

**Prayer Address for the Hundredth Day
Anniversary of the Deceased Victims in
the World Trade Center Tragedy**



To the deceased victims: Today is the hundredth day since the tragedy. Virtuous people all over the world are

commemorating you; the history of humankind is eternally grateful to you. From a Buddhist perspective, you are the embodiment of bodhisattvas who have suffered the human race's eternal misery. You have revealed a warning for the human race's future, to bring racial and religious acrimony to an end.

Among you, there may be thousands whose families could not give you proper burial rites, but in your lifetimes you have already accomplished a great mission. We hope you will let go of all attachment and acknowledge the reality of impermanence, and because of your faith and virtuous merits, will rapidly rise to the heavens and be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha.

--Venerable Master Sheng Yen,
of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association,
representing the Chinese Buddhist Assembly in prayer,
December 19, 2001

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A Word from the Editor

Ground Zero

It's the morning of December 19th -- I'll be at Kennedy at 5am tomorrow, heading for Christmas with the in-laws in Oregon, but this morning I'm to meet Master Sheng Yen, Guoyuan Fa Shi and members of the Chan Meditation Center at Ground Zero for a prayer ritual commemorating the 100th day anniversary of the tragedy of September 11th.

I used to walk to the World Trade Center in 40 minutes -- take Essex past the tefillin shops into Chinatown, down East Broadway and under the Manhattan Bridge to Park Row, cut through the maze of government buildings to City Hall and you're there -- but this morning I'm leaving more than an hour earlier. I'm not sure what route I'll be able to take, what streets are open, where the checkpoints are. It's a beautiful morning -- cold, maybe the coldest so far of this strangely mild autumn, but clear and bright -- and I'm looking forward to the walk.

The increased police presence is already evident as I cross Delancey; I ask an officer how I can best get to West and Liberty. He suggests staying on the East Side, going all the way down to Water and then coming back up. Can I take Park Row and get down Broadway? He thinks so.

I should have known better. Police Plaza, the federal buildings, the court houses are all behind a web of military checkpoints -- there'll be no cutting through this part of town. This officer sends me back up to Worth and suggests I go at it the other way, all the way over to West Street and then down.

The thing is, this part of the island's a triangle -- the further north I am, the further west I'll have to go, only to have to come back to the southeast. (I'm not actually in a hurry, but I seem to have integrated this preference for the shortest route into my walking habits.) So I look for opportunities to cut downtown, and work my way to Chambers Street, into what should be the shadow of the towers...

I realize only now that I've been disturbed by their absence since hitting East Broadway. I'm used to seeing them only from certain vantage points; where I live, they were never part of the daily scene. I'd have to be all the way over in Soho or, like this morning, be heading down the diagonal of East Broadway to have a view dominated by the sun glinting off the twin towers. So I've lived most of the last three months without really missing them, but now, on Chambers Street for the first time since 9/11, their absence is large, as large as they were, yet somehow vague. I know they should be there, but I can't look up and picture them exactly where they were -- I didn't know them that well, even after 25 years of living downtown. I feel guilt, regret, like when the face of a dead friend has become, in memory, indistinct.

West Street is closed -- actually it seems to be gone -- and I work my way around what was the World Financial Center to a checkpoint at what was West and Liberty, and is now the southwest corner of Ground Zero.

I join the small knot of Chan Center members waiting with Todd Jones, representing the mayor's office, along with representatives of several Chinatown sanghas -- Shifu and his party are not here yet. It's cold -- we're in what was a kind of urban Grand Canyon, but is now an open plain, with no protection against the wind -- and strangely there's nothing to see. I say strangely because we're standing in a spot where, had we been here a hundred days ago, I doubt we could have survived, yet there's nothing to see, no real evidence, aside from the soldiers, that this is any different from the other hundred demolition sites that always plague the cityscape. Crude plywood barriers, barbed wire, rubble, dust, work boots and hardhats, and the constant rumble of big engines, punctuated by the beep, beep, beep of a vehicle in reverse.

Shifu arrives. There's not much fuss -- he greets the monks from other temples, and we gather up our bouquets of flowers and photo i.d.'s and are led through security onto a narrow, covered pathway that opens onto a 30' X 30' plywood platform, a sort of shrine/observation point that gives me my first real view of Ground Zero.

There's nothing there. Well... almost nothing. There's one surreal, twisted shell of a metal facade -- 1 World Trade, I think -- still standing in the northwest corner of the site. (I'll watch that come down the next day, live on CNN, on my father-in-law's satellite TV.) And there are the scarred facades and broken windows of the surrounding, surviving buildings. But what makes the greatest impression on me is the nothing -- the great, grey hole in the ground. It seems incredible that they ever built it at all... incredible that they knocked it down... incredible that in three short months they seem to have cleaned it up.

Of course they haven't. Even though I can't see much going on, the rumble I heard from outside has now become a roar -- equipment straining, metal tearing, tons of rubble shifting. They'll be at this for many months more.

Shifu is lining us up -- mostly with gestures, I can't hear him -- with the site on our left, facing a temporary wall that has been made a shrine. It reads, "In Memory of the International Victims of the World Trade Center Attack, September 11th, 2001," followed by the names and flags of 87 countries, and the addition, in every available bit of space, of handwritten memorials to individuals -- "We will never forget you," in magic marker, in several languages that I know, and probably in many more that I do not.

Sangha members are in front, lay practitioners in back. We've been given programs, with liturgy -- the Presiding Master, Shifu, makes three bows, and offers flowers; the Elderly Master, Xi Chen Fa Shi of the Wonderful Enlightenment Temple, does the same; we chant the Heart Sutra, in English, then in Mandarin; Shifu offers a prayer, which is inaudible (see Page 1), followed by Wei Tan's translation into English, barely audible; there's an address by the Elderly Master, also inaudible; we chant the transfer of merit; we make three concluding bows.

Throughout the ceremony -- all the while that we've been here -- there's been a steady traffic of others, in groups of several to a dozen, coming onto this makeshift viewing stand to have a look. Many are women, several generations together, wearing police or fire department gear -- I imagine that they're the families of either victims or rescue workers. Other groups are clearly from other countries -- a group of Japanese, another that appears to be African. And perhaps some visiting experts -- half a dozen guys in bright yellow hardhats and vests that read, "Oklahoma City Disaster Relief." As it turns out, I will see a headline in tomorrow's Times announcing the decision, in response to popular demand, to build more such overlooks from which visitors can see, and photograph, the site.

The ceremony over, we don't hang out -- we say our goodbyes and thank yous and Merry Christmases and go our own ways. I go home the way I should have come -- down West Street until I can turn left, east until I can turn left again, around the site to Trinity Church and past half dozen makeshift memorials and hundreds, maybe thousands of visitors with cameras.

I have very mixed feelings about this scene -- this is the oldest part of town, the original New York, with streets nowhere near adequate to today's traffic, now gravely injured, and all that being exacerbated by this influx of tourists who want what? Closure? To witness history? To be a part of something? Is it paying respect or is it rubbernecking?

Different for everyone, I suppose. During the month after, when it seemed everyone was trying to get as far downtown as they could, I had made the conscious decision to stay away, and now that I've been there, now that I've seen it, I don't feel much different. I don't really feel any closure -- the buildings are gone, the lives are lost, and the future is open-ended, unknowable, as ever. I don't feel that I've witnessed history, certainly no more than I did the morning of September 11th, when I saw the second plane hit the south tower. And I don't feel any more a part of anything, certainly not of anything that I wouldn't rather be separate from.

But that's not everyone's view. 48 hours later I found myself in the emergency room of St. Anthony Hospital in Pendleton, Oregon -- nothing serious, but I needed a CAT scan -- having a

conversation with a friendly x-ray tech. "In town for the holidays?" Yep, visiting the in-laws. "Where ya from?" New York City. "Really!... Were you there?" Uh, yeah. "You close?" Well, yeah, coupla miles. "Wow!... Really!... Wow!... Hey, everybody, this guy's from New York. This guy was a coupla miles from Ground Zero!"

The Editor

What Is It?

*In this issue we're inaugurating a new feature. It's called **What Is It?** and it's our invitation for you to participate in the ongoing dialogue here at the Chan Center. Do you have any questions about the Dharma? About something you read in the last issue? About experiences you've had in practice, or in daily life? Send them to us, and, calling on the Centers staff of Dharma lecturers, meditation teachers, scholars, and the resident Sangha, we'll publish them along with the best answer we can come up with. Send your questions to Chan Magazine, 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, NY 11373, or better yet, email them to chanmagazine@yahoo.com.*

Question: I know that liberation means freedom from suffering in time and space, but what about being in the right place at the right time? The Buddha determined, before he sat for forty days, not to get up until he was enlightened. Did he simply understand that he was at the right place at the right time, or was it something else? I mean, is timing everything? -- S.P.

Answer: To answer this question I have to talk about cause and consequence and causes and conditions, that is to say, it's about karma and conditioned arising.

It is true that every event, including the Buddha's liberation, is the consequence of previous causes; it is also true that karmic causes only ripen into consequences if and when conditions are right. But that doesn't mean that events are pre-determined. In the continuing stream of karma, every event also functions as a cause for future events, and in the vast interdependent web of conditioned arising, every change in conditions influences which karmic seeds will ripen and which will not.

In other words, what we choose to do has the potential to change everything. We may each have our limitations, and our tendencies, due to causes laid down in the past and conditions we encounter, but we also each have the power to choose, in every passing moment -- to do good or evil, to help others or think of ourselves, to practice or not. These choices are what make all the difference, determining which seeds will ripen in each new present, and what new seeds will be planted for the future.

The Buddha did not achieve enlightenment because he found just the right moment to practice -- he achieved it because he chose, in moment after moment, to follow the path of liberation.

Question: If there's reincarnation but no soul, what is reborn? -- M. M.

Answer: Good question. As a matter of fact, this was one of the questions that led to an important revision of the Buddhist analysis of consciousness during the 4th and 5th centuries. Early Buddhism spoke of six consciousnesses, those of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. But the sixth consciousness, that of mind, was very complex. It included awareness, thought, emotion, intention, distinction, attachment, karmic propensity -- so many functions that analyzing them was getting very messy.

In response to this problem the Yogacara school proposed separating out some of the functions of the sixth consciousness into a seventh and an eighth. The new, slimmed-down sixth consciousness is understood as similar to the first five sensory consciousnesses -- it arises when the sense organ called mind encounters the sense objects called thoughts. The seventh consciousness is the tendency to attach to the concept of self -- it is primarily responsible for the arising of subjectivity. The eighth consciousness is called the alaya, or storehouse consciousness -- when the first six consciousnesses arise, the seventh identifies their activity as that of a self, and plants an imprint of the action in the eighth consciousness, which stores it, like a seed, until conditions ripen it.

In this scheme of things, then, it is only the eighth consciousness that reincarnates, carrying with it all the stored karmic potential for future action. Notice how this analysis neatly separates the karmic storehouse from those aspects of consciousness of which we are normally aware, and that we normally associate with the self, and thus explains how our karma reincarnates, but our thoughts, feelings, memories, personalities, etc. do not.

The Six Paramitas: Precepts and Patience

Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This is the second in a series of talks by master Sheng Yen on the six paramitas, given at the Chan Meditation Center, New York. The remaining talks will be printed in subsequent issues of Chan Magazine. This talk was translated orally by Ven. Guo-gu Shi, transcribed from tape by Tan Yee Wong, and edited by Ernest Heau, with assistance from Tan Yee Wong.

The Second Paramita: Precepts

The second paramita is precepts, or sila. It refers to conduct that is in accordance with Buddhist morality. The Buddhist precepts are taken according to one's stage of practice. At the most basic level there are the three cumulative pure precepts: to refrain from harmful deeds, to accumulate virtue through the practice of beneficial actions, and to work for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Other types of individual liberation precepts are taken to complement or uphold the three cumulative pure precepts. These vary based on whether one is a lay person, a novice, or ordained. We can uphold the precepts of a shravaka, one who practices for the sake of personal liberation, or we can uphold the precepts of the bodhisattva, one who vows to help sentient beings to attain liberation. We can take the shravaka precepts for the present lifetime, or we can take the bodhisattva precepts continuously, lifetime after lifetime. The virtuous seed that is generated by the bodhisattva precepts and vows is imbedded in one's subtle mind-stream, and will continue to mature until the ultimate attainment of buddhahood.

The Buddhist Precepts

The five basic Buddhist precepts, which complement the three cumulative pure precepts, can be taken partially, that is to say, it is not necessary to take all five. They are: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no sexual misconduct, and no taking of intoxicants.

Why do the shravaka precepts last only a lifetime? The seed generated by taking and maintaining the Buddhist precepts can be thought of as the precept essence. This essence is in a subtle form, different from ordinary matter. It is a hidden, non-manifested form-dharma that arises from material phenomena such as body and speech. Therefore, when our physical life ceases, that precept essence also ceases.

On the other hand, the essence generated by the bodhisattva vows is established on the subtle level of one's mind-stream, or mental continuum. It is actually a mind-dharma, not a form-dharma, or phenomenon of form. Since the mind-stream is without beginning or end, the

precept essence persists until one reaches full buddhahood. This is one difference between the precept essence of the vows of a shravaka and the vows of a bodhisattva.

While the bhikshu/bhikshuni precepts are taken once per lifetime, the bodhisattva precepts can be taken cumulatively over and over again. This is how bodhisattvas integrate the precepts into their conduct and being over many lifetimes.

Another difference is that the shravaka vows place great emphasis on renunciation, on leaving behind one's own suffering, cutting off desire, and transcending the ocean of suffering -- the three realms of samsara. Although the bodhisattva precepts also involve renunciation, they go beyond renunciation and take the altruistic bodhi-mind as the very foundation of the path.

Monastics, in taking their vows, renounce the life of a householder, and also renounce careers, wealth, social status, and other things associated with lay life. But lay people who have access to these assets should also contemplate that these things are intrinsically empty. They should understand that their worldly goods are the result of many conditions coming together, and as such, lack permanence and inherent reality. Nevertheless, one should still use one's assets wisely and beneficially. Possessing these things, one should use them to benefit others, and should also contemplate their emptiness. One should use one's body, speech, mind, and resources to help others without having notions of "This is mine," or "I am helping others." As one upholds the bodhisattva precepts, renunciation and bodhi-mind manifest inseparably.

The very spirit of the bodhisattva precepts is the vow to benefit others. Through genuinely benefiting others, we ultimately benefit ourselves. Instead of making our own concerns paramount, we concern ourselves first with the welfare of our immediate family or sangha members, and then extend that spirit to relatives, friends, associates, and acquaintances. Then, we can extend this point of view to strangers and the larger environment. This truly benefits us many times over. Ordinarily, people believe that if they do not take care of themselves first, "Heaven will crush you and the earth under your feet will break." But the bodhisattva's way of taking care of self is using expedient means to benefit others. The precepts provide us with the moral foundation for accomplishing this.

The Third Paramita: Patience

The third paramita is ksanti, the perfection of patience. The Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra (Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom) describes the practice of patience as "pacified patience". This means that when there is patience, the mind will be pacified. Not only will the mind be stable, but the body will also enjoy a sense of well-being. Patience in one's livelihood will extend to other aspects of one's life, and vice-versa. Without patience we could not endure the conflicts and obstacles we encounter in life. Without a pacified mind and body we can become very

agitated and consumed with internal turmoil. A Chinese proverb says, "When tigers fight, death or great injury will result." With humans the conflict is often between the external world and the mind within.

Once I watched an Olympic event between swimmers from Japan, the USA, and the Soviet Union on TV. A Japanese swimmer came in first. When he emerged from the pool a reporter asked him, "Did you know that the Soviet swimmer was only a few inches behind you?" The swimmer replied, "I was absorbed in exerting my whole being and skills in swimming. If I had worried about who was next to me, I would have lost." The reporter said, "You seem very proud and self-confident." The swimmer replied, "For months I studied these swimmers from videos. By incorporating their skills into my training, I gained confidence in my own abilities. I would not say that I am proud. I am just learning, not competing."

This story relates to the perfection of patience because the Japanese swimmer's mind was at peace through his patient learning from his opponents, and his consequent confidence. To learn from one's opponents, to be confident without arrogance or pride, this is the bodhisattva spirit, worthy of emulation.

There are three ways to practice patience, the first two of which are bodhisattva practices: patience with those who wish to harm us, patience with the environment, and patience in enduring the dharmas.

Patience with Those Who Would Harm Us

If we do not respond in a harmful way when confronted by those who wish to harm us, we can avoid harm. If we do not habitually respond negatively it may seem that we are always surrendering, but in fact we are developing the courage and skill to protect ourselves as well as others. In the long run it will be better for everyone. By analogy if you refrain from chopping down a tree every time you need firewood, in the long run the forest is preserved for future use.

Patience with Regard to the Environment

Patience with regard to the environment means enduring pain and difficulty when faced with natural calamities, hurricanes, great storms, extreme cold or heat, and so on. Furthermore, Buddhists view their physical bodies as consisting of the same four elements that make up the environment; earth, fire, water --and wind. When the body is not in harmony, or when we are ill, it falls into the same category; patience with regard to the environment includes one's own body as well.

Patient Endurance of Dharmas

To patiently endure all dharmas is to see all phenomena, including our own experiences of pleasure and pain, as having the nature of emptiness. It is to realize that all dharmas lack independent self. This kind of patience encompasses all favorable and unfavorable conditions, and includes the two previous patience practices.

Contemplating Emptiness

When we practice the three kinds of patience we are actually contemplating emptiness. In principle the three practices progress from enduring those who wish us harm, to enduring difficulties in the environment, to enduring the emptiness of dharmas. In a sense, the third kind of patience is the easiest, since you can do it at any time, wherever you are, by contemplating the emptiness of dharmas. As a result one also perfects the previous two patience practices. When we contemplate the impermanence of all our experiences -- whether painful, pleasurable, or neutral -- we gain an insight into selflessness. We can understand the meaning of emptiness through this insight of selflessness, and directly engage the Dharma.

You may question these ideas and say that everyone is selfish, and that if you do not fight back you will be preyed upon and taken advantage of. If you are the only one who is practicing patience in a group of one hundred, you may feel overwhelmed and even fear losing your life or livelihood. In the midst of a situation like this, how can you practice patience?

In ancient China, General Sunzi studied the art of conducting war. He taught that the best strategy was to persuade the enemy to surrender without fighting. The same teaching is used in Chinese martial arts, where the skilled fighter does not harm or kill, using the least amount of effort to best the opponent. A martial arts axiom says; "Use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds" -- this means using the opponent's own force to defeat him. This same principle can be used in the perfection of patience, the critical pivot being the application of wisdom to turn around difficult situations.

To resolve confrontations, extend compassion to those who would harm you. By using wisdom during these difficult times, you may transform at least half of them into favorable conditions. This is not to say that if you are the only one who is practicing patience in a group of people, you should let them take advantage of you. Rather, you should respond with wisdom and relate to them with compassion. Not all of them may become very good people, but if half of them treat you fairly, this is already very favorable.

The sutras say that to practice patience is to manifest wisdom and compassion. Therefore, one should not mistake surrender for patience.

Worldly and World-Transcending Patience

Patience can be worldly or it can be world-transcending. Worldly patience is manifested in coping with the environment, enduring extreme heat, cold, hunger, thirst, pain, joy, criticism, and physical and mental fatigue. World-transcending patience goes beyond the experiences of pleasure, pain, fatigue, etc. It is forbearance in integrating the Dharma into one's life. It is also accepting the difficulties that come with exertion in practice, and in using one's time wisely and fully. By its nature, perfecting patience is a long process.

I once encouraged an overweight person to engage in more meditation and exercise. Two weeks later he returned saying he had followed my advice, but had not lost much weight. Besides, he was getting tired of the routine. I countered that I had been a monk for several decades without feeling that I had made any progress. Nevertheless, I had to be patient and continue to fulfill my vows as a monk. I told him that he should also be patient and continue to practice.

On the other hand, yesterday Robert remarked that lately, practicing the Dharma had been of no help to him, yet I see him showing up again today. Even though he feels stagnant for the moment, he continues to come. This is world-transcending patience.

The ability to endure, to have forbearance, is integral to living; without it we cannot accomplish anything. To practice patience is to integrate it into our family lives, our careers, our studies, and so on. These all require degrees of patience, without which it would be very difficult to maintain a basic sense of humanity, and of harmony with others.

In one of the sutras Shakyamuni Buddha said that patience was the greatest wealth, and without it, he would not have attained buddhahood. We are all probably aware that there has never been a war among Buddhists, or an extended war against Buddhists. This is probably due to the sense of tolerance and patience, and the practice of compassion, which are at core of Buddhism.

In a Chinese martial arts novel there was an expert swordsman who was so arrogant about his ability that he used his skills to bully others to get what he wanted. At the same time there was also a monk who was well-trained in using his cloth belt to defend himself. One day the overbearing swordsman and the monk crossed paths. The monk knew that this swordsman had evil intentions and decided to block his path. The swordsman demanded that the monk get out of his way or feel the fury of his sword. When the monk stood his ground, the swordsman attacked. The monk simply flicked his belt around the swordsman and his weapon, and tied them both up. When confronted with forbearance and patience, even an expert warrior can be defeated.

As Rivers Flow...

Poem by Sheila Sussman

On discovering the Basha Kill Wetlands, on Haven Road, off 209, just south of Wurtsboro, N.Y.

**Here in an expansive wasteland
cradled by hills with color ablaze
the spacious blue Fall sky above
light plays
in peace**

**the blustering west wind
is tossing clouds up over the ridge
shaking trees and grasses to their roots
and furrowing the water where it can**

**On the bridge over the channel
a black-and-brown furry caterpillar
has reached the northern edge of the road
the watery expanse shimmers out
among reeds and grasses
multitudes of ripples under gusts of wind
cover the open water in the channel**

**there is less reflection on the southern side
how beautiful - this water in the channel
perfectly clear -
four feet down maybe
lies the bottom
(yes, that is a beer bottle)**

**waterplants
tall to just below the surface
are bending unvaryingly that way -
so the current is flowing that way -
through the multitudes of ripples
frenzied by the wind**

**a piece of twig - so small -
floats on the ripples**

**on the water's wrinkly skin
it is moving
away
not so slowly
not with the ripple
or with the wind
but that way -
how amazing**

Sheila Sussman is a newcomer to Buddhism and to the Chan Center. English by birth, she was raised in colonial British Africa and Western Europe, and has lived for the past 28 years in Manhattan.

"...No Other Way."

Retreat Report by M.K.

This retreat extended over the first four weeks of the seven-week retreat offered by Chan Master Sheng Yen at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, Pine Bush, New York. The report covers an experience I had in the first week and ongoing experiences I had in the second, third and fourth weeks.

On the third day of the retreat, during fast walking meditation, when passing the end of the Chan Hall near the Buddha, I suddenly noticed Shifu sitting in front of the Buddha. Then I was "gone." When I "came back" I was at the other side of the Chan Hall. First there was silence, then one thought surfaced: "Where am I?" The second thought was the answer: "In the Chan Hall." The third thought: "Shifu has gone." Then I noticed Shifu again. How I got from one end of the Chan Hall to the other, and how long it took, I do not know. For the next hours mind and body felt settled and calm. Seeking an answer to this altered state of mind of "no time" I requested an interview with Shifu. Guoyuan Fa Shi helped with the translation. Shifu asked about feelings and sensations before, during and after the episode. Then he said: "This was a one-mind state, albeit short, it is a good experience." I asked where the mind had been. He answered: "The mind was there, but for a short period free of vexations." Then he told an experience of his own during his solitary retreat, where he had moved books from downstairs to upstairs in such a state. When he "came back" all the books were in their correct place, everything was in order. This experience of his had lasted hours.

Otherwise the first week was unremarkable. I had attended about a dozen one week retreats with Shifu and concluded that one week was not long enough to get me out of misery.

On the last telephone call with my wife before the retreat she gave me one "secret" tip: "Do exactly what Shifu says." I had tried to do that before, but now I really tried: I took a ready stance with my sword and whenever a wandering thought dared to surface it fled at once. Again and again I went through the sequence of checking the posture and relaxing eyes, face, neck-shoulders-arms, back and belly. Then my breath would drop to the lower dantian, "expanding" with each in-breath and "contracting" with each out-breath. Now usually wandering thoughts would sneak in and generate a trail of lingering thoughts and stories. I found that exactly when I had "arrived at the dantian" I could remain alert "by will" and could thus maintain silence for some time. All this was not new to me, but starting in the second week I could for the first time "see" what I was doing. "Seeing" means here an awareness in myself, which as such has no identity, a subjective observer which simply is, and certainly is not a self. Usually at least once a day I would go from this "superficial silence" to a "deeper silence." The associated feeling I can only describe by the analogy of the sensation one may

get when a plane slowly descends from a higher to a lower altitude. At the deepest "silence" the body was no more except a tinnitus (ringing ear) "floating" in the realm where my left ear had been and a faint tickling sensation where my right leg, with its sometimes unbearable nerve pain, had been. During the process of "losing the body" I found that, as soon as the shell of the body had gone, my control of the posture would reduce: I would lean to the left and drop my chin. At this level of "silence" the meditation was nearly effortless and time would go fast. If I failed to enter this descent into silence I had to put up with a bad nerve pain in my right leg. As the days passed I could go "deeper, stay longer and see clearer" and I could make observations:

- (i)* There were coarse wandering thoughts, but they were rare. At the point where they "made themselves aware" their content became clear and then they were gone. Because they had "strength" at the point where they became visible, I could "sense" a prior history: Although I have no clue as to where their individual roots are, I could see that they come "from all over the place" and not from a "contained self". Then there was a response of great regularity: After such a coarse thought had waned, the tickling sensation, where my right leg had been, increased to pain and slowly decreased to the tickling again. Next to these coarse thoughts were lesser thoughts, also rare, of which I could not "see" the content, they felt like a "string of empty sausages" and they triggered the same wave of waxing and waning nerve pain in my right leg. Then there were even lesser activities of the mind, whether thought or not I cannot tell.
- (ii)* Once in this state of "no body" the sensation of sneezing emerged in the realm of my left nose. The sensation started very faintly, grew stronger, peaked, waned and vanished. The body did not sneeze, did not move, it actually was in no position to do anything ("as it was no more present").
- (iii)* (iii) In the "deeper states of silence" sometimes one of two thoughts would manifest: "... if it would simply last and...", "...if it only would go deeper...".

During the third week I requested an interview with Guoyuan Fa Shi to make sure I was practicing "in the right direction." Upon hearing about the state of "near effortlessness" he answered: "just continue."

On Wednesday of the fourth week, the 31 May 2000, before noon, sitting in meditation, suddenly there was a shadow in front of me and a snap in my left ear: Shifu stood in front of me and motioned me to follow him. Then he did the same to Guoyuan Fa Shi. He took us to the interview room and said that he wanted to examine me. He questioned me on how I applied and understood the method of mozhao, how I experienced my body and my mind.

Then he questioned me on the concepts (theory). I answered that I understood the Three Dharma Seals as follows:

All mind activity in the form of thoughts that I could become aware of in meditation was manifesting at some level of strength, gaining strength and then vanishing. There are levels of mind activity, which may no more be thoughts, but which also come and go. All mind activity I could become aware of is impermanent, so is my body, our planet, our universe (this does not prove the nonexistence of permanence, but there simply is no evidence for it). "Between and behind" that activity, although there are levels and levels of increasing subtlety, there is not something, but nothing, certainly no self-contained self, be it a small self or the great self. Shifu usually spoke Chinese, sometimes asking Guoyuan Fa Shi, who translated, for clarifications. Now Guoyuan Fa Shi said: "Shifu says, according to his knowledge, you have seen the nature. Prostrate three times." Which I did. Then Shifu gave further explanations (the content of which I remember well, but not the exact wording):

Seeing the nature is not liberation, practice hard.

When you return to everyday life the strong forms of greed and hatred will have vanished, but the fine forms of these vexations will still be there.

Remain alert to these and be careful.

You may now have your own students, but their experiences you have to verify with me as long as I live. To teach the ways to the Bodhi mind is a big responsibility.

Asking my age (56 years), he said that his grandmaster Xu Yun was at a similar age when he received Dharma Transmission and had started passing on the Dharma in his seventies (living up to 120 years).

Since then a good week has passed. When Shifu confirmed my seeing the nature of mind I thought: "It never came to my mind that this could be it, but now, where he said so, it makes sense: That's the way it is, no other way." Later: "Is it possible that the whole thing is not it after all, but that I had fooled myself, Guoyuan Fa Shi, and Shifu?" This passed because I could not detect any doubt in my confidence in Shifu's ability to find fraud in a mind. Now remains a strong faith that this is the way it is, a conviction that I have to verify all that I have seen at ever deeper levels, and a sense of wonder and gratitude to all teachers who handed the Dharma down to the present.

Zen and Compassion

Lecture by Master Sheng Yen

The following was the inaugural lecture given by Master Sheng Yen to the Meditation Group, the Chan Meditation Center's Manhattan affiliate, on May 15, 2001. It was translated live by Rebecca Li, transcribed by Stacey Polacco, and edited by David Berman.

Good evening. This evening's topic is Zen and compassion. Zen is wisdom; why is it also compassion? A lot of people don't understand what Zen is. Many people think that Zen is sitting meditation. Actually, in the Chinese tradition, Zen does not necessarily require sitting meditation. As long as one's mind is free from emotional afflictions, free from vexations, free from contradictions and free from suffering, that is Zen, or in Chinese, Chan. So before talking about compassion I'd like you to have some idea of what it's like to have a mind free from vexations -- without any burden, without anything bothering you.

In the Sixth Patriarch Huineng's Platform Sutra, there's a line that says, "There is no good; there is no bad." This means that when one looks at what has happened in the past, and at what's going on right now, one does not say, "I like this," or, "I don't like that." "There's no good; there's no bad," doesn't mean that there is no good or bad, right or wrong in the world. It means that when one encounters the good, one does not give rise to the mind of craving; when one encounters the bad, one does not give rise to the mind of hatred. That state of mind, that neither clings to the good nor rejects the bad that's Chan.

For example -- take the flowers here. Some people look at them and say, "Oh! Yellow flowers! I like them!" Others may say, "I don't like yellow flowers, I like white flowers. How come they don't have white flowers?" When you look at phenomena, what is the reaction that arises in your mind? You can observe that you often have these emotional reactions, and when that's the case, that is not wisdom. We cannot say that it is vexation, but it is some kind of self-referential knowledge or judgement, and that is not wisdom.

Another example. Here, right now, I'm actually wearing a lot of clothes underneath my robe. When I left the Chan Meditation Center in Queens this afternoon, my disciple told me, "Shifu, it's very cold this evening. Wear more clothes." So I wore all these clothes here, and now I'm really hot, and I want to take them off. And what happens? If I'm sitting here thinking, "I'm really hot and I want to take off these clothes, but it's embarrassing," -- that's a problem. If I'm just sitting here thinking, "I'm hot. I need to take off these clothes," and I just do it, then that's not a problem. It's not discrimination or judgement, it's just a reality -- that's the way it is. No problem.

(Shifu removes his robe, removes some layers, and puts his robe back on. Giggles from the audience.)

So what I did just now, did it cause you a lot of suffering? For me, it certainly gave me some joy, because it was hot, and now I've taken these extra layers off. When I feel hot and I need to take off clothes, I take them off, and when it's cold and I need more clothes, I put them on -- that's Chan.

Sometimes I see gentlemen in suits and ties. They look very nice and proper, but sometimes they get very hot, and you see them sweating all over, sweat dripping off their heads, and they still feel, "No, I'm a gentleman -- I can't loosen my tie or take off my jacket. It wouldn't be polite." Just as it's not very proper for a monk to take off his clothes in front of an audience. Maybe I should have just sat here getting hotter and hotter. If I thought that way, it wouldn't be the action of a Chan Master. As a Chan Master, if I need to take off some clothes, I take off some clothes. If I need an extra layer of clothes, I put on some clothes. I just do what needs to be done, whatever the situation calls for.

Once there was a woman with her little boy, 5 or 6 years old, who came to me very excited, and wanted her little boy to come and pay respect to me. She kept saying, "Bow to Master Sheng Yen" Instead the little boy started crying, and started peeing in his pants. The woman became greatly embarrassed; her son totally embarrassed her in front of the Master. I told her, "Your son did not embarrass you. It's normal for kids to cry, and it's normal for kids to pee -- he's just doing what needs to be done. In fact, you embarrassed yourself, because you were the one thinking, 'My son is not supposed to cry in front of Master Sheng Yen; my boy is not supposed to pee in front of Master Sheng Yen!' and you became embarrassed -- what he did what was entirely natural for him."

Now I'd like to talk about compassion. In order to have compassion, one must have wisdom. If one has wisdom, then one will not give rise to emotional afflictions when one encounters difficult or problematic situations in life. There will not be a lot of movement in one's mind, or ups and downs in one's emotions, so one's point of view will not be full of judgements like, "This is really good," or, "This is really bad." When individuals without wisdom encounter difficult circumstances, they tend to create lots of conflict and struggle within themselves, and consequently they also see opposition between themselves and others. Here opposition doesn't necessarily mean bad relations, it means seeing others as opposed to yourself. Some people you like, you perceive them as good, you want to be close to them and even possess them; others you hate, you see them as bad, and you reject them. This is self-centered behavior; it is the behavior of those without wisdom, and why, without wisdom, one will not be able to treat others with compassion.

Very often when we think about compassion we think of two things: sympathy, or pity, which means feeling bad for others; and empathy, which means feeling what another person feels. Actually, compassion, in Buddhism, means unconditional love. Love means concern for the welfare of others (not romantic love), and unconditional means without regard for recognition, reward, or receiving anything in return. There are different levels of this compassion. The first is compassion for those close to us, our families and friends. At the second level, we have ceased to distinguish between family members and strangers, or friends and enemies, and we manifest compassion for all people. But we are still distinguishing between the self (the one who is compassionate), the act of compassion itself, and the one who is the object of that compassion. At the highest level of Chan, compassion is just giving that occurs naturally, with no sense of self, or of other, or of being compassionate. You understand so far?

Now I'd like to talk about the method of practice. What kind of method do we use to attain this level of practice -- the compassion we just talked about? Being compassionate in that way is not easy, and we must rely on a method of practice to reach that goal.

Methods of practice fall into two main categories. The first is gradual practice and gradual enlightenment, and the second involves either gradual practice that leads to sudden enlightenment, or sudden enlightenment followed by gradual practice. A lot of you may have been thinking of sudden practice and a sudden enlightenment. But there's no such thing. The most common method is that of gradual practice and gradual enlightenment. So I will talk a little about this. I'd like to ask how many of you have experienced sitting meditation, or have learned how to do sitting meditation already? More than half... most of you.

The main function of sitting meditation is to concentrate and then unify the mind. Unified mind can manifest in three ways. First is unification of body and mind, body and mind fused into a single stream of clear concentration. Second is unification of inside and outside, so that there is no distinction between self and environment. Third is unification of the previous thought and the following thought -- the mind stays on one thought, and we enter what is called samadhi. It's difficult to go right to unified mind, so in the beginning of practice, one has to try to concentrate the mind. And in the beginning even concentrating the mind is not so easy, so one has to work on relaxing the body and mind and eventually the scattered thoughts will lessen, the mind will begin to settle down, and concentrating will be easier. Once the scattered thoughts in the mind cease, then one has entered the unification of body and mind.

Earlier today, when I was riding into Manhattan from Queens, I was talking with someone in the car. After a while I stopped talking, but she continued -- she kept talking and talking, reacting to everything in the environment... everything interested her. And I was there listening to everything she said. I'm using this individual as an example of someone with a scattered mind, whereas my mind was in a unified state. I heard everything she said, but did not give rise

to any reaction. I did not give rise to craving or to hatred. This was a state where the body and mind were unified. When the body and mind are in a unified state, they are not bothered or moved by what's going on in the environment. (This is the stage where the mind, body and environment are unified, but not the previous thought and the following thought.)

All of you have probably had some experience like this, when you have been aware of what's happening in the environment, but your mind was not moved by it. But this state of mind may arise only occasionally. In order to maintain this state of mind, one must practice constantly, and then it is possible that in this state of unification one will experience enlightenment. If one has not studied the Buddhadharma then this is very unlikely, but if one has diligently studied the Buddhadharma, and has been able to maintain this state of unification, in which the mind is very calm, and one's responses to others are without either hatred or craving, then this experience of enlightenment is very possible.

One of the very important things one must understand from the study of Buddhadharma is that the experience of unified mind is not liberation. It is an experience that can be very profound and joyful, but the Dharma teaches us not to attach to the feeling of joy and mistake it for liberation. What we must understand is that there is something beyond unified mind, and that is no mind.

And what about the unification of previous thought and following thought? What is this like? It is as if you were inside of a big, clear crystal ball, but you do not see the crystal, because you are as clear as the crystal around you. The mind is very clear and bright and solid. Will one get enlightened while in this state? No, as long as one is in this state one will not get enlightened. But after one leaves this state and returns to normal activities, one may become enlightened. One should not attach to the experience, and should not give in to cravings to repeat the experience, and should simply go about one's daily life, and some simple thing may happen that leads to enlightenment.

This is the approach of gradual practice and gradual enlightenment. So you see there is no sudden enlightenment, where after one experience everything is resolved. One goes about practice gradually, then one becomes enlightened gradually. How is that related to compassion?

After enlightenment, one is able to put down the burdens in one's mind. This is a very great joy, different from worldly happiness -- it is the joy of liberation. And when enlightened beings see others they see all the suffering others experience, the contradictions between previous thought and following thought, the constant struggle in their minds, and inevitably give rise to compassion for others.

Now I'd like to ask you to think of your family members, or perhaps your friends. When they experience struggles in their minds, and those struggles manifest in their speech and manner, they may do or say things that are difficult or unpleasant for you, things that cause you to suffer. But if you have been engaging in practice, and are aware that their behavior is the result of their suffering, you will probably not do anything that causes them more suffering, right? You may react, but instead of fighting back and increasing the suffering, you might comfort them, or might find it's best to get out of their way... but you certainly wouldn't want to do anything that causes them more suffering.

As practitioners, we should practice concentrating the mind, and also practice compassion when interacting with others. We should not wait to have the experience of unified mind before treating others with compassion. We should find ways to benefit and to bring joy to every person we come across. To make the other person happy -- that is the practice of compassion. It's interesting though, that there are some people who are compassionate to everyone else, but harsh on themselves, constantly oppressing themselves, and causing themselves a great deal of suffering. This is because they lack wisdom. It is important to be compassionate with oneself as well with others, to reduce the suffering of others, but also to reduce one's own suffering. Have you met people like that, who are compassionate to others but not to themselves? This is a problem -- often such people will work hard to help others, but eventually, because of their own suffering, they will cause others to suffer more. Without wisdom, it is difficult to practice compassion.

To cultivate wisdom one needs to practice a method. What is the method of practice? Be aware of your breath. Whenever you encounter any stressful situation, or tension, or any form of suffering, simply relax all your muscles and nerves, relax your body, and just put down whatever it is that is stressing you, and go back to enjoying the breath. You just go back to your breath, and say, "Oh, this is so joyful, this breath, and it's so wonderful to be alive and enjoying this breath." As long as you're alive, there are infinite possibilities. And this way you can come to understand that there's no need to suffer. Whatever needs to be done, you simply do it, but it's not necessary to suffer. And if you always practice this way, then it's very possible that this practice can lead to enlightenment.

I'd like to tell you a gongan (koan) that comes as a dialogue between a Chan Master and a monk. One day the monk said to the Master, "I would like to know Buddha." The Master answered that the Buddha is someone who is riding on an ox and also looking for an ox. Do you understand the meaning of this? You're asking, "What is Buddha?" but you yourself are Buddha. Do you understand?

Then the monk asked the Master, "So what happens after I know of the ox? After I know that I myself am the Buddha?" The Master said, "Then just ride the ox home."

Even after you know you are the Buddha, it doesn't mean that you have returned to the Buddha. Even though you know you are inherently the Buddha, you are still just a baby Buddha -- you haven't completely become the Buddha yet.

Then the monk asked again, "What should one do when one has ridden the ox all the way home?" And the Master replied, "Then, like a herdsman, tend to the ox, so that it doesn't trample over other people's meadows and fields."

Even after enlightenment, one does not become lazy about practice, but continuously cultivates compassion and wisdom so as not to cause harm to oneself or others.

Night of 5-25-01

No more squeaks of floors.
No more cold of air on skinny.
No more bones of light
And powder,
Fruit of the earth.
Be gone.
Attuned to the air
The radio signals of the no
Climb through your nostrils.
Walk on earth.
Piss off,
You window of all,
You closet with no hangers.
Buzz off,
You yes and no.
Buzz
Bss
S

--Giora Carmi

"Listening to the Wind"

Retreat Report by A.R.

It was 16 years since my last retreat, and I was carrying a lot of excess baggage. There were anxieties, can I do it? Fears I'm too old, it's too late, but deep down I knew it's the only practice that matters, I'm old enough to have experienced most worldly endeavors and they never really fulfill.

Although I've tried to live an honest, moral life, even though I've had both sons blessed by Shifu at birth, even though I take refuge in the Three Jewels every day and make a meager attempt at sitting, even though I'm sure the blessings Shifu has bestowed on my family have given us a very happy and successful life, it definitely is not enough. To quote Shifu, it doesn't mean anything without retreats.

My last retreat in 1983 was so painful for me, I even recorded an album entitled "The Last Retreat." I wasn't able to settle down for a second, I was not able to use the huatou or counting the breaths, so I chose to follow precepts, raise my family, sit some daily, and read lots of Dharma, well, I'm back. I ask Shifu's forgiveness for my long absence, and I'm ashamed for the countless opportunities I wasted to sit with my master.

This retreat was a great experience for me. I still was one of the least settled, but there were some great periods, and I believe this silent illumination method is something I can use, finally. This method, coupled with some of Shifu's perfectly timed talks, one on impermanence, using himself as an example, and a talk on shame and humility, tugged at my heart and offered me some emotional moments, followed by a couple of deep sittings. Time is definitely moving by quickly in the physical realm, it was just yesterday when Shifu came to the Temple of Enlightenment in the Bronx and this wonderful Dharma journey began, we were both young men then, well, Shifu, as late as it is, I vow to take advantage of your retreats from now on, if you will have me.

The walking meditations were also very good for me, and I'd like to thank Guoyuan Fa Shi and Guogu Shi for that. The walk to the lake with Guogu Shi brought the chance to try the direct contemplation method, which is working well for me, I selected listening from the two choices of seeing or listening, this experience was great, I started listening to the wind but not labeling it wind, shortly all sound seemed to get absorbed together, and then I, the listener, disappeared completely, incredible, this seems to have joined in with my sitting, thank you Guogu Shi.

After the retreat I was driven back to the center, and then took a taxi to Lagaardia, to fly home to Florida, I sat there for eight hours and felt that my mind didn't move, with all the activity at the airport, for the first time in my life, I sat in a chair quietly, devoid of anxiety, remarkable. I'd like to thank all that were responsible for the opportunity to attend this retreat, too numerous to mention, and once again I offer my gratitude to Shifu for his tireless transmission of the Dharma, peace.

The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Dharma Drum Retreat Center Hosts Open House

On September 8, 2001, Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York, hosted an Open House to acknowledge and give thanks to the people who have helped DDRC as it has settled into the community. Approximately 25 neighbors and community residents came out on that Saturday afternoon to enjoy the beautiful setting of the Retreat Center, as well as a healthy lunch, informal cultural exchange, and an opportunity to learn more about the Center.

Monita Choi welcomed guests to Dharma Drum Retreat Center and introduced Guoyuan Fa Shi, Abbot of DDRC and Chan Meditation Center. The abbot spoke briefly about the history of the Center, and offered special thanks to Mark Watkins of Triple M Construction Co. in Pine Bush, who worked with his crew for many months to complete renovations on the dining hall, main house, and Chan Hall. Guoyuan Fa Shi explained that Dharma Drum Retreat Center plans to offer additional programs and activities for local residents. Then Monita thanked the many men and women from public safety offices in the community, including the Pine Bush and Walker Valley Volunteer Fire Companies, Shawangunk Town Police and the State Highway Patrol. She also cited the help and support provided by the Town of Shawangunk's Board of Supervisors. Supervisor Kris Pedersen replied that she was pleased that Dharma Drum had settled in the community and was there to serve local residents as well as those who come to the Center from outside the community.

After a brief welcome, guests were invited to help themselves to a buffet luncheon that featured Asian and Western vegetarian foods. During the Open House, booths provided information about meditation practice and the upcoming beginner meditation classes, offered books by Chan Master Sheng Yen, and a variety of other Dharma Drum publications. For children's activities, Robert Hoover was available to draw caricatures, and Eva Liu showed guests how to make animals, fruits, and vegetables out of colorful silk cord. Berle and Tim Driscoll, Jenny Li, and volunteers from the Chan Meditation Center,

DDRC's Wednesday evening meditation group, and even members of the construction crew helped in making the delicious Western and Chinese dishes as well as in preparing and running the event.

For many guests, the Open House was their first opportunity to visit Dharma Drum Retreat Center and to learn about its mission and some of its activities. Thanks to all the volunteers and participants who helped make this special event possible.

--Berle Driscoll

A Traditional Chinese Wedding at DDRC

On Oct. 6, the normally quiet Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) was crowded with about 200 noisy guests invited by the hosts, Jeffrey and Lily Kung. They were having a wedding party for their daughter Lisa Azan Kung and son-in-law Philip Joel Volkoff. What attracted most guests was that the wedding was conducted in a traditional Chinese way.

For thousands of years, the traditional Chinese wedding had been carried on until the modern Western-style wedding made its way into China in the 1930s. According to ancient Chinese tradition, a professional matchmaker must be hired to serve as the go-between for the two families. The matchmaker checks the astrology of the new couple, the acceptability and compatibility of both families, and the details of the wedding. In addition, an elaborate wedding carriage must be used to bring the bride from her own family to the groom's family. A band must be hired to play traditional music all the way as the groom is fetching his bride. For all these requirements, the traditional Chinese wedding makes the modern Western-style wedding look like a piece of cake.

To Jeffrey and Lily, all these details were easy compared with the making of the traditional Chinese dresses for the new couple and themselves. These traditional dresses simply can't be found anymore. Fortunately, they made a trip to China and found a tailor who can still make the old-fashioned dresses. The second hurdle they had to face was the making of the wedding carriage. First, no Western carpenter has any notion of how to make a Chinese wedding carriage. Second, these carriages are now mostly museum pieces, not to be rented. Fortunately, the Kungs found a skillful Chinese carpenter who made the carriage from some old pictures and sketches. They then found some Chinese musicians in New York who can still play the ancient

instruments and music for a traditional wedding. The easy part was the matchmaker. Because Lisa and Phil fell in love with each other themselves, Jeffrey and Lily simply asked their best friends Judy Chen and Linda Tao to serve as the readymade matchmakers. After all the pieces fell into place, the wedding was set for the first Saturday in October to take advantage of the spectacular autumn leaves and splendid open space in DDRC.

A huge tent was set up for the reception dinner; the serene gazebo next to the main house was renovated to hold the religious ceremonies. Lisa and Phil requested two wedding ceremonies, one Buddhist, which was performed by Guoyuan Fa Shi, and one Hindu Vedic conducted by Joan Suval, a senior disciple of Shri Brahmananda Sarswati. Four husky best men carried the newly made carriage around the block as loud, exciting Chinese wedding music played. When the bride emerged from the carriage, a heavy veil, representing the mystic secrecy of a Chinese bride, covered her entire head and shoulders. When the ceremony finished with the lifting of the veil, the crowd spontaneously broke into applause. A tea and coffee reception was followed by a lavish vegetarian dinner catered by the famous Zen Palate Restaurant from NYC. A five-piece band then played African dance music for the entertainment of the guests.

The traditional Chinese wedding opened many eyes, both young and old, as many had seen it only in the movies but not in real life. Many guests used the occasion to show off their traditional Chinese outfits and gorgeous dresses. It turned out to be a gala Chinese fashion show. Most important of all, it revealed the happy and relaxed part of Buddhist life, different from the rigorous practices of Chan.

--Jeffrey Kung

Chan Master Sheng Yen Meets Religious Leaders

During the United Nations Millennium World Peace Summit in August 2000, the need to form a World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders became apparent. This World Council will serve as a resource for the United Nations on issues related to religion in the world. Master Sheng Yen was invited, as one of the religious leaders representing Buddhism, to attend the inaugural meeting of the steering committee to discuss the formation of the World Council. The meeting was held October 22 - 24, 2001, at the Pocantico

Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. Representatives of many religious and spiritual traditions from all over the world took part in the three-day discussion.

In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C., the committee spent some time discussing how the World Council could have been helpful to the UN Secretary General, had it already existed at the time of the attacks. Through the discussion, the unique characteristics and the potential functions of the World Council were articulated. Based on the consensus reached by the committee members, the mission statement of the World Council was collectively drafted. According to the initial draft of the statement, the World Council of Religious and Spiritual Leaders aspires "to inspire men and women of all faiths in the pursuit of peace and mutual understanding, and to provide spiritual resources of world religious traditions to assist the United Nations and its agencies in the prevention, resolution, and healing of conflicts, and addressing major social issues."

In order to expedite the formation of the World Council, the committee has agreed to form an interim executive council consisting of five to six religious leaders representing all faiths in the world. The members of the interim executive council are charged with discussing the issues of planning, structure, and funding for the World Council in the next six months. The steering committee has also agreed to hold the first World Council meeting, after its formation, in June of 2002 in Thailand, where the United Nations headquarters in Asia is located. Proposed themes for the 2002 meeting in Thailand are poverty, environmental problems, religious conflicts in Asia, and religious education in China. Master Sheng Yen plans to attend the meeting in Thailand and has been invited to participate in a preparatory discussion in early February.

--Rebecca Li

DDMBA Annual Convention

The DDMBA (Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association) has been established and registered in New York as a Buddhist non-profit organization since 1994. Its purpose is to assist Shifu in spreading Buddhadharma in the United States by conducting Buddhist book study and Chan sitting groups.

Started in New York and California, DDMBA chapters have quickly sprung up in New Jersey, Illinois, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, Michigan, Ohio, and Connecticut, among other places. This year we are proud to announce a total of 20 chapters with over 1,000 members in the United States.

This year saw the fifth annual convention of DDMBA chapters, held from November 2nd to November 4th in Ramada Inn, Gibbstown, NJ. The purpose of the convention is to educate and encourage members and evaluate their activities on a yearly basis. More than 100 members from 14 chapters participated in the convention.

Even though Shifu had just returned from Mexico in the wee hours of the night before, he appeared totally refreshed when he showed up for the opening of the convention. He gave the participants a thorough report of the DDMBA headquarters and the status of construction for the DDMBA graduate and sangha schools in Taiwan. Following Shifu, Guoyuan Fa Shi talked about how to organize and grow as a group in DDMBA. In the afternoon there was walking meditation and then the participants were divided into two panels. One was a special panel for the chapter presidents and officers and the other was a panel for sharing experiences among the members in promoting DDMBA ideals. After a long day of hard work, the evening was balanced with group games.

On the second day, Guo Shiang Fa Shi addressed the audience on the ways to cultivate spiritual growth in body and mind. The afternoon was dedicated to a prayer session for the victims of the September 11th attacks, and the rehearsals for the amateur shows to be performed in the evening. The participants were divided into eight teams, and each team was given a topic to perform. The innovative performances in the evening surprised all participants.

The third day began with another rousing speech by Shifu, followed by a ceremony for appointing new chapter presidents, awarding retiring presidents, dedicating new chapter flags and giving out many service awards. Overall, this year's convention was a big success. Four new chapters were added, there were many new members, and most importantly, spirits were lifted by assisting Shifu in spreading the Buddhadharma.

--Jefferey Kung

Shifu Lectures at Stony Brook University

On Thursday, November 15, at the Student Activities Center of Stony Brook University, Chan Master Sheng Yen gave a lecture entitled "Chan: Healing, Reconciliation and World Peace," drawing an audience of more than 500 students, faculty members, and vice presidents of the university, as well as religious leaders of various faiths from the Long Island Multi-Faith Forum. This very successful event was sponsored by the Stony Brook University Community Development and Diversity Challenge grants. The sponsoring organizations included Student Buddhist Study and Practice Group, Long Island Multi-Faith Forum, Peaceful Dwelling Project, Asian American Faculty Staff Association, Asian American Center Bridge, International Services of the Graduate School, Protestant Campus Ministry, Chinese American Association in Suffolk County, Chinese Student and Scholar Association and Taiwanese Student Association. Reporters from New York Newsday and the local Three Village Herald covered the lecture and an interview with Master Sheng Yen on the same day.

Ven. Sheng Yen began the lecture by stressing the need to pacify one's mind. A mind that is unsettled causes anxiety and insecurity. In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, many people feel this insecurity, and they have the need to calm their minds. Religious faith is a common source of security of mind for many people. However, there are methods of meditation that transcend religious beliefs and boundaries, which everyone can use to cultivate inner peace. Ven. Shengyen gave a brief introduction of such a method and asked the audience to try it for five minutes. Most of the audience responded that the method of meditative relaxation was useful in providing a feeling of stability and security. He added that this experience of calm can infuse our daily lives with an ability to make good decisions in peace and good health.

To help us accept the events of September 11th, Ven. Sheng Yen focused on the reality of impermanence. In life, disaster, death, and uncertainty are all changes that are inevitable because of impermanence. To understand and accept this reality will ease one's anxiety. For example, to describe the parting of friends and relatives from this world, he used the analogy of a group of people traveling together on a bus. He said that everyone has a mission in his or her life, and occasionally we share the same bus with these friends on our missions. When one person's mission is accomplished, this person would get

off one bus and board another one traveling to another destination. Death is inevitable, but we can approach it with peace of mind.

Ven. Sheng Yen used an analogy of someone being struck by an arrow to encourage an attitude of reconciliation. When one has been injured by another's arrow, to then fill oneself with anger and hatred is to thrust another arrow into one's own heart. To respond to tragedy with hatred does not help ease the suffering and insecurity that we feel; it merely adds to the injury.

Later in the lecture, to relate peace and wisdom with practice, Ven. Sheng Yen described the various stages of the cultivation of mind from the perspective of Chan. One starts out by relaxing the body and mind. With dedicated practice, the body and mind will eventually be unified in a state of harmony and peace. This is described as the attainment of personal peace in the relative sense. Moving one step further, one can achieve a unification of the self with the environment. This is the stage at which personal ego or "small self" is transcended. However, from the perspective of Chan, even this concept of a "large self" has to be transcended in order to arrive at a state of absolute peace.

Ven. Sheng Yen said that in order for world peace to be a reality, everyone must cultivate an attitude and lifestyle of peace within themselves. Moreover, in the question and answer session following the lecture, Ven. Sheng Yen emphasized that there is a common ground for all religions, regardless of their perspectives and reactions to various issues. This common ground is to respect all human beings and to cherish all lives. Working together, people can bring about the realization of world peace.

--David Kabacinski, Hai-Dee Lee & Wei Tan

Zen Moments: Photos and Poetry by Young Artists

An exhibition entitled "Zen Moments: Photos and Poetry By Young Artists" took place at the Rosenthal Library Rotunda at the New York Queens College from December 3, 2001 to January 7, 2002. A reception was held on December 10 from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.



The exhibit was coordinated by Lindley Hanlon and curated by Dr. Rikki Asher, who is Director of Art Education in the Department of Secondary Education and Youth Services at Queens College.

This exhibition featured photographs and poetry by local young adults and adolescents studying Chan meditation and attending the summer camp at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center. "Techniques of being in the moment" were the focus of the works. This exploration captured the richness of the natural upstate New York landscape through the language of art. The following article was contributed by Carrie Dam, one of the young exhibitors, about her experience:

I remember when I was walking towards the Queens College Library, and wondering what I would see. I imagined it to be a lot of professional pictures taken by people older than the age of twenty. When I got there I was so surprised to see the age of the photographers. They were kids my age! They inspired me to do something more productive of my life. And it gave me more confidence to try new things. The people who came to see the pictures didn't seem to believe the age group of the photographers. I think it caught attention of many of the students studying in the library. I hope that the Chan Center will make more events for younger children.

Shifu Lectures in LA

On Dec 14 Shifu and his entourage of ten, including Guoyuan Fa Shi, Guo Yao Shi and eight members from the DDMBA New York chapter, arrived in Los Angeles, where Shifu was to give a lecture arranged by the DDMBA California chapter. About thirty LA members greeted them enthusiastically at the airport upon arrival. Shifu was escorted away immediately by a special media committee to attend a live TV interview in one of the most popular TV stations in the LA Chinese community. The rest of the entourage was treated to a sumptuous lunch at the DDMBA local chapter residence before they checked into the nearby hotel.

On Dec. 15, more than 100 local DDMBA members welcomed Shifu and his entourage for a full day of activities at the local chapter residence. They started with a courteous greeting from LA chapter President Stanley Kung, followed by a heartwarming speech by Shifu, who thanked the local members for their hard work on this event and yearly activities in promoting DDMBA causes. Shifu also took the occasion to report the latest activities of DDMBA headquarters in Taiwan.

Jeffrey Kung from New York reported on the activities of NY DDMBA and the construction project of Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York. Guoyuan Fa Shi lectured on the mission and vision of DDMBA.

The highlight of the evening was Shifu's lecture at the Chinese Cultural and Educational Center in LA. An audience of more than 1,000 attended Shifu's lecture, "How to Lead a Happy and Meaningful Life." Shifu talked about what humankind is heading toward in the twenty-first century. He proposed that the development of technology must be balanced by the consideration of humanity. He urged that all religions accept the multicultural aspects of modern life, that religion can never be exclusive. His final remark in the speech was the introduction of DDMBA as a spiritual environmental protectionist. He emphasized that the world is becoming more and more polluted, not only materially but also spiritually. We have to learn how to protect ourselves from spiritual pollution and defilement. Especially after the September 11th tragedy, human beings are facing a big crisis in faith and self-assurance. Spiritual purification is a major task for us all. Only then can we face the terrorist crisis without losing our faith and self-confidence. His words of wisdom inspired applause throughout the lecture.

On Dec. 16, Guoyuan Fa Shi led a full-day retreat with about 100 participants at the hotel where he stayed. It was supervised by Shifu and assisted by Mr. Chin Mao, who is a meditation teacher certified by Shifu. Guoyuan Fa Shi and Shifu presented sitting and walking meditation methods.

On Dec. 17, Shifu and his entourage left LA with exhausted bodies but elevated spirits. The members from New York sincerely appreciated the effort by the DDMBA members in LA for making them so comfortable. They felt they truly belong to the same big family of DDMBA.

--Jefferey Kung

Drepung Loseling Performs "The Mystical Arts of Tibet" at CMC

On the evening of December 22, 2001, twenty lamas from Sacred Music Sacred Dance for World Healing, an ongoing tour of Drepung Loseling monks, visited the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York, for a performance of "The Mystical Arts of Tibet." On the day before their visit to CM they completed the construction of a 7-by-7-foot mandala sand painting for the healing and protection of America at The Smithsonian Museum in Staten Island. This is

the first time that the Chan Meditation Center had housed so many eminent sanghas. There were five geshe among the lamas in attendance from Tibet. The twenty lamas performed special chants and prayers for the victims of the 9/11 attack, their families and of us in America. Following a dinner reception held in their honor, they performed Vajra Dance, which is composed of five stages: 1) Chanting to invite the Buddhas and the bodhisattva to the ritual; 2) Vajra dance to purify negative karma; 3) Cutting off vexations; 4) Debate (to gain an understanding of the Dharma through analysis); 5) Transfer of merits. They concluded the performance with a recitation of the Six-syllable Mantra of Avalokitesvara.

--Tan Yee

In Brief...

Two Recent Seven-day Retreats at DDRC

A Huatou Retreat was held from November 24 to December 1, 2001, and attended by 48 practitioners from fourteen states and five countries (Canada, Croatia, Korea, Poland and United Kingdom). Shifu's lectures were translated by Rebecca Li and Wei-wu Tan.

A Silent Illumination Retreat, from Christmas Day 2001 to New Year's Day 2002, was attended by 93 participants hailing from 14 states and five countries (Australia, Canada, Croatia, Singapore and Switzerland). The translator was Wei-wu Tan.

Both retreats were held at the Chan Hall, newly completed after years of renovation.

First Silent Illumination Retreat in Mexico

(Source Dharma Drum Mountain Newsletter December Issue #144)

From October 25 to November 1, 2001, 56 participants attended the first retreat led by Master Sheng Yen in Mexico. A Spanish interpreter was present, since most participants spoke little or no English. There were ten among the 56 participants who have practiced for more than ten years. One of these, an artist, who had practiced for more than 17 years, declared at the conclusion of the retreat that he had finally realized the proper practice of meditation. "Only

when you can relax your body and mind, let go of your body and mind, let go of this detachment of letting go...", he said, calling this the beginning of his proper practice.

Many of the participants were very enthusiastic about Chan practice and wished to be able to follow Master Sheng Yen in the study and practice of Chan after the conclusion of the retreat. Realizing, though, that it would be difficult for Master Sheng Yen to conduct another retreat in Mexico, they agreed to go attend the retreats at DDRC to continue their practice under Master Sheng Yen.

Beginner's Meditation Class for Flushing, Queens, Chinese Community

On September 29, 2001, Guoyuan Fa Shi conducted a one-day Beginner's Meditation Class at Flushing Hospital for more than 50 participants from the mostly Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese Chinese community in New York's Flushing, Queens. This Chinese community is made up of more recent immigrants than that in Manhattan's Chinatown, which is predominantly Cantonese-speaking.

Many volunteers from the Chan Center arrived early to set up the hall, and assisted Guoyuan Fa Shi, who explained the basic meditation principles and tools including positions, methods, and exercises. The class was well received by the students.

In conclusion, Guoyuan Fa Shi also encouraged the participants to practice at home as much as they can, and to learn Buddhist teachings when they can.

--Virginia Tan

Chan Center Inaugurates Beginners' Dharma Class

In January the Chan Center held its first Beginners' Dharma Class. The six-hour course, offered in 3 two-hour classes, is designed to introduce newcomers to the core ideas of Buddhism, and is meant to complement the Beginners' Meditation Class that is offered several times a year. It covers Buddhist basics like suffering, karma and conditioned arising, using Master Sheng Yen's pamphlet on the Four Noble Truths, Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel, as its text.

The course will be offered again on three Saturdays in June, on the 8th, 15th and 22nd.

Please register by calling the Chan Center at (718) 592-6593.

The DDRC Retreat Scholarship Fund

The Dharma Drum Retreat Center Scholarship Fund was established to provide full or partial scholarships to practitioners who want to attend the seven-, ten-, or fourteen-day retreats, but cannot afford the expenses. To be qualified, interested candidates must have previously attended at least one seven-day retreat with Chan Master Sheng Yen either in the U.S. or abroad, and must be in good physical and mental health.

Qualified applicants will be selected for each retreat. Candidates from abroad are welcome to apply. Please request an application form via fax (718) 592-0717 or write to:

DDRC Retreat Scholarship Fund
Chan Meditation Center
90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11371, USA
