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The Fundamental Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism

Buddhism in Every Step 2

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The Fundamental Concepts of Humanistic Buddhism

The founder of Buddhism, Sakyamuni Buddha, is the Buddha of our world. He was born into this world; he cultivated his spiritual development, attained enlightenment, 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 not achieve Buddhahood in one of the other five realms? Why did he not attain enlightenment in one of the other ten dharma worlds? Why did he, instead, attain complete awakening as a human being? Taking this question one step further, why did the Buddha not attain enlightenment in a past or future kalpa? Why did he choose our saha world and our present kalpa? There can only be one reason: the Buddha wanted the teachings of Buddhism to be relevant to the human

world. The Buddha's very life as a human being has given us all an inspiration and a model for the spiritual path and for making our own lives a spiritual practice. The Buddhism that the Buddha gave us is humanistic, and Humanistic Buddhism is the integrating of our spiritual practice into all aspects of our daily lives. Humanistic Buddhism has the following six characteristics:

1. Humanism

The Buddha was neither a spirit, coming and going without leaving a trace, nor was he a figment of one's imagination. 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 his human existence that he showed his supreme wisdom of compassion, ethical responsibility, and prajna-wisdom. Thus, he is a Buddha who was also a human being.

2. Emphasis on Daily Life

In his teachings, the Buddha placed great im-

portance on daily life as spiritual practice. He provided guidance on everything, from how to eat, dress, work, and live, to how to walk, stand, sit, and sleep. He gave clear directions on every aspect of life, from relations among family members and between friends to 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 and heart. In short, his every thought, word, and action arose from a heart filled with deep care and concern for others.

4. Joyfulness

The Buddhist teachings give people joy. Through the limitless compassion of his heart, the Buddha aimed to relieve the suffering of all beings and to give them joy.

5. Timeliness

The Buddha was born for a great reason: 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 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, etc.

In the past, it has been difficult for people to see the relevance of Buddhism in their modern, daily lives. I can still recall the exchange between Mr. Shuming Liang and Master Taixu about the relevance of Buddhism to our human world. Mr. Shuming Liang said that he felt Buddhism did not emphasize human concerns sufficiently in explaining why he parted ways with Buddhism and focused his energy in Confucianism. When Mr. Liang was in-

vited by Master Taixu to lecture at Hanzang Buddhist College, Mr. Liang began his lecture by writing on the board: “Now, Today, and Us.” He said, “It is precisely for these reasons that I chose to study Confucianism. Buddhism speaks of the countless past, present, and future kalpas, but I believe the present time in which we live is the most important. Buddhism speaks of space and the elements, of this and other worlds, of the countless worlds in all ten directions, but I believe our own world is what we must purify. Buddhism speaks of humans and all beings of the ten dharma worlds, but I believe humans are the most important.” After the lecture, Master Taixu offered his insight about the matter. He said that although Buddhism speaks of the past, present, and future, it particularly highlights the universal welfare of the beings of *the present world*; although Buddhism speaks of this world and countless other worlds, it particularly underscores the welfare of the beings of *this world*; and although Buddhism speaks of all beings of the ten dharma worlds, it reserves the most emphasis for *humans*.

Buddhism is a religion for human beings, and the regard for human concerns is very much at the

root of this religion. In the various sutras and sastras, the Buddha said repeatedly that he, too, was a member of the community in 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 multitude of beings, there is no path to Truth.” The Sixth Patriarch also taught that, “The Dharma is in the world; to understand the world is to understand the Dharma. Seeking enlightenment apart from this world is like seeking horns on a rabbit.” To achieve Buddhahood, we must train and cultivate ourselves in this human world of ours. There is simply no other way to attain Buddhahood. Now that we are so fortunate to be reborn as humans, we should live our lives in accordance with Humanistic Buddhism, integrating our spiritual practice and our daily lives.

When we say that Buddhism is a religion for human beings, we also need to understand that the human form is something we should treasure and not take for granted. In fact, the *Lotus Sutra* uses an analogy to illustrate both the difficulty and the preciousness of being born human. The sutra states: “In the pitch black night, a blind turtle hopes to find a

shallow shore. In the vast ocean and endless darkness there is only one piece of wood. This piece of wood has one hole. Over the course of one hundred years, the turtle only comes up for air one time. Only if it is able to find that hole will it be able to survive.” In the *Agama Sutra* it is also written: “The count of those who lose the human form are as numerous as the particles of dirt on the earth; the number of those who are able to attain the human form are as scarce as the dirt under a fingernail.” These quotations all indicate how precarious and precious human existence is.

Once I was at a fellowship meeting in San Francisco. A teacher in the group asked me this question, “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?” This comment greatly disturbed me, because such people perceive Buddhism as a religion removed from humanity. This perception of Buddhism is character-

ized by isolation, retreat to forests, self-concern, and individualism; it has lost its humanistic quality. It has reached the point where many who are interested in entering the gate of Buddhism dare not do so; they hesitate as they peer in and wander about outside. We must refocus and redouble our efforts towards helping all sentient beings.

The first 100 to 300 years of Buddhist history was the period of the Small Vehicle, but not the Great Vehicle; that is, Theravada Buddhism was popular, while Mahayana Buddhism remained obscure. The following 600 years saw the emergence of the practice of the Great Vehicle, but not the Small Vehicle; that is, Mahayana Buddhism gained popularity, but Theravada Buddhism receded from view. For 1,000 years after that, Tantric practice developed. The Humanistic Buddhism I advocate invites the integration of all Buddhist teachings from the time of the Buddha to the present—whether they are derived from the Theravada, Mahayana, or Tantric traditions.

Humanistic Buddhism is truly the study of the bodhisattva path. Chinese Buddhism has long honored the bodhisattva path, which Humanistic Buddhism embodies. Over the course of the development

of Chinese Buddhism, four mountains have gained fame as pilgrimage sites. Each of these mountains is associated with a particular bodhisattva: Avalokitesvara (Guanyin), Manjusri (Wenshu), Samantabhadra (Puxian), and Ksitigarbha (Dizang). Of the four, Avalokitesvara, Manjusri, and Samantabhadra all manifested as lay Buddhists; only Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva manifested as a monastic. Why did three out of these four bodhisattvas manifest as laypersons? This is because, while monastics emphasize detachment from and transcendence of the mundane world, it is the optimism and active engagement of lay Buddhists that holds the greatest potential to realize the goals of Mahayana Buddhism and is truer to the spirit of the Buddha. As Master Taixu once said of himself: “A bhiksu I am not, nor have I become a Buddha; instead, I hope to be called a bodhisattva.” What he meant is this: I dare not call myself a bhiksu since it is so difficult to uphold the bhiksu precepts with perfection. If you call me a Buddha, I have not yet become one. My hope, however, is to serve others as a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva is not merely a clay statue to be worshipped in a temple; rather, a bodhisattva is an energetic, enlightened, and en-

dearing person who strives to help all sentient beings liberate themselves. We can all become 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 being is the goal of Humanistic Buddhism.

In concert with our goal of becoming a bodhisattva, we should all strive to live in a pure land. While we speak of the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss to the west and the Pure Land of Azure Radiance to the east, in reality, pure lands are not just found in the east or west. Pure lands are everywhere. Maitreya Bodhisattva resides in the Tusita Pure Land, and Vimalakirti stresses the Pure Land of the Mind. Many of you are already familiar with the concept of the 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 planet Earth into a pure land of peace and bliss? Instead of committing all our energies to pursuing something in the future, why don't we direct our efforts toward purifying our minds and bodies right here and now in the present moment? It is in this spirit that Fo Guang Shan provides retirement care for long-time, loyal devotees

who have dedicated their lives to the Order. In this way, they do not necessarily need to be cared for by their children. They do not even need to wait until death to finally enjoy the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. 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 temples and monasteries should instill in these disciples the confidence that the Order can provide for all their needs and that they can find the joy of a pure land right here. I believe that Humanistic Buddhism must focus more on issues of the world rather than on how to leave the world behind, on caring for the living rather than for the dead, on benefiting others rather than benefiting oneself, and on universal salvation rather than cultivation for oneself only.

Regardless of the school (Theravada or Mahayana) or the emphasis (tantras or general teachings), Buddhism should have a humanistic dimension so that it can remain relevant as times change. Because Humanistic Buddhism attends to the trends of the current age rather than merely following traditions blindly, it is a beacon for the future. It is all the more

important to spread the ideals of Humanistic Buddhism now because, as Master Taixu observed, we live in the period called the Declining Understanding of the Dharma. During the earliest stage of Buddhism, the Mahayana spirit of the Dharma was seen through the eyes of sravakas, traditionally called “holy practitioners,” thus this was the period of the True Understanding of the Dharma. Subsequent to this was the period of the Semblance Understanding of the Dharma, when the Mahayana spirit was seen through the eyes of the “celestial vehicle” practitioners. We are currently living in the last stage of Buddhism when the Mahayana spirit is seen through the eyes of the “human vehicle” practitioners. This is the period of the Declining Understanding of the Dharma. According to Master Taixu, during this period--when our spiritual maturity is nascent, it is important that we understand the Dharma via practice in our everyday life. The following six points tell us what Humanistic Buddhism is and how to apply it to our everyday living.

I. Humanistic Buddhism is the Integration of the Five Vehicles

We know that Buddhism speaks of the Five Vehicles, which are the human, celestial, sravaka, pratyeka-buddha, and bodhisattva vehicles. The human and celestial vehicles focus on worldly matters. The sravaka and pratyeka-buddha vehicles focus on matters that transcend the world. The bodhisattva vehicle combines the worldly spirit of the human and celestial vehicles with the transcendental spirit of the sravaka and pratyeka-buddha vehicles. We should strive for the bodhisattva goal of simultaneously benefiting, delivering, and awakening self and others. If we understand that self and others are inextricably interrelated, we will see that to benefit others is to benefit oneself. When we deliver other sentient beings, we also deliver ourselves. Thus, when the interrelatedness of the teachings of these five vehicles is comprehended, we have Humanistic Buddhism, or Buddhism for the human world. The following example illustrates this point. Suppose you want to go to Taipei today. Taipei is the goal of your Buddhist cultivation; it is a pure land. As you take the train, you pass through Tainan, Taichung, and Hsinchu. Al-

though you do not have to get off at these stops, you have no choice, however, but to *pass through* Tainan, Taichung, and Hsinchu. This is to say that while we have to *pass through* the cultivation of the human, celestial, sravaka, and pratyeka-buddha vehicles, we can strive for Buddhahood by directly practicing the humanistic Buddhist teachings of the bodhisattva path.

II. Humanistic Buddhism is the Practice of the Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Conducts

Specifically what are some concrete examples of what Buddhism can offer to a nation and society? The nation and society can benefit from the Buddhist teachings of the Tripitaka. Indeed, just the Five Precepts alone can bring peace to the country and the entire world. The Five Precepts teach us to abstain from killing, abstain from stealing, abstain from sexual misconduct, abstain from lying, and abstain from the use of intoxicating substances. To abstain from killing is to show respect for the lives of others; if we do not encroach upon the rights of others, we

can all enjoy freedom of life. To abstain from stealing is not to infringe upon the property rights of others; there can then be freedom of wealth. To abstain from sexual misconduct is to show respect for the body and honor the integrity of others, allowing all to enjoy freedom of body and dignity. To abstain from lying and false speech is not to impugn another's reputation, and no one's name is slandered. To abstain from intoxicants and stimulants is to avoid doing mental or physical harm to ourselves, thus, keeping us from harming others as well. If a person can 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 members of that family are in good order. If all in an organization, society, or nation can uphold the Five Precepts, then that nation will certainly be one that is characterized by stability, peace, and prosperity.

We only need to visit a prison to realize that all those incarcerated for their crimes 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, misap-

appropriation, 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, and defaulting on loans is to violate the precept against lying. In addition to proscribing 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 unconscionable acts. If everyone can uphold the Five Precepts, then the prisons would become empty.

Today, some Buddhists look at Buddhism as a folk religion. They pay their respects to the Buddha because they want to pray for longevity, wealth, a prosperous family, fame, and health. If we can raise the level of our faith and uphold the Five Precepts with reverence, we will indeed enjoy great blessings, without having to ask for them. If one does not kill but also protects life, how can one not have longevity? If one does not steal but also acts generously, how can one not be wealthy? If one does not engage in sexual misconduct but is also respectful, how can the family

not be harmonious? If one does not lie but is also honest, how can one not have a good name? If one does not become intoxicated but also looks after the body, how can one not have good health? The Five Precepts, indeed, have a great impact upon the individual, society, and nation.

Thus, what does Humanistic Buddhism mean? Humanistic Buddhism is the practice of the Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Conducts. The Ten Wholesome Conducts are extensions of the Five Precepts. In one's deeds, do not kill, steal, or engage in sexual misconduct. In one's speech, do not lie, slander, cheat, or be offensive. In one's thoughts, do not be greedy, hateful, or corrupt in views. In Buddhism, the development of right views is called the study of wisdom, the ultimate goal of which is to awaken the wisdom of one's true nature. The Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Conducts are tools to help us achieve this goal. This is also what Humanistic Buddhism is about.

III. Humanistic Buddhism Incorporates the Characteristics of the Four Immeasurable States of Mind

The Four Immeasurable States of Mind are loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. In fact, one does not have to look further than these four states to understand why Chinese Buddhism has lost its vigor. Chinese Buddhists have not put the Buddhist teachings into practice and have 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 equanimous? Regardless of whether we are laypersons or monastics, if we do not practice the Dharma, how are we any different from non-Buddhists?

There is a common saying: “Every family has Amitabha, every household has Avalokitesvara.” There, Avalokitesvara is worshipped in every shrine. The best spot in the house is selected for Avalokitesvara. Why is this so? Because Avalokitesvara is compassionate. Compassion is welcomed in each household; compassion earns one respect and wins the hearts of others.

I don't know when Buddhism took on such shades of pessimism. Whenever Buddhists see each other, they often say things like, "Life is suffering! All is impermanent! Oh, impermanence!" But 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, and how we could be liberated from delusions and attain true joy. 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! It makes change possible, for the bad can then be transformed into the good. Because of impermanence, adversity can be followed by felicity, and bad luck can change for the better. It is because of impermanence that fate is not irrevocably determined. Our task as bodhisattvas is to spread the seeds of joy so that the whole world may hear the Dharma, and everyone can have a life of well-being, peace, and joy.

Sometimes a prosperous material life, such as that created by a flourishing economy, does not necessarily alleviate the suffering of life. More money and material possessions can give people more troubles. The joy of the Dharma is the peace and happiness that we can all experience when we are at ease with ourselves; this joy is derived from the understanding of Chan and the realization of Truth. Often, people's religious practice is based on greed; people pray to the bodhisattvas and gods for peace, fortune, a happy family life, longevity, and a winning lottery number. Such religious faith that stems from covetousness does not have a deep level of spiritual maturity. We should base our faith on *giving*. To practice a religion is to contribute, make sacrifices, and work to benefit others. Since one of the characteristics of Humanistic Buddhism is the spirit of giving and benefiting others, Humanistic Buddhism incorporates the characteristics of the Four Immeasurable States of Mind of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. This is also the meaning of Humanistic Buddhism.

IV. Humanistic Buddhism is the Application of the Six Paramitas and the Four Means of Embracing

The Buddhist teachings of the Six Paramitas (giving, upholding the precepts, patience, diligence, meditative concentration, and wisdom) and the Four Means of Embracing (giving, amiable speech, conduct beneficial to others, and cooperation) are humanistic and relevant to human interactions.

While I was traveling in the United States spreading the Dharma, I felt that, although America is not a Buddhist country, Americans possess the character of Humanistic Buddhism and the spirit of the bodhisattva. Take giving as an example. Americans are very willing to give. Many willingly provide donations to their church. When a social problem arises, everyone happily does all he or she 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 examples of how Americans have integrated giving into their daily life.

As for upholding the precepts, Americans are very law-abiding people. Upholding the precepts means observing the rules of the law. America is a country in which people follow the rules of the law. One need not go to a court of law to see how laws are observed. When Americans come to a red light, even if there are no other cars or police officers around, they still do not run the light. If there is a stop sign, they will not immediately go through the intersection, but instead stop for a moment before continuing on. People also 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 respected and obeyed. When it becomes too crowded for attendants to direct everyone, they simply use a rope to regulate where people may sit. Everyone stays within the confines of the rope, whether they are kings, state officials, gov-

ernors, or senators. Why? Because the rope symbolizes the law, and no one is above it. The solemn sacredness of the law is fully integrated into the daily life and mind-set of Americans. Because everyone is compliant, it is naturally a country that follows the rules of the law.

On the contrary, what is the situation in developing countries? Do not mention ropes. Even if there is a wall, everyone tries to think of a way to climb over it. Hence, to follow laws is to keep precepts and regulations. Whether or not a country's populace obeys its laws will affect its image, its development, and its prosperity. Humanistic Buddhism is built upon the principles of laws and regulations.

Americans are also very patient. Patience does not mean staying silent when being yelled at, or turning the other cheek when struck. These are not examples of patience. Patience means taking responsibility; patience means being strong. To be patient is to be proactive, progressive, willing to make sacrifices, and able to shoulder burdens. Americans work hard, don't they? When lining up, they don't skip ahead. This, too, requires patience. So, when everyone is patient with each other, society can be

orderly and without chaos.

Everyone knows about how diligent Americans are. Americans are ambitious, dedicated, and hard-working. Some people fantasize that America is a heaven where everyone is automatically well provided for. In reality, Americans are very industrious and conscientious; they work hard and have a lot of pride in the quality of their work. Their work ethic is very much like the Buddhist notion of diligence. Buddhism speaks of diligence as the Four Right Efforts of bringing forth goodness, developing the existing goodness, ending the existing harm, and preventing the arising of new harm. Americans are well-known for their dedication to research, developing breakthroughs, and striving to be the very best. This is why their country has become a world power.

We can also find examples of meditative concentration in the American lifestyle. Instead of running about the streets after work or school, adults and children often spend their time at home. And when they speak, they usually do so in a soft voice so as not to disturb anyone. When using public transportation, they are often relaxed and at ease, as if in meditation.

As far as wisdom is concerned, some people say

that Americans are lacking in this area. 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; it is just that the Chinese are shrewd, sometimes too shrewd 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 that one is one and two is two. They are very precise in their scientific and technological research and are very reliable in all they do.

By pointing out the above it may seem that this is just another case of the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. This is not the case. Taiwan is a country that promotes and practices Mahayana Buddhism, so why is it that some people here are miserly, snobbish, selfish, irresponsible, and unkind? Why do they only look out for themselves? The ideals of Humanistic Buddhism must be spread in

Taiwan. In practicing the Four Means of giving, using amiable speech, performing conduct beneficial to others, and cooperating, Buddhism again becomes relevant to the needs of contemporary society. Indeed, the Five Precepts can provide a stabilizing effect on society, the Six Paramitas can serve as a good foundation on which to build a country, and the Four Means of Embracing can be a fountain of goodness for us all.

V. Humanistic Buddhism is the Understanding of Cause, Condition, Effect, and Consequence

In the military some young draftees will question their officers, asking them, “I enlisted last year, at the same time that he did. How come he is now a sergeant, while I am still a private? It’s so unfair. We have the same qualifications and we enlisted at the same time, so why is there such a discrepancy in the advancement of our careers?” They should know that, in the law of cause, condition, result, and consequence, condition is right in the middle. When conditions are different, the results 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, then even though both flowers are nurtured by the same sunshine, they will grow differently. The two flowers may be of the same variety, but because of different conditions, the result is not the same.

Some people complain about their fate and condemn the world as unfair. They criticize that this family member or that friend is no good. If they would just look closer at their own causes and conditions, they would discover the source of their problems. For example, they might see that they had lost the opportunity for promotion to a sergeant because of something inappropriate they had said. In another instance, where two people are competing for the same promotion, one person may be better qualified, but the other party may earn the promotion by strengthening his or her conditions. He may have provided a 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 said, "Before achieving the Buddha Way, we must first cultivate good relationships with others." In our daily life, we should know that a single grain of rice is the

culmination of many causes and conditions. We should appreciate all the various causes and conditions.

In the morning, newspapers are delivered to our homes. In the evening, many television programs bring us enjoyment 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. Efforts and contributions of many people have provided all of us with a lot of conveniences. We should value these causes and conditions. Since others have labored to provide us with such good conditions, what can we do to repay their kindness? We can learn to be grateful and to truly enjoy the wealth and satisfaction of life anywhere and anytime.

Speaking of cause, condition, effect, and consequence, the law of cause and effect is profound. Some people misunderstand the law of cause and effect. Some regularly recite the name of Amitabha Buddha, but the moment a problem arises, they blame Amitabha Buddha for not looking out for them. They

say, “I’ve been cheated out of my money, and now I’m bankrupt. Why didn’t Amitabha protect me?” “I haven’t made any money in the stock market. Where is Amitabha’s power?” “I am a vegetarian, but my health is deteriorating. Why is Amitabha Buddha not more compassionate?” But where is the connection between the fact that one recites the Buddha’s name or is a vegetarian and the fact that one is wealthy, healthy, or lives a long life? We must not be confused about what causes what effects. How can a person who plants a melon expect to get 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. How can people attribute all their problems to religious faith? Therefore, there are too many people today who, having confused the connection between particular causes and effects, are not able to accurately understand the law of cause and effect.

Once a passer-by stole a coconut from a family’s yard. The owner said, “Hey! How dare you steal my fruit!” The passer-by responded, “What do you

mean this is yours? It's from the tree." "Well, I planted the tree," yelled the owner " The passer-by retorted, "The coconut you planted is in the ground. Mine is from the tree." Is there not a connection between the two? Cause and effect are forever linked; they can never be disconnected. A cause, upon encountering the right conditions, will bear fruit. There is the saying, "Bodhisattvas fear causes, sentient beings fear effects." Bodhisattvas, knowing that causes are not to be taken lightly, do not haphazardly create causes. Because sentient beings do not fear causes, they act without thinking through the effects. In the end they fall into the depths of hell, with the most frightening consequences.

In my hometown in Yangzhou, China, there were 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. Why? Because we believed that 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, existed in the realm of cause and effect, and therefore 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. No one can escape this law. There is a saying: “People take advantage of those who are nice, but that which sees to justice does not. People are fearful of those who are mean, but that which sees to justice is not.” Who or what is this “seer of justice”? In Buddhism, the seer of justice is cause and effect. Cause and effect are always fair and just. We who are promoting Buddhism strive to firmly 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 and guide. Cause and effect would be each person’s principle of law.

VI. Humanistic Buddhism Encompasses the Teachings of Chan, Pure Land, and the Middle Way

Buddhist teachings are vast and profound, and there are many sects and schools. The teachings of the Chan and Pure Land schools, the doctrine of the unity of form and emptiness, and the Middle Way are some of the Buddhist teachings for everyday living, thus they are part of Humanistic Buddhism. In the Chan tradition, patriarchs and masters do not practice meditation to become Buddhas, but to attain enlightenment. With enlightenment, they are able to realize liberation and settle their minds and bodies in the here-and-now of daily life. What is most gratifying to Chan practitioners is to find peace of body and mind, or in other words, “to illumine the mind and see one’s True Nature.” Thus, Chan practitioners are very much focused on life in this world.

The Pure Land School is the same. Pure Land practitioners practice mindfulness of Amitabha Buddha and recite the Buddha’s name in our present world in the hope of attaining rebirth in the Pure Land. If their practice is inadequate, rebirth in the Pure Land is impossible; so they consider this world as the

foothold for devoting themselves to their cultivation and to being mindful of Amitabha Buddha. There is no shortcut. Pure Land practice is a wonderful method for calming our minds and bodies, especially when we are faced with the demands of modern society. If you practice both the Chan and the Pure Land methods, you are truly practicing Humanistic Buddhism.

The Middle Way, which is the wisdom of harmonizing emptiness and existence, allows one to venture directly into the true reality of all phenomena. If one has the prajna-wisdom of the Middle Way, then one enjoys happiness and blessings in this very life. Some people place too much emphasis on materialistic life; they become lost in the burning zeal of worldly pursuits. Others abandon the world, retreating deep into the mountains to be alone. Blind to the suffering of the world, such people are as unfeeling as a withered piece of wood or a pile of cold ashes. A life that is either too detached or too attached is not healthy; it lacks the harmony of the Middle Way.

The “Middle Way” refers to the prajna-wisdom of contemplating the harmonized mean. If we have this type of wisdom, we will know the underlying

principles at work in various situations and the appropriate actions for dealing with them. If we have the wisdom of the Middle Way, we will know that existence occurs within emptiness; without emptiness, nothing could exist. If there were no emptiness of space, how could we gather together here? Without space, how could the myriad phenomena of the universe develop? Only in the midst of emptiness can existence arise. 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 pursuits, and there is also the internal world of the mind. There is the world before us, and there is also the world behind us. If one insists on charging forward blindly, one inevitably gets hurt; one must also look back and within. Humanistic Buddhism allows for both existence and emptiness, possession and non-possession, the world of companionship and that of solitude. By harmonizing everything in the world, Humanistic Buddhism allows people to achieve a beautiful and wonderful life.

The Humanistic Buddhism that I promote may be seen in the objectives that I have established for

the Fo Guang Shan International Buddhist Order. The objectives are to give people faith, to give people joy, to give people hope, and to make other's lives more convenient. 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 the 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 satisfying life? If we practice Humanistic Buddhism, or in other words, apply the Buddhist teachings to our everyday living, then we possess the entire universe, happy and at peace in all we do. As Chan Master Women said, "The spring has its flowers, the autumn its bright full moon; the summer has its cool breezes, the winter its snow. So

long as one is not caught up in mundane worries, then every season is a wonderful season.” “When the mind is burdened, the whole world seems limiting; when the mind is clear of burdens, even a small bed feels expansive.” When we truly touch 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. How do we achieve this awareness? We can only do so if we continually apply the Buddhist teachings in all aspects of our everyday living. This is the true spirit of Humanistic Buddhism.