

# The Art of Living: Houston & Dallas



Venerable Master Chin Kung

The Art  
of Living :  
Houston

Venerable Master Chin Kung



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# "THE ART OF LIVING"

HOUSTON, TEXAS

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EDUCATION OF BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI, OUR ORIGINAL TEACHER



"Education - The field of study  
concerned with teaching and learning."

- THE AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY

Buddhism is an education about our living environment and us. The Buddha teaches us to recognize ourselves; our thoughts, speech, and actions and the consequences they evoke. Most importantly, the Buddha wants us to restore our original and complete wisdom. He teaches that everyone possesses the ability to attain complete understanding of life and the universe, and it is only because of delusion that we are unable to realize it. We are blinded by discrimination, wandering thoughts and attachments, and forget the original pure mind of our self-nature. In this way, we have caused ourselves much unneeded suffering.

The Buddha also teaches us to view our environment clearly. Environment refers to the people,

matters, and objects we come across everyday. When our hearts are free from discriminatory thoughts and attachments, we will be able to view everything clearly and deal with them appropriately. Thus, we can live in harmony with others and succeed in all our endeavors.

What did the Buddha mean when he taught us to cultivate? His intent was mainly to rid us of our delusions and attachments. If we drew together the Six Principles of practice taught by the Buddha, we would only end up with the practice of giving. Giving simply means to let go. If we can let go of our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, then we would always dwell in purity of mind. If we can let go of all discriminations, worries and attachments, then we would attain peace, spiritual liberation, health and longevity. If we can let go of our own views and work together for the benefit of others, then we can achieve harmony with others, harmony in society, and ultimately, world peace. From this, we can see that the main practice of the Buddha's teachings is none other than giving.

When Buddha Shakyamuni was in the world, he not only used words to teach, but made an example of himself for all living beings to follow. He let go of all desires, worldly enjoyments, fame and wealth to lead

the life of a left-home person. He lived a life of simplicity, purity of mind and body, and happiness. Ordinary people might see this as bitter and miserable, but this is only due to their lack of understanding. One with wisdom would view things differently. The wise would see the Buddha's life as one of true liberation, happiness and fulfillment. The Buddha does not have useless thoughts, discriminations, attachments, or worries. How at ease he is! He accords with all conditions and emanates wisdom in every thought and action to teach sentient beings in this world.

The Buddhas live lives of wisdom, while ordinary people live lives of affliction. Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings show us how to change afflicted lives into ones of great wisdom. From these teachers, we will learn how to restore the ultimate and complete wisdom and abilities of our self-nature; allowing us to attain true happiness and prosperity. This, is the Buddha's Education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FOUR KINDS OF BUDDHISM TODAY

In our world today, there are at least four different types of Buddhism. The first is the authentic Buddhism, the education of understanding the true reality of life and the universe originally taught by Buddha Shakyamuni. Unfortunately, the authentic education is rare and difficult to encounter nowadays. The remaining types of Buddhism are more or less distortions of the original teachings.

The second type is the religious Buddhism. Originally, Buddhism was not a religion, but now it has become one. We can no longer deny that there is a Buddhist religion because everywhere we look, especially in Asia, it is displayed as a religion. Unlike the monasteries in the past, which held eight-hour classes per day and provided another eight hours for self-cultivation, today's Buddhist temples no longer uphold such a perseverance of the Buddha's Teachings. Today we mainly see people making offerings to the Buddha statues and praying for blessings and good fortune. In this way, Buddhism has been wrongly changed into a religion.

The third type of Buddhism is the philosophical study of the Buddha's teachings. Many universities

today offer courses on the study of Buddhist Sutras, considering the teachings as a philosophy. The content of the Buddha's education is actually a complete university of knowledge and wisdom. Philosophy is only one of its courses. Just as it is wrong to recognize a university as a single course, it is also inappropriate to think of and limit the Buddha's education to only a philosophy. The Buddha's education can help us resolve our problems - from family difficulties to the great issue of life and death. The Buddha's teachings are profound and vast, and teach us the truths of life and the universe. It should not be mistaken as only a philosophy.

The fourth type of Buddhism we see in our world today is the deviant and externalist Buddhism. This is an extremely unfortunate distortion, which only came to be in the past thirty to forty years. Religious Buddhism encourages people to be decent and philosophical Buddhism pursues truth, neither cause much harm to society. However, if Buddhism is changed into a deviant and externalist path, using the weakness of human nature to cheat and harm living beings, disturbing the peace and safety of society, then this conversion has gone too far. The speech and actions of these deviant and external paths can be very attractive and enticing. One

should be very careful as not to be misled by these deviant ways or regretting it would be too late.

These four types of Buddhism exist in our society today, we should recognize them for what they are and think carefully as to which way is most beneficial to us and the one we will ultimately follow.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ART OF LIVING / SELECTED PASSAGES

Our goal in studying Buddhism is to open up our wisdom; to attain this goal, we cultivate purity of mind. In today's society, our greatest obstacles are TV, radio, newspapers and magazines - these all contain contents that can pollute our minds. I often encourage people not to read or listen to these things. When our hearts are free from these un-needed afflictions, we can live each day in peace and happiness; thus, allowing our minds to return to purity. With an undeluded mind, one will see matters of life clearer, more deeply and farther than others. This is because a settled and concentrated mind is a mind of wisdom. The key in cultivating the Buddha's teachings is having a settled and concentrated mind. In practicing the Pure Land method, purity of mind is of foremost importance.

The Infinite Life Sutra teaches us to cultivate purity, equality and enlightenment. Being mindful of the Buddha is cultivating the above, for Buddha Amitabha is purity, equality, and enlightenment. When we recite the Buddha's name, we are reminded of these qualities.

In China, Buddhism can be divided into ten

schools. Aside from the two Small Vehicle schools, which have already declined, the eight remaining schools belong to the Great Vehicle. Two schools (Zen and Shing) enter the Buddha's teachings through the method of "Enlightenment." They seek the great enlightenment, to understand the heart/mind and uncover the self-nature. Usually, those of lesser capabilities to become enlightened on their own have much difficulty in reaching their goals through this method. Thus, to cultivate the Zen School requires a high level of wisdom, ability and a considerably pure mind. Without these, one would have to start learning from the basis of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings.

The study of these teachings is to help establish proper understanding and viewpoints; thus, the method of "Proper Views and Knowledge" is used here to enter the Buddha's teachings. There are four schools in this category (Tian Tai, Shian Shou, Fa Shi-ang and San Lwun). The practitioners of these schools study and follow the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni to correct their erroneous views, thoughts, and actions. Most people are capable of learning this method, but it is a long journey, such as going to school. One must start from elementary school, then gradually advance grade by grade to

junior high, high school, and college. In finishing one grade, one attains the benefit of that single grade. The final two schools are the Pure Land and the Esoteric. These stress the importance of cultivating purity of mind; thus, their method of practicing the Buddha's teachings is through purity. People of all capabilities, regardless of whether they are intelligent or less able can practice the Pure Land School. All can practice and succeed in cultivating Pure Land method. On the other hand, the Esoteric School requires a high level of purity of mind, making it very difficult to reach attainment.

The difference between the cultivation of purity in the Pure Land School and the Esoteric School is that the Pure Land School teaches us to cultivate purity of mind away from pollution, while the Esoteric School teaches us to cultivate purity of mind in the midst of pollution. The latter involves a state of being immersed in pollution but not being contaminated; naturally, this state is too difficult for most people to attain.

True wisdom arises from purity of mind, thus, the wisdom spoken of in the Buddha's teachings is not attained from reading and studying books; the wisdom we attain from reading and studying is only worldly knowledge and not true wisdom.

True wisdom is the function of our self-nature. Our self-nature is complete with infinite wisdom, virtues and abilities; qualities that are present in everyone's self-nature and we need to know how to bring them out.

"Buddha" is Purity, Equality and Enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings can be summarized into ten simple phrases:

**True Sincerity**

*towards others,*

**Purity of Mind**

*within,*

**Equality**

*in everything we see,*

**Proper Understanding**

*of life and the universe,*

**Compassion**

*in helping others in a wise, unemotional and*

*unconditional way,*

**See Through**

*to the truth of impermanence,*

**Let Go**

*of all wandering thoughts and attachments,*

**Attain Freedom**

*of mind and spirit,*

## **Accord With Conditions**

*to go along with the situation,*

## **Be Mindful of Buddha Amitabha**

*following his teachings and vowing to be born  
into the Pure Land.*

The first five represent the Buddha's heart and the virtues of our self-nature. Presently we are unable to completely manifest these qualities due to our lack of cultivating the latter five. Diligent practice is needed to bring out these virtues of the Buddha-nature within us.

The ultimate goal in learning Buddhism is the great Perfection. In all walks of life, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas act as role models for all people to follow. Students of the Buddha can be good examples for all others. Families that follow the Buddha's teachings can behave in a way that is worthy of being the role model for all families. If one is still a student, then one's schoolwork, conduct and health become an example for one's classmates. This is being a student of the Buddha. In going to work or running a business, one can be a role model for all businesspersons to follow. Thus, everything in the Buddhadharma can be number one. A family dwelling in perfect wisdom is the most content, fortu-

nate and happy family in the world.

Buddhism is the education of wisdom; it encompasses all things and exceeds the boundaries between countries, races and religions. Since Buddhism is an education, followers of all religions are welcome and can learn and cultivate this education of true wisdom.

In the Visualization Sutra, the Three Conditions are the foundation of cultivation in Buddhism. Upon perfecting the Three Conditions, one will have complete wisdom, good fortune and virtue.

The first condition consists of four practices based on the fundamental morals of humankind:

- 1) Being filial to our parents,
- 2) Respecting teachers and elders,
- 3) Being compassionate and not killing any living being and
- 4) Following the Ten Good Conducts.

The second condition consists of three practices based on cultivating the self:

- 5) Taking Refuge in the Triple Jewels,
- 6) Abiding by precepts, rules and customs,
- 7) Conducting ourselves in a proper and digni-

fied manner.

The third condition consists of four practices, which follow the practices of Bodhisattvas:

- 8) Generating the Bodhi mind,
- 9) Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- 10) Reciting and upholding the Mahayana sutras and
- 11) Encouraging others on the path to Enlightenment.

Altogether, these eleven practices, each having its profound and vast meaning, needs to be put to use in everyday life, for they are the foundation of the forty-nine years of teachings given by Buddha Shakyamuni.

Great Vehicle Buddhism in China can be represented by the great Bodhisattvas of the Four Famous Mountains. First is Earth Treasure Bodhisattva of Jiuhua Mountain representing filial piety and respect. Second is Guan Yin (Great Compassion) Bodhisattva of Putuo Mountain, representing compassion. Third is Manjushri Bodhisattva of Wutai Mountain, representing wisdom. Fourth is Universal Worthy Bodhisattva of

Emei Mountain, representing true practice. These four great Bodhisattvas represent the core of cultivation. As beginners, we start learning from Earth Treasure Bodhisattva, for the earth is the root of life of all living beings. Because the great earth nurtures all beings and is the treasury of all that is precious, the Buddha uses it to represent our "mind ground" or "mind earth." Our true mind/original nature is complete with infinite wisdom, virtuous abilities and talents; we must know how to open this treasury in order to attain its benefits. Earth Treasure Bodhisattva teaches us to be filial to our parents and respectful to our teachers, for in these practices lies the key to opening the treasury of our self-nature.

The field of filial piety is vast. Our parents have shown us great kindness in bringing us up and in educating us, therefore, we should not only nurture their aging bodies, but we should also nurture their spiritual well-being and minds thus helping them to be happy; this is practicing filial piety.

Regarding the practice of filial piety, we should strive to do our best in living up to our parent's expectations. When they wish us to be good persons and to benefit society, we should do so; to act otherwise would be unfilial. For children going to school, it would be unfilial to do poorly in schoolwork, caus-

ing one's parents to be worried and disappointed. It would be unfilial if one's conduct was poor, or if one's health was poor, or if one was disrespectful to one's teachers or could not get along with others. After reaching adulthood and entering society, it would be unfilial to be rebellious towards one's boss or unable to cooperate with co-workers, causing one's parents to worry. From these, we realize how vast the field of cultivating filial piety really is, and that the entire Buddhadharma is actually just teaching the Way of Filial Piety. In Buddhism, the perfection of filial piety is only completed upon reaching the Unsurpassed Enlightenment of Buddhahood.

Nowadays, humankind has been seriously polluted in heart, thoughts, views, spirit and body, thus leading to the appearance of many strange illnesses. The root cause of illness and disease is pollution; if one's body and mind are pure one will not fall ill or grow old. To not become ill or grow old is true happiness and good fortune. To attain this goal, we only need to learn and cultivate according to the Buddha's teachings.

In our world today, where foods have been polluted by poisons, we should harbor compassion, for compassion is the antidote for all poisons. A truly compassionate heart can neutralize all poisons. The

Buddha once said, "Everything arises from the mind." Thus, a pure, equal and enlightened mind/heart naturally brings health to one's body.

When we recite morning and evening ceremonies in front of the Buddha and Bodhisattva images, it is just as if we were vowing to abide by their teachings right in their presence. Morning recitation acts as a reminder, preventing us from forgetting the Buddha's teachings, and reminding us to act accordingly in the course of the day. Evening recitation is a reflection of the day's practice, checking to see if we acted according to the Buddha's teachings. If we did, then we can work even harder next time, if not, then we need to reform, seeking to renew ourselves each day. Only by practicing in this way can true benefits be attained. Morning and evening recitations are the most basic practices in learning Buddhism. It is necessary to remind ourselves each day and reflect and reform.

One who wishes to become a student of the Buddha should first learn from Maitreya Bodhisattva, better known in America as "The Happy Buddha." Maitreya Bodhisattva represents the most basic conditions necessary to become a Buddhist - a smiling face and a big heart, represented by his big belly. All the Buddha images serve to remind us of the

teachings and are not idols or gods of worship. "The Happy Buddha" teaches us to give rise to a non-discriminating mind and to be happy; thus being able to enter the Buddha Way.

The content of the Buddha's teachings is infinitely profound and vast; one is unable to speak of it all, for the essence of it is unfathomable. Understanding it can bring great help to our living, work and interacting with all people, matters and affairs. Buddhism truly surpasses the boundaries of nationality, race and religion - it encompasses everything. The Buddha's teaching is truly a perfectly complete education.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TAKING REFUGE IN THE TRIPLE JEWELS

Taking Refuge means to return and rely. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded state of mind and relying upon an Awakened, Enlightened mind. When we take refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding. When we take refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from pollution and disharmony and relying upon Purity of Mind and the Six Principles of Living in Harmony. Taking refuge in the Triple Jewels restores the complete wisdom and abilities of our Self-Nature. We will attain Purity, Equality, Honesty, Freedom, Compassion and overall, True Happiness.

#### The Buddha Jewel

Buddha is a Sanskrit meaning Awareness and Enlightenment. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we vow to return from blind faith and delusion and rely upon Understanding and Awareness as a way of life. Images of the Buddha serve as a reminder for us to practice awareness and understanding, and are not objects of worship. Prostrating and showing re-

spect towards these images are only ways to counter arrogance and cultivate humility. This is taking refuge in the Buddha.

## The Dharma Jewel

Dharma means Proper Understanding and Views. Delusion has obstructed us from seeing the true face of people and the reality behind matters and objects. This has caused us to look at life and the universe in a distorted and deviant way. When delusion is cleared and our minds are pure to an extent, we give rise to wisdom. With wisdom, we are able to see all people and matters completely and clearly. When our hearts are pure, we can see the past, present and future. Only when we have clearly seen the Whole can our viewpoint and Understanding be considered Proper.

The Buddha's mind is pure without the slightest pollution and therefore sees everything clearly and entirely. We can rely upon the Sutras, recorded teachings of the Buddha, because they speak entirely of the truths the Buddha has seen. They teach and show us the way to attain Purity of Mind, to see life and the universe most clearly, and become just like the Buddhas. When we encounter sutras, we

should immediately bring forth a mind of respect and remind ourselves to cultivate Right Understanding and Views. This is taking refuge in the Dharma.

### The Sangha Jewel

Sangha means purity and harmony. Today's world is filled with pollution; pollution of mind, spirit, views, and body. Even the earth and the atmosphere are hazardly polluted. The Buddha taught, "The environment changes according to the mind." We should return from all these pollutions and rely upon purity of mind. Purity of Mind is the key to saving our Earth.

There is also great disharmony in our world today, among spouses, families, friends, societies and countries which has brought us much suffering and many disasters. The Buddha taught us to rely upon the Six Principles of Living in Harmony to establish harmonious relationships among others and ourselves.

Sangha also refers to a group of four or more persons who practice the Buddha's teachings and abide by the Six Principle of Living in Harmony. This includes the monks and nuns we may encounter. When we see monks and nuns, we should immediately give rise to a mind of purity and harmony. This

is taking refuge in the Sangha.

## **THE THREE REFUGES**



*To the Buddha I return and rely,  
returning from delusions and  
relying upon  
Awareness and Understanding.*

*To the Dharma I return and rely,  
returning from erroneous views and  
relying upon  
Proper Views and Understanding.*

*To the Sangha I return and rely,  
returning from pollution and disharmony  
and relying upon  
Purity of Mind and the  
Six Principles of Harmony.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### HOW HOMEMAKERS CAN CULTIVATE THE BODHISATTVA WAY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

It must be very tiresome to do the same kind of work everyday, and especially for homemakers. It seems as if one cannot be free from household chores for a single day, and many are greatly troubled by their duties. However, if we can learn to change our way of looking at things, we will be able to perform our chores with great joy.

Much of the problem is that ordinary people are very much attached to the "self." They think, "*I* am doing all this work; poor *me*, *I* am so tired; why should *I* do this for them?" The more they think this way, the more afflicted they become. If we were to learn the Bodhisattva Way, the Way of Understanding and Enlightenment, and vow to universally help all living beings, then our viewpoint would be much different.

In following the Bodhisattva Path, the first thing we learn is the Practice of Giving. By serving the family at home, the homemaker Bodhisattva is already cultivating Giving. Giving includes the Giving of Wealth, the Giving of Teaching and the Giving of Fearlessness. The Giving of Wealth can be divided into outer wealth and inner wealth. For example,

outer wealth refers to making money for our family and providing the means for living. Inner wealth refers to using our physical energy and wisdom to support our family. So, the practice of giving can be completed perfectly at home.

When we do our housework with care and organize our home to be clean and neat, this is bringing comfort to the family and admiration from our neighbors; this is cultivating the Practice of Precept Observation. Abiding by precepts simply means abiding by rules - rules of the country, society and family, and doing everything in an organized and proper way. Endurance in doing our chores without complaint or fatigue is cultivating the Practice of Patience. In seeking improvement everyday, hoping that tomorrow's attainment will exceed that of today's, is cultivating the Practice of Diligence. In performing one's various duties daily but still maintaining a pure and undeluded heart, is cultivating the Practice of Concentration in Purity of Mind, being apart from discriminating thoughts and attachments. From within purity of mind, one will give rise to wisdom, and will be filled with inner peace and happiness, this is cultivating the Practice of Wisdom. Thus, with true understanding, we will discover that these Six Principles Cultivated by Bodhisattvas (Giving, Pre-

cepts Observation, Patience, Diligence, Concentration in Purity of Mind, and Wisdom) can be practiced to perfection in the everyday acts of dusting, sweeping, washing and cooking.

Once we have performed our duties well, we become role models for homemakers all over the world and an example for all families to follow. Thus, not only can we help our neighbors, but extended, we can influence society, the country, and even the world in a positive way. From this we come to see that in dusting, sweeping, washing, and cooking, a homemaker Bodhisattva is actually carrying out the great vow of helping all living beings. This is truly being a student of the Buddha. So, if we can contemplate our duties as described above, we will be filled with peace and happiness in our work. How then could anything trouble us?

The most important factor in learning and cultivating the Buddha's teachings is that one be able to practice them in everyday life. Understanding this, we would be able to practice the Six Principles Cultivated by Bodhisattvas at our work and office. A Bodhisattva, in all walks of life, whether appearing as a man, woman, elder, or child, cultivates by living up to his/her own responsibilities. Cultivation and living are one - this is the life of enlightened beings.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SELECTED PASSAGES FROM LIVING BUDDHISM

✿ Buddhism is an education, not a religion. We do not worship the Buddha, we respect him as a teacher. His teachings enable us to leave suffering and attain true happiness.

✿ It is best to treat all people with respect and sincerity, being responsible for our actions and careful when handling other's property. Be conservative with speech and actions to avoid harming others.

✿ It is best to show our gratitude to those who have shown us kindness, such as parents, teachers and even society. Everyone in the society is interdependent and inter-related; we can practice good deeds to repay them.

✿ How many people recognize the kindness shown by parents? Usually, people do not realize until they themselves become parents or lose their parents. We can show our gratitude through practicing filial piety by being responsible, considerate and compliant to our parents.

✿ To be a poor, content, and happy person is better than being one who is rich, worried, and afflicted with greed.

✿ Buddhism is a teaching, which shows us how to live a happy, fulfilling, and content life.

✿ True Love is indiscriminating, unattaching, and unconditional; we can share this love with all beings. This is called compassion.

✿ If we wish to bring peace to the world, we need to start by changing our erroneous ways. World peace stems from inner peace.

✿ Our goal in studying the Buddha's teachings and cultivation is to attain complete understanding of life and the universe.

✿ Be considerate and kind in your speech. To put down another person is only proving your own arrogance and lack of self-confidence to others.

✿ Life is short and fragile, why not cultivate kindness instead of committing acts which cause harm to living beings and oneself?

✿ Cultivating virtue is to keep a kind heart, speak kind words and do kind acts to benefit others.

✿ Wise persons do not harbor feelings of gain or loss. In this way, they constantly dwell in the joy of possessing great peace of mind.

✿ The point of practicing giving and charity is to forsake greed, hatred, ignorance, and arrogance.

✿ When helping others, we should think about benefiting the entire society or even the world instead of limiting our help to just the ones we love. Expanding the boundaries of our care for others makes our lives more meaningful, full of freedom and happiness.

✿ The Buddha's teachings are a teaching of wisdom. Living Buddhism is to fill our lives with utmost wisdom and happiness.

✿ In all circumstances, we must first reflect upon ourselves. Confucius once said, "Do not give to others what you yourself do not desire". This is teaching us to keep a humane and sincere heart. If we want others to smile at us, we must first smile at others. In

dealing with matters, we must not seek personal gain but should work for the public welfare.

✿ A true cultivator does not see the faults of others. When we think of others' faults, it becomes our own affliction. Everyone has their good and bad sides, but we must learn to look at the good points of others and strive to respect all beings.

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## "THE ART OF LIVING II"

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Buddhism instructs us how to live happy and fulfilling lives. It was transmitted to China in 67 AD and since then, has spread and flourished throughout the country. However, anything that has been passed down for a long period can be expected to experience some distortion and Buddhism is no exception.

Originally, Buddhism was Buddha Shakyamuni's teaching of perfection of enlightenment for all sentient beings in the nine realms. Unfortunately, over the last two to three hundred years, some began to regard it as a religion. Then, in the past twenty to thirty years it began to be viewed as a philosophy. However, the most disastrous of all is its distortion by some into a cult. These have seriously misled people away from the original teachings. If we commit ourselves to the practice, we need to clearly understand exactly what the Buddha taught us.

A few years ago in San Francisco, I gave a talk titled "To Understand Buddhism." Unfortunately, due to the one and a half-hour time constraint, I was unable to elaborate as much as I had wanted to. Then, several months later, Mr. David Zheng invited

me to Miami. He both hosted and provided the English translation for my seven-day lecture series on Buddhism titled "To Understand Buddhism". The talks were video taped at that time and later published. To understand the Buddha's teachings is our first and most basic lesson. Practicing Buddhism and not knowing what the goals are can reduce our practice to blind superstition.

First, the Buddha is our teacher and not a god. Bodhisattvas are our senior classmates with whom we share equal status. Buddhism is an education. What does it teach? The Buddha's forty-nine years of teaching are recorded as sutras. These have been combined with sutra commentaries by great masters throughout history into a dense collection called The Buddhist Canon, of which there are over thirty versions in existence. These teachings explain the truth about life and the universe. Life refers to us and the universe refers to our living environment and beyond. What is more relevant than to understand the relationship between the universe and us?

Several years ago, I was lecturing to professors at the Universities of Beijing, Nanjing and Liaoning. Upon learning that Buddhism is an education, my audience was astonished. Then, two years ago I learned that there were one hundred seventy professors

across China studying the teachings. This is a good sign. We ought to first change our perceptions and understand the nature of this unsurpassed education, to fully benefit from it.

The Buddha told us that an enlightened person is one who completely understands about life and the universe. A Buddha is a being who is perfectly enlightened while a Bodhisattva, according to Master Xuan Tsuang, is an "awakened, sentient being." The element that differentiates us from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is the state of consciousness or enlightenment. Enlightened beings are free and independent in any environment while we are not. The Chinese have a saying "When one is constricted by society, one is unable to act according to one's will." For instance, almost everyone wishes to make a fortune in this lifetime, but look around, how many people's dreams have actually come true? Buddhist sutras have provided us with methods to achieve whatever we wish; to stay healthy, young and happy as well as to end the cycle of birth and death. Praying to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas or spirits simply does not do it.

The sutras have taught us the way to take control of our destiny. If we follow the teachings, we can have what we wish for. However, if we fail to

achieve our goal, it is because we either have applied the wrong method or misinterpreted the meanings within the sutras. Buddhism is a teaching of wisdom as only wisdom can resolve our problems and fulfill our wishes.

How do we gain wisdom? Many people who grew up in our modern society would agree that wisdom is gained from information or knowledge. The Buddha told us the opposite! He taught us that wisdom is already within our self-nature; it does not come from the outside. Upon reaching enlightenment, the Sixth Patriarch of Zen, Master Hui-Neng reported to his teacher that wisdom is something we all possess and that it is innate. Our good fortune, capability and wisdom are complete; none of them can be obtained externally. The Buddha teaches us to look for them within our mind, our pure mind. Therefore, Buddhism is a study of the inner self.

Earlier this year, a group of professors, most of them from the University of Taiwan and the Central Educational Research Center, requested me to talk on the Diamond Sutra. Although I had not lectured on this sutra for almost twenty years, I gladly accepted the invitation as an opportunity to leave future Buddhists a lecture series to aid them in their studies.

The Diamond Sutra is truly an important part of Mahayana practice as well as the core of Zen practice. It concentrates on the understanding of wisdom. Due to the advocacy of Zen's Fifth and Sixth Patriarchs, this sutra became widely known in China. Over five thousand eight hundred words in length, it is too profound for most people to completely understand. There have been several hundred explanations or commentaries written on this sutra alone throughout Chinese history. Earlier in this century, Mr. Wei-Nong Jiang, who spent forty years studying this sutra, wrote what has become a well-read commentary. He combined the essence of both the ancient and current commentaries to make it easier for people to understand the sutra and thus, the true meanings of life and the universe.

The Diamond Sutra, like other sutras, contains the principles and methods to achieve enlightenment. If we can master the principle and cultivate with confidence, we will become enlightened regardless of the method we choose. However, if we are not achieving improvement in our daily practice, then we must have overlooked the principles and methods of the sutra.

For many years, I have been lecturing on the Pure Land method. Someone asked me, "Teacher,

you have been speaking of the Pure Land teachings for so long, why are you now lecturing on the Diamond Sutra?" When you think about it, the Diamond Sutra, the Amitabha Sutra and the Infinite Life Sutra are all the same in that they encourage us to recite the Buddha's name, without any attachment, in order to be born into the Western Pure Land. If we did not already have a high degree of wisdom, good roots, merits and good conditions, we would not have chosen the Pure Land School as our practice.

When I was young, I made the mistake of thinking that this school was not a high level practice. Fortunately, I met good teachers who tried to convince me of its importance. Still I was unable to completely accept it. The confidence I now possess comes from having lectured on the Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment) Sutra for seventeen years. It tells of how Manjusri Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra (Universal Worthy) Bodhisattva, Maitreya Bodhisattva, the forty-one levels of enlightened Bodhisattvas, Sudhana and the fifty-three spiritual guides all turned to the Pure Land School in the end. As I became convinced of its importance, I started to study the Pure Land sutras. I realized that practicing the Pure Land method was actually the highest level of Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings and of all the Buddhas

in the ten directions as they strove to help all sentient beings achieve enlightenment.

I have lectured on the Diamond Sutra, the Infinite Life and the Visualization sutras. They all are concerned with the right and proper way of living. The Diamond Sutra speaks of the principle while the Infinite Life Sutra and the Visualization Sutra speak of the specifics in practice and attainment. Mr. Wei-Nong Jiang emphasized that one who cultivates prajna, innate wisdom, should chant the name of Buddha Amitabha in order to be born into the Pure Land. Practitioners need to completely understand the Buddha's teachings because they lead us to perfect, free-spirited and prosperous living. If we misinterpret the teachings, then we will not benefit from them. While Buddhism emphasizes the principles, it puts more stress on our practice. If our practice fails to follow these principles then we have missed the point.

Take the Diamond Sutra for example. As it begins, the Buddha takes us into his daily life. This is unlike other Mahayana sutras in which he would release radiant light at the beginning of his talk. However, this talk is all about everyday life! Every action the Buddha has taken has revealed his virtues and merits due to his commitment of practicing Buddha-

hood through infinite lifetimes.

The Avatamsaka (Flower Adornment) Sutra tells us that "One is all and all is one." One refers to a matter or subject, for example, dressing is one activity, eating is another. From the moment we decide to begin our practice till the time we achieve Enlightenment, our merits are accumulated and revealed through our efforts and commitment. Daily activities are the way of practice; however, most of us cannot see this. Why not? Because of our lack of wisdom. Subhuti, one of the Buddha's main students, explained it for us. We all get up every morning, dress and eat. What do we have to show for this? Infinite lifetimes of committing misdeeds and the resultant sufferings due to incorrect understanding of the purpose of life and our environment.

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas show us the art and the correct way of living. If we understand the Diamond Sutra, we will understand everything around us and in the universe. Beings who do understand are called Buddhas and Bodhisattvas: those who do not are called ordinary people. We all possess the capabilities of Buddhas, but we are temporarily lost and have forgotten what we possess. This is why we must practice to learn how to live our lives. Practicing Buddhism means correcting our erroneous thoughts

and actions in our daily lives. Those of us who understand focus on the root of the problem, which means we focus on correcting our thoughts while others focus on their actions. By only correcting our actions, we may gain some improvement; however, this is similar to only taking care of the branches and leaves of a tree while neglecting its roots. The most effective way, as pointed out in the Diamond Sutra, is to correct our thoughts by attacking the roots of all that is wrong or erroneous.

What are the guidelines for practicing Buddhism? Buddha Shakyamuni told us they are The Three Learnings, which are precepts (rules), concentration and wisdom. Precepts refer to following all of the Buddha's teachings, not just the basic five or ten precepts. They also include following customs, rules and laws wherever we are. Law-abiding people have a clear conscience, so their minds are peaceful and they can more easily concentrate, whereas, people who often break the law are generally unable to concentrate. Therefore, following rules and obeying laws enables us to achieve the concentration that allows us to uncover the wisdom that we already possess.

The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch Hui-Neng is praiseworthy for its high level of wisdom. We can

understand why the Sixth Patriarch told his master that he often generated wisdom. We, on the other hand, often generate affliction. He achieved this high level because his mind was pure. Our minds are filled with afflictions, attachments, discriminating and wandering thoughts: all causes of reincarnation. To alter this course requires us to cleanse our minds of these pollutants. To accomplish this, Buddha Shakyamuni gave us the fore-mentioned three guidelines which are also contained in the Infinite Life Sutra, the full title of which is The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School. Purity refers to precepts; equality refers to deep concentration; enlightenment refers to wisdom. These are also expressed as the Triple Jewels, representing respectively the Sangha, the Dharma and the Buddha. Please do not mistake the physical images of the Triple Jewels for their true essence. The Diamond Sutra clearly tells us "One who sees images of oneself, other human beings, all beings and life is not a Bodhisattva." In other words, looking beyond physical aspects is the correct way to understand these guidelines.

The Buddha represents enlightenment. The Dharma, symbolized by sutras, represents the Bud-

dha's wisdom, virtue and proper understanding of life and the universe. The Sangha represents purity of the six senses, having no pollution. The Three Jewels are being enlightened and not deluded, proper and not deviated, pure and not polluted. When we take refuge in the Triple Jewels, we request guidance from a Monk or Nun regarding purity, equality and enlightenment. It is important to understand this at the beginning of our practice. We need to use an awakened mind to perform in our daily lives. The Dharma comes from the self-nature within. The goal of the learning process is to find our true self and to let go of our incorrect state of mind.

This incorrect state of mind is embroiled in a non-stop rush of thoughts. When we let go of all our wandering and discriminating thoughts, our true self will surface and so then will true wisdom. Only through the process of concentration and purification can wisdom flourish. To accomplish this, the Pure Land School uses the Buddha Name Chanting Method, while Zen uses a different method. Every practice has its own method to accomplish the same goal of enlightenment. All ways of practice are equal.

Buddha Shakyamuni taught us innumerable ways of practice. It is up to us to choose the one

that is compatible with the depth of our root nature, level of achievement and manner of living. Regardless of the practice we choose, the three basic guidelines are enlightenment, right and proper thoughts, and purity.

We have to be extremely careful living in our time. The Surangama Sutra tells us that we are now living in the Dharma-ending age when pollution of both the mind and the environment are at their worst. There are countless numbers of deviated thinking teachers in this time who are creating great chaos. It is crucial that we use the standards taught by the Buddha to distinguish between proper and deviated.

The Pure Land sutras teach us how to start our practice with the Three Conditions. These three have been the foundation of Buddhahood throughout eternity. All Buddhas say that Buddhahood is achieved through any one of an infinite number of methods. However, every method requires the Three Conditions as a foundation. This is similar to building a house. No matter how many houses we are building, each requires a good foundation. The First Condition includes:

- ✿ Showing respect and care for ones parents,

- ✿ Listening carefully to and respecting teachers and elders,
- ✿ Showing compassion by not killing and
- ✿ Following the Ten Good Conducts.

If we act accordingly, then we will benefit from this First Condition. The practice of Filial Piety is showing respect and caring for one's parents. The foundation of Chinese civilization has been built on filial piety, as was Buddhism in India. The Chinese character "Xiao" means filial piety. The top part means old age while the bottom part means son. When the two are put together, it gives us the meaning of one entity. It is vastly expansive and never-ending. It speaks of the generations before ours and of those to follow.

I have met many westerners who asked me about the Chinese tradition of paying respect to ancestors they did not even know about. They did not understand that all of life is just one entity with no beginning and no end. Only Buddhism can carry filial piety to perfection.

Being filial does not simply mean taking care of parents financially, it goes beyond that to helping them cultivate their minds to a higher level of living and wisdom. Buddha Shakyamuni, our "Original

Teacher", taught this to us. If our actions such as not doing well at school, not following rules and listening to teachers, not getting along with friends, relatives or co-workers; generally not living up to our parent's expectations worry them, then we have done poorly at filial piety. In other words, making our parents happy is part of filial piety. But most importantly, not until we reach the state of Buddhahood, will we perfectly fulfill filial respect for our parents and ancestors.

The second part of the First Condition is following and respecting teachers and elders. In his forty-nine years of teaching, Buddha Shakyamuni showed us how to correctly live our lives. Following his teachings shows our respect for him.

The third part of the First Condition is cultivating compassion and not killing. There is a big difference between love and compassion. Love comes from feelings; compassion comes from wisdom. Love is unstable and unreliable. We may love someone today but not tomorrow. When someone tells us that he or she loves or hates us, we would do well not to take it too seriously. However, compassion is forever because it is based on the wisdom that is part of the true mind, our original self. It is not based on emotion. We can start by showing compassion and

kindness for our family and keep expanding until we include every sentient being in the ten directions. Developing this level of compassion is another part of the cultivation that will lead us to enlightenment.

The fourth part of the first Condition includes following the Ten Good Conducts. These are no killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, bearing tales, seductive words, greed, anger or ignorance. The first three are disciplines of the body, the next four are disciplines of the mouth and the last three are disciplines of the mind.

One who follows the Ten Good Conducts in their daily life acquires a solid foundation for self-cultivation. To be truthful, understanding the principles is easy; however, putting them into practice requires a high level of wisdom. There is some flexibility in practicing the Ten Good Conducts, which is why the guidance of a good teacher and the encouragement of our fellow classmates or practitioners are essential in helping us to attain enlightenment in this lifetime. This is why the respect and sincerity towards our teachers and elders are part of the foundation and a prerequisite for our cultivation.

Having achieved the First Condition in this area will have a positive effect on one's prosperity and well being in both the human and the heavenly

worlds. The sutras call those who accomplish this, "good men and good women" because they are ready to accept the teachings and follow the precepts to attain purity of mind.

The Second Condition is:

- ✿ Abiding by taking refuge in the Triple Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
- ✿ Following the precepts, laws and customs and
- ✿ Behaving in a dignified and proper manner.

I have discussed these earlier in this talk.

The Third Condition is:

- ✿ Generating the Bodhi mind,
- ✿ Deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect,
- ✿ Reciting and upholding Mahayana sutras and
- ✿ Encouraging others to advance on the path to enlightenment.

In generating the Bodhi mind, one commits oneself to achieving ultimate enlightenment. Enlightenment refers to a perfect and complete understand-

ing of life and the universe. If we cannot reach it then we can at least obtain a clear understanding of it.

The second part of the Third Condition is deeply believing in the Law of Cause and Effect. **Nothing is beyond this law.** All other laws in the universe revolve around it. However, one can control one's own cause and effect. How can this be done? There is nothing we can do about past causes once the thought or action has been done, but we can control the "condition." For a cause to generate an effect, a condition has to exist. By controlling the circumstance or condition, one prevents the cause from coming into effect. For example, if we place a seed on a rock, it will not grow. However, if we plant it in fertile soil where the sun shines and water it carefully, then it can grow. Once we learn how to control the condition, then everything we wish for can be obtained. Knowing this and acting accordingly, we will be liberated from aging, sickness and the cycle of birth and death.

All dharmas are generated by the mind. For example, why does a person become old? When a person reaches a certain age, he or she starts thinking "old." I have spoken with a number of Buddhist doctors about why people become old. They

agreed with me that when people are working, they do not think about old age. However, after they have been retired a few years they look as if they were twenty years older! Why? Retired people who are no longer working start thinking every day about becoming old. After a while, they start to age more rapidly and then to become sick. Once they get sick, they start thinking about going to the hospital. All this came about from wandering thoughts.

However, this is not the case for people who successfully practice the Buddha Name Chanting Method. My late teacher, Mr. Bing-Nan Lee, lived to be ninety-seven years old but looked more like seventy. He cooked for himself and washed his own clothes. Not until his last two years did he accept any care. He was healthy, had a strong voice and was giving lectures up until two weeks before he passed away. Why? He did not think about sickness or old age. We will not get sick if we do not think about getting sick, we will not age if we do not think about old age and we will not die if we do not think about death.

Buddhism provides the principles, methods and practices to accomplish this. The art of living can be mastered once we fully understand and practice Buddhism. It teaches us to maintain a healthy mind.

A healthy mind creates a healthy body. All sickness comes from pollution and the worst pollution is that of the mind. The Buddha called this pollution the Three Poisons of Greed, Anger and Ignorance. Between the pollution of the environment and that of our mind how can we not get sick? However, even with the worst pollution around us, a person who is free of the three poisons will not become sick.

All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas set examples so beings can see that we may live happy, prosperous and perfect lives. Seeing this, people will want to follow our example. We are supposed to be role models for society. However, if people see Buddhists living a miserable life, no one will want to learn from us!

The more we understand the Buddha's teachings, the more joy we will receive from them. To comprehend the profound meaning within, one needs to practice earnestly. Understanding and cultivation are equally important in complementing each other to attain even deeper understanding and cultivation. Achieving this, one will experience true inner joy and peace. If we are not experiencing some of this joy and are instead filled with worries then we need to take a good look at ourselves, to see whether or not we are practicing in accordance

with the teachings. If not, find out where the problem lies and correct it. Doing this properly, we will be on the right path of Buddhism.

Regardless of the situations we encounter, adverse or favorable, keep focused and concentrate on achieving enlightenment. The fifty-three visits that Sudhana had in the Flower Adornment Sutra represented people from all walks of life portrayed by fifty-three enlightened Bodhisattvas. This shows us that people of any profession can become a Buddha or Bodhisattva. We do not have to change our job or the environment, in which we live, but can practice, wherever we are. The benefits begin the minute we start to correct our thoughts and actions.

We would do well to live our lives with a clear mind and to be proper in thought and action, not being tempted by erroneous influences. If we are able to do this, then no matter which method we choose we will be true followers of the Buddha. As our daily thinking becomes clearer, our mind will become purer, enabling us to live happier, peaceful and fulfilling lives.

When I heard of a suggestion made by the late Mr. Lian-Jui Xia to use the name Pure Land Buddhist Learning Center instead of the traditional name of temple, I thought it was appropriate for today's soci-

ety. Buddhism has always been forward thinking not backward. It has adapted to existing cultures and localities. When Buddhism first came to China, it took on aspects of the Chinese culture. The temples had a Chinese appearance, the monks and nuns clothing was in the Chinese style. If the temples had followed Indian design, the Chinese would not have wanted to enter such a foreign looking place. The teachings were interpreted in a way that enabled the Chinese people to merge them into their daily lives, thus they were readily accepted. The Diamond Sutra tells us that nothing is permanent, while the Surangama Sutra explains that everything should accord with the minds of sentient beings. All this is to remind us to accord with local conditions.

At a talk one time in Miami, there were quite a few Buddhists who were westerners. I told them that Buddhism had not yet officially come to America. They asked why I had said that when Buddhism was very popular in America. I asked them, "Have you ever seen Buddhist statues with features that resemble a westerner?" They briefly thought about it and realized that what I had said was true. When Buddhism spread to China, pictures and statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas adopted Chinese features. In Japan, they have Japanese features. The

same applies to Thailand, Tibet and so on. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not have only one fixed appearance, rather they appear in the form that is most acceptable and comfortable for the local people.

Furthermore, Buddhism adapts to take on the aspects of the local culture. In America, a typical Buddhist temple needs to look like the White House and not like a traditional Chinese temple. When Americans see a Chinese temple, they would think of it as foreign and might not feel comfortable going in. However, if the buildings look like the White House, they would go in uninvited! Do you not think that they would be happy to see Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with western features? They certainly would.

We need to remember that Buddhism is an education. As it spreads through America, it will take on a more western appearance just as it did when Indian teachers brought it to China, where it took on a Chinese appearance. As Buddhism adapts to new cultures, it will remain current with the times, thus appealing to more people. Those, who accept it, will be able to apply the teachings in solving their personal as well as social problems. As Buddhism is accepted, it will bring peace and prosperity to those people as well as to the whole world. Understanding

this will help us to begin our cultivation.

After the Pure Land Learning Center was officially established, Five Guidelines were set up for practice:

- 1) The Three Conditions,
- 2) The Six Principles of Harmony,
- 3) The Three Learnings,
- 4) The Six Paramitas or Principles and
- 5) The Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva.

These Five Guidelines can bring us happiness and prosperity if we make them a part of our daily lives.

The Six Paramitas or Principles, one of these Five Guidelines, represent the six goals that Bodhisattvas practice. They are giving, precepts, patience, diligence, deep concentration and wisdom. A homemaker, who daily performs the same chores and constantly complains about them, will find that with this attitude, he or she has created a certain destiny within the cycle of birth and death. On the other hand, if one is awakened and devotes himself or herself to accomplishing the Six Principles, the results will be quite different.

For example, the Principle of Giving is achieved when one takes care of the family with wisdom and tireless labor. The Principle of Precepts is achieved when one sets priorities and puts things into order; the Principle of Patience when one increases patience while working; the Principle of Diligence when one tries to improve daily; the Principle of Concentration when one is no longer affected by external factors and the Principle of Wisdom when one is clear-minded. A pure mind has no attachments therefore it never gets tired. On the other hand, a polluted mind becomes easily tired without having doing much. The difference lies in the way we think, when this changes, so will the results. Wherever one is, at work or with friends, one can strive to achieve the Six Principles. Cultivation is not being separated from family or society, but is perfected within one's daily life. One who truly knows how to cultivate accumulates infinite good fortune and merits.

In conclusion, the most important principles of the Buddha's teachings are having purity of mind, thoroughly seeing through to true reality, letting go of all worries and attachments and serving all sentient beings with a joyful heart.

May you all learn and practice the "Art of Living" so that your lives will be happy and fulfilling.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question. How do we purify our minds so we can remain forever young?

Answer. This is a good question. The sutras tell us that anything that has a physical image is unreal. We can apply or use these physical images, but we cannot foster attachments for them. Attachments create impurity in our mind, deterring us from achieving enlightenment. This applies to all forms of practice in Buddhism. Even the Pure Land School, which many agree is the easiest to practice, requires that although one who wishes to be born into the Pure Land can take their remaining karma with them, they cannot have any existing worries or attachments. Therefore, a person with worries or attachments cannot transcend the cycle of birth and death. Life becomes harder as we pass through the cycles of rebirth.

Earlier in this talk, I spoke of filial piety. Up until 1995, the only attachment I had left was for my ninety-one year old mother, who lived in China. When I met with her about ten years earlier in Hong Kong, I persuaded her to practice the Buddha Name Chanting Method. When I spoke with her on the telephone several years ago, she still had strong at-

tachments for her sons and grandchildren. Not until a year ago did she finally let go of all attachments. She told me that she had seen Buddha Amitabha twice and Guan Yin Bodhisattva once. In addition, she had prior knowledge of when she would be leaving this world. On May 29, 1995, she passed on and was born into the Western Pure Land. At her funeral, people were aware of a radiant glow and a pleasing yet unfamiliar fragrance. Her complexion appeared similar to that of a live person. After eight days, her body was still soft. Upon her cremation, more than three hundred sharira, or relics, were found. All this is evidence that she had been successfully born into the Pure Land.

In conclusion, once we are rid of worries and attachments we can go to the Western Pure Land whenever we wish. By maintaining a pure, non-discriminating, compassionate and kind heart, one holds the key to remaining youthful.

Question. Why do some Buddhists exclude the five pungent vegetables from their diet?

Answer. Some Buddhists who follow a strict diet do not eat the five pungent vegetables; onions, garlic, chives, green onions and leeks. The Buddha said

that these adversely affect those who are in the early stages of cultivation. If eaten cooked, they produce hormones. Eaten raw, they may affect the liver, leading one to become irritable and less able to concentrate. Please understand that this only happens if you eat them in large quantities. There is no problem if a moderate amount is used for cooking.

The same applies for alcohol and intoxicants. Intoxication can be a factor in causing erroneous behavior. The Buddha warned people against alcohol or intoxicants to guide them in the avoidance of committing misdeeds due to intoxication. Therefore, the precepts that the Buddha set forth really depend upon the environment and the situation that we are in.

Our society is different from that of Buddha Shakyamuni's. If he were to re-appear in this world, I am sure the Buddha would encourage the use of garlic, simply because it can be used to cure some diseases, especially lung disease.

Many years ago, I was teaching at the Eastern Buddhist College. During that period, we found out that a few of the students had lung diseases. Dr. Tang, who was one of the professors, suggested that they use garlic for treatment. He told us of an event

that had happened in China some time ago. A patient was told by his doctor that due to his end stage of TB, he only had three months to live. The patient's family was also told to let him have anything he asked for, with one condition; that he lived apart from his family. His family, therefore, built a room for him to live in a vegetable garden and delivered meals to him every day.

In that garden, grew a large amount of garlic. Due to his isolation and boredom, he tried the garlic raw and discovered that he enjoyed the taste of it. Soon the garlic became more of a snack for him. Three months later, he was still alive, and months after that, he was becoming healthier and healthier. His family found it strange and thinking there had been a misdiagnosis took him back to the hospital.

The doctor was astonished at what he saw and immediately gathered a group of specialists to investigate his patient's case. Finally, they found out it was the garlic that cured the disease! From then on, many medicines for lung disease have been made with garlic. Regretfully, when Dr. Tang suggested that those students use garlic for treatment, his suggestion was not accepted. The students did not want to violate the precepts even though their illness was contagious. Therefore, precepts have to be

flexible and to consider environmental conditions. Nowadays, almost everything we eat, such as, meat, fish and even vegetables, contains either chemicals or preservatives, which are harmful to us. In addition, we are seeing more and more people with diseases that have not previously existed.

Even the taste of meat is different now. Years ago, chicks and piglets were raised in the open, so they were happier and that affected the taste of the meat. Now animals are raised in a narrow space with no place to move. Do you think they are happy? I heard that in Taiwan, the piglets are injected with chemicals so they grow more quickly. Their life span is only six months and the chickens only live for six weeks! Even vegetables and grains are no exceptions to being contaminated. How could we not get sick?

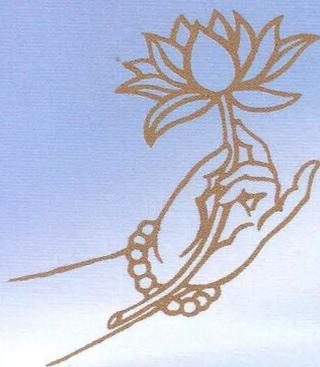
Therefore, garlic is good for us, although it is harmful to our eyes when taken in large quantities.

Question. The Buddha taught us not to kill, but what should we do about insects such as mosquitoes and flies?

Answer. The Buddha not only taught us to protect all animals, but also plants. Even plants have

lives and grow with dignity. Therefore, unless there is absolutely no space for us to walk around them, we should not step on them because that behavior is disrespectful and an insult to the plants.

Normally, when a tree is as tall as human, there is a tree spirit. In ancient times, monks often lived in mountain huts. Three days before they cut a tree to build the hut, they would respectfully tell of their intention and ask the tree spirit to move to a safe place. This method can be applied to insects. In order to keep our houses and environment clean and our family healthy, we can stand in front of a statue of the Buddha or Bodhisattva three days before our actions and ask the insects to move. Some people who have done so with sincere and kind hearts have received good results.



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