

News from the Dharma Realm

A Talk by Dharma Master Heng Chi at Eastern Purity Monastery, Hualien, Taiwan

The name of this Dharma Assembly is the Great Gwan Yin Dharma-gathering for Protecting the Nation and Eradicating Disasters. When disasters occur, we can be sure they are due to causes and conditions. There must be reasons for calamities. These reasons are all born of human actions. The karma of people is what creates disasters. Although this is the scientific age, scientists have no way to measure human karma. Scientists claim to study cause and effect, but the cause and effect they study is shallow and superficial compared to what is taught in the Buddha's Sutras: this is the cause and effect that we as Buddhist disciples should study.

Just as the happiness and suffering of an individual comes from the nature of his past deeds, either good or bad, likewise a country's good fortune or disasters are brought about by its citizens' actions. Each person experiences the results of his own past karma, and this is called "individual" karma. Likewise, a whole nation of people experiences the results of good and bad deeds they had done together in the past. If we experience a disaster together, it's certain that in the past we had made bad karma together. The causes and conditions behind a nation's rise and fall are called "collective" karma.

We know that disasters arise due to the past actions of a group of individuals. These actions bind people together and lead them to experience the unfortunate results together.

The present situation of pending worldwide calamities is due to a widespread moral deficiency among people everywhere. People everywhere are no longer following the rules. This is particularly true of people in the West, and especially in my own country of America. And now this moral decline has spread to Asia. I'm sure, as Buddhists, you are aware of this situation. The major religions of the world no longer seem to have the moral authority to cause their followers to conduct themselves in ethical ways. The results of this are everywhere apparent: wars, natural disasters, and many new and strange incurable diseases. To avoid such disasters, it is important to create wholesome causes and conditions.

We who know the Buddha's teaching on cause and effect clearly, have a duty to, 1) be models for others so they can learn from us how to lead proper lives and stop creating the bad karma that will be the cause of future disasters; and, 2) to create conditions that eradicate disasters whose causes have already been planted, on behalf of those who have not yet awakened to the need to be pure.

Now with this Gwan Yin Recitation Session, we can practice the second responsibility: creating a special kind of karma for the benefit of the world. Reciting the name of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva is called "pure" karma. It's effect is extremely powerful, when done with sincerity and concentration. When our efforts are pure, we can certainly expect a

response, not only a response for ourselves and the Country of Taiwan, but for the whole world. This is what is meant by "eradicating disasters".

The other aspect of this Recitation Session, "Protecting the Country," means not only to guard the nation against invasion from outside enemies, but to guard a more vulnerable resource, not only of Taiwan, but of all nations: we need to safeguard the moral purity of the people.

This purpose is the reason the Venerable Abbot has lead us at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to concentrate on personal virtue and the study of ethics, not simply on our own behalf, but for the sake of the entire country. We do so not just for Buddhists, and not only for Buddhism, but we do this work for all people of all religions. For this reason, in recent years, several religious conferences have been held at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, in which leaders of all the world's major religions have joined together to help each other see the situation regarding moral purity very clearly, and to work together on this problem.

This is my view of the work we are doing here at Hualien, and of course, its efficacy depends on the quality of our singleminded concentration. So I urge all fellow cultivators to be vigorous and pure in mind as we recite the name of Gwan Shr Yin Bodhisattva.

News from the Dharma Realm

Buddhism into the Year 2000: A Conference in Thailand

An international conference on "Buddhism into the Year 2000," sponsored by the Dhammakaya Foundation was held at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Bangkok, Thailand from 7 to 9 February 1990. Foremost Buddhist scholars from around the world, including from Thailand, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, England, the United States, Germany, Japan, and Brazil, gathered to discuss Buddhism in the past, the present, and the future. The major theme of the conference was how the united values of the various branches of Buddhism can affect the future. At the end of the conference, participants joined in the Candlelit Magha Puja Ceremony, a ceremony of twenty thousand candles, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Dhammakaya Temple. The conference was the first of its kind to be held in Thailand.

Keynote speeches were delivered by H.E. Dr. Ananda W.P. Guruge, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Sri Lanka in France, and by Venerable Tripitaka Master Hua of Dharma Realm Buddhist University. Other speakers representing Dharma Realm Buddhist University were Dharma Master Heng Sure and Chancellor Douglas Powers.

See page one of the Chinese section of this issue of Vajra Bodhi Sea for a photo.

Keynote Address by H.E. Dr. Ananda W. P. Guruge

By inviting me to address this auspicious assembly, the organizers of the International Conference on Buddhism into the Year 2000 have not only conferred on me personally an enviable privilege and honor but also signified the close and lasting bonds of friendship between Thailand and Sri Lanka, founded on our joint commitment to the preservation and development of Buddhism. It is with satisfaction that I recall that role which the learned Buddhist theras of Sri Lanka played over the last millennium in the establishment and the promotion of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. At the same time, it is with a deep sense of gratitude that I acknowledge the indebtedness of Sri Lanka to Thailand for its contribution to the revival of Higher Ordination in 1750, when due to foreign invasion the Sangha had virtually disappeared. May I also express on behalf of the international Buddhist community our grateful appreciation to Thailand for having provided a home for the World Fellowship of Buddhists, which was founded in Sri Lanka in 1950 on the initiative of Professor Gunapala Malalasekera.

When I informed His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranasinghe Premadasa, of my participation in this Conference, he made three specific requests. The first was to apprise you of his personal admiration for the laudable service rendered by Their Gracious Majesties the King and the Queen of Thailand and Their Royal Highnesses as well as by the Government for the promotion of Buddhism both in Thailand and abroad. He also asked me to convey to you his most cordial greetings and best wishes for the success of your deliberations. Lastly, he underscored the noble example set by Asoka the Righteous, the great Indian Buddhist emperor of third century B.C., and wished that I should highlight its relevance to the tasks before the international Buddhist community.

Today at the beginning of the last decade of the century that would soon dawn with promise and anxiety, the twentieth century, we focus our attention on the new hopes and fears, aspirations and apprehensions. Humanity would look back on the last two centuries, in particular, with an unprecedented sense of pride, achievement and fulfillment but, nevertheless, with also a disquieting feeling of disappointment, if not dejection.

While gloating over the spectacular successes in science and technology, conquest of nature, inroads into space, mastery over disease, advances in communication and the like, we wonder whether all these achievements are of equal benefit to the humankind as a whole or whether these have been accomplished with justifiable means. At what price have we achieved an incredible prosperity for a relatively small fraction of humanity? In the process, how much irreparable damage have we done to planet earth through our greed and ignorance by polluting the environment with industrial waste and over-exploiting irreplaceable natural resources? With continuing destruction of the ozone layer and the resulting global warming, to what extent have we endangered life on earth? How many thousands of species, both flora and fauna, have become extinct in the face of our willful encroachment or unpardonable neglect? I have no doubt that there arises a tinge of guilt in the mind of every reasonable human being as he asks himself these ineluctable questions.

The spectre of hunger, malnutrition, disease and preventable death stalks over vast continents as deserts advance at a galloping pace over once smiling green fields and millions are driven away from their homelands in search of the barest means of survival. Two thirds of the world's population lives in abject poverty deprived of a minimum of food, clothing and shelter even to ensure them a modicum of human dignity. A billion adults, mostly women, remain illiterate and have no access of essential knowledge for better and more dignified living.

Alongside poor, debt-burdened developing countries, which ask for nothing more from the world than a fair and reasonable price for the products of their labor, are those rich nations which still think that a pittance of foreign aid—more often than not, with strings attached—is all they owe their less fortunate fellow-humans. But the tragedy is that the same kind of exploitation of the poor and the weak which we unhesitatingly condemn in world forums does exist in diverse forms within every nation.

With mind-boggling advances in knowledge, we had hoped that science and technology would solve problems of food, health, housing, communication and environment. Instead what we see is that close upon half a million of the best scientists in the world devote their supremely invaluable talents to the perfection of increasingly deadly weapons of destruction. Yet we are mesmerized by them to such an extent that even forums dedicated to world peace do not see the incongruity of expressing gratitude for what are called non-military spin-offs of military research. Not only are the fears of a deliberated or accidental nuclear holocaust real, but the fact is undeniable that the arms race deprives nations of their scarce resources for development and the indiscriminate arms sales have brought violence and insecurity to everyone's doorstep.

With developments in human and social sciences, we also hoped that we would discover ways and means of improving interpersonal relations and pave the way for societies to eliminate social inequalities and that men, women and children would freely and fruitfully cooperate among themselves in a collective effort to enhance their opportunities for better life. But these remain receding goals even as we understand more and more the needs and the motivations of the humankind. The human and social scientist may throw up his hands in despair at the moment, but will insist that human nature still needs to be understood.

Yet, with our increasing awareness of global social problems, we are appalled by the deterioration of basic human values. How else could human society allow innocent children to be abused and neglected, women to be exploited and humiliated and the most dangerous narcotics and drugs to be pedalled about with no scruples whatsoever?

It is with such a balance sheet that we prepare ourselves for our different roles in the new century. We are elated with the gigantic victories of the humankind in diverse fields. But at the same time, we are perturbed by the accusations of our inner conscience. We cannot deny that we have paid too dearly for our materialistic achievements, whose beneficiaries are only a small minority. This inordinate price has been not only in terms of sacrificing basic human values of equity and social justice, kindness and compassion and moderation and generosity.

If this truly is how we feel, are we not in the same frame of mind in which Emperor Asoka was on the day he was victorious in his war against Kalinga? Here was a conqueror who, at the height of his military career, asked himself if the price of victory paid in terms of human lives and suffering was justified or permissible. His conscience, undoubtedly, replied with a resounding "No". Therefore did he abandon war and violence forever and expound Dharmavijaya of Conquest by Righteousness as the one and only noble pursuit for both monarch and commoner.

Emperor Asoka's principles and methods of Dharmavijaya are as relevant to us in our present crisis as it was twenty-three centuries ago. It was founded on the conviction that the human being is basically good and just and all that is necessary is to help one to guide one's life on a simple and practical code of ethics.

It is undeniable that the Emperor Asoka found this code of ethics in the noble teachings of the Buddha. But Asoka did not tell his people that he was teaching them Buddhism. He made no reference to even the fundamental doctrines of the Buddha such as the Four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path or the Nibbana, because it was neither philosophy nor ultimate emancipation that concerned him. But the essence of Buddhism he gave his people through all means of dissemination of information which were current in his days.

Further to show that it was virtue that he valued and not individual sects and schools of religion, he not only supported every traditional religion but strongly advocated interreligious tolerance and amity. His most fervent plea was not to speak disparagingly of other religions but to seek cooperation so that the essentials of righteousness could be jointly developed through each and every one of them.

As I examine the agenda of this Conference, I am impressed by the vision of Venerable Mettanando, Her Highness Princess Vimalachetara and the Dhammakaya Foundation. They have identified for discussion a most promising theme. It would enable us to examine in what way Buddhism, with its rich diversity of observances around its noteworthy doctrinal unity, could serve humanity today.

With the Buddha's overreaching emphasis on the Four Sublime States of Brahmavihara, namely Metta, Loving Kindness; Karuna, Compassion; Mudita, Sympathetic Joy and Felicitation; and Upekkha, Equality and Equanimity, Buddhism cannot but be conscious of the glaring imbalances which divide humanity today. Let us, therefore, concentrate our deliberations during the next three days on how Buddhists in unity could dedicate themselves to bring about the most urgent of all conquests by righteousness and that is to conquer greed and avarice, hatred and violence and delusion and ignorance so that all beings shall be happy and contented and each, in his or her own way and pace, shall strive for their ultimate Deliverance from misery and suffering and endless births and deaths. Sabbe satta bhavantu sukhitatatta!

*Ven. Abbot's Opening Address to the Congress on
"Buddhism Into the Year 2000", Bangkok,
Thailand, Feb. 7, 1990.*

All of you Good and Wise Advisors! Today I am very honored to join this auspicious Assembly, and I would first like to offer you all my blessings, with the wish that all of you will be healthy in body and happy in spirits. I hope that you will be vigorous and courageous in your support of Buddhism, and will quickly accomplish Right Enlightenment.

As Buddhist disciples, we should be models for people in the world. We should base ourselves on the Four Limitless Attitudes of the Buddha: kindness, compassion, joy, and even-mindedness, as we cultivate and uphold the Dharma that the Buddha spoke. We

want to actually put our feet down on solid ground, and take firm steps forward. We want to use the time well as we advance in our cultivation. Our work is to enact the vows and the will that the Buddha put forth. Then we represent the Buddha in actually cultivating and practicing the Dharma. We then make his will and vows a reality.

The Buddha's vows are these: Living beings are boundless, I vow to save them all. Afflictions are endless, I vow to cut them all off. Dharma-doors are infinite, I vow to learn them all. The Buddha's Tao (Spiritual Path) is supreme, I vow to attain it.

We base ourselves upon these four vast, great vows, and then we add these: we vow not to fight, not to be greedy, not to seek, not to be selfish, not to pursue personal advantages, and not to tell lies. If we can truly not fight, be greedy, seek anything, be selfish, seek personal gains, or tell lies, then we can be considered true disciples of the Buddha. If on the other hand, we fight, are greedy, seek things, are selfish, want personal advantages, and tell lies, then you can say we have not truly recognized what Buddhism is all about.

We disciples of the Buddha must be excellent examples of what it means to be a Buddhist. We must be guides along the Way, so that after passing another 2000 years in the future, 2000 years from now, Buddhism will expand and cover the entire world. Then all people in the world will be able not to fight, not be greedy, not seek, not be selfish, not want personal advantages, and not tell lies.

If we can do this, then even without seeking peace, the world will be a peaceful place. Even if you were not to want Buddhism to spread, it would still spread on its own. If every person in the world could understand Buddhism, then wars would come to an end.

In the recent past I spoke with the late Catholic Cardinal of China, Cardinal Paul Yu-bin. I said to him, "You should be a Buddhist among the Catholics, Cardinal Yu-bin." He was very surprised to hear this.

I said, "Don't be alarmed, I myself will be a Catholic among the Buddhists. We will put our minds together and make our religions cooperate. If we help each other out in this way, then the world will know peace."

Cardinal Yu-bin thought about this for a moment, then slapped his thigh and said, "That's an excellent idea. Let's do just that!" After this, Cardinal Yu-bin came to the Buddha-hall, and made bows to pay his respects to the Buddhas.

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas wants to unite all of Buddhism in the world, and to unite all religions into a single body, so that we can stand together, and advance the true principles of human life. We want to bring forward the values of the Buddha, and enact his will, so that all people may be level and equal, putting out of their minds their attitudes of selfishness. In this way the world can be rid of all the problems that now beset it.

Time is precious today, so I will not take up more of it than I already have. I hope that all of you will be vigorous and courageous, and that you will quickly realize great wisdom. Thank you.