

Bathing the Buddha and Purifying the Mind

By Venerable Xin-xing

The Buddha is the bringer of light to all beings. The suttas say that on the occasion of all the major events in the Buddha's life, there appeared a surpassing light radiating all over the world, which even beings living in the darkest part of the world could witness. This light is said to have been so brilliant and

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so wonderful that in comparison the sun and the moon lost their splendor. The Buddha brings light to beings and dispels the eternal darkness of the world with this brilliant, marvelous, radiant light.

We may wonder: when the sun and the moon shine day and night in the world, why is it said that beings are living in darkness? This darkness is not the darkness that comes from the absence of the sun or moon or some other illuminating object. Rather, beings are said to be living in darkness because greed, hatred, and delusion cover the basic luminous nature of the mind. On Vesak day we bathe an image of the Buddha. This ceremony symbolizes the purification of the mind, cleansing the mind of greed, hatred, and delusion. However, it is not merely through this ceremony that beings are purified. Rather, it is through practice in accordance with the Dharma that beings are purified. How does one

practice so that one purifies the mind?

The opening verse of the *Dhammapada* says that the mind is the forerunner of all activities. When the mind is tainted, suffering will follow one just as the wheel of a cart follows the foot-step of the ox which pulls the cart. Likewise, when the mind is pure, then happiness will follow one just as one's shadow follows one without departing.

Just before the Buddha passed away, he told his disciples: "Formations are bound to vanish. Strive to attain the goal by *appamada*" (SN 6:15) The Pali word *appamada* is usually translated as "earnestness" or "diligence," which conveys the idea of sustained, determined effort. However, the Buddha himself, on another occasion, expressed the nuance of *appamada* as carefully guarding the mind against defiling mental states, while at the same time strengthening it in terms of the five faculties: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (SN 48:56). This passage points out that *appamada* is not simply holding onto the practice untiringly and diligently. Rather, *appamada* means the purification of the mind by developing the five faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The task of purification of the mind begins with faith. Faith is not blind belief. Rather, it is the trust or confidence that arises by applying the knowing and seeing nature of the faculty of wisdom. Knowing and seeing that the mind, if connected with the three roots of the unwholesome – greed, hatred, and delusion – will bring affliction to oneself, to others, and to both oneself and others. On the contrary, the mind connected with the three roots of the wholesome will bring happiness to oneself, to others, and to both oneself and others. When one has this firm confidence, one mindfully guards one's mind against greed, hatred, and delusion.

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Bathing the Buddha (*continued from page 1*)

There are three steps in the purification of the mind. First, one knows the mind; second, one shapes the mind; and third, one frees the mind. The mind is invisible. How does one know it? One knows the mind in these three periods of time: before one is going to do an action, while one is doing an action, and after one has done an action. One reflects on the mind in these three periods of time to see whether it is wholesome or unwholesome. Then one shapes the mind. If the mind is connected with any one of the three unwholesome

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roots, one has to stop doing the action by abandoning the unwholesome root. If the mind is connected with any one of the three wholesome roots, one may do the action.

The *Dhammapada* sums up the practice of the Buddha's teaching in three simple guidelines for training: to abstain from all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one's mind. However, one might think that this teaching on purifying the mind is shallow and not profound. The difficult part of this practice is not so much that one has to understand a deep teaching but that one has to train a mind tainted with a cunning and deceitful tendency. When others see through our mind's crooked character, we feel embarrassed. To avoid such embarrassment, the tainted mind may fabricate all kinds of excuses, telling itself that a

certain unwholesome action is a necessary evil. Rationalized in this way, the mind wishing to deceive others feels it is righteous in acting upon the unwholesome intention.

Yet, the point is that while others may be deceived, we should know the mind as it is by mindfulness. In this way, the cunning and deceitful tendency will be restrained. Some people know that the mind is tainted and the action is motivated by the tainted mind; yet the craving tendency will urge them to cover it up, to hide the tainted mind so it cannot be known by others. Therefore, the defilements are suppressed and pushed deep down to the bottom of the mind. However, the point of departure in mental purification lies in knowing the mind as it is. If one day, when we believe in the excuses that the mind invents, it will take a long time to disentangle the fabrication, to straighten out the crooked inclination of the mind, to unveil its true illuminating nature. It is by the piercing nature of mindfulness that one knows the deeply suppressed and distorted mind as it is. Just as it is only when he knows that he is sick that a sick person will visit a doctor and take medicine, so it is when one knows that one's mind is defiled that one will purify and shape one's own mind.

The third step in purification of the mind is to free the mind. One guards one's five senses, so that the mind does not cling to sense objects. One applies wise attention, so that the mind does not attend to sense objects by way of the four distortions of perception. One does not hold that in the impermanent there is permanence; that in suffering there is happiness; that in what is non-self there is self; that in the foul there is beauty. In this way, one guards the mind from delusion by preventing its condition and cause from arising.

The mind is the lord of the five sense faculties: "These five faculties have different domains, different resorts, not experiencing each other's resort and domain — they take recourse in the mind, and the mind experiences their resort and domain.... The mind takes recourse in mindfulness. Mindfulness takes recourse in liberation. Liberation takes recourse in Nibbana" (SN 48:42).

Many people ask why Buddhism lays so much emphasis on curing the dark side of the mind. It sometimes makes one feel that the positive side is left uncultivated. The reason is that one must begin the practice by first clearing away the evil forces, just as one clears away the troublesome weeds from a garden before one plants the pretty flowers. Even so, as one practices morality to purify both one's bodily activities and speech, one also practices concentration to purify one's thoughts. While the bodily, verbal, and mental activities are being purified, do not think that the defilements are completely eradicated from the mind. There is one other level of defilement that one has to purify, namely, the underlying tendencies of the defilements. It is with

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the practice of wisdom that one roots out all the underlying tendencies. In this way, the defilements will never arise again and the mind is completely purified.

When the mind is pure, one will be the master of one's mind and one can then use the mind as a useful tool according to one's needs and to benefit others. Just as gold, when freed from the entrapping stone in the goldmine and refined by a goldsmith, can be used for all kinds of ornaments or useful vessels, so the refined mind will be malleable enough to practice deeds motivated by such positive virtues such as loving-kindness and compassion. ☩

(Text of a talk given at Bodhi Monastery on Vesak, May 27th, 2006.)

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER NEWS BRIEFS

Upcoming Programs:

Fall Session of Sutta Study Course with Bhante Begins September 5th — Newcomers Welcome

Course: Study of The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikaya)

Teacher: Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

Fall Session: Sep. 5th until late December

Time: Tuesdays, 7:00 to 8:15 pm

Cost: The purchase of the book, *The Middle Length Discourses*, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi.

The Majjhima Nikaya, or "Middle-length Discourses" of the Buddha, is the second of the five nikayas, or collections, in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Tipitaka. This nikaya consists of 152 discourses by the Buddha and his chief disciples, which together constitute a comprehensive body of teaching concerning all aspects of the Buddha Dharma.

This is a class for practitioners who want to advance in their study of the Buddha's teaching. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi gives a lecture at each class followed by a brief question and answer period. The group has met on Tuesday evenings

since January 2003. On September 5th, 2006, we will be starting a new subsection "Penetrative Insight" within the "Cultivation of Wisdom" section from the course syllabus. The first lecture will be on the Chachaka Sutta (MN 148).

We welcome all newcomers to attend a class or two to see if it is right for you. You can also access the archived classes as MP3 files on our website, www.bodhimonastery.net, to get a sense of the study that we are undertaking. You do not need to purchase the book immediately if you are a newcomer; we can provide you with a photocopy of the sutta we are studying.

Weekend Silent Meditation Retreat October 27th-29th

Registration: Friday, Oct. 27th, 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Program: Begins Sat., Oct 28th, 8:30 am and ends Sun. Oct. 29th at 5:30 pm

Dana: There is no fee, but donations to support the Sangha are appreciated.

The retreat will be led by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi assisted by other members of the Bodhi Monastery Sangha. All retreatants must arrive on Friday evening, October 27th and attend the entire retreat from start to finish. The main subject of practice will be mindfulness of breathing with sessions of

meditation on loving-kindness. There will be periods of sitting meditation alternating with walking meditation, as well as guided instruction throughout the day. There will be an evening Dharma talk. We will offer optional yoga during breaks as well.

More details and registration information will be provided in mid-September by e-mail and on our website.

We also hope that some people will offer to help do tasks to support this meditation retreat. The required tasks will be posted in a future e-mail. Please consider "taking your turn" and helping in some way with this retreat so that we can keep the Bodhi Monastery meditation program going.

Introductory Course to Buddhism and Meditation Sep. 9th-Oct. 14th

We will be conducting a six-week course entitled "An Introduction to Buddhism and Meditation," on six consecutive Saturday mornings, September 9th through October 14th, from 9:00 – 11:00 am. This course is designed for those relatively unfamiliar with Buddhism who wish to know more about it. Phone 973.940.0473 or e-mail contactus@bodhimonastery.net

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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER NEWS BRIEFS (*continued from page 3*)

Special Events:

Shifu to Lecture at CUNY in NYC – September 14th

Ven. Jen-chun will be lecturing on "The Path to Being a Bodhisattva" at CUNY Graduate Center in mid-Manhattan on September 14th from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. The lecture will be given in Mandarin and translated into English. Admission is free. Address: Elabash Recital Hall, CUNY Graduate Center, 365 5th Avenue (corner of 34th Street), New York, NY.

Great Compassion Meditation to Support the People of Darfur – September 16th

On Saturday September 16th, we will hold a special meditation on great compassion to express our solidarity with the people of Darfur, in Sudan, who have been the victims of a near-genocidal campaign for the past three years. The 30-minute guided meditation, led by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi, will take place from 12:45 to 1:15 pm. Details will follow in a separate email posting. After the meditation, Ven. Jen-chun will give a Dharma talk from 1:30 to 2:30 pm."

Saturday Dharma:

Morning Study Groups

Saturdays, 9:50 - 10:40 am

English Group: Ven. Xin-xing and Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi are facilitating a discussion of the *Dhammapada*, widely considered the most succinct expression of the Buddha's teaching found in the Pali Canon.

Chinese Group: Shifu continues with the study of the history of Indian Buddhism, based on Master Yin-shun's work, *Yindu Fojiao Sixiangshi*.

Afternoon Dharma Talks

Saturdays, 12:40-1:30 pm

On alternate Saturday afternoons, Bhante continues his Dharma talks based on the *Sutta-nipata*, while Ven. Xin-xing lectures on topics taken from Ven. Yin-shun's *The Way to Buddhahood*.

Saturdays, 1:45-2:30 pm

Ven. Jen-chun gives Dharma talks in Chinese, with English translation by Ven. Xin-xing.

Bodhi Youth Program

Saturdays, September 23rd and October 21st, 9:50 - 11:00 am

This class for kids ages 9 - 13 years old is taught by William Bertolotti. For more information you can contact William at 516.314.0306 or by email, williambertolotti@yahoo.com.

Reviews:

Summer 2006 Dharma Retreat

This summer, the annual Dharma Retreat sponsored by the Yin Shun Foundation was held at Bodhi Monastery from July 1st through the 7th. The Chinese program ran the entire week, while the English program ran through July 4th. Well over 40 students participated in the English Program, and about 60 students in the Chinese program. Special thanks are due to the teachers (five of whom came even from as far as Taiwan), to Retreat Chairman Ray Chuang, to Huey-ling Wu for managing the kitchen so well, and to all the volunteers whose dedicated efforts made the retreat a big success.

Ullambana Program

The Sangha is grateful for the bountiful offerings and the respectful attendance of many practitioners at our first Ullambana Program on August 12th. This celebration emphasized respect, gratitude, and love for parents.

In Appreciation:

Thank you to Ven. Jian-dao and Ven. Jian-xun

Ven. Jian-dao and Ven. Jian-xun, two bhikkhus from Xiang Guang Si Monastery in Taiwan, who were temporarily residing at Bodhi Monastery since June 2005, have relocated to the U.S. Zen Institute in Germantown, Maryland. Their main purpose in coming to Bodhi Monastery was to study Pali and Early Buddhism, but while here they also helped with the general activities and taught some classes. We greatly appreciated their efforts and wish them all the best.

Thank you to Ven. Dhammadipa

Ven. Dhammadipa (Xing-kong), while visiting Bodhi Monastery for just under a week in early August, gave Dharma talks on the subjects of wisdom and the divine abodes (brahma viharas). We appreciated his clear and deep understanding of these subjects.

SEP/OCT DHARMA SCHEDULE

Saturdays:

9:50 - 10:40 am	Study Groups (English and Chinese)
10:50 - 11:10 pm	Devotional Service
11:15 - 12:15 pm	Lunch and cleanup
12:40 - 1:30 pm	Dharma Talk (English)
1:45 - 2:30 pm	Dharma Talk (Chinese with English translation)

Sundays:

9:30 - 10:45 am Meditation Group

First Sunday of each month:

9:00 - 9:30 am Beginners
instruction
in meditation

Tuesdays:

7:00 - 8:15 pm Sutta Study Class

Daily:

4:30 - 5:00 pm Chanting Liturgy
5:05 - 6:00 pm Sitting meditation