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You must enlighten yourself, and after enlightenment, your teacher will affirm it. But the affirmation is not to transmit to you some other thing, because what you awaken to is what you already have, not what the teacher transmitted to you. The only things that can be transmitted are teachings and methods.



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

“The Seeds of Chan,” July 2008

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FROM THE EDITOR

THIS SUMMER ISSUE TURNS OUT TO HAVE a theme of “retreats.” From *Humanity Magazine* we have a timeline showing the impressive history of our Master Sheng Yen, and his Dharma Drum organization, leading meditation retreats around the world. I myself was blessed to have attended the first retreat our Shifu led in the United States, at Bodhi House in Stony Brook, New York, and I attended the last retreat he led in the United States, at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC). I attended many retreats in between and after, including a forty-nine day retreat at DDRC. I also served for seventeen years as DDRC’s retreat coordinator, so in a way retreats became my “right” livelihood, for which I am most grateful. I learned firsthand from Shifu and his heirs and monastics how to create the proper environment to support intensive practice, where participants are cared for like precious little chicks in an incubator.

In this issue we also have an account of a history making retreat, the forty-five-day “International Mahayana Bhikshuni Joint Summer Retreat.” This was attended by one-hundred-twenty-seven nuns from eight countries. It was held in Shravasti City in Uttar Pradesh, India. The Vice Abbot of Dharma Drum Mountain, Venerable Guo Goang (a Dharma heir of Master Sheng Yen), was invited to serve as the Abbot

nun of this joint summer retreat. Thus Dharma Drum continues Shifu’s timeline of spreading Chan around the world.

This issue also includes a slideshow from an artist who attended her first retreat. She illustrates her encounter with “noble silence,” which can be a daunting concept for people unfamiliar with the practice. When I attended the forty-nine-day retreat, the idea that I would not speak for the duration impressed my family much more than the fact that I’d be sitting cross-legged on a cushion for all that time. On that retreat I learned how language helps to create our deluded notion of self. Time after time I’d control the impulse to speak, and observing what it was I’d wanted to say, saw clearly how needless it usually was. There is so much freedom in quietude.

In our meditation practice we try to diminish our thoughts, in order to investigate that part of our mind which exists before words. Therefore on retreat, in addition to no speaking, noble silence also encompasses no reading and no listening to recorded speech (except of course for the Dharma talks). Participants are also instructed to avoid eye contact with others. For some newcomers this feels wrong, somehow rude, and isolating. One first needs to comprehend the intent of retreat practice before one can



DDRC Archive Photo

understand the compassion of respecting each other's silent space.

DDRC is located in an area rich with resorts and retreat centers of all kinds; yoga ashrams, wellness spas, etc. In my time as retreat coordinator, I hosted more than one guest who arrived not realizing what they'd signed up for. One couple, it seems, were expecting a romantic new-age weekend getaway, and most likely booked us because our fees are much less than the luxurious vacation centers. They obviously had not read the retreat description; they were upset that they would be staying in separate dorm buildings, and bewildered by the rule of silence. They made it through the first night's orientation. But later, in the dorm before bedtime, the woman expressed to another participant, in hushed tones of distress, her very real fear that she had encountered some sort of ominous cult. The two made their escape in secret that night and we never heard from them again.

I witnessed many, many retreats over seventeen years. I checked the participants in at the registration desk. Each day, from my office window, I saw them walk past from the Chan hall to the dining hall and dorms, and back again, several times a day. Many of them had arrived nervous and agitated. But as each day passed you could see them settle more and more. You could see it in the way their bodies moved. At the end, they were serene and even joyful; their faces were open and shining. Not one person remained unchanged, and all were changed for the better. This was true for every retreat I witnessed there. The Dharma is so wonderful. I am so grateful to our Shifu for bringing this practice to us, and grateful that I have been able to spend a good portion of my life supporting it. 🌿

by *Buffe Maggie Laffey*
Editor-in-Chief





The Seeds of Chan

— BY —

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

Photo by Dawid Zawila

In July 2008, Chan Master Sheng Yen's Western disciples John Crook, Simon Child, Žarko Andričević and others returned to Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan to trace their origins and pay homage to their ancestors. Master Sheng Yen specially summoned his disciples to give a lecture in which he reaffirmed and encouraged those who followed him. Fifteen years after Master Sheng Yen passed away, re-reading this sermon will help us examine ourselves. Are we integrating Buddhism into our lives, with fewer worries and more compassion? This talk is taken from Shifu's Chinese book *The Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan Buddhism: Inheriting the Past and Inspiring the Future*, published in 2021 by Dharma Drum Publishing.



Chan Master Sheng Yen and his Western disciples at Dharma Drum Mountain Photo by Tong-Yang Lee

I HAVE BEEN TEACHING MEDITATION IN the United States for thirty years, and during that time I have also taught in the United Kingdom, Croatia, Switzerland and other countries. However, my personal conditions are insufficient and I do not have much influence. Therefore, after developing for so long in Western society, I have not been able to form a trend of studying Chan Buddhism. However, during this period, there were still more than thirty Westerners who followed me and did not leave. I feel very grateful. In particular, all of you have been trained to be Chan meditation teachers and have begun to guide meditation. From now on, even if I never travel to the United States or Europe to preach, Chan Buddhism has sown seeds and taken root in Europe and the United States. Therefore, although my promotion of Dharma in the West cannot be said to be successful, it cannot be said that I have achieved nothing at all.

Buddhist Life Is to Spread the Dharma

Many people are curious about “Dharma transmission” and think it is mysterious and glorious. In fact, starting from the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, teaching the Dharma is just an assignment. What task? It means that disciples should firmly remember the Dharma that they have understood and learned, and then spread it to those who need it. This is called “transmitting the dharma.”

Not all people who are able to accept the task of teaching the Dharma have attained enlightenment, or have achieved complete enlightenment. There are three conditions for transmitting the Dharma. First, one must have a correct knowledge and view of Buddhism; second, one must have stable emotions, a healthy personality, and adhere to the principle of purity in daily life behavior, otherwise the preaching of the Dharma

will not be pure; third, one must have the compassionate vow to save all sentient beings and to promote Buddhism. Saving all sentient beings is compassion, and promoting Buddhism is the great vow. Letting all sentient beings know how to use the Dharma is to spread the Dharma. Moreover, Buddhadharma is the mind Dharma. If the Dharma has been integrated with your life, you are truly spreading the Dharma! What else do you want?

Some people worry that they are not enlightened, so how can they teach meditation? Many people ask me out of curiosity: “You teach meditation and pass on the Dharma, are you enlightened?” My answer is simple: “Whether I am enlightened or not is my own business. I can guide you to enlightenment. That’s what matters.”

Enlightenment is one’s own business. Even if I tell you “I am enlightened,” would you believe it? If I say “I’m not enlightened,” that’s even worse, you might run away faster! You must have confidence in yourself. Your teachings, that is, methods and concepts, are inherited from me, and I am inherited from Chinese Buddhism. I believe that there is no problem with my inheritance, and you should also believe that there is no problem with your own inheritance, so there is no need to ask the question of enlightenment.

You Can Teach Even If You Are Not Enlightened

Don’t come up with any tricks on your own, what you are taught is Master’s teaching. What should you do if someone has a physical or mental condition during meditation? It’s very simple, just tell them: “There are no ghosts, no monsters, no demons here. Because you have distracting thoughts in your mind or your body was basically ill to begin with, you will have hallucinations, delusions, and illusions. As long as you just

don't treat it as real you'll be fine." As for back pain and foot pain, it's not a problem at all.

In America there is a Zen Master, John Daido Looi (1931–2009) who is a disciple of Zen Master Hakuyū Taizan Maezumi (1931–1995). Before Maezumi Roshi died, he said to Daido: "There are very few people teaching the Dharma now, so you have to spread the Dharma!" Daido said: "I can't do it, I'm not enlightened yet!" Maezumi Roshi said to him: "You just need to just do it!" Later, Daido did open a Zen monastery and attracted many people. Although he was not enlightened at that time, his disciples felt that he was enlightened.

People who teach and promote the Dharma are a bit like basketball coaches. They study the game, know how to play, and have a clear understanding of the psychology, rules and shooting skills of the game. The coach can train players and help them win championships, but he cannot play. There is a martial arts star, Jet Li, in Hollywood. He received martial arts training since childhood and won five national martial arts championships. One time I asked him: "How many times has your teacher won the championship?" He said: "None once."



Therefore, although people who promote Dharma know the correct knowledge of Buddhism, as well as the skills and methods of practice, they are not necessarily enlightened themselves. What is "enlightenment?" It is indescribable, just like pointing your finger at the moon to show you where the moon is. If you believe there is a moon, you have to find it yourself. You can't just rely on the teacher's finger. Therefore, even an unenlightened teacher can guide an enlightened student.

To Use the Dharma Is to Obtain the Dharma

Many people misunderstand and think that enlightenment can be "transmitted." In fact, this is impossible. You must enlighten yourself, and after enlightenment, your teacher will affirm it. But the affirmation is not to transmit to you some other thing, because what you awaken to is what you already have, not what the teacher transmitted to you. The only things that can be transmitted are teachings and methods. Since the time of Buddha Shakyamuni, the only Dharma transmitted is these two items, which are the so-called "mind Dharma." Mind Dharma is one's own experience of Dharma, but this experience is not about dreaming or seeing something while meditating. It is about the reduction of vexations and the growth of compassion. Therefore, if you can benefit from the Dharma, then you have already obtained the mind Dharma. It is not an "enlightenment" that can be suddenly transmitted to you from a teacher.

Many people will ask: "What is enlightenment? What kind of condition or state is it?" I would say: "If there is a state or a condition, it is not enlightenment." To put it more clearly, enlightenment is nothing, it is emptiness, no self, no mind; if there are still some things in your mind that make you attached to it, and

Photo by Charlein Gracia

get excited, it is not enlightenment, so it cannot be explained and cannot be described. In fact, only you know whether you are enlightened or not. If you feel doubtful, go find a wise teacher to confirm it. But confirmation or “sealing it” does not mean striking an actual seal, but a mind-to-mind confirmation.

I am still an ordinary person, I have not achieved liberation, have not become an arhat or a Buddha, and I am still teaching the Dharma according to the lineage. However, I have fewer emotions, lighter worries, less hatred, and more compassion. I also feel that as I get older and spread the Dharma for longer, my wisdom seems to be higher. So, step by step, I gradually move towards liberation.

Don’t hope that you won’t have troubles all of a sudden. Instead, after learning Buddhism and Chan, you will know how many troubles you have. You will also know that your troubles were very heavy in the past, but now they seem to be lighter. If you have troubles, use the Buddhadharma to deal with them. Adjust yourself and your worries will gradually become less severe.

Using the Dharma to help yourself is learning the Dharma; helping others with the Dharma is teaching the Dharma. Cultivation does not rely on the legs, and preaching does not necessarily rely on the mouth. There was a meditation master in India, S. N. Goenka (1924–2013), who taught vipassanā meditation, but he could not sit cross-legged at all, so he asked someone to help him cross his legs to show his disciples. Therefore, the heart is very important. If you have the heart to care for and help beginners, and are willing to be



Photo by Jacob Dyer

patient and care about their situation, and help and correct their mistakes in ideas and methods, you can guide them. As long as someone comes to meditate, whether it is one person, two people, three people or four people, they can form a group for meditation.

I didn’t establish the organization of Dharma Drum Mountain until I was sixty years old. I had no money or manpower at that time, but in the blink of an eye, twenty years later, the construction of Dharma Drum Mountain has been completed, so everyone must make a vow. 🌿

SPREAD

CHAN *from*

EAST to WEST,

NORTH to SOUTH





Chan Master Sheng Yen Photo by Ven. Chang Chen

The United States is where Master Sheng Yen started teaching Chan. He first held a Chan training class at the Temple of Enlightenment in the Bronx, New York. Later, at the request of his students, he held his first seven-day meditation retreat at Bodhi House in 1977. From then on, the master's path of teaching Chan spread all over the world. In 2006, Master Sheng Yen presided over his last seven-day retreat in the West at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Shawangunk, New York. He said: "Even if I never travel to the United States or Europe to preach, Chinese Chan Buddhism has already sown seeds and taken root in Europe and the United States. Therefore, although my promotion of Dharma in the West cannot be said to be successful, it cannot be said that there is no achievement at all." After the master passed away, the seeds of Chinese Chan Buddhism were cultivated by Eastern and Western disciples. The Chinese version of this article was written by the editorial team of *Humanity Magazine* and appeared in issue 486. English version edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey. All retreat photos were from the DDM Archive.

• UNITED STATES •
Bodhi House, New York

IN DECEMBER 1975, MASTER SHENG YEN first arrived in New York, just in time to catch the Western enthusiasm for Zen practice. In the spring of 1976, Master Sheng Yen began to teach Sunday meditation classes at the Temple of Enlightenment in the Bronx, New York, and opened special classes for teacher training. Most of the students were Americans. Later, at the request of this group of Western students, in May 1977, he held his first meditation retreat at Mr. C. T. Shen's Bodhi House in Stony Brook, New York. The number of people was small, but it was quite successful. It established the master's belief and wish to continue to spread the Dharma in the West. From then on, he formed an inseparable connection with leading meditation.

In the first Chan retreat, in addition to Master Sheng Yen who led the retreat, there were also Venerable Ri Chang who assisted, and participants Rikki Asher, Aranka Galgoczi, Paul Kennedy, Buffe Laffey, Dan Stevenson, Ming Yee Wang, and Dan Wota. Master Sheng Yen led five Chan meditation retreats in total at Bodhi House, which was a beautiful colonial-style mansion with a rich history. At the end of the first retreat, the attendees signed their names in the Bodhi House guestbook which also included the signatures of some of America's founding fathers. This place can be said to be the starting point for Master Sheng Yen's promotion of Chan.



• TAIWAN •

**Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture &
Nung Chan Monastery**

Master Sheng Yen led the first seven-day Chan retreat in Taiwan in November 1978 at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. At that time, the news that the master was leading retreats in the United States gradually spread back to Taiwan, and at the request of the followers of the Sutra Translation Institute and the Institute of Buddhist Culture, he took the first step to guide meditation in Taiwan. Chan retreats were still rare in Taiwan back then. Therefore, the sitting cushions, incense sticks, interview, etc., as well as the Chan master's guiding techniques, attracted great attention from Buddhist circles. Master Sheng Yen's intensive retreat style also spread far by word of mouth.

After that, a seven-day retreat was held four times every year in the Institute of Buddhist Culture. Later it was changed to two sessions of Chan retreat and two sessions of Buddha-name recitation retreat. After 1984, due to the expansion of the Institute of Buddhist Culture, retreats were moved to Nung Chan Monastery. The Dharma was transmitted for the first time in 1985 to Venerable Chi Chern from Malaysia.



• UNITED STATES •
Chan Meditation Center, New York

After Master Sheng Yen left The Temple of Enlightenment in 1979, he wandered on the streets of New York for a while, taking turns leading meditation at his disciples' homes. Later, he rented an apartment to set up a Chan center, and then bought and renovated an old two-story apartment into a practice center. He named the Chan Meditation Center in Chinese *Dongchu* Monastery, in honor of the Grandmaster Dongchu. Since its opening in the summer of 1980, seven-day Chan retreats were held regularly four times a year.

In 1993, the Master presided over the sixtieth Chan retreat, and transmitted the Dharma to the British psychology professor Dr. John Crook. Dr. Crook had already been guiding meditation in various European countries for a long time. Later, Master Sheng Yen went to Poland, Germany, Russia and other places, and many of these occasions were made possible by the connections that Dr. Crook had made among them.



• UNITED KINGDOM •

Wales

In 1989, Master Sheng Yen went to Wales to lead a seven-day Chan retreat. This was the first time Master Sheng Yen went to a Western country outside the United States to guide Chan practice. After reading the Master's book *Getting the Buddha Mind*, Dr. Crook went to New York in 1986 to attend a seven-day Chan retreat led by Master Sheng Yen. He was sure that this was the Chan practice tradition he wanted to follow, so he invited the Master to guide him. After many twists and turns, the master finally taught the Chinese Chan method to the British Buddhist community in a systematic and complete manner in the spring of 1989.

Master Sheng Yen came to Wales three times to lead retreats in 1989, 1992 and 1995. In 2000, thanks to Dr. Crook's intermediary contact, he went to Gaia House, a famous Theravada meditation center in West Ogwell, England, to lead a seven-day Chan retreat. Master Sheng Yen has a close connection with the United Kingdom as he has two British Dharma heirs, John Crook and Simon Child.



• POLAND •

Warsaw

After the Polish Chan practitioners went to the United Kingdom to participate in a seven-day Chan retreat led by Master Sheng Yen and John Crook, they were moved and inspired by the personalities and teachings of the two teachers. In 1996, they first invited John Crook to lead a meditation retreat in Warsaw. In 1997, Master Sheng Yen was invited to Poland to lead a seven-day Chan retreat. Although it was only once, it had a profound impact. The Polish Chan congregation established the Chan Buddhist Union and began to

translate and publish books on Chan Buddhism. The Polish Chan congregation even found ways to participate in any place where Master Sheng Yen or John Crook led meditation, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, Germany, Russia, and even Taiwan.

After Master Sheng Yen passed away, Venerable Chi Chern and Simon Child continued the work of spreading the Dharma and went to Poland regularly every year to conduct intensive Chan retreats.

• CROATIA •

Zagreb

In 1997, after Master Sheng Yen finished leading his Chan retreat in Poland, he went to Croatia at the invitation of Žarko Andričević, to host a five-day meditation retreat. In the 1970s, Žarko had founded Dharmaloka, the first Buddhist group in Croatia. He

began to meditate with Master Sheng Yen in 1996 and received Dharma transmission in 2001. In 2019, Žarko presided over the opening of Chan Retreat Center Hartovski Vrh, which is the first Chinese Buddhist retreat center in Europe.



• RUSSIA •

St. Petersburg & Moscow

This trip originated from John Crook. In 1995, Crook went to Russia to lead a seven-day Chan retreat, and the local Buddhist community hoped that Master Sheng Yen could come and provide guidance. However, when the Master arrived in St. Petersburg in 1998, he discovered that there were many gaps in understanding, including that most of the Chan students were interested in Chinese martial arts, rather than the students who had originally followed Crook in meditation. Despite this, he shared the Chan method with sincerity, frankness, and compassion. The master described the end of the retreat as “like a master and a disciple who have been together for many years, opening their minds, discussing the meaning of the Dharma, asking questions, and preaching. Which all felt quite natural.”

In 2003, the Master was again invited to Moscow to host a five-day meditation retreat, with eighty local people participating. DDM also established the Moscow Meditation Center, hoping to deeply and extensively share Chinese Buddhism with Russian society. After Master Sheng Yen passed away, Russian Chan practitioners came to Taiwan to seek their roots. Venerable Guo Xing, the leader of the DDM Chan Hall and Shifu’s dharma heir, went to provide guidance in 2018, 2019, 2023, and 2024 respectively, allowing Chinese Chan methods to continue to take root in Russia.



• GERMANY •

Berlin

In 1999, Master Sheng Yen was invited by Dr. Rainer Noack, the head of the largest Buddhist group in Berlin, Buddhistische Gesellschaft Berlin e. V., to preside over a seven-day Chan retreat. This was the first time he was invited to Germany. In addition to the local

Germans, the participants also came from countries spanning five continents including Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Portugal, and Israel. This is the retreat with participants in attendance representing the most extensive geographic area since the Master began leading retreats.

• SWITZERLAND •

Bern

In 2004, Master Sheng Yen was invited by the Beatenberg Meditation Center to host a seven-day Chan retreat. This was the first time Shifu went to Switzerland to preach the Dharma. There were a total of seventy-three participants from the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, Switzerland, Russia, and Poland. Many of them were experienced meditation

and yoga teachers. Swiss student Dr. Hildi Thalmann was deeply inspired by the retreat. In 2008, she was recognized by Master Sheng Yen and was approved to teach Chan in Europe. In 2012, she established the Chan-Bern Center and regularly invites monks and Dharma heirs from Dharma Drum Mountain to lead meditation activities.



• MEXICO •
Mar de Jade Retreat Center

The conditions that led to Master Sheng Yen leading retreats in Mexico can be traced back to 1993. Laura Del Valle, a Mexican doctor, attended a seven-day Chan retreat at the Chan Meditation Center and afterwards invited the master to come give guidance in Mexico. From then on, every year when she went to New York to do the retreat, her same request would be mentioned again. Laura even built a meditation hall, but unfortunately the conditions were not met until 2001 when Master Sheng Yen was able to go there to lead a retreat.

Mar de Jade is located in a seaside resort. Master Sheng Yen described it as “Chan Meditation at the Mexican beach.” The level of Chan participants varied, with most of them being new students. However, the sincerity of the participants in seeking Dharma and the enthusiasm for practicing the Dharma were one hundred percent impressive. The Chinese Chan method took root there. After Shifu passed away in 2009, his Dharma heir, the current abbot of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC), Venerable Guo Yuan, continued in his footsteps and holds meditation activities at Mar de Jade every year.



• UNITED STATES •

Shawangunk, New York

The Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) was purchased in 1997 on property with a view of the scenic Shawangunk Mountain Ridge. Master Sheng Yen named the center in Chinese *Xianggang* (elephant mountain) because the word sounds very similar to the local pronunciation of the mountain's name (*SCHWAN-gunks* or *SHAWN-gums*), and also because the mountain has many flat-faced cliffs that resemble the sides of elephants. He hoped that it would become a place for cultivating dragons and elephants (a Chinese saying that represents talented and capable people).

After the first seven-day retreat was held at the end of that year, all subsequent seven-day retreats held by the master in New York were moved to DDRC. The first forty-nine-day Chan retreat was held here in 2000, with more than ninety senior Chan

practitioners from thirteen countries including the United States, Britain, France, Portugal, Australia and Croatia participating. The Dharma Drum Mountain sangha also assigned many monastics, including Venerables Guo Xing, Guo Dong, and Guo Guang, to assist and learn.

In November 2006, Master Sheng Yen let a ten-day Huatou Chan retreat here. This was also the last Chan retreat led by Master Sheng Yen in the West. Master Sheng Yen transmitted the Dharma here to Simon Child from England, Max Kälin from Switzerland, Žarko Andričević from Croatia and Gilbert Gutierrez From the United States. In the summer of 2016, Simon Child also transmitted the Dharma to Dr. Rebecca Li after a ten-day silent illumination retreat. The continuation of the Dharma lineage echoes the Master's expectations. 🍃





International
Mahayana Bhikshuni
Joint Summer Retreat

—— BY ——

VENERABLE CHANG HWA

Venerable Chang Hwa is the Director of the Chan Meditation Center in New York. She received full ordination in 2005. Venerable served as Director of the Department of International Relations and Development in DDM Taiwan during 2008–2009. In addition to her current position as Director, Ven. Chang Hwa also supervises DDM Dharmapala Groups in North America, gives public lectures and leads meditation programs. Venerable holds a PhD in Biochemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Here she reports on the nun's summer retreat held in India. This article is translated by Angela Yu, proofread by Keith Brown, edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey.



Front: DDM Vice Abbot Venerable Guo Goang and His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgön Chetsang Rinpoche CMC Archive Photo

ON SEPTEMBER 15, 2023, one-hundred-twenty-seven nuns from eight countries including Taiwan, United States, New Zealand, Vietnam, Nepal, and Bhutan completed the forty-five-day “International Mahayana Bhikshuni Joint Summer Retreat” and attended the closing ceremony on the same day. His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgön Chetsang Rinpoche of the Kagyu Sect attended in person, while three-hundred guests from Taiwan came to Shravasti City to participate in the auspicious event.

This event was the first joint summer retreat for nuns. It was initiated by His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgön Chetsang in 2018. Venerable Khenmo Drolma of the Tibetan Kagyu Sect sent a letter inviting Dharma Drum Mountain to participate in and co-organize the event. Many people helped to organize this event, including elder Venerable Wu Yin (Abbot of Xiang Guang Shan Temple in Taiwan), Venerable Hengqing

(Professor at National Taiwan University), and Venerable Thubten Chodron (Abbot of Sravasti Vihara in the United States). It was originally scheduled to be held in the summer of 2020, but was postponed due to the pandemic and other factors.

The joint summer retreat started according to the Buddha’s teachings on August 1st. Everyone first gathered at Buddha’s sermon platform, which is known as the place where the Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī bhikshuni first led five hundred women to seek Buddha’s permission to join the Sangha. Therefore, nuns from all lineages gathered together, chanting, praising the Buddha, and making offerings at this place of great significance.

The closing ceremony began with a welcome speech from event organizer Venerable Khenmo Drolma, followed by speeches by the summer retreat Abbot, Venerable Guo Goang, Ācārya Venerable Khenchen

Nema Gyaltzen, guests Rinchen Dorje Rinpoche, Konchok Tsephol, and others. Ācārya praised all the participating nuns for successfully completing this summer retreat under an extremely hot and humid environment. He shared how to practice Buddha’s teachings through body, speech and mind, while also reminding the assembly to remember Buddha’s last teaching on “taking the precepts as the teacher.”

Venerable Guo Goang praised and blessed Shravasti City, the holy place for spiritual practice, as a “*bodhimāṇḍa* that lasted thousands of years with monastics coming and going like flowing water.” Nuns from Vietnam, Bhutan, Nepal, India and other places also sent representatives to the stage and shared their spiritual growth and joy.

During the closing remarks, His Holiness Chetsang thanked all the people who worked on making this summer retreat possible, including Venerable Guo Goang, Venerable Khenmo (the head organizer),

the planning and execution team, the internal and external guardians, and all the volunteers. His Holiness Chetsang expressed his joy that, during this retreat, nuns from nine countries and twenty-two monasteries could gather next to Jetavana where Buddha had delivered Dharma for the longest time in Shravasti City and completed the summer retreat together. His Holiness encouraged the nuns from different lineages to always learn from and encourage each other. He also reminded monks and nuns to respect and bear with each other, as well as to work diligently together for “the true Dharma to abide in the world.”

Around the Buddha’s Teaching Platform

In the afternoon, His Holiness, Ācārya, summer retreat abbot and all one-hundred-twenty-seven nuns arrived at the Buddha’s teaching platform in Jetavana



to transfer merits. Afterwards, the crowd chanted and circled around the bodhi tree planted by Ananda during Buddha's time. In the evening, a lamp offering ceremony was held, where everyone prayed for the world to have fewer disasters and greater blessings.

The Vice Abbot of Dharma Drum Mountain, Venerable Guo Goang, was invited to serve as the Abbot nun of the joint summer retreat. In addition to giving lectures on precepts, she also led a seven-day silent illumination meditation retreat. Venerable Guo Goang gave lectures on the threefold training – precepts, concentration, and wisdom – and used the *Āgama* sutras as a basis of the teaching. In particular, Venerable Guo Goang used the story from the *Āgama* sutras of how Buddha taught his disciples to illustrate the causes and conditions behind the Buddha's establishment of the precepts. The precepts were established based on the foundation of the right view. Venerable Guo Goang

used the twelve links of dependent origination to explain the purpose of upholding precepts: namely, to cut off craving caused by ignorance, thereby cutting off the self-view created by the consciousness grasping on name and form which was supported by craving.

Venerable Damcho discussed the development of the ordination of bhikshuni in the Buddha's time, after which Venerable Guo Goang shared the process of ordination of bhikshuni in the Chinese tradition as well as the origin of *The Baizhang Monastic Rules* in Chinese Chan Buddhism. Venerable Guo Goang gave her lectures in Chinese, which were translated into English, Tibetan, Bhutanese, and Vietnamese. The translation process was lengthy; however, everyone waited patiently and had a strong aspiration to seek the Dharma, particularly the Tibetan nuns, who cherished the causes and conditions of being monastics and the opportunity to hear the Dharma on precepts.



Venerable Guo Goang (middle) was invited to serve as the Abbot nun of the summer retreat in Shravasti CMC Archive Photo

During the seven-day silent illumination meditation retreat, Venerable Guo Goang led this group of nuns with widely varying meditation experiences step by step in this order: concentration by the front, counting the breath, following the breath, contemplating the totality, and contemplating the mind to experience silent illumination, and how one can return to truth from delusion. Venerable Guo Goang used the ten ox herding pictures to illustrate the process of cultivation and liberation. Venerable Guo Goang cleverly pointed out that the breathing method (sixteen exercises of mindful breathing) taught by Venerable Khenmo Drolma is a practice of gaining entry by phenomena, while the method of silent illumination is a practice of gaining entry by teaching. Although these methods differ, they have the same purpose, which is to see the clear and pure self-nature. At the end of the seven-day retreat, Venerable Guo Goang used Bodhidharma's *Two Entrances and Four Practices* to guide everyone how to deal with favorable and adverse situations in daily life, and how to maintain a state of practice that is in accordance with the precepts and Dharma.

Prostrations of Gratitude

It is worth mentioning that at the end of the seven-day retreat, a gratitude paying-prostration practice was conducted. In addition, the participants were asked to pay gratitude to the Mahāprajāpatī Bhikshuni and His Holiness Chetsang, as part of the practice. All the nuns prostrated devoutly in their own ways and made personal merit transfer. The atmosphere was very moving.



At summer's end, each day included a period of communication and interaction. Senior monastics from different countries and lineages took turns sharing their own learning process, the operation of their temples, and their practice and study projects. The process was very exciting and inspiring. Among them, a venerable from Bhutan mentioned that she was ordained for the first time in 2022, and several Tibetan venerables similarly shared their feelings about receiving the ordination. I introduced the life of Master Sheng Yen, the process of establishing the Chan Meditation Center and Dharma Drum Mountain, as well as the Chan method of Dharma Drum Mountain and the study structure guided by the Master.

During the last few days of the summer retreat, each group shared what they had learned. Everyone said that this experience had expanded their horizons, and that they had learned a lot. At the same time, they discovered that spiritual practice can be approached from different aspects; nonetheless, these different paths all lead to the same destination. Finally, all the nuns followed rituals such as repentance and *pavana* to examine their own habitual tendencies and shortcomings, and made final reflections on their practice and future monastic life. 🌿

MY FIRST SILENT RETREAT

———— BY ————

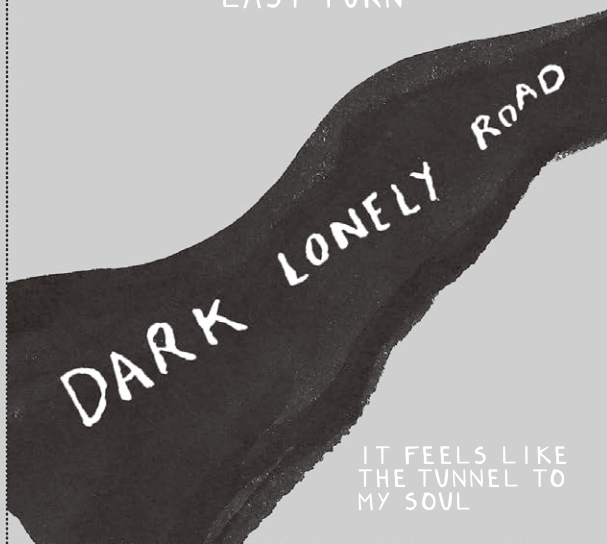
SOPHIE BUTCHER

Sophie Butcher is a New York based creative visual director who loves to tell stories through drawing and photography. Her latest project has been launching an indie climate magazine called *Hold on Whale!* inspired by her connection to nature and art. She recently attended her first meditation retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, New York and illustrated her experience. See more of her photos @famefamefamephoto and her drawings @sophiebutcherdraws.

MY FIRST
SILENT
RETREAT



AFTER HOURS ON
THE ROAD I MAKE MY
LAST TURN



IT FEELS LIKE
THE TUNNEL TO
MY SOUL

I TRY TO TEXT PEOPLE I'LL
BE UNRESPONSIVE



BUT I'VE ALREADY
LOST SIGNAL

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME
I GATHER WITH STRANGERS
AND AM NOT SUPPOSED TO
SOCIALIZE, THEY
CALL THIS...

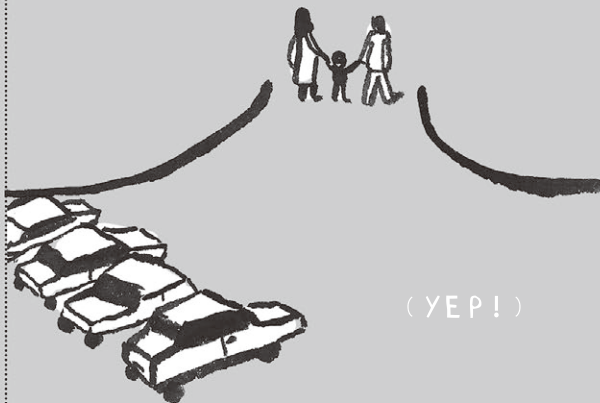


THIS PERSON IS REALLY
VIBING, I THINK TO
MYSELF...



I LEARN CONNECTING WITH
NATURE CAN SLOW YOUR
NERVOUS CENTRAL SYSTEM

I PARK THE CAR.
NO WAY! THIS CHILD WILL
BE SILENT THIS WHOLE
WEEKEND TOO?



(YEP!)

WHY ARE
PEOPLE WALKING SO
SLOWLY?



I LEARN THIS IS
WALKING
MEDITATION

I MAKE MY BED AND LOOK AT
THINGS I WASN'T
SUPPOSED TO BRING



CHOCOLATE!

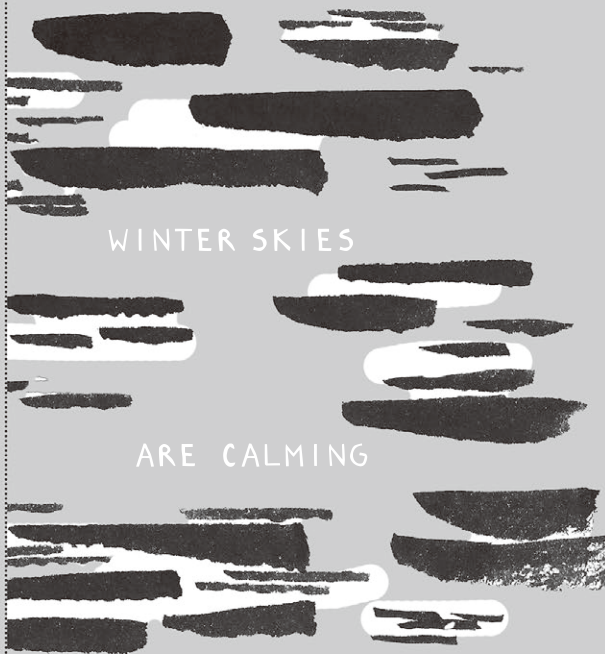
MY JOURNAL

I TAKE IN THE SCENERY
FROM MY DORM



WINTER SKIES

ARE CALMING



AT TEMPLE WE ARE EACH
GIVEN CHORES FOR THE WEEKEND



THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW
TIMES WE CAN TALK AND SO
PEOPLE CHAT ABOUT IT IN
DETAIL, LOTS OF DETAIL

ONE PERSON WASN'T HAPPY
WITH THEIR CHORE SO TASKS
WERE REASSIGNED AND NOW
MINE WAS TO CLEAN
THE TOILETS



THERE'S GOT TO BE SOME
ZEN IN THAT?
I THINK TO MYSELF

IT'S SUPRISINGLY EASY
TO EAT WITH STRANGERS IN
SILENCE



CLANK
CLANK
CLANK!

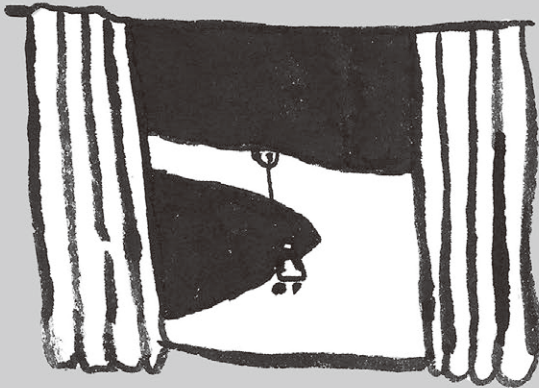
I FALL ASLEEP THINKING
ABOUT HOW LOOKING AT THE
STARS IS LIKE LOOKING INTO
OUR PAST



WE ARE MADE OF STARS

I DON'T HAVE THESE THOUGHTS IN
THE BIG CITY

BEFORE SUNRISE, I WAKE UP TO A
MONK WALKING BACKWARDS



I GET TO MY
MEDITATION SEAT

UH OH,
MY BODY ACHES



CAN I DO
THIS TWO DAYS
STRAIGHT?

YES,
I CAN!

I TRY AND STOP THINKING

SNAP

OUT OF
IT!

DURING A BREAK, I WALK IN THE
WOODS AND THINK OF
EVERYONE I LOVE



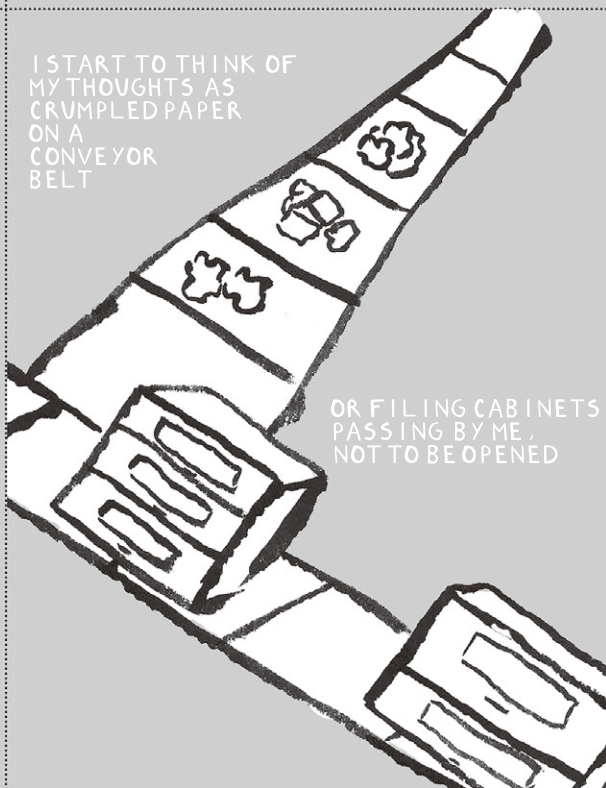
I FORGIVE
LOVE

I CRY OUT OF RELIEF OR GRATITUDE

THE PAST IS AN ILLUSION,
THE FUTURE A DREAM,
THE PRESENT, ESSENTIAL

I THINK OF THE
LESSONS

I START TO THINK OF
MY THOUGHTS AS
CRUMPLED PAPER
ON A
CONVEYOR
BELT



OR FILING CABINETS
PASSING BY ME,
NOT TO BE OPENED

THERE'S A MOMENT WHEN THE
CONVEYOR BELT IS EMPTY



THE LAST NIGHT, I WALK THE
FROSTY GROUNDS AND A LADY
WALKS TOWARDS ME

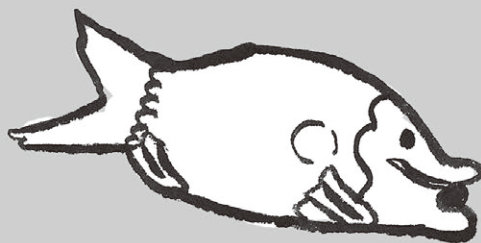


SHE SPEAKS
A LOT

I WHISPER KINDLY
"WE'LL CHAT WHEN IT'S OVER"



THE DAYS WERE LONG, SLOW
AND FAST. I PACK MY BAGS
AND THINK OF ALL THE
SOUNDS I'LL MISS



THE SOUND OF THE WIND, GONGS, A
WOODEN FISH THAT GETS KNOCKED
BEFORE EVERY MEAL

ON MY WAY HOME, MUSIC FROM THE
RADIO MAKES ME TINGLE



I LOOK AT THE SUNSET
AND THE CITY, I AM
ECSTATIC...

ONCE HOME I TRY TO HOLD ON
TO THE FEELING



I WANT TO FEEL THIS
ALIVE EVERYDAY!

THANK YOU DHARMA DRUM
MONASTERY!

@SOPHIEBUTCHERDRAWS



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