

# Chan | 禪 | Magazine

Summer 2012



# “I saw firsthand

how influential Shifu was, and how his compassion affected many people. Although his English was not so good, his demeanor and genuine concern for people was a concrete example of the religious principles that he stood for. When he spoke, he addressed the common needs of everyone, rather than asserting his own religion. He was a Buddhist monk with a global perspective, a person with firm principle, yet no fixed view. A true Chan master, he had complete confidence, faith, and experience in his own tradition, yet did not impose these teachings on others.”

—Ven. Chang Wen  
*Leaving Home, Part Five*

# Chan Magazine

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*Cover and table of contents photos by  
Taylor Mitchell*

# From the Editor

Sometimes a photograph can augment insights that the words of a story are meant to convey. For this issue I was so taken with the group shot from Chang Wen Fashi's ordination ceremony that I blew it up to full size in the centerfold. You can find him there, high up in the left corner, third row down from the top and second in from the left.

You can't say he is "the lone western face" in this sea of monastics because in this photo you can't tell. All the faces blur into a common generic humanity. But knowing that he is the lone westerner brings home for me the enormity of his undertaking. Leaving home to become a monk is impressive in itself, but much more so with a new language and in a foreign culture. Now that he is back in America directing a practice center and leading retreats perhaps there is a different kind of loneliness; he has to do it all without the daily support of that sea of monastics. But I expect he would not call it loneliness.

Seen in its entirety this group photo can be viewed as a two-dimensional pattern. The "weave" is tight and regular at the bottom but looser and less regular towards the top. It reminds me of a print by the graphic artist M. C. Escher; an interlocking pattern of birds which seem to be identical but vary slightly in each row until the birds at the top are taking wing and flying out of the pattern. I can imagine animating this photo as a huge descending escalator, a sort of hopper that produces trained monks. The raw, newly-ordained monks are dropped into the top rows, their robes slightly askew and their

faces turned at different angles. As the rows descend the angles of the robes become more uniform, facial expressions settle and gazes become more direct, until we come to the ultimate product, refined masters sitting solidly in the front row.

It occurs to me that a good share of our training has to do with demeanor. Not only monastics, but lay people as well. There are so many rules on retreat for how to enter a practice space, how to walk through a room, etc. This can seem oppressive but over time one comes to appreciate the purpose. Following the rules is a mindfulness practice which makes you aware of how your own energy and attitude affect an environment. Even if you don't feel quite as centered and clear as a monk, you try to move like one in and doing so gradually become more centered and clear. This is a good example of the saying "fake it until you make it." — one reason why it is so beneficial to train in the presence of monks. As Elder Shou Cheng says, quoting the Buddha "[monks are a] role model for all gods and humans." (p. 29)

For Chang Wen Fashi, immersion in that sea of monastics was certainly a means of wearing down sharp corners and turning him into a monk, further refined by his service as Shifu's attendant. All of us who were blessed by being able to train directly with Shifu, even for a short time, know the power of his example. His naturalness was wordless training to be emulated, consciously or unconsciously, to one's benefit. I think of Shifu every time I put on my coat in a crowded entryway; he showed

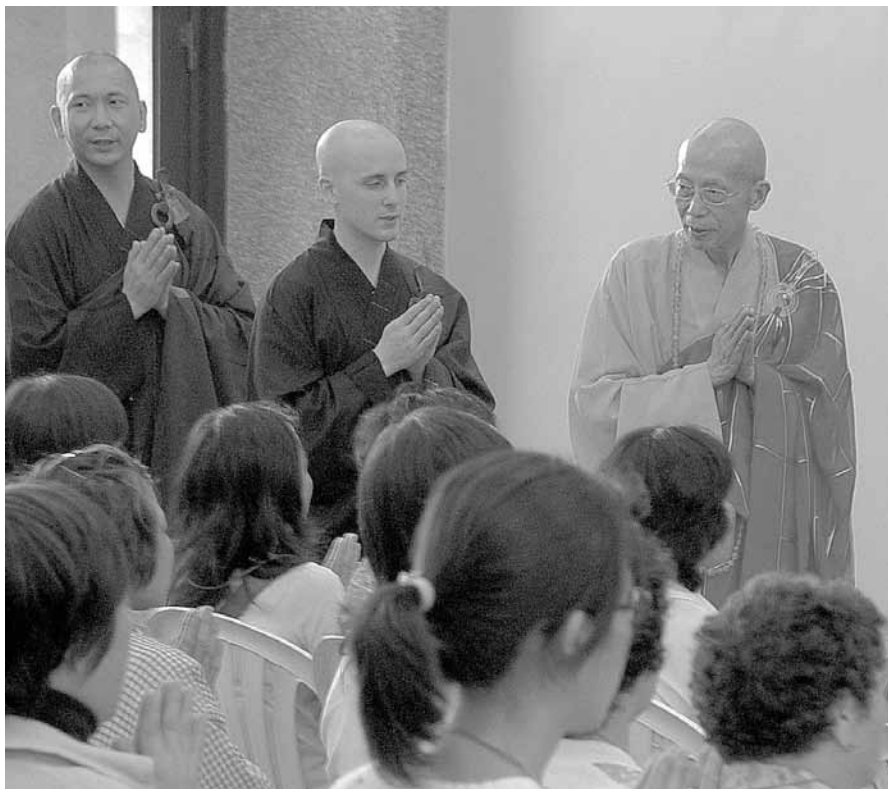
me how to do so gracefully without flapping around and hitting the people next to me.

I once saw Shifu give a talk in an overheated auditorium. He had only spoken a few words when he excused himself and began to undo his clothing. Without getting up from lotus posture he opened his upper robes and removed more than one sweater from underneath, explaining as he did so that his attendants had advised him to bundle up against the cold. He said “I apologize for doing this in front of you, but my body is too warm and for me to just sit here and do nothing about it would be ignorant.” His grace and efficiency were amazing. In short order the extra clothing was neatly folded away, the robes adjusted, and he continued the talk as if there had been no interruption. He had no trace of self-consciousness and there was no feeling of embarrassment in the audience. His example of naturalness and ease was a powerful lesson I’ve never forgotten.

Here’s a story I was told about the photo on page 31, taken of Dharma Drum Mountain by Master Sheng Yen

himself. Our elderly Shifu climbed all the way up the mountain to get the picture. His attendants had some concerns about him making this effort, since the weather was misty with rain and they feared visibility would not be good. When they reached the vantage point the mist suddenly thinned and the buildings appeared haloed with a mystical glow (more evident in the original color version). Shifu snapped a shot or two and then the mists closed in again. Glancing at his attendants he said something like, “So . . . some people wonder if Dharma Protectors are real.”

Bufe Maggie Laffey  
Editor, Chan Magazine



# The Mahayana Method of Calming and Contemplation

by  
Venerable Chi Chern

*Ven. Chi Chern was Master Sheng Yen's first Dharma heir. Born in Malaysia in 1955, he is one of the most respected meditation teachers in Malaysia and Singapore. What follows is a Dharma talk given by Ven. Chi Chern at the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, New York on September 18, 2011. It was translated by Ven. Chang Wen, transcribed by Chang Jie and edited for the magazine by Buffe Laffey.*



## Precepts, Concentration, Wisdom

When talking about calming and contemplation, we should mention it in the context of the comprehensive practice of Buddhism which includes precepts, concentration, and wisdom. These three fundamental aspects depend upon and mutually strengthen one another. For example, the practice of precepts is to live a lifestyle of upright behavior, avoiding behaviors which create trouble. We try to practice behaviors which are wholesome, whether physical, verbal or mental. By cultivating wholesome roots we can have a balanced lifestyle which creates a firm foundation for cultivating the practice of *Buddhadharma* more deeply.

### Precepts Engender Concentration

We can say that precepts are the foundation of practice. If we take care of our bodies, minds and behavior in daily life, cultivating more wholesome attitudes, we will find that although we still have wandering thoughts the things that arise actually help us move forward in our meditation. This is because they are wholesome thoughts and point us in the direction of cultivating concentration or *samadhi*. However if we do not take care of our daily lives then the thoughts that arise in meditation will be unwholesome. These thoughts have such powerful negativity they make it impossible to develop concentration. Instead they become obstructions and prevent us from cultivating a stable, relaxed body and mind.

The saying that “precepts engender concentration” doesn’t mean that if we practice precepts, we will automatically attain *samadhi*. It means that the practice of having a stable

lifestyle can give us the foundation for cultivating *samadhi*. It helps us move forward in the practice of mental stability. So, we can look at the practice of these three (precepts, concentration and wisdom) as mutually strengthening. When our precepts are pure and our lifestyle is wholesome, our meditation and concentration will be strong. Then very naturally when we cultivate wisdom we’ll be able to get the desired results.

### Concentration Engenders Wisdom

When we have a foundation of concentration, we can then move on to cultivate wisdom. We do this by using a method such as contemplating the principles of the Dharma. In this process of contemplation, we think deeply about the Dharma or we directly experience reality that the Dharma describes.

If we try to use this approach of cultivating wisdom without having a foundation of concentration or mental stability, the contemplation itself can be very shallow or short-lived. Such contemplation can easily turn into merely thinking about something else altogether. We may even begin to generate negative emotions based on what we are thinking about.

In order to cultivate wisdom successfully through the practice of contemplation, a person needs to have a firm foundation of mental stability. If the power of one’s mind is very strong, these methods of contemplation are able to produce the desired effect: the generation of wisdom. There’s another saying that, “concentration engenders wisdom.” But this doesn’t mean that when we have concentration we automatically have wisdom. It means that concentration or mental stability is the



foundation for generating wisdom. If we have this foundation, we can progress and generate wisdom based on contemplation.

## Mutually Enriching

We can go further and say that when we have generated or realized wisdom, we can then use this wisdom to further strengthen our mental stability. With wisdom our mind becomes very clear and sharp. We can use this mental clarity to cultivate an even stronger and more stable *samadhi*. When we return to daily life with wisdom, we are able to be even more aware of our behavior in daily life. If we are already in accordance with precepts and live a healthy lifestyle, with wisdom we can further refine our behavior.

These practices are mutually inclusive and supporting. With the foundation of precepts, we can have strength in cultivating mental stability. With the foundation of mental stability, we can cultivate wisdom through contemplation. These three become a wholesome cycle. When we cultivate them all together we are engaging in a very comprehensive practice of Buddhadharma.

## Calming and Contemplation

The method of practicing concentration and wisdom is called “calming and contemplation.” We practice calming until we reach the goal of mental absorption or concentration. Practicing contemplation, we eventually reach the goal of generating wisdom. In cultivating this practice within Buddhadharma a progressive set of staged methods has been established for people to use. Why is that? It is because people have different needs based on their differing circumstances. This sequential approach to practice is specifically designed

for the different needs of sentient beings. One circumstance we all find ourselves in is that our state of mind is often quite agitated, coarse or unrefined. In this scattered state of mind it is easy to be affected by things we encounter in our environment; our minds are pulled along by all the different stimuli from the situations we find ourselves in. Even if we want to progress more deeply into the practice, it’s quite impossible to generate wisdom with an agitated mind.

One of the first practices we need to do is to cultivate calming or stilling the mind. With this practice we develop single-pointed concentration. To take the mind from a scattered and coarse state; we choose one particular object and continually place the mind on that object. We fix the attention on one point and reach stillness of mind. This is the basic approach of the method of calming.

## Contemplating the Dharma

When we have a foundation of mental stability and concentration, we have the clarity and strength of mind to cultivate the practice of contemplation. But what is the object of our contemplation? We are contemplating the principles of Dharma. We have to have a clear understanding of the conceptual principles of the Dharma to engage in the contemplation (or deep reflection) which leads toward the experience of these principles.

People may practice many different kinds of meditation. Meditation consisting of calming or generating concentration isn’t really unique to Buddhism. There are many different schools of meditation and they all include methods of bringing the mind to a state of single-pointedness and generating *samadhi*

or mental absorption. Many people who think they are practicing Buddhist methods still may not know how to practice contemplation. They can be stuck and not know how to progress.

## Causes and Conditions

Other non-Buddhist schools of meditative practice may have their own kinds of contemplation, but they are based on their own basic dogmas or principles. In Buddhism, what are the principles that we are contemplating? If we don't know them, we may think that we are practicing contemplation, but we are not really doing anything; we have no place to begin. So it is important that we have a truly solid and grounded understanding of the basic principles, which we can summarize as "causes and conditions" or "conditional arising." Basically this means that whatever kind of phenomena exists is based on different causes and conditions coming together to generate this one thing.

There is a saying that the arising of any phenomenon is based on causes and conditions, and its basic nature is *emptiness*. It's empty of any fixed nature in that all the causes and conditions coming together to create one thing, are themselves changing. They are *impermanent*, which is another basic concept of Buddhism. With this conditional arising, all these different conditions coming together are constantly changing, and since there is no

fixed nature within anything, we say that it is also *selfless*. These are the basic principles of Buddhadharma and the qualities to observe within the objects of our contemplation.

## Understanding Basic Principles

We may have heard these things before. We may say, oh, I know about that, everything is impermanent, everything is selfless, and everything is causes and conditions. We may be familiar with these concepts, but our understanding may not be very grounded. So, even though we come to a point where it's time to practice contemplation, we can't derive benefits because our understanding is not solid. In this case, the practice of contemplation will be weak and will not generate wisdom.

In order to practice contemplation based on calming, we have to have a very thorough understanding of these basic principles of Buddhadharma: conditional arising, the empty nature of things, impermanence and selflessness. Only then can we have success in the practice of contemplation. With Chan methods such as Silent Illumination or Huatou, we may think we can just go ahead and use the method and be able to reach the goal. However, if we don't have a firm grasp of the central principles of Buddhadharma, we won't be able to generate wisdom and derive the benefits of these Chan methods.

## Abundance and Variety of Conceptual Teachings

What is the origin of the central principles of Buddhism? It is the *sutras* (the teachings of the Buddha) and the *shastras* (commentaries of the great doctrinal masters and meditation masters throughout the generations). Teachers even up to modern times continue to give commentaries on these writings. There is an incredible abundance of conceptual teachings of Buddhadharma. Why is that? The main reason is that people all have different capacities. They each have their own ability to grasp the Dharma in a different way. That's why you have an extremely broad collection of teachings; each of these teachings is directed towards a particular type of being with a particular capacity.

For example, some of you may be physicists, or studying psychology, or involved in various other professions. When you read a commentary by a teacher who explains Buddhadharma using concepts similar to your profession, you may feel connected and close to the teachings. Whereas you may read another commentary and think it's difficult to understand and you just can't connect with it. That's very normal and natural.

### Emptiness

All of the various teachings are designed to suit the diverse needs of different people. That's why there are differing traditions and schools within Buddhadharma. Within Indian Buddhism you have the Southern and Northern traditions. The Northern tradition eventually moved on to China to become the Chinese tradition as well as developed in Tibet and became the *Vajrayana* tradition. Within

these traditions you have different systems of thought. For example there is *Madhyamika* or the Middle Way, *Yogacara* or Consciousness Only, and *Tathagatagarbha* or the Buddha Nature system of thinking. The thorough and comprehensive explanation of these central principles of Buddhadharma — causes and conditions, selflessness, and impermanence — are all summarized with the later Buddhist word emptiness, which encapsulates all of these ideas.

If we try to engage in contemplation without having a very thorough understanding, we may feel that we are contemplating but we won't be very clear about the content of our contemplation. Our understanding will not be firm or stable. With all these varied teachings the main purpose is to explain to us, to enable us to firmly grasp the central teachings of Buddhadharma, which are actually found throughout all of this mass of teachings. If we can grasp the central teachings, then we can truly apply them in contemplation and eventually experience a thorough awakening and liberation from vexations.

### Sequential Practice

The practice of calming and contemplation generally follows this sequence: with the cultivation of calming, we develop stability, concentration, and meditative absorption. We fix the attention in one place and generate this single-pointed, very calm, and stable mind. Then, with this foundation of a stable mind, we engage in contemplation. This contemplation in the traditional practice is also a sequential, step-by-step process, where we have space to contemplate the essential principles of Buddhadharma which we summarized as conditional arising, impermanence, selfless-

ness — simply expressed as the empty nature of things. We use this as the basis of contemplation and then we generate wisdom.

## **Mindset of Compassion**

As to the topic today, the calming and contemplation of Mahayana Buddhism, what is the main difference between the Mahayana approach and the traditional approach? In our practice we have the basic goal of freeing our self from suffering and generating happiness. As we work on this, gradually reducing our vexations, we realize that with this practice we experience a kind of freedom, a true joy and ease within our lives. When we have this experience, we can then generate the sense of compassion for others.

Of course, it starts with oneself. We have this basic goal but then, because we know that all people experience great suffering, we hope to share this practice with all sentient beings and we generate the mindset of compassion. We have the aspiration, the vow, to help other people discover the same freedom and true joy within their lives. Initially, this vow is a kind of intention, but then it actually becomes behavior, because with this kind of idea in our mind, our behavior becomes such that can actually bring joy to others. This kind of compassionate behavior plays itself out in our daily life and translates into something that is real and practical.

So, what is the main difference between the traditional approach and the Mahayana approach? The crux is this compassionate vow. This practice of compassion manifests in our daily life, but is founded in the basic practices of calming the mind and contemplating the essential principles of Buddhadharma. By

combining this compassionate vow with the practice of calming and contemplation, this becomes the Mahayana practice of calming and contemplation.

## **Finding Suitable Methods**

With this method of calming and contemplation, we have the basic method which is putting the mind in one place and contemplating the central principles of Buddhadharma. Afterwards, adding the element of compassion, we have the aspiration to help all sentient beings to realize this freedom in their own daily lives. Initially, it's just an aspiration, but how do we translate it into behavior? To do that, we need to think of ways to attract sentient beings to the practice.

We need to develop suitable methods for people to use to gain the benefits of calming and contemplation. We can't expect that everyone is going to be able to use the approach of sitting meditation. Some people may not think they have the time or they just don't find that sitting meditation is suitable for them; they are not able to do it. This is actually fine because keeping still in sitting meditation is not the only way to develop this insight.

## **Work as Moving Meditation**

We know that there are many different kinds of moving meditation; for example, one of the earliest kinds is something unique to Chinese Buddhism. The phrase that has been coined is "agricultural Chan". In the monasteries in the past for much of the day the monastics were engaged in cultivating the fields. To sustain the life of the monastery they had to do things like cut wood and carry water. So their practice was in the midst of movement. In

the midst of movement, they cultivated calming and contemplation. Nowadays in modern times many people still do manual kinds of labor, for example in factories. What they are doing is putting their mind on their work. By putting your mind completely on your work, you are also cultivating this practice of Chan, calming and contemplation.

## **Chan Video Game**

A lot of people are also busy with office work, especially computer work. I think we really need to develop some sort of computer Chan. For example, there are games that people play on the computer and in most of them you are killing people, destroying things left and right. With “calming and contemplation computer Chan,” you can have a game where you have this person and within their life in the game, you have to figure out how they can cultivate more wholesome behavior, how they can cultivate meditative concentration and engage in different contemplations. Through the wholesome behavior and practices they’re developing, they’re perfecting Buddhadharma. While you are going through this video game you get all these points, and earn merit. You cultivate a compassionate aspiration and develop it to its fullest. This would be an awesome game, I think. For those of you who are talented in this field, you can develop this. Make this an expedient means for attracting people, giving them the chance to cultivate Chan in an area that they are comfortable with.

## **Practice According to Capacity**

The Mahayana practice of calming and contemplation is taking the basic method and principles of Buddhadharma and translating

them into an activity in which different sentient beings can engage according to their capacity. It’s not limited to sitting meditation. It could be moving practice or it could be something with computers. This depends on your creativity and ability. This approach to sharing the Dharma of calming and contemplation in any way possible is the real spirit of calming and contemplation in the Mahayana.

We can see in other ways in which Mahayana Buddhism has taken this calming and contemplation and developed it to its fullest. Mahayana Buddhism is not only directed towards helping relieve people from suffering, but all sentient beings, including animals. The monastic institutions of Chinese Buddhism encouraged practices of protecting life. So if a person found an animal which was trapped or hurt in some way, they would take the animal to the monastery, and there would be a ceremony of freeing the animal and returning it to its natural habitat. This is one kind of practice.

## **Chanting Services**

Another kind of practice is the Dharma service or chanting service. The people who attend these ceremonies cultivate certain benefits from reciting the sutras, and using chanting to learn the Buddhadharma. They also cultivate calmness of mind. These ceremonies also help other kinds of sentient beings who are in states where they are unable themselves to practice the Buddhadharma. They depend upon these chanting services to hear the Dharma and experience the benefit.

It’s also a place where a large gathering of people can engage together in this recitation of Buddhadharma, a group practice of calm-

ing the mind. At first glance you might think, big deal, they're all just sitting around reciting sutras, who can't do that? But actually practitioners of these Dharma services, especially the chanting leaders, need to have a very stable and concentrated mind to be able to chant in a way that brings the most merit for these other sentient beings. If they just loosely recited the sutras in a scattered state of mind, there wouldn't be much strength or benefit coming from their practice.

There is a Dharma service in Taiwan called the Water and Land Dharma Service. Our Chan Center's Abbot Guo Xing Fashi, is often the leader of this service. He has to study the content of the chanting very deeply, and he also needs to memorize a lot of mantras. Only by memorizing them are you able to penetrate deeply into the concept of concentration when doing the chanting. This in itself is a very profound practice which requires strong concentration. This is just another example of how, within Mahayana Buddhism, calming and contemplation have been developed to such a broad range.

To finish this talk, another very clear example of this spirit of the Mahayana's calming and contemplation is with our own Shifu, Chan Master Sheng Yen. When he passed away, he didn't want an ordinary funeral where people go and mourn

the passing of a person. Rather, he wanted his funeral to be a kind of group practice, where everyone can be part of a Dharma service. With the environment that this Dharma service creates, people feel the sense of calmness just in the atmosphere, just from the sense of being there. Many of you may have seen it on the internet. Even people outside of Taiwan were able to watch it and participate in it. The atmosphere itself created a sense of calmness through a digital medium. People can practice calming and contemplation by participating in this kind of funeral service, which is the main concept that Shifu wanted to portray in his funeral. This truly exemplifies the main principle of the Mahayana calming and contemplation.

May you all experience great joy and may your wisdom and compassion grow day by day.



# Four Kinds of People

by

Žarko Andričević

*Žarko Andričević was one of Chan Master Sheng Yen's four Western Dharma heirs first introduced in the book Chan Comes West (Dharma Drum Publications 2002). He is the founder and director of Dharmaloka, a Buddhist community in Zagreb, Croatia. He often comes to lead the intensive retreats at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center. This Dharma Talk was given on the third evening of the Winter 2011 10-Day Huatou Retreat.*



Good evening to everyone. Perhaps there is not really any point in me talking tonight since I talked to almost every one of you today. But still, maybe there is a need for a few words about one very important aspect of practice. Today we spoke individually about the method. So I hope that now you have a clearer idea about how to use the method and how to practice. But there are other things besides the method and practice which are also important; those are what I want to talk about tonight.

I will start with a saying of the Buddha. He said there are four kinds of people in the world:

- The first are those who only think of and take care of themselves.
- The second are those who only think of and take care of other people.
- The third are those who neither think of themselves nor of other people.
- And the fourth are those who take care of themselves and take care of other people.

I think this is a useful way of presenting the varieties or differing qualities of relationships we establish. I think it's very clear which category here is the preferable one. Of course we have to take care of ourselves. There's no doubt about it. But we also have to take care of other people. This is really the only balanced way of being in the world. This saying of the Buddha is useful as a kind of diagnostic to see clearly where we fall in these four categories. And I'm sure all of you here know people who belong to each of those categories.

So what is the connection between our practice and this saying?

## Ourselves And Others

Very often we can approach our practice from the perspective of just taking care of ourselves. Somehow it seems very natural and appropriate. We are here, it's true, in a group. But you are told that you have to isolate yourself, that you should be concentrated only on your practice and nothing else. You have to work on your method and forget everything else. These instructions seem to support the idea that we have to take care of and think of only ourselves. But that attitude is not a right one.

Generally we live in a society in which that attitude is very much present. Individualism is something which is taken as standard, seen as normal and positive. Sometimes we practice with the same attitude which we normally have in life; so we practice in order to become enlightened. This is our aim: "I" want to be enlightened, and we don't realize that this is actually a contradiction in itself.



If we are only concerned with our own practice and we only want the benefits of this practice for our own self, then it becomes counterproductive. So, how can we take care of ourselves and others in our own individual practice? That is really the question. And that is definitely possible, that is something we should do here. So, in what way can we do this?

Several times a day here we recite the four great vows. As we all recite these several times a day, maybe this whole talk tonight is completely unnecessary. Because this talk is actually about becoming aware of what we are reciting in these four great vows, and bringing that to our own practice on the cushion. If we are just concerned with ourselves



when we practice it's very easy to become obsessed with our own situation. It's easy to have a very narrow view of what's going on with us, and a very narrow view of practice itself.

So what we have to do is raise compassion in ourselves. We have to change orientation in our practice somehow, in order to practice not just for ourselves and our own benefit, but for the benefit of all sentient beings, or at least for the benefit of people with whom we have relationships.

And if you think a little bit more about it, you'll see that our own suffering and vexations, our problems which we have in life, are not just our problems. All these problems we experience in life affect other people too. We are not an island in the sense that whatever is happening to us doesn't have any effect on other people. It has.

Once we become aware of this, we have a responsibility, and I am sure this responsibility is something which brings us to this retreat. But that responsibility has to include not just ourselves. It has to include other people too. So in our practice we have to raise this compassionate attitude. We have to practice very hard. Not just for our own liberation but for the liberation of, I will say again, all sentient

beings. But if this seems too wide, too abstract in a sense, it is better that you think of the people with whom you have relationships.

If we bring this compassionate attitude into our practice it will definitely change the atmosphere. The whole situation becomes transformed, because to practice with such attitude is actually the highest possible motivation which we can have. There are all kinds of

motivations for practice. Some people just do it for health reasons; they heard that practicing meditation is good for the health of their body. Some people do it

in order to eliminate stress which they feel is the result of their job. Some people want to be reborn in a better condition, so they practice for results in the next life. And some people might want to be enlightened in this life. There is a range of different motivations which can bring people to practice. But the highest of all of them is the motivation in which we want to be enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings, not just for ourselves. This is the highest possible motivation. So in what way does this compassionate motivation help our own practice?

We have to know that all our vexations in life come from our own egocentricity and selfish-

“HAVING A COMPASSIONATE ATTITUDE  
IS LIKE A MEDICINE.  
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IN OURSELVES  
EGOCENTRICITY WEAKENS.  
AS OUR PRACTICE PROGRESSES PROPERLY  
EGOCENTRICITY COMPLETELY DISAPPEARS.”

ness. All our sufferings come from being obsessed with ourselves and believing that we exist separately from everyone else. Believing in this separate existence, in other words, is called ignorance, and is the root source of all our vexations. Desire, greed and hatred come about as a result of ignorance. Where there is ignorance there is always greed and hatred; all this together we can just call egocentricity and selfishness.

This egocentricity manifests itself as a very strong attachment, and this attachment is something which creates suffering. There is a very clear chain which shows how, from ignorance through attachment, we come to suffering. If we are clear about how the suffering arises in our life then the idea of practice will be very clear. And what is the basic idea of

practice in Buddhism and Chan? It is liberating our awareness from this egocentricity.

Our true mind is actually captured and used by egocentricity. All this suffering is completely unnecessary. If we look at history . . . not just history, we have to look at what's going on right now in the world . . . what a great amount of suffering people are going through! It is unbelievable how much suffering we can bring to ourselves and other people, and it is all the result of this ignorance, hatred and greed. Or, in one word, it all comes from egocentricity. So the aim of practice is to liberate us from this egocentric mind in order to find our true mind, which is free from ignorance, hatred and greed.

This egocentricity, ignorance and all these



poisons are really based on this idea of a separate existence. We believe that we exist separately, and therefore being greedy and having hatred is a strategy in life – if we want to be successful, we have to use these things. On the other hand, compassion is something completely opposite from this. Compassion is the awareness of the state of being of others. If we want to be aware of others and how they feel, we have to open up. We have to stop being obsessed with ourselves. We have to extend that awareness if we want to include others in it.

We know practice wants to liberate us from this self-centeredness; having a compassionate attitude is something which helps us a great deal in that. It is like a medicine. When we raise compassion in ourselves egocentricity weakens. As our practice progresses properly egocentricity completely disappears.

This compassionate attitude is not just towards others, it is the attitude we have towards ourselves also. When we raise compassion in our practice it includes us too. We actually have to dedicate our practice to ourselves and other sentient beings.

Because we create very contradictory situations in ourselves, if we practice with only ourselves in mind sometimes it increases vexations in our practice. If we have this wider view of dedicating our practice not just to ourselves but to all people with whom we interact, it give us much more power. Our vexations become much less present and our practice develops properly. I just wanted to remind you of this. Now every time you recite these four great vows, remind yourself when you work on your method in your practice on the cushion, to include all other beings. Try

to practice for the sake of all. It will certainly bring a change.

Okay. And now, we intensified our practice a little bit today. I was in the interview room but I heard Chang Wen Fashi shouting in here during the walking meditation. I hope that was beneficial for your practice. I hope you're not afraid of the shouting; you have to understand it as outer support for your inner effort. As you're trying to practice hard from inside of yourself, it is good also to have support from the outside. All this energy from the shouting you should direct towards working on the Huatou.

Shouting can come from inside or it can come from outside. In both cases, you use it to concentrate more in questioning on the Huatou itself. So don't be afraid of those shouts and of incense boards and anything which might be used from now on. Just concentrate fully on working on your Huatou and on asking, asking, asking. But at the same time with this compassionate attitude. You are not asking just for yourself – you are asking for the sake of all the people with whom you interact. This is the best that we can do for ourselves and others. If we practice in this way we will be in the fourth category which Buddha mentioned, and this is the most balanced one.

Okay so now continue working on your method. What is wu?

What is it?

If you don't know the answer you have to ask. Actually it is more about asking than answering. So just continue asking "What is it?"

Okay.

echo



Drawing by Rikki Asher





# Leaving Home

David Kabacinski



Becomes



Chang Wen Fashi

# Leaving Home - Part Five

by

Ven. Chang Wen

*Venerable Chang Wen is a Western monastic disciple of the late Chan Master Sheng Yen. Formerly known as David Kabacinski, he was ordained as a novice in 2004, received his monastic education at Dharma Drum Sangha University in Taiwan, and received full ordination in 2006. He currently serves as Director of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY. The following is the fifth installment of his autobiographical account of becoming a Buddhist monk. It was originally published in Humanity Magazine in Taiwan, and was edited for Chan Magazine by David Berman.*

(Editor's Note: We'd like to issue a correction on a date given in the previous article, "Leaving Home – Part 4". The grand opening ceremony of the Confidence and Practice Monastery actually took place in July of 2005.)

## Taking Care of Others, Forgetting Myself

In early 2005, I returned to Taiwan from Ireland. Having fulfilled my duties as a temporary attendant to Shifu, I once again joined in the activities of the sangha. By this time I had become more accustomed to daily life on the Mountain (referring to Dharma Drum Mountain in Jinshan, soon to be the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education). My routine was still quite simple: do daily chores, like cleaning various areas in the monk's quarters; study Chinese; and most importantly, learn the life of a monastic, by taking basic courses in precepts, meditation, and Dharma, and putting it all into practice.

It was such a simple lifestyle that it felt almost like being on solitary retreat. For much of the time, when not attending classes or studying Chinese, I was alone. Doing simple chores was excellent for introspection, yet I sometimes felt isolated.

On one hand, I enjoyed the silent practice; on the other hand, I felt a bit of distance from the rest of the sangha. As I mentioned before, I didn't initially mix well with my Dharma brothers. This was partly due to my lack of fluency in Chinese, but also to cultural differences and personality. Not understanding all of what was being said, I did not attend many of the activities and classes in the early months living at the Mountain. So I didn't feel so connected to the sangha. Everybody was "out there"; I was "in here," as if in semi-solitary retreat. I had a lot of unresolved questions about practice, a lot of vexations and self-concern.

Thankfully, there were some opportunities for human interaction with people outside of the monk's quarters. For example, I was able to help with projects that required English fluency, such as receiving international visitors, translating documents, and leading group Chan meditation for English-speakers. These occasions gave me the chance to open up my mind and make good connec-

tions with people. The role of being guide for special guests was truly a blessing. I met and spent time with eminent monastics like Venerable Walpola Piyananda, Abbot of the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles, who is also nephew and student of the well-respected Walpola Rahula, author of *What the Buddha Taught*. I had the pleasure of engaging in interfaith dialogue with a Catholic priest interested in studying Buddhism. I also had the chance to care for other international visitors — people who were interested in the practice at DDM, who were, like myself, being introduced to a new culture and environment. There were practitioners from all over the world, including Spain, Germany, and the U.S.. When caring for guests, showing them around, providing what they needed, introducing them to people, I began to see things from *their* perspective. I began to pay attention to how wonderful the environment was, and how special it was to be there, practicing as a monk. Everything seemed fresh again! The things that I overlooked, the people I may have formed certain opinions about, they now looked different. I began to appreciate everyone in a new light, and to see how my previous perceptions actually distorted my mind.

Another opportunity to push myself out of self-isolation was helping with translations. Guo Xing Fashi and the team from the “Passing on the Lamp” department were working on the English video version of the *Eight Forms of Moving Meditation*, and I was asked to do the voice-over. This was a great chance to do something I was quite uncomfortable with — presenting myself in front of others, and using a microphone. It allowed me to face the fears of being on the spot, while maintaining a relaxed body/mind and pleasant-sounding voice. After all, people would be

using this video to do the exercises, so it had to be relaxing. Eventually, I just had to forget about any kind of insecurity and pay attention to doing the voice-over.

This project gave me a chance to contact more people within DDM, including elder monastics like Guo Xing Fashi. I saw more of Taipei, as we went to a professional recording studio to do the voice-over. It was eye-opening to see the big city and to learn how Taiwanese interact outside of DDM. Most importantly, this experience of forgetting myself gave me confidence in the approach of Chan, where letting go is the key to dissolving self-concern. By forgetting myself, and caring for others and my task at hand, I tasted a bit of the freedom and ease of the bodhisattva’s mind.

## Learning & Leading Chan Practice

The most challenging and rewarding task of all, given to me in early 2005, was to assist with, and eventually lead the Chan meditation group for English speakers (called the International Meditation Group, or IMG). For years it had been held at Nong Chan Monastery, led by monastics including Guo Xing Fashi and Guo Guang Fashi, but by 2005, no one was assigned to this role, as everyone was busy preparing for the DDM opening ceremony at year’s end. Guo Yuan Fashi, the former abbot of the Chan Meditation Center in New York, had been recalled to Taiwan to help plan operations in the new Chan Hall, and he took up the job while it was being completed. I assisted him with a few of the practice sessions, and not long afterwards he said, “Can you take over the group yourself?” This question stopped me in my tracks. “Me?” “Sure, no problem,” he said with an assuring tone. But I was far from assured. I had just become



a monk one year before, and still felt quite insecure in my own practice. "Just tell them to relax, that's all," he said. "So... the next one-day retreat you will lead, OK?" And that was final. Before I had any time to think of a way to refuse or get out of it, I had already agreed. I was willing to take on the responsibility, but not so sure of my qualifications to do so.

Despite being insecure about myself and my own practice, I did have experience being a timekeeper for the weekly sittings at CMC in New York, and during intensive retreat. In the role of supervisor, I had observed Guo Yuan Fashi leading many retreats at DDRC in New York State. All these instances became my references for guiding people in group practice. I did have some good experiences with sitting and knew how to relax. And yes, mindfulness practice was a firm grounding for knowing what to say when guiding others in the practice. Yet it was still a bit unnerving taking the role as "teacher." In the beginning, I was accompanied by some elder monastics including Guo Qi Fashi who supported me when I led the first retreat. Later on, Guo Ji Fashi drove me to the group practice location in Taipei each time, and helped with making arrangements and administration. He very kindly introduced me to other monastics at Nong Chan Monastery and the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. I appreciated very much his encouragement, as he was very open and expressive. He would often share what he thought about how I led

the group practice, what could be done better, and what he had also experienced. He knew some English, so I felt very comfortable sharing with him and getting his feedback and advice. Eventually, he became very busy with the expanding departments of DDM and left everything to me.

A few months after, I began to make arrangements for the group practice myself. Having met the various monastics in charge of the venues that we borrowed for the group practice, I felt more comfortable communicating in Chinese. At the time, my Chinese was still quite basic and clumsy, but I could get the point across. By communicating through email in Chinese, my fluency in both reading and writing improved quickly. Eventually, my vocabulary became good enough to communicate about the various things related to planning for weekly group practice, or our monthly one-day retreats.

All the monastics and volunteers, especially those at the Chung-Hwa Institute, were very supportive of IMG and what we were doing. They even had a special room renovated in the nearby apartments to be used exclusively for IMG and occasional volunteers' sleeping quarters. The space was very comfortable for sitting meditation, in the quiet neighborhood behind the Institute. Despite the occasional "vroom" of motorcycles or trucks, it was quite a nice area that bordered a lush-green hillside

**THIS EXPERIENCE OF FORGETTING MYSELF GAVE ME CONFIDENCE IN THE APPROACH OF CHAN, WHERE LETTING GO IS THE KEY TO DISSOLVING SELF-CONCERN. BY CARING FOR OTHERS AND THE TASK AT HAND, I TASTED A BIT OF THE FREEDOM AND EASE OF THE BODHISATTVA'S MIND.**

spotted with temples and small houses, as well as lots of hot spring resorts. Nearby were a few parks, and the whole area had a sense of calm. This center was a historical place, established by our grandmaster, Venerable Dong Chu, and so also had a feel of being the home of DDM and the Dharma Drum Lineage. In this very supportive environment, I had another chance to break out from self-imposed isolation and cultivate a more compassionate mindset.

Eventually, I became quite comfortable leading IMG and thinking more about the needs of others. As teacher or facilitator, I tried to help them understand their own practice. I also became less nervous by being more focused on helping the students. Before the group discussion, I would think, "What do these people need? What can I say that can help them? What problems may they be encountering in the practice?" Then I would observe how they behaved before, during, and after the group practice. Reflecting on what I'd observed and then sharing my own problems seemed a good way to connect with them. They appreciated my guidance. Yet, to my surprise, when I returned to the Mountain and met with my Dharma brothers everyday, I still often felt irritated. It was only later that I discovered why.

## **The Manifestation of a Grand View**

Prior to residing at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan, I had little knowledge of what Shifu and the organization were doing there. My only exposure to their activities was hearing others discuss it at the Chan Center in New York. I had heard there was some massive project to build a large education center, but I had no real idea what that meant. I had

seen a poster about the Sangha University, but unable to read the Chinese at the time, I only understood a few words of it. I was only familiar with what Shifu and the sangha were doing here in the States, leading retreats and giving Dharma talks. I knew he was busy in Taiwan, but I had no idea what he was busy with. Even after having lived at DDM for a year, I still wasn't clear as to the magnitude of what he and DDM were undertaking. Only 18 months later, in October 2005, when the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education held its Grand Opening Ceremony, did I realize that DDM was part of a grand vision, which would have far-reaching impact on Buddhism as a whole and the population of the world, beyond just adherents of Chan practice.

The completion of the entire complex was astounding in itself. Over the months before the ceremony, I had seen the construction from a distance, huge machinery and foundations that had to be drilled deeply into the moist, soft mountain terrain. After the foundations were built, retaining walls made of netting and plant life were needed to prevent the steep hillsides from collapsing. Some areas were completed and then demolished and re-done. In particular, there was a staircase by the bus stop – in the original design plan it had seemed acceptable, but it turned out to be too narrow for the hundreds or thousands of people who'd be using it during popular activities. For weeks, jackhammers banged away. Later, Shifu told us that it was he who had ordered the rebuilding. He said, "If this complex is to last for 500 years or more, we'd better build it right the first time. Afterwards, you'd better not haphazardly change what's been done. Every building, every plot of land, and every stone here has been placed at its lo-

cation for a reason. Everything has a function and every place is also designed to be scenic landscape.” The complex seemed to grow right out of the mountainside. The earthen colors of the buildings and walkways blended perfectly into the natural landscape. When viewed from a distance, the Buddha Hall with its grey walls and brown roof seemed soft, yet stood firm. There is no other place in Taiwan where one can see such a design. The combination of traditional Chinese Buddhist and modern architecture created a style that had never been seen before.

The trees at DDM also have their own story. During the construction, one by one, they were moved from the building sites to various locations around the campus. Among them were fifty-foot tall cinnamon and fig trees, which took 18-wheel tractor trailers and huge cranes to move. They originally grew in the forest, and then were relocated to provide shade and greenery amidst the campus grounds and driveways. Rather than destroy the trees, Shifu said that we should be as careful as we could to respect the natural habitat and either maintain it or try to relocate and re-establish the plant life. After all, these plants are homes to countless sentient beings.

At the time I didn’t realize how unique a project this was. Shifu’s view and vows, and the various conditions that came together due to the efforts of thousands of people, including project leaders, donors, and participants of DDM’s activities, gave birth to a Buddhist

education center that might truly last 500 years. To present such a magnificent center to the world, an equally grand ceremony was designed. I’m not aware of many of the details, nor of the names of the people involved, but I knew that various professionals from the media were invited to take on roles as event coordinators, film directors, event production staff, interior designers, and masters of ceremonies, etc. I wasn’t familiar with the people in these industries, but could see by their performance and leadership that they were very accomplished and experienced. The monastics took on

important roles as well, as they worked together with these professionals to create a ceremony that was at once grand, with big lights and big banners, and at the same time solemn and noble, suited perfectly to the new Center’s appearance and the underlying principles of Dharma Drum Mountain and Buddhist Dharma in general.

My role in this grand scheme was a small one. With a few other Dharma brothers, we served as attendants to the elder monastics who were invited to give their blessings and take part in the opening ceremonies. Our group of five was assigned to the Grand Buddha Hall, where Shifu and his closest and most-respected Dharma brothers and elders were present. Among them was the late Master Ren Jun, for whom I felt a deep affinity. As it turned out, I was assigned to be his attendant! What an honor! I was so happy to see him again, and to have a few moments to chat with him

ONE TAKES THE PRECEPTS ALONE,  
 AND WALKS THE PATH ALONE.  
 ALTHOUGH WE PRACTICE IN A SANGHA,  
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before and after the events. He laughed and complimented me on my speaking Chinese! He said with a look of surprise, “Hey, look, Chang Wen became so handsome after having become a monk!”

The ensuing ceremonies were attended not only by some of the most well-respected elders of the Taiwan Buddhist community, but also by various Buddhists, religious leaders, politicians and celebrities from all across the world. Over the years, Shifu had made many friendships and connections with people while working on global issues. While in New York and when traveling abroad with him, I saw firsthand how influential Shifu was, and how his compassion affected many people. Although his English was not so good, his demeanor and genuine concern for people was a concrete example of the religious principles that he stood for. When he spoke, he addressed the common needs of everyone, rather than asserting his own religion. He was a Buddhist monk with a global perspective, a person with firm principle, yet no fixed view. A true Chan master, he had complete confidence, faith, and experience in his own tradition, yet did not impose these teachings on others. The diverse array of people who attended the Grand Opening Ceremony was a testament to the fact that he had deeply affected many influential people. His goal of “Creating a Pure Land on Earth” was shared by many, and they came to show support.

One startling fact that we all discovered after the ceremony was that Shifu was not in good health. Yet only after the event, during an after-breakfast Dharma talk, did Shifu share the news with the sangha: “How did I appear during the lecture on that day? Good? Well, that was an illusion. I actually felt physically

terrible and weak. But I did my best to give a talk and encourage everyone.” He explained how one failing kidney was removed not long before opening day, and the remaining one was not functioning so well. He would probably have to receive dialysis on a regular basis. But his spirits didn’t seem affected at all. Although his voice was weak, he shared the news with such detachment it was as if he were talking about some stranger’s health condition. I was astounded upon hearing this, and admired Shifu even more for his great vow and determination to fulfill his role as spiritual guide for Dharma Drum Mountain.

After 16 years of planning and work, the education center was finally opened and began operation. Of course, Shifu would not have missed the opening, and despite age and infirmity, made the effort to express his gratitude for all the efforts of the countless people involved.

## Receiving the Bhikshu Precepts

After the Grand Opening, there was a period where everything slowed down a bit. The sangha began the task of getting acquainted with running such a large center with all new facilities and modes of operation. I also got more settled in the daily routine, which now included activities in the Grand Buddha Hall, and all across the complex. The sangha as a whole held morning and evening services, with monks and nuns as well as all lay members chanting together. I began to get a better sense of the strength of the sangha, just by seeing and hearing us all together. With such a large complex, we needed to work together more to run the daily operations and activities, which also became larger. Shifu gave more lectures in the dining hall to the whole

sangha, which further seemed to strengthen the morale and unity among everyone.

Within a few months, it was time for the 2006 Chinese New Year activities, and I got more involved in assisting with chanting and using the Dharma instruments. It was a very busy season, and by the end of it I had become quite ill. My throat was sore and sinuses infected; I developed an irritating dry cough that made it difficult to talk, chant, and even to breathe. It was exhausting as well, as coughing takes a toll on one's energy. Eventually, I was physically exhausted and cold, suffering in the damp and windy winter at the Mountain. I dreamed of a warm fireplace where I could warm my aching body and cook off the chill.

I was notified by the sangha that it was time to prepare to take the full ordination. When my Dharma brothers, with whom I took the novice precepts, went to Mainland China for full ordination a year earlier, I didn't get to go. At the time, the precepts were being held at the famous Gao Ming Monastery, which was especially prestigious as the place of Chan Master Xu Yun's (Empty Cloud) initial enlightenment experience. It was also where Chan Master Lai Guo, once the abbot, guided and instructed many disciples, and established a strict regimen for intensive Chan retreat practice.

The main reason I hadn't been allowed to go was that my Chinese at that time was still not fluent enough, and surely not good enough to understand the accents of people in that region of China. Certainly, I wouldn't

have been able to understand the lectures of the elder monastics who spoke local dialects. But now it was time to take the next step on the path of monastic life. We were scheduled to take the precepts in March 2006, just two years after my novice ordination. The place of ordination was Bamboo Forest Monastery, in northern Taiwan, in a city called Xindian (新店). The monastery sat in the thick of a mountainside forest, overlooking the city below. Interestingly, this time we did not go to the Mainland; rather, the Mainland came to Taiwan. About ten sangha members from Jeweled Flower Mountain (an area across the river from Gao Ming Monastery) came to direct the precepts training in their particular style, including monastic manners and demeanor, the ceremonial procedure, and chanting.

What brought about this special circumstance was that the preceptor, the late Venerable Elder Jie De (戒德長老), 98 years old at the time, was determined to gather together the personnel to transmit the precepts that year. Because he was previously a member of the



Jeweled Flower Mountain community, and because of his great influence in the modern world of Chinese Buddhism, he was able to gather together an exceptional group of Dharma teachers to conduct the training. Among them were 80-year-old Elder Song Chun (松純長老), then residing at Jeweled Flower Mountain, 82-year-old Elder Kuan Yu (寬裕長老) and 85-year-old Elder Shou Cheng (守成長老), the latter two being descendants of Jeweled Flower who now reside in Taiwan.

## Elder Shou Cheng

Elder Shou Cheng happened to be one of Shifu's previous teachers, who along with our esteemed Master Ren Jun of Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey, taught at the Jing An Buddhist University in Shanghai in the 1940s. In addition were a younger group of monastics, many of them directors and abbots of their own monasteries from various locations on the mainland. Included was Venerable Xin Ping (心平法師), the abbot of Longchang Temple, a monastery at Jeweled-Flower Mountain known for its precepts training, transmission, and study.

Elder Shou Cheng was the director of ceremonies, and for almost the whole month, day after day, he spent hours directing our practice of the precept ceremonies, chanting louder than all the young monks and nuns. At the end of the he night would, while standing, give an inspiring Dharma talk about the spirit of the precepts. "Take the precepts as your teacher." Quoting the Buddha, he emphasized that the precepts are the foundation for a monastic's life-long career as a "role model for all gods and humans." "However, in following the precepts we should use wisdom," he added, saying that for example, when keep-

ing the precept of not eating after noontime, we should take caution. Although it can be very good for the health to abstain from taking food after noon, we should take care of the body. If we are hungry we should eat; if we are busy all day and into the night doing Dharma work, we must replenish the necessary fuel that the body needs. The crucial point is that when we eat, we do so with a pure mind, clear and aware, yet without the desire to experience pleasant sensations. Just eat without a mind of craving. So he gave the formula, "In the morning, eat just enough to be full; in the afternoon, eat well; in the evening, eat less." The Old Master gave this and much other advice on how to follow the *spirit* of the precepts.

Of all the elder masters present, Elder Shou Cheng interacted with us the most, and so my impression of him is the deepest. He seemed at once strong-minded and stern, yet also could be very soft-hearted and humorous. He would sometimes scold us and other times tell funny yet meaningful stories. Once, he was demonstrating the traditional chanting style of Jeweled Flower Mountain, which actually few monastic communities in Taiwan were able to preserve. This style of chanting is truly a treasure, and stands out as very unique among the world's religious traditions as melodic and yet very calming. Although he was over eighty years old at the time, his voice was still strong and resonant like a great bell. He continued to chant a very intricate and subtle verse, and at one point stopped and said, "Well, I made that up, but the original melody is something like that." We all laughed and he chuckled as well. His noble appearance, upright demeanor yet free spirit, and compassion for us were a display of all the qualities that a monastic should

have. I was particularly moved by this, and equally by the respect he showed to his Dharma brothers and elders, like the Preceptor Elder Jie De, as well as all the younger monastic teachers and leaders of the training. Just watching and listening to him inspired me to work hard at the practice.

During this whole month of precepts training, I was quite ill. I had one of the worst nasal infections in my life, had a fever and was very weak. The weather wasn't conducive to healing, as there were cold fronts coming down from the north—with winds and moisture—making the physical experience all the more miserable. While I tried to rest as much as possible, there wasn't much time. We couldn't leave in the middle of any activity, so I couldn't drink much water to flush out the cold. We didn't take the evening meal, which seemed to leave me even weaker. At one point, I had to ask for crackers in the evening because I felt faint. The training leaders were very compassionate and very accommodating. Although they scolded us as a group, they treated us individually with respect and care. They took me to the doctor when my fever reached a peak. The ear/nose/throat specialist sprayed some antibiotics into my nose and gave me some medicine. He also said, "You know, what's best is if we fix your nose." "What?" "It's a bit crooked, and that could cause some problems. Let me use your picture, and we'll fix it for free." "You mean surgery?" "Yes." I laughed and said, "No thanks. It's crooked, but it seems to work fine." He seemed more interested in doing surgery than curing the infection.

Back at the precepts training site, I was still ill after taking his medicine. Nothing seemed to work. But I was clear-headed enough to func-

tion and remember the most essential verses and responses required for passing the "Examination of Hindrances" as well as receiving the precepts and making vows. This body was functional enough to take the precepts. Thankfully, before this month of training, back at the Mountain, my Dharma brother and counselor, Venerable Chang Chi (常持法師), had helped me to review the whole procedure of precepts training. With this preparation, I was able to understand enough to get by, and my precepts brothers were also kind enough to explain some things.

But sometimes, even they couldn't understand the old masters' accents! The training leaders came from different districts of the Mainland, each having their own distinct dialect of Chinese. Since the "standard" Chinese pronunciation was secondary to them, many of their accents were incomprehensible to those accustomed to the Taiwanese accent. I wasn't the only one who was lost during some of the lectures. Yet, strangely I became accustomed to their accents over time. Without straining to catch the meaning of one word, I would just listen with a relaxed mind, and let everything come in. Instead of getting stuck on something, I'd just let it pass and continue to listen. In the end, I would get the main point of what the speaker was saying.

On a deeper level, there were more obstructions than just the language barrier. My habit energies surfaced when faced with illness, discomfort, and the stress of being very unfamiliar with the environment and people. Essentially, one takes the precepts alone, and walks the path alone. Although we practice in a sangha, one's work is done by oneself, and karmic obstructions must be dealt with that way too. I was faced with all the crav-

ing, anger, and ignorance that seemed to awaken when I decided to devote my life to the training of a *bhikshu*. In theory, renunciation of worldly pleasures and self-attachment sounds alluring. In actuality, it is a process of unraveling that resembles peeling off layers of dead, itchy skin—sometimes painful, yet liberating. In the face of these obstructions, all that I could do was rely on the precepts, the Dharma, my method of Chan practice, and do repentance prostrations with whatever little energy I had left. I vowed that although my vexations and obstructions were heavy, I would see through them, and continue to make diligent effort in the practice for the sake of all sentient beings.

After we received the precepts—after a month of mostly rain and cold winds, mixed with smoky air from the paper-burning urn and nearby factories—the weather cleared up and the air was crisp and fresh. The sun was shining and the sky a deep blue. After returning to DDM, only after five or six days of living in the fresh air, and with time to rest, I recovered from the cold. It seemed as if the precepts training was a life test of facing illness and obstructions of body and mind. Facing myself, repenting, and making vows, as well as absorbing more of the richness of the culture of Chinese Buddhism, I felt greatly renewed and inspired.



Dharma Drum Mountain –Photo by Master Sheng Yen



# The Past

*News from the Chan Meditation Center,  
DDRC and the DDMBA Worldwide*

## Loving Kindness Photo Contest

The Chan Meditation Center (CMC) held a photo contest to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Master Sheng Yen's teachings on "Protecting the Spiritual Environment". The theme of the contest was "Spreading Loving Kindness". More than one hundred entries were submitted. The photos were exhibited during the Buddha's Birthday Celebration

held at CMC on May 20, 2012. Three judges selected ten finalists, including a first place winner, "Growing Up Together" taken by Alberto Valdes.

Alberto photographed the combined shadows of himself, his wife and their child to commemorate their first walk in the park together as a family (his daughter had just learned to walk.) He says that the shadow is a metaphor of the family growing together in their relationships to one another and the karma that they share. He enjoys taking photos of shadows to express the emptiness of phenomena, and suggest impressions of the physical world, not as separate from one another but as one shadow.

Attendees of the event also voted for a "People's Choice" — the winning photo was "Samantabhadra" submitted by Dennis Chih-Yang Chang, a CMC member who lives in New Jersey. The photo was taken at Mount Emei in Sichuan, China. According to the locals the four faces of the statue are usually obscured by fog and clouds. The photo was actually taken by Dennis' wife Miya Lee. On the way up to the statue she kept chanting the name of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. When she arrived she was surprised to see the four faces



People's Choice Winner: "Samantabhadra" by Dennis Chih-Yang Chang



Cecilia, Mengchen, and Alberto

and, feeling very thankful, took this photo. Samantabhadra represents the power of vows. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, Samantabhadra teaches that wisdom only exists for the sake of putting it into practice; that it is only good insofar as it benefits all living beings. Dennis hopes that through this photo, people can feel Samantabhadra's love and kindness brightening a life direction for us.

There were many fine photographs among the finalists. Chan Magazine will be showcasing more of them in future issues.



First Place Winner: "Growing Up Together" by Alberto Valdes

## DDRC Spring Events

### *Little Bodhisattvas Visit Catskill Animal Sanctuary*

The children and teachers of DDRC's Little Bodhisattvas program visited the Catskill Animal Sanctuary (CAS) on April 14th, 2012. CAS Director Kathy Stevens established the facility as a home for rescued farm animals. It is also a place where people can learn to recognize the similarities between animals and humans, and the importance of treating all living beings with compassion. Many animals at CAS are free-range, so you might walk right up to a goat or a cow as soon as you park your car. On arrival our Little Bodhisattvas

engaged in some direct contemplation with a turkey. Then they were given an extra-long tour by the founder herself, who told them the stories of the various rescued animals. They discovered that just being around animals in the proper way can be a mindfulness practice. At one point they all relaxed in silence with some very calm (and very large) pigs. Some children actually rested right on top of the animals. Later all agreed they had experienced a sense of loving-kindness coming from the animals.

CAS has a children's education program which includes gardening, vegan cooking, and an understanding of the benefits that a vegan diet can bring to the earth. Visit their website: <http://casanctuary.org/>



### *Gardening Weekend*

Thirty-five volunteers came to DDRC for the annual Gardening Weekend, April 28-29, 2012. On the first morning they began by listening to a brief Dharma talk by Ven. Chang Wen on the mindfulness of gardening. Then they spread out on the campus grounds and weeded the lavender hill, the vegetable garden, and various other areas. Later they had free time to explore the woods; some went hiking on the nearby Shawangunk Ridge. After dinner there was Dharma sharing followed by quiet socializing.

The second day was very much like the first. On both days the weather was mild, slightly cool and partly cloudy, very pleasant for working outdoors. Most of the volunteers had come in together from the city in groups of

friends. They were happy to have two days to enjoy each other's company in the pleasant natural environment, with Dharma training as an extra benefit. The following week the Little Bodhisattvas were happy to find their area of the vegetable garden all weeded and ready for them to plant.

### *Family Weekend*

Ten families, including sixteen children, attended DDRC's annual Family Weekend event, May 5-6, 2012. On the first day the adults sat a 1-day meditation retreat while the children attended the Little Bodhisattvas program. Among other activities, the children planted seeds and bulbs in their area of the garden (weeded especially for them by volunteers on Gardening Weekend.) In the evening adults

and children gathered for a Dharma workshop in the Chan Hall. Chang Wen Fashi had them break out in family groups, and discuss the question "What makes a happy family?" Each family was given a large sheet of poster paper and a box of crayons. They were asked to draw pictures of what a happy family looks like, and what the seeds of happiness might be. Later, each family took a turn to display and describe their drawings to the group.

That night children were excited about their sleepover in the big old house. Most of them are already good friends because they attend the 1-day program every month. By contrast, their parents don't get much time to socialize at the end of the 1-day retreats. Family Weekend allowed them the time to get to know one another in a relaxed atmosphere.

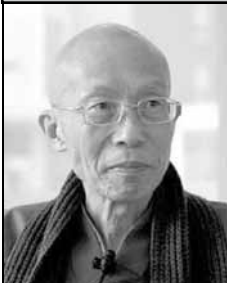


The highlight of the next day was a group hike in the forest, including wading in the shallow stream. Many small creatures were discovered, examined and left free. The children demonstrated boundless energy and curiosity and the adults remembered what it was like to see the world in that way. People lingered at the end, tired but happy and unwilling to leave.

# The Future

*Retreats, classes and other  
upcoming events*

## “Zen & Inner Peace”



*Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program*

*Now on ICN Cable*

*Channel 24.2 in NY*

*Fridays 7:45 pm - 8:00 pm*

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

(845) 744-8114 - [ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org](mailto:ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org) - [www.dharmadrumretreat.org](http://www.dharmadrumretreat.org)

*DDRC holds a variety of Chan practice activities, including weekly group meditation, Sunday services, beginner's meditation classes, as well as beginner's, weekend, intermediate and intensive Chan retreats. Novices and experienced practitioners are all welcome at DDRC. 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

#### 7-Day Intensive Chan Retreat

Led by Chi Chern Fashi

Saturday July 21 - Saturday July 28

#### 1-Day Retreats & Children's Program

Led by Chang Wen Fashi

Saturdays, July 14, September 8

#### Young People's Retreat

Led by Chang Wen Fashi

Friday August 24 - Sunday August 26

### Workshops

#### Young People's Workshop

Led by Guo Chan Fashi & Chang Ji Fashi

Friday August 17 - Sunday August 19

### Classes

#### 2-Part Beginner's Meditation Class

Led by Chang Wen Fashi

Part 1 Saturday September 15

Part 2 Saturday September 29

### Regular Weekly Activities

#### Thursday Evening Meditation

7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Sitting, walking, moving meditation and Dharma talk.

#### Sunday Service

10:00 am - 12 noon

Sitting, walking, moving meditation, chanting and Dharma talk.

**Chan Meditation Center (CMC) in Elmhurst, Queens, NY**  
(718) 592-6593 - [chancenter@gmail.com](mailto:chancenter@gmail.com) - [www.chancenter.org](http://www.chancenter.org) - [www.ddmba.org](http://www.ddmba.org)

## Retreats

*(Pre-registration advised.)*

### One-Day Beginner's Mind Retreat

Saturday, July 28  
9 am - 5 pm (8:45 check-in)  
Led by Dr. Rebecca Li; \$25

### One-Day Meditation Retreat

Saturday, September 29  
9 am - 5 pm (8:45 check-in)  
Led by Dr. David Slaymaker; \$25

## Classes

*(Pre-registration advised for all classes.)*

### Tai Chi Moving Meditation with David Ngo

Thursdays 7:30 - 9:30 pm - ongoing  
\$25 per 4-week month, \$80 for 16 classes  
*First Thursday of the month is free for newcomers.*

## Saturday Night Movies

*Screenings and discussions of movies  
from a Buddhist perspective*

Led by Lindley Hanlon  
Free of Charge  
Check website for dates and film description.

## Special Events

### Family Chan Camp

**Buddhism in Action: Peaceful Mind, Peaceful Body**  
*(by DDMBA, held at DDRC)*  
Wednesday, August 1 - Sunday, August 5

### 7-Day Surangama Chan Retreat

*(by DDMBA, held at DDRC)*  
Led by Guo Xing Fashi  
Monday, August 6 - Sunday, August 12

## Regular Weekly Activities

### Monday Night Chanting

7:30 - 9:15 pm - Last Monday of each month  
*Recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas' names and  
repentance practice.*

### Tuesday Night Sitting Group

7 pm - 9:30 pm: *Sitting, yoga exercises, walking  
meditation, dharma sharing, recitation of the Heart  
Sutra.*

### Saturday Sitting Group

9 am - 3 pm  
*Sitting meditation, yoga exercises, walking medita-  
tion.*

## Chan Meditation Center (CMC) Sunday Open House

### Sunday Schedule

10:00 am - 11:00 am Meditation  
11:00 am - 12:30 pm Dharma Lecture  
12:30 pm - 1:00 pm Lunch offerings  
1:00 pm - 2:00 pm Vegetarian lunch

### Chanting and Recitation

1st Sunday: 2-3:30 pm Guan Yin Chanting Service  
2nd Sunday: 2-4:00 pm Great Compassion Repentance Ceremony  
3rd Sunday: 2-3:00 pm Earth Store Sutra Chanting Service  
Last Sunday: 2-3:30 pm Bodhisattva Precept Recitation Ritual

### Sunday Dharma Talks

11 am - 12:30 pm  
Please check website for speakers and  
topics.

*(Please note: If there are five Sundays in the month,  
there will be a Guan Yin Chanting Service on the 4th Sunday.)*

# Chan Center Affiliates

*Local organizations affiliated with CMC and DDMBA provide a place to practice with and learn from other Chan practitioners.*

*If you have questions about schedules, activities or publications you may find useful information at one of our affiliates near you.*

## New York - USA Headquarters

### *Chan Meditation Center (CMC)*

*Home of:*

- *Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA)*
- *Dharma Drum Publications*
- *Chan Magazine*

90-56 Corona Avenue  
Elmhurst, NY 11373  
Tel: (718) 592-6593  
Fax: (718) 592-0717  
ddmbausa@yahoo.com  
www.chancenter.org  
www.ddmba.org

### *Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC)*

184 Quannacut Road  
Pine Bush, NY 12566  
Tel: (845) 744-8114  
ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org  
www.dharmadrumretreat.org

## Taiwan - World Headquarters

### *Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education:*

No.14-5, Lin 7, Sanchieh Village,  
Chinshan, Taipei  
Tel: 02-2498-7171, 02-2498-7174  
Fax: 02-2498-9029  
webmaster@ddm.org.tw  
www.ddm.org.tw

### *Dharma Drum International Meditation Group*

Contact: Antonio  
Tel: 02-2893-4646 ext. 6504  
contact@ddm.org.tw  
*Saturdays, 2:00 - 5:00 pm at the  
Jiantan Group Practice Center*  
www.ddm.org.tw

### *Nung Chan Monastery*

No. 89, Lane 65, Tayeh Road  
Peitou, Taipei  
Tel: 02-2893-3161  
Fax: 02-2895-8969

## NORTH AMERICA

### Canada

#### *Toronto*

*DDMBA Ontario*  
Contact: Angela Chang  
ddmba.toronto@gmail.com  
www.ddmba-ontario.ca  
Tel: (416) 855-0531

#### *Vancouver*

*DDMBA Vancouver Center*  
8240 No.5 Road,  
Richmond, BC, Canada V6Y 2V4  
Tel: (604) 277-1357  
Fax: (604) 277-1352  
info@ddmba.ca  
www.ddmba.ca

### Mexico

#### *Mar de Jade Oceanfront Retreat Center*

*Chacala, Nayarit, Mexico*  
Contact: Laura del Valle MD  
USA tel: (800) 257-0532  
Mexico tel 01-800-505-8005  
info@mardejade.com  
www.mardejade.com

*Daily meditation; regular retreats*

## NORTH AMERICA – UNITED STATES

<b>California</b>	<b>Illinois</b>	<b>Pennsylvania</b>
<p><i>Los Angeles Chapter</i>            Contact: Ashley Chiang            Tel: (626) 350-4388            bluebean88@earthlink.net            www.ddmbala.org</p>	<p><i>Chicago Chapter</i>            Contact: Susan Lincke            Tel: (847) 824-6882            ddmbachicago@gmail.com            www.ddmbachicago.org</p>	<p>Contact: Kun-Chang Yu            ddmbapa@gmail.com            www.ddmbapa.org</p>
<p><i>Sacramento Chapter</i>            Contact: Janice Tsai            ddmbasacra@yahoo.com</p>	<b>Michigan</b>	<p><i>Philadelphia</i>            Contact: Thomas Chiang            tchiang2001@hotmail.com</p>
<p><i>San Francisco Chapter</i>            Contact: Kyle Shih            Tel: (650) 988-6928            ddmbasf@gmail.com</p>	<b>Missouri</b>	<b>Texas</b>
<b>Colorado</b>	<p>Contact: Tai-Ling Chin            acren@aol.com</p>	<p><i>Dallas</i>            Contact: Patty Chen            ddmba_patty@yahoo.com</p>
<p>Contact: Yun-tung Chu            tomchu100@gmail.com</p>	<b>New Jersey</b>	<p><i>Houston</i>            Contact: Theresa Feng            power26v@aol.com</p>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<p><i>New Jersey Chapter</i>            Contact: Jia-Shu Kuo            789 Jersey Ave            New Brunswick, NJ 08901            Tel: (732) 249-1898            jskuo7@gmail.com            www.ddmba-nj.org</p>	<b>Tennessee</b>
<p><i>Fairfield</i>            Contact: Ming-Mei Peng            kontekalice@aol.com</p>	<b>New York</b>	<p><i>Memphis</i>            Contact: Dan Tu            dan_tu@hotmail.com</p>
<p><i>Hartford</i>            Contact: Linyung Wang            ling-yunw@yahoo.com</p>	<p><i>Long Island:</i>            Contact: Hai Dee Lee            haideelee@yahoo.com</p>	<b>Utah</b>
<b>Florida</b>	<p><i>New York City Chapter</i>            Contact: Carol Fong            carolymfong@yahoo.com</p>	<p><i>Salt Lake City</i>            Contact: Inge Fan            inge_fan@hotmail.com</p>
<p><i>Gainesville</i>            Contact: Lian Huey Chen            lianflorida@hotmail.com</p>	<b>Rochester</b>	<b>Vermont</b>
<p><i>Miami</i>            Contact: May Lee            Tel: (954)-432-8683</p>	<p>Contact: Chi An Hong            chian@turb-tech-int.com</p>	<p>Contact: Jui-Chu Lee            juichulee@yahoo.com            www.ddmbavt.org</p>
<p><i>Orlando</i>            Contact: Chih-Hui Chang            chihho2004@yahoo.com</p>	<b>Nevada</b>	<b>Washington</b>
<p><i>Tallahassee</i>            Contact: Guo Gu            tallahassee.chan@gmail.com            http://www.tallahasseechan.com/</p>	<p><i>Las Vegas</i>            Contact: Mabel Lin            mebaltan@go.com</p>	<p><i>Seattle Chapter</i>            Contact: Joyce Wang            14028 Bel Red Road Suite 205            Bellevue, WA 98007            Tel: (425) 957-4597            lichin22@yahoo.com            http://seattle.ddmusa.org/</p>
<p><i>Tampa</i>            Contact: Nancy Kau            skau@tampabay.rr.com</p>	<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>District of Columbia</b>
	<p>Contact: Shirley Wang            Tel: (919) 852-4860            tsuili2@yahoo.com</p>	<p><i>Washington D.C.</i>            Contact: Jack Chang            chiehhsiungchang@yahoo.com</p>



## ASIA and AUSTRALASIA

Australia	Malaysia	New Zealand
<p><b>Melbourne</b>                      Contact: Laura Chan                      ddmlaura@hotmail.com                      Tel: 61-4-0204-1997</p>	<p><i>Dharma Drum Mountain                      Buddhism Information Centre                      in Malaysia:</i>                      Block B-3-15 &amp; B-3-16, 8 Avenue                      Pusat Perdagangan Sek. 8                      Jala Sg. Jernih                      46050 Petaling Jaya, Selangor,                      Malaysia                      Tel: 603-79600841, 603-7319245                      Fax: 603-7331413, 603-79600842                      kahon@pc.jaring.my                      www.media.com.my/zen</p>	<p>No. 9 Scorpio PL.                      Mairangi Bay, Auckland,                      New Zealand                      Tel: 64-9-4788430</p>
<p><b>Sydney</b>                      Contact: Agnes Chow                      agneschow323@hotmail.com                      Tel: 61-4-1318-5603</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Singapore</b></p> <p><i>Singapore Liaison Office</i>                      No. 10 Second Avenue,                      Singapore 266660                      Contact: Ms. Yeh Yin Shia                      Tel &amp; Fax: (65) 6469 6565                      Cell: 9745 6565.                      ysyehsg@yahoo.com.tw</p>
Hong Kong		
<p>Room 205, 2/F BLK B,                      Alexandra Industrial Building                      23-27 Wing Hong St.                      Cheung Sha Wan                      Kowloon, Hong Kong                      Tel: 852-2865-3110                      Fax: 852-2591-4810</p>		

## EUROPE

Belgium	Poland	
<p><b>Luxemburg</b>                      15, Rue Jean Schaack L-2563                      Bonnevoie GD.DE Luxemburg                      Tel: 352-400080</p>	<p><b>Warsaw</b>  <i>Zwiazek Buddystow Czan (Chan                      Buddhist Union):</i>                      Contact: Pawel Rosciszewski                      ul. Promienna 12,                      05-540 Zalesie Górne, Poland                      Tel: 48 22 7362252                      Fax: 48 22 7362251                      GSM +48601224999                      budwod@budwod.com.pl                      www.czan.org.pl</p>	<p><b>Bern</b>                      Hildi Thalmann                      Haus Sein                      Bruungasse 16                      CH3011 Bern Switzerland                      hthalmann@gmx.net                      www.chan-bern.ch                      Tel: 31 352 2243</p>
Croatia		
<p><b>Dharmaaloka Buddhist Center</b>                      Dordiceva 23                      10000 Zagreb, Croatia                      Tel/Fax: ++385 1 481 00 74                      info@dharmaloka.org                      www.dharmaloka.org                      Teacher: Zarko Andricevic  <i>Ongoing program of study and                      practice, including courses in                      Buddhism and Chan meditation,                      meditation group meetings, and                      retreats.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Switzerland</b></p> <p><b>Zurich</b>                      Teacher: Max Kalin (Guo-yun)                      Tel/fax: 411 382 1676                      Mobile: 4179 416 8088                      Email: MaxKailin@chan.ch                      www.chan.ch</p>	<p><b>London</b>                      18 Huson Close                      London NW3 3JW, England                      Tel: 44-171-586-6923</p>
		<p><b>Western Chan Fellowship:</b>                      24 Woodgate Ave.                      Bury Lancashire, BL9 7RU, U.K.                      Contact: Simon Child, Secretary                      secretary@westernchanfellowship.                      org                      www.westernchanfellowship.org</p>