

Application of Tathāgata Citta, a Buddhist version of Lectio Divina
to the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Buddhist Chaplaincy at
University of the West

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Buddhist Ministry

by

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Fall 2024

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I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted
as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,
and that it is entirely my own work.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my special thanks to those who have contributed greatly to my spiritual growth and academic development, enabling me to complete my dissertation successfully. I am indebted to my master, YinGuang Shi, who inspired me to solve my spiritual puzzle and led me to become a Buddhist nun in 2010. I am also grateful to my ordination temple, Chong Fu Si in Fu Zhou City, which provided me with full ordination as a monastic (Bhikkhuni). At that time, I participated in organizational and coordination efforts to continuously integrate Buddhism into my life, and to develop and gain experiences. Furthermore, I would be remiss not to mention my permanent resident temple, Guanyin Si in Taiyuan, which supported me throughout my eight-year study at Uwest. Their belief in me has kept my spirits and motivation high during this process.

I am so grateful to my school's founder, Master Hsing Yun, and President Minh-Hoa Ta, who gave me this opportunity to study at Uwest. My heartfelt thanks also go to the IBEF scholarship supporters for their generosity, and to Grace Hsiao, who assisted me during these study years. I am especially thankful to my Chair professor, Victor Gabriel, for patiently helping me improve my English skills and for inspiring me in my academic journey. I would also like to acknowledge my previous professors, Jitsujo T. Gauthier, Daphna McKnight, and Monica Sanford, in the Buddhist Chaplaincy Department for their spiritual care and frank feedback, which significantly contributed to my study. Additionally, I express my gratitude to Religious Studies Professors Lewis Lancaster, Shou-Jen Kuo, Miroj Shakay, Willian Chu, and Darui Long at Uwest, who supported me in deepening my understanding of religious research and educational development. I am

also grateful to my participants and chaplaincy cohorts who attended this program and supported me in completing my dissertation.

In my personal expressions of gratitude, I would like to thank my mother, also a monastic named Dangbian Shi, who has dedicated her life to supporting me in my studies and life. Her unwavering understanding enabled me to overcome every challenge. To my Dharma sisters and brothers, I am deeply thankful for their friendship and patience, which provided me with the support needed to overcome difficult emotional times. Lastly, I am grateful to my supporters, who have given me their heartfelt support year after year.

ABSTRACT

Application of Tathāgata Citta, a Buddhist version of Lectio Divina, to the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra

By

Hongye Peng

The Lotus Sūtra is one of the most important sūtras in the Mahāyāna tradition. Although Buddhists read ancient Sūtras daily, they often do not use these texts to reflect on their feelings and emotions. There is a gap in the relevance and importance of using an ancient sūtra to alleviate contemporary suffering and to engage people in cultivating insightful wisdom to release their suffering.

So far, there has been no research that utilizes an ancient sūtra specifically to address contemporary suffering. However, there is research on the use of Lectio Divina, an ancient Christian meditation technique, on engaging people in their daily lives to confront and transcend their suffering, whether from family or work. This technique can teach people how to contemplate sacred texts for reflection on emotional well-being; it can also be applied to a deeper understanding of Buddhist sacred sūtra.

My project aims to utilize three parables from the Lotus Sūtra to create a three-week course, structured into three sections, with one parable dedicated to each section. Participants were divided into three groups: chaplains, doctors, and Buddhists. A total of

16 participants engaged in this program to explore the parables of the Lotus sūtra using the Lectio Divina to deeply reflect on their feelings and emotions.

This project was designed as a guide—both written and recorded—for monastics and chaplains to teach others how to use this technique for reflecting on emotional health through the Lotus Sūtra parables. My future hope is that the Lotus Sūtra will be used to reflect on symptoms related to Moral Injury, such as guilt, shame, and betrayal.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Buddhism has existed for over two thousand years; it emerged around 550 BC in India. Approximately 2500 years ago, Buddha Shakyamuni preached the teachings of Buddhism to alleviate people's suffering. He taught his principles for 50 years. It wasn't until the last eight years of his preaching, according to Tiantai, Nichiren, and other Buddhist groups, that he revealed the true purpose of the Lotus Sūtra.

This statement forms a belief among many Mahāyāna Buddhists.¹ The Lotus Sūtra is one of the main Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtras. Mahāyāna Buddhists are a later sect that developed in Buddhism. The Lotus Sūtra involves explications meant to understand Buddhism. It was the first Buddhist Sūtra to be translated from Sanskrit into a Western language—into French in 1844 by the eminent scholar Eugène Burnouf.² There was another great translation from Kumārajīva, Tsugunari Kubo, and Akira Yuyama.³ Burton

¹ Nikkyo Niwano, "The Threefold Lotus Sutra: An Introduction," in *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra*, ed. Gene Reeves (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 2002), 27.

² Thomas A. Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xvii.

³ Kumārajīva, *The Lotus Sutra* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2007).

Watson⁴ and Hendrik Kern⁵ also translated this Sūtra into different versions. It has become a significant Sūtra to inspire all kinds of people in Western societies.

The Intention of the Study

There is still a gap as to the relevance and importance of an ancient sūtra in relieving contemporary suffering and engaging people in insightful wisdom that arises to release their suffering. For example, how do we engage people in their daily lives to face their suffering from family or work, and how do we use the ancient sūtra in their daily lives? How does the sūtra deal with Moral Injury (also abbreviated 'MI'), considering that MI is an important problem in this modern age? According to Shay, MI is a betrayal of what is right by a person with legal power.⁶ MI causes lots of suffering for the veterans. Shay defined this term in 1998 with Munroe. Norman studied the symptoms of MI⁷. These are guilt, shame, and betrayal. MI patients experience a loss of trust, which causes social problems such as loss of meaning, difficulty in forgiveness, and self-condemnation. The treatments for MI are cognitive behavioral therapy, adaptive disclosure, mindfulness, and acceptance and commitment therapy. Last year, the ProQuest Research Library listed 4959 articles that covered MI. The study of MI crosses

⁴ Burton Watson, *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁵ Hendrik Kern, *The Saddharma-Pundarīka, Or, The Lotus of the True Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884).

⁶ Jonathan Shay, "Moral Injury," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 31, no. 2 (2014): 182.

⁷ Sonya B. Norman et al., *Trauma Informed Guilt Reduction Therapy: Treating Guilt and Shame Resulting from Trauma and Moral Injury* (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2019).

psychology, psychiatry, social work, philosophy, and religious/spiritual studies. The treatment of MI continues to be studied.

Pilot of the Study

I realized the application of the parables of the Lotus Sūtra might alleviate the suffering of MI. First, I conducted a pilot study where two volunteers read the Lotus Sūtra and provided feedback on their reading. From this preliminary study, documented in Appendix B, I identified four implications and two limitations. My plan is to utilize three parables from the Lotus Sūtra through reading exercises to help people reflect on MI. This pilot project sought to demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of using the Lotus Sūtra as a narrative tool in modern societies and guide the design of the more extended study. My pilot study was the first research of this type. The data collected and analyzed can serve as the first step in understanding the usability and feasibility of the application of the Lotus Sūtra.

Method and Finding of the Study

After this pilot study, I realized that my plan was too extensive and that I needed to discover a useful method of practice. Professor Daphna McKnight introduced me to the Christian technique of Lectio Divina. I felt this was the perfect method of reading sūtra, allowing participants to reflect on their daily lives. Lectio Divina is a particular

Christian methodology used for reading and reflecting on sacred texts.⁸ It is a contemplative exercise that involves slowly and prayerfully reading a passage of Scripture, contemplating its meaning, and seeking to apply its lessons to the reader's own life. Lectio Divina offers four steps: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

For my dissertation project, I invited 16 participants to join three groups to read three parables of the Lotus Sūtra. One group was for chaplains, another for doctors, and the last for Buddhists. I looked for any differences between these three groups. This project included eight steps of Tathāgata Citta to explain the meaning of three parables profoundly: Arrive/ Check-in, Reading/Action, Reflecting, Writing/ Reaction, Responding, Rest, Discussion, and Check-out. This method integrated the Three Parables within the Framework of the Threefold Truth, helping people reflect on their feelings and emotions, such as shame, stress, guilt, and confidence. This dissertation also discussed improvements in design, participant feedback/ observations, the author's observations, and future studies on Moral Injury, Spiritual Care, and Interreligious Dialogue.

Significance of the Study

I believe that the Lotus Sūtra is one of the most important sūtras in the Mahāyāna tradition. Although Buddhists read ancient sūtras daily, they do not use this sūtra to reflect on their feelings and emotions. There is a gap in the relevance and importance of

⁸ Marek S. Kopacz, Mary S. Adams, and Robert F. Searle, "Lectio Divina: A Preliminary Evaluation of a Chaplaincy Program," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 23, no. 3 (2017): 2-3.

using an ancient sūtra to alleviate contemporary suffering and engage people in insightful wisdom to release their suffering. My project seeks to show how the Lectio Divina meditation technique can teach people to contemplate Buddhist sacred texts for reflection on emotional well-being. As a Buddhist chaplaincy and ministerial student, this project allowed me to better understand the integration of different religious faiths and practices in understanding myself and others. Ultimately, my goal is to create a tool that can help any chaplain when providing spiritual care to identify, evaluate, access these resources, and engage in life-giving spiritual care. Using the parables of the Lotus Sūtra in interreligious dialogue helps individuals recognize their true thoughts and find a way to balance their emotions and feelings.

In my future studies, I will use this course, Teaching the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra using Tathāgata Citta, as a treatment to help people change dysfunctional behavior, make time for self-care, and build up self-confidence. It aims to support Buddhist practice and the engaged outlook of Buddhist practitioners.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Significance of the Lotus Sūtra

Buddhism has existed for over two thousand years; it emerged around 550 BC in India. Approximately 2500 years ago, Buddha Shakyamuni preached the teachings of Buddhism to alleviate people's suffering. He had taught his principles for 50 years. It wasn't until the last eight years of his preaching, according to Tiantai, Nichiren, and other Buddhist groups, that he revealed the true purpose of the Lotus Sūtra. According to Nikkyō Niwano, the "Threefold Lotus Sūtra consists of the Sūtra of the lotus flower of the wonderful law (Saddharmapuṇḍrīka-sūtra) and two shorter related Sūtras; the Sūtra of Innumerable Meanings and the Sūtra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue. For centuries, the Three Sūtras in China and Japan have been called the Triple Lotus Sūtra, which is respected not only as Buddhist Sūtra, but also as literature."⁹

The Lotus Sūtra has long been hailed as the "King of all Sūtras,"¹⁰ which means it contains the essence of Śākyamuni's, the historical Buddha's doctrine. Śākyamuni preached many doctrines throughout his lifetime, many of which are called together as "the eighty-four thousand sermons." These scriptures or sūtras were recorded and organized and these teachings number approximately seventeen hundred. Since ancient

⁹ Niwano, "Threefold Lotus Sutra," 27.

¹⁰ Niwano, 27.

times, the Lotus Sūtra has been widely accepted as the Supreme Buddhist scripture, which shows its significance in enlightening people.

This previous statement forms a belief among many Mahāyāna Buddhists. The Lotus Sūtra is one of the main Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtras. Mahāyāna Buddhists are a later sect that developed in Buddhism. The Lotus Sūtra involves explications meant to understand the whole of Buddhism. It is believed that the earlier parts of the Lotus Sūtra were formed around 50 CE. The Lotus Sūtra as definitive teaching of the Mahāyāna occurred in the later stage of Buddhist history. It was the first Buddhist Sūtra to be translated from Sanskrit into a Western language—into French in 1844 by the eminent scholar Eugène Burnouf.¹¹ There was another great translation from Kumārajīva, Tsugunari Kubo, and Akira Yuyama.¹² Burton Watson¹³ and Hendrik Kern¹⁴ also translated this Sūtra in different versions. It has become a significant sūtra to inspire all kinds of people in western societies. Here I would like to ask: How do scholars go about studying this Sūtra? What are the subsequent studies?

Modern Scholars of the Lotus Sūtra

The Lotus Sūtra has long attracted many scholars with its unique ideological charm. I will focus on modern scholars for my project. The study of this classic is endless

¹¹ Tweed, *American Encounter*.

¹² Kumārajīva, Kubo, and Yuyama, *Lotus Sutra*.

¹³ Watson, *Lotus Sutra*.

¹⁴ Kern, *Saddharma-Pundarīka*.

and I would just like to highlight its unique characteristics. For example, we could use a religious lens or a literary lens.

Murano wrote an article which was named “An Outline of the Lotus Sūtra”¹⁵ that gave an overview of the Lotus Sūtra. Also, Buswell and Lopez showed the starting time of the Lotus Sūtra in India.¹⁶ As a philosophical inquiry; Ziporyn wrote two books to explain the essentials of Lotus Sūtra.¹⁷ He conducted philosophical research by transforming Tiantai Buddhism into a Neo-Tiantai Buddhism, engaging with modern Western philosophy. He also interpreted some essential words in this sūtra, such as “emptiness.” However, no matter from what angle it is viewed, researchers can appreciate the Lotus Sūtra’s beauty and benefit, and grasp the unique essence of this scripture’s value, which encourages people to understand more about Buddhism. The study of the Lotus Sūtra is important not only because of its prominent aesthetics but also because of its different perspectives.

Another group that has studied the Lotus Sūtra is Nichiren Buddhism. It is a branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It began in medieval Japan in the 13th century and has since spread to millions of practitioners worldwide. Nichiren tradition is practiced

¹⁵ Senchū Murano, "An Outline of the Lotus Sutra," *Contemporary Religions in Japan* 8, no. 1 (1967).

¹⁶ Robert E. Buswell and Donald S. Lopez, foreword to *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), xx.

¹⁷ Brook Ziporyn, *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

worldwide, with practitioners present in the United States, Brazil, and Europe, as well as in South Korea and Southeast Asia.

Although Nichiren has worldwide popularity, there is some controversy over their interpretation of the Lotus Sūtra. Stone particularly explained the Nichiren tradition by saying, “It is as hagiography, rather than history, that its influence has most strongly endured.”¹⁸ Her article outlines the situation of “Atsuhara’s persecution” and the political and religious tension that fueled it, and considers how Nichiren persuaded his followers to remain firm in the face of serious threats. Atsuhara is in the Fuji district of the Suruga province in the Japanese city of Kamakura. Nichiren overcame this situation, and after that, Nichiren Buddhism became a well-known Buddhist sect in Japan. Stone studied the connection between Nichiren's interpretation of the persecution and the larger themes in his doctrine of dedication, especially his life-long dedication to ensuring that he obtained this Dharma.

On other hand, Ikeda has different thoughts on Nichiren’s teaching.¹⁹ He sternly expressed that Nichiren’s followers killed the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin within their own school. He said that the Lotus Sūtra was the teaching, in which everyone equally had the potential to attain Buddhahood. However, there are great differences in the forms whereby Shakyamuni and Nichiren expressed this teaching. Nichiren praises and offers

¹⁸ Jacqueline I. Stone, "The Lotus Sutra, Persecution, and Religious Identity in the Early Nichiren Tradition," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 34.

¹⁹ D. Ikeda, *The Heart of the Lotus Sutra: Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters* (Santa Monica: Middleway Press, 2014), 17, <https://books.google.com/books?id=-fcBBAAAQBAJ>.

the most encouragement to his followers by calling them “votaries of the Lotus Sūtra.”²⁰ who are never succumbed to any persecution or difficulties.

Ikeda explained Buddhism always means action and practice. In order for people to overcome difficulties and build the happiest lives, he believed that the chapters “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” are the most important in the Lotus Sūtra. Such that, in action and practice, beat the heart of the Lotus Sūtra.²¹ He pointed out: “Unfortunately, the priests of Nichiren Shoshu have subverted the intent of this concept. They have misused the idea of the Buddhist teaching hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sūtra, mystifying it to bolster their own air of authority. In doing so, they have ascribed to priests and temples a special level of privilege and the endeavor to use the Gohonzon—the object of devotion in Nichiren Buddhism—as a tool for controlling people. While failing to engage themselves earnestly in Buddhist practice, they have instead tended toward the pursuit of pleasure and personal gratification, allowing their humanity to erode at its root. This is a truly fearsome development. They have, in effect, killed the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin within their own order.”²²

He mentioned the practice of the Lotus Sūtra was a living interpretation—an interpretation that puts Buddhist scriptures into practice, an interpretation from a human perspective, an interpretation for lay folk, an interpretation that focuses on people’s daily

²⁰ Ikeda, *Heart of the Lotus*, 17.

²¹ Ikeda, 17.

²² Ikeda, 21.

lives. The Lotus Sūtra is not a mystifying scripture. Stone focused more on the studies of history, especially the phenomena of being inclined to obtain the Dharma through dedication. Ikeda explained that Buddhism always means action and practice. Nichiren's teaching was not meant to be mysterious.

These two scholars' thoughts directed my attention to the effects of other schools of the Lotus Sūtra's teaching such as the Tiantai tradition. Since the founder of Nichiren proposed his own teaching in 1253, he advocated an exclusive return to the Lotus Sūtra based on his original Tendai interpretation. Tendai also is the Tiantai school's name in Japan.

Tiantai or T'ien-t'ai is a school of Buddhism in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam that reveres the Lotus Sūtra as the highest teaching in Buddhism.²³ In Japan, the school is known as Tendai; in Korea as Cheontae; and in Vietnam as Thiên thai. Due to the central role of the Lotus Sūtra in its teachings, Tiantai was also called "The Lotus School". Tiantai studies are not only aesthetic but also interpretative. As the fourth patriarch, Zhiyi or Chih-i (538-597 CE) also known as "the little Śākyamuni,"²⁴ proposed a dimensional and all-inclusive system of thought. The core ideas of his teaching are the "Threefold Truth 三諦", "the Fourfold Teachings 四教", "the Subtle Dharma 妙法" and the

²³ Paul Groner, *Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1984).

²⁴ Gene Reeves, *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 2002), 37.

“Nonconceivable Discernment (Inconceivable Mind)”²⁵.

The Threefold Truth is the most significant conception, which is a main philosophical principle in Tiantai’s teaching of the Lotus Sūtra. Zhiyi developed the study of Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka philosophy to explore the “Threefold Truth (emptiness, existence, and the middle; 空假中; or Emptiness, Provisional Positing and the Center²⁶)”. This framework describes all the phenomena of the world.

All the phenomena are empty (śūnya, 空 Kong); this is linked to the Mahāyāna concept of the ultimate truth. Swanson said, “All beings can attain Buddhahood precisely because emptiness, the lack of any self-existent and substantial Being, is the nature of reality.”²⁷ When people realized the existence of emptiness, it will become easy for them to see the nature of reality.

Phenomena exist (假, Jia) is the positive side of emptiness. It is the confluence of causes and conditions such as aggregates, forms, colors, and so forth. Swanson mentioned it is an analysis of the phenomenon in its ontological (causally arising), temporal (continuity), and logical (relativity) aspects. In other words, the phenomena that exists are not real; they are conventional, dependent, temporary, and relative realities.

²⁵ David W. Chappell, "Is Tendai Buddhism Relevant to the Modern World?" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 14, no. 2/3 (1987): 252, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30233986>.

²⁶ Ziporyn, Brook, "Tiantai Buddhism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/buddhism-tiantai>.

²⁷ Paul Loren Swanson, *The Two Truths Controversy in China and Chih-I's Threefold Truth Concept* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison Press, 1985),376.

Realizing this phenomenon is not real help relieve some of the sufferings of the ego.

The middle truth (中, Zhong) depends on the above concepts, that is the harmony of the two truths. Phenomena are both empty of existence and exists provisionally. It is Neither Being nor Emptiness (non-Being), and neither dual nor nondual (Neither "both Being and Emptiness" nor "neither Being nor Emptiness") The middle truth is beyond verbalization and conceptualization.²⁸ Being good at utilizing the middle truth could lead people to be successful. This is because it can be a practice of the mind to see clearly the consequence of actions.

Chappell appealed “: I can only hope that modern Tendai practitioners will be equally curious to see how their sacred heritage might relate to contemporary thought, and be refurbished and applied to aid people in their religious growth in the modern world”.²⁹ These Tian Tai scholars gives me a thought to rethink the Lotus Sūtra and how to utilize this Sūtra.

Parables in the Lotus Sūtra and Christianity

A parable is a short, simple story that we can use to teach a moral or spiritual lesson. Parables are found in many different religious and philosophical traditions, and they have been used for centuries as a way to communicate important ideas. They are simple and easy to understand, but they also carry a deep meaning that can be interpreted

²⁸ Swanson, *Two Truths Controversy*, 348.

²⁹ Chappell, "Is Tendai Buddhism," 264.

in many different ways. In Christian and Buddhist tradition there are many parables in the Bible and sūtras. The Lotus Sūtra contains seven of the most famous and popular parables in all of Buddhist literature. These studies demonstrate the richness and versatility of metaphors in the Lotus Sūtra and their continuing relevance to Mahāyāna research and practice.

Gene Reeves provides a detailed analysis of the parables in the Lotus Sūtra.³⁰ He argued that the parables in the Lotus Sūtra served multiple functions, including conveying complex philosophical and religious ideas in a form that is accessible and engaging to a wide audience, emphasizing the centrality of compassion and wisdom in Buddhist practice, and challenging conventional views of reality and identity. Coreless and Shahbazi³¹ encourage practitioners to go beyond superficial understanding and embrace a more profound and inclusive perspective.

There are many Christian studies on parables as well. Kistemaker³² provides a clear and accessible introduction to the parables of Jesus, exploring their historical context and theological significance. The author draws on both scholarship and personal experience to shed light on the meaning and relevance of each parable for contemporary Christian life and faith. Jermias³³ offered offers a thorough and scholarly examination of

³⁰ Gene Reeves, *The Stories of the Lotus Sutra* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2010).

³¹ Roger J Coreless and Ali Shahbazi, "Parables of Deconstruction in the Lotus Sutra," *Journal of Seven Heavens* 13, no. 49 (2011).

³² Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2002).

³³ Joachim Jeremias, *The parables of Jesus* (London: Xpress Reprints, 1995).

the parables of Jesus, exploring their origins, themes, and theological implications. The author draws on historical and cultural context to shed light on the meaning and significance of each parable, highlighting the Jewish roots of Jesus' teachings. Butler³⁴ uses the parable of the sower to encourage individuals to examine their hearts, seek understanding, and actively engage with the message of God's kingdom, allowing it to transform their lives and bear fruit in their actions and relationships.

I found this western study on the application of parables very interesting. I believe that the use of the Lotus Sūtra could be studied through its application. My continuing study asks how we can use the parables in the Lotus Sūtra.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a methodology or approach to reading and reflecting on sacred texts, particularly in the Christian tradition.³⁵ It is a contemplative practice that involves reading a passage of scripture slowly and prayerfully, meditating on its meaning, and seeking to apply its lessons to one's own life. Lectio Divina is often described as a four-step process, which includes reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. In recent years, Lectio Divina has been adapted and used in a variety of contexts, including interfaith dialogue and spiritual practices outside of the Christian tradition. While it is primarily a religious practice, some scholars have also applied the principles of Lectio

³⁴ Octavia E Butler, *Parable of the Sower* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2023).

³⁵ Kopacz, Adams, and Searle, "Lectio Divina," 2-3.

Divina to secular texts or used it as a method for teaching critical reading and thinking skills. It in this spirit that I seek to apply Lectio Divina to the Lotus Sūtra.

Kopacz, Adams and Searle³⁶ studied Lectio Divina as a chaplaincy program to help hospital chaplains practice reading and meditation on scripture that involves four steps: reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. They reported that the patients found the sessions helpful for their spiritual well-being, and many reported a greater sense of peace and comfort as a result of their participation. The authors conclude that Lectio Divina has the potential to be an effective spiritual practice for patients in a hospital setting and recommend further research to explore its benefits in more depth. They suggest that chaplains and other spiritual care providers may find Lectio Divina a useful tool for supporting patients in their spiritual journey.

The newest study of Jennings³⁷ investigates the effectiveness of Lectio Divina as a method for reducing stress and negative emotions in university students. The study involved a group of undergraduate students who participated in Lectio Divina sessions over a period of several weeks. The results of the study suggest that Lectio Divina may be an effective tool for regulating negative reactions to stress in university students. The students who participated in the sessions reported lower levels of stress and negative emotions, as well as increased feelings of peace, calm, and well-being. The authors

³⁶ Kopacz, Adams, and Searle, "Lectio Divina."

³⁷ Amy Sturdivant Jennings, "Scripture Meditation (Lectio Divina) And The Regulation Of Negative Reactions To Stress In Anderson University Students Anderson, South Carolina" (PhD diss., Macon: Mercer University, 2020).

suggest that this may be due to the fact that Lectio Divina involves a structured process of reading and reflecting on scripture that encourages individuals to focus their attention on positive, uplifting messages.

Studzinski³⁸ and Robertson studied how this ancient practice has adapted and transformed in response to contemporary needs and opportunities. It highlights how Lectio Divina continues to provide a powerful means for individuals to engage with sacred texts and deepen their spiritual journey in a changing world. Keator³⁹ uses Lectio Divina as a transformative teaching method within humanities education. It explores the potential benefits of this contemplative approach in fostering deep understanding, empathy, and critical thinking among students and offers practical suggestions for its implementation in the classroom.

The authors conclude that Lectio Divina has the potential to be a useful tool for promoting mental and emotional health in university students and recommend further research to explore its benefits in more depth. They suggest that Lectio Divina could be integrated into existing wellness programs and support services on college campuses as a way to help students cope with the stresses of academic life. These studies have inspired me to apply Lectio Divina on the Lotus sūtra.

³⁸ Raymond Studzinski, *Reading to Live: The Evolving Practice of Lectio Divina*, vol. 231 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009).

³⁹ Mary Keator, *Lectio Divina as Contemplative Pedagogy: Re-appropriating Monastic Practice for the Humanities*, vol. 16 (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Conclusion

As stated above, this paper explores several issues in modern society. The Lotus Sūtra, a traditionally complex teaching, is difficult to spread in Western societies. Some scholars study this sūtra as an art; others translate it into different languages, and Nichiren and Tiantai study it for its meaning. However, how this Sūtra can be utilized to solve contemporary issues still presents challenges. As a monastic researcher, my own vow led me to explore the lesson plans for teaching the parables of the Lotus Sūtra using *Lectio Divina*.

CHAPTER III: BUDDHIST MINISTRY

Practice of Bodhisattvas

This section will explore my ethical and ministerial development from two Buddhist traditions. The two Buddhist scriptural traditions that I practice come from the Three Vehicles of the Lotus Sūtra and the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra. The Three Vehicles teach about different paths to Buddhahood. This is related to my ministry and my ethical development, which in turn is connected to my motivation to alleviate suffering. At the same, the example of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva reveals how a personal mission and vow can influence the practice of the Buddhist path in releasing grief successfully. The practice of Buddhist ministry is always connected to the practice of Buddhist ethics. Buddhist ethics are found in the teachings of early Buddhism and the Theravāda School and lead the practitioner to abstain from unwholesome actions. Later, in the Mahāyāna, the earlier shared tradition perspective is altered by the increasing emphasis on compassion.⁴⁰

The Three Vehicles of the Lotus Sūtra

In this section, I will explain how I understand the Three Vehicles of the Lotus Sūtra and the different paths to achieve Buddhahood through their practice and its

⁴⁰ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

connection to my ministry. The Lotus Sūtra declares that the Three Vehicles are Śrāvaka (disciple), Pratyekabuddha (Solitary Buddha), and Bodhisattva.⁴¹

The Śrāvaka vehicle is about the disciples of the Buddha. They learned from Buddha and practiced the Four Noble Truths, which could cause the practitioner to realize the suffering from birth, old age, illness, and death to release them and achieve nirvana. However, this practitioner is still a human with bad habits such as selfishness, distrust, and fear. These bad habits will cause suffering in their life.

Relating the teachings to my childhood, I realize I relied too much on my parents and only thought of myself as always looking after myself. When I lost my dad, I felt I had no hope. I was falling deeply into grief because I was only looking at myself and did not see my mother's suffering. I did not realize the meaning of my mother's responsibility. In contrast, I doubted myself and others in doing something successfully. As such, the Śrāvaka vehicle as a human practitioner shows the weakness of their practice. As a child, I had to rely on the surrounding environments to face my weaknesses and learn successful methods to release/transform the suffering.

Next is the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle. Here, the practitioner is a wise person who practices dependent origination to attain enlightenment without relying on the Buddha's teaching. They are awakened by their own insights. The practitioner of this vehicle practices the 12 causes and conditions to achieve Buddhahood. When an unhealthy

⁴¹ These are categories inherent to traditional commentaries on the Lotus Sūtra.

situation happens, the practitioner can see the actual reason and resolve this suffering. However, this vehicle's person is not willing to help others. It is a kind of selfish action. To reflect on this Vehicle, I see its connection to cognitive development as explained by Fowler, as the fourth stage, which is individuated-reflective faith.⁴² People can adopt new value systems as a result of exposure to different ways of life.

For example, when I began to go to school, it was the first time I had to face society without my parents. I had to deal with different conditions and discovered many new feelings and emotions. I made a friend for the first time and built relationships with others. I felt jealous when my friend was close to others, excited when the teacher praised me in public and embarrassed when I did not earn higher scores. It was the first time that I observed these feelings and emotions. These feelings could lead me to get angry or sad. If I could not realize the reason for those attachments, I would follow this reincarnation with another life.

For example, I might be angry with my friend when I feel jealous. So, I had to be less dependent to be a wise person like the Pratyekabuddha. I wanted to break the chain of suffering conditions to enlighten the wisdom and release more suffering. Thus, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle reminds me of the importance of self-awareness, but I also see the weakness of this path, which is the unwillingness to help others.

Finally, the practitioner achieves complete enlightenment and perfect all-

⁴² James Fowler, "Stages of faith," *Women's Spirituality. Resources for Christian development*, ed. Joanne Wolski Conn (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1986), 174.

knowledge in the Bodhisattvas Vehicle. The practitioner of this vehicle respects the six perfections (pāramitās), believes all the people will be the Buddha, and intends to take responsibility for protecting sentient beings. I have been a practitioner of the Bodhisattva Vehicle for fourteen years.

Starting in 2016, I began chanting the Lotus Sūtra daily. I realized that none of Buddha's disciples wanted to go to Earth to teach the Lotus Sūtra because people on Earth were hard to teach, but then, the Bodhisattvas did not fear difficulties and made a wish to teach this Sūtra on Earth. I admired the Bodhisattvas' courage and followed the Bodhisattvas' path by wishing to be a teacher and true practitioner of the Lotus Sūtra. This is connected to the ethic of a Bodhisattvas, which leads me to establish my ministry: the willingness to alleviate suffering and help others.

As an example of a Bodhisattva, the 25th chapter of the Lotus Sūtra introduces the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. If innumerable hundreds of thousands of myriads of koṭis of sentient beings who experience suffering hear of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and wholeheartedly chant his name, Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara will immediately perceive their voices and free them from their suffering. Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, manifested as a family member in these stories, answered prayers to overcome fire, flood, stormy oceans, and calamity.

Though I do not know enough to achieve this path, I intend to develop the Bodhisattva's character perseveringly. Thus, emulating the bodhisattvas, I applied to be a chaplaincy who could work with people during their suffering and be willing to help

them overcome their grief. As I studied Three Vehicles, I learned about another individual to embrace within in my practice, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva.

Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva

Ksitigarbha is an excellent exemplar of the Bodhisattva path, embodying values such as filial piety, saving others, and vowing to be the last one to become a Buddha. This figure has become a savior in my life, and I strive to emulate him.

When I first became acquainted with Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, I read the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra (地藏菩薩本願經) to accumulate more merits for my father. In this Sūtra, I encountered the figure of Bright Eyes, a manifestation of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, who endured hardships to rescue her mother, who had fallen into a lower realm and was undergoing great suffering. Her mother had developed a habit of eating fish, turtles, and even their eggs; leading to her rebirth in these lower realms thousands of times over. These transgressions caused her mother to suffer in hell. However, Bright Eyes exerted tremendous effort to rescue her mother. I realized she was a filial daughter, and I aspired to be a filial person as well. I endeavored to alleviate my father's suffering as if he had been in hell.

Additionally, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, as manifested as Ti-Tsang, is well known in China for rescuing people from purgatory, as described in the Ten Kings Scripture.⁴³

⁴³ Stephen F Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

Ti-Tsang is a savior who helps the people who suffer in purgatory on the way to the Pure Land. Practitioners worshiped Ti-Tsang in ritual acts to send blessings to alleviate their ancestors' suffering in the purgatory.

Ti-Tsang was a bodhisattva specializing in helping the dead escape the rule of the ten kings. He was a kind benefactor who did not fear suffering and chose to accompany those suffering in hell. His willingness to save people is essential in these disturbing times. He provides a safe environment and earns people's trust. This value of trust also makes me a dedicated monastic, as I, too, strive to save others and build a harmonious place to live on earth. My mother also became a Buddhist nun the same year I did. My second and third aunts also converted to Buddhism. Consequently, my whole family has thus devoted their lives to alleviating the causes of suffering.

Ksitigarbha not only values filial piety, but his most significant value is that he has taken a vow. He wishes to spend hundreds of thousands of millions of myriads of future kalpas in all worlds where there are hells and the three lower realms to rescue all the wrongdoing and suffering of beings, causing them to leave the lower realms of hells, animals, and hungry ghosts.⁴⁴ Only when the beings who undergo the ripened effects of wrongdoing become Buddhas will they be the last to attain Buddhahood. He let others go first into the Pure Land and always took on the challenging work of spending his entire life helping people overcome their suffering. This vow is an excellent volition that has led

⁴⁴ Tsai, *Original Vow*, 99.

me to be compassionate and reminds me to continue studying and constantly learn from others as a chaplain. I am willing to be a good practitioner as a chaplain who could be grounded with others, engage others in the practice of their faith, and be endlessly patient.

The two Buddhist traditions, the Lotus Sūtra and Kskitigarbha (Earth treasury) bodhisattva have helped me deeply understand suffering and learn how to release grief. I realized the bad habits from my childhood and began to see my weaknesses and willingness to change. This understanding of causal conditions gave me a chance to release suffering. When I realized the Bodhisattvas' volition, I encouraged myself to become a more knowledgeable Buddhist nun and chaplain, equipped with professional skills and willing to be with people to face and release their suffering. This led me to encounter my Ministry Life.

The Practice of Humanistic Buddhism

According to Shou-Jen Kuo, “Among Taixu’s countless public seminars and publications throughout his life, his most popular motto was to transform Chinese Buddhism to a “Buddhism of Human Life” (rensheng fojiao 人生佛教), that is, Buddhism as a provider of moral guidance and liturgical service to the living.”⁴⁵ Taixu was a Buddhist modernist activist and thinker who advocated for the reform and renewal

⁴⁵ Shou-Jen Kuo, *Situating Themselves in the Pure Land of Humanistic Buddhism on Earth: A Study of Chinese American Religiosity at Hsi Lai Temple in Southern California* (Riverside: University of California, 2018), 64.

of Chinese Buddhism. This term “Buddhism for Human Life” is reflected in his criticism of several aspects of the late Qing dynasty and early Republican Chinese Buddhism that he wished to correct, namely, an emphasis on spirits and ghosts ("human") and funeral services and rites ("life"). The Buddhist tradition for the dead was a religious expression of filial piety in Chinese culture.

One of Taixu's disciples, Yin Shun, used the term humanistic Buddhism to indicate a criticism against the "deification" of Buddhism, which was another common feature of much of Chinese Buddhism, in his articles and books.

Understanding my practice of Humanistic Buddhism is a wonderful opportunity to develop my spiritual growth and find the awareness to allow me to overcome suffering. Referencing Erikson’s human stages,⁴⁶ I built my theoretical framework of stages to reflect on my past. I believe these chaplain skills and Buddhist teachings can help me become a reliable person who can help others.

Here is the summary of my stages.

Stage 1: Childhood (0-13) - I was the only child in my family, and I was doted upon and could get everything I wanted. I built a feeling of trust in my parents, and I mainly relied on my father. Filial piety was a substantial value in my life as I grew up. However, my father’s death influenced me to become a Buddhist nun. In Erikson’s stages, three parts relate to my situation: the Infancy, Early Childhood, and Childhood

⁴⁶ James Fowler, "Stages of faith," 52.

stages.

Stage 2: Personal Spirit Growth (14-25) - It felt like I lost my future when my father died. Fortunately, I met my master, who taught the ultimate truth from Buddhist teachings, which changed my life entirely. On the other hand, I also had to face my weakness in understanding dharma teachings. Erikson called this the Adolescence stage.

Stage 3: Understanding of suffering (25-31) - As a Buddhist nun, I studied two traditional Buddhist teachings that inspired me to be a good leader and teacher. The first is the understanding of suffering. The second is being a good practitioner, such as a Bodhisattva, to effectively release suffering. Erikson named this the Young Adulthood stage.

Stage 4: Ministry Life (32 – present-day) - Starting at the age of 32, I learned chaplain skills from American culture and explored the roots of my faith tradition to improve my ability to help others. Now, I am working toward becoming a chaplain with specific skills to help others face their suffering and support them in changing their own lives. Erikson called this the Adulthood stage. A more in-depth discussion of my stages to find my spiritual growth follows.

This section is the last but not least. I will explore what I have learned about the skills required in chaplaincy and how the theories of Erikson and Fowler helped me deepen my understanding of my spiritual growth. Erikson focuses more on psycho-social development, while Fowler's stages focus more on faith development. My four stages are built by their theories as well. My growth is also reflected in my CPE Evaluations, found

in Appendix C. During this year, I trained my chaplain skills. I had a better understanding of how my spiritual growth. What follows is a summary of my longer reflection on this chapter.

According to Erikson, caring for feelings and actions is the most important thing during adulthood. To reflect on this, I remembered the first time I learned to be present, which is one chaplain skill I learned from Professor Jitsujo Gauthier. Gauthier has lots of spiritual care experiences helping others to face their suffering. The impressive thing to me is her hand drawing. When she meets a client, she draws a colorful and meaningful meeting scene. This skill is more focused on being in the present. To illustrate the importance of applying such a skill in a patient-care setting, she told us that when she meets a client who is so sad, she draws him in blue. Pictures are an easy way to reflect on their feelings about that situation. Then, I learned more skills such as “Just being there, not having an agenda, having time to listen, being present, offering support.”⁴⁷ Hence, using the skills I listed as examples above led me to reflect on myself to understand more about the situation of others and how to deal with their suffering.

I did verbatim exercises three times with others to practice chaplain skills.

Verbatim includes Preliminary data, Plans and preparation, Impressions, Intention and learning goals, Spiritual encounters, and Analysis and reflection. The specific parts in the Analysis and reflection section are emotional, psychological/mental, social/cultural,

⁴⁷ Stephen B. Roberts, review of *Professional Spiritual and Pastoral Care: A Practical Clergy and Chaplains Handbook*, by Landon Bogan, *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 32 (2012): 460.

spiritual consciousness, self-evaluation, authority and confidence, spiritual assessment, and spiritual reflections. These sections are new parts to me.

Erickson's stage of Generativity vs. Stagnation tells us that it is good to reflect on your past life and make a new purpose for the future in adulthood. However, I failed to help my first care-seeker reflect or create a sense of meaning. I did not know how to physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually observe his actions. I did not see his needs and suffering in the present. For the second care-seeker, I learned to ask more specific and direct questions. I asked open-ended questions like "Would you be willing to tell me about your daily practice?" or "Is there anything happening these days that you would be willing to share?" I felt that open-ended questions invited the person to lead the conversation and gave me a fuller and more experiential answer.

When I pay attention to and notice the vulnerability of the opening that the care seeker gives me, the patient can feel the care and comfort to face their suffering sincerely. I also reflect in the analysis section on what I could have done differently and notice my body-mind to ask specific questions. The experience of these conversations gives me a chance to improve my chaplain skills. However, my chaplain skills affect me, and my Buddhist ethics are the most significant factor that encouraged me to be an honest person who could be a reliable chaplain for others.

The roots of my tradition, Buddhist ethics, are teachings of early Buddhism and the Theravāda School to abstain from unwholesome actions. Meanwhile, the Mahāyāna

traditions put more emphasis on compassion⁴⁸. However, all Buddhist schools share the five precepts. The five precepts (pañca-sīla) are the leading training to keep people from immoral activities caused by greed, hatred, and delusion⁴⁹. These unwholesome activities include killings, taking things without permission, lying, adultery, and taking intoxicants. The precepts are a commitment not to do these activities with body, speech, or mind. That is a fundamental way to take care of daily actions to avoid harm.

Avoiding harm is the most significant thing in society. Every harm could lead to suffering. A chaplain has to adhere to the five precepts to care for others as a caregiver. I also practice the five precepts in my daily life. For example, I always look at the ground when I walk to avoid harming the bugs. When I meet with friends, I do not speak too much to be careful of my words. When I encounter spite from others, I ignore the bad feelings and think that person prompted me to be better. These five precepts lead me to review my actions and protect myself with a healthy mind to avoid potentially harming myself.

Another vital teaching to me, as discussed in the previous section of the current paper, is the Lotus Sūtra. I have been a practitioner of the Lotus Sūtra for fourteen years. When I first learned of the Lotus Sūtra from my master's teaching, I decided to become a Buddhist nun in 2010. Chapter 13 of the Sūtra talks about how none of Buddha's

⁴⁸ Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 8.

⁴⁹ L. Ghose, "Karma and the Possibility of Purification: An Ethical and Psychological Analysis of the Doctrine of Karma in Buddhism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35, no. 2 (2007): 273.

disciples wanted to go to this world to help others and teach this Sūtra. But then, in Chapter 15, many Bodhisattvas did not fear foreseeable challenges and made a vow to lead this Sūtra to all beings in this world. I felt so inspired by this transformation. I wanted to be a Bodhisattva to help others. However, only a vow was not enough to help because everyone has their own situation. Similar to Fowler's conjunctive faith theory, I have to combine chaplain skills and Buddhist ethics to help me experience difficulties in my life.

When I joined the meeting of the National Council of Churches, there was a dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity. My chair professor, Victor Gabriel, brought me there to introduce the Lotus Sūtra and my project. One of the scholars in the meeting talked about Lectio Divina to inspire me on how the application of Lotus Sūtra could be used in Western society. I spent nine weeks with three groups to explore teaching the parables of the Lotus Sūtra using Lectio Divina. That kind of a tool to develop the meaning of the parables to let learners reflect on their daily lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explored the stages of my life and reflected on the ethics of Buddhism, Humanistic Buddhism, and the theories of Erikson and Fowler. My spiritual growth is affected by these stages. Through childhood events, I received the filial piety value from my family and realized the suffering of love.

During my personal spiritual growth, I learned Buddhist teachings and realized the weakness of learning. As a Buddhist nun, I explored traditional Buddhist teaching in

the suffering stage, which led me to understand the suffering and how to solve the hell, making me a good leader and teacher.

Eventually, I learned chaplain skills from American culture and combined them with Buddhist ethics, specifically the five precepts and Bodhisattva values. Awareness of these theories and values has empowered me to offer proper care to patients and recognize my own spiritual growth, alleviate suffering, and develop myself into a skillful Buddhist nun and chaplain. I also developed a course to teach the parables of the Lotus Sūtra using Lectio Divina. The integration of the Lotus Sūtra and Lectio Divina is an expression of my personal growth, as seen through the lens of Fowler and Erickson. This growth is informed by the teachings from the Three Vehicles of the Lotus Sūtra and the Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra, Humanistic Buddhism, and Buddhist ethical practices.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

I have called my community project Teaching the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra Using Lectio Divina. This will comprise the teaching of the Lotus Sūtra with Lectio Divina. I have chosen three parables from the Lotus Sūtra to represent the “Threefold Truth,” Emptiness truth, existence truth, and the middle truth (空假中).⁵⁰ Emptiness (空) truth is linked to the Mahāyāna concept of the ultimate truth. Existence (假) truth is the confluence of causes and conditions such as aggregates, forms, colors, and so forth. The middle truth is the harmony of the Emptiness and Existence truths. These stories, which will be expressed in further detail below, are: “The Rich Father and the Poor Son,” which will represent the truth of emptiness; “The Fantastic Castle City,” to represent the truth of existence; and “Great Treasure Is Very Near,” to represent the middle truth. These three parables make the understanding of Buddha’s words clear. They are an expression of wisdom that shows the infinite mercy of the Buddha and his attainment of ultimate freedom.

This program is a reading and reflection process of three weeks. The participants are divided into three groups respectively. These three groups are a group for chaplains, doctors, and Buddhists. Each group has roughly five people. Each week, we go through the eight steps of Tathāgata Citta: Arrive/ Check-in, Reading/Action, Reflecting, Writing/

⁵⁰ Paul L. Swanson, *Foundations of T’ien-T’ai Philosophy: the Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), 4.

Reaction, Responding, Rest, Discussion, and Check-out.

“Arrive/Check-in” asks people to become still and centered and touch in on something or someone they consider spiritual or loving. Take long breaths and calm down emotions and feelings. “Reading/Action” is silently reading a parable from the Lotus Sūtra while listening to a recording. “Reflecting” is rereading the parable silently and reflecting on its meaning and personal relevance. Reflect on questions like the ones below related to the parable and your current life situation. Gain the reflection from the meaning of this parable. What are your feelings before and after reading this parable? How does this parable relate to your life, or what do you gain from this parable in relation to daily life? Which parts of this parable are helpful to you? The “Writing/ Reaction” part is to write down the answers to the above questions on a white paper. The white paper could give a person a clear mind. “Responding” is a silent moment; let go of participants’ thoughts and interpretations of the parable. Reconnect with the spiritual/sacred place, person, being, and nature you connected to at the beginning. This response would be from the belief of the heart. The “Rest” section is dropping all thoughts and visualizations and resting in silent openness in the presence of the sacred. Take three long breaths to relax. “Discussion” is sharing your experiences, reflections, and suggestions. During the final session, participants would be asked for feedback about ways to enhance the process for the next group of participants. “Check-out” is the final 3 minutes of the hour for greetings and leave-taking. Choose one word to describe what you want to share.

I observed this process's effects through the Eight steps of Tathāgata Citta using a Lotus Sūtra parable. It is an extension of the contemplation step of Tathāgata Citta.

Integrating the Three Parables within the Framework of the Threefold

Truth

The Lotus Sūtra is most meaningfully understood by its parables. Narrating the parables of the Sūtra or any other significant writings has been hypothesized to have the ability to reflect our feelings and emotions of suffering. According to White and Epston,⁵¹ the meaning of stories can empower individuals by re-examining their self-narrative habits or internal narration and exploring the possibility of telling new stories about their lives.

The first parable, “The Rich Father and the Poor Son,” is a metaphor for how a poor man can turn from a despicable person into a generous person, in the process transforming their shame and guilt. In this story, the disciples were inspired by Śāriputra receiving a prophecy from the Buddha, and they were encouraged to tell this story.

The second parable, “The Fantastic Castle City,” is a metaphor that provides a respite from our lives, calming down the negative tendencies of our emotions. The Buddha knew human beings are timid and lazy. Therefore, the parable talks about journeying and coming to an illusory city to find rest for its travelers.

The third parable is “Great Treasure Is Very Near”. This story is about an honest friend who helps a beggar find the jewel of his life. This can help build our confidence in our

⁵¹ Michael White, Made Wijaya, and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: WW Norton, 1990).

daily lives because everyone can find a jewel for themselves.

Parables in the Detail the First Parable: Transforming Shame

In this section, I will explain these three parables in detail. In the “The Rich Father and the Poor Son” (the fourth chapter of the Lotus Sūtra), the parable of the wealthy man and his poor son introduces one method for changing a human being with poor behavior into a generous person. The son lives in the reality of being a poor man but is blind to the true nature of his existence that he is a rich man. His true nature represents the Emptiness of Truth.

A boy was separated from his father and lived the life of a tramp. He wandered everywhere, doing odd jobs to survive. One day, he stumbled upon a mansion owned by his father. The boy did not know his father, but the father immediately recognized his son. His father quickly sent someone to catch him. However, his son was shocked by his father's dignity and wealth and had a shameful sense of inferiority.

Knowing the humble appearance of his son, his father gave up convincing him. Instead, he sent two men with humble appearances to recruit his son to work as a cleaner in his mansion. His son immediately accepted the job because he thought it suited his skills and abilities.

Sometimes, the father disguised himself and wore dirty clothes to get close to his son and encourage him to work hard. For 20 years, his son had worked hard and won his father's trust. His father promoted the son to be the chief steward in the warehouse. When the father's death was imminent, the father revealed the truth of the father-and-son

relationship between them and bequeathed all his treasures to his son.

This story tells that changing human behavior takes a long journey and utilizes skillful methods to widen a person's vision of experiences. The father disguised himself as a person of the same level to enter his son's life. He stayed and influenced him to know and accept that the son is a generous person who has the ability to treasure himself. People suffer because they do not see the truth; they have prizes within themselves but always want to seek them outside themselves.

Each group read this parable three times using Tathāgata Citta's eight steps. I hope to learn about the participants' feelings about shame, their understanding of this story, and how they can utilize it daily.

The Second Parable: Relieving Stress and Guilt

In the parable of "The Fantastic Castle City" (found in the seventh chapter), the phantom city and treasure land demonstrate another method of changing behaviors. Even though the apparitional town is inaccurate, it is conventional, dependent, temporary, and a relative reality representing the Existence of Truth.

In this parable, a wise and experienced tour leader leads a group of travelers searching for enormous treasures. The journey is long and dangerous. Over time, this group of people became tired and depressed, wanting to give up halfway through and turn around.

To help his team continue the journey, the leader conjured a great apparitional city to let the people rest. People could see that city and go to the town. After the group of

people had a good rest, the town disappeared. The wise leader revealed to them that this city was just an illusion for them to rest, and their true treasure destination was right in front of them.

The insight of this story is that the journey leader makes an excellent rest for these people, who feel the guilt of the harshness of their judgments towards their exhaustion. When the emotion of depression and frazzle arises, they could take some rest time and face the suffering caused by guilt.

Each group read This parable three times with Tathāgata Citta to learn about participants' feelings about their guilt, what they understand about this story, and how they can utilize it in their daily lives.

The Third Parable: Finding Treasures of Self-value and Confidence

The last parable of the Jewel in the Robe is from “Great Treasure Is Very Near”, which shows that the beggar has the jewel in his life, but it is his friend who has found it. This metaphor represents the Middle Truth that in the Existence Truth, he is a beggar, but in the Emptiness Truth, there is a jewel inside of his clothes. When his friend points it out, he finds the jewel immediately. As a result, he builds confidence.

In this parable, a poor man visits his good friend. He quickly gets drunk and falls asleep. Before going on a business trip, his friend leaves a priceless gem by sewing it into the poor man's robe lining. When this poor man wakes up, he lives like a tramp, utterly ignorant of the priceless jewel in his robe. Over the years, he has become poorer and poorer.

One day, he met his good friend again. His friend was surprised to know that the man was still poor. Then, the good friend showed him the jewel sewn into his robe. When this poor man found the treasure in his robe, he felt incredible. With this gem, the poor man got rid of poverty. Trust in this story plays an important role. If the poor man could trust his friend and find something inside, he could know he is rich.

Each group read this section three times with Tathāgata Citta to learn about participants' feelings about their confidence, what they understand about this story, and how they can utilize it in their daily lives.

Eight Steps of Tathāgata Citta Using a Lotus Sūtra Parable

1. (Arrive/ Check-in) Become still and centered and touch in on something or someone you consider spiritual or loving. Take long breaths and calm down emotions and feelings. (e.g., Nature, God, Buddha, a particular person or animal, etc.) (approximately 5 minutes)
2. (Reading/Action) Silently read a parable from the Lotus Sūtra while listening to a recording of it. (approximately 5 min)
3. (Reflecting) Reread the parable silently. Reflect on the meaning and personal relevance of the parable. Reflect on questions like the ones below related to the parable and your current life situation. Gain the reflection from the meaning of this parable. (3 minutes).

What are your feelings before and after reading this parable?

How does this parable relate to your life, or what do you gain from this parable in relation to daily life?

Which parts of this parable are helpful to you?

4. (Writing/ Reaction) Write down the answer to those questions. (approximately 7 min)

5. (Responding) For a silent moment, let go of your own thoughts and interpretations of the parable. Reconnect with the spiritual/sacred place, person, being, and nature you connected to at the beginning. What might the spiritual/sacred connection be? What comes from your heart? (about 3 minutes).

6. (Rest) Drop all thought and visualization and rest in silent openness in the presence of the sacred. Take three long breaths to relax. (about 2 minutes).

7. (Discussion) After practicing Tathāgata Citta using a Lotus Sūtra parable, you and the small group may share your experiences, reflections, and suggestions. (approximately 25 minutes). During the final session, participants will also be asked for feedback about ways to enhance the process for the next group of participants. Please allow additional time, up to 30 minutes, for final feedback.

8. (Check-out). The final three minutes of the hour will be for greetings and leave-taking. Choose one word to describe what you want to share.

Conclusion

This learning program established a new method of using Tathāgata Citta to teach

the parables in Lotus Sūtra. Narrative scripture stories or other meaningful parables could help people recognize their feelings and emotions to reflect on their daily lives. It may allow people to have the level of awareness necessary to lead a new life. A meaningful discussion from the parables could change one's newly found realizations to alleviate suffering and establish a solid foundation to build trusting friendships and gain more self-confidence. The study in its current form can help people observe their feelings and emotions and find hopeful solutions.

The parables clarify the findings' advantages and help us see the benefits of understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra. The Lotus Sūtra has inspired individuals by using metaphors such as being patient in the process of changing behaviors, accepting others' kindness, and applying practiced methods to expand insight. Additionally, understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra can teach us the value of taking a deep rest while in the process of achieving our goals, thus gaining the inner strength to persist in the pursuit of our goals. It can inspire us to trust ourselves and our friends and inspire us to seek out the truth and its importance in our lives. The parable is a powerful blessing, which means the Lotus Sūtra also has the power to bless all beings. Aside from being beneficial to the participants, this project will help generate knowledge about the experiences of Buddhists engaged in using the Lotus Sūtra as a useful method in order to benefit the professional education of Buddhist scholars.

This project's deficiency is the lack of interactions. Larger-scale studies will be required for further research. As a Buddhist nun, I identify strongly with my role. This bias may cause certain deficiencies in my study. I will be aware of this situation through

solid and consistent self-reflection. I will engage longer with the participants in their natural environments and build trust.

This sūtra is significant in this modern era because it's the path of the Bodhisattva, which can lead people to be kind and aware of perfect wisdom. When people can preach the dharma, they practice it daily; they become more knowledgeable and willing to help others.

The application of the Lotus Sūtra is utilizing the teachings of Bodhisattva's methods in different professions. For example, in my understanding, as a chaplain, if we could learn this Bodhisattva's education and practice what it means to be a Bodhisattva, we could let people rely on the sūtra, and they could build their own ways to resolve their suffering. They would then be using the Buddha's perspective to resolve their problems.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Design

What happened in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries concerning the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism? I believe that the development of Humanistic Buddhism is the most significant development of Mahayana Buddhism during this period. In addition, the use of ancient sutras to release contemporary suffering is an important part of Humanistic Buddhism.

The Lotus Sūtra is one of the most important sūtras in the Mahāyāna tradition. Although Buddhists read ancient Sūtras daily, they do not use this sūtra to reflect on their feelings and emotions. This dissertation designs a course study program using the Tathāgata Citta technique to discuss the relevance and importance of using an ancient sūtra to alleviate contemporary suffering and engage people in insightful wisdom to alleviate their suffering.

My project uses three parables from the Lotus Sūtra to create a three-week course. The course has three sections, using one parable for each section. Participants were divided into three groups: chaplains, doctors, and Buddhists. There were 15 participants engaged in this program to explore the parables of the Lotus sūtra using the Tathāgata Citta to reflect on feelings, emotions, and how they affect their lives.

From the participants' feedback, I improved on the steps of Lectio Divina. This will be shown below.

First, initially, Seven Steps of Lectio Divina using a Lotus Sūtra parable

1. (Arrive/ Check-in) Become still and centered and touch in on something or someone you consider spiritual or loving (e.g., Nature, God, Buddha, a special person or animal, etc.) (approximately 5 minutes)
2. (Reading) Silently read a parable from the Lotus Sūtra while listening to a recording of it. (approximately 5 min)
3. (Reflecting) Reread the parable silently. Reflect on the meaning and personal relevance of the parable. Reflect on questions like the ones below related to the parable and your current life situation. (10 minutes).
4. (Responding) For a moment, let go of your own thoughts and interpretations of the parable. Reconnect with the spiritual/sacred place, person, being, and nature you connected to at the beginning. What might the spiritual/sacred connection be? (about 3 minutes).
5. (Rest) Drop all thought and visualization and rest in silent openness in the presence of the sacred. Take three long breaths to relax. (about 2 minutes).
6. (Discussion) After practicing Lectio Divina using a Lotus Sūtra parable, you and the small group may share your experiences, reflections, and suggestions. (approximately 25 minutes). During the final session, participants will also be asked for their feedback about ways the process might be enhanced for the next group of participants. Please allow for additional time, up to 30 minutes, for final feedback.
7. (Check-out). The final 3 minutes of the hour will be for greetings and leave-

taking.

Second, this changed to the Eight Steps of Tathāgata Citta using a Lotus Sūtra parable. I would like to call this methodology Tathagata Citta. I will describe it below.

1. (Arrive/ Check-in) Become still and centered and touch in on something or someone you consider spiritual or loving. Take long breaths and calm down emotions and feelings. (e.g., Nature, God, Buddha, a particular person or animal, etc.) (approximately 5 minutes)

2. (Reading/Action) Silently read a parable from the Lotus Sūtra while listening to a recording of it. (approximately 5 min)

3. (Reflecting) Reread the parable silently. Reflect on the meaning and personal relevance of the parable. Reflect on questions like the ones below related to the parable and your current life situation. Gain the reflection from the meaning of this parable. (3 minutes).

- What are your feelings before and after reading this parable?
- How does this parable relate to your life, or what do you gain from this parable in relation to daily life?
- Which parts of this parable are helpful to you?

4. (Writing/ Reaction) Write down the answers to the above questions on a white paper. (approximately 7 min)

5. (Responding) For a silent moment, let go of your own thoughts and

interpretations of the parable. Reconnect with the spiritual/sacred place, person, being, and nature you connected to at the beginning. What might the spiritual/sacred connection be? What comes from your heart? (About 3 minutes).

6. (Rest) Drop all thought and visualization and rest in silent openness in the presence of the sacred. Take three long breaths to relax. (about 2 minutes).

7. (Discussion) After practicing Tathāgata Citta using a Lotus Sūtra parable, you and the small group may share your experiences, reflections, and suggestions. (approximately 25 minutes). During the final session, participants will also be asked for feedback about ways to enhance the process for the next group of participants. Please allow additional time, up to 30 minutes, for final feedback.

8. (Check-out). The final three minutes of the hour will be for greetings and leave-taking. Choose one word to describe what you want to share.

In the first course, the steps were not clear. They were confused about parts 1 and 4. Then, I took more body movements to describe the mental movements to help them understand the workings of the thought. Also, for part 3, the 10 minutes to reflect were inaccurate. I separated the two parts to make their body movements clearer. Then, they could see clearly their mental movements and try to find peace of mind.

The doctors focused more on the patient or son's feelings to develop their behavior. They said: "I realized that parents hope every child has a good life. They want to give them everything." "We need to find the whenever which way is good for them. Oh, so." "Usually we just like gave them, not learn something from them too when needed to, you know, to find the way they can accept." "It's just the same, and you have given patience to both sides." "they can reach their purpose." "wait until his son has good enough confidence."

The Buddhist group's observation was deeper with mental movements such as "trust." One person said: "I will attend just to observe the number around me with whole judgments. And endeavor to abide in mindfulness without following the loose of thoughts." "To see the cause and a condition moves." Another person also talked about "trust:" "So when you trust the father, we have a true self there. If we don't trust, there is a true self there." "To trust is a very important part." "We should have a good strategy." "Revolving the truth. And, what prevents us to seeing the truth?"

it's important to go through this; otherwise, they will not have the opportunity to get to that place that is high and has the treasure. So I think it's very significant. That we have. Common goal but not to be determined.”

The Buddhist group was more focused on the practice and the mind. “So we cannot give up. Just keep going. If we are tired, then we get time to rest and start again. So, just don't give up.” “We are driven mostly by our karma, not by wisdom. So our view is short. We always look at things very shortly. But we cannot see the whole picture.” “We need to empty our minds and have trust in the guru's instruction unconditionally.” “That's why we need to trust and believe.” “So practice is the brand and belief.” “I feel like it's a great compassionate mind, which is very important.” “Actually, during my daily life, I am a little afraid to deal with different kinds of people. I know I must experience it. Then, we'll get a breakthrough. But from the bottom of my heart, yeah, but as I have strong self-attachment and ego, it is easy to stick to the object and feel mindful. So, and every failure causes my affection for a period.”

also have a hand in.” “Maybe I would add the unique imprint of God in our creation as individuals. Everywhere. Yeah, we recognize our uniqueness and act on giving it to the world or being it in the world. It's part of the Christian treasure.”

The doctors were more focused on both sides of thinking, inner and external. “Just look backward. Look inside.” “You have a very good treasure inside yourself.” “So I think most human beings are. We are usually struggling in our daily life for many different reasons, but we do not realize we are.” “Just most people do not realize they already have a treasure nearby. Then we just continue struggling with the divide for so many.” “In our situation, a lot of times, we realize we have no help or something. To create our own to face the problem or challenges we have.” “So in that sense, actually, we as human beings all have some capacity to awaken to and to face the problem and then create an opportunity to solve the problem. It is actually beyond our imagination, I think, in certain ways. But we are blocked by the situation. And this happens actually very often. At least to me, giving treasures is even coming to this—this class. I realized I was showering, being shown a lot of treasure. You know, by attending this group and learning from this, the stories. And to understand, actually, there's this meaning deeper than the story itself. So. I think it's very valuable.”

The Buddhist group talked about truth and practice. “Although it is a great success compared with ordinary practitioners. All single beings process wisdom and their virtues. Holidays of Tatakata. But are unable to realize them due to attachment to delusions. Hard cuts of the delusions of views and sorts and miserable and numerous delusions of dislike attachments. Eliminated in the process of benefiting or sending

beings. In this way, all sending beings provide the course and the condition for the practice of the body. It's a mutual accomplishment. So, in my daily life, to be a practitioner, I tend to avoid interacting with people too much at certain times.” “So we have to be living in Buddha.” “Okay, business, satisfying, failing, actually. We already have everything inside ourselves. We don't need to worry about our future because nature is rich.” “It can bring us peace and all the fruit that we need. And also the pleasure that is already buried in it. We are inside ourselves, but we always look outside. So we are poor. We have to continue fighting for our lives. You have to survive in society. You have to work with other people for limited resources. We use the wrong way to seek, which is why we are feeling. Worse and worse, probably like a banker. Homeless people. Like we don't know, we are already rich and are using the wrong way to approach our goal.”

Author's Observations

During the nine weeks of this course, these three groups of participants learned how to reflect on their feelings deeply. They could express their needs and the results of this learning program. Also, they reflected that they considered values through this course.

From my observation, I felt the participants could be divided into three vehicles. First, the Śrāvaka vehicle is about the disciples of the Buddha; this practitioner is still a human with bad habits such as selfishness, distrust, and fear. This is demonstrated by this reflection: “Very unfortunate. Kind of a timing issue. So, we don't know, right? We don't know that I'm going through an unfortunate time. So I think that is. Reflecting on my life.

I think that rings a bell to me. That is reasking myself whether the waiting, patience, and sacrifice are worth it. And, are you? Like. Just am I missing any kind of unfortunate time? Before I regret it or before it, it just passed, so Yeah, that's my reflection. Yeah.” In this reflection, the participant talked about the worst time; he felt the father wasted twenty years waiting for his son and missed the happy hour with his family. He felt sadness. Actually, this feeling comes from his own fear. In his life, he is a pastor. He spends much time at work and no time with his family. So, this reflection asks him to come back with his family.

Second, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle practitioner is wise and practices dependent origination to attain enlightenment without relying on the Buddha's teaching. This is demonstrated by this reflection: “Get from his father. Okay, we are very rich but don't realize we are rich.” “So if we want to give something to somebody. And they wish your tool in a way that the person can accept. So they don't get scared. You should do a way. That's it. The person can accept. And into what happened in this story. And it takes time sometimes. Okay, so we need to be patient and understand the people. Yeah, just to pass I learned from this story.” This participant also talked about the reflection of the father. However, he could see the deeper meaning and learned more about being patient with others as a way to help people overcome bad behavior.

Finally, the practitioner achieves complete enlightenment and perfect all-knowledge in the Bodhisattvas Vehicle. This is demonstrated by this reflection: “From this story, I think a more, you know, About the father the great father So I, that when we teach somebody how to Make it successful.” “The Great father knows his son properly

knew his son. Knowing what it is that he's not scared, you know. And that's a very important part. If the father doesn't know his son is scared, he does not have a good teaching strategy. When we're teaching, the Teacher puts knowledge or teaches the kids, right? We should know the listeners. And so it's very important to get a trust.” “The third point is the way you need to get a good strategy. Okay, be patient. Um, figure out step 1, step 2, step 3. We need to get a good strategy and, you know, think in detail, then Do it. I think it is the 3 points I learned this time. And I think I, in the future, will use this knowledge.” This participant discussed three learning points found in this story's meaning. ”

These three vehicles could use these learning programs to illuminate their behavior from others and become one vehicle person who could balance their feelings and emotions to enlighten themselves.

In addition, the Lotus Sūtra has inspired individuals through metaphors such as being patient with changing behavior, accepting others' kindness, applying skilled methods to expand their vision, taking a great deal of rest to achieve goals, and keeping going on the way; and trusting themselves and their friends to see the truth in their entire lives. I found this was demonstrated by the differences in views between those three groups. From the Western view, they talked more about the thoughts of superiors, such as “I don't know, how could his son not recognize his father? Like, how does that even happen? That a family member's face becomes unrecognizable. That just seems so unlikely to me. Yeah. And then why would the father never reveal himself until the very end? When he's so longed for his son.” Another person said: “I was asking myself,

through this story, am I? All the patience and waiting and sacrifice that I have in my life. Yeah, wow. Is it really worth it? Is there any other way that I can pursue my happiness? Instead of waiting and sacrificing myself, yes. If the time has passed, I cannot go back, so if I have to regret it, it's just unfortunate, right?"

From the Asian viewpoint, they talked more about the inferior view. "Well, I see in this parable that the son left the house when he was a boy. So, he basically had no parents raising him up. However, after his father found him, he was treated extremely well without letting him know he was his own son. I could sense that. Without the nourishment when he was growing up, he did not have the confidence to believe in himself. So, as you know, that's lacking confidence."

The background of people's growth is limited by their thoughts, and their behavior is controlled. Reading the parables and discussing the reflections of different groups could help individuals recognize their true thoughts and find a way to balance their emotions and feelings.

The last point for myself: I take off the Buddhist hat (my monastic background) to ground with people and learn together to grow up. From these nine weeks, I can separate a monastic role into a partner with others to see clearly the layers of the present needs. Then, I can offer opportunities to open their awareness. I learned how to guide people to find their cause of suffering. It is so helpful to me to assess the process of spiritual care. Instead of telling others what I consider of them, I began asking them questions and following their lead. I was not following my thinking of their needs; I was more listening to their reflections and needed to guide them to find the resources of their suffering or to

guide them to discover their underlying thoughts and behavior. It helped deepen my connection with learners in the ways it fostered meaningful conversation. This brought great satisfaction to me.

Future Study

This course only created eight steps for teaching the parables of the Lotus Sūtra using Tathāgata Citta. As a pilot study, this learning still needs more research on how it can be applied to human behavior suffering, such as Moral Injury.

The Lotus Sūtra has historically been used to alleviate suffering in Buddhist communities. However, how to utilize this Sūtra to solve contemporary issues is a question always around me. At present, one of the significant contemporary aspects of suffering is Moral Injury (MI). There have been many recent insightful studies on the dimensions and treatment of MI, among which are how MI affects medical workers or professionals. Those studies emphasize the psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of this trauma.

When I attended the study group in the summer of 2021, I found a most important problem in this modern age. It is MI. According to Shay, moral injury is a betrayal of what is right by a person with legal power.⁵² Shay defined this term in 1998 with Munroe. Shay and his colleagues based their definition on the numerous narratives veteran patients provided because they believe improper leadership leads to injustice.

⁵² Shay, "Moral Injury."

After their studies, Litz did not focus on the 'legitimate authority' but believed that moral injurious action is “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”⁵³

Other scholars have also focused on various related fields. These symptoms that can be researched and applied to the Lotus Sūtra can include guilt, shame, betrayal, loss of trust, loss of meaning, difficulty in forgiveness, and self-condemnation. Each of them can cause social problems. Meanwhile, the current effective treatments are Cognitive Behavior therapy, Adaptive Disclosure, Mindfulness Acceptance, and Commitment Therapy. The study of moral injury has overcrossed the boundaries of psychology, psychiatry, social work, philosophy, and religious/spiritual studies. Only last year, 4959 articles that researched MI were published in the ProQuest Research Library. Nevertheless, the treatment of moral injury remains in development.

In my future studies, I will use this course, Teaching the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra using Tathāgata Citta, as a treatment to help people change dysfunctional behavior, make time for self-care, and build up self-confidence. I will make this treatment a quantitative study. It is aimed at supporting Buddhist practice and the engaged outlook of Buddhist practitioners.

Also, as an interfaith practitioner, spiritual care and Interreligious Dialogue are the most important aspects of my future learning and practice. Spiritual care is the most

⁵³ Brett T Litz et al., "Moral Injury and Moral Repair in War Veterans: A Preliminary Model and Intervention Strategy," *Clinical Psychology Review* Vol. 29, Issue 8 (2009).

important term in my studies. As a therapy, it could be used in different fields. My eight steps Tathāgata Citta can be used for individual self-cultivation. Although evaluating and addressing the spiritual needs of patients is an important part of it, mental health care is much more than that. The way doctors and other members of the health care field provide general health care can be "spiritual." This means providing care with respect for the individual patient, a person with a unique life story; providing care in a kind and gentle manner; providing care in a "competent" manner; and taking extra time with patients who really need it.

Spiritual care could apply to healthcare. It has the potential to bring vitality back to patients and healthcare practices. Due to limited time, spiritual care must be a priority for the spiritual care team. That could save time and improve the relationship between a physician and a patient.

Personal beliefs are difficult in spiritual care. Patients will fear how the clinician will treat their beliefs. It is important to reassure patients that their beliefs will always be respected and fulfilled, which usually alleviates such worries. Making boundaries will help caregivers show respect for their patients. Caregivers could focus on respecting and supporting the patients' spiritual beliefs to give them a safe place. Spiritual care providers could be trained to recognize that the mind, the body, the social environment, and people's spiritual beliefs and practices all influence each other in complex ways.

Professor Doehring offered the plans for spiritual care.⁵⁴ First, listening and responding to stories could create a dialogue between caregivers and care seekers, allowing them to understand each other more. Then, narrative themes lead them to gain the main point of the care seeker's needs. When caregivers monitor their response to the care seeker's pain in self-reflection, they will be less likely to experience the transference distress that makes them withdraw and are more likely to approach compassionately. When they really listen to the voices of others, even if their conceptual reactions close the relationship with each other, their hearts will resonate; the connection from the inter speaks to them. If they are committed to suspending judgment, they will find themselves listening deeply. Listening enables them to hear their own hearts, and they can begin to recognize the identity of the orphans they carry. With deep listening and compassion, the caregiver could establish a contract of their relationship. Caregivers also need to assess immediate risks. When care seekers are living in fear, shame, guilt, anger, or disgust, they may have hurt themselves or others. Making an ongoing plan of care and analysis assessing social privileges or disadvantages will help caregivers find a way in this journey.

Doehring's plans for care give me the chance to look back on my studies. I am so glad to have joined this spiritual care course during this semester. The hat of the caregiver is so important in counseling. In listening to the dialogue, the hat is the chaplain's

⁵⁴ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: a Postmodern Approach*, ed. Revised and Expanded Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 174.

because they could be sitting on the same stage with the care seeker who needs to find some way to solve their struggles such as loss (grief) and violence (PTSD). Sometimes, when responding to the dialogue, the hat of both a chaplain and a Buddhist are good to be applied. Caregivers could share their experiences in the same situation and use compassionate emotion in this dialogue to build trusting environments. Utilizing the Dharma of the Buddhist stories, the caregiver could put on the Buddhist hat to show their wisdom and reliably give care seekers a safe space.

When I took an Interreligious Dialogue and Leadership class at the Claremont School of Theology, I realized that interreligious dialogue is a conversation between two or more people (groups). Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer mentioned that the purpose of dialogue is not to eradicate differences in opinions and beliefs but to gain an understanding and acceptance of these differences. Dialogue does not seek to defeat or silence others but to learn, understand, and improve their understanding of others.⁵⁵

Interreligious dialogue means holding on to one's own beliefs while trying to understand the beliefs of others. It requires participants to be honest and respectful so that both people can express their religion in good faith. Unity and agreement are not aims but cooperation and a combination of our different strengths for the well-being of mankind.

Interreligious dialogue conveys much more clearly and directly the reality in which we live today. Many people have never been to a synagogue, mosque, or temple,

⁵⁵ Muhammad Shafiq and Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Guide for Muslims* (London: Washington, 2011), 01-02.

and some of them still have few, if any, religious friends. So, they don't think of themselves as actively engaging in "dialogue." According to Kristin Johnston Largen, the reality is that here in the United States, in the twenty-first century, we all live in a pluralistic, interreligious context that marks us and shapes us in ways we sometimes don't even recognize or realize.⁵⁶

Dialogue can also be understood in different ways. First, at the purely human level, it means communicating with each other to achieve a common goal. Second, dialogue can be seen as a form of respect and friendship. Third, in religious pluralism, dialogue means actively establishing relationships with other religious groups and aiming to understand and enrich each other to obey the truth and respect freedom. Dialogue includes both the observer and exploration of respective religious convictions.

The truth is that whether we want it or not, there are many different forms of religion in our lives. Consequently, we sometimes find ourselves in confusing situations that leave us unsure how to respond. Therefore, this class seemed to be a good choice for me to begin understanding interreligious engagement and also some concrete strategies for facilitating such an engagement with living interreligious experiences that many of us have encountered.

In the end, interreligious dialogue promotes the idea that connects other religions.

⁵⁶ Kristin Johnston Largen, Mary E. Hess and Christy Lohr Sapp, *Interreligious Learning and Teaching A Christian Rationale for Transformative Praxis* (Minneapolis: Library Materials, ANSI Z329.48-1984, 2014), 01.

It shows that your religion is simply a matter of personal choice. It depends on personal experience and can be put on or discarded like a piece of clothing. It's like what you decide to wear after waking up. You can wear striped or solid color suits. You can wear high heels in different colors. Either way, it is your decision that you make for that day. Interreligious dialogue is how you talk with other people, how you treat them, how you spend your time, what you care about, and what problems you can solve.

Interreligious dialogue can easily solve problems. We should first have solidarity by creating a committee, listening to others, and sharing our values. Thus, we can help others kick off white or black boundaries. Second, we should be peaceful. Next, we need to be open to surprise, trust, community, wonder, and action. Finally, a wise person must know the inner self and always consider questions that happen on a daily day.

Interreligious dialogue provides a chance to understand other religious beliefs and their doctrines and widely to know this world. Spiritual care and Interreligious Dialogue will be my future practice to focus on.

Using the parables of the Lotus Sūtra in Interreligious dialogue helps individuals recognize their true thoughts and find a way to balance their emotions and feelings. My groups included participants from religions like Buddhism, Christianity, and Antitheism. They were able to find benefits from this learning program.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This study uses Tathāgata Citta with the three parables of the Lotus Sūtra to establish a learning course. Reflecting upon scriptural stories or other meaningful parables could help in the reflection of feelings and pain. It may allow people to achieve the level of awareness necessary to lead a new life. The eight-step technique of Tathāgata Citta on the parables could lead to newly found realizations, alleviate shame and guilt, establish a solid foundation on which to build trusting friendships and gain more self-confidence.

Advantages

The parables clarify the findings' advantages and help us see the benefits of understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra. From participant observations, in the first week of the discussion “The Rich Father and the Poor Son,” the chaplains discussed the story from the perspective of the father's perspective and considered the situation “unfortunate.” The doctors focused more on the patient or son’s feelings to develop their behavior. The Buddhist group’s observation was deeper with mental movements such as “trust.”

In the second week of “The Fantastic Castle City,” the chaplains discussed whether the group needed a guide to lead or a guide to remind them of a comfortable resting space. The thoughts of the doctors' group in this story were about hope, heart, and positive thinking. The Buddhist group was more focused on the practice and the mind. In the discussion of “Great Treasure Is Very Near,” the chaplain group discussed the mind and the meaning of their daily life more. The doctors were more focused on both sides of

thinking, inner and external. The Buddhist group talked about truth and practice.

The Lotus Sūtra has inspired individuals by using these metaphors, such as being patient in the process of changing behaviors, accepting others' kindness, and applying practiced methods to expand insight. During the nine weeks of this course, these three groups of participants learned how to reflect on their feelings deeply. They could express their needs and the results of this learning program. Also, they reflected that they considered values through this course.

From my observation, I felt the participants could be divided into three vehicles. First, the Śrāvaka vehicle is about the disciples of the Buddha; this practitioner is still a human with bad habits such as selfishness, distrust, and fear. Second, the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle practitioner is wise and practices dependent origination to attain enlightenment without relying on the Buddha's teaching. Finally, the practitioner achieves complete enlightenment and perfect all-knowledge in the Bodhisattvas Vehicle. These three vehicles could use these learning programs to illuminate their behavior from others and become one vehicle person who could balance their feelings and emotions to enlighten themselves. The background of people's growth is limited by their thoughts, and their behavior is controlled. Reading the parables and discussing the reflections of different groups could help individuals recognize their true thoughts and find a way to balance their emotions and feelings.

I also learned how to take off the Buddhist hat to ground with people and learn together to grow up. During the weeks of discussion, I am not a monastic. I am a learner, like others. It helps me to see clearly the layers of the present needs and reflect on the meaning of the parables. Then, I can offer opportunities to open others' awareness.

The eight-step technique of Tathāgata Citta on the parables will lead to further studies. How to utilize this Sūtra to solve contemporary issues, such as Moral Injury. Also, spiritual care and interreligious dialogue are the most important aspects of my future learning and practice as an interfaith practitioner, as they help individuals recognize their true thoughts and find a way to balance their emotions and feelings.

Implications

The parables clarify the benefits of understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra. In addition, I hope the findings can help us understand the practical implications of the Threefold Truth. The Lotus Sūtra has inspired individuals by using metaphors such as being patient in the process of changing behaviors, accepting others' kindness, and applying practiced methods to expand insight. Additionally, understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sūtra can teach us the value of taking a deep rest while in the process of achieving our goals, thus gaining the inner strength to persist in the pursuit of our goals. It can inspire us to trust ourselves and our friends and inspire us to seek out the truth and its importance in our lives. The parable is a powerful blessing, which means the Lotus Sūtra also has the power to bless all beings. Aside from being beneficial to the participants, this study will help generate knowledge about the experiences of Buddhists engaged in using the Lotus Sūtra as a technique method in order to benefit the professional education of Buddhist scholars.

Limitations

The deficiency of this project is in the lack of the number of participants and interactions. Larger-scale studies will be required for further research. My pilot study on

the use of the Lotus Sūtra with Moral Injury is in Appendix A as a reference.

As a Buddhist nun, I have a strong identity in my role. This bias may cause certain deficiencies in my study. I will be aware of this situation through solid and consistent self-reflection. I will have longer engagements with the participants in their natural environments and build trust.

This sūtra is significant in this modern era because it's the Bodhisattva's path that could lead people to be kind and be aware of the perfection of wisdom. When a person can preach the dharma, they practice it daily; they become more knowledgeable and willing to help others.

This application of the Lotus Sūtra can demonstrate how to utilize the teachings of Bodhisattva's methods in different professions. For example, in my understanding, as a chaplain, if we could learn the Bodhisattva's education and practice what it means to be a Bodhisattva, we could let people rely on this Sūtra, and they could build their ways to resolve their suffering. They would then be using the Buddha's perspective in resolving their problems.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

Community Project: Lesson Plans for Teaching the Parables of the Lotus Sūtra Using
Tathāgata Citta

Description

My name is Hongye Peng. My name as a Buddhist nun is Venerable Danghou. I am a doctoral student in the Buddhist Ministry program at the University of the West. I am developing a lesson plan to allow people to use a Buddhist scripture – in this case the Lotus Sūtra, combined with the textual meditation technique – Lectio Divina, to reflect on their daily life and perhaps address perceived suffering using sacred scriptures. I have no financial interest in this study.

The focus of the sessions is to allow volunteers to experience this technique for themselves as they assist me to hone and edit this process. This program will be a process of three 60-minute sessions over three weeks. The third session may last an additional 30 minutes to obtain participants' suggestions for improvement. The participants will be divided into three groups. The second and third groups will have updated versions of the technique based on the recommendations of the previous group. Each group will have 4-6 people. Each week, we will go through the eight steps of Lectio Divina, using parables from the Lotus Sūtra, and discuss the process. Volunteers will be asked to share their experiences with the process and offer suggestions for making this process more accessible to the general public.

What am I being asked to do as a participant?

As a participant, you will be asked to actively participate in three 1-hour sessions

(one week apart), reflect on your experience of the process each session, and then follow up with suggestions for making the process more accessible to the general public.

During each 1-hour session, you will be guided through the eight steps of Tathāgata Citta (a technique for contemplating scripture). The steps include:•

1. (Arrive/ Check-in) Become still and centered and touch in on something or someone you consider spiritual or loving. Take long breaths and calm down emotions and feelings. (e.g., Nature, God, Buddha, a particular person or animal, etc.) (approximately 5 minutes)

2. (Reading/Action) Silently read a parable from the Lotus Sūtra while listening to a recording of it. (approximately 5 min)

3. (Reflecting) Reread the parable silently. Reflect on the meaning and personal relevance of the parable. Reflect on questions like the ones below related to the parable and your current life situation. Gain the reflection from the meaning of this parable. (3 minutes).

What are your feelings before and after reading this parable?

How does this parable relate to your life, or what do you gain from this parable in relation to daily life?

Which parts of this parable are helpful to you?

4. (Writing/ Reaction) Write down the answer to those questions. (approximately 7 min).

5. (Responding) For a silent moment, let go of your own thoughts and

interpretations of the parable. Reconnect with the spiritual/sacred place, person, being, and nature you connected to at the beginning. What might the spiritual/sacred connection be? What comes from your heart? (about 3 minutes).

6. (Rest) Drop all thought and visualization and rest in silent openness in the presence of the sacred. Take three long breaths to relax. (about 2 minutes).

7. (Discussion) After practicing Tathāgata Citta using a Lotus Sūtra parable, you and the small group may share your experiences, reflections, and suggestions. (approximately 25 minutes). During the final session, participants will also be asked for feedback about ways the process might be enhanced for the next group of participants. Please allow additional time, up to 30 minutes, for final feedback.

8. (Check-out). The final 3 minutes of the hour will be for greetings and leave-taking. Choose one word to describe what you want to share.

Are there any risks?

There is minimal risk involved in this activity, but there is a possibility that challenging thoughts or emotions could arise during this process, depending on what topic you choose to reflect on. If you experience any discomfort from participating in the activity, you are free to tell me and/or pause or end your participation at any time. If you feel emotional discomfort, I can guide you and/or the group through a grounding/re-centering technique. If you feel physical discomfort, you are free to move around and stretch your body during the session if needed. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to end your participation at any time. In the unlikely event that you seek out professional medical, psychological, or other support related to your participation in

this process, you will be responsible for those costs.

Are there any benefits?

You will learn a technique you can continue to use to reflect on aspects of your life through contemplating sacred texts like the Lotus Sūtra (or poetry or other writing you connect with). Your participation will also be a benefit to the lesson planning process so that others may benefit from this technique in the future.

There is no direct financial benefit to you for participating in this lesson planning process.

Will I be recorded, and how will my comments be used?

Participants will be recorded, but the transcriptions of the recordings will not contain names or identifiable information. The transcripts and recordings will be password protected, and the recordings will be destroyed by the researcher after completion of the project. Your comments may be used to make edits to the lesson plans and/or illustrate a point during the write-up of this project or related writings. Your comments will not be linked to you, and they will not be analyzed as part of a whole group analysis.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected in the following ways. No personally identifiable information will be shared or published. All documents,

transcripts and recordings will be password protected (or kept in a locked drawer if it is a paper copy), and the recordings and any paper documents with identifiable

information will be destroyed by the researcher after completion of the project. Your name will be replaced by a code on all documents. The only other person who may have access to identifiable information, if needed, is the chair of my doctoral committee. Personal contact information will be deleted within one year of the completion of the study, while anonymous questionnaire responses and transcripts may be retained indefinitely to inform future research. There is minimal risk of lost personal information, but I will take strong precautions to keep your identifiable information safe until it is destroyed by me.

What if I have questions?

If you have any questions about this project, you can contact me at

Hongye.Peng@my.uwest.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Victor Gabriel, at (626) 571-8811 ext 345 or victorg@uwest.edu. If you have any questions about your rights while participating in this project, you may email IRB@uwest.edu. If you choose to participate in this study, please sign this form and return it to me. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

Please initial the following boxes and sign this form at the bottom to indicate you understand:

I know that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time with no penalty, by contacting Ven. Danghou in person or by emailing her at Hongye.Peng@my.uwest.edu.

I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

I understand that the lesson plan sessions will be recorded, and I understand

how the recording may be used and how my personally identifiable information will be protected.

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

Project Leader Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY OF THE PILOT STUDY

The following sections detail the research design and methodology used to gather information and research issues. This type of study design is known as a qualitative study. Study subjects are observed “in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”⁵⁷ Qualitative research methods typically collect data in the field where people encounter challenges or problems. These are real-time data, and participants are rarely taken out of their local areas to gather information. Qualitative researchers often do not rely on a single data source but instead collect various data types, such as interviews, observations, and documents. This research technique aims to solve complex problems by breaking them down into relevant inferences that everyone can easily access and understand. Because it is a technique based on conversation, participants can build confidence with researchers easily, and so the information obtained is genuine and authentic to human experiences.

This pilot study combined the Narrative Model and Phenomenological Method to understand the experiences of a specific population and gain their insider perspectives. Narrative models are a qualitative research method that focuses on oral or written words or people's visual representations of a sequence of events or story. This approach involves people analyzing their stories or narratives by participating in interviews to identify specific questions or problems. On the other hand, phenomenological approaches aim to explore the experiences of a particular phenomenon within a community or population. It

⁵⁷ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th. Ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 7.

is used to study a specific phenomenon by interviewing people who have experienced it to find similarities between their experiences. These two approaches will help understand the way people express themselves and their experiences to a broader audience.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I examined the phenomenon of suffering in frontline Healthcare Professionals (HPs), who are at the highest risk of moral trauma due to the pandemic, and their narratives of each of their experiences.

The participants have been recruited from a pool of HPs who live in America and are interested in reading sūtra. Firstly, I contacted scholars who have studied Moral Injury to find some participants. Then, I built a website to recruit participants and also sent a survey (see Appendix B) to relevant websites to find participants. Finally, I contacted professionals I met while doing my CPE⁵⁸ program in the summer to see if I could get more participants.

For the pilot study, I recruited two HPs who are chaplaincy students at the University of the West. For the larger, six-week study to follow, I aim to find 15 participants who could fill out the online survey and be engaged in this longer intervention program. The criteria of these participants are that they have at least ten years of work experience as HPs and they are over the age of 18. The healthcare professionals could be working in any health-related job in medicine, such as Dentistry, Ophthalmology, Physical Therapy, Chiropractic, or Mental Health, at any level of responsibility, as long as they work

⁵⁸ Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is a type of training for spiritual care providers (i.e., chaplains).

with human patients. All participants will complete an Informed Consent Form, which I will directly administer, either in person or via Zoom (an online meeting platform).

When participants were recruited, I asked them to fill out the Moral Injury Symptoms Scale – Healthcare Professionals Version (MISS-HP) to evaluate their suffering level due to Moral Injury. In this pilot study, two participants will read the parables at least once and give me their feedback on the reading. From what I have learned, I will create a six-week program of 30-minute per week reading exercises to observe and evaluate collected data. These stories are short texts from the Sūtra, which can be read easily. It is an attempt to understand the practitioner’s experience when engaged in the Lotus Sūtra by understanding their reflections and self-interpretation; seeking the advantages or deficiencies of their meaning making; how their experiences can be utilized for transforming the suffering (guilt, shame, and betrayal) from Moral Injury, as shown by the understanding of the parables mentioned later. For the pilot study, each participant met with me once for an interview. In the six-week study, each participant would need to meet with me seven times (the first time being an introduction, and the other six meetings are weekly assessments in the form of interviews) with an estimated duration of up to 50 minutes each time.

Interview

The method of interviewing used for this qualitative study is semi-structured, in which the researcher asks prepared questions in detail, depth, and nuance to the

participant.⁵⁹ It is focused on how people think, feel, or view a phenomenon and how they develop detailed personal narratives to reflect on their lives. The interview questions were carefully selected to elicit as much information about each participant's situation. All participants will be asked the same questions to maximize the consistency of data. A total of nine questions were used to explore pertinent information needed for this study. The questions are detailed in *Appendix C*.

These questions mainly focus on their work experiences, their feelings, and how they understand their work situation. All data from this study were collected through interviews to compare the findings with the results after the six-week reading program to examine its validity.

The interview would have an estimated duration of up to 50 minutes. I will meet with participants seven times weekly to discuss their practices. As a chaplain, I will ask interview questions to guide participants in finding awareness around their current suffering. I will record this interview so I can document the details accurately. Only my academic advisors and I will hear the tapes. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and they will be stored on a password-protected computer, to which only I have access. Participants can refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time.

There is little risk involved in this study. Sometimes misunderstandings and misconceptions create life-denying meanings (harsh judgments towards their own lives).

⁵⁹ Felice D. Billups, *Qualitative Data Collection Tools: Design, Development, and Applications* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2020), 37.

I have genuine and authentic respect for how participants have made meaning of their lives. I am sensitive when the process of making meaning takes on life-denying forms. I will attempt to skillfully use questions that can clarify the participants' life-giving and life-denying intentions; later, life-denying meanings can be transformed into life-giving meanings. However, if someone experiences discomfort from participating in the study, participants are free to tell me or stop the interview. They can also contact my supervisor to report any situation.

The participants could speak English or Chinese, and the conversions will be recorded. Based on these recordings, I will translate the Chinese conversations accurately into English. Careful consideration will be taken to ensure that the translations are transcribed accurately during the research process.

This project utilized a narrative model that is new and potentially valuable in utilizing the descriptive stories about the participants who suffered from Moral Injury. It may also help Buddhist chaplains prepare Buddhist students for hands-on experiences in spiritual care and interfaith settings by drawing lessons from their forerunners. It could show the value of the Lotus Sūtra and the beneficial way to learn and practice this Sūtra.

Further research will be needed to develop tools and resources for the nascent field of Buddhist Chaplaincy training and in order to cultivate more ministers of Buddhist chaplaincy to meet the demands of our times and provide spiritual care that is most appropriate to clients. People can change their self-destructive behaviors, take a break in their lives, and build self-confidence.

The Pilot Study: Design, Findings, and Implications for Further Research

Design of the pilot study

This study examines explicitly how practitioners can learn from the reading of the parables of Buddha to transform their suffering from moral injury. Two HPs who are chaplaincy students at the University of the West have read the parable and were interviewed to reflect on how the parable affected them in their lives. The study was conducted in two parts. **The first part** includes an assessment of the participant about moral injury. Participants were assessed for their degree of moral injury. The **second part** consists of reading the parable followed by interviews with the researcher, DangHou. Participants read the parable at least one time and met with the researcher for an input interview of about 50 minutes. There is no cost other than time to participate in this study.

Attained data

Oral Interview

Name	Location	Files	References	Modified on
Je		1	16	2022/4/11 17:39
Attribute		Value		
age		36-40		
ethnicity		Asian		
religion or belief		Buddhist		
gender		Female		
time of work		Under-five years		
suffering of work		None		
New Attribute				
Ng		1	26	2022/4/11 17:39
Attribute		Value		
age		36-40		
ethnicity		Asian		
religion or belief		Buddhist		
gender		Female		
time of work		11-15		
suffering of work		shame,grief		

Analytic Coding Data

In this study, I interviewed two participants (Je and Ng) to collect information from the subjects regarding their Emotions, Values, and Conflict Coding to build on the findings.

Emotions	Happiness	<i>Je: The story. Yes, of course. So, the meaning is, what is the really valuable thing? What is really true happiness? This can help me the most. True happiness. Ng: Hmm: Yeah. In order to have joy and happiness in my life</i>
	Grateful	<i>Je: I finally found what a real jewel in my life is; I feel very grateful.</i>
	Encouraged	<i>Je: I feel life is really short. I cannot waste my time. Yeah, I feel encouraged.</i>
Values	Reminder	<i>Je: And I might remind myself in this life finally, like the old son, I finally, after the long term the trip, the suffering journey. Ng: It becomes like a reminder for me.</i>
	Help	<i>Je: What is really true happiness? This can help me the most. True happiness. Ng: So, the Sutra helps me to take care of my mood so that I will apply mindfulness, Chant the Ami tava name. Take a walk.</i>
	Precious	<i>Ng: Oh, I think it's precious. I'm at a point where I really need my calm and peace. So, the sutra is a big part of my life.</i>
Conflicts	Stressed	<i>Ng: I was very stressed. I could feel, you know, stressed in my head and chest, and I didn't feel too good about myself before I read that.</i>
	Self-care	<i>Ng: I understand this parable to be a self-care method. Yeah, the self-care method always goes back to myself, and it's only when I feel happy and joyful and peaceful, if only when I take care of myself in that way will I be able to take care of others.</i>
	Truth	<i>Je: I feel it's a good metaphor, and it's a truth of the reality, you know.</i>
	Practice	<i>Je: I have the opportunity to meet dharma. I have the opportunity. I have all the conditions to practice Dharma. Ng: So, this sutra helps me be stronger, have faith in myself, and put it into practice, not just imagine</i>

Findings related to Moral Injury

The **first** finding illustrates that moral injury is caused by emotional reactions; people may feel shame in their daily lives. This reading exercise allows them to live in happiness. When Je read this parable, she felt happy, grateful, and encouraged. I asked Je to read “Willing Acceptance” (the fourth chapter of the Lotus Sūtra). She does not want to be that “son” and would not waste her time doing so. She said: “I feel it's a good metaphor, and it's a truth of the reality.... I feel grateful for that. I have the opportunity to meet Dharma. I have the opportunity. I have all the conditions to practice Dharma. I feel I'm very lucky; I feel grateful.”

The **second** finding is that the Lotus Sūtra could be a reminder to help people realize the full potential of their lives and build up their confidence in releasing grief. Ng mentioned when she read this parable, she realized the importance of self-care, truth, and practice to overcome stress and suffering. I asked Ng to read the parable of the Jewel in the Robe from “The Five Hundred Disciples Receive Their Predictions”. She felt she had built up the confidence already. She could do self-care and not be affected by others. She mentioned this parable as a reminder to practice more in her daily life. She said, “I understand this parable to be a self-care method. Yeah, the self-care method always goes back to myself, and it's only when I feel happy and joyful and peaceful, if only when I take care of myself in that way, will I be able to take care of others. Because I can't take care of others when I'm stressed out and feeling vulnerable and sad and depressed, right? So, this one is, I understand to be my very valuable self-care method, self-care.”

Implications

The implications of cooperation using the repetitive reading protocol

The two participants interviewed were opposite in their willingness to repeat the reading protocol. Je believes she understands this parable and does not want to reread it. But she was interested in other parables in this Sūtra. On the other hand, Ng seems interested in reading more. This finding gives me the impression that Je is a confident person; she realized she got something she needed, and that was enough. On the other hand, Ng seems to have less confidence; she needs to read more and learn more about the parables.

The implications of changes to the interview questions

Those interviewees have helped me develop my interview questions. For example, the first question is, “How did you feel before reading this parable?” They replied that they were unsure of how they felt. Then I had to change to a more specific question: “What was your feeling before you read this parable, such as happy or sad?” In the future study, I will consider the interview questions that are more understandable to the participants.

Limitations

There are two limitations. This project only studies two people, and both of them are Buddhist. So, the results of these findings are biased in that they are culturally relevant to Buddhists but may not be relevant to people of other religions or no religion.

However, recognizing this limitation will help me in the development of my future study, in which I will invite more participants from other religions, including atheists.

Survey

About me: My name is Hongye Peng. I am a Chinese Buddhist nun; my dharma name is Danghou. I am a Doctorate student in the Buddhist Ministry program at the University of the West. Now, I am doing a dissertation to discover how the ancient Sūtra could be utilized to alleviate contemporary suffering and guide people towards reaching insight wisdom to alleviate their difficulties.

This six-week program will use the parables of the Lotus Sūtra and Buddhist teachings as narrative therapy to alleviate the suffering caused by Moral Injury by healthcare professionals. I have no financial interest in this study.

If you are a Healthcare professional living in Los Angeles and want to join this program, don't hesitate to contact me.

Connection: danghousi@gmail.com, WeChat: shidanghou.

This survey may take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses are entirely confidential, and the results will be presented in a manner that maintains the anonymity of all participants. Participation in this process is voluntary, and you may skip questions that you do not wish to answer. The information gathered through this survey will be used in further studies but not connected to your personal information, so it cannot be traced back to you.

About you...

a. What is your age?

- Under 26
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- Over 50
- I prefer not to answer

b. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/third gender
- I prefer not to answer
- Other

c. How do you describe your ethnicity?

- Native American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Unknown
- Other/Prefer to self-describe
- I don't wish to answer

d. What is your religion or belief?

- No religion
 - Christian
 - Buddhist
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Muslim
 - Sikh
 - Pagan
 - Other (please specify)
 - Don't know
- e. Where are you working?
- The City of Los Angeles
 - Others

f. How long have you been a Healthcare Professional?

- Under-five years
- 5-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- Over 25 years

g. Do you know about Moral Injury?

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

h. Do you have shame, grief, and betrayal from your work?

- Yes
- No

i. If there is a test for your Moral Injury, would you like to take it?

- Yes
- No

j. If there is a six-week Buddhist reading program that is hypothesized to alleviate the suffering from Moral Injury, would you like to join?

- Yes, don't hesitate to get in touch with me.
- No

Interview Questions

1. What is your feeling before you read this parable?
2. Does the problem in this story sound like anything you're dealing with in real life?
3. How did you feel while you read this parable? How did you feel afterward? How was the rest of your day? Do you want to reread it?
4. How did you overcome the emotions associated with potentially positive or negative judgments after reading this parable?
5. What have you learned about your ability from this parable to manage these emotions and behaviors from your reflection?
6. Tell me, after reading these parables, how often have you managed to achieve success in attaining moments of peace from suffering?
7. Can you describe the value of this reading time in your life?
8. How do you understand this parable? Are you able to interpret this parable?
9. Which parts of this parable could help you?

Moral Injury Symptoms Scale – Healthcare Professionals Version

(MISS-HF) ©

*The following questions **may be difficult**, but they are common experiences of busy healthcare professionals. They concern your experiences on your job as a health professional and **how you are feeling now**. Try to answer every question. Circle a single number between 1 and 10 for indicating how much you personally agree or disagree with each statement.*

1. I feel betrayed by other health professionals whom I once trusted.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

2. I feel guilt over failing to save someone from being seriously injured or dying.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

3. I feel ashamed about what I've done or not done when providing care to my patients.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

4. I am troubled by having acted in ways that violated my own morals or values.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

5. Most people with whom I work as a health professional are trustworthy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

6. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful as a health professional.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

7. I have forgiven myself for what's happened to me or to others whom I have cared for.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

8. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure in my work as a health professional.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. I sometimes feel God is punishing me for what I've done or not done while caring for patients.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

10. Compared to before I went through these experiences, my religious/spiritual faith has strengthened.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Strongly disagree Mildly disagree Neutral Mildly agree Strongly agree

11. Do the feelings you indicated above cause you significant distress or impair your ability to function in relationships, at work, or other areas of life important to you? In other words, if you indicated any problems above, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not at All Mild Moderate Very Much Extremely

Scoring:

Reverse score items 5-7 and 10, and then add up to produce a total score (range 10-100). Higher scores indicate greater Moral Injury.

Scores of 36 or higher are 84% sensitive and 93% specific for identifying MI symptoms causing moderate to extreme problems with family, social, and occupational functioning, and therefore require clinical attention.

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Cite as: Mantri, S., Lawson, J. M., Wang, Z., & Koenig, H. G. (2020). Identifying Moral Injury in healthcare professionals: the Moral Injury symptom scale-hp. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59(5), 2323-2340

The Chinese Version of Moral Injury Symptom Scale with Original English

Version Final Chinese version			Original English scale	
Strongly agree	Mildly agree	Neutral	Mildly disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5
我觉得那些曾经信任医生同事辜负了我				I feel betrayed by other health professionals whom I once trusted.
我因没能成功挽救危重病人生命而感到内疚				I feel guilt over failing to save someone from being seriously injured or dying
我因为在工作过程中没能给予患者应该的诊疗服务而觉得惭愧				I feel ashamed about what I've done or not done when providing care to my patients
我因为不能依照自己的道德标准和价值观开展诊疗活动而烦恼				I am troubled by having acted in ways that violated my own morals or values
我在工作中遇到的大多数人都值得信赖的				Most people with whom I work as a health professional are trustworthy
作为一名医务人员，我感到自己的人生非常有意义				I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful as a health professional
我已经原谅了我的失误和对患者造成的伤害				I have forgiven myself for what's happened to me or to others whom I have cared for
总而言之，我觉得自己是一位失败的医务人员				All in all, I am inclined to feel that I'm a failure in my work as a health professional
有时我觉得，是因为自己工作中的失误而被老天爷惩罚				I sometimes feel God is punishing me for what I've done or not done while caring for patients
在经历了上述问题之后，我的精神信仰（精神信念）更加坚定了				Compared to before I went through these experiences, my religious/spiritual faith has strengthened.

Note: This table is offered by Zhizhong Wang

APPENDIX C: CPE EVALUATION

Chaplain Student: Hongye Peng (Ven. Danghou Shi)

Certified Educator: Glory Bautista

USC arcadia Hospital

Spring-Summer extended unit 2022

Final Self- Evaluation

Learning Contract / Spiritual Theme

After 90 days of visiting more than 400 patients by the end of this training, I realized I learned more about myself and my practice theme, "The Third Way." As a Buddhist nun, I am an excellent disciple who can follow the rules. Growing up as a Chinese child, filial Piety was a significant value in my life. These backgrounds influenced me to rely on others easily. On the other hand, I am sensitive to people and the environment because I care about others' feelings, emotions, and physical changes. However, I would become tired when surrounded by several people, as I could focus on their situation and lose myself. So, I attempted to find the third way to follow, but I did not fail. This theme is also related to my practice of the Bodhisattva path, which involves practicing the six perfections (pāramitās), helping all beings become Buddhas, and taking responsibility to protect sentient beings. The third way could develop the character of the Bodhisattvas perseveringly. Thus, as a chaplain, I am emulating the Bodhisattva to work with people and be willing to help them overcome their suffering without losing myself.

I always have one mind to think and act. I always use my mind to think about

others' thoughts and actions; then I realize something would happen, but sometimes it would not be accurate. The third way could remind me to be a spectator who was a witness to see something happen clearly. Then, I could be aware of my role in this situation and the relationship between me and others. The third way gives me an alarm to not drop into the position and provides an excellent opportunity to face my suffering and find the awareness to overcome it.

My goal for this unit is to use "the third way" effectively to broaden the scope of awareness to discern every situation, help others with their needs, and not lose myself. The third way will lead me to understand the patient's background and make me aware of my role in that situation.

Relationship to Self

I was the only child in my family in my childhood, and I was doted upon and could get everything I wanted. I strongly trusted my parents, and I mainly relied on my father. Filial Piety was a substantial value in my life when I grew up. However, my father died when I was 14, and I lost myself in suffering. During this CPE training, I realized the grief of my childhood was the suffering my whole life, and it gave me an excellent opportunity to understand others' suffering. Practicing "The Third Way" would help me put myself in a clear mind to help others.

I felt I developed a depth of self-learning from weekly reflections during this training. I was asked not to wear my religious clothing by the department, which upset me, but I still wanted this training. I did more meditation to release some sad feelings about these changes. A few weeks ago, I found my reliance on the robe or traditional

clothing was also a limitation in my understanding of Buddhist practice. I found my ego in the Buddhist tradition. After this unit, I felt I did not rely on my appearance or outside looking. I do not care about judgment from others. I was more confident that I could help others without religion. I am someone who has good care for others, an open heart for others, and is honest with myself and others. I feel that I find my values in this training.

I also feel more understanding of Buddhist practice to guide me to do something, not only teach me. I learned how to use "the third way" to understand other choices and have more respect for others. When I felt so frustrated with visiting time, I would take time to rethink other options I could offer. Without the label "Buddhist" chaplain, I think I embody the Buddha's thoughts, guiding me to meet my best self.

Relationship to Peers

At the end of this training, I realized I was not open enough to my peers from the beginning. I was the only Buddhist on my team. It caused me to fear a little about how I could communicate with another religious person because I am also a nun who was always living in the temple. However, I have a habit of giving a gift to others. I felt that would be a good start. The great thing is that my peers are such a supporting team. I am so glad to meet my peers; they are kind, acceptable, honest, and open. We built a lot of trust from this training.

Also, our team is a great caregiver. We had a chart of our group and shared our difficulties with each other to offer help. We would not hesitate to ask for help and were willing to give support. Even for the suggestions, we also shared them with each other. When we discussed some situations, we always attempted to express our thoughts and did

not feel ashamed. Our group was a fantastic team. We built a significant safety and learning environment for our team.

On the other hand, the closer also caused me more stress. I am easy to take care of others' feelings and thoughts. When I am close to someone, I always get more tied. Then, "the third way" helped me to alleviate it. During this training, I challenged myself to connect more with my peers and know the great distance between us when we still could feel well with each other, more careful and wiser.

In my team, we have another Chinese member. She is a Christian. She explained a lot about Christian culture to me. I learned more about Catholics and Christians. I felt so comfortable with my team. We also have two pastors. One is the man, and the other is a woman. Both of them are so wise, humble, and funny. I learned how to connect and build trust with others. Also, from their praying, I truly believed in different faiths. It also could make our world peaceful.

I felt I earned more new skills of learning and interpretation, which could help me observe myself and others, but I am still weak in noticing and naming relational dynamics. I will do more in the next unit.

Relationship to Patients and Staff

I was assigned to the Critical Care Respiratory, Medical, and Cardiac Units and Cardiac/Telemetry unit (5N). I was responsible for providing spiritual care to patients and families as a member of the Interdisciplinary Care Team on my units, participating in interdisciplinary rounds if available, and checking in with nursing staff for referrals. I provided spiritual care to staff on my assigned units by being open to them individually

for pastoral concerns. In rotation with my peers, I served as overnight Chaplain On-Call during weekends, providing spiritual care for all hospital areas and, as needed, in the Viewing Room.

The first impressive thing was the "Tea for the Soul." I saw a big smile on the nurses' faces. This activity showed the soul's connection from sharing our care. They were getting to know our team and welcomed us. I felt happiness in our hospital.

The next was the Blessings of Hands. On this day, our department invited the Father to come and give us his blessing from God using holy oil to anoint our hands. May this oil make our hands and lives smoother, allowing us to use these holy hands to solve our difficulties and live peaceful lives. These two sentences spontaneously came to my mind, and I used the exact words to bless our staff. I saw the staff's eyes and gave them my honesty, my true blessing. Someone cried. I felt this blessing was so meaningful for this hospital. My supervisor, Glory, helped me overcome my nervousness at the beginning. She held people's hands, anointed them with oil, and gave her blessing from her heart. This was genuine care and gratitude towards others. I am glad to learn from her.

Another thing was the verbatim learning process. When my peer presented their experiences with patients and reflected on them, we could learn more about our visiting details, such as how to ask questions. The analysis of the dialogue let me think deeply about the importance of the questions. I also realized asking a consequence question could be a tool to explore the knowledge of present suffering from a patient's experience. After this knowledge of suffering, maybe there were some ways I could find a solution to the suffering and help the patient overcome that. I was so excited about this understanding because it also related to my traditional teaching from Buddha, the Four

Noble truths--Suffering, Cause of Suffering, the Path of Attain, and Attain (Nirvana).

While visiting patients and reflecting on it, I learned how to become a chaplain as a Buddhist nun.

In the early months of the unit, I saw myself more as a Buddhist chaplain. I can only use Buddhist teaching to connect with patients, to help them train their breath, and to practice mindfulness. I still live with a monastic member who advises others. After a few months, with a lot of reflection, exploration, and feedback from my peers and supervisor, I became a real chaplain who could understand more about patients' needs. Glory calls this "finding balance" an accurate "Third Way."

I can separate the layers of the suffering to see clearly which one is the present need of the patients. Then, I can offer help to patients precisely. I learned how to guide patients to find the cause of their suffering. This is so helpful for me to assess the process of spiritual care. Instead of telling patients what I think of them, I began asking questions and following their lead. I was not following my thoughts about their needs; I was more listening to their suffering and guiding them to find the source of their suffering or discover their underlying thoughts and behavior. This helped deepen my connection with patients and fostered meaningful conversation. This brought great satisfaction to me. Over time, I also realized that this helped me discover which patients to spend more time with. I stayed longer when encountering someone who wanted to explore their situation with me. When encountering those that didn't, I felt free to leave. This freed up considerable energy within me – energy I used to spend striving to give to others, regardless of whether they wanted it or not. I felt improved a lot from visiting patients.

Relationship to Educator

My supervisor is Glory. She gave me a great comfortable study program, like the meaning of her name. Individual Supervision with her leads me to discover more about myself, such as childhood grief. She is fantastic guidance in lectures, games, and reflection skills. She has extraordinary compassion and a wise mind. All of our peers feel they learned a lot from her training. Glory always explains some challenging situations several times to ensure others can understand fully. She uses games to lead us to be in the position and reflect on that situation to build deeper thinking and find our compassion. However, I felt she gave us a great start and a meaningful training process in only a few days.

I also felt Glory was a seasoned guide. She cared for us and shared the most important information with us. Even though she was not on duty during floor time, she still managed for us and was willing to give us advice. I felt so safe working with her.

Glory gave us excellent teamwork and helped us build strong relationships with each other. Our team could live in a harmonious environment because Glory gave us several activities that created trust and honesty with each other. She also shared her home with us on our story day. On that day, we opened our hearts because she provided a safe environment. She already showed her values to us, and we learned them by influence. I was so glad to have this supervisor, Glory Bautista.

The training on "Personal Awareness" is a great lecture.

The preference and opposites let me know more about myself and the differences between opposites. I am an "INFJ" person, the first time I have known it. As an

introverted and intuited person, I am susceptible to people and the environment. I am so sensitive. It also affects my peers and patients. I am so easy to feel someone's feelings and suffering. Sometimes I carried on those feeling and suffering on me. It is so heavy, which causes me a lot of stress in my daily life. I have to learn to be present, see some things currently to know the applications or results and ask specific questions to make more details. In my "Feeling and Judging" personality, I am too integrity with myself and my actions. This also impacts me hard to change my behavior; I have to be aware of myself to broaden my thinking and be objective as my theme, "the third way." On the other hand, I rely on my feelings or experiences too much; sometimes, it takes a lot of misunderstanding.

This course gave me an excellent opportunity to think more deeply about myself or others' personalities. There is no right or wrong, only different ways of thinking. It is helpful to work with our peers and build trust and a safe environment.

Relationship with Religious Tradition/Practice

I am a Mahāyāna Buddhist nun willing to attain Bodhisattva; however, before the end of this CPE training, I did not realize why I chose the Bodhisattva path. A few months into the unit, I worked on connecting my behavior with my family of origin. It revealed that my experience of helplessness in the face of my brother's death and dad's death and the subsequent suffering I had caused me to want to do something to alleviate the suffering of myself and others. The path of the Bodhisattva requires me to live in a way that helps others and earns enough knowledge to solve problems in different situations. Now I understand why I was inspired to choose that particular way. I named

this insight helpful because it helped me make sense of my choices and behavior and clarified my goal. From this training, I realized I practice the path of the Bodhisattva more deeply. Before, I performed a Bodhisattva role, but now I have transformed into a Bodhisattva. Also, I could help others to take action on their insights.

A chaplain is a highly understanding person who can understand themselves and others. A chaplain may be a great Bodhisattva in this world. I want to integrate my learning from chaplaincy into my leadership as a Venerable. I also want to bring this training into my community to help more monastic members to realize themselves.

I felt so cheerful at the end. I met great peers, a great supervisor, and a great version of myself.

Chaplain Student: Hongye Peng (Ven. Danghou Shi)

Certified Educator: Rev. Stephen Wilson

CPE Center: USC Arcadia Hospital

CPE Unit: 2022 Winter-23 spring Extended Unit

Date of Final Self-Evaluation: 03/02/2023

Learning Contract / Spiritual Theme

After 90 days of visiting more than 400 patients during my training, I realized I had learned more about myself. My practice theme is continuing “The Third Way,” which involves building healthy relationships in a balanced manner. As a Buddhist nun, I am a good disciple who follows the rules, and as a Chinese child, I grew up in filial piety. These backgrounds make it easy for me to rely on others. On the other hand, I am sensitive to people and the environment because I care about other people’s feelings, emotions, and physical changes. However, being around several people can make me tired as I tend to lose myself while following their situation. Thus, I attempted to find a third way to follow without losing myself.

From my traditional teaching of Buddhism, we practice “No self” or “Non-existence of self.” This teaching teaches us to avoid our desires and practice impermanence. The third way could help me to practice the Bodhisattva path. This path practices the six perfections (pāramitās), helps all the people become the Buddha, and intends to take responsibility for protecting sentient beings.

The third way could develop the character of the Bodhisattvas perseveringly. As a chaplain, I emulate the bodhisattva by working with people and helping them overcome their suffering without losing myself. I also aim to build on the connections through

healthy relationships in this third way, focusing on the dynamics between my peers, my supervisor, the peer group, and the patients.

The third way is an excellent opportunity to face my vulnerability and find how to build a connection of healthy relationships. The third way could remind me to be a spectator who was a witness to see something happen clearly. Then, I could be aware of my role in this situation and my relationship with others. The third way gives me an alarm to not drop into the position. Practicing this theme would help me put myself in a clear mind, which would not be impacted by grief or building the connection between grief and happiness.

My goal is to broaden the scope of awareness to discern every connection in my CPE training. This theme may lead me to understand the patient's background and make myself aware of my role in chaplaincy. I want to remind myself how to build healthy relationships in different situations. (Outcome L1.1)

Relationship to Self

As an only child, it was tough to realize my faults, and easy to build my ego. This CPE training has been a great lesson for me. It helped me understand my feelings and emotions. I discovered my theme, "Building Connection of Relationship through the Third Way," which developed from my initial theme, "The Third Way." It helped me look more deeply at the third way in a functional manner. I realized that practicing non-attachment from my traditional teachings and forming attachments with my peers and patients is challenging. Being distant from others made me aware of my actions and thoughts. I asked my supervisor and peers for space and time to process my feelings and

emotions, which helped us understand each other better.

Discussing childhood events highlighted the influence of behavior and cognition during my growing period on my current behavior and cognition. It deeply explored the experiences of being an only child and how they shaped my actions. This reflection series deepened my understanding of my self-knowledge and behavior patterns, helping me feel more connected to myself and my peers. Healthy relationships come from continuous deep self-reflection and understanding of real self-needs and those of others.

Initially, I struggled to understand my peers and follow their conversations. It upset me, but I decided to train myself in any situation, seeking solutions. Living in the third way helped me identify my stresses. For instance, when arriving at the hospital, I often went out for fresh air, realizing the need to step out due to stress from seeing many people and a messy student room. This awareness helped me manage my feelings and provide better care to patients.

Learning from verbatim experiences, I realized my weaknesses. One case involving a newborn triggered fear from my traditional teachings. I feared for the baby's safety and doubted the new parents' capabilities. Understanding their suffering during this unique experience required my compassion. I realized the need for more experience and conversation skills in this area. My fear of the unknown made me retreat to traditional suggestions, but I recognized the need for better responses. This reflection helped me face such situations bravely. (Outcome L1.2/3/4/6/8)

Relationship to Peers

For my peers, I felt I needed to open more to them or get entrance to meet them.

We were introverts. We need more time to know and understand each other. I realized we did not do more actions together, and then we could not get the reflection on our feelings. Also, all three of us are in different religions. We may have a different understanding of our practices and behaviors. It was also taking a distance from our group. It was hard to find interesting things about us. However, we spent several months getting closer. I felt I liked my peers. We have more common in thinking and actions. We are honest and respectful and trust each other. They are venerable and wise. They teach me how to observe others' actions and environments. They give me more feedback on my difficulties.

Asking what I need

During the initial weeks, I had many complicated conversations with my peers. One of them spoke very fast and unclearly, which caused me frustration and anger. I struggled to understand their conversations and felt upset with myself. I was stressed trying to figure out what they wanted to say or what they expected from me. During our reflection time, I expressed my feelings of being lost. I talked with my peers and requested that if I didn't understand them, I could ask for clarification, or they could give me time to process what they were saying. If they needed a response from me, they could ask directly. This approach helped me understand when I needed to respond. My habit of making things clear and responding to others required me to know their expectations.

Taking a self-care

After struggling for several weeks, I decided to take some self-care measures. I was so exhausted that I could not control my emotions, and everything seemed annoying. I felt the need to recover, so I went camping. I spent a night in the mountains, surrounded

by trees and fresh air, and practiced breath meditation. This experience refreshed me and helped relieve the stress from work. When I returned, I felt less stressed and could understand my peers better, leading to better teamwork. I felt happy and had to apologize to my peers for my previous emotional outbursts.

Understanding of Others

My peers are great caregivers. They are patient and skillful in counseling. When they talk to patients, they put themselves on the same level. Understanding patients' needs, they observed patients' actions and asked about their feelings about a company with them.

I shared my weakness of having only used English for six years, so my skills needed improvement. High-intensity listening situations stressed me out. I asked my peers to speak slowly and use simple words, which helped reduce my stress.

As introverts, we all tend to wait to ask for help and avoid interrupting others. This experience taught me the importance of asking about others' needs and responses. I had to learn more about connecting with others.

Sharing work-time

We need to be more relaxed during our working hours. Only three of us work together to meet the needs of the whole hospital. Even though it was only two days a week, it was still stressful. However, after several months of getting to know each other, we could share our struggles and help each other. I asked our supervisor to help us. We separate day and night-time working. It releases some stress from the daytime. We could make more effort to take on work during night on-call time.

The feedback within our team was helpful in deeply understanding each other. Speaking openly about our feelings and ideas built honesty and trust. Despite language issues and directive speaking challenges, we had profound discussions and clarified how to make others understand. After six months of working together, I learned observation and questioning skills from my peers. They are adept at identifying the dynamics of different situations, which helped me stay aware of my feelings without diving into emotions.

I am glad to have achieved this level of understanding. More reflection and explanation brought us closer. Our team became more supportive, flexible, and caring towards each other. (Outcome L1.3/4/5/6/9)

Relationships with Patients and Staff

I was assigned to the Critical Care Respiratory, Medical, Cardiac Units, Cardiac/Telemetry unit (5N), and Physical Rehabilitation Unit (3T). As a member of the Interfaith Care Team on my units, I was responsible for providing spiritual care to patients and families, checking in with nursing staff for referrals. I provided spiritual care to patients for pastoral concerns. In rotation with my peers, I served as overnight Chaplain On-Call during weekends, providing spiritual care for all hospital areas and, as needed, in the Viewing Room.

In this unit, I practiced how to balance between the Buddhist nun and the chaplaincy role. I had been asking myself these questions, when do I change the subject, and when do I go to the surface? It gave me a signal to remind myself what had happened then.

Initially, I felt more comfortable when visiting patients. I was able to discern their needs without imposing my suggestions. Instead, I asked them what they wanted to do, allowing me to be more aware of their needs. When I encountered suffering and sadness, I took a deep breath and reminded myself, "Danghou, you are here." This helped me look at the patients' suffering without internalizing their emotions. I aimed to explore their needs and available resources, looking to build bridges to connect them.

However, there was also a challenging case. This lady was a lawyer. The yelling may be her habit. However, she was the first person I had met who blamed others as a regular thing. She initially asked me to change my name and told me how to do something. My anger was arising. But I still remember I was a chaplain. So, I kept talking with her. She pointed out that my English was bad and asked me why you were there, and she used her finger to point at others every time. I felt I could not offer reasonable care to her. And I said, please do not point your finger at me; I felt bad. She was suddenly angry with me and said this was Asian thinking. Why were you here? I do not like you. I said sorry I had to go and thank you with you. She kept yelling at me.

I realized I still stayed in a monastic role in the visiting. I saw her living a suffering life. I want to help her. But my way is not a good way for her. I did not accept her action initially, so I did not see her needs and resources. When I talked back about pointing finger at things, I triggered her anger. I realized our chaplain role is a company with a patient and live in empathy with them, and we also have the distance with a patient, offer what we have, and build what we can connect with. We do not know their background and lives, so it is better to distance ourselves from them.

This lady let me know my intense feelings about myself. I still imagined their

problem and did not stay with them. I had to ask myself to stand back and distance myself from others.

Over the course of 400 visits, I became more adept at asking open-ended questions. I encouraged patients to express their feelings by asking about their families and their experiences in the hospital. For example, I would ask, "Are you alone?" or "What is your hardest time in the hospital?" These questions helped open the door to deeper conversations, allowing me to build a connection with the patients. I felt more balanced and confident in calming their emotions.

Another case involved a patient with heart issues who repeatedly said he was "fine" despite appearing nervous. I missed the opportunity to delve into his background and understand his needs. My supervisor pointed out that I lacked curiosity in this conversation. I realized I wasn't naturally curious about others' lives and needed to give more time to understand their feelings and emotions. I focused on their suffering but did not intend to befriend them. This case made me reconsider my approach: I needed to be open to making connections, even in brief conversations, without internalizing the patients' emotions. Feedback from my peers also helped me recognize that I had preconceived notions about patients' needs, which hindered my curiosity. (Outcome: L1.3/4/6/7/8/9)

Relationship to Educator

My supervisor was a manageable and successful person, with everything in precise order, making it easy to follow. He provided excellent opportunities to learn how to manage the program. I appreciated his reflective and organized approach. We

discussed Asian culture, which helped me remember the cultural values we hold. In mainland China, with 1.4 billion people, we often avoid expressing feelings or emotions to prevent trouble. This made it difficult for me to inquire about feelings and emotions during visits. When I asked directly about feelings, patients usually responded, "Oh, I am good." However, asking about family often led to more detailed responses and reflected their loneliness.

I realized we could develop more specific questions to help Asian patients reflect on their feelings and emotions. Questions such as, "Do you feel like you are getting better?" "How about your arm and leg? Can you move them?" "Are you okay with connecting with a nurse or doctor?" "Do you have family visiting you?" "How about your relationship?" "What do you like to do when you get back home?" and "What is your joyful moment?" could help them realize their feelings.

He helped me connect my emotions, such as shame, fear, and anger, to my physical sensations. For instance, when my body felt tense and upset, I recognized this as shame. If the tension became more intense, leading to coldness and shaking, I identified it as fear. When I blamed myself or others, I recognized it as anger. These insights allowed me to understand my emotions more clearly and determine how best to support others.

He also introduced me to the concept of the "aperture of the heart." Previously, I felt overwhelmed when visiting sad or suffering patients. Now, I can metaphorically close the aperture of my heart to hold their suffering instead of becoming engulfed by it. I am happy to have discovered this technique and plan to practice it in future visits.

Practical Guidance

He provided printed explanations of various themes, which helped mitigate any verbal misunderstandings. I appreciated his teaching style and particularly enjoyed his lectures on CPE learning skills— “action, reflection, reaction,” and “knowing both self and others.” He also discussed the difference between surface goals and profound goals, helping me realize that I could reach deeper goals quickly and spend more time exploring situations.

Cultural and Spiritual Insights

We discussed ignorance and the nature of existence, as well as the significance of the 49 days following death in our tradition. I learned that our prayers during this period are not only for the deceased to gain merit but also for the family to express their grief. Talking with Stephon taught me how to ask more effective questions.

Learning from a Rabbi, I appreciated his perspective that everything is connected to the Light, which resonated with my tradition of enlightenment. Light opens the door to truth, and in the third way, light helps make everything visible. My practice of connecting with others can help them find their light in different situations.

One thing I felt was missing was spending more time understanding our peers’ beliefs and practices, which could help us build trust more quickly.

Relationship with Religious Tradition/Practice

Reflecting on my practice, I realized how karma brings us together. My peers and I are introverted and willing to help others, creating a great opportunity to learn from each other.

I also understood that my practice of No Self and Non-Attachment relates to building healthy relationships. Non-attachment helps people avoid clinging to others or things, fostering peace and happiness and ultimately freeing them from suffering. It allows people to release suffering from their egos, which are illusions created by the mind. However, reducing the ego is challenging. Realizing how much curiosity can lead to non-attachment may be a step towards achieving it.

In the first month of this unit, my ego surfaced. I often compared this unit to my last one and struggled with changes. Using the third way helped me accept others' habits and be more patient and accepting.

When I feel sadness, I practice the third way to understand the underlying causes. If I feel rejected, it closes me off from sharing. Conversely, I quickly gain others' trust by accepting their feelings or opinions, which aligns with the Buddhist practice of "Willing Acceptance" in the Lotus Sūtra.

Building Relationships

The third way has been instrumental in helping me build relationships. It reminded me of the importance of healthy boundaries. I noted my peers' speaking habits to understand how best to communicate with them. I named my feelings to clarify issues and sought help when needed, which made me feel safer with my peers. The third way provided a tool to maintain a necessary distance and see things clearly.

Conclusion

I feel cheerful at the end of this experience. I met wonderful peers, had a great supervisor, and discovered a better version of myself. I was not only a Buddhist

outwardly but also a chaplain embodying Buddhist principles to understand and help others. I learned to balance my Buddhist and chaplaincy roles through the third way. The power of prayer was also evident, as chanting could change the environment and calm people.

I am confident that I will eventually become the person I aspire to be.