

Sense of Humility

by Chan Master Sheng Yen

In Chinese the word "*chan kui*" means that whatever we do we could do better and we should do better. This concept is quite useful to our practice. We can and should do more than we have already accomplished. In English we translate this term as "**a sense of humility**" or "**a sense of shame**," although neither covers all of the word's connotations and nuances.



When we reflect on ourselves we realize that we have not fulfilled all of our responsibilities. Also, we often do not do our best. In addition, we do things that we should not do, we say things that we should not say, and we have thoughts that we should not think. We even exhibit facial expressions that we should not have! We know that we should not engage in certain actions of body, speech and thought, yet we continue to do them, lacking self-control and self-restraint. Recognizing this, we should generate a sense of humility and shame and we should feel the need to do better.

The idea that we can and should do better can help us all the way to Buddhahood. We have not done our best until we reach Buddhahood, which is perfection.

<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 December 1st and 26th, 1987, and were edited by Chris Marano.</p>	<p>Commentary by Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>4</p>
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Chan and "Emptiness" (sunyata) This is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled <i>Hoofprint of the Ox</i> , which is based on lectures by master Sheng Yen translated, compiled, arranged, and edited by professor Dan Stevenson.	By Master Sheng Yen	10
Pure Action An excerpt from Master Sheng Yen's book, <i>Complete Enlightenment</i> .	By Master Sheng Yen	14
Eight Verses on Training the Mind: The Dalai Lama's Commentary in Central Park On Sunday August 15 the Dalai Lama spoke to thousands of people gathered in Central Park on <i>Eight Verses on Training the Mind</i> by Gesge Lang-ri Tang-pa.	By Lawrence Waldron	17
Retreat report	By M.K.	23
News (special: Earthquake in Taiwan)		25

This magazine is published quarterly by the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, Chan Meditation Center, 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, New York 11373, (718) 592-6593. This is a non-profit venture solely supported by contributions from members of the Chan Center and the readership. Donations for magazine publication costs or other Chan Center functions may be sent to the above address and will be gratefully appreciated. Your donation is tax deductible.

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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 December 1st and 26th, 1987 and were edited by Chris Marano.

***Those not moved by the environment,
Are strong and great.***

Those not moved by the three levels of environment -- phenomena not related to you at all, phenomena that happen to you in a cursory way, phenomena that you actively and willfully engage -- are considered strong and great. To reiterate, an example of a phenomenon that is not related to you might be the sound of a jet passing overhead. An example of a phenomenon that happens to you in a cursory way might be a chance interaction between you and another retreat participant. An example of a phenomenon that you actively and willfully engage might be the pain in your legs. Pain in the legs is a physical phenomenon, but the thoughts derived from that pain are a product of your discriminating, self-centered mind. Pain is pain, but the mind which experiences the pain will either remain calm or become vexed.

It is difficult not to be influenced by the environment. Today, was anyone able to meditate, do yoga exercises, eat, work, prostrate, slow walk, fast walk, listen to lecture, recite the liturgy, or even rest without being disturbed by the environment? Do not be disturbed if, in recalling your day, you realize that you were off your method or unmindful many times. Practice is precisely catching yourself engaging in thoughts of past, future and fantasy, and bringing yourself back to your method or to the task at hand.

Every situation is an opportunity for practice. For instance, are you disturbed by the ticking clock, or do you use it to help your practice? Most of you have indicated that the even, rhythmical sound of a clock is not a hindrance. That is good, but what if a team of construction workers were digging up the sidewalk outside? This actually happened when our Center was located down and across the street. I recall it was a particularly hot and muggy summer retreat. That Center was not as luxurious as this one. What little ventilation we had, was provided by open windows and a noisy fan. All day for seven days we were surrounded by the sounds of jackhammers, hydraulic machinery, power tools, and workers talking, yelling, laughing, cursing and telling

stories. Two of them ate lunch every day right outside one of the windows, and all of us heard their conversations. It was challenging, to say the least. How many of you would have remained undisturbed through all of that? Would you have been able to use that commotion to help your practice?

One of you says that you would deal with external disturbances by grabbing hold of your mind and chi. That will not work. If you grab hold of your mind, it will hurt. If you grab hold of your chi, it will become obstructed. What you must do is grab hold of your method. If you are really concentrated, you will not be bothered by any external phenomena, no matter how chaotic it might seem.

How many of you are aware of me when I walk behind your meditating bodies? If you are aware of me and it moves you to think and wonder, then your mind is scattered. If you are aware of my movements, but you are undisturbed and continue with your method, then your mind is fairly, but not deeply, concentrated. A deeper level of concentration would be if you were so focused on your method that you were completely unaware of my presence. One of you is indicating that you are sometimes unaware of my movements. Strange. If you are unaware of my movements, then how can you be sure I was even there?

Usually, retreatants are easily disturbed by movements, sounds and body pain the first two-to-three days of retreat. As the retreat continues, however, your concentration will strengthen and deepen. You will acknowledge, but no longer be bothered by, things that disturbed you in the beginning. I would describe this as moderate concentration. In deep concentration, you would not even note or acknowledge external phenomena.

Think of your method as stringing pearls, each pearl indicating your attention to the method. As your concentration deepens, the spaces between each pearl -- those times when your mind is idle or not on the method -- will lessen and eventually disappear. When there are no longer any gaps in your concentration, you will not be disturbed by any external phenomena. You will be unmoved by the environment.

Of course, the unmoving mind I have described here is different from what is often described as the "unmoving mind of an enlightened being." As has been the case with previous verses, these lines of verse can be interpreted on two levels: that of ordinary practitioners and that of enlightened beings. I am sure all of you have had experiences where you were completely unaware of phenomena around you because you were so concentrated on what you were doing. You do not need to practice

meditation to experience this. It is not uncommon. People engrossed in reading, writing, studying, working, watching or listening to a performance can become so absorbed by what they are doing that they are not aware of sounds and other disturbances around them. These are examples of a non-enlightened mind that is unmoved by the environment.

I recall seeing a movie a long time ago in which a child was watching an outdoor performance. The boy was outside the periphery of the audience, and he had been tending a small fire to keep warm. He became so engrossed in the performance that he forgot about the fire. Unbeknownst to him, the fire spread and started to scorch the back of his clothes. Still, he was so involved in the performance that he did not realize what was happening. Part of his awareness knew something was amiss because he would occasionally wave his hand to shoo away the disturbance, but never once was his focus on the performance broken. His clothes ignited, and still he was unaware. It took a bucket of cold water thrown on him by someone else to break his concentration. If you can work on your method and attain the same degree of concentration as that boy attained, then you have reached a fairly deep level of concentration.

The second level of interpretation describes enlightened beings who have let go of all attachments. When there is no self-center or mind of attachment, there is no mind to be moved. On the other hand, enlightened beings are clear and keenly aware of all that happens around them. It is as the Diamond Sutra states: "The mind should be kept independent of any thoughts which arise within it. "The mind that the Diamond Sutra speaks of is not the self-centered mind of vexation, but the mind of wisdom. The objective environment exists, but there is no longer a self which attaches to it.

The unmoving mind of enlightenment is different from the ordinary mind that is unmoved by disturbances. Actually, the mind that is wholly concentrated on the method is stuck to the environment. In this case, however, the environment is the method. Although the mind is focused and working hard on the method, it is still a discriminating, self-centered mind. Hence, the mind that moves is the mind of discrimination; and where there is discrimination, there is vexation. If discrimination and vexation still exist, so too does the self. With the enlightened mind, there is no self-centeredness; and, although the environment still exists objectively, enlightened beings do not perceive it as such because they have no egos which attach to it.

"Those not moved by the environment are strong and great" does not refer to people who are famous leaders, athletes, or karate experts. It refers to those who are

unmovable. Those without self-centers are truly strong because they cannot be deterred by anything or anyone. One who is self-centered can still be harmed or influenced by others; but a selfless, enlightened being cannot.

Such strength and greatness can sometimes be observed even among unenlightened people. For example, people who act not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of others, are often more courageous than those who have only their own interests in mind. Their words and actions are often more noble. Acting always and only with one's own benefit in mind -- even if it is striving for enlightenment -- is not a sign of strength and greatness. That is why the first Bodhisattva Vow states, "I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings."

While we traverse the Bodhisattva Path, we are still ordinary sentient beings, replete with vexation, attachment and egos. There is still the idea, "I want to help sentient beings," and there is still a sense of satisfaction when we see the good work we have done. This is good, but it is not enlightenment. As the Diamond Sutra also states, for those who have attained great enlightenment, helping still continues, but there is no longer an "I" who helps or sentient beings who need to be helped.

There is neither people nor seeing.

Without seeing there is constant appearance.

These verses relate to what the Diamond Sutra says about there being no self and no sentient beings. In this case, "no people" refers to there being no objective reality and "no seeing" refers to there being no self-view, or subjective reality. However, even though there is neither self (subject) nor others (object), everything is still clearly perceived the way it is. When there is no "you" working on the method and no method being used, we say that you have become one with the method; and although there is neither a "you" nor the method, you are still working hard from moment to moment.

People come to retreats so that they can spend an intense, extended period of time cultivating their minds. For most people, meditating an hour or two a day at home does not provide enough momentum to penetrate a method deeply. As we meditate sitting period after sitting period, we should attempt to make the environment as well as our minds become smaller and smaller, until there are no others to see and no self that sees them.

I understand that some retreatants here are making phone calls and waiting for family members to arrive so that they can receive and deliver messages. People who have been on retreat before know that this is not permitted, and for good reason. If we cannot even remove ourselves from our relationships with the outside world for seven days, there is no way we will be able to make our minds and the environment become smaller.

The first condition for a successful retreat experience is that you let go of, or isolate yourself from, all thoughts about anything outside the Chan Meditation Hall. The second condition is that you let go of all thoughts about everything that happens in the Meditation Hall. If someone yawns and causes you to yawn in turn, then you have not yet removed yourself from what goes on around you. Although yawns may be contagious under normal conditions, they should have no affect on you during retreat. Train yourself to remember that you have no relationship to people sitting around you. They are they and you are you. I see that someone is dozing while I am lecturing. What do you think? Is it because she is bored or sleepy, or is it because she is clearly on her method and knows that I have nothing to do with her? Since it is the first day of retreat, I would wager that it is the former reason.

The third condition is that you let go of all thoughts about yourself. When your legs or back become painful, you must cultivate the ability to say, "These legs and back have nothing to do with me. I am meditating." Or, this sleepy practitioner can tell herself, "My drowsiness has nothing to do with me. My body may be drowsy, but I will continue to work on my method."

The same is true of wandering thoughts. Once you realize you have been caught in a web of wandering thoughts, all you have to do is return to the method. The wandering thoughts are not you. The person who had just entertained wandering thoughts is also no longer you. That person is now part of the past. In the present moment, you are working hard on your method. If what I am saying to you right now is useful to you right now, then accept it; but do not continue to think about it. Likewise, do not imagine what the next moment will bring. You will experience it soon enough.

If you can isolate yourself in this manner -- first from the outside environment, then from those around you, then from your own body and wandering thoughts, and finally from the past moment and the next moment -- then you, your method and the environment will disappear. This is the ideal. When practitioners claim they have reached such a level of absorption, it is usually for a different reason. Namely, they have become fatigued from expending so much energy and have fallen into a stupor.

Many people who claim to have had enlightenment experiences have merely gone blank from exhaustion. Obviously, this is not the condition of which the Song of Mind speaks. If it were, I am sure many of you would have already experienced enlightenment.

"Without seeing there is constant appearance" also refers to the enlightened mind. To an enlightened being, all phenomena are still present and moving, but there is no self which interacts with them. This condition -- when there is no self but everything is still present -- is called wisdom. There is complete awareness of phenomena and all of their movements, including the movement of the body, but there is no self which attaches to it. If, in your practice you get a taste of what it is like to be undisturbed by the environment, you will feel free and at ease. If you get to the point where your former thought and subsequent thought have no relationship to each other, you will feel even freer.

What I speak of is not easy to accomplish. We are ordinary human beings, and as such we are often moved by our thoughts, feelings and emotions. We are moved by sensations of the body. When our body is in pain, or ill, or exhausted, it is difficult to concentrate on things like meditation methods. In addition, we are moved by thoughts of the past and future. We are moved by others around us. We are moved by the everyday world. That is why retreats exist, so that we can devote the time and effort necessary to isolate ourselves from such relationships.

Today is the first day of retreat. Begin it by isolating yourself from the outside world. Let go of all thoughts about the day you just experienced. For the next seven days, your world is your method in the present moment. Devote all of your attention to it.

Chan and "Emptiness" (sunyata)

by Master Sheng Yen

*This is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled *Hoofprint of the Ox*, which is based on lectures by master Sheng Yen translated, compiled, arranged, and edited by professor Dan Stevenson.*

Chan and Buddhist Meditation

The word "chan," from which Chan Buddhism or Zen Buddhism takes its name, is a Chinese transliteration of the Indian Buddhist term dhyana, meaning "meditative concentration" or "meditative practice." Applied specifically to the Chan or Zen school, it carries the particular sense of the cultivation and experience of enlightenment itself, not just any sort of meditative experience. Thus Chan or Zen Buddhism is often characterized as the school of meditative experience qua enlightened insight par excellence, for it claims to embody and transmit the living wisdom that Siddhartha Gautama achieved when he became the Buddha or "enlightened one."

As the timeless insight that informed the Buddha's fashioning and preaching of the Buddhist doctrine, this enlightenment can be said to both precede and "stand apart from" the spoken word of the Buddhist sutras. But at the same time, it is immanent to the sutras and the spoken Dharma as the very subject around which they orbit. For the scriptures both take it as their foundation and aspire to point the way back to it, as a finger might point to the moon or a raft be constructed to help one reach the other shore. The living wisdom to which the Buddha awakened and to which his spoken teachings aspire is the heart of Buddhist tradition in all its forms.

This being the case, Chan is not something utterly distinct from the sutras, much less antagonistic to them. For it embodies the very insights that the sutras seek to express, allowing for a profound complementarity between the two: What is stated in words in the Buddhist scriptures will be confirmed in fact in the course of Chan practice, while what is experienced in Chan practice will resonate immediately with what is written in the sutras.

Today one hears many American students say that, as practitioners of Zen or Chan, they don't need to learn or think about the Buddhist sutras and their teachings. Just sitting in zazen is the real practice; reading and studying written words is for soulless pedants and academics. In China, Korea, and Japan, where knowledge of the

Buddhist teachings was widespread, such a rejection of the written word makes poignant sense. But this is a very dangerous attitude in a culture that has no native traditions of Buddhist learning to speak of. For silence, in and of itself, is anything but innocent or neutral, much less free of ignorance. How the more problematic it becomes when it is blissful!

Chan/Zen and the sutras are both the wisdom of the Buddha, and between the two there is no real discrepancy. Without the Buddha's word how would we ever hear or think to seek the Dharma, much less begin to fulfill our vow to help others on the path to enlightenment? If one has already set out on the path of "Zen" or "Chan," what is this "enlightenment" that you are seeking? What are the aims of "Zen practice"? What does it entail and how does it "work"? If you did start to ask such questions about Zen, you would probably hear a lot of aphorisms, sayings, and stories from previous masters, all of them gleaned from books. If you started to look into this Chan or Zen literature you would soon discover that it is more extensive than any other school of East Asian Buddhism, even the doctrinal ones! Indeed, to be a good priest or Zen master in Japan, one must be trained in this literature through and through. You would also find that the ancient Chan masters and patriarchs were themselves highly literate individuals, whose teachings were deeply imbued with the language of the Buddhist sutras. Moreover, of all the specialized ideas that one might come across, by far the most common would be liberative insight or wisdom (*chih-hui; prajna*) and its correlate teachings of "emptiness" (*k'ung; sunyata*), "having nothing to obtain" (*wu so-te; anupalabda*) and "having no place to stand or abide" (*wu so-chu; apratistha*).

Bodhidharma, the twenty-eighth Indian patriarch and first Chinese patriarch of Chan, once remarked, "The Buddhas expound the Dharma of emptiness in order to eradicate the myriad false views. But should you then cling to emptiness, even the Buddhas will be unable to do anything to help you. When there is arising, it is only emptiness that arises; when there is perishing, it is only emptiness that perishes. In reality nothing whatsoever arises or perishes." [1]

The Sixth Chinese patriarch Hui-neng once said, "In this teaching of mine, from ancient times up to the present, all have established no-thought (or no-mind) as the main doctrine, non-form as the substance, and non-abiding as the basis. Non-form is to be separated from form even when associated with form. No-thought is not to think even when involved in thought. No-abiding is the original nature of humankind." [2] The great Chan master Lin-chi said: "I don't have a particle of Dharma to give to anyone. All I have is cure for sickness, freedom from bondage. You followers of the Way from here and there, try coming to me without depending on anything." Or, "I tell

you, there's no Buddha, no Dharma, no practice, no enlightenment. Yet you go off like this on side roads, trying to find something. Blind fools!" [3] Thus we find throughout Chan history instances where the scriptural teaching of "emptiness" is equated with the heart of Chan practice.

If one looks through the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana scriptures, one will find that they talk endlessly of the need to realize prajna or "insight and wisdom." In the Hinayana teaching, the simple hearing of the Four Noble Truths and the resolve to seek a solution to the miseries of birth and death (samsara) is a kind of prajna "insight." But in its most profound sense, prajna is nothing short of the living insight -- born of meditation -- that eliminates the defilements that keep one bound to the cycle of samsara. What that insight discloses is that suffering, in all its forms, is the reified product of false views and "topsy turvy" thinking. By awakening deeply to the fact that existence is problematic rather than pleasant, that existence is fleeting rather than stable, and that, as persons, we are not the discrete and enduring "selves" (*anatman*) that we have always thought we were, a world that was formerly experienced as a tangle of conflict (*dukkha*) is transformed into the easefulness and illumination of nirvana.

In the Mahayana sutras, prajna or "insight" continues to carry the same transformative power, but to an even deeper level. Through the "perfection of insight or wisdom" (*prajnaparamita*) -- what the sutras aptly call the "mother of the Buddhas" -- the bodhisattva acquires the wisdom that enables one to deliver others from suffering along with oneself. Upon awakening to the fact that every aspect of mental and physical experience is "empty" of absolute "ownbeing" (*svabhava*) -- that every individualized moment or object is dependently interconnected with and contingent on everything else -- the bodhisattva sees the unconditioned world of nirvana and conditioned world of samsara as perfectly interfused. So doing, he or she perfects the wisdom, compassion, and skill in means that brings the supreme perfect enlightenment of a Buddha. The Heart Sutra says, "Relying on this perfection of wisdom, the bodhisattva's mind is freed of impediment, and by dint of his freedom from impediment he is free of fear and departs far from illusory thinking, thereby realizing the highest nirvana. All Buddhas of the three times acquire supreme perfect enlightenment by relying on this perfection of wisdom (*prajnaparamita*)."

In the Vajrayana, this insight into "emptiness" (*sunyata*) wherein samsara and nirvana, wisdom and skill in means, enlightenment and afflictions are experienced as identical is itself the "bliss void" of the Tantric adept. In the Chan or Zen tradition, too, the

insight of sunyata is the foundation of Chan practice. One could say that Chan enlightenment is itself none other than an awakening to sunyata.

Notes:

1. From Ta-mo lun, in Yanagida Seizan, ed. Daruma no goroku. Zen no goroku 1 (Tokyo: Chikuma shoten, 1969), p. 58.
 2. Philip B. Yampolsky, The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (NY: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 137-138.
 3. Burton Watson, tr. The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), p. 53.
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Pure Action

by Master Sheng Yen

*An excerpt from Master Sheng Yen's book, **Complete Enlightenment**.*

Motivation is the key in determining whether desire is pure or defiled. An action is pure when performed solely for the sake of others, without concern for oneself. It is pure even if there is a concept of self behind the action. The actions of parents for their children, for example, can be pure in this sense. On the other hand, if someone helps another in order to win that person's love, the action is not pure. When our actions are motivated by a desire to help others without consideration for personal benefit, desire is transformed into compassion. Although it is not the true compassion of a bodhisattva, it is still good because desire is becoming purified.

Objects of desire may take many forms. We may desire physical things, such as food, clothing, or comfort. We may desire emotional gratification, such as the love of another. We may desire recognition or fame. We may desire good karma in order to ensure better conditions in future lives. There is nothing wrong with having desires. The fulfillment of these examples would not automatically cause one to be reborn in lower realms. But these are not examples of true compassion. If we calculate the benefit we will receive from our actions, it is not compassion. If we practice because we want to transcend samsara and attain Buddhahood, it is not compassion. As long as there are ulterior motives in our minds, no matter how lofty these motives may be, it is not compassion. It is not wrong or bad, but it is self-centered love and desire, not compassion.

We may have passed a wild flower and stopped to admire its beauty and fragrance. The flower may remain in our mind as we walk away. We may even contemplate picking it. In a sense, we have fallen in love with this flower. We may have gone beyond enjoying it. Now we want to possess it so that we can enjoy it continuously. We all have a hunger that makes us want to possess something we don't have, and which drives us to hold on dearly to that which we already have.

Similarly, one may have a good experience while meditating, feeling pure and light. In the future that person will likely desire this experience again, and so will continue to meditate. This is yet another attachment. As long as one is attached to spiritual experiences, self-centered love and desire are still present.

Of all the experiences one can have, none brings more happiness than samadhi. The deeper the samadhi experience, the greater the happiness will be and the longer it will last. People who have experienced deep levels of samadhi may remain peaceful and even-tempered for the remainder of their lives. In comparison, the happiness derived from food and sex is coarse and short-lived. Someone who has reached the highest levels of worldly samadhi may feel liberated, but attachment still exists; the person is still motivated by self-centered love and desire, not compassion. It is still samsara. Again, there is nothing wrong with samadhi, but it isn't liberation, and it isn't compassion.

For enlightened bodhisattvas and Buddhas, the forces of self-centered love and desire are replaced by compassion and vows. Compassion manifests when bodhisattvas and Buddhas help sentient beings. Compassion is the action and vows are the motivating force. Bodhisattvas make vows until they reach the eighth bhumi, or stage, of the Bodhisattva Path -- the position of non-intentionality. At this stage, they help sentient beings spontaneously. Once they attain the eighth bhumi, bodhisattvas no longer need to make vows. Here's an analogy: you may vow to climb a mountain, but you don't have to repeat the vow once you reach the top.

To vow to be liberated from birth and death because of an aversion to samsara is not enough. To vow to free oneself from vexation is not enough. One must take the vows of a bodhisattva, who is not concerned with liberation but rather with helping other sentient beings toward liberation.

Practitioners on the Bodhisattva Path should make vows for the benefit of others, not for themselves. Bodhisattvas do not vow to reach the Pure Land, but if their vows to help others are accomplished, they will also benefit. By the time we are truly capable of helping others, we will already be more evolved. In fact, it is only when we are awakened that we can truly help others. If we learn to swim well enough to help others from drowning, we will also have liberated ourselves from drowning.

We need vows to motivate ourselves to cultivate compassion in order to help others. In contrasting compassion with love, understand that even with the more elementary levels of compassion we are not concerned with our own benefit; the emphasis is on ultimately helping others toward liberation. On the other hand, although there are many levels of love, some more expansive than others, self-centeredness is always involved.

There are three levels of compassion. The first is compassion that arises from a bodhisattva's relationship with sentient beings. The bodhisattva sees people suffering and vows to help them gain liberation. In this case, there is a subject that feels compassionate and an object of that compassion. Also the bodhisattva recognizes differences among sentient beings. This is the compassion of a bodhisattva before the first bhumi. The second level of compassion is compassion that arises from the Dharma. The bodhisattva naturally helps sentient beings without distinction or discrimination, but there is still a subject and an object involved. This applies to a bodhisattva on the first through seventh bhumi. The third and highest level is where the distinction between subject and object is transcended. This is the compassion of great bodhisattvas and Buddhas and is without limit and conditions. Bodhisattvas on the eighth bhumi and above, as well as Buddhas, have the greatest power to help others, but for them there are no ideas of sentient beings or compassion. It is only sentient beings who see it as such.

As ordinary sentient beings, it is a given that we possess love, but true compassion is another matter. Even the first level of compassion is hard to attain. As Buddhists, we vow to help others. These vows put us on the path to achieve the first level of compassion. To reach the Dharma level, we need to start ascending the ten bhumis of bodhisattvahood. To reach the highest level of compassion, we must attain at least the eighth bhumi of the Bodhisattva Path. Bodhisattvas return to the world of samsara to help others by virtue of their vows. They may voluntarily enter the circle of birth and death and live as humans do or they may briefly manifest as transformation bodies and then disappear. However, their appearance is not driven by self-centered love and desire, for if it were so, this love and desire would cloud their minds and obscure their wisdom and they would still be subject to the forces of karma.

Bodhisattvas appear because of the power of their vows. Sentient beings are driven by self-centered love and desire and so are concerned with gain and loss. Therefore we suffer vexations. Love, however, is a necessary part of our lives. We must learn to elevate our love, to transform our love for self and others into compassion, which is without limit and distinction.

Eight Verses on Training the Mind: The Dalai Lama's Commentary in Central Park

Report by Lawrence Waldron

On Sunday August 15 the Dalai Lama spoke to thousands of people gathered in Central Park on Eight Verses on Training the Mind by Gesge Lang-ri Tang-pa.

Early on a cloudy, Sunday morning, my fiancée and I got aboard a somewhat crowded number 7 train, bound for Manhattan. Could so many people be going to work on a Sunday? Riders of the #7 train are notorious for their strange working hours. It is one of the most populous trains, even in the dead of night. But many of these people aboard this morning's train were dressed far too festively to be going to work. In fact, they were decked in full ethnic finery of a sort that convinced me they were going where I was going. These were Tibetans and they were on their way to see the Dalai Lama in Central Park. Each time the train stopped, more Tibetans got on. Some knew each other. Some did not. Tibetans are scattered all over the world, so wherever they settle, they tend to be a very mixed and slightly disparate group. The train filled with the complex syllabary of their Himalayan language, a bit strange, even on the #7, New York's most diverse train route. Chinese, Korean and Southeast Asian passengers knitted their brows and cocked their ears, not sure what to make of this colorful Asian minority. I smiled and my heart brimmed with a warm feeling of solidarity. We were very much so, pilgrims. Immigrants from very different places, but Buddhists all the same and for a few hours today, we would be joined by our aspirations to a state of compassion and the desire to be bathed in the effulgent presence of His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama.

We all took the same route there. Tibetan prayers and mantras became more audible as we got off the train and made our way through the Upper East Side towards Central Park. Really, I have never felt so part of a pilgrimage as I did that day. We all stopped at the stores on the way to buy bottled water, bagels, pretzels. Many of the Tibetans had brought home-cooked meals, though. It was now becoming apparent that some of the other passengers in the subway were also on their way to see the Dalai Lama. I could not have told for sure by the malas on their wrists because Buddhist rosaries have become quite fashionable these days and are sold as jewelry at every little gift table in the city. But as we entered the park and joined the line that snaked through the maple trees, I knew that many of these Westerners were also among the faithful.

It was still before 9AM, the official time for seating (His Holiness would not speak till 11). But there were already droves of people settled in Central Park's East Meadow. In fact, those of us who came early managed only to stake out a spot on the very rim of the sunken meadow. We were perhaps the last row of people who would be able to see His Holiness directly. Others behind us would have to look at the large monitor set up at the south end of the meadow.

Everyone seemed at peace or at least, in good spirits. Most of the audience was not Buddhist. I could tell because people stared as I bowed towards the stage where His Holiness would speak. Despite their different origins, a certain spirit of tolerance and compassion seemed to settle over the crowd. It was actually possible to meditate in the midst of all these people because they were not nearly as loud and restless as I had expected. However it was no longer possible to sit, as latecomers began filling every spot, beside you, in front of you, behind you. Evidence of the Dalai Lama's mass appeal.

I watched the sky, still cloudy. It would never rain that day, despite weather predictions on all news programs.



Finally, it was time for the Dalai Lama to speak. Cymbals and bone trumpets had cleared the air of inauspicious influences. The crowd was at peace, though a little expectant. The Parks Commissioner had sung the praises of His Holiness, Richard Gere had received a standing ovation for his involvement in bringing the religious leader to New York and then hearts leaped with joy as His Holiness came onto the platform. The crowd was on its feet, faces a little flushed, hands clasped, eyes glued to the stage or to the giant TV monitor. It is true that on this day New Yorkers were positively miraculous in their patience and tolerance, even as late-comers jostled for space, stepped on people's blankets and so on. But in their ignorance of Buddhist tradition, the mostly non-Buddhist crowd sat down quickly and became impatient with those of us who remained standing till His Holiness had taken his seat.

Never had I heard His Holiness talk on so many matters nor in so short a time. He spoke about things I had never heard him tackle before. I suspected it was because of the approaching millennium that he found it necessary to cover all these sociopolitical

issues. It turned out that some of these are topics of his latest book (which, with typical humility, he did not even mention at this talk). He spoke of economic inequality. He spoke of the abstract and illusory nature of borders and political boundaries. Ownership too was an illusory concept, just what I needed to hear as one of my cramped neighbors was accidentally using my shoulder bag as a footstool. His Holiness spent no less than 10 minutes on the topic of racism, in America, South Africa and, of course, in India and Tibet. This I found particularly interesting and heartening, not only as a black immigrant to the United States but also having heard some unduly harsh criticisms of His Holiness that he has an increasing number of black followers but has never really spoken on "black issues."

Such criticisms were vanquished that glorious Sunday as he told a tear-jerking story of a black school teacher he had met in Soweto, South Africa. His Holiness had told this gentleman that a world of new possibilities had opened up with the ending of apartheid, that there was much work to do, but that secure in the knowledge that blacks in South-Africa were now on equal social footing with whites, there was no obstacle that could not be overcome. But the school teacher seemed insecure and it came out that he did not truly believe that blacks were equal to whites after all. The Dalai Lama was shocked that the teacher could say or think such a thing. "With this" said His Holiness "I had to argue!" His Holiness told the unfortunate man that South Africans, like Tibetans could not afford to let oppressive circumstances convince them that they were inferior, that they should never lose sight of the fact that all people are equal and to approach this equality with self-confidence and ambition. In tears, the teacher found His Holiness' words to be true and was deeply moved to a healthier outlook.

Self-confidence was the chord running through most of the talk. His Holiness counseled that those who were fortunate should develop the self-confidence to render aid to the less fortunate, to not despair in the face of too many suffering people, to never check one's compassion out of cynicism or any sense of futility. Conversely, the unfortunate should not wallow in their suffering but generate a hearty resolution to work hard and remove themselves from their adverse circumstances ethically, lawfully, truthfully.

The teaching followed the Eight Verses on Training the Mind by Langri Tangpa, so many of His Holiness' analogies and anecdotes were used to illustrate the following verses:

Eight Verses on Training the Mind

By Geshe Lang-ri Tang-pa

Determined to accomplish
The highest welfare of all sentient beings
Who are more precious than wish-fulfilling jewels,
I will practice holding them supremely dear.

Whomever I accompany,
I will practice seeing myself as the lowest amongst them,
And sincerely cherish others supreme.

In all my actions,
I shall examine my mind,
And the moment a wild thought arises,
endangering myself and others,
I shall face it and prevail.

When I encounter those overwhelmed
By strong misdeeds and sufferings,
I shall hold them near as if I had discovered
A precious treasure difficult to find.

When, out of jealousy, others treat me badly
With abuse, slander and the like,
I will practice taking all loss
And offer the victory to them.

When someone I had benefited in great hope
Unreasonably hurts me badly,
I will practice regarding that person
As my most excellent and holy guru.

In short, I will learn to offer help and happiness
Directly and indirectly to all my mothers,
And secretly take upon myself,
All their harmful actions and suffering.

I will keep all these practices
Undeiled by the superstitions of the eight worldly concerns,

And by understanding all the dharmas as like illusions,
I will practice, without grasping,
To release all sentient beings from bondage.

In the first two verses, humility is stressed in dealing with sentient beings and in seeing them as a most precious opportunity, "more valuable than a wish-fulfilling jewel."

And yet, His Holiness reminded the audience, that humility too, must be cultivated with self-confidence. So placing others above oneself is not done out of low self-esteem (as in the case of the South-African anecdote) but out of a deep understanding that others are as much a part of you as your organs or your limbs. 'Taking care of others is taking care of yourself.' My own understanding was that if one develops, say, liver disease, then one's liver becomes one's chief concern above all other organs and so, the sentient being in need of our assistance is the sentient being we are to hold chief, above even ourselves. Treating your enemy as if he were a "treasure, difficult to find" sent ripples of uneasy laughter through the sea of young bodhisattvas. No doubt, this is easier said than done, we thought. But His Holiness explained that our enemies are, in fact, our greatest gurus. They supply us with the most strenuous practice, the best exercise for our method. "Offering the victory to them" comes naturally from seeing them as oppressed creatures in need of our generosity. Being treated badly by people after doing good deeds for them, liberates us from the selfish expectation of rewards.

The last verses implore us to willingly take on the suffering of others and that of our "mothers." I was unsure whether the reference to our mothers was pluralized because the verse had always been meant to be recited by a group of people or if it referred to the common Buddhist belief that all sentient beings were at one time, our parents. This was the only part of Thubten Jinpa's always splendid translation that was left a bit unclear.

In the very last verse, is a vow to always keep these aspirations undefiled by selfish considerations. The Dalai Lama stressed the importance of discipline in holding to one's compassionate vows and aspirations. He jovially pointed to the weather as a perfect example of self-discipline in that it had prevented itself from raining on this wonderful occasion. A brief initiation followed in which a compassionate, ecumenical prayer was said three times, wishing "wealth for the poor, power for the weak, courage for those afraid..."

The Dalai Lama bowed to us, told us happily to go home, we bowed to him and dispersed.

As we left the park, I thought what a rare occasion this was. This many people from so many walks of life have not come to hear a Buddhist teacher, perhaps since the Buddha himself spoke at Vulture Peak and Jetavana Grove some 2,500 years ago. I was assured of the continuing power of Buddha-Dharma to transcend the barriers of the mundane world. It was truly a miraculous day!

Retreat Report

by M.K.

day one

a blank in my memory,
with the exception on some concern whether my freshly injured right leg would hold
up to the sitting;

day two

a blank

day three

no blank: my unruly day as the timekeeper;
there was interview with Shih-fu, in groups of five, with fifteen participant being absent
at once;
the tracking of who was where turned from difficult during the intermissions to
impossible during walking meditation;
then, counting full and empty cushions, I certainly missed one person, a lady;
some days later this came back to me, I checked the ladies' cushions, on each there
was one sitting;
up to now I do not know whether one did not get her interview;
in the dining hall, I happened to glance a wall-picture: it showed Shih-fu with the Dalai
Lama: immediately the misery of the Tibetan people was in my head;

day three/four

I dreamt of fighting cruel men;
restless, no peace;

day four

as the monitor, a nightmare came true: the alarm failed to
go off;
four minutes after four I woke up, jumped the wrong way
into my pants, out and in again, and hit the morning board;
with the exception of Cathy, the reliable spirit, who started
to walk in my direction, nobody indicated having noticed;



day four and five

no peace, poor sitting, I needed instruction;
in the morning there was interview with an assistant;
before noon Shih-fu walked to me while sitting and tapped my shoulder: "did you get
an answer?"

"no"

He took me outside, sat on a rock and pointed me to sit in front of him;

"what is the question?"

"no peace"

this is what he had to say:

"killing is the nature of samsara, the ocean of suffering;

man is the most anxious of all animals, yet he kills by far the most, his own kind and others;

we have to use reason;

the root is ignorance, not evil;

wisdom and compassion, both are necessary;

forgiveness is not enough, compassion is;

there is only one way, the path of liberation;

there is only one cure to the suffering, the spreading of the Dharma;

although none of this was new to me, I realized it was true;

sitting in front of him, much like a disciple might have sat in front of the Buddha more than two millennia ago, I clearly saw it to be true;

day six

the second half of the last sitting was my best ever:

the body reduced to a faint shell, no wandering thoughts;

the hua-t'ou steady in front of me;

the doubt sensation steady and like a cloud in my upper body.



NEWS

Sangha Meeting at DDMBA Taiwan

Guo-yuan Shih represented Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association of America and the Chan Center sangha at a meeting event in Taiwan. On Saturday August 21st, 1999, he attended a gathering for honorary board members of the DDMBA in Taiwan.

On Sunday, August 22nd, from 9AM to 4PM, he attended the World Gathering of DDMBA Members. About 2,000 people were in attendance. On Tuesday, August 24th, the first Tri-annual Sangha Meeting of DDMBA Taiwan was held. In this meeting, the focus of discussion was the laws of the sangha of Dharma Drum Mountain.

Recitations

On the August 29th, there was a one-day recitation of the Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra at Chan Center. One hundred and fifty people attended. More than forty people attended a One-Day Recitation of the Buddha's name on September 18th.

Retreat

From September 3rd to the 6th, there was a Three-Day Retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Shawangunk, upstate. Twenty-eight people attended from New York, New Jersey, Georgia and Oklahoma.

Earthquake in Taiwan

The Taiwan Earthquake. Transcription of a talk given by Shifu at the November 5th Dharma Gathering after his return from Taiwan.

On September 21st there was a major earthquake in Taiwan. More than 2,300 people died, tens of thousands were injured, and property loss amounted to 100 billion U.S. dollars. It was a terrible disaster in a country whose population is only 22 million. So,



on average, each person in Taiwan lost about \$3,000 U.S.

The earthquake occurred around 1:45 AM. Three hours later, I arrived in central Taiwan, the earthquake's epicenter, to lend my support to the victims. I visited the families of people who had died, to

give them my condolences. I went to hospitals to visit those who were injured, to give them my encouragement. A lot of them were in intensive care wards, very seriously injured. I visited some people very shortly before they died. In the open area in front of the hospital, there were hundreds of corpses laid about. At first, it seemed like a lot of those rescued from the rubble would survive. But many died on the way to the hospital. They could only be put here, in the open area outside the building. Very few of these corpses were completely intact. Most of them were crushed by falling concrete blocks or rubble during the earthquake; pretty much disintegrated.

I went to the area where the fault line lay. On one street right on the fault line, I looked at all the houses and there was not one that had not collapsed. The earthquake itself only lasted for around thirty seconds. Not even a minute. All these houses collapsed within that time. The houses collapsed in different ways. In a lot of them, the pillars of each floor broke. The top floor would then collapse onto the next, lower floor and just keep going down in succession. There were other tall buildings where the pillars broke at the bottom level and so the entire building collapsed sideways. When these buildings fell, they did so onto the next building, breaking that neighboring building as well.

One victim there told me exactly how the earth was shaking during that thirty seconds of the earthquake. The earth shook up and down, then shook sideways. However strong a building is, it will collapse with this kind of shaking in all directions. There was no time to escape. The only people who could escape were the ones who lived on the top floors of the multi-story buildings. Even when the building collapsed sideways, they were injured, but could still escape because the upper floors were intact.

When the building collapsed straight down, the people on the top floors still survived. But there is no way that people who lived on the bottom could survive.

The way these buildings collapsed is very interesting. Imagine a dog in the snow; the dog is covered with snow. When the dog shakes his body the snow flies off. When these buildings collapsed, they were pretty much the same way. When the building was shaken up and down and sideways, all the concrete got shaken off. At the end there was only the steel frame left. Under these conditions, it is impossible for someone to survive.

The scene over there is very, very sad. In some households there were survivors but in some, the entire family died. Only friends or distant relatives could be depended on

to take care of their funerals. The whole situation was very sad indeed, the most sorrowful thing I've ever witnessed in my life. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't.

What I'm going to tell you next may be very difficult to imagine. There was a hill, about 100 meters tall. A large hill. There were people living atop the hill and at the bottom. Down the middle of the hill ran the fault line. During the quake, this hill was divided into two. Half of the hill stayed where it was but the other half slid for two kilometers. During the process, it actually rode over another hill and stopped on the other side of that hill. The households on top of the first hill felt the quake. They were fine and their houses were intact. But when the residents came out, they found that they had moved two kilometers. People who lived at the bottom of the hill were all dead, totally crushed during the process of the sliding. This half of the original hill had slid two kilometers and formed a new hill, about a hundred meters tall. This is something I've never heard of, myself. What happened to this piece of land was that one side was subsumed, and the other side was raised, covering the side that went down. So the owners of the piece of land that was covered no longer have that piece of land.

There are about 300,000 people without homes. The victims in the disaster area were left without water, without electricity, without food, without a transportation network. All the roads were disrupted. Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan, and a lot of the local organizations worked very hard to help the victims. I, myself, went to the disaster area four times. When I left Taiwan on October 18th, a lot of people would still not return to their homes. They lived in the park, on the side of the road, slept in tents all because they were afraid that the houses would collapse. They were not sure if they would collapse, because there were tens of thousands of aftershocks after the September 21st earthquake. There are still aftershocks now.

This disaster really affected everybody in Taiwan. The buildings of Dharma Drum Mountain did not collapse, but a lot of our followers and people related to us were affected. In central Taiwan, there is a very well known scenic area. All the houses there collapsed, so for the next two or three years it won't be possible to tour that area and enjoy the scenery. In central Taiwan, there are over 100 temples, and more than ten of them were completely destroyed. Those that collapsed were all large monasteries with a few hundred people living there. But in all those collapsing temples, there was not one person injured. This was very strange.

There are two stories I will tell about. The first one is about the Buddhist Study Institute, in the Monastery of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Right after the earthquake the monks in this monastery decided that they should get out of the building, and so they

did. As they were getting out, the building began to collapse right behind them. A few of them did not leave right away, and the part of the building they were in stayed intact for that little moment while they were still there. It then collapsed right after they got out. None of them got injured. It was very strange. The second story is also very strange. In a two-story building, the people on the ground floor escaped, but those on the second floor were trapped there. The building had partially collapsed and so there were no staircases. They couldn't walk down. All the doors and windows were broken, so they crawled out of the windows. These windows were pretty high, more than the height of 2 people, over 10 feet above the ground. I asked them "The ground is pretty far away. How did you get out and not get hurt?" They said, "Well, at that time it just looked like it was really close to the ground and we just got out." This was very strange.

The abbot of this monastery had been in his room during the quake. All the doors and windows had been destroyed. He remained in his room, with no electricity, in total darkness. There were some documents that he needed to take care of, documents related to the property of the monastery. He wanted to make sure that he had organized these documents and taken them safely out with him. When he was in that pitch-dark room he could see the documents clearly as if in daylight. He organized everything and after he finished, he couldn't see anymore. It was dark again. At that time, other people who had escaped came to rescue him. When he was asked how he saw in the dark, he said, "I am not sure. I don't know how that happened."

These are two stories that I wanted to share with you. In the earthquake, these practitioners didn't get hurt or lose their lives. After they escaped, the monks didn't have anything except the clothes on their bodies. But they went to help the victims in the local area right away.

The earthquake had a serious psychological effect on the people of Taiwan. From very young children to adults, the people are still traumatized by this experience. A lot of them see the fragility of life, impermanence, and how property and life can be lost overnight. They feel hopeless and they are in despair. A lot of them have begun to have mental problems, some hallucinating. Those who were helping the victims began to have problems, themselves, and had to receive treatment.

To help these people in Taiwan, who have suffered so much, Dharma Drum Mountain is training 5,000 people who will go to the victims and help them with their mental problems. During this period, I was very busy, from Sept 21st until I left Taiwan on Oct 18th. In less than a month I had given a lot of talks and written a lot of essays. These

have already been compiled into a book and published to assist these people. Here in the U.S., a lot of volunteers have also collected donations to help the victims of the earthquake. At the Chan Center, we have collected over \$90,000 U.S. to date.

There are two ways we can go about supporting the victims. One is helping materially and the other is to help them psychologically. Rendering material assistance is a little easier, though it's not that easy. However, to help psychologically, to heal from this experience, will probably take about ten years. The occurrence of this disaster seems to be giving us a lot more work. However the Buddha comes to this world because it is impermanent. There is suffering here. That is why the Buddha has been busy alleviating the suffering of sentient beings in this world, especially psychological suffering. So in this catastrophe, I find that our organization is very useful in helping the victims. Instead of thinking, 'well, there is a disaster in Taiwan, so we'd better leave,' we should see this as an opportunity to tread the Bodhisattva Path, to practice helping other sentient beings, and to give more of our time and our heart in helping these individuals. At this time, the use of wisdom in handling matters of life and the use of compassion to care for others is very appropriate and useful in what's going on in Taiwan.

Book Fair

On September 26th, representatives from Chan Center went to the New York is Book Country fair. Volunteers passed out Meeting of Minds, Spirit of Chan, and Advantages One May Derive From Zen Meditation booklets. By the early afternoon, all the materials brought had already been passed out and volunteers had to ask the Center to ring more copies of the free booklets and materials to the event.

Shawangunk Country Fair

On Saturday, October 2, Lindley Hanlon and Guo-huan represented Dharma Drum Retreat Center and Dharma Drum Publications at a bustling country fair in Wallkill, New York, 15 minutes from the Retreat Center. Setting up a book booth under a large awning housing 6 or 7 other vendors, they distributed hundreds of copies of Shifu's dialogue with the Dalai Lama Meeting of Minds and other free handouts to many passersby. Local residents were very friendly and receptive to these books; many were eager to take a beginning meditation class scheduled for March. In the festive setting of a real country fair, complete with firehouse barbeque and displays of tractors and fire engines, the open-mindedness of our neighboring residents was evident and heartwarming. We look forward to the growth of friendships, community activities, and classes in the Shawangunk area.

Fall Picnic

The Fall Picnic took place in Shawangunk on October 17th. After lunch, picnickers went on nature walks, hikes and sightseeing at the nearby Ice Caves.

Chan in Daily Life

On November 20, Master Sheng Yen gave a lecture at Rutgers University in New Jersey entitled "Chan in Daily Life". Over 300 people attended. Twenty people took refuge in the Three Jewels and also took the Four Great Bodhisattva Vows during a Three Refuges ceremony following the talk. A reception followed during which Master Sheng Yen spoke personally with many people. The event was co-sponsored by the Rutgers Zen Meditation Group lead by Dr. Kurt Spellmeyer and the New Jersey chapter of Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association.

Ordination

On September 9th, Earth Store Bodhisattva Day, Nung-Chan Monastery held a very auspicious ordination ceremony. 7 laypersons were ordained as monastics. Among these new sangha members was our very own Cathy, whose Dharma name will be Guo-shen Shi. She is the first Chinese-American woman from Chan Center to be ordained as a nun. Congratulations, Guo-shen Shi.

Fundraising for Taiwan Earthquake Victims

On September 25th, the Chan Center, DDMBA New Jersey Chapter participated in a fundraising event for the support of the Taiwan earthquake victims, sponsored by the Yin-Shun Foundation. It was held at the Taiwan Cultural Center in Flushing, New York. Members of the Chan Center, New Jersey DDMBA and other Buddhist organizations donated various household items and valuables like jewelry and art to raise over \$80,000.

Blessing Ceremony

On the evening of September 25th, Guo-yuan Shi lead Chan Center members to the Botanic Gardens in Flushing where they attended a blessing ceremony for the Taiwan earthquake victims. The interfaith ceremony was sponsored by the Eastern American Chinese Business Association. The Buddha's name, the Heart Sutra and prayers from the Christian and Jewish traditions were recited.

On September 27th, the regular Monday night recitation of Amitabha's name was replaced by a special recitation of the Amitabha Sutra and a blessing ceremony. The merits were transferred to the Taiwan earthquake victims.

Further Fundraising

At the Sunday Open House on September 26th, Chan Center members set up a fundraising booth outside the Center and on October 3rd DDMBA, New Jersey Chapter organized another fundraising event for Taiwan earthquake victims. They raised over \$10,000. On November 6th, Lindley Hanlon guided 13 members of the Buddhist Youth Group on a tour of 20 works of Buddhist art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Students were encouraged to focus and silently contemplate each artwork for a few moments before saying how the work conveyed important Buddhist ideas.

Lecture and the Three Jewels

Shifu spoke at Rutgers University in New Jersey on November 20th. Over 300 people attended the talk on "Chan in Daily Life" sponsored by Rutgers Meditation Group and DDMBA, NJ Chapter. Twenty people took the Three Refuges in a ceremony after the lecture.

Lecture and Meditation Demonstration

The Philosophy Department of Dowling College in Oakdale, Long Island invited Guo-yuan Shi to give a talk and demonstration on meditation on December 8th. Guo-yuan Shi spoke to over 80 listeners on basic methods of sitting, breathing, walking, sleeping and yoga exercises.

Thanks to Linda

The staff of the Chan Magazine would like to express our heart-felt gratitude to Linda Peer for her work as the managing editor of the publication. She has done an excellent job of assembling and administering this quarterly for the past 5 years or so. As she must leave us now, we wish to thank her and wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

Happy Birthday Shifu

It is rare to be born human. It is rarer still to discover the Dharma in this life. How miraculous it is to be blessed with a great Dharma instructor. This winter, Master Sheng Yen turns 70. We celebrate his life, nobly spent in the service of sentient beings. We express our deepest gratitude and consider ourselves fortunate indeed. Happy Birthday, Shifu.
