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INTRODUCTION

In this age of mass communication and internationalism, the various Buddhist traditions have begun to interact and cooperate as never before. To further foster this trend, the Los Angeles Buddhist Union offers this text as a step towards creating a book of common reflections to be used in Buddhist functions.

Several criteria have influenced our choice of material. We selected reflections that present those aspects held in common by Buddhist traditions. We included the ancient Pali language in certain sections to emphasize and honor tradition. In selecting English translations, we have chosen readability over scholarly precision.

It is important to keep in mind that in Buddhism, chanting is not a mere ceremonial formality, but a potentially profound spiritual practice in its own right. It is particularly useful in developing concentration and for opening one's heart. For this reason we have added a brief appendix, containing suggestions on how to most benefit from these reflections and the practice of mindfulness.

DEDICATION

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Los Angeles Buddhist Union and the 15th anniversary of the Rosemead Buddhist Monastery, we present this text to all who are interested in walking this spiritual path for the benefit of themselves and for all beings.

A special thanks to the Sunday morning Dharma Class participants for their input and support in this project. We hope this thin volume of Common Reflections for Buddhist Gatherings will be a small step toward the further development of American Buddhism.

This booklet was compiled by Dr. Sean H. Thompson with the guidance of Venerable Bhante Chao Chu at the Rosemead Buddhist Monastery.

Hows and Whys...

Prostrations:

Doing the three bows to the floor is important in that it imparts a humble respect for the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This practice also allows us a chance to begin to prepare our body for mediation with a sense of humility and mindfulness.

Chanting:

Chant with concentration of mind.

Make the activity of chanting, i.e. pronouncing and hearing the sounds of each word your object of meditation. Bring the words into consciousness. If your attention wanders, gently return to the activity of chanting.

Chant with repose of body.

Keep the body upright, but at the same time in a state of over all relaxation. You will then be able to feel the vibration of the chant in your whole body. Use that vibration to take you even deeper into relaxation. Joining the hands in front of the heart is as much to impart a feeling of focus as to show respect.

Chant with your whole being.

Try to inflate each syllable with a sense of expansiveness by giving yourself fully to it. Try to become the sound rather than make the sound. Through this, you will gain insight into the experience of 'no-self'. Let yourself go, but at the same time...

Chant with the group

Carefully remain in sync with the rhythm and tone set by the chant leader and the group as a whole. Through chanting, you can gain insight into how we can live in unity and harmony.

Meditation:

There are many different ways to meditate. In Buddhism we meditate to understand the nature of the mind and use it effectively in our daily lives; to take the mind beyond its innate tendency to dwell in the inherent suffering of life; and to develop the mind far past the Cause and Effect interaction of happiness and suffering, to the ultimate goal of enlightenment (Nirvana.)

The common denominator of all meditation systems is the focus on the breath. You'll find breath focus in Buddhist meditation, Hindu meditation, Jain meditation and the Pranayamas of the Yogic tradition. And although attention to breath (Samatha Meditation) is a focal point of Buddhist Meditation (leading to serenity), the Buddha took this practice to its next logical stage, Insight meditation (Vipassana), leading to liberating wisdom. It is through the combination of these two meditation concepts **that** Buddha attained enlightenment.

How to meditate: A simple technique

Sit comfortably and fold your hands in your lap. Close your eyelids two-thirds of the way and cast your gaze comfortably down the bridge of your nose to the floor (about three feet out).

Focus on the sensation of your breath...

As you inhale, say to yourself, 'rising', and as you exhale, say to yourself 'falling'.

If your mind wanders (which it will, because it's the mind's nature to wander) just gently bring it back to the focus of the breath.

Ti-SARANA: Pali version, the three guidances (taking refuge)

NAMMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMA SAMBUDDHASA
NAMMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMA SAMBUDDHASA
NAMMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMA SAMBUDDHASA

BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
DHAMMAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
SANGHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

DUTIYAMPI BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
DUTIYAMPI DHAMMAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
DUTIYAMPI SANGHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

TATIYAMPI BUDDHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
TATIYAMPI DHAMMAM SARANAM GACCHAMI
TATIYAMPI SANGHAM SARANAM GACCHAMI

Monk/Minister: "Sadhu"

Congregation: "Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu"

The Three Guidances (Ti Sarana, English) (Guidances)

Homage to him, to the Blessed one, the Worthy one, the Buddha.
(3 times)

I go to the Buddha for guidance,
I go to the Dhamma for guidance,
I go to the Sangha for guidance.

A second time I go to the Buddha for guidance,
A second time I go to the Dhamma for guidance,
A second time I go to the Sangha for guidance.

A third time I go to the Buddha for guidance,
A third time I go to the Dhamma for guidance,
A third time I go to the Sangha for guidance.

ANATTALAKKHANA SUTTA

Impermanence (The Sutra of the Characteristic of Non-Self)

The body is not the *self**, if the body were the self, this body would not be subject to suffering.

If the body were the *self*, one could say, 'let my body be like this or let my body be like that.'

It is because the body is not the *self* that it is subject to suffering.

That is why one cannot get the body to be one way or the other.

Similarly, feeling is not the *self*.

Perception is not the *self*.

Mental formations are not the *self*.

Consciousness is not the *self*.

If consciousness were the *self*, then this consciousness would not be subject to suffering, and one could say, 'let my consciousness be like this or let my consciousness be like that.'

It is because the consciousness is not the *self* that it is subject to suffering.

That is why one cannot get the consciousness to be one way or the other.

"What do you think disciples?"

"Is the body permanent or impermanent?"

"It is impermanent, venerable sir."

"If it is impermanent, is it accompanied with suffering or happiness?"

"It is accompanied with suffering, venerable sir."

"If something is impermanent, accompanied with suffering, and is by nature changing, is it proper to treat it as 'it is I, it is myself?'"

"No venerable sir." They replied...

"Is consciousness permanent or impermanent?"

"It is impermanent, venerable sir."

"Is that which is impermanent suffering or happiness?"

"Suffering, venerable sir"

"Is that which is impermanent, full of suffering, and subject to change to be regarded as, this is mine, this is myself?"

"No, venerable sir"

“Therefore, whatever the body may be, whether of the past, present, or future, internal or external, coarse or tender, pleasant, or unpleasant, far away or close by; It must be treated with right understanding, properly, as, ‘it is not I; it is not myself.’
So is feeling, so is perception, so are mental formations, and so is consciousness.

“The noble disciple who sees this will not be attached to forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. By not being so attached, he will be detached. Through detachment, he will be emancipated. He will have the knowledge that he is emancipated; that he has done away with rebirth; that he has lived the higher noble life; that he has done what should have been done; and that there is nothing left to be done.”

When the Buddha explained this, the five disciples rejoiced in what he had preached, and at his pronouncement the disciples attained emancipation from all mental burdens. And at this time, there came to be six holy ones in the world.

Monk/Minister: “Sadhu”

Congregation: “Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu”

(Samyutta – Nikaya XXII, 59)

Begin sitting meditation...



(Self; here is used as meaning ‘permanent entity’ or soul. There is no English equivalent in original texts regarding this.)

Meditation on loving kindness (Metta Bhavana)

Having seen that all beings have a desire for happiness,

One should mindfully develop loving kindness towards all beings.

May I be happy and free from suffering,

and always like myself may my friends, neutral persons, and the hostile be happy too.

May all beings in this village, in this state, in other countries, in our galaxy be ever happy.

May all persons, individuals, beings, creatures in all the galaxies be ever happy.

So too may all women, men, noble ones, non-noble ones, gods, humans, and beings in the lower worlds be happy.

May all beings throughout the universe be happy.

May I be free from hatred,

may I be free from affliction,

may I be free from worry,

may I live happily.

As I am so also may my parents, teachers, preceptors, friendly, indifferent and hostile beings be free from hatred.

May they be free from affliction,

may they be free from worry,

may they live happily,

may they be released from suffering,

may they not be deprived from fortune duly acquired,

All have karma as their own.

The teaching on Loving Kindness (Metta Sutta)

“One skilled in good, wishing to attain peace should act thus:

One should be able, straight, upright, obedient, gentle, and humble.

One should be content, easy to support, with few duties, living lightly, controlled in senses, discreet, not impudent, balanced about family.

One should not do any slight wrong for which the wise might censure one.

May all beings be happy and secure!

May all beings have happy minds!

Whatever living beings there may be without exception, weak or strong, tall, large, middling, short, subtle, or gross, visible, or invisible, near or far, born or coming to birth,

May all beings have happy minds!

Let no one deceive another nor despise anyone anywhere.

Neither in anger nor enmity should anyone wish to harm another.

As a mother would risk her own life to protect her only child, even so towards all living beings one should cultivate a boundless heart.

One should cultivate, for all the world,

a heart of loving kindness above, below, and all around,
unobstructed, without hate or enmity.

Monk/Minister: “Sadhu”

Congregation: “Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu”

Begin sitting meditation...

The Heart Sutra

Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, while practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita clearly saw that all five skandas are void of independent existence...

“Shariputra*, form does not differ from emptiness, emptiness does not differ from form, and form then is emptiness. Emptiness is then form; Perception, conception, volition and consciousness are also like this.”

“Shariputra, all Dharmas are void of substance. There is no beginning, no ending, nothing stained and nothing pure, no eye, no nose, no tongue, no thinking, no realm of sight, no realm of thought, no ignorance, and no ending of ignorance; no old age and no death and no ending to death; no suffering, no craving, no extinction, no path, no wisdom and no attainment. There is nothing to attain.”

“When one practices the perfection of wisdom, with no hindrance of mind, no hindrance of body, no fear and no illusion, one will finally awaken to complete, unobstructed Nirvana.

Ga-te, ga-te, para-ga-te, para-sam-ga-te, bodhi swa-ha;
Ga-te, ga-te, para-ga-te, para-sam-ga-te, bodhi swa-ha;
Ga-te, ga-te, para-ga-te, para-sam-ga-te, bodhi swa-ha...

(Gone beyond, gone far beyond)

*Shariputra was one of the first disciples of the Buddha

REFLECTIONS AND CHANTS FOR MEMORIAL SERVICES

This time of mourning for our departed can be difficult. The Los Angeles Buddhist Union will present traditional memorial services here today for your loved one. Please feel free to join along. Your participation shows honor and respect for the departed and their family and friends. The readings here are provided for you to follow along to find solace and for you to contemplate later. Please feel free to keep this document and share it as you find appropriate.

LOVING KINDNESS AND TRANSFER OF MERIT.

“We transfer our collective thoughts of loving kindness, this great metta, to our dearly departed.....

May..... always be peaceful,
May..... always be happy,
May..... always be content,
May..... always remain in the
state of perfect peace...”

For contemplation:

Just as the dew drop on a leaf at sunrise very soon vanishes and does not remain for long: just so is the dew drop-like life of beings, very short and fleeting.

Just as with the pouring down of a mighty rain, the bubbles on the water very soon vanish and do not remain for long: just so is the bubble-like life of beings, short and fleeting.

Just as a line drawn with a stick in the water soon vanishes and does not remain for long: just so is the life of beings, short and fleeting.

One should wisely understand that the life of everyone is short, limited, and fleeting, full of pain and torment. Do wholesome deeds and lead a good life, for no mortal ever escapes death...

-The Buddha



Advice to the Kalamas

The Buddha advised the Kalamas people with eight guidelines to use before accepting any teachings:

1. Don't accept anything based upon mere reports, traditions or hearsay-
2. Nor upon the authority of religious texts-
3. Nor upon mere reason and arguments-
4. Nor upon one's own inference-
5. Nor upon that which *appears* to be true-
6. Nor upon one's own speculative opinions-
7. Nor upon *another's seeming ability*-
8. Nor upon the consideration that 'this is our teacher' -

The Buddha taught that one should learn and apply the teaching for him or herself, only after applying the teachings correctly can one know the truth.

The Four Noble Truths:

1. *Suffering exists and should be understood,*
2. *Suffering is caused by selfish desire and clinging.*
3. *There **is** a way to end the suffering...*
4. *The Noble Eight-fold path is the cure for suffering!*

The Noble Eightfold path

To end this suffering the Buddha taught us the Eightfold Path which consists of:

- * *Profound understanding*
- * *Good, realistic thinking and aspiration*
- * *Non-hurtful speech*
- * *Non-hurtful action*
- * *Non-hurtful work and lifestyle*
- * *Good effort,*
- * *Being present in mindfulness, and*
- * *Positive concentration*

This is the most general advice the Dhammapada gives.

The meaning of taking guidance and the five precepts (Taking Refuge)

To 'take guidance' in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha is the traditional vow to become a Buddhist. The ceremony is called the Guidance ceremony.

After taking guidance, the lay person may choose to take the Five Precepts.

The Five Precepts:

- 1. I take the vow to abstain from taking away a life.*
- 2. I take the vow to abstain from taking things not given.*
- 3. I take the vow to abstain from sensual exploitation.*
- 4. I take the vow to abstain from false speech.*
- 5. I take the vow to abstain from intoxicants.*

These precepts are not taken out of fear of a vengeful god; they are followed as a way to better oneself and the world by the practice of ethical behavior. They are also followed to become more skillful in our daily lives, in light of the Law of Kamma. (Intentional kamma, or moral causation)

Common terms;

Buddha: Title for one who is enlightened.

Dharma: Natural phenomenon, teachings of enlightened ones.

Dukka: Suffering, dissatisfaction, dis-ease,

Karma: Dependent causation, cause and effect.

Metta: Compassion,

Nirvana: Enlightenment, void of dukka,

Saddhu: Well said, good...

Sangha: Monks and Nuns, Ministers and the lay community are not part of the Sangha.

Sutra:

Prajna:

Paramita:

