



Four Pursuits: Advocacy for Stabilizing People's Minds:

Pursue only what we need.

Do not pursue what we merely want, as it is not important.

Pursue only what we can and should acquire.

Never pursue what we can't and shouldn't acquire.

Chan Master Sheng Yen

<p><u>Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung</u> Commentary on a seventh-century poem expressing the Chan understanding of mind. This article is the 31st 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 edited by Chris Marano.</p>	<p>Commentary by Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>3</p>
<p><u>The Four Noble Truths</u> This is the last of four Sunday afternoon talks by Master Sheng Yen on the Four Noble Truths, at the Chan Meditation Center from November 1st to November 22nd, 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.</p>	<p>Lecture by Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>6</p>
<p><u>So if desire is bad, is Buddhism</u></p>	<p>David Berman</p>	<p>17</p>

anything like Stoicism?		
Retreat Report		23
News		24

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Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung

Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This article is the 31st 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.

Neither entering nor leaving,

Neither quiet nor noisy.

These two lines of verse speak to enlightened beings as well as to beginning practitioners. The Heart Sutra states, "This voidness of all dharmas is not born, not destroyed, not impure, not pure, does not increase or decrease." In other words, the coming and going of dharmas, birth and death, and leaving samsara to enter nirvana, are all products of our discriminating minds.

It seems relatively easy for people to intellectually accept these concepts. The words are a great source for rationalizations. "You have vexations? Well, vexations and wisdom are one and the same." "Practice? Why? Ignorance is the same as enlightenment, samsara is the same as nirvana, and we are already Buddhas." "Don't worry about birth and death. There is no coming and going." That is all well and good. It works well when someone in a different relationship leaves his or her partner for a new love interest, but what if it is you who are being rejected. These are wise words when someone else's parents die, but how well would the words work for you if it were your parents.

Humans have emotions. We are attracted to some things and avoid others. Things do not always go as we would like them to go, and we suffer. We all have vexations. The words of the Heart Sutra speak of the enlightened condition. For ordinary sentient beings, replete with discriminating minds and attachment to self, birth and death still exist, vexation and wisdom are different, and practice leads one from samsara to nirvana. From our point of view this is all true. But, when you actually do leave behind all vexation and attachment to self, then you realize that vexation and wisdom as well as samsara and nirvana are one and the same. If you arrive at a level where there is no more clinging to birth and averting death, then you are in nirvana. But if your mind is still influenced by the environment and you are still governed by karma, then you still reside in samsara.

"Neither entering nor leaving" refers to the deeply enlightened person. Beginning practitioners, however, can also make use of this principle in their attitude towards practice. As I have said many times, when you are practicing, do not think about achieving enlightenment or entering samadhi, or leaving behind wandering thoughts or your pain. Do not seek anything. Just stay with the method.

Beginning practitioners can also make use of the second line of verse: "Neither quiet nor noisy." First-time retreatants at the Chan Center are surprised to discover that we are located in the heart of New York City. If it is peace and quiet you are after, you have come to the wrong place; that is, if you feel that peace and quiet come from the outside. While we practice, we are bombarded by sounds from outside -- traffic, subways, children coming and going to school, people coming and going to work, buses stopping and starting right outside our doors -- and by sounds from inside -- phones ringing, people walking behind you, the clock ticking, people cooking in the kitchen. If you are moved by these sounds, then it will be difficult to concentrate on your method. But if you attend to your method, then the sounds will not be a bother. Sounds are everywhere, it is you who must change.

I will tell a story. Before a particular monk became a master, he practiced in a large monastery. No matter how hard he tried, he could not concentrate for long periods of time. There was just too much noise and commotion. So, he decided to leave and practice alone in the mountains. When he arrived, he finally relaxed, "Finally, no more people to disturb my practice. This will be great." He sat down to meditate. Just as he was relaxing, a bird started to chirp right above his head. He tried to push it out of his mind, but he could not. "Too much noise!" He tried to chase the bird away, but it was no use. Finally, he thought, "It's the trees that draw the birds, so I'll go where there are no trees." So he walked to a meadow and began to meditate again. "Ahh, no more birds." But he forgot about the insects. He would slap the ground and that would quiet them for a few seconds, but they would soon begin again, and after awhile it became unbearable. He thought, "This is not a good place for meditation. Let me go to a place where there are no bugs and birds." He walked until he found a small pond of water that was fed by a stream. Soon after he sat down, the frogs started to croak, and behind that noise he could hear the continual trickle of the stream. He realized that there was no place that was quiet, and decided to take matters into his own hands. He balled up small pieces of cloth and stuck them in his ears. Now it did not matter where he sat because he could not hear anything. "Now I'll be able to meditate," he thought. He sat for a few minutes, when suddenly, "Where is the sound of those drums coming from?" When he removed the cloth to listen, the drumming stopped. As soon as he put the cloth back in his ears, the drumming resumed. Then he realized the drumming was the sound of his own beating heart. Disgusted, the monk figured, "I'm just not cut out for meditation. I may as well forget it."

Later on, a master told him, " The problem is not with sounds, but with the mind that is influenced by those sounds." As soon as the monk heard those words, he immediately became enlightened. This is good advice for all of us. In and of themselves, phenomena are not disturbing. It is the mind that is moved by phenomena which calls them disturbances. I hope that you can put this into practice, especially those of you who are sitting next to the door where the noises are louder. If, however, you agree with the monk in the story that it is the sounds that are a problem, then let me know. We can always move you and your cushion to the boiler room.



The Four Noble Truths

by Master Sheng Yen

This is the last 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. These talks are compiled in the booklet: "Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel"

Chapter Four: The Cessation of Suffering

Today I will complete my presentation of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism. In three previous talks we discussed the truth of suffering and the truth of the origin of suffering. We will continue with the third and fourth noble truths: the cessation of suffering, and the path of cessation.

The Meaning of Cessation

True cessation is not the process of ending suffering; true cessation is a state of complete realization. It means having completely terminated emotional affliction and having fully realized the path; it is liberation from the causes and the effects of suffering, and it is a state where there are no more outflows -- the root defilements of craving, becoming, and ignorance that keep us in samsara, the cycle of birth and death.

The cause of suffering is resistance to suffering and trying to escape tribulation. We help ourselves when we can find meaning in our suffering and allow ourselves to live through our difficulties, when we can understand and accept suffering as the result of our own thoughts and actions. To the degree that we recognize the causes of suffering and really experience their effects, we achieve a kind of liberation, and we have begun to be free from it.

As an analogy if you are not relaxed when you sit in meditation your legs and back may hurt. In this case the cause is your body taking a meditation posture; the effect is discomfort. So you have the both cause and the effect of suffering. But if you find value in meditation, then to a degree you will free yourself from the discomfort of sitting. Not that the discomfort will go away, but you will not try to escape or resist, and your mind is already liberated. This is just an analogy, but you can say this is a kind of cessation of suffering.

Realizing the Nature of Emptiness

True cessation is fully realizing the nature of emptiness and liberating oneself from the cycle of birth and death. How does one fully realize the nature of emptiness? To understand emptiness

we should first understand the workings of causes and conditions. Phenomena come into being through 'conditioned arising,' the coming together of causes and conditions mutually influencing each other. Everything is in constant flux; nothing remains the same one instant to the next. Any cause or condition affecting the object will transform the whole. Through this constant transformation all phenomena arise, deteriorate, and eventually cease. Since everything is in flux without a permanent nature or identity, there can be no separately identifiable 'self'. We call this quality of selflessness in phenomena 'emptiness.' This emptiness of substantial reality we call 'no-self'

Those who realize the nature of emptiness also realize that their own nature is that of flux, change, and impermanence. They will directly experience that mind, body, and environment, are pervaded with a dynamic quality of emptiness. They will see buddha-nature. To deeply and fully realize buddha-nature is to become an arhat, a noble one who has attained cessation. It is to have the four characteristics of an arhat: (1) that all defilements have been purified, (2) that all that needs to be done has been done, (3) that all future rebirths have been exhausted, and (4) that liberation from karma and retribution has been achieved. This is realizing the true nature of emptiness.

Nirvana

Nirvana in Sanskrit means 'extinction-quiescence.' Extinction is the complete cessation of suffering and the termination of the samsaric cycle. Quiescence means that fundamental ignorance and its vexations have been stilled, extinguished, no longer arising. There are two levels of nirvana: nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder. An arhat who has realized nirvana with remainder has been liberated from all mental defilements but the body of retribution still remains. The body is still subject to the misfortunes that can befall a body, but this remainder does not have the ordinary person's vexation from having a body. The arhat still experiences painful events and difficult situations but being completely free from the klesas--desire, hatred, and delusion--the mind does not suffer. Such was the case with many of the Buddha's disciples who became enlightened.

The second kind of nirvana is nirvana without remainder (parinirvana), where the life cycle terminates with no trace of the five skandhas, and no future retribution. From the perspective of individual liberation, an arhat or a buddha who enters nirvana without remainder will no longer appear in the three realms of existence. From the perspective of the bodhisattva path [4.1] there are certain important differences, but for now I want to focus on how nirvana relates to cessation. Either one of these nirvanas is reached at the fourth fruition [4.2] level of the arhat path, the level of 'no more learning.' The three previous stages are all called stages 'with further learning,' where there is still a need to practice.

Indeed, talk of liberation can be quite enticing and alluring, but until we become an arhat these lofty states have no relation to us. Talking too much about nirvana can trivialize the path, so let's continue talking about the path itself.

The Eightfold Noble Path

When the Buddha expounded the Four Noble Truths to five ascetic monks at Deer Park, he explained the fourth noble truth as the path away from suffering. By this he meant the eightfold noble path, which are the eight practices that can lead one to cessation. These are right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right perseverance, right mindfulness and right concentration.

This eightfold path is the middle way between extremes of indulgence and asceticism. Following the path of pleasure will not free one from suffering because happiness and pleasure are not lasting, and inevitably everyone encounters misfortune, illness, and death. On the other hand asceticism with its harshness and self-torment cannot, by itself, lead to wisdom and freedom from attachment. Free from these two extremes one should follow the stable and middle way of the eightfold path.

Because we have not yet realized the truth of cessation we find ourselves still in the four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. To help us end the cycle the Buddha taught us to practice the eight paths, eight ways of being through which we can begin the process of cessation. First I want to make sure we understand the difference between the *process* of cessation and the *realization* of cessation. The noble eightfold path is a gradual process of ceasing our vexations and suffering, including the root vexation of ignorance. To the extent of one's attainment in the eightfold path, one will diminish one's vexations and suffering. The path is gradual, but the ultimate result is complete realization of cessation.

While on the eightfold path we should also practice the five higher preparations of faith, generosity, precepts, concentration, and insight. They are called preparations because as we advance on the path, we reach higher levels of fulfillment of these requisites. But we should not understand the five preparations and the eightfold path as separate. The more we engage in the five preparations the deeper we get on the eightfold path. As we discuss the eightfold path in detail, we will also relate them to the five higher preparations.

Because of time limitations I will not discuss in great detail the eight paths, as they deserve at least one whole lecture by themselves, but I will try to briefly explain each and relate it to the cessation and liberation.

Right View

The first noble path, right view is the correct understanding of the true Dharma, especially the Four Noble Truths, the three Dharma seals (three marks of existence), and the twelve links of conditioned arising. We have discussed these concepts in previous talks. The first higher preparation, faith, is very much connected with right view. As Buddhists we must not rely on blind faith but on faith based on a correct understanding of the Dharma. As such, right view may be the most important of the eightfold paths in accomplishing cessation.

Right Aspiration

The second noble path is right aspiration, which also means 'correct thought' and 'correct reflection.' As Buddhists we should hold correct views but we should also integrate them into our thinking and into our very being. To accomplish this we must reflect on what we have heard and learned. In relation to the Four Noble Truths we must understand the origins of suffering in our own actions, and we must see all circumstances as potential suffering. Understanding the origin of suffering, we will develop right aspiration and affirm that suffering can be ended. With that conviction we integrate the Four Noble Truths into our thinking and our own being, and we engage the path. This is what is meant by right aspiration.

Right Speech

Right speech is the cultivation of the four precepts governing speech. The first is to speak the truth and to abstain from uttering falsehoods, of which the most serious are claiming to be a buddha when one is not, and claiming to be enlightened when one is not. The second is to refrain from slander or divisive speech that can create discord. The third is to speak pleasantly and courteously, and to refrain from harsh language that can cause suffering to others. The fourth is to refrain from frivolous chatter, and idle or malicious gossip. When practiced as virtues these rules of speech help to purify our minds and actions.

Right Action

Right action refers to abstention from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking of intoxicants. They are basically the five precepts one accepts when taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. To observe these five precepts is right action. Right action relates to suffering insofar as action is karma, and as long as we create karma that leads to suffering, cessation is not possible.

Right Livelihood

Right livelihood means earning one's living in accordance with Buddhadharma, and not causing harm to oneself or others while doing so. There are therefore many kinds of right livelihood, and many kinds of wrong livelihood. The Buddha proscribed earning one's living

through breaking any of the precepts of right speech and right action. Wrong kinds of livelihood also include making one's living through deception, through self-aggrandizement, through occult practices, through false claims about oneself, and through exaggeration. There are subtle distinctions among these but they all involve deception and exploiting others. In connection with right livelihood, the Buddha said in the *nikayas*, "... this holy life is not for cheating people, scheming, nor for profit, favor, and honor... this holy life is lived for the sake of restraint, for abandoning [delusion], for dispassion, for cessation [4.3]."

Right Effort

The sixth noble path is right effort, or perseverance, and refers to the four proper lines of exertion, or endeavor: (1) to cut off unwholesome acts that have already arisen, (2) to prevent from arising unwholesome acts that have not yet arisen, (3) to develop wholesome acts that have not yet arisen, and (4) to increase wholesome acts that have already arisen. By 'acts' is meant physical acts as well as words and thoughts. Right effort is endeavoring to attain whatever in the Dharma is attainable through faith, diligent application, and perseverance.

Right Mindfulness

Ordinarily our minds are full of a whole army of distractions and discursive thoughts. Right mindfulness is being free from these mental afflictions so that there's just one thing remaining in the mind, and that is the path of practice. One approach to mindfulness practice is to contemplate the six objects of mindfulness: the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the precepts, the merits of renouncing worldliness, and the merits of good deeds. The six mindful practices are really the prerequisites to engaging in the four foundations of mindfulness of body, of sensation, of mind, and of dharmas (external and mental objects).

It is not necessary to practice all six mindful practices before practicing the four foundations. You can choose any one of the six as a preparatory practice. Once we engage in the four foundations of mindfulness, we can enter the eighth noble path of right concentration.

Right Concentration

Right concentration consists of a whole repertory of samadhi [4.4] practices. It would not be possible here to detail all of them, but they include the seven expedient stages: (1-5) the five methods of stilling the mind [4.5], (6) the four foundations of mindfulness, and (7) the path of seeing, which is the first level of the arhat path. For right concentration there are also the practices of the sixteen aspects [4.6] of the Four Noble Truths, which was briefly discussed in the first lecture.

Cessation and the Twelve Links

To begin the process of cessation we need to understand the twelve links of conditioned arising, and how they are both the causes and the effects of suffering. The twelve links are the stages that an individual experiences through the samsaric cycle of birth and death. The first is (1) fundamental ignorance: being ignorant as to the impermanent nature of existence and being defiled by the poisons of desire, hatred, and delusion. This link sets into motion the second link, (2) action, or volitional impulses, where the seeds of karma are planted. The third link is (3) consciousness, the active mental force that propels us from one life cycle to the next. In the fourth link, (4) name-and-form, we enter the phase of the current life in which the karmic residue of consciousness and bodily form unite to ultimately become an individual. The fifth link, the (5) six entrances, or sense faculties, are our windows of interaction with the world. Note that in addition to the senses, consciousness is the sixth sense faculty; The sixth link, (6) contact is the interaction of the sense faculties with the environment. The seventh link, (7) sensation discriminates among experiences as to pleasurable, painful, or neutral. The eighth link, (8) desire, is the result of the interactions between sense faculties and their sense objects. The ninth link, (9) grasping, is the eighth link translated into action. When the craving for existence becomes grasping, one's re-entry into the world of samsara is imminent. The tenth link is (10) existence, the creation of a new cycle of karma in the form of a sentient being. Once there is sensation, inevitably there is desire, when there is desire there is grasping; once there is grasping, there is existence; once there is existence, there is the eleventh link, (11) birth. The newly born individual has received the retribution of previous karma and is starting a new round of karma creation. The twelfth link, (12) aging and death, completes the current cycle. Once there is birth there inevitably will be old age and death. So those are the twelve links of conditioned arising.

The Four Noble Truths and The Twelve Links

How do the twelve links relate to the Four Noble Truths? The first noble truth, the existence of suffering, is related to the seven-fold links of consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense faculties, contact, sensation, birth, and aging/death. The second noble truth, the origin of suffering, is related to the five-fold links of ignorance, action, desire, grasping, and existence. In terms of the Four Noble Truths, you could say that the set of five are the causal factors and the set of seven the effects, namely, our being caught in the cycle of suffering. The origin of suffering causes suffering; suffering is dependent on its origin, and will not exist without it.

Contemplation of the Twelve Links

To begin cessation we can practice the twofold forward and reverse contemplation of the twelve links of conditioned arising. Forward contemplation throws light on the existence of suffering, leading to the question, "What is the origin of suffering?" Following the causal chain

of existence we first contemplate how fundamental ignorance sets in motion the life cycle. Ignorance then conditions action, and action conditions consciousness. From consciousness we contemplate name-and-form, and on to the six sense faculties and so forth. And finally we see that our desire leads to grasping. Because there is grasping, there is existence, and when we exist we are born, we become sick, and we die. And of course there is much suffering between birth and death. Contemplating this process we can arrive at a profound understanding of the state we find ourselves in. This is the forward contemplation of the twelve links of conditioned arising, and its purpose is to help us realize cessation.

We can practice reverse contemplation to realize the emptiness, the actual non-existence of suffering. However, we should not think of reverse contemplation as starting with the last link, sickness and death, and asking, "What causes sickness and death?" "They are caused by existence." "What causes existence?" "Existence is due to grasping," and so on, working way back to the first link. That is not how it is done. In reverse contemplation we still follow the links from first to last, but instead we contemplate that there is no fundamental ignorance to begin with.

One begins with fundamental ignorance, contemplating that once there is no ignorance there will not be any deluded actions. Once there are no deluded actions, there is no defilement of consciousness. We proceed in this manner on to the six sense faculties which give rise naturally to contact, desire, grasping, existence, birth, death and so on. This is reverse contemplation on the cessation of the twelve-linked chain of conditioned arising. It is a gradual way of engaging the eightfold path, particularly the first path, right view that is essentially an antidote to fundamental ignorance. Practicing right view, right action, and so on, one uses the eightfold noble path to put a cease to the chain of existence.

This reverse approach can be a way of 'backing out' of conditioned existence. But the first step is to fully understand the fundamental ignorance with which we enter the world. In Buddhism the Sanskrit avidya means having a fundamental misconception of the nature of the world; specifically, it means not understanding the three Dharma seals--impermanence, suffering, and no-self. This leads us to create karma. In Chinese the term means 'not bright,' or 'not clear,' about the true nature of existence; in other words being in the dark, not illuminated by wisdom. So, lacking this wisdom is the first aspect of fundamental ignorance; the second is that being ignorant, we create new karma, and the cycle continues.

So we have the forward contemplation on the causes of suffering, and the reverse contemplation on the non-existence of suffering. In forward contemplation we realize how we come into being and in backward contemplation we realize we have no independent self. Both

modes of contemplation are related and it is necessary to complement one with the other. The point of both practices is to learn how to realize cessation, to terminate cyclic existence.

Awakening to true nature, your mind will be unclouded by ignorance--it will be bright with wisdom. Transcending fundamental ignorance, you will no longer be conditioned by it. This non-conditioning will be true for the remaining links of the chain, one after another. Thereby is birth and death also ended--when fundamental ignorance ceases, ultimately there is also cessation of birth and death.

The Four Noble Truths and the Three Seals

The three Dharma seals affirm that all conditioned things are impermanent, all suffering is caused by fundamental ignorance, and all dharmas are without self. Let's relate these ideas to understanding suffering, severing the causes of suffering, attaining cessation, and cultivating the path. Realizing the first noble truth of suffering and the second noble truth of the origin of suffering depends on realizing impermanence and selflessness. The realization consists in separating from suffering, and cutting off its origins. The third and fourth noble truths tell us that to reach extinction-quiescence we must engage the path. To engage in the path is to govern oneself on the principles of impermanence and selflessness. With these principles in mind we can separate from suffering; we can sever its very origins. When we truly understand that suffering is impermanent and does not truly exist, when we truly realize that suffering is fundamentally empty, we are headed in the direction of cessation.

This concludes our presentation of the Four Noble Truths. Thank you for coming. (*Applause*)

Notes

[1.1] Kondanna, Asaji, Wappa, Mahanama, and Bhaddiya (names in Pali), the early followers of the Buddha during his ascetic practice, which was characterized by extreme austerity and belief in the soul (atman).

[1.2] Subsequently recorded as *The Sutra Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel*. (Pali: *Dhammacakka-pattavana Sutta*)

[1.3] The eightfold noble path consists of the practices of: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

[1.4] See *The Way to Buddhahood*, Ven. Yin-shun, Wisdom Publications, 1998, pp.174-178

[1.5] The three turnings and twelve processes are summarized below:

First noble truth:

This is the noble truth of suffering
The truth of suffering must be understood
The truth of suffering has been understood.

Second noble truth:

This is the noble truth of the cause of suffering
The cause of suffering must be abandoned
The cause of suffering has been abandoned.

Third noble truth:

This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering
The cessation of suffering must be experienced
The cessation of suffering has been experienced.

Fourth noble truth:

This is the noble truth of the path out of suffering
The path out of suffering must be practiced
The path out of suffering has been realized.

[1.6] The order of enlightenment of the monks (according to *The Life of the Buddha* by Edward Thomas, p.88) suggests there were three teachings, Or turnings of the Dharma Wheel before all five monks became awakened. First Kondanna alone, then Vappa and Bhaddiya, and then Mahanama and Asaji.

[1.7] The tripitaka, the 'three baskets' of the Buddhist canon, consists of the vinaya (rules of discipline for monastics), the sutras (the discourses of the Buddha), and the abhidharma (philosophical and psychological analysis).

[1.8] The twelve links (*nidanas*) of conditioned arising are the basic causal forces in samsara, the cycle of birth and death. They are called 'links' because they sequentially form the causal chain of sentient existence. The links are: (1) fundamental ignorance, (2) action, (3) consciousness, (4) name-and-form, (5) the six sense faculties, (6) contact, (7) sensation, (8) desire, (9) grasping, (10) coming into existence, (11) birth, and (12) old age and death.

'Conditioned arising' refers to the fact that all phenomena are the result of the interplay between countless factors, interrelating in a nexus of cause and effect. Also referred to as the twelve links of dependent origination.

[1.9] The fourth talk in this series includes a discussion of the contemplation of the twelve links.

[1.10] Theravada: early Buddhism espousing the way of the arhat. Mahayana: later Buddhism espousing the way of the bodhisattva. Vajrayana: branch of Mahayana espousing esoteric cultivation. Sudden and gradual schools: two approaches to enlightenment within Chinese Chan Buddhism, often associated with Linji and Caodong schools (Zen: Rinzai and Soto).

[1.11] The five methods of stilling the mind: (1) mindfulness of breath, (2) contemplating the impurity of the body, (3) mindful recollection of the buddhas/bodhisattvas, (4) meditation on the four limitless mentalities (loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity), and (5) contemplating causes and conditions.

[1.12] The four foundations of mindfulness, described in the *Sattipatthana-sutta* (Pali) are: (1) mindfulness of breath, (2) mindfulness of sensation/feeling, (3) mindfulness of mind, and (4) mindfulness of mental objects (dharma).

[1.13] The sixteen aspects or attributes of the Four Noble Truths are: first noble truth--impermanence, suffering, emptiness, selflessness; second noble truth--cause, origin, condition, completion; third noble truth--cessation, peace, bliss, emergence (renunciation); fourth noble truth--true path, knowing, attaining, elimination (of delusion). For a more detailed discussion of the sixteen aspects, see *The Four Noble Truths*, Ven. Lobsang Gyatso, Snow Lion Publications, 1994.

[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, Fayen, Linji, and Caodong--only the latter two still exist. These two correspond to the Rinzai and Soto sects of Zen.

[2.5] The three-fold aspect of suffering is expounded in the Visuddhimagga (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.'

[3.1] The Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification) by Buddhagosa (5th century C.E.) enumerates ten klesas (variously translated as 'defilements,' 'passions,' 'impurities,'

'vexations,' 'delusions'): desire, hate, delusion, pride, wrong views, doubt, rigidity, excitability, shamelessness, and no conscience. Some analyses limit the number to the first six, regarding them as root vexations from which all other vexations derive.

[3.2] The six realms (or modes) of existence are the three upper realms and three lower realms. The realm one is reborn in results from one's guiding and completion karma. The three upper realms are the human, the lower gods (asuras), and the celestial beings (devas). The three lower realms are the animal, the angry spirits (pretas), and the hell beings (naraka). The inhabitants of all six realms inhabit samsara and are therefore subject to rebirth.

[3.3] 'Primary mind' here refers collectively to the six sense consciousnesses, which are the six sense faculties interacting with their corresponding sense objects. The sense faculties are sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and cognition.

[4.1] The path of the arhat and the path of the bodhisattva are often distinguished, the former being the path of individual liberation, the latter being the path of deferring enlightenment until all sentient beings are delivered.

[4.2] Four fruition levels of arhat: (1) 'stream-enterer,' one who has eradicated wrong views, but is not entirely free of the defilements of desire, hatred, and delusion; (2) 'once-returner,' one in whom the defilements are only slightly present, and who will return only once more; (3) 'non-returner,' who is free from the five fetters of ego, doubt, ritual, sensuality, and envy; and will not be reborn; (4) 'arhat,' one who has attained the state of no more learning, has extinguished all defilements, and is free from the fetters of existence.

[4.3] *Anguttara-nikaya (Graduated Collection)*, from the sutra section of the Tripitaka.

[4.4] Samadhi: state of deep meditative absorption in which the individual experiences extreme single-mindedness, and suspension of the sense of time. Buddhism describes many types and levels of samadhi.

[4.6] See Chapter One, endnote [1.11].

"So if desire is bad, is Buddhism anything like Stoicism?"

The Dharma Lecturer Training Program goes to Stuyvesant High by David Berman

I came home Thursday to find a message from Guo-yuan Fa Shi: he had been contacted by a teacher from Stuyvesant High School who was looking for someone to come talk about Buddhism, and would I give her a call?

I did, and she turned out to be Jennifer Suri, the Assistant Principal for Social Studies. She had done a web search for local Buddhist organizations, had made a bunch of phone calls, and I was the only one who had called her back. She told me that her ninth-graders had just done Buddhism in their World History class, and had come up with questions that neither she nor the other teachers could answer, questions like, "What about the desire to be a good person, what's wrong with that?" and, "If everything causes suffering then why bother doing anything?", so she had decided to seek some outside expertise. Might I be available to come speak and answer some questions? Maybe two, maybe three classes, maybe she could put some groups together, actually if I could stay till after lunch she could put the Humanities kids together with one of the other classes in the lecture hall, but she didn't want to overtax me, that might be too much?

I would have said yes anyway -- after all, this is exactly what the Dharma Lecturer Training Program is for - but the fact is her enthusiasm won me completely. Here was a public school teacher who didn't know the answer, and was doing whatever it took to get it and make it available to as many students as possible. That, I thought, is a behavior that should be encouraged.

Not only that, this would be an excellent road test for my toddling skills as a Dharma lecturer. I've spent the last year writing and delivering little Dharma talks to small, well-behaved groups of sympathetic colleagues at the Chan Center, but this would be my maiden voyage into the outside world, and I know ninth-graders. I have taught ninth-graders, and performed for ninth-graders, and the thing about ninth-graders is they are the most brutally honest audience in the world. If you bore them, or talk down to them, or, pardon the expression, aim the wrong end of the bull at them, their attention is gone in a heartbeat. At the very least, they would let me know how I'm doing.

I knew from Jennifer that the kids had studied the biography of Siddhartha Gautama, and had been introduced to the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. I also had the impression from Jennifer that the history textbook might not have done what we would consider justice to all of the teachings. (It had said that desire was the cause of suffering and

left it at that). I had a week to prepare, and I'd have forty minutes for each class, so I started outlining, thinking that I'd concentrate on the First and Second Truths, explaining Suffering, Karma, conditioned arising, the three root vexations, and the interrelations among them. I ought to be able to do that in twenty-five minutes, and leave time for questions. I had already presented twenty-minute lectures on suffering and the cause of suffering in class, so I opened the My Documents/Chan Teachings/My Writings sub-folder and took a look at what I'd already written.

It was pretty good! Clear, concise, and key points illuminated with examples from my personal experience. But as I started to edit with the Stuyvesant freshmen in mind, everything felt wrong, like I was trying to move them through the material way too fast, and they would never come along. My previous lectures now seemed to be skimming over the surface of the teachings, as if I knew that my audience already knew everything I was saying, which was of course true. I hadn't really been teaching, I'd just been demonstrating that I could teach, as if for a panel of judges, giving answers that were clear, concise, and entirely about me. Yech!

In discussing the Dharma lectures presented in the training program, the question of who we were addressing had often come up. Was the lecture pitched at beginners, at Buddhists, at experienced retreatants? Often the answer had been, "I wrote this lecture for people who know basic Buddhism, but who may not be clear on all the teachings. In other words, for people like ME. We were actually lecturing to our Buddhist classmates week after week, and we were naturally trying to appeal to the people in front of us. Now I suddenly had real students to write for, and they were going to be vastly different from me: they hadn't read all the Chan books, or heard all of Shifu's talks, or come to the Friday night classes, and I had to think about how to be informative, and interesting, and helpful to THEM.

What surfaced in my mind was the lecture Shifu had given to inaugurate the Dharma Lecturer Training Program. He had spoken about correct views, and had begun with what you might call "correct overview", a simple, clear outline of Buddhism as a whole:

BUDDHISM

Buddha **Dharma** **Sangha**

REALIZATION DOCTRINE

Concepts & Ideas Methods

Buddhism consists of the Three Jewels, the Buddha being the source, the Sangha being the means of transmission, and the Dharma, the teachings, being the centerpiece. The Dharma

consists of Realization (what the Buddha sees and knows) and Doctrine (what ordinary sentient beings study and practice). Realization is available to all of us, but is not accessible to language; what the Buddha sees and knows can't be adequately described. Doctrine, on the other hand, consists of Concepts and Ideas, which are ways of pointing in the direction of what the Buddha knows, and which include things like the Four Noble Truths, and Methods, which are ways of making steps toward the experience of realization, and which include the Noble Eightfold Path.

If I started by laying this foundation, then everything the students had learned from their textbook could be placed in a larger context and understood to have a function, instead of being just a list of technical terms. And now, as I thought again about explaining suffering and its origins, my ideas seemed to have a place to land. I was beginning to understand why Shifu likes to use visual aids, and I was beginning to feel a lot better.

So now I was charging ahead and getting into the nitty-gritty of the Second Truth with desire and hatred creating the perfect conditions for the seeds of karma to ripen into more suffering in the soil of *fundamental ignorance, ignorance of what? Of this*, and in my mind I'm pointing at my chart where it says *Realization*, at which point I realize that that's just a big blank spot, all I've said about it is that you can't say anything about it, and is that going to satisfy ninth-grade honors students? No way! In my mind I see hands shooting up all over the room, with that straining gesture that says, "Call on *me!*"

Back to My Documents/Chan Teachings/My Writings to look at the Four Pillars of the Dharma lecture. Can I say anything useful about impermanence, emptiness and no-self in five minutes? Because if I can't, I'd better not bring it up. But if I don't, then there's no foundation: without impermanence, emptiness and selflessness, fundamental ignorance sounds like an Asian version of original sin; without a correct view of ignorance, there's no context for understanding vexation, how it arises, and who's responsible for it; and without all that, the First Noble Truth is going to sound like a bad case of pessimism. I still had a lot of work to do. I needed to step back.

What did I want them to know? I wanted them to understand suffering--that suffering is not a characteristic of reality, like a law of physics, but a symptom of a dysfunction, a mistake, a dissonance between the mind of awareness and the phenomena that arise. I wanted them to understand the cause of suffering--what the dysfunction is, and especially, where it can be found. And I wanted them to understand something about the importance of practice--that so much of Buddhism is concerned with what we actually do, both in the world and in the mind, and the power this activity has.

So what if I taught them to meditate? Sure, right after I spend two minutes on emptiness I'll spend two minutes on silent illumination. No, really, what if I teach them a simple method, awareness of the weight against the chair, and have them practice for five minutes? Eyes closed, no moving allowed. Simple instruction on recognizing wandering thought and moving back to the method. How many of them, during that five minutes, will give rise to the desire to be doing something else? There's suffering and its cause in a nutshell. How many will be able to recognize that they weren't suffering while on the method, only while off it? There's the possibility of cessation, and the whole experience is the path, and no matter what happens it will illustrate impermanence?

And I realized there was something else that I wanted--I wanted to demonstrate the truth of these Truths--I wanted to avoid putting the kids in the position of having to believe or disbelieve anything I say. This was in a sutra, and it was in my notes in the green spiral-bound notebook, the first one I brought to the Center. Here it is. The *Kalama Sutra*:

Do not believe in anything because:

It is accepted by many.

It is written in religious books.

It is spoken by teachers or elders.

It is handed down in tradition.

But if, after analysis, it is found to accord with reason, and to result in the common good, then accept it, and *live up to it.* (italics mine)

This was the teaching that, more than any other, had opened the door of Buddhism for me. Now, of course, there are many teachings that are important to me --teachings on ethics, phenomenology, epistemology - but what first got my attention was the invitation to come in and bring all my faculties with me, to be, not a follower, but a participant. Maybe it would appeal to others as well.

The following Friday, October 20th, 9:30am. I had arrived at 9, had been duly impressed by the security I had had to get through, had found Jennifer in the social studies office, and had been shown to the classroom, armed with markers. The room was a real lecture hall, with theatre seating equipped with foldout desks facing a wall of white boards; I was busily filling them. The selection from the *Kalama Sutra* came first, then Shifu's outlined overview of Buddhism, then the Four Noble Truths as a dual system of cause and effect with an arrow pointing to karma, then an expansion of suffering and cause, then the three root vexations with a short list of their attendant branches, and finally the four sentences that express the Four Seals. Whew. I was still writing when they started filing in.

"Mr. Kaufman's class, please take notes. Mr. Harris' class, take notes if you want." (Applause and laughter from Mr. Harris' class; groans from Mr. Kaufman's.) Excellent--I have an example of suffering before I even get started. Then Jennifer introduced me as, among other things, a real live Buddhist, and off we went.

The first class, I'd have to say, went fine. If I were scoring it I'd have to deduct a few tenths for time management and for organization. I started by asking them questions about what they knew, and it had the intended effect of getting them involved--the class was very lively, with lots of questions, which I was still answering as the bell rang and the morning announcements came over the p.a.- but it also had the effect of bumping me off my outline here and there. I didn't quite get to impermanence and emptiness, but near the end I got a question about the non-existence of self that gave me the opportunity to talk a little about the Buddha's view. I described self-centeredness as being like living in a lighthouse, and looking out at everything from within the tower. Then I challenged them to imagine the world without their lighthouse. "Then what's your viewpoint?" "No viewpoint. View, but no point." It was tangible enough to chew on, and quite a few of them left the class still chewing.

Second group, 10:20 to 11:00. I tried a different tack--get through the outline in twenty minutes and save the questions for the end. The lecture was better, clearer, simpler, more complete, but there was much less participation, and although I didn't lose them, I didn't have as much fun with them as with the first group. Jennifer said it was the kids that were different; maybe so, but I'd like to have found that out from them.

At lunch (which, by the way, was a disgrace--public school lunches must be the only things in this country that haven't changed since 1965) a teacher sought my opinion. She had a student, a Buddhist, who was terribly offended that Buddhist beads, malas, had become a fashion item, and what did I think? Did they have a religious significance, she asked, pointing to mine, and was it offensive to wear them as mere jewelry? Now, I had been waiting all morning for some smart-aleck fifteen-year-old to ask me a question I couldn't answer, but I was completely unprepared for the fact that I didn't know the meaning of my own beads. Do they have a religious significance? A history? A story? I have no idea. So this is what I said, and I hope it's not offensive to those who are better Buddhists than I. I said that some people use them like rosaries, to keep track of practices like repeating the Buddha's name, but that I don't do those practices, so I guess it would be correct to say that I wear them as mere jewelry. As far as their current popularity is concerned, if I notice myself becoming offended at someone else's fashion sense, Buddhism has taught me to consider that a vexation arising in me, and as long as they wear them on their wrists, and not through holes in their lips or eyelids, I don't let it bother me.

In the midst of this another teacher had joined us, and now he said oh, he wished he'd known, was there any way I could talk to his class too? What would that mean? When would I be finished? 2:10? Sure, why not, I was feeling pretty good, like I'd had two good rehearsals, and I was looking forward to the main event, my double period from noon to 1:25.

It worked just right. The forty minute classes that morning had forced me to organize the material in my mind for maximum clarity, and I now had a much better idea what the students' understanding was, so I knew where to start, and what I had to cover carefully, and the extra time meant that I could afford to answer questions without worrying about the bell. We meditated, I talked about impermanence in the thought-stream, they asked about ideas from Hinduism and the Greeks (I had to take a pass on Hinduism); we had a great time.

But to my surprise, the best one was the last one, the add-on. Maybe it was the students, or maybe I was just tired enough to be loose, I don't know, but I went from "Buddhism" to "no-self" in twenty minutes flat and didn't lose a kid. I fielded a lot of interesting questions. ("If there's no God in Buddhism, who's my dad prostrating to every morning?") I got a big round of applause. A lot of them thanked me afterwards; I thanked them back. Jennifer asked me to come back next year, and she gave me an official Stuyvesant mug.

Now, looking back from the vantage point of two weeks later, I wish I had expressed my gratitude better, to all of them. I have to admit that at the time I was focused on how well I was doing for them; now, I'm much more aware of what the whole experience did for me. I did so much learning in only five hours: about managing the presentation of Dharma on the one hand and the students' needs and preferences on the other; about being nimble enough to take advantage of all the wonderful opportunities they gave me to teach them. But there were also so many opportunities for me to practice: with my preference for one student and aversion to another; with my attachments, to my lesson plan, to my experience in the previous class; with my habitual desire to fascinate, and have the audience like me. In our sitting we distinguish between daily practice and periodic, intensive practice; this was like a one-day teaching retreat, during which I experienced teaching as practice much more intensively than I ever had in the Friday classes, or in my daily teaching. For that, I send my gratitude to all the students and teachers at Stuyvesant High, to all my colleagues in the Dharma Lecturer Training Program, to Guo-yuan Fa Shi and the Sangha at the Chan Meditation Center, and to Shifu, from whom the Dharma so generously flows.

Retreat Report for #'s 13 and 14

How poor, I think. Only 14 till now. What a small number. Many things happened on these retreats. #13 was full of little occurrences of the slow, beautiful eating away of the personality, and opening up to the unbelievable beauty of what. I don't really know of what? But all this happened a long time ago. Today I think: Who cares? I just want to fill the gap. I don't want to neglect writing these two retreat reports. I want to keep things in order, and not give up. So I'll blend all this with right now. It is correct to do so. Right now- and then- is the same. There are two forces only. One is so beautiful. It is the rising of freedom. The force of the eternally good, deep, encompassing flow of huge love and beauty. The other is fear, out of which cruelty comes, the cruelty of stopping. The first is very simple. It is what it is. Very simple. The second - its nature is to get very complicated, because it is ashamed of itself, so it hides in different guises. That's all there is, folks.

But the world! You'll ask. What about all this tremendous thing around us, going far beyond imagination! What about this?!

Yes, I ask this question too: What about this?

-- *Anonymous*

NEWS

Venerable Thich Thanh Tu, a master from Viet Nam, gave a Dharma talk at the Chan Center on Nov. 1. On Sunday November 5 the **Youth Group** went to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to see the Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan, a Buddhist dance group which is performing as part of BAM's Art and Spirituality series.

On Nov. 11, 2000, Nancy Makso, who has been a practitioner at the Chan Center for 21 years, taught a **Beginning Meditation Class in New Canaan, CT**. If you are interested in future classes please contact <ContekAlice@aol.com>

On Dec 18 **Master Sheng Yen received a National Cultural and Art Award** and honorarium from the "Executive Yuen," a government organization in Taiwan. This is the fourth year this award has been given. It is given to four people in recognition of their contribution to education, culture and the arts in Taiwan. Master Sheng Yen is the first religious leader to have ever been given such honor by Taiwanese government.

Master Sheng Yen received the award in part because of his inclusion in the UN's Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders last August. Taiwan has been excluded from the UN for the last thirty years, and despite that Master Sheng Yen was included in this historic religious summit because of his stature as a religious leader. The award includes an honorarium of \$20,000 US, which Master Sheng Yen will donate to a foundation for scholarship.

Westerner's Dharma Gathering Friday October 20th, 2000

As always, the welcome back party for Shi-fu drew a crowd. Around 50-60 people came not only to welcome Shi-fu back to N.Y., but also to hear Shi-fu's Dharma talk and spend some time with fellow Dharma students and friends. It is always impressive to see the broad diversity of people who attend the Chan Center.

In his Dharma talk, Shi-fu spoke on the importance of using both method and concept in our practice. The basis of successful method being to relax the body and mind, Shi-fu emphasized the two key points of relaxation - the eyeballs and the lower abdomen. After the group practiced relaxing these two key points, Shi-fu spoke about the importance of concept. One point Shi-fu emphasized here was that during practice, by letting go of wandering thoughts and returning to our method, we are putting down the self. Why is this? Because the notion of self is just wandering thoughts. Bill pointed out that we can sometimes feel like we are observing our wandering thoughts, while at the same time identifying with the observing, and asked Shi-fu to explain this. Shi-fu explained that even this "observing" is actually wandering

thoughts, just more uniform wandering thoughts. Shi-fu told us that because they are so uniform (and thus subtle), we really need to see their nature directly through our own meditation. Shi-fu also reminded us that we can use both method and concept to practice during our daily life as well as "on the cushion."

Our gratitude as always to the volunteers who put the event together and kept it running smoothly.

Dharma Lecturer Training Program Reaches Out

The Dharma Lecturer Training Program, the effort Master Sheng Yen inaugurated last year to prepare speakers to lecture in the community at large on Dharma subjects, is already bearing fruit. On Friday, October 20th, Guoyuan Fa Shi sent Center-member David Berman to Stuyvesant High School in downtown Manhattan to teach the basics of Buddhism to their ninth-grade history and humanities students.

The Chan Center had been initially contacted by Jennifer Suri, the Assistant Principal for Social Studies at Stuyvesant, after several teachers reported to her that they had received questions from their students about Buddhism they couldn't answer. They decided to seek outside expertise, and called the Center after doing a web search for local Buddhist organizations.

Ms. Suri indicated that Buddhism was part of the world history curriculum, and that the students had read a biography of Siddhartha Gautama, and had been introduced to the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, but that when they started asking philosophical questions about desire and pervasive suffering, the teachers called for help.

David reported that the day of teaching went very well. He taught three forty-minute classes and one double-period of an hour and a half, starting with a structural overview of Buddhism, covering the Four Noble Truths, and including a brief period of meditation. "The kids were great," he said. "I presented lots of difficult information and they stuck with it, and came up with interesting, challenging questions. I'm very impressed with Jennifer and the program at Stuyvesant High." Ms. Suri and the other teachers also seemed very pleased. They have invited David back next year, and expressed the hope that this can become an annual event. On October 24, 200, the first **Tuesday evening sitting practice** took place at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pinebush, NY. This will be an ongoing group practice, and consists of meditation, exercises, walking meditation and a Dharma discussion period. The group is led by Guo-yuan Fa Shi and all are welcome to attend.

Master Sheng Yen represents the Chan Tradition in the conference "Buddhism in the Catskills" at Hartwick College **by Rebecca Li**

Master Sheng Yen gave a Dharma talk at Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY on October 26 at 7:30 p.m., as one of the twelve speakers on Buddhism invited to participate in the College's semester-long conference "Buddhism in the Catskills". Master Sheng Yen was invited to represent the Chinese Chan tradition. There were also representatives from the Japanese Zen, Tibetan, and Theravadin traditions in the Catskills area. At the request of the program coordinator, Dr. Huntington, Master Sheng Yen gave a brief overview of the characteristics, goals and methods of practice in Chinese Chan. Approximately 90 students, faculty, and staff of the College as well as members of the surrounding community attended the lecture.

Shi-fu started his talk by telling two famous stories about the early lineage masters in the Chinese Chan tradition. The first story was an exchange between the second lineage master, Huike, and the first lineage master, Bodhidharma, on calming the mind. Huike said to Bodhidharma that his mind was not calm, and asked for a method to calm it. Bodhidharma answer that if Huike would show him his mind, Bodhidharma would help him. Huike looked for his mind, and then said that he could not find it. Bodhidharma responded, "Then I have calmed your mind already." This is how Huike was enlightened.

The second story was an exchange between the fourth lineage master, Daoxin, and his master, the third lineage master Sengcan, on how to attain liberation. Daoxin asked, "What is the method for liberation?" Sengcan looked at Daoxin for some time and then asked, "Who is binding you?" Daoxin said, "No one is binding me." Sengcan said, "Since no one is binding you, aren't you liberated?" This is how Daoxin was enlightened.

Shi-fu pointed out that these two stories summarized the causes of our suffering and how suffering can be extinguished. The first story shows us that contradictions and struggle within ourselves create tremendous suffering in our lives. Once we realize that all such contradictions within ourselves are nothing but emotional afflictions and thoughts, outside which there is no permanent mind to speak of, we can be liberated from suffering. The second story shows us that the environment by itself does not make us suffer, but because we cannot master our own minds we allow the environment to influence and bother us. As a result, we feel that we are bound by the environment and thus not free. Once we realize that the environment need not bother us, we are liberated.

Master Sheng Yen then discussed the goals and methods of practice in Chan. The goal of practice is to eliminate contradictions and struggles within oneself and conflict between the self

and the environment. Before introducing the two main methods of Chan practice, hua-tou and silent illumination, Master Sheng Yen pointed out that, in order to use a method of practice effectively, it is important to relax the body and mind and clear the mind of wandering and scattered thoughts.

After describing each of the two methods briefly, Shi-fu invited the audience to try practicing either one of the methods. Everyone followed the instructions closely, and after applying the methods for five minutes the audience reported that they enjoyed the meditation. Shi-fu pointed out that while it was relatively easy to describe the methods, liberation usually requires a long period of diligent practice. It is also important to seek the guidance of a teacher.

Finally, Shi-fu discussed three levels of the fruits of practice. First, one becomes free from the small self and will no longer experience internal contradictions and struggles within. The second level is the unified self. One becomes unified with the environment and no longer discriminates among the elements in the environment. Both of these are joyful experiences, and as one attains the unified self one is filled with love but can also become prideful. Therefore, one must transcend the unified self and move on to the third stage, no-self, where one puts down all self-centered thoughts.

At the end of the talk, Shi-fu opened the floor for questions. Participants eagerly sought explanation of the difference between liberation and enlightenment, guidance on how to find a good teacher and how to decide which method to use, as well as clarification on certain concepts taught by ancient Chan masters. Many participants were delighted to find out that there is a Chan retreat center in the Catskills and inquired about the activities in Pine Bush and at the Chan Center in Elmhurst.

We are grateful to Dr. Huntington and Hartwick College for organizing and hosting this meaningful event. Also many thanks to George Devine who volunteered to do the driving.

My trip to Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY was one in which I will always remember. I drove Guo-Yuan Fa Shi, Rebecca, and Master Sheng Yen by van from Dharma Drum Retreat Center to Hartwick College for a Dharma talk.

When we arrived we were welcomed for dinner with several College staff. During Shi-fu's lecture the audience was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Shi-fu sprinkled bits of humor in his talk which delighted his listeners, in Rebecca Li's very lively translation.

The event was recorded and videotaped and may possibly be seen sometime in the future on public TV.

When we arrived back at the Dharma Drum Center at 12:15 A.M., Shi-fu looked at the van's clock, then looked at me and gave me the "thumbs up" sign, which I returned with a great smile. Driving Shi-fu was a wonderful experience for this new student. I took Refuge last night. A new life for me has begun.

George Devine (Chang He)

Year 2000 DDMBA Fund Raiser Convention

On Oct. 27 over 160 people from 12 states and Toronto, Canada, came to the Dharma Drum Retreat Center for the "Year 2000 DDMBA Fund Raiser Convention." All of the participants help raise funds for the many activities of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association. Highlights of the two and a half day event included a speech by Master Sheng Yen to give encouragement and to strengthen and awaken people's clouded minds. Dr. Yeung-Pei conducted workshops on "Five, Fourfold Attitudes and Actions" and "Say Kind Words, Do Kind Things." Guo-yuan Fa Shi led a "Water Bowl Walking Meditation." In this meditation, participants each carried an empty bowl from the meditation hall to the pond where they filled them about 90% full. They carried the bowls of water back with careful concentration, and placed them on the alter in the meditation hall in offering to the Buddha. Participants also engaged in a "Smiling Exercise." Recognizing how difficult it is for 160 people to live together without conflict, the fundraisers were asked to try to smile at all times, as an aid to maintaining a compassionate and un-self centered attitude. This was quite successful. The event came to a perfect ending with "Gratitude Prostration" and "Transmission of the Lamp of Mind" ceremonies.

Huatou Retreat and Dharma Transmission

From Nov. 25th to Dec. 2nd Master Sheng Yen conducted a huatou retreat at the Dharma Drum Meditation Center. There were fifty-two participants, including retreatants from Poland, Canada, Luxemburg, Switzerland, the UK and Indonesia. This was the first retreat in the newly renovated Chan Hall. At the end of the retreat Shih-fu conducted a Dharma transmission ceremony for two long time disciples, Simon Child who is part of the Western Chan Fellowship in the UK, and Max Kalin who is head of the Dharma Drum group in Switzerland. This transmission allows these two practitioners to teach Chan independently.

Public Lecture by venerable Thich Thanh-Tu at Chan Meditation Center

On November 1st, Venerable Thich Thanh-Tu and 10 of his disciples visited Master Sheng Yen at Chan Meditation Center and held a public lecture. There were one hundred audience who listened to his profound teaching. Venerable Thich Thanh-Tu is a living legend among the Buddhists of Vietnam. The Master has seven monasteries across Vietnam, as well as chapters through out Australia, USA, Canada and Europe. He has over seven hundred left-home disciples. His lineage is called Bamboo Forest teaching.

His public lecture outflowed with profound teaching based on the second and the sixth patriarch of the Chan tradition. He introduced practice methods which emphasize the principle of how to calm one's mind, and the non-duality concept of the sixth patriarch. In closing, the Master compassionately encouraged everyone to practice diligently, and eventually, all can reach the ultimate path.

The abbot of Chan Meditation Center -- Guo-yuan Fa Shi, expressed sincere thanks to Venerable Thich Thanh-Tu for providing us with such a comprehensive teaching.