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How to Find a Buddhist Temple

by George Klima and Chris Ng

Many Canadian people every year become curious about Buddhist teachings and decide to visit a temple. They want to find out first-hand what it's all about.

Perhaps you are thinking of visiting a temple. But which one? There is no Consumer Reports for Buddhist Temples to tell you which ones are the best and no Lemon Aid guide to tell you about the worst. Does that mean every Buddhist sect is suitable for every person? Are all Buddhist temples consistently pure? Are all Buddhist monks and nuns virtuous? No. The simple answer is that Buddhist practitioners are people like everybody else.

The purpose of this little guide is to help you to find a temple that is suitable for you.

Objectives

Although Buddhist practice begins with yourself, you need a temple to find a teacher. The community of people at a temple can also help you to share Buddhist values and to encourage you in your practice. You need a teacher to help you to learn Dharma (the Buddha's way) and to meditate. These are the two key things that a temple should be able to provide.

By "meditation" we mean the whole variety of sitting, visualizing, and chanting practices, and the integration of the underlying principles of meditation practice to all aspects of life as expressed in the present moment.

Most temples also have regular services, which are typically comprised of some combinations of teachings, meditation, chanting, and socializing. Such services are familiar to us coming from other backgrounds. They are useful for those of us leading lives that have routine jobs and schedules. But they are neither necessary nor sufficient.

Some groups make meditation available for beginners, but do not teach Dharma to beginners. This is fine, as long as you know that dharma classes are also available as you establish some basic discipline. However, keep in mind that meditation alone, with no teachings is a little like travelling without a destination: amusing but pointless.

Some groups provide Dharma teachings, perhaps in the form of lectures, regardless of the students' background. These are quite popular among "dharma hopping" students, who travel the lecture circuit. Perhaps such groups rely on students to develop their own meditation practice. However,
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Verses from the Dhammapada

*Translated by the Venerable Balangoda
Ananda Maitreya*

Animosity does not eradicate animosity.
Only by loving kindness is animosity dissolved.
This law is ancient and eternal.

There are those who are aware
That we are always facing death.
Knowing this, they put aside all contentiousness.

If someone harms an innocent person,
One pure and free of guilt,
Evil results will fall upon the doer
Like fine dust thrown into the wind.

There is no place in the world -
Neither the sky, the sea, nor in mountain crevices -
Where an evildoer can hide,
Safe from the consequences of his action.

There is no place in the world -
Neither the sky, the sea, nor in mountain crevices -
Where one can escape the inevitability of death.

To shun all evil.
To do good.
To purify one's heart.
This is the teaching of the Buddhas.

Truly we dwell in happiness.
Others hate but we do not.
Surrounded by those who hate
We live free from hatred.

Truly we dwell in happiness,
Free from struggles while others struggle.
Surrounded by struggling people
We live free from conflict.

The wise ones who do no harm
Ever restrained in body, word and mind,
Come to the place of peace
Where they will sorrow no more.

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How to Find a Buddhist Temple

(continued from page 1)

to make sense of Dharma it is necessary to still the mind; to meditate. And meditation requires the guidance of an experienced meditator. Dharma class with no practice is interesting and intellectually enjoyable, but it is a little like studying cooking without ever having a meal.

Is the Teacher a Good Teacher?

The Buddha himself left quite explicit instructions on how we can judge. We expect ordained monks to have sufficient practice that they develop beyond where we lay people have developed. And they should have developed in three areas: freedom from ignorance, freedom from greed, and freedom from anger.

Firstly, a good teacher has made progress in attaining freedom from ignorance. This means the teacher has arrived at some understandings about the nature of existence, and is able to show a genuine compassion. You should not hear a teacher quoting nonsense taken from a New Age bookshelf.

Freedom from ignorance also means a sufficient grasp of the teachings to be able to answer your questions. In fact, the Buddha was very clear that all followers should test all his teachings against their experience. The Buddha very much encouraged all visitors to ask questions. You should be able to get straight answers to your questions. Do be respectful, do be truthful with yourself, do focus on what matters to you, but do not be shy to ask, even the same question over and over. And do listen closely to the answers you hear. A good teacher will find a way to give you an answer that speaks to you, at your level of understanding.

Secondly, a good teacher is largely free from greed and lust. How can you tell? One way is to stay sensitive to an undue focus on your generosity. Be cognizant that your generosity benefits the community rather than accruing to specific individuals. Also look for signs of attachment to things and to people. What might be some signs that there is some funny business going on? Perhaps the teacher lives a fine and comfortable lifestyle. Perhaps there are too many women around who praise the teacher excessively and uncritically.

Thirdly, a good teacher is advanced in developing freedom from anger. Such a teacher might have a "lightness" in style and would not be trapped in his own "likes" and "dislikes", exhibiting kindness towards others, even very ignorant and difficult students. You would not find an authoritarian attitude where something is so because it's written here or there, or because the Buddha said so. In fact, any display of anger for any reason is a seriously unwholesome act. So-called "skillful" anger is no different from plain anger; it is therefore a dangerous concept.

Practicalities

It's helpful if the temple is nearby to where you live. Why make things needlessly difficult? It's far more sound to work towards a situation where the teachings and your visits to the temple become part of your everyday life, rather than being some kind of retreat from it.

Visting temples is a most pleasant activity. No doubt you will find that the people running them are an amazing collection of cheerful, courteous, and kind people. To ensure that you arrive at a convenient time, it's good to phone beforehand. It may be good to bring some fruit or a cash donation -- think of it as a show of your sincerity.

(continued on page 6)

什麼意思？

-- 梁啟妙

在一次朋友的敘餐時，有位李太太很好奇的問：她去旅行時，曾見一僧人的禪房內牆上掛著一個“死”字。她想知道是什麼意？筆者對她說：是這位僧人要以此“死”字去勉勵自己，要把握現有的時光多為社會人群造福，自己更要斷除貪瞋痴等煩惱，去了脫生死。

世間大部份人，有些雖然曾受過高深教育，甚至對人類社會亦有貢獻，但對自己生老病死的變化過程卻莫不關心，以為只是自然生態的演變，因為宇宙一切生物，都會經過此變化過程，大家都已經習慣熟識，所以未有特別去留意，尤其當我們身體還健康，一切順心意的時候，我們只知眼前所見的一切人，物，事態，境像，確實存在，便可能不擇手段去爭取，去追求財富，名利，權勢。從不會想到自己終有一天，會走向死亡邊緣，亦不會想到臨命終時這一剎那的狀況，因為現在距離死亡好像還有一段很長的日子。但當即將面臨死亡的威脅時，才突然醒悟已太遲了。所以這位僧人以掛上個“死”字去提醒自己，好等自己能把把握現有的分秒時光。

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Buddhist Community. @ Sidney Smith Hall

4 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. Chinese Tea Ceremony, Tea Mind / Ch'an
Words, meditation and reflections with Rev. Man Long and Miao
Hsin (Buddhist nuns) of Fo Guang Shan Temple of Toronto. @
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Wednesday Oct 10, 2001

4:15 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. Dharma Talk "Peace in the Mind, Peace in
the World" by Ven. Bhante Kovida, Buddhist monk. @
International Student Centre

Thursday Oct 11, 2001

11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Displays and information tables by U of T Buddhist
Community. @ Sidney Smith Hall

Friday Oct 12, 2001

10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Seminar Presentation by Professor Koichi Shinohara
of McMaster University "Visions at the Moment of Death: Some
Examples from the Biographies of Eminent Monks Collections". @ Croft
Chapter House, University College

5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Meditation and Discussion with Rev. Saranapala
(Buddhist monk), Chaplain of U of T. @ 21 Sussex Ave. Rm 507

Saturday Oct 13, 2001

10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Seminar Presentation by Professor Donald Lopez,
University of Michigan "Dying the Good Death in Tibetan Buddhism".
@ Croft Chapter House, UC

10 a.m. to 12 noon. Peace and Loving-kindness Meditation led by Ven.
Bhante Kovida, Buddhist monk. @ 21 Sussex Ave. Rm 507

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(Saturday Oct 13, 2001, continued)

11:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Seminar Presentation by
Professor Gregory Schopen, University of California,
L.A. "Indian Buddhist Monastic Rules and the
Ritualization of Dying". @ Croft Chapter House, UC

1:00 p.m. to 1:20 p.m. "Beating the Deathless Drums"
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** The seminar presentations are part of a three-day
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gratefully accepted.

Highlights of Venerable Madawela Punnaji's Exposition of Buddhism and "Awakening Meditation"

by *Sesath Hewapathirane*

The most recent of Venerable Madawela Punnaji's publications is the book titled 'Awakening Meditation - Sambodhi Bhavana' (Puremind Publishers, Edmonton, 2001). This work is a compilation of the material discussed at several dhamma talks given by the author. Ven. Punnaji discusses and explains the core Buddhist teaching from his perspective – that of being a Theravada Buddhist monk for over fifty years, and that of being a scholar in modern Psychology, the Pali language and modern Medicine. The clarity of the concepts discussed arises in large part from the author's introduction of new terminology based on his translation of Pali terms to English. The description of complicated ideas is highly facilitated by the author's strong command of the English language.

Discussed here are a few key concepts from this book that, to the individual interested in Buddhist teachings, are extremely interesting and illuminating.

When one forms attachments to things that are impermanent – such as other individuals, our own bodies, material possessions – once these impermanent (or unstable) things disappear or are lost, we feel unhappy. The formation of attachments is a self-centred or self-motivated occurrence, as the aim is personal fulfillment. The normal human being is not conscious of, or not fully awakened towards, this reality. In fact he/she is in conflict with reality. This is the reason for human suffering.

When one awakens to the reality of impersonal experience, the experience of 'self' is seen for what it is, as only a creation of the impersonal process of experiencing. Then, birth, aging, disease and death of the body are seen as stages of an impersonal process. This is the end of suffering and the actualization of immortality, or Nirvana.

Buddhism should be viewed as a personal growth technique. It involves a system of emotional control or management. A self-centred life is an unhappy one. A selfless life is a happy one. This is what the Buddha taught. The Buddha tried to solve the problem of unhappiness, by transforming self-centred individuals into selfless people.

Self-centredness is biological. All our emotional/instinctual impulses are self-centred. From the day we are born we are in a state of disequilibrium. We are bombarded with various stimuli from the environment outside. All our sense organs are stimulated. We begin to react to these stimuli emotionally and by doing so, we lose our equilibrium. However, we can control these emotional impulses. It is by such control that we can become selfless. This basically is the aim of Buddhist practice.

The Supernormal Eightfold Transformation (the new term proposed to replace 'Noble Eightfold Path') begins with good association, hearing the 'dhamma' (teachings), reflecting on the dhamma, and understanding the dhamma. When one associates with people having the harmonious perspective, one learns from this. One begins to think about it and starts understanding it. This results in a change in one's sense of values, which gives a new direction to life. This results in a change in one's goal in life.

By understanding the supernormal eightfold way, one is able to transform oneself from a self-centred personality to a selfless one. By learning to gain control over the emotions one is able to give up selfishness.

The human being has the capacity to delay reaction, to get sufficient time to decide which response to make in a given situation. This enables the human being to act rationally, instead of emotionally. This ability to choose one's reactions is not something that we are born with. It is a capacity that has to be developed. It is only by developing this capacity that we become fully human. The only sure way to get rid of a bad habit is to stop practicing it. There is always a goal to a habit. We may not be aware of it. But if we try and become aware of it, we can change it consciously, and the habit will automatically disappear.

We should avoid emotional thoughts and begin to cultivate calming or tranquilizing thoughts. True happiness is nothing but tranquility of mind. Therefore our goal in life should be the calmness (composure, imperturbability, and equanimity) of mind amidst all changing vicissitudes (trials, tribulations, uncertainties and unpredictable changes).

Tranquility does not mean inactivity. It means stopping the emotional reaction to circumstances, and learning to respond to situations intelligently. One should use one's intelligence to change one's circumstances, when they can be changed, and when they cannot be changed, to learn to bear them up patiently. If we seriously make tranquility our goal in life, we do not have to push ourselves to meditate. We will automatically be practicing what leads to tranquility, because tranquility is what we want.

Buddhist meditation involves efforts to consciously purify the mind. When the mind is purified, one experiences an inner calm. The mind enters a state of peace and equilibrium. It is a state of mind filled with kindness and compassion, which is selfless. Such a tranquil mind can also think clearly resulting in intelligent behavior.

The awakening is not a 'normal' experience but a 'supernormal' one. The aim of Buddhist meditation is to awaken from this dream full of suffering into a supernormal reality where there is a supernormal level of mental health, happiness and truth. A human being is capable of transcending the ordinary human limitations in knowledge and goodness, and attain a state of

How to Find a Buddhist Temple

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In fact, the cheerfulness and focus of the people at a temple are a good indication of the general health of the place. One of our practical goals is surely that we should become more happy, more at peace with ourselves, more free from fear and worries, as a result of our association with Buddhism. Take some time to meet a few people. Remember also to note whether the adherents seem physically and mentally healthy. Sit quietly in a corner for a while. Do you feel comfortable enough that you could spend an entire weekend sitting quietly with this group of people?

Note also whether the place is clean. Is the bathroom clean? A committed group of people will keep their temple spotlessly clean. There should be no shirking over toilet duties.

You may be more comfortable having studied some basics about Buddhism. There are many helpful introductions that you can start with, such as "What the Buddha taught" by Walpola Rahula.

The Web site buddhismcanada.com consists of directories of temples and groups you could consult with if you decide to visit a Buddhist temple. It also contains a listing of special events taking place in Southwestern Ontario. Best wishes for your Buddhist journey.

"Awakening Meditation"

(continued from page 5)

perfection. The aim of Buddhist meditation is also to raise the human consciousness to a higher level. It is to raise the normal person to a super-normal level of thinking, feeling and living. Buddhist meditation in the true sense is a growth technique helping people to grow to a level of emotional maturity, where one is free of normal unhappiness.

The technique enumerated in the book is called transformational meditation because its aim is to transform the character and personality of a person. It is shown that, properly practiced it is the way to become fully human, which is a supernormal state.

Developing human consciousness is a gradual evolutionary process. It is a process of growth and expansion of awareness, which is consciously achieved through a systematic psychological technique. Buddhist meditation is such a technique. It is a method of making people conscious of reality and thereby helping people to transcend suffering and weaknesses. It is through this evolutionary process of developing human consciousness to the fullest that "Sambodhi" or Harmonious Full awakening is attained. Here 'harmonious' means freedom from conflict with reality. It is being in harmony with reality.

'Nirvana' simply means the tranquillity that can never be disturbed; it is the mind that is unshaken by changing vicissitudes of life. A true Buddhist, whose life is oriented towards the goal of nirvana, is a tranquil person. When one awakens to the reality of impersonal experience, the experience of 'self' is seen for what it is, as only a creation of the impersonal process of experiencing. This is the end of suffering and the actualization of immortality.

To conclude, this book offers new insight to the nature of Buddhist practice and introduces an improved set of terms that appear to help describe the Buddha's teaching. It is highly recommended to the student of Buddhism and Buddhist meditation.

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