。

完成课程的禅修者，往往更了解自己，特别是自己

的弱点，他们也感觉更轻松、更愉快。

最后，再提一提南奔寺。

这里的修行者大多是妇女和女童，预示着泰国佛教的美好将来，因为母亲对孩子的影响力甚于父亲。

一名为中文背景禅修者担任翻译的中国籍八戒女说：“阿姜素攀法师对男女一视同仁。”

有时候，泰国佛教被指歧视女性，因为女性无法成为受具足戒的比丘尼。她们只能成为八戒女，而且一般只能呆在寺院的厨房。

不过，在南奔寺的八戒女则可以执行各种职务，包括弘扬佛法和进行禅修。有一名在中国受戒的比丘尼甚至成为了英语翻译员。

2010年4月，我到南奔寺禅修时遇见了Phra Lim。他是一个和蔼可亲的文莱籍和尚，但在佛法礼仪和修行方面，他对禅修者的要求是非常严格的。通晓中英双语的Phra Lim也协助阿姜素攀法师与外国禅修者沟通。

他很热情地欢迎我。他说：“你知道你有多幸运吗？因为你选择禅修。新加坡人和文莱人生活得太舒适了，他们都不想禅修。”

一如过往，我祝您阅读愉快。

Chwee Beng
编辑



[编辑说]

活在当下 —— 南奔寺（Wat Ram Poeng）的闭关禅修

诸位且听言，我已看分明；我自不恐慌，诸法因缘生。

世界和草莽，慧眼可观知；是人知“无我”，不悲“我有失”。

长老偈716 - 717

(The Essential Teachings of Buddhism, 暂译：佛教的基本教义 ——

Ed. Kerry Brown and Joanne O' Brien)

南奔寺（Wat Ram Poeng）是一个坐落在清迈西南部的中等规模寺院，离机场不远。

它的外观很普通，和泰国这个佛教之国其它数以千计的泰国寺庙没有什么不同。不过，只要深入观看，就能察觉它的不同。

每一天都能看到身穿白袍的禅修者在树下打坐或经行，潜心静观。禅修者中有一些外国人，但主要是泰国人。在礼堂里，也有一群整齐排列的禅修者，但更多人选择在自己的房间（kuti禅修房）进行禅修。

南奔寺是北部内观禅修中心（Northern Insight Meditation Centre）的所在之处。

北部内观禅修中心持续提供两个分别长达10天和26天的禅修课程。

所谓“持续提供”，指的是来自任何地方的任何人，可随时申请在这里免费禅修。若他们的申请成功了，就在约定时间到这里来，然后他们每人会分配到一间禅修房进行禅修。

禅修的目的，是了悟生活中的3个普遍特征：无常、苦和无我。这个世上的所有事物都是短暂的，离不开痛苦并且无法受控。因此，要放弃收集、拥有和成为的欲望。（北部内观禅修中心的禅修手册）

禅修的工具是正念，就如佛陀在《四念处》中的教导：观身不净、观受是苦、观心无常及观法无我。

禅修有两个重要的方面。

无论产生正面、负面或中立的思想、情感或感觉，禅修者都要学会不去拒绝或接受，而只是承认它们的存在，然后让它们自由存在。它们都是无常的现象。

如果禅修者可以在日常生活中实践，就能更好地处理生活中的起伏，在顺境时不执着，面对逆境

时也无惧无怨。

同时，禅修者也必须保持一致的专注力。因为当你心烦意乱时，片刻的专注力就会被削弱。

因此，必须将外来的刺激减至最低。不说话、不眼神接触、不看书（甚至不看佛书）及禁用手机。

在第一天，除了简要地介绍经行和打坐的禅修方式外，学员就必须完全靠自己了，如同被抛入水中，任由他们在水里遨游、漂浮或挣扎。毕竟，他们的进度由自己决定。

每一天，他们都要向阿姜素攀法师（Phra Ajahn Suphan，南奔寺的住持）汇报自己的进度，若有问题，也可提出。（Phra Ajahn是指德高望重的老师）

禅修者会从中获得建议或进一步的指示。有时候，他们也会得到一杯酸奶或一个橙，但肯定的是，他们总会得到一个微笑。

（有一天）

“您好，阿姜素攀法师”

“你好，今天感觉如何？”

“我很好，谢谢您，师父。”

“你的禅修进行得如何？”

“很糟糕。我很晒。”

“没关系。那是无常的。尽力吧！”（微笑）

（另一天）

“你的禅修进行得如何？”

“比之前好多了。”

“没关系。那是无常的。尽力吧！”（微笑）

（另一天）

“你的禅修进行得如何？”

“很糟糕。”

“无论好或坏，应保持正念。”（微笑）

所有禅修者都必须遵守八戒，包括“不妄语”和“不非时食”。

“不妄语”要求我们诚实地回答师父的问

我也是出家人，我也做了同样的事情！

但是实际上，佛陀并没离开他的亲戚，也没丢弃他的职务。当然，他尽不了一些简单职务，比如，他不能在日常生活中伺候他们，不能在世俗的层面上让他们快乐。

但是他内心的想法并非一般。他反思着，大家在我身上期待着快乐，希望看到我成功、进步。但是这样的快乐是短暂的。大家总有一天要死去。我必须找到真正永恒的快乐。

永恒的快乐只能来自脱离痛苦或不适。如果可以摆脱这个痛苦，那就是永恒的快乐。

因此悉达多太子下定决心寻找永恒的快乐，这是为了自己，也是为了他的家人和亲友，还有整个世界以及无边无尽的众生。

因此如果我们以正确的角度去理解，我们不能说他出离之际是不负责任或是忘了他的义务。相反的，为了尽更大的责任，他积极实践菩萨道，这并非仅仅为了全人类，而是为了一切众生的永恒快乐。

因此我们把他的出离称为大出离，而非一般的出离。

佛陀在为他遮蔽风雨的菩提树下证得觉悟。因此证悟以后，佛陀向菩提树敬礼，站着专注地凝视着菩提树七日。

直至今日，佛教徒延伸了这个礼敬菩提树的习惯。

从这里我们能看出佛陀对大自然也表达感恩。如今，我们非但对大自然缺乏感恩之心，而且还糟蹋它，为自己制造了许多问题，致使现在面临着环境危机，比如全球气温变暖。

再者，当佛陀以六年寻觅觉悟之道时，曾向两位伟大的老师学习。尽管他们没有成功引导他证得觉悟，但是当他最终凭着自己的努力觉悟之际，却没有忘记两位老师的恩惠。遗憾的是，那时候他们都已经谢世。

接下来他想到了曾在修持过程中帮助过他的五个同伴。这些同伴当初见到他放弃苦行，以为他是放弃了寻求觉悟，于是离开了他。佛陀在瓦拉纳西找到了他们，并帮助他们证得解脱。

除此之外，佛陀的一生还有其他动人的故事。

佛陀的继母离世之时，他在很远的地方，必须一路走回来。当他抵达之时，释迦族人正要把他的继母火葬。佛陀在火葬场顺时绕了三圈，致上印度文化里最高的崇敬。

火葬以后，他请亲戚把骨灰放在骨灰瓮里，然后捧着骨灰瓮带到另一处，亲自致上敬意后才将它埋藏。虽然他已经达到了圆满修行，但还是向继母表达敬意。不仅如此，继母在世之时，佛陀也让她受戒出家，以让她修行佛法求得解脱。

还有一个关键时刻，当佛陀的父亲病重时，佛陀多次回去探望他。当佛陀知道父亲快要不行了，佛陀伴随在他的病床边，直到父亲过世。尔后，佛陀还引导释迦族人为父亲进行火葬仪式。

很明显的，佛陀不但宣扬感恩，自己也实践得非常好。

尽管我们可能不是极度忘恩负义的人，但是却不怎么重视感恩的美德。我们身处变幻迅速的物质世界，它影响了我们培养感恩之心，导致我们忽略了对恩人施与关爱。

因此，我们为图方便，只懂得借助物质和金钱来表达感恩。其实，我们可以做得更多，也应当做得更多。

如果我们不好好地报恩，终将自食其果。许多人不明白这一点，最终导致自己受苦。

如果我们向别人表达感激，别人也会同样地对我们表示感激。这也是很重要的。

曾有人问佛陀：最大的快乐是什么？

佛陀举了明确的例子，说明如何得到最大的吉祥之乐。

最后，我想引述《吉祥经》里几段相关偈子：

孝顺于父母
护养妻与子
正命维生计
此为最吉祥

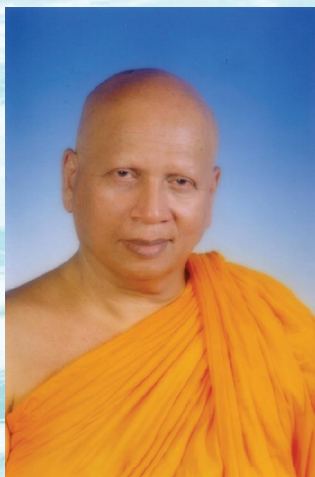
布施修十善
扶助诸亲族
不作诸罪业
此为最吉祥

禁绝造诸恶
不染麻醉物
精勤修善法
此为最吉祥

恭敬与谦逊
知足常感恩
适时听闻法
此为最吉祥



佛教图书馆
宗教顾问
达摩拉达那法师



佛教里的感恩

恩心的人很少。

尽管如此，我认为一般而言人类还是懂得感恩的。佛陀以上的意思是，在真正的意义上把感恩付诸于实践的人很少见。

比如，我们时常通过施与物品来表达感恩。当然，物质的布施也是重要的。但是人们往往过分注重物质，导致内在感恩之美德无法增长。

有时候，我们忽略了恩人对我们的善行，由此可能对他们造成很深的伤害。

比如对待父母亲。有时候，儿女对父母的孝行可说是非常不足。因为这些孩子以为在母亲节请父母吃顿午餐或晚餐，就不需要再做其他的事了。

如果他们每月给父母生活费，他们就觉得这样已经表达了感恩之情，因此不需要再多做些什么。

但是再多的金钱也比不上父母多年来给我们倾注的关注和爱护。我们应当把敬爱和感激之情更深刻广泛地体现出来。

这就是为什么佛陀说在真正的意义上实践感恩的人少之又少。

如果我们看看佛陀的一生，就知道他竭尽所能去实践自己所教授的东西，从不要求弟子实践他自己不做的事情。

只有一件事也许能让人们指责佛陀不修感恩。

当悉达多太子29时，他离开了皇宫以及他的父亲、继母，甚至他的妻儿，为的是成为一个苦行僧。

所以，人们可以质问：“这称得上感恩吗？”

对我而言，这不是问题。但是也许你会认为，

今天，我想谈谈佛法里的感恩。

我们现在表达感恩的其中一个方法是庆祝母亲节。佛教图书馆也庆祝这个日子。但是这个习惯其实起源于西方国家，就像父亲节、教师节或情人节一样。

一般来说，人类相当健忘，特别是生活忙碌的人们。所以定下一个特别的日子做一些我们认为重要的事情是有效益的，因为这些日子能对我们起提醒作用。这也许是这种节日背后的目的。

巴利文里有两个词，和我们谈论感恩息息相关：‘Katannyu’和‘Katavedi’。

Nyu的意思是知恩，知道别人对我们所行的善。当然，这不包括别人对我们行的恶。

Katavedi的意思则是报恩。

佛陀说：“这个世界上，知道别人对自己的恩惠并且记着要报恩的人很少。”换句话说，修感

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