

### Bhante Says

If someone were to ask you - *Is nirvana the ultimate goal of Buddhists?* – how would you answer?

In life, people have many worldly goals such as having a good family or a good job.

## The Ultimate Goal of Buddhists

But, in a religious context, the ultimate goal is different.

As Buddhists, we follow the teachings of the Buddha. We do our best to practise these teachings to achieve our goal. What is that goal?

In a simple way, I can say that our ultimate goal is to find permanent happiness, the highest level of mental peace.

In Buddhism, we have a word to describe this highest state of mental peace - *nirvana*.

This term used by the Buddha means cessation of worldly suffering. The basic idea behind this term is the putting out of a fire.

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### BL'S NEW SIGNBOARD

On Sept 19, 2010 at 10 am, Bhante B. Dhammaratana and Ven Chuan Guan led a ceremony to solemnise the unveiling of BL's new signboard. They recited *Homage to the Triple Gem* and the *Metta Sutta*. Mr. Tan Choon Huat, a BL Trustee, unveiled the Signboard.

BL's new signboard is clear, yet distinct and artistic, retaining the calligraphy of renowned artist, Mr Khoo Seow Hwa, carved in teak wood. It addresses members' feedback that the old signboard could not be seen clearly from the outside.  
(Weng Fai)



What is this fire that is put out? It is the fire of greed, hatred and delusion.

Why is *nirvana* the ultimate goal for Buddhists? Because it is the only way we can attain permanent happiness or mental peace.

In Buddhism, heaven is not our ultimate goal because it is not permanent. Beings born in heaven will still have to die and be reborn, sooner or later. Besides, they have not totally eradicated their mental defilements. They have not put out the fire. So how can there be permanent peace in heaven?

*'If my sickness is of benefit to living beings, 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

That is why the Buddha said that the only goal worthy of attainment for a Buddhist is *nirvana*.

In the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha said -

*There is no fire like lust  
no evil like hatred.  
There are no disasters equal  
to those we create in our existences.  
There is no happiness greater  
than the peace of (nirvana).*

But if somebody were to ask me – *Is nirvana the ultimate goal of Buddhists?* – I would answer Yes and No.

Yes, because we can definitely expect to achieve the highest level of purity of our mind by practising the Buddha's teachings.

But I would also say 'no' because it is difficult for ordinary Buddhists, to appreciate this highest level of purity of the mind.

In the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the Buddha said –

*Brightly shining, luminous is this mind, but it is defiled by the stains which visit it. This the unlearned common folk do not really understand; so for them there is no development of the mind.*

*Brightly shining, luminous is this mind, and it is freed of the stains which visit it. This the learned noble disciples really understand; so for them there is development of the mind.*

Anguttara Nikaya, Vol 1, page 10

Since *nirvana* has not been experienced by ordinary people, it is unknown or unfamiliar to them.

However, this does not mean that the ultimate goal of *nirvana* is illogical or invalid.

It's just that it's difficult to ask ordinary people to strive for a goal which they do not understand.

What we need is a more user friendly way to educate people about *nirvana*.

There is in fact something that is known to ordinary people, that they experience on a daily basis. This is suffering or discomfort (*dukkha*). Why don't we talk of this known thing to explain *nirvana*?

We can say that our ultimate goal in life is to overcome this known suffering. We must strive to get rid of suffering.

All the teachings of the Buddha are directed towards how to get rid of *dukkha*. As the Buddha said –

*'Now, as formerly, I just point out dukkha and its cessation.'*

Majjhima Nikaya, Vol I, page 251

However, when we mention suffering or discomfort, people complain that Buddhism is pessimistic. We also experience happiness in our lives. Why can't we talk about happiness?

Of course, we do experience happiness in our lives.

Actually, the Buddha's main objective when he preached the Dharma was not merely to tell people that old age is suffering, experiencing health problems is suffering or that not getting what we want is suffering. Yes, he did talk about all these things but that was not his main purpose.

Frankly, we don't really need a Buddha to tell us that old age is suffering, experiencing health problems is suffering and that being unable to get what we want is suffering. This is what the Americans call 'a no-brainer'.

We experience all these things almost everyday. When we visit a hospital, for example, we can see for ourselves how badly people suffer from health problems.

Rather, the Buddha's main purpose was to help us understand that what we call happiness is also *dukkha*. That is the biggest problem we have to face in life.

There are many things in this world which bring comfort to us but the problem is that we are emotionally attached to them.

On the other hand, if there is anything which brings discomfort to us, we develop aversion towards it. We get disgusted.

And so we are like the meat in a sandwich caught between these 2 things – attachment and aversion. That is how our restless mind works.

For sure, comfort is good. We enjoy it. But our emotional attachment makes comfortable things uncomfortable because we are afraid we may lose them.

And there are certain things we want all the time. We want to have perfect health all the time. But this is impossible. So our attachment to perfect health brings us *dukkha* because even comfortable things are not permanent.

Similarly, we want to be only with people who can bring happiness to us. Unfortunately, the very people who can bring us happiness can also bring us a lot of *dukkha*. That's what parents experience from time to time.

The Buddha wanted us to know this truth.

By understanding this truth, we can overcome attachment to comfortable things and aversion to uncomfortable things. We don't have to run away from them. We can experience them but there is no necessity to be attached, or develop aversion, to them.

This does not mean that we must develop a fatalistic outlook in life or wish for bad things to happen to us. But, to have a more stable and happier life, we need to accept not only the good but also the bad, and neutral, events as a necessary part of our lives.

So instead of talking about the nature of something which is distant and unknown, it's better to speak about something that is immediate and known. In this way, we can have a better understanding of *nirvana*.

Getting rid of *dukkha* is *nirvana*. Overcoming attachment and aversion is *nirvana*. If we are completely free from all forms of *dukkha*, we are in *nirvana*.

But if we still have some *dukkha*, we are not there yet.

(Continued on page 5)





# Editorial

## ***The Emptiness of Ghosts and Miracles***

Tim, an ex-student of mine, comes from a small town in north east Thailand, bordering Laos. But he studies in a Chiangmai university.

Last summer, Tim's mother summoned him home. His grandfather was dying from lung cancer.

After 20 hours in 3 buses, Tim arrived home. Grandpa was still alive but could barely recognise his grandson.

The next day, Grandpa passed away. And 3 days later, he was cremated.

Following local custom, the mourners dressed Grandpa in his finest clothes and deposited his mobile phone in his pocket.

That evening, Tim went to bed at 10 pm. He soon fell into a deep sleep.

Shortly afterwards, Tim's mobile phone rang. He picked it up. There was no caller at the other end, just a continuous tone.

Tim glanced at the caller's number. It was Grandpa's.

Then he noticed an earlier missed call. Also Grandpa's number.

Over dinner in September 2010, I related this story to my brother and his family. He laughed and reminded me of an incident involving our own late father.

Father was an invalid who spent virtually all his waking hours watching TV.

One day, he requested me to buy him a new TV set. I was very busy during that period and did not pay much attention to his request.

A few nights later, I came home to find him watching a new TV set. He proudly declared that he had asked my brother to buy the new TV set for him, using his own savings.

One night, some years later, Father passed away in his sleep.

After the funeral, we invited our guests home for the customary meal before dispersing. As we chatted, I decided to bring the TV set up to my bedroom.

I'd just taken a few steps when there was a thunderous crash.

The carved wooden screen separating the living room from the dining room collapsed, dragging down with it my father's precious TV set. Glass littered the floor.

The screen had been standing there for some time and there was no breeze at the time. Why did it crash?

I know what you're thinking.

Indeed, human beings tend to jump to conclusions. We do it all the time. It's called *bias confirmation*.

We have our pet theory and anytime something happens which appears to support it, we confirm our bias.

Take an ex-colleague of mine. Every time something good happened to him or something bad to the people he disliked, he would attribute the event to divine intervention. But never when the converse happened.

Fortunately not everyone is a champion jumper.

Fergus Anckorn was a British POW of the Japanese in Singapore during WW2. Anckorn escaped death several times but lived to tell his story in his nineties.

His first brush with death came when his vehicle was bombed. He was badly injured.

Taken to Alexandra Hospital, he alternated between consciousness and unconsciousness.

Somehow, the Japanese mistook him for dead when they shot the other Allied patients.

Later, forced to work at the River Kwai, he fell into, and almost drowned in, the river when a Japanese soldier threw a corrosive substance at him.

Even more remarkably, Anckorn was one day taken into the jungle to be shot.

*"We didn't have blindfolds or anything. And we waited for the bullets for ten minutes ... We were talking to each other; you know 'why don't they just get on with it, get it over with, when are the bullets coming?' and then they decided against it for some reason or other ... (Later) we found the war had been over for three days."*

A BBC interviewer suggested that Anckorn must have had a pact with God and asked him if he was religious.

"No," Anckorn replied instantly.

He could not see why God would spare him and not millions of others.

Watching the interview, I was deeply impressed by Anckorn's matter-of-fact manner, lack of bitterness and, above all, his great sense of humour. Like HH the Dalai Lama, he did not allow his enemies to subjugate his mind.

No one can blame Anckorn if he'd claimed that divine intervention saved him, a serial miracle, if you like. But the fact that Anckorn did not do so was the real miracle.

Kalu Rinpoche once remarked that miracles are possible because they are empty. The doctrine of emptiness, as every Dharma student should know, posits that all phenomena come into being, change or cease to exist, depending on their causes and conditions.

Miracles, on the other hand, don't follow the normal laws of nature. They claim a supernatural origin.

Rinpoche's remark can thus be taken to suggest there are no such things as miracles, merely events that we aren't yet able to understand or explain.

But some day we will.

Indeed, this is the way scientists view the world. What would the world be like today if scientists had simply accepted the traditional explanations of diseases like leprosy and the plague, or phenomena like the eclipses of the sun and moon, instead of investigating them for their actual causes?

Alone among religious leaders, the Buddha gave his followers permission to doubt and question, even his own teachings.

In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha, for example, affirmed the *Kalamas'* right to doubt *'in a matter that is doubtful.'*

The Buddha was also dismissive of miracles, especially as tools for converting people.

In an article published in POJ 20 (Oct – Dec 2006), Prof Y Karunadasa related one such incident.

*'One day, when the Buddha visited ... Nalanda, the people came to him and said - "Venerable Sir, this city ... is very affluent and prosperous. It's teeming with people. It would be a good thing if the Buddha could perform some miracles, so that the Buddha would be able to convert many people to his religion".'*

(T)he Buddha replied –

*"There are 3 kinds of miracles.*

*The 1<sup>st</sup> is the ... ability to perform such supernatural acts as levitating...*

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> kind ... is some kind of hypnotism or mesmerism... the ability to hypnotise or mesmerise*

*someone and reveal the kind of thoughts that the person is having."*

The Buddha did not recommend or endorse these 2 kinds of miracles...

*"(The 3<sup>rd</sup> is) the miracle of instruction... It's nothing but teaching the Dhamma through rational persuasion ... The Buddha said that this was the only miracle that he recommended or endorsed."*

I'm not saying that ghosts and other supernatural beings don't exist. Indeed, the Buddha taught 6 realms of existence including ghosts and heavenly beings.

The *Mangala Sutta*, for example, was preached by the Buddha in response to a question by a heavenly being as to what the Buddha considered to be the highest blessings.

And the Buddha taught the *Metta Sutta* to a group of monks whose meditation practice was obstructed by ghosts.

Yet the Buddha did not use his miraculous powers to destroy the ghosts.

Instead, he taught the monks to generate thoughts of unconditional love for all sentient beings, including ghosts.

And, according to the story, it worked. The ghosts not only ceased to bother the monks but attended to their needs thereafter.

For the last 5 years, I've been teaching English to Thai students from rural families in northern Thailand. Boys so deprived that they ordain just to be educated.

The odds against these boys entering good universities are overwhelming.

They make do with an outdated education system, poor teaching standards and facilities that Singapore schools discarded decades ago.

But most of all, their worst enemies are themselves.

Thai students, particularly rural ones, have low self-esteem and typically accept their stations in life fatalistically.

As a boy, I grew up in a poor family too, living from hand to mouth. My parents were never sure whether they could pay the rent at month's end.

But my siblings and I were all able to lead comfortable lives later on.

What rescued us was education.

We were fortunate. We had a mother, who, although illiterate herself, refused to accept the idea that we were destined to be poor.

Education can do the same for my students.

It can help them not only to break out of the poverty





## BL EVENT – PUBLIC TALK

**Buddha's Lotus Flower:  
Flower Symbolism in the  
Lotus Sutra -**

**A Talk by  
Professor  
Gene Reeves  
September  
10, 2010**

**At Singpost  
Auditorium**

**Organised by BL**

Photo Credit :  
Yeow Foo

*Bhante's Say (Continued from page 2)*

I hope that, by reading what I say here, you will be able to appreciate, if not understand, what *nirvana* truly stands for in Buddhism in a slightly better way.

Bhante B Dhammaratana  
Religious Advisor  
Buddhist Library

Acknowledgements:

*Dhammapada* quotation taken from the translation by Ven Balangoda Ananda Maitreya.

Other quotations taken from *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism*. Editors: Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien

*Editorial (Continued from page 4)*

cycle but also enable them to accept the Buddha's invitation to doubt and question.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Chwee Beng  
Editor

[Acknowledgements:

Fergus Anckorn quotes taken from *Remembrance* go website.

*Kalama Sutta* quotes taken from *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism*.  
Editors: Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien.]

**Aukana Standing Buddha statue  
in Sri Lanka**

Photo Credit :  
Yew Beng





## Book Review

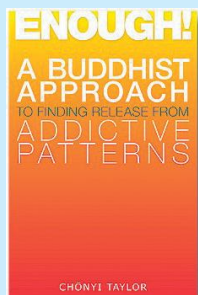
### Enough! - A Buddhist Approach to Finding Release from Addictive Patterns

by Chonyi Taylor

Published by Snow Lion Publications (2010)

192 pages

Reviewed by Evelyn



'Only unhappy people make other people unhappy.'

'...(e)mptying shelves in ION Orchard might just mean more than being a Material Girl in a material world.'

I shall begin by doing a little social research. Anonymity guaranteed.

*Are you addicted to say, food, alcohol, hi-tech gadgets, shopping, sex, you name it? What about inner addictions like your own point of view, sense of uselessness, desire to hear nice things about yourself, or making others angry with you so that you can blame them for your misery?*

Let's admit it. Many of us are actually guilty, until proven innocent. As the writer, Chönyi Taylor (Dr Diana Taylor) puts it - *We all have addictions, big or little.*

The inconvenient truth is that *'addictive patterns are harmful, not only to us, but often to other people as well'.*

Under their spell, we withdraw into isolation, neglect others and even lash out at those who try to help us.

Echoing the sentiments of those who desire to end addictive desires, of those who cry - 'Enough!' - to the pain of addiction, this is a practical guidebook on rescuing us from our lonely planet to one where we *'see ourselves as part of the huge web of humanity'*.

I have therefore nothing but praises for it.

For starters, the writing style is lucid, fluid and current. There is no beating about the bush. The goal of pulling readers out of addiction traps overrides linguistic sentimentality. The contents are very structured and coherent, beginning often with a clear explanation of a topic followed by a corresponding meditation technique.

To quote, *'addictions are a desperate way of seeking happiness'*.

It is an escape from the painful reality of our lives. The frustration is that they only provide symptomatic relief, much like pain-killers. It is therefore crucial to trace the root cause, which can be some physical or emotional pain inflicted on us by our elders during our childhood.

Taylor then goes on to teach us the way to manage this underlying pain and, at the same time, forgive our elders for their imperfections since they must have been suffering too. Only unhappy people make other people unhappy.

It is comforting for me to learn that addiction, formidable though it may seem, is *'primarily a state of mind'*. After all, we consciously take the first step in, say, drinking.

With enough repetition, it evolves into a compulsion. From there, we, the initial agent, lose control and become slaves to addiction.

Meditation techniques on equanimity, mindfulness and compassionate wisdom are taught in this book to help us effectively break this mental loop – our much needed *'mental spa'*.

I will not do the book justice without highlighting a few insightful points featured in it.

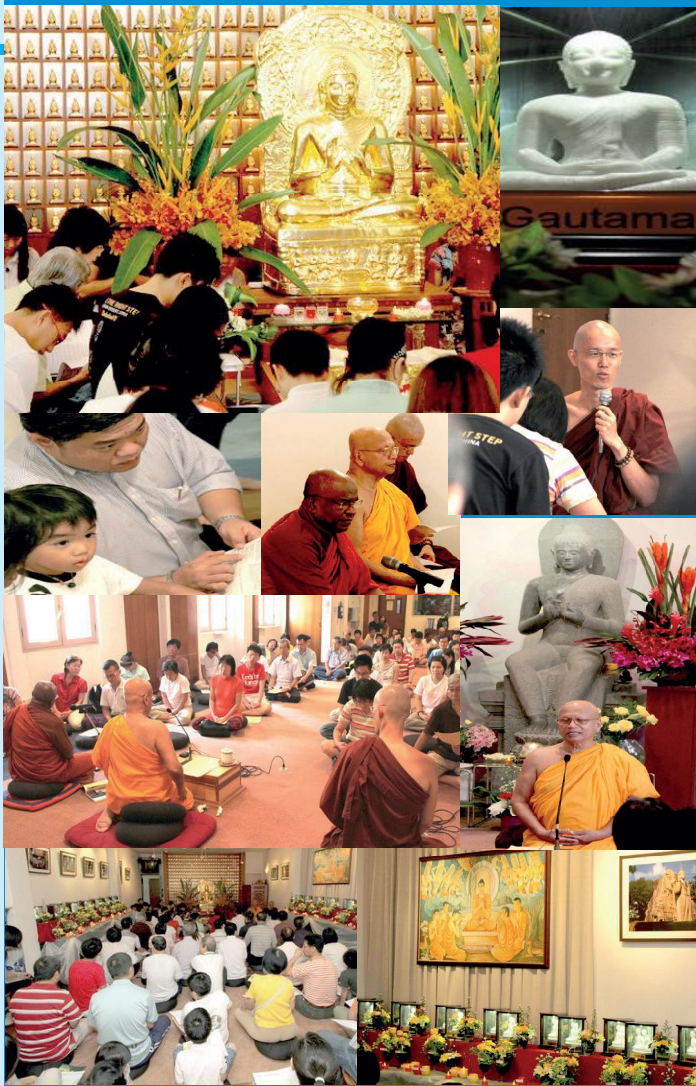
Loving kindness is defined as *'service in action'* while bodhicitta is explained as *'wisdom love'*, which is antithetical to the egocentric actions of addictive patterns. Bodhicitta is about seeing *'our own needs in the context of the needs of others and choos(ing) what is important on that basis'*.

What truly arrests my attention is the way the book sort of demonises romantic love, something so magically beautiful to many of us. It says that we usually fall in love because we desire to feel complete through our partners, due to our sense of inadequacy. A partner helps in completing our dream. It is not so much about cooperation but ugly manipulation. Such love is clearly without wisdom, without love for others - the nemesis of bodhicitta. Learning this is *'disturbing'* but nonetheless thought-provoking.

It is also through this book that I gain valuable insight into *'shopaholism'*, if I may coin a term. Nowadays, the act of compulsive shopping is often euphemistically called *'retail therapy'*, masking the lurking emotional pain of shopaholics. Their compulsion could possibly be fueled by feelings of being *'unloved and unlovable'* or *'disconnected from the rest of the human race'*. Something like alienation, a BIG word in sociology. Hence emptying shelves in ION Orchard might just mean more than being a Material Girl in a material world.

Perhaps the most bizarre fact to me is that of US soldiers being fed pills to eliminate any fear in them. Unfortunately, the effects extend far beyond the confines of battlefields, immunising them even to the feelings of others, including their loved ones. This example is raised for the purpose of highlighting the paramount importance of wisdom and love in our reality, which is necessarily both

(Continued on page 7)



# BL DHARMA DAY 2010 Event



The Significance of Dharma Day

by John

Photo Credits : Yeow Foo and Yew Beng

Dharma Day marks the beginning of the Buddha's ministry. Dharma is Truth, the vision of Reality as taught by the Buddha.

On that day the Buddha taught his 1st sermon, the *Dharmacakrapattana Sutta*, or *The Turning of the Dharma Wheel Discourse*.

Bhante B Dhammaratana led the chanting of the Discourse. Ven. Chuan Guan then discussed the significance of Dharma Day and how to put it into practice.

It was a perfect opportunity to contemplate the Buddha's teachings and how we can better achieve our ultimate aim of ending suffering for ourselves and others.

(Continued from page 6)  
material and spiritual.

'Enough!' leaves us more than enough food for thought. To name but a few - What inspires us? Can death be inspiring? Can you imagine yourself as a courageous person, how would your life be different? Would your addiction be important if there were something more urgent in your life?

Besides thought-provoking questions, the book is peppered with catchy quotations by practitioners like Lama Yeshe. The very first of his quotes goes like this -

'Do not expect material objects to satisfy you or to make your life perfect; it is impossible. How can you be satisfied with even vast amounts of material objects? How will sleeping with hundreds of people satisfy you? It will never happen. Satisfaction comes from the mind'.

With that, I shall conclude my review before I get addicted to writing and you get addicted to the book. 'Enough!' is quite enough for now.

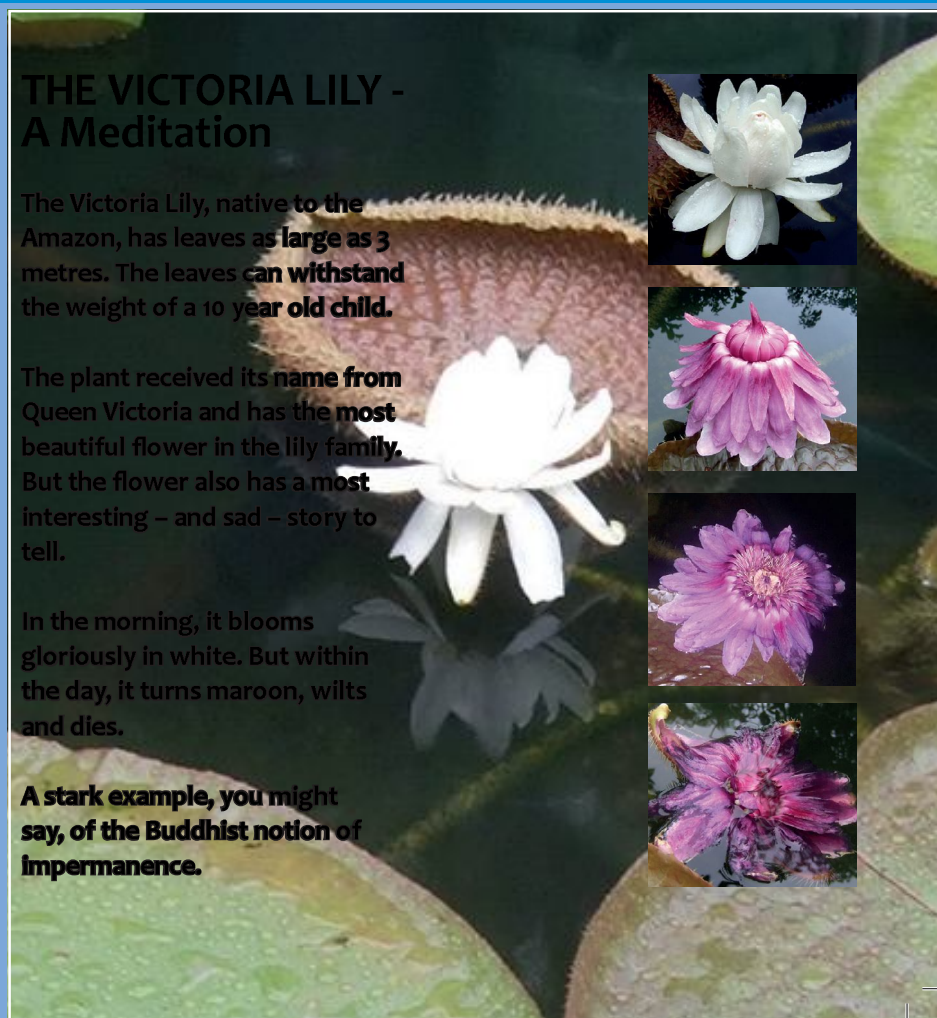
## THE VICTORIA LILY - A Meditation

The Victoria Lily, native to the Amazon, has leaves as large as 3 metres. The leaves can withstand the weight of a 10 year old child.

The plant received its name from Queen Victoria and has the most beautiful flower in the lily family. But the flower also has a most interesting - and sad - story to tell.

In the morning, it blooms gloriously in white. But within the day, it turns maroon, wilts and dies.

A stark example, you might say, of the Buddhist notion of Impermanence.





## Book Review

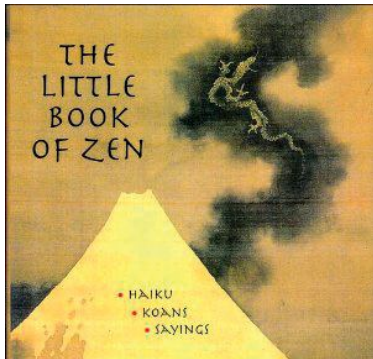
### The Little Book of Zen

Author: Manuela Dunn Mascetti

Publisher: Barnes & Nobles Books (2001)

156 pages

Reviewed by Kim Li



What attracts you to a book? I think I need to take a poll, not that I know of many avid readers out there. =)

As for myself I think I am generally attracted to the cover, which is usually the first thing I see. Alternatively, I am attracted to the title, especially if it mentions any of the authors I am usually interested in.

Now, *Zen*, as the title goes, attracted me first and foremost with its size. Small and simply done, it was an easy-to-carry-around book. The woody feel of the cover just sends forth a very relaxing feel.

But I am not that easily sold. I took a peek inside the sleeves and looked at the table of contents and the short introductions by the editors. Now, that got me hooked.

The main editor describes what the book comprises - basically haiku, koans and sayings - and then goes on to give a very brief explanation of what each is.

Haiku is poetry. Koans are conundrums or enigmatic riddles. And sayings are stories of experiences of Zen masters.

Being ever interested in the quiet, contemplative, uncluttered style of Zen, I was very curious about this book since it promises to touch on what the 3 traditional methods of Zen Buddhism are. What I know about Zen Buddhism has always been limited though I do know that koans are usually very difficult to answer questions set by Zen masters to test their students' spiritual progress.

The answers may not always make sense to most people unless they've attained a certain level of understanding of Buddhism. So, of course, I was not going to let go of this chance to learn more about Zen.

Each of the 3 sections starts off with an introduction to what the subject is, a little about its history and its evolution and how it fits into the teachings and practices. It is then followed by the more common and famous of the subject matter.

The sections on koans and sayings are both very well written and reading them was definitely interesting.

The explanations of the koans make for an interesting read though I don't always get the same understanding of the koans as the explanations. It makes me go "Ah ha" more than 70% of the time.

Some koans have me hooked as I sit and try to digest their explanations more thoroughly. It is not as easy as it sounds and I must admit I'm still left puzzled by quite a number of koans.

Of the 3, I love the section on haikus most. It is the section that is most unforgettable and alluring.

To me, it is endearing because there is much that lies behind the elegance of the phrases used in the poetry. It is beautiful, an art in itself. With just a few words, it manages to capture the essence of the moment, the teaching.

The editor says that

*'The art of haiku is to frame reality in a single instant that will lock the poet and the reader into the same experience. It is this thunderbolt-like encounter that has made haiku the poetry of Zen'.*

I don't know if what I experience is the same as what the masters experienced when they wrote the haiku but I am indeed left transported, with eyes wide open. Maybe it is the use of a flowery language with such simplicity and the ergonomics of the words that leave me transfixed with the haiku. I just can't fathom how 3 lines of under 20 words can describe so brilliantly the clutter in our mind, or how it can link nature with the undeniable suffering of change so effortlessly. Less is indeed more in this case.

But I do realise that the feelings the haikus evoke are generally those of quietude which also ignite a feeling of wonder in me.

Have I mentioned that it is a must-read? =)

As always, I like to end with something I love about the book. This time round, it is the 2 haikus that I feel particularly strongly about.

*A single petal  
Of the cherry blossom fell:  
Mountain silence.*

- Kenneth Tanemura

*Not knowing why,  
I feel attached to this world  
Where we come only to die.*

- Natsume Soseki





# BL Event Teacher's Day 2010

Photo Credits :  
Yeow Foo and Yew Beng

BL Sunday Dharma School  
Celebrates Teachers' Day on  
August 29, 2010

by John

The celebration was organised  
by Mudita and Upekkha class  
students. They planned the  
programme together for the 1st  
time.

After the Sunday Morning Puja,  
teachers and students gathered  
at the Art Gallery.

Karen and Hui Zhen welcomed  
teachers, parents and students.

Karen also shared the significance  
of offering candles to the Buddha.

Then SDS lay advisor Seaw Choon  
offered candles to the Buddha,  
followed by the others.

The 1st game session then started.

The students from Metta class and  
Karuna class were so shy. When  
Karen asked them who knew the  
answers, all of them kept silent. Not  
their usual selves. They are normally  
so active and noisy. Karuna class  
answered most of the questions.

The students in charge led by Karen  
had prepared 3 Buddhist songs and  
one Chinese song dedicated to all  
Dharma teachers.

Happy moments pass quickly.

Before we ended the session, we  
surprised Principal See Yeong.  
September 1, 2010 (Wednesday)  
was his birthday. The School  
sang a birthday song followed by  
dedication.

A big Thank You to Seaw Choon,  
Bee Lian, Kelvin, See Yeong, Karen,  
Reynold, Shi Jie, Zenn, Guan Hong,  
Kang Wei, Yao Wei, Ting Ting, Jie  
Ying, Hui Zhen, Adeline and Hui Yun.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!

## Quotable Quote

You are now like a withered leaf,  
Very close to the approaching  
messenger of death.  
Although at the point of departure,  
You have not prepared yourself for the  
journey.

Prepare a refuge for yourself,  
Work hard, use good judgment.  
Free of flaws and passions,  
You shall enter the highest realms.

You have reached the end of your time.  
You stand face to face with death.  
You have no place to rest upon the  
road,  
Nor any preparation for the journey.

Prepare a refuge for yourself,  
Work hard, use good judgment.  
Free of flaws and passions,  
You need never return to the cycle of  
birth and death.

The Dhammapada  
Translated by Ven  
Balangoda Ananda  
Maitreya



## Article The Significance of Wat Rong Khun, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Text and Pictures by Yeow Foo



Wat Rong Khun ('The White Temple') explores contemporary Thai artistry in a temple setting. Designed by a renowned artist, Chalermchai Kositpipat, it is an extraordinary, mainly white, complex which starkly contrasts with the golden theme of a typical Thai monastery.

The Wat is still under construction. When completed, it will comprise 9 buildings - the assembly hall (*ubosot*), the hall containing Buddha's relics, the hall containing Buddha images, the preaching hall, the contemplation hall, the monk's cell, the door façade of the *Buddhavasa*, the art gallery, and toilets.



Man and Woman in the sensual realm

The bridge signifies the crossing over from the cycle of rebirth to the Abode of the Buddhas.



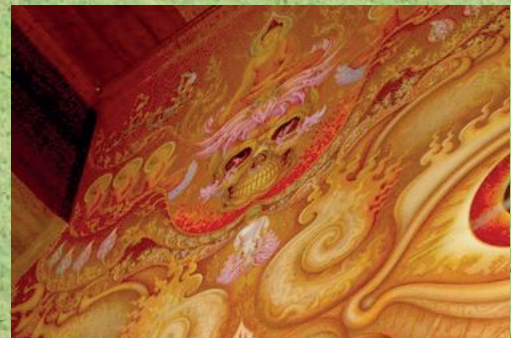
Animals representing earth (elephant), water (naga), wind (swan's wings) and fire (lion's mane).







The Buddha seems to hover amidst the fire of samsara, yet so serene and untouched by impurities.



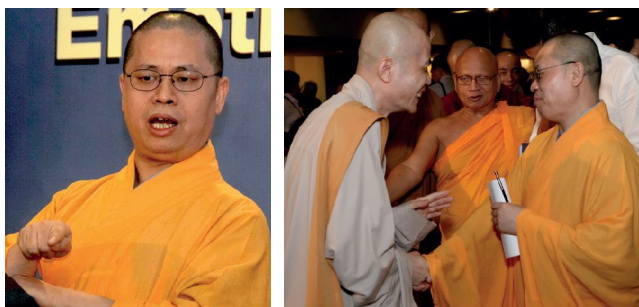
Perhaps the most interesting part of the temple inside the assembly hall (ubosot). The 4 walls, ceiling and floor exhibit paintings showing an escape from the defilements of temptation to reach a supramundane state. It's the area that represents human mind.

Sources of information: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wat\\_Rong\\_Khun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wat_Rong_Khun); <http://www.thailandtraveltours.com/news/16-chiangrai-wat-rong-khun-temple-chiangraiwatrongkhuntemple.htm>



## INTERVIEW

Venerable Jing Yin  
July 17, 2010  
Singapore Buddhist Lodge  
Interviewed by Tjiep Hoe



*The questions are a mixed bag elicited from a cross-section of people. I contributed the first 2 questions. Pretty basic, you might say, but very relevant to the Singaporean mindset. As I have posed the same questions to other monks from other traditions before, a friend commented that I appear to be shopping for answers that are more appealing to me. Perhaps so. But maybe that's the nature of the Singaporean mindset. Isn't it?* (Tjiep Hoe.)

*I was 'born' a Buddhist and went to the temple from an early age. I prayed and participated in rites and rituals without much understanding. What makes a person a Buddhist (in the true sense of the word) in the Chinese Buddhist tradition?*

The most important is right understanding. Rituals can help people by leading them to right understanding, and, in that sense, they are a gateway.

Although right understanding can only be achieved through practice and meditation, rites and rituals are a preparation for it.

*You write for the Hong Kong Economic Journal Monthly. Can a person be a good Buddhist and a successful businessperson at the same time?*

Why not? If we practise Buddhism and do good things, we will generate good karma, get a good reward and have a good life. The Western Paradise is the most prosperous society imaginable.

Poverty is not an aim or prerequisite of Buddhism, but simplicity is the Buddhist way. Buddhists must, however, earn money in the right way.

*How and why did the bodhisattva Guan Yin evolve from a male form (Avalokitesvara) to a female form (Guan Yin)? What significance, if any, does this female aspect have in Chinese Buddhism?*

The answer is very complicated, but let me give you one

simple reason.

Avalokitesvara is the embodiment of compassion and unconditional love.

A mother is the most easily identifiable symbol of unconditional love, and in this respect Avalokitesvara takes the female form to symbolise compassion and unconditional love for all sentient beings.

The technical aspects of this change are too complicated to explain during this interview.

*What is ego in Buddhism and is it different from the everyday understanding of that term? Why is ego so central to the practice of the Dharma?*

We must first distinguish between the everyday understanding of ego which is actually personality and the Ego, which is the 'I'.

There are 107 causes of suffering, but the root cause is Ego (the 'I'), and this arises when people have the mistaken belief that Ego (the 'I') is permanent and unchanging, and they form an attachment to Ego. We do not have to destroy Ego, but must try to understand it and have less attachment to it.

*Pure Land Buddhism, an important part of Chinese Buddhism, stresses the need to recognise that the practitioner is helpless to attain liberation without the help of Amitabha Buddha. How does Amitabha Buddha actually help people and how consistent is this with the general Buddhist principle that 'no one can purify another'?*

This is a question of self-power and external power.

At the initial stage, when we are weak and confused, we need an external power to guide us to the right path, but after we progress, we have to rely on ourselves.

In the Western Paradise, we still have to listen to the Dharma and do our practice.

After we pass the initial confused stage, we have to rely on ourselves

*Theravada Buddhism encourages the practice of metta while Mahayana Buddhism stress loving-kindness. Are they the same thing?*

Metta is loving-kindness. One is in Pali and the other is an English translation.

*If bodhicitta is the will to become a Buddha, does it apply to all Buddhist schools including Theravada?*



Of course. Bodhicitta means that the mind has a will to save all sentient beings. Once one has compassion, action will follow, merit will be accumulated, and the journey to Buddhahood thus begins. This is also the path to arahantship, on a journey that accumulates both wisdom and merit.

*It is commonly taught in the Mahayana Buddhism that an arahant is equivalent to the level of an 8<sup>th</sup> stage bodhisattva, (some say, 4<sup>th</sup> stage), Is this true? What are the main differences between arahants and bodhisattvas? How do we know which practice is more suitable for us?*

This is a very complicated question.

The arahants and bodhisattvas are not strictly comparable.

The arahants should be compared to Buddhas and not bodhisattvas. The arahants have similar spiritual achievements as Buddhas but the Buddha is a teacher while the arahant is a follower.

Comparisons cannot be made simply and certainly not in the time that we have for this interview

*The Buddha taught us to learn to live with less attachment but we are in fact getting more attached in order to build a more cordial and friendly family life. How can we practise less attachment as an ordinary layman?*

You have made a mistake in your understanding of attachment.

Real attachment is a mental state where the mind is stuck at a point in the past, and does not move forward or change. For example, if somebody slanders you or does something bad to you and you keep going back and bringing it up over and over, it is attachment.

(On the other hand) if you act according to the way the situation changes, it is not attachment.

Our family relationships are not attachments, but they are our responsibilities and commitments.

As a lay person, you are a householder and you have a commitment to your family. So as well as searching for liberation for yourself, you also have to help others achieve liberation, and the commitment to family is included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> requirement of helping others.

*How can we practise equal kindness to all sentient beings when we are obligated to show more kindness to our own family members?*

Again, you have made the mistake of mixing up the requirements for monks and laypeople or householders.

Monks have no family commitments whereas householders do.

Monks are required to treat everybody equally, but as householders, you must take more care and concern for your wife and family.

Having said this, you are to treat all sentient beings with kindness.

*Life is stressful in modern city life. We have little or no time to practise. What is your advice on how to practise effectively in our daily hectic life?*

We can approach this in 2 ways.

The 1<sup>st</sup> is to do a training course where we reserve some time for practising meditation, perhaps half an hour every morning or evening at the same time. It is important that we do this regularly and be committed to our practice. This makes it powerful.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> way is to bring calm, peace and focus to our daily life and also to live and work mindfully. We should apply Buddhist principles to our daily life.

Combined together, these 2 steps will be very effective.

*What advice would you give to those of us just beginning to learn Buddhism?*

For learning Buddhism, I would advise a gradual practice, and a step-by-step approach.

Even in learning the Dharma, one should not be 'greedy' to get knowledge or results quickly. The middle way is best.

There is a 3 stage approach that we can follow - 1. Listen 2. Contemplate 3. Apply.

1<sup>st</sup>, we listen (or read) and learn from Dharma teachers and books. 2<sup>nd</sup>, we contemplate on what we have learned, and especially find what is suitable for us to follow and 3<sup>rd</sup>, we apply what we have learned and contemplated on.

Buddhism is not theoretical. It is practical - to be lived, practised and applied to our daily life.

The self-check to see if we are probably on the right path is whether our burdens have increased and we are more unhappy.

If this is the case, we need a re-examination and maybe a consultation with a teacher.

If one follows the Buddhist path, one should be happier and our burdens will seem lighter. Buddhism (should) bring happiness

Thank you. Venerable Jing Yin.

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“现在，如以前，我只指出苦与苦之灭。”

然而，当我们提到痛苦或不适，人们抱怨说佛教是悲观的。我们也在生活中体会到快乐，为何不谈论快乐呢？

当然，我们也在生活中体验快乐。虽然佛陀在宣扬佛法时说衰老是苦，身体的病痛是苦，或得不到自己想要的也是痛苦，但这不是他说此话的主要目的。诚然，我们并不需要佛陀告诉我们衰老是痛苦的，生病是痛苦的，无法得到自己想要的也是痛苦的。正如美国人常说的，这是不需大脑去想也知道的事。我们几乎每天经历这些事情。比如说当我们到医院去的时候，可以看到许多病人为身体的不适而遭受极大的痛苦。

其实，佛陀的主要目的是要帮助我们了解到，我们所说的快乐亦是苦。这是我们必须面对的最大的问题。

世上有很多事情给我们带来舒适感，但问题是我们对它们生起了执著。另一方面，如果有什么东西带给我们不适，我们就会产生反感，甚至厌恶它。因此，我们就像被夹在三明治中间的那块肉，被执着与厌恶紧夹着。我们这颗不安定的心就是如此的运作。

当然，我们享受舒适的感觉，舒适是好的。然而，由于我们害怕失去它，这种情感上的执着导致舒适的东西也变得不舒服了。有些东西是我们一直希望拥有的，就好像健康，我们希望永远保持顶尖的健康状态，但这是不可能的。如果我们坚持想要得到这种永恒的健康，这将带给我们痛苦，因为即便是舒适的东西也是无常的。

同样的，我们希望只跟带给我们快乐的人相处，可惜，这些人同时也可能带给我们不少烦恼，作为父母的最能体会这种感觉。

佛陀要我们明白这个真理。明了这个真理，便可以克服对

喜欢的东西的执著，以及对不喜欢的东西的厌恶。我们不需要逃避，我们照样可以体验它们，但没有必要对它们产生执着或厌恶。

这并不意味着我们必须培养宿命观或希望坏的事情发生在我们身上。但是，为了过一个更稳定与幸福的生活，无论是好的、坏的，或中立的事，我们都必须接受，因为它们都是人生中不可缺少的一部分。

因此，与其谈论那些遥不可及而又未知的事物本性，不如踏实地谈论当下容易了解的事物。这样，我们便可以更好的理解涅槃。

灭苦就是涅槃。克服执着与厌恶就是涅槃。如果我们能从各种苦中完全解脱，我们就在涅槃中。但是，如果我们仍然有一些苦，我们就还未到达涅槃。

我希望读者通过阅读这里所介绍的视角，即便还无法参透涅槃为何物，至少可以更好的方式进一步理解涅槃在佛教中的意义。

佛教图书馆  
宗教顾问  
达摩拉达那法师

[致谢：《法句经》引文摘自巴兰格达阿难陀弥勒法师（Ven Balangoda Ananda Maitreya）的翻译。其他引文摘自《The Essential Teachings of Buddhism》（哲译：佛教的基本教义），编辑：布朗与奥布莱恩（Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien）]

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在过去6年里，我一直在泰国北部教英文，学生都来自农村家庭。他们十分贫困，为了接受教育，这些男孩可以毅然剃度出家。

这些男孩要进入优秀大学的几率微乎其微。这里的教育体系已经过时，教学水平低落，所使用的设施是新加坡学校早在数十年前就已弃置的。不过，他们最大的敌人是自己。泰国学生，特别是来自乡村的学生，非常没自信，也非常宿命。

小时候，我的家境也很贫穷，过着捉襟见肘的日子。我的父母永远都无法肯定，到月底时是否有能力支付房租。不过，我和兄弟姐妹长大后，还是有能力过着舒适的生活。

教育，拯救了我们。我们是幸运的，母亲虽然不识字，但她拒绝接受我们注定是穷人的想法。

教育，也能拯救我的学生。教育，不仅能让他们摆脱贫困，还能让他们接受佛陀的邀请，开始对事物存疑。

一如过往，我祝您阅读愉快

Chwee Beng  
编辑

[致谢：菲尔克斯安肯（Fergus Anckorn）的引文摘自《Remembrance 90》（哲译：90年历史回顾）网站。卡拉玛经（Kalama Sutta）的引文摘自《The Essential Teachings of Buddhism》（哲译：佛教的基本教义），编辑：布朗与奥布莱恩（Kerry Brown and Joanne O'Brien）]





# 编辑的话

## 鬼魂和奇迹皆无自性

汤姆是我以前的学生，他来自泰国东北部与寮国毗邻的小镇。不过，他在清迈大学念书。

去年夏天，汤姆的母亲召他回家，因为他的祖父因肺癌病危。换了3辆巴士，经过20个小时的车程，汤姆到家了。祖父还有气息，但仅能勉强认得孙子。隔天，祖父去世了，并在3天后火化。

根据当地习俗，家属为祖父穿上最好的衣服，并把他的手机放在口袋里。当晚，汤姆大约10时上床睡觉，而且很快就熟睡了。

不久后，汤姆的手机响了。不过，汤姆接听后，另一端并没有人，只有一串声调。他瞄了瞄拨电者的号码，竟是祖父的手机号码！接着，他发现之前的一通未接来电，也是拨自祖父的手机。

2010年9月，我和哥哥一家人吃晚餐时，告诉他们这个故事。哥哥笑了，并提醒我关于父亲的那件事。

父亲在生病期间，几乎把所有醒着的时间都花在看电视。有一天，父亲要求我买一台新的电视机给他。不过，我当时很忙，因此没有把他的要求放在心上。几天后的一个晚上，我回到家中，发现父亲有了一台新的电视机。父亲很骄傲地说，电视机是他用自己的储蓄让哥哥帮他买的。

数年后的一个晚上，父亲在睡梦中去世了。

葬礼过后，我们依照习俗邀请客人回家吃饭后才解散。大家在聊天的当儿，我决定把电视机搬到我的房里。我才走了没几步，突然一声巨响。客厅和饭厅隔开的木屏风应声倒下，将父亲的那台电视机一并扯到地上，只见满地的玻璃碎。屏风已存在好一段日子了，当时也没风。为什么会倒下呢？

我知道你在想什么。

的确，人类往往急于下结论。我们总是这么做。这就是所谓的偏见确认。我们有自己的理论，每当发生一些似乎能支持这些理论的事件时，我们就确认我们的理论。

我有一名前同事，每当他有什么好事发生，或者他不喜欢的人遇到不好的事情，他总会说“上帝是伟大的”。不过，在相反的情况，他则不会这么说。

幸好，不是所有人都这么急于下结论。

菲尔克斯安肯（Fergus Anckorn）于二战时期在新加坡沦为日军的战俘。他屡次逃过死劫，并在90多岁高龄时回溯其传奇的故事。

有一次，安肯乘坐的汽车被炸毁，那是他第一次和死亡擦肩而过。身受重伤的他被送往亚历山大医院后，一直处于时昏迷时清醒的状态。不知何故，日本人在射杀其他病患时，竟误以为他已经死了。

之后，安肯被迫到桂河（River Kwai）工作。一名日军把一个腐蚀性物质丢向他时，安肯摔进河里并差点淹死。

最匪夷所思的是，有一天安肯被押到森林里枪毙。

“我们的双眼没有被蒙上，什么都没有。我们等着子弹的到来，等了将近10分钟……我们彼此对话，例如‘为什么他们不干脆一点，子弹什么时候要射过来’等，然后他们因某种原因决定不这么做了……（过后）我们发现战争已经结束3天了。”

一名英国广播公司的记者认为，安肯一定是和上帝有协议，并问他是否笃信宗教。

“不。”安肯立刻回答。他不明白上帝为什么要放过他，而不放过其余数百万人。

看着这段采访，我对安肯就事论事、不受痛苦影响和幽默感的务实态度留下深刻印象。就如达赖喇嘛，不曾让敌人征服他的心智。如果安肯要宣称他屡次逃过死劫的连串奇迹是因为上帝的缘故，那也是无可厚非的。但事实上，安肯没有这么做才是真正的奇迹。

卡卢仁波切（Kalu Rinpoche）曾说过，奇迹是可能发生的，因为它们都是空性的。每个佛教徒都应知道，所谓空性，既是诸法因缘生、诸法因缘灭。奇迹，则不按自然的规律。他们宣称这源自于超自然力量。因此，按仁波切的说法，奇迹是不存在的，那都只是我们目前还不能够理解或解释的事件，但我们总有一天会明白。

事实上，这正是科学家看待这个世界的角度。如果科学家在面对麻风病、鼠疫等疾病，或者日食或月食等现象时，仅接受传统的解释而不追根究底，那今日的世界将会是怎么样的？

与其他宗教领袖不同，佛陀允许他的追随者质疑和提出问题，包括自己的教义。例如，在卡拉玛经（Kalama Sutra）中，佛陀肯定了卡拉玛质疑“存疑事件”的权力。

佛陀对奇迹（神通）也不屑一顾，特别是不屑以它作为吸引追随者的工具。在第20期的《极乐之程》（2006年10月-12月）的一则篇章中，卡鲁纳达萨（Y. Karunadasa）教授叙述了一起事件。

“有一天，佛陀到访那烂陀，那里的居民来到他的面前说‘尊者，这个城市……非常富裕和繁荣，有很多人。如果佛陀能创造一些奇迹（显现神通），那就太好了，这么一来，佛陀将能让许多人信奉他的宗教。’”

佛陀回答

有三种奇迹

第一种奇迹是……表演悬浮超自然行为的能力……

第二种奇迹是……类似催眠术……能够催眠他人并揭示其思想的能力

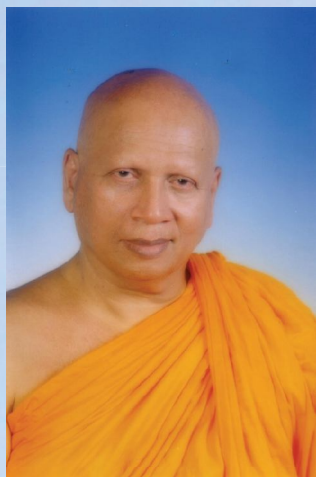
佛陀并不推荐或认可这两种奇迹……

（第三种）是教学奇迹……这纯粹是通过理性说服的方式来教导佛法……佛陀说，这是他唯一推荐和认可的奇迹。”

我并不是说鬼魂和其他超自然生命并不存在。事实上，佛陀所教导的6道中，是包括鬼魂和天人的。例如，一名天人问佛陀，他认为什么是最崇高的祝福时，佛陀推荐吉祥经（Mangala Sutta）。当一群比丘的修行被鬼魂干扰时，佛陀就教导他们慈经（Metta Sutta）。

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MICA (P) 013/10/2010



### 法师的话

如果有人问你：涅槃是否是佛教徒的终极目标？你会如何回答？

在生活中，人们有许多世俗的目标如：一个美满的家庭或一份称心的工作。但是，在宗教方面，最终目标是不同的。作为佛教徒，我们遵循佛陀的教诲。我们竭尽所能，实践这些教诲，以实现这一目标。这一目标是什么？

简单的来说，我们的最终目标是达到永恒的幸福，最平静的精神状态。在佛教中，我们有一个词来形容这种最平静精神境界——涅槃。

佛陀运用的这个巴利文术语，是指世俗苦的止息。这个词背后的基本思想是把火熄灭。到底是熄灭什么火？就是贪，嗔和痴之火。

为什么涅槃是佛教徒的终极目标？因为，它是唯一能够实现永恒的快乐或达到最平静的精神状态。在佛教中，天堂不是我们的最终目标，因为它不是永久性的。出生在天界

## 佛教徒的终极目标

的人仍然有生死轮回，迟早要面对生死。此外，他们还没有完全消除心中的烦恼。既然他们还没将火扑灭，试问在天堂如何能享有永恒的平静？这就是为什么佛陀说，佛教徒唯一值得实践的目标是涅槃。

在法句经中，佛陀说：

无火可比贪欲，  
无恶可比嗔恨，  
无苦可比五蕴，  
无乐可比寂静。

但如果有人问我：涅槃是否是佛教徒的最终目标？我会回答“是”和“不是”。

是的，因为我们肯定可以通过实践佛陀的教导，达到最彻底的心灵净化。但我也说“不”，因为一般的佛教徒不容易理解这种心灵洁净的最高境界。

在《增支部经典》，佛陀说：“明亮的，发光的，是这个心，但它由外来之污垢玷污。这，无智之一般人真正了解，所以他们未能净化心。明亮的，发光的，是这个心，因它无外来之污垢。这，有智之圣弟子真正了解，所以他们能净化心。”

由于凡夫尚未体会涅槃，这是他们所未知或不熟悉的。但是，这并不意味着涅槃的最终目标是不合逻辑或无效的。但是，想要求一般人追求一个他们不明白的目标是困难的。我们需要的是一个更简明易懂的方式来教育人们有关涅槃之境。

事实上，有些东西是一般人可以理解的，那就是他们每天所经历的苦痛或不适，何不以此东西引导他们了解涅槃呢？可以这么说吧！人生的终极目的就是为了克服这个已知的痛苦。我们必须努力摆脱苦难。

佛陀所有的教诲都是针对如何解除痛苦，正如佛陀在《中部经典》说：

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