

# Mahāyāna Practices for Healing, Reconciliation and Peace

## Perfect Peace Makes Practice

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It is indeed an honor and a privilege to share some perspectives on the theme: “Liberation from Relational Suffering between Persons.” I would like to begin by offering an adaptation of a popular verse composed by Reverend Ernest and Dorothy Hunt for Buddhist youth in Hawaii about eight decades ago. The original title is “The Golden Chain of Love.” It has gone through a number of revisions since it first appeared in an English service book titled *Vade Mecum* (in Latin, service manual) published by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. I have titled my version “The Golden Puzzle of Love and Life”:

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*I am a piece in the Buddha’s Golden Puzzle of Love  
and Life that connects the world.*

*I will try to keep my piece bright and strong.*

*I will try to be kind and honest with all beings, including myself.*

*I will try to think clear and helpful thoughts,  
to speak clear and helpful words, and to do kind and helpful deeds—  
knowing that on what I do now, depends not only my  
happiness or unhappiness but also that of others.*

*May every piece in the Buddha’s Golden Puzzle of Love and Life  
become bright and strong, and may we all realize and become  
Perfect Peace.*

The original version used the metaphor of a chain related to an early summary of Sakyamuni Buddha’s essential insight that was elucidated as a twelvefold link chain of causality known as “conditioned origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Recognizing how all beings are inextricably interrelated and that no one or thing exists alone, independent, unchanging unto itself, is the basis of the Mahāyāna awareness and appreciation of the Oneness of life. I understand that the word “heal” or “health” is etymologically related to “whole” and “holy.”

To offer a different expression of the same theme of our interrelatedness, I came up with the image of our seemingly independent existences as pieces of a borderless puzzle. Each piece manifests as a different temporary form, function, and expression that in connection becomes the “Big Picture” of Immeasurable Life. In the

Pure Land Buddhist perspective of the Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle) awareness, the Big Picture of Immeasurable Life is referred to as Amida Buddha. Amida as the Big Picture incorporates two aspects. One is of Immeasurable Light (Amitābha) that illuminates the shadow of ignorance. The paradox here is that by virtue of light (wisdom) darkness (ignorance) is realized and transformed. The other aspect is that through being made aware of the Big Picture, we realize, in mutual respect, the equal value of each piece of the puzzle as the most important piece by virtue of their connection with and support of all the innumerable causes and conditions that interconnect to make each piece possible in Immeasurable Life (Amitāyus).

In the light of the Buddha Dharma that illuminates our heart/mind, or opens our spiritual eyes to the universal truth of impermanence and interdependence, we are made to become aware of the paradoxical relationship of the dynamic dialectic of ignorance/enlightenment, dark/light, birth/death, suffering/joy, good/evil, and conflict/peace. This realization helps us to appreciate that the healing, reconciliation, and peace that we aspire to is not something to be attained or created per se. Rather, it is our true state of Being in which we are truly awake and alive in Oneness with immeasurable life. In other words, through realizing that my ignorance and self-centeredness is the cause of my sense of separation from others, even those I love, reconciliation occurs. It is the universal light of wisdom shining on all beings equally that awakens me to the cause of my suffering and simultaneously to its presence, to the Heart of boundless compassion/love—this is the healing, the realization of Perfect Peace.

The Heart of Mahāyāna (Big Vehicle/Picture) is the Buddha's Great Practice that is dedicated to alleviating suffering (healing),

reconnecting (reconciliation) a world separated by illusory distinctions, and affirming the essential harmony of the interdependency of all life (peace). These words and teachings are not the monopoly of any religion, race, culture, gender, or generation. They express a sense of life that transcends any place, time, or person. The “religious” engagement or meaning of our living then becomes a matter of awakening to, or realization of, the Oneness or connection of the infinite and finite, sacred and secular, or, as I would like to describe it, to come A.L.I.V.E!

To relate what coming alive means to me, I would like to offer a story that I heard many years ago in Hawaii. It involved a local guy who was waiting at the interisland terminal in Honolulu to catch a plane back to Maui. As he was sitting in the boarding area he overheard someone behind him say, “I came to Hawaii to die.” The local guy, surprised at the comment, leaned over to follow the conversation. After listening further, he realized that he had overheard a visitor who had just arrived from Australia. Being from Australia he had spoken those words with an Australian accent. So what the visitor actually said was, “I came to Hawaii today.”

In reflecting on this amusing anecdote, it occurred to me that religiously speaking, it could be said that we are “born to die” to our self-centered thinking bound by the notion of an unchanging, independent “me, myself, I,” and thereby to come A.L.I.V.E to our true and real life: Being of Oneness in Immeasurable Life. This acronym expresses a basis for healing, reconciliation, and peace.

- “A” is for *awareness* of the truth that everything changes, that nothing stays the same, that we are all finite existences. From this realization we are awakened to the fact that no one/thing exists independently, unchanging by itself; all are pieces of the

Golden Puzzle that is the Immeasurable Life (Amida) that we come alive to and with, in gratitude.

- “L” stands for *loving*, which is the experience of Oneness in the Immeasurable Life we share with all beings.
- “I” is to be *inspired*. Spirit is a word that refers to the formless essence or sense of our being. Coming from the Latin, it is used interchangeably with “breath.” This universal awareness of life is expressed in various cultures. For example, the etymological root of the popular Hawaiian greeting “Aloha” is “The breath of God/Life”. In Japanese the term, “*Ikiru*,” which means “to live,” can be interpreted as, “to breathe.” The German word for breathe, “*atmen*,” is said to come from the Sanskrit “*Atman*” for the divine spirit within.
- “V” is to *value* the finite life that we come to appreciate because we sense it is not everlasting, and thus we are inspired to realize that which is infinite, compassionate, inclusive, holy. This is the conscience of religious concern.
- “E” is to be *engaged*, connected. This is where our sense of integrity comes from: the realization of being integral, meaning whole, undivided, all one piece/peace.

This is how I appreciate the meaning of that on which our spiritual awakening, enlightenment, faith, and entrusting is predicated. So the expression “Birth in the Pure Land,” that is often used to refer to what happens after we die, for me can best be described as *Coming Alive!* To echo the words Pope Francis spoke to us, “This is healthy!”

As a concluding meditation, I would like to cite an encouragement from the Rev. Howard Thurman, who I understand was a mentor to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Reverend

Thurman once said, “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

*Namo Amida Butsu*

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