

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

A

# Buddhist View

**Master Sheng Yen**

## **Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Buddhist View**

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# Contents

## *Introduction*

Preface	05
Environmental Protection	07
Buddhadharma—Wisdom for Solving World Problems	15
Protecting the Four Environments to Improve the Human Character	17
How to Protect Our Spiritual Environment	22
A Proposition for Living in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	25
The Meaning of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign in Our Era	27
Integrating the Spirit with the World	30
Living Buddhadharma	32
A Movement of Spiritual Enlightenment and Living Education	35
The Four Approaches for Cultivating Peace	38
The Four Guidelines for Dealing with Desires	43
The Four Steps for Handling a Problem	47
The Four Methods for Helping Oneself and Others	51
The Four Ways to Cultivate Blessings	56
<i>Appendix</i>	61



## Preface

Master Sheng Yen, the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain and the chairman of the World Council of Religious Leaders Board, is dedicated to ‘seeking commonality while preserving diversity’, and aims to eliminate spiritual poverty and to promote of environmental protection. Dharma Drum Mountain’s environment protection movement spearheaded by the “Protection of Spiritual Environment”, promotes compassion, wisdom, and tolerance, and it transcends all boundaries of faith. Master Sheng Yen treats all sentient beings as equals, regardless of race, gender, nationality, social status and religion, and sees them as brothers and sisters of a large family. His teachings encourage people to go beyond themselves and extend help to those who have harmed them.

Master Sheng Yen outlined the goal of Dharma Drum Mountain’s environment protection movement in his keynote speech at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held at the New York United Nations headquarters in 2000: “With Protecting the Spiritual Environment as the foundation, Dharma Drum Mountain is promoting the protection of social, living, and natural environments

Protecting the Four Environments. We believe that, if we wish to attain world peace and thoroughly solve the problems of poverty and environmental deterioration, we must begin by re-examining our concepts and raising our spiritual level.”

Protecting the Four Environments are not mere slogans, but a concrete plan for implementation. Protecting the Four Environments with the protection of Spiritual Environment at its core begins with the purification of the mind, and then extends the peace and harmony within one’s mind to people in the family, society, humanity, and the natural environment including the ecosystem. Following the Protecting the Four Environments is the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, which is a project to develop the human spirit and consists of concepts and methods for initiating the Protecting the Four Environments. The goal of the Campaign is to bring about the purification of one’s body and mind, which can be gradually realized in every aspect of life. It allows modern people to engage the world, transform the quality of their lives, and relieve the spiritual poverty that afflicts most people today.

## Environmental Protection

**B**uddhism is a religion that places great emphasis on environmental protection. Sakyamuni Buddha was born at Lumbini Garden. He engaged in spiritual practice in the forest, attained Buddhahood under a tree, and first began preaching at Deer Park. The major monasteries where he taught his disciples were all gardens or woods, such as Jeta Grove, Bamboo Grove, Amravana Garden, and he passed into pari-nirvana between two Sal trees near Kusinagara. He exhorted his monastic disciples, when spending the night under a tree, to regard that place as his home and take loving care of it.

The Buddha told us in the sutras and precepts that we should take loving care of animals, and that we should not harm the grass and trees, but regard them as the home where sentient beings lead their lives. In the stories of the Buddha's past lives, when he was following the Bodhisattva path, he was once reborn as a bird. During a forest fire, he tried fearlessly to put out the fire, disregarding his own safety by bringing water with his feathers. In the Avatamsaka Sutra it is said that mountains, waters, grass, and trees are all the manifesta-

tion of the great bodhisattvas. So, Buddhists believe that both sentient beings and non-sentient things are all the Dharma-body of the buddhas. Not only do the yellow flowers and green bamboo preach Buddhist teachings, but rocks can also understand Buddhist doctrines. Therefore, Buddhists regard our living environment as their own bodies. The Buddhists' life of spiritual practice is by all means very simple, frugal, and pure.

Unfortunately, the immoderate development and the excessive use of chemicals in the world have led to the rapid consumption of natural resources, the speedy deterioration of the natural environment, and the extinction of a variety of species. The collective result speeds the earth towards doomsday. Although no human being hopes for the early arrival of doomsday, few are willing to strive together to take action to salvage the destiny of the earth, despite the fact that most are conscious of the crisis. Day in and day out everyone still consumes even larger amounts of natural resources, produces more refuse to pollute the earth, the air, and rivers and oceans. The remaining tracts of tropical rain forest become smaller and smaller; the number of species likewise decreases, and desertification of the land expands at a faster rate. If this



situation is not placed in check and reversed, then humankind will have become extinct even before the earth is destroyed.

In the modern world, everybody knows that we should protect our living environment, reduce the amount of garbage we produce, classify our refuse, and recycle as much as possible. Nevertheless, we are still consuming substantial amounts of energy resources every day, and producing tremendous amounts of refuse and pollution. In the former agricultural and pastoral ages, garbage could become the fertilizer and soil, returning to nature; in contrast, the natural resources consumed by the modern industrial and commercial sector are non-renewable. Contemporary civilization produces a huge amount of pollution, and this act is as horrible as generating a tremendous quantity of cancer cells in the body of Nature.

We do not curse modern industry and commerce; neither do we denounce the rapid development of technological production. Therefore, we are forced to appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders of the world to advise all humankind that it must take responsibility to protect the environment

while engaged in industrial, commercial, and technological activities. Human beings should not, just because of their curiosity for technological innovations and the competition of industrial and commercial wealth, keep on destroying the environment on which we rely for our survival; otherwise, humankind's history will not endure another thousand years!

The wasteful consumption of natural resources and destruction of ecology are caused by humankind's psychological craving for convenience and wealth. If we can practice the Buddha's teaching of "leading a contented life with few desires" and "being satisfied and therefore always happy", and if we are willing to use our intelligence to deal with problems and engage diligently in productive work, then, without having to contend with one another or fight with nature, we can lead very happy lives. Therefore, the members of our organization use the following four sentences to encourage one another:

Our needs are little;  
Our wants are great.  
Pursue only what we really need;  
What we want is unimportant.

If, for the sake of satisfying our wants, humankind consumes natural resources and devastates the ecological environment, then we repeatedly borrow to repay what we already owe. By borrowing to cover old debts, one's debts will grow increasingly heavy; by cutting out one's flesh to appease one's hunger, one is slowly committing suicide. Unfortunately, humankind loses its head for the sake of temporary convenience and selfish gains. Some say that future technology will be able to rectify the errors caused by modern people. Supposedly, this future technology will be able to solve the problems resulting from contemporary technology. Further, they say if one group of people causes problems, another group of people will manage to deal with them. They imply that the act of destruction should come first before humankind achieves more advanced insight. These are extremely irresponsible concepts. While engaging in various kinds of production and manufacturing, if modern people do not at the same time pay close attention to measures for protecting the environment and cherishing their resources, this amounts to burying mines everywhere in the environment to menace future generations of humankind. So, we have to appeal to the religious and spiritual leaders of the whole world not only to pray for the success of environmental work, but also to get involved

personally in the all-encompassing movement of environmental protection.

As I said, the environmental protection movement should be all-encompassing. In addition to cherishing natural resources, protecting the ecological environment, and lifestyle choices such as reducing the amount of garbage, recycling, living a pure, simple, and, frugal life, and minimizing the pollution we produce, we should further learn to respect lives and others, always reminding ourselves of this thought: apart from ourselves, there are innumerable other people; apart from our one generation, there are our innumerable descendants in future generations.

Therefore, Dharma Drum Mountain, our small Buddhist community of only about one million members, has in the last ten years promoted four major principles of environmental protection:

1. The cherishing of natural resources and the protection of the ecological environment;
2. Maintaining cleanliness in family life and using daily necessities simply and frugally;

3. Improving interpersonal politeness and social etiquette; and,

4. Instead of considering everything from the standpoint of one person, one race, one time-period, and one place, we should consider it from the standpoint that all humankind of all time and space should be protected in their existence, possess the right to live, and feel the dignity of life.

In brief, the above-mentioned Protecting the Four Environments can be restated as protecting the natural environment, living environment, social environment, and spiritual environment. The environmental tasks of general people are mostly restricted to the material aspects, namely, the first and second items. The environmental tasks we carry out have to go deeper from the material level to the spiritual level of society and thinking. Environmental protection must be combined with our respective religious beliefs and philosophical thinking into an earnest mission, so that environmental protection will not become mere slogans. So, strictly speaking, the purification of humankind's mind and heart is more important than the purification of the environment. If our mind is free from evil intentions and is not polluted by the surroundings, our living environment will also not be spoilt

and polluted by us. However, for ordinary people, it is advisable to set out by cultivating the habit of protecting the material environment, and go deeper step by step until at last they can cultivate environmental protection on the spiritual level.

*By Ven. Sheng-yen,*

*Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association of the United States*

*Speech on August 31, 2000, working session on environmental protection*

*at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel*

## **Buddhadharma—Wisdom for Solving World Problems**

**D**harma Drum mountain is promoting Protecting the Four Environments: ‘spiritual, social etiquette, living, and natural.’ Their purpose is to solve the problems people are facing today. Many people ask with curiosity: “How did Protecting the Four Environments come about?” I say they are originated from the perspective of Buddhadharma, accommodating to the needs of the present world. Thus, the terms may seem new, but the content is essentially Buddhadharma.

What is the Buddhadharma on which Protecting the Four Environments are based? The Buddhadharma talks about the realm of the five skandhas (aggregates), the realm of sentient beings, and the material world. The skandhas is actually our body and mind. If our mind is in balance and the problems of the mind are resolved, then the problems of the body is easy to deal with. Even if the body is ill, if our mind is very peaceful, we will not feel suffering. Thus, to achieve the harmony of body and mind is to harmonize the five skandhas. This deals with the first problem. As for the second problem, problems of relationships between people, that is, all

sorts of interpersonal relationships from family life to social life, as well as relationships between ethnic groups and nations. How to harmoniously coexist with one another is an extremely big and important issue. This is actually the problem of sentient beings.

The third problem is the conflict between nature and humanity. We need to adopt the concept of protecting the natural environment. The natural environment is the ‘material world’ mentioned in the Buddhadharma. The physical body is our primary environment of retribution, and the environment is our dependent environment of retribution. We should take care of and protect the entire natural environment, just like how we care for and protect our own body. If we do so, our world would be truly blessed.

However, if we only pay attention to protecting the natural environmentalism, this is not realistic, so we should start from the root, which is starting from the mind.

*Abstracted from Protecting the Four Environments is Buddhadharma,  
the speech given at ‘The World Buddhist Leaders Conference’,  
on October 20, 2005*



## Protecting the Four Environments to Improve the Human Character

Dharma Drum Mountain is promoting Protecting the Four Environments, the first is spiritual environment, the second is social, the third is living, and the fourth is natural environment, and among them, spiritual environment is the core. To improve the human character, one must begin with the protection of spiritual environment, as well as the nurturing and improvement of one's spiritual life. Only when the mind is well developed, can the character be well developed. The meaning of 'spiritual' is to have compassion with others and oneself. A person who treats everyone with compassion, would love everyone. The person who can perceive everything with wisdom would not give rise to vexations, because he knows what to do and when it needs to be done. The person who can be compassionate towards others, and deal things with wisdom, is actualizing the protection of spiritual environment.

The origin of protecting the spiritual environment is from the concepts of compassion, wisdom, vows, and actions of Buddhadharma. It uses the compassion, wisdom, vows,

and actions of bodhisattvas as its basis. Thus, the new term protecting the 'spiritual environment, is actually the main essence of Buddhadharma. If one were to depart from compassion, wisdom, great vows and great acts, then one is unable to accomplish anything.

The fundamental basis of spiritual environment is protecting one's spiritual mind against defilement. It does not rely on the environment to protect people. It uses the spiritual mind to protect oneself. When your spiritual mind is free from defilement and devastation, and it can function normally, healthily, and stably, then you are safe and protected. If your mind is in a mess, and you are always scheming against others, in a state of anger, hate, envy, greed, and misery, wanting to take advantage of others or feel indignant and disturbed, yet complain that this environment is terrible, and it can't protect my mind. Actually, it is not that the environment cannot protect your mind. It is you who are unable to protect yourself from the environment.

In order to generate protection from the environment, one needs to make some efforts. What kind of efforts? Reciting the sutras, repentance, meditation, reciting the names of

the Buddha, going to retreats, participating in reading groups etc., these are all making efforts. When we do so, we would be living in the Dharma every moment, and our minds would be protected. Otherwise, if we quarrel easily or feel hurt easily, thinking that we are the victims, our minds are not protected.

The protection of spiritual environment comes first, followed by that of the social environment as the second. When we interact with each other, we should speak politely, and be polite verbally and physically. In addition, we should be polite in our facial expression, gesture, and body movements. The body should act in the right way, and we should speak the right way, with the right way of thinking in mind.

These are all social environment. If you learned to protect the social environment well, and if you were female, then others would see you as a lady. If you were male, then they would see you as a gentleman. The so-called ‘gentleman’ and ‘lady’ are expressed through social etiquette. If a girl speaks rudely, walk inappropriately, then that is behaving without manners. Furthermore, regardless of male or female, if one speaks loudly, walks in hurry, scrambles for a seat, and not waiting in line when taking public transportation or at a pub-

lic place, these are all behaving with no manners. Thus, the proper etiquette and manners in our daily life is the protection of social environment.

The third is living environment movement. Living means living in a very clean and tidy manner, not disturbing others, not making noise and mess, not wasting natural resources, consuming less and conserving more, being purified and simple, orderly and clean... these are all contents of protecting our living environment.

Doing living environment well, we can save a lot of money and produce less trash. For example, if a piece of paper is crumpled and thrown into the trashcan, it becomes litter immediately. If you use the backside of the paper, and after shredding it with a shredder, send the shredded paper to make recycled paper, then that would reduce the volume of the garbage generated. If one pays some attention, trash could be reduced, and reducing the use of all kinds of resources, is the meaning of protecting our living environment. Conserving resources is a kind of merit; it is a virtue, and it is also doing environmental protection.

The fourth is natural environment. We can do it anytime.

For example, when you are alone, you can take the public transit, take the bus, and not necessarily need to drive a car or even ride the motorcycle. Instead, you could walk for a distance, which is healthier. We can reduce waste and the use of natural resources, and this is protecting the natural environment. The ones that are doing massive destructions to nature are mostly governments and industries; they are not governments of small countries, but those of powerful nations, and the big industries are also from powerful nations. They could destroy the whole massive areas of land, mountains, and oceans, destroying all of them at once. These circumstances could not be stopped immediately, but the only thing we could do immediately, is to waste less ourselves, do less devastation, and conserve on natural resources. This is protecting the natural environment.

*Abstracted from The Four Resolutions of Dharma Drum Mountain,  
'Speech Given to Full Time Staff of Dharma Drum Mountain',  
on July, 31, 2007*

## How to Protect Our Spiritual Environment

What is environment protection? Environmental protection is protecting, our living environment, the natural environment, and spiritual environment. Spiritual environment includes emotions, mentality, and psychological aspects. However, the average people are accustomed to and unaware of the magnitude of defilements of their spiritual mind. The reason that our living and natural environment is being polluted and devastated is due to the serious defilements of our spiritual environment.

The human mind is easily defiled. The mind is often moved by the eight states: praise, ridicule, suffering, happiness, fame, slander, gain, and loss, and it is also often defiled by fame, status, power, and prestige. The mind is often ruined by presumptuous desires, leading to emotional dilemma and suffering, the struggle between conscience and selfish desires, and the trouble of making choices. These all threaten our spiritual environment. How to prevent the spiritual environment from being defiled? That is the need to use the methods and concepts of Chan practice.

Anyone with the ability to distinguish right and wrong, good and evil, would know that one should not blindly chase after things that do not belong to one's share, things that are not well deserved and not within one's own ability and conditions. However, it is unavoidable for one to keep a fluke in mind, having insatiably desires, worry about one's personal gains and losses, and having endless greed. It is especially unbearable when one is tempted by wealth, sex, fame and status, undergoes unexpected calamity, and suffers the blow of slander and disparage.

If one could adopt the concepts of Chan practice, tell oneself: "no abiding, no coming and going", then why be bothered by these things? Just maintain a peaceful mind, and be content, no matter one is rich or poor, noble or humble, having honor or disgrace, with gain or loss. In addition, use the methods of Chan practice to relax the body and mind, and put down the self-centeredness. This would enable one to empower one's mind so it would not be moved and defiled by temptations and stimulations. This is doing spiritual environment protection.

Dharma Drum Mountain is an environmental protection organization that upholds protecting the spiritual environment as its principal, followed by social, living, and natural environments. Aside from Chan practice, the content of protecting the spiritual environment also includes ‘The Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign Movement’, and they are:

The Four Approaches for Cultivating Peace: The Mind, Body, Family and Activity

The Four Guidelines for Dealing with Desires: Need, Want, Worthy, and Propriety

The Four Steps for Handling a Problem: Face it, Accept it, Deal with it, and Let go of it

The Four Methods for Helping Oneself and Others: Feeling Grateful, Feeling Thankful, Reforming Yourself, and Moving Others Through Virtue

The Four Ways to Cultivate Blessings: Recognizing Blessings, Cherishing Blessings, Nurturing Blessings, and Sowing the Seeds of Blessings.

*Abstracted from Chan and Protecting the Spiritual Environment,  
a speech given at Zhongshan University, Guangzhou, China on April 29, 2005*



## A Proposition for Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign adopts five methods to outline actions of Protecting the Four environments, with spiritual environment as its lead. These methods are: the four approaches for cultivating peace, the four guidelines for dealing with desires, the four steps for handling a problem, the four methods for helping oneself and others, and the four ways to cultivate blessings. This is the essential objective of Dharma Drum Mountain as we advance into our second decade, and we believe it is the social movement needed by people worldwide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

People of vision already foresee that technological civilization will develop at an astounding rate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, we fear that it will bring disaster instead of blessings to humanity. It is difficult to imagine the magnitude of depletion of earth's resources and the destruction of natural environment. Thus, we should actively transform people's values and purify the minds of humanity. Through humanistic and social caring, we aim to constrain and guide the development of technology, so that it may serve humanity instead of leading it towards destruction.

Dharma Drum's Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign is a spiritual enlightenment movement, and it is also a living education needed by modern people. Given our organization's current foundation, its positive domestic image, and its international prestige, the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign definitely can offer humanity a promising outlook for the future.

No specialized Buddhist vocabulary is found in the methods that make up this Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign movement. This playing down of religious overtones allows them to be used by people of different cultures and religious backgrounds. Yet the essence is the Buddhist teaching of the 'mind', which is not religious belief in a narrow sense, but a method that purify the humanistic and social values. These methods are deep Buddhadharma that does not conflict with other cultures or religions. Thus, this movement can be both far-reaching and long lasting.

*Abstracted from the Speech at Dharma Drum Mountain's  
Global Volunteers Meeting on August 22, 1999*

## **The Meaning of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign in Our Era**

**T**he Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign transforms abstruse and difficult Buddhist terminology and doctrines into sets of ideas and methods that can be understood, accepted, and used by the average people in their daily lives. It is the fruition of Dharma Drum's many years of effort. Although the terms are new, but the essence and spirit is still Buddhadharma.

Dharma Drum has designated the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign as its 'proposition for living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.' It is not a mere slogan, buzzword, or rhetorical flourish, but a program for developing the spirit.

Actually, the methods of Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance are not new. They have been around even in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha. When the Buddha manifested to preach the Dharma in the world, his primary audience was human beings. His aim was to spread the Dharma widely in people's lives, allowing them to gain enlightenment, and thus resolve their predicaments to reveal the inherent wisdom of the illu-

minating mind, which can be called the wisdom of the mind or wisdom itself. By applying the ideas and methods of the Dharma in their lives, people can moderate and subdue their afflictions, habits, and thus begin to realize a pure land, a place of purity and peacefulness, within their mind.

‘Spiritual’ refers to the mind and ideas. Buddhadharma is the teaching of the spiritual mind, and so is the Chan School of China. It is a kind of wisdom, which is partly innate and partly acquired. In other words, the preconditions are innate while nurturing and development are required. If some people have difficulty accepting nurturing and development, it is because they are unwilling to change.

The formation of ideas begins at an early age. Since childhood, people gradually establish their own ways of thinking, but they are not yet mature. After reaching adulthood, mature ideas are gradually formed, which then become the opinions and ideas of an individual. The ideas of an individual are not unchangeable, especially when one encounters suffering, dilemma, and disaster, which cannot be resolved. Under such situation, if someone were to tell the person a certain idea that helps solve his or her problem, it is possible for the person to

change the previous views and accept the new idea. The counseling of psychologists, the guidance of religious teachers, and spiritual conversation between family and friends all have this function of helping a person find methods to adapt to the environment and to harmoniously interact with others.

## Integrating the Spirit with the World

**T**he Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign uses Buddhism to adjust our views and develop our minds. In the past, due to the specialized terminology in the sutras that were difficult to understand, and because many people turned Buddhism into a kind of profound learning or mystical experience, it seems irrelevant to our daily lives. Actually, this was not the Buddha's original intention. The Dharma taught by the Buddha can be used by anyone regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, and level of knowledge or education, to develop the mind, transform views, and improve behavior to adapt to the present living environment.

I have used the phrases: “spreading widely the Dharma relevant to people's lives in the human world” and “establishing a pure land of purity and peacefulness in a burning house”. By spreading widely the Dharma relevant to people's lives in the human world, we can uplift people's characters and improve the quality of their lives. By establishing a clear and cool pure land in a burning house, we can insure not being burned by the ‘fire’.

The 'burning house' refers to the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness, including the human world we live in. 'Fire' is a metaphor for afflictions such as sorrow, anxiety, anger, fear, suspicion, jealousy, obsession, and clinging. Shakyamuni hoped that after the spreading of the Dharma throughout the three realms, people would be able to avoid worry, fear, arrogance, dejection, disappointment, and depression and manifest a clear and cool pure land within their mind, in all circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable. This is precisely Dharma Drum's vision.

## Living Buddhadharma

‘Living Buddhadharma’, ‘humanized Buddhist studies’, and ‘humanistic Buddhism’ are the fundamental spirit of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign. It is living Buddhadharma because Buddhadharma is to be widely applied in everyday life. It is humanized Buddhist studies because Buddhist studies are used to improve the character of humanity. It is humanistic Buddhism because Buddhism belongs to the human world. ‘Living’, ‘humanized’, and ‘humanistic’ have different meaning, and there are also differences between Buddhadharma, Buddhist studies, and Buddhism.

‘Living Buddhadharma’ means using the ideas of Buddhadharma in daily living, which we are actively promoting. The Dharma can be applied in our daily life, and it doesn’t necessarily require practicing in a remote forest. Buddhism stresses the middle way. It advocates neither indulgence in sensual pleasures and comforts nor meaningless asceticism. Whether one is a monastic or layperson, throughout the day, walking, standing, sitting or lying down, one should apply the Dharma to one’s life, living in accordance with the definite standards. This is living Buddhaharma.



As for ‘humanized’, why does Buddhist studies need to be humanized? It is because many people treat Buddhist studies as mere information, metaphysics or a profound form of learning. As a result, it is sealed in an ivory tower and becomes cold academic, losing intimate relationship with humanity. Many people do research for the sake of research and treat Buddhist studies as a field of study, without applying it in their lives. Thus, it becomes academic instead of humanized Buddhist studies.

‘Humanized’ means doing Buddhist research from the human perspective, using the research achievements suitable for people to improve the human character and purify the human world. Take the example of Dharma Drum Mountain’s Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, its ‘Declaration of Principles’ states “practical application is our priority, and benefiting others is our emphasis”. Buddhist studies that promotes benefiting others and practical application is humanized Buddhist studies.

‘Humanistic’ Buddhism is one fundamental spirit of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance. One may ask, “What is religion”? A long-established orthodox religious tradition must

have three traits: a founder, doctrines, and religious community. That is, there must be a historical figure that founded the religion, a foundation of religious doctrine, and a community that cultivates or practices the doctrine. Buddhism has these three traits.

‘Humanistic’ means these three traits are all centered on humanity, and established in view for serving humanity instead of on metaphysics, or ghost and spirit worshiping. Thus, it is called humanistic Buddhism. Today, there are some people who constantly emphasize enlightenment, wondrous responses and spiritual powers from mystical experiences, and their ability to contact and command beings from the spirit realm. These deviate from the human standpoint, and are not humanistic Buddhism.

In sum, if, one does not take the standpoint of humanity in speaking Buddhadharma, doing research in Buddhist studies, or Buddhist faith, then it is not living Buddhadharma, humanized Buddhist studies, or humanistic Buddhism. The Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance must be humanized, humanistic, and relevant to people’s lives.

## A Movement of Spiritual Enlightenment and Living Education

The goal of the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance is to make Buddhism relevant to people's lives. This is a kind of living education based on the spiritual enlightenment movement, to actualize the three types of education: education through academics, public education, and social care service. Thereby promote our vision of 'improving the human character and building a pure land on earth.'

Perhaps some may ask: "Does education through academics make Buddhism relevant to people's lives?" The answer is affirmative. Our curriculum and the education environment all work towards this goal. Currently, the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies is promoting education that makes Buddhism relevant to people's lives because 'practical application is our priority', and this maxim is humanistic, humanized, living Buddhism.

In promoting the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, there are two aspects to consider. First, playing down religious overtones to engage in the secular world and influ-

ence it. Second, strengthening us in the Dharma to avoid compromising with the secular world and be mired in it.

In playing down religious overtones, the primary thing is to not use paranormal phenomena, mystical experiences and spiritual powers as such to attract followers, not to emphasize idol worship nor take any person, spiritual object or force as idols. The highest principle of Buddhadharma is “giving rise to the mind while not abiding anywhere”, “phenomena are not existent nor non-existent”, and “all phenomena are Buddhadharma nor Buddhadharma”. Thus the Buddha preached for forty-nine years, yet says over and over again that what he taught were not ultimate teachings but expedient teachings and skillful means.

Most religions believe in a ‘creator god’ and worship supernatural phenomena. However, Buddhism does not talk about such a ‘creator god’. As for supernatural phenomena and spiritual powers mentioned in the sutras, they are definitely not central to the Dharma. The Chan School of China in particular does not advocate spiritual powers or the supernatural to attract followers. Thus, Chan is the most humanistic, humanized, and living form of Buddhism.

Some worry that playing down religious overtones will cause us to lose our original direction, for this, everyone should have confidence. We will continuously seek to strengthen ourselves in the Buddhardharma and influence and transform the secular world. We will not be thrown off course by the winds and waves of the world, contrarily, we will stand firm like a rock in mid-stream and engage our influence.

In order to avoid fanciful daydreaming in promoting the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, the focus of our efforts will be making concrete, feasible plans and choosing locations to establish exemplars. We will start from Dharma Drum's community of monastics and Dharma Upholders then gradually extend our efforts to families, communities, campuses, and eventually to the whole world.

At the same time, we can use the Internet and various languages to make the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance an international language and idea that the whole world can identify with.

*Speech given to Fulltime Staff on September 7, 1999*

## **The Four Approaches for Cultivating Peace: The Mind, Body, Family and Activity**

**W**e must implement the Dharma in human society. By bringing the Dharma into every family, people will be in contact with the teaching of compassion and wisdom, and that enables them to cultivate a peaceful mind, body, family, and activity. This is truly reliable and utmost peace.

### **Cultivating a Peaceful Mind Lies in Having Few Desires**

Having few desires and being content means having no intense desire or insatiable greed, thus allowing one to cultivate a peaceful mind.

Brining peace of mind to others is a bodhisattva act on a compassionate mind. One should make a compassionate vow to benefit others and work for their welfare. Otherwise, by merely practicing to have few desires and to be content, one may not be actively involved, and can even become negative and passive.

People with good potentials would cultivate peace of mind through the path, give rise to the bodhi-mind, and cul-

tivate the bodhisattva practice. People with moderate potentials would cultivate peace of mind through activities, not causing trouble for oneself or others when given sufficient amount of work. People with low potentials would seek peace of mind through pursuit of fame, fortune and material things. I hope that everyone can at least cultivate peace of mind through activities, and not be the one with low potentials who seek fame and fortune.

### **Cultivating a Peaceful Body Lies In Hard Work and Thrift**

People should work, but work is not all there is to life. Life is not just working for material wealth or for satisfaction of material desires. One should work for the sake of one's mental and physical health and for the opportunity to render service to others with a grateful heart.

Besides a healthy body and peaceful mind, diligence and hard work usually bring material remuneration as well. However, after receiving remuneration, one should use it moderately. Otherwise, seeking to satisfy material desires would generate unhealthy activities for the body and mind. In other words, after hard work should come thrift. Hard work and

thrift are two key principles to physical health. At the same time, thrift will result in many benefits that you can pass on to others. If you do so, you will become someone that is liked and admired by everyone.

### **Cultivating a Peaceful Family Lies in Love and Respect**

The family's warmth lies in loving and respecting each other, and its preciousness lies in helping one another. Helping one another means helping those in need of help. When helping someone, you shouldn't be swelled with pride and think you are a great benefactor that the one being helped should thank. Instead, you should feel grateful and thank the person for the opportunity to contribute and grow through serving others.

The essence of a peaceful family is respecting, learning, and being understanding to one another. Simply making arrangements for your family on the material level is not enough, to truly cultivate a peacefully family, one must allow each family member to do their part and play their role.



## **Cultivating Peaceful Activities Lies in Being Honest and Upright**

When most people think of ‘cultivating peaceful activity’, they probably think of their professional activity, their job, and its stability and security. However, if we take into account the purity and diligence of all three types of activity- mental, verbal, and physical, then it includes both personal and professional activities.

We should pay attention to our behavior, moderate our deeds, words, and thoughts. We should not act rashly, blindly and without standards, talk foolishly or erroneously. We also should not be indecisive and change our minds frequently. These are guidelines we should observe in our daily lives.

That one should work diligently and harmoniously is a platitude, yet it is not easily done. Even if you do things successfully, and get what you wish for, one day when you encounter some setback, dilemma or difficulty, you may have doubts about what you are doing and for whom you are working for so hard. If these thoughts arise, you are not working diligently and harmoniously.

Working diligently means taking one's work responsibilities seriously. Diligence is working hard, tirelessly and putting wholeheartedly into one's work. If you have an attitude of holding back on your abilities, mental and physical energy, then you are not working diligently.

One should consider the principle of 'benefiting others and benefiting oneself' in taking any action. Do not pursue your own benefits, instead, work diligently for the benefit of others, and consider both their long-term and immediate benefits. Whether at home, at work or in any other context, if you can face things with this attitude, I believe you will have good relations with others and enjoy their support.

## **The Four Guidelines for Dealing with Desires: Need, Want, Worthy, and Propriety**

**I**n modern society, the flourishing of material civilization and the excessive speed of structural change has led to confusion in people's values. As a result, people are not sure what they truly need and what they want out of greed, what is legitimate to acquire, and what is proper needs due to their responsibilities.

Since they are unable to distinguish between needs, wants, worthy, and propriety, most people simply goes with the crowd and follow the trends of society - "if other people have it, I want it too."

Furthermore, typically modern people's 'needs are few, but wants are too many'. On top of that, they pursue what they shouldn't and cannot acquire. When they cannot acquire what they want, the result is the feelings of restlessness and uneasiness, and the cropping up of endless social problems.

### **Our Needs are Few and Our Desires are Too Many**

What is 'need'? It is things you cannot live without, such

as the sun, air, moisture, minimum amount of food, clothes to fend off the cold, and house to shelter from the wind and rain. In our era, the basic transportation, computers, and telephones have also become needs. Having these necessities is not indulgence.

What is indulgence? It is those luxuries and adornments beyond that which is necessary, things that only serve to satisfy your vanity and social appearances. Nevertheless, in certain situations and in accordance with one's status, one must have a certain level of elegance in order to suit the occasion. That can be counted as a need, but one must have a sense of propriety.

Things that are truly needed in life are not many. From a subjective perspective, it seems that life is empty, forlorn, and meaningless without certain things. This is purely personal value judgment. So, the definition of 'need' becomes hazy. When considering the differences between 'need' and 'want', we should do so from a subjective standpoint as well as from an overall, objective standpoint.

## **Is it Worthy? Is it Proper?**

‘Worthy’ means within the scope of ability. You may work hard to obtain the things you need, but if your ability is insufficient, you should yield to those capable and not insist. There are many things in life that lead people to strong envy and cravings, including fame, fortune, power, status, and love. However, when you wish to obtain them, you must think carefully: “Are my ability and contribution sufficient to make them deserving? Are the conditions such that they can be readily obtainable? Am I being too forceful?” If your contributions and abilities are insufficient and the conditions not ripe, yet you still hope to gain it, this is craving for things you do not deserve. This will only increase your pain and do harm to yourself.

As for ‘propriety’ or not, if we consider a phrase popular with young people today: “If I like it, then do it”, this is an example of not distinguishing what is proper and what is improper to desire.

Most people’s desires are endless, liking and wanting too much. They should ask themselves whether they should like

them and try to obtain them. For example, everyone likes fame, status, wealth, and power, but undeserved fame is only a facade, undeserved wealth is ill-gotten gains, and undeserved status is just an act. It is improper to pursue such things. Of course, obtaining them is not blameworthy if one truly deserves them; it is a kind of reward.

Actually, in our daily lives, the things we need are not many, yet the things we want are many indeed. The things we need are proper to desire. The things we want are unimportant. We should start from the perspective of protecting the spiritual environment. Protect our minds from being negatively affected by the environment, and empower our minds against such defilement. Not give rise to negative states of the mind such as jealousy, anger, suspicion, and selfishness, which makes the environment even worse. By being aware of each subtle thought in our mind, we can clearly know our needs and resolve our wants.

If you clearly understand these four criteria for dealing with desire in the course of your life, then you will have a clear sense of direction and be able to live peacefully.

## **The Four Steps for Handling a Problem: Face it, Accept it, Deal with it, and Let go of it**

**A** diversity in life is unavoidable. When handling difficult problems, I often encourage people to face them calmly, accept them, deal with them, and let go of them. When we encounter difficulty, hardship or unfair situations, we should not try to escape because it cannot solve the problem. To be truly liberated from confounding problems, one should use wisdom and be responsible.

### **Methods for Facing Afflictions**

How can we face our problems? We must tell ourselves that everything and every phenomenon happens for a reason. We don't need to delve into the reasons, and there is no time for that. It is most straightforward and important to face and improve the situation.

Many people say, "I am a good person. Why do I suffer so many hardships?" We need to be aware that with a material body comes karmic retribution and obstacles. It is like the earth that comes with its mountains, rivers, rain, clouds and fog. Even great practitioners suffer karmic retribution. For

instance, the Buddha's toes were struck and hurt by a large rock, and he also underwent serious illness. However, karmic retribution and obstacles do not necessarily have to lead to afflictions. This is the difference between ordinary people and great practitioners.

When ordinary people suffer from things they encounter, they lose faith. Great practitioners can let go of the self and remain unobstructed by affliction. We follow the Buddha's path in order to emulate his wisdom. This way, we can discern the causes of affliction and face them, accept them, deal with them, and let go of them.

Karma must manifest in accordance with conditions. Under any circumstance, if you can improve the situation, do so. If you cannot, then face it and accept it. Don't avoid it, but strive to improve it. It is not worth the cost to avoid responsibility and karmic retribution. The smartest thing to do is to try to improve the situation.

Things planned are not necessarily always reliable. Unexpected situations can occur. At this time, one should accept it, and then try to find ways to deal with it, because it is just the



way conditions are.

So, if problems occur in the course of your plans, there is no need to be sad or disappointed. Continue to work diligently to bring conditions to ripening fruition; there is still opportunity for success. If after careful consideration, you judge that the conditions cannot reach fruition, then the only thing to do is to let it go. This is completely different from giving up without making an effort.

### **Let Go of Yourself and Let Go of Others**

Clinging to oneself is a lack of wisdom, and clinging to others is a lack of compassion. If one thinks this way, one can give rise to a mind of sympathy and respect. Sympathize others because they are also human, and respect others because they are also independent individuals.

How does Chan teach people to cultivate peace of mind in ordinary life? The attitude of Chan is: knowing the facts, facing them, dealing with them, then letting go of them. No matter what circumstance you encounter, you wouldn't see it as a disaster. If you know something troublesome might happen, and can prevent it, that is the best. If it is going to happen

inevitably, then what is the use of worrying about it? Worry and anxiety not only does not help the situation, it can even make things worse. Facing it is the best solution.

I frequently encounter people who seem to be trapped in the midst of fire, and coming to me for help. Generally, I would listen to their problems, know what their anxieties are, but I wouldn't make their anxieties my own nightmares.

The principle advice I give them is: For emotional problems, it is advisable to apply rationality. For family problems, ethics is the best solution. Even if something big happens, you should take time to resolve and mitigate it. If it is a truly unavoidable misfortune, then you can only face it and accept it. By facing and accepting it, it is dealing with it. Since it is already dealt with, then there is no reason to worry about it, so let go of it. Don't constantly think: "What should I do?" Just sleep as before, eat as before, and live, as you ought to live.

## **The Four Methods for Helping Oneself and Others: Feeling Grateful, Feeling Thankful, Reforming Yourself, and Moving Others Through Virtue**

**H**ow can we specifically engage in the practice of helping others and ourselves in our daily life? We can start with the four methods of feeling grateful, feeling thankful, reforming ourselves, and moving others through virtue.

### **Feeling Grateful— Contributing and Repaying Kindness Without Seeking Anything in Return**

You should be grateful at all times, and contribute all that you can with your wealth, strength, wisdom, and intelligence. When making a contribution, you should hold an attitude of respect, and not out of charity. Otherwise, you may think of yourself as a great benefactor, and develop an arrogant attitude. To think that you've done many meritorious deeds, and wait intently for reward, this is without shame. On the other hand, one who receives gifts or services should treat the giver as a benefactor and feel a debt of gratitude. Both parties should maintain a mind of contribution, offering, gratitude,

and repaying kindness. One person contributes with a grateful heart, and the other person receives with a grateful heart.

Many people pay lip service in making contributions. In their hearts they are only investing; contributing something today in hope of gaining something in return tomorrow. Actually, this is simply an exchange of favors. It is neither repaying kindness nor contribution. True contribution is unconditional.

### **Feeling Thankful— Good and Ill Fortune are Both Beneficial**

We should accept both favorable and adverse conditions with thankfulness. Those who give us a helping hand are our benefactors. It is right and proper to be thankful towards them. Those who encourage us to grow by being our adversaries are also our benefactors, and they should also be thanked. Actually, we should take everything we encounter and everyone we meet as our benefactor, as someone who helps us and benefits us. In doing so, we will maintain peace in our minds.

## Reforming Yourself— Knowing Shame, Repenting, and Improving Oneself Through Wisdom and Compassion

Many Buddhists take the scriptures and use them to teach and reform others. They use the standards of Buddhadharma to demand other people.

The Dharma is there to help us practice; they are not for us to judge others with. Unfortunately, many people not only use the Dharma to judge others, but also use the secular moral standards to demand people. Yet they are unable to serve as a positive example for others themselves. Such people not only are unable to use the Dharma to help themselves, but also unable to assist and benefit others.

Reforming oneself means knowing shame and repenting often. Knowing shame is because one has not done well enough, and hopes to work harder and do better. Repenting is because one is aware of his own mistakes and wishes to remind himself not to make them again.

The sutras tell us that only after reaching the eighth stage do the Bodhisattvas of Mahayana practice achieve the state of

no-more-learning. As for the shravakas of Hinayana, it is only after attaining arhatship that one achieves that state. ‘No-more-learning’ means no need for learning anymore; no longer commit misconduct and need to be shameful or repent. Perhaps some may ask: “How can bodhisattvas still have faults and still need to feel shameful?” Actually, bodhisattvas need to feel shame and repent so they can become more diligent, more pure in their minds, and more able to affect others.

### **Moving Others Through Virtue— Reform Yourself, Use Compassion and Wisdom to Move Others**

Some people complain that the members in their family are inadequate, and do not meet their expectations. Or they feel that society is a mess, and people’s minds are restless and uneasy. They somehow feel that if other people do better, they would be safer. If other people were more earnest and responsible, they would be happier. Based on this standard of expectation, they believe that if only others were better, they would have more blessings. However, they forgot to demand themselves and see if they have done as what others wish.

The world needs Buddhadharma, and it is most reliable

to practice the Dharma oneself. It is unrealistic to expect others do so. If people can handle matters with wisdom, and interact with others with compassion, they naturally will have the power to move others.

‘The four methods for helping oneself and others’ ask us to reform ourselves, move others through virtue, feel thankful towards both good and ill fortune, and gratefully contribute ourselves. They ask us to emulate the compassion of Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) Bodhisattva and the vows of Ksitigarbha (Earth Treasury) Bodhisattva. This way, we can get through hardships without regarding them as hardships. At the same time, we can save others from hardship in the midst of hardship. This is the bodhisattva spirit of benefiting and assisting oneself and others.

## **The Four Ways to Cultivate Blessings:** Recognizing Blessings, Cherishing Blessings, Nurturing Blessings, and Sowing the Seeds of Blessings

**T**he doctrines and practices of Buddhadharma aim to cultivate wisdom and blessings, to cultivate blessings with compassion and to cultivate wisdom with wisdom. We must also cultivate wisdom to foster blessings, and cultivate blessings to support wisdom. If one has blessings without wisdom or wisdom without blessings, then one's practice will not be complete and perfect. It is the same case if one has compassion without wisdom or wisdom without compassion.

For this reason, one who is perfect in blessings must be perfect in wisdom, and one who is perfect in wisdom must be perfect in blessings. And this is the 'Buddha'. We refer to the Buddha as the 'honored one in two perfections', meaning one who is perfect in both blessings and wisdom.

One who is able to practice the four ways to cultivate blessings: recognizing blessings, cherishing blessings, nurturing blessings, and sowing the seeds of blessings and wish oth-



ers good fortune, is a person of great blessings.

## **Recognizing Blessings— Being Content and Being Happy, Being at Peace With Minimum Desires, and Being Delighted in the Path**

Being aware of one's blessings is very important. Everyone living in this world at the very minimum has his breath, and with this breath, all hopes are possible, and life can be full of possibilities. For this reason, our breath is very precious. As the proverb says: "As long as the green mountains remain, I fear no lack of firewood." If one can recognize one's blessings, then one can say: "as long as I have my breath, I am satisfied."

Many people don't understand that they must treasure their lives. They don't realize their lives are a blessing. Especially in our modern society of affluence, many people are nurtured in blessings but do not recognize that. They see someone else has something and wants to possess it, without regarding the effort that person has made to obtain it. They may even use unscrupulous ways to reach their goal, thereby harming themselves and others. If we can recognize our blessings, we will be content, and if we were content, we will always be happy. Being content does not mean not wanting

anything, but knowing “it’s good to have more, it’s good to have less, it’s good that all are filled with joy.” This is truly being content.

### **Cherishing Blessings— Treasuring What We Have With Gratitude and Repaying the Kindness We Receive**

Besides our breath, we possess many things, including our lives and property etc. We also have our relationships with others, that is, our interpersonal relations and affinity with people.

Cherishing our blessings means treasuring what we have, including our resources of intellect, health, natural environment, and society. We should cherish them and do not waste or spoil them. In particular, we should not spoil our health or harm our reputation, character, or even ideas and ideals. This is cherishing blessings.

### **Nurturing Blessings— Enjoying Our Blessings is Not a Blessing, Nurturing Blessings is a Blessing**

Nurturing blessings is like spreading and sharing the blessings of this life to others so you could cultivate more

blessings. If you can treat the whole world, the universe, and all beings of the ten directions as your object in nurturing blessings, and ceaselessly sow the seeds of blessings, then you will be a person of great blessings. Ultimately, your blessings will be perfect as those of the Buddha.

Sometimes retribution arising from karmic obstruction may mislead people to believe that it is a blessing. For instance, living a comfortable life which one can sit idly and enjoy everything without doing anything. From the Buddhist perspective, this is not necessarily a blessing.

By applying the Buddhist idea that all phenomena are impermanent, and nothing is forever unchanging, then we know living a good life is not a blessing. Only treasuring and nurturing blessings are true blessings. The reason being that after we exhaust this life's blessings, what immediately follows is bitter retribution. If we grasp the opportunity now, pay no heed to our toil, not keep track of insults and humiliations, nor work for our own fame and fortune, then help others resolve their difficulties, strive unceasingly to make progress, and give all of ourselves to those in need, this is gaining and nurturing blessings.

**Sowing the Seeds of Blessings—  
Through one's own growth, one can widely sow the  
seeds of blessings, so all may be blessed**

Shakyamuni Buddha informs us that people come to this world to sow the seeds of blessings. Each individual can sow blessings from his own fields, such as family, friends, people in the society in need of help, those who are suffering without support, and to work for the benefit of society and nation, as well as for the happiness of all sentient beings. These are all fields of blessings for us to sow.

Those who are aware of the need to sow blessings anytime and anywhere are the ones who are blessed. In order to sow the seeds of blessings, we must work diligently on improving ourselves, including our knowledge, character, wisdom, and skills, etc. Only then will we have more resources with which to sow the seeds of blessings.

## *Appendix*

### Dharma Drum Mountain Pocket Guides to Buddhist Wisdom

- E-1 Meeting of Minds*
- E-2 In the Spirit of Chan*
- E-3 A General Introduction to the Bodhisattva Precepts*
- E-4 The Effects of Chan Meditation*
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- E-11 Wu Ming Exposes Ignorance*
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- E-13 The Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan Buddhism*
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