

The Bodhi Stand



Upasika Ma Rou Yu

Superficially, Mrs. Ma looks like any other well-to-do Chinese housewife living in San Francisco. Her husband is a construction contractor, and the couple has grown-up children living in Hong Kong and Canada. What is different about Mrs. Ma is that she has been a devout Buddhist for the past thirty odd years.

Having witnessed people undergo tremendous suffering in Mainland China, as well as her own personal experience of the deprivation of war, Upasika Ma has developed a sense of compassion and sympathy for her fellow beings, especially for those who have died in disasters or suffered unnatural deaths, and whose spirits are still roaming in darkness with no way of escape.

"All of empty space throughout the Universe is crowded with the souls of the departed. This is something we cannot see with our ordinary, physical eyes, but nevertheless it is the case. Lacking the blessings and strength to save themselves, they seek aid from those who dwell in the sunny—human—realm to perform meritorious deeds on their behalf, so as to rescue their souls and lead them out of the evil paths. The Dharma of The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva is extremely efficacious and powerful. It can save many souls and take them to a good place of rebirth."

A passage from *The Earth Store Sutra* expresses this idea clearly:

When a man or woman in Jambudvīpa is on the verge of death, and their consciousness and spirit are confused and dark, when they are unable to discriminate between good and evil, and their eyes and ears are unable to see or hear, all their relatives should certainly make great offerings, recite the Holy Sutras, or recite the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Such good conditions can cause the dead person to leave the evil paths, and all the demons, ghosts, and spirits will withdraw and disperse.

World Honored One, if at the time of death any living being hears the name of one Buddha or one Bodhisattva, or if one hears a sentence of a gatha or a Mahayana Sutra, I see that such a person can be liberated from his very small bad deeds, which unite to pull them into the evil paths, and can also be kept apart from the uninterrupted retribution of the five offenses involving bodily harm and killing.

*Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva,
Chapter Eight, "The Praises of the Multitudes of King Yama"*

Intent on aiding those beings who have fallen into the evil paths, Upasika Ma has for the past three years sponsored an annual Dharma Assembly for Extensively Crossing Over All the Souls of the Departed, especially those who have died in war and other disasters. During the ceremony for the crossing over of souls, the members of the fourfold assembly at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas recite The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, the Rebirth Mantra, and the Mantra for Eradicating Karmic Offenses, dedicating the merit from their recitation to the speedy rescue of those beings.

"It's not only for the benefit of my own ancestors that I sponsor the Dharma Assembly, but it is on behalf of all living beings. When you come right down to it, who hasn't been our parent in a past life, and who won't be our future relative or friend? We are all connected, we are all one substance. Caring for others is just the same as caring for oneself. Being one with everyone is great compassion."

Upasaka Ma took refuge with Bhikshuni Fwo Ying in the 1950's when she was living in Hong Kong. Bhikshuni Fwo Ying was an erudite Dharma Master who wrote various commentaries on the Vinaya, as well as on the Consciousness-Only School. Upasika Ma maintains a rigorous program of reciting the sutras and mantras as part of her daily practice. She considers the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to be her spiritual home. She regularly attends the daily Sutra lectures given at Gold Mountain Monastery, in San Francisco, and also participates in the meditation lessons given there on weekends.