

The Source of Life is Calling

『生命故鄉的呼喚』

Follow your Heart to where your Home is

Let Your Heart Be *Alive*

The Profound Beauty in the Garden of Life

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Chapter Eight

The Hidden Treasures of Life

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Don't waste any more time or energy on those desires for money, fame, lust, food and sleep! Focus your attention instead on the value, meaning and purpose of your life. Set your course based on assuring your position on the existence and truth of living.

Or else you can start from the topic on "life". What is the value and meaning of life? What is the existence of life? You may like to focus on these issues. Another option is to focus on "humanity". What is humanity? What is the value and meaning of humanity?

Many people, who devote all their energy in advancement towards success, question the value of humanity. Humanity is priceless! When you can assure humanity, life and living, regardless of

your success or failures, your life will be fulfilled and valuable.

We do not need to be afraid of richness or poverty, but we need to be afraid if we are squandering our life aimlessly. The key lies here, the authenticity also lies here: yet the virus in the social structure, the illness in our social values has distorted our thinking. We are not asking you to give up striving for success, but your struggles should be worthwhile, meaningful and for the right reasons. Don't earn money if you do not know how you should spend it and don't lose your way in your course of life when and if you do succeed!

Successful or not, we still have to live on; and we should live well, that is the right way to live our lives! If your goal is to be successful, then what will you do after you have achieved that? If your goal is to be "number one", then what do you do after becoming "number one"? Life goes on after winning the most coveted prize, for example the Oscar! The important thing is how to live better after you have achieved your goal. Or else that little golden statue is only a symbol with no meaning. If you have a doctoral degree, you still need to live on. Do live like a professor! Don't live like a primary school graduate, otherwise what good is your degree?

It is important to know how to live after you have become successful. But it is more important for those people who have failed to find out how to

live after failure. How can you live with meaning and value? If you have succeeded but live a meaningless and worthless life, then there is no different than those people who has failed! This is why we repeat over and over: the key issue in living is not based on failure or success, but on how to live a meaningful and valuable life.

Jimmy Carter is the American president who lost badly while seeking re-election. But his failure brought him to become involved in charitable causes, therefore adding much meaning and value to his life. Now he is one of the most respected humanitarians in the U.S.A. Conversely, there are many successful people who do not know how to handle their success and end up wasting their health, marriage or even their lives. For example, John Belushi, River Phoenix or Johnny Cash, all successful entertainers who have succumbed to alcohol and drug abuse and ended up losing everything.

There is only one winner in any competition but many losers. Therefore the most valuable lesson in life is to learn how to survive in failures, disappointments, and feelings of helplessness while living well and meaningfully. If you can realize the meaning and value of your existence through these struggles, then you can experience where the treasures of live are hidden.

We start from the three directions or targets in “living”, “life” and “humanity”, to assure, scrutinize, reflect and experience the six factors around these three directions. The six factors are: existence, meaning, value, purpose, assertion and truth. If you raise your existential doubts in your course of life towards these six aspects, you will be able to discover them very soon!

So what is left to do is to practice until you can master the skill. This skill cannot be attained by accumulating knowledge, or by researching on information. What is meant by the value and meaning of life, living and humanity? Researching will only give you information, which is within the definition of “pronoun” thinking mode. That information or knowledge will only be baggage or a burden for you to memorize. The key lies in experiencing, feeling and entering into that state of mind. What we

want is at the state of “being”, and not the state of “pronoun” – its belongings. You must be able to enter into that state of life.

Can you feel the value and meaning of life? Are they within your grasp? Your spiritual being will be totally transformed when you can experience and grasp them. You will realize that gaining in one area may only mean losing in other areas. To have less money may allow you to learn and experience more about the truth of life. What is authentic life? It is the priceless treasure of mankind; it is where you should earn! What you need to earn is not money, not something external, but the authenticity in life. To manifest the experience of authenticity, that is the real treasure!

Thus I say: “Sutras are the words of the Buddha, the words of the Truth.” How? Buddha is the Truth, not the representative of the Truth, but the embodiment of the Truth. Buddha manifests the Truth directly, thus he is the Truth. We have not manifested the Truth; we are still searching for the Truth; we are following the Buddha’s footsteps to search for the Truth. What is the Truth? The Truth is life. The authenticity of life is the Truth. In another words, Sutras are the words of the Buddha, the words of the Truth. Since Sutras are the words of the Truth, they are also the words of the authenticity of life.

We must assure ourselves of the truth of these statements, which are really inconceivable, and they are very profound for many people. We all know that Sutras hold the words of the Buddha, but few know that Buddhist Sutras are the words of the Truth, and even fewer know that Buddhist Sutras are the thinking mode of the Truth. Not to mention there is hardly anyone who can understand that Buddhist Sutras are the words of life, and also the thinking mode of life.

Do you know how to think through “life”? We understand so little about life. I really wish that there was a chance for me to explain to you how life functions? This topic involves deep and philosophical insight, not easily comprehensible to many people; we need a special lecture on that in the future.

Wishing the best to you all.



Chapter Nine

Living and Practicing

Can “Practice” -cultivating oneself in Buddhist practice- be incorporated into the activities of daily living as many people have thought?

There are different approaches towards Practice; they are “Shamatha”, “Samadhi” and “Dhyana” (or “Chan” in Chinese). Shamatha is dedicated, pure practice per se; its goal is the attainment of deep concentration by focusing the mind on single object. Samadhi is applied meditation; it is the application of concentration and insight in daily life. Chan is intimately connected or fully integrated with everyday living.

So when we talk about Practice, which approach are we referring to? According to the Theravāda school, their emphasis is on Shamatha. Thus they would not agree with the assertion that one can carry out the Practice in day to day living; practice is distinct from daily activities. For the monks or the left-home ones, every activity is purely and meticulously dedicated to cultivation.

Practice in Japan is just the opposite. The practitioners in Japan have integrated Buddhism into their social traditions and daily life. The monks get married, have a family and run their own businesses to make money, some even on the temple grounds. As long as the business makes a profit, they may even undertake Karaoke or Video Arcade. Should one accept this kind of attitude as Practice?

The two approaches mentioned above are dramatically distant. While the monks in Japan live like regular folks, many devoted stay-home Buddhists in Taiwan live like monks! Even though these scenarios are quite extreme, they each have their respective merits. Unfortunately, many people may form their own prejudices

before they understand the strengths of each of these approaches.

We should explore the relationship between Practicing and living. How can that relationship be closely integrated? People in Taiwan may have some general ideas but they have no clear template to follow. They fully intend to carry out the saying “Living itself is the Practice”, but all too often, in reality, they live their lives but forget to practice. So, it is easier said than done.

Let’s look at how the different approaches are differentiated in Buddhist terminology:

Shamatha is a rigorous fundamental principle in Buddhist training, whereas Samadhi (“*Sui yuan zhi*” - 隨緣止) in Chinese can be reflected in the daily activities. “*Sui yuan zhi*” means follow the flow of cooperative causes and settle your mind. Your mind will be calm regardless of the rhythm of life. This is the most common Practice in Mahayana. But for advanced and vigorous Mahayana practitioners, they may undertake Ch’an, integrating Practice with daily life, even in the practice of taking a meal.

Let us look at the ritual of “Taking a meal in the dining hall - 過堂用齋”, a ritual that is still practiced in most temples in Taiwan. The ritual is a set of Practices, in other words, having lunch is the Practice itself. How can you turn dining into Practice? Before dining the disciples have to make offerings to the Buddha, followed by a walking meditation around the Buddha statue. They will then enter the dining room and have another “mindful offering” before eating the meal solemnly. They have to undertake the meal as though they were approaching the altar for worship. After that, there is the walk back to the grand hall and another walking meditation around the Buddha statue, ending with the transfer of merits.

So, eating the meal is only part of the complete set of practice. If you participate occasionally, all the restrictions and regulations may make eating quite awkward. Yet, the regular practitioners execute this with ease. What is upsetting is that nowadays, many temples carry out this ritual as a

ceremony and not as a Practice. They just go through the motions without grasping the essence of the Practice. You can call this way of Practice “Chan”, but not “Samadhi”.

Since most people have difficulty accepting the rigid expectations of “Chan”, we will focus on how to develop the “Samadhi” approach; how to use our mind skillfully and effectively to attain enlightenment.

The key to Samadhi, put simply by Bodhisattva Manjusri, is “practicing mindfulness and awareness”. The emphasis is on “how” to be mindful, and act wisely. For example, what is on your mind while you are doing your laundry, taking a bath or carrying the garbage out? If you just carelessly let the water run or throw out the garbage without awareness, then you are not using your mind skillfully. Should we be separating the garbage from recyclable items before they are thrown out? Should we be more conservative in the use of our electricity and water? When we are mindful, we act wisely and we will live more earnestly. Living and working earnestly are Practicing too.

One may wonder why we should practice this way, what’s it for? There is no immediate gain in living earnestly, no monetary benefit, it is just being conscientious and responsible. If we are only interested in getting paid but not in the work we do, we will not be very good at what we do, and our work will easily evolve into problems like fraud, manipulation or opportunism.

It is very important that we make “Living” a priority in our business or political world. Living refers to carrying out your work wholeheartedly, trying with all your might, putting out your best effort. The materialistic rewards like money, fame or power are all secondary, not your ultimate goal. They are encouragements in life, but not the purpose for living. Do not be overwhelmed by these materialistic rewards! If you do not know how to enjoy the wealth you have accumulated or the fame and power you have mastered, then what is the point? A lot more can be lost in the process than the transient glory that these bring.

Today, if you have the “blessing/merits”, you just need to put in your best and you will be successful. Money, fame and power will follow accordingly. As long as you take responsibility and follow your conscience, you are living earnestly; you will enjoy a very high quality of life. With this as the primary objective, all external matters will have little effect on you. You will not be bothered by how others think of you, whether they care about you, whether you have a place in their heart. All these are no longer important!

We need to know how to practice mindfulness. Regardless of your success or failure, winning the first prize or losing it all, life goes on! The sun still rises in the morning for winners and losers. Do you know how to live like a winner? That is the main issue! So, are you leading a successful life or are you just trapped in the circuit of dinners and deals? These experiences can be interesting as they feed your ego and your sense of self importance. But, is this a meaningful lifestyle? These transient rewards may create obstacles towards your cultivation without you even knowing.

Once we understand the true value and meaning of living, then living is practicing. You no longer have to differentiate between living and practicing, to integrate the two, or even define the difference between them.

When we can figure out the purpose of our existence and our course in life, ask ourselves why are we here? What for? Where are we going? We will discover that the “ultimate goal” for living is to take responsibility for our work and to live earnestly and conscientiously. We should not be living for the rewards that life may or may not bring.

... to be continued in next issue

