



美國波士頓行願淨宗學會 - 行願蓮海月刊 Amita Buddhism Society - Boston, USA

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December 30, 2014

Traditional Chinese Culture and a Harmonious Society

Education on Raising the Quality of Spirituality

16 April 2007, Zhengzhou University

Respected leaders of various universities, honored guests and fellow students, Greetings to all!

It is indeed a great honor for me to be invited by the leaders of Henan province to participate in this grand ceremony in memory of Huang-Di, the Yellow Emperor, to have this wonderful opportunity to visit and to learn from your university, and to report to you what I have practiced and learned on traditional culture.

The Source of Harmony, Peace and Happiness

Descendants of the Chinese people call themselves children of the Yellow Emperor. Recently my clan showed me the treasured family archive containing thirty-three volumes of my family history, the “Hsu” clan, which can be traced back 4500 years. This last name has been passed on from generations to generations and I am the 136th generation of the Hsu clan.

The Yellow Emperor had twenty-five sons. The last name “Hsu” was passed on by his second son Chang-Yi. This information can also be found in the archives and the historical records on China. As I start to trace back my roots and their sources, I begin to understand clearly what it means when people say that we are all children of the Yellow Emperor and that we are of the same family especially when I am being invited to participate in this grand ceremony in memory of the Yellow Emperor. I feel a very warm and close kinship to this event.

In the past, in China, most of the families kept a detailed record of their family history. Knowing about the family history people naturally feel more affectionate towards their clan. Only those who love their families also love their country. Gradually people learn to expand their love towards their race, towards all people including heaven, earth and all things to finally realise that people of this world are really of one big family. Therefore, the concept of universal harmony is entirely possible. Our family archive helps us to understand its deep underlying meaning.

Even more important, family’s traditional injunctions can be found in the family archives. They contain records passed down from generations to generations. This is how the elders passed down the essence of their life long experiences to the next generations. Those records are usually comprehensive and thorough, recorded in words and served as the paragon for the descendents. Their descendents then learn from them, their thousands of years of wisdom and experience to keep themselves from making the same mistakes. They are the cultural treasure of humanity. They are also the source of our material and spiritual civilisation. Today the human race

has neglected the tradition and the accumulated wisdom of their forefathers, has opted for new innovations, and erroneously thinks that the human race is in great progress. Not until they are at the end of their road will they begin to value the traditional culture and the wisdom of our forefathers.

Even though today our technology is advanced, at the same time, our society is facing extreme poverty more so than ever before. There are two kinds of poverty. One is lack of needed necessities. The other lacks spiritual culture. Recently a fellow student from Beijing invited me to talk about “How to Assist Those Who Are impoverished by the Lack of Spirituality and Culture”. Apparently it has become a serious problem in our society. Let us think about this carefully. What is more important, materialism or spirituality? Let us take a look at all the sages of this world. Should we live a life in poverty?

In China we all know Confucius and Mencius lived in poverty. Yan-Hui was Confucius’s best student. Confucius often praised him. However, among all his classmates, he was the poorest. He ate out of roughly woven bamboo ware and only had a ladle made of gourd. He didn’t even own a rice bowl or a cup. This was his living condition but he was very happy. His happiness came from being able to practice what he had learned. Therefore, we know happiness does not come from owning material things. This is also how we should look at our current problems.

All the saints, sages, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas had already demonstrated for us that the enjoyment of owning material things cannot make us happy. Shakyamuni Buddha was born a prince in India. He gave up his throne when he was nineteen years old, along with it, the life of luxury. Instead he went in search for knowledge. For the remainder of his life he only owned three pieces of clothing and one bowl. He only ate one meal a day and slept underneath the tree. He did not think this was suffering. He was actually very happy. At that time countless number of kings, ministers, rich elders became his students and wanted to learn from him. Buddha did not accept their offerings. He never owned or built a temple in his life. Occasionally he accepted invitation to give lectures and lessons in homes. He always left soon afterwards. He went into nirvana in the woods not under a roof but in the fields. He demonstrated for us that true happiness comes from spiritual realisation. It has nothing to do with wealth or fame or because of the type of life we lead. Only when we truly understand what this means will we “let go”.

The Self-Nature Embodies All

Shakyamuni Buddha was extremely intelligent. We can just imagine the excellent opportunities he had. At age 19 he went in search for the truth. He had the chance to meet all the great religious gurus and teachers in the academic field. After he studied with them for twelve years, at age thirty, he knew they were not able to help him find a satisfactory answer to the three questions that he had. Firstly, why do we have to suffer birth, old age, sickness, death, unquenchable desires, unavoidable departure of the loved ones and having to live with those we hate etc. Secondly, what causes the transmigration of the souls in the six realms? Thirdly, are there other worlds other than the six realms? When he finally realised that none of his teachers could help him find the right answer, he sat down underneath a Bodhi tree in deep meditation. He stopped thinking and let go of all his knowledge. The minute he let go, he became fully enlightened. All his doubts and questions disappeared.

Shakyamuni Buddha put on an act for us to help us understand what keeps us in between the worldly and the spiritual. The key is to “let go”. The “worldly” kind of deep meditation and concentration can break through space and dimensions; however, without truly letting go of the wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments, our minds are still in the worldly realm not in the spiritual realm. In other words, worldly knowledge cannot help us attain enlightenment. Shakyamuni Buddha studied for twelve years and finally he had to let go.

In China we also have a Buddha. He is the sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism, the Great Master Hui-Neng. He demonstrated for us that he was able to reach full enlightenment even when he was illiterate, had never read a book or gone to school. He became fully awakened when the fifth patriarch explained to him the meaning of the Diamond Sutra. When the fifth patriarch read the passage that “our mindfulness are freed of attachments”, the Great Master Hui-Neng immediately understood the meaning and became fully enlightened. He understood the importance of letting go his wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments. The key to enlightenment is “letting go”.

The moment Great Master Hui-Neng let go, he reached the same state of awakening as Shakyamuni Buddha sitting underneath the Bodhi tree. According to the Platform Sutra, Great Master Hui-Neng spoke of the state of his penetrating understanding. He made the following statements. “How marvellous, our self-nature was originally pure!” Our self-nature is our original nature, our true nature. The ancient Chinese also said that “human nature was originally good and kind”, meaning that the original mind was pure and not contaminated. “How marvellous, our self-nature cannot be kindled or extinguished!” It means that there is actually no birth or death. “How marvellous, our self-nature is able to embody all!” Buddha, in the Avatamsaka Sutra states that “all beings have the same perfect wisdom and virtue as Buddha”. Our self-nature embodies the same immeasurable perfect wisdom, virtues, abilities and good fortune as Buddha. It was not until Great Master Hui-Neng became fully awakened did he realise this truth. Today we are merely confused. Our state of full awakening is not lost. It is just inactive. “How marvellous, our self-nature remains unmoved!” He meant that our minds are without the fluctuating thoughts. Ordinary people’s minds are constantly swaying and fluctuating but those wandering thoughts are not a real substance. They are merely thoughts wandering. Our true minds do not wander. Lastly, he commented: “How marvellous, all stems from self-nature!” This passage is very important. Where does our universe come from? Where do our ten realms come from? Where does the transmigration in the six realms come from? They all stem from our self-nature. Thus Buddha said in the Avatamsaka Sutra that “all phenomena derive from the mind and change only when there is a change in mind’s consciousness”.

The fifth patriarch was really pleased after Hui-Neng made those five statements. It proved to him that Hui-Neng had reached the state of true awakening. The fifth patriarch then handed to Hui-Neng his mantle and alms bowl and made him his successor. At that time Hui-Neng was only twenty-four years old.

Great Master Hui-Neng demonstrated the importance of “letting go”. If we do not let go of our wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments, we will always be just ordinary. Only when we let go, will we be a Buddha. We must realise that “all beings originally were Buddhas”. It is when our self-nature is at its purest. Today when we talk about helping those who are spiritually and culturally poor, according to Buddhism, all we

need to do is to close the gap between the spiritually rich and the poor. In a perfect state, there are no wandering or discriminating thoughts or attachments.

If we truly understand those two acts put on by Shakyamuni Buddha and the Great Master Hui-Neng, we will also be at ease, gain great wisdom and the richness that enable us to attain great virtues and capabilities. The fact that originally we are all Buddhas makes it easy for us to learn the sacred teachings to regain the virtues of our self-nature. Therefore, we build our confidence from knowing that our self-nature was originally pure and good. Then we know how to proceed.

Return to Simplicity, the Truth and Our Self-Nature

Among all people, the Chinese truly understand about education. They understand its intent and its importance. Five thousand years ago our ancestors already said that human nature was originally good and kind. The Analects of Confucius also states this fact. Was this an original statement made by Confucius? No, Confucius merely narrated what he learned from his ancestors. He never made an original statement. Shakyamuni Buddha said the same thing. He said that what he taught us was taught by ancient Buddhas. This “ancient Buddha” is our original self-nature not one from the outside.

Therefore, education is very important to the Chinese people. The first eight passages in the Three Words Scripture were handed down from our ancestors. It says, “At the very beginning, the self-nature of humankind was good. Even though their self-nature was very similar, their habits are very different. If people are not taught, they can easily lose their original self-nature. The key to teaching is single-mindedness”. These passages were the guiding principle of spiritual and culture education that transcends time and space. It transcends time and space because it is the universal truth. When we act contrary to the truth, we will encounter many problems and catastrophes. After realising this fact that this is just the way it is, we will naturally choose the right path to follow that is healthy and sublime, to surpass this state of being just ordinary so we can be a sage as well.

When the Three Words Scripture states that “at the very beginning”, it is not talking about the time when we are born. It means “originally”. Our self-nature was originally good and kind. It still is, forever unchanged at its purest state. Why have we become bad? The following passage, “even though our self-nature was very similar, our habits are very different” gives us the reason. The key to this passage centres on the word “habits”. As for our self-nature, we have exactly the same natural capacity, virtue, looks and utilisation like a sage. However, when we are confused, we only follow our habits. Most people are influenced by their immediate environments. Thus education plays an important role. If children are not taught when still young, they will change, dictated by the change of their environments. When they are in a bad environment, they become bad because children learn from their environments. What the children learn from the outside are not qualities of their original self-nature. Thus we need education.

How do we teach the children? We teach them by using the method of “single-mindedness”. In Buddhism we have the Three Learnings. “Concentration” is the key to our learning. “Single-mindedness” is the key to deep concentration. Deep concentration comes from abiding the discipline. From deep concentration we gain wisdom.

Only when we have wisdom can we truly help solve our problems.

The current education teaches students many different subjects. What are the effects? Even though the students do gain knowledge but they have become impatient and impetuous. Those qualities are the exact opposite of their self-nature. It becomes difficult for them to achieve any spirituality. Academically they also need this concentration to be successful. If they become impatient and impetuous they can never succeed in anything they do.

Education begins from Having a Loving Relationship between Parents and Children

Today the whole world is trying to find a solution to resolve conflicts, and a way to restore stability and peace. To thoroughly solve this problem, we need to rely on the culture education passed down from our ancestor, the Yellow Emperor.

There are basically five moral relationships. There is a natural loving relationship between parents and children. The leaders and those being led have mutual obligations and duties. Within a family, husband and wife have their distinct functions. There is a proper order between the old and the young. Friends should be trustworthy. These five basic moral relationships are not invented or created by anyone. They are the inborn virtues of all beings. In another word, it is the way it is. It is in accord with the law and order of the Nature. “Dao” is the order of Nature. It is a “virtue” when we act according to Nature. It is a “moral conduct” when we act in accordance with the law of Nature. If we go against it, we will encounter many man-made and natural catastrophes and problems.

The traditional culture education begins with the loving relationship between parents and children. Presently there is very little love between most parents and children. If we watch children who are three or four months old, the love they have towards their parents is unconditional. This loving relationship deteriorates as children grow older. That is because both parents and children act out of habits. Out of this confusion they have created many social problems.

The main purpose of Chinese education is to keep this inborn loving relationship between parents and children intact over their lifetime. From then on, children learn to expand their love to include the whole family, the whole clan, the whole neighbourhood, the whole village, their political party, the society, the country and the whole humanity. In the book, Standards for Being a Good Student and Child, it says that “we should love all people”. We need to expand our love to include beings of all the realms without any thought of hurting them in our words or deeds.

The Intended Purpose of the Traditional and Culture Education in China

True and sincere love must be practiced in our daily lives in the way we treat people and the way we handle our business. Otherwise, what we learn is merely academic. We will not be able to solve problems. Only when we put the teachings of Confucius, Shakyamuni Buddha and Lao-Tze into practice will we be able to gain the ultimate wisdom and be benefited. Just as what Confucius said: “We are the happiest when we can practice what

we have learned.” Buddha also said that “our hearts are filled with happiness when we truly understand the Dharma.”

When we put this concept of love into practice we would naturally respect other people. We respect people because we love them. If we do not understand this concept then we really do not understand the meaning of love. Even when other people do not respect me, I would still respect them. If they do not love me, I would still love them. This is how we practice according to the teachings of Confucius, the Buddha and Lao-Tse. If people do not practice what they learn, they have only touched the surface of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

According to Confucianism, there are five steps to learning. They are erudition, examination, careful consideration, clear identification, and the actual practice. The first four steps are the methods of learning. They do not include the actual practice. The actual practice has to do with respecting and loving the others especially those who made mistakes. If we belittle those who made mistakes we are wrong. We must know that they were merely acting out of habits. They did not act according to their self-nature of pure goodness. If we were originally all Buddhas; they, too, are all-knowing, good and pure. Therefore, we must not look down on them. The actual practice helps us truly understand and be what we have truly learned.

The second moral relationship is on the relationship between the leaders and those being led. For example, the owners of a business are usually leaders. Their hired helps worked for them. Both have their obligations and duties to each other. The love existing between their relationships is now called “obligations and duties”.

There are also distinct functions between the husbands and wives. Their functions are their duties to their family. Families are formed by husbands and wives. Families are the core of society. They act like cells in our body. Each family has two major functions. It has to financially support the family and to properly raise the children. Usually the husband supports the family and the wife raises the children. The wife’s duties are actually more important than the husband’s duties. In traditional Chinese culture children are heirs to carry on the family name and tradition. It is really not important how many children we have but whether we actually have an heir to carry on the family tradition and business which is much more important. This depends entirely on how well the children are being raised.

Therefore, traditionally whether we have a sage in a family depends entirely on the mother. Confucius was taught and raised by his mother. So was Mencius. All the ancient wise emperors were raised by their mother. Therefore, Chinese call their wives “Tai-Tai” which means a holy person. This title was created in the Zhou dynasty. The three founding emperors of the Zhou dynasty were all holy men. Emperor Wen’s grandmother was Tai-Jiang. His mother was Tai-Ren. His own wife was “Tai-Si” who gave birth to Emperor Wu and Zhou-Gong. According to the Chinese history, all three, Emperor Wen, Emperor Wu and Zhou-Gong were sages. Thus the three first ladies of Zhou dynasty were called the “Three Tais”. Henceforth the name “Tai-Tai” was created.

All families hope that they have a sage in their families. Thus the title “Tai-Tai” signifies the importance of being the wife! When Tai-Ren was pregnant with Emperor Wen, she put great emphasis on in-utero education. She knew her thoughts and actions during pregnancy would greatly influence her child while in the in-utero stage. Therefore, she let go all her unkind thoughts, words and actions during her pregnancy. The baby born was

Emperor Wen.

The Zhou dynasty lasted eight hundred years. It is the longest dynasty in the Chinese history. Thus the name “Tai-Tai” implies the heavy responsibility and duty carried on by the wives. Otherwise, no matter how brilliant a career the husbands may have, without an heir to carry on the business and the family tradition, their achievements equal to zero.

Another relationship exists between brothers and sisters. There is a natural order among them. Between friends, their relationship should be trustworthy. Thus the word “love”, when applied to different relationships, is called by different names. Therefore, the true intent of an education for the past five thousand years in China, from the time of birth to adulthood and old age, all centres on how to carry on a true, sincere and loving relationship (the five moral relationships) with the people around us.

Therefore, we know among the five steps to learning: erudition, examination, careful consideration, clear identification and the actual practice, the actual practice is most important. The actual practice involves personal cultivation of letting go the five desires, the six sensations and the desire for fame and wealth. Buddhism puts great emphasis on self-cultivation to abstain from doing all evils and to do all that is good. The traditional Chinese teachings talk about being trustworthy and loyal in words, being sincere and respectful in actions, curbing of anger, ridding of desires, changing to be better and mending our mistakes. Buddhism teaches us the same, to diligently cultivate our self-discipline, deep concentration and wisdom, to extinguish our greed, anger and ignorance, to abstain from evil deeds and to do all that is good. It is important that we cultivate ourselves. Therefore, we need to put our loving-kindness and duties to our fellow humankind over our own desires for material gain. Only then can we truly correct our behaviours and be able to help the others.

Only when we are at peace and in harmony with ourselves will we be able to help the others. We will then be able to treat each other equally, to live together in harmony, and to gain permanent peace and happiness. When we are easily influenced by the external elements such as fame and profits, the temptation of wealth, sex, fame and just being lazy, it would be very difficult for us to be successful. Therefore, we need to be alert, not be tempted by our desires or afflicted by our bad habits that keep us from our self-nature. Otherwise, our actions will lead us astray and we will suffer many bad consequences as the result.

Our Natural Environment Changes according to the Changes of Our Minds

This year we have experienced unpredictable weather changes. Our winter has become warmer while the weather in spring still feels like winter. The ancient people called this “signs of heaven”. The Nature is giving us warning signals which means that it is time for us to reflect on what we have been doing that is wrong. Buddhism is thorough in its explanation of this phenomenon. It says that “our environment changes according to the changes of our minds” and that “all derives from the mind”.

Our physical, personal and natural environments all change according to the changes of our minds. When we are kind-hearted, our environments will be kind to us. The sun and the moon shine clearly and brightly. The weather is in accord. However, when our hearts are filled with the unnatural elements such as unkindness,

selfishness, greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance, our environments also become abnormal. We will encounter many problems and catastrophes. The Shurangama Sutra states clearly that when we become excessively greedy we will incur flooding; when we are filled with anger, we will have eruption of volcanoes and a rise in weather temperature. Strong winds are caused by people's ignorance while earthquakes are caused by their arrogance. There is arrogance when people are being unfair. Greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance are the causes of the previously mentioned four types of catastrophes. Therefore, Buddha taught us that the only way we can resolve those catastrophes is when we diligently cultivate our discipline, deep concentration and wisdom and when we extinguish our greed, anger and ignorance. This is proven by the lab experiments done by the Japanese scientist Dr Emoto.

Indeed, our environment changes according to the change of our minds. If our minds are at their purest and kindest, all the external disasters will resolve by themselves. When we truly understand this principle, we understand the meaning "see through". As we finally understand the truth, we must diligently put them into practice. It is necessary that we let go of our greed, anger, ignorance and arrogance. We need to abstain completely from doing all evil and cultivating our goodness. As a result, we will be able to accumulate many merits and virtues.

Reflecting on the Thought: "Humans can Triumph over Nature"

Today we have advanced technology. People are addicted to its convenience. However, there are few who think that advanced technology has no real benefits to humanity. At its worst, advanced technology can annihilate the whole human specie. There are already telltale signs. Those who are into technology feel that humans can triumph over nature by changing the law of Nature. The fact is humans did change the Nature but not its laws. The abnormalities we are experiencing now are its response. For example, there is a change in the earth's crust formation, the rise in the sea level and the global warming are all its warning signals. We must wake up soon before our planet earth is no longer fit for human living. So have we triumphed over Nature or is it the other way around?

Many would argue that the ancient Chinese said that "humans can triumph over Nature". Its meaning has always been misinterpreted by many. What it really means is that in deep concentration, we will be able to master the Nature. We have the ability to restore our natural environments back to normality because our environments will change according to the change of our minds. When we are in deep concentration we naturally let go our wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments. When our minds are back to normal, naturally, our physical environments will also return to normal.

The State of Being Truly Sincere, Pure and Good

I have been learning and practicing the sacred teachings for fifty-six years. My experience can be summed up as follows: be true and sincere, be pure at heart, treat people equally, with right thinking, loving-kindness, see through, let go, at ease, be in accord with the conditions and be respectful. They are my guidelines and the results of what I have learned and practiced. If other people are not being true or sincere, if they cheat me, insult

me, or even bear false witness against me, my response to them is still true love and sincerity. They do not cultivate themselves but I do. I learn from the sages; therefore, I must act like one.

Shakyamuni Buddha was a true and sincere person. So was Confucius. I must not learn from those who are not. I must always be true, sincere, pure and good. In time I will be benefited. I will then be able to gain perfect peace of mind. I purify my mind so it would not be contaminated. I cultivate equality so I am no longer confused. I cultivate compassion so I understand the needs of others.

The word “mind” is an abstract word. We practice purity of mind through “see through”, through truly understanding its meaning. Then we are able to “let go”. We let go of all our evil and confused thoughts, all our unkindness in words and deeds. Then we will be at ease with ourselves. In our daily lives, we accord with our external environments and conditions without any complaint. We will then truly realise that all people are good people so are all matters. They are here to help us end all our karmas so we will learn and be wiser at the end. Therefore, it is important that we must act in accord with our true nature that is sincere, respectful, humble, and at peace.

I do not really have any virtue I can speak of. To be honest, those are the only qualities that I have been cultivating for the past thirty years. I practice them in my daily life, in the work I do, in the way I treat people and the way I handle all matters. I realise that we must first learn to love ourselves before we can love anyone else. If we are not awakened ourselves, we cannot help anyone else.

What does it mean to love ourselves? It means that we need to understand that our self-nature was originally pure and good and that we love our original self-nature.

If we truly love ourselves, we will let go of all our unkindness and delusions. This is how we should love ourselves. Then we will be benefited. After we learn to love ourselves, we know how to love the others because we are of the same entity and because all things derive from self-nature.

The sixth patriarch of Zen Buddhism, the Great Master Hui-Neng said: “How marvellous! All things derive from self-nature!” All things and I are one. We are of the same entity. Therefore, we must love all people including all the animals, beings of different dimensions, trees, flowers, grass, mountains, rivers and land. We should love them all. When love permeates throughout the universe there is no reason why anyone would be unhappy. When I love all beings, all beings love me back! When I love the trees and flowers, they love me as well. They grow strong. They give out fragrances and they give me their fruits. The birds and the animals can freely live among us. They will also be polite and we can learn together. We can have such a happy life! This is the perfect happiness experienced by Shakyamuni Buddha.

Presently, we are confused; therefore, we need to learn from the sages such as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas respect all beings. They would never hurt the others for their own gain. They would treat all beings and things with sincerity, respect, humility and kind-heartedness. They would humble themselves in respect for the others. In their daily lives, they would encounter people both kind and unkind. They would only

remember their kindness and not their unkindness.

People who are truly intelligent would always try to protect the purity and the goodness of their minds by not loading anyone else's filth into their minds. If we unload other people's unkindness into our hearts, we will also become unkind. This is wrong. True cultivators always purify their minds. They would never remember or talk about other people's mistakes. If we talk about other people's mistakes, our minds are already contaminated with their mistakes. By listening to other people's conversation and watching their actions we know who is good and who is not. Therefore, we only praise the goodness in people and we do not harbour people's wrong doings. This is how we keep our minds pure.

If we are able we must do what Shakyamuni Buddha and Confucius did, to hold classes and to teach the others what we have learned, especially if we want to save our world. We have come to understand that our current problems stem from neglecting to teach people the sacred teachings. The education today only teaches students about competition. When the competition becomes too keen, competition turns into fighting. When further elevated, fighting will turn into a war. Ultimately education today can only lead people to their own extinction.

The ancient Chinese sacred teachings teach us moral principles and virtues. They teach us the meaning of filial piety, fraternal love, loyalty, trustworthiness, etiquettes, duties and obligations, honesty, the sense of shame, loving-kindness, peace and equality. These qualities will return us back to normality to our self-nature. It is an education of simplicity and the truth.

All in the Universe is One and of the Same Substance

Today our society is filled with selfishness and competition. Our only resolution is when we actually do what we teach. Otherwise, no one would believe us. We must practice at all times. Only then can we help transform the others. Today we have advanced technology. We utilise distance education, television and the internet to expand the effect of our teachings to let it spread globally. We must truly believe what President Hu advocates "a peaceful society and a peaceful world" because it can someday become a reality.

Last year we implemented an experiment in the town of Tangchi in Anhui province. It was a success! What it has proven to us is that "people as a whole can be educated for the better." Once we have expanded on this idea we realise that harmonious world can be a reality when there are harmony and equality between nations, factions, ethnic groups and religions. Out of the four, unity of religions should be engaged first to receive the best result. There is a more detailed report presented to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris in October 2006 that you may find useful.

Ancient Chinese said that "when learned, one realises one's inadequacy." The process of learning is a never ending one. When will we reach perfection in our journey of learning? According to the Buddha, we must let go of our wandering and discriminating thoughts and attachments, and restore our intrinsic purity of mind to lead a life that is full of compassion, sincerity and true regards for others without oppositions and doubts. Multiculturalism is

an important issue to the world today.

Under its bracket, we must realise that different religions, schools (factions), ethnic groups and nations are all part of the same living entity. We must be mutually respectful to each other. The act of “being mutually respectful to each other” must be initiated by ourselves first. When we are being respectful to others, it should not matter to us whether they are being respectful or not.

It is a wrong approach if we ask the others to respect us first. We must be the one that initiates the process of respecting, loving, caring and helping the others. Once we are truly awakened to the truth of our existence, that we are of the same entity, it becomes natural for the others to respond in kind. If the others are not reciprocating in kind, it only shows that they are still deluded. Perhaps I am more awakened than they are at this stage in time. When they are awakened later on, they will feel and do the same as I feel and do. This is the true reality of our existence. This is what Buddha said about the “true form of all phenomena.”

The idea of multiculturalism is clearly explained by the Buddha as well as by the ancient sage emperors of China. In one of the edicts of Emperor Yongzhen of the Qing dynasty of China, he said that “the three teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) are of the same family.” During the time of Emperor Shun of Tang dynasty, I saw a stone carved with words that says: “the United Diagram of the Three Teachings and the Nine Classes”. It says that all schools, including the three teachings and the nine classes, are of the same family. It then states that “everything in our universe is but one living entity.” When we expand on this idea, we see that all schools of religions are but one family in this world. We must understand this and help to unite all schools and factions of religions in our world. This is also the path that will help resolve all the conflicts and promote social stability and harmony in our world.

Conclusion

We need to make serious vows and have visions, especially those that are benefiting to all beings. We need to treat friends and foes alike. We need to stop wrong-doings, cultivate kind deeds, and act as role models for the others. All the pain and suffering we have experienced should be a benefit to the others to warn them not to make the same mistakes. Our actions should help the others to become awakened. Once we understand this reasoning, we would want to help even more people to reach awakening.

People’s awakening may not be instantaneous. It may take time and continuous effort. Shakyamuni Buddha had been doing it for sixty-one years (twelve years of self-cultivation and forty-nine years of teaching). The fact is, starting from the day he entered his mother’s womb to his final stage of nirvana, that is all part of a performance as his way of teaching the people. If we look around us, everyone in this world including all beings is performing in front of us for our benefit. It is true that everyone is a Buddha and every being is a bodhisattva. All are my teachers who perform in front of me their positive and negative roles to help me to be awakened. All acts are to help us alleviate our afflictions and gain wisdom. Indeed, all beings are originally Buddhas and so are you.

What I have reported are only my humble observations with regards to traditional culture education. I respectfully

seek your guidance and advice. Here I sincerely wish you all a very good fortune and happiness and wish this event the greatest success.

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Honour Professor of University of Queensland

Director, Lujiang Cultural Education Centre

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