



2021 UN WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK EVENT REPORT



Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order

01 & 07 FEBRUARY 2021 15:00-16:00 (NY EST)



“Healing the Mind and Finding Inner-Joy in a Post-Pandemic World”

Zoom Online Forum – Synchronous Online Video Conference
1st February 2021, 15:00 -16:00 (NY EST)

Agenda

15:00 –15:05 VIP Introductions

MC: Sarit Gafan

15:05 –15:08 Welcome Speech

Venerable You Wang

15:08 –15:32 Session 1

Prof. Bee Scherer
Dr. Miroj Shakya

Tracy Liu
Regina Gallo

15:32 –15:35 VIP Speech

Rajnish Kashyap

15:35 –15:59 Session 2

Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
Dr. Jonathan Mair

Zivile Adulcikaite
Haiying Ni

15:59 –16:00 Ending

Venerable Dr. Miao Lung



“Healing the Mind and Finding Inner-Joy in a Post-Pandemic World”

Zoom Online Forum – Synchronous Online Video Conference
7th February 2021, 15:00 -16:00 (NY EST)

Agenda

15:00 –15:05 VIP Introductions

MC: Ricky Wong

15:05 –15:10 Welcome Speech

Venerable Man Kuang

15:10–15:30 Session 1

Mr. Dhruv Chhatralia BEM

Mr. Peter Bennetts

Ms. Sarit Gafan

15:30–15:55 Session 2

Q&A by Maggie Wong Connie Suluihana Dr. Yunxia Wu

15:55 –16:00 Closing Speech

Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway

Sarit Gafan (MC)
Founder, Highest Good Wellbeing
Author, Gratitude Goldmine
London, U.K.

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening, to you all, wherever you are in the world.

My name is Sarit Gafan, and I would like to honour the beautiful intention of this event by inviting you all to take a break at this moment to send kindness and peace to ourselves, to each other and to the world. We can do this by taking one breath together.

(...Thank you)

I whole-heartedly welcome you with all my heart and soul and on behalf of the organiser of this wonderful event, the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order. This event is part of the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week, which is held every year to cultivate energy, mutual understanding, and cooperation between communities of all faiths, which is even more important now given the current global crisis and longer violence around the world. There is more suffering than ever before. If we can join our hearts, open our minds and use our compassion, to learn from each other, I feel encouraged and we can find new ways to connect around the love of god and the love of our neighbours. As suggested in the earlier incarnations of this annual event, in this way, we can nourish ourselves and our communities, and grow from this crisis with kind strength for all the humanity, starting from within ourselves.

I, myself, am of Jewish heritage, but have embraced more open spirituality, with love and hope for healing for all humanity at heart of my beliefs. It is through this connection with the Fo Guang Shan community, particularly with Venerable Dr. Miao Lung, that I found inspiring hope for better times. I had privileges to attend several cultural events at the temple in London. In 2019, Venerable Miao Lung lit up my heart at the study group session, where she in the group warmly welcomed me to share some traditions of Jewish festival of Chanukah (the festival of light). I left the gift of Chanukiah (traditional candelabrum) and she lit the candles to honour the gift and the tradition. This simple act moved me deeply and I felt to find ways to honouring each other and find the shared values within our beliefs is a real way for peace. Accepting the MC of this event, it is one way that I feel like complete my part in this effort.

Last year event was on the theme of “Five Harmonies” and Humanistic Buddhism as guided by Venerable Master Hsing Yun and I am so grateful to learn about them through perspectives of other faiths as well and how they can cultivate energy of peace of the world from the individual soul outward. This year’s theme, “healing the mind and finding inner-joy in a post-pandemic world”, and I whole-heartedly welcome all the speakers, guests, will be bringing their unique perspectives to nourish this event.

Welcome Speech

By Venerable You Wang

Current Representative of BLIA to United Nations

New York, U.S.A.

Good afternoon, from New York! Auspicious blessings to all. I am Venerable You Wang, the representative of BLIA to the United Nations. I would like to thank this opportunity to speak at this forum. Also, I would like to thank you all for joining with us online today.

Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) is an international NGO founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. It is composed of Fo Guang Shan monastics and laypeople. We enact Humanistic Buddhism, and we are committed to equality, respect for others, and social progress.

In February of each year, BLIA participates in the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week events. It is typically held at the UN Headquarters here in New York. It is a big, fun and informative celebration that brings people of many backgrounds and faiths together to promote peace. We have shared the panel with Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamic leaders.

However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, we can no longer meet in person. We have had to change many aspects of our lives. This includes how we learn, how we work, how we get around, and how we interact with our colleagues, friends and families. This has been a challenging year.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun said that, during the times when we encounter difficulties and negative situations, what we need to do is establish faith. It is faith that brings confidence and strength. When we feel confident that our values are good and beautiful, we will have strength. We can improve our lives, take control of our future, and strive for greater social welfare.

BLIA is a faith-based organisation. A lot of work was on-the-ground. We met people face-to-face. We interacted with our community daily on many levels, from administration, to prayers, to classes, to volunteer services. During the pandemic, like many other organisations, we have had to change how we traditionally held these activities and how to deal with a global sense of anxiety.

But, to return to the Venerable Master's words, we are a faith-based organisation. We do good deeds, speak good words, think good thoughts. We offer others confidence, joy, hope, and convenience. Venerable Master said that to actively transform our world, we must be actively engaged in it. Community transcends the individual, and in doing so, this fulfils the individual in the most complete way possible.

Therefore, during these tough times, we continue to take care of ourselves and to serve our community. Our volunteers and staff worked tirelessly to bring our existing programs online, so that people can continue to pray or meditate, engage with others, and to learn. Many of our members prepared food and brought supplies to the neediest. Our chapters donated millions of units of PPE to emergency services and essential workers.

Venerable Master also spoke about the “Five Harmonies”. This is “the harmony of joy within oneself”, “harmony of cooperation within the family”, “harmony of respect between self and other”, “harmony of unity in society”, and “harmony of peace throughout the world”. Here, individual harmony, as our event’s theme shows, “healing the mind and finding inner joy”, lays a solid foundation for a unified society and world peace. It is important to both our current situation and a post-pandemic world.

How we work, how we meet, and how we care for each other have changed because of the pandemic. We are never sure of what the future will look like, but we are sure that we will keep the faith, and from our faith, draw our strength.

Thank you!

By Prof. Dr. Bee Scherer

Professor of Buddhist Studies

Faculty of Religion and Theology, Texts and Traditions

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Pandemic Challenges to ‘Harmony in Oneself’:

Religious Responses between Action and Contemplation

The phrase ‘harmony in oneself’ points to a holistic subjective wellbeing that incorporates spiritual and/or religious wellbeing. In this context ‘harmony in oneself’ is taken from what Master Hsing Yun 星雲 of the Ch’an Humanistic Buddhist organisation Fo Guang Shan (*Fóguāngshān* 佛光山) calls the first of his ‘five harmonies 五和 (*wǔhé*)’: ‘harmony in one own's mind/heart’ 自心和悅 (*zìxīn héyuè*).

In the following I will make observations on (multi-) religious responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and add some interpretative reflections on Hsing Yun’s teaching of 和 *hé*, harmony.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges for religious organisations and devotees in the UK and worldwide. The COVID death toll since the beginning of the pandemic [in the U.K.](#) alone stood at 103,602 cases per 28 January 2021, raising to 120,580 per 21 February 2021, with twin peaks of 1000+ deaths/day in April 2020 and again in the first months of 2021.

The pandemic has been affecting individuals not just in terms of existential threat to physical health, but also through lockdowns in their social, educational, and economic wellbeing. In terms of ontological security, the challenges of the pandemic to individuals and society appear unrivalled short of times of war and famines.

Mental well-being has been linked with religiosity and spirituality when positive spiritual and religious coping mechanisms are successfully employed; we also have to acknowledge the possibility of a detrimental effect to wellbeing by ‘negative religious coping mechanism’: the rigidity of internalised demands to religious belonging can override healthy needs of individuation and can lead to spiritual bypassing, spiritual anxiety and religious (self-)traumatising.

While the pandemic unfolds, I observe positive religious coping alongside two modes: one of a centrifugal orientation, focused on community action for the securing and reaffirmation of religious belonging and one of a centripetal orientation, focussed on subjective introversion and contemplation.

As for community action, multi-religious activism arose early on during the Pandemic. For example, *Religions for Peace* issued an action statement ([“Standing Together in Spirit and with Actions”](#)) as early as 13 March 2020, followed by the [“Launch of Global Multi-religious Faith-in-Action COVID-19 Initiative”](#) in a joint venture with UNICEF on 7 April 2020. Individual religious organisations often pursued a double strategy of negotiating physical modes for community building and maintenance and producing alternative modes through technology.

Negotiating sacred space and physical community gathering took the form of negotiating new legal and policy frameworks on social distancing in houses of worship such as mosques and churches or [innovating worship](#) e.g. by consecrating outside spaces for communal events.

A less constructive discourse around communal worship involved the discussion about [meeting bans](#) with some communities privileging their right to practice their religion freely above public health needs, e.g. in the case of some churches in the [Netherlands](#).

Alternative, [virtual modes](#) emerged early on in Christian communities building on existing experiences of radio and TV broadcasting through the live streaming of worship and was extended with interactive events such as Zoom prayer meetings. Buddhist communities started to live-stream service, too, and in the case of Tibetan Buddhist groups, even advanced rituals that require in person presence such as initiations were now given virtually.

On the side of religious subjectivity, early research demonstrated a significant surge in internet searches related to contemplative practices. For instance, worldwide Google searches for the term ‘prayer’ increased by 25% in the first three weeks after the WHO declared a pandemic in March ([Bentzen 2020](#): 54). For spiritual carers and chaplains in the health care sector, the COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges in intensive care and palliative spiritual care needs.

One of the successful examples to offer individual virtual space for contemplation and devotion have been the [interactive Buddha Bathing](#) and [Chinese New Year Lamp offering](#) sites prepared by Fo Guang Shan, where devotees were enabled to perform acts of worship on their own time,

virtually. Other technological well-being support aids by FGS include a dedicated Buddhist networking App (*BLIA* App) and the guided body-scan *Mindful Check-In* App developed by the Nan Tien Institute (Wollongong, Australia).

It is evident from the teaching by Fo Guang Shan's Master Hsing Yun how fundamental mental wellbeing as 'harmony in one own's mind' is. Hsing Yun talked about the *Five Harmonies* first in a speech given at the *World Economy Forum* in Davos, 2012: "The Value of Faith" ([信仰的價值](#)). 'Harmony' as represented by the Sinitic translingual character 和 (Mandarin *hé*, Korean Hanja 화 *hwa* and Japanese Kanji *wa*) is a key Classical East Asian concept most prominent in Neo-Confucianism. Hsing Yun uses the term as *skilful means*, by reinfusing a deeply engrained Chinese cultural concept with Buddhist meaning *for the Human World* (人間 *rén jiān*). Starting with *Harmony in oneself* (自心和 *zìxīn hé*), this individual contentment is marked by Hsing Yun with a key Buddhist term that points to self-cultivation and transformation on the path to enlightenment: 樂 *lè* (joy, [happiness](#)). In Classical Chinese Buddhist translation literature *lè* is used to render Sanskrit *sukha* (happiness) in the sense of better conditions for liberation. Moreover, as 'resting in mind itself', the first harmony is really the foundation for the following four that then exemplify the Buddhist core teaching of interdependency in ever expanding, concentric spheres: from the personal to family, state/society and the world (the latter three are, again, classical Confucian groupings).

Looking at harmony in oneself as a starting point and interconnectedness Master Hsing Yun's skilful utilization of popular Confucian thought (respect, humility, etc.) points to one of the key features of contemporary socially engaged or 'humanistic' Buddhist thought (with a bow to the programmatic and influential book by Thich Nhat Hanh, 1987): what is needed for outer and inner peace (平 *píng*), is *Being Peace*.

By Dr. Miroj Shakya
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Religious Studies
University of the West
California, U.S.A.

How did religious communities promote inner peace and harmony amid coronavirus pandemic in SoCal?

Hello Everyone! I am pleased and honored to participate in the 2021 United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week Forum organized by Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order.

Los Angeles is one of the hardest-hit cities of the United States where more than fifteen thousand people have already died from the coronavirus. Los Angeles city has been imposing strict restrictions and limiting gathering due to the coronavirus. But despite these restrictions, many religious groups such as Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple, at Hacienda Heights, the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hill, and the Riverside Gurdwara -Sikh Temple in SoCal are still finding ways to stay connected with their communities. I will briefly talk about these three religious groups' efforts to promote peace and harmony among their communities during this difficult time.

First, Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple, the North American Regional Headquarters of Fo Guang Shan, was built to serve as a spiritual and cultural center for those interested in learning more about Buddhism and Chinese culture. It is the aspiration of its founder, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, to propagate Humanistic Buddhism which seeks to propagate Buddhist teachings through education, cultural outreach, community services, and spiritual practice. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic began, the Hsi Lai Temple has been working with BLIA and other Fo Guang Shan branch temples to donate medical supplies to hospitals, police officers, senior houses and other frontline persons.

In addition to that, the Hsi Lai Temple provides online One-day Meditation retreat – People are dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the many challenges in life have caused a lot of unease, anxiety, stress, and fear in people's minds. This online one-day Meditation helps people to find peace in daily life through Buddhist teaching along with mindfulness training. Hsi Lai Temple hosted its annual Prayer for World Peace Ceremony on YouTube the first day of the New Year to welcome 2021 and offered the shared message of peace and hope to the world. Religious leaders from the Catholic, Theravada Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Hindu faiths joined virtually to extend their sincerest wishes to everyone for a better year in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, The BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Los Angeles branch is a spiritual, volunteer-driven organization dedicated to improving society through individual growth by fostering the Hindu ideals of faith, unity, and selfless service. BAPS has been providing Live Mandir Murti Darshan, Online Weekly Satsang Assemblies for their communities promoting peace and keeping harmony among the BAPS community from all over the world. Kirtan is a form of bhakti. These Satsang Assemblies' role is to unite people and to bring everyone closer to God. people are discovering that this sacred, traditional practice allows them to access inner peace, calm, connection, and non-thinking. On January 19, 2021, many members of the BAPS community from across the country participated by lighting candles with their loved ones from home to reflect and honor those lost to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third, the Riverside Gurdwara community began providing hot to-go meals, masks, and groceries to community members. Now Riverside Gurdwara has been providing 1,400 vegetarian to-go meals with drive-through meal service every day. They also deliver meals to local hospitals and seniors. The restaurants' cooks and owners have donated their time every day to prepare these meals. They vow to keep the operation going despite the expenses and the work involved. They believe that no one should go hungry at this point. When they see people lining up or waiting to receive food, they can really sense the amount of pain and anxiety people are going through. The Gurdwara community is following in the footsteps of Guru Nanak's vision of religion of pure love which binds the whole global community in one human race. This religion of love knows no hate, no ego, no distinctions and divisions, no inequalities, no discrimination. The Gurdwara community's unconditional support to people who are living in desperate situations shows that we all are indeed one family and connected. We cannot survive in the world if we don't treat each other with warmth, kindness, compassion. loving hearts and wise minds are the secrets to a happy life and a peaceful, sustainable world. In sum, this pandemic teaches us how important it is to live in harmony with each other, living together peacefully rather than fighting or arguing.

I would like to end my speech with the quote, "Peace starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities and so on."

Thank you!

Session One Q&A:

The first question is proposed by Tracy Liu, Ph.D. Candidate in Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge, the U.K.

Tracy Liu: Thank you Prof. Bee's analysis of two modes used by religious organisations. I agree that new technologies such as live stream, synchronic online meetings, help religious organisations to transfer their ways of propagation and consolidation within their communities. I also feel that online environment can help activities expand beyond their own devotees into wider societies, having more audience beyond geographical locations and time zones. As you mentioned, Buddha Bathing Ceremony, held by Fo Guang Shan last year, was broadcast across its global branches. My friend, who has never attended the off-line ceremony before, watched the live ceremony with me and was keen to participate it in person after the pandemic. Thus, I am curious about **how religious organisations make adaptations, caring their communities and benefiting wider societies at the same time?**

Prof. Bee Scherer: Thank you for your question, Tracy. I think the key element here is how do we establish belonging when we cannot be physically together, and also there is an example of "expedient means", "skillful means", appropriate means that has already been used by London Fo Guang Shan Temple before the pandemic actually. The building is cramped old and everyone cannot climb up the stairs. Sometimes, there are many people in it. So then, the event can be live streamed, upstairs, downstairs and so on. This is all about using skillful means. But it is important to understand, that is not enough just to preach through stream, but to give opportunities for interaction, to share, and to be with others in a way where we listen deeply, and we give opportunity for people to go, for their anxiety and loneliness and so on. It is not just about religious rights, and it is also about being human with each other.

The second question is proposed by Regina Gallo, Masters Candidate, Florida Atlantic University, the U.S.A.

Regina Gallo: Thank you for your presentation, Dr. Shakyia. From my understanding, you are a scholar who embraces and understands the importance of technology for both education and religious institutions. These three religious institutions have utilised technology to bring people together in harmony safely during a pandemic. My question is: **have any of these communities mentioned feelings of missing out on an integral part of communal religious practice by going online?**

Dr. Miroj Shakya: Thank you Regina. They really missed out on an integral part of communal religious practice such as in Buddhism, Sunday Buddhist Sutra classes, dharma sermons, prayers, retreats, and for Hindu, Darshan, and for Sikh, Langar where they meet and eat. These are very important in-person practice, and they connect all the devotees with their faiths. Due to this pandemic, they are not able to do any in-person practice right now. But they found a new way to do it by new technology such as by Youtube, Facebook, sometimes live stream prayers and services. However, it is not the same as in-person services. We are likely to have a Zoom meeting on services, but we have to at least acknowledge that new technology help to reaching out to the community and sharing information to a wider community than before. That is good thing. They should continue to use it after the pandemic as well.

By Mr. Rajnish Kashyap
General Secretary
Hindu Council UK

Hinduism and Harmony

One of the key lessons of Hinduism which Hindus learn is that everything in this world contains the essence of God. Because of this, we should protect and respect all living beings. Although things may seem to be bad and out of control, however, placing your full faith in God, it will relieve you of stress caused by fear of this virus.

Now the question is how to heal the mind and find inner peace. For this, it is important to remind ourselves that the spiritual effect of the Covid-19 outbreak cannot be neglected. Your soul or your inner self is the most intimate part of you, and it is not found by running away.

There are three levels of responses to the Covid-19 outbreak as to how it affects us physically, mentally and spiritually. The physical response comes first, and by now everyone knows about self-isolation, social distancing. The second effect is on mental well-being. The best advice in the mental area is meditation and one of the greatest gifts of Hinduism is the healing power of yoga and Ayurveda for mind and body, also relaxation techniques and paying attention every day to finding not just relaxation but joy and comfort in your life. The virus makes the need for a positive psychological response more urgent, and the good news is that meditation and yoga are good for antistress, which is connected to a strong immune response.

But it is the third area, the spiritual effect of the outbreak, that is being neglected. Spiritual well-being is alien to many people's daily lives, and with the decline of organized religion, millions of people experience a tired soul, however you want to define it — weariness of heart, existential dread, a sinking feeling that nothing really matters — without finding a way out.

Don't spend more than a few minutes diagnosing these feelings. Everyone is experiencing them. Instead, you can improve the state of your soul in the following ways:

- Having a sense of meaning and purpose.
- Loving and being loved.
- Self-esteem, a sense of your own worth.
- Tapping into inner peace and joy.
- Being of service to others, we call Seva.

Practicing daily Seva will keep you centre on the path towards liberation and inner healing. According to the practices of Hinduism, one of the most purificatory practices of Seva is to perform selfless service to God through daily worship and offerings. According to Hinduism, Seva also occurs through devotional service towards others. Remember that each person in this world contains the essence of God, so by helping those less fortunate it also is a form of offering to God. In these times of lockdown, there are thousands of people without food and shelter who are in need, so if you can try to offer them even some small assistance, this has the power to have a ripple effect throughout this world. It is our moral duty as human beings to help and support each other so that we can push through these dark times and come out stronger than ever before.

Another highly purifying and powerful form of Seva is to practice daily Kirtan and mantra chanting. According to Bhakti yoga, chanting the names of God will not only purify your mind, heart, and soul, but this energy of chanting has the potential to purify others as well.

The power of faith you believe or spirituality to cope and heal the psychological impact of coronavirus cannot be ignored. As we elevate our mental and spiritual energies higher through yogic practices, it not only purifies our own hearts and minds, but this purification has the potential to spread worldwide. Use this quarantine as an opportunity to move inwards and grow spiritually stronger and always remember that you are not alone in this. One day this will end, and we will come out of this on the other side stronger than ever before. Your Atma or soul is the most intimate part of you, and it isn't found by running away. In a time of crisis, the impulse is to go into emergency mode, fear, concern and panic and giving in to those impulses will contribute to an epidemic of soul indisposition.

Health care is shifting from treatment to prevention. Why wait for problem to occur in our life if we can proactively address them and save ourselves so much pain. Small act of love and kindness done regularly are important and not just big gifts given on special occasions. It is the small things done rightly and consistently make huge differences in our life. Success is less about intensity and more about consistency.

By Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
Levenson Chair and Associate Professor
Department of History
Florida Atlantic University, the U.S.A.

Buddhism and Harmony

The first thing that I feel is important to say about how Buddhism sees the plight of people who are living through this awful pandemic is that being here, right now, does not mean we are in any way bad. Yes, Karma is a central Buddhist belief, but this is not retribution for some inherently evil aspect our soul. On the contrary, as Venerable Master Hsing Yun often says, we are all future Buddhas. There is an inherent goodness in every being, so how is it that we are living in such difficult times? The *Vimalakirti Sutra* provides a comprehensive introduction to Buddhism, and as such is an excellent resource for understanding how Buddhism is entirely humanistic. In Chapter Eight, the Way of the Buddha, it explains how perfect individuals, Bodhisattvas can be born in the deepest layer of hell or even be born as an animal. The following is my translation of the Kumarajiva edition:

At that time Manjusri asked Vimalakirti saying. “How do bodhisattvas enter into the Buddha's Way?” Vimalakirti said: “If bodhisattvas act contrary to the way, this is how they enter into the Buddha's Way.” Manjusri asked again: “How do bodhisattvas act contrary to the Way?” Vimalakirti replied: “Bodhisattvas perform acts according to the fifth layer of hell but lacks anger and hate. They arrive in hell without the various feelings of guilt and defilement. Being born as an animal, they are without ignorance, arrogance, and other excesses.”

然後文殊師利真童子對離車族維摩詰說道：「善男子啊，菩薩怎樣依據種種佛法入道？」維摩詰回答說：「文殊師利啊，菩薩入非道，也就是依據種種佛法入道」文殊師利說道：「何為菩薩入非道？」維摩詰回答說：「如果進入五無間道，他不起狠毒、殺害和怨恨之心。進入地獄道，他遠來一切煩惱塵垢。進入畜生道，他遠來愚痴黑暗。」¹

It is important to be cognizant of the fact that most of us are unaware of our past lives. In fact, it can be difficult to remember what we ate for dinner two weeks ago! Because of this, we must not

¹ This translation of mine is based on the Chinese provided in Huang, Baosheng 黃寶生, ed., *Fan Han Dui Kan Weimojie Suo Shuo Jing* 梵漢對勘維摩詰所說經, Di 1 ban, Fan Han Fo Jing Dui Kan Cong Shu (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 2011), 221-222.

think of ourselves as devoid of potential. In fact, the opportunity to be a human, even in these dark times is a blessing.

Later in Chapter Eight, the sutra tells us how we should understand these difficult times that the world is facing today.

Lotuses do not grow in the highlands; the low-lying mud and filth is where the lotus grows. In this way, those who see the dharma of nonaction and enter enlightenment can never once again experience their first realization of the dharma. It is in the midst of affliction and filth that all beings are able to realize the Buddha's Dharma.

譬如高原陸地不生蓮華，卑濕淤泥乃生此華。如是，見無為法入正位者終不復能生於佛法，煩惱泥中乃有眾生起佛法耳。²

This relates to the current state of the world today in that despite being surrounded by a people dying by the hundreds of thousands this past year, we cannot become callous to this suffering. Even more importantly, we cannot lose faith and become despondent.

The challenge that I have experienced this past year is balancing between maintaining awareness of the suffering in the world, and not becoming either overwhelmed or numb. There is no question that we are all deeply and palpably aware of suffering on a scale that eighteen months ago we could not have imagined in our worst nightmares.

Somehow, we have to continue to grow and continue to treat others with compassion and wisdom. As Venerable Master Hsing Yun often says, “with the dharma there is always a way (*you fofa jiuyou banfa*; 有佛法就有辦法).”

² The Sanskrit and the Xuan Zang versions list out several types of lotus flowers that do not grow in the highlands, but only in the marshland. The quote I am using here is the Kumarajiva version, which does not list these variant types. Huang, *Fan Han Dui Kan Weimojie Suo Shuo Jing*, 228-9.

By Dr. Jonathan Mair
Visiting Researcher
Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

***Individual Harmony Achieved Through Joy:
Self-Cultivation in Lockdown and in Fo Guang Shan's Short-Term Monastic Retreat***

Last year, Master Hsing Yun published a *Covid Prayer*, which included the following lines:

May the momentary isolations become retreats for self-introspection,

May the momentary inconvenience become mindful practices of self-improvement.

How can we understand this wish? How can the 'momentary inconvenience' we go through in lockdown become an opportunity for 'mindful practices of self-improvement'?

During lockdown, own kind of self-improvement has been widespread. Many people took up new hobbies and learned new skills. For instance, I started studying the guitar. That's nice, but I think Master Hsing Yun was referring to something beyond that. His prayer reminds me of what I learned during my experience of self-cultivation in a Fo Guang Shan event called the 'Short-Term Monastic Retreat'.

The Short-Term Monastic Retreat

The Short-Term Monastic Retreat was first organised in the late 1980s and has taken place hundreds of times in centres around the world ever since. In each retreat, up to a thousand lay devotees are sealed into a temple for a week. During that week they have no access to phones or social media, and idle chatter is forbidden. They pass most of the time in silence.

The participants are temporarily ordained as monks and nuns for the period of the Retreat, then they live a life of disciplined simplicity modelled on the lives of Chinese Buddhist novices. Their daily routine is shaped by a repetitive pattern of prayers, ritualised meals, lectures, exercise and chores. The domestic tasks of laundry and cleaning shared spaces, things we barely notice in our busy everyday lives, become

prominent. There is a strict curfew of 10 pm, lights are turned off and the participants go to sleep before being woken by a bell at 5 am to start the daily cycle again.

I took part in the retreat as a researcher in Taiwan in 2016 and 2018, and, together with James Laidlaw, a colleague based at the University of Cambridge, I interviewed former participants in Taiwan, the UK, Singapore and Malaysia. My own experience was very similar to the experience reported by our interviewees. At the beginning of the Retreat, participants feel overwhelmed by the routine and find their minds turn to dark thoughts. Gradually, the anxiety passes until, at the end of the retreat, it is increasingly replaced by joy.

Mindful Self-Cultivation in the Retreat

The constraints of the Retreat mean that participants have no decisions to occupy themselves with—their actions must follow routine and etiquette. Once the mind is freed from the responsibility of planning the day, it is possible to concentrate mindfully on simple activities such as walking with grace and eating elegantly.

When we do this, we quickly find that unpleasant thoughts intrude—we worry, we feel bored, we start comparing ourselves to others and we envy or look down on them, we lose concentration and when we notice all these things we can react with self-hatred. In the Retreat, such thoughts and feelings are not a failure but an opportunity to practice self-cultivation. For instance, living cheek-by-jowl with others gives rise to strong feelings of envy or resentment. Retreat participants practice displacing those feelings by consciously generating compassionate feelings instead. When they notice that their mind is raging, they can practice use mindful concentration to calm it.

Living under constraints makes it possible to concentrate on our minds and to pay better attention to the mental afflictions that we have often come to take as part of the background of our lives. In this way, mindful concentration with right intention can turn our underlying anxiety into individual harmony achieved through joy.

Similarities with Lockdown Life

Many people have been in the midst of the action during this pandemic. Medics and essential workers have been helping others to get through it and risking their own lives to do so. However, many of us have been confined to our homes for much of the time. Our usually frenetic social life has been constrained. Our options for leisure activities have been reduced.

This situation has a lot in common with the Short-Term Monastic Retreat. As our lives have contracted, many people have reported dark thoughts and anxiety, much like the experiences that our interviewees went through at the beginning of their Retreats. This suggests that we can benefit from the lockdown if we are aware of the possibilities for self-cultivation and adopt the right intention. That, then, is how I understand Master Hsing Yun's Covid Prayer:

May the momentary isolations become retreats for self-introspection,

May the momentary inconvenience become mindful practices of self-improvement.

Session Two Q&A

The first question is proposed by Zivile Adulcikaite, volunteer engagement and project coordinator at St. Joseph hospice in London.

Zivile Adulcikaite: Thank you, Dr. Holloway for your beautiful reflection. What particularly resonated with me is that image of a lotus flower growing in the mud. Last week, I was talking to one of the lead nurses in the hospice about the current situation. She mentioned that the pandemic has brought Death into the proximity here in the West. A high rate of death by infectious diseases for a long time was seen as something happening in faraway places, not here. But with the pandemic, we have also witnessed the increase of communities coming together to support each other, with all mutual aid groups springing up here in the UK. We have seen a surge of people wanting to volunteer for our hospice. I wanted to ask **how it has been for you where you are?** I wonder if this difficult situation could be seen as something that teaches us the importance of compassion and community support. That in this mud we can all grow into beautiful flowers.

Dr. Kenneth Holloway: Thank you so much for the question. It has been incredibly difficult, but I think we have to remember that we have to balance between paying close attention to all the sadness around us and not withdrawing and being numb to that. We are also maintaining our own mental health, and through that, to realize that we have choices, we are the captains of our ships. We can decide if we are going to allow this to make us very angry or are very depressed. If we are going to try and channel this energy in a more positive direction, as master shilling and often says, with dharma, there is always a way your forefathers or, your grandfather, I feel like with all faiths. This situation is an opportunity to reignite our connection to our faiths. And through this, we can become come out on the other side, even stronger and more compassionate than before.

The second question is proposed by Haiying Ni, Ph.D. Candidate in School of Anthropology and Conservation, University of Kent, UK.

Haiying Ni: Thanks Dr Mair. I also joined the short-term retreat in Paris you studied. I still remember well how we enjoyed the food for our body and mind. Now I find the situation is different because we are not voluntarily to choose to stay at home and socially isolated. It feels not the same as the before when I decided positively to a temple stay or a retreat. I notice we are learning new rules such as smiling instead of speaking out “Good Morning”, waving hands replacing shaking hands.

My question is about our crave for social information as human beings in this new remoteness. I notice gossips, fake news, conspiracy theories go virus in the social network. Many people might find they are just nonsense but still are worried or received

negative responses from those stories. **How could we get along with our human nature, as gossip lovers, to protect our mind and approach a more positive online social connection? Or how can we find more joy instead of seeking dark stories or mistrust and make ourselves uneasy and upset?** Thank you.

Dr Jonathan Mair: Thank you. I think the key, again, is in Master Xing Yun's prayer. When he said explicitly, make the momentary inconvenience, become mindful practices of self-improvement. I think the most important thing is mindfulness. When you know, this situation has been going on for a long time now. I am sure we are all very familiar with this situation, with this feeling that I am going to describe in ourselves and other people. I can see this in the people they are talking to. They get very bored with the routine. They have done something so many times. They want to find something else to occupy themselves. It's very easy to turn to social media, as Kenneth was saying, to allow yourself to get angry with the situation and seek out things that will make you more furious.

But in the retreat, one of the most important things is that there is monastic walking around the whole time, observing the participants and shouting of them, regularly, concentrating on what you are doing, remembering your intention. That is something that we can use, I think, the routine we are forced to adopt we cannot go out and eat in a different restaurant. Several nights a week. We cannot rush out and meet some other friends every night. We are going to be sitting there on our own with the people. We live with the same people every night. Probably we are going to run out of different things to eat. We are going to be eating similar things every night.

Instead of using the boredom of the resistance, they find out irritation that might come from that situation to prepare us to look for more stimulation here or there. I think the key is to sit there, be aware of it. Bring us back to what we are doing and say we are going to have a good mealtime. I am going to cultivate good feelings towards my companion that I am living with. I am going to be aware of my feelings. And repeat my intention to myself. And I think that mindfulness and intention make the difference between reality. This is what we have all been talking about, right? The difference between suffering from anxiety and the difficulties that we are all going through and learning from them and making some progress. But it easier said than done, of course.

By Venerable Man Kuang

Former Representative of BLIA to United Nations

Abbess of Fo Guang Shan Dallas, U.S.A.

Auspicious Greetings to everyone. Thanks for the causes and conditions making us to meet each other online without any traveling and journeys, saving us a lot of time and money.

From last year in the same meeting, we know about the Five Harmonies from Venerable Master Hsing Yun's ideas and they include five aspects: harmony within oneself, harmony with others, harmony within the family, harmony with society and harmony with the wider world. By seeing this sequence, I sense that before we prepare to spread harmony in the world, balancing our own mind is the first thing we should do, I think this means a lot to all of us, especially during this pandemic period.

How to balance or how to achieve individual harmony within our mind while we are sick? Or while in just few days, we were infected with corona virus? I would like to share with you Eric Chen's experience who is one of our disciples and also a Covid-19 survivor in 2020. He was invited four times to talk online about his journey through Covid-19 to recovery by different groups. I believe his case would be a good example to explain the importance of inner harmony.

Just two days after Eric and his wife attending a closed friend's family gathering, they both tested positive, developing more serious situation. They were both sent to hospital three days later. Eric was transferred to an ICU with ventilator immediately, while his wife stayed at regular ward.

During the recovery period, he recalled "With a mask on my face, I had fears, even though I was conscious, but I felt my mind was empty. I tried very hard to recite Buddha's name as possible as I could while I was awake. I didn't know how long I will be here but just kept praying and telling myself how lucky I was to be alive. Gradually, I felt calm and seemed to be wrapped up by some warm energy, I learned patience and gratitude".

When I asked him what did he feel when he laid in the hospital's bed, he said "It's been so gratifying to watch doctors and nurses come together to provide the best possible care for patients — despite the isolation I feel from not having visitors, despite the anxiety that I

and my family are all experiencing. I guess that was these grateful thoughts inspired me and sustained the confidence of my recovery from the virus.

Since leaving the hospital, Eric suffered loss in strength and fine motor skills because the nerve damage in his legs, neck and shoulders, also he had difficulty swallowing and ongoing shortness of breath. He went through rehabilitation for one month and now he had improvement.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun said: “individual harmony achieved through joy”. Eric found the healing power from his gratitude and appreciation to the people around him, he balanced his mind with practice of the Middle Way — not overwhelmed by the difficult situation yet was aware of the things happening around him.

Now he joins temple’s online classes and service chanting, continues singing in our choir, and attended 2020 North America Buddhist Exam with other 1,300 participants. He cherishes every moment to learn, he said he is a person who lives with joy from his heart right now, the joy that he hasn’t discovered before.

Is there a quote saying that he who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe? Let’s achieve harmony within ourselves and contribute more to the family, society and the world.

By Dhruv Chhatralia BEM

Principal Associate Corporate Lawyer

the London office of international law firm Gowling WLG

How to heal the mind and to find the harmony of joy within oneself

According to the Hindu Vedic tradition of the Himalayas if one wishes to understand the mind then one should observe and study how nature works. Nature is made up of the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind and ether. Everything in the material nature is made up of these elements. With the digestive system, when we eat food then it is made up primarily of the earth element because it is solid, when it mixes with the saliva in our mouth then it is absorbed into the water element, when it is digested in the small intestine it is absorbed into the fire element, when it enters the large intestine then it is absorbed into the air element and then the subtle parts of the nutrients in the food are absorbed into the ether element.

In the same way, the outer parts of our physical body and our ego are made up of the earth element, which contains memory and attachment. When we connect with the external world then we do so through the water element of the mind which is feelings and emotions. The outer world is where consciousness tries to take form. Through the water element we take in impressions from our five senses of knowledge through sight, smell, taste, sound and touch. We gather these impressions from the outside and react to them through attraction and repulsion, like and dislike, desire and fear. Water is the part of the mind where we imagine and create what we believe to be reality. It is where we are motivated and act in the outer world. This part of the mind is turned outwards and looks to gather things in the material world. Through it we continue to gather more and more impressions from the outside. It aids us in performing our role in the world in order to properly function in it and gives us the impression that we are a part of the material world. This is what modern science regards as the mind as it is where thoughts, emotions and sensations arise.

The fire element of the mind is the bridge between the outer and the inner worlds or between the inner consciousness and the sensory organs on the outside. The fire element allows the mind to perceive the world. The light in the fire illuminates and gives us understanding. It is the logical and rational part of the mind and gives vivek (discernment) where we can judge and perceive things. The fire element in the mind measures, examines and evaluates in order to determine what is true and false, right and wrong, or real and unreal. When impressions come in from the outside then we analyze them through the fire element and place a judgement on it and obtain a meaning

out of it. This reasoning capacity digests impressions, emotions and thoughts into forms that are more subtle that give nourishment to our understanding and so we gain wisdom from them.

Then comes the wind element towards the inner part of the mind. The mind moves quickly like the wind and moves even faster than the speeds of sound or even light. The mind is able to do so many things at the same time for example thinking, feeling, judging, organizing impressions and coordinating the body. The mind is able to do this because of the wind element.

At its deepest core, the mind is mainly made up of the ether element. The mind is likened to the vast space as it is open and pervades everything. In this space it can hold so many forms and never gets tired from doing so. As one's mind develops more through wisdom and meditation, the amount of space in the mind increases. When the mind is dominated by sensual pleasures and is less developed then the mind contains less space. Lack of joy in life comes from a mind which has limited space similar to a bird stuck in the cage. Bliss in life comes from space that is unlimited in the mind similar to a bird being able to fly in the sky freely. Therefore, the five elements provide the key to how the mind works.

I will leave you with a few verses in Sanskrit, which is every day repeated by millions of people in India, and which I believe represent the most powerful thought in the universe:

Aum sarve bhavantu sukhinah
sarve santu niraamayaah
sarve bhadraani pashyantu
maa kaschit dukha bhaagbhavet
Aum Shaanti Shaanti Shaanti

Aum may all be happy and prosperous,
may all be healthy.
may all see auspiciousness,
may none suffer.
Aum. Peace! Peace! Peace!

By Peter Bennetts LLB

Head of Interfaith and Outreach

London Central Mosque and the Islamic Cultural Centre

Islam and Harmony

Islam like most ways of life values the importance of good mental health and emotional wellbeing. In the times we live in achieving higher and higher material goals has become such a normal state the constant television adds help corporations reach the percentage extra growth each year, year on year, it is easy to become unbalanced, dissatisfied with what we have, this can lead to depression as we work flat out with overtime just to make things meet and still not achieve that new car that new kitchen.

The Islamic way of live, based on the Quran and the practice of the Prophet Muhammad is amongst other things a balance that is much needed these days, it is a healing for the mind. In the Quran there are approximately two hundred repeated references to the concept of balance or al Mizan. The Quran and the statements of the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him guide and teach mankind regarding all aspects of life, in order to achieve the balance, and establish harmony.

Most Muslims will understand the term Nufs as used in the Quran to mean that mental element of energy that drives our desires and lusts, it's that part of self that is all about me and what I want, however this term Nufs is also about other parts of self, it's also about our mind's conscience, a built in understanding of right and wrong, and this part of the self or Nufs is inspired by the heart.

In answering the question, what is a sin, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "it is that which causes the heart to flutter." In other words, it worries us and plays on the mind. The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, is reported to have said, "Verily there is a soft part of the body and if that part is good then the whole body is good and if that part is bad then the whole body is bad and verily that is the heart". Now if one were to look at this statement from a physiological and psychological view, then certainly if the heart is not beating correctly the vital organs of the body will suffer, the whole of the body will be negatively affected including the mind.

There is another part of Nufs or self, it is the state of contentment and peace there are no immoral desires, and this is the ideal state of self or Nufs, and it is acquired, by a complete way of life, rather like instructions for use that are provided with a new product. This complete way of life is found in the Quran augmented by the lived

example of the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him, indeed the prophet's third wife Ayesha may God be pleased with her, is reported to have said that the prophet was the walking Quran.

It is impossible to cover that whole system, that complete way of life in such a short talk, however by way of example some important aspects can be touched upon. The Quran teaches that we should be grateful for what we have, and promises that if we are grateful, we will be given more, this inspires not the negative emotions of feeling less than others because of personal possessions, the Nufs of self of desires, but hope, peace and contentment, indeed it is a balance, because if we are content and grateful, we are promised more, it is a balance between always wanting more which is part of human self and contentment another part of the self or Nufs.

Muslims are taught by the Prophet Mohammad peace a blessing be upon him to look not at what others have got that we have not, but to look at what we have and others have not, and thus engender in us the feeling of gratefulness. This balance of the self through gratefulness can be disturbed when our emotional needs are not being met, if a footballer is racially abused despite being a prolific goal scorer, if an employer only concentrates on mistakes of an employee, if a neighbour causes inconvenience if a family member speaks very hurtful words, if we watch only negative things on social media.

The Quran gives guidance, and the prophet Mohammad teaches us how to get back into balance to that state of self of peace. If you are standing when you become angry, we are instructed to sit down, if we are sitting and become angry were advised lie down, in order to return to that state of harmony or balance we are instructed to do the wash, we usually do before prayer and then to do an extra prayer, the sections of prayer, involve standing bowing prostration and sitting, which help return us to the balance.

Part of healing the mind is about control, control with regard to acquiring material wealth, control about how long we sleep, about what we eat and drink, about how much we pray fast, and so on. Part of healing the mind is about kindness to parents and neighbours near and far the community society and the planet. Part of healing the mind is knowing and the knowing comes with education. The prophet Mohammad peace be upon him is reported to have said (referring to the Arabs at that time) but applicable to Muslims like myself in the UK, to travel as far as China to get knowledge.

The harmony, the balance is achieved by adhering to rules and guidance from the point of birth and how to treat the new-borns through all of life and preparation for death and

the next life, thus rules include recognising the rights of God, the parents, the extended family, the neighbours the community, society, the animals, insects and the planet, if those rights are observed, there will be harmony or balance within the self, the family, neighbours, the community, society and so on and so forth. It is interesting to note that after according God his right of worship parents come next and the mother is at least three degrees above the father. Respect and caring for the elderly are so important that the Prophet Muhammed peace be upon him informs us that paradise lies under our mothers' feet.

By Sarit Gafan

Founder, Highest Good Wellbeing

Author, Gratitude Goldmine

“World peace must develop from inner peace”, in the same way, I believe that harmony must start from within and then it glows outward.

Life has the ability to make us feel bombarded with pollution — anything that creates stress or negative emotions within us — world events, the media, modern life, societal or peer pressure, programming from childhood — negative or limiting beliefs about ourselves. This pollution can cause imbalance and disharmony within us, and if we are not prepared for it, it can cause long term difficulties.

During this global pandemic, I have discovered that a simple way to maintain harmony within myself is to bombard myself in as many different ways as possible with nourishing thoughts, nourishing words and nourishing actions, which has now become the essence of my mental wellbeing service. I call this bombardment of positivity the three keys to mental wellbeing: self-awareness, self-kindness and self-nourishment.

Self-awareness means tuning in regularly to my inner self, my soul, to let it guide me to my highest purpose on earth and the things that make it happy. Through mindfulness and meditation, I have often managed to discover underlying thoughts and beliefs that were pulling me off my path, causing difficult emotions. Once I identified them though I was able to see how they were creating negative energy within me and affecting my inner peace and harmony.

Self-kindness means treating myself with kindness to fill my cup so I can serve the world from a place of nourishment, with great energy, even Divine energy. Buddhism teaches the parable of the second arrow — we cannot control the pain that life may bring, but we can control how we respond to it and lessen our suffering by focusing on healing the first arrow with kindness and necessary action. Kindness is not to be underestimated though. I have learnt that there is a Yin and a Yang element to self-kindness. The Yin element is the gentler, more softly nurturing energy, whereas the Yang is more like a compassionate drill sergeant! Instead of directing oneself with the authoritarian energy that a regular drill sergeant might project, Yang self-kindness is a more empowered, encouraging energy, coming from a place of knowing your worth and not allowing judgements or criticisms to pull you off your path. For me, self-kindness is about finding the balance — when do I need the Yin energy and when do I need the Yang?

Self-nourishment means investing time in finding out, through tuning in and mindfully observing ourselves and what affects my energy, what nourishes me, what restores my harmony and realigns me with Divine energy — once I do this, I return to my true self and think nourishing thoughts, speak nourishing words and do nourishing actions, which in turn spreads harmony to others outside of myself — what a blessing! This can help when I encounter people who are experiencing disharmony within themselves, reflected by behaviour or responses to us that we may find challenging. So how do we nourish ourselves? This is of course different for everyone, so it takes time, patience and a willingness to explore this for yourself. On my journey, I have found that meditation is an excellent tool for Self-Awareness but actually also self-nourishment. I find that chanting sacred mantras is a great form of meditation, sometimes even just words — heal, peace, love, whatever I want to feel at any given moment. May this information bring blessings to all who receive it!

Coda by Dr. Kenneth W. Holloway
Levenson Chair and Associate Professor
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Confucianism and Harmony

The focus of Confucianism is on living in the present more than death or the afterlife, but I will share the relevant lines from Confucius on this subject in a moment. Confucianism believes that we can achieve peace and harmony by cultivate our minds, even in the midst of this tragic pandemic. Let me begin by reading a translation from The Western Inscription (西銘 Ximing) by Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077). Zhang Zai is one of the most famous interpreters of Confucianism in the past millennium. The following was inscribed on the western wall of his lecture hall:

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst.

Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider my nature.

All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.

The great ruler (the emperor) is the eldest son of my parents (Heaven and Earth), and the great ministers are his stewards. Respect the aged—this is the way to treat them as elders should be treated. Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak—this is the way to treat them as the young should be treated. The sage identifies his character with that of Heaven and Earth, and the worthy is the most outstanding man. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers [and sisters] who are in distress and have no one to turn to.¹

The framework Zhang Zai is articulating can be seen in its basic form in the text of the Great Learning 大學. When I went to Taiwan in the 1990s to study under the late Professor Yang Youwei 楊有維, we read Confucianism through the Four Books. This is the tradition, start with the Great Learning, move to the Doctrine of the Mean, then Confucius, then Mencius. Today I will shorten the process by focusing on the Great Learning as a window into Confucianism. The Great Learning describes the world in a series of Concentric

¹ Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook In Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 497.

Circles, and I should note that while this structure is clearly evident in the text, highlighting the circles is the favorite way of describing it for Tu Weiming 杜維明, Emeritus Professor of Harvard.

The inner most circle is the individual, and from this we can see that individualism is central to the Confucian project. Families do not come first, neither do obligations to the state or any other people. The duty of each individual is to exercise their inborn ability to think critically and analytically about everything in the world. This can be more directly translated as “knowledge is attained by the investigation of things” 致知在格物. Since this is the central lynchpin of the text, it repeats the same statement in reverse “when things are investigated, knowledge is attained” 物格而后知至. The point the text is making is that intellectual curiosity is something that all people have the ability and obligation to exercise. When this happens a person’s thoughts will be sincere, and their hearts will be upright. These are the keys to self-cultivation; it is all about how we individually must learn and understand our world. Only when that has been done can we have our families harmonious and then our state well governed. The final result of this process that is put into motion by analytical thinking is that we can actually achieve peace on earth 天下平.

In contrast to the focus on how to live our lives that we see in the Great Learning, when speaking on the issue of death, Confucius is brief.

4.8 If in the morning you learn of the Way, and that night you die, this is acceptable

11.13 Zilu asked about serving spirits and gods, the Master said: “Not being able to serve other people, how can you serve the spirits?” Zilu said “May I ask about death?” The Master replied “If you do not yet understand life, how can you understand death?”

As you can see, the focus is on the present, and in our present, we are facing the challenges of a global pandemic.

It has been popular since the early 20th century to see Confucianism as a philosophy and not a religion. The truth is that this was an argument built to provide protection in an environment of religious persecution where all of China’s traditional religions, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were under attack. In fact, there is tremendous faith necessary to believe that each and every person has the ability to understand this world and if each of us exercises that ability we can achieve peace on earth. This focus on individual cultivation, this emphasis on education, is something that Confucianism shares with Buddhism and certainly Islam and also Hinduism. In light of this I hope you can see that this Confucian faith in individual understanding is a common thread amongst the world’s religions.

Thank you.

Question One

By Maggie Wong

Thank you for all the speakers sharing with us today, it has been very inspiring to me. And here, I have a question for Ven. Man Kuang and Mr. Dhruv Chhatralia.

There are impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on faith communities in the UK where the Churches, mosques and temples are also changing rituals in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. The transfer of faith to the easily accessible and informal virtual world unleashed a new experimentation.

I would like to address my questions to Ven. Man Kuang and Mr. Dhruv Chhatralia: At a critical moment when people were frightened, uncertain and in desperate need of comfort and hope, **how do you think devotees can maintain the sense of spiritual connection when the way they worship has changed in terms of practicing religion and spirituality from home?**

Ven. Man Kuang:

Thank you for this question. it is very practical, and of the reality. At the beginning of this forum when Ricky has mentioned that we can treat the pandemic as a chance or opportunity for us to learn or giving us a chance to let us slow down. I believe that the attitude and the way we treat this pandemic are very important. Currently, we are all facing a very difficult time, but when we have to seek the harmony in our mind, the first thing is that we have to acknowledge and accept what we are experiencing and facing.

Covid-19 is affecting many of us and we should rethink of how we are spending our time. Previously, we were able to socialise with people; however, it is a new page for us now to rethink. We have to reschedule our time, to practice mindfully based activities. For example, painting, praying, calligraphy, self-reflecting, singing, meditation, explore in the nature and practicing yoga. I think these are very helpful to maintain mindfulness within ourselves.

The second concept or attitude we can hold is that we view the Covid-19 as an opportunity rather than a challenge. This reminds us that “everything is impermanent”, which is a lesson to learn within Buddha’s dharma teachings. Since we are in this situation, we have to change our concept and mindset, we do not want to treat Covid-19 as our enemy, but as a chance for us to make the power or motivation to challenge

ourselves in viewing this situation. Therefore, impermanence actually is the principle of harmony in my point of view, as we are learning how to live in a new lifestyle and the new way in connecting with others.

The third attitude is very important for the devotees who can practice at home, which is that we can cultivate connections through rituals. It's very important for people to practice their beliefs in a way that make them feel peaceful and hopeful. For example, we have virtual dharma service every Sunday morning at our Temple; apart from this service, we have another online group called the praying group where we meet monthly on Zoom and we pray for people (i.e. pray for people who are facing difficulties, pray for new-born babies, pray for house moving, etc.).

Even though we cannot see each other in person, we can continue to stay connected through modern technologies. Nevertheless, the attitude we view pandemic is vital and changing the way we think can help us stay positive during these uncertain times.

Dhruv Chhatralia:

Hinduism has Shad Darshanas (six schools of thought). They are as follows:

- Purva Mimamsa (which is about the authority of the Vedas and performing the right actions and rituals in accordance with Dharma (natural law)).
- Nyaya (which is about logic and analysis of speech and of utterances).
- Vaisheshika (which is about physics and analysis of matter which is made up of atoms).
- Samkhya (which is about the why and categories of counting in terms of reality where One gets divided into multiplicity).
- Uttar Mimamsa or Vedanta (which is about what and the nature of reality).
- Yoga (which is about the how and the process of self-realization).

Of these, Yoga comes from the root Sanskrit word Yuj which means to join or unite with the Divine. And you can join with the Divine through your thoughts (gnyan yoga), emotions (bhakti yoga), actions (karma yoga) and energy (kriya yoga). Yoga is also physical, mental and spiritual practice having its origins in India that transforms the body and the mind to function at their peak. This process of self-realization through Yoga comes about through eight steps which are:

- Yama (which are five things to observe in our interactions with the outer world) being Sattya (reality), Aparigraha (non-possessiveness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (non-excessiveness) and Ahimsa (non-violence)).

- Niyam (which are five things to observe with ourselves) being Shaucha (cleanliness), Santosh (contentment), Svadhyay (study of the Vedic scriptures) and Ishvar Pranidhar (devotion and surrender to the Divine).
- Asana (physical postures).
- Pranayama (breath control).
- Pratyahara (turning our mind and senses inwards).
- Dharana (concentration).
- Dhyan (meditation).
- Samadhi (self-realization).

This Sadhana (spiritual practice) of Yoga can be practised at home and it is scriptural method of aligning your body, mind, emotions, thoughts and energies to function in complete harmony. It is not about looking up or outside but turning inwards for well-being. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his address to UN General Assembly on 27th September 2014 said: "Yoga is an invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition. It embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment; harmony between man and nature is a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. It is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with yourself, the world and the nature. By changing our lifestyle and creating consciousness, it can help us deal with climate change. Let us work towards adopting an International Yoga Day."

Question Two

by Connie Suluihana

Brunel University London, U.K.

Over the past year, we have seen the consequences of the pandemic, aside from the physical health implications, also had effects in other areas, for example, mental health that Sarit and Venerable have mentioned, also the way that we navigate our personal relationships, our interactions with people in our community, and even just how we view ourselves and our habits.

Nevertheless, this flow or harmony of life has never been throwing off. In Buddhism, we talk about Five Harmonies: harmony within self, harmony of others, harmony within the family, harmony in society, harmony or peace around the world.

My question is to Ms. Sarit Gafan and Mr. Peter Bennett: **During the pandemic and lockdown, in which ways do you think religion helps to maintain a sense of harmony within one of the areas above?**

Peter Bennett:

Thank you very much for the question. First of all, from the Islamic point of view, what the religion has taught us in this lockdown is to make us contemplate all parts of religion that fit what we are going through now. I am sure it praised to every single religion, to every single way of life. And I go back to a passage in the Koran, where God tells us “mankind, after hardship comes ease”; and in the compassion in a way repeating it, “verily, after hardship comes the ease”. This is telling us when facing difficulties, Koran instructs us to seek help in patience and prayer. This combination of patience and prayer is very important.

It's not good praying if we are only wanting an instant answer. There must be the patience, because God tells us patience is a struggle. And God tells us, “verily, he is with patience”. The beauty I found not just about my own religion, but it is all the other religions, because being ahead of interfaith we initiated a keep-in-touch Zoom meeting to interact with different faith groups. Talking about the change in this pandemic, I can tell you that during this lockdown I have spoken with and seen more people's faces than I did when it wasn't in lockdown.

And what is inspired there? What is inspired on this evening? I'm listening to Dhruv, I am listening to Venerable Man Kuang and listening to you all. I have been trying to

memorise all the things you said. But I can sum it up and say, “the best way religion has helped this lockdown by bringing a sense of harmony is the teachings I have been listening from everybody.” That makes me feel harmonious and peaceful. When I listen to each of you, it is just like an echo in different words from the teachings, which is so beautiful; you could call it spiritual, you could call it mindfulness or an influx of energy.

Sarit Gafan:

I am not a religious person myself, but I have heard about some of the ways that religions have stayed connected during the previous event for United Nations Interfaith Harmony Week. For example, live streaming of services and performing traditions and rituals online have enabled congregations to access their sense of belonging and faith and find a way to celebrate festivals in spite of being unable to physically be together in holy communal places. This is, of course, not the same as sharing a physical space, but it makes the heart and soul connection even more important and powerful.

I believe that there is great power in collective prayer: positive focus from a shared intention. For example, for the healing of a loved one, or an entire community or even the world, I would love to arrange interfaith gatherings like these (online and perhaps eventually in person when it is safe to do so), where we can share prayers in our diverse and beautiful ways, around the shared intention of world healing, and then say a collective prayer together. I feel that this would be very powerful, similar to the way that some of the group and global meditations in which I have participated in have generated great energy. When a person prays for someone, I believe that it goes beyond simply the thoughts and words. I truly believe that Source delivers the divine energy that their loved one has asked for them to receive, and I believe that doing this in larger groups could have a great healing effect for the world.

Learning about Five Harmonies in Humanistic Buddhism at last year's event helped me understand why I feel such a warm and close connection with the Fo Guang Shan community. We share a peaceful, loving energy and wish it for all of humanity through our thoughts, our words and our actions, and the focus on harmony in particular reflects out from the souls of this wonderful community. We seem to bring out the best energy in each other, perhaps our souls recognize each other's common values and energy and reflect it back like a mirror of love, peace and harmony! What a blessing!

Question Three

By Dr. Yunxia Wu

Lancaster University, U.K.

I have a question to Mr. Peter Bennetts and Mr. Dhruv. This question was inspired by my pen friend, an 84-year-old English artist, Yvonne. She lives alone in a small village in England. She believes that the West is not very good at looking after the elderly, as the elderly are only put in homes. She admires the elderly people in Asian societies, as they stay within the family.

Can you talk about the concept or meaning of family life for one's spiritual cultivation? According to your traditions, how do the elderly people apply a faithful life and transfer their wisdom to the younger generation?

Please Mr. Peter Bennetts, can you share your thoughts with us first. Thank you.

Peter Bennetts:

Sure. Tracing back to 1625, the first family records, we were Jews. And I was born in Catholic. My father was Church of England and he wasn't allowed to marry my mother in Church, (as) she was Catholic. And we were all religious. I have seen traditions and different traditions as well. I married to a person of Indian origin, fourth generation going back to catching "good trial".

So, I can actually compare the ways some, it is wrong to say British, because it is funny to say English. Because it is such a mix. But what I can say is looking at Muslim family looking after one another. From Asian tradition, there is the extended family. My mother-in-law is still living in a house with all the family grew up, where one of her sons were still living there looking after her. That tradition is a wonderful tradition, where the elderly becoming important. From Islamic point of view, this come across, we have people from all ethnic groups for Muslims.

God tells us five times in the Holy Quran, after worshipping him, the most important thing is to be kind to parents. after worshipping him, the most important thing is being kind to parents. Five times he tells this: "worshipping means being kind to your parents." And out of the parents, the most importance is the mother. Worship means being kind to your parents, in pain after pain, did your mother carry you? In pain after pain, did she bring you forth? And women period is two years. If either of them, the parents, becomes old in your lifetime, say not word without respect. But loving them with humility. And pray for my lord of mercy upon them. It is the beauty of the importance of the parents. They are the ones immediately after god, should take the highest point in our life as long as they live.

So, this watering down, not deliberately, but the watering down of the closed family when the elder people were more important. It is so sad that it's happening. But it can be something drawn back through religions, through teachings. So many times, we had so many criticisms about religion. Religions are always the cause of war. It is not the religion at all. It's the people

within them done this in the past. That is all it is. But the importance of parents and looking after them, right on them and passed away is absolutely crucial in my belief, and this wonderful thing has been interfaith. I get the hear a lot of this same stuff but from different traditions. So, it's wonderful.

When God tells us this in the Holy Quran those with humility. This reminds me of a parent not so good at technology, like myself perhaps, then the person treating you little bit stupid, because you are not good on the technology, and you used to change their habits, and they should ask you a thousand time, "what is that?". "Daddy, it is a bird." You never lose patience. So, I think this time of lockdown where we can become more religious and it is our turn to look after our family and look after the elders. They have the wealth of experience and knowledge passing on us, for us to accept it.

Yunxia: Thank you! Thanks for your sharing. So, from your multi-cultural family you shared with us a lot of things about the crucial function of family for a person to learn from their parents about their experience and knowledge. And lockdown means to be back home and to look after their parents. Thank you very much, thank you!

Can I ask Mr. Dhruv to share with us your thoughts? Thank you.

Dhruv:

Thank you peter for sharing your beautiful thoughts. I am getting to echo what you said and as well I will share some other thoughts from my perspective. What I remembered about a spiritual organisation from a cartoon. A monk, he was in discussion with his disciple. The disciple asked a question, "Master, I wish to attend the sense of Samadhi, which in the Sanskrit even mindless. How can I stay in it even mindless?" The master said, "I will show you the way". The next clip of the cartoon shows that the same person back to a family, where his kids are telling him something, his wife is yelling ahead, another person is telling him one thing,

That is why even mindless is learning from family. That's why it's so important in Upanishad, where in ancient time children used to learn hermitage. In the last part of the cartoon, the person saying him one thing, that where even mindless learned from family. That is why it is so important in Upanishads that in ancient time Children learn the hermitages. The last important words, "Matru devo bhava, Pitru devo bhava, Atihi devo bhava" (Sanskrit), means "regard your mother as divine; regard your father as divine; regard guests of the house as divine as well."

To show the importance of everything we got from parents. I want to share the seven tissues in the eyes of Hindu tradition. We have seven tissues in our body, what we said plasma, blood, muscle, fat, bone, nerve and reproductive fluid so much go on. Three of them come from father; three of them come mother, and DNA is connected with seven generations in the family. And so, whenever I was going up to my grandmother, she always teaches me to do some certain rituals to remember our ancestors with offered water.

So, it is necessary to ask yourself, “how much with enlightenment or our ancestor and parents expected of us. How much have we grown? Spiritually in according to their wishes. Because no parents want anything bad for their children. All the parents would want their children to grow in terms of their well-being and in terms of their spirituality. And that’s why as well as that happen when we have our parents looking after us when we are young. It is our future to look after our parents when they are older.

My grandmother is used to such beautiful things, not just the relationship we have within family, but among animals and birds, and the pond that resides in our garden. And my grandmother is used to get everything in the morning to leave a portion of our food we have for the dinner for the birds outside. So much that she gets complaints from the neighbours. So many pigeons came to our garden. And she didn’t speak a lot of English. So, when the council came, she closed door and said, “no English”. And victoriously she always nourished the pond of the nature, which she regarded as the heart of family.

There was a study done on longevity and family in particularly, I think on Italian family. And they realised the families who had three generations have all living together, have the longest longevity. And families are not just about duties, it’s a connection of love and emotion, and when you have someone who you share your emotions with. It increases your wellbeing and happiness. And the essential thing is not just to protect the elderly generation but to protect ourselves. And certain things our grandmother used to teach us to keep the family strong and united about four things, we used to have at least one meal together as a family. Which is quite nice. She always used to encourage us to have as much conversation as possible within the family, which increases the bond. We always used to pray together in the morning. the four thing we can’t do so much in this environment, but we used to go to pilgrimages together. I found those four are very strong pillars.

Having that reference the elders were taught in the tradition to touch the feet when we bow down, we fold our hands, I bow down to the divinity. We may touch the ground, it’s the relevance to elders in the family. There’s a greatness in learning how to bow down, because a lot of humility is missing in this world. The more fruit in the branches of a tree, the more that the tree declines. And that makes the mind joyful, because the overseeing of an arrogant person smiling whole heartedly, the more successful you are in life the more you have to be modest. That grounding comes from family. Because showing an arrogant person respect as soon as they go, turn the back they change. But there’s a bliss in that bowed down one’s head, a picture in a bowed down to get water from a river. In fact, the picture just has the bowed down, and the river doesn’t do anything else, and one of these pots in thirst’s quench will get rid of thirst of many pots. So, when we bow down, we got the blessings coming to us and there’s great power in these blessings, those are the key themes that I’ve seen.

The sayings are pretty much as what Peter said. In ancient sense the culture he reads the scriptures like the marble and so on the stories of the boar and soldiers weren’t desired by the father’s name but the mother’s and the importance of what the mother means to us. And not

just the physical mother but also cows, a mother gives us milk from a young age but after that there are enzymes in the body that can't process that milk from the mother cow. So, there's a reference to the mother cow. And so that family relationship extends to more than own family, but there's a famous Sanskrit saying: "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, the whole world is one family". we learn those values of how to interact with other people and how to show other people respect and compassion from family. So, the essential component of lives and something that must protect by passing this tradition down from generation to generation.

Yunxia :

Thank you. So, I have learned two concepts from you. The first is connection. It is a kind of sense of connection in the family to help the younger generation to know that they can have the good connection with society and the whole world. And the second is conversation, it means in the family, the elderly can, it is not like teaching, it's like funny talking, talking to the nature. So, this kind of conversation can happen anywhere, anytime, even in the lunch time. It will have a good relationship (with the elderly) for the younger generation. I will pass your and Peter's answers to my friend. I want to encourage her. Thank you.



THANKS FOR READING

Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order

