

New Year's Talk

(Sunday Morning, January 1, 1989)

by the Venerable Chan Master Hua

I would like to wish everybody a happy new year! Today is the first day of the new year by the solar calendar, and we should resolve to be good people, and not be as muddled and confused as we were in the past. Studying Buddhism is studying wisdom, and studying wisdom means not doing muddled things. However, if it happens occasionally that we do muddled things, once we have done them, we should courageously correct those mistakes and start anew.

Last year the travel agents were probably very upset with me because I said that during that year it would be dangerous to travel -- that planes would encounter obstacles, lots of problems would arise with boats, and cars and trains would be even more perilous. For that reason I said that they should travel less and bow to the Buddha more. That is what I said last year, which was the year of the dragon. Dragons have infinitely many changes and transformations. Suddenly they can be very good to people, and then suddenly they will turn impolite. Why is that? It is because they have bad tempers. As soon as they get angry, they aren't courteous to anyone. If they aren't angry, they are nice to people. Last year being that of the dragon, a lot of problems arose.

For example, when I was preparing to go to Malaysia, a poisonous black dragon in Malaysia kept trying to prevent me from going there. Consequently I had a lot of problems getting a visa. As it turned out, I was the last one to obtain a visa for Malaysia, and so I went a few days later than the rest of the delegation. When I came several days late, it was a great disappointment to the people who came to the airport to meet the plane. The person making the arrangements for the delegation's visit was obstructed in many ways as well, to the point that he told everyone not to go to the airport. When I was delayed, he didn't let them all know when my plane would be arriving. There was just a small group of people who snuck off to the airport to greet me, which was quite ridiculous. Why did things happen that way? It is because the dragon had heard that I was going to expose his misbehavior, and so he was badly disposed towards me.

Even a few days before I went to Taiwan, the weather report was that a typhoon was certain to hit Taiwan on November twenty-eighth or twenty-ninth. I didn't want a typhoon to hit when I was there. If there were a typhoon, a lot of people would be at a loss as to what to do. There were many such considerations. Fortunately, the Venerable Ji was there, and he helped out. The typhoon didn't hit Taiwan, and the Dharma assembly went smoothly. Probably the Venerable Ji exerted a considerable amount of effort. That happened last year.

This year is the year of the snake. There are also good snakes and poisonous snakes. Good snakes don't bite people, but if people are bitten by poisonous snakes, I am afraid it's very dangerous. Therefore this year don't hit snakes, and hunt less. Hunt less and fish less. It will be dangerous to fish this year, and dangerous to go hunting. You should even

less get angry at people. The most important thing for students of Buddhism is to have an attitude of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity towards everyone, and to maintain the four vast vows: 1) Living beings are countless, I vow to save them all. 2) Afflictions are endless, I vow to cut them off. 3) Dharma-doors are measureless, I vow to learn them. 4) The Buddha's Way is unsurpassed, I vow to realize it. We should base ourselves on the scope of the four unlimited minds and really put the four vast vows into practice.

Further, it's very important this year not to gamble. Most people who gamble this year will lose; they won't win. Also, boys should not go looking for girl friends, and girls should not go looking for boy friends. As soon as they start looking, they are sure to be bitten by the snake. Once they are bit, it's to be feared they will lose their lives. In addition, this year don't kill. You can't take life. Don't kill mosquitoes or cockroaches. If you kill, then the snake will have a chance to come find you and make you pay up. It will say, "You have committed the offense of killing, and so I can give you a fatal bite. I am heaven's agent in administering justice. I eliminate pests for living beings. You have killed living creatures, so now I am going to kill you." If you want to kill, wait until next year to consider it. Don't kill chickens or ducks. Don't kill cows, sheep, or pigs. It's best not to take life at all this year.

You may ask, "Then is it all right to steal?" It would be best not to steal either. Others may be saying, "I never have stolen." Then there's basically no problem. I wasn't talking to you. I was talking to the people who steal. You shouldn't engage in sexual misconduct either, and you shouldn't lie as much or take as many intoxicants. This year you have to follow the rules, and then you won't get bitten by the snake. If you don't follow the rules, the snake will bite you.

One important matter is that rich people who gamble will lose all they have, and poor people who gamble won't win much—maybe just enough to eat on. Therefore, this year, don't gamble. This year you should not kill or steal or engage in sexual misconduct or lie or take intoxicants. This year you should hold the five precepts and practice the ten good deeds. That way the snake won't be able to do anything to you. Don't be opportunistic and try to maneuver situations to your own advantage. That's important this year. And don't have a bad temper.

Everyone should pay attention to all of this. Anyone who doesn't pay attention will regret it. Don't say I didn't warn you in advance. You should pay close attention to what I've said, and this year not kill, not steal, not engage in sexual misconduct, not lie, and not take intoxicants. Don't gamble. Don't go fishing or hunting, much the less commit murder, arson, or robbery. Those are all impermissible. This year you must scrupulously follow the rules. I wish all of you health of body and happiness of spirit, and a happy new year!

Also, one more thing. This morning I counted over one hundred and fifty people outside doing three steps one bow from the front gate to the Hall. It would be best if you could maintain the spirit of doing three steps one bow all the time in protecting and supporting the Triple Jewel. Today I will just say this much. I hope that this year everything will be just the way you want it to be, and very auspicious.

But I do want to tell you just a little bit more. Basically, the Abbot of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is Heng Sure, but now he wants to go to a cold place to teach and transform living beings. For that reason, this year there will be Heng Chang, who is originally from Vietnam and very young -- now just twenty-eight years of age. I observe that he has an extremely strong mind for the Way, and in particular does not get involved with women -- he doesn't have affinities with women at all. Starting this year he, by himself, can temporarily be the acting Abbot of the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. He can take responsibility for leading the assembly in cultivation for the ceremonies. When he is not doing the ceremonies, he wants to recite the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. That's because when Heng Liang needed brain surgery, Heng Chang vowed to recite the *Flower Adornment Sutra* one hundred times for him. Consequently he will be practicing being Abbot for the ceremonies, but aside from the ceremonies not attend to other matters, but instead recite the *Flower Adornment Sutra*. He can have that method of concentrated cultivation. I wanted to tell all of you, with the hope that you won't bother him, but will let him fulfill his vow to recite the *Flower Adornment Sutra*.

