

Buddhism 101 – Questions and Answers

(A Handbook for Buddhists)

4rd Edition

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Foreword

Dear Friends in Dharma,

This handbook, Buddhism 101—Questions and Answers, is a selection of Buddhist teachings for beginners. While composing this book, I thought in particular about those who just started to study and practice Buddhism in environments of multiple religions and cultures. The basic themes introduced here serve to provide readers with a general view of the Buddha's teachings with regard to theory and practice. The questions discussed here are the core teachings of Buddhism. As a beginner, you need to master these teachings firmly and precisely before going further into the Buddhist studies. I hope that this handbook will be a useful ladder to help you with your learning and practice. For the present edition, I would like to thank Shirley and Patrick for their great effort in editing this work. May you be well and happy.

White Sands, Summer 2017

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101 – Questions and Answers

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- 1. *What feature does Buddhism share with other religions?***

Buddhism shares numerous common features with all other religions. All religions encourage human beings to do good deeds, avoid evil deeds, cultivate a life of morality and compassion,

and develop human dignity for both oneself and others as well as for family and society.

2. What is the difference between Buddhism and other religions?

The key point by which Buddhism differs from other religions is that Buddhism does not believe in the existence of a Personal God who creates, controls, and governs the life of all sentient beings, including human beings. In the Buddhist view, suffering or happiness is not created by God, but together with karmic force, is the product of each person. The Buddha taught that a person becomes noble or servile not because of his or her origin (e.g., family background or social rank), but because of his or her actions. Indeed, personal action makes a man or woman noble or servile. Additionally, there are radical differences between the teaching of Buddhism and that of other religions. Buddhism considers all dharmas (things or existences, including both the mental and the physical) in this world to be conditional and exist in the mode of Dependent Origination. No dharma can exist independently and permanently as an immortal and invariable entity. Thus, all existences are non-self. Similarly, no human or non-human is able to control and govern the life of another person, only the person himself or herself can. Consequently, the most essential point in Buddhist humanistic teaching is that all sentient beings have their own Buddhahood; thus, each person has the ability to become a Buddha. Enlightenment and liberation, in the Buddhist view, are equal truths for all sentient beings and not a holy privilege reserved for a particular for a certain person. This great view of equality in Buddhist doctrine is rarely found in other religions.

3. What is a brief history of the Buddha?

Buddhism was established more than 2,600 years ago in India by the Sakyamuni Buddha. Modern historians believe the Buddha was born in Lumbini Park, Nepal, during the Vesak (May) full moon Poya day around the sixth century before the Christian era. The Buddha, whose birth name was Siddhartha, was born a prince and the only son of King Suddhodana and Queen Mahamaya. Upon growing up, he married princess Yasodhara, and they had a son named Rahula. After realizing the nature of human suffering from birth, old age, sickness, and death, prince Siddhartha decided to leave the palace to look for the truth of enlightenment and spiritual liberation. After five years of study with several masters, six years of solitude and ascetic practice in the forests, he finally attained enlightenment after forty-nine days of motionless meditation under the Bodhi tree. Since this enlightenment, he has been called The Buddha, a person who has reached enlightenment and has been liberated from the cycle of samsāra. After attaining enlightenment, he started to teach the Dharma (the path leading to enlightenment and liberation) and established the Sangha (a community of monastic people such as monks and nuns) over a period of forty-five years. He entered Nirvāna (passed away)

at the age of eighty while under the twin Sala trees at Kusinara, around 543 B.C.E.

4. *How is Buddhism defined?*

Traditionally, Buddhism is defined as the path leading to enlightenment, as *Buddha* means to be an awakened or enlightened person. Thus, the essential characteristic of Buddhism is the *path to enlightenment and liberation* from the world of samsāra.

5. *Does Buddhism require that we reject the world?*

This question requires a delicate answer. History tells us that even after the middle-aged Buddha Sakyamuni had attained enlightenment and ultimate liberation from the binding cycle of samsara, he remained with the world for more than forty years teaching the Dharma and bringing benefits to all sentient beings. In this regard two important points should be considered:

a) *The Buddhist concept of enlightenment (bodhi)*: In Buddhism the term Bodhi refers to a full awakening or full awareness of the operation of pratītyasamutpāda, the Law of Dependent Origination, which is the mental and physical corporeality on which the life of a human being is developed. The capability of full awareness permits the individual to overcome all afflictions, delusions, and impurities and create a true life of peace and happiness. Additionally, the capability of awareness is divided into various levels from low to high. Therefore, you should keep in mind that spending a whole life practicing the Dharma does not always mean that you will obtain full awareness (realization of the absolute truth). Although you have the ability to become enlightened, your level of enlightenment depends on your individual karmic force, which is the total of your past lives.

b) *The Buddhist concept of liberation (moksha)*: The term *moksha* or *mukti* in Sanskrit means *release, transcend beyond, or liberate* from the bondage of samsāra. Liberation in Buddhism consists of various levels, from minimal to absolute freedom. Whenever you transcend beyond the bondages of afflictions and defilements, such as craving, hatred, ignorance, self-attachment, and self-pride in your own life, you will reach the realm of liberation. Until you liberate yourself from such afflictions (i.e., your mind is no longer governed or controlled by such mental impurities), you cannot truly enjoy the taste of liberation. However, to reach the state of absolute liberation, you must completely eradicate the roots of those afflictions, as those roots of impurity are the causes of the birth and death cycle of *samsāra*. In the Buddhist view, to liberate oneself from the cycle of samsāra, is to release oneself from one's life of afflictions and impurities. This is the concept of *renunciation* in Buddhism. It is important to remember that to be truly liberated you do not have to go anywhere special to practice the

Dharma. It is enough to practice right here, right now, in this person and in this world.

6. *Is Buddhism a religion or philosophy?*

The modern world is home to various religions, as well as various concepts of God [1]; moreover, each religion has its own doctrine and vocation. However, based on the general characteristics of religions, we may categorize all world religions into two groups: a) *theistic religions*—religions believing in the existence of either one personal deity (monotheism) or multiple deities (polytheism) such as the Creator, God, Brahma, Gods, etc., who creates and controls the life of humans and nature; or b) *non-theistic religions*—religions that do not believe in the existence of any deity whose actions create and control the life of both sentient and non-sentient beings. Within the limit of this definition, Buddhism is a religion that does not have a personal God, but incorporates all the functions of a religion including conceptions, canonical languages, doctrines, symbols, rituals, spiritual practices, and social relationships. Yet many people today consider Buddhism to be “a philosophy of life” or “a philosophy of enlightenment”; this is just a personal choice.

7. *What is the main principal of Buddhism?*

The essential tenet of Buddhism was taught by the Buddha during his first teaching in Deer Park (*Sarnath*). It focused on the Four Noble Truths (*Catvāri āryasatyāni*): the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the causes of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the noble path leading to the cessation of suffering. Following this first Dharma teaching, the Buddha taught about non-self—i.e., that no independent entity is perpetual and invariable within the context of the five human aggregates of form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. In other words, nothing in the physical or mental world can be considered as having an immortal self or permanent ego. In speaking of the essential Buddhist tenet, it is important to remember the historical fact that, on his way to enlightenment, the Buddha, during his deep meditation on the law of *Pratītyasamutpāda* (Dependent Origination), that the Bodhisattva Siddhartha became a Buddha when he cut himself off from the cycle of *samsāra*. [2] We can therefore conclude that the essential tenet of Buddhism includes the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, Non-self, and Dependent Origination.

8. *If Buddhism is a non-theistic religion, can we say that it is a religion of science or one of philosophy?*

You can define Buddhism as you choose, but you should keep in mind that, from the beginning, Buddhism has had no purpose to interpret or certify any problem belonging to science, as modern science does today. Buddhism does not put science at the top of its

teachings; nor is it inclined to any interpretation of science, although what the Buddha taught was always very scientific. The truth is that, when science is intensively developed, its discoveries help us verify the subtle problems of the Buddhist teachings, particularly those in the field of psychological studies. Perhaps, for this reason, Buddhism has become increasingly popular today and has quickly developed in Western countries—particularly in the academic environments of North American and European universities.

The most fundamental doctrine of Buddhism, as expressed in the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, is to deeply realize the causes of suffering, in order to transform them into true happiness and liberation. Buddhism is often called a religion of wisdom; and as one Buddhist expression states “only wisdom should be a true career”. In Buddhist teachings, wisdom and compassion must always go together and be the true career of a Bodhisattva or a Buddha.

9. What happened in the history of Buddhism to change it from its original form?

Three doctrinal movements have occurred in the history of Buddhism: Theravāda, Hīnāyana, and Mahāyāna. Theravāda is the primitive school of Buddhism. It began in the time of the Buddha and continued to develop until almost one hundred years after his Nirvāna. Following this original period came the spreading of the other two major Buddhism movements: Hīnāyana and Mahāyāna. The schools of Hīnāyana (Small vehicle) and Mahāyāna (Great vehicle) gradually emerged during the process of the expansion and development of Buddhist thought and philosophy and then these two major movements slowly diverged into eighteen sub-schools. However, both major movements based their teachings on the same doctrinal foundation (i.e., the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and Non-self), although each movement had its own views and interpretations based on various aspects of personal practice and social relationships. Historically, when a society evolves its languages and thoughts, a practical life also evolves and this resulted in the Buddha’s disciples developing various views and interpretations in the expansion of Buddhism. As an example, after the Buddha had already been in Nirvāna for hundreds of years, his plain and simple teachings had been covered up with philosophical reasons and social reformations. Today the differences in various forms of Buddhism are often called *traditional Buddhism* and *developed Buddhism*.

10. Since its beginning, how has Buddhism changed over time?

We can summarize some basic differences between the two form of Buddhism, the original and the developed, as follows:

a) *Canonical languages*: Primitive Buddhism (*Theravāda*) practitioners use Pali as their primary language and Nikāya sutras (or sutta in Pali form) are the foundation for their

practice. Meanwhile, Mahāyāna Buddhism uses the Mahāyāna sutras, in which Sanskrit is the primary language, together with some ancient languages, such as Tibetan and Chinese.

b) *Thoughts*: Primitive Buddhism is based on the teaching of Dependent Origination (*Paticcamūpāda*), while Mahāyāna Buddhism established two additional major philosophical movements: the Middle Way (*Mādhyamika*) and Mind-only (*Yogācāra*), which are also based on the same teaching of Dependent Origination. In the evolution of Buddhism the Diamond vehicle (*Vajrayāna*) was the last school developed. Except in the conceptual expansions of the meaning of spiritual end and the problem of saving others, these various schools of Buddhism only differ slightly, and their fundamental teachings are not contradictory to one another.

c) *Practices*: Primitive Buddhism focused on meditating on the four foundations of mindfulness; body, feeling, mind, and mind's objects (*all existences*). Mahāyāna Buddhism expanded its forms of spiritual practice, such as Zen (*meditation*), Pure Land, and Tantrism; each of which has several forms of practice.

Diversity themes	Primitive Buddhism	Mahāyāna Buddhism
Canonical languages	Pali sutta/Nikāya	Sanskrit sutras & sutras in Tibetan and Chinese
Central thoughts	Dependent Origination (<i>Paticcasamūppāda</i>)	Middle Way (<i>Mādhyamika</i>) Mind-only (<i>Yogācāra</i>) Tantrism (<i>Vajrayāna</i>)
Practices	Traditional meditation	Zen, Pure Land, and Tantrism (<i>various sects</i>)

11. In addition to the two forms of Buddhism—original and developed—why do we also have the names Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism?

Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism are alternative names used for primitive Buddhism and developed Buddhism respectively. These names refer to the directions in which

the practitioners of the two Buddhist traditions migrated. Southern Buddhism, the primitive branch, was popularly propagated in southern India, moving toward countries such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. Meanwhile Northern Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, expanded to northern India, China, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

12. Regarding the practice activities, is there any difference between Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism?

Southern Buddhism monastic lifestyle still maintains the primitive style for everyday activities, which were set up during the time of the Buddha. Southern Buddhist monks all wear the same style of yellow colored robes, eat one meal a day at noon, study and recite the Pali sutras, and recite the same canonical language (*Pali*). For this reason, monks in Southern Buddhism—even from different countries—can sit down and recite the same sutra expertly and skillfully.

In contrast, monks and nuns in Northern Buddhism do not keep the traditional lifestyle as the primitive Buddhism does. Rather, they adjust their lifestyles in everyday activities as well as in spiritual practices, relying on different habits, customs, national cultures, and social requirements. Thus, the lifestyles of monks and nuns in Northern Buddhism are dependent on various traditions of local peoples. For example, monks and nuns in Northern Buddhism wear different styles and colors of robes. Canonical texts were translated into the local languages, and followers can, depending on their individual health issues, eat more than one meal a day. Generally speaking, Northern Buddhism is a form of developed Buddhism because it has effectively adapted to social needs in becoming the first priority in the mission of preaching the Dharma.

13. How do Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism differ with regard to enlightenment?

Traditionally, the process of enlightenment and emancipation of a Buddhist Holy one is concretized in the Hearer (*Srāvaka*)—and includes the four attainment stages of Stream-enterer (*Sotāpana*), One-returner (*Sakadāgāmi*), None-returner (*Anāgāmi*), and Complete liberation (*Arhat*). The Steps of enlightenment are explained below in detail. A holy man or woman must purify all their afflictions by cutting off ten fetters (*samyojana*) as follows:

- Belief in an individual self (*sakkāya-ditthi*),
- Doubt or uncertainty about the Dharma (*vicikicchā*),
- Attachment to rites and rituals (*silabata-parāmāsa*),

- Sensual desire (*kāma-rāga*),
- Hatred (*vyāpāda*),
- Craving for existence (*rūpa-rāga*),
- Craving for non-existence (*arūpa-rāga*),
- Pride in self (*māna*),
- Restlessness or distraction (*uddhacca*), and
- Ignorance (*avijjā*).

With the exception of the expansion of the notion of “spiritual end” and “saving other sentient beings” in the ten stages of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva development, the concepts used to describe this process vary little between Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism spiritual training. Although descriptions of the path to enlightenment may be diverse, the content of spiritual liberation always remains the same—namely that to attain enlightenment, an Arhat or a Bodhisattva must completely delete the ten fetters of defilement.

Process of enlightenment and liberation of a Holy one in Buddhism

Four stages of attainment	Fetters must be deleted	Cycle of samsāra
Stream-enterer (<i>Sotāpana</i>)	Belief in an individual self, doubt or uncertainty about the Dharma, attachment to rites and rituals	At most, seven more births in either humans or devas (like heaven).
One-returner (<i>Sakadāgāmi</i>)	Weakened sensual desire and hatred	One more birth in the sense-sphere realm.
None-returner (<i>Anāgāmi</i>)	Completely deleted first five fetters: belief in an individual self, doubt or	Spontaneous birth in the form realm.

	uncertainty about the Dharma, attachment to rites and rituals, sensual desire and hatred.	
Complete liberation (<i>Arhat</i>)	Completely deleted last five fetters: craving for existence, craving for non-existence, pride in self, restlessness or distraction, and ignorance.	None. Complete liberation from the world of samsāra.

14. What are the ten stages of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva development?

The ten stages of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva development are:

- Pramudita*: joyfulness at having overcome the afflictions and defilements and the beginning of the process to enter the Buddha's path;
- Vimalā*: liberation from all possible defilements, the stage of purity;
- *Prabhākari*: the stage of developing wisdom;
- Arcismati*: the stage of shining wisdom;
- Sudurjayā*: the stage of overcoming the utmost or subtle defilements;
- Abhimukhi*: the stage of attaining transcendent wisdom;
- Dūramgamā*: the stage of transcending all notion of self in order to save others;
- Acalā*: the stage of not falling back into impurity;
- Sādhumati*: the stage of skillful wisdom and attainment of the ten powers; and

-*Dharmamega*: the stage of absolute liberation and freedom.

A Holy one practices the ten pāramitās (*perfections*) in connection to the ten stages above: dāna/charity; sīla/purity or morality; ksanti/patience; virya/progress; dhyāna/meditation; prajñā/wisdom; upaya/skillful means; pranidana/vows; bala/power; and jñāna/true knowledge.

15. What is the difference between Southern Buddhism and Northern Buddhism with regard to the ideal model

This is an interesting question. We know that, in all aspects of humans, the *ideal model* plays an important role in the formation of individual personality and lifestyle, regardless of their religion or non-religion. Likewise, the ideal models for practitioners between Primitive Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism vary.

In Primitive Buddhism, the ideal model is the very image of an *Arhat*, a Holy one who has given up all impurities of their personal life, living in an awakening and blissfulness state, and teaching and helping others. However, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the ideal model is the embodiment of a Bodhisattva, who always carries within him- or herself the vow to save others throughout their spiritual training journey. The ideal of saving others or performing beneficial acts for all other sentient beings is a spiritual mission which a Bodhisattva vows to consecrate his or her life in their spiritual journey, from the day of their first vow to the day of their becoming a Buddha. Consequently, in order to carry out the vow of saving others, a Bodhisattva endlessly practices and cultivates his or her wisdom and compassion. It is important to note that wisdom and compassion are the true career of a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Furthermore, to fulfill the ideal of saving others, a Bodhisattva must make a vow to enter the mundane world in thousands of worldly forms in order to benefit the world, which is why Mahāyāna Buddhism always modernizes *the way of entrance* to any practical life in order to benefit it. The way of practicing the Bodhisattva's vows consists of the ten pāramitās previously addressed in question 14, and bears the same traditional characteristics of primitive Buddhism.

16. How many major schools exist in Buddhism?

As we have seen, several periods of thought have emerged in the process of Buddhist development and are closely related to what we call Primitive Buddhism and Developed Buddhism. The first is the *Buddhist history of thoughts*, as defined by Buddhist logists such as academic Theodor Stcherbatsky (1866-1942); and which documents different periods in the whole process of development of Buddhist thoughts. The second is the *history of thoughts of Buddhist Schools*, and includes several Buddhist schools. For example, Buddhism in China,

includes at least ten different schools, and each school also has its own system of thoughts and unique methods of practice, thus, you need to have the time to study each of the doctrines of each school (e.g., Zen, Pure Land, or Tendai).

We may divide the first major system, the *Buddhist history of thoughts*, into two major subcategories based on history: a) Buddhist thoughts in the primitive period and b) Buddhist thoughts in the periods of development. Buddhist thoughts in the primitive period were established on the foundational teachings of Dependent Origination and non-self, and were taught directly by the Buddha after his attainment of ultimate enlightenment. The central content of these teachings explain that all existences (*dharmas*) in the three worlds—senses-sphere realm, fine form realm, and formless realm [3]— are nothing but the products of inter-beings from multi-conditions. They appear in either cosmic mode (e.g., institution, existence, transformation, and destruction) or in the flux of mental transformation (e.g., birth, being, alteration, and death). In this way, all things—both the physical and the mental—are born and die endlessly and are dependent on multiple conditions in the cycle of *samsāra*. All that is present through the Law of Dependent Origination is, therefore, impermanent, ever-changing, and without any immortal entity that is independent and perpetual. This is the truth of reality when the Buddha affirmed that “whether the Buddha appears or not, the reality of dharmas is always as such.” Based upon this fundamental teaching, Buddhists built for themselves an appropriate view of personal life and spiritual practice: the liberated life of non-self—the end goal of the spiritual journey.

Although various schools of Buddhist thought in periods of development were formed gradually, two prominent systems of philosophy emerged: the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra. Both these philosophical systems relate strictly to the primitive thought of *Paticcamūpāda*. However, each system has its own approach to interpretations and particular concepts. The Mādhyamika developed the doctrine of Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), while the Yogācāra instituted the teaching of Mind-only (*Vijñāpati-mātratā*), emphasizing the concept of *Ālaya* (*store consciousness*). The doctrine of Emptiness focuses on explaining that the nature of all dharmas is emptiness of essence and that all dharmas are non-self by nature and existences are but manifestations of conditional elements. Thus, when a practitioner penetrates deeply into the realm of Emptiness, he or she simultaneously experiences the reality of the non-self. However, you should remember that the concept of Emptiness used here does not refer to any contradictory categories in the dualistic sphere, such as ‘yes’ and ‘no’ or ‘to be’ and ‘not to be.’ Rather, it indicates the state of true reality that goes beyond the world of dualism. For this reason, in the canonical languages of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the term *Emptiness* is used as a synonym for *Nirvāna*. In the Yogācāra philosophy, the concept of *Ālaya*—the most

fundamental issue of this system of thought—points out that all problems of both suffering and happiness are the outcome of mental distinctions (*vikalpa*) between subject (*atman*) and object (*dharma*), or between self and other. This mental distinction is the root of all afflictions, birth-death, and samsāra. Thus, in the path of spiritual training, a practitioner must cleanse all attachments to self as it embodies what we call the ‘I’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself’ in order to return to the realm of pure mind, which is non-distinct by nature.

Based on what has been discussed here, clearly the consistency in Buddhist thoughts—whether original or developed—is that all teachings focus on purification of craving, hatred, and attachment to self, in order to reach the reality of true liberation: the state of non-self or Nirvāna.

17. What are the fundamental beliefs in Buddhism?

Buddhists are encouraged to believe in the Triple Jewels—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—and the vital teachings of the Buddha as explained in the Four Noble Truths. Put more simply, Buddhists need to believe in the basic teachings of both morality and spirituality, which arise from the karmic law of causes and effects of the Four Noble Truths. In particular, *Buddhists must believe in their ability to attain enlightenment and spiritual liberation*. If you do not practice and transform all negative or evil deeds in your own life, you will still suffer. Depending on your degree of practice, if you put your efforts into practicing the Dharma, your life will be happy, peaceful, and free from the bondages of sufferings. These basic Buddhist teachings help us avoid negative karmic actions, cultivate good actions, and purify the mind so we may have a happy and peaceful life. Furthermore, practicing the Dharma will help us transform the flow of karmic force in both this life and the afterlife.

18. What is the karmic law of causes and effects?

Karma and *the law of causes and effects* are the two most important issues connected to the life of human beings. They are also considered to be the reason for the cycle of samsara in human existence. Cause is the original force or reason that produces a direct effect and effect is a mature consequence created by its causes. You can understand the relationship of causes and effects through the correlations of an action, such as when you eat your stomach gets full, or when stay up late, you feel sleepy. Causes and effects are the compensational law, working objectively and correspondingly, but the actual impact is always influenced by psychological elements. Contrastingly, karma refers to a good or bad action that is created and governed by the mind. A proper name for such actions is wholesome karma or unwholesome karma. Accordingly, karma and causes and effects always connect to each other *Karma is the*

operation of causes and effects in which the mind always serves as the foundation for any creation and destruction. Therefore, the flow of mental energy is the life of karma. Truly, a good mind produces good karma and a bad mind gives birth to bad karma. Hence, in order to have a life of peace and happiness, you should cultivate the wholesome seeds through your three personal karmas and develop the pure and bright energy of the mind. Buddhism teaches that a practitioner must always nurture and cultivate the four virtues of the sublime mind: loving kindness, compassion, joyfulness, and equanimity.

19. What are the three karmas?

The three karmas are the body, mouth, and mind or the physical, verbal, and mental. Body and mouth belong to the physical realm while the mind is all about psychological activities. However, it is the mind that serves as the decisive factor in creating any kind of karma (*Cittamātram lokam*—the world is nothing but mind). A natural action like standing, walking, lying, or sitting cannot actually create karma, even though that the action is governed by the mind. Thus, karma always comes from a volitional or intentional action. For this reason, the Buddha divided the three karmas according to the three aspects of the physical, verbal, and mental into ten karmas:

a) Physical karmas:	Killing, stealing, and conducting sexual immorality.
b) Verbal karmas:	False speech, a double tongue, hateful speech, and slanderous speech.
c) Mental karmas:	Craving, hatred, and ignorance or false view.

These ten basic karmas are the causes that force us adrift in the ocean of samsāra, with its six realms of destinations.

20. In Buddhism, what does Samsāra mean and how does it work?

In Sanskrit, samsāra means being born, dying, and being reborn in accordance with the

continuous karmic circulation, like an endlessly circulating wheel. Thus, samsāra is the cycle of life. However, the concept of samsāra in Buddhism describes the flowing of a sentient being in the three worlds of senses-sphere realm, fine form realm, and formless realm and the six destinations of heavens, human beings, titans, hells, hungry ghosts, and animal kingdom. According to Primitive Buddhism, only an enlightened one (such as the Buddha or an *Arhat*) can truly be liberated from the cycle of samsāra. Meanwhile, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas always vow to return to the world of samsāra to save all sentient beings. Therefore, there are two ways for an individual to enter the world of samsāra: a) make a vow to be reborn, as a Bodhisattva does voluntarily, or b) be forced to enter a certain realm, like a human, hell, or hungry ghost, by unwholesome karmas.

21. If Buddhism does not believe in an immortal soul, then what and who will be reborn in the cycle of samsāra?

This is an interesting question. Buddhism definitely does not accept the belief that there is an immortal and perpetual soul. As mentioned in the teaching of non-self, no permanent self or soul entity exists permanently and invariably— all that exists is the constantly flowing current of sentient being karmic consciousness, flowing like a running river. If there were an immortal and invariable soul, an animal would not be able—after cultivating wholesome karmas through multiple lives—to become a human and a human would not be able to become a Bodhisattva or even a Buddha (See Jataka Tales for more information). Here, it is the karmic flowing current of consciousness that continuously operates and transforms itself in the mind of each individual from this life to the next life in the cycle of samsāra and is the foundation for the operation in each individual mind (see question 18). Consequently, Buddhism does not accept the existence of an immortal soul, although it does accept that a *transformation of the mind* occurs throughout the journey of birth and rebirth. Until a practitioner—after a long term of spiritual training—attains the sainted the fruits of Arhat, Buddha, or Bodhisattva in the eighth stage, will he or she break the cycle of samsāra. At this point of their spiritual journey, the motivation of birth and rebirth belongs to the devotional vow of each Bodhisattva and they are no longer pushed by the karmic force. Speaking of problems of rebirth or samsāra, you should note that Buddhism does not use the term *soul*, but rather *mind*.

22. How can one know that he or she will be reborn in the cycle of samsāra?

This question goes beyond the ability of human knowledge because we human beings are not able to control the problem of birth and death in the cycle of samsāra. According to the Buddhist view, we are all adrift unknowingly and inconceivably in the ocean of karma. If you were asked “where did you come from?” you would also be puzzled in the same way.

However, to the Buddha, Arhats, or Holy ones who all already possess supernatural eyes (spiritual powers), such a question as “where did one come and where will one go?” is no longer an uncertain matter left in the dark. The Buddha, in Jātaka Tales, told of many of his own stories of previous lives when he used to be a practitioner practicing the noble path. As already explained, because of the karmic law of causes and effects, you need not worry about where you will go after death; rather, what you need to know is how you are living and how your mind is developing. Are you cultivating good or bad karmas? The karmic law of causes and effects will itself manage all the remaining matters of your life. If you are a practitioner you may, depending on your school of practice, make a devotional vow for your next rebirth. For example, a practitioner in Pure Land always wishes to be reborn in the Western Paradise of the Amitāba Buddha after his or her life ends.

23. How are the Buddhist mental formations such as the concepts of mind, thought and consciousness different?

According to various statuses in Primitive Buddhism, the three terms *mind*, *thought*, and *consciousness* are used interchangeably, despite the fact that these three terms all indicate the entire activities of the mental formations. In Developed Buddhism, particularly in the doctrine of Mind-only (*Vijñāpati-mātratā*) of Yogācāra philosophy, the system of mental activities consists of eight consciousnesses categorized as follows:

- a) Thought consciousness (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*): This senses-sphere includes six sense organs: consciousness of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and thought.
- b) Thinking consciousness (*mano-mana-vijñāna*): This consciousness function serves as the intermediary connection between the six senses organs and the mind deep inside which is also referred to as the seventh consciousness.
- c) Store consciousness (*ālaya*): This serves as the store that contains all kinds of conceptual seeds (experiential data) of the past and present; it is also named the eighth consciousness.

Together these three consciousnesses are generally called the mind and they all work together to produce an actual experience through a psychological process. For instance, when your eyes see a flower, the notion of that flower will be transferred into the store consciousness—where images of all kinds of flowers of your past experiences have been stored—and produce, through the thinking consciousness process, the actual recognition that this flower is a rose. Subsequently, this rose’s characteristics such as smells, etc., go through a process of mutual recognition until you are finally able to create an actual experience of the rose that you have just seen.

Briefly, mind, thought, and consciousness are the mental aggregate of human psychological activity. These mental aggregate exist as a whole and cannot work effectively if we divide them into separate parts. You can however clarify the basic function of each characteristic of this mental aggregate. The mind is the place where all conceptual data are stored, thought is the mental energy of creation, and consciousness is the ability of recognition and distinction. Suffering or happiness is created by the operation of the mind, thought, and consciousness; all other realms of sentient beings are also products of the mind's making.

24. If God does not exist, then on what condition is the existence of heaven and hell based?

Everything is mind-made, but you should never use the impure mind of the human realm to think about the blissfulness and happiness of other realms, such as heavens (*states of devas*) or the Pure Land. Doing so would be an impossible task. In much the same way, you cannot truly understand the suffering of lower realms (compared to the human realm), such as hell, the hungry ghosts', and animal kingdoms. To a certain extent or in a particular case, you may experience the suffering and the happiness of other realms when your mind is corresponding to those realms. For instance, when nearing the peak of an anger, you may feel and experience the suffering of realms that are full of anger. When your mind is no longer infected or disturbed by craving, hatred, and ill-will, you will experience the taste of blissfulness and freedom in the happy realms. According to Buddhist teachings, celestial beings (*devas*) in the realm of fine-form (heavens) live in the blissfulness of their own minds, and all conveniences in those heavens are created by their own minds. However, when their own merits of heaven have faded, those celestial beings will be reborn in (fall into) lower realms. If they put their efforts into practicing the Dharma, they will certainly be free from the cycle of samsāra and attain enlightenment. Similarly, sentient beings in unhappy realms experience the suffering made up by their minds; however, beings in unhappy realms can still remain free of those states if they have a chance to generate the righteous mind of goodness.

25. If everything comes from the mind, how can a non-Buddhist practice the Buddhist doctrine?

Everyone—Buddhist or non-Buddhist—can equally practice the noble Dharma as taught by the Buddha. In their present being, those who practice the Dharma way precisely and sincerely, will be able to change and transform their karmic life of defilements. For those who are non-Buddhists, their practice in the Buddhist way needs to be guided by a monk, nun, or a layperson who has some experience in the ways of spiritual training. As such, you are encouraged to study and examine the Buddhist teachings under the guidance of a master. The practice of Dharma will bring you actual effects whenever your mental current of greed,

hatred, self-attachment, and self-pride begin a cooling down tendency. If you only study the Dharma and even have great knowledge of Dharma, but you have not practiced the Dharma, your mental afflictions will not decrease or weaken and you will never experience any mental improvement.

26. What is the primary core of spiritual practice in Buddhism?

The primary core of Buddhist spiritual practice is to develop ethics (*sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*), regardless of whether it is a traditional or modern school. First, the practice of ethics or moral disciplines helps prevent and avoid unwholesome deeds, restrains the mind from performing potentially hidden evil deeds and cultivates human dignity. In other words, developing Sīla one is training oneself for a life of ethics, dignity, and noble virtues. Second, meditation practice is the way to purify one's mind of all affections and afflictions making it pure, peaceful, and bright. Finally, practicing wisdom is to develop the right view, recognizing truths, understanding the nature of life, and attaining enlightenment. These three aspects of this path of practice always complement one another. For example, the one who lives a life of high ethical discipline and noble virtues will have a peaceful mind, self-confidence, and fearlessness. The one who develops meditation will have a quiet, calm, and blissful mind. The one who develops wisdom will always and everywhere have a bright, smart, and tranquil mind. . The resulting gain from your mental training will vary according to your degree of practice. Buddhism calls these three aspects of practice the pure studies (*anāsrava*) of deliverance from the passion stream; in other words, you no longer fall into the stream of samsāra, and are truly liberated from all impurities of the mundane world.

27. Is there any difference in the manner of practice of Buddhism and that of other religions?

The manner of spiritual practice in other religions focuses on prayers as a way of connecting to the Holy existence. Buddhist practice focuses on developing (*bhāvanā*) the three studies (ethical disciplines, meditation, and wisdom), although prayers are still sometimes used in the practice process. In Buddhism the term *bhāvanā* (development) has a special two part meaning: a) renunciation of unwholesome deeds and b) development of the noble virtues of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and performances of pāramitās (see question 14). If you focus on the first part—namely, the renunciation of unwholesome deeds, you are only stopping at the point of not doing evil; at that point you have actually not undertaken any spiritual training. For example, an addict who has consumed alcohol for many years becomes seriously sick and being aware of his illness, he stops drinking. Such an action means he is just giving up his habit of alcoholic addiction however, he still has to deal with

healing the illness in his body and simultaneously developing a physically and mentally healthy and wholesome life. Similarly, in Buddhist practice, you have to do both: quit doing all evil deeds and start cultivating the good deeds. In brief, it is the fundamental Buddhist practice to not do evil deeds, but good deeds, and to purify one’s mind through the noble path of ethical disciplines, meditation, and wisdom.

28. Does one benefit by only practicing one of the three pure studies: moral discipline, meditation, or wisdom?

You should keep in mind that the three pure studies—ethical discipline, meditation, and wisdom—are three facets (more precisely, three elementary characteristics) of spiritual practice in Buddhism. They are considered a *group quality*, working together mutually and cooperatively. For instance, when practicing ethical disciplines, your mind will be pure, peaceful, fearless, and free from worry and sorrow depending on the quality of your meditation or concentration. These pure qualities will also lead you to a higher level of meditation. Furthermore, based on this pure mind, you will be able to set yourself up for the right view and bright choice to guide your everyday activities. In this way, it is all about the quality of wisdom. Ethical discipline, meditation, and wisdom are, therefore, a group quality, always working together. For example, a bank robber cannot be peaceful and tranquil, with true wisdom in his life, when his mind is full of greed, hatred and ill will. Accordingly, greater ethical virtue is achieved as higher meditation levels develop and the brighter your wisdom will be. Thus, you do not need to divide this group of qualities into separate parts in the path of spiritual practice.

29. How can a person become a Buddhist?

To become an actual Buddhist, you must take refuge in the Triple Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Buddha is the Fully Enlightened One, who transcended beyond the world of defilements (*kleśa*) and samsāra. Dharma is the teachings of the Buddha, the noble path to enlightenment. Sangha is the Buddhist community (originally just monks and nuns) living in harmony and awareness and following the path of the Buddha. However, the Triple Jewels can be understood in various ways, as described in the following table.

Classification	Buddha	Dharma	Sangha
History	The Sakyamuni Buddha	The teachings of the Buddha collected in the	Community of monastic persons,

		Triple Basket (Tripitaka).	including Holy Ones and monks and nuns.
Definition	An Enlightened One	The noble path leading to enlightenment and ultimate liberation.	Those spiritual practitioners who live in awareness, harmony, and purity.
Symbols	Images of the Buddha or Buddhas	The Triple Basket (Tripitaka) or Buddhist scriptures, texts of ethical disciplines (Vinaya), and commentaries (Abhidharmas).	Buddhist monks and nuns.
Philosophy	The Buddhahood or Buddha nature is always available in every person.	The truth of enlightenment.	The essence of harmony, awareness, and purity in every person.

The basic ethical discipline of a Buddhist is also the foundation of Buddhist ethics, including the five precepts: not to kill, not to steal, not to be involve in sexual immorality, not to lie, and not to use intoxicants. In becoming a Buddhist, you must undertake at least one of the five precepts. The more fully you practice the precept, the higher your ethical virtues will develop, and the greater dignity you will achieve.

30. Why must a person take refuge in the Triple Jewels to become a Buddhist?

If you do not have a sincere desire to take refuge in the Triple Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha it indicates that your decision and devotion are not strong enough for you to sow

the Bodhi seed (seed of enlightenment) in your mind. In fact, you may, in your own very naturally congenial way, be performing ethical and wholesome deeds but an outburst of rage and ill will may suddenly emerge in your mind and it may whirl you, sweeping you impotently into the darkness of your karmic habits. In such a situation, you may be engulfed in sin after sin, because at this point in life you still have not developed a *coast of enlightenment* as a spiritual refuge or shelter. Once you have taken refuge in the Triple Jewels, you have sown a seed of Bodhi in the field of your mind. If you take good care of your Bodhi tree by practicing the Dharma, you are creating *an invisible current of protective energy* that will be within you throughout your life. Thus, even when a mental storm of greed, hatred, and ill will emerges in your life, disturbing your inner peace, this invisible protective energy will provide you a spiritual shelter. The enlightened energy you sowed with sincerity and devotion will, at a future point in your life, regenerate the Bodhi seed that has slept latently in the bottom of your mind. Even if, after taking refuge in the Triple Jewels and you neglect to care for or completely ignore your Bodhi seed, that enlightened seed will sleep soundly in your mind, then in the right conditions and time, it may awaken like an old friend coming back with earnestness and love. Then, in the light and love of that spiritual regeneration, you will be able to continue to nurture the enlightened source of your forgotten Bodhi tree. This is why a Buddhist needs to take refuge in the Triple Jewels.

31. Can a person attain enlightenment and liberation if he just practices the Dharma without taking refuge?

Yes, but it is really rare! The Buddha Sakyamuni is the one person in history who attained enlightenment based on his self-training, self-discovery, and self-realization; his personal efforts cut off all roots of suffering. He is honored for attaining full enlightenment by self-realization of truths. Furthermore, the Buddha's first five Holy disciples, as well as other Holy ones in the Buddha's time, became enlightened or Arhats not by taking refuge, but by listening to the Dharma taught by the Buddha. Likewise, Prateyka-Buddha(s) achieve enlightenment through their own realization of the truth of Dependent Origination. Generally, achieving enlightenment without taking refuge in the Triple Jewels is very rare in the realm of human beings, particularly for an ordinary person. You should keep in mind that taking refuge in the Triple Jewels is the first step in becoming an actual Buddhist. However, to be enlightened and liberated or not, depends on the strength of your spiritual training. In fact, after taking refuge, a Buddhist must, in order to have a peaceful and happy life, practice the Dharma in a step-by-step manner, such as ethical disciplines, six Pāramitās, or the four all-embracing virtues (*Catuh-samgraha-vastu*).

32. Is the Buddhist moral discipline similar to or different from that of other religions?

Buddhist and other religions have some common and different features in their ethics . The common features stem directly from the human life and form *the human base of morality and ethics*. Meanwhile, the differences between the Buddhist moral disciplines and those of other religions relate to the *path of enlightenment and spiritual liberation*. Thus, we should be concerned about two aspects:

a) *Human base of morality and ethics*: Buddhist ethics are based on the five precepts (not killing or doing harm to the life of humans and sentient beings, not stealing or taking things that are not given, not conducting sexual immorality, not lying in order to do harm to one's self or others, and not using intoxicants that weaken the mind). Christianity teaches ten commandments (worship God, do not worship an idol, do not make false use of the name of God, keep the Sabbath day holy, honor and respect your parents, do not commit murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bearing false witness against your neighbor, do not covet your neighbor's wife, and do not covet things that belong to others). Likewise, Islam teaches some fundamental creeds, such as worshipping the one and only Allah, honoring and respecting your parents, respecting the rights of others, treating all people fairly, giving to and helping the poor, not killing humans except in holy wars, not committing adultery, taking care of orphans and the poor, and being sincere in all of your intentions. In addition, Islam includes some conductive regulations, such as visiting Mecca at least once in your life, not eating pork, and not drinking alcohol. The precepts mentioned above cover the common ethics and morality of the predominate religions.

b) *Buddhist ethics—the path leading to enlightenment and spiritual liberation*: The five precepts (ethical disciplines) in Buddhism are fully associated with the three personal karmas the physical, verbal, and mental. Those associated with the physical karmas are killing, stealing, and conducting sexual immorality; the verbal karmas are false speech, a double tongue, hateful speech, and slanderous speech; and the mental karmas are craving, hatred, and ignorance or false view. Therefore, if you are able to keep your three karmas completely pure, you will enter the palace of Nirvāna, truly experiencing the life of true liberation and enlightenment. However, the mental karma—the third one—is the most fundamental one, it governs and drives the other two karmas, the physical and verbal (see question 19). Thus, building a right view for your life is the key that opens the door to spiritual liberation. In Buddhist ethical disciplines, as previously discussed, no precept requires a practitioner to honor or worship a personal God, rather, all that is required in personal spiritual training is to focus on the three karmas. This is the difference between the Buddhist precepts and the creeds

of other religions. In addition to the five basic precepts, Buddhism also has a special system of moral code that is more rigorous for monastic persons such as Srāvakas and Bodhisattvas. However, in order to develop wholesome roots (wholesome karmas) and nurture your Bodhi mind for your spiritual life the lay Buddhists, in addition to taking a vow to follow the five basic precepts, you need to practice the four *all-embracing virtues* acts and the six deeds of the Pāramitās.

33. What are the four all-embracing virtues (Catuh-samgraha-vastu)?

The four all-embracing virtues are four actions concentrating on helping others achieve a true life of peace, happiness, and spiritual liberation. These four actions are named the four all-embracing virtues (*Catuh-samgraha-vastu*) because these actions have the ability to transform others and help them return to the truth of life, free from defilements and sufferings. The four all-embracing virtues consist of donation, affectionate speech, direct beneficial acts to others, and cooperation with and adaptation to others. The following table describes the general meaning of these four virtues.

Samgraha-vastu	Definition	Categories	Purposes
Donation	Charitable acts of giving, dedicating, or offering to others.	(a) Materials, (b) True knowledge (Dharma donation), and (c) Security (fearlessness, bestowing of confidence)	Sharing sufferings of others and helping them return to the good and happy life.
Affectionate speech	Speech filled with kindness, sympathy, and compassion.	True and honest speech at the right time, in the right way, and filled with encouragement.	Encouraging others to live wholesomely and ethically, avoiding doing evil, doing good, and purifying the mind.

Conduct beneficial to others	Doing beneficial acts for others or serving others with kindness and compassion.	Conducting good deeds through personal body, speech, and thought.	Helping others benefit along the path of spiritual practice.
Cooperation with and adaptation of others	Cooperating with others practically in order to help them return to the noble path of enlightenment.	Applying all <i>skillful means</i> of personal ability to help others.	Helping others return to the noble path of spiritual liberation and enlightenment.

34. What are the deeds of pāramita (transcendental perfection)?

Pāramita is the characteristic of transcendental perfection that goes beyond the world of dualism, such as attachment to the self and others or the inner discrimination between atman and dharma. This transcendental perfection is also known as the *spirit* of non-distinction and non-attachment. For instance, you give a donation to someone; but, at the back of your mind, you are still entangled in the thought of that donation, identifying the giver and the receiver. Donations in such a manner result in *attachment to the performance of giving*—namely, giving in the bondage of the self and others. It is absolutely not giving from your true heart of compassion when strings are attached. Until you give a gift to someone without any attachment to the notion of the giver, the receiver, or the gift, you cannot truly reach the state of non-attachment to the act of giving—that is, true giving is free from the three-wheeled condition of giver, receiver, and gift. Therefore, practicing the deeds of Pāramita is but training in renunciations of self-attachment and distinction. The Pāramita deeds include six factors: giving, practicing ethical disciplines, right efforts, patience, meditation, and wisdom.

35. What is the Bodhi mind (Bodhicitta)?

The Bodhi-mind, (*Bodhicitta*) in Sanskrit, is the mind (*citta*) of awakening (*bodhi*), also called the *enlightened mind*, the mind orientated toward enlightenment, or the mind in which tranquility resides in the state of awakening. Additionally, in Buddhist thought, the Bodhi-mind has two basic aspects: the conventional—namely, the daily practice of ethics, virtues, and merits in order to achieve noble happiness and peace in the practical life, and the absolute—namely, the full awakening of Perfect Wisdom to become a Holy one, a

Bodhisattva, or a Buddha. The Bodhi mind is the heart of Buddhism, the foundation for the whole process of practitioner spiritual training. If a person does not nurture and take good care of the Bodhi mind, his Buddhahood will be buried by karmic defilements. The Bodhi mind is the Buddha nature within each person, and is the potential seed of true happiness and enlightenment. Traditional Buddhism includes several practices to help you develop the Bodhi mind, including 37 conditions leading to Bodhi (*Bodhipaksika*): four foundations of mindfulness, four right efforts, four steps towards supernatural powers, five spiritual faculties and their five powers, seven branches of enlightenment, and the eightfold noble path.

36. What are the four foundations of mindfulness?

The four foundations of mindfulness (*smṛti-upasthàna*) are the basis for practicing meditation. In the process of meditating these four foundations are also known as the four themes of mindfulness (*smṛti*). They are body, feeling, mind, and the mind’s objects. The following table categorizes the position and functions of these four foundations of mindfulness.

Four themes	Categories	Meanings	Purpose
Body	The entire physical body including the inside and the outside.	Meditate on the body in order to realize its true nature of impermanence and impurity.	Leaving afar or renunciation of the cravings of the senses-sphere realm, fine form realm, and formless realm.
Feelings	Feelings of pleasantness, pain, and neutral.	Meditate on the feelings in order to clearly see that they are actually conditions (foods) of the mind.	Cutting off the roots of all kinds of cravings.
The mind	The current of mental energy, which is endlessly	Meditate on the mind in order to recognize its operation and	Removing all kinds of attachment and false views of

	flowing.	manifestations through various kinds of thoughts, such as greed, hatred, ill will, self-pride, self-attachment, and doubt.	self in order to reach pure states and develop wisdom.
The mind and mind's objects	All kinds of forms (mental and physical), sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and objects of the mind (all things recognized by the mind).	Meditate on forms or existing beings in order to see their status of changing, such as institution, existence, deterioration, and destruction.	Attaining pure wisdom, blissfulness, and ultimate liberation.

37. What are the four right efforts (*catvāri prahāṇāni*)?

The four right efforts are devotional endeavors directed towards a virtuous life to cut off defiled roots and cultivate wholesome roots in the field of the mind. There are four right efforts with which a practitioner must train himself or herself to follow along the spiritual development path: a) the effort to discard all past evil deeds so as not to commit them again; b) the effort to prevent evil deeds that have not yet arisen; c) the effort to maintain and promote the further growth of good deeds that have arisen; and d) the effort to generate and develop future good deeds.

38. What are the four supernatural powers (*rddhipāda*)?

The four supernatural powers are special powers of the pure mind, leading to concentration (*samādhi*) and/or working in concentration, independent of any ordinary or natural law. They are also known as the four exclusive characteristics of meditation (*dhyāna*). These four powers are: a) the desire for intense concentration (*chanda-rddhi-pāda*)—strong devotion to self-purification that creates extensive concentration during meditation; b) persevering energy or intensified effort (*Vīrya-rddhi-pāda*) that creates the power of concentration (*samādhibala*) in

meditation; c) the powerful mind in the stage of freedom from all defilements (*citta-rddhi-pāda*) in meditation; and d) the power of intense observation (*mimāmsā-rddhi-pāda*) in meditation. When a practitioner attains these four special powers through meditation, then he or she has achieved the four supernatural meditation powers.

39. What are the five spiritual faculties (*pañcānām indriyāṇām*) and their five powers (*pañcānāṃ balānām*)?

The five spiritual faculties are fundamental agents upon which you may develop your state of spirituality, including belief, persevering effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. The five powers are the mental forces that arise from these spiritual faculties: powers of belief, persevering effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. In the process of spiritual training, you should strive to develop all five faculties because they are mutually dependent on one another. For instance, if you have a strong belief in what you are doing, then you will be able to put all your efforts into reaching your goal. In addition, when your effort is mindfully directed, you may generate an inner source of powerful concentration and wisdom. All Buddhist schools practice these five faculties and their five corresponding powers. These five spiritual faculties differ from the five physical organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body.)

40. What are the seven branches of enlightenment (*saptabodhyanga*)?

The seven branches of enlightenment are the seven elemental states of awakening or the seven factors of a peaceful and liberated life of enlightenment. They consist of mindfulness (*smṛti*), investigation of dharma (*dharma-pravicaya-sambhodyanga*), persevering effort (*vīriya*), rapture (*prīti*), calmness (*prasrabidhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upeksā*). If you develop these seven characteristics to a perfect degree, you will attain the blissfulness of enlightenment and liberation.

41. What is the noble eightfold path?

The noble eightfold path is the Holy path to enlightenment; it includes eight branches: a) right view (*samyak-dṛṣṭi*), the view that is always in accordance with the truth; b) right thought (*samyak-saṃkalpa*), the thinking or intention that is in accordance with the truth, leading to the virtuous life of true peace and happiness; c) right speech (*samyak-vāc*), the speech of truth that is in accordance with Dharma; d) right action (*samyak-karmānta*), doing good deeds; e) right livelihood (*samyak-ājīva*), the noble life of goodness, virtue, and ethics; f) right effort (*samyak-vyāyāma*), diligence in practicing ethical disciplines, meditation, and wisdom; g) right mindfulness (*samyak-smṛti*), an action performed with attention, awareness, and

alertness; and h) right concentration (*samyak-samādhī*), the concentration or meditation that leads to the renunciation of craving, hatred, ill will, self-attachment, etc. The noble eightfold path is the guideline for spiritual practice in the Buddhist life. Each branch of the eightfold path works mutually with the others. Thus, you can divide the eightfold path into the pattern of the three pure studies, as follows:

Prajñā (wisdom)	Right view and right thought
Śīla (ethical discipline)	Right speech, right action, and right livelihood
Samādhī (meditation)	Right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration

The term *right* (*samyak*) always stands in front of each branch to remind us of the difference between right and wrong. For instance, the right view (non-attachment to the self) differs from the wrong view (attachment to the self and other); the right livelihood (good life) differs from the wrong livelihood (evil life).

42. Is there any plain and simple teaching that can be remembered most easily?

The most easily remembered Dharma taught by the Buddha:

Not to do evil,

To do good,

To purify one's mind,

This is the teaching of the Buddha (*Dhammapada.183*).

43. Why do we eat vegetarian foods?

Maintaining a vegetarian diet has become increasingly popular for several reasons, such as improving health, controlling sexual desire, or protecting animals and environments. Eating vegetarian foods means not eating the meat of any animal. In Buddhism the aim of eating vegetarian foods is to purify your three karmas, particularly the karma of killing sentient beings either directly or indirectly. Refraining from meat eating is also one way to develop your compassion. As a lay Buddhist, you are not prohibited from eating meat, but you are encouraged abstain either periodically or permanently.

44. Can a person become a Buddha by only eating vegetarian foods, and how is vegetarianism related to spiritual practice?

No one in has ever become a Buddha simply by eating vegetarian foods. You should keep in mind that eating vegetarian foods is one way to support your physical and mental practice of personal purification. The awakening life is comprised of the three pure studies: ethical disciplines, meditation, and wisdom.

45. Does a Buddhist break the precept of not killing when he eats meat?

By eating meat, you may break the first precept (not killing) in three specific cases: a) you kill an animal to make food; b) you order other people to kill an animal to make food for you; and/or c) you are complacent seeing other people kill an animal to make food for you. In these three cases, the first one is directly killing while the last two are considered indirectly breaking the killing precept.

46. What does repentance (*Ksamayati*) mean in Buddhist rites?

“Repentance” in Sanskrit is *Ksamayati*, and translates into English as repentance and remorse. Basically, *Ksamayati* includes two parts: a) repentance—to feel regret or contrition for a past sin or guilt—and b) remorse—to be gnawed at, be distressed by, or suffer from a sense of guilt for past wrongs for which you have promised yourself not to commit again. Briefly, when you perform repentances, you acknowledge that you sinned or were guilty and being aware of that sin, you honestly repent in your remorse and promise yourself that you will never commit that sin again. However, when performing a repentance ritual, your body and mind must unite together in a respectful manner (e.g., adornments by both physical and mental purification); in the state of one-pointed mind, you earnestly and sincerely pray and make a promise in front of the Triple Jewels. After repentance, your own body, mouth, and mind will become pure. The level of purification depends on your sincerity; the more profound your sincerity, the more ease you will feel, regardless of whether you repent in front of the Triple Jewels or face your own conscience. The Buddha taught that two classes of noble persons can be found in the world: the first one is the person who lives nobly and never creates a sin—even a simple one; the second one is the person who has the awareness of sin and is always ready to repent whenever he commits one.

47. Can a person’s unwholesome karmas be eradicated through repentance?

What you have sown (created or done) in the past shall definitely come to fruition when its

time of maturation arrives. When you honestly and properly repent for your sins, you may transform your karmic force in two ways by not creating more sin and by cultivating good deeds. However, with a mind of purity, tranquility, control, and renunciation (the liberated mind), the effect from past deeds—whether painful or pleasant—is not powerful enough and will no longer govern your life of inner peace and tranquility. When your mind is absolutely pure as snow, no sin remains; even the notion of remorse is removed. At this point of purification, you actually go beyond the dualistic realm of birth and death. In such a state, the problem of causes and effects no longer has an effect.

48. *What is the aim of reciting the Buddha's names?*

Recitation of or meditation on the Buddha's names is a method of cleaning impurities from the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind. When you put your heart and devotion into the respectfully chanting the Buddhas' names, you may nourish the pure and virtuous qualities of your inner life as well as annihilate all contaminated defilements in your mind. The truth is, if your mind is pure, your world will be pure as well, regardless of where you are. The recitation of or meditation on the Buddha's names can be carried out in several ways. You may sincerely recite the Buddha's names out loud or just whisper or mutter them softly. You may also sit down and visualize the holy images of the Buddha or attentively and respectfully chant the Buddha's names, bowing to the Buddha. In fact, you may choose a specific name of either a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, such as "Namo Amitābha Buddha" (the Buddha of infinite light), "Namo Sakyamuni Buddha" (the only historical Buddha in the human world), or "Namo Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva" (the Bodhisattva of compassion). Most importantly in your practice you must put all of your heart into every single sound of chanting to achieve the state of one-pointed mind through the union of mind and sound. In meditation, the body and mind must unite together; likewise, during the recitation of the Buddha's names, the mind and the sound of chanting—either loudly or softly—must join together. Reciting the Buddha's names in such a manner, your mind will gradually become pure, bright, and tranquil, naturally nurturing your virtue of purity and, of course, making your life happy and peaceful.

49. *Would you please explain more about the doctrine of the Pure Land School (Sukhāvati) and the practice of reciting the Buddhas' names?*

It is the principal practice of the Pure Land School (*jìngtǔ-zōng*), to reciting the name of the Buddha Amitābha. The Pure Land School, which has been popularly propagated in China where it is pronounced Ching Tu (淨土), Japan, Vietnam, other Buddhist countries, and was first established in China by the great patriarch Hui-Yuan or Hui-Yüan (慧遠 334-416). It was

then imported into Japan thanks to the great master Ennin (793-864); in the twelfth century, and was officially established by the great master Hōnen (1133-1212). Around the end of the second century in Vietnam, the practice of Pure Land was first introduced in K'ang-Sen-Houci's (200?-280) work entitled *The Practices of the Six Pāramitās* (六度集經, Sanskrit translation: *Saḍpāramitāsaṃgrahasūtra*), and today continues to develop through various phases. The three fundamental sutras of the Pure Land School are the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha-sūtra*, the *Amitābha-sūtra*, and the *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*. In Pure Land practice it is the belief that a practitioner who devotionally and respectfully recites the name of the Buddha Amitābha will, after his body ends, be reborn in the Amitābha Buddha's Western Paradise, the realm of *infinite longevity*, *infinite light*, and *infinite merit*. Thus, the Buddha Amitābha is the founder of the Western Paradise and the symbol of great compassion (infinite merit), perfect wisdom (infinite light), and immortality (infinite longevity).

50. What is the core teaching of the Pure Land School?

In the Pure Land School a practitioner must have three prerequisite virtues: belief, practice, and aspiration. Belief is a strong confidence or sincere trust placed completely in the Triple Jewels, especially the path through which a person enriches his spiritual training. Practice is the diligent recitation of or meditation on the name of Buddha Amitābha to foster and nourish one's individual Buddha-mind. Aspiration is the devotional vow to carry out good deeds and not commit evil deeds, and also the sincere desire, after this physical body dissolves, to be reborn in the Buddha Amitābha's land of infinite blissfulness. Consequently, in order to transform all impure defilements of the mind (greed, hatred, and ill will) into meritorious virtue for this life and the afterlife, mindfulness of the Buddha's name is the core teaching of the Pure Land School. "The pure mind creates the Pure Land." A Pure Land practitioner must establish for him- or herself an *Amitā-nature*, which is the spiritual life of infinite longevity, infinite light, and infinite merit.

51. What is meditation?

Meditation or Zen is the basic practice of Buddhism. The aim of meditation is to guide practitioners in returning to the life of awareness and mindfulness in order to attain the state of renunciation, purity, and enlightenment. Several meditation techniques exist in both the primitive and developed forms of Buddhism. We may generalize these characteristics of meditation through the following principal terms. Meditation (*dhyāna*) is awareness, attentiveness, and alertness, while concentration (*samādhi*) is the focus of the mind on one object. Buddhist sutras offer two major methods for practicing meditation: a) breathing meditation (*Samatha* also known as *Ānāpānasati*, Skt: *ānāpānasamṛti*) and b) insight

meditation (*Vipassanā*). In breathing meditation one focuses on breathing in and out to dispel thoughts and to control the mind. Insight meditation involves meditating on the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind, and mind's objects (see question 36).

52. How is *Ānāpānasati* meditation related to *vipassanā* meditation?

Both methods of meditation are mutually supportive. Breathing meditation focuses on mental concentration while insight meditation practitioners use the development of wisdom about reality through the four foundations of mindfulness. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha taught how to use breaths (bring awareness to breaths) as one of the four main themes of meditation. He also taught that, when a diligent practitioner properly exercises breathing meditation, he or she shall attain full control of the four foundations of mindfulness and may further achieve the seven factors of enlightenment (see questions 36 & 40).

53. What are the main themes of both *Ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā* meditation?

In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha taught the following sixteen themes of meditation:

A bhikkhu (monk), goes to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, sits down erectly and having folded his legs crosswise, and establishes mindfulness in front of him, as he mindfully breathes in and mindfully breathes out.

(1) Breathing in long, he understands: “I breathe in long”; and breathing out long, he understands: “I am breathing out long”;

(2) Breathing in short, he understands: “I breathe in short”; and breathing out short, he understands: “I breathe out short”;

(3) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing my whole body [of breath]”; “I shall breathe out”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing my whole body [of breath].”

(4) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in tranquillizing my body formation”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out tranquillizing the body formation.”

(5) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing rapture”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing rapture.”

(6) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing pleasure”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing pleasure.”

(7) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing my mental formation”; he trains thus: “I

shall breathe out experiencing my mental formation.”

(8) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in tranquillizing my mental formation”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out tranquillizing my mental formation.”

(9) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in experiencing my mind”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out experiencing my mind.”

(10) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in gladdening my mind”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out gladdening my mind.”

(11) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in concentrating my mind”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out concentrating my mind.”

(12) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in liberating my mind”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out liberating my mind.”

(13) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in contemplating impermanence”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out contemplating impermanence.”

(14) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in contemplating fading away”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out contemplating fading away.”

(15) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in contemplating cessation”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out contemplating cessation.”

(16) He trains thus: “I shall breathe in contemplating relinquishment”; he trains thus: “I shall breathe out contemplating relinquishment.”

And, that is how mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, so that it can be of great fruit and great benefit.^[4]

Version of practice:

(1) “I breathe in long”; “I breathe out long.”

(2) “I breathe in short”; “I breathe out short.”

(3) “I breathe in experiencing my whole body [of breath]”; “I breathe out experiencing my whole body [of breath].”

(4) “I breathe in tranquillizing my body formation”; “I breathe out tranquillizing my body formation.”

- (5) “I breathe in experiencing rapture”; “I breathe out experiencing rapture.”
- (6) “I breathe in experiencing pleasure”; “I breathe out experiencing pleasure.”
- (7) “I breathe in experiencing the mental formation”; “I breathe out experiencing the mental formation.”
- (8) “I breathe in tranquillizing my mental formation”; “I breathe out tranquillizing my mental formation.”
- (9) “I breathe in experiencing my mind”; “I breathe out experiencing my mind.”
- (10) “I breathe in gladdening my mind”; “I breathe out gladdening my mind.”
- (11) “I breathe in concentrating my mind”; “I breathe out concentrating my mind.”
- (12) “I breathe in liberating my mind”; “I breathe out liberating my mind.”
- (13) “I breathe in contemplating impermanence”; “I breathe out contemplating impermanence.”
- (14) “I breathe in contemplating fading away”; “I breathe out contemplating fading away.”
- (15) “I breathe in contemplating cessation”; “I breathe out contemplating cessation.”
- (16) “I breathe in contemplating relinquishment”; “I breathe out contemplating relinquishment.”

54. In the practice of meditation how important are the breaths and breathing?

When meditating, because of the concentration of the mind, sense organs such as the eyes or tongue, as well as other parts of the body, temporarily cease to work, but breathing and breaths still work naturally and more prominently than other body parts. Thus, you should skillfully employ your breaths by mindfully breathing in and out. It is an invisible string to tie the mind and body together, not letting the mind work in a disorderly manner in regard to the complexity of thoughts. By firmly and effectively controlling your breathing in and out, you shall diminish random thoughts, imaginations, or illusions which may dominate the flow in your mind. This is the way to purify your mind of defilements and allow wisdom to arise. Not relying on the tranquility of breathing in and out, you will not be able to remain in focused concentration. Therefore, in the process of spiritual training, you should maintain awareness and attention to the flux of thoughts in your mind as you follow each breath in and out. It is absolutely not meditation if you stay in one place (here) and your mind stays in another place

(there), even though you are still breathing regularly and unintentionally. In meditation, a practitioner is able to reach the state of samādhi only when his breaths are ruled and controlled by his own mind.

55. *Would you please explain more about the role and function of the one-pointed mind in meditation?*

The state of a one-pointed mind is absolutely important in practicing meditation. In order to reach the state of samādhi, you should commit yourself to a long term of practice. The reality of your mind is that thoughts always flows like a river and as such, if not tied to an object of meditation, your mind will work in a disorderly manner, aimlessly thinking, like a monkey constantly moving from one branch to another. Regardless of how long you have been involved in the meditative practice if your mind is not in a state of tranquility, you will not be able to attain the one-pointed mind that is by nature the foundation of tranquility and liberation. The actual state of the one-pointed mind will bring you an inner peace that transcends all worries, sorrows, and fears, cleanses all defilements in the mind, and renews your life through its regeneration of fresh and pure energy.

56. *How do feelings relate to the mind?*

The Buddha taught that feelings are food for the mind. Feelings nurture the mind and make the mind develop. Thus, the development of the mind depends on each type of feeling (e.g., pleasant, painful, or neutral). For instance, a painful feeling makes the mind develop in the direction of pain; conversely, a pleasant feeling leads the mind to joyful tendencies. It is important to notice that *it is feelings that lead to various kinds of cravings*. When feelings are subjectively ruled, the mind becomes comfortable and free from all psychological urges. However, if you cannot control your feelings and you follow them by all means, your mind will be upset, compelled, and distressed which results in the state of being consumed by either physical or mental desire or covetous pleasures. Depending on the contacts between the six internal sense-bases and their corresponding six external senses-spheres (eyes/object, ears/sound, noses/smell, tongue/taste, body/touch, and mind/thought), all kinds of feelings can develop. For this reason, feelings are one of the four foundations of mindfulness.

57. *Would you please explain more about insight meditation?*

Vipassanā is known as insight meditation, which means *seeing things as they are* by meditating on the four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind, and existences (the mind's objects). Meditating intensely on these themes enables you to develop wisdom and experience the reality of the non-self. In practicing insight meditation, you must deeply and

specifically observe each theme of mindfulness. For instance, when meditating on the body, you should start with your present body with all its constituent elements (four fundamental elements: earth, water, wind, and fire), internal and external relationships, body parts, body organs, and even each simple body motion (e.g., altering the long-short and birth-death of each breath). Practicing insight meditation helps you realize those subtle realities that cannot normally be recognized or experienced by our ordinary senses. Consequently, over a long period of time, practicing insight meditation will help enhance the practitioner’s wisdom as well as lead him or her to discover the truth of life and perceive the true nature of reality.

58. Why does a practitioner have to mediate on the body in such detail?

In the Buddhist view, the human body is an integrated aggregation of mental and physical elements. The elements depend on and mutually support each other. Through intensive observation of the body and mind, you will see the characteristics of impermanence and change in the entire process of each single cells birth and death and its real mode of life. By achieving these realizations, you may change the direction of your mind to create a life that renounces craving and attachment and instead experiences the reality of spiritual freedom. For example, in meditating on the body, you will recognize that it has two distinct characteristics: the body as the present house of your spirituality and the body as the store of all your defilements and illnesses. Optimistically, your body is the present house of your spirituality and as such embraces and fosters your base of virtuousness and noble aspirations as well as your own life of happiness. In contrast, it is your body and its physiological needs that force you into the roaming life full of sufferings, such as hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, and pushes you to find pleasures to satisfy your desires and urges. This is why, as a practitioner, you must clearly and precisely perceive the operation of the five-aggregate body and try to control the operation of your body and mind by observing all their creations.

59. What are the five aggregates?

The Buddhist five aggregates (*skandhas*) are five fundamental elements or five constituent groups that constitute a whole person. The five aggregates have elements that are both physical and mental. They are the foundation of senses-spheres (*āyatana*)—namely, psychophysical domains (*dhātu*). The following table briefly describes the five aggregates.

Five Aggregates	Constituent elements
Form or matter (<i>rūpa</i>), including visible and invisible	5 elements (earth, water, wind, fire, and space) and 6 external senses-

things	bases (form, sound, smell, taste, contact, and mind's object)
Feeling (<i>vedāna</i>)	Pleasant, painful, and neutral relating to six internal senses-bases
Perception(<i>samjñā</i>)	Words, images, or concepts used to produce an actual experience .
Mental formations (<i>samskāra</i>)	Craving, hatred, and ill will or all kinds of karma, both wholesome and unwholesome.
Consciousness (<i>viññāna</i>)	The mind and all five senses of the body.

60. Why are the five aggregates considered the foundation for the twelve senses-bases and eighteen psychophysical domains?

When speaking of the existence of humanity and its problems, the Buddha always clearly emphasized the relationship of the body and mind through three special terms: aggregates (*skandha*), senses-bases (*āyatana*), and psychophysical domains (*dhātu*). The aggregates, mentioned earlier, consist of five elements. Senses-bases include twelve kinds: six senses-organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) and six external corresponding senses-spheres (form, sound, smell, taste, contact, and dharma or the mind's object). Psychophysical domains include eighteen kinds—the sum of the twelve senses-bases plus the six kinds of senses-organs consciousness. For example, an actual perception of the eyes must always have three connected factors: the eyes (domain of the eyes' sense), eyes' objects (domain of the external dharma), and direct consciousness from the eyes (domain of seeing). Similarly, a whole person always has five aggregates, twelve senses-bases, and eighteen psychophysical domains. The following table describes the eighteen psychophysical domains.

Six sense organs	+ Six external senses-bases	+Six consciousnesses
Eyes	Form	Consciousness of eyes

Ears	Sound	Consciousness of ears
Noses	Smell	Consciousness of nose
Tongue	Taste	Consciousness of tongue
Body	Touch/contact	Consciousness of body
Mind	Thought	Consciousness of the mind

61. Why are aggregates, senses-bases, and psychophysical domains analyzed in such detail?

By deeply meditating on aggregates, senses-bases, and psychophysical domains, you will readily, without using much intellectual reasoning, recognize the non-self nature of all existences. For instance, the perception of the eyes results from the connection between the three elements: eyes, object, and consciousness. Depending on the specific status of both the eyes (vivid or vague) and consciousness, the object perceived may be recognized in several ways, thereby leading to various perceptions and understandings. This is the limit of human knowledge regarding *reality*. In meditating however, when you truly recognize the complexity of an object (i.e., multiple attributes and angles of an object), you shall simultaneously reveal its Dependent Origination and non-self characteristics. Consequently, by meditating on such themes of reality, you will easily give up your inherent habit of self-attachment.

62. Would you please explain the nature of the self or ego in the Buddhist view?

Usually, the self or ego is identified through three personal categories: the ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ and ‘myself’. More simply, ego is an individual self to which a person makes an attachment and assumes to be true. According to the Buddhist view, attachment to the self is the most ignorant mistake humans makes because it leads humans to float adrift in the ocean of craving and hatred. All human sufferings arise from an attachment to self. After thoroughly meditating on the five aggregates, you will clearly see that the concept of the self or ego is but an illusion stemming from the distinctions made by languages. In reality, *the self or ego of a person is just a combination of the five aggregates and a name*. Without a doubt, and as already discussed in question 59, no self has been found in the constituents defining the five aggregates,. Indeed, what we call an *individual self* appears only when the five aggregates are given a name. Different names will lead to different kinds of self-attachment, such as Mr. A is

different from Mr. B. For this reason, failing to meditate on or be mindful of this problem, humans willingly sacrifice their lives just to protect their own *name of self*—particularly when they think that their self is hurt or offended. Therefore, the more you attach to a self, the more you will suffer and the more the mind will develop craving, hatred, ill will, and pride. You should keep in mind that the body of five aggregates constantly changes at every moment of life; it also does not carry within itself any individual self or ego. So why do we work so hard to embrace the *barren name of self* when it does not possess any special meaning for our life of true happiness?

63. *If there is no individual self or personal ego, who is it that will suffer and who is it that will be happy?*

Because of the habitual attachment to an individual self, we always fear that we will someday become nothingness and be forgotten. The truth tells us that the life of true happiness actually does not need a self to exist—and neither does suffering! Just look at the reality of some actual experiences. For example, the most peaceful and soundest sleep is the one that is not sobbing and vacillating because of the ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ or ‘myself.’ The happiest moments of life are those in which we live at ease, in peace and tranquility, without being disturbed by the ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ and ‘myself’, which cause the mind to worry, fear, and hope. The greatest feeling of ease is the feeling of pure rapture in which the notion of ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ and ‘myself’ is completely absent. Contradictorily, the status of suffering will increase if it is attached to an ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ and ‘myself,’ such as I lost money, I lost fame, or I lost power. Happiness and suffering are all manifestations of Dependent Origination, and when they occur you should use *the mind of non-self* to experience them without unnecessarily focusing on the self or its name.

64. *What is non-self?*

As previously discussed, non-self is one of the essential tenets of Buddhism. The central point of this doctrine can be generalized three ways: a) by rejecting the view that a powerful God exists who creates and controls the life of all sentient beings and non-sentient beings; b) by not accepting the view that each individual has a soul that is immortal and invariable; and c) by not accepting the view that a perpetual entity or ego exists in the conditional world of Dependent Origination.

In the *first view*—rejecting the existence of a powerful God who creates and controls the life of all sentient and non-sentient beings—Buddhism teaches that man and his world are created and formed by innumerable conditions in which a man takes the decisive role in creating a life of suffering or happiness through his own physical, verbal, and mental karmic actions.

In the *second view*—not accepting that each individual has an immortal and invariable soul — Buddhism advocates that the life of each sentient being is the product of each individual’s mind; that the mental current of each sentient being flows endlessly and is always able to change or transform (e.g., from ignorance to enlightenment). Thanks to this ability of change or transformation, a mind of ignorance can, through spiritual training, be awakened, and the ignorant mind may become enlightened, in either one life or several lives.

In the *third view*—not accepting that a perpetual entity or ego exists in the conditional world of Dependent Origination—Buddhism teaches that each individual matures through the process of multi-conditioning, including the influences from parents, family, society, and culture. Accordingly, the existence of a person is an aggregate of both individual karma and universal (or common) karma. Each individual always carries within him- or herself elemental conditions reflecting the meaning of *all in one and one in all* (inter-being). No independent ego or entity can be found in the existence of a person, except as already explained in the series of Dependent Origination in the groups of the five aggregates, the twelve senses-bases, and the eighteen psychophysical domains. This is core to the non-self doctrine.

65. How does the reality of the non-self relate to nirvāna?

It is necessary to consider two perspectives when speaking about the doctrine of the non-self: the spiritual practice and spiritual liberation. Regarding spiritual practice, you should consider that a human’s existence is nothing other than an aggregate of form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness and constitute the body of the physical and mental elements. The innermost characteristics of this body of five aggregates does not possess any immortal self-entity, nor is it independent of the conditional element series. The real nature of this body of five aggregates is emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and non-self (*anātman*).

Spiritual liberation and the true state of non-self can be achieved through meditative practice. Meditation will transcend you to a world in which all the dualistic notions between self and other will be purified, all attachments to self or other will be dropped, and all impure defilements will be cleansed. Such a peacefully transcendent and tranquil state is the true life of non-self, the life of nirvāna. Thus, non-self is nirvāna.

66. How can one perceive the meaning of emptiness (śūnyatā) in the presence of things?

To truly obtain emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the presence of other existences, you should contemplate the fundamental physical and mental characteristics of existences, as summarized in the following four terminology definitions: *Dependent Origination*, *false name*, *emptiness*, and *middle way*.

a) Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*): A physical or mental existence always carries within itself multiple conditions of causes and effects and it is the combination of the series of multiple conditions that gives rise to an existence. Therefore, when those series of multiple conditions are dissolved, the existence constructed from them would cease as well.

b) False name (*prajñapti*): When a physical or mental existence is given a name and the conditions under which it was given the name changes, then the name that stems from those conditions changes as well. As a tree, for example, changes from a tree to its ashes it goes through several different names, each being used for a period of time to describe the same material: tree, lumber, table, firewood, and ashes.

c) Emptiness (*śūnyatā*): Depending on its function, a physical or mental existence is given a name, but subjected to a thorough analysis, its characteristics would eventually become *empty* (i.e., no independent entity in what we call the *self-nature* can be found in that existence). For example, when a complete chemical analysis is performed on a physical entity it would be determined that its existence is but the combination of multiple conditions, in much the same way as water is the combination of hydrogen and oxygen.

d) The middle way (*madhyamā-pratipad*): The actual value of a physical or mental existence should be viewed through an integrated and related series of conditions, in order to avoid extreme views, such as things simultaneously having an existence/non-existence, or easing/arising, or annihilation/permanence, or identical/difference or appearance/disappearance. The *middle way* is the path of transcendence free of attachments between the extremes of sensual indulgence and self-mortification, giving vision, knowledge, and leading to calm, insight, enlightenment and nirvāna.

After a deep ponderance on the four characteristics above, you may perceive the meaning of emptiness in the presence of existence.

67. Why is it said that the middle way is the path leading to nirvāna?

More simply, the middle way is the *medium way*—, the way in which we do not tie our views to any extreme, such as existence/non-existence, ceasing/arising, annihilation/permanence, identity/difference, appearance/disappearance. For instance, when talking about the emptiness of all dharmas, a practitioner should not be attached to the concept of nothingness or nihilism, or be excessively fond of nihilism, or holding the view that all is nil. If attached to such a view and resigned to live with it, a practitioner would lose all his or her personal ability to develop virtuous deeds and the Bodhi mind. Contrastingly, if they become attached to the view that all is true and that each existence has a true self-nature that is immortal and perpetual,

practitioners would try to maintain the impermanent conditional elements, making their life more miserable and anguished. For this reason, the wise choose to follow the *middle way*, free from extreme attachments so as to reach enlightenment and liberation. Just imagine a bicyclist: if he steers too much to the right or left, the bicycle will fall to the ground and the rider's journey would end. However, if he keeps a balance between right and left (the middle way), he will reach the end of his journey. The middle way is the path free of all attachments, leading to nirvāna.

68. How can the teaching of the middle way be applied to our practical life?

It is essential that the “spirit” of the middle way be applied to your spiritual training journey. The Buddha, after six years of ascetic practice discovered the significance of the middle way. He taught that, just like tuning a musical string, if stretched too tense, the string when played will sound strident and is likely to break; conversely, if the string is too loose, it will not produce a pleasant sound. Only when properly adjusted will listening to its sound be nice and easy. Similarly, when applying the “spirit” of the middle way to your life, you should not keep hold of the thought that you must leave this world to enter nirvāna, rather you need to build a life of nirvāna here in this mundane world. Similarly the body of five aggregates is impermanent and ephemeral, and if we do not acknowledge and protect it appropriately, we will not be able to reach enlightenment and liberation in the development of our spiritual life. An excellent illustration of the middle way is the metaphor of “a boat carrying passengers to the other shore”, more fully explained in question 69. You need to rely on the conventional truth in order to attain the absolute truth, because without reaching the absolute truth, you are not able to *live a life of nirvāna* in the profane world. This is the way of the two truths of life.

69. Would you please explain more about the two truths?

The two truths are conventional truth (*samvriti-satya*) and absolute truth (*paramārtha-satya*). The conventional truth is the interim and temporary truth relative or interconnected with a particular person; the absolute truth is the truth at the end and is forever. In the Buddhist sutras, these two truths are defined as the means and the end. An ordinary person can neither combine the two truths into one nor choose one of the two, as the nature of the two truths are not identical. If we just choose one of them, we cannot achieve our spiritual journey end goal. The metaphoric images of “a boat carrying passengers to the other shore,” “a handful of leaves,” and “yarn lifting the kite” are examples of the two truths. The boat is the means in the conventional truth and getting to the other shore is the end in absolute truth. If we do not use the boat, we will not get to the other shore; but when we reach the other shore we will leave the boat behind. The two truths also remind us that we should never use the knowledge of an

ignorant mind, full of craving, hatred, and ill will of the human realm, to measure the realm of enlightened ones. If we use the ignorant mind to describe the enlightened realm, that realm of enlightenment will become the ignorant realm—no more and no less. Thus, we should bear in mind that what we have learned from the Buddha’s teaching, or what the Buddha has taught us, is just the means (conventional truth), not the end (absolute truth). Just as with nirvāna, each person should perceive him- or herself with the absolute truth, because that absolute truth cannot be described by our languages.

70. *Is the absolute truth identical to the realm of nirvāna?*

Terminologically, nirvāna (Pali: *Nibbāna*) is a combination of the prefix ni[r]—(*ni, nis, nil*) and the root vā[na] (Pali. *vāti*); *nir* means transcending beyond, leaving off, or releasing from, and *vāna* means the passion stream of rebirth or craving. Therefore, basically, Nirvāna is the state of tranquil extinction or the cessation of suffering (*Nirodha*) of the mind, which has transcended beyond or left the passion stream of the three worlds of karmic rebirth destinations (see question 13). It is the state of absolute freedom in which a practitioner experiences the ultimate truth after having completely purified his or her own body of both mental and physical defilements. As such, nirvāna is divided into two kinds: a) Sopadhisesa-nirvāna, which means the causes of rebirth have been fully destroyed but the physical effects of those causes still exist and is called nirvāna with residue—namely, the state in which the existence of the physical body still remains; and b) Anupadhisesa-nirvāna, or the state of complete extinction in which no existence of the physical body remains—that is, the final nirvāna without residue, as when the body of a Holy One dissolves. The Lotus sutra describes the Anupadhisesa-nirvāna of the Buddha as “*the fire is extinguished as the wood finally burned out*”. In the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, nirvāna is Nirodha, the third truth.

71. *Would you please explain more about the characteristics of nirvāna?*

The *Mahaparinirvāna Sutra* noted that nirvāna has four special characteristics: a) *True Eternity*: no longer being governed or ruled by impermanent and variable conditional elements; b) *True Bliss*: the blissful life of the mind stream in which craving, hatred, and ill will no longer exist; c) *True Self*: different from the personal self in the dualistic realm; and d) *True Purity*: absolute purity. Nirvāna is also named “non-birth” (*anutpāda*), “everlastingness” (*aksaya*) beyond the conditional world, and “absolute freedom” (*mukti*) when one is no longer fastened to the cycle of *samsāra*.

72. *What does the Buddhist expression “samsāra is nirvāna” mean?*

“*Samsāram eva nirvānam*” is an expression frequently mentioned in Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. The meaning of this saying emphasizes the work of building nirvāna in the human world; in other words, the saying encourages us to live a life of nirvāna in this human world using this human body and is meant as a warning that it is not necessary for a person to leave the world of birth and death entirely to enter nirvāna. The truth tells us that the Buddha and the Buddhist Holy ones (Arhats) lived a life of nirvāna in this mundane world and in doing so made it beneficial to sentient beings. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas vow to reenter the world of samsāra in order to save all sorts of sentient beings, thereby demonstrating the great heart of compassion of a Buddhist Holy One. You should also note that we cannot reach nirvāna (the absolute truth) without samsāra (conventional truth) (see question 69). As already explained in questions 68-70 (the Four Noble Truths) the world of samsāra serves as the foundation through which we may experience the taste of nirvāna.. Put another way, nirvāna is the very blissful life of ultimate liberation and freedom; accordingly, a practitioner who lives a life of nirvāna is completely free from the bondage of the three worlds.

73. What does nirvāna relate to in the doctrine of three Dharma Seals?

In the Agama sutras, nirvāna is one of the three seals of Dharma (three special Dharma seals that identify the Buddha’s teachings in the triple baskets of Buddhist scripture), which include: a) Anicca (Skt: *anitya*): impermanence; b) Anatta (Skt: *anatman*): non-self; and c) nirvāna: freedom from samsāra. The aim of this Dharma summarization in the three seals of the Holy Disciples is that it helps us identify precisely what is taught by the Buddha and what is not. We may briefly understand the three Dharma seals as follows:

a) *All conditional things (sankhara) are impermanent*: All voluntary actions and creations of the physical and mental body, as well as the natural world, are impermanent. They are all products of multiple conditional elements; things will arise when the right conditional elements come together and will decompose when those conditional elements dissolve. Thus, the nature of things is always changing and is impermanent.

b) *All conditional things are non-self*: Since the nature of things arises from multiple conditional factors, they do not possess any self-entity that is unique and independent of the constant operation of Dependent Origination. This is the non-self nature of things.

c) *Nirvāna is nirodha*: In the three seals of Dharma, nirvāna is named *seal of Nirodha* (extinction of all afflictions and defilements). This seal verifies the spiritual state of absolute freedom and liberation of a practitioner. The roots of sufferings in the world of birth and death are cravings (*tanhā*); therefore, when cravings are entirely deleted, a practitioner will obtain

the ultimate state of tranquil bliss of nirvāna.

In the three Dharma seals described above, the first two seals (impermanence and non-self) refer to the characteristics of conditional things; while the last one—nirvāna—is the state of ultimate reality that is, by nature, pure (*asamkrta*), non-birth (*anutpāda*), and superlative liberation.

74. How can an ordinary person live a life of non-self?

Life in modern society requires people to conduct their lives with personal responsibility and duty in their relations and actions among individuals, families, schools, and society. These correlative relations cause the *self* of each individual; as such, the ‘I’ and ‘mine’ to become excessively dominant in everyday activities. Thus, what should a lay Buddhist do in order to practice living a life of non-self? The following suggestions may be helpful :

Instead of living completely *by the individual self* or *for the individual self*, you should generate the thought that you are living, not for yourself, but for your family, your beloved ones, or expanding further other sentient beings regardless of age, race, sex, or nation. As you generate such thoughts and guide your life in such a direction, you actually begin a life of altruism—namely living for others—and you will develop more self-confidence, powerful energy, and a strong will in helping you reach the ultimate goal of your life. If any action of yours is motivated by the heart of altruism, you will truly possess the opportunity to cultivate and develop compassion, generosity, and tolerance, and through which you may gradually erase the notion of self-attachment. In reality, of course, you lose nothing in devoting your life for others; on the contrary, you will have more motivation for a better living. Contrastingly, when you live just for yourself—namely, for the ‘I’ and ‘mine’—you will lose the real significance of life and unintentionally confine, shelter or hide a potentially immense and marvelous life into the narrow *frame of self*. Living such a narrow life is entering the avenue of selfishness, which is by its very nature lonely, sad, anxious, and fearful. In fact, the truth tells us that if you have an altruistic heart of compassion and generosity, you will have more friends, more supports, and a real chance for your achievements in life.

75. How should a selfish and egocentric person practice the Dharma?

If you are a person of selfishness, self-attachment, and mental intricacies, the first thing you need to do is protect your mind, your mouth, and your body carefully. Do not allow your individual karma to create, in harmful ways, more suffering for yourself or others. The Buddha, in the Dhammapada sutta, taught that “The wise are controlled in bodily action, controlled in speech and controlled in thought. They are truly well-controlled” (234).

When protecting your own three karmas (body, speech, and thought), you also need to meditate on the non-self by telling yourself, either aloud or silently, that “*This is not ‘I’; this is not ‘mine’, and this is not ‘myself.’*” Over the long term, just talking to yourself in this way, the self-attachment energy will gradually diminish. It is important to note that, if you cannot change your mind, you will not be able to change your life or your world.

In addition, you should practice conducting pure merits (*anāsrāva*)—doing good deeds for others without attaching meanings to them such as “what I am doing?”, “for whom am I doing it?”, and “What will I get for doing this?” You should just perform beneficial actions for others with all your heart of sympathetic joy and happiness. To do good things without attachments is to conduct pure merits.

76. Would you please explain the concept of “merit” in Buddhism?

The original Pali term for merit is *punna*, which means “purification”. To cultivate merit is to purify the bodily, verbal, and mental karmas by cleaning up craving, hatred, and ill will from your mental flux. Therefore, cultivating merit is to control and transform the craving, hatred, and ill will of your mind, into the state of purity. The Buddha taught us skillful means to control and transform these basic defilements, such as offering donations and charity to deal with craving or greed, developing compassion to eradicate hatred, and training in wisdom to eliminate ill will. Based on this radical idea, you may cultivate merit by giving to others, offering to the Triple Jewels, practicing ethical disciplines, diligently doing charity work, meditating, chanting sutras, or reciting the Buddhas’ names and fostering the Bodhi mind. A Buddhist generally cultivates merit through the directions of the four all-embracing virtues and six Pāramitās (see questions 33-35). Most importantly, a Buddhist should cultivate for him- or herself the pure merit of spiritual liberation.

77. What are the characteristics of ‘pure merit’ and ‘impure merit’?

Impure-merit (*āsrāva*) is that merit which still in the stream of samsara, adheres to the operation of causes and effects, while pure-merit (*anāsrāva*) is that merit which goes beyond the karmic stream of causes and effects and leads to the ultimate freedom of nirvāna. For instance, when you conduct a merit with mind strings and self-attachment, you clearly expect a good response and consider that *good response* to be the end goal of your action therefore you do it with an impure mind which still clings too much to the desire of the ‘I’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself.’ If you sow seeds of impurity, you will correspondingly receive the effect of impurity. Also, if you conduct a good deed, but the energetic flux of *giving and paying* still exists in your mind and governs your action, then you will be absorbed into the passion stream of samsāra, for the *mental energy of giving and paying* (causes and effects) is itself the very

spiritual leakage by which you will be born and reborn in the samsāra cycle. When conducting merit with the true mind of altruism, compassion, loving kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, you are sowing the seed of pure merit, leading you to renunciation and liberation. The three pure studies (ethical discipline, meditation, and wisdom) are the foundation for cultivating the merit of purity.

78. What is the Buddhist view on the issue of “good and evil”?

The Buddhist view on the wholesome (good) and unwholesome (not good) is clearly defined in the teaching of karma. The karmas belonging to the physical, verbal, and mental aspects are further divided into two major sub-categories consisting of ten wholesome (*kusala*) karmas and ten unwholesome (*akusala*) karmas (see the following table).

a) Physical karmas:	Killing, stealing, and conducting sexual immorality.
b) Verbal karmas:	False speech, a double tongue, hateful speech, and slanderous speech.
c) Mental karmas:	Craving, hatred, and ignorance or false view.

Committing any of the ten karmas above is not good (evil). Not committing these ten karmas and trying to save the life of others by providing help, speaking the truth in harmonious and affectionate ways, and cultivating all other virtuous deeds, are called wholesome (good) karmas. However, there are two important aspects of the Buddhist concept of *wholesomeness* that should be noted: the human ground of ethics and the spiritual ground of enlightenment and liberation. Human ethical wholesomeness involves practicing the Dharma and the ten wholesome karmas; spiritually wholesomeness, in the noble path of enlightenment and liberation, is nirvāna and the Dharmas leading to nirvāna, including all pure and non-dualistic Dharmas. Thus, the Buddhist concept of wholesomeness has two levels of meaning; one of basic human ethics and the other is the spiritual state of nirvāna.

79. Why are there different viewpoints on the issue of “good and evil”?

The human world has many religions and cultures and each characterizes “good and evil” actions in a different manners. For instance, Islamic followers do not eat pork while Hindus do not eat beef. Moreover, modern problems such as abortion and euthanasia are still unresolved controversial subjects. However, in Buddhism, the matter of good and evil is, as previously discussed, is clearly defined in the codes of moral discipline, spiritual practice, and virtuous deeds (see questions 76-78). In regard to such problems as abortion and euthanasia, Buddhists should use their wisdom skillfully, particularly regarding those problems that “have already occurred.” You should notice that on the path of spiritual training the Buddha taught us to focus on the mindfulness and transformation of the origins of suffering — this is the core practice of Buddhism. Similarly, Buddhists should make a diligent effort to educate and prepare themselves, as well as their children, about the consequences and responsibilities of sexual actions, such as pregnancy, rather than debating whether to perform an abortion or not after the fact. The Buddhist teachings warn us that “*the Bodhisattvas dare to sow the seeds while humans dare to see the fruits.*” The wise always care for the fruits when they sow the seeds while human beings, because of ignorance, do not care for sowing the seeds; rather, they just fear the retribution of fruits (what they have done.)

80. What is ignorance in the Buddhist view and is a wise person, like a scientist, still ignorant?

The connotation of ignorance (*avidyā*) in Buddhist languages means to not truly understanding or realize the nature of the Four Noble Truths. Ignorance is considered to be the origin of all sufferings so it is from ignorance that the defilements such as greed, attachment, and self-pride develop. When a practitioner truly realizes the Holy Truths—i.e., the Four Noble Truths—his or her inner peace and blissfulness immediately arise and by perseveringly practicing the Dharma, they may reach enlightenment. In human beings, ignorance is the product of the unaware or foolish mind (*moha*), which, through misunderstanding, leads to the *so-called individual self* attaching to the individual self and regarding that this self is something real, immortal, and perpetual. By attaching to the self, defilements and sufferings arise, forcing humans to fall into the cycle of the three worlds. Thus, as long as self-attachment exists, ignorance will still be present in our lives. A wise person, such as a modern scientist, may spend his or her entire life creating extraordinary products or understandings, such as space shuttles or quantum atomic theory, but they cannot create a “miracle button” capable of immediately turning off craving, hatred, and ill will. It is only through the diligent practice of ethical disciplines, meditation, and wisdom, done to the perfect degree that it occurs. Therefore, great scientific knowledge cannot destroy ignorance, craving, and self-attachment;

only by practicing the Holy Truths can a person eliminate ignorance and obtain ultimate enlightenment.

81. How should a person of substantial ignorance practice the Dharma?

Studying and practicing Dharma are the requisites for eradicating the mind of ignorance. It is through the study and contemplation of such teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the twelve factors of Dependent Origination, the five aggregates, and the non-self that you develop true wisdom and the ability of perceiving reality and the operational stream of life as they are. In meditation practice, the four foundations of mindfulness are essential for helping us discover the true nature and operation of own body and mind, as well as its connection with the world outside. If you do not practice mindfulness, your wisdom will not develop and your spiritual training will progress slowly. Therefore, you should practice the three pure studies (ethics, meditation, and wisdom) at the same time.

82. How should a person with substantial hatred (ill will) practice the Dharma?

If you have a lot of anger inside your mind or you are easily angered, you should, before acting or speaking, deliberate on and be mindful of miserable and bitter situations such as sickness, accidents, disasters, death, wars, burning houses, or floods. Mindfulness of the sufferings caused by these situations will help you cool your mind of envy, revenge, resentment, and jealousy. You should note that the origin of hatred is the excessive attachment to self. Accordingly, getting angry indicates you are willingly to do everything to protect your sense of self—especially when you think your ego or self is offended. For instance, a long-lasting manifestation of self-attachment may result when a person, either intentionally or unintentionally back-bites you for a few minutes, but you keep that hatred, of being backbitten all year long or even ten years or more. It is necessary to acknowledge that *when you are angry, you take upon yourself the mistakes of others to punish yourself*. Indeed, in spite of how luxurious and beautiful of a complexion you have, how precious your jewelry is, or how high-class the perfume is that you wear, you immediately become ugly whenever a rage of anger arises inside your mind. Similarly, despite how rich you are and how luxurious your car or house is, you still suffer and imprison yourself in your own magnificent castle through your anger. In order to eliminate the mind of hatred, you need to deeply ponder the dangerous and harmful anger inside you, in addition to practicing living the non-self and developing a heart of altruism.

83. How should a person of substantial craving practice the Dharma?

There are different kinds of cravings, such as the five mundane desires (eating, sleeping,

sexuality, fame, and money) or the more subtle desires in meditative states of the fine form realm and formless realm. Regarding practice, you should identify for yourself what kind of craving is most prominent in your life so that you may find an appropriate way to heal. For example, a money-grubber or a fame-seeker should think about the danger and bitterness experienced on the way to satisfying their cravings, as well as contemplate the actual meaning of life. Various ways to practice exist according to each specific case. Generally, in order to have a true life of happiness (*in terms of wholesome karma*), you need to meditate on the true cause or source of your craving. To live harmoniously in *contentment with reality* you should live with what you *need*, not with what you *want*.

84. How does the Buddhist concept of happiness differ from the mundane concept of happiness?

The concept of happiness is a broad topic. However, the basic difference between happiness in the Buddhist view and that of the mundane world is differentiated by the two terms *attachment* or *non-attachment*. Being free from all attachments, Buddhists live happily and freely in the world no matter what circumstances they encounter or how reality affects them. Happiness in the mundane world is connected to the notion of ‘I,’ ‘mine,’ and ‘myself,’ and results in a conflict between the potentiality of true happiness and silently destructive cravings and attachments pulling you into the realm of bitter regret over gain or loss and pleasure or pain. Thus, non-attachment in the Buddhist view is true happiness.

85. What is the true career of a Buddhist?

This is an interesting question. A Buddhist is simply understood as a child of the Buddha. However, Buddhists include two classes of people: monastic persons (both male and female, like monks and nuns) and lay Buddhists (both male and female). Monastic persons do not get married or have a private family life; their main profession focuses on spiritual training. Conversely, lay Buddhists get married, have children and concentrate on building a family life of happiness in the most practical sense. However, when speaking of the *true career* of a Buddhist, whether monastic or lay persons, we need to deal with or think about the real foundation of not just a flashing happiness, but a prolonged or lifelong happiness—the sort of happiness that significantly impacts both this life and future lives. Within this sense, the true career of a Buddhist is indeed nothing other than compassion and wisdom. Only with compassion can you nurture the existence of life; only with wisdom will you know how to build for yourself a life of true happiness that is secure and long-lasting. In any circumstance, compassion and wisdom will always be the strong foundation for happiness; lacking these two crucial factors, you will be unable to have a true career as such. Moreover, what you try to do

in order to obtain happiness would be like building a castle out of sand. Compassion and wisdom are the true career of not only a Buddhist, but also of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.

86. Do different methods of spiritual practice conflict?

There are no substantial conflicts because the methods of practice are applied according to the specific person and specific situation, just as different kinds of drugs are used for different diseases. Similarly, when training your spirituality, you should choose a training application appropriate to of your problems. The effect and efficiency of various applications serve to heal various kinds of spiritual illnesses. Thus, no conflict exists in the nature of different ways of practice; the only thing we should be concerned with is whether your spiritual training application is appropriate and applicable or not. For instance, some persons often fall asleep when sitting still in meditation, but when reciting the Buddhas' names their minds become pure and calm. In such a case, you should continue reciting the Buddhas' names instead of sitting in meditation. Conversely, some persons' minds continue to move in a disorderly manner when reciting the Buddhas' names, but when sitting motionlessness and observing their breaths their minds gradually become peaceful and tranquil. In this case, you should keep practicing meditation instead of reciting the Buddhas' names. In addition, depending on the different situations and times, you may change the manner of practice. In reality, if you have already chosen for yourself a suitable application and can enthusiastically concentrate on that, you will succeed sooner or later. Although different techniques of practice may support one another—like a dual practice of Zen and Pure Land, for example—you should not constantly change the way of practice, doing so may result in agitating your mind or not getting to the point of focus; consequently, you may lose confidence in your spiritual development . It is important to keep in mind that all the methods of practice are a means, just like different sizes of shoes are used for different feet.

87. Is there any difference in the methods of practice for young and old persons?

Because the physiological life between youth and maturity varies, the approach to spiritual practice may be applied in several different modes. Most young persons are interested in intellectual reasoning; they ask questions like “why?” and “for what?” This curiosity provides them with a good chance for studying Dharma and developing both knowledge and wisdom. Mature persons should encourage the young to study Dharma as a way of looking for “a philosophy of life” for themselves as well as for their future. We should not push our children to accept religious faith as compulsory dogmas. Therefore, the young should be ethically stimulated to learn and discuss Dharma before they begin some initial practice, such as

charitable work or learning how to develop respectfulness and love for parents, teachers, friends, and others, as well as learning how to live and work effectively and carry out beneficial tasks for themselves and others. In particular, they should learn how to build for themselves a life of true happiness that is secure and long-lasting.

On the other hand, because their ‘time’ is shortened, the mature follow the beliefs, knowledge, and practice they already have. Almost all mature people like to practice Dharma (such as chanting sutras, reciting Buddhas’ names, or meditating), embracing their own way of living and the inner blissfulness of their spiritual world. With some background experience, the mature can practice Dharma without the need for any questions or answers. As such, the mature person’s manner of practice is not applicable to the young. When you see your children bowing to the Buddhas, you are very happy; however, if you do not create an opportunity for them to study Dharma, they will not understand the actual meaning of bowing to the Buddhas and someday, once they are older, they may not want to bow any more.

Generally, the spiritual application of the young emphasizes studying Dharma and exercising wholesome things, while mature persons focus on a deep exploration of spirituality. However, in order to fully achieve results of their personal practice, both the youth and mature should develop all five spiritual faculties and their five powers (see question 39), as previously discussed.

88. How should an aged person practice the Dharma, particularly when his or her time of life is shortened?

For seniors, the path of practice should be steadily formed according to the following suggestions: a) clearly affirm the method of personal practice (e.g., Zen, Pure Land, or Tantrism) rather than simply imitating others by doing whatever they do; b) after verifying your personal path of practice, you should intensely develop it in both theory and exercise; practicing under the guidance of a master is always necessary; c) no matter what your situation is, make a vow to be deeply involved in spiritual training as you devotionally and seriously build your own spiritual home;; d) in any practice, develop all five spiritual faculties and their corresponding five powers (see question 39) until the last breath of your life; and e) last but not least, be aware that what you practice today has a great impact on your life—both this life and the future life; ignorance of the correlative karma of cause and effect will result in minimal practice progress and your will not be strong enough to reach the end goal.

89. Why should a person be aware of the future life if he or she practices being in the present?

You should, in this context, carefully discriminate between the concepts of *awareness in meditation* and *awareness in the intellectual field*. Awareness of the karmic law of cause and effect (flowing through the cycle of time: past, present, and future) is the intellectual basis for spiritual practice. For example, a person who does not believe in or is not aware of the cycle of samsāra or the karmic law of cause and effect is regarded as a non-Buddhist. Meanwhile, when practicing being in the present and you are not fully aware of what you are doing but are just concerned with or focused on the future life, you will fall into the crazy world of illusion and imagination. Awareness of the karmic law of cause and effect and its impact on this life and your future life, belongs to the intellectual field. This awareness will help reinforce your will in spiritual training. Meanwhile, the practice of being in the present means living in the state of *full awareness* of every single movement of reality.

90. How should young people practice the Dharma?

The path of spiritual practice for the youth needs to be prepared according to the following suggestions: a) most of you should build an ideal about the life of true happiness; of course, true happiness is always established on the ground of true values and true goodness; b) in order to construct true values for one's life, the first thing you need to do is cultivate for yourself an appropriate view of life and a strong belief in that life (right view and right thinking); c) once you possess the appropriate belief and view, you need to have a shelter for your life—namely, your own *philosophy* of life; in this regard, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path should be the foundation for your practice (see questions 7 & 41); d) because life is always changing and also includes difficulties, you need to apply the teaching of the middle way and the two truths in your everyday practices (see questions 67–69); and e) finally, because the life of youth is often governed by relative elements from family and society, the beginning of spiritual training develops via the diligent actions of doing good deeds and avoiding evil deeds, in order to enrich the base of merit for the present and future. When experiencing good conditions, you should start to become deeply involved in some sort of spiritual training so that you can maintain the balance of life, reduce stress, and reinforce the life of true happiness (see questions 84 & 85).

91. How should a person who is experiencing illness or who is near death practice Dharma?

This is an interesting question, and the answer depends on what you are really asking. When you know without a doubt that you do not have much “time for living,” you should make full use of it in a skillful manner to contemplate on the teaching of non-self (see questions 73–75) and painstakingly heighten your personal practice (Zen, Pure Land, or Tantrism). Old age is in

fact a great opportunity for you to renew your own life of wisdom, year after year, wandering about in adventure, because at this point in life, the stressful hardships of life no longer press down heavily on your shoulders. However, it is your regrets of the past and the fears of leaving the world that create the very innermost anguishes that constantly stir your mind. Thus, at this point in your time, contemplating the reality of non-self will help you renounce all inner attachments more easily, because, in one way or another, you have actually experienced either wholly or partly the real nature of life. At the same time, an intensive mindfulness of the karmic law of cause and effect will be a helpful influx of energy to assist you in regenerating your aspirational ideas of nobility and wholesomeness. A strong belief in the karmic law of cause and effect will also help you carry out self-repentance for any wrongs or sins that you have committed in the past, as well as enhance the mind of wholesomeness that will lead you to develop your own forgiveness and tolerance for all intentional or unintentional obstacles that have occurred throughout your life. Carefully training the spiritual life through mindfulness and the advancement of the wholesome mind during old age is actually the infinite happiness of a Buddhist! You should keep in mind that, according to the Buddha's teachings, you may become an angel (celestial being) in the Heavens or a holy being in the Pure Land *right after* your last breath if you skillfully and devotionally practice in the last moments of life.

92. What should one do in order to extinguish his or her fear of death?

Death is a truth about which many people do not want to think or speak—even if you believe that you do not fear death. As Buddhists, we know that death is a part of life's entire process of the Dependent Origination of samsāra. Thus if you see the truth of death as it really is, you will no longer be afraid; rather, you will be afraid of living too long in old age without death! Just think that if you lived until an age of 200 or 300 years —how full of suffering, how boring, and how tiresome old age would be! Similarly, when speaking about the truth of impermanence, many people hastily assume that this is a pessimistic view; in fact, it is truly optimistic, because impermanence brings to our life numerous chances for transformation and alteration in the ever-changing life stream. Thanks to the law of impermanence evil is able to transform into good or suffering to happiness so your present life may shift to a better direction. Death is, therefore, an indispensable fact in the constant stream of samsāra. Buddhism teaches that death is just a matter of removing an old coat, while birth is putting on the new one. Therefore, there is nothing to worry about regarding death! What needs to concern us is the state in which you die, so that you are able to peacefully and freely take off the old coat and put on the new one. For this reason, practicing the noble Dharma becomes the highest priority. The true practitioner is never afraid of death!

93. Loneliness is an obsession of a person when facing old age and death. How should one practice Dharma in order to overcome this obsession?

This question is true for persons of any age. If you are not a practitioner, then old age and death may result in loneliness obsessions. However, if practicing Dharma properly, you are the only one who is able to enjoy the *taste of inner tranquility* with infinite blissfulness. To reach the state of true blissfulness and liberation, you must experience the subtle states in meditation, including the state of bliss stemming from the renunciation of senses-desires, the state of bliss stemming from the act of subsiding from thinking and pondering, the state of bliss stemming from *dwelling with* equanimity and awareness, and the state of bliss stemming from *pure* equanimity and full awareness. You may understand this process of mental purification as follows: a) the *renunciation of senses-desires* involves giving up the flux in the mind of all kinds of attachment, self-attachment, and manifestations of craving, hatred, and ill will ; b) the *inner tranquility* is the blissful state of the oneness of mind arising from pure concentration and the subsiding of thinking and pondering; c) *pure joy* is the state of pure happiness that arises from the original source of mental purity by dwelling with equanimity and awareness; in this state, all kinds of conditional delights and sensation-ecstasies disappear; and d) *absolute purity* is the state in which all kinds of sensations of happiness or unhappiness, joy or sorrow, etc., completely disappear; this is the final state of pure equanimity and full awareness. These processes encompass the true experience of spiritual purity that you may attain only through meditation—in other words, only in state of solitude. Consequently, for a true practitioner, *the taste of inner tranquility* is a very noble, blissfulness and unthinkable miracle. The truth is that it is the inexplicable *taste of inner tranquility* of Holy Ones; it goes beyond all descriptions by human languages, as does Nirvāna. Thus, to a spiritual practitioner, loneliness is a great chance for him or her to experience this noble tranquility and purity and is definitely not an obsession, as might be thought by an ordinary mind.

94. How can a person overcome this obsession of old age and death if he or she is unable to appreciate the taste of inner tranquility?

Several approaches may help you overcome such obsessions. First, sincerely focus your whole mind in the mindfulness of the recitation of the Buddha's names, as well as enthusiastically putting your heart of respectfulness in taking refuge in the Triple Jewels. With your deeply esteemed respect in every single breath and rhythm of your heart, let your mind-stream concentrate wholeheartedly on a union with the Triple Jewels, a Buddha, or a Bodhisattva. Practicing in this way, you are creating for yourself a special energy of awareness and compassion connecting your *self-power* to *other powers* of the Holy Ones. This pure energy will sweep away all obsessions and fears of loneliness and return you to a source of

noble blissfulness for living. Second, you should acknowledge that you alone came to this world and you alone will leave this world; during this journey, except for the karmic force you created, no one will go with you. Thus, you should try in every way to cultivate merit by doing good deeds whenever possible, as they create a true shelter for a better rebirth. Additionally, instead of sitting still in melancholy and lamentation, you should contemplate the non-self, practice living in purity, and enjoy the taste of inner tranquility—the original source of the pure mind, without pleasure or sadness. For a Buddhist, respectfulness of and sincere belief in the Triple Jewels is always the noble refuge for cultivating the blissfulness of the inner mind, especially during the moments of death and rebirth.

95. How should we encourage our younger children to practice the Dharma?

You cannot push your younger children to follow what you are practicing or what you want them to be. Young people do not like dogmatic lessons or doing what they do not understand or believe in; in particular, they do not like the style of “practicing hurriedly so that it will not be too late” that older people promote. Contrastingly, the youth will willingly do whatever they think is beneficial to them in the most practical sense. Therefore, in order to encourage younger people to practice the Dharma, you should first be a real *ideal model* for them. If you are always acting with peace and calm when faced with storms of suffering and you skillfully use your wisdom in these situations, younger people will imitate you immediately, without needing a word or suggestion from you. In contrast, if you are full of hatred, ill will, attachment, dissatisfaction, displeasure, and false views, and you urge your children to follow your ways, they will definitely not listen to you or may even resist you and your lifestyle. Thus, to stimulate the youth to practice spirituality, you should first be a strong shelter for them, a source of peace for them, and an actual inspiration for them.

96. How can we live in harmony with a person who follows other religions in the same family?

This is very simple. Consider their object of worship and respect for others to be a Bodhisattva embodied in various forms to save suitable persons—as the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara does. Moreover, express your deep respect to the Holy Ones in other religions as spiritual masters or ethical teachers. Thinking and acting in such a way, you will have no difficulty living with persons in the same family who follow other religions. However, if you are living in environments of multiple religions and multiple cultures, such as North America or Europe, you should also study other religions and cultures so that you can create a mutual understanding and sympathy with the followers of these religions and cultures. In the academic circle of the West, scholars often say to one another that “*if you know only one*

religion, you know none.”

97. *How should we live in harmony with a person of divergent views?*

If you want others to accept your views, you must first listen to their views, whether you like such views or not. If you are a true practitioner, familiarity with all views — whether, according to your view they are right or wrong — will help you experience the “polyhedral” complexity of life, as well as enrich your own wisdom. Essentially, living in the circumstances of diverse thoughts, you should patiently develop your compassion and use your wisdom skillfully in order to bring about peace and harmony for yourself and for other persons living around you. However, if you press people with different views into following your views, then conflicts will immediately arise; this is absolutely not a wise choice. Try to avoid this extreme by all means, for the sake of peace.

98. *How can we live in harmony with a person who embraces the wrong views?*

First, you should seriously examine your own view and make sure that your view is really true before judging the views of others. After clearly ensuring that you have an appropriate view, you should make an adjustment in your practices as the answer for both (i.e., yourself and the other) without the need to engage in argument or debate. Any argument based on self-attachment will be useless and may cause more suffering for both. Peace, purity, compassion, and wisdom in your life have the ability to transform others without requiring intellectual reasoning. You should keep in mind that your own energy of purity always has the power to protect you and others.

99. *How can one live peacefully with or alongside a person who is gossipy and stubborn?*

This is an interesting question. Everywhere in life, you will encounter people whom you like and people who make you suffer. If you have to live with a person whose temperament is gossipy and stubborn, you need not talk, but rather listen with all your heart of peace and tolerance. In particular, try not to respond against or involve any resistance to that person. Just meditate on and practice the way of the lotus leaf: water drops on it, and rolls off it lightly and peacefully. In this case, try to train yourself by listening with non-reaction; in other words, be willing to listen to all sorts of *melodies* as if you are listening to a music CD of various songs with different vocal pitches—peaceful or noisy, happy or sad, soprano or bass. By practicing listening with a non-resistant mind, over a long time you will make your mind calm like the surface of the earth, which accepts any kind of feet and can be trampled upon peacefully and freely.

100. *What should one do in order to make the inner life peaceful?*

The reality of life is that it always includes difficulties—whether revealed or hidden—that make us dissatisfied, sorrowful, and anxious. Thus, daily practice in maintaining a balance in life is really necessary for the inner mind. Just ask yourself a simple question: You take a shower every day, but how many times have you taken your mental shower this week, month, or year? In fact, we do not often control our minds; rather, the individual mind controls each of us and constantly pulls us in every direction—even when we eat and sleep. Indeed, we are not the rulers, but the slaves to our own minds. For example, we never realize that the mind can be used as an electrical switch that can be turned on or off whenever we want; rather than letting our minds turn us on and off in an unrestrained and disorderly manner. In addition, it is the mind, full of worry, sorrow, hope, and fear, that continuously circulates and whirls through all the peace. For this reason, we need to practice living in mindfulness and awareness in every breath and every footstep so that we may control our mind and protect our own inner peace. Through mindfulness, we can rule and take control of our mind, as well as cleanse all the wildness from our mental states, such as illusions and imaginations. You may begin to practice mindfulness in the easiest, most simple way: follow your breathing in and out, or bring awareness to every single breath. Try to maintain the awareness of breathing in and out as long as possible. In addition, you need to spend at least fifteen minutes to half an hour or more each day taking care of your mind by contemplating how your mind has been and how it is in the present moment. During those times of mindfulness, you should renounce all thoughts of greed, hatred, and ill will and their body, mouth, and mind manifestations. . Simultaneously, you should try to develop compassion, loving kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. You may make full use of your rest time, or the time before going to bed to practice mindfulness (see questions 54–56).

101. How should a Buddhist practice when facing suffering?

It is the sincere desire of all humans to lessen suffering. However, the approach in dealing with suffering, as the Buddha taught us, is not to run away from it but rather find the cause of the suffering so it can be transformed. The first thing you need to do is to embrace suffering as a valuable experience in life. In order to have the ability to do this, you should spend time meditating on the reality of suffering, as well as its deep roots, instead of sitting still and lamenting or trying to run away from it. Suffering will bring to us precious experiences that are also nurture vigorous energy and the noble will of human beings. Without suffering to fulfill the base for happiness, your happiness will become as slight as dew and fog. In addition, noble virtues which exist in suffering may also help us foster our true wisdom of life. For instance, when facing sickness and grief, we can deeply appreciate the meaning of impermanence, from which we can reduce our self-pride and self-attachment or when

encountering an accident, death, or disaster, our minds of hatred and revengefulness will gradually cool down. Therefore, to transform suffering, you should not run away from it or dispel it, but embrace it as a conditional part of life. However, the most important thing in lessening suffering is identifying the cause. If you cannot recognize the real causes of suffering, you will be unable to transform it effectively. The Buddha taught that suffering is a noble truth; when you are able to see *the truth* of suffering, peace and happiness will arise. Thus, mindfulness on suffering or the causes of suffering is not only a solution for its transformation, but also a way to heal such suffering.

^[1] Atheism (no belief in the existence of God), Agnosticism (“unknowism”), Skepticism (doubting), Naturalism (all is organic to natural reality), Theism or monotheism (belief in a personal deity), Polytheism (belief in various kinds of deities), Henotheism (belief in various kinds of gods in different tribes), Pantheism (belief that God is identical with nature as a whole), and Panentheism (belief that all things exist in God).

^[2] The series of samsāra as explained in the teachings of *Pratītyasamutpāda* include twelve links: Ignorance, volitional actions, consciousness, name and form, six sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, old age and death.

^[3] Triloka: Kārmadhātu, Rūpadhātu, and Arūpadhātu.

^[4] Bodhi 943-944. See also the *Kāyagatāsati Sutta*, *Satipathāna Sutta*.



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2010 *Words from the Heart of Wisdom (Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra)*, White Sands Buddhist Publications, Mims, printed in U.S.A

2009 *Cẩm Nang của Người Phật Tử (Buddhism 101- Questions and Answers)*

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