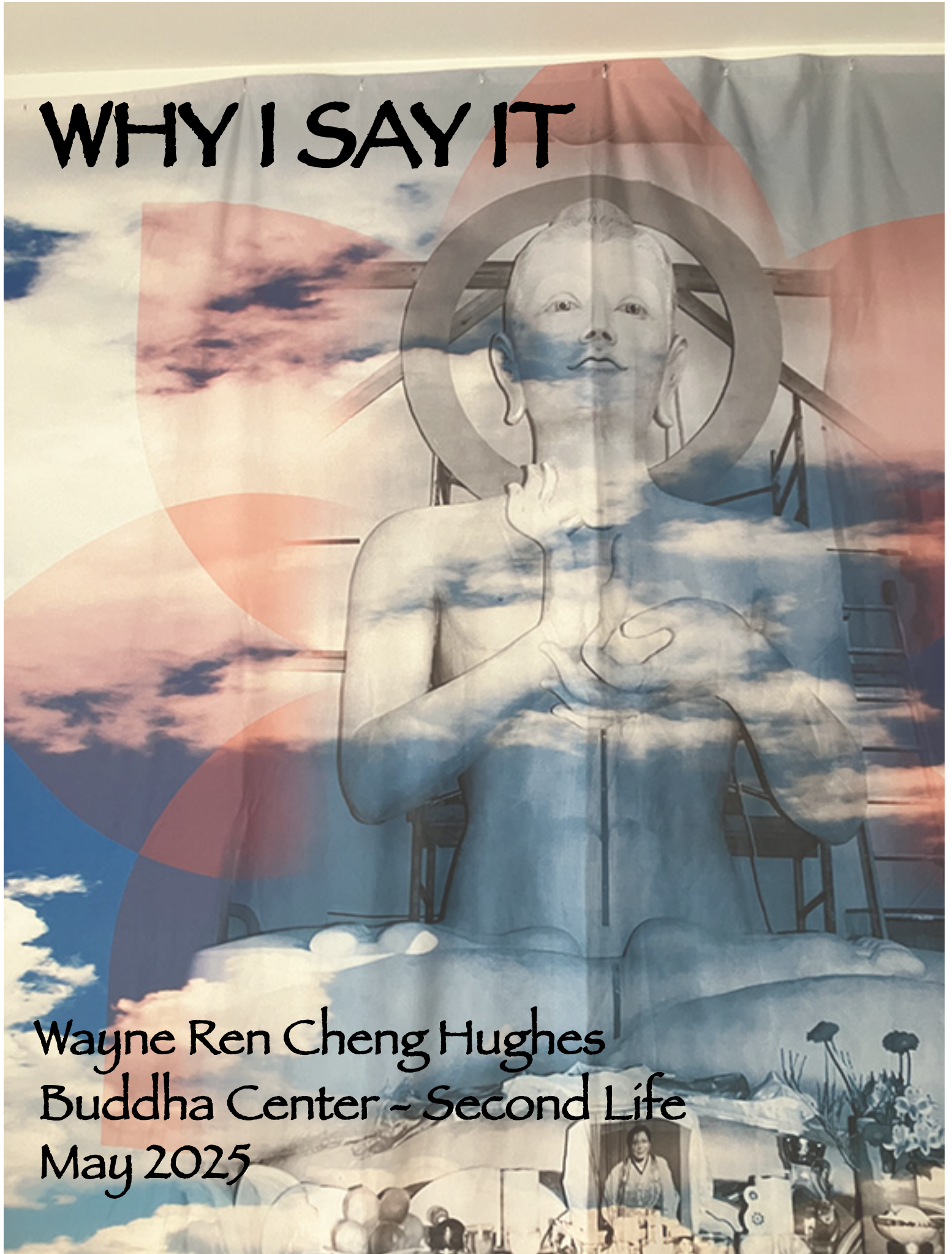


WHY I SAY IT

Wayne Ren Cheng Hughes
Buddha Center - Second Life
May 2025



DEDICATION

I bow deeply to my root teacher, who taught me the ideals needed to meet the real.

I bow deeply to the members and staff of the Buddha Center in Second Life, who stand as examples of the ideals meeting the real.

I bow deeply to Mary, who is both my ideal and my real.

HOW TO USE THESE IDEALS

These things aren't just sayings; they are ideals that can be used to deal compassionately and effectively with reality. They aren't to be memorized and recited when asked; they are actions to take. The value of these musings can only be realized by practicing them.

So, go ahead and get some 3 X 5 cards, or other pieces of paper. It has been experientially verified that a 3 x 5 card is best, though some prefer to put it as a note in the cell phone, and a few record the challenge in voice and play it when needed. A 3 x 5 card is durable, it folds and unfolds without tearing and there is room for notes. It is also something foreign in your pocket or purse, so you notice it more readily, reminding you of your responsibility.

There are three aspects to each of the ideals. What I said. The ideal behind the words. How to engage the ideals amidst the realities of human existence.

The practices are for you to engage and to discern what you learn from them, and to make what transformation you may discern is needed. It is your responsibility to engage the practices and to be rigorously self-honest about the results. Then take appropriate actions to make the transformations necessary to make yourself a better human being.

All of these ideals have arisen in the fifteen plus years I have shared the Dharma with the Buddha Center Sangha in the virtual world of Second Life. Members of the sangha have asked questions or offered comments that gave me fresh insight into how these ideals can be better explained and the practices made more effective.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

when this is present, that comes to be

on the condition of this, that arises



from the arising of this, that arises

when this is absent, that does not come to be



SCRABBLE

EIGHTFOLD PATH

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THE BUDDHA WAS PRAGMATIC.

The story of the Siddhartha, and the teachings that followed his Awakening show are those of a pragmatist. He applied skillful means (upaya) in each unique situation in order to offer the dharma so that it had the best chance of being understood by the audience.

The Eightfold Path is an example of the Buddha's pragmatic philosophy and action. The Eightfold Path isn't a list of commandments telling us what we must do in given situations. Instead each of the eight are guidelines that we must use our own knowledge and wisdom gained through experience to appropriately apply. What works in one situation may not work in a similar situation. Such is the challenge that an impermanent Universe of co-dependent arising presents us with and that we must respond to pragmatically.

In EDIG pragmatism and experiential verification are interdependent. Practices and philosophies of Buddhism are not just believed because someone said so. Instead, the teachings are meant to be experienced and their efficacy verified. This is pragmatism.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Write PRAGMATIC on it. Fold it up and put it away. Each day, for the following week, you will have to decide. It might be choosing where to go for lunch, what garage to bring your car to for repair, or which charitable organization you will donate to. Once each day, when the moment to decide arises, take out the card and read the word PRAGMATIC. Then focus on making a pragmatic choice. Note if the consequences of your pragmatic choice were wholesome or unwholesome

PRACTICE RIGOROUS SELF-HONESTY

Lying to yourself is not an action of appropriate speech. It will lead to suffering. Continuing to hold to a dishonest evaluation of yourself is not an appropriate view. You can become attached to the dishonest notions you hold about yourself and be fearful of accepting that they may be wrong. You can convince yourself that you are how “you think you are” rather than recognizing how “you really are” and realizing how “you could be”. So, let rigorous self-honesty openly reveal the good, the bad, and the indifferent dispositions and habits that make up your character. Then use the empowering ideals of not-self, impermanence, and causality to work toward positive changes.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Think of a lie that you tell yourself about yourself. We have all done it. Write it down. Then, ask yourself why you tell this lie. Be rigorously self-honest with your answer. Write it down. HINT – It could be a lie that makes you look good, or one that makes you look bad. Fold it and put in a pocket. For the next 48 hours carry it with you and about once every couple of hours take it out, read it and put it away. Let the truth of how you are replace the lie. Remember you probably tell more than one lie about yourself.

WHERE THE IDEAL MEETS THE REAL.

In every moment our moral ideals must engage with the realities of life as a human being. The Dharma offers ideals like compassion, selflessness, loving-kindness, appropriate view, and generosity of spirit. We encounter the real in the situations and experiences that come with life as a human being; or when the ideals of Buddhist philosophy and practice meet the real of moment-to-moment life; or when the moral rubber meets the ethical road of reality.

Will ideals sometimes clash with the responsibilities and needs of reality? Yes. This is when intent and being situational matters the most. A Buddhist practitioner must approach reality with the intent to be the cause of the most ethically wide-ranging wholesome effects when engaging their moral ideals; and respond appropriately to that reality.

PRACTICE: Write on a 3x5 card “IDEAL MEETS REAL”, fold it into quarters and put in a pocket. Once per day for a week (that moment when you remember it) take the card out and read the words. Now look around. What is the reality of that moment? What ideal is being engaged? Is it effective given the reality? Why? Example of note written on card: A homeless person demanded a donation. Generosity of spirit and acceptance. Yes. The homeless person got a couple of dollars and I strengthened my practice.



IS IT EASY? NO. IS IT WORTH IT? YES.

Is it easy? A sincere Buddhist practice requires renunciation of HOW you think you are, in order to realize HOW you can be. It isn't easy to set aside a long-held view and embrace one more refined. For example, setting aside the view of a permanent self and realizing the Dharma of a self that transforms each moment: a not-self. Other Buddhist practices require different transformations and all take commitment and mindfulness to engage. So, the answer is no.

Is it worth it? The only way any of us answers this question is through learning about and engaging in a Buddhist practice. It is the only path to verifying whether a practice has worth in our lives. When it does . . . and it will . . . prove worthy, it is up to us to mindfully engage that ideal way of being in everyday life. Doing so will result in wholesome consequences for us and the people and world around us. So, the answer is yes.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Write MEDITATION across the top. During the following week firmly schedule a time to sit quietly with yourself for ten minutes. For six days just sit and think about yourself before you chose the Noble Path. On the seventh day consider how practicing Buddhism has changed you.

BE A BETTER HUMAN BEING, NOT BETTER THAN ANY OTHER HUMAN BEING, BE BETTER THAN YOU WERE IN THE PREVIOUS MOMENT.

Be a better human being. It is an unspoken, though clearly revealed goal of a Buddhist practice.

Not better than any other human being. Life isn't a contest pitting you against others; life is a contest pitting you against your habitual reactivities and unwholesome dispositions.

Be better than you were in the previous moment. Change from moment-to-moment is inevitable so in each moment make choices intended to improve your practice, your knowledge, and your character. Become better.

PRACTICE: On a 3x5 card write the words BE BETTER. Fold it into quarters and put it in your pocket. For a week, each day at lunch time take out the card, unfold it, and note what you did in the previous 24 hours to BE BETTER.



WHY, WHO AND WHAT YOU ARE IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS HOW YOU ARE.

When I ask someone to tell me about themselves, they talk about WHO they are. My name is. I come from. My father is. My mother is. My race is. Then comes WHAT they are. I am put faith here. I am put job title here. I am put political affiliation here. I am put dietary preference here. These, and other "I" statements individualize the person. This is important from a social perspective.

More important for me is to know HOW you are. The answer(s) to that question will reveal the spiritual needs of the person. I feel put emotional state here. I think put thought here. I wonder put question here. A follow-up question is HOW do you view yourself in relation to the world and the other people living on it. The answer(s) reveals the person's worldview. Third question is HOW are you doing in this moment. I am put your mindful insights here. The answer(s) reveals their view of their self. Understanding how a person is is a factor when discerning how they might be better.

PRACTICE: On a 3x5 card write the question 'How am I?', fold the card into quarters and put it in your pocket. Using your cell phone or other timer set a reminder for 9am, 1:30pm, and 7pm. For the next week when the timer buzzes, rings, or chimes take the card out, unfold it and ask yourself the question. Write a brief description of your answer on the card. Yes, you will likely need another card, maybe more. Fold it up, put it back in your pocket until the next reminder.

I BOW TO EACH OF YOU WITH DEEP RESPECT.

This is said to members of the sangha because I do. Deep respect comes with every bow of the avatar that represents me in the virtual world of Second Life.

It is a deep respect arising from the dedication and sincerity of the Buddha Center sangha. Whether the sangha member has been attending for a decade or a day, they deserve deep respect for their efforts.

Why deep, and not just respect? All human beings, and frankly all living beings deserve respect. In Engaged Dharma respect is given freely, though it can be taken back if a situation warrants it. Deep respect because choosing the Noble Path and engaging it is not easy.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card and write 'deep respect' on it. Fold it into quarters and put it in a pocket. Be mindful of moments when you disrespect* someone. When it happens make a mark on the card. At the end of the week check your numbers. How disrespectful are you?

*Disrespect is shown in a variety of ways, ranging from ghosting a text to gossiping about someone. Be rigorously self-honest about your ways of being disrespectful.



I WILL HONOR LIFE.

Here is the fifth lay precept in Engaged Dharma. It is a non-negotiable vow.

I undertake the training of loving-kindness; my intent is to abstain from killing sentient beings. I will honor life.

This vow is non-negotiable in that it cannot be a 'silent vow'. In the Chan tradition a practitioner should not take a precept vow they feel they cannot live up to, at that time. They remain silent when that particular vow is recited. The fifth vow **MUST** be taken and **MUST** be practiced. It is the core of Five Lay Precepts.

I will honor life. Carefully read each of the vows, training and abstaining. I will honor life is the intent of a sincere practice of all the lay precepts.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card and write on it: *I honor all living things who gave their lives, and beings whose efforts brought this food before me. May the strength and vitality acquired by eating this meal be used for the benefit of all living beings. SvaHa!* Fold it into quarters and put it in your pocket. For the following week, before you eat something, that includes snacks, take out the card and recite the Meal Time Dharani, out loud or silently. Fold it up and put it away. Consider how you interact with your meal when you engage in this intentional ritual before eating.

COMPASSION IS NON-NEGOTIABLE.

“A truly compassionate attitude toward others does not change even if they behave negatively or hurt you.” This quote from the Dalai Lama is transformed into the pithy saying, ‘Compassion is non-negotiable.’ A Buddhist has compassion for the person but does not always accept their actions.

Compassion is non-negotiable. Every ideal and practice of Buddhism arises from a foundation of compassion for yourself, others, all other living beings. Ideals like generosity of spirit, morals, and patience are causal consequences of compassion, and compassion strengthens those ideals. Without compassion a Buddhist practice would be false.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Write the name of someone you feel is the least deserving of compassion. Fold it into quarters and put it in a pocket. Once per day for the following week take the card out, unfold it and read the name. Then, close your eyes and imagine that person as a 2-year-old child. Imagine yourself holding them. Keep that image in your mind for a minute. Fold the card up and put it away. How does your view of that person change by the end of the week?



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HUMAN(E) FLOURISHING

The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard “has developed an approach to human flourishing based around five central domains: happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships”. This is what Buddhists want for themselves and all other human beings. I offer a broader concept of this ideal of human flourishing.

I have added an ‘e’, humane. Humane flourishing. Flourishing that has pragmatic regard for the human component and all other living things, as well as this planet we depend on. Humane flourishing requires us to engage in skillful intent and actions in order to achieve the ideals of harmony, health and happiness (in any number, order or combination) in the midst of the reality we must deal with in any given moment. It means making difficult decisions based on mindful assessment of situations so that man and nature both have opportunities to flourish. There will be situations where nature must take a backseat to the needs of man, while in other situations the California Spotted Owl will prevail. Humane flourishing requires a delicate balance between human beings, and all the other living beings that inhabit our planet.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card and write down each of the five central domains (happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships) using both sides if you need to. Fold it into quarters and put away. Take it out the first five days during the next week. Choose one of the domains and be mindful of it throughout the day. At the end of the day contemplate, for ex., what gave you life satisfaction during that day.

DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD THEM DO UNTO OTHERS

The English language is full of aphorisms. When talking about being neighborly and treating all with loving-kindness, one stands out: "Do unto others as you have them do unto you." It is a great sentiment, but from a Buddhist view it has a tinge of selfishness.

It becomes a selfless aphorism when worded, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto others.' The intent is to influence others, through being an example of selflessness, into taking selfless wholesome actions that will have encompassing societal effects.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card and write the aphorism on it -- 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto others.' -- Fold it into quarters and put it in a pocket. Each morning read the aphorism before putting the card in your pocket. Be aware during each day of moments when someone takes an action to help others that you view as a wholesome example. When it happens take out the card, unfold it, make a note about what was worth emulating.



I AM HAPPY TO DO IT

Saying, "I am happy to do it", has been part of my practice for a while now. "I am" is an intentional reminder that how I choose to be is my responsibility. I experience a sense of joy when I've done something nice for someone and I've experienced that using the word "happy" is more likely to elicit a smile. And it is an intentional reminder that doing good makes me feel good, or happy if you will. As Buddhist practitioners we strive to do, to take wholesome actions for our self and others, or "to do it".

The phrase 'I am happy to do it' is a reminder that the action isn't taken only for a particular individual (you're welcome). It is something I am happy to do it for whomever needs action. It's the bodhisattva-in-training way to be.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. During the next day whenever someone thanks you for something you have done, instead of saying 'you're welcome' say 'I am happy to do it'. Keep track on the notecard of how many times in that day you were happy to do it.

REBIRTH. I DO NOT BELIEVE OR DISBELIEVE. I DO NOT KNOW. SO, I STRIVE TO BE THE BEST HUMAN BEING POSSIBLE SO IF IT IS REAL THEN I AM READY FOR A GOOD REBIRTH; IF IT IS NOT REAL THEN I WILL LEAVE A WHOLESOME LEGACY BEHIND.

This worldview was born from this passage from David Kalupahana's book, *Ethics in Early Buddhism*, *"For the Buddhist scholar interested in interpreting the doctrine in the light of what he or she believes to be critical modern philosophy, the idea of rebirth is no more than an ancient Indian philosophical relic either let alone by the Buddha because it was supposed to do no harm or brought into the Buddhist fold by his later disciples. It was not the least compatible with the Buddha's conception of not-self or nonsubstantiality."* This view doesn't mention that in traditional, and some contemporary teachings, the ideal of rebirth guides the morality and ethics of a practitioner. Is the "threat" of rebirth needed? That it is a threat is hard to deny. Do as the teachings say, or you will wind up with a terrible next life, human or animal.

This worldview matured into an agnostic, pragmatic view. Rebirth is an expectation, a reward for engaging in wholesome thoughts and actions during the current life. Buddhists aren't supposed to expect anything from ceasing to do harm, doing only good, and doing good for others. It is done because it is the appropriate way of being for those who choose the Noble Path. So, if rebirth is not real, I will strive to leave a positive legacy. But if rebirth is ever proven to be real, then I'll have a worldview in need of transformation. And I am good with that.

And there is nothing unwholesome or negative about having a belief in rebirth. There are millions of Buddhists who agree.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card and write, REBIRTH PROS; on the other side write, REBIRTH CONS. Now list five pros and five cons of rebirth. During the week take out the card occasionally and read both sides. Add or subtract or move a pro to a con, or con to pro if it is appropriate. At the end of the week check the results. They are a part of your worldview.

KARMA IS HUMAN PHYSICS IN ACTION

Siddhartha realized that the Hindu concept of karma didn't fit within his own experience. He didn't call it "human physics in action", but he realized that what we do affects not only on us, but also reaches far beyond our unique place in the Universe. This realization became the Buddhist ideal of karma. This phrase honors both views. Karma, as action or consequence is an ideal that is both connected to, and dependent on the actions of human beings. Human physics in action is the intersection of the Buddhist ideal of karma and the reality of the causal conditioning of all phenomena.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Write KARMA IS HUMAN PHYSICS IN ACTION across the top. Make two columns, one labeled "Good" and the other "Bad". Before you take any significant actions consider whether the consequences will be good or bad. Do the ones that can go in the good column, think more on the ones for the bad column before deciding to, or not to do them.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE ALWAYS PRACTICING; DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN'T HAVE FUN DOING IT.

This is an Engaged Dharma aphorism. There are three lessons.

Remember. Be ever mindful.

You are always practicing. The ideals of Buddhism are meant to be integral to how you engage life. In Engaged Dharma we say a Buddhist practices 24/7/365, no time off.

Doesn't mean you can't have fun doing it. If practice is 24/7/365, then we must be practicing during serious moments like performing a job or meditation, and in fun moments like birthday parties or playing sports. Look for opportunities to practice no matter the situation. Practice patience when waiting for a colleague to send an important document and practice patience waiting for the goalie to put the ball back into play. Practice mindfulness during meditation and practice mindfulness making art. There is joy in practicing the Dharma.

PRACTICE: Get a 3x5 card. Write down three things you do for fun. Then, for each of them, think of what Buddhist ideal you practice while doing them. For example, I make art and dependent origination has a defining role. What ephemera, parts, paint, and surface I have, along with a creative idea are the origin of the piece.





BYE FOR NOW



Text by Venerable Wayne Ren Cheng Hughes 仁 誠 – Original art created by or owned by Venerable Wayne Ren Cheng Hughes 仁 誠

Please use this text mindfully and respectfully.