



# **The Truth Of The Messengers**

**Questions and Answers**

**With**

**Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu  
Beggar of the Century**



**PATRIARCH MINH DANG QUANG**

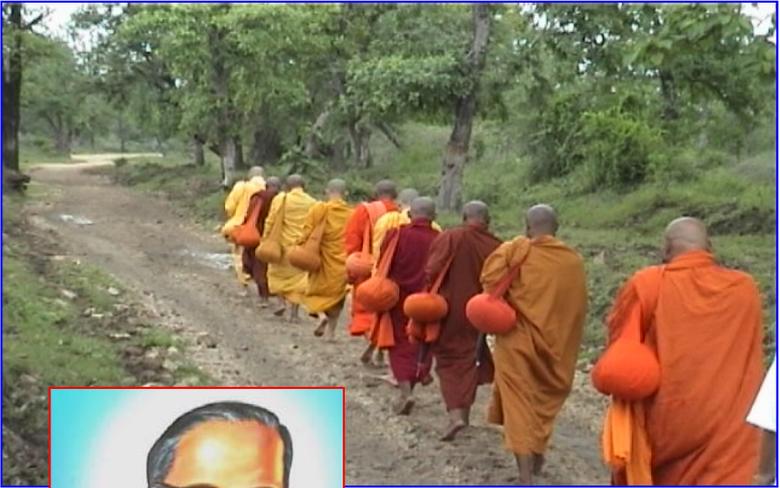


**BHIKKHU BUDDHA DHATU**

**BEGGAR OF THE CENTURY**

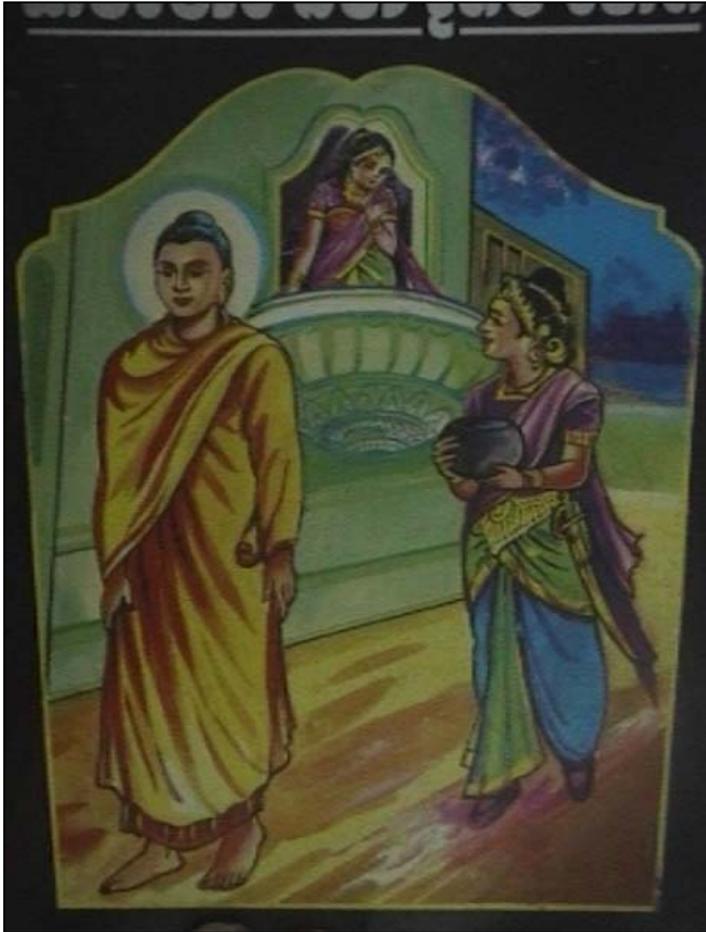


*Patriarch Minh Dang Quang said that animals cannot talk but they can understand. In its previous life, this bull was once an officer with the British army that colonised India. Now, after listening to some words of blessing from Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu, it bows in repentance.*



*Bodhisattva Dr. Ambedkar*

*The Heart for Peace Sangha of India fulfilling the wishes of Patriarch Minh Dang Quang and Bodhisattva Dr. Ambedkar to bring back the Buddha Dhamma to India.*



(picture to be put on page 29, qs. 12)



*Kamma does  
not give way to  
anyone*



*“The Gift of Truth excels all other Gifts.”*

# **The Truth of the Messengers**

**Questions and Answers  
with  
Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu**

**Beggar of the Century**

The Heart For Peace Order would like to express our gratitude to our helpers and supporters who have contributed in cash or kind to the printing of this book. May the merit they have thus accrued benefit them and their loved ones, and may they all attain the bliss of Nibbana. May the merit also be dedicated to the well-being and peace of all sentient and non-sentient beings.

## **The Truth of the Messengers**

*Questions and Answers*

*With Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu*

*Beggar of the Century*

*Copyright 2006 by Le Duc Ngoc*

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author. For information, contact:*

*Email: [heartforpeace@hotmail.com](mailto:heartforpeace@hotmail.com)*

*First edition: Dec 2006*

**(Printed for Free Distribution)**

## CONTENTS

| PART |                              | PAGE |
|------|------------------------------|------|
|      | Preface                      | 1    |
| 1    | Patriarch Minh Dang Quang    | 3    |
| 2    | Right Vinaya Practice        | 21   |
| 3    | Various Sects and Traditions | 39   |
| 4    | Chinese Rites and Rituals    | 46   |
| 5    | Dana and Vegetarianism       | 62   |
| 6    | Meditation                   | 70   |
| 7    | Miscellaneous                | 75   |
| 8    | Gems from Bhikkhu            | 147  |
|      | Appendix                     | 160  |
|      | Glossary                     | 164  |

## PREFACE

It is undoubtedly true that there are already a lot of books written on the Buddha and His Teachings and the reader may question why yet another one is being added to the pile. The answer is simple – the world needs to re-evaluate its concepts of Buddhism instead of just blindly following the teachings of misguided Buddhist monks and nuns.

Buddhism is beautiful in its simplicity and practicality. It has been so 'overdressed' for more than two thousand years that most of us cannot see it for what it is – the medicine for all of mankind's maladies. Misrepresentations and misinterpretations of the Buddha's teachings have caused Buddhism to be labelled many things - including being a superstitious religion of rites and rituals. In the first place, the Buddha did not set out to create a new religion. He just taught the Path to attain True Understanding or Enlightenment. Secondly, the Buddha did not advocate rites and rituals – in fact, He spoke out against them. It is not even necessary for Buddhists to go to temples and erect statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in order to practise the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha Himself said, *"He who practises my teaching best, reveres me most"*. However, due to tolerance, Buddhism does not totally denounce the masses' need for such outward shows of devotion.

There are concerned Buddhists who are tired of the noise and drama of so-called Buddhist practices and are out to revive the Buddhist way of life as taught by the Buddha himself. Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu is a Buddhist monk with such a mindset and has inspired many of his students to seek the 'Truth in the Path' and to rethink their ideas of Buddhism. It has not been easy for his students to accept his concepts, as it is always frightening to discard old ways for new ones - especially when his ideas seem so revolutionary. However, his students have seen the wisdom of his words and their lives have been changed very drastically. Their lives are filled with a deeper sense of peace and fearlessness than before. In wanting to share their newfound peace with other Buddhists, some of these students decided to record Bhikkhu's words of wisdom in a book of questions and answers and you are now holding the result.

The questions found in this book were asked by Buddhist devotees in Malaysia and Singapore and should be familiar to many of you, but you may be shocked by Bhikkhu's answers. You may even find them

unacceptable. Yet, we hope that as you read the book, you will keep in mind Bhikkhu's mission to achieve Peace based on the Truth and the practice of Loving-kindness. The world is in the trouble that it is in right now because people have closed their hearts and minds to their fellowmen. Please keep yours open.

The Editor

Dec 2006  
Malaysia

## **PART 1 : PATRIARCH MINH DANG QUANG**

1. *We understand that you are a Bhikkhu from the Order of Bhikkhus founded by Patriarch Minh Dang Quang in Vietnam. Who was Patriarch Minh Dang Quang?*

**ANS.** Patriarch Minh Dang Quang's real name was Nguyen Thanh Dat and he was born on 26<sup>th</sup> September 1923 in Tam Binh, South Vietnam to a family of devout Buddhists. His mother was pregnant with him for twelve months before he was born and she passed away nine months after that and he was put in the care of a woman named Ha Thi Song.

At the age of 7, his father placed him in a primary school where he received a basic education until he reached 11 years of age. He was well loved for his intelligence, neat and tidy appearance and gentle ways. Even at a young age, he aspired to become a monk despite much discouragement from his family. When he reached 14 years of age, he took a certain Khmer monk in Kampuchea as his teacher. However, his teacher practised black magic, ran a grocery store and hired out his novices to dig wells for the villagers in return for payment. Nguyen Thanh Dat realised that he had found the wrong teacher and path, and when his teacher was away on another business trip, Nguyen Thanh Dat gave away all the goods in his teacher's shop, including all the cash he could find there to the villagers and returned to his family.

One day he saved a young girl from an untimely death due to a black magic spell that had been cast on her by some evildoers and in return, she offered to marry him and serve him for the rest

of his life. That may seem strange to us in our modern society, but among the Vietnamese people then, it was acceptable practice to repay one's benefactor in such a manner. After the wedding, they moved to Saigon City where Nguyen Thanh Dat worked in a commercial firm. However, he never stopped researching and learning more about Buddhism, which is one reason why he once again yearned to leave the worldly life in search of the Truth.

Some months later, his wife died while giving birth to a baby girl. Three years later, the little girl also died. (This teaches us all a lesson. If we do not suffer in life, we will not know what suffering means. The First Noble Truth itself deals with this fact.)

He was thus alone once more, and decided to be re-ordained. He had wanted to go to another country but because he was too late to catch the last ferry, he started to walk along the beach and then sat down on a big rock to meditate. Seven days passed very quickly and one evening he looked at the choppy sea and observed a boat rocking and bobbing up and down on the waves. All at once, the Truth dawned on him.

He returned home to see his father one more time before going to the mountain *That Son*. (Seven Mountains in Vietnamese) He told his father that he was already enlightened to the Truth, but his father did not believe him, as he was only 21 years old at that time. To the elderly man, no one could be enlightened at such a young age. However, Nguyen Thanh Dat stayed on at his family home for a while, but in a *kuti* set up for him in the compound of the house. He draped a blanket around him as his robe and used a coconut shell as his alms bowl because he did not want to adhere

to the *Mahayana* tradition, and there was no *Theravada* temple for him to go to.

He lived by begging for alms and at night he went into the jungle to meditate. One day a monk invited him to stay at a temple called Linh Buu Tu in My Tho. At this temple, he took his 250 vows and was given the name Minh Dang Quang by *Amitabha Buddha* who appeared to him in a vision.

Patriarch Minh Dang Quang started walking from village to village and from town to town in South Vietnam, teaching people about Buddhism. He begged for his food like *Lord Buddha* used to do and generally lived as the *Buddha* himself had done more than two thousand five hundred and fifty years ago. In 1946, he established a religious order called *Tang Gia Khat Si (Bhikkhu Sangha)*, which upholds the mendicant tradition set by the *Buddha*. Then one day, Patriarch Minh Dang Quang told his students that he had spent enough time teaching the Path for those who would understand it, so his duty had been discharged. He said that the Chief Commander of the Army was determined to arrest him for having acquired so many supporters and planned to meet him personally the following day. His students were anxious for his safety when they heard his words, but he said to them, "No one can kill the son of the *Buddha*". The following day, he disappeared. This was on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1954.

Fortunately for us, Patriarch Minh Dang Quang left behind 69 booklets in which he expounded the *Buddha's Teachings* and recorded guidelines for all his Mendicant *Sangha* members to study and follow. Most of these volumes were later compiled into a thick

book entitled *'Chon Ly (The Truth)*. Some students of the Patriarch have since travelled to other parts of Vietnam as well as other countries to spread his message of Universal Peace and Compassion.

**2. *What was Minh Dang Quang's mission? What did he hope to achieve?***

**ANS.** He wanted to teach us how to stop the wars that plague the world by ending all our inner conflicts. You see, warfare that is waged by governments against each other - or even petty quarrels and fights among individuals - are all caused by greed, anger and ignorance. If we do not covet others' possessions, if we are not jealous and do not bear ill will towards others, we would not end up fighting and killing. The world outside is a reflection of the world inside us; so to end the external conflicts, we must firstly end the inner conflicts.

As human beings, do we have one or three stomachs? One, according to the Science textbooks. Three is my answer. Why? One is the 'lower stomach' – the one we keep feeding with food; and the other is the 'upper stomach' – the mind which is hungry for wisdom but we keep neglecting it. And the third or 'middle' stomach is that of our Heart of Love. We forget these last two stomachs and end up slaughtering not only animals but human beings too. All the prophets and messengers of Truth have taught that the way to Peace is through Love and Compassion, but many politicians use the name of religion to promote their own interests. That is why people are always fighting with each other – everyone

is worried about feeding their 'lower stomachs' only.

Of course many would say that they do feed their 'upper stomachs' through years of education and now they can read and write and even debate long and loud about various issues – see how clever they are now? Unfortunately, many people have qualifications as long as their arms and they think they are clever, but their cleverness does not help them to reduce their attachments. Instead, they have even more desires – for Cash, Condominium, Credit card, Car, Country Club membership (the 5 C's ) – then, their desires turn to ego and fear of losing prestige. On a larger scale, such greed translates into fear of having less than neighbouring countries and greed for power over others. Where is the peace that everyone in the world keeps talking about when we have such insanity ruling our lives?

Minh Dang Quang was so concerned about establishing inner and outer peace that he addressed this issue in seven chapters in ***Chon Ly (The Truth)***.

He also wanted to change whatever he saw was wrong practice among certain *Mahayana*, (as well as *Theravada*) *Sangha* members and to do that, he wrote ***Bo Tat Giao (Bodhisattva Teaching)*** which contains many chapters on the way of the *Bodhisattva* so that monks and nuns can have a guideline to the right practice.

Above all, his main purpose in life was to remind us about our own purpose in life as Buddhists – to achieve Enlightenment by following the *Buddha's* Teachings. Many people change the *Buddha's* Teachings to please themselves, discarding whatever irks

them, and reinterpreting whatever does not suit them. Minh Dang Quang was brave enough to risk everyone's displeasure by standing up and saying: Enough is enough – follow the Teachings properly or you will destroy the *Dhamma* and yourselves.

### **3. *Was he successful in his mission?***

**ANS.** Many prophets and messengers appeared in the world from time to time to teach human beings how to live in peace. Did they succeed? To a certain extent, yes. However, we still have a long way to go before we can claim to have a peaceful world. *Mara* is very strong, and man's greed is just as strong. We have tied knots around ourselves with our materialism and ignorance and until we learn to untie them, we will still be under the control of our evil desires; and hence wars will still be waged. Minh Dang Quang did not say that by a certain year, we would finally achieve world peace. On the contrary, he said that only if we were willing to change ourselves would the world also change.

As for his efforts in changing the Buddhist *Sangha*, I am sad to say that there are many, many monks and nuns today who just put his photograph on their altar tables but do not follow his teachings at all.

Patriarch Minh Dang Quang taught for 7 years in Vietnam but due to political unrest and the poor communications system at that time, he could not reach enough people.

He had 100 monks and nuns as students and many of them had actually left their *Theravada* or *Mahayana* temples to join him. When he was still by their side, these *Sangha* members were strong in their practice and were well respected by the Vietnamese

community for their high moral standards. But once he disappeared, they faced difficulties and many of them reverted to their old practices. Later, some of these so-called Minh Dang Quang's students settled down in remote parts of the country to avoid detection and began to use his illustrious name to earn their living. The laypeople there supported them, as they did not know any better; and the poor communications system blocked much of the information from the main towns.

Now there are 7 distinct groups of *Sangha* members living in 500 temples and kutis in Vietnam and abroad claiming to follow the true teachings of the Patriarch, but I know for a fact that **none of these groups** is really doing so. Minh Dang Quang's teachings are now no longer followed in Vietnam, but in India. Today, there are bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen and laywomen in India who have undertaken upon themselves the noble task of preserving the Patriarch's teachings there and they have been endorsed as Patriarch Minh Dang Quang's followers by Venerable Thich Giac Luong of Phap Duyen Temple in San Jose, California. The rest have become corrupt, eat more than one meal a day, handle and even earn money, own luxury cars and temples, get involved in politics, offer package deals for chanting at funerals (while guaranteeing that the deceased will thus gain entry into heaven) and the list goes on and on. One example would be the Vietnamese monk residing in the USA, Thich Giac Nhien aka the Mercedes Monk. He met Patriarch Minh Dang Quang just one month before the Patriarch disappeared, but he claims to be among his first batches of students. When the Second Patriarch, Ven. Thich Giac Chanh

achieved Nibbana in 2004, Thich Giac Nhien tried to install himself as the Third Patriarch, but fortunately, he did not succeed.

Patriarch Minh Dang Quang once said that his teachings would be lost from Vietnam but reappear outside that country and spread to 5 continents. That is what our Heart for Peace Mission is trying to do on his behalf, in order to keep his teachings alive for the sake of humanity and to expose the miscreants among the *Sangha* members.

Lastly, was he successful in waking up the Buddhist community? Look within now and answer that question yourself.

**4. *Did you try to change these Sangha members in Vietnam?***

**ANS.** I did try to persuade them to return to the original teachings of the *Lord Buddha* but they refused. They say that the *Buddha* taught in a different time and place and so did the Patriarch, and that nowadays, society has changed and so the *Sangha* must also change with the times.

This is such an absurd thing to say. If they think the *Buddha* belonged only to the past, then why put His image on the altar? Plus the Patriarch's photograph too. Why shave their heads and wear the yellow robes of a monk or mouth the *Vinaya* rules twice a month if they do not intend to follow them? These people are making a mockery of the *Buddha's* Teachings and should be disrobed. They are only using the robes to earn a living. An example: there is a monk in USA who advised a young, struggling engineer to give up his job and be ordained – he would then earn USD\$1 million a year instead of his current salary of only USD\$30,000 p.a.

Sadly, such black sheep are found not only in Patriarch Minh Dang Quang's fold, but they are in all the other Buddhist traditions as well. Our job now is to alert the laypeople so that they will know how to judge whether a *Sangha* member is a true disciple or not, and to avoid the false ones as much as possible. They should not support them either physically or morally, so that without material gains coming their way, such monks and nuns will disrobe and rejoin society where they may commit less weighty *Kamma*.

**5. *What did Patriarch Minh Dang Quang have to say about Sangha members building temples? Did he approve of temples with a lot of statues and images in them?***

**ANS.** Minh Dang Quang said that if *Sangha* members build temples out of a desire to earn money, to possess property, that is very bad. It would lead to fighting within the *Sangha*. Look around you – people fight each other over money and property, even family members do it, so who can say that monks and nuns would not do the same? Minh Dang Quang recommended that fewer temples be built and that each temple be kept simple. **He did not say to completely not build temples at all.** Devotees who have reached a higher level of understanding of the *Buddha's Path* do not need to see or enter a temple in order to cultivate. However, there are people who need to go to temples before they can learn about the *Buddha* and *His Teachings*; especially people who are new to Buddhism. Hence, temples and places of cultivation do serve a purpose in Buddhist society.

However, Patriarch Minh Dang Quang said to use wood and

leaves as building material for the temples and to build *kutis* for the *Sangha* to occupy. In that way, the *Sangha* would not be attached to any of the temples; they would understand them to be impermanent like everything else. Monks and nuns can then come to stay in the *kutis* for a few months before leaving them behind for another place. If big, strong temples are built for them, money will come pouring in and monks, being human too, can become lazy and greedy then.

Concerning the placing of statues and images in the temples – Minh Dang Quang said to keep them to a minimum. Just one statue of the *Buddha* would do. We must understand that it is really not necessary to have thousands of statues to adorn a temple. Some wish to add statues of *Kuan Yin Bodhisattva* and *Earth Store Bodhisattva* as well, but that is really optional. After all, if you think constantly of *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa*, and if you practise the virtue of Compassion, He is already installed in your heart. Keep Him in your heart where His thousand hands and thousand eyes can join yours in helping to make the world a better place. Instead of a temple, isn't that a better place to put Him?

We can apply the same principle above to the altar table we have at home. Some people place a lot of idols and images on the altar table but do not keep the *Precepts*; hence they are unable to find peace of mind. When you keep the precepts, the *Buddha* is already with you. As for the offering of incense sticks or joss sticks – some people tend to overdo it by burning a lot of them until the entire prayer room is filled with overpowering smoke. Just one or three joss sticks would be enough. The *Buddha* does not need the

fragrant smell from the joss sticks – He would be more interested in the fragrance of your morals. And never ever forget the harm all that burning will do to the environment!

In *Bodhigaya*, thousands of oil lamps are left burning throughout the day by devotees and the smoke has blackened the walls of the temples and statues there quite badly. The devotees there feel that they are doing something that will win them lots of merits. During the time of the *Buddha*, oil lamps were more difficult to come by, so the people then offered less lamps and kept the environment clean. They also understood that just one lamp offered with true sincerity would bring more merit to them than a hundred lamps. Nowadays, with global warming and pollution threatening the environment, Buddhist devotees should practise with more wisdom than to just burn, burn, burn! They must realise that the *Buddha* would prefer them to light the lamp of wisdom in their minds than all those oil lamps that stain the walls and *Buddha* statues! At the same time, there are unscrupulous *Sangha* members who collect money from foreign devotees in order to purchase oil lamps to be burnt at *Bodhigaya*! Many Buddhists have paid up substantial amounts of cash to these monks and nuns who then go to *Bodhigaya* and burn cheap oil lamps on their behalf while pocketing the balance of the money. I have seen this happening even in other temples in Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia and other countries that practise the *Mahayana* tradition.

Finally, let us keep in mind Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty in China (6<sup>th</sup> Century) who built lots of temples in the hope of acquiring merits. He asked Patriarch *Bodhidhamma* how much

merit he had won and to his consternation, the Patriarch answered, "None". And why not? Because the Emperor had been misled into believing that the more temples he built, the greater would be his merits. No one should do good deeds for the sake of getting merits alone and there is no necessity to go overboard in our choice of good deeds. Both Emperor Wu and King Asoka earned enough merits to become kings because of small, simple acts of goodness. In a previous life, Emperor Wu was a woodcutter who came across a statue of the *Buddha*, and since it was a hot day, the woodcutter removed his hat and placed it on the head of the statue. For that act, he won a crown for his next rebirth. And King Asoka? When the *Buddha* was still alive, He was once offered a handful of sand by a small boy. Ananda did not appreciate the act, but the Lord asked him to take the sand and use it to plaster the *Buddha's kuti* with it. Then the *Buddha* said that the boy had earned himself enough merit to be reborn a king as his small act of giving was done with deep sincerity.

**6. *What did Patriarch Minh Dang Quang have to say to the laypeople?***

**ANS.** Patriarch Minh Dang Quang taught the laypeople to take refuge in the *Triple Gems* and adhere to the *5 Precepts* :

1. Do not kill
2. Do not steal
3. Do not engage in sexual misconduct
4. Do not lie
5. Do not drink alcohol

By doing this, a person can be reborn as a human being. In order to transfer to the *Pure Land*, one also has to make a vow to be reborn there plus avoid committing the Ten Evil Deeds :

1. Killing
2. Stealing
3. Sexual Misconduct
4. Lying
5. Slandering
6. Coarse Language
7. Frivolous Chatter
8. Covetousness
9. Angry speech
10. Wrong views

To make your vow to be reborn in the *Pure Land*, just say a simple prayer like this every time you do a good deed: ***“I vow that if I do not attain arahant hood in this life, I transfer all my merits from the past, present and future to Amitabha Land so that at my last breath, I will be transferred there”***. And don't make a show of it; just say it quietly to yourself – don't worry, *Amitabha Buddha* will hear you. However, let me remind you that repeating this vow is useless if you do not strive to cut your desires and defilements.

**7. What else did Patriarch Minh Dang Quang say?**

**ANS.** In the book *Chon Ly*, there is a chapter called *Dao Phat*

(*The Buddha's Path*) where you will find the Patriarch answering questions asked of him. His answers are very interesting, so I shall translate them for you here:

Q Why do you go on alms rounds for your food?

**A All the *Buddhas* of the past, present and future in the 10 directions have to go on alms rounds for their food. Nowadays, not many monks do it, so I have to do so.**

Q Why is your attire not like the others'?

**A Because the rest of them are not attired as the *Buddha* was.**

Q Why do you not have a rank or position?

**A Because the *Dhamma* is for Enlightenment, and not to acquire rank or position.**

Q Why do you practise homelessness and not worship the gods like the others do?

**A Because when you go homeless, that means liberation from rebirth, and you are like the Universal Truth.**

Q Why do you not do any work?

**A Because I am not greedy for anything.**

Q Why don't you join the other groups of monks in the temples?

**A Because the *Buddha* asked us to practise, not to be involved with groups or temples.**

Q Why is your practice of Buddhism different from the others'?

**A Because they are far from the *Buddha*. If they come**

near to the *Buddha*, our practice would be one and the same.

Q Why do you live in simple *kutis*?

A Because the *Vinaya* (precepts), *Samadhi* and Wisdom do not look like a marketplace.

Q Is the *Buddha Dhamma* not separate from 'Worldly Dhamma'?

A Who can say that the *Buddha* is Mara?

Q Are there two types of *Dhamma*?

A The *Dhamma* isn't even one, so how can there be two?

Q Why don't you do any charitable work?

A Because I don't want to enjoy anything.

*(ie. People who do a lot of charity are sowing seeds for better rebirths, but they will still remain in the realm of birth and death.)*

Q Why do you wear a patched robe?

A Because the *Buddha* and His disciples also wore patched robes.

Q Why don't you set up an organization or society?

A Because I have to walk the *Buddha's* Path and have no time for such things.

Q Why don't you like temples?

A Because the real Path is not there.

Q Are you practising the real Path of the *Buddha*?

**A It is for those who want to be enlightened.**

Q Is the *Buddha's* Path found in the *Tripitaka*?

**A No, the Path is within the heart, not in the *Tripitaka*.**

Q Do we have to study the whole *Tripitaka*?

**A No, no one can learn the whole *Tripitaka*. Better to study less but cultivate more and you will be enlightened to the *Tripitaka* in yourself.**

Q Did the *Buddha* teach any sects or traditions?

**A The *Buddha* did not even have a single sect or tradition, yet the people created so many.**

Q What is the True Teaching of the *Buddha*?

**A True Practice is His True Teaching.**

Q What do you think of studying/learning?

**A Practice – that is your highest learning.**

Q Why don't you go to India to study Buddhism?

**A Because I don't have to. Wherever you are, the practice is the same.**

Q Why was King Yama of hell given that name?

**A Yama means speaking the truth, but in a harsh manner.**

Q What do we mean when we say "King of Earth", "King of Heaven" and "King of the *Dhamma*"?

**A "King of Earth" means to love all; to be compassionate. "King of Heaven" means when you**

**do good deeds, your mind is very open. "King of the *Dhamma*" means your mind is the *Dhamma*.**

Q Why do we call Mara an ugly ghost?

**A When you are in his net of desires or illusions, you cannot escape.**

Q What is hell?

**A When you tie up your mind, that is hell.**

Q How should an employer treat his servants?

**A**

- 1. Give them work that befits them**
- 2. Give them food and salaries that befit them**
- 3. Look after their welfare when they are sick**
- 4. Have meals together during celebrations**
- 5. Give them enough rest**

Q How should students show respect for their teachers?

**A**

- 1. Every time a teacher is talking, show him love and respect**
- 2. Follow the teacher's instructions**
- 3. If the students do not understand what the teacher says, they must ask questions**
- 4. The students must analyse what they have been taught**
- 5. The students must contemplate the meaning of what the teachers have taught**

Q How can a teacher be a good one?

**A**

- 1. Advise the students to do good**
- 2. Be calm, compassionate and loving**
- 3. Teach them the right values and the 6 *Paramitas* (charity, discipline, forbearance, energy, concentration and wisdom)**
- 4. Clarify their doubts**
- 5. Always help them to improve themselves.**

Q What should we do as good people?

- A
1. Learn and understand well what you are taught
  2. Do not break the precepts taught in the *Sutras*
  3. Respect the *Triple Gem*
  4. Accept the *Dhamma* and do not forget it
  5. Control your greed, anger and ignorance
  6. Practise *metta* (loving-kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic/ appreciative joy) and *upekkha* (equanimity) (*see Glossary*)
  7. Do good deeds
  8. Avoid harming sentient beings
  9. Always help bad people to change their character
  10. Understand what is right and what is wrong

The aspirations of good and intelligent people are :

1. Always think of leaving home for the homeless life (i.e. join the *Sangha*)
2. Always be ready to cut off worldly attachments and lead a quiet life
3. Always be happy to do charity
4. Always think of all sentient beings with compassion
5. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to do good deeds
6. Always remind yourself to strive for liberation from *samsara*

## PART 2 : RIGHT VINAYA PRACTICE

### **8. *How do laypeople differentiate between true Sangha members and false ones?***

**ANS.** When you meet Buddhist monks or nuns, observe whether they keep the *Vinaya* precepts. See if they accept money, whether in the form of *angpows*, cheques, cold cash or even credit cards! The tenth precept forbids this strictly.

See if they eat after midday, and if they eat more than once a day. If they do so, they are breaking the sixth *Vinaya* precept (this would be the sixth according to the *Theravada* tradition, and the ninth according to the Mahayana). There are *Sangha* members who claim that the *Buddha* set this rule because when He was alive, there was very little food around but that today, we have plenty of food, so this precept is now redundant. That is just nonsense and an insult to the *Buddha*. He was a prince and also highly respected by royalty when He became *Buddha* – how can anyone say that He did not have enough to eat? (Except for the time when there was a famine in India, and the Buddha and His disciples ate horse fodder) No, the reason why the *Buddha* made this rule is because if one eats too much and too often, one cannot meditate properly. Eating after midday also makes it difficult to control one's sexual desires.

Now, there are *Sangha* members who even eat breakfast besides their midday meal. They quote the story of *Visakha* serving early morning tea to the monks during the *Buddha's* time but fail to note that this is allowable only on certain occasions, e.g.

when the monks have to go on a long journey, and that after eating their breakfast, lunch is no longer allowed. I have caught many *Sangha* members doing this in *Theravada* temples and even among Minh Dang Quang's so-called disciples in Vietnam. The latter started doing this within two years of the Second Patriarch's demise – how can they be role models to other *Sangha* groups? Worse still are those who not only eat more than one meal a day, but also drink beer! They say that beer is allowed because the *Buddha* only forbade the drinking of wine, not beer. How can they say such a thing when they know that during the *Buddha's* time, there was no beer around for Him to forbid in the first place? Devotees who *Dana* such monks and nuns should stop doing so – do not support such conmen and conwomen posing as holy *Sangha*!

And of course, all *Sangha* members should be vegetarians.

Next, observe their behaviour – do they indulge in idle chatter or are they mostly calm and serene, often meditative? Are they modest in their behaviour, especially with the opposite gender? Do they try to sell you prayers and chanting sessions? Do they try to sell you anything at all? Many temples have become marketplaces where *Sangha* members sell prayer beads, images of the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* and even decorations for the altar at home. I have even seen stalls around temple grounds selling handphone accessories, tee-shirts and *feng shui* paraphernalia. Plus flowers, candles and incense sticks, and lucky charms for your car. There are monks and nuns who would bless your new car or house – for a fee, of course. Besides such

deplorable activities, there are *Sangha* members who collect donations from devotees to build guesthouses and spend their time working as 'hotel managers'!

All such activities are not allowed for the true sons and daughters of the *Buddha*. The only duty of the *Sangha* is to practise the path of the *Buddha* in order to win liberation from *samsara*, and having found it, to teach the path to others.

**9. *But that means laypeople should know the Bhikkhu Rules or Vinaya. And if we see bhikkhus and bhikkhunis behaving badly, what should we do?***

**ANS.** Yes, by all means, feel free to read up on the *Vinaya* rules for yourself. That is the only way for you to know if a certain *Sangha* member is breaking the precepts. Of course the *Vinaya* rules are too many for laypeople to remember. *Theravada* monks observe 227 precepts and the nuns observe 311 precepts while the *Mahayana* observe 250 and 348 precepts respectively. The *Mahayana* have more precepts but do not observe them as strictly as the *Theravada*. Some of them even say that they are keeping the *Bodhisattva Precepts* so they can be excused from neglecting some of the *Vinaya Precepts* but they forget to mention that a *Bodhisattva* or *Bhikkhu Bodhisattva* keeps even more and stricter *Precepts*! As far as I can see, if they cannot keep *Precepts* properly, they do not qualify to preside at ordination ceremonies for novices as well as guide 5 and 8-Precepters. For example, if a father does not stop smoking, he cannot ask his son to do the same.

So the best thing for you to do is to just keep in mind the first 10 precepts that **all** *Sangha* members have to abide by, and these are, according to Patriarch Minh Dang Quang's ***Bhikkhu Rules***:

1. To abstain from taking life
2. To abstain from taking what is not given
3. To abstain from unchaste acts
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness
6. To abstain from wearing garlands, scents and perfumes
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music and unseemly shows
8. To abstain from the use of high, large and luxurious couches
9. To abstain from eating after midday (i.e. taking only one vegetarian meal a day)
10. To abstain from accepting gold and silver (money) and jewellery

If laypeople see the *Sangha* breaking the *Precepts*, they have a moral obligation to remind them of their vows. A particular Vietnamese monk, Thich Thien Tam has written in his book, *Pure Land Principles and Practice*: *"In the Great Heap Sutra, the Buddha said, 'If kings and officials beat and scold monks and nuns, whether the latter keep the precepts or not, their bad karma is as great as if they had shed the blood of millions of Buddhas. If we see someone wearing the yellow robe, whether he keeps the*

*precepts or not, we should consider him a Buddha.' "*

However, this does not seem to make sense, does it? After all, most of us have seen 'monks' and 'nuns' going around in their robes begging for money or selling religious articles to customers at coffee shops. There was even a monk in a Malaysian town who used to sit in the back of a pickup truck and sprinkle 'holy water' on devotees near a marketplace – for *angpows*, of course. It was quite disturbing to see the many ladies gathering around his pickup, laden with shopping bags and lining up sheepishly for their turns to be blessed with 'long life and prosperity' by a dour-faced old monk in yellow robes. And there are monks who have had to disrobe due to having illicit relationships with lady devotees, or tampering with temple accounts to line their own pockets. These 'monks' are obviously not true *Sangha* members. Should we then bow to them in respect just because of their robes or should we use our own discretion when reading *Sutras*? After all, it has been more than 2550 years since the *Buddha* was around – is it not possible that His words got twisted by some people somewhere for their own benefit? If we consider how words spoken by the rich and famous today can be misquoted and taken out of context in order to sell gossipy tabloids, what more can be said about the *Buddha* whose words were passed down the generations orally before they were finally written down and then translated from *Pali* to *Sanskrit* to Chinese etc etc?

In reading such a *Sutra*, some people are afraid to question the actions of the *Sangha*, thinking that it would result in bad *Kamma* for themselves, but let me assure them that if they do not

Speak out, they would indirectly be encouraging such monks and nuns to continue breaking their vows and **that** would destroy the *Dhamma*. The laypeople must not believe that they will go to hell if they criticise the errant *Sangha* members – these monks and nuns will go there first. But if the laypeople support them even though they know the monks and nuns are breaking their *Precepts*, then such laypeople will be committing a grave sin and will have to face heavy *Kammic* retribution too. In fact, it is stated in the *Dai Bao Tich Sutra* that if a king knows of a *Sangha* member who breaks the precepts but does not express any disapproval of his actions, then this king will lose all the merits he has earned from all his past and present lives.

**10. *I myself have been accosted by a monk at a coffee shop. He was going from table to table with his bowl, asking for money from the customers. What should I have done then?***

**ANS.** You should have notified the authorities! I have seen monks going around with their almsbowls half filled with dollar notes. I always warn my students to ignore such monks and not to give them any money. Such monks give a bad name to the *Sangha*.

**11. *We have met monks and nuns who are patient, kind and compassionate but who eat after midday and they handle money. On the other hand, there are monks and nuns who do not eat after midday and do not touch money, yet have other bad habits. What is your comment?***

**ANS.** Such monks and nuns are not kind to you, but to your money! They look upon you as big fish to be caught! If only they would keep the *Vinaya* strictly, and then transfer all the merits they would thus earn to you, then I can say that they are being kind to you.

Not long before the *Buddha's Parinibbana*, He went to the Sala Grove of the Mallas and asked Venerable Ananda to prepare a couch between twin Sala trees. Then, the *Buddha* laid Himself down on His right side, mindful and self-possessed.

The Sala trees started blooming out of season with lots of beautiful flowers and the *Buddha* said, ***"It is not thus, Ananda, that the Tathagata is respected, revered, venerated, honoured, and revered. Whatever Bhikkhu or Bhikkhuni, Upasaka or Upasika lives in accordance with the Teaching, conducts himself dutifully, and acts righteously, it is he who respects, reverences, venerates, honours and reveres the Tathagatha with the highest homage. Therefore, Ananda, should you train yourselves thus – 'Let us live in accordance with the Teaching, dutifully conducting ourselves, and acting righteously.'*"**

If you can, please refer to the ***Culahatthipadopama Sutta*** (*The Shorter Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint*) found in the **Middle-Length Discourse**. There, we find the *Buddha* talking about how bhikkhus should behave. It is too long for me to reproduce the whole sutra here, but let me just quote some pertinent passages from it:

*".....He abstains from injuring seeds and plants. He practises eating only one meal a day, abstaining from eating at night and outside the proper time. He abstains from dancing, singing, music, and theatrical shows. He abstains from wearing garlands, smartening himself with scent, and embellishing himself with unguents. He abstains from high and large couches. He abstains from accepting gold and silver. He abstains from accepting raw grain. He abstains from accepting raw meat. He abstains from accepting women and girls. He abstains from accepting men and women slaves. He abstains from accepting goats and sheep. He abstains from accepting fowl and pigs. He abstains from accepting elephants, cattle, horses, and mares. He abstains from accepting fields and land. He abstains from going on errands and running messages. He abstains from buying and selling. He abstains from false weights, false metals, and false measures. He abstains from cheating, deceiving, defrauding, and trickery. He abstains from wounding, murdering, binding, brigandage, plunder, and violence.*

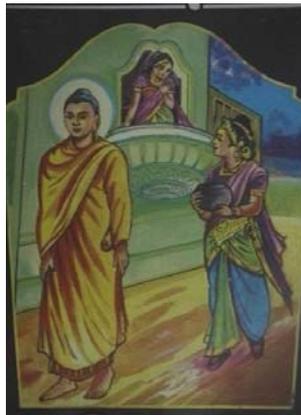
*He becomes content with robes to protect his body and with almsfood to maintain his stomach, and wherever he goes, he sets out taking only these with him. Just as a bird, wherever it goes, flies with its wings as its only burden, so too the bhikkhu becomes content with robes to protect his body and with almsfood to maintain his stomach, and wherever he goes, he sets out taking only*

*these with him. Possessing this aggregate of noble virtue, he experiences within himself a bliss that is blameless.” (MN27)*

I think no further explanation is needed here. The *Buddha's* words are easy to understand.

**12. *What does a monk's bowl symbolise?***

**ANS.** When a person gives up everything to be ordained, his property will be three robes and a bowl. Wherever he goes, he must carry the robes and bowl with him – like a uniform of sorts. The bowl symbolises his homeless state and non-attachment to the worldly life. He is not supposed to use it as a begging bowl to collect money from the public.



*(Nanda leaving his bride to become a bhikkhu)*

**13. *Bhikkhu, sometimes you are too critical of monks or nuns who handle money and eat after midday. These monks and nuns feel unhappy over your remarks. What is your view on this?***

**ANS.** When the *Buddha* entered *Parinibbana* (i.e. He passed away), some of the monks were happy! One of them was Venerable Subhadda (*not to be confused with another Venerable Subhadda who became the last person to be converted by the Buddha*) who said, "That's good! Now we can live at ease. We can do whatever we want and not be bothered by all the rules anymore!" Even during the *Buddha's* time, there were monks who did not appreciate being taught the right path.

Such people are very silly – they do not value having their eyes opened so that they would do no wrong. I tell the truth for the sake of the *Dhamma*. If I see *Sangha* members adhering to wrong practices, I have to speak out so as to set them straight. It is my moral obligation to do that so as to protect the *Dhamma* and the image of the Holy *Sangha*. If you see a child about to put his hand into a fire, what would you do? Let him burn himself or try to pull him away from it? Similarly, by criticising the *Sangha* who do wrong, I am trying to save them from the fire of ignorance, and unfortunate rebirths in the future. If I just keep quiet, I am not human.

As lay supporters, you can also help to put these monks and nuns back on the right path. Do not give them any money and do not cook meat and fish for them to eat. If you offer meat and fish as *Dana*, you cannot escape *Samsara* because you must

face retribution for your bad *Kamma*. You must allow yourself to be reborn as animals for others to kill and eat you! If the Sangha members say it is okay for them to eat meat and that they will chant prayers for the dead animals, say to them, "Why don't we kill you and then chant for you? Would you like that?"

**14. *Bhikkhu, you have said that Sangha members who are attached to their temples and the donation boxes will be reborn as dogs. Is there any proof of this?***

**ANS.** No, not just dogs. Even insects. Let me refer you to the story about Tissa, the monk who was too attached to his set of robes before he died:

Once Tissa the monk received a set of fine robes and was very pleased. He planned to wear the robes the next day, but he died that very night. Because he was so attached to the robes, he was reborn as an insect that lived within the folds of the robes. As there was no one to inherit his belongings, the other monks decided to share them among themselves, including his new set of robes. The insect was very upset and cried out, "They are destroying my robes!" The *Buddha* heard his cries by means of His supernatural powers and advised the bhikkhus to take the robes only at the end of seven days.

Later, the *Buddha* told them that while they were preparing to share the robes, the insect was in great agony and if they had really taken the robes away then, it would have been filled with so much hatred that it would have been reborn in greater misery.

Now, he had been reborn in a happier state because he still had some good merits to benefit him. The *Buddha* ended by saying, ***“Indeed, bhikkhus, attachment is very dangerous; as rust corrodes iron from which it is formed, so also, attachment destroys one and sends one to lower forms of existence.”*** (*Dhammapada, 240*)

If attachment to just a set of robes could cause Tissa to be reborn as an insect, how much greater would be the defilement of being attached to temples and money?

There was a nun in a temple who was very attached to the money she earned from conducting funeral rites (as well as the donation box). I went to visit her once, but could not talk her out of her greed. Much later, I revisited that temple. There was a dog there that kept barking at me till I said to it, “Keep quiet! You are shameless! Always thinking of money – see what has become of you now?” The dog stopped barking at once and lowered its head. The people at the temple asked me who the dog was in its previous life, and I said it was the nun. Then the temple caretaker told me that a bitch had carried a puppy to the temple on the 49<sup>th</sup> day after the nun had passed away.

In our new VCD, *Kamma and Dana*, you will see more examples of such bad rebirths due to attachments to temple earnings. One case would be that of two tortoises who bowed at my feet in respect. One of them used to be a monk in a temple who was very attached to his room, and the other tortoise used to be one of his supporters. I spoke to them and reminded them of

how they came to be reborn thus, and in shame, they paid their respect to me. In another part of the VCD, you will see a black dog. It was once a Chinese man from Singapore who helped his friend to build a temple in India for the sake of earning money. They collected a lot of donations from devotees in Singapore for this purpose, and now are facing their retribution. This dog barked at me at first, but I told him, "You are not ashamed of what you did in the past?" The dog also hung its head in shame and bowed to me. In another temple, there is a cat that had once been such a person too.

Most *Sangha* members join the homeless way of life for good reasons, for example, they are inspired by stories about the *Buddha* and His disciples or they are sincere in their search for liberation from *Samsara*. However, over time, many of them forget their noble intentions with too much exposure to easy money-making tactics and instead of storing up their merits, they start to store money in bank accounts. Filled with greed, they are ready to twist the Truth into untruth, and Peace into 'un-peace'. Even if they were to make it to heaven or Paradise, such people would surely turn back midway to check on their savings plus the interest earned.

- 15. *You said that monks and nuns can be reborn as dogs. Wouldn't they have acquired enough merits just by being Sangha members to avoid such a bad rebirth?***

**ANS.** Just by being a monk or nun for a day, we can earn merits

equivalent to that required to be a king more than 16 times, so it is true that each *Sangha* member is actually acquiring a lot of merits. However, these are just outer merits, not inner merits or wisdom. Inner merits or wisdom can never be lost, and by wisdom, I do not mean intelligence or education. Many well-educated monks can give *Dhamma* talks without having any true wisdom.

Some people can earn a lot of merits but can lose them as soon as they go against the Truth. Monks who use their robes to earn a livelihood would also lose their outer merits quickly. Perhaps they would still be able to have quite a pleasant next-life owing to their balance of outer merits left over, but remember that when such merits have been expended, *Kamma* will deal out the retribution. There is never any escape from *Kammic* retribution – it is just a matter of sooner or later.

Hence, as can be seen, earning outer merits is not as important as inner merits, and that your merits may or may not ripen when expected to, since everything depends on various conditions. Your wisdom or inner merits will be transferred from life to life and will not be lost. What is lost is only your worldly knowledge.

**16. *So, that means that once they have finished their bad Kamma that makes them get reborn as dogs, these miscreant monks and nuns can have good rebirths again?***

**ANS.** Yes, of course. They may even be born kings and queens! When a person's good or bad *Kamma* has been expended, the

opposing *Kammic* force will come into play.

17. ***Venerable Hui Neng once said, "Real Dhamma cultivators will not see other people's faults." If this is the truth, why does Bhikkhu encourage his students to observe and criticise monks and nuns who are not practising well?***

**ANS.** What the sixth patriarch said is correct. Even the *Buddha* Himself said that we should look into our own bowls and not into others'. However, observing the faults of the *Sangha* and keeping quiet about them would also bring about undesirable results. It would make the observer an accomplice to the wrongdoings of the misbehaving *Sangha* members, plus bring about the eventual downfall of the *Dhamma*.

An analogy here: a person learning to drive will have to concentrate on what he is doing; otherwise he may cause a road accident. Once he has passed the driving test, he must still pay close attention while driving. When he becomes a driving instructor, however, he will have to monitor what his students are doing and correct their mistakes while noting how the oncoming cars are being driven too. Or consider your meals at home with your young children. The children would most likely be paying close attention to the food in their own bowls. On the other hand, you, the parent would keep an eye not only on your own food, but also on whether the children are eating properly or not.

In a similar way, we practise self-cultivation in our minds, but we must also observe, and point out, the mistakes made by other cultivators so that they can correct themselves before they

live (or die) to regret them. At the same time, we will also be aware of the many ways in which a cultivator can go wrong, and so learn to be more careful in our own cultivation.

Students follow what their teachers say and do. If a teacher teaches the wrong concepts, he will only lead his students down the wrong path too, and hence destroy their chances for spiritual development.

There are so many *Sangha* members today who are well-versed in the *Sutras* and quotes a lot of the verses and phrases, yet do not know the true meaning of the teachings in the *Sutras*. Their knowledge has led them to be egoistical and they think that they are always right and do not respect well-meaning, older and wiser monks and nuns. In Sri Lanka, I met such a group of arrogant monks from Burma, Kampuchea and Vietnam. They are monks who have earned university degrees, but did not respect an older, wiser monk who passed away during our Tsunami Prayer-retreat. He had spent seventy-five long years in the Sangha, hence he deserved all our respect. These highly-educated monks then pulled long faces at the idea of spending just one night in an old temple that did not have toilet facilities! Surely they would not have been able to survive during the time when *Shakyamuni Buddha* walked the earth. Such monks live on the *Dana* of the people and get so used to a life of luxury that they bring shame to the *Sangha!*

**18. *How do we know that a Dhamma teacher is teaching the right Dhamma?***

**ANS.** Who is your teacher? A monk? No! The *Buddhā*? No – He passed away more than 2,550 years ago. One of the Rinpoches? No! Your true teacher is the *Vinaya*. You have to keep the *Precepts*, and if you still wish to have a teacher among the *Sangha* members, see if he keeps his *Precepts* too. The *Buddha* stressed before His *Parinibbana* that although His physical body would no longer be with us, as long as we keep the *Vinaya*, He is always there.

**19. *How do we keep the Precepts and what are the merits of doing so?***

**ANS.** The *Precepts* can be divided into three categories as follows:

- a. We keep *Precepts* to abstain from wrongdoing. The benefit of this is that we will achieve good rebirths and self-liberation, e.g. *Arahants*
- b. We keep *Precepts* to teach others through examples, e.g. *Bodhisattvas*
- c. We keep *Precepts* to purify our minds and win liberation from all sufferings, ie., to gain *Buddhahood*.

**For every *Precept* that we keep, we have five *Dhamma Protectors* to look after and guide us, so the more *Precepts* we keep, the better it is for us.**

A higher concept of the *Precepts*, as explained by a great master, goes like this:

1. Do not kill the Truth.
2. Do not steal the right concepts.
3. Do not commit adultery in your mind
4. Do not lie against the Truth (e.g. claiming to be an *Arahant* or *Bodhisattva* when you are not one.)
5. Do not get drunk on the material life

As we progress on the spiritual path, we have to observe more and more *Precepts*. When we were small, we did not need to keep *Precepts* because our minds were pure, but as we grew up, our minds became corrupted with all kinds of desires and wrong thoughts. As such, we need the *Precepts* to control our minds. Parents need to keep more *Precepts* than their children, teachers more than their students, kings more than their subjects etc. etc. *Buddhas* keep their *Precepts* in a very natural manner – it is as if they are the *Precepts*, and the *Precepts* are them.

### PART 3 : VARIOUS SECTS AND TRADITIONS

20. *After the Buddha's Parinibbana, distinct traditions appeared like Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana. Each 'vehicle' claims to be the best or most authentic one to cultivate. This often confuses us as laypeople. Can you advise us?*

**ANS.** The *Buddha* never used such terms to describe His teachings. They came up much later when *Sangha* members allowed their egos to dictate their words and actions.

The *Buddha* sent His disciples in various directions to teach the people the proper *Dhamma*. Some of them went to the south (*Theravada*), some to the North and further (*Mahayana*) and others to the region which is called Tibet today (*Vajrayana*).

People say that they belong to this *yana* or that *yana* but fail to remember that the only *yana* worth talking about is **Non-yana**. Everyone claims to be following the *Buddha*, but do they practise His teachings? Do they keep the *Precepts*? Only if we keep the *Precepts* are we true Buddhists at heart. There is no point in talking so much about the various schools of Buddhism if we don't even know how to keep the basic *Precepts*.

Let us remember a vital fact here: The *Buddha*, just before his *Parinibbana*, told his disciples, ***"...Whatever Doctrine and Discipline have been taught and promulgated by me, Ananda, they will be your Teacher when I am gone."***

Similarly, when the Second Patriarch of our Minh Dang Quang order in Vietnam achieved *Nibbana*, he did not choose a

particular successor to take over the reins. Instead, he said, as the *Buddha* had done, that whoever kept the *Vinaya* (Bhikkhu Rules) properly would be the Third Patriarch. Hence, no matter what tradition or sect you are talking about, the most important thing is to **Keep the Precepts!** That is the only way that leads to concentration and Wisdom will then arise in your mind and you will be able to cut your defilements.

**21. QS. There are so many books on Dhamma in the world and so many different concepts. How do we know the True Dhamma from the false?**

**ANS.** *True Dhamma* is not found in books but in your own practice. *True Dhamma* does not change with the vicissitudes of worldly life. When you find it, you will know it from the peace and wisdom that will arise in your life.

Calm yourself and think rationally whether something is right or wrong before you accept it. If in doubt, ask a good *Sangha* member for clarification. If you can't find a good monk or nun to explain things to you, then stick to the *Buddha's* teachings in the *Sutras*. Above all, keep in mind the advice He gave us in the *Kalama Sutra*.

The *Buddha* taught for 45 years, but still said that all his teachings were like a drop of water in the ocean! How can we hope to know the big ocean then? Do not be so attached to what the *Buddha* said or did not say. To do so would be to miss seeing the *True Dhamma*. If you are faced with conflicting ideas or instructions on your practice, then the rule of thumb should be:

Keep it simple. Buddhism is actually very simple; it is only the people who have made it so complicated.

I also have lay supporters who come to me and complain that their children prefer reading books on other religions rather than the *Dhamma*. Here, I would like to tell these parents: Don't stop them. All religions are good, they teach humans how to achieve peace by adhering to basic universal truths / precepts / commandments. It is the children's *Kamma* which religion they choose to embrace in the end. Perhaps they prefer to be free thinkers – it is still okay as long as they grow up to be responsible, highly principled adults.

Let them read books on all the other religions; do not restrict them. It is better for them to seek their own Truth for themselves than for us to stuff our beliefs down their throats.

**22. *When I read about the Buddha and His disciples, I notice the vast difference between the way they practised the Teachings and what most Sangha members seem to be doing today. What has happened to the real Teachings of the Buddha (both Theravada and Mahayana)? Is this a sign of the Dhamma ending age?***

**ANS.** First of all, being the Universal Truth, the *Dhamma* has no beginning and no end. It is infinite and indestructible.

During the first twelve years after the *Buddha's* Enlightenment, all the holy people who joined Him were able to reach higher levels of spiritual attainment. After that, jealousy arose among the other groups of mendicants because the *Buddha*

was garnering too much support from the rich and influential wherever He went. Hence, to destroy Him, these other teachers sent spies to join His *bhikkhus*. At the same time, there were people who found the daily struggle of life to be too tough for them, so they joined the *Buddha* in order to escape their problems. Even criminals came to the *Buddha* to escape punishment! As such, the *Buddha* knew that after His *Parinibbana*, the *Sangha* would slowly destroy itself. Why, there were even *bhikkhus* who were pleased to see Him die as they would not have anyone to discipline them anymore!

Then, there were the Hindus who were not happy that so many of their people had decided to follow the *Buddha* too, so they decided to create disharmony among the Buddhists. The *Buddha* sent His *bhikkhus* in different directions to spread the *Dhamma*. The group that went south later became what we call the *Theravadas*. The group that went north became the *Mahayana* school of thought. They tried to convert more Hindus, but were themselves 'persuaded' into adopting various Hindu deities and gods into Buddhism. Later, the Hindus claimed that the Buddhists were not pure enough as they were not vegetarians like the Hindus were. So, the *Mahayana Sangha* began to practise 'mouth vegetarianism'. The *Buddha* did not specifically say 'No Meat', but the first *Precept* tells us not to kill. Eating meat would involve the slaughter of animals for our tables, so we would still be guilty of killing indirectly. We should not look for loopholes to indulge our senses. Some monks even smoke and drink beer, saying that the *Buddha* did not forbid these activities. (refer to qs.

8) These monks are not using their heads! The *Buddha* also did not say 'No Ecstasy Pills' – would that mean that we can take that drug?

Today, there are also monks and nuns who left their homes not out of a sincere wish to win liberation from *Samsara*, but for selfish materialistic reasons. These *Sangha* members do not understand - and do not seem interested to do so – the Truth of the *Dhamma*. When people do not treasure the *Dhamma* and strive to uphold the Teachings, it will be a matter of time before it disappears from our world.

**23. QS. How do we know which is the best way for us to cultivate – Zen or Pure Land?**

**ANS.** *Zen* or *Pure Land* – these are just names for different methods to take you across the ocean of *Samsara*. All the various methods are good, as long as we know our own sickness first. Keep in mind that the *Dhamma* is just a medicine for the sicknesses of mankind. It cures us of, first and foremost, our delusions so that we can see the way clearly out of the rounds of rebirth. It is just like our physical ailments – you have a headache, you take panadol, if you are suffering from diabetes, you need insulin jabs and so on. Different types of medication for different types of medical problems.

Know your illnesses first. Recognise the symptoms to diagnose Delusion, Greed and Anger. Then, take the medicine of keeping the *Precepts* properly. The *Precepts* form the foundation for all the different methods.

A good master will know the best way for each student to practise. Some people can be enlightened through meditation, others through *Zen koans*, and there are even people who see a leaf fall and get enlightened – but that is very rare.

Pure Land practitioners are supposed to chant the name of *Amitabha Buddha* till they reach one-pointedness in their minds, but many people cannot achieve this due to their many stray thoughts and desires. Many monks and nuns who spend a lot of time chanting at funerals are not free of such distracting thoughts either - despite being in the presence of death which should remind them to 'die' to themselves! This proves my point that it is not how often you chant the name of *Amitabha Buddha*, but how mindful you are when doing it.

So, whether you prefer to meditate, chant *Namo Amitabha* or mantras and tantras - it is entirely up to you and the level you have achieved in your understanding of the *Dhamma*. Some people find that they can concentrate better when they chant mantras, and some prefer to chant sutras. But my advice to the laypeople is to build the foundation first and that means to keep the 5 *Precepts* and once in a while, to observe the 8 *Precepts*; do good deeds, avoid the 10 evil deeds and vow to be transferred to the Pure Land where they can practise the *Dhamma* further until they reach *Buddhahood*.

Remember this: if you keep the 5 *Precepts* for just one day, your accrued merits will bring you back to a human rebirth and you can even become a king. That is how great the benefit can be from just keeping 5 *Precepts*.

If you can keep the 8 *Precepts* for just one day, your merits will be equivalent to that required to make you a king 16 times. A *samanera* keeping the 10 *Precepts* will obtain merits equivalent to 100 times that acquired by the 8-*Precepter* (1600 times). *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* (keeping between 250 and 348 *Precepts*) will earn the merits equivalent to 160,000 times greater than the former, and the *Dhutanga or tudong* monk (forest monk) will have merits 100 times more than the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*! (16,000,000 times)

However, should one vow to keep the *Precepts* and then break them, the *Kammic* consequences would be very serious. Take for example, *Sangha* members who keep breaking the *Precept* of not eating after midday – they are supposed to earn merits equivalent to 160,000 times that of a king, but their lack of discipline will cause them to have *Kammic* retribution that is 160,000 times more serious than any that will be borne by a 5-*Precepter*.

With that said, let it be known that over and above all the merits that can be acquired by keeping the *Precepts*, the highest of all merits will accrue to those who teach the Universal Truth and are not afraid to die for the sake of doing so. The merits thus accrued would be equivalent to 1,600,000,000,000 times that required to be a king!

#### **PART 4 : CHINESE RITES AND RITUALS**

24. *The Chinese burn a lot of incense sticks and paper offerings to their deities, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. What is your opinion of this practice?*

**ANS.** This question reminds me of a man in Malaysia who came to the temple where I was staying. He lit a big bundle of joss sticks, waved them in front of the altar and then planted several sticks in each incense burner that he saw around him. Then, he started burning colourful prayer paper that had Chinese words printed on every sheet. I asked him why he did all that, and he replied that he was just following Chinese customs and that it was the way he had been taught to pray.

Well, all such practices are definitely not Buddhist. When the *Buddha* was alive, He did not tell anyone to burn joss sticks or paper offerings. The world is already polluted enough, so why should we aggravate the situation? One to three joss sticks would suffice if you really wish to pay homage to the *Buddha* in that way; but please do not burn any more paper offerings. The *Buddha* does not need your paper offerings. Paper is made from wood and trees are being cut down at an alarming rate to feed the desires of man. It would be sinful for Buddhists to contribute to the deforestation of the earth just because we want to 'send petitions' to the *Buddha* or the gods and goddesses. Surely they would know your problems without having to 'receive' your 'letters'? And don't even consider burning packets of 'money' to bribe the deities! Nor credit cards.

Some enterprising businessmen who wanted to make a fast buck from superstitious people introduced the burning of paper offerings long ago. It has since evolved into a cultural practice that many people fear to abandon in case they incur the wrath of the gods. Let me repeat here – the *Buddha* does not require anyone to burn joss sticks or paper offerings to Him. He only wants us to follow His teachings on the *Three Refuges* and the *Precepts*, that's all. Buddhism is actually very simple and straightforward. It is only people who have made it so complicated by combining Buddhism with other cultural practices.

I must add here an admonition about lighting oil lamps and placing them on the altar table. The first precept a Buddhist has to abide by is not to kill, but people seem to be unaware that insects often fall into the oil lamps and die there. Buddha did not say that you must burn lots of oil lamps before you can get some merit; He was, and still is, more interested in devotees lighting the lamp of wisdom within themselves. Thus, please use simple oil lamps and keep an eye out for insects that may stray into the lamps. Once you see an insect in danger of being burnt to death by the flame, or being drowned in the oil, fish it out so that it can survive. That is also a way to practise the virtue of 'releasing life'.

**25. *What about the Chinese practice of burning hell notes and paper offerings to their ancestors then?***

**ANS.** If the hell notes can really be turned to good use as legal tender in the 'next world', would the shopkeepers be so silly as to sell them to you so that you can burn them to make your

ancestors rich? Wouldn't they prefer to make their own ancestors richer than yours? Besides, are you implying that your ancestors are in hell right now?

Many intelligent people – well educated and sophisticated in a modern world - follow illogical cultural practices without a second thought. Where did they learn such things but from their parents, who learnt them from their parents, who learnt them from theirs and on and on.....? Do not believe in such things and do not support such practices, otherwise you will be helping ignorant people to lead others astray.

Instead of such practices, you should repay your ancestors by following the right path. Do good deeds and even recite *Sutras* if you wish, and then transfer the merits to them – that will help them more.

**26. *But that has been part of the Chinese culture for 5000 years. How could our ancestors have been wrong for so long?***

**ANS.** Historians would tell you that paper was only invented around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., not 5000 years ago. The practice of burning paper offerings and hell notes was started much later than that, to revive a lukewarm paper industry.

By burning such offerings, you are assuming that your ancestors are in hell. What if they were in heaven instead, or already in the *Pure Land* or perhaps even reincarnated into your family? What if your great grandmother has already been reborn as your child now – wouldn't it be ridiculous for her to follow your

example and burn hell notes for herself to use in hell when she is not there? Or paper houses? Or paper maids and paper passports? Or paper credit cards and jewellery? Or paper television sets and computers? What I find most amusing is the different brands of paper mobile phones that they burn for the departed ones. After all, among the hundreds of thousands of bodies washed up on the shores of South Asia after the Tsunami, were those of Western tourists with real mobile phones in their possession and yet we have not received a single call from them! The longer the list of items burnt for the dead, the more unbelievable it becomes. Why can't the people realise that nobody can take anything else except their good or bad deeds with them when they die?

Too much of anything is dangerous – too much food gives us diseases, too much money makes us greedy, too much water drowns us and too many wrong concepts make us deluded. Ignorance is darker than hell, so let us not mindlessly lead each other there.

**27. *The Chinese community often hire priests to chant prayers for the deceased at funerals. Will this help the deceased in any way? Must we really make food offerings to the deceased for the first 100 days after his death?***

**ANS.** This question reminds me of some monks who place advertisements in the daily newspapers to attract business. They advertise their services for funerals and even offer big discounts for early birds!

1. Many Chinese families pay thousands of dollars to hire priests to conduct funeral rites because they have been told that this is the way to help the deceased person go to heaven. The *Buddha* said in the *Kalama Sutra*, and I shall repeat it here, ***“Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe in anything (simply) because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”*** (*Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. 1, 188-193 PTS Ed.*)

With this in mind, think for yourself – do you think that if we do not live a righteous life, if we do not keep at least the 5 *Precepts* and try to be good, kind people – while alive - we will still get a place in heaven just because a priest chants prayers for us when we are dead?

2. Do you think that the dead can eat the food offerings? Or is the food being offered in order to show the neighbours that we are filial descendants? Or because our ancestors did it, so we must also do it now regardless of whether we understand its significance?

Many people perform such funeral rites to appease the

mind consciousness of the deceased because within the first 49 days, and even 100 days for some traditions, the mind consciousness can still be around and can observe all that is being done for him. Seeing the food offerings would then make him feel glad that he has not been forgotten, that's all. However, do remember that there are two kinds of food here. When the person is still alive, he needs food for his stomach, but once dead, he needs food for his mind. This food is the food of the *Dhamma*. This kind of food is unlimited and can cure the hunger of his mind.

Normally, the person would still be very attached to his family and possessions so he needs to learn to let go. We can help him to do so by chanting *Sutras* or *mantras* for him on the 7<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 49<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> day after his demise. Get a good monk or nun to do this, one who sincerely helps at funerals without charging a fee for their services. If you cannot find such a monk or nun, then you can do the prayers yourself. Chant *Wang Shen Zhou* 3,7, 21 times, or even 108 times if you so desire and dedicate the merits to the deceased person. This prayer tells us that all is impermanent, and can help the deceased to understand the truth and thus, gain release from suffering.

3. Keep the funeral proceedings simple and dignified. Do not hire professional mourners who wail hysterically for the deceased into loudspeakers in order to show the neighbours how filial you are. This is nothing but a despicable show for the sake of 'saving face'. If you are really a filial child, be good to your parents

before they die. Love and respect them and if possible, teach them to practise the *Dhamma* and to keep the precepts. That is the best way to help ensure that they go to heaven.

4. Cut back on expensive funeral arrangements. Use the money thus saved to help others and dedicate the merits to the deceased. If possible, participate in organ donation programmes to save the lives of others in need. That would be a very meritorious act indeed.

People are creatures of habit and often stick to the 'done that for umpteen years' syndrome. Those who try to make changes to long-established traditions may face some opposition from their families and friends. But what should be done has to be done so we must be brave enough to go against the stream instead of accepting traditions blindly.

There is a story that I think is rather pertinent here. There was once a man who liked eating fish head very much, but every time his wife cooked a fish for their meal, she would discard its head. Finally, he asked her why she did that, and she said that she didn't know the real reason, except that her mother had taught her to do so. So, he asked his mother-in-law if she had taught his wife to always cook a fish without its head, and she said yes – she had learnt to do that from her own mother. "But why?" asked the man of his mother-in-law. "I never questioned my mother, so I don't know why. She's my mother so she must be right in whatever she does, so why should I question her?" was the reply. Now, luckily for the man, his wife's grandmother

was still alive, so he went to see the old woman to seek an explanation from her. "My mother-in-law said that you used to cut off and throw away the head every time you cooked a fish. Is that true?" he asked. "Yes," the old lady said. "But why?" the man was curious to know. The old lady replied, "Because I had a small frying pan."

Thus, we must stop doing things without proper understanding. We must always use our wisdom instead of just following traditions blindly otherwise we will pass our ignorance to our children too, generation after generation.

5. Finally, do not place the remains of the deceased in stupas or pagodas. These are holy structures meant to store the holy relics of the *Buddha* and the *Arahants*, and are not to be used as graves for laypeople. There are monks and nuns who know how to take advantage of the emotional trauma that the bereaved family is going through and advise them to express their filial piety by housing the deceased in stupas and pagodas. It is important for everyone to use their wisdom, be wary and say 'NO' to all kinds of ridiculous recommendations put to them.

**28. *What about the Chinese practice of offering food and other paper paraphernalia to the hungry ghosts every year during the festival of the hungry ghosts which falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> lunar month?***

**ANS.** Hungry ghosts do not have bodies like we do, nor stomachs that can store and digest the food that you offer them,

so how can they get hungry the way we do? No, they are hungry in their minds. They are burning with greed and desires. All Buddhists should know the story of *Maudgalyayana* who used his 'divine eye' to check on his deceased mother and found that she had been reborn as a hungry ghost and how when he tried to feed her some food, it all burned up. Distressed, he asked the *Buddha* for help and the Lord told him that the only way to save her was to get all the Buddhist monks together for a mass *Dana* and *Paritta* chanting and then transferring the merits to her.

We should learn from this story that the only effective way to help hungry ghosts is to pray for them, not burn hell notes for them. Surely the way to reduce their greed would not involve making them thirst for more hell notes, paper cars and houses. If all these can really benefit the dead, then logically, all of us should hope to die soon so as to become multi-billionaires immediately.

**29. *I understand that you are against the burning of food as offerings too, but during the Tsunami Prayer-Retreats at Khao Lak, Thailand and Pulau Pinang, Malaysia, you were observed throwing food into the sea yourself. How do you explain your action?***

**ANS.** We should not burn or destroy food. Food is for the sustenance of animals and human beings. Some people burn food as offerings to spiritual beings thinking that it would earn them more good merits but this is wrong. Our children would also learn to do the same and we would be guilty of leading them on

the wrong path. Just think about the starving masses in Africa and we would feel ashamed of ourselves for destroying our food.

There was once a monk who believed that food that had been given to the *Sangha* shouldn't be eaten by laypeople anymore. So, he would feed the leftovers to the animals, but he did not realise that the food was not suitable for the animals. It was too spicy and hurt the stomachs and digestive systems of the birds and animals that he fed. See what harm a lack of wisdom can do? This monk finally realised that it was not the right thing to do, so he began to just accept the amount of food he could eat and bless the balance before the laypeople took it home for themselves.

From this, we learn that firstly, we must not waste food, and secondly, food fed to animals should be suitable for them so that they are not caused any pain by ingesting it. As for the Tsunami prayer-retreats, I did not destroy any food – I fed the fish in the ocean with it, and transferred the merits to the Tsunami victims.

**30. *QS. What about chanting the Sutras in front of an image of the Buddha then?***

**ANS.** You can chant anywhere but when you have a *Buddha* image in front of you, you can concentrate better. While chanting, you must understand what you are saying, not just memorise the words. There was once a man who had chanted the *Diamond Sutra* for twenty years but still did not know its meaning. One day, a poor young man overheard this man

chanting as usual. Although the young man was illiterate, he could understand the Truth in the *Sutra* and was enlightened. Needless to say, I am talking about Patriarch Hui Neng.

You must remember that during the *Buddha's* time, there were no *sutras* around yet. The *bhikkhus* just abided by the *Vinaya* rules, followed Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold path of cultivation, meditated, went on almsrounds, ate only once a day before midday etc and were able to attain *Arahanthood*. Later, after the *Buddha's Parinibbana*, many *bhikkhus* became lazy so the Patriarchs laid down the rule that the *bhikkhus* had to chant *Sutras*. The Patriarchs wanted the indolent *Sangha* to put in some kind of effort into their cultivation, but as time went by, the *bhikkhus* began to make chanting their sole business.

Hence, go ahead and chant if you wish, and in whatever language you like, just as long as you understand the *Sutra*. Do not follow those who insist that you chant in a certain language or style, or even a certain intonation. All this is rubbish. Always remember that understanding the meaning is better than mere parroting of the *Dhamma*. Lack of wisdom and understanding has caused a lot of misinterpretation among the Chinese concerning Buddhist practices. A case in point here. Some monks say that the *Shurangama Sutra* teaches them to burn round scars into their scalps or to burn their fingers. This is wrong interpretation of the *Buddha's* words. The *Buddha* meant to burn away our desires, not our limbs or body parts.

Similarly, we see a misinterpretation of *Kuan Yin Bodhisattva's* 1000 eyes and 1000 hands. There are people who

believe that they should emulate her and cut off their own hands and pluck out their own eyes too. What they fail to realise is that *Kuan Yin Bodhisattva's* hands and eyes are just metaphors to teach us to cut off our 'selfish hands' and when that happens, thousands of helping hands will come forward to lend us whatever help we need. We have to pluck out our 'selfish eyes' and more wisdom will arise in all of us.

People read words and take them literally, without realising that meanings can get lost in the midst of 2550 years of translations and oral transmissions.

**31. *During Buddhist festivals, a lot of people buy cages of birds, crickets, frogs, tortoises etc to be released. They say it is to earn good merits. What is your view on this?***

**ANS.** This practice is due to the merits that can accrue from releasing life and by right it is a good deed. However, these people do not seem to realise that they are actually encouraging a lucrative trade. There are professional hunters who catch these poor animals to sell to the pet shops and animal traders just because they know there are Buddhists around who want to earn merits. Imagine the poor animals being caught, sold, released and then caught to be sold and released again... and on and on. Imagine the fear and suffering the animals are put through for your merits.

One of my students used to buy small birds from the neighbourhood pet shop in order to release them. She said that it made her feel so happy to see the birds fly into the sky and she

would utter prayers and *mantras* to send them on their way. Then one day she went to the pet shop to get some more birds as it was the *Kuan Yin Pu Sa* festival the following day, but there were none left. All the cages were bare – even the cages that used to house the bigger, more expensive songbirds. When asked why, the shopkeeper told her that it was not unusual and that she should not be disappointed because the cages would be filled up very quickly after the festival was over. The bird catchers would get them back very easily. *So, how many birds do you want to order?* – he asked my student. That question stunned her into realisation – she had helped to feed the greed of the shopkeeper as well as all the bird catchers more than she had helped the little birds.

If you really want to release sentient beings, which is a praiseworthy deed, then it is better to release animals that stray into your garden, or which you come across by accident. You see an animal caught in a trap? Help it get loose. You see naughty children torturing a cat? Stop them and set it free. You see animals at the market that are definitely meant for the cooking pot? Buy them, set them free. Nothing planned beforehand. Use your wisdom. Then this good deed will become more meaningful and your merits will certainly be high.

Finally, there are also four types of liberation to be understood here:

- a. Love all sentient beings, regarding them as your family members from past lives. (So how can we eat them?)

- b. Do not kill, whether directly or indirectly.
- c. Do not eat meat and fish.
- d. Release your desires, anger and ignorance and strive for your own liberation from the rounds of rebirth.

Of these four, the first three involve liberating other sentient beings and thus, earning good merits but the last is the best and the most difficult to do.

**32.. *My friend bought some birds to release but one of them died in the cage before he could do so. Would it affect my friend's Kamma?***

**ANS.** No, it would not affect his Kamma because his intention was good. It was just the animal's Kamma that it should die in the cage at that time.

**33. *Some Buddhist devotees wear 'holy' strings around their wrists, and want Sangha members to bless them on the crown of their head or bathe in 'holy' water with flowers taken from the temples etc. What is your view on such practices?***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* himself disapproved of such things as they can lead us to having wrong views. If a person can remove his bad *Kamma* just by tying 'holy' strings around his wrists, there would have been no necessity for the *Buddha* to spend so many years striving for enlightenment – He would have just tied plenty

of 'holy strings' around Himself. If 'holy' water could save us, we should take buckets of such water to all the prisons and dip each criminal in them. Then, we would be able to turn them into law-abiding citizens and solve the problem of overcrowding in the jails.

Besides such wrong practices, the *Buddha* also included ascetic practices, fire sacrifices, fortune telling, bodily mutilation, self-torment, belief in magical amulets, bizarre rites and rituals etc. in the category of actions that do not help us to achieve enlightenment. Let us recall the *Buddha's* words in the *Kalama Sutta*:

***Do not believe in anything (simply) because you have heard it. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe in anything (simply) because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. (Anguttara Nikaya, Vol. 1, 188-193 PTS Ed.)***

So, do not believe in anything blindly and follow traditions without proper understanding.

**34. *Some monks and nuns bless cars and houses to bring luck to their owners. Can you do that for us, Bhikkhu?***

**ANS.** I do not bring luck to you. If I can do so, why don't I bring luck to my own family and country first? Many Thai monks come to Malaysia and Singapore to do such things, and they return home with a lot of money. If these monks could give you luck, why were Malaysia and Singapore still affected by the recession like the rest of the world? Money cannot buy merits. Your merits take time to bloom. These monks know that you are greedy for all your merits to bloom here and now, so they use your minds against you. Their aim in coming here is to make money and there are some monks who fear returning to their monasteries in Thailand if they have not made enough money here. Isn't that a shame?

I am here just to show you the way. Sometimes, devotees may ask me to bless their homes and offices or even sprinkle water on them, and once in a blue moon, I do comply with their wishes - when I see that they are too rooted in their old superstitious ways to listen to me. Once I have done so, they are normally ready to learn what I have to teach them; and I often tell them sincerely that my blessing of their premises really will not make them rich. Nothing will work to give them luck except their own good deeds.

## PART 5 :DANA & VEGETARIANISM

**35. *What is the significance of offering alms food as Dana to the sangha?***

**ANS.** Like anyone else, the monks and nuns have to eat to survive. But the *Vinaya* rules laid down by the *Buddha* state that they cannot plant their own food, or earn their own livelihood. They are not even allowed to eat any fruits that have fallen off tree branches onto the floor of the jungle! The fruits do not belong to them, and by picking them up for their own use; the *Sangha* would be breaking the precept of Non-stealing. As such, the *Sangha* has to depend on the lay supporters to offer them their food once a day. By performing *Dana*, the lay supporters will get to practise the virtue of generosity through the act of giving, and earn good merits for themselves. Their desires and selfishness will be reduced and their lives will slowly become more peaceful.

The monks and nuns who receive such *Dana* are also obligated to the lay supporters. They would then be expected to turn the *Dhamma Wheel* and teach the laypeople the *Buddha's* Path in order to reach Enlightenment. By not having to plant or cook their own food plus plan meals and do the washing-up, the monks and nuns are able to spend more time than householders, on their practice. So, they should work hard at their cultivation and acquire more wisdom to guide the laypeople correctly.

As far as *Dana* is concerned, other things can be offered to the monks and nuns. The *Buddha* said that *Sangha* members need, and can accept, offerings of the four necessities of life: clothing, food, shelter and medicine. However, please remember that your offerings should be done with wisdom – give something that is useful to the *Sangha*, and **do not give more than what you can afford**. Above all, make your *Dana* offerings to the right kind of *Sangha* members. Give the requisites to the monks who truly follow the *Buddha's* Teachings. And remember not to offer money as *Dana* or you might generate bad *Kamma* for yourself if your cash donations should turn the monks and nuns into greedy ones.

At the same time, do remember not to offer food to any *Sangha* member after midday, because that would bring you bad *Kamma*. According to the *Buddha's* teachings, such a *Sangha* member would be behaving like a thief, and the devotee would be his accomplice. The only exception would be if the *Sangha* member is sick and the doctor advises strongly that he takes his medication together with some food, but this must be done with the permission of the Head of *Sangha*. Once the monk or nun has recovered from the illness, they must revert to following the *Precepts* strictly again. Of course, it goes without saying that these sick monks or nuns must be GENUINELY SICK!

**36. *Bhikkhu, I have noticed that many devotees who follow the Mahayana tradition like to give angpows***

*(red envelopes filled with money) to the sangha as Dana, whereas the devotees who follow the Theravada tradition like to give robes as Dana. Which is the better form of Dana?*

**ANS.** Of course you should not give *angpows* to the *Sangha* at all! I have explained before that *Sangha* members are not allowed to touch, hold, handle or possess money in any form – it is against the tenth precept. *Dana* in the form of money can be handed over to the *kappiya* (attendant) or the temple committee to handle for the *Sangha*. These lay devotees will then see to the four requisites of the monks and nuns, i.e. clothing, food, lodging and medicine.

As for the robes, monks are only allowed to own three robes each and the month following the three months' Rains Retreat (*Vassa*) is the time for renewing the monks' robes (*Kathina* time). In ancient times, the monks would help each other make their robes but nowadays, laypeople often purchase ready-made robes to offer to the *Sangha* on that day.

Unfortunately, abuse of the laypeople's generosity has surfaced in **some** temples. Devotees go to these temples and see robes on sale there, so they buy them to offer as *Dana* to the monks residing in the temples. However, once the devotees leave the temple grounds, the monks put the same robes back on sale to cheat another

unsuspecting devotee. This goes on and on and the cash register gets filled to the brim with money. I witnessed this in two temples – one in Singapore, and the other in Malaysia, but I know that it is happening in other places as well. This is very, very wrong and the *Sangha* members doing such a thing are actually generating bad *Kamma*. I appeal to the laypeople not to support such practices by checking out the temples and the monks there first before taking out their wallets.

**37. *There is a certain Buddhist nun in Taiwan who plants vegetables for consumption because she does not wish to be dependent on the laypeople for food and thus become a burden on others. What is your view?***

**ANS.** I have heard of her, and understand that she has done a lot of charitable work to relieve the sufferings of the people, and for that I commend her highly. We need a lot of such people around. However, I regret to say that she is breaking the precepts by cultivating her own food. The *Buddha* did not do such a thing when He was alive, and it was for a good reason – He did not want a single ant, worm or insect to die because of Him. In fact, the *Buddha* once said that a prince who killed his father in order to usurp the throne would not have committed a sin as great as that of a *Sangha* member killing just a little insect intentionally. The reason for this is that such a prince would not have vowed to keep any *Precepts* (especially that of NOT KILLING),

while the *Sangha* members must observe their *Precepts*. This nun has a good heart, but when she tends her vegetable garden, ants, worms and insects will be killed inadvertently. It would be wise for her to reconsider her actions now before it is too late. It is better for her to cultivate the farm in her own mind with the seeds of *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna*. (morality, concentration and wisdom).

Besides that, the *Buddha's* instruction to all *Sangha* members was to obtain their food by going on almsrounds (*pindapata*). This serves to remind the *Sangha* and the laypeople of their interdependence – the *Sangha* members teach the laypeople the right way to attain liberation from *Samsara*, and the laypeople help to ensure the survival of the *Sangha* in their bodily forms while they cultivate. Furthermore, it allows the laypeople to practise the virtue of giving which helps them to accumulate merits to deepen their wisdom. By looking after a good monk or nun, a layperson can earn unimaginable merits – why deprive them of this chance? By saying that she does not want to depend on others shows a lack of understanding of the *Dhamma*. Even the *Buddha* and his disciples depended on the laypeople for their requisites.

Anyway, this nun is not the only one who is misguided. In Australia, there are Vietnamese monks who do the same and they use pesticides too! That is already bad enough, but these monks also harvest their crops and vegetables to be sold at the local marketplace! Such monks

are committing a great sin by killing all the creatures on their vegetable plots and by selling their produce to earn profits. Then, to add insult to injury, each of them also applies for – and given – unemployment benefits amounting to AUD800.00 per month from the Australian government. All this is going on alongside the donations that pour in from the Buddhist devotees there.

If you want to teach non-greed, you must firstly have no greed yourself. That logic is as simple as saying that if you don't want your kids to smoke, then you don't do it either. How can these *Sangha* members leave the worldly life for homelessness and yet still have bank accounts? How do they teach loving-kindness while spraying pesticides on their vegetables?

**38. *Between keeping the Precepts and being vegetarian, which is the more important for laypeople?***

**ANS.** If a person is a 'vegetarian by mouth' but breaks the precepts, can he be considered a good person? If being vegetarian will guarantee us a place in Paradise, then all the cows and horses deserve to be there first. And elephants too.

Our stomachs do not know the difference between vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. Only the mind knows, and is greedy for, the taste of meat. People place five types of food as offerings on the altar table but neglect to keep the 5 *Precepts*. Even the hungry ghosts are more interested

in sharing the merits we will earn by keeping our 5 *Precepts* and not, as we have been told, in the five types of food offered to them during the Hungry Ghost festival.

Hence, laypeople should try to be vegetarian if they can, but better than that is to keep their *Precepts* well.

To help you decide to go vegetarian, let me tell you a true story here. There was a boy born into a Vietnamese family that I am acquainted with. When he was still small, his parents would feed him with fish or meat porridge, but he would keep vomiting it all out. Every time he saw meat or fish, he would see the humans they once were. When he reached eighteen years of age, he was drafted into the army against his will. He was in the army for three years and he was forced to eat meat there. He suffered from depression because he was so troubled about eating Mr. A or B or C. Later on, this young man became a monk.

Then, there are the monks and nuns who 'hop-over' from *Theravada* to *Mahayana* sects and vice versa. I met such a *Mahayana* monk who decided to join the *Theravadas*, and he began to eat non-vegetarian food. Later on, he felt that the *Theravadas* were 'impure' for they accepted whatever food was offered to them. He was afraid that one day, he might end up mistakenly consuming wild animals' meat, for example, tiger meat! I have also seen *Theravada* monks join the *Mahayanas* because the *Mahayanas* eat 'pure food', but alas, these monks soon followed the *Mahayana* practice of eating after midday, and several

meals a day too! All this is very wrong. The *Mahayana Sangha* should follow the *Theravadas* in eating only one meal a day, and never beyond midday, while the *Theravadas* should emulate the *Mahayanas* in eating vegetarian food only.

**39. *Should we invite monks and nuns to eat at vegetarian restaurants?***

**ANS.** *Dana* of food and drinks is done to sustain a *Sangha* member's life so that he or she can do *Dhamma* work, and after the *Dana* is over, the *Sangha* member should give a *Dhamma* talk to the devotees.

Restaurants are noisy places – how can the *Sangha* member give a *Dhamma* talk there? Restaurants cater to our desires – how can *Sangha* members make choices of what to eat, or even peruse a menu? There are even some *Sangha* members who take advantage of the devotees' generosity and ask for lobsters!

Just offering a simple bowl of rice and salt is better than taking a monk or nun to a restaurant where they will only build up their desires and you will lose your merits! When the *Buddha* was alive, He and his disciples went on almsrounds without any desires for any particular type of food from the devotees. Once they had received enough food, they would mix up the food in their almsbowls till it all looked unpalatable so that no pleasure would be enjoyed from eating any of it. The *Buddha* taught his disciples to

treat their food as bitter medicine for the sake of staying alive only. Why can't the *Sangha* do the same today?

## **PART 6 : MEDITATION**

**40. *Bhikkhu, my friends are inviting me to attend a meditation class with them. Should I join them?***

**ANS.** Everywhere I go, I see many meditation centres being opened and run by monks and laypeople. Yet, when I ask them what meditation means, and how to do it properly, no one can give me a satisfactory answer.

In school, a bad teacher can spoil at least one class of students; a bad doctor can administer the wrong medication and kill one patient and a corrupt politician can destroy one generation. What about a bad meditation teacher? He can destroy your cultivation, and you will end up wandering in *Samsara* for one more *kalpa*.

To meditate properly, you must have a good master and you must be ready to walk that path. If your *Kamma* does not permit it, you will achieve nothing no matter how long you meditate. As laypeople, your days and nights are filled with the problems of survival in this materialistic, dog eat dog society. How then can you meditate well? Highly spiritual people like the *Arahants* can achieve Enlightenment through meditation because

they have given up everything to be homeless. They are free of desires, attachments, anger and delusions – are laypeople able to do that?

As laypeople, the meditation that is suitable for you is to be constantly mindful throughout the day. As you go about your daily activities, driving the kids to school, doing your accounts, washing the dishes etc – do all these mindfully, trying to keep calm and collected. And when you feel like it, sit quietly for a while and calm your mind while breathing slowly, observing your breath. Keep your 5 *Precepts* well. Your 5 *Precepts* should be your object for concentration. Then, once in a while, take part in 8 *Precept-Retreats*. And do remember that for every *Precept* you keep, you will have five *Dhamma Protectors* watching over you.

Imagine your mind as a cup. Before you can drink from this cup, you must wash it clean. You can use various kinds of dishwashing liquid to do so – with all the different brands available – or if you wish, you can just use plain water. If the cup is dirty, the beverage you pour into it will be contaminated. Then, upon drinking that beverage, you will most probably fall ill due to the bacteria in the cup. The dishwashing liquid mentioned above represents your 5 *Precepts*. Keep them well in order to protect your mind from wrong concepts; otherwise you can end up like some of the people I have met in the mental institutions.

**41. *Bhikkhu, why do some people meditate but end up being 'disturbed' by evil spirits and then lose their minds? How should we meditate properly so that such bad effects will not occur to us?***

**ANS.** Because they do not keep their *Precepts* properly. If you build a house on sand, it will topple over sooner or later. If you build it on solid rock, it will last a long time. Similarly, meditation must firstly be built on the foundation of solid *Precepts*.

When the *Buddha* achieved Enlightenment under the famed *Bodhi* tree, he was also 'disturbed by *Mara*'. But people have misunderstood that to mean some kind of evil being that appeared to fight with him etc. If that were true, surely the paintings depicting His encounter with *Mara's* armies would show lots of singed leaves and branches due to the fires that would have accompanied the fierce battle. The *Buddha* had had countless lives before his last one as *Prince Siddhartha* and countless experiences that left imprints on His mind consciousness. He was battling with His inner self of attachments and defilements, his own mind. It was due to His own practice and discipline that He could conquer Himself and emerge an Enlightened Being.

*Mara* belongs to our inner world, our mind, not the external world. We have, like the *Buddha*, had many, many experiences and made many enemies too. When our minds are not steady, old defilements from the past can come back to distract us. Close the doors to your mind and no one can enter. Close all the 6 doors of your senses, and concentrate mindfully. Don't let anyone in. Once you have managed to calm your mind and closed all your six senses, you are ready to meditate.

People mistakenly think that they must join certain groups or organizations to learn meditation over a certain number of days. Such people are very attached to all their various meditation

techniques and may even hop from teacher to teacher seeking to learn about their past lives. If their *Kamma* does not allow it, what they will achieve is just contact with past *Kammic* enemies instead, and hence get 'disturbed'. They do not realise that real meditation really means sitting, standing, walking, doing things in a mindful manner.

Laypeople should do the simple meditation exercises taught by the *Buddha* just to calm their minds. That is enough. Meditation is also not to be practised in order to have better luck in business deals. Someone once told me that he was meditating every day in order to open his 'third eye' so that he would then be able to tell which business would bring him the most money. This is so wrong! Meditation is a discipline that can turn harmful if you do not have a proper meditation master and if your motives are wrong.

Most meditation masters of the past taught that only those who could devote their full efforts to the *Dhamma* (i.e. the *Sangha*) could achieve Enlightenment through meditation – not the laypeople who are so full of attachments. In the *Surangama Sutra*, it is also stated that ***'if carnality (lust) is not wiped out, the practice of meditation is like cooking gravel to make rice; even if it is boiled for hundreds and thousands of eons, it will be only gravel...'***

So, to the layperson, I say this: Your burdens and responsibilities in the world are your *Kamma*. They will weigh on your mind and make it difficult for you to meditate properly. Hence, you have to take it slow and easy. You have to build your

foundation on the *Precepts* first, and open your heart to Love and Compassion. Then, let go of your desires so that you can attain equanimity to help you deal with your problems.

**42. *Some people cultivate with the intention of achieving miraculous or spiritual powers. Is it a good idea to do so?***

**ANS.** You are talking about the supernormal capacities developed by the *Arahants* and sages: clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, psychic travel, the ability to know the past and future and the capacity of ending contaminations or non-attachment (which is definitely the best of the six). But the most desirable type of power to develop is the ability to turn the *Dhamma Wheel* to teach others how to end rebirth.

The *Buddha* Himself did not approve of the display of spiritual powers. Once, He was waiting on the banks of a river waiting for a boat to take Him across. Along came an ascetic who started showing off his spiritual powers, crossing the river back and forth by treading on the surface of the water. The *Buddha* asked him, "How long did it take you to learn to do that?" The ascetic replied, "Thirty years." The *Buddha* said, "Thirty years of effort? Why, I can cross the river for a small fare!"

If you want to attain spiritual powers, you should first attain Enlightenment. Once you do that, you will naturally have the spiritual powers – do not do it the other way around.

## PART 7 : MISCELLANEOUS

43. *We see some Buddhist sects setting up temples, hospitals as well as educational facilities. Isn't that good for society? Yet you do not seem to approve of such work. Why?*

**ANS.** How did the *Buddha* live? He left a palace for the forest; he left home for homelessness. Yet, today the monks and nuns leave their homes for yet another home – and often their new home is bigger and better than the houses they grew up in. With air-conditioning too. Many of such monks and nuns have more attachments than even the laypeople, and love their temples even more than they love themselves.

As for the educational facilities you mentioned, let me say that too much academic learning can even destroy the *Dhamma*. It can make people's minds narrow. Worldly knowledge is only meant to help you live a more comfortable worldly life, but it can also be used to harm others.

The *Dhamma* is a universal medicine for mankind's sickness; it does not belong to any particular sect or tradition and cannot be grasped through intelligence alone. Scholars too often sacrifice the universal truth for name and fame. They are more interested in their degrees and doctorates than to contemplate the universal truth with a humble heart. When learning the *Dhamma*, we should put

aside all the degrees and certificates that declare us to be such knowledgeable people and contemplate the precepts. Start with the very first precept – DO NOT KILL. Many scholars cannot say with sincerity that they can keep even this first precept. An example would be the terrorist, Dr. Azahari who used his knowledge to invent bombs to kill and maim innocent people. He was highly educated, but had no compassion. Or the scientists who use their intelligence to produce bombs and nuclear warheads so that their governments can threaten the rest of the world like big gangsters. See what I mean?

What is especially sad is to see monks and nuns having business cards with a string of B.A, M.A, Ph.D titles after their names. This just shows that their heads have been turned by ego over what they have acquired in terms of worldly knowledge. Isn't it ironic that there are *Sangha* members who use devotees' contributions to enrol in universities to pick up worldly knowledge when the *Dhamma* offers unlimited knowledge? Then these young *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* become so overcome with pride over their degrees that they forget to repay the debt they owe their sponsors – viz. by turning the *Dhamma Wheel*. There is no doctorate awarded for having true *Dhamma* knowledge; there is only *Nibbana* but these *Sangha* members do not seem to care for that kind of achievement at all.

Nowadays, many senior monks actually require their

novices to have at least a High School certificate before they are accepted into their temples. This is very wrong practice. They are forcing the young ones to pick up worldly knowledge at the expense of *Dhamma* knowledge. They have forgotten people like Patriarch Hui Neng who was illiterate and yet achieved the Right Path.

I must say that it is not the job of the *Sangha* to set up schools, universities and even hospitals for that matter. Such undertakings should be left to the laypeople. The sole duty of the *Sangha* is to strive for enlightenment, for *Nibbana* and then, to show the others how to do the same. If they go around setting up schools and universities here, there and everywhere, their minds would be distracted from their cultivation. If they set about building hospitals, their minds would be filled with anxieties over the bills, the patients, the maintenance of the place etc. With minds thus shaken, how can they meditate properly? Isn't it stated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* that ***'to neglect the Bodhi Mind when practising good deeds is the action of demons'***?

The *Buddha* taught under the *Bodhi* tree, in the open air and sometimes in homes, not in permanent temples or buildings. He not only turned the *Dhamma Wheel* to teach the people, he truly lived the *Dhamma*. He tended to the sick and dying *bhikkhus* and cleaned their sores besides their soiled robes, but he did not suggest building hospitals everywhere. The *Buddha* taught that life is full of suffering,

that to be born means to suffer and then to grow old and to die. Plus we fall sick in between. This is a fact of life, and **the only way out is to cut rebirth, to win liberation from birth and death.** And who can teach us how to do that? The professors in the universities? The doctors and nurses in the hospitals? Or the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* who have really walked the path, seen the truth and can teach us to do the same?

So, my suggestion to the *Sangha* is to let the laypeople set up and run the temples, institutions of learning and hospitals. The *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* should just stand by with advice on the *Dhamma* – their work is to turn the *Dhamma Wheel*, not give advice on how to raise more money or discuss how to settle the utilities bills. As for a hands-on approach when help is needed urgently - for example, when there is a disaster and victims are in need of help - certainly the *Sangha* must lend a hand. Or when *Dhamma* classes need skilful teachers - go ahead and help out, but do not forget your duty, which is to strive for enlightenment for yourselves and to show the others how to do the same.

The monks and nuns must just be careful not to be too involved mentally or emotionally in anything that concerns worldly life; otherwise they can lose track of all sense of equanimity, which is so important for self-cultivation. In fact, whenever the monks and nuns are faced with the dying, starving or suffering masses, they

should use such experiences to remind themselves of how undesirable this human state really is, and how they should quickly strive for liberation.

As for the laypeople who set up and run these temples, I do have a word of caution here. One of the four types of *Dana* we should provide the *Sangha* would be shelter, and this would include a temple or a devotee's home where the *Sangha* can stay overnight or even for three months. However, I have seen too many people set up temples as a family business, and hire *Sangha* members to be chanting monks and nuns there. These monks and nuns are paid salaries to perform ceremonies for devotees, and to supplement the income earned from the prayer sessions, religious items like statues of the *Buddha* and *Bodhisattvas*, prayer beads, *Dhamma* books, cassettes etc are sold in the temple!

Some temples also charge people for storing ancestral tablets on the temple premises. This is wrong. All living beings are future *Buddhas* and our parents in past lives – why are the *Sangha* members using them to make money? They are investing in dead bodies.

The *Buddha* never sold His *Dhamma* – why are these people doing it now? Every penny donated to a temple also belongs to the *Triple Gem*, for the sake of propagating the true *Dhamma* – why is the money being used to maintain a luxurious life for the *Sangha* and the temple owners? Do not say that the best way in our modern world to teach the

*Buddha's Dhamma* is to do so in grand, air-conditioned halls, seated on comfortable leather sofas – all that is nonsense! The *Buddha* said this of the requisite of proper shelter for the Sangha, ***“Properly considering the lodging, I use it : simply to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off the touch of flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun and reptiles; simply for protection from the inclemencies of weather and for the enjoyment of seclusion.”***

Therefore, anyone who supports such temples should stop doing so immediately.

**44. *How do we get rid of cockroaches, rats etc without harming them?***

**ANS.** First of all, if you keep your house and compound clean, you will not have such a problem to deal with. Although they are pests, they are still sentient beings so we cannot kill them. That would be breaking the very first precept: DO NOT KILL. Try to get them out of your house without harming them. It is their bad *Kamma* to be reborn as such creatures, but if they are reborn in your house, it means that they are related to you because of a past relationship or affinity.

Some devotees have told me of methods they have tried in order to ‘persuade’ such pests to leave and the most interesting one is to pray for them to go away. One devotee tells me that he chants **OM MANI PADME HUM**

as sincerely as he can when he sees cockroaches in his office and pleads with *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa* to help him with them – and it works.

Another student told me an interesting story about a swarm of bees that built a hive among the branches of a tree outside her house. She feared for the safety of her young children and kept them indoors for days. Finally, her husband announced that he had had enough, and that he was going to call a pest control company to get rid of the hive. The lady was unhappy to hear this as she was a good Buddhist and did not want to commit the sin of killing, but she knew it was the only way to safeguard the family. So, she prayed to *Amitabha Buddha* for help. In her simple way, she explained the whole problem to Him and asked Him to deal with the bees before the pest control folks turned up. Ten minutes later, she was stunned to see the bees flying away en masse.

Whether you believe these stories or not, they are true. Their methods may sound crazy to you but to me, these devotees are able to solve their pest problems without breaking their precepts because of their sincerity in not wishing harm to any sentient being. The *Dhamma Protectors* around us are always willing to help us if we are truly sincere, so do give it a try.

**45. *What about the dengue-causing Aedes mosquito or the culling of poultry because of bird flu?***

**ANS.** The first precept: DO NOT KILL is indeed sometimes very difficult to keep, especially when human beings face potentially life-threatening situations. It is like killing in self-defence, isn't it? Or some kind of pre-emptive strike against the viruses. But what does that prove except this: human beings value their lives, and will do whatever they can for self-preservation. Yet, they ignore the fact that animals also feel the same way. Animals also have feelings – they feel pain, fear and hatred like we do. The diseases that are now striking so much fear all over the world – SARS, bird flu, foot and mouth disease etc - are the animals' way of taking revenge on us for killing and eating them.

Killing sentient beings is one of the worst sins in *Buddhism*. This is not only because great suffering is inflicted on the animals, but also because it cuts short the lives of future *Buddhas* – if you know your scriptures, you should know that all beings have *Buddha Nature*, and that all beings will someday become *Buddhas*.

As long as killing takes place, whether it is the killing of a human being, or an ant, or even a foetus as in the case of abortions, it is still a violation of the first precept. The only time it is not considered thus is when you are forced to kill in order to save someone else. Self-defence is not a good excuse to kill anyone because it is a self-centred

action. So, do not kill – not even yourselves. Think of alternative ways to deal with the diseases rather than to destroy the animals. Remember that killing will inevitably incur a heavy *Kammic* debt.

**46. *So, what can we do about such diseases like bird flu then?***

**ANS.** That is what we call *Community Karma*. Human beings have killed too many animals all this while without caring one iota about the agony these poor animals undergo in the abattoirs. The 2004 Tsunami killed 300,000 people, the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan killed 2,400 people and the 2005 earthquake killed about 70,000 people in Pakistan. The bird flu has killed so few people in comparison, but the problem is causing such a panic that ignorant government officials order the culling of even more birds, pigs, cattle and even civet cats! Isn't that cultivating even more bad *Karma*? Besides, war has killed more people than bird flu. Isn't it possible that the pharmaceutical companies are just trying to blow up the whole issue in order to make more money?

Do not be so afraid of contracting bird flu. If it is your *Karma* to die young, you will – whether it is due to a virus or a fall in the bathroom. Be more afraid of following the wrong path; of being unable to overcome your anger, hatred, greed and ignorance.

**47. QS. Many people approach mediums and fortune-tellers when they need help with their problems. Do you think that is okay?**

**ANS.** Laypeople are full of problems and desires and are always eager to know their future etc. There is no need to go to mediums or fortune-tellers for that purpose. All the prophets and messengers, including the *Buddha*, have said that we reap what we sow. If you do good now, you will have good rewards in the future; if you do bad, you will regret it. Hence, look at what you are doing now and you will know your future. Everywhere around us there are many spiritual beings. When we keep the 5 precepts, we will have 25 Dhamma protectors looking after us. Isn't that better than putting our faith in mediums and fortune-tellers?

Some people say that mediums have really helped them to solve their financial problems. My answer to that is, out of every 100 customers who go to them, chances are that one or two of them will definitely find some kind of relief. Yet, if they can perform miracles, why don't they help themselves become rich first?

Once when I was in Thailand, I was approached by a few people who politely clasped their hands in respect before asking me for some lucky numbers to bet on. They told me that other monks used to chant prayers for them and give them good-luck charms to wear. These people failed to see the fallacy in the whole issue - after having

been blessed so often by those monks, shouldn't they have become rich by now? So why aren't they rich?

In Malaysia, there was a man who asked me to bless a lucky amulet that he was wearing so that he could win the lottery! I told him that if I could give him gambling luck by doing that, then the road would be full of people queuing up with amulets of all shapes and sizes and the queue would even stretch all the way from Thailand! I told him that real fortune lies in being able to understand and practise the *Dhamma* and that whatever problems he was facing were due to past *Kamma*. Only wisdom and non-attachment would give him lasting relief from his sufferings. He did not understand what I meant, or rather, he did not want to listen. Before he left, he still asked me to bless his amulet and to teach him to chant a mantra that would give him luck. I feel sad for this man. Like him, many people do not understand that **true** Buddhist monks and nuns do not do such things.

Having said that, I would advise all laypeople to reduce their desires. That is the only way to reduce problems. At the same time, spend less time at work, and more time with the children. They are more important than having a big car, big house or big pay packet.

But, of course, keep in mind that all your problems are non-problems compared to the biggest problem that all of us face - Death!

**48. *Sometimes we seem to face a lot of bad luck for 3, 5 or 7 years and even for several generations. Why is this so?***

**ANS.** Life is full of ups and downs. It is basically made up of good and bad, joy and sorrow, life and death. From our sufferings, we learn and thus wake up to the Truth. This is the *Kamma* we have to face as human beings.

There are people who do bad deeds out of greed, hatred and ignorance and then die without first repaying their *Kammic* debts. If they get reborn into their own families once again due to shared *Kamma*, the retribution for their previous bad deeds will follow them and they will suffer. We who cannot see the workings of *Kamma* would then pity the family for having bad luck that lasts for generations.

Unfortunately, some people do not believe that we can get reborn into our own families. To clarify this point, let me tell you a true story about a particular wedding in Vietnam. Once a young couple fell in love and planned their wedding with great joy as their parents and relatives were pleased with their choices of each other as spouse. In fact, the whole village was happy for them and everyone got involved in the wedding preparations. The day of the wedding dawned bright and sunny; the groom was handsome, the bride very pretty and everyone was in a joyful mood. Along came an old monk who stopped and

stared at the beaming couple – and suddenly, he began to weep. The people were alarmed and puzzled by the old monk's strange behaviour and asked him why he was crying. To that, the old monk answered, "I never thought I would live long enough to see a young man marrying his grandmother."

This story shows us that we can be reborn into our own families if our *Kamma* dictates it so. And when we get reborn, our retribution for past *Kammic* offences, or rewards for good deeds, will also follow us.

**49. *QS. Bhikkhu, the temple in my neighbourhood is organising a fun fair in order to raise funds for charity. Should I support their cause?***

**ANS.** Yes, you can do so, but you must be aware of who the organisers are. Is the fun fair being organised by people who are out to earn money for themselves or to sincerely help others? We should learn a lesson from the Tsunami disaster of 2004 when a lot of money was raised to help the victims, but a lot of it has gone missing, unaccounted for. Let me remind you of the Katrina disaster in New Orleans, USA as well as the earthquake that killed 70,000 people in Pakistan in 2005. Many people donated cash and kind to help the survivors but what was in the news next? Looting, rapes and murders in New Orleans, and unscrupulous people in Pakistan pretending to be earthquake victims so that they could acquire some of the

food aid which they then sold to the real victims

We must understand that all the charity in the world cannot remove the 'hungry ghosts' of mankind. All the money in the world cannot remove the greed of mankind. There are billions of poor people in the world – how can we feed all of them? What we should do is to help them clear their *Kammic* debts. They must understand why they are so poor, so hungry. They were selfish in their previous births and did not know how to give to others, hence they have no merits to enjoy in this life. If we can get them to understand this crucial point, they can then change and their next rebirth will be better. See what I mean? Of course we must help them and feed them while they are so hungry now – but we must also educate them.

The *Buddha* said that He could give all that was required for everyone in the world to be rich and live like they were in heaven if He wanted to, but that it would be a useless pursuit, as human beings would still remain greedy. Hence, He decided to give us the *Dhamma* instead. We should learn from His example to know which charity is of a higher value – feeding the physical body is not as important as cultivating the *Dhamma* body.

Having said all that, it is of course a praiseworthy deed for the lay supporters of the temple to try to raise funds to help the poor, but they should not hold the fair within the premises of the temple. There should be no buying and selling done in the temple at all. The temple is

a holy place, and a haven for people seeking peace. Therefore, it should not be full of noise and confusion but always tranquil. The organisers should do it somewhere else, and make sure that the *Sangha* members residing in that temple do not touch any of the money.

Let me tell you of yet another kind of charity that can be done without fearing that funds collected will go missing-in-action. This is the hands-on volunteer work that touches hearts and changes lives in a way that no money can. During the Tsunami disaster of 2004, our devotees organised *8 Precepts* Prayer-Retreats at Khao Lak and Phuket, Thailand and Pulau Pinang, Malaysia to benefit the victims by way of *Dana* and transference of merits. A highly respected monk aged 115 even came along to help with the prayers. He had never seen the sea before in his life but was brave enough to venture into the water out of compassion for the victims. In December 2005, we organised yet another Prayer-Retreat for the victims in Sri Lanka. This time, the group comprised *Sangha* members from other parts of the world, and together with a thousand Sri Lankans, we conducted the *Dana* and transference of merits for the benefit of the Tsunami victims of Sri Lanka.

While we were at Sri Lanka, we met a lady who had lost her two daughters and a grandson to the waves and was still in mourning. We spent time with her and had *Dana* in her house after which we spoke to her about *Kamma* so that she would find relief from her pain.

All these retreats took a lot of patient planning and good teamwork, but our reward was the knowledge that we had helped to ease the pain of both the living as well as the dead. That brought us deep satisfaction.

**50. *We find it so difficult to achieve enlightenment because of our attachments and wandering minds. Do you think that we should give up everything in our worldly life and go into seclusion in order to cultivate properly then?***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* Himself had tried such a method and even more in his quest for enlightenment. Let us keep in mind what the *Buddha* said in the '***Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar Sutta***' (***Mahasidanada Sutta***) about the great austerities and sacrifices He made while striving to gain Enlightenment, and how at the end of it all, He realised the futility of His efforts:

***"Sariputta, I recall having lived a holy life possessing four factors. I have been an ascetic – a supreme ascetic; I have been coarse – supremely coarse; I have been scrupulous – supremely scrupulous; I have been secluded – supremely secluded..."***

(and then, He spoke on the austerities He undertook)

***".....Yet, Sariputta, by such conduct, by such practice, by such performance of austerities, I did not attain any superhuman states, any distinction in***

*knowledge and vision worthy of the noble ones. Why was that? Because I did not attain that noble wisdom which when attained is noble and emancipating and leads the one who practises in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering.” (M.I.ii.2)*

As laypeople, you have many duties and responsibilities so it is not practical for you to just drop them all and run to the nearest cave to sit cross-legged and wait for wisdom to bloom. You may have to sit there for a long, long lonely time before you realise that it is not where your body is which is important, but where your mind is. You can remain in society and be a useful citizen, a good child to your parents, a good parent to your children, a good spouse, a good employee etc and still be able to find the Truth – as long as you know how to cut your desires. You must know how to let go of the attachments in your mind.

Remember the story about *Angulimala*, the much-feared murderer who wanted to kill the *Buddha* as his 1000<sup>th</sup> victim? He could not get near to the *Buddha* and he shouted out to the Lord, “Stop where you are” and the Lord said, “I have stopped. It is you who have not done so.” *Angulimala* later attained *Arahanthood*. A notorious killer was saved because he was able to renounce his bloodthirsty ways. He let go of his desires, so we must learn from this

story to also let go of our desires.

So, as laypeople, just keep your 5 or 8 *Precepts* and support the *Sangha*. Wait till your good *Kamma* can bear fruit and you can leave home then if you wish, but if you force yourself to do so when you are not ready, it will not work. It is bad for the body to be homeless while the mind is at home.

**51. *Bhikkhu, how can I tell if the Homeless life is suitable for me?***

**ANS.** Before you consider becoming a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni*, you should ask yourself whether you can become a TRUTH MESSENGER or not. Are you able to live, teach and die for, the TRUE PATH OF THE DHAMMA? Do you have the will power, determination and courage to face the challenge of spreading the *Buddha's True Dhamma*? If your answer is YES, then seek a teacher who can lead you on the right path. If you get a teacher who does not keep the *Vinaya (Precepts)* properly, you will likely turn into a **'Mara – yana'**!

Why are there so many *Sangha* members today who are not true practitioners? It is because they do not have good teachers – who themselves were not well-taught either. When a person first joins the *Sangha*, he normally does so with a lot of zeal, hence in his first year, he has the *Buddha* in his heart and mind. Under a wrong teacher, the *Samanera* will gradually remove the *Buddha* from his heart

and mind and just place Him in the temple grounds. By the third year, the *Buddha* is not even in the temple with the *Samanera* anymore – He is gone! Replaced by donation boxes.

Most senior monks are not happy to see their juniors behave better than themselves. They do not want to lose face when others praise their students for keeping the *Precepts* better than they themselves do. Hence, these senior monks go all out to corrupt the young ones. These senior monks go to the extent of telling the *Samaneras* to leave their temples if they do not follow what they say!

Sometimes, it is done out of sheer lack of wisdom and not malice. Take for example the master who once said, "One day you don't work, one day you don't eat." Ignorant monks take this to mean that they must work before they can get to eat; hence they set up temple businesses! This is wrong. What the master meant was that monks must do the work of the *Dhamma*! Proper cultivation! Teaching the laypeople the right practice! This is the true work of the *Sangha*.

Then, there was another master who once said, "When you are hungry, eat. When you are thirsty, drink. When you are tired, sleep." From this statement, generations of greedy monks and nuns have learnt to eat more than one meal a day and sleep when they should meditate. This is wrong again. What this master was referring to was the food and drink of the *Dhamma* and

*Vinaya!* See what it means by the saying, 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing'?

I have witnessed such 'Mara-yana' monks turning away *Dhutanga* monks (forest monks) who approach their temples for a night's shelter. The *Dhutanga* monks are true practising monks, and to refuse to help them is a great sin, but these 'Mara-yana' monks are too far gone in their delusion to admit it. By turning away a true practising monk, they are turning away the *Buddha* Himself, because the Lord had said that whoever keeps the *Vinaya*, keeps Him. The *Buddha Dhamma* is not found in big temples with big names and long lists of members, but in the hearts and minds of true monks. Keep that in mind as you ponder whether you should be a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni* yourself.

**52. *We go from birth to death and back again; round and round like a never-ending drama. There seems to be no meaning in life.***

**ANS.** Oh, but there *is* meaning in life. However, people today are blinded by money and their desires for a luxurious life and do not realise that at death, they lose everything except whatever merits they accumulate in their short lives. Then, if they are not enlightened, they get reborn in other realms or on other planets while beings from those realms and planets get reborn here on our earth - over and over again. That's why we feel so tired.

Consider this: a child is born, grows up, attends

school, college, university etc to acquire some paper qualifications that allows him to join the rat race, slaves at his job, gets married, becomes a parent, and brings them up to do the same things he has done. Then age catches up with him, he is suddenly a grandfather, retired and frequently looking forward to family reunions, falls sick with all kinds of ailments, worries about his grownup kids and fusses over his grandchildren etc till he dies ... and gets reborn again.... Don't you feel tired just reading that? Yet it is happening every minute of every day, with variations thrown in due to *Kammic* influences.

We can end the drama if we wish to. Just strive for liberation from *Samsara* and change. A case in point. You used to go to the temples to pray for good fortune, money, good health etc. – you went there because of your desires. Now, you go to the temples to learn the *Dhamma*. You have changed; you are not so greedy anymore. Bit by bit, we learn to let go of our attachments and the drama will end one day with our Enlightenment.

So, how can we live a wonderful, meaningful life?

Let me tell you a story about a proud prime minister who thought he was the most knowledgeable person in the country, that he was even better than the king himself. But there was a monk at that time who was highly spoken of by everyone - even the king sang his praises.

The prime minister was peeved by everyone's admiration for the monk, so he decided to go and see the

monk by himself and test his knowledge. He went into the mountains in search of the monk with a huge battalion of soldiers, all looking very dignified indeed. But instead of an imposing abbot sitting in a huge temple, he found only a simple, humble monk. He asked the monk, "The *Buddha* preached the *Dhamma* for 45 years. What did the *Buddha* really teach?" The monk answered, "For 45 years the *Buddha* taught us not to do bad, to do good and to purify our minds."

The prime minister snorted, "Even a small child knows that! How can you claim to be so wise if that is all you know?" To that, the monk replied, "Yes, the children can repeat this, but can you do it? Look at your own deeds – you bring an army to challenge me and to make me afraid of you, but I do not fear death. You assert your arrogant ways on the citizens and cow them into obeying your commands, yet despite all your show of power, Death is more powerful than you. You cannot practise the *Buddha's* teachings while the children can. The children are free of hate and anger. Who is better off – you or they?"

We are the same – if our minds are free of hate, anger and delusion, we would be better off than kings and presidents. Many rich people are poor in their minds; many poor people are rich in theirs. Many scientists and professional people are rich in their 'outer knowledge' but handicapped when it comes to their 'inner knowledge', i.e. they do not know who they really are. Our physical eyes

allow us to look at the people 'outside' but our wisdom eye helps us see our own true faces. How can we live a meaningful life? Learn to look with your wisdom eye.

**53. *When I listen to Bhikkhu, I feel that I understand and yet do not. What should I do?***

**ANS.** This is normal. No one can understand another person completely. It all depends on your cultivation in your previous lives. What you hear is my concept. You need to think it over for yourself and work out your own truth. Then your doubts will disappear. Why do so many people take the *Buddha's* teachings and repeat them without true understanding? They do not reflect on His teachings, but run around looking for interpretations outside themselves. Such people are only working on further rebirths for themselves. Calm yourself and look within for the answers.

**54. *Bhikkhu, is it a good way to practise the Dhamma if we deaden our feelings or responses to scolding, criticism, praise etc.?***

**ANS.** No, do not think that Enlightenment is death! It is rather a 'I-know-everything-but-am-not-attached-to-anything' kind of state. The *Buddha* knew everything, that's why so many people sought Him out for advice on all kinds of problems, but He was not attached to anything. Just

practise NON-ATTACHMENT.

How do we do that? Practise seeing everything as NON-SELF. Can you truly say that your body is yours? If it really were yours, then you could tell it not to fall sick, not to grow old, or to die. But you can't, so how can you say you have a self? Even your mind does not belong to you.

Do not worry about anything. Practise till you know your spouse and children are not yours too. Nobody and nothing belongs to anybody – we came to this world empty-handed, we leave it empty-handed too. Due to *Kamma*, we are together for a time, and when it is time to go, we go. When a child is born, I say, "No one asked you to come, yet you came." When a person dies, I say, "No one asked you to go, yet you go." Think this over.

**55. *QS. In the Lotus Sutra (Chapter 25), it is stated that if we are in life-threatening situations, e.g. being surrounded by demons, or robbers, or carried away by floodwaters etc, all we need to do is just to call upon the name of Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa (Bodhisattva Regarder of the Cries of the World) and we will be saved. Plus be freed from birth, old age, sickness and death, as well as being able to have the kind of children we want. Is this really true?***

**ANS.** That is only the superficial and literal interpretation that makes devotees too lazy to work out their own

salvation. After all, why work so hard at keeping the *Precepts* and being good when we can just call upon the name of *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa* and be saved instantly? If it were that easy to just call out his name and he would come to save you from disaster, none of the Vietnamese boat refugees would have died at sea.

When we think of *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa*, we should think of him as a model of Great Compassion. We should not just prostrate at the base of his statue and beg for luck and prosperity – we must be more intelligent in our faith. Everyone seems to go to the temples to pray to the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* for wealth but surely, with their Great Compassion, they would have granted us all our wishes by now. Then, why are so many people still so poor? The *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* came to give us the *Dhamma*, the Truth, not money.

When we think of the *Bodhisattva*, our minds tend to calm down into one-pointedness and we will feel warmth and compassion welling up in our hearts. We will then be rid of ego, anger and hatred and this will in turn generate harmony among the people and in the atmosphere around us and even quarrels can be settled in a peaceful manner.

Substitute the word '*flood*' mentioned in the *Sutra* with '*the waters of desire and attachment that engulf us*', the word '*fire*' with '*the hatred that burns us up*' and '*the fire of greed and hatred*', the term '*perilous road*' with '*the wrong views caused by ignorance that dull our wisdom*' and

you will have a new understanding of the *Sutra*. Chant the name *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa*, by all means, but this time, with the new interpretation in mind. Chant to put out the fire of greed and hatred, chant to avoid falling into the sea of birth and death and drowning in the floodwaters of materialism. Chant so that you can develop the brave, chivalrous, generous character of a hero, and the kind, gentle nature of a heroine (not to get baby boys or girls). Many monks just chant the *Lotus Sutra* without understanding its true meaning and the laypeople just believe whatever they are told without discrimination. It is not wise to stick to literal interpretations of *Sutras* alone. Intelligent people must think twice before they accept any teaching verbatim.

However, I have to say here that the *Bodhisattva* does have the power to save anyone he wants but most of the time, it is the spiritual beings around us who act on his behalf. Due to past merits, we have deities and spiritual beings supporting us and when we are in danger, these beings are the ones to help us immediately. When you call upon *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa's* name, your mind goes into one-pointedness and you attain concentration; hence these spiritual beings will respond on behalf of the *Bodhisattva*. At the same time, due to good deeds that you had performed in your past lives (and present); you will have lots of merits to protect you from danger. And don't forget the 25 Dhamma protectors who follow you around as long

as you keep the 5 precepts! So, miracles do happen, and *Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa* does come if you can concentrate on his name with faith and sincerity. This will depend on your affinity with this *Bodhisattva*.

**56. *We have been told that the best way to win liberation from Samsara is the Ten Recitations Method (chanting of Amitabha Buddha's name). What is your comment?***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* delivered the discourse on *Amitabha* and the *Pure Land* when He saw his old friend and supporter, King Bimbisara imprisoned and left to starve to death by his son, Prince Ajatasattu. This was to help the king reach *Paradise* after death, and he did deserve a place there because the king was a good man when still alive and he followed the *Buddha's* teachings faithfully. Unfortunately, nowadays many monks have misled the laity into thinking that they can just chant *Amitabha's* name 10 times and go to the *Pure Land* easily. This is wrong. You must deserve to be reborn there – you must have lived a good life filled with love and compassion first. Imagine a tyrant who has oppressed his people for years. Upon his demise, thousands of monks chant the *Buddha's* name around his coffin for days on end, from dawn to dusk – do you think the king would still find a place waiting for him in *Paradise*? If the passport to *Paradise* was just to chant the *Buddha's* name, then surely *Paradise* must be full of

*Amitabha*-chanting CDs and cassette tapes by now.

The *Ten Recitations* Method of just chanting *Amitabha Buddha's* name with every inhalation and exhalation of the breath is suitable for those at a lower level of cultivation. For the others, it is important that they understand what *Amitabha Buddha's* name stands for. It actually stands for the ***Ten Heart and Mind Vows***.

Some *Sutras* were translated into Chinese and later taken over to Vietnam and among them is one called the *Dai Bao Tich*. It was in China for centuries before it was finally translated into Vietnamese about 10 years ago. As such, most people have not read this *Sutra* and are ignorant of the Higher Teachings in it. In Book 5, Chapter 25 of the *Dai Bao Tich Sutra*, we read of *Shakyamuni Buddha* talking to *Maitreya Buddha*.

*Maitreya Buddha* asked *Shakyamuni Buddha* about the meaning of *Amitabha Buddha's* name, and the *Buddha* replied that it means the *Ten Heart and Mind Vows*. The *Buddha* said, "*Maitreya*, these *Ten Heart and Mind Vows* are not easily kept by ignorant people who are full of delusions."

The *Buddha* then explained the *Ten Heart and Mind Vows*:

1. To love all sentient beings and not to cause them harm in any way
2. To never cause sentient beings to be in a state of fear; caring for them with your heart

3. To open one's heart to the True *Dhamma* and be willing to protect it with one's life
4. To respect all *Dhammas* but not to be attached to any of them
5. To keep one's heart pure and respectful and not be greedy for profits
6. To be firm and resolute in one's aspiration to achieve full Enlightenment (*Bodhi Mind or Bodhicitta*)
7. To respect all sentient beings and never to look down on any of them
8. To avoid frivolous speech and discussion of worldly affairs and to expend effort only on one's *Bodhi Mind*.
9. To keep one's mind pure and to do good deeds while avoiding bad deeds
10. To remove all attachments to the images of all the *Tathagatas* as well as to our own thoughts

The *Buddha* also said that we can choose any one of these *Ten Heart and Mind Vows* that appeals to us for our own individual practice and if we really observe our vow(s) wholeheartedly, we will be reborn in the *Pure Land*. He added that if we practise in this manner but still do not get to the *Pure Land*, then the *Buddha's Words* cannot be trusted.

This *Sutra* may come as a surprise to many of you

right now, but if you need further clarification or proof of the existence of the *Sutra*, please log on to [www.quangduc.com](http://www.quangduc.com). and refer to Book 5, Chapter 25. Unfortunately, it is in Vietnamese at the moment but we hope that an English version will be released one day.

Hence, chant the *Amitabha Buddha's* name if you wish to, but as your lips move, keep the *Ten Heart and Mind Vows* in your mind and try to achieve one-pointedness in your concentration. And when you have finished, transfer your merits for a rebirth in the *Pure Land*.

**57. *Can we be Arahants or achieve rebirth in the Pure Land in this very life?***

**ANS.** Yes, why not? *Angulimala* killed 999 people, but when he learnt the truth from the *Buddha*, he was able to put aside all his bloodthirsty ways and attained *Arahanthood*. When *Jesus* was crucified alongside two thieves, one of them professed his faith in *Jesus*, and was promised a place in Paradise that very day. (***Good News Bible, Luke 23.39 – 43***) (see Appendix)

If they could succeed, why not you? It is all up to you. The door to *Paradise* is open to all of us. It depends on whether you really want to pass through it or whether you prefer to go round and round, life after life in the cycle of rebirth. Just remember not to follow anyone but to follow the way of the Truth; keep your *Precepts* and practise loving-kindness towards all beings. That is the way

to Peace – both inner and outer.

**58. *How can I improve on my chanting so that I can stop my mind from wandering?***

**ANS.** Whether you are rich or poor, well-educated or illiterate, the chanting of this *Buddha's* name brings great benefits to all of us – as long as we do it with clear minds and understanding. **NA MO A MI TUO FO** consists of 6 syllables and they represent our 6 senses. As we chant the name, we close up each of our senses so that we can attain **one-pointedness** in our concentration. All connection with our worldly life must cease there and then when our minds are totally absorbed in the *Buddha*. All too often, devotees word these 6 syllables heedlessly, with their minds on something else. How then can they acquire the merits from the chanting? From morning till night, and even when they dream in their beds, their minds are on their hopes and worries, desiring this and that. Let go of all that when you chant His name; look within and feel the peace. And practise. Just keep practising.

**59. *Will we incur bad Kamma if we count wrongly the number of times we should chant a mantra, for example, eight times instead of nine?***

**ANS.** Masters who did not want their students to be lazy in their cultivation started the concept of chanting *mantras*

for a certain number of times. Do you think the *Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas* really need to listen to your chanting? Or even count how many times you chant a *mantra*? I don't think so. They are more interested in having everyone living in peace and harmony, following the Universal rules as stated in the *Precepts*. They don't need all that noisy 'kok-kok-bang-bang' that seems to accompany so many chanting sessions in *Mahayana* temples either. If you can chant just one *mantra*, but with deep concentration, the benefit accrued would be far greater than you mouthing the *mantra* one thousand times with your mind far away.

Keep in mind that the *Buddhas* are already enlightened. It is we who are not. Chanting of *Sutras* or *mantras* serve to tie our minds down for a while and make us more aware of the importance of mindfulness. Any method that can be used to tame our minds for even a few minutes would be most beneficial, but don't be too attached to the do's and don'ts. They are manmade.

**60. *The world is always changing. Should we go along with the changes rather than try to resist them?***

**ANS.** People say that our society is modern and progressive; hence we must change along with it. Yet, the world is full of materialism and selfishness and people do nothing much more than strive to survive the rat race. Life is short. If you overwork, medical problems like high blood pressure and strokes may be your lot sooner or later. Many

educated, sophisticated people – even medical doctors – have gone crazy. Why join them?

Imagine that you are the captain of a ship. Would you just let the ship follow the tide and go wherever the waves carry it, or would you steer it yourself? Consider the *Buddha* – He was born a prince, hence His duty was to become a king someday and rule the country but He realised that it would not lead Him out of *Samsara*, so He went against the conventions and left the palace. Because of His courage in steering His ship against the tide, we have the chance to learn and practise the *Dhamma* today. Hence, be in the world, but not of it. Be in society but do not let society bind you.

**61. *How do we free our minds?***

**ANS.** You free the mind when you know the mind. The mind is very dangerous – it nags at you non-stop to fight for this, to fight for that. It is impermanent but never leaves you alone till you fill it up with desires.

And how do you know your mind? By yourself. I can't give mine to you. You must recognise your mind before you can stop it. It is like driving on the highway. If you are going at 140 km/h, and you realise it, you can slow down, but if you are travelling at 70 km/h, you know that you can speed up if you wish. Similarly, you must learn to deal with the desires that fill your mind. You must be alert at all times to what your mind tells you. You must know

how to say 'NO' to your mind when it urges you on to pamper your desires.

Stop your mind from wandering and you will become the master of your mind.

So to free your mind: firstly, follow the *Buddha's* teachings and keep the 5 *Precepts*. Do not do anything that benefits you but brings harm to others, or even vice versa. Secondly, at the end of each day, make a mental review of your deeds throughout the day and see if you had been following your desires or the path of the *Buddha*. Do not make excuses for your mistakes, but change yourself. And whenever circumstances allow it, take part in 8 *Precept*-retreats to practise giving up desires. Slowly, bit by bit, you will see your mind becoming calmer, and the attachments will be gone.

Furthermore, it would be wise not to let the vicissitudes of life affect you too much. The *Buddha* once said, ***"It is in the nature of the foolish to be full of sorrow and feel depressed when things go wrong, and to be full of gladness and feel elated when things go well. The wise, however, can withstand the ups and downs of life."***

(Dhammapada ,Verse 83)

**62. What is the meaning of the term 'Buddha Lands'?  
Please explain the term 'Pure Land' too.**

**ANS.** Another term for *Buddha Lands* is *Buddhakshetra* in Sanskrit. These are worlds created through the vows of the various *Buddhas* to help us cultivate.

The most well-known *Buddha Land* among Buddhists is the *Pure Land* or *Western Paradise* (Sanskrit: *Sukhavati*) which is **'hundreds of thousands of millions of *Buddhalands* to the west'** (*The Amitabha Sutra*). And yet, a true *Pure Land* practitioner can be reborn there in the blink of an eye.

Study the *Amitabha Sutra*, practise the ten good deeds, chant *Amitabha's* name as often as you can (with mindfulness) and transfer your merits there. Then, even if you still have some bad *Kamma* to account for, you can still be reborn there in order to practise some more to attain *Buddhahood*.

*Pure Land* cultivation is a popular method of practising the *Dhamma* because the presiding *Buddha* there, i.e. *Amitabha Buddha* made such great vows to help sincere devotees escape *samsara*. It is neither Mahayana nor Theravada; nor does it belong to any sect or tradition. It is just a *Buddha Land* somewhere in the vast universe, whereas on earth, *Pure Land* is found in any monastery where monks and nuns cultivate properly, and in any home where the laypeople practise sincerely.

**63. *Is divorce allowed in Buddhism?***

**ANS.** Divorce is not forbidden in Buddhism. Separation is much better than living together in misery. The children are also affected adversely if their parents are constantly at each other's throats. The divorced couple must nevertheless be responsible for the welfare of their children together. But if all Buddhists were to follow the *Buddha's* teachings, unhappy marriages leading to divorce would not occur.

If, however, the unhappy couple are unable to divorce for any reason at all, and are forced to stay together, they would need to exercise greater wisdom to reduce their mental torture. They must understand that their unhappiness is due to some *Kammic* forces and strive harder to stamp out their desires and attachments. When they see each other, they must guard their thoughts, words and actions so that hatred does not cloud their judgement. They should regard the other as just a fellow traveller on the journey of life, seeking liberation too and grappling with his or her own defilements. If we refuse to allow another person to annoy us into doing or saying things we will regret later on, we will have more peace of mind.

**64. *If a person is in a coma for a long time, where is his mind consciousness? Does he have any thoughts? Can prayers help him to recover?***

**ANS.** We do not know where his mind consciousness is but there is a possibility that he may have thoughts for fleeting seconds. Miracles can occur if it is his *Kamma* to be cured, but it is still unlikely to happen – if a car, for example, breaks down but there are no spare parts available, how can we overhaul it?

Once, I was invited to a lay supporter's home and while there, I was shown a little girl lying comatose in a small bed. She had been stricken with meningitis some years ago, and suffered a severe brain damage. Her parents had consulted lots of doctors, and even shamans, but nobody could do anything to help her. When I met the family, they asked if I could pray for the girl. Well, I bent over and spoke to the child as gently as I could although I knew that she would not be able to respond – but as I turned to leave, a teardrop rolled down her cheek. So, a comatose patient may have some kind of awareness after all.

In this context, it would be prudent to discuss the concept of mercy killing or euthanasia. Killing is killing, no matter what you wish to call it, and definitely against the *Buddha's* teachings. Even if a comatose patient has to be kept in a hospital year in, year out for many, many years, we still have no right to terminate his life. We must understand that the patient is working out his bad *Kamma*, and if we end his life, we are actually depriving him of that chance. Thus, he would have to repay his debts in yet

another rebirth.

If the patient is conscious and aware of what he is doing, and wish to kill himself out of misery over being bedridden or handicapped, we must also not allow him to commit suicide. We must help him to accept his own *Kamma* instead.

**65. *Why is the lotus flower used as a symbol of Buddhism?***

**ANS.** Imagine the *Buddha* as the lotus flower and the world as the mud and you will appreciate the significance of the flower. The lotus flower grows in muddy pools but it is not polluted by the mud. In like manner, the *Buddha* was born into our world of defilements, but He is pure, wonderful, undefiled. The mud-covered lotus roots represent suffering. The *Buddha's* teachings have their roots in the Truth of Suffering. Put them together and you'll get a picture of the *Buddha's* pure teachings that help us win liberation from the sufferings of the *Saha* world.

**66. *I try to be filial to my parents by providing them material care and comfort. Is there anything else I can do for them?***

**ANS.** Caring for our parents' physical needs is definitely a must for all good Buddhists as our parents are our *Buddhas* at home.

However, if your elderly parents are ignorant of *Buddha's* teachings; you should now send them to 'Dhamma school'. Help them to understand the true Buddhism – not the superstitious mumbo-jumbo that is passed off as *Buddha's* teachings. Teach them not to kill animals as offerings to the *Buddha* or *Kuan Yin*, (as so many people seem to do in Chinese and Vietnamese temples). Encourage them to take refuge in the *Triple Gem* and adhere to the 5 *Precepts*. Urge them to participate in 8 *Precept*-Retreats whenever they can and to do the 10 good deeds for their own merits. If you yourself behave well in front of them, they will take your lead and thus, can be liberated from *samsara* – thanks to your guidance. Isn't that better than just looking after their physical needs?

**67. *What is the difference between the phrases 'belief in the Buddha' and 'practising Buddhism'?***

**ANS.** For people who are at the lower level of spirituality, believing in the *Buddha* is of great importance, but for those at a higher level, understanding and practising the *Buddha's* teachings matter more. Then, at the highest stage, practising will go together with teaching the *Dhamma* to others. It is somewhat like going to school – we progress from primary school to secondary and finally, graduate from the university.

In 1997, when I was in New Delhi, I once had a discussion about Buddhism with some Vietnamese monks

and nuns who were studying at the university there. Someone asked me whether I believed in the *Buddha*. I told them "No, I don't." Their response was quick and predictable – they got angry with me. I said, "You see? You believe in the *Buddha* and when something unpleasant crops up, you get heated up! That shows you don't understand the *Buddha*. *Buddha* did not teach you this. I don't believe in the *Buddha*, but I understand the *Buddha*. He is my Teacher, my spiritual father." Hearing my words, they sat down again, looking embarrassed.

Nowadays, people believe blindly, without understanding, and don't bother to practise Buddhism at all! That is why the *Dhamma* is declining. Some Buddhist monks want to be abbots of big temples and have many devotees and believe that when they die, they will go to heaven or be reborn as kings on earth. But that is not the *Buddha's* aim in teaching us – He taught us the *Four Noble Truths* and the *Eightfold Path* so that we can get liberation from *Samsara*, not stay in it! Save yourselves by understanding and practising. No one else will save you.

**68. *How does one cultivate in order to have a good memory?***

**ANS.** Firstly, do not imbibe alcohol or any other intoxicants as they tend to cloud the mind. Secondly, think of your mind as a storeroom full of thoughts, memories, plans, desires, attachments, worries etc. If you have too many

things in the storeroom of your house, do you think it is easy for you to find particular items? Similarly, the storeroom in your mind must be emptied first before you can see clearly. So, calm yourself and establish mindfulness and slowly, your memory will become crystal clear.

**69. *Some people say that there is no such place as hell, and others say that our world is already hell.***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* has described hell in very vivid terms, especially the 18 different levels of hell but if human beings were to start digging into the ground to look for it, they will certainly not see it. Otherwise, all the miners who work underground would have found it first, right? Hell is to be found on other planets in the infinite universe, just as different heavens are found on different planets too. We might find this hard to grasp because we only know about our own Solar System, but the *Buddha* has been very clear about this.

Then, there are other types of hell on earth itself. Ask any criminal who is locked up in jail now, and he would say that he is in hell. Or any person who is stressed out at work – his workplace is a living hell too. In both these instances, it is clear that hell is their minds. For instance, the criminal who accepts his punishment with resignation would not call the prison hell. And the worker who works hard but with an attitude of gratitude for having a job while so many others are unemployed – his workplace is not hell

for him either.

This just shows that we make our own hell through the thoughts that occupy our minds. The body does not know heaven or hell – only the mind does, hence control your mind always. Do not tie your mind up with attachments or you will really be in hell – even before you die.

**70. *There is a saying that goes “Money makes the world go round”. Without money, life would be difficult for us. What is your view and how should we manage money according to the Buddha’s teachings?***

**ANS.** For laypeople, it is true that you need money to survive. Some people think that to be good Buddhists, they must have nothing to do with striving for material goods or a comfortable life. This is wrong view. The *Buddha* taught us to live life without attachments, and by that, **He meant not to go to extremes in our enjoyment of material goods or our rejection of them.** Either way, we will not be able to practise the *Middle Path* correctly.

The *Buddha* once told his lay disciple *Anathapindika* about the four types of happiness that a layman may enjoy:

***“There are these four kinds of happiness to be won by the householder who enjoys the pleasures of sense, from time to time and when occasion offers. They are the happiness of ownership (atthisukha),***

***the happiness of enjoyment (bhogasukha), the happiness of debtlessness (ananasukha) and the happiness of innocence (anavajjasukha)."***

By that, the Buddha meant that:

1. a layman may enjoy wealth that is earned through righteous means,
2. he may spend that wealth on his loved ones, friends and relatives and on doing good deeds,
3. he should be free from debts and lastly,
4. he should live a pure, faultless life.

Yet, of the four, the Buddha said that the last type of happiness is the best :

***"....But these have not one-sixteenth of the bliss  
(That cometh to a man) of blamelessness."***

***(Dhammapada, Chap. 10)***

Here, I would also like to quote the Buddha's words as found in the *Mangala Sutta* on what constitutes the Highest Blessing:

***Thus have I heard:***

***On one occasion, the Exalted One was dwelling at the monastery of Anathapindika, in Jeta's Grove, near Savatthi. Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity, whose surpassing splendour***

*illuminated the entire Jeta Grove, came to the presence of the Exalted One and, drawing near, respectfully saluted Him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:-*

- 1. Many deities and men, yearning after good, have pondered on blessings. Pray, tell me the Highest Blessing;*
- 2. Not to associate with fools, to associate with the wise, and to honour those who are worthy of honour – this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 3. To reside in a suitable locality, to have done meritorious actions in the past, and to set oneself in the right course – this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 4. Vast-learning, perfect handicraft, a highly trained discipline, and pleasant speech - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 5. The support of father and mother, the cherishing of wife and children, and peaceful occupations - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 6. Liberality, righteous conduct, the helping of relatives, and blameless actions - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 7. To cease and abstain from evil, forbearance with respect to intoxicants, and steadfastness*

*in virtue - this is the Highest Blessing.*

- 8. Reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude and opportune hearing of the Dhamma - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 9. Patience, obedience, sight of the Samanas (holy men) and religious discussions at due season - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 10. Self-control, holy life, perception of the Noble Truths, and the realisation of Nibbana - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 11. He whose mind does not flutter by contact with worldly contingencies; sorrowless, stainless, and secure - this is the Highest Blessing.*
- 12. To them, fulfilling matters such as these, everywhere invincible, in every way moving happily – these are the Highest Blessings.*

This is also a good answer to those who are facing immense pressure at home and at the workplace. By all means, work hard to provide for your family, but be content with what you have. At the same time, do as many good deeds as you can and avoid anything that hinders your spiritual progress, as that is “the Highest Blessing”.

- 71. When we encourage our friends to practise Buddhism, they say that they are already good people so they do not need to do so. What is your*

*view?*

**ANS.** People who say that they are good, are actually sinners. People who say they are educated, have only learned about worldly matters. Even Buddhists are not Buddhists when they pay lip service to the Dhamma and break their precepts at every turn.

Show me one person who has not told a single lie in his life, or drunk a sip of alcohol and I will call him a good person. Even the act of evading tax is considered stealing! And we directly or indirectly support killing when we eat meat. One more precept is to refrain from sexual misconduct. How many men watch scantily dressed ladies on TV and not have fantasies about them? Nowadays, I may add, even women are guilty of fantasizing about handsome men. People who say that they are good are really deluded about themselves. People who claim to be pure are really full of sin.

Religion is both a boon and a bane to mankind. When human beings are slaves to ego and delusion, they can become intolerant of others who do not profess the same faith as theirs. Throughout history, we have seen many instances of wars being waged in the name of religion, e.g. the Crusades. Yet, without religion to guide us, most of us would feel an emptiness within their hearts that only a spiritual life can fill.

Do not go around trying to persuade your friends to become Buddhists. That is not necessary. Perhaps their

*Kamma* dictates that they would make better Muslims, Taoists, Christians or Hindus than Buddhists. All religions are the same – all teach the same precepts and all religious leaders say the same things: avoid evil, do good, keep your thoughts pure, do unto others what you would want others to do to you, you reap what you sow etc. etc. All teach the same Universal Truth which is not the monopoly of any sect, tradition or religion. If everyone would realise this, no one would go around condemning another's beliefs and the world would be a more peaceful place.

Having said that, I must add here that Buddhism is not a religion in the true sense of the word. Many scholars have called it a philosophy, a way of life, an ethical system etc. All these are just so many names or labels. Like the saying goes, *"What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet"*.

To me, Buddhism is just a type of medicine. When you are sick, you go to the doctor's and he will give you medicine to take. He will also say things like, "Take this blue pill three times a day, avoid spicy food and drink more water." Or something like that. The *Buddha* is our Doctor. Mankind is sick so He has prescribed the most effective medicine for us: the *Middle Path*. Walk along that Path mindfully and you will walk yourself out of *Samsara*. Have a good and safe journey!

**72. How does one face up to and overcome his/her bad Kamma? Can we change our bad Kamma within this lifetime and see the effects as well?**

**ANS.** All of us have to face our *Kammic* retribution. After all, we reap what we sow. However, *Kamma* is not something unchanging as the severity of *Kammic* consequences can be toned down through doing lots of good deeds – **with love and compassion**. Those two factors are essential when doing good deeds. If you are kind to others because you have an expected reward in mind, your merit will be less than if you do the same with a sincere wish to help them. And yes, we can see the effects within this lifetime. *Angulimala* is a good example to quote here. He was a murderer, and killed 999 people before he met the *Buddha*. He was lucky in being able to find a good master to lead him on the right path and by applying sincerity to his practice, *Angulimala* became an *Arahant*. King Asoka is another good example. He was a blood-thirsty king who killed thousands and thousands of people until one day, he realised the extent of his sins and became one of the best monarchs in history.

*Kammic* consequences can also be grouped into four main types :

- a. Fixed *Kamma* – e.g. where there is birth, there is always ageing, sickness and death

- b. Unfixed *Kamma* – e.g. doing more good deeds can help to alleviate *Kammic* burdens
- c. Self or Personal *Kamma* – e.g. having to bear the consequences for our evil actions all by ourselves
- d. Community *Kamma* – e.g. wars and natural disasters

As noted, man can influence his *Kamma* with sincerity and true repentance, but it must be remembered that as long as we remain in *Samsara*, we will never be a hundred percent safe from retribution. Even the *Buddha* Himself was affected by certain *Kammās* although He was in His final birth! Hence, what is important here is to strive for liberation from *Samsara*. Then, the whole tiring wheel of existence with its *Kammic* retributions will end.

**73. *In the Buddha's teachings, we always come across the term 'mind observation'. How can we observe our own minds?***

**ANS.** Understand the concept of impermanence first. Everyone is attached to his or her mind or wrong concepts. The *Buddha* said that everything is impermanent; so do not think that this mind of yours really belongs to you. Be constantly aware of whatever thoughts come to your mind and whatever they may be – whether good or bad, pleasant

or unpleasant – just let them go. That is how to observe your mind.

**74. *What are the Bodhisattva Precepts? Is it advisable for laypeople to accept and uphold these Precepts too?***

**ANS.** The *Bodhisattva Precepts* are 58 in number (10 major, 48 minor) and are explained in the *Brahma Net Sutra*. Unlike the *Precepts* (5, 8, 10, 250 and 348), these *Bodhisattva Precepts* are very difficult to uphold as wrong thoughts are enough to break the rules.

Like the *Sangha*, laypeople can accept and uphold these precepts too, but they should not go around the place boasting that they are practising *Bodhisattva Precepts* and have become *Srotapannas*, *Anagamins*, *Arahants*, *Bodhisattvas* etc. The *Buddha* has said that five hundred years after his *Parinibbana*, no one on earth will be able to tell whether they have achieved a high spiritual level or not. Yet, there are *Sangha* members who encourage the laypeople to be egoistical by calling them *Bodhisattvas*! Such monks and nuns are just trying to earn more donations from the laity. We are ordinary people. We have to do good deeds in order to purify our minds. *Bodhisattvas* are themselves already good inside, and their goodness shines from within them. How can we compare ourselves with them? For example, if a medical student has not

passed his exams, can we call him a doctor?

Then, there are certain *Mahayana* monks and nuns who tell their lay followers that it is okay to just keep two or three *Precepts* instead of the five *Precepts* that the *Buddha* had taught. This is really wrong teaching on their part! They are just diluting the *Buddha's* teachings in order to garner more support from lax devotees. If it has been your ill luck to have met such bad teachers, wake up now. Do not support them anymore. Do not let yourselves be used by such *Sangha* members. Just practise on your own, have love and compassion in your hearts and you would already be acting like a *Bodhisattva* – without announcing the fact everywhere.

**75. *How can we get rid of hatred?***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* has taught us that as we strive along the path to liberation, we must be mindful at all times of the many defilements that invade our thoughts every second, every minute of the day. The mind is the precursor of all our speech and actions, and hence, our ultimate joy or suffering. Because of this, hatred born out of ignorance, jealousy, ill-will or any other reason, must be kept at bay at all costs.

How does one manage to keep hatred away? By installing love and compassion in our hearts and minds. Most of the time, hatred arises because our pride has been

hurt and our indignation is not assuaged. When that happens, just recall the *Buddha's* words:

*" ...however men may speak concerning you, whether in season or out of season, whether appropriately or inappropriately, whether courteously or rudely, whether wisely or foolishly, whether kindly or maliciously, thus, O Bhikkhus, must you train yourselves – unsullied shall our minds remain, neither shall evil words escape our lips. Kind and compassionate ever shall we abide with hearts harbouring no ill-will. And we shall enfold those very persons with streams of loving thoughts unfailing, and forth from them proceeding we shall radiate the whole wide world with constant thoughts of loving-kindness, ample, expanding, measureless, free from enmity, free from ill-will. Thus must you train yourselves."*

Yes, thus must you train yourself from now on.

**76. *What is the meaning of the saying, "when the mind is pure, then the land is pure"?***

**ANS.** When your mind is clean and pure, your perception of the world would also be clean and pure. When your heart is good, whatever you do will be good. If your heart is evil, then, even when you want to do something good, it

will be marred.

Holiness is not a place, or any particular piece of land. It is all in your mind. That is why the *Buddha* could achieve Enlightenment in such a dirty world as ours. Hence, whenever your mind is pure, the place where you are at is also pure.

**77. *How do we know if we have made progress in our cultivation? What signs should we look out for?***

**ANS.** Make it a habit to review each day before you go to sleep. See if you have had a more peaceful day with less greed, less attachment, less anger. See if your life has become simpler. If your answer is yes, then say a prayer of gratitude to the *Buddha* for showing you the *Dhamma*.

**78. *Bhikkhu, I am a Buddhist, my sister is a Christian, my brother is a Taoist. When our father passed away, all of us performed different prayers to help him reach heaven. Where is our father now?***

**ANS.** You think that by performing the various prayers, you have helped him to go to one of the heavens? No, he has gone with his *Kamma*.

**79. *Bhikkhu, I am in love with a girl who is of a different religion. She wants me to give up Buddhism and to convert to her religion. What is your advice?***

**ANS.** You can choose any religion you want, but remember that what is important is to convert your heart to the Truth. No relationship is permanent – no matter how much you love each other, you must part when death comes along. Only Truth is permanent. Regard religions as you would regard a cup of water – religion is the cup and this cup can be replaced with a glass or a mug, but its basic function is to hold water. Truth is the water in the cup. Keep your *Precepts* to keep the water pure.

**80. *I went to an exhibition of Buddha relics recently and wonder if they are real. What is your comment on this?***

**ANS.** Some monks have been displaying *Buddha* relics in several countries, including Malaysia and Singapore over the last few years and one wonders which of the relics are real and which are not. A book has even been published on this issue to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of a temple in Singapore and in the book is this paragraph:

*“According to the Theravada Tipitaka, sacred relics appeared after the cremation of the body of the Enlightened*

*One. Among them were **44 holy tooth relics**. The scriptures reveal that the compassionate Buddha left **four wisdom tooth relics and 40 tooth relics** to the future generations for their veneration. The four eyetooth relics were sent to the Dragon King; the Lord of the Nat Devas (Dhaja Min); Kandra (now Sri Lanka); and Kalika (now China). The rest of the 40 tooth relics were given to **Rahula** for distribution to the human world."*

*(Golden Pagoda Buddhist Temple 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Souvenir Magazine: New Discoveries on the Threshold of Enlightenment, p. 79 (2002) )*

Unfortunately, I doubt the authenticity of the tooth relics that are now in the possession of these monks. In India, a person who has the *Thirty-Two Marks* is regarded as a 'Great Man' (refer to the glossary). If you refer to the list of thirty-two marks, you will see that the *Buddha* did not have 44 teeth. He had only 40 teeth. Furthermore, *Rahula* passed away before the *Buddha* did, so how could he have been given any tooth relics to distribute?

### **81. Is abortion allowed in Buddhism?**

**ANS.** No, it is not. Abortion is killing one's own child and definitely goes against the very first Precept. A foetus has the four elements and consciousness, so if you kill it, you are actually killing its mind as well.

**82. *What can we do to correct the mistake of aborting a baby?***

**ANS.** Repent and do good deeds. Then transfer the merits to the child. You should also chant *Sutras* for the benefit of the child, and try to assuage the hurt and anger that the child must be experiencing due to the abortion.

**83. *What about miscarriages?***

**ANS.** That is also due to *Kamma*. There was once a lady in Vietnam who miscarried her first child. One year later, her second baby was born but died within a few days. The third child died at a young age. So the grandparents consulted a priest who told them to pray and do good deeds. Soon the lady became pregnant again, and a handsome boy was born. He died when he was four years old.

Then, the priest realised that it was actually four different rebirths for just one mind consciousness. So, he had the body of the dead baby cut into four parts and placed one part in a mountain, one in a river and one was buried. The last part was kept by the priest who used black magic to control the baby's mind and stop it from being reborn again. Was the baby reborn again? Yes. How did they know it was the same child? Easy – the baby had

scars on four parts of his body.

**84. *If a person has the bad Kamma of being reborn as a tiger or a crocodile which feeds on human beings or other animals, how is it going to redeem itself so that it can have a better rebirth in the next life?***

**ANS.** If we do not practise properly, and do lots of bad deeds, we can get reborn into lower realms and find it difficult to redeem ourselves. Hence, I am telling you now – be careful! Keep your 5 *Precepts* well; avoid sin like the plague. It is easy to fall down and hard to climb up again.

Anyway, in the animal realm there are still *Bodhisattvas* to help out. The *Buddha* Himself was reborn in the animal realm many, many times and still managed to be good. Tigers, crocodiles, land or sea animals – all of them have their own rules to abide by. These act like our *Precepts* in ensuring law and order in the animal kingdom. If the animals follow the rules well, then slowly they will be able to attain human birth again.

**85. *I have always tried to be good, but I find myself treated badly by others. Why is this so?***

**ANS.** This is because you had ill-treated others in a past life and they have come back for revenge. When bad things

happen to you, do not think that you did not deserve it. Accept the situation calmly, telling yourself that you are only repaying an old *Kammic* debt.

Once a lady came crying to me, complaining that her best friend had betrayed her and run off with her husband. She said, "I have always been good to her, but she does not appreciate my friendship at all!" I said to her, "Do you know why? She was your daughter in a previous life – a foetus in your womb and you aborted her. Now, she has come back to make your family suffer. Luckily for you, she is not asking for your life in return!"

Just the other day, I met a little boy who has twenty-four fingers. His father is a butcher and this boy was once an animal that had been slaughtered by the father. Out of anger and hatred, the animal has been reborn into this man's family in order to take revenge.

Sometimes, you have to face *Kammic* retribution within one lifetime too. Here's a true story to illustrate the point. A young Vietnamese refugee started a new life in Melbourne as a chef. One day, during the busy lunch hour, he suddenly saw that instead of beef, he was cooking human flesh in the wok! At that moment, his boss rushed into the kitchen with the latest lunch order. The young man heard a voice calling from the wok, "Kill him! Kill him!" Without a second thought, he threw the wok full of hot oil and cooking beef at his boss! His boss ended up in hospital

and the young man was sent to a mental asylum.

I visited him there and asked him why he had done such a silly thing, and he told me a sad story. He had escaped to Australia with a boatful of Vietnamese refugees. On route to Australia, they ran out of food. To survive, they had to resort to cannibalism. The young man himself had to eat the flesh of his dead friend. At first, the captain ordered that only the dead people were to be eaten, but after a few more days, even the dying ones were quickly drowned in order to feed the rest. By the time the survivors were found and rescued, only a handful of them were left on board the ship. It became clear to me then that the dead refugees had returned to take revenge on him.

**86. *Why did the Buddha have to undergo so much suffering for six years before He achieved Enlightenment?***

**ANS.** Because He wanted to show us that the Truth is not something easy to understand, or a commodity that you can buy. It is priceless. Only when we face discomforts, hunger and thirst will we understand the sufferings of others.

Even patriarchs like *Bodhidharma* who stayed in a cave for nine long years and Hui Ke who had to kneel for days in deep snow before cutting off his arm, were willing to undergo such suffering to show the world how

impermanent and unimportant our human bodies are compared to the *Dhamma*. If we can admire them for what they did, we can understand why the *Buddha* underwent so much suffering for Enlightenment.

**87. *How can we develop our wisdom?***

**ANS.** The *Buddha* asks us to keep the *Precepts* in order to be mindful, and from that, wisdom will arise. A clear mind without worries or fears will acquire wisdom naturally.

Some people think it is easy to keep just 5 Precepts. No, it is not! It is in fact, quite difficult. Many highly educated people cannot keep them at all! Many businessmen cannot keep the precept of not stealing as they tend to cheat on their tax returns. They also break the precept of not telling lies each time they misrepresent the quality of their goods in order to make a sale. Or employees – how many of them really do their work conscientiously without wasting time (breaking the precept of not stealing) or gossiping (breaking the precept of abstaining from false speech)? And what about corruption that is so rife everywhere? The list goes on and on.

Learn to practise love and compassion with wisdom too. If you love without wisdom, you can do more harm than good. An example would be to give money to beggars out of pity without first checking to see if they are real beggars or just fake ones out to make money the easy way.

**88. *During the Vietnam war, some monks killed themselves in public. What is your comment on this?***

**ANS.** These monks broke the first *Precept* of not killing any living being! There was even the case of one of these monks who recruited a fellow monk to help him die by pouring petrol all over the former and then lighting the fire!

Everything is due to *Kamma*. The Vietnam war was also due to *Kammic* debts that Vietnam had to repay. Many people died in that war and even some of those who managed to escape by boat drowned en route to another country. We cannot escape our *Kamma*. These monks thought that they were dying for the *Dhamma*, but they were wrong! The Buddha meant to kill their desires, not sacrifice their bodies for the country's *Kamma*. They were not being heroes, but zeroes in their understanding of the *Dhamma*. They were just being foolish and leaders with hidden agendas used them for their own political designs.

We should never commit suicide. People kill themselves thinking that they are escaping from their troubles, but they actually commit a grave sin. Firstly, they break the *Precept* of not killing. Secondly, they break the *Precept* of not stealing. Why do I say that? They have stolen their parents' love and care and borrowed the four elements from Mother Earth without using them to serve the community properly. They won't easily get another

body after what they have done; hence these people tend to become wandering spirits after death. This body is made up of the four elements and given to man to cultivate the way to the Truth. Do not kill it. Kill, instead, the anger, greed and delusions that tie us down to *Samsara*.

**89. *Bhikkhu, we have heard of monks who burn marks on their bald scalps and some even burn their fingers to express their sincerity. What is your comment?***

**ANS.** I met two young Vietnamese monks from New Delhi University when I was in *Bodhigaya*. One of them had burned his little finger as *Dana* to His Holiness Dalai Lama. When they finally got to meet His Holiness, he was shocked at what the monk had done. He said that he could not accept any *Dana* that would involve hurting or harming any sentient beings in any way. I heard that His Holiness also said he could not bear the idea of accepting the *Dana* of human flesh, much less smell it burning!

Here, I should tell you a story from my past. In 1992, two famous monks, Ven. Thich Tue Si and Ven. Thich Tri Sieu were sentenced to death by the Vietnamese government for political reasons. Thousands of angry Vietnamese people, including *Sangha* members, gathered at Canberra, Australia for a three-day demonstration against the Vietnamese government. I was among them. Many of them vowed to fast for three days, and I myself did too. I added another vow – if the Vietnamese government did not

revoke the death sentence on the two monks, I would burn myself to death at the end of my three-day fast. Vietnam has been a Buddhist country for nearly 2,000 years and should not have its history tainted with the blood of the *Sangha*. It would be too great a sin for the future generations of Vietnamese people to bear.

On the second day, I went back to Ven. Thich Quang Ba's temple in Canberra to take a bath, and I stumbled upon the monks there eating and drinking without any sense of shame! I was shocked and disgusted! Later, I found out that Ven. Thich Quang Ba himself was involved in politics too. It then occurred to me that if the Vietnamese government really did not release the two monks, I would have to burn myself to death and these monks would surely use my corpse to make more money for themselves. Luckily, the Vietnamese government gave way to international pressure and commuted the death sentences of the two monks to life imprisonment. The story has a happy ending as both of them have now been released from jail.

That day, I learnt something very valuable. If I had burned myself up then, I would have had no body with which to search for the *Dhamma*. It was better to burn my ignorance instead. What do you think?

As for the masters who burn marks on the scalps of their novices, I have this to say – the *Buddha* did not mean for them to practise in this way. He was actually telling all

monks and nuns to burn their desires, hatred and ignorance. These monks and nuns think that the more marks they have on their heads, the wiser they are proven to be – but they have misunderstood the *Buddha*! When will they learn?

**90. *Please explain Nibbana to us, Bhikkhu.***

**ANS.** *Nibbana* is one of the most misunderstood words in the world! The first person who spoke of it has already achieved Enlightenment, so we can't ask Him to come and explain it to us. Now, all the *Sangha* members and even the laypeople just repeat the word as if they understand it, but in the process, misunderstand it even more!

*Nibbana* is no land, no place, NOWHERE but it is a WHEN. It is when people have no more attachments to anything, any place. The roots of greed and ignorance are cut off and there are no reattachments to anything. As such, *Nibbana* appears everywhere in the Universe – everywhere attachments are cut! When they were still in the world, the *Arahants* brought *Nibbana* everywhere they went, because they brought peace with them. Monks and nuns today talk about *Nibbana* but look into the *ang paws* you give them, and tell you what they fancy eating for lunch or dinner! Such *Sangha* members know nothing about *Nibbana*.

*So, just practise the Way of the Dhamma yourself, keep the Precepts and when you reach the stage of*

*Nibbana*, you will know for sure then what it is all about.

**91. *Please explain the concept of 'Emptiness'.***

**ANS.** The concept of Emptiness means to see everything but not be attached to anything. It does not mean emptying your mind like some meditation masters say to do, or to remove all images of the *Buddha* from sight so that you would not be attached to them. Such people claim that they do not want to see the images of the *Buddha* while they meditate, yet they set their minds on becoming future *Buddhas* themselves! Ironic, isn't it? So, whether or not there are images of the *Buddha* around when you meditate is not a problem – it is the meditator or his teacher who is the real problem.

**92. *Would you call love and compassion a form of attachment too?***

**ANS.** Yes, if you are attached to the one who is being loved.

**93. *In that case, does it mean that Bodhisattvas who practise love and compassion are also filled with attachments?***

**ANS.** No. Just like Mother Earth, *Bodhisattvas* love with Universal Love. That kind of love is unconditional, completely natural. Humans have narrow minds and we usually do good deeds not out of pure love, but in the hope

of gaining some form of benefit. When the *Buddha* was still a *Bodhisattva* in His previous lives, he performed acts of love and compassion selflessly. Take the time when he saw a tiger about to devour its own cubs, and he sacrificed himself so that the cubs would be spared. He did that not because he wanted the merits that would thus be His, but because His love was unconditional. It did not matter to Him whether or not the action would lead Him to become a *Bodhisattva*. How many people today can lay claim to being similarly loving and compassionate?

**94. *Can servants be hired to work in the temples?***

**ANS.** No. Monks and nuns are not allowed to have servants working in the temples for them. Anyone wishing to help the *Sangha* must do so **voluntarily**, without coercion or payment, and his merit will be great indeed. If work done in the temple is to be paid for, this will, in due course, result in internal fighting and jealousies among the helpers themselves. Lay devotees must not consider hiring these workers on behalf of the *Sangha* either.

**95. *If a temple does not earn money for its upkeep, how can it be run?***

**ANS.** We have to trust the *Triple Gem*. The *Bodhisattvas* give unconditionally, so we must try to do the same thing too. If you do not have the good *Kamma*, you would not even have the chance to see the *Dhamma*, so don't spoil it

all by making it into a money spinning machine.

**96. *How should we celebrate Wesak Day?***

**ANS.** *Wesak Day* is to commemorate the Birthday, Enlightenment Day and *Parinibbana* Day of the *Lord Buddha*, and thus is to Buddhists, the most important day of the year. Without Him, we would not have had such a great teacher to show us the *Dhamma*, hence we owe it to Him to celebrate this day in an appropriate manner. By that, I do not mean hosting noisy, gaudy events or food and fun fairs, because these have nothing to do with the *Buddha's* aim in being reborn. He came to teach us to contemplate, to live calmly, to face life with equanimity and to strive for liberation from all attachments. In line with His ideals, we should spend *Wesak Day* doing just that. We should spend the day in prayer and contemplation, peace and quiet, sitting and thinking about what our *Great Teacher* has taught us. Remember Him and feel the gratitude well up in your hearts. I think He would appreciate that more than to have noisy processions organised in His name.

I also observe that many Malaysian and Singaporean Buddhists like to bathe an image of the *Buddha* as a baby on *Wesak Day* and then, to place *ang pows* in the donation boxes – they are actually paying for the chance to bathe the image. I do not understand why they think they are worthy enough to do that. After all, the *Buddha* is pure, while we

are not. The devotees should realise that it is better for them to keep the *Precepts* and cleanse their minds instead. Some *Mahayana* monks started this practice to draw crowds to their temples and so earn more *ang paws* from them. It is so sad that the *Sangha* has allowed this Holy Day to become the most profitable day of the year.

**97. *Bhikkhu, why was Buddhism lost in India? Will Buddhism return as a major religion in India?***

**ANS.** Yes, I believe it will. Even the *Bodhisattva* Dr. Ambedkar who passed away 50 years ago said that the people of India will return to Buddhism one day.

To answer your first question, let us consider the following points about the history of Buddhism:

- a. *Buddha's* time on earth – He spent 45 years teaching the *Buddha's Path* to the people. It was the best of all times for Buddhism.
- b. King Asoka's reign (270 – 230 BC) – He spent most of his time turning the *Dhamma Wheel*, and because of his efforts, Buddhism was spread far and wide.
- c. Nalanda University – This monastery-cum-university was set up in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and lasted till the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. It was during this period in Buddhist history when the *Sangha* began to leave their forest abodes to stay indoors. These monks turned to

studying, not practising, the *Dhamma*.

- d. Present day – Most of the *Sangha* members just build temples.

So, the conclusion here is clear to see – it is the people who make or break a religion and it is also the people who will patch it up again. We need to do that patching up right now.

Recently, I was in India to help organise the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of Dr. Ambedkar's life. When he was alive, he was instrumental in jolting many of the Buddhists in India from their stupor and he is widely revered as a *Bodhisattva*. He was educated overseas, yet he did not bring his worldly knowledge from those foreign lands back to his people – he only brought back to them the *3 Refuges* and *5 Precepts!* (see *Appendix*)

Dr. Ambedkar once predicted that Buddhism will be revived in a big way in India within 50 years of his passing. Well, some devotees pointed out to me that India is still largely Hindu today, thus implying that Dr. Ambedkar was inaccurate in his prophesy.

I had this to say to them, and I say the same to you now: Dr. Ambedkar was referring to the *Buddha Nature* that all of us have, but which so many are not willing to acknowledge. The people of India do not have to be converted from Hinduism to Buddhism before they can be called Buddhists – all they need is to realise their *Buddha*

*Nature.* That would be enough to qualify them as Buddhists. At the anniversary ceremony that lasted for 3 days, the whole town of Nagpur was flooded with millions of people (Indians as well as from around the world) who had come to join in the commemorative event – isn't that a good indication that the *Buddha Nature* has been reawakened in India? Does that answer your second question?

**98. *Some people say that they will wait till they retire before they can practise Buddhism properly. What is your comment?***

**ANS.** Such people are very foolish. They are the ones who think that bad things and death will happen to the neighbours and never to themselves. No one can tell how much time we have left in our present lives to cultivate the Path. Some of us will definitely not be around anymore by tomorrow. So, do not ever waste time. It is very difficult to obtain a human birth in the first place, so it would be a pity to throw away any opportunity that may come by for us to seek Liberation.

The *Buddha* once scooped up some soil with his fingernail and asked his disciples which was more, the soil on his fingernail or that in the whole world. His disciples answered that the soil on his fingernail was so little that it was incomparable to that in the whole world. The *Buddha* then said that in the same sense only a few beings are able

to secure human form whereas far too many beings fall into the lower realms of the hells, hungry ghosts and animals. (*Darukkhandha Sutra*) So, please take heed of this and strive for Liberation now. Do not wait till it is too late.

One more point here - to be able to hear the *Buddha's* teachings, one has to be born as a human being at a time and place where the *Dhamma* is taught. You are now in that fortunate position, so listen well and learn.

**99. Do you have any last words for us, Bhikkhu?**

**ANS.** When I 'returned from death' in 2003, I went home to Vietnam where I re-ordained my father as a monk together with eleven other members of my family who entered short-term as well as long-term monkhood. Four generations in my family followed the True *Dhamma* and I was very, very pleased. Last year, my father passed away after I had given him his last blessings, and I have no doubt that he is now in Paradise.

Now, I have even happier news to announce - the Heart for Peace mission has finally returned to India.

Patriarch Minh Dang Quang was continuing *Shakyamuni Buddha's Dhamma* and it was his heartfelt wish to bring it back to the land of its birth. I have had to work very hard to fulfil that wish, and at times, I feared dying myself before it could be accomplished. Now, the Heart for Peace mission has been established in India. I spent the *Vassa* this year in Nagpur with our *Sangha* and our

supporters there said that it was the best *Vassa* they had ever witnessed. During the *Vassa*, one of my students, Bhikkhuni Hai Lien passed away due to illness. All along, she had expressed the wish to die for the Truth Wheel in India and when it finally came true, that touched the hearts of *devas* and humans alike. As such, the *Dhamma Wheel* has been turned successfully. It has not been easy with all the obstacles that we have had to face, but I feel confident that the true tradition of the *Buddha Dhamma* has finally come home.

I hope all Buddhist countries understand that we need to build the *Dhamma* in India, not to show that we belong to certain sects, traditions, cultures or renowned temples but to build the *Vinaya-dhamma* in the hearts of the people.

I thank my grand-teacher, the most Ven. Thich Giac Luong of San Jose, California and all our supporters around the world for helping to make this come true. Please support the Heart for Peace *Sangha* in India.

## PART 8: GEMS FROM BHIKKHU

-  The *Buddha's* teachings require a balancing act of the mind and the heart. Wisdom and compassion must go together. Compassion without wisdom leads to blindness, and wisdom without compassion makes a person as ugly as sin because one can misuse one's brains for selfish gratification only.
-  Chanting *Sutras* means to repeat the Truth with understanding and for practising. The value of Truth is very high.
-  Patience is of great importance to a cultivator. Once you lose your temper, the harm done is like a forest destroyed by fire.
-  In Buddhism, there is no room for class or caste.
-  A monk cannot be called one just because he is wearing a yellow robe. Only the way in which he practises what the *Buddha* has taught will show the world whether he is a true cultivator.
-  The heavenly beings look at us eating meat and fish and wonder why we like to eat earth.
-  There are two kinds of food – the first is food for the physical body, which is temporary, and the other is food of the *Dhamma*, which we can eat forever till we realise the Truth.
-  Whoever can control his stomach can control his greed.
-  When your mind is filled with desires, you are like a monkey. You jump up and down excitedly while running after money and when you fail to earn more, you give way to anger! Then you forget everything, get blinded by ignorance and you commit evil! So, when you feel the monkey of desires coming up in your mind, chase it away. So, which do you prefer – money, monkey or monk?

-  When you look into the mirror, remind yourself that the person staring back at you is only a combination of the four elements.
-  The *Dhamma* is medicine for the ailments of mankind.
-  *Nibbana* does not mean the end of existence for the physical body. The *Buddha* achieved *Nibbana* under the *Bodhi* tree, and yet lived for another 45 years to teach the *Dhamma*. Instead, *Nibbana* means the end of attachments, cravings, anger, ignorance and delusions.
-  People have asked me why *bhikkhus* are barefoot. I tell them that the *Buddha* also went barefoot. Besides, if we can leave our families and homes behind for the sake of the *Dhamma*, can't we leave our shoes behind?
-  All religions teach their devotees to follow the *Five Precepts*. All religions are good. Only we human beings have given our religions bad names.
-  Whatever we do, just do and let go. Do and let go.
-  Ego is very dangerous. It is easier to remove a mountain than to remove our ego.
-  The Earth is non-self in nature. It does not know it is Earth. Only people know it as 'my planet, my country and my land' and kill each other over manmade borders.
-  Good and bad *Kamma* are always with you – even in the toilet.
-  War is not holy. Holiness comes only from winning the war within ourselves.
-  The Americans call themselves Big Brother. They do not understand that a Big Brother is not one who produces weapons to kill others, but one who has a Big Heart of Morality.

-  I don't want you to believe me but to think for yourself. Do not be a slave to anyone or anything. Not even to a *Sutra*. Be free. The *Buddha's Teachings* are for practising, not believing.
-  Look at our planet Earth. What is it doing? Nothing. Yet it supports all of us, whether we are rich or poor, clever or stupid – it has no loss or gain from our ways.
-  Everything is impermanent. Work less, spend less, worry less and spend more time on the *Dhamma*.
-  Leaders who wage war for name, fame and money are not heroes but zeroes.  
One monk asked his master for help, saying that he was not able to practise. The master asked him who had tied him up. He understood and realised that he had tied himself up with his own desires.
-  Many monks come to Malaysia and Singapore to earn *angpows* in exchange for sprinkling devotees with 'holy water'. Once, one of them asked me to do the job for him when he went to see a doctor over an ailment. I said to him, "Why? For red packets? This is not the work of a monk. We can't touch money." He replied, "No, you don't need to take the money. Just do it for me. I'll take the money." I told him I would rather cut my hand off or be kicked out of his temple.
-  I ask this of the international sangha – does the Buddha ask you to keep the Vinaya or keep money? If you want to inherit the Dhamma, keep the Vinaya!
-  Most people worry about money but when they were born, they came empty handed. They only came with their merits.
-  Whether rich or poor, clever or stupid, we have to die someday. Why then must we spend so much time looking for money and not seeking liberation from *Samsara*?

-  Nothing on this Earth belongs to you. What you have now is just a big loan from the Universe for your temporary stay here.
-  The body does not know suffering. Only the mind does. Cut the mind from the body and you will have no more pain.
-  From impermanence, strive for permanence.
-  The *Buddha* and His *Arahants* lived 'lives of Precepts'. The *Precepts* were like their second skin, their second nature. The unenlightened have to make a conscious effort to be mindful of their Precepts and often feel suffocated by them. The enlightened ones do not have such trouble – the Precepts fit them like gloves. Strive to be like them.
-  Some claim that one *Sutra* is better than the rest, while others may disagree, saying that another *Sutra* is the *King of Sutras*. *Sutras* are different types of medicine for different types of mental defilements. Whatever your worst defilement may be, the *Sutra* that can cure you is the *King of Sutras*! Hence, no one *Sutra* is above another.
-  Keep in mind that each of us has a future *Buddha* within us – be careful not to harm anyone.
-  Keeping the *Precepts* is like driving on the road. There are so many vehicles besides yours on the road – all of them of different colours, types, all going at different speeds, but if the drivers do not follow the traffic rules, collisions are bound to happen.
-  Do not spend too much money building big temples that would most likely end up as tourist destinations. Instead, spend time and effort on building the temple in your heart. Make it as big as you can, and keep the doors open twenty-four hours a day.
-  Wherever the *Wheel of Dhamma* is turned; that is where

the temple is.



We are all Mr. Pregnant – even little children and old people. We are pregnant with desires, anger and ignorance. All these are always in our minds. Fortunately, we are also pregnant with the *Buddha Nature*. That pregnancy will be over as soon as Mr. Truth is born.



I teach people how to die – not how to live. They must ‘die’ their desires and ignorance. Learn to die now; do not wait till you are in your coffins when it will be too late for regrets.



People say that my words are too strong for them to stomach, but they do not realise that they have been taking the wrong medication for so long that only a stronger dose of the *Truth* can flush out all their toxins.



Don't complain about your *Kamma*. You do good; you get good. You do bad; you get bad.



I do not pray for you to be billionaires, but I pray that you will learn how to leave this world full of merits.



A lot of doctors, lawyers and highly educated people tell me that they know everything, but I ask them: Do you know where you will go when you die?



We fear death because we do not know where it will take us. It is not that we have no visas, passports or tickets to take us to *Paradise*, heaven or any other planet – rather, we have tied ourselves up in *Samsara* with our desires and ignorance.



Language is a very limited tool of communication. Only the language of love and compassion is the true language of communication.



Everyone thinks that they have only one stomach. This is wrong! We have three stomachs! A lower stomach for our food, a middle one for love and compassion (our heart) and an upper stomach for the food of the *Dhamma* (wisdom).



There is a mobile toilet that you carry around and care for

day by day – your stomach. It is so dirty and smelly, yet you love it so much. How shameful!



I spent my 2006 vassa in India and for 21 days I did not eat anything but the *Dhamma*. That was my sustenance for the duration of my fast. That was more valuable than any delicacies that anyone could give me.



Ordinary food goes through the bowels and out through the rear end, but Wisdom feeds the mind and stays there.



A rich man told me that he has been working very hard all his life to feed his family. I told him that he has been working very hard all his life to feed his desires.



Man's stomach is the biggest graveyard in the world. There you can find buried all kinds of land and sea animals.



Those who see the Truth but do not practise it are worse than those who are ignorant!



There are no *Mahayana*, *Theravada*, or *Vajrayana*. There is only the Yana of Liberation from Dukkha (suffering).



The best way to protect your family, country and religion is to keep the *Precepts*.



If you know all the sutras by heart, but do not keep the *Vinaya (Precepts)*, then you are still ignorant. If you keep the *Vinaya* without knowledge of the *Sutras*, then you can solve all your problems.



There are three types of enemies:

1. Wars – both from external threats and civil strife,
2. Enemies from past lives born to create chaos in your family or in the *Sangha*, and
3. Your mind – from this comes all your hatred, anger, greed and delusion.

Of the three, the third is your greatest enemy. Do not let it destroy you.

- ❧ One of the most tragic things in this world is this: that Man should have lived trillions of lives but still does not know his mind, where he comes from, where he is going and what he really wants.
- ❧ The human mind is so strong – it can fly an aeroplane, it can travel to the moon. But it is still not as strong as *Kamma*.
- ❧ We do not only come from our mothers' small wombs. No, we also come from the womb of Mother Earth; hence we are all brothers and sisters.
- ❧ People live, work and die for Mr. Greedy. That's why they cry on their deathbed and as soon as they are reborn.
- ❧ Most people would teach you how to manage your material life. Better than such people would be one who teaches you how to control your mind.
- ❧ King Asoka built 84,000 stupas and earned a lot of outer merits for doing that. Yet, that is nothing compared to one who searches for the Truth.
- ❧ Use your body for the *Dhamma*; like a vehicle to carry the *Dhamma*. Keep your heart full of love for everyone. In this way, your body becomes a temple that can move and is more priceless than any temples built anywhere in the world.
- ❧ To have wisdom is to have good luck. With wisdom, no one can cheat you, and you will cheat no one, because you will realise that to do so would be cheating a future *Buddha*.
- ❧ Many monks and nuns today do not know how to build up their wisdom through the *Vinaya* and meditation; hence they go to the universities to learn how to manage their temple businesses.
- ❧ The business monks are very lucky that Jesus is not around to chase them out of their temples like He did in the synagogue. (see *Appendix – Mark 11.15 – 17*)

-  Instead of displaying many images of the *Buddha* on your altar, just have one – that is enough. Do not waste your money. Do not pray for good luck, but for peace and harmony in your home.
-  In order to receive treatment at a private hospital, a down payment has to be made. In order to receive treatment for Mankind's sickness, just cut off your attachments to family and property.
-  Many people share the costs of building temples, but they do not share the building of the *Dhamma*. It is not their fault – the *Sangha* members do not tell them so.
-  Many monks and nuns who go wrong in their cultivation are also not to be blamed – it is their own teachers who did not teach them properly, and this will be passed down all the way to the future generations of *Sangha* members.
-  Offering *Dana* will help you to build up your material merits, but these also have expiry dates. However, the *Dhamma* teaches you to realise the Truth beyond the material life and this lasts forever.
-  The best type of *Dana* is to give away your desires, hatred and ignorance.
-  All over the world, people are dying from thirst and hunger because they do not know how to drink and eat the *Vinaya* and *Dhamma*, and when death finally comes, they return to the lower realms.
-  A saffron robe does not make a monk – only his keeping of his *Precepts* does.
-  The highest blessing a man can have is that of knowledge. The highest knowledge a man can have is that of the Truth.
-  Abstain from meat eating. Meat is only food for the stomach, not for your mind and it brings *Kammic*

consequences.

-  Do not kill animals and human beings. The body is only made up of the four elements. Instead, steal and kill their greed.
-  Divorce is painful. Bankruptcy is painful too. To be an *Arahant*, you must divorce all ego, anger and hatred and 'sell away' your attachments from trillions of lives. Are you strong enough to do that?
-  Our life is like an on-going video movie. We must 'pause' the show so that we can see ourselves clearly and understand deeply.
-  Someone went to a wise monk and asked, "Is there hell?" The old monk answered, "No." Then, someone else asked him the same question and this time, the old monk said, "Yes." Why did he give conflicting answers to the same question? The answer is simple. If you have achieved true understanding of the *Dhamma*, there is no more hell for you. If you are still chained down by attachments, worries and cares, you are not free – in fact, you are in the hell of your mind!
-  To the poor, to have a million dollars is to be rich, but Jesus said that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. (*Matthew Chapter 19.16 – 24*) (see *Appendix*) The Buddha has also said that the poor need dana and the rich need to go homeless. They taught the same Truth, didn't They?
-  Ho Chi Minh won the war in Vietnam, but two million people had to die for his victory. A *Bhikkhu* should only live to fight the war against his desires and ignorance. Only desires and ignorance will be killed for his victory.
-  Vietnam made history when we defeated the Americans and many people called us heroes. Compared to that, our victory would be a trillion times better if we can destroy our ignorance.

-  Aggressive nations subdue other countries with weapons and occupy the minds of the people with religion. True Buddhists just wish to subdue their desires with Wisdom and occupy their minds with Peace.
-  Pol Pot used weapons to slaughter 1.8 million Cambodians. The Truth Messenger uses the weapon of Wisdom to slaughter greed, anger and ignorance.
-  People are really foolish with their money. Some pay thousands of dollars to have their names engraved on the walls of temples, others pay thousands more to be the first person to hit the big gong in a temple on New Year's Day. Such people do not realise that instead of gaining good merits, such practices will only give them good '**demerits**'.
-  I do not wish to build temples on Earth. Everything is impermanent. I only wish to teach my students how to build homes in Paradise, and if possible, to achieve *Buddhahood* in this life itself.
-  The Way of the *Buddha* does not involve working with money. There is no need to pay membership fees and no need for letters to be sent to appeal for donations. The Way of the *Buddha* is free of charge.
-  There is a beautiful temple-cum-guesthouse in *Bodhigaya* built with donations from Vietnamese devotees all over the world. However, Indian and Tibetan devotees are not allowed into the temple. I asked to speak to the abbot of the temple and asked him whether he was running a temple or a guesthouse. Either way, no one should be kept out. Temples are meant for everyone, and guesthouses should never turn away paying guests. Since then, I have received news that the abbot is now busy raising funds in Thailand to build a similar temple there. Sad, isn't it?
-  Do not worry about the end of the world. Worry instead about the end of Wisdom and Compassion because that would lead you to the lower realms.

 Out of every 10,000 Buddhists, only one wants to learn the *Dhamma*. Out of every 10,000 Buddhists who want to learn the *Dhamma*, only one tries to understand it thoroughly. Out of every 10,000 Buddhists who try to understand the *Dhamma* thoroughly, only one will reach the level of true practice. Out of every 10,000 Buddhists who truly practise, only one will achieve to the Right Path. Are you one of them?

 Nowadays, political leaders use religions to control the minds of the people. The result is worldwide strife, hatred and wars and the world turns ugly. War is never holy. The wise must keep one eye closed to perceived faults in their fellowmen but open their hearts and minds to understanding and tolerance. That is our only hope for World Peace.

 The *Sangha* must remember that every penny donated by the laity is hard-earned money. As such, it is a great sin for the *Sangha* to spend such money for their own comfort and pleasure.

 Do not think that the poor behave like hungry ghosts – the rich are worse. The richer a person is, the more likely it is for him to be greedy for even greater riches.

 Miscreant monks and nuns claim that they touch money with their hands only, and not with their hearts and minds. They say this to mislead others into thinking that they are still pure even as they count their money. Minh Dang Quang said that such *Sangha* members do not know where their hearts are, and that we cannot see someone's mind except through their actions.

 Some monks say that they eat but their minds do not know it and that they keep money, but their minds do not keep it. These people need medical treatment – there is something badly wrong with them!

 All your bank accounts will be closed with your last breath. Only your account in the Bank of Merits will go with you to

your next rebirth.

 Some children are being used by religious leaders to go from house to house to win converts. This is not necessary. There is no need to convert anyone from one sect to another, one religion to another. Knock on the doors of hearts and minds instead to teach the people not to commit sin but to do good, and the doors of Heaven and Paradise will open for you.

 People ask me why I go barefoot. We are born unshod. Trees have roots that reach down into the earth and branches that reach upwards to the sky. If you put a tree into a small pot, its growth will be stunted and it will become a bonsai, not a tree. Similarly, if *bhikkhus* want to deepen their Wisdom, they must be in contact with heaven and earth.

 Black represents hell, evil, darkness, sin, ignorance. Why then do some *Mahayana Sangha* and laity wear black robes at religious functions?

 All of us are VIPs. Very Important People? No, Very IMPERMANENT People!

 We come from our desires, not from our mothers' wombs.

 The highest mountain we can climb is that of EGO.

 The value of Truth is very high. Let those who would seek it climb to the top of the well and see the open space.

 People ask me why I go from a rich country to serve in poor countries, while so many other monks go from poor countries to rich ones. I tell them what the *Buddha* has said in the *Dai Bao Tich Sutra* – if we do good deeds among the rich or even in heaven for 200,000 years, the merit accrued cannot be compared to serving the poor for just 1/60 second.

 If I am wrong, tell me and I will change for my own benefit.

If you are wrong, you should listen to me and change for your own benefit.

-  Money earned through corrupt means must not be used to buy food for holy people and family members or to be given to temples or churches because such food is poisonous.
-  Many monks do not allow the Truth Messenger to stay in their temples because they are afraid that it would affect their rice-bowls.
-  A medical doctor can heal human bodies, but he cannot purge the three poisons from them – the poisons of desires, hatred and ignorance. Only a Mankind Doctor can do that.
-  Lawyers know the country's law and even international law, but the Truth Messenger knows the Universal Law.
-  Stealing from the Triple Gem is a sin worse than killing 84,000 parents.
-  Religion is like a bottle of medicinal oil – once the pain is gone, we throw it away.
-  To the poor, a billionaire is a rich man, but in heaven, a billionaire cannot even buy a cup of water.
-  Anything on earth can be changed – the sun can even become the moon, but the Truth remains unchanged for those who practise.
-  Truth hurts no one but ignorance.

## APPENDIX

### 1. Good News Bible, Luke Chapter 23.39 – 43:

39. *One of the criminals hanging there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"*

40. *The other one, however, rebuked him, saying, "Don't you fear God? You received the same sentence he did."*

41. *Ours, however, is only right, because we are getting what we deserve for what we did; but he has done no wrong."*

42. *And he said to Jesus, "Remember me, Jesus, when you come as King!"*

43. *Jesus said to him, "I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me."*

### 2. Good News Bible, Matthew Chapter 19.16 – 24:

16. *Once a man came to Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what good thing must I do to receive eternal life?"*

17. *"Why do you ask me concerning what is good?" answered Jesus. "There is only One who is good. Keep the commandments if you want to enter life."*

18. *"What commandments?" he asked.*

19. *Jesus answered, "Do not commit murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not accuse anyone falsely; respect your father and your mother; and love your neighbour as you love yourself."*

20. *"I have obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else do I need to do?"*

21. *Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me."*

22. *When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he was very rich.*

23. *Jesus then said to his disciples, "I assure you: it will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven.*

24. *I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."*

3. Good News Bible, Mark Chapter 11.15 – 19:

*15. When they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple and began to drive out all those who were buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the stools of those who sold pigeons,*

*16. and he would not let anyone carry anything through the temple courtyards.*

*17. He then taught the people: “It is written in the Scriptures that God said, ‘My temple will be called a house of prayer for the people of all nations.’ But you have turned it into a hideout for thieves!”*

*18. The chief priests and the teachers of the Law heard of this, so they began looking for some way to kill Jesus. They were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.*

*19. When evening came, Jesus and his disciples left the city.*

## Mr. Kamma

(A song written by Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu,  
and dedicated to the world)

We live short lives, we live long,  
We are schooled, we are not,  
We seek joy but pain we see,  
We do not know who God might be.

God follows us whether in life or death,  
God is with us, in and out of our minds,  
Sometimes He can be so hurtful,  
And yet, sometimes He is so kind.

Who is God? Where is He?  
Why is He so powerful but unjust?  
One is rewarded; another has hell on earth,  
Who is God? Tell me so that I can learn.

Oh no! No one knows,  
Even when we have faith, and the preachers say so.  
Oh no! No one knows,  
That's why Bhikkhu is here to show,  
God is with us all day and night,  
God is with us dead or alive.  
God is Mr. Kamma – aha, aha, Mr. Kamma.

'Live' is 'Evil' when spelt backwards,  
'God' becomes 'Dog' in the same way,  
Oh yes! Mr. Kamma, now I know,  
He is good and bad – so this, I'll say:

Good Kamma follows those who love,  
Bad Kamma comes with ignorance,  
Seek ye first the root of wisdom  
Or face the misery that Bad Kamma brings.

He doesn't care if you are king or slave,  
He doesn't care if you are rich or poor,

The Law of Truth is not bought or sold,  
He only gives way when the 3 poisons are gone.

God, I know you are Mr. Kamma,  
You serve the good, the bad, the lovely, the ugly,  
When we see your true face in our lives,  
We live with no fear, and deathless will be.



### **Mr. Pregnant**

(A poem by Bhikkhu Buddha Dhatu)

Not only animals or women  
carry pregnant wombs,  
All human and sentient beings  
are pregnant with desires.

Engineers give birth to vehicles,  
Mothers give birth to babies,  
or kill them through abortion.  
Filled with hatred, intelligent people  
are pregnant with their enemies in their minds.  
They give birth to weapons to play the game,  
Their past life family members must die.  
How ugly is Pregnancy against Humankind!

Mr. Pregnant, Mr. Pregnant, we are of the same mind,  
Why aren't you born of Compassion to help mankind?  
Why do you keep anger and ignorance in your mind?  
When we must learn to kill only Desires.

Be kind – act, talk and think with Love,  
With Compassion, the Wisdom is born in your mind.  
Truth gets born, Ignorance has to die,  
I will call you the Universal Peace and Compassion King.

## GLOSSARY

- Anagami / Anagamin** - *A non-returner; those who are in the third stage of achieving Nibbana*
- Angpows** - *Small red packets or envelopes filled with money*
- Angulimala** - *The murderer who killed 999 people for their fingers to string into a garland (some sources say 99 people) but was converted by the Buddha. Later, he became an Arahant.*
- Arahant** - *One who is free from all fetters, defilements and impurities through achieving Nibbana, and who is free from rebirth*
- Bhikkhu** - *A male mendicant training under the Patimokkha Rule. In this work, the terms 'bhikkhu' and 'monk' are used interchangeably.*
- Bhikkhuni** - *A female mendicant equivalent to bhikkhu.. In this work, the terms 'bhikkhuni' and 'nun' are used interchangeably.*
- Bodhi mind / bodhicitta** - *The spirit of Enlightenment or the mind set on achieving Enlightenment.*
- Bodhisattva** - *One who strives for Supreme Enlightenment for themselves and all beings.*
- Buddha** - *Awakened One, Enlightened One*
- Dana** - *Almsgiving*
- Dhutanga (tudong)** - *Refers to the forest monk's way of life, wandering through forests, living in caves and at the foot of trees.*

- Eightfold Path** - *The fundamental teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha :*
1. *Right Understanding*
  2. *Right Thought*
  3. *Right Speech*
  4. *Right Action*
  5. *Right Livelihood*
  6. *Right Effort*
  7. *Right Mindfulness*
  8. *Right Concentration*
- Four Noble Truths** -
1. *Dukkha (Suffering)*
  2. *Samudya (the arising or origin of dukkha)*
  3. *Nirodha (the cessation of dukkha)*
  4. *Magga (the way leading to the cessation of dukkha – the Eightfold or Middle Path)*
- Kamma** - *Action leading to future reward or retribution; volitional action*
- Kappiya** - *A lay attendant*
- Kathina** - *Annual robes-giving ceremony*
- Kuan Shih Yin Pu Sa** - *Also known as **Avalokitesvara** and **Goddess of Mercy**, this Bodhisattva is one of the Three Pure Land Sages, the others being **Amitabha Buddha** and **Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva**. In some traditions, these two Bodhisattvas are referred to in the masculine form, but in Asian countries, the feminine forms are more popular.*
- Kutis** - *A monk's hut or shelter*
- Mahayana** - *Also called 'Great Vehicle'. A form of*

*Buddhism of later development and mainly followed in China, Japan, Korea and Tibet.*

- Metta, Karuna, Mudita, Upekkha** - *The four sublime states (Brahma-vihara):*  
a. *Metta – universal, unlimited love and goodwill*  
b. *Karuna – compassion for all living beings*  
c. *Mudita – sympathetic joy in others' success, welfare and happiness*  
d. *Upekkha – equanimity*
- Nibbana** - *Cessation of suffering, freedom from craving*
- Parinibbana** - *The final passing away of the Buddha*
- Patimokkha Rules** - *The rules observed by a Bhikkhu*
- Pindapata** - *Almsround*
- Precepts** - *The basic guidelines of conduct*
- Pure Land** - *Also called Sukhavati, Western Paradise, Land of Ultimate Bliss and Western Pure Land, it is one of the most important Buddhalands and the residing Buddha there is Amitabha Buddha.*
- Saha world** - *The world, which is full of suffering*
- Samanera** - *Novice*  
**Samsara** - *Cycle of existence; wheel of rebirth*
- Sangha** - *Community of Buddhist monks or nuns*
- Srotapannas / Sotapanna** - *A stream-enterer, refers to the first stage in the realisation of Nibbana*
- Stupa** - *A dome-like solid structure built to house the relics of the Buddha*

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Sukhavati</b>        | - <i>See 'Pure Land'</i>  |
| <b>Sutras.</b>          | - <i>records of the Buddha's teachings and were written down many years after his Parinibbana</i>                                       |
| <b>Tathagata</b>        | - <i>'One who has found the Truth' i.e. the Buddha</i>  |
| <b>Theravada</b>        | - <i>Considered to be the orthodox and original form of Buddhism as accepted and followed mainly in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar</i> |
| <b>Thirty-two marks</b> | - <i>The physical characteristics possessed by great beings such as the Buddhas</i>   |
| <b>Triple Gem</b>       | - <i>The Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha</i>  |
| <b>Upasaka</b>          | - <i>Layman who has taken refuge in the Triple Gem, and keeps at least the 5 Precepts and avoids wrong livelihood</i>                   |
| <b>Upasika</b>          | - <i>Laywoman who has taken refuge in the Triple Gem, and keeps at least the 5 Precepts and avoids wrong livelihood</i>                 |
| <b>Vassa</b>            | - <i>The Rains Retreat; the annual three-month period during the monsoon when all bhikkhus have to stay in one place</i>                |
| <b>Vinaya</b>           | - <i>The Bhikkhu's code of discipline which includes the 250 Patimokkha rules</i>   |

