

*Messages from Buddha Heart Village*

No. 1901-005

**FREEDOM:** A state when one has reached it, or a process when one has followed it, he is freed from any constraint or obstacle or any burden, physical or mental.

This is the highest goal of life one may establish for himself, this is the state that Buddha has already reached, and this is the way that the Bodhisattvas try to follow. When we look around at the people we know, who has gained such freedom? Who has followed such a path? We can definitely say "few," if any. Such an impression may mislead us to the conclusion that the goal to reach complete freedom is not practical. We may further have the wrong idea that Buddha is unattainable, only an abstraction, and is therefore not reachable. Hence, many freedom pursuers either modify the definition of freedom to suit their own experiences and perceptions, or give up their pursuit completely, so that they may direct their attentions to other areas.

There are two causes for this hapless situation: 1) The understanding of freedom is incorrect or incomplete. More specifically, the states they try to reach do not exist or the ways approaching them are not correct. 2) There are not enough people truly pursuing freedom to set good examples for others to follow.

Buddha has reached the perfect state of freedom, why haven't we? To answer this question, let us examine the common concept of freedom by quoting John Stuart Mill's statement: "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way." The difficulty of such concept of freedom lies in "our own good in our own way". We have no consensus of goodness, and furthermore, goodness is relative, not an isolated entity. It is relative because one's goodness may very well be another's badness. Goodness is not an isolated concept because its standard is always affected by the embedded environment. Therefore, we cannot talk about "goodness" alone, but "goodness" relative to a group of persons in a given environment at a specific time.

Some people may argue that they do have a consensus of goodness. For example, they agree that money, power, fame, and sex are "good" objects for pursuit, and they may even agree on a singular way to obtain it. Take money as an example, they may all agree to gain it by buying stocks. Now what is the problem? It brings out the concept of shareability (the possibility and degree of being shared with others). If a given amount of money is owned by one person, it cannot be owned by another. The shareability is zero. Furthermore, there is definitely a hidden upper limit how much money one can draw from his environment. If a man does not realize the existence of an upper limit and let his desire goes above it, he is bound to hit a stone wall. He has no freedom but affliction. There is also a boundary across which other person's fair share will be deprived. Since the upper limit and the boundary are hidden, the wise men try to curb their desires. Since the upper limit and the boundary are not lines but regions, the wise men try to practice tolerance. This is wisdom; this is compassion. Only with wisdom and compassion, can we gain freedom. To curb the desire and practice tolerance is an important and simple advice to all who want real freedom, but few can accept it; and fewer can practice it.

When we talk about freedom, we have two entities in our minds: a person P whose freedom is concerned; and an environment of that person, denoted by E(P). If P is the only person in E(P), the

obstacles to his freedom are physical; this is not the situation we are concerned. Let E(P) contain many other persons. If P's pursuing object is the same as that of others and the object is not shareable, P becomes a threat to others; and at the same time, his freedom is restricted because of a conflict of interest.

From the above discussions, we can see that to pursue freedom, the following instructions must be observed:

1. Increase your knowledge and wisdom.
2. Develop your compassion toward others.
3. Curb your cupidity and desires.
4. Train your patience and tolerance.
5. Choose pursuing objects with high shareability or low conflict of interest.

A short note of the concept of shareability is in order. Take money again as an example. I do not mean that "money" is not shareable; but that a "given amount of money" is not. If there is 1,000 dollars and you want all of it, then the "1,000 dollars" cannot be shared with others. However, if the thousand is divided into smaller units, then the smaller units are now shareable. This example is somewhat obvious and almost trivial; but if you replace the concrete object (money) with other more subtle ones, say power and fame, the problem is very complex and intriguing. In daily life, making non-shareable objects shareable is an art of living. Put this paragraph in a laconic way: Don't be selfish.

A Buddha Heart Villager



James C.M. Yu (Kuo K'ung)