



Four Steps to Handle a Problem: Face it: Look difficulties in the face instead of deceiving oneself by burying one's head in the sand. **Accept it:** Accept the fact of difficulties instead of blaming fate or other people. **Deal with it:** Handle things with wisdom, and treat people with kindness and compassion. **Let it go:** As long as one has done one's best, it is not necessary to worry about gain or loss, success or failure.

Chan Master Sheng Yen

<p>Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung Commentary by Master Sheng Yen on a seventh-century poem expressing the Chan understanding of mind. This article is the 29th from a series of lectures given during retreats at the Chan Center in Elmhurst, New York. These talks were given on November 30 1987, and were edited by Chris Marano.</p>	<p>Master Sheng Yen</p>
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Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung

Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This article is the 29th from a series of lectures given during retreats at the Chan Center in Elmhurst, New York. These talks were given on November 30th, 1987 and were edited by Chris Marano.

***Thinking brings unclarity,
Sinking and confusing the spirit.***

These two lines of verse are perfect for our practice. When you meditate, do not think about whether or not you are working hard on your method. Do not think about whether or not the method you are using is suitable for you. Do not think about whether or not the practice is of any use to you, or if you have a suitable nature or personality to practice. All of these thoughts are a hindrance to practice.

Our minds are not like clear water in a crystal glass; rather, they are like water in a pond. If the water in the pond is not stirred, it will naturally become clearer and clearer. However, if you feel a need to clean the pond and remove it of all things that might make it muddy and cloudy, you will only stir all the muck that had settled to the bottom. Do not be so curious as to what lay hidden in the mud. You may start pulling on something at the bottom that you feel is garbage and end up pulling a lot of silt with it. The water was already quite clean until you started to move things around.

We do the same thing with our minds. We are constantly thinking about, watching or repressing our wandering thoughts. If you start chasing away every thought that arises in your mind, or search for the intention that caused such a thought to arise, then you will never become clear. Examining yourself in this way only serves to make you more confused.

Every time you sit down to meditate, just tell yourself to work hard, and do not reflect on whether or not you have wandering thoughts. Easier said than done. Every night of retreat I give a Dharma lecture, which, for many of you, only provides more fodder for you to chew. People often latch onto a phrase or concept from a sutra and go over it in their minds while they meditate, trying to apply it to their practice. That is not the correct way to practice. Some people who experience something while they meditate then scan through sutras in their mind trying to find a phrase that will confirm or explain their experience. This is also an incorrect way to practice. Some people listen

to my lectures and then sit on their cushions trying to figure out if my words were meant for them or not. This is a waste of time. Some people listen to my lectures and compare my words to those of the sutras; perhaps in an attempt to see how closely my understanding accords with the Dharma. This is an even bigger waste of time.

One of you today complained during interview, "Shih-fu, you're messing me up. You tell us, `Don't think, don't think," and then you give us all this stuff to think about." Is this true for many of you? I apologize, but I will not stop lecturing. You must learn to tame your monkey minds. If I advise someone to drink a glass of water, it is of no concern to the rest of you. Do not start wondering, "Why did Shih-fu tell that person to drink water and not me? Does water help meditation?" Likewise, there is no reason for the person to whom I offered water to dwell on reasons why. Just drink it.

What if it happens that I make a mistake while lecturing? What if I give you wrong information? Still, there is no problem. If I say something that is incorrect, the responsibility's with me. Let me go to hell for it. You do not need to worry about it. I see that some of you are skeptical by my answer. I bet you are thinking, "Well, that's easy for Shih-fu to say. But if he tells me something false that I accept as true and then incorporate it into my practice and life, then I may follow him to hell." For this reason, it is important to have faith: faith in what the Buddha originally taught, and faith that what I teach is also in accordance with Buddhadharma. Of course, you do not have to faith in me in order to gain benefit from meditation; but you will get more out of the practice if you trust my guidance.

This morning I told you that you need to have faith in yourself. All Buddhas are sentient beings. You yourself are a Buddha who has not yet realized it. You must also have faith in the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. This includes me, for I am a representative of the Sangha. Lastly, you need to have faith in your method.

Things are different during retreat. It would be unwise during daily life to neglect thinking about everyday matters. On retreat, however, there is no need to analyze anything. There are three simple rules when you come to meditate: first, no matter what you are doing, be direct; second, no matter what happens, accept it, and once it is past, let it go; third, do not have doubts about the teachings, the method, or yourself.

People who have come to many retreats understand these things; otherwise I am sure they would have stopped coming a long time ago. After all, retreats are not

vacations. For a while, one woman came to retreats, but never attended any classes or lectures. I asked her once why this was so, and she said, 'I'm not very interested in the Center or in the teachings, but I do like the retreats?'

"What do you like about them?" I asked.

"I like the way they are arranged. I like the atmosphere."

I asked, "And how do you feel about me as a teacher?"

"Hmm," she replied, "I really haven't thought about it all that much." Eventually, she stopped coming.

A man who attended several retreats a few years ago had different reasons for coming. He loved the lectures, and wished that I would lecture all day everyday. On the other hand, he did not like to meditate; and he hated fast-walk meditation. He thought it was crazy and nonsensical. I have not seen him for awhile either.

To reiterate, do not waste valuable time dwelling on ideas or doubting yourself. The simpler your mind, the better. For philosophers, doctors, artists and poets, retreats can be a challenge. It is hard for doctors and philosophers to let go of their logic, and it is difficult for artists and poets to put down their imaginations. As a monk, I lived for a few years in Japan while I was studying for my doctorate. During retreats, the master would always scold me, saying my intelligence was a hindrance to the practice. He was a good teacher. He did not allow me to get lost in a world of ideas and logic. Many of you here are scholars and artists. Do not make me scold you the way my teacher scolded me. While on retreat, make yourselves simple and place all of your attention on your methods. You will return to your ordinary worlds soon enough.



The Four Noble Truths

by Master Sheng Yen

This is the second of four Sunday afternoon talks by Master Sheng Yen on the Four Noble Truths, at the Chan Meditation Center, New York, between November 1 and November 22, 1998. The talks were translated live by Ven. Guo-gu Shi, transcribed from tape by Bruce Rickenbacher, and edited by Ernest Heau, with assistance from Lindley Hanlon. Endnotes were added by Ernest Heau.

Chapter Two: The Nature of Suffering

Last week we discussed the turning of the Dharma Wheel in Deer Park in which the Buddha gave his first teaching of the Four Noble Truths to the five ascetic monks. We spoke of the basic meanings of the four truths, and of the path away from suffering to liberation. We will continue examining the first noble truth and the nature of suffering, layer upon layer, hoping to find clarification as well as deeper meanings.

There are various approaches I could take to sharing with you the knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. Indeed their profundity can be revealed through many traditions of Buddhism, but for my sources I rely on the early scriptures, such as the *nikayas*, the early Pali sutras, also known as the *agamas*, and from the Sanskrit shastra called *Abhidharmakosha* (*The Treatise on Benefit Knowledge*). [2.1] Other approaches include that of the Madhyamika (Middle Way) [2.2] and the Yogacara (Mind-Only) [2.3], two very dominant Indian schools of thought that were very authoritative in their explanations of the Four Noble Truths. In Chinese Buddhism, besides the lines of Chan -- Linji and Caodong (Zen: Rinzai and Soto) -- there were the Tientai and the Huayan traditions [2.4], each with its own way of explaining the Four Noble Truths. So, with this in mind, I will be commenting primarily from the point of view of the earlier, more fundamental Buddhist tradition.

Three Aspects of Suffering

The first noble truth is the truth of the existence of suffering. The Buddha taught that suffering should be seen from three aspects [2.5]: first is the suffering of suffering, second, the suffering of change, and third the pervasive suffering of the five skandhas, which I will discuss later.

The Suffering of Suffering

The suffering of suffering is ordinary suffering that we can feel in body and mind. Examples of suffering of suffering would be the discomfort from illness, or being separated from a loved one. These kinds of suffering everybody can recognize. But on a much more fundamental level, the suffering of suffering means that we are not our own masters. We are constantly under the influence and conditioning of other forces, from the external environment to the experiences and workings of our own minds and bodies. All these conditions are 'other-powered' because all the causes and conditions that make up a particular moment are dependent on other things happening, either in the environment or in our own body. This is called 'conditioned arising' or 'dependent origination.' At a deeper level we are not even in control of our minds and thoughts. This inability to control our very own being is suffering.

When we deeply reflect on ourselves, we see that we have our own perspectives and views of things. To this extent we seem in control of our minds. But when we take a closer look at our thought processes, very often the prior thought and the following thought contradict each other. In Chinese this is called 'the battle between the heavens and the humans,' the conflict between the rational mind and our feelings. When we know a certain action is right, our feelings may be the opposite -- what we think and what we feel may be in conflict. We think we have a certain personality and certain traits but when we look closer, we seem to have multiple personalities and are in fact almost schizoid. We think one way, and act another way. In different situations, we have completely different personalities. This conflict between different ways of being in the same person can cause much suffering.

We can try to use our mental and physical powers to maintain ourselves in comfort and health, but over time we realize that our body is undergoing changes, is getting older, and is subject to disease. If our own body does not listen to us, how much control over it do we really have? If you are a boss or a teacher you may feel you have control over other people, but there are limits, however much we may want to manipulate others. Ultimately, there is no person aside from yourself that you can rely on. You're on your own. And this inability to be in control and to feel at ease in the environment is also a source of suffering.

People want to rely on someone other than themselves. Some disciples of mine have a strong dependency on me, so as to say, "Shifu, you have to take care of your health. How can we rely on you if you're not around?" Here I am thinking to myself, "I can't even rely on myself and along come you folks who want to rely on *me*." (*Laughter*) So I

tell them to rely not on me but on the Dharma, because it is the Dharma that I myself rely on. I'm here today, but I may die tomorrow so I encourage all of you to also rely on the Dharma, to be centered in the Dharma.

Suffering of Change

The second aspect of suffering is the suffering of change. The dominant feature of existence is constant flux. The Chinese Book of Changes, the I-jing, says that all things are constantly in the state of becoming. By contrast Buddhism says that things arise and perish simultaneously--in the very midst of birth there is both creation and extinction. It is not that after birth the process of dying begins, but that in the very midst of being born there is death. In the midst of creation there is extinction; in the midst of extinction there is birth. The only constant is change--impermanence.

We can view impermanence in ways that correspond with the three aspects of suffering. First is impermanence with respect to the individual's direct experience of birth, living, and death. Second is impermanence with respect to suffering accompanied by constant change as a fact of existence. Third is impermanence with respect to the conditioned arising and extinction of all phenomena. If we can understand these dimensions of impermanence in suffering, we can also recognize the truth of emptiness and no-self.

The Chinese character *hua* means 'suffering of change' but also has the nuance of 'destructible.' Something here today may not be around tomorrow. This is so even with the working of our minds from moment to moment. One thought leads to the next, thought after thought, in constant flux. This is the meaning of 'suffering of change.'

It may appear that in life we have attained certain results or goals, but these too are constantly changing. Ultimately; there is no such thing as some objective result or goal that has been truly attained, because whatever it is will lack permanence. Rather, we need to understand that the world is a never-ending process, without beginning or end. When we look at our accomplishments from this perspective, we see that the fruits of our endeavors are themselves the product of change. Something had to change in order to get from our starting point to where we are now. When we finally get what we want, why should the process of change suddenly stop? For this reason we should not try to hold on to our gains as something set forever in stone. Success is nothing like a fixed or even stable reality, and can be very fleeting.

I met a fellow who had recently become a professor. I said, "Congratulations on becoming a professor." This is what he had attained, what he had planned for his life. Next I told him, "It's unfortunate that one day you will be retired, or even fired." (*Laughter*) I was not trying to pour cold water on his accomplishment; I was trying to encourage him to gain a deeper insight into the way of existence -- that things change and nothing is permanent. So, I encourage you to get a deeper level of insight into your own being and the way of the world, because with this penetrating wisdom, you can start to be free from the suffering of change, the suffering of impermanence.

Pervasive Suffering

The third aspect of suffering, pervasive suffering, has a two-fold meaning. First, it means that all beings experience suffering--that none can escape it. A second meaning is associated with the fourth skandha of volition. To explain this I will first need to discuss the five skandhas as a whole.

Buddhism teaches that a human being is made up of five aggregates or skandhas. Like all forms of existence the five aggregates are characterized by two underlying realities--coming into being (creation) and change (extinction). Once again this points to impermanence as the common thread in the three aspects of suffering. However, even this is only a coarse level of understanding. Pervasive suffering also refers to an undercurrent of consciousness in which attachment and craving can instantly change to hatred and repulsion. It is a very subtle kind of psychological suffering.

The first aggregate is form, referring to the material or physical aspects of our body. The latter four are mental, and within those there are subtler divisions. The second aggregate is sensation. The third is perception, but you can also call it conception. The fourth is volition, which as I have mentioned, plays a key role in pervasive suffering. The last aggregate is consciousness.

Sensation and perception can also be understood in terms of the processes of the mind. 'Mind' is a very general term, but from the perspective of Buddhist psychology we see two different things in this mind: the discriminating, or primary mind and mental phenomena. The discriminating mind is like an emperor who controls his generals, soldiers, and so on. The second and third aggregates, sensation and perception, are a part of this emperor mind, and these two can be subdivided into as many as 175 different mental states.

Discriminating mind contains-- you could say owns --its mental states, such as greed, jealousy, joy, pleasure --a whole army of negative as well as positive thoughts. As such, the mind and its states mutually reinforce each other. The mental states are not the mind; they are just the soldiers doing the bidding of the mind, helping to maintain and perpetuate it. While volition is also a mental aggregate along with sensation and perception, it works at a much more subtle level. Being the aggregate that leads to action, volition ensures that all living beings are constantly in a state of motion and arising. For this reason they cannot escape from the subtler form of pervasive suffering.

Suffering pervades the three realms of existence that make up samsara [2.6]: the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm. This is so because these realms are characterized by attachment, however coarse or subtle. Take someone of great attainment whose highly refined consciousness is free from the coarser attachments of greed, hatred, jealousy, and other lower discriminations. That person has reached the samadhi of 'neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization' --the samadhi of infinite consciousness. In this very high state one is free from the suffering of suffering and from the suffering of impermanence, but one is still subject to pervasive suffering.

The three realms are dimensions of existence where beings reside depending on their level of their consciousness. Until one transcends these three realms, they are not free from suffering. In the realm of desire, where humans exist, we have all three levels of suffering. Even if one abides in a deep samadhi where they are free from the suffering of impermanence, that individual returns to the world of vexation when they come out of samadhi. For this reason no matter how refined the level of consciousness, as long as there is attachment, that individual will experience pervasive suffering.

The Buddha spoke of eight kinds of suffering that human beings endure: birth, old age, sickness, death, separation from loved ones, confrontation with enemies, inability to attain what one seeks and, lastly, the suffering of the five aggregates. Of these eight kinds of suffering, the first seven are contained in the five skandhas. This is called the 'uninterrupted suffering of the five skandhas,' meaning that from one moment to the next, pervasive suffering is renewed by the existence of the aggregates.

According to the agamas and the Abhidharmakosha, there is another dimension of meaning to the five skandhas, namely, 'grasping.' [2.7] Grasping arises when a sense

faculty interacts with a sense object, creating attachment, and consequently, suffering. This grasping after sense experience assures the continuation of the five skandhas through life after life. The objects of grasping are not just desires, but also hatred and delusion. Simply put, grasping causes suffering and in turn, suffering causes the continuation of the five aggregates through rebirths. On this basis we hold onto the poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance which propel us into future rebirths. Then, because of the five skandhas, we give rise to vexations again. So vexations cause the five skandhas, and the skandhas cause vexations. They are inseparable, mutually causing each other.

In summarizing the five skandhas, we can say that they pervade the three realms of existence, that there is no suffering apart from the five skandhas. But Buddhism also says that through the practice of Buddhadharma we can be freed from the very source of our suffering--the five aggregates.

The Lesson of the Heart Sutra

The Heart Sutra states it very clearly: "The bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara, while coursing in the deep prajnaparamita, saw that all five skandhas are empty and thereby transcended all suffering." The real point of the Buddhist way is not just to understand suffering, but also to see the emptiness of suffering. We can use the teaching of the five skandhas to clarify the different dimensions of suffering, to realize the empty nature of the skandhas, and thereby to transcend our own suffering.

When we perceive the five skandhas in the same way as Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, simultaneously there is liberation. This is because upon seeing the true nature of our existence, we see that it is simultaneously suffering, impermanence, emptiness, and selflessness. What is the relationship between these four? First, there is impermanence. When one does not penetrate into the reality of impermanence, there is suffering. Being in suffering, one feels that there is an 'I' experiencing suffering. But for Avalokitesvara, the nature of suffering was revealed in a three-fold way. It is impermanent, empty and selfless, without the suffering. Why is that? Because by developing penetrative insight in Buddhadharma practice, one is freed from suffering. Through insight into the workings of impermanence, we come to recognize selflessness. In this way the Avalokitesvara perceived impermanence and emptiness, and, through emptiness, understood that there is no self. But with a deluded view we only experience suffering, as very real, permanent, and 'mine.' And because of our clinging and attachments we cannot escape.

Summary

So what good is all this talk about suffering and the way out of suffering? Now that you know what suffering is, I hope that knowledge can help you. I hope you also have an understanding of the three seals of the Dharma--suffering, impermanence and no-self. But it is my experience that many disciples and students, both lay and monastic, have heard all this over and over again, and yet continue to experience suffering. I often find myself listening to their complaints and asking, "Why don't you practice the Buddhadharma?" And they will say, "Practice? I know all about practice. I know about suffering, I know about impermanence, and I know about emptiness, and I know about no-self. Despite all this I am still angry and vexed" This is actually the state of affairs with most. We find ourselves knowing all these things yet cannot help being vexed. Why is that? Because our fundamental ignorance has not been uprooted. We are still controlled by greed, hatred, and delusion, so we still undergo suffering. We know we are ignorant yet we are persistent in our ignorance, and that is true ignorance.

Seeing all of you come here to hear me talk about suffering makes me very happy, and being so happy, I was carried away talking about suffering, suffering, suffering. This means that with your permission, I'll have to continue talking about the Four Noble Truths next week. Even though our subject is suffering, I am happy to talk about it. And there are more wonderful things to follow such as the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and, finally, the way out. This will make me very happy.

(Laughter and applause)

Notes

[2.1] A sutra (Pali: sutta) is a recorded discourse or teaching of the Buddha; a shastra is a treatise or commentary on a sutra, or aspects of a sutra. Shastras are more commonly associated with the later Sanskrit (Mahayana) canon, as opposed to the earlier Pali canon.

[2.2] Mahayana school of thought founded by the Indian masters Nagarjuna and Aryadeva (2nd century C.E.) which refrains from asserting extreme positions, such as not asserting either the existence or non-existence of things.

[2.3] Mahayana school of thought founded by Indian masters Maitreyanatha, Asanga, and Vasubandhu (5th century C.E.) in which the central notion is that all experiences are 'mind-only,' i.e., outside the knowing process, there is no reality; thus the world is a construct of the mind.

[2.4] Of the five traditional schools ('houses') of Chan--Weiyang, Yunmen, Fayan, Linji, and Caodong--only the latter two still exist. These two correspond to the Rinzaï and Soto sects of Zen.

[2.5] The three-fold aspect of suffering is expounded in the Visuddimagga (The Path of Purification, by Buddhagosa (5th century C.E.)

[2.6] Samsara is the cycle of birth and death that sentient beings transmigrate through, and is associated in Buddhism with nirvana, the state of transcendence from samsara.

[2.7] Sanskrit: trishna, Pali: tanha, literally 'thirst,' 'grasping,' 'craving.'

The Swastika (Part 1 of 2)

by Lawrence Waldron

Lawrence Waldron is an Adjunct Professor of Fine Arts and Art History at St. John's University in Jamaica, New York. He holds an MFA from School of Visual Arts, New York City.

This is the first of a two-part article on the symbolic meanings of the swastika in world culture and the Buddhist religion. The first installment provides a basic understanding of the swastika in an international and historical context. The second installment will concentrate entirely on the Buddhist applications of the symbol.

There is no symbol in the West more infamous than the swastika. Arguably, no emblem has ever been feared and reviled by quite so many people. The swastika's power to attract our eye and repulse our sensibilities is unique. There is perhaps only one symbol more instantly recognizable in Western culture, the crucifix. If we consider that the German word for swastika is "hakencruz" (or broken cross), we will observe more closely that both of these powerful symbols are essentially crosses. But what a difference, between the swastika and the crucifix! Surely, two symbols were never more disparate in their meanings, one representing hate, oppression and outright genocide and the other, a symbol of supreme self-sacrifice in the cause of universal love, the symbol of a major world religion. But what if the swastika also a religious symbol? What if this auspicious emblem had been plagiarized and perverted for some hateful, political use so that the only known version of it connoted pure evil? How could this maligned symbol recover from such horrifying associations?

The Swastika in the Western Mind

In the West, the swastika inspires fear. It is scrawled hatefully on the doors and walls of Jewish synagogues by skinheads, Neo Nazis and other malcontents. Sometimes, the disturbing *hakencruz* is defiantly sketched on subway cars by graffiti artists with nothing in particular on their minds and nothing better to do with their magic marker. It still hangs proudly over Nazi shrines and is waved over noisome white power rallies. This ominous symbol is, by far, the most fearsome, misunderstood, and darkly compelling in all of recent history.

How did this all come to be so?

The swastika is most familiar to the Western mind as the symbol of the Nazi party, a fascist regime that ran Germany from 1934 to 1945. It is largely the fanatical activities of this right wing group that forced the association between the old Indo-European

symbol and the systematic genocide and murderous imperialism that precipitated the second World War.

Adolf Hitler was an out-of-work watercolorist and graphic designer. His skewed interpretations of Teutonic heritage and the socio-political ills of 1920's Germany urged him to co-establish and promote the National Socialist German Workers Party. His intention was to affect a radical turnaround in German society and to foster ethnic pride in the economically demoralized German people. He chose the swastika as their emblem. As Hitler's German pride party grew in popularity, the swastika took a central position on the unmistakable Nazi flag. This ended millennia of positive associations for the ancient symbol.



Figure 1

The swastika had been used by German rulers before Hitler, even by the First Reich. But it was only one of many exalted symbols for Germans. In the 1920s, the ambitious Hitler sought a singular symbol behind which all Germans might rally one day. Flipping the Indo-European swastika (which usually opened left, see Figure 1), Hitler satisfied himself that he had created his 'own version' of the symbol. If a graphic designer did this today with the established symbol of a company, he would probably lose the copyright infringement lawsuit that ensued. In addition, Hitler half-rotated the symbol, so that his new counter-clockwise *hakencruz* stood on one of its corners. Its nexus formed an "X" rather than a cross. Based on an idea that he may have actually got from a Jewish jeweler, Hitler then placed the tilted swastika inside a circle, giving it more so the elegant appearance of a commercial logo.

The swastika in a circle was powerful, simple, catchy. It would even make a good flag.

Hitler's final decision was therefore, one regarding color, the color of the flag. Steven Heller, art director at the New York Times and author of *Symbol of the Century* (a book on the swastika in twentieth century Western culture) once related to this writer that due to the political ferment in post-World War I Germany, there was much communist activity in the public gathering places. Heller said that Hitler had no love for the communists but was struck by their esprit de corps.

Their rallies were a sea of red Bolshevik flags. He envied that 'sea of red' and the feeling of brotherhood among the left wing Leninists. He hoped to foster this same

feeling of fraternity in his pro-German group. So the Nazi flag, like the communists', would be a red flag too. The circle would be white. The swastika would be graphic, basic black. This would become the flag of the Third Reich, the flag of the Nazis.

By the late 1930's, the totalitarian state of Germany became replete with the red, white and black swastika logo. It was branded on everything, from the uniforms of the soldiers to food products. However, all uses of the swastika were to be authorized by the Nazi Party.

This prevented the symbol from being ridiculed or unintentionally dishonored by inappropriate uses and associations. Also, while strictly under government controls, it earned royalties whenever it was employed. Whenever Hitler delivered his riveting speeches, the swastika flag lapped the wind above his head. When soldiers marched down the street, their swastika arm-bands clipped the air in unison. Though Hitler had been an unsuccessful commercial artist, he had hit upon the power of a singular symbol to mobilize the discontented and often poorly educated masses. But in the end, this auspicious symbol, tilted on its ear, confined in a circle and dipped in blood, would spin horribly out of control and ultimately, against its evil architect. And a Reich that was meant to last a thousand years, lasted little more than ten.

The Swastika in World Culture

The swastika is a symbol that can be found in the indigenous cultures of all the continents and figures among the very earliest symbols devised by humankind. Its applications are usually religious, or at least superstitious, and stretch far back into prehistory. The swastika tends to have certain common meanings in most of the cultures where it may be encountered. For the Ancient Greeks, the Chinese and the people of the Indian subcontinent, the swastika means good luck, long life and prosperity as it does for some Western Saharan tribes and Celts. For the Hopi tribe of the American South-West, the swastika means all of these things and also speaks of the migrations of humanity. The Hopi believe that humans first emerged from the earth and spread out in the four cardinal directions. Once we spread out, some of us returned to the original place, the nexus between Grand Canyon and Yucatan. The migrations described a compass cross (east/west/north/south) whose arms turn at right angles (to return), a swastika. The Hopi believe that those who managed to return with knowledge of their wanderings are the Hopi tribe proper, and that the rest of us are far-flung relatives who settled elsewhere. Every culture using the swastika has its own spin on the symbol, like the Hopi. But the core meaning of the symbol remains a happy, prosperous one wherever it is seen.

The swastika (or *tasita* as it is some times called in India) is featured in Hindu yantras and on the edges of Buddhist mandalas. Look closely at the Greek key pattern scrolling around the borders of ancient black and red figure pottery. It is often a pattern of interconnected swastikas. Observe the geometric designs in certain royal textiles from ancient Yoruba, swastikas recur every few inches. Zuni baskets and Navaho rugs will likewise reveal a wealth of "whirling logs" or swastika emblems, connoting the four seasons/the four winds. The swastika is an ancient symbol for sun gods in cultures as disparate as the Vikings and the Mayans.

Thousand-year-old swastika petroglyphs can be seen on the Anasazi ruins in Canyon de Chelly in Arizona and throughout the American Southwest (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

Visual characteristics of the swastika

There are many geometric properties to the swastika. It is at once a cross and a square. While following that square principle, it also describes a circular rotation in the axial spread of its "arms" like the arms of a windmill or pinwheel. Depending on one's viewpoint, its arms can be imagined to `turn' on their open sides like the scooping motion of a waterwheel or its closed corners to turn like the blunt teeth of a cogwheel. One would not usually ascribe such circuitous properties to an essentially square figure. The swastika starts as a cross with four arms of equal length. The arms then proceed to turn at right angles (all in the same direction). Four arms, therefore, divide into eight. These eight divisions essentially divide the square area of the swastika into four smaller squares like the four panes of a window. Thus, four divides into eight and returns to four again.

Numerologists in most of the cultures employing the swastika are not blind to these aspects of the symbol and attach different meanings to the four, the eight, the five, the six and other combinations that can be seen in its geometric configuration. From culture to culture, the basic swastika is approached very differently in design (see

Figure 3) but essentially remains a four-pronged figure with turning or bent extremities.

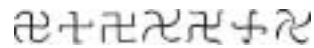


Figure 3

It is called by various names, some ethnic, some technical: fylfot, tasita, whirling log, hakencruz, ushnisha, srivatsa. But in this article, it will be referred to mostly by the standard Western name.

The Swastika in Indian Religion

In order to fully understand the Buddhist swastika we must consider first its pre-Buddhist origins. The swastika is a very ancient symbol whose applications go far back to before recorded history. Common to all the Asian cultures and religions that employ it, the swastika's earliest meanings seem to be that of long life and wealth. "Sv-asti" in Sanskrit means "it is well", so the very name of the symbol, svastika (v's pronounced like w's in Sanskrit), indicates its primary connotation. This 'auspicious swastika' adorns sculptures, paintings and sand mandalas of both Hinduism and Buddhism and other, minor faiths of Indo-European origins (see Figure 4).

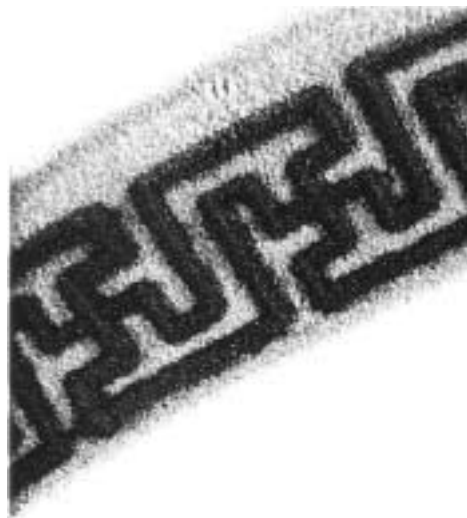


Figure 4

The swastika may be featured as a singular emblem in the palm of a deity's hand or on some other part of their body.

It may also appear as a decorative element, linked in continuous, repeating patterns on the edges of yantras and mandalas and along the borders of religious paintings. This second application resembles the repeating swastika pattern of the Greek key mentioned earlier and can be often seen on the borders of Tibetan sand mandalas like the Kalachakra.

But for all the diverse styles of Hindu and Buddhist swastikas, all seem to come from a common origin. The auspicious symbol seems to have been brought to the East by ancient peoples from Eastern Europe and the Near East.

The "Aryan" Swastika

Sanskrit and Latin are related languages, coming from the same root language, referred to by linguists as Proto-Indo-European. This shared ancestry between Europe and Asia Minor and South Asia was one of the most shocking and controversial discoveries of the 19th century with all of the West's elaborate theories of racial superiority. In Latin and Sanskrit, languages that come from earlier Indo-European roots, there are many words that remain more or less constant. Certain Latin prefixes, even in the English language are good examples of this still-extant Proto-Indo-European heritage, e.g. *para* (as in parapsychology) means "beyond" (beyond normal psychology) as it does in the Sanskrit word *parinirvana* or *paranirvana* (beyond nirvana). Similarly, the Latin prefix *tri* as in *triple* or *trident* tends to mean *three* as it does in the Sanskrit word *Tripitaka* (Three Baskets teachings).

In the Indo-European languages, a word *arya* often appears. Our contemporary use of the word *aryan* tends to assume that aryanians are Europeans and that the two words are synonymous. In fact, the Indo-European meaning of the word *arya* is "noble". An aryan, is therefore a nobleman, not necessarily a white man. German farmhands who join the Nazi army are not automatically *aryans*. Conversely, it can be said that a Jew who has good manners and good schooling is, in fact, an aryan. Anyone with good breeding, genteel mannerisms and knowledge of many subjects would be considered an aryan by the Indo-Europeans who coined that word. Indo-Europeans, however, referred to themselves as "Aryans" comparatively when encountering or conquering a people they thought were less advanced than themselves. This is how the word came to be associated with conquering and ruling classes (in both Europe and India), and more so with Europeans than with other peoples who might have adopted the word. It is a combination of encounters and conquests that brought Indo-European culture, words and the swastika to many parts of Asia.

In the second millennium BC, a great expansion of Eastern European tribes swept South Asia. These "Aryans" occupied many parts of Persia, Afghanistan, Gandhara (and other parts of present day Pakistan) and the Indus Valley region, after which India is named. The Indus Valley civilization had formerly been a great culture on par with that of the Mediterranean and Egypt. But at this time, it was in decline and presented little resistance, militarily or otherwise, to the Western invasion. The result was an eventual sublimation of Indus culture into the new Aryan culture. However, this new society would be a culture all its own, breaking from its European roots while showing a very strong influence from the indigenous people conquered.

The swastika would definitely have been among the symbols of these Aryan tribes. Other Indo-European cultures like the Greeks show ample use of the symbol in the geometric patterns on pottery and architecture (see Figure 5).



Figure 5

However, it is not entirely unlikely that the swastika would also have been used by the Indus Valley people. After all, it is a symbol common to all continents, found on textiles in Africa, architecture in China, in pottery, basket weaving and sand paintings in Native America.

So in the India of the Aryans, the India of the Hindu vedas and puranas, the land of Krishna, the avatar, the swastika was featured prominently. Paintings and sculptures of Hindu gods like Laxmi, and Ganesha often featured the religious effigies holding or wearing a swastika emblem. Gods such as these are particularly associated with good fortune, monetary prosperity and creativity and so depictions of them often carry the auspicious symbol to bring blessings upon the various ventures of the devotees. Ganesha is the god worshipped at the beginning of all new undertakings and is beseeched for success in business and academic matters. Laxmi has a more direct

association with the attainment of material wealth and amid the coffers of gold coins usually surrounding her in paintings are often the familiar Indian emblems of the lotus and the swastika.

The meaningful and decorative applications of the swastika, would carry through to other religions that emerged in India.

Being a Translator

by Rebecca Li

(A 49-day Retreat Report)

I was among the fortunate individuals who could attend Shi-fu's 49-day retreat this summer at the Retreat Center. Because of work, I did not join the retreat until the third week, when the second phase began. It has been a month since the retreat ended. The entire retreat experience was wonderful.

Plunging back into regular daily life after being "gone" for five weeks was a little strange at first, but my busy schedule got me back into it rather quickly. I have wanted to sit down to reflect on the retreat experience these last few weeks. The opportunity finally came when the Humanity magazine asked me to write an article talking about my retreat experience, in particular on how being Shi-fu's translator has affected my practice.

Thinking about this article got me to realize how much my retreat experience has been influenced by being Shi-fu's translator, and I am thankful for this opportunity to reflect on this wonderful experience.

Because this is not the first time I translated for Shi-fu in a retreat, I did not feel too nervous about the assignment. Being a relatively new translator for Shi-fu, I knew there would be terms I did not know how to translate owing to my lack of experience and knowledge in Buddhism. I knew I could only do my best and not worry too much about it. While feeling not too nervous about doing it, I knew translating Shi-fu's Dharma talks carried great responsibility. For participants who could not understand Chinese, all they got was what I could remember and understand from Shi-fu! I wanted them to hear as much of Shi-fu's teaching as possible. I vowed to do my best in order to translate everything Shi-fu said both in words and in spirit. To do so my mind had to be very clear and calm. Of course, it is our responsibility in the retreat to maintain a calm mind all the time. Having this responsibility, however, gave me extra motivation to be vigilant in my practice. I have been to several seven-day retreats before and the hardest thing for me in a retreat has always been getting up at four in the morning since I have never been a morning person. I used to have the hardest time staying awake for Shi-fu's early morning talk after the yoga exercise. After finding out that I would be doing the early morning translations at 5 am, my biggest fear was not being able to rest well and get up in the morning with a clear mind.

I told myself that the only way to have a clear mind by 5 am was to get up the second I heard the board at 4 am, go to the Chan Hall as quickly as possible, do some exercise that can really wake up my body and meditate for a while to clear my mind before the group yoga exercise begins. This means that I could not allow myself to fall into laziness and stay in bed for an extra minute. The moment I was supposed to be up I was up, and this started my day's practice in the right spirit—just do what needs to be done in the present moment. I strove to do this even when I was not the translator, but having this extra motivation made it less painful. I thought to myself, "doing this will improve my translation, and the audience will gain more from Shi-fu's teaching." So getting up at 4 am no longer seemed so dreadful.

Also, with this attitude, there was no room for the mind to dwell on the past, such as feelings of not resting enough or frustrations with people making noise before it was time to get up. Starting the day off in the right frame of mind greatly enhanced my practice for the rest of the day. Since I also knew that if I could maintain a clear and calm mind all the time, it would be easier to focus well when I had to translate, I also enjoyed the additional motivation to maintain my practice at all time.

Having to shoulder the responsibility of the translator allowed me to experience the beauty of the Mahayana path which emphasizes putting the benefits for others before that for oneself. Shi-fu always tells us that when we are only concerned with helping others, we ourselves will benefit most in the process. This is so true. Without the strong desire to make sure that the English-speakers get as much of Shi-fu's teaching as possible, I would not have practiced as hard. In the process of thinking less about myself and more about others' welfare, I was a little more able to put Shi-fu's teaching of putting down the self into practice.

Doing the translation also added challenges to my practice during the retreat. The intense engagement with the ideas and concepts during the translation tended to stimulate my mind to go into the intellectual mode. It sped up the thinking engine quite a bit. Needless to say, I experienced more wandering thoughts in the sittings right after the translations. Fortunately, these wandering thoughts were not all useless. I remembered Shi-fu's teaching not to loath wandering thoughts but simply return to the method. I followed Shi-fu's advice religiously; when a thought arose, I tried to return to the method. This advice was very useful. Although my mind could not stay on the method all the time, it did calm down enough to look at these thoughts more clearly. Another bit of Shi-fu's teaching reminded me that all wandering thoughts are self-centered, and that is why letting go of wandering thoughts is important in the

practice of letting go of the self. When I could look at these thoughts rushing through my mind, I saw that the most stubborn ones tended to have something to do with me. They tended to revolve around ideas such as "did I do a good job," "did I translate that correctly," "I am so ashamed that I didn't know that term," "I can not believe that I left that out," etc. These thoughts would keep replaying themselves again and again, and they were all about the "I"! It was amazing to see for myself the strong habit of the mind to cling to the self, even though I—the one meditating—really did not want to think about anything but to apply the method properly. It was very revealing and humbling to see how out of control my mind could be. It was also comforting to know that as long as I stayed with the method, I would slowly but surely regain control of the mind. How can I not be grateful to the Three Jewels? I am thankful for the job of translator as the translation sessions excited my mind so much that the extra wandering thoughts forced me to be more diligent in applying the method. As Shi-fu always teaches, unfavorable conditions are really favorable conditions because they strengthen our practice. This is so true, and I cannot but be grateful for the opportunity to benefit from these additional challenges.

Being the translator also made life in a retreat a little more complicated. Usually in a retreat, there is not much social interaction with others and this minimizes distractions so that we can concentrate on applying the method. As the translator, sometimes I got treated a little special. Fellow retreat participants would come up to me and offer compliments on my translation job or comment on how I have contributed so much as a translator. Inevitably, I observed prideful thoughts arising in my mind. At first, I thought to myself, "I really do not need this in a retreat. How am I supposed to put down the self when people are arousing pride in me?" Then I reminded myself that whenever vexations arose, it was my fault and I should not blame others. Again, I saw this as an extra challenge that came with the job, and challenges are always opportunities to strengthen my practice. Therefore, whenever I received compliments, prideful thoughts would still arise out of habit energy, but I would remind myself that my ability to translate, like everything else, was also the result of different causes and conditions coming together. It was a great opportunity to apply the teaching of pratitya samudpada (dependent origination). I reflected on how many people have taught me skills necessary for doing translation and given me valuable advice and information. I also felt grateful to all English-speakers who attended Shi-fu's lectures; if it were not for their attendance I would not have the opportunities to practice my translations. So really, my so-called contribution is nothing compared to what I have gained and it is not worth mentioning. I just cannot help feeling grateful for the opportunity. This

practice of giving rise to gratitude instead of pride when confronted with compliments will be something extremely useful to be applied in daily life.

Shi-fu is very compassionate. He was concerned that doing the translation might affect my practice adversely. In an interview, he asked if translating for him made it difficult for me to receive the teaching from him. I told him that I was probably the one who learned the most. In order to translate everything accurately, I had to listen attentively, making sure that I understood everything. Translating what Shi-fu said into English involved thinking about what I heard actively and digesting them fully before I could present them in a different language logically. I benefited greatly from this process; it ensured learning at a level deeper than if I were only listening in the audience. Instead of being an obstruction, translating let me better absorb the teachings.

All in all, it has been truly a privilege to serve as Shi-fu's translator and I can only hope to repay the kindness of everybody who helped provide me with this opportunity by applying what I have learned in my future practice and translations.

NEWS

Two Day Retreat at DDRC

The first Two-day Retreat to take place at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center started on July 28th. There were a total of 23 participants. Two participants flew in from the Chicago area. Their flight got cancelled but that did not discourage them. They rented a car, drove to DDRC from La Guardia Airport. They arrived at DDRC around 1:00 AM, July 29th. What a spirit!

Picnic at Bodhi Monastery

Guo-shun Fa Shi led over 75 people on the summer picnic at Bodhi Monastery, New Jersey, on July 9th. Bodhi Monastery was recently purchased by Yin-shun Foundation. Chan Center had to arrange a 57-person tour bus to accommodate the big crowd.

49-Day Retreat

The 49-day Silent Illumination Retreat ran from May 6th to June 24th at Dharma Drum Retreat Center. There were three two-week periods and then in the final week, the Bodhisattva Precepts were transmitted. There were participants from Croatia, Poland, Switzerland, Israel, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Singapore, UK, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan to attend this intensive program. Over 35 people attended this full 49-day program. Each session had average of 65 people. Over 120 people attended the Bodhisattva Precepts transmission. 6 monastics came to the retreat from Taiwan's Nung-chan Monastery to assist us on this auspicious event.

Bodhisattva Precepts Initiation

By Buffe Laffey

A Bodhisattva Precepts ceremony was held on the last day of the 49-day retreat. The entire seventh week of the retreat was given over to study and preparation for the event. Participants heard Dharma talks by Shih-fu on the meaning of the precepts, memorized their responses for the ceremony, learned how to wear a ceremonial robe, and practiced chanting. Like any retreat, there were also periods of work and meditation, and each evening a moving and beautiful Repentance Prostration Practice. Over 100 people participated in the ceremony. Some came for the precepts week only, some had already attended two-weeks of retreat prior to the ceremony,

while others attended the full 49 days of the retreat. Among the participants were family groups; parents and their grown children. In one case, there were three generations of the same family, including the youngest participant, a 12 year-old girl, her mother, and her grandmother who was the eldest participant in her 80's. Assisting with the ceremony and training were six sangha members from Taiwan.

This was the third Bodhisattva Precepts ceremony held in America with Sheng Yen Shih-fu as Dharma Master. Shih-fu himself wrote the ceremony, drawing on precepts information from the sutras and sastras. This ceremony differed from the two earlier American ceremonies in that, for the first time, Chinese and English were combined in the same ceremony. Bilingual people recited their vows in both languages. Non-Chinese speakers memorized their parts in English, and also memorized the Chinese instructions for bowing and standing, etc. and the words of the Chinese chants (we are very grateful to Rebecca Li for holding a special study group to help with this).

Many Westerners commented on how grateful they were that the ceremony was bilingual. The English translation allowed them to better understand and express the profound vows, while the Chinese chanting allowed them to experience the emotional beauty of the ceremony. Some Chinese speakers, for their part, commented that they were inspired by the Westerners who learned to sing the Chinese chants with such heartfelt conviction.

Some participants were taking the vows for the second or even third time, and reported that the experience was all the more meaningful for being repeated. For others it was the first time, and they found it to be a life-changing experience. One young girl said that, before attending, she did not feel she was a strong Buddhist, and she thought the idea of precepts was boring. For her, it was a last minute decision to attend. But having gone through the training and the ceremony, she felt blessed and fortunate. She was excited by the precepts, and very happy at the idea of being a Bodhisattva and helping people. All participants reported a powerful and joyful experience; some said they could truly feel the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who came to witness the vows.

The event was held at the Shawangunk Retreat Center, in the Chan Hall which is being remodeled. The hall was not quite finished, but the workers laid the plywood floor and installed all doors and windows in time for the event. Retreat work crews lay boardwalks across the bare soil surrounding the hall. A crew of volunteers spent a

very hot day getting the hall ready for temporary use. They taped the unsealed spaces between the windows, to hold in the insulation and to keep out insects (we are very grateful to John Crook for leading a crew to tape the high, hard to reach windows). The entire floor was covered with clean craft paper, meticulously taped, giving the hall the feel of a Japanese zendo lined with tatami mats. Another crew cleared the trash from the central court, and set stones and driftwood in place for a makeshift Zen garden. Ceremonial furniture was set in place, and vases of flowers. Finally, the large Buddha statue rode over in the pick-up truck, resting on a bed of meditation cushions.

The group photo taken the day of the ceremony shows a crowd of happy Bodhisattvas kneeling on the bare dirt in front of the unfinished hall. Their new Bodhisattva Scarves shine in the bright sunlight. No one who attended will ever forget this historic event.

Dharma Talks in the U.K.

On June 28th, Shifu and Guo-yuan Fa Shi headed to the UK to do a 10-day journey to propagate Dharma. Ming-yee Wang (who would translate Shifu's talks) and a television crew from Taiwan joined them on the trip. The first night, they stayed at Sharpham College for Buddhist Studies and Contemporary Enquiry, in Devon, UK. Next day they headed to Gaia House to start a 7 days intensive retreat. There were over 60 participants from Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Croatia, Italy, UK and USA. The teaching from Shifu was a mixture of Silent Illumination and Huatou methods. Gaia House was founded in 1984 and offers insight meditation and Zen retreats throughout the year. On the last two nights Shifu and Guo-yuan Fa Shi stayed at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, Hexham UK. During the stay, Shifu held two one and a half hour question and answer sessions to over 45 monastics. Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey's cardinal teaching and practice is Serene Reflection Meditation Tradition (Soto Zen).

Buddha's Birthday

Buddha's Birthday Celebration took place on April 23rd. Master Jen-chun's blessing, Shifu's Dharma talk, bathing of the baby Buddha, chanting and a big vegetarian feast were the highlights on that day. There were over 400 guests in attendance. Entertainment in the afternoon included beating the Dharma Drum, folk dancing and a performance by the Chan Center choir.

Annual Membership Meeting Draws A Crowd

Report by David Berman

A capacity crowd filled the Chan Hall in Elmhurst, Queens as the Chan Meditation Center of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association held its annual membership meeting on Sunday, June 25th at 9:30am. Attendance was excellent despite the early hour, and the fact that the meeting came immediately on the heels of the historic 49-day retreat completed the previous day at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York.

Board member Nancy Makso opened the meeting by welcoming the membership, and reporting on the just-completed retreat. Thirty-five practitioners attended the entire 7-week event, and another 100 attended one of three 2-week segments. During the final week, 93 retreatants received Shifu's transmission of the Bodhisattva Precepts. Nancy also announced the induction of ten new members of the CMC, bringing the total membership to nearly a hundred. Membership is by invitation only.

Guo-yuan Fa Shi, Vice President of DDMBA-USA, and Abbot of both the CMC and DDRC, spoke about the development of the Retreat Center, still under construction. He reported that cost overruns have swelled the budget to nearly one million dollars, mostly due to the choice of high-quality materials for the expansion of the Buddha Hall, but that much of the excess expense will be defrayed by the recent donation of a half million dollars in stock. Ernie Heau then reported on publications, which this year will include the fall release of Shi-fu's eagerly awaited "Hoofprint of the Ox", published by Oxford University Press, as well as new books on the Heart Sutra, the Four Noble Truths, and the practice of silent illumination.

The meeting also included reports by Anselma Rodriguez on the past year, by Virginia Tan on membership, a financial report by Treasurer Guo-jin pu sa (we operated "in the black" last year), and a report on fund-raising plans for the coming year by DDRC Director Carolyn Hansen.

Finally, it was necessary to elect two new members to the board of directors, to fill the vacancies left by the departure of Jeffrey Kung and Giora Carmi, whose 2-year terms had expired. Jeffrey Kung was re-elected to fill one seat, and Ernie Heau was chosen to fill the other, with David Berman elected as the alternate.

The business before the membership being completed, and there still being forty minutes left before the lunch offering, Shifu thanked everyone for coming out on a Sunday morning, and suggested we use the time for meditation, and with that, the meeting was adjourned.
