



# UNLOCKING MINDFULNESS AND UNIVERSAL COMPASSION

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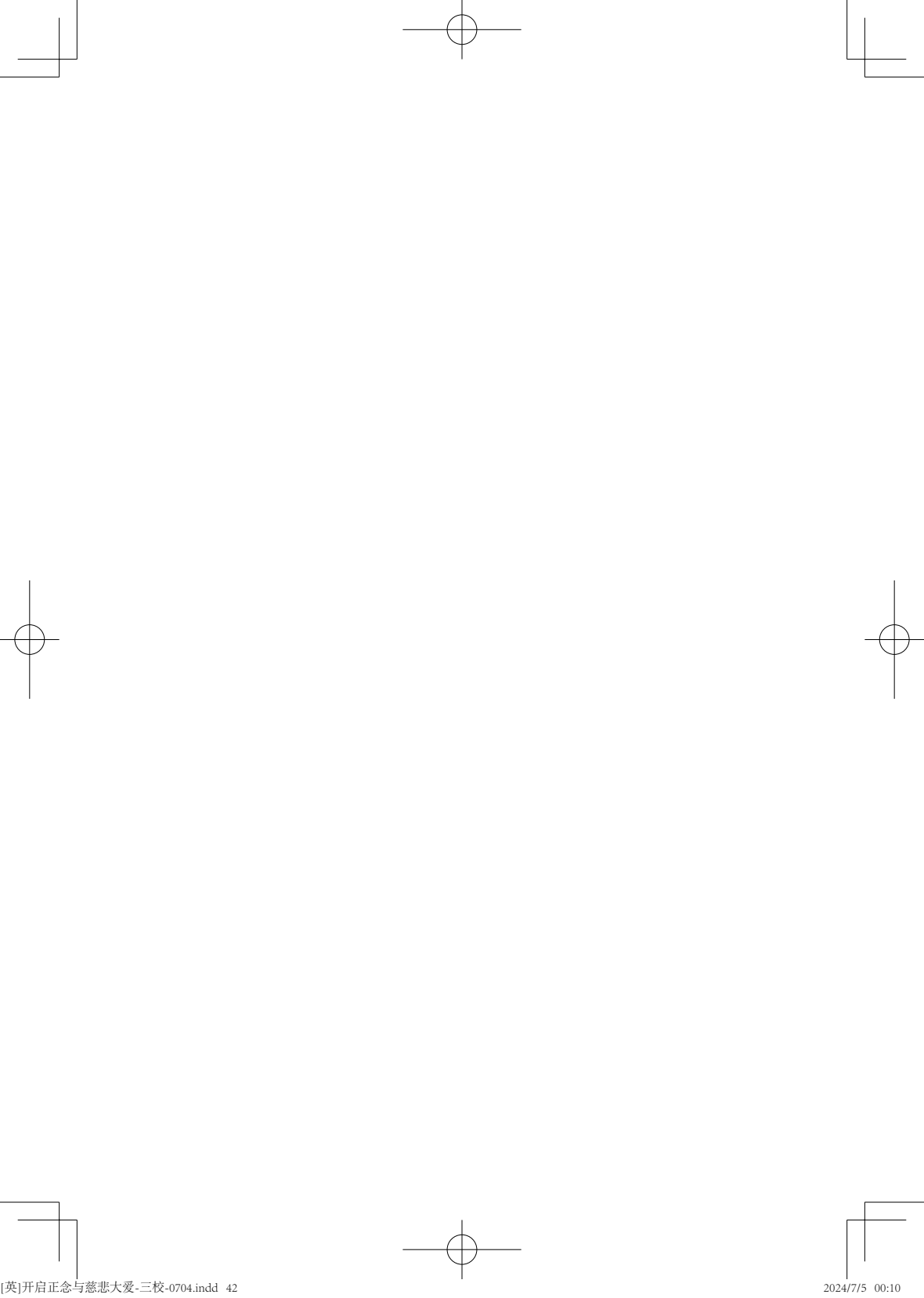
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Today is New Year's Day, marking the beginning of 2023. First, I wish you peace, health, auspiciousness, and joy in the new year. May you stay away from all adverse conditions, study and practice relentlessly, and truly walk on the Bodhi path. I also pray for world harmony and stability, favorable weather, and the happiness and well-being of all people.

# I

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AWAKENING IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

We've experienced an extraordinary year in 2022. In fact, it has been more than a year, as the pandemic has lasted for three years. Throughout this period, the world experienced natural calamities like volcanoes, earthquakes, and severe international conflicts. There were widespread fears of escalating conflicts leading to a third world war or even nuclear war. Under such circumstances, many enterprises and even entire industries are facing a halt, causing people involved to feel anxious, depressed, and troubled, making life increasingly difficult.

What's the root of the problem? It primarily arises from greed, hatred, and ignorance. For a long time, humans have stoked desires to possess more wealth, vigorously developing industry, technology, and commerce. While advancing material civilization, this has dramatically damaged the environment. The ecosystem formed by the earth through hundreds of millions of years has been irreversibly damaged in just over a hundred years. We initially thought that, with economic development, we could have whatever we wanted, and the world should become increasingly better. However, greed, hatred, and ignorance have caused various environmental issues and led to a greater imbalance in human minds and widespread social chaos.

To change the world, we must embrace Eastern wisdom. For instance, Confucianism advocates first cultivating oneself, then managing the family, governing the state, and bringing peace to the world; Buddhism holds that a pure mind makes a pure land. Both start with changing the individual through cultivating oneself, purifying the

mind, building moral character, and fostering universal compassion. When every individual becomes better, the world naturally improves. This perspective, deeply embedded in Eastern wisdom, encourages humanity to reflect and acknowledge the critical challenges in our current social development. Continuing on this trajectory will inevitably lead to a world full of crises. This does not mean we should not pursue economic development to improve the world, but the key lies in changing people's minds.

In Eastern and Western cultures, two concepts are pivotal: wisdom and universal compassion, which are the two essences of an awakened life. While all cultures extol wisdom and compassion, the challenge is how to implement them. How do we unlock wisdom and cultivate compassion? This is quite difficult, making it a focal point of discussion in various philosophies and religions.

In Buddhism, the Dharma's unique excellence lies in not only revealing the complete meanings of wisdom and



compassion but also providing specific methods to develop them. A media outlet once ranked the world's top ten luxuries, placing "the enlightenment of life" at the top. Other luxuries included "a heart free with the joy of love," "the courage to travel the world," and "the ability to return to nature," none of which are about material things. The term "luxury" means that it is something that most people desire but cannot get it. Therefore, leading more people to awakening is the hope of the world.

After a prolonged pandemic and disasters, I hope 2023 will be the inaugural year of awakening, marking a new beginning of unlocking wisdom and universal compassion. To achieve this, we must inherit the distinguished traditional Eastern culture. The study and practice mode we advocate is dedicated to understanding and implementing the two essences.

## II

### MINDFULNESS IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING AWAKENING

Buddha, as the awakened, represents the ultimate and complete awakening. The greatest significance of Buddha's presence to humanity is the revelation that every sentient being has the potential to awaken and the capacity for self-liberation. As stated in the *Lotus Sutra*, the sole reason for the Buddhas' presence in the world is to guide sentient beings to attain the insight and wisdom of a Buddha. Thus, the importance of initiating awakening is indisputable.

The key is, how can one move towards awakening?

Buddha discovered this ancient immortal path through his practice and then taught the Dharma for 45 years. His teachings were further elaborated by successive generations of masters, forming thousands of sutras and treatises, as well as the three major traditions: Han, Tibetan, and Theravada, along with various sects. All these sutras, treatises, and teachings are meant to lead us on the path to awakening. However, over two thousand years of transmission, as these teachings have been continuously interpreted, the path has become increasingly obscure, even somewhat perplexing.

Today, people studying Buddhism are seemingly busy with numerous tasks, such as reading, chanting, or studying sutras, worshipping Buddhas and bodhisattvas, repenting one's karmic evil, chanting Buddhas' names, or participating in various activities, but are we truly on the path to awakening? Do we know how to navigate this path? Many are unclear, simply following others without pondering the principles behind their practices. My decades of exploration in spreading the Dharma aim to

let everyone know how to walk on this path with a clear understanding of the goals, the path, and the methods.

Where lies the key to awakening? It's like arriving in a city filled with buildings, among which a mansion hides a priceless gem. How do we find the treasure? First, we must find the mansion where the treasure is hidden. This is not easy, so we wander around the city, which eventually turns into a leisurely stroll. We get distracted by whatever seems fun, lingering without thought of returning, even settling down, and starting to live there, utterly forgetting our original purpose: "What exactly did I come here for?"

Many people study Buddhism in the same manner, but what is the problem? It is because we do not know where the focus lies. Buddhist cultivation must be based on understanding the true nature of life. Where is the fundamental difference between Buddha and sentient beings, or between ordinary beings and sages? It lies in enlightenment and ignorance. Developing ignorance leads one onto the path of reincarnation; unlocking enlightenment

allows one to return to the ocean of awakened nature.

Recently, while meditating, I have also been reading about how Chan School, Theravada, and Tibetan practices expound on related issues in their advanced meditation. Buddhism believes that all life inherently possesses the potential for awakening, the non-dualistic mind of emptiness and enlightenment. That implies that this mind embodies the characteristics of both emptiness and enlightenment. Why can't we perceive it? It is because our mind is veiled by ignorance. Our current life system, from the first six consciousnesses to the seventh Manas consciousness, and to the eighth Alaya consciousness, is based on ignorance, also called the system of deluded consciousness. However, this system of deluded consciousness still has the nature of awakening.

Therefore, every thought contains both elements of enlightenment and ignorance. Despite the potential for enlightenment, it is often dominated by ignorance, characterized by unawareness. Conversely, being fully aware

in each moment, whether walking, talking, or acting, stems from the function of enlightenment. Thus, liberation can be achieved in every thought and every moment. Losing mindfulness leads to ignorance; maintaining mindfulness is a return to enlightenment.

After finding the treasure room in a complex city, we still need a key to unlock the door that's been locked. The key to unlocking the door to awakening is mindfulness. When we observe our thoughts with awareness, not resisting delusions or afflictions, these delusions and afflictions can return to the ocean of awakened nature and will not harm us. In other words, we can attain liberation when a thought arises. This is the most direct method. Just as the nature of waves is water, similarly, the nature of all delusions and afflictions is awakening. It is only when distorted by ignorance that it turns into afflictions, causing us suffering.

The key to cultivation lies in how we confront each arising thought or situation: do we face it with habits

of greed, hatred, and ignorance, or with mindfulness? If approached with habits, each thought and each situation can contribute to samsara (the cycle of rebirth), further entrenching us. Conversely, if faced with mindfulness, one can achieve liberation at the moment of awareness, as the thought contains the power of liberation.

In all practices, mindfulness meditation is crucial. This differs significantly from the more technique-oriented mindfulness popular in the field of psychology. The mindfulness we discuss is grounded in the *Maha Satipatthana Sutta*, based on the four foundations of mindfulness and extending to the entire thirty-seven factors of enlightenment. It involves not just practicing the right awareness and mindfulness, but also being supported by the mind of renunciation, bodhicitta, adherence to precepts, and the view of emptiness. Only such practice of mindfulness forms a complete system that can lead to true awakening and liberation.

# III

## DHARMA PRACTICE COURSES AND AWAKENING

In the past, we have implemented the approaches of study and service to the public, forming three levels of practice courses: preliminary, intermediate, and advanced. This set of courses can be further divided into the following sections.

The first is *Life of Wisdom*. Through the study of Humanistic Buddhism, we begin to view problems through the lens of Buddhist wisdom. When our views of life, the world, and values change, our coarse afflictions will naturally diminish. This is a common phenomenon among practitioners. It is also a major reason why people are keen



to study the Humanistic Buddhism series and benefit from it.

The second is *Approaching the Buddha*, which includes the courses *Approaching the Buddha and Understanding the Dharma* and *A Guide to Taking Refuge and Studying Buddhism*. Through learning *Approaching the Buddha and Understanding the Dharma*, we can understand the Buddha's journey of renunciation, practice, pursuit of truth, and awakening, and how he guided all beings after enlightenment. Knowing the Buddha's life inspires us to take him as a model of perfect compassion and wisdom, understand what Buddhism is, the significance of learning Buddhism, and the framework for practice. *A Guide to Taking Refuge and Studying Buddhism* guides us to establish a proper Buddhist faith according to the Dharma through understanding the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

The third is *Essentials of Buddha Dharma*, focusing on the *Lam-rim (Gradual Path to Enlightenment)*, which

serves as both stages of practice and essentials of practice. Studying this treatise can help us establish four crucial understandings: the great significance of a precious human life endowed with leisure and opportunities (the time and ability to learn and practice the Dharma), contemplating the impermanence of death, the suffering of samsara, and the deep belief in the law of karma. If we only study Humanistic Buddhism alone, we would feel that this world is quite good. Some people frequently encounter afflictions when not engaged in Buddhist study. After learning Buddhism, their major afflictions diminish, giving an impression of a very satisfying life, seemingly sustainable indefinitely. However, one gains a different understanding of life with these four perspectives. Recognizing the preciousness of human life tells us how much value human life contains and how we should make good use of it. Contemplating the impermanence of death serves as a reminder that, no matter how much we like this world, we are only temporary guests, unable to stay for long. The fact that samsara is suffering reveals that no matter how comfortable our lives are, without addressing greed, hatred,

and ignorance, we won't achieve true contentment, as the nature of samsara is suffering. Believing firmly in the law of karma points out that everything in the world has its causes, conditions, and effects, and if we want to achieve good results, we must make efforts at the cause.

These four perspectives refer to the transformation of our minds in Buddhism, that is, changing our views. So, we can reduce attachment to the present world, which serves as the foundation for seeking liberation and awakening. Without these contemplations, our practice would likely remain in the Human and Heavenly Vehicle. For example, in Amrita Retreat Center, everything is perfect, seemingly like a pure land on earth. But can we stay here forever? Certainly not. Even if no changes occur, we eventually have to leave this world. It's impossible to stay here forever. Thus, these contemplations can guide our practice from mundane life to transcendence, breaking our attachment to the present world and realizing that everything we possess is unreliable. Only awakening can bring ultimate peace and fulfill the ultimate meaning

of life. This entails taking refuge in the Three Jewels, then developing the mind of renunciation and bodhicitta, leading to the path of liberation and the Bodhisattva path. These are the two fundamental paths in Buddhism, to which all 84,000 teachings eventually converge.

The fourth is *The Path of Mindfulness*. Through studying *Lucid Introduction to the One Hundred Dharmas* and the fourth chapter of *Discerning the Middle and the Extremes*, we can master the path and essentials of the liberation journey. From earlier learning, we understand the impermanence of death and the suffering of samsara. But how do we eliminate the suffering caused by delusion and karma, address the continuation of life and death, and resolve the three kinds of defilement, namely, afflictive defilement, karmic defilement, and rebirth defilement? All these must be resolved by practicing the path of mindfulness. In this segment, we establish the levels of mindfulness meditation. At the beginner level, it involves choosing the object of focus to cultivate concentration and awareness. At the intermediate level, meditation is

based on the four foundations of mindfulness and the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, extending mindfulness to all aspects of life. At the advanced level, it involves the right view of emptiness, dissolving dualistic clinging, and letting go of awareness to realize no-thought. Through these three levels of mindfulness meditation, we gradually eliminate ignorance and afflictions, achieving awakening and liberation.

To transform the teachings we learn into personal understanding, we must apply them through the Eight Steps & Three Meditations. Practice generally includes both discriminative and non-discriminative aspects. The Eight Steps & Three Meditations relies on discriminative, rational, and contemplative practice to transform perspectives and adjust the mindset. Without this premise, mindfulness cannot be effectively cultivated and will only temporarily address psychological issues. This is because practice aims to reconstruct the inner world, a systematic endeavor involving changes in our view of life, the world, and values, as well as transformations in aspiration, behavior, and

lifestyle. In this process, the right view is incredibly crucial.

Why do so many thoughts disturb us every day? What underlies these thoughts? It's our perception, seeing the self and the world as too real. This view of self-nature is precisely the support point of samsara. In the basic right views of Buddhism, impermanence teaches that everything is changing, so one should not expect the illusions of permanence; no-self shows that nothing, in reality, belongs to you, only holding a temporary relationship with you; and emptiness reveals that all phenomena are interdependently arising illusions without self-nature. Modern quantum physics has also discovered that the material world does not possess fixed and unchanging characteristics; our understanding of the world does not exist apart from our own perception. We must constantly remind ourselves to view the world from these perspectives, and then the disturbances arising from external conditions will gradually diminish. Greed, hatred, and ignorance are all based on the dualistic attachment to self and phenomena. If we see the self and the world as too

real, we will be swayed by thoughts and mental images. In meditation, we confront these thoughts and mental images. By clearly seeing their true nature and not being disturbed by them, can we constantly abide in the mind as empty as the void.

The fifth is *Learning to Be a Bodhisattva*. Through studying *Bodhicharyavatara* (The *Way of the Bodhisattva*) and the *Yogacara Bodhisattva Precepts*, we can understand the uniqueness of bodhicitta in Mahayana Buddhism and how to develop and practice it. Particularly, the *Way of the Bodhisattva*, which takes bodhicitta as its core, from the excellence of bodhicitta to its generation, growth, enhancement, and even perfection, establishes a complete system for practicing the Bodhisattva path. The practice of the Bodhisattva path is not just an action but also the perfection of altruistic minds such as loving-kindness, compassion, and the mind of non-attainment, embodying the Bodhisattva spirit of universal compassion. The three types of altruistic meditation are meant to help us implement these altruistic practices step by step.

The sixth is *Entering the Gate of Non-Duality*. Through studying *Discerning the Middle and the Extremes*, the *Heart Sutra*, and the *Diamond Sutra*, we can address the issue of dualistic opposition. Ordinary beings live in a world of duality, which gives rise to greed, hatred, and ignorance, alongside emotions like love, hate, passion, and resentment. The practice of both wisdom and compassion requires transcending attachment to duality, understanding that all worldly phenomena are like dreams and illusions. This allows us to grasp the true meaning of the gate of non-duality, just like seeing the sky beyond the clouds. In meditation, I often guide everyone to experience the non-dualistic mind of emptiness and enlightenment, as empty as the void. As we continue to train the awareness, the power of thoughts will diminish accordingly.

For the practice of compassion, it is essential to move from limited to unlimited compassion, from self to no-self compassion, and from attainable to non-attainable compassion. In this process, the view of emptiness is crucial.



Otherwise, we tend to develop attachments in the process of doing things, including attachments to the tasks and their outcomes, thus leading to the arising of the forms of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity.

In the three levels of mindfulness and altruistic practices, “the mind of non-attainment” is attainable at the advanced stages. In mindfulness practice, one can realize that the mind is unattainable and become aware of everything clearly; in the practice of loving-kindness, one should achieve the state of “passing through a thicket of flowers, not a single leaf adheres.” As the *Diamond Sutra* states, even while extensively practicing the six perfections and adorning numerous Buddha-lands, performing various altruistic deeds, one always maintains the mind of non-attainment. As it is said, “In the liberation of innumerable beings, not a single being is liberated.” Even in the process of liberating countless beings, one does not cling to the form of beings or any outcomes. In essence, entering the gate of non-duality enhances the practices of the path of liberation and the bodhisattva path.

The seventh is *Returning to the Original Mind*. Through practicing the *Platform Sutra*, we can bring the mind back home. Every sentient being has the potential for awakening and can become a buddha. The *Platform Sutra* represents a method of sudden enlightenment, directly pointing us to recognize the non-discriminative, clear, and enlightened mind. It says, “directly pointing at the original mind, seeing one’s self-nature and becoming a buddha.” With the foundation laid by previous mindfulness, this original mind becomes more accessible.

The seven parts above are subdivisions based on practice needs, with a more explicit focus at each stage. However, the core revolves around two primary practices: one is wisdom, progressing from mindfulness to awakening and liberation; the other is compassion, from the arising of bodhicitta to the practice of the bodhisattva path. These practices are not merely theoretical but are meant to be applied practically. The three-level practice and study curriculum are designed to guide us step by step on the journey of learning and practicing mindfulness and universal compassion.

# IV

## IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS AND ALTRUISM IN AMRITA RETREAT CENTER

When talking about mindfulness practice, we often confine it to a specific form, as if only sitting is considered meditation practice, while doing activities is not, or that only walking meditation counts, while normal walking does not. Although there are regular sessions in Amrita Retreat Center, relying solely on sitting and walking meditation for a limited time each session, its effectiveness is hard to guarantee. Therefore, it's crucial to integrate training into everyday life, extending meditation beyond the cushion, and truly merging it with daily living.

This aligns with the Chan Buddhism saying, “Walking is Chan; sitting is Chan; whether speaking or silent, moving or still—one is always at peace.”

How do we turn Chan practice into a way of living? Recently, we’ve created two charts: one is the “Mindfulness Daily Journal” for daily recording, and the other is the “Altruistic Meditation Weekly Journal” for weekly logging. These charts list the elements of mindfulness and altruistic practice. When we practice mindfulness and altruistic actions, we need to use these charts for self-examination, to see if we possess the necessary elements and how we can improve further.

There are ten essential elements in mindfulness practice, which consists of three parts: foundation, concentration meditation (samatha), and insight meditation (vipassana).

The foundation consists of three elements. The first is the correct aspiration, initiating the mind of renunciation or bodhicitta. The second is a simple and orderly

life related to the practice of precepts. The mind operates in a consistent and continuous manner. If life is chaotic, it is very difficult to practice meditation well. The third is maintaining enthusiasm, meaning having joy in meditation and being willing to put in effort. When the *Satipatthana Sutta* discusses mindfulness practice, it initially emphasizes the importance of enthusiasm.

The concentration meditation also comprises three elements. First, select an object of focus, which refers not only to traditional meditation objects like the breath but also to any ongoing activity. For example, when we walk, walking is the object of focus; when we eat, eating is the object of focus. The second is to make good use of the mental functions of intention. In the sutras, the intention is defined as “being alert by nature” and “directing the mind towards its object as its function.” Intention, akin to what psychology calls attention, involves using alertness to anchor the mind to a point, an essential condition for practicing concentration meditation. The third is concentration, allowing the mind to engage with

its object in a sustained and stable manner.

The insight meditation includes four key aspects. The first is awareness, being conscious of what one is doing now: when walking, one knows, “I am walking”; when eating, one knows, “I am eating.” The second is acceptance, embracing whatever feelings or thoughts arise during mindfulness meditation without resistance. The third is non-judgment, maintaining awareness of thoughts as they come without evaluating them or thinking, “Why is my mind so chaotic?” As mentioned, when we maintain awareness, all thoughts return to the ocean of awakened nature. Without awareness, even the best ideas are merely delusions. The fourth is having the right views. This means observing one’s body, mind, and the external world with the right views of dependent origination, impermanence, no-self, and the emptiness of inherent existence.

We need to check off the chart every day to see if we possess all these elements. In addition to these, there are two more challenging advanced meditation requirements,

namely non-thought and non-abiding. For basic meditation practice, having the first ten elements is sufficient.

After understanding the elements of mindfulness practice, it's essential to integrate meditation throughout the day, from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night, consciously maintaining awareness. Among the ten elements mentioned, concentration and awareness are the key. These methods are not difficult. What's crucial is to maintain concentration and awareness at all times. Therefore, the chart requires noting how long a task is performed and how much of that time mindfulness is maintained, and describing one's practice experience. Every night, we should self-assess based on the chart, reviewing the effects of today's mindfulness practice and noting any progress. Continuous reflection and reminders are vital to truly incorporate mindfulness into daily life.

The Amrita Retreat Center has installed a mindfulness bell, set to strike the bell of awakening on New Year's Day. The bell rings every hour from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., reminding

everyone to bring your minds back to the present and cultivate mindfulness. We will establish a shift system or accept volunteers. As a bell striker, one should fully devote this time to mindfulness practice, avoiding reading books or using a cell phone. Before striking the bell, join hands and silently recite, “May the sound of the awakening bell spread throughout the world; may all beings move towards awakening.” Then, strike the bell with this aspiration.

When we hear the bell, we should immediately bring our minds back to the present. What exactly is the present? It exists on three levels. The first level is the activity we are engaged in at the moment. Usually, while walking, our minds wander, drifting to the past or future. The same happens while working; our minds drift off. This is a sign of distraction, so we need to cultivate mindfulness, focusing on the current activity with utmost concentration. The second level is awareness, which is being fully clear and distinct about the activity process. Each thought has subjective, objective, and self-witnessing aspects; awareness is the self-witnessing aspect, as well as the power



of self-awakening. The third level is the non-discriminative mind, the ultimate present beyond time and space. We may not temporarily grasp this, but with continuous practice, the power of delusion diminishes, and the clear mind gradually reveals itself. Then, thoughts become passing clouds, not affecting us at all. Whatever we do leaves no trace, like wild geese flying across the sky.

The clarity of mind is inherently present in everyone; it only becomes obscured by ignorance and thoughts. What we need to do now is to reactivate it. When we hear the bell, we must remind ourselves to bring our minds back to the present. There is also a mindfulness bell in the Plum Village of Master Thich Nhat Hanh. Everyone stops their activities immediately upon hearing the bell. We don't have to do exactly the same, especially when receiving visitors—just keep doing what you are doing, without making others feel awkward, but internally you should cultivate mindfulness. If you are alone, take this opportunity to calm down, sitting quietly for a minute or two or even ten minutes.

In summary, the bell serves as an aid to remind us to maintain mindfulness. With continuous training, mindfulness will become our habit, eventually integrating seamlessly into our lives. Since the beginningless time, we've been accustomed to samsara; breaking free from it requires significant effort. Just as corporate transformations are challenging, so is learning and practicing Buddhism. Transitioning from the ordinary mind to mindfulness involves overcoming many obstacles. However, once it becomes a habit, we will reap the benefits. With mindfulness, life becomes more liberated and joyful, and the clarity of our inner mind grows stronger. We have a clear method, but it entails your persistent effort.

For the practice of altruism, recording once a week is sufficient. Many feel they lack compassion because they haven't faced specific people and situations to truly practice it. First, we need to understand which aspects of the mind should be cultivated for altruism. The chart for altruistic meditation lists elements such as loving-kindness, gratitude, empathetic joy, understanding, sympathy,

acceptance, generosity, compassionate heart, companionship care, guidance, kind speech, beneficial actions, collaboration, patience, great compassion, bodhicitta, equanimity, no-self and altruism, the mind of non-attainment, and non-abidance. They encompass primary, intermediate, and advanced levels of altruistic elements. How to cultivate these mental states? The chart proposes four perspectives.

The first is the mindset of benefiting others, thoroughly contemplating the benefits of altruism and the drawbacks of neglecting it. People filled with gratitude can see the help provided by their parents, teachers, the public, and even their country everywhere. They will feel joy towards everyone. Conversely, someone lacking gratitude often views others with hostility, feeling wronged by society, resulting in pain for themselves and others.

The second is the practice of the *Metta Sutta*, where one must continually remind oneself, “May I be free from hostility and danger, may I be free from physical suffering,

may I be free from mental suffering, may I remain happy.” Turning this into a heartfelt wish, and then extending the compassion arising from oneself to others, and eventually to all beings. Over time, we will be filled with compassion, continuously radiating loving-kindness. With loving-kindness as the foundation, we can give rise to gratitude, empathetic joy, understanding, sympathy, and acceptance. All these mental states further assist us in better practicing loving-kindness.

The third is the mindset of dependent arising. When it comes to understanding, sympathy, and acceptance, we often find these challenging to achieve. The root cause is lacking the mindset of dependent arising. We habitually start from our own feelings, and by this standard, we can not understand why others think or act this way, let alone sympathize with or accept them. In reality, each person has different experiences shaping their views and standards of behavior. The mindset of dependent origination allows us to step out of our own feelings and think from the perspective of others, putting ourselves in their shoes.

When you consider others' circumstances, upbringing, and educational background, you understand why they say certain things or act in certain ways. Through understanding, one can give rise to sympathy, compassion, and acceptance. Thus, the mindset of dependent arising is key to compassion.

The fourth is the view of emptiness. To cultivate equanimity, no-self and altruism, non-abiding, and the mind of non-attainment, the view of emptiness is essential. Without the view of emptiness, we cannot experience the equality of all beings; without the view of emptiness, we cannot fully relinquish ego attachment, comprehend no-self, and practice no-self and altruism; without the view of emptiness, we cannot grasp the mind of non-attainment and achieve a state where the mind dwells nowhere.

The fifth is “Other,” which refers to any other methods you use besides the above four points.

The other part of the chart is the subjects of altruistic

practice. When we talk about compassion, developing bodhicitta, and benefiting sentient beings, it must be applied to specific subjects; otherwise, it's easy to become mere lip service. Like “serving the people,” how can one serve well if there is no genuine feeling for the individuals? The same goes for practice: if one professes, “I want to benefit and be compassionate to all beings,” but when facing all beings, they still live in self-clinging, self-view, and the poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance, it is impossible to truly care for, benefit, or be compassionate towards others. This phenomenon is quite common.

The chart lists several categories of subjects for altruistic practice. The first category includes those you live with, such as your children, parents, siblings, and housemates. The second is the people you work with. The third is those you study or practice with, your fellow practitioners. The fourth encompasses all other individuals, including those with whom you have no direct relation. When cultivating compassion, we should direct it not only towards those close to us but towards all sentient beings, not

only towards humans but also towards animals. For these four categories of beings, the chart allows you to check off which mindset you've engaged in and what methods you've used. You can write a weekly summary to reflect on your progress and insights. Next, we plan to develop it into an HTML5 for all practitioners. I hope the Amrita Retreat Center will start using it first, as you are in the best position to do so.

# V

## AWAKENING IS THE HOPE OF HUMANITY

Wisdom and compassion are two universally esteemed and highly aspired ideals in humanity. Through mindfulness, we unlock wisdom; through altruism, we cultivate universal compassion, which is especially needed in the future world. I once engaged in a dialogue with Professor Zhou Guoping on the topic “In the Age of Artificial Intelligence, Where Is Humanity Headed?” If we focus solely on specific tasks, AI could potentially perform up to 80% of jobs in the future, perhaps even better than humans. So, what is humanity’s advantage? It lies in continuously understanding and improving oneself.



Buddhism has long been regarded as a study of the mind, offering the most profound insights into the consciousness, the subconscious, and the ultimate development of life's potential. Buddhism believes that every life has two aspects: finiteness and infiniteness. From the perspective of finiteness, humans are indeed minuscule. Humanity is insignificant on Earth; Earth is negligible within the solar system; the solar system is negligible within the Milky Way; and the Milky Way is negligible within the vast universe. Focusing on the finiteness of life, no matter how glorious or wealthy one is today, it's all but fleeting dust.

However, Buddhism teaches us that life is infinite and that the nature of the mind is the nature of the universe. When we tap into our potential for awakening, we can manifest the infiniteness of life. The universe is vast, but the mind is even vaster, as a mind that embraces the vast emptiness, a heart boundless as myriad worlds. By discovering such a mind, we can find the true value of life's existence.

Otherwise, in this increasingly uncertain world, facing more and more natural disasters and human calamities, we will indeed feel lost about the future, leading to depression, anxiety, fear, and negative mental states like greed, hatred, and opposition. These issues are becoming more severe, filling the world with hostility and unrest. How do we solve this? It is essential to engage in meditation, leading life towards awakening, becoming individuals of wisdom and compassion, akin to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

In today's era of advanced technology, humans should live better lives, so why is happiness becoming more difficult to achieve? It's because everyone lives according to their ego. What kind of culture do we need for the future to create an ideal world where humanity can live in harmony and stability? I believe it cannot be separated from the Eastern cultures of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Firstly, Western culture focuses on changing the world to establish human happiness. The results of their efforts

over thousands of years, along with the various side effects that have arisen, have proven this path is impassable. On the other hand, Eastern culture starts with the human mind and changes the world by transforming the human mind. When the mind becomes pure, filled with wisdom and compassion, our character is perfected. As everyone becomes better, the world will naturally become better. This solution is ultimate and free from side effects.

Secondly, Buddhism advocates the concept of no-self, which sets it apart from all other cultures. Western religions also preach universal love, but it is ego-centered, believing in a unique supreme being. This ego-centered culture can lead to religious and cultural conflicts, and even wars. However, the universal compassion in Buddhism is based on the principle of no-self, believing that any action originating from selfish motives or intended to harm others is wrong, regardless of the justification. Therefore, Buddhism promotes no-self and altruism, where personal interests are set aside in favor of the welfare of all beings and the world at large.

Thirdly, Western culture emphasizes dualistic opposition, leading to conquests among religions, nations, and humanity over nature. In contrast, Eastern culture views humans and the world as one, such as the Confucian concept of unity between heaven and humanity, the Buddhist right view of “circumstantial and direct retributions are not two (direct retribution refers to sentient beings, while the circumstantial retribution is the dependent condition or environment),” and the equality of all beings. Therefore, happiness cannot be achieved through environmental destruction. Only by respecting all beings and caring for nature can the welfare of every sentient being be ensured.

In summary, promoting the excellent traditional cultures of the East represents hope for the world. Mindfulness and universal compassion are the essence of Eastern culture and fundamental to the path of awakening. Mindfulness has the undeniable ability to unlock wisdom, dissolve negative emotions, and develop a healthy personality. In recent years, mindfulness has become

popular worldwide, significantly impacting education, healthcare, and psychology. Universal compassion based on the principle of no-self is an effective remedy for resolving conflicts and is particularly needed in today's society.

In the New Year 2023, let us ring the bell of awakening and pray that all beings move towards the awakening of life and embrace universal compassion!