

The Bodhi Stand



Introducing Upasika Feng Chou Hui Jen

Two principles of Buddhism are especially important to Feng Chou Hui Jen (Gwo Jen). One is the physical and spiritual benefits of vegetarianism, and the other is the realization that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas *always* protect those who are sincere.

Gwo Jen was born in Shanghai on November 8, 1943. At age three, she moved to Taiwan where she lived for more than thirty years. In 1983, she and her family (husband, two daughters, one son) moved to the United States. In Taiwan, she had worked in the import / export business, and in the United States she continued to work in imports. In 1985, she set up her own import gifts and handicrafts store, where she and her husband now work together.

When Feng Gwo Jen lived in Taiwan, she was responsible for taking her grandmother to visit Buddhist temples. Although she fulfilled her filial duty, she did not find this activity particularly meaningful—they would just bow and leave, and she didn't know why.

In the United States, however, Gwo Jen saw a newspaper announcement for a celebration of Gwan Shr Yin's birthday at the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. When she arrived at the Sagely City, she "fell in love" with the teachings and practice she discovered there. Here was a place she could study the Sutras and truly understand why

she was bowing. She learned about making offerings, and began to hope that she could work for Buddhism. As she bowed during the celebration, she found herself crying at the thought that this was where she wanted to be.

From that day on, she wanted to do something for everyone in the Way-place, especially the leaders. She saw how they worked hard to benefit others, and she wanted to pay them back. She thought, "If I can do anything, that would be very fine."

Finding an opportunity to contribute proved difficult. When she could find time to visit the temple, something always seemed to get in the way of her offering her services. One obstacle was that she was not vegetarian, and she felt that she was not clean enough to enter the kitchen.

Finally her resolve to become vegetarian overcame the objections of those around her who warned that she would not have enough strength to keep up with her busy schedule. To her surprise, she found that she had more energy and felt healthier when she gave up eating meat. Because she needed less sleep, she decided to use her extra morning time to go to Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco from her home south of the city.

She says of that time, "Before I became a vegetarian, I felt as if the door [to partake in and help with temple activities] was closed to me. When I quit eating meat, the door suddenly and easily opened wide. "Having witnessed the changes in his wife, her husband has also recently become vegetarian.

Gwo Jen now takes every chance she can get to go to the Way-place to worship and contribute her talents. She tries her best to do whatever is needed. She attends almost all the Dharma assemblies at Gold Mountain Monastery and stays as long as she can, usually rushing off to work with little or no time for eating lunch.

Because Gwo Jen's schedule is so full, she doesn't want to waste even a moment of time. Whenever she drives anywhere in her car, she recites the Buddha's name or the Great Compassion Mantra. She was able to escape completely unharmed from two frighteningly close calls with car accidents and feels certain that her good fortune was due to the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

One time two years ago, Feng Gwo Jen was driving by herself from Los Angeles, and she began to feel drowsy. Three times she momentarily nodded off to sleep. The first two times she had the same vivid dream of seeing her six-year-old son dressed in a white robe, similar to what Gwan Yin Bodhisattva might wear, calling to her, "Mom! When will you come home?" She answered, "It won't be long. I am on the way. In a couple of minutes." And she fell asleep again. The third time, just as she was about to fall asleep, her outside mirror suddenly banged and woke her up. She pulled to the side of the road and took a rest. It apparently was loose, but she had not gone off the smooth, even road and there was no evident reason for her mirror to bang. She then realized that her *two* dreams had been warnings, and she was able to stay alert for the rest of her trip, arriving in San Francisco without further difficulty.

Another time, Gwo Jen was driving her family home from a trip, while her cousin from Taiwan followed in another car. As usual, she was reciting the Buddha's name, and so was her husband, a passenger in her car. Happening too quickly for her to even see, a car suddenly swerved between her car and her cousin's. When it was within inches of her car, it abruptly pulled out, slammed against a divider, spun until it hit the mountain on the other side of the road, and flipped over. It did not, however, even touch Gwo Jen's or her cousin's car. Gwo Jen's daughter was screaming in the back seat, where she had seen everything that happened. But Gwo Jen was thankful that she herself had not seen the other car when it first pulled in, because she might have reacted out of fear in a dangerous way.

Gwo Jen attributes her narrow escape in both these incidents to the protection of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. She hadn't realized in either situation that she was in danger and should seek the aid of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, yet she obtained a response. Both of these occurrences underscored for her the importance of always being mindful of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and not waiting for problems to arise, when it might be too late.