



# The Fundamentals of Humanistic Buddhism

Buddhism in Every Step (A1)  
(英文版)

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# The Fundamentals of Humanistic Buddhism

The founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni Buddha, was born into this world. He cultivated himself in this world, attained enlightenment in this world, and shared with others the deep truths he realized in this world. The human world was emphasized in everything he did.

Why did the Buddha attain enlightenment as a human being and not as a heavenly being, an *asura*,<sup>1</sup> an animal, a ghost, or in hell? Taking this question one step further, why did the Buddha not attain enlightenment in the distant future or the forgotten past? Why did he choose our world and our time? There

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<sup>1</sup> Asuras are beings who practiced the ten wholesome actions in their previous lives but cannot yet be reborn in the heavenly realm because of their hatred, arrogance, and suspiciousness.

can only be one reason: the Buddha wanted the teachings of Buddhism to be relevant to the human world.

The Buddha's life as a human being can serve as an inspiration and as a model for spiritual practice in our own lives. Therefore, the teachings of the Buddha are called "Humanistic Buddhism" to emphasize that they can be integrated into all aspects of our daily lives.

Humanistic Buddhism has six fundamental characteristics:

### **1. Humanity**

The Buddha did not come into this world or go without leaving a trace, nor was he some sort of illusion. The Buddha was a living human being. Just like the rest of us, he had parents, a family, and he lived a life. It was through this human life that he showed his great loving-kindness and compassion, his moral character, and his wisdom.

### **2. Emphasis on Daily Life**

The Buddha's teachings provide guidance on everything, from how to eat, dress, work, and live, to how to walk, stand, sit, and sleep. He also gave clear directions on other aspects of life, such as how to maintain our relationships with family and friends and how we should conduct ourselves in the social and political arenas.

### **3. Altruism**

The Buddha was born into this world to teach, to provide an example, and to bring joy to all beings. He nurtured all beings, for he always had the best interests of others in his mind. In short, his every thought, word, and action arose from a deep care and concern for others.

### **4. Joyfulness**

The Buddha's teachings give people joy. Through the limitless compassion of his heart, the Buddha aimed to relieve the suffering of all beings so that they could be happy.

### **5. Timeliness**

The Buddha arose in this world for one great matter: to build a special relationship with all of us who live in this world. Although the Buddha lived some 2,500 years ago and has already entered final *nirvana*, he left the seed of liberation for all subsequent generations. Even today, the Buddha's ideals and teachings serve as timely, relevant guides for us all.

### **6. Universality**

The entire life of the Buddha can be characterized by the Buddha's spirit of wanting to liberate all beings, without exclusion. The Buddha loved beings of all forms, whether they were animals or humans, male

or female, young or old, Buddhist or not Buddhist; he cared for all without distinction.

For some, it is difficult to see how Buddhism is relevant to our modern lives. I can still recall a debate I once heard between the Confucian philosopher Liang Shuming and the great Buddhist reformer Master Taixu. Master Taixu had invited Liang Shuming to lecture at Hanzang Buddhist Seminary, and he began his lecture by writing three words on the blackboard: “now,” “here,” and “us.” Mr. Liang explained, “It is because of these three words that I gave up Buddhism and decided to study Confucianism.”

After the lecture, Master Taixu offered his insight. Though Buddhism talks about the ancient past and distant future, it particularly emphasizes the universal welfare of beings in the present moment. While Buddhist cosmology discusses countless other worlds, it is *this* world which is most important. Buddhism acknowledges many kinds of beings within the ten dharma realms, but it reserves the most attention for the human condition.

Buddhism is a religion for people, and human concerns are at its root. Throughout the Buddhist sutras, the Buddha emphasized that he, too, was part of the sangha, the monastic order, to emphasize that he was not a god. *The Vimalakirti Sutra* states: “The Buddha realm is found among sentient beings. Apart from sentient beings, there is no Buddha. Apart from

the assembly, one cannot find the Way.”<sup>2</sup> Venerable Huineng, the sixth patriarch of the Chan School, said, “The Dharma is within the world. Apart from this world, there is no awakening. Seeking awakening apart from the world is like looking for a rabbit’s horn.” To become Buddhas, we must train and cultivate ourselves in the world. There is simply no other way. Now that we have been fortunate enough to be reborn as human beings, we should integrate our practice of Buddhism into our daily lives.

In Buddhism, human life is seen as a precious, rare thing that we should not take for granted. In fact, *The Connected Discourses* draws the following analogy: imagine there is a blind sea turtle in a vast ocean. Floating on top of the vast ocean is a wooden ring, just big enough for the tortoise to fit his head. If the turtle only comes up for air once every one hundred years, the likelihood that he will poke his head through the hole is greater than the chance of being reborn as a human being. *The Agama Sutras* also say, “The number of beings who lose their human birth are as numerous as the particles of dust on the earth. The comparative number of those who are able to gain a human birth are as scarce as the dirt under a fingernail.” This shows how rare and precious human life is.

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2 The Way refers to the path leading to liberation taught by the Buddha.

Once, I was attending a Buddhist study group at the home of a devotee in San Francisco. A teacher in the group said to me, “When you ask us lay Buddhists to work toward freeing ourselves from the wheel of rebirth, we have no such desire. When you teach us the path to Buddhahood, we have no such aspiration. Both of these are too remote and distant. We just want to know: how do we live our lives a little better than others, a bit more cultivated than others?”

His words worried me because this type of people see Buddhism as a religion removed from humanity. They see an isolated Buddhism, a Buddhism of monastics surviving only in the mountains and forests, a self-centered Buddhism, and an individual Buddhism. For them, Buddhism has lost its human quality. It has reached the point where many who are interested in learning more about Buddhism dare not do so. We must redouble our effort and affirm that Buddhism is invested in the liberation of all sentient beings.

In the history of Buddhism, the first 100 to 300 years following the Buddha’s final nirvana was dominated by “Hinayana Buddhism.” The following 600 years saw the rise of “Mahayana Buddhism,” while Hinayana Buddhism receded from view. The next 1,000 years saw the development of esoteric practices or “Esoteric Buddhism.” Humanistic Buddhism is an integration of all Buddhist teachings from the

time of the Buddha until the present day—whether they are derived from the Theravada, Mahayana, or Esoteric traditions.

In China, there are four sacred mountains that have become pilgrimage sites due to their association with the four great bodhisattvas: Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, and Ksitigarbha. Of these four bodhisattvas, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, and Samantabhadra manifest themselves as laypersons. Only Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva manifests himself as a monastic. Why? The life of a monastic emphasizes detachment from and transcendence of the mundane world, while the life of a layperson allows for the optimism and engagement that can realize the goals of Mahayana Buddhism.

Master Taixu once said, “I am not a *bhikṣu*,<sup>3</sup> nor am I a Buddha. Rather, I wish to be known as a bodhisattva.” Master Taixu dared not call himself a *bhikṣu*, for a *bhikṣu* should perfectly uphold the monastic precepts, which is very difficult, and he also was not yet a Buddha. He saw himself as a man of great service, and thus wished to be known as a bodhisattva.

Bodhisattvas are not only clay statues to be worshipped in temples. A bodhisattva is an energetic, enlightened, and endearing person who strives to

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3 *Bhikṣu* is the Sanskrit word for a Buddhist monk. Use of Sanskrit rather than the more colloquial “monk” (和尚) suggests very traditional monastic life.

guide all sentient beings to liberation. We can all be bodhisattvas. It is for this reason that Master Taixu dedicated his life to spreading the words and ideals of Humanistic Buddhism. To fully realize the bodhisattva way of life is the goal of Humanistic Buddhism.

In Buddhism, there is the concept of the “pure land.” A pure land is a realm created through the power of a Buddha’s vows to ease the suffering of sentient beings. All people would like to live in a place such as this. Buddhists frequently mention Amitabha Buddha’s Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss in the West or the Medicine Buddha’s Pure Land of Pure Crystal in the East, but there are even more pure lands than just those in the east or west. Maitreya Bodhisattva, who will become this world’s next Buddha, resides in the Tusita pure land, and *The Vimalakirti Sutra* mentions the pure land of the mind. Pure lands are everywhere.

Humanistic Buddhism seeks to create a pure land on earth. Instead of resting our hopes on being reborn in a pure land in the future, why don’t we work on transforming our world into a pure land of peace and bliss? Instead of committing all our energies to some later time, why don’t we direct our efforts toward purifying our minds and bodies right here and now in the present moment?

This is why Fo Guang Shan provides retirement care for long-time, loyal devotees who have dedicated their lives to the order. By doing this, they do not

need to be taken care of by their children, nor do they need to wait until death to enjoy the pure land. We tell them, “You have done much for Buddhism. We will care for you and provide you with a pure land in your lifetime.” I feel that Fo Guang Shan should instill in these disciples the confidence that we can provide for their needs and that they can find the joy of the pure land right here. I believe that Humanistic Buddhism should focus on the world now, rather than on leaving the world behind, on caring for the living rather than caring for the dead, on benefiting others rather than benefiting oneself, and on liberating all beings rather than self-cultivation.

Whether one practices Theravada, Mahayana, or Esoteric Buddhism, Buddhism should maintain its emphasis on humanity so it can remain relevant as times change. Because Humanistic Buddhism regards the trends of the current age rather than merely following traditions blindly, it is a beacon for the future.

What, then, are the special qualities of Humanistic Buddhism? Six of the fundamental characteristics are below:

## **I. The Five Vehicles**

Buddhism is sometimes divided into “five vehicles,” or modes of practice: the human vehicle, the heavenly vehicle, the *sravaka* vehicle, the *pratyekabuddha*

vehicle, and the bodhisattva vehicle. Each of these five modes of practice differ in a number of ways, but in general, the human and heavenly vehicles focus on worldly matters, while the sravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles focus on matters that transcend the world. The bodhisattva vehicle combines the worldly spirit of the human and heavenly vehicles with the transcendental spirit of the sravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles.

We should strive for the bodhisattva goal of simultaneously benefiting, liberating, and awakening oneself and others; once we understand that ourselves and others are interrelated, we will see that to benefit others is to benefit ourselves. By liberating other sentient beings, we also liberate ourselves. The teachings of the five vehicles are interrelated in this same way, and the product of this relationship is Humanistic Buddhism. The following example illustrates this point.

Suppose you are in Kaohsiung, a city on the southern end of Taiwan, and you wish to take the train to the capital city of Taipei, on the northern tip of the island. As you travel from south to north, you will pass through a number of cities in turn, Tainan, Taichung, and Hsinchu, before you arrive at Taipei. While you do not have to get off at these stops, you must pass through them on your way to Taipei. In the same way, while we must pass through the teachings

of the human vehicle, heavenly vehicle, sravaka vehicle, and pratyekabuddha vehicle, we can keep the bodhisattva vehicle as our destination and goal. This is Humanistic Buddhism's unification of the five vehicles.

## **II. The Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Actions**

What are some concrete examples of what Buddhism can offer to society? Indeed, society can benefit from the Buddhist teachings; the teaching on the five precepts alone is capable of bringing peace to the world.

The five precepts are to refrain from killing, refrain from stealing, refrain from sexual misconduct, refrain from lying, and refrain from consuming intoxicants. To not kill also means to show respect for the lives of others; if we do not encroach upon others' right to live, we can all enjoy the freedom of life. To not steal means to not infringe upon the property rights of others; there can then be freedom of wealth. To not commit sexual misconduct is to show respect for the body and to honor the integrity of others, allowing all to enjoy dignity and freedom of person. To not lie is not to impugn another's reputation so no one's name is slandered. To not consume intoxicants and stimulants is to avoid doing mental or physical harm to

ourselves, thus keeping us from harming others as well.

If an individual is able to uphold the five precepts, then that person's character and morality are well-grounded. If a family can uphold the five precepts, the character and morality of the family are in good order. If an entire organization, society, or nation can uphold the five precepts, then that nation will be stable, peaceful, and prosperous.

If you were to visit a prison, you would find that all those who are incarcerated have violated the five precepts in one way or another. For instance, those who have committed murder, manslaughter, or aggravated assault have violated the precept against killing. Those who are guilty of corruption, embezzlement, or robbery have violated the precept against stealing. Pornography, adultery, polygamy, rape, abduction, and prostitution are all examples of violating the precept against sexual misconduct. To engage in fraud, intimidation, or defaulting on loans is to violate the precept against lying. In addition to prohibiting the drinking of alcohol, the precept against intoxicants also includes heroin, cocaine, and other illegal drugs, all of which adversely affect one's mind, harm one's own cognitive abilities, and cause one to do immoral acts. If everyone upheld the five precepts, the prisons would be empty.

Today, some beginning Buddhists treat Buddhism like a folk religion. They bow to the Buddha and pray for longevity, wealth, a happy family, fame, and health. However, if we uphold the five precepts, we can enjoy great blessings without even asking for them. If one does not kill but instead protects life, how can one not have longevity? If one does not steal but instead is generous, how can one not be wealthy? If one does not engage in sexual misconduct but instead is respectful, how can the family not be harmonious? If one does not lie but instead is honest, how can one not have a good name? If one does not become intoxicated but instead looks after the body, how can one not have good health? The five precepts can have a great impact upon an individual, a community, and a nation.

Humanistic Buddhism is essentially the practice of the five precepts and ten wholesome actions. The ten wholesome actions are an extension of the five precepts: do not kill, do not steal, do not commit sexual misconduct, do not lie, do not use duplicitous speech, do not speak harsh words, do not flatter with dishonest intentions, do not become greedy, do not become angry, and do not be ignorant. In Buddhism, the development of right view is called the study of wisdom, the ultimate goal of which is to awaken one's true nature. The five precepts and ten wholesome actions are tools to help us achieve this goal.

### III. The Four Immeasurable Minds

The four immeasurable minds are loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. When considering these states of mind, one does not need to look any further to see why Buddhism has lost its vigor. We have not practiced the teachings and have consequently lost touch with the Dharma. The Buddha teaches loving-kindness and compassion. How many of us are truly kind and compassionate? The Buddha teaches joy and equanimity. How many of us are really joyful and calm under pressure? Whether we are laypersons or monastics, if we do not practice the Dharma, how are we any different from every other person?

In Chinese, there is a saying that “Every family has Amitabha; every household has Avalokitesvara.” Nearly every Chinese family has an image of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva in their home because Avalokitesvara is the bodhisattva of compassion, and compassion is welcome in every home. Compassion earns respect and wins the hearts of others.

I don't know when, but at one point, some Buddhists became pessimistic. Certain Buddhists, the moment they see each other, would say things like, “Life is suffering! All is impermanent! Oh, impermanence!” This is misleading. In reality, Buddhism is happy in character and joyful in spirit. The teachings speak of boundless happiness and

endless compassion, and we Buddhists have the responsibility to share this with the world.

When the Buddha spoke of suffering as the first noble truth, it was because the Buddha wanted us to recognize the cause of suffering so we could be free from delusion and attain happiness. We should not just stop at understanding that life is full of suffering. The Buddha teaches us that all phenomena are impermanent. Impermanence is actually quite wonderful, for it makes change possible. Because of impermanence, the bad can become good, adversity can become ease, and bad luck can become good fortune. It is because of impermanence that fate is not irrevocably determined. Our task as bodhisattvas is to spread the seeds of joy so the whole world may hear the Dharma, and everyone can have a life of well-being, peace, and joy.

Sometimes, the prosperity that comes from a flourishing economy does not necessarily alleviate suffering. More money and more possessions can often just mean more trouble. The joy of the Dharma is the happiness that comes from a mind that is carefree and at ease. We should base our faith on giving. To practice a religion is to contribute, make sacrifices, and work to benefit others. The four immeasurable minds of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are realized in Humanistic Buddhism's spirit of giving and benefiting others.

#### **IV. The Six Perfections and the Four Means of Embracing**

The Buddha taught us to cultivate the six perfections, which are giving, morality, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom, and the four means of embracing, which are giving, kind words, empathy, and altruism. These are part of Humanistic Buddhism and are relevant to our daily interactions.

When I first traveled to the United States to teach the Dharma, I found that even though America is not a Buddhist country, Americans have the characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism and the spirit of the bodhisattva. One can see aspects of the six perfections in American culture. Consider the first perfection, giving: Most Americans are very willing to give. Many willingly provide donations to their churches. When a social problem arises, a lot of people happily do all they can to help. No matter where you are, Americans often smile and greet you warmly saying, “Hello! How are you?” This, too, is giving. A simple smile, a short greeting—these are the ways of practicing giving through one’s expression and speech. These are just a few examples of how Americans have integrated giving into daily life.

As for upholding the second perfection, Americans are generally made up of very law-abiding people, which is morality. America is a country in which people follow the rules of the law, and one

does not have to go to a courthouse to see this; when Americans come to a red light, even if there are no other cars or police officers around, they do not run the light. If there is a stop sign, most drivers will not immediately go through the intersection but instead stop for a moment before continuing on. People also generally line up in an orderly manner. Once, when I was in Hawaii, a large tour group of people, including several of us monastics who were also in the group, went to watch a hula dance. When the attendant saw us, he asked a group of people to move away from the shade of a large tree so that we monastics could sit there. Without any protest, everyone did as they were told. Why? Because religion is respected in America, as are laws and rules; likewise, those in positions of authority are mostly respected and obeyed. The sanctity of the law is fully integrated into the American mindset. The majority of individuals follow the law naturally and are compliant. Whether or not a country's populace obeys its laws will affect its image, its development, and its prosperity. There is much in common with following the law and upholding the six perfections; Humanistic Buddhism is built upon the principles of laws and regulations.

A lot of Americans are also patient, which is the third perfection. Patience does not mean staying silent when being yelled at or turning the other cheek when struck. Patience means taking responsibility

and having strength. To be patient is to be proactive, progressive, willing to make sacrifices, and to ably shoulder burdens. When everyone has patience, society can be orderly.

Americans are ambitious, dedicated, and hard-working, reflecting the fourth perfection of diligence. There are some who fantasize that America is a heaven where everyone is automatically well-provided for. In reality, successful Americans are very industrious and conscientious; they work hard and have a lot of pride in the quality of their work. The American work ethic has much in common with the Buddhist perfection of diligence. Buddhism defines right effort as creating new wholesome qualities, developing existing wholesome qualities, ending existing unwholesome qualities, and preventing future unwholesome qualities. Americans are well-known for their dedication to research, development of breakthroughs, and striving to be the very best. This is why America is a world power.

Meditative concentration is the fifth perfection, and we can also find examples of this in the American lifestyle. Instead of running about the streets after work or school, adults and children often spend their time at home. When using public transportation, they are often relaxed and at ease, as if in meditation.

Some say that, of the six perfections, Americans lack wisdom. They say that if you sell them six things

that cost two dollars each, (the total is, of course, twelve dollars), the Americans take quite a bit of time to figure out what the total should be. Instead of multiplying six things at two dollars each, they will add two plus two, plus two, plus two, so on and so forth to get to twelve. We should not, however, think that Americans are slower in doing these mental calculations; they are simply different from the Chinese, who are shrewd, sometimes too much for their own good. Americans are very methodical in calculating figures. They may appear slower in dealing with numbers, but actually, Americans go by the rules, so one is one and two is two. They are very precise in their scientific and technological research and are very reliable in what they do.

By using these examples, I'm not trying to say the moon is bigger in America or any such dramatic overstatement. These observations are simply based on my visits there. I ask myself, why does Taiwan, a country that promotes Mahayana Buddhism, have so many people who are miserly, snobbish, selfish, irresponsible, and unkind? Why do they only look out for themselves? Therefore, the ideals of Humanistic Buddhism must be spread in Taiwan. By practicing the four means of embracing—giving, kind words, empathy, and altruism—Buddhism once again becomes relevant to contemporary society. The five precepts can stabilize society, the six perfections

can serve as a strong foundation for the country, and the four means of embracing can be a wellspring of goodness for us all.

## **V. Cause, Condition, Effect, and Consequence**

In the military, some young draftees will question their officers and ask, “I enlisted last year at the same time that he did. Why is he now a sergeant, and I am still a private? We have the same qualifications and enlisted at the same time. Why were we not promoted at the same time?”

Such people should know that in the law of cause, condition, effect, and consequence, condition sits right in between cause and effect. When conditions are different, effects will be different. Take two flowers, for instance: If one is given a bit more water and fertilizer and is planted in a richer soil, even though both flowers are nurtured by the same sunshine, they will grow differently. As causes, the two flowers may be of the same variety, but because of different conditions, the effect will not be the same.

Some people complain about their lives and condemn the world as unfair, criticizing family and friends, but if such people looked closer at their own causes and conditions, they would discover the source of their problems. The soldier in the first example may discover that he was held back because

of something inappropriate he said. Suppose that two people are competing for the same promotion: While one person may be more qualified, the other may earn the promotion because of the strength of his conditions. He may have provided great service, said the right thing, or shouldered a huge responsibility at a critical moment.

Buddhism teaches us to improve our conditions and make positive connections with others. It is commonly said that “Before becoming a Buddha, we must first cultivate good relationships with others.” Every single grain of rice is the culmination of many causes and conditions, and we should appreciate each one.

In the morning, the internet quickly delivers news and emails to our screens. In the evening, many television programs bring us entertainment and information about local and global events. Have we learned to appreciate the work of others? Imagine the limited view and monotony of life if these things were not available. Causes and conditions enable us to connect with one another all over the world. The effort and contributions of many have provided us with these conveniences, and we should value these causes and conditions. How can we repay the kindness of those who have provided us with such good conditions? We can learn to have gratitude and enjoy the wealth and satisfaction of life anywhere and anytime.

The law of cause, condition, effect, and consequence is quite profound and often misunderstood. Some people chant the name of Amitabha Buddha, but the moment a problem arises, they blame Amitabha Buddha for not looking out for them. Such people lament, “I was cheated out of my money, and now I’m bankrupt. Why didn’t Amitabha Buddha protect me?” or, “I haven’t made any money in the stock market. Where is Amitabha Buddha’s power?” or, “Even though I am a vegetarian, I am in poor health. Why is Amitabha Buddha not more compassionate?”

What is the connection between reciting the Buddha’s name or being a vegetarian, and health, wealth, and longevity? We must not be confused about what are the proper causes and their effects. If a person plants melon seeds, how can he expect to harvest beans? Chanting and keeping a vegetarian diet are in the realm of religious and moral cause and effect. Amassing great wealth is in the domain of economic cause and effect. Having good health or a long life are health-related causes and effects. Why is it that people attribute all their problems to religion? There are too many people today who are confused about the connection between particular causes and effects and therefore do not understand how cause and effect work.

*The Nagasena Bhiksu Sutra* contained the following story: Once, there lived a man with a fruit tree

in his front yard. One day, a random passerby picked a fruit from that man's tree. The owner was nearby and exclaimed, "Hey! How dare you steal my fruit!"

The passerby said, "What do you mean 'your fruit'? This fruit belongs to the tree."

The owner responded, "Well, I was the one who planted that tree."

The passerby said, "No, no. The seed you planted is in the ground. The fruit I took was from the tree."

How can you say the two are not connected? Cause and effect are forever linked. When a cause encounters the right conditions, it will bear fruit. There is a Buddhist saying that "Bodhisattvas fear causes; sentient beings fear effects." Bodhisattvas, knowing that causes are not to be taken lightly, do not haphazardly create them. Sentient beings do not sufficiently fear causes and act without thinking, fearing the consequences. In the end, such beings may fall into the depths of hell, with the most frightening consequences.

My hometown in Yangzhou, China, had no police for tens of miles and no courts for hundreds of miles, yet crimes or murders were very rare. In the case of a conflict, people did not fight and quarrel. Instead, they would go to a temple and both parties would take an oath in front of the gods. Everyone believed this was extremely fair because we believed the law of cause and effect knows best. Even when

there was no way to appeal, everyone had peace of mind. We all knew that the law of cause and effect would not betray us. As the saying goes, “All acts, both good and bad, bear consequences; it is only a matter of time.”

When the Buddha was alive, he experienced the phenomena of aging, sickness, life, and death, just like all of us. He, too, was subject to the workings of cause and effect. This is a great notion, for in the face of cause and effect, everyone is equal, and no one can escape it. There is an old Chinese saying “Man may take advantage of kind people, but heaven does not. Man may fear wicked people, but heaven does not.” In a Buddhist context, “heaven” is the law of cause and effect. Cause and effect are always fair and just. Buddhists should strive to establish the concept of cause and effect, for it is very scientific and rational. If everyone believed in cause and effect, it would serve as each person’s policeman, guide, and law.

## **VI. Chan, Pure Land, and Madhyamaka**

The Buddhist teachings are vast and profound, and there are many sects and schools. The Chan School, Pure Land School, and Madhyamaka School are just a few. Humanistic Buddhism encompasses all Buddhist schools and teachings.

The Chan School focuses on meditation. Great masters and patriarchs of the Chan School do

not practice meditation for the sake of becoming Buddhas but rather to have a realization. With such realizations, they can be free and settle their bodies and minds in the present moment of their everyday life. What is most gratifying to Chan practitioners is to find peace of body and mind, an idea summarized by the saying “Illuminate the mind and see intrinsic nature.” Chan practitioners are very much focused on life in this world.

The Pure Land School is similarly focused. Pure land practitioners practice the mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha and recite the Buddha’s name in the hope of attaining rebirth in the pure land. With inadequate practice, they will not be reborn in the pure land, so they consider this world a foothold to develop their mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha. There is no shortcut. When faced with the demands of modern society, pure land practices can be a wonderful way to calm the body and mind. If you practice both the Chan and the pure land methods, you are truly practicing Humanistic Buddhism.

The Madhyamaka School is a philosophical school which posits a Middle Way<sup>4</sup> that is a harmony between existence and emptiness, pointing its adherents towards the true reality of all phenomena. Attaining deep wisdom of this reality allows one to

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4 An essential teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha, which teaches the avoidance of all extremes.

enjoy happiness and blessings in this very life. Some people pay too much attention to the material world and get lost in worldly pursuits. Others abandon this world, retreating deeply into a solitary life in the mountains and becoming blind to the suffering of the world. These people can be compared to a withered piece of wood or a pile of old ashes. Being too attached or too detached is not healthy, for both lack the harmony of the Middle Way, an essential component of Buddhism.

The Madhyamaka School teaches the wisdom that comes from realizing the harmony between extremes. This kind of wisdom allows us to know the underlying principles at work in any situation and the appropriate action to deal with them. With the wisdom of the Middle Way, one understands that existence arises from emptiness, for without emptiness, nothing could exist. For example, without the empty space inside a room, how could we gather to hear the Dharma? Without empty space, how could all the various phenomena for the universe arise? Existence can only arise within emptiness.

Humanistic Buddhism recognizes that the material and spiritual are equally important in life and therefore calls for a life that provides for both. There is the external world of action, and there is also the internal world of the mind. There is the world ahead of us and the world behind us. If we always insist

on charging blindly into what is ahead, we will get hurt. It is important to look back and look within. Humanistic Buddhism allows for both existence and emptiness, for having many possessions and no possessions, and for community and solitude. By finding the Middle Way in all things, Humanistic Buddhism allows people to achieve a beautiful and wonderful life. These are the six unique characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism.

The type of Humanistic Buddhism I advocate can be seen in the working principles I established for the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order. They are:

1. Give others confidence.
2. Give others joy.
3. Give others hope.
4. Render service to others.

I believe that being willing to serve others, giving others a helping hand, establishing friendly ties with others, and giving others joy are the teachings of the Buddha. Simply put, the goal of Humanistic Buddhism as promoted by Fo Guang Shan is to make Buddhism relevant in our world, in our lives, and in each of our hearts. Simply close your eyes, and the entire universe is there, within. You can say to yourself, “Everyone in the world may abandon me, but the Buddha within my heart will never leave me.”

In today's world, we are all burdened with responsibilities. We all feel stressed from our obligations in our homes, businesses, and families. So, how can we live a happy and contented life? If we apply the Buddha's teachings to our everyday lives, then the whole universe can be ours, and we can be happy and at peace in all we do. Chan Master Women once wrote:

*The spring has its flowers, the autumn its  
bright full moon;  
The summer has its cool breezes, the winter  
its snow.  
As long as one is not caught up in mundane  
worries,  
Then every season is a wonderful season.*

That is to say that, when the mind is burdened, the world may seem limited, but when the mind is free from burdens, even a small bed may feel vast and expansive. When we are truly able to hold the world within our minds, then we are one with all sentient beings and all the worlds. With this awareness, we can be joyful and at ease. This can be achieved by applying the Buddha's teachings to our lives; this is the spirit of Humanistic Buddhism.

Fo Guang Shan  
International Translation Center

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