

FOLLOWING PUXIAN PUSA

By Leong Kok Kee
Puxian Buddhist Association





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The Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism is a religion originated in India. The founder of Buddhism is Gautama Buddha. He is a real figure in history. He was born as Crown Prince Siddhartha in a small state in northeastern Indian Sub-continent about 2500 years ago. He gave up his throne and married life at the age of 27 to seek for the 'Truth', the true meaning and nature of human life. He became 'enlightened' or 'aware of the Truth' at the age of 35 under a Bodhi tree. He was then known as 'Gautama Buddha'.



Gautama Buddha

The title 'Buddha' carries the meaning of 'complete realization', 'full awareness' or 'Enlightenment'. According to Buddhist teachings, a Buddha not only has fully realized the Truth, but is also able and willing to help others to realize the Truth. Buddhism believes that everyone has the potential of realizing the Truth and becoming a Buddha.

After his Enlightenment, Gautama Buddha then started his 45 years of active teaching and guiding the people before passing away at the age of 80, or in Buddhist terminology, entering 'Nirvana'. Nirvana is a state where one permanently escapes from the otherwise unending cycle of suffering and rebirth for normal beings.

Basic Buddhist Teachings

The Truth as realized and preached by Gautama Buddha is known today as the 'Four Noble Truths'. The Four Noble Truths are: (1) the Noble Truth of suffering; (2) the Noble Truth of the accumulation of suffering; (3) the Noble Truth of the elimination of suffering; and (4) the Noble Truth of the path that leads away from suffering.

The Noble Truth of suffering tells that sorrow is the universal experience of mankind. Birth, aging, illness and death will all cause sorrow and thus suffering.

The Noble Truth of the accumulation of suffering tells that the cause of suffering is desire or craving, which leads to the continuity of life and death, or renewed existence in other words.

The Noble Truth of the elimination of suffering tells that the removal of suffering and sorrow can only come from the removal of greed and desire.

The fourth Noble Truth tells that greed and desire can be systematically abandoned by following the 'Noble Eightfold Path'.

The Noble Eightfold Path describes the way to end suffering, as taught by Gautama Buddha. It is a practical guideline to ethical and spiritual development, with the goal of freeing an individual from attachments and delusions. It finally leads to the understanding of the Truth about life. Together with the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path constitutes the gist of Buddhism. Great emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of existence and finally reach Nirvana.

The Noble Eightfold path consists of: (1) 'Right View'; (2) 'Right Intension'; (3) 'Right Speech'; (4) 'Right Action'; (5) 'Right Livelihood'; (6) 'Right Effort'; (7) 'Right Mindfulness'; and (8) 'Right Concentration'. The first two, 'Right View' and 'Right Intension' are to cultivate wisdom. The next three, 'Right Speech', 'Right Action' and 'Right Livelihood' are to ensure ethical conduct. The last three, 'Right Effort', 'Right Mindfulness' and 'Right Concentration' are for mental development

Years after the Nirvana of Gautama Buddha, Buddhism eventually split and separated into three traditions, namely Theravada (originally popular in Southeast Asia), Mahayana (originally popular in East Asia) and Vajrayana (originally popular in Tibet and Mongolia). Today, all the three traditions have their own followers in every corner of the world. Each tradition has its own doctrines and practices, but all based on the Four Noble Truth and the Noble Eightfold Path taught by Gautama Buddha.

The Evolution of Chinese Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism was introduced to China about 2000 years ago. In the slow process of adapting itself into local culture and society, Mahayana Buddhism has modified its doctrines, philosophies and practices. Thus it has gradually grown into today's Chinese Buddhism, which has its own characteristic beliefs and unique features.

Chinese Buddhism believes that in the Universe, many worlds and many Buddhas are in existence at the same time or at different times. Gautama Buddha, known as 'Sakyamuni Buddha' in the Chinese Buddhism, is only the Buddha for this world of ours. But there are other Buddhas in other worlds in the past, at the present, and in the future. For example, 'Amitabha Buddha' is the Buddha in the world of 'Western Pure Land' and 'Bhaisajyaguru Buddha' (Medicine Buddha) in the world of 'Eastern Pure Land'.

Chinese Buddhism construes 'Pure Land' as a foretaste of Nirvana, or as essentially Nirvana itself. There is no more suffering or rebirth on the Pure Land. The main purpose of spiritual cultivation in Chinese Buddhism is to go to the Pure Land.

Chinese Buddhism and Bodhisattva Ideal

Gautama Buddha often referred himself as a 'Bodhisattva' both in his previous lives and as a young man in his current life, prior to his Enlightenment. The term therefore connotes a being who is "bound for Enlightenment", in other words, a person whose aim is to become fully enlightened. 'Pusa' is the Chinese term for Bodhisattva.

Pusa occupies a very important place in Chinese Buddhism. A Pusa is one who has achieved perfect Enlightenment and is entitled to enter directly into Nirvana, but instead has renounced this in order to help all suffering beings.

Chinese Buddhism is based principally upon the 'Bodhisattva Ideal' (the path of Pusa). Chinese Buddhism encourages everyone to become a Bodhisattva by taking the Bodhisattva Vows (sometimes called the Bodhisattva Precepts). The purpose of taking the Bodhisattva Vows is to show one's determination in progressing on the spiritual path towards Buddhahood.

In the Bodhisattva Vows of the Chinese Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas promise that after they themselves have achieved Enlightenment, they will strive for liberating all sentient beings from the suffering of 'Samsara', the cycle of Birth, Life, Death, and Rebirth, and lead them to Enlightenment. In other words, a Bodhisattva does not seek 'Bodhi', meaning Awakening or Enlightenment, solely for oneself, but also for the sake of freeing all other beings and aiding them into the bliss of Nirvana.

The Bodhisattva Vows can be fulfilled by venerating and emulating the Buddhas, by cultivating supreme moral and spiritual perfection, and by placing oneself in the service of others. So, a Bodhisattva promises to practice the 'Six Perfections' of giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom, in order to fulfill his 'Bodhichitta' aim of attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

Popular Pusas in Chinese Buddhism

Among the many Pusas or Bodhisattvas, Chinese Buddhists are most familiar with four of them. They are Guanyin Pusa (Avalokitesvara), Wenshu Pusa (Manjusri), Dizang Pusa

(Ksitigarbha) and Puxian Pusa (Samantabhadra). Their legendary preaching venues in China are known as Putuoshan Mountain for Guanyin (Avalokitesvara), Wutaishan Mountain for Wenshu (Manjusri), Jiuhuashan Mountain for Dizang (Ksitigarbha) and Ermeishan Mountain for Puxian (Samantabhadra).



Guanyin Pusa

Guanyin Pusa (Avalokitesvara) is the most well-known Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism. In Sanskrit, Avalokitesvara means “one who looks upon the world with compassion”. So Guanyin Pusa is the embodiment of great compassion. Like all Pusas, Guanyin has vowed to free all sentient beings from suffering. It is believed that Guanyin Pusa can appear in different forms to relieve different types of disasters. Guanyin may appear as a male or a female depending on circumstances and requirement. Whoever is in danger or difficulty may chant Guanyin’s name and Guanyin will hear him and come to help.

Wenshu Pusa (Manjusri) is the embodiment of great wisdom (Sanskrit language: Prajna). He is often depicted as riding

a lion, which symbolizes the stern majesty of Prajna. The lion is the king of the beasts and is fearless. Similarly, Wenshu Pusa teaches the Dharma without fear or favor, like the lion's roar. As an attendant of Sakyamuni Buddha, he always stands on his left side.



Wenshu Pusa

Dizang Pusa (Ksitigarbha) is another popular Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhism. Ksitigarbha differs from other Bodhisattvas because he usually shows his appearance in monk's clothing. His greatest compassionate Vow is: "If I do not go to the hell to help the suffering beings there, who else will go?", and "If the hells are not empty, I will not become a Buddha. Only when all living beings have been saved, will I attain Bodhi."



Dizang Pusa

Puxian Pusa (Samantabhadra) is the personification of love, sacred activity, virtue, diligent training and patience. In many Chinese temples, Puxian Pusa is found in Trinity with Sakyamuni Buddha and Wenshu Pusa, standing on the right side of the Buddha. Images of Puxian usually show the Pusa sitting on a white elephant in various ways and holding a lotus flower or a scroll or book. The elephant, normally in a standing posture, may be crouching and may either have three heads or one head with six tusks.

The Importance of Puxian Pusa in Chinese Buddhism

Puxian Pusa occupies an important position in Chinese Buddhism. According to the Flower Garland Sutra (Avatamsaka Sutra), a well-known Sutra in Mahayana and Chinese Buddhism, the Gautama Buddha himself disclosed that Puxian Pusa had made Ten Great Vows (or Aspirations) in front of the Buddha, in order to work his way to full Buddhahood.

The Ten Great Vows of Puxian Pusa as translated from the Chinese language Sutra are:



Puxian Pusa



Puxian Pusa



Puxian Pusa

- (1) To pay homage to all Buddhas.
- (2) To praise and honour all Buddhas.
- (3) To practice offering generously and extensively.
- (4) To repent all karmic faults.
- (5) To rejoice at other's merit and virtue.
- (6) To request for the turning of Dharma Wheel
- (7) To persuade the Buddhas to remain in this world.
- (8) To learn from Buddha's teachings all the time.
- (9) To conform to the aspirations of all sentient beings.
- (10) To transfer merit to all other beings



Puxian Pusa

The First Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

Puxian Pusa's first Vow is to pay homage to all Buddhas. To pay homage means to worship and respect by showing the proper etiquette towards all Buddhas. Puxian Pusa has promised that he will pay respect and worship to all Buddhas because all Buddhas have achieved Enlightenment. They all have great

wisdom and good deeds to become the best examples for Puxian Pusa to follow in his seeking of the path to Buddhahood.

The Second Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The second Vow of Puxian Pusa is to praise and honor all Buddhas. Buddhas do not need our praise. He praises and honors all Buddhas so that others will be aware of the Buddhas' greatness. Puxian Pusa, by praising and honoring the Buddhas openly, hopes that more people will learn from the Buddhas.

The Third Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

Puxian Pusa's third Vow is to practice offering generously and extensively. The target of offering should not be limited to the Buddhas only. Puxian Pusa offers his support and help to whoever needs it.

The Fourth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The fourth Vow made by Puxian Pusa is to repent all karmic faults. Karmic faults are evil deeds which lead to bad 'Karma'. Karma is action which brings result. Karma is the engine which drives the cycle of uncontrollable Rebirth. Puxian Pusa has promised to look back to all his past deeds and make necessary improvement.

The Fifth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The fifth Vow made by Puxian Pusa is to rejoice at other's merit and virtue. To rejoice means to show appreciation. Puxian Pusa wants to encourage all to accumulate merits and get good Karma. It is the way for one to escape from the cycle of suffering, or Rebirth.

The Sixth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The sixth Vow of Puxian Pusa is to request for the turning of the 'Dharma Wheel'. Turning Dharma Wheels means teaching and spreading the Dharma. Puxian pledges his support for the Buddhas to continue propagating Buddhist teachings.



Puxian Pusa

The Seventh Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The seventh Vow of Puxian Pusa is to persuade the Buddhas to remain in the world. If all Buddhas have entered Nirvana, who will remain with us to give us guidance? Gautama Buddha is the source of Dharma. To retain Buddha in this World is to be able to seek the advice from the Buddha's teachings from time to time.

The Eighth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The eighth Vow of Puxian Pusa is to learn Buddha's teachings all the time. Gautama Buddha's teachings have guided a lot of followers to become enlightened, including Puxian himself.

Gautama Buddha is Puxian's mentor. Puxian Pusa has promised to follow Buddha's footsteps always.

The Ninth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The ninth Vow of Puxian Pusa is to conform to the aspirations of all sentient beings. Puxian Pusa has promised to try his best to serve all beings. He prepares to treat all beings with compassion and equality.



Puxian Pusa

The Tenth Great Vow of Puxian Pusa

The tenth Vow of Puxian Pusa is to transfer merit to all other beings. Puxian Pusa has promised that he will share whatever merit he has accumulated with others so that they will also benefit from whatever good deeds he has done.

Modern Ways to practice the Great Vows of Puxian Pusa

As good Buddhists, we should follow the path of Puxian Pusa and emulate all his deeds. Practicing the Ten Great Vows of

Puxian Pusa is a very effective way of Buddhist cultivation. Many grand masters have given us various advices to do so. They include Grand Master Xing Yun (world Buddhist leader and founder of Foguangshan Temples, Taiwan, in his "Buddhist Text Books" series), the late Grand Master Zhu Mo (the founder of the Triple Wisdom Hall, Penang, in his book "Lectures on Puxian's Ten Vows"), and the late Grand Master Shen Yan (the founder of Fagushan Temples, in his book "Lectures on Praising Puxian's Actions and Vows". Their advices are generalized and summarized as below:

We must accept the 'Three Jewels' as our teachers. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, the Dharma (Buddha's teaching), and the Sangha (the community of Monks who master the Dharma). In Buddhist terms, we take 'Refuge in the Triple Gem'.

We must learn to respect and care for one another in our daily life besides paying homage to the Buddhas. This is because everyone has the potential to become a Buddha. Reciting Buddhist Sutras and Mantras is an example of praising the Buddhas.

We must practice 'Dana'. Dana means giving. To practice Dana is to support Buddhism. We should offer our support not only to the Triple Gem but also to our parents, teachers, friends and anyone in need of help. Buddhists believe that giving without seeking anything in return leads to greater spiritual wealth. Moreover, it reduces the acquisitive impulses that ultimately lead to further suffering.

We often make all types of mistakes in our daily life. All these will result in bad Karma. Thus we should often repent with confession. We should always look back and make improvement on whatever we have done wrong.

We shall follow and practice the Buddha's teachings diligently. Buddha's teachings guide us to live happily in our daily life and to realize the Truth finally.



Puxian Pusa

We must support all efforts to propagate Buddhism. We should help to introduce the Buddha's teachings to more people so that they will be properly guided in life. We realize that Buddhism is good for mankind. So we want to share it with as many people as possible.

We should always have our mind to stand for the Truth and share with others on anything good. We should be generous to transfer our merits and share the merits with the whole world.

Introducing the Puxian Buddhist Association

The Puxian Buddhist Association, situated in Jelutong, Penang, is so named because it is dedicated to Puxian Pusa and aimed at following the path of Puxian Pusa.

In the year 1973, the arrival of a small Buddhist Chanting Group at the Chinese village in the slum area of Jelutong, Penang, attracted the attention of a young Form 3 boy, Tan Kooi Beng. He started to learn to pay homage to the Buddha and fell in love with Buddhist chanting. He quickly shared his new found belief with Yeoh Chin Beng and other young boys in the same village. They used their own small savings and, with their own hands also, built a little shed, measuring 10 feet by 10 feet, on a tiny piece of squatter land. With a mini three-inch plastic Buddha statue, the structure was named 'Fo Bao Temple' (Buddha Gem Vihara).



The various activities of Fo Bao Temple attracted more and more youths. With the help of the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM), the Jelutong Young Buddhist Society was registered in 1987. Later, to attract more adults and elders to learn Dharma, it was renamed Puxian Buddhist Association.

The name 'Puxian' was chosen because the leadership and members of Puxian Buddhist Association wanted to commit themselves to follow the selfless path of Puxian Pusa and determined to fulfill the Ten Great Vows of Puxian Pusa.

Meanwhile, with the generous support of some well-wishers, especially the late Dato Low Hooi Siah, the late Datin Tan Koon Geik and their family, the Fo Bao Temple was rebuilt, extended and developed in stages to become the Puxian Temple today.

The Puxian Education Centre was built opposite the Puxian Temple in 2003. Beside it, a fifteen feet tall bronze Buddha statue, in sitting posture, was erected in open air.

Throughout these years, through the various Dharma propagation and educational efforts of the Puxian Buddhist Association, thousands of young people have been kept away from drugs, crimes and other undesirable activities. Bad elements in this area have been transformed into good citizens. The Puxian Buddhist Association has brought Light and Dharma to Jelutong, and hope and happiness to many residents.

Many people are touched by Puxian Pusa's Ten Great Vows, and want to help to propagate and share the joy of the Dharma with more people. But they may not know how to go about it. So, alternatively, they can donate generously to Puxian Buddhist Association, which will do all the Dharma propagation work on their behalf.

Puxian Buddhist Association is run by a group of dedicated and devoted Buddhists. But, most of them come from the lower income group. They need your financial support to carry on their good work. You may send your donation (any amount) to Puxian Buddhist Association, 392, Jalan Bukit

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Dumbar, 11600 Penang. You are also welcome to call at the Temple personally. May all have the blessing of the Triple Gem!



Open air Buddha statue at Pu Xian Temple, Jelutong, Penang.

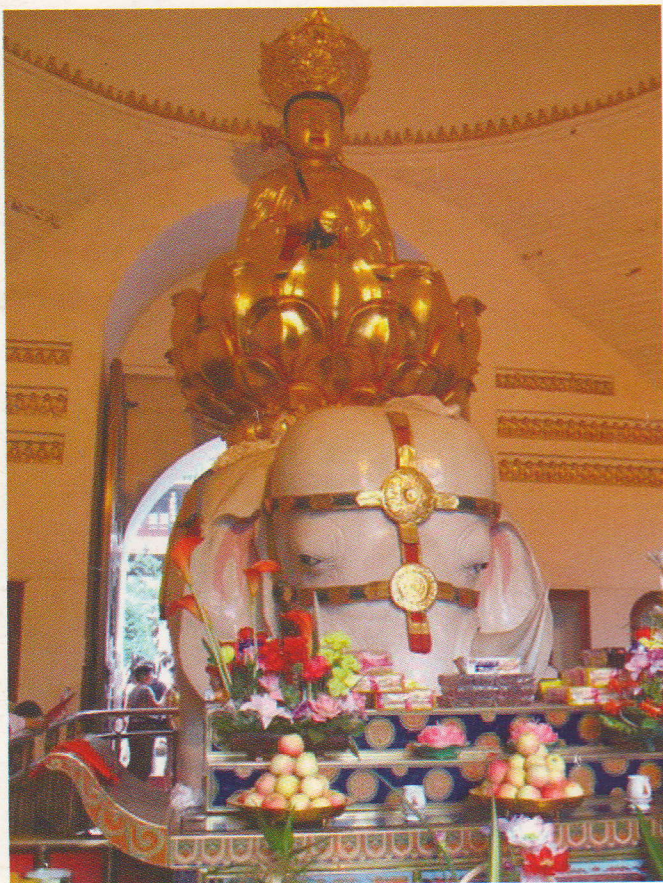
The writer, Leong Kok Kee, has been an active Buddhist worker for about 30 years. He received the Sumangalo Award for Outstanding Buddhist Workers in 1993 from the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM). He also received the DJN, PKT, and PJM awards from the Yang Dipertua Negeri, Penang.



Standing Duddha Statue inside Pu Xian Temple



Puxian Pusa image inside Temple



Published by: Puxian Buddhist Association

392, Jalan Bukit Dumbar,

11600 Jelutong, Pulau Pinang.

Tel: 04-6577749 / 04-6592096 Fax: 04-6598562

Web: www.puxian.org.my E-mail: info@puxian.org.my

Facebook: Pu Xian Vihara

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