

A Moment of Awakening that Changes Everything

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Contents

- I Insight and Meditation: Buddhism’s Two Core Elements
- II True Mind and Deluded Mind: Different Starting Points in Buddhist Cultivation
- III Insufficiency and Self-Sufficiency: Life’s Real Needs and Perceived Needs
- IV Thought and Samsara: The Direction of Our Future
- V Right View: Transforming Our Minds Through Views
- VI Choices: Making Decisions with Wisdom
- VII Meditation: Techniques for Managing Thoughts

Welcome to the “Guanzizai Meditation Retreat.” This is the first meditation camp hosted by Xiyuan Jie-chuang Temple, aimed primarily at practitioners in the field of psychology. We selected this audience because psychology professionals have a better understanding of the human mind than most. In Buddhist cultivation, our goal is to observe the mind, adjust our mental actions, and transform our lives.

Today, the most pressing issue in our society is the decline in people’s mental well-being, which has reached a critical level. The spate of malevolent incidents in recent years should serve as a wake-up call, showing us that addressing psychological issues is not just a concern for certain groups but an urgent task for the whole society. As Buddhist practitioners dedicated to benefiting both ourselves and others, we have an irrefutable responsibility to this cause.

While our efforts have made some progress, they only scratch the surface, considering the vast number of individuals who need guidance. Furthermore, many people harbor misconceptions and negative attitudes toward Buddhism. In response to this, we must collaborate with psychologists and experts from different fields to find the most effective and socially acceptable methods that address both immediate and long-term issues.

The psychology we are familiar with today is largely Western psychology, which has been around for just over a century. In contrast, Buddhism has a history of over 2,500 years, and has long been regarded as a study of the mind. The Buddhist canon is filled with teachings about the mind, such as “The mind gives rise to all phenomena” and “When the mind is pure, the land is pure.” In the *Taisho Tripitaka* alone, the character for “mind” appears over four hundred thousand times. Clearly, Buddhism sees the mind as the cornerstone for understanding the world and for achieving liberation.

Shakyamuni Buddha, upon seeing the morning star, became enlightened under the Bodhi tree. His enlightenment was not about attaining some external power, such as achieving immortality. Instead, it means eradicating all delusion and afflictions and gaining the most penetrating understanding of the mind. In Buddhist terms, he had realized the nature of his mind and directly experienced emptiness. This is humanity’s greatest achievement. Although technological advancements can improve the external world, only by understanding our mind can we perfect ourselves. If we carry mental burdens, no amount of material wealth can grant us peace or joy. After all, happiness is something we experience through the mind. After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha dedicated his life to spreading the truth. His extensive teachings, later gathered into the Tripitaka, continue to guide practitioners today.

All these scriptures and the paths of practice that they have revealed aim to awaken our inner wisdom and dispel the confusion and afflictions that have plagued humanity since beginningless time. In other words, they help us tap into the mind's positive potential to counteract negative emotions.

These negative emotions' impact and destructive power have become increasingly noticeable. The rising popularity of certain terms on the internet like “depressed,” “overwhelmed,” and “entangled” reflects how much these negative emotions are intruding into and occupying our mental space. If we do not address them promptly, we may soon find ourselves in a state of crisis.

The mind is the cornerstone of happiness and well-being for each person, and it also shapes the harmony and stability of society. Therefore, cultivating the mind is both a personal and societal necessity.

I

Insight and Meditation:

Buddhism's Two Core Elements

Buddhism, after originating in India, developed from Sravakayana to the Bodhisattvayana. It then spread to many regions around the world, forming three major traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—as well as other smaller branches. Despite diverse expressions of the Dharma across these traditions and branches, their essence remains twofold: insight and meditation, or theory and practice. Theory guides practice, and through practice, our understanding of theory deepens, allowing us to gradually embed them into our mental activities.

In Buddhist practice, insight helps us correctly understand our mind and the external world. Humanity's biggest issue is that we do not understand ourselves. Some may find this hard to believe. After all, we are most familiar with ourselves, right? But do we know where we came from before birth and where we will go after death? Do we truly know what the “self” is, the one that incessantly occupies our thoughts? Do we know our *original face* before we were born? Do we know where our tangled afflictions are hidden? Without answers to these

questions, we are confused passerby in this world, unable to change anything, only drifting along the flow of karma.

The key to improving our lives hinges on how well we understand ourselves. Just as a doctor must diagnose a patient's condition to prescribe the right treatment, we need to know about the issues within our minds to address them. However, merely understanding is not enough. We must also apply appropriate techniques to make the insight transformative. Meditation serves as one such technique, helping us fine-tune and enhance our inner selves. Without it, even if we recognize our afflictions, we may still lack the experience and tools to overcome them—leaving us feeling powerless and defeated.

Different Buddhist sects have developed distinct approaches that reflect their insights and meditation techniques. Buddhist cultivation, as a whole, is a complete system that integrates theory and practice. This system demonstrates depth through its penetrating understanding of the mind and methods to improve it, and breadth through the variety of approaches tailored to different individuals.

Over the past few decades, Western psychology has gradually recognized the profound wisdom in Buddhist teachings. Researchers have incorporated Buddhist principles and meditation practices into psychological research and clinical therapy, leading to remarkable results. This not only propelled modern psychology's development but also opened new avenues for promoting Buddhism.

In light of this, over the past two years, the Jie-chuang Buddhist Institute has organized professionals to put together the *Series on Buddhism and Psychotherapy*, hoping to bring these research practices and findings to the Chinese audience. This will benefit a lot of people and cultivate richer dialogue between the Buddhist and psychological communities.

It is very forward-thinking of you, as psychology practitioners, to learn about Buddhism and participate in meditation. I believe this will be a key trend for psychology's future. Psychology can be a sensitive and precarious field, as it often exposes you to negative emotions. So, without strong personal qualities and regular guidance and recharging, it is easy to become affected.

II

True Mind and Deluded Mind: Different Starting Points in Buddhist Cultivation

Buddhism presents many teachings on the nature of the mind, which can be categorized into two systems: the system of the true mind and the system of the deluded mind. They represent two starting points in spiritual practice.

The system of the true mind, or of the Tathagatagarbha, teaches that “all sentient beings have Buddha-nature.” This unique perspective sets Buddhism apart from all other religions and philosophies. Buddhist scriptures such as the *Surangama Sutra*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, and the *Nirvana Sutra* all expound upon this idea.

Chan Buddhism is founded upon this insight. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states in its first chapter, “Bodhi, our self-nature, is inherently pure. Awaken to it, and you will directly attain Buddhahood.” Here, bodhi refers to enlightenment, and self-nature refers to our own essence. Master Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan, directly tells us that every life possesses the potential for enlightenment, the very potential for achieving Buddhahood. Thus, achieving Buddhahood is not a far-fetched dream but an achievable reality. By tapping into our inner potential for enlightenment, we are, in essence, no different from all buddhas. Master Huineng’s pithy declaration has awakened many to the hope and direction of life.

However, although there is hope, we cannot be blindly optimistic. Let us look at who this “I” truly is. If we set aside our appearances, identities, and status, what often remains is a chaotic mess of emotions and misguided thoughts. Every day, we are busy satisfying our desires and needs. But are these desires and needs really that important? Are they indispensable?

The truth is, many of us have never questioned this, simply drifting from one feeling to another, endlessly busy. This, however, does nothing to calm our minds or give us a sense of stability or purpose. We often avoid taking the time to reflect on ourselves because doing so might expose the fragility of our pursuits. What if our goals are not as significant as we thought? This realization will leave us feeling lost and disheartened.

Although we share the same potential for enlightenment as the buddhas, we are currently living in a world of delusion. What we perceive is not the world’s true nature, but mental images filtered through our preconceptions and emotions, with ignorance at their root. This is

our reality, the reality we have faced through countless lifetimes. Even though we have access to the true mind, we have never used it. Thus we remain trapped in the cycle of delusion, life after life, unable to escape.

The system of the deluded mind is built upon our current state of mind. By studying how delusions manifest, we can selectively transform them—converting defilements into purity and consciousness into wisdom. The Yogacara, or Consciousness-only school, exemplifies this approach. Its foundational texts—such as the *Sandhinirmocana Sutra*, *Yogacarabhumi Sastra*, and *Thirty Verses on Consciousness-Only*—expound in detail the relationship between our consciousness and the world, and analyze the mind through the eight consciousnesses.

We often believe that what we see is the truth, holding onto the notion that “seeing is believing.” But are we *actually* seeing the truth of the world? Is the world as seen by a drunk person the true reality? What about by someone colorblind? Although we may consider ourselves as normal people, not intoxicated or colorblind, do we see the “truth” as it is? Buddhism tells us that what we see are merely images of the world as they appear to our cognition, not the world itself. Though related, they are not the same. If we can recognize this distinction and stop clinging to our perceived “truths,” many of our afflictions will cease to exist.

The Yogacara school presents the concept of the eight consciousnesses, which include the conscious and the subconscious. The first six consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind consciousness) are part of the conscious, whereas the seventh, manas consciousness, and the eighth, alaya consciousness, belong to the subconscious. The concept of the subconscious was introduced by psychologist Sigmund Freud as part of his psychoanalytic theory. Buddhism, however, recognized the existence of the subconscious over two thousand years ago and understood that conscious activities are but a trivial part of one’s mental world.

The Yogacara school teaches that manas consciousness, the seventh consciousness, represents our subconscious self-awareness, which constantly influences the activities of the first six consciousnesses. Why are people self-centered? Why does the saying “put yourself first, or else face dire consequences” resonate with so many individuals? These behaviors stem from humanity’s subconscious selfish nature, our self-attachment.

The eighth consciousness, or alaya consciousness, is like a super-sized warehouse, storing all the information of our lives since beginningless time. Life is an endless accumulation, and this accumulation will continue until we attain liberation. Throughout the cycles of rebirth, we

constantly leave traces in the eighth consciousness, which Buddhism calls “seeds.” These seeds are hidden yet decisive forces that shape the future course of our lives.

Without addressing these fundamentals, solutions to psychological issues will only be temporary. Just as a river must be dammed at the source to stop its flow, we must identify the roots of our psychological problems to understand their characteristics, functions, and patterns of activity. By doing so, we can guide our mind in the right direction, manage our thoughts, curtail negative emotions, and foster a healthy mindset.

III

Insufficiency and Self-Sufficiency:

Life’s Real Needs and Perceived Needs

The most fundamental issue for people is that they can not see themselves clearly. This is because, in addition to our inherent potential for enlightenment, there is another force at play—ignorance, or delusion. Therefore, the foremost task of cultivation is to understand yourself—to know what represents you, brings you peace, and gives you purpose. We focus on ourselves every day, centering our lives around the “self.” But are our identities, appearances, and thoughts truly the “self”? These aspects are all impermanent; they may be related to us now, but they do not reflect our true nature or the essence of our lives.

Enlightenment and delusion are the two core concepts in Buddhist cultivation. Why has Chan Buddhism become the most direct cultivation method in Chinese Buddhism? It is because its practice directly bases itself on the enlightened nature, which greatly shortens the distance between ordinary beings and enlightened sages.

We often see ourselves as mere mortals, burdened by karmic obstacles and afflictions, while buddhas and bodhisattvas stand high above us. This makes it hard for us to even imagine achieving Buddhahood. But the *Platform Sutra* directly tells us: “If your previous thought is deluded, you are a sentient being; if your next thought is enlightened, you are a buddha.” In other words, the only difference between sentient beings and buddhas is the shift from delusion to enlightenment. Directly experiencing the enlightened nature makes you a buddha in that moment. But if you lose sight of the enlightened nature, you remain an ordinary being.

What does it mean to lose sight of the enlightened nature? Simply put, it means losing oneself.

When the Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, he realized, “How marvelous! All beings inherently possess the wisdom and virtues of the Tathagata.” But this treasure is obscured by layers of ignorance and afflictions, as the Buddha further explained, “it is solely due to ignorance and deluded thoughts that this realization remains unattained.” Our ignorance fosters a primal sense of inadequacy and loss within us, driving us to seek external validations to affirm that “I” exist. The problem, however, is that these external supports are inherently fragile and impermanent. Each new support we add only heightens the risk of instability and collapse.

Therefore, we cannot remedy this sense of inadequacy by adding more things to our lives. Instead, we must look inward. Once we discover the inner treasure of life itself, we will no longer depend on anything from the outside. Like the Chan masters living by rivers and in forests: they have nothing in their lives, yet feel completely fulfilled. This is because they have directly experienced the complete enlightened nature.

As the Sixth Patriarch marveled upon his enlightenment:

How wondrous is my original nature, inherently pure;
How wondrous is my original nature, inherently free from birth and extinction;
How wondrous is my original nature, inherently complete;
How wondrous is my original nature, inherently unshakable;
How wondrous is my original nature, capable of creating all things.

When we grasp such a nature, which is so abundant and self-sufficient, why would we still be concerned with trivial, worldly matters?

However, having lost our true nature, we search everywhere for a sense of existence. The *Surangama Sutra* calls this “forgetting the head to look for shadows,” forgetting that the head is on our shoulders and instead mistaking the shadow as the “self.” Similarly, we mistake our bodies, identities, families, reputations, and careers as the “self,” believing that we will find stability if we hold onto them. But in reality, they are all fleeting and illusory. What’s worse, the more we cling to these things, the more we rely on them without even realizing it.

How much wealth does a person really need to get by? The answer is not fixed. All our needs—whether for relationships, career, social status, and living standards—gradually take shape. When we allow ourselves to become attached to these cravings, they quickly turn into dependencies, and, over time, evolve into habits. Eventually, they become things we can't live without. However, these perceived necessities are not truly essential. We have just convinced ourselves they are.

When our cravings are fulfilled, we feel satisfied; when they are not, we feel frustrated. When we perceive our dependencies as superior to others, we become arrogant; when we feel our dependencies as inferior to others, we engage in self-abasement. If we care too much about our dependencies, we may become anxious; if our dependencies are challenged, we may become irritable... All these emotions are products of our own making.

We have created many needs and, consequently, a sense of insecurity. Every day, the world experiences separation and loss, corporate bankruptcies, natural calamities, and human-made disasters. Constantly, impermanence reveals the truth, showing us that eternity is but a wishful fantasy. This often fills our hearts with fear, particularly the fear that losing what we depend on to impermanence is the same as losing the “self.”

But are those things we believe to constitute the “self” truly us? No, they are not. Due to ignorance, we have developed many thoughts and emotions centered around the “self.” This “self,” however, is not real, but a misconception. This misconception leads to raging currents of afflictions that engulf us, making us feel helpless.

IV

Thought and Samsara:

The Direction of Our Future

The *Three Principal Aspects of the Path* states that every life is “constantly battered by the four currents.” These four currents are the forces of desire, afflictions, views, and ignorance. Desire refers to the longing for wealth, beauty, fame, food, and sleep, as well as the cravings for sensory pleasures—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Afflictions include

negative states of mind such as greed, anger, jealousy, and selfishness. Views are the opinions and thoughts that influence us. Ignorance is the force of unenlightenment that prevents us from clearly seeing ourselves and our mental activities.

For those untrained in meditation, each time a thought arises, their mind clings to it, follows it closely, and identifies it as the “self.” They fail to see that thoughts are merely products of causes and conditions, not the “self.” Lacking introspection, they unknowingly get caught in the flood of their thoughts, experiencing everything from joy to anger to sorrow, and enduring the endless cycle of samsara.

When we talk about samsara, we often think of past and future lives, believing it to be a mysterious and unknowable realm. But this is not the essence of samsara. Broadly speaking, samsara is a form of psychological repetition. Therefore, it does not only occur after death: samsara is in every moment of now.

Consider entrepreneurs, who often have a deep craving for career success. This craving compels them to relentlessly pursue their goals, leading to strong attachment to their career and its outcomes. This attachment, in turn, intensifies their craving for success, creating a continuous cycle of effort, pursuit, and attachment. The same pattern goes for the pursuit of relationships, status, and power.

Throughout our lives, we often repeat certain mental patterns. These repetitions accumulate our mental energy around specific focal points, which grow in power and eventually dominate our lives. We can see many examples of this: for some people, career is everything; for others, love is everything; and for yet others, power is everything. When something becomes our “everything,” it is neither accidental nor imposed by external forces, but developed by us. We pursue these “everything” relentlessly, only to find ourselves, like insects in a cocoon, trapped in a space too small to even fit our bodies, yet we perceive it as our entire world.

This is samsara. It begins in our minds and ends with the objects of our attachment. Of course, this endpoint is only temporary because it will soon become the starting point for the next cycle of attachment. As long as we are gripped by certain mental states, we will continue to yield to them and be driven by them. Over time, these mental states will shape our life trajectories. There is a Chinese saying: “There were originally no roads, but as more people walked, roads naturally formed.” Similarly, our thoughts gradually solidify through constant repetition, forming our character and defining who we are.

Therefore, the focus of practice should be on our thoughts and intentions. With each thought, we gather different influences, which can be either positive or negative. Regrettably, we often overlook this, focusing only on visible, external outcomes while neglecting our inner changes. We fixate on what we have instead of who we are. But who we are inside is far more important than what we possess, as external factors only influence us temporarily, whereas the impacts of our inner world are long-lasting, even permanent, as they determine the direction of our lives. Negative thoughts, left unchecked, can bind to us like shadows for countless lives, denying us peace. If they are allowed to persist, we will face endless cycles of rebirth, reincarnating according to our afflictions. The Dharma describes this situation as “karma is inexhaustible, and samsara has no end.”

V

Right View: Transforming Our Minds through Views

What is the future like for us? For many people, they arrive in this world confused, pass through their lives just as bewildered, and depart in the same way. They do not realize that if they miss the opportunity to attain liberation in this lifetime, they will be bound to samsara for many kalpas, with little hope of ever changing their fate again. Buddhism teaches us to make the most of this invaluable and fleeting human life: first by understanding it, then by improving it, and ultimately by elevating it. In this process, having right view is crucial.

In Buddhism, right view refers to the accurate understanding of the world’s true nature, free from misconceptions and delusions. When we directly experience impermanence, we are freed from the afflictions of clinging to permanence. When we directly realize no-self, we are freed from the burdens of self-attachment. Western cognitive therapy also aims to solve problems by altering the patient’s views. However, right view in Buddhism goes beyond addressing specific problems. It seeks to eradicate our fundamental ignorance and restore us to our original, enlightened state. This is the ultimate solution to all psychological problems.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhism has different sects, each with its own foundational right view. Though they approach the truth from different angles, they share the same goal: to understand the world as it truly is.

The Agama Scriptures focus on establishing the right view of impermanence and no-self. Many people fear the Buddhist notion of “no-self,” thinking that it means: you do not exist. But in truth, no-self does not reject the existence of our physical body; rather, it dispels the false assumptions we have placed upon it. These assumptions blind us from seeing the impermanence of the world and the no-self nature of the five aggregates. This is problematic because our false assumptions conflict with the truth of the world. If we are accustomed to the idea of permanence and a fixed “self,” when impermanence inevitably hits, it can be a major shock. In contrast, by truly understanding impermanence, we can face all changes in life with equanimity, knowing that it is the truth of the world that need not—and cannot be—changed.

The Middle Way Scriptures emphasize the right view of dependent origination and emptiness, teaching that all existence is conditional: illusory appearances arising from the convergence of causes and conditions, possessing no inherent nature. The judgments we make of these phenomena—like beauty and ugliness, or value and worthlessness—are just labels we attach, having no relation to the objects themselves. However, once we make these judgments, we often cling to them as truths, believing that attractive things are truly attractive, valuable things are truly valuable, and what belongs to us truly belongs to us. All these give rise to afflictions. But if we can understand the illusory nature of these phenomena, then the labels we impose become even more illusory and unattainable—what, then, is there to care about or be troubled by?

Yogacara teachings help us understand the world through the doctrine of the three natures, which describe our perception of the world in three aspects. The first aspect, the fabricated or imaginary nature, is a distorted perception of the external world. The second aspect, the dependent nature, is of the mental images arising from dependent origination. The third aspect, the perfected or consummate nature, is the true essence of all phenomena. For example, when we look at a table, we think it is exactly as we see it. But the Yogacara school teaches us that what we see is merely an image of the table, processed through our perception, and not the table itself. This distinction helps us break free from false assumptions and attachments to phenomena.

In Buddhist practice, right view is like our eyes—we must see clearly to walk the right path. Without it, no matter how much effort we put in, we might still find ourselves going in the wrong direction. Fortunately, there are multiple ways to reach our destination, be it through the right view of impermanence and no-self, the right view of dependent origination and emptiness, or the Yogacara doctrine of the three natures. As long as we establish the right view and apply it, we can transform our thoughts, actions, and ultimately, our lives.

VI

Choices: Making Decisions with Wisdom

Throughout our lives, we make countless choices, from selecting daily necessities to making decisions about education, family, and career. Each choice involves trade-offs, influenced by our needs. We pursue what we believe is important and discard what we consider as unimportant. We make these judgements based on our needs, which are shaped by our values and view on life.

How deeply we understand life determines the choices we make. Among these choices, the decisions we make about our thoughts are particularly crucial, as they determine the future direction of our lives. In this sense, choosing our thoughts is essentially choosing our future. If a person has no higher aspirations beyond fulfilling desires, they align themselves with the life state of animals. If someone is constantly mired in greed and desire, they move toward the state of a hungry ghost. If a person is perpetually caught in conflict and hatred, they mirror the life of an asura, characterized by strife. Conversely, those who strive to cultivate compassion and wisdom, dedicating themselves to benefiting both themselves and others, are continuously advancing toward the state of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

To achieve the future we want, we must understand the consequences of each thought, recognizing which thoughts positively influence our lives and which do not. Even though thoughts are shapeless and formless, each one leaves a mark, like seeds in the alaya consciousness. If we repeatedly entertain certain thoughts, they will grow, blossom, and eventually shape our personality and character. Thus, without making the right choices early on, our journey will be flawed from the start.

Thus, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of “giving rise to aspirations,” particularly the aspiration for renunciation and the aspiration for enlightenment. The aspiration for renunciation leads to liberation, while the aspiration for enlightenment directs us toward Buddhahood. If we do not have the right aspiration, chanting sutras, reciting the Buddha’s name, and meditating will not bring the true benefit of the Dharma, nor will these efforts lead to liberation.

Everyone comes to this meditation retreat with different aspirations: some want to learn basic meditation techniques, some hope to enhance their personal cultivation, and others wish to recharge their energy to help more people afterward. These different aspirations will lead to entirely different outcomes. Do not think that because others can not see your thoughts, you can indulge in whatever comes to mind. Each thought we entertain impacts our lives, either immediately or cumulatively over time. Positive thoughts become beneficial life information, leading to favorable outcomes, while negative thoughts do the opposite. This is how the law of cause and effect applies to the mind. Every thought matters.

VII

Meditation: Techniques for Managing Thoughts

We have grasped the importance of choosing our thoughts and learned how to make discerning choices. But putting this knowledge into action is not easy. Often, we want to remain calm but cannot quiet our minds; we wish to let go but find it difficult, reminiscent of the saying, “The trees desire stillness, but the wind keeps blowing.” This is where meditation comes into play. It trains our restless minds, akin to taming a wild horse, guiding it in the direction we desire.

Furthermore, meditation not only helps manage our thoughts but can also strengthen our mental power significantly. Just as light, typically used for illumination, can ignite a flame when concentrated through a convex lens, our minds, when focused, can achieve extraordinary things. As the saying goes, “Where the mind is focused, nothing is impossible.”

Meditation takes many forms. For example, in loving-kindness meditation, we cultivate and deepen our compassion by learning to spread metta. The Recollection of the Buddha meditation helps us reflect upon the virtues of buddhas and bodhisattvas, fostering a yearning for truth and liberation. The Four Foundations of Mindfulness meditation enhances our inner awareness and observation, allowing us to clearly observe our thoughts as they arise.

Every thought has its direction. Money-driven people think of nothing but profits, power-hungry people are preoccupied with authority, and wine lovers long for fine drinks. However, we rarely stop and examine what wealth, power, or alcohol truly are. Instead, when a thought arises, we immediately chase after it, fulfilling its desires.

Today, people are busier than ever—not only because our desires have been magnified, but also because we feel a greater need to escape from loneliness. We are no longer used to being with ourselves or reflecting inward. But can we truly escape loneliness by avoiding it? Too often, we try to appear busy and fulfilled to cover up our underlying sense of loneliness. But this avoidance makes the loneliness feel even more daunting.

If we can calmly face ourselves and make peace with loneliness, our power of observation will dissolve this feeling. This is the lasting solution. Avoidance only pushes the issue aside temporarily and often creates new psychological needs.

People today are very skilled at solving problems, but even more skilled at creating them. For every problem we solve, we create five more; and for every five problems we solve, we generate twenty more. This is because we are not managing our thoughts. Like puppets, we surrender our sovereignty and let our thoughts pull the strings.

This meditation retreat mainly focuses on loving-kindness meditation and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Buddhism also offers more advanced practices, like the Chan school's teaching of "achieving Buddhahood by pointing directly to the mind and perceiving one's nature," which helps us directly experience and awaken our enlightened nature. Of course, we may not yet be at that level, so it is more prudent to start with these introspective meditations.

Changing one's life is not something that can happen overnight. But I believe the choices you make during this retreat will be the most meaningful of your life. As professionals in psychology and members of the public service sector, you are given priority to participate. There are only a handful of places in China like Xiyuan Temple, where you can find such ideal conditions for spiritual cultivation, so I hope you will cherish this opportunity. In the next seven days, set aside all distractions and leave worldly matters behind.

Learning Buddhism begins with letting go. Only after letting go can we settle into the present moment.