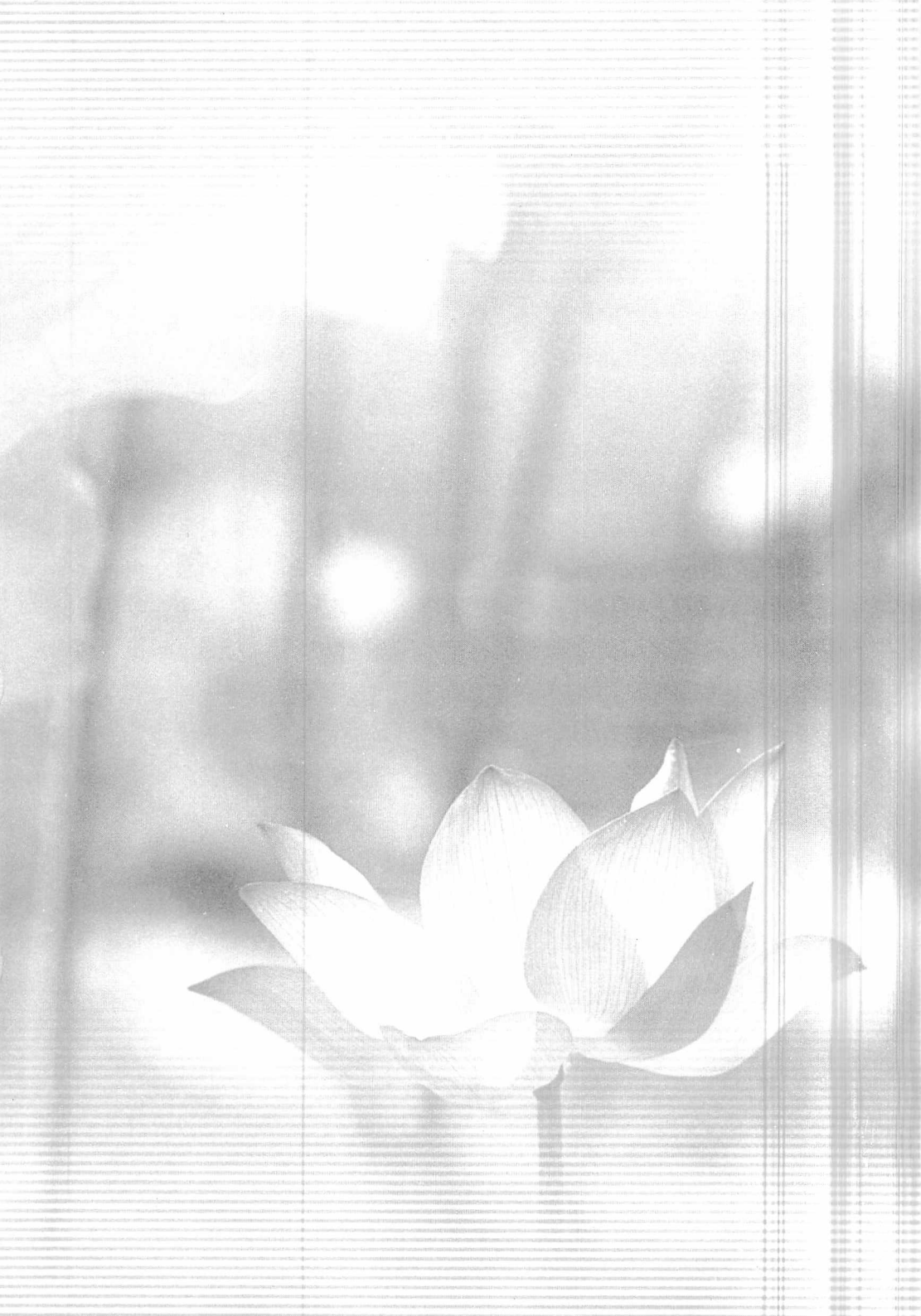




**Short Talks From
Venerable
Master Chin Kung**





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CONTENTS

The Reality of Cause and Effect	5
Subduing Maras	15
Commentary on Liao-Fan's Four Lessons	23
For Peace to Exist: the Multi Faith Forum	33
Homes for the Aged are a Promising Project	39
Saving the World from Disaster	51
Talk at The Sydney Evergreen Elderly	57
Talk at the Lunar New Year's Eve Charity Dinner	69
How to Create a Fulfilling and Prosperous Multi-cultural World	73
Talk at The Hindu Endowment Board	79
Why Make a Donation to the Jamiyah Home for the Aged?	83
Mindfulness of the Buddha	85

THE REALITY OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

In recent years, our world has become beset with calamities and our lives increasingly filled with suffering and unhappiness. As times goes on, these adversities will become more and more severe. Someone asked how the Great Compassionate Buddhas and Bodhisattvas liberate all people from their pain. We need to understand the real meaning of liberation. It does not mean that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will deliver food when we do not have enough to eat, or clothes when we do not have enough to wear.

Then how do they help us? By teaching us how to overcome greed, anger and ignorance so that our minds will no longer be deluded, but awakened. By teaching us of the Law of Cause and Effect. To end our suffering, we first have to know what causes it. As human beings, we undergo the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. We suffer hardships, do not attain what we seek, are parted from our loved ones and find ourselves in the presence of those whom we resent or even hate. We are surrounded by all these with no apparent way of being truly free.

In addition, we need to understand that cataly-

stic conditions or circumstances have to exist for a cause to generate an effect. By controlling these catalytic conditions, we can have some influence on our consequences. We need to practice good deeds during our lifetime to generate good karma. Then we will then truly appreciate that living a happy and fulfilling life is the karmic result generated from a good cause and good condition. And this is the way to help us to attain liberation from suffering and to attain happiness.

Today, many of us feel the weight of our negative karma as we witness the disasters around us. This negative karma is selfish and erroneous behavior, benefiting ourselves at the expense of others. How do we remove this negative karma? How do we prevent further disasters? By practicing what the Buddha taught. By dedicating ourselves to helping and benefiting society, by not protecting ourselves while harming others.

Some of us have the sub-conscious desire to control other people, animals and inanimate objects. But by letting go of this attachment, we can be liberated. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas live their lives with great ease. They fulfill their responsibility of advising and educating the beings by explaining to them the true reality of life and universe, the Law of

Cause and Effect. Whatever people decide to do, it is their choice, their consequence. We simply accord with the condition as we educate them and then leave the rest up to them. By doing this, our mind will remain serene, as it generates the concentration and thus the wisdom to effectively interact with people, matters and objects. The benefits that can be derived from such practice are infinite and boundless. Not only can our present suffering be resolved, but our negative karma accumulated over infinite life times can be eliminated as well.

Why then are we unable to realize the true benefit? Because we are obstructed by our own negative karma, unable to see what is right before our eyes. We are constantly reminded by the images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Constantly prompted by our reciting the sutras. Impelled by our daily chanting of the Buddha's name and listening to the dharma talks. Yet we still are unable to truly comprehend the teachings and are still unable to apply the principles in our daily living.

We cannot blame the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for not helping. In fact, they are trying to. We are not paying attention. We have a wondrous and rare chance to encounter Buddhism, which is about to slip by us. Allowing this to happen will be a

tragic mistake that is entirely our fault. To prevent this from happening, we need to reflect and truly repent our mistakes. This is a learning process that will enable us to overcome our afflictions and worldly habits and thus to remove our negative karma.

What is this negative karma? A part of it is afflictions and worldly habits. How do we overcome these? By choosing and practicing any one of the eighty-four thousand methods that the Buddha taught. From all these infinite ways he told us that in this Dharma Ending Age the Buddha Name Chanting Method is the most convenient, simple and effective. It can generate the positive effect and thus the strength needed to eradicate our afflictions and bad karma.

Why do we not yet feel the results from our daily chanting? It is not because the chanting method is ineffective. Some practitioners have achieved remarkable results and successfully eliminated their negative karma. If we are not feeling the results it is because our daily practice does not accord with the teachings, We are not doing what we are advised to do for our own good, but are doing what we are advised not to do. For example, are we refraining from killing any living creature, refraining from stealing? Are we refraining from committing the mental,

physical and bodily misconducts such as sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, bearing tales, seductive words, greed, anger and ignorance?

We would do well to follow the Buddha's guidance and repent for our mistakes. This will help to decrease our negative karma. Our chanting, our daily practice and our goals need to accord with the principles in the teachings. Our recitation of the sutras is to remind us of the teachings and to accord with them to correct our erroneous ways. Failure to do so will increase our negative karma. Our goal is the mind of sincerity, purity, equality awakening and compassion. Only with this mind will we be able to solve all problems. They cannot be solved by physical force, by war. They are solved with loving-kindness toward others. It is in our best interest to be rid of the desire to control, for it will only result in our committing further transgressions, thus increasing our negative karma. No one can truly control another. History provides us with many examples of countries that tried to use force to control another country; Hitler's invasion of Europe, the Japanese invasion of China, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and the United States' interference of Iraq and Vietnam. All failed.

On the other hand, our work in propagating

Buddhism throughout the world, especially in China where we freely distribute tapes and books to teach people to practice good deeds has resulted in over two billion people listening to the teachings. We did not have to spend much to gain this kind of result. Instead of those countries spending huge sums of money on warfare, they could have spent the money on caring for, loving and supporting people who were suffering hardships. In this way, they would have peacefully and easily won them over. Or they could have used the money to educate their own citizens, to help them be self-sufficient, to pay more attention to internal needs instead of constantly interfering with external affairs.

This is the way to truly influence people with loving-kindness. Using physical force to try to solve problems will not only create enemies but also generate the cause to go to the hell realms. By practicing in accordance with the teachings we will achieve results. In this way we will transform our minds. Since everything is a reflection of our mind, everything can be transformed by our mind. When we accord with the teachings, our thoughts will change, our actions will be proper and correct.

We would do well to let go of selfishness, to only have thoughts to benefit others. Instead we are

wrapped up in our own concerns, thinking only of protecting our own interests, our countries' interests. This way of thinking has led to conflicts among people, feuds among families and wars among countries. It has led to massive damage on both sides; the tragic loss of lives, the excessive monetary cost, the disastrous destruction of land, the final destruction of friendships and peace and the grave consequences that will be incurred due to the Law of Cause and Effect. Our complete lack of concern for the plants, living and non-living creatures of our natural environment, result in the destruction of our natural environment. In truth, it is we ourselves who suffer for this negligence and lack of compassion. We are all one entity, one being, all interrelated closely with one another. Everything, including us, arises from the coming together of causes, so to harm others is to harm ourselves.

Once we thoroughly comprehend this, we will have no more problems. Being overly concerned with our own interest and those of our country, is the root cause of all disasters and misfortunes. Taking care of this problem solves everything else. When we practice accordingly, with caring and correct conduct, we will see an increase in our good karma and a decrease in our bad karma. In turn, our suf-

fering will be reduced or eliminated. In other words, we will experience a favorable change in our environment.

When we give rise to one single bad thought of inequality, we turn a favorable situation into an unfavorable one. When we give rise to one single good thought of equality, the Buddha realm will appear in that moment. When we give rise to one single thought of the Six Paramitas, the Bodhisattva realm will appear. Likewise, with one thought of greed, anger or ignorance, our daily lives will become unsettled and unmanageable. However, with one thought of purity, our lives will become harmonious and peaceful. Thus the world in which we live will be like that of the Western Pure Land.

Our life is short. However, we are unbelievably fortunate to have been born as humans, able to listen to the Buddha's teaching, able to understand a little of its profound and incomparable truth. The Law of Cause and Effect is unchangeable, is permanent. We reap what we sow. By planting good causes we bear good consequences: planting bad causes we bear bad consequences. Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas cannot alter this reality.

However, with the causes that we have already planted, we can learn how to alter our catalyst con-

dition before it comes into effect. Furthermore we need to refrain from committing any more bad deeds and to commit more good deeds, to distance ourselves from adverse conditions. In some cases it reduces or eliminates the bad effects. In this way we can control our own consequence, transforming our environment and changing the direction in which we are currently headed.

We are learning of more and more prophecies that speak of upcoming disasters, of the end of the world. These prophecies also tell us that the great disasters could either be reduced or delayed if we replaced our incorrect ways with those that were good, with those that benefited others and not ourselves. But if we do not turn back then it will be very hard to avoid these disasters. It is crucial that people understand that using physical force cannot solve problems, for even if we totally destroy a country, even if we detonate enough bombs to wipe out the face of the earth, it still will not solve our problems. We cannot waste this opportunity but need to cultivate in a sincere and diligent manner, to apply the principles with unselfish thought and behavior. To be good, to be warm, to be sincere, to put all our efforts into helping others. In this way all that is good will come our way.

SUBDUING MARAS

There is a proverb that says, "The road to accomplishing good deeds is often strewn with setbacks." It is also said that, "As virtue raises one foot, vice raises ten". Maras are the obstacles that hinder us from obtaining true happiness in life and from achieving Enlightenment. Thus, we need to find a way to overcome and solve these problems.

In the Eight Aspects to Enlightenment Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni explained that we overcome Maras not from the outside but from within. When Maras came to create trouble, Buddha Shakyamuni did not defend himself. He applied the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration, and wisdom. Even when female Maras came to seduce him, Buddha Shakyamuni did not avoid the situation, but applied the same principles. Thus, we realize that no matter how threatening the situation becomes or how great the obstacles are, all we need to do is to eliminate Maras from within our mind.

In actuality, there is no Mara or Buddha in the external environment. As Master Ou-I said, "there is neither good nor bad in the external environment, only within our mind." How does the bad external environment come about? It is manifested from Maras,

the evil thoughts within our mind, which include deviated thoughts and viewpoints, greed, anger and afflictions. These are manifested from our mind, which constantly changes. The outside environment is only a reflection of whatever takes place in the mind. The Buddha taught that, if we overcome Maras within our mind, Maras of the external environment would no longer be an obstacle.

We need to remember that Maras are also sentient beings. As stated in the first verse of the Four Great Universal Vows of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, "Sentient beings are innumerable, we vow to help them all". How can we refuse to help them? In the sutra of the Eight Enlightenment of Great Beings, Maras are categorized into four groups of Skandhas Maras, Affliction Maras, Death Maras and Heavenly Maras. The first three are related to our self-nature, the Maras within our mind. Only the Heavenly Maras are external. They manifest from within our mind. Ordinary people are not aware of this. When they encounter these Maras, they try to find ways to avoid or defeat them. But this will never solve the problem. To solve it is to neutralize it.

Our afflictions and deviated thoughts and viewpoints are the root of all Maras. To be rid of these, we first need to have proper thoughts and view-

points. Second, we need to be rid of afflictions. If we have proper thoughts and viewpoints and are without afflictions, then the external Maras would also become Buddhas. In this way, we would be extensively helping all beings to achieve liberation. To do so, we need to attain deep concentration or samadhi. However, today we are unable to comprehend what samadhi is. Even if we practice meditation or attain some level of concentration, we are unable to differentiate whether it is proper or deviated. This is why all sentient beings in the nine realms, including Sound-Hearers, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas, need to rely on the teachings of the Buddha. All the principles and methods we use, and resultant response that arise from our achievements need to correspond with the teachings. If they correspond with the teachings, then they are proper viewpoints and understanding, which is the proper practice and proper perception. This is Samadhi.

We have read in the sutras that before Buddha Shakyamuni gave a teaching, when someone raised questions, he would first enter the state of Samadhi. Actually, there was no need to do so because he and all Dharma-Body Bodhisattvas are constantly in the state of Samadhi or deep concentration. He only did so to teach us the importance of deep con-

centration, that to help and educate all beings, we first need to attain concentration. All dharmas arise in the midst of Samadhi. Samadhi is infinitely profound and vast, a revelation of our self-nature. In the state of Samadhi, we dwell in the state of the One True Dharma Realm, in which no wandering, discriminatory thoughts and attachments exists. Thus, in this state, there is no differentiation between first or last, big or small, etc. All the relative ideas and phenomena aspects do not exist, and are called the One True Dharma Realm. However, this realm, the reality that the Buddha had attained in the state of Samadhi, is inconceivable to us. For example, it is said that a mustard seed has the capacity to encompass Mt. Sumeru. The size of the seed is not enlarged nor has Mt. Sumeru been reduced in size. How would one squeeze Mt. Sumeru into a mustard seed? The seed is able to hold the mountain because there is no difference in size. Today we are attached to the differentiation of size, believing that something small is unable to hold something large.

By ridding ourselves of all wandering, discriminatory thoughts and attachments, we can comprehend that the mustard seed is able to encompass Mt. Sumeru. We need to understand that there is no difference in size, no interior, no exterior, etc. We, as

ordinary beings, think in terms of relativity, what scientists call the theory of relativity. It is not real but purely discriminatory thoughts and attachments. What is so remarkable about Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is that they have no discriminatory thoughts nor attachments, no concept of relativity, thus they have no obstacles in their accomplishments, they are not restricted in their abilities. They regard Maras as their past parents and future Buddhas, and treat them with filial piety and respect.

As long as we still have deviated thoughts and afflictions, we will encounter obstacles in our cultivation. In other words, Maras would constantly surround us. If we were able to rid ourselves of deviated thoughts and afflictions, Maras would in turn become Buddhas. Whether a Buddha or Mara, lies in one moment of thought. A moment in delusion, Buddha would become a Mara. A moment in awakening, Mara would become a Buddha. Thus, we can see the difference lies within our mind not outside of it.

When foolish people encounter Maras, they employ Taoists with special abilities to sketch some magic drawings and chant some incantations to get rid of these Maras. Unknowingly to them, this is solving the problem by force. Even if we are able to win

this battle and force these Maras to leave, this victory is only temporary. We have not solved the problem because the anger and resentment still continue to exist in Maras' minds. They will simply wait for an opportunity to seek vengeance. When Maras do return, they will be more powerful than ever and we will end up being defeated.

Therefore, Buddha Shakyamuni does not use this method to solve the problem. Instead, he used the mind of compassion, sincerity, purity and equality and tolerance to influence and transform Maras and to encourage them to become Buddhas. This benefit works both ways. Once Maras become Buddhas, they will always be grateful. When we help others to become Buddhas, they will be our protectors and supporters in the Dharma teachings. This is the only way to truly solve our problems.

To try to handle matters with ignorance would only make the situation worse. Thus, we need to rely on wisdom, and know how precious and important it is. Buddhism seeks to attain wisdom, for only with wisdom can we perfectly and completely solve problems whether of this world or beyond. All of us originate from the same Dharma nature: all beings are one entity. Our nature is ultimately perfect and complete. All phenomena are perfect and com-

plete because they manifest from our self-nature. We need to deeply and firmly believe in the principle that all problems, of this world or beyond, can be solved. If we cannot solve problems, it is because we lack the wisdom and the skill in applying the methods. Therefore, we need to cultivate to attain the true wisdom needed to apply the methods correctly, expediently and skillfully.

Buddha Shakyamuni stated in the sutras that once we become Buddhas, we would see that our surroundings, all sentient and non-sentient beings possess the same innate true wisdom. So the key to solving worldly problems lies within our mind. The Buddha's teaching are attained from within, not from outside. If we seek the teachings externally, then they are external teaching, which cannot truly solve problems. Only those sought from within can truly solve problems.

What Buddha Shakyamuni taught is the ultimate perfect method. Therefore, for beginners, it is very important to recite Mahayana sutras, especially for those who have vowed to continue the propagation of the Buddha's teaching in educating others. Not only do we need to recite the sutras but also to achieve the level to contemplate intuitively the meanings within the sutra texts. We reform our view-

points in accordance with the teachings in the sutras and achieve the spiritual states from within.

Buddha Shakyamuni has explained to us the teaching, the principles, the ways of practice and attainment. We need to firmly believe in the teachings, to understand the principles, to put them into practice and to achieve attainment. We achieve the state to receive benefits from true cultivation and also follow the teachings within the sutras to reform our viewpoints and achieve the spiritual states from within. However, the most important aspect is our ability to constantly maintain this state when we interact with others. Once we have this ability, we will no longer be afraid of any kind of Maras and will even be able to help them on the path to Enlightenment. And this is the ultimate perfect solution.

COMMENTARY ON LIAO FAN'S FOUR LESSONS

Excerpt from Lesson One

In the sixteenth century in China, Mr. Liao-Fan Yuan wrote Liao Fan's Four Lessons with the hope that it would teach his son, Tian-Qi Yuan, how to recognize the true face of destiny, tell good from bad, correct his faults and practice kind deeds. It also provided living proof of the rewards and outcomes of those who practiced these kind deeds and cultivated virtue and humility. Relating from his own experience at changing destiny, Mr. Liao-Fan Yuan was himself a living embodiment of his teachings.

The title of this book is Liao-Fan's Four Lessons. The author is Mr. Liao-Fan. "Liao" means understanding and awakening. "Fan" means that if one is not a sage such as a Buddha, Bodhisattva or Arhat, then one is an ordinary person. So, "Liao-Fan" means to understand that it is not enough to be an ordinary person, that we should strive to be an exemplary person. That when unvirtuous thoughts arise, we need to gradually eliminate them.

"Now that you recognize your own shortcomings, you need to put forth your utmost efforts into working to change and re-

forming your misdeeds, which cause you not to have a child or become an imperial official."

This is the method that Master Yun-Gu taught Mr. Liao-Fan in changing his destiny, to take the right steps to correct his bad habits and shortcomings. Since he knew his shortcomings, the master taught him to "put his utmost efforts into changing his ways". Mr. Yu said in his commentary that, "Each of us has our own faults and weaknesses, but if we are able to calmly analyze ourselves and find them, one after another, then we will have a starting point". So, changing our ways and reforming is true cultivation. It is by no means just a formality of reciting sutras, prostrating before the Buddha or chanting mantras.

To cultivate our whole life and to still be mired in the six realms is to have simply gone through the formalities. Their purpose is to remind us of the teachings for others to see and to exemplify these teachings to bring forth awakening in others. For self-cultivation however, importance is not placed on the formalities, but rather on discovering our own faults. This is awakening.

To correct our own faults is to achieve in our cultivation. Therefore, the most important point is for us

to be perfectly calm, introspective and watchful over our own conduct as we search out our own bad habits and faults. By knowing our faults and bad habits we will know where to start, what to correct and how to proceed. We can then concentrate and use all of our energy to reform. The following are some examples of this from Mr. Yu's commentary.

"We can change from a miserly and greedy person to become one who generously gives to those in need". For example, if we are miserly, we are not willing to give what we have to others. If we are greedy, we are always trying to gain what we do not have. If we find that we are habitually doing this, we can change ourselves into generous people who give to those in need by using the practice of giving to modify our behavior. What I have and others do not, I can freely give to them upon request. Or, better yet, when I see others who have an urgent need, I can take the initiative and simply give it to them. This is the cultivation of good fortune.

There are three types of giving; that of wealth, teaching and fearlessness. The giving of teaching is practiced when we help others by using our skill or wisdom to teach others. What others are not good at and we are, we can enthusiastically teach to them, to enable them to have this ability, or to

awaken their wisdom. This is the giving of teaching. The giving of fearlessness is helping others to be calm and serene in both body and mind. It is to help relieve their uneasiness, their fears. For example, if someone is afraid to walk home alone at night and we are able, we can accompany him or her, then they will no longer be apprehensive.

Today, many young people need to serve in the military. This is another form of the giving of fearlessness. Why? Soldiers protect a country and its people, and keep the peace by not allowing harm or invasion by foreign forces. We can see that the scope of these three kinds of giving is extensive. The Buddha tells us that with the giving of wealth, we gain wealth. With the giving of teaching, we gain intelligence and wisdom. With the giving of fearlessness, we gain health and longevity.

In many countries, we can see another form of the giving of fearlessness; that of freeing captured animals. However, we also see many improper practices, which have risen as a result of this giving. Because so many have wanted to free captured animals, some people have gone into the business of capturing more animals. Freeing animals in this way is not the giving of fearlessness but subjects them to harm. If we do not set them free, these people will

not capture them. We would do well to understand so that our kind heart will not inadvertently lead us to commit bad deeds.

The proper way to practice this giving of fearlessness is to free animals that we find in the food market when we go shopping. We do so in the knowledge that they will be able to survive once they are freed. This is compassion and kindness for it is saving those beings that are suffering. However, there are many pet shops, which sell animals that were domestically raised and therefore would be unable to survive in the wild. If they were set free, they would die and our good intentions would be turned into transgressions.

So, we need to be aware of the consequences to everything that we do. When we do occasionally find animals in a food market and buy them to set them free, the proper way to do so is to chant the Three Refuges of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and the Buddha's name. In this way, we are saving their lives.

The commentary talks about changing from an angry and agitated person to one who is calm and peaceful. This talks about our disposition. Easily giving in to anger, easily becoming irritated is a major fault. Mr. Liao-Fan had this fault, so the Master en-

couraged him to transform himself into being serene and tranquil, to being even-tempered. With a calm and peaceful mind, our disposition will naturally be gentle and warm.

Both Buddha Shakyamuni and Confucius stressed this important quality of our virtue. The students of Confucius praised his five virtues of gentility, kindness, respectfulness, thriftiness and humility. He was known for being gentle, kind, respectful and discreet towards everyone and everything. Confucius was thrifty and did not live an extravagant life but rather one of simplicity. He was courteous and humble. He never argued and always accorded with others. Confucius was himself a model of moral excellence.

"To change from a person who exaggerates and is boastful to one who is modest and practical". When we know someone who exaggerates, we automatically doubt whatever he or she says. It is difficult for people like this to win the confidence of others, because essentially he or she is dishonest. Therefore, we should never exaggerate or boast, but be modest and honest in all that we say and do.

"To change from a person who is flighty and impatient to one who is settled and stable". We would do well to be composed and concentrated, to be

poised and calm. In this way, we will attain purity of mind.

"To change from a person who is arrogant and insolent to one who is modest and courteous". There really is nothing to be arrogant about. Why? If we have accomplished something successfully, it is our duty, something we ought to do. If we did not accomplish it successfully then we should be criticized, corrected and told how to improve. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas respect everyone and everything. Confucius and Mencius respected everyone and everything. However, we are far behind them in achievement or understanding! Therefore, we need to treat others with respect, courtesy and humility. These are simply virtues of nature.

"To change from a person who is indolent and idle to one who is diligent and resolute". Being lethargic and lazy are great afflictions. One who has these bad habits will not succeed in anything. Therefore, we would do well to be diligent, purposeful and energetic. One of Buddha Shakyamuni's students, Anuruddha was known for his laziness. After being reproached by the Buddha, he resolved to go without rest or sleep for seven days and seven nights. Due to his enthusiastic diligence, he damaged his vision. The Buddha compassionately taught him a

form of Illuminating the Diamond of Delightful Observation Samadhi, a form of deep concentration, which enabled him to see far better than before. Consequently, he was able to see to the extent of one Buddha Land, which is comprised of one billion galaxies.

We too need to be inspired with enthusiasm and determination. When we are lazy, we accomplish nothing. Not only are we unable to achieve attainment in our practice and learning of Buddhism, but we will also fail to accomplish anything in our daily lives. Ancient times or today, in the east or in the west, anytime, everywhere, no one has become successful through laziness. Diligence is the only good root for Mahayana practitioners and Bodhisattvas.

"To change from a person who is merciless and cruel to one who is kind and compassionate. To change from a person who is a cowardly and fearful to one who is brave and motivated". To be cowardly and timorous is another serious fault. We would do well to overcome it and to work diligently and resolutely. Mr. Liao-Fan himself admitted to having all these faults. Again, each of us would do well to be like him, to correct and reform each and every one of our faults, to change our life and destiny for

the better and to lead happier and more fulfilling lives.

FOR PEACE TO EXIST: THE MULTI FAITH FORUM

Last November, I participated in the Multi Faith Forum near Brisbane, Australia. The forum is comprised of leaders of various local religious organizations. They meet once a month and their main goal is to help society learn how to live in peace and harmony. They strive to learn how to resolve misunderstandings among the different religious, racial and cultural groups, how to achieve mutual cooperation and respect and how to honor their similarities and differences. This will in turn ensure a flourishing country and a peaceful world.

There is an increasing need for this cooperation now that Australia has eased their requirements for immigration. As a result it is developing a society of greater diverse culture, a society with more differences. The government strongly shares the concern of the Multi Faith center to have a harmonious society. Actively hopes to expand this idea to spread peace and harmony throughout Australia. We were very happy to have witnessed this and hope that this idea and method will spread throughout our world. Today, everywhere in this world, no matter which region or country, there are diverse cultures. There is a need to learn how to peacefully live together, a

need for education.

I told them that Buddhism is an education of diverse cultures. It is flexible not fixed. It adapts to local customs and conditions to be in harmony with the existing ways of teaching. Three thousand years ago, when Buddha Shakyamuni lived in India, there were diverse cultures. The caste system was comprised of four levels. Additionally, the sutras tell us that there were ninety-six different religions at that time. Now, in this area of Australia there are only ten different religions.

The most important thing now is for everyone to establish a common consensus, to share a common goal. Why? To have a peaceful world we must forget our differences and search for the common ground. Temporarily put aside our differences, strengthen and praise our similarities. There is the need to get along with each other.

We need to learn to be observant and tactful. Not only when educating beings but also when interacting with others. To do this well we need to know their character, their nature. Following our own thoughts and disregarding tact and our own observations when interacting with others results in misunderstandings, thus creating obstacles in our lives. By reading the sutras we learn that the beings in the

Buddhalands live lives of serenity and joy. All these beings represent an infinite and inconceivable range of sentient beings. The Western Pure Land also consists of an infinite number of diverse beings. Many have not yet completely severed their afflictions so how are they able to coexist peacefully? Due to the spiritual ability of Buddha Amitabha.

How does Buddha Amitabha achieve this? The spiritual ability of Buddha Amitabha is the loving-kindness, the compassion and kindness that arise from his mind of purity, equality and awakening. Using these same virtues to interact with others enables different kinds of beings to dissolve misunderstandings among those of different beliefs, different cultures and different species. Reciting sutras, listening to talks on Buddhism, practicing the teaching will enable us to live harmoniously together.

We need to understand that everything in the infinite space and beyond is just one entity, we are one, not many. Enlightened ones know that the infinite space and beyond is our home. As the Chinese sage Lao-tze said, "Heaven, earth and I share the same root. All the infinite things and I are of one entity".

Lecturing daily, enabling beings to thoroughly understand the truth will help to decrease different

views, help to reduce conflicts. The entirety of the Buddha's education meshes harmoniously all of our diverse cultures. It teaches us to reach unconditional mutual respect, to harbor compassion and cooperation, to coexist harmoniously and to honor each other and our differences.

Buddha Shakyamuni taught us how to achieve the goal of peaceful coexistence and the shared richness of diverse cultures. As I introduced Buddhism to these religious leaders, I addressed them all as Bodhisattvas, awakened beings who want to help the sentient beings of the twenty-first century to be free from suffering, hardship and unhappiness.

The Buddha told us that Bodhisattvas will manifest in whatever forms necessary to educate us. During this twenty-one day visit to Australia I have met many Bodhisattvas. They have laid aside their differences to nurture and enhance the similarities that we all share. From this foundation we can extend this idea to society, helping that society to achieve peace, prosperity and world peace. We hope the people from different racial, cultural and religious backgrounds can all help and cooperate with each other, existing joyfully together in sharing the richness of our diverse heritages.

I hope all those who truly have the aspiration of

saving this world will use this institution to nurture their aspirations. Those who have the great heart to be able to tolerate all sorts of different cultures, racial differences and religious beliefs, who are able to engage in this harmonizing work, are truly worthy of our respect. This aspiration is very hard to come by, very rare. To achieve their goal they are now preparing to build a Multi Faith center at Griffith University.

The Multi Faith center is rightfully highly regarded as an important starting point in Australia. They thought about the solution to the problem and implemented it. I believe that there is a similar need in other regions and countries. I hope that the center will be a good role model and succeed in introducing to visitors from the rest of the world, the understanding that can help resolve the conflicts in the world, to safeguard world peace and harmony.

HOMES FOR THE AGED ARE A PROMISING PROJECT

Today, due to technological and medical advances, we are able to prolong our life spans. But in actuality, the length of our life span is determined by the quality of our practice and the accumulation of good deeds in our past lives. The aging population is becoming a serious problem in today's society. Consequently, in many countries we see the establishment of retirement centers and homes for the aged. For example, in Australia, we have visited some of these retirement villages.

In Buddhism, we are taught to pay great attention to the care and provision for the aged, which is the practice of the Three Conditions. The First Condition, teaches us to be filial and respectful towards our parents, teachers, and elders, to be compassionate and not kill any living being and to practice the Ten Good Conducts. So, establishing homes for the aged is adopting and practicing this first condition, which is the foundation in Buddhism. If we do not truly put our efforts into practicing the teachings, but simply chant the Buddha's name, we will be unable to be born into the Western Pure Land or to achieve in any forms of practice. Thus, providing for the aged is the core and of the utmost importance

in Buddhism.

But today, most people believe that Homes for the Aged are a futile endeavor because after we reach old age, we will die. Thus, it is more promising to build children's homes or educational institutions. But this kind of thinking is wrong. Are homes for the aged promising projects? The answer lies in the people not the project. In Singapore, the government encourages every religious organization to build homes for the aged and for children, to care for those in need. This matter is of great concern to us and we hope to teach the aged how to improve their current lives as well as their future ones. In this way, these projects to provide for the elderly will truly be hopeful and promising.

In 1983, when I was in San Francisco, I visited a successfully run center for over four hundred senior citizens, with an adjoining kindergarten, sponsored by a Jewish businessperson. This gave me the idea that Buddhist way places, in the twenty-first century, should follow this model. From this, arose the concept for what has become Amitabha Villages. The residents of these Villages will primarily be retired citizens who have fulfilled their duties and responsibilities in this life and who, are now ready to prepare for their next life, which hopefully will be more mean-

ingful than this one. Thus, senior citizens are to be provided with the opportunity to learn of Buddhism as well as religions. They will be able to listen to lectures on the sutras to help them become awakened. We are to lead them in Buddha name chanting. In this way, they will feel that this would be the happiest time of their lives. The Chinese have a saying that when we are young we should cultivate and accumulate good fortunes and virtues. In our youth, we should exert ourselves to serve people and the community in accumulating good fortunes. In our latter years, we should enjoy our good fortunes. But, if we have nothing to do, then we give rise to wandering thoughts and afflictions. This is what westerners call old age, the time when we are waiting to die. This idea is very different from that of the Chinese. Thus, Buddhist and religious education is very important.

We need to explain to them the conditions in the six realms and the wondrous adornment of the Buddhalands throughout the universe and especially that of the Western Pure Land. We can also teach them of the learning, practice and achievement of Buddha Amitabha when he was in the Causal ground, of the praises from all Buddhas and the wonderful benefits received when we are born into

the Pure Land. We need to help fill their days with hope, to bring spirit into their lives, to truly help them see through to the reality of life, to let go of all attachments and worldly cares and to live their lives with joy and freedom. In this way, they will be able to transcend the cycle of birth and death in the six realms, the ten dharma realms, to be born into the Western Pure Land and become Buddhas.

If just one person in our way place was to become a Buddha, then all of the investment and work would have not been wasted. Nothing is more promising and wondrous than this. Homes for the Aged are the number one way places of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and of the twenty-first century. We can introduce our ideas, methods and practice to religious groups. We hope all religions will emphasize the idea to provide for the aged, to help senior citizens become Buddhas or to enjoy their good fortunes by being born into Heaven.

Mahayana Buddhism tells us that any one in this world is capable of being born into the Pure Land and of becoming Non-Regressive Buddhas. As long as we understand the principles and methods and practice properly, every one will attain achievement. As the ancient patriarchs said, "If a thousand people practice, a thousand people will be born into the

Western Pure Land". If we are able to achieve in this most difficult matter of becoming Buddhas, then we can easily achieve being born into Heaven. Virtually, every religious practitioner yearns to be born into Heaven, thus, we should put our hearts and effort into helping them to achieve their aspirations.

If we wish to be born into Heaven then we need to help others to be born there. As Buddhist practitioners, hoping to be born into the Pure Land, we need to help others to be born there. In this way, we will accumulate great merits and virtues and immeasurable adornment. By doing so we would have accomplished something meaningful and not have wasted this life. But in order to achieve this, we need to deeply understand the teachings.

Having practiced Buddhism for forty-seven years and lectured for forty, I feel most strongly about this. In the past, many practitioners were able to attain achievement because they delved deeply and persistently for a long time into one method of studying the teachings and reciting sutras. Thus, they were able to establish unwavering belief and determination as their foundation. Buddha Shakyamuni is our best role model in that he lectured daily. The students continually spent their time in studying and discussing the teachings. Therefore, nothing was able

to interfere with their concentration. They were able to achieve on the path to Enlightenment.

Currently in Singapore, lectures are given two hours a day, seven days a week. However, even this is not enough. Today, people do not have great fortune. Since they need to work to support their families, it is commendable when they are able to come and listen to the two-hour lectures. Thus, the latter years are the best time to practice Buddhism. Having raised their children and retired from work, they have nothing else to worry about. This is the best time for them to settle down and dedicate most of their time and efforts to cultivation. If we see and understand this clearly, we would put forth our full efforts to help them to achieve.

I have asked Mr. Bock-Guan Lee, president of the Amitabha Buddhist Society, to require the employees and volunteers of the Amitabha Village to listen to lectures daily and to participate in the chanting in the cultivation hall. In caring for the elders, they need to be trained to be filial toward them as they would be toward their own parents and respect them as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This concept is not found in other homes for the aged.

At the village, there will be a lecture hall with two hours of lectures daily and a cultivation hall with con-

tinuous twenty-four hour Buddha name chanting. Everyone does not need to chant twenty-four hours a day. When tired, take a break. When rested, resume chanting. If they are unable to sleep at night, they may go to the cultivation hall to chant and thus, they will not give rise to wandering thoughts. In this way, there will always be people in the cultivation hall.

Entertainment such as folk dances, concerts and plays will be arranged at least once a week to entertain the elders. I believe that everyone will live a quiet and happy life. The Amitabha Village will be one big happy family.

If we do it properly, the management, our practice, etc. will result in achievement in three to five years, or if longer, eight to ten years. This is similar to the achievements detailed in historical records and biographies of eminent left home and laypeople. Our retirement years are the most suitable time for practice. Therefore, providing homes for the aged is a promising project, not a futile endeavor. We need to instill hope into these endeavors and to introduce this concept to all religious groups, to work together to enhance the quality of life for all sentient beings. We should do this wholeheartedly.

When we help others to enhance their lives, we

enhance ours as well. When we help others to become Buddhas, we will become Buddhas ourselves. When we help others to be born into the Heavens, there is no reason for us to not be born there also. Thus, nothing is fixed in either worldly or Buddhist teachings. Good or bad, fortune or misfortune, it lies in a moment of thought. We can turn our thoughts from bad to good, futile to hopeful. Everything lies in a moment of thought. Therefore, we need to delve deeply into the teachings and practice them in our daily lives.

All the Buddha's teachings arise from our self-nature with its innate wisdom and virtuous capabilities. To practice this virtuous nature, we first care and provide for the aged. Eventually, all of us age. If we respect and care for the elders, then when we become old, others will respect and care for us. If we do not respect elders, then others will not respect us when we become old. This is cause and effect. The Buddha taught us that the merit from taking care of parents is equal to that of making offerings to Buddhas. He also taught us that we have two living Buddhas in our family, our parents. If we are not filial and caring towards our parents, but instead make offerings to Buddhas, they simply will not accept them, as they are not sincerely given. Therefore, we

need to practice filial piety and respect for our parents, teachers and elders.

Today in Singapore, our tasks include, first, the establishment of the Amitabha Village, to provide care for the aged. Second, the training of young venerables. Third, the unification of all religions and races, to respect, care and help each other in creating a happy, prosperous, stable society and a peaceful world. We do not want to give rise to selfish thoughts because selfishness only results in the deterioration of moral standards leading to a chaotic society. Only looking after our self-interests ensures our being born into the lower three realms. Giving them up ensures our transcending the three lower realms, the six realms and ultimately the Ten Dharma Realms. Every rising thought of a truly awakened being is for others.

The Buddha taught us that our minds can encompass the universe, our minds are all the Buddha Lands. There are bad people in this world. But if we can help them to become good, to change their deviated viewpoints to proper ones, to cease committing wrongdoings and instead to practice good deeds, then we have succeeded. We hope that all sentient beings will become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in this lifetime. By treating others with the mind of sincerity, purity, equality, awakening and

compassion, then even the most malevolent person will be transformed by us. If not, then we have not done enough, for we are still intermingling selfishness with sincerity.

We should see through to the true reality, let go of all afflictions and accord with conditions. It is also very important to let go of our narrow-mindedness and biased thinking, to accord with sentient beings and to be joyful in their meritorious deeds. It would be wrong to continue to do things our own way. We may not see our own faults, while others can. When they criticize us, we need to honestly reflect, strive to improve and be grateful for their help. We should live our lives in gratitude, putting our hearts and efforts into helping our society and benefiting all sentient beings. We should not mind what others do but rather maintain our purity of mind to achieve the perfect merit.

We see many people practicing good deeds in the expectation of immediate rewards. When these rewards are not immediately forthcoming, these people are unable to maintain their purity of mind. What they practiced will only help them to be born into the three good realms. Pure merits are those that help us to be born into the Western Pure Land. There is a great difference.

Monks and nuns should strive to be good role models for all monks and nuns. Lay people should strive to be good role models for all lay people. Way places should strive to be good role models for all other way places. Our Amitabha Village should strive to be a good role model for all Homes for the Aged. This indeed will be a most wonderful and promising project. We should treasure every opportunity to accomplish this goal.

SAVING THE WORLD FROM DISASTER

In the Middle Ages, there was a well-known French prophet by the name of Nostradamus. His ability was like that of Mr. Kong in Liao-Fan's Four Lessons. Mr. Kong, who was very precise in predicting an individual's destiny, was positive that all sentient beings are subject to destiny, which cannot be changed. Nostradamus also had the gift of prediction, indeed he had the ability to see our current social condition. Where did his ability originate? From mathematical science and meditative insight which enabled him to make predictions with a ninety-percent accuracy rate. The ten percent deviation was due to knowing the "how" but not the "why". Nostradamus, however, was not as brilliant as the Zen Master Yun Gu in Liao Fan's Four Lessons. After Mr. Liao-Fan met Master Yun Gu, he complied with his instructions, ceased doing bad deeds and instead cultivated kind deeds to change his destiny.

Each one of us has our own destiny, but we do not know the principles or the ways of practice to change it. Instead, we are bound by it, "One drink or one bite, everything is predestined." Families have their own destiny, as do countries and the world. In China there is an ancient book of prophecy called

the Book of Imperial Standard for Governing the World, compiled within The Complete Library in Four Divisions. It not only made predictions for our current times, but also predicted events for thousands of years, encompassing a much longer time than Nostradamus' predictions. This book is extraordinary, able to make deductions and observations completely based on the mathematical calculations in the I Ching, the Book of Change.

Only the Buddha can explain everything clearly and completely. If everyone can glance through the books in the world, to think and observe carefully, we can see why Buddha Shakyamuni manifested in this world. Our world is not without intelligent and wise people. However, no matter how intelligent or how capable they are, they too only know "how" things happen but not "why".

In ancient India, the Brahmans and other great religious practitioners had great meditative abilities. In their meditation, they were able to break through the dimensions of time and space. They also were able to unfold before their eyes very clearly the conditions of reincarnation in the six realms. But they did not know how the six realms were formed, how they evolved, their result, their destination. They wanted very much to know, however, they were unable to

further enhance their deep concentration, ability and wisdom. Thus, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were moved by their pleas and manifested in this world to help them fulfill their wishes and needs and to clearly explain the how and the why, the true reality.

By practicing according to Buddhist principles and ways of practice, everyone's individual destiny can be changed, as well as those of families, countries and the world. Buddhist sutras acknowledge the existence of destiny, but not the idea that it is fixed. Destiny is not fixed, but can be changed. How do we change it? It is completely up to our thoughts, speech and conduct. With our thoughts, speech and conduct are kind, our destiny will be favorable. When they are unkind, our destiny will become even bleaker.

By understanding this principle through careful reading of Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, we would not be terrified after watching television programs on ancient prophecies of the west. We would understand what was happening. There is individual karma within our shared karma. We can eradicate our karmic obstacles, eradicate our own disasters and misfortunes. If a family cultivates together, that family can avoid disasters. If the citizens of a country cul-

tivate, then that country will prosper and both natural and human-made disasters will be reduced. Thus, everything depends on one word, "education".

Buddhism is an education of proper enlightenment, an education of true wisdom. It is the caring bestowal of the true beneficial education to all sentient beings. In the early 1900's Mr. O-Yang Jing-Wu stated very well that, "Buddhism is neither a religion, nor a philosophy, but the essential for the modern world." It is the essential education that everyone would do well to learn.

Great prophets knew of the problems we would be experiencing at the end of this century, but they did not know how to solve them. They thought that these unfortunate results were the bidding of God, that since people had sinned, God was angry and wanted to punish them, and that this punishment was unavoidable. Actually this is a wrong idea of destiny.

The deities in heaven are fair and just. These kings have not yet completely severed their afflictions. Still they have lesser degrees of afflictions and have attained higher levels of wisdom than we. If I were a heavenly being, I would be very happy if sentient beings were able to end their wrongdoings and cultivate kind deeds, to turn back from their im-

proper ways. This is also the Buddha's wish for us. Therefore, we would do well to believe the Buddha's words, to accept his teachings to change and thus to create our own and our family's destiny. In this way, we will not have learned and practiced the Buddha's teaching in vain.

In the past, many fortune-tellers have predicted my destiny. They all said I would have a short life, would not live past the age of forty-five. After I began practicing Buddhism, it became obvious that I had changed my destiny. Therefore, we need to know that we all can change our destiny.

The first book I read after beginning my practice of Buddhism was Liao-Fan's Four Lessons, introduced to me by Mr. Jing-Jou Ju, an old layperson. I was deeply moved after I read it. When I was young, my weaknesses were similar to those of Mr. Liao-Fan. Whatever bad habits he had, I had them also.

"There is nothing more virtuous than to know one's faults and be able to reform." Therefore, we cannot simply trust our luck to evade bad fate, for this would not correspond with the great aspirations of Mahayana Buddhism. Now, the most important thing for us to do is to abide by the teachings and wisdom of sages, diligently cease our wrongdoings and cultivate kind deeds. We need to break

through our delusion and attain awakening, and also help all suffering beings to understand the true reality, to encourage them to jointly reform and practice kindness, to accumulate merits. With sincerity and compassion we should care for all sentient beings, to mutually respect each other, to cooperate with each other, to coexist in prosperity, to make a concerted effort in eradicating all natural and human-made disasters. We need to work together to save the world from a disastrous fate, to save the world from disaster. This is the sincere hope of all sentient beings.

TALK AT THE SYDNEY EVERGREEN ELDERLY CENTER
1999 NATIONAL ELDER'S DAY IN AUSTRALIA

Respected Elders and brothers and sisters. Today, Sydney is holding the 1999 National Elders Day. I, Chin Kung, am very gratified to have the opportunity to attend this distinguished gathering. Ancient forefathers of China have passed down through generations, for over three thousand years of history, the moral excellence of honoring the aged and the wise, and being filial and respectful towards our parents and teachers. These are Chinese virtues and also the main goal of Chinese education.

In Chinese education, Confucius had established an example for private tutoring. The policy for national formal educational institutes can be traced back to the three dynasties of Xia (2205~1751 BC), Shang (1751~1111BC) and Zhou (1122~249BC). Ancient educational system had three points.

First, it taught us to understand the relationship between human beings; how to conduct ourselves, how to interact with others. In China this is called the education of moral principles and ethics. These principles of human relations are divided into five categories. The smallest is that of spouses, for they live in the same room. Outside of the room there is

the family. In the family, there are the parents and children, brothers and sister. Outside the family there is society. In society there are friends, government and citizens.

We need to be clear on these relationships, that within these relationships, there are ones of blood relations, and those of moral ethics and responsibility. Therefore, it is said that paternity and filial piety exist between parent and child; a blood relationship. Trust exists between friends and responsibilities exist between a government and its citizens. This is a relationship established on the foundation of morality and justice. Therefore, in getting along with one another, we need to be compassionate and kind to mutually respect, to take care of and help each other.

It is stated in the Infinite Life Sutra that, "People in this world, parent and child, brother and sister, husband and wife, relatives, should respect and love each other and not be jealous and hateful of each other. They should render financial assistance among good friends and not hold stingily on to things." Human beings are social animals and should not try to break away from society, to exist by themselves. This is especially true for different groups living together. It has been like this since ancient times,

today is no exception. Therefore, the diversity of culture is a natural phenomenon and not human-made. It is healthy to be able to adapt to this diversity of cultures, this multi-culture. Those who violate this natural law of multi-culture may find themselves ill in both body and mind.

In addition to knowing how to conduct oneself, the second meaning of education is that we need to understand the relationship between humans and nature. Our lives depend on nature. Whether for clothing, food, shelter or travelling there is no way to escape this reality. Therefore, to get along with nature, we learn in compassionate and caring for all people and animals. How do we care for others? It is "Do unto others as we would have done unto ourselves". In interacting with others, we need to think constantly of how others treat us. Is it appropriate, are we able to accept it ourselves? If not, then we should not use this attitude towards others. This is out of great sincere loving-kindness. Not only do we need to care for all people but all animals and inanimate objects as well. This is to practice loving-kindness and compassion for everyone and everything.

Third, education helps us to understand our relationship with the beings of heaven and earth. In this

world, there are many religions that worship God. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have made offerings to pay respect to the beings of heaven and earth. On the first day of each year, what is the first thing that Buddhists do? The Buddha taught us to pay respect to heavenly beings. Making offerings to heavenly beings, with utmost sincerity is how we express our utmost respect to God.

This Chinese educational system continued until the last years of the Qing Dynasty, the last dynasty in China. These concepts of education did not change. The foundation of education is established on filial piety and respect toward parents and teachers. Filial piety places the utmost importance on taking care of the elderly. It is the unshirkable responsibility of the children to accomplish this task. However, modern education is totally different from that of ancient China. Nowadays, young people are not filial toward parents or respectful to teachers and elders. But we cannot blame them and it would be a mistake to do so. Who do we blame? Ourselves for not educating them. In the Infinite Life Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni stated very clearly that, "their ancestor had no virtue, they did not teach them the knowledge, and there was nothing strange about it", the previous generation did not teach the younger

generation well, did not set good examples for them to follow. So, how could we blame them, how could we shirk off our responsibility and shift the blame onto them?

It could be said that my generation was lucky to have received even a superficial view of that old education, able to understand a little of these principles. Unfortunately for us today, we live in an age of tribulation and chaos. I moved away from my family when I was fourteen. After that, I had little contact with my family, unable to even visit them due to political circumstances. But, I constantly remember their kindness in raising me and their love and care during my childhood. This led me to think of what ancient Chinese sages and Buddhas taught us. In the Sung Dynasty, Mr. Zhong-Yan Fan said that, "we take care of our aged parents first and then extend this same care to all aged people. We do the same for our children and then all children." The sutras have stated this even more profoundly, that "All men are my father, all women are my mother". Thus, we put into practice the great non-discriminatory heart of compassion and kindness.

In light of this, the last time I visited Sydney, I was very happy to hear that the people here wanted to build a retirement home, the Evergreen Elderly Cen-

ter. I am happy to do all that I can to help them. However, after my announcement, many people told me that the situation here is not ideal, that I do not want to be taken in. If every one thinks like this, then there would be no one to do good deeds in this world. Who would dare to? Like many disasters in this world, people often do not dare to pitch in to relieve the victims of disasters. Why? They are afraid that money for disaster relief would not get to the victims. So, they just stand by and watch these victims starve and freeze to death. This is being swayed by our emotions and is not a show of true compassion and kindness.

Even if this money was embezzled by others, when we act out of good intentions, the Buddha said that our merit is still perfect. This is true compassion. The Surangama Sutra said it very well, "when our intentions are true, we will achieve perfect merit." Those who do good deeds and cultivate good fortunes will rise to the heaven, will become Buddhas. Those who steal disaster relief assets and cause victims to starve and freeze will fall into hell. Their fall into hell is not due to our deliberate intention of sending them there. But if we do have that intention, to want to cause harm to that person, to send that person to hell, to deliberately donate money for

them to embezzle, then we ourselves have done bad deeds. We do not harbor these bad intentions.

In Mahayana Buddhism, it is the thought that counts not the act in regards to committing transgressions. Once we have understood this, we can rest assured and boldly tackle the matter, to put our best effort into doing virtuous charitable deeds. What we have is a pure and virtuous heart, a sincere loving heart.

I regard these aging senior citizens as my parents. Today, somebody has the great heart to build a retirement home, so many people will take care of the elderly on my behalf. It is all that I could ever wish for, they have my utmost gratitude. How could I not dedicate all my heart and energy to accomplishing this task? I cannot say that I am helping them because taking care of the elderly is my responsibility, our responsibility. If every one of us could think like this, then the elderly in this world would be very fortunate indeed.

Most of us will become seniors. If we are able to respect, love, care and provide for the elderly, then naturally what we receive in return will be outstanding. On the other hand, if we are overly cautious, and dare not do anything, then when we become old, in return no one will take care of us. By then, we

will be miserable, and it will be too late for regrets.

What is most precious is this bit of good will, this sincerity. Financial capability is not precious, merely worldly possessions. It is this one thought of sincerity, one thought of faith that is precious. To believe in whom? In ourselves. Therefore, we see very clearly. There are only a few who possess this self-confidence and faith, thus making it very hard to achieve in the learning and practicing of both worldly teachings and Buddhism. Without self-confidence, it will be very difficult to believe in others. Master Ou-I discussed belief and confidence in the Essence of Amitabha Sutra. First, is to believe in ourselves. Second, is to believe in the Buddha. This principle is very profound and we need to think about it carefully, to comprehend and practice it.

Even if this world is to have disasters, those who are confident will be helped. Therefore, to do this good deed today, we definitely do not want to be overcautious, to be swayed by anything or anyone around us. If this deed is accomplished successfully, great. If not, also great. God, beings of heaven and earth and the Buddha know that we are sincere. Therefore, in Singapore, we are currently preparing to build an Amitabha Village, to help the aged, so that everybody can live together, and that their lat-

ter years will be most meaningful, fulfilling, happy and full of promise.

I am very interested in the welfare system in providing care for the elderly. As I travel to different countries, I visit those who are involved in the welfare for the elderly. Indeed, in this area Australia has achieved the best. However, it is a pity that even here the elderly are lacking in spiritual life. Therefore, in addition to looking after the physical concerns of the elderly, it is my heartfelt wish that the Evergreen Elderly Center would enhance their spiritual living as well.

The Chinese often say, "In our youth, we should cultivate good fortunes and virtues. In our middle years, we should exert ourselves to serve the community and the people in creating good fortunes. In the latter years, we can enjoy our good fortune". Thus, we hope that this elderly center will be a place for the elderly to enjoy good fortune in their latter years. If we cannot achieve this, then we have seriously erred.

As for an Amitabha Village in Singapore, all staff members and volunteers are to treat the elderly with filial piety as they would their own parents and to respect them as they would the Buddha. Only by doing so are we really students of the Buddha, to

wholeheartedly do our best in serving these elderly. At the retirement home, we would provide Dharma lectures and cultural entertainment programs. These entertainment programs will accord with Confucius' principle of, "with no ill-thinking", to enable the residents able to dwell in the proper thoughts and viewpoints of the ancient sages and the Buddha daily.

Therefore, as I have mentioned before, homes for the elderly is a most meaningful and promising endeavor. Because they need to experience a transformation at this point of life. How to change? From an ordinary person to a sage. For religious practitioners, it will serve as a place to prepare to go to heaven. For Buddhists, it will serve as a place for us to prepare to become a Buddha. How outstanding this endeavor will be? What could be more promising or outstanding than this?

Sutras tell us that filial piety is a virtue of nature. If we could treat every elderly person with filial piety, to respect them as we would the Buddha or God, then it would naturally bring out our virtuous nature. Once this virtuous nature is uncovered, this person will then become a Buddha, a Bodhisattva. So where do we go to cultivate to become a Buddha or Bodhisattva? We can achieve this at the retirement home, to become Buddha, Bodhisattva, to cultivate the Bodhi-

sattva way there.

Today, I have this rare opportunity to be here upon invitation at this distinguished gathering. People have asked me to say a few words. With these, I encourage all ladies and gentlemen participating in this conference to bring forth the great heart, the great loving-kindness to care for society, for all people. To live up to the purpose of this 1999 Sydney's Elder's Day, we need to put our best efforts into making this endeavor of caring and providing for elders a success. I wish to encourage everyone to strive to work together in accomplishing this worthy endeavor. Thank you all.

Talk at the Lunar New Year's Eve Charity Dinner

14 February, 1999

Mr. Chan Soo-Sen, the Parliamentary Secretary of Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Community Development; Mr. Guan Mu, the Minister-Counselor and Mr. Peng An-Hai, the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy, valued and respected friends from the religious groups here in Singapore, seniors and guests.

I am very happy to be here tonight, at the World Trade Center, to be able to celebrate the Lunar Chinese New Year with all of you. From Mr. Lee's speech, we learned that there are over three thousand eight hundred fifty senior citizens and children attending tonight's dinner. There are also leaders of Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Taoism and the Moral Society and members of the Inter-religious Organization Council.

All these leaders and seniors representing the different religious groups here in Singapore are gathered tonight to welcome the New Year. Such a gathering is rarely seen in our society but is crucial in our times. We admire and praise the government of Singapore for their foresight and their outstanding guidance on religious policy and share the hopes of

Singaporeans for a happy, prosperous and harmonious future.

I have been speaking on the Buddha's teachings for forty years, during which time I have met with the leaders of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups and in the process have made many good friends. Over the years, I have come to realize that these leaders have great broadmindedness as witnessed in their concern and compassion for all beings. Whenever we meet, I respect them as Bodhisattvas. In Buddhism, the word Bodhisattva is a title, similar to a degree earned in universities. A Bodhisattva is an awakened being who has the profound wisdom and the great compassion to help all sentient beings; thus, these religious leaders are worthy of the name Bodhisattva.

During the time that I was in Australia, I attended several meetings of the Multi-faith Forum, which is sponsored by the government of Australia. At these meetings, the leaders of different religious groups share their opinions and ideas on how to resolve the conflicts among different religious and ethnic groups. They then forward their recommendations to the government.

The objective of the Forum is to establish a harmonious and prosperous multi-cultural, multi-racial

and multi-religious society. To have a stable and prosperous society and country, we first need to have harmonious interaction among cultural, racial and religious groups. As the ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Zi, explained, "The universe and us share the same root, we are one". To express something this complex, in such an eloquent and clear manner requires a great mind of extensive knowledge and profound understanding.

Buddha Shakyamuni, our original teacher who taught for forty-nine years, also had this great mind. He explained that the universe, everything in it and we are one perfect complete entity. If we could all share this understanding, there would be no need to worry about the stability and peace of our society or world. Using this as a starting point, we will realize that all others are ourselves. To harm others is to harm ourselves; to benefit others is to benefit ourselves.

If we think of a tree as representing our society, we will see that each of us is like a leaf, while different cultures, races and beliefs are like different branches. If we do not understand that we share the same root, but instead only think of ourselves, are only aware of one leaf on that tree, then we will fail to appreciate the perfection of the whole tree, the

one entity. When we isolate ourselves from the whole, with every rising thought for ourselves, with every ensuing action for our own benefit, then it will be impossible to avoid confrontations and wars among races, religions and cultures.

From the Buddha's teachings, we learn the importance of practicing and advocating compassion and equality. In our society, everybody plays a different role, but everybody's role is equally important and necessary. There is no good or bad, high or low, just the difference between the assignment of task. Just now, Mr. Lee Bock-Guan said that our elders represent history and experience, and that our children are our hope for the future. If we respect our elders, we will learn from the past. If we take care of our children, we will provide for the future.

I sincerely hope that this New Year's dinner will be a starting point for interchange among ethnic, religious and cultural groups and that by harmoniously uniting we will help to create a peaceful, happy and fulfilling society here in Singapore and around the world.

HOW TO CREATE A FULFILLING AND PROSPEROUS
MULTICULTURAL WORLD
3 MARCH, 1999

In 1996, Venerable Master Chin Kung was introduced to Mr. Uri Themal, the Executive Director of Multicultural Affairs of Queensland. He told Master Chin Kung that in recent years the government of Australia had adopted a public policy of welcoming people from other countries to immigrate to Australia.

These people represent different backgrounds, races and cultures. They have different ideas, religious beliefs and ways of living. Now, living together, how can they mutually respect, care, love and help each other, create a fulfilling life, a peaceful environment and a prosperous society? Mr. Themal's concerns are very appropriate and very rare. They are the same concerns as those of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, how to benefit all sentient beings. Mr. Themal truly has the wisdom and heart of a Bodhisattva.

Early in 1998, Master Chin Kung visited Bond University of Gold Coast, Australia and met with Professor Paul Wilson, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The university, with over two

thousand students coming from thirty different countries, is not unlike a small United Nations. They are searching both for a way to form a harmonious multicultural environment where students and teachers live and study together harmoniously as well as a way to advocate this spirit throughout the world.

During his conversation with Professor Wilson, Master Chin Kung naturally thought of the Flower Adornment Sutra. At the beginning of the sutra, there are two hundred seventy-five groups attending the assembly who are of different species from different worlds throughout the universe. It is the quintessential multicultural, the gathering together of beings from diverse cultures with different beliefs, enjoying harmonious and virtuous living. In order to help us to achieve this same harmony, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas first explain that the universe is perfect, is one entity.

The Chinese classic from three thousand years ago, I Ching, the Book of Change explains how Heaven and Earth, the four seasons and all phenomena were originally formed from infinite particles. Lao Zi clarified further that the universe and we share the same root and that all creations and we are one entity. As Buddha Shakyamuni said, we all arose from the same essence.

If we wish to achieve a harmonious multiculturalism, we need to have the realization and understanding that we are all one, then all of our problems will be solved. As ordinary beings, we do not yet have this understanding thus our every thought, word and action is only for ourselves, our family and our group. Our selfishness has resulted in our harming others to benefit ourselves. This way of thinking has led to quarrels among people, feuds among families, wars among countries. It is the basic cause of natural and human-made disasters. If we observe this world calmly, we might well wonder what is the cause of these increasing disasters? It is our increasing selfishness. As the Buddha told us, all disasters; all consequences come from our ignorance, our false beliefs and wrong views. If we think of a tree as representing the universe and look at its leaves individually, as ourselves, they appear to be separate but in reality they are part of the whole. Our thinking of ourselves as being separate creates confrontations.

If we were to look more carefully, we would see that the leaves originate from the same branch and that all branches grow from the same trunk. Looking deeply into the tree, to its root, we realize that the leaves, branches, trunk, roots are all one entity. Once we truly understand this, all confrontations will

vanish, as our loving-kindness and compassion naturally arise, as we care for others, as we care for ourselves. This is truly reaching the non-duality between us and others, understanding that we are one being, are all interrelated with one another.

This is realizing that the universe is one ideal family, that all groups are one complete multiculture. Thus all disputes between we and others will naturally dissolve. This reality is the very heart of the Flower Adornment Sutra, making it ideal teaching material for multicultural study. The word "Flower" represents the innumerable diverse groups in the universe. The word "Adornment" represents the concept that all these diversities do not hinder us but combine to create the perfect beauty of the universe. Those who have this great broad-mindedness and understanding are awakened beings like Buddhas or Bodhisattvas.

Last year, Master Chin Kung visited Griffith University of Queensland where they are establishing a multi-faith center advocated by Mr. Themal. Master Chin Kung was delighted and pledged his full support. He suggested that the university consider establishing a multicultural institute, to train professionals to promote stability and world peace. His ideal is to have many multicultural universities or at least a multicult-

tural department in every university.

The principles and methods of the Buddha's teachings are both logical and practical. These teachings are a treasure of humanity. They are the wisdom, the common thread that is the very essence, the very heart, the very root of our religious and secular cultures. These are the perfection of the universe, which can perfectly solve all our problems. We would do well to learn and emulate them.

Today, Venerable Master Chin Kung considers himself most fortunate to be able to attend this very rare and special gathering. He is grateful to you, for you are individuals with great foresight, dedication and wisdom. To the sponsors of this conference, the religious and academic leaders, and the government of Australia, he expresses his deep-felt admiration and respect as he pledges his full support to the accomplishment of this great aspiration. Thank you.

TALK AT THE HINDU ENDOWMENT BOARD

MARCH 9, 1999

Honorable Members of Parliament Mr. Sinnakaruppan, Mr. Inderjit Singh, Mr. Shrinwas Rien, respected President and Council Members of the Inter-religious Organization, and respected friends.

Today, we have this valuable opportunity to visit two Hindu missions. We know that Hinduism shares a close relationship with Buddhism. The Hindus worship three great Gods. In Mahayana sutras these Gods reign over the Brahma (Purity) Heaven, Naraen (Diamond) Heaven and Mahesvara (Great Freedom) Heaven. Recently, at the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, I have been lecturing on the Flower Adornment Sutra in which these three great Gods hold very important positions.

It is commendable that Hinduism emphasizes ethics and morality, compassion, tolerance and equality. I believe that if we can foster and develop these four qualities, we will interact harmoniously with different groups, religions, and cultures. In this way we will respect and cooperate with each other, thereby creating happy and fulfilling lives.

This ideal is shared by the religious leaders of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. On

March 3rd of this year, I addressed them at their meeting in Sydney, Australia. How do we bring this ideal to life? How do we help sentient beings attain true happiness? Education. As the ancient Chinese have said, "Education is most essential in building a nation and governing its people." If we want to reach this goal, there is no better way than education. Therefore, I hope that religious leaders will focus the education of their followers on ethics and morality, compassion, tolerance, and equality, enabling these to become our common ideal.

To accomplish this, it is necessary to have a strong and effective organization to promote a stable society and peaceful world. I hope to help this organization. However, nothing can be accomplished without financial support, therefore I recommended that they set up a foundation and establish a multicultural university to bridge the gaps between people of different religious beliefs and cultures.

I hope that racial and religious groups in our world can respect and help each other, to live together harmoniously. This is what the Buddha taught us to do. Consequently, the Mahayana sutras are ideal teaching materials for multi-cultural education, for they show us how to accomplish our aspirations.

I sincerely practice the Buddha's teachings and

encourage others to do likewise whenever I give talks. That is why I visited Jamiyah two months ago and why I have come today to the Hindu Endowment Board. I hope that we can develop better understanding of each other and build a lasting friendship to cooperate in helping people to live happy and fulfilling lives.

The Buddha told us that all religions, races, that all practice methods are number one, that this is the true reality. Only when we understand this, will we live lives of harmony and equality as our wishes for an ideal world are fulfilled.

I have learned that the first Indian Halfway House established by Hindus will become operational in April and that the Singapore government has provided financial support. This action of yours is one of compassion and tolerance which we respect and admire. I would be honored to help you to fulfill your aspiration. I have learned that the president and members of the Central Sikh Gurdwara Board have pledged S\$100,000. As Mr. V.R. Nathan has just said, the Sikh community is small, but their heart is big. This is most touching. The Singapore Buddhist Lodge and the Amitabha Buddhist Society would like to donate S\$115,000. I hope that from this day on, Buddhists and Hindus can become closer, interacting and

helping each other more and more.

Once again, thank you for your kind hospitality.

Venerable Master Chin Kung's

Answer to the Question:

Why Make a Donation to the
Jamiyah Home for the Aged?

The Buddha taught us to that we should not discriminate between other people, and us because we are all one. We need to have kind thoughts, do good deeds, say kind words, be a decent person. To be sincerely concerned for others, to be compassionate. We believe, like others do, that we should love and care for people. This is what the Buddha taught.

We all live in the same world, have the same problems. We all get old. Many of us need help when we get old. If someone is drowning, and we can swim, we don't ask what religion, what race they are. We do everything we can to help them. This is why we helped the Jamiyah Home for the Aged. We wanted to help, to foster closer rapport and friendship. They have already done so by providing a home for the aged that is open to all races and religions.

If all of us gave help when it was needed, our world would be peaceful and happy, and we would not have the problems we do, the wars, the disasters.

We can either choose to create problems or to solve them. But if we don't help, we will never solve our problems. We can spend hundreds of US dollars on a bomb or twenty US dollars to provide for a person in a third world country for a month. We can spend money to kill or to save lives, which one solves the problem? War will not solve problems, giving unselfishly will. And true giving is totally without expectation of reward. If we expect something then it doesn't solve the problem. When different races and religions respect and help each other, we will finally have a peaceful and prosperous society. This is what we hope for and this is our responsibility to create. Buddhism is not a superstition, not a religion but a way of practicing compassion and respect in our daily lives and this is why we helped.

MINDFULNESS OF THE BUDDHA

Venerable Wu Ling

The Buddha told us that during this Dharma Ending Age, the primary way to be assured of success in cultivation is to rely on the Buddha Name Chanting Method. Buddha Name Chanting is a translation of the Chinese term "NianFuo". The Chinese character for being mindful of the Buddha "Nian" is comprised of two parts. The top part means the present moment, the bottom part means mind. "Fuo" is the character for Buddha and means awakening. So "NianFuo" means being mindful of the Buddha, the mind thinking of awakening,

In being mindful of the Buddha, what do we chant? "Namo Amitufo". "Namo" is a transliteration from Sanskrit, an ancient Indian language. It means to take refuge. This does not mean that we take refuge with the Dharma Master but rather that we return and rely. To what do we return and upon what do we rely? "Amitufo", is also a transliteration from Sanskrit, meaning infinite life, infinite wisdom. Thus Namo Amitufo means to turn around and rely upon the infinite awakening.

What are the benefits of Buddha name chanting? Upon what principles is it based? The Buddha

told us that "everything arises from our mind". In other words, the environment is a reflection of our thoughts. Not yet having become Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, we still have discriminating and wandering thoughts, afflictions and attachments. Still have greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance. The increase of these thoughts is what is affecting and shaping our world today. From disagreements in our family to disasters in our country to chaos in our world. Our thoughts of ignorance cause disasters from wind such as tornadoes and typhoons. Our thoughts of agitation cause earthquakes. Thoughts of greed cause floods. Those of anger cause fires. These disasters will continue to increase in frequency and severity if nothing is done to neutralize them.

How? Chanting "Amitufo" enables us to restore our mind to purity, equality, awakening and peace. When our minds are at peace, the environment will in turn reflect serenity and tranquility. Our thoughts create waves. In the sixties, westerners referred to this as "Vibrations". What we did not understand was the breadth that these "vibes" had. We simply thought of them on an interpersonal level. But the strength from this kind of thought wave is amazing, able to neutralize the turbulent thought waves even from other's greed, anger, ignorance. Thus having

many Buddha Name Chanters in a region will bring peace, stability, prosperity and happiness to that area.

Understanding the need for Buddha Name Chanting, how do we proceed? We can gather in a Chanting Hall where dharma masters using musical instruments lead the group. As we would imagine, the effect from everyone chanting together harmoniously is the most productive. But if time or the lack of a good chanting hall make this difficult, then we can simply turn on the chanting machine in our own home chant along with it,

When working, concentrate on working. When finished, immediately start chanting. As wandering thoughts arise; pay no attention to them. Upon giving rise to the first wandering thought, immediately replace the second thought with "Amitufofo". If wandering thoughts again rise, then again replace the thought with "Amitufofo". Do this continuously until our every chant, every thought is being of mindful of Buddha Amitabha.

In addition to chanting, there are other teaching aids to help us in our mindfulness. When we first enter the Cultivation Hall, we will see images of one Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. In a Pure Land way place they will be Buddha Amitabha, Great Com-

passion Bodhisattva and Great Strength Bodhisattva. Buddha Amitabha symbolizes our original self-nature. Great Compassion Bodhisattva symbolizes compassion. Great Strength Bodhisattva symbolizes wisdom. Compassion and wisdom are the two virtues for us to cultivate to uncover our original self-nature, reminding us to be compassionate towards others, to be rational and not emotional, to be awakened.

On the Buddha table we will see several objects. They are teaching aids not objects of worship. A cup of water symbolizes the teachings. The clear water symbolizes that our mind needs to be as pure as the water to be void of greed, anger and ignorance. It is calm without a single ripple indicating that we interact with people and matters with the serene and non-discriminating mind of equality. Furthermore, it is pure and calm, reflecting clearly and thoroughly just as we would see everything around us as in a mirror. Flowers symbolize the cause as the blossoms result in the bearing of fruit. This serves to remind us that there are consequences from our every thought, word and action.

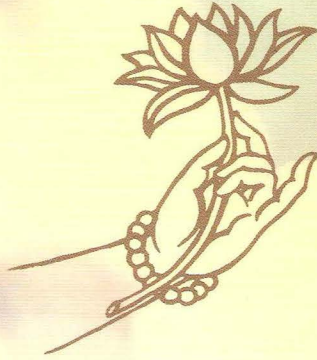
If we wish to obtain the fruit or the result, we must first generate the cause. Lamps, which have replaced candles, symbolize wisdom and brightness, illuminating the darkness of our ignorance. Incense

symbolizes self-discipline and deep concentration as well as the giving of ourselves to benefit others.

Chanting enables us to suppress our afflictions and to neutralize the negative vibrations from thoughts that create disasters. With fewer afflictions our wisdom will grow. This neutralization of bad vibrations and increase in wisdom will enable us to have a successful career, a happy family life, a stable society, a strong and prosperous nation, and a peaceful world. For the sake of all sentient beings, may you all learn and practice mindfulness of the Buddha so that your lives will be happy and fulfilling.







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