

# Chan | 禪 | Magazine

Autumn 2008



# **Chan Meditation Center**

**Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture**

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**Elmhurst, NY 11373**

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**“I started with one question, but suddenly there were a hundred, each more perplexing than the last. They poured from my mouth in a torrent of doubt and despair: Would I be able to become a monk again? Which teacher should I go to? With Buddhist teachings as deep and vast as the ocean, where should I start? With innumerable methods of practice, which method should I choose?**

**“On and on I went, pouring out my heart, all my pent-up frustration and confusion. Finally Lingyuan sighed, lifted his hand, and struck the bed hard.**

**“‘PUT IT DOWN!’ he shouted at me.”**

*From Footprints in the Snow:  
The Autobiography of a Chinese Monk*  
by Chan Master Sheng Yen, Doubleday, 2008

# Chan Magazine

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Cover photo by Kaifen Hu

# From The Editor

We are said to be living in the Dharma-ending age. I suspect that it would be wrong to take individual examples of bad behavior as proof of this, just as it's wrong to take every bad weather event as proof of global warming, but the evidence does seem to be piling up.

Why, for example, should the disappearance of a repressive government cause people who for generations had been living together quite happily, patronizing each other's businesses, marrying each other for crying out loud, to suddenly decide that their ethnicity is the critical thing in their lives, and that the best way to express the importance of that distinction is to do violence to all those of other ethnicities. I've read quite a few analyses of this now ubiquitous phenomenon—it's the legacy of Hitler and who did what to whose grandfather; it's the legacy of Stalin and forced repatriation; it's the legacy of Ottoman atrocities, of the Crusades, of the Great Schism of 1054...I'm not buyin' it. No amount of sociology or history can explain to my satisfaction the act of cutting my neighbor's throat and raping his daughters, an intimacy that has occurred repeatedly in the last two decades, and not among people who were starving or otherwise distressed out of their good sense, but among people whose lives would otherwise have been at least okay. It's evidently the Dharma-ending age.

Why should the humble game show, which once took advantage of our perfectly understandable if not exactly selfless desire to experience great good fortune—"Let's take a look at what you've won!"—have morphed

into the celebration of humiliation and loss called, prophetically, "reality" programming, in which, unlike our forbears, who identified with winners, we delight in the weakness and ultimate failure of other members of our species—"You're fired!?" Evidently the thrill of victory is nowhere near as entertaining as the agony of defeat in the Dharma-ending age.

And why should the previously noble profession of journalism have turned into a non-stop team shouting match between—or among, I should say, given their numbers—ignorant opponents endlessly repeating poorly rehearsed arguments about increasingly trivial matters? Now, to be fair, there is an answer to this question: It seems that gathering actual news from the four corners of the globe is expensive, labor-intensive, and carries the constant risk of being wrong, whereas gathering opinions from a bunch of people who've been sitting around your studio drinking coffee all day is relatively cheap and relatively foolproof (in the sense that nobody ever accuses a pastry of being flakey). So what we'd have to do, as a people, is demand to be informed, rather than have our attachments sublimated, and be willing to pay for the information. Maybe that's too much to ask in the Dharma-ending age.

And maybe I am just indulging my election-year cynicism, and maybe it's inappropriate for the pages of Chan Magazine. If so, I apologize. But I ask myself, every three months, before I send another issue to the printer, if what I'm sending has any power at all to postpone the disappearance of the Dharma in this

Dharma-ending age, and the question always refers me back to Master Sheng Yen's teachings on the Four Proper Exertions: To prevent evil from arising; to cease evil that has already arisen; to give rise to the wholesome; to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen. This requires that we be able to distinguish between the evil and the wholesome, which in the Chan school means distinguishing between that which causes suffering and that which ameliorates it, and it requires that once we've made the distinction we pro-actively support and participate in that which is wholesome and withdraw our support from and participation in that which is evil.

And so it is that I take this opportunity to point my entirely subjective finger at the proliferation of that which seems to be hastening the end of the Dharma in this Dharma-ending age, and at the disturbing pace at which it seems to be crowding out that which was wholesome, or at least harmless, and suggest that we disinvest in the former and do what we can to resuscitate the latter, and to invite any of you who'd like to point out any of the innumerable bits of metastasizing evil or endangered good that I have neglected to send your observations to [chanmagazine@gmail.com](mailto:chanmagazine@gmail.com).



Photo by Kaifen Hu

# The Noble Eightfold Path

## Part One

by

**Chan Master Sheng Yen**

*In the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004 Master Sheng Yen gave several lectures at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York, on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. This article is the first of four in which Master Sheng Yen discusses the Eightfold Path as a liberation process. The articles are part of Master Sheng Yen's forthcoming book on the 37 Aids to Enlightenment. The lectures were orally translated by Dr. Rebecca Li, transcribed by Sheila Sussman, and edited by Ernest Heau.*

### Overview

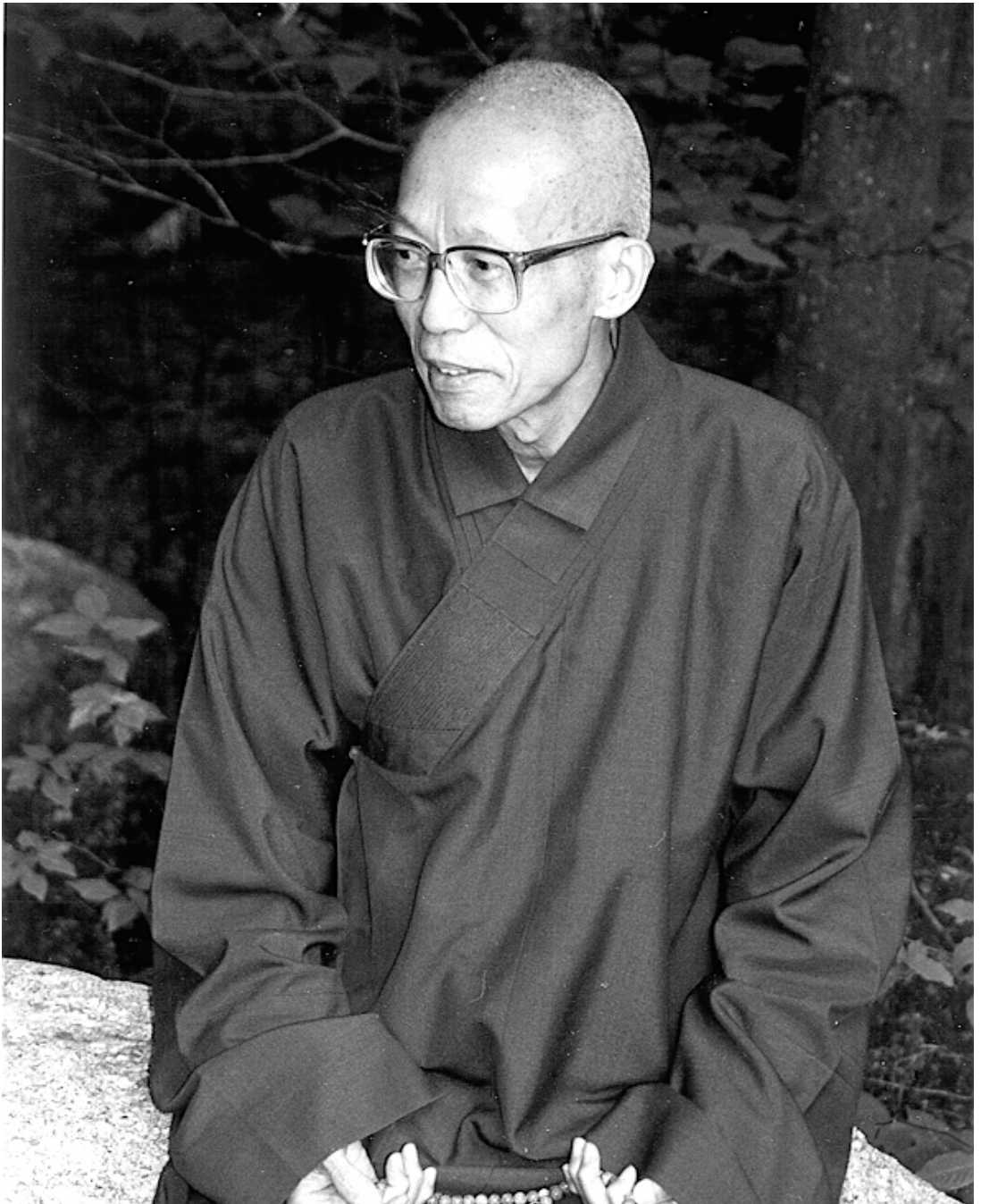
After the Buddha became enlightened the first sermon he preached to his disciples was about the Four Noble Truths. The First Noble Truth, the Buddha said, is that suffering is a fact of sentient existence; the Second Noble Truth is that the origin of suffering is people having wrong views — that is to say, are afflicted by desire, aversion, and ignorance; the Third Noble Truth is that it is possible to bring an end to suffering; and the Fourth Noble Truth is that to cease suffering one should practice the Noble Eightfold Path. To follow the Noble Eightfold Path therefore means practicing to liberate oneself from suffering. In the order given by the Buddha, the Noble Eightfold Path consists of Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

If the way out of suffering is to practice the Eightfold Noble Path, how should we under-

stand suffering? Actually, the Sanskrit “*dukkha*” is conventionally translated as “suffering” but the term is nuanced and also connotes ideas of “unease,” “disquietude,” and “dissatisfaction.” With that in mind, we can say that Buddhism recognizes three kinds of suffering. These are not three categories of suffering separate from each other, but rather, they are three aspects of the experience of suffering as a whole.

The first kind is the suffering of suffering, the second is the suffering of change, and the third is called pervasive suffering. The suffering of suffering consists of everything that we experience as part of being born, getting old, getting sick, and dying. In this sense to suffer is to experience samsara, the cycle of birth and death. This does not mean that in any given life there is no joy and happiness. Sentient beings can know ordinary happiness and joy by satisfying the five senses. On another level they can also experience the meditative bliss of samadhi. One who cultivates the Noble





Eightfold Path can enjoy these kinds of happiness and still not attain liberation. Why? Because the happiness and joy derived from the senses and from samadhi are transitory. Because they cannot be maintained forever the ultimate result is still suffering. Suffering which results from the inherent impermanence of things is called the suffering of change. Underlying both the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change is pervasive suffering; it is a fundamental feature of sentient existence, so long as liberation has not been attained.

When someone praises you and you feel happy, is that true and lasting? On the other hand, if someone scolds you, is that also true and lasting? A treat of ice-cream can be delicious but if you ate one scoop after another, at some point would your joy turn to repulsion? So the same experience may lead to joy

as well as dissatisfaction. Once in Taiwan a lay disciple brought me some loquats. I ate some of the fruit and told him it was delicious. The next time he brought ten pounds of the fruit saying, "Shifu, you seem to enjoy this fruit so much. Next time I will bring you more." If I tried to eat it all, would this be joy or suffering?

The Buddha did not deny that there is happiness in the world. However, the happiness and joy from sensual pleasure is brief and transitory. The bliss of samadhi during meditation can last for a while but however deep the samadhi, one inevitably comes out of it; the samadhi will fade and the joy with it. Often, one is left with craving for more. This is an example of pervasive suffering — the subtle vexation that underlies the most blissful of feelings.



Photo by Kaifen Hu

## The Middle Way

To experience true happiness we need to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path and attain liberation from vexations. The best kind of happiness comes when one is free from ever-conflicting thoughts and emotions. At that time whatever happens in the environment, favorable or not, one's body and mind will not be affected. One sees clearly that things are just the way they are. One no longer has a selfish need to benefit oneself. Both the burden of mind and the burden of body have been lifted. When the mind is without burdens, it is very clear and responds to events appropriately and without vexation. When you are free of the burden of the body then that is lasting samadhi. This is the joy of liberation.

When the Buddha's father died, Shakyamuni returned home to take care of the funeral. He also helped carry his father's body to the ritual ceremony. Do you think that at that time Shakyamuni Buddha's mind was filled with grief and suffering? If he had no grief in his heart, why did he go back to help with the funeral?

Student: Shakyamuni had sorrow but without suffering.

Sheng Yen: Shakyamuni was a completely liberated being and therefore a buddha. But when his father died Shakyamuni still needed to fulfill his responsibility as a son. Though Shakyamuni's father had heard the Dharma from his own son he was not yet liberated. But Shakyamuni knew that his father would eventually become liberated. For these reasons there was no need for him to feel grief.

In India at the Buddha's time, there was a belief that the purpose of life was to enjoy as much sensual pleasure as possible. Sensual pleasures are of course enjoyed through the sense faculties — the eyes, ears, nose, palate, and touch. This ability to experience pleasure through the senses gives rise to the five desires. In this hedonistic view, failing to fulfill the five desires results in unhappiness. In reality, however much we may crave and pursue pleasure, we can never completely satisfy the five desires. Therefore, the result of constantly pursuing pleasure is vexation, not happiness and joy. Furthermore, this behavior ultimately causes conflict with others, producing more vexation. The sutras describe this kind of conduct as that of ordinary beings not sages or saints.

Also prevalent in India at the time was the opposite view that to become pure one needs to experience extreme pain and suffering — the more pain, the purer one becomes. Some ascetics had themselves buried in the earth up to their necks; others would immerse themselves under water for long periods of time, or hang upside down from a tree. Even today, in Mainland China I saw one person who wore a very heavy coat in the summer but very little in the winter in order to inflict suffering on his body. In Taiwan, I saw another person staring directly into the sun for hours. I asked him, "Why are you doing this?" He said that by staring at the sun he was burning off his bad karma. If people like these think they can gain liberation through asceticism, then a furry dog running around on hot summer days can get liberated too.

Shakyamuni Buddha said that if following the path means suffering, the fruit will inevitably be more suffering. Inflicting suffering and pain on oneself will not result in liberation. Furthermore, the pains ascetics inflict on themselves are not necessarily connected to the vexations they are trying to eliminate, and inflicting pain on one's body does not necessarily ease mental suffering. The Buddha therefore taught that practicing the Eightfold Noble Path is the Middle Way between the opposing extremes of hedonism and asceticism. One needs the basic necessities of life in order to practice, but on the other hand one should not merely pursue pleasure for its own sake either. So, if one is guided by the Noble Eightfold Path one will naturally practice the Middle Way. In other words as long as the mind does not attach to this position or that, there is no discriminating self. But when one says, "I am neither on the right nor on the left, I am in the middle," there is still discrimination and therefore a self.

The ultimate goal of the Path is to realize no-self, which is the second meaning of the Middle Way. Whatever one experiences, thinks, says, or does, as long as a self is involved, one has not attained liberation. What then does realizing no-self mean? It means that

although everything exists, self-centered attachment does not.

Some Buddhists see practicing the Noble Eightfold Path as belonging only to the early Buddhism of the Nikaya scriptures. However, the later Mahayana scriptures do indeed advocate the Noble Eightfold Path. For example, the *Amitabha Sutra*, the *Vimilakirtinirdesha Sutra*, the *Lankavatara Sutra*, as well as the *Prajnaparamita Shashtra* all advocate the Noble Eightfold Path as a foundation of the bodhisattva path. That is to say, the Noble Eightfold Path is correct Buddhadharma from the Mahayana point of view.

In early Nikaya Buddhism the focus was on liberating oneself from the suffering and entering nirvana, after which one need not return to the realm of sentient beings. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that the liberation path and the bodhisattva path

are separate. In fact, a proper understanding would be that they are two necessary stages of practice. A practitioner of the liberation path may become an arhat and remain in nirvana for a period of time, but realizing that there are sentient beings that need help, these liberated beings will transform to the Mahayana path and engage in work to benefit sentient beings. Indeed, the *Saddharma-*

“THE LOTUS SUTRA SAYS THAT ONE WHO HAS JUST ENTERED NIRVANA IS LIKE AN INTOXICATED PERSON WHO IS NOT AWARE THAT THERE ARE SENTIENT BEINGS WHO ARE STILL SUFFERING. HOWEVER, THESE LIBERATED BEINGS EVENTUALLY GIVE RISE TO BODHI-MIND AND ENGAGE IN THE WORK OF DELIVERING SENTIENT BEINGS BY TREADING THE BODHISATVA PATH.”

*pundarika* (Lotus) *Sutra* says that one who has just entered nirvana is like an intoxicated person who is not aware that there are sentient beings who are still suffering. However these liberated beings eventually become aware that they should help sentient beings. At that time, they will give rise to bodhi-mind and engage in the work of delivering sentient beings by treading the bodhisattva path.

Once I met a man who told me, “Shifu, practicing the Mahayana path is too much work. It involves helping and taking care of other people. I’m very selfish and I really don’t have that much time. So, could you teach me the liberation path so that I can free myself from suffering and vexations?”

I asked him, “Do you have a wife and children?”

He said, “Yes, I do, but that is precisely my point. My family is very annoying and irritating, and that’s why I want to gain liberation.”

I asked him, “If you became liberated would you still keep your family?”

“Of course I would, but after I attain liberation they won’t irritate me any more.”

That is quite idealistic thinking. I told him, “It’s not that simple and you’re not going to get away with it easily. Even if you attain liberation and your family members have not, they will keep annoying and attaching to you. You are still going to have vexations.”

Just striving for liberation for oneself without being able to let go of everything in one’s life is not truly attaining liberation. A better ap-

proach would be to help sentient beings give rise to fewer vexations. In that way one can be joyful and happy, and as a result one’s family will not be a source of irritation. I told this gentleman that this is actually a very effective approach.

Another person often came to Chan retreats and was always very diligent in his practice. However, because of his intense focus on practice he neglected his wife and children. He even neglected his own career. As a result his family complained to me: “Shifu, our father has been studying the Dharma with you but as a result we no longer feel secure. We feel hopeless. Is this the kind of result you’re supposed to bring about in your teaching?”

So I asked this man, “Have you been studying Mahayana Buddhism?”

He said, “Of course, Shifu, you teach Mahayana Buddhism and that is what I practice. In fact, I practice very hard because I want to become liberated so I can deliver sentient beings.”

I told him that, on the contrary, the bodhisattva path teaches that one needs to vow to first deliver others before delivering oneself. That is the correct way to arouse the bodhisattva mind and practice the Mahayana path.

The Noble Eightfold Path is the essence of the Four Noble Truths in that it contains the methods through which sentient beings can be liberated from ignorance and suffering. In daily life people suffer from conflicts in their ideas, attitudes, and their emotions. These kinds of suffering may seem similar but they are different. While conceptual conflicts can be resolved and clarified through logic and

theory, psychological afflictions are not easily resolved through reasoning. In today's world there are many ideologies: some people praise the benefits of democracy; others argue for totalitarianism. There are also many faiths, each believing itself to be the best, and religious conflicts erupt into holy wars. All these types of conflicts are based on people having different worldviews.

Psychological problems, on the other hand, occur at a more personal level. People want to feel secure and gain as much benefit and happiness as possible. However, opportunities are not that many. People are seldom content: they fear losing what they have, crave for more, and regret what they have lost. As a result, they never feel truly secure. These afflictions affect our sense of self, our health, and our relationships; we feel dissatisfied, unfulfilled, and unstable. These are all vexations.

A while ago we had guests from Taiwan, a mother and daughter. They planned to stay at the Center for a week, but after just two days, they disappeared without saying anything. We became so concerned that we called their family in Taiwan. The family informed us that the women were not there either. What is more, they criticized us for not taking good care of our guests. Four days later the women they showed up again.

I asked them, "Where have you been?"

They said, "We wanted to have some fun so we went to Las Vegas. It was so nice there that we decided to stay for a while."

I asked her why they did not tell us they were leaving, or call us. She responded, "Well, I'm

not a member of the Chan Center, so why do I have to call you when I'm gone? We have to go now. Goodbye." This is an example of vexation in social relationships. We cling to people and things; we can't detach from them. I did not have vexations before they showed up; after they showed up I had vexations.

## Summary

The Noble Eightfold Path helps us resolve afflictions in the realm of concepts as well as emotions. The first two paths — Right View and Right Intention — help us deal with our erroneous views and are perhaps the most important because they are the foundation for all the other paths. Right View is accomplished when one accepts the Four Noble Truths as the means for departing from suffering. When we view the world through the perspective of the Four Noble Truths, we are able to actualize them in thought, action, and speech. Applying the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, we can then depart from suffering and achieve happiness and joy.

Guided by Right View, we can investigate and truly understand what is around us. This will allow us to develop Right Intention and thus be able to manifest purity in our speech and actions. Purity means not causing vexation to oneself or others through words or actions. When our conduct is pure, this encompasses the next three paths: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. Then, through Right Effort we diligently practice meditation to achieve Right Mindfulness. With mindfulness as foundation we cultivate Right Concentration, or samadhi. When we cultivate samadhi deeply we can give rise to the wisdom that leads to liberation in nirvana.

Thus, following the Noble Eightfold Path we can transform ourselves from suffering sentient beings into liberated saints with deep wisdom. The path is called noble because it facilitates our transformation towards sainthood and nirvana. Nirvana is the extinction of vexations, the cessation of the birth-and-

death cycle. In Nirvana vexations no longer arise, and not arising, they also do not perish. In the Noble Eightfold Path we practice the path of liberation while also aspiring to the bodhisattva path.

(To be continued)



Photo by Kaifen Hu

# Master Sheng Yen's Humanistic Buddhism in America

by

Professor Chun-fang Yu

*The following is the text of an address given by Prof. Chun-fang Yu, Sheng Yen Professor of Chinese Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, on the occasion of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Chan Meditation Center on May 18 of this year.*

We are gathered here today to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Dharma Drum Mountain Chan Center. Those of us who studied with Master Sheng Yen in the 1970's regarded him as primarily a Chan master and the Chan Center as a place where we practiced sitting, listened to Master Sheng Yen's Dharma talks and had a delicious vegetarian meal each Sunday. This was also the place where Master Sheng Yen personally directed intensive Chan retreats four times each year. The Chan Center has evolved over the years, just as its parent organization, Dharma Drum Mountain, has since its founding in Taiwan in 1990. Master Sheng Yen is known in Taiwan not only as a Chan master and Buddhist educator, but also as a most successful advocate of Humanistic Buddhism. What is the relationship between Chan meditation, Buddhist education and Humanistic Buddhism? In other words, since Humanistic

Buddhism is a distinctive feature of the Chinese Buddhism practiced in Taiwan, what is its relevance in America?

The term Humanistic Buddhism, or Buddhism for the Human World, was first used by Master Taixu (1889-1947), who promoted monastic education and reform. Traditionally Buddhist clergy served as religious professionals who performed rituals for the dead. Many people came into contact with Buddhist monks only when they had funeral or mortuary services performed for their dead ones in the temples. Therefore, for people who did not understand Buddhism, they came to identify Buddhism with death and the denial of any connection with the concerns of the world. Buddhists were regarded as passive and unable to make any contribution to society. This was of course a caricature. Humanistic Buddhism stresses the positive world-affirming



Photo by Carol Fong



spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, symbolized by the great compassion of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

There are some similarities between Humanistic Buddhism and what is called “engaged” Buddhism. For instance, both emphasize a Buddhist’s personal responsibility to social justice, human rights, protection of the environment and service to the poor and disadvantaged. However, the Humanistic Buddhism taught by Master Sheng Yen has a very profound spiritual dimension. It envisions a total transformation of the society and the world based on a total transformation of the individual. In this regard, the outward engagement with the society is based firmly on personal cultivation. To put it in a different way, when someone is truly spiritual, s/he manifests the great compassion by serving humanity and improving the natural and social environment.

The mission of Dharma Drum Mountain is, as Master Sheng Yen has pointed out, to “elevate the moral character of the people and

to establish a pure land on earth.” These two phrases clearly explain why he believes that Buddhism is for humanity. Compared with Chinese culture, American culture has always prized individualism. When Buddhist teachers arrived in America after the Second World War, Americans were attracted to Buddhism, be it Japanese Zen, Chinese Chan, or Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, because they found that it offered them a personal and experiential engagement with religion that was often lacking in the institutional religions in which they were brought up. The American encounter with Buddhism has always privileged the practitioner’s individual experience over Buddhism’s doctrines, rituals or devotional practices. The danger of this is twofold: first of all, this is a skewed picture of what Buddhism is, and secondly, by privatizing Buddhism, one deprives oneself of benefitting from the rich tradition in its full glory. Buddhism is not just a religion but also a culture. Meditation is very important in Buddhism, but Buddhism is not exhausted by meditation. In Buddhism, we speak of the threefold training in morality, meditation and wisdom. The three cannot be separated from each other. Morality provides the foundation for meditation which results in wisdom. The wisdom thus achieved in turn deepens the meditator’s compassion which is true morality, as it issues forth from free will and thus is not compulsory.

Master Sheng Yen is a tireless educator and a consummate teacher. This is something that those of us who were fortunately enough to study with him quickly noticed. In his autobiography and many writings, he describes his great tribulations in gaining education himself. Since the reason for the decline of Buddhism in late imperial times was the lack of education of the monks, the key to reviv-

ing Buddhism was through education of the clergy. Education is also the most effective way to implement Humanistic Buddhism. In the Buddhist tradition, only monks had the right to teach Buddhism and to guide meditation. But Master Sheng Yen says that it is the duty of all Buddhists, both monastic and lay, to teach Buddhism. After a person has undergone training in lecturing, meditation, and other activities, s/he is qualified to carry out the work of spreading the Buddha Dharma through leading meditation, lecturing on the sutras, or teaching. He places equal emphasis on the role of the laity as on that of the clergy. Indeed, those who have participated in the teacher training program with Jimmy Yu are all lay people. He is outstanding in another aspect: in his many writings and talks, he gives detailed instructions on how to manage marital relationships, how to deal with juvenile delinquency, drug use, children of divorced parents, caring for the old and sick and so on. No human problem is too trivial or insignificant for his concern. In Taiwan, under Master Sheng Yen's leadership, the Dharma Drum Mountain members have organized into voluntary groups to go and chant the Buddha's name by the side of the dying. Dharma Drum pioneered collective Buddhist wedding ceremonies, collective Buddhist birthday parties for senior citizens, and collective Buddhist funeral services. They conduct training classes for school teachers, run Buddhist summer camps for middle school, high school, and college students, and hold days of cleaning the environment. These are just some examples of how Humanistic Buddhism has served as the driving force in community building.

Dharma Drum Mountain is a success story in Taiwan. In a short time of eighteen years, it

has become a huge complex consisting of a research institute for Buddhist Studies granting higher degrees, the only government-accredited Buddhist institute in Taiwan, a college for monks, a monastery, a first-rate library and a conference center. In the near future there will also be a university. In the meantime, Dharma Drum Mountain is a global organization having chapters in many countries. When Master Sheng Yen came to New York in 1976, he did not want to follow the usual pattern of providing spiritual guidance only to the Chinese immigrant community. Instead, he made a conscious decision to reach out to the American people by teaching Chinese Chan meditation. Many people, certainly including myself, became who we are today because of him. We learned not only from what he taught but also from his being the person he is. The flame we received from him must pass on. The best way for us to repay his kindness is to respond to his call for service. Although America is not the same as Taiwan, the problems facing us in this 21<sup>st</sup> century in the two places are not that different. Environmental degradation, familial and social disharmony, economic crisis all create a sense of insecurity and cause anxiety and suffering. We know that it is through helping others that we can help ourselves, for everyone is causally interconnected. But how should we do it? Perhaps Humanistic Buddhism has relevance today, here, in America. On this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Chan Center, it is indeed a good time to look back to where we have been and think about where we should go from here. I think it is for this reason that we are all gathered here to spend the day talking with each other. I thank the Dharma masters of the Dharma Drum Mountain Chan Center for giving me the chance to share my thoughts with you.

summer rain

rain on the party  
only brightens the spirits  
of the mad English

rain on policemen  
who question, question, question  
and don't spot the dope

rain on motorway;  
windscreen awash so all things  
blur into the flow

— frank crazy cloud



Photo by Jerry Roach

# The Wu That We Seek

## Retreat Report by Harry Miller

*In July of this year members of the Chan Meditation Center's Dharma teachers training program, under the direction of Jimmy Yu (Guogu), went to Taiwan to visit Dharma Drum Mountain and attend a retreat led by senior Dharma teacher Guoru Fashi. The following is a report of that retreat by Harry Miller, a longtime student of Master Sheng Yen and regular contributor to Chan Magazine.*

Steve,

You've been a practitioner in the Japanese tradition for many years and you're looking for a new teacher. That's why this letter is addressed to you. Tonight is the last night of a five-day *huatou* retreat and all of the retreatants are sitting in the Dining Hall. Our assignment: write this letter.

Since I've just been on a quintessential Chan retreat here in Taiwan, I wanted to give you some idea of this very specific but wonderfully universal teaching. The retreat was led by a great master, Guoru Fashi. He's short and sweet and wise in the Dharma and beyond. He is also very practical and direct.

I wish the retreat went longer—I'm just getting warmed up. Even in this short time a whole and complete teaching was presented and presented with great power and insight.

The retreat is self-contained in the Chan Hall building, including meditation hall, residence, and dining hall. No need—and no permission, for that matter—to go out. I'm a little tired and there is a flood of stories, teachings and experiences to relate. I'll begin with the method itself—the *huatou*—the deep ques-

tioning method that asks, "What is *wu*?" I've been practicing this method for a number of years, but I have never been so clear about it as I am now.

I know that you have already passed through "What is *mu*?" in your koan practice. In the Chinese tradition we don't frame it in terms of "passing through," although I know that manner of describing the experience is simply a convenient phrase that does not begin to elucidate what transpires between master and student.

We don't become one with *wu* as in your tradition. Rather we question it—very sincerely, as we were admonished by Master Guoru. We seek to know what "*wu*" is with everything we've got, but we have no idea what it is or isn't—a concept, a location, a can of soda, all or none of the above, nothing, anything, everything. It is not subject to intellectual scrutiny, we quickly find.

It is a method that takes a lot of faith. And this faith will lead to what is called the doubt sensation, which is not doubt at all, but a radical transformation of everything that is experienced.

At first glance it seems ridiculous to question what amounts to a nonsense word. We already know that in Chinese, it means “no, not, nothing.” But the *wu* we seek is neither word nor concept, although it’s not necessarily not a word or concept.

Back to the ridiculous: imagine if you went up to someone in a bar and told them you spent days sitting on your ass deeply concerned about the meaning of something that sounds like the first part of a Chinese noodle dish—they’d think you were crazy.

But now after practicing this *huatou* for some time, I see *wu* as a place marker, a gateway to all questions, and because it is a gateless gateway, it cannot be opened or closed, and yet it is always open and opening, closed and closing, and, of course, nothing of the kind.

It is a direct confrontation with the questions that Master Guoru so directly and succinctly articulated: Why were we born? Why do we die? What are we doing here? We have Buddhature—why don’t we recognize it? Why don’t we live it? How will this puny little meditation method help to save all sentient beings?

How do these questions compare with the central concerns of the hypothetical guy in the bar? He wants to know who’s winning the game he’s watching. He may hope that he’s sober enough to drive home. He asks, “Should I get a new iPhone? That would mean changing my phone service. What a drag!” He asks, “Why does my wife yell at me so much? How can I avoid getting fired from my job?”

Have I transcended such worldly concerns? Hardly. I’m even more aware of them now.

But asking the *huatou* dwarfs all these other questions. We are directly confronting what drives samsara and makes suffering seem to persist.

So, at the very least, the *huatou* is a distillation of everything that swirls within our minds. I see that the *wu* that we seek, the true *wu*, which is really nameless and unnameable, is attainable, or like buddhanature, is attained and simply, or not so simply, something that must be recognized. Bearing in mind that there is neither true nor false, then, there really is a *wu* to be what-ed. The goal is in sight.

The *huatou* no longer seems like an artifice imposed from without, some meaningless, abstract philosophical concept or mantra. It is something that is part of our life, has always been part of it, from the undying to the unborn, a key to unlock the prison of self. It is something of which we are slowly becoming aware. It is a mystery we can solve, a knot we can untie.

Your friend,

Harry



Photo by Jerry Roach

# The Past

## News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

### Chan Meditation Center Welcomes New Leadership and Staff

By Tina Kacandes

Four nuns from Taiwan will take over administration of the Chan Meditation Center in Queens.

We welcome Guo Chan Fashi, the abbess; Guo Chuan Fashi, the director, as well as two new staff members, Chang Yu Fashi and Chang Min Fashi. The executive committee at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan selected these highly qualified monastics to assume responsibility for the development and operation of the Chan Meditation Center in cooperation with the local lay leadership.

The new abbess, Guo Chan Fashi, has served the sangha community for 16 years. She has been in New York City for twelve months working on international development and refining her English language skills. Going forward, she will continue to promote world peace through her efforts at the global level, while overseeing all aspects of the Chan Meditation Center locally.

That may seem like a tall order, but Guo Chan Fashi said she is looking forward to her new challenges. The new abbess had worked as Shifu's secretary for 6 years, and in that



New Chan Meditation Center Abbess Guo Chan Fashi

capacity she routinely worked sixteen-hour days at warp speed to fit everything in. What she learned from Shifu and her practice of the Dharma was how to get it all done and radiate calmness and tranquility. She says, "Put all your practice into your daily life. You can handle many tasks, foremost of which must always be the state of your own mind. Strive to move ahead smoothly as if sailing a large ship. This enables those who interact with you to be more effective and at ease too."

Guo Chuan Fashi, a monastic for thirteen years, will be the Chan Meditation Center's

new director. At CMC she will support the abbess, supervising daily operations, leading meditation sessions, giving Dharma talks, and applying herself wherever she is needed.



New Chan Center Director Guo Chuan Fashi

She looks forward to sharing what she has learned on her path with the congregation here.

Chang Yu Fashi and Chang Min Fashi will work under the direction of both the abbess and the



Resident nun Chang Yu Fashi

director. Chang Yu Fashi has been with the sangha community for 5 years and is originally from Malaysia. She was responsible for the Youth Group activities in Taiwan. Chang Min Fashi was born in Canada and English is her first language. She has been a sangha member for almost two years now. Chang Min Fashi said she was inspired to follow the monastic life by a childhood story about leading a joyful life, and she hopes to spread that joy to others.

All of the nuns request the opportunity to offer themselves fully to the congregation. They hope to be approached without hesitation and are eager to hear what everybody has to say.



Resident nun Chang Min Fashi

We also wish to say a fond farewell to outgoing Abbess Guo Ming Fashi and outgoing residents Guo Chian Fashi and Guo Xing Fashi, and to thank them for their years of service to all of us at the Chan Center.

## CMC's Thirtieth Anniversary

By Virginia Tan

The Chan Meditation Center turned 30 this year, and the milestone was celebrated in a weekend of events on May 27-28 at the Chan Center.

The first day's celebration was for the Chinese-speaking members, and was attended by approximately 200. The morning began with taking refuge in the Three Jewels, followed by the annual Chan Meditation Center membership meeting. Participants, past and present, new and old, watched Chan Master Sheng Yen's video relating CMC's 30-year history. Shifu regretted his absence due to his illness, but used the occasion to pass the helm to the next generation, confident that his sangha and followers will face the challenges ahead. He expressed his appreciation for the progress that the CMC has made over the years with the support of his many disciples, and the hope that CMC will become an impor-

tant Buddhist center in the U.S. A number of long-term members concluded the day's event by sharing their experiences of how Shifu's teachings had impacted their lives.

The second day was devoted to the English-speaking practitioners. After the video presentation, Columbia University Professor Chun-Fang Yu, the guest speaker, talked about the relevance of Chinese Buddhism in America and Shifu's role. (The text of Professor Yu's address is included in this issue of Chan Magazine.) Two of Shifu's long-time followers talked about their unique karmic affinity for Shifu, and expressed their gratitude for his teachings:

Rikki Asher: "I met Master Sheng Yen (Shifu) in 1976. Buddhism helped me with my art, and to cope with family issues and become a more conscious citizen in the world. I was a diligent practitioner in the beginning, and then slacked off a few years later, although I never forgot how the practice had impacted my life. By this time the meditation center







had moved to Queens, I met my husband, who lived close to the center, and as a result, I picked up my practice again. This was very hard to do.

“The word ‘mindfulness’ was not popular back then, but Shifu taught us just that. He taught us the stages of meditation practice, going from a stressed state, to a focused, concentrated mind, to a unified mind, to no-mind. He gave us a map for right method, and the opportunity to let go of our strong attachments. He was and is a living example that through patience, we could develop tolerance; through diligence, we fulfilled responsibilities. He taught us that by taking up precepts, our attachment to self would lessen, and our lives would be more joyful. After 30 years, I am beginning to see how this works mostly off the cushion. *Practice is opening to each moment with calm awareness.* It is sometimes easier than I think.”

Nancy Bonardi: “All of us have been looking at the wonderful photos on the wall, and friend has said to friend, ‘Is that really you?’ Some of us are much younger and nearly unrecognizable. It is fitting that we can’t recognize our former selves because of time and

because of how much the practice has helped us change. But it is not just the pictures. As we meet here on the main floor of the Chan Center, we have our own memories of retreats and lectures and special events. We have been taught the benefit of group practice, and today it is just that: we come together by our common care and concern for this place and community. One memory I hold is Shifu sitting right about here where Rikki and I are standing. During a retreat lecture, he told us to be like little Shifus. I believe he meant for us to share our vows and the vision to spread the Dharma. May we take that image as souvenir of the day.”

The highlight of the day was the World Café in which participants in small groups were asked to talk about how they had become part of CMC, expressing themselves either verbally or pictorially. An Open Space discussion session followed; various suggestions and ideas were made for the betterment of the organization as a whole. The Abbot President closed the last day’s celebration by thanking all for their enthusiastic response and encouraging all to be of one-mind and one-heart to achieve common goals.

## **DDM Sends Relief to Twin Disasters**

Last May 3<sup>rd</sup> Cyclone Nargis slammed into the coast of Myanmar, devastating the Irrawaddy delta region, killing tens of thousands and leaving many more homeless in the rain without medicine, food or drinking water. While international attention focused on the resistance of Myanmar's military government to accepting foreign aid, a Dharma Drum Mountain relief team made its way into the country and began to wrestle with the tragedy.

Scarcely had they set up operations when a dreadful earthquake in western China brought much of Sichuan province to its knees on May 13<sup>th</sup>, killing thousands, leaving many thousands more without shelter, food or medical care, and scores of survivors buried in the wreckage of fallen buildings.

With remarkable logistical deftness, DDM then tackled the challenge of operating two complex emergency relief efforts at once in disparate areas with different challenges.

Here follow slightly abbreviated reports from the field of ongoing activities.

### **MYANMAR JOURNAL**

**May 3<sup>rd</sup>** – Myanmar is hit by tropical cyclone Nargis, sustaining the most severe damage in the Irrawaddy Delta region. The impact is catastrophic, with 95% of buildings destroyed, tens of thousands of lives lost and hundreds of thousands more displaced. Myanmar's military junta restricts access to information, and is extremely reluctant to admit international aid.

**May 6<sup>th</sup>** – As news filters through of the scale of the disaster, DDM promptly convenes a meeting to discuss the situation, and decides to dispatch a relief team to the area.

**May 10<sup>th</sup>** – Almost immediately, a 5-member team is ready and waiting to go, but difficulties securing entry visas to Myanmar delay their departure until May 10<sup>th</sup>. Because the junta does not welcome foreign aid groups, DDM can only gain access through the assistance of the brother of a DDM member living in Myanmar.

Prior to leaving, the DDM team meets to discuss their duties, and receives a flag from Guoguang Fashi who passes on to them the blessings and instructions of Master Sheng Yen and Abbot Guodong. Accompanying them are relief supplies totaling 172 boxes (over two tons) packed by volunteers from the Beitou District.

**May 11<sup>th</sup>** – Bearing 1.5 million dollars worth of supplies, the team touches down in Yangon around 11:30 in the morning. With the assistance of local Taiwanese businessmen, all relief supplies are cleared through customs.

Once through customs, they begin to tackle logistics. Local Taiwanese friends recommend they keep a low profile, in light of the government ban on group activities. They resolve, accordingly, to donate medical supplies to the local hospital to care for poor families. As for distribution of basic necessities, they decide to use the lawful distribution points to give out supplies.

**May 12<sup>th</sup>** – The team gathers its remaining supplies from storage and heads to a nearby area to assess the needs of the local popula-

tion. Their first stop is at Weisha Monastery where they find buildings significantly damaged, yet providing shelter to 34 monastics and 63 storm victims. They then proceed to inspect conditions along the banks of the river, where they encounter about 100 people in an area inaccessible to transportation because huge trees have fallen. Gradually they discover that most storm survivors are tending to gather inside monasteries, in groups of at least 100 people. Their needs vary, but the common denominators are food, clothing and water.

**May 13<sup>th</sup>** – In the morning the team delivers basic necessities for 200 people (water, oil cloths, freeze-dried foods) to the Weisha Monastery in Yangon. In the afternoon they take a boat to the monastery in Mula Village, carrying supplies for 100 people. Rivers as well as roadways are blocked by immense trees, hindering delivery efforts.

**May 14<sup>th</sup>** – In one hard-hit area where thatched huts along the river bank were crushed by gale-force winds and crashing waves, whole communities were swept into the sea. Most survivors have sought refuge in monasteries. The team distributes the bulk of its food here. By now they have also availed themselves of additional medical supplies, but these are very nearly confiscated as they endeavor to get past four military checkpoints where they are subjected to intense questioning; it is only after lengthy discussion that they manage to get through with their vital cargo.

**May 15<sup>th</sup>** – The next day the team goes to a small town called Dillin in the southern part of the country which has been very badly hit, where they divide supplies into three lots: one for the monks (about 200-300 people), one

lot personally distributed to 125 household victims, and the third given to a local organization for distribution to 250 household victims.

That evening the team discusses visiting the second hardest hit zone over the next two days, since the Irrawaddy Delta itself, which has sustained the worst damage, is still out of bounds to foreigners by order of the military. At this point, team members are exhausted; they have been working practically non-stop. Yet remembering the plight of the victims, they renew their efforts to press ahead.

**May 16<sup>th</sup>** – Upon learning of DDM's relief effort, Zhudao Fashi, a Burmese-Chinese university student in Taiwan, gets in touch with DDM and offers to assist in Myanmar. He boards the 3 a.m. flight to Yangon bringing DDM logo stickers and mosquito repellent as requested by the relief team. He has also raised some NT\$100,000 and handed the money over to DDM to help with relief efforts. There is some hope of sending an additional shipment of supplies, but flights are overcrowded by large numbers of Burmese anxious to fly home as soon as possible, and for the moment, nothing more can be shipped.

No sooner has Zhudao Fashi arrived in the early morning than he is off with the team distributing supplies in hard-hit areas. One Burmese-Chinese who assists in the operation says that local people have been informed that DDM has come to Myanmar from Taiwan bringing aid, which prompts crowds to turn out to help with the unloading and assembly of goods.

At the same time, the team is constrained not to allow too many people to gather, to

maintain the recommended low profile so as to avoid provoking the military. Thanks to the assiduous efforts of Burmese friends, the team's vehicle is now able to get through checkpoints without incident bearing the DDM logo stickers and the sign of a prominent local company; at last, the team is getting through to distribute supplies. Yet despite these hard-won gains, a formal document granting access to provide relief in restricted areas is still denied them.

Despite these hindrances, the team manages to go to the town of Dedye in Kyunzyanone and distribute rice, soy beans, coconut oil, sauce, soaps, tents etc. A monastery is selected as a distribution point where supplies are parceled out to 750 households representing some 2000 survivors. Items include 30 packages of rice, 5 packages of soy beans, 300 bottles of oil, 360 bottles of sauce, 360 soap bars and a case of tents. The monastery receives a sack of rice, 60 bottles of oil, 60 bottles of sauce and 40 bars of soap. Shortly thereafter, the team visits another monastery where 200 women have gathered, and each receives a bottle of sauce, a bottle of oil and a bar of soap. The women line up in an orderly manner. They sit in the square in front of the monastery and listen to Zhudao Fashi explaining the purpose of the relief team and conveying Dharma Drum Mountain's concern for their plight. The Abbot then receives a sack of rice, a sack of soy beans, a case of rain coats and 2 cases of tents. Finally, as the team proceeds past a refugee area of several dozen tents, they hand out mosquito nets and other supplies to the survivors.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>** – DDM relief team home safe after eight-day mission to Myanmar. Upon returning the team is debriefed by DDM's Social Wel-

fare and Charity Foundation (SWCF), which meets that evening to compile and study all relevant information and consider directions for future operations. They will continue to confer with the local Chinese community, gather the latest information and assess needs to determine the scope and feasibility of future efforts so that the second team can proceed expeditiously.

Team members continue to express concern regarding insufficient access to drinking water, rice, and medical supplies. Some of the main challenges they identified:

1. Shortage of rice. Due to severe flooding of farmlands, it is unlikely that rice can be planted this summer. This may result in a serious rice shortage in the future.
2. Clean water. People living in cyclone-affected areas generally consume water from under the ground. Water purification is thus crucial to prevent an epidemic outbreak.
3. Lack of adequate medical support. Most medical resources, including facilities and manpower, are concentrated in the larger cities. Victims in remote areas receive only minimal medical aid.
4. Continuation of education for children. The main problem remains the lack of funds. Although it takes only US\$5 to send a child to school, those living in cyclone-affected regions cannot afford this amount.

Although the relief team did not have time to visit more remote rural regions, the information it has gathered will enable DDM to draw up long-term plans for reconstruction. DDM has thus far collected NT\$2.6 million for its relief operations in Myanmar. With respect to

education, it has pledged to act in close cooperation with the local community and various government agencies to provide further assistance.

**June 2<sup>nd</sup>** – As the UN issued warnings that 70% of the victims of Nargis are likely to face food shortages, it pledged the assistance of the international community. At the same time, it beseeched the Burmese government to relax its control and let international relief organizations and supplies enter the disaster areas. Against this backdrop, on May 21<sup>st</sup>, DDM Social Welfare and Charity Foundation (SWCF) decided to dispatch a second relief team to the region.

According to local Burmese-Chinese, the disaster victims desperately need water purification systems and simple medical products. SWCF will organize 1000 first aid kits including bandages, cotton, iodine and ointment as well as 5 sets of water purification equipment for the disaster areas. Mandarin Airlines has agreed to assist with the transportation of one metric ton of materials. In addition, the DDM relief team will purchase rice and other food locally so as to save cargo space on commercial flights and avoid the inconvenience of handling such shipments.

As the Burmese government has balked at allowing international relief organizations and materials to enter Myanmar, much material has either been denied entry or confiscated outright by the government. Accordingly, DDM will establish close liaison with local Chinese and government agencies managing the relief effort to expedite the entry of materials into the country. The team will purchase whatever is lacking with the help of local Burmese-Chinese and volunteers.

**June 8<sup>th</sup>** – The second DDM relief team returns home. With assistance from the Myanmar government, the team successfully donated five water purifier sets to local shelters in the southern region of the Irrawaddy Delta. This will enable over five thousand people to enjoy cleaner water for drinking, washing and cooking.

Although the transportation of relief supplies to remote villages was extremely difficult due to the high cost of transportation and hazardous roads, critical supplies such as tents, medication, drinking water, mosquito nets, cooking oil, rice, blankets and slippers were successfully delivered to villages located around the townships of Wakema, Monjho, Pathein, in the southern part of the Irrawaddy Delta. Team members were proud to hear from local villagers that DDM was the first foreign humanitarian group to get through with aid.

At a June 1<sup>st</sup> meeting the Minister of Myanmar's Department of Social Welfare thanked DDM members for their help and looked forward to further cooperation in days to come. He affirmed that caring for orphans and the elderly, and the reconstruction of schools flattened by the storm were the priorities of the government, and that they were keen to collaborate with DDM on improving education.

**June 13<sup>th</sup>** – A set of water purifiers for cyclone victims donated by DDM's Social Welfare & Charity Foundation in Myanmar (SWCFM) was successfully installed and started up in Magyi Pin, a village nearly twelve hours by car from Yangon. They are expected to benefit some 3000 storm survivors.

Since Cyclone Nargis struck southern Myanmar in early May, SWCFM has dispatched three

relief teams to the region, where clean water has been a matter of paramount concern. The Foundation has accordingly donated a total of five sets of water purification equipment. Once official permission is granted, the four remaining sets are to be installed by the end of July in the communities of Laputta, Higyi Island, Kyon Ku and Pyin Sa Lu along the Irrawaddy Delta.

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### SICHUAN JOURNAL

**May 13<sup>th</sup>** – An earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale strikes China's Sichuan Province on May 12<sup>th</sup>, leaving many thousands dead, and DDM puts together a relief team at once. A medical team is recruited for immediate departure to Sichuan with relief materials worth NT\$12 million donated by the Runtex Group and DDM.

At Nung Chan Monastery in Taipei, Master Sheng Yen and Venerable Guo Dong preside at a special Dharma Assembly to pray for peace for the earthquake victims and the deceased.

The Chinese government approves two Taiwanese religious organizations, Tzu Chi and DDM, to dispatch experienced relief volunteers for humanitarian assistance.

**May 14<sup>th</sup>** – The relief team, led by Vice Abbot Venerable Guo Pin, includes three other Venerables as well as medical professionals from Taipei Veterans General Hospital. Volunteers from Shipai and Beitou districts of Taipei help to pack over a ton of relief materials. DDM also establishes a Donation Account; on the first day, donations top NT\$25,475,243. (US\$ 837,452)

**May 15<sup>th</sup>** – The DDM relief team arrives in Chengdu around 2:30 p.m. with over a ton of materials. Yu Xiaohen, Sichuan Province Deputy Director of the Department of Religion, greets them at the airport and helps to clear materials through customs. In addition to, food, medicine, drinking water and tents, the team will provide victims with emotional support and spiritual care.

In the evening, the team convenes to assess needs, drafting plans and schedules.

**May 16<sup>th</sup>** – Around 10:00 a.m. the relief team heads for Dujiangyan district accompanied by officials from the Religion Department to distribute relief materials. The team decides to procure emergency materials for victims, including bandages and tents, from the local market. They then leave Chengdu for Mianyang County, about two hours away by car.

DDM Abbot Venerable Guo Dong, presiding over the congregation in New York, together with other Venerables and devotees, prays for peace for those who have died as a result of Cyclone Nargis in Burma and the earthquake in Sichuan.

DDM learns that China's Yangtze River Express will join its relief mission by transporting relief materials free of charge on a 747 cargo plane from Taipei to Chengdu the following day. DDM springs into action, procuring some 15 metric tons of relief materials.

Donations have now reached NT\$65,189,720 (roughly US\$2,142,992).

**May 17<sup>th</sup>** – In the morning, the team leaves Chengdu for Mianyang County, distributing materials to over 2000 victims and orphans

at shelters in Zhuishui, Xiushui and Anchang Townships. Due to the remoteness of Mianyang County and a shortage of medical supplies, the team decides to set up a medical station in Xiushui Township.

Master Sheng Yen records a video clip to comfort quake victims.

Starting at midnight, nearly a hundred volunteers gather at Yun Lai monastery to pack some 15 metric tons of relief materials donated by TSMC, including 1,100 tents, 5,800 sleeping bags, 78 boxes of blankets, and 202 boxes of food. The materials are flown directly to Chengdu by Yangtze River Express.

**May 18<sup>th</sup>** – While medical staff remain at the medical station, other team members continue to survey devastated areas around Xiushui Township. Conditions are bad: most areas lack essentials such as drinking water and medicine. The team secures some emergency materials from local markets.

At the shelter in Yongan Township school-children from eight shattered campuses gather, and more than a hundred of them have lost all contact with their families. Due to a lack of cooking utensils, the children have been subsisting on raw freeze-dried food. The team promptly purchases cooking equipment so the students can cook their food.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>** – Facing numerous difficulties and acting alone, the DDM relief team has been providing food and medical attention for three days while awaiting other relief teams. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, the People's Liberation Army begins to arrive and joins medical relief efforts.

Medical observers have been logging numerous cases of diarrhea among survivors. By

now, DDM in Taiwan is working with the Taipei County Health Department and other experts on infectious diseases to field a plan to prevent the outbreak of epidemics.

Venerable Changyue, a physician, leads the children in cleaning up the toilets in various refugee centers, teaching them the importance of maintaining a hygienic environment. Venerable Changfa, an experienced social worker, encourages the children to draw pictures of their hopes and wishes for the future, sharing stories in their pictures with tears and laughter to ease their distress, helping to revive their hopes and mitigate the trauma they have been enduring.

**May 20<sup>th</sup>** – Upon learning that survivors in Xiushui have no drinking water because their water tower was completely destroyed in the quake, team leader Venerable Guo Pin donates US\$100,000 on behalf of DDM for reconstruction of the water tower and other water purification equipment. Religion department officials fly in from Beijing and gratefully accept the donation. Survivors, moved by this generosity, offer their services as volunteers.

**May 24<sup>th</sup>** – As the first medical team withdraws on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, Venerable Guo Pin opts to stay on with five others. Their efforts have been warmly praised by the government, and local people have shown deep appreciation, forming close ties with their helpers. A second team led by Dr. Pan Wenzhong is to arrive at the disaster zone on May 24<sup>th</sup> to provide ongoing care. The members of this second team have extensive experience in emergency relief, covering pediatrics, gynecology, surgery and general medicine.

Beyond basic care, it is becoming evident that there is a growing need to help survivors cope

with loss. Increasing numbers are exhibiting signs of trauma and severe depression, thus, an emerging priority is to address these needs.

**July 3rd** – Dharma Drum Mountain Social Welfare and Charity Foundation (DDMSWCF) has dispatched its fourth relief team to the region hit by last May's earthquake in China's Sichuan province. Quake survivors gave a warm welcome to the team, which consists of medical personnel and members of Dharma Drum Youth Buddhist Society. DDYBS members eagerly pitched in along with monks and DDM medical staff, helping to set up tents and assisting the elderly with medical prescriptions. Some cared for orphans while others took on the role of tutors, helping school children with their studies. Every member of the relief team has made a splendid contribution in Sichuan province. Venerable Guo Pin and Venerable Chang Di instructed them to practice mindfully and compassionately in the present moment, summing up their dedicated efforts in the phrase, "Busy but happy, tired but joyful."

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## **Two Masters Emphasize Value and Meaning of Life**

On June 14, Venerable Master Sheng Yen met with Cardinal Paul Shen Kuo-His S.J., of Taiwan's Catholic community. It was their first direct dialogue, held at Taipei's National Chengchi University, and focused on "Regeneration and Cloning—Scientific Breakthroughs and Religious Concerns."

They agreed that life is made up of birth, aging, sickness and death, that this whole pro-

cess is transient and inevitable, and that once we accept that life is ephemeral, we can live in a meaningful way. Both men noted that their religious beliefs give them energy and motivation to contribute to society and devote their lives to charitable undertakings.

Venerable Master Sheng Yen observed that, like China's ancient emperors thirsting for immortality, nowadays ordinary people also seek to live forever. However, accepting the natural transience of life is a key for religious practitioners whose main focus is on long-term spiritual development, and a key to living a meaningful life now.

Cardinal Shan Kuo-His cited an ancient Chinese proverb that stresses the value of life: If one does not know the meaning of life, how can one understand the meaning of death? If we understand this, even through illness, we will always have the energy and perseverance to live a happy and meaningful life.

In conclusion, the two teachers emphasized that life is transient and one can discover its meaning and the value of existence through religious beliefs. Death is but a part of the process of living.

## **Buddhism on the Boundaries of Science**

On May 31, Dharma Drum Mountain hosted a dialogue between Venerable Master Sheng Yen and American astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell at the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, Taipei. The dialogue unfolded around the themes of "Power of the Universe," "The Mystery of Consciousness" and "Enlightenment: Dawn of the Future World."



Dr. Edgar Mitchell stated that witnessing first-hand the infinite nature of the universe during his space missions stimulated him to reflect on his inner self. However, he could not unravel the puzzles in his mind using Western philosophy, so he turned to Eastern philosophy.

Dr. Mitchell found answers in the Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures about *samadhi* (deep meditative absorption). He said that the description of *samadhi* in Buddhist scriptures resonated with his spiritual discovery of self and the universe uniting as one, just as he experienced during one of his space missions.

Venerable Master Sheng Yen praised Dr. Mitchell's valuable discovery, noting that enlightenment could also be realized through deep reflection on the inner self in the process of life. He added, however, that if one wants to achieve enduring enlightenment and true liberation, one must constantly practice detachment.

Dr. Mitchell touched on the "Big Bang" theory, according to which the universe has no beginning and no end, and is actually in a constant process of change and creation. Sheng Yen concurred, saying that from the Buddhist perspective, the universe is in a continuing process of formation, duration, destruction and emptiness, as described clearly in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. He went on to state that both Buddhism and science show many similarities, although science was not equipped to interpret the highest spiritual levels of Buddhism. Dr. Edgar Mitchell agreed, noting that science is also incapable of explaining the creation of beauty in the mind.

On the issue of karma, Master Sheng Yen offered a fairly detailed explanation of the senses, discriminating between good and evil and the storehouse of karmic seeds that will carry over into future lives. Dr. Mitchell observed that although science could not prove the power of karma, he fully agreed with the notion of self-transcendence promoted by religion.

The dialogue ended with a discussion of the future of humankind. Dr. Mitchell said that violence will not resolve conflicts—only love and respect can bring true peace. Venerable Master Sheng Yen said that he remains optimistic about the future as long as there is someone calling for peace, love and tolerance.

### **DDBC and Inventec Sign Agreement on Electronic Dictionary**

On June 10, Dharma Drum Buddhist College (DDBC) signed an agreement with Inventec, one of Taiwan's leading electronics firms, to develop the first major electronic dictionary of Buddhist terminology, for the benefit of both Buddhist scholars and general practitioners.

DDBC President Ven. Hui Min said that this initiative could be of service to all Buddhist practitioners by providing an authoritative and comprehensive list of Buddhist vocabulary, including pronunciation, thesaurus functions and translation of terms into English from Tibetan, Pali and possibly other languages. As of September 2008, the electronic dictionary with its software components is expected to be available for free download from the Inventec website.

## 2nd International Conference on Contemporary Chinese Buddhism

On May 24-25, the Sheng Yen Education Foundation convened “The 2nd International Conference on Contemporary Chinese Buddhism and the Thought of Master Sheng Yen” at the National University of Taiwan. The two-day event attracted over 400 people, including some 45 scholars from the U.S., Europe and Taiwan, twelve of whom read scholarly papers. Five separate forums were held on topics such as Sheng Yen’s interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, his studies of the Buddhism of the late Ming Dynasty, approaches to Chan meditation and a number of other issues including psychotherapy and gender studies.

Columbia University Professor Jun Fang Yu gave a talk on “Venerable Master Sheng Yen & Contemporary Chinese Buddhism,” in which she underscored the impact of Sheng Yen’s ideas on the development of contemporary Chinese Buddhism, noting the added impetus gained through his use of everyday language for the assimilation of Buddhism into modern life, along with continuing concern for precept reform, social sustainability and related issues.

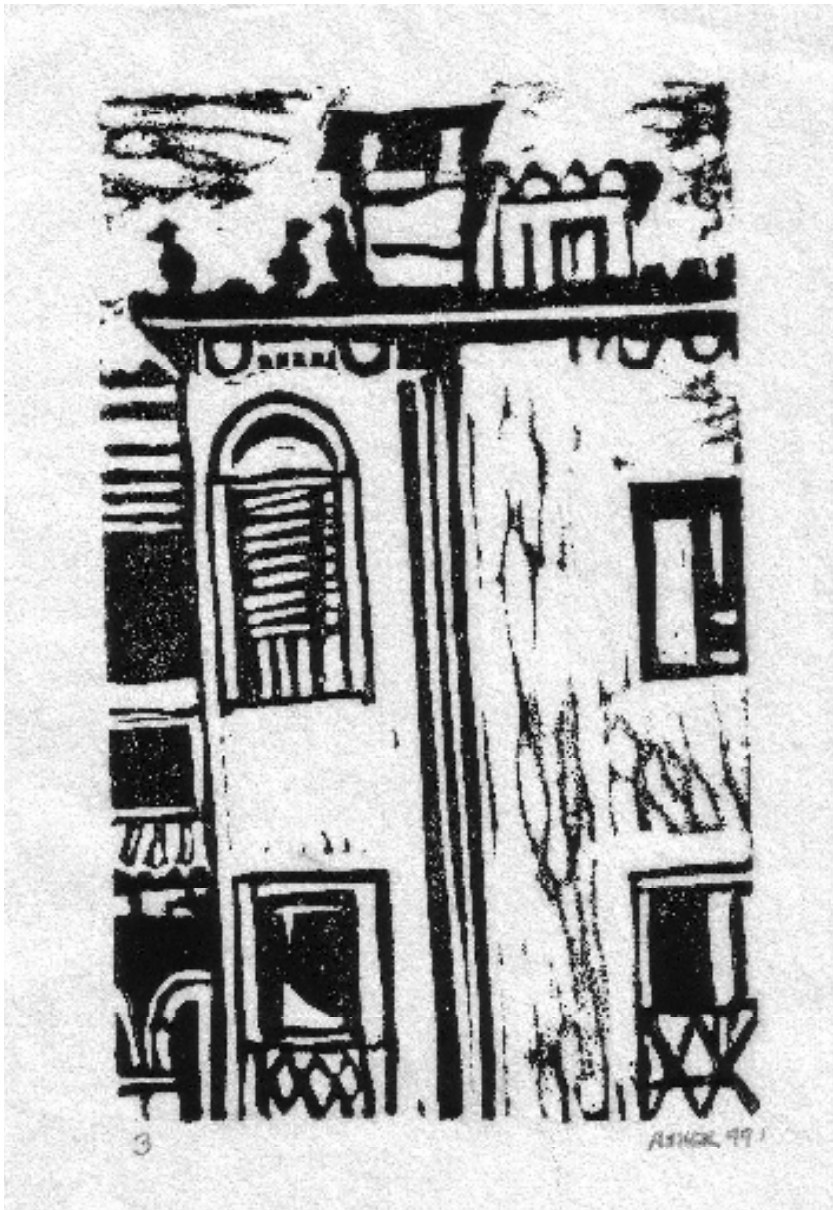
At the closing ceremony, Master Sheng Yen thanked the scholars for their contributions, emphasizing that any focus on his own thought was simply intended for the propagation of Buddhism, and remarking, moreover, that the aim was not simply to study Buddhism for its own sake, since merely transforming Buddhism into abstruse tomes on library shelves had little impact on human society, but that the Dharma research of generations of talented scholars had sustained the Buddhist tradition, awakening the

interest of growing numbers of people in our contemporary world who can make the Pure Land a reality.

## Interfaith Dialogue at Vedic Vision of New York

On April 27<sup>th</sup> Changhwa Fashi, Changji Fashi and Bill Wright represented CMC at an Interfaith Dialogue that was held at Vedic Vision of New York in Sands Point on Long Island. Vedic Vision is a not-for-profit foundation dedicated to promoting religious harmony in the community. At the meeting Bill Wright gave a talk on the history and basic teachings of Buddhism, and representatives of Jainism and Hinduism spoke about their respective traditions. After the talks the crowd of about 50 people enjoyed a vegetarian lunch and some socializing. The meeting then concluded with a lively question and answer period among the three speakers and the audience.





Wood-block print by Rikki Asher

# The Future

*Retreats, classes and  
other upcoming events.*

*To subscribe to our new e-bulletin of Chan  
Center activities, please send an email to:  
chanmeditation@gmail.com*

## **At Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY**

Phone: (845) 744-8114  
E-mail: ddrcc@dharmadrumretreat.org  
Website: www.dharmadrumretreat.org

*Schedule is subject to change. Please check  
the website for updated information.*

**One-day Retreat with Dharma Teachers**  
October 4

**Overnight Retreat with Chang Wen Fashi**  
October 10-11

**Five-Day Western Zen Retreat  
with Simon Child and Hillary Richards**  
Friday, October 17, 6 pm to  
Wednesday, October 22, 10 am

**Open House/Introduction to Meditation  
with Chang Wen Fashi**  
November 1

**One-day Retreat with Dharma Teachers**  
November 8

**Overnight Retreat with Chang Wen Fashi**  
November 14-15

**Three-day Retreat with Chang Wen Fashi**  
November 21-23

**Ten-day Intensive Silent Illumination  
Retreat with Zarko Andricevic**  
November 28 - December 7

**Beginners' Meditation Class**  
December 13 and 20

**Open House/Movie Night  
with Resident Teachers**  
December 20

**Ten-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat  
with Guo Xing Fashi**  
December 26 - January 4

## **Regular Activity**

**Thursday Night meditation**  
7:00-9:00 pm, led by experienced teachers  
Includes sitting/walking meditation, stretch-  
ing exercises, Dharma discussion, and chant-  
ing of the Heart Sutra

## **At Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, Queens, NY**

Phone: (718) 592-6593  
E-mail: ddmbaus@yahoo.com  
Website: www.chancenter.org or  
www.ddmba.org

## **Weekly Activities**

**Monday Night Chanting**  
7:00 – 9:15 pm Last Monday of the month:  
Recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas'  
names and repentance

### **Tuesday Night Sitting Group**

7:00 – 9:45 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma discussions, recitation of the Heart Sutra and social hour

### **Saturday Sitting Group**

9:00 am – 3:00 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation

### **Sunday Open House**

10:00 - 11:00 am: meditation

11:00 am - 12:30 pm: Dharma lectures

12:30 - 1:00 pm: lunch offerings

1:00 - 2:00 pm: lunch

2:00 - 3:00 pm: Chanting (the second Sunday of the month devoted to the chanting of The Great Compassion Dharani Sutra)

## **Classes**

### **Taijiquan with Instructor David Ngo**

Thursdays, 7:30-9:00 pm, ongoing  
\$25 per month, \$80 for 16 classes  
*First Thursday of the month is free for newcomers*

### **Yoga Classes**

Yoga instructor Rikki Asher is on sabbatical leave; classes will resume Spring, 2009.

### **“Zen & Inner Peace”**

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program, Sunday, 7:00 a.m., WNYE (Channel 25)



Photo by Kaifen Hu

# Chan Center Affiliates

*Local organizations affiliated with the Chan Meditation Center and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association provide a way to practice with and to learn from other Chan practitioners. Affiliates also provide information about Chan Center schedules and activities, and Dharma Drum publications. If you have questions about Chan, about practice, or about intensive Chan retreats, you may find useful information at an affiliate near you.*

## NORTH AMERICA

### USA

#### USA Headquarters

*Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA); Dharma Drum Publications; Chan Meditation Center:* 90-56 Corona Avenue  
Elmhurst, NY 11373  
Tel: 718-592-6593  
Fax: 718-592-0717  
Email: [ddmbaus@yahoo.com](mailto:ddmbaus@yahoo.com)  
<http://www.chancenter.org>

*Dharma Drum Retreat Center*  
184 Quannacut Road  
Pine Bush, NY 12566  
Tel: 845-744-8114  
Fax: 845-744-8483  
Email: [ddrcny@yahoo.com](mailto:ddrcny@yahoo.com)  
<http://www.chancenter.org>

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#### San Francisco

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## **Pennsylvania**

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<http://dallas.ddmba.org>

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Email: power26v@aol.com

## **Tennessee**

### ***Memphis***

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Email: dan\_tu@hotmail.com

## **Utah**

### ***Salt Lake City***

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## **Vermont**

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## Canada

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V6Y 2V4 Canada  
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Fax: 604-277-1352  
Email: info@ddmba.ca  
http://www.ddmba.ca

## Mexico

### *Mar de Jade Oceanfront Retreat Center*

*Chacala, Nayarit, Mexico*  
Contact: Laura del Valle MD  
USA phone 800-257-0532  
Mexico phone 01-800-505-8005  
Email: info@mardejade.com  
Website: http://www.mardejade.com  
Daily meditation; regular retreats;  
2005 residential period

## EUROPE

### Croatia

#### *Dharmaaloka Buddhist Center*

Dordiceva 23  
10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
Tel/Fax: ++385 1 481 00 74  
Email: info@dharmaloka.org  
http://www.dharmaloka.org  
Teacher: Zarko Andricevic  
Ongoing program of study and practice, including courses in Buddhism and Chan meditation, meditation group meetings, and retreats.

## Belgium

### Luxemburg

15, Rue Jean Schaack L-2563  
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secretary@westernchanfellowship.org,  
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http://www.media.com.my/zen

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### *Dharma Drum Mountain:*

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Saturdays, 2:00 – 5:00 pm at the  
Jiantan Group Practice Center  
<http://www.ddm.org.tw>

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## New Zealand:

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Auckland,  
New Zealand  
Tel: 64-9-4788430

## Australia:

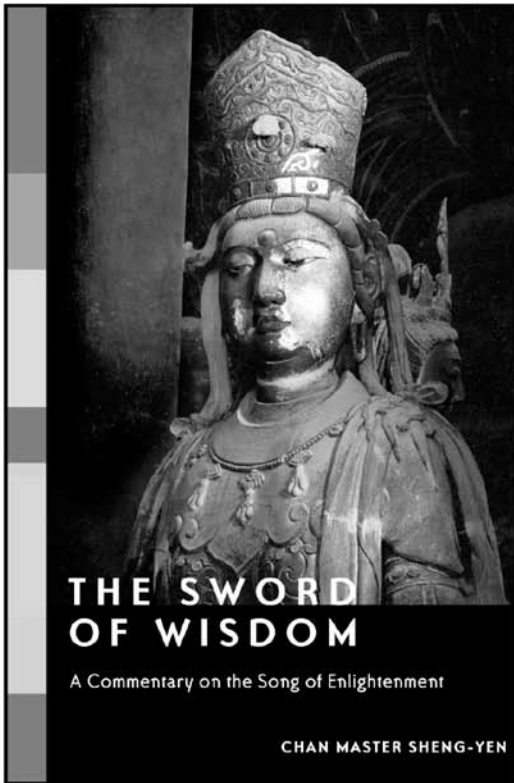
### Melbourne

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Photo: Kaifen Hu

Follow Master Sheng-yen through the Powerful World of Ch'an



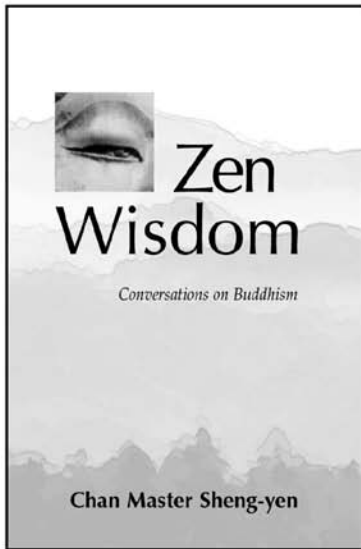
### *The Sword of Wisdom*

*The Sword of Wisdom* is a penetrating commentary on the Song of Enlightenment, a famous Chan text that speaks of proper methods and attitudes for practice. In this book, compiled from a series of lectures delivered during intensive meditation retreats, Master Sheng-yen gives valuable advice and guidance to those who are practicing Chan meditation. His lucid words offer fresh insight into a timeless philosophy that will be beneficial and inspiring to anyone who is interested in Buddhism.

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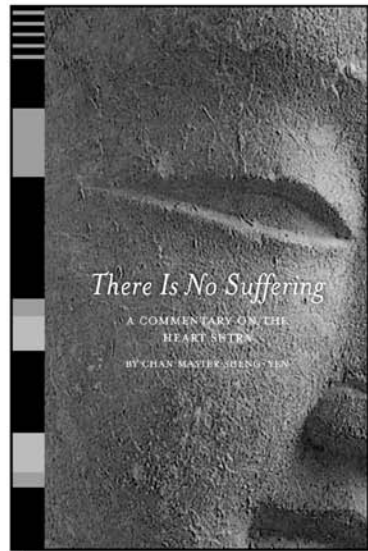


## Zen Wisdom

In *Zen Wisdom*, Chan Master Sheng-yen answers questions from his students with clarity and depth. Collected over several years, these conversations focus on the simple yet seemingly elusive principles of Chan (Zen) practice. Combining wisdom with knowledge of the contemporary world, Master Sheng-yen shows us that Chan and Buddha's teachings are still fresh and relevant in the present day.

## There Is No Suffering

*There Is No Suffering* is Chan Master Sheng-yen's commentary on the *Heart Sutra*. He speaks on the sutra from the Chan point of view, and presents it as a series of contemplation methods, encouraging readers to experience it directly through meditation and daily life. In this way, reading the *Heart Sutra* becomes more than just an intellectual exercise; it becomes a method of practice by which one can awaken to the fundamental wisdom inherent within each of us.



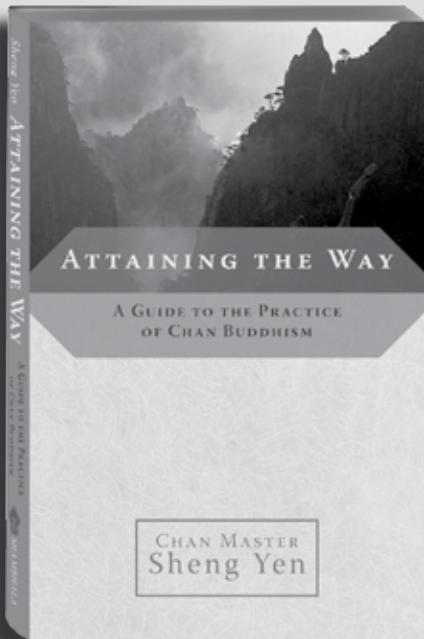
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# Shambhala

## ATTAINING THE WAY A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism Chan Master Sheng Yen

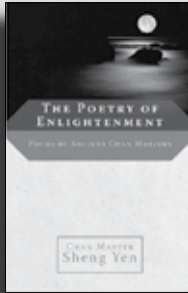


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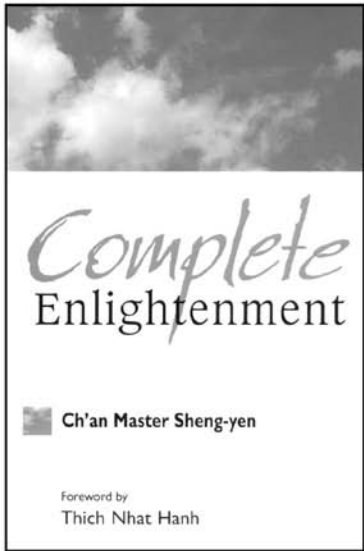
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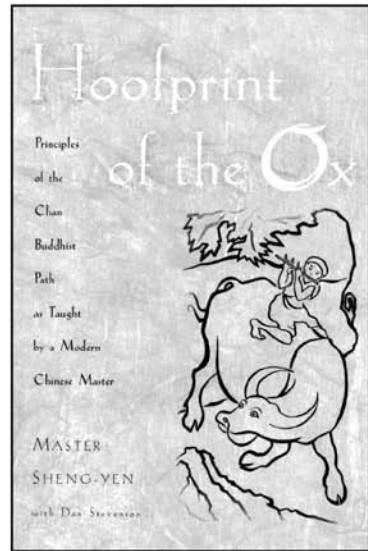
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An authoritative translation and commentary on The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment, a text that shaped the development of East Asian Buddhism and Chan (Zen). Please enjoy this beautiful translation of the sutra and also the valuable commentaries and instructions offered by this great and rare teacher.

Published by Dharma Drum Publications

## Hoofprint of the Ox

Revered by Buddhists in the United States and China, Master Sheng-yen shares his wisdom and teachings in this first comprehensive English primer of Chan, the Chinese tradition of Buddhism that inspired Japanese Zen. Often misunderstood as a system of mind games, the Chan path leads to enlightenment through apparent contradiction. While demanding the mental and physical discipline of traditional Buddhist doctrine, it asserts that wisdom (Buddha-nature) is innate and immediate in all living beings, and thus not to be achieved through devotion to the strictures of religious practice. You arrive without departing.



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