

Zen
&
Inner Peace

Volume One

Chan Master Sheng Yen





Dharma Drum Mountain




Zen and Inner Peace
(Great Dharma Drum)

Talks with Master Sheng Yen



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About the Chan Meditation Center

In 1979, Master Sheng Yen established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture, more commonly known as the Chan Meditation Center. The mission of CMC is to be a Buddhist meditation and practice center for anyone whose good karma brings them to its front door. (As often is the case, adventitiously.)

CMC has a varied and rich offering of classes in meditation and other forms of Buddhist practice, in particular, its Sunday Morning Open House, which is a very popular event for individuals as well as families. It features meditation sittings, talks on Chan and Buddhist Dharma, and a vegetarian luncheon. All are welcome.

Information about CMC is available at
<http://chancenter.org>.

About the Dharma Drum Retreat Center

In 1997, Master Sheng Yen established the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York. It is a sister organization to the Chan Meditation Center, and is located about two hours from the Chan Meditation Center by car.

DDRC offers a rich schedule of intensive Chan meditation retreats of varying lengths, from 3-day weekend retreats, to those of longer duration, typically 7 to 10 days. While the retreats are open to all without regard to affiliation, it is preferred that participants have at least some beginner-level meditation experience and/or have attended at least one intensive meditation retreat.

Information about DDRC is at:

<http://www.dharmadrumretreat.org>

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Preface

The Chan masters of old times discovered the principles of Chan through their own practice and shared them with their disciples so that they too, could awaken to the essence through the teachings. In the TV series “Great Dharma Drum,” which was first broadcast by Taiwan’s Chinese Television System, modern-day Chan Master Sheng Yen, using accessible language and media technology, addressed questions posed by the host, Ms. Chen Yueqing. Using Chan wisdom and compassion, Master Sheng Yen provided easy-to-understand and practical guidance to address these questions that are commonly experienced by many in daily life.

This book is a selection of five of the ten topics that were re-broadcast in the U.S. as “Zen and Inner Peace,” and were translated into English and compiled into this volume as part of the “Passing of the Lamp” commemoration of Master Sheng Yen’s passing in 2009. Each of the five topics contains seven conversations between Master Sheng Yen and host Ms. Chen. The topics include major themes of everyday life, such as self-development, emotional management, attachment, career and Chan. In a forthcoming

second volume, the Chan Meditation Center will publish the remaining five topics of “Zen and Inner Peace.”

Topic One: Development of Self. The stages of progress from having a “self” to no-self, or the no-mind of Chan. Starting from self-understanding, one acknowledges one’s strengths and weaknesses, with the end goal of dissolution of the self through continuous improvement and growth.

Topic Two: Emotional Intelligence. Leveraging the practice of patience, as well as understanding the influence of causes-conditions and causes-effects, and the concept of emptiness, to rid oneself of anger. Seeing the nature of the five aggregates (the components of the “self”), to remove fear and insecurity. Using Chan practice to tune and relax the body, breath and mind, elevating emotional intelligence.

Topic Three: Attachment and Jealousy. Examining the motivation to clarify whether one is attached or sticking to principles.

Topic Four: Temptation and Desires. Discussing ways to alleviate desire and temptation through constant mindfulness, practicing compassion, counting the breath, or reciting the Buddha’s name.

Topic Five: The Workplace. Working to contributing self, learning, and growing, rather than just earning a salary or comparing ourselves with others.

This rare treasure of a book abounds with wisdom, especially for those who are interested in learning and experiencing Chan and Buddhism. As buddha nature is within all beings, this book expounds the meaning of “Life is Chan, and Chan is Life.” Everyone can benefit by applying Chan wisdom and compassion in daily life, regardless of the complexity of their life, their environments and interpersonal relationships, along with the associated stresses and conflicts. The more one learns and applies these principles, the more one benefits. At a minimum one can lessen their vexations, and then further oneself to achieve happiness with an eventual advance into the essence of Chan.

May all readers practice Chan at all times and benefit from the experience wherever they go.

Ven. Guo Xing Fashi

Abbot, Chan Meditation Center, Queens, New York

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Topic One



Development of Self



Self-Development through Learning from Others

August 21, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program the Master taught us that perfecting the self can be seen as a three-stage process: affirming the self, developing the self, and dissolving the self. To affirm the self we must be modest regarding our strengths and we must learn from our shortcomings. That way we can continually develop the self. Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance. Master, are there any other methods besides self-affirmation we can use to help us grow?

Master Sheng Yen: Yes, through self-affirmation – ongoing self-affirmation. Self-affirmation means identifying and understanding our strengths and weaknesses. We remain modest and seek improvement. That way, we are actually developing ourselves, which is the same as improving ourselves. We need to continually do this. It's not a task that can be done overnight. Actually, just as learning is never-ending, improving our character bears no limits.

The first step in self-affirmation is to identify our strengths and weaknesses, and then to overcome our weaknesses and increase our strengths. In fact, even with all our strengths and shortcomings, there's always room for

improvement. Next, we should not just focus on our own strengths and weaknesses, while failing to notice those in others. The best way to develop and improve ourselves is to be more considerate of others, knowing both others and ourselves.

I'm not only talking about the professional world, in which we have to know ourselves as well as others. I don't mean in order to compete with and gain the upper hand; rather, it's about recognizing strengths in others, starting with the people around us. A husband must be able to appreciate his wife's strengths, and a wife should see her husband's. Parents should do the same with their children. This will enable people to respect as well as learn from each other. Some might ask, "What on earth can we learn from children?" Actually, many parents do need to learn from their children. Of course not in terms of book knowledge; rather, much wisdom can be gleaned from a child's behavior. By handling our child's problems, we grow in wisdom and compassion. In this sense, children are our teachers – they are very good teachers, and they have no pretensions. They are genuine teachers.


So, learning more about others people's strengths will certainly do us a lot of good. Besides the people in our own circle, beyond our own families, haven't we learned something from people we come across in everyday life, from all walks of life? We know that Confucius had questions

about everything. He once entered an ancestral shrine and asked about everything and anything; there were still many things he didn't know. Once, observing a farmer at work, he felt that farmers were superior to him in some respects, and that there was much he could learn from them. There are so many people we can learn from. And if we have a specialty of our own, we must keep on getting better at it.


Another step is to learn and gain experience from all people, all things, and all phenomena that we encounter. There is a saying, "Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles." This is about continually educating and developing ourselves. This is about others' strengths. And, if we are oblivious to others' shortcomings, or consciously overlook them, saying that their faults are their strengths, or even that they are flawless – that's simply wrong. That way we have no standard for right and wrong, good and bad – that can harm both others and ourselves. As such, we should look at shortcomings of others as a mirror to reflect on our own.

Between couples, if one demands that the other changes, and vice versa, that may not work as well. It is better that we eliminate in ourselves the flaws and shortcomings that we think the other person has. Don't we need to discuss it with our spouse? We can, actually. But we must not demand changes or make accusations.


Chen: And we can't point fingers.



MSY: No we should not. What we consider a flaw, our spouse may see as part of his or her character, and may believe that's what made them who they are. It may be there's just no way that they can change. If that's the case, we'd better not make the same mistake. As to whether he or she will change, we can give them advice. If they can't accept it, then we should tolerate them. Tolerance itself is also a form of self-development.



Chen: Thank you for your guidance, Master. Confucius teaches us to learn from everyone; others' strengths and weaknesses can be an example to us and serve as an impetus for growth. We hope you'll join us next time as we continue to share more wisdom of the Dharma.



Summary: Spiritual practice is a never-ending process of self-development: Avoid repeating the same mistakes, be they others' or your own. And learn from people's good points.



Self-Development through Managing Emotions

August 25, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. And welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program, the Master taught us another method of developing the self. He said that we should continuously observe our mind, be aware of our emotions and thoughts, and use our willpower to control them. I think many people will find this method useful. Are there any even more effective methods? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, in today's chaotic, relentless, fast-paced times, people experience emotional turmoil almost continuously. So, it is essential to know how to control our emotions. Besides the method you've already taught us, could you tell us about other methods?

Master Sheng Yen: As we discussed in our last program, a method you can use in everyday life is to redirect your focus away from things that trigger vexations. For example, when you take a walk, drink a glass of water, listen to some tranquil music, or chat with a friend, your emotions will start to be at ease.

Chen: Besides this method, are there any other ways?

MSY: Yes, and this is more subtle. First, we try to find out where our thoughts emerge from, and how they emerge. Actually, we won't always be able to find out where they come from; they just suddenly emerge. Sometimes we may know the reason, but if we know the reason, why do we think getting upset helps? It doesn't help at all. Managing the situation would help the moment. Do vexing emotions actually do us any good? Not only do they not do any good, they also disturb our minds, making us speak harshly or behaving rudely. And, who knows how his affect our body, even at the cellular level?

Chen: It harms both our body and mind.

MSY: Exactly. Moreover, it's rather a waste of our energy. That's why people feel quite tired after an outburst of anger, or after feeling agitated. It's as if they are exhausted after doing a great deal of hard work. Sometimes they even shake with anger. When they no longer feel anger they still feel shaky. It's pretty tiring, quite exhausting. Since that's the case, why be self-destructive? It's unnecessary. It's more important that we face up to a problem and deal with it.

Although we should first examine exactly how a thought or emotion arises in our mind, we can't actually. We simply have no way of knowing why an emotion emerges; so, it's not worth our attention and we should ignore it. If an incident never happened or has already happened – perhaps

long ago – what’s the point of remaining angry? When we know the problem and the reason for it – where it arises from, where it vanishes to, when it comes and goes – then we don’t need to get angry. Besides, in terms of one’s health, it’s also unnecessary. This is a very wise way of dealing with our problems.

Wisdom means understanding our emotions as they come and as they go. Being able to do that, we should then handle things the way they’re supposed to be handled. Having done what we can, we needn’t worry about the results; not having to worry, we are able to put our minds at ease.

On a higher level, another method is not to worry about where a thought arises from and vanishes to – not to consider its origin, its underlying cause, and its trigger. Ignore all these factors and simply look at it: Is it a good thought? Is it a wise or troubled thought? If it is a troubled thought, then it’s a useless thought.

As humans we must cultivate wisdom, which is what makes us lovable, deserving, and worthy. How stupid if we lack wisdom and always troubled ourselves! Not only would it not be wise, it would be foolish. However it arises, whether good or bad, we should immediately let go of a troubling thought.

Chen: You mean we ignore how it arises and whether it’s good or bad; emotions of any kind are not good. Just see whether it is wise or deluded?


MSY: That's right. If we have wisdom, it will bring coolness, while anguish is stiflingly hot. Anguish is like a pressure cooker, with perpetual heat causing extreme agony, while wisdom brings serenity and joy. When one is feeling troubled, or "feverish affliction" as it's termed in Buddhism – "affliction" refers to trouble and "feverish" means burning hot and scorching – though one is not in actual hell yet, the state of mind is like a "scorching hell."

So, when we're caught up in anguish, we are effectively in hell. No one is putting you in hell except yourself. How stupid that is. So, when an afflictive emotion arises, you should put a stop to it without hesitation. Then it will disappear immediately after it arises. This is not easily done, though. We should still start from the second level I just mentioned – as a thought arises and perishes, just watch it arise and perish. This is where our cultivation should start. Then, we move on to where we discern an arising emotion and make it disappear, to detect it and make it vanish right away. Whoever can do this we call a good and wise person. Though not completely free from anguish, such a person doesn't allow his distress to harm himself and others. This is an essential stage in the process of self-development.

Chen: Thank you for your guidance, Master. Please join us in our next program as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: Wise persons master the refined art of



observing the rising and perishing of thoughts, allowing themselves to elude the endlessly arising afflictions of the deluded mind.



Self-Development – Understanding of Self and Empathy for Others

August 26, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program, the Master taught us how to maintain a constant awareness of the mind, to apply wisdom to be aware of the rise and fall of emotions, and how to resolutely rid ourselves of mental anguish in an instant. Are there other ways to bolster our self-development? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance. Master, it would be great if I were aware of an afflictive thought as it arises, exactly as you described it to us, and then immediately let it go without hesitation. Are there any even better methods?



Master Sheng Yen: No, there aren't. That is, knowing ourselves and others is the principle. First is to understand our own mental activities and our emotions as they come and go, and then to deal with our problems. By that I mean self-cultivation is about alleviating vexations and growing in wisdom. It also means developing loving-kindness and compassion toward others. How does one develop compassion? Some think it's about showing concern and caring for people; being generous, comforting them with words. They may think that's all there is to it. Actually, it's not that easy. Some people get on well with others while

some don't, and so are considered unsociable, taciturn, or reticent. But this is hard to say. Some people are not eloquent yet well-liked; others are eloquent yet unpopular. So, one doesn't have to be eloquent to be well-liked. Being liked lies in empathizing with others, understanding that others have problems just as we do—that their problems need to be solved just as ours do. We don't like being verbally abused, and other people don't either. Compassion also means knowing that while we want to rid ourselves of vexations, others are no different. We can relate to others by putting ourselves in others' shoes, so to speak. We treat others as we treat ourselves. We consider others by imagining ourselves in their position.

Chen: We should ask, “If I were this person what would I do? How would I want others to treat me?”

MSY: That's right. “How would I feel, how would I want to be treated, what would I think?” and so on. The problem is that most people tend to think: “You're wrong. Why on earth are you so troubled; why so upset, why do you have so many problems?” Or, “There can't be that many problems; that's ridiculous; you're bringing trouble onto yourself.” Most people will only reproach others, without putting themselves in their shoes. When we are in a similar situation, we might be worse off. Or maybe our situation isn't all that bad, and our resources, skills, knowledge, and

our ability to handle matters are different from that of the afflicted. Then we won't feel as much pain in the same kind of situation, because we have developed. However, in the process of our evolution, we have certainly experienced how others regard us, how they treat us, interact with us, make demands on us, criticize us. We will encounter these problems ourselves.

Sometimes we feel we are wronged, completely misunderstood. Some of my disciples will say, "Shifu, you have misunderstood me," or "Shifu, you don't understand us." They mean that I am not them, therefore my demands, guidance, and admonitions are not necessarily correct. They will say, "We're not like what you think; this is only your view." If that were really the case, then I would be lacking in compassion and wisdom. But it's hard to say; sometimes I'm right and it's just that their level of understanding is simply not there yet. It could be that my demands or guidance were right, but they did not catch on. Sometimes, they will say, "Shifu, you're flying in the sky, while we're just crawling on the ground."

It's not that I've set the standards too high; rather, I see further – I see the big picture, and I see things in more depth. They can't keep up, can't see as high, can't see as deep, can't see as far; they can't really see the whole picture. So, when they can't relate to what I say, they feel misunderstood. But after I talk to them further, they'll come to realize that

their Shifu is actually being compassionate. The point is how we can best benefit people according to their actual needs. Nowadays many parents have no idea how to be parents. They simply give whatever their child asks for, and are too accommodating to their child's dislikes. Whatever the child wants, they are permissive and say "Fine." Therefore, the child is not clear about right and wrong, and how to act like a decent human being. In this case you're not showing love, but spoiling and harming the child. Therefore we need to apply wisdom to enable us to be more attuned to other people's feelings. This takes effort. First, we use wisdom in responding to people, and then we can make a correct judgment. Second, by observing people over time, we learn how they tend to react under certain situations. This is also essential.

Chen: Thank you, Master for your guidance. The Master said that knowing ourselves represents wisdom, and knowing others facilitates compassion. We apply wisdom to reflect on ourselves and treat others with compassion. Please join us in our next program as we share more Buddhist wisdom.

Summary: Knowing ourselves lays the foundation of wisdom. Knowing about others facilitates the performance of kindness and compassion.

Applying Compassion in Understanding Others

(Date unknown.)

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. The last few times we've talked a lot about self-development. The Master told us that to improve ourselves, besides using wisdom, we should constantly observe our mind, and using compassion to observe others. How can we put this into practice? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, to me it seems relatively easy to apply wisdom to observe and understand my own mind, but using compassion to observe what others think seems harder.

Master Sheng Yen: Actually, both are easy as well as difficult. Once you have mastered one practice, you'll definitely be capable of the other. If you often observe yourself, reflect on and understand yourself, you'll be able to observe and empathize with other people. Observing others doesn't require supernatural powers, the divine eye, mind-reading, or hypnosis. Rather, we use empathy. Actually, we can do more than merely offer empathy. Besides relating to people's feelings, there's a more subtle kind of understanding – that others have their own viewpoints, just like we do. Viewpoints may differ, as well as age and generation, cultural and educational background, and living environment. We

are all unique. This being the case, besides having empathy we should respect and understand others.

Understanding others doesn't mean putting them under investigation; rather, we observe people, learn what they think, what they need, and how they react. If we spend some time with people, eventually we become better acquainted. We will think, "I know him; that's the way he is, the way he thinks, the way he talks, the way he often reacts." So we should get used to others and understand them – there must be a reason why they are like this. Since there's a reason, in what way do they need our help, and, in what respect? Also, in what ways might they help us? In order to help us, they may suffer too. Also, when they offer to help and we decline it, they might feel the pain too. They show their love, and we say we don't need their love. That way, they feel pain too.

So, we must be considerate and gracious in offering or receiving help, caring for others, or accepting care; these are reciprocal. In such an interaction we let others feel that we are their most intimate, closest, most reliable, safest friends and that being with us is joyful. It's quite a hard thing to do. But it's better to develop our interactions with our immediate family, relatives, and close friends to this level. We can't do this with everyone, with strangers, or those belonging to our social networks; it's enough just to keep abreast of how things are going with them. That would be

sufficient. But about our family and relatives, our friends as well, especially close and intimate ones, it's best that we have a clear idea about where we stand.

Chen: Master, you said there's a difference between using compassion to understand how others think and catering to their preferences, or fawning. What is the difference?

MSY: Of course there's a difference. With more casual friends it's fine being a little flattering, making polite small talk and chatting about their general well-being. But if you do this with your intimate friends, they will feel awkward, thinking that you are being so superficial, like treating them as outsiders. They may wonder: "We can be frank with each other, why are you acting like this?" This is not how you interact with good, close friends. When interacting with others do not put up barriers and do not be defensive. There's Chinese saying about personal interaction, "Never intend harm but be on your guard." That seems to make sense. If we are not on our guard we may well be harmed by others – by unexpected schemes and betrayals, or a stab in the back. People often say, "I don't know what's on his mind." Who knows what others will do to harm us?

Not long ago, a company chairman visited me. "Master, I've been set up by a devious guy," he said. I asked him, "Who is this person?" He said, "He's been my protégé ever since he graduated from college. Until recently, he

was the general manager of my company, but in the end he tricked me and gave me quite a hard time.”

I said, “You have already been tricked, so just forget about taking any action.” Nevertheless, to avoid being tricked, we should stay vigilant without being paranoid and defensive. How? We can observe how loyal a person is. We can let him know how we see things – that we don’t betray others. We can educate our employees or subordinates at all times. If we neglect to do this, if they are only given training in skills, expertise, and techniques, if we fail to provide moral guidance, they may end up betraying us. So, this applies to our friends, our children, and the people who work for us. Compassion is not the same as being overindulgent and permissive. Skillful means and wisdom must still be applied.

Chen: That’s absolutely right. Thank you for your guidance, Master. We hope you’ll join us next time as we continue to share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: Compassion requires us to empathize, observe, to be respectful, understanding, and considerate. Rather than being overly indulgent and permissive.

Self-Dissolution – the Ultimate Goal of Self-Cultivation

August 28, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Almost everyone these days is interested in self-development. In the last few programs, Master has taught us many ways to improve ourselves, including learning from others, using others' good or bad points as a mirror to reflect on ourselves, applying wisdom to observe our minds, reflecting on our faults, and putting an end to our troubles, and finally, using compassion to observe other people. What exactly is the purpose of this series of Dharma talks on self-cultivation? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance. Master, you said that self-cultivation has no limits. Does that mean self-cultivation is in itself a goal – our ultimate goal?

Master Sheng Yen: Self-cultivation is indeed a goal to pursue as far as ordinary people are concerned. We continually pursue this goal in order to elevate our character and our state of life, which is without limits. However, when we reach the state of great bodhisattvas, self-cultivation will no longer be a concern. Where can we learn about this? The subject is found in many sutras, most specifically in the Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra, the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra

and sutras on Manjushri Bodhisattva. In all these sutras we often encounter the step-by-step process undertaken on the bodhisattva path until one attains “the insight into the non-arising of Dharma,” which means no more vexations will arise. By then a bodhisattva won’t need to pursue self-cultivation, as there is no longer anything to be improved – vexations no longer exist, no longer arise. By then wisdom and compassion manifest spontaneously.

In the natural world we also hear of something similar: a basic law of physics states that an object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion. By analogy, in a bodhisattva, the ordinary mind has come to rest completely, no longer moves, and will never move again. But in terms of wisdom and compassion, a bodhisattva’s mind is still in motion; it is in perpetual motion. Since the mind is at perfect peace, there is no need to suppress or release anything, or to divert anything at all. There’s no need because the bodhisattva’s mind is totally unaffected. Since the bodhisattva’s wisdom and compassion are continually in action, there is no need to ask, “Shall I take another vow?” “Shall I make another resolution?” “Shall I set another goal?” “Shall I set another direction?” All these questions are no longer necessary. At all times the bodhisattva’s mind remains in a state of complete stillness while achieving things of great significance. The bodhisattva will not choose to be a certain being, won’t prefer a certain

time, not be limited within a certain boundary, and won't insist on doing some certain thing. As we Buddhists say, the bodhisattva just "adapts to conditions," depending on one's affinity with sentient beings. Affinity to what? Affinity to the causes and conditions of sentient beings in relation to one's bodhisattva vows. When conditions manifest, the bodhisattva's compassion and wisdom will be in motion spontaneously.

If sentient beings have urgent needs, if they earnestly request, or hope for deliverance, for the help of buddhas or bodhisattvas, they will of course be helped. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are always reaching out with helping arms, as if to "catch fish." It depends on whether the fish are willing to swim into the net. If the fish don't, it may be because they are not ready to be "caught." So no matter how hard the buddhas and bodhisattvas try, they can't catch the fish if the fish are not ready to be caught.

As an ordinary person myself, if I want to achieve something, I need to make an effort, I need to take vows, I need to apply my willpower, and I need to set a goal, establish a direction, and direct my efforts in this direction. These efforts will foster my own conditions, fostering the conditions in my pursuit of blessings and wisdom. The great bodhisattvas do not need to make such effort; they are motivated by causeless compassion. They have no need to create conditions since their affinities with sentient beings

are omnipresent. As long as sentient beings are receptive they can obtain deliverance, and even if they aren't, bodhisattvas won't forsake them. Without making any vows they still deliver sentient beings everywhere.

So at this stage there is immense and boundless compassion, immense and boundless wisdom. By then buddhas and bodhisattvas have achieved what we called "dissolving of the self." This means there is no self, no ego, no self-directing their actions, no voice saying, "I don't want to." "I'm going to save this person but not that one." "I want to – or don't want to – go somewhere." They don't have thoughts of this kind at all. Such a state of mind is called "no-self."

Chen: Is no-self the same as nothingness?

MSY: No, it isn't. No-self indicates freedom from the troubled self, which is greatly attached to the value, the existence, or the significance of the self. Bodhisattvas do not have these kinds of thoughts. Nevertheless, their wisdom and compassion function thoroughly, perfectly, and everywhere. Bodhisattvas and buddhas such as these have achieved dissolution of the self, as we termed it, and they have accomplished true completion of the self. So this is the true self? Yes. And we call this true self, "no-self."

People misunderstand this when they think that the ultimate object of Buddhism is no-self: "How empty the

whole idea is.” Actually, even after attaining buddhahood or entering nirvana, the wisdom and compassion of the buddhas still remain in the world; their Buddha Lands manifest throughout the universe; their wisdom and compassion are matched by their fundamental vows that remain in perpetual motion, while afflictions remain eternally at rest. This is the state of no-self.

Chen: So, the ultimate goal of self-cultivation is to dissolve the self.

MSY: That’s right. Dissolution of self is no-self. And, no-self is not the same as nothingness.

Chen: Thank you for your guidance, Master. We hope you will join us next time as we continue to share more wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: No-self means ceasing to cling to the self, especially the troubled self. No-self also means spontaneously responding to sentient beings’ conditions and delivering them.

Self-Dissolution for Ordinary People

August 31, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program, the Master talked about the ultimate goal of self-cultivation, which is to dissolve the self, and achieve a state totally free of mental afflictions, a state of boundless wisdom and compassion. It seems that only buddhas and bodhisattvas can achieve this. Is it true that only buddhas and bodhisattvas need to dissolve the self, and it's something that can't be achieved by ordinary people? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, having heard your Dharma talk in our last program, I wonder if self-dissolution is something only buddhas and bodhisattvas need, and whether it is something ordinary people can achieve. Is this a beneficial viewpoint?

Master Sheng Yen: It's a good question, indeed. In our 3-day meditation retreat for professionals, I also talked about this question. I talked about self-affirmation, self-cultivation, and then self-dissolution. I tried to include as much as possible, but even so, after hearing my talk, most practitioners, like you, felt that the idea of self-affirmation sounded fine; it's a practicable idea. And self-cultivation too, of course: a change of attitudes, and developing good points while correcting bad points. But they felt that self-dissolution

is not so easy. As we are born with this self, which is deeply rooted in our personalities, how can we possibly dissolve it? “I” shows up at every turn – “I, I, I.” So how can “no-self” be possible? Suppose we have achieved no-self, or have dissolved the self, would we still eat? Would we still sleep? Would we still make money? Would we still work?

Such thinking and such a perception is wrong. And, some people think that dissolving the self to become buddhas or bodhisattvas is too lofty an aspiration. “How can we ordinary people possibly become buddhas? That is a long way off!” Ordinary people need a long time to become buddhas indeed. Even if we only want to become a bodhisattva “initial determination” is manageable. As for becoming a great bodhisattva, who is effortless, who has attained insight into the non-arising of dharmas, and whose mental afflictions have ceased, such a bodhisattva’s wisdom and compassion remain in motion, somewhat as the law of bodies in motion says. How do we achieve this?

Ordinary people cannot manage it. Indeed, yours is a good question. But I say that it’s possible; otherwise, this would be empty talk and so why bother? I once asked a venerable Dharma teacher if the states of buddhas or great bodhisattvas can be explained or described, so that we could learn from them. He simply told me to stop dreaming, that we as ordinary people would not be able to understand the state of mind of buddhas and the practices adopted by great

bodhisattvas. In a way, he was right. But, as a Chinese saying goes, “For the time being the goal may be out of reach, but we can keep it in our hearts.” Besides, we can still prepare ourselves so that one day we’ll be able to dissolve the self. That’s what the stage of self-cultivation is for: to dissolve the self.

At the retreat, I suggested some methods, but they are not my own invention, they can be found in many sutras as taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. These methods are easy. Anyone can do it. For example, even if we can only dissolve one or two percent of the self, that’s something. If you can dissolve 99 percent, you are already a great bodhisattva. At the stage of ordinary morality, we can become less selfish, cultivate more compassion, reduce some of our mental afflictions, and cultivate some more wisdom. Whenever our emotions emerge, we apply concepts and methods to adjust them, to direct them, and to release them. Isn’t this also dissolving the self? So, while you’re affirming the self, you’re dissolving the self.

Some people tend to be arrogant, conceited, and extremely pompous. After hearing the Dharma, they will feel ashamed and humble; they will know their own faults, and will understand that their achievements and contributions are actually brought about by many other people’s efforts and are created by the time and environment they live in, as well as with the help of powerful people. As a saying

goes, a hero is nothing but a product of his time. This new way of thinking will change their ideas. After a few days of meditation practice their usual arrogant attitude and tendencies gradually change, they become more modest, stop thinking so much of themselves, stop thinking that they are the reason their employees are able to make a living. If these practitioners no longer think like this, then isn't it so that they have reduced and dissolved a little bit of the self?

Chen: Yes, but Master, I often think that self-cultivation alone is enough, because in the process of self-cultivation we're also dissolving the self.

MSY: That is only a method, a concept. Depending on the emphasis, we apply different methods, and approaches. For example, when I say self-dissolution, I'm emphasizing the sense of humility and the virtue of modesty.

Chen: Thank you very much for your guidance. Self-completion is a process of self-affirmation, self-cultivation, and ultimately leading to dissolving the self. We hope you can also practice this process in your lives. Please join us next time to share with us more wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: Self-affirmation, self-cultivation,

and self-dissolution are actually one thing to be practiced in three stages, which lie in letting go of the self and showing compassion to others.

Self-Dissolution through Gratitude and Repentance

September 1, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Today, we'll continue with the topic of perfecting the self. According to the Master this can be seen as a process of three stages: affirming the self, developing or elevating the self, and finally, dissolving the self. If we only affirm and develop the self, we will likely develop an arrogant attitude. That's why we need to dissolve the self. How can we do that? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, toward the end of our last program, you mentioned the importance of dissolving the self, and that the methods for dissolving the self and developing the sense of humility is different from those used in affirming and elevating the self. Today, could you explain the sense of humility in more detail?

Master Sheng Yen: By sense of humility, we mean that we feel as if we haven't achieved enough, or we haven't yet maximized our potential in the process of achieving our successes. We should always maintain this attitude; with such an attitude we feel as if we have received much but repaid only a little, as if we've received bountiful benefits

but only given little in return.

Buddhists believe in the four sources of kindnesses. The first kindness is from our country, which has benefited and helped us enormously. Here, “country” refers to a country as a whole – including society, the government, or its people as a whole. The second kindness is from our parents; we are born and raised by our parents, which in itself is a kindness. The third kindness is from the Three Jewels, one of them being the Dharma, which has given us so much in our lives. What do we mean by so much? Here I’m not referring to the number of sutras, or the many lessons we been given. Even if we hadn’t received instruction or had not received a single sutra it would not have mattered. Just through hearing a single sentence or several sentences of the Dharma – life-changing sentences – we then feel very thankful, as they’ll benefit us immeasurably throughout our lives.

So, I myself have felt grateful to The Three Jewels since I was a teenager, when I first heard the Buddhist teaching on how to change our inverted views into right views. Out of selfishness, ordinary people look at things “upside down.” This selfishness causes our distorted views about this world. If we look at this world from a non-selfish perspective, we will be able to perceive it properly. By doing that, we’ll be free of mental afflictions; doing so, we won’t resent this world, and we will no longer ask so much, make so many demands. We will then live very happily. Having

heard teachings on how to change the inverted views to right views, I have found them most beneficial throughout my life. I just feel gratitude at all times, and I just want to repay this kindness and hope I can always offer more of myself. This is about the kindness of the Dharma.

The fourth kindness is that of sentient beings. What are sentient beings? They are all the people who are directly or indirectly linked to us, or all the people from ancient times up until now – from time immemorial – whom I never knew and never heard of. History, mankind's cultures, and our modern civilizations are not an individual's creation. They are the results of countless people's wisdom and efforts, which we can now sit back and enjoy. For that, we ought to feel thankful – all the time. If we live with gratitude, we'll be able to dissolve the self in us, knowing that we've contributed so little, that our abilities are actually limited, that this universe is so extensive, that our existence is so inconsequential, that our knowledge, abilities, and contributions are not worth mentioning, and that we've received so many kindnesses and benefits – just so many. Just by thinking that way, we'll be living in a state of dissolving the self. Though we are not yet bodhisattvas or buddhas, our arrogant attitude and self-righteousness will be less strong. This is also dissolving the self.

Another method we can apply is repentance. Repentance means that ordinary people are not saints – we

all make mistakes and in our selfishness, harm other sentient beings or people – mainly people. If so, we should repent. What's the purpose of repentance? Having repented we'll realize our wrongdoings; having realized our wrongdoings, we'll feel deeply sorry and thoroughly ashamed of ourselves. Then our self-centeredness will weaken, and we'll feel we have a responsibility to other people. A sense of responsibility will make us feel less shame. A sense of responsibility is toward others. To feel less ashamed is to reduce our own regret, which is also a kind of self – a mentally afflicted self. Then, when we give ourselves, we do not seek rewards. We do so just to repay kindnesses. Giving ourselves is to repay kindnesses, while repentance is to improve ourselves.

That way, our self-centeredness will naturally dissolve. Thus, our mental afflictions will diminish, as will our faults. We will grow in wisdom and loving-kindness, as well as in compassion. Though we haven't reached the state of a buddha in which the self has totally dissolved, we take one small step at a time, one percent at a time, little by little, gradually improving, until we reach the state where we can stay “in motion and at rest” – with our mental afflictions staying at rest and with our wisdom and our compassion staying in motion. Then we will be able to reach that level.

Chen: Thank you very much for your guidance, Master. Though self-dissolution is the state of buddhas and

bodhisattvas, as long as we repent, show a sense of shame, embrace gratitude more often, and practice little by little in our lives, our self-centeredness will gradually dissolve, and we will grow in wisdom and our bliss will increase. We hope you will join us next time as we continue to share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: To dissolve the self, show gratitude for all you have received, cultivate a sense of shame for your errors, and sincerely repent those errors by preventing them from occurring again.





Topic Two



Emotional Intelligence



Putting Out the Mental Fire of Anger

August 20, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In today's society, we often see two people lose their temper because of a disagreement. Their faces redden and their necks stiffen with anger. This doesn't really help solve the problem. The best way is to deal with it peacefully. As the Buddhist saying goes, "Anger is a fire in the mind." Just what should we do to control ourselves and stop being affected by anger? And when our anger rises, how can we put out this mental fire? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for his guidance.

Master Sheng Yen: Ignorance can cause hatred or anger to arise blindly. That's why it's said, "The sudden fire of blind anger burns down the forest of merits," and "As soon as an angry thought arises, numerous barriers emerge." It shows just how easy it is for one to destroy their accumulated merits in a rash moment. It's like children playing with wooden blocks; they will build a nice house, but when they get annoyed, they just give it a kick, and the whole house collapses in a second. Likewise, many people toil all their life to take care of someone, giving them help and support, but a word spoken in anger can permanently erase the kindness they've bestowed on others, undoing all

their previous generosity. To express this momentary anger is really not worthwhile.

So, patience is very important; without it the mind of anger arises through language and through actions and behavior. Another possibility is when someone represses their anger, letting it smolder. Although he says nothing and does nothing, he is actually harboring strong hatred inside. Others may not be aware of this silent, smoldering anger, but it is very painful for the angry person. Therefore, whether openly expressed or silently harbored, being angry is not worth the effort.

Research shows that when one is angry, the cells of their body perish very quickly. Also, hot-tempered people tend to have problems with their endocrine, circulatory, and digestive systems. Venting anger verbally or physically is bad enough, but not venting one's rage, letting it burn and smolder inside, is even more harmful. So, those who bottle up their feelings and suppress their frustrations are usually susceptible to mental illness, or the modern epidemic of cancer. So, anger is damaging to both oneself and others.

How then, can we resolve anger? We can work on it on a conceptual and practical level. Conceptually, we can learn why we are angry, and why we let ourselves suffer by venting, by smoldering inside. It could be because we feel wronged; or because we did or said something wrong, so we blame ourselves and feel self-loathing. To understand, we

must first of all believe in cause and effect. Everything that happens may be a cause or an effect. From the perspective of cause and effect, first, if it is a cause sown by another, there is no need to retaliate. If you seek retribution, the other person will suffer greatly, but you will suffer still more. Second, if it's an effect, just accept it. No need for retribution. Otherwise, your karmic burden will double, and multiply endlessly in the cycle of karma. If you take this view, you don't need to nurse a grievance.

From a practical view, try as you might, if you can't come to grips with a situation, then just let it go. There is no need to seek explanations. Just recite a buddha's name, such as "Amitufo" (Amitabha Buddha), or a bodhisattva's name, such as "Guanyin Pusa" (Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva). Or you can observe your breathing, or observe your thought process. You can also observe the suffering you feel at the moment. Why subject yourself to agony? You are already in pain; why suffer more? Once you reflect on this your anger will gradually abate. At this time, your mind will also stop dwelling on and struggling with whatever has you upset or indignant. Then, your mood will improve, becoming calm and placid. If you can do this, you are less likely to get angry. Amitufo!

Summary: Anger, expressed or repressed, harms yourself and others. It can be resolved through an

understanding of the law of karma or through practices like observing the breath and reciting the Buddha's name.

Eliminating Anxiety and Fear

August 25, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Humans suffer from two major psychological impediments: fear and anxiety. When caught up in fear and anxiety, people are often unable to make the right decision. Either they are indecisive, overly cautious, and lacking in resolution, or they are rash and impatient, often making hasty decisions. How can we eliminate anxiety and fear, and stay calm and unruffled? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance.

Master Sheng Yen: In fact, humans suffer from many psychological afflictions, not just fear and anxiety. We are apt to lose our emotional balance; we tend to feel insecure and at a loss, not knowing which way to turn, how to face the future or the present. Fear and anxiety emerge because we lack self-confidence, or we can say it's because we aren't clear about our current or future situation. They are related: a person lacks self-confidence because he doesn't know his strength and weakness, and he doesn't understand his social role, his standpoint, and his abilities. He doesn't know what will happen in the future. People first begin to feel insecure when they are children. And it's not just humans; animals

also want security.

When there's no rain, we worry it'll rain; when the sky is overcast, we worry about the blazing sun; we worry that it might start to rain or become windy when we go out. Will we get hit by a car? We don't know for sure about that either. People worry about this and that all the time, and end up becoming suspicious of everything. Before going out, some people will pray and ask the gods or Buddha for some guidance. Some smart people know about astrology, or the eight hexagrams of the Book of Changes, with which they'll do some divination. Only when they finish doing this are they sure they can go out. Such people are paranoid and suspicious of everything. Every day, before going out, many people spend time preparing for this and that to make sure that they'll come home safe and sound. This is also a sign of fear and anxiety.

Let's say some people place a Buddha statue on the family altar and worship every day. They pray to the Buddha in the morning that they may have a peaceful day; this shows they're not sure if they'll be safe when they're out. Then, after coming home, they thank the Buddha for protecting them; it means that their safety for that day is not determined by themselves, but depends on the protection of bodhisattvas, gods, or ancestors. They cannot control what happens in their lives; they cannot be their own masters. So they feel insecure all the time.

How can we eliminate the anxiety or fear that weighs on our mind? This is difficult to do. The sutras, especially the *Heart Sutra*, talk about a state that is far removed from inverted views and delusion, and free of all fear. This state can be reached only when one has clearly seen that the five aggregates (skandhas) are all empty, that is, when we realize that our bodies, minds, and worlds are totally empty. Only then can we have true security. Before going out, you won't worry that something might happen. And even if things do happen, it's no big deal. Then you will always live in peace. This is hard to achieve. In other words, if you gain true understanding of your body, mind, and the outer world, you will be free of fear and anxiety.

Yet, try as we may, we always find it impossible to fully control our body, mind, and the outer world. We cannot totally dictate our bodies, such as when we're going to have headaches or when we're going to sneeze. Oftentimes, we tell people to take care, but we'll sneeze the moment we tell them that. A sneeze just comes out by itself. We tell others not to catch cold, but we ourselves catch cold. This happens quite a lot. Telling others to take care shows that we care about them. We can see from this that perfect peace and security do not exist in our world, that we cannot find true peace and security in our world.

How can we attain peace and security then? I just said that it is impossible for us, but it is possible for a great

bodhisattva like Guanyin, who sees the emptiness of the five aggregates. This is to attain great wisdom. Only then is true peace and security possible. Yet, how can ordinary people obtain peace and security? I often tell myself there is nothing to fear. Feeling afraid is of no use. You should make every arrangement you can think of in order to prepare for things that might happen. This is called planning ahead. You must be prepared. But even if you are prepared, you still can't predict what will happen in the future. And things beyond our expectations often occur – someone appears unexpectedly, or a horse with long odds comes along and wins the race. This happens a lot. This is not something we are able to predict. Since it is not something we can predict, being afraid is of no use. So it's best to choose not to fear. Your fear won't help at all but only makes things worse. If you are paranoid and nervous all the time, you won't be able to move a single step; your life will be miserable. So, we must be prepared in advance. We must know ourselves. If we can understand our surroundings and ourselves well, there's no need to fear. It's no use being afraid. So why should we feel afraid? Fear is useless. So why should we fear? Worry is useless. So why should we worry? It would be foolish not to give up useless fear. Amitufo.

Summary: We often suffer from fear and anxiety due to lack of confidence. If we can strive to understand




ourselves and our surroundings, and be prepared in advance,
there is no need to fear. Fear won't help at all.

Improving EQ through Mediation

August 18, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Today we are going to discuss a very popular topic; that is, EQ, or Emotional Quotient. In the past, people valued a high IQ very much, but now the importance of a good EQ seems to surpass IQ. What is EQ? What difference does EQ make in our daily life? And, how does spiritual practice help to improve our EQ? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for his view.

Master Sheng Yen: There are similarities and differences between EQ and IQ. IQ measures a person's native intelligence whereas EQ is a measure of emotional intelligence. So it should be called EI. "E," of course, refers to emotions, your feelings. The buzzword "EQ" was introduced in Taiwan with a book written by the American scholar, Daniel Goleman, who has received awards in science journalism. Having covered the topic for many years, he collected an enormous amount of data. Though it was never mentioned in his book, he is actually a Buddhist, very interested in the Buddhadharma and Tibetan Buddhism. This is very clear. He presented his ideas in a modern scientific way, supported by statistics, and examples. It was powerfully convincing. So, once published, the book quickly became a bestseller.



Many people in Taiwan read the Chinese translation, including myself. I found the content very familiar. Not that I know all the material quoted, but his viewpoints, the way he presents them, and the arguments he put forth are generally not new to me because it actually talked about regulating one's mind. When we teach people how to practice, we tell them to harmonize their body, mind, breath, diet, and sleep. All together there are those five items: first regulating your diet, your sleep, and your body, then your breath and your mind. Once you are able to grasp these basic principles, your mind is bound to calm down. Once you're at peace, your emotional intelligence will definitely improve.

As it says in the Chinese Confucian classic, *The Great Learning*, "A calm mind leads to serenity, then contemplation, and ultimately attainment." This means if your mind is peaceful, you can reflect serenely, and if you can reflect serenely, you'll be able to achieve something. For Buddhists, the purpose of spiritual practice is to cultivate a peaceful mind, but first, we must cultivate a peaceful body, relaxed and at ease. Our mood must be happy, peaceful, and stable. Then our emotions naturally will not fluctuate that much. If we often get agitated, angry, or carried away by success, and end up fighting and arguing, now with this person, now with that, our wisdom will definitely suffer. The decisions we make at such moments are inevitably inferior to those we make when at peace.

So, EQ tells us to relax our mind, be optimistic, stay fit, and maintain our physical and mental health. So how can we achieve this? The best way is to harmonize our body and that is to exercise – doing martial arts, yoga, calisthenics, and so on. The other way is to harmonize our breath by practicing meditation. If we can practice sitting meditation, if we can constantly adjust and harmonize our mind, we will certainly have excellent EQ. Some can elaborate very eloquently on theories of emotional health, but find it's easier said than done. When people provoke them, if their mood can remain unruffled, and their speech and demeanor uninfluenced, then they are really practicing what they preach, giving equal weight to both understanding and practice. Their thoughts, actions, and mind accord perfectly with one another. This takes some skill and we can achieve it by practicing meditation. So, if we want to enhance our EQ, it's best to devote more time to meditation. I am not saying we should try to develop miraculous powers or be Superman. Just practice and stabilize our emotions. That's the first step. This is the important thing to do. Amitufo!

Summary: Meditation is a wonderful way to raise our EQ. It harmonizes our body, breath, and mind so we can be physically relaxed and at ease and emotionally stable and happy.

Managing Emotions through Buddhadharma

August 12, 1996

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone. I'm very happy to see you again on Great Dharma Drum. Buddhism teaches people to be compassionate. When facing vexation we should dissolve the self to break free of the bondage of vexation. However, when a person is in low spirits, in a bad mood, or enraged, they simply forget about having compassion and dissolving the self. How can people avoid getting caught up in their moods and always maintain compassion? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for his guidance.

Master Sheng Yen: Buddhist practice must include two aspects simultaneously: first is to understand or at least be acquainted with Buddhist concepts; second is to actually practice Buddhist methods. Understanding and acquaintance can come from reading books, or listening to lectures or talks on the Dharma. From the words, you can reach a conceptual understanding. Afterward, if there is no serious problem, event, or disturbance in your life, you can control yourself using just these concepts. You will feel that you already understand and can make use of the Dharma, and that the Dharma is good for you. However, the moment you encounter a storm in your life, such as when your spirits are low, you have an uncontrollable rage, or are physically and

mentally exhausted, then mere acquaintance with Buddhist concepts is of no use. Furthermore, when something conflicts with your own interests, these concepts often go right out the window.

We are all basically ordinary human beings; we cannot escape bad moods, selfishness, or illness. Therefore, when we encounter a physical or mental disturbance, it's not easy to use Buddhist ideas to solve the problem. This is why many people read a lot of sutras and books, and often listen to inspiring talks on the Dharma, but still have a bad temper or mean character. They may even do foolish things that are harmful to themselves and others, or say things that hurt themselves and others.

Does it mean they don't understand the Dharma? No, it does not. Then why are they like this? Does this mean the Buddhist teaching, the Dharma, is useless? No, it's that their understanding is only theoretical and conceptual, not integrated into their life. It's often said that cultured men often behave disgracefully. This is because their knowledge is not put into practice, or there is no aspiration to put them into practice. Although these people claim they're following Buddhism, they only know some Buddhist terminology; they are not really practicing Buddhism. Real Buddhist practitioners emphasize continuous practice in word and deed. I'm sure you've heard that singers continually train their voice and practice even when they're not performing.

So constant practice is also needed to gain proficiency and act in harmony with the Dharma. Such a person is a real Buddhist practitioner.

Therefore, Buddhism emphasizes practice. Practicing what? Practicing the precepts, meditative concentration, and wisdom. The first is keeping the precepts; we must often remind ourselves not to do things that Buddhists should not do, and to do things that should be done. If we do not act this way, we violate the precepts. Meditation keeps the body and mind in a state of balance, calmness, stability, and peace. If our mind becomes unsteady, we must immediately turn to some method, such as reciting the Buddha's name, counting our breath, or meditating. Using these methods will help us maintain stability and peace at all times, and will keep ourselves from being swayed by the influence and stimulus of the environment.

As for wisdom, the practice of wisdom calls for observing more, listening more, speaking more, and experiencing more. Wisdom gained from experience is the best kind. Listening, observing, and speaking are also useful, but not as powerful, solid, and useful as wisdom gained from experience. Experience of what? Keeping the precepts and practicing meditation, so as to make our mind as clear as a mirror. This is the practice of precepts, concentration, and wisdom. If we practice these three disciplines while also gaining an understanding of Dharma, we will make very good

Buddhists who can weather any storm without problems.
Amitufo.

Summary: With only conceptual understanding of the Dharma, one is powerless against outside influences. Only by training our mind through precepts, meditation, and wisdom can we weather all the storms of life.

Dealing with Anger

November 27, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Do you get angry very often? According to a recent survey, people in Taiwan tend to get angry very easily: around 50% of the population gets angry nearly every day and around 60% get angry at least once every week, and the target of their anger is often their family. I wonder if this has contributed to so many family problems between parent and child, and family tragedies in Taiwan. Anger is detrimental to both others and us. How can we apply Buddhism to deal with anger? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance. Master, what's the Buddhist perspective concerning the matter of anger?

Master Sheng Yen: People get angry for many reasons – their health, their way of thinking, the weather, the environment, or relationships. So anger has many causes; it's not totally subjective. It's not necessarily because one is less cultivated. Well, it's hard to say. If one is more spiritually cultivated, one can actually avoid anger, despite the presence of factors that might cause anger. When you get angry, people around you will of course be affected, but still you are the one that will suffer the most: Your heart will beat more rapidly, and your blood circulation and breathing will

be disturbed. That's right. And it causes a surge of adrenaline. All that will harm your body.

When you get angry your face turns red; such an act is all harmful to yourself. When we get angry, we may think we are directing our anger toward others, trying to make others feel pain, but we're the one that suffers most. So, once we realize this truth, we can resolve our anger. Can Buddhism offer any help in this respect? Yes, it can. To resolve anger, first we must find why we are angry. And when we learn why we are angry, we will usually find that is was not necessary.

Buddhism teaches "conditioned arising," which means that things happen because they are influenced by many causes working together. Besides, anger afflicts both others and us. Some people think they can conquer or intimidate others, or subject others to their will, by getting angry. It may work once or twice but not always. When people see you using anger as a means to get their way, then that is not real anger, as much as a way of expressing yourself, indicating a strong expectation. However, we must not use anger to conquer, confront, coerce, and suppress others. When a couple quarrels, one speaks angrily, then the other talks back with a raised voice. This ends up with both raising their voices more and more. In the end, when running out of tactics they may resort to violence. That is undesirable. This happens between friends too. So, yelling and anger can't be the solution.

Chen: I see. Master, we often hear news about killings triggered by verbal conflict or a mere look. But I wonder if the killers had really expected that they'd get so angry they'd kill. It might be that they had failed to control themselves. So, when we sense, or even before we sense our rising anger, how can we be alert of sign of our anger and keep it from arising? Can Buddhism help in this respect?

MSY: It takes daily spiritual practice. Some people never think of making a habit of not getting angry; they think that anger is natural, common to every person, that it is too painful to suppress their anger. Therefore they often resort to anger. These people haven't been taught or told since they began to get angry in childhood. When we get angry, our facial expression looks horrible, and, other people will avoid us. Moreover, we will be the one that suffers the most. So, it's best not to suppress others by anger. And, even if we gain a little advantage for the time being, people will be afraid of us to the extent of regarding us as a specter, and find us abhorrent. That would be our biggest loss.

So Buddhism teaches us to adjust our understanding with the help of its methods. We can understand that the targets of our anger or the things we're angry at don't necessarily deserve anger. Problems don't have to be solved by anger, for all things are produced by causes and conditions. This is about Buddhist teachings. As to the methods, when we sense our rising anger, we can focus on our breathing and enjoy it.

It may be that others simply intend to provoke you into losing your temper. In that case, don't be tricked. When others provoke you into anger to make you stumble, to make you feel agony, why fall for it? Just ignore it, or bring your awareness to your breathing, enjoy your breathing. As to other people's intentions, it's their business and has nothing to do with you. That way, you are not likely to get angry.

Chen: I see. Thank you for your guidance. As a Chinese saying goes, "Forbear a while, and there's peace as calm as an unruffled sea; retreat one step, and there's room as vast as the boundless sky." So the next time you notice your rising anger, why don't you try the method the Master just suggested: bring your awareness to your breathing, calm down, and consider if such things and people are really worth your anger, which produces nothing but undesirable results. Please join us in our next program as we continue to share more Buddhist wisdom.

Summary: To deal with anger, trace the source of anger, apply the principle of emptiness, and divert your attention.

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Compassion has No Enemies and Wisdom Engenders No Vexations

November 30, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Today, we'll continue to talk about anger. To be honest, when I encounter some situations at work, I often get angry too. Once, when I was about to be overwhelmed by anger, I remembered Master's words: "A compassionate person has no enemies; a person with wisdom is not troubled." Like a refreshing rain shower, the words immediately extinguished the flames of my anger. I felt so ashamed and regretted being so unkind and unwise. I suppose this teaching can be applied in many other situations. Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance, to give us a more detailed explanation on its meaning. Master, among the so many encouraging words you have spoken, I find this quotation particularly beneficial. In what context do you suggest remembering it?

Master Sheng Yen: It's very simple: Buddhism teaches about compassion in helping sentient beings. How can we have enemies if we resolve to deliver sentient beings? As we want all sentient beings to be delivered, we first develop affinity with them, whatever kind of people they are. Then we won't have any enemies. To become an untroubled person of

wisdom, first we should consider trouble as something that inflicts us the most. So, when we say, “I am so troubled,” we are actually asking for trouble – there’s no way out. But when we use wisdom to deal with trouble, it is like a bright lamp that dispels the darkness. Darkness does not inherently exist; it is only dark when there is no light. Similarly, at the outset there is no trouble; but when we lack wisdom, when we indulge in wrong-way thinking and erroneous views, then there is conflict, contradiction, and struggle.

When we are troubled, we should use the wisdom of the Dharma to release our problems; after that, what remains is only wisdom. We should be compassionate with ourselves as well with others; failing this, we’ll feel agony; we’ll rebuke and not forgive ourselves. We may slap our head, stamp our feet, feeling only regret; this is not being compassionate to ourselves. When we err, we can make amends; when we’ve done something wrong, or fail to act properly, we can still learn over time; but if we hate and torment ourselves, that is very painful. This is not being compassionate to ourselves.

And we do likewise to others. If we are not compassionate to others, hurting them relentlessly, even when they are already hurt, mutually hurting each other, that is lacking in compassion. So when we are compassionate we have no enemies. What does “enemy” mean? In the extreme sense, “enemy” implies that either you die or I die, and there is no compromise. This is enmity, which exists in love, in

business, in war, and in politics.

Sometimes, co-workers can be enemies in competing for a better position or for job performance. This is the way humans are, hoping to move up the career ladder and outperforming others. This is a radical evil – or at least a weakness – in human nature. Knowing it for a weakness, we should be forgiving; we should sympathize and tolerate those less capable, and learn from those more capable. By interacting with and learning from each other, being each other’s teacher or friend, we will grow and so will the others. Society will also change for the better, become brighter. But with wrong-way thinking, people are only concerned about their own problems and do not consider others. Seeing that others are good, they can’t bear it; they want to eliminate what they think is “bad.” Denying both the superior and the inferior, ultimately they find themselves alone. This is lacking compassion. So, compassion means treating others with a mind of equality.

According to recent research in anthropology, the origins of human beings can be traced to Africa, to a fossil of a female. Isn’t this in line with the Buddhist teaching that all sentient beings are equal and come from the same place? Whether the place of origin was Africa isn’t the question. Humans are all the same, differing only in appearance. Nonetheless, our perspective should be that we share the same needs, hopes, and the same human nature. Whether or

not we all came out of Africa, the Chinese claim that they're the descendants of the Yellow Emperor. Christianity says that Abraham was the ancestor. I think these explanations are all based on religious or ethnic pride, so I don't think we need to insist on that. All human beings are related and essentially the same. From this perspective, humans should care for and help each other; we depend on each other. Thinking in this way will benefit both us and others, and what benefits others, benefits us. This way, we have no enemies.

Chen: I see. Isn't this unconditional compassion?

MSY: No, it's not yet at the level of unconditional compassion.

Chen: Or just empathetic compassion?

MSY: Yes, you can say that.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance.

Summary: "A person with compassion has no enemies, and a person of wisdom is not troubled." This can be a motto to benefit us at all times. We hope you can take it to the heart and practice it in your daily life.

Applying Compassion and Wisdom in Daily Life

December 1, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program, the Master said that when we have compassion we have no enemies; with wisdom we are free of troubles. Many practitioners often say that this motto is very useful to them. Let's find out how they apply this motto in their daily lives to reduce their distress. Master, we often think of "intelligence" as implying eloquence, getting good grades, and quick thinking. Is the wisdom taught in Buddhism the same as intelligence? What does the wisdom in Buddhism lead to? Could you explain that first?

Master Sheng Yen: Quick thinking, a good memory, and ingenuity aren't necessarily the same as wisdom. Wisdom in Buddhism refers to the ability to untie one's mental knots. People are often entangled in various mental knots, even since early childhood. People often say, "This is some kind of neurosis." Actually, children also have psychological complexes or emotional knots when confronted with a situation.

Chen: That's right. My eighteen-month son and his

four-year-old sister are often troubled. They compete, they get angry, they cry.

MSY: That's always the case. Or they fight over toys. Not only human beings, but animals are also like that. But animals have less complicated emotions, whereas human beings have thoughts, plans for the future, deliberation, and therefore have more emotional knots than animals, and more complicated ones. Slower-witted people often have less emotional knots than more intelligent people. So, intelligence, cleverness, quick thinking, knowledge, and ingenuity aren't necessarily the same as wisdom. In fact, those traits tend to bring emotional knots if one cares mostly about one's own existence, one's own standpoint and performance, and about whether others care about them.

My monastic disciples have emotional knots too if one of them hasn't practiced correctly but considers himself to be practicing well. Strangely, intelligent people tend to suffer more distress; instead, they tend to lack wisdom. Intelligent people have many troubles; they often struggle, feeling confused and troubled every day. I often advise them, "Why don't you try to be a little 'dumber'? Don't think so much." Hearing words spoken, they often over-interpret it and suspect that the words point to them. Such people tend to have more troubles and lack wisdom. Wise people see things very clearly, knowing that angry speech reflects distress and emotional knots, and that loss of temper

echoes inner problems. And feeling agony, they target their associates. But if we can handle anger in others, we can divert their focus and attention and won't be targeted. So wisdom implies the ability to see the essence through phenomena, not being deceived by phenomena.

Wise people can prevent problems from happening; and when they do happen, apply Buddhadharma to handle them. I teach people to use the four steps to deal with a problem: face it; accept it; handle it; let it go. It is a very useful method and it is wisdom. If we understand too much, think too much, have complicated thinking, we lack wisdom.

Chen: Master, how do your disciples practice “compassion and no enemies; wisdom and no troubles?” Are there models we can study for our daily practice?

MSY: Our enemies, or those we see as enemies in our daily life, are mostly our family and relatives. We often treat people close to us as enemies; some treat their parents as enemies, some their siblings, some their spouse, and some their competing friends. People we don't associate with won't become our enemies. So it seems that the closer the relationship, the more likelihood of enmity. When couples in a tough relationship ask for advice, I tell them to accept, tolerate, and forgive each other, and over time they will come around. Such situations mostly happen between spouses, friends, parent and child.

Some people treat their parents as someone they can't forgive. I tell them that their parents can't possibly be their enemies, that even if they are bad parents we should understand and forgive them, because this is what their conditions are. I'm not saying that parents are always right;— what is wrong is wrong; when parents make mistakes, they are wrong. Nonetheless, we should understand and forgive them, because they are our parents. If you treat them as enemies, you will be in agony. Why not accept them? In doing so, at least we can suffer less pain.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. From the Master's enlightening talk we've confirmed the survey mentioned in one of our programs, that our family members are often the targets of our anger. Our family is dearest to us, so we should treat them with more kindness and compassion. We hope you will join us next time to continue sharing with us more Buddhist wisdom.

Summary: Wisdom is not necessarily intelligence of ingenuity, but the ability to untangle our emotional knots. Kindness and compassion are the best way to interact with others.



Topic Three



Attachment and Jealousy

Attachment Brings Suffering

November 25, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Today, we'll talk about attachment. What is attachment? How is attachment different from stubbornness? What's wrong with attachment? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for his view. Master, could you first tell us what attachment is?

Master Sheng Yen: Attachment may or may not be stubbornness; it means that you can't let go of something. You care too much, and take things too seriously – ideas, people, affairs, or objects. If you care too much about your own thoughts, point of view, standpoint, attitude or status, if you take whatever is related to you too seriously – time, events, things, people, or even concepts, then that's attachment.

Chen: So it may also be related to stubbornness.

MSY: Stubbornness and attachment seem very difficult to distinguish, but they can be. Stubbornness means that I decide to do things a certain way—nobody can change my mind; my thoughts and ways of doing things are fixed; I'll accept no suggestions. No matter how others try to improve or correct me, I'm convinced that I'm always

right. This is being stubborn and opinionated, but it's not necessarily attachment. Attachment means clinging to something obsessively, unable to let go of it. Some cling to love affairs, some to fame and status, some to profit, some get obsessed over trivialities. Some care too much about how they look in their hat, their hairstyle, or what is growing on their face – they care too much about everything and suffer for it. If one is overly concerned with every trifle, they will be constantly stressed, and there is no way they can take a break or relax. This is a very painful condition. So from the Buddhist perspective, attachment results from regarding oneself as the focal point; you care too much about your own advantage, gain, and whether your existence is safeguarded. You are overly concerned about what others think of you, how they regard you, and how they evaluate you. This is not necessarily stubbornness; it's just hoping to be recognized by others, caring a lot about whether they know you. Or you are overly concerned about some person or some thing: "What's wrong?" "What now?"

For example, for a mother to constantly worry about her child is reasonable when the child is young, but not when the child is grown up, married, and has a family. When he's out, the mother always worries that he might not be careful, or that he might not be warm enough. He is a father himself, but is still being treated like a child. Such excessive caring on the mother's part is attachment.

Chen: But Master, is there anything good about attachment? We often say, “Hold onto a good thing.” So if we believe something is good, we stick to it, striving to carry it out. Is that good or not? Can it be that all attachments are bad?

MSY: Attachment shouldn't be confused with persistence or will power. Will power is persistence, perseverance, and determination, totally different from attachment. If you persist in your direction and aspirations, if you hold to the goal and conditions of your endeavor, that is good. Everyone needs to have an aspiration and persevere in it. This is not attachment, though many people call it that; but if this is attachment, it is a good kind.

Chen: So attachment is different from perseverance. Attachment really means that, if you dwell on something excessively, you will suffer constantly and be unable to relax.

MSY: Attachment is worrying and caring too much about something. But will power is persistence; it makes one's direction unchangeable, one's effort steadfast, and one's vow firm. This is all very good. If you want to call it a good kind of attachment, that's also fine. None of us can go without an aspiration, a sense of direction, or will power. Some people say that this is attachment too, but, if so, this is definitely a good attachment. But if the attachment is simply unreasonable, then this clinging only makes you and others

suffer. For example, I have a disciple. She is more than fifty years old, and her mother is more than eighty. The mother still treats her like a little child. They used to live together, but every time the daughter went out for an hour or two and didn't call home, her mother would call her cellphone. It was really hard on her. Later, she simply sent her mother to a nursing home. It may seem cruel, but the daughter needs her own space. It's probably for the best.

Chen: Thank you, Master, for your guidance. According to the Master, attachment is different from will power. So, how can we eliminate attachment? We hope you'll join us next time to share the wisdom of the Buddhadharma.

Summary: If you take things related to you too seriously and cannot let go, that's attachment, a source of suffering. That's different from will power, which helps you strive persistently to fulfill an aspiration.

Principles Versus Self-centeredness

November 26, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Today, we'll continue to discuss attachment. In our last segment, the Master mentioned that attachment comes from the idea of self. We often hear the Buddhist term "attachment to self." Are attachment and attachment to self the same? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen to explain.

Master, before I ask about attachment to self, you said in the last segment that attachment brings numerous sufferings. But we also heard you say, "hold onto a good thing" and "stick to your principles." Are they good things to do? Or will adhering to principles bring suffering too?

Master Sheng Yen: Adhering to principles is basically a good thing, and we should encourage it. But is one holding to a real principle or just a personal bias? If you always insist on your own views and your own ways of doing things, and have a hard time accepting anyone else's suggestions or advice, or you even hurt people by insisting on your "principles," then, it's not a principle but just a personal bias. It's only your opinion, and it's not shared by others. You're not willing to listen to others' opinions, and you don't put yourself in their shoes. You only think about

yourself. This is attachment to self. Egoism is a severe form of attachment in which you think your ideas, your ways of doing things, and your thoughts are the soundest and the most correct. If anybody offers you a suggestion or criticism, you're unlikely to accept it. This is attachment, not adhering to principles.

The principles we adhere to should be acceptable to others – not only in the present, but in the past and future as well. There are principles of behavior, and principles for conducting affairs. The first principle of behavior is to protect oneself; that's very important but it doesn't mean you can hurt others. You should respect others as you respect yourself. While benefiting yourself, you should wish that others benefit too. It's a correct principle. If your principles mean insisting on your own ideas and methods for your own benefit, or the benefit of the few, or simply your own convenience, then this is not adhering to principles. This is simply bias and attachment.

Chen: When you believe you're adhering to principles, how can you tell whether it is principle or bias that you adhere to?

MSY: If you can tell which is which, I believe you'll avoid bias and turn to principle. Most people cannot tell the difference, so they aren't really defending a principle but just clinging to their own bias. We can help them understand

by asking them to consider how other people feel. While you are engaged in doing something or afterwards, consider the reactions of others. If they are happy, it means your principle is probably right, but if most or all of them are pained or upset, and only you feel it is correct, then it's probably personal bias, not a commonly held principle. Therefore, if there is a consensus and it conforms to most people's ideas or wishes, then this is a principle. A principle is not fixed; it can change with the times and the environment. But it should always make both ourselves and others happy, and be accepted by everyone. Then we can call it a principle.

Self-attachment is mentioned very often in Buddhist teachings. Is self-attachment different from other kinds? It is basically the same as attachment; it means clinging to something, ultimately, the "self." Therefore, if one can be free of self-centeredness, there won't be any attachment. If you can relinquish self-centeredness, look at things with detachment, take things lightly, and have the ability to let go, if you can accommodate everyone and everything, then you'll naturally be free of attachments. The cause of attachment is the self.

Another name for self-attachment is "self-centeredness." This is where attachment takes the self as the focal point. Now what kind of harm and vexation does it entail? There are many. If self-centeredness is too ingrained and too strong, then you'll be excessively prickly and

unyielding in personality and thought. Your insistence will be too rigid. So some say we should be inwardly firm and outwardly yielding. Being inwardly firm refers to principles; being outwardly yielding refers to not harming others. Being inwardly firm means you have definite standards, a code for living that you stick to. But, when there's a need to adapt, you mustn't be inflexible – don't be stuck in your ways. You have to apply skillful or expedient methods and techniques, or you may just change your thinking a bit, speak less sharply. Then the problems will be solved, and you won't make others feel that dealing with you is painful or hurtful.

Chen: Being outwardly yielding but inwardly firm may be a way to remove self-attachment. Are there any other ways? Please join us next time to share the wisdom of Buddhist teachings.

Summary: True principles must be acceptable and beneficial to most people, making them happy. Our “principles” are usually just bias and attachments that result from self-centeredness, and cause others harm and pain.

Do Not Attach to Anything, Not Even to Dharma

November 27, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In our last segment, we talked about how people with attachments have many obstructions in their minds. People with excessive self-attachment often hurt others with their harsh, prickly manners. How can we eliminate clinging and self-attachment? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance.

Master, before talking about eliminating attachment, I would like to ask you about the common saying: "I love my teacher, but I love the truth still more." Is clinging to truth a kind of attachment?

Master Sheng Yen: Actually, so-called truth is but an illusion. There's no incontrovertible truth in this world. Today's truth might not be tomorrow's truth. The truth of Westerners is not necessarily the truth of Easterners. This is especially true of religious truths, which people cling to. The truth of one religion is often seen as demonic by another. It's the same with philosophy; so many different truths have been upheld by different philosophical schools from the ancient Greeks to the present. There are modern and postmodern philosophies whose ideas are always in a

state of flux, like the waves of the Yangtze – always pushing on, one after another, constantly changing and shifting with the times and the environment. There's no absolute truth in the world.

So, if someone insists on saying, "I love my teacher, but I love truth still more," it can only refer to something temporary. We can't say the principles, the thoughts, or philosophical concepts that they cling to are completely wrong. Any philosophical ideas and principles, or scientific laws and equations may be considered correct for a time. But later on, when newer and better concepts or methods come out, the old ones are superseded. So the truths we cling to are all right for the time being until something better appears, but we can't say they are eternal, permanent or unchanging principles or truths. There's no such thing in the world.

Chen: Master, you said that some religious doctrines are not truths; that they change with the time. It reminds me of some Buddhists who cling to the Dharma, and hold it as the truth. Is clinging to the Dharma also a kind of attachment?

MSY: It depends. To people who don't know or don't understand the Dharma, we must say the Dharma is the best, that it's the truth. But to people who know the Dharma, who are already proficient in applying the Dharma, we should tell them that the Dharma is but a skillful means, not an absolute or eternal truth to be held onto forever. There's a parable in

the *Diamond Sutra* about crossing the river: we need to take a boat or raft to cross the river, so we get on the boat, hold on tight or remain seated, until it takes us to the other shore. This is the way it should be. But after we have crossed the river, if we don't get off but stay on board, clinging to the boat, we'll never get to the shore. Only when we leave the boat behind can we truly arrive at the shore.

Therefore, Buddhism teaches that to be truly liberated one must let go of the Dharma. Even the Dharma should be let go of, even the doctrines the Buddha taught must be relinquished. Then true liberation can be obtained. That's called "being free and at ease." So with ordinary people who need something to cling to, we let them cling to the Dharma. But for those who have applied the Dharma proficiently, we tell them to let go of it and obtain real liberation.

Chen: So the Dharma is but an instrument.

MSY: Yes, the Dharma is a tool.

Chen: But will such excessive detachment result in a lack of firm views? Is there any difference between detachment and lack of firm views?

MSY: Detachment and not having firm views are not the same. Detachment requires passing through a phase of attachment, including attachment to personal views. Clinging to such views is bias and should be abandoned. Ultimately, we must let go of attachment to the Buddhist truths, such

as “permanent bliss, self-purification,” “suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path,” and “birth, aging, illness, and death.” We take all these doctrines as truths. But if we have already applied these truths, and used them to help ourselves and others, then we shouldn’t think we need to hold on to them forever; we should let go of them. Only then are we truly liberated. This is not lack of a firm view; we actually have it. Having a firm view at a certain phase is a necessary part of the process. After we’ve gone through the process, we should let go of it. Only after we’ve completely let go of all fixed views will we be truly free and at ease. Do we still have firm views? Yes, we do. We adopt the ideas of all beings and the ideas of the current world as our own. This is “delivering sentient beings by adapting to conditions.” This is not the same as attachment; rather, it means having a fixed principle in the midst of detachment. This is adhering to principles.

Chen: Master, now I’m really confused. You said we should adopt the ideas of all beings as our own. But we know that people can be foolish. Do you mean we should we adopt even foolish views as our own?

MSY: Good question. Although sentient beings are often foolish, “all beings” doesn’t refer to anyone in particular. It means all beings as a whole and their common needs. Maybe sentient beings don’t know what they need. But from our observations, we clearly know what they need, or what their needs are at the time. And we give to them

appropriately.

Chen: Thank you, Master, for your guidance. According to the Master, ultimately we should let go of even the Dharma. How can we eliminate attachment? Please join us next time to share the Buddhist teaching.

Summary: The Dharma is like a boat that we use to help ourselves and others cross over to the other shore. But to be really liberated, we must ultimately let go of it when we reach the other shore.

Eliminating Attachment

November 28, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. We'll continue to talk about attachment. Master said that, ultimately, we shouldn't be attached to anything: not to "truth," not to "principles," and [when we are liberated] not even to the Dharma. So, just how can we eliminate attachment? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance.

Master, you said that principles, truths and even the Dharma are not eternal, that they are merely temporary stages, which should ultimately be let go of. So just how can we eliminate attachment?

Master Sheng Yen: We can relinquish attachment mainly through analysis, or through personal experience. Analysis means looking at things theoretically and conceptually, according to the law of dependent origination, which means that phenomena arise interdependently. Concepts, phenomena, people, affairs, and objects all arise due to the coming together of many causes and conditions. This is also true of the formation of ideas. Things don't suddenly spring into existence, nor have they always been there, unchanging, since time immemorial. Everything in the world, including physiological, psychological, social, and

natural phenomena, all arise through the coming together of causes and conditions. Since they come into being in this way, through the combination of many factors, they are all insubstantial.

If we contemplate and understand things in this way, we will see that this also applies to the self: the objects which the “self” clings to (including itself) come about through causes and conditions. The “I” of today might not be the same as the “I” of yesterday. For example, I tell you of a new idea which you never heard of. After hearing this, you might immediately change your way of thinking. Our audience may have the same experience: when they hear a new concept their thinking today may also differ from that of yesterday.

Chen: Master, that that is a great explanation. I feel I’m much different than I was before; people feel I’ve become a totally different person.

MSY: That’s how you can realize that attachment is unnecessary. So all the different phases, times, places, people, affairs, and objects are all produced by causes and conditions. When one thing changes, so does everything else; whatever happens to the smallest part affects the whole. So don’t cling to anything. Things do indeed exist for a time but you should see them as ephemeral phenomena of the present

moment. They might change the next minute, or the next day. Take these flowers for example; today they're lovely, but tomorrow they'll wilt; then we'll replace them with new flowers. So we needn't cling to the beautiful flowers; it's a natural phenomenon that they blossom and wither. Just don't cling to things too much, and you'll be free of attachment. This is the analytical approach.

The other way to eliminate attachment is through experience. We experience our own life from childhood to old age and until death; we're constantly influenced by the information we receive. Our appearance, our concepts, and our environment all keep changing. The same for our bodies: from the time a little girl grows into a teenager, then a woman, then a middle-aged woman, and then an old lady; she is constantly changing. So which stage can she cling to? You personally experience this process. Suppose you're 80 years old, but you look at a photo of yourself at 16, thinking, "This is me." Which one are you – the 16 year-old, or the 80 year-old? Actually, neither one is you, so there's no need to cling. Your sixteenth year has passed, as will your eightieth. There's no need to hold on. This is what we can experience on the physical level while living our lives.

On the psychological level, our concepts also keep changing. If our ideas aren't changing, then education is useless. We are educated, and we're influenced by our environment, our parents, our teachers, and by the ever-

changing times. Our ideas too are changing constantly. Exactly which concept – from what period – is our “self?” Actually, no concepts belong to our self; our ideas are just the combined results of outside information, which we come to regard as our personal views. Our thoughts change; the way we looked at things yesterday might not be the same way we look at things today. A person who never changes is dead, not alive.

The generation gap comes about when we get old and we stop accepting new information; we do not pay attention to changes taking place in the world – nothing is learned or accepted. As a result, we have no idea what young people think. Such lack of understanding creates a generation gap. This is also a personal experience. Using what we experience in our daily life and in our minds, we can prove the non-existence of the self, and the error of attachment.

Chen: Thank you, Master, for your guidance. Are we willing to try the Master’s thought-provoking teachings? Many attachments can be broken, but it seems hard to break the attachment to life and death. How can we break it? Please join us next time to share the wisdom of the Buddhadharma.

Summary: Looking at things analytically according to the law of dependent origination, or using our personal

experiences, we can realize all things are ever changing and insubstantial, and be free of attachment.

Break the Attachment to Life and Death

December 1, 1997

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In the last segment, the Master explained how to use analysis and personal experience to eliminate self-centeredness and self-attachment. But how can we break our attachment to life and death? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance.

Master, many attachments are easier to break than the attachment to life and death, which is very hard for everyone to overcome. It's difficult to be detached about that. Take the recent disaster of the collapse of the Lincoln Mansions apartment building, for example. It's extremely difficult for the families of the victims to get over it. What's your view on this, Master? How can we look at life and death with detachment?

Master Sheng Yen: It's cruel to tell people who are in mourning, "Just get over it." How can we tell someone to just get over it? Even as a Buddhist, it's hard to just let go when one's near and dear ones pass away. How can you tell the mourning family, "The dead are gone; just let it be. Flowers blossom, and then they wither; there're nice days, and rainy days – that's normal; just let it be." Such words are cold-hearted and inhuman. It is like saying living is without

significance. Actually, experiencing the transition from life to death makes our wisdom grow. It makes us face the reality of the world. No one can be indifferent to the death of loved ones; it's not possible.

For example, I had been a monk for a long time, but when I went back to my parents' home and saw their graves, I shed tears just the same. How could this happen to one who has led the monastic life for several decades? I wasn't there at my mother's deathbed or my father's. After several decades, I finally visited my hometown in China. My parents were gone – all I saw were their graves. At that time I naturally felt a distance between the living and the dead. They seemed so near – like they were in front of me – and yet so far away. I still had very distinct and vivid memories of them. After several decades away, there I was in front of their graves. They were reduced to ashes long ago, and they seemed so far away. The feelings of nearness and distance were mixed at that very moment. The permanent separation from loved ones made me shed tears. In that situation, if we aren't touched, we aren't human. Maybe it's because I haven't attained liberation yet, but I wouldn't wail inconsolably, or blame heaven and other people. I wouldn't feel that I'm a heinous sinner, or complain that they died too soon. I wouldn't act that way. That feeling of loss is the same for everyone, including me.

Having already attained buddhahood, Shakyamuni

Buddha still went to visit his mother in the heavens. When his father passed away, he went home to arrange for the funeral. One's affection is naturally revealed when faced with the death of loved ones. He acted like that even though he had already attained buddhahood. But he didn't wail like ordinary people. To be free from the attachment to life and death, we should see it from the perspective of impermanence. The moment we're born, we are destined to die. We cannot live forever. While alive, we know that eventually we'll have to face our mortality. We should always be prepared for death. Nobody knows when the time will come. You mentioned that typhoon Winnie caused the Lincoln Mansion disaster. And over ten people were killed in the Dahu flood. Death may occur at any time: when we are a child or an adult, or when we're old. We just don't know at what age we'll die. But we Buddhists who understand the Buddhadharma are aware that we're mortal, but we have no idea when or under what circumstance death will occur. So let us be always prepared for it. That way, when it does come, we won't be too surprised.

Will I have a car accident today when I go out? I don't know. I hope it won't happen. But what if it does happen and causes my death? I'm already prepared. I'm ready to face death at any time. Why do I prepare for it? Because, if I don't die today, I will eventually, though I don't know when. Of course it would be better to know. Most people

don't know when it'll happen. So, if we can accept and face our mortality by applying the concept of impermanence, our attachment to life and death will be lessened. Only a saint can be completely free from the attachment to life and death, not ordinary people.

Chen: Thank you for your guidance, Master. I think most sentient beings can't look at life and death with detachment because of the fear of death. How can we be free from the fear of death? We hope you'll join us next time to share the wisdom of the Buddhadharma.

Summary: If we can face and accept our mortality by applying the concept of impermanence, and always prepare for it, we will be more detached when we or our loved ones die, and therefore suffer less.

Jealousy and Its Causes

November 18, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. We've already discussed false speech, frivolous talks, divisive words, and abusive speech. So today we'll talk about jealousy. Do you feel uncomfortable, when you think someone is better than you, or if someone is praising another in front of you? If yes, then you are probably jealous. What causes jealousy to arise? And how does it influence us? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for his view.

Master, could you talk about what exactly causes jealousy to arise, which virtually everyone experiences?

Master Sheng Yen: The first possible cause of jealousy is self-preservation. The second is that someone else has what you want. Third, there's no real reason, except that it's an ingrained habit, which everyone inherently has to some extent. Not just humans, but also animals. And both adults and children have it.

Chen: That's true. Sounds like my three year-old daughter. She has a little brother now, and she's very jealous of him. Nobody taught her to be jealous, but she is anyway.

When I carry her brother in my arms, she's not happy about it. So maybe jealousy is innate?

MSY: Yes, it's an inborn trait. It emerges when others have what we don't, or when others want to have some of what we have. The self-preservation I mentioned earlier means that when we have something, we want to have all of it, which is insatiable greed. Like what you just said about your daughter and son: children have no other reason to be jealous except when a child thinks Mommy should be hers alone. There shouldn't be any sibling to occupy her Mommy's time and love, so jealousy arises. She doesn't know this is jealousy; she only thinks, "Mommy is all mine, how can you take her away? This is *my* mother; how can she be *his* mother?" That's natural, an innate habit. Is that totally bad? Not necessarily.

Chen: Oh? Is there anything good about jealousy?

MSY: Yes, there is. Jealousy comes from others having something that we don't, something we wish we had. For example, if I don't have as much knowledge as others, I'm jealous of their knowledge. This drives me to develop myself, and think of ways to increase my knowledge. This kind of jealousy helps me to grow. However, the negative effects of jealousy on oneself and others far outweigh the positive.

Chen: So what exactly are the negative effects?

MSY: There are many. First, jealousy towards others is reciprocated. Second, when we're jealous, we suffer terribly – this is “the flame of jealousy.”

Chen: That's true; jealousy burns in the heart.

MSY: When we're burning with jealousy of someone, we are in great pain. We don't know how to take them down a peg – not to get revenge, but to take them down a peg. “How come he got it and I can't?” But you just can't get everything you want, so you bear a grudge. Once jealousy turns into a grudge, it will do you great harm. In addition, everyone is wary of people who are extremely jealous, so you won't have any friends.

Chen: Are people who like to measure themselves against others more prone to jealousy?

MSY: Yes, most likely. It depends on what they measure by. It could be their capabilities, their own status level. But if we compare ourselves with others in the hope of developing ourselves, then it's not necessarily jealousy. You might just be thinking, “By comparison, I'm not as good as others. So I hope to make greater efforts and catch up to them.” Then it isn't necessarily jealousy.

Chen: So measuring yourself against others has a positive aspect, but if you do it in a negative way, then it becomes jealousy.

MSY: Yes, it becomes jealousy.

Chen: Master, you said that jealousy brings suffering, and is also completely of no avail. What do you mean by this?

MSY: When you're jealous, you are the sufferer. You actually lose friends when they know you're jealous. And everyone keeps you at a distance, knowing about your jealousy. So it's better to be large-hearted, to praise others for their good points, and commend their betters with praise and admiration, but not envy. That's a wonderful and virtuous thing to do. Jealousy is not virtuous; it's a moral defect. A jealous person will look repulsive. Maybe you can try to look nice on the surface but your attitude is horrendous. In time, jealous people's faces gradually become contorted, and so will the tone of their voice. So they already suffer retribution in the present life. Why? Because jealous people become distorted – as their attitudes get twisted, their faces also get distorted. And they distort reality, too – once your attitude is distorted, your face also gets distorted, and then the way you handle things and your world-view also get distorted.

Chen: Thank you for your guidance, Master. As jealousy has such serious consequences, don't you hope to banish it from your mind? We hope you'll join us next time to share the wisdom of the Buddhadharma.

Summary: Jealousy is pointless, bringing you only pain and making you disliked. Instead, it does you good to commend others in a higher position with a gracious mind while further improving yourself.

Eliminating Jealousy

November 19, 1997

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In our last segment, the Master mentioned that jealousy makes one look repulsive, and distorts one's view of the world. So, seeing that jealousy has such strong influence on us, how can we get rid of it? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen more about this.

Master, last time you mentioned that jealousy can make one look repulsive, and completely distort how one views the world. I used to become jealous of people easily, so I know the taste of jealousy well. It makes me feel really bad. Master, do you have any real-life examples that illustrate just how harmful jealousy can be?

Master Sheng Yen: Ms. Chen, you said that you experienced jealousy before, but actually, we can become jealous at any given moment without even being aware of it. Except for bodhisattvas, who aren't subject to jealousy, we all experience it to a greater or lesser extent, at least a faint taste of sour grapes. It's unavoidable. We envy others' success, hoping it's ours. We probably still say: "Congratulations! You're marvelous!" "It must have been difficult, so I'm proud of you. I'm proud of being your friend." But inside, we are actually jealous; it may be faint and subtle, but still,

we somehow feel...“Why not me?”

Yes, “Why not me, why him?” Some people know that they will never obtain such an honor, or achieve such results. But when others obtain it, they still say, “It’s no big deal. It’s nothing extraordinary. He has good family background. His parents gave him a good upbringing.” Or “He has good connections.” Some might even say, “He got promoted because he used flattery.” I’ve heard that before. Some people say, “He’s from a distinguished family.” Or, “He definitely used flattery.” Is it true? Is everyone who’s in a better position than you like that? Not necessarily. Someone might indeed rely on flattery or on good family background. But why did one person’s flattery bring them success while another’s didn’t? Why does one have good family background but another doesn’t? Why did they have so much help from well-intentioned people, while you didn’t? So, unable to obtain what they want, they can’t let go of it, and get a kind of sour taste in their mouth. This is jealousy.

I know a layperson, whose boss tested him with this question: “What do you think about so-and-so (a colleague)?” The boss wanted to know about the capacity of mind of this person. After considering the question for a while, the employee concluded that the boss was thinking about giving his colleague a promotion. He actually thought that the coworker was not bad, in fact very nice; he was outstanding

in his work and attitude, and interacted with others warmheartedly. He really wanted to say so, but on second thought he knew that if he did, then the boss might pass him over in favor of his colleague. So, with this about-face, he said to the boss, “Normally, his performance appears quite good. I believe you agree with me, boss. But, some coworkers have a bad impression of him. Even though he’s sometimes jealous of me, I still think he’s a good person. On the exterior he looks good and he’s good at his work, but he isn’t perfect, probably having just a slight character flaw.”

Once he said this, the boss got the picture of him. It was a test. The boss simply said “I got it; thank you.” In the end this employee didn’t get the promotion, but his coworker did. If he had praised his coworker, he probably would have gotten the promotion. The boss wanted a magnanimous person, a person who is big-hearted, accommodating, and able to praise others. The boss needed someone who could lead others and had a capacity for tolerance because the position was very important. From what he said, the boss found him small-minded. “He’s far from qualified. He’s not qualified at all.” So, in the end, he didn’t get the promotion, but his coworker did. So, by speaking ill of others out of jealousy, he ends up defeating his own purpose, and harming himself. Yes, he harms himself. So, the point is that if we find ourselves jealous, we should immediately come around, and hope that others, even our rivals, succeed and reap benefits.

We should be happy and pleased that they achieve good results. It's good to praise others, and help them succeed while remaining in the background ourselves.

We often say, "When helping others, do it to the very end." Though we are not yet a buddha, it's very meritorious if we help someone achieve buddhahood. It's good for us to help others become buddhas before becoming one ourselves. If we take such an attitude, we won't have any more jealousy.

Chen: Master, you also mentioned that there's a positive side to jealousy, that jealousy can help us grow. How can we remove jealousy while using it to help ourselves grow?

MSY: Try to have empathy with others, whether you know them or not. When they succeed, prosper, or receive praise, you should feel as if you yourself were enjoying these benefits. You must praise whoever reaps good results. With that kind of spirit you'll be inclined to praise, not to be jealous. Even though it's not your personal achievement, it's still an honor for the entire group.

Chen: That's true. Thank you, Master, for your guidance. If we try to look for the merits and good points of others and learn from them, we can continuously make progress. And this is the best way to remove jealousy. We

hope you'll join us next time to share the wisdom of the Buddhadharma.

Summary: If we are jealous, we only harm ourselves and reveal our small-mindedness. When we have empathy for others, we would rejoice in their success and praise it as if it was our own. That way we won't be jealous, but benefit from greater magnanimity.



Topic Four



Temptation and Desires

Genuine Love is Giving

February, 26, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Have you heard the saying, “Life is precious, love even more valuable?” This idea leads many people to pay for love with their own lives, and sometimes resort to killing for love? You might have read in the newspaper or magazines about suicides and murders for love. Is love really worth your own life, or other people’s lives? Let’s ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, what are your views on love? You said before that human beings have many desires. Then is love a very profound, great desire of the human mind?

Master Sheng Yen: Love is called “the sea of desire.” Among all desires, love between men and women can be the most vexing. People in love hope to control each other, possess each other, and demand things of each other. Therefore, they often find themselves entangled. So love can’t be explained in words; only people in love can experience and feel it for themselves. It is the person who drinks the water who knows how hot or cold it is. But some love relationships don’t involve sex; the parties just love each other emotionally, and they just can’t let go. In this case, they feel they must have love; if they can’t have it they

won't let other people have it, either.

We hear of people who say, "I can't live without you." This is losing one's head. Love is stronger than any other emotion, so it's very hard to untangle. So if two love each other this obsessively, then it's hard for anyone or anything to separate them. Then it's like choosing between destroying your life or preserving this love and you can only choose one. Only novelists can describe such scenarios; other people can't. Only those are trapped in this situation can understand what it feels like. Then they are in big trouble!

We read a story about a person so much in love with a woman that he would have died for her. Then his parents took pains to separate them. After some years they met again, and he wondered why he once loved her so much that he had been willing to die for her. He now found it incredible and no longer felt the same way. Why is that? What does it mean? This is obsession; when we're in love, we lose our ability to reason. It's like when a needle meets the magnet. Without any particular reason, the needle is drawn to the magnet. That's the way it is. Therefore, if one is trapped in a net, or a whirlpool of love, it's not easy to get out. One needs guidance from others to escape. Otherwise, one may suffer so much that one may want to kill oneself or others. At this point, are there friends and family members to help? Is it even possible to help? Therefore, it is best not to fall into this predicament.

Chen: Can the Dharma offer any help in this respect?

MSY: It can help you before you get sucked into this whirlpool, before you are trapped. For example, a young man and woman should keep their relationship a little cooler, not get so obsessed when seeing each other. They can still share a strong, solid love. But first they can start by being friends. Once they are friends, they needn't be so infatuated with each other. If they can marry, that's great; if they can't, it doesn't actually matter that much. It would be better if they understood the Buddhist concept of causes and conditions. They would know that with the right causes and conditions, they will come together, but without that they will remain separate.

Chen: Will people feel less attached this way?

MSY: Yes. You know the Dharma very well, probably because you and your husband don't cling to each other. Clinging too much is an agony; love itself is a painful thing. I often tell young people that true love requires giving. How your giving will be repaid is up to the other. Don't keep it on your mind. Since you love your spouse, you should give, giving your sincerity as well as your love. If you can be repaid, great; if you can't, it's due to causes and conditions. As you just said, the right causes and conditions rely on both sides, not on one side alone. Moreover, even if two people are deeply in love, causes and conditions may intrude,

preventing them from staying together for the time being. In that case, there's nothing they can do about it. So there's no need to feel desperate. The wisdom of the Dharma is indeed useful when it comes to love. It still can help us.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. We hope you'll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: A happy relationship requires the right causes and conditions. First keep the relationship a little cooler while doing your part to give. Leave any possible reward to the other.

Letting Go of Attachment – Awaken Amidst Being Sentient

March 1, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Today we'll continue to talk about love. Recently there have been several suicides and murders committed in the name of love, which have shocked our society. Why is it so hard to cross the threshold of love? How can the Dharma help us in this respect? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, the Buddhist term “sentient beings” refers to all living beings that harbor emotions. Does that mean all living creatures are full of emotions?

Master Sheng Yen: In Buddhism a sentient being is a living being that is not yet able to let go of the attachment to life. We may not realize the meaning of life, but we will always find life valuable. Therefore, anything connected to life – be it people, things, or objects – will arouse our desire to either pursue or reject it. When it can safeguard, help, and benefit our life we go out and pursue it. When we instinctively require a certain thing, we will go and pursue it. If something goes against our instinct or interest, we will reject or ignore it. This is sentience. Emotion is not logical at all; it's purely subjective when we like or dislike, want or

don't want. There isn't any particular reason involved.

Chen: It seems that the sentience that is discussed in Buddhism is the same as our desire, the desire and attachment to life?

MSY: You can say that. Attachment to life is of course a desire; people don't want to die, or to get hurt, or suffer damage and losses. We want to protect our life, which is the desire to live and survive. This wish to survive is also a kind of innate desire. But some desires spring from one's own fantasies, and some from things appearing in front of our eyes to tempt us, while some represent interests we've developed since childhood, or due to some event. Then these become our likes or hobbies. Some appear as a kind of personal or mental inclination. For example, some people like music, some like exercise, and some enjoy reading, while some see those as unpleasant. Such desires all develop from our personal inclination and interest. Such interests can contribute to one's sustenance and search for the meaning of life – one relies on one's own desires and interests for sustenance. These can all be referred to as “sentience.” Without sentience, people can't continue living; it will become a lack of desire to live, giving up the survival instinct. Therefore, sentience is not particularly a bad thing; it serves as a net to protect one's life, a driving force that enables one to live on. Though Buddhism regards sentience

and desire as having a negative aspect, nonetheless, in appropriate measure they are still necessary; one can't do without them as they keep one's life going.

Chen: But in Buddhism, enlightened sentient beings become bodhisattvas.

MSY: Bodhisattvas are enlightened sentient beings. What does that mean? Bodhisattvas know that sentient beings have emotions and desires for the purpose of protecting their lives, and that the attachment to one's life is a human instinct. But out of this instinct, we develop many troubles and pains, distressing not only ourselves but also others. We hurt each other, creating the sea of suffering for ourselves. Therefore, bodhisattvas know that people's suffering comes from the attachment to emotions. If you can face your emotions without being harmed, without hurting yourself and others, you can become a bodhisattva. Then you are enlightened. It's not that enlightened ones need no food, water, and clothing, or that they do not see or hear like other people. However, gain or loss, and having much or little, are equally fine with them, and are accepted with equanimity. This is the way of bodhisattvas because they can leave suffering behind. Do they need food? They still have the desire for food. Then, can a bodhisattva have a family? Yes, he or she can. Bodhisattvas as laypeople can still have a family, but within the family they don't become overly

attached, entangled, or possessive. Instead, they contribute, develop, and learn, becoming companions on the Path. This also reflects sentience, based on which they become enlightened as a bodhisattva.

Can this term “enlightened sentient beings” be explained as the way bodhisattvas inspire ordinary sentient beings? Bodhisattvas are called enlightened sentient beings in two senses: one sense refers to them as enlightened sentient beings; the other is that they awaken and help other sentient beings. They benefit themselves by becoming enlightened, and they benefit others by awakening and enlightening other sentient beings.

Chen: Thank you Master, for your guidance. From the Master’s guidance we realize that what makes us suffer is not emotion itself, but our attachment to it. So we need to break off this attachment, not the emotion. We hope you’ll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: Ordinary people cling to personal feelings while bodhisattvas keep their mind and emotions on an even keel.

Eliminating Attachment to Worldly Emotions and Desires

March 3, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. Today we'll continue to talk about love. In our last program, the Master told us that all sentient beings have emotions, worldly emotions and desires. But what pains us is not emotions and desires as such, but our attachment to them. How can the Dharma help us with this? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, since we all have worldly emotions and desires, and our attachment to them is the source of our suffering, how can the Dharma help us eliminate this attachment?

Master Sheng Yen: One way to be free of attachments is to isolate ourselves from these emotions and desires; to give them up all at once. When encountering emotions and desires, we brace ourselves to keep away from them. But this is like pulling up weeds by their roots, and that is actually not easy. Moreover, rigorous practice in solitude may not eliminate all emotions and desires. Though physically away from the environment of the five senses, we may still be attached to our own body and to what goes on in the mind. There's still conflict and contradiction within which are

not easily eradicated. However, isolation or renunciation – leaving home and practicing the Way – can still serve as a method.

Another way is to constantly use thoughts to help us become immune to emotions and desires; when these appear before us, we use concepts to adjust ourselves. This may sound easier in that you only need concepts to correct yourself, but it's not; it takes long practice. And very often, when we encounter a situation, it's already too late to apply concepts.

Say that beauty, fame, fortune, position, and power appear to tempt you; can you say you don't want it? It's indeed hard to say "no." Even though you say no at the moment, it's still hard to reject them. At such a time it will be very difficult to try to use concepts to guide yourself. So this takes daily spiritual practice. Immediately adjust your mindset whenever something striking, tempting, and stimulating appears in front of you. First, refrain from seeing and hearing it; then focus on your breathing, and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. Have you ever noticed that when some people are yelled at they simply recite "Amitufo"? Or, when there is a temptation, they simply ignore it and concentrate on their breathing? By not seeing and hearing it as a way to keep ourselves pure, we get to reject temptation. This also takes practice, day and night, or whenever we're not occupied.

Look within yourself rather than to the outside. When we look outside, we are affected by our environment. So the next time I see delicious food or a big cake, I must look within and consider how many calories it contains. If people who want to stop smoking, drinking, or taking drugs do not have access to these things, they may be able to give them up. But in the face of the slightest temptation they'll fail to quit their old habits. Therefore, we need to constantly guard against what tempts us. On one hand, we have to correct our mindset; on the other, we should try to keep away from those temptations.

Some people have had kleptomania since their childhood, and always covet other people's belongings. It's not because they urgently need these things, or because they lack them. They just have to take things from others because they want to, or else they'll feel bad. They just have to possess it. Then this becomes a habit, and it is also due to temptation. They can train themselves to walk away or to keep away from the things they covet, instead of getting close to them. We may like something, which we don't need or shouldn't want. Then we should walk away, whenever we see or smell it.

For example, some people enjoy eating meat; when they smell the aroma of cooked meat, they immediately want to eat it. Isn't that so? It's been a very long time since I ate meat. When you haven't eaten meat for a long, long time, it

really doesn't agree with you when you try it again. But if you've only recently given up meat, you can easily resume eating it. At this moment, in the presences of delicious-smelling meat, just walk away as best as you can or its aroma will tempt you. So you need to strengthen your will and leave the temptation as soon as possible!

To cut our attachment to desires, one method is to change and correct our thinking; another is to train ourselves to avoid the temptations of the five senses.

Chen: But love seems different from these situations. Everyone pursues love. So when it comes to a loving relationship, how can we maintain it but not attach to it?

MSY: Love is more difficult. Maintaining a loving relationship without attachment is never easy. However, I personally do not have such experiences to answer your question. Maybe we can continue this topic in our next program, to see if the Dharma can be helpful.

Chen: Thank you, Master for your guidance. We hope you'll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: We can break our attachment to worldly emotions and desires by keeping ourselves away from them or by changing our thinking about emotions and desires.

Dharma as an Antidote to Temptation

March 3, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. People all have worldly emotions and desires. How do we free ourselves from the attachment to them? In our last program, the Master said that in facing temptation, emotions, and desires, we can apply methods to change our thoughts. How do we practice this in daily life? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, in our last program, you used some examples about how to change our mindset [so as to be more immune to attachments]. What other concepts can help us transform our emotions and desires, and let go of our attachment to temptations?

Master Sheng Yen: When we confront temptation, we must keep away from it or correct our thinking by constantly reminding ourselves. However, we need the conviction that our actions are connected to real life; otherwise, just reminding ourselves may be useful, but much less effective. For example, a 13-year old American boy read that much of the beef the Americans eat is imported from South America. In Brazil, there is an enormous tropical rainforest, the Amazon. Ranchers simply cut down the trees in the rainforest to raise cattle. On this wide spread of land,

they grow pastureland to raise cattle. As a result, the ozone layer has been damaged, deforestation has had an impact on the Earth's ecosystem, endangering our planet, and destroying our living environment. After reading the report, this boy just stopped eating beef and hamburgers. But his father told him, "Not eating beef on your own does no good; everybody else is still eating it. They're still cutting down trees; people still raise cattle." The boy replied, "At least *I'm* not eating it. Then there's one less person eating beef; and when fewer people eat it, fewer trees will be cut down. So I absolutely won't eat it."

He never ate beef or hamburgers again. He related to it personally; this is how he felt. This child felt the issue is closely linked to environmental protection, so he decided not to eat beef anymore. But will everyone think like this boy? Even now while I'm speaking and our audience is watching this program, can they decide not to eat beef anymore?

Chen: I won't eat beef anymore.

MSY: You're already a vegetarian! Some people can immediately realize that it not only concerns their lives but also other people's; they can relate. Afterwards, when they see a dish with meat, they will immediately remind themselves, that it is not something they will eat. When our worldly emotions and desires emerge, we can think first that if we fall into it, it does no good to ourselves or to other

people. It's harmful to others and to us. So why bother? So we have to constantly correct ourselves with such ideas; in addition, we must recognize that it's closely connected to our lives and must relate to it personally. This is a shared existence among living beings; harming others means harming yourself. So why do it?

Here's another example: If you already have a boyfriend, and another guy appears, you want him, too, and when a third appears, you also want him. They're all handsome and smart, understanding, and rich. If you want them all, then you're playing with love. It's more terrible than playing with fire. It's dreadful. If you're alert to it and understand that playing like this may cost you your life one day and the lives of others too, and that this is a terrible thing to do and you should stop it before it's too late. People who are alert to this are able to balance reason and emotions. If they lack this sensitivity, or worse, if they are aware of it, knowing full well it will lead to trouble, but still think, "It should be okay. I want it. I just want it," or "I can't get over it. I just want it and I don't care about the consequences. I want it now!" Like things will be OK in the end. When you have such thoughts, then you'll have no way to resist.

Therefore, we have to keep alert at all times and places not to fall into the pit of our emotions and desires; we'll suffer greatly though we may enjoy it at the outset. We feel it's so romantic, it's so wonderful. In the Buddhist

scriptures there is an allegory about honey on the blade of a knife. Though the honey is sweet, if someone licks it, the knife may cut the tongue. So we must be cautious. When we see honey on a knife, we remind ourselves that it's dangerous, and we can't lick it however sweet. If we can think this way, we can reduce many of our problems and troubles; we can reduce a lot of our agony.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. Actually reducing our distress is not that difficult. As long as you can follow the wisdom of the Dharma, I believe you can reduce many of your troubles. We hope you'll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: We can reduce our desires by following the Dharma; in this way, we can release our troubles and distress.

Compassion Amidst Temptation

March 5, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program, Master said by constantly looking at all phenomena in terms of the law of causes and conditions, we'll benefit greatly, and thus won't be tempted by worldly emotions and desires and will be free of attachments. Besides the law of causes and conditions, are there any other Buddhist ideas that can help us? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, people are born with desires that form the basis of our existence. However, desires also bring us much distress and suffering. So we must eliminate our excessive attachment to desires. Last time, the Master told us about the law of causes and conditions. Are there any other Buddhist views that can help us?

Master Sheng Yen: Having compassion is also very useful; compassion requires us to consider others, to develop empathy towards them, and relate to what others – people or animals – feel. When you want to eat meat, consider that meat comes from animals which are also sentient beings – they have lives too, just as we have. All animals fear death and would like to live longer. So how can we bear to eat them? This is compassion. Also, when we see a beautiful

woman, or a handsome man, we should consider that they're someone's child. When they are someone else's spouse or lover, if we steal them away or go and pursue them, we will hurt their partner and that is not compassionate. Even when they're willing to be with you, you have to consider what will happen to those closely related to them.

Chinese people always consider their parents. Just as your parents love and care for you, so do the parents of any other girl. If you do anything to hurt her, her parents will feel sad and great distress. That means you're not being compassionate. If someone doesn't care for you and you still insist on courting them, then that is not being compassionate either, because you are being troublesome to them, making them suffer and feel frightened. If someone wants to break up with you, and you threaten them with death, this is even worse and even less compassionate. Therefore, whatever temptation or desire emerges in front of you, by having compassion for others, you will gradually reduce the desire that you must have them by all means. Would you like it if people treated you with the same disregard as you treat them? Would you find it all right? If not, why treat other people this way? That is not being compassionate. So using compassion to protect both others and ourselves is the safest way.

Let's take another example, lying. Lying seems like a bit of pretty harmless fun. People sometimes tell lies as

a joke. I myself have a personal experience of this. I have a good friend, whom I met in the army when I was young. This friend never told a lie. But one day he told me, "One of your literary friends is here to see you." At that time I had been writing articles, novels and poems for magazines and newspapers. I said, "I wasn't aware I had any visitors!" He said, "This person admires your writing and so he's here to see you." I said, "But we haven't made an appointment." "No, it's not like that," he said, "I told him I am your friend and so he would very much like to meet you." I asked him where this friend was. He said, "He is two miles from here, waiting for you at a teahouse, a small teahouse. He's waiting for you there." I thought this was a rare opportunity, to be able to meet such a person. So I said, "I will go!"

And I really walked two miles to the teahouse. When I arrived there, I told people who I was, but no one paid any attention to me. Many people were drinking tea, but they paid no attention to me. So I announced again who I was. Still, they just ignored me. Then the owner of the teahouse said to me, "Welcome. You're new here. Let me treat you to a cup of tea." So I stayed and drank the tea. Then I asked him if there was someone waiting for me. He asked me, "Who?" I said I didn't know either. Then he said, "Are you out of mind?" So that's the story.

I walked there and back, four miles altogether! When I got back I was very angry. I questioned my friend, "You're

my good friend! How could you play such a trick on me, lying to me?” He just laughed at me and said, “You care so much about your marvelous articles. What’s so great about contributing some articles to a magazine? And you expect people to admire you just for that. I was just kidding!” From that time on, I never treated him as my friend. However, after some time, I began to pity him. He just lied the one time and I just refused to be friends with him anymore. That wasn’t right either. So later we resumed our friendship. This is a kind of compassion, that when interacting with people we can forgive them and won’t harm them.

Chen: If he had been a bit more compassionate he wouldn’t have done that.

MSY: That’s right, he wouldn’t have done that.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. The Master said people with compassion find no enemies. And I think with compassion we won’t bring distress for ourselves. Therefore, let us develop more compassion when dealing with things and situations. We hope you’ll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: By constantly harboring a compassionate mind, we won’t have enemies or distress.




Benefits of Compassion for Ourselves and Others

March 8, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. In our last program the Master told us how to use compassion in the face of our worldly emotions and desires, as well as how to break our attachments and resist temptation. However, some people might think that if they're compassionate while other people are not, they may be at a disadvantage. Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance on this question.

Master, using compassion with others is very good for us as individuals. However, our society is rife with examples of "the strong feeding on the weak." So some people might think that even when they harbor a compassionate mind, others won't necessarily reciprocate. In this case, when we're involved in battles for fame, fortune, and beauty, aren't we just going to lose out; won't we always be at a disadvantage? Master, what is your view on this?

Master Sheng Yen: We will suffer loss for the time being, certainly. However, if we look at the bigger picture, we won't suffer any loss; instead, we will benefit. Compassion means giving others a way out, enabling them to live a happy life, offering them hope and freedom. Let's



say two people walk into each other on a log over a stream, and neither shows compassion and makes way for the other. With neither side giving in, neither will advance. If two tigers fight, one may die and the victor may be wounded. In this case the wounded certainly suffers loss, and the one killed even more so. So both suffer. If we are compassionate and make way for others, they may indeed take advantage, and we may suffer some loss. However, we're not dead or wounded. Therefore, when we're in a deadlock situation, confronting a tough opponent, and we know if we keep fighting we'll only end up hurting each other, then let go of it. As long as we're still alive, we still have hope.

So in the end compassion serves to protect us. Though for the time being we may seem to be submissive and appear to fail where others succeed, this attitude preserves our strength and safeguards our lives from suffering great harm. Take a step back; be compassionate; let people pass by first. By doing that, at least we can still survive. It's never easy to be mutually compassionate. If we are compassionate to others, will they likely be compassionate to us in return? Yes, it's possible. There are such chances, but they are rare. So in the end we still talk about compassion in terms of self-protection. Some will be thankful, while some will think it's their due. "You don't want it, so I'll take it. I don't have to thank you because I deserve it." If we encounter such a situation, don't ever think that this is a disgrace and look

down ourselves. It's not necessary. However, as a Chinese saying goes, "Never decline when it comes to righteousness."

Chen: Never decline when it comes to righteousness.

MSY: That's right. If we give in to someone, only to allow him to harm others, if we let him have his way, allowing him to demand even more, then we can't give ground anymore. What do we do then, if that's the bottom line? It depends on our ability. We measure our own ability and if we have it, then strive for it to the very end. Otherwise, he will harm more people. So we must consider the way to show our compassion.

Chen: I see. But I feel that most of the time people are reluctant to let go of emotions. Many people think that they've already given so much, and if they can't gain any repayment, they won't find it fair and worthwhile. In this situation, how can compassion help?

MSY: We hear people say, "I've already given so much..." Now, where does experience come from? We gain experience from our losses, setbacks, and failures. Since we've already failed after putting in a lot of effort, do we still want to take it back? It's impossible. It's like gamblers who lose money and want to win their money back. So they borrow money and gamble again and again, until they lose everything. They just get sucked in deeper. And that's

foolish. It's the same with love, friendship, career, and other things. If it's obvious that we're no match for the other, that we'll definitely lose, or that we've already lost a lot, retreat as soon as possible before we get sucked in even deeper. If we do lose, take it as a lesson. At least we've gained an experience, and it's enough.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. Compassion is not only for others; it's also for us. It will help us greatly in dealing with people and things, to constantly embrace compassion. We hope you'll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: By applying compassion we won't harm others, but instead benefit others while safeguarding ourselves from distress.

Methods for Coping with Temptation

March 9, 1999

Ms. Chen: Hello everyone. Welcome again to Great Dharma Drum. During the last few programs, Master talked about how to break our attachment to worldly emotions and desires, and how to resist temptation by understanding the law of causes and conditions, using compassion, and transforming our thoughts. Then, are there any other more Buddhist ways that can help us? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for further guidance.

Master, in our last few programs, you talked about transforming our thoughts, developing compassion, and looking at things in terms of causes and conditions. Are there still any other ways that can help us face worldly emotions and desires, as well as temptation?

Master Sheng Yen: In spiritual practice, guiding and correcting the concepts is very important. In our last few programs, we talked about causes and conditions, and compassion. However, sometimes the concepts alone just won't help because it's too late. By the time our emotions and desires arise we have already been sucked in. Therefore, we need additional ways, which include reining in the six sensory organs. Reining in the six sensory organs means keeping our mind from looking outward through the six

sensory organs, and instead looking inward by reining them in. When our senses come in contact with something we may like it, love it, want to possess it, and hope to strive for it. If we are unable to resist the temptation, we should withdraw our senses away from it. Sometimes even when we close our eyes, we still see the image in our mind; if we plug our ears, we still hear the sounds in our mind. At this time, we have to discern how we're troubled by it. Is it comfortable or not? Is it happy or not, painful or enjoyable? What does it actually feel like? If we say it's happiness, what kind of happiness? It is enough to give us a breakdown! We close our eyes and we still can see the image in our eyes. This is suffering! Even when it's not in front of us, we can still see it in our imagination.

I hear that people in love, especially when deeply in love, can see and hear their lover's voice and smiles. Their smiles and voice keep appearing in our mind. They linger in your head and you just can't get rid of them.

Chen: Right. Even if they're far away, they still seem to be right in front of us. This is lovesickness.

MSY: That's right. Lovesickness is usually mutual. If it's one-sided and our love is not returned, we suffer greatly. At this time, just tell ourselves that such things are really painful. Feeling agony, we should then analyze what our eyes are seeing now. Is it real? Once we open our eyes

it's gone. Is what we hear real? Examine further and we will find out there's no such voice at all. It's just what we keep thinking in our head, causing us agony. Then we can use another method. For example, we can be constantly mindful of our breathing; by focusing our attention on the sensation of breathing, by enjoying the feeling of breathing, we can transform our emotion. We were having painful thoughts, but now we are focusing our attention on breathing, and we may transform our thoughts.

Or, we can analyze our thoughts. Thoughts appear one after another, consecutively. If it is a coarse, strong, and fierce thought, we simply can't get rid of it. We can count our breaths, practice mindful breathing, and enjoy our breathing. Then if the thought appears again, we will gradually realize that what we were thinking about just vanishes the next moment. It's because we are focusing on our breathing, and therefore have cut off that thought. However, if our focus on breathing is then cut off, the thought will return again. When that happens, simply go back to focus on our breathing again, to cut that thought off. So alternately, we keep breaking the thoughts into pieces and segments. Since these thoughts are segments, we can say they're only illusions or imagination. Then we can gradually let go of these thoughts.

Alternatively, when our mind is barraged by wandering thoughts and we just can't control it, then doing prostrations to the Buddha will work. How do we do

prostrations? Pay attention to how our body feels; we feel its movements. When we're doing prostrations, we pay attention to every movement – prostrating, and then standing up. If you don't know how to do prostrations, you can just kneel, or bow to the Buddha. When we prostrate, stand up, and then prostrate, that's the Buddhist way. Or we can take a walk, focusing on each step. It's a bit like walking meditation. By doing so, we can draw our attention back to our body. So this is called reining in the mind. That is, we draw back our mind that is usually searching outwards; we draw it back and focus on our breathing, the feeling of our thought and movement. By constantly practicing like this, gradually we will be able to let go of the external phenomena.

Chen: Thank you Master for your guidance. This is a very good method. Why don't we give it a try? We hope you'll join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: Reining in the six senses, counting breaths, cutting off our thoughts, and making prostrations can all be adopted as our methods for spiritual practice.



Topic Five



The Workplace

The Meaning of Work

March 30, 1995

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Today, we will be talking about the meaning of work. Besides drawing a salary, what else is there? In today's society, many people commute to work early each day, go home at night, and rush to work again the next morning. Each day of their working life is busy and hectic, having to deal with various bothersome people and affairs. The same cycle repeats itself day after day, week after week. Thus, they start to question their job. Besides getting paid, what other significance is there? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen.

Master Sheng Yen: This is a good question. If you feel that you are just making money until you are sick of it, you can try being a volunteer at Nung Chan Monastery, where you do not have to draw a salary. But without a salary, what are you going to live on? The necessities of daily life always require money; you cannot live without money. In the agricultural society of the past, people work from dawn to dusk. That's a job too. Modern people commute to and from an office. This commercial and industrial society is different from an agricultural society, which is simpler. When working in a field, one comes into contact with soil,

grass, and some crops that one plants.

But today, in commerce and industry, those we encounter in our work environment are human beings. Whatever job you do, human beings will always be involved. Above you are your superiors, below you are your subordinates and around you are your colleagues. Even if you are the boss and there is no one above you, there are still your customers, and others you interact with, including the government. Too many complex human relationships exist in such a society. Thus, many people feel that living in a modern society is too painful, and they are very envious of ancient people, who only had to work in the fields every day, and did not need to deal with problems between people.

I think such difficulties do not come from one's job, but from problems that occur with people on the job. This is normal. People give you headaches and you give others headaches too. People create certain difficulties for you and you create certain difficulties for others too. You feel powerless to change the situation, and others feel the same way. Thus, this is very reasonable and very fair. When people come together, there will always be problems because each person has a different way of thinking, a different position, and has a different background. There will always be conflicts and friction. This is what we call an occupational sickness or occupational fatigue. This is very common in our commercial-industrial society today.

But from the perspective of the Dharma, this issue can be resolved. When we eat our meals each day, wear our clothes, sleep and walk, where do we think these things come from? The resources of life come from many other people who work to produce the living environment and conditions we enjoy. Without their work, we will not be able to maintain our way of life. Thus, we have to think of ourselves, living in this society and among human beings, as a factor in a set of cooperative relationships, or a unit in these relationships or a force. If we give up our job but still want to eat, dress and relax, it would be unreasonable and unfair.

So, we must not see our job as just earning a salary. Instead, we should say that our job, which we are doing now, is a required input for participating in community life. This is why at the end of each month we get a check. The salary we received reflects the price we must pay to get the way of life we want. Everyone is the same. So, everyone lives under this circumstance. In our society, we help each other and cooperate with each other. One does not just live on his or her own. Even if only one person does not work, whether or not he gets a salary, his idleness creates, for others, a burden and an encumbrance. Such a person does not have a conscience. He lets everyone down.

And, if we are intelligent, if we are wiser, more capable and more skilled than others, then we are benefiting the human race. Although we also draw a salary like

everyone else, our contribution is bigger. Contributing more does not mean our reward should be proportional to our effort; if we give a lot but receive little, this is also good. We call this “forming karmic affinities” or forming karmic ties with others. Being able to form karmic ties with others, help others and help society – that is the spirit of a bodhisattva. It does not matter if we do not especially want to be a bodhisattva. When we work a little extra, contribute a little extra effort to sentient beings, we make an extra deposit in the “bank” of heaven. When our deposits of merit accumulate as we save more and more, then our blessings will grow bigger and bigger.

Thus, as a person in a community, one should exert one’s ability as much as possible, including one’s knowledge and skills. In this way one will grow and strengthen one’s ability to serve the community. Thus, when we go to work we are performing a service, aren’t we? The more we give, the more we feel thankful because we have an opportunity to serve and contribute, and thus be happy. With this attitude, we will not feel tired of working, will not have occupational fatigue, and will not feel powerless regarding your work. Whether we have made progress or not, we are making contributions. As long as we have a job, it is a service. If we have this mindset, I believe we will enjoy our job every day.

Chen: Besides giving us a salary, a job helps us to grow and provides a way for us to coexist with the world.

Interacting with Coworkers

January 31, 1996

Ms. Chen: Greetings everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. Today we will discuss how to get along with people. In a constantly changing society, in which people's values are confused, people's senses can become more and more confused and uneasy, especially when they are confined within a small space. For example, colleagues sharing the same office tend to have disputes and become suspicious and jealous due to their constant interaction. This affects their harmony. Let us ask Master Sheng Yen how people should treat one another at the office.

Master Sheng Yen: From the perspective of the Dharma, we can understand that no matter what the situation or environment, relationships between people should be open and cordial; they should be reciprocal. This is true not just at the office, but also in monasteries, where problems of human interaction still exist. Several people or several dozen people may work together in a big or small office. The staff members may divide the work between them. "You do your part and I do mine." However, dividing their work doesn't mean they don't interact. Sometimes, work may be divided unevenly – you do a little more, I do a little less. How can

you coordinate and work together smoothly? This depends on the system at work, and also on our attitudes in getting along with each other, our mindset in interacting with others.

I often say it is impossible to completely eradicate the tendency to compare ourselves to others. However, frequently comparing ourselves to others causes a lot of trouble for us and other people. When we compare, we feel the other person is doing more, doing things better. We will develop a feeling of envy. “Strange how none of us are doing that much or doing things that well, why is he doing so much, so well?” When we compare like this, what develops? Envy. We may even talk sarcastically about the person to other people behind his back. If the person heard us, would he feel good? Also, when we do more work than others, we get upset by it. “Everyone eats the same amount and makes the same amount of money, why does he do so little work, while we do so much work?” We are unwilling to do more than others, and we continue to compare whether others are working harder. Actually, this can happen in a household as well as in an office. Among brothers and sisters, some siblings are very thoughtful, while others are not. Not only are they not thoughtful, but also they always cause trouble; not only do they not help out at home, but also they create problems for the family. How do siblings get along? Should they compare and be calculating?

Actually in our world, in every environment, some

people are especially competent, and some are less so. Some people are capable and smart, but they do not exercise their potential. They are unwilling to give. They may look at us and laugh, “Ha, ha, go ahead and do it, you go do it.” And when we make a mistake, they laugh at us and exclaim ironically, “Ha ha! That’s what you get, who told you to do that? You can’t do it, look at what you did!” Such people are fastidious and shun work. They specialize in telling others to work rather than doing it themselves. Once other people do the work, they complain about them.

There are also people who love to fawn on others. When the boss is around, this kind of person will deliberately flatter him, say nice things, fawning things, pay him compliments, and make sure that things look good so that the boss will see how devoted he is, what a good person he is. Most bosses have blind spots, and may not see clearly. We could be so good and work so hard. But since we did not show off our work in front of the boss, since we just did our job, the devious person ends up taking credit for our work. When he gives a report, he will tell everyone that he is the one who deserves the credit for the job. When this happens, what do we do?

From the Buddhist perspective and from the standpoint of cause and effect, it doesn’t matter whether the boss notices our work, or whether others praise us, we still try faithfully and conscientiously to do a good job. Maybe

we do a good job to help the boss make a profit. However, while helping our boss make money, we are also making a contribution to the group, to society as a whole. This is enough. So we need to do well at work and also do well as a person. Some people do well at work but they are not a good person. Some people don't do well as a person and don't do well at work either. That is terrible. So we hope we know how to work well as well as be a good person. It doesn't matter whether people see our performance. While interacting with our colleagues, we should try our best to do our job, and not compare ourselves to others. We must think about others, the company, the boss, and devote ourselves to our work wholeheartedly. This is very important. Never mind what others do or what they think of us. This way, we have at least done well as a person. Amitabha Buddha.

Chen: At the office, avoid comparing yourself to others. Just work wholeheartedly to contribute to the group and be thoughtful of others. Then we will have done well as a person.

Being a Good Manager

February 1, 1996

Ms. Chen: Greetings everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In our previous program, the Master discussed how coworkers can get along. What about the mid-level managers in an office? How can they fulfill their ideal role to facilitate smooth communication between the upper managers and the rest of the staff? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen to continue to speak on this topic.

Master Sheng Yen: I have never studied management, held a management class or attended lectures on management, so I don't know how to speak about it on a professional level. I can only take the perspective of a Buddhist monk to see how middle and upper managers should behave. The worst kind of manager is one that fawns on the boss and tyrannizes the people beneath him. He takes all the credit for work done by the people under him and blames them when he makes a mistake. When he is given work from above, he passes the entire load to the subordinates and lets them take the responsibility. When they do well, he takes the credit; when they perform poorly, it's their fault. When his superiors have a problem to solve, and ask him for suggestions, he is unable to contribute any wisdom. He only says, "Boss, your thoughts, your opinions,

and your perspectives are remarkable and farsighted. You have great wisdom.” Originally, the boss hoped he could give him some suggestions, but he made the boss feel good by fawning on him. He tricked the boss. Originally, the boss was not confident, so he asked people beneath him for some suggestions. However, they wouldn’t give him any suggestions; instead they flatter him, telling him that his views are accurate, that his plans are the best. When people do this, they’re doing the boss a disservice.

Also, when a problem from those beneath him arises, instead of taking care of the problem he tells the boss, “Boss, I took care of things the best I could; however, there are some awful people causing trouble and making our work difficult.” And he sees what the boss has to say. When the people beneath him do well, he doesn’t report it. Instead, he reports bad things that happen. Since something has already gone wrong, when reporting, he says he delegated all his power to the people under him, so they must take full responsibility. And when things beneath him do not go well, who gets dismissed? Who gets discredited? Who should be responsible? Of course it’s the people beneath him. The people under him get dismissed or get discredited. And nothing happens to him at all. Is this a good manager?

Some bosses may actually like this kind of manager. But many people believe the best, wisest kind of boss is one who doesn’t like such servile managers who fawn on the boss

and tyrannize their subordinates. What kind of managers do well that wise bosses like? Those who are able to offer precious advice, those who save the boss from having to wrack his brains, and allow him to simply have a firm grasp on company policies and strategic principles. The boss is not responsible for the methods involved. He does not need to tell you how to do it. The boss tells you what he wants. This is the best kind of boss.

What about managers? A mid-level manager is the one who does the planning for the boss. He devises strategies, does research, implements plans, then allocates and delegates the work carefully. After he allocates the work for the different levels under him, he must coordinate and harmonize the lateral relations of the departments, and provide a working system for the company's hierarchy. He solves all problems and is caring toward everyone, all the employees. He understands and is in control of every issue, and knows clearly the details of those issues. This kind of manager is the best kind of manager.

When the boss needs advice, this kind of manager is very frank and very meticulous in analyzing things for the boss, reporting to the boss, and asking the boss for instructions. My principle is that a manager should ask for instructions beforehand specifically regarding general guidelines. After something is done, he should make a report, which includes just the key points. If one can demonstrate these positive

qualities, then one may become upper management. He can be the boss of a company; he can lead a country. He knows how to choose talented people. He knows how to train people. As for the business, he knows how to manage it. I have never studied management, so my guideline has been the principles I use to run a monastery and care for its entirety using the Dharma. Amitabha Buddha.

Summary: A good manager does not fawn on the boss and exploit those under him, but cares for his subordinates and coordinates tasks effectively so as to accomplish what the boss wants.

Dealing with Complaints Effectively

May 27, 1996

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. In today's commercial-industrial society, frequent contacts between people often generate friction and discontentment. Complaints can be heard everywhere. So, how to effectively deal with complaints and solve problems has become a skill necessary for modern people to cultivate. When we hear people complaining, what kind of attitude and view should we take? And how should we deal with the complaints? Let's now ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance.

Master Sheng Yen: Complaints arise from discontent. Everybody feels some dissatisfaction; having everything go one's way and being satisfied with everything doesn't exist in this world. Listening to complaints is an unpleasant thing, and the one who's complaining about others doesn't feel good either. They are only complaining because they are upset. But the one listening to the complaints and the object of the complaints also feel annoyed. Still, this kind of situation is difficult to avoid. Between people, even between relatives and family members, there are complaints about one another. The mother will complain about her children, and the children will complain about their parents. Of course,

parents love their children, but even so there will still be complaints. The mother sees how disobedient the children are, and then she may complain in front of the father: “These kids are like you. They have such a bad temper; there’s nothing I can do to teach them manners. They’re just like you, so you’d better go deal with them.”

From our own families to every corner of society, complaining is a very widespread phenomenon. So we should treat it as something normal, something very common, this way we won’t be so hurt when people complain about us. Otherwise, when others are complaining about us, we’ll only feel that we’re innocent, that we’re a victim, that we’re the injured party, that we’re plagued with criticism. For example, we may think: “We are so good to him, why is he still complaining about us? We are dealing with his problem for him, we are helping him out, and still he complains about us. That’s wronging good-hearted benefactors. We treat him so well and in return, all he does is to complain.” This kind of situation will upset our emotional balance. But if we look at it from another angle, we see that to err is human. After all, people are not saints. And isn’t it also possible that the mistake is our own, that the other person is blaming us for a reason?

Also, we’re all just people, only human, and so we can’t be without vexations. And he who has vexations is likely to complain. Someone may have his own problems.

We didn't necessarily cause those vexations but something's causing them, and so he's taking it out on us; he's venting his anger on us. Let him vent his anger a while, criticize a bit, complain a little, and after that he'll probably regain some balance. We may not even need to help him solve his problem. Just by letting him grumble a bit, we can help him to regain his emotional balance. That's a good thing, and it will help him. It may be his own problem, it may be our problem, yet it's also possible that it's neither, but that someone else spread some false information. In this kind of situation we should place ourselves in the other's position, and think what's best for them as well as for us. First, we shouldn't complain about others. Second, we should accept others' complaints. And third, when we hear others complaining about us, we shouldn't get upset. On the contrary, just as Confucius said: "A superior man welcomes criticism," when someone is criticizing us, or complaining about us, we should be glad, because it means that he has a high opinion of us. If we can look at complaints with this kind of attitude, we'll feel that being complained about is just a very normal thing.

Also, some people hear complaints and assume the attitude, "I know best if I'm innocent or if I am to blame, and the facts speak louder than any argument. You just go ahead complaining if you have to, and I'll simply pretend I don't hear you." But if somebody complains once, and then for a

second time, and again and again, and we completely ignore him, then there'll be big trouble, because he'll then see us as his enemy. He complained because he saw us as his friend, as someone close to him, but we simply paid no heed to his complaints, so now he sees us as his enemy. He believes that we've already given up on him, he thinks we've already built an impenetrable wall around us, that we've cut ties with him. So that way we'll create big trouble.

Therefore, when someone complains slightly, listen and nod, saying, "I see. I know exactly what you mean." He probably just wants us to listen, and doesn't really expect us to do anything about it. Just listen for a while. Listening is enough, and he feels it's enough too. Now, if someone has some serious complaints, then we'll need to respond. We'll need to deal with it. If he's gotten it all wrong, if his complaints are unfounded, if it's all just a misunderstanding, we'll have to straighten things out. We'll need to have a sincere, heart-to-heart talk with him to help him understand the facts of the matter. Also, if he asked us to do something, and is complaining that we didn't accomplish it, then we'll have to tell him: "We are working on it right now, and this is how things are at the moment, and we'll inform you when there are any results." And if the results are not to his complete satisfaction, ask for his forgiveness and say: "We have already dealt with the matter, and this is all we could do now, under the circumstances. This is really the best we could

do. Please understand, and let's try to make a joint effort. On my own we can't do any better than this. We've already tried our best; we want you to know that we've done everything in our power." We shouldn't just lie to him either. We always must manage with this kind of complaint. Amitufofo!

Summary: It's normal for people to complain because we all have vexations. So, instead of getting upset, listen sympathetically and address the problem to help them restore their emotional balance.

Effective Communication

May 31, 1996

Ms. Chen: Greetings, everyone, I'm glad to see you again on Great Dharma Drum. People's insistence on their subjective views often hinders their communication and interaction with each other. It even affects things at home and work. When some people try to communicate, they always think, "That person understands me, so now he will change. He must change to suit me." Is this the right attitude for communication? How can you communicate effectively? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for his view.

Master Sheng Yen: As someone following the bodhisattva path or as a Buddhist, we cannot isolate ourselves from the crowd, because the first bodhisattva vow is save all sentient beings. So we cannot leave the crowd and only seek our own liberation or our own blissful peace, or be concerned only with our own cultivation. Otherwise, we wouldn't be Buddhist practitioners, and we wouldn't be able to save sentient beings. To really save sentient beings, we must first give of ourselves for them; and second, we take up their problems and help to resolve them. Only then can we tell them of the Dharma; only then will they be able to accept it.

In Buddhism there are four ways to lead people into

the gate of the Dharma, and onto the great path of Buddhist study and practice. One is mingling with people, second is giving, and third is acting beneficially. Mingling, giving, acting beneficially, these three are very important. Also, in order to deliver sentient beings, we cannot force them to accept us. Before they accept us, we must accept them first. There are those who, when attempting to gain acceptance, take on a superior tone: “You have to do this and that. The Buddhadharma is like this. Let me tell you, the Dharma is marvelous; you must have it, you must believe in it, you must accept it, you must act according to it.” This is dictating, not influencing.

The Dharma says we should influence people, move them, and not lecture them. Bodhisattvas always keep a low profile and have a modest bearing, mingling with sentient beings. They appear to be equal in status to the sentient beings they meet, or even make them feel respected by appearing to be lower than them. Being courteous and lowering ourselves, we can make sentient beings well disposed towards us. Otherwise sentient beings will not accept us. Therefore, this principle can be used to successfully communicate and negotiate. Most ordinary people think communication and negotiation mean making people accept things, and accept us.

I have a disciple, who, when he tries to communicate and negotiate, will tell people, “I’ve thought it out. This is

for your own good. Listen to me; you have to do it like this. If you don't, it will be a hassle for you. You've just got to do it this way. I'm trying to communicate that, so you must accept it. You can't *not* accept it." Then he would ask, "Do you have any difficulty accepting it?" And when the person tries to explain his difficulty, he would say, "This isn't a problem. After you accept it, it will go away naturally." Then he would ask, "Do you have any difficulty?" And the person would try to explain again. "OK, no need to explain anymore. I guarantee that once you accept it and do as I tell you, it will work out fine." The person says, "I don't think I can accept it." "What do you mean you can't? Did you understand what I said to you?" The person says, "I understood it all right." "Then if you understand it, you must accept it." But the person says, "I understood it, but I just don't think I can accept it." This kind of communication is one-way. It's force-feeding, it isn't communication. In real communication you must first ask the person, "Do you have any problems? What do you want? What do you need? Come, let me help you."

When I was studying in Japan, the clerks in all the stores there said, "What are you looking for? Tell me what you want and I'll see how I can help you." That's what they say. It's so simple. So when we want to help someone, we shouldn't decide beforehand what's best for him or simply dump our own ideas and plans on him, or force them on him,

like it or not. That won't work. When Chinese people treat others to a dinner, as soon as they sit down, they begin to continuously fill their guest's bowl with all kinds of food, spicy, sour, sweet, hard, soft, raw, and cooked. They fill the guest's bowl. The guest might not be able to eat it all, but he can't *not* eat it either. The host didn't check if the guest wanted it or not.

I once gave a Western student some food this way and he got mad at me. He said, "Master, do you know whether I like this or not? Master, do you know whether I need to eat any more?" He reproached me. So I thought, "Ok, from now on I should ask people first." "What else do you want? Can you eat this?" Things like that. So to communicate and negotiate, put yourself in the other person's shoes. Let him say what he thinks, and decide how you can help him according to what he requires. Then tell him how you can help him. This is successful communication and negotiation. The alternative, one-way communication, doesn't work. Amitufo.

Summary: Effective communication must be a two-way street. We must first listen to the needs of others and respect their ideas, rather than dictating a course of action. This is the way to truly help them.

Dealing with Adversities

March 24, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. At work both favorable and adverse circumstances are unavoidable. How can the wisdom of the Dharma help us in the face of adversity, setbacks and difficulty? Many people are afraid of encountering adversity, for they feel as if setbacks and difficulties are a heavy blow in life. When they encounter such problems, what kind of advice would you give them? Let us ask Master Sheng Yen for advice.

Master Sheng Yen: In fact, without experiencing adversity a person can't really grow. There is no wisdom without experience. Setbacks are a kind of experience or process; adversities are a kind of test or training. If, in the face of adversity, you can remain unperturbed, without resentment or hatred, and handle it calmly and wisely, treat it compassionately, then it will no longer be adversity. Actually, when walking far or climbing a mountain, our feet and our bodies will feel tired. But this is a process, not adversity. So in all things we cannot realize how difficult they are without experience. There isn't a single thing without adversities, but when we encounter a setback, if we don't regard it as a setback, it won't be a setback. It's merely a part of the

process. All we have to do is to take adversity into account.

Whatever we engage in, we should consider both the positive and negative aspects; then we are able to move back and forth freely, and flexibly. Does this really count as adversity? No, it doesn't. Because we have taken it into consideration, it's no longer adversity. But even having considered everything, when obstacles occur that are difficult to overcome, we will still feel bad. "If only things could go smoothly." We're bound to feel bad when encountering difficulties. But we should remain confident, and have faith in ourselves because we are not acting for ourselves, but for the whole of society, for our present time, and the humanity of our time. If we operate like this, if we work in this way, we will turn adversity into good fortune. If we only act out of selfishness, our egotism, no matter how smoothly things are going, when adversity emerges, we'll suffer a crushing defeat. Though everything goes very smoothly, once adversity hits, we will be unable to stand up again. We can't ask people to be completely selfless, but if we act less selfishly and more for the good of everyone, then adversity will pose no problems for us.

Chen: Master, could you explain more specifically what we should do when encountering setbacks, difficulties, or adversity at work?

MSY: When we encounter adversity, first of all we

must realize that it's no more than can be expected; we count on difficulties occurring, though we don't know what exactly they will be. If we know what kind of adversity we can expect, then we can do something about it in advance, and then it won't happen at all. Then it is not called adversity. We don't know what adversity will emerge, so how should we solve it? First, we must use our intelligence, our own wisdom. If we are not capable of handling it, then we should seek help from someone who is more professional or capable than we are. Or, we can get a group of people together to solve a problem more quickly – the wisdom of a group together can exceed the wisdom of one sage. On our own we all too often tend to get stuck not really knowing how to proceed. Two or three persons make some discussions, and the problem can be solved. Don't panic. Calmly face the problem.

Chen: Master, according to my own experience, adversity is not so terrible, because when adversity strikes, it actually stimulates us to make a breakthrough. But I am afraid of favorable circumstances. Many people feel favorable circumstances are good. When all is well with me I feel that people tend to become complacent of their good fortune, thereby sowing the seeds of failure. Is this so?

MSY: That's why we should "be prepared for danger in times of safety." At all times we should be modest, alert and prudent. We shouldn't be smug, haughty, arrogant or

self-righteous. Because every one of our successes relies not entirely on our ability; it is related also to the circumstances. A hero is nothing but a product of his time; he is related to the background of the era, to the current circumstances, to people he associates with, or people he interacts with. Of course, his strength and efforts are factors. Some people say he is lucky indeed. One may be very capable, but it is one's good luck that brings one favorable circumstances. But good luck won't always accompany him; it will leave eventually. So, we should be careful when good luck shines on us. It is like climbing a mountain. We should be careful when we reach the peak, because once the peak is reached, the path ahead is downward. At the peak, let's not be elated, for if we fall, it is impossible for us to get up. If we know the peak is reached, and the path ahead is downward, then it doesn't matter to tread the downward slope, because there will be another peak.

In the course of life there are many ups and downs. So, when we are very successful, let's not be arrogant; remind ourselves that the path ahead is probably downward, so we should walk carefully. Sometimes, an uphill path is easier to tread, because we are very careful; but when going downhill we could stumble and fall, which could cost us our life, or at least, we'd break our legs. Therefore, we should be very careful. We shouldn't be arrogant in favorable circumstances, and shouldn't be disheartened in adverse circumstances.

Chen: That's right, a very good point. Thank you Master, for your enlightening talk. Please join us next time as we share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: We should not be arrogant in favorable circumstances, nor become disheartened when facing adversity.

EQ in the Workplace

March 26, 1998

Ms. Chen: Hello, everyone. Welcome to another segment of Great Dharma Drum. All of us know that EQ is very important. EQ stands for Emotional Quotient. Then what kind of EQ do modern people require in the workplace? Are there any differences or similarities with the Dharma? Let's ask Master Sheng Yen for guidance. Master, would you please tell us, what kind of EQ do we require if we want to do our jobs well in the workplace?

Master Sheng Yen: I don't really know what EQ is, but adjusting our mind through the Dharma means to check and balance our emotions. Positive emotion actually forms a kind of compassion, a kind of sympathy, a kind of concern, or hope. It is also a kind of joy. All these are adjustments of emotion. Most of us do our own thing, doing as we please unable to control ourselves; or we do not understand our own personality or emotions. Someone like this, who cannot adjust his emotions, is quick to anger, easily disappointed, pessimistic, jealous, or suspicious. Such psychological manifestations are probably considered lacking in EQ.

In terms of composition and quality, some people's EQ is bad, while some people's EQ is good. Everyone has the same kind of mind, which we may call mental states

or emotions. It's just that some people use it well while others don't. Someone who's good at using emotion is called a wise person, while someone who is poor at using emotion is named a fool. At work or interacting with people, we should utilize emotions well. In fact, doing things by oneself is relatively easier. At work, we interact with colleagues, bosses, and clients, all of whom may make us feel uncomfortable, discontented, or dissatisfied. This brings about an emotional response, or *fantan* (backlash), as people will call it nowadays. Encountering any situation or hearing any different opinion triggers a backlash.

It is resistance, and with resistance contention will follow, then struggle, then war. All these are problems with emotions. So, the Dharma says that everyone has negative emotions or negative emotional elements. These are fundamentally not very good. We call these mental afflictions. Thus, we require some methods. We must use a concept. We must be guided by a concept, and practice using the methods, to calm our emotions and balance our minds. Then what are the concepts we should have? First, we should recognize that problems surely exist among people. No two people are the same in looks, in ways of thinking, in point of view, or needs. Moreover, we usually are unclear about how to judge someone or the occurrence of an event. We aren't even clear about our own views and perspectives, let alone be able to judge those of another person. It is unfair for us

to judge or draw conclusions about someone else from our perspective.

If we think about this, then we can change our conception, and be perfectly at peace. If our mind still can't be calm and we are unable to breathe evenly, then what should we do? We could try out some methods. One method we often use is to recite Amitabha Buddha's name. It is the simplest way. When we recite [in Chinese] "Amitufo," we are aware that we are reciting "Amitufo." Let's not keep targeting our thoughts toward someone else, or treat him as an object. We should divert our thought to another object. What is the object? It is to recite "Amitufo." When we are reciting "Amitufo," our mind should look inward, instead of looking outward all the time. Then, at that moment our emotions will calm.

There is another good method. I often teach people to enjoy the process of breathing. Whenever we encounter anything out of balance – it is very difficult to bring equilibrium to external situations – the crucial point is that we can still go on living, which is most important. We can't survive without breathing; breathing means we are alive. There is a saying about this: "As long as there is life, there is hope." It is useless to be angry now. The most important is to dispose of the matter calmly. How can we calm ourselves down? Focus on our breathing; enjoy our breathing. Then our breathing will become even. As long as we are breathing

evenly, our mind will calm down, and our wisdom will emerge. Then we can dispose of the problem wisely. No need to be angry. If the other side insists on his view, it really doesn't matter. At least, we are not suffering so much.

Chen: Thank you, Master, for your guidance. Amitufo! From the Master's explanation we can understand that compassion, sympathy, concern, and joy can make us succeed in whatever we do in the workplace. If we encounter a problem or difficulty, we may apply some methods to divert our thoughts. Then we will be perfectly at peace. Please join us again next time as we continue to share the wisdom of the Dharma.

Summary: The Dharma can help us achieve a calmer state of mind, reducing negative emotions and bringing out positive emotions in us, which are invaluable in all walks of life.

Other Books in English by Master Sheng Yen

(A partial listing)

Things Pertaining to Bodhi

The Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment

Shambhala Publications 2010

Shattering the Great Doubt

The Chan Practice of Huatou

Shambhala Publications 2009

The Method of No-Method

The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination

Shambhala Publications 2008

Footprints in the Snow

The Autobiography of a Chinese Buddhist Monk

Doubleday 2008

Orthodox Chinese Buddhism

A Contemporary Chan Master's Answers to Common Questions

North Atlantic Books 2007

Attaining the Way

A Guide to the Practice of Chan Buddhism

Shambhala Publications 2006

Song of Mind

Wisdom from the Zen Classic Xin Ming

Shambhala Publications 2004

Hoofprint of the Ox

Principles of the Chan Buddhist Path

Oxford University Press 2001

There Is No Suffering

Commentary on the Heart Sutra

North Atlantic Books 2001

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