

THE HISTORY OF SHAKYAMAUNI BUDDHA FROM MONKHOOD TO NIRVANA

I. PRINCE'S DEPARTURE:

On the fullmoon day of February, the Prince and Channa(Xa Nặc) rode the Kanthaka horse (Kiền Trắc) across the Anoma River. After crossing the river, the prince got off the horse, and cut off his hair with a sword. He cast off his royal garments and ornaments all of which he gave to Channa. He then told him to return to the palace. Alone, the prince was on his way to seek for a true religion. He was 19 years old.

II. SEARCHING FOR A TRUE PATH:

The Prince joined several scholars in practicing their beliefs in hopes of finding a way to liberate the sentient beings.

1. The Prince's first encounter in searching for a religion: On his way to Rajagaha (Vương Xá) city, he encountered the saints in Bạt Già forest. After practicing with the saints and scholars, he realized that the ultimate goal of this group was to become a mara or angels. To him this was not an absolute noble path.
2. The Prince's second encounter in searching for a religion: He went to Tỳ Xá Ly city and encountered minister Alara Kalama (A La La). In practicing with the minister, The Prince realized that the study of destination and deep meditation would not liberate oneself. He then left the group.
3. The Prince's third encounter in searching for a religion: He encountered minister Uddaka Ramaputta (Uất Đầu Lam Phất). In practicing with the minister, the Prince learned the purpose of this group was to disregard existence and non-existence, and only to trust in spirit.

III. THE PRINCE PRACTICED ASCETICISM:

In the end, the Prince decided to seek for a noble path through the act of self-practicing. He went to Uruvela (Ưu Lô Tồn Loa) forest near Ni Liên River and practiced extreme asceticism. His five companions were Kondanna (Kiều Trần Như), Assaji (Ác Bê), Bhaddiya (Thập Lịch Ca Diếp), Mahanam (Ma Ha Nam Câu Ly), and Vapa (Bạc Đê). After some time the five gave up their practices and went home. The prince continued to practice all forms of severe austerity. His body was reduced to almost a skeleton. He realize the more he tormented his body, the further his goal receded from him. He was fully convinced, through personal experience that self-mortification was ineffective. He began to avoid the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and found a way between the two.

IV. THE PRINCE BECAME ENLIGHTENED:

Regardless of the disturbances around him, the prince kept on meditating. On December 8th (Lunar calendar), he achieved three supernatural powers. First, he achieved a Full Understanding of Life (Knowledge, Túc Mạng Minh), which allowed him to relieve all the successive series of birth and death for himself and others. Next, he achieved the Divine Eyes (Thiên Nhân Minh), which allowed him to see things the way it should be seen. Third, he achieved an Eradication of Sufferings (Lậu Tận Minh), which allowed him to eliminate all misconceptions and ignorances. In the early morning hours, he attained enlightenment and became a Buddha with the title Gautama (Thích Ca Mâu Ni).

V. THE MINISTRY OF BUDDHA:

The Buddha visited Isipatana (Vườn Lộc Uyển) and taught the Four Noble Truths (Tứ Diệu Đế) to the brothers of Kondana (Kiều Trần Như) who were with him in the beginning of his meditation and were disappointed when he detached from penance. This was the start of the Three Jewels (Phật, Pháp, and Tăng). He also taught a youngster named Yasa (Da-Xã). The following were a few distinguished disciples among his followers:

1. Ca Diếp, The Master of the Flames.
2. King Bimbirara (Tần Bà Ta La) of Ma Kiệt Đà.
3. Mogallana (Mục Kiền Liên), The Master of Supernatural Powers.
4. Sariputta (Xá Lợi Phất), The Master of Wisdom.
5. Chief Nan-Đà, Chief A Nan, Chief Ưu Bà Ly, Chief A Na Luật Đà.
6. Maha Pajapati (Ma Ha Ba Xà Ba Đề), The First Woman in Buddhism
7. Subhada (Tu Bạt Đà La) (80 years old), The last person among his disciples.

In the 49 years of his teaching, the number of his followers increased tremendously. The Buddha spent 9 months out of a year teaching in the remote areas, and he spent three months in retreat with his chief followers.

VI. THE BUDDHA'S LAST MOMENT:

On the Full Moon in February of India's Calendar, Buddha summoned his disciples for his last words before he passed away. Ca Diếp, the Master of the Flames became responsible to carry on the Buddha's teachings.

VII. CONCLUSION:

Buddha's main commitment was to save sentient beings from sufferings. He cared less about his royalties and self-happiness. He lived in a austere condition and meditated himself to attain enlightenment. He taught sentient beings for 45 years about how his practices had merited him to be an awakened one. He had devoted his entire life to seek for a perfect and practical solution for the happiness of all beings.

A-DI-ĐÀ BUDDHA

(AMITABHA)

I. MEANING OF HIS NAME:

Amitabha Buddha is known as the King of the Heaven, his name has three meanings:

1. His wisdom lights up the whole world and shines on everybody.
2. He lives a long life.
3. His merits are immeasurable.

II. THE HISTORY OF AMITABHA:

1. According to the Great Amitabha Sutra, during Thế-Tự Tại Vương Buddha's period, there was a king named Kiêu-Thi-Ca. After listening to Buddha's teachings, Kiêu Thi Ca left his throne to become a monk with a Buddhist name Pháp-Tạng. One day, he paid tribute to the Thế-Tự Tại Vương Buddha and asked the Buddha to witness his 48 vows. By doing so, he later became Amitabha Buddha.
2. However, according to the Bi-Hoa Sutra, during the reign of King Vô-Tránh-Niệm, there was a high ranking official named Bảo-Hải, who is the father of Bảo-Tạng Buddha. One day, after listening to Bảo-Tạng Buddha's sermons, the King immediately made donations for three months to the Buddha and all the monks. Because the King made donations without understanding the meanings of his action, Bảo-Hải encouraged him to have true compassion when doing good deeds for other people. The King then vowed if he was to become a Buddha, he would be a leader of the purity world by teaching and changing all human beings. After the King made that vow, Bảo-Tạng Buddha assigned him as the future Buddha named Amitabha who will live in the realm of pure land. Bảo-Hải also would become Buddha named Shakyamuni (Thích-Ca).

III. HIS VOWS:

Amitabha Buddha is a brilliant example of the purity conduct. He made 48 vows to rescue all beings from sufferings, one of these pledges is to save all those who pray to him with honesty and sincerity. These people would then be born into the realm of pure land.

IV. THE BUDDHISTS ADMIRATION:

Most people in Việt-Nam practice Pure Land (Tịnh-Độ) branch of Buddhism; therefore, they worship Amitabha. His statue stands or sits on a lotus with his right hand pointing down and giving rays of light. His left hand, in the form of "Ấn Cam-Lồ" is placed in front of his stomach. In most temples, worshipping along with the Amitabha are Đại-Thế-Chí Bodhisattva on the right side and Quán-Thế-

Âm Bodhisattva is on the left side. These two Bodhisattvas assist Him in the Utmost Happiness world.

Every year, the Buddhists commemorate him on the 17 of November, Lunar Calendar. People always recite his name (Amitabha) before passing away so he can help them be peaceful and calm before transition to another life.

QUÁN-THẾ-ÂM BODHISATTVA

I. THE MEANING OF HIS NAME:

He is a Buddhisattva who is always aware of the crying miseries of all beings in the universe. Therefore, he is known as Quán-Thế-Âm. Due to his awareness of the nature of all miseries; wherever there is misery, he appears immediately to relieve their misery in a tranquil way.

II. HISTORY:

In the past, at the same time when Bảo Tạng Buddha was spreading the Dharma to all beings, Avalokita (Merciful) Bodhisattva was a prince named Bất-Huyền, the son of King Vô-Tránh-Niệm. The King idolized Buddhism wholeheartedly. After listening to Buddha's teachings, he immediately made offerings to Buddha and all the Sanghas for three months. Prince Bất-Huyền followed the King footsteps and sincerely respected Bảo Tạng Buddha and the Sanghas.

Following his good deeds, the King pursued in practicing Buddhism diligently until he accomplished all the virtuous goals. Hence, he became Buddha named A-Di-Đà. Prince Bất -Huyền also achieved the same goals of being borne into the purity world (thế giới Cực-Lạc) He became Buddhisattva Quán-Thế-Âm (Merciful). Together, they guide all beings to be born into the purity world (Cực-Lạc world).

III. HIS VOWS:

In Phổ-Môn Sutra, Shakyamuni (Đức Phật Thích-Ca) cited that Quán-Thế-Âm Bodhisattva's vow is to help all beings end the 3 most harmful basic human characteristics: greed, anger, and ignorance. Due to his pledge, a person would get relief from him when chanting his tittle (Nam-Mô Đại Từ-Đại-Bi Cứu Khổ Cứu Nạn Quán-Thế-Âm Bồ-Tát) during hardships.

IV. THE ADMIRATION OF BUDDHIST:

People pay respect to his statue either on the altar or by wearing a charm with his image so that he may help relieve any miseries from all beings.

His image is always in a feminine shape representing motherly love. His statue stand on the lotus with his right hand holding an olive branch representing guidance and his left hand holding a vase of sweet dew (Cam-Lồ), representing the extinction of all sadness. In front of his statue are the statues of Thiện-tài (boy) and Long-Nữ (girl), representing the complete purity of Đức Quán-Thế-Âm. In other words, a lotus grows in the mud but still produces a nice fragrance and is one of the most beautiful flowers.

Every year, the Buddhists commemorate him on 19th Feb, 19th June, and 19th September (Lunar Calendar).

V. CONCLUSION:

A Buddhist chanting his name is following his example of compassion to perform only good deeds in order to save all beings from suffering.

THE SIX RULES OF HARMONY

I. DEFINITION:

The six rules of harmony were formed by Buddha for his followers to live and work together peacefully.

1. ***Harmony of dwelling together:*** Work together, live together in unity and love each other like brothers and sisters.
2. ***Harmony of speech:*** Do not say harmful things; do not quarrel to bring about anger, which may lead to fighting.
3. ***Harmony of views:*** Consider every person's idea and work out a common solution to satisfy all parties. Only can tasks be accomplished.
4. ***Harmony of discipline and study:*** Always encourage and help each other to practice Buddhism.
5. ***Harmony of shared benefits:*** Benefits gained by an individual or by groups must be shared equally with others. This not only refers to money but also any kind of recognition.
6. ***Harmony of discussion:*** Share your knowledge and understanding with others so everyone can improve together and reach the same level of understanding.

II. CONCLUSION:

Buddha is the enlighten one who developed the principle of six unity of conformity for his followers so they can learn and work together in an atmosphere of brotherhood. As Buddhists, we always need to live by these rules in order to better ourselves in practicing Buddhism.

THE FOUR GRATITUDES

I. FOREWORD:

In daily life, parts of a person's achievements depend upon the favors from others, society, and all living beings. As a Buddhist, one is also favored by the Three Jewels (Tam Bảo), because they help to cultivate one's wisdom. Therefore, to build up a good personality and to recognize the relationships of life; one should know, understand, and appreciate the four Gratuities.

II. FOUR TYPES OF GRATITUDE:

The four gratuities consist of parents, teachers and friends, the mother land and her society, and the Three Jewels.

1. ***Gratitude to parents:*** During the nine months of pregnancy, the mother feels unhealthy and loses a lot of nutrition and sleep. When giving birth, she has to endure all the pain which makes her feel like her intestines are being cut apart. The father, on the other hand, is nervously running errands to supply the needs for the mother in labor, and praying for the safety of the mother and unborn child. When the child is born, the parents have to take care of daily activities such as feeding and nurturing. When their child is ill, they can hardly eat or sleep; they are always with the child to take care of him. When the child is grown, they educate him to become a good person.
2. ***Gratitude to teachers and friends:*** In gaining our knowledge and intelligence, the teachers guide us in proper understanding. Teachers and friends always encourage and guide us when we encounter difficulties. Today, our understanding, reading, and writing skills are a result of the teachings and guidances of our teachers and friends.
3. ***Gratitude to the mother land and her society:*** The land we are living in now consists of contributions from the founders, establishers, industrializers, lawmakers and law enforcers. These people establish peace, happiness and a secured society for one to live in.
4. ***Gratitude from the Three Jewels:*** To save all living beings from suffering, the Shakyamuni Buddha left the worldly materials to seek the right path. Buddha had overcome problems, traveled many places, and preached His teachings. Buddha's Teachings give one understanding, the truth, and the realization of what is right. Buddha has shown the right methods for one to practice so that we can escape the cycle of reincarnation, and to live in a pure and happy world.

III. WAYS TO DEMONSTRATE GRATITUDE:

1. Respect, obey, and take care of our parents
2. Obey our teachers, study hard, and always respect and love our teachers and friends.
3. Be a good citizen, cultivate our traditions, build up morality, help people to go into the right direction, do business to raise the society's standard of living.

4. Research, practice, and propagate Buddha's teachings; always take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha; show respect when making offerings to the Sanghas.

IV. CONCLUSION:

Not distinguishing between the rich and poor, a person needs to know and realize the Four Gratuities and appreciate them. As a Buddhist, taking gratitude from all living beings and the Three Jewels, one should always appreciate the Four Gratuities by practicing Buddha's teachings.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

I. CONCEPT:

The five precepts are the guidelines and ethical foundation of a practicing Buddhist. Buddha created these precepts to suppress any wrongdoings from the body, speech (mouth), and thoughts. When a Buddhist takes refuge in the three jewels, he also makes a commitment to live his life in accordance with these 5 precepts:

1. ***Not killing:*** One has to honor all living beings' existence: As a Buddhist, one should not harm any living creatures. By practicing this precept, one obtains compassion. By knowing how to love, care, and respect the lives of those around one, one will not develop enemies. As a result, one will be able to create a peaceful and harmonious lifestyle for oneself and for those around one.
2. ***Not stealing:*** One has to respect other people's properties. Do not take that which is not given to you. If one commits an act of thievery, one will live one's life always worrying about whether one will get caught by the law. By practicing this precept of not stealing, one will live a joyous lifestyle, free of any guilt or suspicion.
3. ***Not committing improper sex acts:*** A person has to respect his family's happiness, as well as the happiness of other families. This means one has to be faithful and loyal to one's spouse. Do not have an affair with another person. By practicing this precept, one will be able to bring trust and true happiness into one's family's relationship.
4. ***Not lying or saying harmful things:*** One has to honor the truth. Telling a lie or saying bad things about someone will bring harm to oneself and to others. If one lies to friends, they will no longer trust and believe in you. Thus, it might end friendship. Telling lies or saying harmful things about family members will break-up a family. As a Buddhist, one has to learn to speak only the truth. Be wise in one's choice of words. There's always two ways to tell things to somebody: Being inconsiderate by using words that hurt their feelings; and being understanding by using soothing words to help them. By practicing this precept, one will receive the love, confidence, trust, and closeness of family, friends, and others around one.
5. ***Not taking alcohol or intoxicants:*** Always keep one's mind and body clear, calm, and collected. Any intoxicants will cause an imbalance in the body system, causing one's senses, reflexes, and thoughts to be altered. It is very difficult to control oneself when one is under the influence of intoxicants. Thus, one's actions may endanger one's life or the innocent lives of those around one. For example, if one drinks and drives, it is very easy for one to cause accidents to occur. Such accidents may lead to injuries or even deaths.

Not only can the five precepts help and guide one individually in one's everyday life, they can also bring about happiness and harmony to society.

II. DAILY PRACTICE:

These five precepts need to be followed so one's mind will be pure of any wrongdoings or selfish acts. Therefore, all one's inner strength (will power) is needed to suppress any temptations that will keep one from living by these 5 precepts. In order to be committed to these 5 precepts, one should understand the meaning of each precept. Only you can make yourself live accordingly to these 5 precepts; there is nobody around that will check-up to make sure one is following them. Only you will know if you are able to keep any of them. Thus, one has to:

1. be honest with oneself
2. be confident that it is possible for one to keep the 5 precepts.

Each morning before one gets out of bed, make an inner promise to oneself: "Today, I have to live exactly by the 5 precepts. Then, each night before one goes to sleep, evaluate oneself to see which precept one was not able to keep and vow that one will not make that mistake again.

III. CONCLUSION:

By living accordingly to these 5 precepts, one's actions, speech, and thoughts will be pure. Thus, one will avoid the many miseries in life. The 5 precepts will help bring happiness and peace to one's present state of being. Also, it's a big step toward reaching enlightenment.

IV. QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

1. What is precept? What are the 5 precepts a Buddhist has to be committed to?
2. Why does one have to keep the 5 precepts?
3. What does one gain by keeping these 5 precepts?
4. What does a person have to do to keep the 5 precepts?

THE FOUR ASSISTANT METHODS

I. FOREWORD:

The main purpose of Buddha's existence was to benefit all beings. Therefore, none of His methods of civilization and education went beyond the purpose.

The same process applies to all Buddhists. Practicing Buddhism is not just for attaining one's enlightenment, but for others as well. This means benefaction. To practice the image of benefaction from Buddha, one needs to study the Four Assistant Methods (Bốn Nhiếp Pháp).

II. DEFINITION:

The Four Assistant Methods (Bốn Nhiếp Pháp) consist of four methods to morally cultivate the sentient beings. These methods are based upon one's compassion to educate beings in mending their ways. They are applied to all circumstances, situations, and have the ability to enlighten the living beings.

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR ASSISTANT METHODS:

The Four Assistant Methods are divided in four categories: To give alms, friendly speech, beneficial actions and collaboration.

1. *There are three aspects of giving alms:*

- a. Donation of goods: Offer help to all beings who are in need of money, clothings, medicines, properties etc. This kind of offering is considered as external wealth. Offering of life, physical strength, speech, thoughts, opinions etc... are considered as internal wealth.
- b. Donation of Dharma: Practice Buddha's teachings to educate and benefit beings, or praying to Buddhas to dedicate the merit to all beings.
- c. Donation of Encouragement: Use all possible ways of donations to help release the pressure of a person facing danger and obstacles. Offer food and clothes for those impoverished. Never commit any ill action that frightens others.

To ensure a successful benefaction, one should practice donation of goods, donation of Dharma and donation of encouragement. Find ways to save someone from difficulty. To educate beings so they are liberated from sufferings which have been created in the cycle of birth and death.

2. *Friendly speech*: Use soft, sweet, bright and clear words to influence people. To show more respect toward Buddha-Dharma-Sangha, one should always speak the truth.

3. ***Beneficial Actions:*** All beneficial actions include: The practice of donation of goods which helps to improve the living conditions of all beings, the practice of donation of Dharma which morally civilizes the beings, and the practice of donation of encouragement which gives all beings confidence and courage when they face problems. To be a success in practicing beneficial actions, one should observe the precepts purely, practice Buddhism diligently and, exterminate the craving and ignorance. Benefitting beings by beneficial actions will directly help the beings' living conditions. In order to provide the most absolute benefit to the beings, one should practice Buddhism diligently.
4. ***Collaboration:*** To be harmonized with all beings in any matters, and situations without distinguishing between the rich, and poor, the noble and the commoner etc...

IV. THE ADVANTAGES OF THE FOUR ASSISTANT METHODS:

Besides civilizing, The Four Assistant Methods have the ability to give all other beings absolute benefits:

1. *To give alms:* To liberate one from poverty, bad karma, and from all negative environments.
2. *Friendly speech:* To help one understands all profound sutra, eliminate all defilements and sufferings, live in happiness, and accumulate merits.
3. *Beneficial actions:* To support all beings by accumulating good deeds and morals in every action and thought.
4. *Collaboration:* To help all beings eliminate evil actions and thoughts, and become perfect.

V. CONCLUSION:

The Four Assistant Methods are very concrete methods. Based upon Buddha's boundless compassion, beneficial action conduct is the main conduct. It is the highest, unique purpose in the existence of Buddha. Therefore, The Four Assistant Methods carry a most surpassing value. They also represent the immeasurable will of the Buddha.

THE COMMON CEREMONY

I. NAMES:

1. *Nam Mô Bốn Sư Thích Ca Mâu Ni Phật:*

- Nam Mô: To respect. It also has the following meanings:
 - 1) Quy-y: To take refuge in the Buddha.
 - 2) Quy mạng: To devote this life to the Buddha.
 - 3) Cứu ngã: Pray to Buddha for his help.
 - 4) Lễ bái: To worship.
 - 5) Độ ngã: Praying to Buddha for his guidance to happiness and enlightenment.
- Dharma Master (Bốn Sư): The Monk who teaches all disciples the way to attain enlightenment. Nam Mô Bốn Sư Thích Ca Mâu Ni Phật is to respectfully devote one's life to worship Shakyamuni (Thích Ca), our teacher. One prays to Buddha so one may someday attain enlightenment.

2. *Nam Mô A-Di-Đà Phật: (Same as above).*

3. *Nam-Mô Đương Lai Hạ Sanh Di-Lặc Tôn Phật:*

- Đương Lai: The future.
- Hạ sanh (born): Born to (Ta Bà) the world.
- Di Lặc tôn Phật: Shakyamuni's (Thích Ca) successor. Di-Lặc has two meanings:
 - 1) Compassion (Tù-Thị): The compassionate one.
 - 2) Vô năng thắng: His wisdom and compassion are incomparable. Di-Lặc Buddha symbolizes the conduct of forgiving.

4. *Nam Mô Văn Thù Sư Lợi Bồ Tát:*

He is a Bodhisattava with boundless wisdom. He rides the dharma lion which represent the power of wisdom to eliminate ignorance. Văn Thù is a brilliant example of wisdom.

5. *Nam Mô Đại Hạnh Phổ Hiền Bồ Tát:*

- Đại Hạnh (great conduct): Extraordinary great conduct.
- Phổ Hiền: He is a Bodhisattave (Bồ Tát) with many vows to help all beings. He rides a six tusk white elephant which represents the unselfish conduct.

6. *Nam Mô Đại Bi Quan Thế Âm Bồ Tát:*

- Đại Bi: Great love and compassion.
- Quán Thế Âm: Is the Bodhisattave who listens to the cries of all beings and helps to relieve the miseries for them. He is the brilliant example of compassion.

7. *Nam Mô Linh Sơn Hội Thượng Phật Bồ Tát:*

- Linh Sơn: Kỳ-Xà-Quật Mountain, India where Shakyamuni (đức Phật Thích Ca) delivered his sermons.
- Hội Thượng: Is an assembly of Bodhisttavas and highest disciples who gathered at Linh Sơn Mountain to listen to Buddha's teachings.

II. THE FOUR GREAT VOWS:

1. Even though there are innumerable beings, I vow to save them all;
2. Even though the passions are inexhaustible, I vow to extinguish them all;
3. Even though the Dharmas are immeasurable, I vow to master them all;
4. The religion of Buddhism is incomparable, I vow to attain it.

III. VÃNG SANH MANTRA:

- *Chú (Magical words):* Spoken by Buddhas which we cannot understand and explain. They have the ability to guide all beings to the purity world (cực lạc).
- *Bạt nhứt thể nghiệp chướng căn bản:* To eliminate the basic Karmas created by body (action), speech, and thought. These are the causes of suffering.
- *Đắc sanh tịnh độ Đà la ni:* Đà-la-ni is the most effective methods to enter the purity world.

IV. THE THREE-FOLD REFUGES:

I take refuge the Buddha as my guide;
 I take refuge the Dharma as the future path;
 I take refuge the Sangha as my companion without obstacle.

I follow the Buddha, the incomparably honored one;
 I follow the Dharma, the words of wisdom from Buddha;
 I follow the Sangha, honorable for its harmonious life;

I have finished following the Buddha;
 I have finished following the Dharma;
 I have finished following the Sangha;

V. FORWARDING THE ACHIEVED MERITS:

- 1 & 2: Vows to forward the achieved merits to all beings.
 3 & 4: Oneself and other beings will attain enlightenment.

THE MEANING OF THE BUDDHIST FLAG

The world's Buddhist flag represents the spirit of the Buddhist religion.

The flag was invented by Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), an American who studied Buddhism with the Venerable H. Sumangala, a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka. In 1889, they drew up the Buddhist flag based on the colors of Buddha's halo. These colors are dark blue, yellow, red, white, and orange. Separately as well as combined, the colors have significant meanings.

In 1889, the Buddhist flag was displayed for the first time at many Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka during the celebration of Buddha's birthday. Sixty-one years later, on May 25, 1950, the first World Buddhist Conference was organized at Colombo, Sri Lanka. The conference consisted of delegates from 27 different countries from Asia, Europe, and North America. During this first meeting, the delegates agreed on the colors of the flag and its meaning. Today, the Buddhist flag is honored and displayed by approximately 80 countries during Buddhist holidays.

The meanings of the colors on the flag:

1. These are the **colors of Buddha's aura**:
 - a. Dark Blue: Meditation
 - b. Yellow: Wisdom
 - c. Red: Diligence
 - d. White: Purity
 - e. Orange: Compassion.
2. They are the **five roots** and basic moral powers a Buddhist needs to progress on the road to enlightenment:
 - a. Dark Blue - Concentration of thought: Do not let the mind wander when performing a task, control it and let it be calm.
 - b. Yellow - Wisdom: The level of understanding and how things are analyzed and judged.
 - c. Red - Diligence: Always strive to improve.
 - d. White - Faith or belief: Believing in Buddha and in oneself.
 - e. Orange - Thoughts or mindfulness: This has to do with the mind, thoughts, and memories.
3. These are the **five things that make up beings**:
 - a. Dark Blue - Material quality or form: The four matters that form us: dirt, water, air and fire.
 - b. Yellow - Sensation/feeling: Sad, happy, angry, etc.
 - c. Red - Knowledge and perceptions.
 - d. White - Action that are in connection with the mind/ conscience: Karmas are results of actions. In other words, if good deeds are performed, merits will follow. When we do good deeds, our minds are at peace, but when we commit wrongdoing, we feel uneasy and guilty.

- e. Orange - Consciousness: The knowledge or the comprehension of all things. It is the most important aspect for all who try to improve their lives. By truly understanding something, one will make the best decisions, otherwise, misjudgment will lead to failure and sufferings.

The combination of all five colors represents peace. This unification of the colors is inseparable. Each of the colors represents one of the five senses. Together the five senses will help attain enlightenment.

The colors of the Buddhist flag also represent the non-discrimination of others based upon the color of their skin. Its belief is that everyone is equal. All of us are brothers and sisters who share the same belief, who worship the same religion, and who work together to build a stronger existence of Buddhism for the future.

The World Buddhist Flag was displayed in Vietnam for the first time at the Vietnamese Buddhist Congregation conference held at Hanoi in 1951. At the same time, the Vietnamese Buddhism Anthem "Phật Giáo Việt Nam" was composed by musician Lê Cao Phan. These events brought about more trust and faith in the delegates by all the Vietnamese Buddhists. These events also revived the morality of Buddhism after its absence due to the political circumstances in Vietnam.

Wherever the Buddhist Flag is displayed, one can be assured that Buddha's teachings are being practiced and the people there understand the way to Buddhahood.

THE UNGRATEFUL PEASANT

One morning in a village near Kase, a peasant was plowing his fields. After he had laid the trenches, he let his oxens loose to graze in a field nearby, and began to turn the soil over with a spade. The day went by, and the oxens strayed further to the outfield. Having completed his day's work, the peasant laid down his spade and went to fetch his oxens only to discover that they were no longer in the field where he had left them.

He was a poor man; therefore, the loss of his oxens was a terrible misfortune. He grew extremely worried and as the night was falling, he went into the forest near the village looking for and calling out to the strayed oxens.

He lost his way in the depths of the forest, and wandered around for seven days and nights, unable to find his way home. By this time, he was starving and unable to move any further. He was about to collapse with hunger and exhaustion when he saw a tree laden with enormous ripened fruits. This tree stood at the edge of a steep slope that dropped sharply to a narrow gorge below.

The peasant staggered up to the tree, plucked the fruit within his reach, and began to eat it as fast as he could. His hunger was still not satisfied; and wanting to eat more of the juicy fruit, he climbed up the tree, and crawled along a branch that hung over the slope. Unable to bear his weight, the branch made a cracking sound and snapped in two.

The peasant was hurled down the rocky slopes into the narrow gorge below. Fortunately, he fell into a pool of water and was saved from being smashed to death on the boulders strewn around. He was so weakened by his fall that he lay in the gorge for ten days, unable to move. He kept himself alive by drinking the water from the pool and eating the shrubs which grew at its edge.

On the tenth day, a monkey who lived in a cave in the gorge, came to drink water at the pool, and saw the wretched peasant lying there. The monkey was amazed at the sight of a human being in such desolated place and so he asked:

- *Who are you and why are you lying here?*
- *Alas, monkey, I live in a village near Quasi; and I lost my way in the forest above while looking for my oxen which had strayed from the field. I wandered around for seven days without food and water until I saw a fruit tree which stood on the top of this rocky slope. I climbed up the tree to reach the fruit and fell into this gorge. I have been lying here for ten days. Please try and pull me up to the forest for I am too weak to make the effort by myself.*

The monkey felt very sorry for the peasant, and decided to help him. He picked up a heavy stone and practiced climbing up and down the side of the gorge to see if he could bear the weight of the man. When he found that he could climb the slope without any difficulty, he went back to the peasant and told him:

- *Now put your arms around my neck and hold on tight. I will slowly climb to the top of the gorge.*

The peasant did as he was told and climbed onto the monkey's back; and laboriously, they made the difficult ascent. When they arrived at the top, the brave monkey was quite worn out. While putting the peasant down he said:

- *I must rest a while. You stand guard and wake me if any wild animals come near.*

The monkey lay down on the grass and fell fast asleep, while the peasant sat near him and kept watch for any dangers. Even though his life was saved by the monkey, the peasant was a very ungrateful and wicked man. As he watched the monkey, he thought of an evil plan:

- *The flesh of a monkey is very tasty to eat. I am very hungry and weak after my fall, so if I kill and eat this monkey I will get strong again. I need not remain in this wretched place, and will be able to find the way out of the forest and back to my village.*

He looked about and found a large stone, and raising it, he hit the monkey on the head; but as he was still weak and feeble, the blow lacked power and he only succeeded in wounding the monkey.

The monkey, with blood flowing from his head, jumped up and quickly scrambled up a tree. When he felt that he was safe from the peasant, he called out:

- *Vile wretch, is this how you repay me for saving your life? You are a treacherous man and you will suffer for your foul deed. Go from here; this is the path that leads out of the forest. If you are not devoured by wild beasts, you will eventually reach your home. Go quickly. I do not trust you and want to see you on your way before I come down from this tree.*

The peasant quickly ran down the path that the monkey had pointed out to him. But he was not to escape so easily. The gods in heaven saw what had happened, and decided to punish the peasant for his wicked act.

When the peasant reached home, he found that his body was covered with horrible sores and after a few days, his limbs began to rot away. The other peasants drove him out of the village. Shunned by people everywhere, he wandered from place to place for seven years. Driven half-mad with his sufferings, he eventually reached the Migacira park in Banaras and laid down in an enclosure.

The people of Banaras took pity on him and gave him food and water to drink.

The peasant, however, had undergone too much pain and died shortly afterwards. The gods sent him to the underworld, where he was made to atone for all his misdeeds on earth.

THE GREAT-HEARTED MONKEY

In the high Himalayas, there once lived a giant monkey king and his troop of eighty thousand monkeys. Their home was in a forest glade by the side of the Ganges River. There stood a tall shady tree where the water gushed pure and clear. In the summer, this tree would bear enormous golden fruits.

As soon as the fruits were ripe, the monkeys ate them all up as fast as they could. For the monkey king, who was extremely wise, had warned his followers: *"Never allow a single fruit to fall in the water. If this happens, the fruit will be carried down the river to distant valleys and cities where men live. Then they may come in search of the tree bearing this delicious fruit, and invade our peaceful kingdom."*

One branch of this tree hung low over the river. A ripe fruit which was hidden by an ant's nest fell into the water and was swept away by the rapid current. It drifted further and further south, until at last it reached the city of Banaras on the banks of the Ganges River.

One morning, while King Brahmadata of Banaras was bathing in the river between two fishermen's nets. When he finished his bath, the nets were pulled in. Caught in the fine mesh was the shining golden fruit. Struck with amazement, the fishermen picked it up and ran to show it to the king. The king examined it curiously, for he had never seen such a fruit before.

"What is this glorious fruit?" he asked them.

The fishermen, who only knew how to catch fish for the royal table, replied: *"We do not know, Sire."*

"Call the foresters," ordered the king.

The foresters came and answered: *"This is a mango, Sir."*

"Where does it grow?"

"Not in our kingdom, Sire. This fruit grows far away in the distant valleys of the Himalayan mountains."

The mango was cut and the king tasted a slice. He gave the rest to his queens and ministers. They all exclaimed in wonder, *"Truly this is a fruit with a divine flavor. We have never tasted anything like this before."*

The days passed and King Brahmadata longed to eat more of the delicious golden fruit. His desire grew so intense that he was unable to rest in peace since his mind was preoccupied with thoughts of the mango. He joined with his men afterwards and sailed up the river.

After a long journey of many days and nights, they reached the mountain valley where the mango tree stood on the river bank. The king got down with his followers, and they all had a delightful feast of the rich juicy mangoes. When night fell, the king laid down to sleep at the foot of the tree, and his soldiers stood guard. Blazing fires were lit on either side, to prevent wild animals from coming too near.

Late that night, when the king was fast asleep and the guards were about to fall asleep themselves, the monkey king and his troop arrived. They jumped onto the mango tree and ate up all the mangoes that were left. They made such noise that woke the king up and he saw the monkeys gliding from branch to branch eating the mangoes. The king then ordered his archers: *"Surround the tree and shoot all these monkeys. Tomorrow morning we will eat monkey flesh with the mangoes. That will make a really tasty meal."*

The monkeys heard the king's words, and trembled with fear as they approached their chief: *"Alas, Sire, you warned us, but unknown to us some fruit must have fallen into the river; therefore strange men have come here. Their leader has ordered his archers to shoot us. The tree is surrounded and we cannot escape. What are we to do?"*

"Do not be afraid, my children," said the monkey chief, *"I will find a way to save you."* Having comforted his followers, he climbed up the highest branch of the tree, and from there crossed to another branch that stretched over the river. With a mighty bound, he cleared the carefully measured branch, saying to himself: *"I will tie one end to a tree trunk here and fasten the other end around my waist. I will leap back to the mango tree and my troop can escape over the reed bridge I will have made."*

Swift as the wind, the monkey chief sprang back to where his followers were waiting anxiously. But he had made a mistake in his calculations. He had not taken into account the part of the rope that tied around his waist. The reed proved to be too short; however, he was able to grasp a branch but ended up using his body as part of the bridge. With all his might, the monkey king grasped tightly to a branch and told his troop: *"Fast, cross this bridge to get to the other side of the river to safety."*

One by one the eighty thousand monkeys saluted their chief, and ran lightly over his back, onto the reed, and to the other side of the river.

Among the troop there was one evil monkey called Devadatta, who was very jealous of his leader. He thought to himself: *"This is the chance to destroy my enemy."*

So he jumped very hard onto his chief's back. The monkey king's back broke and he was in great pain. The heartless Devadatta crossed the reed to safety, leaving his stricken chief to die alone.

King Brahmadata had been awake and saw everything that happened. He was filled with compassion for the heroic monkey. At dawn he ordered his men to carefully lower the monkey chief from the branch where he still clung. When this was done, and the wounded monkey was bathed in the sweetest perfumes and clothed in a soft yellow robe. The king sat down beside the monkey chief and asked: *"You have risked your life by making that bridge for the other monkeys to cross over. What are you to them and what are they to you, O great monkey?"*

The dying monkey replied: *"O king, they are my children, and I am their chief and guide. They loved and trusted me. I do not grieve as I leave this world, because I have gained my subjects' freedom. In order for you to become a good ruler, you must remember that the happiness and welfare of your people must always come first."*

Saying this, the monkey chief closed his eyes and died. King Brahmadata ordered that the dead monkey be given a funeral fit for a king. A shrine was erected at the place of the cremation. Torches were burnt there and offerings of incense and flowers were made.

When the king returned to Banaras, he built another shrine in honor of the monkey chief, and commanded all his subjects to pay homage to the memory of the brave animal. Throughout his reign, he ruled his people wisely and well, as advised by the monkey chief.

KING SIVI

In ancient India, the mighty King Sivi reigned in the city of Ariththapura which was in the Kingdom of Sive. A son was born to him whom he also named Sivi.

The prince reached manhood and went to Taxila to study. When he returned, he was filled with wisdom and knowledge, and his father made him viceroy of the kingdom.

After the King's death, Prince Sivi became king and ruled his people justly and well. He had six alms halls built in the city, four at the city gates and two outside the palace. Everyday six hundred thousand pieces of money were distributed to the poor. On the eighth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month, the King visited the alms halls to see the money was correctly given out.

On a day of the full moon, he sat on the royal throne under the state umbrella, thinking of all that he had done for his people:

"Of material goods there is nothing that I have not given. But this kind of giving does not satisfy me. I want to give something that is a part of myself. Today when I go to the alms hall, if anyone should ask for a part of my body, I shall gladly give it. If any man says that he needs a slave, I will take off my royal garb and go and do the work of a slave. If any man should ask for my eyes, I will forthwith take them out of my head and give to him."

He bathed in sixteen pitchers of perfumed water, and put on his finest garments. After a meal of choice food, he mounted a richly decorated elephant and went to the alms hall.

Sakka, the King of the gods, decided to test King Sivi. He thought: *"King Sivi has determined to give his eyes to any man who should ask for them. When the time comes, I shall see whether he will be able to make this supreme sacrifice."*

King Sakka disguised himself as an old blind Brahmin and stood outside the alms hall. When the King came riding by on his elephant, he stretched out his arms crying, *"Great King, there is no place in all the world which does not echo with the fame of your good deeds. As you see, I am blind. You have two eyes. I have come from afar to ask you for one of your eyes."* The King thought: *"This is just what I was thinking in my palace today. My heart's desire will be fulfilled. I shall give a gift that no man has ever given before."* He turned to the Brahmin: *"Who told you to come and ask for my eye? It is the most vital part of a man's body and difficult to part with."*

"It was the King of gods who told me to beg you for an eye, great King. Men say that to give an eye is the finest gift of all. Do not refuse me, King Sivi. Give me only one of your eyes." Replied the Brahmin. *"You have asked for one eye, old Brahmin. I will give you both of my eyes."* Upon saying this, King Sivi ordered the Brahmin to return to the palace with him.

The whole city rang with the news that the King wanted to give his eyes to a blind Brahmin. The queens, the commander-in-chief of the army, the ministers and the courtiers begged the King: "*Do not give away your eyes, great King. Give money, pearls and coral. Give horses, elephants, chariots and cloth of gold. Give your most precious things, but keep yourself safe and sound for your faithful people. We beg of you not to part with your eyes.*"

"I have vowed to give whatever is asked of me. If I break my oath, I will have committed the greatest sin of all sins. My soul will be in danger and I will descend to Yama's (God of the underworld) Kingdom. Unasked, I would have given nothing. But the Brahmin demands my eyes, I must honor my promise."

The courtiers asked, "*What do you desire in return for the gift of your eyes? What is the motive for your deed? Is it the prize of your life, beauty, joy, or power? Why must great King Sivi give up his eyes for the sake of the next world?*"

"In giving my eyes, I do not seek glory, wealth, kingdoms, or many sons. Giving is the moral vow of all saints. My soul is filled with joy at the thought of making gifts."

The King turned to his surgeon and ordered, "*You are my friend and comrade, Sivakka. Do as I tell you. Take out my eyes with your skillful hands, and give them to this blind Brahmin.*"

"Think carefully, my Lord. To give away one's eyes is no small matter."

"I have thought carefully, Sivaka. Do not delay and talk so much in my presence. Take out my eyes as I command."

The King endured the agony in silence and said nothing while his comrades cried out loud. After a while he beckoned the Brahmin to come closer. "*Here, take my eyes, Brahmin, and place them in your sightless sockets. The eyes of awakening is a thousand times more valuable than these human eyes. You gave me the opportunity to practice charity.*"

The Brahmin placed the King's eyes in his sockets and left the palace. When he was out-side the city gates he resumed his original state of being, King Sakka, and returned to the world of gods.

Now that the King was blind, he remained within the palace, unable to move about freely. After a few days he thought: "*A blind man cannot rule. I will hand over my kingdom to ministers and go to a park and live as an ascetic.*" He then summoned his ministers and told them of his intentions: "*and I will take only one man with me. He shall serve me and guide my footsteps.*"

He sent for his chariot. But the courtiers would not allow the King to mount the chariot. They brought a golden litter and carried the King to the park. Having seen that the King was quite safe, they left him with one attendant and returned to the palace.

Sakka was seated on his throne in heaven and saw the King meditating in the park. He thought: "*I will offer the King a prize and give him back his sight.*"

He came down to earth in his own form and stood before the blind King. King Sivi heard a strange footsteps and cried out: "*Who are you and what do you want with me?*"

"I am Sakka, the King of gods, and I have come from heaven to visit you. I wish to grant you a boon, royal sage. Name whatever you will."

"Osaka, I have left wealth, strength, and treasure beyond count, behind. I want death and nothing more, for I am blind."

"King Sivi, do you ask for death because you are blind, or because you wish to die?"

"Because I am blind, my lord."

"King Sivi, you made your gift thinking of the future. You were asked for one eye, yet you parted with both. Tell me the truth, and why you did so, then only will your eyes be restored to you."

"If you wish to give me back my eyes, Sakka, let them be restored to me as a consequence of my gift."

"Though I am Sakka, the King of the gods, I cannot give an eye to anyone else. But on account of the supreme gift made by you and for no other reason, your eyes will be restored to you."

The King joyfully said: "*Whatever man comes to me and asks for a gift, I will give it without question. If I speak the truth, then let my eye appear.*" As he uttered these words, one of his eyes reappeared in the empty socket.

The King continued: "*A Brahmin came to see me and begged for one of my eyes. I gave him both. That action of mine afforded me the greatest joy and delight. If I speak the truth then let my other eye appear.*"

Instantly his second eye reappeared, and these eyes were called the "*Eyes of Absolute and perfect Truth.*"

Sakka invoked his supernatural power, and the entire royal court assembled in the park. He said to the King: "*King Sive, as a reward for your supreme act of self sacrifice, I now give you a pair of divine eyes. You will be able to see through rocks and walls, over hills and dales. A hundred leagues on every side your eyes shall see.*" Sakka then bade the King farewell and returned to heaven.

Surrounded by his courtiers, the King returned to the city, and amidst great pomp and ceremony entered his palace named Canada, or the "*Peacock's Eye.*" The news that their King has received his eyes back, spread throughout the kingdom of Sivi, and the people came to see him, bearing gifts in their hands.

A large pavilion was set up at the palace gates, and the King seated himself on the royal throne under the state umbrella. Drummers went into the city to collect all the people together. When a large throng was gathered before the King, he spoke to his subjects: "*O people of Sivi, now that you have beheld these divine eyes, never eat food without giving some thing away. Which man among you, if asked to give, would refuse? Though it be his dearest possession? These eyes of mine are the gift of God. Through rock and will, over hill and dale, a hundred leagues on either side, these eyes can see. I gave a mortal eye and*

in return received a divine eye. See, my people; always let others share in your good fortune. Do good to others and you will go to heaven."

On holy day and every fortnight, King Sivi preached thus to his people, encouraging them to lead virtuous lives. His subjects gave alms, performed good deeds, and finally went to heaven to live forever amongst the celestial beings.

HOW TO LISTEN TO DHARMA TALK

I. I HEAR:

When I listen to Dharma talk, I touch the three Jewels in me:

- I open my heart so the Dharma talk can touch the Buddha within me thus waking up the seeds of Compassion and Understanding in me.
- I value the Dharma talk that's being transmitted to me. These words came from the Buddha and are spoken here on behalf of the Buddha to the benefits of all beings.
- I 'm grateful to this Sangha and this speaker; both help me practice the lesson being taught. Their support and experience are valuable to my practice.

I'm filled with gratitude for this opportunity to be here and now and to have a chance to learn and grow my Compassion and Understanding.

II. I CONTEMPLATE:

I can't learn if my mind is too full right this moment:

When my mind is occupied by the past or lost in the future, it's full and no learning is possible for me. I must free myself from other worldly worries and concentrate on this moment; only then can my practice gains from this experience.

I'm practicing the listening quality:

When I listen, I'm practicing the listening quality of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara: I listen without prejudice, criticism, and comparison. I listen for what's being said and also what's left unsaid. I listen also to the noises in my mind that compete to distract me.

I'm open to listen as if it will alter my life in a significant way:

To fully benefit from this Dharma talk, I must listen to it not only from an open mind but also from an open heart. I must be open to receive this Dharma talk as if it can change my life significantly. This is the risk I'm willing to take because I'm not holding on to what's mine in a way that excludes all teachings. To approach this Dharma talk in this manner frees my mind from all attachments and allows me peace of mind.

III. I PRACTICE:

I listen as I would listen to the Buddha himself:

I value the words spoken here as if I'm listening to the Buddha himself. I'm not attached to the personality, charisma, identity, or any other personal specifics of the speaker; rather, I respect the speaker as a teacher and value his contribution to my practice.

I listen and grasp the main idea of the talk:

When I listen, I follow the ideas and the examples of the Dharma talk and try to relate to other ideas and examples previously mentioned. I try to tie the ideas together so I can arrive at the main ideas of the talk. Also the speaker's knowledge, skillfulness in developing ideas and making the speech interesting will benefit me in my speeches.

I free my mind from distractions to get ready:

If I have an event or a thought that may burden my mind and thus prevent me from being with this Dharma talk, I need to get rid of such burdens. I do that by sharing them with someone, preferably close to me, and complete my thought about it. Once completed, the thoughts will not bother me any longer.

I listen with all my mind and heart. I open myself for change, growth, and repentance:

I have an issue or a situation in my life in which I can use a breakthrough. I'm listening to this Dharma talk with the intention to transform this issue or situation. I seek to apply what I learn today to improve my life and the relationship I have with other people. I may even solidify this commitment by sharing it with people because the more people acknowledge my effort, the more firm I become with this commitment.

DISCUSSION:

1. What is a Dharma talk? Where and how often do you get to listen to a Dharma talk?
2. How do you properly listen to a Dharma talk?
3. How does one successfully deliver a Dharma talk?
4. Why do people say that Dharma can help cure mental and physical illness?
5. What is a Dharma? How many Dharmas are there? List 5 Dharmas.

LISTENING QUALITY

I. I HEAR:

I often hear the following aspiration to learn the listening quality:

"We invoke your name, Avalokiteshvara. We aspire to learn your way of listening in order to help relieve the suffering in the world. You know how to listen in order to understand. We invoke your name in order to practice listening with all our attention and open-heartedness. We will sit and listen without any prejudice. We will sit and listen without judging or reacting. We will sit and listen in order to understand. We will sit and listen so attentively that we will be able to hear what the other person is saying and also what is being left unsaid. We know that just by listening deeply we already alleviate a great deal of pain and suffering in the other person."

II. I CONTEMPLATE:

I like to talk:

Not only do I like to talk but I also like for others to agree with me, to appreciate and acknowledge me. I also like to have 'the last words' in and I especially hate it when people hang up on me! When I can express all that's bottled up in me, I feel understood and less apprehensive about things. On the contrary, when people talk, I already know where they're going with it. I can't wait to tell them my experience or my better ideas. If only they can hear my better response! I usually tell them: "Not bad idea, but the best way to do this is Listen to this."

Why should I listen to you so emphatically?

I listen to you so emphatically because at the present moment, you have my full attention. I want to hear all you have to say; I want to appreciate your feelings; I want to pick up your body language; I don't want to miss what you intend to communicate to me including what is left unsaid. Only by listening to you this way can I fully honor you and your words. In the future, when I look back, I won't regret having missed the opportunity to understand you.

When I listen to you emphatically, I give you all the time you need to share your feelings. I trust that, in return, you will take the time to listen to me when and if I have something to say.

Often when I am stubborn with an idea, I shut people out because I don't want them to change my mind. I take a big risk when I listen to you with all my heart because you may convince me with your arguments. However, I'm willing to risk changing my position and I hope you are willing to do that too.

III. I PRACTICE:

When you don't want to talk:

There are times when you may not feel safe to share very personal things or sensitive things with me. In those cases, I need to make you feel safe by sharing myself with you. The more authentic and intimate things I'm sharing with you, the more you'll feel safe to speak your mind.

My attention is very short; I can't focus long:

With practice and meditation, I will increase my ability to concentrate and listen. Meanwhile, I practice to mentally repeat the last word of every sentence you speak. By doing this, I can follow you effectively and I can even repeat what you said.

How do I quiet the thoughts in my head to listen to you?

Again, this also relates to my ability to concentrate and I will improve it by meditating.

I can increase my concentration on you by:

- Being in the frame of mind that you are most important to me and there's nothing I rather do than listening to you and help you speak your mind.
- Focus my eyes on the space between your nose and upper lip.
- Maintain my breathing: long and slow.
- Notice my urges to interrupt, judge, evaluate, defend, explain, counter and notice them disappear. Concentrate on long and slow breathing.
- Encouraging you to speak more so you open up more. Use punctuations such as: I see. I hear you. What else works for you? What else doesn't work for you?

SUMMARY:

Being able to listen to you and others is important to me. I vow to practice listening with the quality inspired by the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. I listen without prejudice so I can understand you to contribute to you and let you contribute to me. I'll practice meditation and living in mindfulness to improve my ability to listen to you and to others.

I also will practice listening to nature so I can hear the wind, the bird singing, the leaves in the tree. By listening to nature, I connect with nature at a deep level. I realize I'm one with nature - I have never been born; I have never died. This gives me peace and relieves my fear of death.

I INQUIRE:

1. Who is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara? What does she inspire me to do?
2. Explain: prejudice, emphatic listening, judge, reaction.
3. How many people I know like to talk?
4. How do I listen to people that 'I hate'?
5. How do I overcome my short attention span?
6. What practices can help me improve my ability to listen?
7. When I listen to nature, what do I hear?

BEING A PIOUS BUDDHIST TO MY PARENTS

I. I HEAR:

I remembered having been taught that as children, we have to love, respect, and obey our parents and that's the way it must be. While there's no dispute that my parents brought me into this world and brought me up, I do have trouble thinking about them in terms of obligation. Obligation limits my freedom especially in matters concerning relationships.

II. I CONTEMPLATE:

Loving my parents is a privilege:

I never thought that having parents around is a privilege until my father passed away before I turned 6 years old. It's no surprise that I don't remember much about my father and seeing children with their fathers always touches me in a deep way. Having both parents to me is a privilege, especially if they both are young, healthy, and loving. Tomorrow we may lose them due to a divorce. And certainly some day sickness and death will eventually claim both of them. Thus it would be wise for me to treasure the time we have together here and now. When my mother gives me a little trouble nowadays, I contemplate about her liveliness and good health at the age over 80 and find comfort that I still have her around. I missed many years of not being able to feel this way while living in the same house with my mother. Instead of being grateful, I took things for granted and didn't appreciate that mothers are miraculous and magic. Now that I find treasure in my mother, loving her and expressing my love for her becomes easy.

What the Buddha taught us about piety?

The Buddha taught that when I am pious to my parents, I also pay respect to the Buddha. Buddhism teaches me to lead my life with compassion for all: people, animals, plants, and even minerals. Naturally, to love and respect my parents deepens my compassion for all. Moreover, I believe that my parents and I could share a tie in a previous life and I should do my best to honor an engagement thus previously made. In an earlier reincarnation, the Buddha was a prince whose generosity was unparalleled. He would give away anything he had just for the asking, including his own children. But he vowed not to give his parents away. To practice compassion as taught by the Buddha, I learn to truly love myself by taking care of my thought, speech, and action. Next I project my compassion to my loved ones whom naturally include my parents. Then I project my compassion to others. Thus loving my parents is most natural next to loving myself.

My parents' happiness contributes to my happiness and vice versa:

In me, there are elements of my parents and there also are elements of my ancestors, both physical and spiritual. I cannot be happy while my parents suffer; to make my parents happy contributes to my happiness. Being pious to my parents is no longer an obligation since loving them contributes to my spiritual welfare.

Since my parents are in me, when I smile, my parents in me are happy. And when I walk-meditate, my parents in me find peace. Lucky are the youngsters who find ways to touch the parents in them since that gives them an important perspective about their bodies and minds.

III. I PRACTICE:

Being pious to my parents in my youth:

As a young person, I often felt bound by my parents being old fashioned, controlling, and unreasonable. In fact, in a survey, a group of Vietnamese teenagers were quoted to have said that they "disliked" their parents. What brought about this startling emotion? I honestly believe that my parents love me but often such love does not get expressed nor comprehended. I vow to look deeply and listen intently to truly understand my parents because I know that true understanding reveals their love for me and also brings about my love for them. In my youth, I did not accomplish that and I now vow to overcompensate for it.

Being pious to my parents in my adulthood:

Now that I am married and have a home and my own children, I easily let my busy schedule detract from spending time with my parents. To make up for that, I intend that every minute spending with parents to be of quality. In addition, I make available the quality time that my parents share with my family. I also show my children the interconnectedness among the generations: ancestors, offspring, and ourselves.

Being pious to my parents in their later years:

When my parents get much older, their needs become more spiritual. Plus I remember the Buddha's teachings about the importance of near-death karma: their thoughts and actions as they near the end constitute the strongest force in leading them from this life. Consequently, I make available time for them to be close to the Three Jewels: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. I'm committed that my parents find peace in their later years and find refuge in the Three Jewels.

DISCUSSION:

1. Why is it not effective to tell children that they must be pious to their parents?
2. Offer some ways of thinking that make you capable of showing the love you have for your parents is not obligatory.
3. Recommend guidelines for us to be pious to our parents in our various age groups.