

earth was formed. From the point view of I-kuan Tao, the world is filled with different names of her.

The integration of different religions is a tendency during the current age. I-kuan Tao, as a new religious movement, aims to unify the world and work toward building world peace by integrating the five main world religions. Dr. Chen expresses his gratitude to University of the West for offering the Department of Religious Study and helping its students from different religious backgrounds pursue their significant research.

– Yung Dong

## **The Length of One Breath: Living Well the Buddhist Way**

**By Kodo Matsunami  
Buddhist Searchlight Center, Tokyo,  
Japan, 2005.**

Life has become much easier in the contemporary world. To live a decent life, one needs enough money to meet his needs. It seems that our needs for materials have become insatiable as new fashions emerge in an endless stream. No matter how much money he has, no matter how many new things he has obtained, we seem to feel dissatisfied. We often hear people complaining, grumbling, and expressing their disappointment over the situations.

*The Length of One Breath: Living Well the Buddhist Way* by Professor Kodo Matsunami aims to give the key to the questions people frequently ask about the meaning of modern life. The book is divided into five chapters with 94 subchapters. And each subchapter is two-three pages in length. They cover almost all aspects in life in times of success, failure, perplexity and loneliness and deals with attitudes toward people and work and the importance of a sound mind. What is

more important, the author incorporates the wisdoms of both East and West into these chapters, enabling readers to share the gems of world civilizations. In fact, the book reminds me of *The Popular Collection of Traditional Chinese Wise Sayings* which contains rhymed stanzas.

Chapter 1 touches on the subject of the right way to live. The author tries to illustrate his points by introducing the concepts of Buddhism. For instance, the fourth subchapter entitled “Life is but a fleeting moment” quotes the Buddha’s teaching on our life as “the length of a single breath.” Indeed, life is a moment in space. Discussing the topic of “No one is perfect,” he advises readers by quoting Confucius’ words: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Similar teaching can be found in the Bible.

One thing necessary to be pointed out is that on page 79 the author describes what happened with Japan during World War II. As “the Imperial Japanese Army, bent on acquiring new territories and drunk with its successive victories, forgot all about prudence and tactics.” The words are partially correct in describing Japanese army’s loss sense of prudence whereas the fact is that they were engaged in an unjust war against the Chinese people. It was not simply “acquiring new territories,” but a war of invasion full of atrocities.

The second part totaling 21 subchapters deals with admonitions for oneself. The chapter urges readers to perfect themselves by self-cultivation. When people are successful, they probably are proud of their achievements. Overdone, they begin to fail. Thus, the author offers his advice – to do away with presumptuousness, empty the desire and so on. In fact, his advice is valuable for modern people to purify themselves – “Slough off the scum from your soul,” “Do not allow yourself to be obsessed by delusion,” “You are not the only one having a hard time at the moment,” and so forth. In these short subchapters, the

author tries to illuminate readers with wise sayings of sages of the East and West.

The next chapter contains the author's advice for one's attitude toward others. Human beings live in society with many connections. Certainly, it is necessary to keep harmonious relations with the people around us. The question lies on how. The author offers more than 19 pieces of advice. Simple and lucid, they are persuasive to readers: "Have ears to listen," "Be kind to others," "Have a loving heart," "Do not feign benevolence," "Make true friends," and so on. The author illustrates the basic values of human relationship by simple stories. He even provided precious advice for readers to say "No" when necessary. It is necessary to make friends and keep good relationship in the spirit of harmony. The whole chapter shows his persistence in what is right.

Chapter 4 contains sixteen subchapters, focusing on Mental Attitude toward Our Work. This chapter is filled with the Buddha spirit of "Right Efforts." However, the author incorporates the adages of many bright persons, both East and West, into various its subchapters, including Prince Regent Shotoku (574 - 622), Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (1130 - 1200), Honen (1133 - 1212), William James (1842 - 1910), etc. He convinces readers that they should always face things in earnest in order to make achievements. In so doing, it is necessary for them to act rather than talk and to avoid waste and try to make the best of things. He even uses a very good imagery "Catch the best winds to blow in your sails." "Always be prepared for anything" will enable one to meet the challenges in life, such as school entrance examination, employment examinations, qualifying examinations, contests and competitions. We have to face and overcome difficulties as we live our life. As we do

things, we should do our best scrupulously and cautiously.

The last chapter entitled "The Everyday Frame of Mind" discusses the adjustments of one's mind in various circumstances. We are living in a world full of pressures of work, money, transportation, environment, competition and so forth. If careless, we are doomed to fail. It is up to us to relax ourselves and balance our life. Without relaxation, we cannot concentrate on the matters that need to be attended to. Humor and wit are a good medicine. Readers are encouraged to gain wisdom on the conquest of the fear of death.

The author presents five chapters with many real-life examples. They just demonstrate the sparkle of wisdom in "The Length of One Breath," guiding both readers of the East and West to take the Buddhist way of living, the way leading toward perfection although we cannot make the world perfect. The efforts we spend will not be vain because there is always cause-effect. This is the goal of the book - to help reader ask themselves what life means to them, and what legacy they hope to leave behind.

- Darui Long