

News from the Dharma Realm

*Address Given at Unesco Headquarters
Paris, 24 October 1990*

by Venerable Master Hua

Continuing Vajra Bodhi Sea's series on the chronicles of the 1990 Dharma Realm Buddhist Association's delegation to Europe is the Venerable Master Hua's address given to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on the importance of educating our children to be virtuous citizens. See Vajra Bodhi Sea issues #246, November 1990 and #248, January 1991 for articles on the delegation's visits to England and Poland.

Good and wise advisors, when people attend our delegation's presentations, many initially don't know what our monks and nuns are talking about. Wherever we go, we propagate Buddhist education: Buddhist education is concerned with saving human nature, with saving people's souls, with saving people's lives.

Any individual who possesses intelligence, good conscience, and common sense will admit that the mistakes made by our present education system and by educators in this age can harm society in ways worse than the AIDS virus. The errors of modern education plague us more grievously than cancer. They threaten our world with harm potentially more dangerous than the disaster of atomic warfare.

Through modern education, imperceptibly, we are killing our own younger generation. We are teaching our progeny how to forsake their own natures, how to compromise their souls, and even how to forfeit their lives.

This is why our delegation travels about making a large outcry at every lecture-stop: we hope to stir the people of the world to wakefulness, and we urge everyone we meet to reform the education system. We want in this way to pull the next generation back from the brink of disaster, to prevent the world from becoming extinct, and to keep humanity from reaching its end.

My purpose in saying these things is not to startle the world or to rock the boat, nor to intimidate anyone, but simply to encourage all people to carefully consider the situation of education the world around. We see that primary school children in many countries are exposed in their classrooms to information on murders, to crime, and to promiscuity on the part of both sexes.

I ask you, what manner of education can this be? What kind of future can we expect for a world that exposes its young primary students to such information? I don't mean to alarm you all needlessly, but what can we hope for a world whose children learn these things at

a tender age? We are effectively cutting the roots of our younger generation; we are destroying the moral foundation of our progeny. Once the roots of our posterity are cut through, we are facing the extinction of humanity and the end of civilization. The world will march en masse, irreversibly, towards Doomsday.

We need no stockpile of atomic weapons to threaten our existence, nor chemical warfare technology to bring us to a dismal end. We face sufficient harm already when our school classrooms fail to supply humane education and instead lead their students to enter seas of confusion, where they flounder without anchor or compass.

Having lost the proper path, having been led off the road of light and having gone down a dark bypath, what hope can there be for them? On these twisted, narrow roads they learn to take drugs. In school they meet unscrupulous pushers who place illicit, harmful substances into their innocent hands and teach them to sell this poison. This tragedy is being enacted everywhere, and its insidious harm filters up to all levels of society. Think it over, everyone. This problem potentially endangers citizens of every nation.

Yet our governments appear blind to the danger of drugs that ruin our children. Government leaders seem concerned only with the myth of national defense: we spend billions to defend against country X, country Y, and country Z. Education should be the most thoroughgoing national defense policy. If children are not well-educated, then no amount of defense spending will purchase military armaments effective enough to save a demoralized citizenry. Atomic bombs, hydrogen bombs, and chemical weapons will be useless if they defend citizens who are already ruined.

Citizens of all nations should quickly wake up from their muddled dreams and abandon the frantic search for satisfaction amid the five desires of wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep. We should pull back from our headlong plunge into hedonistic pleasure. We people are meant for more than eating, drinking, and indulging in the so-called good life. Abandoning our moral restraints to heedless pleasure-seeking puts our world on a very hazardous path.

If we ignore this truth and fail to reverse our mad rush towards moral depravity, we will reap serious consequences. I often tell American audiences that education in the world has gone bankrupt. The major cause of this bankruptcy is television's negative influence on children. The television set that appears in every home threatens our children no less dreadfully than a terrifying monster. This monster not only teaches our children habits that ruin their young lives, it also saps their vital energy. It cuts into the precious time that could be used in wholesome study, and it infects with a virulent poison more deadly than any other. This is why I say education has been driven bankrupt by the television.

Yes, of course, some countries have so far escaped contamination by this infectious bug, but once a house-hold catches the virus by purchasing a television set, the disease spreads very rapidly. If we don't come up with a way to protect ourselves from this disease, we will remain defenseless against the most dangerous threat of all.

What can we use to neutralize television's danger to our children? The solution is very simple and very easy to apply. We need not imitate the typical American method of first proposing a whopping big budget item to solve this problem, not at all.

All we need is to employ the Eight Virtues of Chinese culture: filial respect, fraternity, dedication, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience. Once families advocate the Eight Cardinal Virtues until they become well-known and trusted by people, then our educational system can be rescued from its current predicament.

These eight virtues are a wonder-drug that can save people's spiritual nature; they are a miracle-medicine capable of saving our souls; they are an efficacious remedy potent enough to save our lives and rescue education from its predicament. They can, in effect, bring the dead back to life.

Suppose, on the other hand, that we don't revitalize classroom education with the Eight Virtues. In that case, we will simply continue to teach schoolchildren skills that lead them to crave fame and profits, how to win the biggest salary after graduation, and how to be greedy for power and position. We will, in short, proceed as ever, running full-speed down the wrong road.

Furthermore, a child's education should be founded on six principles, which are no fighting, no greed, no seeking, no selfishness, no pursuing personal advantages, and no dishonesty. When every schoolchild learns these six rules and no longer studies how to fight, how to be greedy, how to seek, how to be selfish, how to want selfish profits, and how to tell lies; when children learn to avoid alcoholic drinks, tobacco, drugs, and promiscuity, then education will have hopes of revival, and the younger generation need not face oblivion.

If, however, we fail to turn the tide around, then our world nears an unthinkable end; the fall of civilization is certain: it is only a question of time. At the end of the Eastern Chou Dynasty, during the Spring and Autumn Period in China, ethical standards fell as the age neared its demise. The rulers did not know how to rule, and ministers failed to behave as ministers. People did not act like proper people, and even animals showed uncommon traits. As dishonesty and deception became widespread, no one in the country trusted another.

This was the time when the sage Confucius appeared and travelled throughout the land, preaching humaneness, righteousness, virtue, and the path. He taught filiality, fraternity, dedication, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience. These basic doctrines of Confucian virtue held Chinese society together for thousands of years. They were the important threads that wove throughout Chinese civilization and kept it intact from ancient times to the present.

In the modern world, humanity has indulged its desires, and our society has lost its moral fibre. The leaders of nations have set aside their proper priorities. The moral life of the younger generation seems to have been ignored. Leaders pay attention instead to national

defense and overlook the vital matter of education. Nowhere do we find leaders who emphasize humaneness, righteousness, the path, and virtue, or the Eight Virtues.

I am not scolding our leaders as I say this, but most of the men and women who govern our countries are confused by sex and wealth. If sex and wealth aren't their preoccupation, they will be confused by fame. If fame isn't their hang-up, then they will crave food or sleep. Such people pass their lives pursuing the five desires of wealth, sex, fame, food and sleep. They fight for power and celebrity instead of guiding the younger generation by acting as models of the eight virtues of filiality, fraternity, dedication, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience.

The ancients had a saying:

*Propriety, righteousness, integrity, and
conscience are the four pillars of a nation.
If the four pillars aren't set upright, the
country will decline and fall.*

Any country that fails to honor these four virtuous qualities will certainly perish. Yet no matter where you look, you won't find even one schoolchild who actually understands propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience. Can you find a student who practices these virtues? Or one student who has even heard the names of these qualities?

Our era resembles the period before the Eastern Chou dynasty's demise. Men do not behave as they should, and women don't know their proper roles. No matter where you look, you will find both sexes running amok and heedlessly throwing their lives away. People everywhere cherish the idea that human life is for the sake of eating, drinking, and merry-making without satiation. In fact the reality of life is that:

*Enduring suffering puts an end to suffering;
Enjoying blessings exhausts blessings.*

Confucius travelled about propagating virtue and the path and teaching filiality, fraternity, dedication, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience. His wonder-drugs were solely responsible for keeping China together as a society for these many thousands of years.

China's culture survived all the way up to the end of the Manchu dynasty and the beginning of the Republic. Then a group of irresponsible culture-mongers tried to usurp power by condemning Confucius, using the slogan, "Down Confucius, the Second Son." They nearly brought the good teaching to its knees, and by so doing, they condemned the Chinese people to a nightmare of misery and pain, to homelessness, exile, and unspeakable suffering.

Now I want to revive those wonder-drugs of Chinese culture and bring back to life humaneness, righteousness, the path, and virtue, and the Eight Virtues of filial respect,

brotherhood, dedication, trust, propriety, righteousness, integrity, and conscience. I want to carry them all over the world to save the souls and remold the lives of the youth of all countries, and by so doing, to rescue their natures from peril and ruin.

Please pay heed, everyone! The world has reached the point of no return. The critical time has come. I now bring these wonder-drugs to Paris, to the educators of UNESCO, hoping that you, too, will use them to save the world and rescue our younger generation from imminent peril.

Some people facing this crisis, sensitive to the dangers of pollution in land, sea, and sky, want to move into outer space to avoid destruction here on earth. Unfortunately, we who stay here are very likely to refuse to wake up to our danger with this result: we will in our confusion spawn a generation of freaks, semi-humans, people not different from vegetables!