

Master  
Sheng Yen

## **Master Sheng Yen**

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# Contents

## *Introduction*

Biography of Master Sheng Yen 05

Chan Teachings 19

Dharma Drum Mountain 57

Engagement in Society 73

Speeches 101

*Appendix* 121





## Biography of Master Sheng Yen

By the time of his death in February 2009, Chan Master Sheng Yen was recognized as a pre-eminent spiritual leader. A traditional master of Chinese Buddhism, he was a lineage descendant of both the Linji and Caodong schools of Chan. For over three decades he taught Buddhadharma in Taiwan, the United States, and Europe, and led meditation retreats worldwide. He was also a scholar, earning a master's in Buddhist Studies and a doctorate in Buddhist Literature from Rissho University in Japan. During his life he authored over one hundred scholarly and popular works in Chinese and English, many of which have been translated into other languages. Among his lasting achievements was to establish and lead Dharma Drum Mountain, one of the major Buddhist centers in Taiwan. His influence in world religion was acknowledged by his service as chairperson of the World Council of Religious Leaders.

Born as Chang Baokang in 1930 near Shanghai to a family of farmers, Master Sheng Yen was the youngest of six

children. As a child he was sickly and slow to develop, not able to speak until he was about six. It was not until Baokang was nine years old that he entered primary school in his village. When he was thirteen, a neighbor named Dai Hanqing, while visiting their home, asked his mother if her young son would like to become a monk. She referred the question to Baokang who was not quite sure what being a monk meant. But he liked the idea, and knew that going away would alleviate the burden on his family, so he said yes. Mr. Dai had some connections with a Wolf Mountain monastery and said he would see what he could do. After months of waiting Baokang learned he had been accepted and crossed the Yangzi with Mr. Dai and entered the Wolf Mountain monastery, where he was ordained in 1943 by Master Langhui.

For the next five years his training consisted mostly of doing monastery chores, working in the fields, and performing daily ritual services. He was also expected to memorize sutras, which he was entirely unable to do. Master Langhui told the young monk that this was due to his heavy karmic obstructions, and ordered him to do 500 prostrations every morning and night to the bodhisattva of compassion, Guanyin. After three months of this, he had what he described as a

“curiously refreshing experience,” and his mind became vividly clear. Master Sheng Yen said he believed that Guanyin came to his aid. This event strengthened his faith in Guanyin, and it gave him confidence to practice well. After this he had no problem memorizing sutras. Through the rest of his life, Master Sheng Yen recommended Guanyin prostration as a beneficial practice.

Then came the Communist revolution. In the wake of the violence and social disruption, the monks had a choice of either staying—in which case they might be forced to renounce their vows, or worse, going to Taiwan with the government-in-exile, in which case they would have to join the Nationalist army. Thus, in 1949 at age eighteen, Sheng Yen went to Taiwan and while in the army, maintained his precepts and practice as best he could for 10 years.

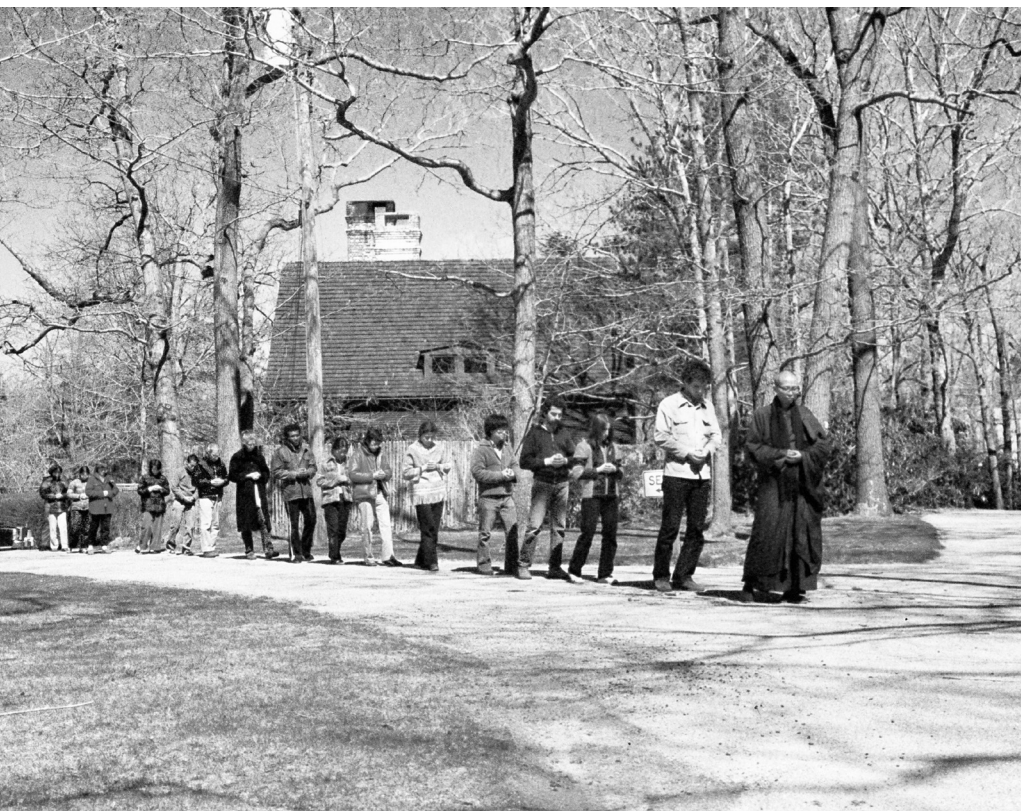
At the age of 28, while on a brief vacation leave from the army, Sheng Yen visited Gaoxiong Buddhist Temple, a lay practice center in southern Taiwan. There, he found himself sharing a sleeping platform with an eminent visiting monk, Master Lingyuan. The older monk was meditating, and Sheng Yen decided to sit with him. Finding his mind spin-

ning with questions that had been building during years of mostly unguided practice— “What is enlightenment? What is buddhahood? How can I resolve the many contradictions there seemed to be in the teachings?”—he finally asked Linguan to answer a few questions. The master agreed. A flood of questions poured out of Sheng Yen. For hours, his “great ball of doubt” grew and grew while the master patiently listened. Finally, Lingyuan struck the platform with a sharp whack: “Put it down!” At that moment, Sheng Yen felt a great weight suddenly being lifted from him. After recovering from the shock, he felt supremely happy, and in his words, “There was nothing there.” The next day the world seemed fresh, as if he was seeing it for the first time. Sheng Yen had his first profound Chan experience of “dropping the mind.”

After 10 years of service Sheng Yen was able to leave the army, and soon after was re-ordained by another monk, Master Dongchu, who became his principal teacher. The training under Dongchu was very rough—he neither lectured on doctrine nor instructed on method, but mostly offered harsh criticism—everything Sheng Yen did was wrong. Later, speaking of his two years with Master Dongchu, Master Sheng Yen said, “Without him I would not have realized much.”

In 1961, after 18 years of study and practice, Sheng Yen went into a three-year solitary retreat at the Chao Yuan Monastery in Taiwan. The first year was spent mostly doing repentance prostrations; the second and third years he divided his time between meditating and reading sutras. At the end of three years, realizing he hadn't accomplished what he wanted to, he remained another three years, adding study, research and writing to his regimen. By the end of the six years, he had written several books, learned to read Japanese, and became convinced that scholarly training in Japan would be invaluable to his aims of reviving Chinese Buddhism. With the encouragement of Master Dongchu, Sheng Yen applied for the master's program in Buddhist Studies at Rissho University in Tokyo, and was accepted. He earned his Master's degree in 1971 and his doctorate in Buddhist Literature in 1975.

While in Japan Sheng Yen also attended winter-long retreats with Zen master Bantetsugu Roshi, who was critical of him for being an intellectual with strongly held opinions. However, after Sheng Yen completed his doctorate, Bantetsugu advised him to go teach in America. When Sheng Yen complained that he didn't know English, Bantetsugu Roshi rejoined, "Do you think Zen is taught with words? Why wor-



In April 1979, Master Sheng Yen led his third 7-day Chan retreat in America, at Bodhi House at Port Jefferson, Long Island, New York.

ry about words?” Thus, in 1975, Sheng Yen went to America and began teaching Chan meditation at the Temple of Great Enlightenment in New York City.

After 1976 Master Sheng Yen began to divide his time evenly between Taiwan and the United States, engaging in “reviving Chinese Buddhism and uplifting the Chinese people,” as well as spreading Chan Buddhism in the West. In 1977 he led his first one-week Chan retreat in America and subsequently established the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, New York. In 1978, upon the death of Master Dongchu, he inherited stewardship of the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture and the Nung Chan Monastery in Taiwan. In 1985 he established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in Taipei, which now offers a master’s degree, encourages Buddhist research, and transcends sectarian boundaries through its academic exchanges with Tibetan and Theravada Buddhism.

In 1989 he established Dharma Drum Mountain on a large tract of land in Jinshan, north of Taipei. The monastery became the eventual home of Dharma Drum University, Dharma Drum Sangha University, Dharma Drum Buddhist



Master Sheng Yen and the sangha members.



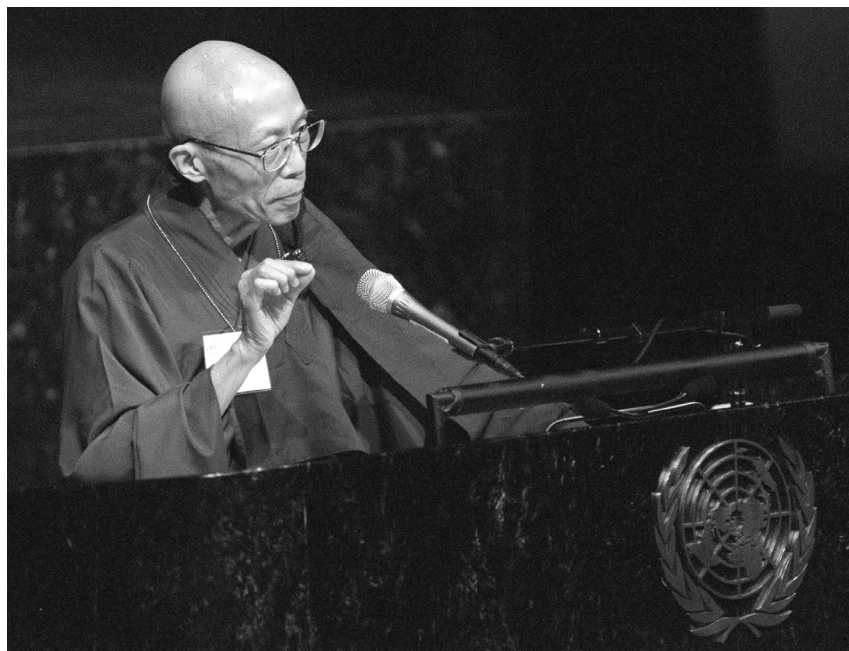
Panoramic view of Dharma Drum Mountain after its inauguration in 2005.



College, and Dharma Drum Monastery, including facilities for intensive group practice and long-term solitary retreats. In 1997 he established the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York as Dharma Drum's international practice center, with facilities for up to 100 retreatants. As a result of these and other activities, Master Sheng Yen had disciples, students, and followers in many countries.

Master Sheng Yen actively encouraged interfaith activities between different branches of Buddhism, advocating and promoting understanding, tolerance and freedom. A forward thinker in revitalizing Chinese Buddhism and engaging in outreach to society, he was recognized for his influence in transforming religious culture in Taiwan and China. He urged practitioners to be aware of their own mundane thoughts, so as to perceive changes in themselves and their environment. This wisdom was to be applied in their workaday lives to face themselves and grow, to lessen their attachments and ultimately be able to enter a state of "no-self." With this wisdom they could feel relaxed, unhindered, and enjoy everyday life while helping others despite life's pressures.

Master Sheng Yen's quest for a consensus of "seeking



Representing Chinese Buddhism, in August 2000, Master Sheng Yen gave the keynote speech at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders.

commonality, while preserving diversity” to eliminate spiritual poverty and protect the environment led to the initiative to Protect the Spiritual Environment. His message of compassion, wisdom, and tolerance transcended national borders and faith. He served humanity by honoring peoples’ character, showing respect for them, encouraging kinship among all, and urging them to take care of the planet. He saw all sentient beings as equals, brothers and sisters of one family, regardless of race, gender, nationality, social standing, or religion. He urged people to reach beyond themselves to heal those around them who are hurting. At the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations headquarters in 2000, he appealed to leaders from all walks of life that “if any sacred texts or ancient teachings of any peoples propose tenets that go against the principle of peaceful coexistence for all humanity, then these texts must be reinterpreted...” Only in this way would we cultivate a society that respects multiculturalism and live in harmony with each other.

He taught that there are two kinds of poverty—material poverty and spiritual poverty, that although material poverty makes life hard, spiritual poverty can manifest in greater destructiveness. He pointed out that the main causes of the

rapidly deteriorating environment were excessive development and waste, resulting in large-scale depletion of natural resources and destruction of the living environment. Therefore, effective environmental protection is a mission of great urgency. However, he cautioned that environmental protection must begin with a change in people's values. To transform the selfish heart that plunders and seizes into a compassionate heart that gives and contributes, Master Sheng Yen developed the Protect the Spiritual Environment initiative that would address this concern, and realize a pure land on Earth. Master Sheng Yen's vision of a pure land on Earth is a pillar concept in the organizations that he founded, an idea that pivots on protecting the spiritual environment. Through the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, the goal of a pure land may be gradually realized in every aspect of life and bring about the purification of one's body and mind. Once people's minds are purified, the nation will be pure. In a keynote speech to the first Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, Master Sheng Yen said: "[When] individuals start by purifying their minds, filling them with gratitude for life as well as kindness and compassion...they will devote the fruit of their efforts to others."

The implementation of this concept, along with harmonizing the liberation path and the bodhisattva path, is Master Sheng Yen's teaching on how to benefit sentient beings; it allows modern people to engage the world in a way that transforms their lives and relieves the spiritual poverty that afflicts most people today.

Master Sheng Yen dedicated his life to realizing the vow he made when he was a young boy to benefit others by sharing with them the compassion, methods and teachings of the Buddha. In his life, he promoted environmentalism as a life-long devotion. He instructed that his physical remains be buried as ashes to reunite with nature, thus exemplifying his identification with the environment.

"The universe may one day perish, yet my vows are eternal." Master Sheng Yen made this vow to carry on in his future lives what he was unable to accomplish in this lifetime, and he also hoped that others would also undertake what he was unable to accomplish on his own to together build a pure land on earth.

Shortly before his death, he wrote this poem:



On September 21, 1999, a severe earthquake struck Taiwan. In its aftermath, Master Shen Yen's "Go, go, Taiwan" consoled the spirits of many people.

*Busy with nothing, growing old.*

*Within emptiness, weeping, laughing.*

*Intrinsically there's no "I."*

*Life and death, thus cast aside.*

Note: For a fuller account of Master Sheng Yen's life in his own words, we refer the reader to his autobiography in English, *Footprints in the Snow*, published in 2008, the year before he passed away, by Doubleday, New York.

# Chan Teachings

## Attaining the Way

*Excerpts from Retreat Talks by Master Sheng Yen*

*The following passages are abridged excerpts from Attaining the Way: A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism, by Master Sheng Yen, et. al., First Edition, 2006, printed here through the courtesy of Shambhala Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. These extemporaneous teachings were compiled from one retreat given by the Master at Nung Chan Temple, Taiwan, in 1991, and three separate retreats at the Chan Meditation Center, New York, in 1992. For the full flavor, depth, and breadth of these teachings, we highly encourage reading the above-mentioned book.*

### What is Your Bodhimandala?

To cultivators of Chan, I give three guiding principles. First, relax your body and mind. Second, settle upon a practice method as soon as possible. Third, do not concern yourself with how well you are doing. If you follow these guidelines, your practice will be smooth and fruitful.

First, relax: when you sit in meditation, relax your body from your head to your belly and to your legs. Your mind must not be tense or hurried, and always keep a patient attitude. If you sink into torpor or become scattered, or your method is not going smoothly, then just relax your body and your mind. Tensing will only add to your afflictions and waste time. Remember though, the purpose of relaxing is to further your practice, not to take it easy.

Second, do not be casual about switching your method. The practice methods we commonly use are breath counting, reciting a buddha's name, investigating gong'an (Jap., koan) or huatou (Jap., wato), and silent illumination, or mozhao (Jap., shikantaza). If you have been practicing a specific method, whether for a short time or many years, try to stay with it.

Third, do not gauge your own progress. If your practice goes well, don't be elated. If it is not going well, don't get discouraged. Just be sure that you are practicing in accordance with the Dharma.

Starting this morning, before you sit, bow to your cushion and ask, "What is my bodhimandala, my place of practice,



my site of enlightenment?” After sitting, adjust your posture so that your whole body is comfortable and as it should be. It is not necessary to sit in the full-lotus position—the main thing is to be stable. After your posture is correct, do not pay any more attention to your body; just keep your mind on your method.

If you do all of these things you will already be practicing Chan.

### **Principles for Cultivating Practice**

If you are aware of the orderliness and cleanliness of your surroundings, you can be more aware of your inner mind. To purify your mind is no small task, but when your awareness functions in orderly surroundings, your mind can reflect that and become more tranquil. Tranquility also means being silent and smooth in your motions. No matter what you are doing, be calm, careful, peaceful, and quiet. This way, even with a lot of people moving in a confined space, there will be order and tranquility. Do not harbor contradictions or antagonisms in your mind. If you cannot harmonize your inner mind, neither can you harmonize with those around you. If you resent your environment and find fault with others,

your mind will surely lose its inner balance. Thus, an ancient worthy said: "Be ever mindful of your own faults as you sit quietly, and when you are talking freely do not speak of the faults of others." Enmity and strife are not the way to harmonize: tolerance, persuasion, and explanation are better. Chan practitioners must first do a good job on themselves. If there are no internal contradictions, then you will certainly be able to harmonize with yourself and with others.

### **The Twin Pillars of Concepts and Methods**

Chan relies on the twin pillars of concepts and methods. Unless both are firmly in place and working together, your practice will lack a firm foundation. Without cultivating practice, studying Buddhist concepts is just an intellectual exercise; on the other hand, practicing the methods without understanding the concepts can lead you astray. Empowerment comes with clearly grasping the concepts and methods and using them to cultivate practice. So please attend to the Chan master's instructions, correct your concepts, and practice your method.

One basic concept is to offer your body and mind to the life of practice. This overcomes self-centeredness and

all of its consequences. However hard you practice, cultivating from a self-centered stance can only result in more afflictions for yourself and others. Practice requires three kinds of “putting aside.” First, putting aside the self; second, putting aside thoughts about goals; and third, putting aside past and future.

“The self” refers to the notion of “I” that we have as a result of possessing a body and a mind. “Goals” refers to the benefits of Chan practice, especially enlightenment. “The past and future” refers to our mental projections of things that no longer exist and things that do not yet exist. These three attitudes—belief in a self, desire for benefits, and being hostage to past and future—compose the central core of the personality and the essential elements of self-worth. They are the roots of misfortune, bringing with them affliction and bondage. Not putting them aside means that the most important result of Chan practice—enlightenment—will be beyond reach. To experience the benefits of Chan, you have to put these attitudes aside, at least temporarily.

Methods are the tools you use to correct yourself, to regulate your conduct, your speech, and your mind. Basically,



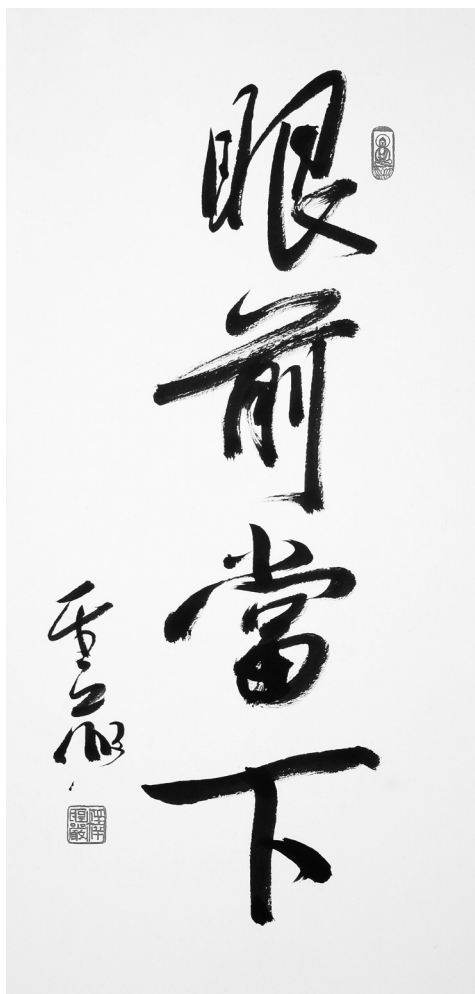
Calligraphy : *Chan*

we rely on the five precepts and the Eightfold Noble Path to correct our physical, mental, and verbal conduct. On retreat we also use sitting and walking meditation, prostration, and work to regulate bodily conduct. We restrict speech and chant scriptures to regulate our verbal conduct. We practice concentration, recite the Buddha's name, and investigate huatous to regulate our mind.

The mind is the most difficult to regulate—for this we use correct knowledge, correct mindfulness, correct concentration, and correct energetic progress. Day after day we monitor ourselves. From moment to moment we need to be aware of thoughts coming and going. Whether or not they are delusions, we must be aware of them. If a thought arises in a crude, careless way, after it disappears we must alert ourselves: “What was I just thinking?” If we can persevere, we will enjoy correct mindfulness all the time.

### **Impermanence: The Foundation View**

To learn Buddhism, you must start from the foundation view of impermanence. What is impermanence? It is suffering, it is emptiness, it is no-self, it is the absence of intrinsic identity. These are basic concepts of Buddhism and Chan.



Calligraphy : Now

Impermanence is inherent in the cycle of birth and death. Our bodies, our minds, and our surroundings are impermanent. There is nothing that does not change. Some people say, "The changing moment itself lasts forever," but this view is alien to Buddhism. Buddhadharma holds that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent, perpetually coming into being and extinguishing. Buddhadharma requires that we understand this.

The meditation method that we teach is an orderly process for helping you step by step until you reach the state of having no discriminating thoughts. We have thoughts all the time. When our scattered and chaotic mind is strong, these thoughts are illusions, the mind of affliction. After using the meditation method properly and consistently, you will gradually detach from the afflictions of greed, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and doubt.

Perhaps some people think that meditation is also a form of attachment. This is true, but it is not attachment that brings affliction. On the contrary, it can relieve affliction. The meditation method is the Way. To genuinely benefit from Buddhism, there is no other route except to walk on solid ground,

and start building from the foundation of understanding impermanence. You can't enter the realm of enlightenment by just imagining it. You must exert the patience it takes to meditate. The records of Chan show that there are hardly any cases of great penetration and great enlightenment, except through practice. Thus we have the admonition: "If you don't endure the cold that pierces your bones, how can you smell the fragrance of the plum blossoms?"

### **The Mind of Faith**

Without a mind of faith, there is no practice. First, believe that you have good karmic roots. Buddha said, "To attain a human form is rare," and you have already attained that. Buddha said, "To hear the Buddhadharma is rare," and you have already heard it. Buddha said, "To practice the Dharma is difficult," and you have already begun to practice. Buddha said, "To meet an illuminated teacher is rare." An illuminated teacher is one who holds the correct views of Buddhadharma and has tasted at least some of the fruits of realization. I do not claim to be illuminated, but I am a teacher and I can give you some guidance.

Like the buddhas of the past, we should believe that we



ourselves are sure to become enlightened. We must also believe that the Dharma expounded by the Buddha is genuine and true, that he would not deceive us. All the methods and ideas I teach on this retreat are based on the Buddhist teaching, the Buddhadharma. Ever since the time of the Buddha, the Sangha has transmitted the Dharma. So we believe in the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. If you believe in the Dharma, you must also believe in the Buddha and you must also believe in the Sangha. The Sangha includes the generations of illuminated teachers who transmitted the teachings of the Dharma, first expounded by the Buddha.

It has been said, "Without faith, a person cannot stand." Faith in the Three Jewels can only come from faith in yourself. The Dharma Jewel was expounded by the Buddha Jewel and transmitted by the Sangha Jewel. Without faith in the Buddha, there is no Dharma to learn; without faith in the Sangha, you cannot be taught the Dharma. Therefore, start with believing in yourself; next, believe in the Three Jewels. Thus, it is evident that faith is the basis for practice.

## Three Principles of Chan

Buddhist practice rests on the three principles of discipline, samadhi, and wisdom. Discipline includes precepts for living and for preparing oneself to commit to the path by making vows. Samadhi broadly includes the meditative methods. The Chan patriarchs have said that samadhi is none other than the mind. It follows that cultivation of samadhi through meditation will lead to a clear, stable mind.

It is generally accepted that the cultivation of samadhi leads to the third principle, wisdom. Other spiritual disciplines view wisdom in a different light. Their levels of deep meditative absorption lead to wisdom, insight and mental stability, but not liberation in the Buddhist sense. The wisdom that Buddhism speaks of refers directly to the experience of buddha-nature.

In the *Platform Sutra*, Sixth Patriarch Huineng says that samadhi is prajna and prajna is samadhi. The essential theory states that there is no truly abiding self because nothing is permanent. When one practices samadhi, one directly experiences impermanence and opens the gate to prajna. Thus

prajna, or wisdom, is the fulfillment of the complementary relationship between theory and practice. When samadhi accords perfectly with prajna, this is Chan wisdom.

## **Concentration and Wisdom are One Essence**

To practice Chan we begin with afflicted mind and learn to discipline it. We then concentrate the mind to unify it, and eventually we perceive the true nature of mind and realize enlightenment, which is the essence of Chan. Discipline corresponds to the spirit of the Buddhist precepts that guide personal behavior. It also corresponds to the habits of normal daily living—maintaining an orderly, clean, tranquil, and harmonious environment.

Concentration means using methods of Chan to rein in and pacify the mind. The *Platform Sutra* of Huineng says that samadhi itself is prajna. This means that wisdom and concentration are not separate things. Apart from the mind, there is no samadhi and no prajna.

The third and paramount principle of Buddhist practice is wisdom. Wisdom is the direct experience of phenomena as precisely emptiness—the realization that self and all objects of

the mind are empty and that emptiness is not separate from form. This understanding arises from a state free of afflictions and deluded thoughts. Sudden enlightenment may be abrupt, but it is not easy to produce. It is terribly naive to believe it can happen without genuine cultivation. Without the methods of Chan guided by practical wisdom, one will practice blindly or be misled by wayward ideas.

### **No Enlightenment without Discipline**

As we have said, practice according to the Buddhadharma consists of none other than the three impeccable studies of discipline, concentration (samadhi), and wisdom. Discipline means not doing what you should not do, and not failing to do what you should. From the point of view of karma, your actions have consequences and you will earn retribution. From the point of view of practice, negative actions create mental chaos and a chaotic mind cannot attain wisdom. In this state you would just be another sentient being trapped in ignorance. Discipline is the basis for achieving mental balance and stability, and therefore a prerequisite for liberation.

Many people go on retreat to get enlightened. Someone asked me, "Shifu, please help me experience enlightenment."

But if I could give you enlightenment, would this be my enlightenment or yours? I can teach you Buddhadharma, but awakening to the knowledge of the Buddhas requires your own cultivation and realization. There is hope of opening the wisdom eye, of 'breathing through the same nostrils as the Buddhas of the past, present, and future,' only when you stop the deranged mind, and shatter the ego-centered view of body, mind, and world.

To become enlightened, one must uphold discipline and intensively cultivate meditative concentration. Some people may say, "That way is gradual enlightenment; I want sudden enlightenment!" Since I have been directing retreats, I have met too many people who are in a great hurry to find enlightenment. When I ask why, many say they think their problems will vanish once they become enlightened. I tell them that the more they hurry, the longer it will take to become enlightened. Practicing the Buddhadharma gives you no undeserved advantage. If it did, the law of karma would be violated. Those who think this way have very wrong notions of causality; and some are nihilists who even deny cause and effect. In the Middle Way practice you get only as much as you put in. That's why the paramita of perfecting diligence is so important.

Chan practice cannot be faked, and it cannot be watered down. All the way through it's like two hard objects colliding. The results you get are proportional to the effort you put in. On the path to enlightenment, no one gets by with trickery. Therefore, we need to first establish the correct view. We must walk on solid ground, and work hard at the three studies of discipline, concentration, and wisdom.

### **Reining in and Pacifying the Mind**

In Chan we practice toward self-mastery so that we will no longer be subject to external circumstances and to the comings and goings of internal afflictions. To help you with this, I give you two key principles: reining in the mind, which means bringing your mind back from clinging to external objects, and pacifying the mind, which means settling your mind that is floating about here and there. In Japanese the seven-day Zen retreat is called sesshin, a transliteration of the Chinese shexin. Sesshin has two meanings: one is “gathering in”; the other is “unbroken continuity.” Thus the goal of sesshin is to gather in the mind from its illusions and attachments and to make it a steady stream of no-delusion-arising. Without reining in the mind, you are a wandering ghost, chasing the mind’s ceaseless waves and currents.

Pacifying the mind also has two meanings: one is calming the mind that is awash with afflictions and vexations; the other is liberating the mind from all discriminatory thought, thus achieving no-mind, or no-thoughts. When your mind is settled, it is relaxed, at peace—this is meditative concentration. When there is not even a mind that can be pacified, you attain true mastery and see your buddha-nature—this is the discovery of the selfless mind that abides nowhere.

Unable to pacify their minds, ordinary people feel fear, worry, sorrow, hopelessness, and other negative emotions. As Chan practitioners we have concepts and methods that help us reach the goal of gathering in and pacifying the mind. Let us use them.

### **Stages of Mind to Selfless Wisdom**

The teachings of Chan enable us to clearly understand the need to put aside self-centered ways of acting and thinking. But the teachings alone are not enough. We also need techniques to put the teachings into practice. So, concepts and methods work together in Chan to help us practice. First we need concepts to redirect our attitudes; then we need meditation methods to put the ideas into practice. Now



Calligraphy: *Prajna*

Prajna: the wisdom of insight into the true nature of phenomena as being impermanent and without self-identity.

The seal of Master Sheng Yen – A bhikshu amongst people



[using the simple breath-counting method as an example] I will discuss the stages your mind can pass through to arrive at selfless wisdom. When you first take up the method, the mind is like a caged monkey whose eyes and ears are focused outside. Your task is to take this chaotic monkey-mind and focus it on the meditation method. This is easier said than done, but having taken up the method, you are at least in the first stage. Take your scattered mind and place it on the method. Allow the chaos to gradually diminish, but you should not actively hope that stray thoughts will lessen, as this hope itself is a delusion.

The second stage is quieting down the confusion in the monkey-mind. Figuratively, we get the monkey to cover its eyes and ears; though the mind is still restless, it is at least blind and deaf to the outside, reducing the disturbance of external objects. The more you focus on counting the breath, the less room there will be for outside thoughts. Even though you still have illusory thoughts, there aren't as many as before. The breathing is there, and though illusory thoughts come and go, the counting is not interrupted.

In the third stage you leash the monkey-mind to a post

不觸事而知  
不對緣而  
照其知自微  
其照自妙

宏智正覺白

至廉



錄

Calligraphy:

*"Without encountering things, it knows; its knowing is inherently subtle. Not opposing conditions, it illumines; its luminosity is naturally wondrous."*

Often quoted by Master Sheng Yen, these lines describe the essence of Silent Illumination practice. (From Chan Master Hongzhi Zhengjue's Advice on Sitting Meditation.)

so that it cannot dash back and forth in confusion in the cage. It must obediently stick to the meditation. This means that you just consistently return to the method when stray thoughts come up.

In the fourth stage of unified concentration, not only is there no involvement with external objects, even internal objects are abandoned. The mind monkey has finally quieted down and, in fact, is nowhere to be seen.

At the fifth stage, awareness of the breath is still there, the sense of self is still there, but the counting has stopped. It's not that you deliberately stopped it, but your breathing is so rarefied that there's nothing to count—you're still doing meditation work, but the counting is gone.

At the sixth stage the body and the mind, the internal self and the external surroundings, are all still there but they are no longer seen as separate. Body and mind are unified, internal and external are unified; the previous thought and the successive thought are unified. The unification of the thought stream occurs when all thoughts are connected to the same content—the method itself. At some point, however,

thoughts will neither arise nor disappear; there is no before or after and no feeling of time or space. You have entered the precious oneness of stable meditative absorption.

But this is not enlightenment. When both internal and external are emptied out at once, when oneness is shattered, then selfless wisdom appears. When there is no internal or external and no clinging to the in-between, this is enlightenment. Therefore, to meditate to the point where scattered thoughts become fewer and fewer, first we rein in our six sense faculties—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The eyes don't see, the ears don't hear; sensations of the body and other faculties don't react to stimuli. Because stray thoughts are news brought in through the sense faculties, after they are shut off, all sorts of internal false thoughts will subside. As they gradually lessen, the mind will gradually stabilize. At that point it is easier to recognize your own character and tendencies, what sort of person you really are. The more we truly understand ourselves, the more we can make our moral character sound and whole.

### **Joy of Dharma, Delight of Chan**

To truly function as a Chan person, you cannot be naive;

you need to realize there is a lot to learn and cultivate. Don't be in a hurry to get enlightened, but don't wait for it either. In the beginning, it is most important to pacify the mind, to settle it down. And you need to be free, at all times and in all places, from the undue influences of external objects. If you can do this without bothering other people, you will know the joy of the Dharma and the delight of Chan.

In the sutras there is a metaphor about reining in and pacifying the mind: "Guard your six sense faculties the way a turtle hides its limbs, head and tail." Like the turtle, we must guard our six senses of vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and thought, from being disturbed by objects.

When we sit, we go from mind-moment to mind-moment without straying from the focus of concentration—this is the method of Chan. To relax body and mind, to settle seriously on the method, not to calculate success and failure—these are principles of Chan. Impermanence, no-self, no-thought, non-abiding, formlessness, no-attainment—these are the perspectives of Chan. Please take these methods, principles, and perspectives and commit them firmly to memory, and practice them without letting up.

This is all very simple, and at the same time very profound. But without practice, you will not know its profundity, and neither will you know its simplicity. On the contrary, the simpler something is, the harder it is to penetrate its inner mystery.

### **All Activities are Chan**

Speech and silence, motion and stillness, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—these are all practice. In the Chan Hall—sitting, standing, walking, stretching—these are all forms of practice. Outside the hall—eating and drinking, sleeping and arising, working after meals, all places, all moments—these are also practice. When doing tasks that do not require thought, you can recite the Buddha's name or count breaths. When doing work that requires your attention, make sure that your mind and hands work together. Your mind should be where your hands and body are. Washing dishes? Leave them spotless. Cutting vegetables? Be the knife that cuts perfectly. Splitting firewood, heating water, sweeping the floor, put your whole mind and strength into the task, cleanly and skillfully—this is practicing Chan. Concentrate on your food when eating, chew deliberately, and do not let your mind wander. Going to bed, put aside the four elements

of the body and the five aggregates of form, sensation, conception, volition, and consciousness. Forget past, present and future; just have a good sleep. That too is Chan.

## **Plowing and Weeding**

Coming to retreat to accomplish something may be a correct attitude, but for now you must forget all about goals. When working on the farm, you focus on plowing and weeding, not on the harvest. Storms, floods, droughts, and earthquakes are all beyond your control. If causes and conditions and past merit are good, there will be a rich harvest. If not, there may be a meager one or none at all. The farmer's only choice is to put his whole heart and strength into his work; he cannot ensure any results. Yet the very experience of arduous tilling and planting is itself a precious thing. Therefore we make practice itself a goal we can rely on. Whatever you are doing—eating, meditating, cooking, cutting vegetables—that is both the practice and the goal. Just single-mindedly apply yourself to the task with an even, down-to-earth, balanced mind. With your mind thus free from peripheral issues, you will truly practice Chan. Good results appear when you don't covet gain and just pay attention to the practice. With this attitude you will surely harvest a bountiful crop someday.

## **Chan Practice and Will**

Take the direct experience of impermanence and infuse it in your life. At all times, remember that you live amidst impermanence and that your life itself is impermanent. Indeed, to maintain this awareness is very difficult and takes will power. Buddha said, "Control the mind in one place, and everything is accomplished." This can also mean that with a strong, determined will, you can cope with anything. To learn Buddhism and become enlightened is a task for many lifetimes. Becoming a monk or nun is not a game, Chan practice is not a passing fancy—it is a lifetime commitment. There is no room for dilettantes, or the half-hearted. You must steadily advance over the long haul, through wind, waves, ice and snow; only you will be able to reveal the beam of light from Spirit Peak. If you are mentally prepared, your will power will be strong. Anticipating difficulties along the way, you will work through them and make progress.

## **As Clearly as the Palm of Your Hand**

Inner observation of the mind's direction is awareness—knowing at all times what your thoughts are, whether you are focused on the method, lost in illusory thought, or unclear



what you are doing. If you can see these conditions of your mind as clearly as the palm of your hand, you are really practicing Chan. If you can ignore your body but observe your mind, if you can ignore external objects but observe the movement of your thoughts, you will soon forget time and space. When you observe your inner thoughts, their numbers will diminish, time will contract, space will expand, and your body and mind will lighten.

### **Balancing on a Fine Point**

Effective Chan practice requires balancing on a fine point between relaxation and dullness. To practice for more than a few periods in succession, much less days, without tiring, you need to be relaxed, both in mind and body. Otherwise, physical and mental exhaustion will overtake you. On the other hand, while relaxing the body and mind, you must guard against dullness. If you can maintain this balance, the energy that is freed up can be channeled into the method, and nourish your dedication to the Way.

### **Meditation is the Root of Life**

For true Chan people, their practice is the root of life; when separated from practice, it is as if they are in danger

道心之中有衣食  
衣食之中有道心

日本最澄語

聖嚴



Calligraphy:  
*"Food and clothing in the mind of the path; no mind of the path in food and clothing."*

As his life motto, Master Sheng Yen used these words by Master Saicho (767-822), founder of the Japanese Tendai sect.

of losing their lives. Therefore the Chan teachers since ancient times have taught disciples to hold fast to their gong'an or huatou as the guardian of their life. You should imagine that you are lost at sea, clinging to a life preserver—how could you dare let go?

Even so, after meditating for a long time and beginning to feel tired and lazy, you may succumb to that feeling, even if you don't want to. As a Chan student, this is the time to mobilize your courage, rededicate yourself, and energize your faith; this is the time to renew your grasp on the life-saving Chan method. But if you give up the method, you should feel a great sense of shame, a piercing, painful sense of shame. What you need then is to take a vow of great compassion for the sake of sentient beings. This will strengthen your diligence, dispel oblivion and scattered thoughts, and inspire you to wholehearted practice.

### **Arousing Bodhi-mind**

The aspiration for enlightenment arises from hearing and studying Buddhadharma, and is called bodhicitta. This is the mind's signal to itself that it is ready to abandon affliction, nurture compassion, and cultivate wisdom, which is to say,

perceiving one's own true buddha-nature. To arouse bodhicitta, one first loosens the mind's fixation on craving, anger, folly, arrogance, ignorance, and countless other afflictions which cause suffering, and keep one from seeing his or her true nature. The mind of a buddha is manifested on the one hand as compassion, and on the other as wisdom. However, they are not separate but two aspects of the same thing. To seek wisdom alone is the way of the shravaka, not the way of the bodhisattva, who also nurtures compassion. Arousing the mind of enlightenment should be simultaneous with arousing the mind of compassion. Chan practitioners should not defer vowing to help sentient beings until after being enlightened; doing so would defer the supreme enlightenment of the Great Vehicle—anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. Conduct is the causal basis for tasting the fruit of supreme enlightenment—one must travel the bodhisattva path, benefiting sentient beings not oneself. Transforming the ordinary into the compassionate self, you will be in accord with the selfless wisdom of liberation.

## **The Mind of Compassion**

The ordinary love that people feel is basically egocentric and brings afflictions that lead to more afflictions. This is

not true Buddhist compassion. Even so, Buddhists should learn compassion at this level and progress to a higher expression, which is to help all equally, while the act, actor, and receiver are all seen as empty. True compassion springs from selfless wisdom and is not conditioned by relationships; it is everywhere equal—what the *Lotus Sutra* calls "a single rain which brings nourishment to all." Compassion cannot be based on the hope of receiving benefits from acts of kindness. This is acting for one's own sake, not genuine compassion. Therefore, if you would arouse the mind of compassion, you must boldly advance, and energetically practice to cut off delusion, and witness the real. Be guided by Buddhadharma, and rely on the methods of Chan. Chan is based on the teaching of cause and effect. To center and guide our practice, we must root it in the mind of great compassionate vows and energize it with the mind of great enlightenment. Otherwise we practice blindly, like wandering ghosts floating in the air.

## **Repaying Benevolence**

The Confucians have a saying: "Remember, no meal comes easily, and a single strand of thread comes only with hard work." This saying carries the idea of repaying benevolence. Now that environmental awareness is in style, we should

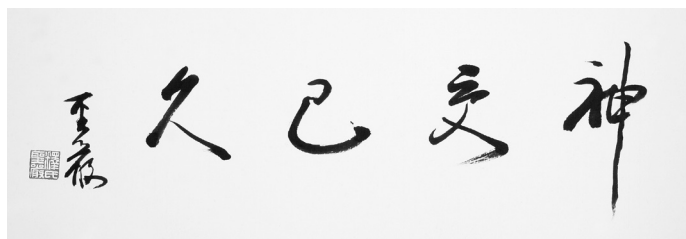
urgently put this saying into practice. To enjoy the conveniences of modern life and blame others for the state of the environment is hypocrisy. We must go beyond lip service.

Buddhists should seek simplicity and plainness in their lives: if you don't freeze in winter, and are not starving, your material needs have basically been met. When we have good fortune, we should recognize and cherish it; we should nurture it, and put it to good use. But often, people seek petty advantages, enjoying things made by others, and striving for their own convenience. But people with deeper roots will give something in return—this is recognizing and repaying benevolence. Buddhists should not only give something back; even more, they must practice charity, and make good karmic connections with sentient beings. Wherever you go, whether or not you benefit from being there, let that place benefit from your being there. This is good practice for the mind of enlightenment and the mind of compassion. To give something back in return for a benefit received is good, but strictly speaking, this is not in accord with Buddhadharma. Dana, giving, is one of the Six Paramitas, or Perfections; it means giving without conditions—it is one of the ways of the bodhisattva.

## Expressing Gratitude

Knowing how rare and difficult it is to encounter the Buddhadharma, Buddhists should feel gratitude and indebtedness for the benevolence of the buddhas and the enlightened teachers. It is hard for people to acknowledge and appreciate that other people have helped them throughout life. They feel that they have given at least as much as they have received. Others believe that the help they have received from others did not matter, that they would have done just as well without it. Some people express gratitude, but there is no real gratitude in the speaker's mind; it is mostly lip service. Attitudes like these are arrogant, self-centered and vain; they do not accord with the true gratitude we should feel for receiving the precious gift of Buddhadharma.

As Chan practitioners, we should feel grateful for so much as a grain of rice or a drop of water. Beyond feeling gratitude, we should give something in return. However, repaying the benevolence of Buddhadharma can be as hard as making water flow upstream. It's not just a matter making direct material offerings. If Chan practitioners are able to calm the mind of false thoughts, put it into correct balance,



Calligraphy: *A kindred old soul*



and begin benefiting themselves and others, this is truly repaying the buddhas and the enlightened teachers.

## Who Can Become Enlightened?

Chan practice has often been defined by the following passage from the Chinese Chan classic, *The Transmission of the Lamp*:

*“Illuminating the mind and seeing its true nature, suddenly awakening and becoming a buddha, not establishing any words or texts as sacred, but directly pointing to the human mind.”*

This passage has proven to be rather attractive to Chan aspirants, but it is often misunderstood. Many people study a few gong’ans (koans) and read the recorded sayings of the Chan and Zen masters, and then suppose that everyone has the qualifications to become enlightened. This is true insofar as all sentient beings inherently possess buddha-nature and, therefore, can become enlightened—this is the basic teaching of Buddhism. But in the historical records of Chan and Zen, there were not that many people who experienced sudden enlightenment, and achieved buddhahood.

There is no set timetable for enlightenment. Some people can do in an hour what other people do in two days, and for some, even two days is not enough. Some people can help ten million with a single sentence, but others cannot help a single person in their entire lives. Therefore, there is no way to use time as a measure of progress in cultivating practice. We must take into account such factors as the student's diligence as well as their karmic obstructions. This being the case, the best way to practice is to forget about when you will be enlightened—to see the practice itself as the goal and the result. With this attitude, you cannot fall into misunderstanding.

### **Enlightenment: Benefiting Others**

There is a saying in Buddhism: "It is rare to attain a human form, and difficult to encounter the Buddhadharma." We here are very fortunate; we have managed to attain human bodies and to hear the Buddhadharma. We also have the good karma to meet teachers who can guide us in practicing the Dharma. The chance to take part in a Chan retreat is hard to come by, and for this we should feel great joy. To make use of our good fortune, we should generate the aspiration for enlightenment. This means undertaking the four great vows:

to deliver sentient beings, to cut off mental afflictions, to master Buddhadharma, and to attain buddhahood.

The Buddha taught that suffering results from ignorance both to the causes of suffering and the means of ending it. The Buddhadharma gives us a way out of this predicament. But when we consider that countless other sentient beings suffer as much as we do, or more, how can we think of our own deliverance as the goal of practice? Therefore, we learn Buddhadharma to help us deliver, not ourselves, but other sentient beings from their suffering. Thus, we study and practice Buddhadharma to become enlightened, not for one's own sake but for the sake of sentient beings.



# Dharma Drum Mountain

## Building Faith and Aspiration

Master Sheng Yen was born in a simple farming village near Shanghai, south of the Yangtze River. Back then the area suffered from flood, drought, and wars for years in a row. By the time he learned to speak, he had witnessed the impermanence of life and the fragility of the environment. However, seeing people helping each other, he also came to appreciate the brighter side of humanity. This initiated his exploration of the ultimate meaning and value of life.

After leaving home to become a novice monk, he realized through the inspiration of a teacher of Buddhist liturgy that there actually was profound wisdom behind the words of the scriptures, and that if such wisdom were applied to daily life, the troubles and vexations in the world can be resolved. He was deeply moved and said, “The Buddhadharma is so wonderful, yet few people know about it and many misunderstand it.” Therefore, he made a vow to “learn as much as possible, and share what I know about the Dharma with other people.”

# Establishing Dharma Drum Mountain

## Origin

By the end of 1975, Master Sheng Yen had earned a doctorate from Rissho University in Japan, and soon left for the United States to spread the Dharma. There, at the Temple of Great Enlightenment in the Bronx section of New York, he began to teach Dharma, lecture on the sutras, and teach Chan meditation to Westerners and the local Chinese community. The meditation classes exerted a deep influence on the participants. Through this experience, the master's vision of sharing the Dharma in the West quickly took shape.

With the passing of Venerable Master Dongchu late in 1977, Master Sheng Yen returned to Beitou, Taiwan to handle the affairs of his deceased master. In his will, Master Dongchu designated Master Sheng Yen to become abbot of Nung Chan Monastery, and president of the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. Master Sheng Yen drew on his experience of teaching Chan in the United States to continue the spreading of the Dharma in Taiwan. At the same time, he was invited to serve as the director of the Institute of Buddhist

Studies of the Chinese Academy, which enabled him to work toward the fulfillment of his long-cherished ideal of cultivating highly qualified Buddhist talent.

When the work of Dharma propagation and education had made steady headway in Taiwan, he returned to the United States at the earnest request of his Western disciples. However, upon his return to the Temple of Great Enlightenment, many things had changed and he decided it was better if he moved out. For a brief time, he decided that rather than being a burden to others, he would walk and sleep on the streets, carrying a simple bag, eating found food, on occasion accompanied by his disciple, a young American monk he had ordained. At that time he realized that “in order to pass anything down from generation to generation, people must have their homes and clerics must have monasteries, just as a bird must have a nest.” To enable the Dharma to abide lastingly in the world, it is necessary to have a Dharma center and a group. With this in mind, he set out to build a Sangha by establishing Dharma centers.

In 1979, Master Sheng Yen established the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York, and began to divide his

time between the United States and Taiwan. In the same year he established the Three Studies Institute at Nung Chan Monastery in Taiwan, where he trained young monastic talent to take on the work of sharing the Dharma with all, and sustaining the Three Jewels. In the following year he ordained four disciples. In this way, a community living the pure monastic life was formally formed.

In 1985, Master Sheng Yen established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in Taiwan, at the site of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. In the meantime, the original fund-raising council and the committee of Dharma supporters continued to support the Master's efforts. They were the forerunners of DDM's Society of Dharma Supporters. Meanwhile, Dharma Drum Mountain began to take shape as an orthodox Buddhist sangha of monastic and lay followers that took as its core the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

## **Establishment**

After being in development for over ten years, the scale of education and Dharma propagation had increased to the extent that space at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist



Culture and Nung Chan Monastery was no longer adequate. To address the needs at that time and for the future, the Sangha began to search for a piece of land for expansion. At first, the Sangha spent several years looking in vain for a suitable site. Then, on March 25, 1989 at Nung Chan Monastery, Master Sheng Yen led more than 1,000 monastics and lay followers in reciting the Great Compassionate Dharani, praying for the right causes and conditions for finding a construction site. Almost at the same time, on March 26, Venerable Quandu, who resided far away in Jinshan Township, was also reciting the Great Compassionate Dharani, praying that Guanyin Bodhisattva would guide a virtuous person to take over his own monastery. When these remarkable causes and conditions came together, a new DDM headquarters in Jinshan became possible.

With a “world center for Buddhist education” as the goal, Master Sheng Yen formally named the new center Dharma Drum Mountain, in hopes that the drum of the Dharma would reverberate, thus actualizing his vision of “uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth.” He also expressed a wish that “Dharma Drum Mountain be a place that belongs to all Buddhism, dedicated to education for

the public as a whole; that Dharma Drum Mountain not be just a monastery but a school for uplifting the character of humanity, not just in Taiwan but in the entire world; not just in the present but also in the future.”

After sixteen years of concerted effort by monastic and lay followers, the first phase of DDM’s construction was completed in 2005. The inaugural ceremony entitled “The Rising Great Compassion” was held on October 21 of the same year.

### **DDM's Vision: Uplifting the Character of Humanity and Building a Pure Land on Earth**

“The inauguration of a monastery (in Chinese, “opening up a mountain”) means that each of us strives to uncover the treasure mountain within our own heart. That is to say, we work to develop wisdom and compassion, and together to bring harmony, peace, happiness, and health to our society and the world. That is the true meaning of opening up a mountain. This is a work that has to be carried out everlastingly since, whenever a new human being is born in our world, this individual should also work to uncover the treasure mountain within.”

Master Sheng Yen attributed the chaos in society to the fact that while people today work hard to develop material civilization, they are lacking in spiritual growth. The advance of material civilization cannot ensure that people be rid of their panic and afflictions. Only by making people strong, wholesome, and healthy in mind and spirit can we free our society from disorder and confusion. Therefore, the Master took “uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth” as the vision of DDM, in the hope that by clearing up our concepts and adjusting our attitudes, we uncover the compassion and wisdom within. In order to uplift the character of humanity, we must start with our own mind and work further to influence our families, societies, and countries, and finally, to extend that influence to the whole world. Only then will there be universal peace on earth. That is why building a pure land on earth should be a consensus shared by all, a goal that each of us can contribute to achieve. That was Master Sheng Yen’s purpose in establishing Dharma Drum Mountain.

### **The Method for Uplifting our Character— Protecting the Spiritual Environment**

DDM’s vision originates from the teachings of Shakyamuni

Buddha. Through spiritual practice the Buddha realized that all phenomena arise from the coming together of causes and conditions, and the connection of causes and consequences. He also realized that the “I” that we cling to, our body’s sensations, our thoughts and our personal ideas, as well as things and phenomena, are all temporary and illusory. Due to self-attachment, we give rise to a great variety of vexations, and come into opposition and conflict with others and with the environment. Therefore, the Buddha spoke the Dharma for over forty years to teach people to let go of self-centeredness, to realize the truth of no-self, and to allow the inner wisdom and compassion to manifest. Having acquired wisdom, we can allow our bodies and minds to always remain in a state of health, happiness, and peace. When we have a compassionate heart, we will help others to live a healthy, happy, and peaceful life. Even though we may not yet be liberated, there will not be wars, massacre, terror, deception, mutual suspicion, and other evils. This way, our world will become just like a pure land.

Master Sheng Yen found out that traditional Chinese Chan was inclusive, relevant to all people, and adaptable to changes, and so is most applicable in our rapidly changing,

pluralistic modern world. Therefore, he took the best of Chinese Chan's concepts and methods and came up with the new vision of Protecting the Spiritual Environment.

Master Sheng Yen's purpose was to promote everywhere the simple, practical, and easy-to-apply wisdom of Buddhism, to make it a part of everyday life. He described the four stages for uplifting our character as understanding ourselves, affirming ourselves, developing ourselves, and dissolving ourselves. He also espoused the four steps to handle a problem as facing it, accepting it, dealing with it, and letting go of it. These teachings all take "something existent" as a device for taking the first step, and taking "no-self" as the goal to strive for. In giving guidance for Chan practice, he devised a "gradual" approach within the "sudden" path of Chan practice, mapping out four stages from scattered mind, to concentrated mind, to unified mind, and, finally, to no-mind, or enlightenment. Chan practice will result in different experiences according to each person's practice. However, as long as we apply it, we will surely derive benefits for our body and mind.

## **The Means for Building a Pure Land on Earth— Threefold Education**

The purpose of Protecting the Spiritual Environment is to build a pure land on earth. To realize this vision, our approaches are “to promote comprehensive education, and put into practice comprehensive care,” which is DDM’s common ethos. This means that we fulfill the functions of education with care and concern, and accomplish the mission of caring through education. Comprehensive education refers to the threefold training in academic education, public Buddhist education, and social care education. In fact, the purpose of extensive academic education is to train highly qualified talents to take on extensive public Buddhist education and extensive social care education. To meet different needs, DDM established Dharma Drum Buddhist College, which trains highly qualified researchers of Buddhism; Sangha University, which fosters highly specialized monastics with the spirit of religious teachers; and Dharma Drum University which cultivates specialized professionals for building a pure land on earth. These three schools share the available resources and provide assistance to each other. In addition, the Dharma Drum Humanities and Social Improvement Founda-

tion and Sheng Yen Education Foundation were established to promote academic research and exchange.

Extensive public education resorts to cultural events, publications, and various activities and courses to popularize Buddhist concepts and methods in a sequential and systematic way, so as to purify the hearts and minds of people and society. For our activities and courses, we have group meditation, reciting the Buddha's name, and Dharma services. In addition the Sheng Yen Academy offers two series of courses: one, a "field of merit" curriculum focused on understanding the mission and vision of DDM and following the bodhisattva path of helping others; the second is a series of courses on the Buddhist teachings. These courses are offered at branch monasteries and practice centers all over Taiwan. Thus, people may cultivate both merit and wisdom, as well as devote themselves to understanding and practicing the Dharma. Moreover, our Dharma School, a DDM e-learning website, and DDM Community College also offer diverse and practical courses.

In our extensive social care education, we extend universal and equal loving care to the general public based on

humanistic Buddhism. The long-term major areas of social care education include social relief work and care for the terminally ill, as well as the four kinds of environmentalism: protection of spiritual environment, the social environment, the living environment, and the natural environment. In order to address diverse social problems, we also appeal to the various circles of society to show their loving concern. These activities all demonstrate the relevance of our extensive social care education. In recent years, there have been natural disasters such as earthquakes in Taiwan and the tsunami in Southeast Asia, to which DDM responded with materials and services. Also, with an empathetic heart, the DDM Social Welfare and Charity Foundation works actively to provide international disaster relief in the three-stage mode of disaster relief based on the principle of rebuilding a peaceful body, a peaceful mind, a peaceful family, and a peaceful activity, winning wide recognition from the public.

DDM's threefold educational goals are connected and interrelated like links in a chain. Moreover, the links merge, with each comprising the functions of the other two, enabling all partakers to receive loving care while learning the compassion and wisdom of Buddhadharma. Further, this allows



them to emulate the Mahayana bodhisattva spirit, in giving of themselves and fostering themselves into professionals in sharing the Dharma. Therefore, DDM emphasizes holistic education and life-long learning, bearing in mind that we grow in life by continuously making contributions and learning.

### **The True Definition of Dharma Drum Mountain**

“Today, Dharma Drum Mountain is not just the name of a place or a mountain in Jinshan Township in Taipei, but also a fresh, vigorous Buddhist organization widely known in Taiwan, as well as an educational institute symbolizing for the world the hope and peace of humanity. Based on correct Buddhist teachings and keeping pace with the pulse of our time, we offer to contemporary society forward-looking concepts, loving concern with an educational effect, productive projects, and practical facilities. And we take ‘uplifting the character of humanity’ universally as our cause, and ‘building a pure land on earth’ everlastingly as our mission.”

Dharma Drum Mountain consists of the Sangha and the laity, that is, the four assemblies of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The monastic assemblies study and practice

Buddhism in order to offer services and make contributions to the vast number of believers. The lay assemblies make donations and support the Three Jewels in order to study and practice Buddhism. All are united under DDM's vision for the purpose of studying and practicing the Dharma, supporting the Dharma, and sharing the Dharma far and wide.

The four assemblies take the Sangha as the core because the Sangha members lead a pure, monastic life in accordance with the precepts, and thus actualize the Dharma. Also, the Sangha represents DDM's vision and methods, and like a roadmap, shows the followers the direction to be taken, enabling them to be engaged with the world and transform the world instead of becoming worldly, and to retain the purity and harmony of Dharma Drum Mountain.

Master Sheng Yen said emphatically, "Dharma Drum Mountain is an aggregation of vision, faith, and the power of compassionate vows and deeds. If, in our minds, we are able to identify with DDM's vision, accept its principles, and be confident in it, then whatever we do at any time and any place, is part of the mission of Dharma Drum Mountain." Therefore, as long as we use Buddhadharma to help others

overcome suffering and obtain happiness and lessen our own vexations, we are beating the Dharma drum, and where we are would be Dharma Drum Mountain. As long as people encounter Buddhism and hear the correct teachings because of you, then you represent Dharma Drum Mountain.



## Engagement in Society

*“I simply keep learning, continually learning, to be able to contribute myself. Since becoming a monk at thirteen and starting to acquire a little learning of the Buddhadharma, I have wanted to share it with people. I share as much as I know about the Buddhadharma. Where there is something I don’t know, I go and learn it. This is the only goal I have in mind, not wanting to accomplish this or that.”*

Dedicated to his vision of uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth, Master Sheng Yen founded the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education. Although honored with awards for his achievements he never sought to accomplish “great things.” Rather, he simply made use of existing conditions and strove to do his best. He did not attribute the results he achieved later in life to ability, karmic blessings, or good roots, but to the fact that people in the environment and at the time had needs. In the midst of changing causes and conditions, the Master always shared the Buddhadharma he learned and benefited from. As long as people needed help he would approach them; as long as there were places needing his contribution he

would be there. This was the process of dedicating his life to serving sentient beings.

## Extensive Academic Education

### Developing the future of Chinese Buddhism

*“As far as Chinese Buddhism is concerned there has long been a lack of ideal educational environment and quality. That is why I vowed to contribute myself. Because I missed educational opportunity as a child and wasn’t able to receive a complete Buddhist education, I hope I can provide our next generation with a chance to receive Buddhist higher education. The decline of Chinese Buddhism has been due to the lack of sufficient talent. Therefore I say, ‘If we don’t provide education there will be no tomorrow for Chinese Buddhism.’”*

In order to improve the quality of Chinese Buddhist education, at age 40 Master Sheng Yen went to Japan for further study and eventually obtained a doctoral degree there. Later, he was appointed director of the Institute of Buddhist Studies of Chung-Hwa Academy, although the Institute was still short of resources at the time. The Institute suspended operations

in 1984, but reluctant to see its closure, Master Sheng Yen instead founded the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, thus laying a new foundation for academic education at Dharma Drum Mountain.

Master Sheng Yen launched Buddhist higher education in Taiwan to nurture talent for carrying out Buddhist higher education and spreading Buddhадharma, in hopes that they, in turn, can nurture more talent to enable the survival and spreading of the Buddhадharma. Seeing that conventional Buddhist education fell short of addressing issues of the modern world, Master Sheng Yen introduced the latest academic standards, research atmosphere, educational system, and teaching methods from abroad, and invited internationally renowned Buddhist scholars to Taiwan to teach. In addition he organized international conferences for Buddhist studies to enhance Chinese Buddhism in terms of academics and research. He established the library, produced an electronic database of the Buddhist canon (CBETA), digitalized Buddhist literature, utilized networking of data, and spearheaded the development of a Buddhist electronic library.

25 years after its founding, the Chung-Hwa Institute of

Buddhist Studies transferred its operation of Buddhist higher education to Dharma Drum Buddhist College, and turned to dedicate itself to the research, publishing, and the nurturing of researchers for Chinese Chan Buddhism.

## Completing a Comprehensive Structure for Buddhist Education

### **Dharma Drum Buddhist College**

Thirty years after an extended request by Master Sheng Yen and others concerned about religious education in Taiwan, mono-religious education was finally incorporated in Taiwan's national education system. In 2007, Dharma Drum College of Buddhist Studies became the first ever mono-religious college ratified by Taiwan's Ministry of Education, and enrolled its first class of graduate students. On one hand, the College continued the educational results and experience of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies; on the other hand, it incorporated the practice elements of Dharma Drum Mountain Sangha, creating an atmosphere that values both studies and practice, combining both academics and career development. In the following year the College was renamed Dharma Drum



Buddhist College, and was granted permission to set up a Department of Buddhist Studies as part of its undergraduate programs. In the future, the College will develop into a Buddhist university, making the Buddhist higher education system more complete and comprehensive.

### **Dharma Drum University**

Master Sheng Yen established Dharma Drum University so that the ideals of uplifting the character of humanity, building a pure land on earth, and protecting the spiritual environment could be better integrated into every walk of society thus influencing the future of humanity for the better. He hoped to nurture talented professionals with humanistic ideals, social concern, and global perspective, in the spirit and concepts of protecting the spiritual environment, so that a world which overvalues technology and knowledge can resume its balance.

Currently, Dharma Drum University plans to set up a School of Life and Living, a School of Philanthropy, a School of Environmental Studies, and a School of Arts, as well as a Chan Center, a Language Center, and an Information Communications Center. In its teaching and research, the University

emphasizes interdisciplinary and integrated professional training, as well as internships at home and abroad. In addition, with educating character holistically as its core value, Dharma Drum University adopts the residential college system, which integrates study and living, facilitating learning about life beyond academic education.

### **Sangha University**

Combining the resources of Dharma Drum Mountain Sangha with his own experience in organizing education, Master Sheng Yen established the Sangha University in 2001, thus modernizing and systemizing its monastic education. This was a new milestone for Dharma Drum Mountain Sangha. Over time, the Sangha University established the Department of Buddhist Studies, the Preparatory Program for Prospective Monastics, and the Department of Chan Studies. It aims to nurture young monastic teachers excellent in virtue and learning with foresight, open-mindedness, and international perspective. Most importantly, Master Sheng Yen stressed the cultivation of spirit and character as required of a religious teacher. Therefore the curriculum puts equal emphasis on study and practice, on Buddhist and worldly studies. It includes external internships and social service to

develop in future monastic teachers the required character and compassion, equipping them for undertakings in Buddhist education, culture, spiritual cultivation, and general operations.

## **Various Foundations**

Master Sheng Yen also established the Dharma Drum Humanities and Social Improvement Foundation, as well as the Sheng Yen Education Foundation to promote academic research and exchange. The Dharma Drum Humanities and Social Improvement Foundation sponsors academic research and publishing projects, holds dialogues and academic conferences, and has co-established the Dharma Drum Humanistic Lecture Series with seven higher institutes at home and overseas, to enhance exchange activities in humanistic and social science disciplines. The Sheng Yen Education Foundation, on the other hand, is devoted to the spread and promotion of Master Sheng Yen's ideas and thought internationally. In addition to sponsoring research and publishing, the Foundation holds a biannual international seminar on Master Sheng Yen's thought. In 2007, the Foundation and Columbia University co-established the Sheng Yen Professorship in Chinese Buddhist Studies, setting a new milestone for the development of Chinese Buddhism in the academic circles of the West.

## **Extensive Public Buddhist Education**

Devoted to uplifting the character of humanity and the building of a pure land on earth, Master Sheng Yen believed that uplifting the character of humanity must start with every individual by constant learning and improvement from birth till death. Hence the realization of holistic and lifelong education also represents the goal of Extensive Public Buddhist Education.

## **Popularizing Buddhist practice methods and concepts**

The way Master Sheng Yen actualized Extensive Public Buddhist Education was mainly through teaching orthodox Buddhist ideas and methods of practice. In the teaching of Buddhist knowledge, the Public Buddhist Education Center established a Sheng Yen Academy that adopts the school system which offers the Buddhist Studies Program and the Field of Merit Program, emphasizing cultivating merit and wisdom. The academy sets up courses at branch monasteries and practice centers affiliated with Dharma Drum Mountain in an organized and systemized manner, offering the general public an ideal opportunity to study Buddhism. In addition, it organizes reading groups, including real-life and virtual

learning opportunities.

Dharma Drum Mountain Community University, on the other hand, offers diversified, practical courses which are most popular with local residents. In addition, speeches, sutra explanation lectures, and dialogues are held, either regularly or sporadically. Social movements for the purification of people's minds are launched, such as Protecting the Spiritual Environment, and Four Steps for Handling a Problem (Face it; accept it; deal with it; let it go). The courses are designed to make the wisdom of the Buddhadharma more accessible and applicable for people today by translating it into modern language. Regarding the methods of practice, the available activities mainly include meditation, Buddha-name recitation, and Dharma assembly group practice. For meditation practice, we offer elementary meditation introduction, beginners' meditation classes, one-day, two-day, and seven-day Chan retreats for beginners, and seven-day, fourteen-day, and forty-nine-day Chan retreats for advanced practitioners, as well as the Dharma Drum Eight-Form Moving Meditation, which is aimed at practitioners of all ages. There are also meditation camps designed for professionals, school teachers, university students, adolescents, and school children. For

Buddha-name recitation practice, there are seven-day recitation retreats, intensive one-day to three-day recitation retreats, Eight Precepts Observance, and group Buddha-name recitation activities.

With regard to Dharma assembly and group practice we organize mountain pilgrimage practices, Great Compassion Repentance Ceremony, Dizang Pusa (Kshitigarbha Bodhisattva) Repentance Ceremony, Guanyin Pusa Ritual, Liang Emperor's Repentance Ritual, Water and Land Dharma Service, and Offering for the Hungry Ghosts Service. Given the wide misunderstanding on Dharma assemblies, Master Sheng Yen sought to highlight its function in terms of education and spiritual practice. Especially, by combining the spirit of environmentalism and art, the modified and improved version of the Water and Land Dharma Service aims to convey its significance in influencing people's minds and society positively.

### **Sponsoring cultural undertakings**

Master Sheng Yen put much value on using modern culture, art, media, and information technology to promote and develop Buddhadharma. During his life the Master pub-

lished more than a hundred books and his works in Chinese have been compiled in the Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen. He initiated the publication of magazines, books, as well as audio and video media. In addition, he brought the Buddhadharma closer to society by means of electronic and printed media, as well as the Internet and TV channels, voicing the concern of Buddhism toward current society, such as in the TV program series Great Dharma Drum and Different Voices. To meet the trend of the digital age and the demand of information society, he set up the Dharma Drum Mountain e-Learning Network. By organizing Buddhist-related art and literary exhibitions, he facilitated the general public's access to the wonder of Buddhism through the appreciation of art. For instance, the exhibition "Odyssey and Rainassance: The Returning of the Akshobhya Buddha Head Statue to the Four-gate Pagoda, Shandong Province" in 2002, and the exhibit "Free Mind, Chan Delight: Exhibition of Master Sheng Yen's Calligraphy Works," held as a fundraising event for the establishment of Dharma Drum University, was widely recognized in Taiwan.

## **Fulfilling practice and education objectives through contribution and service**

The purpose of Extensive Public Buddhist Education all comes down to personal spiritual practice and establishing in individuals orthodox knowledge and views, and further, to the internalization of the Buddhadharma and its actualization in daily life. Spiritual practice in its true and complete sense lies in giving of oneself and fostering others. Therefore, giving of one's own time, labor, energy, and wisdom and volunteering form important parts of the Extensive Public Buddhist Education.

Master Sheng Yen liked to call the volunteers at Dharma Drum Mountain “bodhisattvas of ten thousand good deeds.” Here, “ten thousand” does not imply that one has to be competent with all skills. Rather, it suggests that one needs to be comfortable with either higher or lower level tasks. Taking on what others are reluctant to take on, practicing what is hard to practice, forbearing what is hard to forebear, and relinquishing what is hard to relinquish—that is the meaning of “bodhisattvas of ten thousand good deeds.”



Actually this represents the spirit of a Mahayana bodhisattva that embodies both compassion and wisdom. Compassion means giving of oneself and benefiting society, while wisdom requires one to cultivate the mindset of letting go of selfishness and self-centeredness, while practicing the “ten thousand good deeds.” That is, one does not consider things from the standpoint of gain or loss. This is exactly wisdom. With wisdom and compassion, we will treat others more respectfully and harmoniously, as well as care for all sentient beings more equally. Hence, contributing is not a sacrifice but a method of practice that benefits others and ourselves. As Buddhism puts it, the bodhisattva path is sought after in sentient beings; sentient beings are the merit field for bodhisattvas. And this is the meaning of cultivating both merit and wisdom.

### **Extensive Social Care Education**

Out of reverence to each and every life, Master Sheng Yen would provide the needy with care grounded in Buddhism, hoping to inspire their inner wisdom and thus help them obtain safety and health, and to further cherish and make the most of their life while radiating the light and heat of life. More than simply providing goods and services in

a passive sense, it also seeks to fulfill a proactive meaning of education. That is, to achieve the purpose of social care through education and fulfill the function of education by means of social care services.

## **Social care**

The issue of social care can be addressed in terms of service and emergency relief. Besides long-term social care services for groups such as low-income households, seniors, and the physically and mentally challenged, DDM offers end-of-life chanting, guidance for family members on end-of-life preparations for their ill, and funeral rites for the deceased. Through this process, DDM hopes to alleviate the fear of death among the mortally ill, to encourage the family to experience life in a new perspective, and to bravely live out the meaning of life.

Care for the terminally ill and the newly deceased has always been a focus of concern by Master Sheng Yen, because only with a correct concept of death can people really establish a proactive and open-minded view of life. With this conviction, the Master urged the establishment of a Jinshan Eco-friendly Memorial Garden. A site for ash burials only, the

Memorial Garden is not only environmental friendly but also requires the ash to be buried in five separate holes, to alleviate people's attachment to their physical body. Master Sheng Yen himself chose to have his ash buried at this very site, which reflects his selfless attitude toward life and serves as a final, silent Dharma teaching for the public.

In addition, Master Sheng Yen urged all walks of society to show concern about the problems emerging in society. For instance, in light of the increasing amount of suicides, the Master organized a series of events to advocate the cherishing of life and initiated the International Caring for Life Awards. Moreover, seeing the decline of ethics in our society, he launched the Six Ethics of the Mind campaign. These efforts showed his deep concern toward society.

### **Emergency relief**

The emergency relief efforts by Dharma Drum Mountain started in 1999, when a major earthquake struck Taiwan on September 21. Master Sheng Yen visited the disaster areas in person and offered comfort to the affected people. He encouraged people by saying that “those who relieve suffering and afflictions in others are bodhisattvas while those who are

themselves suffering and afflicted are great bodhisattvas.” This gave the affected people strength to face and accept disasters. He directed and coordinated the relief works in person, helping the stricken people calmly deal with various problems brought about by the disaster. As the situation eased out, he further helped with the rebuilding of their homeland and schools, and established the Peace of Mind Relief Station in Nantou, Puli, Dongshi, Zhushan, among other townships, as a long-term effort for their rehabilitation. In addition, stipends were established to help children resume their schooling and receive proper education. Ten years on, Dharma Drum Mountain Peace of Mind Relief Stations are still operating in respective local areas, and have extended their service to offering care for the needy residents. The stipends are now also offered to the needy children throughout Taiwan.

Drawing from the disaster relief experience from the September 21 earthquake, Master Sheng Yen consequently established a three-phase mode for emergency relief based on the philosophy of Four Fields for Cultivating Peace. The first phase is emergency rescue and aid, which reflects Cultivating a Peaceful Body; it focuses on immediate relief with material and medical aid. The second phase is rebuilding

homeland, which corresponds to Cultivating a Peaceful Family and Cultivating Peaceful Activity; its main concern is the rehabilitation of people's lives and means of making a living. The third phase is psychological rehabilitation, which amounts to Cultivating a Peaceful Mind, its primary task being mental rehabilitation. In addition to hoping to save lives immediately following a disaster, it also accompanies the disaster stricken people to walk out of their trauma and create a promising future.

Especially today when natural disasters occur more frequently, Master Sheng Yen also applied this model in his international disaster relief efforts, for example, the relief projects for the earthquake in Afghanistan, the South Asia tsunami, the Sichuan earthquake, and the cyclone in Burma. There are follow-up reconstruction and rehabilitation plans, after evaluating the needs of the local governments and the available resources of various charitable organizations. More important is sharing the peace-of-mind Dharma method developed by Dharma Drum Mountain. For instance, there were the Five-year Plans for Sri Lanka and Indonesia, which suffered heavy damage from the South Asia tsunami. For Sri Lanka, the Peace of Mind Relief Station and a Health Service Center

were set up. In addition, with collaboration of the local Buddhist groups, a Taiwan village was built up to shelter the affected people, where job training, schooling, and psychological rehabilitation were offered. While in the case of Indonesia, a Peace of Mind relief Station was set up in Medan. Home visits and care services were given. Volunteer and Mandarin teacher training programs were offered. For the earthquake-stricken Sichuan province in China, Peace of Mind Relief Stations were established in Xiushui and Shifang. A series of courses on life education were provided, along with the help to rebuild hospitals and schools, as an effort to provide continuous care and concern.

### **Valuing spirituality more than the material**

Master Sheng Yen advocated the building of a pure land on earth by promoting comprehensive education and extending loving care to all, hence social and charitable works are considered indispensable and fundamental undertakings. The Master emphasized that social charity requires the spiritual more than the material aspect, while emergency relief efforts should focus on relieving the desperate need rather than the poverty. In today's world, chaos and turbulence in fact result from spiritual poverty in humanity. Only through spiritual

overhaul can human destiny be fundamentally improved.

## **International Development**

In 1976 Master Sheng Yen went to the United States to spread the Buddhadharma, marking the start of his journey to develop Buddhism internationally. Through the experience of spreading the Buddhadharma in his early days, he realized the importance of having a venue as a Dharma center. Therefore in 1979, despite a lack of resources, the Master managed to establish the Chan Meditation Center in New York, serving as base and departure point for him to develop and popularize Buddhism in the West.

## **Widely establishing the bases for the Threefold Education**

As a response to the increasing number of international practitioners, the Dharma Drum Retreat Center was established in the Upstate New York in 1997, as a Dharma Drum Mountain's international venue for Chan practice. Moreover, to meet the needs of various localities, the Vancouver Practice Center and the Malaysia Practice Center were subsequently established, along with over twenty branch Dharma centers and liaison offices throughout Europe, Asia, North America,

and Australia, as a joint force to promote the ideals of Dharma Drum Mountain through the Threefold Education. In 2005, Dharma Drum Mountain was officially inaugurated. Positioning itself as a world center for Buddhist education, Dharma Drum Mountain aims to provide educational, cultural, and spiritual treasures for international practitioners.

The international development of Buddhism Master Sheng Yen was involved in focused on four aspects: Chan practice, religious interaction, world peace, and nurturing young talent.

### **Promoting Chan practice**

Master Sheng Yen had profound experiences in Chan practice and was also extremely knowledgeable in Buddhist teachings and philosophy. Having spread the Buddhadharma internationally for over 30 years, the Master gradually established himself as a leading Chan master in the international arena. Apart from promoting Chan practice in the Dharma Drum Mountain practice centers at home and abroad, Master Sheng Yen was also invited to teach Chan meditation in England, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Switzerland, Russia, Croatia, and Malaysia, and at other places throughout



Europe, Asia, North America, and Australia.

After many years of careful cultivation and tutelage, the Master's Dharma lineage has since been transmitted to many of the Master's disciples in the East and West. Seven of his international disciples were certified by the Master as his Dharma heirs, including Ven. Ji Cheng from Malaysia, Dr. John Crook and Dr. Simon Child from the United Kingdom, Dr. Max Kalin from Switzerland, Zarko Andricevic from Croatia, Gilbert Gutierrez from Los Angeles of the United States, and Ven. Guo Jun from Singapore. They have been promoting Chan Buddhism and establishing Dharma centers in their respective home countries, continuing the Master's compassionate vow to develop Buddhism internationally by traveling worldwide.

### **Religious exchange**

In 1997 the Master attended the 11th International Conference on Religion and Peace at the Vatican. After the conference, the Master met with Pope John Paul II, which was a sign that Chinese Buddhism had entered the international religious arena, opening new opportunities for Buddhism to participate in global affairs. In 1998, the Master participated

in a dialogue with His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama at the Roseland Ballroom in New York City. The dialogue was entitled “In the Spirit of Manjushri: the Wisdom Teachings of Buddhism,” and signified the turning of a new page in the history of Buddhism in terms of interaction between Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism. Once again Chinese Buddhist wisdom and Master Sheng Yen’s deportment drew the eyes of the world.

In 2000 Master Sheng Yen attended the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. This event was the first of its kind held since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945. In his opening remarks the Master made a sincere proposal:

*“For the sake of world peace, if you find that the doctrines of your faith contain something that is intolerant of the other groups, or in contradiction with the promotion of world peace, then you should make new interpretations of these relevant doctrines. Why? Because every wholesome religion should get along peacefully with other groups so that it can, step by step, influence humankind on earth to stay far away from the causes of war.”*

In addition, he earnestly advocated the ideals of building a pure land on earth and protecting the spiritual environment, gaining resounding approval from the participants. Master Sheng Yen was therefore invited on the spot to join the consulting committee for the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. Subsequently the Master regularly received invitations to take part in all manner of international meetings, where he would offer up words of wisdom advising on issues at various meetings, working tirelessly to facilitate interfaith interaction and world peace.

### **World peace**

In addition to taking on various missions of the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, Master Sheng Yen often held peace dialogues with various walks of life and ethnic groups in his capacity as a religious representative. In 2002, he attended the World Economic Forum held in New York. In the Forum he proposed a transcending view that “‘holiness’ should be perceived by humanity in our diversified world as finding commonality among differences,” and seeking to find a solution to the tough issue of religious conflict.

While in the first Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders in 2002 and in the Women's Prayer Breakfast for Peace in 2003, the Master advocated the power of female compassion.

*“In Mahayana Buddhist sutras wisdom is compared to a father’s essence while compassion represents a mother’s essence ...; wisdom is our inner cultivation while compassion is actions embodying universal love. From this we learn that the female spirit can facilitate the world to become a better place and foster and nurture life, bringing eternal peace for humanity and protecting the earth’s resources, ensuring their sustainability.”*

In 2003, Master Sheng Yen visited Israel and Palestine along with representatives of the religious and spiritual leaders from the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. It was an effort to build a bridge of communication for different concepts and views, in hopes that the religious and political leaders of the area can utilize their wisdom and compassion, enabling their people to live in an environment free of anxiety and fear.

## **Nurturing young people**

Young people are the masters of our future world, and represent our hope of advancing world peace and spiritual purification. For this reason, Master Sheng Yen proactively participated in activities and events for the nurturing of young talent. In 2003, Master Sheng Yen attended the first preparatory meeting for the World Youth Peace Summit, held in Kyoto, Japan. In 2004, Master Sheng Yen led a delegation of six Taiwanese outstanding youth representatives to Bangkok to take part in the Asia Pacific World Youth Peace Summit, organized by the World Council of Religious Leaders.

Under Master Sheng Yen's guidance, Dharma Drum Mountain's international and youth oriented Dharma sharing activities have become an important policy in recent years. Since the establishment of the Young People Development Department in 2005, Dharma Drum Mountain has also initiated international meetings. In 2006, Dharma Drum Mountain and the Global Peace Initiative of Women co-organized the Young Leaders Peace Council, held at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, New York, which was the first time Dharma Drum Mountain organized an international forum together

with an international non-profit organization in the United States. After the event, the Master led 15 youth representatives to New York, where they took part in the UN Global Youth Leadership Summit, opening up an opportunity for global collaboration and interaction.

In 2007, the Sudan Youth Peace Dialogue organized by Young Leaders Peace Council was held in Kenya, to discuss solutions to the problems in Sudan caused by the Sudanese civil war. Master Sheng Yen urged the young people to face all problems in peace, and to seek ways of reconciliation, as the best path in facing conflict.

### **Inheriting the past and inspiring the future**

*“We must take a modern perspective, looking back at the positive traditions in our history and culture while looking forward to cultural innovations in the future. That is what Chinese people refer to as ‘inheriting the past and inspiring the future,’ meaning that one should not forget about the past and cannot afford to overlook the future, and that the present is the present.”*

Throughout his life, Master Sheng Yen never planned for

himself but simply embraced a heart of giving and learning. He always considered the benefits for sentient beings throughout the past and in the future, and steadfastly moved toward the ideal of uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth. Over time, he served as a pioneer in this journey of building a pure land on earth, opening up numerous great paths and leaving behind infinite treasures.

As he once said: “The Dharma Drum Mountain I perceive has already been completed. Do you believe that? Has the Dharma Drum Mountain in your mind been completed too? The Dharma Drum Mountain of many sentient beings in this spacious world has not yet been completed. Thus, the ideal of building a pure land on earth still rests on our inheriting the past and inspiring the future, as well as on our joint effort.”

And this may well be his expectation for people of future generation.





## Speeches

### *The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders*

Most honored religious and spiritual leaders of the world, dear brothers and sisters: Thanks to the joint efforts of humankind, the movement toward world peace has been promoted extensively. Today, however, in the year 2000, we are still gathering here at the United Nations to discuss how to achieve world peace. This signifies that there are still conflicts for which the world is waiting for us to find solutions. I believe no one could doubt that we, the religious and spiritual leaders, are all peace-loving people. However, there still exists the fact that different religions clash or even provoke wars against each other. When people maintain what they believe in is the best religion in the world, they should not forget that others also have the right to say that their faith is the best. When people strive to survive and develop, they should not forget that others also have the right to survive and develop.

Therefore, I would like to make a sincere proposal: If you find that the doctrines of your faith contain something that is intolerant of the other groups, or in contradiction with the promotion of world peace, then you should make new interpretations of these relevant doctrines. Why? Because every wholesome religion should get along peacefully with other groups so that it can, step by step, influence humankind on earth to stay far away from the causes of war.

When speaking of the problem of poverty on earth, everyone will think of regions that are ravaged by natural disasters and wars. So we should offer assistance to those regions and appeal for peace. But as you may also know, even the United States is not free from the problem of poverty. So I wish to point out a fact: material poverty threatens people's lives, whereas poverty of the spirit and heart deprives them of an environment of security and happiness. Therefore, our organization, Dharma Drum Mountain, is promoting a movement called "spiritual environmentalism," where individuals start by purifying their mind, filling it with gratitude, kindness, and compassion for life. In this way, they will devote the fruit of their efforts to others. As long as one continuously works hard to improve one's living conditions, one will be

able to overcome material poverty; as long as one feels grateful and compassionate, one will be able to enrich oneself spiritually and mentally.

Enrichment of the spirit is a more precious wealth than material possessions. Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhism is characterized by a simple way of life. Chan practitioners can gain freedom and peace of mind because they have little desire for material things in their lives. When one's spirit is calm and stable, one will not be stimulated and tempted by the external material environment; neither will one harm others and damage the natural environment. Therefore, the Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith says, "when the mind arises, all things arise; when the mind perishes, all things perish." Peace and war reflect the harmony or conflict contained in the human mind; likewise, paradise and hell are not separate from the human mind's inclination toward virtue or evil.

Poverty or wealth is mostly determined by the ignorance or by the wisdom of the human mind. If due to ignorance people are greedy and insatiable, they will cause destruction and conflicts and end up poor in spirit. Even enormous material wealth may be lost overnight if one is ignorant and unable

to use it wisely. Indeed, the Buddha said, “One’s material wealth is commonly owned by the five enemies, namely, flood, fire, bandits, tyranny, and prodigal sons.” If you possess wisdom, you can transform the corruptible into something wonderful, turn discarded junk into treasure; you can also change few into many, make ugly things beautiful, turn disappointment into hopefulness, and transform hell into paradise.

Humankind’s ignorance is caused by its deluded views. The Complete Enlightenment Sutra says, “Since time without beginning, all sentient beings have had all sorts of delusions, like a disoriented person who has lost his sense of direction. They mistake the gathering and dispersing of the four elements (namely, earth, water, fire, and air), for their physiological selves, and the six conditioned impressions of the six sense objects, (namely, form, sound, smell, tastes, touch, mental objects) for their psychological selves. They are like a man with an illness of the eyes who sees illusory flowers in the sky, or a second moon.” Therefore, sentient beings vex themselves and others. If the concepts of the Buddhist scriptures can be used to guide humankind’s life, and its methods of meditation can be applied to help people become aware of their weaknesses, then humankind can hope to achieve everlasting peace.

On the basis of “spiritual environmentalism” our organization also advocates and carries out social etiquette environmentalism, living environmentalism, and natural environmentalism. Together they are called the “Four Kinds of Environmentalism.” We believe that, if we wish to pursue world peace, if we wish to solve the problems of humankind’s poverty and the environment, then we should review and examine the thinking of humankind, and start by purifying the mind and uplifting the spirit. I would like to offer everyone two thoughts: “With true wisdom one will not have any vexations. With true kindness and compassion one will not encounter any enemies.”

Moreover, I believe that every religion cherishes an everlasting hope that God’s paradise or the Buddha’s pure land will be established for the sake of humankind. Although Buddhism maintains that all sentient beings are equal, only human beings on earth can put the Buddha’s teachings into practice. Therefore, our organization promotes a movement, initially, to build God’s paradise and the Buddha’s pure land on earth. If we could endeavor to carry out the construction of the earthly paradise or earthly pure land, then no matter when we die, we would surely be blessed by the grace of God and be

taken by the Buddha into his embrace.

Whether paradise or pure land or by whatever name one may call it, we are good neighbors in the global village. Indeed, we are all sons and daughters born of the same Mother Universe. We are not just good friends to one another, but basically brothers and sisters in a great cosmic family.

Therefore, we have no other choice but to employ all kinds of methods to protect the living environment of this earth. We have no other choice but to remove all the mental barriers between people and to love one another. Thank you!

*Millennium World Peace Summit  
United Nations Headquarters, New York  
September 19, 2000*

## *The Sacred in a Pluralistic World*

### **Seeking Common Ground While Preserving Differences**

**I**n a modern, pluralistic, and global society, the meaning of the “sacred” differs according to time, place, and individual. Religions derive their understanding of the “sacred” from faith and through interpretation of scriptures and teachings, and some derive it from direct religious experience. On the surface these understandings may seem to come from “divine revelations,” but in reality they have been influenced by other people, time, place, history, and culture. Thus, they are not entirely free of subjectivity.

I believe the highest Truth revered by each religion is necessarily perfect and sacred to that religion. However, once human factors come in, and interpretations and outside agendas are imposed on this Truth, it becomes subjective and individual differences arise. Thus, although Buddhists take the law of causes and conditions as most sacred, we do not deny the values of monotheism—not that we identify with and accept them, but we understand and respect them. We

accept that every wholesome religion has room for continued development and the right to proclaim itself the world's best religion. Likewise, I myself would say that Buddhism is the best religion.

For this reason, to manifest the tolerance expected in a pluralistic society, the definition of the "sacred" ought to be reinterpreted. The highest Truth may be universal, but different perspectives and interpretations have resulted from variations in culture, as well as in the scriptures and teachings, which were personally experienced by prophets and passed on orally and in writing. To save humanity from the dangers of conflict and even destruction, we should of course preserve our own values. However, while holding to our own values we should tolerate and respect the values held by others.

In a pluralistic society, peaceful exchanges can help people learn from each other, grow, and keep their cultures perennially vibrant. The days of mono-cultural societies have long gone and will not return again, and fortunately so; otherwise humanity's destiny would be a very tragic one! Therefore, I appeal now to all humanity: in a pluralistic world,



the one sacred principle which all humanity should come to understand is “seeking common ground while preserving differences.”

*World Economic Forum Annual Meeting*

*Waldorf Astoria, New York*

*February 1, 2002*

## *Environmental Protection*

As a religion, Buddhism places great emphasis on protecting the environment. Shakyamuni Buddha was born at Lumbini Garden, 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 parinirvana 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 of sentient beings. In the stories of the Buddha's past lives, while 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 manifestation of the great bodhi-

sattvas. So, Buddhists believe that both sentient beings and non-sentient things are all the Dharma-body of the Buddhas. Not only do yellow flowers and green bamboo preach Buddhist teachings, but rocks can also understand Buddhist doctrines. Therefore, Buddhists regard their living environment as if it were their own body. 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 content 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 not important.*

If, for the sake of satisfying our wants, humankind consumes natural resources and devastates the ecological envi-

ronment, 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. As well as cherishing natural resources, protecting the ecology, and lifestyle choices such as reducing garbage, recycling, living a pure, simple, and, frugal life, and minimizing pollution, we should further learn to respect others and their lives. We should remind ourselves that, apart from ourselves, there are countless other people; apart from our one generation, there are our innumerable 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. Cherishing natural resources and protecting the ecology*
- 2. Maintaining cleanliness in family life and using daily necessities simply and frugally*
- 3. Improving interpersonal politeness and social etiquette*
- 4. Considering everything from the standpoint that all humankind should be protected in their existence, possess the right to live, and feel the dignity of life.*

In brief, the four kinds of environmental protection can be restated as protecting the natural environment, living environment, social environment, and spiritual environment. The environmental goals of most people are mainly the material aspects, namely, the first and second items. We need to take these deeper 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 they are not mere slogans. So, strictly speaking, purification of humankind's mind and heart is more important than 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 spoiled 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 environmentalism on the spiritual level.

*Working Session on Environmental Protection*

*Waldorf Astoria, New York*

*August 31, 2000*



***Statement of Support for the First  
Conference of the Global Peace Initiative  
of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders***

Greetings, women religious and spiritual leaders of the world. First, I wish you success in this Global Peace Initiative. I pray that this conference in Geneva will bring hope and lay the foundations for the cause of everlasting peace throughout the world, and open the door to greater happiness and well-being. Secondly, I would like to convey my respect for the great women of the world. Whether or not history has preserved their names, women have always been men's strongest partner and most reliable support. For all the accomplishments for which men are given credit, half the contributions have come from women. How then could it not be that in the world's religions, women have always surrounded the founders and leaders, standing at their sides and at their backs, providing inspiration, care, and support? Moreover, not a few great religious figures have themselves been women.

Today, in the twenty-first century, the equality of men and women has already become the consensus of the civilized

world. Thus Dena Merriam conceived and organized this Global Peace Initiative of Women Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which convenes here today. Here in Geneva, the best and brightest women of the world's religions have come together to discuss how they can together use spiritual values to assist the United Nations in preserving the traditional cultures and religions of the world's peoples; to discuss easing world conflict, encouraging ethnic harmony, and dealing with such problems as the oppression of women and abuse of children, as well as pervasive poverty and disaster relief.

In all ancient cultures of the world, the sky is referred to as the father of all things and the earth as their mother. The maternal and the paternal contribute equally to the earth and sky's creation and nourishing of all things. In the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, wisdom is described as paternal and compassion as maternal. When wisdom and compassion work together, we can liberate sentient beings from their afflictions and save them from their sufferings. Wisdom is the result of inner cultivation. Compassion is universal love in action. From this we can see that the female spirit creates the world and can give rise to new life as well as bring

humanity lasting peace and ensure the endless renewal of the world's natural resources.

I, myself, though limited in my influence, have spent the last ten to twenty years promoting enduring human peace through campaigns to protect the spiritual environment and establish a pure land on earth. Protecting the spiritual environment means maintaining inner peace and tranquility. No matter what situation one encounters, as long as one deals with it wisely, one will not have to struggle in panic and agony; as long as one deals with others compassionately, one will not be driven by tangled feelings of love and hate to harm oneself or others. In this way, a crisis can become the start of good fortune. The pure land on earth is a call to all humanity to actively and extensively promote a wisdom rooted in selflessness and compassion directed equally to all in this time and place, rather than simply wait to go to our ultimate reward. In this way we can eliminate the human disasters of enmity, conflict, discrimination, misunderstanding, violence, terror, destruction, and inequality. Even natural disasters will diminish.

Finally, let me again convey my best wishes for this first

global peace initiative of women religious and spiritual leaders. May you meet with complete success.

*Inauguration of the Global Peace Initiative of Women*

*Palais des Nations, Geneva*

*October 6, 2002*

## The Chronicle

- 1930** born in Jiangsu Province, China
- 1943** becomes a novice at Guangjiao Monastery, Nantong, Jiangsu province
- 1949** joins the army and arrives in Taiwan from Shanghai during Chinese Civil War
- 1959** ends his 10-year service in the army, and is re-ordained by Venerable Master Dongchu
- 1961** begins his six-year solitary retreat at Chaoyuan Monastery in Kaohsiung
- 1969** begins his studies at Rissho University in Tokyo, Japan and earns doctorate in Buddhist Literature in 1975
- 1975** heads to the States to spread the Dharma
- 1977** returns to Taiwan taking over the reins of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture and Nung Chan Monastery by Ven. Master Dongchu's will
- 1978** receives Dharma transmission of the Linji lineage from Venerable Master Lingyuan
- 1979** establishes a monastery in New York named Chan Meditation Center
- 1980** ordains first group of disciples in Taiwan, marking the beginning of the DDM Sangha
- 1985** establishes the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in Beitou, Taipei
- 1989** establishes Dharma Drum Mountain
- 1992** proposes Protecting the Spiritual Environment as the core DDM vision
- 1997** sets up the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York  
attends the 11<sup>th</sup> International Meeting People and Religions in Padua, Italy and meets with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican
- 1998** holds a dialogue with the Dalai Lama in New York city, titled "In the Spirit of Manjushri: The Wisdom Teachings of Buddhism"

- 1999** proposes the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign: A lifestyle for the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- 2000** attends and makes a keynote speech at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held at the UN headquarters in New York
- 2001** establishes the Dharma Drum Sangha University in Taiwan
- 2002** attends the World Economic Forum in New York as a Buddhist leader  
donates and escorts the Akshobhya Buddha head statue, stolen in 1997, back to Four Gate Pagoda in Shandong province, China
- 2003** makes a speech at the meeting for the World Council of Religious Leaders at the UN headquarters in NY at the invitation of the UN secretary Kofi Annan  
travels to Israel and Palestine with representative leaders from WCRL for religious peace movement
- 2004** attends and the Seminar on Preventing Terrorism held by WCRL in New York
- 2005** attends Leaders' Meeting on Faith and Development organized by the World Bank in Dublin, Ireland  
receives honorary doctorate degree from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Buddhist University, Thailand  
inauguration for the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education takes place
- 2006** leads a delegation of 15 DDM youth leaders to attend the UN Global Youth Leadership Summit at the UN headquarters in New York
- 2007** establishes Dharma Drum Buddhist College in Taiwan  
established the Sheng Yen Professorship in Chinese Buddhism at Columbia University, New York  
initiates the Six Ethics of the Mind campaign  
the Taipei County Jinshan Eco-friendly Memorial Garden starts operation
- 2009** passes away on February 3rd  
receives posthumous honors from the President of R.O.C

## Books in English

### Autobiography

- *Footprints in the Snow*

### Chan Practice

- *Attaining the Way: A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism*
- *Chan Comes West*
- *Getting the Buddha Mind: On the Practice of Chan Retreat*
- *Hoofprint of the Ox: Principles of the Chan Buddhist Path as Taught by a Modern Chinese Master*
- *Illuminating Silence: The Practice of Chinese Zen (Silent Illumination)*
- *In the Spirit of Ch'an: An Introduction to Ch'an Buddhism.*
- *Ox Herding at Morgan's Bay*
- *Shattering the Great Doubt: The Chan Practice of Huatou*
- *Subtle Wisdom: Understanding Suffering, Cultivating Compassion through Chan Buddhism*
- *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*
- *The Poetry of Enlightenment: Poems by Ancient Chan Masters*

### Chan Master's Discourse

- *Faith in Mind: A Commentary on Seng Ts'an's Classic*
- *Meeting of Minds: A Dialogue between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist Traditions*

- *Song of Mind: Wisdom from the Zen Classic Xin Ming*
- *The Infinite Mirror: Commentaries on Two Chan Classics*
- *The Sword of Wisdom: A Commentary on the Song of Enlightenment*

### **Dharma for Daily Life**

- *Dharma Drum: The Life & Heart of Chan Practice*
- *Zen Wisdom: Conversations on Buddhism*

### **Buddhadharma**

- *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*
- *Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel*
- *The Six Paramitas: Perfections of the Bodhisattva path, a Commentary*
- *Things Pertaining to Bodhi: The Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment*

### **Sutra Commentaries**

- *There is No Suffering: A Commentary on the Heart Sutra*
- *Complete Enlightenment - Zen Comments on the Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*

**For more of Master Sheng Yen's teaching, please visit the website: [www.shengyen.org](http://www.shengyen.org)**



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*What I am unable to accomplish in this lifetime, I vow to push forward through countless future lives; what I am unable to accomplish personally, I appeal to everyone to undertake together.*

– Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009)