

## Buddhist Column #4 June, 2019

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(1)  
Sayings to Live by

“Being born is amazing.  
Living is amazing,  
Let us join our hands in gratitude:  
For this supreme wonder.”

(Shinmin Sakamura, “Amazing”)

## (2) Buddhist Humor:

### Cliff Hanger

A man is on the edge of a cliff hanging on to dear life. The Buddha appears, and the man looks up and says with his last ounce of energy, “Oh Buddha, ... save me ... please save me!”

Then the Buddha replies, “I will. ... *Let go.*”

Comment: The man “thought” he was on a cliff, with the ground being hundred yards below. However, he was actually only *one* yard above the ground!

This is a metaphor for how we erroneously think that when things don’t go our way or when we feel that we are in trouble., “it’s the end of the world”! But from the Buddha’s point of view, we are often greatly exaggerating the difficulties. We are “making a mountain out of a molehill”! The Buddha wanted him to realize that he was fine, for the ground was just one yard below him.

For example, say your team lost a very important game by a narrow margin. It’s devastating for you and the teammates *as if* you fell a hundred yards. You had all practiced so hard and came so close to winning. But in the big scheme of things, you will be falling only a yard below! So the Buddha is admonishing you, “It’s no big deal. Let go!”



### (3)

#### Buddhist News from Japan: A rapping priest and a “monk bar”

Buddhism in Japan has its challenges: Buddhist teachings being too *difficult* especially for the younger generation; declining overall population particularly in the rural areas; less people seeking to Buddhist priests to officiate at funerals; absence of young people attending its services, etc.

So, some priests are meeting this challenge with running of a drinking bar or conveying the teachings through rap!

Here is a video of a rapper priest and a “monk bar.”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eRTlnAA8\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eRTlnAA8_E)

## (4)

## “Being More Attentive to the Five Constituent Functions for Greater Peace of Mind and Less Suffering”

by Kenneth Tanaka

### The Five Constituent Functions

Buddhism fosters greater peace of mind. It also lessens suffering, which we human beings all experience in our daily lives. One of the teachings that can help us is the “Five Constituent Functions” (Aggregates , 五蘊 or *skandhas* in Sanskrit). (See below the visual image that I created; the diagram: by Rev. K. Sugahara)

I regard the “Five Constituent Functions” as the “subjective functioning of my experience.” (\*Disclaimer: *I am interpreting this teaching of the “Five Constituent Functions” in ways that deviates slightly from the traditional way, but I believe that the ultimate goal is the same, that is, to foster peace of mind and minimize suffering for myself and others.*)

1. Senses
2. Feelings
3. Thoughts
4. Intentions
5. Consciousness

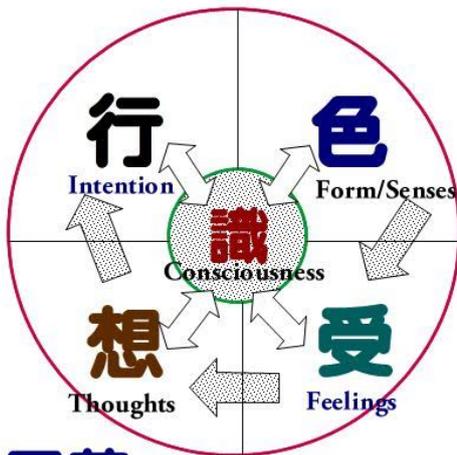
First is “Senses”: This includes the only physical element (body) among the five, but its importance lies with its function of supporting the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The five senses are important for they are the means by which we make “contact” with the outside world; they also generate the other four of the Five Functions.

The second is “Feelings,” which in Buddhism are categorized in three ways, 1) pleasant, 2) unpleasant and 3) neither pleasant or unpleasant (neutral).

The third is “Thoughts,” which include thoughts, ideas, and beliefs that are conceptual in nature.

The fourth is “Intentions,” which point to what one *wishes* or *want* to act (say or do), based on the previous three functions.

The above four functions take place *automatically*, based on the result of one’s past



## 五蘊 Five Constituent Functions

experiences, which are “stored” in the Consciousness. (In Yogacara Buddhism, this is called “Storehouse Consciousness.” The white arrows in the diagram are pointing from the center or Consciousness to each of the four functions since they mutually influence each other). What is important to note here, however, is that we are *not* able to *control* the four functions. They take place automatically, dictated by the Consciousness.

The fifth is “Consciousness.” This determines one’s *action* in terms of what we *think*, *say* and *do* (the well-known teaching of “Three Actions” “三業, which includes “thinking” 意). As mentioned already, this differs from the other four functions because Consciousness does not take place automatically but can be managed or controlled. And the degree to which we are able to manage or control depends on how we train our mind or our Consciousness. A person who trains well will be better able to determine how one thinks, says and do, in ways that fosters inner peace and reduces suffering (anxiety, worries, fear, stress, etc.) for oneself and others.

### An Ordeal at the Hospital

To better understand the points I have made, allow me to apply it to my recent experience at a hospital in California. My wife, Carrie, and I flew back to California in March to see our first grandchild. Unfortunately, Carrie caught the flu, probably from a person sitting next to us in the plane. I, fortunately, did not.

Arriving in California, she was prescribed medication, but while the flu symptoms disappeared after 5 days, she felt an unusual pressure on her chest. Since it was on a Sunday, we had no choice but to go to the Emergency Room at Alta Bates Hospital, which we know very well (for all three of our “kids” were born there.)

I shall now describe in the *present tense* how I experienced the visit to the emergency,

within the framework of the Five Constituent Functions.

As I sit in the Emergency Room doctor's office, what I am experiencing is the first of the Five Functions, the Senses. I am sensing the visual (one the senses) as I watch the doctor asking many questions of Carrie. At the same time, the sense of hearing is also functioning as I hear many sounds of the medical equipment in the room. And finally, through the olfactory sense, I smell the distinctive odor of a medical facility. So, such is my experience through the first of the Five Functions.

The second of the Five Functions, Feelings, are felt in three kinds, 1) pleasant, 2) unpleasant, or 3) neutral. In my case, it is definitely "unpleasant," for I am feeling a great deal of anxiety and worries about my wife's situation.

The third of the Five Functions, Thoughts, begins to churn out thoughts, influenced by the feelings of anxiety. I am thinking, "My wife is now here in the emergency complaining of pressure in her chest area. It could be a heart attack. If so, that would be *awful* and *frightening*, but, at least, we are at a hospital which means she can get help right away!" I am experiencing similar thoughts.

The fourth of the Five Elements, Intentions, are, to be honest, filled with my wish not to be there at all. If I have a choice, I want to take my wife and get out of there!

The above four functions took place *automatically*, based on the results of my past experiences that were "stored" in the Consciousness. So, we cannot control or manage any of the four functions..

However, the Consciousness (the fifth Function) is different, for we are, to some extent, able to control and manage it. What we can control is our actions (of thinking, saying and doing) to deal with or face up to what we are experiencing through the first four functions. So, I managed to think, "I need to stay with my wife until they find out the cause of her symptoms and support her in any way possible." Then, I stayed by her side to support her till she was discharged.

Obviously, my actions (how I thought and what I did) were correct by not only Buddhist but also by secular standards, but when we find ourselves overwhelmed by anxiety and worries, we can easily end up taking a wrong action, such as actually leaving the scene!

After 7 hours in the Emergency Room, mostly waiting for the results of the tests, we were *relieved and elated* to learn that they found no abnormalities or problems. It seems that the cause of the pressure in the chest was related to her chronic medical condition that was aggravated by the influenza.

### Implications for Our Inner Peace and Reduced Suffering

Our daily lives are filled with things that don't go our way. Life is, indeed, a Bumpy Road! We find ourselves in undue stress and anxiety, such as, when taking a test, speaking before a crowd, pressed to meet a deadline, and getting into an argument with a family member, a friend or a co-worker. To be better prepared for such situations, we need to train ourselves on a daily basis during normal times by listening, studying and practicing the teachings to enhance the quality of my mind. We need to plant positive "seeds" for the quality of our Consciousness.

In my particular situation at the hospital, I was able to deal with and overcome my anxieties and take the right action because, in great measure, I was attentive to the workings of my Five Functions. To observe or being conscious of our mental functions can help us deal with the difficulties that we face, without being tossed around and overwhelmed by "undesirable and difficult" situations.

We can, thus, prevent such extreme examples as road rage and domestic violence but also ordinary conflicts stemming from my unnecessarily harsh reaction to someone's negative comment about myself!

Once again as we conclude, I wish to emphasize the point that in order to take the correct action at the stage of Consciousness (or the Fifth Function), we must cultivate ourselves and be attentive to our mind on a daily basis. Toward that end, one thing we can do is to engage in meditation (one of the Three Trainings of precepts, meditation and wisdom) on a regular basis. Meditation can take various forms, such as mindfulness meditation or oral recitation ("Namu Amida Butsu" or "Namu myoho Renge Kyo"), among others. (More on this in the future issues of "Buddhist Column")

All the best to you as we help each other to realize greater peace of mind and lesser suffering.

*(FYI, we were astounded to learn that our total bill for the 7 hours (5 hours of which was spent waiting) at the ER was \$10,000!! Fortunately, the Medicare insurance paid most of it. In Japan, at most it would probably have been 1/10 of that. If traveling to the U.S. from abroad, we definitely suggest you take out a health insurance.)*

## (5)

## Kenneth Tanaka 2019 Speaking Schedule in N. America and Europe

For engagements in **Japan**, see “Buddhist Column” in Japanese  
 For example, June 29<sup>th</sup> and November 30<sup>th</sup> at Tsukiji Hongwanji in Tokyo,  
 which are talks in English.

Please see: <https://tsukijihongwanji.jp/lecture/saturday-english-service>

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|-----------------|---|
| August 25       | San Jose Betsuin Buddhist Temple: Afternoon Seminar   |
| September 6-7   | Spokane Buddhist Temple: TBA  |
| September 14    | Enmanji Buddhist Temple: Afternoon Seminar  |
| September 15    | Sacramento Betsuin Buddhist Temple<br>Ohigan service from 9:30<br>Seminar from around noon  |
| September 20    | San Diego Buddhist Temple, Seminar 7-9PM<br>"An Introduction to Shin<br>Buddhism through Humor: a Path of Naturalness<br>for Greater Happiness and Meaning" |
| September 21    | Orange County Buddhist Church<br>Ohigan seminar from 9 - noon   |
| September 22    | Orange County Buddhist Church<br>10AM Ohigan service talk at<br>Vista Buddhist Temple<br>Ohigan service at 3PM, followed by<br>Mini-seminar for 1-2 hours   |
| September 24    | Arizona Buddhist Temple evening   |
| September 25    | Chicago Buddhist Temple evening   |
| September 26    | Midwest Buddhist Temple evening   |
| September 28-29 | Kamloops Buddhist Temple, Canada<br>British Columbia Province Conference  |
| November 22-24  | Eko Haus, Dusseldorf, GERMANY Hoonko Lectures   |

