

Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha

Chapter Three Summary

Out of the Three Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—the Dharma is the most supreme, for it is what the Buddha relied on to attain enlightenment.

The Dharma can be categorized into “this-worldly” (conventional truths) and “other-worldly” (Ultimate Truths). The Buddha taught using “real teachings” as well as “provisional teachings.” He was able to guide sentient beings through harmonizing the ultimate and conventional truths, using both real and provisional teachings.

Upon enlightenment, the Buddha realized that the truth of Dependent Origination was too profound for sentient beings. Instead, he spoke the Four Noble Truths at the first turning of the Dharma wheel. As suffering was more easily relatable, the Buddha began his teachings with it. He then proceeded with the cause of suffering, to inspire others to seek the end of suffering.

Additionally, he taught the Three Dharma Seals, explaining that all phenomena arise due to causes and conditions and are also bound by impermanence as they eventually dissipate. As conditions are unsubstantial, dependent, and impermanent, the Buddha taught the concept of non-self and emptiness. Since nothing is substantial, it is thus possible to transform affliction into Bodhi wisdom, ignorance into enlightenment, and ordinary beings into sages. It is also possible to attain the state of nirvana—absolute tranquility.

Unlike conventional Buddhist thought, which is impassive, Humanistic Buddhism advocates harmonizing ultimate and conventional truths together. In this way, the Dharma is presented in a positive, optimistic, and joyful manner. To truly uphold the original intents of the Buddha, Buddhism must be a beacon of happiness for the world.

Chapter Three: Core Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism

When the Buddha taught, he constantly acknowledged the different aptitudes of his disciples and amended his approach. Yet, he always taught according to the same set of core concepts. For example, the teachings of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and selflessness are commonly recognized as the earliest Buddhist teachings. In later periods, Buddhists were encouraged to practice the Six Paramitas, aspire to the Four Immeasurable States of Mind, and realize the Four Universal Vows.

Early Buddhism, as we understand it, ultimately concerned Buddha's perspective of the human world, which was expressed through the ideas of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and selflessness. However, these teachings were later assimilated by Buddhists without depth, and were mostly interpreted from a negative perspective, leading people to assume that Buddhism embraced a rather passive and negative view on life.

Regardless of the fact that the humanistic Buddha remained connected to society by living close to communities, begging for alms, speaking the Dharma, and delivering sentient beings; modern day Buddhists choose to live secluded lives of spiritual cultivation, detaching themselves from society, and turning the proactive and soteriological concepts of Dharma into something passive and evasive of worldly matters, which is truly regretful. In this chapter, the fundamental teachings of Buddha are further elaborated on alongside their relation to Humanistic Buddhism.

1) The Ultimate Meanings of Suffering, Emptiness, and Impermanence

A large number of Buddhists portray life as an experience of extreme suffering, and further divide it into suffering caused by birth and death, the Three Sufferings, Four Sufferings, Eight Sufferings, and endless sufferings. The truth is, Buddha never taught about suffering to worsen our aversion to life and reality, treating the Saha World as the sea of suffering, regarding the Three Realms as a burning house, feeling that life is meaningless. Rather, his intention was to draw our focus onto suffering itself, and cultivate virtue to eradicate the causes of suffering and attain ultimate peace.

This is not how suffering should be perceived. Proactively, suffering can be regarded as a contributive factor to life. Suffering is a contributing condition, and a nutrient for life. Suffering causes one to learn, work harder, improve, grow, and transcend. Suffering enables those with potential to endure hardship and strive harder, which are positive energies in life.

In terms of liberation from suffering and attainment of happiness, no student can pass

exams without years of studious effort. No farmer will ever yield a good harvest without diligent cultivation. No soldier can emerge gloriously as a general without fighting hard battles. No engineers can become experts without years of research works. Without hard work, how can there be success? Without proper upbringing and education, how can parents raise their children well? Without caring and providing for one's parents, how can these children live an ethical life once they become adults? Without being subject to the harsh cold and bone-chilling storm, how can there be pleasant floral fragrances in Spring? Without experiencing a long period of hibernation, how can animals exhibit the vibrant energies of life?

Suffering is our teacher, our strength, our factor of success, and what makes us admirable. Suffering is like clay, which, having gone through the furnace becomes solid and strong. Suffering is like asphalt, which, once pressed hard into the ground, becomes a firm path for travelers. Suffering is like gold, which must be subject to extreme temperature to become refined and pure.

Suffering trains us and makes us stronger, more determined, and more aspiring. Suffering is a path upon which we head towards a greater future. As the saying goes, "one becomes the best of the best by enduring the worst of the worst." Eminent Buddhist masters of the past all endured the greatest hardships in order to achieve spiritual attainment. Even the Buddha had to go through six years of austerity in order to become awakened. The path is certainly not an easy one.

1. Suffering: Life, after endless hammering and refinement, becomes full of potential

*After endless hammering and refinement,
it is ready to depart the deep mountains;
Having gone through the furnace of raging fire,
it is no longer linked to the ordinary.
Though its body is shattered and bones crushed,
it harbors no resentment.
All that is left behind in this world,
are the white colors of purity.*

In this poem by Yu Qian (于謙, 1398-1457) from the Ming Dynasty, it tells us that without excavation, high temperature, extreme refinement and chiseling, lime cannot become the pure white substance that beautifies the houses that people live in.

Suffering is indeed an inevitable truth of life. In Buddhism, there are the so-called Eight Sufferings: suffering caused by birth, old age, sickness, death, union with foes, separation from loved ones, unfulfilled desire, and burning of the Five Skandhas. Parents go through extreme hardship to give birth to and raise their children, the pain of which is

certainly hard to imagine. When old age arises, the situation is worsened by loneliness, which is also suffering. Once sickness strikes, the torments of mental illnesses such as greed, anger, and ignorance, added with the physical pains are indubitably oppressing. In addition, the fear of death certainly worsens life's reputation as one that is filled with nothing but suffering.

There are also the sufferings caused by loss of loved ones, meeting one's foes, and insatiable desires. These pains are certainly difficult to endure. Even everyday encounters can cause emotions of discomfort, fatigue, and hardship, which are also categorized as suffering in this world.

However, it is not entirely impossible to overcome such adversities and calamities in life. For example, despite the painstaking effort of having to raise one's children, when they hold their babies in their arms, the pain then transforms into the joy of hope. There are also dutiful children who offer constant care and love, which assuredly brings warmth to the hearts of the parents.

Old age may be suffering. However, there are also elderlies who enjoy a retired life in the company of their children and grandchildren. It is not a joy to care for one's spouse in old age and be in the company of one's offspring? When the elderly are respected, attended to, and provided for, old age certainly has its joys and splendor. Even when retired and alone, one still has a chance to start a second life and continue to expand life's horizons. Can you say that old age is truly nothing but suffering?

When we are sick, we can go to the hospital and find doctors of distinctive specialties to treat our illnesses. Concurrently, you must know your body well and give it sufficient nutrients, health care, and exercise in order to help it heal. Even bedridden patients are afforded various conditions and care. Therefore, sickness cannot be entirely regarded as suffering. Many are ultimately given the luxury of time when sick, and learn from the lesson of sickness. Some are able to retreat to quiet places to rest and enjoy natural surroundings by wandering in the wilderness, appreciating the flowers, all alongside the mountains and rivers. After the mind and body acquire deep relaxation and recuperation, they are able to start anew. In this way, illness has become a good cause.

As the saying goes, "the gift of food comes with a little price." It is not entirely cruel to come across sickness, for it can make us stronger. Buddhist masters take minor illnesses as companions for the Way, for they inspire us to improve and transcend life. In the sutras, suffering is categorized into: 1) Physical illness: old age, sickness, death, and rebirth 2) Mental illness: greed, anger, and ignorance. With the guidance of Dharma, you shall be able to train yourself in becoming mentally and physically free of suffering.

To those who lead a hectic life, the gains of minor illnesses is a few days of rest. Sometimes, through the occurrence of a minor illness, people would come to understand the inspiration it offers. Illness is a reminder for us all that the world is not perfect, and no one can live forever. Illness shows the reality of life in helping us to become detached from it. “Illness is feared even by heroes,” “Only upon sickness does one come to realize that the body is a source of suffering.” By embracing the suffering of illness, we will no longer become attached to it. It is usually upon the moment of sickness that people come to realize the need to let go of the delusive joys of wealth and fame, and embark on the journey to finding life’s true meanings. It is not a total loss if with illness come unique realizations.

Speaking of death, most people think the greatest suffering comes from death. Actually, not only can death be painless, it can even bring a sense of joy. Why so? An aging and dying body is compared to a dilapidated house that requires reconstruction in order for someone to live in it again. Death is similar to a rundown engine that needs to be replaced in order to get the machine up and running again. Death is also like a garden that needs to be trimmed and weeded, otherwise there is no hope of future blossoms. It is true ignorance to think that there is no hope or future beyond death. Just as the cycle of seasons continues to revolve, once winter is over, one needs not be afraid that a spring full of blossoms will never come.

Death does not mean the end. Death is merely the sweet fruition of life. Once harvested, new seeds will grow and ripen for the next harvest. Once the cycle of old age, sickness, and death is complete, although the physical body dies, our True Thusness—buddha-nature lives on as the eternal life. Just as one log burns out after the other, what endures from the logs is the flame. From one stage to another, the flame of life continues to burn without end.

Consider chanting beads as another example. Each bead represents a single lifetime that is connected together by the thread of karma. From previous lifetimes to succeeding lifetimes, life continues in a cycle without end. It does not disappear when death occurs. It is only the disrememberment in-between lifetimes that cause one to feel separated by different bodies. When one migrates into a new body, it then symbolizes a new lifetime. Like a wall that places you on one side and I on the other, nothing beyond the present lifetime is remembered. What remains is one’s wholesome and unwholesome karmas that keep us in the river of causes and conditions, floating on and on.

Death can be likened to migration to other places. Wealthy people have the capital to migrate to better places, while poor people are only able to reach the less affluent places. The same goes for rebirth, the forces of our good and bad karma guide us in great accuracy and

fairness. Thus birth, old age, sickness and death are particularly natural processes, so there is no need to worry.

At one time, Buddhists explained the process of life by order of “birth, old age, sickness, and death,” placing death as a final destination, which is rather passive. Imagine if the order were rearranged into “old age, sickness, death, and rebirth,” though the contents remain the same, the new order adds a sense of proactiveness to life. Since birth symbolizes a future, where there is a future, there is hope. Just as winter is followed by spring, what can be bad about this? Since the flame of life continues to burn, all we need is to do good to create good causes and good conditions; therefore there is no need to be so passive and negative about life.

We believe that Buddha had intended for us to understand the natural process of life—birth, old age, sickness and death, and aspire for virtue and enlightenment, a broadened life, and an enriching future. Therefore, it is essential that we establish good affinities, and endeavor to do good so as to lead to a wealthy and joyful future life.

Followers of the Buddhist faith will understand that life is filled with half and half. If the Buddhist practices were well followed, we will then be offered numerous solutions to our sorrows and sufferings. For example, the suffering caused by greed can be resolved by the contemplation of impurity. The suffering caused by anger can be remedied by compassion. Understanding causes and conditions can alleviate the suffering caused by ignorance. In addition, lethargy can be relieved by diligence, and arrogance by respect. Henceforth, the remaining four of the Eight Sufferings—suffering caused by union with foes, separation from loved ones, unfulfilled desire, and burning of the Five Skandhas, as well as infinite types of suffering are not totally unsurpassable. Faith offers us so many wholesome solutions to life's problems and afflictions, and allows us to continuously grow and improve. How then can we not see the beauty of life?

Our fear of suffering is exactly what makes us vulnerable to it. Freedom from that fear will release us from the worries of hardship and suffering, which will enable us to confront life's challenges, overcome all adversities, and succeed in our endeavors. In the past, the key tenet within Chinese culture was the willingness to endure suffering, aggrievement, and hardships so as to attain greater strength to grow as a human being with a hopeful future.

We can also see that those who fear hardship, who are lazy and passive, are the ones who never succeed. Only those who are willing to confront adversity, overcome challenges, and strive hard will succeed. Hence, Buddha taught us suffering for the purpose of encouraging us to head for the Buddha path, to tread the untreadable, and endure the unendurable. To have no fear in suffering and adversity is what the Buddha wished to teach

us.

In general, the statement, “life is suffering” is not wrong. Suffering connotes proactiveness and growth, and does not need to be interpreted as something passive and unendurable. As Buddhists, it is important for us to see austerity as a bridge that links us to spiritual cultivation and enlightenment. Nonetheless, austerity does not necessarily have to be the only path to success and accomplishment. Thus we must understand suffering from a new perspective, that it is a contributing factor of growth, not our enemy. The spiritual attainment to regard suffering as joy, suffering as a blessing, and suffering as peace, allows us to enjoy life to the fullest.

2. Emptiness What is Empty in This World Thereby Exists in This World

The greatest misunderstanding of Buddhism is the fear of ‘emptiness.’ Early translations of the Buddha’s teachings on dependent origination rendered it as the word sunya, which was quite precise. However, sunya was also interpreted as ‘nothingness’ and ‘emptiness,’ thereby provoking even greater misconceptions of the Buddhist teaching on “Emptiness of the Four Elements” as things being nothing and empty. If anyone were asked to believe in Buddhism, they would feel as if they believe in a somewhat delusive life and empty world. When this misunderstanding worsens, in-depth understanding of the Dharma is thus hindered, which is a genuine pity.

The truth is, emptiness is not to be feared. Instead, it should be something we pursue. Imagine if there were no empty lands, where would I build my house? If there were no empty fields, where would I plant my crops? Without crops, how can there be a harvest? If my pockets weren’t empty, where would I put my money? If my bowl were not empty, where would I place the rice and vegetables? Emptiness allows us to have and to hold something, which is said in the phrase, “Out of true emptiness arises wondrous existence.”

Although Buddhism speaks of emptiness, it in fact gives rise to existence, helps us build our future, and enables us to succeed in life. For example, the often-misunderstood connotation of “Emptiness of the Four Elements” in fact means that everything in this world is comprised of the Four Elements—earth, water, wind, and fire. Since everything is a conglomerate of the Four Elements, everything is thus empty in nature. If the Four Elements disintegrate or cease to be empty, then nothing can be created or exist.

For instance, this universe is made up of the Four Elements. Without Earth, where can life grow? Without Earth, where can things be stored? Without the Earth, where can we stand and live?

Water is also as vital. Without water you would be dry and thirsty. Without water to cleanse you, you will be dirty. Without the nourishment and purification of water, do you think we would ever live happily?

Fire helps us cook food and keep warm. Is not the warmth of the sun truly wonderful? Imagine if there were no sunlight, no electricity, no fire, no warmth, or cooked food, would humans be able to survive?

The gentle breeze brings refreshing air to us. Wind is air that flows, and the air that we breathe. Imagine if there were neither wind nor air, how can beings survive?

Therefore, the Four Elements—earth, water, wind, and fire actually enable us to survive. It can even be said that the Four Elements represent existence, as emptiness and existence are one and the same. Without an empty pocket, you would have no space to carry your money. Without empty space in your organs, mouth, and nostrils, do you think you would be able to survive? Empty lands and empty space are indeed very precious! Even one square foot of open land can be worth millions of dollars, how can you say that emptiness is not good? Without empty space or land, where can houses be built? People fight over empty space. They would take each other to court for a single empty space.

Emptiness is the most ideal foundation of existence. Emptiness offers us the most bountiful riches. Therefore, there is no need to fear emptiness, because it gives us a chance to survive and prosper. For this reason, I have written the couplet:

The empty nature of the four elements manifests in existence;

The incorporation of the five aggregates are ultimately unreal existence.

In being empty, the Four Elements are in fact not empty. We all wish for our space to be as big as possible, because the greater the space, the greater the matters we are able to contain therein. Those with big hearts embrace big things, and are more likely to succeed. Thus it must be understood that emptiness gives rise to existence, and existence depends on emptiness in order to be.

The Five Skandhas—form, perception, volition, mental formation, and consciousness, refer to our body and mind.

The Four Elements—earth, water, fire, and wind, symbolize our skin, flesh, bone, marrow, internal organs, tears, saliva, urine, body temperature, and breath. In Buddhism, these physical and astounding realities are generally referred to as form, while perception, volition, and mental formation are mental activities. Consciousness is the owner of this self, which directs our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. In addition, consciousness enables us to

distinguish right from wrong, and even eliminate wrong by doing good.

Perceptively, it can be said that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form; the two are one and the same. This interpretation of life's truth will inspire in us wisdom, and provide us insight to the ultimate meaning of life. Having understood that form is emptiness, and emptiness is form, one has understood the Truth, and will naturally be replete with the joy of Dharma and Chan. What reason is there for you to deny the wondrous meaning of emptiness? If you do, why would you desire more space?

The truths imparted by the Buddha in the *Treatise on the Perfection of Great Wisdom*, *Sutra on the Perfection of Great Wisdom*, *Diamond Sutra*, and the *Heart Sutra* can be abridged into the following: the non-duality of emptiness and existence. Since emptiness gives rise to the myriad phenomena, existence, and matters, the phrase “form is emptiness, and emptiness is form” thus becomes such a wonderful truth! However, it is difficult for the world to understand this wondrous Dharma, and the word *se* (色) is even misunderstood as a tangible color or sensual pleasure. It is a real pity to see the profound wisdom of past great thinkers distorted in such a manner.

Emptiness embodies the meaning of causes and conditions, namely, the truth about everything in the universe. Frequently, we discriminate between the conventional manifestations of all matters instead of probing into the truth within them. As a result, we fail to understand the meaning of emptiness.

Take a table for example. The moment you call it a table, its conventional form traps you, because in fact it is timber. However, if you then call it timber, it is still conventional, because timber is obtained from trees, whose essence is actually a seed. Yet the moment you come to understand that the true form of a tree is a seed, you must also realize that this seed has gathered the conditions of soil, water, sunlight, air, and human labor in order to grow into a tree that is cut into pieces of timber, which are then made into a table.

For this reason, the Buddhist teachings often speak about an entire universe visible within a grain of sand. From a piece of timber, I am able to see the energy of the entire universe that brought it into existence. This is the meaning of causes and conditions. This whole connection explained in Buddhism can be expressed with one word, ‘emptiness.’

Consequently, it can be said that emptiness is the foundation of all forms of existence, for it embodies the criteria of existence for all matters. Emptiness allows us to survive, and emptiness allows us to become prosperous. Thus ‘emptiness’ should be praised, instead of misunderstood, as something that is bad to us when it is actually beneficial. Why would you reject the treasure of emptiness?

The most unique part of Buddhism is that, unlike other religions that define the process of existence in a linear perspective with a single starting point and a single ending point, Buddhism explains the cosmology in an infinite and cyclical manner. Time is defined as beginningless and endless, while space is described as without inside or outside. Such an extremely wondrous and vigorous life brings so much hope and future to the human world. Why would anyone reject this teaching and taint the Truth?

Just as the seasonal cycle progresses from spring to summer, autumn and winter, what follows is not the end but the advent of spring yet again. When myriad phenomena go through the cycle of becoming, existing, deteriorating, and emptiness, emptiness does not mean nothingness but the availability of space that allows a building to be rebuilt. When the circle of life goes from old age, sickness, death and rebirth, death does not result in nothing; like the arms of a clock, it merely means that the number twelve has been crossed and will start anew. Since the law of causes and conditions operates in a cyclical manner, then emptiness or the great void would be infinite and boundless. Such are the meanings of emptiness and conditions.

Since it is not easy to understand the concept of emptiness, reflected within the law of causes and conditions, even the Buddha went through painstaking efforts to realize this. Its full meaning cannot be described by words. For this reason, empty space has thus become a pragmatic method to teach the doctrine of emptiness.

It is often said that the more energy you possess, the greater the space you own. Modern day people define their wealth by the spacious mansions and lands that they own, yet they never realize that a carefree mind sleeps on a spacious bed, while a troubled mind turns the Three Realms into the smallest spaces. Outwardly, one may look as if he owns nothing, yet has the riches of the entire great chiliocosm. On the contrary, one with a narrow mind may look to enjoy a wealthy material life, but in reality he is nothing but a slave to his riches, always fearing loss of wealth, his life thus becomes meaningless. Such a person is ridiculed as the poorly wealthy. Furthermore, poverty is emptiness too, though one still lives in a confined space.

From this the proactive significance of emptiness can be understood. Emptiness gives rise to myriad matters. Emptiness is also a conscious river that enables us to cruise through the vast emptiness. Is this not a beautiful life? If the positive attitude of emptiness can be understood, then it shall no longer be misunderstood.

The meaning of emptiness, as explained by experts in Buddhist studies, may involve causes and conditions as supporting factors of all forms of existence. It also embodies the relationship between phenomena, which abiding by principle then comes into being.

Emptiness is the foundation of existence. Form arises from the presence of conditions. Conditions comprise emptiness. The myriad matters are the same as emptiness. Without emptiness, how can there be room for any form of existence?

As we are currently addressing Humanistic Buddhism, we should mention the contributions which emptiness, as taught by the Buddha, can offer to us. That is, emptiness constructs existence for us. The greater our space, the wealthier we become. It is truly perplexing to see emptiness explained otherwise, deeming it as 'nothingness' instead. Would this not create greater misunderstanding in the Buddha and his Dharma? Even more so, this not only does injustice to Buddhism, it is an even greater loss to all living beings, because they would be obstructed from properly understanding the Truth. Worse, they may even be lost in the delusive thoughts of being correct, guiding the blind with their own blindness. This certainly causes many worries.

3. Impermanence: Everything can change

In the past, Buddhism was much feared for the constant mentioning of an impermanent world and a life that is short and full of suffering. In fact, impermanence makes life even more wondrous and infinite, because impermanence means that I have a chance for change. Be it our daily life surroundings or future dreams, impermanence means change and improvement are possible. On a different level, impermanence can be said to embody a positive and aspiring attitude towards life.

For example, impermanence means that poverty could be transformed into wealth through diligence. There are many real life stories about young students who have pursued their dreams of wealth and glory by studious efforts. We also see many aspiring youths who were promoted for their hard work and eventually became entrepreneurs or tycoons.

The world is impermanent. Swallows that have departed will return again. Wilted flowers will one day bloom again. Cold winter days will not last forever, for they will only remain temporarily. What follow would be the warm springs and refreshing summers that offer the luxury of full blossoms and summer creeks. If this place is too cold, I can move to a warmer place. When a place is too hot, I can find a cooler summer abode. All of these are possible because impermanence makes anything changeable. To be able to benefit so much from the ever-changing impermanent world, how can we not be content?

This world is filled with the continuous conditions of arising and extinction. Just as flowers bloom and wilt, the sun rises and sets, the moon becomes full and crescents, the four seasons bring about warmth and cold, and the ever rotating cycle of day and night, these are all the beauty of impermanence. Impermanence makes Mother Nature so much more

wonderful and diverse. Impermanence also inspires us to strive hard. Therefore, there is no need to fear impermanence. Instead, we should be grateful of the wonderful prospects in life and the endless potentials to achieve greater success brought about by impermanence.

When perceived negatively, impermanence will bear a negative effect. However, impermanence can also help us improve. For example, being poor, if I work hard and broadly establish good affinities, then I would have a chance to succeed. Though being rich, without cherishing my blessings, even a gold mine will run out over time. I may not be smart, but if I study diligently, there is still a possibility of becoming intelligent as a result of my hard work. Imagine if poverty and dullness are set for life, there would be no purpose in life.

A life filled with impermanence and ever-changing rules means that as long as we are willing to correct ourselves, refine our behavior, and strive hard, then we can naturally turn our future and fate around. Thus impermanence teaches us to cherish our blessings, our conditions, and our relationships.

We should be grateful to impermanence for reminding us of the need to strive hard and work diligently; otherwise what we have may soon disappear. Impermanence reminds us of the need to cherish time. Impermanence reminds us of the need to protect our perishing environment. The beauty of spring blossoms and the autumn moon make this world so much more beautiful! Even if we are subject to the process of old age, sickness, death, and rebirth, we still have a chance to reinvent ourselves. Having shared such wondrous Truth of this world, which the Buddha had awakened to, if we were able to believe, accept, and practice it, the resulting benefits would be worth more than the greatest wealth in this world.

4. Selflessness: From the Smaller Self to the Greater Self

In the past, the notion of ‘selflessness’ created fear in people, causing them to feel that once the self disappears, life will no longer bear meaning. The truth is, this conventional body of ours is not worth coveting. The Buddhist doctrine of selflessness is not to make us deny ourselves but to teach us not to stick to that smaller and ignorant self. Instead, we should bring out that “true self” who makes us bigger, pure, greater, and more elevated. The Buddhist terms of True Thusness, intrinsic nature, tathagata-garbha, true form, prajna wisdom, and Dharma body all serve the purpose of helping this world build a hopeful future, and strive for success. Therefore why would anyone define ‘selflessness’ as a form of annihilation?

The so-called Dharma body is omnipresent within the vast emptiness, and all pervading within the Dharma realm. Life exists everywhere, and the vast emptiness exists within our minds. The self can be infinite and boundless. The self is eternity. The self goes through the cycle of old age, sickness, death, and rebirth with a predetermined life span and

body. However, this is the same as changing from a ragged piece of clothing into a new one. When this body deteriorates, we then change into a new one. When the sun sets, it will rise again the next morning. Whilst sunrise has its glories, sunset is also filled with endless beauty. Are birth and death not just the same?

The story about two ghosts fighting over a body in Chapter Twelve of the *Commentary on the Perfection of Great Wisdom* is worth mentioning:

Once, a traveler missed his final chance to lodge before dusk fell, therefore he had no choice but to stay at a small abandoned temple. He cleared out a space beneath the altar table and decided to rest before resuming his journey the next day.

In the middle of the night, a small ghost suddenly entered the temple.

“Oh no! Am I in trouble now?” Thought the traveler. As he panicked, a taller ghost followed and yelled at the small ghost, “What do you think you are doing with my body?”

“What do you mean your body? It’s mine!” Replied the small ghost.

“No! It’s mine!” Said the tall ghost. The two began to fight fiercely over the body, causing the traveler to shake in fear. “Hey! There is a man here! Come out and bear witness. Tell us who came in with this body.” Unsure of the consequences of telling the truth that it belonged to the small ghost, the man nevertheless decided not to lie, “I saw the small ghost come in with the body.”

This made the tall ghost very angry that it ripped off the man’s right arm and ate it. Not wanting to see the man who took its side suffer, the smaller ghost then ripped off the dead body’s right arm and attached it to the man’s body, causing the tall ghost to become even more angry. It then ripped off the man’s left arm and ate it. Again the smaller ghost replaced it with the dead body’s arm. It went on like this, whichever part the man’s body was ripped off and eaten, the smaller ghost would replace it with that of the dead body. In modern terms, this could be considered the same as organ transplant.

After they had all the fun, the two ghosts ran off and disappeared into the distance, leaving the man in a serious dilemma, “Who am I? I used to be John from Broadway New York, but his body has been eaten away by the ghost, so to whom does this body belong?” A sudden realization came to him. The body was never really his, it was just conventional existence. What remained uneaten and irreplaceable was his true nature. Thus his true self had finally been discovered.

“Who am I?” This is a question worth pondering over for everyone. Is ‘I’ the conventional Four Elements? Is life measured by years? If so, then it would be a true pity to see life through such a narrow view. Humans are “eternal beings of the past and future, the

ever-changing and prevailing beings across infinity.” Humans are beings who pervade all directions and penetrate all three lifetimes. Human beings are made great from birth, which is why we endure the painstaking experiences of faith in pursuit of Buddhahood. Beyond the physical body is an eternal spiritual life that never dies. For this, life becomes extremely meaningful and full of hope.

For this reason, the ‘I’ within the question of “Who am I?” is not that physical body but a true self that must be understood and attained. Once we enter that state of eternal and undying self, we shall no longer fear or have delusive thoughts.

Thus it can be seen that the consequence of comprehending Buddha’s early teachings of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and selflessness with a passive mind would be unimaginable. On the other hand, when regarded with a positive mind, the teachings then become very wonderful. Holding true to the original intent of Buddha, Humanistic Buddhism’s interpretation of the Dharma offers hope to this world, and never provokes fear. By nature, every Dharma is meant to help and benefit us.

Buddha’s teachings on life and the universe were later proven by scientists to be true. Much of what Buddha awakened to still remains a mystery to even the most prominent scientists today.

For example, Buddha’s awakened insight enabled him to realize that the Earth bears the same shape as that of an Amala Fruit. Indeed, the Earth was later proven to be round. Some sixteen centuries after the Buddha’s declaration, Polish scientist Nicolaus Copernicus also proposed that the Earth was round, which was later supported by Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei who, as a result, was tried by the Roman Inquisition for heresy. Almost a century later, English physicist Isaac Newton supplemented this theory by his laws of motion and universal gravitation. Based on the fact that Buddha’s insights were slowly understood by the world through scientific proofs, it can be said that for any mundane knowledge to catch up to the level of Buddha’s attainment, it would take an extremely long time.

Another of Buddha’s insight from thousands of years ago was that he could already see within a glass of water the existence of 84,000 organisms. Thousands of years later, scientist were finally able to prove Buddha’s claim through the use of microscopes. In Chapter Sixty-Five of the *Sutra of the Right Mindfulness of Dharma (Saddharma-smrty-upasthana-sutra, T17 No.721)* Buddha explains that there are about eighty types of organisms that live on the human body. Modern day science has come to explain this with the term ‘microbes.’

In addition, when Buddha referred to the universe as “the three thousand great chiliocosms,” he perceived the world as the greatest, boundless, and subtlest without any

limits. According to the findings of modern day scientists the Earth, which we live on, covers an area of approximately one hundred and thirty millionth of the entire Solar System. Yet there exist two hundred billion suns within the entire galaxy, on top of which, millions of galaxies exist within the whole universe. The boundlessness of the universe is therefore exactly what the Buddha had said.

Speaking from the perspective of the smallest particles, modern day physicists have broken matters down to the smallest units of atoms, electrons, neutrons, and even smaller units. Yet by “micro dust” Buddha meant something even smaller than protons. This is similar to placing an animal hair underneath a microscope; you will be able to see even smaller particles within the hair. Taking those particles into even smaller matters a million times, we might come closer to what Buddha meant by “micro dusts.” Scientist have even discovered that 99.999999% of an atom is empty. What we perceive are in reality not as they really are, instead, we are only perceiving matters from our own perspectives, under the control of our consciousness. True reality is like a sea of energy that is boundless and filled with infinite waves of change. Everything is a part of the whole unity, which holds us together by interconnectedness. Therefore, all of the above fit within with the Buddhist concepts such as “the Three Realms are nothing but a creation of the mind, and all phenomena manifestations of the consciousness,” “true emptiness gives rise to wondrous existence,” and “oneness and coexistence.”

In terms of Buddha's claim that the myriad phenomena in the universe all go through the cycle of formation, existence, disintegration, and emptiness, and that our mental process experiences the changes of arising, abiding, changing, and extinction. Scientists are yet to come up with an even more complete theory to surpass the Buddha who had already realized it all 2,600 years ago. No wonder Albert Einstein once said, “If there is any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs it would be Buddhism.” Later facts have indeed proven that the more advanced science becomes, the closer it gets to the Truths expounded by the Buddha.

Buddha not only spoke in accord with the Truth, he also spoke in accord with the different aptitudes of living beings. To rulers, he spoke of the ways to govern and to love one's people. To entrepreneurs, he spoke of the proper means of business to benefit humanity. To the general public and even housewives, Buddha also patiently taught the ways to maintain a family or to deal with people.

Buddha actively engaged in the activities of society. Other than teaching and developing the Sangha community, he spent most of his time traveling and delivering people along the shores of the Ganges River even at the age of eighty. For this reason, we are still able to discover the remains of those sites that the Buddha had been to. For example, ruins of

the Jetavana Grove still speak of the Buddha's teachings through every existing rock and brick whilst conveying the Buddha's selfless and altruistic spirit.

2) The Mahayana Practices of Perfection

Mahayana Buddhism holds that in order for humans to be delivered, they must follow six practices known as the Six Paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and prajna wisdom. On the surface, the Six Paramitas may appear to be nothing out of the ordinary, creating a rather mundane outlook of the Mahayanist teachings by simply telling us to share, abide the law, work hard, be patient, focus, and have mental agility. If they were simple, why would the Buddha have to teach these? This is not true, because the Buddha had so much more to offer. They are listed as follows:

1. Generosity

In the early days of Buddhism, the Buddha walked between Southern and Northern India across the shores of the Ganges River. In order to help people relate his teachings to their daily life, Buddha often used the river as an example. In the *Diamond Sutra*, Buddha taught that, if anyone were to “give away the seven jewels accumulated from the three thousand chiliocosms in the amount of sands from the Ganges River,” he would accumulate innumerable merits. However, such merits would still be bounded by form, by number, and by amount. True spiritual cultivation is to be able to practice “formless giving” through the attainment of the “emptiness of the three aspects of giving.” Anyone who has read the *Diamond Sutra* will see the immense heart of the Buddha that has room for the greatest universe. He often taught his disciples to “give without becoming attached to form, and deliver living beings without become attached to the self.” This certainly is the unconditional, altruistic, all-embracing, and non-dualistic trait of the Mahayanist teachings.

Therefore, does generosity actually mean giving to others or to the self? If it were the former, people do find it hard to give away for a good cause. On the other hand, if generosity were taken to be an act of giving both to others and the self, where the benefit and honor is mutual, would you still hesitate to give? Just as farmers cannot harvest without sowing seeds, by giving you shall gain. Whenever there is giving, there will be gain.

The notion of generosity is frequently mentioned in Buddhism. On the surface, devotees give by donating money and materials to the Sangha community, while bhiksus and bhiksunis give back to the devotees by gifts of Dharma. Just as the saying goes, “the giving of money and Dharma are no different but one and the same.” Buddha had continued to

emphasize the quality between them, which is also what makes the Dharma extraordinary.

In addition to the giving of money and Dharma, there exists an even more important form of giving—the giving of fearlessness. This means to protect people from worry and fear just as how a mother protects her baby, and how a nation protects its people. The greatest form of giving is to offer humanity a life filled with happiness and peace as well as freedom from fear.

In the process of giving, there may exist unwholesome ways such as giving with attachment, bias, greed for fame and benefit, or expectation for return, all of which have been mentioned in various sutras. Nevertheless, the most significant meaning of giving, according to the Dharma should be remembered as: “the giver and receiver are one and the same.”

When the act of giving is being done, instead of just thinking about what merits we will have, we must also remember that those who accept our giving will receive just as much merits. This is similar to inviting guests to our house for dinner; at the end of the day, we as hosts must thank them for coming, for their friendship, and for coming all the way to our house to accept our offerings. In other words, we must thank people for eating our food. This indeed brings the relationship of the giver and receiver to its most profound level.

2. Discipline

People usually fear the word ‘discipline,’ because it carries the tone of restrictions on the self. Thus we must raise the question, “does discipline actually mean restriction or freedom?”

The answer is not difficult to see with a little deliberation. Discipline means to prevent wrongdoings and cease unwholesome acts. If you can achieve this, discipline will no longer be a restriction and ultimately is freedom. When we abide by the law, why would we ever be jailed? We can see that inmates of prisons in this world are mostly people who have violated the Five Precepts and broken the Law. Thus they are sanctioned for their crimes. If they never committed the acts of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, drinking or taking intoxicants, then why would they be anywhere but inside prisons? Just as trains must stay on track, and planes must fly on route, the Buddha had already pointed out a clear route for humans to follow in life.

For example, after the Vinayas came into China, in order to become fully ordained, one must go through the Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony. On the first platform, sramaneras and sramanerikas must take the Precepts of Rites, that is, to follow the regulations of demeanor in walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. Coming to the second platform,

bhiksus and bhiksunis must take the Precepts of Virtue, that is, to practice all good deeds and actively reach out to living beings to teach them, and to serve society. Finally on the Third platform, either lay or monastics must take the Precepts to Benefit Sentient Beings and to “deliver all beings from suffering and adversity with great loving-kindness and great compassion.” To reach the state of “no marks of self, no marks of people, no marks of sentient beings, and no marks of living beings” as said in the *Diamond Sutra* would be the ultimate practice of discipline and precepts.

3. Patience

On the path of spiritual cultivation, our most intimate companion is the paramita of patience. It is not easy for us to swallow insult and humiliation, endure suffering and adversity, or tolerate wrongful accusations and criticism, because we would feel as if we were disadvantaged. That is why people are able to endure hunger, suffering, or adversity, but are unwilling to endure insults. When confronted with aggrievement or grievance, most people tend to yield to the tendency to resist and fight back.

The truth is, patience does not mean to simply endure physical discomforts such as harsh cold or starvation, nor does it mean to endure humiliation or insult, or to yield and swallow your anger. Patience as taught by the Buddha is a kind of strength. However much praise, ridicule, slander, honor, profit, loss, suffering or joy you are able to endure, however much stronger you will be.

The truth is, patience is a kind of wisdom, and compassion. By enduring a situation, you will certainly come to know the causes, effects and stories behind it all, and then you will be able to transcend and rise above the situation. Just as the saying goes, “Endurance brings peace and serenity; compromise makes the world so much bigger.”

In regards to patience, one question is worth pondering over, “Is patience really a disadvantage or advantage?”

For most people, the answer would be the former. However, one who endures places oneself at an advantage, and one who fails will be at a loss. The ability to endure makes us stronger and wiser. Never be a pot that calls the kettle back. Being able to endure, I should strive to rise above and be better than others. That is why various Mahayana Sutras encourage the practice of the Bodhisattva Path, especially by focusing on the practice of the paramita of patience.

The importance of patience must not be overlooked. Disharmony in a family could turn family against each other, and then there would be no such thing as happiness and peace.

If we are always comparing and arguing with people, always being so stubborn and unwilling to endure, lacking manner, then how would it be possible for us to survive in society?

The world today is filled with disputes, war, crime and murders. Lawsuits are endless. All of these are caused by people's unwillingness to endure insult or anger. Those who lose will become depressed, while those who win will continue to inflict pain and suffering onto others. Is this truly the happiness we want? If it is, how long would this happiness last?

The ancients used to say, "Only patience brings peace." In order to achieve world peace and happiness, it is essential to inspire mutual benefit and mutual tolerance. Any moment we are able to endure a little misunderstanding, aggrievement, slander or insult; then the world will be in peace.

In the *Agamas*, patience can be divided into: ordinary patience, dharma patience, and patience of non-arising dharmas. What this means is that the only way for us to survive in this world is through the wisdom and strength found within patience.

Ordinary patience means the wisdom to see the good and bad of this world in order to survive. Patience is also a form of acceptance where not only are you able to take in all the humiliation, insult, merit, profit, as well as good and bad treatments but also to take these matters into your own hands and resolve them. One who is patient will find the courage to endure all suffering and adversity, and help people find happiness and peace.

Ordinary patience is the endurance and courage, which arise from our will to survive. It is also wisdom and strength, which is cultivated from our experiences resolving everyday matters and relationship issues. Therefore, whether we are able to endure any unfair treatment or adversity in life will depend on our ability to learn from these lessons as well as our wisdom and strength within.

Dharma patience is best represented by the phrase, "to remain unmoved against the Eight Winds." In other words, to remain unmoved by all matters in life, all phenomena in this world, all the sorrow, sadness, suffering, affliction, fame, gain, benefit, kindness and coldness experienced. In addition, Dharma patience enables us to understand, confront, resolve, transform, and even purify these circumstances. Therefore, only patience will enable us to understand, accept, confront, and resolve life's problems.

Patience of non-arising dharma is yet an even higher state, which means an insight into the fact that every phenomena intrinsically neither arises nor extinguishes, that everything is equal. To be able to go along with the condition and an enlightened mind to the theory of non-arising, then even the concept of patience would have no need to exist, as everything is simply just as it is.

Therefore, does patience actually put us at an advantage or disadvantage after all? My eighty-years of experience as a monastic has taught me the true wonder and power of patience. The greater your patience, the closer you are to success.

4. Diligence

On the Bodhisattva path, not only are the practices of generosity, discipline, and patience important, diligence is also essential to the training of a bodhisattva. As the saying goes, “There is only benefit in diligence, not in play.” Buddha also taught four ways to practice diligence:

To prevent evil from arising when there is none.

To eradicate evil when there is some.

To prompt the arising of virtue when there is none.

To enhance the growth of virtue when there is some.

In other words, Buddha has taught us to actively engage in acts of virtue when we are not yet doing any, to make sure that all transgressions we have committed are eradicated, to refrain from doing anything unwholesome when we have not done any, and to discipline our minds from trespassing upon others by thoughts of greed, anger, or jealousy. In other words, it is all about diligently engaging in the acts of stopping evil and doing virtue without ever being lethargic or negligent.

While the wealth and luxury enjoyed by millionaires in this world may be attributed to their blessings and conditions, most of them have also earned it by hard work. Money will never fall into your lap while you are sitting at home. Nor will it pop out of the ground at your disposal without toil. As the saying goes, “Even if there is gold flowing down along the stream, you still have to rise early to scoop it up.” Scholars who are studious will succeed. Farmers who diligently cultivate their fields will not fear lack of harvest. Therefore, does diligence mean toil or happiness?

Laundry that is left unwashed will always be dirty, and only clean clothes will give us comfort. When your home is unclean and untidy, how will you be at ease living in it? In this world, parents raise their children, and teachers educate their students all for one purpose: to teach youngsters that those good grades in school or success in one's career would not be possible without diligent work. Therefore, is diligence actually hardship or happiness? Before you reap, you must first sow. How can there be a fruitful harvest in the vineyard without the diligent works of cultivation, weeding, and fertilization?

Humanity has evolved from the agricultural era to the industrial revolution, and then

finally to the era of technological advancement. Although automated robots now largely assist our works, the human brain still plays a key role in designing the function and operation of even the most advanced computers. The most advanced robot still depends on humans to give it the power to move.

If all members of family are united and cooperative, then there will be happiness within the family. An organization cannot progress if its members do not work as a team. If every person in this world strives hard to bring happiness to others, then how can this world be without peace and joy?

5. Meditative Concentration

Within the practices of the Six Paramitas, it is important to learn the many ways of dealing with the world and people. In the process of liberating both oneself and others, the practice of meditative concentration is also essential to an aspiring bodhisattva. Most of the time, the unrest of our minds is caused by our afflictions. When our minds are filled with greed, anger, ignorance, resentment, and jealousy, there will be no willingness to do anything that is beneficial to others. This unrest will remain for as long as the delusive thoughts of greed persist, then how can we help or be of service to others? Therefore, meditative concentration is a key practice to finding peace and purpose in life. It is also the driving force of the remaining five paramitas.

When Buddha held up a flower and smiled on Vulture Peak, what emanated from his smile was a wonderful spark in the universe, the profound Truth of life, and the beginning of the endless words of wisdom in Chinese Chan Buddhism. Let us ask a question: “Is Chan lively or rigid?” The answer is the latter. Most people take meditation to be an act of sitting cross-legged with eyes closed. In fact, sitting meditation is merely a means and a process through which the development of wisdom through meditative concentration is assisted. The true way of Chan should be something active and lively. As has been said, Chan is found in collecting firewood and water, eating and drinking, when walking, standing, sitting and reclining, in silence and in movement, and in a lifted eyebrow and blinking eyes. Chan is a smooth and carefree attitude used in dealing with the world.

6. Prajna Wisdom

In general, the first five paramitas—generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and meditative concentration on their own are merely worldly teachings. Only in the presence of the Prajna Paramita do they then become transcendental teachings. Just as the saying goes, “The first five precepts are like blind men awaiting the guidance of prajna wisdom.” The

worldly acts of giving and discipline are conducted with attachment, but when guided by prajna wisdom, these can then be practiced without attachment to form, attachment to dualistic stances, and comparisons.

At this point, another question must be raised, “Can prajna wisdom be sought through the within or the without?” From the without, you would need to consult science and philosophy, which are nonetheless mundane knowledge, and are still far from the prajna wisdom which can be attained by seeking from the within. Prajna wisdom, attained by inner searching, is wisdom perfected by gaining an insight into the law of Dependent Origination and the nature of emptiness within all phenomena. With prajna wisdom, we will overcome all dualistic views between self and others, transcend all afflictions caused by ignorance, and thereby reach the state of perfect ease. Thus the Six Paramitas bear a much more profound meaning than what it simply exhibits in words.

Humans are Made Sacred through Life and Spiritual Cultivation

In the practice of Humanistic Buddhism, one must first elevate his character if he wishes to be a decent and healthy human being. For example, to make oneself better than others, better than before, and greater along the path of time. The Six Paramitas as practiced by bodhisattvas are the guides to our practices of Humanistic Buddhism. For example, a blueprint of Humanistic Buddhism on our ways of dealing with family and relatives, friends, food, clothing, daily living, transportation, education, leisure, resources and spiritual cultivation is provided in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*:

*Wisdom is the mother of all bodhisattvas,
Skillful means is the father.
Among all guides and teachers,
None are not born from these parents.
Joy in the Dharma is the wife,
Compassion is the daughter,
Kindness and sincerity are the sons.
Ultimately, Dharma is the home.*

The *Lotus Sutra*, regarded by the Tiantai School in Chinese Buddhism as their primary text, ultimately advocates the teaching of the One Vehicle, which embodies the bodhisattva way. The physical manifestation of an arhat with the inner quality of an altruistic bodhisattva encourages people to deliver all living beings whilst benefiting the world. In particular, the metaphors such as that of a conjured city used by the Buddha serve as a reminder for us to come to terms without our own mind, and to cultivate ourselves physically so that we will not leave our inner treasure hidden and lost. Most importantly, we must let our “True Thusness”

— our intrinsic natures shine and guide us along the path of life.

Other than the *Lotus Sutra*, Chengguan (澄觀, 738-839, also known as National Master Qingliang) was a teacher to seven Emperors during the Tang Dynasty. He encouraged Buddhists to imitate Sudhana from the *Avatamsaka Sutra* who embarked on a journey to visit fifty-three teachers who could mentor him. He reached out to people of all walks of life across all social strata. For example, Megha-dramida the linguist, Indriyesvara the mathematician who played with sands, King Anala who governed his state with strict law enforcement, Vairocana the voyager, and Jayottama the judge.

In my opinion, any young pupil who does not seek advice in at least fifty to one hundred great mentors on ways of self-establishment and dealing with the world throughout his entire life is unlikely to succeed. Has anyone ever assumed the throne solely on his own individual effort? If you desire a noble rank, then you must have staff, a crowd, and a team. Therefore, as the *Avatamsaka Sutra* mentions the phenomenal dharma realm, the principle dharma realm, and mutually unobstructed phenomenal dharma realm, these are in fact teachings on how we can be a good human being who deals with the world appropriately, and through our interactions with daily matters, come to understand the truth about the interpenetrating dharmas of the world and live life in joy and perfect ease.

3) The Sacred Truth of Humanistic Buddhism

Certainly, it is not possible to perfect oneself in an instant. Based on my lifetime experience, we each have our own attainments, and each day's cultivation means each day's growth. By gaining thorough understanding of the Mahayana teachings such as prajna, Middle Path, or Dependent Origination, which embody the profound meaning of "oneness of self and other," we will also be attaining the sacred connection between Humanistic Buddhism and Buddha.

Therefore, can the sacredness of a bowl of rice be denied? Can the sacredness of the joy found in life or the support and help we are given be overlooked? Would the sacredness of a smile, handshake, or a nod be denied? When I am willing to give others faith, joy, hope, and convenience, would this not be regarded as sacred?

The Three Acts of Goodness are promoted for the purpose of helping people do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts. Therefore is it not regarded as sacred? Faith itself is sacred. Spiritual cultivation itself is sacred. The process of purifying ourselves and transforming ourselves into sages and saint would be the power of our sacred faith.

Based on this, it can be said that Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism. In fact, since

Buddha taught the Dharma to human beings in the human world, Buddhism certainly is none other than Humanistic Buddhism. During Buddha's time, many yogis and shamans adopted odd and eccentric approaches of spiritual cultivation, which were in disaccord with ordinary human behavior. Out of his compassion, Buddha subdued ninety-six such 'heretics' and underwent the arduous journey of spreading the Dharma to deliver sentient beings. Although he made tremendous progress, the large discrepancies of principle and habit among sentient beings were ultimately hard to unite. In particular, Devadatta's rebellion and propagation of austerity as a means to surpass the Buddha had in the end failed.

Although Buddhism counsels against indulgence in luxury for it will eventually lead us astray, over insistence on austerity to win admiration and followers is not deemed ideal for the benefit of society. True Humanistic Buddhism should advocate the Middle Path and practice in accord with what the Buddha taught and practiced.

In light of this, the future of Buddhism should certainly be a faith that follows what the Buddha taught to humanity. Just as the saying goes, "The attainment of Buddhahood is concurrent with the perfection of our human characters." Once we master our ways as humans, how can we not become buddhas?

Furthermore, Buddha has taught us the Four Ways of Embracing and the Four Universal Vows as ways to deliver sentient beings. He also taught us to value every part of our daily life, and discover true peace, and perfect ease by applying the transcending and profound meanings of the Dharma.

Buddha's sacred teaching of the age holds that our priority is to serve our nation, be dutiful to our parents, and regard all humans as equals. Both the Confucian thought of benevolence and Daoist principle of transcendence share a similar belief with Buddhism, although only in parts. Only the Buddhist Dharma is complete and all embracing, and thus has prevailed over time as a unique teaching for humanity.

Humans Begin to Transcend in the Face of Equality

Equality is another teaching which makes Buddhism supreme. Within Vimalakirti's chamber, Sariputra was taught a lesson on equality by a young lady. From this it can be seen that even a great arhat must learn from the teachings of a female bodhisattva, which is equality. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Sudhana was able to enter the realm of the Dharma under the guidance of female advisors such as Isana, Vasumitra, Prabhuta, Bhadrattama, Maitrayani, Srimati, Simha-vijrbhita, Vasumitra, and Vasanti.

Thus to all bhiksus of today, is not the Guanyin Bodhisattva to whom you constantly lay prostrations also manifested as a lady? I wonder why your so-called respect for women is

often contradicted by your actions? Is this not ironic? This is the result of your lack of understanding in Buddha's teaching of equality.

Not only between man and women, equality also applies to lay and monastic Buddhist, to past and present, and to phenomenon and principle. It can be said that Truth itself is equality. That is why I composed the BLIA verse:

*May kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity pervade all Dharma realms;
May all people and heavenly beings benefit from our blessings and friendship;
May our ethical practice of Chan, Pureland, and Precepts help us to
realize equality and patience;
May we undertake the Great Vows with humility and gratitude.*

The most important messages within the verse are equanimity and patience, which represent the ultimate teachings of the Dharma.

Living in the modern era, a majority of Buddhist aspire for nothing but transcendence of life and liberation from death. I wonder what this actually means? Has anyone ever been seen achieving this?

True transcendence of life means to remain unattached to life, never compare, and never cling to anything. It also means to have no fear in death or see it as destruction. In fact, death is just like moving, immigration, buying a new car, or changing into new clothes, which are something worth celebrating. Moreover, death is preceded by birth, if there were no birth, would there never be death then? In the when moment we are born, we are already destined to die.

Not only should Buddhists stop pursuing only their own cultivation and liberation, the habit of praying, prostrating to, and chanting Buddha's name to ask for Buddha's blessings and help should also be corrected, because these actions are still done with the intention of greed and desire. What the Buddha taught us is to maintain a simple and pure mind. True faith is found in the motivation to spread the humanistic spirit of Buddha, that is, to follow the Bodhisattva path of aspiring for the willingness to sacrifice, to give, to serve, to propagate and practice the Dharma, and to deliver all living beings. The path of Humanistic Buddhism is pursued through the development of the Bodhi Mind, only by which can the spirit be truly reflected. Therefore, it is not enough to just beg or pray to the Buddha; instead, we should practice the Buddha's ways. Only the Bodhisattva path can pave our way to Buddha's humanistic spirits.

4) The Omnipresent Humanistic Buddha

All of the above said harmonizes Early Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism, which is the original intent of the Buddha. Buddhists of today should never omit any single teaching. Should you choose to retreat into the mountains, you will not be abandoned by Humanistic Buddhism. Should you choose to cultivate and embark on endeavors to benefit humanity, Humanistic Buddhism will not reject you either. The Buddha's original intent was to embrace the vast emptiness, embrace all forms of existence, and encourage coexistence and mutual respect. Nowadays when I am writing my One-Stroke Calligraphy, I would often choose words such as "co-own," "co-share," "co-exist," and "co-live" to explain Buddha's original intents in simple words and practical manners.

Throughout the almost eighty years of my life, I have gradually come to realize the importance of emptiness. If your mind is as big as the vast emptiness, how can you not embrace the entire universe and everything that the Buddha had ever taught? The world exists in our minds. All sentient beings live as beings within our hearts. The myriad phenomena are also embraced as the myriad phenomena within our hearts. Since everything exists within our hearts, why should we reject anything? Therefore, since emptiness is existence, what is stopping you from realizing all forms of existence within emptiness? If my mind is as vast as the emptiness, what is stopping me from becoming the master of the world?

As said in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, "Shall one desire to see the state of the Buddha, he must first empty his mind like the great void." The void neither arises nor extinguishes. Realization of such nature of emptiness will enable us to also understand that life too neither arises nor extinguishes. In Buddha's explanation about life, he too mentioned that our Dharma body could be attained through the cultivation of our physical body. This Dharma body is omnipresent, all pervading, and is that original face of ours which exist anywhere and everywhere. To realize this would be the goal of spiritual cultivation.

Today, if someone was to ask me where the Buddha is, an answer based on my personal experience would be: "The Buddha is in our hearts. The Buddha is in the vast emptiness within which we exist. The Buddha is in our faith."

Buddha is within our hearts. For this reason, there exist the common sayings, "Everyone has the buddha-nature," "Buddha is in my heart," or "I am a buddha." Nevertheless, it cannot be said that there will then be no *icchantikas* in this world. Would Buddha exist in the mind of an *icchantika*? Would Buddha exist in the minds of terrorists? Would Buddha exist in the minds of the bishops at the Vatican? Thus it is not entirely correct to say that Buddha exists within every one of our hearts.

In this case, where exactly is Buddha? Based on my more than seventy years of Buddhist practice, Buddha probably exists within the vast emptiness and dharma realms. Just as the sutras say, “The Dharma body of the tathagata permeates the vast emptiness, and is omnipresent within the Dharma realm. Where within the vast emptiness does Buddha not exist?”

When you prostrate to a painting, for you, you are doing so not to a piece of paper but to Buddha. When you prostrate to a Buddha statue, you are not revering some substance of gold, silver, bronze, steel, concrete, or timber; your respect is fully directed at the Buddha. In the same way, we can regard anything in this world as Buddha.

*The sounds of the creeks are voices spoken by your broad and long tongue,
The mountains are none but manifestations of your pure body.*

Be it mountains and rivers, the sun, moon and stars, which of them is not a manifestation of Buddha? It can be said that the entire vast emptiness and Dharma realm are the Buddha's true body.

The Chan stories of Danxia burning a Buddha statue and the old lady who burns down the temple should make us wonder who truly has come to see the real Buddha. Once a monastic said during his Dharma lecture that Buddha's Dharma body is all pervading and omnipresent, causing his audience to feel the greatness of the Buddha.

Suddenly a Chan Master began to cough and then spat at the Buddha statue, leaving the entire assembly speechless. The Dharma lecturer became very angry and yelled at him, “How dare you blaspheme against Buddha?! You can spit anywhere you want, so why do it to the Buddha?” The Chan Master coughed a few more times and replied, “Dear Venerable, I would like to spit again, please show me a place in the entire emptiness where the Buddha does not exist. I shall aim in that direction.”

What the Chan Master pointed out was the segregation of theory and practice which, becomes a hindrance to the thorough attainment of Dharma. Nonetheless, it is not an easy task to see and realize the all-pervading and omnipresent true body of the Buddha.

To put the aforementioned in simpler words, where is the Buddha? The Buddha is found in our faith. Since the depth of faith varies within each one of us, what the Buddha looks like to each one of us will subsequently vary too. When Bodhidharma (達摩) said to his disciples, “Dao Fu (道副, 464-524) has only received my skin, Zong Chi (總持) (Bhiksuni) my flesh, Dao Yu (道育) my bone, and Huike (慧可, 487-593) my marrow.” It implies the same message that the depth of our faith will influence the way in which Buddha appears before us. It is hoped that Buddhists will not shirk their faith and allow their attachment and

biases to block them from seeing the Buddha, thereby distancing themselves from him. Our glimpse of the Buddha is not found through an epistemological world based on discrimination but through the different depths of our faith. On the ultimate level of theory and practice, you will realize that you are already living in Buddha's Dharma body, which too, already exists in your mind. Buddha is not a deity who is based in a particular place, nor the lord of the Thirty-Three Heavens. Buddha was an awakened one who realized the Truth. Only by ultimately putting into practice your faith will you see the true abode of Buddha.

Humanistic Buddhism: Rediscovering the Original Face of Buddhism

The fundamental concepts of Dharma as taught according to principle of the Three Dharma Seals: 1) Everything is impermanent, 2) Nothing has a substantial self, and 3) Nirvana is the ultimate peace, can only be elaborated in general. The profound attainments of Buddha are in fact beyond words and perception. It is not to be understood or realized by mental activities. Not even the compiled Buddhist texts such as the *Agamas* which are rendered in language and character can thoroughly explain Buddha's state of formlessness, without-abiding, mindlessness, and boundless of wisdom. Only by reaching such states will Buddha truly exist in your heart. As we speak of Humanistic Buddhism, this is exactly the order by which we continue to broaden ourselves.

By broadening ourselves, it means to see oneself and others as one and the same, to see the unity of the self and all phenomena, and transcending past and future. Just as the saying goes, "Those from yesteryears may not be able to see today's moon; yet today's moon had once shone on those from yesteryears." Would you refuse to become the sun, moon and stars? Would you not see life as akin to them? As people say that "Each generation outdoes the last," we cannot help but wonder where the new generations come from? Are they not we in the form of rebirth? Why are you not able to see your past self or that "original face before your parents gave birth to you?" Towards the east flows the spring river, but to where exactly is the water headed? Would they not come back after all? This undying life and eternally rotating cycle within the dharma world is exactly what brings hope to the world. If our faith in Humanistic Buddhism were not established based upon this supreme and unparalleled insight, where else would be a good place for it?

For this reason, Humanistic Buddhism is no different from traditional Buddhism. The only discrepancy exists in our discriminative minds that have divided Buddhism. Just as the phrase "the same water is seen with four views" said by Yogacarians, heavenly beings will see water as crystal, humans will see water as rivers, fish and prawn will see water as their palace, while hungry ghosts would see water was puss and blood.

Are we able to truly understand the original meaning of the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha? Be it Humanistic Buddhism, traditional Buddhism, or any Buddhism, we shall nevertheless be able to, through our faith, realize that the Truth is equal in front of all. What makes it different is only our attachments and our soliloquy.

Humanistic Buddhism: Our Future Hope

In today's society, since people all yearn for a positive, happy, reassuring, and hopeful life; would Humanistic Buddhism not be worth spreading, practiced, and taken back to Buddha's true intent? The propagation of Humanistic Buddhism will offer a future to Buddhism as a whole, and to shine a ray of light onto the world. Let us not submerge in an old Buddhism that was conservative, passive, biased, and distorted. Today we are propagating Humanistic Buddhism to return to Buddhism its true face, that is, a proactive, transcending, and self-fulfilling Buddhism.

To sum up, the concepts of Buddhism, whether taught to large audiences or individuals, to monastic disciples or lay devotees, Buddha always emphasized simplicity, peace, oneness of all, bringing joy and happiness to humanity, as well as perfect ease and liberation. By purifying ourselves of afflictions, rising to a world above mundane matters, transcending the world of form to a Dharma realm of boundlessness, formlessness, and infinity, then we would have uncovered our true Dharma nature as that of the Buddha. This would be the Dharma body, which reflects our Wisdom of Great Perfect Mirror.

In closing, our only intention is to inspire a holistic view of modern day Buddhism where people are able to perceive both the principle and phenomenal aspects of Buddhism, to regard oneself and others as one, and respect man, woman, and all beings as equals. May we follow the footsteps of the humanistic Buddha in allowing the bond between oneself and the multitude to prevail. Even when we become awakened, as buddhas, the world and the vast emptiness will still be our abodes.