

THE PATH OF JOY

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*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

Bhante Says

Desire - Good or Bad?

Today, I want to talk about desire. Is it good or bad?

Desire is *chanda* in Pali. It is not the same as attachment which is *tanha*.

When we talk about desire, Buddhists usually think that desire is bad. We don't even want to discuss it. We think that desire can bring about negative results especially if we do not get what we want.

Buddhism begins with impermanence, then suffering or unsatisfactoriness. Desire can cause these things. We can also find this theme in the Four Noble Truths, the idea of attachment as the cause of suffering or discomfort.

Therefore when we talk about desire, we usually think that there is no place for desire in Buddhism.

But we can look at desire in a different way.

The Buddha even talked about different kinds of desires and how to achieve those desirable things. He mentioned 10 types of desirable things. They are hard to achieve, difficult to gain but still people want them. If the Buddha was totally against desire, why would he talk about different kinds of things that we desire and how to achieve them?

The Buddha's idea was that there are 2 aspects of desire. Desire can bring happiness or it can bring suffering or discomfort. When we gain desirable things, we experience happiness. If not, we are unhappy.

Also, if we gain these desirable things after working very hard to obtain them, we worry that we may lose them. Discomfort then arises. To be aware of these things, we need wisdom. We can overcome this problem with some awareness.

So thinking that Buddhism is totally against desire and that we should not work for desirable things is not correct. We can work for desirable things but we need the wisdom to see that not all desirable things are achievable. If we have wisdom, then even when we cannot achieve the things we desire, we won't suffer.

Then again, if we have the wisdom to realise that the things we gain even after hard work are not permanent, we also won't suffer. This is the wisdom that the Buddha wanted us to realise.

The 1st desirable thing is wealth. Everyone wants to be wealthy. The Buddha asked, "*How can we achieve wealth?*"

There are 2 important qualities necessary for achieving wealth. Energy (*viriya*) and exertion. If a person can have energy or effort, wealth can be achieved but that is not enough. We also need exertion or hard work.

The Buddha also advised us to practise another quality - righteousness. We should not attain wealth at the expense of other people or other beings experiencing suffering or trouble. That is why the Buddha advised lay people to avoid certain jobs.

"These five trades, O monks, should not be taken up by a lay follower - trading in weapons, trading in living beings, trading in meat, trading in intoxicants, trading in poison."

(Anguttara Nikaya)

The 2nd desirable thing is finery, adornment or beauty. When we hear about the Buddha talking about impermanence or suffering, why should we work hard to attain beauty?

Beauty encompasses both internal and external appearance.



Internal beauty means mental development. But we must also pay attention to our external appearance. In the case of the Buddha himself, when he appeared at places, people paid special attention, kept silent when he preached and paid respect to him. It's not just because he was a great preacher or because of his words or wisdom but because he had a great personality and serene appearance. His physical appearance was very attractive. People gained wisdom by listening to the Buddha's teachings.

Lay people are attracted to adornments. That is their nature. These things are not wrong. Although they are desirable things, the Buddha did not condemn attaining them.

The 3rd quality is health. We cherish health. Maintaining our good health can sometimes be an expensive affair. In particular, Singaporeans have no great difficulty in maintaining their good health but often at a very high cost.

The Buddha mentioned that health is the greatest wealth. Without good health, life cannot be happy and peaceful. All the money in the world will not be a sufficient substitute for good health. We only need to look at the example of the late Steve Jobs, one of the richest men in the world, who died of cancer, to see how important and indispensable good health is.

To nourish health, we have to do things at the proper time. Doing things at the proper time means leading a well-organised or systematic life. During working time, a person must work. At meal times, we should eat. We should not skip lunch or dinner and continue working. As you are aware, many Singaporeans are workaholics. Generally speaking, even monks like me have a problem with this.

Some people mix their working life and home life. I personally think this is not so good. At home, we should not think so much about work but should instead attend to the needs of the family or relax.

The Buddha was a good example for us.

He had a routine, what to do early in the morning, time for meals, meetings, going out to help people outside. Even with all of these things, he had time for himself also. So the Buddha had a well-planned routine for all of his 45 years of teaching. That is why he managed to spend so much time on his activities.

The 4th desirable thing is friendship. Good friendship is desirable. It can be managed with good principles or virtues (*sila*).

Friendship is very important in life, whether spiritual or worldly. Spiritual life is 100% based on friendship. Spiritual life, which is the developing of knowledge and meditation, is not easy.



For instance, today we can meditate well but tomorrow we may not have enough energy. Owing to certain problems, we may not have a good mood for meditation. But in order to progress in meditation - or any other good practices, for that matter - we cannot afford to simply wait for our mood to be better. It can be very hard if we have to do this by ourselves. And so the best way to solve this problem is to have good friends (*kalanīyamitra*). We need good friends to encourage us to make progress in spiritual practice.

How do we have good friends? The most important quality is friendliness or not quarrelling. If we are quarrelsome, people will leave us. So we have to be free from a quarrelsome nature. We, ourselves, like to stay away from quarrelsome people

The 5th desirable thing is having a virtuous or holy life. As Buddhists, we are working for spiritual development or the attainment of enlightenment. We can achieve enlightenment but it does not come automatically. Enlightenment or freedom from defilement can only be achieved if we guard our 5 senses - eyes, ears, nose, body and mind.

We take everything into our mind with the help of these 5 senses. The problem is whether we are using our 5 senses correctly or incorrectly.

The 6th desirable thing is knowledge. How do we achieve knowledge? One important prerequisite is repetition. Constant repetition is essential.

But modern people, especially the young, tend to see repetition as very boring. However, if we don't repeat, we may forget. During the Buddha's time, people studied by heart, even in monastic life.

When I was a novice, our teacher required us to repeat the discourses. In the evenings, we were supposed to repeat the discourses. Sometimes, our teacher came to listen and check whether we were making mistakes.

But it is not just discourses. Everything we learned we had to repeat and practise. If not, our knowledge would not grow.

Wisdom is the 7th desirable thing. To gain wisdom, we have to listen carefully and question. Mere passive listening is not encouraged in Buddhism.

There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. By just listening and repeating, we can have knowledge, or the gathering of information. Nowadays, we can even use machines to do this. But this does not necessarily bring about wisdom. To acquire wisdom, we have to listen carefully and question.

To have a good Dharma teacher and to be good Dharma teachers ourselves and have a good knowledge of the Dharma, we also need another 2 qualities. These are engaging in *study* (the 8th desirable thing) and *examination* (the 9th desirable thing).

By engaging in study and examination, we attain knowledge of the Dharma. But this is not just about taking examinations. By having group learning, we can improve our Dharma knowledge or understanding.

The 10th desire is good or fortunate rebirth. In Buddhist teachings, rebirth is very important. But some people have so much fear about rebirth.

Of course, we are not perfect. Because of the mistakes we commit, we fear we may not have a good rebirth. However, I think this fear is unnecessary.

An unfortunate rebirth is mainly due to serious negative karma which we perform in our lives. So it is not right to think that just because of mistakes we tend to make, we will have a bad rebirth.

The Buddha taught us that if we live righteously, we can have a good rebirth in a heavenly realm or the human realm. Living righteously means that our lives should not be harmful to others. If we can live a harmless life or abstain from a harmful existence, we can have a good rebirth. This is not so difficult.

When we go through this list, we can see that some desirable things are worldly, whilst others are spiritual. This shows that the Buddha was not against desire *per se*. If desire is not harmful to ourselves and others, it is not negative desire. For



example, having desire to achieve knowledge or wisdom is not harmful to ourselves and others. They may even be beneficial to ourselves and others.

However, ultimately, it is important to realise, and always be mindful of, the fact that even desirable things are not permanent and being attached to them and clinging to them as if they are permanent things will only lead to suffering.

In the *Ittha Sutta*, the Buddha stressed that people who wish for desirable things such as long life or rebirth in heaven and so on should not just wish or pray for them.

'If they were to be obtained by reason of prayers or wishes, who here would lack them?' Instead, they should *'follow the path of practice leading to long life'* (or rebirth in heaven and so on). In this way, the Buddha encouraged his followers to practise morality and accumulate merit, thus laying the groundwork for desirable things to accrue.

Let me close by quoting some of the beautiful words used by the Buddha in this sutra.

*Long life, beauty, status, honor,
heaven, high birth:*

*To those who delight
in aspiring for these things
in great measure, continuously,
the wise praise heedfulness
in making merit.*

*The wise person, heedful,
acquires a two-fold welfare:
welfare in this life (and)
welfare in the next.
By breaking through to his welfare
he's called prudent (and) wise.*

Bhante B. Dhammaratana

Religious Advisor

Buddhist Library

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Vanijja Sutta: Business (Wrong Livelihood) (AN 5.177)

- translated by Thannisaro Bhikkhu.

Ittha Sutta - What is Welcome (AN 5.43)

- translated by Thannisaro Bhikkhu.



A CALL TO BE 21ST CENTURY BUDDHISTS

From June, 14 to June, 16 June 2013, I had the great fortune of attending teachings by His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama in Sydney, Australia.

His Holiness spoke on *bodhicitta* (the determination to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, including oneself) based on the text - *The Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta. Vast as the Heavens, Deep as the Sea* - written by Khunu Rinpoche.

My attendance at the Sydney teachings was wholly due to the tireless efforts and generosity of my eldest sister, Judi, who lives there. She not only arranged attendance at the teachings but also accommodation, meals and leisure activities, envisioning the visit as a long overdue reunion of her siblings scattered in Sydney, Singapore and Chiangmai.

Inspired by His Holiness' teachings, we decided, one evening after dinner, to pose a question which each of us had to answer. The question was intentionally chosen so as to require no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, just an honest and sincere response based on each person's experience.

The question was -

Do you think you are a Buddhist? If yes, why yes? If no, why not?

The first person to answer the question was my brother, Hock.

He acknowledged being a Buddhist because he was born into a Buddhist family. As a young boy, he attended Sunday school and studied Theravada Buddhism. As a consequence, he felt most at home with this school of Buddhism and, although he did not require any prompting or persuasion to attend His Holiness' teachings, he confessed that he was neither conversant nor comfortable, in general, with Tibetan Buddhism.

His wife, Shirlyn, considered herself a Buddhist because she married a Buddhist and has over the years learned more and more about this religion which she generally agreed with.

Their daughter, Si Xuan, said that she believes she is a Buddhist because both her parents are Buddhists and bring her up as such. Besides, the Buddhist teachings make sense to her.

Judi told us that she considers herself a Buddhist because the Buddha's teachings give logical answers to questions that arise from day to day. Things fall into place when viewed from this perspective and practising the Dharma makes living this life a much happier experience for her than would have been otherwise the case.

Her daughter, Sumeeta, acknowledged that she feels more aligned with this religion or philosophy called Buddhism than any others she has come into contact with thus far.

In particular, she takes comfort in the belief that the people in this lifetime, with whom she has had the closest connections, have not only been connected with her in her past lives but will continue to be connected with her in future lifetimes as well, something that her mother taught her.

Judi's son, Arvin, on the other hand, does not consider himself a Buddhist precisely because he finds it difficult to accept the Buddhist notions of karma and rebirth even though he appreciates the Buddhist teachings on compassion and loving kindness.

Judi's friend, Greg, said that he does not consider himself a Buddhist although he finds that Buddhism, stripped of its apparent ritual and mystery, is fundamentally a very sensible philosophy.



He is comfortable with his own life-ethic without feeling the need to adopt a philosophy embraced by another or a group of others.

And my youngest brother, Calvin, said that it was the Buddhist fundamental principle of non-violence that attracted him to Buddhism and convinced him to commit himself to the practice of the Dharma.

Finally, it was my turn to answer the question.

I said that I regard myself a Buddhist because I find that what the Buddha taught more than 2,500 years ago is no less relevant or true today than it was in 6th century BCE India.

People then suffered because of greed, hatred and delusion. We, living in the 21st century, suffer no less today from greed, hatred and delusion despite the incredible advances made by science and technology over the centuries. Ideology, corruption and hatred today continue to spur violence and ill-will all over the world and block resolution of issues which could have been peacefully resolved much earlier if compassion, loving kindness, wisdom and equanimity had prevailed instead.

In particular, I find that the *Three Characteristics of Existence* taught by the Buddha (impermanence, suffering and non-self) truly define the realities of the world in which I live.

In Sydney, His Holiness urged his audience to be '21st century Buddhists', a theme he has consistently stressed over the last few years. And so not only should Buddhists shun superstition and blind faith, they should check to ensure that they

constantly have their feet firmly grounded in reality.

His Holiness advised Buddhists to reject any teachings, even those found in Buddhist texts and firmly held for centuries, if they contradict what has been proved beyond doubt by science to be the case.

A famous example given by His Holiness on previous occasions is the idea of Mount Sumeru being the centre of the universe, as taught or referred to in some classical Buddhist texts. This idea is obviously contrary to the nature of the universe as proved by science and so, urged His Holiness, is rightly rejected.

The reason that His Holiness is able to make this call is that the entirety of the Buddha's teachings, whether taught in the Theravada, Zen, Pure Land or Tibetan tradition, without exception, rest on 2 foundations which, by their very nature, not only permit free enquiry but demand it.

These foundations are the wisdom of emptiness (the idea that phenomena are impermanent and constantly in a state of flux, thereby lacking any stable or unchanging, permanent core that we can point to as their essence) and dependent origination (the idea that phenomena are mutually conditioned and serve as both causes and effects). An enquiring mind is so fundamental to the study of these quintessentially Buddhist concepts that it is impossible to appreciate them without asking questions.

His Holiness' call also echoes the Buddha's famous advice to the Kalamas, a group of non-Buddhists who were confused by the contradictory teachings preached by visiting religious teachers.

In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha said -

'It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.

... Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them.'

Amazing as the *Kalama Sutta* is, especially when we recall that it was taught in a conservative society like India in the 6 century BCE, the Buddha in fact went even further than that.

In the *Alagaddupama Sutta: The Snake Simile*, the Buddha compared his teachings to a raft which a person might use to cross the river of suffering. Having successfully crossed this river, what should he then do with this raft? Having seen its usefulness, should the man then carry the raft over his shoulder and bring it along with him?

"What do you think about it, O monks? Will this man by acting thus, do what should be done with a raft?"

"No, Lord"

"How then, monks, would he be doing what ought to be done with a raft? Here, monks, having got across and arrived at the other shore, the man thinks: 'This raft, indeed, has been very helpful to me. Carried by it, and laboring with hands and feet, I got safely across to the other shore. Should I not pull it up now to the dry land or let it float in the water, and then go as I please?' By acting thus, monks, would that man do what should be done with a raft.

In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to.

You, O monks, who understand the Teaching's similitude to a raft, you should let go even (good) teachings, how much more false ones!"

Thus dogma and attachment to dogma have no place in Buddhism.

Each of us may have a different response to the '*Buddhist or not*' question. But whether we think we are Buddhists or not is less important than whether we lead or try to lead good lives in accordance with universally accepted moral values such as non-violence, obeying the laws of the land, tolerance, inclusiveness and love of peace. So, if you will pardon me, here's another question.

When you wake up tomorrow morning, which kind of world would you rather wake up to? A world where everyone thinks he belongs to the same religion but pays lip service to the teachings of that religion, complying with them only when it profits him in some way and cherry picking only those that he can profitably comply with? Or would you prefer a world in which people of various religions, or none at all, practise non-violence, compassion and tolerance?

To me, the answer is obvious. Thus, it was personally gratifying for me to note that His Holiness also gave a fully attended public talk in Australia on *Beyond Religion : Ethics for a Whole World*.

I hasten to add though that this in no way implies that I would cease being a Buddhist any time soon. I still need to practise the Dharma in the best way I can.

It takes a fool to carry a raft on his shoulder even though he has no further use for it. But, speaking only for myself, and as a Buddhist, I would be an even greater fool if I were to throw the raft away when I have yet to cross the river of suffering.

As always, I wish you pleasant reading.

Editor

Chwee Beng

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Kalama Sutta: The Instruction to the Kalamas Translated by Soma Thera. (AN 3.65).

Alagaddupama Sutta: The Snake Simile Translated by Nyanaponika Thera. (MN 22).

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Readers Write

Dear Editor

I refer to your Editorial, *The Magic of Emptiness* in Issue 41 of *The Path of Joy*.

On page 7, you wrote: *Thus when we say a cup is empty, we don't mean that there is no cup, just that the cup has no contents.*

Please note that the cup and its contents are separate objects and both would be empty of inherent existence. Therefore a cup only has dependent existence.

So when we say that a cup or any other object is empty, we simply mean that it is empty of inherent existence and the cup is empty regardless of whether it has contents or not.

If you use the cup as an example, you can look at it in terms of its constituent parts and then come to the position that has no existence apart from its parts. So similarly a chariot is empty regardless of whether there is a rider in it or not. So to avoid confusion, we can simply say that an object is empty of inherent existence instead of just saying that it is empty.

Thank for your attention.

Regards
Kwok Wai



Editor's Response

Hi Kwok Wai

Thank you for your email.

When I made the statement - *When we say a cup is empty, we don't mean that there is no cup, just that the cup has no contents* - I was explaining how the word 'empty' came to be used in relation to the term 'emptiness', using the word in its conventional, everyday meaning. I was not trying to explain the absolute nature of the cup or its contents.

Thus in an everyday, conventional situation, if you were to order a cup of coffee in a coffee shop and the waiter brings you a cup without any coffee (that is, with no contents), you wouldn't say to him -

'Why do you bring me a cup, which is empty of inherent existence, with no coffee, which is also empty of inherent existence?'

You would simply say - *'Why do you bring me an empty cup?'*

In other words, there is no need to refer to causes and conditions and inherent existence when we are speaking in a conventional, everyday context.

If the sentence is read in its proper context, the question of confusion does not arise.

Thank you so much for your interest in POJ and for taking the time and trouble to write in.

Chwee Beng
Editor

VESAK DAY 2013

Date : May 24, 2013

Venue : Buddhist Library

Photo Credit : Yew Beng



BL EVENT

MOTHER'S DAY 2013

Date : May 12, 2013

Venue : Hotel Royal @ Queens

Photo Credit: Yew Beng



BL EVENT

TALK ON 'CARING FOR OUR ELDERS'

by DR. NG WAI CHONG

Date: March 29, 2013

Venue: Buddhist Library

Photo Credit: Yew Beng





Interview

with

Venerable Wiloye Wimalajothi

Buddhist Library (May 2013)

Interviewer and Photographer: Jono

What is the proper role of rites and rituals in Buddhism?

There are two related words in Pali, *carita* and *varita*. In this context, *carita* means customs while *varita* means avoidance of negative actions. To answer this question, you have to understand both terms.

In relation to *carita* or customs, we have to practise positive actions. In relation to *varita* or avoidance, we have to avoid negative actions.

The Buddha, in one of his sermons, said, "*Don't do bad activities, do good things and develop your mind. This is every Buddha's teaching.*"

What are the good things? We have to show respect to the parents, teachers, elderly people and siblings. First, respect others. Second, be obedient. Third, help the elderly and parents. This is especially necessary in a fast ageing society. Many elderly people cannot function well physically so we have to help them and protect them.

Underlying rites and rituals, there is a deeper meaning.

When we offer to the Buddha drinks, candles, flowers, and the like, it is not just mere offering. By undertaking the physical action of offering, we practise generosity, respect, loving kindness and other good qualities. Thus, we practise the core teachings of the Buddha. When we offer flowers, we have to try and realise *anatta* or non-self.

While the Buddha is not around physically anymore, we can develop reverential feeling, loving kindness, generosity and finally realising *anatta*, *anicca* (impermanence) and *dukkha* (suffering) in carrying out his teachings.

We should not merely offer prayer and expect to go to heaven, get more wealth or power. Owing to fear, some people worship many things, like trees, the sun, the moon and the river. As Buddhists, we don't do that. We carry out rites and rituals with wisdom.

Does the water pouring ceremony actually promote spiritual progress?

It is not merely pouring water. When we pour water in the water pouring ceremony, it serves to help others. We don't know where our departed relatives are born after their death. According to Buddhism, there are 31 realms. Anyone can be reborn in the deva realm, Brahma realm, animal realm or human realm.

There is one realm called *paradatuppajivi* or misery plane. For those who are born in this realm, they expect our merits or our help. When they get our merits or help, this can change their lives. It is our duty, according to the *Sigalovada Sutta*, after our parents have passed away, to observe this custom and transfer merits to them. The water pouring custom can also help us practise generosity, develop compassion and cultivate loving kindness. Therefore, the basis of the custom is compassion and generosity.

Should women be fully ordained as Buddhist nuns?

In Theravada countries, like Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, there has been no fully ordained nun order for more than 300 years though we know in the Anuradhapura period, there were some *Bhikkhunis* who were fully ordained. Yet, after the Anuradhapura period, the *Bhikkhuni Sasana* disappeared owing to some internal problems.

Likewise, during the Kandy period in Sri Lanka, there were no fully ordained monk orders. Then the Sri Lankan King at that time sent some delegates to Thailand and requested the Thai King to bring some fully ordained monks to Sri Lanka to ordain the local monks and to re-establish the *Bhikkhu Sasana*. The Thai King agreed to help. In addition, some high ordained monks from Burma also established *Bhikkhu Sasana* in Sri Lanka because there were existing fully ordained monks in Thailand and Burma.

But this is not the case with the *Bhikkhuni Sasana*. The King in Sri Lanka at that time did not re-establish the *Bhikkhuni* order.

Now we can find some *Bhikkhunis* in Sri Lanka but most monks and scholars disagree that they went through high ordination. In Thailand and Burma, ten preceptors wear white clothes but in Sri Lanka they wear yellow robes.

Can someone still be called Buddhist if he or she does not believe in karma & rebirth?

As Buddhists, we have to understand the doctrines of karma and rebirth but we can't say everything happens because of karma. The Buddha also said there are 5 factors that determine our lives and karma is only one of them. Calamities like the tsunami are not due to one's individual karma.

We read of Buddhist monks being involved in politics from time to time. Should they?

Monks should not be directly involved in politics. But they can help the king or ministers by offering good advice on how to help and protect the people in accordance with the Dharma, like how to protect the environment and animals.

Ven Wiloye Wimalajothi is a highly qualified and popular Dharma teacher and currently teaches Pali, sutra study and meditation courses at BL.



POJ EXTRA!!!

From time to time, we receive articles which we are unable to accommodate in the usual POJ Newsletter but, which, nevertheless, may be of interest to some readers. We have therefore decided to publish them in BL's website. Readers who wish to read *Mindfulness - Spiritual Cultivation* vs. *Secular Applications* by Ven. Fa Xun, may visit BL's website at

<http://www.buddhilib.org.sg/>.

Editor

Interview with Carmen Mensing

by Email

The Art of Thangka Painting

What made you choose thangka drawing/painting? Was it your interest in Buddhism or art?



My interest in art has always been there. As a little girl I was always drawing, so after high school it was a logical step to go to art school; where I later graduated as a graphic designer.

From an early age I was interested in Buddhism as well, but really started reading more about it during art school.

I visited centres from the different Buddhist traditions and followed several meditation retreats (*vipassana /Lam Rim*) before I finally took refuge in Tibetan Buddhism.

I was also interested in Buddhist art and its meanings, especially after a trip to the wonderful monasteries in Ladakh, Northern India.

So, to my great surprise, one day I saw that the Buddhist centre I visited offered a weekend course in thangka drawing. I never knew this was actually something a lay person could learn!

That weekend I met my teacher, Andy Weber, and I became totally 'hooked' on thangka drawing & painting. Then it grew from there.

What are the difficulties of learning thangka and what advice would you give to a beginner?

I think the biggest difficulty is thinking 'I cannot do it' or 'I'm not good enough' which is actually an ego-based emotion. Try to let it go. It's not about the result but about what you experience on the way.

During the years I've been teaching, I've experienced that even if you have no drawing experience, with meditation, concentration, the grid patterns we use and the help of the Buddhas, everybody is able to create a wonderful piece of art.

Just try it! You will be astonished.

Is there such a thing as fusion art for thangkas? Is there any difference in thangka painting when done by a westerner?

There are many people making a kind of modern fusion-buddha-art, but in my teachings and the lineage I come from, we like to pass on the thangka tradition in the traditional way, as I think it's important to preserve it for future generations.

***'When you paint a Buddha,
you're painting your own mind'***

Besides this, it's not just a drawing or painting but a full practice: a combination of meditation, Buddhist philosophy and iconography.

As far as differences in paintings created by easterners/ westerners are concerned, I noticed they can be mainly found in the faces. The Green Tara face of my teacher (a westerner who studied with a Tibetan) looks still very much Tibetan. But my teacher says the face of the Green Tara that I painted looks western. Not something that I intended to do; it just happened that way, and that's fine.

Through the ages, Buddhism and Buddhist art have shown their ability to adapt to different countries and cultures in an organic way, without losing the essence of the teachings and tradition.

As the lamas say, *"When you paint a Buddha, you're painting your own mind."*

So you paint what you are familiar with. Sounds quite logical, right?

Are the dyes used for thangka painting natural or synthetic or a mixture of both? Have they changed over the centuries? Is there any health issue with regard to handling and using the dyes for an extended period of time?

For many centuries, the dyes *thangka* painters were using came from pigments made out of stones, minerals and plants. Now we know some of those dyes were very poisonous, but centuries ago they didn't know that. There have been reports of painters (not only *thangka* painters) who died from licking their paint brushes (to give them a fine point), not knowing this way each time a bit of poison entered their body. One example is the very poisonous arsenic sulfide, which was the basis for yellow pigment.

During the past 30 - 50 years or so, this has very much changed. Nowadays hardly anyone paints with the traditional pigments any more as they are very expensive and difficult to make. A small piece of stone, for example, takes many days of grinding. These days most *thangka* painters choose to go to the art store and buy gouache paint (colors are most similar to the traditional pigments) or acrylics from a good quality brand.

Can you give our readers some idea of the standard requirements of a traditional thangka e.g. size, theme, colour scheme etc. Have these changed over time?

The subjects of a *thangka* are almost endless. In Tibetan Buddhism, there are many different Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Lamas, mandalas and symbols. Almost all have their own grid-patterns we work with. These are the traditional measurements that we use to create a Buddha, and which

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ensures the continuation in the tradition. The size can be as small or big as you prefer.

As for the color scheme, you are very free in a lot of ways, but there are some restrictions like, for example, the colour of a Buddha (a Green Tara obviously cannot be painted purple!). This is because everything on a *thangka* is there for a reason, and has a meaning.

Different painting styles can be found over the centuries but also within the different Tibetan traditions.

When people acquire thangkas whether for aesthetic or religious purposes, what should they do to maintain these art pieces at their pristine condition bearing in mind, in particular, that in a tropical country like Singapore, humidity is a major problem.

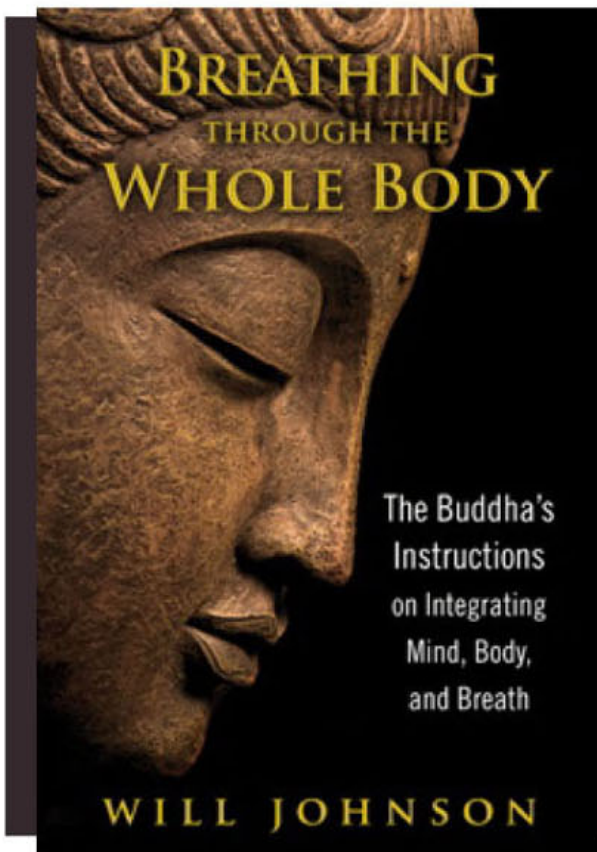
To be honest I don't know much about the best way for the conservation of *thangkas* in a humid country. It will also be different for a hot or cold humid country as the following example shows.

A student of mine from Venice, Italy, had the problem that one of her *thangkas* started to show some mould after 2 - 3 years, especially on blue and green colors. Venice is very humid because it's built on salt water which settles in the bricks. After noticing this, she made sure the *thangka* did not touch the wall directly anymore and she started to heat up the (dark and cold) room some more.

If you've had *thangkas* for many years and they are still fine, there's no problem.

If the *thangka* shows signs of humidity after a few years, you might want to consult a conservator of a museum.





Book Review

Reviewed by Venerable Wimalajothi

Breathing Through the Whole Body

by Will Johnson

Published by Inner Traditions (2012)

87 pages

Will Johnson, a well-known western Buddhist scholar, specially researched on the role of the body through western approaches in spiritual practice. Holding an art and archaeology degree, he founded the Institute of Embodiment Training with the aim of building a link between western psychotherapy and eastern meditation practices. So far, he has written several books on the applicability of meditation. *The Posture of Meditation* and *The Spiritual Practices of Rumi* are some of his significant contributions.

Breathing through the Whole Body is the latest contribution of Will Johnson to the Buddhist world. The text provides a comprehensive understanding of mindfulness of breathing meditation (*Ānāpānāsati*) based on the Buddha's essential teachings on mindfulness of breathing.

In Part One, the author gives a general instruction as to how we can begin this practice. The author illustrates with his own experience. Practitioners aiming for spiritual attainment should find an appropriate environment and prepare themselves well on the basis of alignment, relaxation, and resilience. Without these fundamental requirements, there is no chance of achieving any spiritual improvement. Therefore, the instructions are really important.

In the rest of the text, the author emphasises how we can practise breathing through the whole body. We should feel the breathing and should observe the appearing and disappearing of each breath and the nature of breathing properly. The author advises practitioners not to be disappointed when they lose concentration as this is normal. He explains that mindfulness of breathing helps to establish a disciplined and subtle mind. Awareness of breathing means awareness of everything. It neutralises our mind from too much rejoicing, gladness or sorrow.

The text ends with the topic of *Turning the Wheel*. Here, the author explains how mindfulness in breathing can help practitioners achieve spiritual attainment. The text is one of the most useful texts which provide deep and complete analysis of breathing meditation. Mindfulness of breathing is the most popular kind of meditation in Buddhism. Taking the breath as a meditation object is what one can apply in any moment. Therefore, understanding breathing meditation is really important whether we practise tranquillity or insight meditation. The Buddha said -

"Monks, this concentration on mindfulness of breathing being developed and repeated, peaceful, sublime, being cool without any sprinkle of water and abiding in happiness, unwholesome and evil deeds (that) occur will be subdued and will vanish" .

From the above quotation, we can realise the importance of mindfulness of breathing. That's why we need to read and understand this book.

Outlook - poj 42 x
Microsoft Corporation [US] http://www.buddhlib.org.sg.

Outlook | v (+) New Reply | Delete Archive Junk | Sweep | Move to | Categories | ...

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Drafts 46

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Quick views

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Photos 1

New category

Readers Write

致编辑

我以第41刊的编辑语录《空性的魅力》为参考。

在第7页中，您写道：“所以当我们说杯子是空的，我们不是指没有杯子，而是杯子里没有东西。”

我想指出杯子与其内容是两个不同的个体，而且都不实而存在。故此，杯子是因缘和合而成的。

所以，当我们说杯子或其他物体是空性的，我们纯粹是指它无实质，而且无论杯子里是否装着东西，它的本质都是空性的。

如果以杯子为例，你可以从构成杯子的各部分来看，去了解它除了这些部分以外，并无实际存在。

同样的，不论战车是否有骑士，它都是空性的。所以为了避免混淆，与其说物品是空的，不如简单地说它空无实质。

感谢您的阅读。

Regards
Kwok Wai

Editor's Response

Kwok Wai 您好，

感谢您的来邮。

当我说“所以当我们说杯子是空的，我们不是指没有杯子，而是杯子里没有东西。”时，我是以生活化的字眼来解释‘空’与‘空性’的关连。而并非想要解释杯或其内容的真实性质。

因此，以世俗的情况来说，如果你在咖啡店叫了一杯咖啡而服务生端上的是一杯没有咖啡的杯（也就是空杯子），你不会对他说——

“为什么你端上一个自性空的杯子，里面也没有自性空的咖啡？”

你会直接说，“你为什么端上一个空杯子？”

换句话说，平时当我们在交谈时，无须论及因缘与自性空。

若阅读句子时也适当地考量其上下文，那混淆的情况就不会产生。

感谢您对本刊的支持，并且抽空电邮赐教。

Chwee Beng

编辑

<http://joyeditor@gmail.com/#>

明天早上你起床时，你希望醒在什么样的世界？是一个所有人认为大家都属于同一个宗教，但都对该宗教的教义只是敷衍了事、只有在某方面会利益自己的时候才依教奉行、只挑选有利于己的教条的世界？还是一个大家属于各种不同宗教，甚至不属于任何宗教，却都实践非暴力、慈悲和宽容的世界？

对我而言，答案是明显的。因此，尊者在澳洲也以《跨越宗教——新世界的道德》为主题，向满座观众进行演讲，让我个人感到非常欣慰。

我必须澄清，这并不意味我会停止做一个佛教徒。我还得尽我所能好好修行。

傻瓜会继续将不再用得着的木筏扛在肩上。不过，就个人而言，身为佛教徒，如果尚未渡过痛苦之河就把木筏丢弃，那我才是真正的傻瓜。

祝阅读愉快！

编者

Chwee Beng

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17



《做21世纪的佛教徒》

2013年6月14日—16日，我有幸在澳洲悉尼聆听第14世达赖喇嘛尊者弘法。

尊者以咕嘎仁波切的著作《广如天，深似海——宝炬论菩提心赞》讲授菩提心（为利益一切众生，包括自己，而发愿证悟之心）。

我之所以能在悉尼听法，完全要归功于我大姐Judi的慷慨与坚持。大姐住在悉尼，不仅为我们安排了参加听法，还替我们打点了住宿、三餐以及娱乐活动，准备把这次的行程办成一次我们散落在悉尼、新加坡、清迈的兄弟姐妹的久别重聚。

参加尊者的法会使我们深受启发，于是一天晚餐后，我们决定提出一个每个人都必须回答的问题。我们特意选了一个并没有对错的问题，大家只需凭个人的经验老实真诚地作答。

问题是：

你认为自己是佛教徒吗？为什么是，又为什么不是？

第一个回答的是我的弟弟Hock。

他认为自己是佛教徒，因为他出生于一个佛教家庭。他从小就上周日佛学班，研读南传佛法课程，所以对南传佛教最为熟悉。虽然他并不需要任何劝说或鼓励去参加尊者的法会，但他坦言，整体而言对于藏传佛教，他既不熟悉也不相应。

他妻子Shirlyn自认是佛教徒，因为她嫁了个佛教徒，并且数年来对于佛教逐渐有了更多了解，也大体同意佛教的观点。

他们的女儿Si Xuan相信自己是佛教徒，因为双亲都是佛教徒，并且以佛教思想养育她。何况，她也很认同佛法。

Judi说她自认是佛教徒，因为日常生活中出现的问题，佛法都能予以合理的解答。如果从这个角度去观察事情，很多问题就能明朗化，并且，修学佛法也让她这一生活得更快乐。

她女儿Sumeeta觉得相较于其他她所接触过的宗教或哲学，佛教是她感到最相应的。

她母亲告诉她，这一生和她有最密切关系的人，不但上辈子和她有缘，而且以后的轮回当中也会和她有缘。这让她特别感到欣慰。

Judi的儿子Arvin则不认为自己是佛教徒，原因正是因为他很难接受佛教中“业”和“轮回”的理念，尽管他能认同佛教慈心和悲心的教诲。

Judi的朋友Greg认为自己不是佛教徒，但是他觉得佛法除去了表面的仪式和神秘色彩，根本上是个很合理的哲学。他对于自己的人生道德观感到自在，不觉得有必要采纳其他人信奉的哲学。

我的小弟Calvin则说，吸引他接触佛法的是佛法非暴力的根本教义，这也是让他决定修学佛法的原因。

最后轮到我回答问题了。

我认为自己是佛教徒，因为我觉得虽然相隔2500年，佛陀在公元前6世纪的教诲，直至今日一样实用。

当时的人们因为贪、嗔、痴而痛苦。今天，活在21世纪的我们，尽管经过数世纪不可思议的科技发展，依然因贪、嗔、痴而痛苦。今天，全世界的人们依然被贪念、贪污、嗔恨所驱动，产生敌意、引发暴力，造成许多问题无法得到解决。如果我们以慈心、悲心、智慧、平等心来面对问题，那么这些问题就能更早地和平解决。

尤其是佛陀三法印（无常、苦、无我）的教诲，为我所生存的世界给予了真实的阐述。

在悉尼，尊者呼吁听众当‘21世纪的佛教徒’。这也是他数年来不停强调的主题。佛教徒不仅应该摒弃迷信与盲信，还应该时时警惕，确保自己一直都看清事实，脚踏实地。

因此，尊者劝告佛教徒，就算是数世纪以来记载于佛教经典里的教义，如果经科学确凿证实是错误的论点，就不该接受。

尊者以往举过的有名的例子，就是一些佛教经典里提出须弥山是宇宙中心之说。尊者说，这很明显与科学研究所证实的宇宙自然规律相违，因此不应接受。

尊者之所以能如此呼吁，是因为整个佛教的教义，不论是南传、禅宗、净土或藏传，都毫无例外地奠定于两个基础，而这两个基础在本意上，非但允许、而且要求佛弟子质问探究教理。

第一个基础是空性智慧，也就是所有现象皆是无常，都不停地在变化当中，因此都没有一个找得到的稳定不变的恒常本质。第二个基础是缘起观，也就是所有现象皆互相起作用，既是因也是果。要学习佛法，就必须有一颗不停地质问探究的心，否则就不可能真正体会佛法的精髓。

尊者也以佛陀予以卡拉玛人的著名的教诲劝导我们。卡拉玛人是一群非佛教徒，他们为来访的各种不同宗教导师所提出的相互违背的教法感到困惑。在《卡拉玛经》里，佛陀说：

卡拉玛人！汝等所惑是当然，所疑是当然，有惑之处，定会起疑。卡拉玛人！汝等勿信风说；勿信传说；勿信臆说；勿信于藏经之教相合之说；勿信基于寻思者；勿信基于理趣者；勿信熟虑于因相者；虽说是与审虑忍许之见相合亦勿予信；说者虽堪能亦勿予信；虽说此沙门是我之师亦勿予信之。

卡拉玛人！若汝等只自觉一此法是不善，此法是有罪，此法是智者之所诃毁者。若将此法圆满、执取之即能引来无益与苦一则卡拉玛人！汝等于是时应断（彼）！

卡拉玛人！若汝等只自觉一此法是善，此法是无罪，此法是智者之所称赞者。若将此法圆满、执取之即能引来益与乐一则卡拉玛人！其时应具足而住之。

《卡拉玛经》是在公元前6世纪保守的印度社会所传授，这已十分不可思议，但是佛陀的进步思想不止于此。

在《中部·蛇喻经》里，佛陀用木筏来比喻他的教法。一个人可利用木筏渡痛苦之河，但渡河后，他应该如何处置木筏？这个人体会到了木筏的好处，是否应该把它扛在肩上带着走？

“比丘啊！你们认为如何？此人如此处置木筏，是否恰当？”

“不，世尊。”

“那么，当如何处置木筏？既渡彼岸，此人若想：这木筏确实对我帮助甚大。我乘着它，凭着自己手足之力，安然渡河。我何不将它拖上陆地，或任它浮于水上，继续上路？比丘，如此处置木筏，甚为恰当。”

“比丘啊，同样的，我教之法，如同木筏，乃渡河之用，非执取之用。”

“比丘啊，若明了我教之法犹如木筏，则应知正法也当舍弃，何况非法？”

由此可见，佛法不讲求教条以及对教条的盲信。

我们每个人对于“是不是佛教徒”的问题都有不同的回应。不过，与我们是是否遵循着普遍的道德观，如非暴力、国家法律、忍让、包容、爱与和平的观念生活相比较，我们是否自认为佛教徒并不那么重要。请容我再提出一个问题。

有些人将工作和家庭生活混淆了。在家时，我们不该想太多工作的事，反而该把精神投入在家庭所需，并且尽量放松自己。

佛陀是我们的好榜样。

他的生活有规律——早晨做什么，几点用餐、聚众、出去帮助他人。即使如此，他还是有时间留给自己。因此，佛陀过着四十五年的有条有理、弘扬佛法的生活，所以他能够有充分的时间放在佛法事业上。

第四个令人欲求的是友情。良好的友情是值得追求的。通过优良的原则或持戒可维持友谊。无论是宗教或是世俗方面，友情在我们的生活上都是重要的。由于培养知识和禅修的生活不容易，因此宗教生活百分百仰赖友谊。

举例，今天我们能打坐得很好，但明天未必有精神坐得好。也许因为某些烦恼导致心情不适于打坐。如要在禅修或其它修行有所进步，我们不能只是坐着等待心情的恢复平静。自己一个人去面对可能很困难，最好有善友的帮忙。在修行的道路上，我们须要善友的鼓励以求进步。

我们该如何结交善友？结交善友最重要的条件是友善，或是不爱与人们争执。我们若是喜欢争执，身边的人会离去。因此我们应当远离争执的本性。我们本身也不喜欢亲近喜爱争执的人。

第五个令人欲求的是殊胜的人生或是具德的人生。身为佛陀的弟子，我们努力地让心灵成长和朝着证悟的方向前进。我们可以证悟，但不可能不劳而获。要达到证悟或是解脱于染垢，惟有透过守护眼、耳、鼻、舌、身这五种感官（五根）。

我们透过五根去理解所有的事物，关键在于是否有正确地使用它们。

第六个令人欲求的是知识。我们要如何获取知识？其中一项先决条件是重复练习。必须不断地重复。

但是，现代人尤其年轻的一辈，往往对重复练习感到无趣。若是不复习，就会忘记。在佛陀的时代，人们都是用心复习，就连寺里的僧加也如此。

当我还是沙弥时，师父要我们复诵教法。每个黄昏我们都必须复诵教法。有时师父会来聆听，并检查复诵是否无误。

不单是教法，我们所学的一些事物，都应当复习。否则，知识是不会增长的。

第七个令人欲求的是智慧。为了获取智慧，我们应当仔细聆听与思考。佛教不鼓励人们仅懂得聆听。

知识与智慧是有差异的。单纯的聆听与复习，能让我们累积知识或是收集到资讯。现在，透过机器也能达到此目的。可是这并不会开启我们的智慧。为了开启智慧，应当仔细聆听与思考。

为了寻获或成为具德的师父，并且深悉佛法知识，我们还当具备两种特质。它们是修（修学）《第八个欲求》和思（思考或探讨）《第九个欲求》。

透过修与思，我们能获得佛法知识。这里提到的思不是指某种考试或测验。透过群体的修学，能让我们增长佛法知识，或是加深对它的理解。

第十个令人欲求的是投生善道。轮回是非常重要的佛教教义，可是人们往往畏惧轮回。

当然我们都不完美。因为所犯下的罪业，我们害怕不能投生善处。可是，我觉得畏惧是没必要的。

投生恶趣最主要的原因是因为我们造了极大的恶业。因此当我们以为平时所犯的小错就会导致投生恶趣，这想法是不正确的。



佛陀教过我们若合乎正道的活着，就能够投生善处（天道或人道）。合乎正道是指我们不去伤害其他的众生。我们若能够诸恶不做，就能够投生善道。这并不太难。

当我们回顾这十种欲望时，会发现有些欲望是世俗的，有些是出世间的。这证明佛陀并不反对欲望。倘若欲望不会伤害到自己和其他众生，那就不是负面的欲望。比如说，欲求获取知识与智慧并不会伤害到自己和其他众生，相反地，它还可能自利与利他。

最终，我们应当理解与紧记，这些欲望都是无常的。倘若执着，认为它们是恒常不变的东西，将会带来痛苦。

在Ittha（“所欲求的”）经里，佛陀强调了，如若想要得到某些欲望，比如投生善道，我们不能单靠祈愿或祈祷。

《如果只是透过祈愿或祈祷就能获得，我们怎可能还会缺少什么呢？人们应当通过正确的修持，以达到所欲求的长寿或投生天道。佛陀鼓励弟子们合乎正道的活着，并不断地累积福德与资粮，从而为获取所欲求的东西奠定基础。

最后，让我用这部经典的一些教法来终结。

如若想得到，
长寿，端庄的容貌，名誉，与荣耀
天道，善趣。
智者推崇广造善业。

广造善业的智者将得到现世与来世的福报，
如此累积福报，此人是谨慎与理智的。

达摩拉达那法师
宗教顾问
新加坡佛教图书馆

参考资料：

Vanijja Sutta（暂译：买卖经）：Business
（Wrong Livelihood）（AN 5.177）－坦尼沙罗比丘译
（Thannisaro Bhikkhu）
Ittha Sutta（暂译：所欲求经）－What is Well-
come（AN 5.43）－坦尼沙罗比丘译
（Thannisaro Bhikkhu）



法师开示

欲望—是好，还是坏？

今天我想探讨关于欲望。它是好，还是坏？

“欲望”在巴利文称为“参答”，它与在巴利文称为“谭哈”的“贪爱”是不一样的。

当我们谈到欲望时，佛教徒总会认为欲望是不好的。我们根本不想谈论它。我们认为欲望是会带来不良的果报，特别是当我们得不到所想要的。

佛教首先讲无常，然后阐述痛苦或不满。欲望能导致这些。我们也能在四圣谛里发现这个主题：贪爱是痛苦之因。

所以当我们谈到欲望时，我们往往都会认为欲望在佛教里是不能被接受的。

但是我们是能够在另外一个角度去看待欲望的。

佛陀论及不同种类的欲望和如何去达成某些欲望。他谈到十种可取之物。它们虽然难实现、难获得，但人们仍然想要得到。如果佛陀完全否定欲望，那他为何还提起各种我们想要的东西和如何去获得它们呢？

佛陀的想法是，欲望有两面；它能带来快乐，也能带来痛苦或不安。当我们获得所想要的东西时，我们感到欢喜。当我们得不到时，我们却感到不乐。

此外，如果我们是通过非常努力才获得我们所想要的东西时，我们往往会担心失去它，不安的感受就会接着升起。这些，我们须要智慧去察觉，而拥觉知能让我们克服这问题。

因此，认为佛教是完全反对拥有欲望以及我们不该追求所想要的东西，这个想法是不正确的。我们可以为想要的东西努力，但是须要有智慧地清楚知道，不是所有我们想要的东西都能实现或获得。如果我们有智慧，当得不到所想要的东西时，就不会感到痛苦。

再说，如果有足够的智慧认识到，即使经过艰苦的努力所获得的东西也不是恒长的，我们就不会感到痛苦。这就是佛陀所希望我们能够觉悟到的智慧。

首个令人欲求的是财富。人人都想要富裕。佛陀问：“我们该如何获得财富？”

要获得财富必须要具备两种特质—精力（精神和体力）和努力。如果一个人有精力或肯尝试，财富是可得的，但这还不够，我们还要具备努力。

佛陀也劝导我们要培养另一种品德—正义。我们不该为了获得财富，而导致他人或其他的众生经历痛苦或麻烦。因此，佛陀劝导在家众要远离某种职业。

“比丘众，有五种行业在家众是该避免的一武器买卖、人口买卖、肉食买卖、酒精买卖、毒品买卖。

（增支部）

第二个令人欲求的是精致优雅的服装和装饰或美貌。我们常听佛陀教导无常或痛苦，那我们为何要去努力争取这些呢？

美包括内在和外在的显现。

内在美指的是心理的培育和长养，但我们也该注意自己的外表。如同佛陀，当他出现在某个地方时，人们都会格外注意，保持宁静听他宣说佛法和他敬仰他。这不单只是因为佛陀是一位导师或因为他的语、言和智慧，而是因为他拥有优良的品德和庄严素净的外表。他的外貌非常有吸引力。人们听了佛陀的教导，才能获得智慧。

在家众容易被外表吸引。这是他们的天性，也并没有什么不对。虽然这些是引起欲望的事物，但佛陀并没有谴责追求外表的人。

第三个令人欲求的是健康。我们珍惜健康。有时候，维持身体健康是一件非常昂贵的事。特别是在新加坡，人们要保持健康并不难，但却需要付出很高的代价。

佛陀提到健康就是最大的财富。没有了健康，生活就不会快乐和平静。世界上所有的钱财都不足以代替健康。我们只须以已故的史蒂夫乔布斯为例，他虽是世界首富之一，但也不免死于癌症，所以健康是至关重要的。

为了健康，我们必须在适当的时候做适当的事情。这意思指的是过一个有条有理、有规律的生活。在工作的时候，必须工作，在吃饭的时候，该吃饭。我们不该跳过午餐，继续工作。如你所知，很多新加坡人是工作狂。一般来说，即使身为僧侣的我也有同样的问题。

