

Humanistic Buddhism: Holding True to the Original Intents of Buddha Chapter Two: The Humanistic Lifestyle of Buddha

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1) Renunciation and Pursuit of the Truth

The Buddha lived an extraordinary life. Growing up as the gifted Prince Siddhartha, he mastered the Five Sciences and Four Vedas at a young age. Life inside the palace meant he could have all he desired, including the power to reign over his kingdom. Despite this, he instead drew his attention to the forces of impermanence experienced in life and society such as the significant issues of suffering caused by birth, old age, sickness, and death; discrimination of the caste system; the oppression of power; wealth disparity; and the weak preyed upon by the strong. All these signs of inequality amongst living beings left him perturbed and perplexed.

What he realized notably was that no political power could ever relieve people from their sufferings and the cycle of birth and death, or shine a light on ignorant minds. He thus aspired to become renounced so as to accomplish ultimate liberation for the self, discover the Truth which would liberate living beings, better society, relieve people from fear, affliction, attachment, sorrow, and suffering; then ultimately discover the true abode of life.

Having explained his decision to become renounced to his father, King Suddhodana, the answer he received was certainly contradictory.

Rather than obliging his son, the king insisted that he first follow the

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natural path of life, assume the throne, and then rule the kingdom. In reply, Siddhartha made the following requests:

“Father, if you could grant me these four wishes, then I would happily forgo the idea of renunciation:

- 1) Let there be no birth, old age, sickness, and death in this world.
- 2) Let there be no distresses of sorrow, sadness, suffering, and unhappiness.
- 3) Let there be no pain of separation from loved ones.
- 4) Let everything in this world never change.”

(Sutra on Past and Present Causes and Effects, T03 No.189)

“How could you propose such requests? Who in this world could ever resolve such problems for you?” replied the King.

“Father, if you are unable to oblige my requests, then please allow me to search for answers myself.”

Despite the ineffectual conversation, and after deep deliberation, Siddhartha remained firm with his decision to relinquish his throne and life of luxury. One quiet night, when the entire palace was dormant, he left with Channa, his attendant.

In order to avoid the subjugations of royal affairs and the pursuit of the muster dispatched by King Suddhodana, Siddhartha tried to travel as far away as possible. When he finally came upon Magadha, a kingdom in the South, he began his austerities in Uruvilva alongside other practitioners, many of whom were yogis and shamans. Notwithstanding, he nevertheless sought advice from them, and even followed as his spiritual master Alara Kalama, seeking for ways to attain liberation. However, when all efforts came to naught, he began practicing on his own.

According to *Shijia-pu (Genealogy of the Sakya clan, T50 No.2040)*, his life of austerity involved only intake of wheat as sustenance. He was in such deep levels of sitting meditation that he never even raised an eyebrow when birds began to nest over his head. He simply let them be. From this one can recognize the harsh conditions of his practices.

During this time, the royal muster also caught up with the prince in an attempt to persuade him to return home. Firm with determination the prince instead changed the ministers' minds, and inspired them to stay to practice

austerity with him.

As time went by, the prince realized that years of austerity still offered no passage into the world of the Truth or methods of liberating living beings. What he also came to understand was that while unhappiness had come from the constraints created by the Five Desires and Six Dusts, the path of austerity offered no peace either. Ultimately, spiritual cultivation does not have to be done by torturing one's own body. Thus, he rose from his seat, resolving to search for alternative ways.

Lacking physical strength, along his way to the nearby Niranjana River to bathe himself, the prince fell. Fortunately, a shepherdess offered him some goat milk to help replenish his energy. However, the sight of him forgoing the practices of austerity was perceived by his five followers as a sign of weakness and regression. In enmity, all five abandoned the prince.

Having regained his energy; Siddhartha reached Bodhgaya, took a seat beneath the Bodhi tree, and made a vow: "I shall never relinquish this seat until enlightenment is attained." (*Abhiniskramana Sutra*, T03 No.190)

Throughout the process of meditative concentration, Siddhartha experienced an endless array of afflictions. From the external temptations of fame and gain to the internal unrest caused by greed, hatred, ignorance, and doubt; he nevertheless confronted them all with fortitude. Finally came the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month when, the stars and moon shining at their brightest, Siddhartha became enlightened.

According to Fascicle Thirty of the *Abhiniskramana Sutra*, upon that moment, heaven and earth shattered, and the delusional world was undone. What appeared before Siddhartha's eyes was a different world, one that shone with the golden light of Truth. Within such a world, all dualities of arising and ceasing, emptiness and existence, principle and phenomena, good and evil are all eliminated in a moment of thought. What Siddhartha awakened to was the Truths of dependent origination and emptiness. That all phenomena arise due to causes and conditions, and all phenomena are erased due to causes and conditions. What the prince also became awakened to was that despite the fact that our physical bodies go through the cycle of birth, old age, sickness, and death, our Buddha-nature, the true Thusness is all-pervading and omnipresent.

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Upon that moment, his mind was as calm as a still lake, beneath which all living beings within the Ten Realms suddenly manifested distinctly before him. What were once difficult problems suddenly became simple equations. He finally realized that everything was equal, and matters that differed became unified. He knew that his life had totally and thoroughly changed. He also knew that the Truth to which he awakened to was something that he could teach to the world. Thus he murmured, “How amazing! How amazing! All living beings possess the wisdom and virtue of the Buddha; it is only through delusions and attachments that they have shielded themselves from it.” This was truly Buddha’s declaration on the equality among ordinary beings and buddhas. (*Avatamsaka Sutra*, Fascicle 51)

Nevertheless, the awakened Buddha was in no haste to expound the Truth. Instead, he continued to meditate on ways to remedy the mind, steps to attaining enlightenment, his perspective on the universe, his view on life, and even how he would teach such truths in the future as well as establish the monastic community and promote equality amongst all four categories of Buddhists. The Buddha was well aware that if the people in this world practiced such teachings, they could all be akin to him, to embark on the journey of spiritual cultivation, attain enlightenment, and realize a complete and liberated life.

2) Establishment of the Sangha Community

Having pondered further on the truths that he had awakened to, his mind was as clear as a bright full moon, ready to illuminate the world. At that moment, he thought of Ajnata Kaundinya and the four others who had followed him in his practices, wishing that he could share his enlightenment with them. On a nearby hill, the Buddha found his five companions and expounded on the Truths of suffering: suffering, cause of suffering, cessation of suffering, and path leading to the cessation of suffering. According to the *Dharmacakra Pravartana Sutra* (T02 No.110), these explanations occurred on three separate occasions, known as the Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel.

During the First Turning of the Dharma Wheel, the Buddha said, “The sufferings in the world are oppressive; the cause of life is impelling; the perfection of life is achievable; and the path to liberation is attainable”. This

historical moment stands for the First Turning of the Dharma Wheel.

Buddha continued to teach the five practitioners, “This is the oppressive reality of suffering, which you shall know; this is the affliction caused by ignorance, which you shall eradicate; this is the eternal life, which you can attain; this is the way to liberation, which you shall practice and realize.” This elocution is known as the Second Turning of the Dharma Wheel.

“All such sufferings are that which I have already come to realize; all such afflictions and ignorance are that which I have already eradicated; such eternal life is that which I have already attained; these such Ways are that which I have already tread and completed.” This is known as the Third Turning of the Dharma Wheel.

Having heard the Buddha’s teachings, the minds of these five practitioners suddenly unraveled. Although they were prone to dismiss the man who had abandoned the practices of austerity; when this man appeared as Buddha and radiated the light of awe-inspiring virtue and compassion, they were so overwhelmed that all fell to their knees. “Siddhartha, we have wronged you before, but now we are willing to be your disciples. Please let us follow you and learn from you.”

“I am Siddhartha no longer. Henceforth, please call me ‘Buddha.’ I hereby accept your request so that we can strive together in delivering sentient beings.” According to *Sutra on Past and Present Causes and Effects*, these five thus became the Five Bhiksus who formed the earliest Sangha community, thereby completing the framework of a faith, which consists of the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Today, when tourists visit Rajagriha in India, they can still see the historical site where Buddha first taught the Dharma to the Five Bhiksus.

Soon after that, Buddha and the Five Bhiksus began their lives as propagators of the Dharma, attracting people of all walks of life, including shamans and spiritual practitioners, all of whom had come to learn from the Buddha. In particular, Uruvela Kasyapa, along with his two brothers and their one thousand or more disciples were the largest group to take refuge in the Buddha. This certainly intensified Buddha’s propagation works immensely.

Moreover, the renowned Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, along with their

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two hundred followers, also took refuge in the Buddha. Yasa, son of a greater elder from Varanasi, India, in aversion for his mundane life, also took refuge and became Buddha's disciple along with his fifty followers. Eventually Yasa's father, mother, and wife also took refuge and became the first upasakas and upasikas within the community. These stories are all recorded in the *Sutra on Past and Present Causes and Effects* as the founding of the 1,255-member Sangha community in the world.

As Buddha's reputation traveled far and wide, he knew that provided the environment, climate, and social conditions in India at that time, other than the establishment of a set of regulations within the Sangha community, a dwelling place was also direly needed in order to accommodate such a large number of people who would be practicing, living, and propagating with him. Rapidly, Buddha received help from King Bimbisara, a sovereign who once offered to donate lands from his Kingdom to the Buddha.

Not far from Bodhgaya, where Buddha had attained enlightenment, King Bimbisara offered a vast land for the construction of the Venuvana Vihara. This dwelling was said to consist of sixteen courts each containing sixty chambers, five hundred buildings, seventy-two halls as teaching spaces for the Buddha, and living as well as cultivation quarters for his one thousand and more disciples. This was also Buddha's first monastery in his endeavor to propagate the Dharma. (*Sutra on Past and Present Causes and Effects*)

While the Buddha was based in Southern India to conduct his propagation works; merchants from the North also came to hear the Dharma. Sudatta, an elder and merchant from the Northern city of Sravasti, having been inspired by Buddha's teachings, vowed to support the Buddha by building the Jetavana Vihara so that he could spread the Dharma to Northern India. (*Sutra on the Wise and Foolish*, T04 No.202)

Somewhere in the North, Sudatta the Elder thus purchased a garden from Prince Jeta and offered it as a site for the Vihara. With Sariputra assigned as the construction supervisor, it became Buddha's base of Dharma propagation in Northern India—Jetavana-anathapindasyarama, the ruins of which still remain today.

According to Chapter Twenty-Five of *Vinaya in Five Divisions* (T22

No.1421), Jetavana Vihara was situated over a flat land with an area of approximately eighty hectares. Eight small chambers along with other facilities such as the Walking Meditation Quarters, lecture hall, Greenhouse, Dining Hall, Kitchen, Bathroom, Sick bay and Lotus ponds surrounded the Central Shrine.

Thus far, there were already monasteries in both Southern and Northern India. Regularly, Buddha would lead his one thousand, two hundred and fifty-five disciples in propagating the Dharma to various places, each time being well received by the local communities. Even King Prasenajit of Kosala from the North became a follower of the Buddha. Initially, the bottom-up approach made the spread of Dharma a difficult challenge. But with the timely addition of royal patrons in both the South and North, Buddha's endeavors in Dharma propagation enabled the Buddhist community to grow daily. It can be said that the Buddha then established the world's first comprehensive Buddhist community.

The greatness of the Buddha lies within his unique approach in delivering sentient beings. Not only had he never regarded himself as the most illustrious in the world, he even asserted that he is but a part of the multitude. He had taught his disciples to "rely on the self, rely on the Dharma, and rely on nothing else." This is to show that the true meaning of faith is about having faith in oneself, and discovering one's compassion and wisdom. For this reason, Buddha set Dharma as the core spirit of the Sangha community and taught the Four Reliances: "Rely on the Dharma, not on people; rely on the meaning, not on words; rely on the ultimate meaning, not on conventional meanings; and rely on prajna, not on knowledge." There is no reason for such open-minded teachings not to be accepted by the world. It is also not difficult to understand why Buddhism stood out among other religions in India.

Establishing the Sangha community was certainly no easy task. One needs to know how to spread the Truth that liberates the world, in other words, to propagate the Dharma. In addition, one also needs to know how to liberate people from suffering and adversity, in other words, to deliver them. One also needs to have a comprehensive plan for the organization and day-to-day maintenance of the Sangha community.

In particular, to meet the needs of daily life, Buddha established a set of

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regulations for the community called The Six Points of Reverent Harmony. For example, Harmony of Being is achieved by keeping courtesies such as lining up in order, and refraining from trespassing on others. Harmony of Speech means to speak softly with kind words to prevent conflicts. Harmony of Thought means keeping shared goals and serene minds. Harmony of Discipline means that everyone is equal in front of the law. Harmony of Profit means all daily necessities are distributed equally among the community, and any surplus given to the poor and needy. Harmony of View means to share the same viewpoints upon having heard the Buddha's teachings. Under these regulations, the community thus becomes a complete and more ideal place for spiritual cultivation.

Nonetheless, virtue may be strong, but Mara can be even stronger. In the nascent days of prosperity for Buddhism, heretics retaliated out of jealousy and enmity. As mentioned in the Eight Stages of Buddha's Life, after Buddha underwent painstaking efforts to cultivate and finally subdued external temptations and internal afflictions, he also became immovable against such oppressions.

For example, a Brahmin once challenged Buddha to a debate. In order to be courteous, he brought two pots of flowers to greet the Buddha. Upon seeing the Brahmin, Buddha said immediately, "Let go!" The Brahmin thus released the pot in his left hand. However, Buddha continued,

"Let go!" The Brahmin then released the pot in his right hand.

"Let go!" said the Buddha still.

"I have already put down both pots, what else do you want me to let go of?" asked the Brahmin.

"What I asked you to let go of were not the flowers. What you should let go of are the greed, anger, ignorance, and afflictions in your mind." replied the Buddha. (*Outline of the Buddhas and Patriarchs*, X85 No.1594)

The Brahmin was overwrought by the Buddha's words. What he had regarded as well cultivated attainments were merely ignorance that was instantly dispelled by the Buddha. As a result, he bowed to the Buddha and took refuge in him.

On another occasion, after teaching at Mrgaramatuh Prasada, the Buddha

went into Sravasti to beg for alms as usual. Suddenly, a Brahmin appeared out of nowhere and started to yell at the Buddha. Ignoring him, Buddha continued to proceed peacefully, arousing even greater anger in the Brahmin, who reached down to grab a handful of dust and threw it towards Buddha. A breeze happened to sweep towards the Brahman and blew the dust back into his face. Upon seeing this, Buddha uttered the following verse,

*He who enforces anger upon one who is peaceful,
Since this peaceful and righteous mind is freed of all ties of afflictions,
Any unwholesome thoughts enforced onto him
Shall be returned to the unwholesome doer;
It is like throwing dust into the wind,
Eventually it will all come back to you.*

In other words, anyone who speaks harshly without a due reason to hurt others will suffer from his own actions. It is just like throwing dust at others, when the wind blows back, the thrower will eventually be the one who gets dirty. (*Samyuktagama*, T02 No.99)

Once, a group of heretics threatened the Buddha: “We shall spread all the wrong Dharmas to make people feel that your teachings are not suitable for those living in India.”

“I care not for your heretical views.” replied the Buddha.

“We will gather a crowd to attack your community.”

“The community does not fear your clubs and sticks.”

“Then we will don your robe, eat out of your bowls, but act in disaccord to your Dharma and rules to destroy your reputation.” said the heretics.

Upon hearing this, the Buddha replied with sadness, “In this case there is nothing that I can do.” This was the famous story which gave rise to the saying, “That which feeds off the lion’s flesh are the bugs living on it.”

There were also stories about Angulimala and Devadatta who had betrayed the Buddha. Devadatta, in particular, attempted to hurt Buddha by pushing boulders off hills or inciting a drunk elephant towards him.

Other than the above, Buddha’s disciples were also often tempted by heretics with money, force or even lust. For example, Matanga’s attempt to seduce Ananda, and Maudgalyayana’s trouble with Utpalavarna. Luckily, these

bhiksus were firm in their faith and remained steadfast against temptations. Instead, these incidents indeed strengthened them and further safeguarded the Sangha community.

With great wisdom, courage and fearlessness, Buddha found his way through the challenges of some ninety-six types of heretics and propagated the Dharma with determination, bequeathing India with one of her greatest traditions—Humanistic Buddhism.

3) Daily Routine

We are born in an era that is very distant from Buddha’s time, yet it can be certain that many of us are greatly interested in the way Buddha lived his days after attaining enlightenment. In fact, from the four *Agamas*, we can discover the way Buddha and his disciples lived their days. It can best be described with the saying, “To be at ease under all circumstances, to live by following conditions, to undertake every endeavor with joy, and to truly own everything by heart.”

The *Sutra of Bequeathed Teachings* says, “During daytime, learn and practice the teachings diligently without neglect. Do not languish during the early and late hours of the night either. In the midst of the night, chant the sutras to extinguish your afflictions.” The Buddha’s intention is to encourage his disciples to practice zealously, meditate, study the teachings, and carry out their chores diligently. A description of Buddha’s daily life as a propagator of the Dharma begins with his morning hours:

Everyday, the Buddha rose before the break of dawn to brush his teeth and wash his face. In Buddha’s time, the people cleaned their teeth by chewing on willow twigs in the form of toothbrushes used today. In *Vinaya in Five Divisions*, the Buddha spoke of the five benefits of chewing willow sticks: 1) aids with digestion, 2) clears phlegm, 3) enhances sense of taste, 4) eliminates bad breath, and 5) clearer vision.

While washing up, Buddha also intoned prayers. For example, when washing one’s face, “As I cleanse my face with water, I wish for all living beings to find purity and never be tainted.” When brushing one’s teeth, “As I chew on the tooth stick, I wish for all living beings to tame and purify their minds, and eliminate all afflictions.” These prayers serve the purpose of reminding spiritual

practitioners to always pray and remain aware.

Having washed up and woken after a night's sleep, the mind is refreshed, devoid of worries and afflictions, and is instead clear. Thus one is most aware in the morning hours. As the sky brightens and roads become visible, Buddha would lead his disciples on alms processions in Magadha and Kosala, accepting offerings from people in an orderly fashion.

By "orderly fashion," it denotes that the bhiksus cannot choose between wealthy or poor households or eschew the line. Regardless of the quality or content of the offering, they can only see the victuals as medicine that cure the weakening body. This is also Buddha's way to demonstrate the spirit of equality.

During alms processions, not all devotees made their offerings at set times or always with the same contents. In Buddha's time, the Indians had a tradition of setting up a table of offerings at the door during funerals or festivities. When Bhiksus passed their house, they would then kneel along with joining their palms, and respectfully offer a bowl of rice, a bowl of food, a flower or some fruits. Should the offering from one household not be sufficient to sustain anyone for the rest of the day, the bhiksu could then proceed to the second or third house to obtain the rest of the required food. Upon attainment, they immediately returned to the monastery to partake of their meal.

In the vast but sparsely populated land of India, bhiksus must follow the rules of proceeding from adjacent to distant locations in an orderly fashion and dignified manner, so as to inspire respect in the devotees. When Sariputra saw Asvajit begging for alms in Sravasti, he was deeply moved by his demeanor and sacredness. Therefore, he approached him to ask who his teacher was, and what his teachings were about. A monastic's dignified demeanor thus became the cause for Sariputra's refuge in the Buddha.

This practice of alms procession enabled people to come in close contact with Buddhism, whilst Buddhism was allowed to stay connected to society. In return for the devotees' material offerings, Buddha and his disciples would offer gifts of Dharma by teaching them the Truth about life. As the saying goes, "The giving of Dharma differs not from the giving of money." Eating with a mind of equality was the Buddha's intention behind establishing the rules of alms begging. This also assisted greatly in the development of Humanistic Buddhism.

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Considered in modern units of time, the practice of alms begging takes approximately one hour from beginning to end. After that, the bhiksus would return to their quarters to wash their hands and feet, sit cross-legged, and eat their meals.

They also ate, through the procedure of alms begging, while also being mindful of the Five Meal Contemplations, which are also commonly seen in contemporary monastery dining halls. Bhiksus of Buddha's time also similarly followed these eating procedures.

After the meal, they would wash their bowls, clean their feet, and straighten up their robes. This is likewise Buddha's emphasis on chores and conduct. It can be said that the Buddha taught by example and demonstrated the true form of spiritual cultivation.

According to the sutras, eating is followed by walking meditation around the monastery. According to *Vinaya in Four Divisions* (T22 No.1428), there are five benefits of walking meditation: 1) enhances stamina, 2) enables tranquil contemplation, 3) greater immunity to illnesses, 4) aids in digestion, and 5) prolonged period of meditative concentration. Afterwards, Buddha would lead his disciples back to their seats to meditate, followed by Buddha's teachings.

Buddha was not necessarily always the one to initiate a teaching. Whenever his disciples had queries about life, ideas, experiences, and cultivation, they went to the Buddha to inquire for answers and instructions. Thereafter, the bhiksus would each return to their own abode to meditate, contemplate, and reiterate what the Buddha had just said.

Having listened to Buddha's teachings of the Dharma, the disciples would each return to their own place to practice. Following this would be time allotted to all people from society. At about ten o'clock, devotees would come to the Vihara to seek advice or pay respect to Buddha. Buddha would then impart his teachings to these people. Sometimes he would speak on the Four Noble Truths, the Three Periods, or the cycle of rebirth through the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. Sometimes, he would speak about ways to strengthen one's faith or how to eradicate afflictions. Other times, he would encourage devotees to observe the Five Precepts, and practice the Ten Wholesome Deeds, as well as kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity. These teachings were all

memorized, then later compiled and recorded as the Tripitaka: Sutra, Vinaya, and Abhidharma.

Other than large scale teachings, sometimes Buddha also taught to individuals or small gatherings. For example, his teachings on the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* took place in four venues over sixteen gatherings. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* involved seven venues and eight gatherings. On the other hand, the *Lotus Sutra* involved a gathering of over one million people and heavenly beings. The locations and scales of each teaching varied. Today, when the Buddha's Light International Association organizes a variety of activities in different parts of the world, their purpose is to relive the moments of Buddha's Dharma assemblies.

After lunch, some would lay prostrations, some would meditate, some would do walking meditation, some would be in meditative contemplation, and some would take a rest. Members of the Sangha community each had their own habits, and as long as they did not trespass on others, freedom was still very common among these practitioners.

The weather in India is very hot. Most people would opt to be indoor during noontime. Other than staying in their abodes, the bhiksus would also disperse around nearby caves, tree shades, or beside waters to debate and exchange thoughts. This is quite similar to modern day school group discussions yet with rather different ambiances. Bhiksus lived a somewhat simple life and seldom lost their discipline to indulge in recreation. Most of them practiced diligently with right mindfulness, and abided by Buddha's precepts and regulations strictly so as to purify their bodies and minds, and improve their characters.

In the afternoon, Buddha would gather the bhiksus to discuss their findings and questions regarding spiritual cultivation. The Buddhist sutras that we see today contain records of questions and answers raised by the Sangha community. Following this, Buddha would then reach out to society to propagate the Dharma. It is not difficult to see that Buddha focused on spreading the Dharma to the world.

Given the hot weather in India, all that bhiksus needed to live were their three robes. Their material needs were minimal so as not to add to their burdens.

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In the occurrence of Dharma Services, they would don their nine-striped robe, while the seven-striped robe was worn on a daily basis. When doing chores, they would put on their five-striped robe. This is analogous to the different robes worn by BLIA members for different activities in Humanistic Buddhism. While the designs and styles may differ, when worn as a uniform, it bears the same significance as the three robes passed down by the Buddha himself.

At night time, members of the Sangha community continued with their own practices, where most would meditate and connect spiritually with the Way that was taught by Buddha.

On the path of spiritual cultivation, there will be different levels of attainment. Be it the Four Stages of Arhatship, or Fifty-One Stages of Bodhisattvahood, they must all be accredited by the Buddha to confirm their spiritual progress. Just as modern day schools are divided into different grades, the progress of spiritual attainment also involves different stages.

In the sutras, we can also see how Buddha lived his days in meditative contemplation and the Way. He was constantly mindful of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In his interactions with disciples and devotees, he was always teaching, instructing, benefiting, and bringing joy to them. Thus at the end of his discourses, his disciples would always vow to “practice in accord with Buddha’s teachings” before leaving with a bow and joyful minds.

From this it can be said that Buddha seemed to have lived a life that was no different from ordinary people. He too ate, slept, walked, and talked. Yet when observed carefully, the difference is rather distinct. Once a man asked a Chan Master,

“How do you cultivate?”

“I eat, and I sleep.”

“We eat and sleep too. Does this not mean we too are cultivating?”

“No. On the contrary, when you eat, you pick and complain about your food. When you sleep, you toss around in bed with an agitated mind. This is very different from how I eat and sleep.” replied the Chan Master.

The life led by Buddha was one that abided by the Six Paramitas and illuminated the light of prajna wisdom. This differs greatly from that of ordinary people who are always comparing and competing. For example, in

begging for alms, not only did Buddha provide opportunities for devotees to accumulate their merits, he also used this chance to teach the Dharma to them, which is the Paramita of Generosity. When Buddha donned his robe, what he demonstrated was the constant practice of precepts, which is known as the Paramita of Discipline. When he begged house to house and deemed the rich and poor as equals, this is known as the Paramita of Patience. When he washed his own bowl, laid out his sitting mat, and practiced zealously, this is known as the Paramita of Diligence. When he practiced walking meditation, sitting meditation, meditative contemplation, and dwelled deeply in the Dharma, this is known as the Paramita of Concentration. All of the above are how an enlightened practitioner lives his life, which is known as the Paramita of Prajna Wisdom.

4) Guiding Disciples

Since the Buddha's disciples each had their own character, their daily routine differed. Some preferred to meditate inside caves or beneath trees, while some preferred to reach out to people and spread the Dharma. No matter their options, Buddha always encouraged and supported them, and taught them according to their aptitudes and needs. To understand how the Buddha taught, we can begin by looking at his attentiveness, care and instructions to his disciples.

Once, when Buddha was inspecting the Sangha community, he discovered Sariputra—one of Buddha's Ten Principal Disciples, an arhat, and a leader of the Sangha community strolling around the forest late into the night when everyone else had gone to rest. When Buddha asked why he was taking a stroll instead of taking a rest, Sariputra told Buddha that it was a day when the monastery was crowded and lacking beddings, therefore he gave his bed to a young bhiksu to sleep in. The next day, Buddha gathered the assembly to instruct them on the importance of showing respect to the Elders.

When Maudgalyayana realized the evil deeds his mother had enacted before she passed away, he sought advice in the Buddha on ways to pray for and redeem his mother. Buddha instructed him to arrange a banquet as an offering to the monastics on the first day of their return from their summer retreat. The

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merits accumulated from the offering shall release his mother from hell. This became the cause for the Ullambana Festival, which was later advocated by Emperor Wu of Liang and Chan Master Baozhi, a tradition that still thrives to this day.

Purna—the Foremost in Expounding the Dharma, was particularly passionate about propagating the Dharma. When he expressed his wish to go back to his homeland, Sronaparanta, Buddha reminded him of the cruel nature of the kingdom’s people. In reply, Purna tells the Buddha,

“I shall have no regrets. If they berate me, attack me or even kill me, then I shall see it as an offering of my life to the Buddha.”

“Very well then. Since you are prepared to sacrifice yourself for the Truth, you have my blessings.” said the Buddha.

Ananda—the foremost in hearing the Dharma, was the most loyal member of the Sangha community. His handsome appearance became a cause for many troubles. For example, by giving to a maiden two pieces of rice-cake that stuck together as one, he was criticized for being fond of women. In addition, Matanga’s crush on Ananda also prompted many troubles. Each time the Buddha came to his aid and resolved these troubles.

The noble Mahakasyapa was well-cultivated and most respected for his practice of austerities. Once, when he returned to the Sangha community wearing a ragged robe, the Buddha vacated half of his seat for Mahakasyapa as a message to the assembly that he is just as respectable and noble as the Buddha himself.

Mahakasyapa never begged for alms from rich families, because he believed that these wealthy people had already accumulated enough merits from the acts of giving in their previous lives, therefore the field of merit should be spared for the poor to cultivate their fortune. This is the reason that he always went to poor families when begging for alms.

On the contrary, Subhuti—the Foremost in Expounding the Teaching of Emptiness, thought otherwise. Because he felt that the poor were already in need of food, how could he add to their burdens by begging from them. Instead, it is much more effortless for the wealthy to give, therefore he always begged from the rich instead of the poor.

Being aware of these intentions, Buddha spoke to the assembly, “To favor either the poor or the wealthy over another is contrary to the spirit of equality. The Dharma should be practiced with an impartial mind. Regardless of all the existing discriminations and differences in this world, what is most important is that we abide by the spirit of equality if we wish to benefit ourselves and others.”

Buddha was always caring and attentive towards his disciples. For the elderly and sick, Buddha would help them bathe, collect water, and wash their clothes. When Aniruddha fell asleep during a lecture, he was severely reprimanded by the Buddha. Feeling extremely ashamed, Aniruddha vowed to practice diligently, and consequently went blind due to the lack of rest. One day, upon seeing him struggling to thread a needle bereft of eyesight, Buddha helped him and even mended his robe for him. (*Ekottaragama Sutra*)

To the extremely zealous Sronakotivimsa, Buddha taught him that “Spiritual cultivation is like playing the zither. When the strings are too tight or too loose, the zither will not play. Thus it is best to follow the Middle Path.” Following the Buddha’s instructions, Sronakotivimsa felt more peaceful, and attained arhatship swiftly. This is how Buddha guided his disciples.

Towards those who were willing to follow his instructions, Buddha taught them with patience. Towards those who could not, Buddha taught by expedient means. Towards those who were lethargic and passive, Buddha encouraged them to be diligent. Towards those who were rigid or fierce, Buddha taught them the ways of gentleness and caution. Be it intelligent or foolish disciples, Buddha taught according to their aptitudes and needs to help the Sangha community improve and grow.

For example, Cudapanthaka had a very poor memory, therefore Buddha patiently taught him to recite the line, “sweep away the dust, and remove the dirt.” Cudapanthaka abided by Buddha’s instructions and recited the line daily whilst sweeping the ground. By doing so, he eventually became enlightened and well respected.

In fascicle six of the *Sutra of the Wise and Foolish*, when Nidhi the dung carrier, too ashamed of his status, tried to avoid the Buddha, Buddha purposely detoured to run into him. As Nidhi knelt down to apologize to Buddha for

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coming face to face with him as an untouchable, Buddha very kindly replied,

“Would you like to become renounced under me?”

“Am I worthy of becoming the great Buddha’s disciple?” Nidhi replied, confused.

“In my teaching, there is no difference between wealthy or poor, noble or lowly, or caste rankings.” said the Buddha. As a result, Nidhi became renounced, and was eventually well cultivated.

To the Buddha, as long as you treat someone with respect, care, compassion, encouragement, and help them build self-esteem, then they will surely improve and grow.

Buddha established each precept with careful deliberation, always ensuring that the precept was both appropriate and suitable. For example, Kalodayin had a tall and dark appearance. One evening, he went into the village to beg for alms. A pregnant woman came to answer the door and thought this tall and dark bhiksu was a ghost. Seriously frightened, she had a miscarriage. For this reason, Buddha deemed it unsuitable for bhiksus to beg for alms in the evening as well as night time and established the precept for bhiksus to fast after noon.

On another occasion, an engaged lady planned to visit her future mother-in-law with some homemade cakes. As she was baking them, some bhiksus came to beg for alms, so she offered her cakes to them. The cakes were so delicious that many bhiksus returned for more. As the young lady was required to make more cakes, she failed to visit her fiance’s family on time. The groom-to-be became furious and threatened to cancel the engagement. Having heard the news from the lady’s parents, Buddha immediately called for an assembly to establish a precept that required bhiksus to refrain from greed when begging for alms.

Each precept established by the Buddha is a demonstration of the close relationship between Buddhism and daily life. For example, the procedures of posadha, repentance, and tripartite ceremony are similar to the establishment of laws in modern day congress halls, where a bill needs to be read out loud three times in order to be passed. The precepts system can be said to be the earliest form of democratic congress.

Examples of how Buddha taught the Dharma to the world are countless.

Regardless of nobility or peasantry, wealth or poverty, man or woman, of career, race, or faith, Buddha treated all as equals. As stated in “Chapter on Suffering and Joy” of the *Ekottaragama*, “Once the waters from the Four rivers flow into the ocean, they shall no longer bear their old names and instead, as one, be called the ocean. The same goes too with the caste system, be it ksatriya, brahmin, elder, or layman. Once shaven in the house of the Tathagata, all shall don the three robes, learn the monastic way of life, and relinquish their birth name.” This was how Buddha challenged the caste system to achieve true equality.

Take Upali for example. Though he was born a low rank, he was admitted into Buddha’s Sangha community, became renounced, attained enlightenment, and eventually became the Foremost in Upholding Precepts amongst Buddha’s Ten Principal Disciples. When Upali first witnessed the royal princes subsequently becoming renounced under the Buddha, he became saddened by his lowly upbringing, which eliminated his chances of doing the same. Aware of his thoughts, Sariputra said to him, “Buddha’s Dharma is about the attainment of ultimate freedom, equality, and compassion. Regardless of one’s wisdom or career, anyone who is willing to abide by Buddha’s teachings is eligible to become his disciple and attain enlightenment.”

Consequently, Upali received his tonsure from the Buddha, and was introduced to Prince Bhadraka and other royalty, who were reluctant to greet him. Therefore the Buddha said, “The primary task for a renunciant is to subdue one’s arrogance. Since Upali has renounced first, you shall all pay respect to him as your senior.” Bhadraka and the others accepted Buddha’s instructions and humbly paid respect to Upali. (*Abhiniskramana Sutra*)

Back in those days, Buddha would sometimes send his senior disciples to teach bhiksus living in remote areas, unable to abide by the rules and regulations of the Sangha. Upali was among the Buddha’s choices. When there were disputes in Kausambi and Saketa, Buddha would also send the calm and gentle Upali to resolve the disputes.

Once Buddha intended to send Upali to Saketa again, who uncannily declined.

“What is your reason for declining?” asked the Buddha.

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“Dear Buddha, traveling during the rainy season would be rather uncomfortable if my only robe gets soaked by the rain. That is why I cannot oblige your request.” replied Upali. Very touched by Upali’s honesty, Buddha amended the precepts so that bhiksus would be allowed to bring an extra robe with them when they travel.

Being well respected by the community for his self-discipline and gracefulness, Buddha also taught Upali on how to visit the sick, as well as how to prepare food and medicine for sick bhiksus. (X44 No.744)

Buddha taught and guided all disciples with equality, and always gave them chances. For example, he once allowed a drunken Brahmin to become renounced. After becoming sober, the Brahmin became frightened by his new appearance and fled the Sangha. Some disciples questioned Buddha’s decision despite knowing the inevitable outcome. In reply, Buddha explained the extreme rarity for the Brahmin to give rise to such thoughts. That is why he created a cause for his liberation.

Rahula was a naughty and playful novice monk who often teased Buddha’s visitors. One day, Buddha paid a personal visit to Rahula’s living quarters, his demeanor stern. When he took his seat, Rahula collected some water to wash Buddha’s feet, who remained silent until Rahula was done, and pointed to the basin,

“Is this water drinkable?”

“No, Buddha, this water is already dirty, and therefore not drinkable.”

“Your mind is just like this water; originally pure, but now is polluted. Despite your pure practices, your lack of verbal discipline and impure deeds are like water that is tainted and no longer pure.” The Buddha then continued,

“Can this basin be used as an eating bowl?”

“No, Buddha. A foot basin should not be used as a food bowl, because it is too dirty to contain food.” replied Rahula.

“Rahula, you are just like this basin. Despite being a spiritual practitioner, your mind is filled with impurities. How can it then contain the pure Truths?” Buddha then kicked away the basin, causing Rahula to be very scared. He then asked Rahula,

“Are you afraid that the basin would be broken?”

“No, Buddha, it would not matter for a dirty basin to be broken.”

“Rahula, your lack of concern for this basin is similar to the community’s lack of concern for you, because you have no regards for demeanor or respect for others. That is why you make fun of people. No one will care for someone like you.” replied the Buddha.

His entire body covered in sweat, Rahula felt extremely ashamed and vowed to never lie again. Working very hard to correct his behavior, Rahula subsequently became known as the Foremost in Esoteric Practices. Not only was Buddha strict to Rahula, he also demonstrated compassion in his strictness.

Other than Rahula, Buddha was also very caring towards the novices. One day, Katyayana, who was propagating the Dharma in a distant land, sent his disciple back to Jetavana Vihara to see the Buddha. Upon seeing Katyayana’s disciple arriving from afar, he instructed Ananda to add an extra bed in his room for the young novice. For a great enlightened sage to show such delicate concern, how can this faraway disciple not be touched? This is the human empathy shown by Buddha the great sage.

There were also times when members of the Sangha community failed to cope with the monastic lifestyle. The Buddha obliged their wish to return to family and mundane life though still as practicing Buddhists. This indeed helped maintain their self-esteem.

Not only did Buddha teach by example of his present life, he also used lessons from his previous lives. For example, the *Sutra of the Nine-Colored Deer* tells the story of betrayal that befell the nine-colored deer. In *Sutra of the Collection of the Six Perfections*, Buddha was the Deer King who took the pregnant doe’s place as a sacrifice. In the *Older Sutra of Parables*, Buddha was the parrot that attempted to extinguish a forest fire by small mouthfuls of water. In the *Prince Sudana Sutra*, Prince Sudana vows to practice generosity to help and liberate sentient beings, and has no regrets in undergoing extreme suffering. “Chapter on King Dighiti” in the *Madhyama Agama* records the story of Dighiti who returns anger with kindness. Many times Dighavu, the son of Dighiti, had the chance to take revenge on Brahmadata for his father, but every time he recalls how his father never held grudges against his enemies, and was always kind, remembering how his father taught him never to make

enemies, three times he withheld his desire to kill. Such thoughts of forgiveness touched Brahmadata, who vowed to never cause harm on another. These are all examples of teaching and compassion which the Buddha had bequeathed to the world.

5) Benefiting and Serving All Beings

After attaining enlightenment Buddha traveled across the Five Indias, from Magadha in the South to Sravasti in the North, from Varanasi to Vaishali, along the Ganges, and across mountain ridges and steep cliffs. All for the purpose of propagating the Dharma and benefiting sentient beings without rest.

Throughout the forty-nine years of his endeavors in Dharma propagation, Buddha spent the first twenty-one days teaching the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. After that, he catered to the aptitudes of his audience and taught the *Agamas* for twelve years, the *Vaipulya Sutras* for eight years, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* for twenty-two years, and then the *Lotus Sutra* and *Nirvana Sutra* for eight years altogether. These were the teachings delivered in front of an assembly, coupled with the countless instances of individual teachings, through which Buddha had changed the lives of innumerable people.

Other than the leaders of other traditions, faiths, royalty, and wealthy elders, sovereigns such as Bimbisara, Prasenjit, Vaidehi, and Mallika were also among Buddha's followers. His teachings are like a boundless ocean that was home to every being, and alike the sun and moon that illuminates the Earth. To merchants, Buddha would speak of the ways of management. To farmers, he would teach them the ways of farming. To statesmen, he would speak of the ways of governance. He always taught according to the conditions of his disciples, caring for them as equals. Markedly, Buddha did not just practice inside his Vihara, he also reached out to people in difference places with his disciples, teaching them the Dharma, and even helping to resolve disputes.

For example, in the *Attadanta Sutta* from the *Samyuktagama*, Buddha helped settle a dispute between the Sakyians and the Koliyans by advising them to lower their clubs, and share the water resources peacefully as equals to survive the drought together.

Buddhism developed rapidly in India during those days. For this reason,

kings and statesmen sought the Buddha for advice. The site where King Bimbisara parked his carriage up on Vulture Peak still remains today.

When still as Siddhartha, on his journey to finding a way to cultivation, he once passed the kingdom of Magadha. Being so moved by his demeanor and determination King Bimbisara offered him half of his kingdom, but Siddhartha declined and instead promised to return to guide him if he ever attained enlightenment.

After becoming the Buddha, he kept his promise and returned to Magadha with his disciples to teach the Dharma to King Bimbisara, who in return built the Venuvana Vihara for the Buddha to settle the Sangha community and propagate the Dharma. Whenever Buddha stayed at the Vihara, the king would visit him for guidance.

Years later Devadatta incited Prince Ajatashatru, son of King Bimbisara, to usurp the throne by imprisoning his father. Not only did Ajatashatru feel sorrow in becoming King, when he thought of his father's love and kindness, he felt so much remorse and regret that he fell ill. Jivaka the doctor advised him, "Your Majesty, doctors may cure your physical illness, but we cannot cure your spiritual illness. All this suffering is coming from your mind. If you are willing to see Buddha, the supreme potentate of doctors, he will surely cure your illness."

When Ajatashatru willingly went to the Buddha, the Buddha said to him: "In this world, only two kinds of people are able to find true happiness. The first is one who practices virtuous deeds and never begets transgressions; the second is one who has created transgressions but is willing to repent. Now, if you are willing to repent and redress yourself, then you can still be a good person. From now on, you shall govern your people with righteousness instead of unwholesome deeds. Be benevolent in policy making, and not only shall your good name spread wide and far, you will also be respected by all."

Upon hearing Buddha's words, Ajatashatru fell to his knees and broke into tears. With much gratitude, he regained hope and faith in starting anew. (*Amitayurdhyana Sutra*)

In the *Varsakara Sutra* from the *Madhyamagamas* (T01 No.26), a story depicts Ajatashatru's intention to conquer Vrji. The king sent his minister,

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Varsakara, to inform Buddha of the plan. Knowing the minister's intentions well beforehand, Buddha turned to Ananda and spoke about the virtues of Vrji, "The people of this kingdom often gather to discuss good causes....the king and his ministers share a harmonious relationship, and people are always respectful to one another....it would be difficult to overcome such a great kingdom." Varsakara understood Buddha's intention and left without speaking further. Judiciously, Buddha was able to prevent a war and bloodshed from occurring.

Another who shared a deep connection with Buddha was King Prasenajit of Kosala. Being obese, the king was often troubled by shortness of breath. Thus the Buddha taught the following verse,

*One shall be mindful
In always dieting on food intake;
In doing so, all perceptions will be light,
With good digestion and longevity in life.*

What this means is that we shall always remind ourselves to control our food intake. Never overeat to add burden to the body, so that one can stay light, comfortable, healthy, and long-lived. (*Samyuktama*, T02 No.99)

When King Prasenajit was grief-stricken by his mother's death, Buddha said to him,

Ever since ancient times, humans have experienced the following four most horrifying matters:

- 1) Where there is birth, there will be death.*
- 2) When sickness strikes, one's body becomes gaunt and unsightly.*
- 3) Upon death, the consciousness will leave the body.*
- 4) After death, one will be forever separated from loved ones.*

No one can be exempt from the rules of impermanence. No matter how intimate, loved ones will eventually be separated. No one can escape death. Instead of grieving over someone's death, one may as well accumulate some merits for them, which will truly benefit the deceased.

This indeed opened up King Prasenajit's mind and helped him recover from his grief.

This story, told in the *Sutra on King Prasenajit Covered in Dust After His Mother Passed Away* (T02 No.122), points out the inevitable truths of old

age, sickness, death, and rebirth. Whenever there is birth, there will be death; whenever there is arising, there will be extinction. No one is exempt from the rule of rebirth. Nevertheless, the Buddhist perspective on rebirth depicts an unending cycle of birth, death, rebirth, death, and so on, highlighting the fact that birth is not the beginning, whilst death is not the end. True wisdom is what enables us to discover an undying life within the continuously changing cycle of birth and death.

The compassionate Buddha never overlooked anyone who shared an affiliation with him. No matter how ignorant or stubborn, he always guided them through life with hope and Dharma. For example, using the parable of the Kusa grass, Buddha gracefully guided a woman out of her grievance over her dead son. (*A Collection of Parables*, T04 No. 208)

Other than speaking to devotees to help resolve their problems, sometimes the Buddha also visited the homes of troubled families. The most well known example being Buddha's teaching to Sudatta's daughter-in-law, Sujata. "True beauty lies not within a good appearance or a nice body. These are not worth being proud of. Only those with a graceful heart and conduct, womanly elegance, and respectability can be called a true beauty." Furthermore, Buddha also taught her the Five Virtues to adequately care for her parents-in-law. As a result, Sujata requested the Buddha to ascribe the precepts to her, vowing to always live as an Upasika who followed the Buddhist ways of family. Appreciative, Sudatta gave Sujata his blessings, and this became an exemplary story of how Buddha helped resolve family issues (*Sujata Sutra*, T2 No.142).

A happy family can only be created with the presence of a compassionate father, dutiful sons, loving siblings, a loyal husband and wife who are respectful, tolerant, and understanding as well as forgiving towards one another. Buddha always instructed his disciples and devotees with the use of parables and inspiration to help them realize that the right path can be trod without the need for punishments or reprimands. Not only does this preserve a person's dignity, it can also help avert wrongdoings.

Many women and children were also among Buddha's disciples. For example, Lady Mallika was a pious believer of the Three Jewels who strictly upheld the pure precepts. Together with her husband King Prasenajit, they took

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refuge under the Buddha and propagated the Dharma to their people. Their daughter, Srimala, made ten great vows and sounded her lion's roar by speaking the Mahayana teachings. She too, took refuge and propagated the Dharma together with her husband, King Yasomitra of Ayodhya. Srimala paid special attention to children's education, and summoned every child above the age of seven into the palace on a regular basis to educate them. (*Sutra on the Lion's Roar of Srimala*, T12 No.353)

Lady Visakha, mother of Migara and loyal patron of Buddhism, not only provided for the daily necessities of Buddha, bhiksus, and bhiksunis; she even gave away her pearl dress to build the Mrgaramatuh Prasada. It can be said that swift progress could not have been possible without the dedication of these Dharma patrons.

In the *Maharatnakuta Sutra*, the enlightened eight-year-old Naga girl becomes the teacher of Manjusri, the Bodhisattva with supreme wisdom. This little girl also voiced questions to the Buddha on how to eradicate delusion and attain enlightenment, astonishing the entire assembly. She thusly inspired faith in sravakas and pratyekabuddhas to follow the Greater Vehicle.

Having spent his time teaching the Dharma in the human world, Buddha also values children highly. One day when Buddha was out, he saw a few children playing with fish beside the river. Very gently, he reminded these children that animals also have fear and pain just like human beings, that they too should and have compassion for all forms of lives by protecting and cherishing them.

Once impermanence strikes, it may be hard to be reborn as a human being. Thus Buddha told stories on the importance of diligently serving and helping others, and also to possess Right View and Right Thought.

In the *Sutra of Parables*, a man traveled across the wilderness when, out of nowhere, came a charging elephant. Being very frightened and having nowhere to run, the man found a dry well and climbed down the well along an old vine. As he was about to reach the bottom of the well, four giant snakes suddenly appeared. Too afraid to descend any lower, he clinged tightly onto the vine. Then a white and a black mouse both began to nibble on the vine. At that very moment of life and death, five bees began lingering around the mouth of

the well and released five drops of honey into the traveler's mouth. Being so absorbed with the beautiful and sweet taste of honey, all the existing dangers had been precluded in the traveler's mind.

In this story, the elephant symbolizes impermanence which follows closely behind. The dry well represents the deep pool of birth and death. The four giant snakes represent the Four Great Elements—earth, water, wind, and fire that comprise our physical body, which are threaded together by the line of life, that is, the old vine. The black and white mice are interchanging days and nights that nibble away our time, while the five drops of honey represent the Five Desires—wealth, lust, fame, food, and sleep. Indulgence on the small drops of sweet desire are enough to cause the traveler to forget the dangers that surround life. This indeed is a profound and astute story that calls for deep contemplation.

In addition, Buddha used “the Four Types of Friends”—that some friends are like a flower, like a scale, like a mountain, and like the Earth, to explain the types of friends that one should make (*Commentary on the Foshuo Bei Sutra*, T17 No.790). He also used the story about the blind men and the elephant to show that ignorant sentient beings are like blind men touching an elephant. Their biased views only take them further from the truth about matters in this world, unable to see the whole picture. (*Dirghama Sutra*, T01 No.01). For this reason, the most dreadful nature in this world is neither poverty, hunger nor fear. It is ignorance, making one unreasonable, have distorted and evil views, and do unwholesome deeds. Not only do they suffer, their actions would also affect others and the rest of the world.

Malunkyaputta, a bhikṣu who was constantly perplexed by questions such as “Is the world permanent or impermanent?” or “Does life still exist after death?” once went to the Buddha for answers. In reply, Buddhas used the parable of a man who is shot by an arrow but refuses to go to a doctor for treatment until he found out what material the arrow was made of, what shape the arrowhead bore, and what the name and physique was of the craftsman who made the arrow, (*Sutra on the Parable of the Arrow*, T01 No.26)

Only fools would ponder over such metaphysical yet meaningless questions. The humanistic Buddha is more affected with issues concerning real life. For example, parables such as the foolish doorkeeper, killing another son

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to balance the pole, yelling at water, the three-storied house, foolish man eating the salt, storing milk in the cow, and flogging oneself are all stories about the absurdity and folly of ignorant minds.

Ignorance is much more frightening than mistakes. The difference is that a mistake can be corrected just in the same way one gets back up when fallen, while ignorance is like walking in the dark without any light. Thus humans need the light of wisdom to dispel the darkness in their minds. Just as has been said, “A thousand-year dark room can be illuminated instantly with one single light; while endless kalpas of ignorance can be instantly enlightened with one single moment of wisdom.”

Other than the above, did Buddha ever get aggravated? Did Buddha ever rebuke? Did Buddha lose his temper? We can find in the sutras that, occasionally, Buddha’s compassion would be expressed in the form of anger and even reprimand. However, he reprimanded and got angry in a lesser crude way than ordinary people.

For example, Buddha admonishes by using expressions such as “you have no shame,” “you know not what afflictions are,” “you have no respect,” “kindness is absent in your mind,” “you have no compassion,” “you are inhumane.” By “inhumane” it is meant “you are not acting like a human,” or “you are unhuman.” It can be forbidding to have this said to you by the Buddha, because as explained in the sutras, to be “inhumane” means one who is “not laughing when you are supposed to, not being joyful on joyful occasions, not being kind when kindness is needed, not correcting oneself in the face of evil, not feeling joy in seeing virtue.”

The so-called “dutifulness” in Buddhism is different from that in the mundane world, which is personal and limited. The act of renunciation is usually criticized by society on the assumption of negligence of one’s duty towards parents, believing that: “One’s body, hair and skin have been bestowed by one’s parents, and therefore must not be harmed.” This is untrue. In fact, the sutras have recorded stories about Buddha returning to the palace to teach the Dharma to his family and relatives. (*Abhiniskramana Sutra*, T03 No.190)

“Chapter on the Mahaparinirvana of Mahaprajapati Gotami” of the *Ekottaragama Sutra* (T02 No.125) reveals records of the Buddha carrying his

father's coffin and teaching the Dharma to his deceased mother. Even when his aunt Mahaprajapati entered nirvana, Buddha also led Nanda, Rahula, and Ananda in lighting the fire for her. These are all examples of Buddha's dutifulness to his family.

The *Ekottaragama Sutra* also emphasizes Buddha's continued love for his people despite having relinquished his throne and becoming renounced. When King Virudhaka of Kosala set out to conquer Kapilavastu, Buddha attempted to stop his army by sitting in the middle of the road, beneath the scorching sun, reminding the King that only the shade provided by one's relations is greatest. This stopped the army and saved the Sakya clan from a bloodbath. From this it can be seen that Buddha had not only never relinquished his parents and family, but that he was always loyal and protective of his motherland.

According to the *Xingqiji Jing* (T04 No.197), Buddha experienced ten calamities such as having his foot pierced by a wooden spear, bleeding caused by a rolling boulder, eating horse-grain, practices of austerity, headache, back pain, and joint pains. King Prasenajit once asked Buddha,

“Why is it that even someone of your unparalleled virtue and magnificence would still experience all such adversities?”

“Your Majesty, the Dharma body of buddhas and tathagatas are their true eternal body. Such adversities as foot injuries, begging for milk, taking of medicine, and even nirvana, as well as distribution of relics to be enshrined in stupas are merely manifestations of expedient means to deliver sentient beings. By calling upon their awareness in the prevailing existence of karmic retributions that they may, out of fear, eradicate all transgressions and practice all virtuous deeds for the attainment of eternal Dharma body, longevity, and Pure Land.” replied the Buddha.

Upon hearing this, King Prasenajit's queries were thus cleared and his mind filled with joy from gaining a deeper understanding of Buddha's profound compassion.

All of the viewpoints stated above bear the purpose of demonstrating Buddha's humanistic lifestyle. Nevertheless, it is natural for people to deify the human Buddha to illustrate his sacredness. For example, legends about Siddhartha being born through his mother's right armpit in Lumbini Garden,

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“Holding a Flower and Responding with a Smile”
(East Cliff Rock Carvings in Zizhong County, Sichuan)

the marks of thousand-spoke Dharma wheels at the soles of his feet, and how Buddha always levitated three feet above ground. In theory and significance, Buddha is indeed liberated and has unified with the universe. But continual emphasis on his supernatural powers does not necessarily aid in the demonstration of Buddha's greatness.

The Buddha, as a being of the human world, has always asserted the key tenets of normality, simplicity, impartiality, and pertinence as well as humanism. In trust with these beliefs we hold true to the original traits of Humanistic Buddhism, pertaining to its relevance

to all aspects of life as well as its universal propagation. Through Buddha's chronicles we are able to perceive his self-effacing way of life. This authenticity will not only aid to engender greater faith but to also encourage, in the world of today, a greater acceptance of him. My affirmation of the belief that Buddha is a human being, not a god, and in his worldly allure is embodied in the Buddha Memorial Center. Ultimately, Humanistic Buddhism, as taught and lived by the Buddha, is a truthful and genuine philosophy.