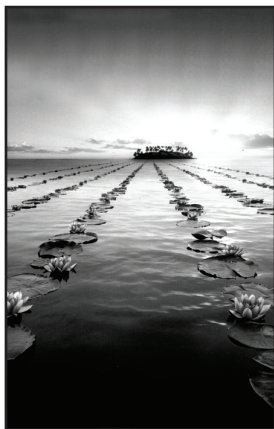




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# **Worldly Living, Transcendental Practice**

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**Buddhism in Every Step 36**

Written by Venerable Master Hsing Yun  
Translated by Fo Guang Shan  
International Translation Center

Published by



Buddha's Light Publishing  
3456 S. Glenmark Drive  
Hacienda Heights, CA 91745 U.S.A.

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International Translation Center

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Translated by  
Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center

Edited and proofread by  
Venerable Yi Chao, Louvenia Ortega

Cover design and book layout by  
Ya Chun Lin and Wan Kah Ong

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# **Worldly Living, Transcendental Practice**

We all have our own vision of what an ideal world is like, but the question on hand is how do we go about constructing our ideal world. How do we turn an ideal into reality? Before we can discuss how to get from “here” to “there,” we should first understand what “here” is. Before we discuss how we can all lead our lives transcendently, we should have an understanding of worldly living.

What is worldly living? It is our daily activities in our homes, in the workplace, or anywhere in the community. This includes every aspect of our lives, from basic activities such as dressing, eating, resting, or commuting, to our every thought and stirring of the mind. The four main characteristics of worldly living are:

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# **Worldly Living**

## **I. The Material Side of Worldly Living**

Our day to day life is very much governed by our material wants and needs such as the four basic activities of dressing, eating, resting, and commuting. With these four as a starting point, we will soon see that material things are integral parts of each of these activities. Without the benefit of material things, how can we move about, have shelter, or find a place to rest. Our existence, indeed, is very much dependent on all kinds of material things. Because of this dependency or need, we become slaves to our material desires. We work hard the whole day so that we may have a tasty meal. Sometimes, we are even willing to compromise our integrity just to climb up one more rung on the social ladder; other times, our hunger for fame drives us to become obsessed with our work or career.

In our daily life, materialism takes on many forms. Some people are very focused on food and care little about what they wear. Other people pride themselves on how well they dress, while some others put their priorities in having a comfortable house. Then, of course, there are many others who are preoccupied with all of the above. In one way or another, our life revolves around material things, and we simply cannot live apart from material things. This material side of worldly living is a stumbling

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block on the path of happiness.

If we build our happiness on material things, we are treading on very shaky ground. True, material things can satisfy our desires, but such satisfaction is short-lived and full of pitfalls. Before long, the whole cycle of wanting, striving, and momentary rejoicing starts all over again. Happiness that is built on material things is like a trap of quicksand; it grips us tightly and will not let go of us. Thus, if we are to look for happiness in material things, we are destined for disappointment.

## **II. The Emotional Side of Worldly Living**

After we achieve a certain standard of living, we often focus on our emotional needs. We have emotional ties with our parents, our friends, our lovers, our children, or even our pets. Thus, we say human beings are emotional beings, and in Buddhism, human beings are often referred to as “sentient beings.” But, when we do not know how to moderate our emotions, our emotions can run amuck and may even drive us to do something that we may regret later. If we just open the newspaper, we would notice that the cause of many suicides, acts of vengeance, and assaults is emotional in nature. Some of these crimes are driven by love; others are driven by hatred. Love and hatred are closely linked and are major parts of our emotions.

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Buddhism does not reject emotions but it warns us that emotions can bring us many problems and headaches. We must use wisdom to moderate our emotions and transform our self-centered emotions into compassion for all. Compassion is a critical ingredient in the recipe of happiness.

Some people say that the emotion of love is the flower of life. A flower is indeed beautiful, but how long does it last? Love is blissful, yet it can be possessive in nature. Love is pure, yet some kinds of love are unhealthy. While we treasure the moments of love, how do we feel when we lose the person we love? Some people say that love is the moisture that holds the landscape of life together, without which life becomes a parched desert. What if we do not know how to moderate our feelings; an excess of feelings can bring about a flood of bitterness. A once loving couple may file for a divorce; a once doting father may want to disown his child. Regardless of how loving a relationship is, the impermanence of life can bring it to an abrupt end. What are we to do in such a situation? It is difficult to find everlasting happiness within the emotions of worldly living.

### **III. The Communal Side of Worldly Living**

No man is an island. There is a Chinese saying which is similar in meaning: “At home, we lean on our parents; away, we depend on our friends.” Our

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inter-connectedness is not just limited to the families we have or the friends we know. We also depend on the many farmers and merchants who provide us with all kinds of goods and services. Our existence in this world is very much dependent on one another. It is simply not viable to live completely apart from a community.

How do we depend on one another? The clothes we wear have to be sewn by seamstresses in garment factories. The food we eat has to be grown by farmers in the field. The buses we use for transportation have to be driven by bus drivers. The roads we travel have to be paved by construction workers. The bricks and mortar that make up a house have to be laid by craftsmen. The national parks that we visit have to be developed and maintained by many forestry workers. I can go on and on with such examples; the point I want to make is that we need others to live. With this said, you may think that the source of happiness lies within the community. This is not entirely correct, for our interdependency is often built upon a symbiotic relationship of trade and business. When we all strive to have a bigger piece of the pie, tension and conflicts often arise. When we want to gain at the expense of others, gamesmanship becomes a part of our relationship. Thus, if we are to look for happiness within the community, our search may be for naught.

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#### **IV. The Sensory Side of Worldly Living**

The pursuit of worldly happiness pretty much hinges upon the satisfaction of our six sense objects (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma). It is said in the Discourse on the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* that the major difference between a worldly life and one of transcendence lies in the manner in which one pursues happiness. Worldly happiness is derived from the external environment. Our eyes like to look at beautiful things; our ears like to listen to delightful sounds. Our nose finds fragrant smells pleasing; our taste buds savor the joys of culinary delights. Our body prefers comfort, and our mind is often looking for ways to benefit ourselves. When we pursue happiness externally, our life is focused on the physical body and senses. In this mindset, we tend to look at the world from the perspective of self as we continually try to jockey for an advantageous position. When we are faced with hardships or struck with illness, or when things do not go our way, then we are beside ourselves and become miserable. Thus, if we want to pursue transcendental joy, we simply cannot look for it outside of ourselves. A true cultivator does not need to feast his or her senses on the beauty and comfort of the external world. A true cultivator finds joy within the richness of his or her own heart and the wisdom of his or her own mind. When we do not look outward to experience

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happiness, we have indeed found the limitless joy of the Dharma.

There are many sides of worldly living, yet these worldly ways of life cannot give us ultimate joy. Only when we live our lives in transcendence can we find ultimate joy and peace. What does transcendental living mean? First of all, it is important to note that the Buddhist practice on transcendental living does not mean that we have to live apart from others. There is no need for us to move to “other worlds,” and it is not a life that we can only experience after death. When we speak of transcendental living, it does not mean that we should turn our heads away from the suffering of the world and be only concerned with our liberation from the wheel of rebirth. The transcendental living that we refer to in Buddhism is right here in the midst of our everyday living. What we need to do is to fully integrate the Buddhist teachings into our daily lives. With compassion and wisdom, we should concern ourselves with the liberation of all sentient beings. When we can all live in a transcendental way, the world will be a much better place and all nations will be more prosperous. Everywhere we go, we will see truth and peace.

What is transcendental living? There are four aspects of transcendental living. What better way to learn about transcendental living than to look at how past masters and enlightened individuals had lived

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their lives? Though they lived in a different place and at a different time, we can glean from their examples what is appropriate for each of our own individual situations.

## **Transcendental Practice**

### **I. Observe the Way through Living Simply** (as exemplified by the arhats' way of life in the *Agama Sutra*)

In the early days of Buddhism, how did monastics observe the Way<sup>1</sup> and live their lives? As the daily lives of these monastics were not one of material things, emotional ties, or sensory pleasures, they led a lives of few material things and cool emotional ties. Their pursuit was a life of cultivation and the severance of attachment to privileges and pleasures. The world within their heart was pure and their spiritual life was forever lasting.

In more concrete terms, their personal belongings were limited to three garments and one bowl. They only ate one meal a day, and they often slept under trees, along river banks, or even by burial grounds. Then there was the method of “discipline cultivation,” which involved an enormous amount of solitude. The goal of discipline cultivation was to become unperturbed by the trials of life through discipline

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1. The teachings of the Buddha; the Truth; the right path.

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or even ascetic practices. They were not after present enjoyment and thus worldly temptation did not have a hold on them. They often shunned crowded and noisy places and were most keen on attaining the eternal peace of nirvana. Unfortunately, some people today just want to copy the lifestyle of these arhats in appearance, but not in practice. They want to remove themselves from communities and yet long to live in worldly comfort. This later lifestyle is not what we mean by cultivation.

The elder Mahakasyapa was one of the foremost disciples of the Buddha. He was most diligent in his practice of discipline cultivation. Through a life of frugality, he wanted to purify his body and mind, to free himself from the shackles of worldly worries, and to attain the ultimate Buddha-wisdom. One day, the Buddha happened to notice Mahakasyapa was well advanced in years and advised him, “You really need not live such an ascetic life. You can return to the Jetavana Monastery and be the head monastic. There, you can lead the assembly in practice. This way, you can still achieve your goal of purifying your mind of worldly cares and desires.”

Mahakasyapa replied to the Buddha, “Lord Buddha, I really cannot do as you have suggested. I am here to practice discipline cultivation, and I want to set an example for generations of Buddhists. I want them to know that ascetic practices can help us sharpen

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our will, strengthen our faith, and boost our spirit. We need to find our hearts and minds and be masters of them. This way, we will be in the company of all Buddhas.” The approach of discipline cultivation is no different from one of the teachings of Mencius (an ancient Chinese philosopher), which is: “Before the heavens above bestow a great responsibility upon a person, the heavens will first test the person’s mind and spirit, task the person’s tendons and bones, starve the person’s body and skin, deny the person everything, and throw confusion into all the person does.”

Among the Buddha’s disciples was Prince Bhadraka, a cousin of the Buddha who renounced his household life to become a bhiksu. One day, the prince was out in the woods meditating with Aniruddha and Kumbhira. During his meditation, he suddenly called out, “Oh! How wonderful! This is too wonderful!”

Aniruddha asked him, “What are you exclaiming about? What is so wonderful?”

The prince replied, “Aniruddha, let me tell you. When I was still a prince, I lived in a heavily guarded, fortress-like palace, but I still worried about the threat of assassination. What I ate was the best kind of food and delicacies, and what I wore was fine silken clothing. I lived a life of luxury, but somehow the food did not taste right, and the clothes did not

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look proper. Now I am a bhiksu, there is no guard to protect me. Though I am always meditating by myself in the woods, I do not fear others will assassinate me. Although my food and clothing are very simple, I feel very contented. Now, I sit and sleep freely; I feel most comfortable. I can only feel an indescribable joy within myself!”

From this, we can see that though the lives of these Dharma practitioners were simple, they were not lacking in happiness. Worldly living measures happiness by how much one owns; transcendental living builds happiness on the freeness of not possessing. Possession is like a piece of baggage; it can be burdensome. Not possessing is boundless and limitless. Though these enlightened individuals did not possess much, they had the whole world to enjoy.

The material life of the sangha was limited to the basics. When the Buddha’s aunt offered the Buddha two garments that she herself had made, the Buddha only took one and asked her to offer the other one to a bhiksu. The life of the sangha emphasized self-reliance and mutual support. When older bhiksus could not see well, the Buddha helped them thread needles and mend clothes. When some of them fell ill, the Buddha prepared medicine for them and helped them bathe. The life of the sangha was demanding and called for self-motivation. The

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Buddha often encouraged his disciples to travel as much as thirty miles to receive an offering. The sangha sometimes traveled many miles to teach the Dharma. From our standpoint, such a life may seem harsh, but these enlightened individuals were not the least bothered by the meager conditions they lived in. Regardless how trying the circumstance, it was a means to observe the Way. The arhats did not make the distinction of possessing and not possessing, far and near, or hardships and comfort. They looked at each of these qualities with equanimity.

Look at the lifestyle of monastics today. When I spoke yesterday, I wore this robe that I am wearing today. Tomorrow is no different; I will still wear this same robe. I only have this robe so there is not much to think about. In the morning when I wake up, I simply put on this robe. I like it just the way it is. Now, it is different with lay people. Everyday, you have to think about what you should wear for the day. If you want to wear red, you may even have to think about which shade of red looks good on you. All those decisions! Tomorrow, when you come to attend the lecture, you may want to wear a color other than red. Which color? Green, maybe. This is a lot more complicated than what monastics have to deal with.

Let me give you another example. In the kindergarten school that we have opened, we just

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hired a few young ladies to be school teachers. Their salary was three thousand dollars a month. In the school, there are also a few monastics working as teachers. As monastics, they are only paid a hundred dollars a month. Strangely enough, I once heard a salaried teacher asking a loan from a monastic. What is enough? Is three thousand dollars enough? Is a hundred dollars enough? To make a lot of money does not necessarily mean happiness; to make a miniscule amount is not necessarily bad either.

To enlightened individuals who have renounced their attachments, all the happenings in the world seem like fleeting smoke or floating clouds, leaving not a trace in their minds. They remain unperturbed by worldly phenomena and are not slaves to desires. They look at relationships coolly, and everyday they live their lives simply, peacefully, freely, and harmoniously.

To live transcendently does not mean we have to live apart from people. When we live and function in our homes and society, we can practice transcendental living by remembering four things. First, we cannot let wealth and fame dictate what we do. Second, our love for others should not be possessive and demanding in nature. Third, we should not become attached to power and position. Fourth, we should not focus on self versus others, or what we like versus what we dislike. If we can live in

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this world in accordance with these four points, then we will taste the joys of a transcendental life.

## **II. Awake to the Way through Transcending Worldly Phenomena** (as exemplified by the Chan masters' ways of life in the Chan records)

The Chan School of Buddhism is a prominent branch of Chinese Buddhism, and it has given us many eminent Chan masters. We can read about the worry-free lives of enlightened Chan masters in Chan records. Some were known to travel with bare essentials—just with sandals on their feet and a chipped bowl in hand, or with a straw hat and staff. We can also read about how Chan masters worked in all kinds of capacities. Some did menial labor like chopping wood and fetching water. Others herded cattle or pushed carts. Then there were some who preferred to sit quietly and cultivate in a meditation hall. As they were no longer attached to the comforts of the material world and had extricated themselves from the emotional ties of social relationships, their lives were at peace with their surroundings. Whatever they did before, they were still doing it after enlightenment, except that they were now doing it with transcendence. From the ways they lived and the kinds of work they did, we can see the lives of these enlightened masters were free, idyllic, and tranquil.

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Chan Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, pounded rice for years at the monastery of Chan Master Hongren, the Fifth Patriarch. Chan Master Tianyi Yihuai was a waterman at a monastery in Cuifeng. Chan Master Qingzhu was in charge of cooking vegetables at a monastery in Youshan. Similarly, Chan Master Xuefeng cooked for hundreds at a monastery in Dongshan. Hanshan and Shide, two eminent masters, served meals at the monastery in Tiantai. While the rest of us may consider cooking vegetables and pounding rice lowly jobs, these enlightened Chan masters looked at all jobs as dignified and important. Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, father of modern China, once said, “Be great doers, not great ministers.” As it turned out, such a motto was nothing new to the Chan masters of the past, who had long been practicing such noble ideals. In fact, while no one would want to follow in the footsteps of tyrannical emperors such as Jie, Zhou, You, and Li, Chan masters of limited means and modest living have become popular role models.

In Chinese Buddhism, there is a wonderful story that puts the carefree lives of Chan masters in stark contrast with the often-tangled life of politics. During the Tang dynasty, there was a Chan master by the name of Daolin. He was often referred to as Chan Master Niaoke (which means bird nest) because of his choice of accommodation. Instead of living in a

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house, he made his home in a tall pine tree overlooking a cliff at the top of the hills of Qinwang. For twenty years, he lived like this. One day, Magistrate Bai Juyi came to pay him a visit. Curiously, he asked the Chan master, “Why do you pick such a dangerous place to live?”

“It is no danger at all to live up here in the tree. It is the magistrate who is living dangerously,” replied the Chan master from up above.

The magistrate answered, “Your humble official guards the rivers and mountains of our country. What danger is there?”

With this, the Chan master responded, “Your situation is an explosive mix of fire and fuel, in which the true nature cannot be released. Is this not dangerous?”

I encountered a modern day Niaohe when I was traveling in India in 1963. By the site where the Buddha entered parinirvana, there was a huge tree. On top of the tree lived a Chinese monk by the name of Shanxiou. When the government found out that a monk was living in the tree, they ordered him to leave the tree. At this point, Shanxiou, who had lived in the tree for over a decade, would not budge. The government felt that the living conditions atop the tree were too precarious and harsh. When Shanxiou refused, the government had no choice but to fell the thousand-year old tree. Shanxiou, of course, felt

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differently. He said, “It is very safe to live atop the tree. It is also very free. I felt very fortunate to be able to live so close to the place where the Buddha entered parinirvana. Atop the tree, I had the sun, the moon, the stars, and the clouds to keep me company. I had flowers and trees as my neighbors. How can they say that it is unfit for human living?”

The eyes of enlightened Chan masters see beauty everywhere. The world they live in is no different from our world, yet they are in harmony with nature, with Truth. With the carefree attitude of “neither rejoicing over birth, nor grieving about death,” they live in enlightenment and transcendence.

During the Sui dynasty, there was a Chan master by the name of Zhishun. One day, while Zhishun was meditating in the woods, a pheasant chased by a hunter ran up to him and hid. When the hunter demanded to have his pheasant back, Zhishun refused; it was a stand-off. Finally, Chan Master Zhishun said to the hunter, “How much does a pheasant weigh? What if I give you one of my ears as a trade?” As he spoke, he cut off one of his ears and handed it to the hunter.

The life of enlightened Chan masters is one of transcendence. They see that the four great elements of the body (earth, water, fire, and wind) are empty, and the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness) do not exist

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on their own. An ear, therefore, does not amount to much at all.

Once, the Chan Master Daoshu built a monastery next to a Daoist temple. The Daoists were quite upset to see a Buddhist monastery situated right next to their temple, so they decided to conjure up all kinds of spirits and apparitions to drive the Chan master and his people away. Most young monks were scared away. The Chan master was not the least affected and continued to stay in the monastery for the next twenty years. Finally, the Daoists exhausted all their means and gave up. As the Daoists were unsuccessful in driving the Buddhists away, they decided to abandon their own temple. Some people were curious and asked the Chan master, “How did you withstand all the magic and spells they had cast on you?”

The Chan master replied, “I do not have any magic formula that can beat them. All that I have is the knowledge of ‘emptiness.’ The Daoists have plenty of magic and spells, but regardless of how many magic spells they have, they will be exhausted one day. As for me, ‘emptiness’ is boundless and limitless. Of course, I can endure longer than them.”

A Chan master’s life of awakening is one of “emptiness.” In the realization of emptiness, an enlightened Chan master does not engage in gossip, discriminate between self and others, or strive for glory and fame. A Chan master’s life, free like

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drifting clouds and flowing water, is beyond the constraints of worldly life. This is the transcendental life of the enlightened.

### **III. Practice the Way through Living**

**without Attachment** (as exemplified by the bodhisattvas' way of life in the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra*)

Most people practice so they may go from worldliness to transcendence. As one's spiritual development matures and one is awakened to one's nature, one often chooses to leave worldly living behind so as to experience pure, transcendental living. Mahayana bodhisattvas, whose goal is not just to escape the sufferings of the world, do not choose such a path. After they become one with transcendental living, great compassionate bodhisattvas choose to manifest in our world to help all beings cross the sea of suffering. Bodhisattvas live a worldly life that is without attachment. Master Cihang left the following words for his disciples: "Flee not, as long as one more sentient being remains to be ferried."

Vimalakirti is a very good example of how to lead a worldly, yet transcendental life. Vimalakirti was a married man with a family, property, and wealth. From the outside, his lifestyle was no different from any of us, yet he was a bodhisattva who had truly comprehended transcendence. His lifestyle can be

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described as, “Though living in a family, he was not attached to the three realms. Though married, he continually practiced pure living.” He led a life that is without attachment, yet he could abide in anyway. “Passing through a grove of flowers, yet not a leaf clings to the body.” What a portrayal of living without attachment! “When we look at flowers and birds like a wooden carving would, then we fear not the myriad of things illusively surrounding us.” How wonderful a way to live without attachment! It is said in the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* that, “A bodhisattva, who is in tune with the Dharma, lives without attachment.” Only when we live without clinging to any notion can we live freely and shine in whatever situation we find ourselves!

For most of us, our well being is grounded in the six sense objects stirred by our senses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma. Sense object, stirred and unsettled, is an apt description of the restlessness of worldly living. On the contrary, bodhisattvas live their lives without attachment and so are unswayed by these sense objects. How do they live without attachment? Simply put, “Not only do they not abide in existence, they also do not dwell in non-existence. Not only do they not abide in non-existence, they also do not dwell in the absence of non-existence.” Without any particular attachment, all notions become possible. The sun, because it is

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not shining on any particular spot, can shine on us all.

The Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, Huineng, became enlightened when he heard the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren, speak this excerpt from the *Diamond Sutra*: “Let the mind be present without an abode.” The enlightened Huineng then made the following remark, “Who could have thought that intrinsic nature is inherently so pure and clear! Who could have thought that intrinsic nature is inherently neither created nor destroyed! Who could have thought that intrinsic nature is inherently complete! Who could have thought that intrinsic nature is inherently unmoving! Who could have thought that intrinsic nature can inherently manifest all phenomena!” Bodhisattvas, having realized that our intrinsic nature is all encompassing and that it reaches “all ten directions and all three time periods<sup>2</sup>,” rest their minds in the state of non-attachment. Living without attachment is the true way to live in accordance with truth. When we can live without attachment, we can truly live in tune with the bodhisattva spirit of equanimity and freeness.

The bodhisattvas’ way of living without attachment is a beautiful way of living. For example monastics have renounced the household life and do

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2. The ten directions are the usual eight directions plus up and down. The three time periods represent the past, present, and future. This means the intrinsic nature is everywhere and everlasting.

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not have a traditional home like lay people, they can call every temple their home. The fact that they are not attached to any particular home allows them to call many places home. When their minds are not attached to any particular notion, it becomes possible for them to embrace everything. When they live without attachment, they do not cling to the notion of life or the notion of nirvana. In this mindset of non-attachment, worldly problems of distress, sorrow, suffering, fear, and confusion no longer matter to them. Through living without attachment, bodhisattvas practice the Way. In the *Universal Gate*, the practice of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva is described as “traveling the worlds” because Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva approaches the task of helping all sentient beings cross the sea of suffering as traveling the worlds. How free! How at ease!

During the time of the Buddha, there was a bhiksuni, who was bitten by a poisonous snake while meditating in a cave. Though she knew she did not have much time to live, she remained very calm and asked for Sariputra so that she might leave instructions with him on what to do after she passed away. When Sariputra approached her, he was a bit skeptical and asked, “Bhiksuni, you look splendid. Is it possible you were bitten by a venomous snake?”

The bhiksuni replied, “Elder Sariputra, lately I have been contemplating emptiness and as such I have

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been practicing living without attachment. The snake might be able to hurt my body, but it cannot sway my practice. I guess this is why my complexion has not changed.” With these words, the bhiksuni smiled and peacefully entered nirvana. This is an example of what a life without fear, without attachment, without aversion is like.

Some of us do not know how to let go of fame and fortune. When our lives revolve around fame and fortune, it becomes particularly painful when fame and fortune elude us. Others of us do not know how to let go of our emotions. When our relationships fail, we fall apart. If we do not know how to let go, we bring a lot of headaches upon ourselves. If we practice living without attachment, we will not be affected by what we have or do not have; fame and obscurity will have very little bearing on us. In this way, we can truly experience the true joy of the Buddha’s teachings.

Among the many disciples of the Buddha, Subhuti was the foremost in the wondrous practice of living without attachment. In the *Diamond Sutra*, we read about the exchange of Subhuti and the Buddha regarding the truth of living without attachment. Subhuti, reading the Buddha’s mind, stood up and asked the Buddha, “Lord Buddha! We all know how much the Buddha loves us and how well the Buddha guides us. Let me ask this question. For those of us

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who have pledged our bodhi mind and want to practice the bodhisattva path, how do we abide our mind? How do we subdue the distraction of our wandering thoughts? Please give us some guidance.”

The Buddha replied, “This is how we can abide our bodhi mind so that we will not become distracted by wandering thoughts. When we practice generosity, we should give without abiding in any notion. When we help sentient beings cross the sea of suffering, we should liberate all sentient beings without the notion of self. Abide our bodhi mind this way; subdue our wandering mind this way.”

Bodhisattvas are truly in tune with prajna and emptiness. Manjusri Bodhisattva and Vimalakirti can teach us a lot about the teachings of non-duality. Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva can manifest in thirty-three forms, depending on the need and situation. To live in this world, yet not to be attached to this world; to have everything, yet be able to joyously part with everything—this is the bodhisattvas’ practice of living without attachment.

#### **IV. Live the Way with Liberation and**

**Attainment** (as exemplified by the Buddha’s way of life in various sutras and vinaya texts)

Let me just again emphasize that when we speak of transcendental living in Buddhism, we are not talking about living outside of this world. The

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Buddha was born into this world, practiced in this world, taught us the Dharma, and lived the Way right here in this world. We all can realize the Way. For those who have reached this stage of spiritual development, how is their way of life? The best way we can approach this question is to look at how the Buddha lived his life. How did the Buddha handle his relationships? How did the Buddha deal with worldly stress and suppression? How did the Buddha handle his relationships with his friends, those who had helped him, his disciples, and those who were hostile toward him? How did the Buddha handle himself in the face of danger, false scandalous remarks, life, and death? In summary, how did the Buddha live his life during the good times and the hard times?

We all know that the Buddha left home to seek the Way, but do we know that his renunciation did not mean that he loved his country less? To renounce the household life does not mean that we have to forsake our country; we should still love our country. One time, King Virudhaka led his army to invade Kapilavastu, the Buddha's hometown. As the army of King Virudhaka was many times larger and stronger than that of Kapilavastu's, there was very little hope for Kapilavastu. Though the Buddha was a prince of Kapilavastu, he strictly adhered to his life of renunciation and had never become involved in its affairs, that was, until the impending invasion.

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As the army of King Virudhaka approached the city, the Buddha planted himself in the midst of the road that the King's army had to pass through. Now, there was a custom among Indian armies that they would postpone a fight if they happened to see a monastic on the day of the fight. So, when the army saw the Buddha in the middle of the road, they decided to halt and set up camp. The next day when the army was about to continue with the advance, the Buddha was still in the middle of the road. The same happened on the third day. King Virudhaka was growing impatient and so he decided to approach the Buddha. He went up to the Buddha and said, "Lord Buddha, why are you always sitting here? You should not be sitting here under the blazing sun. Why don't you rest in the shade of the big tree at the side of the road?"

The Buddha replied, "The shade of my family tree is much better." What this means is that he treasures his country and its people; he prefers to sit under the shade of the trees within his country. Now that his country is under attack, how can he sit and relax under the shade of other trees? When the fierce King Virudhaka heard the Buddha's remark, he was very moved and ordered his army to turn back. From this episode, we can see that the Buddha had lots of feelings about his country and continued to care for his country deeply even after he renounced the household life.

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Before the Buddha left the palace to find the Way, he was married to Princess Yasodhara. After many years of cultivation, the Buddha finally was enlightened to the Way. The Buddha then spent the next few years in the southern part of India teaching the Dharma. It was over ten years when he finally got the chance to visit his hometown. When Princess Yasodhara heard that the Buddha was visiting, her emotions were mixed. On the one hand, she was still angry with the Buddha for leaving her; on the other hand, she was very happy for the Buddha's visit. What was she going to do when they finally met again? There were many things she would like to tell the Buddha, but she really could not because the Buddha had already renounced his household life. She wondered how the Buddha would treat her; her mind was full of questions and anxiety. Now, how do you think the Buddha would handle such a situation?

After the Buddha paid his respect to the king, his father, the Buddha's young son, Rahula, went up to the Buddha and told him that his mother was waiting for him. When the Buddha and Princess Yasodhara finally met, the princess was moved by the majestic look of the Buddha. All of a sudden, she found herself kneeling down to pay respect to the Buddha.. Slowly and gently, the Buddha said to the princess, "Yasodhara, I must apologize to you for my leaving

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you, but I am most true to myself and to all sentient beings. I want to thank you because I have now finally realized my wish of many kalpas to become the Buddha.”

It is not that the Enlightened One did not have any emotions; it is just that the Buddha was no longer ruled by his emotions. From the way the Buddha talked to Yasodhara, we can see that the Buddha was indeed a very sensitive and reasonable man. The Buddha loved his family, but he also loved all sentient beings. It was out of compassion that the Buddha left his princess and son to seek the Way. When King Suddhodana passed away, all the princes expressed their desire to be pallbearers. The Buddha was no different and insisted on also being a pallbearer. When everyone saw the Buddha in the funeral procession, all were moved. Was the Buddha not a filial son? Was the Buddha not grateful to his father for raising him? The Buddha, the fully enlightened one, demanded nothing of sentient beings; he just loved us all. To us, the Buddha is always generous and compassionate.

When one of the Buddha’s bhiksus fell ill, the Buddha personally took care of the sick disciple—bathing him, bringing him water, and tidying up his room. When one of the Buddha’s older bhiksus failed in his eyesight, the Buddha helped him thread a needle and mend his clothes. The Buddha was full

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of affections and was most loyal, most filial, most compassionate, and most kind. Some of you may say that these gestures are everyday occurrences and not anything special, but it was the manner in which the Buddha did these things that made them special. There is a Chinese saying which describes how everyday mundane things can also feel special: “Though it may be the same moon that shines outside the window every night, the flowering of plum blossoms is what makes a world of difference.”

Next, we’ll talk about how the Buddha handled stressful situations. One day, the Buddha was in the country of King Supprabuddha, begging for alms. King Supprabuddha was the father of Princess Yasodhara, the wife of the Buddha. The king was not at all pleased to see the Buddha and personally came out to stir up trouble with the Buddha. He stopped the Buddha on the street and said, “You are the kind of person who deserted your country, your wife and your child to seek cultivation. How dare you come to my country to beg for alms! Why don’t you go and make a living for yourself? You think you can just beg for alms and enjoy the fruits of others’ labor.”

The Buddha was not the least angry; he calmly said to the king, “King, please do not be mistaken. Everyday, I cultivate the field of blessings for all sentient beings. Patience is my plough, and diligence is my hoe. I sow seeds of wisdom, so that all sentient

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beings can have a beautiful garden of blessings and enjoy the fruits of bodhi.”

Among the seven princes who renounced the household life to follow the Buddha was a cousin of the Buddha by the name of Devadatta. Devadatta grew impatient with the gradual process of cultivation and became attracted to the immediate results of supernatural power. He wanted to use supernatural power to trick others into believing that he was superior to them and that they should become his disciples. So, Devadatta went to the Buddha and asked the Buddha to teach him supernatural power. When the Buddha refused his request, Devadatta grew angry with the Buddha. He gathered a few vicious hoodlums to assassinate the Buddha. When the Buddha’s disciples got wind of the plot, they all became very nervous and feared for the Buddha’s safety. With wooden sticks and iron poles in hand, they were ready for a good fight with Devadatta and his people. The Buddha saw the situation; he smiled and said, “The life of the Buddha is not something that can be protected by brute force. Many times I have told you that when we are faced with the fights of our lives, we must be prepared with wisdom and patience. In this way, we will not be intimidated by others. Wooden sticks and iron poles are not the best kinds of weapons for the situation at hand. Please rest assured, it is not my time to leave this world.

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Even if it is time for me to enter parinirvana, my Dharma body<sup>3</sup> will still be here with you. Please go and cultivate; it is more important to stand guard on our own minds.”

There are many more examples of how the Buddha handled the many unpleasant situations of life that we all have to face at one time or another. When Uruvilva Kasyapa first met the Buddha, he intended to do the Buddha harm, but he ended up becoming a disciple of the Buddha. Angulimalya was a vicious killer, but under the gentle guidance of the Buddha, he also turned a new leaf and took refuge in the Buddha. When the Sakya and Koliya clans were about to fight for water rights during a time of drought, the Buddha hurried back home to be a peacemaker and resolved the situation without any bloodshed. When Vaisali was struck by an epidemic, the Buddha went there to volunteer his help. When Cincamanavika falsely accused the Buddha of sexual misconduct, her plan was foiled and everyone respected the Buddha that much more. When the Buddha’s disciple, Kaloayin, was murdered, or when Maudgalyayana, (known for his miraculous power, was beaten to death by Nigranthas (a nudist cult), the Buddha was heart-broken. Though saddened, the Buddha also took the opportunity to remind his disciples that they should not be caught up in the web of worldliness

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3 The body of teachings.

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and that even miraculous power was not the ultimate solution for attaining the Way. He advised them to be forever vigilant of observing the Way. On numerous occasions, the Buddha reinforced that we should all use the teachings of the Three Dharma Seals and the Four Noble Truths to guide us in our journey of life. At the crossroads of life, we can always rely on these teachings, as we rely on a compass, to help us choose the right path to our destination.

The Buddha, who had attained the Way, continued to live in this world. Like all human beings, the Buddha lived through good times and bad. The difference is that the enlightened Buddha was not at all perturbed by the ups and downs of life. The Buddha lived his life in transcendence and liberation.

There are many wonderful examples the Buddha has given us on how to live transcendently, but this booklet only includes a few of them. . Hopefully, four aspects of transcendental living discussed in this booklet will suggest an avenue to pursue such a goal. To live a transcendental life does not mean that one has to renounce the household life and become a monastic. Anyone can discover transcendence in the midst of worldly living, and when this occurs there will be found the peace and happiness of transcendental living. Consider the following closing thought:

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*To hold on to the safety of a household life  
is easy, to renounce is not!*

*To renounce is easy, to live in  
transcendence is not!*

*To live in transcendence is easy, but to truly  
understand the ways of the world is not!*