

Chan 禪 Magazine

Winter 2007



Chan Meditation Center

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“Among the great masters and adepts, Chan was known as the Dharma gate of ‘letting go of one’s life’ and ‘putting to death one’s delusion.’ When one can die the great death of delusion, then one can live the great life of awakening. This is the meaning of resolving the great matter of life and death .”

**– Chan Master Sheng Yen,
from the introduction to
his new book *Attaining the
Way: A Guide to the Prac-
tice of Chan Buddhism.***

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Chan 禪 Magazine

From the Editor	4
The Four Steps to Magical Power	6
<i>The second of two lectures on the third group of practices known together as the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment, by Chan Master Sheng Yen</i>	
Communicating from the Heart	14
<i>Keynote address to the First World Buddhist Forum by Chan Master Sheng Yen</i>	
Receiving the Great Precepts	21
<i>Report on the ordination ceremony into the Chinese monastic Buddhist tradition by Chang Wen Fashi</i>	
The Past	27
<i>News from the Chan Meditation Center and DDMBA</i>	
The Future	32
<i>Retreats, classes, and other upcoming events</i>	
Chan Center Affiliates	34

From The Editor

I am writing in the aftermath—some would say afterglow—of the election of 2006, an election in which the American people, according to the pundits from both sides, have voted for change. It will be interesting to see if change is what they get. Replacing the crew is one thing; turning the ship of state is something else, and ours is a ship riding low in the water. Burdened as we are with debt, change won't be easy to finance; burdened as we are with conflict, change won't be easy to negotiate.

But what interests me at the moment is our burden of karma. Buddhists of all political inclinations would have to agree, I think, that America has taken on a tremendous load of negative karma in the last five years. The conservative estimate of the number of civilians killed as a result of our military intervention in Iraq is in the neighborhood of 50,000 (the Lancet medical journal has recently published a figure thirteen times that; I'm happy to report that no additional lives have been lost in the frequently bitter controversy over those numbers) in addition to over 3000 coalition deaths and over 21,000 U.S. soldiers wounded. On the war in Afghanistan, figures are harder to come by. Deaths have included over 500 coalition forces, something over 8000 Afghan soldiers, and according to a University of New Hampshire economics professor, who seems to be the only one counting, around 3500 civilians. That's 65,000 human beings gone as the direct consequence of American military action since September 11, 2001.

There are many who would say, who do say, that those deaths were necessary. There are

fewer who continue to maintain that they were somehow worth it, and those who do just lost the election. But while that was a critical argument on November 7th, it will make little difference when this karmic debt comes due. Let's imagine that Iraq and Afghanistan were to morph somehow into the free-market democracies of George Bush's dreams—how much would that lighten the karmic burden of having killed 65,000 people?

No, in my understanding of Buddhism, winning the argument isn't how you change your karma. The only way to lighten the crushing karmic weight this country has accumulated is by doing serious good. Fortunately for us, there's still plenty of good out there to do.

Diarrhea kills 1.8 million children each year, and virtually all of those deaths can be prevented by simple oral rehydration therapy, but of course most of those children get diarrhea because they have no access to safe water in the first place. If we spent the next five years, and only a fraction of the 350 billion dollars we've spent in Iraq building sanitary facilities in sub-Saharan Africa, we could save 100 times the number of lives we spent the last five years taking.

Between one and three million people die each year of malaria, a disease we've known how to control for over a century; Ronald Ross and William Gorgas, U.S. Army, led a campaign that successfully controlled malaria on the Panama Canal site from 1905 – 1910. More recently, researchers from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, working with the South African Medical

Research Council, demonstrated that the use of insecticide treated bednets was most effective at controlling the disease, at a cost of \$16 per new case averted, and \$1696 per death averted. Not bad considering it's been costing us around seven million USD apiece to kill Iraqi civilians.

And then there's Darfur—400,000 dead and 2.5 million displaced—about which we could surely do something if we applied our will and our resources as we have against our perceived enemies; there are the 800 million people, and counting, who go to bed hungry every night, most of them in Africa and Latin America, despite the FAO's decade-old plan to cut that number in half; there are the 25 million or so people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, 2 million of whom died last year, most of which deaths could have been prevented by the anti-retrovirals to which Americans with HIV have access...

Excuse me, I'm being boring. This column is read only by a relatively small number of Buddhists; the idea of reducing the suffering of others is nothing new to any of you. And I know we're at war, it's a post-9/11 world, yadayadayada...but I can't help but think it would be hard to sustain popular support for terrorism against a country that was spending a billion dollars a week saving people, instead of killing them.

So my bit of post-election punditry is this: when you are contacted by your new Democratic congressperson, as you will be, and asked what you think should be at the top of the new majority's list of priorities, why not suggest that the last remaining superpower use some of that super power to save people.

That would be a change.



The Four Steps to Magical Power

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

The Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment consist of seven groups of practices towards enlightenment, especially as followed in the Buddhist Theravada tradition. Beginning with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, a practitioner makes progress through the groups, culminating in the Noble Eightfold Path. In previous issues of Chan Magazine we presented the first two of the seven groups—the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Four Proper Exertions. In the last issue we presented the first of two parts concerning the third group, the Four Steps to Magical Power, and we present the second of those two articles here. They are based on lectures by Master Sheng Yen at the Chan Meditation Center, New York, given on October 20 and November 5, 2002, which were orally translated by Rebecca Li, transcribed by Bruce Rickenbacker, and edited by Ernest Heau.

Supernatural Powers and Karma

The third group of practices in the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment is called in Sanskrit riddhipada, literally, “steps to power.” One Chinese translation of this title is the Four Steps to Miraculous Power. Here, “miraculous” refers to powers of transformation, such as transporting objects or changing the size of things, and so on. The Chinese term has two characters, the first meaning “miraculous,” “mysterious,” or “supernatural,” and the second meaning “transforming.” In general then, these powers consist of the ability to transform certain phenomena in mysterious or supernatural ways.

We can read accounts in the sutras of arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas possessing such transforming powers. There are descriptions

of the Buddha emitting light while speaking the Dharma or making other worlds visible. Even some supposed arhats who could not even speak the Dharma performed these transformations—they would levitate on their cushions, change their location, appearance, size, and so on. People who witnessed these transformations were sometimes awed, and would prostrate before these practitioners, giving them great respect as if they were true arhats.

So, it was not only Buddhist adepts who obtained supernatural powers. Non-Buddhists who cultivate samadhi could also acquire supernatural powers. Someone whose samadhi power is weak may also experience visions, sounds, odors, and so on, but these are not supernatural powers. Furthermore, these in-



dividuals usually cannot control their limited powers, which come and go out of the blue. In fact, these phenomena do not even require one to be in samadhi, only that one is sensitive to such things. In the end, these are just illusions.

Only those who have cultivated deep samadhi and who have attained the four dhyanas and eight samadhis have supernatural powers that they can control.

One who has mastered real supernatural power can perform otherworldly feats at will. Even so, having these powers does not mean one is liberated in the Buddhist sense. It may sound appealing but in fact these powers are not always useful and often yield negative results; they are not in themselves reliable and are often illusory. For instance, people may use supernatural powers to visit the past or foresee the future, or to witness things happening elsewhere.

They may see concealed objects or read other people's minds. Abilities like these may seem useful, but they mainly serve to give pleasure and pride to the user. From the perspective of the present, seeing into the future may seem useful. However, the future is really determined by causes and conditions and by causes and consequences; what will or will not happen is determined by karma. To try to change one's karma with supernatural pow-

ers would not work, since that would violate the law of karma.

In both the early Buddhist and Mahayana traditions, there are records of supernatural powers being used. But what did the Buddha do when he was hungry? Did he conjure up a feast or have one catered by a deity? No, he walked around with his alms bowl begging for food. After he attained buddhahood he

walked from village to village spreading the Dharma. He did not fly through the air. He did not magically erect monasteries but relied on lay people to build them and to sew robes for the sangha. Before entering parinirvana—you may have read of this—he received an offering of food that was tainted. You would think that he should have used his supernatural powers to know the food was bad, but he did eat it and became very sick. So even though the Buddha possessed

supernatural powers, he did not use them in self-centered ways.

One of the Buddha's senior disciples, Maudgalyayana, was noted for his magic and clairvoyance. Among the Buddha's disciples was one called Color of Lotus who was famous for her supernatural powers. Both of them were ultimately beaten to death by people hostile to Buddhism. You could say that having su-

“SEEING ONE’S BUDDHA-NATURE...MAY BE LIKENED TO TRAVELING ON A DARK ROAD ON A VERY DARK NIGHT. ALL OF A SUDDEN, THERE IS A BOLT OF LIGHTNING. FOR A SPLIT SECOND, YOU SEE THE ROAD BEFORE YOU, BRIGHT AND CLEAR. BUT SEEING THE ROAD IS NOT THE SAME AS HAVING FINISHED THE JOURNEY.”

pernatural powers, they should have escaped from their attackers. But they couldn't because having supernatural powers does not change one's karma.

Why We Practice Dhyana

I want to emphasize that we practice dhyana not to acquire supernatural powers but to attain liberation. We begin the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to calm our mind, and to become clearly aware of how thoughts rise and fall in our mind. We then practice the Four Proper Exertions along with the Four Foundations, with an attitude of great diligence. Practicing these contemplations together results in the generation of wisdom. However, without adequate samadhi, this wisdom will not be deep-rooted and firm. At this stage we need to develop samadhi power for this wisdom to have a secure foundation. To do that, we cultivate dhyana.

I previously described the four enhanced phenomena of warmth, summit, forbearance, and supreme in the world. These phenomena characterize the practice of the Four Steps. I also described the Four Steps to Miraculous

Powers as the second of the five stages to buddhahood. So, on the foundation of dhyana we build our practice from which we move forward on the path of the bodhisattvas and buddhas.

Self-Nature is Buddha-Nature

One of the main methods of dhyana in Chan is investigating huatou. By investigating a huatou one may make a breakthrough and perceive directly that self-nature is that of emptiness and that there is no enduring self. This self-nature is also called buddha-nature. Seeing one's buddha-nature, however, does not mean that one is liberated, nor does it mean that one's practice is completed. Rather, it means that one has gained more faith and confidence in the practice, and that one now clearly knows where the path is. This may be likened to traveling on a dark road on a very dark night. All of a sudden, there is a bolt of lightning. For a split second, you see the road before you, bright and clear; because of that momentary bolt of lightning, you clearly see the road ahead. But seeing the road is not the same as having finished the journey. You still need to travel on to the end. In a similar manner, seeing your self-nature may have gained



you a little bit of wisdom, but you still need to practice. The next step is to deepen your samadhi, to cultivate dhyana. So really, the title Four Steps to Miraculous Power is really an analogy of the stages of meditative concentration. In that sense, a more proper title would be The Four Kinds of Samadhi.

Why is it useful to practice the Four Steps to Miraculous Power? Please recall that this practice is part of the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment, which is a complete description of the steps toward liberation. The Thirty-Seven Aids begin with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, in which we cultivate meditative concentration. Then we practice the Four Proper Exertions to enhance diligence in concentration. Together both practices help generate wisdom. However, in the beginning this wisdom is not deep-rooted and firm; to further solidify it we need to cultivate meditative absorption, or dhyana. To do that, we can practice the Four Steps to Miraculous Power.

Four Steps to Miraculous Powers

To quickly review them, the four steps, or *ridhipada*, consist of *chandra*, concentrating on a desire for dhyana; *virya*, concentrating on diligence; *citta*, concentrating on a mind for practice; and *mimamsa*, concentrating on inquiry into the nature of one's practice.

Chandra: Concentration of Desire

Chandra is the intense desire to attain dhyana. To develop the power of *chandra* one looks at the mind's vexations and contemplates their true nature. Do these vexations have enduring existence? If you contemplate them deeply you will see that vexatious thoughts

are all indeed illusory. Since they are illusory, why attach to them? One will then realize we suffer because of our attachments to vexations. So, the more we observe the mind and the more we realize that our vexations are illusory, the more we can let them go. In this practice, we remind ourselves, "I know that wandering thoughts arise because of my attachments, and I know that they cause me vexation." All your thoughts, as long as there is attachment, are wandering thoughts. So, when you see that wandering thoughts are caused by vexation and cause more vexation, and that one should therefore not attach to them, then one will learn to let them go. When you can do that, they will gradually subside, and your mind will become clearer and more stable, thus enabling dhyana.

Virya: Concentration of Diligence

Virya is diligence in dealing with the wandering thoughts that arise, whether they are thoughts of the past, present, or future. As for the present, thoughts come and go ceaselessly, and when we attach to them, they become wandering thoughts. However, thoughts of the past and future are also wandering thoughts, since the past is gone and the future is yet to be. All wandering thoughts, whether they relate to the past, the present, or the future, are illusory, so we just let them go.

When we are diligent in letting go thoughts of the past, not giving rise to thoughts of the future, and stopping thoughts in the present, we eventually enter the single-minded state of non-abiding. This corresponds to the line in the Diamond Sutra that says: "Abiding nowhere, give rise to [bodhi] mind."

Citta: Concentration of Mind

Citta is being mindful of your intent to practice. You need to be on guard against laziness, drowsiness, and scattered mind. You need to be aware that these states cause vexation and that they are the reasons we cannot attain liberation. Constantly be aware of their presence and once aware of them, put them aside right away. Do not struggle with them, as that will make it worse. If you can do this, constantly observing your mind, and putting down obstructions, you will be able to attain samadhi, the state of one-thought.

Mimamsa: Concentration of Inquiry

Mimamsa consists in having an inquiring or discriminating mind, ensuring that chanda, virya, and citta are present. If desire, diligence, and intent are present along with inquiry, with consistent practice it is possible to enter deep samadhi. Mimamsa consists

in knowing fully the importance of the other riddhis and that the Four Steps to Miraculous Powers is an important stage on the path to buddhahood.

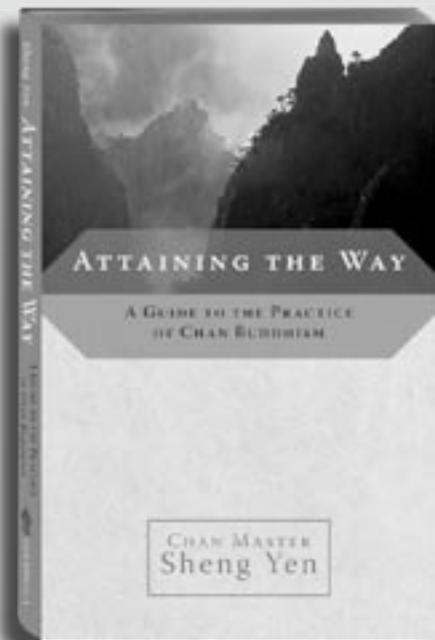
Conclusion

Practicing any one of the concentrations is a great benefit, but the greatest benefit would be to practice all four of the riddhis. Once you have established a firm footing in one of the riddhis it is easier to move on to the next. When you have mastered the Four Steps to Miraculous Powers, the next stage is to fully embark on the path of the bodhisattvas and buddhas. We talked a lot about supernatural powers but mainly to make it clear that the attainment of such powers is not the purpose of dhyana. The true miraculous power of dhyana is in attaining the path of the bodhisattvas and buddhas. That is what is really useful.



Shambhala

ATTAINING THE WAY A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism Chan Master Sheng Yen

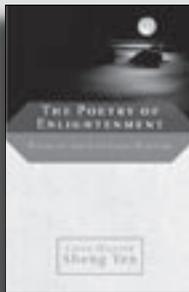


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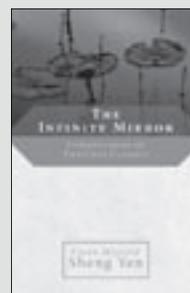
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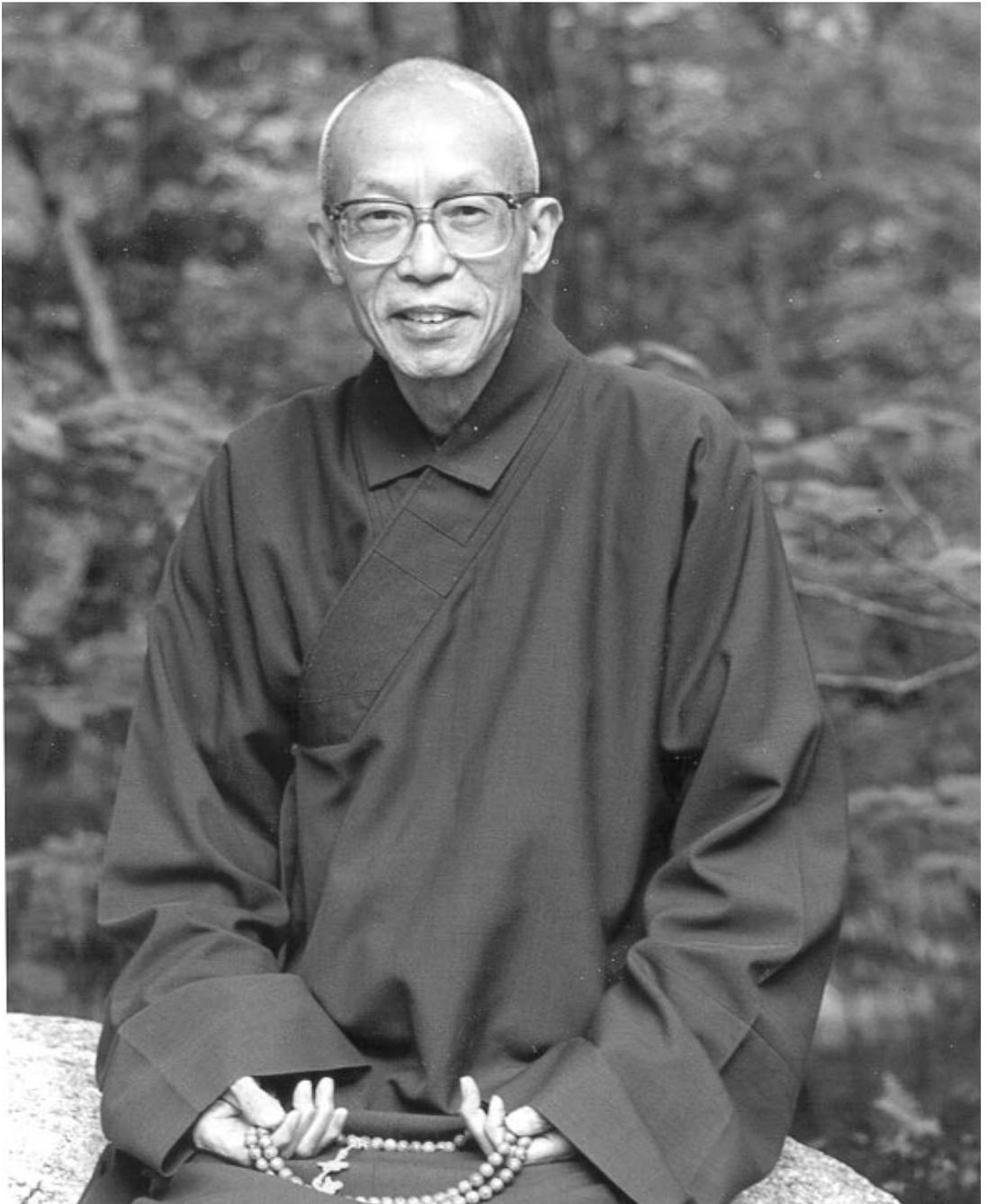
Keynote address at the First World Buddhist Forum, April 13-16, 2006
By Most Venerable Master Sheng Yen, Dharma Drum Mountain

Greetings, esteemed Dharma masters and distinguished practitioners. Forgive me for not being able to attend this forum because of my health condition, and listen to your valuable views. So I'd like to use this written address, which is now being read by a Dharma Drum Mountain representative, Bikkhu Guo Pin, to seek your views and comments.

In the past few years, our organization, and I personally, have attended many international conferences, including the World Economic Forum, World Bank, World Council of Religious Leaders, Global Peace Initiative of Women, the Earth Charter, and the World Youth Peace Summit. These conferences all focused their discussions on the issues of how to transform conflicts between different groups and communities into harmony, so that world peace can be achieved; how to help poverty-stricken countries become collaborative partners to share world resources, and seek sustainable development of such resources; and how to turn hostility between different cultures into mutual learning and tolerance, so as to develop common values and moral concepts among all humanity. As far as Buddhism, especially Mahayana

Buddhism, is concerned, this is not that difficult theoretically. The three main Western monotheistic religions also wish to live in harmony with each other. They all believe the supreme God is love and justice, and that different groups and communities should treat each other like brothers and sisters, and can actually live in peace and harmony. They don't disagree about the concept of "love;" but, when it comes to the idea of "justice," they simply hold on to their respective viewpoints. Even so, if people insisting on different standpoints can get together often, and discuss shared problems affecting everyone, they can at least improve their relationships and make friends.

Since the late 20th century, the Roman Catholic Church has regularly held interfaith dialogues; I was invited and attended the dialogue once. In the dialogue, different religions could freely express their views. However, that doesn't mean the Vatican is going to change its stance. As a result, many other denominations simply don't attend this kind of dialogue. In addition, those attending interfaith meetings convened in the West were still mainly from the three major West-



ern monotheistic religions. There were very few attendees from Asian religions, much less from Chinese Buddhism. It's really a pity that there haven't been enough opportunities to offer Buddhist wisdom to all humanity in today's world.

When I attend similar meetings, I don't emphasize the Chinese Buddhist standpoint, and I even avoid touching on issues that involve judging each other's core values. I only focus on the common points that people today yearn for and are concerned about. Ever since I proposed the "Protecting the Spiritual Environment" concept and "building a pure land on earth" campaign, I've always been able to have enjoyable conversations on whatever occasion, with people of whatever stance. For instance, people from Judaism, Catholicism, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and Islam all treat me as their good friend. In fact, I'm not very knowledgeable, but because the Buddhadharma is the Dharma of the mind, if we deal with all problems with the attitude of no-self, then everything will go smoothly for us.

I remember that on April 23, 2005, I attended the "Round Table Conference for Buddhists from across the Taiwan Strait, Hong Kong, and Macao," convened in Sanya City on Hainan Island by China's National Bureau of Religion and the Buddhist Association of China. The meeting resolved to establish a "World Buddhist Forum" sometime in the future. I was very happy about that. Among the world's religious believers, Buddhists are a small minority, primarily concentrated in eastern and southeastern Asia. Therefore, in the global context, Buddhists have little visibility, and very few opportunities to speak to the world on behalf of Buddhism. Even though it's true that different denominations

of Buddhism are already interacting with each other, a comprehensive and permanent institution like the World Buddhist Forum is important, and urgently needed. It allows different Buddhist denominations to first find common values and missions, and then to connect these common values and missions with those of other religions, so as to create a future of prosperous coexistence, peace, and bliss for our world.

I will now set forth my own thoughts regarding the theme of this forum, "A Harmonious World Starts with the Mind."

As everyone knows, from the perspective of philosophy, Buddhism is neither materialism, nor idealism, nor theism, but is based on the law of causes and conditions. On the surface, the theme of this forum, "Starting with the Mind," seems to classify Buddhism as idealistic. In this sense, even Dharma Drum Mountain's "Protecting the Spiritual Environment" campaign seems like idealism. But this is not the case.

The basic Buddhist perspectives are the teachings of early Buddhism about the Four Noble Truths, twelve links of dependant origination and, especially, the theory of conditioned arising in the Agama Sutras, which takes the mind as the core of existence, as is revealed in the verse: "When this exists, that exists. When this ceases, that ceases." Among the Four Noble Truths, "suffering" is a phenomenon of the afflicted mind; the "origin of suffering" means the cause of the consequences created by the afflicted mind; the "cessation of suffering" means to cease the afflictions of the mind and hence obtain liberation; and the "path" refers to using various methods of spiritual practice to transform the afflicted mind



into a liberated mind. Therefore, the teaching of the Four Noble Truths also revolves around the mind, the core of existence.

The twelve links of dependent origination start with ignorance, which gives rise to the twelve links of life process throughout the three periods of time. Ignorance is the core of the afflicted mind. Buddhism analyzes the phenomena of the world as comprised of “five aggregates,” among which the “form aggregate” refers to matter, and the other aggregates—feelings, conception, volition, and consciousness—belong to the category of mind. From the perspective of life, matter does not exist independent of mind. So the content of the twelve links of dependent origination also emphasizes the mind as the core of existence.

In the initial stages of Mahayana Buddhism, as it developed from early Buddhism, the Madhyamika school established its theory based on the law of dependent origination, derived from the principles of the Four Noble Truths and the twelve links of dependent origination. The Madhyamika school teaches emptiness, which means to “empty” all attachment of the mind. Whether it is the doctrine about the emptiness of self, dharmas, or ultimately everything, they all refer to the need to empty our minds’ attachments to these concepts.

So, the realm of sentient beings and the realm of the physical world are, after all, composed of five aggregates as they develop from the realm of the five aggregates. Therefore, we can see that the Madhyamika teachings also regard the mind as the core of existence.

That's why the Heart Sutra says, "He realized the five aggregates are all empty," and, "There is no ignorance and no ending of ignorance; there is no aging and death, and no ending of aging and death."

The Consciousness-Only school of Mahayana Buddhism divides the mind into the "mind-king," and "mental factors or qualities." It holds that everything is created by and transformed through the alaya consciousness, and that the seeds of consciousness will give rise to manifest activities, which will in turn influence the seeds of consciousness. In fact, all that can influence, and that is influenced, is just a reflection of the phenomenal and cognitive aspects of the alaya consciousness. Although the alaya consciousness gives rise to all phenomena, it is still a deluded mind. And to attain Buddhahood is to transform the deluded consciousness into the mind of suchness, or reality.

The Tathagatagarbha school, another branch of Mahayana Buddhism, emphasizes that the mind is not only the source of all dharma realms, but also encompasses all dharma realms and their functions. As the Avatamsaka Sutra says, "The mind is like a skillful painter painting pictures of the five aggregates. There is no dharma in all the worlds that is not created by it." The Lotus Sutra

also says, "All who say the Buddha's name but once have already achieved the Buddha path." Then, who is it that says the Buddha's name? And, who is it that can achieve the Buddha path? It's the sentient being's mind. Also, when the Avatamsaka Sutra says, "There is no difference between the mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings," it means that the mind of an afflicted sentient being is, in essence, the same as the pure mind of all the

Buddhas with their perfect merit and wisdom. The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana says, "What are called 'dharma's' refer to the mind of sentient beings. This mind encompasses all the mundane and supramundane dharmas." It also says, "As the mind arises, various dharmas also arise; as the mind ceases, various dharmas also cease to exist." That means the mind is common to both ordinary people and sages, to both this world and the transcen-

dental world, and to both conditioned and unconditioned things—it permeates each and every thing.

If we look at everything in this world and discuss different ethnic groups, cultures, and ideas from the Buddhist perspective of the mind, then we won't insist that there should be an absolute and unchangeable viewpoint. As far as the person who advocates a certain viewpoint is concerned, his/her perspective is right. But looking at it from the perspective of

"WHO IS IT THAT SAYS THE BUDDHA'S NAME? AND WHO IS IT THAT CAN ACHIEVE THE BUDDHA PATH? IT'S THE SENTIENT BEING'S MIND . . . THE MIND OF AN AFFLICTED SENTIENT BEING IS, IN ESSENCE, THE SAME AS THE PURE MIND OF ALL THE BUDDHAS WITH THEIR PERFECT MERIT AND WISDOM."

others, and especially from the perspective of humanity as a whole, there may still be room for discussion and modification. In international meetings, I often interact and discuss with other people from the perspective of no-self, without a subjective, preconceived standpoint. I will first approve of a person's idea, and that person will respect me, too. As the Commentary on the Mahayana Splendor Sutra says, "There's no object beyond the mind; when the object is nonexistent, the mind doesn't exist either. Those who realize that both are nonexistent reside well in the Dharma realm of reality." As real Buddhist practitioners, it doesn't matter whether we practice Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism, or the Madhyamika, Consciousness-Only, or Tathagatagarbha teachings. As long as we realize that no object is outside the mind, and that the mind does not exist outside the object, we will know that all problems actually come from the mind. It would be awful if we felt that there are still certain people and things to overcome or oppose, because what we are dealing with is not the people or things outside the mind, but our inner afflictions. If everyone can realize this and adjust their ideas promptly, then there's no external phenomenon that cannot be tolerated or dissolved.

Should you agree with what I just said, that means The World Buddhist Forum is a forum for all Buddhists around the world to express their ideas, including those from the traditions of Chinese Buddhism, Theravada Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism. Even though these traditions also include various schools, each with its respective philosophies, practices, and lifestyles, we should understand that these different schools arose as a result of differences in regions and cultural back-

grounds. They may also differ in their modes of expression because of the different scriptures they follow. In addition, the respective teachings, principles, practices, and attainments that each school values are interpreted differently.

All in all, this doesn't really matter. I am sure everyone would like to see all traditions and schools freely express themselves in this forum, and open their hearts to accept diverse views beyond their own domains. As a Chinese saying goes: "Everybody can play a trick, but their skills are all different." Through this forum, we can learn from each other and gain something from our exchanges. This will be a brainstorming of cultures and thoughts, which will inspire new and vibrant flashes of wisdom. And then, on the basis of what we've gained, learned, and absorbed from this forum, we can collaborate with other cultures and religions, and strive toward shared values and missions together. Although we think that our own school is good, we should also respect the strengths of other traditions. Nevertheless, each school should still have its own standpoint. The most commendable thing is learning from others' good points to compensate for what we lack, as well as bringing our strength into full play and contributing it to all humanity. Only then is it the spirit of the World Buddhist Forum. Otherwise, if our ideas and thoughts are not impartial, human cultures will probably not be able to make any progress.

The World Buddhist Forum was initiated in China, and also held for the first time in China, which I think has a significant meaning. Because in the territory of China all the three main Buddhist traditions—Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, and Theravada

Buddhism—exist, even though the languages and races of these three traditions are different. As we all know, China experienced a Cultural Revolution, which caused social turmoil for a decade, and also led to a temporary halt in the development of Buddhism for 20 to 30 years. Now it's time for China to catch up. As Buddhist leaders from around the world have

convened at this forum, hopefully it will bring about a revival of Buddhism in China, and further set the trend for global Buddhism.

Thank you, spiritual friends, and I wish the forum every success. Your comments on my above views are welcome.



Photo by Kevin Wo

Receiving the Great Precepts

Native New Yorker and former resident of the Chan Meditation Center, Chang Wen Fashi, aka David Kabacinski, Shares His Experience of Ordination into the Chinese Buddhist Monastic Tradition

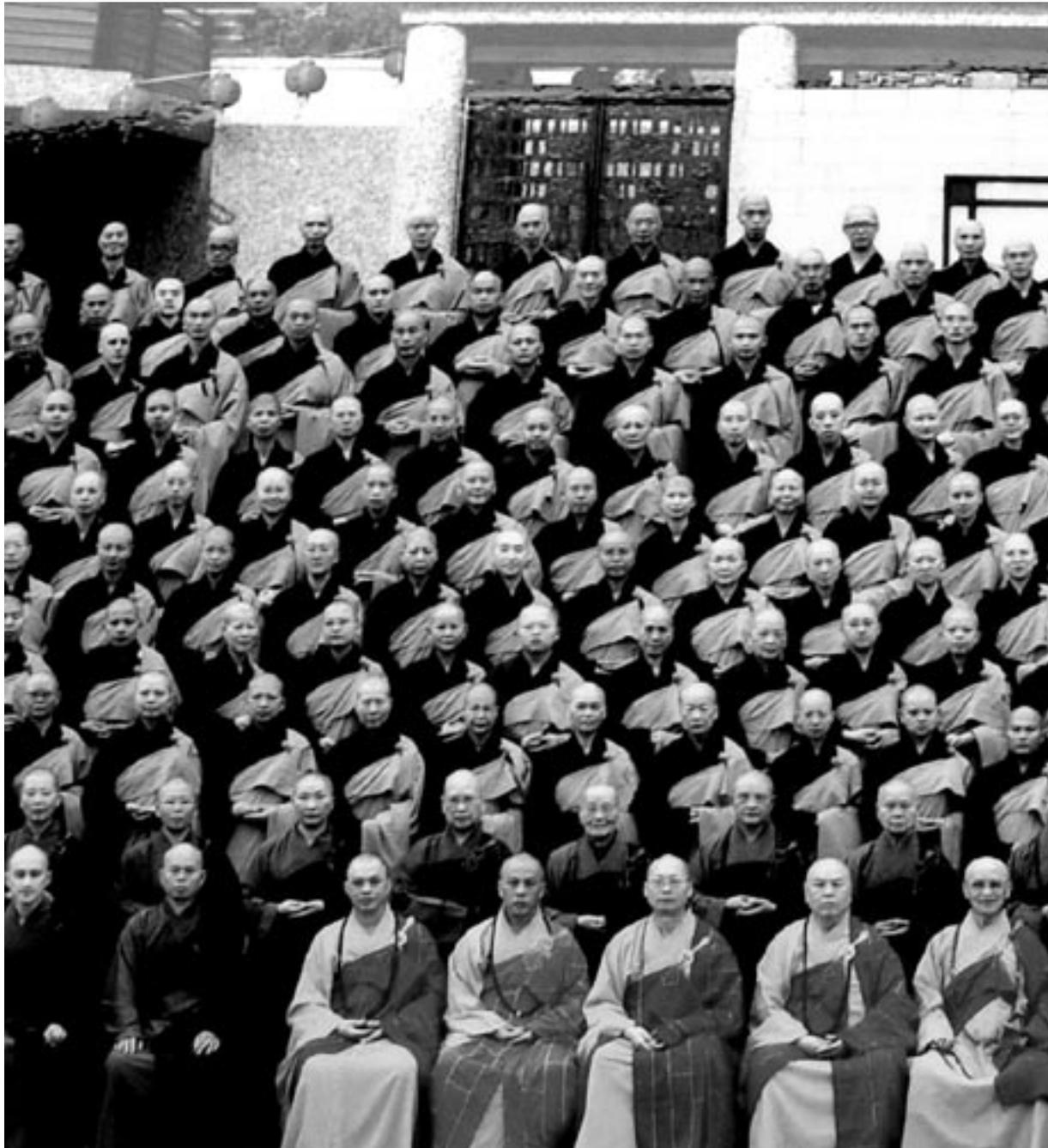
Background

In the Chinese Buddhist monastic tradition, in order to be truly considered a “left-home person” one must be formally ordained and receive the Great Precepts. The Great Precepts includes the Bhikkhu and Bhikkuni Precepts (of the monk or nun) and the Bodhisattva Precepts. Specifically, it is the receiving and upholding of the Bhikkhu and Bhikkuni Precepts that distinguishes one as a monastic practitioner, who aims at completely “leaving” the “home” of attachments; their code of morality is consequently more detailed and stringent than that of a lay practitioner. Although anyone can shave one’s head, wear robes, and outwardly have the appearance and demeanor of a monastic, it is only by officially receiving the Precepts from a recognized Preceptor and related community that one can be considered a member of the monastic sangha.

By practicing the Precepts, one fully engages in the Training of Morality—of the Threefold Training of Morality, Concentration, and Wisdom. The Precepts form the most elemental practice of this Training, providing practical guidelines for daily-life behavior,



showing us how to act with purity of body, speech, and mind. Purity of action is without greed, anger, and ignorance, and thereby full of charity, compassion, and wisdom. Thus, the Precepts show us how to behave in a way that leads to a stable body and mind, and a balanced lifestyle. Only with this foundation





will we be able to enter deeply into the training of Concentration, and eventually realize Wisdom, or Enlightenment.

The Precepts are designed not only to purify one's individual lifestyle, body, and mind, but also form the guidelines that establish and maintain harmony within the monastic sangha. During the time of the Buddha, there were a few monks and nuns who encountered difficulties in their practice, and behaved in ways that caused conflict. The Buddha created the Precepts in response to each of these cases, to ensure that the sangha members could avoid making the same mistakes in the future, thus maintaining purity and harmony. The Buddha himself said of the Precepts, during his last sermon to the sangha, "You should know that it is like your great teacher, and is not different than my actual presence in the world."

Personal Experience

As of March 2006 I had been a novice monk at DDM here in Taiwan for two years. Usually, after the first year as a novice, and after having the approval of the sangha, one goes through the ordination-training course, lasting for one to three months. Here at DDM, we have not yet established our own Great Precepts training course, so novices are sent off to other monasteries where the training is conducted. But after the first year of my novitiate, my Chinese language skills were not yet up-to-par, so Shifu directed me not to take the training yet. At that time, many of my classmates went to Mainland China, to Gao Ming Monastery, a landmark and stronghold of the Chinese Chan tradition, where the descendants of Great Master Lai Guo (a contemporary of Master Empty Cloud)

continue to teach the Dharma. It was not until this year that the sangha decided I had the necessary comprehension and stability of mind to attend the training.

The place of ordination was in northern Taiwan, in a city called Xindian, at Bamboo Forest Monastery, which sat in the thick of a mountainside forest, overlooking the city below, and the beachfront off in the distance. Interestingly, this time we did not go to the Mainland; rather, the Mainland came here to Taiwan. About ten sangha members from Jeweled Flower Mountain (an area across the river from Gao Ming Monastery) came to direct the Precept training in their particular style, including monastic manners and etiquette, the ceremonial procedure, and chanting.

What brought about this special circumstance was the Preceptor, Venerable Jie De, a 98-year-old Dharma teacher who was determined to gather together the personnel to transmit the Precepts this year. Because of his connection with Jeweled Flower Mountain, as he was previously a member of that community, and because of his great influence over the modern world of Chinese Buddhism, he was able to gather together an exceptional group of Dharma teachers to conduct the training. Among them were the 80-year-old Venerable Song Cun, currently residing at Jeweled Flower Mountain, 82-year-old Venerable Kuan Yu and 85-year-old Venerable Shou Cheng, both descendants of Jeweled Flower who now reside in Taiwan. Venerable Shou Cheng happens to be one of Shifu's old teachers, who along with our esteemed Venerable Jen Chun of Bodhi Monastery, taught at the Jing An Buddhist University in Shanghai in the 1940s.

Venerable Shou Cheng was the director of ceremonies, and for almost the whole month, day after day, spent hours directing our practice of the Precept ceremonies, chanting (louder than all the young monks), and at the end of the night would, standing, give us an inspiring Dharma talk about the spirit of the Precepts.

“Take the Precepts as your teacher.” Quoting the Buddha, he emphasized that the Precepts are the foundation for a monastic’s life-long career as a “role model for all gods and humans.” “However, in following the Precepts we should use wisdom,” he added, saying that for example, when keeping the precept of not eating after noontime, we should take caution. Although it can be very good for the health to abstain from taking food after noon, we should take care of the body. If we are hungry we should eat; if we are busy all day and into the night doing Dharma work, we must replenish the necessary fuel that the body needs. The crucial point is that when we eat, we do so with a pure mind, clear and aware, yet without the desire to experience pleasant sensations. So he gave the formula, “In the morning, eat ‘til your full; in the afternoon, eat well; in the evening, eat less.” The Old Master gave this and much other advice on how to follow the spirit of the precepts.

One interesting point to note is that although my classmates and I can understand Chinese, as spoken by Taiwanese people, most of the old masters are from the Mainland, and have quite heavy accents. So for many lectures and for especially the ceremonies, it was a challenge to make out just what they were saying. “Do you understand?” they’d ask.

“Amitofo!” we’d reply altogether in one voice, some thinking, “No, I don’t but...” Thankfully, we had a ceremonies manual, that we’d read afterwards and thoroughly digest the meaning of the ceremonies’ content. After going back to the dorm after a lecture, we’d also ask around to the others participants, “Hey what did the Old Master say?”

Each day the participants’ daily affairs were guided by two very dedicated monks from Taiwan, as well as the crew of 20 monks and nuns who helped with organizing and conducting the ceremonies. I was personally moved by their endless energy in looking after so many of us, around 250, and their compassion in making sure we were well taken care of in body and mind. To note, many people caught and spread their colds during the training, as the living quarters were very cramped and the air quality both indoors and outdoors was very poor. Doctors were called in often to check up and give medicine to those who needed it. As for me, I had caught a sinus infection earlier in January, and not until returning from the training in April did I recover. So for the whole period of the training I was troubled by constant nasal congestion, weakness, and intermittent fevers. However, these Dharma teachers were very kind in taking us to see outside doctors and allowing us to have time to rest and recover. What I was most impressed by was that they constantly were guiding and correcting our manners, the way we walked, wore our robes, folded our bed sheets, ate, spoke, and did day-to-day activities. As behavior is the core of monastic practice, they were very particular in stressing manners and etiquette. We had many compassionate elders looking after us.

Conclusion

The Precepts are a tool, a code of conduct that we can use to guide our behavior in daily life. They are not a device to restrict us, or prevent us from being free, as some may believe. It is possible that in the West, we were brought up to see rules as restrictive, as barriers to our freedom and happiness. However, the Precepts, if viewed and taught correctly, are actually the vehicle for our freedom—more specifically freedom of mind. Telling us what we should and should not do, they limit our freedom of behavior, but in doing so, they teach us to let go of the habitual thoughts that propel us to act unwholesomely, and thereby free the mind from the shackles of habitual action. Precepts then become a tool for freedom. As the Buddha said in the Sutra on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teaching,

“The precepts are the root of proper freedom...By relying on these precepts, you will give rise to all dhyana concentrations, and reach the wisdom of the cessation of suffering.”

In the West, practitioners of Chan or Zen often emphasize meditation and mindfulness, and some then claim that Precepts are unnecessary, saying that by knowing the mind and using the method all the time, we will naturally have wholesome behavior. “Precepts are for practitioners with dull roots and weak ability,” we say. “After all, Chan is the school of sudden enlightenment. Like the Sixth Patriarch said, all we need do is illuminate the mind and see self nature. Who needs Precepts!?” But only fully enlightened beings have the awareness to live in a way

that does not harm themselves or others and instead liberates all beings. We ordinary people are far away from this level of practice, as we have scattered minds and deeply rooted habitual tendencies, making us often unaware of vexations. It is for this reason that we must rely on the Precepts as a mirror for our behavior, pointing out our weaknesses and helping us remember what areas we need to work on to improve our character. If we ignored the Precepts, and relied merely on our awareness and strength of meditative concentration in guiding our behavior, we would definitely have flaws in our practice, unaware of our blind spots.

As I have just received the Great Precepts, my understanding is very shallow, and so I have much to learn. I will continue to take classes here at DDM, and will continue to study on my own. The Buddha, a fully enlightened being, himself created the Precepts as a way to lead the sangha and preserve stability and harmony within the sangha. If each individual studies and practices these Precepts, the sangha will be in harmony, and thus be able to do its work sharing the Dharma with the world. It is for this reason, that I view the Precepts as very important, and will do my best to follow them. As Shifu teaches, we must study and practice the Precepts according to their spirit, which is to help transform vexation into wisdom. I vow to share this with others, and most importantly vow to embody the Precepts, with behavior that is pure—bringing peace, joy, and liberation to all sentient beings.

With Palms Joined,

Shi Chang Wen

The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Attaining the Way Released by Shambhala

Shambhala Publications has released the latest book by Chan Master Sheng Yen, *Attaining the Way*, a collection of teachings by four great Chan masters: Boshan, a Ming dynasty master of the Caodong lineage; Jiexian, a younger contemporary of the Linji school; Xuyun, the great modern patriarch who deserves much of the credit for the revival of Chinese Buddhism in the twentieth century; and Master Sheng Yen himself.

Translated by both Master Sheng Yen's long-time attendant Guogu (Jimmy Yu), and the well-known translator J.C. Cleary, and edited by Dharma Drum Publications managing editor Ernest Heau, the new volume includes a previously unpublished dialogue on the relationship of mind, wandering thought and meditative absorption between Xuyun and his Dharma disciple Lingyuan, of whom Master Sheng Yen is a Dharma heir.

The release of *Attaining the Way* also marks the debut of a new relationship between Dharma Drum Publications and Shambhala, which includes new Shambhala editions of a number of Master Sheng Yen's previous works, including *Dharma Drum*, *Faith in Mind*, *The Infinite Mirror*, and *The Poetry of Enlightenment*.

Dr. John Crook To Conduct Koan Retreat

Drs. John Crook and Simon Child, both Western Dharma heirs of Chan Master Sheng Yen, will conduct a seven-day koan retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center from March 9 – 16, 2007.

In the retreat, they will present new ways of exploring koans that they have found appropriate for Westerners attempting to uncover their enlightenment potential. Having found many Westerners to have very busy, highly educated and technique-oriented minds, they begin by pondering a selection of koan stories in a traditional Western style in order to drain the mind of excessive intellection before transferring to contemplation of the koan through intuitive mindfulness.

The process, a blending of Dr. Crook's Western Zen Retreat and a traditional huatou retreat, has been developed within the Western Zen Fellowship (UK) in a series of six retreats in Europe. (For details about the Western Zen Retreat, please see Dr. Crook's two-part article "Life Koans and Retreat Experience" in the Summer and Autumn 2006 issues of Chan Magazine.)

To apply for the retreat, please visit us online at www.chancenter.org.

Master Sheng Yen Confers Title on Successor

The morning of September 2nd was a special one for everyone at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. The moment had arrived for Master Sheng Yen formally to confer his role as Abbot of Dharma Drum Mountain on the Venerable Guo Dong Fashi, amid grand traditional ceremonies of Chinese Buddhism that went on for nearly three hours, concluding at noon with songs of blessing by the DDM Young Buddhists' Society.

Practitioners from all over Taiwan sat at length enduring the harsh summer sunlight as they awaited the splendid ceremony. The sound of chanting by thousands of voices pervaded the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education as all present gave voice to blessings for both leaders and the future of Dharma Drum Mountain. In the solemn rite of benediction that ensued, Master Sheng Yen, acting as officiating prelate, presented Guo Dong Fashi to the congregation and invested him with the insignia of his office.

"Venerable Guo Dong Fashi is the most suitable candidate to lead DDM in the future," said Master Sheng Yen, "though he is neither the most senior nor the most erudite. He has immovable faith in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, and devotes himself unstintingly to the Buddha's teachings. He is in excellent health and willing to go wherever he is needed."

Venerable Guo Dong Fashi responded that since the work of establishing DDM as an institution has been thoroughly completed, he will devote himself entirely during his tenure as abbot to carrying out DDM's work

for the welfare of humanity, and said that Master Sheng Yen will always remain DDM's spiritual leader.

The new abbot was picked personally by Master Sheng Yen from a list of five candidates previously selected and ratified by a vote of the DDM Sangha in strict adherence to the Code for Designating an Abbot of DDM. This procedure can now serve as a precedent, offering a sound model for choosing future abbots. Each term of office is for three years, and an abbot may be reelected twice, serving a total of nine years.

Master Sheng Yen affirmed that the new abbot's mission is one of selfless devotion for the benefit of others, fostering the culture of Chinese Buddhism and the teaching of spiritual environmentalism. He explained that the character and personal morality of the abbot of DDM are of the utmost importance, and abuses of power or other such offenses cannot be tolerated. "If the new abbot goes against DDM's long-term beliefs, then we all have the right to call on him to step down... Indeed, we must all be vigilant about any corruption or deterioration of standards."

He emphasized, however, that he has not yet retired and there are still many tasks he hopes to accomplish, including work to build Dharma Drum University. Furthermore, he pointed out, "I will always be the spiritual leader of DDM," which was received with thunderous applause.

Pure Land GDP

To help Taiwanese youth gain a better understanding of global environmental protection in preparation for the November "UN Global

Youth Leadership Summit”, last July in Taipei DDM hosted a conference attended by more than 300 young people on “New Ideas in Economic Development and Environmental Protection,” with a special appearance by Master Sheng Yen and a panel of four distinguished guests: Vincent Siew, former Premier of the Executive Yuan, Stan Shih, founder of Acer Incorporation, Professor Chu Yun-peng, of the Academia Sinica’s Sun Yat-Sen Institute for Social Science and Philosophy, and Professor Chang Juu-en, former Minister of the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA).

As summed up by Professor Chu, Green GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is basically an adjustment of the traditional concept of GDP, incorporating resource and environmental costs into the assessment of economic activities. The key concept at play is sustainable development, which involves caring not only for our generation but for all future generations.

“The emphasis nowadays should be on quality rather than on quantity,” said Vincent Siew. “Economic development must enter into harmony with environmental protection.”

All concurred that the government should adopt a Green GDP measurement as an index of the quality of life in Taiwan, and urged everyone in attendance to practice spiritual environmentalism in their daily lives to foster more efficient use of resources for the long-term benefit of the natural environment.

According to the Economist, last year total GDP generated by developing countries outpaced that of developed countries, constituting “... the greatest change since the Industrial Revolution.”

“This is another reason why we must apply a Green GDP model,” Professor Chu warned. “If the US model of resource consumption is followed by developing countries, the earth



will end up being completely depleted, so sustainable development is a matter of urgent concern to us all.”

The question came up as to whether applying Green GDP standards would increase operating costs for businesses that are already constrained by a highly competitive market. If so, it might explain why prospects for environmental protection in developing countries have not been bright.

Professor Chu conceded that businesses are initially reluctant to adjust their production lines to reflect environmental criteria as stipulated by the law because of a fear of soaring costs. However, if companies could truly restructure their operations and economize on resource use, then costs could be reduced and high efficiency attained, he said, citing the remarkably successful example of the 3M Corporation.

Spiritual Environmentalism

Stan Shih, founder of Acer Inc., agreed that the main goal of business is to pursue maximum efficiency with a minimum waste of resources, and maintained that if businesses respect the environment, it will eventually pay off.

Professor Chang touched upon the question of personal attitude. He noted that despite modest progress in recycling as a result of long-term educational campaigns by the government, in order to achieve “true” victory in pursuing sustainable development in Taiwan, a change in people’s outlook is required. Yes, reducing toxic emissions does entail an improvement of efficiency for a company. “But true success lies in the mind of each

individual—whether one’s mind is turned towards living in harmony with nature,” he said, observing that this goes hand in hand with building a pure land on earth. “One can only feel at peace in a sound environment.”

Master Sheng Yen warmly endorsed the professor’s remarks, and outlined four guiding concepts for approaching environmental issues:

- 1) Our wants are many.
- 2) Our needs are few.
- 3) Only pursue what we can and should acquire.
- 4) Never pursue what we cannot or should not acquire.

The panel members also encouraged those slated to attend the UN summit to speak out boldly and ask the United States to sign the Kyoto Treaty, which it has so far refused to do for fear of hampering economic growth. As Professor Chu pointed out, the U.S. share of carbon dioxide emissions is the highest in the world.

Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of DDM in Singapore

Over the past decade, Dharma Drum Mountain in Singapore has been actively promoting the idea of “uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth,” guided by spiritual environmentalism, and engaged in educational and charitable projects.

To celebrate its 10th anniversary, DDM held a banquet last July 15th which was attended by more than a thousand community members. Guo Dung Fashi and Mr. Hwang Chu-qi from Taipei were also in attendance.



The banquet began with the chanting of scriptures. Leaflets explaining the history and ideas of the community were distributed. In closing, a choir organized by Sangha members on fairly short notice regaled the assembly with inspirational songs about compassion.

Master Sheng Yen, though unable to attend in person, conveyed warm blessings in a videotape filmed in Taipei. "To accomplish a pure land on earth requires that we purify our minds," he said, "which can to some extent be done through education, and involves a long-term effort."

All present resolved to do their utmost for peace by sharing Buddhist teachings and the idea of spiritual environmentalism, firm in the conviction that if the wisdom of the Dharma can be properly applied, it can bring about world peace.

Peace of Mind Relief Station Launched in Sri Lanka

On July 14th, 2006, after six months of hard work and preparation, the Peace of Mind Relief Station in Hambantota, Sri Lanka was inaugurated under the sponsorship of Dharma Drum Mountain to aid victims of the 2004 Tsunami facing post-disaster trauma.

To celebrate the event and explain the station's mission in Sri Lanka, a press conference was held the day before at the Colombo Hilton Hotel, attended by the President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, as well as Guo Pin Fashi, Guo Qi Fashi, Mr. Chen Guokaei, Secretary-General of the DDM Charity Foundation, and many others.

In his opening remarks, Guo Pin Fashi emphasized how much DDM appreciated the tre-

mendous help received from the government, as well as from people from both Taiwan and Sri Lanka, noting that without their support, the Relief Station would not be possible.

Chen Guo-kaei thanked the local community for help in expediting the delivery of supplies from Taiwan. He pointed out, however, that infrastructure for transportation and water supply will need to be improved to enhance the station's operation in the future. Though it is only a small step for DDM, Chen added, we must work harder to help local victims out of their distress and make the station a spiritual refuge for people in Sri Lanka.

The Peace of Mind Relief Station in Sri Lanka has been enthusiastically received by the local community. On July 15th and 16th, Refuge-taking ceremonies presided over by Guo Pin Fashi were held at the station for 474 people.

Since the Tsunami occurred in December 2004, DDM has embarked upon a series of relief projects in Sri Lanka, notably the creation of a kindergarten, improving the water supply and the construction of up to 300 shelters, all of which have been warmly welcomed by residents and the government. DDM has also dispatched medical teams to Sri Lanka four times to provide free medical care. In addition, to upgrade local health services it is now working on the construction of a Health Care Station which, it is hoped, will be completed by the end of this year.

The Future

Retreats, classes and other upcoming events.

Chan Retreats

Chan retreats are opportunities for serious practitioners to deepen their practice and receive guidance from resident teachers. Retreats are held either at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens (CMC) or at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Ridge, New York.

Three-day College Retreat at DDRC

Thursday, January 11, 8:30 pm –
Sunday, January 14, 5:00 pm

Seven-day Koan Retreat:

Drs. John Crook and Simon Child (DDRC)

Friday, March 9, 6:00 pm –
Friday, March 16, 10:00 am
(See article on page for details)

Phone: (845) 744-8114

E-mail: ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org

Website: www.dharmadrumretreat.org

Chan Practice

Monday Night Chanting

Every Monday, 7 – 9:15 pm

Devotional chanting of Amitabha Buddha;
88 Buddhas Repentance on last Monday of each month.

Tuesday Night Sitting Group

Every Tuesday, 7 – 9:45 pm

Periods of sitting meditation alternating with yoga, walking meditation, readings, discussion, and chanting the Heart Sutra.

Saturday Sitting Group

Every Saturday, 9 am – 3 pm

Half-hour periods of sitting meditation alternating with yoga or walking meditation.

Sunday Open House

Every Sunday

10:00 am – 11:00 am Group Meditation

11:00 am – 12:30 pm Dharma Talk

12:30 - 1:00 pm: lunch offerings

1:00 - 2:00 pm: lunch

2:00 - 3:00 pm: chanting; Q & A for

English-speaking practitioners (the second Sunday of the month devoted to the chanting of the Great Compassion Dharani Sutra, 2 – 4.)

Sunday Lectures at CMC

The Diamond Sutra, by Guo Chian Fa Shi

The Platform Sutra, by Guo Ming Fa Shi

Sundays, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Classes at CMC

Taijiquan Classes

Thursdays, 7:30 – 9:00 pm, ongoing with instructor David Ngo, \$80 for a session of 16 classes, or \$25/month. (First Thursday of the month free for newcomers.)

Yoga

Due to instructor Rikki Asher's sabbatical leave, yoga classes will be suspended until September.

Beginners Meditation and Dharma Classes

Call, e-mail or check the web for schedule:

Phone: (718) 592-6593

E-mail: ddmbaus@yahoo.com

On the web: www.chancenter.org

Special Events

Chinese New Year Celebration at CMC

Sunday, February 18, 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

"Zen an Inner Peace"

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program on WNYE 25, Sunday, 7 am.



Chan Center Affiliates

Local organizations affiliated with the Chan Meditation Center and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association provide a way to practice with and to learn from other Chan practitioners. Affiliates also provide information about Chan Center schedules and activities, and Dharma Drum publications. If you have questions about Chan, about practice, or about intensive Chan retreats, you may find useful information at an affiliate near you.

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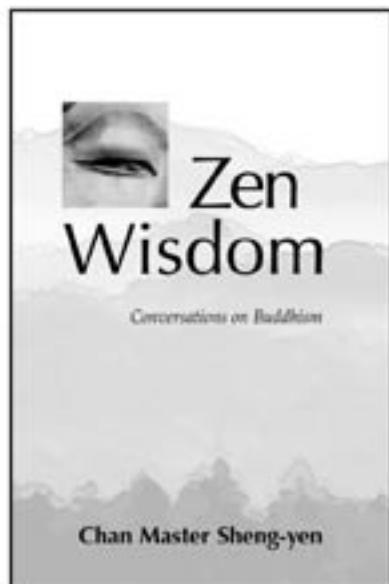
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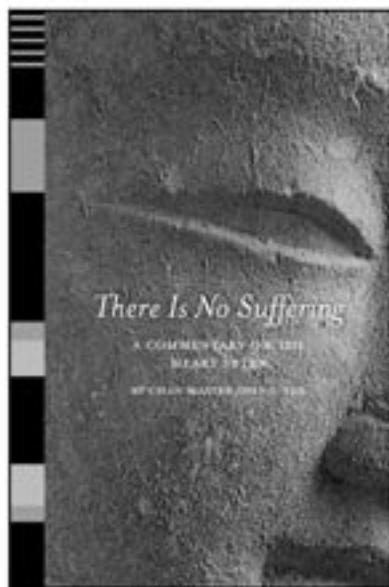


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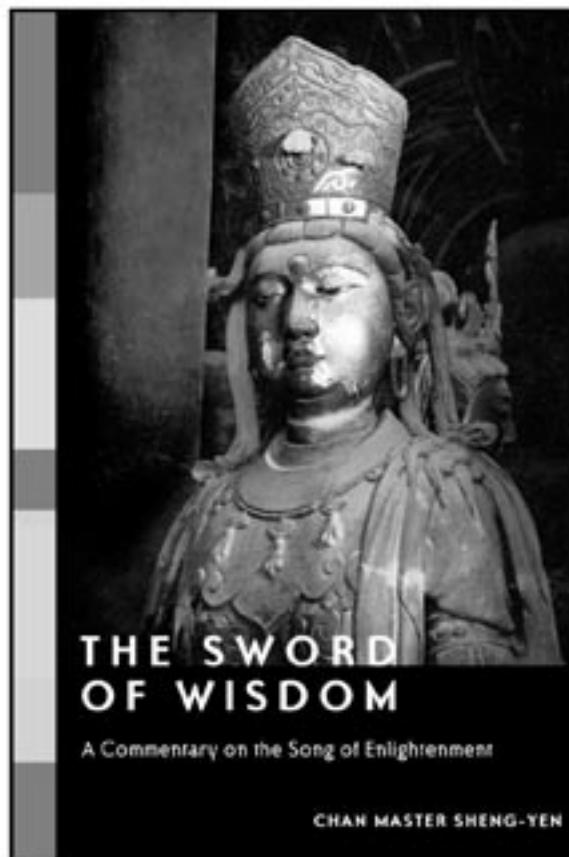


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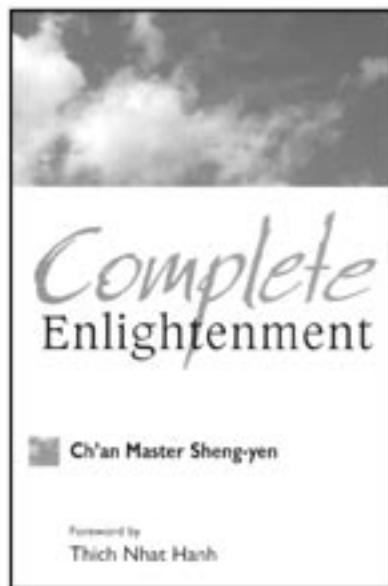
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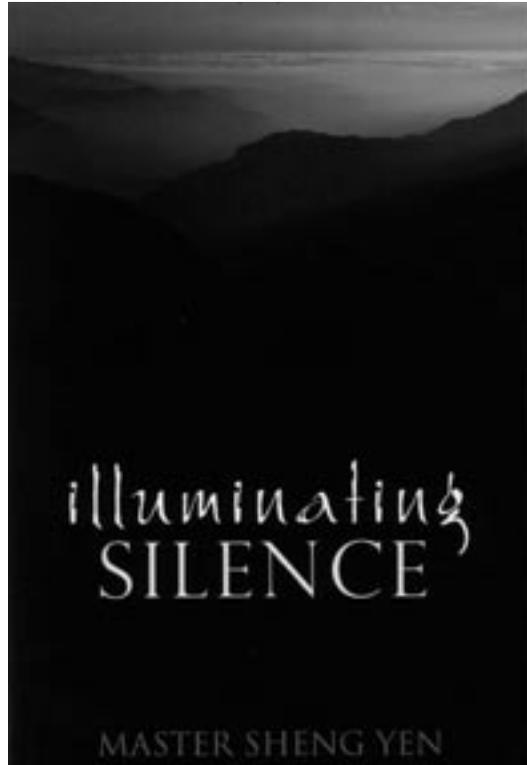
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