

"**Avalokitesvara** serves as a giant reflector, upon which thousands of people direct their thoughts. If these people were to direct their thoughts to different objects, they would be shining thousands of weak flashlights, scattered beams of limited power. But when people concentrate their thoughts on a single entity, they shine all of the flashlights' beams onto a single mirror, which creates a tremendous illumination. Avalokitesvara is such a mirror. Externally, this may seem similar to the practices of many other religions, but the perspective is different. Other religions say that power comes from the deity one prays to. Buddhism maintains that power comes from the individuals who pray."



from *Dharma Drum*
by Chan Master Sheng Yen

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For Dharma Drum Publications please call **(718)592-0915**.

Email the Center at ddmbaus@yahoo.com, or the Magazine at chanmagazine@yahoo.com, or visit us online at <http://www.chancenter.org/>

Chan Meditation Center

Founder/Teacher: Shifu (Master) Ven. Dr. Sheng Yen

Publisher: Guo Chen Shi

Editor-in-Chief: David Berman

Coordinator: Virginia Tan

Design and Production: David Berman

Photography: David Kabacinski

Contributing Editors: Ernie Heau, Chris Marano, Virginia Tan

Correspondants: Jeffrey Kung, Charlotte Mansfield, Wei Tan, Tan Yee Wong

Contributors: Ricky Asher, Berle Driscoll, Rebecca Li, Mike Morical, Robert Weick

From the Editor

It is September 11th, 2002.

Yesterday I received an email, one of many that have come in the last week inviting me, or in some cases exhorting me, to spend the anniversary of 9/11 engaging in protest against the Bush administration. This particular one caught my attention, though. It was a strong polemic against the plans to make war on Iraq, and it ended with the line, "Don't let the bad guys win."

Now, as a Buddhist - as a human being, for that matter - I certainly favor peace over war. Does that mean that those who favor war are my enemies? Are they the bad guys? And if they make war on Saddam Hussein, should I respond by making some form of "war" on them?

These questions are very current for me. I went on my first protest march in the early fifties (although I didn't actually march - I was in a stroller), and I spent much of the next thirty years protesting: against the A-bomb tests, and the arms race; against the Jim Crow laws in the South, and de facto segregation in the North; against the war in Viet Nam, and the subsequent military adventures in Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Memories return - I was against US investment in South Africa, against the Alaska pipeline, against the Reagan budget cuts; I could write my complete vitae entirely in terms of the evils perpetrated by others, all of which I set myself against.

And have I now, as a result of my practice, resolved that history of conflict? Far from it. I'm still against all the violence and injustice and foolishness I was ever against, only now I find that I'm also against all the opposition, that as much as I reject the plan to attack Iraq, I also reject the notion that I must respond to that plan by opposing it, by saying "No!" to it as loudly as possible. I say "No!" to that!

And to make matters worse, to take one more step toward infinite regression, I'm also against spiritualist non-involvement - I reject the notion that George Bush is going to do whatever it is his karma to do, and that my job is to stay on my method while he does it. That strikes me as being neither the path of a bodhisattva, nor of a good citizen of a democracy. I'm against it.

What to do? Well, if, as the saying goes, the best place to practice Chan is in the busy intersection, then perhaps the best time to practice Chan is now, when the intersection has become the size of the world itself, with all three billion of us jostling to get across the street. That's a lot of traffic to negotiate, but it's also a lot of

opportunity to practice. There are lots of things I'd like to say "No" to, but also lots of opportunities to just say "Yes." And if practicing in the post-9/11 era is not going to be easy, it's certainly not going to be boring.

The Editor

The Sixth Paramita: Wisdom

Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This is a talk on the sixth paramita, wisdom (prajna), given by Chan Master Sheng Yen at the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, New York, on May 13, 2001. It was translated orally by Rebecca Li, transcribed by Stacey Polacco, and edited by Ernest Heau.

"...ONE NEEDS NOT ESCAPE FROM THIS BODY AND MIND IN ORDER TO GAIN LIBERATION."

The sixth and last paramita is *prajna*, wisdom. Prajna is a Sanskrit word which is translated into Chinese as *zhahui*. This is often translated as wisdom. *Hui*, the second character, refers to having sharp roots, and a very clear mind. *Zhi*, the first character, refers to using this clear mind to handle situations in an appropriate manner. So one can say that *hui* is the essence, and *zhi* is the function. There is another character for prajna in Chinese, which means brightness, being absolutely transparent, being at ease without obstruction. Another meaning for prajna is the quality of being very acute, perceptive, and flexible.

I define prajna in relation to the methods of practice towards enlightenment for an arhat or a bodhisattva. These methods involve the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the triple studies of precepts, samadhi, and, wisdom, and also the Six Paramitas.

Prajna is an essential part of Buddhadharma. Shakyamuni Buddha said that even if one practices all the principles of enlightenment, without the guidance of prajna, one is really not practicing Buddha-dharma. For example, when you uphold the precepts or practice dana (giving) without prajna, you are really only cultivating merit, which allows you to receive good retribution, such as being reborn in the human realm. Also, cultivating samadhi without prajna, you may experience the dhyana heaven, but once this samadhi is gone you will come back to the world in the same state.

To achieve wisdom you need to be guided by correct prajna. What is this correct prajna? In the agamas, the early Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha said, "This arises therefore that arises; this perishes, therefore that perishes." He meant that when ignorance and vexation arise, we do certain deeds, and then we receive the retribution from those deeds. In receiving retribution our vexation causes us to commit

more deeds, prolonging this long chain of suffering, which is ultimately the chain of birth and death. This is the meaning of "this arises, therefore that arises."

What does "this perishes, therefore that perishes" mean? Ignorance is the root cause of our vexations. When ignorance perishes, all vexations in the rest of the chain perish. Therefore as one practices towards enlightenment and ignorance is eliminated, the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death also perish, and along with them, worry, sorrow, agony, and emotional affliction.

Ways of Looking at Prajna

I will now discuss three different ways of looking at prajna. The first way is to distinguish prajna according to three dichotomies. The second classification distinguishes prajna into three functional categories. The third classification distinguishes prajna into five functional categories. This is somewhat complicated so please bear with me. If you can't understand the theory that's fine, as long as you understand the last section where I talk about prajna in practice.

General Prajna and Specific Prajna

The first dichotomy in kinds of prajna is that the Buddha taught general prajna to people with duller karmic roots, and specific prajna to people with sharper karmic roots. People with duller roots include sravakas (people who have heard the Dharma), as well as those already on the bodhisattva path. For them the Buddha taught liberation methods like The Five Skandhas and The Twelve Links (nidhanas) of Dependent Origination. Of course, since we are ordinary beings with duller roots, this general prajna is good for us. For those with sharper roots Buddha taught specific prajna, but it is important to remember that specific prajna always includes general prajna.

To understand the difference between general and specific prajna, let me give an analogy. Recently I read about a sixteen-year-old boy who got his doctorate and is ready to teach in a university. Does this young boy with a Ph.D. also have the knowledge of an elementary school, a high school, and a college student? If this is an appropriate analogy then you can see that this boy has both the general knowledge of all his education, as well as the specialized knowledge associated with his degree. Would you say that this boy has sharp intellectual roots?

The central teaching of general prajna is that there is no self. Let's look at the Five Skandhas. The first skandha is form, the material aspect of our existence. The other

four skhandas-sensation, perception, volition, and consciousness-make up the mental aspects of our existence. General prajna teaches that the interaction between the skhandas give us the illusion of having a self, but since each of the skhandas are in fact empty, there is no abiding self.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination describe the origin of our existence in time as a causal sequence. It begins with ignorance and goes step by step to the last link, which is death. When understood, the twelve links also show us that nowhere in the chain is there an arising of a true self.

Now what is the content of specific prajna? It teaches that we should neither attach to, nor fear, ignorance itself, or any of the other links including birth and death. One should not be affected by ignorance; one should be able to be in the midst of birth and death and not be affected. In principle, general prajna has more to do with escaping from ignorance as a source of our suffering. So one tries to liberate this body and mind of suffering to another state. Specific prajna says that one need not escape from this body and mind in order to gain liberation. As long as one can be here and not be affected by ignorance, in one's body or mind, that is liberation itself. There is no need to escape to another world in order to gain liberation. As long as one can put down attachment to body and mind, that is liberation. This is an agreeable idea because if we can stay in the world and still be liberated that would be great. Specific prajna says, we shouldn't think about the benefits to ourselves, but only about people around us, whether close or distant-think about all sentient beings. Think about how we can best serve others, without thought of gain or loss to ourselves. Then, we will no longer be troubled by self-centeredness. With this attitude one is practicing the way of a bodhisattva, the Mahayana way.

Suchness Prajna and Illumination Prajna

A second way to dichotomize prajna is from the point of view of function. First is what we call suchness prajna, which is present whether one knows it or not. Then there is illumination prajna, which is present when one has attained wisdom. When one's wisdom eye has opened, with a mind that is not self-centered, one can apply this prajna to the benefit of people and the environment. One has no specific view of the world-there is only this prajna that one uses to view and understand the world. So illumination prajna refers to an active function, whereas suchness prajna is inactive. Suchness prajna is there whether one has wisdom or not, and illumination prajna refers to the function of wisdom seeing the world around oneself.

Worldly Prajna and Non-Worldly Prajna

A third way to dichotomize prajna is based on its different levels. First there is worldly prajna, which is wisdom applied to a relative world, where we deal with people and the environment in relation to the self, where there is a subject (oneself), and there are objects (other people and things).

Then there is the non-worldly prajna of liberation, in which one does not see people and things around oneself as objects. Since there is no subject and no object, this kind of prajna is absolute, not relative. There is no idea of "me" versus an object out there. This non-worldly prajna of liberation also functions when one is alone, but the main point is that one does not treat people and things in the environment as objects -one does not establish a relationship between subject and objects.

Does this mean that worldly prajna is bad since it has subjects and objects? Not necessarily. As long as we apply the attitude of non-worldly prajna, that is to say, not to treat people and things as objects, that will still be liberation.

Kinds of Prajna

Another way of classifying prajna is according to suchness prajna, illumination prajna, and expedient prajna. We have just described suchness prajna as always present, whereas illumination prajna is attained wisdom. We also just talked about worldly prajna and non-worldly prajna, both of which are aspects of illumination prajna. The goal being to realize illumination prajna, methods are needed, and these methods are expedient prajna. Because the methods need to be communicated, we rely on language, such as through a sutra or through a talk like this one. When we use sutras and Dharma lectures as tools to communicate methods of practice, these tools are considered expedient prajna.

A third classification of prajna divides prajna into five categories: suchness prajna, illumination prajna, and expedient prajna are three we have already discussed. The fourth and fifth we will mention but not go into detail. The fourth is phenomenal prajna, which is illuminated by illumination prajna. The fifth is auxiliary prajna that is there to assist our cultivation of prajna. As with the first three, the last two are really about attaining illumination prajna.

Methods of Practicing Prajna

Now I want to talk about methods of practicing prajna, which is precisely practicing illumination prajna. The first practice is to see that this body, this mind, and our environment are transitory and impermanent. Next come the four kinds of contemplation: subjective contemplation, objective contemplation, direct contemplation, absolute contemplation.

Most of the time we have a subjective view of the world. The interesting thing is that most of the time we actually think we're being objective. In fact there's no such thing as being absolutely objective. Objectivity really is just several people's subjectivity-when enough people agree on something it is then considered objective.

Once, I was in a meeting, and when it was time to make a decision, there were two sides that could not agree. I was the chair, so I abstained. The two sides tried different ways of voting and each time came up with a tie. Finally they said, "Shifu, you have to cast a vote to solve this problem." So I cast a vote. After that, some asked me, "Shifu were you objective?" I said, "If I had really been objective I would have abstained and just watched you fight-that's fun." There is no absolute objectivity in the world. What we talk about as being objective is sometimes just the subjective view of a few influential people-everybody follows and sees that as objective.

So, we should practice being aware of our "subjective" and "objective" views, and observe these perspectives as they arise in our daily lives. People often will offer me food. Sometimes my well-meaning disciples think that this food is good for me. Sometimes I will decline to eat it and they will say, "Shifu, we are objective in seeing that this is good for you. If you don't eat it, you're being subjective." Are these people objective? They have used their "objectivity" to deny me my subjective preference.

Direct Contemplation

In the method of direct contemplation you do not apply any interpretation or judgment to anything you see or encounter. You do not label or compare. You just are aware that this is this, that that is going on. However, this is not prajna itself. All one can say is, "This is happening." Direct contemplation cannot be applied to solving problems. When it comes to what to do, "I don't know" would be the correct response. So direct contemplation is not prajna.

Absolute Contemplation

The fourth prajna method I will talk about is absolute contemplation. In fact absolute contemplation is madhyamika-achieving liberation by realizing emptiness. In absolute contemplation, one applies one's common sense knowledge, one's experiences and skill, in dealing with people's problems, but without thinking about one's own preferences. The important thing is to look at what's going on, and to decide what's most appropriate for helping someone, without reference to one's own likes or dislikes. This involves communicating with and understanding that person, and deciding what is most appropriate and beneficial for them. It is important to understand that this judgement is not based on one's self-centered preferences. This is absolute contemplation and this is madhyamika. We are not talking about having supernatural powers, just about dealing with people without putting one's own perspective into it. We still need to rely on professional knowledge and specialized skills. When people are sick and ask me for help I refer them to a good doctor. Otherwise, if I tried to cure someone's illness, I would be getting medicine from heaven.

To conclude, I emphasize that prajna is wisdom, and wisdom is the attitude of no self. This means not having an attitude that is based on a self-centered perspective. Please do not misunderstand that this attitude of no self means that there's nothing there. The self of wisdom is there to solve problems, and the self of compassion is there to benefit people. One applies both the self of wisdom and the self of compassion to develop and cultivate a self that is pure and happy, one that eventually will grow into a perfect being, a buddha.

Master Sheng Yen at the World Council of Religious Leaders

by Chan Master Sheng Yen

"ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO MAKE A VOW – TO TRANSFORM THE SELFISH HEART THAT PLUNDERS AND TAKES INTO A COMPASSIONATE HEART THAT GIVES AND CONTRIBUTES."

"FROM THE STANDPOINT OF A RELIGIOUS LEADER, COMPASSION AND UNIVERSAL LOVE ARE ABSOLUTE TRUTHS; JUSTICE AND PEACE ARE INSEPARABLE."

As a follow-up to the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held in August, 2001 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the first meeting of the World Council of Religious Leaders was held June 12-14, 2002 at the UNESCAP regional office in Bangkok. The Council invited more than seventy representatives of the world's religions to attend, including both religious leaders and scholars, for the purpose of giving advice and counsel to the UN in resolving religious and ethnic conflicts, alleviating poverty, promoting global environmental protection, and eliminating war and terrorism.

Master Sheng Yen, one of nine co-chairs of the World Council, opened the first session with an address entitled, "The Mission of World Religious Leaders in the 21st Century." The full text of his address follows in English translation.

The Mission of Religious Leaders in the 21st Century

"Today, in the twenty-first century, because of the rapid development of advanced technology, humankind can enjoy amenities of life far more convenient and abundant than those in the past. However, because of such development, traditional values have also been brought face to face with a variety of challenges. In particular, conservative religious beliefs, claims to racial superiority, social structures, and ways of life are constantly being criticized and tossed about in this time of globalization, social pluralism, and postmodernism.

"Religion is the common source and refuge of all humankind. But we cannot deny that because some conservative religious figures are too quick to mistake those who are different for being evil, discrimination and opposition are formed, and hatred and conflict are created. This is a problem that is awaiting our positive resolution.

"The important topics that should be discussed at this conference are: *How can religious leaders assist the United Nations in resolving religious and ethnic conflict? How can poverty in the world be alleviated? How can we effectively work to protect the global environment? How can we end the violence of war and terrorist attacks?* In other words, aside from spreading our own faiths, religious leaders in the twenty-first century must also play an active role in rescuing humanity from these crises. These issues are precisely the work my organization, Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association, has been engaged in since the late 1980's. Now, I'd like to share the ideas we have been practicing and promoting, and I welcome your feedback and suggestions.

"How can conflicts be resolved?" Whether in terms of religion, politics or culture, there should be a consensus among different groups to seek common ground while preserving differences. That is, in the pursuit of common interests and goals, it cannot hurt to permit different ways of thinking and doing things. This is like the way members of a family are each allowed to think and do things in a different way. In this spirit, Confucianism advocates 'seeking harmony, not sameness.' And the Buddha said, 'Sentient beings have varying predispositions, but they all have the potential to realize the Path,' and, 'A forest can accommodate myriad kinds of sentient beings.' Actually, religions themselves do not conflict, nor is there any problem with the deities that are worshipped. It is only because of the foolish interpretations of human beings that opposition and conflict exist. Therefore, we must make a public appeal-whenver a passage in a holy scripture is found to be in conflict with human peace, it should be given a new interpretation.

"How can poverty be alleviated?" There are two kinds of poverty: material and spiritual. Material poverty makes life difficult, but spiritual poverty can create disasters of great destructiveness. Materially impoverished peoples deserve great sympathy; spiritually impoverished peoples can be extremely dangerous. Today, besides those who are the victims of droughts, floods, and earthquakes, the recipients of international humanitarian aid are primarily war refugees. Inadequate productivity and the destruction brought by war result in material poverty. But spiritual poverty is the source of wars and conflicts between peoples. For this reason, if we wish to alleviate material poverty, the best way is for religious leaders to encourage everyone to make a vow-to transform the selfish heart that plunders and takes into a compassionate heart that gives and contributes. While the materially affluent should of course give and contribute, the materially impoverished should also partake in the joy of giving according to their ability. If such giving and contributing can be promoted widely, not

only can it alleviate material poverty, it can also resolve the problem of spiritual poverty. Only in this way is there hope for a lasting peace on earth.

"How can we effectively work to protect the environment?" As you all know, the environment we live in is already rapidly deteriorating. The primary cause is humanity's excessive development and waste, resulting in the large-scale depletion and destruction of our natural resources and living environment. Therefore, effective environmental protection is a mission of great urgency. Environmental protection must, however, begin with a change in people's values. Hence, using the protection of the spiritual environment as its cornerstone, Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association promotes the protection of the social and living environments, as well as our natural resources and ecosystems. Protecting the spiritual environment means looking within to develop wisdom and compassion. Once the spirit is enriched, one will be filled with a strong sense of stability and security. With this, one will no longer experience conflict within oneself nor with the external environment. One will then always treat others with respect and courtesy. Moreover, one will no longer waste resources and destroy the environment in order to satisfy one's excessive material desires. Therefore, for religious leaders, protecting the spiritual environment is particularly important to emphasize.

"How can the violence of war and terrorist attacks be ended?" From the standpoint of a religious leader, compassion and universal love are absolute truths; justice and peace are inseparable. If in order to uphold justice and revere truth, one resorts to violence or terrorist actions, then those who do so must be dissuaded and such behaviors should be condemned. Violence may temporarily serve to shock and terrify, but lasting peace can only be established on a foundation of mutual respect and tolerance. In fact we should move beyond the principle of mutual and reciprocal benefits, engaging in giving without expecting any reward and contributing unconditionally. If everyone gives and contributes wholeheartedly, they will inevitably become more productive, grow faster, and become stronger. Therefore, this practice of contributing unconditionally can also be an effective method to root out violence and terrorism.

"In conclusion, if humanity can seek common ground while respecting difference, can give and contribute, can protect the spiritual environment, and can respect and tolerate one another, then there is hope that in this century peace will gradually prevail. And this is the vision we are promoting-the arrival of heaven on earth, the establishment of a pure land in this world. Let us all pray for the swift arrival of that day."

The following day, June 13, was a day of working sessions on the four topics Master Sheng Yen had outlined in his address, and the additional topic of generating a Charter for the World Council of Religious Leaders. Master Sheng Yen participated in the session on environmental protection and restoration. He stressed that mankind is plagued by selfishness, that self-centered claims on environmental resources inevitably come into conflict with each other, and that only by changing this selfishness into compassion and concern for others can we succeed in our mission of environmental protection.

On June 16, on his way back to New York, Master Sheng Yen met with members of the press in Taiwan, and reported that the most important outcome of the first meeting of the WCRL was its establishment as an official unit of the United Nations to aid the Secretary General on religious matters. The Council will meet annually, with Master Sheng Yen as one of its chairs. In addition, it was decided that the protection of the spiritual environment, an important aspect of Dharma Drum's program of environmentalism, should be included in the UN Earth Charter.

"How long can I stay like this?"

Retreat Report by M. U.

This was my third retreat. The two previous ones were working with the *Huatou* method.

I have been doing spiritual work since I was 16 years old. Since I was very young I started to ask myself questions about life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Where do I come from? Why I had so many different aspects inside of me - one conforming with my surroundings, school, friends, teachers, parents etc., and another quite wild, that wanted to go against everything established, but scared of what was going to happen if I did. Maybe nobody would like me? Always feeling an incredible strength inside of me, I relied enormously on my intuitive instinct or intelligence. But on the outside I was timid, I didn't feel secure, I felt I couldn't be as funny, extroverted, spontaneous, smart, or fast as I would have liked to be. I was afraid of coming out and expressing the way I felt, or the way I thought. I began my search for a dharma and a sangha.

At 17 years old I got involved with a school called Arica, founded by Oscar Ichazo. It is a spiritual and mystical school based on philosophy and Buddhism. I spent my next 30 years with Arica.

In the late 90's, I started investigating Buddhism; I wanted to go to the source. I went to lectures and weekend teachings. The Dalai Lama was the one that inspired me the most, but it wasn't easy to study with him. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* is wonderful; I use it every day. One day I saw an article in "Tricycle" magazine about Master Sheng Yen, who was meeting the Dalai Lama to help him re-institute the precepts for nuns in the Tibetan lineage. I thought since his Holiness trusted this master, so could I. In the same issue I saw an ad for a retreat with Master Sheng Yen, which I immediately signed up for.

It was in the middle of the winter, the 25th of December. I got up that morning with a hangover. I had only slept two hours and was exhausted. To make things worse, I got locked in the bathroom. The door-knob broke, and I had to call a locksmith. Three hours later I came out and hurried off to the train station. I had of course missed the train and had to wait until three in the afternoon for the next train. I was cold, had not eaten, felt horrible, but was, nonetheless, determined to get to the retreat as fast as I could. I had called, and they had said it was ok to arrive late. When I finally arrived, the train station was completely empty except for one family that quickly drove off in

their car. There I was, alone in the middle of nowhere; the only other person at the station was a man, who looked extremely threatening. We had both called a taxi. When the taxi arrived, the driver told us we had to share. There was no other taxi coming. I was so afraid and tired and nervous about arriving so late to the retreat that I took my chances and went with them. The taxi driver unexpectedly stopped at a desolate place and said I would have to wait for another taxi to take me. I thought, "This is it, who knows what they will do with me now!" But thankfully, the second taxi arrived shortly afterwards and I was finally on my way to the retreat.

When I arrived, everybody was just coming out of the Chan Hall, where they had been given instructions. Now they were in silence. I found a monk and told him who I was; he wrote down on a paper, "You are ok and you can start your retreat now". I didn't know what to do, so I asked where I should sleep. He showed me the list on the wall with my name, so immediately I went to the room and put my sleeping bag down and went to sleep. The other people were sleeping already. I was so exhausted I fell asleep immediately.

At four I was up again; it was dark, cold, horrible, and I wondered, "Where do I go? Where do I sit?" I decided to follow my instinct and picked a seat. I figured if it was not mine they were going to tell me. To my amazement, even though the hall was still empty, I had chosen my assigned seat. Nobody had told me to move. Later I confirmed on the sheet of paper on the wall that that was indeed my seat. From then on I trusted that I was going with the flow.

It was hard the first three days. My mind filled with muddled thoughts, mostly pain, anxiety and expectations. It made my practice very difficult, even though the lectures were the best instructions and teachings that I had ever had. The *Huatou* method was tough; I didn't quite get it. But I learned that intellectual responses were not the idea.

Master Sheng Yen told us that we were very spoiled on this retreat – we lead comfortable lives, had heating and hot water, had electricity; it was so easy for us! For him in Japan on the other hand, it had been under very difficult conditions. He meditated in freezing temperatures with a master that was very tough on him.

The next morning we woke up and the heat was off; we also did not have water or electricity. I used my flashlight and wore all my clothes to be as warm as possible. It was very cold, especially sitting the whole day. I never knew if Shifu did it on purpose or if it had been a storm. I remember walking in snow up to my knees.

The main teaching for me, was when I asked Shifu, "Why do so few people in the world achieve enlightenment?"

Shifu said I had to have faith. To me that was perfect; it gave me the strength and reassurance that I felt I had lost along the way. Shifu said people give up before it happens -too soon- so I had to persist.

The next time I went to a retreat was two years later. I decided to do more studying with other teachers. One day I was on a retreat at the Zen Mountain monastery and at the end of the retreat I went to their bookstore and found a book written by Sheng Yen. I hadn't known he wrote books, so I was pleasantly surprised. I read the book and decided that I wanted to be his student and that I didn't need to look around anymore. I called the center in Queens and they told me he had just arrived that day and that teachings would start that Sunday. I brought a friend with me and went and registered for the next *Huatou* retreat. It was good but uneventful. The *Huatou* method for me is hard so far. At times I thought I was closer to doing it, but then I left the retreat at the end and could not practice in my daily life. I need some method I can practice every moment, or at least try.

This last retreat was very special – it was my first Silent Illumination retreat, there were a lot of people, 108, and I invited my daughter to come with me. She was very happy but a little fearful. She had not sat in meditation very long before. I did not think about it, I just think the only thing to be fearful about in life is to continue being ignorant. So, when we arrived at the retreat, the first few days were not very hard at all for me, I went with the method right away, I felt like a fish in water. Of course I still had deluded thoughts but at the end of every session I was surprised how calm my mind was. Then I went into a wonderful space, where my mind was so calm -steady, solid -no thoughts whatsoever, I felt like a rock and that nothing could move me. I felt at ease, I didn't feel my body, but I knew it was there. I was big and it included all my surroundings, I was one with it all. Then I went into a state where all I felt was as if I was just conscious. I sat through two sittings and a chanting. Then I started to think one thought: "How long can I stay like this?" Then fear came, and very slowly another thought, and of course by then I had changed the state where I had been before. I was still very calm for that whole day. I had very few thoughts. I felt I could move very slowly.

My daughter on the other hand at some point after this, told me in the least possible words, that she wanted to offer herself for volunteer work in exchange for some of the sittings and then she could stay meditating. If they didn't accept, she wondered if I had

money for her transportation back home. I said I didn't since we were going back with the van from the center and transportation was already paid for. I asked her if she was thinking of leaving in the case they didn't accept her to do volunteer work? She responded, "Yes, I am not interested in suffering this much." I replied, "Stay for three days then, decide what to do." I remembered that my experience on each retreat was that the first three days had always been the hardest, and that eventually I felt better with Master Sheng Yen's lectures, the interviews, the schedule, and eventually the mind did calm down a little.

After that, I went into all kinds of thoughts – I got sad, I cried – it took me out of my center quite a lot. Then I had an interview with Shifu, and he told me not to worry about my daughter's problems. He confirmed to me that what I had felt the day before was unified mind. I decided not to worry anymore, that she had her own life and karma and that all I could do was to encourage her, no more than that, the rest was up to her. I felt very at ease from then on. At one point during the exercises, Shifu came to me and asked me where my daughter was -he didn't see her - and I answered that I did not know. The truth is I wasn't paying attention anymore to where she was or what she did. He came back later and told me, "No problem; she is ok". I thought Shifu is such a caring person, so sweet. I felt my daughter was in good hands. She finished the retreat very well. I am so happy for her.

As for me, I am so happy that Silent illumination is a method I can use all the time, it is not easy to keep those thoughts away, but for the first time I understood in a deep way how I have to keep going back to the method, and that is the only thing I have to do. Before I was still so confused with what method to use, getting upset, thinking to myself – "I can't believe I am still thinking after all these years!" Not being patient, thinking I should at least have good meditating experiences, etc. Now I know even good experiences I have to let go of, it is such a relief to know this. It is moment to moment – simply letting go of everything. Looking back, I thought the retreat went by so fast, I felt like nothing was happening, like I never went anywhere or came back from anywhere, like I did different activities all in the same place and time – it was a strange and a different feeling. I felt more humility than I have ever felt before; I felt an overwhelming sense of compassion. The lectures of Master Sheng Yen were so perfect. He talked about everything we needed to know, in such a clear way. Everyday we were given these verses, to explain silent illumination, and I was making a great effort to remember them.

But one day after meditating all day, using the method, I had very little in my mind, only his words in the moment and Shifu asked the English-speaking people if we

could remember the verse of the day before. Shifu looked at all of us, including me, I could not remember it at all, I could only remember the ones before, but I had stopped trying so hard to remember them, by now there were too many. My mind was a blank. I felt so bad, Shifu was teaching us and we were like zombies, not remembering. What patience Shifu has to have with us! I am a better person after the retreat. I am so much more conscious of my judging, criticism, not discriminating, labeling things, separating good and bad, me and them, etc. The verses left deep impressions in my psyche. Also the image of a mirror being like our mind, has been very useful, to let go of everything.

"Pay no attention and let go of all phenomena." The moment I say this to myself, somehow like magic, the thing, whatever it is, disappears.

Today I understand that what I felt as a kid, and then as a teenager, were a strong intuition that I needed to do the work I am doing now.

Thank you Master Sheng Yen!

May all sentient beings be happy!

Liquefying

Diamond leaks
from my hands,
no stopping it.
One more sunset,
last facet's gone.
I remember other stones
liquefying, and finding
the gaps between my fingers.

Did they glitter
or stand
in dull perfection?
I can't recall.
My hope's
in that void
and the liquid
nature of stone.

--Mike Morical

The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Meditation Workshop at Stony Brook University

On September 21st, 2002, at the Student Union Center of Stony Brook University, the Chan Meditation Center held a full-day meditation workshop, organized by Hai-Dee Lee and led by Abbot Guo Yuan Fa Shi and



Nancy Makso. From 9:30am to 5:00pm, students and faculty of Stony Brook, and others with an interest in meditation, spent a whole day learning and practicing relaxation, peacefulness, and mindfulness, using Chan methods. The number of participants reached nearly 65, and they showed great attention and patience in listening to, thinking about, and undertaking the methods presented by Guo Yuan Fa Shi and Ms. Makso. Fittingly, this event was held on the Day of Peace, a day proposed by the UN's World Council of Religious Leaders.

The general theme of the practice of Chan, as presented at Stony Brook, is the overall well-being of body and mind. To cultivate this optimal state of health, one must first learn to relax and dissolve tension, and second, must devote keen and single-minded attention to a method of concentration.

To relax, one finds a comfortable position; each individual has their own specific needs and abilities with regard to posture and flexibility. Ms. Makso presented numerous postures and exercises that can be used in the practice of meditation whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. As she explained, a comfortable posture, one that is relaxed yet upright, is necessary to allow the qi to flow naturally in the body. This promotes well-being and is essential if one is to progress with a meditation method.



"Did you have a good experience?" Guo Yuan Fa Shi asked the audience after they had tried a method of relaxation. One woman said, "It was nice, but I fell asleep." The Abbot responded, "That's good. That means you can relax." But the goal of meditation is not to put oneself to sleep. He said that to stay awake and alert, one may need to have an object of concentration, and that to attain concentration, one must relax while calmly and steadily focusing the mind. To

facilitate this, he taught the method of counting the breath. He explained the different stages that one may achieve with this method, and how they arise as wandering thoughts related to the past and future decrease. By putting down wandering thoughts and returning to the method, one returns to the present and gains concentration. With single-minded effort, one can maintain awareness of the breath, the count, and the fact that one is meditating. Practicing diligently, one may experience an expanded sense of self, wherein one's experience of others and the environment is one of boundless unity. Guo Yuan Fa Shi called this state "unified mind," where body, mind, self, and others, internal and external, all seem like one entity. This state of calm concentration fosters an attitude of compassion, and in addition, has countless benefits for one's health.

Explaining the theory behind Chan meditation, Guo Yuan Fa Shi taught that by advancing further beyond the unified state of concentration, one can reach the state of no-mind. This is enlightenment. One realizes that the self has no true existence; there is liberation and peace. To elaborate on this concept, he asked, "What is the present moment?" When we are not distracted by our wandering ideas of the past and future, we are here and now in the present, and at that time, there is no past or future. But what is the present? "The present moment, in meditation, is the counting." By working single-mindedly, one comes to see that the present moment only has existence when the number counted serves as a point of reference. From moment to moment, the counting continues anew. Each present moment passes with every breath, every number. Yet when the counting stops, there is

no reference for time, no past, future, no present moment, no mind. Thus, ultimately there is no self. The self is an illusory appearance of thought after thought.

In addition to presenting methods and theories, Ms. Makso and Guo Yuan Fa Shi generously shared their experiences in meditation and daily life.



Ms. Makso spoke of the importance of establishing a daily routine of proper sleep, exercise, and meditation. She stressed that this routine and discipline of mind and body must be gradual, and by gradually increasing the duration of one's practice, one can naturally adjust to the rigors of sitting Chan. Guo Yuan Fa Shi spoke of being constantly mindful in daily life. By being aware of what one is doing in the present moment, one can strengthen one's concentration and calmness, and function more happily and efficiently when dealing with everyday challenges.

After discussing the benefits that Chan meditation can bring to oneself and others, Guo Yuan Fa Shi spoke of the peacefulness it can bring to society and the world. He then asked, "Would all of you like to have world peace?" To this, everyone smiled and applauded. It seemed at that moment that everyone felt that they had just been given a key to realizing this goal.

News From Dharma Drum Mountain

The Dharma Drum Mountain Complex in the county of Chin Shan, Taiwan, houses three major educational institutions: The Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies (CHIBS); the Sino-Tibetan Cultural and Buddhist Studies Exchange Program; and the Buddhist Seminary of Dharma Drum Sangha University (BSDDSU). On September 4, 2002, the institutions held a get-together celebration. Honored guests included Professor Jeffrey Hopkins of the Department of Religious

Studies at the University of Virginia, Mr. Yueh-Feng Chung, director of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission, Geshe Lobsang Domyo of the Sera Jey Monastic University, and Mr. Yo-ji Tang, member of the Taipei County Council.

The celebration included the inauguration of a new relationship, that of "sister" departments, between CHIBS and the Department of Religious Studies at U.V., which will include the recognition of academic credits. Students who obtain a Master's degree from CHIBS will be able to transfer those credits when pursuing further studies at the University of Virginia. The agreement brings to eleven the number of universities internationally that recognize academic credits from the Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies.

The Sino-Tibetan Cultural and Buddhist Education Exchange Program, now in its second year, is designed for Tibetan monastics to advance their studies in Chinese Buddhism. Eighteen students, monastics from different traditions and countries, are currently learning the Chinese language and studying Chinese Buddhism, in courses that are also available as electives for students in the CHIBS program.

The Buddhist Seminary of Dharma Drum Sangha University (BSDDSU) is also in its second year. This program is designed to cultivate and develop future Dharma monastic teachers. Students undergo a four-year program specializing in Buddhist studies and monastic cultivation.

Memorial Prayer Service for 9/11 Anniversary

On Sunday, September 8, 2002, members of the Chan Center participated in prayer services commemorating the first anniversary of the September 11th tragedy.

First, at the Chan Center in Elmhurst, the Chan Hall was completely full for the chanting of the name of Amitabha Buddha. The purpose of reciting the name of the Buddha of Wisdom and Compassion is to remind ourselves to emulate his qualities, and is also offered as a prayer that the deceased may be released from attachment.

From the Chan Center the group proceeded to Chatham Square in Manhattan, where they were joined by other groups from the American Buddhist Federation. Rev. Guo Yuan Fa Shi is the current president of the federation, which is comprised of 14 Chinese Buddhist monastic and lay organizations representing many denominations of Buddhism. A solemn procession then made its way to the site of the former World Trade Center and formed a prayer group. Students from the Shaolin Temple lined both sides of the group with the light blue flags of the federation.

Presiding over the ceremony was the elder Rev. Xichen from the Wonderful Enlightenment Temple. Our own Rev. Guo Yuan Fa Shi also offered prayers and memories in Chinese and English for the group of approximately 300 participants.
