

The Awakening of Loving-kindness

*Based on the Work of
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Love

With their true sincerity, purity, equality,
Ultimate wisdom and compassion,
Saints and gods of all religions
Benefit all people in acting as
Leaders by guiding,
Parents by nurturing, and
Teachers by educating.

Saints and gods teach all people
The relationships between
Humans,
Humans and nature, and
Humans and spirits of heaven and earth;
To change from bad to good,
Deluded to awakened,
Ordinary to sage;
To have kind hearts and thoughts, and do kind deeds;
To differentiate neither by nationality, belief, or race,
Nor between self and others.

Coexist harmoniously,
Regard each other with equality and respect, and
Love one another.
Work together,
Care for each other and accord with all,
Unceasingly and forever.

Through true honesty, deeply believe that
All sentient beings are one with the
Same true nature, wisdom, and virtue.

One who achieves these teachings is a saint.
A manifestation of a Perfectly
Enlightened Being of Infinite Life and Light.

Harmony and Unity

1 January 2000

His Excellency, the President of Singapore, Mr. S.R. Nathan and First Lady Mrs. Nathan, distinguished guests, honored Ambassadors, the Deputy Director General of States Administration for Religious Affairs of China, Mr. Tong-Xiang Yang, representatives of the Inter-Religious Organization, religious representatives from Singapore and abroad, guests and friends. Everyone is a great Bodhisattva, a messenger of God, and an utmost virtuous person.

Tonight, the nine religions of Singapore are united here for the Inter-Faith Prayer for the Millennium and Charity Dinner to celebrate the arrival of the new millennium. We wish to welcome our guests, over five thousand senior citizens, and children of different religions and races from Homes for the Aged and from Children's Homes. It is our deep-felt wish that this event would help to foster harmonious relationships and unity among different races and religions. In this way, we hope to achieve happy families, a stable society, prosperous nations, and a peaceful world.

In recent years, we have witnessed disasters that are increasing in severity and frequency. Many people think that these disasters are unavoidable while others believe that these can be resolved. Most of us are worried. How are we going to face the coming 21st century?

We have studied the past and present teachings of the great sages and virtuous people of various religions on the origin of life and the universe. The Buddha said it is the True Mind; that the universe is manifested from the mind. The Hindus say it is the

Identity of Ego and Brahman. This ego or self does not refer to the minor self, but the eternal true self that always exists. Many religions say God created the world and life. Other religions say that God is the manifestation of wisdom. This is spoken from the aspect of essence. Those who understand this are called sages and virtuous people.

From our experience, the world can be divided into two aspects—spiritual and material. They are infinite. There is a creator and the created. The creator is the truth, the true god, the true mind. The created is everything that is manifested, generated, and transformed. How do we understand this?

In Buddhism, understanding of the true reality of life and the universe is achieved through a high level of moral self-discipline, deep concentration, and wisdom. Deep concentration gives rise to the wisdom needed to understand the truth of the universe. This is why the great sages and virtuous people of this world diligently practice deep concentration and meditation to witness the true existence of spiritual planes and infinite dimensions. This confirms the eternal presence of the Identity of Ego and Brahman, God, True Mind, the Holy Spirit. This is the creator. From here, we know that all sentient beings in the universe are one entity.

We often hear national leaders address people as “Fellow citizens.” Great sages would say, “Fellow sentient beings of the universe.” Although all living beings are of different ethnic groups, cultures, appearances and religions, we all share the same origin, are all one. Those who understand are called God, the Holy Spirit, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, prophets, or angels. We sincerely respect them equally. Those who do not understand are called ordinary beings.

Sages and virtuous people teach us that the key in

understanding the truth lies in changing our viewpoints. To do this we change from bad to good, from deluded to enlightened, and from being ordinary to a sage. We often say that by planting good causes, we will harvest good results, but although many people cultivate good deeds, they seem unable to change their karmic retribution. Why? Because while their speech and behavior may be virtuous, their thoughts are not. Thus, the ancients taught us to cultivate from the basics.

As long as our minds are virtuous and we have the minds of sincerity, purity, equality, proper understanding and compassion; as long as our thoughts are virtuous and we cultivate good fortune for all beings, let go of differentiation and attachments, accord with all beings and are joyous in the merits of others; we will be able to change karmic retributions and resolve all disasters.

I often use a tree as an example. The mind is the root, our thoughts are the trunk, our behavior is the branches, and our speech is the leaves. If we try to correct the problem of an unhealthy tree by plucking off each leaf while forgetting to treat the root, our efforts will be futile. But if we were to begin from the root, to understand from the basics, our problems would be easily solved.

Today, the goals of our prayers are very practical: peace and equality. The Buddha described this in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* as multiculturalism and inter-faith. In this sutra, we see an infinite number of groups that are able to live together in harmony and equality, to respect, help, and cooperate with one another regardless of race, religion, or nationality. Creation without destruction: peace without chaos. Their lives are happy and complete, filled with truth, goodness, beauty, and wisdom. This is what we strive to learn and accomplish.

Today, I am encouraging religious leaders around the world to educate their followers, wishing that everyone who is involved in multicultural education will be the messengers of Buddha and God, nurturing the sincere, pure, equal, selfless loving-kindness, and awakening the proper understanding in all beings. In this way, we will live in harmony and equality, and gradually understand that “we are all one entity.”

While our lives are eternal and our future lives are infinite, this lifetime is short. In striving for eternal happiness, we must eradicate all that is bad and embrace all that is good to transform delusion into enlightenment. It is important to be virtuous in our thoughts and conduct, and to live in harmony with people of all races, religions, and nationalities, and with all beings. If we regard all seniors as our parents and all children as our own as we care for, protect and guide them, we will be setting good examples. Thus, we will attain peace and happiness for all.

The Buddha said: “Refrain from all that is bad and there will be peace and harmony. Do all that is good and dreams will come true year after year.” Lastly, on this rare occasion of the new millennium where all virtuous people have gathered, I wish everyone a Happy New Millennium.

The Path to Buddhahood

Today, very few practitioners truly understand the term cultivation although many talk about it and this is why our thoughts and behavior have not changed. There are countless types of behavior, but Buddha Shakyamuni categorized all of them into three major types. They are the three karmas of the body, speech, and mind.

What is karma? The act of doing something is called a deed and the consequence of that deed is called karma. Karma is divided into three types: good, bad and neutral or that which is neither good nor bad. What is considered good or bad? The standard for good or bad is actually very complicated.

Just like the educational system of our schools, the standard of good or bad for a primary level student is different from that for a secondary level student. The standard for the latter is different from that for the university student and that for the university student is different from that for people in society.

Similarly, Buddhism has levels of standards; each is finely detailed and differentiated because Buddhist teachings are for all the sentient beings in the universe and their abilities are very different. For example, in this world the beings are of different cultures, races, religions, lifestyles, and live in different environments and geographical locations. Just one standard for good or bad cannot possibly meet the needs of everyone; thus, we need many standards.

Today, due to the advancements in technology and communication, we can easily travel to other countries. When we are in a different country, we learn about their diverse cultures, customs, and laws. As it is said: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." The

standard for what is good in our region may not work elsewhere, for others may think that it is bad, while what they regard as good, we may consider as bad.

However, among all the different standards, one never changes. What is it? It is love. This standard does not change with different ethnic groups, cultures, or religious beliefs. Every ethnic group and religion teaches people to love themselves and others. God loves everyone in this world. If we adhere to this absolute standard, then we would commit fewer mistakes.

In Buddhism, we are taught not only to love, but that our love needs to arise from a mind of sincerity, purity, and equality. We call this kind of love compassion. Compassion is rational love. We also need to use true wisdom. Wisdom is the true mind and emotion is the illusory mind. Love that arises from emotions will change while love that arises from wisdom will never change. Hence, Buddhas do not use love, but instead use compassion. On appearance, love and compassion seem the same, but their intentions are different. Love may change to hatred but with wisdom, love will never change. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will love us no matter what; whether we love or hate them, become jealous, or slander, harm or destroy them. Their compassion for us will never change. This is true love.

Ordinary beings have an illusory mind, the mind that arises and ceases. In other words, ordinary beings have wandering thoughts. Enlightened beings have true minds that constantly dwell on truth. They do not have wandering thoughts, only deep concentration. Deep concentration is the state without discriminatory wandering thoughts or attachments. However, this does not mean that we are idle all the time; we continue to do our job with a pure and

completely aware mind. When the external environment no longer hinders or affects us, we have attained deep concentration.

Understanding this principle, we will know how to correct our improper behavior. When our six senses encounter the external environment, our thoughts, words, and deeds are improper because our senses follow the external conditions and we allow afflictions to take hold. We have been wrong for countless eons and this is the root of our improper behavior. We have lost our True Nature and have allowed afflictions, especially those of views and thoughts, to be dominant. Thus, we have transformed the One True Dharma Realm into the Six Realms of Reincarnation. How are the Six Realms formed? They are formed by our attachments.

The first mistake from the view or thought affliction is our attachment to our bodies as we think that this body is “I.” This is why the Buddha told us there is no self and therefore our attachment to self is wrong. With the initial attachment to self, we have a mistake that is hard to undo. This body is not “I.” This body is something that we possess just like the clothes that we own. If we understand this, we will realize that humans do not have births or deaths. Death is just like taking off our soiled clothes and birth is like putting on a new set of clothing. In the cycle of reincarnation, our birth and death is like changing clothes.

What then is “self”? In India, some religions believe that the spiritual self is “I.” In China, we call it the soul. In Buddhism, we call it the spirit. This state of believing that the spiritual self is “I” is higher than that which views the body as “I.” Why is it such an improvement? Because when one believes that when revolving in the cycle of reincarnation the spiritual self takes on a body just like someone takes on a piece of clothing, there is no fear of death.

Rather, death is regarded as something quite normal.

If we have accumulated only good karma in this lifetime, then we will be reborn into the Three Good Realms—changing from a human into a heavenly being and having a much more beautiful and dignified appearance, a longer lifespan and greater good fortune. This is to “sow a good cause and reap a good result.” However, if we were to do bad deeds, then our body will change for the worse.

Recently, in Singapore, some Chinese practitioners told me about an elderly woman in Tianjin, China. She dreamt that her son, who had died two years before, came to tell her that he was now a guardian at a certain temple. She woke up feeling very sad.

Sometime later, she heard some practitioners planning a pilgrimage to the temple her son had spoken of in the dream. She accompanied the practitioners to the temple and asked the abbot about the temple guardian. The abbot answered that there was only a temple guard dog named Xiaohu (which means little tiger). As the woman heard the name, she suddenly had goose bumps because that had been her son’s name. She rushed to the gate of the temple to find the dog. When she got there and the dog saw her, tears began to stream down its cheeks and as they hugged each other, she too began to cry.

This account of a human being reincarnated as a dog is the consequence of the human having done bad deeds. When the residents of Tianjin heard what had happened, many of them came to see the dog. The intelligent dog felt ashamed and he avoided people who came from his former hometown but would reappear when people from other places visited the temple. Some practitioners encouraged the woman not to feel embarrassed, but

to tell her story so others could learn the truth.

There is another case of a person being reincarnated as a dog. I will ask those who know about what happened to record the details so that all of us will know that reincarnation is true and that we need to be cautious in our every rising thought. Life is short but death is really not frightening. However, what comes after death? Have we seriously considered this? This critical issue of death is the major reason why we cultivate. We hope that our future lifetimes will be better than this one and that tomorrow will be better than today. With this goal in mind, we must know how to practice and remember the teachings of the Buddha that are recorded in the sutras.

We need not learn all of the Buddha's numerous teachings but instead grasp their essence that is within the Three Conditions found in the *Visualization Sutra*. First, we are to be filial to our parents. Second, we are to be respectful to our teachers and elders. This is the heart; the very foundation of the Buddha's teachings, and it is from this foundation that the innumerable Dharma methods were developed. Hence, filial piety and respect for teachers and elders are the way of Buddhism. In many Mahayana sutras, especially those on the Bodhisattva precepts, the Buddha taught us to regard all women as our mothers and all men as our fathers. This is the basis for our practice of filial piety. Also, every being is a future Buddha and this principle is the basis for respecting teachers and elders.

Who is a Bodhisattva? Bodhisattvas are beings who regard and respect all others as their parents and as Buddhas. This is the mind and heart of a Bodhisattva. Today, the main reason we cannot achieve results in our cultivation is due to our lack of filial piety

and respect for others, and our incessant thoughts of superiority. Without respect for others, no matter how hard we practice, even to the point of chanting a Buddha's name one hundred thousand times a day until our voices become hoarse, we cannot escape retributions in the Three Bad Realms.

In the *Surangama Sutra*, we learn that when our causal intentions are impure, our results will be false and confused. What is the causal intention? It is the very first arising thought. Thus, we need to follow the teachings of the Buddha to correct any erroneous thought.

The Buddha said that every sentient being was our parent in our past lives and is a future Buddha. If instead he had said that every being is our current parent and a current Buddha, we may not understand or accept this fact so readily. We can more readily accept his explanation that every being was our past parent and is a future Buddha. But frankly, even after hearing this, we still cannot accept this wholeheartedly; if we did, we would become a Buddha. Those who are able to practice this teaching in their daily lives are Bodhisattvas who have attained at least the first level of the Ten Beliefs Bodhisattvas; they have already corrected their basic wrong views.

Without exception, the great masters of all schools in Buddhism taught us to cultivate from the root, and from here, to bring forth the minds of sincerity, purity, equality, awakening, and compassion. Today, although we know the essence of the Buddha's teachings, we have yet to benefit from our cultivation. The reason why we cannot reap anything is that we have yet to find the root. For countless eons, we have been revolving in the cycle of life and death. We do not know where the problem lies or what is our

relationship to the universe. The Buddha was a human being who had experienced life and who revealed the truth to us. Thus, we need to believe and accept this truth, and truly reform. After we have reformed, we will be leading the lives of the Bodhisattvas and following the Bodhisattva's way.

The word "Bodhisattva" is a Sanskrit one meaning an enlightened sentient being. A sentient being is an ordinary being and all of us are sentient beings. Bodhisattvas are enlightened sentient beings. The difference between an ordinary being and a Bodhisattva is that the former is deluded and the latter is enlightened, and thus they are given different names.

Enlightened beings are constantly correcting their erroneous behavior. But, before we are able to correct our faults, we must first discover them. In Buddhism, one who discovers and clearly knows his or her faults is awakened. After we have awakened, the next step is to correct our faults. Bodhisattvas abide by six guidelines that are called the Six Paramitas of Giving, Moral Self-discipline (Precepts-keeping), Patience, Diligence, Deep Concentration, and Wisdom, to remedy our six major afflictions. The foremost of our six afflictions are greed and stinginess. Most people desire wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep as well as sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thought while Bodhisattvas correct these faults by the practice of giving. The *Paramita of Giving* can free us of greed. The roots of greed and stinginess are our attachments to our bodies, fear of death and selfishness.

How do we practice giving in order to free ourselves of greed and stinginess? We need to know the true meaning of giving for it does not mean donating money to temples. Its underlying meaning is to be filial to parents, and to respect teachers and elders as all beings

are our parents, teachers, and elders. The Paramita of Giving is to consider all beings with sincere filial piety and respect, to serve and to help them. We give wealth to benefit society and all beings, and we sacrifice ourselves to help and serve all others unconditionally.

Today, voluntary social work is the Paramita of Giving. Constantly bearing in mind the needs of all beings and how we can help them encompasses the giving of wealth, teaching, and fearlessness. When our minds are filled with filial piety and respect, giving becomes an offering, which is one of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. These Ten Great Vows are the highest level of practice.

It is important that we nurture in ourselves the spirit of filial piety and respect, and do not slight anyone for that means slighting our parents, teachers, and elders—a serious offence. We cannot be born into the Pure Land even though we chant the Buddha's name because we continue to commit these mistakes daily. So, we have actually not accumulated great merits although we think we have.

When working for others, no matter how inconsequential the task might seem, as long as we do it logically and abide by the rules, we are practicing the Paramitas of Wisdom and Precepts keeping respectively. We are setting good examples for others by systematically completing the task. The practice of the Paramita of Precepts Keeping helps us to correct our bad habits and erroneous behavior. We have countless weaknesses that are bad examples for others. If we can constantly remind ourselves to be good examples for all through our behavior, we are practicing precepts keeping. Thus, we need to understand the Buddha's teachings.

When we interact with circumstances fairly and sensibly, we are

practicing the Paramita of Wisdom. When we are courageous when helping others, we are practicing the Paramita of Patience. Practicing the Paramita of Patience frees us from the afflictions of intolerance, anger, and hatred. Small tasks require a lesser amount of patience while great undertakings require an abundance of patience. Without patience, nothing can be achieved.

In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha told us that everything is achieved through patience. In the Bodhisattva's practice of the Six Paramitas, the Buddha particularly emphasized endurance, showing that in this Saha world of endurance, patience is greatly lacking in all beings. This is why we cannot succeed in anything (either worldly or Buddhist). To obtain success, we must learn to cultivate endurance. And in whatever we do, we must not be overly enthusiastic or rash because rashness results in mistakes. It is good to slow down a little.

Two days ago, in Australia, we met Mr. Uri Themal and today we met with a senator in Brisbane. We talked about the rapid advancements in technology that are causing disasters in our world. Wisdom tells us that some things need to be done quickly while others need to be done more gradually. People today do not possess the wisdom to differentiate between the two.

In the past, the ancient teachings like those of Confucius and Buddha Shakyamuni taught that a moral character should be quickly and enthusiastically cultivated while material objects should be pursued at a slower and less aggressive pace. Buddhism emphasizes progress in cultivation and teaches us to be contented with just the necessities. Many religious teachings, such as those in Christianity and Catholicism, also place great importance on leading a simple and honorable life, and are indifferent to pursuing

materialistic enjoyments.

If we feel the same way, we need to be enthusiastic in helping others and unconcerned about our own needs. In doing so, we will be practicing the Paramitas of Patience and Diligence. The *Paramita of Diligence* frees us from laziness. If we follow the teachings of the Buddha to practice the Six Paramitas, they will benefit us for the rest of our lives. And when we dedicate the merits from our practice, vow to be born into the Pure Land, and chant Buddha Amitabha's name from one to ten times, we are assured of being born into his Western Pure Land.

Can we really be born into the Pure Land by chanting "Buddha Amitabha" just one to ten times? The sutras assure us that yes, we can. When we do not create negative karma but accumulate merits due to our daily cultivation of the practice of proper thoughts, words and deeds, we are assured of being born into the Pure Land.

What is the *Paramita of Deep Concentration*? The Buddha taught us to concentrate deeply in order to free ourselves of distractions. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha taught Subhuti, who had generated the Bodhi heart to help all beings, that the most important criteria in helping others are deep concentration and wisdom; that is to not be attached to phenomena, but to maintain the mind of tranquility. These principles are the basis of the teachings of China's Sixth Master of Zen, Master Hui-Neng, who taught us not to be attached to external forms and to maintain the mind of stillness within. Not to be attached to external forms is not to be attached to phenomena, while maintaining the mind of stillness means that we do not have greed, anger, or ignorance as we encounter external conditions. When we encounter external conditions but are unaffected and can thus help others, it is due to

our deep concentration and wisdom.

With deep concentration and wisdom, we will be unaffected by external situations; without deep concentration, we will be unable to educate others, but would instead be swayed by them and end up being confused about the whole situation. How does this happen? When we are in contact with others and things go our way, thoughts of greed arise. When things do not go our way, anger and hatred arise because we lack deep concentration and wisdom. With deep concentration and wisdom, we will not have thoughts of greed, hatred, or anger in any circumstance, whether they are favorable or unfavorable.

Deep concentration is the state of constantly maintaining a mind of purity and equality. Cultivating deep concentration does not solely mean sitting in meditation in the cultivation hall. Practicing sitting meditation is similar to teaching the skills to a beginner. After graduation from school, the students need to practice what they have learned in the cultivation hall by applying the principles in their daily lives. The practitioner will have practiced deep concentration when he or she can remain unaffected by external circumstances.

In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Master Yu-Xiang practiced deep concentration by visiting busy places, such as marketplaces. Today, we need not need to visit noisy and busy places. We can practice deep concentration while having the television turned on. However, are we able to remain unaffected by external situations in places such as discotheques, movie theaters or other places of entertainment? If we can, then that is deep concentration. When we can clearly perceive what is happening around us, remain unmoved, and not have any wandering discriminatory thoughts or

attachments, we are cultivating wisdom and deep concentration simultaneously. Bodhisattvas use these principles in their daily lives.

We do not need to change our current lifestyles or jobs to accord with the teachings. Of all professions, the ones that involve killing are the worst as they create negative karma and consequences. Bodhisattvas however, can practice any profession even that of a butcher or a restaurant owner.

Why is it that Bodhisattvas do not create negative karma by doing these seemingly negative deeds and instead are able to help sentient beings? This is because in everything Bodhisattvas do, they do not have wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments. Therefore, they do not create negative karma. By not creating such karma, they are able to liberate all beings from sufferings.

Not creating negative karma is not achievable by ordinary beings because we kill animals and eat meat, while at the same time, have wandering thoughts such as what does or does not taste good. Hence, we will have to suffer the bad consequences. It is crucial to understand that we should not try to emulate all of the Bodhisattvas' behavior because we have not yet attained their level of deep concentration.

One of the fifty-three advisors in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Sweet Dew Fire King represents a profession that involves killing. Another advisor, Shengrepoluomen represents a profession where beings are deluded. And a third advisor, Fasumiduonu, can also be a Bodhisattva because as a prostitute she practices the Bodhisattva's way to help beings. The fifty-three advisors, who are actually portrayed by Bodhisattvas, represent all levels of society. Thus, we see that the Buddhism encompasses all of society.

With the minds of sincerity, purity, and great compassion,

Bodhisattvas benefit society in every field they are engaged in. These beings take on these immoral jobs in order to help sentient beings reduce their own disasters and negative karma. If we do not possess the Bodhisattva's great compassionate and sincere mind to help all others as well as their level of achievement, and try to follow their example in doing these jobs, then we are creating negative causes and results.

The practice guidelines in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are comprised of the Ten Paramitas of Great Wisdom Bodhisattva and the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. These twenty Paramitas and vows are the primary guidelines for the Dharma Body Bodhisattvas of the Flower Adornment Assembly. Each of the guidelines has profound meanings and encompasses the entire universe.

Since we are mere beginners in learning Buddhism, it is necessary for us to look for favorable environments in which to practice. But, the Dharma Body Bodhisattvas are the advanced learners of Buddhism; they practice in whatever environment they are in and do not try to change their present lifestyle or job. They cultivate the Ten Paramitas and the Ten Great Vows in meeting their daily responsibilities to become Buddhas.

Although we are not yet able to accomplish this, we must know this principle so that our spiritual level will be continually raised. We may practice very hard, but if we do not know this principle and truth, our level of achievement will be limited. We cannot achieve a breakthrough because our thoughts are barriers.

In recent years, we have maintained contact with friends from religions and other races; this is truly practicing the teachings in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. The ancient sages explained that the *Avatamsaka Sutra* is the expanded version of the *Infinite Life Sutra*.

At the end of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Manjushri Bodhisattva and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva dedicate the merit of the Ten Great Vows to be born into Buddha Amitabha's Pure Land. If we abide by the methods and principles in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, correct our improper thoughts and behavior, and dedicate the merits of our cultivation to being born into the Pure Land, we will be born there. As the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas said, such truly wonderful merits and benefits are beyond description and comprehension.

The teachings in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are in accordance with the level of understanding of people today and are suitable to our current conditions. Although people are creating heavy negative karma, they possess deep and great roots of virtues and merits. It is a pity that these beings have not had the good conditions to bring about the germination of their virtuous roots and merits. With a change of thought, they would uncover the Mahayana's perfect root nature. Without such a change, then as the ancients said: "We will get the result that we are destined to get (as we have not yet encountered good conditions)." With such a change in thought, we will immediately break through delusion, become awakened, and be transformed from an ordinary being into a sage. As Master Shandao said, a person's achievement depends on the conditions he or she encounters. Thus, encountering the right conditions is crucial in determining whether we attain results in our cultivation.

However, an ordinary being is simply that, an ordinary being. Even if we were to listen to the Buddha's teachings for hundreds or thousands of times, it would still be difficult for us to reform. Buddha Shakyamuni taught daily for forty-nine years, he lectured for tens and hundreds of thousand of times to "wake" us up. If we will turn back from our erroneous behavior, then the Buddha's

goal of eradicating our suffering will be achieved.

Have we lost our chance to encounter the right conditions now that the Buddha is no longer with us? No, the question is—do we know how to hold on to the right condition when we encounter one?

At eighty-six years old, the former president of the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, Mr. Guang Bie Chen, who was recently been reborn into the Pure Land, did not ignore the right condition when he encountered it.

A few years before he died, his poor health forced him to stop working and to remain at home. During this period, Mr. Bock Guan Lee gave him videotapes of my lectures on Buddhism. Mr. Chen listened to these lectures eight hours daily for four years. He had met a wonderful opportunity and made good use of it. He succeeded after four years, attained the state of One Mind Undisturbed and knew three months in advance the day he would die.

Two years ago, he saw Buddha Amitabha and requested to leave for the Pure Land. However, Mr. Lee said that probably Buddha Amitabha advised Mr. Chen to wait another two years to take care of the Buddhist Lodge until the election for the next committee was over.

I was there the day he attended the election seated in his wheelchair. A few months later, Mr. Chen left this world. This shows that conditions depend on us. The late president of the Lodge had the wonderful opportunity to obtain the videotapes of all my lectures. If our conditions are not as good as his were it does not matter. If we can only obtain one videotape and listen to it eight hours a day for four years, we are assured of surpassing him in our merits.

This kind of prolonged cultivation on one single subject

encompasses the Three Learnings of self-discipline, deep concentration, and wisdom, and assures us success in our practice. Thus, if we do not succeed, we cannot blame others, our bad luck, or the lack of good teachers or classmates; all these are just excuses to shift our responsibility. True practitioners understand that we ourselves are to blame; others and our environment are without fault, but rather we let the opportunity pass us by.

About fifteen years ago, when I lectured in Los Angeles, I met a retired university professor, Mr. Li-Ben Zhao. After his retirement, Mr. Zhao had opened a restaurant with a friend. He heard my lectures and was very happy to learn the teachings. He brought home audiotapes of the lectures on the *Platform Sutra* and the *Diamond Sutra* and listened to these for twenty-six times. Mr. Zhao asked me if his approach of sutra study, of simply listening to these two sets of lectures, could help him be born into the Pure Land when he chanted Buddha Amitabha's name and vowed to be born there.

I assured him it would, but that twenty-six times was not enough, that he needed to listen at least one hundred times. When he had done so, he came to me again and I told him to listen for another one hundred times. Now, Mr. Zhao lectures very well on these two sutras and receives many invitations to give lectures. It really is possible. If we can become very familiar with the teachings, then they eventually will become part of us and will come from within us.

It is good if we know this method of concentrated cultivation for it contains each of the Three Learnings. Practicing according to the teachings is *self-discipline*; when our minds are settled and focused on learning one method of cultivation, we will have *deep*

concentration and with deep concentration, we will uncover our *innate wisdom*.

Why is it that most people cannot uncover this wisdom? It is because our minds are too cluttered. If we can concentrate deeply, we will uncover wisdom with new awakening and understanding each time we listen to the lectures. Accumulating small awakenings leads to complete enlightenment. When we dedicate this merit to be born into the Pure Land, we are assured of being born there. This is stated in the last section about the three levels of rebirth into the Pure Land of the *Infinite Life Sutra*.

Master Ci-Zhou (who wrote the study outline of the thirty-seven chapter version of the *Infinite Life Sutra*) said that it does not matter whether the sutra we choose to learn is one of the Pure Land sutras or not, as long as it is one of the Mahayana sutras. If we dedicate the merits from our learning to being born into the Pure Land, we are assured of attaining our goal. There have been practitioners who succeeded in this way and they are good examples for us.

With our advanced technology, it is easy for us to use a cassette player and listen to audiotapes of one or two series of sutras. There is no reason why we cannot succeed in our practice. If we truly practice, everything we do will be in accordance with each of the Six Paramitas for to practice one Paramita is to practice all Paramitas. This is the way Bodhisattvas practice.

We need to understand these principles to know how we should practice. Those who succeeded are those who practiced patience. The Buddha taught us that everything is obtained through patience. If we patiently and persistently listen to the Buddhist teachings and correct our faults everyday, follow the teachings in

the sutras on what should or should not be done and repeatedly engrave them in our memory, we will be able to immediately perceive a rising thought and detect whether or not it is proper during our daily interaction with others and circumstances. If the thought is improper, we should correct it instantly; this is true cultivation. We no longer follow our afflictions and bad habits, but instead accord with the teachings of the Buddha. In this way, we are assured of success in our practice.

In the *Infinite Life Sutra*, the Buddha said that this kind of practitioner is the Buddha's best student, for he or she abides by the Buddha's teachings, studies the sutra, and is a good example for all. If we truly understand what the Buddha told us, we will accept his teachings wholeheartedly; if we have yet to accept his teachings, it simply means that we have not truly understood them. Why are we unable to understand the intrinsic meanings? It is because we have not read the sutra enough. The ancients said that we would naturally understand the meaning in a book if we read it one thousand times.

This principle can also be applied to listening to teachings. One who listens to the lectures for one or two thousand times, will naturally attain awakening. When the number of times we immerse ourselves in the teachings is insufficient, we will be unable to overcome our afflictions. Focus on one subject, for that will block the distractions that keep us from entering the door to awakening.

To listen or read the sutras with concentration is to practice all Three Learnings at one time. If we listen to too many different types of teachings, then all that we gain is knowledge. This will not qualify us to teach others. The secret in obtaining deep concentration and in uncovering wisdom lies in choosing one

method of cultivation and studying it for a prolonged time. With deep concentration, our wandering thoughts and afflictions will lessen as our wisdom increases proportionately. Whereas in the past, we were confused and disorganized, now we are intelligent and clear about everyone and everything. This indicates that we have increased deep concentration. In the past, we used to make mistakes, now we no longer do so. This is a sign of deep concentration and wisdom.

To be able to overcome our afflictions accumulated from incalculable lifetimes, to transform afflictions into wisdom, evil to good, delusion to awakening, and from being ordinary to a sage, we must use great efforts in our practice. Everyone can achieve this goal so long as we know how; it has nothing to do with our lifestyles or jobs.

Do not mistakenly think that your job makes it too difficult to cultivate or that another job lends itself more easily to cultivation. The key lies in whether we know the proper way to succeed. If we do not know the right method, then even if we were to become monks or nuns, chant the Buddha's name and meditate all day in the cultivation hall, we will still never be able to achieve the way in our practice.

The Three Learnings and Six Paramitas can be achieved all at one time in our daily lives, whether eating, dressing or doing anything else, all activities can completely encompass the Six Paramitas. This is the state of "one is all, all is one" that was taught in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Any cultivation method encompasses infinite cultivation methods and contains the complete Paramitas and infinite teachings within each. Thus, if one method works, all methods work. We need to listen to the Mahayana

teachings more often so that we can break through our wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments. This will reduce our misunderstandings and obstacles in our path of cultivation.

Today, although this lecture is only ninety minutes long, we can still benefit from it if we grasp the important points on how to cultivate, and make use of today's technology to keep listening to the lectures. We are much more fortunate than our ancestors were because we are able to listen to a lecture repeatedly until we thoroughly understand it. Listening to the lecture many times will enable us to truly understand the way to attain Buddhahood.

Everyone Can Be a Buddha

Several groups of practitioners from China, the USA, and Taiwan are here to visit us. Although they have not been here long, only a week or two, they have seen our conditions for learning and practice. Not everything has been satisfactory, for doing everything perfectly is very difficult.

During the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, there were numerous diverse religious groups as well as differences of opinions within the Sangha itself; hence, their Buddhist community was also imperfect. The Buddha said it was actually all a great performance, that they were all manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Some played negative roles, like Devadatta, while others played positive roles; but those who are unawakened do not realize this. From this example, we can see how Buddhas guide sentient beings with both positive and negative examples.

The Buddha taught in this way, as did the saints from various religions. As Confucius often said: “In every group of three people, there is teacher we can learn from.” When we include ourselves in a group of three, there would be one person who is more virtuous and one who is less virtuous. We emulate the former and observe the latter to see if we have the same faults. If so, we quickly correct them. In this way, we learn from both examples.

The same applies to situations, whether they are good or bad, both can help us to learn. Likewise, we make use of favorable or unfavorable conditions and relationships with others to help us achieve attainment in our practice of virtue. Confucius said that a benevolent person has no enemies. This is even truer in Buddhism.

We are listening to people from various religions. For example,

last night at the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, we attended the lecture given by a Sikh Elder, Mr. Harbans Singh. Are there any real differences between the Sikh or other religious teachings and the educational teachings of Confucius or Buddha Shakyamuni? Problems exist today because we do not listen to one another—we envy one another, we surmise and jump to the wrong conclusions. These lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and even wars among ethnic and religious groups. What were the causes? People did not communicate. If we frequently visit one another and exchange ideas, there will be mutual understanding. (As Mr. Singh elaborated on Sikh beliefs, we also explained that we view Buddhism as an education rather than a religion.) If everyone communicated like this, our problems would cease.

Last night, practitioners asked Mr. Singh some very good questions. One person asked what was a Sikh's highest goal in cultivation. Mr. Singh wisely replied that the highest goal is to become one with God. Buddhists do not speak of God but of perfect enlightenment, to become one with one's mind and True Nature. What Buddhist practitioners call mind and True Nature, religious followers call God. The words are different, but the meaning is the same.

Mr. Singh explained that God created everything. Buddhism does not mention God in this context. Rather, we believe, as explained in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*: "Everything arises from the mind and changes according to our perceptions." We speak in terms of mind and consciousness; others speak about God. When others ask us the ultimate goal of our practice, we explain that it is to become Buddhas, for our bodies and minds to combine with all sentient beings throughout the universe to become one entity. We

are all speaking of the same thing.

Religions say that the saints from all religions, who we call the founders of religions, are messengers or embodiments of God. This is correct. The God they speak of is what we call the True Nature. We want to be logical, mindful, and free of prejudices in our communication with all religious groups.

We know that all sentient beings in the universe share a common life entity that Buddhists call the Dharma-body: "All Buddhas from all space and time share one Dharma-body." Thus, among religions, there are no contradictions or conflicts but peaceful coexistence and equality. When our minds reach the equal and non-discriminatory state, we become Buddhas and we no longer have wandering discriminatory thoughts or attachments. When such thoughts and attachments are present, the mind is not in the state of equality.

To explain further, all the saints in this world and beyond are manifestations of God. But what about us mortal beings? We are also embodiments of God! To use religious terms, everything created by God is his manifestation. In Buddhist terms, everything in the universe is the manifestation of the Dharma-body, which is the mind and consciousness. Nothing exists outside the mind-consciousness.

With a profound understanding of this principle, we reach the state of seeing our True Nature, which also means having no obstruction in understanding all phenomena of the universe. We then reach the state of not encountering any hindrances at all, as auspicious peace and harmony pervade the universe.

Originally, human beings of all diverse nationalities, races, and religions, and other sentient beings coexisted peacefully, for all are part of the same family; like parents, children and siblings who have

respect and non-discriminatory unconditional love for one another. To love all beings is to love ourselves. Thus, in Buddhism it is said: “Unconditional compassion for all others, as we are all one entity.” Who really understands this truth? Buddha Shakyamuni understood, Dharma-body Bodhisattvas understood, and as we learn about the founders of religions, these saints understood.

In Buddhism, we learn ten guiding principles for relating to others and circumstances. These are the Four All-embracing Methods and the Six Paramitas. How do husbands and wives get along? By practicing the Four All-embracing Methods and the Six Paramitas. In this way, spouses and families would live together harmoniously, society and nations would be stable and prosperous, and the world would be peaceful. Why are we unable to practice the Four All-embracing Methods and the Six Paramitas? Because, we lack the right learning and cultivation. We cannot blame ourselves for we did not receive such an education.

In the past, Confucius, Buddha Shakyamuni, great sages, and virtuous people dedicated their lives to teaching people and enabling them to understand the true reality of life and the universe. The Four All-embracing Methods and the Six Paramitas are actually virtuous qualities of our True Nature, what the True Nature is supposed to be; they are natural qualities and not the opinions of Buddha Shakyamuni. We are at fault if we cannot practice these principles with understanding, for we are going against the True Nature.

We have lost touch with our consciences, the intuitive ability to know right from wrong. We originally had this ability in our True Nature. Thus, by nature we are the same as Buddhas. In religious terms, we are the same as God. However, we are now different

because we have lost our True Nature.

Why do we have so many adversaries and where do they come from? They come from misunderstandings. Once we thoroughly understand the true reality, we will no longer have adversaries for they cannot exist when the mind returns to its originally sincere, pure, non-differentiating, awakened and compassionate state.

Even if someone physically hurt us, like King Kali's dismemberment of the Buddha in one of his former lifetimes, would we as enlightened or awakened people harbor any hatred? No! An awakened, understanding person would know that the other party had misunderstood and would therefore be very caring. Ill intentions and bad behavior arise from a lack of understanding.

Both the ancient Chinese and the saints taught us to have "open communication." In managing the country, a government that understands and governs well will be supported by the people. How can a family be united? By having open and honest communication, and by not hiding anything, a family is assured of prospering. So, we need to understand this major principle of open communication.

Misunderstanding results from a lack of interaction and communication. Discord between spouses is also the result of the lack of communication and of having secrets. Wives and husbands lie to one another and eventually the family is torn apart. A family in which the siblings are suspicious, envious, and distrustful of each other will decline.

Last night, Mr. Singh told us two stories about honesty. In one story, a thief was asked who he was. He honestly replied: "I'm a thief." The guard did not believe a real thief would say this and allowed him to enter the palace. The thief gathered many valuable items, but before he left, he remembered that a saint had told him

that it was wrong to steal. He realized what he was doing was wrong, put down the belongings and left empty handed.

Buddhism and Confucianism both speak of sincerity. We read in Confucianism of the sincere and honest mind. We read in Buddhism that sincerity means the true mind. The essential nature of the Bodhi mind is utmost sincerity. What is the true mind? It is the presence of sincerity and the absence of deceit. It is to be honest even after making a mistake. This is how we will reach enlightenment and become Buddhas. However, we will not accomplish our goals if not only do we not admit our mistakes but even try to conceal the truth.

Even with good cultivation, we will remain mired in reincarnation that we alone have created. With utmost sincerity, reincarnation will disappear; with an illusory mind, reincarnation will manifest. We learn from the sutras that reincarnation is an illusory realm formed by wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments. We have failed to transcend this illusory state in countless lifetimes throughout infinite eons because we have not severed our wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments.

Fortunately today, we have encountered Buddhism and the teachings of saints from many religions. After carefully absorbing what we have heard, our problem lies in whether we can practice the teachings. By following them, we would transcend to a higher level in this lifetime or as we have learned from many religions, we would become a saint, not to become God, but to become one with God, to possess the virtues and conduct of saints.

Consider our chaotic and unstable world. Yesterday, I had lunch with Mr. Huang, the director of the London Buddhist Library, and his wife before they left Singapore. He told me that London has

become extremely unsafe. Children kill their parents, and students kill their teachers and classmates. Similar worrisome occurrences are taking place in the United States as well. There are frequent strikes in the transportation and communication industries disrupting people's lives. Moral concepts are in a steep decline in western societies and there is an urgent need for the education of morality and ethics.

Mr. Huang has edited a series of textbooks that are used in government-run schools. He will send a copy of the textbooks to us. This first series is for elementary schools. He wants to continue with another series for secondary schools and a third one for universities. Moral education is urgently needed. The British government and the Prince of Wales welcomed the introduction of these textbooks and actively support this project.

When I asked him if there was an inter-faith organization in Europe, he replied that they have one that is similar to the Singapore Inter-Religious Organization. I asked if it was possible to communicate with them in the hope that these organizations might begin a dialogue. We could invite them to visit Singapore or the nine major religious groups in Singapore could visit them. The purpose of the lunch with Mr. Huang yesterday was primarily to discuss this idea.

It is hoped that all the religious leaders can communicate and meet often to find ways to save this world from disasters, eliminate racial prejudices and conflicts, and abolish religious misunderstanding and wars. This is the way to nurture a stable and prosperous society, and to bring true peace to the world. This work is urgently needed now.

Somebody asked, since there is only one God, why are there so

many religions? Many others have also asked this very good question. We can better understand this by looking at history and geography. Modern technology has advanced greatly from its inception approximately one hundred years ago when aviation did not even exist. It took a few months for people to travel by steamship from China to America and more than twenty days from Shanghai to Singapore.

Two hundred years ago, it took three or four months to sail from China to America and without favorable winds the trip could last six months. Because transportation and communication were inconvenient and slow, people had limited contact with one another. The ancient Chinese said that if someone visited the provincial capital, they were considered to have seen the world. That was because people were completely isolated from one another throughout their entire lives and most never even left their town. Written communication primarily relied on asking friends or relatives to pass on a letter until it reached its recipient. This whole process could easily take weeks.

Before the Chinese War of Resistance against the Japanese invasion, I lived in Anhui, China and my father worked in Fujian Province. We had mail delivery, but it usually took two and sometimes even three weeks for a letter to be delivered. An improvement over times past, but it was still very slow. In the same amount of time, God can manifest in many forms to teach different races. I believe that this adaptation among various races with different cultures and historical backgrounds resulted in different religions.

Likewise, Buddha Shakyamuni taught sentient beings according to individual needs and circumstances. Buddhas do not have a

fixed way of teaching and neither does God. They match their teaching to the being's needs.

We read of the thirty-two manifestations of Great Compassion Bodhisattva in the “Universal Door Chapter” from the *Lotus Sutra*. To those who can be liberated through the manifestation of a Buddha, they will appear and teach as a Buddha. Similarly, to those who can be liberated as Christians, they will appear and teach as Jesus. And for those who can be liberated as Sikhs, they will appear and teach as a Sikh. The form he or she appears in will be the same as that of the group.

During our last visit to Malaysia, we visited a Burmese temple and saw twenty-some statues of Buddha Shakyamuni. Each had different features. The first statue we saw had Indian features. The features of the second Buddha were Nepalese. We also saw statues with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean features. This illustrates that wherever Buddha Shakyamuni manifested, he assumed the same features as the local people and adapted to local conditions, so they would feel comfortable with him. Thus, he had no fixed form.

The teaching given to any particular group must be adapted to their capacity while according with the true reality. In religion, the true reality at its highest level is to be one with God. We are now witnessing this as we listen to lecturers from the different religions. The truths and principles are the same; just the words and presentations are different.

Beginners and those with lower abilities and understanding are taught how to change from bad to good. Those with higher abilities and understanding are taught how to change from being deluded to becoming awakened. The ultimate goal is to help all beings change from being ordinary beings to becoming sages. These three

main guiding principles in Buddhism are present in all religions.

Previously, people were not aware of this because they did not associate with one another. In their conceit and arrogance, each thought that their religion was the best and that all other teachings were improper and inferior. Now that we are communicating, we realize that all are equal. All is one, not two. Hence, we not only come together, we are like sisters and brothers who have a shared mission.

We cannot continue to think only in terms of a small geographical area. In the past, religious teachers would spend their entire lives within this narrow scope, but no longer. Today, we must think globally. If we think only in terms of my district, my religion or my group, we will not survive. Such narrow-minded and selfish thinking leads to misunderstandings, conflicts, wars, and ultimately a Third World War—nuclear war. Our world would be destroyed.

We have to expand our thinking. In our lectures, we have encouraged practitioners to care about our world. Is this enough? No! Now we hear of the possibility of interplanetary wars. We need to expand our hearts and minds further, to think not only of our planet Earth but also of the infinite planets throughout the universe. Mahayana Buddhism teaches us that our minds can encompass the universe. Only in this way, can our problems be truly solved. If practitioners cannot think this altruistically and do not have this mind capacity, how can we become Buddhas? This mind capacity is the Bodhi mind, the true mind. Originally, our minds were this all-encompassing.

Where do all the sentient beings in the universe come from? They manifest from our True Nature. Thus, it is said in Buddhism: “Nothing exists outside the mind. The mind is not excluded from anything.” Once our capacity of mind is extended, higher spiritual

realms will materialize, and all resentment and hatred will dissolve.

Some practitioners have asked me how to cultivate the Paramita of Patience. Upon reaching this higher spiritual state in practice, the Paramita of Patience is non-existent because there is no attachment to the form of patience. With the severing of wandering discriminatory thoughts and attachments, all greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, right and wrong are non-existent. In this state, we reach the realm of inconceivable liberation described in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, that of absolute ultimate liberation. It is the highest enjoyment in life. It is the life and enjoyment of a Dharma-body Bodhisattva. What is Dharma-body? It is the state in which we unite our bodies and minds with those of all the beings throughout the universe. In that state, we are the Dharma-body for we change from ordinary beings into sages and our every thought will no longer be just of this earth but of all sentient beings in the universe.

The Buddha taught us in the *Infinite Life Sutra* to “dwell in the wisdom of true reality.” Only when we attain the aforementioned state will we dwell in true wisdom. In this state, our benefit is “to receive the teaching and uncover the true reality.”

This is also the ultimate enjoyment in human life that Mr. Dong-Mei Fang, a Professor of philosophy, spoke of. Benefiting others is to “bring all sentient beings true benefits.” In other words, loving-kindness that is the sincere, non-discriminatory, unselfish great caring for all sentient beings. All sentient beings include plants, animals, as well as inanimate objects, and can be expanded to include all natural phenomena. This happens because everything arises from the gathering of affinities and conditions.

The term “sentient being” has vast meanings. With sincere, pure, non-discriminatory, and compassionate love, we give true benefits to

all. We learn that the *Infinite Life Sutra* is a good sutra, hard to encounter in infinite eons. It tells us of the “three truths.” If we can carefully study and contemplate its essence and principles, and compare these with the philosophies and conduct of the saints and sages, we will realize that such philosophies and conduct are the same as the teachings in the *Infinite Life Sutra*. Although the words and practice may differ, careful observation shows that the principles are the same. This is why in Buddhism; we say that the saints of all religions are manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Once we realize this, it will become easy for us to accomplish the highest level of Mahayana Buddhist practice. The first of the Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva is “To equally respect all beings and things.” We respect all sentient beings the same way we respect the Buddhas.

Last night, Mr. Singh said that whenever they visit any other religious place or group, including Buddhists, they show their respect. When we walk into their temples, are we to do likewise? Certainly. I have visited Sikh temples and paid my respects as they do, by prostrating. Their followers respected me for doing so. Why? When I respect them, they in turn will respect me. It is illogical to expect otherwise.

Christians call Jesus the “messenger of God.” We respect their Bible. Some of them may call us disbelievers only because they do not know or understand us. As we communicate and they read about Buddhism, they will understand us better. How can we help them? First, we need to respect them and take the initiative. This is why every Sunday our Singapore Buddhist Lodge invites representatives from religious groups to teach us about their beliefs.

Their response to our taking the initiative has been very good.

In less than a year, a Hindu group has invited us to lecture. Islamic organizations have not only invited us to lecture but have held a forum with us. Our contacts with the Catholics are even more frequent and our venerables have given lectures for them. They have now invited me to lecture on the Rosary. I will not lecture on Buddhist sutras but on their sacred texts. The Rosary is a prayer; a requirement for them like our morning and evening ceremonies are for us. I have accepted their invitation to lecture on the Rosary.

Gradually we will meet with every religion. First, we extend an invitation to them and in return, they invite us. Our sole hope is that every religion will open its church, mosque, and temple doors and welcome all the other religions to give teachings. This is an inevitable evolution of the twenty-first century. Our world is no longer comprised of small self-contained societies or locally restricted areas. Keeping to ourselves is wrong and is no longer an option.

The Buddha explained in the *Lotus Sutra*, that in the Dharma Ending Age we would need to propagate Mahayana Buddhism. He knew that in our time, society would be democratic and liberal. While Theravada Buddhism is more conservative and was suitable for earlier times, Mahayana Buddhism is better suited to our times.

In this progressively liberal age, even some countries that have had a monarchistic form of government are turning to democratic constitutional governments. This is their only option in the face of modern political and social changes. This trend goes well with the propagation of Mahayana Buddhism. We wish to introduce its principles and practice to every religion in the world. I sincerely respect their sacred texts as I respect Mahayana sutras.

Judaism upholds the Old Testament. Christianity upholds the

New Testament. Catholicism regards the Old and the New Testaments as equally important. These three religions share a very close relationship. In their worship of one God, a few differences abound. In Judaism, God is worshipped as supreme to Mother Mary and Jesus. In Catholicism, Mother Mary and Jesus are equally supreme as are God and Jesus in Christianity. The three religions differ primarily in this aspect. Thus, this is like one family being divided into three parts. These three primary religions are like brothers with the other religions and Buddhism branching out from them like cousins and the whole being one big family.

Buddhism does not talk of brothers or cousins but of one common life entity. As the Buddha said: “All sentient beings by nature can become Buddhas.” Buddhism provides us with a perfect and complete explanation. It does not discriminate, but says that no one is inferior to another and that it regards all equally. It is stated in the *Infinite Life Sutra*: “All will become Buddhas.” We need to work especially hard to seek the profound meanings within these two phrases and achieve the state of mind of a Buddha. Only in this way, can we truly become one entity with all Buddhas throughout all space and time.

Achieving Lasting World Peace Through Education

Throughout history, humanity has longed for and prayed for lasting peace. But, not only has this peace continued to elude us, natural and human made disasters, especially those from warfare, are increasing in frequency and severity. The loss of lives and property is beyond calculation. In the last century, there were two world wars and I fear a third is inevitable. The possibility of genuine peace seems hopeless.

Why have these things happened? While sages and virtuous people of ancient China prayed for blessings from heaven, they did not rely on heaven but rather on the teachings of the sages. When Buddhism was brought into China, it encountered Confucianism and Taoism. These three are not religions, but teachings, each with its own unique qualities.

As Emperor Yung Zheng, who came to power in 1722, stated in the proclamation for the *Sutra of the Ten Virtuous Conducts*, the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism all guide people to enlightenment. Their basic teachings and methods of practice are essentially the same and thus do not conflict with one another. The emperor was correct. Similarly, the teachings of many religions also come from the same basis, the same principles. What are the principles? They are sincerity, purity, equality, and compassion. When we summarize the Buddha's teachings, they are these same four values plus proper understanding.

The principles and methods of practice can coexist without conflict. What is the teaching? It is to love everybody and everything. This is the answer of retired Sister Theresa Hsu in

Singapore. When Mr. Bock Guan Lee asked her what religion is, she replied that it is love. We read in the Holy Bible that God loves all people. In Buddhist sutras, we read that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are compassionate. Most people in this region are Muslims. For example, our neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia are Islamic. When we open the Quran, we find that the beginning of each paragraph starts with “In the name of Allah, the Merciful.” They address God as Allah.

Although there are many religions in our world, they all have the same essence of sincerity, purity, equality, wisdom, compassion, and nondiscriminatory love. The teaching goal of each religion is the same as well; it is to guide all to mutual respect by living in harmony and equality regardless of nationality and ethnicity. We do not hear members of the clergy say that you are not supposed to believe in their religion because you are not from their group or country. We see that religions have now spread around the world. Most people do not understand that all religions are equal, and that only through religious education can we attain world peace.

Originally, every religion was a teaching, a multicultural social education. When we carefully read the sacred texts of each religion, we will understand; they all harbor great broadmindedness. As the Buddha said: “The mind encompasses the universe.” Which religion is not like this? Then why are people so narrow-minded? They think only of themselves and look down on others. This is not God’s will or the teaching of the sacred texts but the opinions of individuals.

Take Buddhists for example. Do we follow the Buddha’s teachings? No. We want our buddhist center to be prosperous and that of our neighbor to fail. We want the followers of other centers

to come to mine. Even within Buddhism, different factions compete with one another. Is this really what the Buddha taught? No. He taught that “Praising oneself and slandering others” is a grave offense.

What did the Buddha teach us? We can see in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that every Bodhisattva and every benevolent teacher is humble, and respects and praises others. This is to demonstrate “Principles and methods of practice accord with each other.” This is how world peace can be attained. We are told that every proper teaching in the world is equal and the best; but, if we say this one is number one and that one is number two, we create conflicts. Equality is indeed the foundation for peace.

Harmony is invaluable and it is what we all wish for but where does it come from? It comes from equality, without which, there will be no lasting peace. Every religion teaches people to regard others with a non-discriminatory mind.

Why are there so many religions? In the past, most people were unable to travel much over great distances, and thus could not easily communicate with one another. People who lived in the countryside only moved within their own villages. To live harmoniously in a small village required the guidance of the teaching of sages and virtuous people. Due to differences in culture, history, and surroundings, the sages and virtuous people guided people with diverse needs and abilities and this resulted in different religions.

We read in the sutras that in India, in Buddha Shakyamuni’s time, there were over one hundred religions and thus over one hundred teachings that guided people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. This is how the different religions in India originated.

China became a unified nation during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.) under the Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Although the dynasty was short-lived, its influence was far-reaching. The succeeding dynasty, the Han, had a much longer history, approximately 400 years. Emperor Wu, the second emperor, unified educational policy and goals that were based on Confucianism.

Since that time, Confucianism has been the most popular teaching in China. Over the past 2000 years, there have been many dynasties in China; but although the government changed, the educational policy remained the same, even during the Mongolian and Manchu invasions.

In 67 AD, during the Han dynasty under Emperor Ming, Buddhism was formally introduced into China. Thus, since ancient times there have been three major teachings to guide the Chinese people. As Buddhists would say, “The Chinese people possess excellent roots of goodness.” For millennia, the Chinese have sought peace. In the early dynasties, China never invaded any country because they were well educated in and accepted the teachings of sages and virtuous people. China cared for others and governed by virtue and not by force.

In ancient times, emperors in every dynasty nurtured and ruled with virtue. Neighboring countries respected and thus willingly followed the guidance of China. They showed their respect by making offerings and sending it gifts. This esteem was returned many times over for we see that China respected smaller countries and treated them well.

In the past, China governed by the ancient teachings and not by force, but over the past one hundred and fifty years, the Chinese have gradually turned away from the ancient virtuous teachings. As

their afflictions and bad habits surfaced, their selfishness, greed, anger, ignorance, and arrogance corrupted social values. Thus, when they encountered the guns and cannons of the invading westerners, the country was almost torn apart and has continued to suffer the results ever since. In the face of this erosion, the Chinese people started to doubt their own culture and moral values.

They have not been alone. People around the world need to return to traditional values and strive to attain peace. How do we attain peace? Through education. The most important education is that of the family as it is the basis of all education. When a family loses its sense of unity, it affects the stability of society because families are the foundation of society and the core of a family is the husband and wife. When spouses do not get along, society will not be peaceful. This is why Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism emphasize family education.

The principle teaching in Buddhism is to practice filial piety and respect; we are to be filial to our parents, respectful to teachers and elders, compassionate and not kill any living beings, and practice the Ten Virtuous Conducts. The essential teaching of the *Ten Virtuous Conducts Sutra* is comprised of these four principles.

Confucianism stresses the Five Human Relationships including those between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, friends, political leaders and the public and the Eight Virtues of loyalty, filial piety, kindness, compassion, trustworthiness, justice, harmony, and equality.

Whether it is Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism, the teachings primarily begin in the family. If family education is lost, then no other teachings will be able to help us reach peace and stability. The family is the foundation of society like the ground

level is the foundation of a four-story building. Without the first level, the other levels cannot be built.

Formal education is the second level, social education is the third level, and religious education the fourth level. Religious education is the education of spirituality. The main objective is to help sentient beings transcend from ordinary beings to sages. Religious teachings show us how to broaden our compassion and loving-kindness until we care for all sentient beings in the universe. When all four educations are taught, the world will attain eternal peace and stability, living beings will mutually respect and care for each other in unity, and we will coexist in peace and harmony. However, without these four educational foundations, peace and stability will be mere hollow words.

In the world today, traditional education by the family rarely exists; thus, the vast majority of children no longer listen to their parents. Quality education in schools is rare to find; most students ignore their teachers.

As to the education that society largely provides, what do we learn from our daily contact with newspapers, magazines, television, and movies? How to kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, and lie. Religious education has also greatly changed as most emphasize ceremonial rites; so religious education has also largely vanished. Even if we can read religious texts, we barely understand the principles within them. No wonder we cannot practice their teachings in our daily lives.

When the four kinds of education are so rare, how can the world not be in chaos! Today, there are people who want to save this world, but without these four kinds of education how can they achieve that? Do we need a new religion? No. The religions passed

down since ancient times are rich in content. If we can practice only a small percentage of their teachings, the world will exist in peace and hope.

There is no need for new religions, for they would be meaningless and would only serve to increase confusion in the world. We must understand this. In the past, the world recognized six main religions. In Singapore, nine main religions have excellent sacred texts and teachings. We need to use loving-kindness and profound understanding to bring together and harmoniously unite all these teachings.

Today, they are separate, but all originate from the same basis, the same principles of sincerity, purity, equality, and compassion. If we can accomplish harmonious unification and earnestly learn these teachings, we can widely propagate them to help society, save the world from conflicts, establish world peace and bring happiness to all. We must solve these crucial problems now.

In the 1970s, Professor Arnold Toynbee said: “Only the teachings of Confucius, Mencius and Mahayana Buddhism will be able to solve the problems of the 21st century.” What he said is reasonable because these teachings are specific and complete and are thus, worthy of our study and propagation.

The Foundation of All Religions:
Compassion and Loving-kindness

1 January 2001

Your Excellency, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Goh Chok Tong and Mrs. Goh, honored Ambassadors, representatives of the Inter-Religious Organization, religious representatives from Singapore and abroad, guests and friends. Everyone is a great Bodhisattva, a messenger of God, and an utmost virtuous person.

We are here tonight to celebrate our march toward the new century and a new year. As each year begins, everything changes from old to new. This first day of the new Millennium is very rare, occurring only once in a thousand years.

We would like to thank the Singapore Buddhist Lodge and the Jamiyah Centre in initiating this Cross-Century Charity Dinner and uniting the nine religions of Singapore in a prayer for world peace. We extend a warm welcome to our important guests, over five thousand senior citizens and children of different religions and races from Homes for the Aged and from Children's Homes. The elderly have dedicated themselves to building the nation and society, and have contributed to the sparkling success of Singapore. We wish to show our respect and care for them, and hope that this will serve to remind future generations to always appreciate and repay with kindness the efforts of the seniors.

Here in Singapore, people of different racial and cultural backgrounds have fostered harmonious relationships. Due to mutual respect, clergies of the nine religions here work well together. We believe such harmony and respect are rare. I believe

there are two basic reasons for this: the wise guidance of the Singaporean government, and its advocacy of both secular and religious education.

The ancient sages said: “Education is essential in building a country and governing its people.” The basis for a happy family, a prosperous society, a stable nation, racial harmony, and world peace is education, of which there are four types. The first is family education as found in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Second is formal education. In ancient China, this was based on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.

Third is social education, which in the past was taught through the arts. When Confucius traveled to different states, he collected popular folk songs from various areas and ethnic groups. Later, he edited these excellent songs and compiled them into *Book of Songs*. In *Analects*, Confucius wrote: “The content of the three hundred poems in *Book of Songs* is to teach people to nurture a pure honest mind.” This is the ultimate guideline for social education. Its goal is to attain happiness, harmony, and a prosperous society.

From times past through the present, we see that social education can encompass many areas, from drama, dance and books to newspapers, movies, TV, and the Internet. We hope these will teach people to nurture a pure honest mind.

The last type is religious education and it is the highest level of human education. Unfortunately, today religious education all too often emphasizes the appearance and thus can border on superstition. These four types of education are rare today. Our minds and spirits have nothing to return to or rely upon. The questions on the meaning and value of life, spiritual refuge, and the resultant confusion have

become serious problems for modern society.

High technology and economics cannot bring happiness and peace to all beings but only serve to increase greed and desires. Consequently, our living environment has become polluted and our natural ecology is being destroyed. Natural resources are being depleted and illegal drugs are everywhere. People have forgotten moral values and are only concerned with self-benefit. The shocking increases in juvenile delinquency, wars, and continuous conflicts make our world increasingly chaotic. Why? Because we have neglected humanity and moral education. These problems cannot be solved by politics, physical force, economics, or technology.

We know that there are four main cultural systems in our world: Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. These cultural systems are the foundation for most people. We understand that only Buddhist and religious education, in other words the teaching of multiculturalism, can revive the teachings of humanity and morality, and propagate the education of love.

The Buddha said: "All sentient beings have the same wisdom and abilities as those of the Buddha." We read in the Mahayana sutras that broadminded care for all beings encompasses the whole universe. The Buddha explained: "There are no boundaries within the pure mind."

I often use a tree as an example. Different religions and ethnic groups can be seen as the twigs, branches, leaves, and flowers of the tree. They all stem from the same root. They are actually one entity. Only with this understanding, can we live in peace, have mutual respect, and work harmoniously with people of different nations, religions, and ethnicities.

The core of Buddhism is sincerity, purity, equality, proper

understanding, and compassion. These qualities are not only the essence of Buddhism but are at the heart of all religious teachings as well. God loves all beings; Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have great compassion. Who are the Holy Being, God, Buddhas, and Bodhisattvas? They are these five virtues of sincerity, purity, equality, proper understanding, and compassion, the innate virtues of the True Nature. Anything that is done from the True Nature is done with non-differentiating compassion and loving-kindness, care for all inanimate and animate beings regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religious beliefs. Through sincere communication and the exchange of ideas with various religions, we have found a common ground: compassion and loving-kindness.

Over the years, we have earnestly worked with different religions, and hope that all religious leaders can help and guide all beings with their teachings. With thorough understanding of Buddhism and religious teachings we would do well to apply these teachings daily when interacting with others and situations. Our every rising thought is to benefit society, to remember the kindness of others and to repay them with gratitude. Also, we are to set good examples for society.

In June 2000, the Singapore Buddhist Lodge began a weekly program to invite representatives from various religious groups to teach us about their beliefs. Every religious talk is broadcast live on the Internet and has been produced on VCDs. Also, representatives of the nine major religions of Singapore have made a friendly visit to the five main religions of China. Such activities enhance our communication and understanding, and are sure to bring good responses to our propagation of Buddhism and religious teachings.

We need to do our very best to create happiness and social

stability so that all may exist in a peaceful world. If we are sincere and diligent, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, God, and the spiritual beings of all religions will guide us.

With utmost sincerity, I wish everyone success in their contributions to foster social stability, prosperous nations, world peace and universal happiness and lastly, I wish everyone infinite life.

Compassion and Loving-Kindness

The foundation of all religions is
compassion and loving-kindness.

The goal of all religions is
to teach everyone
to interact with all beings with equality,
to share our prosperity, and
to coexist in harmony.

The Ten-recitation Method

This simple, convenient, and effective way to practice Buddha name chanting is especially suitable for those who find that they have little time for cultivation. It helps us to be mindful of Amitabha Buddha. It brings us joy.

We begin when we wake up. Sit up straight and clearly chant “Amitufo” ten times with a calm and focused mind, aloud or silently. We repeat this eight more times during the day, each time chanting “Amitufo” ten times. This chanting can be done by following one of two programs. Please choose the one that is most comfortable for you and suitable for your circumstances.

One program is to chant upon waking up,
before and after breakfast,
before work,
before and after lunch,
before and after dinner, and before retiring.

The other program is to chant upon waking up,
before breakfast,
before and after our morning’s work,
before lunch,
before and after our afternoon’s work,
before dinner, and before retiring.

The key is regularity; disruption of this practice will reduce its effectiveness. When we recite consistently without interruption, we will soon feel an increase in our wisdom, serenity, and purity of mind. Diligent practice of this method together with unwavering belief, vows, and living a moral life can ensure fulfillment of our wish to reach the Western Pure Land.

Glossary

Affliction. Condition or cause of pain, distress, and suffering which disturbs the body and mind.

Amitabha. The name of the Buddha of the Western Pure Land, primarily meaning Infinite Life and Infinite Light.

Attachments. Fixed to certain ideas or objects.

Bodhi mind. The great compassionate and sincere mind, with every thought to attain complete self-realization for self and others.

Bodhisattva. One who has vowed to attain Supreme Enlightenment for themselves and all beings.

Buddha. One who has reached perfection in both self-realization and helping others to reach realization.

Delusion. False beliefs and views.

Dharma. 1) The teachings of the Buddha (generally capitalized in English); 2) Things, events, phenomena, everything in the universe; and 3) Duty, law, doctrine.

Eon. 1,334,000,000 years. The length of time between the creation and recreation of a world system, spanning the period of a world system's formation, existence, destruction, and non-existence. An unimaginably long time.

Five Human Relationships. These principles taught by Confucius are founded on traditional moral principles. They include those between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings, friends, political leaders and the public.

Five Pure Land Sutras and One Treatise. (1) *The Buddha Speaks of the Infinite Life Sutra of Adornment, Purity, Equality, and Enlightenment of the Mahayana School* (The *Infinite Life Sutra*); (2) *The Amitabha Sutra*; (3) *The Visualization on the Infinite Life Buddha Sutra*; (4) "Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Conduct and Vows", from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*; (5) "The Chapter on the Perfect Complete Realization of Great Strength Bodhisattva through Buddha Name Recitation" from the *Surangama Sutra*; and (6) the *Rebirth Treatise*.

Good Fortune. Happiness, intelligence, wellbeing, prosperity, etc. The great benefits of the human and celestial realms; therefore, they are temporary and subject to birth and death.

Karma/Cause and Effect. Consequences result from thoughts, speech, and behavior.

Mahayana. One of the two major branches of Buddhism, it is the Bodhisattva path of helping all beings to attain Enlightenment.

Merits and Virtues. They are accumulated by doing good deeds selflessly without expectation of reward, wandering or discriminatory thoughts, or attachments.

Phenomena. Things, events, happenings—everything in the entire universe.

Practice Guidelines. 1) The Three Conditions; 2) The Six Harmonies; 3) The Threefold Learning; 4) The Six Paramitas; and 5) Universal Worthy Bodhisattva's Ten Great Vows.

Precepts. Rules that were set up by Buddha Shakyamuni to guide his students from erroneous thoughts, speech, and behavior.

Pure Mind or Purity of Mind. The mind without wandering and

discriminatory thoughts and attachments.

Retribution. Karmic punishment from erroneous thoughts, words, or deeds.

Root of Goodness. Good qualities or seeds sown in a good life to be reaped later.

Saha world. Refers to our solar system, filled with suffering and afflictions, yet gladly endured by its inhabitants.

Samadhi. Proper enjoyment. Usually denotes the particular final stage of pure concentration and contemplation. There are many degrees and types of Samadhi.

Sangha. A group of four or more people who properly practice the Buddha's teaching together, especially the Six Harmonies.

Sentient-being. A living being that is self-aware and that can experience feeling or sensation.

Six Paramitas. Giving, self-discipline, patience, diligence, deep concentration, and wisdom.

Six Realms. Three upper realms are heavens, demi-gods, and humans. Three lower realms are animals, hungry ghosts, and hells.

Six Senses. Sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thought.

Sutra. Teaching by the Buddha, initially given verbally, later compiled, and written down by the Buddha's students.

Ten Virtuous Conducts. No killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, abusive language, bearing tales, enticing speech, greed, anger, or ignorance.

Ten Great Vows of Universal Worthy Bodhisattva. 1) To respect all Buddhas; 2) To praise Tathagata; 3) To make offerings extensively; 4) To repent karmic hindrances; 5) To rejoice at others' merits; 6) To request the turning of the Dharma wheel; 7) To request the Buddha to remain in this world; 8) To constantly follow the Buddha's teachings; 9) To accommodate all sentient beings; 10) To dedicate all merits universally.

Theravada Buddhism. The Path of strictly abiding by the precepts. The objective is to attain realization for him/herself. It is often called the path of the elders and is primarily practiced in Southern Asia and the west.

Three Bad Realms. Please see Six Realms.

Three Conditions. The First Condition is to: A) Be filial to one's parents, B) Be respectful to one's teachers and elders, C) Be compassionate and not kill any living beings, and D) Follow the Ten Virtuous Conducts. The Second Condition is to: E) Take the Three Refuges, F) Abide by the precepts, laws, and customs, and G) Conduct oneself in a proper and dignified manner. The Third Condition is to: H) Give rise to the Bodhi mind, I) Deeply believe in the law of cause and effect and that chanting "Amitufo" is the cause and attaining Buddhahood is the effect, J) Recite and uphold Mahayana sutras, and K) Encourage others to advance on the path to Enlightenment.

Three Dharma Age. The Dharma Perfect Age began with Buddha Shakyamuni's demise and lasted five hundred years, during which Enlightenment was often attained. The Dharma Semblance Age began after that and lasted one thousand years, during which Enlightenment was seldom attained. The Dharma Ending Age that we are now in began after that and will last for ten thousand years during which Enlightenment will rarely be attained.

Three Karmas. Created by our body, mouth, and mind.

Three Learnings. Self-discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom.

Three Relationships. These three relationships taught by Confucius are among humans, among humans and spirits, and among humans and the nature.

True Nature. Also called the self-nature. Our original, true self that we still have, but that is currently covered by deluded thoughts.

Wandering, Discriminatory Thoughts and Attachments. Afflictions that cloud our True Nature. When we have no wandering thoughts, we only have absolute proper and virtuous thoughts. It does not mean that our minds are empty of all thoughts.

Western Pure Land. The world created by Buddha Amitabha, which is an ideal place of cultivation, for those who are born there are no longer subject to reincarnation.