



正信
ZHENGXIN

VOICE OF ZHENGXIN

The official newsletter of Zhengxin Buddhist Association 正信佛友會刊物

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From the editor

Hi! How is life?

I can't remember when was the last time we spoke. This is especially so when none of the newsletter has been published on time as promised. Truly, I do not know why? I have lost my enthusiasm? I have changed? Or perhaps it is just the effect of me changing my expectation? You see, the higher your expectation is, the deeper is your disappointment.

Many events took place in the last few months. Among them, as far as ZX was concerned, the grandest was ZX Bodhi Night. Well, as one of the members involved, perhaps I should not sing praise here, but I think the organizing committee deserved it. These were some of the comments I gathered:

- * Endless Light: Ok
- * Speech: Fine
- * Food: Good
- * Program: Very Good

To me, it was a success. A success that was, to quote the president's words, "Together we made it happened". Perhaps, there is this question lingering in our mind, "When is the next one?" The answer, I'm afraid, has to be answered by the next exco.

Then, it was the demise of Chief Reverence of Maha Vihara. It is a painful loss to all Buddhists. Hopefully, his spirit will forever live in each and everyone mind. Goodbye, Chief Reverence. May we meet again to continue our affinity.

Next Theme

Let's share your views on 'self-benefiting and benefiting others'.

During one Wednesday discussion, WK raised this question, "Is there a balance?" "I have seen people of both extremes. They all had a miserable end".

What do you think? Can't we practise one of them only? You do not have to take the middle route, a compromise. You can always take side. Remember: You and I are just ordinary people trying our best to practise the teaching of Buddha. How do we see things may not necessary right. Neither is it necessary wrong. What is important is to learn from mistake.

So I look forward to your contribution. I know our economy is shrinking, but I also know that your understanding of Buddha dharma have got nothing to do with it.

(dateline: 13.11.06)

Till then, hopefully my partner will be the one to ink this page on the next issue. Why? I have run out of idea or issue to write and to share. Old brain does not have much juice!

** 'Spiritual disease' refers to the subtle aspects of the mind that are ill through the power of defilement. Everyone has spiritual disease, whereas physical and mental diseases only occur in some people at some times. (Heart-Wood from the Bo Tree, by Ven. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu)

Announcement

Monthly Prostration and Meditation Session

Date: 1st Sunday of the month (starts 1.10.06)

Time: 0900-1000

Venue: ZX center

Enquiry: WK (012-2074213)

(Editor: Sometimes we need to be pushed when our own willpower aren't strong enough. Practise in group serves this purpose, besides the benefit of sharing experience)

Translation of Miao Yun

Please be reminded that Miao Yun Translation, Part 11, is due at the end of this month. Kindly contact the coordinator, Eric Keng, should you think you have problem in meeting this dateline.

New Appointment

Papa and Mama

We are please to announce our latest appointment for the post of papa and mama. Somehow they are not contented to live life as a husband and a wife, so naturally they decided to give themselves a promotion – to become husband cum papa and wife cum mama.

Congratulation! We now pronounce you, Wai Loon and Penny, as papa and mama. Welcome to you too, the latest addition to this world and ZX.

For more information as to the sex, weight, etc of their baby; please do not contact the editor. Please call 013-3918616 (24 hours)

(Editor: Do we get to eat **vegetarian** red eggs and nasi kunyit?)

Right Practice – Steady Practice (Con't)

Two or three times and it's still not finished, so they just give up, pack it in and sit there hating themselves. "I'm so stupid, I'm so hopeless!" They sit and hate themselves, feeling like a hopeless case. This just gives rise to frustration and hindrances. This is called the hindrance of ill-will. They can't blame others so they blame themselves. And why is this? It's all because of **wanting**.

Actually it isn't necessary to go through all that. To concentrate means to concentrate with detachment, not to concentrate yourself into knots.

But maybe we read the scriptures, about the life of the Buddha, how he sat under the Bodhi tree and determined to himself, "As long as I have still not attained supreme enlightenment I will not rise from this place, even if my blood dries up".

Reading this in books you may think of trying it yourself. You'll do it like the Buddha. But you haven't considered that your car is only a small one. The Buddha's car was a really big one, he could take it all in one go. With only your tiny, little car, how can you possibly take it all at once? It's a different story altogether.

Why do we think like that? Because we're too extreme. Sometimes we go too slow, sometimes we go too high. The point of balance is hard to find.

Now I'm only speaking from experience. In the past my practice was like this. Practising in order to get beyond wanting... if we don't want, can we

practise? I was stuck here. But to practise with wanting is suffering. I didn't know what to do, I was baffled. Then I realized that the practice which is steady is the important thing. One must practise consistently. They call this the practice that is 'consistent in all postures'. Keep refining the practice, don't let it become a disaster. Practice is one thing, disaster is another. Most people usually create disaster. When they feel lazy they don't bother to practise, they only practise when they feel energetic. This is how I tended to be.

All of you ask yourselves now, is this right? To practise when you feel like it, not when you don't: is that in accordance with the Dhamma? Is it straight? Is it in line with the Teaching? This is what makes practice inconsistent.

Whether you feel like it or not you should practise just the same: this is how the Buddha taught. Most people wait till they're in the mood before practising, when they don't feel like it they don't bother. This is as far as they go. This is called 'disaster', it's not practice. In the true practice, whether you are happy or depressed you practise; whether it's easy or difficult you practise; whether it's hot or cold you practise. It's straight like this. In the real practice, whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining you must have the intention to continue the practice steadily, making your sati consistent in all postures.

At first though it seems as if you should stand for as long as you walk, walk for as long as you sit, sit for as long as you lie down ... I've tried it but I couldn't do it. If a meditator were to make his standing, walking, sitting and lying

down all equal, how many days could he keep it up? Stand for five minutes, sit for five minutes, lie down for five minutes ... I couldn't do it for very long. So I sat down and thought about it some more. "What does it all mean? People in this world can't practise like this!"

Then I realized ... "Oh, that's not right, it can't be right because it's impossible to do. Standing, walking, sitting, reclining ... make them all consistent. To make the postures consistent the way they explain it in the books is impossible."

But it is possible to do this: The mind ... just consider the mind. To have sati, recollection, sampajanna, self awareness and panna, all-round wisdom ... this you can do. This is something that's really worth practising. This means that while standing we have sati, while walking we have sati, while sitting we have sati, and while reclining we have sati – consistently. This is possible. We put awareness into our standing, walking, sitting, lying down – into all postures.

When the mind has been trained like this it will constantly recollect **Buddho, Buddho, Buddho** ... which is **knowing**. Knowing what? Knowing what is right and what is wrong at all times. Yes, this is possible. This is getting down to real practice. That is, whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down there is continuous sati.

Then you should understand those conditions which should be given up and those which should be cultivated. You know happiness and unhappiness. When you know happiness and unhappiness your mind will settle at the point which is free of happiness and unhappiness.

Happiness is the loose path, kamasukhallikanuyogo. Unhappiness is the right path, attakilamathanuyogo. If we know these two extremes, we pull it back. We know when the mind is inclining towards happiness or unhappiness and we pull it back, we don't allow it to lean over. We have this sort of awareness, we adhere to the awareness, not allow the mind to follow its inclinations.

But in your practice it doesn't tend to be like that, does it? You follow your inclinations. If you follow your inclinations it's easy, isn't it? But this is the ease which causes suffering, like someone who can't be bothered working. He takes it easy, but when the time comes to eat and he hasn't got anything. This is how it goes.

So I've contended with many aspects of the Buddha's teaching in the past, but I couldn't really beat him. Nowadays I accept it. I accept that many teachings of the Buddha are straight down the line, so I've taken those teachings and used them to train both myself and others.

The practice which is important is patipada. What is patipada? It is simply all our various activities, standing, walking, sitting, reclining and everything else. This is the patipada of the body. Now the patipada of the mind: how many times in the course of today have you felt low? How many times have you felt high? Have there been any noticeable feelings? We must know ourselves like this. Having seen those feelings can we let go? Whatever we can't yet let go of we must work with. When we see that we can't yet let go of some particular feeling we must take it and examine it with wisdom. Reason it

out. Work with it. This is practice. For example when you are feeling zealous, practise, and then when you feel lazy, try to continue the practice. If you can't continue at "full speed" then at least do half as much. Don't just waste the day away by being lazy and not practising. Doing that will lead to disaster, it's not the way of a cultivator.

Now I've heard some people say, "Oh, this year I was really in a bad way" "How come?"

"I was sick all year. I couldn't practise at all"

Oh! If they don't practise when death is near when will they ever practise? If they're feeling well do you think they'll practise? No, they only get lost in happiness. If they're suffering they still don't practise, they get lost in that. I don't know when people think they're going to practise! They can only see that they're sick, in pain, almost dead from fever... that's right, bring it on heavy, that's where the practice is. When people are feeling happy it just goes to their heads and they get vain and conceited.

We must cultivate our practice. What this mean is that whether you are happy or unhappy you must practise just the same. If you are feeling well you should practise, and if you are feeling sick you should also practise. Those who think, "This year I couldn't practise at all, I was sick the whole time"... if these people are feeling well, they just walk around singing songs. This is wrong thinking, not right thinking. This is why the cultivators of the past have all maintained the steady training of the heart. If things are to go wrong, just let them be with the body, not in mind.

There was a time in my practice, after I had been practising about five years, when I felt that living with others was a hindrance. I would sit in my kuti and try to mediate and people would keep coming by for a chat and disturbing me. I ran off to live by myself. I thought I couldn't practise with those people bothering me. I was fed up, so I went to live in a small, deserted monastery in the forest, near a small village. I stayed there alone, speaking to no-one – because there was nobody else to speak to.

After I'd been there about fifteen days the thought arose, "Hmm. It would be good to have a novice pr pakow here with me. He could help me out with some small jobs" I knew it would come up, and sure enough, there it was!

"Hey! You're a real teacher! You say you're fed up with your friends, fed up with your fellow monks and novices, and now you want a novice. What's this?"

"No", it says, "I want a good novice"

"There! Where are all good people, can you find any? Where are you going to find a good person? In the whole monastery there were only no-good people. You must have been the only good person, to have run away like this!"

... You have to follow it up like this, follow up the tracks of your thoughts until you see ...

"Hmm. This is the important one. Where is there a good person to be found? There aren't any good people, you must find the good person within yourself"

These days I still teach my disciples like this. You won't find goodness anywhere else, you must look within yourself. If

you are good in yourself then wherever you go will be good. Whether others criticize or praise you, you are still good. If you aren't good, then when others criticize you, you get angry, and when they praise you, you get pleased.

At that time, I reflected on this and have found it to be true from that day up until the present. Goodness must be found within. As soon as I saw this, that feeling of wanting to run away disappeared. In later times, whenever I had that desire arise I let it go. Whenever it arose I was aware of it and kept my awareness on that. Thus I had a solid foundation. Wherever I lived, whether people condemned me or whatever they would say, I would reflect that the point is not whether they were good or bad. Good or evil must be seen within ourselves. However other people are, that's their concern.

Don't go thinking, "Oh, today is not hot, or, "today is too cold", or, "Today is ...". Whatever the day is like that's just the way it is. Really you are simply blaming the weather for your own laziness. We must see the Dhamma within ourselves, then there is a surer kind of peace.

So for all of you who have come to practise here, even though it's for a few days, still many things will arise. Many things may be arising which you're not even aware of. There is some right thinking, some wrong thinking ... many, many things. So I say this practice is difficult.

Even though some of you may experience some peace when you sit in meditation, don't be in a hurry to congratulate yourselves. Likewise, if there is some confusion, don't blame

yourselves. If things seem to be good, don't delight in them, and if they aren't good don't be averse to them. Just look at it all, look at what you have. Just look, don't bother judging. If it's good don't hold fast to it; if it's bad, don't cling to it. Good and bad can both bite, so don't hold fast to them.

The practice is simply to sit, sit and watch it all. Good moods and bad moods come and go as is their nature. Don't only praise your mind or only condemn it, know the right time for these things. When it's time for congratulations then congratulate it, but just a little, don't overdo it. Just like teaching a child, sometimes you may have to spank it a little. In our practice sometimes we may have to punish ourselves, but don't punish yourself all the time. If you punish yourself all the time in a while you'll just give up the practice. But when you can't just give yourself a good time and take it easy either. That's not the way to practise. We practise according to the Middle Way. What is the Middle Way? This Middle Way is difficult to follow, you can't rely on your moods and desires.

Don't think that only sitting with the eyes closed is practice. If you do think this way then quickly change your thinking! Steady practice is having the attitude of practice while standing, walking, sitting and lying down. When coming out of sitting meditation don't think that you're coming out of meditation, reflect that you're simply changing postures. If you reflect in this way you will have peace. Wherever you are you will have this attitude of practice with you constantly, you will have a steady awareness within yourself.

(To continue)

“Life is a Spiritual Journey”

by Sayadaw U Jotika

Life is a series of tests. Difficulties are tests. We are in school now. Our whole life is a school. From the time we were born until we die, we are in school. This is an informal school. There is no classroom. Everything we see, everything we hear, everything we smell, everything we feel, all happiness and all suffering, every problem, every achievement, every success and every failure is a lesson. When we have success, this is a test. It is testing how humble we can be when we are successful. Most of us become very proud and conceited: “Oh! I am a success. Other people are failures.” So we don’t treat people with respect anymore. We become conceited and arrogant. In the same way failure is a test. How equanimous can you be? How can you keep your balance and not feel depressed, inferior, or unhappy about not succeeding. Also it is a test to find out whether you will try again.

You fail, you try again.
You have another failure and
try again.
So it is a test to see whether
you have the kind
of maturity, courage and
trust in yourself and
trust in life,
to see whether
you will try again and again.
We need to trust ourselves
and trust in life.

Most people don’t have trust in life. They don’t have trust in themselves either. This is something to think deeply about. When you face difficult situations, often you will think: Oh! How unfortunate I am. What have I done to deserve this difficulty, this pain?” You complain about your kamma, your parents, your husband or wife, or your government. You complain louder and longer. The more you complain the more it shows that you are failing the test. This is a test of your maturity, your endurance, your equanimity and wisdom. Whenever you face a difficult situation, remind yourself: “This is a test. This is a challenge. I must learn something from these experiences and become more mature.”

Life is a series of tests,
But you will know when you pass your tests;
You will be able to look back on them
As good experiences!

Problems have their purpose. It’s a lesson we need to learn in order to grow up. Yes, they have a wonderful purpose. Some people wish for a life of not problems. But I would never wish for such a life for any of you. What I wish for your is the great inner strength to solve your problems meaningfully and grow.

The purpose of our life is to mature, to solve our problems meaningfully, mindfully. Wisdom comes and mindfulness comes. You need to be mindful and you need to develop wisdom. You need to be always ready, prepared and alert and do not react automatically. When we react automatically, we are not solving our problems meaningfully because automatic reaction happens unconsciously and usually there is no wisdom. Automatic reactions are usually unskillful. Whenever we are face with a problem, we need to remind ourselves: “Be mindful, be mindful.” Take your time. Calm down and don’t take it personally. Don’t react to it from your personal feelings. Look at it from a higher perspective.

Bhavatu Sabba Mangalam ~ May All Blessings Be Upon You!