**The Responsibility of the BLIA**

“The heavens gave me birth, and therefore, I must have a purpose.” This is a good saying to remember.

Sometimes life becomes so overwhelming, we feel as if there    is no purpose to our existence and no value to our lives. Moments   of despair like that are easily refuted by the truth. All things in the universe have purpose and use. They exist for a reason. A small stone, a tiny needle, a blade of grass – all things, no matter how insignificant they may appear, have purpose and use. All things are imbued with the wonder of being, and all things can serve as instruments that lead sentient beings to the Buddha realm.

People in today’s world often seem “to be blown by the wind, with no memory of the ancients.” They lust after power and money, and lose themselves in sensory indulgence. They see no real value in themselves, and they certainly see no value in taking on responsibility for the well-being of others. They have many things to amuse themselves, but no virtues with which to console themselves.

The BLIA is dedicated to values that are quite  the  opposite. Our values emphasize responsibility and dedication. In the next few sections, I will discuss the kinds of responsibilities BLIA members should be willing to take on and fulfill.

**Encourage the study of Buddhism**

For much of the history of Buddhism, too many Buddhists have concerned themselves with prayer, chanting and worship above all else. This kind of Buddhist expends little or no energy to read the sutras, study the commentaries or discuss the ideas of Buddhism. People like that not only impede their own progress because their understanding remains low, but they also hinder the development of Buddhism itself. This is a real problem! If we compare Buddhism to a school, then chanting the sutras and praying belong to elementary school. They are a good foundation, but they are only a foundation. The reverence and dedication that inspire chanting must be refined, and must be built upon. If we really want to benefit all sentient beings, then we must be willing to keep growing and learning. This is a process that never stops. Buddha never instructed us to find a meager level of contentment in the Dharma, and then close our minds to all growth beyond that point. All of us have joined the BLIA not because we are weak and need to huddle together. We have joined because we feel the strong determination to help others learn about Buddhism. Every member of the BLIA should engage in the study and discussion of Buddhist texts and Buddhist ideas with other chapter members. We should encourage each other to learn and think for ourselves so that the truths of Buddha’s teachings can be fully realized in our lives at every moment.

Having said that, let us recognize also the Buddhist literature truly is vast. One could read for an entire lifetime and never get to the end. The point here is not that we all need to absorb every last iota of subtlety contained in the Dharma or be conversant in the nuances of every school. The point is that we need to keep learning and keep improving our understanding. To this end, the BLIA has undertaken the task of producing a ten-volume work on Buddhist Reference Books. The purpose of this work is to provide BLIA members with a tool that will help them progress rapidly in understanding the Dharma. Each volume covers a major Buddhist topic. Taken together, all ten volumes give an excellent overview of Buddhism. The ten topics covered are: Buddhist Principles, Buddhist Sutras, the Buddha, Buddha’s Disciples, Buddhist History, Schools of Buddhism, Buddhist Regulations, the Purpose of Buddhism, Buddhism Art and Literature, and Humanistic Buddhism.

Each volume is roughly 300,000 Chinese characters long. I hope that every BLIA member will read all of these volumes, and hope that each BLIA chapter will form study groups to discuss them. The more we learn, the more we grow. When we learn together, we grow together and benefit ourselves as well as all beings in the world.

**Encourage the production of Buddhist literature**

Compassion and generosity are supreme virtues in Buddhism, but let us never forget that only literature can stand above time. We experience the compassion and generosity of generations in the past mostly through the literature they produced. The Diamond Sutra emphasizes over and again the importance of literature and of disseminating the sutras. It says, “Buddha resides in any place where this sutra can be found, and where his disciples venerate it.” In another place, the Diamond Sutra says, “Among all devotions, devotion to the Dharma is the highest.”

An important part of Buddhist practice is the practice of venerating the sutras. There are ten ways to do this. They are called the ten ways of showing devotion to the sutras. These ten ways are: copying them, serving the places where they are kept, preaching them, listening to them, reading them, following them, discussing them, chanting them, meditating on them, and learning from them.

The very lifeblood of Buddhism is held in its literature. Since its inception, the BLIA has been dedicated to producing Buddhist literature. We have writers and translators working in many of our chapters. In other places, we are producing taped lectures, music tapes, videos, movies, and TV shows. We have done a lot, and I am deeply appreciative of the efforts of everyone who has helped so much. If we continue working with this kind of energy, I know we will accomplish even more in the future. I hope one day the BLIA will succeed in creating a Buddhist information center, a Buddhist newspaper, a Buddhist TV station, a Buddhist library, and other organizations of this sort.

It is very important that all of us in the BLIA always encourage anyone who is writing about Buddhism, translating Buddhist literature, or creating Buddhist music and art. These are the means by which Buddhism is spread more efficiently, and as we encourage those who are engaged in these activities today, let us remember that we have been privileged to hear the Dharma ourselves only because of work like this done by others in the past.

**Take on social responsibilities**

Buddhism places great emphasis on society and on our responsibilities toward society. These responsibilities must not be avoided. Buddha said, “I am part of society.” He also said, “The Dharma is to be found in society.”

Throughout history, Buddhists have dedicated themselves to shouldering significant social responsibilities. Buddhists have done things like build bridges and roads for travelers, they have offered food to the tired and hungry, and they have been involved in disaster relief efforts. Buddhist temples have opened their doors to refugees, they have stored grain, offered loans, run clinics and schools and done many other things for people who were in need. Working for the good of all sentient beings means working for the good of our societies, and Buddhists throughout history have exemplified this kind of dedication and awareness.

The BLIA stands firmly in the center of this great tradition. We take the Buddha very seriously when he says we must open our hearts to all sentient beings and bring benefit to all who are in need. The BLIA already is committed to disaster relief, aid programs, environ- mental programs, hospitals and schools. In the future, I hope we will succeed in creating other projects to benefit our societies. We ought to start thinking about creating a Dharma phone line, an information center, a career counseling center, a retirement fund, a book exchange program, immigration services for overseas Chinese, and an immigration service for non-Chinese who want live or study in Taiwan. Through these activities, we will succeed in reaching more and more people, and we will succeed in touching them with the compassion and kindness inherent to all Buddhism.

**Develop Buddhist education**

One of the biggest differences between the BLIA and other social organizations is the BLIA is not limited merely to social work. The BLIA is also dedicated to furthering education.

Buddhism itself is the teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha. Sakyamuni Buddha was the greatest educator the world has ever seen. The Dharma is a teaching aimed at the human mind and heart. It seeks to lead the human mind and heart toward the fullest possible life, toward a life that ultimately is completely without any limits of any kind. This magnificent goal is the reason Buddhism has been so successful in so many different places over such a long period of time.

Buddha used many methods to teach the Dharma. He spoke in prose and verse. He chanted, and he used metaphors, parables, visionary discourses and many other means to make the Dharma understandable to people everywhere no matter what their circumstances. During the time of Buddha, Srimala explained the Dharma to palace women and their children. Her classes were some of the earliest classes ever given in Buddhism by a non-monastic. Several hundred years later Master Dao’an (312-385) was endangered over and again by the wars raging around him, and yet he managed to educate thousands of monks, nonetheless. His direct disciples fanned out across China, and through them, Dao’an was almost single-handedly responsible for the spread of early Buddhism in China.

These examples show very well how important education is to Buddhism. Through education, Buddhism is able to continue and preserve its traditions while adapting them constantly to a changing world. Without education, the purity and profundity of the Dharma soon would be compromised.

The BLIA is a staunch advocate of education, and for this reason we host and encourage all kinds of seminars and meetings concerning Buddhism and topics relevant to Buddhism. I hope all BLIA members will find the time and energy to participate in these sorts of activities. I hope also that our younger members, especially those who have the ambition to preach the Dharma, will join some of our retreats and special functions, such as the Eight Precepts Retreat and the Short- term Monastic Retreat. Beyond these, I hope that even more young people will enter Buddhist colleges and schools. Study is the way to learn. Then, once you have learned, you will be well-qualified to make a deep and lasting contribution to the world.

**Promote internationalization of the Dharma**

“Religion knows no national boundaries.” This saying expresses well the deep truth that religion is founded not on race or nationality, but only on truth, goodness and beauty. These qualities are transnational, and that is why religions are able to transcend the limitations of time and space.

Buddha himself set the first precedent by preaching to beings in all the six realms of existence, and in all the Pure Lands. Buddha always emphasized equality among people, among races and between nations. He also emphasized the importance of good social relations, the need for people to intermingle, and the need for all of us to be tolerant in all that we do and say. His open-mindedness and all-inclusiveness are what account for the rapid spread of Buddhism across northern India during his lifetime.

Two hundred years after the Buddha’s final nirvana, the efforts of King Asoka helped spread the Dharma to southern India, Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. Eventually, Buddhism spread beyond these places to Tibet, Mongolia, China, Japan and Korea. When Buddhism spread beyond India, it began to have a truly international character. And now, the advanced technologies of the modern world have at last provided the conditions necessary to make Buddhism a global religion. These technological conditions are significantly augmented by the despair and unsettledness characterizing so many of the world’s societies today. Means for spreading the Dharma efficiently have advanced as quickly as the need for people everywhere to hear it. Members of the BLIA should contemplate this concordance. Each of us must work with dedication and determination in our local areas. However, at the same time, all of us should be well aware of the global status of Buddhism, and we should be deeply heartened in knowing that what we do in our local areas will have ramifications that may well affect people all over the world. There is no way to measure determination or compassion. Each act performed with these virtues produces wonderful effects on the world that none of us can predict beforehand.

The important thing is that each of us should be the best we  can be so that our common hopes and vows will succeed in having a wide-ranging, positive influence across the face of the earth. The BLIA can never be stronger or better than the people who make it up. For this reason, we must look to ourselves and to the people around us for ways to deepen our education and further our understanding of the Dharma.

We must help ourselves as we help each other.

All of us must check ourselves frequently to be sure that we really do have right views and right understanding. We must examine ourselves to be sure our morality is everything we want it to be. We must bear in mind always that a good Buddhist is characterized by balance between practice and understanding.

I hope many who read this will feel inspired to train to become lay preachers of the Dharma. We cannot expect monastics to do everything for us. Once our understanding of Buddhism has reached a certain level, we should begin to feel the need to share what we know with others. We can be compassionate and generous with our knowledge, just as we can be with our material possessions.

Since literature is the principal way most people learn about the Dharma, we should support efforts to write about Buddhism and to translate Buddhist literature. The BLIA already has produced trans- lations of Buddhist literature from Chinese into Japanese, English, Korean, German, Russian, Portuguese, Spanish and other tongues. We have done a lot in this area, but still our efforts have fallen far short of the need. I hope all members of the BLIA will support any effort to write, translate or communicate with others who speak a language that has not had long and deep contact with Buddhism.

**Establish a Pure Land in this world**

Every Buddha has a Pure Land associated with him. Amitabha Buddha established the Western Pure Land on the strength of his forty-eight vows. The Medicine Buddha established the Eastern Pure Land on the strength of his twelve vows. If all of us in the BLIA can succeed in following the path of all the Buddhas in this universe, then our vows and our behavior will create a Pure Land right here on earth.

How can we begin to establish a Pure Land in this world?

In Switzerland and America, the ideals of freedom, peace, equality and human rights not only are respected, they actively are sought after. In Japan and Thailand, the ideals of Buddhism, respect for religion, and social order are emphasized. Are these ideals different from the mores that will prevail in the Pure Land? Clearly, they are not.

Major changes do not happen overnight, of course. Insofar as some countries are able to imagine and pursue higher ideals, then those countries can be said to be leading the world toward the Pure Land. Insofar as any community learns how to function with kindness, compassion and ungrudging support for its members, then that community can be said to have established a piece of the Pure Land in this world. Insofar as any family can establish respectful and harmonious relations among its members, then that family can be said to have planted the seeds of the Pure Land in this world. Insofar as any individual can base his thoughts and motives on selflessness, compassion and mutual benefit, then that individual has done his part to bring the Pure Land here to us on earth.

The Pure Land will be built in that way, piece by piece, heart by heart, home by home. We will not establish a Pure Land here if we place our hopes in some other world that can only be attained after death. In the deepest levels of reality, the Pure Land is not something separate from ourselves. It is, properly, part of our very minds. How can we ever expect to establish it, then, if we do not establish it in our minds?

The large and the small are one. We begin with ourselves and work from there. Our selflessness will lead our families toward harmony, our communities toward cooperation, and our nations toward compassion. In the end, the entire world will be bathed in the light of Buddha’s wisdom and his illimitable concern.