

Seeing Clearly

Buddhism in Every Step D4
（英文版）

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Seeing Clearly

I. To See Space

Most of us have an idea of what constitutes the space outside of us; it is the environment in which we live. This includes the house we live in, the city we live in, or even the world we live in. We need to manage the space outside of us. For example, if we wish to travel, we need to know which route to use, what kind of transportation we need, how much time it requires, what we need to pack for the trip, and what potential problems we may encounter along the way. If we plan ahead, chances are we will have a wonderful trip. Longer trips, like traveling around the world or into outer space, require much more extensive planning, but the considerations are pretty much the same. If we expend the effort to plan and to understand, we stand a fair chance of being able to manage the space outside of us.

But there is a limit to the space that is outside of us, what we may call our "external space."

Regardless of how powerful or resourceful we are, the extent of our external space is still very limited. Some may disagree because we now have the ability to send people to the moon or to faraway space stations. While these wonders are a reality, the area we can cover is still just a small corner of our solar system. Our solar system is a miniscule fraction of our galaxy, and there are millions upon millions of galaxies in the universe. Hard as we may try, the space in which we can leave our mark, in the scheme of the universe, is as insignificant as a dust particle. Most of us spend our entire lifetime trying to amass as much "space" as possible in the form of land or material possessions, but there is a Chinese saying that puts this into perspective: "With ten thousand acres of fertile land, we sleep in an eight-foot space at night."

The space inside of us, our "internal space," is another story. It is formless and hard to visualize or comprehend. The Buddha told us that the space inside of us is many times larger than the space outside of us. One of the sutras says, "The mind encompasses the space of the universe, traversing realms as numerous as there are grains of sand in the Ganges." We should get to know the space inside of us rather than becoming preoccupied with the space outside of us.

To be clear, when I say "internal space," I mean the heart, and we should learn to let our hearts grow. In Chinese literature, when someone has a big heart,

we say that even boats can sail around in it. The Buddha told us that the immenseness of the heart can encompass the whole universe. When we open up the heart, we feel the wholeness of the universe within us. Once, someone suggested to the father of Venerable Tzu Hui that he should do some traveling. He pointed to his heart and replied, "The whole universe is right here within my heart. Where else would I want to go?" How freeing!

How can we allow our hearts to grow? *The Vimalakirti Sutra* contains a teaching called the "Dharma door of non-duality," which means not creating distinctions or divisions. When we open our hearts, we are vast like the oceans that welcome water from all tributaries, large and small, or like Mount Sumeru,[1] which embraces all kinds of soil, coarse and fine. When we open our hearts, disputes, politics, and power struggles will no longer affect us. We will be at ease wherever we find ourselves. Only when we are at ease with the space inside of us, can we enjoy the space outside of us.

The World Ahead, the World Behind

In life, it is important to know how to forge ahead, but it is even more important to know how to pause and look back. Most of us only know how to go

1. In Buddhist cosmology, Mount Sumeru is the tallest mountain in existence.

forward and do not realize that there is also a world of possibilities behind us. When things are going our way, we charge ahead, seemingly unstoppable. When we come to a brick wall, we stubbornly continue our forward motion and bring much unnecessary suffering upon ourselves.

The Buddha teaches that at any moment in life, there are two worlds to choose from: one is the world ahead; the other is the world behind. We should know how to make use of both of these worlds, without excluding either of them. When the time is right to charge ahead, we should charge ahead. When it is time to turn back, we should turn back. These two worlds are like our two hands; we should use both, for there is no need for us to go through life with one hand tied behind our back. There is a Buddhist poem that describes how we can move ahead by stepping backward. It goes like this:

Planting rice by hand in the field,
With lowered head, the sky is seen in the water.
Purifying the six sense organs is the way;
Step back to proceed onward.

When we come to a precipice in the journey of life, we should remind ourselves that if we take a step back and think, we can better see that the ocean is clear, and the sky is wide open. We can look to the

behavior of water for a perfect example of this attitude. We all need water, and it is everywhere. When water flows downhill, it picks up speed, and as it approaches flat land, it slows down. As it travels over the flat land, it meanders and automatically changes course when it hits obstructions. If we can learn to be like water and know when to change course, we will sail through life's obstacles and avoid unnecessary hardship.

Some people have said to me, "Your religion teaches people to refrain from smoking, drinking, and gambling. It takes all the fun out of life! Isn't that way of life too rigid and depressing?" We Buddhists refrain from smoking, drinking, and gambling because we see through the short-lived joy these activities hold; we know enough to step back and change course. We would rather devote our energies to practicing the teachings, spreading the Dharma, and helping others. When we truly understand that there is always a world behind us, then we will know that we can always choose to turn back. When we are faced with money, fame, love, or hate, we need not charge ahead; we can also turn back. When we know how to step back, we will actually progress in life. When we embrace not only the world ahead of us, but also the world behind us, then life is full of possibilities.

From the Phenomenal to the Transcendental

When we look around us, the world we see is covered with all kinds of colors and dotted with many different shapes—not unlike looking into a kaleidoscope. This is the world we all live in and where we pursue our hopes and dreams. How we live our lives in this world is entirely up to us. Some people see the world as a place to make money; others see it as a place for sharing with their loved ones; and there are those who see it as a place to make a name for themselves. It is very easy to get caught up in the things of this world. Our delusions prevent us from seeing that all phenomena arise from a combination of causes and conditions and have no independent nature of their own. *The Diamond Sutra* says, "All phenomena are illusory." If we understand this truth, we can transcend the phenomenal world and not be bound by it.

What is the transcendental world? Notice that the question is "what" and not "where," for the transcendental world is right here on Earth. Living in the transcendental world does not mean that we have to give up our everyday activities, like eating or sleeping. We will continue to eat, sleep, and put on our clothes. The difference is that we are no longer preoccupied with the trifles of life. If we live in this world of money and fame without getting caught up in it, then our world can become a transcendental world.

It is admirable to remove yourself from the rat race, but it is even more admirable to work within it and remain true to yourself. The lotus flower is a much admired symbol of Buddhism, for while it grows in the mud, it remains pure. It is easy to stay immaculate in a sterile environment, but it is a lot more difficult to remain clean in a filthy setting. For a Buddhist, choosing to retreat in isolation is not the supreme form of cultivation; instead, it is to remain unmoved when surrounded by temptation. The most cultivated among us are those who can practice even amid a crowd. We have special admiration for those who practice the Dharma amid the hustle and bustle of life. Throughout history, there have been many such examples for us to learn from. The Chinese poet Tao Yuanming wrote, "Live amongst the people, yet hear not the bustle of horses and carriages." In his eponymous sutra, it is said of the layman Vimalakirti: "Though a layman, he is not attached to the three realms. Though married, he always cultivates purity." Chan Master Ikkyu, a respected monk of his time, was another good example. Once, while he was out traveling with his disciple, he saw a woman by the bank of a swift flowing river, wondering how she would cross to the other side. Chan Master Ikkyu offered to carry her across on his back. At this time in Japan, physical contact between a monk and a woman was strictly forbidden. His disciple, horrified that

his teacher would have such contact with a woman, remained sullen for a whole month. When the Chan master found out what was bothering his student, he told him, "I've already forgotten the whole incident. I only carried the woman across, but you have been carrying her in your mind for a whole month." When we see through the illusion of the phenomenal world and do not become attached to anything, then we are living transcendently.

II. To Know Time

The Buddhist sutras say that "We live from breath to breath." This saying should remind us of the brevity and impermanence of life. In Chinese myth, there is a figure named Pengzu who is said to have lived for eight hundred years, and the celestial beings of Buddhism are said to have lifetimes of tens of thousands of years, but even these lifespans are as fleeting as the morning dew when viewed against all of eternity.

Each one of us should treasure the time we have and use it wisely. We should use our limited time to enrich our lives and live life to its fullest.

Some of us live to be seventy while others may live to be a hundred. The limited time we have in this world is often diminished by all the things we have to do to stay alive. Because of these activities,

a single day gets chopped up into bits and pieces. Each day we eat, sleep, work at our jobs, and work around the house, and before we know it, another day is over. To prepare food, we first have to buy it and cook it before we can eat it. Even if we go out to eat, we still have to travel to a restaurant and wait to be served before we can eat. Sleeping also takes up a lot of our time. We have to tidy our beds, and we sometimes toss and turn before falling asleep. While we may or may not enjoy eating or sleeping, we still have to engage in these activities; there is just no getting around it. If we take the limited years we have and deduct the time we spend eating, sleeping, traveling from place to place, waiting in lines, cleaning ourselves, and going to the bathroom, how much time do we have left? On top of this, if we take away the years we were young and the time we will spend debilitated by old age, there is really not that much time left to apply ourselves to the betterment of mankind. The prime years of our lives are truly limited and brief.

Given how fragmented our days and years are, I often encourage people to make use of every bit and piece of time. In the case of young students, I advise them to make use of the fifteen minutes they have here and there to read a book, write in a journal, or review a chapter. Why waste time chatting or watching television? Little bits of free time are also good

for practicing Buddhist chanting. We can recite the name of Amitabha Buddha while cooking or cleaning, waiting for the bus, or commuting to work. In Buddhism, there is a saying, "Say one less sentence; recite the name of Amitabha Buddha one more time."

There is another common saying, "Illness enters through the mouth; trouble exits through the mouth." When we chat with our friends without thinking about what we are saying, we can easily say something which offends them without even realizing it, so when we have a moment of free time, we should use it to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha or to contemplate the splendid appearance of the Buddha. In this way, not only will we not inadvertently offend others, but it is also an easy way to practice. This is truly a win-win situation. When we are constantly mindful of the Buddha, we will be at peace with whatever we are doing. When we can make use of each fragment of time we have, our practice also benefits.

When we were building Fo Guang Shan Temple many years ago in Taiwan, there were some who were skeptical and asked me, "Are you an architect? What do you know about building? Are you a trained educator? What do you know about running schools?"

I would tell those people that my biggest secret is that I know how to use my time. Even though I am not an architect or a trained educator, I have traveled to many places and seen many houses. I often put

myself in the shoes of a contractor and imagine what I would do if I were building the house I am in. When I was still in school, I would often think about what I would do differently if I were running the school. When we began building Fo Guang Shan, I already had an idea of what I wanted to do, and everything just fell into place.

In today's fast-paced society, if we don't know how to make use of every bit of time, we will find ourselves always struggling for more. With the advent of pagers, faxes, and cell phones, the age of the nine-to-five workday is history. We have to adapt to this hectic lifestyle and use every bit of time to reflect. Unfortunately, when I look around, I see a lot of people squandering their time away. When I ride the bus, I often see people sitting with blank stares on their faces. It is unlikely that someone who doesn't know how to utilize their time will ever achieve anything remarkable. According to the sutras, we should always be mindful of the Buddha, even when showering or going to the bathroom. When we string together all the fragments of time, we can continually stay mindful of the Buddha. In this way, the Buddha acts as our anchor, and we can remain unmoved by changes in our life, career, or circumstances.

The passing of time is merciless. If we are not watchful, time slips by without a trace, like a thin veil of fog. We have to seize the present moment,

for time waits for no one. If we wait for things to happen, we often end up sitting idly by. We should treasure the limited years we have in this life and apply ourselves to living the best we can. We should work to better ourselves, for we do not want to look back when we are old and wish that things had been different.

Once, there were two men from Sichuan who both wanted to make a pilgrimage to Guanyin Temple at Mount Putuo. One man wanted to wait until he had saved up enough money to hire a boat so that he could travel by sea to the shores of Mount Putuo. The other man was poor, but he wanted to leave right away. He decided to travel to Mount Putuo on foot, asking for alms along the way. After a while, the poor man returned, while the other man had yet to hire a boat, let alone start on his pilgrimage.

The moral of the story is that we should not spend our lives waiting for things to happen. Instead, we should seize the present moment and *make* things happen. As long as we have the ability to do good, we should act when the opportunity presents itself. Opportunity does not knock twice; we do not want to have to look back and think what could have been. When we are young, we should make use of our youth and apply ourselves. We do not want to wait until our hair is gray to realize that we have wasted our youth away. The wise do not romanticize about

the past or fantasize about the future; they simply live in the present.

The sands of time disappear one grain at a time, and before long, we wonder where the years have gone. We should use the time we have to make whatever contributions we can. When we were building Fo Guang Shan Temple in Taiwan, the area we had chosen was a remote and barren piece of land. Some people wondered out loud why we should "waste" our time. With determination and the help of many faithful devotees, we finally completed what we had started. Imagine if we had not started when we did or if we had decided to wait for a better location, Fo Guang Shan may not be where it is today. If we use our time to create rather than to wait, then we can turn dreams into reality. As long as we dedicate ourselves to serving others, our time is well spent.

Amitabha Buddha is an excellent example of one who used his time to create. Amitabha Buddha is known for creating the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, where beings who are reborn there can cultivate without the impurities of our world. It was manifested through the strength of Amitabha Buddha's forty-eight great vows, which came to fruition over the course of countless asamkhyeya kalpas.[2] We should learn from Amitabha Buddha and use our time to

2. A *kalpa* is an incredible long, nearly incalculable period of time. An *asamkhyeya kalpa* is an especially long kalpa.

make things happen. We should not sit idly by waiting for Amitabha Buddha to come and invite us into the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. We should use our time to work hard in our practice and apply ourselves diligently. In this way, our practice will be like the great vows of Amitabha Buddha, and we will be able to realize our own pure land.

If we only focus on how limited our life is, we will begin to think that life is dull and lacks possibilities. On the contrary, if we realize that life is everlasting, then life becomes a lot more interesting. Some of you may ask, "Since we all will die one day, isn't it impossible to say that life is everlasting?" If we can break out of our tunnel vision, we will see that death is, in fact, the beginning of another life.

According to the Buddha's teachings, death is not the final chapter of life. Death is like moving from an old house to a new house; when our current physical body becomes old and dies, we will take up a new body. How we will be reborn depends on our cumulative positive and negative karma. Let's take the analogy of moving into a new house a step further. If we have been putting money away while living in our current house, then we can afford to move to a nicer, bigger house when the current one starts to fall apart. If we have not been putting money away, then when it is time to move, we'll have no choice but to move down to a smaller house. Thus, while

our life is limited, we should use our time wisely to do good. Then when it is time for us to depart this body, we can be reborn into the Pure Land.

According to the sutras, the Pure Land is a place of grandeur. The ground is paved with gold, and the houses are built of seven kinds of precious stones. Thus, Buddhists do not fear death, and we do not look at death as an end. We know that by steadfastly practicing during this brief existence, we will come to happiness in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Once, there was an elderly gentleman who wanted to plant a peach tree. As he was laboring to plant the small peach tree, a young man passed by. The young man struck up a conversation with the elderly man and asked, "Sir, are you sure you want to spend such energy on planting this tree? You may not live to see it grow, let alone enjoy its fruit. Is this not a waste?"

The old man stood up and wiped off his sweat. With his dry, crackling voice, he looked at the young man and, in a serious tone, replied, "You are too young to understand the meaning of life. It is not that I want to plant this tree for myself. Though I may not live to see it bear fruit, my sons will get to enjoy its shade, and my grandchildren will enjoy its fruit. How can you say this is a waste?"

The young man was moved by the profound insight of the elderly gentleman; this is why we say

that later generations enjoy the fruits of earlier generations' labor. We should not look at life as limited by the span of one person's lifetime; we should look at the larger life of the universe. While a person's life may only span a limited number of years, its value is everlasting. The continuity of life from one person to another is not unlike the process of spreading fire from one candle to another. While the fire of the second candle is not the same as the fire of the first candle, it represents a continuation of the fire from the first candle. In a similar way, we can see the continuity of life from one being to another.

Since we all play roles in the continuum of life, how can we contribute to this larger life? Some people contribute through politics, others through their writing, and others live by example. While these are all worthwhile contributions, Buddhism teaches us a more complete and better way. Buddhism teaches us to discover the *Dharmakaya*. "Dharmakaya" means "body of truth" and refers to the true form of the Buddha, which is present everywhere and is everlasting. Each of us can discover our own Dharmakaya, and, in doing so, find eternity. Our teacher, Sakyamuni Buddha, is a great example of one who found eternity in the Dharmakaya. Though the Buddha entered nirvana over two thousand five hundred years ago, the Dharmakaya of the Buddha is still here with us.

III. To Understand Community

Human beings are social animals; we cannot live apart from community. We should seek the Dharma among the people. The cornerstone of a happy life is to have good relationships with others. Thus, it is important that we understand the role that our relationships with others play in life. Toward this end, I would like to present three points to consider:

1. Think of the Greater Good

This world is the culmination of all of our collective causes and conditions. Thus, the world is here for all of us. Each one of us is born into this world because of our own individual causes and conditions. The fact that we live in this world together with others means that we share some common causes and conditions. Since we all live in this world, we should try to see others' points of view and extend a hand to others when they need help. If we all can be considerate of others, then the world will be a better place.

Venerable Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School of Buddhism, once said, "The Dharma is within the world. Apart from this world, there is no awakening. Seeking *bodhi* apart from the world is like looking for a rabbit's horn." The Dharma is in the world, in every one of us. If we want to experience the Dharma, we should first start

by understanding that we are all one. When our view of the world is grounded in oneness, then our life will be truly joyous and meaningful.

Happiness, like the Dharma, cannot be fully experienced apart from others. When we go to the movies, it is more fun to go with others. When we share moments of joy with others, we feel truly blessed. Why? Let me explain by returning to the candle analogy. When we use the flame of one candle to light other candles, the original flame does not lose its brightness. On the contrary, the light from all the candles build upon each other, making the room that much brighter. Happiness is very much like the flame of a candle. When we share our joy with others, our joy will not be lessened. Many times, our emotional state is dependent on how others around us feel. Take the example of the everyday family dinner. It is a lovely sight to see caring parents and happy children sitting together at the dinner table, laughing and talking. The dinner may be simple, but the atmosphere is what makes the difference. On the other hand, eating alone takes the fun out of eating. In solitude, even gourmet food tastes like cardboard. From this, we see that happiness is something that multiplies when shared. Thus, if we want to find lasting happiness, we must first take down the walls that separate us from each other.

I have personally experienced how much better life can be when it is grounded in oneness. In my

early years, I came into some money from the books and articles I authored. Using this money, I purchased a fairly nice house, thinking that it would give me a place to concentrate on my writing. True, the house was comfortable, but I ended up selling it and using the proceeds to start Fo Guang Shan. Now when I hear the voices of young students reciting their lessons at the schools of Fo Guang Shan or when I see devotees coming to pay their respects to the Buddha, I feel such joy. Even though I personally do not possess anything, the reward I get from seeing how Fo Guang Shan has blossomed is many times greater than the comfort of living in a nice house. When we look at the world through the eyes of the community, then our lives will be much more rewarding and joyful.

2. Feel Remorse for Any Harm That We Cause

Each day we are alive in this world, we create new karma through what we think, what we say, and what we do. Some of our karma is positive, but we also create a lot of negative karma. Thus, when we interact with the people around us, we should always be mindful of our actions.

Buddhism places a great deal of emphasis on continually reflecting on the "three doors"—our body, speech, and mind—by which we generate karma, as well as feeling remorse for any of the ill we may have

caused. The Buddhist practice of repentance can have a great impact. For example, if a student makes some mistakes on an examination but learns from those mistakes, the student will not repeat them in the future. We should all be vigilant in not repeating our mistakes, and the practice of repentance can act like the Dharma water that washes away our delusions.

During the seventy or eighty years each of us is here in this world, we are constantly busy, working, and providing for our family. How many times, because of our obligations to work or family, have we created conflicts with others? If we all learn to be vigilant in guarding the three doors of karma and repent for the harm we've caused, then we stand a better chance of creating more positive karma than negative. The sutras say, "Do not fear having affliction; fear not awakening soon enough." When our delusions cause us to act unwholesomely, we should immediately recognize them and repent for our actions. What is most tragic is when we do not see our faults and continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. If we mistakenly walk into a swamp, we still can be saved if we quickly turn around and walk out. If, however, we stubbornly persist on the same course of action, we will soon be beyond hope of being rescued.

There are various kinds of Buddhist rites and rituals that teach us to atone for our mistakes. In

addition to these, I have here a simple method that we can use in everyday life. This method works all the time, and all you have to do is remember: "You are right; I am wrong."

This may sound counterintuitive because we are trained from a very young age to look out for ourselves. We can spot others' mistakes from a mile away, but we are blind to our own follies even when they are right under our noses. If we could switch this around, then the world would be a much more peaceful place. Let me give you an illustration of how this works in everyday life:

It was a hot day, and Lee wanted to turn on the fan. Chan was annoyed and yelled, "Don't just think about yourself. You know I have a cold. Please turn off the fan."

Lee was put off by Chan's yelling and answered back, "You are the one with the cold. If you don't like the fan, you can sit over there."

Now, Lee was really angry and shot back, "Why should I move?"

One wants to turn on the fan, and the other wants it off. They just cannot see eye to eye. What if Lee had just apologized to Chan in the beginning and moved the fan so that it did not point in Chan's direction? The whole incident would have just blown over. When we're focused on our own faults, there is little room for delusion to manifest itself. When

we do not dwell on the faults of others, there is little chance for conflicts to develop. In this way, we make peace, not war.

3. Be Generous and Grateful

Most people are focused on themselves. They have no qualms about taking, but when it is their turn to give, they make all kinds of excuses. If we understand the Buddha's teachings on life and the universe, we will change our ways. If we understand that every cause has its effect, then we may think differently about taking advantage of others, and we will not be so hesitant about giving.

Once, there were two men from the same village. One of them was miserly, while the other was generous. They both happened to pass away at about the same time. In death, they appeared before King Yama who was about to pass judgement on their past actions. He told the two men, "I am going to let both of you be reborn into the world. One of you will always be giving while the other will always be receiving. Which one would you rather be?"

The miserly person immediately spoke up, "I want to be the one that is always receiving."

The other man did not mind being the one who will always be giving, so he agreed. Both of them stood there waiting for final instructions as to where they would be reborn. King Yama picked up his staff

and pounded on the ground a few times. He said to the miser, "Since you choose to receive from others, you will be reborn as a beggar. This will give you plenty of opportunity to be on the receiving end." He then turned to the other man and said, "You will be reborn into great wealth. Share your wealth with those less fortunate and give alms."

As Buddhists, we should model ourselves after the Buddha. The Buddha is always compassionate, and puts the welfare of others before his own. Instead of thinking, "What can others do for me?" we should think, "What can I do for others?" The experience of giving is much more fulfilling than receiving.

If we pause just for a minute, we will see that we owe our existence to the generosity of many. We will realize that in addition to giving, we should be thankful for what we have. Generosity and gratitude always go hand in hand. What should we be thankful for? We should be thankful for the Buddha's teachings. We should be thankful for our parents giving us life, raising us, and teaching us. We should be thankful for our teachers and elders who taught us right from wrong. We should be thankful to all those who provided us with our many necessities in life. We should also be thankful for the sun, which gives us warmth, for the air, which gives us oxygen, for the rain, which gives us water, and for nature, which lets us enjoy its beauty. When we think of all the causes

and conditions that must be present for us to live, we should feel indebted to everything we have. Then we can listen to the singing of the birds with delight and look at every flower in a different light.

All the great Buddhists in history share the common trait of gratitude. Their gratitude is a form of practice. One example that comes to mind was the Venerable Yinguang, who became a monastic at the age of twenty one. When he first became a monk, he was responsible for making sure that there was enough boiled water for drinking. When he needed to boil more water, he had to first go into the woods to get firewood. A lot of people in his shoes would complain of being assigned such a menial task. Not only was Venerable Yinguang never bitter, he was very grateful that he was given the opportunity to live there and work for the temple. If we are conscious of our blessings, we will not be bent out of shape when we are thrown a curve in life. We are fast becoming a nation of cynics; we concentrate on being vindictive rather than being grateful. If we develop a grateful attitude, I can assure you that conflict, jealousy, and squabbles will disappear without a trace.