

ENCOUNTERS
with Master
Sheng Yen Ⅷ

Encounters with Master Sheng Yen VIII

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Preface

To share with the public the thoughts and life experiences of Dharma Drum Mountain founder Master Sheng Yen (also known as Shifu, meaning “Master”), the Sheng Yen Education Foundation embarked on a series of talks beginning in September of 2009. Fifty-three talks were given at the Sheng Yen Lecture Hall (located in the official residence where Master Sheng Yen lived in his final years). The talks were titled *A Living Example, Countless Teachings—Encounters with Master Sheng Yen* and we invited all his monastic and lay disciples to share with us their stories about Shifu, how he taught them through his living example and words. Listening to these speakers’ personal accounts of the interactions between teacher and student allowed the audience to commemorate Master Sheng Yen’s journey, and once again hear his gracious teachings.

The talks include stories of Master Sheng Yen’s everyday life, how he would give detailed guidance to his disciples regarding their speech and actions. There are also accounts of his travels to share the Buddhadharma locally and overseas, reaching out to the public, and teaching them skillfully and flexibly based on the existing circumstances. Even in his later

years when he became quite ill, he was an example of how to face life and death with freedom and ease. All of these examples, no matter how small the story or how short the conversation, radiate Shifu's compassion and wisdom. They inspire us to vow to "Emulate the worthies and sages, practice what the Dharma has taught us, and repay through our heartfelt gratitude."

At the end of the series, we felt that the interactions from these true life stories were brimming with the Dharma spirit. Hence the audiences initiated and organized transcripts of the talks, to be compiled and published by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation, hoping to allow the general public to learn from the wisdom of Master Sheng Yen, so that together we can realize his vision to create a pure land on this earth.

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Contribute Our Best Efforts without Taking Credit

Xie Shuiyong

Shifu once said, "Foremost is to exert your wholehearted effort," which I found very inspiring.

When the circumstance allows, we should make our best effort to contribute.

If we insist it has to be us that accomplish a task, or worry about gain and loss, then we're not in accordance with the Chan spirit or Buddhist teaching as taught by Shifu.



Introducing the Speaker

Xie Shuiyong

Xie Shuiyong was born in 1946. He attended his first seven-day Chan retreat led by Master Sheng Yen at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in Beitou in January, 1982. Two years later, he attended a seven-day Chan retreat again at Nung Chan Monastery. A founding member of NCM's Prajna Meditation Group, Xie specializes in formulating organizational regulations, and often takes the lead in a group setting. He has served as deputy supervisor of the Association of Dharma Supporters Fundraising Section, director of the Social Caring Office, senior specialist of the Branch Centers Planning and Construction Committee, chief operating officer of DDM Social Welfare and Charity Foundation, and vice secretary-general of DDM Cultural and Educational Foundation.

Most people would consider the age of 50 to be the prime of their life, when one has achieved maturation in family, daily life, career, and interpersonal relationships. I agree, and do feel that my life has been very different, after I retired at 50.

When I was 47, Master Sheng Yen asked me, “Now our organization is in need of manpower. Would you be able to retire earlier to help us?” I had actually planned to retire at age 50, and according to the regulations of Chunghwa Telecommunication Co., the company I worked for, I only had to wait for another three years before I could apply for retirement. So I replied that I would very much like to join Dharma Drum Mountain. After three years, I retired and committed myself to working for DDM, full time.

Make the Best Effort, without Minding Gain and Loss

I retired from the civil service in 1996, when I turned 50, and joined DDM as a staff member and full-time

volunteer, for the next nine and a half years. Initially, I was appointed as supervisor of the Social Caring Office and director of the Organizational Development Office for the Association of Dharma Supporters. Around two years later, Shifu wanted me to transfer to the Chan Meditation Courses Planning Team, to help design, manage, and promote Chan practice activities and courses.

Later, again, I was transferred to the Chan Practice Center, while also responsible for promoting free distribution books, which required me to search for and set up additional locations across Taiwan to share our free publications, in an effort to explore new distribution channels.

From 2000 on, Shifu asked me to help with the evaluation and construction planning for establishing new branch centers, so as to facilitate a more integrated and systematic operation. Starting from 2001, I worked as chief operating officer of DDM Social Welfare and Charity Foundation. And later I was transferred to DDM Cultural and Educational Foundation, serving as vice secretary-

general. Towards the end of 2005, I asked Shifu for permission to leave the post and instead simply work as a volunteer again, due to family issues.

People once asked me, “Aren’t you troubled that you have to change posts so frequently?” I said it did not bother me, because I have faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, the sangha, as well as Shifu. As Shifu said, “Foremost is to exert your wholehearted effort.” His words are helpful to me. When the circumstance allows, I do my best to contribute and I don’t need to take credit for the things accomplished. If I’m concerned about gain and loss, then I won’t be in line with Shifu’s teaching on Chan or the Dharma.

I contribute my abilities, mental efforts, knowledge, and experience, and give my all, without thought of success or failure. For example, I teach courses at the Sheng Yen Academy and the Zhongshan Practice Center, but I never worry whether I’m a good speaker or not. If I would compare myself to others, then there would always be people better than me as a lecturer. So I just wholeheartedly devote myself to it, and see how current

conditions will develop, without worrying about gain and loss. Therefore, I'm grateful to Shifu, without whom I might not have met the opportunity in my life to keep learning Buddhism, cultivating merit and wisdom.

Participation in the National Development Seminar

I came into contact with Buddhism at an early age. Due to family exposure or perhaps because I had practiced Buddhism in my past lives, I had always been interested in Buddhism. Before attending kindergarten, I used to watch my grandfather doing his daily morning and evening practice. He recited the scriptures and taught me how to strike the wooden fish. At that time, Buddhism was still not prevalent in Taiwan, and most people actually practiced the “Zhaijiao,” or the Chinese religions of fasting. A Zhaijiao devotee, my grandfather did one thing that had deep influence on me: At 50, he decided to leave behind his work and family affairs and commit his life to spiritual practice.

He said, “I’ve spent the first half of my life working hard for my family. From now on I want to live the life I want.” He still lived with us, though had since no longer involved in family affairs, but only focused on his practice, and often travelled far to attend Zhaijiao practice activities. At that time I was about three or four years old, but I remembered clearly that my grandfather had since embarked on a different path in life past 50. This had a great influence on me.

In 1964, I got into the Taipei Technological College (now the National Taipei University of Technology). My course work was demanding, but I still took time to join the school’s Buddhist Society. At that time, Mr. Zhou Xuande was promoting the establishment of Buddhist societies at colleges and universities in Taiwan. In addition, he offered scholarships, which I also benefited from. After graduation, I worked for a government organization, and often came across Master Sheng Yen’s articles in two Buddhist magazines, the *Bodhidrum* and the *Haichao-Yin* (*Sound of Tide*). At that time, Shifu had obtained a doctoral degree in Buddhist studies in Japan, which was a

rare, remarkable achievement for a Buddhist monk from Taiwan. In early days, magazines published articles without showing the photos of contributing authors, so it wasn't until 1975 when Shifu attended the National Development Seminar as an overseas scholar and professional that I got to see him in person for the first time.

Why I would notice this news is because many government organizations were involved in this seminar and Chunghwa Telecom, the company I worked for, happened to be in charge of transportation. As the only monastic who had just obtained his PhD, Shifu was in the spotlight both at the seminar and in the media. As a Buddhist I felt so proud seeing Shifu as a Buddhist monk attending the seminar and being so valued.

The first time I listened to a talk by Shifu was on March 25 in 1978. It was a five-day lecture series organized by the Neng Ren Society, and among the speakers were Master Sheng Yen, Ven. Hongyin, and Prof. You Xianzhou. Afterwards, I started to attend courses offered by Neng Ren Society, on the *Miaoyunji* (*Wondrous Cloud Collection*), the

Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom, and the *Twenty Verses on Mind-Only*, to learn Buddhism systematically.

Concentrate on the Present Moment without Comparing

We know that Buddhism teaches about the three learnings of precepts, concentration, and wisdom. Upholding the precepts is a Buddhist duty. Studying sutras and listening to Dharma talks marks the beginning of developing wisdom. And concentration derives from Chan practice. After taking the Buddhist courses for three years, I realized that though I was learning about the precepts and wisdom, I still lacked concentration and the cultivation of Chan. So I was happy to learn from the *Bodhidrum* magazine that Shifu was going to lead a seven-day Chan retreat at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in Beitou, and immediately signed up.

In early days, applicants had to go through an interview in order to attend a seven-day retreat. At the interview, a monastic asked me, “Why do you want to

attend this retreat?” I replied, “There is a first time for everything.” I was lucky to be accepted for the retreat in 1982. There were altogether 30 participants, including the now Ven. Guo Che and Ven. Chang Yan.

This retreat turned out to be a most influential experience for me, especially two principles Shifu pointed out in his Dharma talk. The first is “to live in the present, and capture the present moment, without regretting the past and worrying about the future.” I may be strong in logical thinking and understanding concepts and ideas, but a very big weakness of mine is that I have lots of wandering and deluded thoughts; I tend to constantly think and worry about this and that, which compromises memory, study and work efficiency. People with many wandering thoughts may seem smart and witty, but their responses are superficial and shallow. That’s why I often write the wrong words and say the wrong things. Shifu taught us to make the most of the present moment by focusing on the task at hand. This really awakened me, and I’ve benefitted from it a lot. The biggest influence Chan practice has on me is to cultivate concentration and awareness of what

I'm doing at any given moment, and thereby changing my habit of writing the wrong words and saying wrong things, while developing in-depth and inclusive way of thinking.

The other principle is reflected in what Shifu once shouted at us at the meditation hall: "How can you expect to become enlightened, being such selfish beings?" This overwhelming admonition forced me to reflect on myself honestly. Humans tend to be selfish. Buddhist practitioners may be nice people, but their initial aspiration can still be based on selfish motivations. Through Buddhist practice, however, we can eliminate our self-attachment and dissolve our ego. Otherwise, we'll very often treat things and people from a selfish, egoistic perspective, considering "my" benefits, needs, and views more important than our care for others and the entirety. In this sense, we're indeed "selfish beings."

In 1984, I attended my second seven-day Chan retreat at Nung Chan Monastery, and this time I learned to stop comparing myself to others. People have their differences, so we feel distress when comparing ourselves to others

or to our past selves. As the retreat concluded, Shifu instructed to form the Prajna Meditation Group, and I became a planning committee member.

To support education and to facilitate donation

In the group, regardless of whether I was assigned a task or not, my role was to support the Dharma. As Master Yin Shun said in his book, *The Way to Buddhahood*, “[I] cannot bear to see the decline of the holy teachings and the suffering of all sentient beings.” These words influenced me a lot. Finding the decline of the holy teachings unbearable, a Buddhist should strive to share the Buddha’s teaching. Finding it unbearable to see sentient beings suffering, a Buddhist practitioner should generate great compassion. But how does one go about sharing the Buddha’s teaching? Master Sheng Yen’s approach is to tap into education, as reflected in what he once said: “If we don’t start developing education today, then Buddhism has no tomorrow.” When Ven. Guo Fan called me towards the end of 1982, asking if I could act as a council member to support the Chung-

Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, I immediately accepted, promising that I would support the activities and attend the meetings for the Dharma Supporting Council.

On March 26, 1989, the first planning meeting was held for the reorganization of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies Council of Dharma Supporters into the DDM Association of Dharma Supporters. I remembered this date very well, because the Buddhist Study Society at Chunghwa Telecommunication Co., where I worked for, was founded one day earlier, on March 25. I actually initiated our company's Buddhist Society, which was the first of its kind at government agencies and organizations in Taiwan. In those days living under martial law, it was required to submit an application report to the authorities before forming any society at government-owned organizations. Since Buddhists tend to be more helpful, I was involved in all the procedures from drafting the regulations, application for its establishment, inviting well-represented candidates to be elected for the presidency, to recruiting the members.

We invited Shifu to give a speech at the inauguration of the Society at Chunghua Telecom, which saw an audience of over 800 people, with hundreds of them taking refuge in Buddhism. It turned out to be the biggest gathering in the company's history. I can recall how Shifu mentioned his plan to go on a solitary retreat in two more days. Who could have expected that it was on the very same evening that he led the Amitabha Chanting Group's members to chant the Great Compassionate Dharani 21 times at Nung Chan Monastery, in the hope of finding the land. The prayer was soon answered, and the first planning meeting for the DDM Association of Dharma Supporters was held on the following day.

In retrospect, the first planning meeting on the night of March 26 actually marked the starting point for the Association. It was decided in the meeting that the association should include four sections: merit field, planning, education and training, and activities. I joined the merit field section, with Guo Chaoxing as the section leader, and Chen Xiumei, Xiong Qingliang and I as deputy leaders, in charge of fund-raising. Buddhist disciples are

supposed to strive to achieve what their teachers require them to do. During that time, I usually worked with Xiumei, who was experienced in sales, full of ideas, and very flexible, while I was good at writing and putting ideas into words.

We raised funds by organizing promotion sessions across Taiwan to explain the construction of DDM and advocate the Shifu's ideas in developing education. I remembered the first leg of the trip was Taoyuan, and we were mostly aiming at Buddhists. Shifu was invited to give lectures in places such as Tainan, Taichung, Kaohsiung, and Chiayi. And from 1990 to 1992, we also consecutively covered the Hsinchu, Keelung, Hualien, Taitung, and Yilan areas.

Frankly speaking, we didn't do a very good job in the beginning, but we learned by doing and made adjustments along the way. It was not difficult to introduce Shifu as a person to the general public, but the key was about how to grasp the essence of what Shifu wished to deliver. Since we lacked expertise in publicity, what we did initially was

to collect his articles published in *Humanity* magazine, as well as edited lecture notes from his Dharma talks for the Amitabha Chanting Group and the Meditation Group, cutting and pasting then together. We introduced Shifu's visions by basing on how he developed the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, and the four-page leaflet we used in the early days over time evolved into booklets on the Institute and Shifu's ideas.

Following Shifu to share the Dharma everywhere

From 1990 on, Shifu started to give public lectures at various venues, including auditoriums in Keelung, Tainan, Kaohsiung, and Banqiao, as well as Taipei International Convention Center and National Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, in order to reach more people. Up until September 1996, he had given over 30 speeches, each with an audience of thousands of people. Though Shifu didn't speak with a heavy accent, some still found it difficult to understand him, especially Buddhist terminologies. To better involve the audience, we prepared overhead projectors so that

the audience could listen to the lecture while reading the summary. Shifu asked me to simultaneously note down the main points, keywords, and Buddhist special terms on the transparencies while he was speaking. This certainly helped, because after the lecture those who had missed the key points would come forward to ask. For that task, I really had to concentrate and listen very carefully. Also, by having to writing on the transparencies, I got to remember the contents very well and hence benefited the most.

In addition to large-scale lectures, from 1990 on, Shifu started to travel across Taiwan to visit devotees, giving spiritual guidance and encouragement, as well as listening to more voices. Since Chen Xiumei, He Shijing and I (and Liao Meiyong, who joined later) were responsible for internal support services, so anything from itinerary arrangement, liaison, event planning, coordination, activity execution and supervision, to follow-up review and evaluation was all part of my job. It is through these opportunities, in which I got to be close to Shifu, received his advice, and learned from his examples that allowed me to meet so many volunteers all over Taiwan. That is why

when I retired in 1996 I naturally took up the position as director of the Association of Dharma Supporters Office for Devotee Care, to continue the task of rendering support to devotees across Taiwan and taking care of the organization's operation.

I was extremely busy during those days, and always found myself engaged in liaison and communication duties, attending meetings, and running around Taiwan. In order not to compromise my family life, I did my best to share family chores, sometimes by doing even more. One evening my wife suddenly cried and I asked her if it was because of anything I had done wrong. She said I had done a superb job at home, but she wished I didn't have to work such long hours outside all the time. At that moment I really didn't know how to explain. Another time, my wife joined me to attend a sharing session. On the way home she heard some Dharma brothers and sisters sharing their stories, she came to realize and said: "I understand now. Xie Shuiyong belongs to everybody." Hearing that, I felt much relieved.

Endurance and tolerance achieve all

The developing process of the Association of the Dharma Supporters actually reflects the overall construction of DDM. In its initial founding stage, building a consensus was urgent, for which Shifu led a group of supporters and volunteers to take a pilgrimage trip to India and Nepal, in search of the Buddha's intention. Also, regarding the regulations for the Association, more communication was required to achieve a consensus. Therefore, internal training had become all the more essential, to help everybody understand DDM's ideals and so work together for a common goal.

The earliest internal training can be traced back to the Dharma Drum Inheritance Growth Camp in August, 1991, held at the Guanyin Hall of Dharma Drum Mountain, where Shifu led a "contemplation of the earth" practice, given that the supporters were from all walks of lives, all very enthusiastic, but not in sync. Shifu thought that we could use more respect and tolerance to each other by emulating the qualities of the earth: endurance

and tolerance. By developing this capacity, we're already practicing the spirit of DDM: giving of ourselves for the benefit of all. Various activities that were organized afterwards—including growth camps for convening committees and fund-raising members; volunteers paying visit to Shifu; and Shifu making traveling visits and Dharma talks to the devotees—were also meant to urge supporters to practice the ideas of DDM. Only by developing ourselves through the Dharma can we be ready to serve others.

From December 1992 on, the Association started to encourage the establishment of local committees in different regions, and assign convening committee members. We entered into a foundation laying phase, with different regions starting to operate independently and offer different activities for local needs. It was not until 1996 that the DDM Fellowship was formally established, to oversee its already existing Buddha-name Chanting Group and Meditation Group, and to form more subgroups, including the Volunteer Group, End-of-Life Caring Group, Honorary Board of Directors, and Merit-Field Society,

which focuses on disaster relief and social welfare efforts. All groups worked in coordination with the Foundation under the sangha. This was the developing phase. DDM officially started its first-phase physical construction in 1998, and part of the buildings were completed and opened to use in 2001, marking the start of the maturing phase. When the DDM complex was inaugurated in October 2005, Shifu proposed that year be remembered as the “First Year of Dharma Drum Mountain,” and stated that DDM would strive more to contribute to the entire world.

Shifu founded DDM step by step while allowing us to follow his footsteps. Though sometimes we might not do things very well and were therefore admonished by him, it was all part of the process of learning by doing and doing while learning. Shifu said this also applied to himself.

Shifu became a monk in childhood, joined the army in his youth and had pursued further academic study in Japan. He might not have much exposure to the “real world,” but he had nonetheless inspired more and more devotees and volunteers to practice and support Buddhism,

not least after the founding of DDM. So Shifu was also learning along the way. If we put ourselves in his shoes we would wonder: whose advice should Shifu take, when he was exposed to so many different views and opinions?

When we hold meetings at DDM, it often involved talking backwards and forwards before we could reach a final decision. This is how it felt. At Chunghwa Telecom, where I worked for before, most colleagues shared a similar academic background, either in engineering or technology. In addition, we had been working together for over a decade, so it was relatively easier for us to communicate, since we knew each other quite well. But it was a completely different experience serving at DDM. Coming from various backgrounds and with different views, everybody had his or her own ideas about doing things. Therefore, sometimes I would feel frustrated or get scolded by Shifu. Once, I felt really upset having been admonished by Shifu, and so on the way home I cried, asking the Buddha in my mind: “Could I have done something wrong?” But, this is precisely the process through which we advance our practice.

All things attest to the truth and serve as the answers

Shifu's teaching always comes at the right time and for the right person. As he often taught us: "Ask not others to accommodate us; ask us to accommodate others." "Allow me to take on the undertaking that needs to be done but left undone." He also taught us: "Busy but happy. Tired but teeming with joy." These words may seem plain and simple, but they can certainly help us dissolve our ego. People perceive things differently, take different positions, and have different temperaments. We tend to be selective with things we prefer doing and with people we prefer working, but this often reflect our self-centeredness. Instead, Shifu taught us to drop our preconception or preconceived position when dealing with things, and do our best to accommodate others when working with people. By benefitting others, we can in turn dissolve our ego.

I had a profound experience. I used to think that by practicing the methods to dissolve our ego whenever we encounter frustrations and upsets, we can always

learn to let go over time. But this is not really the case. Take interpersonal interaction, much as I force myself to smile, but I can still feel that the smile does not come from within, and that I still have inner burden—that is, unresolved frustrations buried deep down in my heart.

In 2001, Shifu led a 49-day Chan retreat on Dharma Drum Mountain, and I attended the final three seven-day weeks. One day, when practicing the method of direct contemplation, I noticed the tiny yellow wildflowers on the slope in front of the temporary quarters' main hall. Some of them were robust and some delicate, while some were taller and some shorter. I suddenly realized that all flowers were expressing the Dharma. Without expecting themselves to grow into particular forms, they nevertheless exhibit the way they are as a result of taking in various conditions combined together, including sunshine, earth, air, and water.

In the evening Dharma talk, Shifu explained the phrase from the *Inscription on Silent Illumination*: All things attest to the truth and serve as the questions-and-answers.

It suddenly dawned on me that, as if asking each other “How are you doing over there?” and answering “This is the way I’m here,” those flowers simply reflected the conditions around them as a matter of fact. So it occurred to me that the way people treat me actually reflects their physical and mental states at the time, and meanwhile represents the karmic result I deserve, which I should receive and accept without complaining at all. It is from that moment on that I could really let go the burdens on my mind, and sincerely smile from within.

In these years serving at the Association, what I’ve learned is to show respect and tolerance. As Shifu said, “Kindness and compassion have no enemy, and wisdom engenders no afflictions.” Everybody wants to make an effort to support DDM, and do things well. However, with different conditions and backgrounds, people will have different views and we should respect that. Even when a decision has been made, some people may still have complaints. We need to respect that, too. We should show tolerance for people’s habitual patterns, and even their faults.

Shifu talked about the flexibility and great benefit of Chan, and taught us to empty our mind without holding preconceptions, and to be considerate to others by putting ourselves into others' shoes. With this mindset, we will not invite opposition and conflict with others. When we are free of affliction, we'll be more able to do things calmly. By working together with others and promoting the ideals, we can also help others. To help ourselves and others with the Dharma is what Shifu expected of us.

Compassionate teaching by examples for the benefit of others

I've read many of Shifu's books and often listened to his Dharma talks, but what inspired me the most was Shifu's exemplified deeds. For instance, he was never late for a meeting, even when he was ill. Once, we had a meeting at Nung Chan Monastery that didn't finish until 11:30 p.m., but Shifu insisted to see us off at the main gate and apologized: "I'm sorry that the meeting went on for so long. And now you probably won't get home until after midnight!" Hosting the meeting Shifu must have been

exhausted, but he still showed concern about how much time and effort we had spent that meeting and whether we would be able to find transportation home.

Shifu really braced himself to guide a seven-day Chan retreat in the winter of 1992. On the afternoon before the retreat started, I got a phone call from Shifu at the office. He wanted me to go to Nung Chan Monastery to have a meeting with some monastics coming from other towns. In the meeting I noticed that he had difficulty talking. It turned out that on the very day Shifu had been to the dentist, who had accidentally cut on Shifu's tongue during the treatment. So it actually hurt when Shifu had to talk, drink, and eat. But he still managed to host the meeting and give three separate Dharma talks each day during the Chan retreat as scheduled. We could tell that Shifu was really in pain when he talked, but he still gave the Dharma talks, speaking clearly without compromising his effort. Later, I learned that he was on an IV drip from the third day on, and hospitalized right after the retreat concluded.

In March 1995, Chan Master Thich Nhất Hạnh visited

Taiwan. At that time Master Thich Nhất Hạnh was not well known in Taiwan, and Prof. You Xiangzhou, the organizer, was worried that not many people would be enthusiastic. Prof. You was considering inviting Master Sheng Yen to hold a dialogue with Master Thich Nhất Hạnh so that more people would be aware of the event. Though acquainted with Shifu, the professor was hesitant to ask him directly in case the idea would not be appreciated. To avoid any possible awkwardness, Prof. You asked me to do the job. To our surprise, Shifu accepted the invitation immediately. On March 25, Master Thich Nhất Hạnh visited Nung Chan Monastery. He was welcomed by all the monastic members lined up at the Buddha hall, to the drums and bell chimes and with a red greeting banner. Shifu and Thich Nhất Hạnh then prostrated to each other in mutual greeting. Later, Shifu told me that people in Taiwan did not know Master Thich Nhất Hạnh very well, and since Nung Chan Monastery was the first leg of his first-time visit to Taiwan, a formal welcoming ceremony would mark a good start, to help his subsequent itinerary succeed. This shows how thoughtful Shifu was.

I can continue with more stories about Shifu's compassion. After the landslide at the Lincoln Community Mansions, Shifu immediately visited the affected area. The then county magistrate, You Qing, was so devastated that he couldn't help but hug Shifu and burst out crying. After the massive earthquake on Sept. 21, 1999, Shifu directed the relief effort himself and made over five visits to the affected areas to comfort the victims. We set up relief service stops, and published the book *Take Heart, Taiwan!* to encourage people. In addition, Shifu also instructed DDM devotees to engage in the disaster relief efforts for Turkey's earthquake, Iran's earthquake, China Airline's accident, Southeast Asia Tsunami, SARS breakout, and Sichuan earthquake.

Repaying Shifu's kindness throughout the future

A former colleague of mine once asked me, "Do you think your early retirement 10 years ago was a wise decision?" He meant: was it really a good idea to have lost the income I could have been entitled to for the past 10

years? I told him that it has been a bargain. I may have earned less income, but I've in return gained a "Mani Jewel," a many-fold multiplied revenue.

The luckiest thing in my life is to have met Shifu and learned Buddhist practice with him. My parents and my country have raised and nurtured me, but it is Shifu who awakened me in the Dharma, inspiring me to learn to develop compassion, wisdom and cultivate peace in body, mind, family, and activity. My parents and the country have given me the well-being in this lifetime, while Shifu gave me the happiness throughout the future lifetimes. Thanks to Shifu, I had many opportunities to meet and work with like-minded volunteers at DDM, and join relief efforts to care for the "great bodhisattvas" (Shifu once said that those who are suffering and inflicted are great bodhisattvas manifesting themselves as examples.) at home and abroad.

To remember and repay Shifu's kindness, I'll be willing to go forward to help whenever DDM needs me. In early 2009 I had some time available, so I called Sheng Yen

Academy to ask if there were any courses there I could help teach. When the local Association of Dharma Supporters committee needed manpower, I volunteered to serve as leader of the End-of-life Caring team. On completion of the reconstruction of Nung Chan Monastery, it required people for liaison and miscellaneous works, so I offered to help too. Following the devastating Typhoon Morako, I helped out at Yunlai Monastery for a month altogether. Meanwhile, I've always been engaged in inviting people to join the fund-raising team, without limiting myself to being a fund-raising committee member.

For decades I've lived a busy but fulfilled life, helping to promote DDM's vision and its educational endeavors as advocated by Shifu. Regardless of how I try to, I can never do enough to repay Shifu's vast kindness. Nonetheless, having made my best effort in this lifetime, I believe I will be able to follow Shifu again in the future, and wish I can do more to help and do a better job.

*(An interview at Dharma Drum Degui Academy
on March 27, 2015)*

Following Shifu's Vows and Deeds, Doing My Duty to Support the Dharma

Chen Xiumei

After the rain, there were puddles in front of the Guanyin Hall.

Shifu led us to practice walking meditation under the moonlight.

Without even uttering a word,

We were nonetheless utterly touched:

Joining DDM is the most rewarding undertaking in our lives.



Introducing the Speaker

Chen Xiumei

Born in 1953 and starting her practice at Nung Chan Monastery in 1983, Chen was one of DDM's pioneering supporters. After the founding of the Association of Dharma Supporters, she had served as deputy supervisor of its Merit Field team. She mostly works with Xie Shuiyong in organizational development and planning, training programs, and often hosts the Association's activities.

After the inauguration of DDM World Center for Buddhist Education, I've often volunteered or attended activities there. Walking in the Center, I can still feel Shifu's presence on every path and in every corner. Sometimes I recall how Shifu talked about DDM's future, before the road was even there. When I go past some building, memories of attending meetings with Shifu would just pop into my head.

What touches me the most is a photo of Shifu at the Founding History Memorial Hall, which seems to be asking us with his piercing look: "How is everyone?" And I reply in my mind: "To be able to learn Buddhism with Shifu is the greatest blessing in my life. Shifu has left us with your teachings and examples. And now it's our share of duty to live them out in the future."

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels as the most essential task in life

I started Buddhist practice at Nung Chan Monastery

in 1983, being inspired by the book *Correct Buddhist Belief*. At that time I was 30, working as a sales manager for a garment export factory. I often felt life was so busy, and very exhausting. One day, I happened to see the book *Correct Buddhist Belief* on my boss's desk. I was curious and asked if I could borrow that book from my boss. He was very generous and said, "If you're interested, just keep it."

Prior to that, I had never been to any Dharma center or in contact with monastics. Sometimes even when I had come across some Buddhist books I would always find them too hard to understand. *Correct Buddhist Belief*, however, opened my eyes and I realized that the profound Dharma can actually be explained in plain language, and practical.

I lent the book to a friend of mine and she felt the same way, so we decided to mail-order all the books published by the Dharma Drum Publications. After we got the books, I found out that the most challenging one was the *Essentials of Buddhist Sila and Vinaya*, while I enjoyed books on Chan practice very much, such as the *Chan*

Retreat Reports and the Questions and Answers on Buddhism. In fact, we could only understand very few of the books, but this did not affect our enthusiasm in exploring Buddhism at all, and never had we imagined that we would one day be in close contact with the author, Master Sheng Yen.

One day, a friend of mine happily told me that she had taken refuge in Buddhism with Master Sheng Yen. I really envied her. Then she said she would be happy to take me to take refuge as well, if I wanted. At that time, I had no idea what taking refuge meant. I only felt what Shifu taught about Buddhism had helped me a great deal, and it would be great if I could be close to Shifu.

Back then there was no MRT, so traveling to Nung Chan Monastery often required two or three bus transfers, even though it is located in Taipei City. When we finally got to Lane 65 of the Daye Road, what met our eyes was a big area of Chinese silver grass, the sort of desolate scene that would make one wonder if one has gone the wrong way. It was a Sunday when we went there, and Shifu was explaining the sutra. The main Buddha hall was not very

big, with only about 20 or 30 people there listening to the talk. The refuge ceremony took place right after Shifu's lecture. Now looking back, I would say taking refuge has been a most significant experience in my life.

Learning Buddhism to settle the mind, following examples to support the Dharma

As a compliant disciple, I did everything Shifu taught me to do after I took refuge. I often took my son to the Amitabha Chanting Group gathering on Saturday evenings and the meditation practice on Sunday afternoons. I also started to give offerings to Shifu on a monthly basis, like other practitioners did. After a while, Shifu asked me, "You've been giving offerings to me every month for a while. Are you here to learn Buddhism?" Actually, I only offered 300NT dollars each monthly, which was not much at all. But Shifu was aware of newcomers and would check why they gave him offerings. Also, he would think of a most suitable way to guide each newcomer. Therefore, Nung Chan Monastery felt like a family to me, with Shifu,

monastics, and devotees interacting with each other like family members. It had a feeling of calm and safety.

Shifu was very stern and serious in those days. Much as we all wanted to be close to him, we would hesitate to speak with him, or shy away from him when seeing him approaching. Maybe it's because we lacked confidence, thinking that we still had many negative habits. Even so, I enjoyed attending activities and volunteering at the Monastery, and my family was very supportive of me.

Nung Chan Monastery is a calming, peaceful place of practice, though the future of its surrounding was uncertain. We were all well aware of Taipei City government's project of Guandu Plain Urban Planning, for which the land of the Monastery would be expropriated and its buildings torn down anytime. Therefore, we had to find land to build a permanent center. When the possible plot of land in Jinshan presented itself, we were all delighted. The details of this process are recorded in many of Shifu's books, and it is a memory that I'll cherish for life.

I remember one day in 1989 when Shi Jianchang

announced at the Amitabha Chanting Group meeting that he had found a piece of land in the Jinshan area and would need everyone's help to make this a reality. He then immediately decided to make a donation, in hope of inspiring others to follow suit. The following day, after Shifu's Dharma talk for the Sunday meditation practice, Shi went up to the front and knelt down, urging all of us to join in and make the acquisition of the land possible. At that moment I was very emotional and thought to myself: if Shi could do it, then I should also follow his example and take supporting DDM as my share of duty.

After the Association of Dharma Supporters was formed, Shifu actually took the lead in almost everything. He was steadfast on what the DDM's position should be. I had heard a story about someone who had wanted to donate one million NT dollars to DDM. Yet Shifu replied by saying: "Running Nung Chan Monastery is simple and doesn't require that much money, so please use it to support other organizations." But after the land in Jinshan had been found, fundraising suddenly became a priority. However, Shifu warned us "not to tear down other temples

and use the bricks to make our wall.” That is, we should not try to persuade those who had been supporting other Dharma centers to switch to support DDM instead. He made it clear that DDM has an endeavor to promote Buddhist education, so we should invite the public to join our efforts by organizing events.

Fundraising visits

In early days, I worked with Xie Shuiyong at the Association’s Merit Field section, in charge of fund-raising. Shifu told me, “Xie is outstanding. Many organizations want to recruit him. You can work together with Xie.” I’ve been working with Xie for over two decades now.

In 1991, I was in New York for business. It was my first time to visit Chan Meditation Center, Shifu’s Dharma center in New York. Shifu gave me a detailed tour of the center. For example, the Buddha statue enshrined in the Buddha hall was given by a devotee from Taiwan. We started talking about fundraising and Shifu wanted to hear my views. Though I actually didn’t know much about it,

I did feel that if people had little idea about where Nung Chan Monastery was and what Shifu's ideas were about in developing DDM, then we should change our outreach approach, by paying visits to devotees in different areas. Shifu thought this was a good idea and wanted me to start planning after I returned to Taiwan.

After discussing with Xie, we decided to divide the Association of Dharma Supporters into 17 local teams. After Shifu returned to Taiwan, we would then invite him to visit the local committee leaders, who were supposed to invite people who were interested in DDM to come to the meeting. Devotees in different local areas were excited to meet Shifu in person; some even welcomed him by setting off firecrackers. That was an event we organized in 1991.

In retrospect, Shifu's visits to all the local committee leaders were a significant breakthrough in the Association's development. In fact, I didn't have any special ideas, but Shifu always required us to carry out tasks through group discussion and brainstorming, to come up with likely solutions.

Training the mind and growing in gratitude

The event as a whole seemed a great success and I thought I had finally made some contribution. However, after the event the then president of the Association, Yang Zheng, pointed out at a meeting that I hadn't been thoughtful enough and had made the trip physically too demanding for Shifu. Also, I hadn't shown due respect for the Association's president by failing to report to him either prior or after the event.

I used to be rather arrogant. I was very proud of my capability to have accomplished a very important task, from its planning to execution. I didn't expect that I had not only won no applause, but had instead received harsh criticism. My mind was in turbulence, and I felt I had been terribly wronged, wondering if it was still worth it to volunteer, especially when I was being told off right in front of the meeting. Should I stay in the meeting? Or should I just leave? Though in the end I decided to stay, I really had no idea what I had done wrong.

Then I reflected on it and realized that the Association was after all a group, though consisted of individuals. I wanted to contribute myself, but had failed to report to the president prior to and after the tour, and that was indeed inconsiderate and disrespectful. Later on, when I happened to be on a trip with Shifu and Yang Zheng, I took an opportunity to apologize to him, saying, “I’m really sorry that I didn’t acknowledge you during the organization of this event, which has made Shifu exhausted. It’s my fault.” Hearing my apology, Yang said to me, “Now you’re doing the right thing!” And Shifu also responded in agreement: “We’ve been waiting for your apology.”

My heartfelt realization is that to volunteer is to keep learning. However, learning at DDM is different from learning at home or in the workplace. Here, people don’t compete for gain or fame, but are working together for the greater good for all. Therefore, mutual respect is very important. I really appreciated Yang for pointing out my faults. He actually meant well to criticize me in public. Yang died in August 2009. At that time I was attending a Liang Emperor’s Repentance Ritual at Nung Chan

Monastery, but I still managed to attend his funeral in Tainan to show my gratitude toward him for inspiring me in spirituality.

Learn to respect, and to accomplish

The Association of Dharma Supporters was formed in response to the need to find the land for DDM. At that time Nung Chan Monastery could be torn down at any time. So, everyone had this sense of crisis, concerning the possible threat to the development of Nung Chan Monastery, and the urgency to find a more suitable environment for Buddhist education based on Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. Therefore, the Association was set up to join efforts of all supporters.

Members of the Association came from all walks of life, so how to integrate various different ideas and views posed problems. My work experience told me that you can simply go ahead with a task as long as you've discussed with your boss. But at the Association everybody has his or her own opinions, and they all need to be heard. So

sometimes I would wonder if this was an effective way of doing things.

But Shifu can always manage. He was open, and valued everybody's opinions. He would lead us to discuss and analyze the pros and cons of each suggestion, just like a parent guides their child. For temporarily impossible proposals he would show us possible compromises based on currently available conditions, in order to reach a consensus. During the process, we learned how to respect others and adjust our old habits. Every one of us was competent, and we all tend to consider our own idea to be the best. Shifu simply helped to allow everyone to express his or her potential to the full, while incorporating individual strengths into a power to move forward.

Spiritual cultivation is the foundation for supporting the Dharma

Members of the Association are all devoted, but our capacity is still limited. Because doing fundraising actually requires one to practice the Dharma at the same

time. When we fail to practice Buddhism ourselves, our capabilities are diminished. This is why in those days Shifu insisted that all volunteers should practice the Dharma, attend seven-day Chan retreats, and receive the Bodhisattva precepts.

The first time I attended a seven-day Chan retreat, I had serious leg pain, but I tried all my might to endure the pain. During the interview, Shifu admonished me: “Xiumei, you’re pampering yourself too much, by not wanting to fix yourself!” I had no idea why he admonished me, given that I had been working so hard. One day before the end of the retreat, Shifu took us to the window to look at the outside. He told us, “Now you see the trees, birds, blue sky and white cloud in front of you. But I can tell you: there is no such thing as blue sky, white cloud, trees, and birds. There is nothing at all. Things are just the names we assign.”

My feeling of that retreat is that I was being continuously belittled. I practiced sitting very hard, but it was negated by Shifu; Shifu wanted us to look at the blue sky and white clouds, and then told us that there is nothing

at all. I collapsed on spot and burst into crying, with little idea why that happened. I was conscious that I didn't want to, but I just couldn't control my howling that resonated everywhere throughout the hall. I simply couldn't stop, so I remembered Shifu asked Ven. Guo Zhou, "Is she still crying?" The venerable replied, "Yes, she is."

After crying, I felt my heart had opened up much more. I used to consider what I thought and did to be the best, without knowing where I might be wrong. After the retreat, I had learned to reflect on myself; I stopped demanding of others and instead started to be more considerate. So, serving at the Association I made cultivating good interactions with other people as my priority in life.

In 1993, Nung Chan Monastery held its first Bodhisattva Precepts ceremony and Shifu required all the members to take the precepts. Again, I broke down crying during the ceremony, realizing that whatever I see, hear, or think of, are nothing but a tiny corner of some phenomenon, and yet I've generated so many deluded thoughts that I'm not even aware of and should correct.

So, I'm grateful to Shifu all along the way. It doesn't really matter if we don't understand; as long as we follow in Shifu's footsteps, it'll be fine.

In those days, there was the Dharma Drum Inheritance Camp for the members, which also touched me profoundly. I remembered the first day, after checking in at the Guanyin Hall all participants started to sit in meditation while waiting for Shifu to show up. Shifu shed tears while giving his first Dharma talk, saying that on the way there from Nung Chan Monastery he felt overwhelmingly touched at the thought of such a group of people who had vowed to follow him to learn Buddhism and support Buddhist education. Therefore, he was grateful to Guanyin Bodhisattva, and all the supporting members. I'll never forget the sight of Shifu shedding tears, while all participants also shed tears of gratitude.

After the rain, there were puddles in front of the Guanyin Hall. Shifu led us to practice walking meditation under the moonlight. Without even uttering a word, we were nonetheless utterly touched: Joining DDM is the

most rewarding undertaking in our lives.

To be close to the Dharma is to benefit

DDM is a big merit-field, where you'll always benefit once you're engaged, by supporting the Dharma, helping to raise funds, or volunteering. You might not know how you're going to benefit for the moment, but you'll feel it in the future.

I've been volunteering at DDM for over two decades, and I really appreciate my family's consistent support. I might not be spending much time taking care of my family, but they understand that I volunteer either at Nung Chan Monastery or on Dharma Drum Mountain. So I really appreciate that they are not opposed to it.

However, we are bound to encounter challenges in our lives, which are also the turning points in our lives. My husband had a serious stroke in 2006 and he lost the ability to walk and talk. Shifu called to comfort me by urging me to accept the truth. I replied over the phone

that I would face and accept it, but it was really difficult to honestly accept the truth especially when changes strike. Dai Liangyi from the Sheng Yen Academy also advised me that “You can only accept it by facing it, accepting it as the way it is without asking the reason.” I really appreciated his words and so stopped blaming myself for not having taken care of my husband properly or wondering whether it had been due to medical neglect. During the recuperation period, my husband experienced some realization and decided to take the Bodhisattva Precepts in 2008.

I consider supporting Buddhism, the Dharma, and the sangha to be my share of duty, and think that one can always benefit by being close to the Dharma, directly or indirectly. Shifu advocated Buddhist education to nurture monastic and lay talent, which all the more needs us to join efforts. Especially after Shifu passed away, I felt the urgency and highest priority of my life is to support Buddhism. Supporting Buddhism requires one to practice and experience the Buddha’s teaching. When you feel the benefit of the Dharma from within, you will be grateful and want to share it with others. The more you have

benefitted and grown, the more enthusiastic you want to support Buddhism. I may not know how to disseminate the Dharma, but doing my duty to support the Dharma, thereby inspiring others to identify with the cause and jointly support DDM is a way to practice, support, and disseminate the Dharma as well.

Joining the Association of Dharma Supporters constitutes a most significant learning experience in my life, and I'm still constantly learning, learning how to respect others and cultivate myself. Thus, when I see Shifu's portrait at the Founding History Memorial Hall, I say to myself, "I'm most grateful to Shifu for founding DDM, which has helped me become where I am now. Learning Buddhist practice from Shifu is the biggest blessing in my life."

(Edited in May 2015 from a speech given at Sheng Yen Education Foundation on Nov. 11, 2009 and an interview at Nung Chan Monastery on May 18, 2010)

Protecting the Spiritual Environment to Attain Peace of Mind

Li Chun-en

*Whenever there are major social incidents
where Buddhist voices are needed,
almost all media in Taiwan would interview Shifu first.
Shifu's wisdom and insightful replies
Help a great deal to calm people's minds in society.*



Introducing the Speaker

Li Chun-en

Born in 1951 and originally a journalist, Li Chun-en met Shifu through his contributions in the printing of the book, *Correct Buddhist Belief*. He has served as planning team supervisor and president of the Amitabha Chanting Group, and secretary-general of the Association of Dharma Supporters since November 1991. Aware of social trends, he suggested Shifu adopt the idea of “protecting the spiritual environment” as the core value of Dharma Drum Mountain, given the growing awareness on environmental protection in the 1990s. Much trusted by Shifu, he was a core advisor in DDM’s initiation stage of development.

To a journalist, being aware of social trends is part of our professional requirements. For the past two decades serving at DDM, most of my interactions with Shifu were about social issues.

I was an interview journalist at the *United Daily News* for a few years surrounding 1982, after being relocated to the News Center in Taipei from Miaoli. One day, there was an official press release from the Dalai Lama Foundation that the Dalai Lama might visit Taiwan and would like to hold a dialogue with a revered Chinese Buddhist monk. Our center asked if I'd be interested in covering this news and told me that Master Sheng Yen on a mountain in Beitou was a learned Buddhist monk who also gave lectures on Buddhism at Shandao Temple. In the end the Dalai Lama did not come to Taiwan that year, but I did visit Shandao Temple and was received by Ven. Liaozhong. Young and composed, the venerable gave me a very different impression about Buddhist monks. He told me that Master Sheng Yen gave lectures on sutras from 7-9 p.m. every Wednesday, which was the day I visited. But I already had a scheduled interview engagement that

evening so I couldn't stay for the lecture. Later on, when my high school classmate Xiong Qingliang asked me to contribute to a Buddhist book he was planning to print, I found out it was authored by Master Sheng Yen. What a serendipitous coincidence, I thought.

Contributing to printing *Correct Buddhist Belief* connected me to Buddhism

Xiong Qingliang is a dentist. Many of his friends knew that he was helping print the *Correct Buddhist Belief*. Once he told me, "You work for a newspaper, and have steady income. Why don't you make a donation, say 5,000 or 8,000 NT dollars, to help print the book?" Dr. Xiong was skillful in inviting people to come into contact with Buddhism. He would urge his friends to join whatever undertaking he finds meaningful and is engaged in himself.

After contributing to several printings of the book, I thought to myself that since I identify with this Dharma teacher's writing; why not pay him a visit? On my first visit to Nung Chan Monastery I was accompanied by Dr. Xiong,

in around 1985. I visited three times that year. Once, the reception monk told us that Shifu was not there but might be back any time soon. We might be able to meet Shifu that day, but we would have to wait and see.

We waited for an hour or so and finally saw Shifu walk into the reception room slowly. He asked us politely where we were from and why we were visiting, so I mentioned my intention to help print the book. Though nothing really significant, Shifu still kept on praising us, saying “Very good, very good.” Then he took us to another room and we continued talking for another three and half hours. We talked about social trends and my impression of Shifu was that he was very concerned about and interested in those issues, and seemed very keen to continue. From that experience I felt that Shifu was a Buddhist monk full of ideals towards society. That day, he gave me several books, including *Correct Buddhist Belief*, *Questions and Answers on Buddhism*, and *Essentials of Buddhist Sila and Vinaya*. As a journalist I’m a fast reader, so I finished reading *Correct Buddhist Belief* in one night. I finally got to know what Buddhism in its original sense was all about.

In fact, I was no stranger to religion growing up. My grandmother became a Taoist nun in her old age. Since our family was poor, my parents told me to visit my grandmother at the temple often, in order to save some money on food for the family. I started to visit my grandmother frequently since I was eight, and so became familiar with some religious rituals. For example, I was asked to play the drum and bell. I was small, and couldn't reach the bell so I stroked the bell by pulling the string attached to the bell. At first, I was criticized by the adults at the temple for sounding the bell more than 100 times in total, instead of the supposed 72 times. The correct way was to sound the bell once after striking the drum twice. But the bell was so loud that I often lost count, and then I would start from one again. The next day I came up with a solution: I picked 36 burned-out incense sticks from the cauldron. After sounding the drum twice and the bell once, I would take out one stick to keep count of the number of times. After I finished the job, six temple workers approached me and asked if I had acquired some supernatural power. In fact, I tucked those incense sticks in a corner, so they had no idea that I had figured out a counting device.

The Taoist and folk beliefs from my hometown were my first impression of religion. The good impression was that religion offers people convenience, comforts people, and is compassionate.

At that time most people were poor, so when people got sick some would resort to consuming incense ashes to be cured. Mediums would heal the sick for free, and even give devotees medicinal herbs with prescriptions. As a child, I had the impression that mediums and spirit writing were in service of the general public. While my negative impression is that religious practice often involved the secular “red envelope” culture. I remembered when a neighbor passed away and the temple workers were asked to go over to perform a chanting. They ended up with arguing over the amount of the “red envelope” money. Even after my grandmother became a Taoist nun, she still had quarrels with my parents from time to time. These are part of my childhood memories.

So, the *Correct Buddhist Belief* gave me fresh ideas about Buddhism. Before I further learned about

Buddhism, it helped me understand that self-cultivation is the first step to benefitting others.

Keeping the precepts as a way to protect others

Of the books I was given, the *Essentials of Buddhist Sila and Vinaya* had influenced me the most. I understood that monastics uphold the precepts to regulate themselves, protect other people, and sustain the Dharma by living a pure monastic life. Not long after, Shifu also talked about similar teaching in his Sunday Dharma talks. He pointed out that monastics discipline themselves with the precepts, as a way to guide the general public. To me, it was encouraging to know that I shared the same idea with Shifu's thought.

We can actually promote and extend the spirit of the precepts. I discussed with Shifu that if a religious group could take care of people's lives by means of the Dharma and help them incorporate Buddhist practice into their daily lives, then every household would become a practice

center, to demonstrate the Dharma in everyday activities. In other words, if this Dharma center is needed by the general public, then it is a beacon of hope. Whereas if the practice place only serves the certain few, such as by performing funeral rituals for the deceased of devotees' families, then such function would not really be needed by society. So I made a bold suggestion that Buddhism in modern times should break away from certain conventions and establish new practices, to impact society in a positive way.

Perhaps my words were direct enough to make an impression on Shifu. Afterwards, whenever Shifu was in Taiwan, I would often get phone calls from Ven. Guo Jing, then director of Nung Chan Monastery, telling me that Shifu wanted to speak with me. Shifu was usually free between 6 to 7 a.m. when he was not giving Dharma talks for the monastics after breakfast. Our conversations were mostly about current issues, directions and changes in social trends. In secular terms, this is referred to as “tackling the problem as it arises,” whereas in Buddhist terms this reflects the “causes and conditions.” In fact, there is no such thing as the “mainstream” in social trends. However,

trends would gradually merge, with some social conduits functioning as facilitating conditions that help the major trends to mature and become the social atmosphere.

Supporting Buddhist education by joining force

The third time when I went to Nung Chan Monastery, there seemed to be an activity or a meeting going on for the reorganization of the Amitabha Chanting Group. That day, two things happened, marking another new chapter of my life. First is what Shifu said upon seeing me: “You have heavy karmic obstacles. It’ll be good for you if you can come help set out cushions.” I was really shocked the moment when I heard him suddenly say this. But I took his advice and started to take every Saturday afternoon off from work to go to the Nung Chan Monastery to set out cushions and prepare the room for the Amitabha Chanting Group’s practice, for over a year. Secondly, the then president of Amitabha Chanting Group, Fang-Cai Guimei, told me that she intended to recommend me as the vice-president, as they were going to re-elect the group’s leaders

soon. At that time I didn't know the group very well, so if they needed manpower then I would be happy to serve as supervisor of the planning team, since I was experienced in activity planning. One month later, when the re-election took place I was still appointed vice-president while Liao Yunlian (Liao Jinrong) the president.

Due to my unfamiliarity with the rules, I often made embarrassing mistakes when serving at the group. There was one thing I remembered very well. At that time there weren't many monastics at Nung Chan Monastery, particularly male monks. At the Group's practice on Saturday evening, there were often only two monks sitting in the first row in the men's section. I thought it should be okay to take up the space and so decided to move up and sit in the first row. Later, Ven. Guo Jing asked me in a serious manner: "Mr. Li, have you thought of becoming a monk?" I replied that I probably wouldn't have the opportunity to do so in this lifetime. He then told me, "In that case, you'd better not sit in the first row because that is reserved for monastics." I thought to myself: "That's really bad. I've been coming to Nung Chan Monastery for a

while now, and how come I still didn't know the rule?"

In the Spring of 1989, with the acquisition of the land in Jinshan, the DDM complex was inaugurated, along with the forming of the Association of Dharma Supporters later that year. I became the secretary-general of the Association and started to work full time for DDM from 1991. From the Buddhist perspective, all things reflect the law of causes and conditions. At the crucial time Shifu advocated the promotion of Buddhist education, which indeed required a group of people to help make his vision into reality through joint efforts. I wouldn't dare think of myself as the mainstay of the group; I'm only part of the group. I learn from doing, and we've achieved a lot from scratch. Through trial and error, we have paved our path.

At that time, my work as the secretary-general included planning, publicity, public relations, organizing activities, and education training. I was mostly engaged in education, which reflected an influence of my upbringing. I was born in a Hakka village in Pingtung. Hakka people are known to be frugal and value education, as reflected

in a saying: “work on the field when it is sunny, and study when it is rainy.” Shifu valued education and cultivated talent, which I strongly identify and agree with. DDM’s visions, including protecting the spiritual environment, popular Buddhist education, and social care efforts, are all based on the idea of education. To promote DDM, we need to make fund-raising members truly understand the meaning of supporting DDM.

Keep moving forward for the benefit of all beings

In the initial stages of its establishment, I often talked with Shifu about how to define DDM’s vision, because it would concern the meaning and value of DDM for the following two to three decades, even after Shifu’s pass away. So I kept urging Shifu that he must make time to decide the vision for DDM. If Shifu was too occupied in Taiwan, then perhaps he would find some time when staying in the US.

In September 1989, Shifu officially proposed the vision of DDM: to uplift the character of humanity, and

build a pure land on earth. He wrote this down at Chan Meditation Center, New York, and faxed it back to Taiwan. I still remember the content roughly:

Dear Li Chun-en,

I have defined DDM's vision. That is, to uplift the character of humanity, and build a pure land on earth. I hope you can further explore the idea, organize relevant activities, and make the most of it in our organizational development.

After that, we started to work on organizing activities and events, hoping to let more people know about DDM. After Chinese New Year in 1990, we organized a fundraising fun-fair at Nung Chan Monastery. Actually earlier on in 1987, we already held a fundraising fun-fair at the Monastery to support Shifu's Buddhist education endeavor. I remember it clearly that we spent around four months preparing for the first event. But we didn't expect that for the last one month before the event it would rain almost every day; it was still raining one week prior to the event. I went to the Monastery to prepare the venue every

afternoon, and I would look at the rain, worrying if it would keep on raining, even on the very day of the event, and wondering how many people would actually show up. Seeing me so anxious, Shifu simply said to me, “As long as it is for the benefit for all, go ahead and do it. Leave the rest to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.”

I helped plan many events at DDM, and his words have benefitted me the most, and so I simply stopped worrying about it. I remembered on the day of the event, it was still raining at around 4 or 5 a.m., and then the sky started to clear out after around 7 a.m. The fun-fair was a success. The strangest thing was that it started to rain again after the event, for the following eight consecutive days. That was really an impressive memory in my mind.

In those years, we organized several fun-fairs, and the one held at Zhongzheng High School, Shilin, in February, 1991 was the biggest in scale, with over 50,000 people participating, a record high, and with some 1,300 volunteers joining to help.

Protecting the spiritual environment to bring peace to self and others

I was honored to have been involved in forging the vision of protecting the spiritual environment. As Shifu wrote in his book, “protecting the spiritual environment” was inspired by a conversation with a journalist. That is true. At the time I was working as a journalist, while in transition to becoming a full-time worker at DDM.

In November 1991, Shifu had a dialogue with Zhao Shaokang, the then minister of the Environmental Protection Administration of Executive Yuan, launching the theme of “protecting the spiritual environment.” In 1992, the idea of protecting the spiritual environment was officially proposed. Though an idea I suggested, its essence resonated with what Shifu expounded on the spirit of precepts. I got the inspiration from two personal experiences.

In early days, the Amitabha Chanting Group met on Saturday evenings for group practice. Once, perhaps

due to poor lighting, a member of ours accidentally hurt a chicken that belonged to a neighbor in the alleys. The owner was furious and threw the injured chicken on the table at Nung Chan Monastery's reception. Learning the incident, Shifu immediately instructed the monk on duty to apologize to the person and make compensation for his loss. Shifu thought that since the Monastery is located there, we must build a good relationship with our neighbors and should never make the same mistake again. I felt that very much.

In fact, building good relationships with neighbors is in line with the spirit of the precepts. Why the neighbor was angry was because we failed our job to keep a good relationship with our neighbors, and thus caused them inconvenience. At the time, most of those living near Nung Chan Monastery were not well-off. If we hadn't been considerate enough, they might have thought that living near the Monastery was not benefitting them at all, because people visiting the monastery would be a disturbance and cause them some loss. Therefore, I often suggested Shifu that we should try some skillful means to

let our neighbors accept us. For example, when we held Dharma assemblies at the Monastery we would share with them the food devotees brought along as offerings, as a gesture of goodwill. Those who were initially not happy about us might thus change their attitudes toward us. This was my first strong impression.

Another experience was when once I had to drive to Taichung on business. After setting out from Beitou I was soon stuck in a heavy traffic at the Zhongxing Bridge. There was a protest going on, with more than 40 trucks dumping piles of dirt on the bridge simultaneously. It was during peak hours and commuters were all trapped in the traffic. It struck me deeply that if everyone only focuses on his or her own viewpoints to fight for personal rights, then the price we have to pay is that society will suffer as a whole.

That incident astonished me, but also inspired me: “Protecting the spiritual environment” is precisely what DDM should do and advocate. I suggested to Shifu that we use “protecting the spiritual environment” to mark the core value of DDM, and he couldn’t agree more. Afterwards,

whenever there was a major social issue going on, I would call Shifu to report to him, even when he was not in Taiwan. Also, I would invite the press to interview Shifu, for him to comment by introducing the idea of “protecting the spiritual environment.” His wisdom and insightful responses were indeed welcomed by the press and greatly helped bring peace of mind for people in our society.

As a member of Shifu’s think tank, I was always prepared and ready to help identify the agenda, and provide frames of reference for Shifu and journalists as well. In the 1990’s, whenever a major incident occurred in Taiwan and the Buddhist voice was needed, almost all media would interview Shifu first for his views.

Recruiting the right people; placing people in the right position; caring for people

While Buddhism may not teach about leadership, I do think Shifu had the charisma as a leader, as shown in three aspects:

1. Recruiting the right people: Shifu told me that as a secretary-general I needed to recruit people, although there was no need to rush into decision. I asked him how I should go about it, and he advised me to adopt a three-month probation period, during which I could assign people both difficult and easy tasks so as to find out jobs that suited them, before deciding whether to recruit them or not. I learned a lot from Shifu in this regard.

2. Placing people in the right position: In the initial stage of DDM, the Association of Dharma Supporters consisted of mostly volunteering devotees. Shifu often urged us to practice the Dharma ourselves, especially fundraising members. That is, we needed to provide the new recruits with Buddhist education so that they can work for the benefit of themselves and others. Shifu was adamant about that, and I was impressed by his perseverance.

3. Caring for people: For example, Shifu required us to show appreciation to our elders and senior supports when it comes to major holidays. In fact, Shifu practiced this himself as an example. In those days, right before

the school year started Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies would hold the Dharma supporters' council meeting. During the lunch gathering Shifu would personally serve food. I still keep those photos.

In addition to his leadership and charisma, Shifu had frequent and direct contact with members of the Association of Dharma Supporters. Thinking back, sometimes I do feel that I wasn't showing proper respect to Shifu by acting like we were peers, however sweet those memories are.

I remember once I accompanied Shifu on his trip to Chaoyuan Monastery, Meinong. He told me how the environment there reminded him of his hometown in Nantong, China, while we were walking through a bamboo forest. He also said that he had a special karmic connection with the Hakka people: both in his monastic life at Jing'an Monastery, Shanghai, and in his solitary retreat at Chaoyuan Monastery, the Hakka people supported him. Especially during the solitary retreat, there were two elders who took great care of him. "When they made buns, they

would give me buns. When they made buns with vegetable fillings, they would give me the same,” Shifu said. So I said jokingly, “So, Shifu, you actually ate a lot there!” And Shifu replied with a big bright smile.

Learning from experiences and being grateful for setbacks

When I was working for the Association, I communicated with Shifu mostly via fax. In early days, he divided his time between Taiwan and the US to share the Dharma. Whenever he was staying at Chan Meditation Center, New York, we would mostly communicate via fax. Usually, I would receive his reply one or two days after I sent him my questions. In the reply, other than answering my questions, he would also point out where I might still lack confidence, and then encourage me. So I learned a great deal.

In the process of the group’s development, I also observed that Shifu was always keen to learn, and would proactively absorb other people’s experiences and then

incorporate them into DDM's resources. For instance, he would fax information about NPO regulations in the US to Taiwan, which had greatly influenced the founding and development of DDM as an organization; the policy of reserved honorary board members was precisely inspired by NPO regulations in the US.

I also observed how Shifu was quick to learn from his interaction with the press. When I proposed that Shifu give a press conference to promote Nung Chan Monastery and Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, he didn't like the idea and told me off by saying that press conferences were like swindlers' scams. But I explained that the purpose of giving a press conference was to share Shifu's idea about Buddhist education with journalists, through whom the idea could be conveyed to the general public. He then accepted the suggestion. Next day, following the press conference, *United News Daily* and *China Times*, two most popular and reputable newspapers in Taiwan, each wrote an eye-catching article about Shifu's ideas on Buddhist education. This changed Shifu's view. From then on, he would periodically speak to the press whenever he was in

Taiwan, and he would get a firmer grip of social trends by interacting with the press. This is also why I admire Shifu.

It was indeed challenging for the Association of Dharma Supporters to grow and develop. In those days, many people found it extremely difficult to raise funds for DDM, because few people really understood the ideas of Buddhist education and “protecting the spiritual environment.” I once sent a fax to Shifu explaining about the difficulty, so he encouraged all of the Association’s members to endure hard work, hardship, and the frequent harsh criticism, while promoting the ideas. It may be nothing special to endure hard work and hardship, but to endure harsh criticism really takes genuine skill of practice. Regardless of how people may criticize and misunderstand you, it doesn’t really matter. But we should remember that Buddhism is for everyone, and one day they will change their minds and return. We mustn’t create opposition because of frustration, but should always harbor gratitude.

Continuing to share and popularize the Dharma

Shifu was a highly cultivated Buddhist monk. When I was serving as the secretary-general, the only thing on my mind was to offer whatever I could do and join efforts to promote Buddhist education. I'm grateful for Shifu's guidance and all those volunteers' assistance along the way. DDM's Association of Dharma Supporters was formed to support Buddhist education, and DDM's ideals and the idea of "protecting the spiritual environment" were proposed to promote the Dharma. These were all derived from the cause to practice and protect the Dharma.

Serving at DDM for the past 20 years has been the most rewarding period in my life. When I was younger I was impatient. Then I joined this organization and have learned and grown a lot, thanks to Shifu's teaching and guidance. I believed that the devotees of DDM can all benefit from the Dharma in various different aspects. I appreciate Shifu's effort in encouraging people to practice the Buddha's teachings in their daily life, and so while

receiving, facilitating, and supporting Buddhist education, we as his disciples should work even harder to promote the idea of “protecting the spiritual environment” and help Chinese Buddhism to take root in more places, by continuing to sow the seeds and inspire the future generations.

If there is anything I could suggest, then I hope that DDM can continue the effort to popularize the Buddha’s teaching to benefit people by answering the needs of today’s society. In the future, religion will experience enormous changes, especially when new religions will become a trend, with their advantage of humanitarian focus.

In terms of people, things, timing, place, and objects, the factors of time and space are what religion can work on. For example, the digital era is changing people’s perception of time and space. When industries around the globe are searching for new space for survival by exploring how to make use of digital channels, religion has no reason to exclude itself. It is the same for Buddhism:

only by answering to the needs and accommodating to the spiritual capacities of people can we help popularize Buddhist teachings.

(Edited in May, 2015 from a lecture given at Nung Chan Monastery on May18, 2010 and an interview at Datong Dental Clinic, Taipei, on March 26, 2015.)

Disseminating the Dharma with the Power of Guanyin Bodhisattva

Xiong Qingliang

The piece of land for constructing DDM was granted by Guanyin Bodhisattva.

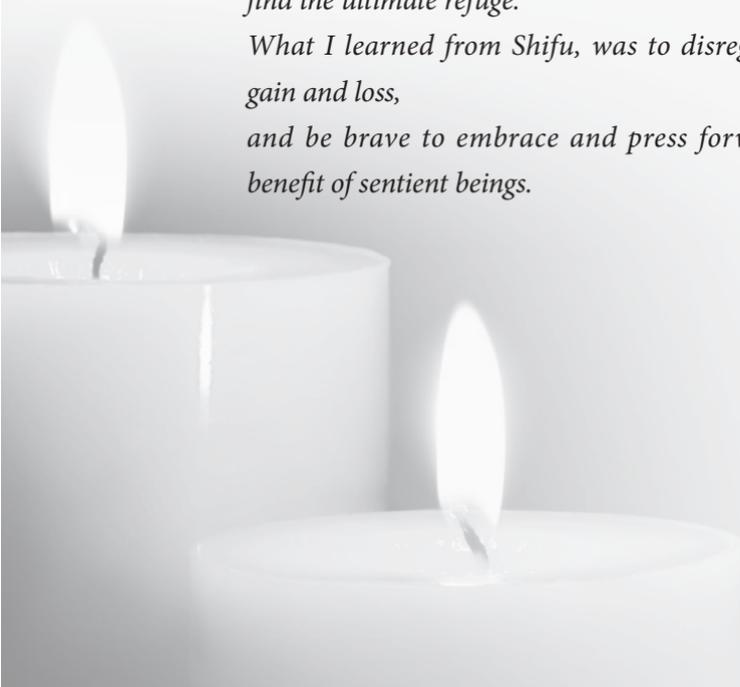
Shifu used the phrase “the rising great compassion” to highlight DDM as a practice center dedicated to Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Guanyin Bodhisattva manifests in various forms to help all beings,

so that all beings can have guidance and reliance, and find the ultimate refuge.

What I learned from Shifu, was to disregard my own gain and loss,

and be brave to embrace and press forward, for the benefit of sentient beings.



Introducing the Speaker

Xiong Qingliang

Born in 1951, Xiong Qingliang joined Nung Chan Monastery in 1984, being inspired by the book, the *Correct Buddhist Belief*. He has served as supervisor of the ritual team of Amitabha Chanting Group, leader of the land acquisition team at Nung Chan Monastery, and founder of DDM's Pilgrimage Group (1990-1996). It is thanks to his suggestion that Master Sheng Yen decided to lead members of Amitabha Chanting Group to chant the Great Compassion Mantra as a prayer on March 25, 1989, leading to the finding of a piece of land in Jinshan, where the DDM complex is located now.

People came together at DDM because of Master Sheng Yen's endeavor to advocate Buddhist education, bringing people from various backgrounds to join the effort in DDM's different stages. I am greatly moved since I joined in the earliest stage, and have seen DDM developed from nothing to where it is now.

In those days, we participated mostly by offering suggestions and organizing activities and events. Once Shifu agreed to our proposals, we had to try to make them into reality by finding resources and manpower on our own. We started everything from scratch and navigated our way forward one step at a time. Shifu was open-minded, willing to hear different ideas and opinions. Especially, he was tolerant of us, the group of disciples who were not really obedient and would even make objections.

Buddhism talks about the law of causes and conditions. To support the Dharma, I express my opinions, and it is another thing whether Shifu would agree or not. I simply make my best effort and my share of duty, and so I often feel at ease, everywhere I go.

A most unforgettable Mother's day to reflect on impermanence

My encounter with Master Sheng Yen was a special experience, which was a blessing from Guanyin Bodhisattva. The story starts in my childhood.

I was born and grew up in Pingtung. I had never had any contact with Buddhist teachings while I was still a student. In those days, Buddhism was not commonplace in Taiwan, and most people actually believed in folk religions and Taoism. Even things to do with Buddhism were often mixed with folk religions in one way or another. For example, my earliest impression of Buddhism was the statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva that my mother prayed to in our house.

One day in 1982, when I already had my dental clinic in Taipei, I got a phone call from home in Pingtung that my mother had suffered a stroke and was in a coma. When I rushed home, she had not been able to open her eyes and speak. My family told me that before going into a coma, she kept calling my name. As the youngest in the family,

I had been very close to my mother, even after I went to college and worked in Taipei.

So I held her hands and talked to her right next to her ear, asking her to wiggle her fingers if she could hear me. After I repeated over 10 times, my mother finally moved her fingers and patted my hand lightly. My medical background told me that she was still conscious; she went into a coma because she was physically weak. So I suggested that we send our mother to a hospital in Taipei immediately.

But my suggestion wasn't fully supported by my family because they wanted my mother to stay in Pingtung. But I thought my mother's situation was critical and the medical facilities in Taipei were much better, which was what she needed urgently. When we were still arguing about it, a thought suddenly came to me: my mother was a devout believer of Guanyin Bodhisattva. So I asked everyone to the room with the Guanyin statue, and suggested that we decide by performing the "poe divination." If we could throw five consecutive "holy castings", then we would transfer mother to Taipei; otherwise, she would stay

in Pingtung. Then we did, and we got five consecutive “holy casting.” So, there were no more objections and we called an ambulance to take mother to the Chang Gung Memorial Hospital in Linkou. And I remember that very day was Mother’s Day.

Because of a stroke, mother had undergone a brain surgery before, which had gone really well. But later she became malnourished due to bedsores, leading to the coma at that time. After mother checked into the hospital, multiple examinations revealed that mother was in grave condition, because she did not show any response. But I thought the main reason was malnutrition caused by the bedsores, and suggested that an IV fortified with multi-vitamin and other essential nutrients should help. After several shots, mother finally opened her eyes on the very evening and was able to speak the follow morning. Her first words were: “Qingliang, hospital costs a lot of money!” hearing that, I felt happy and sad at the same time.

While I was growing up, mother always taught me that “Health is the most important wealth in life, while

money can be earned any time.” Now mother was in a critical situation but she was worrying about the money for medical treatment. So I replied in her words by saying, “Health is the most important thing!” Then she smiled at me in content.

Mother was hospitalized for almost two months and went through eight critical surgeries. On the day before she was scheduled to be discharged from the hospital, I received a phone call from the hospital around 5 a.m. telling me that mother passed away. I felt so bewildered, as if the whole thing was a sick and absurd joke. Wasn't she going to be discharged soon, why would they tell me that she had passed away? When I rushed to the hospital, I found out the cold hard truth. Then I tried to figure out what happened and it turned out that it was caused by a medical fault on the part of the hospital. That was such a huge regret, which caused resentment in my mind. Knowing nothing about Buddhism at the time, I didn't understand impermanence and the law of causes and conditions. I only knew that I was trying hard to keep my mother living and hopefully could spend more time with

her in the future. So how could she have suddenly died, due to some unexpected factor?

Dreaming of Guanyin Bodhisattva helped cast away my doubt

My mother's death was a huge blow to me. Suddenly, I lost the focus of my life and was heavily bothered by the reality. The following night after mother passed away, I had a strange dream that Guanyin Bodhisattva flew to me riding a cloud. There were two "me": one observing the whole thing and the other praying to Guanyin in piety. The observer me watched the devout me chanting "Amitabha Buddha" three times and then watching Guanyin Bodhisattva turn around and leave. Though I couldn't see mother physically, I could sense clearly that she was right next to Guanyin Bodhisattva.

To me, this dream indicated two meanings. First, I realized that there are always people who are better than me. Suddenly, I felt I was so minute, as humble as a tiny blade of grass. Before that, I had been extremely adamant

that religion is redundant, and that I would never become a Buddhist. But this dream baffled me. Why would I be chanting “Amitabha Buddha,” and why would I be praying to Guanyin Bodhisattva in such devotion and reverence? These questions could not be brushed off easily with “what one dreams at night what one thinks during the day.” Regarding myself as an educated person, I thought I had to rely on myself to find the answer for what I did not understand. So I embarked on the journey to read books on religion.

Secondly, dreaming of Guanyin Bodhisattva really made me feel calm and peaceful, both during and after the dream. My mind was tranquil. My interpretation was, my mother had been with Guanyin Bodhisattva now, and this dream comforted me, enabling me to let go of my previous resentment and confusion.

Discovering a new spiritual territory by reading *Correct Buddhist Belief*

Though I had let it go, searching for the faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva was still on my mind. Once I went

to the National Taiwan Museum to see an exhibition of Buddhist statues carved by a famous sculptor from Banchiao. A bonus from that exhibition was that I got the *Correct Buddhist Belief* written by Master Sheng Yen as a free gift. This was the first time I had read a book by Shifu. I was impressed that Buddhism as explained by Shifu was so in line with reason and scientific principles, and wondered why Buddhism had always been associated with superstition.

I read the book altogether three times, and eventually gained some understanding. I could not wait to share this book with almost everyone I met as if I had discovered a new territory. I am a dentist, and have a fixed workplace. Most of my patients have probably heard my “book report.” For example, Chen Zhaoxing and Wang Chongzhong, two senior volunteers at Nung Chan Monastery, were both my patients. They have listened to my book reports too. When we reminisce about the past, they would jokingly say, “We just had to have our mouth open in awe to listen to what you had to say.”

Then I started to contribute in the reprinting of *Correct Buddhist Belief* and introduce Nung Chan Monastery to my friends. For example, Chen Zhaoxing, Wang Chongzhong, Chen Ruijuan, and Li Chun-en, who was my high school classmate and later the secretary-general of Association of Dharma Supporters. I visited Nung Chan Monastery for the first time in 1984, and I immediately felt like home there; it was like finding a spiritual refuge. At the time, Nung Chan Monastery was a group of corrugated iron buildings surrounded vegetable farms. Prudent and simple, it indeed embodied the spirit: “A day without work is a day without food.”

Other than Shifu’s books, his experiences were also the reasons why I admired and respected him so much. Shifu did a six-year solitary retreat in Meinong, Kaohsiung, and then he went to Japan for further academic study, and obtained a Ph.D. With these experiences, he attracted much attention and many people had great expectations of him at the time. I particularly identified with his vision in providing higher education for monastics and sharing correct Buddhist belief with the general public. So I was

glad to have had the opportunities to assist Shifu, helping more people to benefit from the Dharma. This was my initial intention, which was also agreed by many. As for my karmic connection with Shifu, I may not know anything about my past lives, but I'm certain that I went to Nung Chan Monastery after reading the book, *Correct Buddhist Belief*.

At the time, there were only two group practice activities at Nung Chan Monastery, one run by the Amitabha Chanting Group, and the other by the Meditation Group. I needed to work at my clinic on weekdays and also on Saturday afternoons, so I could only join Amitabha Chanting Group's practice activity on Saturday evenings. I remembered I used to sit in the last row and often dozed off, because I was exhausted from work.

I was in charge of guiding newcomers to become familiar with the basic Buddhist etiquette of prostrating to the Buddha and chanting Amitabha Buddha's name. I realized that many people were actually interested in

Buddhism, but they often found the rituals intimidating and would worry about doing the movements wrong or forgetting the correct formation during the rituals, so they seemed anxious when they came to the monastery. Therefore I volunteered to help with the ritual part, by thinking in the shoes of the beginners to help them become familiar with the group practice as soon as possible. Shifu must have noticed how I was enthusiastic in helping the newcomers, so he once asked me to share about the topic: “How to receive people in Buddhism?” Now thinking back, I find that really interesting.

Chanting Great Compassion Mantra, praying to Guanyin Bodhisattva for finding land

In the book *The Direction of Dharma Drum Mountain*, Shifu mentioned my name, which was about the story that he led Amitabha Chanting Group’s members to chant the Great Compassion Mantra in order to find a plot of land in late March, 1989.

Though it is the book, *Correct Buddhist Belief*, that had inspired me to come to Nung Chan Monastery and encourage many of my friends to learn Buddhist practice with Shifu, I've always considered supporting the Dharma and introducing Buddhism to people to be my aspiration. As for whether the Shifu had known me personally or not, that doesn't really matter at all. It was through Li Chun-en's recommendation to Shifu that I was good at introducing Buddhism to people and DDM could use my help that Shifu decided to invite me for a talk. Since then, my work at Nung Chan Monastery had been receiving people, group practice, volunteering, and having meetings with Shifu.

In those days, the Association's members had frequent meetings with Shifu, either at Nung Chan Monastery or at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. Of all the meetings, the ones to do with the land acquisition constituted a most special experience in my life. I remembered our first land acquisition meeting (October 1988) was held at the Institute and there were about 10 participants, including Shifu, Prof. Li Zhifu, then president of the Institute, Prof. Fang Ningshu, Yang Zheng, then

president of Association of Dharma Supporters, Li Chun-en, and Lin Xinxing. Shifu told us right at the start of the meeting that the effort to search for a piece of land had gone on for seven years without any result, so now hopefully a land-acquisition team could be formed, with a special group of people in charge and a convener. Li Chun-en immediately nominated me as candidate and the appointment as decided by show of hands. At the moment I thought to myself, “I’m neither an architect nor a land administration notary. Would it be a good idea, for a dentist to be in charge of finding the land?” But since the decision had been made, I could only accept, and take up the task.

My principle in looking for land, either for Nung Chan Monastery’s relocation or for finding the suitable place to be a downtown practice center (i.e. the Anhe Center), was the same. I would first propose 10 possible plots, and then narrow them down to three according to Shifu’s criteria, before finally being reviewed by Shifu and secretary-general Li Chun-en. At the time, what we required had to be a plot of land bigger than 5 acres of

flat area so there would be enough space for a university campus. Finding the land itself wasn't so hard, but the problem was price and location, which were two important factors to consider.

Before finding the land in Jinshan, I had recommended another plot in Sanxia which was over 5 acres of flatland. Sheltered by surrounding mountains, the land resembled an area embraced by two ancient straight-backed armchairs, with a grand and imposing atmosphere. Shifu and many other resident monastics went to check the land and were very pleased with it. But, there were other potential buyers as well, and that lot was soon sold afterwards. Ven. Guo Jing, then director of Nung Chan Monastery, told me that Shifu seldom had dreams. But he had dreamt twice about that plot during the time. Maybe Shifu also found it a pity. But, it was what it was, and we had tried our best.

Actually, I felt a bit uncomfortable about the fact that the deal wasn't successful. On the one hand, we hadn't acted quickly enough; on the other hand, we weren't aware of the overall economic changes. That's why we missed the

opportunity. So, I told Shifu that since I had done my best why didn't we leave this matter to Guanyin Bodhisattva? He asked me what I meant by that. Then I said we could chant the Great Compassion Mantra as a prayer to Guanyin Bodhisattva during our Amitabha Chanting Group meeting. He glanced at me and said members of the Group only recite the Buddha's name, and so wondered who would chant Guanyin Bodhisattva's name.

In the end, Shifu still took my suggestion, because the process of finding land had gone on for too long, and, due to the Guandu Plain Development Plan, Nung Chan Monastery could be torn down at any time. On the Saturday evening of March 25, 1989, Shifu led over 100 members of Amitabha Chanting Group to chant the Great Compassion Mantra 21 times, in the hope of finding a suitable piece of land. Originally just a casual suggestion for a regular group practice meeting, it turned out to be a surprising turning point that would change the course of development of DDM.

After the group practice, Li Zhaonan went to the

reception office and told the monastic on duty that it was his first time to join the Amitabha Chanting Group's Buddha-name recitation practice at Nung Chan Monastery, and heard Shifu talk about the plan to find a piece of land. "I'll let you know about it, in one week," he said with confidence. And so he did. A week later, we got a message from him that Ven. Quan Du, then abbot of the Jinshan Monastery in Jinshan, Taipei County, was also chanting the Great Compassion Mantra in late March to pray for finding a highly cultivated and revered monk to take over that monastery. We were actually chanting the Great Compassion Mantra at around the same time for similar reasons. And the rest is history.

I was part of this incredible history, serving in a supporting role. Actually we had run out of ideas and so that's why I suggested Shifu plead Guanyin Bodhisattva to help us find a solution. As Shifu would often mention this story afterwards, the plot of land for DDM was granted by Guanyin Bodhisattva.

Walking prostration to witness the promise coming true

After we finished the land transaction, Shifu named it “Dharma Drum Mountain” and confirmed its vision: to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth. However, the next concern emerged: how should we raise funds? So everyone started to feel anxious about it.

At the time, devotees of Nung Chan Monastery were mostly office workers, house-makers, and intellectuals. Some could give of their time, and some would offer ideas, but most of us only had limited resources to support. Due to the nature of my profession, I had contacts with people from all walks of life. Also, I had a habit of observing social trends. I discovered that at the time the practice of walking prostration was becoming a trend for many Buddhists in Taiwan. So, I suggested to Shifu that if walking prostration was a popular practice, we could always give it a try. Though not opposed to the idea, Shifu revealed that within the organization there were actually different opinions that regarded walking prostration as a non-mainstream Buddhist

practice, and so it should be considered with caution.

In fact, another reason for suggesting walking prostration was to gain the trust from devotees. By inviting people to visit the mountain, devotees would see for themselves that Shifu's aspiration for developing Buddhist education was not an empty promise and that we had already acquired the land and started planning. At the time, there was a "bounced check" scandal in the religious circles, so people would be suspicious about a monastery only in its planning stage.

At the time, not many people really believed in and practiced Buddhism, and few monastics were actually living a monastic life for the benefit of all. Under this circumstance, even though like-minded people would identify with Shifu's aspiration to promote Buddhist higher education to nurture Buddhist talent, it would still take a lot of effort to get this idea across to the general public. For this purpose, it is necessary to have a platform to convey this idea, and walking prostration was exactly like this platform, an activity to invite people to join and learn more

about DDM. After my explanation, Shifu then agreed to my proposal.

To ensure the success for the walking prostration, members of the Association of Dharma Supporters went to observe and learn how other monasteries did it. However, due to lack of experience, our walking prostration took four hours to finish while other people might only take two hours. Nonetheless, after several times, we had made progress. For example, I noticed that the route back and forth was very important. On the way up, people would focus on prostrating and so it was easier to observe silence. After reaching the top and thinking that the task is accomplished, people coming down would be more likely to lose concentration and start chatting, and thus disturb those going up doing prostration. So, when organizing walking prostration activity on Dharma Drum Mountain, we needed two separate routes for going up and coming down.

Furthermore, the purpose to organize the walking prostration activity was to allow people to know about Shifu's idea of developing Buddhist education, so we would

train volunteer guides to do this even on the shuttle bus to the Mountain. This is also why Shifu would identify with and accept the proposal: to infuse the function of education and care into activities.

To practice purity in the three actions while in motion

In June, 1990, the Association of Dharma Supporters organized a walking prostration experience trip for its members, mainly as a training activity for potential leaders. The activity officially took place for the first time in March, 1991, with over 1,000 participants. Later, it was expanded into a “ten-thousand people walking prostration” event to allow more people to join. That was really impressive, quiet, and orderly. People came continuously, from dawn till dusk, to participate in the activity, and remained silent all the way through the process.

Can walking prostration count as an official method of practice? At the inauguration of the reconstructed Nung Chan Monastery towards the end of 2012, many senior

devotees were invited to return “home”. Time really flies. At that time we were in our thirties, but now we are senior devotees ourselves. I was so moved when reading the poem Shifu wrote in his later years, which reads:

*By practicing walking prostration, your prayers and wishes
may be fulfilled more easily.*

*Chant and listen in sincerity, moving forward by
prostrating once after taking three steps.*

*Regardless of whether it is smooth or not, dawn or dusk;
Regardless of the weather condition, walking alone or in a
group;*

*Chant Amitabha Buddha’s name clearly, and listen to the
Buddha’s name attentively.*

*Simply prostrate, arise, and walk, while being aware of our
chanting, listening, and bodily movement.*

*Remain diligent and pure by practicing our three actions in
accordance with the Dharma.*

*With a refreshed body-mind as a good response, we can
eliminate our karma and increase in merit and wisdom.*

I’ve always considered walking prostration to be a

form of practicing Buddhism in motion. Judging from Shifu's words quoted here, it seems he agreed with the idea too. As the phrase "regardless of the weather condition" reflects, in those years, we did come across with all kinds of weather conditions. I remember clearly about the first time we organized the "thousand-people walking prostration." It rained non-stop for ten days before the event. Consequently, the trails were all muddy and slippery. Some of us went up to the DDM complex the night before the event, when it was still raining. At 7 a.m. the following day, Shifu called and asked me about the weather. I replied, "Amitufo! I can see the sunshine!"

Entering into the crowd to invite the public

Shifu often said, "The Buddha's teaching is so wonderful, but so few people know of it." Shifu considered sharing the Dharma as his mission in life; he made his greatest effort to introduce the Dharma to the general public. I was touched for three reasons. Firstly, Shifu promoted correct Buddhist belief and had thus changed

the society's conventional perception of Buddhism. I agree, and admire that. Secondly, Shifu had an immense capacity of mind. I think that is the function of wisdom, which manifests in egalitarian compassion. He gave guidance to whoever interested in learning Buddhism in an equal manner. Thirdly, Shifu practiced what he taught us, put equal emphasis on intellectual understanding and real practice, and taught by example. He was a real teacher.

Shifu experienced lot of hardships in founding DDM. As his disciples we should never forget why we wanted to support Shifu and DDM in the first place. The plot of land where the DDM complex is located was granted by Guanyin Bodhisattva, and Shifu used the phrase, “the rising great compassion,” to highlight DDM as a place of practice dedicated to Guanyin Bodhisattva. Guanyin Bodhisattva can manifest himself in all forms and appearances to care for sentient beings, and help them to feel secure and find the ultimate refuge. As the Diamond Sutra says, “Attach to nothing when giving rise to the mind,” one should actually seek nothing, except for responding to sentient beings’ needs for help. The Buddhist philosophy of Buddha-

nature and emptiness actually reflects unconditional love and wishes all sentient beings to realize the compassion and wisdom marked by emptiness in nature. So, I always think that we should promote Buddhist teachings by first identifying people's needs so as to truly share with them the benefit of the Dharma.

Buddhism talks about doing our share of duty while adapting to conditions as they arise. I often feel that I have done little, so since I have the good fortune to be part of it I should just wholeheartedly do my best. Although I may not be doing a good job in the process, as long as I correct and improve myself it will always help me grow and develop. Shifu often urged us to dissolve our ego by constantly acting for the benefit of others. What I learned from Shifu is to disregard my own gain and loss, and be brave to embrace and press forward, for the benefit of all sentient beings. As Shifu's early disciple, this is what I want to share with our group.

(An interview at Datong Dental Clinic, Taipei, on March 26, 2015)