

Chan 禪 Magazine

Autumn 2010



“If you try to cut off thoughts and feelings, thoughts and feelings will defeat your efforts and come flooding through, and you’ll be desperately trying to plug the dike. Such an endeavor brings only despair. Inevitably you notice that you are thinking something as you sit on your cushion in zazen. Remember Mu at such a time. Notice and remember; notice and remember—a very simple, yet very exacting, practice.”

Robert Aitken Roshi
1917-2010
from *The Gateless Barrier*

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*Cover and table of contents drawings by
Rikki Asher*

From the Editor

Robert Wright writes for the New York Times, among other publications, about culture, politics, world affairs, and recently, quite often, about technology, and on September 1 he reported on having “spent a week off the grid – no World Wide Web, no e-mail, no cell phone, no landline.” Turns out he had spent a week on retreat with our old friend Narayan Liebenson Grady of Insight Meditation Center, and he discovered that “a week of silent meditation can help highlight how technology keeps us in its grip, and what some of the costs of our ongoing surrender are.” Wright went on to describe how the mindfulness he had cultivated on retreat illuminated his vexations once back in front of his computer – how, for example, his desire for the pleasure of *schadenfreude* had tempted him to click on the link to Paris Hilton’s drug arrest. Wright doesn’t make the mistake of blaming the internet for his wantonness, but he notes the range of emotions he experiences online, and describes the Web as “a medium so vivid and interactive as to offer a tool of seduction with unprecedented power.”

I hadn’t been tempted by the link to Paris Hilton, but I had clicked the link to Wright’s column, and being a moderate tech-resister – I use e-mail, read The Times online and do web searches, but eschew texting, tweeting, blogging and friending – I thought I’d post a supportive comment recommending some regular time spent in the here and now as antidote to time spent multi-tasking in cyberspace...but my attention was quickly waylaid by the first few posted comments, in which the terms “na-

vel-gazing” and “solipsistic ruminations” and other such perjoratives were used to describe meditation, and that by those who professed not to have ever practiced meditation nor to know anything about it. One contributor wrote, without a hint of disingenuousness: “I’ve never found meditation useful. Perhaps because I’ve never succeeded in doing it. I just fall asleep.”

What occurred to me at that point was that the message I was getting was indistinguishable from the medium in which I was getting it – that the net was not neutrally vivid and seductive, but that it was, despite being the greatest centralised repository of information ever created, actually a manufacturer of ignorance.

Just look at the little corner of cyberspace to which I had navigated. I was on The Times website, on a feature called “The Opinionator,” a kind of meta-column within which dozens of writers comment on as many subjects, and which then allows hundreds of readers to post comments on those comments, many of which are of course commenting on the previous comments on the original comments. What then is the resulting online content? A few hundred words based, presumably, on some form of expertise, followed by thousands expressing opinions of dubious provenance, and then thousands more expressing opinions of those opinions... it is the very structure, the very essence of wandering thought, created communally, and preserved electronically. One can only imag-

ine that if Bodhidharma had seen it, he would have spent his life looking for the plug so that he could pull it.

And it must be said that the example I choose is from one of the most intellectually responsible little towns on the whole cyber-planet. The Times actually moderates the comments it receives, not publishing those that are off-topic or abusive (or pornographic), unlike the literally millions of blogs out there for whom whatever form of outrage is daily grist.

Now, to be fair, as the day wore on and the comments piled up, (I was at this point telling myself that I was following the action just in order to write this column responsibly) some meditators chimed in, and some critical

thinkers pointed out helpfully that the web was neither good nor evil in and of itself, but was in essence a really, really big sheet of paper on which anything, good or evil, useful or bootless, could be writ...

...but what if that's not true? What if, despite the fact that "The **Tipitaka**, the Pali canon, is now available online," (according to Google) the web were a medium whose very structure encouraged poor mental discipline? We know that time spent in outer space weakens the muscles and softens the bones; does time in cyberspace do the same for the mind? Could that explain what seems to be the disappearance of clear critical thinking? And if so, could enough of us possibly spend enough time on retreat to make up for it?

Chan Magazine Is Going Green

Yes, Chan Magazine is going green. We will be launching an electronic version next year that will have a greater potential to reach many more people all over the world, save money and manpower, and most importantly, do our part to be eco-friendly.

Beginning in July of this year, **we are asking our readers to express your preference—a choice to receive either the paper or electronic version of the magazine.** Please select one of the procedures below to express your choice:

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Chan Magazine thanks you all for your loyal support and readership over the years, and we hope to be able to bring you an even more useful, and greener, magazine in years to come.

Metta.

In Retrospect: Early Lectures of Master Sheng Yen in America, Part 2

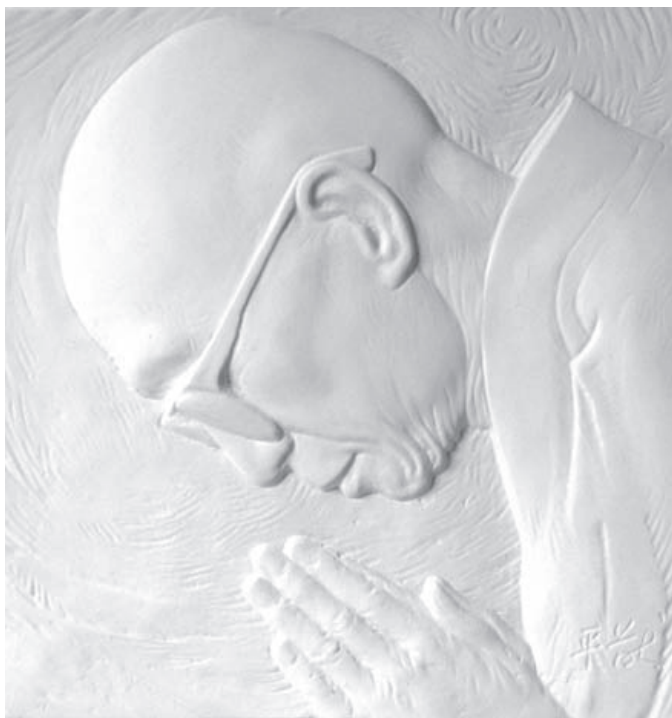


Photo by Ernest Heau of sculpture by Tommy Yang

In 1976, not long after he arrived in the United States, Master Sheng Yen began teaching Chan meditation to a mixed group of Westerners and Chinese at the Temple of Great Enlightenment in the Bronx, New York City. In March of 1977, Master Sheng Yen launched this quarterly journal, Chan Magazine. In November 1979, Master Sheng Yen also began the monthly called Chan Newsletter, which, like Chan Magazine, was compiled, edited, and published by his students. Each issue of both periodicals contained news and announcements, but the lead article was almost always a lecture by Master Sheng Yen on

Chan practice. For many years, Chan Newsletter was published in parallel with Chan Magazine. In August 1997, as a cost-cutting measure, as well as to cease redundant coverage between the two periodicals, Chan Newsletter published its last issue, No. 124.

In this issue of Chan Magazine, we are pleased to continue our retrospective selection of some of the 120-plus lectures by the Master that fronted each issue of Chan Newsletter. Most of these lectures were given in an informal class environment, though some of them come from formal Chan retreats. Besides their brevity, depth, wisdom and humor, in general they have to do with the attitudes and approaches that serious students of Chan should bring to their practice. Rather than being theoretical and conceptual, virtually all of the lectures share one all-encompassing theme: how to get on with the singular endeavor of becoming enlightened through the practice of Chan (Zen).

These lectures were edited for the magazine by Ernest Heau. The accompanying drawings are by Rikki Asher.

Chan, Meditation, and Mysticism

(From Chan Newsletter No. 26, Dec. 1982)

Some people think Chan and meditation are one and the same—that Chan is meditation and meditation is Chan. This is not the case. Chan is actually the stage at which one has progressed through the various levels of meditation experience, but has transcended these stages. If one only practices meditation and does not transcend the meditation state, one can at most attain a mind that is unified and unmoving. This is called samadhi. When a person in samadhi re-enters the dynamic, everyday world, he or she will very likely revert to ordinary mind. To maintain the samadhi state one needs to practice continuously. It would be best to withdraw from everyday affairs and go to the mountains. However, even when a person in samadhi returns to the world, that person will be changed by virtue of having experienced samadhi. He or she will tend to be more stable and have a better understanding of the world than those who have never been in samadhi.

The true Chan experience goes beyond samadhi. When one's mind reaches a very concentrated and unified state, the Chan method urges one to press on until even that unified mind is transcended—shattered or dissolved if you will—and one experiences no-mind. At this time the mind will not easily return to its original scattered state because it is not there. However, after a certain period one's residual attachments may cause the mind return to the ordinary, deluded state.

I describe the stages of practice as going from a scattered mind to a unified mind. This is the meditation state. But the final stage, called Chan, is reached when even this unified mind disappears. In Chan, even the unified mind is considered an attachment, though to a large self, as opposed to our normal small self. In the meditation state the self is limitless and unbounded, but there is still a self-center to which we are attached. Because of this attachment one still discriminates between the “real” and the “unreal.” For example, reli-

gious figures often say they alone speak the truth. These positions are based on their religious experiences and the convictions which stem from them, but they make a clear separation between the “real” and the “unreal.” This person will often feel they have left the false world and entered into a truer, more real kind of world. A feeling of opposition to the “false” world arises as this person has no wish to return to his previous state. So in this struggle to reject the false and cling to the real a kind of friction, or dualism, develops between these opposing worlds.

In Chan there is no bias towards the “real” or rejection of the “unreal.” Chan encompasses the totality of all things and sees them as equal and not different. Thus, characteristic of the Chan sect are the many stories and sayings, called gong’an (koans), that seem paradoxical or illogical. I myself have a saying, “Birds swim deep in the ocean; fish fly high in the sky.” Is this nonsense? Actually it’s very simple. Birds and fish are originally without names, why not call birds fish? Also, our lives are simply the way they are. What is wrong with them? What need is there to search after some real world? Why do we insist on seeing the world as confused and unhappy?

Each individual existence is real, but reality is not separate from illusion. Chan transcends the ordinary and then returns to the ordinary. But it would be deception to say that we already understand what Chan is. First, one must practice to attain a unified, concentrated state of mind, then cast off this mind and return to the ordinary world. At this stage one is truly liberated and free to roam in the world. To use an analogy, the ordinary mind sees mountains and rivers as mountains

and rivers. Next one reaches a state where mountains are no longer mountains and rivers are no longer rivers. This is the mind of non-discrimination. Finally, even this state is transcended and we again see mountains and rivers as part of the ordinary world. This is no-mind but it has embraced the real world. There is no “real” and “false” world.

So if one wants to compare Chan to mysticism, we may say that the practitioner has mystical experiences but Chan itself is not mystical. Rather, Chan is ordinary life. Actually, the mysticism spoken of in academia and books is not what I regard as genuine mysticism. Those who speak of mystical states but have never experienced them will of course think of them as strange and extraordinary. Perhaps when one first begins to practice meditation, or possibly through the practice of other religious disciplines, one may have such an experience. At this point one would feel one’s state to be different from one’s ordinary, practical life. But, this experience is still not complete and this understanding is still vague and not totally clear. One still regards the experience as mystical and strange.

However, when one deeply experiences unified mind or the transcendence of Chan, this experience is not viewed as strange or extraordinary. On the contrary, the experience is seen as real and true; there is nothing mystical about it. It is simply normal, ordinary life. From this standpoint one may say that the world as ordinary people see it could be considered strange or mystical, while the world as enlightened people see it is true and ordinary. So, I would say that in Chan there is no mysticism at all!

Compassionate Contemplation

(From Chan Newsletter No. 27, Feb. 1983)

The purpose of compassionate contemplation is to help us eliminate anger and arouse the desire to alleviate suffering in others. We practice compassionate contemplation with a mind of bodhi to help sentient beings free themselves from bodily and mental suffering, and if causes and conditions are right, to help them derive happiness from the Dharma, and ultimately to reach nirvana.

Here are some ways to practice compassionate contemplation. First, we contemplate how we tend to see sentient beings as beneficial or harmful to us, or as neither beneficial nor harmful. Therefore, we should contemplate our relationships to others to better understand how we can help them.



Second, we contemplate how we respond to others with like or dislike. We see that our feelings are often based upon the perceived benefit or harm we receive from others. If we understood that the mind is an ever-changing succession of sense impressions and delusory thoughts, we would see there is no reason to like or dislike our interactions with others.

Third, we investigate what really happens when we interact with others. We see that praise and blame are only sounds or vibrations entering our ears; a smile or a frown is only light rays perceived by our eyes. Just as the body is illusory, so are these external phenomena illusory. Once we realize this, we no longer need to give rise to feelings of like or dislike and we will treat all sentient beings as equal.

Fourth, we contemplate why sentient beings suffer, which is that they are ignorant of the true nature of the self. Up to now, there is still no true compassion in our contemplation. How can we feel compassion towards sentient beings that possess an illusory self? Not knowing why they act in certain ways, sentient beings don't know why they feel happiness or anger. They are attached to emotions and possessions and are fearful of loss. This causes suffering. They are not as free in body and mind as they imagine; they know they shouldn't do certain things but do them anyway, and this also causes suffering. Sometimes it seems we have two selves, each struggling towards different ends. Sentient beings are born, grow old, get sick, and eventually die. In the very short life span, each sentient being endures all kinds of afflictions of body and mind. Because of the suffering they undergo we should have compassion for them.

Finally, we contemplate sentient beings not as beneficial, harmful, or neutral, but as equals. We realize that our relationships with them are not fixed or unchanging. We cannot say that those with whom we now share affinity were not once our enemies or vice versa. There is no definite, unchanging relationship of closeness or adversity. Seen from the perspective of the infinite past, present, and future, all sentient beings have had some interaction with each other in the past, and probably will have in the future. From this point of view we can see all sentient beings as equal to ourselves, and can feel compassion for them.

Buddha-Nature, Sentient Beings, and Ignorance

(From Chan Newsletter No. 31, Aug. 1983)

Buddha-nature is pure and unchanging. However, if sentient beings are originally buddhas, how did we become impure and how did we fall into ignorance? When we say that sentient beings are originally buddhas we are stating a universal principle that everyone has the potential to discover their innate buddha-nature. We often hear the saying, “Anyone can become president of the United States.” This means that any native-born citizen of the United States has the potential to become president. But that does not mean everyone *is* president. Similarly every sentient being is capable of becoming a buddha but not every sentient being has realized buddhahood.

How did sentient beings originate in the first place? No religion or philosophy has yet answered this question to everyone’s satisfaction. Certainly it would be nice if we began as buddhas and did not suffer vexation. But

Buddhism does not address these questions of origin, and will say only that there is no fixed point in time when sentient beings were created. If we say that God made sentient beings, then many questions arise: Why did He create heaven and hell? Why did He create suffering? Why do sentient beings commit evil? Buddhism does not seek to answer these questions; it only tries to answer the question of why sentient beings suffer, and how suffering can be alleviated.

In one of the sutras, the Buddha tells the story of a man wounded by a poisoned arrow. This man begins to ask all kinds of questions about how he came to be wounded by a poisoned arrow. The Buddha said, rather than ask a lot of questions—what kind of poison was used, the lineage of the man who shot him, and so on—it would be wiser to remove the arrow and begin healing. Similarly, Buddhism tries to cure the disease of suffering, not to answer philosophical questions.

As to why we do not now have the purity of a buddha, it is because over countless lifetimes we have accumulated karma, doubts, and vexations that have clouded our minds with ignorance—in Sanskrit, *avidya*. Our inability to recognize our own original buddha-nature is a result of this ignorance. What then is *avidya*? Buddhism regards phenomena as occurring in time and space, and as impermanent and changing. These characteristics are interdependent. For example, a movement in space takes place over time, and both conditions result in a change to our physical and psychological environment. Something that is universal and eternal is unchanging. It is impossible for a universal to exist “here” and not “there.” When we say that sentient beings are originally buddhas, we refer to their

unchanging buddha-nature, not the local, temporary, and changing vexations they experience.

Let's use the analogy of space: space is originally unchanging but when enclosed by a container—round or square, large or small—the space seems to take on the shape of the container—it becomes round or square, large or small. Actually, the space itself remains unchanged; it just temporarily takes on the appearance of the container. Similarly, when the ordinary mind responds to a stimulus in the environment, its mental content changes accordingly and there is a potential for vexation to arise. This is *avidya*, a mental state of moment-to-moment change, which remains ignorant of the real nature of phenomena.

Ignorance has been present since time without beginning, causing sentient beings to continue the cycle of birth and death. But ignorance itself is not eternal, universal, or permanent. It is a space-time phenomenon that is continually in flux. When we use our practice to bring our minds to an unmoving state, *avidya*—in the form of greed, hatred, and ignorance—will not arise. In this state, our unchanging buddha-nature has a chance to be revealed. When our minds are not excited or tempted by the environment, ignorance does not exist for us. There is only buddha-nature.

Until we completely remove all ignorance, we continue to discriminate and use a mind limited by *avidya* to contain that which has no limits. When ignorance and its containers are removed only *tathagata*—the universal, unchanging buddha-nature—remains. Ignorance, on the other hand, has no original existence; it can only exist conditionally. If it

had true existence it would not be in a state of constant change.

The analogy of water and waves is used in the sutras to illustrate this point. In the absence of wind, water is still and calm but when the wind blows, waves form. The waves are the same substance as the water, but originally they did not exist. In this same way ignorance did not originally exist, until blown by the winds of the individual's karma. In this analogy, water is the ever-existing *tathagata*, waves are ignorance. Water can exist without waves but waves must have water to exist.

As I said earlier, when we say that sentient beings are originally buddhas, we are speaking in terms of principle and potential. If we say that Shakyamuni was the Buddha, and he died twenty-five hundred years ago, we are speaking of a buddha who took on the appearance of ignorance to help sentient beings. The real Buddha, the *tathagata*, is eternal. He never came, and he never left. The Buddha took a human form so that he could speak on the level of the sentient beings. Free from *avidya*, the Buddha only reflects the ignorance of sentient beings.

To reach the universal, eternal and unchanging, requires a great deal of faith and practice. On the basis of faith, people can say that they have met the Buddha. This is also true when we have gained some benefit from practice. However, when most people make such a statement, they only have an intellectual understanding of what it means to meet the Buddha. Unless your spiritual convictions are strong, you won't be able to directly experience buddha-nature. Most Buddhists seek a spiritual life but don't necessarily want to see the Buddha. Those who want understanding

will only see the Buddha as light or sound. Those whose religious faith is strong will definitely see the Buddha.

Thinking Without Purpose

(From Chan Newsletter No. 35, Jan. 1984)

To think means to investigate, to look into something, to analyze with reasoning and logic. First we should understand that thinking by itself does not necessarily cause vexations. For example, statues of bodhisattvas and buddhas and certain patriarchs, especially those in the Tibetan tradition, often have their heads tilted to one side, signifying thinking. But there is a difference between thinking with purpose and thinking without purpose. People ordinarily think with a self-benefiting purpose in mind. When there is a purpose there is a goal, and when there is a goal there is a self that wants to accomplish that goal. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, engage in thinking but without a specific purpose—people who are not self-centered will have no self-benefit in mind when they act.

The thinking of a bodhisattva arises out of unified mind, which we call samadhi. To have a sense of self implies that there is a conscious entity, the “self,” that is separate from the object of one’s thinking. In that state at least two thought-streams exist: the self and what that self is thinking about. With two thought-streams, one’s mind cannot be completely unified and one cannot enter samadhi. A bodhisattva without a self-center can abide in samadhi and still act without mental constructs. Does this kind of thinking still function as regular thought? By all means, but the thinking of a bodhisattva is more open, clearer, and suffused with wisdom.

It is not necessary for buddhas and bodhisattvas to think. They do think, however, when they speak the Dharma and when they help others. Mahayana Buddhism holds that buddhahood has a triune aspect: dharmakaya (the Dharma or truth body), nirmanakaya (the incarnation body), and the sambhogakaya (the bliss body). Thinking is not necessary for a buddha in the dharmakaya aspect, but an incarnated buddha does engage in thinking. What kind of thinking? An incarnated buddha who appears before human beings would of course use human thinking. The difference is that incarnated buddhas and bodhisattvas do not have specific ends associated with their actions, and they do not have a sense of self when performing them. Ordinary sentient beings, despite what they may say or believe, always have a sense of self.

While most of us are not at the stage where we can function without a sense of purpose, it is still beneficial that we understand that it is possible. This understanding is especially important in daily life, when we are prey to a sense of gain and loss, when self and environment come into conflict. At such times it is important to remind ourselves of *asamskrita*, the unconditioned state in which we can act without self-centered purpose. We will not always be able to do this, but we should still emulate the buddhas and bodhisattvas. When conflicts arise between self and others, or self and environment, we can reflect that we are caught up in our sense of self and our sense of purpose. If we can move towards *asamskrita*, then these conflicts may be resolved.

Samskrita, the conditioned state, involves a self. When there is a self, whatever we encounter will be in the realm of the six kinds of sense data, of which the sources are our

own bodies and the environment. Since the six kinds of sense data are based on phenomena, can thoughts be separate from phenomena? Even when we think in abstract concepts, we still have to use symbols which are, to the mind, also phenomena. That is to say, without reference to phenomena, we cannot think.

If we were to say that we must have phenomena in order to think, and that the spirit realm can only be reached through thought, we will arrive at materialism, the belief that phenomena are real. But the Buddhist scriptures do not lead us towards a materialistic point of view. The *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* shows that thinking arises only when our minds interact with the six kinds of sense data. We can turn this around and say that without the functioning of the mind there would be no sense data. For example, if you are in a sound, dreamless sleep, what exists in the world? It can be said that nothing exists. By the same token, when the mind is completely dull, as in a coma, nothing exists because the mind is unaware of anything. On the other hand, when the mind is completely clear and most acute, once again, it is unaware of the material world. Thus in these two opposing states—when the mind is extremely clear or extremely dull—there will be no awareness of the material world. The

existence of ordinary sense data, ordinary material things, is present only when the mind is in its ordinary state.

This line of reasoning leads to the view that phenomena exist only when the mind is aware of them. When the mind lacks such awareness, phenomena cannot be said to exist. So this is the opposite of materialism. Are we to

“TO USE AN ILLUSORY MIND TO SEEK BUDDHAHOOD WOULD RESULT IN MORE ILLUSIONS, LIKE SEEING FLOWERS IN THE SKY. THE FRUIT THAT COMES FROM ILLUSORY FLOWERS CANNOT HAVE MORE SUBSTANCE THAN THE FLOWERS THEMSELVES. THEREFORE IT IS USELESS TO TRY TO PROBE TO THE DEPTH OF BUDDHAHOOD WITH A SELF-CENTERED MIND.”

say that the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* leads us to pure idealism? The mind can function only when it is interacting with phenomena, including purely mental phenomena. If we posit that phenomena exist only when they are experienced by the mind, then neither phenomena nor mind really exists. If phenomena had independent existence they would not have to rely on the mind’s awareness of them, and if the mind had real independent existence, its functioning would not rely on the material world. Thus we can reject both materialism and idealism.

dependent existence, its functioning would not rely on the material world. Thus we can reject both materialism and idealism.

If we know that the mind is an illusion without real substance, to use an illusory mind to seek buddhahood would result in more illusions, like seeing flowers in the sky. We might go a step further and see the flowers blossom and bear fruit. The fruit that comes from illusory flowers cannot have more substance than the flowers themselves. Therefore it is

futile to try to probe the depth of buddhahood with a self-centered, illusory mind.

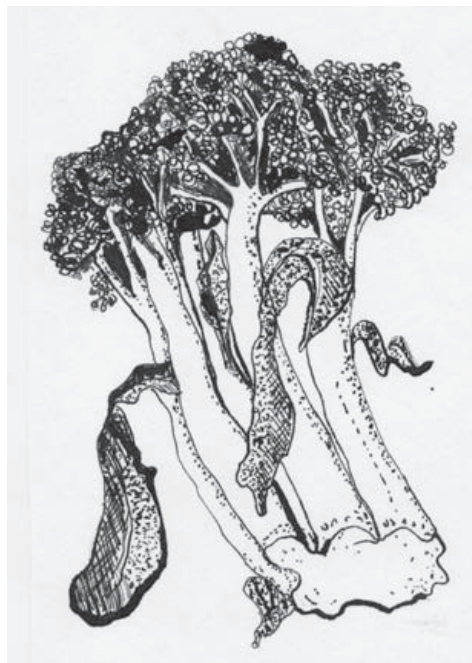
Sentient beings may aspire to buddhahood but approach it with self-centered attitudes, an impossible task. It is not easy to let go of these attitudes. To get results, a practitioner can summon extraordinary effort for a while, but it is very difficult to persist in this over a long time. Most people are not willing to endure untold suffering to reach a goal. The result is that they may realize that practice is not so easy. Ridding oneself of vexations is not easy, let alone becoming a buddha. In fact, some people develop more vexations after they begin to practice. At some point they may feel, "I'll stop for a while; when I am ready I will come back again." I have met a number of people who put forth a great deal of effort at first, but slackened after a while and ultimately turned from the path.

It is best not to seek anything from practice. The more we seek spiritual attainment the more we live in illusion, and the further we drift from seeing buddha-nature. Instead, we should maintain a calm and stable attitude and just follow the teachings of the Buddha, not concerning ourselves with progress or getting rid of vexations. Free of such concerns, vexations will lessen of their own accord, and we will make progress while being unaware of making progress. If we are anxious about progress, disappointment is likely, and we may become disillusioned and eventually turn away from practice. When we are free from thinking with purpose and have let go of self-centered mind, then complete enlightenment and buddhahood are possible.

Why Sentient Beings Are Sentient Beings

(From Chan Newsletter No. 37, June, 1984)

According to Buddhism, all sentient beings are originally buddhas. However, to sentient beings this seems completely contradictory—the buddhas are perfectly wise whereas we are profoundly ignorant. How did this seeming contradiction arise? The *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* tells us that buddha-nature and the ignorance of sentient beings are actually not different. Both have existed from time without beginning—ignorance is only a different form of buddha-nature. This is like ice and water—the same substance can be ice or water depending on its temperature. We can extend this analogy—the ice at the North Pole is frozen just as sentient beings have always been ignorant. But due to climatic variations,



some ice at the North Pole may occasionally melt, and similarly due to causes and conditions among sentient beings, some of them do realize their buddha-nature.

Ignorance and buddhahood, just like ice and water, are essentially the same although they may appear different according to conditions. The difference that we perceive between buddhas and sentient beings is but an illusion. This raises an interesting question: Buddhism teaches that sentient beings can become buddhas, but if buddhas and sentient beings are one by nature, what is to prevent a buddha from becoming a sentient being?

According to Buddhadharmā, nirvana and samsara (the cycle of birth and death) both exist and do not exist. They exist from the perspective of sentient beings because sentient beings are attached to self and cling to form and appearance. However, from the perspective of a buddha, there is no difference between samsara and nirvana because a buddha is not attached to form and appearance. But a buddha can manifest equally in samsara or nirvana depending on the needs of sentient beings. So, just as ice can melt into water, there is nothing to prevent a buddha from taking the form of a sentient being. This is what happened when the Buddha took the form of an Indian prince. But a sentient being who is a manifestation of a buddha is very different from one who has never been a buddha. The former have become sentient beings because of their wisdom, while the latter remain sentient beings because of their impure karma.

This impure karma is the result of attachment to the four kinds of phenomena that are mentioned in the *Diamond Sutra*: Self,

other people, all sentient beings, and life as a continuum. Each form of attachment encompasses a wider circle of beings. As illustration of the four kinds of phenomena, let us say that two young people are deeply in love. It is unlikely that today they will feel love for each other and tomorrow they will not. More commonly, people in love want to remain in love forever. They may have the attitude, "It does not matter even if we go to hell so long as we stay in love." Here we can perceive three of the four kinds of phenomena: The self who falls in love, the [other] person who is beloved, and the desired continuity of love throughout time, or life. What about sentient beings? A child may be born and the parents will aspire for it to have a career, get married, and have a family. Moreover, the child will probably aspire similarly, and so on through endless generations. This instinct to proliferate gives rise to sentient beings. So, all four forms of attachment can be generated in this example of two people in love.

I once asked someone if he wanted to become a monk. He said, "It is not that I don't want to become a monk, but my father would like to have grandchildren." So I said, "Well, why don't you first have a son, and then become a monk? After you have a son, you will have fulfilled your obligation." He responded, "Sure, that's what I'll do." But then I assured him that he would never leave home after he had a son. His own son would want his own children, so there will continue to be attachment. This is life for all sentient beings and it is without end.

The four kinds of attachment are but mirages arising and perishing through causes and conditions. Holding on to the phenomena as if they were real creates attachment to self.

But the ego by itself is hard to establish; it is through others that we develop attachments and these attachments reinforce the sense of self. Attachments can be directed mainly towards outer objects, relationships or events, or they can be mainly self-centered. There is a mayor of a certain city who is over fifty years old and has never been married. With no family, do you think that he has fewer attachments? Not at all; it is as if the city totally belongs to him. He always says, "I want my city to be like this, I want it to be like that." This is the first kind of attachment, that of the ego.

There was once a general who understood the second kind of attachment—that which is directed to others. He would assign important jobs only to men with a wife and children. Having found the appropriate man for a job, he would have that man's family placed in a very secure environment both to prevent anxiety and ensure loyalty. We have seen that our ignorance continues as a result of the four attachments, but what is it that indefinitely sustains ignorance? I will give two answers. When the self is erroneously taken as eternal, attachment arises not only for the self of the present but also the self of future. So as someone makes preparations for the future, he creates karma relating to the future. Having by the end of his life accumulated much future karma, he must be reborn to experience the retribution for this karma. Since they constantly prepare for the future, sentient beings must time after time suffer rebirth. Always thus attached, they remain impure indefinitely.

My second answer pertains to practitioners who seek buddhahood, nirvana, or any kind of heavenly world, but travel an outer path

that is not in accord with Buddhadharmā. They feel aversion to the world and a corresponding desire for escape. Practitioners on outer paths who seek residence in heavenly worlds can certainly attain their desire through accumulation of merit. But their stay in these worlds is limited, for departure is unavoidable once their merit is exhausted, and they must return to samsara. Similarly, those Buddhists who seek buddhahood as an escape from the world may gain entrance into the Pure Land. Such practitioners may think they have achieved nirvana, but as their merit subsides they are compelled to leave their heavenly abode and be reborn in the desire realm. There, these two kinds of practitioners will again work to accumulate merit to gain respite in the heavens. They never lose their attachment and remain impure indefinitely.

It is attachment that causes impure karma, and it is by attachment that it is sustained. If sentient beings are to become buddhas, then there can be no attachment, no seeking, and no goal.

Chan Sickness

(From Chan Newsletter No. 41, Nov. 1984)

Someone who has practiced for many years and has achieved good results may feel that they have realized pure wisdom, where all attachment to self is terminated and nirvana is entered. Actually, anyone who thinks they are enlightened really is not, since such a person still thinks that there is a self to be enlightened. Enlightenment is neither an object, nor a feeling, nor a realm to be entered. If enlightenment were any of these, it would be limited and thus illusory. So long as enlightenment is the objective, and so long as there is a self to benefit, wisdom will be remote.

If you have just begun to practice, after hearing what I have just said, you may think that you understand. But it is difficult for a beginner to appreciate the joy that results from deep practice. Indeed, suppose that after much practice you feel as if the self has entered nirvana; at this time tremendous bliss would well up in you, and you might exclaim, "Truly, my ego has disappeared completely. I have entered nirvana." Have you really entered nirvana? Since you believe there is still a sense of self to enter nirvana, that ultimate achievement is still unrealized. But so powerful is this experience that it is likely to mislead even a very experienced practitioner. This is an example of the kind of misconception that can result from attachment to self.

Another example would be a practitioner who reaches the stage where self-centeredness ends and the method of practice disappears. This practitioner will feel entirely relaxed and free, unified with the universe, yet unconcerned with its relation to her because her self-sense is gone. Her state is not one of exultation, but rather of perfect ease; she will not jump with delight and shout that she has entered nirvana. But the self still exists in this case, no matter what she has experienced. Once she comes down from this peaceful state, she may assert that she understands nirvana, that she has seen the Dharma body of the Buddha, and that she has attained final wisdom. If you, who have not yet attained the meditative skill of this person, attempt to contradict her, she may well overcome you in debate: "You have never had my experiences, so you don't know what you are talking about." Such a practitioner is generally deeply attached to her achievement and will be frustrated when you do not believe her. To make matters worse, there may be another person who



is willing to affirm this practitioner's claims, perhaps because this other person feels his own achievements accord perfectly with the sutras. This bystander may claim also having had such experiences and being in a position to validate the claim. This will make the first practitioner very happy and see the other as a true Dharma friend.

What kind of liberation does this practitioner possess, who responds to praise with delight and to doubt with irritation? It would seem that his or her nirvana is faulty. Perhaps our practitioner might answer: "I may respond to praise and criticism in different ways, but I do not do so to please myself. Since I am

quite free from the self, I really do not care at all. But to uphold the dignity of the Buddhadharmā, I censure those who conflict with the Dharma and praise those who are in accord with it." What can we say to this? It would be impossible to judge such people's achievements. What is important is the nature of their experiences. But if they feel they have attained deep wisdom, then they have not truly entered nirvana. Nirvana is entered only when both nirvana and samsara disappear and become like a dream; nirvana is entered only if there is no more feeling of happiness and sorrow, and if the mind is quite stable and tranquil.

It is strange to speak of enlightenment as a dream, but if samsara and enlightenment are both illusory, then the practitioner is striving to leave one dream only to enter another. Actually, enlightenment itself is not a dream, but the idea of enlightenment as well as its attainment is a dream. Thus, sentient beings in samsara live in a dream, with a view of enlightenment as an object of grasping. If they actually reach enlightenment, it will no longer be seen as a dream. Indeed, at that time, enlightenment will cease to exist. When genuine enlightenment is entered, being empty, it disappears.

A diligent practitioner is like someone trying to climb a glass mountain which is very steep and slippery. The mountaineer is barefoot and to make matters worse, the mountain is covered with oil. Every time she makes an effort to climb, she slips. With persistence, she tries again and again to make progress up the mountain until she collapses utterly exhausted, into a deep sleep. When she awakens, the mountain has disappeared. She then realizes that all her effort was but a dream, and that

there is no need to climb; there is no progress to make. In the dream, however, the mountain did exist, and if she had not attempted the impossible, she would not have been able to wake from her dream. We practice Buddhadharmā in order to leave samsara and achieve nirvana. If in the course of practice you think you have left one realm and entered the other, you are still only dreaming.

So far we have talked about those who feel they have achieved enlightenment in relation to an existing self. We will now examine the equally false, reverse perspective. In this case, the practitioner asserts that there is no nirvana and no self to enter nirvana. Therefore he is indifferent to praise and blame, to worldly affairs, and even to his own practice. This attitude is quite erroneous and is perhaps more dangerous for the practitioner than either of the two previous examples. In those previous examples, the practitioner may at least attain the heavenly states of dhyana, but this third practitioner is tempted to give up practicing. Were he to persevere in practice, he might be able to enter the formless heavens. But if he were to cease practicing because all is illusion, because of this ignorance, neither the human nor heavenly realms would be open to him, and he could be reborn in the animal realm.

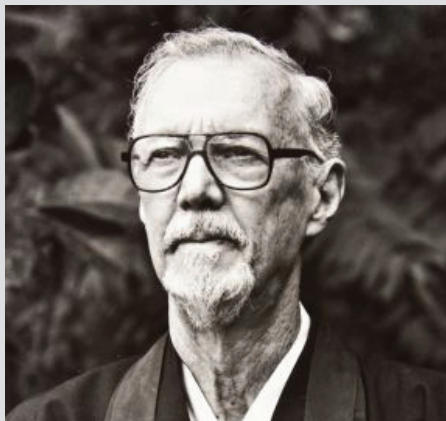
It is easy for even diligent practitioners to make these mistakes—thinking of yourself as enlightened, attaching to your achievements, and denying the possibility of enlightenment. Thus, it is important to have a teacher who can guide you away from these pitfalls. Otherwise, though convinced you are practicing Buddhadharmā, you could actually be traveling outer paths.

“Show me *mu!*”

For a student having *dokusan* for the first time with Robert Aitken Roshi, these words beginning the private interview may have startled, but they were uttered with compassion and kindness. Clearly, the roshi was a teacher who did not waste time with niceties, even if that frugality came with a challenge. This was, after all, Zen, a rigorous practice towards realizing *mu* (Chinese, *wu*), the emptiness of phenomena. For those who persevered, studying with Aitken Roshi went beyond learning to sit *zazen* or penetrate *koans*. They also learned that practicing Buddhism was to be fully engaged in one’s life and times, to be fully active in society.

As a Buddhist practitioner Robert Aitken had a very unlikely beginning. Captured as a civilian worker on Guam by the Japanese in World War II, Aitken was sent to an internment camp in Japan, where a compassionate guard gave him a copy of R. H. Blyth’s *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. As if he were genetically coded to become a devotee of Zen, Aitken read the book many times and said afterwards that his readings made the world seem “transparent,” and that he became “absurdly happy” despite being a prisoner. Fate intervened again when he met Blyth, who through sheer karma was also a prisoner, and they became close friends. It was with Blyth that the young Aitken began to learn what Zen practice was about.

From this inauspicious beginning, after long study with Zen masters in Japan, Robert Aitken fashioned a storied life that ultimately led to his becoming one of the historic figures in Ameri-



Robert Aitken Roshi
(1917–2010)

can and Western Buddhism. Beginning with the founding of the Diamond Sangha in Honolulu, Hawaii, with his devoted wife, Ann, Aitken’s legacy extends to having left several Dharma heirs and many Zen centers in several countries, and over a dozen books on Zen and Zen practice.

It would not be fair to say that Robert Aitken sought controversy, but he did not shy from stating his views openly when issues that touched him deeply offended his sense of decency. In this sense he belied the stereotyping of Buddhists as people who retired into their meditative cocoons to remain above the chaos and confusion of the mundane world.

Among his later causes, which he expressed quietly with scholarship and writing, was to remind his Zen brothers and sisters about their ancestral ties to the Chinese Chan masters. His own way of expressing his gratitude for the legacy of Chan Buddhism was to translate the collection of classic *koans* (Chinese, *gong’an*) by Master Wumen Huikai, as *The Gateless Barrier: the Wu-men Kuan*, with his own commentaries. In Aitken’s introduction are these fitting words: “Through this process [of studying the koans], we discover that life and death are the same as no-life and no-death; the other as no other than myself; each being is infinitely precious as a unique expression of the nature which is essential to us all.”

We *gassho* in gratitude to Robert Aitken Roshi for his abundant gifts to sentient beings.

—Ernest Heau

Inner Dimensions of Climate Change

Spirituality Meets Environmentalism at a Conference at DDRC

In 2006 the United Nations hosted a summit to mobilize young leaders in support of peacebuilding; Master Sheng Yen had the idea to host a pre-summit conference. Here the young leaders could prepare for the summit by connecting with each other, and by exploring the relationship between spirituality and peace. Thus, the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) organized the UN Peacebuilding Forum held at Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in 2006.

The design of the program supported young people in leading their own discussions and discovering the central concepts of the event. The "adults" were there to facilitate the process, rather than "preach" or present concepts in a didactic way. Because the young leaders benefitted so greatly from this process, and from the combination of spirituality and peacebuilding, many of them requested that similar conferences be brought to their home countries. As a result, conferences were held in 2007 in Kenya and in Cambodia, and at Dharmasala, India, in 2008 and 2009. When representatives from DDMBA and GPIW attended the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009, they saw many young people struggling to have their voices heard. It seemed only natural to apply the successful program design. Thus, The Inner Dimensions of Climate Change Conference was held this past May at DDRC.

Master Sheng Yen envisioned DDRC as a place that would support traditional-style intensive Chan practice, but he also hoped it would be a place where young people could gather and connect. The normal retreat ambience is silence, people in drab clothing moving gently, avoiding eye contact, serenely intent on their practice. This event was quite different, alive with young people in colorful and exotic clothing, some with elaborate tattoos, dreadlocks, musical instruments. There were periods of meditative silence, but there was a great deal of laughter and singing and dancing. Mainly, there was a LOT of animated discussion, in organized talking circles as well as impromptu gatherings. The fifty young contemplatives, hand-picked for the event, resonated with the energy they felt on the property, and by the end no one wanted to leave. I know that Master Sheng Yen would be pleased to see his retreat center used in this way.

—*Bufe Laffey, Associate Editor*

Mother Earth Needs You

by
Kami Dvorakova



The Inner Dimensions of Climate Change Conference on May 12-16, 2010 was a powerful gathering of young contemplatives who shared an interest and passion in both spiritual practices and environmental actions. Following the 2009 United Nations Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, the organizers, the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA), recognized the desire of young people to participate in environmental transformation and decided to host a retreat for spiritual leaders in the US. With financial support from DDMBA, approximately 50 young adults and 10 spiritual mentors, who seek positive changes in their diverse communities, gathered in the natural setting of Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in upstate New York to discuss the inner and outer dimensions of climate issues. The purpose was set: to establish a young spiritual alliance that will promote mindful shift and conscious action toward a more peaceful and sustainable global community.

During the retreat, as young spiritual leaders and activists, we meditated, discussed, shared, contemplated, sang, danced, and, maybe most importantly, showed love for our Mother—Mother Earth. We praised her and honored her in different ways and we strengthened our bonding with her. Presentation topics of our mentors included environmental degradation in association with spiritual awareness, as well as recognition of our society as overproducing and overusing resources based on human desires rather than community consciousness. We heard young people express what they want and need from spirituality and learned ways of communicating across spiritual traditions. As the retreat progressed, we discovered a need for more activities led by participants and, consequently, the schedule was adjusted. Participant-led discussions and activities took place and more meditation time was included in our program. The objective of the retreat was being accomplished: a spiritual alliance was unfolding as we came closer to each other, discussed our shared interests, and implemented our collective ideas. On the next few pages I would like to share with you my experience from this extraordinary gathering.

Day 1

Interfaith, sustainability, Sufism, Light Circles, Vaishnavism, Master Sheng Yen, peace, help, change, children, India, youth, teach, Earth, meditation, yoga, Buddhism, Catholicism: These were some of the terms mentioned by retreat participants in their introductory speeches. Sharing our intentions and hopes of what to achieve from this retreat brought very motivating and empowering energy into the atmosphere. We finished with quiet singing of “When happiness is in our heart, then

peace is in our home...” As we retired for the night, the uplifting feeling stayed with us and I was amazed by the variety of movements that already pursue similar objectives, such as building strong and spiritual communities, supporting a clean and healthy Earth, and ultimately planting the seeds of a better future. I was at an amazing place with amazing people.

Day 2

In one of our discussions, we came across the question of how we can bridge the duality of self and other. How do we get away from the relationship of “I and it” without judgments

about the external environment? One suggestion was to simply shift our perception and see the beauty of the world and people surrounding us. This does not mean that we will not take any actions in the world because everything is already perfect. It only means that our thinking and understanding will be much clearer without any mental clinging to “my truth and your truth” and that we will view others, who may not be environmentally mindful, with compassion. We can serve as examples for the surrounding world and show our own awareness of the material world by asking ourselves: “Do I need this? Do I really have to buy this?” Instead of lecturing others, we can help them find their own way to en-

THE ENVIRONMENTAL VIEW OF BUDDHISM

The earth, our planet, is akin to our own mother. It is the land that nurtures and sustains us. It is important that we recognize its blessings and kindness and understand how it affects our lives; but more importantly, we need to ask ourselves this question: how have we been treating our Mother Earth?

We are the products of our parents, who create us with their body cells, composed of materials that are transformed by the food and nutrition that they consume. The food and nutrition come from Earth. Without Earth, nothing can be produced. We have an expression in Chinese that describes a newborn as “having fallen onto the earth amid cries,” which means that the moment we are born we have landed on Earth. Therefore, we live on Earth from the cradle to the grave. Our existence is not possible without Earth. For that reason, Earth is our greatest benefactor, whose kindness to us truly cannot be expressed in words.

And yet, our general attitude towards Earth is unbridled destruction and abuse of it. We receive so many resources essential to our living from it, and yet we give back nothing but garbage. From the earth, we take its water to drink, wash and use, and then we give back the waste and the sewage. This is how we repay its kindness.

However, Mother Earth never protests. It has never asked, “Why do you hurt me? Why do you abuse me?” Many people have warned that by destroying our environment, we are inviting Earth to strike back. But the idea of Earth striking back is quite unjust. We are the ones that have failed to care for our environment and we are now suffering the consequences of our abuses; these calamities are of our own doing. Earth never views us as an enemy nor seeks to retaliate against us. If one sweeps the floor while the wind is blowing and thus gets dust all over one’s face, does one accuse the dust of sullying him? That would be unfair to the dust—it is the person who disturbs the dust from the floor and stirs it into the air; the dust never intends to sully anyone.

vironmental consciousness. We do not have to ask others to follow our path, but we can rather help them to create their own practices, helping themselves and consequently the Earth. Each person in this world might have a slightly different way to the common objective of global awareness. Even participants at the conference were walking different green paths to respecting the natural environment. We arrived at the question: How we can help others to be guided by their inner best Self?

To spread environmental mindfulness among others and to deepen our love for Mother Earth as the foundation, we felt we needed a spiritual practice to help us to be aware of our actions in the present moment. Many of us meditate or have some type of spiritual prac-

tice. What do we do when we stand up from our cushion or when we finish our prayers? Are we fully mindful in our daily lives? Can we be in the present moment and strive to do better? The most basic and simple things we can do to begin caring for our Mother Earth are in our simple daily tasks—we can increase our awareness of how much water we use during showers, while brushing our teeth, or washing the dishes. How much paper towels, napkins, or even toilet paper do we use on a daily basis? How many plastic bags and utensils do we take without really needing them? These things sound simple but the power is in doing them right now. There are many ways to minimize the damage we are causing every minute. Mindful awareness of our resources and the way we are using

Everything around us, be it animal, plant or mineral, is connected to the earth. We often say we should always remember to be grateful for all beings around us, but we rarely recognize that all beings are deeply connected to the earth that we all share and from which we receive sustenance. Many Buddhists only think of worshipping the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas. However, to understand the mind of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva, one only need observe and appreciate the spirit, kindness and generosity of Mother Earth. The mind of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva is the same as that of Mother Earth in that they only give and never ask for anything in return. Yet very few people think of repaying their kindness.

Our ability to mirror our mind to that of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas will depend on how, in our daily lives, we relate to and appreciate the kindness of Mother Earth. If we fail to do so, all the talk about repaying kindness to people and being grateful to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is nothing but empty words. In fact, we can repay kindness and contribute anytime and anywhere. By protecting the environment and caring for all things that are connected to it, we repay kindness and contribute. If we often appreciate the kindness of Mother Earth, then everyone and everything we see inspires gratitude in us. We find gratitude arising in us anytime and anywhere.

We often walk on the earth with our feet yet it does not say: "You upset me." We often take whatever we want from the earth, yet it does not say: "Why do you take so much from me?" The earth treats us as part of it. It accepts us, supports us, forgives us, and cares for us. No matter how we treat it, it will not retaliate. Like the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, like our parents, teachers and close friends, Mother Earth gives unconditionally. It lets us walk all over it without complaint. No matter how we mistreat and abuse it, it will always forgive us. Such is the kindness of Mother Earth.

Chan Master Sheng Yen, 2001



them open our eyes to the beauty and interdependence of everything in the world. We identified organic farming, local agriculture and vegetarianism as some sustainable elements of a green-friendly community.

Day 3

We heard many interesting stories but a specific one very clearly stood out in my mind. The essence was: “If you don’t play your music, who will? If you are not fulfilling your life’s purpose, who will? If you don’t listen to your heart, whose ideas do you listen to?” At the beginning of a spiritual journey, it might be difficult to be attuned to our heart and soul. The process of traveling a spiritual path is analogous to the process of butterfly emerging. First, we need time to be in our cocoons and get nourishment—we have to take care of the inner self and nurture it with spiritual

experiences. Developing a strong core helps us to develop inner strength and, at the right moment, the cocoon opens up and the butterfly emerges. We will then be ready to play our music and listen to our heart.

Exploring the present moment as individuals is the beginning of cultivating a mindful society. Through contemplation, our environment-friendly awareness increased, which in turn could become the beginning of a global shift. At the same time, it could be difficult to make the transition from individual to global consciousness without guidance and wisdom. To create a bridge between these two perspectives, we need mentors who instruct us as well as give space to our own individual actions and experiences. Those we met at the conference gently guided us to learn more about our inner strength and potential while encouraging us to explore our innovative ideas.

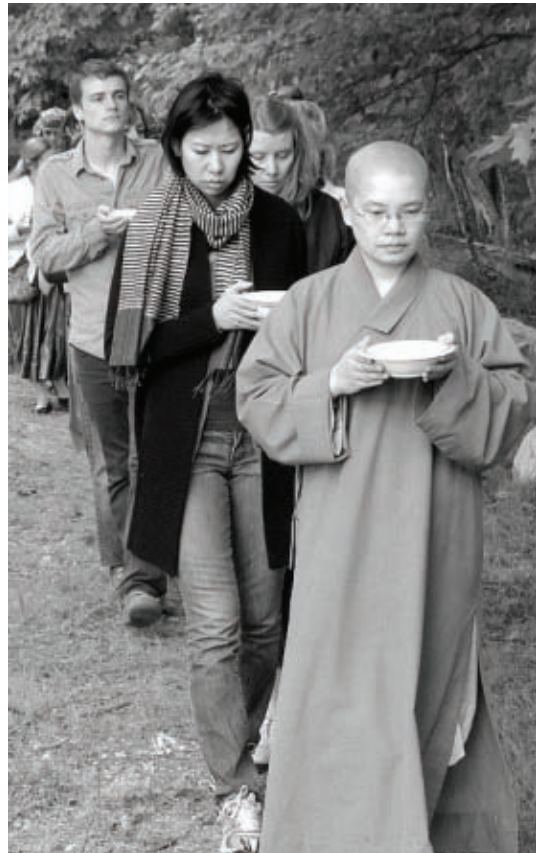
Dena Merriam, founder & convener of GPIW, discussed another principle for shifting public consciousness: the cultivation of non-greed. Transformation of thinking is feasible by: 1) acknowledging that all religions and traditions stem from the same spiritual foundation; 2) accepting that sacredness is part of our everyday life and of the surrounding world; 3) noticing that cultivation of a non-greed society can relieve the environmental burden we are imposing on our Mother Earth. In our overproducing and resource-depleting world, we need to transform our thinking through mindful contemplation and increased environmental awareness. Ms. Merriam encouraged us to take advantage of this meeting of spiritual minds and begin a spiritual movement across traditions and religions. As a spiritual alliance uniting many schools, we could move forward with our aspirations on a bigger scale. Global shift is possible; we just need to work together toward that goal.

Day 4

One of the specific ways we were shown to deeply explore our relationship to the Earth was through a Sacred Water Ritual led by Venerable Chang Ji and Venerable Guo Chan (DDMBA). In this ceremony, we experienced all themes of the conference: The individual relationship to Mother Earth, the community energy, and guidance to the deepest levels of bonding with the Earth. At the beginning of the ritual, we placed a stone in our water bowls, to represent the Earth and Water elements. Then, we began our journey—walking meditation—through the woods. Seeing reflections of Sun in the water and noting a gentle breeze touching the water surface, I realized that the Fire and Wind elements were present as well. At one point, I was holding in

my hands all four elements of our planet—I held the entire Earth. Through this realization, I felt responsible for the whole planet all at once.

At the end of the ritual, as it was time to give the stone back to Earth and pour out the water, I noticed that my mind was attached to these representations of Nature and wanted to keep them. Thanks to the time spent in meditation and silence during the Water Ritual, I saw this clearly. I realized that I could place the sense of the whole planet in my heart and anytime I wanted to restore the connection,





I could touch my heart and the experience of Earth in it.

As the retreat was slowly finishing, our spiritual alliance began to function. Through group discussion, we raised our voices and requested a change in the program. Instead of having another presentation, we created space for a fishbowl discussion (a conversation technique for large groups), more contemplation, and free writing activity on the question, “What would you like to blossom in the world with contemplative practice? What is the real vision?” We also talked about what our souls want and we brainstormed how to put our collective thoughts into actions.

Day 5

As our bus was scheduled for early morning, we only had a little more time to spend together. First, we met for group meditation and enjoyed the last moments in the Chan Hall of DDRC. After breakfast, as everybody was bringing their luggage to our bus, several people started to play their instruments. We had a harmonium, guitar, drum, and our

voices. What started as a small musical sharing slowly became a collective chanting meditation where all our sound expressions were overflowing with joy and excitement. In my mind was only one thing: “There is no doubt where this beautiful energy is coming from. This is a real manifestation of the Universal Spirit. This is a blessing.”

During this conference, we experienced the strength of our contemplative voice and the potential power of our actions as a community. We were also reconnected to our global green consciousness, a concept shared across all our traditions. If our spiritual objectives resonate with what is in the hearts of others, perhaps they will find and participate in some type of contemplative or environmental action, and together we can make the shift to a more conscious and sustainable society.



Isle of Anglesey, 1951

Cornflower blue
Wallflower mauve
Growing from the cliff
Above the cove

Where I perched on an overhanging rock
To watch the maddest high spring tide
come thundering in
Against the land
I roared with excitement what fun getting
splashed
Suddenly struck by a giant I was gone
Swept in to the Leviathan which gulped
me down
I fought to swim with Wellington boots on
Full of water like lead weights
And the pebbles of the beaten beach rolled
and rolled and rolled Giant waves roiling
back into sudden depth and no way
Could I haul myself out my strength fal-
tering I went under
And again under lungs feeling unfit to
burst with water
Then glug bubbling sound a silent roar
White darkness

The first time in my life I felt sure I was
dead
With the voiding of even that feeling

Then someone grabbed my flailing arm
– fishermen hauling me up
Into the small boat they had hurriedly
shoved out
Into the merciless maw of the ocean

Someone pumped my chest where I splut-
tered salt
As we were tossed this way and that but
With two pairs of guiding oars we scarily
made shore
Crashing in on a storming wall of surf

Soaked through and squelching heavily
As the men pulled the boat up to safety
I stood awed in the cove
Breathing unbelievably again on terra
firma

Thank you good people not forgotten for
saving my child life

Another time I felt I was a real goner
In Italy I was also saved from drowning
.....which is another story
Right now it's 3am I'm sleep-pilled up and
should be in bed
- or running out of my head to lose
some of the belly

I just wanted to say
Thank you
To all you many good people through vari-
ous level loves
For starring in my reckless life

Frank Charlton
28th June, 2010

Transmission Ceremony of the Bodhisattva Precepts



At the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, July 2 - 5, 2010, 75 participants from the United States and Canada received transmission of the Bodhisattva Precepts. A team of 10 monks and 8 nuns, many of whom had travelled overseas especially for the ceremony, were present to support the participants, as well as lay volunteers and trainers. The ceremonies were presided over by Transmission Master Venerable Guo Xing, Abbot of Chan Meditation Center and Dharma Drum Retreat Center in New York, Repentance Master Venerable Guo Yuan, Vice Provost of DDM Chan Center in Taiwan, and Training Master Venerable Guo Chi, Head Teacher of DDM Chan Hall in Taiwan. The photos are by Kai-fen Hu.



The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Peace Across the Straits

The Vice President of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) in mainland China, Mr. Min An, recently paid his first visit to the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education. On hand to welcome him were Abbot Venerable Guo Dong, Deputy Abbot Venerable Guo Hui, President of the Dharma Practice Society Mr. Chan-Ban Chang and Vice President of the Association of Dharma Upholders Mr. Chu-Chi Huang.

Venerable Guo Dong took the opportunity to explain that DDM had made education a priority, and was dedicated to the building of Dharma Drum University to benefit society and foster the cultivation of Chinese Buddhism.

Min An expressed his appreciation to DDM for the kind reception, and encouraged his hosts to promote humanitarianism in accordance with Buddhist compassion, to facilitate vigorous religious dialogue and to assist in the maintenance of peace across the Taiwan Straits.

Abbot Addresses Intelligence Agency

On July 2, Venerable Guo Dong gave a talk at Taiwan's main intelligence agency, the Na-

tional Security Bureau (NSB) in Taipei on how to maintain a calm state of mind in the face of highly stressful situations.

NSB Chief De-Sheng Tsai arranged the talk as part of an effort to help NSB staff find ways to deal with the mounting pressures of their jobs. The talk, presented to over four hundred people, was on "Peace, Harmony and Abundance," and sought to give NSB employees a sense of empowerment, emphasizing the need to remain composed at all times, particularly in challenging circumstances.

In his opening remarks Venerable Guo Dong praised the compassion displayed by NSB staff last September as they joyously offered assistance to indigenous children in Jiayi County returning to school in the aftermath of Typhoon Morakot, which had devastated the southern region of Taiwan, citing it as an embodiment of great compassion as propagated by the Dharma. "When you care for others, the pressures that beset you will naturally turn into a force of support for others."

In closing, he recalled the words of the late Master Sheng Yen to the Sangha, who called on his listeners to "uphold principle, delegate authority with full confidence, care for one another, respect others, aspire to forthright communication and always cultivate introspection," in order to sow peace and harmony in the workplace and the family.

Visitors from the Mainland

On July 28, 2010, over a hundred university students and teachers from Taiwan and mainland China paid their first visit to the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education.

Of the students, 24 were from Taiwan's Tamkang University, while 76 of the others came from nine Chinese universities, including the universities of Beijing, Fudan and Nanjian.

Accompanying them were representatives of the various faculties. The visit was an initiative put forward by Tamkang University to give students, especially those from across the straits, a chance to experience the beauty and wisdom of Buddhism in Taiwan, and Chan practice in particular.

The group was led on a guided tour of Guanyin Hall, Great Buddha Hall, Memorial Hall and Lotus Bell Park, and was made aware of the work and teachings of the late Venerable Master Sheng Yen.

Qihui Liu, a young woman from Fudan University, said she was struck by the mood of tranquility in the surroundings and in the demeanor of the monastics who welcomed them, and said she was looking forward to the possibility of another visit in the future.

3rd International Buddhist Conference

On May 28th the 3rd International Conference on Contemporary Chinese Buddhism and Reflections on Master Sheng Yen began at the National University of Taiwan, attended by more than a thousand people.

Over the course of the gathering, local and international Buddhist scholars presented more than 50 papers to stimulate dialogue and the exchange of ideas.

Jian-Chan Shih, President of the Sheng Yen Foundation, encouraged all present to persevere in walking the Bodhisattva Path for the sake of all sentient beings. One way to do this, he noted, is by organizing future conferences and supporting one another in efforts to pass on the Master's teachings, not only in the days following the conference but for generations to come.

Venerable Guo Dong, Abbot of DDM, commented that over the past year, monastics had been carefully and diligently examining themselves to ensure that they were in line with the late Master's teachings and making progress in Dharma practice. He asked everyone to work hard putting the teachings into practice, noting that the best way to honor Master Sheng Yen's memory is to be steadfast in attempts to purify one's mind.

Nung Chan Monastery Restored

On May 22, the opening ceremony of the restored Nung Chan Monastery took place in Taipei, presided over by Deputy Abbot, Venerable Guo Hi, with the attendance of many distinguished citizens.

The aim of renovating Nung Chan, as Venerable Guo Hui explained, is to "uplift humanity and build a pure land on earth," in pursuit of an ideal to which the late Master Sheng Yen dedicated his entire life.

Thanks to the long-term commitment demonstrated thus far, the Monastery is heir to the

wisdom of traditional Chinese Buddhism and the teachings of the late Master. In the future it will offer practitioners a center for purifying the mind and cultivating the Dharma.

Because the ceremony coincided with Vesak Day, DDM also hosted the customary Dharma Ritual and Charity festival with numerous events, attended by more than five thousand people.

Vancouver Celebrates Vesak

DDM Vancouver held its Vesak Festival on May 22, with the traditional bathing of the Buddha ceremony, as more than 230 community members from the Vancouver metropolitan area came to celebrate.

The celebration began in the Great Buddha Hall with the chanting of sutras and vows to dispel ignorance and self-centeredness, cultivate perseverance and foster purity of mind.

Venerable Chang Xing, Abbot at DDM Vancouver, explained that the Buddha came to our world to teach us about the impermanence of all things, and urged practitioners to embrace the Dharma in the face of adversity. As Master Sheng Yen often taught, “a mind at peace gives rise to a world at peace.”

School and Medical Center Open in Sichuan Village

On June 3, after two years of construction organized by DDM’s Social Welfare and Charity Foundation (SWCF) in the wake of the deadly earthquake that devastated China’s Sichuan Province in May of 2008, Xiushui township

inaugurated its new primary school and medical center. Venerable Guo Dong and Deputy Abbot Venerable Guo Pin went to Xiushui together with SWCF Director Venerable Guo Qi to officiate at the inauguration ceremony.

Zengjian Wang, Director of Sichuan’s Religious Affairs Department, was also in attendance, accompanied by Deputy Director Jun Zhang and numerous local officials, as well as staff and students at the new primary school.

Venerable Guo Dong remarked that DDM was very grateful to all those who supported the construction of the buildings over the past two years in ways that embodied the Bodhisattva spirit of helping those in need.

Venerable Guo Qui explained that the school had been designed with a “green vision” in mind to foster ecological awareness among the students. The medical center would attend not only to the health care needs of Xiushui residents but would also aspire to nurture their spiritual wellbeing.

Deputy Director Jun Zhang said that he was deeply grateful for SWCF’s long-term efforts to ease the misery of quake victims in Xiushui.

Shortly after the quake hit, SWCF dispatched an emergency relief team to Sichuan that has been working in the region ever since. The Xiushui initiative is one among several efforts sponsored by SWCF to help quake victims rebuild their lives, including study groups and a camp focusing on the spiritual environment and fostering green ideas.

Show of Gratitude

On June 10, a ten-member delegation of a Party Committee from northern Sichuan led by Committee Secretary Li Wang paid a visit to DDM's World Center for Buddhist Education in Taiwan.

The visit, according to Secretary Wang, was intended to express the gratitude of his community to the DDM Sangha for the successful opening of the new primary school and medical center the week before in Xiushui.

Venerable Guo Dong, Venerable Guo Pin and various other community members involved in disaster recovery efforts were on hand to greet the visitors. In welcoming them, Venerable Guo Dong expressed his heartfelt appreciation for the cooperation of local government officials in Sichuan and to all who had contributed to reconstruction projects. He added that DDM would go on working on recovery, especially to provide spiritual care for those suffering from post-disaster trauma, and to help residents continue to get back on their feet.

Secretary Li Wang spoke for many in giving thanks on behalf of people from Sichuan, emphasizing that without DDM's long-term help they could never have recovered so swiftly. He added that many people in his community now were anxious to emulate the Bodhisattva spirit by volunteering to help others in need.

Bridge to Somewhere

On June 26 and 27, DDM's Social Welfare and Charity Foundation (SWCF) enjoyed a rare op-

portunity to celebrate the local Bamboo Shoot Festival in the town of Jiashian in southern Taiwan's mountainous Kaohsiung County. Jiashian residents were also celebrating the re-opening of the Jiashian Bridge, the isolated village's sole access to the main highways, and key to the scenic region's tourist industry.

For area residents it had been a long journey. More than a dozen people were killed and the regional economy was crippled when the bridge was knocked out not once, but twice in the past two years by raging typhoons.

In September of 2008, Typhoon Sinlaku lashed the region with winds gusting up to 100 miles an hour, drenching the countryside with record-breaking rainfalls. A fatal mudslide smashed out a section of the bridge, cutting off the village from the outside world almost completely.

Disaster relief teams, including SWCF volunteers, were dispatched to the region immediately. Efforts to rebuild the bridge got underway in April of 2009, and a temporary structure was soon put into service, but in September of that year, Typhoon Morakot slammed into southern Taiwan and reduced the bridge to rubble. Finally in June of this year, after months of work to reopen the area to tourism, the Morakot Post-Disaster Reconstruction Commission and local governments were proud to unveil a new NT\$500 million steel bridge, 21 meters across.

SWCF was extensively involved in disaster relief efforts, and was invited to this year's Plum Festival and bridge celebration in appreciation of its long-term work in the area helping storm victims.

The Future

Retreats, classes and other upcoming events.

Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY

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

DDRC holds a variety of Chan practice activities, including weekly group meditation, Sunday services, beginner's meditation classes, beginner's retreats and intermediate and intensive Chan retreats. Novices and experienced practitioners are all welcome at DDRC, whether to begin practicing or to deepen their cultivation. Volunteer opportunities are also available.

Schedule is subject to change. Please check the website for updated and detailed information, or to register for activities online.

Retreats

3-Day Chan Retreat
Led by Chang Wen Fashi
Friday - Sunday, October 1 - 3

1-Day Chan Retreat
Saturday, October 9

Western Zen Retreat
Led by Simon Child
Friday - Wednesday, October 15 - 20

1-day Retreat
Saturday, November 13

10-day Silent Illumination Retreat
November; date and teacher TBA.
Please check website.

8-day Huatou Retreat
Sunday - Sunday, Dec 26 - Jan 2
Led by Abbot Guoxing Fashi

1-Day Retreat
Saturday, December 11

Regular Weekly Activities

Thursday Evening Meditation
7:00 - 9:00 pm; Sitting, walking, moving meditation and discussion.

Sunday Service
9:00 - 11:00 am; Sitting, walking and moving meditation; Dharma talk; chanting.

Chan Meditation Center Elmhurst, Queens, NY

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

Retreats

Monthly 1-Day Retreats
Last Saturday of each month (except Dec.)
9 am - 5 pm (8:45 am arrival); Fee: \$25

Classes

Beginner's Meditation, Parts 1 and 2

Saturdays, November 6 & 13, 9:30 am - noon

Led by Harry Miller; Fee: \$40

Intermediate Meditation

Saturday, November 20, 9:30 am - 3

Led by Harry Miller; Fee: \$40

Dharma 101 (The Four Noble Truths)

3 sessions, Saturdays, Dec 4, 11, & 18

9:30 am - Noon; Free of charge

Saturday Night Movies and Mind

Saturdays, Oct 9, Nov 13, Dec 11

6:30 - 9 pm; Led by Lindley Hanlon

Screenings and discussions of movies from a Buddhist perspective, free of charge.

(Pre-registration advised for all classes.)

Regular Weekly Activities

Monday Night Chanting

7:00 - 9:15 pm (On the last Monday of each month there is recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas' names and repentance.)

Tuesday Night Sitting Group

7:00 - 9:30 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma discussions, recitation of the Heart Sutra.

Thursday Night Taijiquan

7:30 - 9:00 pm, ongoing

Led by David Ngo

\$25 per month, \$80 for 16 classes.

First class is free for newcomers.

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: vegetarian lunch

2:00 - 4:00 pm: Chanting

(1st & 5th Sunday: Chanting Guan Yin

2nd Sunday: Great Compassion Repentance

3rd Sunday: Bodhisattva Earth Store Sutra

4th Sunday: Renewal of Bodhisattva Precept Vows.)

1:45 - 3 pm: English Dharma Study Group, led by Dharma Teachers-in-Training, 2nd and 4th Sundays, except 11/28.

Text: Zen Wisdom by Master Sheng Yen.

Special Events

Please check the DDMBA or CMC websites for special events in the months October - December, 2010.

“Zen & Inner Peace”

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program now on Crossing TV:

NYC: Time Warner Cable channel 503

Monday - Friday, 11:55 am - 12:05 pm EST

Sacramento, CA: Comcast Cable channel 238

Monday - Friday, 9:55 am - 10:05 pm PT

Sunday, 11:55 am - 12:05 pm PT

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.

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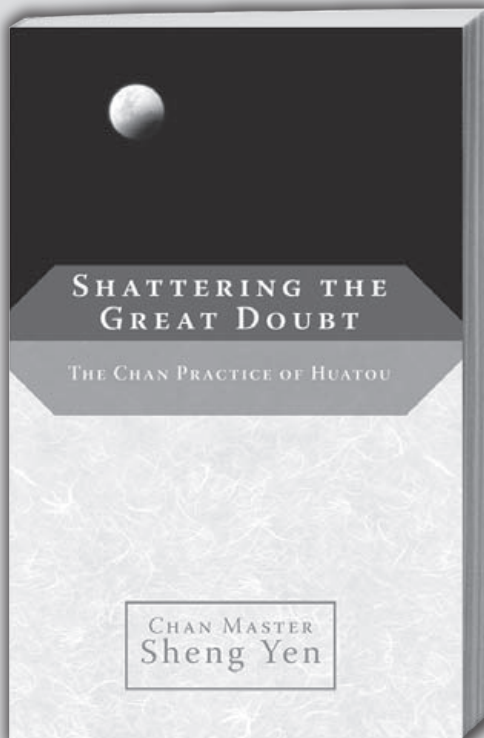
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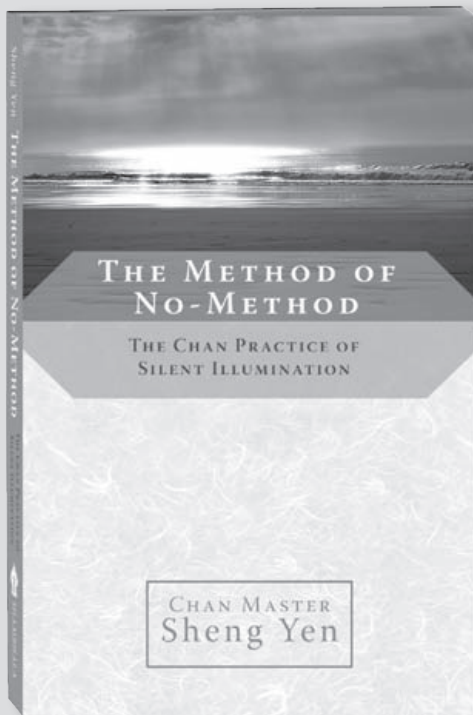
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