A watercolor illustration of a cityscape. In the foreground, there are several stylized buildings in shades of blue, purple, and red. A tall green stem with a red lotus flower rises from the city. In the background, there are green hills and blue clouds. The title 'URBAN LOTUS' is written in large, dark green letters on the right side.

URBAN LOTUS

American Buddhist Folk Songs Vol. 2
Reverend Heng Sure

About the Album

Buddhism came to California a century ago. One of Buddhism's symbols is the lotus flower. Lotuses are rooted in the mud but their blossoms stand above the mud, pure and undefiled. The heart of the Mahayana's hero, the Bodhisattva, or Awakened Being, is the same way. Bodhisattvas keep a pure heart while living in the muddle of the mundane world.

Chan Master Hsuan Hua (1918-1995) opened monasteries in the heart of major urban cities up and down the West Coast: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Vancouver, Calgary, Sacramento, San Jose, Berkeley and elsewhere. He trained Western monks and nuns to become like lotuses and bloom amid the concrete city sidewalks. He himself was a song-writer and he challenged his disciples to rewrite the daily ceremonies, chants and praises to accord with the musical tastes of the contemporary West. This album, Urban Lotus, is our second go at setting the Buddha's Dharma teachings to Western melodies, played by a contemporary string-band. Please make these tunes your own and watch a lotus bloom!

“How Can I Keep From Singing?”, a favorite Christian hymn, praises the power of music to calm the heart in times of trouble. The method of reciting the Buddha’s name works the same way. The vows of the Buddha Amitabha take us to a world free from pain and suffering.

I Never Stop Reciting 3:31

*Music: Robert Wadsworth Lowry, “How Can I Keep From Singing”
Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure*



A Buddha named Eternal Light
Made vows to save creation
He made a land where suffering's gone
A place of liberation
So use his vows and be reborn
In lotus flowers delighting
You simply keep his name in mind
And never stop reciting

The Saha land is a place of pain
With struggle and contention
To find a world of Utmost Bliss
You first set your intention
Those men or women, rich or poor
In rebirth not delighting
Apply themselves with a single mind
And never stop reciting

I praise the Buddha's compassionate vows
With melodies unending
My body lives in the world of woe
My heart is world-transcending
With Bodhisattvas joyfully
I'll soon be reuniting
Until I reach Amitabha's land
I'll never stop reciting

Namo Amita Buddha
Namo Amita Buddha
Namo Amita Buddha
Namo Amita Buddha
Namo Amita Buddha
Namo Amita Buddha
I'll never stop reciting

“...praises the power of
music to calm the heart
in times of trouble”.



2

She Carries Me 3:02

Music & Lyrics: Jennifer Berezan

Bodhisattva Guan Shi Yin is the most beloved of all the figures in Mahayana Buddhism.

Guan Yin is the Awakened Being who hears the sounds of the world, sounds of joy and sounds of suffering alike. She extends a hand to anybody who is in need, as long as you call on her name. When we say, “Namo Guanyin Bodhisattva,” she carries us to the other side, and delivers us from our troubles.

The song was written by Jennifer Berezan, a Canadian-American musician who lives in Berkeley, California. Wherever I am in the Buddhist world, from China to Taiwan, from Singapore to San Francisco, people hear in this song a compassionate spirit of Guanyin Bodhisattva. She Carries Me is a favorite.

She is a boat
She is a light
High on a hill
In the dark of night
She is a wave
She is the deep
She is the dark
Where the angels sleep
When all is still
Where peace abides
She carries me
To the other side

She carries me
She carries me
She carries me
To the other side

She carries me
She carries me
She carries me
To the other side

And though I walk
Through valleys deep
And shadows chase me
In my sleep
On rocky cliffs
I stand alone
I have no name
I have no home
With broken wings
I long to fly
She carries me
To the other side

She carries me
She carries me
She carries me
To the other side

She carries me
She carries me
She carries me
To the other side

“Na Mo Guanyin Bodhisattva, ...
she looks a lot like Mother Mary.
I think that we don’t have to draw a
line too clearly between the two
feminine sages who represent the
spirit of great compassion.”

3 Samantabhadra's Repentance Verse 3:00

Music: Rev. Heng Sure

Lyrics: The Flower Garland Sutra translated by Rev. Heng Sure

Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is known as the Confessor Bodhisattva. He listens for sincerity when we decide, in our heart of hearts, to change and become a better person. Sincerity brings a response. Samantabhadra's verse provides the inspiration to continue with the work of cleaning hearts and minds and returning to our original state of purity.

This verse says, "For all the harmful things that I've done, with my body, speech and mind; from beginning-less greed, anger and stupidity, through lifetimes without number, to this very day, I now repent and I vow to change entirely."



For all the harmful things I've done
With my body, speech, and mind
From beginningless greed
Anger and stupidity
Through lifetimes without number
To this very day
I now repent and I vow
To change entirely

For all the harmful things I've done
With my body, speech and mind
From beginningless greed
Anger and stupidity
Through lifetimes without number
To this very day
I now repent and I vow
To change entirely

For all the harmful things I've done
With my body, speech and mind
From beginningless greed
Anger and stupidity
Through lifetimes without number
To this very day
I now repent and I vow
To change entirely

I now repent and I vow
To change entirely

“...take charge of our karmic
scorecard, so to speak, we become
the architects of our future.”

“Praise the Buddha” is traditionally sung once a year on Buddha's Birthday. My hope is that this English version, set to a familiar Western anthem, can make this tune be sung year-round.

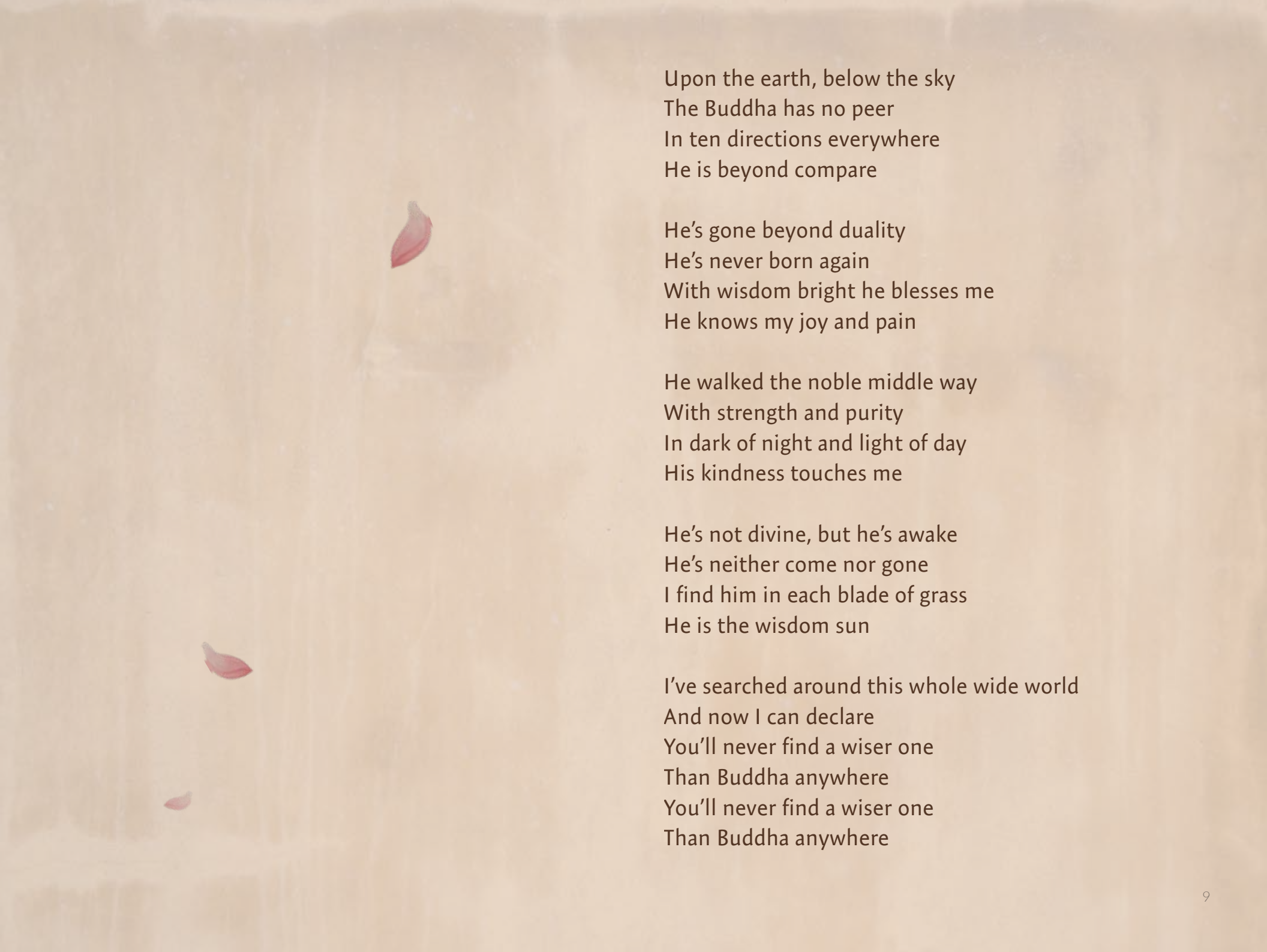
4

Praise the Buddha 3:43

Music: William Walker, “Amazing Grace”

Lyrics: Traditional Verse translated and adapted by Rev. Heng Sure





Upon the earth, below the sky
The Buddha has no peer
In ten directions everywhere
He is beyond compare

He's gone beyond duality
He's never born again
With wisdom bright he blesses me
He knows my joy and pain

He walked the noble middle way
With strength and purity
In dark of night and light of day
His kindness touches me

He's not divine, but he's awake
He's neither come nor gone
I find him in each blade of grass
He is the wisdom sun

I've searched around this whole wide world
And now I can declare
You'll never find a wiser one
Than Buddha anywhere
You'll never find a wiser one
Than Buddha anywhere

The Mahayana tradition celebrates many Buddhas. One of the most revered is Medicine Buddha, the Master of Healing. We know him by three different names: 1) Medicine Master, 2) the Buddha Who Dispels Calamities and Lengthens Life, and 3) the Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Light. Medicine Buddha, in the past, made twelve vows, focused on healing our minds, bodies and spirits. You can access the power of his vows by reciting his name, his mantra and his sutra.

5 Medicine Buddha's Name 2:26

Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure



Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo
Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

He dispels calamities and lengthens life
Namo, Namo
He dispels calamities and lengthens life
Namo, Namo

Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo
Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Light
Namo, Namo
Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Light
Namo, Namo

Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

Medicine Master Thus Come One
Namo Namo

“People will recite this Buddha’s
name, read his Sutra and draw
pictures of him to bring that healing
presence into their life. ”

The most popular form of Buddhist practice in East Asia is reciting the name of the Buddha Amitabha, which means “Limitless Light.” In Chinese we say “Namo” which means; “I take refuge, I find safety here.” If you recite Amitabha’s name you can go to his Pure Land, a paradise where there is no suffering. In Chinese we recite Namo Ami Tuo Fo. When we set this practice to music, we move closer to his Land of Utmost Happiness.

6

Amitabha Buddha’s Name 3:32

Music and Lyrics: Traditional Buddhist chants



Namo Amita Buddha...
Namo Amitabha...



When my mind is clear
I feel grateful for the
kindness I've received.
My heart expands and
I feel humble.
This song keeps that
awareness
front and center.

7
I'm Feeling Glad
(For My Mom and Dad) 4:35

Music and lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure



Thank you Mom
For your love and care
Thank you Dad
For letting me stay here
Hey, I'm feeling glad for my Mom and Dad

This morning my mom said
'You've got to pay me for my cooking
Three meals a day
For the last nine...24...37... years
You got to pay for what you eat
No more freebie treats
There's a padlock on the kitchen
I'm not your maid.'

Well, I can't pay
But I can start by being grateful
Thank you Mom
For your love and care
Well, thank you Mom and Dad
I didn't know how good I had it
Hey, I'm feeling glad for my Mom and Dad

This morning my dad said
'You got to pay me for my driving
Gas ain't cheap
And there's wear and tear
I'm going to charge you for every night
You've been sleeping underneath my roof
Your bed's out on the driveway
Your iPhone is there.'

Well, I can't pay
But I can start by being grateful
Thank you Dad
For letting me stay her

Well, thank you Mom and Dad
I didn't know how good I had it
Hey, I'm feeling glad for my Mom and Dad

This morning my teacher said
'I'm not interested in teaching
Nobody listens
It's just a waste of time
I'm not puttin' on a show
You've got to pay for what I know
Learn it or lose it
That's the way it goes.'

Well, I can't pay
But I can start by being grateful
Thank you teacher
For letting me learn here
Well, thank you Mom and Dad
I didn't know how good I had it,
Hey, I'm feeling glad for my Mom and Dad

This morning the earth said
'You've got to pay me for my growing
All those crops
For all those years
You cut down all my trees
You waste me as you please
I'm fed up
You humans got to go (Don't mention earthquakes)

I can't pay
But I can start by being grateful
Thank you earth
For your love and care
Well, thank you Mom and Dad
I didn't know how good I had it
Hey I'm feeling glad
Hey I'm feeling glad
Hey I'm feeling glad for my Mom and Dad

“Recognizing the kindness that has
been done for us ... is a major step
towards ... great compassion. ”

One of my musical inspirations is a singer, composer and wise woman, the late Joanne Shenandoah, who was a member of the Iroquois Nation, a member of the wolf clan, and daughter of a Clan Mother from the Haudenosaunee community in Upstate New York. Joanne was also the granddaughter of Chief Shenandoah of the Iroquois. Joanne was called in some circles the “voice of Native America.” Joanne was an advocate for peace and for reconciliation and for transcendence of differences. The song is dedicated to her.

8 Road to Brotherhood 2:48

*Dedicated to Joanne Shenandoah
Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure*



In the distant past
Ancestors fought a war
The grievances flowed on from generations
The curses and the lies
The vengeance and the blood
Their children and their children learned
the hatred

Your nation in the valley
My family in the hills
The strangers on the plains beside the river
Your color and your clothes
Your language and your ways
Kept us far apart from one another

In the past there was violence
Now we are related
And violence is no more
Before we met
There was hatred
Now we are related and hatred is no more

Then your daughter fair
Met my eldest son
Then I traded baskets for your silver
Then I saw you laughing
Then I heard your songs
Then we shared a meal beside the river

Now the ancient lies
Vanish in the sun
Now my eyes awaken to the vision
Now I see the ties
Now I see the kin
Now I see the future of our nation

In the past
There was violence
Now we are related
And violence is no more
Before we met
There was hatred
Now we are related
And hatred is no more



Check the label on your toothpaste tube:
why is there sweetener in a product that
reduces tooth decay?

I wrote this song to help me get control of my
own sweet-tooth. I sing it like a mantra when
I'm tempted by a second piece of cake.

9 Sweet-tooth Blues 2:54

Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure



Sugar is this Bhikshu's bane
Just one bite can fog my brain
One sweet cookie melts my spine
Gets me high as quick as wine
I'm singin'
The sweet-tooth blues

Turned by sugar that I ate
I forget to cultivate
Red of face and short of breath
Unconcerned by birth and death
Singin'
The sweet-tooth blues

Sugar makes my thoughts run on
'Til concentration's lost and gone
Makes me want to laugh and play
And wander from the Middle Way
'Til I'm singin'
The sweet-tooth blues

People like it good and sweet
We sweeten everything we eat
Read the label, yes it's true
There's sweetener in the toothpaste, too

Colgate's got us singin'
The sweet-tooth blues

Sugar used to taste just great
Now I would rather concentrate
I won't eat another dose of
Dextrose, fructose, and sucrose
Gotta kick 'em
The sweet-tooth blues

People like it sweet and good
We sweeten nearly all our food
Tell me Doctor, who's at fault?
Who put Dextrose in the salt?
Sun-dried,
Sweet-tooth blues

But one day to be really true
I'll put down no sugar, too
Until then I am glad to be
Bittersweet and sugar-free
You and I
We can be
Bittersweet
And sugar-free

Written on a bowing pilgrimage
for world peace,
to keep spirits up,
on the down days.

IO Bow Down, Turn Around 3:31

*Music: Traditional-African American kids' ring game song,
"Green, Green Rocky Road"*

Lyrics: Martin Verhoeven



Return the light and turn around
Found a penny on the ground
Met a friend I always knowed
Bowling down on a rocky road

Bow down and turn around
Look inside and see

Is it black or white?
Is it up or down?
Is it in the sky?
Is it on the ground?

Bow down and turn around
Look inside and see

Leave the beaches find the gate
Hurry up now, don't be late
Leave the false and find the true
Ten thousand Buddhas inside of you

Bow down, turn around
Look inside and see

Return the light and turn around
Found a penny on the ground
Met a friend I always knowed
Bowling down on a rocky road

Bow down and turn around
Look inside and see

“...we bowed every three
steps, and did a prostration
to the ground. ”


This song was written for the URI, the United Religions Initiative. Our planet cannot hold that tribal view of religions in conflict any longer. Our planet is a global village. Our religions should become good neighbors, in harmony with each of us, each of our faiths.

There's a line in here that comes from The Peacemaker of the Iroquois. The various nations of the Iroquois, some of the First Peoples of this land called Turtle Island, were at war with each other. The peacemaker Hiawatha brought them all together and created the Iroquois Confederacy. Their constitution was studied by our founding fathers, including Thomas Jefferson in the creation of the US Constitution.

II You Are I (The URI Song) 4:01

Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure





You are I
We are one
Reunited
We become

If the religions of the world could sit
For just one hour in harmony
What a peaceful happy world
That hour of harmony would bring
If the leaders of all faiths agreed
To share their hearts in honesty
What a model for the world
Their friendship and integrity

You are I
We are one
Reunited
We become


And when the children of the world
agree
To teach their elders harmony
What a joyful laughter in
That lesson to humanity

When the people of the world agree
To be the change they wish to see
What a peaceful, happy place
This world of suffering could be

You are I
We are one
Reunited
We become

And when the nations of the world
agree
To bury guns beneath the tree
What a blessed celebration
The end of death by guns would
bring
When the URI guides society
To religious hospitality
Happiness abides within
That commonwealth of harmony

You are I
We are one
Reunited
We become
Reunited
We become



This song arose in a United Religions gathering in Antwerp, Belgium. One of URI's young leaders from Africa, Despina N. told a story of making friends across religious boundaries in Uganda, with the Lord's Resistance Army. Despina said the hardest thing is to get people to set down the old stories and forgive the grievances and insults from the distant past.

I2

Set It Down 2:36

Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure



God taught us forgiveness
Heaven holds us all
Never mind who hit who first
Be still, hear the call

O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down
O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down

Some say bad religion
Is worse than none at all
Anyone who teaches hate
Some day is bound to fall

O set it, down set it down
Set that vengeance down
O set it, down set it down
Set that vengeance down

To free your mind of hatred
Makes you truly great
All our ancestors rejoice
When we put an end to hate

O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down
O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down

Coal turns into diamonds
There's diamonds in the coal
Hell turns into heaven
When there's forgiveness in your
soul

O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down
O set it down, set it down
Set that vengeance down

“...To free your mind of
hatred, makes you truly
great. ”

This tune was born nine days after 9/11 at Our Lady Of Grace Benedictine Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana. Dedicating merit is a way to share the goodness of enjoying music together, or the merit of any goodness we create. There are no fences in the air separating one mind from the next, so we use that connection and from our good hearts, create a better world, thought by thought.

I3

Dedication of Merit 2:II

Music: Loreena McKennit, "The Dark Night of the Soul" from the Quinlan Road CD The Mask and Mirror. Published by Quinlan Road Music Ltd (SOCAN/BMI). www.quinlanroad.com

Lyrics: Traditional Buddhist Hymn translated and adapted by Rev. Heng Sure and Bhikshu Heng Lyu



May every living being
Our minds as one and radiant with light
Share the fruits of peace
With hearts of goodness, luminous, and bright

If people hear and see
How hands and hearts can find in giving, unity
May our minds awake
To Great Compassion, wisdom and to joy

May kindness find reward
May all who sorrow leave their grief and pain
May this boundless light
Dispel the darkness of our endless night

Because our hearts are one
This world of pain turns into Paradise
May all become compassionate and wise
May all become compassionate and wise

“... to send out a wish for goodness,
however you would like to make a
better world. ”

This wedding blessing song is also known as “Dana Paramita,” the perfection of generosity. The wedding of the couple that inspired the song are pillars of Service Space, a social service organization that defines generosity for millions of souls world-wide.

14

Dana Paramita (Wedding Blessing) 4:23

Music & Lyrics: Rev. Heng Sure



Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

Let my eyes see
Let my heart learn
Let my hands give
Let my feet serve

Make our roof into a refuge
Make our floor a Bodhimanda
Make our hearts into a shelter
Make our eyes into a beacon

Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

Turn ourself into the selfless
Turn our passion to compassion
Turn our seeking into service
Turn our love to liberation

Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

Let our deeds reflect the Dharma
Let our words resound with wisdom
Let our thoughts be filled with kindness
Let our hands bestow compassion

Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

May this family be a blessing
May these children love their parents
May these elders teach with patience
May this house contain the world

Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita
Dana Paramita

Let my eyes see
Let my heart learn
Let my hands give
Let my feet serve

Producer Homero Espinosa

Recording Studio Pandora HQ, Oakland, CA

Recording Engineer David Cuetter

Mixed by Eduardo Mendoza,
Homero Espinosa

Mastered by Colin Russell

Album Art Wu-ni 吳泥

Photo Art Reverend Heng Sure

Album Design Lai Theng Leong

Production Credits



Deep thanks to Homero Espinosa, DJ and impresario extraordinaire, who invited me into the studios at Pandora and introduced me to engineer David Cuetter, whose sensitive ears and outstanding ribbon mics captured the sounds you hear. Homero mentored this project through to completion.

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Loc Huynh, Meghan Sweet, Xuan Ooi.

And deepest bows to the late Chan Master Hsuan Hua, who encouraged a clueless American monk with these words: "You know, in your culture, you have to use everything you have, every skill, to expediently teach the Dharma. In this country, a monk who plays guitar could be really useful!"

Personal Credits

Urban Lotus





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