

**SEEING**  
**DHAMMA MATTERS**



**OH TEIK BIN**

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## THE GIFT OF DHAMMA EXCELS ALL OTHER GIFTS

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## DEDICATION

**“Seeing Dhamma Matters”**  
*is dedicated in ever loving memory of*

My late Parents

**OH KHAY LENG ( 1924 – 1999 )**  
**LIM SAW GHIM ( 1924 – 2012 )**

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contributed to my growth in the Dhamma

*This book has been sponsored  
for free distribution*

**from the Proceeds of the Sale of My Book**  
**“School Stories \* Travel Tales \* Hotel Happenings”**

## DEDICATION OF MERITS

May all beings share in the merits of this Dhamma Dana.  
May they find happiness, peace and liberation.

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## **Dedication**

## PREFACE

My first Dhamma book for free distribution was “*Dhamma Matters – A Buddhist Reflects*” and it was published in 2010 . Since then two reprints have been done. The response and feedback to *Dhamma Matters* have been quite positive and encouraging. Many of my former students have told me that *Dhamma Matters* is clear and simple to understand containing many practical points of the Dhamma where one can reflect upon and apply in daily life.

My other Dhamma / LIFE Lessons books, namely

- \* “*Why Like That One?*”
- \* *LIFE Lessons With PowerPoints*
- \* *More LIFE Lessons To Learn*
- \* *Thoughtful Twitter Tweets To Treasure*
- \* *A Collection Of LIFE Lessons*

have also been well received and all the titles except for ‘*A Collection Of LIFE Lessons*’, have now run out of stock.

All these have motivated me to write ***Seeing Dhamma Matters*** for free distribution. This book aims to

- \* impart many important points in the Buddha’s Teachings
- \* help us realize and correct our weaknesses and defilements
- \* help Dhammaduta workers cope with the many challenges and obstacles
- \* motivate us into Dhamma practice.

***Seeing Dhamma Matters*** is a collection of 30 *Dhamma* or *LIFE Lessons* articles inspired by the happenings and experiences of the author’s Dhammaduta work at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak over the last 25 years. The contents touch on various Dhamma teachings like the The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path, Kamma and Rebirth, the Eight Worldly Conditions, the nature of the mind and so on. May All Beings Be Well, Happy And Peaceful!

## 1 A Sense Of Urgency

*“To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse one's mind — this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”*



Do you find that time seems to zoom past by us so very fast each day? I do. Modern life seems to be so very hectic with so many people caught up pursuing their careers, tending to family matters and indulging in sensual pleasures. We seldom sit back to ponder and contemplate – what the heck is life all about? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What are the things that really matter ultimately?

*Life is uncertain. Death is certain.* We intellectually know this but is there any true realization that will spur us to a sense of urgency to spend time in Dhamma practice – in Dana ( charity), Sila ( morality ), Bhavana ( meditation or mental cultivation )?

For over twenty years, I have been involved at our local Buddhist Association in helping to conduct wake services and Buddhist funeral rites for members, their family members, friends and devotees. So many of my friends have transited due to illnesses, accidents, old age and other reasons. Deaths can be very sudden and there is no bargaining with *Prince Death*. Often times during wake services, for a while I would stand by the side of the coffin and gaze at the deceased. After doing a silent prayer, a radiation of metta or loving-kindness and the transference of merits, I would reflect on impermanence and think to myself, “My turn will also come and I don’t know when”. Ha, ha, all this has not made me morbid or negative in my mind. On the



contrary, it has helped me to realize some important Dhamma points like ‘letting go’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘the importance of dana, sila and bhavana’ and so on. I learn to value the present time I still have and to do the meaningful things a wise one would do when I still can before it is too late.

Of the many cases of wake services I have rendered help in over the years, there was this case that really had a tremendous impact on me. It taught me about the impermanence and uncertainties of life.

*Dr. K. H. Soo* ( name changed to protect his identity ) was a former student of mine in our Community Guidance Class in the 1990s. He was an exemplary student – intelligent, responsible, conscientious, helpful, unassuming and diligent. He served our Association in various capacities – as a head librarian in the Community Library, a leader in our Dhamma and Motivation Class, a leader in our youth camps and a volunteer helper in many of our special functions.

After his SPM, Soo got a government scholarship to pursue his medical studies abroad. He graduated as a doctor but decided not to work in the hospital. Instead he chose to work as a lecturer at a local university.

One morning, I received a phone call from his youngest brother who broke the tragic news to me. “Bro. Oh,” he said quite calmly, “we need some help from you and the Buddhist Association. My brother K.H. Soo was killed in a road accident a few hours ago while he was driving on his way to work at the university.” Of course, this came us a shock to me. Our Buddhist Association rendered all the necessary assistance to the bereaved family. We handled all the wake services and funeral rites. At the first night of the wake service, I learnt about the details of the accident and the tragic circumstances leading to Soo’s death. He was

supposed to leave for Australia the following month to pursue his Ph.D under a scholarship tied up with the university he was working at. I thought to myself, "*Life is really uncertain.*" Dr. K.H. Soo was just turning 29 in age.

What really matters in this short life of ours? This question has pervaded my mind ever since I was young. Some years ago, someone sent me a mail containing some profound material that helped to answer the question *What Really Matters?* I reproduce here the article for your reflection and contemplation.

### **So What Will Matter...? A Reflection**

*Ready or not, someday it will all come to an end.  
There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours or days.  
All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten,  
will pass to someone else.  
Your wealth, fame and temporal power  
will shrivel to irrelevance.*

*It will not matter what you owned, or what you were owed.  
Your grudges, resentments, frustrations, and jealousies  
will finally disappear.  
So, too, your hopes, ambitions, plans,  
and to-do lists will expire.*

*The wins and losses that once seemed so important  
will fade away.  
It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant.  
In the end it won't matter where you came from,  
or on which side of the track you lived.*

*Even your gender and skin colour will be irrelevant.  
Then, how will the value of your days be measured?  
So, what will matter?*

*What will matter is not your material wealth  
but your spiritual wealth;  
not what you got, but what you gave.  
What will matter is not your worldly success,  
but the richness of your mind.  
What will matter is not what you learned  
about mundane matters,  
But the Dhamma you learned, realized and taught.*

*What will matter is every act of integrity,  
compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched,  
empowered or encouraged others  
to emulate your example.*

*What will matter is not your competence, but your character.  
What will matter is not how many people you knew,  
but how many will feel a lasting loss when you're gone.*

*What will matter is not your memories  
of possessions rooted in attachment,  
but a trained mind that can let go  
and dwell in mere awareness  
What will matter is not how much worldly enjoyment  
you have had  
but the deeds you have done to bring  
happiness and peace to others.*

*Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident;  
it's not a matter of circumstance but of choice;*

*and of much patience, perseverance, and determination.*

*So Reflecting mindfully and wisely,*

***LET US  
lead a righteous life  
reach out to others in need  
cultivate and purify the mind  
strive diligently in the Dhamma  
help spread the Dhamma for  
the benefit and happiness of all***



## 2 Doubts, Doubts, Doubts...

*“As long as evil has not ripened,  
The fool thinks it honey;  
When evil ripens,  
the fool suffers.”*



One of the great hindrances to the spiritual development of a person is doubt and skepticism. In Wikipedia we find the following points about doubt or vicikicchā:

*The hindrance of doubt (vicikicchā) refers to doubt about one's ability to understand and implement the meditation instructions, as well as about the teacher and Buddhist teachings in general.*

*Ajahn Brahmavamso states: "Doubt refers to the disturbing inner questions at a time when one should be silently moving deeper. Doubt can question one's own ability, "Can I do This?", or question the method "Is this the right way?", or even question the meaning "What is this?". It should be remembered that such questions are obstacles to meditation because they are asked at the wrong time and thus become an intrusion, obscuring one's clarity."*

*Traleg Kyabgon states: "When we meditate in the presence of this hindrance, we have a constant nagging feeling: "How do I know what I am doing is right? How do I know if this thing really works and if I am not just wasting my time? How do I know what the Buddhist teachings say is true? How do I know if that what the meditation teachers have taught me is right and that they are not deluded?""*

It is kind of sad that we find Buddhists who, despite years at our Buddhist Association reading and learning about the

Dhamma, still harbor strong doubts about the Dhamma. Why is this so? Among the reasons are the following:

- \* No real understanding of the Dhamma; their knowledge remains but at the intellectual level.
- \* No practice or a lack of practice of the Dhamma – there is little striving on in Dana (Charity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Cultivation) or Dana, Samadhi (Concentration or Stillness of the mind) and Panna (Wisdom)
- \* Lack of patience, determination and effort in meditation practice to realize gradually the sublime Truth of the Dhamma.
- \* Caught in the worldly trap of excessive pursuits of mundane sensual pleasures.
- \* Associating with fools – people who have no inclination for Dhamma but are ‘addicted’ to their habitual or conditioned ways ( like excessive entertainment stuff, gambling, shopping, dabbling in the share market, pleasure seeking through endless eating, touring, chatting and games over the internet. )

( In the Mangala Sutta or Discourse on Blessings, the Buddha expounded many important Dhamma points, among them:

*“Not to associate with fools, to associate with the wise, and to honor those who are worthy of honor - this is the Highest Blessing.” )*

Many a time I have heard our members and devotees expressing their doubts in matters of the Dhamma. They ask:

- \* How do I know that the Dhamma is true? Was the Buddha really Enlightened?

\* Kamma...is there really such a Law? Moral justice, Cause and Effect ...why do bad things happen to good people?

\* Is there such a thing as a past life? Does it make sense that a person experiences a suffering due to a kamma of a past life? He can't even remember his bad deed as 'another person' in the past. Is it fair that he has to 'pay the price' for an action not of his but somebody else in the past life?

\* Dana or a meritorious action ... isn't the person performing this in a way selfish? He just wants to get merits... to be rewarded, go to heaven or have a better rebirth.

\* Wouldn't it be better for me to live just the way I want...to be comfortable, enjoy my present life as much as I can? When I die, it wouldn't be me enjoying the rewards of my good deeds. So why bother?

Well, well, we can argue on and on but the skeptic will still doubt with his set and conditioned mind. There is only one way where all doubts about Dhamma can be resolved, and confidence (Saddha) in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha gained until one's faith is unshakable. And the Way? It is to walk the Noble Eightfold Path ardently, with determination, patience, perseverance, diligence, and sincerity. The problem with the skeptic or one filled with doubts is that there is a lack of effort in the Dhamma practice – he gives up easily or gets 'sucked' into the mundane, worldly or sensual ways.

Reflection and contemplation is an important aspect of the spiritual life. It is necessary in Bhavana or mental development. Let me reflect upon the issues of doubt raised above.

Truth of the Dhamma? It has to be tested by oneself honestly through learning, understanding, practice and realizing it. When one persistently undertakes the 3-Fold training of Dana, Sila and Bhavana, one can experience for himself a gradual transformation of the mind – for the better. He becomes more happy, peaceful and free in the mind. Of course, this process is not the ‘3-minute Instant Maggi’ type. It requires patience, endurance and persistence. *He that wants the fruit must climb the tree.* And for some the tree is a very tall one!

One of the most challenging questions I ever came upon was this. A very intelligent student of mine once asked me, “How do you know that the Buddha is Enlightened or to put it another way, how do you know that there is this thing called Enlightenment? For all you know, the story of Buddha and His Teachings might have been just ‘cooked up’ or perhaps a legend.

I knew I could not just tell him that all this is in the Holy Buddhist Scriptures ... ‘*how would you know that what was written is true?*’ he would ask. I thought for a while and gave the student this answer:

*“It’s good to ask and clarify your doubts. It is in the spirit of the Kalama Sutta, The Charter of Free Inquiry.*

*Now you have studied in your Physics and Chemistry about the gases and the Gas Equation  $PV = nRT$ . A perfect or ideal gas follows this Equation but real gases deviate from the equation. Some deviate a lot; others are closer to the perfect state governed by the equation. Minds are like that – some are filled with more negative states of greed, anger, hatred, delusion and so on. Others have better minds – they experience more peace, happiness, contentment, freedom, contentment etc. So you see, the mind can develop into*



*higher and higher spiritual states. When the mind is 100 % happy, peaceful, wise, compassionate and free, that's Enlightenment. You can practice the Teachings of The Enlightened One and experience for yourself your mind transformation. Your doubts will disappear and your confidence in the Dhamma will grow and grow."* The student seemed to be very happy at my answer.

In Buddhist Cosmology, the Law of Kamma (sometimes labeled as the Law of Moral Causation ) is but one of the 5 Universal Laws that govern everything – physical and mental phenomena. (The 4 others being The Law of Physical-Inorganic, The Biological and Genetic Law, The Law of the Mind and the Phenomenology Law.)

I remember one of my Dhamma sisters who initially had great doubts about Kamma. 'Why should I get so much pain and suffering from various sicknesses? I have been practicing Dana, Sila and Bhavana the best I can and I have not done anything unwholesome. Why me?' We must see that Kamma is generated not only in this life but also in our past and the vipaka or resultant effects could be experienced in the past, the present or the future. When we experience very good and happy things, not many would ask *Why Me?* The fact that we are born means there will be the dukkha of old age, sickness and death. The wise man sees this and constantly trains and develops his mind so that he can embrace calmly, peacefully and positively whatever comes to him. He knows he cannot alter the past ( *and his ignorant wrong doings* ); he lives the present life practicing the Dhamma well. He is confident that good will beget good eventually in the present or future. Regret, remorse, anger or frustration over the past is futile and unwise.

Many find it difficult to accept the point of their suffering thinking it's unfair that they have to 'pay the price' for the misdeed of another in the past who is not him or her. It is not a question of 'unfairness' or the need for a memory of the past life ... it is an operation of cause and effect. To explain in a simple manner that one is 'different' from one's past life and yet there is a continuation or link, I used to narrate a happening to one of my relative's sons whom I shall refer to as Ah Gong ( *not the real name* ). When Ah Gong was a crawling baby, he liked to crawl up low tables and platforms. His mother used to warn him, "Ah boy, don't do that, you can fall." Ah Gong would just respond with 'Ek Ek' sounds; he was ignorant of gravity or other physical dangers. One day he had a bad fall down from a table; he hit his cheek against the floor and wailed in pain. His mother soothed the injured cheek part with medicinal balm and he recovered well a few days later and there were no physical injury mark. (*Do we say that the Law of Gravity is unfair to the young innocent and ignorant Ah Gong and that he should be protected by Nature?* ) Many years passed and one day when Ah Gong was about 17 he noticed upon looking into the mirror that one of his cheek bones appeared larger and a bit swollen compared to the other. He asked his mother, "Mother, why is my left cheek not of the same size as the right." The mother explained, "Ah Gong, when you were 1 or 2 years old, you had a fall down from the table and hit your left cheek; it was swollen but responded to the medicinal treatment. Over the years with changes in conditions in your body, the effect of that hit on the cheek is now experienced or seen." Ah Gong exclaimed, "It's not true! I can't remember. It was not me! It is not fair! I would not have done a heedless thing like that to cause the terrible fall."

Based on the above account do reflect on cause and effect, kamma and past lives, memory and the question of 'fairness'.

In another chapter I have written on reincarnation or rebirth and have referred to hypnosis and past life regression. This provides very good food for thought to answer the question "Why Me?"

Just the other day, I heard one of our members telling a group of Buddhist friends about the 'selfishness' of so many people doing Dana (Generosity, Charity ). He said, "You know, these people are actually greedy and selfish. They all do these Dana and services actually to get merits ... they chase for merits for themselves; perhaps they are greedy to go to heaven after death." "Oh, my God... oops I mean Buddha!" I thought to myself. " This person is really cynical; he is so full of doubts even after so many years of 'learning and practicing the Dhamma'. One can only conclude that he has not practiced well to realize Dana at its different levels. Perhaps it's a rationalization of his little involvement in Dana due to strong association with the 'anti-Dhamma' world outside.

Let us reflect on the practice of Dana which undoubtedly has different levels of intention and motivation. Ideally, Dana should be born completely out of love and compassion, free from any attachment and sense of self. The cynic or skeptic should not judge the heart and mind of another doing Dana. He should instead lead by example ... to come forward and do more and more Dana selflessly and be an inspiration to others. ( The Buddha taught the importance of doing Dana in one's spiritual practice. Likewise all other religions also teach the importance of Charity and service to others. Are the people who do charity in way selfish or greedy ... to gain

something and get to heaven? What a delusion and cynicism!)

Let us not forget that even Dana at a 'lower level' has brought benefits and help to so many in need. There are donors to charitable bodies who wish to be acknowledged or have their names mentioned. Why judge them so much or let such cases prevent you from doing your selfless Dana?

I remember way back in the early 90s when we launched our Donation scheme to build our first building. The scheme entailed the inscription of donors' names as an acknowledgement. A few 'Buddhists' approached me to complain on the 'non-Dhamma' nature of such a scheme. One even said, "You all should just have a donation box and those who wish to donate towards to Building Fund should just quietly and anonymously put their money into the box."

*I silently thought to myself, "Yes this is ideal. But if this method were used no building can come out in more than 10 years!" ( I am happy to note that today we have 3 large buildings to provide facilities for our Dhamma promotion work. )* You know over the years I have met many skeptics and arm-chair critics who actually are reluctant to do any Dana but habitually point out others' faults but fail to see their own.

Throughout aeons of lives we have accumulated heaps of defilements (greed, hatred and delusion); we have sunk into unwholesome conditioning and habitual thinking. Whether we sincerely want to lead a life based on Dhamma and strive on ardently in our Dhamma Practice, the choice is ours. If we live by the philosophy "There is no cure between birth and death save to enjoy the interval", there will come a time where the mind will be filled with remorse and regret.

The wise ones live meaningfully; they die joyfully.

### 3 Wise Words, Life Lessons

*“Better than a thousand verses,  
comprising useless words, is one  
beneficial single line, by hearing  
which one is pacified.”*



During the Buddha's time, there were disciples who attained the different stages of Sainthood by listening mindfully, intently and diligently to the Dhamma discourses given by the Enlightened One. Today, alas, in a fast moving sensual world, not many have the interest, inclination, patience and endurance to listen to Dhamma talks, live or on CDs and other media. The reading of Dhamma books has also declined. Many, especially among the younger generation have little interest to take free Dhamma books and CDs / VCDs /DVDs to read, listen or watch let alone borrowing Dhamma materials from the library or buying them from the major bookstores. It is a world of the internet, the smart phone, tablets, Facebook, YouTube and other social networking stuff. Many are more drawn to things that stimulate and titillate the senses. How many would spend time to read, digest, reflect and contemplate upon Dhamma writings to transform their minds to cut the defilements of greed, anger, hatred, delusion and ignorance? For more than 25 years, through our local Buddhist Association, I have been trying to promote and propagate the sublime Dhamma, beautiful in the beginning, in the middle and in the end. The task or mission grows harder each day. Our stores are overflowing with untaken Dhamma books, CDs and VCDs. Many, both the young and the old say that they just are too busy; they cannot find the time to read Dhamma books or

listen to Dhamma Talks. Silently inside me I wonder, “If it’s true, how is it that such people can find the time to:

- \* indulge in social networking with Facebook, Blogging etc
- \* play around with their smart gadgets
- \* be potato couches following so many entertainment programs on the TV or Computers
- \* do hours of shopping
- \* spend at social clubs or the stock market
- \* go for trips, excursions and tours
- \* pursue entertainment activities in cyber cafes, karaoke centers, amusement outlets and so on?”

Honestly, I feel that it’s a question of priorities and realizing the urgency of Dhamma practice and transforming the mind spiritually. Well, I can quite understand. The sensual world outside is very alluring and the worldly trap is very powerful. The Dhamma Path oftentimes takes an opposite direction to the worldly ways. Unless we put in the effort, discipline, determination and perseverance, our lives might just be wasted away in useless pursuits.

Listening to or reading words of wisdom and life lessons and reflecting or contemplating on them can help motivate or inspire us to practice the Dhamma. These days, not many read thick and very textual books. Over the years I have attempted to promote the Dhamma through doing slide presentations and posting them over the internet at various web sites. The response and feedback has been quite encouraging.

Below are the contents of three of the Slide Presentations (*minus the pictures*) I did that pertain to **Words of Wisdom and Life Lessons**: (*Some material from forwarded Emails*)

## **I 10 Valuable Life Lessons**

*( On Slideshare in the Net: As on 2 June 14 : 20,724 views )*

- \* Everything you say and think has power to create its likeness.
- \* Fear and procrastination are major enemies to success.
- \* Don't take everything so seriously. Have a sense of humor.
- \* Acknowledge your shortcomings and work to improve them.
- \* Acknowledge your strengths, be humble but don't diminish or deny them.
- \* Relationships don't end... they change.
- \* You can make a living doing what you love.
- \* In bad times everyone can't help you and in good times everyone isn't as happy for you. Learn how to discern and develop true friends.
- \* The past has passed... let go of the pain, nostalgia, 'would have', 'would be', 'could have', 'could be', 'should have', 'should be'.
- \* Practice everyday saying and/or doing something that is helpful, filled with loving-kindness and meaningfulness.

## **II Words Of Wisdom**

*( On Slideshare in the Net: As on 2 June 14 : 10,124 views )*

- \* *Alexander Pope :*  
Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.  
A little learning is a dangerous thing.
- \* *Thomas Edison :*  
I haven't failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.

\* *Winston Churchill :*

The greatest lesson in life is to know that even fools are right sometimes.

\* *Abraham Lincoln:*

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other thing.

\* *Norman Vincent Peale:*

Believe that you are defeated, believe it long enough, and it is likely to become a fact.

\* *Ray Kroc:*

The quality of an individual is reflected in the standards they set for themselves.

\* *Albert Schweitzer:*

Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing.

\* *Thomas Jefferson:*

Whenever you do a thing, though it can never be known but to yourself, ask yourself how you would act were all the world looking at you, and act accordingly.

\* *Confucius:*

The journey of a thousand miles begins with but a single step.

\* *Aristotle:*

We should behave to our friends as we would wish our friends to behave to us.

\* *Franklin D. Roosevelt:*

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.

\* *John F. Kennedy:*

The time to repair a roof is when the sun is shining.

\* *John Wooden:*

Failure to prepare is preparing to fail.



\* *Henry Ford:*

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.

\* *George Carlin:*

Some people see the glass half full. Others see it half empty. I see a glass that's twice as big as it needs to be.

### **III Life Light Of Wisdom**

*( On Slideshare in the Net: As on 2 June 14 : 5,500 views )*

\* Life is tough...it can be hard

But when it gets unbearable don't let down your guard.

\* Although bad things happen to us all

It's important to remember to learn from each fall.

\* Life is tough but you are tougher

And just remember it could be rougher.

\* Remember to cherish the good things in life

They help to get you by in times of strife.

\* Don't underestimate the worth of a friend

Because without them our hearts would not mend.

\* Always be true to everyone you meet

If you act fake you have suffered defeat.

\* It's important to say what is only sincere

Words from the heart are the best kind to hear.

\* Never look back...the past is gone

Only memories remain to look upon.

\* Learn to forgive even if you can't forget

Put things behind you and never regret.

\* Always look forward...moving ahead you must

Make the most of each day...it could be your last.

\* Don't let others get you down

Show them a smile when they want a frown.

- \* Try your best in all that you do  
Believe in yourself and others will too.
- \* Life is not a game to win or lose  
It is a Gift to LOVE if we wisely choose.

**May the Light of Truth shine upon you  
in your quest for Peace and Wisdom true.**



## 4 Of Religious Items And Fear...

*“The fickle, unsteady mind, so hard  
to guard, so hard to control, the  
wise man straightens, as the  
fletcher the arrow.”*



When it comes to matters of religious items like statues, images, posters and pictures of Buddha, Kuan Yin, Bodhisattvas or deities, Dhamma books, cassettes and compact discs, many so-called Buddhists still have feelings of fear or mental uneasiness when they no longer want them for one reason or other. The root of the problem lies in a lack of understanding, practice and realization of the Dhamma.

Over the years, our Buddhist Association has become a sort of ‘dumping ground’ for the unwanted religious things of our members, devotees and other members of the public. Some ask what they should do with very old and tethered Dhamma books; they have the fear of getting rid of them. When I suggest that they can be burnt away or sent for recycling (*to minimize open burning and polluting the environment, I personally favor recycling*), many express shock or fear. Where is the logic of keeping such things that might pose health problems like termite or other insect invasion? Money collected from recycling can be channeled for welfare purposes. Wouldn’t this be a wise course of action rather than burdening temples, Buddhist centers or libraries with such wanted or unusable reading stuff?

When it comes to images and statues of a ‘holy’ nature, many are even more fearful. There was an occasion when some of our devotees saw us at the Association carrying Buddha and Kuan Yin images to be washed and cleaned at

the water tap stand areas. “Oh, how can you all do that?” the shocked devotees exclaimed. “Our ‘ang kongs’ (statues of deities ) at the altars have not been and will never be washed since the day they were installed.” It took me some time to explain the illogical basis of their delusion and fear. Ha, ha ... surely Buddha and Kuan Yin will never approve of all the dirt and dust covering their images! Not only are they unsightly but there is the danger of hygiene and health problems.

A few days ago, one of my former students phoned me to ask about a ‘problem’ he and his wife were facing. “Brother Oh,” he explained, “our Buddha statute at home now has a line crack. What should we do?” I could sense that he was a bit worried or fearful. Perhaps he and his wife regarded this as a bad omen! (*Superstition still prevails among many Buddhists.*) I assure him that nothing is amiss; things like this can naturally happen due to so many physical causes like expansion and contraction of material. I told him, “You can choose one of these two courses of action:

\* If it does not ‘disturb’ you or your wife, you can just ignore the flaw or crack in your Buddha statue and maintain it as usual in your altar. You can even reflect on the impermanence of all things. Didn’t the Buddha teach that all compounded things are transient? They will decay and break up ultimately.

\* If you and your wife feel like getting a new image to replace the flawed one, it’s fine. You can select one whose posture and countenance would help you to settle your mind, be peaceful, to happily pay homage and do your devotional practice and to contemplate on the Dhamma. As to your old statute, you can discard it in any logical and wise way. Some people place it at a temple willing to receive it with a Dana contribution to the temple. (*Nowadays not many temples or*

*Buddhist Associations want to receive unwanted images. Our Association too does not accept such items ... there is a storage problem and it would be horrible to have an array of old statues lining our Buddha altar.)* You could also bury your statue in suitable ground! If the material comprises calcium carbonate, phosphates or other chemicals, it would eventually ‘decay’ away providing useful minerals for the soil!

In the early 1990s, one of my relatives phoned me one day about an incident that was causing her worry and fear. Her young child had climbed on to a chair near her Buddha altar and touched the Buddha statue. The statue toppled over and fell to the floor. *The Buddha was beheaded!* “What should I do?” she asked frantically. I asked, “Is your child hurt?”. I was relieved when she said *No*. “Well,” I assured her, “it’s just an accident and you must not harbor any superstitious beliefs in your mind. Now that your Buddha statue is headless, I suppose you would want to get a new one to replace it. You can discard the broken statue through your garbage disposal truck after packing the broken pieces properly. If you don’t like doing it this way, you can bury the broken pieces. It’d be difficult to find a temple to accept your broken Buddha!”

I also explained to my relative the significance and purpose of a Buddha altar and conveyed to her some important Dhamma teachings.

As to my suggestion of what she should do with the ‘broken Buddha’, she was still a little doubtful. (*I suppose this could be due to the point that I am a lay Buddhist lacking in authority unlike a Buddhist monk or nun!*) She requested me to consult a Buddhist monk on her behalf. I did. I met up with one of our religious advisors, a Theravada monk. He

essentially gave the same suggestions as I did and I let my relative know.

My late mother ( *she passed away at 88 a couple of years back* ) had been a typical Taoist devotee for years doing the usual practices of worshipping many deities at home and in temples, consulting temple mediums during ‘crises’ of sicknesses or other problems of family members, offering food and burning paper paraphernalia to ancestors and deities on certain days and religious festivals. When I got transferred back as a teacher to my hometown, I started introducing Buddhism and the Dhamma to my mother. She was in her late fifties then. She read Dhamma books, listened to Dhamma talks (English and Hokkien ) through tape cassettes and public Dhamma speakers and practiced Dana, (Charity) Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (mental cultivation ) . A few times I brought her for Kathina Ceremonies and meditation retreats.

After a few years of learning, understanding and practicing the Dhamma, my mother grew in her compassion and wisdom. I suppose her Vipassana meditation helped her to see the Dhamma and she got rid of many of her past deluded practices. There was a transformation of her mind with the light of Dhamma growing. One day she told me, “I am getting on in age and it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to tend to the traditional prayers to deities, gods and ancestors. My Buddhist practice now is simple – learning and understanding the Dhamma, Pali Chanting, and meditation. I would like to do away with a few of the altars for a couple of deities and ancestors. She got a carpenter to dismantle the altars for the Kitchen god, one more deity and the ancestor shrine altar and tablets (*she had them placed at the Moral Uplifting Society*). On that day, in front of our

Buddha Shrine, she performed her puja and chanting, radiated metta and transferred merits to the deities and the departed ancestors. She had confidence in the Triple Gem of Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and she was peaceful doing all this. Naturally I was happy at her spiritual transformation. However, my mother was still doubtful about removing the outside shrine altar for the Heaven god (*"Thee Kong"*). She said she would consult a cultivated monk first. For her entire married life she and my father had been observing the 'Pai Thee Kong' night corresponding to the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the Chinese New Year period. Various offerings like sugar cane, fruits, roasted chicken and pork among other items, were made in the midnight prayers. There was burning of paper money. I did not press my parents to discard the practice immediately. I felt that things had to change gradually with understanding so that the mind would not be troubled. I did initially convince my mother to just have vegetarian offerings to avoid animal sacrifices through killing. She also minimized her paper burning; I told her the money saved could be used to do some meaningful charity work. Not long later, Bhante Suvanno came to our Buddhist Association to give Dhamma talks and teach the Vipassana meditation. He stayed for a number of days at one of the committee members' home. My mother asked me to fetch her to have a consultation with Bhante Suvanno, especially on her indecision about the Heaven god's altar. Bhante gave a most 'enlightening' explanation of 'Thee Kong' (*the deva King Sakka*). My mother learnt that the gods, even 'Thee Kong', being unenlightened, must too die and be reborn. He even paid respect to the Buddha.

It was not too long later when my mother had the 'Thee Kong' altar dismantled. She now only placed her refuge in the The Triple Gem.

## 5 Too Busy...

*“What is laughter, what is joy,  
when the world is ever burning?  
Shrouded by darkness, would you  
not seek the Light?”*



Aren't many people today caught up in the dis-ease of over 'busyness' in pursuit of so many things that in the final analysis come to nothing: endless chase of greater success in our career, acquiring or amassing more and more material wealth and possessions, striving to attain more power and recognition in society and seeking more sensual pleasures.

Do we ever stop, sit back, ponder and reflect on what life is all about, what are the things that really matter upon death when we have to live everything behind? When will we realize that true happiness and peace lies within the mind; it is not found in the world outside our fathom-long body. The wise ones slow down their 'busyness' before it is too late; they take time and put in the effort to develop the mind in terms of enriching it with noble qualities like patience, loving-kindness, compassion, contentment, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

'Busyness' engulfs people of all ages. Even children at the kindergarten and primary school are so busy in the pursuit of academic achievements. Fun and play take a back seat. It's just more and more cognitive learning to the detriment of developing their emotional and spiritual quotients.

Many teenagers and youths are 'stressed out' in an endless stream of schoolwork, home work, projects and assignments and tuition. Their form of relaxation... TV, smart gadgets like the hand phones and tablets, virtual games and social networking. This is all taking a heavy toil on their mental



and physical health. Stress-related illnesses and psychiatric disorders like anxiety and depression among the young are on the rise. I hardly heard of suicide cases among young people in the 50s or 60s. Today we read of more and more such tragic happenings. Aggression, violence and criminal acts among the young are getting more prevalent.

Many adults in their middle ages and elder people who are retired are also 'busy' in not so worthy pursuits – gambling, indulgences in the share market, endless shopping, entertainment, social networking in the Internet, making merry with eating and drinking, jetting here and there on trips and tours and doing side-line businesses to earn more to satisfy the craving for more sensual pleasures. How many would want to engage in things of a spiritual nature like attending religious talks and classes, prayers, chanting, meditation, and outreach work in community services? To invitations for Dhamma-based programs, many a time I have heard the usual reply: 'I don't think I can make it ...too busy lah!' (*The interesting question is : Busy with what?* )

From time to time I receive some very motivating and inspiring material through forwarded emails. They convey important Dhamma points or Life Lessons for one to reflect upon. Some years ago, I got a forwarded story that was really touching. It pointed out how the 'busyness' of a person made a person lose sight of some of the things that really matter – kindness, love, understanding and spending time with loved ones before it is too late. The story ran something like this:

*A man came home from work late again, tired and irritated, to find his 5-year old son waiting for him at the door, "Daddy, may I ask you a question?"*

*"Yeah, sure. What is it?" replied the father. "Daddy, how much money do you make an hour?" the son asked.*

*"That's none of your business! What makes you ask such a thing?" The father said angrily.*

*"I just wanted to know. Please tell me, how much do you make an hour?" pleaded the little boy.*

*"If you must know, I make \$20 an hour."*

*Looking up, he said, "Daddy, may I borrow \$9 please?"*

*The father was furious. "If the only reason you wanted to know how much money I make is just so you can borrow some to buy a silly toy or some other nonsense, then you march yourself straight to your room and go to bed. Think about why you're being selfish. I work long, hard hours everyday and don't have time for such childish games."*

*The little boy quietly went to his room and shut the door. The father sat down and started to get madder about his little boy's questioning. How dare he ask such questions only to get some money? After an hour he calmed down.*

*He started to think he might have been a little too hard on his son. Maybe there was something he really needed to buy with that \$9. And he didn't ask for money often.*

*The father went to his son's room and opened the door. "Are you asleep, son?" he asked. "No, daddy, I'm awake," replied the boy.*

*"I've been thinking, maybe I was too hard on you earlier," said the father.*

*"It's been a long day and I took my aggravations out on you. Here's the \$9 you asked for."*

*The little boy sat up straight, beaming. "Oh, thank you daddy!" he said.*

*Then reaching under his pillow, he pulled out some more crumpled bills. He counted the money, then looked up at his father.*

*"Why did you want more money if you already had some?"  
the father asked.*

*"Because I didn't have enough, but now I do," the little boy  
replied.*

*"Daddy, I have \$20 now. Can I buy an hour of your time?"*



## 6 Seeing The *Unseen*

*“Be devoted to vigilance;  
Guard your mind. Raise  
yourself from the bad path,  
Like a tusker sunk in mud.”*



Are there spirits, ghosts or other entities that live in another plane after death? In Buddhism there is the teaching of Kamma, Rebirth and the 6 Realms of Existence, namely, Hell, Hungry Ghosts (Peta), Demons (Azura), Animals, Humans and Gods (Deva). Is there an Intermediate State after death before Rebirth takes place? There are two Schools of Thought: Theravada Buddhism believes that rebirth takes place instantly after death whereas the Mahayana School talks about an Intermediate state. To my mind, it is probably a matter of terms and interpretation.

Our Buddhist Association has been conducting wake services and Buddhist Funeral Rites for more than 20 years. This is done on a non-commercial basis. It is essentially a community outreach sort of service. No fees are charged but usually the family members of the deceased make a voluntary donation of any amount to our Buddhist Association. The chanting members don't receive any payment.

In the early years there were some reports of some chanting members 'seeing' or perceiving the presence of the *unseen*. Is there a reality in their claims or is it more of the mind imagining or hallucinating? Who knows?

Many years back there was a 'crisis' in our Wake Services and Buddhist Funeral Rites section. A member of the Sangha told some of our Chinese Chanting members: "You all are

not ‘qualified’ to conduct such services; you need Sangha members to do so. You only observe 5 precepts whereas we Sangha members have to keep more than 200 precepts. If the hungry ghosts present themselves, are you lay people able to handle such things?” Many understandably were rather perturbed and fearful upon hearing such things from the Sangha member. A couple of members even added on to the tricky situation: *‘Yes, it’s true; we have seen hungry ghosts hovering around when we were chanting. Are we able to handle this? Will the hungry ghosts harm us?’*

For a few months the Chinese Chanting section did not want to conduct wake services; some leaders and members were troubled or disturbed at what they were told. So what happened in those few months? The Pali Chanting section continued to undertake the wake services while things were sorted out through talks and consultation with our religious advisers and other cultivated monks and nuns. Things were resolved after some months; our Chinese chanting members regained their confidence in the meritorious services they had been rendering born out of loving-kindness and compassion. They resumed their good dana work and today the conducting of Buddhist Funeral rites and wake services goes on smoothly and peacefully.

Do the spirits or ghosts of the deceased come back to visit their family members on the 7<sup>th</sup> day after death? This belief is very strong among many members of the Chinese community. Some of our members have reported on their ‘seeing’ or perceiving *the unseen* on the night of such a day. “You can hear sounds on such a night; there are even footprints around the house!” one member once told me.

I have done a lot of reflection on this matter. These happenings seem to only occur in the Taoist or ‘Buddhist’ Chinese community. I have not heard of Christians or

Muslims reporting such experiences. They have the strong faith that their loved ones are in heaven united with their Maker.

To me this thing about the '7<sup>th</sup> Day' is linked up with culture and the mind. Your mind creates your world. If one's mind is 'weak' (filled with unfounded beliefs, superstition, worry, attachment, fear or other negative states) , one may indeed 'see' things that may not be a reality at all but more of a mind-made experience.

My father passed away at the hospital in 1999 from COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease ) due to his years of smoking before he quit in his sixties. He was 75 years of age. I had an Indonesian maid to help look after my father. When he passed away at the hospital, the maid was with him. She had been helping to accompany my father in the days he was warded.

One morning, some days after my father's death, my maid, whose name was Betty, approached my mother and said, "Mak, saya ada mimpi Ayah balik. (*Mak, I have dreamt that Ayah came back*). Betty used to call my mother and father 'Mak' and 'Ayah'.) My mother became very alert and interested to know more. She asked the maid, "Betty, dalam mimpi awak, ayah tidak cakap betul?" ( *Betty, in your dream, Ayah did not talk, correct?* ) (My mother used to hold on the belief that when a dead person appears in your dream he or she cannot speak or talk; he remains silent. Even though I had told her many times that it's not true, she still believed it. ) Betty replied, "Mak, ada! Ayah ada cakap dalam mimpi saya. Dia kata, "Betty, Betty ...Bawa ubat." (*Mak, Ayah spoke in my dream. He said,, 'Betty...bring the medicine.'*). (I had heard my father saying this to Betty a number of times in the hospital.)

My mother then asked, “Awak buat apa lepas mimpi?” (*What did you do after your dream?*) Betty said that she got up from her bed and went round the house to see if there was any sign of Ayah but she did not see anything strange. Everything was normal. My mother then asked, “Betty, awak mimpi Ayah pada malam ke-tujuh selepas Ayah meninggal, betul?” (*Betty, you dreamt about Ayah on the 7<sup>th</sup> night after Ayah passed away, correct?*) “Tidak! Saya mimpi pada malam ke-sembilan!” Betty replied. (*No! I dreamt on the 9<sup>th</sup> night!*) My mother remained silent.

In the early nineties, I had a form six student who consulted me about a problem she was facing. She said she was being disturbed at night by a ghost. Her studies were affected and she could not sleep in peace. She kept hearing strange sounds and was having visions of the ghostly kind. She had consulted psychiatrists, psychologists, temple mediums, and monks but to no avail. I was not sure what was wrong with her but deep down inside me I felt it was a mind problem; her mind was not at peace. I explained to her the practice of Dana (charity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental Cultivation). I taught her some simple chanting and the use of mantra recitation to settle and calm the mind. I also passed her a tape of the Kuan Yin mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum”. Before long, this student told me that her problem had been resolved through practicing what I suggested to her.

Many years ago, a friend of mine told me about his experiences of the ghostly kind. This was his account:

*“My wife and I lived alone in a double-storey house not far from the sea. I was working in an industrial factory where I had to supervise workers sometimes on night shifts. It was a trying job in the sense that I had to deal with some very*

*tough workers with terrible attitude. Many a time I lost my patience and temper. Sometimes I would curse and swear. I was rather frustrated at my work. It was during these times that I began to see the 'unseen' beings. Upon my return at night and reaching my room, I would sense the presence of the 'unseen'. When I thought I saw some apparitions I would switch on the lights but there was nothing. I had recurrent nightmares of monsters chasing me and I would wake up in cold sweat. My wife told me that I talked eerily in my sleep and sometimes I would sleep walk. I consulted a Feng Shui Master and he suggested I moved the position of my bed because it was facing the sea. Ghosts were coming into my room from the sea! That was what he said. Moving the position of the bed did not improve my predicament; neither did consultation with temple mediums and bomohs worked."*

After hearing him out, I told my friend I believed that his problem could be traced to his mind – anger, ill will, frustration and other negative mental states were manifesting themselves out in suffering ways. I explained some simple Dhamma to him and also encouraged him to practice Dana, Sila and Bhavana. I gave him simple instructions on the practice of Metta Bhavana, the meditation on Living-Kindness. Simple chanting of a suitable mantra might also help him to calm and settle the mind. Some weeks later I was happy to learn that my friend's 'problem' was reducing; he saw less and less of the 'unseen' and eventually everything was alright again. Inside me, my confidence in the power of the Dhamma began to grow.

A few years ago, a middle-aged woman came to our Association to seek for some spiritual help. A tragic thing had happened to the family. One day, she, her husband and two children had gone for a holiday in another state.



Unfortunately her husband drowned in a swimming pool. It was really traumatic for the family. Not long after the death of her husband, she and her children ( who were still at primary school) began to have experiences of a ghostly kind at their family house, a double-storey bungalow. She said, “My children and I are seeing the apparition of my dead husband at our home, usually past midnight. We could perceive some inexplicable sounds around the house.” She requested me to ask a monk as to what she should do to solve her problem. I consulted with a cultivated senior monk residing at a monastery not far from my home town. The monk explained, “The deceased, dying in such an unexpected and traumatic death was not at peace. Attachment to his possessions and loved ones is very strong and his ‘spirit’ returns to his home. A close family member, his wife in this case can do a meritorious deed like an offering to the sangha and then transfer the merits to the departed one. Thoughts of loving-kindness can be radiated to him. The wife can also try to ‘talk’ to him in a quiet setting – reassuring the spirit not to worry about the family; everything would be alright. The spirit should transit on.” I conveyed the monk’s message to the wife of the deceased. Over time the ‘problem’ was resolved and life went on more peacefully for the deceased’s family.

Sometime last year, a mother came to our association again seeking some advice on a serious problem her family was facing. A daughter of hers, in lower secondary school had been very troubled with visions of the ghostly realms. This affected her ability to study and she had been missing school very frequently. According to the mother, the problem started when the daughter was in primary school and this had been going on till the present moment. Of course the family

had sought help in various ways like seeing doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, various mediums in temples and spiritualists but the problem still persisted. I met up separately with two Buddhist monks, a local one and one from a foreign country. Both were quite senior in their monkhood and are practicing the Dhamma well. I narrated to them the case of the victim seeing the *unseen* and sought advice from them. The two monks essentially explained in the same way and gave similar spiritual advice:

- \* There could be a kammic link ... some past kammic actions could be giving rise to the present effects (There is mention of such things in the Buddhist scriptures. ).

- \* The frequency of the victim's mind could be attuned to that of a realm of existence like the peta ... hence the 'seeing' or perception of 'ghosts'.

- \* The spiritual steps to be taken by the 'victim' and the family members are essentially Dana, Sila and Bhavana. And this must be continually and persistently done with sincerity.

- \* The transference of merits to the unseen beings in need should be performed after meritorious actions like offering to the Sangha or other charitable acts.

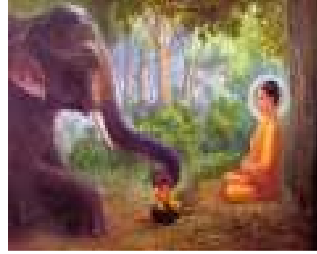
- \* Buddhist Chanting and radiation of loving-kindness (metta) can be done by the victim and the family members.

- \* Where possible, the victim can try to mentally communicate with the unseen beings – send metta, appealing to them to transit on upon receiving all the merits transferred to them.

Being charmed, possessed by spirits or seeing the *unseen* ?  
The best defense against these is the sincere and persistent practice of the Dhamma – Dana (Charity), Sila (Morality – keeping well our precepts) and Bhavana (Mental Purification through meditation, chanting, and Dhamma / Sutta study )

## 7 Children, Children...

*“Just as a candle cannot  
burn without fire, men  
cannot live without a  
spiritual life.”*



Our Buddhist Sunday School started way back in the late 1980s and since then I have been teaching the children...for almost 25 years already handling various aspects of the curriculum – Buddha Puja, Dhamma, Singing, Art and Craft, Dynamics, English and Thinking, Motivation and Story telling. Things have changed tremendously when it comes to the children today. Many of my Sunday School colleagues who have taught in primary schools for more than 30 years have said that it is becoming a great challenge to handle the children of the present compared to the ‘good old days’. There is increasing misbehavior and indiscipline. There is a high degree of impatience and restlessness among the kids. Some of my teacher friends call such children products of the ‘super milk powder’! They cannot sit still for even a few minutes and their attention span in class is getting shorter and shorter. In the short meditation on loving-kindness (Metta Bhavana) that we conduct regularly after the Buddha Puja, we can see many children ‘polishing the floor’ with grimaces in their faces. Training the mind is no easy matter but this is essential to transform the character and behavior of a child.

It is an irony that we got more attention from the Sunday School children of the nineties even though the teaching methods were rather traditional and old-fashioned – the ‘chalk-and-talk’ way, an approach many would regard as

most boring. Today, we employ all sorts of creative and innovative ways in the Sunday School curriculum - multimedia, hands-on projects like cookery, needle work, craft, dynamics and games and a host of other activities. Yet teachers are facing greater challenges to draw the children's attention. Some pupils sneak their smart phones into classes and go into their own world of playing virtual games and sms-ing. We find kids playing truant, chit-chatting during lessons, dozing away, having their own 'entertainment' activities and disturbing others in the class. Teachers are having a tough time counseling and disciplining. What we are seeing here at our Buddhist Association is a reflection of what is happening in many schools outside. So many teachers are in a way stressed out having to tackle tough discipline cases on top of a lot of unnecessary paper work and 'administrative stuff' in their jobs.

How a child behaves, his personality and character are dictated by

- \* his inherent nature – the kamma he inherits from the past
- \* the way he is brought up and educated by the parents
- \* influences from the mass media
- \* the educational system he is subjected to
- \* peer group influences
- \* other factors like nutrition, psychological or psychiatric disorders

To my mind, one of the most important factors in molding the character and behavior of a child is the family and parenting skills. Most cases of indiscipline or misbehavior among children can be traced to the home and family. Such children might come from broken homes, families which do not spend sufficient time with their children especially

during the formative years. The children lack attention, care and love and resort to errant ways to have this need met.

Over the years, I have seen that Buddhist families who practice the Dhamma well are blessed with angelic children, children who are well-mannered, responsible, diligent, helpful and morally upright. Indeed they have most praiseworthy qualities and are well-liked by all.

The importance of parenting skills cannot be denied. How many parents, in their ignorance, have resorted to 'psychologically damaging' ways in educating their children. If only so-called Buddhist parents learn, understand and practice the Dhamma, I am certain, good values and virtues can be inculcated into their children.

In 2010, I posted in my Slideshare space over the Net, a presentation titled "Memorandum From Your Child". The contents were from an unknown author and I got them from a forwarded Email. They contain some very good points that pertain to parenting skills.

Below are the texts in the slides (*minus the graphics and pictures*):

#### **"Memorandum From Your Child"**

\* Do not spoil me. I know quite well that I ought not to have all I ask for. I'm only testing you.

\* Do not be afraid to be firm with me. I prefer it. It lets me know where I stand.

\* Do not use force with me. It teaches me that power is all that counts. I will respond more readily to being led.

- \* Do not be inconsistent with me. That confuses me and makes me try to get away with everything I can.
- \* Do not make promises; you may not be able to keep them. That will discourage my trust in you.
- \* Do not fall for my provocations when I say and do things just to upset you. Then I'll try for other such "victories."
- \* Do not be too upset when I say "I hate you." I do not mean it, but I want you to feel sorry for what you have done to me.
- \* Do not make me feel smaller than I am. I will make up for it by behaving like a "big shot".
- \* Do not do things for me that I can do for myself. It makes me feel like a baby, and I may continue to put you in my service.
- \* Do not let my "bad habits" get me a lot of attention. It only encourages me to continue them.
- \* Do not correct me in front of people. I'll take much more notice if you talk quietly with me in private.
- \* Do not try to discuss my behaviour in the heat of a conflict. For some reason my hearing is not very good at this time and my cooperation is even worse.
- \* Do not try to preach to me. You would be surprised how well I know what's right and wrong.

- \* Do not make me feel that my mistakes are sins. I have to learn to make mistakes without feeling that I am no good.
- \* Do not nag.  
If you do, I shall have to protect myself by appearing deaf.
- \* Do not demand explanations for my wrong behaviour. I really do not know why I did that.
- \* Do not tax my honesty too much.  
I am easily frightened into telling lies.
- \* Do not forget that I love and use experimenting.  
I learn from it so please put up with it.
- \* Do not protect me from consequences.  
I need to learn from experience.
- \* Do not take too much notice of my small ailments. I may learn to enjoy poor health if it gets me much attention.
- \* Do not put me off when I ask HONEST questions.  
If you do, you will find that I stop asking and seek my information elsewhere.
- \* Do not answer “silly” or meaningless questions. I just want to keep you busy with me.
- \* Do not ever think that it is beneath your dignity to apologize to me. An honest apology makes me feel surprisingly warm towards you.

\* Do not ever suggest that you are perfect or infallible.  
It gives me too much to live up to.

\* Do not worry about the little amount of time we spend  
together. It is how we spend it that counts.

\* Do not let my fears arouse your anxiety.  
Then I will become more afraid.  
Show me courage.

\* Do not forget that I cannot strive without lots of  
understanding and encouragement; but I do not need to tell  
you that...do I?

**Bringing up a child in unskillful ways will lead the child  
to problematic days.**





## 8 Releasing Lives - Thoughts

*“As rain falls equally on the just and the unjust, do not burden your heart with judgments but rain your kindness equally on all. ”*



Some Buddhists involve themselves ardently in the practice of releasing lives. They would on a regular basis on weekends or the new moon and full moon days, buy living animals in captivity like birds and fish and then release them into what they consider their natural habitats. Such practitioners say that they do this out of compassion and also to ‘wash away’ all the bad kamma of their past. Some believe that their sicknesses are due to unwholesome kamma in their past lives and that releasing lives is the way to ‘cure’ their afflictions.

The cultivation or practice of compassion for all living beings is indeed of utmost importance in Buddhism but to my mind, today there is a lot of misunderstanding and a lack of wisdom in the practice of releasing lives. It has become more of a ceremony or ritual with many practitioners having the ‘selfish’ intention of protecting themselves rather than a sincere compassion for animals.

Some years ago, one of my relatives confronted me and asked, “What are you people in the Buddhist Association doing to educate people on the matter of releasing lives? I have seen ‘Buddhists’ organizing on a large scale ceremonies involving the release of hundreds if not thousands of animals they think are suffering in captivity? Have you seen silly people along riversides releasing all types of live fish into the waters? They might actually be

harming or killing them if the habitat is inappropriate. Compassion? If these people are truly compassionate, why don't they volunteer their services at the Society For The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and other Animal Care Homes? Why don't they do something about the stray dogs and cats which are really suffering? And what about the so many suffering ones in old folks' homes, orphanages, homes for the handicapped or disabled, institutions for the destitute and other welfare homes? Don't you think that it is wiser and more meaningful for these Buddhist practitioners to do charity work at such places rather than spending their money, time and energy in the rituals and ceremonies of releasing lives? We should learn from the followers of some religions – the truly compassionate ones rendering selfless services at welfare homes, orphanages, old folks' homes and Animal Care Centers.”

I could see the validity of his questions. I explained to him that Dhamma practice must entail wisdom. There are inevitably deluded ‘Buddhists’ who resort to unwise practices for rather self-centered reasons. What we try to do at our association is to educate the people especially the younger generation on what compassion and true Dhamma practice is. What people practice outside is sometimes beyond our control.

On the issue of releasing lives, I recall a few rather unfortunate and amusing incidents. One such case involved a fish pond we once had outside our first building. A few devotees volunteered and very conscientiously maintained and tended to the upkeep of the pond. This did not go on for long. The volunteers eventually gave up. Some members or devotees started to release all sorts of fishes into our pond.

Perhaps they had the thought: *Nice place to release lives ...so near the Buddha. Our merits would be greater!*

There was another occasion when one of my former students (*He was then doing very well in business.*) approached me to make a request. He said to me, “Brother Oh, can you help? I am a member of a ‘Releasing Lives’ Group. We collect donations to carry out this meritorious deed on a regular basis. Here is RM 2000. Can I pass this sum to you to help our ‘releasing lives’ project? Every new moon and full moon days, can you get some members to buy some fish from the market or some birds from the pet shops and have them released?” I politely declined and explained to him that our Association does not carry out such practices. I told him we have our Welfare Section that reaches out to the needy by providing some financial help on a regular basis. Sad to say, he said, “I cannot donate towards this cause. The donation must be used for the project of releasing lives.” He seemed disappointed that I did not want to participate in his project. He said, “Brother Oh, you must believe in the great merits from our project. You know, there was one occasion when I brought some fishes to a small lake in the countryside to have them released. You know what ... when the fishes got to the water, they were so grateful to me ... they expressed their thanks by swimming around in circles for some time before dispersing!” I nearly laughed out aloud. Oh my! What an assumption to make! I thought to myself, *“The fishes probably were panicked in a new strange environment and were confused! If I were placed in the heart of New York for the first time, I too would be fearful, lost and confused!”*

I recall a happening some years ago, probably 12 years or so. I had returned from an overseas tour. A member of the Association told me this: *‘You know, Brother Ah Lock (not*

*his real name ... for confidentiality reasons ), our devoted elderly member fell very sick. We told him that it must be due to his past kamma of killing living beings and the way out of his problem was to purchase some living animals in captivity and have them released. We managed to convince him; on his behalf we purchased about twenty birds, put them in a sack and drove to the countryside to release them. Unfortunately, upon reaching the place, half of the birds had died.'*

I was rather sad to hear about the deluded beliefs and the silly action. Of course the birds died from suffocation in the sack. I explained to some members some aspects of the Dhamma hoping to clear some of their delusion.

I remember one member of the 'releasing lives' group telling me and some of my friends about the sinful cruelty of people who keep pet fish in aquariums. 'How would you like to be in captivity?' he asked. 'The fish must be out in their natural habitat, the lakes, rivers, seas and oceans. They will be more happy and peaceful.'

I told this member that he simply could not make such assumptions. I then narrated to him an account about 'pet fish in an aquarium' given by a very cultivated monk.

"You know, fishes well-kept in an aquarium by a very responsible, loving and compassionate pet owner, can be more happy and peaceful than fish out in the wild. Have a thought about the comparison below:

- \* Fishes in an aquarium are fed regularly by the owner. Those in the wild have to struggle to look for food.

- \* An aquarium is well maintained by the responsible owner – the water pH is right and the water is kept clean free from pollutants, unwanted plants and organisms. Fishes out in the

lakes, rivers and seas may have to deal with the ever increasing problems of pollution.

\* Fishes in an aquarium do not have to 'worry' about predators going after them; small fishes in the wild live under the constant threat of predators like large fishes.

\* Fishes in an aquarium are so well protected from the threatening forces of Nature like a typhoon, a hurricane or adverse climatic changes.

\* Sick fishes in an aquarium are even taken care of by the dedicated owner; they are isolated and treated by the compassionate owner. Do the fishes in the wild get such medical treatment?

\* Fishes in lakes, rivers and seas live under the constant danger of becoming victims of anglers and fishermen. The aquarium fishes can live a relatively safe and peaceful life.

Who are we then to make assumptions and judgment that pet fishes and other domesticated animals must be suffering from a lack of freedom compared to their 'friends' out in the wild? Unwise courses of action in the practice of releasing lives can bring about more harm and suffering to some animals. Of course compassionate people who rescue stray animals from being killed, who help animals out of danger on the roads, who feed hungry stray cats and dogs, who save puppies and kittens fallen into drains, and those who serve in so many animal care homes, are most praise-worthy. When the practice of 'releasing lives' is reduced to a ritualistic or ceremonial thing born out of delusion and the 'self-centred' intention of protecting oneself, then such action cannot be good and wise Dhamma practice.

So much commercialization has come about through the practice of releasing lives. In the 1950s and 60s during the

celebration of Wesak, releasing pigeons in ‘captivity’ was quite prevalent in many Buddhist temple and centers. This soon turned into a rather lucrative business. Many domesticated pigeons were brought into the temple ground during the Wesak period to be sold to the devotees that thronged the temple. Many took part in the ‘releasing lives’ ceremony. A ‘recycling’ took place. Most of the released pigeons flew back to be sold and released again. What sort of Dhamma practice is this. Most temples have since then stopped this meaningless practice.

During one of our Buddhist pilgrimages in India in 2004, I saw the ‘business’ that went hand in hand with the practice of releasing lives. It was in the Ganges River area. We were supposed to take a boat cruise along the river and we were waiting on the river shore for our turn. There were a few Indian men shouting (in English and also Chinese!), “Release lives! Release Lives! Do this meritorious deed and you will be blessed with longevity, good health, good wealth, good luck and other blessings!” These sellers had lots of live fishes for sale. One of them approached me and said, “You from Malaysia? You Buddhist?” When I replied in the affirmative, he went on and on, “Then you must buy fishes from me and release them into the Mother Ganges River!” All good Buddhists must do this!” I politely declined and went on my way.

Later on when we were cruising along the Ganges River, I saw a distance away, men casting nets and using lines to catch the very fishes that were released not so far away! These fishes would be ‘recycled’ in the ‘business’ of ‘releasing lives’.

May we practice true compassion and wisdom in walking the spiritual path.

## 9 Dealing With People

“Silence the angry man with love. Silence the ill-natured man with kindness. Silence the miser with generosity. Silence the liar with truth.”



Our local Buddhist Association, Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak or fondly known as PBHP was established more than 25 years ago. The PBHP Vision is to spread the Light of Dhamma for the peace and true happiness of one and all. The objectives are:

- \* Promoting Buddhist Teachings to the Buddhist Community
- \* Providing moral education for children and youths
- \* Rendering educational, welfare and community services

In our Dhammaduta work, we are non-sectarian; we have members and devotees practicing the Theravada, Mahayana or Vajarana tradition under the same roof. Both Chinese and English are used in the various programs and activities. Diverse skillful means are used to realize the objectives through the nine sections and forty units in the organization structure. We strive to strike a good balance between ‘Reaching out’ and ‘Self-development of the mind’.

Over the 25 years as a committee member of PBHP, I have found that problems, conflicts or issues that arise are not due to the different Buddhist traditions being practiced or doctrinal things or the use of a medium of language. Most of the problems or conflicts are traced to interpersonal relationships. Some members ‘clash’ with one another; they do not see eye to eye. Arguments, quarrels and the use of unbecoming words affect relationships between people.

Some groups cannot work in harmony and some people remain in ‘non-talking’ terms because of misunderstanding. Upon reflection, I feel that relationship problems arise because of one or more of the following:

- \* No true and sufficient learning, understanding, practicing and realizing the Dhamma
- \* The clinging on to one’s own conditioned views
- \* The strong sense of the ‘self’ or ego
- \* The inability to understand and see another’s view or position
- \* The lack of Metta (loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion)
- \* The inability to forgive and ‘let go’

One of the great weaknesses in our local Buddhist Association and also many Buddhist or Dhamma centers elsewhere lies in the area of public relations – proper interaction and kind dealing with people. Over the years I have heard so many comments from my Buddhist and non-Buddhist friends:

“Buddhists lack the warmth and friendliness as compared to the Christians in the churches.”

“Nobody seems to bother or tend to you when one visits a Buddhist temple or a Dhamma center.”

“So many monks or nuns are not so friendly; they are so distant and there seems to be a barrier between us and them.”

“In many centers, there seems to be an over emphasis on rather cold doctrinal teachings – there is a lack of the human touch.”

“The outreach work of Buddhists is far below the various charity works of the Christians in terms of education, welfare, the medical field and other humanitarian causes.”



“ Too many Buddhists are too intellectual in their preaching - they fail to touch the hearts of others or be a source of inspiration to people.’

I think there is some truth in some of the points raised. We need to put in more effort to overcome the weaknesses. I must say some good improvements have come about through some good work in reaching out to others and relating to them well.

Over here at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, we too have tried to improve on our public relations and on ways to improve human relationship among people. The issues are addressed in committee meetings, through Dhamma teachings in our various classes for different age groups , through Dhamma talks and discussions and some projects that aim at the problems of human interaction.

In the last few years we conducted a few workshops on human relationships for students, youths and adult members. Various presentations were give that we felt would be beneficial to the management committee, our members and devotees in dealing with people. Below are the points in the presentations given:

### **I Good Leadership**

- \* Self – Control
- \* Firm Courage
- \* Sense of Justice & Fairness
- \* Clearness of Plans
- \* Positive Mind
- \* A Pleasant Personality
- \* Compassion & Understanding
- \* Sacrifice & Doing More
- \* Completeness of Details

- \* Responsibility
- \* Getting Cooperation
- \* Leading by Example

## **II Reaching Out To Others**

- \* Show loving CARE for people.
- \* Take every opportunity to HELP.
- \* Keep good MORALITY every time.
- \* Practice great PATIENCE.
- \* Use ability to SERVE.
- \* Practice RIGHT SPEECH.
- \* Develop the STRENGTH to succeed.
- \* SERVE the NEEDS of others.
- \* Have high INTEGRITY and HONESTY.
- \* Have COURAGE to face obstacles and problems and to OVERCOME them.

## **III Cultivating A Winning Personality**

- \* Smile as much as possible
- \* Show genuine interest in other people.
- \* Show honest and sincere appreciation.
- \* Be a good listener.
- \* Consider the other person's needs and interests.
- \* Make the other person feel important in a sincere manner.
- \* Arouse an eager want in the other person.
- \* Try to remember a person's name.
- \* Don't criticize, condemn or complain

## **IV Human Relationship Laws**

- \* Be polite and well-mannered.
- \* Be cheerful. Smile.
- \* Remember people's names.

- \* Be a good listener
- \* Show appreciation.
- \* Show a sincere interest in others.
- \* Be kind and helpful.
- \* Be patient, tolerant and understanding.
- \* Do not argue with people.
- \* Watch your speech.
- \* Don't brag. Let your virtues speak for themselves.
- \* Never criticize without complimenting.
- \* Refrain from discussing issues that will hurt other people.
- \* Do unto others as you want others to do unto you

### **V Effective Speaking**

- \* Define the Purpose of your speech.
- \* Get to know your audience.
- \* Prepare and organize your material.
- \* Get attention at the Introduction.
- \* Make an Effective Conclusion
- \* Use Audio-Visual Aids where necessary
- \* Speak from brief notes or points.
- \* Watch your Body Language
- \* Be Aware of the way you speak.
- \* Adopt a proper posture.
- \* Be your natural self.
- \* Remember to practice
- \* Spice up your Speech with wit and humor.
- \* Avoid negative elements.
- \* Show Enthusiasm in your speech.
- \* Concentrate. Be Mindful
- \* Handle Questions intelligently.
- \* Be Honest and Sincere.
- \* Exercise Flexibility in your speech.

- \* Have a Positive Mind

## **VI Time Management**

- \* Have very clear goals
- \* Set deadlines and meet them.
- \* Get your priorities right
- \* Plan and Follow a Program
- \* Always Be Punctual
- \* Use efficient ways
- \* Be Alert and Mindful
- \* Practice Strong Discipline.
- \* Do not Procrastinate
- \* Don't Waste Time
- \* Concentrate Well.
- \* Organize your Work
- \* Delegate and Share the work
- \* Take good care of your health
- \* Cultivate Good Attitudes and Habits

## **VII 10 Most Powerful Words**

- \* The most selfish 1-letter word – ***"I"*** . Avoid it.
- \* The most satisfying 2-letter word – ***"We"***. Use it.
- \* The most poisonous 3-letter word – ***"Ego"***. Kill it.
- \* The most used 4-letter word – ***"Love"***. Value it.
- \* The most pleasing 5-letter word – ***"Smile"***. Keep it.
- \* The fastest spreading 6-letter word – ***"Rumor"***. Ignore it.
- \* The most diligent 7-letter word – ***"Success"*** . Achieve it.
- \* The most enviable 8-letter word – ***"Jealousy"***. Distance it.
- \* The most powerful 9-letter word – ***"Knowledge"***.  
Acquire it.
- \* The most essential 10=letter word – ***"Confidence"***.  
Trust it.

## 10 ‘Don’t Touch My Dead Body....’

*“Thoroughly worn out is this body,  
a nest of diseases, perishable. This  
putrid mass breaks up.  
Truly, life ends in death.”*



Some years ago, I heard one of our Buddhist devotees, a middle-aged lady, telling her friends, “When I die, my dead body must not be touched for eight hours. I have told this to my family members. I have read some Dhamma books and heard some talks by Sangha members on this matter. You know why? You see, after a person dies, his consciousness is still hovering around him for a certain time. During this period, if his body is touched, he will feel pain. His mind then becomes agitated, disturbed or even angry and hateful. Such negative thoughts can propel him to a woeful state in his next rebirth.”

I reflected deeply on what was said by the lady. “Did the Buddha teach such things?” I thought to myself. I was convinced this was not true. How about people of other faiths like Christianity and Islam? They do not believe or practice such things? Bodies are touched, cleaned and properly attired before putting them into the caskets. So such people will have woeful rebirths? This sounds nonsensical to me. What about dead bodies that have to go through a post mortem due to the circumstances of their deaths? And accident cases where the bodies have to be touched and removed from the accident spots as soon as possible? The more I thought about the different circumstances where death could occur and where touching the dead bodies was inevitable, the more I felt that the belief had no basis or truth.

If Buddhists are ‘brainwashed’ into believing that it would be ‘dangerous’ to have their dead bodies touched before 8 hours, then more and more of them would be reluctant or fearful to donate their organs upon death. (*The dead organs would be quite useless if they are not ‘harvested’ until after 8 hours!*) And the irony is that Dhamma teaching talks about the importance of practicing Dana (Charity, Giving, Generosity) and this includes organ donation.

I asked a few senior and well-cultivated monks about this matter. I was told that there is no such teaching by the Buddha and the original Pali Canon does not contain such a thing. This teaching probably came much later when Buddhism spread to China and some monks wrote and taught this thing. Perhaps in the early days, there were cases of the ‘dead’ coming back to life; they arose from the coffins because they were not dead yet. So as a safety precaution, the idea came that it would be wiser to leave the bodies undisturbed for some time, just in case...

Today death is certified by doctors in so many reliable medical methods ... breathing, blood pressure, ECG, EEG ... ( and in Buddhist terms, a loss of body heat, coldness in the body...). When my father passed away in the hospital, after death was certified by the doctors, his body had to be removed from the bed in the emergency ward (to make way for another patient who might need it. ) Everything was done so peacefully... all within half an hour. None in my family was perturbed by the ‘8-hour stuff’ because we did not believe in such a thing. I wonder about the problems and dukkha that would arise if our family members had insisted on not allowing my father’s body to be touched for 8 hours!

Our Buddhist Association has been conducting wake services and Buddhist funeral rites for more than 20 years. I remember one case where the undertaker got real mad with the family members of the deceased who was killed in an accident. The body was brought back to the home (after the post mortem and clearance by the hospital). The family told the undertaker not to touch the dead body until after 8 hours. He got angry with such illogical instructions... hadn't the body been touched already, in the accident spot and the hospital? As the condition of the body was quite messy, the undertaker wanted to clean up and dress the body properly before laying it in the casket. He wanted to have some injections done to check the decaying and smell. Upon hearing the ridiculous orders from the family, the undertaker told them he would not then handle this case; they could look for another undertaker. The family relented and then allowed him to do the necessary for the good of all.

When I met the undertaker during the night wake service, he complained to me. "You Buddhists can be foolish and utterly ridiculous!" He then told me what happened. "Hey, Mr....", I told him, "you must not misunderstand. Don't brand Buddhists this way. There are some people who have funny beliefs; Buddha-Dhamma is pure. Our Buddhist Association does not teach such things." He apologized for his outburst.

More than 10 years ago, a lay Dhammaduta worker came to our Association for Dhamma sharing. He was a western doctor from New Zealand, a very kind, compassionate and wise doctor, one who practices the Dhamma very well. In one of our discussions, I asked him about the matter of 'not touching the dead body until after 8 hours'. This was essentially what he said:

*“This teaching has no logical basis; it is not true. My wife was struck with cancer just a few years after our marriage. I looked after her the best I could ...with love, understanding and compassion. Upon her death, of course, I touched her in terms of cleaning the body, dressing her nicely and placing her with dignity in the casket. All this was done with metta and understanding.”* He reminded us to rid the mind of superstition and fear born out of ignorance and delusion.

Deep within me, I feel that Dhamma speakers or writers should concentrate on the important and fundamental teachings of the Buddha: The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eight-Fold Path, The Law Of Karma and Rebirth, The Dependent Origination, Dana, Sila, Bhavana, Buddhist Meditation, The Three Characteristics of Dukkha (Unsatisfactoriness), Anicca (Impermanence) and Anatta (Non-self), The Four Sublime States (Metta or Loving-kindness, Karuna or Compassion, Mudita or Altruistic Joy and Upekkha or Equanimity and a host of other useful topics.

I see little point in talking about things of a speculative nature, things which are more like mythologies and legends. They do not really benefit our proper mental development or purification. On the contrary, such ‘off the track’ teachings may adversely condition the minds of ignorant people. This may lead to feelings of dis-ease, worry and fear.

A couple of years ago a lady Buddhist devotee came to our Buddhist Association to get some free Dhamma books. She asked to see me to discuss a problem she was facing. This was what she said:

*‘I have learnt the Dhamma for quite some time – sometimes I get confused. One monk or nun teaches this thing; another one contradicts it.’*



I told her about the Kalama Sutta (The Charter of Free Inquiry) and advised her to go back to the original Buddha's Teachings as expounded in the 4 Nikayas of the Pali Canon. She then continued, "I am now facing a problem; my mind is greatly troubled. You see, some years ago I pledged to donate my organs upon my death. Recently I heard some Sangha members preaching about the importance of not touching the body until at least 8 hours after death. If this is a Dhamma teaching, then how can I be an organ donor; I would feel pain during the organ removal; my mind will be negative and I will be propelled into a woeful realm. I am in a real dilemma as to what I should do."

I told her that she had received 'wrong Dhamma' and that the Buddha did not teach such things. In fact, her pledge of organ donation is a most meritorious act of Dana. When death takes place the body decays and goes back to its elements. The kamma of her mind goes on to the next rebirth; all her good thoughts and actions are her good kamma and they follow her from life to life.

Listening to deluded 'Dhamma teachings' constantly can to my mind, bring harm to a person's mind. It can cause undue anxiety, worry and irrational fear in the mind. Imagine this scenario: *Bro. X and his family members very often listen to talks by lay and Sangha members harping on the danger of touching the body within 8 hours of death. These people get 'brainwashed'; their minds are conditioned to react with worry and fear. Now, suppose Bro. X dies in an accident and his body has to be extricated from the vehicle. He would have been touched. His family members may worry themselves to death upon learning that he had been touched. The mind, spirit or soul (whatever you call it) of the deceased is stuck with the belief or thought "Had it! I have*

*been touched; it's bad." His mind is troubled with worry and fear! Ha! He creates his own hell!*

If a person lets his mind be conditioned negatively, he will face more and more suffering with the arising in his mind of states like attachment, greed, anger, ill will, hatred, ego and fear – a reaction to the conditioning his mind has been subjected to time and again. The happy and peaceful mind is one that cuts the attachment and greed, reduces anger, hatred and delusion.

I once heard in a Dhamma talk of a hypnosis experiment carried out by a hypnotist from a Psychical Society in England. The experiment was carried out at the University of Cambridge. The hypnotist got a volunteer subject and hypnotized him in front of a large audience. In his hypnotic state, the following message was put into the mind of the subject: "Sir, afterwards when you see me putting my left hand over my left ear, you will walk to the edge of the stage and sing our National Anthem, 'God Save The Queen' ". The subject was then awoken from his hypnotic state. He did not know what message had been put into his mind. Upon seeing the hypnotist put his right hand over his right ear, the subject did not react in any way. However when the hypnotist put his left hand over his left ear, the subject walked to the edge of the stage and sang "God Save The Queen"!

So beware of mind conditioning and brainwashing!

A good Dhamma practitioner would not let 'mumbo jumbo' pollute or weaken his mind. With diligence and mindfulness, he strives on in his practice of Dana (Generosity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Meditation). He practices ardently 'letting go' and 'non-attachment'. He knows only The Noble Eightfold Path will lead him to Enlightenment.

## 11 Reincarnation Or Rebirth - *The Evidences*

*“All tremble at the rod, all are  
fearful of death. Drawing the  
parallel to yourself, neither  
kill nor get others to kill.”*



Ever since I was a student I used to ponder on questions like

- \* Is there survival after death?
- \* What really happens after death?
- \* Is there a heaven and a hell?
- \* What is the meaning and purpose of life?
- \* Is this life of ours the only life?
- \* Does one get reborn after death?

During my school days I followed the teachings of a theistic religion that taught among other doctrines that our life is the only one and upon death there will be a judgment and one will be sent to heaven or hell according to his ‘sins’. When I was in sixth form, I started to think, question critically and read many books that touched on life, death and after-death. I found that the one-life theory could not explain so many things like *‘why is there so much disparity among people – the rich and the poor, the intelligent and the moronic, the ugly and the beautiful?’*, *‘why do some die so very young?’*, *‘Why are there geniuses and child prodigies?’* *‘Why do bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people?’* It was only when I came upon the Dhamma and the teachings on Kamma and Rebirth that the answers unfolded so very clearly to me.

Some years ago, I came upon a posting on Slideshare that ‘attacked’ the doctrine of Reincarnation or Rebirth; it tried to provide ‘proofs’ for the one-life theory ( *which to me were rather flimsy and illogical – it was essentially just based on the writings of a ‘Holy Book’*). I did and posted on Slideshare a power point presentation on ‘Rebirth – The Evidences’. The summarized points for the empirical evidences of Reincarnation or Rebirth were listed as follows:

\* **Some famous thinkers who pondered and believed in Rebirth** – they included Carl Jung, Mahatma Gandhi, Mark Twain, Albert Schweitzer, Benjamin Franklin, William Wordsworth, Schopenhauer and Socrates among others

\* **Case Studies** – of people particularly children who could recall their past lives. These have been documented in journals of parapsychology and psychical inquiry. The classic book ‘*Twenty Cases Suggestive Of Reincarnation*’ by Professor Ian Stevenson is a ‘must-read’.

\* **Teachings From The Great World Religions** – Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism have referred to the doctrine reincarnation or rebirth . ( Some early sects of Christianity have also teaching points on reincarnation. )

\* **Child Prodigies** – This is logically explained through the rebirth doctrine.

\* **Phobias** – A study of this could show the link with past lives in the rounds of rebirth.

- \* **Transsexualism** – This strange phenomenon would be consistent with the fact of rebirth and past lives ( which could crisscross between the male and female genders )
- \* **Obsessions** - Many cases of obsessive behavior can be logically explained from the past lives of the person.
- \* **Déjà vu** – This phenomenon *of having the strong sensation that an event or experience currently being experienced has been experienced in the past ( not of this life )* can be explained through the teaching of rebirth.
- \* **The Dream World** - Certain cases of recurrent dreams could be explained on the basis of certain ‘traumatic’ happenings in a past life.
- \* **Multiple Personalities** – Cases of this human behavior would be consistent with the doctrine of reincarnation or rebirth.
- \* **Hypnosis and Past Life Regression** – This modern approach provides very strong empirical evidence as to the reality of rebirth and past lives. Many great books by very qualified experts have been written on this. Among them are *Many Lives Many Masters*, *Brian Weiss*, *You Have Been Here Before: A Psychologist Looks at Past Lives*, *Dr. Edith Fiore*, *Journey of Souls: Case Studies of Life Between Lives* by *Michael Newton*, *Other Lives*, *Other Selves: A Jungian Psychotherapist Discovers Past Lives* by *Roger J. Woolger*, *Return Again: How to Find Meaning in Your Past Lives and Your Interlives* by *Georgina Cannon* and many others.

\* **Meditation** – Ajahn Brahmavamso, a meditation monk and teacher once said, “Reincarnation or rebirth is not a theory, a mere teaching or doctrine. It is a fact and you can realize it for yourself.” Through meditation one can realize for himself that he has lived before. The Buddha before His Enlightenment, in His meditation could see all his past lives in his rounds of rebirth before His final human life.

Many a skeptic would dismiss all the empirical evidences in support of rebirth and past lives as ‘works of Satan’ trying to mislead people away from the true path. I find this quite amusing but I can understand. Systems of beliefs and faiths sometimes cloud our logical thinking and reasoning even though the evidences become overwhelming. The conditioned mind is not easy to transform to accept facts and see things as they truly are.

When I first read about the Buddhist narration of Siddhartha Gautama meditating under an apple rose tree when he was just barely 7, I had my doubts. Could it be possible for one so young, so protected from ‘spiritual’ matters, meditate so intensely on his own without prior learning? I thought about the hundreds of children in our Sunday School who could hardly sit still for even 10 minutes. Later on when I started to learn, understand and practice the Dhamma, I realized that we have all lived before in so many past lives. Siddhartha must have cultivated his mind in many an aeon of past lives ...it would then be no surprise that he could reach mental absorptions even at a young age.

In 1989, I attended my first meditation retreat of 8 days at the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Center in Penang. It was a real ordeal for me. I wanted to give up but for the

encounter with a little boy ( of 10 or 11 years of age ) who really inspired me to meditate on. He was on a temporary monkhood program. During the meditation sessions, he sat in front of me, so calm, patient, serene and peaceful, meditating for 1 to 2 hours at a stretch. And there I was behind him so restless and wanting to give up. He was an inspiration to me to strive on to 'conquer the mind'. After the retreat, upon reflection, I knew inside me that the little boy was a living proof that he had practiced meditation in a past life.

In 2011 at our local Buddhist Association, we conducted an 8 or 9-day Vipassana Meditation Retreat. We had a standard 4 girl who participated in the retreat. The meditation teacher marveled at her practice – so patient, calm, composed, peaceful and diligent in her practice. She must have meditated in past lives, the meditation teacher told us after the retreat. Observing her myself, I am convinced of this.

In May 2014, I got a forwarded news report through my email about an astonishing case that pointed to the reality of rebirth and past lives. There was also a link on my Facebook. To provoke the thinking of people, particularly the skeptics or non-believers, here is the account from the news report:

### **3-Year-Old Remembers Past Life, Identifies Murderer and Location of Body**

**By Tara MacIsaac, Epoch Times | May 17, 2014**

*The universe is full of mysteries that challenge our current knowledge.*

*In "Beyond Science" Epoch Times collects stories about these strange phenomena to stimulate the imagination and*

*open up previously undreamed of possibilities. Are they true? You decide.*

*A 3-year-old boy in the Golan Heights region near the border of Syria and Israel said he was murdered with an axe in his previous life. He showed village elders where the murderer buried his body, and sure enough they found a man's skeleton there. He also showed the elders where the murder weapon was found, and upon digging, they did indeed find an axe there.*

*In his book, "Children Who Have Lived Before: Reincarnation Today," German therapist Trutz Hardo tells this boy's story, along with other stories of children who seem to remember their past lives with verified accuracy. The boy's story was witnessed by Dr. Eli Lasch, who is best known for developing the medical system in Gaza as part of an Israeli government operation in the 1960s. Dr. Lasch, who died in 2009, had recounted these astounding events to Hardo.*

*The boy was of the Druze ethnic group, and in his culture the existence of reincarnation is accepted as fact. His story nonetheless had the power to surprise his community.*

*He was born with a long, red birthmark on his head. The Druze believe, as some other cultures do, that birthmarks are related to past-life deaths. When the boy was old enough to talk, he told his family he had been killed by a blow to the head with an axe.*

*It is customary for elders to take a child at the age of 3 to the home of his previous life if he remembers it. The boy knew*



*the village he was from, so they went there. When they arrived in the village, the boy remembered the name he had in his past life.*

*A village local said the man the boy claimed to be the reincarnation of had gone missing four years earlier. His friends and family thought he may have strayed into hostile territory nearby as sometimes happens.*

*The boy also remembered the full name of his killer. When he confronted this man, the alleged killer's face turned white, Lasch told Hardo, but he did not admit to murder. The boy then said he could take the elders to where the body was buried. In that very spot, they found a man's skeleton with a wound to the head that corresponded to the boy's birthmark. They also found the axe, the murder weapon.*

*Faced with this evidence, the murderer admitted to the crime. Dr. Lasch, the only non-Druze, was present through this whole process.*

When one realizes the truth of rebirth and past and future lives, one wisely wants to live a righteous and Dhamma-based life, avoiding negative Kamma and generating good and positive Kamma.

The Buddha said: *I am the owner of my actions, heir of my actions, actions are the womb (from which I have sprung), actions are my relations, actions are my protection. Whatever actions I do, good or bad, of these I shall become their heir.*

Kamma is indeed our true inheritance. It follows us from life to life. Do ponder and contemplate on this.

## 12 My Mother's Dementia...

*"There is a way to be purified, to overcome sorrows and grief, to release suffering, to secure the right path to realize nirvana. This is to be mindful."*



My mother passed away peacefully in 2012 at the age of 88 – from some end-stage complications due to diabetes which she had since her 50s. Her vital organs like the heart, lungs, kidneys and liver gradually and naturally shut down.

Early dementia started in my mother when she was 80 or 81 and over the years I could see the progressive deterioration in her dementia. She was still mentally active and alert until her late 70s. My three younger brothers would come at least once a week to play cards with her. We all enjoyed her good sense of wit and humor.

Just what is Dementia and what are the symptoms? A recent article in the Health Section of the New York Times gave some very clear and useful points. Below is the extract:

*Dementia is a loss of brain function that occurs with certain diseases. It affects memory, thinking, language, judgment, and behavior.*

### **Symptoms**

*Dementia symptoms include difficulty with many areas of mental function, including:*

*Emotional behavior or personality*

*Language*

*Memory*

*Perception*

*Thinking and judgment (cognitive skills)*

*Dementia usually first appears as forgetfulness.*

**Mild cognitive impairment (MCI)** *is the stage between normal forgetfulness due to aging and the development of dementia. People with MCI have mild problems with thinking and memory that do not interfere with daily activities. They are often aware of the forgetfulness. Not everyone with MCI develops dementia.*

**Symptoms of MCI include:**

*Difficulty doing more than one task at a time  
Difficulty solving problems or making decisions  
Forgetting recent events or conversations  
Taking longer to do more difficult mental activities*

**Early symptoms of Dementia** *can include:*

*Difficulty with tasks that take some thought, but that used to come easily, such as balancing a checkbook, playing games (such as bridge), and learning new information or routines  
Getting lost on familiar routes  
Language problems, such as trouble with the names of familiar objects  
Losing interest in things previously enjoyed, flat mood  
Misplacing items  
Personality changes and loss of social skills, which can lead to inappropriate behaviors*

*As dementia becomes worse, symptoms are more obvious and interfere with the ability to take care of oneself.*

**Symptoms may include:**

*Change in sleep patterns, often waking up at night  
Difficulty with basic tasks, such as preparing meals, choosing proper clothing, or driving  
Forgetting details about current events  
Forgetting events in one's own life history, losing self-awareness*

*Having hallucinations, arguments, striking out, and violent behavior*

*Having delusions, depression, agitation*

*More difficulty reading or writing*

*Poor judgment and loss of ability to recognize danger*

*Using the wrong word, not pronouncing words correctly, speaking in confusing sentences*

*Withdrawing from social contact*

***People with severe dementia can no longer:***

*Perform basic activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing, and bathing*

*Recognize family members*

*Understand language*

**Other symptoms that may occur with dementia:**

*Incontinence*

*Swallowing problems*

Since 1978, after getting a transfer from my teaching post in Kelantan to my hometown in Teluk Intan, I had been living at my home with my parents and a maid. (*My father passed away in 1999.*) I introduced Buddhism to my mother and she began to learn, understand and practice the Dhamma. She took up chanting and meditation, did lots of Dana at our local Buddhist association and attended many Dhamma Talks. She had even participated at Kathina Ceremonies and Meditation Retreats at our local Buddhist Association and at Penang MBMC.

From the age of 83 or so, my mother had increasing difficulty in her memory and certain cognitive functions. She had to grapple or struggle particularly with concepts of space, time, relationships, some mundane matters and her short-term memory began to worsen. She could not recognize some family members and old friends especially

those she had not seen for some time. *(Of course she had no difficulty recognizing me... I had been helping to look after her since 1978.)*

It was a couple of years before her passing away that my mother began to lose memory of all the Dhamma that she had learnt and practiced over the years. She forgot basic Dhamma doctrines and no longer could carry out her regular Dana, chanting and meditation. I consulted a couple of senior Buddhist monks on this matter ... I was feeling a little sad that all 'seemed to be lost.' The monks assured me that Dhamma learnt, practiced and realized can never be 'lost'. I was told, "You must understand that the physical brain is not the mind. Things like Dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other neurological disorders are diseases of the brain. Of course, when the brain is diseased, certain mental functions can be impaired - memory, cognitive thinking, some psychomotor tasks and so on. However the mind stores the Dhamma knowledge and realizations and other spiritual qualities developed when the person is still mentally healthy. This wealth in your mind is your true treasure and it follows you from life to life. At one's dying moments it can surface out, you can have good last thoughts and a good rebirth.

So you see the mind is unique; it can be independent of the brain. You know there was a case at the University of Sheffield of a student who was born without a brain but yet went on to graduate with first class honors in Mathematics."

( I later checked it out on the Internet and found this account: *"There's a young student at this university," neurologist Professor John Lorber of Sheffield University told Science magazine in December 1980, "who has an IQ of 126, has gained a first-class honours degree in mathematics, and is socially completely normal. And yet the boy has virtually no brain."*

*A scan revealed that the student had only 1mm of brain tissue lining the inside of his skull - fluid filled the area where the rest of his brain should have been. His was an extreme case of hydrocephalus, or "water on the brain", whereby cerebrospinal fluid fills the brain instead of circulating around it. Most sufferers can lead normal lives if regularly treated. )*

The monks then gave this very important bit of advice, "Considering that our physical health and mental health can go off at any time, it is most important for all of us to practice the Dhamma NOW when we are still healthy physically and mentally. Don't wait; it may be too late."

One of the very trying things for the care-giver of a Dementia patient is dealing with his or her forgetfulness. He cannot remember events that happened just a few minutes ago. He will keep repeating and asking the same thing.

I used to take my lunch and dinner with my mother. At the stage when her dementia became very serious, she would constantly ask me again and again the same question: "What is this dish?" In time, I find myself becoming exasperated and losing my patience.

One day, somebody sent me a forwarded email of a most touching story. *( Some time later on, I received a Video clip based essential on this story. )* I read and reflected on it carefully. It helped me to be more patient, understanding and compassionate in tending to my demented mother. I reproduce the email story for your perusal and benefit:

*"An old man was sitting in the courtyard of his house along with his son who had received a high education. Suddenly a*

*crow perched on a wall of the house. The father asked the son: What is this? The son replied: It is a crow. After a little while the father again asked the son: What is this? The son said: It is a crow.*

*After a few minutes the father asked his son the third time: What is this? The son said: Father, I have just now told you that this is a crow. After a little while the old father again asked his son the fourth time: what is this? By this time some note of irritation was felt in the son's tone when he rebuffed his father: Father! It is a crow, a crow. A little after the father again asked his son: What is this? This time the son replied to his father with a fit of temper. Father: You are always repeating the same question, although I have told you so many times that it is a crow. Are you not able to understand this?*

*The father went to his room and came back with an old diary. Opening a page he asked his son to read what was written. What the son read were the following words written in the diary:*

*'Today my little son was sitting with me in the courtyard, when a crow came there. My son asked me twenty-five times what it was and I told him twenty-five times that it was a crow and I did not at all feel irritated. I rather felt affection for my innocent child.'*

*The father then explained to his son the difference between a father's and a son's attitude: While you were a little child you asked me this question twenty-five times and I felt no irritation in replying to the question twenty-five times and*

*when today I asked you the same question only five times, you felt irritated, annoyed and impatient with me.*

Contemplation upon the story helped me realize some very important Dhamma points:

- \* When there is patience, understanding, compassion and wisdom in our hearts, anger or other negative states would not arise in our minds.
- \* When gratitude to our parents for all they have done for us is truly felt and realized, we will not react negatively towards an outside speech or action.
- \* When one understands the causes of another person so-called annoying behavior, one can embrace it with patience and endurance. One's mind then can remain more peaceful.
- \* The practice of mindfulness is essential for the developing of wisdom.
- \* The mind can attain peace when it is trained to be more and more to be in the present moment, in the NOW. When the mind goes to the past and thinks about the disappointment, the happenings one regrets, and the 'should be's', the mind then becomes ruffled and loses its peace.
- \* When the mind goes to the future wishing this and that, fantasizing, worrying and expecting, the mind gets agitated and troubled. The calm and peacefulness of 'present moment awareness' is lost.



### 13 Sharing LIFE Lessons & Dhamma

*“One who drinks in the  
Dhamma sleeps happily with a  
clear mind. The wise one ever  
delights in the Dhamma  
proclaimed by the noble ones.”*



In February 2008 I started posting on my Slideshare space Dhamma, educational and motivational material in the form of PowerPoint Slide Shows and Word documents. As on 25 July 2014 there are 926 Slideshare posts on my web site [www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/presentations](http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/presentations).

I do not expect a great number of hits or viewers when it comes to things that deal with Dhamma or LIFE Lessons. How many people would be keen or have the inclination to learn, ponder, reflect and contemplate on matters such as the meaning and purpose of life, why there is so much Dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) in the world, how and why we should lead a moral and righteous life, why and how we should train or develop the mind to grow in peace, happiness, contentment, compassion and wisdom, how we can develop harmonious relationships within ourselves , with other people and also with our environment?

So many especially the younger generation are spending so much time on things that essentially titillate more and more the senses – through social networking, thrilling virtual games in all sorts of modern gadgets and the internet. One question we need to ask: Has the ‘modern’ mind become more peaceful, happy, calm, patient, compassionate and wise? The irony is that despite the ‘progress’ and more luxurious lifestyle offering so much sensual pleasures, there seems to

be more problems among the younger generation today – anxiety, worry, stress, restlessness, drug abuse, alcoholism, social and sexual crime, depression and other psychological or psychiatric illnesses. To my mind, unless and until there is Dhamma learning, understanding, practice and realization the problems will not be resolved or reduced.

One day a Sangha member and I were discussing the influence and impact of so many networking web sites on the younger generation – YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogger, Wordpress, Linkedin and a host of others. We agreed that there is so much abuse of these ‘modern’ tools. I remember what the monk said: These things with lots of ‘rubbish’ are here to stay. Instead of complaining or lamenting, why not we try to put some ‘precious treasures’ (he means the Dhamma) among the ‘heaps of rubbish’. *There will be some people out there who have little dust in their eyes*, he said. I thought that made sense and had wisdom. It has motivated me since then to do lots of Dhamma and LIFE Lessons postings at various web sites.

The lack of sense control or sense restraint can eventually lead one to much dukkha and misery. This admonition the Buddha has given in His Teachings. I am on Facebook and Twitter ( *Essentially I use these media to post Dhamma material and LIFE Lessons – ha, ha ... I feel happy if even a few people view the posts. I know most people would prefer to view posts that excite, thrill and stimulate the senses of seeing, hearing or lead one to indulge in the pleasures of touch, taste and mind excitement. There will be a fantastic number of viewers for game posts, posts related to tempting food, fashion, fascinating places to visit, sensational news and scandals, sex, political upheavals, the latest modern*

*devices, equipment, and gadgets, sport and so on. I am not in any way saying that one cannot view such posts but too many have fallen into the worldly trap of pursuing more and more sensual things and acquiring increasing material possessions to the extent there is no time or effort put in on Dhamma matters to develop the mind. )*

I have said that I am not perturbed by the relatively small number of people who view my Dhamma / LIFE Lessons posts. However I must admit that I have been motivated by some of the appreciative comments from viewers in foreign countries, like the ones below among others:

1 Thanks, we learnt a lot from your quotes  
<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/10-wise-quotes-on-life-presentation>

Views : 71,198 as on 28 June 2014

2 Thank you for sharing!!!! It is my first time on this site and I am soooo grateful to people like you!! I teach in China and am very excited that I could find something with Chinese included. THANK YOU!!!!!!

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/the-boy-and-the-apple-treea-touching-story>

Views: 49,062 as on 28 June 2014

3 Congratulations great work !!! .. Thanks for sharing !  
 The motivation and inspiration, build a better world, share common values, promote world peace, These are a few goals of 'GREAT CAUSE and JUST CAUSES' Group. (au sens large du terme) Very nice... Great work ! !Thanks for sharing,. Best regards . Bernard (France)

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/10-jokes-10-life-lessons>

Views: 48,744 as on 28 June 2014

4 I liked it.. very true; it reminded of my father....

Thank u.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/a-fathers-letter-to-his-daughter>

Views: 42,416 as on 28 June 2014

5 This was great - had a great time sharing it with my students in Belize.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/qualities-of-a-true-friend>

Views: 35,969 as on 28 June 2014

6 Great insight.

I have shared this work on my blog. Thanks

wisdomzama.blogspot.com

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/12-inspiring-thoughts>

Views: 38,926 as on 28 June 2014

7 Rocking images - really good sharing and nice presentation.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/10-posters-about-education>

Views: 24,511 as on 28 June 2014

8 Absolutely Beautiful thoughts! Thanks for posting these wonderful slides!

A long time ago Swami Vivekananda was also asked the same question: *Which Religion is the best?*

To which he had remarked 'Mine, mine", is always the cry, never "thine, thine", and so religion has devolved into a tribal fight.

This quarrel over religion, he said, was just like 5 blind men trying to ascertain what an elephant looks like.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/the-best-religion>

Views: 21,762 as on 28 June 2014

9 Valuable quotes that one must note, learn and remember.

My favourite is slide 4. This is a good PPS my friend.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/10-valuable-life-lessons-presentation>

Views: 20,869 as on 28 June 2014

10 From 'GREED, ANGER, HATRED, EGO and DELUSION' towards 'GENEROSITY, LOVE, COMPASSION AND WISDOM '

That's what the world wants! :-)

Thanks for sharing the slideshow.

<http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/15-shocking-photos-for-reflection>

Views: 20,657 as on 28 June 2014

From time to time some people forward some useful material to my emails. I have turned some of them into PowerPoint presentations ( with some illustrations, graphics or pictures) and then uploaded them into a few websites. Just a few days ago, someone forwarded an email containing beautiful LIFE Lessons. With the material, I came out with the presentation "*Terrific Thoughts To Treasure.*" I posted it on my Slideshare. The contents of the presentation I'd like to share below:

### **Terrific Thoughts To Treasure**

\* A Lot Of Trouble Would Disappear

If Only People Would Learn  
 To Talk To One Another  
 Instead Of Talking About One Another .....

\* When People Walk Away From You, Let Them Go.  
 Your Destiny Is Never Tied  
 To Anyone Who Leaves You.  
 It Doesn't Mean They Are Bad People.  
 It Just Means That Their Part In Your Story Is Over.. !

\* Human Life Would Be Perfect If...  
 Anger Had A STOP Button  
 Mistakes Had A REWIND Button  
 Hard Times Had A FORWARD Button  
 And Good Times A PAUSE Button !!

\* Always Welcome Your Problems,  
 Because Problems Give You Dual Advice,  
 Firstly, You Can Know How To Solve Them,  
 Secondly, You Learn How To Avoid Them In Future.

\* Reflection Cannot Be Seen In Boiling Water,  
 In The Same Way,  
 Truth Cannot Be Seen In A State Of Anger!  
 Analyze Before You Finalize.

\* Success Is Like A Beautiful Lover  
 It Will Leave Us At Anytime,  
 But Failure Is Like A Mother  
 It Will Teach Us Some Important Lessons Of Life!

\* A Good Heart Can Win  
 Many Relationships.

A Good Nature Can Win  
Many Good Hearts!

\* TOUCH Could HEAL A Wound  
An Eye Could SPEAK Volumes  
A SMILE Can Confirm I AM THERE !!

\* The Bird Asked The Bumblebee:  
"You Work So Hard To Make The Honey  
And Humans Just Take It Away,  
Doesn't It Make You Feel Bad?"  
"No," Said The Bee, "Because They Will Never  
Take From Me The Art Of Making It."

Posts pertaining to many Dhamma teachings can be very beneficial for one to understand and reflect upon and then strive to apply them in our life. With confidence, patience, determination and effort, the mind can be transformed from twisted, defiled or deluded thinking into a state of clear comprehension, compassion and wisdom.

Some years ago I did a power point on the danger of anger by using some of the very good quotes and advice of some wise or great people. I reproduce here the excellent quotes:

### **The Danger Of Anger**

- \* He who angers you conquers you. *Elizabeth Kenny*
- \* For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness. *Author Unknown*
- \* Anger is one letter short of danger. *Author Unknown*

- \* People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.  
*Will Rogers*
- \* Where there is anger, there is always pain underneath.  
*Eckhart Tolle*
- \* If you kick a stone in anger, you'll hurt your own foot.  
*Korean Proverb*
- \* Anger dwells only in the bosom of fools. *Albert Einstein*
- \* No man can think clearly when his fists are clenched.  
*George Jean Nathan*
- \* Anger blows out the lamp of the mind.  
*Robert G. Ingersoll*
- \* At the core of all anger is a need that is not being fulfilled.  
*Marshall B. Rosenberg*
- \* When anger rises, think of the consequences  
*Confucius*
- \* Anger always comes from frustrated expectations  
*Elliott Larson*
- \* Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.  
*Benjamin Franklin*
- \* The angry people are those people who are most afraid  
*Dr. Robert Anthony*
- \* When you are offended at any man's fault, turn to yourself and study your own failings. Then you will forget your anger.  
*Epictetus*
- \* If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.  
*Chinese Proverb*
- \* Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding.  
*Mohandas Gandhi*
- \* Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.  
*Mark Twain*



- \* Every time you get angry, you poison your own system.  
*Alfred A. Montapert*
- \* Expressing anger is a form of public littering.  
*Willard Gaylin*
- \* Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.  
*Buddha*
- \* The more anger towards the past you carry in your heart, the less capable you are of loving in the present.  
*Barbara De Angelis*
- \* If you do not wish to be prone to anger, do not feed the habit; give it nothing which may tend to its increase.  
*Epictetus*
- \* Never get angry. Never make a threat. Reason with people.  
*MARIO PUZO*
- \* When you clench your fist, no one can put anything in your hand, nor can your hand pick up anything.  
*ALEX HALEY*
- \* If a man be under the influence of anger his conduct will not be correct.  
*CONFUCIUS*
- \* Anger is poison. You must purge it from your mind or else it will corrupt your better nature.  
*CHRISTOPHER PAOLINI*
- \* Anger is like a flame blazing up and consuming our self-control, making us think, say, and do things that we will probably regret later.  
*THICH NHAT HANH*
- \* When you make a move out of stress or anger, it always ends in catastrophe.  
*JOHN CASEY*
- \* Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns it all clean.  
*Angelou, Maya*

## 14 Meditation Matters

*"Understand the suffering of worldly existence. Abandon its causes of ignorance and selfishness. Practice the path of meditation and compassion. Awaken from suffering within Great Peace."*



At our local Buddhist Association we have two meditation sessions every week, on Sunday afternoon and Tuesday night. Sad to say over the last 25 years or so, the number of members and devotees who come to meditate regularly leaves much to be desired. Although meditation is essential for one walking the Dhamma path for liberation, why is this so? I feel the following are some of the reasons:

- \* Many cannot bring themselves to sit quietly; the restless mind is their obstacle.
- \* The distractions of the outside sensual world are too strong and many would prefer entertainment to the hard struggle of meditation.
- \* A lack of real understanding and realization as to the importance of meditation to free the mind of defilements.
- \* Mental laziness and a lack of discipline
- \* Wrong motivation and expectation due to ignorance and delusion
- \* A lack of patience, determination and endurance
- \* Fear – some harbor the wrong idea that meditation is dangerous
- \* Failure to realize that self-reliance is important and constant practice is needed. Many give up easily; some only wait and come to practice when there is a meditation teacher around.

Is meditation dangerous ? Can everybody meditate? One meditation teacher gave a very good answer as to whether it is dangerous to meditate. He asked the questioner, “Do you need to go along the road to reach a destination? Is it dangerous? Of course, one has to be careful and mindful and then things will be alright.” Another meditation teacher commented, “A knife can be dangerous if used carelessly and stupidly but we need to use a knife to help us do so many important things.” A third meditation master gave a very ‘cute’ answer: ‘Meditation dangerous? Ha, not to meditate is dangerous – we will remain mad, mad with the defilements of greed, anger, hatred and delusion. And this will be with us from life to life. Don’t wait, don’t hesitate! Meditate!’

Most meditation masters tell us that meditation is safe if we follow proper ways and receive proper instructions from a proper meditation teacher. It might not be wise or advisable for the following categories of people to meditate:

- \* People who suffer from psychiatric disorders or have a family history of mental illnesses
- \* People who have lots of superstitious beliefs and harbor irrational fears of many things in their minds
- \* People who are very emotionally unstable and prone to things like hysteria
- \* People who have deep-rooted emotional problems

There was a case of a lay Buddhist lady who was guiding some people in meditation. *(She was, I was told, given the green light by her meditation teacher, a monk, to teach meditation to the new ones.)* Some of my sixth form students came under her guidance. In a meditation retreat she attended, this ‘meditation teacher’ broke down and became hysterical. She had to receive psychiatric treatment and had since then

not been allowed to meditate. The word spread around and some of her meditation students lost confidence. We found out that she was actually suffering from a host of problems: her family and home and her work place gave her great emotional stress; she was experiencing an emotional upheaval due to a one-sided romantic relationship.

In meditation practice sessions and retreats, sometimes strange happenings occur. In the 1990s, I used to bring a group of meditators from our Buddhist Association to a Thai temple about three miles away. The Buddhist Association was just renting a shop lot then; we did not have our own premises as yet. The Thai temple, situated in the rural area, was very conducive for meditation.

One day, a strange (and hilarious!) thing happened during our meditation session. Our members were doing their sitting meditation and I was doing my mindfulness walking. A stranger, a Chinese man in his late forties, came into the meditation hall. I approached him to find out what he wanted. "Oh, he said, "I am a seasoned meditator doing a well-known 'Chi' type of meditation. What about all of you?" I replied, "We are from PBHP. Our members are doing Buddhist meditation – basically Metta Bhavana (meditation on loving-kindness) and Vipassana Meditation."

As I had no authority to prevent him or bar him from meditating in this Thai Temple, I left him to his own meditation and I continued with my walking meditation. I noticed that this stranger could settle pretty fast in his concentration. Hardly 10 minutes had passed when I saw this man in his meditation, moving his hands all over like in a trance. His hand movements were autonomous and I must say quite graceful. He then got up with his eyes still closed. He started to 'dance' around like in a Chinese opera show

and his movements were rhythmic and graceful. Just as I was wondering what should be done, this ‘dancer’ was already right in front of one of our meditators, an elderly lady in her sixties. Even with her eyes closed, she must have felt that something or somebody was in front of her. She opened her eyes and let out a piercing scream when she saw the ‘dancing’ man. All our meditators got up to find out what happened. The ‘dancing’ meditator also awoke. It took me some time to calm down our screaming member.

In Buddhist meditation, mindfulness is a most important thing. We have been taught to be always mindful of all physical and mental phenomena, our bodily feelings and sensations, our mental states, thinking and thoughts. I have great confidence that if we follow diligently proper Buddhist meditation teachings, nothing untoward will happen.

In the mid-nineties, a well-known meditation teacher, a monk, came to conduct a 7-Day Vipassana Meditation course for our members. He stressed the importance of understanding clearly and following faithfully the meditation instructions. He told us of a case of a meditator who refused to follow the instructions but continued in his own ways. This was the monk’s account:

*Ah Toon (not his real name) participated in one of our week-long Vipassana Meditation Retreats. He was in his early fifties and came from a typical Chinese family whose religion was more of ancestor and deity worship. Ah Toon was quite superstitious in nature and he had been praying to various Chinese deities for years. During the first interview of the retreat he reported that a Chinese deity, old and bearded appeared to him. He felt happy that a god chose to visit him. When I told him that there was no reality in that and he had to just note “Seeing, seeing, seeing”, he seemed*

*rather disappointed. I reminded him not to attach to any visions because they were all just conjured by the mind. Unfortunately, Ah Toon did not follow my instructions and advice. At his second interview a couple of days later, he told me that his Chinese deity was carrying out a conversation with him and giving him advice. I knew he was going astray in his meditation. I strongly reminded him about what to do ... noting, non-attachment and so on. Ah Toon still went on in his own way. Delusions set upon him; after the retreat he had to be admitted to Hospital Bahagia in Tanjung Rambutan for psychiatric treatment."*

In 1978, I was transferred back to my hometown after having served as a teacher for 6 years in Kelantan.

One evening one of my friends invited me to go to a Hindu Asram a few kilometers from my home. When I arrived at the place ( which was just a simple shed ), I saw about a dozen people, young and old in the midst of a sitting meditation. My friend invited me to join in the meditation session but I politely declined. I was cautious and I just wanted to observe. An Indian *Guru* soon came in; he was carrying an urn of burning camphor and he was chanting the mantra 'Om Shanti' repeatedly. The atmosphere was really drowsy. Before long many of the yogis got into a trance-like motion, swaying their hands and heads quite autonomously. Some were wailing in gibberish language. At the end of the session, the yogis awoke; they seemed drained out and weak. One yogi I knew told me he experienced a sort of entity going up his spine moving toward his mind. He asserted in his mind "mindfulness" and would not let the entity 'take control of his mind'. He remained calm and did not go into trance movements.

Meditation, an essential mind development practice can be safely practiced with proper instructions and understanding.

## 15 A Jaguar By Chance?

*"Fools wait for a lucky day,  
but everyday is a lucky day for  
an industrious man."*



I have a love for creative slogan writing and over the years I have taken part in a number of commercial contests that involved the penning of a creative slogan as a tie-breaker to decide the winners. I do not participate in lucky draw contests or the ones that award prizes based on the number of qualifiers you have. I have had some 'luck' over the years in that I managed to win some prizes ranging from cash, holiday tours and vehicles like cars and motor bikes. Was chance, or lady luck at work for my winnings or were there other factors ? The results of some good kamma ripening? I really don't know.

One of the most memorable contests I took part in and won was the HSBC Formula One Contest organized in the year 2000. To participate, one had to apply for a HSBC Credit Card, answer a few simple questions and then complete the sentence *"HSBC Credit Card is definitely my choice because..."* in not more than 20 words. My youngest brother, who is most passionate about slogan-writing contests encouraged me to take part. He placed on my writing table an application form for a HSBC Credit Card and also the *Formula One* Contest Entry Form.

One morning a few days after my brother gave me the Contest Form, while I was doing my regular morning walk, an inspirational idea of a slogan for the contest, came to my mind. When I finished my walk, I immediately wrote down

the slogan. The following day, I submitted my contest entry form together with the application for a HSBC Credit Card. That was it. This matter was then off my mind ... I was so busy with Dhamma promotion matters at our Buddhist Association.

A few weeks later, I was woken up from my afternoon nap by a phone call from the HSBC Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. A Westerner (*I guessed he must be one of the top management staff members.*) broke the good news: “Congratulations Mr. Oh! You have been selected as the Grand Prize Winner of the HSBC Contest we ran recently.” I was rather calm and asked naively (*I had forgotten about the Contest.*), “I am sorry, what contest was that and what is the Grand Prize?” “Oh, Mr. Oh!” the caller continued. “It’s the HSBC Formula 1 Contest and you have won a Jaguar car! The Prize Presentation is next week and you will be receiving the Prize from Eddie Irvine, driver of the Jaguar Racing team. We will be sending you the details soon.” I thanked the caller and hung up. Strangely, my mind was not excited; it remained quite cool and calm.

As there would be a Press Conference and the mass media people would be there at the Prize Presentation asking all sorts of questions, I had to prepare myself by learning all I could about matters pertaining to HSBC and the Formula One Grand Prix.

The Prize Presentation was held at the Pan Pacific Hotel KLIA on Wednesday, 18 October 2000 in the afternoon. At the event, I met with the ‘top guns’ of HSBC, the Jaguar dealers and some people involved in the Formula One Prix. The CEO of HSBC told me that the Contest attracted thousands of entries from which the judges short listed 200 for the Management of HSBC to select the final winners. He told me, “Mr Oh, everyone in our HSBC panel of judges



unanimously picked your entry as the Grand Prize Winner.” I thanked him politely. Deep down inside me I was thinking: *There are so many high-calibre entries from professionals like authors, copywriters, English lecturers and so on. Why me? Luck? Chance? I believe there must be a kammic factor... ha, ha, perhaps some of my good kamma ripened and the devas intervened in the judging!*

What slogan did I write? It was this:

**HSBC Credit Card is definitely my choice because**  
*, with **minimum** fuss, **maximum** speed,*  
*this Card has ONE FORMULA I need –*  
**WORLDWIDE ACCESS ALWAYS GUARANTEED.**

At the Press Conference, all sorts of questions were ‘bombarded’ at me by people from the media. I answered the best I could using lots of humor and wit. Thoughts like this went through my mind: It’s a world of pretence to interact with the materialistic world outside. The Dhamma or Spiritual Path seems to run opposite to the mundane, ‘money, status and power’ world. On one hand, the Dhamma follower tries to practice simplicity, contentment and ‘letting go’. On the other, ‘worldly teachers’ keep on emphasizing ‘getting and attaining’, money, status and power. “Mr Oh,” someone asked, “What do you intend to do with the Jaguar?” I immediately replied, “I have to sell it; I cannot afford to maintain a luxurious car like this Jaguar.” I heard sighs of disappointment. Someone remarked, “Mr. Oh, you have to keep and drive this ‘wonder’ car. You know life is short ...we need to have the best of things that are the hallmarks of success and happiness. We all know that success means having the 5 C’s:

- \* Cash
- \* Career
- \* Condominium
- \* Country Club Membership
- \* Credit Card ”

When I commented that the Credit Card has to be a HSBC, everyone laughed.

Well, the social interaction and conversations went on for some time. They were all about money, wealth, possessions, careers and other mundane stuff. Nobody talked about the Dhamma or spiritual matters. I was praying for the whole function to end. In my own mental world, I thought about the delusion that the 5 materialistic C's are a measure of one's success and happiness. To me the 5 C's that really matter in life are:

- \* Calmness in the mind
- \* Confidence ( in our spiritual pursuit / Dhamma practice )
- \* Charity
- \* Compassion
- \* Clarity of the mind ( in developing Wisdom )

I recalled a Verse from *Dhammapada*:

*'If by giving up a lesser happiness, one may behold a greater one, let the wise man give up the lesser happiness in consideration of the greater happiness.'*

My winning the Jaguar and attending the Prize Presentation gave me lots of Dhamma points for reflection and contemplation. *May I continue to grow in Compassion and Wisdom.*

## 16 Three Things

*"He who would counsel,  
instruct, and restrain another  
from base behavior  
is dear to the good, but  
displeasing to the bad"*



In October 2012 I received a forwarded email containing a write-up entitled 'Three Things'. There were many good Dhamma points for reflection. Based on the material I did a Power Point Presentation and posted it on my Slideshare web site.

I would like to give here my reflective thoughts on each of the sets of 'Three Things' in the Slide show.

### 1 **Three things to Admire:** Intellect, Simplicity, Virtue

In our materialistic world today we find so many people admiring and worshipping things which can lead to more greed, jealousy, anger, ill will, ego and delusion. They look up to people who are incredibly wealthy or have immense power and status even though such possessions might have been acquired through dubious or immoral ways. Glamorous movie stars, singers, dancers or sportsmen seem to be more admired than the humanitarians or spiritual beings who do so much to relieve the suffering of so many unfortunate ones.

Having a good intellect that is put to wise use to grow spiritually is indeed a blessing. However being intelligent, smart or clever is not the same as being wise. The robber, murderer or terrorist can be intelligent but foolish or deluded in causing so much pain and suffering to other people.

Living a simple life brings much contentment and peace to the mind. Look at the lives of the great spiritual beings of the different religions. Simplicity is a hallmark in their lives. Today so many have the deluded belief that the more they accumulate in material possessions to live a greater luxurious life, the more happy they will be. This is not the case. The most happy and peaceful people are the ones with few wants.

On virtue, there is profound truth in the quote:

*“Just as treasures are uncovered from the earth, so virtue appears from good deeds, and wisdom appears from a pure and peaceful mind. To walk safely through the maze of human life, one needs the light of wisdom and the guidance of virtue.”*

Buddha

It is indeed sad that many today without a sense of shame are leading a life of vices. Moral precepts are flouted so often. We need to realize that there will be a price to pay.

## **2 Three things to Respect:**      Old Age, Ethics, Law

Is the younger generation showing enough respect to the elders – the grandparents, parents, teachers and religious counselors? At an age of greater self-centeredness, craving for instant sense gratification and pre-occupation in pursuit of wealth, the younger generation seems to be losing patience and tolerance in caring for the aged. Education of the young must address this issue.

When people become less ethical and less law-abiding, a society will become more and more miserable to live in. People who flout ethical laws will ultimately face with more dukkha. Can the corrupted, the deceitful, or the criminal find

true happiness and peace? Until and unless the spiritual path is taken, there will be no true mental peace for a person.

**3 Three things to Remember:** Filial Piety, Gratitude,  
Integrity

Filial piety and gratitude are noble spiritual qualities to practice. Ponder on the quotes below:

*\* The parents gave you this body and fostered the intelligence and love that are embedded in it; so, gratitude is their due.*  
Sri Sathya Sai Baba

*\* Appreciate your parents. You never know what sacrifices they went through for you.*  
Unknown

*\* Love your parents and treat them with love and care. For you will only know their value when you see their empty chair.*  
Unknown

*\* Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.*  
Marcus Tullius Cicero

*\* We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives.*  
John F. Kennedy

*No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.*  
Alfred North Whitehead

*Gratitude is a duty which ought to be paid, but which none have a right to expect.*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

A person of integrity shows consistent commitment to honour moral, ethical, and spiritual values and principles. In walking the Dhamma Way, this is essential.

#### **4 Three things to Govern:** Tongue, Temper, Action

Right Speech is speech that is free from falsehood, harshness, slander and gossip. To practice Right Action one has to refrain from killing, stealing and engaging in wrong livelihood, a livelihood that brings suffering to oneself or other beings.

The second of the three mental poisons is Dosa or hatred, anger or temper. This generates negative Kamma.

#### **5 Three things to Avoid:** Deceit, Egoism, Heedlessness

One who deceives through lying, cheating and stealing is breaking a moral precept which has a kammic consequence.

The person who has strong attachment to the 'self', the 'I', 'My' and 'Mine' exhibits behavior of pride, conceit and egoism. This delusion will bring him much suffering; he will have conflicts in his relationship with others.

The heedless person is careless, reckless and foolish in his ways. The practice of Right Mindfulness is essential for spiritual development to grow in insight and wisdom.

#### **6 Three things to Value:** Time, Health, Family

Do we use our time well and constructively or do we waste out time away in useless pursuits of transient sensory delights? Can we see an urgency to spend time on something that ultimately matters – spiritual development.

The Buddha said, *“Health is the finest possession. Contentment is the greatest wealth. Those trusted are the best relatives. Nibbana is the supreme happiness.”* It is a blessing to have good physical and mental health so as to be able to practice the Dhamma well.

The wise man takes good care of his family and ensures there is harmony; at the same time he also gives time for his own spiritual development.

### **7 Three things to Promote: Industry, Kindness, Patience**

There can be no success without industry or effort. This too goes for mental development. Good Dhamma practice requires determination, effort and perseverance. The fool is overwhelmed by mental laziness, sloth and torpor.

Mark Twain said, “Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.” The practice of metta or loving-kindness is very beneficial to a person to spiritually grow in wisdom and compassion.

How can one achieve anything or attain the goal without patience. There is a proverb that says, “Everything comes to him who waits.”

### **8 Three things to Love: Honesty, Purity, Truth**

The honest person does not lie, cheat, swindle or rob. With a good mind state of clear conscience he is mentally peaceful, free from feelings of remorse, regret or guilt.

A good prayer to say is: “May I be pure in my mind, speech and bodily actions. I shall strive to be free from greed, anger and delusion. I shall refrain from lying, slander, harsh speech and gossip. I shall not kill, steal or commit sexual misconduct.”

Truth is the Way things really are. Truth is Nature and the Universal Laws. Truth is that which leads us to perfect happiness, peace, compassion, wisdom and liberation.

### **9 Three things to Conquer:** Greed, Hatred, Delusion

The three mental poisons of Greed (Loba), Hatred (Dosa) and Delusion (Moha) cause us to experience Dukkha or suffering. Our spiritual practice must work at eradicating these mental defilements. There is this 3-fold training we can undertake with mindfulness and diligence: Dana (Generosity or Charity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Meditation or Mental Cultivation)

### **10 Three things to develop:** Generosity, Mindfulness, Contentment

The constant practice of generosity leads to the cutting of attachment and craving, the root cause of suffering and the force that makes us spin in the wheel of cyclic existence. Through generosity there is a ‘letting go’, a spiritual realization that leads to true mental peace and eventually liberation.

Samma Sati or Right Mindfulness, a factor in the Noble Eightfold path has 4 aspects as expounded in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, namely:

- \* Mindfulness of the body
- \* Mindfulness of feelings



- \* Mindfulness of mind or consciousness
- \* Mindfulness of mental phenomena or mental objects

Contentment is the mental state of feeling fine, peaceful and secure with what you have and embracing who you are and the circumstances you are right at in this moment. It is the freedom from desire and wanting.

**Three things to Practice:** Morality, Charity, Meditation

Morality as given in the Noble Eightfold Path is – Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

Charity or Dana can be done in so many forms or ways – offerings to the order of monks and nuns,, giving money and material things to the needy, blood and organ donation, rendering help and services to people and animals, sharing and teaching the Dhamma and so on. The most important element in Dana is the sincere and righteous intention.

The practice of samatha or concentration meditation and vipassana or insight meditation is integral in Dhamma practice. Through meditation one strives to eradicate all the mental defilements of greed, hatred and delusion.

**Three things to Cultivate:** Love, Compassion, Wisdom

Love or Metta connotes the following: loving-kindness, goodwill, friendliness, benevolence, a wish for the well-being of oneself and others.

Compassion or Karuna is the wanting or doing something to relieve the suffering of sentient beings.

Wisdom or Panna is the understanding, discernment and insight into the true nature of all things. The perfectly wise mind is clear, peaceful and free from all mental defilements.

## 17 Hypocrisy And Perception

*"It is easy to see the faults of others,  
but difficult to see one's own. A man  
broadcasts the fault of others like  
winnowing chaff in the wind,  
but hides his own faults  
as a crafty Fowler covers himself."*



Isn't the hypocrite breaking the moral precept of lying? He is not honest in his ways; he deceives, cheats and resorts to falsehood to project something he is not. He has the unwholesome intention of gaining something for himself, to get an upper hand over a thing he covets after. His speech, action and behavior are not in line with his hidden mental intention and feelings in the heart.

One meaning of perception is *"a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression."* And this is what I'd like to reflect upon. A perception of something or somebody based on wrong view or non-factual data can lead one to have mental suffering ('dukkha'). Such a person cannot be at peace within himself, with others and the environment. A wrong view arises through not seeing things as they truly are; it is rooted in one or more of the defilements - greed, attachment, selfishness, covetousness, anger, ill will, jealousy, aversion, hatred, ego, self-pride, conceit and delusion.

A few years ago I did a power point presentation titled '*A Humor Lesson – Hypocrisy, Perception*' and had it posted on [www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/presentations](http://www.slideshare.net/ohteikbin/presentations). I used wit and humor in various situational observations.

For each one of the slides, I did some reflection with the intention of conveying some Dhamma points for practice and realization,

Below are the textual contents – the humor and the reflection in each of the Slides in the presentation:

\* *When I develop a pot belly, I am overeating and boozing.  
When my Boss develops a pot belly, it's a sign of prosperity.*  
Thoughts: My mind is peaceful if I don't booze, I don't overeat and I live wisely.

\* *When I take a long time, I am slow.  
When my Boss takes a long time, he is thorough.*  
Thoughts: My mind is at peace when I am mindfully doing my very best.

\* *When I crack some silly jokes, I am childish and stupid.  
When my Boss cracks more silly jokes, he is funny and creative.*  
Thoughts: My mind can be peaceful despite what others think of me.

\* *When a pretty lady talks to me, I am a lustful man.  
When a pretty lady talks to my Boss, he is a man of many admirable qualities.*  
Thoughts: My mind is peaceful if I am righteous and moral.

\* *When I do something without being told, I am trying to be smart.  
When my Boss does the same, that is initiative.*  
Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I help sincerely.

\* *When I wear a new dress, I am a 'Show-Off'.*

*When my Boss wears a new dress, she has a good sense of fashion.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I am not affected by criticism.

\* *When I do good, my Boss never remembers.*

*When I do wrong, he never forgets.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I don't have expectations and I learn from mistakes.

\* *When I have cheap meals, I am stingy.*

*When my Boss has cheap meals, he is a man of simplicity.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I practice generosity and simplicity.

\* *When I please my Boss, I am apple-polishing.*

*When my Boss pleases his Boss, he is co-operating.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I do my duties sincerely.

\* *When I am out of the office, I am wandering around.*

*When my boss is out of the office, he's on business.*

Thoughts: I am peaceful when I am honest and my conscience is clear.

\* *When I shout, I am a hooligan.*

*When my Boss shouts, he is being assertive.*

Thoughts: When I am mindful of my thoughts, speech and action, I am peaceful.

\* *When I daydream, I am reprimanded.*

*When my Boss daydreams, he is planning.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful if I don't react to negative things said about me.

*\* When I am late for meetings, I have no respect for others.*

*When my Boss is late for meetings, he is treated like a VIP.*

Thoughts: I value punctuality; I am only late if it's inevitable.

*\* When I make a mistake, I am an idiot.*

*When my boss makes a mistake, he's only human.*

Thoughts: All can make mistakes...realizing this I remain peaceful.

*\* When I apply for leave, I must be going for an interview.*

*When my boss applies for leave, it's because he's overworked.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I tell the truth and do not cheat.

*\* When I try to be friendly with others, I am flirtatious.*

*When my Boss does the same thing, she is sociable.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful when I have an honest and harmonious relationship with others.

*\* When I take medical leave, I am a sickly person.*

*When my Boss takes medical leave, he needs to rest.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful even when my body is sick.

*\* When I read the newspaper in the office, I am shirking work.*

*When my Boss does the same thing, he is updating his knowledge.*

Thoughts: My mind is peaceful 'cause I know the world can never be 100% fair.

\* *When I overlook a rule of etiquette, I am rude.*

*When my Boss slips a few rules, he is original.*

Thoughts: I always am mindful of my manners and I am peaceful.

\* *When I listen to music in the office, I am taking work too lightly.*

*When my Boss does the same, he is improving his creative power.*

Thoughts: When I do good honest work, I am not perturbed by others' blame.

**May we be happy and peaceful through living a righteous and wise life and not reacting negatively to others' views.**



## 18 Spiritual Response?

“Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and **compassion** are the things which renew humanity.”



Kuan Yin the Bodhisattva is an embodiment of the Buddha's compassion. In our Buddhist Association there are many devotees of Kuan Yin and their faith is strong. The Kuan Yin path is not merely one of ritualistic chanting and prayers but more so a practice of compassion – a reaching out to the needy to relieve them of their suffering.

*In Buddhism, a bodhisattva is an enlightenment (bodhi) being (sattva). Traditionally, a bodhisattva is anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated bodhicitta, which is a spontaneous wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. According to Tibetan Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is one of the four sublime states a human can achieve in life (the others being an Arhat, Buddha, or Pratyekabuddha).*

*The bodhisattva is a popular subject in Buddhist art. Usage of the term bodhisattva has evolved over time. In early Indian Buddhism, for example, the term bodhisattva was primarily used to refer specifically to the Buddha in his former lives. The Jatakas, which are the stories of his lives, depict the various attempts of the bodhisattva to embrace qualities like self-sacrifice and morality. (From Wikipedia)*

Does Kuan Yin exist and can she help you in times of trouble? (The name 'Kuan Yin' evolved from the original Sanskrit term 'Avalokiteśvara'.

*Avalokiteśvara (Sanskrit: lit. "Lord who looks down") is a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. Portrayed in different cultures as either male or female, Avalokiteśvara is one of the more widely revered bodhisattvas in mainstream Mahayana Buddhism, as well as unofficially in Theravada Buddhism.*

*The original name for this bodhisattva was Avalokitasvara. The Chinese name Guan Shi Yīn Púsà is a translation of the earlier name "Avalokitasvara Bodhisattva." This bodhisattva is variably depicted as male or female, and may also be referred to simply as Guānyīn. (From Wikipedia )*

In an interesting Dhamma talk I heard in the 1990s by a venerable monk, to the question “Can Kuan Yin Help You?”, the answer given ran something like this:

“Kuan Yin exists and can help you if

- \* your heart or mind is good or pure filled with compassion
- \* you practice the Dhamma well – do good charity work, observe your precepts and purify or cultivate your mind.

I thought that was an excellent answer.

On the thing about a ‘spiritual response’, I would like to narrate two actual happenings that I experienced directly. They were really thought-provoking, profound points for reflection.

One of the fund-raising projects for our third 3-storey Bodhicitta Building in Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak (PBHP) was the donation scheme for contributions towards glazed Kuan Yin Tiles to be placed on certain walls of the building. Each donor would have his or her name inscribed



on a plaque or the name could be in memory of a departed family member.

The committee member in charge of this project enlisted my help to search for a suitable Kuan Yin picture to be embossed in the glazed tiles. A dateline was given to ensure the project could be completed on time for the opening ceremony of the new Bodhicitta building. As the dateline drew nearer we still could not find a suitable picture – we did not want the common and usual colorful 2-D Kuan Yin pictures we used to see all over Chinese temples in Malaysia, Singapore and a few Asian countries. We had scoured books, magazines, brochures, catalogues and the Internet for quite some time already but to no avail. The pictures were just not right. Then one morning I told the coordinator, “We have to come to a decision today to select one picture as time is running out and we need to go to Ipoh to the tile factory to settle things.” I sat in front of the computer trying to do a final image search for a suitable Kuan Yin picture. Hardly 10 minutes had passed when a stranger walked through our main gate and entered the office where I was in. He was carrying two boxes in his hands. We welcomed him and he told us, “My hometown is Hutan Melintang ( a small town about 11 miles from Teluk Intan ) but I have been working in Singapore for some time. Not long ago my brother passed away and I was advised by a monk in a temple to present to a Buddhist or Dhamma Center a Kuan Yin statue and then transfer merits to my late brother. I want now to present to PBHP these Kuan Yin and Amitabha Buddha images.”

When he opened one of the boxes and took out the white Kuan Yin image, I had an inexplicable feeling of joy and wonder and goose pimples ran all over my body. “That’s it!” I exclaimed. “This Kuan Yin image is incredibly beautiful. It’s what we need for our glazed tiles.”

All the committee members and some of our regulars who subsequently viewed the ‘miraculous’ Kuan Yin image, agreed that it would be perfect to use as the image for our glazed tiles. Digital photos were taken of the Kuan Yin statue and we enlisted the professional expertise (of one of our former Buddhist youth members ) in Kuala Lumpur to do some touch-ups before having the pictures embossed on to the glazed tiles. The project proceeded smoothly.

Whenever I gaze at the wall tiles with this Kuan Yin image in our Bodhicitta building, I would recall that strange morning when ‘Kuan Yin visited us’. A coincidence? A chance happening? Well, I know nothing happens without a cause. A Kuan Yin or spiritual response? I don’t know but I do know that if we practice the Dhamma well with confidence and sincerity, positive things happen for us.

Sometime in March 2014, three Dhamma sisters and I decided to go for a day-trip to Penang to attend the Big Bad Wolf Book Sale. One of the ladies drove my Kelisa car. A couple of days before the trip, I checked some basic things in my car – tyre pressure, engine oil, brakes, radiator water, wipers, lights and signals. I also filled the petrol tank.

We started our journey around 7 in the morning. Along the way, we stopped for breakfast and then proceeded on.

It was just after we had passed the second Penang Bridge, that we detected that something was wrong with the car. There were funny sounds and the car was not moving smoothly. We then realized that one of the back car tyres had punctured. We were at the Jelutong Expressway and traffic was heavy. We stopped along the side of the highway; to our left was the motor bike lane.

Ha, ha ...none of us really knew how to change a flat tyre! I had not been driving outstation for more than 20 years and I am quite hopeless with hands-on technical things. One of the

younger ladies (*she was driving my car; she used to drive her car all over Malaysia*) said that she would try to change the punctured tyre. As we were at a dangerous part of the highway, another of our passenger ladies used an umbrella to alert and slow down the passing vehicles – we had to protect our driver while she was trying to carry on her task! As a lot a strength was required to loosen the bolts on the wheel, I was asked to jump upon the wrench handle in a clockwise direction to loosen the nuts! I said, “Shouldn’t it be anti-clockwise?” But I was outvoted by the ladies! (I have learnt not to argue with many women!) Ha, ha. . the bolts got more tightened. The tyre could not be taken out. We tried to flag down passing vehicles but without success. None of us had the AAM or other phone numbers of the highway authorities. Just as we were wondering what to do next, a motor cyclist on his own came to our rescue! He said he was a mechanic on his way to his working place in Penang town. He was one of the kindest ‘bodhisattvas’ I have ever met in my life. In no time he got our problem sorted out – he changed the tyre for us and even so kindly led us to his friend’s tyre shop in Jelutong town to have our car tyre problem resolved. My heart was really touched by this kind and compassionate mechanic. I gave him a generous ‘ang pow’ of appreciation. He refused to take but I insisted.

At the tyre shop, we met the owner, another ‘bodhisattva’. He noticed the sling bag I was carrying. It bore the name of ‘Bodhgaya’. The shop owner said, “What a coincidence! My 2 sons went through the temporary monkhood program at Bodhgaya.” He was most honest, kind and helpful and his charges were so reasonable.

How was our trip? The best part was encountering two great ‘bodhisattvas’ in one day!

## 19 Reflections On Impermanence

*“Sons have I; wealth have I”:  
Thus is the fool worried. Verily,  
he himself is not his own. Whence  
sons? Whence wealth?”*



One of the central teachings of the Buddha is **The Three Characteristics** of *Dukkha* (*Unsatisfactoriness or Suffering*), *Anicca* (*Impermanence*) and *Anatta* (*Non-self*). Buddhist meditation teachers constantly remind the yogis to reflect and contemplate on *Dukkha*, *Anicca* and *Anatta* in order to gain some insight into the true nature of all things.

Most Buddhists seem to think that Impermanence is such an easy teaching to understand. Yes, intellectually they know that *nothing is permanent, transiency is a fact of life, everything must come to pass, conditioned and compounded things cannot remain constant - they ultimately decay, disintegrate or break down into their components or elements*. But then a book knowledge or intellectual understanding of *anicca* is one thing, actual realization in the mind is another thing altogether. When the changing world conditions sometimes bring much pain and suffering, can the mind embrace it calmly, patiently and peacefully? Although we know that nothing remains permanent, how well do we cope when we face with relationship trouble, lose money, our jobs, possessions or loved ones, fall terribly sick, get blame and verbal assaults or encounter situations that threaten our lives, our families and our security? Unless and until we have truly realized the Dhamma, we will experience *Dukkha*. The more the realization, the lesser the *Dukkha* will be.

There was one happening I faced that made me realize the world of difference between an intellectual grasp of impermanence and the actual realization of this dhamma.

My learning of Dhamma dated way back to the mid-seventies – but it was mostly academic and intellectual stuff – lots of reading, listening to Dhamma talks and taking Buddhist Correspondence courses. There was hardly any actual practice of the Dhamma.

In the early 1980s, I was teaching in a rural school about 17 miles from my home in Teluk Intan. I was driving a new Opel Kadet to school. One evening, as I was driving home after the evening sports practice in school, a large vehicle rammed into the back of my car as I was about to reach home. The damage to the rear of the car was pretty serious ; I felt very bad and my mind was filled with negative emotions – sadness, disappointment, anger and hatred. Such feelings dragged on for days! *Oh, didn't I learn about impermanence? Why was I still feeling the prolonged hurt?* The intellectual knowledge did not help me to embrace any negative happening with a calm and peaceful mind.

Our local Buddhist Association started in 1987 and I was a committee member. My Dhamma practice of Dana (charity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana ( Dhamma reflection, chanting and meditation ) began from this time. I would follow the Dhamma programs quite consistently and with diligence.

It was around the year 1993 that something ‘interesting’ happened. One Tuesday night, I drove my new Mitsubishi Lancer to our Buddhist Association which occupied the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of a shop lot. The program was a meditation practice. I parked my car outside the row of shop lots and went up the building for the meditation session. At the end of the session around 10 pm, I drove my car back. When I reached home,

one of my brothers switched on the porch lights. He and my mother came out to the porch area. “Oh, what happened to your car?” my brother shouted. “You didn’t know someone had rammed into the side of your car? Wah! The dent is very bad!” Interestingly, my mind remained calm and peaceful upon hearing the ‘bad’ news. I just blurted out, “Everything is impermanent lah! It must have been a hit-and-run motor cyclist.” That night when I reflected on the happening, my mind felt a sense of joy and peace. It was not overwhelmed by the negative emotions I had years back when my Opel Kadet was rammed at its rear. I understood that Dhamma realization cannot come from mere book knowledge. One has to practice mindfully with diligence, patience and perseverance.

My mother passed away in 2012 at the age of 88. Our local Buddhist Association undertook all the wake services and Buddhist funeral rites. I did away with the use of any joss sticks and the burning of smoky incense and paper paraphernalia. (*I strongly believe we should not pollute our environment.* ) For relatives, friends and well-wishers who came to pay their last respects, we offered stalks of flowers for them to hold in their prayers and respect-paying. *Flowers remind us of the impermanence of all things and one should reflect upon the dukkha that attachment will bring.*

One of my younger brothers is in business and many of his business associates both in Malaysia and abroad sent beautiful flower wreaths. There were lots of them. I had digital photos taken of the beautiful flower wreaths and a week later I did and posted on my various web sites a power point presentation titled “Reflections On Impermanence”. Some of the sayings were my own composition; the others were selected from the quotes of some thinkers or well-

known people. I reproduce here all the sayings and quotes pertaining to impermanence. May they help you in your contemplation to grow in compassion and wisdom.

\* “All conditioned things are impermanent. Work out your own salvation with diligence.”

- *Buddha's last words*

\* “When impermanence is realized,  
one’s mind grows more steady and wise.”

\* “Everything flows and nothing abides,  
everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.”

~*Heraclitus*~

\* “When one sees transiency clearly,  
one clings not to things greedily.”

\* “Everything - every tree, every blade of grass, all the animals, insects, human beings, buildings, the animate and the inanimate— is always changing, moment to moment.” *Pema Chodron*

\* “All compounded things are impermanent.  
May we all strive hard for Enlightenment.”

\* “We are like the spider.  
We weave our life and then move along in it.  
We are like the dreamer who dreams and then lives in the dream. This is true for the entire universe.”

*The Upanishads*

\* “One cannot know when one will transit.  
Why then live a life of so much greed?”

\* When death finally comes you will welcome it like an old friend, being aware of how dreamlike and impermanent the phenomenal world really is.

*Dilgo Kyentse*

\* “When one sees that conditioned phenomena don’t last, one knows that ‘Striving for the Unconditioned one MUST.’”

\* “Nothing is perfect, nothing lasts, and nothing is finished.”

*~Richard Powell*

\* “Reflecting on the impermanence of everything, may we practice ‘Letting Go’ and remove all clinging.”

\* “ All composite things are impermanent, They are subject to birth and death; Put an end to birth and death, And there is a blissful tranquility.”

\* “Wealth, beauty, and fame are transient. When those are gone, little is left except the need to be useful.”

*Gene Tierney*

\* “Why bear anger or hate towards another when transient life will end sooner or later.”

\* “ Catch, then, O catch the transient hour;  
Improve each moment as it flies! “

*St. Jerome*



\* “Life will come to an end one day...  
May we all live the Righteous Way”

\* “In the midst of clouds of impermanence and illusion  
dances the lightening of life. Can you say you won’t die  
tomorrow? Practice the dharma.”  
*Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*

\* “When there is life, there must be death and decay.  
Let’s live a life of worthiness everyday.”

\* “All formations are ‘transient’ (anicca);  
all formations are ‘subject to suffering’ (dukkha);  
all things are ‘without a self’ (anatta).”  
~ *Gautama Buddha*

\* “Life is impermanent and all have to depart.  
May you have kindness and forgiveness in your heart.”

\* “Again, when one understands that corporeality, feeling,  
perception, mental formations and consciousness are  
transient (subject to suffering, and without a self), also in  
that case one possesses Right Understanding.”  
*Buddha*

\* “The only certainty in life is uncertainty.  
Reflecting, let’s strive for peace and equanimity.”

\* “We need to surrender to the fact that all efforts at  
permanence are hopeless.  
No structure we can build will protect us from the  
contingencies of life. But in the midst of that impermanence  
is the incredible gift of life.” ~ *Ecclesiastes*

\* “Yesterday – A Memory  
Tomorrow – Uncertainty.  
What matters is Today.  
That’s why the Present is a Gift.”

\* “ Everything about us, within as well as without - our relationships, our thoughts, our feelings- is impermanent, in a constant state of flux.”  
*J Krishnamurty*

\* “Do we live with a purpose and meaning  
in this life that is so very fleeting?”

\* When you truly embrace your human impermanence you connect with the power you have, and influence you have, over the time you have.  
— *Steve Maraboli*

\* “ ‘Birth, old age, sickness and death’ is our ‘Fate’.  
Mindfulness is the Path to the Deathless State.”



## 20 Good Old Days, Stress-Free Ways

*“There is no fire like lust, no crime like hate. There is no ill like the body, no bliss higher than Peace (Nibbana)”*



Many of my retired friends tell me that modern life with all its scientific and technological advancements, more luxurious lifestyles, greater material possessions, wider sensual pursuits and availability and acquirement of knowledge and information, seems to be wrought with more problems and suffering of the mind and more conflicts, trouble and crime in society. We read in the media of increasing crime, anxiety, stress, worry, fear, feelings of disease, mental illnesses like depression, conflicts and wars between people and nations, terrorism, and a host of other problems.

Sometime in 2013, I received a forwarded email containing some interesting and thought-provoking material about the good old days of the 50s and 60s where life was relatively more simple, peaceful and stress-free. Based on the pictures and content received, I did a power point presentation titled “Good Old Days, Stress-Free Ways” and posted it at various web sites. For each of the situations, I did a reflection with the primary objective of conveying the need for simplicity, patience, contentment, service, generosity, non-greed, non-attachment, non-craving, and non-anger in order to cut stress and be more happy and peaceful.

I reproduce here, minus the pictures, the contents of the slides in the power point presentation:

\* 70 sen from our parents was sufficient for cheap matinee shows which normally started at 10.30 am on Saturdays and Sundays - 50 sen for the ticket and 20 sen for the return bus fare, food not included. Nobody paid 1 ringgit for the 'Reserved' seat.

### **Reflection**

**Simplicity and contentment bring us much peace.**

**In this fast-paced and sophisticated world many cannot find contentment but are constantly in a state of restlessness and dis-ease.**

\* Whenever we boarded the double-decker bus, we would run to the upper deck to get a view of the journey.

### **Reflection**

**How many have lost the ability to appreciate and enjoy simple things? In this high-tech time, there is an over stimulation of the senses and people remain unsatisfied.**

\* 5 sen for *kacang putih* ( a type of peas or nuts ) and 10 sen for ice "ang tau" (red beans). 'Ice balls' cost only 5 sen each – with red beans inside and coatings of red or black sugar syrup or 'sarsi'.

### **Reflection**

**Today, how much money do the 'modern' people spend to titillate their taste buds with so much rich food and junk food?**

\* Parties in the olden days were simple and decent ... Waltz, Cha Cha, Rhumba, Foxtrot and Offbeat Cha Cha. No

smoking, no boozing, no promiscuous sex and no doing drugs.

### **Reflection**

**We hear of wild parties and orgies today. Smoking, boozing, sex and drugs are becoming more prevalent. Beware before you fall into great suffering and misery.**

\* We did take sweet stuff like candy floss, fizzy drinks, shaved ice with syrups in moderation but diabetes was rare. Sometimes simple medicine was taken for headaches. The young in the old days ate in moderation, had exercise, proper nutrition, rest and sleep.

### **Reflection**

**Are more and more modern young people suffering from ill-health due to stress, overeating, lack of physical exercise, rest and sleep? Beware! There will be a heavy price to pay for unwise lifestyles.**

\* In the old days many people had to make do with tough conditions ... 'bucket system' toilets, simple bathrooms using pails of water ... and yet they did not complain but embraced these things peacefully.

### **Reflection**

**Despite all the luxurious living conditions of many young people today, they still complain and want more and more in a never-ending game. Hardship is alien to them. It's time they count their blessings.**

\* In the old days there was so much fun, exercise and healthy interaction involved in traditional games like ‘5 Stones’, tops, kites and a host of outdoor activities.

### **Reflection**

**In this high-tech age, overindulgence in the internet, computer games and the attractions of smart phones can be detrimental to the physical and mental health of the users.**

\* We caught guppies in drains/canals and when it rained, we swam there.

### **Reflection**

**How many young people today are keen in ‘slow’ hobbies like keeping pets, maintaining an aquarium, stamp collection, reading, gardening, cooking and so on? More are drawn to the fast world of computer and internet games. More restlessness, impatience, boredom, poor interpersonal skills etc seem to be setting in.**

\* We ate some salty, sweet and oily food... candies, bread and real butter, and drank condensed milk in coffee/tea, ‘ABC iced kacang’, but we weren't overweight because we walked, ran, cycled or climbed trees so often.

### **Reflection**

**Couch potatoes who spend hours on TV and the computer addicts take heed ... your lack of exercise will take its toll in a matter of time.**

\* Rare were the occasions where we spent lots of money, time and energy on celebrations etc. We were thrifty and things were done on a modest scale.

### **Reflection**

**Today, aren't we going overboard with so many festivals and celebrations ... we overeat and spend lavishly. The 'eating business' is booming! Danger lurks.**

\* In the good old days, there was so much racial harmony ...there was great understanding, trust, goodwill and friendship.

### **Reflection**

**What can we say about racial harmony and unity today? Is there more mistrust? Is there more racial segregation at the different levels? Have more conflicts and animosity arisen?**

\* We flew kites with string coated with pounded glass powder and horse glue, and we cut our hand on the string.

We made our own kites to suit our "fighting styles".

We spun tops and played marbles.

There was much fun, happiness and peace in our minds.

### **Reflection**

**Has the modern child lost the innocent fun, peace and enrichment things of childhood?**

\* We were the last generation to know how to use logarithm tables and slide rulers.

**Reflection**

**Today, have we become too dependent on high-tech gadgets to the extent that our mental calculations and skills are declining?**

\* For our communication we used letters and the simple old-fashioned telephone. However we got on well without the high-tech gadgets of today.

**Reflection**

**Have all the modern gadgets of communication made us more happy and peaceful? Undoubtedly these gadgets can be useful but the foolish use and abuse have brought problems and stress.**

\* Village folks enjoyed outdoor movies.  
Life was one of simplicity.  
It was more care-free, and stress-free.

**Reflection**

**It is not so much of how much we have, own or possess that determines happiness and peace. It is that inner contentment and the wise embracing of things that come along life's way that give inner peace and joy.**

Stop the endless chase for the 'Wealth' Crown.  
You need a mind that's peaceful and sound.  
Do remember to pause and slow down.  
Don't wait...soon you may not be around!



## 21 Joss Sticks and Paper Paraphernalia

*“Of paths, the Eightfold is best.  
Of truths, the four sayings. Of  
qualities, dispassion. Of two-  
footed beings, the one  
with the eyes to see.”*



Isn't it a great irony that in an age of high technology, information and knowledge explosion and widespread education we see so many foolish and superstitious practices around us – actions that harm ourselves, others and the environment?

Today I seem to see so many so-called Buddhists burning more and more joss sticks, incense and paper paraphernalia on new moon and full moon days, Cheng Beng, the month of the Hungry Ghosts and other Chinese festivals. Huge joss sticks lasting for days are burnt by many with deluded beliefs. Poor Mother Earth! She must be weeping and choking with so much pollution. People around are breathing in more carcinogenic chemicals emitted in the smoke of the burning joss sticks. And the burning of paper paraphernalia? It's unbelievable ... we have reached ridiculous stages, burning items like paper iPads, iPhones, laptops, aeroplanes, checkbooks, travel tickets, huge mansions, and many other worldly items you might not have thought of. Some years ago, in the vernacular paper there were even pictures of paper hotels and prostitutes being burnt ... to ensure the deceased can continue their unwholesome indulgences!

I recall a happening narrated to me by one of my friends:

*'It was the Cheng Beng period and my family members and I were visiting the graveyard of my late mother. We brought offerings of food, drinks, paper money and some paper*

*paraphernalia like a house, a car, a TV set, a VCD player and a few other electrical appliances. These colorful items were lined up near the tombstone to be burnt after our prayers.*

*Before the burning took place, a little boy of aged 7 or 8 came and stood near us. He must be from a village near the cemetery area. He appeared curious and fascinated with the various colorful paper items on the ground. He asked me, "Auntie, what are all these items for?" "Oh," I explained, "these are burnt for my late mother so that she will be comfortable and happy in the spirit world." "Auntie," the boy said, "this is not logical. There is no electricity on the other side." I was really embarrassed.*

More than ten years ago, I had a discussion with one of our elderly members at our local Buddhist Association. I was rather shocked when he told me this: "Brother Oh, you know, I think it would be best to have two types of funeral rites for me when I die – Taoist and Buddhist. You Buddhist friends can do the chanting for me, radiate metta or thoughts of loving-kindness and do the transference of merits. After that it'd be 'safer' to get the Taoist people to burn some paper money, a house, a car or at least a bike, a portable cassette player and a TV. You never can tell ... what if I go to the other side and have no house to stay, no transport to move around and no entertainment items ... I will be in misery."

I told this friend of mine, "You must let go of such attachments and cravings. They cause more suffering. You have been a member of our Association for years. Have confidence in the refuge in the Triple Gem. Your good Kamma will lead you to a good rebirth. Continue your good practice of generosity, morality and mental cultivation. You know, Uncle, what you have in your thoughts has no logical

or truthful basis. If what you said were true, then all Christians, Muslims and followers of other faiths who do not carry out the ‘burning rituals’ must be miserable after death with no homes and money to spend! This would be absurd, isn’t it? One who leads a righteous and moral life, practices charity and rids the mind of greed, anger, hatred and delusion, will find happiness and peace after death.”

For more than 20 years our Buddhist association has been conducting Buddhist wake services and funeral rites for members, their families and devotees as long as they can abide by our terms and conditions which include the following:

- \* No killing involved in their devotional prayers – if there is a wish to do offerings at the altars (*more a Chinese tradition*), only vegetarian food can be offered.
- \* No burning of paper money and other paper paraphernalia. (*The use of incense and joss sticks should be minimal.*)
- \* No unwholesome or disrespectful actions like gambling, and drinking liquor.
- \* No loud wailing and crying by the side of the casket of the deceased.
- \* No unnecessary ‘traditional’ or ‘cultural’ practices that will cause more trouble, pain and suffering to the living loved ones. (*Buddhist funeral rites are simple, peaceful, solemn and meaningful.*)

Upon reflection, I see that many Buddhists still resort to foolish and superstitious practices out of fear and delusion and a lack of learning, understanding and practice of the Dhamma or the Teachings of the Buddha. They need to strive on to let go and de-condition the mind through mindful and diligent learning and practice of the Dhamma. Only then will the mind be strong, peaceful and wise.

## 22 Wisdom From Humor Pics

*“Just as a deep lake is clear  
and undisturbed, so the wise  
become clear, having heard  
the Teachings.”*



According to Wikipedia,

*Wisdom is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight. Wisdom has been regarded as one of four cardinal virtues; and as a virtue, it is a habit or disposition to perform the action with the highest degree of adequacy under any given circumstance. This implies a possession of knowledge or the seeking thereof in order to apply it to the given circumstance. This involves an understanding of people, things, events, situations, and the willingness as well as the ability to apply perception, judgment, and action in keeping with the understanding of what is the optimal course of action. It often requires control of one's emotional reactions so that the universal principle of reason prevails to determine one's action. In short, wisdom is a disposition to find the truth coupled with an optimum judgment as to what actions should be taken in order to deliver the correct outcome.*

*Humor is the tendency of particular cognitive experiences to provoke laughter and provide amusement.*

*People of all ages and cultures respond to humour. Most people are able to experience humour—i.e., to be amused, to smile or laugh at something funny—and thus are considered to have a sense of humor.*

Over the years I have posted on a few web sites in the internet various hilarious or amusing pictures upon which are given some points of wisdom or life lessons.



## Lessons From Humor Pics 1

- \* How much suffering will Man experience if Animals hunt Man instead of Man being the hunter and Animals the prey?
- \* Do not do unto others what you do not want it done upon you.



- \* Many have become victims of 'Mobile Phone Addiction'
- Beware of the dangers of abusing the Mobile Phone.
- \* How many accidents have happened through a lack of Mindfulness due to using the Mobile Phone at improper places and inappropriate times.
  - \* Beware of the dangers of 'radiation' through excessive use of the Mobile Phone in empty talk, games and downloading.

## Wisdom From Humor Pics 2



- \* It's unbelievable but true that man is capable of cruel and heinous actions.
- \* One who intentionally kills or inflicts pain or suffering upon others will face grave karmic consequences.
- \* May we practice loving-kindness and compassion.



- \* One needs to be alert and be wary of some people who may have ill intentions in their mind.
- \* Outward behavior or sweet talk can be misleading ... many have been conned due to their heedlessness, naïve state and sheer greed and stupidity.



- \* Beware! Pride, ego, cruelty or lack of care can lead to unpleasant consequences.
- \* Things in life cannot always go about smoothly ... suffering and pain are inevitable.
- \* Pain and suffering can be lessened through mindfulness, compassion and wise actions

### Wisdom From Humor Pics 3



- \* Life is truly uncertain. 'Prince Death' is always just around the corner; he can come most unexpectedly.
- \* Let us strive to lead a life that is worthy ... a life of righteousness, heedfulness and compassion.



- Many, oftentimes are unaware of the very precarious situations they are in. They lead a life as if they would not die ... a life of excessive sensual pursuits, a life that causes so much pain and suffering to other people.
  - \* The wise, knowing and realizing the uncertainties of life lead a life reaching out to others and purifying the mind.

## Wisdom From Humor Pics 4

**Modern restless  
kid**  
*"I am bored"*



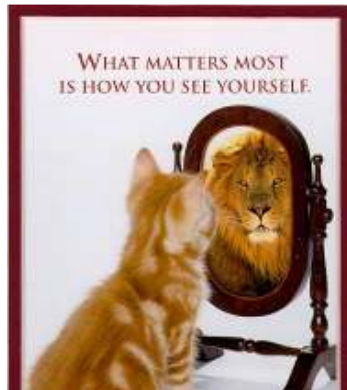
- \* It's an irony that so - called modern progress with its great technological advances has not brought about greater happiness, joy and peace to the human mind. On the contrary there is a rise in mental problems, aggression, violence and conflicts.
- \* True peace and happiness lies within the mind – we need to train, develop and purify the mind.



- \* Is it wise to do things that put our lives in great danger? Think before you act.
- \* Pranks or tricks may seem amusing but they can be really stupid and put other people's lives into great danger.



## Wisdom From Humor Pics 5



\* One who has a very low esteem of himself can face psychological problems.

\* One's attitude and confidence is of great importance.

\* Before one can radiate Metta or Loving-Kindness to others, one must have self-acceptance and be able to love oneself.



Wise people realize the danger of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine'. The world is filled with more and more who think only of themselves.

Dukkha arises as long as there is the ego or self in us. How many of our actions go towards satisfying our ego-self? We need to strive for a realization of Anatta or Non-self. Only then can our mind be truly happy, peaceful and free. (Dukkha = Suffering)

## 23 Emails, Facebook And The Dhamma

*“People hold dear the one endowed with  
virtue and insight,  
Who speaks the truth and does the work  
that is his,  
Who is established in the Dhamma.”*



In a high-tech society like ours today, a large proportion of people, both the young and not so young use Emails, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogger, WordPress and many other networking sites.

As I do a lot of postings, mostly educational and Dhamma material, on various websites, I maintain a few Emails and am on Facebook mainly for communication and feedback purposes. I receive a lot of forwarded emails, messages, tags, links and sharing on Facebook. The volume can be tremendous. On Facebook, I have more than 800 ‘Friends’. I added them upon request with the hope that a few may view some of the Dhamma and educational things I post. I remember a monk once telling me that most of the stuff posted on Facebook are ‘thrash’ and waste a lot of the users’ time. However, rather than complaining, why not ‘put’ some ‘precious stones’ (the Dhamma) among the ‘rubbish’ that one finds on the Facebook. I thought that makes sense; since then I have been posting educational and Dhamma material on Facebook from time to time.

Most of the forwarded Emails to me and the things posted on my Facebook page pertain to:

- \* personal photos (*one just can’t find time to view so many*)
- \* entertainment - links, video clips of singing, movies, sport
- \* sensational news

- \* political issues
- \* business and the commercial world
- \* travel and tours
- \* fashion and food
- \* gossip matters

As one's time is limited, I have to prioritize what I read, see or do. To me what matters most is the Dhamma; I skim and scan the lots of stuff in my mails and Facebook. Now and then I do come across some good and beneficial things that can help the mind to grow in loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom. I reflect on such posts and sometimes I do power points and videos based on the material and then post them on web sites for easier and a more appealing reading.

I reproduce here two pieces of very good and thought-provoking stuff that I received through forwarded emails some years ago:

### **Interview With The Buddha**

*I dreamt I had an interview with the Buddha.*

*"Come in," He said. "So, you would like to interview Me?"*

*"If You have the time," I said.*

*The Buddha smiled and said: "For Me, there is no time; it doesn't exist. What questions do you have in mind to ask Me?"*

*"What surprises You most about mankind?" I asked.*

*The Buddha answered: "That they get bored at being children, are in a rush to grow up, and then long to be children again.*

*That they lose their health to make money and then lose their money to restore their health.*

*That by thinking anxiously about the future , they forget the present, such that they live neither for the present nor the future.*

*That they live as if they will never die, and they die as if they had never lived... ”*

*The Buddha's hands took mine and we were silent for a while and then I asked ...*

*”As a Bodhisattva, what are some of life's lessons You want humans to learn?”*

*The Buddha replied with a smile: "To learn that they cannot make anyone love them.*

*What they can do is to let themselves be loved;*

*To learn that what is most valuable is not what they have in their lives, but who they have in their lives;*

*To learn that it is not good to compare themselves to others.*

*All suffer and receive rewards individually on their own merits, not as a group on a comparison basis!*

*To learn that a rich person is not the one who has the most, but is one who needs the least;*

*To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open profound wounds in persons we love,*

*and that it takes many years to heal them;*

*To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness;*

*To learn that there are persons who love them dearly, but simply do not know how to express or show their feelings;*

*To learn that money can buy everything but happiness;*

*To learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it totally different;*

*To learn that a true friend is someone who knows everything about them...and likes them anyway.*

*To learn that it is not always enough that they be forgiven by others, but that they have to forgive themselves;*

*I sat there for a while enjoying the moment.*

*I thanked the great Bodhisattva for His time (which was nonexistent) and for all the wisdom that He left here for me, for my family and for my friends.*

*He replied, "Anytime. I'm available, if you'll pardon the expression, 24 hours a day.*

*All you have to do is look for Me inside yourself.*

*That's where I live. I'll answer every time.*

*People will forget what you say. People will forget what you do.*

*But people will never forget how you made them feel."*

\*\*\*\*\*

### **People in Heaven, People in Hell**

*"I have seen people in heaven, I have seen people in hell."*

*The Buddha once made this statement. But how can this be possible? Isn't heaven a place only for gods, angels and radiant beings, and hell a place where tormented beings dwell in constant torture of unimaginable magnitude?*

*Once, the lord of after-life summoned four people in order to pass judgment on them and determine their future destiny according to their individual deeds.*

*To the first guy, the lord said, "Your records are not bad, but..... you'll be reborn as a human again for 30 years."*

*The first guy begged for a few years more but the lord refused.*

*To the second guy, the lord said, "You have been lazy all your life..... you'll be reborn as a cow for 50 years!"*

*The second guy became so upset that he broke down and begged, "Please, please lord, I cannot take it. 50 years is too*

*long. I promise to be a hard working cow, but please lessen my sentence to 25 years."*

*"All right, all right," the lord said.*

*On hearing that, the first guy said, "Please, please lord, give me the extra 25 years that the cow rejected."*

*"All right then," the lord agreed.*

*The lord then turned to the third guy and said, "You have been unfaithful and irresponsible all your life..... you'll be reborn as a dog for 20 years!"*

*The third guy broke down and said, "Please, please, I cannot bear it; 20 years is too long. I'll be a great dog and I'll look after my master's house faithfully, but lessen my sentence to 10 years."*

*"All right, all right," the lord agreed.*

*The first guy again came forward and begged. "Please, please lord, give me the extra 10 years from the dog to me."*

*The lord gave in again.*

*Turning to the fourth guy, the lord shook his head and said, "I am sorry, you had been wicked all your life..... you'll be reborn in hell for a million years!"*

*The fourth guy begged for forgiveness but the lord refused. But after much persistence, the lord finally decided to lessen the sentence by a mere 10 years.*

*The first guy quickly begged, "Please, please lord, give me that 10 years too."*

*"All right, all right, you greedy fellow!"*

*Hence, the first guy was reborn as a man for 75 years instead of 30. After taking birth as a human being, he had a wonderful first 30 years. His life was full of vigour, joy and he even got married. Then, he had lots of children and had to spend the next 25 years working extremely hard everyday to put food on the table for his family and pay for his children's education. His life was no different from that of a cow. His*

*children grew up and after finishing higher education, they all got married and worked in far away places. They were so busy with work and their own families that they hardly returned home to visit their poor lonely father.*

*Therefore, after 25 years of hard work and retiring at 55, the man became so disillusioned and lonely. He looked after the empty house with his ageing wife, each day longing for his children to come home. His next 10 years were no different from that of a dog. When he was 65, he spent the remaining 10 years of his life angry and sad. He was suffering from many painful diseases and none of his children wanted to be near him. Life was hell to him and he died in sadness, anger and loneliness.*



## 24 The Four Wives

*“Even the king’s chariots, so splendidly adorned, decay. Alas the body too decays. But the Dhamma of the good does not age.”*



Our body is subjected to age, sickness, decay and ultimately death. This fact of impermanence many do not see or realize. They spend so much time, money and energy ‘pampering’ the body at eating places, beauty salons, physical fitness centers, entertainment outlets, shopping complexes and so on. I do not mean to imply that we should not take care of the body – we must of course look after our physical health but the point is that many seem to go beyond the limit and are not spending enough time to develop the mind, something that will follow us upon death.

We find many people who are in a way ‘obsessed’ with multiplying their material possessions and wealth and chasing for power and status. Little do they realize that all these things are truly transient – they will be separated from their ‘owners’ at any time with no bargaining option. The wise realize that more important than all these things are our true wealth and inheritance – our Kamma and Dhamma. These follow us from life to life until we are enlightened.

The greater our attachment to our family, relatives and friends, the greater the dukkha (suffering, pain) we will experience when the time comes for us to leave everything behind. The first two verses of the Metta Sutta (Discourse on Loving-Kindness) have important points for reflection:



*He who is skilled in good, and wishes to attain that state of Peace, should act thus: he should be able, upright, perfectly upright, amenable to corrections, gentle and humble.*

*He should be contented, easy to support, not busy, simple in livelihood, with senses controlled, discreet, not impudent, and not greedily attached to families.*

I remember a Dhamma friend who was a little perturbed by the words ‘*not greedily attached to families*’ during our reading of the English translation after chanting the Metta Sutta. He asked, “Isn’t it natural that we should love and be attached to our family? Wouldn’t one be highly irresponsible not to take care of the family?” I think this friend failed to see the suffering that will come when there is ‘greedy attachment.’ Of course one loves the family – but it should be love that is unconditional, love that has understanding and wisdom. Such a person takes care of the family with responsibility but at the same time he still gives time and puts in effort to practice the Dhamma and develop his mind spiritually for he knows that ultimately only this counts.

There is a good Dhammapada story with points for reflection on the foolishness and danger of attachment to possessions and people. It is the story of Ananda The Rich Man (Verse 62):

*While residing at the Jetavana monastery, the Buddha uttered Verse (62) of this book, with reference to a miserly rich man, named Ananda.*

*There was once a very wealthy man named Ananda in Savatthi. Although he possessed eighty crores, he was very reluctant to give anything in charity. To his son, Mulasiri, he used to say, "Don't think the wealth we have now is very much. Do not give away anything from what you have, for*

*you must make it grow. Otherwise your wealth will dwindle away."*

*This rich man had five pots of gold buried in his house and he died without revealing their location to his son.*

*Ananda, the rich man, was reborn in a village of beggars, not far from Savatthi. From the time his mother was pregnant, the income of the beggars decreased; the villagers thought there must be a wicked and unlucky one amongst them. By dividing themselves up into groups and by the process of elimination, they came to the conclusion, that the pregnant beggar woman must be the unfortunate one. Thus, she was driven out of the village. When her son was born, the son proved to be extremely ugly and repulsive. If she went out begging by herself, she would get as before, but if she went out with her son she would get nothing. So, when the boy could go out by himself, his mother placed a small plate in his hand and left him. As he wandered about in Savatthi, he remembered his old house and his past existence. So he went into the house. When the sons of his son Mulasiri saw him, they were frightened by his ugly looks and began to cry. The servants then beat him and threw him out of the house.*

*The Buddha who was on his alms-round saw the incident and asked the Venerable Ananda to fetch Mulasiri. When Mulasiri came, the Buddha told him that the young beggar was his own father in his previous existence. But Mulasiri could not believe it. So, the Buddha directed the beggar boy to show where he had buried his five pots of gold. Then only, Mulasiri accepted the truth and from that time he became a devoted lay-disciple of the Buddha.*

Then the Buddha spoke in verse as follows:

**"I have sons, I have wealth"; with this (feeling of attachment) the fool is afflicted.**

**Indeed, he himself is not his own, how can sons and wealth be his?** (Verse 62)

Some years ago there was a very good story circulated over the Internet. It contained very good Dhamma points for reflection. It was the story of The Four Wives:

*There was a rich merchant who had four wives. He loved the 4th wife the most. He adorned her with rich robes and treated her to delicacies. He took great care of her and gave her nothing but the best.*

*He also loved the 3rd wife very much. He was very proud of her and always wanted to show her off to his many friends.*

*However, the merchant was always in great fear that she might run away with some other men.*

*He too, loved his 2nd wife. She was a very considerate person, always patient and in fact was the merchant's confidante. Whenever the merchant faced some problems, he always turned to his 2nd wife and she would always help him out and tide him through difficult times.*

*Now, the merchant's 1st wife was a very loyal partner and had made great contributions in maintaining his wealth and business as well as taking care of the household. However, the merchant did not love the first wife and although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her.*

*One day the merchant fell ill. Before long, he knew that he was going to die soon. He thought of his luxurious life and told himself, "Now, I have 4 wives with me, but when I die, I'll be alone. How lonely I'll be." Thus, he asked the 4th wife, "I loved you most, endowed you with the finest clothing and showered great care over you. Now that I'm dying, will*

*you follow me and keep me company?" "No way!" replied the 4th wife and she walked away without another word. The answer cut like a sharp knife right into the merchant's heart.*

*The sad merchant then asked the 3rd wife, "I have loved you so much for all my life. Now that I'm dying, will you follow me and keep me company?" "No!" replied the 3rd wife. "Life is so good over here! I'm going to remarry when you die!" The merchant's heart sank and turned cold.*

*He then asked the 2nd wife, "I always turned to you for help and you've always helped me out. Now I need your help again. When I die, will you follow me and keep me company?" "I'm sorry, I can't help you out this time!" replied the 2nd wife. "At the very most, I can only send you to your grave." The answer came like a bolt of thunder and the merchant was devastated.*

*Then a voice called out : "I'll leave with you. I'll follow you no matter where you go." The merchant looked up and there was his 1st wife. She was so skinny, almost like she suffered from malnutrition. Greatly grieved, the merchant said, "I should have taken much better care of you while I could have !"*

Actually we all have 4 wives in our lives...

The 4th wife is our **body**. No matter how much time and effort we lavish in making it look good, it'll leave us when we die.

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> wife is our **possessions, status and wealth**.

When we die, they all go to others.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> wife is our **family and friends**. No matter how close they had been there for us when we're alive, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave.

The 1<sup>st</sup> wife – It is something intangible , something you can't see - **our mind**.

The 1<sup>st</sup> wife is often neglected in our pursuit of material wealth and sensual pleasure. It is actually the only thing that follows us wherever we go.

Perhaps it is a good idea to cultivate and strengthen it now rather than to wait until we're on our deathbed when it is too late; we will then regret, cry and lament.



## 25 Bits Of Wisdom For You

*“He who practices the Dhamma  
abides in happiness with mind  
pacified; the wise man ever  
delights in the Dhamma revealed  
by the Ariyas.”*



According to the Oxford Dictionary, Wisdom can be defined in the following ways:

- 1 The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise.
- 1.1 The fact of being based on sensible or wise thinking
- 1.2 The body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period:

Wisdom In Buddhism (Wikipedia)

*Prajñā (Sanskrit: प्रज्ञा) or paññā (Pāli) in Buddhism is wisdom, understanding, discernment, insight, or cognitive acuity. It is one of three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such wisdom is understood to exist in the universal flux of being and can be intuitively experienced through meditation. In some sects of Buddhism, it is especially the wisdom that is based on the direct realization of such things as the four noble truths, impermanence, interdependent origination, non-self and emptiness. Prajñā is the wisdom that is able to extinguish afflictions (kleśas) and bring about enlightenment.*

Who is the Wise One? Verses 76 to 89 of The Dhammapada give some beautiful points about who The Wise One is:

*Verse 76:* One ought to regard another who sees one's faults,

And censures what should be censured,  
 As a revealer of treasure.  
 One should associate with such an intelligent and wise  
 person,  
 For such company is always for the better.

*Verse 77:* He who would counsel, instruct,  
 And restrain another from base behavior  
 Is dear to the good, but displeasing to the bad.

*Verse 78:* Do not associate with bad friends.  
 Do not associate with depraved people.  
 Associate with virtuous friends.  
 Associate with the best of people.

*Verse 79:* One who drinks in the Dhamma sleeps happily  
 With a clear mind.  
 The wise one ever-delights in the Dhamma  
 Proclaimed by the noble ones.

*Verse 80:* Irrigators guide water,  
 Fletchers straighten the shaft,  
 Carpenters bend wood,  
 The wise master themselves.

*Verse 81:* Just as a solid rock is unmoved by the wind,  
 So the wise are unmoved by blame or praise.

*Verse 82:* Just as a deep lake is clear and undisturbed,  
 So the wise become clear,  
 Having heard the teachings.

*Verse 83:* The good are not pleasure-lovers who seek idle chatter;  
 Always, they are detached.  
 Though touched by comfort and then by affliction,  
 The wise manifest no elation or depression.

*Verse 84:* One who would not want, for the sake of oneself  
 or another,  
 A son, wealth, a kingdom, or unjust success;  
 This is one who is virtuous, wise, and righteous.

*Verse 85:* Few are those who have gone to the other shore;  
 Many are those who run about on this side.

*Verse 86:* But those who live according to the well-taught  
 Dhamma  
 Will go beyond the realm of death, so difficult to cross.

*Verse 87:* Having abandoned the dark state,  
 The wise one cultivates the light;  
 Having gone from home to homelessness,  
 He enters solitude, so difficult to enjoy.

*Verse 88:* Owning nothing, having abandoned sense  
 pleasures,  
 Having cleansed himself from mental defilements,  
 There, let the wise one wish for delight.

*Verse 89:* Those who have minds well-developed in the  
 means of awakening,  
 Who, having removed the toxins, delight in renouncing  
 attachments:  
 They are radiant and completely emancipated in this world.



( From Dhammapada – The Way of Truth  
*A Translation By Peter Feldmeier* )

There are beautiful quotes on Wisdom upon which one can reflect. My personal favorites include the following:

*\* Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are.*

- John Wooden

*\* A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success.*

- Anonymous

*\* A wise person knows that there is something to be learned from everyone.*

- Unknown

*\* Many people have ideas on how others should change; few people have ideas on how they should change.*

- Tolstoy

*\* Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is Enlightenment.*

- Lao Tzu

About two years ago I posted on my Slide share space, the power point presentation entitled “Wisdom For U”. The words and advice of wisdom are given below (*minus the pictures and graphics*):

\* Life is tough. It can be hard. But when it gets real hard, face it with courage and understanding.

\* Although bad things happen to us all, it's important to remember to get up and learn from each fall.

\* Life is tough. But you are tougher. You can cope. And just remember that it could be rougher.

\* Remember to cherish the good things in life. They help you to get by in times of strife.

\* Don't underestimate the worth of a friend. Because without them our hearts would not mend.

\* Always be true to everyone you meet. If you act fake, you have suffered defeat.

\* It's important to say what is only sincere. Words from the heart are the best kind to hear.

\* Never look back, the past is gone. Don't worry about the future, it's yet to come. Be with the present, take care of it.

\* Learn to forgive yourself and others. Feelings of remorse, regret, anger, and hatred will only hurt yourself.

\* Put things behind and never regret. Always look forward and keep moving ahead.

\* Waste not your precious time.  
Make the most of each day.  
It could be your last.

\* Don't let others get you down.  
Show them a smile when they want a frown.

\* Try your best in all that you do.  
Believe in yourself and others will too.

\* Life is not a game to win or lose.  
It is a Gift. Choose to serve and love.

\* Follow good and righteous ways.  
You will have happy and peaceful days.

To attain perfect Wisdom, Compassion and Liberation, one  
has to walk the Noble Eightfold Path which is the Way to  
Enlightenment.

The 8 Factors of the Noble Eightfold Path are:

Right Understanding ( Samma Ditthi )  
Right Thought ( Samma Sankappa )  
( The Wisdom or Panna Group )

Right Speech ( Samma Vaca )  
Right Action ( Samma kammanta )  
Right Livelihood ( Samma Ajiva )  
( The Morality or Sila Group )

Right Effort ( Samma Vayama )  
Right Mindfulness ( Samma Sati )  
Right Concentration ( Samma Samadhi )  
( The Concentration or Samadhi Group )

## 26 ‘To My Daughter...’

“As from a large heap of flowers  
many garlands and wreaths are  
made, so by a mortal in this life there  
is much good work to be done.”



On the subject of gratitude to parents, in Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha said:

*‘Even if one should carry about one's mother on one shoulder and one's father on the other, and so doing should live a hundred years.... Moreover, if one should set them up as supreme rulers, having absolute rule over the wide earth abounding in the seven treasures - not even by this could one repay one's parents. And why! Bhikkhus, parents do a lot for their children: they bring them up, provide them with food, introduce them to the world.*

*Yet, bhikkhus, whoever encourages their faithless parents, and settles and establishes them in faith; or whoever encourages their immoral parents and settles and establishes them in morality, or whoever encourages their stingy parents, and settles and establishes them in generosity, or whoever encourages their foolish parents, and settles and establishes them in wisdom - such a person, in this way repays, more than repays, what is due to their parents.’*

It is indeed very sad to read of the increasing number of cases where children show no gratitude to their parents; many dump their parents at old folks' homes hardly visiting them at all. Worse still, some even treat the old folks harshly, subjecting them to verbal or physical abuse.

One of the activities or programs in our Dhamma Youth Camps is a visit to an old folks' home an orphanage or a home for the handicapped. Apart from some Dana (charity) practice, the students also do some cleaning-up of the place and cheer the inmates with some entertainment programs like singing and dancing. They are also asked to talk to the old folks, the orphans and the underprivileged ones. In one of the past visits, a survey was made to gather some information about the old folks – the reasons why they were placed at the homes, their family circumstances, their physical and mental well-beings and so on. The students were shocked to learn that the majority of the inmates actually were married and had children. *(They perhaps assumed that the inmates were single people with no children to look after them.)* In many cases the children had abandoned them hardly visiting them anymore.

A monk once asked me to put a newspaper cutting on our Association notice board. The report tells about a case of a set of parents being forsaken by their son after they had transferred all their money and properties to him. The old folks had nowhere to live; their home was at an abandoned old building in a sorry state of affairs. Shocking? Indeed!

I find it unbelievable that in a neighboring country there is a law compelling children to take care of their aged parents. Forced filial piety? Where has our sense of gratitude, values, morality and ethics gone? I believe there will be a karmic retribution for the guilty ones. *What goes around, comes around*, the saying goes.

Why do some children neglect, abuse or abandon their parents? There might be some reasons but whatever it is, they do not justify such ungrateful and unwholesome actions.

Just reflect: How would such children feel if one day when they become old and are treated in the same way? I like telling my Sunday School children the Jataka Story 'The Clever Son.'

*"Long long ago, in an Indian village there lived a poor family made up of a man named Vasiṭṭhaka, his wife, his 7-year old son and his old father. Vasiṭṭhaka's wife used to complain to him: "Look there! That is your father's doing! I am constantly begging him not to do this and that, and he only gets angry!" Your father is useless, forever picking quarrels. A worn-out old man like that, tormented with disease, is bound to die soon; and I can't live in the same house with him. Take him to a cemetery, dig a pit, throw him in, and break his head with the spade; and when he is dead, shovel the earth upon him, and leave him there."*

*The wife continued to nag Vasiṭṭhaka. She told him of a plan to tell a lie and bring the old man, that is, Vasiṭṭhaka's father, to a cemetery.*

*She said, "When you get there, bury him in a pit, make a noise as if you had been robbed, wound and wash your head, and return."*

*"Yes, that plan will do," said Vasiṭṭhaka.*

*Now, Vasiṭṭhaka's son was wise and clever. The lad overheard what his mother said. "My mother," thought he, "is a wicked woman, and she is trying to persuade father to murder his father, my Grandpa. I will prevent my father from doing this murder."*

*Vasiṭṭhaka, at the time suggested by the wife, prepared the cart. The neighbors came out to see and asked Vasiṭṭhaka where they were going. He lied to them.*

*"Come, father, let us go," he placed his father in the cart. Vasiṭṭhaka's young son got into the cart. Vasiṭṭhaka could not prevent him, so he took him to the cemetery too. At the*

*cemetery, he left his father and his son in the cart. "You two stay here for a while," he told them. He then sneaked off to a secret spot. There, with a spade he began to dig a hole.*

*Now, the young boy, had discreetly followed his father and observed what his father was doing. He then returned to the cart, took another spade and went off to another secluded spot. He too started to dig a hole. It was not long before Vasiṭṭhaka approached his son. Surprised at what he saw, he asked, "Now, son, what are you doing?"*

*"Pa," the boy replied. "Just as you are digging a hole to bury Grandpa, I am also digging a hole to prepare for your old age ... to bury you."*

*At hearing these words, Vasiṭṭhaka cried in his heart ... he realized his wrong doing ... the cruel act he was about to do to his old father. He hugged his son and said, "Son, let us bring your Grandpa home and look after him well."*

*And so Vasiṭṭhaka seated himself with his son and father in the cart and returned home.*

*When they reached their home, Vasiṭṭhaka's wife on seeing her old father-in-law still alive, fumed with anger and cursed and cursed. However when Vasiṭṭhaka explained to her what happened at the cemetery, she regretted her actions. She knelt down before her husband and asked for forgiveness.*

*From that day onwards, Vasiṭṭhaka, his wife and son took good care of Vasiṭṭhaka's old father out of understanding, gratitude and kindness."*

One of the reasons why some sons and daughters try to 'get rid' of their aged parents is because they lose patience or cannot tolerate the ways and behavior of some old people. How terrible? Do such sons and daughters ever realize that one day they too may behave in the ways they once had aversion to. Of course when one grows old he may become

slower in his movements, turn more forgetful, and show some odd psychological behavior. The use of the sense faculties may become impaired and their perception of things and people may prove trying. Compassionate and wise children have patience and understanding and they cope well with the challenges old people can give.

I once received from a Dhamma friend a very beautiful PowerPoint presentation that makes children reflect on how they should treat their aged parents. It was in the form of a letter and was done with good pictures and graphics. I herewith reproduce the textual contents of the presentation:

### **A Father's Letter To His Daughter**

Dear Daughter...,

There will be one day that you see me old, (*I am already grey!*) ... please have patience and try to understand me ...

If I get dirty ... if I cannot dress... have patience.

Remember the hours I spent teaching it to you.

If, when I speak, I repeat the same things, a thousand times... please try to... listen, if not with your ears, then with your heart.

When you were small, I had to answer you a thousand and one times, many, many questions until you were satisfied...

For many years, we as a family tried our best to walk the Noble Path guided by the Dhamma and our Precepts. You must now walk this Path firmly and steadily, and in turn you must help others too.

When you see my ignorance on new technologies... give me the necessary time and not look at me with a mocking smile... the oldest and most applicable technology is the Dhamma, it is still the best, learn it well..



I taught you how to do so many things... to eat good food, to dress well... to confront life... to know what is right from wrong... the beautiful Dhamma... to question...

School and college can teach you science, maths and business, but we taught you the Buddha's Teachings, I hope you had learnt well...and is applying it..

When at some moment I lose the memory or the thread of our conversation... let me have the necessary time to remember... and if I cannot do it, do not become nervous... as the most important thing is to be with you ... You may even now teach me back

If ever I seem to test your patience, recall how your mummy and I were taught "patience" in raising you and your siblings.....

When my tired legs do not allow me to walk...  
... give me your hand... the same way I did when you had your first steps.

And when someday you find me spending much time just sitting in meditation, looking at my mind..., it is not that I reject your company, it's just that I'm trying to know myself better.. Despite all these years, I am still learning

Try to understand that like a sand clock flowing fast, I do not have the luxury of time, so every moment is precious; whether spent with you or alone.

Some day you will discover that, despite our mistakes, your mummy and I, always wanted the best things for you and that we tried to prepare the way for you..

You must not feel sad, angry or frustrated when seeing my faults. Try to be next to me, to understand me and to help me as I did it when you were young.

Help me to walk... this Noble Path,.... with love and patience, just as I tried to help you. I will pay you by a smile and by the immense love I always have for you.

I love you my daughter...

Metta,  
Daddy



## 27 The Dhamma Youth Camp - Reflections

*“Irrigators guide water,  
fletchers straighten the shaft,  
carpenters bend wood. The  
wise master themselves.”*



The first English Dhamma Youth Camp of Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak was held way back in 1993. As we did not at that time have our own proper premises we had to borrow the Chinese Independent School to run the Camp. It was a big struggle then as there were only a few adult members and student helpers to conduct the 5-day camp.

Dhamma Youth Camps for students are a very important activity in a Buddhist organization that stresses on Dhamma education and Dhammduta work. The energetic young people with diverse talents, creativity, drive and spirit need to be trained and exposed to the Dhamma ... they represent our future Dhammaduta leaders and managers. Through Dhamma Youth Camps, the young can

- \* Be exposed to the essential Teachings of the Buddha
- \* Learn to relate, communicate and interact with others
- \* Learn to practice various aspects of Buddhism like welfare and charity work, chanting and simple meditation
- \* Be gradually trained in self-development

Over here at our local Buddhist Association, we run the annual Dhamma Youth Camps both in Chinese and English. Over the years, thousands have been exposed to the Dhamma

in this way. Some seniors return every year to help in the camps for the new campers. This dana is a most praiseworthy Dhammaduta work. It also provides good fellowship for our young Dhammafarrers.

The English Dhamma Youth Camp (DYC) has certainly grown since 1993. There is now a Facebook page with hundreds of DYC alumni members now scattered all over. Many have rendered tremendous help to the parent Association in so many ways... conducting the Children's Dhamma Camps, the Metta Camp, youth activities, offering services at special functions etc

The Dhamma Youth Camps organized here have a wide variety of activities and programs such as:

- \* Dhamma talks and discussions / workshops
- \* Motivation talks / forums
- \* Buddha Puja, chanting and meditation
- \* Dynamics and Sports
- \* Welfare projects
- \* Outdoor trips
- \* Hymn singing
- \* Talent Night / Show / Concert
- \* Fellowship Party
- \* Exercise, telematches and treasure hunt

Every Dhamma Youth Camp has a Dhamma Theme ... through this the Camp aims to impart to the young vital elements of the Dhamma. There is also a Theme song for every camp. All the previous Dhamma Youth Camp Theme songs have been uploaded on to YouTube ( [www.youtube.com/user/ohlifelessons](http://www.youtube.com/user/ohlifelessons) ) and the web site

<http://ohteikbin.weebly.com>

How much has the Dhamma Youth Camp realized its objectives and has it been effective in motivating and inspiring the young to learn, understand, practice and realize the Dhamma? Well there have been both ‘successes’ and ‘failures’. I even had reports of a few ex-DYC participants who converted to another religion; there was also a case of one ending up in the jail! This comes as no surprise to me ... one cannot expect to transform all young participants in just a camp of a few days. We know that many young ones join for reasons like socializing and fun; some are forced by their parents to participate. For some participants it is just a case of ‘planting Dhamma seeds’ in them. Hopefully they will grow one day. Of course there have been many ‘success’ stories of campers who grew in the Dhamma; some even bring the Dhamma to foreign places when they continue their tertiary education overseas.

From 1993 to 2013, I came up with the themes for each of the camps ... it was difficult to find volunteers to suggest suitable themes and to do the write-up. Looking back, I feel it is important for all previous DYC participants to ponder and reflect on the themes, making good aspirations to practice the Dhamma accordingly. They must not let the DYC be nothing more than a passing memory.

Let us take a walk down the memory lane of the DYC, ponder at the theme and do some reflections and aspirations.

### **1st DYC 1993 “Good Heart, Clear Mind”**

Reflection: “Have I become more and more kind-hearted?  
Has my mind grown in calmness and clarity?”

**2nd DYC 1994 “Reaching Out, Looking In”**

Reflection: “Have I been reaching out to others?  
Have I looked inward and cultivated my mind?”

**3rd DYC 1995 “Walk The Dhamma Way”**

Reflection: “Have I reduced my Greed, Hatred and Delusion?  
Have I practiced well The Noble Eightfold Path

**4th DYC 1996 “Mind Matters. Love Conquers”**

Reflection: “How much have we grown in Wisdom?  
How much have we grown in Compassion?”

**5<sup>th</sup> DYC 1997 “Living Virtuously, Acting Mindfully”**

Reflection: “Have we been keeping well the 5 Moral  
Precepts?  
Have we been more mindful and heedful?”

**6th DYC 1998 “Right Vision, Good Action”**

Reflection: “Do we develop Right View through Dhamma  
Practice?  
Do we carry out the 10 Wholesome Actions?”

**7th DYC 1999 ‘Buddha My Guide, Dhamma My Light’**

Reflection: “Have we taken Refuge in the Buddha?  
“Are with living by the Principles of Dhamma?”

**8th DYC 2000 “Walk The Path With Heart”**

Reflection: “Have we been practicing Dhamma  
conscientiously?  
Have we made the Dhamma known to others?”

**9th DYC 2001 “Minding My Monkey Mind”**

Reflection: “Have we been training our mind?  
Has our mind become more calm, patient,  
compassionate and wise?”

**10th DYC 2002 “Sharing Dhamma, Spreading Metta”**

Reflection: “Are we promoting the Dhamma?  
Are we radiating Metta to others?”

**11th DYC 2003 “Troubled Times, Dhamma Chimes”**

Reflection: “Are we learning and practicing the Dhamma?  
Are our minds wiser to face challenging times?”

**12th DYC 2004 “Seeking Nature’s Peace and Bliss”**

Reflection: “Are we appreciating Nature more and more?  
Do we meditate regularly?”

**13th DYC 2005 “Doing Good, Seeking Truth”**

Reflection: “How much Dana (Charity) have we been doing?  
Are we practicing Meditation to purify the mind?”

**14th DYC 2006 “Goodbye Samsara, Hello Nibbana”**

Reflection: “Are we walking the Path to end Dukkha or  
Suffering?  
Are we striving on diligently for Enlightenment?”

**15th DYC 2007 ‘Ehipassiko – Life’s Lessons To Know’**

Reflection: “Do we know what things really matter in life?  
Do we investigate into the Dhamma?”

**16th DYC 2008 “Noble Thoughts, Righteous Ways”**

Reflection: “Do we have Right Understanding and Right  
Thought?  
Do we practice good Morality?”

**17th DYC 2009    “Open Heart, Radiant Mind”**

Reflection: “Are we growing in Loving-Kindness and Compassion?

Are we seeing things as they truly are?”

**18th DYC 2010    “A Path To Peace and Bliss”**

Reflection: “Do we know what true Peace and Bliss is?

Are we following The Middle Way to conquer Dis-Ease?”

**19th DYC 2011    “Mindful Ways, Peaceful Days”**

Reflection: “Are we practicing Right Mindfulness ardently?”

Do we follow The Middle Path to live peacefully?”

**20th DYC 2012    “ In The Master’s Steps”**

Reflection: “Do we take Refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha?

“Do we strive in Dhamma Practice to attain Nibbana?”

**21st DYC 2013    “Knowing Wisely What Matters Truly”**

Reflection: “How is our Practice of Dana, Sila and Bhavana?

Do we develop our Compassion and Wisdom well?”

**May the DYC be more than just a memory  
May we practice  
the sublime Dhamma diligently**



## 28 My Four

### *Special Friends*

*“Through effort, vigilance,  
restraint, and self-control,  
The wise one makes himself an  
island that a flood  
could not overwhelm.”*



Do people who are mentally ill or have mental disorders have an inclination to go to religious places like temples, churches, Buddhist and Dhamma centers? Perhaps. In such places there is an atmosphere of spirituality, a state of peacefulness, calmness and serenity so lacking in the outside world of hustle and bustle, of stress and mental agitation.

Over the last 25 years at our local Buddhist association we have had our share of visits by mentally-ill patients seeking a sort of solace to be free from their mental pain and anguish. There are people afflicted with anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar, neurosis, compulsive obsessive personality disorder and some other psychiatric illnesses.

Many people wonder as to the causes of mental illnesses. Perhaps one cannot point at just one causative factor; there may be various causes – a heredity factor, upbringing, psychological reasons, stress, kamma and so on. I have asked some cultivated monks about the link or correlation between kamma and mental disorders. Some point out the roots of attachment, anger or hatred and the ego or delusion manifesting out when conditions like stress prevail. One monk said, “Aren’t we all mad in a way – mad with the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion? Only the arahants

are free from this ‘madness’. For we worldlings, it’s a matter of degree – some are more mad than others!”

Another monk told me that the kammic link of mental disorders lies in our past heavy breaking of the first and fifth precepts – killing, torturing or causing harm and pain to others in previous lives and the taking of alcohol and drugs leading to severe intoxication.

I would like to talk about four of my *special* Dhamma friends - two suffering from schizophrenia and two from bipolar. Names are changed to maintain confidentiality.

*Schizophrenia is a mental disorder often characterized by abnormal social behavior and failure to recognize what is real. Common symptoms include false beliefs, unclear or confused thinking, auditory hallucinations, reduced social engagement and emotional expression, and inactivity.*

A web site gives a more complete list of the symptoms of schizophrenia:

#### **Positive Symptoms of Schizophrenia**

Positive symptoms of schizophrenia are behaviors and experiences that the ill person has that healthy people do not. Positive symptoms are also referred to as psychotic symptoms, although the word psychotic is used in many other ways as well. Positive symptoms include:

*Delusions*

*Hallucinations*

*Disorganized speech*

*Disorganized or catatonic behavior*

#### **Negative Symptoms of Schizophrenia**

*Flattened affect*

*Anhedonia*

*Reduced speech.*

***Lack of initiative*****Cognitive Symptoms of Schizophrenia***Difficulty maintaining attention**Memory problems**Difficulty planning and structuring activities**Lack of insight*

Ah Pong (*not his real name*) was a student of mine in our community guidance class way back in the mid-1990s. He was pleasant-looking, well-behaved and quite good in his academic study. Initially, I could not detect the symptoms of schizophrenia in him. It was until some of his classmates told me of his bizarre behavior in school that I began to be more alert and pay closer attention to him. True enough, he showed more and more of the symptoms. I contacted his father and discussed the matter with him. The family had for some months been bringing Ah Pong to various temples to consult the mediums but to no avail. I persuaded the father to bring his son to see a good psychiatrist; he did and it was confirmed that Ah Pong was indeed schizophrenic.

So many years have passed since I have known Ah Pong. As long as he takes his regular medication he is alright. There were a few occasions when he lapsed in taking his medication and the attacks came. He started to hear voices and hallucinate again; at times he was catonic and withdrew himself. He recovered with medication. Now and then he still drops by at our association for chanting sessions, Dhamma talks and the Sutta study class. I encourage Ah Pong to keep on practicing the Dhamma in terms of Dana (Charity), Sila (Morality) and Bhavana (Mental cultivation).

Boh Ho (*not his real name*) was afflicted with schizophrenia when he was in his early twenties. After leaving school when

he finished his Form 5, he started working in the private sector – some office work. One day he had a very bad fall from his bicycle and hit his head on the hard road. He sought medical treatment with some doctors and a neurological surgeon. However the pain in his head persisted from time to time and the symptoms of schizophrenia began to show up. This was what he told me when he started to come to our association. He was under medication for schizophrenia and he could lead quite a ‘normal’ life. He worked but could not sustain for long; he changed jobs a number of times. At our association, he did good Dana work, helping in cleaning the premises and general manual work during functions like Wesak, Ullambana and fellowships. I used to remind him to keep his precepts well and to learn and practice the Dhamma sincerely. He was quite regular in joining our Pali chanting sessions and also in our Sutta class. He even participated in our wake services. Although I advised him not to meditate, he would still show up quite often in our meditation sessions. Fortunately, nothing untoward happened in his meditation.

I remember a few occasions when Boh Ho’s schizophrenic attacks came because he stopped taking his medication. There was one day when he came to see me while I was having a community guidance class. I told him to wait for a few minutes and I would see him after the class which I did. He said to me, “Brother Oh, I cannot stay at my home...please let me stay at the association for a few days. The spirits are visiting me at home ...I think they want to harm or kill me.” I thought to myself, “He is hallucinating again...the delusions are pretty bad now.” I was in a big dilemma – it would be risky for him to stay at our association without professional help. On the other, to reject his request might provoke some aggressive behavior. I had to buy time. I told Boh Ho to return home and rest first; I would

go to his home in about an hour's time to help sort out his problems. He complied. I got another committee member to accompany me to visit Boh Ho's home. Upon reaching his home we met up with Boh Ho's mother, an old lady in her late seventies. She wailed, "Oh, there is something wrong with my son, Boh Ho. Last night he frightened me out of my wits. He was going in and out of the house and did not sleep the whole night. He burnt his prayer books and threw away all my deity statues which I have been praying to for more than 30 years already. Oh, Oh ... what should I do?" My Dhamma friend and I consoled Boh Ho's mother. "Auntie," I said, "you must not blame your son ... he is not well. We will help him. We will get him admitted to the hospital where he can get the proper treatment for his illness. He can and will recover, Auntie."

It took us more than half an hour to convince Boh Ho that he really needed to get warded at the hospital so that he could get treatment and recover. That night itself, we got Boh Ho admitted to the psychiatric ward where he stayed for about a week before discharge. He was prescribed the proper medication for schizophrenia and the psychiatrist asked us to help to remind Boh Ho to regularly take his medicine. Boh Ho, with his regular medication, could cope with his illness. However as the years passed, he grew weaker and was starting to show symptoms of depression. He still continued to come to our association and we continued to give him all the moral support and help we could. It was I remember in the year 2011 that Boh Ho's aged mother passed away leaving him to live alone in the house. One of his elder brothers got a maid to help look after him but Boh Ho was losing his will to live. It was sometime in 2012 that he passed away due to worsening conditions of his vital organs. He was just in his 50s.

Bipolar disorder, also known as bipolar affective disorder, manic-depressive illness, or affective psychosis, is a mental illness characterized by periods of elevated mood and periods of depression. Some useful information on the Bipolar disorder is found on the Mayo clinic web site:

### **Symptoms**

Bipolar disorder is divided into several subtypes. Each has a different pattern of symptoms. Types of bipolar disorder include:

Bipolar I disorder. Mood swings with bipolar I; cause significant difficulty in your job, school or relationships. Manic episodes can be severe and dangerous.

Bipolar II disorder. Bipolar II is less severe than bipolar I. You may have an elevated mood, irritability and some changes in your functioning, but generally you can carry on with your normal daily routine. Instead of full-blown mania, you have hypomania — a less severe form of mania. In bipolar II, periods of depression typically last longer than periods of hypomania.

Cyclothymic disorder. Cyclothymic disorder, also known as cyclothymia, is a mild form of bipolar disorder. With cyclothymia, hypomania and depression can be disruptive, but the highs and lows are not as severe as they are with other types of bipolar disorder.

The exact symptoms of bipolar disorder vary from person to person. For some people, depression causes the most problems; for other people, manic symptoms are the main concern. Symptoms of depression and symptoms of mania or hypomania may also occur together. This is known as a

mixed episode.

Manic phase of bipolar disorder

Signs and symptoms of the manic or hypomanic phase of bipolar disorder can include:

*Euphoria*

*Inflated self-esteem*

*Poor judgment*

*Rapid speech*

*Racing thoughts*

*Aggressive behavior*

*Agitation or irritation*

*Increased physical activity*

*Risky behavior*

*Spending sprees or unwise financial choices*

*Increased drive to perform or achieve goals*

*Increased sex drive*

*Decreased need for sleep*

*Easily distracted*

*Careless or dangerous use of drugs or alcohol*

*Frequent absences from work or school*

*Delusions or a break from reality (psychosis)*

*Poor performance at work or school*

Depressive phase of bipolar disorder

Signs and symptoms of the depressive phase of bipolar disorder can include:

*Sadness*

*Hopelessness*

*Suicidal thoughts or behavior*

*Anxiety*

*Guilt*

*Sleep problems*

*Low appetite or increased appetite*

*Fatigue*

*Loss of interest in activities once considered enjoyable*

*Problems concentrating*

*Irritability*

*Chronic pain without a known cause*

*Frequent absences from work or school*

*Poor performance at work or school*

Nelson Ng (*not his real name*) has bipolar disorder. In his early forties, he is well-built, polite but a little on the reserved side. Some years ago his mother told me about the bizarre behavior of Nelson. She believed her son was possessed and brought him for ‘treatment’ at various temples through the help of mediums. This went on for some months but there was no cure; in fact the condition deteriorated. During the manic episodes, Nelson exhibited ‘grandeur behavior’; he had the delusion that he was a Chinese deity and wore special costumes and sat on a throne-like high chair. Manipulative in his ways and racy in his thoughts, Nelson was getting very difficult to manage; he had quit his job and was causing great worry and suffering to the family members. When he was warded at the psychiatric unit of the local hospital, I visited him a few times. I accompanied the mother and Nelson for consultation with the psychiatrist. Nelson was put on medication and also had to undergo electroconvulsive therapy or electroshock treatment. Some weeks later, the bipolar episodes ‘subsided’ and he slowly recovered. I visited him at his home now and then and shared some Dhamma with him. Today he is quite alright; he has to be on regular medication. He is now working at a new job in another state.

Cathie Chong (*not her real name*) was in my community guidance classes for Chemistry and MUET in Form 5 and 6



some years back. After her STPM, she studied at a university in Singapore and graduated with a Bachelor's degree. She has a bipolar disorder. Below are some extracts from an account she wrote at my request:

*"I have had many episodes of mania and one depression.*

*The first was when I was in Form 3. I was doing quite ok academically and everything seemed to be going on quite well. I was a perfectionist and stress was building up in me. Problems of the mind began to arise; I could not sleep many a time and my emotional feelings were going haywire. My mother took me to consult with the temples (There is always this social stigma of being a psychiatric patient seeking proper medical treatment. ) but to no avail. One of my teachers then advised my parents that I should seek help from a psychiatrist. It was then that my treatment for bipolar disorder began and the episodes passed and I could continue with my education. I have had one depression episode where I felt so hopeless; I would sleep a lot; I lost interest in everything. My emotions were really down. The most bizarre manic episode I experienced was when I had completed my final year university project. I ran away trying to look for an imaginary family. I took a bus from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur and wandered around aimlessly in the streets and the shopping complexes. Eventually a security guard at a shopping complex alerted the police who got me warded at the Hospital in Kuala Lumpur. I stayed for some days, received treatment before my parents came to fetch me home.*

*I am now coping quite well with my bipolar; I am on regular medication. I have a job and am learning and practicing the Dhamma the best I can. I know that the understanding and realization of Dhamma is of utmost importance in my life."*

## 29 Happenings To Reflect Upon

*"Make an island of yourself, make yourself your refuge; there is no other refuge. Make truth your island, make truth your refuge; there is no other refuge"*



It is indeed sad when we come across long-time practicing Buddhists who do not seem to have real confidence in going to the Triple Gem for refuge. They run to temples and shrines to worship and make material offerings to various gods and deities in prayers of supplication; some go to mediums, fortune tellers and ‘holy monks and priests’ to have their fortunes read and to consult on ways to live their lives. In the process, many waste lots of money while some are conned.

Have we forgotten what the Buddha said about true refuge? In The Dhammapada Verses 188 – 192, the Buddha said,

*“They go to many a refuge, to mountains and forests, to park and tree shrines: people threatened with danger.*

*That's not the secure refuge, not the supreme refuge, that's not the refuge, having gone to which, you gain release from all suffering and stress.*

*But when, having gone to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha for refuge, you see with right discernment the Four Noble Truths — stress, the cause of stress, the transcending of stress, and the Noble Eightfold Path, The Way to the stilling of stress: that's the secure refuge, that, the supreme refuge, that is the refuge, having gone to which, you gain release from all suffering and stress.”*

In the mid-19070s, I heard about Sai Baba, the ‘Man of Miracles’; some regarded him as a god. I started to read accounts and books about him. To many, reports of his many ‘miracles’ were very fascinating – mind-reading, teleportation, materialization, healing powers, clairvoyance, psycho kinesis and other psychic abilities. Thousands of people all over thronged to see Sai Baba in India – to listen to his religious sermons, witness his ‘miracles’ and to seek for cures for their ailments. One of my relatives who had an advanced stage of cancer went to seek help from Sai Baba. He managed to get near him and receive his ‘blessings’. Upon his return home, my sick relative reported that he had been cured of his cancer but some months later the cancer came back. It was then that some members from a Christian group came and evangelized to him and his family. They convinced the cancer victim that a conversion to Christianity could cure him. So my relative and his family converted. Initially there seemed to be improvement in his ailment but before long he succumbed to the cancer. (*One who understands would know that some cancers could go into remission only to surface again. Of course there have been cases of faith healing but this is no monopoly of any religion. Some Taoist mediums have even been reported to bring about a cure for ‘sick people beyond redemption’!*)

When one understands, practices and realizes the Dhamma, teachings like The 5 Universal Orders, Kamma and Vipaka, the nature of body and mind and so on, he develops a clear mind of insight and wisdom. He knows what true refuge is and why he must walk the Noble Eightfold Path to be free from all Dukkha (suffering, stress, pain and dis-ease).

In the late 1990s, a few of our lady devotees came to tell me about a ‘miraculous’ happening they had witnessed. It was

about the ‘Hindu Milk Miracle’ involving the Hindu deity Lord Ganesha. *(The Hindu milk miracle was a phenomenon, considered by many Hindus as a miracle, which started on 21 September 1995, in which statues of the Hindu deity Ganesha allegedly "drank" milk offerings. )*

One of the devotees, a Sister Ah Lian *(not her real name for confidentiality reasons)* told me excitedly, “Brother Oh, a few of us went to a Hindu Shrine a distance away from Teluk Intan to pray to the ‘Elephant god’ and to feed him with milk. You know what ... you’d not believe it! The milk disappeared from the spoon – the god had swallowed it. It’s a miracle! We should pray to such gods.”

“Oh, is that so?” I said. Before I could continue further, Ah Lian said, “Brother Oh, can the Buddhist Association committee allow us to feed the Buddha statue here with milk – you know, just as we did for Lord Ganesha?” I was taken by surprise at such a request. From my heart I just gave this reply: (I was the Vice President of our Buddhist Association then.)

“Such an action would be unwise and futile. What is the purpose? Will it help you to grow in the Dhamma, to put an end to Dukkha or suffering. Now suppose you do this ‘milk feeding’ to Buddha. One of 3 things might happen and none of them is going to be beneficial; on the contrary, more problems, trouble and delusion can arise.

1 Through your excitement and lack of mindfulness, the milk might spill on to the floor! Ha, ha ...we need to clean the place!

2 Nothing happens! The milk just remains as it is. So then? You lose faith in the Buddha and Dhamma? You run to other false refuges and your greed, anger and delusion will increase.

3       The milk incredibly is ‘sucked in by the Buddha statue!’” (*Very likely through a capillary action...*) So then? Do you become enlightened? Probably your delusion will increase and you will stray more away from the true Dhamma. Ha, ha ...and the Association will be flooded with ‘devotees’ coming to pray to Buddha as a great god and to ask for ‘empat ekor!’. This is not the Dhamma Way.

After explaining to these ladies the essence of the Dhamma, they were a little wiser. No ‘milk feeding’ took place!

Is our life fated or pre-destined? Are there people like psychics who are able to predict the future? We read about precognition, the paranormal ability to ‘see into the future’. These questions or issues have been raised a number of times by our members. Sad to say, such people fail to realize that Kamma is not fate or predestination. Our present life and circumstances have been influenced or shaped by our past doings among other things; what we do now in terms of mental, verbal and bodily actions will have an effect on our future either in this life or in lives to come. Our destiny lies in our hands.

I had two Dhamma friends who once came (separately) to tell me that they were greatly troubled by what they said was their psychic ability to see some future events.

They were quite sincere in their narrative accounts. On a number of occasions they had ‘seen’ or dreamt of events of the future that came true – accidents happening to some close friends or relatives, a natural disaster, certain family members falling sick, and some other sad or tragic happenings.

Now I reflected: How are these reconciled with kamma which is not fate? Isn’t the future uncertain and not pre-

determined? I gave my 'psychic' Dhamma friends these points to help them in coping with their 'problems'

"No one can be sure of the future which is not fixed. The only certainty is uncertainty. One's future is in one's hands. Should you think you have glimpses into the future, do not attach to these experiences – just note and let them pass. Fill your mind with positive thoughts – metta, compassion, renunciation and other paramis. Not all your predictions come true – things can change according to conditions and certain circumstances. Now there might be some people due to their past kamma, who seem to be able to 'see the future'. Actually, what they could perceive sometimes might just be some kammic tendencies which are heading for fulfillment. But remember these are not certainties. Take the analogy of a projectile object about to be hurled. If we know parameters like the angle of projection and the initial velocity, we could predict its trajectory. However do bear in mind this. The trajectory can be altered after the launch of the projectile – you could apply an external force to alter the trajectory. So you see, kamma is not fate. It is something alive and you can change it through your wise and compassionate actions.

To have a peaceful sleep with no bad dreams or nightmares is a blessing. When I was in my twenties I used to suffer from a sort of insomnia. It was terrible counting sheep and tossing in bed unable to sleep even well past midnight. Since I took up the practice of Metta Bhavana or the meditation on loving-kindness, I have been able to sleep easily with no bad dreams or nightmares. ( These are among the 11 benefits of Metta Bhavana. ) Ha, ha ...my 'problem' now seems to be the reverse – not being able to stay awake sometimes when the night is still young; sleep beckons so strongly.

I had a Dhamma friend who used to have a recurrent frightening dream of being trapped in an earthquake rubble. He told me that the experience was most horrifying – like being in a state of hell with so much suffering. His dreaming of the earthquake and his torment went on for some months until one night in his dream something happened – in his dream he started chanting the Kuan Yin Mantra of ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ and lo and behold, the earthquake dream disappeared and did not come back again. (*When I reflected on this, it was interesting to note that this Dhamma friend had, during the early years of our Buddhist association, been leading in our Sunday Buddha Puja which included chanting the ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’.* So this had paid off!)

To be able to die easily and peacefully when the time comes, is indeed a great blessing. Over the years of Dhammaduta work, I have seen cases where dying dragged on with so much pain and suffering for the dying person as well as his family members. I recall two cases quite clearly. A relative of mine had terminal cancer but his dying dragged on and on with him in a vegetative-like state. His family members asked me why it was so difficult for him to pass on. I told them that to my mind, it was probably due to the negative states of worry, fear and attachments in the mind of the dying. He, very likely, could not let go with so much non-peaceful thoughts and negative thinking in his mind. I suggested, if the family members could accept it, to let the dying person listen to a Buddhist mantra continuously especially in the quiet of the night. Based on what I knew of his life, I suggested the use of the ‘Namo O Mi To Fo’ mantra. His family members agreed. The following day I got word that my relative passed away peacefully in the early hours of the morning. (To me, listening to the mantra had

helped my relative stop his attachment and worry; he managed to let go. )

Not too long ago, another Dhamma friend of mine was dying in the hospital. One of his children contacted me and said, “My father seems to be struggling for so long to be able to pass away. The doctors have done all they could. We family members have also talked to him and given him all the assurances that everything would be alright. What can be done to help him?” I suggested that he could listen continuously at night to the chant of “Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhasa” . ( *He had for years been chanting this ‘Homage to the Buddha’.* )

A few hours later, the son phoned me and said, “Brother Oh, after listening to the chant, there has been a transformation in my father – he appears to be very calm and peaceful; a smile seemed to form in his face.” I was happy to hear this. The following day, my Dhamma friend passed away peacefully.

In the Vinaya, the Buddha forbade the sangha members from dabbling in the arts of fortune changing and fortune telling, using amulets and talismans as charms, and other occult practices. This is definitely not the correct practice of Dhamma. They will bring more problems and suffering.

Many many years ago a relative of mine went to consult a palmist to have her fortune read. The fortune teller, upon studying her palm lines declared, “I see that in 2 years’ time, there is a big life hurdle for you. You will be afflicted with a major cardiac problem.” My relative who was 63 then was naturally very worried; she gave a big ‘Ang Pow’ to the palmist to thwart her impending life threatening heart problem. The fortune teller performed some rituals and prescribed some talismans and amulets for my relative.



Sad to say, despite all the ‘prescriptive steps’, my relative remained troubled with what the palmist had said. Two years later, near her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday, my relative told her children, “I don’t feel good in my heart; I think what the palmist predicted 2 years ago is coming true.” When she was brought to see the doctors, they found that heart palpitations had set in. Prediction come true? I believe it’s a psychosomatic case. A negative mind can bring about a negative happening.

One with an untrained or uncultivated mind reacts to the changing conditions and happenings around him; he suffers greatly in pain. On the other hand, one who has developed the mind with loving-kindness, compassion, and equanimity, can remain so peaceful, calm and unperturbed amidst the challenging and trying circumstances surrounding him.

In the early 1990s, we had a visiting psychologist monk who came to do some Dhamma sharing. We had just moved into our first building and the telephone had not been installed yet. There was no mobile phone then.

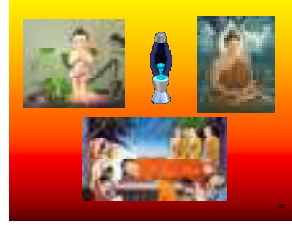
I was given the duty of tending to the monk. No one stayed the night with the monk. I made the terrible mistake of not providing a means for the monk to communicate with me or another committee member should there be an emergency.

After the night Dhamma talk, I checked security and told the monk that I would come to do Dana breakfast the following morning. When I brought breakfast food the next morning, I was shocked to learn that an insect had got into one of the monk’s ears. He showed no sign of being perturbed; he was so calm and serene. He said, “I tried using a torchlight to let the poor creature out but was unsuccessful. So I meditated on loving-kindness.” I felt so bad and apologetic. We brought the monk to the hospital to have the insect taken out.

I learnt important Dhamma lessons from this incident.

### 30 Of Wesak and Aspirations

*“Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts, suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.”*



Wesak commemorates the Birth of Siddhartha Gautama, His Enlightenment and the Buddha's passing into Parinibbana.

On Wesak Day we see people thronging into Buddhist temples and Buddhist Associations and societies to

- \* do offerings, chant and pray to the Buddha
- \* bathe the baby Siddhartha
- \* get blessed 'holy water'
- \* have yellow or orange threads tied round their wrists
- \* do lamp-lighting for blessings
- \* listen to Dhamma talks given by Sangha members
- \* receive free Buddhist materials – books, CDs, posters etc
- \* contribute donations
- \* enjoy free food for breakfast and lunch

At our local Buddhist Association, we try to educate the devotees as to the significance of Wesak ... a time to pay Homage to the Enlightened One, to reflect and re-charge our refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, to affirm our observing the Precepts, to practice Dana (charity) and Sila (morality) and Bhavana (mental purification).

We explain the significance of

- \* the bathing ceremony ( *to reflect and aspire to cleanse our mind of greed, hatred and delusion* )

h\* the taking of ‘blessed water’ ( *to reflect on purifying our mind, speech and action as the water is used for washing hands* )

\* the tying of yellow threads ( *to remind us of constantly following the Buddha’s Teachings* )

\* lamp-lighting – offering to the Buddha ( *to make the aspiration and resolution to dispel the darkness of ignorance through the practice and realization of Dhamma until the Goal of Enlightenment is attained* )

\* the practice of Dana or Giving ( *to cut our greed, covetousness and attachment; to evoke our metta (loving-kindness and karuna (compassion)* )

Reflections and making aspirations are an important aspect of Dhamma practice. We at our Buddhist Association incorporate this into our Buddha Puja and chanting.

Below are the Wesak Aspirations we made for Wesak 2012, 2013 and 2014 :

### **Wesak 2012 - Aspirations**

May we be free from Greed, Attachment and Craving.  
May we practice selfless CHARITY and GIVING.

May we not be conquered by Hatred and Anger.  
May our METTA and COMPASSION grow stronger.

May we dispel Ignorance and Delusion.  
May we develop WISE, MINDFUL attention.

May we not Lie and spread Falsehood.  
May our speech be TRUTHFUL and Good.

May we not speak ill of another being.  
May we bring HARMONY and understanding.

May we not speak words of Harshness.  
May our speech be filled with KINDNESS.

May we refrain from harmful Gossiping.  
May we be CONSTRUCTIVE in our speaking.

May we refrain from Harming or Killing.  
May we be more KIND to every being.

May we not Steal, Swindle, Deceive or Cheat.  
May we be GENEROUS to those in need.

May we not commit Sexual Misconduct.  
May CONTENTMENT be in the mind and heart.

May our GENEROSITY grow each day  
and help us walk the Noble Eightfold Way.

May we observe good MORALITY  
in terms of our Mind, Speech and Body.

May we strive on in MEDITATION  
to attain Peace and Liberation.

May we have respect for beings everywhere.  
May we practice METTA and show that we care.

May we serve others with a SELFLESS heart  
as we strive on in the spiritual Path.

May we transfer MERITS to those in need  
after we do a Meritorious deed.

May we REJOICE in others' meritorious action.  
May such meritorious deeds be an inspiration.

May we constantly learn and practice the DHAMMA  
as we strive on diligently for Nibbana.

May we teach and spread Dhamma everywhere.  
May we with PATIENCE any hardship bear.

May we straighten the views in our mind  
as we walk the Path for TRUTH Sublime.

### **Wesak 2013 - Aspirations**

Greed will cause pain eventually.  
May we practice Generosity

Selfishness cannot bring happiness.  
May we be helpful and show kindness.

Immorality will bring suffering.  
May we be pure in every dealing.

Impure thoughts, speech and deeds bring misery.  
May we observe our Precepts carefully.

The danger of Attachment is truly great.  
May we realize this before it is too late.

Ego and clinging to the Self cause much Dis-ease.  
May we realize Non-Self so that Dukkha can cease.

Ignorance and Craving cause Dukkha.  
May we see things as they truly are.

Mental defilements obstruct the Path to Wisdom.  
May we walk The Middle Way to Enlightenment.

Sloth and laziness hinder spiritual progress.  
May we strive energetically for success.

Nibbana cannot be reached without perseverance.  
May we strive on diligently for deliverance.

To be Enlightened needs patience or Khanti.  
May we strive on in the Dhamma patiently.

Patience and understanding are important.  
May we bear with others' mistakes as we learn.

Truth is most powerful and supreme.  
May we be honest in our living.

Integrity is spiritually good.  
May we never swerve from the Path of Truth.

To attain the Goal needs discipline.  
May we be patient and determined.

Persistence is essential in spiritual practice.  
May we not slacken on the Path to Nibbanic Bliss.

We need to cultivate Loving-Kindness.  
May we spread to all Love and Happiness.

Metta brings us benefits most certainly.  
May we be compassionate, kind and friendly.

Equanimity brings true mental peace.  
May our mind be balanced and at ease.

We need to develop tranquility.  
May we be able to live peacefully.

### **Wesak 2014 - Aspirations**

Let NOT Greed conquer and fill our mind  
May we be contented all the time

Let NOT Hatred come and grow in us  
May we cultivate Loving-Kindness

Let NOT Delusion cause us Suffering  
May Wisdom grow through Dhamma Practicing

Let NOT Shamelessness lead us to Immorality  
May the shame of wrong doing protect our Purity

Let NOT Fearlessness cause us to act wrongly  
May we practice Morality mindfully

Let NOT Restlessness ever weaken our mind  
May our Concentration grow and grow in time

Let NOT Wrong View lead us far astray  
May Right Understanding come our way

Let NOT the mind be assailed by Envy  
May Appreciative Joy grow steadily

Let NOT Covetousness kill Mental Peace  
May Generosity help our greed to cease

Let NOT Worry put us in Misery  
May we practice Mindfulness ardently

Let NOT Sloth and Torpor make our mind weak  
May we have Effort and be energetic

Let NOT the Ego and Conceit conquer the mind  
May we slay these defilements and see Truth Sublime

Let NOT Doubt and Skeptism be a hindrance  
May we The Triple Gem have Confidence







My first Dhamma book for free distribution was "*Dhamma Matters – A Buddhist Reflects*" and it was published in 2010 . Since then two reprints have been done. The response and feedback to *Dhamma Matters* have been quite positive and encouraging. Many of my former students have told me that *Dhamma Matters* is clear and simple to understand containing many practical points of the Dhamma where one can reflect upon and apply in daily life.

Like *Dhamma Matters*, this book, aims to

- \* impart many important points in the Buddha's Teachings
- \* help us realize and correct our weaknesses and defilements
- \* help Dhammaduta workers cope with the many challenges and obstacles
- \* motivate us into Dhamma practice.

*Seeing Dhamma Matters* is a collection of 39 *Dhamma or LIFE Lessons* articles inspired by the happenings and experiences of the author's Dhammaduta work at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak over the last 25 years. The contents touch on various Dhamma teachings like the The Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path, Kamma and Rebirth, the Eight Worldly Conditions, the nature of the mind and so on.

May All Beings Be Well, Happy And Peaceful!

*About the author:*

Oh Teik Bin is a retired teacher and has been involved in Dhammaduta work for more than 25 years at Persatuan Buddhist Hilir Perak, Teluk Intan. His Dhammaduta and outreach services include guidance classes, community library work, Buddhist Sunday School, Dhamma classes, Youth Camps, Dhamma sharing and Buddhist wake chanting services. Over the Internet, Oh Teik Bin has posted lots of Dhamma and educational material at various Web sites.

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