



# WACANA 2025

Buddhist Conference

Forum  
Articles

# Synopsis of Forums

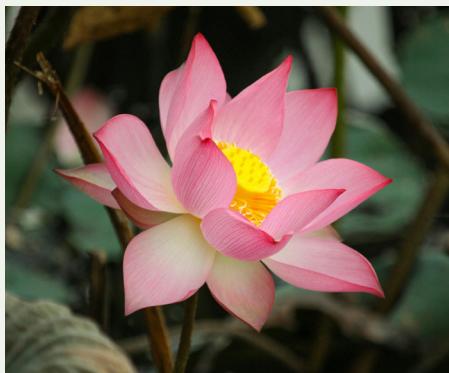
One of the most popular segments of WACANA Conference is the break-out session where participants can discuss pertinent issues close to their hearts.



## Forum 1

### *Together on the Journey: Nurturing Dhamma as a Family*

Family units play the most pivotal role in shaping the future of our community. This forum introduces the innovative concept of Dhamma School for Families. Our discussions centre around how family members can actively support each other as a unit in Dhamma learning.



*Lotus* grows in muddy water but rises above to bloom pristinely. Likewise, we can rise above confusion and suffering to achieve purity of mind, peace, and ultimately spiritual well-being and Enlightenment.



## Forum 2

### *Cultivating a Spiritually-rooted Youth Community*

This forum aims to identify appropriate initiatives and strategies to create a platform for youths to gather and learn the Dhamma in a dynamic and nurturing environment. It is for those who care deeply about making the Buddha's path relevant, real, and reachable for today's youth.



*Jasmine's* delicate fragrance and pure white colour symbolise mental calmness and devotion. Offering jasmine flowers encourages the cultivation of a pure heart and peaceful mind essential for emotional and spiritual well-being.



## Forum 3

### *Graceful Ageing on the Path of Dhamma*

This forum invites Buddhist seniors to explore how the Buddha's core teaching — Avoid evil, Cultivate good, Purify the mind — can guide us to live our later years with clarity, dignity, and renewed purpose. We will explore how Active Ageing principles position seniors to actively engage their golden years with enthusiasm and wisdom.



*Chrysanthemums* are linked to noble qualities and tranquility. Cultivating these through meditation and ethical living, contributes to lasting well-being. Its association with longevity symbolises a well-lived and balanced life.



## Forum 4

### *Serving Others, Awakening Ourselves*

This forum aims to establish sound strategies in forming sustainable Buddhist communities supported by long-term, passionate, and dedicated contributors. Leaders, teachers, and volunteers reflect on how they can find lasting meaning in their service and transform their selfless acts into progress on the Buddha's path.



*Plumeria's* association with immortality reflects the ongoing process of spiritual growth and renewal. It reminds us that well-being is a journey involving continuous growth, healing, and transformation of the mind.

## Flowers and Well-being in Buddhism

In Buddhism, well-being isn't limited to physical health but encompasses a deep state of mental peace, balance, and spiritual harmony. Flowers serve as powerful symbols and reminders of these qualities, helping practitioners cultivate inner well-being through mindfulness and reflection.



# Forum Articles

Venerable Sumangalā

See Hui Shien

Yeo Disheng

Teo Heng Xuan

Benny Liow Woon Khin

Wang Hwee Beng

Venerable Chang Wei

Nandinī Tan Meng Fong



Author's profile on Page 10.



FAMILIES

# Reawakening Family Dhamma Education : Ariya Rainbow Kidz

by Venerable Sumangalā Therī

## INTRODUCTION: WHY FAMILY COMES FIRST

In today's fast-paced, hyperconnected world, the family — once the cradle of moral and spiritual formation — is fragmenting. Economic pressures, digital distractions, and shifting social norms have left many households spiritually adrift. Institutional Buddhism, often perceived as monastic and ritualistic, has struggled to stay relevant to modern family life.

Yet, it is within the home that the earliest seeds of wisdom, compassion, resilience, and ethics are sown. The Buddha himself uplifted the role of laypeople. From his Enlightenment to his *Mahāparinibbāna*, the Buddha empowered the Four-fold Assembly — bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, laymen, and laywomen — as co-guardians of the Dhamma.

In response to today's challenges, this article introduces Ariya Rainbow Kidz (ARK) — a Family Dhamma Education programme by Ariya Vihara. ARK serves as a dynamic bridge between timeless Dhamma and modern family life, using joyful, virtue-based learning rooted in the early *Suttas*. It aims to nurture ethically grounded, harmonious, and spiritually vibrant families — rippling well-being into the wider community.

## Core Challenges Facing Modern Buddhist Families

Modern families face complex obstacles in living the Buddha's teachings:

- **Spiritual Disconnection:** Dhamma is often reduced to rituals or festivals. Children receive superficial exposure, and parents feel unprepared to integrate Dhamma into daily life.
- **Limited Institutional Support:** Temples and Dhamma centres primarily cater to adults or monastics, lacking child-friendly, family-integrated learning environments.
- **Overwhelming External Influences:** Consumerism, social media, and academic stress increasingly shape values — pulling families away from mindful living.
- **Perceived Incompatibility:** Many believe household life conflicts with spiritual progress, weakening intergenerational Dhamma transmission.

The result? A rise in materialism, mental health issues, family disintegration, and detachment of youth from spiritual roots.

Yet, the Buddha's teachings offer powerful solutions. As the *Vasala Sutta* teaches, true nobility is not by birth, but by conduct. Practising the Five Precepts, cultivating Right Effort, and walking the Noble Eightfold Path can transform households into havens of well-being.



## Awakening Through Family Dhamma Education: The ARK Way

"Liberation begins at home — through love, wisdom, and daily Dhamma."

ARK is a transformative family-based Dhamma education model rooted in canonical teachings. It brings the Buddha's wisdom into homes through participatory, age-appropriate learning and practice.

## Vision

Founded in 2015 by Ven. Sumangalā and a committed team, ARK was designed to raise peaceful, wise, and well-rounded individuals — not in isolation, but as families living and growing in the Dhamma together.



## Canonical Roots: Wisdom in Action

ARK draws from key *suttas*:

1. *Dhammapada* 183: Avoid evil, do good, purify the mind.
2. *Abhisanda Sutta*: Rewards of taking refuge and keeping the Five Precepts.
3. *Sigālovāda Sutta*: Duties and ethics in household relationships.
4. *Dīghajānu Sutta*: Right effort, noble friendship, balanced livelihood.
5. *Mahā Mangala Sutta*: 38 blessings leading to liberation.
6. *Parābhava Sutta*: Causes of downfall.
7. *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*: The Noble Eightfold Path and Four Noble Truths.
8. *Brahmavihāra*: Loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity.



## Philosophy: Head, Heart, Hands-On

ARK's pedagogy is experiential and holistic, based on:

P. I. P. – Participation, Interaction, Pro-action

With foundations in:

1. *Dāna* (Generosity)
2. *Sīla* (Ethical conduct)
3. *Samādhi* (Mental focus)
4. *Paññā* (Wisdom)
5. *Brahmavihāra* (Divine abidings)

## Family Dynamics

Each family undergoes a goodwill interview and orientation to build rapport and co-create a supportive Dhamma environment.

## PROGRAMME FLOW: SUNDAYS WITH ARK

Alternate Sundays | 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Time	Activity
8:30 AM	Family setup – Sitting & Mindfulness preparation
9:00 AM	Opening – Chanting, Reflections, Themed Video & Q&A
10:00 AM	Break
10:05 AM	Breakout Sessions: - Super Junior (4 – 6 yrs) - Junior (7 – 11 yrs) - Parents Group
11:30 AM	Lunch <i>Dāna</i> – Families offer food to the Sangha
12:30 PM	Announcements and reflections
1:00 PM	Programme ends; facilitator debrief

## Beyond Sundays: Living the Dhamma

ARK encourages families to integrate Dhamma into daily life:

1. Participate in community projects (e.g., *Wesak*, *Kathina*, charity fairs)
2. Practise daily chanting, gratitude, generosity, and reflection
3. Seek ongoing counselling and spiritual guidance
4. Engage in digital resources (WhatsApp inspiration, video teasers, Zoom sessions)

## WHY ARK MATTERS

ARK bridges the gap between ancient wisdom and modern living. Families that practise Dhamma together, awaken together.

## Key Benefits

1. Deepened parent-child bonds through shared values
2. Children grow in empathy, focus, and virtue.
3. Parents become confident role models.
4. Home life becomes joyful, peaceful, and meaningful.
5. Community engagement blossoms from family transformation.

*“The Dhamma used to feel distant. Now it lives in our home and hearts.”*

— Tan Family

## ROOTED IN THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING APPROACH

### 1. Gradual Training (*Anupubbikathā*)

Like the Buddha's methodical approach, ARK leads families through:

- (a) *Dāna* – Cultivating generosity.
- (b) *Sīla* – Strengthening virtue.
- (c) *Sagga* – Promoting heavenly states.
- (d) *Kāma-ādīnava* – Understanding sensual dangers.
- (e) *Nekkhamma* – Inclining toward renunciation.
- (f) Noble Truths – Awakening to liberation.

### 2. The Threefold Training (*Tisikkhā*)

ARK embodies:

- (a) *Sīla*: Family ethics via the Five Precepts.
- (b) *Samādhi*: Chanting, mindfulness, meditation.
- (c) *Paññā*: Inquiry, reflection, and wisdom cultivation.

## TRANSFORMATIVE STORIES: TAN FAMILY'S JOURNEY

From spiritual seekers to active Dhamma practitioners, the Tan family experienced:

1. A shift from ritual to meaningful daily practice.
2. Harmonious relationships and mindful parenting.
3. Purposeful living guided by the Triple Gem.
4. Community involvement and leadership.
5. Technology use redefined for spiritual enrichment.



## FROM INSTITUTIONS TO RELATIONSHIPS: A CALL TO ACTION

### 1. Make Temples Family-Friendly

Transform centres into welcoming spaces for multi-generational learning. Encourage parents to model Dhamma and build sustained relationships rooted in spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa mittatā*).

### 2. Train Dhamma Facilitators

Equip facilitators with:

- (a) Age-appropriate teaching methods.
- (b) Family and child psychology knowledge.
- (c) Dhamma pedagogy based on canonical principles.
- (d) Interpersonal skills for nurturing family goals and dynamics.

### 3. Integrate Digital Tools Wisely

Use technology to sustain connection, reflection, and inspiration:

- (a) Zoom: Facilitator meetings and planning.
- (b) WhatsApp: Daily messages and group sharing.
- (c) Video projects: Thematic storytelling and real-life application.
- (d) Family challenges: Gamify daily Dhamma practice.

## DHAMMA BEGINS AT HOME: THE BENEFITS

The home is the first Dhamma school — and perhaps the most impactful. When families anchor themselves in the Buddha's teachings, daily life becomes both meaningful and transformative.

## Healthy Homes

### 1. Daily refuge in the Triple Gem and commitment to the Five Precepts:

- (a) Abstaining from destroying living beings.
- (b) Abstaining from taking what is not given.
- (c) Abstaining from sexual misconduct.
- (d) Abstaining from false speech.
- (e) Abstaining from consuming intoxicants that cause heedlessness.

These are not restrictions, but gifts of protection — offered to oneself and to all beings.

### 2. Cultivation of emotional balance, kindness, and mindful living amid modern-day stress.

## Prosperous Living

Following the *Dīghajānu Sutta*, ARK encourages:

1. Right Effort and diligence.
2. Safeguarding of wealth.
3. Associating with virtuous friends.
4. Maintaining a balanced livelihood.

Together, these lead to a happy and successful family life, grounded in both material and spiritual well-being.

## Harmonious Relationships

Rooted in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, ARK nurtures:

1. Respect and ethical role fulfilment.
2. Compassionate communication.
3. Replacing blame with mutual understanding and shared responsibility.

This strengthens family harmony and guides families towards collective progress.

## Spiritual Depth

Dhamma becomes lived experience, not just intellectual understanding. Children grow up with ethical clarity, mental calmness and wise compassion — qualities that ripple into society.

*"The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts."*

— Dhammapada verse 354

## KEY ARK PRACTICES AND RITUALS

ARK's structure is not only educational—it is ritualistic in the best sense: rooted in reverence, rhythm, and relationship-building.

- **Goodwill Interview & Orientation**

Builds trust, mutual understanding, and emotional safety between facilitators and families.

- **Children as Co-MCs**

Fosters confidence, leadership, and a sense of belonging.

- **Welcoming Greetings**

Using "*Namo Buddhāya, Sukhī Hontu*" fosters loving-kindness and a sense of Buddhist family identity.

- **Buddha Pūjā & Recitation**

Shared devotional acts build reverence, rhythm, and spiritual confidence.

- **Five Precepts as Gifts**

Presented not as prohibitions, but as freedoms — freedom to live, to trust, to love truth, and to live clearly.

- **Reflection Circles**

Encourage emotional awareness, peer listening, and inner growth.

- **Karāṇiya-Mettā Chanting**

A living practice of empathy and universal goodwill.

- **Thematic Learning, Dialogue, and Q&A**

Grounded in narrative, inquiry, and experience, reflecting the *Kālāma Sutta*'s spirit of discernment.

- **Offering of Dāna & Sharing Merits**

Generosity is extended not only to the Sangha and fellow participants, but also to unseen beings — cultivating gratitude and reducing selfishness.

- **Duty & Responsibility**

Families contribute to the upkeep of the *vihāra*, reinforcing values of service, care, and shared responsibility.

## CONCLUSION: A CALL TO BUDDHIST LEADERS AND CHANGE-MAKERS

To rebuild strong, spiritually resilient communities, we must start at home.

The Buddha taught in homes, walked among families, and embraced the lives of lay disciples. Liberation was not reserved for the forest — it was made possible in the heart of daily life.

ARK is not a break from tradition — it is a revival. It reawakens the household as a space for wisdom and compassion to flourish — through gradual training, threefold cultivation, family creativity, and community support.

Let us, as teachers, leaders, practitioners, and parents:

- Reimagine temples as family sanctuaries.
- Empower families as Dhamma communities.
- Invest in training spiritual facilitators.
- Create a generation where wisdom and compassion are nurtured in homes.

“A family that practises Dhamma together, awakens together.”

Let the home become a living *vihāra*.

Let families become islands of refuge in a restless world.

Let the Dhamma be felt, lived, and shared — starting from within. ■



“The gift of Truth excels all (other) gifts.  
The flavour of Truth excels all (other) flavours.  
The pleasure in Truth excels all (other) pleasures.  
He who has destroyed craving overcomes all sorrow.”

— Dhammapada, Tanhā Vagga, Verse 354





Author's profile on Page 12.



# Together on the Journey: Nurturing Dhamma as a Family

by See Hui Shien

## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society, families constitute the nucleus of human communities. The culture, values, and worldview cultivated within the household do not remain confined to the private sphere but radiate into the wider community. In the Buddhist tradition, the family is often described as the first school of moral and spiritual training, and parents are considered as the first teachers of their children. It is within the home that children first learn what is wholesome and unwholesome, and where they encounter, often through parental example, the living embodiment of values such as compassion, respect, and responsibility.

The Buddha himself recognised the importance of the family institution. In the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (DN 31), often regarded as the “householder’s code,” He clearly outlines the reciprocal duties between parents and children: parents are to “restrain their children from evil, establish them in good, provide them with an education, arrange suitable marriages, and hand over their inheritance.” Children, in turn, are to honour and care for their parents, uphold family dignity, and continue the lineage of goodness. Such instructions affirm that family life, when lived with wisdom, is itself a fertile ground for Dhamma practice.

In recognition of this, the Nalanda Family Dhamma School (FDS) was inaugurated in Kuala Lumpur in 2023, followed by the establishment of Nalanda Family Dhamma School Johor Bahru in 2024. The impetus for this initiative arose from the realisation that while many children were attending Dhamma schools independently, the absence of parents in this journey created a gap. Children might learn noble values in class, yet at home encounter an environment not fully aligned with those principles. Similarly, parents, though often deeply supportive, lacked avenues to develop their own spiritual practice alongside their children. The Family Dhamma School thus emerged as an integrated model where parents and children embark together on the journey of Dhamma learning and cultivation.

For parents, participation is not only an opportunity for personal spiritual growth, but also a practical training ground to refine their parenting skills in alignment with the Buddha’s teachings. Through reflective sessions and guided discussions, they learn to embody patience, skilful communication, compassionate discipline, and wise decision-making — qualities that shape a nurturing home environment. Children, meanwhile, absorb foundational values such as respect, gratitude, integrity, and loving-kindness, virtues repeatedly extolled in the *Mangala Sutta* as blessings that lead to well-being and success. When these values are consistently cultivated at home, they contribute directly to family well-being, fostering trust, harmony, and warmth within the household.

The Family Dhamma School also addresses a pressing contemporary issue: the fragmentation of family life in an era of rapid technological advancement and social change. Many parents express concern about the growing distance between themselves and their children. Shared learning of Dhamma provides a wholesome avenue for families to reconnect, not merely through casual interaction, but through deep conversations on life’s meaning, ethical choices, and mutual aspirations. It reorients the family from being a unit of consumption toward becoming a community of cultivation.

Thus, the Family Dhamma School concept is not merely an innovation in Buddhist education; it is a restoration of balance, reminding families that spiritual growth is most sustainable when undertaken together.



## APPROACH

The pedagogical approach of the Family Dhamma School draws inspiration from the Nalanda model of holistic Buddhist education, which emphasises integrated, holistic, and practical Dhamma education. The approach is grounded in three key principles: structured learning, experiential cultivation, and family-centred practice.

### 1. Structured Learning

Learning sessions are designed to include parallel learning for parents and children, as well as integrated family activities. For children, lessons employ age-appropriate methods such as storytelling, roleplay, group games, guided reflections and creative expression. Parents, on the other hand, attend sessions that provide deeper reflections on the same themes, exploring how to guide children's growth and embody values at home.

For instance, if the theme of the week is generosity (*dāna*), the family is not only introduced to the concept in class but also encouraged to carry it into practice through a family project. Parents and children may plan together to offer time, effort, or resources for the benefit of others, such as preparing meals for the Sangha, visiting a welfare home, or offering services in the Buddhist centres and monasteries. By engaging in these joint acts of giving, the habit of generosity is nurtured as a natural part of family life. Over time, this repeated practice cultivates not just occasional giving but the spirit of generosity that permeates household culture.

Other themes emphasise respect and gratitude towards parents, elders, and teachers, while parents are guided on modelling these values and reinforcing them through daily family interactions. Lessons on loving-kindness (*mettā*) encourage children to practise empathy in friendships, while parents reflect on how to apply the same principle in conflict resolution, encouragement, and creating a supportive family atmosphere. Here, the *Metta Sutta* (SN 1.8) becomes a guiding text, reminding families to "radiate loving-kindness to all beings" beginning with those closest at home.



### 2. Experiential Cultivation

Dhamma is best learned through practice. Therefore, the programme integrates devotional practices, meditation, and communal service. Families participate in activities such as community clean-up projects, communal service, *Pindacāra* and offering to Sangha members. These activities not only instil values of service and humility in children but also allow parents to model these virtues in concrete ways.

Weekly sessions also include guided meditation suitable for all ages. By sitting together in silence, even only for a few minutes, families taste the peace that arises from inner stillness. Simple chanting and reflection strengthen faith and cultivate mindfulness in a supportive environment.

Beyond weekly classes, families also engage in spiritual cultivation during significant observances such as Buddha Day and the *Gimhāna* retreat period. These observances provide opportunities for whole families to practise making offerings, undertake meritorious acts and dedicate time for meditation and reflection together. By practising together during these occasions, families strengthen their inner qualities of faith and mindfulness, while finding inspiration and support in the collective energy of the Buddhist community.

### 3. Family-Centred Practice and Events

A hallmark of the Family Dhamma School is its emphasis on family bonding through Dhamma. Special events such as family camps, family outings, and celebration days provide opportunities for families to spend time together meaningfully.

Family camps, for example, offer a retreat-like environment where parents and children live together in simplicity for several days. They engage in mindful activities, communal chores, and evening reflections. Such experiences create cherished memories while demonstrating how ordinary family life can be infused with Dhamma values.

Another distinctive feature is the emphasis on gratitude through events such as the Tea Offering Ceremony and Parents' Day Celebration. These occasions provide children with the opportunity to formally express respect and appreciation to their parents, while parents in turn reflect on their roles as nurturers and guides. Such acts of gratitude not only foster harmony within the household but also cultivate an atmosphere of mutual care and understanding. By embedding these practices into the school programme, families learn that gratitude is not merely a feeling but a living expression that strengthens relationships and supports long-term well-being.

## RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Although the Family Dhamma School is still in its early years, the results have been encouraging. Evaluations and feedback from participants reveal several positive outcomes:

### 1. Strengthened Family Bonds

Parents have shared that participating alongside their children has given them fresh insights into their children's personalities, struggles, and aspirations. Children, in turn, express appreciation for their parents' involvement, noting that they feel supported and understood. The shared learning context reduces generational gaps and fosters open dialogue.

### 2. Tangible Character Development

Many families report observable changes in behaviour. Children become more respectful toward their parents, more grateful for simple acts of care, and more considerate in their interactions with siblings. Parents, having internalised Dhamma-based parenting approaches, respond with greater patience and mindfulness rather than impulsive reactions. These subtle but significant shifts create an atmosphere of harmony and mutual appreciation, supporting long-term family well-being.

### 3. Cultivation of a Supportive Community

The Family Dhamma School has become more than just a weekend programme; it has nurtured a community of like-minded families. Parents find encouragement in connecting with other parents facing similar challenges, while children form friendships grounded in wholesome values. This network of support provides resilience in navigating contemporary social pressures.

### 4. Broader Engagement in Service and Practice

Families that participate in the school often extend their involvement to temple activities, community service projects, and Buddhist observances. They no longer see Dhamma as confined to a weekly class but as a living tradition to be embodied in daily life.

While these achievements are modest in scope, they signal a promising trajectory. They also affirm the conviction that families, when given the opportunity, can indeed grow together in Dhamma.



## FUTURE HOPE AND DIRECTION

Moving forward, the Family Dhamma School envisions several directions to deepen its impact and extend its reach.:

### 1. Addressing Contemporary Challenges

Modern families face unique challenges, from digital distractions to academic pressures and shifting cultural values. The Family Dhamma School must remain adaptive, developing programmes that address issues such as mindful technology use, emotional resilience, and ethical decision-making in daily life. The Dhamma, timeless in essence, must be presented in ways that are relevant and practical for today's families.

### 2. Capacity Building for Parents

Future programmes can regularly incorporate workshops on Dhamma-based parenting skills, addressing challenges such as digital distractions, emotional regulation, and guiding teenagers through transitions. At the same time, parents' own spiritual cultivation is emphasised through meditation, chanting, and Dhamma study, enabling them to embody patience, compassion, and wisdom at home. By integrating practical skills with inner cultivation, the Family Dhamma School nurtures parents in becoming both effective caregivers and spiritual role models, thereby strengthening family well-being.

### 3. Facilitators Training and Development

With families ranging from those with young children to those with teenagers, the Family Dhamma School embraces a wide spectrum of developmental stages. This diversity requires facilitators to be well-prepared in addressing the psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs of different age groups. Effective training therefore goes beyond imparting knowledge of the Dhamma; it also equips facilitators with skills in child development, adolescent psychology, communication, and age-appropriate pedagogy.

Continuous development is emphasised to ensure that facilitators remain sensitive, creative, and adaptive in designing programmes that are relevant and engaging. Regular workshops, peer-sharing sessions, and the development of resource materials support facilitators in this process. In this way, the School not only nurtures families but also cultivates a dedicated community of facilitators who grow alongside the families they serve.

#### 4. Integration with Broader Buddhist Community

The Family Dhamma School should not function in isolation but as part of a larger ecosystem of Buddhist education. Collaboration with the Society, youth groups, Buddhist organisations, and temples will create continuity of practice as children mature into teenagers and young adults. By strengthening these linkages, families can remain engaged in the Dhamma at every stage of life.

#### 5. Cultivating Future Generations of Leaders

Ultimately, the hope is that children who grow up in the Family Dhamma School will not only embody noble values in their own lives but also become future leaders of the Buddhist community. Parents, too, will become more confident spiritual guides, capable of sustaining wholesome family cultures. Together, these efforts can contribute to the flourishing of a compassionate and wise society.

#### CONCLUSION

The Family Dhamma School is more than an educational programme; it is a living expression of the principle that togetherness is essential for spiritual growth. By bringing parents and children into shared learning, practice, and reflection, it restores the family as a site of spiritual cultivation.

In an age where families are increasingly fragmented by external pressures, the Family Dhamma School offers a refreshing model of unity, reminding us that the journey of Dhamma is most fruitful when undertaken hand in hand. Families who learn, serve, and grow together not only nurture their own domestic bliss but also contribute to the well-being of the broader community.

As the theme of this WACANA *“Awakening to Community Well-being – Contemporary Approaches”* reminds us, the well-being of society begins in the home. The Family Dhamma School, still in its infancy, points to a hopeful future where Buddhist families live with wisdom and compassion, together on the journey of Dhamma. ■



“Faring far, wandering alone, bodiless, lying in a cave, is the mind.  
Those who subdue it are freed from the bond of Māra.”

– Dhammapada, Citta Vagga, Verse 37





Author's profile on Page 13.



YOUTHS

# Cultivating a *Spiritually-rooted* Youth Community

by Yeo Disheng

## BUDDHISM NEEDS YOUTH, AND YOUTHS NEED BUDDHISM

The vitality and continuity of the Buddha-*Sāsana* rest on the shoulders of the younger generation, for they are the torchbearers who will preserve and practise the teachings for future communities. Youth involvement is pivotal, as they are immersed in the latest trends, technologies, and challenges that shape their daily lives. With this experience, they can relate the Dhamma to their peers more effectively, ensuring its relevance in the modern world.

At the same time, young people need the timeless wisdom of Buddhism to navigate the complexities of life. Many are searching for guidance, meaning, and happiness as they strive to find their place in society. Exposure to the Dhamma offers them the path to peace and liberation – the teachings that lead to the end of suffering. Therefore, it is vital to establish a systematic model – beginning with awareness, grounded by anchor principles, guided by clear approaches, and expressed through meaningful activities to cultivate a spiritually rooted youth community in today's world.

## BUDDHIST CENTRES ARE VIBRANT SPACES FOR THE YOUNG

To make this vision a reality, we encourage youths to take up leadership roles by initiating projects and programmes that not only reflect their interests but are also grounded in Dhamma values. We recognise that youths flourish in peer groups where they share wholesome values, support each other's growth, and inspire one another through spiritual friendship (*kalyāṇa-mitta*).

Since youths spend much time together, their influence on one another can be a powerful force for cultivating good habits and Right Understanding. For this reason, **peer leadership** serves as a key anchor principle, ensuring that youths are guided by fellow youths according to the Buddha's teachings. In this way, those who join our programmes experience a strong sense of belonging, teamwork and common spiritual purpose.

To make peer leadership more effective, the youth group need to establish a **clear structure** where every individual plays an important role in nurturing the community's growth. Leadership positions, ranging from Youth Leader to group leaders, are designed to maximise opportunities for service while systematically channelling efforts toward wholesome activities. In this way, participants gain **first-hand experience** in practising generosity, patience, and responsibility – qualities that strengthen both character and spiritual maturity. These invaluable experiences not only benefit the youth community but also prepare them to bring wisdom, compassion, and integrity into the wider society.

## GUIDE ON THE SIDE

Although youths are given the freedom to explore, we must remember that they are still in the process of finding their footing in life and society. They come to Buddhist groups for many reasons – some are drawn to meditation, some turn to the Dhamma during difficult times, and some may be struggling with depression, uncertainty, or personal challenges. For this reason, it is essential for us to truly understand those who walk into our centres with open hearts and without imposing unrealistic expectations. If we focus only on building an active youth group without recognising their individual struggles, we risk burdening them with responsibilities that may lead to burnout and discouragement. What they need most is not a "sage on the stage" who dictates, but a compassionate "guide on the side" who walks with them.



Adult **mentorship** therefore plays a vital role in bringing both depth and balance to the youth community. Mentors support youths not only in organisational matters but also in their spiritual growth, helping them cultivate *saddhā* (faith), *sīla* (virtue), and *paññā* (wisdom) as guiding principles. By walking alongside with patience and empathy, mentors embody *kalyāṇa-mitta* (spiritual friendship), offering stability and encouragement when critical decisions arise. This companionship assures youths that they are not alone and that their efforts are part of a larger path of growth and service. At the same time, mentors themselves deepen their own practice of generosity, loving-kindness, and humility through this relationship, making mentorship a mutual cultivation of wholesome qualities.



Moreover, mentors serve as an important **communication bridge** between the parent organisation and the youth group. When expectations differ, misunderstandings can easily arise. Mentors, who understand the perspectives of both sides, can mediate skilfully to preserve harmony and strengthen inter-generational trust. They also play a key role in filtering and **consolidating feedback** for youth leaders, ensuring it is constructive and balanced.

This prevents youths from feeling overwhelmed by multiple voices, while still allowing them to learn and grow from guidance. In this way, mentorship does not replace youth leadership but enriches it, ensuring that the younger generation matures with confidence in the Dhamma while staying rooted in the wider Buddhist community.

## ADDRESSING MATERIALISTIC OUTLOOK OF THE WORLD

In today's world, with the rapid rise of technology and the increasing cost of living, many challenges flow into the lives of our younger generation. The pressure to excel in the worldly context is becoming heavier, while social media often defines success by material possessions. This culture of constant comparison further fuels discontent, trapping youths in a cycle of chasing material gain — only to find that suffering chases after them in return. Buddhist organisations need to respond by acknowledging the role of material needs while also highlighting the dangers that come with attachment to them. Therefore, it is essential to **create constant touchpoints** for youths to stay close to the Dhamma. With the Dhamma as their anchor, they can find guidance in letting go of the causes of suffering, even as they navigate worldly responsibilities and ambitions.

To address these challenges effectively, it is important to provide different platforms that cater to different needs. Not every youth enters a Buddhist organisation for the same reason — some may seek quiet meditation, others may wish to deepen their understanding of the Dhamma, while some may simply need a safe space to share their struggles. By offering varied platforms such as meditation sessions, Dhamma study groups, counselling



support, or opportunities for community service, we create avenues where each individual can engage meaningfully according to their stage of life and personal circumstances. This inclusiveness ensures that no youth feels left out or disconnected from the community.

Equally important is to **increase youths' association with the Dhamma**. In a world filled with distractions and pressures, regular contact with the teachings becomes a source of clarity and strength. Through consistent learning, reflection, and practice, youths gradually develop resilience, and wisdom to face life's challenges without being swept away by worldly definitions of success. By encouraging them to weave Dhamma into their daily lives, they learn to balance worldly responsibilities with inner peace, finding true fulfilment beyond material pursuits.

Finally, **fostering stronger spiritual friendships** play a crucial role in shaping a wholesome youth community. When youths are surrounded by peers who share similar aspirations and values, they naturally encourage one another to grow in kindness, discipline, and understanding.

Such friendships not only provide emotional support during difficult times but also inspire individuals to live more mindfully and compassionately. In this way, *kalyāṇa-mitta* becomes the backbone of a spiritually rooted community, where each member uplifts and guides the other along the path of Dhamma.



## INDEPENDENT OR INTERDEPENDENT

One of the recurring challenges in managing a youth group is deciding how much independence to grant in terms of self-management, funding, and community-building. The intention behind encouraging autonomy is often wholesome — it allows youths to develop leadership skills, initiative, and confidence that prepare them for future responsibilities. Yet, independence that is not balanced with guidance carries risks. When youths operate in silos, without sufficient communication with the parent organisation, it can lead to fragmentation, misunderstanding, and even a sense of disconnection from the larger Buddhist community.

True independence, however, does not mean standing apart from others. Rather, it reflects the maturity to work harmoniously with anyone, while carrying a sense of responsibility and openness. In the light of the Dhamma, independence is not about self-centred freedom but about developing the wisdom to see **interdependence** — the reality that our growth is always supported by conditions, teachers, friends, and community. From this perspective, it becomes more fruitful for youth groups to remain closely connected with the parent organisation. By aligning their efforts towards a shared vision, youths can grow in leadership while staying firmly rooted in values that transcend personal or generational interests.

Furthermore, it is important to **nurture synergy** between the different divisions of the organisation. When the youth group actively engages with other divisions — such as the Dhamma school, adult group, or senior members — they gain a holistic sense of how the community functions as one body. This creates mutual familiarity and trust: the **youths come to know the wider community**, and the community in turn comes to know and appreciate the youths. Such two-way understanding strengthens belonging and reduces the perception that the youth group is isolated or separate.

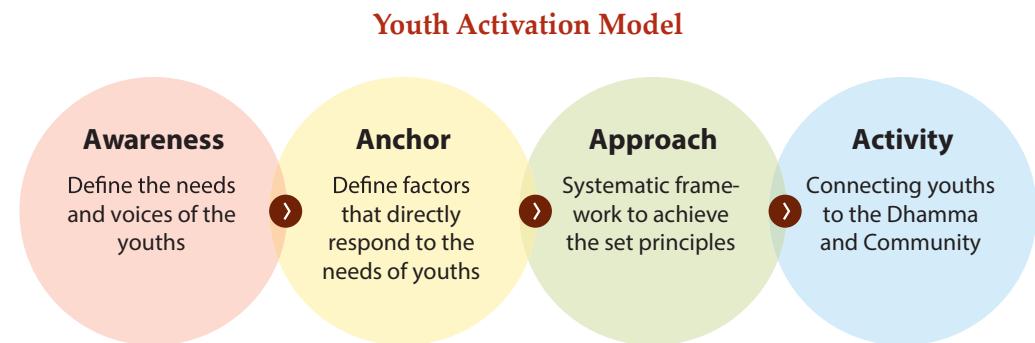
In addition, strong collaboration **eases the transition** of members across divisions. As youths grow older or take on new responsibilities; they can move smoothly into adult or leadership roles without feeling disconnected or having to start anew. Likewise, the younger generation can naturally step into the youth group when they see continuity and healthy interaction between divisions. In this way, the organisation sustains itself across generations, not through rigid structures, but through the spirit of unity and interdependence. Just as the Buddha taught that all beings live supported by conditions, a youth group flourishes not by clinging to its own independence, but by recognising that its strength lies in being part of the greater whole.



## CONCLUSION

As an often-quoted African proverb goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” In the same way, nurturing a spiritually rooted youth community is not the task of a few, but the shared responsibility of the whole community. By listening deeply to the voices of youths and anchoring our efforts in principles that meet their real circumstances, we lay a strong foundation for growth. From there, a systematic approach provides clarity and direction, while meaningful activities bring the Dhamma to life in ways that touch both heart and mind.

Ultimately, the goal is not merely to build an active youth group, but to cultivate a generation who embodies the Dhamma in daily life. When youths feel supported, guided, and integrated into the wider Buddhist community, they thrive and ensure the continuity and vitality of the *Buddha-Sāsana* for generations to come. ■



“Like a thorough-bred horse, touched by the whip,  
even so be strenuous and zealous.  
By confidence, by virtue, by effort, by concentration,  
by investigation of the truth, by being endowed with knowledge and conduct,  
and by being mindful, get rid of this great suffering.”

— Dhammapada, Danda Vagga, Verses 144



Author's profile on Page 13.



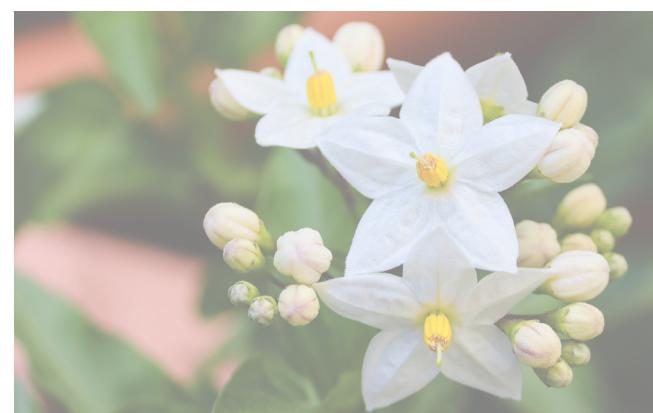
YOUTHS

# Strategies for Building a Nurturing & Dynamic Buddhist Community

by Teo Heng Xuan

Recent insights have highlighted key strategies for cultivating a sustainable, vibrant, and future-ready Buddhist community. Recognising the increasing importance of digital platforms in modern religious engagement, these insights were delivered through videos, reflecting the belief that the future of Buddhist engagement lies online and through multimedia.

This article captures the core of that message and outlines practical strategies to address the two major challenges Buddhist societies face today: community building and content distribution.



## UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES

Modern Buddhist communities, particularly those involving youths, face several pressing challenges:

- 1. Irrelevant Topics:** Current themes and teachings often feel disconnected or unrelated to younger generations.
- 2. Youth Burnout:** Young members who step up to serve frequently experience burnout due to overreliance on their energy and effort to “revive” youth engagement.
- 3. Lack of Direction:** Many youth members are unsure of the broader purpose behind their service, resulting in a sense of disconnection or aimlessness.
- 4. Hard-Selling Tactics:** Overzealous attempts to push attendance and participation — such as constant weekend talks, forced meditation sessions, or moral messaging — can alienate rather than attract.

To address these, communities must re-examine both how they are built and how they distribute their content and values.

## REIMAGINING BUDDHIST COMMUNITY BUILDING

The Buddhist landscape saw significant growth of societies in the 1980s and 1990s, successfully nurturing a new generation of practitioners. However, structural development largely plateaued by the late 1990s, with many Societies continuing to rely on outdated systems.

To ensure longevity and relevance, a shift in mindset and strategy is proposed:

### 1. Reframe the Central Question

Instead of asking, “How do we attract younger generations?”, Societies should ask, “How do we value-add to younger generations?”

This reframing emphasises service over attraction and leads to deeper insights into the actual needs of youth. Importantly, it encourages communities to distinguish activity (noise) from impact (progress) — a distinction often blurred in event-heavy calendars.



## 2. Build Systems, Not Dependence

Key-person risk is a significant threat to sustainability. Many Societies hinge on a single individual's continued involvement. To mitigate this, communities must build systems and processes that can be replicated and iterated on, regardless of leadership changes.

## 3. Apply the Principles of DAYWA

Drawing from experience in building DAYWA (Dhamma Assembly for Young Working Adults), a Buddhist Society grounded in three core principles :

- **Sustainability:** Prioritise long-term impact. One meaningful event is more valuable than three rushed ones.
- **Resourcefulness:** The issue isn't a lack of resources, but a lack of creativity in utilising them. Societies should leverage their existing human and physical capital wisely.
- **Quality over Quantity:** Focus on depth. It's better to have a few well-trained practitioners than a crowd unfamiliar with the Noble Eightfold Path.

## 4. Adopt a People-First Strategy

Invest in leadership development. Teach life skills like emotional guidance, conflict resolution, and facilitation. When leaders grow personally and professionally, serving becomes a source of fulfillment rather than obligation.

## 5. Redefine Community Identity

Clarity in identity is essential. Societies should not attempt to be "everything for everyone." Defining what the society "is not" is just as important as defining "what it is". This prevents overextension and confusion in mission.

## 6. Select Leaders Thoughtfully

Leaders are chosen based on four key criteria:

- **Personal Practice:** They must walk the path themselves with confidence in the Dhamma.
- **Inspiration:** They should genuinely feel aligned with and inspired by the Society's mission.
- **Coachability:** Leaders must be open to advice and willing to learn.
- **Willingness and Competence to Help:** Service must come from intention, and competence can be trained.

## REASSESSING DISTRIBUTION STRATEGIES

Distribution is critical but should not overshadow the foundational work of building. A suggested 20/80 principle states that only 20% of energy should go into distribution, with 80% focused on meaningful, internal development.

Too often, societies pour effort into flashy reels, memes, and social media posts without showing what truly matters — the emotional and spiritual impact of being part of the community.

### 1. Focus on the Feeling, Not Just the Function

Rather than merely advertising events, societies should highlight how members feel after participating. This shift from logistics to emotional storytelling creates stronger resonance.

### 2. Modernise Communication Tools

Many Buddhist Societies still use outdated tools — posters, Facebook, early-2010s style graphics, and emoji-heavy designs. These methods no longer appeal to today's digital-native youth. It's time to evolve communication platforms and aesthetics to match the expectations of the present generation.

### 3. Activate Word-of-Mouth Power

The most powerful form of distribution remains personal testimony. When someone says, "This is my safe space. This is where I practise," it carries more weight than any social media campaign. A strong, values-driven community naturally attracts through authentic word-of-mouth.



## SPECIAL NOTE: REVITALISING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

To both seniors and youths involved in reactivating Buddhist youth groups, three key strategies are recommended:

### 1. Sandbox Approach

Create a safe-to-fail environment where youth can experiment with ideas and events. Seniors must be willing to let go of rigid control, allowing younger members to iterate, fail, and learn within defined timelines and with clear objectives.

### 2. Disagree and Commit

Borrowed from Jeff Bezos, this principle encourages trust over agreement. Even if seniors disagree with an idea (e.g., organising a run club), they should support it if they trust the team's competence and vision. This creates room for innovation and mutual respect.

### 3. Foster Mentorship and Dialogue

Create platforms where youth can express their concerns and aspirations. The world has changed dramatically — AI, digital culture, shifting social norms — and younger members have different needs and perspectives than previous generations. Listening and mentoring bridges the generational gap and strengthens continuity.

A practical example: while some senior members believed karaoke nights would draw young adults, conversations revealed that many actually craved quiet spaces for walking meditation and reflection. This underscores the need for dialogue over assumption.

## CONCLUSION

Building a nurturing and dynamic Buddhist society is not about chasing numbers or virality. It's about creating value, fostering growth, and enabling transformation — both individually and collectively.

As the core perspective reminds us : “*The question is not how do we attract people, but how do we add value to them?*” This shift in perspective could define the next era of Buddhist engagement — rooted in wisdom, responsive to change, and committed to serving the next generation with compassion and clarity.

*Ma nivatta abhikkama* Advance and never falter. ■

“Indulge not in heedlessness; have no intimacy with sensuous delights. Verily, the earnest, meditative person obtains abundant bliss.”

– Dhammapada, Appamada Vagga, Verse 27



### SCAN TO WATCH

Bro. Heng Xuan shares about the points addressed in this article through video.

Watch and share the strategies we can take to effectively build Buddhist youth communities that are spiritual and dynamic.



Author's profile on Page 11.



SENIORS

# Ageing Mindfully: Buddhist Wisdom for Elder Well-being

by Benny Liow Woon Khin

The Buddha offered deep insights into ageing — not as something to be feared or avoided, but as a natural part of life that can lead to wisdom and liberation when approached mindfully.

## INTRODUCTION

In the time of the Buddha, Visākhā stood as a shining example of devotion and generosity. A woman of great beauty and deep faith, she was beloved not only for her external grace but for her tireless support of the monastic community. Yet even Visākhā could not escape the passage of time. As she aged, she once approached the Buddha, saddened by the loss of her youthful appearance and the physical changes she was undergoing.

The Buddha, with characteristic gentleness, reminded her: "All conditioned things are impermanent." He likened the body to a clay pot — bound to crack with time — and invited her to shift her focus inward, toward the enduring qualities of wisdom and compassion. He also used the simile of a flower — just as it blooms and withers, so too the human body is subject to time and change.

This moment of teaching transformed Visākhā's sorrow into strength. She came to see ageing not as decline, but as a new season of life, rich with spiritual opportunity. Buddhism views elderhood not as something to fear or avoid, but as a sacred time to nourish well-being, insight, and liberation.

## THE VALUE OF THE ELDERLY

The Buddha often emphasised the value of the elderly — not only as repositories of experience but as individuals still capable of deep realisation. In *Dhammapada* verse 114, He says:

*"Though one lives a hundred years, without seeing the deathless,  
Better is one day lived, seeing the deathless state."*

— Dhammapada verse 114

The implication is clear: a single moment of insight is more valuable than a century lived without it. This reinforces the Buddhist view that elder years are not spiritually secondary but potentially their most fertile.

Promoting elder well-being, therefore, is more than an act of kindness — it is a way of honouring the sacred potential of old age. Whether through meditation, supportive community, or compassionate caregiving, a Buddhist approach to eldercare upholds the dignity and possibility inherent in the later stages of life.

The Buddha recognises the inevitability of physical aging and illness but emphasises that one can maintain mental clarity and peace even amidst bodily decline. In a profound yet practical message for elders, he addressed a householder Nakulapita as follows:

*"Therefore, householder, you should train yourself thus:  
'Though my body is sick, my mind shall not be sick.'  
Thus you should train yourself."*

— Nakulapita Sutta, SN 22.1

This line is both deeply compassionate and empowering.

## DAILY BUDDHIST GUIDELINES FOR ELDER WELL-BEING

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama often shares a simple yet profound morning reflection that he personally uses and recommends. It teaches us to begin the day with mindful reflection, capturing the essence of Buddhist compassion, intention, and responsibility. Here's what we too can emulate each day upon waking:

*Today I am fortunate to be alive, I have a precious human life, I am not going to waste it.  
I am going to use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others; to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.  
I am going to have kind thoughts towards others,  
I am not going to get angry or think badly about others.  
I am going to benefit others as much as I can.*

The morning reflection supports elder well-being in the following ways:

- **Affirming the Value of Life:** “Today I am fortunate to be alive...”  
Many elders face feelings of invisibility, loss of purpose, or declining self-worth. Beginning the day by acknowledging the preciousness of life — despite aging, illness, or limitations — can reawaken a sense of gratitude and self-respect.  
This practice counters depression, cultivates meaning, and affirms dignity in later life.
- **Cultivating Purpose and Motivation:** “I am not going to waste it. I am going to use all my energies...”  
Aging can bring the illusion that one's meaningful contributions are over. But His Holiness reminds us that every day is an opportunity to grow, reflect, and give — through words, presence, or even silent prayer. This practice supports mental resilience, combats stagnation and inspires engagement with life.
- **Expanding Compassion and Connection:** “To expand my heart to others... I am going to benefit others as much as I can.”  
Loneliness is a real challenge for elders. This reflection shifts attention from self-concern to compassion for others, a known source of joy in Buddhist practice. Even small acts of kindness can bring profound emotional fulfilment. This practice strengthens emotional connection, reduces isolation, and fosters a sense of belonging.
- **Training the Mind for Inner Peace:** “I am not going to get angry or think badly about others.”  
With age, people often reflect on regrets, grievances, or painful memories. This line encourages letting go of resentment and practising mental discipline, leading to emotional stability and peace. This practice supports emotional regulation, reduces inner conflict and promotes calmness.

### • Living with Intention and Awareness

This daily reflection isn't just inspiration — it's a mindfulness practice. It guides elders to live each day deliberately, rather than drifting passively. Even in old age, we can choose how we meet each moment. This practice cultivates presence, reduces anxiety about the future and deepens acceptance of change.

If we reflect each morning on what the Dalai Lama suggests, it will help elders to:

- Affirm their inherent worth
- Stay engaged with life's deeper meaning
- Maintain emotional and social well-being
- Strengthen inner calm and spiritual growth

In Buddhist terms, this is the path of wholesome kamma, the cultivation of inner qualities that support peace in this life and beyond. At the same time, this reflection reminds us to be mindful of the following:

- **Gratitude** (*Kataññū*): Recognising the rarity and value of being alive and conscious.
- **Motivation** (*Cetanā*): Reaffirming purpose, not in grand gestures but in daily actions.
- **Compassion** (*Karuṇā*): Centering the day around kindness toward others.
- **Mindfulness** (*Sati*): Training the mind to respond with wisdom, not reactivity.

Though this reflection is practical for people of any age, it is especially nourishing for elders as it reinforces a sense of value, purpose, and connection.

As mentioned in *Dhammapada* verse 1 :  
“Mind is the forerunner of all states.”



## OTHER PRACTICES DURING THE DAY

- **Gentle Mindfulness:** It is important to practise gentle mindfulness throughout the day. The Buddha advises in *Dhammapada* verse 293: "Whoever is mindful lives happily."

Elders can practise mindfulness in small ways: while walking slowly, eating, or drinking tea. Simple phrases like "I am breathing in, I am breathing out" or "stepping, feeling, noticing" can be used during daily chores. Even short moments of mindfulness help cultivate mental presence and calm.

King Pasenadi of Kosala came to the Buddha after a heavy meal, feeling sluggish and uncomfortable. The Buddha offered gentle advice through a short verse in the *Gilāna Sutta*, SN 3.13:

*"When a person is constantly mindful, knowing moderation in food, their ailments diminish. They age slowly and live long."*

— *Gilāna Sutta*, SN 3.13

- **Loving Kindness:** "May all beings be happy. May all beings be free from suffering." (*Mettā Sutta*, Sn 1.8)

Practising meditation on loving kindness (*mettā*) for oneself and others brings emotional balance, reduces loneliness, and strengthens connection. Simple phrases can be repeated:

*"May I be safe. May I be well. May I be at peace."*

*"May others be safe. May they be well. May they be at peace."*

*This can be done during rest, before sleep, or whenever stress arises.*

— *Mettā Sutta*, Sn 1.8

This can be done during rest, before sleep, or whenever stress arises.

- **Stay Engaged with Friends:** "Admirable friendship is the whole of the spiritual life." (*Upaddha Sutta*, SN 45.2)

Make time for connection with family, friends, or Dhamma companions. Cultivate spiritual friendship — those who support wholesome living, encourage reflection, and bring joy. Regular group meditation, Dhamma discussions, and conversations with kind-hearted friends nourish the spirit.



- **Engage in Acts of Generosity and Service:** "If beings knew, as I do, the results of giving and sharing, they would not eat without having given." (*Itivuttaka* 26)

Offer help, attention, or small gifts — even a smile or listening ear. Elders often feel empowered and valued when they continue to give, even in modest ways. Generosity (*dāna*) brings joy and counters feelings of helplessness or isolation.

- **Embrace Rest and Simplicity with Contentment:** "Contentment is the greatest wealth." (*Dhammapada* verse 204)

Elders can benefit from simplified routines, quiet surroundings, and unhurried time. Let go of unnecessary worries or comparisons — focus on what brings peace now, not what was in the past or might come in the future (*Bhaddekaratta Sutta*, MN 131). Take pride in resting well, eating mindfully, and letting each moment be enough.

- **Reflect on Impermanence and Prepare the Mind for Peaceful Dying:** "Whatever is born is subject to decay and death."

Reflection on death and impermanence can be gentle, not fearful: just as the body ages and changes, so too will it pass. This can be reflected upon in the *Upajjhathana Sutta*, AN 5.57 where it helps elders face aging and illness with calm acceptance and prepares the mind for a peaceful transition. Practices like chanting, keeping a Dhamma book nearby, or meditating on the breath can provide comfort.

## A SIMPLE DAILY WELL-BEING ROUTINE (EXAMPLE)

Time	Practice
Morning	Short reflection or meditation (5 – 10 mins)
Breakfast	Eat mindfully; express gratitude for the day
Midday	Gentle walk, mindful movement, social connection
Afternoon	Read Dhamma books, rest, reflect on acts of kindness
Evening	<i>Mettā</i> meditation, reflect on the day, set intentions for peace

## SUMMARY: BUDDHA'S GUIDANCE ON AGING

- Accept aging as natural and universal.
- Reflect on it to reduce attachment and cultivate wisdom.
- Use aging as motivation for spiritual growth.
- Let go of vanity and physical identification.
- Nurture qualities of the heart and mind that transcend age.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude with the story of Citta the Householder in the *Samyutta Nikāya* 41.0. Citta was one of the Buddha's most esteemed lay disciples. A prosperous merchant and landowner, he was widely respected for his wisdom, generosity, and deep understanding of the Dhamma.

Despite his wealth and social position, Citta lived a life of simplicity, regularly hosting monks, offering support to the Sangha, and leading Dhamma discussions in his community.

In his final days, Citta fell gravely ill. Monks came to visit him, concerned about his well-being. But instead of fear or regret, Citta met his approaching death with calm confidence. He reassured the monks, saying,

*"I do not fear death. I have no regret. I have lived a life in line with the Dhamma."*

He passed away peacefully, surrounded by respect and gratitude — not as a renunciant, but as a layperson who had integrated the Buddha's teachings into the fabric of his ordinary life. ■

“Whoever lives contemplating “the impurities”,  
with sense restrained, in food moderate,  
full of faith and sustained effort,  
him, Māra overcomes not,  
as the wind (cannot overthrow) a rocky mountain.”

– Dhammapada, Yamaka Vagga, Verse 8





Author's profile on Page 12.



SENIORS

# Senior Buddhists Embrace *Active Ageing* Programme for the Enhancement of Spiritual Cultivation

by Wang Hwee Beng

## INTRODUCTION

The Subang Jaya Buddhist Association (SJBA) has approximately 2,000 members, with over 80% aged 60 and above. Many of these senior members follow Buddhist traditions and cultural practices. However, unlike the younger generation, they had fewer opportunities in their earlier years to systematically study and practise the Dhamma and discipline taught by Gotama Buddha, which is rooted in the Pāli Canon and guided by the aspiration for enlightenment.

When SJBA was first founded, there were no structured or dedicated programmes tailored for its seniors. When it came to Buddhist learning, their engagement was limited to occasional meditation sessions, chanting, and Dhamma talks. This ad-hoc learning approach lacked continuity and depth, falling short of fostering lifelong spiritual development. While many seniors attended major annual events such as Wesak Day or *Kathina* ceremonies, there was generally a lack of sustained attention, platforms, and programmes designed to meet their spiritual and educational needs. This gap was particularly significant given that seniors form the majority of SJBA's membership.

## FORMATION OF SJBA SENIOR CITIZENS GROUP

The SJBA senior citizen group, called the Fellowship of the Wise (FOW), was launched on the 30th April 2017. FOW was tasked to plan, organise and implement a programme for improving the physical, mental and emotional well-being of its senior members, as well as to enhance their spiritual development. It was also to fulfil SJBA's pledge during its donation drive to raise funds for the construction of SJBA extension block to house a senior citizens centre.

## ACTIVE AGEING: A STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Recognising the need to provide a more comprehensive Dhamma programme for senior members, SJBA initiated a project to create a centre which would be dedicated to activities for its seniors.

A task force was established in early 2017 to research and design a senior citizen programme that would meet its aim. This led to the founding of the Fellowship of the Wise (FOW), which was launched on 30 April 2017. FOW was entrusted with planning and implementing structured, meaningful activities for seniors.

In the same year, FOW introduced the Active Ageing Programme based on the World Health Organization (WHO) Active Ageing Framework (2012). This model emphasises optimising four key pillars of well-being:

- Health and wellness
- Lifelong learning
- Participation
- Security

The framework seeks to enable seniors to maintain their physical and mental health, actively participate in community life, and engage in lifelong learning, including spiritual development. UNESCO also actively promotes lifelong learning and cultural participation for older adults, which aligns closely with SJBA's mission for seniors' spiritual growth.

## SJBA FOW ACTIVE AGEING PROGRAMME

As individuals age, their quality of life are closely linked to their ability to maintain autonomy and independence. Ageing often brings physiological and cognitive decline, emotional challenges, increasing risks of physical disability, mental distress, and poor health.

FOW's objective is to optimise opportunities for seniors to live longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives — socially, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Independence is central to this mission.



FOW has therefore designed a holistic Active Ageing Programme rooted in WHO's framework, with activities that encourage ongoing participation and purposeful engagement. This integrated approach promotes not just physical wellness but also spiritual growth, creating a nurturing space for seniors to age gracefully and meaningfully.

## FOW'S APPROACH

### 1. Addressing Participation Challenges

FOW faces a key challenge: engaging seniors who are reluctant or unable to leave their homes. Despite SJBA having over 680 senior members, fewer than 20% are registered for Active Ageing activities. Barriers include shyness, mobility issues, fear of burdening others, and anxiety. FOW focuses on:

- Building a safe, welcoming, and comfortable environment
- Offering enjoyable, low-pressure activities
- Creating structured, routine programmes
- Promoting fellowship and Dhamma-centric social interaction.



### 2. Developing Targeted Programmes

Activities are designed to maintain and improve physical vitality, mental alertness, emotional stability, and overall wellness, helping seniors remain active and resilient.

### 3. Dhamma Pedagogy for Seniors

FOW introduces age-appropriate Buddhist teachings, focusing on practical applications. Content is tailored to seniors' needs, with clear and simple pedagogy to help them progress toward deeper understanding and insight.

### 4. Integrating Active Ageing with Buddhist Principles

FOW integrates physical, mental, and emotional well-being activities with Buddhist teachings, particularly *Dhammapada* Verse 183 ("To avoid evil, do good, and purify the mind"). Traditional Dhamma propagation often lacks continuity and interconnectedness. FOW emphasises a seamless, integrated programme where activities support both physical vitality and spiritual cultivation.

## THE FOW ACTIVE AGEING – SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION MODEL

FOW's model connects the WHO Active Ageing framework with Buddhist teachings, such as:

- The Four Noble Truths
- The Noble Eightfold Path
- The principles of *Dāna* (generosity), *Sīla* (ethical conduct), and *Bhāvanā* (mental cultivation)

Ageing is framed as a natural and meaningful stage of life – not a burden, but an opportunity for profound spiritual growth. Through participation in Active Ageing activities, seniors learn to:

- Acknowledge suffering (physical pain, loneliness, loss of independence)
- Understand its causes (attachment, greed, delusion)
- Practise the path leading to the cessation of suffering

This model integrates social engagement, health education, physical and mental training, and spiritual cultivation into a seamless cycle of lifelong learning. All activities are guided by the threefold training of:

- *Pariyatti* (learning)
- *Paṭipatti* (practice)
- *Paṭivedha* (realisation)

As Dr. Wong Foot Ming, FOW's Qigong master, eloquently summarises :

*"FOW has become a conducive centre where seniors can engage in meaningful activities, discover a sense of purpose and build dignity and fellowship. The best gift FOW offers is the Dhamma itself — enabling members to live happier, with more beneficial lives along the path taught by the Buddha."*



## HIGHLIGHTS OF FOW ACTIVE AGEING ACTIVITIES

- Health & Wellness Initiatives:** Talks, demonstrations, and health screenings in collaboration with universities and experts (e.g., University of Malaya, International Medical University, MIT). Talks highlight topics on fall prevention, nutrition, mental health, and gut microbiome research.
- Social Gatherings:** Regular in-house and outdoor events to encourage fellowship and reduce isolation. Annual Chinese New Year community lunches at old folks' homes and orphanages foster joy and compassion.
- Physical and Mental Activities:** Ping pong, line dancing, Qigong, calligraphy, chess, darts, and singing promote vitality, balance, flexibility, mindfulness, and positive energy.
- Spiritual Cultivation:** Structured chanting sessions (e.g., *Bojjhaṅga Sutta*), Dhamma discussions, and the Mindful Ageing Course deepen practice and insight. These initiatives help seniors apply the Dhamma practically, cultivating wisdom and mindfulness.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROGRESS

Since its inception, FOW has successfully fulfilled its mandate to serve SJBA's senior community. The growth is evident:

**2019:** Only 22% of FOW members reported participating in Dhamma activities

**2025:** Over 85% of respondents have attended some form of Dhamma activity

This remarkable transformation reflects the dedication of FOW volunteers, SJBA leadership, and the senior members themselves.



## SUMMARY

The following figure illustrates a holistic, integrated Active Ageing Programme model developed by FOW. The left circle shows the components of active ageing activities encompassing activities related to:

- Health and well-being
- Social and community
- Physical, mental and emotional



The right circle depicts personal spiritual development based on the principle of doing good, avoid evil and purify the mind. The practice of *dāna* (meritorious deeds), and *sīla* (ethical conduct) are the foundation for *bhāvanā* (cultivation of mind). By way of participation, learning and practise diligently, it is envisaged that realisation is possible and achievable. ■

## Holistic and Integrated Active Ageing Conceptual Model



*This chart depicts how Active Ageing principles are strategically combined with Spiritual Development (Mindful Ageing) to form a holistic approach to the transformation of seniors within the FOW framework.*



Author's profile on Page 10.



VOLUNTEERS

# Buddhist Volunteers: The Path to Engagement and Spiritual Growth

by Venerable Chang Wei

*"Volunteering is about emergency relief and dedication, not employment."*

*"Go wherever help is needed."* (1)  
— Master Sheng Yen

## ABSTRACT

Buddhist volunteers play an indispensable role in the process of propagating the *Dharma* and benefiting sentient beings. They are not only practitioners of Buddhist principles but also promoters of social welfare. However, how to effectively engage volunteers and promote their self-awareness, self-affirmation, self-growth, and self-dissolution has become an important issue for Buddhist organisations. This article aims to explore methods for engaging Buddhist volunteers and their paths for spiritual growth, and to propose specific strategies to promote the comprehensive development of volunteers in both practice and service.

## Keywords:

Buddhism, volunteer, engagement, spiritual growth, practice.

## INTRODUCTION

Buddhist volunteers are a crucial force in the propagation of Buddhism. With a spirit of selfless dedication, they embody the core Buddhist value of "altruism." However, the inner spiritual needs of volunteers are often overlooked, leading some to experience burnout or lose direction during long-term service. Therefore, Buddhist organisations should prioritise the psychological well-being and spiritual growth of volunteers, helping them achieve self-improvement while serving others. This article will explore volunteer engagement and spiritual growth from four dimensions: self-awareness, self-affirmation, self-growth, and self-dissolution. (2)

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

The engagement of Buddhist volunteers should be guided by the principle of "teaching according to individual aptitude", providing appropriate guidance based on different backgrounds and needs. The following are several important strategies:

### 1. Clear Mission and Vision – Build Resonance

Buddhist organisations should clearly communicate their Dharma propagation goals and social service philosophy, enabling volunteers to understand the importance of their participation. Through Dharma activities, seminars, and training courses, volunteers can feel their value and contribution.



## Reference:

- (1) Master Sheng Yen, [The Direction of Dharma Drum Mountain: The Bodhisattva of Universal Practice] (The Volunteer Spirit of Dharma Drum Mountain), [The Complete Works of Sheng Yen] (Volume 9, Book 6), Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing, 2020 commemorative edition, p. 120. Retrieved from: <https://ddc.shengyen.org/?doc=09-06-022> (Chinese Version)
- (2) Master Sheng Yen (2016). *Liberated in Stillness and Motion* (1st Edition) (p.108). Taiwan. Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. Available at: [https://www.dharmadrum.org/portal\\_d4\\_page.php?cnt\\_id=3&up\\_page=1](https://www.dharmadrum.org/portal_d4_page.php?cnt_id=3&up_page=1)

## 2. Teach According to Aptitude – Provide Opportunities for Practice

Each volunteer has different backgrounds, abilities, and interests. Therefore, they should be assigned to different teams and suitable tasks based on their individual expertise and interests, such as the environmental groups, educational promotion groups, or event support groups. This process emphasises “acting according to one’s nature,” ensuring that each volunteer can utilise their strengths. This not only improves work efficiency but also gives volunteers a greater sense of accomplishment and value in their participation. As Master Sheng Yen said in “108 Adages of Freedom” :

*“Big duck swims, big wave; little duck swims, little wave.  
No duck in the water? No wave at all.”*

Each individual has his or her own disposition, wisdom, environment, physical makeup, and background. There is no need to compare. As long as the individual is solid, taking each step in life with certitude and stability, then he or she will be able to make something out of life.” (3)

## 3. Establish Support Systems – Cultivate a Sense of Belonging

It is vital to emphasise the feelings of beginners, encourage them to observe their own needs, and build mutual trust through listening and caring among the volunteers. Through group activities, regular exchange meetings, or psychological counselling, volunteers can build interpersonal connections and a sense of belonging, making them willing to commit to Buddhist affairs long-term. In addition, we should provide emotional support and warm care to volunteers, enabling them to maintain a stable mindset when facing challenges.

### Reference:

- (3) Master Sheng Yen (June 2011). “108 adages of wisdom” (English) (1st edition). Taipei. Sheng Yen Education Foundation. Available at: [http://www.108wisdom.org/html/ENG\\_01.pdf?link=ENG\\_01](http://www.108wisdom.org/html/ENG_01.pdf?link=ENG_01)
- (4) Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website. <https://fagushan.ddm.org.tw/xmnews?xmsid=OK316607348124000728>
- (5) Master Sheng Yen (2020). Dharma Drum Mountain (Booklet). Taipei. Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Foundation. Available at: [https://www.dharmadrum.org/portal\\_b8\\_cnt.php?folder\\_id=7](https://www.dharmadrum.org/portal_b8_cnt.php?folder_id=7)
- (6) Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website. Video: When you and I have a pure mind, everywhere is pure land. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2TogLy5hnA&t=1s>
- (7) Master Sheng Yen (April 2025). Protecting the Spiritual Environment (Pocket Guides to Buddhist Wisdom E-34) (1st Edition) (p.17). Taipei. Cultural Center, Dharma Drum Mountain. Available at: [https://www.shengyen.org/freebook/pdf/Protecting\\_the\\_Spiritual\\_Environment.pdf](https://www.shengyen.org/freebook/pdf/Protecting_the_Spiritual_Environment.pdf)  
Thought and Ideas: <https://www.shengyen.org/eng/ti-01.html>  
Animation: <https://www.shengyen.org.tw/ListAnimeAll.aspx?pid=487&lang=en&type=A>

## MECHANISMS FOR ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS (4)

The volunteer engagement mechanism centres on “spiritual growth” : as its core practice, with the main theme of “To uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth” (5) (6) through volunteer service.

The purification of the human mind has a profound impact on individuals, families, groups, societies, and nations. Therefore, the volunteer engagement mechanism must also start from the heart, from within to without, from oneself to others, and expanding to a holistic concern for society, to promote peace and happiness for all. The concept of “Spiritual Environmental Protection” advocated by Master Sheng Yen, founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, can serve as a reference. In the book on “Protecting the Spiritual Environment”, Master Sheng Yen mentioned :

*“In order to encourage people to build proper life values and lead healthy, happy, and peaceful lives, I began advocating for “Protecting the Spiritual Environment” in 1991. Only by purifying people’s minds can society be purified. Modern civilisation is not sinful. As long as minds are not contaminated, our world has hope for tomorrow. Only by catering to modern civilisation’s scientific and technological production with a healthy and correct mentality, can we really benefit humankind.*

*Otherwise, being materially wealthy but spiritually poor will cause more harm than good to society today and tomorrow, and may even lead to grave disasters.” (7)*

### 1. New Volunteer Training

New volunteer training is the first step in volunteer engagement. Buddhist organisations can regularly hold “New Volunteer Introductory Courses” to introduce the basic principles of Buddhism and their operational models to new comers. The course content includes fundamental Buddhist knowledge, the core values of the organisation, and basic requirements for volunteer service. This aims to help new volunteers quickly integrate into the organisation and understand the importance of their role.

### 2. Volunteer Engagement Activities

To attract more people to participate, Buddhist organisations can regularly organise various types of engagement activities, such as blessing and refuge ceremonies, community lectures, and cultural exchange events. These activities not only enhance the public’s understanding of Buddhist community but also provide potential volunteers with opportunities to personally experience the religious atmosphere. Engagement activities should be characterised by strong interactivity and diverse formats to attract people of different ages and backgrounds.



### 3. Volunteer Service Platform (8)(9)

Buddhist organisations can establish diverse volunteer service platforms, such as temple maintenance, event assistance, *Dharma* promotion, environmental promotion, spiritual education promotion, meditation promotion, media communication, community care, and charity events, etc. These activities allow volunteers to choose service areas that are based on their interests and expertise, and participate in religious and public welfare affairs through practical actions. These platforms not only promote diverse volunteer participation but also improve overall service efficiency, enabling volunteers to experience the altruistic spirit of the Buddhism through practical actions.

## CONTINUOUS TRAINING AND SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION (10)

The inner growth of volunteers is not spontaneous but a gradual process that requires appropriate and continuous guidance and support from religious organisations. Religious organisations should focus on the spiritual growth of volunteers, promoting self-awareness and affirmation, providing education and training, and guiding the practice of selflessness, to comprehensively promote the spiritual growth and elevation of volunteers. Only then can Buddhist volunteers practise in service, serve in practice, and ultimately achieve the dual goals of benefitting sentient beings and self-perfection.

### 1. Promote Self-Awareness: Reflection and Self-Understanding

Self-awareness is the starting point of spiritual growth. Buddhist volunteers need to understand their inner needs, values, and potential. The following are ways to promote self-awareness:

#### (a) Meditation and Sitting Practice

Meditation is an important practice method in Buddhism. Buddhist organisations can regularly hold meditation courses specifically for volunteers, including sitting meditation, walking meditation, and mindfulness training. Through meditation, volunteers can reflect on their inner world and thus understand their emotions and thought patterns. In the book "Liberated in Stillness and Motion," Master Sheng Yen repeatedly emphasises the importance of harmonising the mind methods:

*"Mental stability is closely related to eating, sleeping, and breathing. If one harmonises the mind well, one's mood will be pleasant and stable. One can then use the method of Chan to transform false and defiled mind into true and pure mind. We start with harmonising the daily habits of eating, sleeping, breathing; we then use method of Chan such as counting the breath, investigating huatou, Silent Illumination, and direct contemplation, to reach the state of undefiled purify."* (11)



#### (b) Self-Reflection Journal

It is vital that we encourage volunteers to keep a journal, recording daily feelings and experiences in order to review changes in their mindset during service. For example, using the content of the Ten Good Deeds as a self-standard to examine whether one's body, speech, and mind are always in a state of goodness.

#### (c) Group Discussion

Through small group discussions or sharing activities, volunteers can exchange experiences with each other and gain insights from others' experiences. Organisations can set up spiritual growth groups, arrange reflection discussions after service, and have volunteers exchange their service experiences, allowing volunteers to review their efforts and contributions and affirm their self-worth.

#### (d) Training Courses

We can regularly hold *Dharma* study classes, meditation courses, and sharing sessions to help volunteers deepen their *Dharma* wisdom during service and reflect on their practice state.

#### (e) Guidance from Teachers

Monastics or senior volunteers provide counselling and feedback, offering simple affirmation and suggestions to help volunteers recognise their strengths and weaknesses, and providing encouragement and support.



#### Reference:

- (8) *Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website.* <https://fagushan.ddm.org.tw/xchome?xsmsid=0K316606653787082657> (Chinese version)
- (9) *Volunteer Recruitment.* (Chinese version) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoM4T5R03tA&t=37s>
- (10) *Dharma Drum Mountain Global Website.* (Volunteer Group. <https://volunteers.ddm.org.tw/> (Chinese version))
- (11) *Master Sheng Yen (2016). Liberated in Stillness and Motion (1st Edition) (p.167). Taiwan. Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.*

## 2. Cultivate Self-Affirmation: Discovering Value and Strength

Self-affirmation is a crucial motivator for volunteers to continue their commitment. When volunteers can recognise their own value, they will have more confidence in facing challenges. This can be explained from the following three aspects:

### (a) Positive Feedback

Buddhist organisations should provide timely positive feedback to volunteers, such as praising their contributions or commending their achievements, to boost their confidence.

### (b) Provide Learning Opportunities

Design a learning roadmap and arrange advanced training courses, such as *Dharma* courses, meditation training, and life education lectures, to help volunteers continuously improve their self-awareness and reflect on the value and meaning of life.

Buddhist organisations can provide various professional skills training, such as interpersonal skills, team communication skills, emotional management, crisis management, and specialised knowledge like environmental protection and medical first aid, to help volunteers enhance their confidence and teamwork, and feel their progress in practice.

### (c) Establish Achievement Records

Record volunteers' service achievements and regularly share individual or team success stories, making them feel the value of their efforts.



## 3. Promote Self-Growth: Learning and Transformation in Service

Self-growth is an important stage for volunteers to deepen their practice during service. The following methods can help volunteers continuously improve:

### (a) Deepen *Dharma* Study

Regularly hold *Dharma* courses, meditation training, book clubs, and self-growth camps to help volunteers deeply understand Buddhist teachings and guide their actions with wisdom. This enables volunteers to serve others more effectively while deepening their understanding of the *Dharma* and finding nourishment for self-growth.



### (b) Group Practice Activities

Group practice activities are an important way to promote volunteers' spiritual growth and team cohesion. Buddhist organisations can organise collective chanting, blessing ceremonies, and sharing sessions, allowing volunteers to support each other and grow together in a religious atmosphere. Group practice not only helps enhance volunteers' religious faith but also strengthens team spirit.

### (c) Diverse Participation Opportunities

Provide different types of service activities, such as environmental actions, community education, and social care, to expose volunteers to people from different cultural backgrounds, thereby broadening their horizons and deepening their inclusivity. Encourage volunteers to actively undertake different tasks, enabling them to break through themselves in challenges, cultivate diverse abilities, and elevate their state of mind.

### (d) Encourage Creative Problem Solving

Involve volunteers in activity planning or problem-solving processes to stimulate their creativity and enhance their sense of responsibility. Exchange experiences of failure and view setbacks as opportunities for growth and refinement.

### (e) Guidance from Virtuous Friends (*Kalyāṇa-mitra*)

The companionship and teachings of virtuous friends can inspire volunteers to contemplate the higher meaning of life. By sharing core Buddhist values such as compassion, wisdom, impermanence, and selflessness, volunteers can feel the enlightenment of the *Dharma* on life, thereby motivating them to pursue self-transcendence.

#### 4. Moving Towards Self-Dissolution: From Self to No-Self

Self-dissolution is the highest realm of Buddhist practice, which means transcending personal attachments and fully integrating with all sentient beings. It means letting go of personal attachments and reaching a state of no-self. This stage requires a combination of deep practice and inner transformation:

##### (a) Cultivate Wisdom of Emptiness

Through studying the Buddhist concept of “dependent origination and emptiness,” guide volunteers to understand the truth of impermanence and no-self, thereby transcending the boundaries of the self.

##### (b) Deepen Meditation Experience

Encourage volunteers to continue meditating to let go of attachment to the self and achieve inner peace and openness. Master Sheng Yen guides meditators to self-transform through meditation and dissolve the self and transcend human character, as explained in “Liberated in Stillness and Motion”:

*“At Dharma Drum Mountain meditation camp, I emphasise affirming and developing the self, but after we do that, we should dissolve the self and transcend our human character to perfect pure mind. We do not measure success or failure in terms of visible or invisible fame, fortune, power, or status.”* (12)

In addition, the booklet “Spiritual Environmental Protection” states that,

*“Chan meditation is the method that we use. The basic principle consists of four levels: relaxing our body and mind, being mindful of our body and mind in the present, unifying our body and mind, and ultimately letting go of our body and mind. Relaxing and being mindful of our body and mind are stages of self-affirmation and self-understanding. Being mindful of and unifying our body and mind are stages of self-reflection and self-growth. Unifying and letting go of our body and mind are stages of self-fulfillment and self-dissolution.”* (13)

##### (c) Deepening Compassion

“Compassion has no enemies; wisdom, no vexations.” (14) Encourage volunteers to view all sentient beings with an undifferentiated mind, thereby reducing attachment to the self and vexations. Master Sheng Yen further explains:

*“We should handle all matters with wisdom, and treat all people with compassion. Not creating troubles for oneself is wisdom; not causing harm to others is compassion. To adjust one’s attitude and look at the reality as it is, it is wisdom. To treat others with tolerance and empathy, it is compassion. With wisdom vexations do not arise; with compassion one will have no enemy.”* (15)

##### (d) Practising the Bodhisattva Path

Buddhism emphasises “Great Compassion without conditions, Great Compassion with the same body”, believing that all sentient beings are equal and should be treated with compassion. It encourages everyone to take pride in the achievements of the group, no longer focusing on individual merit.

Volunteers are guided to act with the *Bodhisattva* spirit, not seeking rewards or clinging to results in their service, but dedicating themselves entirely to the well-being of sentient beings, so that volunteers gradually dissolve their ego in their giving.

The four levels of spiritual growth, from self-awareness to self-dissolution, require continuous integration of service and practice to achieve self-transcendence, break through self-limitations, and view life from a broader perspective. However, in the process of service, we inevitably encounter setbacks, but this is also a good opportunity to train our minds by using the environment. We can use Master Sheng Yen’s “108 Adages of Wisdom” as a motto for training our minds, always maintaining an open mind to welcome all unpredictable realms. For example:

*“A mind of kindness and compassion will resolve any rivalry; a mind of wisdom will dispel all vexations.*

*View every experience in life with gratitude, make good use of one’s life with diligence.*

*Virtues are cultivated through a sense of contrition, karmic obstructions are eliminated through a mind of repentance.*

*Persistence will get you through everything, resilience will help you achieve anything.”* (16)

##### Reference:

- (12) Master Sheng Yen (2016). *Mind in Buddhism and Chan, Liberated in Stillness and Motion* (1st Edition) (p.108). Taiwan. Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation.
- (13) Master Sheng Yen (April 2025). *Protecting the Spiritual Environment (Pocket Guides to Buddhist Wisdom E-34)* (1st Edition) (p.51). Taipei. Cultural Center, Dharma Drum Mountain.
- (14) Master Sheng Yen (June 2011). *108 adages of wisdom ( English )* (1st edition). Taipei. Sheng Yen Education Foundation.
- (15) Master Sheng Yen. A speech given at the Meeting of World Faith and Development Leaders, held in Dublin, Ireland, February 1, 2005.
- (16) Master Sheng Yen (June 2011). *108 adages of wisdom ( English )* (1st edition). Taipei. Sheng Yen Education Foundation.

## ACTUAL IMPACT AND ANALYSIS

A well-established Buddhist volunteer system has a significant impact on individuals and society in many ways.

### 1. Individual Level: Improved Mental Health

Volunteers can enhance their religious practice and psychological well-being. They learn to face life's challenges with mindfulness, confront difficulties with equanimity, and find meaning in life and a sense of accomplishment through serving others. In addition, participating in diverse volunteer services also allows volunteers to gain skills, such as communication and problem-solving abilities.

### 2. Group Level: Enhanced Cohesion

Volunteer groups build deep friendships and trust through shared service. This cohesion not only promotes internal cooperation and operational efficiency within the organisation but also helps create a harmonious and mutually supportive work environment, and transmits a positive influence on the outside world.

### 3. Religious Level: Deepened Buddhist Wisdom

Through practising Buddhist concepts such as the “Four Noble Truths”, “Eightfold Path”, “Twelve *Nidanas*”, and “Four All-Embracing Virtues and Six Perfections”, volunteers understand that the truths of the world are “impermanence”, “non-self”, and “dependent origination and emptiness”. They gradually internalise religious belief as part of their lives, achieving the integration of practice and daily life.

### 4. Social Level: Deepened Buddhist Wisdom

Buddhist organisations can attract more people to participate in religious and public welfare affairs through volunteer training and spiritual growth programmes, further realising the concept which aims “to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth.” Volunteers apply what they have learnt in their daily lives and social interactions, having a positive impact on overall social harmony.



## CHALLENGES IN MODERN SOCIETY AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

### 1. Challenges

In modern society, Buddhist volunteers face some challenges, including time pressure, insufficient resources, and misunderstandings about religious public welfare by some people. In addition, due to the rapid development of technology, interpersonal interaction is gradually decreasing, which indirectly affects the promotion of volunteer activities.

### 2. Outlook

Facing challenges, the Buddhist community should actively take measures, such as using technology to expand influence, strengthening volunteer training and publicity, so that more people understand the value of Buddhist volunteers. At the same time, through interfaith cooperation and joint actions with non-religious organisations, public welfare concepts can be promoted more effectively, creating greater social impact.

## CONCLUSION

The recruitment and growth of Buddhist volunteers is a gradual process, covering multiple levels from self-awareness to self-dissolution. Through effective strategies and spiritual guidance, Buddhist organisations can help volunteers achieve holistic growth in service. At the same time, this spiritual uplift not only benefits individual volunteers but also promotes the spread of the Buddhist spirit in society.

On the path of volunteering, no step is solitary. We constantly encounter ourselves and grow ourselves in service, and ultimately transcend and dissolve the self, integrate into the masses and embrace all sentient beings. “To help Buddhist volunteers walk more steadily on this path, I believe that every stage — from recruitment and self-awareness to the ultimate letting go of the self — requires sincere and heartfelt companionship”. ■

“As upon a heap of rubbish thrown on the highway,  
a sweet-smelling, loving lotus may grow,  
even so amongst worthless beings,  
a disciple of the Fully Enlightened One  
outshines the blind worldlings in wisdom.”

– Dhammapada, Puppha Vagga, Verses 58 – 59





Author's profile on Page 11.



VOLUNTEERS

# Serving Others, Awakening Ourselves

by Nandinī Tan Meng Fong

Volunteers are the backbone of Buddhist organisations, carrying the spirit of service into every aspect of community life. At Nalanda, volunteerism is more than the fulfilment of duties, it is a living practice of the Dhamma that transforms both the community and the individual.

This paper explores Nalanda's distinctive approach to volunteerism, rooted in two deep motivations: *Sabbe sattā sukhī hontu* — the heartfelt wish that all sentient beings be free from suffering; and *Buddha-sāsanam ciram titthatu* — the commitment to work towards the non-decline and long endurance of the *Buddha-Sāsana*.

Guided by eight core values and a community-driven volunteer system, Nalanda's model focuses on building the Buddhist community to support the practice of the community. In other words, building the community for the community. This paper also outlines a structured "Volunteer Development Pathway", sustainable service strategies, and transformative impacts, offering insights and practical models for other Buddhist communities seeking to sustain long-term, joyful volunteerism.

## INTRODUCTION

In every thriving Buddhist organisation, volunteers form the backbone of its work. They are the first faces that greet visitors, the steady hands that keep operations running, and the compassionate presence that supports learning and practice.

Yet in the Buddhist perspective, volunteering is not simply an act of giving time and effort. It is an integral part of cultivating generosity (*dāna*), moral discipline (*sīla*), and mental development (*bhāvanā*). The Buddha Himself spoke of the joy and merit in selfless giving, saying in the *Itivuttaka* that "the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts". Volunteers, by enabling the sharing of Dhamma, become vital contributors to the spiritual well-being of others.

The title of this forum — "*Serving Others, Awakening Ourselves*" — captures this dual benefit. Through service, we contribute to the welfare of others while nurturing our own qualities of patience, humility, wisdom, and compassion.

At Nalanda, volunteerism is not an ad-hoc or event-based activity; it is a well-structured, value-based practice designed to serve both the community and the personal cultivation of each volunteer. Over two decades of refining, this approach has shown that such service can be sustainable, joyful, and deeply transformative.



## NALANDA'S TWO-FOLD MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE

### 1. *Sabbe sattā sukhī hontu* – The heartfelt wish that all sentient beings be free from suffering.

The Buddha taught in the First Noble Truth that life is marked by *Dukkha* – suffering, unsatisfactoriness, and stress. Out of compassion, we cannot bear to see others struggle without guidance. We also understand that the Buddha's teachings offer the only complete way out of all sufferings.

This conviction drives us to serve in diverse ways, by offering holistic Buddhist education through Nalanda Dhamma School and Nalanda Institute Malaysia, by creating conducive spaces for meditation, by supporting the welfare of monastics, and even by simple gestures of kindness such as offering a seat or a listening ear to a visitor.

For example, a Nalanda volunteer once noticed a newcomer sitting alone after a service. Instead of rushing to pack up, she sat down, smiled, and began a friendly conversation. That warm interaction was enough for the newcomer to feel welcomed, return for future programmes, and eventually join as a member. Small acts, when done with compassion, have a ripple effect that reaches far beyond the moment.

### 2. *Buddha-sāsanam cirām tiṭṭhatu* — The commitment to work towards the non-decline and long endurance of the Buddha-Sāsana.

The Buddha's Dispensation — the living body of teachings, practice, and community can only flourish if upheld by dedicated practitioners. Apathy, neglect, or improper transmission can lead to decline. Nalanda volunteers therefore see their service as a direct contribution to preserving and strengthening the *Sāsana*.

This means not only organising Dhamma courses and programmes, but doing so with integrity, accuracy, and faithfulness to the teachings. It means creating a wholesome and harmonious environment so that the Dhamma can be practised in its true spirit.

#### One volunteer reflected:

*"When I sweep the Shrine Hall floor, I feel I am not just cleaning dust; I am protecting the Sāsana by ensuring the hall is a worthy place for the Buddha's teachings to be heard and practised."*

When service is rooted in these two motivations, every task — no matter how small, contributes to communal well-being and spiritual progress.



## CORE VALUES THAT GUIDE SERVICE

Nalanda volunteers embody eight guiding values that form the moral and cultural compass of our service:

1. **Compassion** – Being kind and supportive of others in our thoughts, speech, and conduct.
2. **Courage** – Being strong and determined in the face of adversities and challenges in life.
3. **Respect** – Being respectful of our elders, teachers, fellow practitioners, and all sentient beings.
4. **Integrity** – Living by righteous means, principles, and values.
5. **Service** – Living not just for ourselves, but for the welfare of others as well.
6. **Faith** – Having right understanding and deep confidence in the *Buddha-Dhamma*.
7. **Learning** – Continuous learning and improvement as an individual and as a community.
8. **Reflection** – Living mindfully and purposefully towards liberation from afflictions.

These values shape what we call the Nalanda Spirit — humble, eager to learn the Dhamma, easy to be advised, yet confident in their inherent goodness, and courageous in acting and living wisely.

As we often say, "Service is not just an action, it is cultivation that leads to purification." Volunteering is Dhamma practice, and service is the process of transformation. Volunteers grow in compassion, wisdom, and humility.

## A CULTURE OF SPIRITUALITY

Nalanda's volunteer culture is not only about skills and efficiency; it is about embodying the Dhamma in daily conduct. Volunteers are trained to:

- **Uphold ethical conduct** — practising integrity, maintaining confidentiality, and refraining from gossip.
- **Maintain etiquette and represent Nalanda gracefully** — through wholesome speech, neat appearance, punctuality, and showing respect to all.
- **Preserve the spiritual ambience of the centre** — observing noble silence when appropriate, practising mindfulness, and maintaining Nalanda's warm "greeting culture".

Every act of service becomes a cultivation of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. In this way, service is not just a function, it is a spiritual practice woven into every interaction and task.

## A UNIQUE APPROACH — BUILDING THE COMMUNITY FOR THE COMMUNITY

A defining feature of Nalanda's volunteerism is that it is community-driven. Nalanda's focus is to nurture a Buddhist community that actively supports the practice and well-being of its members.

This philosophy is summed up in the phrase:

*"Build the community for the community."*

Every volunteer role, from hospitality to teaching, from cleaning to leadership — is designed to strengthen the community's ability to live and practise the Dhamma together.

An analogy we often use is the tending of a tree. We do not only prepare for its fruits; we care for the roots, the soil, and the surrounding environment so that it may provide shelter, shade, and nourishment for generations to come.

This approach shifts the mindset from "helping out at events" to "being a steward of the community's spiritual life."



## NALANDA'S VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Sustainable volunteerism requires more than goodwill. It needs a clear path for growth. Nalanda has developed a "Volunteer Development Pathway" to help volunteers deepen their skills, knowledge, and commitment over time :

1. **Volunteer** – Initial stage of contributing time, skills, and effort.
2. **Supportive Member** – Regularly involved and supportive of initiatives.
3. **Core Member** – Taking on specific duties and responsibilities within the organisation.
4. **Key Driver** – Leading divisions, programmes, or services, and mentoring others.

At each stage, volunteers receive:

- Dhamma education to strengthen right understanding.
- Skills training in communication, organisation, and teamwork.
- Mentorship to nurture leadership qualities.
- Opportunities for hands-on experience in diverse roles.

This pathway transforms volunteering from a one-off activity into a lifelong practice of service, ensuring that the community remains strong while individuals grow in capability and confidence.

## STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERISM

From experience, Nalanda has found several strategies that keep volunteerism meaningful and sustainable:

- **Matching roles to strengths** – Volunteers are placed in roles that align with their abilities and interests, while also offering room for growth.
- **Continuous learning** – Training in Dhamma, communication, and practical skills ensures volunteers are well-prepared and confident.
- **Mentorship and feedback** – Regular guidance helps maintain service quality and personal motivation.
- **Volunteer welfare** – Caring for volunteers' spiritual, emotional, and even physical well-being is key to sustaining their joy in service.
- **Recognition through appreciation, not reward** – Acknowledgement is expressed in gratitude and shared joy, rather than material incentives.

For example, instead of giving gifts, Nalanda often organises Volunteers' Appreciation Gatherings where senior leaders personally express thanks, share how volunteers' work has impacted lives and invite reflection on lessons learned. This creates a culture of heartfelt appreciation and shared purpose.

## TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF SERVICE

Service changes people. We have seen youths who began with simple tasks like cleaning or ushering grow into confident facilitators and community leaders. We have seen working adults find renewed purpose and joy through service, overcoming personal anxieties and building lifelong friendships.

### One young volunteer once shared:

“When I first joined, I just wanted to help a little on weekends. But over time, I realised service was helping me overcome my shyness, teaching me patience, and giving me a circle of friends who share the same values.”

This transformation occurs because service at Nalanda is not mechanical; it is mindful and rooted in the Dhamma. In serving, we practise *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. We learn patience when things do not go as planned, humility when working in teams, and compassion when responding to the needs of others.

## CONCLUSION

The Buddha taught that the path to liberation is one of practice, not merely intellectual understanding. Service is such a practice — a fertile field for sowing the seeds of wisdom and compassion.

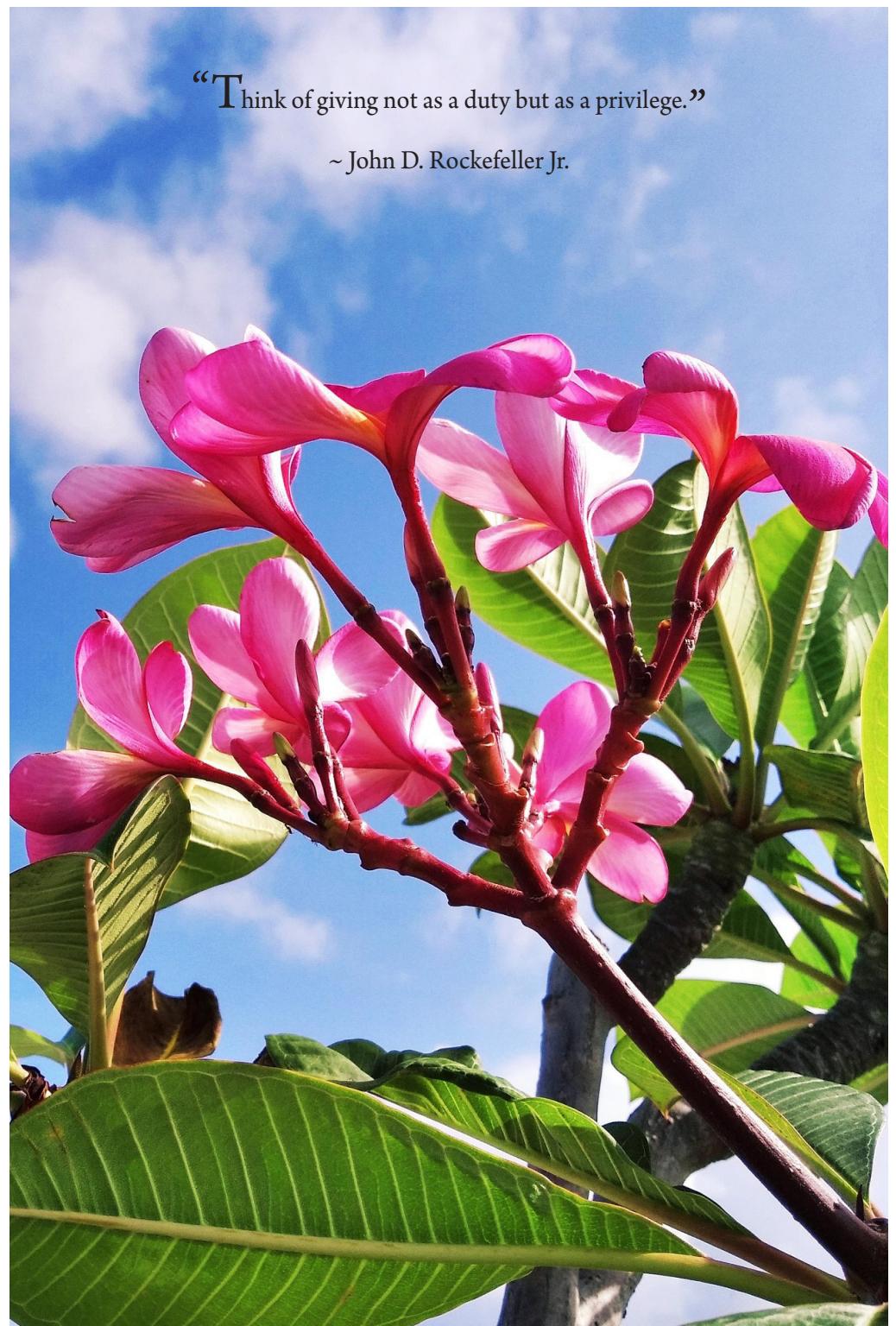
At Nalanda, our twofold motivation : compassion for those who suffer (*Sabbe sattā sukhī hontu*) and commitment to preserving the *Sāsana* (*Buddha-sāsanaṇī ciraṇī tiṭṭhatu*), gives our service depth and direction. Guided by core values and a community-centred approach, volunteerism becomes more than an action; it becomes cultivation.

Volunteering is not just an offering of time, it is an offering of our life towards wisdom and compassion.



It transforms not just the organisation, but also the individual on the Noble Eightfold Path.

In serving others, we create the conditions for our own awakening. In awakening ourselves, we become better volunteers. This mutual nourishment sustains both the community and the Buddha's Dispensation for generations to come. ■



“Think of giving not as a duty but as a privilege.”

~ John D. Rockefeller Jr.