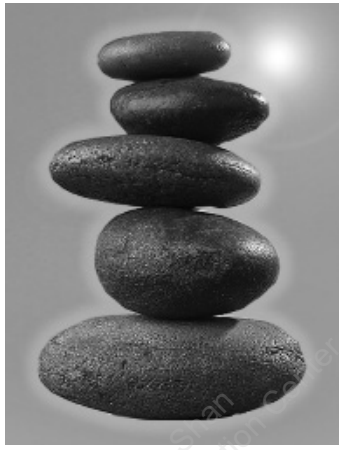


Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center

Buddhism and Healing

Buddhism in Every Step D2

（英文版）

Venerable Master Hsing Yun

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I. Healing the Body

Technological progress and advances in modern science have led to material improvements that have enhanced the quality of people's lives on many levels. Yet no matter how much we have progressed or how advanced our technology is, there still remain fundamental problems in life that science will never be able to solve.

Two of the greatest problems people face are birth and death. No sooner are we born than we must begin to face the problems of sickness and aging, both of which have always been intensively studied by medical and social researchers; Buddhism is also concerned with sickness, aging, and death. The Buddha was a great doctor and teacher of all humanity, the Dharma is like medicine that can cure both physical

and mental problems, and monastics are like nurses who protect all sentient beings. Thus, the Triple Gem is often referred to metaphorically as the doctor, the medicine, and the caregivers. If we use Buddhism to solve the problems faced by us today, we will discover a prescription with great effectiveness.

People become Buddhists due to certain causes and conditions. The ancients used to say, "A serious practitioner should have a few ailments, for these are what teach us to commit to the Way." Some people, after experiencing difficulties and setbacks in their lives, want to have something to rely on, so they become Buddhists. Other people become Buddhists because they hear some Buddhist teachings while they are deeply despondent or saddened and feel comforted by them, and this causes them to commit themselves to the Dharma. Some people are confused by life and hope to find answers in the practice of Buddhism. Still others become ill and discover that life truly is impermanent and filled with suffering and thus embrace the Dharma.

All of these examples show it is not necessarily a bad thing for someone to become physically ill. Sickness is one way for people to discover the Dharma, and sometimes, it is the only reason they become committed to Buddhism and overcome their fixations on worldly matters. Though physical ailments do have a negative impact on people's

lives, they also can bring positive effects to some lives.

Birth, sickness, old age, and death are processes we all must experience. Who among us has a physical body that arose out of the four elements and the five aggregates and will never become ill? *The Supreme Dharani Sutra* says, "Goiters, neurological diseases, excessive phlegm, diseases of the eyes, headaches, abdominal pains, hemorrhoids . . . skin funguses, or leprosy are rampant throughout the world and cause extreme suffering among sentient beings." If we want to know how to heal our bodies and diseases such as these, we must first establish a correct perspective. We must understand how to prevent disease by distancing ourselves from it. If we become sick, we must learn how to befriend our illness. It is especially important that we come to some realization of the deeper significance of life itself. Only by facing illness and death without any sense of attachment or clinging can we face sickness calmly and not let our minds be filled with denial, dread, and anxiety. A mind disturbed by these things only worsens physical conditions.

There are many kinds of physical ailments. Many branches of medicine only deal with specific parts of the body, such as ophthalmology, dentalology, dermatology, cardiology, and other types of medicine. Beyond these, there are also specialists who work

with pregnant women, children, and those with psychological problems. When we are sick, we must consult with a doctor and listen to his or her advice and from this select the best cure we can. The cure we use may be based on medicine, diet, physical therapy, psychotherapy, or even folk remedies and music therapy. For some illnesses, all that is required is extra rest, for they are best healed by time. For example, most doctors say that the flu is essentially incurable, as there are over one hundred types, and medicines that target each type are simply too difficult to produce. So in the case of a disease like this, the best the medical profession can offer is a little sympathy and comfort because the best thing to do is rest, drink a lot of fluids, and stay inside in order to overcome it.

Sometimes, there is nothing wrong with our bodies at all, but because we suspect that there may be something wrong, we begin to feel ill and suffer from a sort of hypochondria. I have had this experience myself. When I was around twenty years old, one of my teachers said, "People often become ill because of paranoia; lung disease is an example of this." Upon hearing this, I began to doubt the health of my own lungs and actually spent quite a lot of time under the shadow of that fear. I controlled my anxiety by reminding myself, "My health is so good, how could I possibly have lung disease?" Still, I could not

help being affected by those words. Years later, I arrived in Taiwan, and while I was living in Chungli, someone told me that lung disease could be cured by eating tomatoes. Since tomatoes were not expensive back then, I bought a bushel of them. After finishing all of the tomatoes, I convinced myself that eating so many tomatoes ought to completely cure my ailment, and from that time on, I ceased to worry about the possibility of having lung disease.

Other times, physical problems are caused by the mind's fears, and these mental illnesses require mental cures. These issues often require nothing more than having faith in ourselves, being optimistic, getting enough exercise, and eating the proper foods. We can naturally overcome such illnesses without medication.

When trying to heal the body, the old adage holds true: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Strengthening our immune systems is the best way to maintain our health. According to research, over ninety percent of human diseases have something to do with problems in the immune system. A working immune system is like having an army of experts capable of fighting off infections, cleaning out waste materials, and repairing damaged organs or systems. The immune system fights diseases and prevents foreign matter from entering the system. In a normal immune system, there are many beneficial

bacteria that kill harmful germs. For example, some people catch a cold easily after being exposed to low temperatures, while others who have healthier immune systems do not become ill under the same circumstances. This is also true in the case of other contagious diseases, such as lung disease, liver disease, or malaria, which can be easily contracted by those with weak immune systems. A person with the right antibodies in his or her immune system will not easily contract these diseases even with the same exposure.

In most hospitals, doctors do whatever they can to boost the strength of their patients' immune systems and often spend a lot of time teaching people better ways to care for themselves. They advise getting enough sleep at night, exercising at least thirty minutes every day, getting massages, laughing more often, relaxing, adopting better hygienic practices, and so on. These techniques can strengthen our immune systems. In addition, a study done at Harvard Medical School clearly shows that people who have religious faith are generally healthier than those who do not. From this, we can see that the best cures involve correcting our perspective and curing the mind, for a healthy mind and the right perspective is the most effective way to heal the body.

Buddhists believe that life itself never dies and that it is simply part of a cycle of birth and death,

much like the seasons of the year. The truth is death is no different from moving from one home to another or changing clothes—it is nothing to be afraid of. Everything that is born must die, and everything that dies is born again—there is nothing frightening about this. What is frightening is pain, for pain is difficult to endure.

Most of us must become ill before we can understand the suffering of having a body. It is said that "The hero fears only the torment of illness," for a serious disease can make even a brave man weak. When we are healthy, few of us appreciate how precious that state is, but once we become sick, we realize how truly difficult suffering can be. For certain germs or viruses, having to overcome an illness can in turn strengthen the immune system, so illness may actually be beneficial to our health in the long run.

The most dangerous thing with the onset of an illness is the confusion it can generate. Some people, upon first learning that they have a disease, will panic and search recklessly for an unconventional remedy. Strangely, everyone suddenly claims to be an expert the moment they learn you are unwell. They say things like "You should take this kind of medicine," or "This kind of disease should be treated in such and such a way." Such talk is mostly just harmless banter, but if you are without your own opinion, you will either follow one person's advice and go to

their doctor, or you will follow someone else's advice and go to a different doctor, and there is no telling who is correct. There are also some people who try to hide their illness out of fear or embarrassment of getting treatment.

Illness should not be looked on as something frightening; this will lessen the confusion being sick can create. Once, a group of monastics I was with went to visit someone who had lung disease. One person in our group was afraid that the patient's illness would be contagious, but a member of the nursing staff said that it was good to be exposed to contagions every so often since exposure can strengthen the immune system. The nurse said that if you never exposed yourself to any germs at all, you would have a very weak immune system. An illness is much like a demon—the more you fear it, the more formidable it becomes and the more it can harm you.

Everyone should develop a good attitude toward their health and learn to be their own doctor. If we get sick, there is no need to panic. Of course, we need to find medical treatment for our illness, but it is most important to know how to best treat ourselves and be our own physician in this way. If our minds are healthy and strong, we will be able to overcome any difficulty. If our willpower is strong, we will be able to overcome the suffering of any disease. If our minds are free of suffering, our bodies will likewise

become free of pain. Then, what disease is there that can distress us? The secret of healing the body lies in practicing the threefold training—discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom—and using these methods to erase all traces of greed, anger, and ignorance from our minds.

II. Healing the Mind

In addition to physical diseases, people suffer from a variety of diseases of the mind, such as being greedy, judgmental, or quick to anger. *The Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* says, "There are four kinds of diseases of the body, which are due to excessive wind, heat, phlegm, or other causes. There are also four kinds of diseases of the mind, which are greed, anger, ignorance, and pride." Truthfully, it is much easier to cure physical ailments than mental ones. Just as the body is ours to have and understand, we should each strive to know the mind as well. If we know both our bodies and minds well, then whether our disease is mental or physical, we will naturally be able to heal ourselves.

Mental sickness is like a demon. Each of us has many demons living in our bodies or entrenched within our minds that may appear at the easiest opportunity to wreak havoc in our lives. According to the Buddhist tradition, there are 84,000 kinds of afflictions or illnesses. At the forefront of all of those

afflictions is greed. The next type is anger, the third is ignorance, the fourth is pride, the fifth is suspicion, and the sixth is wrong views.

There are many afflictions residing in our minds, but in the end, there is only one affliction that precedes them all: our self, otherwise known as "clinging to the self." The affliction of clinging to the self unites and controls all the other afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, pride, and doubt. Most of the time, we can very easily control our minds when they are healthy and strong, our views are correct, and our thoughts are appropriate and filled with compassion and wisdom. As *The Flower Adornment Sutra* says, "A single shot of the arrow of wisdom can destroy an army of demons, while one swing of the sword of sagacity can slash through the nets of suspicion." The moment we become careless and forget to protect ourselves, we will be beset again by the demons of our minds, which in *The Teachings Bequeathed by the Buddha Sutra* are compared to thieves, wild horses, and enraged elephants.

If we look for the deeper reasons why there are so many troublesome afflictions in our minds, we will find that it all comes down to ignorance and distorted views. For example, as soon as you become suspicious, you give your afflictions a chance to arise. If you become arrogant, extreme in your opinions, stubborn, selfish, and gullible, or if you enjoy seeing people

argue, have no sense of what you believe in, and have low self-esteem, you will easily be led and become a victim of the demon king and his armies of afflictions.

How, then, can we heal the mind? The secret lies in practicing the threefold training: morality, meditative concentration, and wisdom. It is by practicing the threefold training that we can erase all traces of greed, anger, and ignorance. Greed, anger, and ignorance are sometimes called the three poisons because they are the enemies most profoundly harmful to the body and mind. Greed is like a stomach ailment since, just like many stomach problems, greed is the result of gluttony. Anger can be compared to lung disease, since diseased lungs gradually ruin the body just as anger ruins all that it touches. Ignorance can be compared to a neurological disorder, since neurological disorders are characterized by the loss of control over speech and action, just as ignorance is the source of mishaps. We can view the three poisons—greed, anger, and ignorance—separately.

Firstly, all people harbor some degree of selfishness in their minds. They always think of themselves first. When they see something they like, they want to possess it; as long as they can get what they want, they do not care if others live or die. As a result, the disease of greed naturally arises. Wouldn't it be better if we could be like a candle that sacrifices itself so others may have light, like dew that appears only

briefly but gives part of itself to nourish other living things, or like the sun that selflessly shines across the earth providing warmth and light? People who are able to give of themselves and who know how to help others feel happiness and joy are people who have overcome greed because generosity is the best way to heal selfishness.

Next, anger is another common illness that troubles people's minds. People who become angry quickly have not spent enough time cultivating their character. The moment something they do not like happens, they become angry; in a moment of anger, a friend may become an enemy, while a spouse may become a foe. When a thought of anger arises, all things may appear so loathsome and hateful that they may wish to destroy the entire world with one blow. The *Dhammapada* says, "If one tries to end disputes with more disputes, they will never end, for it is only through patience that one can end disputes." Anger never solves problems. If we practice patience at crucial moments and realize all things in the world are essentially equal, and there is no real difference between good and bad or oneself and others, then the disease of anger can be healed.

Lastly, people have the illness of ignorance because they are confused and lack awareness. Ignorance exacerbates the problems of greed and anger; it is the root of all our afflictions and the main

reason we remain trapped within the cycle of birth and death. Ignorance leads to wrong views, and all too often wrong views lead to the creation of unwholesome karma, which in turn may lead to being reborn in one of the three lower realms: the hell realm, the ghostly realm, or the animal realm. If we can spark a bit of awareness in our minds and realize that an ocean of wisdom resides within us, we will be less susceptible to the harsh winds and turbulent waves generated by ignorance.

The way to heal the mind of the three poisons is threefold: generosity can heal greed, patience can heal anger, and awareness can heal ignorance.

III. Healing Afflictions

What are people supposed to do when they are troubled by afflictions? Some people are troubled by very specific things, others encounter poverty, and many have poor relations with other people. This section will explore what we can do when faced with such problems.

Some individuals are disturbed the moment they hear even the slightest comment they do not like, or they become angry when they see someone doing something they do not approve of. This sort of reaction is actually cheating the person who feels it. Someone else has said something, but I am the one who gets angry. Someone else has acted wrongly, but

I am the one who loses my appetite. Someone else looks at me a certain way, but I am the one who loses sleep over it. If we allow ourselves to be so easily affected or unsettled by others, it means we lack resolve and resilience.

A lot of people today lack inner strength and are unable to withstand even a single comment they do not like. Yet anything that is worthwhile, including ourselves, must endure. For example, one time Taiwan tried exporting lumber to the United States, but due to the dry climate in the U.S., the wood cracked, and no one wanted to buy it; that wood was not durable. When Hsi Lai Temple was built near Los Angeles, we used a ceramic glazed roof tile that was put through stringent tests to make sure that it was appropriate—it had to withstand several thousand degrees of heat. The afflictions are a similar kind of test. If we totally crumble in the face of affliction, we will never know true peace of mind or have a restful home.

The Treasury of the Abhidharma Treatise says, "When the obstructions of the afflictions are serious, further karmic obstructions may be generated, and these karmic obstructions may further generate more obstructions of different kinds—this process is based upon the first affliction, which is its root." When afflictions arise, you must face them and dissolve them. If you try to avoid them by hiding, it will

be of little help. We cannot hide from our afflictions; the only way that we can claim victory over them is to drive them out of our bodies and minds.

So where do afflictions come from? Afflictions are a form of ignorance; they stem from not being able to reason correctly. When they arise, it is as if a bad person has just arrived, for all of our good friends will quickly depart. Afflictions ruin our peace of mind. They are like storms and disasters. Sometimes, they arise from our external environment, such as instances of being unable to bear the words or actions of others. At times, they arise internally, such as when suspicion, jealousy, or narrow-mindedness takes over. It is said that "Fundamentally, there are no problems in the world, for they all arise from our own worries." We make most of our afflictions.

We must each have the strength to transform our afflictions and turn them into enlightenment. On occasion, we speak without thinking and are criticized by others, and this can be a source of affliction. Another kind of afflictions arises when we are unhappy because others rebuke us for our own misdeeds. All too often, we become troubled due to other people, events, or the things someone says. However, if we change our thinking and accept criticism as an opportunity to learn, then the comments of others will no longer become afflictions. We must rely on ourselves to dissolve them because the advice and

counsel of others is only momentary. Unless we can eradicate the roots of our afflictions, there cannot be a good outcome.

How can we overcome our afflictions? Here are a few ideas:

1. When with others, do not compare yourself to them or be petty. Many afflictions stem from pettiness or unfavorable comparisons. If we do not compare or judge, then we will have fewer afflictions.
2. When afflictions arise because we feel someone is doing better than us, just wish them well. If someone you know buys a large house but you do not have enough money to buy your own home, so what? You can keep out of the rain by standing under the eaves of that person's building, so his or her good fortune may also do you some good. If someone buys a TV set but you cannot afford one, why does this matter? While he or she sits in front of it to watch TV, you can stand behind and watch for a while, too. If someone builds a large temple and you only have a small temple, is this a big deal? When you visit and stay at his temple, you can enjoy a meal there. For the many things we may encounter in this world, as long as you can keep an open mind and accept them as they are without grudge or envy, you will be free of afflictions.

3. It is best not to cling to things or insist that they turn out a certain way. Do not expect others to do things as we wish. People all have their own personalities and freedom to act as they want, so if we get upset because others do not comply with our wishes, then afflictions will occur because our mental state is vulnerable, obscured, and ignorant.
4. It is best to spend our time engaged in wholesome interests, work, and hobbies because they can fend off innumerable onslaughts from the demons of our own indulgent behavior. The most important thing is to work hard at your job since if you are busy, you simply will not have the time to cause yourself many problems. It is also important to spend time with wise and good friends and to avoid people who cause problems, for if we try to drown our troubles with alcohol while in the company of unsavory people, we will only make matters worse.
5. We must constantly reflect on ourselves and be willing to say, "I am not doing enough; I am not good enough." *The Way to Buddhahood* says, "Be ashamed of what you do not know and of what you are not able to do. Be ashamed of your impurities and enter upon the Mahayana path." If we only think about how good we are and are forever willing to forgive ourselves, we are likely to say, "That's just how I see things. It's the way I

am!" This sort of thinking keeps us from improving and ridding ourselves of afflictions.

6. Be attentive to others, do good deeds, speak good words, and have good thoughts. If we can keep these three benevolent acts in mind, we will have far fewer afflictions. When you perform good deeds, speak good words, and have good thoughts, other people will praise and respect you. Of course, you will be free from afflictions.

Beyond these points, having afflictions is inevitably due to our own mistakes, so we must face them with courage and be willing to admit fault and make amends. A person with an illness must first admit he or she is sick in order to be treated.

The most useful thing about religion is that it helps us to overcome ignorance and reduces our afflictions. The Buddhist tradition is replete with a vast range of teachings, but no matter how numerous or effective they are, if we fail to learn and apply them, we are like fighters who refuse to train. Even if a fighter is equipped with the best weapons, if he does not learn to use them, not only will he not be able to defeat the enemy, he will be beaten. For these reasons, we must use the tools of right mindfulness and right thought to conduct ourselves and deal with issues that arise. With right mindfulness, we can overcome the sources of delusion that produce afflictions. It is said that

"The Dharma can be understood in infinite ways, but the best way is with purity as the foundation." If we understand how to purify our minds, afflictions will have no source from which to rise.

IV. Healing Fear

All people—men, women, young, and old—have fears. Some fear death, some fear the dark, some fear ghosts, some fear people, some fear strangers, some fear pain, some fear contracting disease, and some fear old age; there are so many things for us to be afraid of. How can we rid ourselves of these fears?

People are mostly afraid of what they do not know. For example, a lot of people fear the dark because they cannot see what is there. If we understood everything, we would fear nothing. Most of us become afraid when we enter an unfamiliar environment.

I've suffered from fear. When I was a young boy, I always felt that a ghost was following me when I went out walking alone. At that time, I was quite small and had not yet become a monk. To overcome my fear of the ghost, I would walk faster, but as soon as I sped up, I felt that it was speeding up, too! If I was far from home, the ghost would follow me for quite some time, so I had to think of some way to stop it. One day, I decided to stop and turn around. When I did, I saw that, of course, there were no ghosts behind me anywhere. It was then that I

learned how to discipline myself since if there were no ghosts behind me, there was no reason for me to be afraid.

I think the main reason people become afraid is they do not see the reality of the situation at hand. It is said that "Once bitten by a snake, we will fear a piece of rope for ten years." If a snake bites us one time, the mere shadow of a rope will cause us to overreact.

Some people are timid and lack courage, which is an essential part of healing fear. If you asked them to go on stage and give a talk, they would say, "I wouldn't dare!" If you asked them to greet guests, they would say, "I don't want to!" No matter what you ask them to do, they reply that they cannot simply because they are timid. This is a character flaw, for we must have the courage to face anything that confronts us. If we want to succeed, we must first work hard. People must also be able to withstand being embarrassed in front of others in order to become strong. We must endure certain fears.

Why are people afraid? They fear losing love, money, power, their social position, or honor. We fear losing what we already have. Some people fear things like mice, even though it is really the mouse that is afraid of us. In the same way, there are those who fear cockroaches, but cockroaches run and hide the moment they see a person coming. Why be afraid of these things? People also fear disasters, typhoons,

earthquakes, and mudslides. Some fear robbers, unsavory people, bandits, and so forth, but fearing does no good whatsoever. Trying to hide from them does no good, either. If we know that a typhoon is coming, we need to reinforce our doors and windows. If there is a mudslide, we need to go to a safe place and wait it out. As for earthquakes, you need to understand what to do if one strikes. Instead of letting fear paralyze us, we must act.

From a very young age, I trained myself to be courageous. During the war of resistance against Japan, I slept among a pile of corpses. I also experienced the hail of bullets on a battlefield. When I first came to Taiwan in 1951, I needed a place to sleep at Shandao Temple in Taipei, so I made a space on the lowest rack in the room where human ashes were usually stored. That night, there was a huge earthquake in Hualien, and the shaking caused many of the urns above me to lean to the side. I said to the ashes, "You all, please don't fall down and hit me!" During that tremor, I did not worry about anything else and did not feel afraid in the least; the reason I remained calm is that I had only one thing on my mind—making sure the urns would not fall on me.

Oftentimes, panicking is unnecessary. For example, wooden buildings will most likely stay during an earthquake; they simply sway back and forth because they are pliable. Situations can seem scary—if you

live in a tall building, the taller it is, the more it will shake during an earthquake. Even if you want to escape, there is not enough time, but even then, there is no need to panic. Instead, you need to know what to do in such a situation. Time is better spent crawling under a table, finding a support beam to stand near, or looking for an open space where you can find safety. People who panic when a crisis comes have a tougher time escaping it.

The truth is that no matter how serious a catastrophe may be, there is always something that can be done about it; superstition is far more frightening and can cause people far more distress than the things they usually fear. Many years ago, there was a movie star named Lin Yan. She bought a house in the United States, and though she was a Buddhist, she was still very superstitious about feng shui. She asked a feng shui expert to come to her new home and look it over. The expert told her that three ghosts were living in her home. Since she was a single woman, she was afraid of spending her evenings alone with the ghosts, so she sold the house.

After she purchased another home, she asked the feng shui expert to come have a look at it as well. Although she expected her new place to be trouble-free, the geomancer told her that the yin elements in her new home were very heavy! This made her even more fearful, and because she was unable to find

peace of mind after many moves and enduring a lot of anxiety over the years, she eventually committed suicide.

Ultimately, the law of cause and effect is the reason events happen. This is not to say that there is no such thing as feng shui; it is true that ghosts have places where they roam. There is a saying that "Humans have human principles; the heavens have heavenly principles; emotions have emotional principles; the Way has its principles; and the land has its principles." In spite of these truths, you cannot tell if a property is good or bad simply by looking at the direction it faces. For example, there may be a number of businesses on the same side of the street, all facing east. Some of them may make money and others may not. Their success or failure has nothing to do with the direction they face. The success of a business is based on the products they sell, how the business is managed, and how well the owners have researched the marketplace. None of this has anything to do with feng shui, for all things are subject to the law of cause and effect.

Superstition can be quite scary because it leads us to misunderstand things. When we deal with fear, we should use wisdom and common sense. If we understand typhoons, we will not be frightened by them. If we understand earthquakes, we will not be frightened by them, either. We must recognize that ghosts have

their world and animals have theirs. The situation is similar at Fo Guang Shan where men have their own area and women have theirs. Each of us has our own world, and because of this, we do not obstruct each other. By the same principle, ghosts will not bother someone without a reason, and human beings should have no reason to go looking for trouble from them. Do not let yourself become obsessed with ghosts, and do not do anything to invite them into your home. People may have no problems at all, but due to superstitious beliefs, they might do things that actually attract ghosts to them. We have this situation in Taiwan among people who raise "pet ghosts," or spirits one makes a connection with in order to manipulate others into giving them money for advice or any number of dishonest activities. Needless to say, these actions always end up creating all kinds of problems. Thus, it is better to be wise than superstitious and not rely on the supernatural for false knowledge.

A lot of our fears consist of things we have no need to be afraid of. For example, I do not feel that ghosts are frightening. In fact, I feel that human beings are much more frightening than ghosts. In the section on the Jin dynasty in *The Twenty-Five Histories*, there is a story about a man named Song Dingbo from Nanyang who was hurrying along a road one night. In a very remote area, he unexpectedly came across a ghost. Striking a courageous pose, he asked, "Who

are you? And why do you hop up and down when you walk?

"I am a ghost! Who are you?"

When he heard that, Song Dingbo thought to himself, "Oh no, how did I manage to run into a ghost today?" If he openly told the ghost that he was a human being, he thought he might have a big problem on his hands. So he lied, "I, too, am a ghost!"

"Oh, so you are a ghost, too! Where are you going?"

"I am going to the capital."

When the ghost heard that, he appeared quite pleased and said, "Great! I am going to the capital, too. Why don't we travel together?"

Song Dingbo had no choice but to agree to walk along with the ghost. After a while, they both became tired, and the ghost said, "There is still a long way to go, and if we continue like this, it will be pretty rough. Why don't we take turns carrying each other? That way we can hurry along, and one of us can rest as we go."

"Okay."

"Let me carry you first." As soon as the ghost stopped speaking, he hoisted Song Dingbo onto his back.

"Oh, wow! How can you be so heavy?" he asked.

Song Dingbo quickly made up a lie to answer the ghost: "Since I died only very recently, I am still quite heavy."

The ghost believed his story and continued carrying him along the road until they came to the bank of a river full of rushing water. The ghost pointed to the river and said, "We had best swim across this."

With a slight grunt, the ghost dove into the water and swam as lithely as a cloud to the other side, where he turned to watch Song Dingbo slowly struggle to cross the river, expending great effort and with much splashing and sputtering. The ghost ran to the bank and in a disdainful voice, asked, "Why did you make so much noise when you were swimming? If any humans hear you, they will be really frightened. Why did you make so much noise?"

Song Dingbo realized the ghost was getting suspicious, so he again quickly relied on human trickery to come up with a story: "Since I just died, I am not that good at swimming yet."

After Song Dingbo climbed out of the water, the two continued on their way, but Song thought to himself, "I am really unlucky today for meeting a ghost. I better think of some way to get away from him." So, Song put on a humble and deferential face and asked the ghost, "Say, older brother, since I have not been dead very long, I am not all that clear about the world of ghosts. For starters, can you tell me what it is that we ghosts fear more than anything else?"

"We ghosts are most afraid of human saliva. If someone spits on us, we will be totally helpless," the ghost answered in a very sincere manner.

By this time, dawn was breaking, and the sky was as pale as a fish's belly. After a night of traveling, the two could see that they were almost to the capital. Taking advantage of a moment when the ghost was not paying attention, Song Dingbo spat a thick gob of saliva at him. Immediately, the ghost began twisting and writhing in pain, and then just as quickly, he turned into a small mountain goat. Song subsequently led the small goat to the capital and sold it for one thousand copper coins.

The truth is that ghosts are not terribly frightening. Surely, they are not as frightening as some people, just as Song Dingbo's actions were much more dismaying than the ghost's. Yet there are still many timid people who fear ghosts. For someone who truly fears ghosts, developing wisdom will naturally allow one to overcome such fears. Otherwise, he or she will have to rely on outside help. Ultimately, we all must rely on ourselves by making good connections with others throughout our lives. As long as we have wholesome causes and conditions, even if we end up running into a ghost in the middle of the night, some good person will surely come to our aid.

Once we are without fear, we are in fact more likely to avoid many calamities. One time, there was

a nun who was bitten by a venomous snake. She had a severe reaction to the venom and appeared as if she was going to die, but amazingly, she was not frightened. She said, "I am someone who contemplates emptiness. A venomous snake can bite my body, but can it bite emptiness?" If we can identify with emptiness, we will have no fear.

A compassionate person has no enemies and is welcome wherever he or she goes. If we are wise and understand many things, then we will have no fears. If we have courage, believe in ourselves, have right thoughts and the ability to direct our attention where we want, there will be no fear. When we have to walk along a road at night, we must depend on lights. If a person lacks courage, he or she can get other people to walk with him or her. It is fairly easy to deal with objective fears that come from the outside, but it is also important to realize that all fear arises from the timidity and ignorance of the mind. This is why we must train ourselves.

V. Healing through the Five Contemplations

Buddhism also teaches the "five contemplations that still the mind." *The Commentary on the Flower Adornment Sutra* says, "Wholesome methods for curing illnesses are: for illnesses that arise out of the four great elements of this world, herbal medicines are the cure; for mental afflictions, the ten perfections and the five contemplations that still the mind

are the cure." The five contemplations that still the mind are used to address five kinds of harmful mental afflictions:

The Contemplation of Impurity

The contemplation of impurity is used to heal the mind of greed and lust. Sentient beings often confuse impurity with purity. A flower that appears beautiful may arouse desire in some people, just as a handsome man or attractive woman may arouse passion in others. These sorts of reactions create all clinging and afflictions in the mind. The contemplation of impurity teaches us to see that the things we desire have another side to them—in addition to being beautiful, they can also be filthy and unclean. For example, a flower may appear attractive, but when you remember that it grows in dirt, and its petals and leaves may hold many parasites and germs, you may no longer be attached to it. If you see a person who you think is very attractive but visualize that his or her body is a rancid leather bag put together by many causes and conditions, realizing it is merely an unclean bundle of flesh and bones, then the mind will naturally be free from lust.

The Contemplation of Kindness and Compassion

The contemplation of kindness and compassion is used to heal the mind of anger. Some people often

lose their temper for no reason and aggravate others. Some people feel no joy when they see others do good, yet feel spiteful when they notice someone doing something bad. Some people point out how much they dislike someone, someplace, or even a time schedule. Still others think they are always right about everything and others are always wrong. These kinds of people tend to argue a lot and are easily angered.

Most people know that kindness and compassion are the core of Buddhism. Kindness and compassion remove the suffering of others while giving them joy. Any Buddhist teaching that departs from the spirit of kindness and compassion is nothing more than deceptive teaching. Kindness and compassion is Buddha nature and wisdom itself, and it means that our minds have a correct view of the importance of helping others; it is based upon benefiting other sentient beings selflessly and altruistically. Kindness and compassion is purified love; it is generosity that does not seek a reward. If you have a truly kind and compassionate mind, why would you cling to notions of what you like or dislike?

Kindness and compassion are not confined to Buddhist practitioners; it is a gift that belongs to all sentient beings. When people are compassionate and loving, lives will be filled with meaning. In China, there is a saying: “A humane person has no

enemies." If we capture this sensibility in Buddhist terms, it means that kindness and compassion and love have no adversaries and that they can overcome all problems. Kindness and compassion are virtues implemented through our actions and not a ruler to measure the worth of others. True, kindness and compassion are not always expressed through pleasant praise and gentle encouragement. Sometimes, great kindness and compassion have a more difficult and noble manifestation, and they use their diamond-like toughness to destroy demons.

The Contemplation of Causes and Conditions

The contemplation of causes and conditions is used to heal the mind of ignorance. Some people believe the self and everything in this world either exists or does not exist. This is ignorance based on clinging to a one-sided view of reality. People who contend that there is nothing after death are ignorant because they cling to a type of nihilism. People who believe they will be reborn as humans after they die are ignorant because they cling the idea of eternity. Some people believe Buddhist practice must be very austere and involve depriving oneself of food and sleep; they are ignorant because they cling to extreme asceticism. Others think Buddhist practice should always be completely joyful, and these people are ignorant because they cling to the feeling of joy. The common

problem is clinging to one's ignorant beliefs, which can be overcome by using the contemplation of causes and conditions, since ignorance exists essentially due to a failure to understand the truth.

What is the truth? All things arise due to causes and conditions. The Buddha's explanation of the three time periods and the twelve links of dependent origination teaches us how to understand the interconnectedness of the past, present, and future. There is nothing in this world that arises alone or stands alone, for each thing depends on many causes and conditions. For example, a building consists of a steel framework, cement, and wood, and it depends on human labor for its construction. A building is formed by many causes and conditions. In the same way, a single grain of rice is the result of many causes and conditions such as the original seedling, the rice paddy, sunlight, water, and the farmer who planted, irrigated, and tended to the rice. From the contemplation of causes and conditions, we learn that all things in the universe are the conditions on which our lives are based—all things in the universe have led to our birth and development. They are wholesome causes and conditions that have supported us, so we must always show our gratitude by being kind to all people. If we can truly understand the profound and wondrous causes and conditions that underlie all beings, we will transform ignorance into wisdom.

The Contemplation of the Buddha

The contemplation of the Buddha is used to overcome karmic obstruction. Due to bad karma generated by unwholesome actions, speech, and intentions in former lives, some people experience many difficulties in life. Nothing they do seems to go right: when they try to make money, someone always swindles them; when they try to do good things, someone always slanders them; when they go out, they often get into accidents or trouble somehow. Indeed, no matter what they do, they tend to suffer from resentment and criticism. The contemplation of the Buddha can cure such problems of karmic obstruction. This contemplation asks us, first, to reflect on the emptiness and non-action of the Buddha's Dharmakaya, using it to combat the karmic obstacles that arise due to pressures around us. Second, this contemplation may also be used to consider the many virtues of the Buddha's Sambhogakaya, as the mental states produced by this tend to lessen the negative karmic obstructions that arise within the mind. Lastly, this contemplation may be used to consider the noble and radiant features of the Buddha's Nirmanakaya, as the mental states produced by this tend to lessen the negative karmic obstructions of sloth and pessimism.

The Contemplation of Counting the Breath

The contemplation of breathing is used to heal confusion and anxiety. Our thoughts are everywhere. One moment they are in heaven; the next they are in hell. Our minds constantly fly between wholesome and unwholesome thoughts and back again. The contemplation of breathing can cure a confused and chaotic mind. The contemplation of breathing is a practice that entails counting each inhale and exhale to allow the confused mind to settle.

VI. Healing the Mind with Buddhist Practice

Beyond these five contemplations, one can also heal oneself by practicing both Chan and Pure Land Buddhism. Chan practices are good for gathering oneself, not allowing our thoughts to run wild, and keeping the forces of delusion at bay. Pure Land practices are helpful for purifying the spirit and focusing the mind. When we can recite the Buddha's name with total concentration, we can also subdue delusions and keep the disease of stray thoughts from unsettling us.

There are many other forms of practice in Buddhism such as bowing to the Buddha and taking vows. Vows provide us with the strength to resist delusions. Buddhist practice emphasizes the importance of making vows of compassion, repentance,

and cultivating the bodhi mind because these types of vows can endow us with incomparable strength. Additionally, we can learn to endure what we must and let go of what we can. We can also cultivate prajna wisdom and sound reasoning. All of these practices are unsurpassed remedies for healing the illnesses of the mind.

Today, many of the counseling techniques used by psychologists are far less effective than the practices taught within the Buddhist tradition. This is especially evident when we consider that Buddhism clearly teaches that virtually all mental problems spring from clinging to the self. *The Heart Sutra* says, "[Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva] realized the five aggregates are empty and was liberated from all suffering and hardship." Similarly, once we can understand that the self is empty, we will overcome all confusion and mental turmoil.

Though it is somewhat easy to overcome clinging to the self, clinging to the Dharma is another matter. Buddhist practice means battling with the 84,000 afflictions mentioned by the Buddha. If we allow ourselves to be careless, we can easily be defeated by any of those afflictions. For this reason, healing the illnesses of the body and mind require us to reinforce our strength with wisdom, kindness and compassion, and sound reasoning. A martial artist must know eighteen martial forms; similarly, Buddhist practitioners

need to bolster their defenses with positive forces, such as the six perfections, the four means of embracing, the Noble Eightfold Path, and so on. Only by being prepared can we expect to subdue the afflictions that can do harm to our mental health.

Conclusion

If we want to heal ourselves, we have to rely on our own efforts. A doctor can prescribe medication to a patient, but no one can force the patient to take it. If the patient does not take it, he or she may never recover. In the same way, even though Buddhist practices can heal the illnesses of the mind, if one refuses to practice them diligently, his or her disease may never be cured. Learning from the Buddha is nothing more than studying his teachings and putting them into practice. It is much more important to live by the teachings prescribed by the Buddha than just to believe in them. If we merely believe but do nothing, it is like talking about food or counting someone else's money; we will not enjoy any of the benefits. However, if we commit to enacting the Dharma in our everyday lives, they are sure to improve!