

# **MA-HA CA-DIỆP**

## **I. THE MEANING OF HIS NAME:**

Due to the merit of molding statues of Buddha in his past life, he had an immeasurable brightness that reflected from within. He was also a successor of Buddha.

## **II. HIS LIFE:**

He was born in Ma-Kiệt-Đà and belonged to the Brahmin (Bà-La-Môn) family - A very powerful race in India at the time. His father was Âm-Trạch and his mother was Hường-Chi. He was raised in a very wealthy family, but was not interested in the material world. He was forced by his parents to marry to a beautiful girl in Tỳ-Xá-Lý city. However, he was very happy to know that his wife also had the same living style. They lived together for more than 12 years in a life of purity. Thereafter, they both detached from the material world, and Ma-Ha Ca-Diếp became a disciple of Buddha.

## **III. HIS SUCCESS AND ADMIRATION OF THE BUDDHISTS:**

He practiced a conduct called Đầu-đà. His age did not hinder him from practicing this conduct. The Buddha encouraged him by saying that: "Having the Đầu-đà conduct will make our religion forever lasting". (Đầu đà means to renounce the three worldly pleasures: eating, clothing and sleeping). He stood on the left side of Buddha representing the immaterialistic conduct of Buddhism.

After Buddha entered the Nirvana, he summoned all the Sanghas at Vương-Xá city to recite the Buddha's teachings. This was the first recital since Buddha entered Nirvana. He was the first disciple to be honored to receive the Buddha's garb and bowl, and the responsibility of leading the Sanghas to propagating Buddhism.

We, as Buddhists, always pay tribute to him by adoring, worshipping and living closely to his wishes.

# **A-NAN-DA**

## **I. THE MEANING OF HIS NAME:**

The translation for the Sanskrit term A-Nan-Da, means happiness. Because:

1. He was born on the date the Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, the happiest day for all human beings.
2. He was the son of King Hộc Phạn, the younger brother of king Suddhodana (Tĩnh Phạn). Hộc Phạn is a very compassionate king. Therefore, everybody in the country celebrated when Prince A-Nan-Da was born. A-Nan-Da always attended the Buddha's teaching sessions. He is a cousin of Buddha. He was personal attendant to the Buddha.

## **II. HIS PAST LIFE:**

In Lang Nghiem written: In past life, Ananda and Gautama Buddha were close friends. They practiced the good conduct. Ananda liked literature and did not spend much time in practicing while the Gautama was always practicing diligently. Ananda benefited from the past life by being born into the Thich family and became a cousin of the Gautama Buddha. He left home and was accepted into the Order at the age of 25.

## **III. HIS SUCCESS AND THE ADMIRATION OF BUDDHISTS:**

1. Because he had tried very hard to enrich his wisdom in his past life, he was very intelligent in his present life. He was honored as the most intellectual person of all Buddha's disciples.
2. He was accredited with convincing Buddha to admit ladies into the Order as Bhikkhunis or female devotees. Therefore, in the Nirvana, Buddha said that on the 8th of December (Ananda's birthday) the female Buddhists must always pay tribute to him.
3. He was the 2nd master after Kashtapa (Ca Diếp). He stood on the right side of Buddha.
4. In the 1st convention and council of the Shanga after Buddha's death, the Buddhist scriptures were recorded due to his excellent memory of the Buddha's sermons.
5. In the beginning of every sutra, we always see the sentence "Như thị ngã văn (I heard like this)" in the beginning of a sentence, this means that the sutra was recorded from the memory of Ananda.

He is most remembered for his recitation of Buddha's teachings. The Bhikkhunis always remember whatever he did. His statue is on the right side of Buddha.

# NGUYỄN THIỀU

## I. NATIVE:

Nguyễn Thiều's family is unknown. His last name was Tạ. He was a Chinese, born in Trịnh Lương, Triều Châu County, Quảng Đông Province, China.

## II. THE LIFE OF NGUYỄN THIỀU:

He left his family at the age of 19 and was accepted by The Most Venerable Đổi Khao Khoán Viên, a Chinese. In the 3rd year of Cảnh Trị, the Lê Huyền Tôn Empire (1665), he followed the merchants to enter An-Nam (former of Vietnam) in Quy Ninh (Bình Định Province) and built the Ten Stupa Amida Temple (Thập Tháp Di Đà). He established schools to educate people of Buddha's teaching. Then he went to Phu Loc County, in Thừa Thiên Province to build the Hà Trung temple. At Huế, the capital of Thua Thien, he built the Quốc Ấn Temple and Phổ Đồng Stupa which was destroyed by Tây Sơn Empire (late 1700). After several years at the Quốc Ấn, he was asked by King Anh Tôn to return to China to invite knowledgeable monks and bring more Buddha statues and Buddhist scriptures back to Vietnam. In Quảng Đông, the farthest southeastern province of China, he met many knowledgeable monks including the Most Venerable Thạch Liêm. He was able to invite them and bring more Buddha statues and Buddhist scriptures back to Vietnam. Upon Nguyen Thieu's return, the Nguyễn Empire ordered to hold a first big ordination at Thiên Mục temple. During the 10th of King Thảo Thế's reign, on October 19th, he gathered all his disciples and gave the last words:

*"Tịch tịch kính vô ảnh  
Minh minh châu bất dụng  
Đường đường vật phi vật  
Liễu liễu không vật không."*

He wanted his disciples to realize that the body is pure and clear as a glass eventhough one cannot see it, it is there and not empty. Because one goes through life evolution, the true self is influenced by the changing of society. Therefore, one cannot recognize the truth. Then he sat dying in calm.

## III. HIS INFLUENCE ON MORALITY:

He was the first Master of Lâm Tế lineage in the Middle of Vietnam and also the first monk who brought Buddha teaching into Thừa thiên.

Beside being the founder of temples (Thập tháp, Hà Trung and Quốc Ấn), he invited many high monks into Vietnam and opened the ordinations so that many people could understand and practice the Buddha's teachings which helped to lead them into good moral lives.

These monks stayed in Hue and built more new temples which today are recognized as the most honored temples.

# LIÊU QUÁN

## I. NATIVE:

Liêu Quán whose layname was Lê Thiết Diệu, was born in Bạc Mã village, Đồng Xuân county and Phú Yên province. His mother died when he was six years old. His father gave him consent to enter the Order. His master was the Most Venerable Tế Viên, a Chinese.

## II. HIS YEARS OF PRACTICING BUDDHISM:

After 7 years with the Order, his master died. He then moved to Thuận hóa province to continue his studies under guidance of the Most Venerable Giác Phong in the Bảo Quốc Temple. A year later, in 1691, he returned home to care for his father. After his father past away in 1695, he went back Thuận hóa and was ordained as a Buddhist novice (Sramana, beginning Buddhist monk who practice 10 precepts) by the Most Venerable Thạch Liêm. In 1679, he was accepted for Upasampada (ordination) by the Most Venerable Từ Lâm. Begin in 1699, he traveled to many meditation centers to prove himself in practicing Buddhism. In 1702 he practiced meditation under the guidance of the Most Venerable Tử Dung in the Long Sơn Temple. Between 1733 and 1735, he attended 4 big meeting of Bhikkus. In 1740 he headed the Long Hoa ordination. He then went to Thiên Thai mountain to build a small pagoda to practice Buddhism by himself. His pagoda later became the Thuyền Tôn temple. In 1742, knowing he was close to death, he gathered all his disciples and said: "the dependent-arising (nhân duyên) is over, I am going to die." When his disciples cried, he asked: "Why do you have to cry? The Buddhas that have been born have also gone to nirvana, I know where I came from and where I am going to go; you need not cry nor be sad." He then said:

*"Over 70 years living in this universe  
The emptiness and the forms are same  
Today, I'll return to where I come from  
It is not necessary to know who I am."*

After that he said: "*After I die, you need to think nothing is forever, study hard, and never forget my words.*" On November 22, 1742, after a cup of tea, he said good-by to his disciples and died.

King Minh Vương entitled him as Đạo Hạnh Thụ (An outstanding moral venerable) "Chánh Giác Viên Ngộ". He was the 35th successor of Lâm Tế branch and the founder of Thiên Thai Thuyền Tôn temple (Huế).

## III. HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO BUDDHISM:

Liêu Quán was an outstanding master. He brought the influence of the Lâm Tế branch from Central Vietnam to South of Vietnam. He was the founder of Liễu Quán branch. He is the first master of

Vietnamese Buddhist. The Liễu Quán branch continues to expand and the Buddhist names are given according to the following words: "***Thiệt tế đại đạo, tánh hải thanh trường, tâm nguyên quang nhuận, Đức Bốn Từ phong, giới định phước huệ, thể dụng viên thông, vĩnh siêu trí quả, mật kế thành công. Truyền trì diệu lý, diễn xướng chánh tông, hạnh giải tương ưng, giác ngộ chân không.***" The current words being used as the beginning of Buddhist names are Tâm, Nguyên and Quang.

# THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

## I. ORIGIN AND DEFINITION:

The Buddha Dharma is not based on the fear of the unknown, but on the base on of facts which can be tested and verified by experience. Buddhism is rational and intensely practical.

Buddha, after attained enlightenment, He went to Loc Gia park (dear-park) at Isipatana (Chu Thiên Đọa) to convert the Kondanna's brothers, His five former companions. At first, they did not listen to Him; but His appearance was spiritual beauty, His teaching was sweet and convincing, they soon turned and gave Him their closet attention and then became His disciples which earned them the Arahats state. His first lecture to them was called The Four Noble Truths. These four truths represent the philosophy and the ethics of Buddhism. They are the foundations of Buddhism.

## II. THE FORMS OF FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS:

1. ***True of Suffering:*** The misery of evolutionary existence results in births and deaths, one life after another. There are eight different forms of suffering:
  - a. Suffering from Birth: The suffering that one faces following births.
  - b. Suffering of old age: The physical and mental suffering one faces when getting old.
  - c. Suffering of Illness: Suffering that one gets ill or disease.
  - d. Suffering of Death: Suffering that one gets when approaching death.
  - e. Suffering from the Separation of objects one love: The suffering that one gets from the separation.
  - f. Suffering from the Association with those who are repugnant: Suffering that one gets around unpleasant people.
  - g. Suffering from Craving for what cannot be attained: The suffering that one gets when not receiving what one craves.
  - h. Suffering from Five aggregates of attachment: each person suffer differently depending upon his personality, society and relations to nature.
2. ***The cause of suffering:*** This truth is the cause of suffering which has been obtained in the past life of the being. This cause based on the followings:
  - a. Sensuality, bodily passions (Kama): Craving for sensual pleasures.
  - b. Hatred, ill-feeling: Anger, hot temper
  - c. Ignorance (Avijjā): Lack of knowledge, unawareness.
  - d. Pride (Māna): Overhigh opinions of oneself, undervalue the opinion of others.
  - e. Doubt (Vicikicchā): Waver in opinion, feel distrust, be inclined to disbelief.
  - f. Delusion of self (Sakkāya-ditthi): Belief in the personal is truth and forever.
  - g. Love of life on earth (Ruparaga): Try to make the one's life last forever.
  - h. Desire for life in heaven (Aruparaga): Desire for the purity world.
  - i. Self-righteousness (Uddhacca): Never listen to the right opinion.

- j. Dependence on superstitious rites (silabbata-parāmāsa): Believes and practices the wrong precepts.
3. ***The Noble Truth of Annihilation of Suffering:*** It is to destroy completely the craving, ignorance, sorrow. It is the Nirvana.
- a. Nirvana: is formed of Nir and Vana. Nir is a negative particle and Vana means lusting or craving. Nirvana is a departure from the craving, and is the final beatitude that transcends suffering, karma and samara. Nirvana has three characters:
- 1) *Unborn*: Not to be born because the life has been eliminated.
  - 2) *Purity and calm*.
  - 3) *Enlightenment*: Destroying the fetters, get out of ignorance, ending the suffering.
- b. Stages of advancement:
- 1) *Tu-Đà-Hoàn* (Sotāpatti) (Stream - Winner) - the beginning or entering into the stream of sainthood which occurs after one's clear perception of the "Four Nobles Truths". He had destroyed three fetters (self-illusion, doubts and wrongful rites). As he has not eradicated all fetters, he is reborn seven times at the most.
  - 2) *Tu-Đà-Hàm* (Sakardāgāmi) (Once returnee) - the path of one who has restricted of two or more fetters (Sense-desire and ill-will) that he needs only return once to this material world.
  - 3) *A-Na-Hàm* (Anāgami) (Never returnee) - the path of those who have so far conquered self that they need not return to this world. But he is reborn in the "Pure Abodes", a congenial Brahma world until he attains Arahatsip.
  - 4) *A-La-Hán* (Arahat) - the path of the holy and worthy Arahat, who is not only free from the cycle of life and death, but has capacitated himself to enjoy the perfect wisdom, boundless compassion for the ignorant and misery, and measureless love for all being.
4. ***The Path leading to the Annihilation:*** The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Annihilation of Suffering is the Middle Way (The Eightfold Paths).
- a. Right view
  - b. Right thought
  - c. Right speech
  - d. Right action
  - e. Right means of livelihood
  - f. Right effort
  - g. Right mindfulness: Right remembrance and self-discipline
  - h. Right meditation.

In brief, the Middle Way is the path leading to Nirvana. It helps us to get out of the ignorance, and attain the enlightenment.

### III. BUDDHIST WITH THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS:

Whether the Buddhas arise or not, these four Truths exist in the universe. The Buddhas only reveal these Truths that lay hidden in the dark of time. According to the Buddha, the happinesses that the man

enjoys in the sensual pleasures are the momentary happinesses, illusive and temporary; only non-attachment is a greater happiness.

Buddhism sees suffering as natural condition and seeks the cause to eradicate it. Suffering exists as long as there is craving. It can only be annihilated by practicing the Eight-Fold Noble Path and attaining the supreme bliss of Nirvana. As a Buddhist, we need to follow His teaching.

# **THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DEPENDENT ORIGATION (PATICCA SAMUPPADA)**

Paticca Samuppada is only a lesson about the 12 conditioned causes. It is neither a theory of origin of life nor an exposition of evolution from the beginning of the universe.

## **I. DEFINITION:**

Paticca means because of, or dependent upon; Samuppada means arising or origination. Hence, Paticca samuppada means dependent-arising or dependent origination.

1. ***Dependent arising.*** Matter will arise when there are enough dependents existing.

*Ex:* A statue can only be built with the combination of materials, water, sun, labor....

2. ***Dependent origination.*** The origination of one thing is dependent upon others.

*Ex:* Orange tree is related to orange seed. Orange tree is dependent on the origination of its fruit.

## **II. THE CHARACTERISTICS:**

Paticca samuppada includes: Ignorance(Avijja), Activities(Sankhara), Consciousness ( Vinnana), Mind and Body (Nama Rupa), Six Senses (Salayatana), Contact (Phassa), Feeling (Vedana), Craving (Tanha), Grasping (Upadana), Kamma (Bhava), Birth (Jati), and old age and death (Jara-marana).

1. ***Ignorance:*** The lack of knowledge. It clouds all the right understanding. Externally, one cannot realize that all things are unreal and impermanent. Internally, one cannot come to the realization that the mind is pure, and continues searching for cravings. Ignorance is the first cause of sufferings which continues from one life to the next.

2. ***Activities:*** Action, the cause of miseries. Because of ignorance, the activities, both moral and immoral, arise. The activities, whether good or bad, have their due effects which prolong the life's wandering.

3. ***Consciousness:*** The ability to judge. Ignorance and activities together mislead the ability to judge. Because of the wrong understanding, one tends to have false belief regarding himself and his surroundings. This delusion hinders a person from seeing things as they really are. The sensation of joy, sad, love, hate also arise because of the same reason. Consciousness is one of the three required conditions (sensation, cells, consciousness) which forms and constitutes a human.

4. ***Mind and matter:*** Mind and matter constitute a living being, which has been formed inside the mother's body. The mind and matter (sperm and ovum cells) unite and depend on each other to nurture and promote the grow of the fetus.

5. **Six senses:** The baby receives the six senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and objects) from his mother to grow and develop.
6. **Contact:** At birth, the baby makes contact with his surroundings. Because he is very young, he can make contact but unable to analyze.
7. **Feeling:** As he grows older, his way of contacting with the world improves, which causes his feeling to arise. He cries to show disagreements and laughs to show his enjoyments.
8. **Craving:** Feeling causes the craving to arise. Passionately fond of good things and staying away from anything that is bad and hateful.
9. **Grasping:** Craving causes the grasping to arise. Be possessive towards the things that he loves. It is the cause of immoralities.
10. **Actions (Kamma):** Because of craving and grasping, actions (Kamma) arise, that lead to the sufferings in three universes.
11. **Birth:** Actions cause re-births It indicates the constitution of the living beings (mind and body) which is a psycho-physical organism. The length of a person's life depends upon his karma.
12. **Aged and death:** Aging indicates the final stage of the living stream. Death is the end of a living chain.

The reverse order of the paticca samuppada will make matter clear: Aged and death are possible in, and with, a psycho-physical organism. Such an organism must be born; therefore it pre-supposes birth. But birth is the inevitable result of past deeds of Karma. Karma is conditioned by grasping which is caused by craving. Such craving can appear only where feeling exists. Feeling is the outcome of the contact between the senses and objects. The senses cannot exist without the mind and body. Where there is a mind there is consciousness. It is the result of past good and bad deeds. These activities are due to the ignorance of things as they truly are. Thus, the entire aggregation is the origination of sufferings.

### III. CLASSIFICATION:

1. **Wrong understanding.** The lack of psychological knowledge which misleads the judgment both internally and externally. Ignorance, craving and grasping reflect this aspect.
2. **Karma.** The bad activities arise from the body and mind. Activities and karma reflect this group.
3. **Suffering.** The result of ignorance and karma. Consciousness, mind and matter, senses, contact, feeling, re-birth, old age and death belong under this group.

#### **IV. EFFICIENCY:**

1. Wanting to cease the reincarnation, one has to cease the result of present and future. Wanting to cease the results, one has to cease the ignorance, activities, craving, grasping and karma.
2. Right understanding and hard practice lead to ceasational of the cause and not to be drowned in the living flux, and to be enlightened.

#### **V. BUDDHIST WITH PATICCA SAMUPPADA:**

1. The paticca samuppada helps us to understand the actuality of things. Everything is only the union of psycho-physical. Time is understood only through the connection between the past and the future. Therefore, things are not fixed or unique.
2. Understanding the constitution of living beings and the changing of life from past to future.
3. Things are not built or created by God, naturally formed, or non-cause involved. They rely on dependent origination, to form to exist and to disappear. Understanding things are impermanent and have no self, one can eliminate craving. Understanding the karma, one can change and divert them. Realizing that all things are only the due effects of dependent origination, one can change the life from suffering into happiness.

As a Buddhist, one needs to learn, experiment, practice and help other people do the same to cease re-birth and to enter enlightenment.

# THE EIGHT-FOLD NOBLE PATH

Buddha shows us The Eight-fold Noble Path to stop suffering and to enter the Nirvana. They are simple guidelines anyone can follow and practice in daily living.

I. **DEFINITION:** The Eight-fold Noble Path is the right way to lead a person toward enlightenment.

## II. CHARACTERISTICS:

1. ***Right understanding*** (Samma Ditthi): Deep and through understanding
  - a. Correct understanding:
    - 1) Understand things are a union of many causes, impermanent and will disappear.
    - 2) Understand the results of all actions and ideas.
    - 3) Understand worthiness of the life: self, others, living being.
    - 4) Understand all living beings have the same pure mind.
    - 5) Understand karma is the result of actions (good and bad).
    - 6) Accept truly morality for one's goal.
  - b. Incorrect understanding:
    - 1) Thinking the existence of things is natural.
    - 2) Accepting God and denying the law of cause and effect.
    - 3) Recognizing predestination, denying the results of karmas.
    - 4) Distinguishing the levels between humans, and between humans and animals.
    - 5) Following the Divine and superstitions.
2. ***Right thought*** (Samma Sankappa): Means thinking truthfully. It will be beneficial to you and everyone.
  - a. Correct thoughts:
    - 1) Think about precepts, concentration of the mind (Samadhi) and wisdom for practicing Buddhism.
    - 2) Think of the causes of sufferings to explain and encourage all beings to practice.
    - 3) Think about the mistakes and bad ideas and to repent and correct them.
  - b. Incorrect thoughts:
    - 1) Think about witchcraft to hurt people.
    - 2) Think of bad way to hurt the humans and animals.
    - 3) Think of tricky ways to revenge enemies.
    - 4) Think about sensuous pleasures and reputation.
3. ***Right speech*** (Samma Vaca): Speaking truthfully with nice words. The words are beneficial and skillful.

- a. Right speech:
    - 1) Honest and clear speech.
    - 2) Straight forward speech.
    - 3) Clear, simple and amiable speech.
    - 4) Beneficial, harmonizing and encouraging and unique speech.
  - b. Incorrect speech:
    - 1) Untruthful speech.
    - 2) Unrighteous, partial, flattering.
    - 3) Harmful, bad-tempered, curseful, scolding, slanderous, and ill-mannered.
    - 4) Disuniting and harmful to all beings.
4. **Right action** (Samma Kammanta): Any action that is right and beneficial to everyone.
- a. Right actions:
    - 1) Reasonable actions. Respect the life and happiness of humans and animals.
    - 2) Respect people's occupations and properties.
    - 3) Maintain the purity precepts. Avoid corruption.
    - 4) Be responsible and dedicated to one's jobs.
    - 5) Know how to sacrifice to liberate oneself and other's from suffering.
  - b. Incorrect actions:
    - 1) Killing.
    - 2) Theft and seizure.
    - 3) Living in luxury and corruption.
    - 4) Invent dangerous weapons to kill human and animals.
    - 5) To construct fake things to lie and deceive people.
    - 6) Take advantage of music and entertainment to lead people into corruptive activities.
5. **Right livelihood** (Samma Ajiva): Select an occupation that avoids killing or is harmful to others.
- a. Right livelihood:
    - 1) Work hard but do not hurt others and animals.
    - 2) Take advantage of one's abilities but do not use it deceitfully.
    - 3) Maintain a noble living, never unreasonably beg before anyone.
    - 4) Follow the Dharma, not superstition.
  - b. Incorrect livelihood:
    - 1) Hurt living beings.
    - 2) Use astrology, destination, predict the fate and tell fortunes to make a living.
    - 3) Follow one's power, treachery and lie to someone for a living.
6. **Right effort** (Samma Vayama): Work hard on any job or your practice to receive benefits for yourself and others.
- a. Right effort:
    - 1) If one has made mistakes or are guilty, one has to repent and avoid repeating mistakes.
    - 2) If evils and mistakes have not arisen, try to prevent them by continuing good work.
    - 3) If one does not have a good karma, try to build one.

- 4) If one already has a good karma, try to maintain and develop it more.
- b. Wrong effort:
    - 1) Frequently killing.
    - 2) Frequently lying and stealing.
    - 3) Frequently using sensual pleasure.
    - 4) Frequently distorting and flattering.
    - 5) Frequently drinking (alcohol).
7. **Right mindfulness** (Samma Sati): Observe the present see the way things are from moment to moment.
- a. Remember the past:
    - 1) Remember the gratitude one has for one's parents, teachers and friends in order to repay them.
    - 2) Remember the gratitude one has for one's society in order to serve and protect it.
    - 3) Remember the gratitude one has for living being in order to help them.
    - 4) Remember the gratitude one has for Buddha, Dharma, Shanga for self cultivation.
    - 5) Remember old mistakes for repentance.
  - b. Incorrect mindfulness:
    - 1) Remember someone's faults to mock and criticize.
    - 2) Remember old hatred for revenge.
    - 3) Remember old sensual pleasures to corrupt the pure will.
    - 4) Remember treacherous and cruel actions in order to be satisfied and proud.
  - c. Right observations:
    - 1) **Be mindful of compassion**. Observe hunger, illness, ignorance of living beings at the present time and numerous accidents in the future. One should develop a merciful soul, help, and search for a method to defend and protect living beings from these sufferings.
    - 2) **Observe wisdom**. Observe the cause of the rising and changing of the universe: living being, hatred and love, good and evil... in order to cultivate and educate in a clear, concise and liberated way.
  - d. Wrong observation:
    - 1) Remember sensual pleasures.
    - 2) Remember dangerous ways to hurt someone.
    - 3) Remember distorting words.
    - 4) Remember untruthful words.
    - 5) Remember savory dishes.
8. **Right concentration** (Samma Samadhi): Practice the right meditation; do not practice the wrong meditation.
- a. Right meditation:
    - 1) **Meditation on impurities**. Meditate on the impurities in order to suppress the desires.
    - 2) **Meditation on compassion**. Meditate that all living beings have the same pure mind and are equal in order to build more respect and compassion so as to terminate all vengeance.

- 3) ***Meditation on causation***: Meditate on all forms: big as mountain, small as a bacteria; if there is form then it is only temporary and impermanent. Meditate on forms to eliminate the ignorance.
  - 4) ***Meditation on sensation***: Distinguish and meditate on the temporary existence of 18 senses (6 seeds, 6 senses, 6 kind of consciousness) in order to eliminate the concept of permanent existence of all forms.
  - 5) ***Meditation on breathing***: Concentrate on breathings is the easiest way to cultivate mindfulness.
- b. Incorrected meditations:
- 1) Meditation to eliminate the changing of 7 kind of consciousness and wish to attain the untrue Nirvana.
  - 2) Meditation of the formless to eliminate six senses and wish to enter heaven worlds.
  - 3) Meditation to attain supernatural power, and miracles.

### III. CLASSIFICATION:

1. ***Wisdom*** (Panna): Right understanding and right thought.
2. ***Moral*** (Sila): Right speech, right livelihood and right action.
3. ***Concentration*** (Samadhi): Right endeavor, right mindfulness and right concentration.

### IV. EFFECTIVENESS:

1. ***Improve oneself***: One who practices the Eight-fold Noble Paths will improve oneself, one will have a true, beneficial and good life.
2. ***Improve surroundings***: If one follows the Eight-fold Noble Paths, it could make the world a peaceful and beautiful place.
3. ***Foundation of enlightenment***: The Eight-fold Noble Paths is the foundation of enlightenment of Buddhas. A Buddhist who wants to become a good person needs to practice these Paths.

### V. BENEFIT: Practicing the Eight-fold Noble Paths will gain:

1. Right view will not be deceived.
2. Right thought will not be misunderstood.
3. Right speech will help oneself and others.
4. Right action will not harm living beings.
5. Right livelihood will earn other's respect.
6. Right endeavor will get good results.
7. Right mindfulness will help to understand the situations and receive good results.
8. Right concentration will help to develop the knowledge and lead to enlightenment.

## **VI. CONCLUSION:**

The principle of the Eight-fold Noble Paths explains the good methods to be applied in daily living. They will improve life. They are the foundation of enlightenment and liberation from sufferings. As a Buddhist, one needs to learn and practice these Noble Ways to help one's life and to change the world around one.

# THE SUTRA OF THE TEN GOOD DEEDS

Ananda said:

"I heard Buddha taught the Sutra of the Ten Good Actions to his disciples in the palace of King Ta-Kiet La Long Vuong."

Ta Kiet La Long Vuong had a good position in that Dharma meeting so that Buddha called him and said:

"Because of the different thoughts, all beings have created different karma. Based on these karma, beings are in a cycle of re-birth (reincarnated) in one of the six different universe. The different forms and appearances of beings come from the karma which had been created by the their actions, speech and thoughts. An intelligent person who understands the law of cause and effect should practice the ten good actions to obtain beautiful body forms and be re-born into the world of purity.

"La Long Vuong; look at the good body forms and the brightness ejecting from Shakyamuni Buddha and the Bodhisittvas! These are the results of good action practiced. Beings having unattractive or attractive appearances are due to both bad and good karma created by themselves.

"La-Long Vuong! One should know that the Bodhisittvas posses a method to eliminate the miseries from the bad karma. That is to observe and practice good actions, continue to accumulate good karma and do not give any chance for bad action to start. These good actions are:

## **A) *THERE ARE THREE GOOD BODILY ACTIONS:***

- Do not kill but free all beings.
- Do not steal but practice charity.
- Do not commit adultery but live a moral life.

## **B) *THERE ARE FOUR GOOD ORAL ACTIONS:***

- Do not lie. Only speak of the truth.
- Do not exaggerate.
- Do not speak to disunite, speak to reconcile.
- Do not speak cruelly, speak nicely.

## **C) *THERE ARE THREE GOOD THOUGHTS:***

- Do not be greedy or over desirous; rather understand the impurity of all things and all beings.
- Do not be angry; rather understand and practice compassion.
- Do not be ignorant; rather understand the law of cause and effect.

- i. **No killing:** When one does not kill, one will obtain 10 ways to detach oneself from the sufferings:
  1. Give to and never ask others to pay one back.
  2. Compassionate toward all beings.
  3. Eliminate angry emotions.

4. Have a healthy life.
5. Have longevity.
6. Often aided and protected by Sages.
7. Sleep well without nightmares.
8. Eliminate all resentments.
9. Never be born into one of the three lower worlds (Hell, Ghost, Animals).
10. Be born into the higher worlds/spheres.

**ii. No stealing:** When one does not steal, one will gain trust in 10 different ways:

1. Have a good material life, never be affected by natural disasters. Will not be bankrupted by one's own children.
2. Be well liked by everyone.
3. Not be betrayed by anyone.
4. Be admired by everyone.
5. Not lose anything.
6. Have good reputation.
7. Danger free.
8. Be prosperous in every aspect.
9. Always want to give.
10. Be born into mighty universe.

**iii. No adultery:** When one lives a moral life, one will gain 4 merits, such as:

1. The six roots of sensation are completed (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind).
2. The elimination of all miseries.
3. Family is safe from intruders.
4. Have good reputation and is admired by everyone.

**iv. No lying:** When one does not lie, one will gain 5 merits, such as:

1. Speak rightfully.
2. Be loved by human beings and high spirits.
3. Conversation will not be mistaken.
4. Have a high intelligent level.
5. Enjoy a desired life and the 3 karma are pure.

**v. No disunity:** When one does not disunite, one will gain:

1. A safe life.
2. A close relationship with kin.
3. A strong faith.
4. A deep understanding.
5. Good teachers and friends.

**vi. No cruel speech:** When one does not speak cruelly, one will gain pure karma, such as:

1. Generosity.
2. Speak beneficially.
3. Speak truly.
4. Speak nicely.

5. Other will listen.
6. Speak believably.
7. Speak acceptably.
8. Speak to make everyone happy.

If these 8 merits are forwarded to Buddhahood, when attaining enlightenment, one will gain the speaking ability like those of Bodhisattvas' and the Buddhas'.

**vii. No exaggeration:** When one does not exaggerate, one will gain these:

1. Educated people love you.
2. The ability to answer questions based on true knowledge.
3. Respectable position in both human world and spirits world.

**viii. No greedy:** When one does not greedy, one will gain the 4 self-contentment:

1. All three karma (action, speaking, thought) are stabilized because the causes of all senses are sufficient.
2. Not losing any personal property.
3. Please with one's blessing.
4. Gain pleasant things without wishing for them.

**ix. No anger:** When one is not short-tempered, one will gain these:

1. Not have thoughts that would endanger anyone.
2. Not have an angry mind.
3. Not have a disputed mind.
4. Have a fair mind.
5. Have the compassion that Buddha has.
6. Always help beings.
7. Have a respectable appearance.
8. Have a patient mind and will be born into almighty universe.

**x. No ignorance:** If one is not ignorant, one will gain these:

1. A rightful knowledge and have more good friends.
2. An understanding of cause and effect; one would rather sacrifice oneself than to commit a bad act.
3. Take refuge in Buddha, not in other gods or devils.
4. Right understanding and fair mind.
5. Born into the almighty universe.
6. Happiness and mindfulness will expand.
7. Eliminate the wrong doings, always practice the right actions.
8. Do not put oneself before others' well being; therefore, bad karma is not created.
9. Retain in right understanding.
10. Will not be in dangerous situations.

"La Long Vuong! The existence all human beings and spirits depend on is these 10 good karma. The enlightenment of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is also based on these ten good actions. Therefore everyone must learn and practice them."

Ta Kiet La Long Vuong and Buddha disciples were very happy after listening Buddha's discourse. They vowed to believe and practice his teachings.

## **SUPPLEMENT WORDS:**

The ten good karmas as well as ten bad karmas are created by actions, speech, and thoughts. For example, in the rice-field, the weeds represent bad karma and the rice represents good karma; they grow together. Weed always grows faster than rice and stop the development of the rice. If we want to have a good harvest, we have to kill the weeds. Hence, if we want good karma, we have to eliminate the bad karma.

By controlling the bad karma and developing the good karma; we will obtain the following benefits:

### **1. *Self-cultivating in a positive way:***

Beings are controlled by the karmas. Practicing the ten good actions will change one's characteristics and become a good person.

For example, instead of killing, one should try to save others' lives. In this ssense, one's nature will more compassionate and one's enemies will become one's friends.

### **2. *Improving one's society:***

The situation is like a big mirror. It reflects any action being created. If one laughs then one's image will laugh, if one cries then one's image will cry. If one does more good actions and help other beings, one makes this world becomes more peaceful. If one does not hold grudges but practice being patient one will not create wars and will live in a joyful world.

### **3. *Will be re-born into the almighty universe.***

Practicing the ten good actions leads us to the almighty world in the next life.

### **4. *The foundation for basic concepts.***

All Buddhas and Bodhisatvas use these ten good actions as the fundamental to get out of samsara and attain enlightenment.

Practicing these good actions will purify the three karmas created by actions, speech and thoughts. If one forwards these beneficial acts to other beings, one will attain enlightenment.

Finally, by practicing these ten good actions, ones' nature will be changed; and so ones' life will be peaceful. One will not be re-born into one of the three lower worlds. We hope everyone practices the ten good actions so it benefits all beings.

# KARMA

Each person is born into a different situation. Therefore, each has different personalities and characteristics. The cause of these differences is due to the karma created by the individual's past and present. This karma effects and controls his/her life.

## I. DEFINITION:

"Thien" means goodness and kindness which benefits to others. "Ac" means evil acts and anything that brings damage to others. "Nghiep" means thoughts and actions that come from body, mouth, and mind. "Bao" means the results of karma.

## II. CONCEPTIONS OF GOOD AND EVIL:

Good and evil does not have a clear definition. The meaning of good and evil in everyday life is different from the meaning of good and evil in Buddhism.

1. ***Good and evil according to the customs.*** According to some customs, anything that follows accepted habit is considered "good", even if it's an immoral act. For example, several countries in Africa consider killing and eating their elderly parents a good act. In Vietnam, it's considered a pious act for children to kill animals to worship their parents who have passed away. Therefore, the meaning of good and evil is varied, depending on given customs.
2. ***Good and evil according to the laws.*** Laws are created to protect citizens of a country. By following the law, a person is considered a "good" citizen. Hence, "bad" does not really mean that it's immoral. "Good", then, doesn't really mean it's moral. Because laws differ from one country to another, something that is considered beneficial to one country's citizens may be harmful to another country's.
3. ***Good and evil according to monistic religions*** (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam): These religions claim that believing in God is good, not believing in God is incorrect. Thus meaning of good and evil is based on an article of faith, not on the individual's moral exertions.
4. ***Good and evil according to Buddhism.*** the Buddhist teaching espouses the idea that doing whatever reasonable and beneficial to oneself and others is considered good or else evil.

## III. CLASSIFICATION:

1. ***Evil:*** Evil actions keep human beings in the cycle of re-birth and suffering. There are many evils; however, they are under two different categories: five immoral actions and ten evil actions.

- a. Five immoral actions: Killing father, killing mother, killing Arahant, hurting Buddha, and disunifying the Sangha.
  - b. Ten evil actions: Killing, stealing, lust, lying, two-edged exaggerated speech, harmful speech, greediness, hatred, and ignorance.
2. ***Intentional good action***: Good actions. Do good and beneficial things for oneself and others.
    - a. Stop evil: Do not think about or commit the five immoral and ten evil actions.
    - b. Good action: Practice the following ten good deeds: set free all living beings, to be charitable, good conduct, truthful speaking, rightful speaking, gentle speaking, reconcilable speaking, compassion, endurance, right thinking.
3. ***Unintentional good actions***: Do good things without thinking the benefits for oneself and others.

#### IV. UNDERSTANDING KARMA:

1. ***Depends on cause***: action, speech, thought.
2. ***Depends on result***
  - a. Intentional karma: Karma keeps people in the cycle of samsara (reincarnation)
  - b. Immovable karma: Karma of beings in the heaven where there are forms and formless universes.
  - c. Faith karma: Karma of the enlightened ones. They are not controlled by karma. They are embodied in numerous forms to help beings. This karma cannot be explained or discussed.
  - d. Leading karma: The karma that leads one to receive the result of such karma.
3. ***Effectiveness of karma***
  - a. One's actions and behavior are effected by karma.
  - b. The circumstances of a person or a society are effected by karma.
  - c. Karma controls one's rebirth. The karma that a person accumulates in his past or present life will predict his next life.
    - 1) Accumulated karma: Karma accumulated from many lives.
    - 2) Custom karma: Karma from the habit of one's life.
    - 3) Most important karma: Karma that over power other karma.
    - 4) Dying karma: Karma that comes when one approaches death.

#### V. UNDERSTAND THE RESULT OF KARMA:

1. ***Classifications***
  - a. The result of karma of the individual: The results of the individual's body, behavior, feelings, thoughts are all due to cause.
  - b. The result of karma of a group: Results of a society or group's circumstances are due to cause.
2. ***Timing of the result of karma***

- a. Immediate recompense: Karma takes effect in the same life.
  - b. Next life recompense: Karma of the present life will have effect in next life.
  - c. Future recompense: Karma of the present life will have effect in many future lives.
3. ***Result of karma with effects within oneself.***
- a. Result karma within oneself: One has shot a bird. His action makes his cruelty accumulate in himself. Result of karma goes against the one who created it.
  - b. Bird was killed: In the future if he has the capability he will seek revenge.
4. ***Types of "result of karma" within oneself.***
- a. Unintentional:
    - 1) If unintentional, performance of a good action will result in no gaining of good karma within oneself. However, there will be good karma towards oneself.
    - 2) If performing a good action unintentionally and one regrets it afterwards, there will be bad karma in one's mind.
    - 3) When performing a bad action unintentionally, one does not gain bad karma in one's mind, although there will be bad karma towards oneself due to the other's revenge.
    - 4) When performing a bad action unintentionally, if one realizes it and repents it, there will be good karma within one's mind.
  - b. Intentional.
    - 1) When performing a good action for a purpose to benefit from it, one will still accumulate bad karma within the mind.

## **VI. RELATION BETWEEN KARMA AND RECOMPENSE (the result of karma).**

- 1. The good and evil karma theory is a natural law, and affects one's actions. It is a part of the cause-effect law.
- 2. One may change one's karma.

## **VII. CONCLUSION:**

- 1. The evil and good karma help us understand that happiness and miseries depend on one's actions, not on a divine being.
- 2. Karma affects one's life.
- 3. One may change his/her karma. One can create his/her future if one has the will to do it.

# THE SIX PERFECTIONS

## I. DEFINITION:

"Độ" means to overcome or complete; to overcome ignorance to liberation, suffering to happiness, samsara (rebirth cycle) to Nirvana (Niết-Bàn). "Lục Độ" are the six methods which guide beings to overcome ignorance and sufferings which would lead to the life of happiness and purity. "Lục Độ" consists of: Giving Alms, Preserving the Precepts, Patience, Diligence, Meditation, and Wisdom.

## II. THE ASPECTS OF SIX PERFECTIONS:

### 1. *Giving Alms:*

- a. **Definition:** Giving Alms is to donate private ownerships (goods or spirit) to all beings with no distinction between people or animals, a close friend or an unknown person, a person with the same or different nationality. If there is a being in need of useful alms, one should happily donate them without being stingy.
- b. **Donation of goods:**
  - 1) **Donation of money or materials:** Use private properties to help the poor and the sick
  - 2) **Donation of Dharma:** Educate and benefit other beings by sharing Buddha's teachings so they can eliminate ignorance and evil thoughts...
  - 3) **Donations of Encouragement:** Use courage and braveness to help the beings eliminate fearfulness, feebleness. There are two types of encouragement donation:
    - Use the courageous words to encourage beings while they are in fear or suffering.
    - Use all possible ways to rescue beings while they are being oppressed.
- c. **The Merits of giving alms:**
  - 1) **The Elimination of greed and selfishness:** Alm giving has the capability to eliminate greediness and selfishness, and build up the equality of compassion.
  - 2) **The Delivery of Prosperity:** The donations of goods has the capability to help beings escape poverty and hunger and the ability to obtain a happy living condition.
  - 3) **The Development Wisdom:** Donation of Dharma has the capability to eliminate ignorance, to build up wisdom, and to understand the truth.
  - 4) **The Delivery of Calmness:** Donation of encouragement has the capability to help beings eliminate worries and sadness, and obtain peaceful living condition.

### 2. *Preserving the Precepts:*

- a. **Definition:** Preserving the Precepts is the observance of Buddha's rules and the prevention of the bad conduct. In other words, to avoid doing wrong actions, speaking harmful words and thinking bad thoughts; on the contrary, only do good things, and guide other beings to a right path.

b. **The Precepts:**

- 1) ***Impose Precepts:*** Precepts established by Buddha such as the 5 Precepts for lay Buddhists, the 6 strict Precepts and 28 other important Precepts for lay Bodhisattvas, to prevent the sins created from actions, speech and thought.
- 2) ***Virtuous Precepts:*** Precepts established by Buddha as a foundation for one to practice charity which benefits oneself and others at present and in the future, such as 10 Virtuous Acts (10 Điều Thiện) and 4 Assistant Methods (Tứ Nhiếp Pháp).
- 3) ***Benefitting Being Precepts:*** Precepts established by Buddha for a Buddhist to apply to save all beings from sufferings.

c. **Capabilities of Preserving the Precepts:**

- 1) ***Purify the three major karma:*** By practicing the Precepts, the 3 major karma (body, speech and thought) are completely purified; there are no wrong doings or evil thoughts.
- 2) ***Develop merits:*** By practicing the Precepts, good merits are obtained: Compassion is built up and Wisdom is expanded.
- 3) ***Build up good reputation:*** By practicing the Precepts one avoids violating it with bad actions, thus building up one's good reputation.
- 4) ***Gain love and respect from beings:*** Do no harmful thing to others and animals, rather only help and benefit them. This results in respect and love from others.

3. ***Patience:***

a. **Definition:** Patience is the capacity of forbearance; to be tranquil and calm under a favorable circumstance or an adversity, a praise or a criticism, a success or a failure; not to be pessimistic of an adversity nor optimistic of a favorable situation.

b. **Types of patience:**

- 1) ***Patience in a favorable circumstance:*** Not to be arrogant or conceited by praise or respect from others.
- 2) ***Patience in an adversity:*** Not to be angry or resentful of an insult or abuse from others.
- 3) ***Internal patience:*** To be internally tranquil and calm in the oppression of the defilements which are created by greediness and anger. Always keep our mind bright and pure, and not let it be controlled by defilements.
- 4) ***External patience:*** Do not complain, or be angry when facing the oppression of unsuitable conditions such as hunger, cold and hot.

c. **Capabilities of being patient:**

- 1) ***Not doing thoughtless actions:*** Patience has the capability to eliminate anger. From this, one can avoid doing unthoughtful things.
- 2) ***Be calm under all circumstances:*** Patience leads to concentration and peacefulness of one's mind under all adverse situations.
- 3) ***Not dominated by the five basic desires:*** Patience has the capability to control all defilements, ambitions, and the five basic desires such as wealth, beauty, fame, foods and sleep.

4. ***Diligence:***

- a. **Definition:** Diligence means to concentrate on practicing the doctrine of liberation from the cycle of life and death to attain enlightenment. Not to step back, not to be disturbed by the impured environments.
  - b. **Types of diligence:** (Four essential methods)
    - 1) If bad action has not yet developed, diligently keep them from happening.
    - 2) If bad action has already developed, diligently eliminate them.
    - 3) If goodness has not yet developed, diligently generate them.
    - 4) If goodness has already developed, diligently expand them.
  - c. **Capabilities of diligence:**
    - 1) ***Build up courage and enthusiasm:*** Diligence has the capability to eliminate timidity and laziness. Therefore, always be courageous and eager.
    - 2) ***No retreating or giving up:*** Diligence has the capability to build up confidence that helps one not to withdraw under any adversity; instead always stay committed and courageous on the way toward enlightenment.
    - 3) ***An effective way to enlightenment:*** Diligence has the capability to eliminate evilness in order to build up the goodness to liberate and attain enlightenment.
5. ***Meditation:***
- a. **Definition:** Meditation is to purify the defiled thoughts of greed, hatred and ignorance by mindful of an object so that one's mind cannot be disturbed by these thoughts.
  - b. **Types of Meditation:**
    - 1) ***Mindfulness of the impurities of body:*** Observing the body as impure, which contains blood, mucus phlegm etc.
    - 2) ***Mindfulness of compassion:*** Use the compassionate mind to observe the sufferings of the beings: birth, aged, illness and death.
    - 3) ***Mindfulness of dependent origination:*** Observe that all existing forms in the universe are interdependent.
    - 4) ***Mindfulness of Buddha's images:*** Observe all Buddhas and reflect their merits.
    - 5) ***Mindfulness of breathing:*** Concentrate on one's breathing to keep the mind from being disturbed.
  - c. **Capabilities of Meditation:**
    - 1) ***Pacify the desire:*** The mindfulness of impurities of the body has the capability to pacify materialistic desires, and to avoid being damaged by unrealistic ambitions.
    - 2) ***Eliminate anger:*** Mindfulness of compassion has the capability to eliminate anger and cruelty. Instead it builds up morality and cultivates one's compassion.
    - 3) ***Eliminate ignorance:*** Mindfulness of dependent origination has the capability to eliminate ignorance, thus cultivating wisdom.
    - 4) ***Eliminate distress:*** Mindfulness of Buddha's images has the capability to reduce sorrows, expand wisdom and merits.
    - 5) ***Eliminate unawareness:*** Mindfulness of breathing has the capability to purify the mind in avoiding any disturbing indulgences.

6. **Wisdom:**

- a. **Definition:** Wisdom is the understanding of what is true, right; wisdom is the knowledge, the brightness. Use wisdom to realize and distinguish things clearly.
- b. **Types of Wisdom:**
  - 1) **Penetrating wisdom:** Wisdom of hearing and learning the truth
  - 2) **Thinking wisdom:** Wisdom of thinking the truth
  - 3) **Practicing wisdom:** Wisdom of practicing the truth.
- c. **Capabilities of Wisdom:**
  - 1) **Eliminate suffering:** Ignorance is the source of suffering. Wisdom has the capability to brighten one's mind and eliminate one's sufferings.
  - 2) **Clearly see the nature of reality:** Wisdom has the capability to understand the truth of the interdependence and impermanence of all existing forms.

III. THE CONDITIONS TO APPLY THE "LỤC ĐỘ":

1. **Express the compassionate heart:** Limitlessly expressing the love to all beings by practicing the four Vows:
  - a. **However innumerable beings are, I vow to save them:** The universe is boundless and beings are many. With innumerable types of beings, there exist different attitudes in many. However, when vowing to practice the "Lục Độ" one tries to help all beings, even when the task takes more than one life time, or when one has to deal with different adversities with different types of beings.
  - b. **However immeasurable exhaustible the passions are, I vow to extinguish:** The characters and attitudes of beings are always changing with time and their immeasurable defilements are developed and accumulated over time. Practicing the "Lục Độ", one vows to eliminate all the defilements, even the smallest one.
  - c. **However immeasurable the Dharma-Doors (methods of practice) are, I vow to master:** The attitudes and levels of understanding of countless beings are different; therefore, the appropriate Dharma-Doors for all beings are also innumerable. Practicing the "Lục Độ", one vows to learn and practice all the Dharma-Doors.
  - d. **However incomparable the Buddha-truth is, I vow to attain it:** Attaining the Buddha path is the highest accomplishment. To attain this level, one has to eliminate all the defilements, learn all the Dharma, and help all types of beings. Practicing the "Lục Độ", one vows to attain this level.
2. **Disregard one's life and properties:** Practicing the "Lục Độ", a Buddhist must widely express his/her heart, disregard one's life and properties, and only focus on benefits for all beings. If called upon to sacrifice one's life or property to rescue another being, a Buddhist must happily and willingly do so without regret.

3. **Consider other's sufferings as our own sufferings:** Practicing the "Lục Độ", a Buddhist must realize and understand there are great deal of suffering in one's life. Although human beings are physically different, all undergo suffering. From understanding the principle of interdependence, a Buddhist realizes that the suffering of other human being is directly or indirectly related to his/hers; thus vow to relieve their suffering.
4. **Capability to liberate ourselves and other beings:** A Buddhist must clearly understand that due to the bad karma created in the past lives, we and other beings suffer the life of re-birth. However, every being has a Buddha nature and has the potential to to attain enlightenment. A Buddhist should practice to cultivate his/her own nature to develop this capability and to help other beings.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION:**

Extinguishing defilements and eliminating sufferings are the main goal of a Buddhist. To accomplish this goal, a Buddhist must diligently practice the "Lục Độ". "Lục Độ" are the paths to guide us toward enlightenment. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas use the "Lục Độ" to accomplish the goal - benefiting in oneself and others (Tự Lợi Lợi Tha). Even though, a Buddhist cannot accomplish every aspect of the "Lục Độ", he/she should continue to try. At the beginning, it is hard for a Buddhist to accomplish the "Lục Độ" completely, yet he/she should try to practice them. In the process of practicing the "Lục Độ", one will find oneself treading on the path of attaining true happiness and enlightenment.

# THE METHODS OF MEDITATING ON BUDDHA

## A. OBSERVATION METHOD:

I. **PURPOSE:** To better present circumstance; eliminate the unrealistic ambitions; purify the body and mind.

## II. THE PRACTICE:

### 1. *Prior to the Meditation:*

- a. Regulate the diet: Only eat foods which digest easily, and should not eat too much nor too little. One's awareness is lessened when eating foods that are hard to digest. Hunger causes one to suffer and can not sit still. And fullness causes one to feel uncomfortable, breathing becomes loud and fast.
- b. Regulate the sleep: Practice to sleep less to keep the mind bright. During the practice if there is a need to sleep then do so, but always try not to fall asleep.
- c. Regulate the body: Keep the body clean. It is better to shower prior to the observation.
- d. The seat and place: Soft seat helps prolong the sitting period without numbing the legs. It is better to sit in the large and quiet room with dim light.
- e. The sitting styles: Sit half-fold (half lotus) or full-fold (full lotus) style. Sitting a half-fold style by crossing one leg on top the other. Pull the legs in until the toes are aligned with the knees. Whereas, sitting a full-fold style by crossing the right calf on top the left leg and left calf on top the right leg, or vice versa. Using this style helps one sits longer, straightens the back but hard to practice. Place right hand on top the other, sit straight, the nose must line up with the navel, look straight and keep both eyes slightly opened.
- f. Regulate the breathing: At the beginning, slowly and deeply breathe in with the nose and breathe out with the mouth for several time, then partly closed both eyes. During the practice, one must follow every breath - do not breathe strongly, rapidly or loudly; breathe softly and lightly, do not be frustrated.

### 2. *During the Observation:*

- a. Moment of silence: At the beginning, silently reciting the mentra "Án lam tóa ha" for three times to purify the environment, and then continuing "An ta phạ thuật dà ta phạ, đạt ma ta phạ, bà phạ thuật độ hám" for three times to purify three major karma.
- b. Contemplating on Buddha's virtues: After the recitation of mantras, one process with the contemplating of Buddha's virtue. Buddha has innumerable merits and one can not

contemplate all at once; therefore, he/she can contemplate one by one depending on his/her karma. For example, if one has a hot temper then he/she can contemplate Buddha's compassion and forgiveness, or Buddha's courage if he/she is in fear, etc.

- c. Meditation on the Buddha's Body: In addition to contemplation on Buddha's virtues, one can meditate on the Buddha's body to overcome bad karma. To practice this method, one observes one of Buddha's 32 physiognomies and 80 beauty marks. For example, he/she can observe a white hair between the Buddha's eye brows. This long hair represents the Buddha's mindfulness. When that physiognomy has been deeply absorbed in one's mind, one has completed a step of this observation. One then continues meditating on other physiognomies or beauty marks. When all of physiognomies and beauty of the Buddha have clearly appeared as real, one has fully completed this method.
- d. Meditation on the Buddha's statue: Place a picture or a statue of Shakyamuni or Amita (A-Di-Đà) Buddha in a quiet room with a dim light. In the front of Buddha's statue, one sits silently, keeps both eyes partly opened, reveres the statue and observe every feature of it; concentrates on the observation to avoid the disturbance of impure thoughts. When the statue has clearly appeared, even with eyes closed, one has successfully accomplished this method.
- e. Meditation on Breathing: Besides above three methods, the meditation on breathing is a method which is easy to practice and has major effect on controlling the impure thoughts. Meditation on breathing is a method that one can practice by counting one's breaths. Count one for every breath up to a selected number then back to one. If the count is messed up, then start over the cycle. Repeat this routine as desire. The important thing is that one needs to concentrate on following the breaths to avoid having disturbance by impure thoughts. When one's mind is peaceful and purified with this method one can practice on others.

Note: The purpose of the meditation methods mentioned is to eliminate the ambitions, and to purify one's mind. There are many other different methods from which one can choose to practice depending upon on one's ability and suitability.

- f. Controlling method: During the meditation if the mind is being darkened, and the head is bending down, one needs to focus at a middle point between both eyes; if the mind is being stampeded, the body can not be sit still then one need to focus on the navel. When feeling pressure on the chest, one needs to relax one's mind, and reduces the concentration. On the other hand, when feeling lazy, and the body is stooped, one needs to concentrate hard to overcome these weaknesses. During the meditation if something strange appears such as a lighting flash, apparitions... do not be so pleased or afraid, but see them as projections of desirous thoughts.
3. ***Points to remember***: To be successful in meditation, one needs to remember the following:
- a. Perseverance: Practice daily at determined hour
  - b. Diligence: Practice 15 minutes daily on first week, 30 minutes on second to fourth week and then 45 minutes on 5th and so on. It can go as long as 1 to 2 hours or more.
  - c. Best time to practice is at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, after waking up, or at night before going to sleep. Practicing in the morning is always better than at night.

- d. Do not boast about your practice
- e. After each session, if one has obtained a peaceful feeling then one has practiced the right way.
- f. During the session if the mind or body feels uneasy, one needs to seek advice from his/her master or an experienced person.

## **B. PONDERING METHOD:**

- I. **PURPOSE:** To change impure thoughts to right mindfulness, a bad circumstance to good one, to eliminate all unrealistic thoughts, and to attain the truth of all forms.

### **II. THE PRACTICE:**

- 1. ***Prior to Meditation.*** Regulate the diet, sleep and breathing as previous stated.
- 2. ***Continuously Reciting the name of Buddha.*** This is a simple and suitable method for human beings in this degrading period of the world, as Di-Đà Sớ Sao sutra stated: "Reciting the Buddha's name is a shortest path of all short paths to enlightenment". To practice this method, one must continuously recite, either loudly or silently, the name of Amita Buddha with undivided attention. By virtue of the undivided attention, one obtains pure thought. The following are several ways to practice this method.
  - a. Ten-count Recitation: For every breath, in or out, one silently recites the name of Amita Buddha 10 times, or 10 times for both in and out (time for practicing is the same as in the meditation method). If the condition does not allow one to practice long each time, one should silently recite the name of Buddha at least 10 times in 10 breaths before going to sleep each night and in the morning after waking up. Regularly practice this way one gets a lot of spiritual benefit.
  - b. Continuation: Reciting the Buddha's name continuously. This method emphasizes the continuation; therefore, in every breath, one needs to concentrate on reciting the Buddha's name until the set time is expired.
  - c. Reciting with the Bodhi Beads: Counting a bead for each recitation. Concentrate on the counting and praying to avoid the disturbance of impure thoughts. The number of recitation depends on one's vow. If one vows to recite the Buddha's name by counting twice the string of 108 Bodhi beads, one needs to be consistent on each day unless one becomes ill.
  - d. Sound listening Recitation: Pay attention to every word one recites, do not leave out any word, even when reciting silently. The purpose of this method is to listen the sound of every wording in order to prevent the invasion of any other sounds or thoughts.

- e. Walking Recitation: Reciting while walking in the praying hall or under the tree shadows around the temple.
  - f. Frequent Recitation: The above five recitation methods are used to practice under scheduled time and at selected places. Whereas, the frequent recitation method is used at any time, any place. One can recite while walking, standing, lying or sitting; or one can recite while having a meal, sleeping etc. Whenever one's mind is being invaded by the impurities one needs to recite the name of Buddha. It will not be fully successful until one establishes oneself in mindful stage.
3. ***Method of Chanting***: The following chanting methods can be applied depending on one's situation and ability:
- a. Loud chanting: Chant loudly along with the sound of the wooden drum. Keep up the schedule daily, do not be lazy or late. Be solemn and respectful in front of the altar, and concentrate on the Buddha. One can practice this method with other people.
  - a. Soft chanting: Do not chant too loud, just enough for oneself to hear. This method is used for an individual to practice meditation or make a ceremony in front of the altar. Observing and reciting the Buddha at the same time, do not let the mind be interfered with impure thoughts.
  - b. Silent chanting: Unlike the above two, this method requires one to silently chant with one's mind and thought only. Concentrate on Buddha's statue and silently recite his name. This method is applied during walking or working, or at a place where there is no shrine available.
4. ***Recitation by reflecting on the true Nature of reality***. The methods of chanting and continuously reciting the name of Buddha above are the basic steps to this method. This method is used to search for the truth and to realize the reality of nature. The reality of nature is interdependent impermanent and non-substantial, which the Buddha already attained. To attain the true nature of reality or a life of liberation, one needs to eliminate the concept of self. When the truth of reality is attained, one has no distinction between oneself and Buddha. Buddha and beings are not different when the mind is purified; therefore, reciting the Buddha's name is to reflect on the Buddha nature of oneself. There is no enlightenment that can be searched outside. In short, by realizing the true nature of reality as non-self, one attains Buddha nature or enlightenment.

### III. POINTS TO REMEMBER:

1. Select a suitable method. Buddha teaches the different types of practicing methods based upon the capacity of beings. When choosing a method, one should choose the type that is suitable to one's capability. Practice an easier method first before moving on to the harder one.
2. Spend about a half or one hour for reciting every night before going to sleep or in the morning after waking up. Both the silently reciting method and the reflecting on Buddha nature can be practiced at any time.

3. Remember, during the practice one may experience some adversities. Besides the inconvenient conditions, there are internal and external challenges; therefore, one needs to be courageous and diligent to overcome them.
4. Imagination can manifest in different strange forms to trick and threaten the person who tries to lead a religious life; therefore one needs to be calm and knowledgeable to distinguish right from wrong.
5. During the practice if something strange appears, do not be so pleased or afraid, but only concentrate on reciting Buddha's name and realize that all forms are illusions.

### **C. CONCLUSION:**

The methods of reciting the Buddha's name are simple, yet suitable for everyone. As a Buddha follower, one needs to practice Buddha's teachings. A Buddhist should not neglect practicing the methods above. The practice requires one to be constantly diligent and determined.

At the beginning, in order to prevent tiredness, one should not work so hard. One should begin practicing lightly to assure more effective results. Practicing the above two methods is to practice the Five Conducts: Diligence, Forgiveness, Compassion, Purity and Wisdom.

# THE EIGHT RETREAT PRECEPTS

## I. DEFINITION:

Quan means to close. Trai means after abstinence; to purity as by fasting or abstaining. The Eight Fold Precepts mean to keep the mind and body purified in 24-hour period by practicing the eight retreat precepts:

1. Not killing living beings
2. Not stealing.
3. Not having sexual intercourse.
4. Not telling lies.
5. Not taking intoxicants.
6. Not wearing bodily decoration, not using perfumes.
7. Not singing and dancing.
8. Not sleeping in a raised bed.
9. Not eating after noon time.

By taking the Eight Retreat Precepts ordination one vows to live the life of a monk within 24 hours.

## II. UNDERSTANDING THE RETREAT PRECEPTS:

1. ***Not killing:*** One should not deliberately kill any living beings, either by committing the act oneself or instructing others to kill.
2. ***Not stealing:*** Do not steal anything from anyone or even thinking about it. Try to practice charity. Do not use anything not given.
3. ***Not engaging in sexual misconduct:*** To abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. ***Not telling lies:*** One should not lie but tell the truth without exaggerating.
5. ***Not taking intoxicants:*** Intoxicants will make one lose control of oneself, and delude the mind.
6. ***Not wearing perfumes, nor dancing and singing:*** Wearing make-up and perfumes predispose oneself to sensual desires while dancing and singing disturb one's concentration.
7. ***Not sleeping in an elaborate, raised bed:*** To practice a simple life style.
8. ***Not eating after noon time:*** The Divine eats in the morning, Buddha eats at noon, animals eat in the afternoon, and ghosts eat at night.

The benefits of not having meals in the afternoon:

- wrong/confused thoughts do not arise.
- no drowsiness.
- improve concentration.
- healthy body.

### III. THE FORMALITES:

The Eight Retreat Precepts ordination is usually held in the Temple within 24 hours. If there is no temple, a quiet house may be used. The eight fold precepts maybe transmitted by:

1. ***A master:*** A master monk or nun will conduct the ordination. Prior entering the ordination, one needs to shower and repent. The master will introduce and explain the Three Jewels and the eight precepts. In the ordination, one has to be quiet, concentrate and listen to the master's questions, then one should answer the questions and vows to take refuge in the Three Jewels and to practice the precepts. During the 24 hours living as a monk, one has to control one's actions, speech and thoughts. Always think about Buddha and keep on learning and practicing the Buddha's teachings.
2. ***Oneself:*** If there is no temple, one may conduct this eight fold precepts at home by oneself. In front of the Buddha statue, one vows:

*I am ..... will take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Shangha, vow to keep the eight fold precepts within 24 hours. Buddha is my master.*

*As the Buddha who never destroys the life of beings, I vow to abstain from destroying the life of beings during these 24 hours.*

(Repeat eight different precepts).

### IV. THE EFFECTS OF PRACTICING THE EIGHT FOLD PRECEPTS:

One who practices the eight fold precepts will purify one's mind and never commit bad actions. By practicing the eight fold precepts, one obtains mindfulness. The Buddha said: *"One, who practices the eight fold precepts will be born into the happy worlds and never be born into the lower universe (such as hell, gost and animal). If one forwards merits to other beings, one will get innumerable merits and achieve enlightenment."*

### V. CONCLUSION:

Practicing the eight retreat precepts keep one from committing the bad karma of the body, speech and mind. As a result, the mind becomes purified and wisdom is developed. In short, the eight fold precepts are the foundation for attaining enlightenment. For the sake of beings, the Buddha taught these precepts. A Buddhist should learn and practice them.

# **BUDDHISM IN VIETNAM**

## **FROM THE TRAN DYNASTY TO PRESENT**

### **I. BUDDHISM DURING THE TRAN DYNASTY (1225-1400):**

1. *Tran Thai Ton (1225 - 1258):* Tran Thai Ton was a King who profoundly understood Buddhism. Besides his royal duties, he concentrated mainly on propagating Buddhism by means of constructing temples, preaching Dharma and supporting the Sangha. He wrote: "The Thuyen Ton Chi Nam" which clearly explains the principles of meditation and "The Khoa-Hu" which illustrates the four types of suffering: Birth, Old-Age, Sick, and Death. Both are the valuable sources for studying and practicing.
2. *Tran Thanh Ton (1258 - 1278):* Even though he was a Confucian scholar, he was very devoted to Buddhism.
3. *Tran Nhan Ton (1278 - 1293):* King Tran Nhan Ton had a strong faith in Buddhism. At age of 16, he left the kingdom to practice Buddhism at Yen Tu mountains, but unfortunately, his father ordered him to return to the kingdom. He then studied with Master Tue Trung, an officer that belongs to Vo-Ngon-Thong branch. In the year 1293, he abdicated the throne, and his son became the successor. King Nhan Ton finally departed the kingdom and returned to Yen Tu mountains, and took the new name Huong-Van Dai Dau Da. During this time, Buddhism was very popular.
4. *Tran Anh Ton (1293- 1314):* Tran Anh Ton had a deep understanding of Buddhism. He was Master Phap Loa's student. Even though all his efforts were focused on propagating Buddhism, during this time, Buddhism was unfortunately mixed with other religions. The cause was due to the practitioner's misunderstanding of Buddhism teachings and also due to external influences.

### **II. BUDDHISM DURING THE HO DYNASTY (1400-1407) AND THE MINH DYNASTY (1414-1427):**

The Ho Dynasty had reigned for 7 years when Vietnam was colonized by the Ming Dynasty in China. Our country was dominated by them. Buddhism during this period was in stagnant phase. In 1416, the Ming collected all the books in our country including Buddhism scriptures and brought them back to Kim Lang. They also destroyed the temples and other historic monuments. Afterward, they took advantage of Buddhism for their governing and led the religion into difficult situations.

### **III. BUDDHISM DURING THE HAU LE DYNASTY (1428 - 1527):**

Buddhism was still affected by the previous dynasty so there was no significant events to be remembered.

#### IV. BUDDHISM DURING THE RIVALRY BETWEEN THE TWO WARLORDS OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH REGION (1528-1802)

During this period, many Zen branches were resurrected and some were introduced from China.

##### 1. *North Region:*

Under King Le The Ton (1573-1599), the Tao-Dong branch was brought from China by Master Tri-Gia Nhut Cu who transmitted it to Master Thuy-Nguyet and Master Ton-Dien. Tao-Dong was one of the branches of Master Bo-De-Dat-Ma.

During the reign of King Le Hy Ton (1676 - 1705), a Buddhist monk named Lan Giac established the Lien Ton branch at Lien Phai Temple in Ha Noi. At the same time, Master Nguyet Quang of Lam Te branch established a subbranch at Ba-Da temple.

From King Le Du-Ton (1719) to King Le Hy-Ton (1737) to King Le Chieu Thong (1787), Buddhism was declining and there was no memorable events.

##### 2. *South Region:*

When Lord Nguyen came to guard the Thuan-Hoa region, everything began to develop. Buddhism was popular once again. At that time, two Chinese Buddhist monks named Te Vien, and Giac Phong brought Buddhism into the region. In 1665 (the WarLord Nguyen Phuc Tan 1646 - 1667), Master Nguyen Thieu from China came to Quy-Ninh (Binh Dinh) and established Thap Thap Di-Da Temple, then to Thuan-Hoa to establish Ha-Trung temple, and finally to Thua-Thien to establish Quoc-An Temple.

During the reign of the War Lord Nguyen Anh-Ton (1687 - 1691) that Master Thach Liem, Master Tu-Dung, Master Minh-Hai Phap Bao, and Master Minh Hanh Tai-Toai arrived and established Linh Mu, Thuyen Lam, Kim Tien, and Tu Dam temples. During this time Master Lieu Quan, from Phu-Yen, received religious instructions under Master Te Vien and later under Master Giac Phong at Bao-Quoc Temple. Soon after, he returned to Thuan Hoa and established Thuyen-Ton Temple.

#### V. BUDDHISM DURING THE NGUYEN DYNASTY:

After the three Tay-Son brothers (Nguyen Nhac, Nguyen Hue and Nguyen Lu) unified the entire Vietnam, many temples such as Bao Quoc, Quoc An, and Tu Dam were destroyed.

In 1802, after Nguyen Phuc Anh defeated Tay Son, he took over the throne and named his title Gia Long. He permitted Buddhism to be practice and to order the reconstruction of many temples. In 1815, he reconstructed the Thien Mu temple. In the 7th year of Minh Mang (1839), Thanh Duyen temple was remodeled. Then in the 4th year of Thieu Tri (1844), the Thien Mu tower and the Dieu De Temple were built. In the 7th of Tu Duc reign (1854), the king donated public lands to all the temples. During this time, even though the royalty had strong belief in Buddhism, they only worshiped to seek good fortune.

## VI. BUDDHISM AT PRESENT:

From 1879, the French dominated Vietnam and Buddhism weakened. It had been not until the 20th Century that Buddhism flourished. Several Buddhist associations were organized. In the South, there were the Southern Associations and the Buddhist Research Foundation (1931) which were made up mainly by Southerners. In the Central region of Vietnam, there was the Annam Buddhist Studies Association (1932) which was later renamed to Vietnam Buddhist Studies Association. In the North, there existed an association named Northern Buddhist Association (1934) which consisted primarily of Northerners. In all, their main goal was to train Buddhist monks. Buddhist schools were built, and magazines were published. These specialized associations translated the Chinese sutras into Vietnamese language, improved ways of living based on Buddhist morals, and educated the youth. There were schools exclusively for monks located at Quan-Su Temple, and there were schools provided only for nuns located at Bo De Temple in the North region. In central Vietnam, there were also separate schools provided for monks and nuns such as Tay Thien Monastery, Bao Quoc Buddhist school and Dieu De. In the South, there was also a monastery named Luong Xuyen Buddhist Studies in Tra Vinh province.

For spreading the Buddhist teachings, there was the Duoc-Tue newspaper in the North, the Vien-Am newspaper in the central, and the Tu-Bi Am and Duy Tam in the south.

Each district and village, Buddhists organized local Buddhist committees (Chi Hoi), and Buddhist Youth Associations.

Those who initiated or led all the tasks of propagating Buddhism at this time were mainly knowledgeable Buddhist monks and scholars.

In 1951, the United Buddhist Association of Vietnam was formed. Master Thich Tinh Khiết was elected to the chairman of the association. The association consisted of The Buddhist Studies Foundation, the Vietnam Buddhist Studies association and the Northern Buddhist Association.

The Geneva Treaty of 1954 divided Vietnam into two parts: North and South. The north region was controlled by the Communist Party. Under Communism, all the Buddhist activities were limited or banned. In the South, Buddhism suffered a great deal of hardships from dictatorship of the Ngo Dinh Diem Government. Many temples blockaded, spiritual leaders arrested, and the Buddhist flag pulled down. However Buddhist communities in the South were determined to fight for religious freedom. Several Buddhist monks and lay Buddhists sacrificed their lives for the cause. In November 1963, after the military overthrew Ngo Dinh Diem, Buddhism was free for a short period. In 1964, the Vietnamese United Buddhist Congregation was formed to replace the United Buddhist Association. The Congregation was jointed with other Buddhist branches such as the Theravada Buddhism, and the "Khất Sĩ".

In 1966, the political situation in the South worsened, and the Buddhism, again, was politically oppressed by the government led by Nguyễn Văn Thiệu. The Paris Treaty temporarily ended the war. The Treaty was signed on January 1973 by four sides: the North Communists, Mat Tran Giai Phong Mien Nam (formed and controlled by the North Communist Party), the South Government, and the United States.

After the American armies withdrew from Vietnam, the North Communist party supported by the Soviet Unions and China, broke the Treaty and brought their armies into the South. In April 1975, the Communists took over the South and established a totalitarian and tyrannical regime over the country. As a result, millions of Vietnamese fled the homeland to settle in different countries around the world. For that reason, Vietnamese Buddhism is now worldwide.

Currently, the Communist government set up the Vietnamese Buddhist Association (1991) in an attempt to undermine the United Buddhism Congregation. In other foreigner countries, several of Buddhist Associations have been established to held the spiritual need of local Buddhists. In 1992, the United Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation Oversea was formed in the United State (and in other countries such as Canada, Europe and Australia) in order to propagate the Buddhist teaching and to fight for democracy and human right in Vietnam.

The history of Buddhism in Vietnam as presented just provides a sketchy knowledge of what and how Buddhism contributed to Vietnam in terms of the spirittual cultivation, democracy and human rights. Due to the scope of this lesson, there are many important things left out.

# **BUDDHIST VIEWPOINT ON HUMAN BEINGS ABOUT SPIRIT AND MATTER IN BUDDHISM**

## **Is Buddhism monistic or pluralistic, eternalistic or materialistic?**

From an external perspective, Buddhism is misunderstood as exclusively being monistic, pluralistic, eternalistic, or materialistic. However, from an internal perspective, Buddhism appears rather odd. Depending on the point of view, it seems Buddhism can be monistic, pluralistic, eternalistic, or materialistic.

Truly, such is strange. Upon hearing this, those with short tempers would become angry or frustrated and claim that Buddhism is wishy-washy or irresolute. That is not the case. From a philosophical point of view, Buddhism is doctrinally rich and leads to ultimate enlightenment.

### **1. Materialism**

Materialism claims that all reality is materialistic. The universe and all beings are materialistic, or, said more simply, are made up of tangible matter. Even sentient beings' purest aspects of thought and emotion are based on matter. Without matter, thought and emotion are impossible. The spirit consists of extremely delicate matter that is simply more pure than other matter such sugar, honey, nutrients, nerves, etc.

Materialists often reason that wherever there is not matter, then the spirit or the conscious cannot exist. As a result, the conscious must be derived from matter and is a state of matter. We need not waste our time critiquing such a shallow and partial point of view since everyone can see its absurdity. Also worth mentioning, materialism is an extroverted doctrine, which disregards the rich introverted doctrines that scientists can use to uncover the shortest light rays. Even those materialists who do acknowledge the internal universe simply regard it as another external phenomenon no different from other external objects, even if it is "the most delicate or purest of matter." To create the conscious from matter is difficult, and to think that the conscious believes it to be derived from matter is difficult to accept. How did such a bizarre consciousness ever "know" that it was derived from matter?

Also, to state "wherever there is not matter, then the conscious cannot exist" is strange. As if human eyes and ears could sense the separate conscious present. Our eyes and ears can only indirectly sense the conscious through its effect on matter. The conscious is present, but we cannot sense its presence without its effect on matter. For example, there is always an electric current, and sound can be broadcasted over that electric current, but we only know that such sounds exist if we have a radio.

### **2. Eternalism**

Eternalism states that the universe does not really exist, and that all matter does not exist outside of one's imagination. Only the mind or the conscious truly exists. All else is a figment of the imagination, an

illusion created by the mind. Eternalists claim that other than the conscious, nothing else exists: the universe, other people, and even their conscious are not real.

Eternalists are like materialists in that they only acknowledge a part of the truth; eternalists intentionally ignore the effects and interactions of external objects and matter on our conscious and thoughts. Our loved ones who live with us also have feelings and thoughts, and simply stated, have a conscious of their own. Anyone can see this even in our most basic of activities. We cannot simply acknowledge our own conscious only.

### **3. Buddhism and the nature of the Self or soul**

Buddhism is neither eternalistic nor materialistic, and it is also not agnostic. Buddhists state that the five aggregates constitute material phenomena and conscious phenomena, and the five aggregates (body, sensation, perception, mental formation, consciousness) are potentials found in Alaya.

All phenomena whether mental or material are those potentials that have arisen or manifested themselves. Before they have arisen, the phenomena are latent or are simply potentials. Potentials arise to become actual phenomena, and actual phenomena degrade or diminish back into future potentials; this cycle continues on never ceasing.

This issue demands thought for those seeking to understand reality. Here the material will simply present the main points of the idea. The potentials are a sort of force that make up the essence of all conscious and material phenomena, phenomena that have actually arisen or are real. All these potentials reside in the realm of Alaya, or, said differently, all these potentials make up the realm of Alaya. As a result, Alaya is the essence of all conscious and material phenomena.

All phenomena (either conscious or material) after their expiration return to become a potential for another phenomena. Stated in a way easier to understand, in reality, all phenomena arise and expire in the span of a moment, so all phenomena constantly return to becoming a potential, and potentials are constantly arising to become phenomena. This chain or cycle is so quick that we cannot even recognize the individual moment.

How do these phenomena arise? They arise according to their corresponding interactions and are effected into being. For example: thought, reason, and emotion arise as a result of real physical (or material) stimuli. They (conscious phenomena) depend on the material phenomena as stimuli instead of being created by those material phenomena. With this understanding, we no longer believe that the conscious creates matter or that matter creates the conscious. The potentials depend on each other to form and arise and because they reside in Alaya. These potentials are the "body" or "form" of causes and effects, meaning they are the primary factors, whereas other phenomena contributing to the realization of the potentials are called "enhancement" factors because they help to enhance the possibility of the potentials becoming realities.

Therefore, the main causes of all phenomena are the potentials. However, to call them "causes" is not entirely correct; one must call them the essence of all phenomena. So potentials, with regard to the nature of reality, can be seen as "forces" that make the foundation for both conscious and material phenomena.

All potentials and phenomena combined together are called Alaya.

After the body has decayed or expired, lacking the requirements to exist, the conscious phenomena return to the subconscious realm of Alaya. This way there are no stray conscious or spirits present without a body. The functions of the conscious (understanding, reasoning, love and hatred, etc.) cease to exist anymore, so they cannot be called a spirit. Of course, the realm of Alaya is changed, and those potentials that are ready or ripe will arise in a new world, in a new situation, with a new destiny.

Having heard this, there are some people who say that Buddhism is eternalist (conscious-oriented). But this is not the case because there is no Alaya that is independent. Instead, there are many Alaya from many sentient beings. The existence of one Alaya depends on the existence of other Alaya, and the existence of other Alaya depends on the existence of one Alaya. They all obey the miraculous rule of interbeing and cause and effect.

Our governing conscious conveniently resides in our Alaya. Objective reality exists outside of that conscious, but that does not mean that only our Alaya is responsible for all phenomena but rather an infinite number of Alaya combined together. This point we shall see clearly in the doctrine of self-destiny or cumulative communal destiny of the law of karma. Only when Alaya is pure and bright due to the effort of self-improvement does one become an official member of the Realm of Wisdom, and then does it separate from the above community and merge with the vast essence of purity and brightness.

# **BUDDHISM'S VIEWPOINT ON THE UNIVERSE**

## **THE FIRST CAUSE**

The origin of the universe is a controversial issue often debated and confused. Theism results from the suffering arising from this uncertainty. Each theistic doctrine exclusively claims a deity responsible for the creation of the universe. These deities include Brahma, Allah, Jehovah, and God. Humans cannot understand the nature of these deities. These deities' abilities to create, to save, and to punish cannot be understood by humans. Regarding these deities, human logic does not apply; humans can only have faith and accept the deities.

That faith is a source of comfort, a mental tranquilizer to alleviate the stress, confusion, and suffering of the uncertainty above.

These deities created by man have hindered mankind's understanding. Primitive people, upon experiencing strange natural phenomena, could not scientifically explain these phenomena and simply attributed them to the supernatural deities. Winds are the result of a passing wind god. Floods result from the rage of a water god. If science accepted these explanations, then how could science progress to explain through cause and effect that winds result from atmospheric activity, that floods result from excessive water flow?

Buddhism declares that there is no origin to the universe. The concept of an origin is illogical and attempts to compensate for our ignorance. If we understood Buddhism, then we would see that the concept of an origin is incredible, ridiculous, and not worthy of controversy or confusion.

According to Buddhism, all phenomena are in a constant state of change, of becoming and of annihilation. The existence and destruction of these phenomena have both causes and conditions. The becoming of a phenomenon is not the result of a singular cause, but instead also relies on numerous other conditions. These conditions too do not spontaneously arise. They too are the results of numerous other conditions. Hence, a phenomenon is dependent (whether directly or indirectly) on all the phenomena of the universe.

To speak of a phenomenon in this sense refers to an actual chain of phenomena. When speaking of a phenomenon, we are actually referring to its birth, its development, its degradation, and its destruction. To experience birth, development, degradation, and destruction does not result in change, but rather change results in birth, development, degradation, and destruction. A "phenomenon" is not simply a singular phenomenon, but rather a chain of phenomena because the phenomenon a moment later is not the same phenomenon as it was a moment ago. Similarly, we often claim that before the existence of a phenomenon, it did not exist. Actually, the phenomenon had already existed through its constituent predecessors; we simply could not recognize it with our superficial perspective.

A friend of mine had assembled a bicycle in Saigon back in 1945, of Dur-Ford brand, costing VN\$400. That bicycle was old and broken down, and it had undergone several repairs, including

its spokes, rims, wheels, and tires. He even replaced the handlebars, and just when the frame broke, he discarded it to a corner of his patio and did not use it anymore. He points to it and tells me, "That is a bicycle that I bought in Saigon back in 1945 for \$400." He does not realize the changes that the bicycle had undergone and insists that the bicycle today is one and the same with that of 12 years ago. He should realize that during the course of change by the bicycle that the bicycle tomorrow is different from the bicycle from yesterday and furthermore that the bicycle of the following moment is different from the bicycle of a moment ago.

Even worse is that he recognizes that the bicycle only started to exist the moment he bought it and ceases to exist after its frame broke. He does not realize that the bicycle existed before he bought it and had always existed through its causes and conditions. He also does not realize that it continues to exist despite its broken frame and defects, back in the corner of his patio. The bicycle lies there and continues to change to perpetuate its chain of cause and effect, interacting with innumerable other objects. It's possible that my friend's child could remove the bell to place it on the child's bicycle. His nephew or niece could remove the pin and sharpen it into something else. It's possible that the remaining scrap metal may one day become some other metallic tool.

My friend sees it only as an unchanging bicycle, but in reality, it is a constantly changing phenomenon, in which one of its states is a "bicycle." That is the first misconception.

My friend, because of his "selfish" perspective, sees the bicycle as only existent during his time of use and nonexistent before and after that short interval of time. This misconception of being and nonbeing is the second misconception.

Everyone shares these two misconceptions.

Everything changes, and as a result, becomes, changes, degrades, and expires. As a result, we believe everything as either existent or nonexistent. Our perception of being and nonbeing results from the innumerable arising and expirations of phenomena. In reality, these phenomena simply succeed each other and arise dependent on their interactions. The notion of being and nonbeing is simply an illusion of our deluded minds. Nothing more, nothing less. Thus, being and nonbeing is simply an illusion arising out of the endless arising and expiration of phenomena. We see things as "existent" when conditions result in a phenomenon; we see things as "nonexistent" when those conditions have deteriorated.

We use various words to describe and identify phenomena and believe them to be constant and unchanging. In reality, nothing is constant and unchanging, and yet we see everything as arising and expiring, as having a beginning and ending, forcing our minds to find their cause.