

The Bodhi Stand



Introducing Liung Soo Hoong

The One Great Matter, the reason for cultivating, is the matter of ending birth and death. Three deaths inspired Liung Soo Hoong (梁素芬) to cultivate the Buddhadharma. Her personal experiences of suffering caused her to abandon her art career and multiple interests in order to "concentrate on only the most essential one, which is: to try and live my life as closely as I possibly can to my own spiritual ideals, and to continue to persist in this direction until I realize my ultimate goal."

Soo Hoong began to seriously investigate religion in 1983 after the death of her pet bird. One night, she woke up and saw a rat in her room. She immediately became concerned about her bird downstairs, but went back to sleep. The next morning, her birthday, she found the bird's cage bitten through; the bird was gone, and only blood and some feathers remained.

"I felt utterly depressed and responsible, but I was also determined to find out 'where' it had gone. This matter concerned me deeply. I searched, inquired, read, and thought intently. Eventually I was introduced to the wonderful Buddhadharma. I had a few encounters with Buddhism in the past, but the impact was never this great. The timing was almost perfect because I was now ready to receive the Dharma. I will always be grateful to that little friend for rekindling in me a firm resolve. It's sudden death was a powerful reminder of the transiency of life and of the urgency in earnestly pursuing and realizing my spiritual ideals."

A second experience with death further helped her to realize the truth of the Buddhadharmā. She describes the experience:

"In Shih Fu's commentary to the Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva, he explains,

Those who have this illness may become emaciated, consumptive, and racked with pain and spasms, and be always on the verge of tears. All of this is because the offenses which they have committed are numerous, and although they are not yet dead, their retributions are being determined in the hells.

"The above passage became painfully clear to me when my eldest sister was bedridden with cancer. I kept watch over her day and night and saw how rapidly her condition deteriorated. Tears frequently welled up in her eyes. She suffered severe and intense pains constantly. During her last week, she had degenerated into a state almost beyond recognition.

"Three days before she passed away, she underwent physical and mental agony. She had conversations with unseen beings in the evening, throughout the night, and until almost noon the next day. From her extremely pathetic expressions, painful reactions, and pleadings, it became frightfully clear to us that she was undergoing unpleasant interrogations and torments in the hells. We were all utterly stunned by the fierce reality of retribution.

"Towards the end, we all witnessed a miracle happening right before our eyes. But, at the most crucial moment, 'something' intervened, and the whole healing process stopped. We lost her the following day.

"During that time I felt so ashamed and cried a lot, because I realized then that I had no merit or virtue to pull any living being out of their plight or sufferings."

After the death of her dearly loved mother--"the kindest and most understanding lady I ever knew"--however, her feelings of despair were transformed into feelings of hope, and her experiences with the suffering of death served to nurture her faith.

"[My mother's] sudden death left me with a lingering, intense kind of dull and numb pain inside...I thought then that I could never feel happiness again." Her feelings changed when she joined a delegation from Malaysia to attend the Ten Thousand Buddhas Jewelled Repentance Bowing Ceremony at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas." Shih Fu was in the office when the delegation and I arrived...Surprisingly my heart was filled with joy when I saw the Venerable Master...What I learned during that first trip here helped me immensely during my grief." With strengthened resolve, she now hopes" to be able to fully repay the Buddhas', Bodhisattvas'and Shih Fu's boundless compassion, and my mother's deep kindness someday by slowly attempting to walk the Path of the Sages."

In order to realize this hope, Soo Hoong has come to live at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

I never knew that I would one day be able to find a place where the people will not deliberately step on ants or even kill little creatures that are considered to be pests...Every day there are tests. Every living being I meet is a teacher. Every moment is a challenge. Those who are able to maintain the daily schedule here without showing signs of laxness, conceit or impatience have certainly earned my respect. This is truly a rare and inconceivable Way-place, and I honestly wouldn't want to live or cultivate anywhere else."