

## **Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha**

### **Chapter One Summary**

In the 2,600 years of Buddhism's dissemination, many traditions arose as adaptations to the diverse needs of distinctive countries. Whom they all follow is the Buddha, propagating the teaching of Buddha; all are Buddhism. Specifically, all are Humanistic Buddhism.

Humanistic Buddhism is what the Buddha 'conveyed' to the "human world" with the original intents "to teach, instruct, benefit, and bring joy" and "to attain the Buddha's insight." It is closely related to society and individuals, evident in the Buddha's declaration of equality: "all sentient beings possess the buddha-nature," fitting the modern mentality of freedom, democracy, and equality.

The Buddha established precepts to ensure that the Sangha prevails, with the spirit of "not trespassing upon others." It is the root of social harmony and humanity. In addition, all Buddhist concepts are derived from the Buddha's teachings of Dependent Origination, guiding us to hope and perfection.

The essence of Humanistic Buddhism is negating superstition and blind faith, in its inspiration of wisdom and clarity. It emphasizes self-awareness, self-enlightenment, and self-improvement by offering insights into the truth, peace and stability, freedom from the fear and sorrow caused by birth and death, and ultimately the perfection of life.

Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism as needed by humanity, so we put it forth as the original intents of the Buddha so that his teachings can be seen in a new light. Denying biased notions and coming together in Humanistic Buddhism, we allow the Buddha's compassion and wisdom to shine a light of hope on humanity.

## **Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha**

### **Chapter One: Overview**

#### **1) Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intent of Buddha**

Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was born some twenty-six hundred years ago in the Indian kingdom of Kapilavastu as Prince Siddhartha Gautama, son of King Siddhodana.

Before Prince Siddhartha renounced and attained enlightenment, he lived a princely life of luxury in the palace. However, what he also discovered were the hardships suffered by ordinary people. Especially distressing to him was the caste system, its segregation of people into specific and perpetual classifications, the epitome of inequality. Once born as a Brahmin (priest), Ksatriya (nobility), Vaisya (agriculturalist, cattle rearer and trader), or Sudra (slave), a person was fated to consent to how they were treated by society, even if prejudicial or unequal. Predictably, those issued with 'lesser' rankings experienced greater misery.

Nevertheless, whilst still a prince and dwelling in the palace, Siddhartha demonstrated love and concern for his people. Markedly, due to his outside excursions, he drew nearer to the reality of sufferings caused by life and death in order to overcome the strict caste system and to realize equality for all beings. (*Abhiniskramana Sutra*, T03 No.190)

After becoming the Buddha, he taught the world that only by following the Middle Path and living a life that is free from the dualities of suffering and joy can one truly resolve the problems in life. For this reason, he spent forty-nine years teaching at over three hundred assemblies for the purposes of instructing, benefiting, and bringing joy to society (*Lotus Sutra*). Consequently, the Buddha's compassion and teaching bequeathed "Buddhism" to the human world.

One can say that Buddhism had been taught by the Buddha to the human world for the purpose of helping people resolve their difficulties in life. Everything that the Buddha had ever taught serves the purpose of discovering happiness and peace in this world. That is why it can be said that Buddhism is in fact Humanistic Buddhism—the original intent of the Buddha's birth into this world and sharing of his teachings. Everything he had taught is Humanistic Buddhism, and everything about Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism itself.

Since Buddhism embodies the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism, and that everything about Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism itself, then why the necessity to insert 'Humanistic' in front of 'Buddhism?'

The inference behind this is the time span of 2,600 years separating the Buddha's era

from the present. Along this considerable amount of time, various sects and reflections of Buddhism arose due to the differences in opinion among Buddhist disciples regarding teachings and precepts. These disparities have added to the challenge of unity among Buddhists. For this reason, cooperation between Buddhists and the development of Buddhism have become rather difficult.

Furthermore, after Buddhism spread to China, political oppressions and social changes impelled Buddhism into the mountain forests, causing Buddhism to become a religion that focused on spiritual cultivation in seclusion for the sole benefit of oneself. The situation was exacerbated by monastics who spoke the Dharma solely from their own perspectives, exaggerating the need to be other-worldly, dismissing people's needs in life for wealth, love, and family. For instance, on the topic of wealth, they would speak of money as a poisonous snake; when speaking about marriage, they would describe husband and wife as adversaries; when talking about children, they would call them debtors who have come to collect their due. The lack of value for human life in "traditional" Buddhism has drawn criticism from society for being unhumanly and irrelevant to real life.

We now propose "Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intent of Buddha," for the purpose of re-presenting a lifetime of the Buddha's teachings through a comprehensive review of his original intents on teaching the Dharma. It is hoped that through advocating Humanistic Buddhism, we are able to grasp the true meaning of the core teachings of the Buddha and his spirit of liberation for this world. Through the unification of different theories and opinions, we hope to reconnect Buddhism with the human world, only then can we truly realize Buddha's original teachings today. Furthermore, it is to ensure a thorough understanding and practice of the Dharma to discover greater happiness and perfection of life. These are the Buddha's original intents in choosing to be born and teaching the Dharma in this world.

## **2) The Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Deeds as the Basis of a Human Being**

Embodying a lifetime of the Buddha's teachings, it is believed that Humanistic Buddhism will surely shine its light on humanity one day. Today, the whole world is pursuing peace through advocating freedom, democracy, and equality. From as early as the moment of his enlightenment, the Buddha had already made a very important declaration: "How amazing! How amazing! All living beings possess the wisdom and virtue of the Buddha." (*Avatamsaka Sutra*, Fascicle 51)

What he meant is that our intrinsic nature is the same as his; we retain the buddha-nature within. When it is revealed, we can find peace and liberation, be our own masters, and

never let our future fall into the hands of divine entities. That is why taking refuge in the Three Jewels in Buddhism is to take refuge in ourselves, just as the Buddha encouraged his disciples to “rely on oneself, rely on the Dharma, and rely on nothing else.” In other words, to take refuge means to rediscover our buddha-nature. (*Samyuktagama*, T02 No.99)

All beings are equal in terms of buddha-nature. This core Buddhist notion is what makes Buddhism unique from other religions. It is also one of the greatest ideals of democracy and equality. Just as stated in the *Ekottaragama*, “Once waters from all rivers flow into the ocean, they shall no longer bear their individual names; once people from all castes renounce, they will share the Sakya name.” In particular, Buddha placed special emphasis on equality between men and women, as well as equality between all four categories of Buddhists. Disappointedly, a number of Buddhists today not only fail to comprehend Buddha's original intentions but also conceitedly place themselves as superior and better than others. This certainly is a great fallacy.

The saying, “All beings are equal in buddha-nature” holds that all beings merit to be treated equally. This is a respectful, sacred, and noble statement! The Buddha also established the Sangha community under the rules of the Six Points of Reverent Harmony, including various precepts to maintain the tranquility and welfare of the Sangha. He even taught lay Buddhists to uphold the Five Precepts and to practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds.

The Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Deeds are the foundations of a happy family; more so, they are the foundations of personal liberty. Once, people lacked proper understanding of the precepts and hence believed that they were merely constraints and shackles on life. The truth is, real freedom can only be gained through observing precepts. Those who have violated the precepts are sanctioned by law and imprisoned for the transgressions committed. That is why they have been deprived of their freedom.

The spirit of precepts in Humanistic Buddhism is to not trespass upon but to respect others:

- 1) No killing: not to trespass upon others' lives means to respect their right to life.
- 2) No stealing: not to trespass upon others' assets means to respect their right to possession of wealth.
- 3) No sexual misconduct: not to trespass upon others' reputation and integrity means to respect their right to dignity.
- 4) No lying: not to trespass upon others' honor means to respect their trust and character.
- 5) No intoxicants: not taking drugs, intoxicants, or substances that arouse violence and cruelty, means to respect others' right to good health.

Precepts are the basis for all spiritual cultivation. All roots of virtue and merits arise

from precepts. That is why the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says, “Precepts are the basis of supreme Bodhi wisdom, for they nurture all roots of virtue.” It is further emphasized in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* (T12 No.374), “Although it is said that buddha-nature is intrinsic in all living beings, it nevertheless cannot be revealed without the practice of precepts.” From this, one can see the importance of upholding precepts.

The Five Precepts are the foundations of being human. One who observes the precepts will refrain from trespassing upon others, and naturally, will not create karmic retributions. By observing the precepts, freedom is ensured for both self and others, and will become an intangible power of stability within society. Continuing from the Five Precepts to the Ten Wholesome Deeds, it means to refrain from: 1) the corporal misdeeds of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; 2) the spoken misdeeds of lying, idle talk, duplicity, and profanity; and 3) the spiritual misdeeds of the Three Poisons — greed, anger, and ignorance.

The Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Deeds are the Buddha's initial instructions for the human world. Not only do they set the standards for social behavior, they also provide a clear direction for life. Thus, these are the basis for the development of Humanistic Buddhism. That is why Humanistic Buddhism can be deemed as the original teachings of the Buddha. In fact, Humanistic Buddhism can unquestionably be traced from Buddha's teachings. Just as Master Taixu (太虛, 1890-1947) said, “Who we shall look up to is none other than the Buddha, and regard the perfection of our character as our goal; Buddhahood is attained the instant our characters are perfected. This is true reality.” In other words, the perfection of our character as human beings is the attainment of Buddhahood.

As Buddhism continues to evolve, the bodhisattva spirit as advocated in Mahayana Buddhism comes even closer to the Buddha's original intents, as well as the essence of the human world. Bodhisattvahood is attained through the development of the Bodhi mind, complementing the fundamental values of Humanistic Buddhism.

Nevertheless, differences in the aptitudes of disciples have led to differences in the levels of understanding and realizations of the Buddha's teachings. Their differences in spiritual attainment have thus given rise to varying opinions and beliefs in the Dharma. People's insistence upon their own opinion and ideas have also complicated the situation. Their purported attachment to the self and to the Dharma have caused further discord amongst Buddhists, hindering the overall development of Buddhism.

For instance, soon after the Buddha entered nirvana, his disciples had distinct disparities in opinion and understanding of his teachings and the precepts, causing a major schism and the creation of Sectarian Buddhism. As time passed, further schisms ensued and came Early Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism. By geography, Buddhism was further split into Southern Buddhism, Northern Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. Eventually, there

was also Korean Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Thai Buddhism, and Western Buddhism. In particular, Chinese Buddhism alone split into the Eight Schools, followed by the spread of Chan Buddhism into the Five Houses and Seven Schools.

However, heedless of the fact that the Dharma was spoken by the voice of the Buddha and interpreted by living beings (*Vimalakirti-Nirdesa Sutra*), it must be known that ultimately, all expedient means lead to a single path (*Lankavatara Sutra*). These differences in opinion were not personal, just as the Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism each held to their own standards of classification. Instead of further schism, the outcome has allowed Buddhism more diversity and a greater range of expedient means to cater to the aptitudes of living beings. On balance, all these individuals believe in the same Buddha and propagate the same Dharma based on the Truths of the Three Dharma Seals, which the Buddha has dedicated his entire life to teaching.

Nonetheless, in recent years, as Western knowledge prevails over the waning Eastern philosophy, many scholars study Buddhism not for the purpose of faith, but for bias, comparison, and criticism. This has created further misunderstanding and division among Buddhists. In light of this, a group of Buddhists have come together to search for common understanding in the future development of Buddhism. For this reason, Humanistic Buddhism has come to exist.

In Mainland China, Master Taixu spoke about *Rensheng Fojiao* (人生佛教, lit. Life Buddhism) in various places. In 1932, he published an article, “How to Develop Humanistic Buddhism.” During the same period, in Singapore and Malaysia, Venerable Tzu Hang (慈航, 1893-1954) founded the *Humanistic Buddhism Magazine* to propagate the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism. Open-minded contemporaries such as Yang Renshan (楊仁山, 1837-1911) and Ouyang Jingwu (歐陽竟無, 1871-1943) co-founded Jinling Sutra Publishing House (金陵刻經處) in Nanjing to promote Chinese culture. Zhao Puchu (趙樸初, 1907-2000), then President of the Buddhist Association of China, was also an advocate of Humanistic Buddhism. All these forerunners believed that Humanistic Buddhism was the original intents of the Buddha. It includes the Buddhist teachings of “teaching, instructing, benefiting, and bringing joy” to both self and others, to become enlightened through concepts such as Dependent Origination, the Middle Path, the unity of all within the dharma realms, as well as oneness and coexistence. It also includes equality among all living beings to achieve world peace and happiness. Humanistic Buddhism has since been regarded as mainstream Buddhism for the modern age.

### **3) The Three Acts of Goodness and Four Givings as the Fundamental Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism**

As aforementioned, Humanistic Buddhism holds true to the Buddha's original intents. The Buddha was born in the human world, cultivated and attained enlightenment in the human world, and taught everything to human beings. If not Humanistic Buddhism, would it be better to call his teachings Rebirth Buddhism? Animal Buddhism? Hell Buddhism, Asura Buddhism, or even Hungry Ghost Buddhism?

The Buddha taught 'Buddhism' to human beings. That is why the discussion of Humanistic Buddhism should begin with his 'humanistic' qualities. The historical records of Buddhism clearly state that the Buddha was a human, not a god. He was a historical figure whose existence in this world can be proven. Instead of an imaginary deity such as Xuan Wu (玄武), the Eternal Mother (無生老母), or the Jade Emperor (玉皇大帝), the Buddha was an awakened sage.

He was not a divine being who came and went without a trace. Even if the deification of the Buddha were true, it is not consequent from people's pronounced admiration of him. Rather, it is the result of his arduous journey of spiritual cultivation. His thorough enlightenment of the human mind; the ways of human nature and character led to the attainment of his virtue, character, compassion, and wisdom. The teachings expounded by him such as Dependent Origination, Middle Path, Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, Three Dharma Seals, Four Noble Truths, Cause and Effect, karmic retribution, Five Precepts, Ten Wholesome Deeds, Six Paramitas, and the Four Means of Embracing are all supreme Truths that reveal the path to mental and physical well-being. They show the means by which we liberate ourselves from life's predicaments, and present solutions to life's problems such as birth and death, as well as everyday living.

Let us illustrate this in the instance of karmic retribution. Karma denotes deeds or actions. The fortunes and misfortunes that we experience all arise from our respective actions. Namely, it is our karma. Accordingly, when Buddhists pray to the Buddha, the wish to eradicate karma carries greater importance than the wish for good fortune. Provided that we practice the Three Acts of Goodness — do good deeds (virtue), speak good words (truthfulness), and think good thoughts (beauty), our minds will be filled with the power of integrity, and we shall inherently be relieved from adversity and calamity. We thereby accumulate merits whilst removing unwholesome karma. That is why practicing the Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings are fundamental.

The Four Givings symbolize the Four Immeasurable States of Mind. These are further detailed as: "Give others faith, give others joy, give others hope, and give others convenience." Being willing to give others faith, one will naturally speak comforting words. In the willingness to give others joy, one will innately see the good in others and praise them. Essentially, this is speaking good words, thus purifying one's verbal karma. Owing to the

willingness to give others hope, one will instinctively show care, concern, and encouragement. In essence, it is to think good thoughts — the purification of one's mental karma. Befitting the willingness to give others convenience, one will naturally offer a helping hand altruistically. This is to do good deeds, subsequently the purification of one's corporal karma. Thus, the Three Acts of Goodness and the Four Givings both embody the Four Immeasurable States of Mind cultivated by bodhisattvas. Collectively, these are the core concepts of Humanistic Buddhism.

Nonetheless, it is human nature to prefer gaining over giving due to our fear of loss and the disadvantages resulting from the acts of charity and virtuous deeds. For this reason, people regard virtuous deeds as difficult and fruitless practices. The truth is, the act of giving is like sowing seeds. How can one harvest without sowing? How can there be crops if seedlings were never cultivated? How can flowers and fruits grow if seeds were never planted? Within these notions of Cause and Effect, as well as karmic retribution, Buddhists stand resolute. As early as two-thousand years ago, Buddha was already propagating this universal truth of life to the world. This is Humanistic Buddhism.

Therefore, what Humanistic Buddhism advocates is neither blind faith nor unquestioning belief. Rather, Humanistic Buddhism aims to inspire wisdom and rationality. Those willing to accept and practice Humanistic Buddhism will be mindful to the wisdom of the Dharma, and its insights to the truths of life. By doing so, mental and physical well-being will not only be possible in our present life, but we will also free ourselves from the fear and sorrow caused by life and death. Ultimately, a consummate life will be attained.

Moreover, we will not be the sole beneficiaries of our faith. Our descendants and future generations shall inherit our faith in the Dharma. Fittingly, we shall convey to our descendants bountiful knowledge. They shall bathe in everlasting light. Their minds shall awaken to their intrinsic buddha-nature. They will grasp the Truth through the Three Dharma Seals. They shall strengthen their faith in the Four Noble Truths. With the Five Vehicles, all dharma realms shall be open to them. They shall contemplate the world of buddhas through the gate of the Six Paramitas. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment shall nurture their wisdom. By adhering to the Noble Eightfold Path, they shall further cultivate their practices.

In other words, Humanistic Buddhism will open our eyes to a faith that is real, virtuous, and has true potential. This faith will empower us to find peace and stability, relieve us from the constraints of daily worries, and allow us to clearly perceive all phenomenon through Dependent Origination and its emptiness. Understanding the true meaning of emptiness can awaken our buddha-nature, the True Thusness. Therefore, this world needs Humanistic Buddhism as it can help all living beings realize a happy and peaceful life. To encourage people in achieving these goals was the original intent of the Buddha.



Humanistic Buddhism is not exclusive to any individual. Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism that is essential to humanity. It carries the mission of guiding sentient beings to awake to the Buddha's insight, through expedient teachings, (*Lotus Sutra*). Accordingly, Humanistic Buddhism should focus on expounding the teachings that Buddha awakened to. For example, Dependent Origination, Cause and Effect, karmic retribution, impermanence, suffering, and emptiness are all essential teachings for this world.

Particularly, Humanistic Buddhism holds true to the Buddha's spirit and unique characteristics. It is humanistic, relevant, altruistic, joyful, universal, and timely. To elaborate on this, I often cite the essence of Humanistic Buddhism as "what the Buddha taught, what is essential to humans, what purifies, what is virtuous and beautiful." A clear comprehension of these principles is decidedly more vital than mere arguments over trivial matters such as regulations and rituals, which only prompt criticism, accusation, rejection, and even slander amongst Buddhists.

In 1963, when we traveled to Japan as the Chinese Buddhist delegation, Ishibashi Tanzan, President of Taisho University, said in his address to the delegation:

"Today, you represent Chinese Buddhists on this visit to Japan, yet inwardly you may not think much of Japanese Buddhism conceivably because contemporary Japanese monastics are married with children, which shapes a perception of negligence in regards to precepts in Japanese Buddhism. Perhaps you also dismiss Thai Buddhism, because they depend solely on the devotion and offerings of their followers, and seldom engage in doctrinal propagation or academic activities. Perchance, Thai Buddhists doubtlessly have reciprocal feelings about Chinese Buddhism. They feel that you have deviated far from the precepts established in the Buddha's time. You speak in the name of Mahayana Buddhism, yet you also lack thorough understanding of the Dharma. Even Japanese Buddhists may belittle Chinese Buddhism, because while Japanese Buddhism is divided by sects, they are undivided in thought. On the other hand, Chinese Buddhism is filled with divisions both of sects and thoughts, which is its weakness."

In this situation, the conference clearly exuded a sense of prejudice and repudiation. Deprived of trust, fellowship, and willingness to confer, how can Buddhists find common ground? For this reason, the study of Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes the recognition of humanistic characteristics, unity, cooperation, and consensus. Undoubtedly, this is a rather difficult endeavor.

Consequently, it is pointless to insist on rules and formalities. In its place, if teachings such as the Three Dharma Seals, Four Noble Truths, Six Paramitas, Noble Eightfold Path, Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, Cause and Effect, and karmic retribution are easy to understand, subsequent universal acceptance of Buddhism is feasible. Conversely, an

excessive emphasis on metaphysics and overly profound concepts not only results in antipathy towards Buddhism, but also its potential extinction.

Furthermore, differing cultural, linguistic, customs, environmental, and geographical backgrounds have given rise to varied lifestyles around the world. For instance, consider the Sangha community from the Buddha's era. Then, monastics exposed their right shoulder, fed on offerings of alms, and slept under trees. This is only feasible in the tropical weather of India. For monastics living in the snowy climate of Siberia or Harbin in North East China, a lifestyle analogous with alms begging and displaying one's shoulder would be unfeasible. Markedly, the Chinese see alms begging as the behavior of homeless beggars. Assuming this, is it still possible for today's bhiksus and bhiksunis to observe the Buddha's precept of alms begging?

Therefore, a reconsideration of Buddhist formalities is necessary. The core principles of faith should be prioritized to meet the mental, doctrinal, spiritual, and practical needs of the practitioner. For this very reason, it is evident that Humanistic Buddhism is ideal for the present-day mentality.

#### **4) Lifestyle and Ways of Cultivation in Humanistic Buddhism**

From as early as the ancient times, it is easy to discern the traits of Humanistic Buddhism within the teachings and practices of Chinese Buddhist masters. For example, Huineng (惠能, 638-713) the Sixth Patriarch stated, "Dharma can only be found in the world, and enlightenment cannot be attained away from it." Baizhang's (百丈, 749-814) insistence on "A day without work means a day without food" integrates Chan practices with agricultural life. Similar Chan monastery lifestyles were also established according to the Buddha's expectations for Sangha communities.

The different ways of life in China and India have made it impossible for Chinese monastics to follow the traditions of primitive Sangha communities. Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一, 709-788) thus established "monasteries," whilst Baizhang Huaihai introduced the pure regulations as adaptations to the Buddha's precepts. Monastery rules and pure regulations thus became a unique feature of Chinese Buddhism, and furthered the development of the Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism throughout the Sui and Tang dynasties.

Further on the subject of the Eight Schools of Chinese Buddhism, we have sects such as the Tiantai, Huayan, Three Treatises, or Yogacara Sects that emphasize doctrinal interpretations. On the other hand we also have sects such as the Pure Land, Chan, Vinaya, and Esoteric that stress actual practice. However, what they all have in common is the Dharma's relevance to daily life and ceaseless social participation. Many inspired faith in

people by benefiting society through charitable activities, while others taught and transformed people's minds by expounding the Dharma, attracting the interest of scholars and even royalty. This is similar to how the Buddha taught the Dharma to kings, royalty, and ministers. Thus one can clearly see their humanistic characteristics.

Humanistic Buddhism can be defined as “what the Buddha taught,” but also “what is essential to humans beings.” Both represent the essence of Humanistic Buddhism. In this world, people cannot survive without the protection of their country and the supporting conditions of society. From the moment one is born, they become dependent on a material life provided for by scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants. A human being also has the need for family, love, friendship, and kindness. In order to elevate one's character, a spiritual and aesthetics life is also necessary. Moreover, since the issues of life and death are inevitable, people seek faith. In light of this, I have proposed the following principles:

1. Glory goes to the Buddha
2. Success goes to the multitude
3. Benefit goes to society
4. Merit goes to devotees

Additionally, I have also proposed the following principal creeds of Humanistic Buddhism:

1. To honor one's family and country
2. To lead a moderate lifestyle
3. To value worldly interconnectedness
4. To maintain a peaceful and joyful mind

In my view, only Buddhism that is widely accepted can be called Humanistic Buddhism.

There is a Chinese proverb that says, “the same moon is now different in the presence of plum blossoms.” Our lives, as human beings, when guided by the Dharma, will become more diverse and meaningful.

The most renowned Buddhist text in China, the *Diamond Sutra*, begins with: “At one time, when came the time to eat, the World-Honored One donned his robe, carried his alms bowl, and entered Sravasti to beg for alms in an orderly manner. After returning to his place, having partaken of the food, he straightened his robe, put away his alms bowl, washed his feet, and sat down on his mat....”

Describing the seemingly ordinary occasion of eating breakfast, it embodies a considerably more profound meaning. This opening text reveals the ways of practice, compassion, and wisdom. All of these retained by an awakened one, abiding in the daily

routines of life while resolving to enlighten and deliver both self and others.

“When came the time to eat, the World-Honored one donned his robe, carried his alms bowl,” demonstrating his upholding of the precepts. In this part, the Buddha displayed the discipline of dressing properly, maintaining his demeanor, and begging in a peaceful and orderly manner. To “beg for alms in an orderly manner” symbolizes the spirit of patience, equality, and abiding in present conditions. It also shows equality in the treatment of nobility and the poor, as well as being satisfied with both delicate and coarse food. Moreover, whilst begging for alms, devotees offered food to monastics who in turn reciprocate by teaching the Dharma. This symbolizes the spirit of generosity as it recognizes the equality between the giving of Dharma and the giving of wealth. Lastly, to straighten his robe, wash his feet, wash his feet, put away his bowl, arrange his sitting mat, and to sit down in meditation to pacify his body and mind, serves to demonstrate the Paramita of Diligence.

In conditions where the quality of food and the social acceptance of Buddhism vary, the Paramita of Patience is essential. In order to perfect the practices of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, and meditative concentration, prajna wisdom plays a guiding role. Together, the Six Paramitas represent the daily life of a humanistic Buddhist.

The Buddha illuminated the world with the great light of prajna wisdom through the simple procedure of alms-begging. Light radiated from the Buddha's hands when he donned his robe and carried his bowl. Light exuded from the Buddha's feet when he walked into the city to beg for alms. Light emanated from the Buddha's eyes when he begged for alms in an orderly fashion. Light issued from the Buddha's mouth when he put away his robe and alms bowl after partaking of the alms. Having washed his feet and sat down, the Buddha's entire body shone with light.

In the simple matters of everyday life, the Buddha was able to thoroughly express the relevance of Buddhism and its humanistic spirit. He not only demonstrated the Six Paramitas, but also the profound meaning of Humanistic Buddhism. Therefore, instead of a cursory look at the Dharma, we need to gain deeper insight into the compassionate intentions and aspirations hidden behind the Buddha's every action. Only then can we truly comprehend the meaning of the Dharma.

## **5) Aspiring for the Bodhi Mind and Bodhisattva Path**

In the past, the spread of Buddhism mainly depended on devotees who, lacking self-confidence and faith, used Buddhism to grant their wishes, hopeful that the buddhas would make the sick healthy, resolve family quarrels, and make the poor rich.

While it is reasonable to rely on the Buddha's virtue to enhance our confidence and

personal growth, if we expect Buddha to fulfill our selfish desires, then we lose the true meaning of faith. Like children expecting their parents to fulfill their every need, the only thing that grows would be greed. On the contrary, faith should be balanced around sacrifice, service, and giving for the greater good.

Thus, Humanistic Buddhism holds true to the Buddha's spirit by advocating an altruistic faith. In one of the Buddha's previous lives, he fed his flesh to an eagle to protect a rabbit, and in another, fed himself to a tiger as a rabbit. Such acts of sacrifice and giving are truly the rarest, noblest, and most precious in the world. Therefore, in order to enhance the relevance of Buddhism, the concepts of Humanistic Buddhism must be established first. As said in the *Shorter Chinese Samyuktagama* (T02 No.100), "The Buddha, having aspired for great loving-kindness, benefits all worlds." With the teachings of Humanistic Buddhism, it is easier to actualize practices that praise virtue, beauty, harmony, and joy. It also inspires one to reach out and help others.

An exemplar practitioner of Humanistic Buddhism would be the layman in the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. Additionally, the Chapter on "A Parable" in the *Lotus Sutra*, and the concept of the "mutual-unobstructedness of all phenomena" in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* are all core concepts of Humanistic Buddhism.

Specifically, Humanistic Buddhism must embody the characteristics of altruism and universality. It is based on the Bodhi mind and the Bodhisattva path, namely, reaching upwards for Buddhahood while delivering sentient beings below. To aspire for the Bodhi mind is to practice the Buddha's teachings and to emulate his acts of sacrifice and giving.

The Nine-Colored Deer King who sacrificed his life for his kind, and the parrot who attempted to extinguish a forest fire with small mouthfuls of water are both examples of aspiring for the Bodhi mind. What matters is not whether the fire will be extinguished but the parrot's vow and Bodhi mind. The two combined, are the bodhisattva path, which is Humanistic Buddhism. Otherwise, one is nothing but a "barren seed." That is why it is said in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, "Any virtuous deed practiced in the absence of the Bodhi mind is destined to become the act of Mara."

The Bodhi mind symbolizes "this-worldly" spirit along with an "other-worldly" transcendental mind. Specifically, it means to remain in this world without becoming attached to it. Yue Fei (岳飛, 1103-1142) from the Song Dynasty once said, "A prosperous nation is only possible with honorable ministers and courageous generals." The same is true for Buddhism. A good future for Buddhism is only possible with the harmonization of "this-worldly" and "other-worldly" thoughts. In Humanistic Buddhism, the Bodhi mind serves as the basis of faith and spiritual cultivation.

Humanistic Buddhism prioritizes this-worldly issues over other-worldly transcendence, real life over birth and death, the greater good over the lesser good, and universal deliverance over individual liberation. There is no bodhisattva path without the Bodhi mind. Only those with the Bodhi mind are worthy propagators of Humanistic Buddhism.

Most Buddhists today wish to attain buddhahood. However, according to the sutras, it takes three great Asamkya Kalpas for one to attain buddhahood. The affirmation of faith alone takes one great Asamkya Kalpa. Would the attainment of buddhahood then not take forever? Therefore, the most significant undertaking for Buddhists is not chanting, praying, or prostrating to the Buddha. To practice the way of the Buddha's is to go through a thousand deaths and endless trials before finally attaining enlightenment and uniting with the Buddha's mind. Once enlightened, the fear of failure in said attainment is superfluous.

Humanistic Buddhism emphasizes actual practice of the Buddha's ways, which is to realize the bodhisattva path. Even though the ultimate goal of Buddhists is to attain buddhahood, the only way to reach it is through one's connection with sentient beings. The journey from being human to becoming buddha cannot be accomplished by shirking the bodhisattva path. Only through the Bodhi mind, and the Bodhisattva path, and awakening oneself and others, can buddhahood be possible.

The Bodhi mind is the main driving force behind buddhas and bodhisattvas in liberating sentient beings. For example, the Four Renowned Mountains in China embody the Four Great Bodhisattvas in Chinese Buddhism:

- 1) *Avalokitesvara* - great compassion in alleviating living beings from suffering
- 2) *Manjusri* - great prajna wisdom.
- 3) *Samantabhadra* - the exemplary practice of his vows.
- 4) *Ksitigarbha* - great altruism in entering hell to redeem all beings within.

The dispositions of these bodhisattvas are the only means by which Buddhism can gain universal recognition. If we neglect these unique characteristics of compassion, wisdom, vow, and practice, and rely only on prayer and devotion, Humanistic Buddhism can never have any effects.

In order to propagate Humanistic Buddhism through these attributes, I once penned an article, "From the Four Noble Truths to the Four Universal Vows" in an attempt to integrate the early Buddhist and Mahayana teachings. In order to resolve the most paramount problem in life—suffering— one must "vow to deliver the endless sentient beings." In order to liberate all beings from the karmic retributions of greed, anger, and ignorance— all causes of suffering, one must "vow to eradicate the endless vexations." In order to enable sentient beings to practice all Dharmas, one must "vow to learn the inexhaustible Dharma"— the path leading to

the end of suffering. Finally, the ultimate goal in our pursuit of the Buddhist faith is to guide all living beings towards ultimate liberation, therefore they must “vow to attain the supreme Buddhahood”—the end of suffering.

## 6) The Future and Development of Humanistic Buddhism

Master Taixu and Venerable Tzu Hang both emphasized the importance of education, culture, and charity in the future of Buddhism. I have likewise established four objectives for the future development of Humanistic Buddhism:

1. *To propagate Dharma through culture*
2. *To foster talents through education*
3. *To benefit society through charity*
4. *To purify human minds through spiritual cultivation*

In terms of culture, education, and charity, secular society has already been fostering talents and raising social awareness. However, their equivalents in Buddhism are even more excelled and transcending. The Buddhist philosophy of formlessness, selflessness, detachment, and desirelessness implies a world that is inexhaustible, everlasting, boundless, and infinite. It is also what makes Buddhist endeavors distinctive from secular undertakings.

That is why in Humanistic Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths are expanded into the Four Universal Vows and the Six Paramitas. These not only are ways of individual cultivation; but also paths of liberation. Thus it is Buddhism that places dual emphasis on understanding and practice, as well as harmony of past and present.

Another important question: Why did the practitioners of Mahayana Buddhism integrate the Four Universal Vows with Buddha's early teachings on the Four Noble Truths? In my opinion, Buddhism should not merely be theory; it should help to resolve life's problems. That is why the Dharma offers more than just insights into the truth of suffering, cause of suffering, end of suffering, and the path leading to the end of suffering. Vows, spiritual cultivation, and actual practice are also needed. Within the Four Noble Truths, to eradicate suffering and its causes, the practices of spiritual cultivation must be perfected. The Four Noble Truths and achieving them through the path of the Four Universal vows thus becomes the core concept of Humanistic Buddhism. Sustained by the power of the Four Universal Vows, we must reach out to sentient beings in need. This is how, in the future, Humanistic Buddhism will shine a ray of hope on the world and be recognized.

Notably, many scholars are inclined to compare different schools of Buddhism based on personal prejudices and opinions. Some compare Indian Buddhism with Chinese Buddhism; others early Buddhism with modern Buddhism. Some compare Buddhist texts and even

scholars in Buddhist studies, criticizing one another for a lack of insight or clarity in concepts. This only serves to incite division, which unquestionably is not the Buddha's original intent.

For committed Buddhists, this deeply tarnishes Buddhism. Has anyone ever compared and scrutinized the Bible or the Koran in a similar manner? Candidly, to treat the holy teachings with such insolence in the name of scholarly work causes nothing but harm to Buddhism. The singular purpose of Buddhism is to encourage faith and enlightenment; it is not something to be scrutinized or compared. The holy texts by which a religion abides should not be treated in this manner.

A professor from the China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Tian Qing once said, "Scholars who simply regard Buddhism as a study will never become enlightened. The attainment of buddhahood is only possible to those who abide by and practice the Buddha's teachings." This is indeed true! Any discussion of the Dharma without a sincere appreciation or actual practice is futile. While there is the need to discuss the formality of Buddhist practice as well as the core teachings, mere criticism and denigration should not be tolerated. A lack of respect, tolerance, and understanding, to simply criticize, prejudge, or impulsively render conclusions based upon prejudices are severe deviations from faith. Any provocation made will only hinder the development of Buddhism. It is truly regretful to see this happen.

The Dharma exists not just in writing but also within the mind, the whole universe, and as a part of our faith. Anyone who neglects to see the supreme Buddha and the purifying effects of the Dharma within the faith carries no legitimacy in criticizing or judging Buddhism.

Essentially, we propose that Humanistic Buddhism holds true to the Buddha's original intents, for the purpose of harmonizing and uniting all Buddhists across time, geographical, customs, and cultural differences. We nevertheless respect, accept and cooperate with those different from us.

For the same reason, we advocate that Humanistic Buddhism bears the utmost respect for human beings, as each individual has their own faith. Even if each faith differs in depth and form, there is no need for conformity. We must recognize that each of the seven or eight billion people on Earth has their own perspective and depth of faith. Technically, there are seven to eight billion singular faiths in the world.

For example, a believer of *Tudigong* (土地公, lit. Earth God) will espouse the *Tudigong* Faith. A worshipper of *Chenghuang* (城隍爺, lit. City God) will follow the faith of *Chenghuang*. Those who follow *Mazu* (媽祖) or Jesus will believe in *Mazu* or Jesus. Moreover, genuine religions are divided into different levels. It is similar to how schools are divided into different grades. The bodhisattva path itself is divided into fifty-one stages, and arhatship into four different types of attainments. The difference in levels is understandable,



while derision in the ultimate and supreme goal of a faith should not be tolerated.

Although the Buddha has declared that we are all the same in terms of buddha-nature, those people with different aptitudes and influences have categorized Buddhism into the Human Vehicle, Heavenly Vehicle, Sravaka Vehicle, Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and the Bodhisattva Vehicle. The first two represent this-worldly Buddhism. The third and fourth are other-worldly Buddhism. The final one, which harmonizes this-worldly and other-worldly Buddhism is the Mahayana Bodhisattva Path, which represents Humanistic Buddhism.

Therefore, those who lead secluded lives in austerity are also deemed practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism. Those with a passion for Dharma propagation are also considered teachers of Humanistic Buddhism. Those who practice the Five Precepts, Ten Wholesome Deeds, Six Paramitas, and the Four Ways of Embracing are all regarded as followers and practitioners of Humanistic Buddhism, providing that they embrace their faith and contribute to the betterment of society.

Humanistic Buddhism directly inherits all of the Buddha's teachings. The chapters that follow shall provide introductions to the Buddha's original teachings, his humanistic lifestyle, the spread and development of Buddhism, and how modern Buddhism holds true to the Buddha's original intents. It is our wish to offer a Dharma guide for daily living so that people will be able to journey through the stages of life—birth, schooling, adulthood, matrimony, career advancement, old age, sickness, and even death — all under the auspices of the Buddha's wisdom.

We hereby present an overview of the past, present, and future of Humanistic Buddhism through enhancing understanding of its core concepts, essence, historical development, and ways of propagation. All so that we may perceive the Buddha's original intents. Otherwise, would we not be looking at a Buddhism that is segregated and deviated towards beings in lower realms, heretics, and theocracy? We assert Humanistic Buddhism to be the Buddha's original intents in the fervent hope that Buddhists can unite in shared faith, mutual growth, and coexistence with the Buddha.

As we abide by Humanistic Buddhism, may we join our hands in propagating the teachings, restoring its ties to the Buddha's Dharma. May the Buddha's compassion and wisdom shine light onto the universe and this world with brightness and hope. For this, we hold true to the meaning and purpose of this book—*Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha*.