

Tending the Ox

"When I tell people to relax there is always somebody who overdoes it and at once begins to feel drowsy. On the other hand, when I tell people not to be lazy, there is always someone who tenses up his body and mind until he begins to wonder why he feels stressed. It is vital, therefore, to find a point of balance between relaxation and alertness...it is like catching a feather on a fan..."



--Chan Master Sheng Yen
from *Illuminating Silence*

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From the Editor

From the Associated Press, via The New York Times, August 8th: "**Clergy in Asia and Africa Condemn Election of Gay Bishop.**"

In case anyone missed it, the U.S. Episcopalian Church had just, over the strong objections of a conservative minority, confirmed the appointment of its first openly gay bishop.

"Practicing homosexuality is culturally and legally not acceptable here," said Bishop Dr. Lim Cheng Ean, leader of the Anglican Church of West Malaysia. "They violate the explicit scripture," said the Very Rev. Peter Karanja of Nairobi, Kenya. "We cannot comprehend the decision to elect as bishop a man who has forsaken his wife, in order to live in a sexual relationship with another man" agreed the Rev. Dr. Mouneer Anis, bishop of the diocese of Egypt, North Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia.

I don't mean to beat up on the Episcopalians; we had a little one of these ourselves not too long ago. Chan Master Sheng Yen got into some trouble with certain members of his congregation when he answered a question about the precepts by saying that yes, according to Buddhism, homosexual acts would indeed be considered sexual misconduct. Not a controversial thing to say in the part of the world from which he and Bishop Dr. Lim come, but it proved to be quite controversial in New York.

To his credit (in my opinion), Master Sheng Yen responded to the controversy that ensued by making it clear that he had in no way meant to condemn homosexuals, that precepts are not commandments but practices that we take up voluntarily, that our understanding of what constitutes proper behavior must always stand in relation to the cultural norms in our environment, that good and evil in Buddhism is not absolute but is related to alleviating and causing suffering, and that he regretted having caused any. He has further called on all religious leaders to re-examine and re-interpret any passages in their own scriptures that are being used to justify violence against or to demonize those who are different.

But the conflict at the heart of the controversy is not easily resolved. How do Episcopalian homosexuals integrate their sexual preference into their reading of the Bible? How do we Buddhists integrate *any* sexual preference into the practice of a religion that rejects the very idea of preference, of the very self that has preferences, of any action founded on desire? And if found to be in irrevocable conflict, should we call into question the personal preference or the ancient wisdom, wisdom that comes

to us from societies that accepted racism, sexism, and demonization of the "other" as the norm?

This issue of Chan Magazine features a recent address by Chan Master Sheng Yen on the subject of terrorism and its relation to religious fanaticism, which points out the extent to which our world has become a multicultural, pluralistic one. He recognizes that all religious people consider their faiths to be the source of fundamental truth, but that all religious documents are in fact culturally specific, and all subject to interpretation by fallible human beings. He calls for tolerance, for adaptation to the inevitability of cultural globalization...he calls, finally, for compassion and wisdom.

Shifu's talk was addressed to the pressing problem of terrorism, but I find it equally relevant to the Episcopal controversy. After all, what could better represent the globalization of culture than the *Anglican Church of West Malaysia*? My answer: an Anglican Church of West Malaysia that could accept a gay bishop from New Hampshire.

Postscript

Those of you with keen eyes for design will no doubt notice that Chan Magazine looks a little different yet again. This time the changes, and the unfortunate tardiness, are the result of a computer crash, a new operating system, new layout software...all exacerbated by the limited skills of the editor. We hope the resulting mutations of form are not too disturbing to the usefulness of the content.

Adding considerably to that content is Belia Pena, who has graciously taken on the responsibility of editing the magazine's news section, The Past. Thanks, Belia - you couldn't have come at a better time.

Corrections

On page 27 of the Summer 2003 issue, in the article "Long Island Multi-Faith Forum", one of the participating religious groups is incorrectly listed as "Bai'Allas." The correct spelling is "Baha'i". We apologize.

Fear and Peace

*The following lecture was given by **Chan Master Sheng Yen** on May 4th, 2003, the day of the Buddha's birthday celebration, at the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, New York. It was translated live by **Rebecca Li**.*



Venerable Old Master Jen Chun, dear venerable masters, and ladies and gentlemen, today I'd like to talk about a topic that is very relevant to our environment today, fear and peace. One can see that this topic is about how one can obtain peace in the midst of fear.

This seat that I'm sitting on right here seems to be very peaceful and safe. In fact, it's very dangerous.

So what is peace? From the perspective of Buddhadharma, when the mind is at peace, there is peace. As long as the mind is not at peace and is unstable, then there is no peace.

For us ordinary people, we tend to think that the source of danger in our lives is the environment that we live in. When will crisis in our lives occur? We don't know; it's unpredictable. When will a certain situation occur? We don't know; we have no idea. For instance, what's been happening in the world recently - the epidemic of SARS has been affecting Hong Kong, Singapore, Guangzhou, Beijing, and Shanghai, and for the last few days, Taiwan as well. So a lot of people are wondering, "When am I gonna hit the lotto?" Of course, if you really hit the lotto, that's a good thing, but if you get infected by SARS, that's not good at all.

However, if you look at the fatality rate from SARS, the number of people who have died, in total, is about three hundred. This number includes everyone in Hong Kong, in China, actually all over Asia, since December last year, and now it's May, so that's in

about five months. However, despite the relatively low fatality rate, most people are very, very afraid, all over the world.

This is because of the ignorance of human beings. Because the environment that we live in, originally, before SARS, is not secure, it's filled with danger. We fear SARS because we don't have this understanding that the environment is always filled with danger.

Actually, a very long time ago, Shakyamuni Buddha had already told us that this world is very dangerous and very fragile, that human life is impermanent, that the very existence of life hangs on the continuation of breath going in and out. Human life only hangs on this breath. It only takes the breath to stop, and human life ceases to exist. This is how fragile and impermanent human life is. This world that we live in is filled with such danger, very fragile. One need only look at the natural disasters that occur all the time, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and plagues ... as well as wars. These are among the sources of danger in the world.

We hear about these instances all the time; we think it's normal because we're so used to it. When I was young, I heard that the number of people who die from car accidents was very high. Because of that, among us Chinese people, we refer to automobiles on the road as tigers roaming in the street. It only takes a malfunction for a car accident to occur, or a drunk driver, or a driver falling asleep ... or it can be a pedestrian that is responsible. A pedestrian could be having wandering thoughts, not paying attention to what's going on, or be irritated, and have an unstable mind and not even see the car coming. Because of all these dangers on the road people would say, "The world is so dangerous, so we should just avoid getting on to the road at all." However, nowadays, even though there are so many more car accidents than there used to be, we are used to it, we hear about it all the time, we think that it's normal, and we don't see it as very dangerous anymore. It doesn't keep us from driving around in cars or walking around on the streets, not at all. It happens so often that we don't think about it.

It is the same with the entire world that we live in. It originally is filled with danger all the time. But because we see it all the time, we don't think about it - we are not aware of the dangers anymore.

Just ten years ago we had this rapidly spreading epidemic, AIDS. In the last ten years, about 20 million people have died from this disease, and in the next 10 years it is

forecasted that double that number will die. We don't think about it anymore. In the beginning, when we first heard about this disease, everyone was very afraid, very worried. When people were dating they were very worried about it. People were worried about going to use the bathroom, about using towels, or chopsticks or bowls in public places. Now, we don't think about it anymore; we are used to it.

If you look at the statistics on death rates, the number is highest among those who get cancer; cancer patients have among the highest death rates right now.

So this is illness. Shakyamuni Buddha told us a long time ago that human life inevitably has to go through this process from birth towards death. Once we are born, it is inevitable that we will die. When will we die? How will we die? We don't know. We have no idea. In fact, we now know that genetically we may be born carrying all sorts of illnesses already. It may not be from our parents, it may come from various conditions and factors, but the fact is that from the moment of birth we are already carrying the causes of illness and death. This process, from birth to old age to illness and death, is the undeniable inevitable fact of life. This is what we should understand.



It is actually quite strange that we have this very big industry, the insurance industry. You may have heard that there is a very big life insurance industry. So one day, at the monastery, a salesperson from an insurance company came and visited us, and introduced me to life insurance and told me that I should purchase a life insurance policy. I asked this person, "So this is going to insure me against death?" "No, no, no, that's not the case at all. It's going to insure that after you die, the people who survive you are not going to have trouble." So I said, "Oh, so this insurance is to ensure my death, not to insure me against death."

This is death. Everybody is afraid of death. Why are we afraid of death? We don't know, we are just afraid of death. This fear comes from a sense of insecurity, because we don't know what's going to happen. That's why we are afraid. So whenever we encounter a dangerous situation, whenever there's danger, we become very afraid. When we encounter uncertainty, when we have no idea what's going to happen, then we are also afraid. For some people, when they give a talk in front of a very large group for the first time, they will start to tremble, very afraid. Why are these people

afraid? Probably because they are worried that they will make a mistake, then maybe the audience will do something to them.

It's like Guo Gu here. There was one time I brought him here for a speech, for a lecture at Harvard University. When we got there, he saw that all the Harvard University professors were staring at him, and he was very afraid, he was trembling after seeing that. For me, I was just speaking Chinese, and they didn't know what I was talking about, so I was fearless, I wasn't afraid at all. But Guo Gu, who was there to translate my speech into English, was really worried, he was trembling the whole time. I asked him, "Why are you trembling?" He said, "Well, they're staring at me." And I said, "Well, of course, you are here to translate my talk into English, of course they will be looking at you."

Sorry, Guo Gu.

This world is filled with danger. This world is filled with danger and is very unstable. There is not a place, there is not a time in this world that there is total security, when it is not dangerous and unstable. It is important to have this understanding that there is no place and no time in this world that is secure. We have to keep this in mind at all times and in all places, knowing that anytime, anywhere we are, we can encounter life-threatening danger. That's what we need to keep in mind.

In fact, that's what Shakyamuni Buddha taught us, that this world we live in is like a house on fire. If we are in a house on fire, how can there be any place that is secure, that is safe? Therefore, what do we do in this house of fire? Well, we practice. We practice to cultivate compassion and wisdom. When we are able to cultivate compassion and wisdom, then we will feel more secure. Does it mean that this house of fire will not injure us, that we will not get burned? That's not the case at all. In fact, we're very likely to be burned and injured by the fire in this house - more than likely - it's certain. However, if you are able to cultivate wisdom in your mind and compassion in your heart, then you will be able to feel secure, even in this dangerous environment.

As you all know, we are here to memorialize the birthday of Shakyamuni Buddha. That's why we have this ceremony of bathing the Buddha. How did Shakyamuni attain Buddhahood? Well, I'm not going to talk about how he cultivated the Path towards Buddhahood in all his previous lifetimes. I'm going to focus on his last lifetime, on his cultivation during his life as Shakyamuni.



When he was a prince, one day he left the palace and wandered around in the city. While he was wandering around, he saw a very pitiable old person, an old man. He also saw a sick person, a very pitiable sick person. Apparently nobody was taking care of him. He also saw a dead person, and saw the family of this dead person very sad, grieving over the death. Upon seeing these phenomena, Shakyamuni Buddha did not think of himself, but tried to figure out what the source of the suffering was. He saw that sentient beings' suffering comes from this process of life, the cycle of

sickness, old age, and death. He wanted to look for a way to help sentient beings to eliminate their suffering in this process, and to finally depart from this cycle of birth and death. That is to say, he was trying to find a way to help sentient beings be liberated from the suffering of life. Because of this, he gave rise to the mind of compassion, and he left the life of the palace and entered the monastic life. His cultivation resulted in his realization.

Sentient beings are very ignorant. After Shakyamuni's death, when his body actually was burned to ashes by the fire in this house, (some people said that he had actually burned his own body using the fire of his Samadhi - whether that's the case or not, his body was burned to ashes, his body was gone) the number of people actually applying Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching were very few. If we were able to use the Buddha's teachings, then we might give rise to wisdom and compassion, and that would help us deal with the dangers of the world and be less fearful and feel more secure.

When I was a teenager, and first heard this story of Shakyamuni Buddha, it made a deep impression on me. Whenever I would see old people, I would give rise to pity in my heart, thinking, "Oh, this old person is so pitiable, this person is going to die soon." Whenever I would see people with white hair, I would think those thoughts. The strange thing is that these old people didn't seem to be unhappy at all. In fact, often they were still quite happy, as if they were unaware of their approaching deaths. So one day, I saw an old person, and again I felt the same thing, "This person is so old, so pitiable, nearing death," and I said this to my master, and my master scolded me saying, "Nonsense. It is not old people who die. The people who die, die because it is the time for them to die." What this means is that it is not only old people who die.

Babies can die, children can die, young people can die. People die when it is their time to die.

From then on, I was prepared for death anytime, because I knew that death could happen anytime. Of course I would not commit suicide, but I understood that death can happen any time. Because of that, I made sure that I made good use of my life all the time. I made sure that I made good use of this body all the time. That is to say, I want to make sure that I do the things that I need to do with this body, with the time that I have before my death. Because there is no way for me to know when death is going to fall upon me. It can happen any time --one could get hit by a car, or be walking on the sidewalk, and a brick could fall and hit your head. Or you could walk under a tree, and there could be a rotten branch that could fall on you. The strangest case that I have seen was a person who was washing his face and he drowned in the sink.

It is clear that death can fall upon us anytime, that any time, any place, we could die. Therefore, it is important that we have an alert mind, that we are aware of this fact, and that we have a clear understanding that death is around us at all times, in all places. Because of this understanding in my mind, I really cherish my life. I make sure that whatever I should do, and whatever I can do, I do it. Whatever people I can make a connection with, I would like to meet and connect with them. There are people who ask me, "Shifu, you are so old, why do you busy yourself, running all over the world all the time?" I say to these people, "Well, I'm trying to make good use of this piece of garbage." It's true. This body is so old, and there's not much else in it, so it's really a piece of garbage, but I still want to do my best to make good use of it. By doing what I can and should do, and meeting the people I can. And so here, my teacher here, who is ten years older than myself, who's an even older piece of garbage, he's still making good use of himself!

Instead of us saying "making good use of garbage", we can also look at it as "recycling good resources," until we can't use them anymore.

Death can happen anytime, anyplace, so one needs to have this understanding. However, one should not be thinking, "I should be dead pretty soon, so what's the point of trying to carry on living?" For myself, if it's not my time to die, why should I give up? Why should I give up living? Indeed, it is not fun being old. Old age is indeed suffering, and I can tell you that. However, if I think of this as making good use of

garbage, trying to do one's best, carrying on in one's old age, that's pretty good. Maybe you can think about old age this way as well.

Finally, I would like to remind you all that in the Heart Sutra, in the one line of the Heart Sutra that you all have recited this morning, the first line of the Heart Sutra goes like this, "When the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara was coursing in the deep Prajnaparamita, he perceived that all Five Skandhas are empty, thereby transcending all suffering." What this says is that when Avalokitesvara was deep in his cultivation, deep in his wisdom of Prajna, he was able to realize and understand that this life and body of ours is empty, it's not real, it's not permanent. Having understood that this body and life of ours is empty and not real and impermanent, he was able to be liberated and transcend the suffering of life. If you remember, later in the sutra, it says that because of that "one will depart far from confusion and imaginings." If we are able to understand that this life and body of ours is empty, is not real, and is not permanent, we will be far away from the confusion, the upside-down views that we have in our lives. These upside-down views that we hold are the beliefs that our lives and bodies are real and permanent and we are thus unable to see and accept the truth. If we are able to see life and the body as impermanent, as empty, then we will be able to face the hardships of the world without suffering. This is the teaching of these lines.

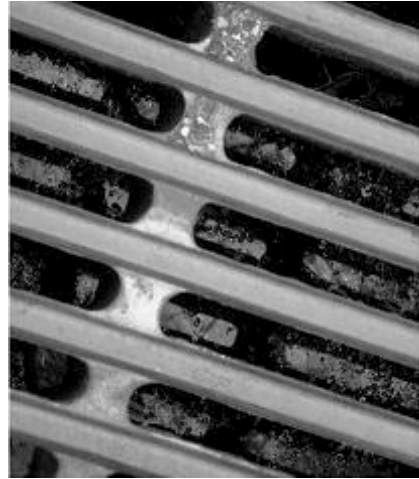
Now, my lecture here has come to an end, and I hope that you can remember this.



Hands Hospitalized

Between bloodlettings I turn my wrists
and see my hands angle after angle.
Nothing familiar
even in this plain-speaking light.
Did these hands hold a steering wheel?
Did they aim a fire hose at blazing
windows?
Did they push a lawn mower, no engine?
Did they hold a briefcase packed with
plans?
Did they shake the hand that saved them?
Did they move iron?
I see blood - dark through thin hide.
The palms are red, the fingers yellow.
One rip and these hands would spill.
They are not mine.

Mike Morical



"Storm Drain"

Photography by Chang Wen

Violence and Terrorism in Religion

The following is the full text of an address given by The Most Venerable Master Sheng Yen, Litt. D. to the United Nations' conference on "The Illegitimate Use of Religion to Incite Violence (Terrorism): Crime Against Humanity" in the Dag Hammarskjold Library Auditorium May 21, 2003.

Organized by the World Council of Religious Leaders, the Global Ethics Resource Center, Touro College Law School, and Fordham University Law School, the global conference was convened at the request of Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations (UN).

According to Bawa Jain, Secretary General of the World Council of Religious Leaders, the purpose of the conference was to review and analyze the use of religion to incite violence within the context of contemporary human rights and humanitarian laws and to fill the gap in international law by pointing out the need for a resolution to include the use of religion to incite violence (terrorism) as a crime against humanity...

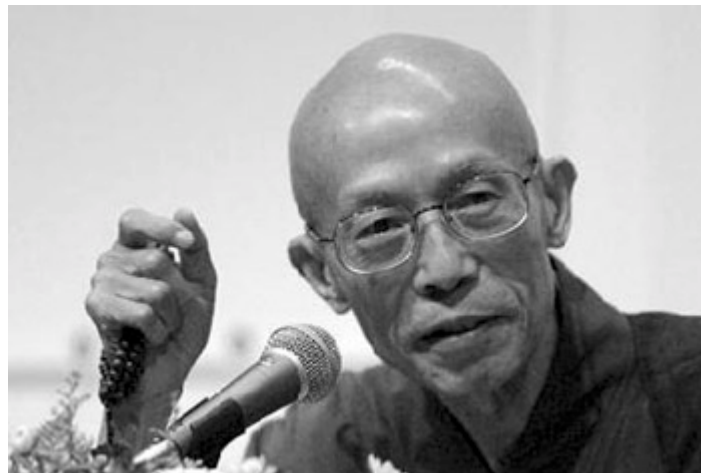
The conference proposed to discuss the issue from the perspectives of both religion and international law. Chan Master Sheng Yen was a member of the panel of guest speakers, made up of representatives from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam, as well as experts on international law. The audience was made up of UN staff members, diplomats, and representatives from various religions, law experts and students.

We believe that all religions of the world advocate that human beings should live together in harmony. We should accept that all religions in the world believe that the God they worship is the most righteous, the most loving, and possesses the greatest capacity to give humanity the blessings of well-being and happiness.

We must ask, however, why the world has been rife with conflicts, violence and terror throughout its history, and why this has happened among the social groups with the strongest religious fervor. Even among believers of the same religion in the same ethnic group, differences of circumstance, environment, individual understanding, and emotional experience have given rise to conflict, and people have insisted that the God according to their own knowledge, views, experiences and beliefs was the only God, or the most peace-loving God, or the most real, most perfect or ultimate God. Thus opposition and ideological rivalry have led to violent confrontations; thus intolerance among various forms of fundamentalism has brought about bloody conflicts.

This is neither a problem of God nor of religion. Rather this is because of human beings' ignorance, their lack of wisdom, their inability to open their minds and to understand themselves and others. If one believes that God is omniscient, omnipotent, full of love and authority, one should also believe that God provides the most appropriate teachings and aids according to the needs of different ethnic groups at different times and in different civilizations. These various manifestations are the result of Gods' all-encompassing love for all humans. With this understanding, one can see that the various Gods worshipped by various religions and their sects are each the one supreme, monistic God, manifested in different forms as the result of His universal love for humanity. If God can manifest in many different forms, then are not the followers of all religions none other than the children of God? Aren't they all brothers and sisters? Is there still any need for opposition and conflict?

In the absence of this understanding suspicion, denial, opposition and struggle among religions and sects will inevitably result in endless conflicts that damage everyone's sense of security. In order to guarantee one's safety, protect one's space, preach God's love and extend God's righteousness and power, there seems no choice but to use violence to suppress those deemed as the evil enemies. They must be terrorized, destroyed, annihilated from the face of the earth, so that no lurking dangers remain.



In reality, of course, one can never completely annihilate all those who disagree with one's thoughts and religious beliefs. The enemies are all generated from within to begin with; after one group is exterminated, another group will appear. This view, that all those with whom one disagrees are evil demons, brings about an endless cycle of retaliation. How terrible this is!

Therefore we believe that religious violence and its terrorism have their origin in human beings' insecurity. When confronted with phenomena that one does not yet

know, one gives rise to suspicion and fear. Because of fear one resorts to violence, striking out preemptively to embolden oneself and trigger terror in the enemies.

How can we solve this millennia-old problem? I suggest the following two main general approaches:

The most swiftly effective means would be to pass a resolution under international law in the United Nations stipulating that in order to protect human beings' freedom of pluralistic religious belief and the security of human lives, any individuals, ethnic groups or countries who use religion to incite violence and terrorism should be tried by the international criminal court and subjected to sanctions by all of humanity. However, this is not my area of expertise, hence this should be discussed by the legal experts in this conference.

The most thoroughly effective means is:

Call upon all people of love and wisdom to employ all available means to constantly extend, whenever it is appropriate, our friendship towards every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Let them know that they are not alone or helpless and let them feel the warmth of care, respect and acceptance. When they feel a sense of security, then they will no longer feel the need to engage in violent terrorist actions because of fear.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom to employ all available means to actively interact with, understand, and empathize with every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. Whenever it is appropriate, help them correctly understand their own religious beliefs and let them know that if they want to receive God's love, they must emulate God's all-encompassing love for the world. Hence, no one should regard terrorists as evil demons. If everyone treats those with whom he disagrees as evil, then terrorist attacks will never be terminated. Only when we give the world our love can we resolve all forms of enmity. This is the utmost reliable action to guarantee security for all.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom to employ all available means unceasingly to introduce, when appropriate, knowledge of diverse ethnicities, cultures and religions to every ethnic group, region and individual who is prone to terrorism. This is to help them understand that pluralism is the inevitable trend of civilization and the common necessity of modern human society. Only when we tolerate the differences among various ethnic groups within a pluralistic global society can we exchange virtues and strengths and learn from each other. Otherwise, if people seek only to reject those

who are different, or attempt to use violence to intimidate and conquer those who are different, they will end up targets of terror and conquest themselves.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom to employ all available means unceasingly to encourage, whenever it is appropriate, teachers of all religions and their various sects and all intellectual and influential religious people to reexamine their sacred scriptures. If they discover points that contradict the inclusiveness of a pluralistic global culture, they should be given a new interpretation. Human society has now transitioned from the dominance of separate, monolithic cultures into cultural plurality and mutual interaction. Those who pay no heed, or who insist on resisting this change will either be isolated from or come into conflict with the common global community.

Call upon all people of love and wisdom to employ all available means unceasingly to make use of every appropriate opportunity to advise all religious and spiritual leaders that while they should pay attention to politics they should not harbor political ambitions. Furthermore, they should warn their followers not to be provoked, manipulated and controlled by politicians. They should advise their country's political leaders that they can be devoted in their religious beliefs and true to the religious experiences that have flowed from spiritual cultivation, but that they should not exploit their religious followers, arouse religious fanaticism, incite religious reprisals or declare "holy war" against peoples who do not concur with them, or use terrorist attacks for political gains. In other words, we should help religious and political leaders to understand that in today's global world, religion and politics must function separately from one another. Otherwise, while belief in God and religion does not itself present a problem, it is unavoidable that people with unwholesome ambitions will exploit the name of God and His followers to incite ethnic conflicts and violence. The powerful side will resort to war; the weaker side will resort to terrorism; humanity will suffer unceasing calamities.

The above statements are my recommendations for today's topics of discussion and not a representation of Buddhist beliefs. Buddhism does not deny the Gods worshipped by any other religions. More importantly, Buddhism is about how to use compassion in interaction with others and how to use wisdom in handling affairs. With compassion, one will not view others as loathsome enemies. With wisdom, one will not give rise to the vexations of suspicion, hatred and fear. Buddhists should not harbor attitudes that violate these principles regardless of what scriptural justification may seem to exist.

Admonitions to Disciples

By Chan Master Zhongfeng Mingben translated by Ocean Cloud

Zhongfeng Mingben (1262-1323) was an eminent Chan master of the Linji lineage in the Yuan dynasty. He was one of the very few to receive transmission from his teacher, Chan Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao (1239-1295), the protagonist of the famous gong'an, Do you have mastery of yourself when you are in a dreamless sleep?

*Ocean Cloud is a group of practitioners, students of **Chan Master Sheng Yen**, who endeavor to bring the classics of Chinese Buddhism to the English-speaking community in the spirit of dana-paramita. They are: **Chang Wen (David Kabacinsky)** from New York, **Guo Shan (Jeff Larko)** from Ohio, and **Guo Jue (Wei Tan)** from Maryland.*

There is no way for you to understand Buddhadharma! There is no way for you to escape from birth and death! Our bodies are like candle flames in the wind and sparks flying out from flint stones. Even if you were to practice with every thought as if your head were aflame [1], you still would not be able to resolve this affair thoroughly. There is no need for you to do it impatiently, in a blind manner. Going about recklessly and confusedly, in a blink of the eye, you would have reached the age of forty and fifty...

What do you think Buddhadharma is? Even if the smartest person in the world were to come along and write impeccable and irrefutable commentaries on all the scriptures [2], gong'ans [3] and philosophical classics [4], he or she would still be moving about outside the door. When these smart people speak of the Dharma, it often seems that they are enlightened; but when they encounter [challenging] conditions in real life, they are lost.

It has always been said that there is no way for you to understand this affair! The more you want to understand it, the more you will be in discord with it. Do not give rise to some sort of conceptual response upon hearing this, thinking that if you can enter into a state that other people cannot enter, you will find some lively things there. Alas! All you can come up with are none other than the deluded thought of "wanting to understand it".

Only those who have the profound root of faith, who are willing to genuinely investigate themselves until true enlightenment is realized can take up this affair. But if they hang on to the thought of "taking this up", they still have not gotten it. That is why the ancient teaching says that: "Even if a world full of people as wise as Sariputra

were to come together and hold a discussion, it is still impossible for them to fathom the wisdom of the Buddha".

These days there are people who go about proclaiming what they know and advocating a particular way of practice. These people are like those who have found a piece of orange peel and mistook it as fire. They claim they know what Buddhadharma is and demand that people respect them. What good can they really gain? I have been practicing for more than thirty years and I am still not in accord with the Buddhadharma. That is why I am constantly humbled and shamed. I do not dare to accept the position of a teacher casually. When good things are said about me and generous offerings brought to me, I see them as poisoned arrows striking my mind. I have been running away from them to no avail. There is no doubt that they are brought about by karmic relations from my past lives. They are the very source of delusion, not a result of virtue on the Path.

So many people claim to be on the Path, and yet when they encounter a little thing that goes against their will, ignorance will take hold of them, unleashing their habitual ways. Letting their minds run wild, unwholesome actions manifest. They will use what they call justice [5] to harm others, pushing others around. They do not know that since time immemorial, this so-called justice of theirs has been binding them to ignorance. Not once through this justice did they engender a true mind on the Path. Moreover, never do they notice that this justice of theirs [reeks so much that] it causes people to cover their noses instantly.

There is no way for you to escape from birth and death! This great affair of birth and death belongs to you yourself; it sticks to your skin and your bones, thought after thought without relenting. For innumerable kalpas, you have exhausted all contrivances but your mind just will not stop and rest! [As a result,] you have made serious vows time and again, having thousands of Buddhas and numerous ancestral masters as your witnesses. Continuing in this way, you left home again in this life, becoming a monastic with three robes in your possession [6], calling yourself a person on the Path! The truth is, you still cannot see through what is happening in front of your very eyes. Everything causes you to move your mind in reaction. What you do only adds to the knot of birth and death that binds you, making you betray your original aspiration to leave home.

If you go about in such a confused and reckless manner, even if you were to be given thousands of lifetimes to practice, you would only reinforce the wheel of karma,

bringing no benefits in principle. You should know that sentient beings are bound and tied up gravely and there is nothing you can do. If you do not have the ability to live together with others, you may as well put down everything, go and live in a thatched shack. That way, you can live your life in apathetic solitude, surviving on alms, wearing a patched robe, working only on your own salvation. That way, at least you will not be hurting the field of others, living like a shameless person with no humility.

Therefore I say that there is no way for you to understand the Buddhadharma and there is no way for you to escape from birth and death! If you cannot understand it or run away from it, why don't you simply abide in this place of "no avail" [and practice]? Do not worry whether it will take you twenty years or thirty years. When you suddenly penetrate through this place of "no avail", you will find that I have not meant to deceive you.

FootNote

1. Refers to Bodhisattva Samantabhadra admonition.
 2. Literally, "the twelve divisions of teachings in three vehicles."
 3. Literally, "one thousand seven hundred pieces of intertwining rotten old vine."
 4. Literally, "the classics of the sages and the hundred philosophical schools."
 5. Literally, "public consensus."
 6. Refers to monastic Vinaya requiring monks to have no more than three robes.
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Retreat Report by E. B.

Prior to coming to the retreat...

"Is this going to be your last retreat?" was the response from my husband when I asked if it would be ok for me to attend the Christmas retreat. He gets nervous when I go to the retreat because he feels that I will come back withdrawn from the world and will continue not to enjoy life.

Things were pretty rough in the family last year. Several times I thought it would be the end of my marriage. On the morning of September 11th, we had our biggest fight ever and both of us thought this was it. We then left home and went to our work places. When I got out of the subway station, on my way to work, I witnessed the second plane flying through the second tower. On that day, our agency turned into a rescue center for the people who fled from the two towers. The shock of 9/11 made me realize how trivial the fight I had with my husband was. So, I called him at work and ended the fight. Subsequently, we have decided to work hard on our marriage, and since then, things are getting better.

This was my fourteenth retreat and one that I really felt a strong need to come to. I needed to repent for my and my family members' bad conduct and to pray for world peace, and thought a 7-day retreat would be a good way to fulfill my needs.

During the retreat...

During my first and only group interview with Shifu, he quickly reminded me of what I need in order to be familiar with the method of silent illumination. I need to meditate regularly and attend retreat more often. In addition, it helped me to put down all the expectations I might have and to focus my attention on following the instructions given by both Shifu and Guo Yuan Fa Shi. As the result of this mentality, seven days went by quickly. I believe I didn't waste any time idling in this retreat. I also learned how to relax my body and mind and had a better understanding of the mental stages of the method.

One subject was brought up during the retreat, which was related to the precept of no sexual misconduct. I found it very helpful to hear Shifu's clarification about it. He stated that the essence of the precept has to be in accordance with wisdom and compassion. One participant had raised several questions related to sex that, I

thought, were very relevant to lay practitioners. He asked, "In general, how does Buddhism view sex? What is Buddhism's point of view towards love, affection and passionate sex?" Shifu stated that these were complicated issues and he would take time to think about them. I look forward to hearing Shifu's talk regarding the aforementioned subject.

I spent all of my spare time during this retreat doing prostration. I felt a strong sense of shame during the prostrations. I realized that I had been taking things for granted. For example, I was fortunate enough to have the chance to know and to learn from Shifu but I didn't work hard. I also have been very passive in just about every aspect of my life, as if I were a child refusing to grow up and afraid of taking responsibility. I think it is pointless to spend time and effort analyzing why I acted the way I did. It would be more beneficial for me to start to live actively and to practice diligently.

Summary

This retreat made me realize how casually and carelessly I have treated my practice, as if good cause and condition would always be there. Obviously, I need to constantly remind myself about the impermanence of life and practice as diligently as I can.

Finally, I want to thank Shifu, Guo Yuan Fa Shi, all the sanghas, volunteers, retreat participants and my family for making this retreat possible for me.

The Past

Master Sheng Yen in Moscow

On May 6-16, 2003, Master Sheng Yen, board member of the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCRL), traveled to Moscow for an ecumenical meeting and to lead a seven-day intensive Chan retreat. The meeting was held in the Svyato-Danilov Monastery, the oldest and largest Russian Orthodox monastery in Moscow. During the meeting, Master Sheng Yen met with Russian religious leaders representing Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. They exchanged opinions regarding what religions have already accomplished and what more they can do together to further world peace.



During the meeting, Master Sheng Yen updated those in attendance of the WCRL's efforts and accomplishments over the past two years. These accomplishments include attendance at the World Economic Forum; the conference in the U.N. regional office in Bangkok where the Council was formally established; the conference of female religious leaders in Geneva; and the Council's planning of the World Youth Peace Conference to be held in the regional office in Kenya, Africa, October 2004. Furthermore, he updated them on the Council's current efforts to raise funds to develop a program for the psychological rebuilding in postwar Iraq.

On behalf of the WCRL, Master Sheng Yen extended an invitation to the Russian religious leaders to host a future WCRL meeting in Moscow. Hosting of such an event would open Russia to receiving the kindly intentions of various religious organizations from around the world and be an occasion to further the dialogue on the ongoing efforts for achieving world peace.

The conclusion of the meeting was highlighted with the Russian religious leaders indicating their willingness to consider the possibility

of hosting a future assembly of the World Council of Religious Leaders. Master Sheng Yen's efforts and the openness of the religious leaders in attendance constituted a meaningful first step in this historical process.

A Dharma Drum Chan meditation affiliate was also established during this trip with the hope to deepen and broaden the spread of Chinese Buddhism and to share the teachings of the Dharma with Russian society. Two books based on Master Sheng Yen's discourses have already been translated into Russian by the organization.

Master Sheng Yen ended his trip in Moscow by leading a seven-day Chan Retreat from May 9th through May 16th at the Vysokoye guesthouse.

First Planning Session for the World Youth Peace Summit

The World Council of Religious Leaders (WCRL) held the first planning session of the World Youth Peace Summit (WYPS) on April 8, 2003 in Kyoto, Japan. Youth leaders as well as leaders from religious, business, government, professional and cultural sectors all over the world gathered in Kyoto to discuss and plan the first WYPS to be held in Nairobi, Kenya October 2004. Master Sheng Yen attended the planning session for the Summit as one of the co-chairs of the World Council of Religious Leaders.

The Summit will convene under the auspices of the WCRL whose primary role will be to listen and empower youth to play a more active role in conflict resolution, and to explore new and innovative ways of examining and addressing the most pressing global challenges. The Secretariat of the WCRL stated: "This Summit aims to build a strong global network of young leaders committed to working for peace transcending national borders, cultures, and faith traditions. [We] will enable youth to engage in inter-generational dialogue, so the wisdom and experience of their elders can help shape the vision for the future. [It] also aims to develop a framework that celebrates similarities and

rises above differences to build a sound foundation for the lasting future of peace in the next generation of leaders."

During informal meetings at the planning session for the WYPS in Kyoto, members of the WCRL deliberated about the approach to providing humanitarian aid to postwar Iraq. In addition to offering material aid such as the provision of food and medical supplies, the Council also laid emphasis on the importance of efforts to calm and ease people's minds. Master Sheng Yen indicated that since many agencies are already providing humanitarian aid of food and medical supplies to the postwar Iraqis, he will focus more efforts on calming and easing the minds of the people through sharing with them the concepts and rationale of protecting the spiritual environment and empowering them to cope with the aftermath of the war. Dharma Drum Mountain hopes to create lasting, positive effects on Iraqi society just as it helped the victims of the catastrophic earthquake in Taiwan in 1998.

Master Sheng Yen Lectures at Columbia University

More than 1,100 attended Master Sheng Yen's lecture, entitled "The Eye of the Storm," at Columbia University on Saturday, June 14.

Shifu spoke to the crowd about achieving inner peace in a troubled world as if one were traveling in the eye of a storm. He addressed issues such as the S.A.R.S. epidemic, global conflict, terrorism and violence perpetrated in the name of religion. He reminded the audience of the challenges our ancestors survived in earlier periods of history. These obstacles, to which Shifu often refers, require us to drop our illusions and fear in order to act effectively when a calamity strikes. He suggested that everyone prepare to face and appropriately handle difficult circumstances by learning to cultivate our minds. Through a series of eminently practical, eloquent and funny examples, Master Sheng Yen unraveled the illusions we maintain and the fears to which we cling, thus revealing our misconceived perceptions of life and death.

Ironically, an actual storm came over New York City the day of the lecture. However, it was of short duration and, though those directly exposed to it were drenched, the convoys were not detained for long. As a matter of fact, the storm seemed to revitalize the volunteers.

Many thanks and blessings to the Bodhisattvas who volunteered countless hours to make this event happen.

Master Sheng Yen Visits Texas



June 20, 2003, Master Sheng Yen gave a lecture at the University of Texas/Austin on the topic of "Living Chan", which over 700 university students and scholars attended. Master Sheng Yen spoke about: 1) expounding the Buddha everyday even while sleeping; 2) maintaining the clarity and relaxation of the mind at all times and in all aspects of life; 3) Cultivating our awareness while neither suppressing thoughts nor seeking the truth; 4) Benefitting others and ourselves in our daily lives by relaxing and unifying our body and mind as well as letting go of our illusions and vexations.

On June 21st, Master Sheng Yen made his third visit to Dallas upon the invitation of the Dallas Chapter. His last visit there was twelve years ago. Master Sheng Yen lectured at the Eisemann Center where John Murphy, Mayor Pro Tem of Dallas, gave a welcoming address. The topic of the lecture was "Chan: Suffering vs. Happiness." Master Sheng Yen lectured that the apparent subtlety of suffering, joy, ignorance and enlightenment lies in a thought. If the mind is unenlightened, suffering will arise. If the mind is enlightened, joy will arise. He also noted that there are several types of suffering and joy. There is suffering arising from pain and joy. The pains associated with the material world are suffering arising from pain. The joys of the material world are suffering arising from joy. Additionally, there is joy arising from the five desires, joy arising from samadhi and joy arising

from liberation. The joy arising from the five desires and from samadhi is actually suffering arising from joy. Only through the awakening of the wisdom of impermanence and no-self can we find true joy arising from liberation.

A one-day Chan meditation retreat was held the following day on the 22nd. Guo Yuan Fa Shi, along with the assistance from other monastics and disciples, taught the class of more than 250 people from the city.

Update on the Restitution of Akshobhya Buddha

Chan Master Sheng Yen's effort at the restitution of the Akshobhya Buddha statue of the Four Gates Pagoda (Sui Dynasty, 580-618 AD) was acknowledged with gratitude by Mr. Mounir Bouchenaki, the Assistant Director-General for Culture of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) this year.

In May 2003, Master Sheng Yen received a letter of thanks from Mr. Bouchenaki. In his letter, he said, "it is heartening to see the success of the voluntary restitution of cultural property." He hopes that "this may serve as a valuable example to the inter-national community." This historic endeavor not only served to draw the civic ties of both China and Taiwan closer and encouraged academic exchange between the Straits on their common cultural heritage, but it also marked the recognition of Master Sheng Yen's diligent efforts in promoting engaged Buddhism in the international arena.

In 2002, when Chan Master Sheng Yen received the donation of the Akshobhya Buddha head purchased by loyal followers in Taiwan, he embarked on a journey to bring the Buddha head back to its original site. He initiated various investigations by experts in the field of Buddhist antiquities to determine its origins and it was finally concluded that the donated Buddha head was from the Akshobhya Buddha situated at the East Wall of the Four Gates Pagoda at the capital of Shandong Province, Jinan.

Master Sheng Yen's aspirations were to demonstrate support for UNESCO's noble efforts to protect the world's cultural heritage and to draw the world's attention and participation to the importance of preserving cultural history so that our descendants may also enjoy its historical magnitude. It is the Master's hope that "...this project can raise people's awareness to the significance of the preservation of our cultural heritage so that many more antiquities such as this one may be passed on for thousands of years to come."

Guo Yuan Fa Shi Visits Interfaith Center

Guo Yuan Fa Shi, along with other Buddhist leaders, was invited to be a panelist in an intensive summer course for independent school teachers and educators organized by the Interfaith Center of New York on June 24, 2003. Professor Y. Chen Fang of Rutgers University began with an introduction to Buddhism followed by each panelist giving a brief speech introducing themselves, their organization, and the role their religion and organization plays within the community. Guo Yuan Fa Shi introduced Dharma Drum Mountain's vision of "Uplifting the human character and building a Pure Land on Earth." He also shared with them his experiences on his path toward renunciation, Chan Meditation Center's activities, and Shifu's modern teachings of the ancient wisdom of the Buddhadharma. After all the panelists made their speeches, the session was followed by a successful question and answer period.

... and Blessed City College of Technology Commencement

Lenore Gall, City Tech's dean of students and academic services, invited Guo Yuan Fa Shi to conduct a Buddhist ceremony during the Commencement Exercise of the New York City College of Technology on June 2, 2003. Commencement was held at a theater within Madison Square Garden with approximately 3,500 people in attendance.

As the academic procession made its way to the stage, many people in the audience were quite surprised to see a Buddhist monk in the procession. Upon seeing the packed theater, Guo Yuan Fa Shi realized the magnitude of the event and started to ponder what to say as he heard each speaker covering the topics he wished to discuss. To Guo Yuan Fa Shi's surprise, everyone in the theater was asked to stand up when it was time to conduct the benediction. He bowed to his audience and began his benediction by congratulating the 900 graduates on their accomplishments. However, he reminded them that although they have graduated this should be seen as a new beginning. They have finished their academic studies and now they are going to start on a new path. He hoped that they would be able to do something to benefit themselves as well as others.

Guo Yuan Fa Shi concluded his benediction with chanting of the Four Great Vows:

I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings;
I vow to cut off endless vexations;
I vow to master approaches to the Dharma;
I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.

At the end of his talk, the crowd enthusiastically applauded and appreciated his words of advice. The event was a great success and many commented on the soothing qualities of the chanting.

This was a groundbreaking occasion as it was the first time City Tech broke with tradition and asked a Buddhist monk to conduct the benediction ceremony.

DDMBA Leadership Seminar

On June 7 & 8, 2003 a mid-year leadership seminar was held at CMC for DDMBA officers and select members from chapters and liaison offices throughout the US and Canada.

On the first day, participants listened to a tape recorded by Shifu who instructed participants to be democratic in reaching their consensus for

their local activities. He also urged us to be clear on what DDMBA stands for such as uplifting ones character and building a pure land in this world. As leaders and members, we all have the responsibility in sharing with others the benefits of Buddha Dharma and experience of Chan practices. He emphatically pointed out that we should not have the false notion that only he and the Sangha are ordained to have this holy mission.

The seminar continued with Guo Yuan Fa Shi and Paul Lin, DDMBA National President, suggesting ideas and areas in need of focus. It was suggested that youth membership, both English and Chinese-speaking, should become a focus for DDMBA activities. Also, focused attention should be given to the need and care for new immigrants and foreign students from China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Guo Chen Shi clarified some bookkeeping details regarding donating money for DDMBA activities and Wei Tan, the organizations' web designer, explained the current status of our website. Shifu's book excerpts and Chan magazine reruns attracted most of the 10,000 hits per month. Mr. Tan urged more volunteers to contribute their time and effort into the design and content of our website.

Members were organized in small group discussions for the rest of the seminar. Four major topics were discussed: 1) How to grow and break through the bottlenecks of activities; 2) How to care for and communicate with our members; 3) How to set up and manage the direction of fundraising activities; 4) How to organize, motivate and galvanize members. The break-out sessions generated fresh ideas for future plans and projects.

Overall, the seminar was a huge success.

Spring Silent Illumination Retreat

Retreatants congregated at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center to train under Chan Master Sheng Yen on the method of silent illumination from May 22 - June 1, 2003. During Master Sheng Yen's lectures, he

gave analogies of the monkey and the parrot as examples of the conditions of our practice and attachments.

The Monkey

During a late autumn night, a monkey hanging by a branch that extended toward a pond noticed a bright reflection of the moon on the calm surface of the water. It reached into the pond to play with the moon, but not realizing that it was only a mere reflection, the monkey leapt into the pool and drowned. Our attachments are likened to that of the monkey playing with the reflection of the moon. We should cultivate our awareness of phenomena as an illusion whenever we encounter them during our practice. Cultivating our awareness in this manner will eventually lead to non-grasping and non-attachment. Thus, if phenomena are truly recognized as illusions, the practitioner will know the true nature at every moment because he is encountering without encountering. The practitioner will then not act like the monkey reaching out to an illusion while thinking that it is reaching out to reality.

The Parrot

Our struggles during the course of our practice are likened to that of a parrot fighting with its own reflection. There was once an owner of a parrot who could not find another parrot for his pet. Fearing that his parrot would be too lonely, he came up with the solution of placing a mirror on the parrot's perch. Thus, its own reflection would deceive it into thinking that it had a new companion. However, because this was a male parrot, it became very agitated, aggressive and territorial upon seeing another male parrot. It fought with the parrot in the mirror viciously and constantly. After three days, the parrot was covered with scabs and wounds that it had inflicted upon itself. In our practice and our daily lives, our struggles with our scattered thoughts and emotions are likened to that of the parrot fighting with its own reflection. We can have less conflict and, as a result, fewer vexations if we can stop to realize that these occurrences are only reflections of us. We can illuminate our minds to see the true nature by allowing the ebb and flow of thoughts and emotions to occur.

Huatou Retreat Summer 2003

From June 26—July 6, 2003, 67 retreatants from around the world joined Master Sheng Yen in this summer's ten-day retreat to practice the method of Huatou. In this retreat, Master Sheng Yen meticulously taught the method from introductory to advanced levels. He elaborated on the relationship between "seeing the nature" and enlightenment. Master Sheng Yen said that when one is able to use the Huatou method to see the nature of emptiness it is not necessarily equivalent to enlightenment. It is enlightenment only when one has the correct view of "no characteristics". Otherwise, one can actually become more arrogant if one misunderstands the experience.

There were two power failures during the retreat that affected air-conditioning and plumbing. We applaud the good spirits of the retreatants as they kept to their methods de-spite the discomfort!

New Dharma Lecturers Certified

During the general membership meeting of CMC on 6/15, Shifu openly bestowed upon five CMC members the certificate of completion of the Dharma Lecturer Beginners Class. The honor is given to those who have completed the first part of the Dharma Lecturers' training, under Shifu's direction, and are considered qualified to lecture on Dharma subjects. Since 1978, Shifu has been engaged personally in teaching the views and methods of Chan Buddhism. Over the decades, the overwhelming response to Buddhism in this country has rendered Shifu and his Sangha disciples incapable of filling all the requests for lectures that they receive. Shifu realized the urgent need for more Dharma lecturers and Chan instructors at the beginners' level. In 1999, he started the beginners' class for teaching Dharma lecturers, meditation teachers and retreat monitors. Dozens of CMC members joined the class and a few of them have had the honor of receiving the certificate of completion for either teaching the Chan practices or giving Dharma lectures or both. The latest honors were given to the following CMC members: Amy Yoo, David Ngo, Wendy Cheng, Jeffrey Kung and Lily Kung.

Lawrence Waldron and Erneslyn Velasco Wed at Chan Center

Lawrence Waldron and Erneslyn (Nes) Velasco held their wedding ceremony at the Chan Meditation Center on Saturday, June 14, 2003.

Master Sheng Yen officiated the ceremony and briefly spoke on the virtues of respect and forgiveness in marriage. The couple paid respect to their parents in a beautiful ceremony which included prostrations to their mothers, Barbara Budd-Mulzac and Erlinda Hoefler. Nes' brother, Daniel Velasco, served as the witness and read words of encouragement to the couple as did David Slaymaker, who read verses on harmonious living from the Majjhima Nikaya. The couple then read their matrimonial vows together and were blessed by Shifu. As the ceremony drew to an end, the couple made an offering and presented garlands to Shifu and Guo Yuan Fa Shi.

Lawrence, whose paintings are on display at the Chan Center Buddha hall, is an art teacher. Nes is currently studying to become a nurse. They have been participating in the Dharma life of the Chan Center together for several years.

May Lawrence and Nes live together as each other's best friend and grow together on the road ahead.

Buddhism is Good for You

Researchers are showing that the practice of meditation is not only good for emotional well-being, but for physical health as well, according to an article by Stephen S. Hall in The New York Times Magazine September 14.

Over the past ten years, since the Dalai Lama offered to cooperate with the research, a number of Buddhist monks have been meditating regularly with a net of 256 electrodes on their heads in psychologist Richard Davidson's lab at the University of Wisconsin, and the results of the experiments, though as yet unpublished, are beginning to intersect with a number of other studies that suggest meditation may

have long-term physiological effects more profound than the "relaxation response" popularized by Prof. Herbert Benson in the seventies.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at Massachusetts Medical School, has shown that people with psoriasis heal four times faster if they meditate, and that meditators show an increased ability to produce antibodies in response to receiving a flu vaccine.

Scientists have been slow to accept research into meditation as legitimate, and in fact the Wisconsin study took five years to publish in part because a number of scientific journals refused to even send it out for peer review. But many of the researchers who both practice and study meditation are convinced of its benefits, both from the results coming in and from their personal experience.
