SUMMER 2026 VOLUME 2.6

BUDDHISM IN PRISONS

From Seeking to Living

I was introduced to Buddhism during my early school years through visits to a local Buddhist temple in Asia. After coming to Canada, I continued to stay connected to Buddhism by visiting Fo Guang Shan Temple of Toronto. The founder, Master Hsing Yun, emphasized the practice of the "Three Good Deeds": do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts.

Transformation Takes Time, Honesty, and Courage

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to attend a short-term Buddhist institute program to focus on Buddhist teachings, meditation, and daily practice. At that time, I thought that entering a more structured environment would help me quickly change my reactions to stress and expectations of myself. However, after that experience, I realized that change did not happen as immediately as I had expected. Instead, it became the beginning of a deeper process of understanding myself. Rather than changing me instantly, the experience showed me that true transformation takes time, honesty, and courage.

After returning from the Buddhist institute, I continued participating in group discussions. Through these conversations, I found that the Buddhist teachings were something I could gradually relate to my own experiences.

Everyone has the Potential to become a Buddha

It has become especially meaningful to me that everyone has the potential to become a Buddha, an awakened being. This reminded me that transformation does not come from outside but begins with one's own willingness to change and effort. After all, the Buddha was once an ordinary person just like everyone one of us, which makes this path feel real and possible.

The Buddha himself was once a prince in India. After encountering the realities of birth, aging, sickness, and death, he chose to seek a path beyond suffering and eventually attained enlightenment. He spent six years practicing extreme meditation, almost starving himself to death. However, this method did not lead to liberation, but he discovered a balanced approach.

Peaceful Buddha Representing Mindfulness & Presence
Photo Source: *pixabay.com*

A few years later, he sat under a Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, determined not to rise until he understood the truth. After overcoming temptations, he attained enlightenment, realizing the Four Noble Truths: the end of craving and suffering. Buddha achieved Nirvana through personal effort, rather than divine intervention. His journey showed me that awakening is not something given, but something realized through one's own effort.

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The Five Precepts

The precepts are an integral part of the moral practice of Buddhism. We follow these principles to ensure that we live a righteous life, cultivating habits that do not cause us to accumulate bad karma through our daily actions. By following these precepts, we also ensure that we reduce evil in our actions, thoughts and words; compassion is born from the dust of our moral practice – for these simple rules cultivate compassion with its focus on respect, generosity, truth, kindness, and discipline.

The precepts are a practice in themselves, so they are not rules that are static and unalterable (as I always understood the commandments when I was a Christian); we work on them every day. We observe how we understand them at any moment and how our experience can change our relationship to certain precepts. We can always continue to deepen our understanding and it can change over time. Sometimes I will work on a certain precept, and let it become my practice for a period of time to deepen my understanding, and also my relationship with myself and my own moral Practice.

The first precept is not to kill and respect life; one must not kill a living being – more specifically, one must not intend to take the life of another living being.

The second precept is not to steal; respect for the property of others is essential in our moral practice. We must not forget that theft can be direct, that it is we ourselves who have the intention and the desire to appropriate the property of another, either by force or through deception, but it can also be indirect through others.

The third precept is not to engage in sexual misconduct. This could involve sexual assault, adultery, or sex with a person placed under the protection of a parent or with someone who is already married or in a relation-ship. One can be addicted to sex just as one is addicted to alcohol or gambling. These are expres-sions of greed, violence, and the objectification of others.

The fourth precept is not to tell lies; you must be honest. Lying is not tolerated, and distorting the truth is considered lying. This precept invites us to give a sacred value to words, because truthfulness is a source of confidence – also, false speech is that which has its roots in greed, ha-tred or fear, or frivolous gossip.

The fifth precept is not to use intoxicants, to have respect for a clear mind. The consumption of drugs or alcohol is prohibited. This is because consumption causes a loss of awareness. This is why Buddhists are in favor of the practice of meditation, because it is the essential means to achieve liberation (meditating under the effects of drugs or alcohol is almost impossible). Some encourage total abstinence from drugs and alcohol, while others encourage moderation and abstinence from excess that results in intoxication.

If you have broken any particular one of the five precepts, you need to retake that one precept with the firm intention of not breaking it again in the future.

Taking the Precepts

1. panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
   I strive to observe the precept of not killing.[1]
2. adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
   I strive to observe the precept of not taking what has not been given to me.
3. kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
   I strive to observe the precept not to commit adultery.
4. musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
   I strive to observe the precept of not lying.[2]
5. sura meraya majja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.
   I strive to observe the precept of not using alcohol or drugs that lead to neglect.[3]

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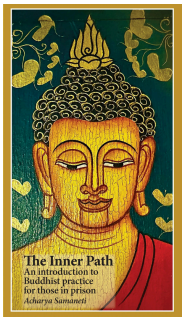
1 Do not kill refers to any living thing, including insects.

2 Not lying also includes not back-biting, not swearing and not talking about unnecessary things.

3 Alcohol refers to: champagne, wine, beer, pastis, whiskey and others. Drugs: opium, cannabis, LSD, ecstasy, cocaine and others. Cigarettes and medications containing alcohol are not included.

This article has been excerpted with permission from The Inner Path: an introduction to Buddhist practice for those in prison. (Sumeru Press Inc., 2024).



Acharya Samaneti is a Canadian Buddhist prison chaplain, philosopher, lover of the written word and seeker of truth. He wishes to bear witness to the universality of suffering and actions of love that awaken hearts.

The Sutra of Forty-Two Chapters
佛說四十二章經

Chapter 32: Desire Leads to Fear

The Buddha said, “Fear arises from worry, and worry arises from craving and desire. If you abandon desire, what fear or worry could you have?”

第三十二章　我空怖滅

佛言：人從愛欲生憂，從憂生怖。若離於愛， 何憂何怖?

Chapter 33: Perseverance in Spiritual Battle

The Buddha said, “One who practices the Way is like a single person battling against ten thousand. Donning his armor and leaving home, his will may weaken, he may retreat halfway, he may be killed in combat, or he may return victorious. When shramanas follow the Way, they should be resolute, diligent, and valiant; not fearing what challenges lie ahead, they destroy all demons and attain the Way.

第三十三章　智明破魔

佛言：夫為道者，譬如一人與萬人戰。挂鎧出門，意或怯弱，或半路而退，或格鬥而死，或得勝而還。沙門學道，應當堅持其心，精進勇銳，不畏前境，破滅眾魔，而得道果。

Chapter 34: Dharma of the Middle Way

One night a shramana was reciting the Sutra Bequeathed by Kashyapa Buddha. His tone was woeful and tense. Plagued by doubts, he thought of abandoning the monastic life. The Buddha asked him, “What did you do when you were a householder?” He said, “I was fond of playing the lute.”

The Buddha asked, “What happens when the strings are too loose?” He replied, “There is no sound.” “What happens when the strings are too taut?” He replied, “The sound is discordant.” “What happens when the strings are neither too loose nor too taut?” He replied, “All the sounds are in harmony.”

The Buddha said, “It is the same when a shramana is practicing the Way. If his mind is properly tuned, he will attain the Way. If he pursues the Way too impetuously, his body will be weary. If his body is weary, his mind will be vexed. If vexations arise, his practice will regress. If his practice regresses, his faults will increase. However, if he remains pure, serene, and joyful, he will not lose the Way.”

第三十四章　處中得道

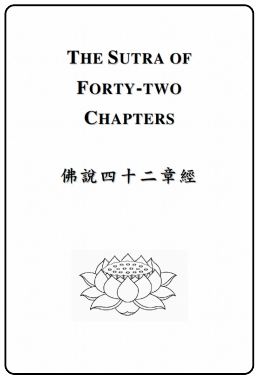
沙門夜誦迦葉佛遺教經，其聲悲緊，思悔欲 退。佛問之曰：汝昔在家，曾為何業？對曰： 愛彈琴。佛言：弦緩如何？對曰：不鳴矣。弦急如何？對曰：聲絕矣。急緩得中如何？對 曰：諸音普矣。佛言：沙門學道亦然。心若調適，道可得矣。於道若暴，暴即身疲。其身若 疲，意即生惱。意若生惱，行即退矣。其行既退，罪必加矣。但清淨安樂，道不失矣。

Chapter 37: Be Mindful of the Precepts

The Buddha said, “If disciples thousands of miles away from me are mindful of my precepts, they will surely attain the fruit of the Way. If those who are by my side and see me constantly do not uphold my precepts, they will never attain the Way.

第三十七章　念戒近道

佛言：佛子離吾數千里，憶念吾戒，必得道果。在吾左右，雖常見吾，不順吾戒，終不得道。



The Sutra was translated into Chinese by Kashyapa-matanga and Gobharana of the Later Han Dynasty. We have selected some chapters with their English translations from buddhagate.org to be shared in this newsletter.

Song of the Truthful Mind

The Way of the supreme is not difficult,
If only people will give up preferences.
Like not, dislike not.
Be illuminated.
If you are off by a millimeter,
You will be off by as much as earth is separate from heaven.
If you want to see Truth,
Call no life experience favorable or unfavorable.
To be caught between favorable and unfavorable
Is the sickness of the mind.
If you miss this key point,
Any practice of meditation would only be a waste of time.
The All-Roundedness is like the vast emptiness.
There is nothing lacking, and nothing in excess.
Only the discriminating mind
Renders the All-Roundedness not whole….
Do not pursue the transient,
Do not dwell in emptiness.
Keep to equanimity,
Forget yourself.
If you want to stop an action and so restore stillness
You will only end up putting in more action.
People are always stuck at the two extremes—
If only they know the One (Mind)!

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If you miss the One (Mind),
You would miss the two:
When you want to chase away existence,
You betray emptiness just as you espouse emptiness.
The more you talk and worry,
The more you sever your link with reality.
When you give up talk and worry
You will encounter no obstructions wherever you go….
Go back to your roots and you will see the key point.
Go where the images go, and you will lose the purpose of your training.
The moment you follow the images
All your previous practice on emptiness will be overtaken.
This degeneration of your previous practice on emptiness
Arises because of false perspectives.

Venerable Seng Can, Third Patriarch of Ch'an
Photo: *Chinese Cultural Center www.buddhistdoor.net/features/xin-xin-ming-song-of-the-truthful-mind*

There is really no need to go after the Truth
But there is indeed a need to extinguish biased views.
Do not dwell in the two biased views.
Make sure you do not pursue.
The moment you think about right and wrong
The moment you unwittingly lose your true mind.
The two biased views arise from the false mind.
So do not be stuck with your false mind.
When mental images no longer arise
Everything will be just fine....

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There isn't anything wrong; there isn't any object.
Nothing arises because the false mind does not even exist.
The actor vanishes with the context.
The context disappears and the actor is gone.
The context arises because of the actor.
The actor arises because of the context.
Wish people knew that both the actor and the context
Are empty in essence.
The false mind and the two views are all empty.
This encompasses all phenomena.
Do not distinguish the fine from the coarse.
This way you can avoid bias.
The great Way is broad.
It is neither easy nor difficult.
When the eye with a tiny view doubts
There will arise rapid turns and slow tracks.
Once you lose prudence
You will head straight into the wrong way.
If you relax and take it easy
Your body will neither go forward nor stay behind.
Your nature becomes one with the Way.
With worries gone, you will be your true self.
If you get bogged down by thoughts
You just sink into a dreamy world….

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Continued on P. 5

SONG OF/Con't from P. 4

If you get weary with anxiety
Neither your close ones nor your more distant acquaintances can help.
If you want a vehicle to take you to the reality
You must not reject the sensory world.
Only when you do not reject the sensory world
Can you return to right consciousness.
The wise ones never pursue anything;
The foolish ones always get tied up in knots.
There is really no other teaching.
Only the foolish ones chase after they don't know what.
Whether you drive your mind or your mind drives you
You make a grave error.
In bewilderment you derive a sense of false stillness or confusion.
Better, refrain from favor or disfavor.
Both the two biased extremes
Arise from the calculating mind.
Dreamy worlds and false flowers
Need never be grasped and disposed of.
Any sense of gain or loss, right or wrong, however,
Do give up momentarily.
If the eyes aren't asleep
All the dreams are gone.
If the mind does not make any distinctions
All the phenomenal world will be one with reality.
When you see reality as a mystical whole,
Immediately there will be no more conditional existence.
As you look at the entire phenomenal world with the same mind
You return to nature as it is.
When subject and object exist no more
The entire world will not be the same.
There will be no action because actions have stopped;
There will be no inaction because inactions have been activated.
With both action and inaction gone,
Where is the false mind?
When the ultimate reality is realized,
No more rules can you find….
Thereupon the mind assumes equanimity.
There will be nothing more to do.
All doubts are swept away.
Only then the truthful, straight mind obtains.
Nothing is left behind.
Nothing is left to recall.
The empty enlightenment illuminates itself.
There is no need for the slightest mental effort.
It is a realm beyond thinking,
A realm beyond the apprehension of reasoning and emotions.
A realm of reality as it is,
Concepts about the self and the others vanish….

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If you want a quick dialogue with reality
Just avoid the two extremes.
When there is no hang-up with the two extremes
You will accommodate everything.
All the wise ones from the ten directions
Follow this same teaching,
A teaching that is neither hurried nor slow:
Yet one flash of thought is like ten thousand years.
The reality is everywhere.
It is in front of you, and in all the ten directions.
The extremely small is no different from the big
As you forget totally the context.
The extremely big is no different from the small
As you see no more the edge and the outer covering.
Existence is the same as emptiness.
Emptiness is the same as existence.
If it were not like this
You know it is not worth following.
In one you can see all.
In all you can see one.
If you can do this
You will have no worry that you will not see the ultimate.
The truthful mind is beyond the two views.
Beyond the two views is the truthful mind….

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Words and language fail,
For reality is neither the past nor the future.
And it is not even the present.

Jianzhi Sengcan was the Third Ch'an or Zen Patriarch in China, who has been credited with composing a verse called Xinxin Ming. This verse is an appeal to utilize skillful means, such as Taoist language, to spread Buddhist Dharma.

Whether or not Sengcan was the real author is still in dispute, but the text remains an eloquent testament to the Ch'an suspicion of dualistic attachment, narrow-mindedness, and over-reliance on any one set of paradigms or beliefs.

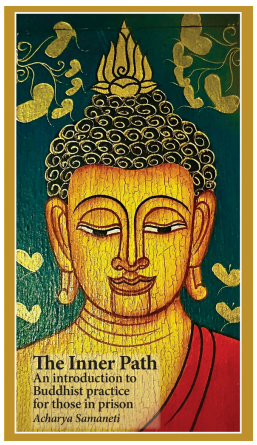
With references to the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, the Avatamsaka Sutra (Huayan Jing), as well as the Lankavatara Sutra, Xinxin Ming is a tribute to the benefits of emotional equanimity and the truth of non-duality.

This text is translated by Lok Sang Ho.

A New Study Course for Inmates: An Introduction to Buddhism

The Buddha says, ”Just as in the great ocean there is but one taste — the taste of salt — so in this Teaching and Discipline (dhammavinaya) there is but one taste — the taste of freedom.”

This new course, Introduction to Buddhism, offered by us studies the book The Inner Path: An Introduction to Buddhist practice for those in prison” written by Acharya Samaneti, a Buddhist Prison Chaplain in Canada. We offer a certificate upon completion of this course.



Even though being incarcerated limits your physical freedom, you may gain freedom of mind through studying this book.

Please ask your Chaplain to request copies of the book and print the enrolment form/study guide at www.buddhisminprisons.ca/introduction-to-buddhism-course.html

Announcement: This Newsletter is Now Published Quarterly

We decided to publish this new-sletter quarterly instead of monthly. This Summer 2026 issue is our first quarterly newsletter.

If you wish to have the monthly Buddhist calendars for the rest of 2026, please ask your chaplain to download them from our website: www.buddhisminprisons.ca/newsletters.html

FROM SEEKING/Con’t from P. 1

Changing from Within

In the past, I tended to rely more on seeking external support. However, over time and through personal reflection, I began to understand that real change requires my own dedication. When I take steps to work with my mind and actions, I feel more grounded and steady. This period of self-reflection and practice has been especially meaningful, as I experienced that change can come from within, rather than only seeking help externally.

Now, I am more aware of how my thoughts influence my emotions. In conversations, I try to listen more carefully rather than responding immediately. While these changes may seem simple, they have helped me feel more grounded. I have also learned to stay more present, focusing on what is in front of me.

For me, the Buddha is not only a figure to rely on but someone who inspires and accompanies my efforts to become a better version of myself. When I am willing to take a step forward, I begin to understand that I, too, have the potential to become awakened, just like the Buddha.🪷

Tee *is a volunteer at Buddhism in Prisons.*

About Us

This newsletter is published by Buddhism in Prisons Canada. It is intended to help inmates learn and practice Buddhism, and for prison chaplains to provide Buddhist spiritual care.

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