



BUDDHIST LIFE:

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THE SPIRIT OF GIVING AND THE JOY OF CARING ARE TWO OF THE BUDDHA'S GREAT GIFTS TO US

Buddhism is a way of living based on a personal choice to follow the teachings of the Buddha.

By following the Buddha's teachings we learn to avoid actions of body, speech, and mind that result in negative results and behaviors, both for ourselves and for those around us. This allows us to live in peace and harmony. In addition, by modeling Right View and Right Actions, we create a Pureland in the here and now--through compassion and equanimity.

TWO MAJOR BENEFICIAL ORIENTATIONS OF BUDDHISM

One view of Buddhism is to divide it into two beneficial orientations: a self-development orientation and an altruistic orientation.

A Self-Development Orientation

In one's daily life there are eight benefits derived from a self-development practice: (1) *simplicity of living*, (2) *contentment*, (3) *renunciation*, (4) *effort*, (5) *mindfulness*, (6) *concentration*, (7) *wisdom*, and (8) *liberation*.

Living in simplicity means reducing stimulation to the senses and the complex of relationships that result from that stimulation. Living in simplicity means living a life of lessened desire. Living in simplicity means having simple, straightforward and honest familial, sexual, and social relationships.

Contentment is the result of simple living. Without contentment, without the ability to achieve lives of simplicity, we encourage rather than abate our suffering and the suffering of others.

Therefore, we should avoid misstepping, and avoid prejudices, unwholesome habits, and harmful behaviors. This is renunciation, and it requires ever-present effort, from moment to moment, in order for the renunciation to be successful. With the benefit of this effort, renunciation is possible, generating lives of simplicity and contentment.

Stated another way, it is Right Effort and Right Understanding that lead us on the Path to Buddhahood, and lead us forward in our practice of the Buddha's teachings. We are expected to examine our personal experiences and the lessons of daily life. Everyday experiences will naturally indicate what is to be avoided, what is to be renounced.

Right Mindfulness is a special teaching and practice of Buddhism that leads to the development of increasingly beneficial lives. The cornerstone of Buddhist morality teaches one to continuously and progressively move from bad to good, from unwholesome to wholesome, from unrighteous to righteous.

Mindfulness, in the Buddhist sense of the word, is self-awareness of the mind and body, and of the mind and body's reaction to external things--self-awareness of one's feelings, of one's likes and dislikes, and of one's state of mind. This self-awareness is designed to lead to the attainment of a morally correct and simpler life.

With mindfulness, positive behaviors result in a peaceful mind, and that mindstate is independent from the bodystate. Mindfulness, leads to Right Concentration, that is, being able to be single-pointed in our everyday life, not just when one is on the meditation cushion. It is the most beneficial way to practice. Ultimately, mindfulness is at the heart of the Eightfold Noble Path, which provides the method to gain the wisdom needed for liberation.

These eight elements of the self-development orientation lead to a mature and pure practice and a more peaceful life. This benefits them, of course, by allowing them to live more and more peaceful lives. By reducing attachments, these benefits ultimately lessen stress and anxiety, dissatisfaction and suffering, and produce immeasurable benefit for others.

An Altruistic Orientation of Benefit

In the altruistic orientation, the orientation in which a Buddhist's goal is to be selflessly caring and to act unconditionally for the benefit of society and of all beings, even at their own expense, there are four key teachings. Understanding these is what keeps a Buddhist on the right track.

THE KEY TEACHINGS

Impermanence: Knowing that everything is impermanent, even that we ourselves are impermanent, reduces craving. Seeing that there is no permanent self (no-self or egolessness) provides the tools we need to minimize and ultimately

stop the reaction of clinging. Non-clinging/no-attachment is like a duster which can clean away the affliction that results from attachment to external things. In the Buddhist view, this reorients one to a clearer, simpler, calmer life.

Compassion and Wisdom Compassion is the shield, wisdom the armor that are necessary to ensure that we act in the positive and wholesome ways that are of benefit to themselves and to all sentient beings.

Karma Understanding karma (The Law of Cause and Effect) and the interdependent relationship between what we do with body, speech and mind, with the results of those actions, and the interdependent relationship between physical, external phenomena and the mind, encourages the cultivation of morally upright and disciplined lives.

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

These four states of mind allow one to remain harmonious and peaceful, regardless of circumstances or surroundings:

Lovingkindness Lovingkindness is selfless love, the unconditional desire for others to be happy. (The opposite is meanness.)

In Buddhist practice, loving-kindness is offered freely and without any expectation for personal reward or benefit. This kind of offering can be sensed by others as positive and wholesome. It is especially important to offer lovingkindness in times of personal hardship and poverty, in times of societal distress, and in times of human-caused or natural catastrophes. Buddhism teaches one to be particularly alert to being unreservedly kind; it teaches one to make the giving of lovingkindness a practical, omnipresent habit. Always being kind is not only one of the most effective teachings for





the benefit of others, but it also produces calm and peace in those who practice it.

Compassion is the empathetic feeling that urges us into action to benefit others and ultimately to end suffering. (The opposite is pity.)

Being compassionate is an outpouring of our own internal happiness, a happiness that we find increasing in ourselves the more we practice the Buddha's teachings, the more we practice kindness and compassion.

Sympathetic Joy

Lovingkindness and compassion lead to a feeling of sympathetic joy--to finding joy within when we see the success, prosperity, and happiness of others (The opposite is jealousy.).

Sympathetic joy is an infinitely wide mood, a state utterly removed from suffering. It is a joy that is not concerned with any personal profit or loss; it is a joy utterly devoid of ill-will toward others. It is an unconditional joy for others, completely free of any dualistic preconceptions or judgments.

Equanimity is the tranquil state that comes from greeting each moment, each situation, with an open heart and mind, neither hindered by preconceptions nor overpowered by the delusions of everyday life (The opposite is anxiety and stress.)

As long as we practice giving generously and selflessly of the Four Immeasurables, as long as we are inclined to continuous and ever-increasing good behaviors, as long as our giving is heartfelt and pure, altruistic and non-judgmental, it benefits us as well as others. It produces the blessings of a peaceful and progressively less stressful life, the trust and dependability of living a morally upright life, and the happiness that derives from the courage and confidence of a solid practice.

IN SUMMARY

Because the aim of Buddhism is to relieve one's stress and distress, one's worries and anxieties, one's grief, pain, and suffering, our practice starts with giving—mindful, wholehearted, selfless giving. To practice in this way, we learn to rid ourselves of vanity, conceit, and deluded views. In this way we are able to truly be of benefit to mankind and to society.

The two beneficial orientations are based on a universal morality, based on self-awareness, and committed to peace and non-violence in the understanding of a mutually interdependent co-existence.

As a karmic result of this practice, as a result of walking the Eight-fold Noble Path with altruism as our aspiration and intention, and as a result of maintaining the Four Immeasurables, we benefit all beings, including ourselves.



Born in Malaysia, **MASTER JI RU** was ordained as a Theravada monk in 1980. He later studied Chinese Buddhism and ordained in that tradition under the great Buddhist Master, Venerable Zhu Mo in 1986. Currently he is Abbot of the Mid-America Buddhist Association in Augusta, Missouri, and its sister temple in Chicago, the International Buddhism Friendship Association.