



Buddha Root Farm

Talks by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua in Oregon, 1975

### Dharma Talk on

Aug.17 | Aug.18 | Aug.19 | Aug.20 | Aug.21 | Aug.22 | Aug.23 | Aug.24

#### **Editor's Introduction**

In the summer of 1975 Bill Brevoort, owner of Buddha Root Farm on the Smith River, near Reedsport, Oregon, decided he wanted to host an outdoors Buddha Recitation Session on his land. He requested the Venerable Master Hua and the fourfold assembly of Gold Mountain Monastery to join in the session. The Venerable Master assented, and in August 1975 a group of over fifty cultivators from all over the U.S. gathered at the farm to attend a week-long session of reciting the Buddha's name.

This was the first time that a traditional Buddha Recitation Session was held in the open air, in the mountains. A large main tent was set up to provide shelter from the hot afternoon sun and occasional downpours of rain. Beside the tent a circular path was cleared for members of the assembly to use during walking recitation. Beside the winding river, the yellow grasses, and the wild flowers the assembly recited the Buddha's name, attended ceremonies, and listened to instructional talks.

The participants worked on quieting the mind; some attained the state of "light ease" or gained the flavor of Buddha Recitation. Ultimately, reciting the Buddha's name can result in the Buddha Recitation Samadhi, a concentrated state where, as the classical Chinese poet Su Dong-Po wrote:

*Of the colors of the mountains,*

*none are not his vast long tongue;  
In the sparkling streams and the forests green  
his compassionate song is sung...*

At the end of the week 17 people took refuge with the Triple Jewel and bowed to the Venerable Master as their teacher.

During the session Venerable Master gave talks twice daily, one in the afternoon and another in the evening. He brought the Pure Land Dharma-door alive, explaining the fundamentals of practice and revealing the fruits of cultivation. He spoke so simply that even absolute beginners could comprehend the principles, and yet his words awakened more experienced cultivators to the profundities of the Buddhadharma. The Venerable Master's words provided inspiration and instruction for all assembled at Buddha Root Farm, and they serve as a wealth of Dharma for cultivators of the future.

*Vajra Bodhi Sea* will be printing the instructional talks given by the Venerable Master during that Recitation Session along with photographs, hoping to give our readers an idea of how the Master guided Westerners in the first outdoor Buddha Recitation Session and to remind them of the Master's painstaking toil in bringing the Buddhadharma to the West. May this inspire everyone to take up the mission of the Thus Come One and carry on the Master's wishes, thereby saving themselves as well as others.

As the third anniversary of the Master's Nirvana approaches, this series is being published as a form of commemoration.

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**Sunday, August 17, 1975 (evening)**

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Homage to the Eternally Dwelling Buddhas of the Ten Directions

Homage to the Eternally Dwelling Dharma of the Ten Directions

Homage to Our Teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha

Homage to the Shurangama from the Buddha's Crown

Homage to the Bodhisattva Who Observes the World's Sounds

## Homage to the Vajra Treasury Bodhisattvas

How are you? This Dharma Assembly is wonderful! Despite the rain, so many people have gathered here deep in the mountains to blaze trails through the wilderness. We are here to plant the seeds of Bodhi so that in the future we may harvest the fruit of Buddhahood.

What is meant by “planting the seeds of Bodhi”? Upasaka Bill has named this place “Buddha Root Farm.” At Buddha Root Farm one should plant Bodhi seeds. First you plant a Bodhi seed, then you send down the Buddha Root, and in the future you will reap the Buddha fruit. So your coming here is an extremely important first step.

Why do I say that it is important? Because if you recite the Buddha’s name you can end birth and death, and then, like the Buddha, you can teach and transform living beings. From limitless eons past till now, each one of us has been born and then died, has died and been born, passed through birth upon birth – death after death: Who knows how many times we’ve turned on the wheel? We have not yet encountered the Dharma-door of Buddha-recitation, and so we have not ended birth and death.

Now, having learned the method of Buddha-recitation, we can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. This is extremely important! Buddha-recitation is a serious matter because it can cause all living beings to end birth and death, gain release from the revolving wheel, separate from suffering, and attain bliss. Since it is so important, all of us participating here should be sincere and recite with a true heart.

There’s a way to determine if you are reciting with a true heart. If you are sincere, the mosquitoes will not bite you. If you are insincere, the mosquitoes will bite you. If you recite with a true heart, you won’t be bothered by the rain. No matter how it pours, it won’t dampen the mind which recites the Buddha’s name. Recite until the wind blows, but doesn’t touch you; the rain pours, but doesn’t fall on you.

If your only thoughts are to chant the Buddha’s name, then it won’t rain. The weather will be fine, that’s certain. The mosquitoes won’t bite you and the rain won’t fall. These are some responses that come from sincere recitation of the Buddha’s name. If you are simply

pretending, then it will rain, the mosquitoes will bite, and you'll be miserable sitting there. If you recite well, however, even when the mosquitoes bite you'll pay no attention to them, and so it will be as if they hadn't bitten.

You should think, "I will endure the pain of being bitten. My only thought is to recite the Buddha's name. If the mosquitoes bite, I won't even know it." If you don't feel the bugs bite and if you don't know it's raining, that's being true-hearted. If your heart is sincere you will certainly have a special response. You may see Amitabha Buddha coming to rub you on the crown of your head or you may see him bathing you in light. Amitabha Buddha may appear and cover you with his sash. These are all responses:

*His hand rubs my head,*

*His sash covers me...*

Amitabha Buddha may respond in these ways.

So if you don't fear that the mosquitoes will bite, if you are unmoved by the rain, and if you're not afraid to walk the rugged path back and forth, then your heart is true. If your heart is true, even when mosquitoes bite, you won't feel it. That's why I say they won't bite. They won't bite because you won't know that you have been bitten! If, as soon as a bug flies near you, you think, "Oh no! Here comes a mosquito!" and try to brush it away, then you've forgotten about reciting.

This is not a joke. It's a very serious matter. When Guo Yu said to me today that a mosquito had bitten him, I said, "You haven't been mindful and that's why the mosquito bit you." The mosquitoes are just acting on the principle that

*Everything's a test,*

*To see what you will do;*

*If you don't recognize what's before your eyes,*

*You have to start anew!*

If you can't even deal with the demonic obstacle of a mosquito, then you've really

chanted the Buddha's name in vain.

That's all for today. I hope you all sleep well, and the mosquitoes don't bite. If you recite as if you were asleep, then if the mosquitoes bite, you won't know it. When you're asleep you don't feel them bite; if you recite well, it's the same way.

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**Monday, August 18, 1975 (afternoon)**

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Today is the first full day of the Buddha recitation Session. Those who have chanted the Buddha's name before know of its advantages. Those who have never recited before will not know what we are doing. "Namo, namo, namo—what?"

Amitabha!

"Well, what is Amitabha anyway?"

A Buddha!

"But what are we doing? We recite while we walk, recite while we stand, recite while we sit, and even when we lie down to sleep our minds are still reciting. What use is it?"

I will tell you:

*To bow in worship before the Buddhas  
Eradicates offenses like the Ganges sands.*

If you just bow once before the Buddhas, you eradicate as much bad karma as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges.

You say, "As grains of sand in the River Ganges? Well, I've sung the Buddha's name so many times, certainly my offense-karma has been completely wiped away."

You should be aware that from limitless eons ago, from the time when you first became a human being until the present, your incarnations are uncountable. You yourself may not even believe that you have past, present and future lives. In each life you were confused,

muddled, and unclear, and therefore, at present, you don't know how much bad karma you have amassed as a human being. There is reason to fear that the bad deeds you have committed in one single life exceed the number of sand grains in the Ganges. Although reciting the Buddha's name will eradicate offense-karma like the Ganges' sands, you don't know how much of it exists. Fortunately, our bad deeds have no material form. If they did, each individual's karma would completely fill empty space. That's the extent of your offenses! But, because karma has no material form, empty space has yet to be filled. So it says,

*To bow in worship before the Buddhas  
Eradicates offenses like the Ganges' sands;  
To give a single penny  
To increases your blessings without limit.*

In supporting the Bodhimanda, those with money give money. Those with strength give strength. Whether you give money or strength, the merit and virtue are the same, and they help you to plant good roots.

To recite the Buddha's name but once eradicates the grave offenses committed during ninety million eons of birth and death. In America, where the Buddhadharma is new, you now have the rare good fortune to encounter this method. What's more, you've rare good fortune to encounter this method. What's more, you've met with a Good Advisor, one who can teach you the method of Buddha Recitation. No one should casually waste this precious time. Be very conscientious, work hard at your recitation, and you will not have attended this session in vain.

Here we are bivouacked out-of-doors under the open sky, camping in the wilds and reciting the Buddha's name. There is nothing to shelter us from the rain. When it's not raining we recite while walking on a circular track. This is truly an excellent recreation. We're not here to play ball or set off rockets, but to recite the Buddha's name. This is truly a subtle, wonderful, and inconceivable environment. There are no sounds at all. It's not like San Francisco with its cars, buses, trolleys, and planes going "vrooom!" Vrooom!" --- all making a tremendous din. It's very peaceful here, and perfect for

Buddha Recitation. So all of you take care not to waste this precious time.

Deep in the mountains the air is fresh and there is not the slightest trace of pollution. The evil world of the five turbidities, the turbidity of the eon, the turbidity of views, the turbidity of living beings, the turbidity of afflictions, and the turbidity of the lifespan--- exists in places crowded with people. This wilderness, by contrast, is the clear, pure Land of Ultimate Bliss. If you can cultivate in the Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, the power of the noisy bustle of the city. Here, it is easy to enter samadhi, to gain concentration, to obtain the Buddha Recitation samadhi.

As you recite the Buddha's name, every sound of the Buddha's name is a thought of purity. When every sound is recitation, every thought is clear and pure. When every thought is clear and pure, you obtain the Buddha Recitation samadhi.

As it is said,

*One pure thought is one thought of the Buddha.*

*When every thought is pure, every thought is of the Buddha.*

Beside us runs a small river, and the flowing water recites the Buddha's name. As you listen to it, it says, "Namo Amitabha Buddha." The blowing wind also recites the Buddha's name, proclaiming the wonderful Mahayana Dharma. This state is the same as that in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. In the Land of Ultimate Bliss:

*The water flows, the wind blows*

*Proclaiming the Mahayana;*

*In the pools of seven treasures*

*Are flowers of four colors*

*And waves of solid gold.*

The lotuses which bloom in the pools made of the seven treasures are green-colored of green light, yellow-colored of yellow light, red-colored of red light, white-colored of white light. Green, yellow, red, and white, the lights shine brightly.

You say, “Dharma Master, you have been explaining Buddha Recitation for quite a while now, but ultimately what is this ‘namo, namo’ all about? Namu what?”

“Namo” yourself! Don’t “namo” anyone else. Think of it this way, “I have such good roots that I have learned to recite the Buddha’s name!”

“Namo” means “to return one’s life and respectfully submit.” This means to return your body, mind, and life and respectfully bow before Amitabha Buddha. Say to yourself, “I take my body, mind, and life and return in refuge to Amitabha Buddha.”

You ask, “Well, if ‘namo’ means ‘to return one’s life and respectfully submit,’ what does ‘Amitabha’ mean? Can you explain that?”

Of course I can. Don’t be impatient. I’ll tell you in due time. If I don’t finish this time, I’ll continue next time. And if I don’t finish next time, I’ll continue later on. Don’t worry. I am determined to teach you what “Namo Amitabha Buddha” is all about.

“Namo Amitabha” is Sanskrit. Yesterday Guo Zhen said it was Chinese, but that’s completely wrong. “Buddha” is also Sanskrit. The Chinese character “Fo” is a partial transliteration of the word “Buddha.” Amitabha’s other name, “Amitayus,” means “limitless life.” When you recite the Buddha’s name, you obtain a limitless life span. Because you return your life and respectfully submit to the Buddha of Limitless Life, you may take the merit and virtue you obtain by reciting and live as long as you please!

If you say, “I want to live to be ninety-nine years old,” then you will certainly not depart at age eighty-eight. You will live to be ninety-nine.

You say, “But I want to live to be a hundred!”

You can do that, too. All you need to do is recite the Buddha’s name sincerely. This includes all of us gathered here today. I will now make a prediction: Those among you who want to live to a very old age will certainly get to do so. Not everyone, mind you but only those who are sincere. Whoever recites sincerely will obtain that response and get his wish.

“Amitabha” means “limitless light.” The limitless light is the light of wisdom, the opening of wisdom. Whoever recites sincerely can develop great wisdom and a faultless memory. There’s no question about it. “Amitayus” means “limitless life” and “Amitabha” means “limitless light.”

The word “Buddha” is also Sanskrit. I explain the word “Buddha” using the similar-sounding Chinese phrase 不大 bu da, which means “not big.” So I have a verse:

*Neither great nor small,  
Neither come nor gone,  
In numberless world systems,  
Buddhas shine upon each other’s lotus thrones.*

The Buddha is not any bigger than we people are. Rather, he is just the same size. However, he has become enlightened and returned to his inherent wisdom. We are no smaller than the Buddha, and the Buddha is no smaller than we are. But, because our hearts are not pure, because we have not discovered our inherent wisdom or developed great wisdom, we are still common people.

The Buddha is one who is enlightened. Living beings are those who are confused.

*When enlightened, one is a Buddha.  
When confused, one is a living being.*

To become enlightened is to become a Buddha. Before enlightenment, one is just a living being. When you become enlightened you gain nothing that the living being doesn’t have. When confused, one hasn’t anything less than the Buddha has. There is no increasing and no decreasing; it’s a question of whether you are confused or enlightened. That’s where the difference lies.

I will illustrate this with a very simple analogy. Mind you, this is just an analogy. Don’t take it literally, because it’s all hypothetical. The Buddha is like a university professor---university professors are not Buddhas---you should be clear about that point---and living beings are like students. Every student can become a professor. Every professor can

become a student. The Buddha is, however, wiser than professors. He's even higher than a professor! Remember, this is a mere analogy which demonstrates that the Buddha and people are the same.

"Then why should I chant the Buddha's name? Why doesn't the Buddha recite my name?" you wonder. "Why should I recite 'Namo Amitabha Buddha'? Why doesn't the Buddha recite me? Why doesn't he recite my name?"

That's a good question. In fact, it's got me stumped. I don't know how to answer it, but I'll think up something: Ah! I know! It's because you never made a vow to cause living beings to recite your name. The Buddha Amitabha on the causal ground was a Bhikshu named Dharma Treasury, and he made forty-eight great vows. In every vow he said, "In the future, when my cultivation succeeds and I have become a Buddha, my country will be one of ultimate bliss and purity. The murkiness of the five turbidities will not exist within it. All living beings in the ten directions who recite my name will be led to rebirth in my land, where they may realize Buddhahood. As long as one of them has not become a Buddha, I will not accomplish the right enlightenment."

Because of the power of the vows of Amitabha Buddha, we have gathered here to recite---with different mouths but with the same sound---"Namo Amitabha Buddha." We are cultivating by relying on the power of the vows of Amitabha Buddha. When we recite the Buddha's name, Amitabha Buddha knows about it. "Hey, I signed a contract with that living being saying that if he kept my name in mind I would lead him to become a Buddha. If I don't guide him to Buddhahood now, the contract is nothing but a lie." And the Buddha hurries right over to guide you to Buddhahood.

Someone says, "But the Western Land of ultimate Bliss is so far away---hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands---how can I go there? Can I take a plane? How much will the ticket cost? How much is the train fare? Can I take the bus or drive myself?"

Don't worry about that. You can arrive in a single thought. You don't have to buy any tickets at all. In a single thought you can be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands are not beyond that one single thought.

We now recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” and there is nothing more important than this work. Don’t you see? Last night it was raining and today the sky is clear. In a moment you are all going to make a vow to stop the rain. The rain has got to stop because we are working hard here at our cultivation. I myself don’t have the strength, but if you collectively say, “IT IS NOT ALLOWED TO RAIN!...” Yesterday I admonished Guo Tong because he was being lazy and not working hard. Now we should all do this work together. For these few days while we are cultivating her, the least response we can expect is a clear sky. Otherwise it will be pitch dark at night, and the paths are very muddy. The men don’t know this, but the women are really roughing it over there. They have to cross the river, and it is never certain whether they are going to cross the water or whether the water is going to cross them. But I’ll tell you:

*When you’re confused, the teacher takes you across.*

*When you’re enlightened, you take yourself across.*

When you become enlightened, you take yourself across; you carry your own flashlight.

At just this moment Guo Hang has struck up a false thought. He wants to run into the mountains to live. Isn’t that right, Guo Hang?

Guo Hang: Yes...

Ven. Master: But you have to open your eyes. If you keep your eyes shut, even if you have a flashlight, it will be useless. You’ll fall down anyway. Remember, you’ve all made a vow that it is not allowed to rain. If it doesn’t rain, that proves you are all sincere. If it does rain, that will prove that you are not sincere. It has nothing whatever to do with me. It’s none of my business. The rain is your business.

Most of the people from Gold Mountain Monastery have entered the sleep samadhi, because they’re used to sleeping sitting up, so they can sleep while they sit. The newcomers aren’t able to do this.

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**August 18, 1975, Monday (evening)**

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Disciple: This is a story I've already told everyone at Gold Mountain Monastery, but there are so many new people that I'd like to tell it again.

There was an eighty-year old lady. When Shi Fu was in Hong Kong, he had a temple built on top of a mountain and you had to walk up eight hundred steps to get there. I wasn't clear about the details last time and Shi Fu had to tell me, so I know them now.

This eighty-year-old lady was deaf, yet every day she would go to Shi Fu's Dharma lecture. She insisted on going even though she couldn't hear. After a while, one day when everyone was chanting, all of a sudden she could hear them. On the night before this, she had had a dream in which three fat children ran into her stomach, and from then on she had to eat every hour. She had to go down in the middle of the Sutra lectures and cook something for herself and go back to the lecture. This went on for about a week and then she decided to tell Shi Fu.

Shi Fu would get up very early in the morning and take supplies to an island where he was building a temple, and he would return in the evening for the Sutra lecture. The elderly lady got ready to meet him as he was coming up the steps. She told him her dream. Shi Fu told her to light a stick of incense at midnight. She went back and lit incense at midnight and then she saw Weitou Bodhisattva take the children by the ear and drag them away. Shi Fu later told her the Bodhisattva was taking them to jail. Afterwards she was cured of her hunger ailment.

The reason she had it in the first place was because in her past life her friend had had that ailment and she had not believed it. She had accused her friend of making it up. That was why she had received this retribution in this life. When she herself had the ailment, a lot of people said she was faking it. Those people will receive a similar retribution in the future.

**Ven. Master:** If anyone wants to say anything, I'll give you an opportunity to speak right

now.

**Question:** We haven't told people on what page in the Recitation Handbook the Sutras and mantras we'll be reciting are. The new comers won't know, so people from Gold Mountain should tell them where we are in the book so they can follow along in the recitation.

**Ven. Master:** Good. You should tell everyone where we are starting. It's not like at gold Mountain where we only have a couple of new people. Here we should announce it to everyone.

**Ven. Master:** What time did you start this morning?

**Disciple:** 7 o'clock.

**Ven. Master:** Did you do Morning Recitation?

**Disciple:** Yes.

This afternoon at the three o'clock lecture I spoke about Amitabha Buddha, but I did not finish explaining the term "Buddha." I will do so now.

Previously, the Buddha was the same as every other living being. Not only was he the same as human beings, he was the same as all living creatures, even mosquitoes, bees, and ants. Because he shared this kinship he later brought forth the thought of enlightenment. Having brought forth the thought of enlightenment, he practiced the Bodhisattva Way, benefiting himself and benefiting others, enlightening himself and enlightening others, helping himself and helping others, saving himself and saving others. There was no selfishness in the things he did; he was open and unselfish. He helped everyone. When he cultivated in the causal ground, he gave up his very life to rescue living beings.

The Buddha saw a tiger about to starve to death, and he offered his body to the tiger as food. When he saw a hawk on the brink of death, he fed his own flesh to it, slicing the meat from his bones in order to feed it. Think it over: The tiger is the most ferocious of beasts and the hawk is one of the fiercest of birds, but when the Buddha saw that these

evil creatures were starving, he gave up his life to save them. Because he had such a great, magnanimous spirit, he became a Buddha.

After he became a Buddha, did he then sit back and enjoy the bliss of Buddhahood? No. He did not forget all living beings. He saved them; he taught and transformed them.

The Buddha has three kinds of enlightenment,

- 1) self-enlightenment;
- 2) the enlightenment of others; and
- 3) the perfection of enlightenment and conduct.

He enlightens himself; and he enlightens all living beings, and he has perfected the practices of his cultivation.

*Perfect in the triple enlightenment,  
Replete with the myriad virtues,  
He is called "Buddha."*

As to the myriad virtues, in every move the Buddha makes, he benefits others, thus perfecting his virtuous conduct. That is why we call him "Buddha." This has been a general explanation of the term.

Not just a Buddha can realize Buddhahood. Everyone can become a Buddha. That is why our faith in the Buddha is not superstitious [literally, "confused faith"]. Buddhism is not like other religions whose deities claim, "I am the true god. All others are false. No matter how faithfully you believe in me, you will eternally be my inferior. Never can you occupy my position."

Religion such as this is dictatorial, authoritarian, and unjust! On the other hand, everyone can become a Buddha. This is why Buddhism is the most democratic religion, the most just religion. The Buddha is completely devoid of selfishness, thoroughly devoid of desire for self-benefit. He is open, generous, and impartial, straightforward, true, and unprejudiced. He sees all beings as identical with himself and so he wants to take them all

across.

Hearing this, someone has become arrogant. Why? It doesn't occur to him that the Buddha became a Buddha by virtue of his cultivation. He says, "Oh, everyone is a Buddha. I don't have to cultivate. I am a Buddha! Everybody is a Buddha!"

This person has deviant understanding and heterodox views. It's true that everyone can become a Buddha, but in order to do so, one must cultivate. When you become enlightened you can certify to the result of Buddhahood. If you do not cultivate and have not become enlightened, what kind of a Buddha are you? You are a stupid Buddha, a confused Buddha. Muddled and dense, you understand nothing. You hear others talk about it, misunderstanding them, yet consider yourself a Buddha, too. This is not permissible.

Why do I mention all this? Because in the past I have met many people who have held such views and so I decided to tell you about it.

We will now discuss the Pure Land Dharma-door, Buddha Recitation. The Pure Land is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss, the country of Amitabha Buddha. When the Buddha was in the world, no one understood the Pure Land Dharma-door. That is why not even one of the Buddha's disciples, with their great wisdom, didn't understand it. No one thought of asking for it, and so the Amitabha Sutra, which we just recited, was spoken by the Buddha without request. All the other Sutras which the Buddha spoke were requested by an interlocutor.

For example, in the Vajra Sutra the interlocutor was Subhuti, who asked the Buddha to speak the Sutra. Since none of the Buddha's disciples understood this Dharma-door of Pure Land recitation---not even the great and wise Shariputra---the Buddha spoke the Amitabha Sutra to Shariputra without waiting to be asked. It is an extremely important Sutra and takes across those of great wisdom. Those who lack wisdom are not able to understand it. That we now have met to cultivate this method of Buddha Recitation makes Shakyamuni Buddha very happy and pleases Amitabha Buddha a great deal, too.

Simply explained, there are four kinds of Buddha Recitation. The first is "Contemplating

by Thought Buddha Recitation”; the second, “Contemplating an Image Buddha Recitation”; the third, “Holding the Name Buddha Recitation”; and the fourth, “Real Mark Buddha Recitation.”

In “Contemplating by Thought Buddha Recitation” one contemplates the following verse:

*Amitabha Buddha’s body is of golden hue,  
His fine marks brilliant beyond compare.  
The white hair-mark winds as high as five Mount Sumerus,  
And his purple eyes are as deep and clear as four great seas.  
Countless transformation Buddhas appear within his light,  
With transformation Bodhisattvas, also numberless.  
His forty-eight vows take living beings across  
In nine grades of lotuses to reach the other shore.*

**Amitabha Buddha’s body is of golden hue:** Amitabha Buddha’s entire body is gold.

**His fine marks brilliant beyond compare:** His characteristics are incomparable. Amitabha’s light is unequalled. He has the thirty-two marks and eighty minor characteristics of a Buddha. His brilliant light pervasively illumines all living beings with whom he has an affinity.

Whoever is sincere in his recitation during this session may be illuminated by Amitabha’s light. But your heart must be truly sincere. Bring forth your true heart to recite the Buddha’s name, and don’t fear suffering or pain. You must be extremely sincere and earnest.

Whoever is sincere in his recitation during this session may be illuminated by Amitabha’s light. But your heart must be truly sincere. Bring forth your true heart to recite the Buddha’s name, and don’t fear suffering or pain. You must be extremely sincere and earnest.

**The white hair-mark winds as high as five Mount Sumerus:** In the space between Amitabha Buddha’s eyebrows there is a white hair-mark. How big is it? As big as five

Mount Sumeru. And how high is Mount Sumeru? Mount Sumeru is the highest mountain there is. None of our mountains are as high.

The empty space that we see is called the Heaven of the Four Kings. Mount Sumeru is twice as high as this heaven. In other words, the Heaven of the Four Kings is located half-way up Mount Sumeru. Amitabha Buddha's white hair-mark is five times as high as Mount Sumeru. How high do you think that is?

**His purple eyes are as deep and clear as four great seas:** Amitabha Buddha's eyes alone are as large as four seas. Now, would you say he has big eyes? His purple eyes, bright and clear, are as big as four great seas, so how big would you say his entire body is? His body is as big as one hundred million trichiliocosms.

**Countless transformation Buddhas appear within his light:** Amitabha Buddha emits light from his eyes, his ears, his nose, and his mouth. His entire body pours forth light, and from every hair pore on his body appear Buddhas from boundless universes. See? Your mind can't possibly conceive of anything so big. No one knows how many transformation Buddhas he creates.

**With transformation Bodhisattvas, also numberless:** The Bodhisattvas which appear on every single hair pore of his body are also boundless.

**His forty-eight vows take living beings across:** He has made forty-eight vows to teach and transform living beings.

In nine grades of lotuses to reach the other shore. His lotuses are divided into nine grades:

1. superior rebirth in the superior grade;
2. superior rebirth in the middle grade;
3. superior rebirth in the lower grade;
4. middle rebirth in the superior grade;
5. middle rebirth in the middle grade;
6. middle rebirth in the lower grade;
7. lower rebirth in the superior grade;

8. lower rebirth in the middle grade;
9. lower rebirth in the lower grade;

Each of these nine grades in turn divides into nine, making nine times nine, or eighty-one grades in all.

Among the eighty-one grades, how big is the largest lotus? It's about one hundred times as big as the United States of America. A small lotus is about the size of this country. This should give you a general idea. The bigger your lotus is, the bigger your Dharmabody will be when you realize Buddhahood and sit upon the lotus throne. If your lotus is the size of single U.S.A., then as a Buddha you will also be just about that big. The Buddha's transformation bodies are inconceivable. This is called "Contemplation by Thought Buddha Recitation."

As we sit here listening to the lecture, several mosquitoes among us are thinking, "Oh! How can the Buddha be that big? I don't believe it." It's fitting that they don't believe it, because they are so small they can't believe there could be something that big. Not only do they not believe that the Buddha is as big as he is, they also don't believe people are as big as they are. Although they may see a person, they don't know what a person is. They think we are Mount Sumerus. Each one of us is, in fact, a Mount Sumeru. What does that mean? Today I'll reveal this most subtle and wonderful dharma: Your Mount Sumeru is just your arrogance, your smugness, and your disbelief!

Okay. That's all for today. There are still three more types of Buddha Recitation to be discussed. Perhaps someone will tell you in a dream tonight what they are. If not, I'll explain them tomorrow.

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**Tuesday, August 19, 1975 (afternoon)**

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Today is the second day of the Buddha Recitation Session. Yesterday you didn't know what the recitation of "Namo Amitabha Buddha" was all about, and so I explained it to you. By now, each of you should know how to apply effort in reciting the Buddha's name. When reciting, don't sing too loudly or it may injure your energies. However, if you recite

too quietly, it's easy to doze off and lose your vitality. When you are drowsy, you are not able to hear yourself recite. If you can't hear yourself recite, then "Namo Amitabha Buddha" will not be present in your heart. So it is necessary to recite out loud so that your ears hear the sound clearly and distinctly, and your mind contemplates the sound clearly and distinctly. Don't waste even a single second. At all times be mindful of your Buddha Recitation. Say "Namo Amitabha Buddha" with sincerity and concentration.

Your mindfulness should be uninterrupted. Continue reciting at all times without a break. Last night I explained the first of the four techniques of recitation, "contemplating by thought." Today I will continue with the second, "contemplating of an image Buddha Recitation."

When you contemplate using thought, Amitabha Buddha's Dharma body is so large that it is not easy to expand the measure of your mind to contemplate it. As an alternative, you may set up an image of Amitabha Buddha and practice mindfulness of the Buddha while facing the image. Look closely at the white hair-mark between the Buddha's eyebrows. The white hair-mark will emit a great light which will travel to the end of space throughout the Dharma Realm, so that all places receive the illumination. Within Amitabha Buddha's light appear limitless Buddhas and countless Bodhisattvas. This is the method called "contemplation of an image Buddha Recitation."

The third is "holding the name Buddha Recitation" in which one repeats the six-syllable vast name, "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo," that is, "Namo Amitabha Buddha." This technique is divided into audible recitation and soundless recitation. Here in the Dharma assembly we practice audible recitation. When the bell is rung, everyone recites "Namo Amitabha Buddha" in unison, making a melodious sound. Soundless recitation refers to the period when we sit in silence while single-mindedly reciting "Namo Amitabha Buddha." This is called "silent recitation," or "vajra recitation."

Of all the Dharma-doors in Buddhism, Buddha Recitation is the easiest one to cultivate, as it

*Receives the beings of the three dispositions,*

*And gathers in both the intelligent and the dull.*

Living beings are of three dispositions: a superior disposition, that is, people with wisdom; a mediocre disposition, that is, people of average intelligence; and an inferior disposition, that is, people who are very stupid. This method benefits both the young and the old, and works for both the intelligent and the dull. Intelligent people are those with wisdom and dull people are the stupid ones. People with wisdom who recite the Buddha's name can easily gain a response. People who are stupid who recite will also find it easy to gain a response. Therefore the recitation of "Namo Amitabha Buddha" on the one hand saves effort and on the other costs nothing. It's the most convenient Dharma-door of all. Not only is it convenient, it is the most expedient of all expedient methods, the shortest of all short cuts, the most wonderful of all Dharma-doors. Some people may say, "What's the significance of the phrase "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo?" Its significance is profound and vast. Its wonder cannot be exhausted in speech, nor can its advantages.

When the Buddha dwelt in the world, that era was called the Proper Dharma Age. At that time, the Buddha taught the Dharma and there were certified Arhats and great Bodhisattvas; the sages were dwelling in the world. The Dharma-image Age followed next, after the Buddha entered Nirvana. During this period people who cultivated the Way were few; those who were attached to external appearances and concentrated on making Buddhist images were many, but genuine cultivators were few in number.

After the Dharma-image Age, came the Dharma-ending Age. The Proper Dharma Age lasted for one thousand years. The Dharma-image Age lasted another one thousand years. That's two thousand years in all. The Dharma-ending Age endures for ten thousand years. We are now living in the Dharma-ending Age. What does the phrase "Dharma-ending" mean? It means that the Dharma has nearly come to an end and is about to disappear. The "disappearance" of the Buddhadharma involves the disappearance of belief in the Buddha. In the Dharma-ending Age, living beings' faith in the Buddha is not firm. When the Buddha dwelt in the world, people's faith was so firm that if you held a person at knife-point and threatened his life saying, "Don't believe in the Buddha or I'll murder you," he would rather die than surrender his belief. That's how solid in faith the people were

during the Proper Dharma Age.

Now, in the Dharma-ending Age, you don't even have to threaten a person with death. You just have to say, "Don't believe in the Buddha," and they quickly reply, "Okay, fine." You don't have to threaten them, just tell them to quit believing and they will. It's very difficult to promote faith.

Calculate it for yourself: How many people are there in the world? Among the entire human race, how many people believe in the Buddha? You can lecture the Sutras to these believers every day and they will still waver between doubt and faith. You can conduct a small experiment. Try this. Invite a person out to a movie. He'll accept on the spot and away you go. Then try asking him to a Sutra lecture. He will say, "Ohhh...sitting there for two hours is nothing but suffering and tedium. It's not half as much fun as a movie!"

That's the Dharma-ending age for you. You needn't threaten them with death. You can simply say, "If you believe in the Buddha, I'll bow to you three times." And what do you think happens? They snap, "You go believe in the Buddha yourself. Why bow to me?" In the Dharma-ending Age it is difficult to believe in the Buddha. People may believe for a while but then they retreat. They may believe for two and a half days, but before the third day rolls around, they turn back and say, "I'm tired of Buddhism." Tired. See? That's the basic make-up of people in the Dharma-ending Age. You suggest to him gently or tell him, directly, "Don't talk so much!" and he'll continue to talk, talk, talk too much! That's the way it is. If you tell them not to do something, they insist on doing it. If you tell them to do something, they will insist on not doing it. That's the way beings are in the Dharma-ending Age.

In this age, the Dharma will disappear. The first Sutra to disappear will be the Shurangama Sutra. That is why those who study the Buddhadharma should first investigate the Shurangama Sutra. As long as someone understand this Sutra, the Buddhadharma will not become extinct. As long as there is someone who can recite the Shurangama Mantra, the demon kings, the heavenly demons and those of externalist teachings will not dare come into the world to play their tricks and to make trouble. The Shurangama Mantra is the most miraculous mantra for helping the world. The

Shurangama Sutra is the primary Sutra which protects and supports the Proper Dharma.

The Shurangama Sutra will disappear first, and then no one will be able to recite the Shurangama Mantra, because it is too long. For example, many among us have been studying it for over a year and still can't recite it. Basically, the Shurangama Mantra should take six months to learn. The Sanskrit "Shurangama" is transliterated into Chinese as *leng-yan*, and those who study it are said to be "*leng*," that is, in a daze, for half a year while memorizing it. Here in the West, we have people who have been "*leng*" for one, two, and even three years, and still have not come out of their "daze."

The Shurangama Sutra and the Shurangama Mantra will be the first to disappear. The last Sutra to disappear will be The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra.

When the Amitabha Sutra has become extinct, only the six-syllable vast name "Na-mo-A-mi-to-fo," will remain in the world. It will last another one hundred years and save limitless living beings. After one hundred years the six-syllable vast name will lose two syllables and only "A-mi-to-fo" will remain for another hundred years and then they will disappear. At that time people will be undergoing extreme suffering. They will have no blessings at all. What they eat will be like horse manure. The food will have no nutritive value, even the natural foods. No matter what one eats, it will be harder to swallow than horse manure. Why? Because the people will have no blessings. When the Buddha was in the world the water that people drank was more nourishing than the milk we have today. Why does today's water lack nutritive properties? It's because now the people don't have such great blessings.

At that time, people will be as tall as dogs. When their suffering reaches its peak, things will start getting better, and the eon will beg to "wax." We are presently in an eon of "waning." This means that every one hundred years the average lifespan of human beings decreases by one year and their average height by one inch. When it has decreased to the point that an average lifespan is ten years, and an average height is about the size of our present-day dogs, people will have sexual desire as soon as they are born and they will also be able to commit murder. That's how rotten they will be.

But at that time, the eon will be waxing, and every hundred years people's lifespans will increase by one year and their height will increase by one inch. When the average lifespan has reached eighty-four thousand years---would you call that a long life?---it will begin to decrease once again. When the average lifespan has waned to eighty thousand years, the next Buddha, the Venerable Maitreya, will appear in the world. Whoever wants to meet him at that time should work hard right now.

We are now conducting a Buddha Recitation Session. The Dharma-door of chanting "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo" is not easy to encounter. It is said:

*Supreme, profound, wondrous Dharma  
Is hard to meet in a million eons.  
I see it, accept, hear, and uphold it,  
And I vow to understand  
the Tathagata's true principle.*

**Supreme, profound, wondrous Dharma:** It may look to you like Buddha Recitation is very easy, yet this method is quite rare and hard to find. You should all think about it: In America Alone, how many people understand the Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation? Many people will say, "Buddhists sit in Zen meditation." Others say, "Cultivate the Secret School. It's fantastic. It's a secret." Very few truly understand how to recite the Buddha's name. In America such a Dharma assembly has simply never been held before.

This is the very first time that the deep, deep, and wonderful Dharma has been explained in the countryside. You might say our Dharma assembly is unprecedented in the history of this country. And what is more, people have come from the four quarters to attend, including such distant places as Los Angeles and San Francisco. This demonstrates real sincerity. If they were not sincere, they would not have come all this way. They'd be at the movies instead, or out dancing, drinking, playing cards, shooting a few holes of golf, playing football, ice-skating, skiing, or whatever. However, these people have abandoned such pleasant diversions to chant "Amitabha" in the mountains.

**Is hard to encounter in a million eons:** Although it is hard to meet, you have now

encountered it.

**I see it, accept, hear, and uphold it:** Now you have met with the Buddhadharma and know how to recite the Buddha's name.

**And vow to understand the Tathagata's true principle:** Vow to understand the true principles of the Dharma-door of the Pure Land.

You are all sincere and today I am very happy. Why? Because you have evoked a response and stopped the rain. It didn't rain last night and it didn't rain today. That's two days. This proves that you are earnest in your recitation. If it rains tomorrow, you've retreated. But if it doesn't, then you will have created three dry days. If it doesn't rain for a whole week, that will be conclusive evidence of genuine effort on your part.

Since you are all so earnest, I will tell you what I've been doing. In the last few days I have negotiated and signed a contract with the mosquitoes. It says,

Mosquitoes are not allowed to bite participants in the recitation session.

Should they feel compelled to bite someone, they shall bite me first. This applies equally to all those attending, regardless of whether or not they are my disciples. Mosquitoes are not allowed to make trouble for anyone.

So they will bite me first because it doesn't matter if the mosquitoes drink a little of my blood; I want to give it away. After this, if anyone is bitten by a mosquito, please report it to me. If bitten by one mosquito, tell me. If two bite you, announce, "I've been bitten twice!" and I'll take it up with them. After all, they did sign a contract and if they don't live up to it, I just might take them to court!

Someone is thinking, "If I do, Dharma Master, you will say I'm not reciting sincerely." Well, if you don't tell me, you'll just cheat yourself. It's none of my business. Do as you please!

**Disciple:** Master, just as the subject of mosquitoes came up, one flew by my ear and I believe it is still biting me.

**The Master:** Oh? Very well, you can take it to Buddhahood. Tell it, “I vow that you will become a Buddha first.”

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**Tuesday, August 19, 1975 (evening)**

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The second day of the session has almost passed. I believe it won't rain tonight. That means that during the last two days everyone has been sincere. I don't know if you will continue to be sincere tomorrow. We'll just have to wait and see whether it rains. While walking and reciting “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo,” when you hear the large bell, that is the sign that you are to return to your bowing cushions, and the tempo of the recitation is speeded up. I've noticed that many of you are unaware of this. When you recite, keep your hands in front of your chest; this is called the “palms-lowered position.” Don't let your hands hang down by your belly. That does not look nice. They should be right in front of your rib cage, directly below the heart.

When you hear the big bell, raise your palms and join them together. Then you no longer recite “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo,” but just “A-mi-to-fo.” I've noticed a lot of you don't raised your palms at this time, but let your hands hang down or swing at your sides. This is because you don't know about the rules. Although rules are not important, you still have to abide by them. As it is said, “If you don't follow the rules [in Chinese the word for “rules” is made of the two words “compass and T-square] you can't make circles or squares.” That is, if you don't follow the rules you won't attain your goal.

For example, when Guo Tong came to the temple at the age of four, the only question he had was, “Why do there have to be rules?” That was the question he asked at age four. Seeing that he had this question at such a young age, I knew that he was an unruly kid.

I told him, “The rules are there just because you don't follow them. If you abided by the rules, there wouldn't be any need for them.” Even now, I think he must still detest the rules. He wants to be free to run around, play, and be rowdy. That's just his character. He's like a monkey, jumping and crawling all over the place. He is very lively and his eyes are always looking around at everything. But he can really tell stories. If he continues, in the future, he's going to make his mark as a master storyteller. He is only

eleven now and he can really make stories up; wait till he grows up—he will be even better at it then. So keep your eye on him. Pretty soon his stories will fly right up into the sky.

If anybody here wants a story, he can make one up for you. Don't forget about that story about a single strand of hair [given in the *The Earth Store Sutra* with the Venerable Master Hua's commentary, published by D.R.B.A.]. that's a secret dharma that most people don't know about. Even if people want to know about it, don't tell them right now.

Also, when you stand at your places, those who come first should stand up in front and those who follow should stand behind them in the order that they file in. The first to come should not stand in the back so that those who follow have to shove past to find a place. No matter where you go, you should proceed according to the rules for order in the assembly. Then things won't become confused, but will run smoothly. You should all take note of this.

Cultivation must be done every day. You can't cultivate one day and slack off the next. The same applies to following the rules. You have to follow the rules every day. If you don't, you are not acting in accordance with the precepts of the Buddhadharma. So, wherever you go, take care to observe the regulations and don't be sloppy about it.

“Holding the name Buddha Recitation” can be practiced by both the young and old, and those in the prime of life. It is suitable for everyone. Sick people can recite the Buddha's name. You who are sick suffer from the pains of disease because of karmic obstacles. You should hold the Buddha's name in order to lessen these obstacles. Those who are healthy should take advantage of their health to recite the Buddha's name and dedicate their recitation to insure their perpetual good health. Old people who are approaching the end of the road should follow the good path to the end. They should recite the Buddha's name. Young people whose road ahead is filled with limitless light should recite “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo,” to make the light appear. Thus, the Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation is suitable for every type of person.

You can chant while walking, standing, sitting, or reclining. However, when reclining you

should not recite aloud. Do it silently in your heart. If you recite aloud it is disrespectful. The busiest people can recite the Buddha's name, and people who are the most at leisure can also recite the Buddha's name.

How do you practice recitation when you are very busy? You practice the "*Morning and Evening Dharma of Ten Recitations*." In the morning and the evening do "ten recitations." Recite for the length of a single breath, "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo," and that is one recitation. Ten such "breaths" is called "ten recitations." In the morning when you get up, wash your face and brush your teeth. Then face the West, or better still face an image of Amitabha Buddha. If any of you would like to have an image, I have some paper images at Gold Mountain Monastery that I can give you. Face the Buddha image, join your palms together very respectfully and bow three times. Chant "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo" for the length of ten full breaths. Do this in the morning and in the evening. Recite "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo, Na-mo A-mi-to-fo, Na-mo A-mi-to-fo, Na-mo A-mi-to-fo...until you run out of breath and that counts as "one recitation." Do this ten times in the morning and ten times in the evening.

Don't deliberately stretch out the length of your breath or cut it short. It should be very natural. This is called the "Morning and Evening Dharma of Ten Recitations." Do this every day without interruption; it will only take five or ten minutes. Can you recite at other times during the day? Of course you can. The more you recite, the better. With the skill derived from your practice of this Dharma you can be reborn in the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. This method of Buddha Recitation is the most convenient Dharma door.

As I said, "Those with wisdom should recite the Buddha's name, stupid people should do it, too." Suppose someone says, "I'm very stupid. Probably it's useless for me to recite." In using this technique, the more stupid you are, the better! The wiser you are, the better! No matter how wise you are you cannot exhaust the method of Buddha Recitation. No matter how stupid you are, you are still included within it and it can be your guide.

Among the Buddha's disciples, one in particular was extremely stupid. How stupid was he? When you taught him how to recite "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo"---a mere six syllables---he

could not remember them. Finally the Buddha thought of a plan.

“Fine,” he said, “since you can’t remember the Buddha’s name, I’ll give you two words. Just recite ‘sweep clean.’” But he still forgot! He would say “sweep” and forget “clean,” and then he would say, “clean...uhh...what was the first word again? Oh! Sweep! Sweep...sweep...Just a minute now; don’t tell me, ah...what was the second word?” He’d remember one and forget the other. He was that dumb. None of us here is quite that stupid. Even me. I’m a bit more intelligent than him. Don’t you think so? I do. You are all, of course, much more intelligent than I am. Anyway, what was his name? Little Roaside (Shuddhipanthaka). He got that name because he was born by the side of the road. Although he was very stupid, he later became enlightened when he found out—  
What did he find out?

He discovered that his mother was a woman! He didn’t know that before. The Buddha certified his enlightenment and he gained spiritual powers. See, if such a stupid person can get enlightened, we who are so intelligent will certainly have even more success. Okay, that’s all for today because someone is thinking the idle thought that, “You know, the lectures are really too long.”

### **Bhikshuni Heng Hsien:**

Today we’re in the third day of reciting the Buddha’s name, and you can expect to be getting a bit of response at this point in the session. Yesterday the Master talked about how people who were sick, if they recited the Buddha’s name, could be cured by virtue of their karmic obstacles being lessened through reciting “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo.” Yesterday we had a “big cat” story. Today I thought I’d tell a couple of “little dog” stories. These are true stories of how reciting the Buddha’s name has effected cures.

The first involves a Pekinese dog who live in Fresno. Pekinese dogs were developed in China as a response to the introduction of Buddhist Sutras. The very first printed books in China, printed from wood-block, were of the Vajra Sutra, and they depicted the Bodhisattva Manjushri riding on a lion. The ladies of the imperial court were very much taken by the lion, and so a new breed of dog was developed—the Pekinese—to look like the lion of the Bodhisattva Manjushri. So in Fresno, California, there was a small

Pekinese—the runt of the litter. A runt, but a show dog. She wasn't special dog, and a very lively, good-tempered dog, with only a few minor failings—a little bit of vanity and a little bit of over-fastidiousness with regard to food, but aside from that, there seemed to be no reason that what happened to the dog should have happened, except perhaps it was due to the jealousy of one of the older, larger dogs.

At any rate, when I went down to visit my great aunt, who owned the dog, the Pekinese was paralyzed from the waist down. Something had happened to her spine, and the whole back end of her. She couldn't move, but she could drag it along just barely. She was in tremendous pain. You could see that she was exhausting her strength and was going to die very soon. I'd been studying the Buddhadharma for a while, and I had great faith in the power of the mantras and the power of the Buddha's name. She was being taken for treatment with some kind of rays, but I saw that the people giving the treatment were more concerned with my great aunt's pocket-book than they were with the dog. The treatments were not doing anything for the dog.

I sat down with a book of the Shurangama Mantra and recited it two or three times, and then I started to recite the Buddha's name, "Na-mo A-mi-to-fo." It was very strange and very wonderful, but as soon as I started reciting it, it's as if something clicked with the dog. I had her facing away from me, with the idea of concentrating on her injured spine, and she started looking around at me and making all sorts of noises and gestures as if she wanted to recite the Buddha's name too. And it occurred to me that perhaps—of course I had no way of knowing—but perhaps in previous lives this had been something that she was familiar with and that somehow struck a bell. At any rate, from that time on she improved. Within a few days, she was virtually normal with only a slight limp, and eventually she recovered entirely. This was by virtue of the recitation.

Another incident involved people from Gold Mountain—Upasaka Guo Kui and Upasika Guo Cong. Before they had their daughter Guo Fang, they had a dog name Lucy. Lucy was a very lively and intelligent terrier. She had a lot of tricks and was very rambunctious—a very human kind of dog. I felt I had a lot of affinities with the dog. One afternoon I looked out the window of Gold Mountain Monastery to see Lucy being hit by

a car. I went running out and found her lying in the street, severely injured. The car had probably hit her on the side of her head and the front part of her body. Her eyes were starting to roll back, blood was coming out of her mouth, her legs were sticking straight out and she was going stiff. The driver of the car, a demonic looking young man, came out and started yelling at her, “Hurry up and die, dog!”

I asked him to leave, which he did, and started reciting the Great Compassion Mantra. Other people came out to recite, and someone went to tell the Master what had happened. Word came down to us that the dog was going to die, and we should recite, “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo.” We carefully moved the dog into the office, washed her wounds, wrapped her warmly in a blanket, and recited “Na-mo A-mi-to-fo” for all we were worth. We recited for a couple of hours, and during that time, you could see Lucy coming back to life. By the end of an hour and a half, you had to hold her down—she didn’t want to stay in the blanket. She’d been a dead dog out in the street, but she came back to life.

We kept reciting until it was time for the Master to lecture. The Master immediately asked how Luc was and had us bring her upstairs. Now some people figure that Lucy had taken refuge at some point. Someone else saw her being ushered out of the Master’s quarters, presumably after an interview on another occasion. At any rate, she had a lot going for her in terms of studying the Buddhadharma. The Master scolded her and reminded her that he had told her that if she kept running out of the building, she was due for some trouble. But she hadn’t listened, and that was why this happened. All of this she meekly accepted. She was already running around in a subdued fashion that evening, and she was normal by the next day—completely cured.

An interesting thing about Lucy is that her owner, Upasika Guo Cong, was expecting Guo Fang at the time. Shortly before Guo Cong's daughter was born, Lucy just disappeared. She didn't get lost; nobody lost her. She just wasn't there anymore and very shortly after that Guo Fang was born. Now, don't draw any conclusions from that necessarily, because I've never seen Guo Fang pull that trick of sitting down on her haunches and playing around with her paws, so there may not be a connection. At any rate, that's the story of Lucy. Lucy isn't here today due to those causes and connection of the Buddha's name. The

important thing in this, of course, is the power of not of one person but of lots of people.

When I was reciting for the other dog---Ah Choo was her name and she's actually very much alive at the present---I knew that it was the power of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that worked through the invocation of the mantra and the Buddha's name. People aren't always clear about this. However, it's easy when you have an extremely powerful mantra in your grasp to figure that it's you doing it and somehow get confused and maybe show off a little bit. This can be very dangerous.

This happened to someone in China. There was a Bhikshu who had a lot of cultivation and he was known as the "Living Arhat." His specialty was using the Great Compassion Mantra to cure people, and he could cure anybody of any disease. One time a lot of Dharma Masters were assembled at Pu-tuo-shan (*Pu-tuo* Mountain) in china for a precept ceremony. After the ceremony was over, many of them had no way to get back to their home temples.

The Living Arhat did a lot of flamboyant curing with the Great Compassion Mantra, amassed a lot of money, and rather conspicuously bought everybody tickets or chartered a boat to get everyone back to their temples. At that time the Master was part of the assembly and he saw that the Living Arhat was due to die pretty soon himself, so he went up to him and said, "You're called the Living Arhat, aren't you? You can cure other people's illnesses, but have you cured your own?"

"What illness do I have?" asked the Arhat.

"Now you've got the illness of seeking for fame, and in the future, you're going to contract the illness of seeking for profit. In fact, it won't be long before you fall," said the Master. Now the Arhat had some cultivation. He never lay down to sleep and ate only one meal a day, and he had this power, and he recognized that something was going on. But it was very strange: he immediately bowed down to the Master and pleaded with him, not to keep him from falling, but that when he did fall, to come and save him. So, since the Master grants people's wishes and the man was sincerely asking to be saved when he fell, the Master said, "Alright, when you fall I'll save you."

Years passed, and Dharma Masters had to leave the mainland and flee to Hong Kong and Taiwan and so on. After a passage of time, what should happen but, on the streets of Hong Kong, the Master ran into the "Living Arhat," except that he was no longer a Bhikshu. He was dressed as a layman. He had gone back to lay life; in other words, he had fallen. The Master said, "Well, what happened to your Living Arhat?"

The man said, "It's just because everything you say is so effective. Your words are magical. It's just because you said I was going to fall that I've fallen."

The Master said, "Well, I promised you that if you fell, I'd save you, so I'll save you. So you can go back to being a Bhikshu now."

"Well, I haven't got any money," said the man. Now, in China, you had to pay a lot of money to leave home. If you wanted to leave home and you were broke, you were out of luck.

The Master said, "That's OK, I'll give you money and you can leave home." And so the man did. You would think the man learned his lesson, but he got involved with a layman in Hong Kong who was looking for a Bhikshu as a drawing card for his establishment. The layman at first approached our teacher, who would have no part in being used as an advertising gimmick. But this former Living Arhat took him up on the deal. So the layman set him up as a "Living Buddha," bowing to him as such. It wasn't very long before the "Living Arhat" just disappeared. So it's very dangerous to play around with the mantras and the curing power behind them for one's own personal benefit.

What is generally done in order to aid people is to transfer the merit from recitation of the mantras or recitation of the Buddha's name for other people's benefit. Transferring merit is one of the Ten Great Vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, and these vows are recited every morning by people who do Morning Recitation.

The first vow is to worship and respect all Buddhas. This is done by bowing to all the Buddhas, not just one Buddha. It certainly doesn't mean bowing to blocks of wood or pieces of stone that are carved to represent Buddhas. Rather, it means taking refuge with

all the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time.

The second vow is to praise the Thus Come One's qualities. Such praises are, for example, the praise of the Buddha Amitabha. The praise that says that Amitabha's body is a golden hue and the light of his fine marks are beyond compare. The mark of the white hair tuft between his eyes is as large as five Mount Sumerus and his clear purple eyes are as vast as four great seas. In his light there are countless transformation Buddhas and boundless transformation Bodhisattvas. His forty-eight great vows save living beings and the nine grades of lotuses completely cross beings over to the other shore. This is a praise of the Buddha and that fulfills the second vow to praise the Thus come One's qualities.

The third vow is to extensively cultivate the giving of offerings. Giving offerings can be done in many ways. It can be done by offering incense and flowers before Buddha images or it can be done with the offering of the pure heart which is not fixed at all.

The fourth vow is to repent and reform all karmic faults. This means repenting all the things you've done that make it hard for you to cultivate right now, that act as obstacles. Karmic obstacles make it hard for you to sit in quiet meditation; they make it hard for you to concentrate your mind on the Buddha's name or whatever practice you are practicing. You repent of all the evil done through body, mouth, and mind through beginningless time up to the present.

This is very important in taking refuge. There is a moment in the taking refuge ceremony when the aid of the Buddhas is invoked. At that point, the Buddhas of the ten directions shine light upon you, and if you can very sincerely repent at that moment, you can completely eradicate your karmic obstacles and be completely pure. It all depends on the degree of your sincerity at that time.

The fifth vow is to compliantly rejoice in merit and virtue, which sounds sort of occult and mysterious, especially about 4:30 in the morning when we recite the vow. But this means that whenever anybody is doing something that is good, you are pleased and you also participate; you join in. If people are having a recitation session, you don't just say, "Well, that's really fine that they're having a recitation session." You also go and

participate. Some people heard from as far away as Los Angeles that there was this session of reciting the Buddha's name up here in Oregon. They not only approved, but rejoiced or followed in accord and came up to participate. Other people have also come from a great distances.

The sixth great vow of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva is to request the turning of the Dharma Wheel. Now we know that the explanation of the Pure Land Dharma door was spoken by the Buddha without anybody explicitly requesting it. But in general, the Dharma must be requested before it is spoken. Of course the speaking of Dharma can be a speaking that takes many forms; it's not just necessarily in words. So the sixth great vow is to request that giving of Dharma, the turning of the Dharma Wheel.

The seventh vow is to request that the Buddhas dwell in the world. Now, of course, when Buddhas become Buddhas, they just enter Nirvana and don't have to stay around in our suffering world. They're not subject to any kind of suffering whatsoever. If living beings want them to stay around, however, they will. So the seventh is to request that the Buddhas stay in the world and teach living beings.

The eighth vow is to always follow the Buddhas in study, which means doing what the Buddha did. The Buddha, for example, gave his life to save a starving tiger. This vow involves doing this kind of practice. The Buddha also cut off his flesh to feed an eagle. That's another example of what can be done to constantly follow the Buddha in study.

The ninth vow is to forever accord with living beings. This doesn't mean that when living beings are doing things which are questionable you go ahead and do them, too, because you want to follow in accord. It means that whatever living beings like, you start from there in teaching them. Whatever they like to do is what you use as a basis for helping them to end birth and death, without imposing some exterior kind of structure or regulation on them. You start out from where they're at.

The tenth is to universally transfer all merit and virtue. That means that you take the merit and virtue of all of the practices that you do from knowing about the Buddhadharma and being able to cultivate according to it, and transfer it to other living beings, ideally to all

living beings on a very vast scale so that all will accomplish Bodhi. Merit can also be transferred for individual needs or for healing purposes.

Those are the ten great vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. Now the living Arhat that was mentioned, of course, was no Arhat because a real Arhat has ended one of the two kinds of birth and death. There are two kinds of birth and death. One is being born in a body with a given life span which is more or less fixed, though not completely fixed. And the other is change birth and death which is the birth and death involved in the constant succession of thoughts: One thought being born and dying, the next thought being produced and then being destroyed, and so forth. Arhats have ended the first kind of birth and death. They are no longer subject to being born in a body with a given life span. But, of course, the so-called 'Arhat' in the story had not reached that point. He didn't have control over his own birth and death and so when his offenses had accumulated to a certain point, he had to die.

Now I know that some people wonder why we've said that our Master does not concern himself particularly, in most cases, with individual cures. It's because the Master is curing on a much larger scale. He's giving people the medicine for curing birth and death; that is, if one follows those teachings that he teaches one can learn to have complete control over one's own destiny and be able to teach other people to do the same as well. So it's not just a matter of being cured of a given illness, but of completely being free of birth and death.

**A man:**

Oftentimes examples are used to illustrate things that happen on the mind ground that happen in the world of the relative. An example such as this occurred to me today. I used to live with a group of people on a beach on Maui, called McKenna Beach. We were all engaged in setting up a camp. Right smack-dab in the middle of the camp was a part of the foundation to an old army bunker of reinforced concrete that was about a foot thick, two feet high, and quite a few feet long. Anyway, it had to go. We were all busy setting up camp and none of us really wanted to face the task of getting that thing out of there. Nevertheless, it was right in the way of the camp and impractical to keep. So, we're all busy setting up camp and one person would go over with a sledge hammer and hit it a few times, and the thing wouldn't move. This went on throughout the course of the day. A

person would get on it for five or ten minutes, get discouraged and bummed out about the thing, then go back to whatever they were doing. Basically no one wanted to get on this thing. I was avoiding it altogether. It just looked hopeless.

An idea occurred to me about half way through the day that with anything in the world, if you hit hard enough and long enough in one spot, it will eventually break up. After I took a swim to refresh myself, I grabbed a sledge hammer and worked on that piece of concrete. I just kept hitting it in the same place---toward the middle and toward the bottom---for about two hours. Finally, the entire thing broke. A couple of us hauled it out in two long pieces and got it out of there.

This illustrates how one should cultivate on the mind ground. Often people will begin cultivating a Dharma door such as reciting mantras or perhaps a Bodhisattva's name or a Buddha's name like we're doing now. The beginning is usually fine, but after one achieves a little bit of concentration, one's karmic obstacles rise to the surface and the more one meditates or recites or whatever Dharma door it is, the longer the obstacle will stay up on the surface. Many people don't understand what is actually happening and say, "Well, meditation is just an utter drag. I'm more bummed out now than a few years ago when I started," and they quit. This is a very, very common tendency and a tactic that people use to avoid facing the deeper problems of life.

Basically when cultivating a Dharma Door, such as reciting the Buddha's name for example, one recites and recites. At the beginning notices nothing. After a while one notices that attachments and false views come into view. These will take a very definite personalized form according to who the individual is and what his attachments and shortcomings are. After a long as definite, tangible forms, these attachments all merge together into a kind of a blob within oneself of misery and melancholy and total, utter blah. This actually shows a little bit of success. Then one meditating on it, and lo and behold, this blob starts producing light. This is when a state of equilibrium is achieved. It's basically the same whether one is reciting a Buddha's name or reciting a mantra.

One takes a conscious thought, this thought of the Buddha, and uses it to overcome one's unconscious thoughts or false thoughts. Normally one's false thinking is most definitely

strong, very strong, stronger than one's conscious thoughts. When one's conscious thought, one's recitation becomes as strong as one's unconscious thoughts or false thoughts, they start bouncing back off one another and this will produce light in the mind. The longer you can keep the conscious thought equal to the unconscious thoughts arising, the longer the light will actually appear. And eventually this light will destroy one's attachments and obstacles.

Very often—I know I find myself doing it all the time and many of you may notice the workings of your mind while reciting and walking around outside and sitting in here—one tends to say to oneself, “Oh, I don't care about that. I don't think that is necessary or I don't think this is necessary.” When this kind of thinking occurs, one should ask oneself, “If I don't think this is really so, then who is it that does?” Look into this question and really contemplate it. “If I'm not really attached to such and such a thing, who is it that is? If I don't think I'm doing this wrong, who is it that thinks I'm doing such and such wrong or incorrectly?” These are things that should be looked into in order for one to realize who one really is. It's very important to recognize the fact that you may be wrong and everybody else may be right, and really acknowledge this fact. Otherwise if one can't bring a change of attitude to one's mind, even one's own cultivation could be totally incorrect. Basically, even meditation is false. If one's attitude isn't correct toward meditation, meditation itself will become an obstacle. It is important to realize this, so one doesn't spend years of cultivation in vain.

This sort of reciting that we're doing today here in the session is really fine, because sitting is fine and most people here have probably done quite a bit of sitting meditation, but I know I, myself, and a lot of my friends never practice walking meditation. Walking meditation is a really fine practice and should be introduced more because it's very important for people to realize that one doesn't have to be seated in order to mediate. In our daily activities there is ample opportunity to practice meditation, even for very busy people. There are always times when one is waiting in line or one has to just bide one's time. One can take these opportunities to get in quite a few hours of meditation a day, even in the course of daily activities.

In addition to meditation, to eliminate obstructions and whatnot and to help one to realize

one's fundamental nature, there's the keeping of precepts. The Buddha instructed his left-home disciples that after he passed into Nirvana the monks should take the precepts as their teacher. Basically, a person who becomes a monk is not supposed to get involved with any meditation whatsoever before keeping the precepts for at least five years, and there is a very good reason for this.

To draw another analogy, it's sort of like going along in an automobile and trying to stop the automobile by just turning off the motor and not even bothering to apply the brakes. Now, the car will eventually stop and if it does stop, it will take a lot longer and it will also be a lot easier to get going again with no brakes applied, a child could come along and push it. The same principle applies to keeping precepts. If one achieves success in meditation and one has held the precepts for a good length of time, his chances of falling into worldly ways are pretty slim. Suppose one runs across a beautiful woman or a nice beautiful bag of ganja (marijuana) or psilocybum (another drug) or whatever one may like. It's highly unlikely that one will think, "Oh, that's really great," and get involved in it. On the other hand if one cultivates on one's own and ignores precepts, one can very easily not only fall into one's old attachments, but create very new ones that will emerge very strong and make it very difficult to cultivate.

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**Wednesday, August 20, 1975 (afternoon)**

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**The Master:** Are there any questions?

**Student:** I am rather new to Buddhism and would like to know what school or sect you teach.

**The Master:** What is your name?

**Student:** Bob.

**The Master:** Where are you from?

**Student:** Manhattan.

**The Master:** At gold Mountain Monastery we study the entire spectrum of Buddhism. We do not subscribe to any one particular sect or school. We maintain no such divisions.

**Student:** I recall the Master once saying that we must cultivate our roots where we come from and we must cultivate the Dharma where it comes from. I'm very new and I don't really understand very much, but I do grasp the idea of birth and death. I understand that when things die, new things are born. I would like the Master to expound upon that and tell us more about what the Dharma is and how we can learn to propagate it in the Dharma-ending Age. Like other living things, when the Dharma ends, does it then get reborn?

**The Master:** The Dharma is a method---a method for cultivating the Way. After practicing for a time, people often feel that the Dharma is not as fresh and exciting as it was at first and they quit cultivating. Basically, there is no Dharma-ending Age and there is no Proper Dharma Age. The Dharma itself is unmoving. It is not inherently "proper" or "ending." People, however, are sometimes diligent and vigorous and at other times they are lax and lazy. When people are vigorous, that's the Proper Dharma Age. When people are lazy, it's the Dharma-ending Age. The Buddha Recitation session we are conducting here is a vigorous one and it is the proper Dharma Age for us. After the session is over, if you don't cultivate and aren't vigorous, it will revert to the Dharma-ending Age.

**Another student:** Could the Master please tell us more about the third eye?

**The Master:** There are five eyes, not just three eyes. Where have you heard about three eyes?

**Student:** Yesterday, when the Master discussed Amitabha Buddha's white hair-mark, I took that to be the third eye.

**The Master:** That's not the third eye. That's just the white hair mark. The Buddha doesn't have just three eyes. The Buddha has a hundred thousand billion, limitless, boundless eyes. If we living beings cultivate, we too can possess a measureless number of eyes. On the tip of every hair alone there is an infinite number of eyes. The third eye which non-Buddhist religions talk about is really nothing. They simply have no

understanding of what the doctrines of Buddhism are all about. If you cultivate and become a Buddha you will have an uncountable number of eyes and an uncountable number of hands. Guanyin Bodhisattva is said to have “a thousand hands and a thousand eyes,” but not only has she a thousand eyes and hands, she has more than ten thousand. It cannot be known how many hands and eyes she has.

Has anyone been bitten by mosquitoes? Certainly a lot of people must have bites?

**Student:**...

**The Master:** That’s because you haven’t been sincere in your recitation! You haven’t brought forth your true heart.

**Student:** What about the contract?

**The Master:** The mosquitoes are not trustworthy. They are bound to fail to observe the terms of the contract. There’s not the slightest doubt about it. They are just too small to pay attention to things like that. There are too many of them, besides. I can sign a contract with one of them, but another won’t keep the agreement, and will close in. They like their independence and are very democratic in spirit. They won’t put up with having people supervise them. If I sign a contract with one of them, another will say, “I didn’t sign nothin’. I’m not following no contract,” and so they bite.

**Translator:** The Master only made out a contract with one mosquito...

**The Master:** Hey, it wasn’t just one. It was a lot of them. But there were still a lot of them who didn’t sign. For example, in this country there are the Democrats and the Republicans. If I signed a contract with one of them, the other would say, “He didn’t sign. It’s none of our business.” Mosquitoes, too, have a lot of different parties and sects.

Mosquitoes have the Mosquito Party. Ants have ant parties and bees have bee parties. Each creature belongs to its own organization and faction. Only my Buddhism has no party, no school, and no sect; it is all-inclusive, complete Buddhism. The Buddhism I teach is not Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Burmese, Ceylonese, or Indian. The Buddhism I

promote is world-Buddhism, universal Buddhism, the Buddhism of the entire Dharma Realm. The Buddhism I promote I don't even call Buddhism; I call it "the teaching of people." If you are a person, you should believe in Buddhism. This is because people can become Buddhas. Since all people can become Buddhas, we can call this teaching "the teaching of people."

But "the teaching of people" is not an all-inclusive term, so we will give it yet another name, "the teaching of living beings." All living beings are included within it. This includes the living beings who fly in the air, those who walk on the earth, and those who live in the waters, as well as all the plants and trees. All the trees have living beings inhabiting them. Living beings are born from a conflux of changing conditions. When the causes and conditions conjoin, living beings are born. So I advocate that Buddhism be renamed, "the teaching of people," and that that name be further changed to "the teaching of living beings."

What is more, "the teaching of living beings" can be renamed "the teaching of the mind." Because all living beings have minds, they can all become Buddhas. Thus we call it "the teaching of the mind." The mind, the Buddha, and living beings are three and yet are not different. They are one and the same. That take the Dharma Realm as my school; I take the Dharma Realm as my name. And I embrace the teaching of the Dharma Realm. So, in name, substance, school, function, and teaching, it is all "the Dharma Realm."

Name: The Dharma Realm.

Substance: The Substance of the Dharma Realm.

School: The School of the Dharma Realm.

Function: The Function of the Dharma Realm.

Teaching: The Teaching of the Dharma Realm.

The entire Dharma Realm is our scope. All living beings live within the Dharma Realm. No matter what religion you follow, you can't go beyond the Dharma Realm. Moreover, there is no way you can deny that you are a living being. All living beings are included within the Dharma Realm. Thus you are encompassed within Buddhism. Whether you are a good person or a bad person, you are included within Buddhism, and I consider you to

be a Buddhist whether you consider yourself to be one or not.

You may say, "But I don't believe in Buddhism." Well, that's your business. You are like a person who ran away from home at an early age and now no longer recognizes his own father. Even face-to-face you no longer know your father. The scope of my Buddhism includes everyone---believers and non-believers alike. Are believers real Buddhists and non-believers not Buddhists? No. Whether you believe or not, I claim you as a Buddhist. The Buddha himself said, "All living beings have the Buddha nature and all can become Buddhas." You can't run away. There's no place to run to! So when my disciples want to draw near, they may do so; if they want to leave, they are free to leave. No matter where you go, I know you'll never run beyond the Dharma Realm, and that is just my territory.

My Buddhism has no limits. If you believe, fine. If you don't, that's even better. If you praise Buddhism, fine. If you slander it, it doesn't matter. I am vigorous whether the situation is favorable or unfavorable. Even if you slander Buddhism, I will still take you across to Buddhahood. For example, yesterday Guo Li said a mosquito was biting his ear and I told him to make a vow to cross it over to Buddhahood. When you have that kind of vow power, the mosquitoes won't bite you. Guo Tong said that a mosquito had bitten him and I told him to take it to jail. He said, "No, no, no..." Even though he was bitten, he wouldn't lock the bug up in jail. That's the heart of compassion.

Even though I said that I had signed a contract with the mosquitoes, some people have been bitten by them. Although a contract was signed, in all matters one should reflect upon oneself, illuminate inwardly. The first doctrine I spoke was the real one. What was that? I said that if you brought forth your true hearts to recite the Buddha's name, no mosquitoes would bite you and no contract would be necessary. If you do not recite sincerely, but drift off in idle daydreams instead, the mosquitoes know what to look for and they'll say, "You! You're supposed to be cultivating and reciting the Buddha's name but all you're doing is day-dreaming. Okay, you can just offer me a bit of your blood. How do you like that?" They can tell just by looking, you know. If your heart is true, then,

*Better would it be to change the course of a thousand rivers,*

*Than to disturb the mind of a cultivator of the Way.*

The mosquitoes intuit, “That person is busy cultivating and reciting. No matter what, I’m not going to pester him.” Although mosquitoes are small, they can tell by looking, and they also know how to distinguish odors. If you have the “Buddha Recitation fragrance,” if your heart is true, they won’t bite you. If your heart is not true, if you’re like me, for example, and do nothing but day-dreaming, they come to beg from you all the time. The mosquitoes come to ask for a handout, and although I’m very stingy, I have to oblige and give them a little blood.

The same is true, of course, for all of you as well. You never, ever considered giving away a penny in order to help someone else, so the mosquitoes say, “This guy is a hard case. I have to transform him in a tough way instead of gently. He’s very stingy with his blood and so I’m determined to taste it.” They are encouraging you to bring forth the thought of Bodhi, because when they sting and drink a little blood you may wake up a little, “Ah, the Saha world is truly filled with suffering.” Because the bite hurts for several days, you can know how bitter samsaric existence is, and think, “I must hurry up and recite the Buddha’s name and seek rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss where there is no suffering, only happiness. There are none of the three evil paths, and no mosquitoes, ants, or other pests there either.”

And if you do bring forth the thought of enlightenment, then the mosquitoes become your Good Advisors. They truly help you cultivate. You’ve got to turn the illumination around and reflect inwardly. Ask yourself, “Have I recited in earnest?” That’s the important point. Yesterday when I said that I had signed a contract, that was false. What I told you today is the truth.

Someone is thinking, “I came to this recitation session to hear instructional talks; why is he talking about mosquitoes?” Although the mosquitoes are small, they are a topic for a major essay. When we cultivate the Way, we should start from the small, not from the big. One proceeds from the small to the big, from the near to the far, from the lowly to the lofty. So if you can be clear about the things close at hand, you will understand what is

going on at a distance.

If you don't want to hear what I have to say, simply forget it. If you can forget it, you're truly mindful of the Buddha. However, I feel sure that you won't forget it today.

Someone is thinking, "I can forget. When I fall asleep I'll forget about it." That's all too true.

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**Wednesday, August 20, 1975 (evening)**

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All of you participating in this session should earnestly recite the Buddha's name so that other people will not have to suffer just because of you. If you don't recite sincerely, it will rain, and those who are sincere will be forced to suffer because of you. If the majority of people are sincere, of course it won't rain. There's no question about it. When it rains, the paths are hard to walk, especially at night. It hasn't rained now for three days, and that is a great response, but there are still four days left. We'll have to wait and see what happens. Everyone should be mindful; be extremely earnest and sincere as you chant. Don't be lazy and sneak off to rest, and don't neglect to join the recitation. You've come from such a long distance; to be careless and flippant at this point would make the experience meaningless. So it doesn't matter who you are, all participants in the Dharma assembly must endure the bitterness and recite the Buddha's name. Be patient, no matter what happens, and continue to recite sincerely.

You shouldn't sing too loudly or too softly. When it's time to recite, don't sing like someone asleep and then suddenly wake up and energetically babble to your friends. Don't be like that. You should put all of your energy into reciting the Buddha's name and visualizing Amitabha Buddha. Then you may obtain a response or observe an auspicious sign. For instance, you may see Amitabha Buddha come to rub you on the crown of your head; he may draw near and cover you with his sash; you may see Amitabha Buddha emitting light. These are all auspicious signs. You may also smell a very strong and fragrant incense, and extraordinary scent, or you may see lotuses. At night you might dream of reciting the Buddha's name or other various portents. If you obtain such a response, it proves that Amitabha Buddha has come to watch over you, to take care of

you.

There are other types of favorable signs. Tomorrow, if anyone has experienced such a sign or evoked a response, they can tell everyone about it. I want to know about it. We've managed to move heaven and earth and stop the rain, so you can expect more portents. No matter who you are, if you see Guanyin Bodhisattva or Amitabha Buddha, tell us about it. Guo Tong, have you seen any Bodhisattva or Buddha during this recitation session? If you have had any such experience, you can tell everyone. Little Guo Fang, you can speak up, too, if you have had some special state. Anyone can speak up. Young and old can relate what they've seen and heard because everything we do here is open and democratic. Everyone can know everything that's going on.

Don't assume that the Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation is a trivial matter. All the Buddhas of the ten directions were born from this practice. At present, Guanyin Bodhisattva, Great Strength Bodhisattva, Manjushri Bodhisattva, and Universal Worthy Bodhisattva all continuously recite the Buddha's name. There was once a Dhyana Master called Yong Ming Shou. He started out as a cultivator of Dhyana meditation and later he became enlightened. After his enlightenment he understood that the Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation was most wonderful and so he began to chant the Buddha's name. Every time he recited "Namo Amitabha Buddha," a ray of light flashed out of his mouth. What's more, this was no ordinary light. Within the light was a transformation body of Amitabha Buddha! So it is said,

One thought of Amitabha, One thought is the Buddha; Every thought of Amitabha, Every thought is the Buddha.

Shakyamuni Buddha taught this Dharma-door without having been requested to do so, because its wonders are manifold, ineffable, and uncountable. The Sutras say, "Of all the living beings in the Dharma-ending Age, if a billion cultivate, rare will it be for even one to obtain the Way. They shall be taken across only by relying on Buddha Recitation." However, if you recite the Buddha's name, you can end birth and death, and be released from the spinning wheel of rebirth. That is why we call it the most wonderful of Dharma-doors. You shouldn't mistake what is right in front of your eyes. Don't let it slip through

your fingers. Don't go to the mountain of jewels and return empty-handed. You see, the recitation session itself is a mountain of treasures. When you come to the mountain, you should take some treasures back with you. What do we consider to be gems and treasures? There are many kinds of them. Gold is a treasure, silver is a treasure, lapis lazuli is a gem, mother-of-pearl is a gem, red pearls are gems, carnelian is a gem. Ginseng is a treasure! So are he-shou-wu (*Polygonum multiflorum* Thunb.) and huang-jing, but you may or may not be able to get them.

How does ginseng become a treasure? If it weighs nine ounces, it's called ginseng. If it weighs eleven ounces, it's called a "gem." Look carefully, because there's a lot of ginseng in these mountains. Whoever finds a root weighing eleven ounces will live without disasters, without sickness, and have a lifespan as long as that of the gods. As for he-shou-wu 何首烏 ("Mr. He's Hair Blackener") a thousand year-old piece is considered a gem. Many Westerners have white hair, and the moment they are born they look like old men and women with frosty temples. But there is hope for all of you. Eat a little he-shou-wu and your hair will turn black and so will your beard. Therefore, we consider it a treasure.

Huang-jing 黃精 (Solomon's Seal) was eaten by cultivators of old who lived deep in the mountains. Because they were far away from civilization and had no car, plane, motorcycle, or other means to get to town to buy rice or other staples to eat, they subsisted on whatever herbs they could find growing in the mountains. It is a very nutritious herb that can prolong your life. In the *Ben-Cao*, a book on Chinese herbs, it says that if you eat huang-jing, you can fly. The *Ben-Cao-Bei-Yao* (Treatise on Herbal Medicine) tells of a young woman—like Guo Fang—who ran away from home after she had been scolded by her stepmother. She ran into the mountains where there was no food for her to eat, no oil, no salt, nothing. She survived by eating huang-jing and before long she was able to fly through thin air. People saw her flying around in space and coaxed her down with some food to eat—a piece of candy—but once she ate their cooked food, with its oil and salt, she lost her power of flight. Thus, we consider huang-jing a treasure.

The layman who is sponsoring this Buddha Recitation Session---I can't pronounce his name---has given everyone this opportunity to gather here to recite the Buddha's name. This layman plants and studies Chinese herbs. So all of you who've come to participate in

the Recitation Session will obtain his treasures.

I was told that the kitchen served ginseng tea today. Did you drink any? If you did, then when you recite you should have even more energy. You'll have no excuse to doze off. In just a minute we are going to do the Great Transference of Merit Ceremony and you can strike up your spirits and sing so loud that each sound of the Buddha's name pierces the heavens and plows into the earth. I want you to sing so that the gods in the heavens will hear our sound and join in! The creatures in the hells will hear us recite the Buddha's name with such ringing clarity that they will all bring forth the thought of enlightenment. That will be a great response!

[Explaining to translator] Huang-jing is a medicinal herb that immortals eat. It can prolong your life, and people who eat it can fly. People who are cultivating immortality eat it. They have to steam it and sun it nine times. They steam it until it is cooked, then dry it in the sun, then steam it again. After doing this nine times, they eat it.

Translation is really a troublesome affair, isn't it? Just when it's your turn to translate, I talk about so many things which are unfamiliar to you.

Well, I wasn't thinking. If I had thought about it first, I wouldn't have talked about this.

Translator: [in Chinese] If I had thought about it, I wouldn't be translating.

Venerable Master: Well, if you don't translate, we'll just get Guo Fang to do it. She's very intelligent.

My hair once turned white. I didn't eat any he-shou-wu but it still turned black again. I didn't use Mr. He's Hair Blackener, I used my own hair blackener.

You have been working so hard translating; I hope everyone will work just as hard when we do the Great Transference of Merit.

Guo Fang, don't go to sleep! That goes for Guo Tong, too!

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**Thursday, August 21, 1975 (afternoon) Ullambana Day**

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**Bhikshu Heng Sure:**

So much has been going on that trying to share with people the beauty and wonders of it is like trying to scoop the ocean out with a teacup. It's really hard because you can only get a drop at a time. But the water that comes out is so nourishing, so fine, that it's really worth all the effort. It's kind of frustrating for people who have been cultivating a little longer to know how much there is and to want to share it all at once. Of course you can't do it, but I think this week has been an epoch-making event. This is a historically significant occasion because it's very similar to the Dharma assembly---this is an arrogant thing to say, but it seems to me Sixth Patriarch, the Great Master Hui Neng, spoke his Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra.. The conditions were somewhat similar, and certainly the quality of Dharma was of the same flavor. This is a remarkable event; don't miss it. As the saying goes,

*Whether you're walking, standing, sitting, or lying down,  
Don't depart from this.  
Once you separate from this, you've gone amiss.*

As the Master said last night, to return empty-handed from the mountain of jewels would really be a mistake. One of the more obvious Dharma treasures we can share is the verse you hear every afternoon, just before you plunge into the natural goodies that Peggy Brevoort lays on the table. That verse goes, in part: "The Buddha told the assembly, while eating observe the Five Contemplations." I imagine every one of you has said, "Okay, what are the five? I'll observe them if you let me know." Well, here are the *Five Contemplations*:

**1. As you eat, you should be mindful of the amount of work that it took to bring the food here to the place of eating.** Think about the farmer who grew the vegetarian meal that you're eating, the various people that were involved in planting, nurturing, harvesting, trucking, sorting, selling, and preparing the food all to bring it into your mouth. There's a lot of work involved, a lot of sweat and toil. You're reaping the benefits

from it, and you should be mindful of the amount of work that was required in all these different phases to bring the food to the place of eating. The second thing that Sanghans and faithful disciples should be mindful of is:

**2. Are you worthy of this offering of food?** That is to say, have you done anything today to deserve the blessing of eating? The Chinese talk about “mouth blessings” (口福 kou fu) – the mouth gets a lot of blessings to enjoy. What have you done today to serve the Dharma? Have you served anyone else? Have you been a lazy worm? Have you been vigorous? Have you been mindful of the Buddha and really done the work out here? Have you been interested mainly in pursuing the five desires instead? These are questions that only you can answer. This is the second contemplation.

**3. Guard your mind and depart from all transgressions, of which the most coarse is greed.** The foremost of the three poisons (greed, hatred, and stupidity) is greed. Now, who isn't greedy? Who doesn't have greedy thoughts? Well, the Buddha doesn't have greedy thoughts. Sages don't either. But almost everyone else, up to and including Seventh Stage Bodhisattvas, still have some slight flicker of desire, some slight stirring of the passions. Now, someone who is just beginning to cultivate the Way will think, “Gee, I'm doing pretty well. I don't have any greed left. I was able to put down that fourth bowl of noodles today and share it with someone else.” Well, that's good. That's the first step. You start near if you want to go far. That's the way to begin.

But know that greed manifests in a thousand different ways, and once you get past the coarse forms of greed, there are subtle forms of greed that are just as powerful and poisonous. It all depends on the subtlety and quality of your mind as you cultivate.

So the third contemplation is to guard the mind and depart from all transgressions, of which greed is by far the most prominent. Some people say that greed is the thing that turns the world. Well, if you can put your greed down, if you can actually get in there and uproot the greed and the mountain of self---that false illusion of a self that you're getting something for---then you're really cultivating the Way. That's where cultivation actually works.

People say, “My gosh, Buddhism? I know all about Buddhism. I’ve read all those books. I’ve seen those farout pictures of things popping out of these sages’ heads---they sit there all tranquil. I sat in meditation this morning and I know what Buddhism is all about.”

Well, they’re not wrong. Buddhism includes all that. Buddhism includes just about every kind of practice and every kind of thought that you can imagine. But the Buddhism that’s taught at Gold Mountain starts with the very common, the very ordinary, mundane things of daily existence---for instance, eating. Wow, eating is the place where a lot of cultivation or lack of cultivation happens every single day.

The Master urges his disciples to be mindful of their eating. He sets a perfect example by the vow he made, which was to strictly observe the Buddha’s regulation and take only one meal a day, and that being taken before noon. This is one of the Twelve Ascetic Practices that Shakyamuni Buddha and early Buddhists cultivated. It’s not to say at all that to be a Buddhist you can only eat once a day. For a lot of people that would be too much---it would turn them away from Buddhism. That’s not the way to go about it. The way to go about it is to be mindful of your eating, and be mindful of the greed that makes you want to eat more, and eat more, and eat more...

Basically, Americans are pretty wasteful when it comes to eating. Americans eat much too much. They just pile it on when they don’t have to. That’s why we have so many heart attacks, so many arterial diseases---that sort of thing. It’s because people’s eating habits are pretty gross. So the third contemplation is to guard the mind and depart from transgressions, of which greed is the most prominent.

4. The fourth contemplation is that **food is medicine**. If you can really think that way and grasp that idea, you’ll never use more than you need to cure your disease of hunger. If you think about it, it is medicine. Everything that you put in your body is medicine of one kind or another. The Master has lectured time and time again: Don’t pay any attention to whether food is delicious or plain. That’s not the point. The point is to eat until you’re full, and then stop. People who stress the variety of flavors and the delicious quality and the perfect turning of a pot of rice or the expert seasoning of that salad dressing---that’s to be attached to food, and that’s to use up your blessings. People eat away their blessings.

In fact, in the mind ground, where real cultivation takes place, you should pay no attention to whether food is delicious, or super-nutritious, whether it's perfectly cooked or badly cooked. You should eat what comes in front of you, and eat until you're eighty percent full---don't stuff it right up to the top. Then you'll see that food is really medicine. Now, you wouldn't take nine aspirin to cure a headache any more than you would put a gun to your head and pull the trigger. That's overkill. The same thing with food. Food is medicine, and if you see it as medicine you'll never eat too much. You'll eat just enough to cure your disease of hunger, and then you'll stop.

Now, this is not to say that you're really virtuous if you eat less than the person sitting next to you. That's not the point. Some people have a huge capacity. If they eat six bowls of rice and they're not full, they should eat until they're eighty percent full. Another person has a smaller capacity. If he ate three spoonfuls of rice and he could only hold one, then he's being greedy. It's entirely up to you. You eat your own food, just like you wear your own clothes. But you should know your own limits.

5. The fifth contemplation is that **you should accept food only to cultivate and to accomplish the Way**. The only reason that you eat at all is to keep your body going so that you can continue to do the work with vigor and accomplish the Way. Basically, the body is impure. It's got all kinds of impurities floating around inside; every hole puts out a different kind of foul stuff. When you die, this beautiful body that you've put deodorant on all these years to make it smell better, that you've brushed, combed, washed, patted, exercised, and taken care of in all these ways to keep the illusion going that it's attractive and bearable---is revealed. At death, this fallacy really comes home and you can see this body for what it is---a stinking bag of skin. Inside are bones and they come popping through; and the worms eat it and it goes right back to the ground.

While this body is impure, at the same time, a human body is the perfect vehicle to cultivate the Way. If you don't eat, you're going to die. So you eat just enough to cultivate and accomplish the Way. That's the purpose of eating.

There's a verse that makes the *Five Contemplations* a little easier to remember. It goes

like this:

*This offering of the faithful is the fruit of work and care.  
I reflect upon my conduct: Have I truly earned my share?  
Of the poisons of the mind, the most despicable is greed.  
As a medicine cures illness, I eat only what I need.  
To sustain my cultivation and to realize the Way,  
So I contemplate in silence on this offering today.*

The first line says, “This offering of the faithful is the fruit of work and care.” The whole matter of offerings is an important one in Buddhism. It’s very important in that it’s the first of the Six Perfections in Sanskrit, *bu-shi* (佈施) in Chinese. When a person leaves the home life, he takes a vow of poverty. One of the Shramanera (novitiate) precepts is that you own nothing valuable---money and so forth. Basically, Sanghans need nothing. They need the requisites of a roof, food, and clothes, but in minimal amounts. In India, monks went begging. Because in China the weather could go to extremes and it was really hard for monks to go out daily begging---often the monasteries were way out in the wilds and there were no communities to beg from---gradually the practice of begging was discontinued in China, and the monks relied for the sustenance on the offerings of the faithful. How can a monk say, “Gee, you ought to give to me”? Well, they don’t say that.

The major function of a left home person is to serve. He serves by maintaining the Proper Dharma, keeping it alive in the world. That’s how he serves the Triple Jewel. How does he serve the community of laypeople? He serves by becoming a field of blessings.

That’s an analogy. Think of a field---there’s fertile soil in a field of blessings, and it can grow just about anything. Does the Sanghan cultivate his own blessings? No, the Sanghan does not consciously set out to cultivate his own blessings and say, “Boy, I’m getting a lot of blessings by reciting this mantra, by walking around and reciting the Buddha’s name so many times---I’m really rolling up a big bank account of blessings.” That’s not the way he looks at it.

He serves the disciples, the lay community, by allowing them to make offerings through

him and thus cultivate blessings for themselves. In this way they also make offerings to deceased relatives, and do real work for others. A layperson can make offerings and cultivate this principle of Bodhisattvaship, which is helping himself and helping others.

By making offerings to the Triple Jewel, you are doing real work for other people—you are planting seeds in the field of blessings that the Sangha represents. At the same time you are tying conditions with the Dharma so that in the future you can encounter the miraculous Dharma again and continue your cultivation towards Buddhahood. And you are also keeping this pure, ancient wisdom in the world a little longer by making these offerings. So it's an important role and shouldn't be taken lightly. Now in America where the Dharma is really young, the sprout is just out of the ground. It's a sturdy sprout moving towards the sun, but it's still a small one. People have to investigate how this relationship between the Triple Jewel, between the Sangha and the lay community operates. There is a proper way for it to work.

For a Sanghan to accept any offering whatsoever is to put himself under a heavy karmic burden. When accepting an offering, the Sanghan says, "Well, I've got to get enlightened because I've accepted this. Otherwise, I'm making a karmic mistake." Only an Arhat is really worthy of an offering. That's one of the names of the Buddha—Worthy of Offerings. Once Sanghans accept an offering, they're giving themselves a heavy mandate to cultivate to enlightenment. They should not miss that point.

On the way to Buddhahood, the Buddha cultivated the Paramita or Perfection of Giving. He gave up his life, which you could say is a sincere offering. Time and time again, for the sake of the Dharma, for the sake of other living beings... The Master has said that to give up your life for the sake of the Dharma as many times as there are atoms in the universe. That's taking a long view of history, but that's the way it is. He gave up his life that many times. How much the more did he give up his external wealth—things like money, possessions, even wives, husbands, children, families, houses, vehicles...

Venerable Master: If anyone has experienced any unusual states, now is the time to tell us about them.

**Student:** My mind feels a lot clearer than it did before I came here. I feel like when I

leave here I will have a few more tools to cultivate the seed that has been planted within me. I've only heard the sounds, "Namo E Mi Tuo Fo" a few times, and at first when I chanted it, it didn't mean anything to me. I centered on the concept of putting my trust and faith in "limitless light," and that uplifted me a great deal. I haven't yet seen any tall Buddhas as big as Mount Sumeru with purple eyes, but maybe if I am persistent to use these tools well.

I have something I would like to share with the people who are planning to take refuge. When I took refuge with the Master last year, I didn't have a clear idea of what I was doing. I was drawn there through faith, very auspiciously, as someone said. Before I left for San Francisco, someone gave me a very meaningful poem which I would like to read:

*There are ways we travel  
Silent, golden and yet unseen  
By most who stand behind  
The hand of life as it sows the field.  
Those who know say let it go  
And it will grow to radiate itself.  
Never fear,  
For very near you stands the guardian.  
The gate he guards is never closed  
To close inspection.  
Close your eyes to distracting images,  
Open your mind's eye and say,  
"I am the Buddha; the Buddha lives in me.  
His compassion shines, and forever lights up my way."  
There are truths we know,  
And yet beyond our knowing  
Still more await.  
And again we stand before the guardian  
Of yet another gate.*

**The Master:** Does anyone else want to say something?

**Student:** Last night I dreamt that I was with my mother, my sister, and three of my cousins and we were all respectfully walking around the Buddha.

**Another student:** I had some significant visions while I was sitting. I saw a golden sphere with a keyhole in it. A golden key was inserted in it and it began to turn. As it turned, the light intensified. Another vision was that of a formation of jewels. It had a definite pattern and was set in something that looked like highly polished lapis lazuli. The colors were intense reds and golds.

**The Master:** Who else had an experience? Speak up.

**A student:** In the world at present there are a great number of people who do not have enough food to eat, who are not properly dressed or housed, while a small minority of people have much more than they can use. I experience a lot of frustration because of my actions seem very insignificant and the problems are great. Just what can we do to change these things?

**The Master:** Worrying about them is of no use. Exhaust your efforts and do what you can and don't ask too much of yourself. An individual has only a limited amount of influence. There are too many people in the world. You must first rescue yourself.

**Guo Tong:** [Sound unclear.]

**A woman:** A couple of months ago, I asked a friend to wake me up in the morning...  
[Sound unclear] **The Master:** Who else had an experience? If you had a special feeling or experience that you feel good about, you can bring it up.

**Bhikshuni Heng Hsien:** Sometimes I see light that pervades universally, but occasionally I see light that's kind of different, like sudden flashes, like a little point of light in space. I saw a couple of these a couple of days ago while I was writing notes; it wasn't during meditation. I've seen them at Gold Mountain too, and it occurred to me what Sutras describe as mani jewels, but I don't know. They were silver-colored.

**The Master:** When we are reciting the Buddha's name and we stop and take our seats, that can be considered investigating Dhyana. But you can also continue to recite the Buddha's name silently. It is then very easy to experience a state of "peace." What is "peace"? It is the beginning sign of entry into samadhi. You may feel as if your body and empty space have united into one. There will be no mark of people, no mark of self, no mark of living beings, and no mark of a life span. You are certainly not asleep, but everything has come to a stop. This is the state of "peace." Whoever can stop his idle thoughts can realize genuine wisdom.

This layman just said that many people in the world lack food, clothing, and shelter. Many people have no food to eat, no clothing to wear, and no house to live in. Why is this? It's because those who do good are few and those who do evil are many. People who commit many evil acts and do not practice good deeds must undergo this kind of retribution.

This kind of retribution is not easy to avert, since those who do evil are so numerous and those who do good are so few. If you want to make the world a good place, you must first begin with yourself. If you want to alleviate the sufferings of everyone in the world, you must also begin with yourself. How? Do no evil yourself; instead, practice all kinds of good deeds. In this way you can avert the disasters due to afflict us and help the world out a bit. Do as many good deeds as you have the power to do. Do your best to fulfill your responsibilities, but don't worry too much.

If you do nothing all day except sit and think, "People are suffering too much. What can I do?" it is useless. You yourself must do good deeds and make it so that there are more good people in the world every day and fewer bad people. Then the world will be well, and everyone will have clothing, food, and shelter. It is not a matter of saying, "Democracies are no good. We should become communists and share the wealth." In communist countries, it's not necessarily the case that everyone has food, clothing, and shelter. In fact, sometimes there is misery on top of misery. Therefore, if you wish the world to be good, you must refrain from all evil and practice all good, and then the world will naturally become good. It is said,

*Plant a good seed, reap a good fruit;*

*Plant an evil seed, reap an evil fruit.*

If you plant ginseng, in the future you will harvest ginseng. If you plant he-shou-wu, in the future you will harvest he shou wu. You get what you plant. Karma works in the same way fields are planted and harvested.

I have just asked you to speak about your experiences, and I, too, remember an experience I had at Gold Mountain Monastery in San Francisco. Once, after a ceremony at which some thirty people took refuge, I asked, "Why did all of you decide to take refuge?" The new disciples had been followers of an outside-way teacher, whom I had given the name, "Shan Lu," "Mountain Deer." When I first came to San Francisco, Shan Lu wanted to come and study the Buddhadharma with me. At that time I only gave informal Dharma talks once a week, on Sundays. He came every Sunday for two years. His name was Mountain Deer. I gave him this name. His original name might have been "Wild Deer" but I called him "Mountain Deer."

Why did so many people believe in him? Because during the two years he studied with me, he learned a few doctrines and set himself up as a patriarch, and took disciples. Why did his disciples believe in him? He had money, perhaps as much as a million. Whoever went to him and believed in him had food to eat, a place to live, and clothes to wear. They solved their problems of the three necessities. Thus, many people who had no food, clothing, or shelter came to believe in him.

He was seventy or eighty years old and very rich, so he gained a large following. He was also very casual. You could eat meat and drink wine if you liked-he would buy you your wine and your meat!-in fact, you could have anything you wanted. There was no moral code at all. He didn't talk about the moral precepts at all, yet he claimed to be an enlightened patriarch. A lot of people, as the word got around, said that he had attained sagehood and others said that he was enlightened. Some really stupid people studied the Buddhadharma with him, while others, the smart ones, thought continually about his money.

He had one disciple who thought, "I've followed you for so long, and you still haven't

died and left your money to me! What a nuisance!” One day as the teacher was on the stairs, that disciple gave him a push and he went tumbling down the stairs and became unconscious. Taking advantage of the fact that the “enlightened patriarch” was in a coma and couldn’t talk, the disciple claimed that his teacher’s final instructions were to give the money to so-and-so, and that no one else had any share in it.

Then, without a sign, without a sound, the teacher died. After his death, the group published his books and styled him a patriarch. One night, he appeared to his followers in a dream. He said, “The Dharma I taught you in the past is not ultimate. You should now go take refuge with Dharma Master so-and-so, and study the Buddhadharma with him. That’s the right thing to do.” So his followers came to me and signed up to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and started studying the Buddhadharma over again.

When you cultivate the Way, it’s not easy to meet a genuine good advisor. Some people pretend to be such advisors, and without any real understanding they proceed to teach other people. Shan Lu, for example, was such a one. Yet he still had a sense of conscience, for when he realized he had done wrong to his disciples, he told them to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and thereby avoid falling into the hells. That was pretty decent of him. And so many of his followers came to Gold Mountain Monastery to take refuge. Of the thirty people who took refuge that day, more than twenty of them were Shan Lu’s disciples. After the ceremony, they told me about this dream. They said that Shan Lu had instructed the entire group to come and take refuge. They believed their dream, because over twenty of them had dreamt the exact same dream. They thought it was a miracle. Do you all remember this incident? [Disciples: Yes.] And so all those people had that dream.

In this world, everything proclaims the wonderful Dharma. The mountains proclaim the wonderful Dharma of the mountains. The rivers announce the wonderful Dharma of the rivers. The seas proclaim the wonderful Dharma of the seas. The streams and plains report the wonderful Dharma of the streams and plains. It is said, “Both sentient and insentient things are speaking the Dharma.” People speak the dharma of people. Dogs speak the dog-dharma. Cats are speaking the cat-dharma. And so, all the myriad things are speaking

the Dharma.

For example, cats eat mice. They say that in past lives they liked to kill and in their present life they still like to kill. Tigers are the same way. They proclaim their own wonderful Dharma, and if you understand that they are speaking the Dharma you will not imitate their conduct.

How did dogs get to be dogs? Dogs are very stingy. They can't give anything away, so they guard the door. When someone comes, they bark and bite. Why do they bite? It shows their stinginess. They don't like strangers, so they bite because they are afraid someone will steal the valuables. You could say that they are "wealth-guarding slaves."

There are people who share this attitude towards money. They can't give up a single cent. When you tell them to give, they object violently. In China, many people keep their money for their sons and daughters. They turn into beasts of burden, scraping together a pittance to leave to their children. This is utterly foolish. A verse says,

*Sons and grandsons have their own blessings.*

*Don't slave like an ox on their behalf.*

Don't be a draft-horse for the sake of your kids. Westerners are much more intelligent than the Chinese in this respect. They also accumulate money, but after they have accumulated it, they give it away. As a result, in their next lives they can be even wealthier.

You might say, "I don't believe that there are future lives."

Then let's not talk about future lives. Let's talk about tomorrow. Do you believe tomorrow will come? Do you believe that yesterday happened? Then, because you cannot believe in such a distant time, I'll shrink the time period so that you can understand. [The Master added the following during translation] Yesterday was just your former life and today is your present life. Tomorrow will be your future life. If you don't believe in future lives, you still can't deny that there was a yesterday, is a today, and will be a tomorrow. Can you seriously object to this? Yesterday, today, and tomorrow exist and in the same

way so do past, present, and future lives. That's a fact.

“Then why don't I know about it?” you ask.

If you knew, you would have become a Buddha long ago. But because you've been muddled and confused through limitless eons until the present, you haven't known your former or your future lives. Thus, you did mixed-up things, like acting as a “wealth-guarding slave,” watching the door, afraid that some stranger would come to steal your goods.

When the Buddha was in the world, he once went to a layman's house to accept offerings. In the house there was a dog that stayed under the bed, day and night. He wouldn't allow anyone except members of the family to get near the bed. Anyone else who approached got bitten. Even the Buddha was not allowed near the bed. The household experimented to see if the dog would bite the Buddha, and, sure enough, it snapped at him. They asked the Buddha why the dog was so protective of the bed.

The Buddha said, “Don't you know? In its last life the dog was your father. Your father spent his whole life earning about three hundred ounces of gold and loved it so much he buried it under the bed. Then suddenly he got sick and died before he could tell you what he had done with it. After his death he hurried right back as a dog to guard the pile of gold. If you don't believe me, start digging and you'll find the gold.” They dragged the dog away and did, in fact, uncover three hundred ounces of gold. This proves that stingy people can easily turn into dogs.

Dogs are speaking the dog-dharma. Cats relate the cat-dharma. People expound the people-dharma. In the world, everything speaks the dharma it wants to speak. The important point is whether you understand it or not. If you understand it, the dharma is spoken so you may understand more. If you don't understand it, you're dreaming, and the dharma simply makes you muddled.

Those who have left home proclaim the dharma of those who have left home; those at home expound the dharma of those at home. Bhikshunis speak the dharma of Bhikshunis; Shramanikas proclaim the dharma of Shramanikas. Bhikshus speak the dharma of

Bhikshus; Shramaneras proclaim the dharma of Shramaneras. Boys relate the dharma of boys; girls relate the dharma of girls. If you don't understand it, you will become confused. When you understand, you can wake up, become enlightened.

This principle extends to Arhats speaking the dharma of Arhats; Bodhisattvas speaking the dharma of Bodhisattvas; Hearers communicating the Hearer-dharma; and Buddhas speaking the dharma of Buddhas. Gods speak the dharma of gods, asuras speak the dharma of asuras, and ghosts speak the dharma of ghosts. Animals expound the dharma of animals, hell-beings are moaning the dharma of hell-beings. In the ten Dharma Realms, each speaks the dharma of its own realm. If you understand that in the ten Dharma Realms all proclaim their wonderful dharma, you can then become enlightened; you can realize Buddhahood. And Little Guo Tong is here proclaiming the dharma of Little Guo Tong.

Let's talk about people. People with eyes expound a dharma with eyes; people without eyes speak an eyeless dharma. What does this mean? Why do people have eyes? It's because in the past they refrained from doing much evil. Why does someone else lack eyes? Because that person looked down on others. Since he looked down on everyone, he now has no eyes.

Why are deaf people deaf? They expound the dharma of deafness. Deaf people in the past liked to mind other people's business. They wanted to hear everything so they listened in on conversations, phone calls, and so forth, and thus they became deaf. Why are mutes mute? Because they indulged in gossip. Before long, they themselves became unable to speak. The deaf, mute, and blind all speak the Dharma.

Cripples can't walk because they always took wrong roads. They walked down roads they weren't supposed to travel and thus became crippled and unable to walk. Those whose hands are paralyzed got that way because they stole too many things in the past. They are all speaking the wonderful Dharma. All of you, when you see something, if you understand it, it's speaking the Dharma. If you don't understand it, you're dreaming. Everything is a matter of cause and effect. So don't worry about the world, thinking that there are too many poor people who have no food, clothing, and shelter. It's because they

planted those kinds of causes that they have reaped such effects.

If I explain more clearly, I'm afraid everyone will be unhappy. People without legs don't have legs because in the past they danced too much. People without eyes are that way because they watched too much dancing, too much striptease, and too many plays and movies. Now, a lot of people are very unhappy with me...

The principle is demonstrated in this verse: As is the cause, so shall be the result...

**Question:** Does Dharma speak the Dharma of Dharma?

**The Master (in English):** Dharma cannot speak the Dharma.

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**Friday, August 22, 1975 (afternoon)**

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So far, I have explained three techniques of Buddha Recitation: "contemplation by thought," "contemplation of an image," and "holding the name." But I have not yet explained the fourth method, which is "Real Mark Buddha Recitation." The Real Mark is apart from marks; it is not attached to any distinguishing characteristics. It has left all dharmas behind and swept away all marks. This is the Dharma door of investigating dhyana. Those who truly practice dhyana truly chant the Buddha's name as well. Those who can really recite the Buddha's name are, in fact, investigating dhyana. Dhyana practice and Buddha Recitation both help you to stop your idle thoughts and sweep away your personal desires and random thoughts, so that your original face appears. This is called Real Mark recitation.

The Buddha spoke all the Dharma doors to cure the illnesses of living beings. If living beings had no illnesses, then none of the methods would be of use. But, because we living beings have such problems, the methods are useful. Of the eighty-four thousand Dharma doors spoken by the Buddha, every Dharma door is number one. Not one of them is number two. Whichever method is appropriate to your situation is number one. If one is inappropriate and you can't use it, that doesn't mean that it is number two, because it may be number one for someone else. So I say that there are eighty-four thousand Dharma

doors and eighty-four thousand of them are number one.

Now we are cultivating the method of Buddha recitation, and some also cultivate the technique of holding mantras. There are various mantras, and there are many different Buddhas, but of all the Buddhas, Amitabha Buddha has the closest affinity with us. We living beings may be likened to iron filings and Amitabha Buddha is like a magnet which draws us in to the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss. The other Buddhas are also like magnets, but their magnetism is not as strong. So living beings should recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and cultivate the Pure Land Dharma door. This is the first time in the history of America that we have gathered in the mountains to recite the Buddha's name. I believe that we are planting a cause which will in the future certainly produce a grand blossom and bear a great fruit. I absolutely believe that this will be the case.

After the session, I will teach you a secret mantra. When you return home, if you want to recite the mantra you may, or if you want to recite the Buddha's name you may. We'll see who succeeds first in their cultivation. Does anyone have an opinion on this?

**Student:** Could we still speak about special occurrences? Yesterday during the hour sit, I felt a lot of electrical energy and at one moment I felt very large. My head was in the clouds and a rainy feeling was in the air. Later, I was once more in the clouds only this time I was talking with an entity and I did not want the rain to fall.

**The Master:** This state may happen to those who cultivate dhyana. I just said that when the session was over I would teach you a mantra and I think now that some people are having a particular idle thought and there is something they want to say. If you want to speak, just go ahead. Someone is thinking, "I'm leaving tomorrow. I might not get a chance to learn it." Isn't that correct?

**Student:** Yes.

**The Master:** Well, if I taught it to you now, would that be okay?

**Student:** Yes, thank you!

**The Master:** This is the most wonderful of mantras. Now I will teach it to you audibly, but when you recite it you should do so silently. Don't speak it out loud, because it's a secret mantra, and if you speak it out loud it won't be a secret any longer. Walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, you should always recite this mantra.

The mantra's power is very great. For example, if you recite it in the mountains, after five hundred years have passed all the living creatures on the mountain will become Bodhisattvas. Its merit and virtue are that great. If you recite it in the water, after five hundred years all the living creatures in the water will bring forth the Bodhi resolve and in the future will become Bodhisattvas. Just recite it, and five hundred years later all the fleas, nits, and bed-bugs, and all the germs in your own body will also bring forth the thought of enlightenment and become Bodhisattvas. Is this or is this not powerful? If you yourself do not wish to become a Bodhisattva, helping other living beings to become Bodhisattvas is a good thing to do. Therefore, you can't fail to recite this mantra. You should hurry up and recite it!

I will now transmit it to you and you should all pay special attention to it. If you already know the mantra, don't think, "Oh, I know it," and look on it lightly. Those who don't know it should be even more respectful of this dharma. Now I will teach it to you. Pay attention, because I'm only going to repeat it three times and whether or not you remember it is up to you:

*Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum....*

The power of the mantra is inconceivable. Pay special attention in cultivating and upholding this dharma.

*[On Friday afternoon, seventeen people took refuge with the Master, including Mr. And Mrs. Brevoort, hosts of the Buddha Recitation Session, and their son, Joshua. At the end of the ceremony, the Master delivered the following short talk to the new disciples:]*

I have a few more words to say to you. Please sit down. You should all remember that you took refuge at Buddha Root Farm. I gave young Joshua the Dharma name "Fruit of the Root," (Guo Gen) because he is a Buddha root. All of you who have taken refuge here

should be leaders of Buddhism. You must act as models for all peoples of the world. Be good Buddhist disciples and spread Buddhism throughout the entire world, throughout the Dharma Realm. If there is one person who does not believe in the Buddha, it will be because you have not fulfilled your responsibilities. You should vow to cause all people to take refuge with the Triple jewel. That will result in the greatest merit and virtue.

*The Sutra of Comparative Merit and Virtue* says,

“If there were Buddhas in number like the seedlings of rice, stalks of hemp, stalks of bamboo and reeds in the great trichiliocosm, and if you presented those Buddhas with the four kinds of offerings, and then, when those Buddhas passed into Nirvana, you again made offerings of incense and flowers, food and drink, and built shrines and temples for them, the resulting merit and virtue would be great indeed. However, when you yourself take refuge with the Triple Jewel and exhort others to take refuge, the merit from this exceeds the former.”

What are the four types of offerings? They are: food and drink, clothing, bedding, and medicine. Although the merit from offerings of flowers and incense and building shrines and temples is considerable, when you encourage one person to take refuge with the Triple Jewel and when you do so yourself, the merit from that action surpasses the merit obtained by making offerings to all those Buddhas. Thus, the result of taking refuge with the Triple Jewel is inconceivable.

Each of you should make Buddhism your own responsibility. Think, “Buddhism is just me; I am Buddhism.” Don’t set yourself apart from Buddhism. “Not only is Buddhism my religion, but I am going to convert those of other religions to Buddhism. This is my vow.”

You should make the Four Vast Vows:

*I vow to save the boundless number of beings.*

*I vow to sever the endless afflictions.*

*I vow to study the unlimited Dharma doors.*

*I vow to realize the supreme Buddha Way.*

You should make great vows to spread the Buddhadharma. Okay?

Refuge-takers: Okay!

Of those who took refuge today, many are familiar to me and need not stand on ceremony. Go ahead and do a good job, okay?

Refuge-takers: Okay!

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**Friday, August 22, 1975 (evening)**

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**[Bhikshuni Heng Chih records:** It's raining. The Venerable Master just told Guo Tong to stop the rain.]

**Venerable Master:** The reason for this is his rocket didn't go off and he cried, and the dragons couldn't do anything about it. You see? He doesn't have any talent except crying. We're not going to listen to that anymore.

**Bhikshuni Heng Yin:** Today's rain was brought to you by Guo Tong, because he cried and cried so much that the heavens started crying too.

**Guo Tong:** This is a story about the Buddha in a life before he became Shakyamuni Buddha. He was a Patient Immortal...

Are there any questions?

**Student:** I would like to know if the coming of Maitreya Buddha and the return of Christ is going to be the same event.

**Venerable Master:** What's your name? (Student: Guo Li)

**Master:** What do you think?

**Student:** It makes sense that it would be, but I don't know.

**Master:** Why do you think it makes sense?

**Student:** I don't know a lot about the coming of Maitreya, but I think they're both supposed to come to save humanity and they're both supposed to come soon.

**Master:** I have no comment on when Christ is due to come. As for Maitreya Bodhisattva, it's still very early to look for his coming. Those who say that Maitreya is due simply do not understand the situation. Although Maitreya actually comes here all the time, he hasn't yet become a Buddha. When we talk about the coming of Maitreya, this refers to his return as a Buddha, not just as an ordinary savior.

Every one hundred years our average height decreases by one inch and our average lifespan by one year. When the average human lifespan, which is now sixty or seventy years, has decreased to ten years, it will begin to increase again. When it reaches eighty-four thousand years, then it will start to decrease. When it has decreased to eighty thousand years, then Maitreya Buddha will appear in the world. So if you calculate the time, it is still in the distant future. Those who are coming now are Maitreya's transformation bodies, not his true body, and they are not coming to manifest the attainment of Buddhahood.

Do you who are Christians know that Jesus disappeared for three years, during which time no one knew his whereabouts? During those three years, he went to India to study the Buddhadharma. Having studied the Buddhadharma, he preached about rebirth in the heavens and going to a heavenly paradise. This concept is pretty similar to what the Amitabha Sutra says. Jesus was also a part of Buddhism. He used those methods to teach and transform a certain kind of living beings, but ultimately, they will all go back to the root and return to the source and everyone will become a Buddha. But many people are unaware of this. (Added during translation: Jesus was a part of Buddhism. He was a Buddhist. However, he did not want to admit that he was Buddhist, so he did not preach Buddhism.)

A few days ago I said that all the world's religions are included within Buddhism. This is because Buddhism takes the Dharma Realm, the universe, as its substance, and no living

being can escape it. Other religions do not teach this. There are Ten Dharma Realms: The Dharma Realms of the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, the Condition-Enlightened Ones, the Hearers, the gods, humans, asuras, animals, ghosts, and the beings in hell. No religion surpasses these Ten Dharma Realms and so all are included within Buddhism; none are not Buddhism. Although they might not admit to being a part of Buddhism, it's only just a matter of time. In the future they will certainly acknowledge it. There will be no way they can avoid acknowledging it, since they can't run outside of the Dharma Realm. Buddhism takes the Dharma Realm as its substance. I hope that you will all use effort and look into this doctrine.

Many people do not acknowledge that they are Buddhists, but this is no problem. Why don't they acknowledge that they are Buddhists? Because they have not understood that they are within the Dharma Realm. They are like dreamers who are not in control of their actions. They are out of touch with what is really going on. They are also like the insane. Sometimes insane people don't even know that they are human beings. When you ask them what they are, they may answer, "nothing at all," or they may think that they are some strange creature of their own demented fantasy. When a person has lost touch with his humanity, you can't rely on his own word when he tries to identify himself. In the same way, you can't accept as reasonable the statement that one is not within the Ten Dharma Realms when it is made by someone who does not know the truth.

The Shurangama Sutra relates the story of Yajnadatta, who one day looked in the mirror and noticed that the person reflected in it had a head. At that point, he lost his wits and said, "How come that person has a head and I don't? Where has my head gone?" He then ran wildly through the streets asking everyone he met, "Have you seen my head? Where has it gone?" He accosted everyone he met, yet no one knew what he was doing. "He already has a head," they said. "What's he looking for another one for?"

There are a lot of people just like poor Yajnadatta.

Are there any more questions?

\* \* \* \* \*

**Student:** Are there people who have written about Buddhism, other than yourselves, who are worth reading? Most writers come from a Western orientation and this tends to lead them to alter the doctrines.

**The Master:** There are other translations, but it is not a question of relative worth. Many previous translators of Buddhist texts were priests, ministers, scholars, or professional writers. Although they did translate Sutras, they didn't necessarily understand the Buddhadharma. However, their translations cannot be said to be of no worth---they sell; people buy them. Thus they are worth something. But their principles do differ from the orthodox tradition. The translations done at Gold Mountain Monastery are done by Bhikshus, Bhkshunis, Shramaneras, Shramanerikas, laymen and laywomen, professors, and scholars of the Buddhadharma who all work together. They translate Sutras from within the Buddhadharma. Previous translations were largely done by people standing outside of Buddhism. Even if these Sutras were translated by Buddhists, they represent only one person's opinion. They were not subjected to the scrutiny of others, not examined by many people, and inaccuracies passed unchecked into print. It is not, then, a question of worth; it's a question of validity.

Previous translations do exist, but the difference is here: The translators have an external viewpoint---they do not stand inside the study and practice of the Dharma. "Outsiders" don't have a genuine, reliable understanding. That's where the problem lies.

The translations done at Gold Mountain Monastery are checked and criticized by many people. We do not claim that our translations are perfect, but we do strive for perfection. We don't want to imitate the earlier translations (done by clergymen or scholars) which became vehicles used to talk about the doctrines of Christianity. We don't substitute Christian terminology for Buddhist technical terms, so that nothing substantially Buddhist remains in them.

We have been investigating the Buddhadharma for many years, yet there are many things we do not understand. How much the less can those who have never looked into Buddhism be expected to render the original meaning of the Buddhist Sutras?

We at Gold Mountain Monastery would not dare to say that our translations alone have worth. We would simply not say that. But we are trying to do a good job; we are striving for perfection.

I now have a few more words for those of you who took refuge this afternoon. After this, anywhere you go, if people ask you who your teacher is and you want to admit that I am your teacher, you can tell him. “The stupidest person in the world is my teacher. His name is such and such. There isn’t anyone dumber or more ignorant than he is.” That’s how you should answer. Don’t say something like, “My teacher is really intelligent and he has all these good qualities.” Your teacher has no praiseworthy qualities. Don’t go around promoting your teacher and talking about how great he is. He doesn’t have any good qualities at all, only shortcomings.

Whenever you go to a Buddhist temple you should be humble. Do not be arrogant. You should feel that everyone else is better than you, and that you have much to learn from them. For example, when you bow to the Buddha, don’t stand in the center aisle, because that is the space reserved for the Abbot. Bow off to one side. Don’t cause those who see you to think, “Oh, your teacher is really stupid. He hasn’t taught you anything. You don’t even know how to bow to the Buddha.” Then no matter how good you say your teacher is, no one will believe you. On the other hand, if you do everything well and according to the rules, then you won’t even have to say anything about your teacher being a good teacher. People will just take one look at you and think, “He’s so well-behaved and well-mannered; probably his teacher doesn’t have any major flaws.” Do you believe this? No? Okay, that’s all for today.

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**Saturday, August 23, 1975 (afternoon)**

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**Disciples:** When Guanyin Bodhisattva succeeds Amitabha Buddha in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, where will Amitabha Buddha go?

**Venerable Master:** He’s going to go right into your heart. Who else has a question?

**Disciple:** When you are born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, do you stay there until you are

a Buddha or get enlightened, or do you stay only briefly and then leave?

**Venerable Master:** You become a Buddha right there. Those born in the superior grade of the superior lotuses become Buddhas as soon as they appear. Those born in the lower grade of the lower lotuses must wait ninety great eons to become Buddhas.

Several days ago Guo Tong asked a question about why there were two Buddhas with the same name in the Amitabha Sutra. There were unreckonably many Buddhas with identical names.

In the Land of Ultimate Bliss alone, there are three hundred and sixty billion, one hundred nineteen thousand, five hundred Buddhas all called the “Guiding Master, Amitabha Buddha.” The answer that Guo Hang gave to his question was correct. There are that many Amitabha Buddhas, all of whom guide living beings.

Yesterday, I said that Amitabha Buddha was like a magnet and that all living beings are like iron filings. When iron filings meet a magnet, they are irresistibly drawn to it. I also said that the other Buddhas were like magnets, but their magnetism was not as strong as Amitabha’s. Several people couldn’t sleep last night because they were having this false thought: “If all the Buddhas are like magnets, how come some have a stronger magnetic field than others? How can their powers be different?” Today, when I asked if there were any questions, no one dared bring the matter up, but I will answer it anyway.

It is because Amitabha Buddha has made forty-eight vows, and these vows are like the power of a magnet. Other Buddhas have also realized Buddhahood, but they have not made these forty-eight vows and so their power is not as great. Thus, in cultivating the Way, one must make vows. If you have vows, they are certain to come true. Vows are like a lamp to light the path, it is very easy to travel. Each one of us should make vows in our cultivation.

At Gold Mountain Monastery, every year on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, the anniversary of the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, those who wish to do so may make vows. That day is called “vow day.” Although the word vow (願, *yuan*) in Chinese sounds the same as the word for resentment (怨, *yuan*), it is not a day of resentment. Some

people resent heaven and blame their fellow human beings, saying, “Heaven! You really don’t know how to do your job. You are so unjust! And every soul on this Earth is wrong!” People like that think everybody else is in the wrong. That’s the day to make vows. You can make a vow about something you want to accomplish or about how you want to cultivate. Can one make vows at other times as well? Yes. However, that particular day is the anniversary of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment and so, when you make vows on that day, he is very pleased. “Oh! In the Saha world living being has made vows because of my enlightenment! These are supreme conditions!”

And so he says, “Good indeed! Good indeed! Good man, good woman, you have made these vows and I shall certainly help you to fulfill them.”

Yesterday, I taught you the mantra, “Om Mani Padme Hum,” and some people had these idle thoughts, “Perhaps I was one of the bugs on that Dharma Master’s body three or four hundred years ago. Since he recited the mantra, I’ve now become a human being and taken refuge with the Triple Jewel. Could that be the case?” That’s their false thought. Well, I’m not going to answer that question. Maybe Little Guo Fang was such a bug. She likes to eat candy and when I recited the mantra it probably kept turning things into candy.

Today I will continue speaking about Amitabha Buddha. It’s not the case that there’s just one Buddha or two Buddhas. In fact, there are as many Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges, and they dwell in the ten directions. What are the ten directions? They are: north, east, south, west, northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest--- that’s eight directions. Then add the zenith and the nadir and you have ten directions. In each of the ten directions there are Buddhas in number like the sands in the Ganges. The Buddha is a living being who has become enlightened. As many living beings as there are, there are that many Buddhas. Can you count the number of living beings that currently exist? There’s no way to count them. You can’t even reckon the exact number of human beings. You might figure out the number of people in one country, but you don’t necessarily know the population of all the countries in the world. There’s no way to come up with an accurate figure, no matter what scientific methods you use, including computers!

Even if you could count the human population, could you count the mosquitoes? How many are there in one country? How many are there in the whole world? You can't count the mosquitoes; you can't count the ants; you can't count the bees. All the insects, the birds, and all other living creatures are also uncountable. And the Buddhas are also like that. There are so many you could never count them. For every living being, there is a Buddha, and that Buddha will take that living being across. Thus, we talk about the Buddhas of the three periods of time throughout the ten directions. The three periods of time are; the past, the present, and the future. A few days ago I mentioned that some people do not believe in past, present, and future lives, especially rich people. They don't believe at all in future lives. They just enjoy themselves, thinking that if they can make a fortune in their business, they are "getting the most out of life." But they are wrong.

Why is one wealthy in one's present life?

It's because in the past one made offerings to the Sangha and aided the poor.

Why are you wealthy and honored in this life? It's because you practiced charity in past lives. It's said, "Renounce one, and gain ten thousand in return." If you gave away a penny in a past life, in this life you get it back ten thousand times as interest.

Why is one poor in one's present life?

It's because in the past one refused to aid the poor.

In past lives, when you had money, you didn't give, and so now you are poor. You were afraid if you gave away your money that you wouldn't have any for yourself. "I'll be stone broke. Why should I give my money away? That's too stupid." You held on to every single cent, squeezing it so tightly that it melted in your hand. You would rather have it melt than let go of it. That's how stingy you were. Those so terribly afraid of being poor, in their next life are, in fact, poor.

Why is one handsome in one's present life?

It's because in the past one offered incense, flowers, and lamps to the Buddha.

Suppose a person is extremely attractive. Everyone who meets him respects him and is fond of him. In general, no one dislikes him. Why is this? It's because that person made offerings of incense and flowers, and lit lamps before the Buddhas in past lives.

Everything is a matter of cause and effect. So it doesn't matter whether in your past lives you were an American Indian, American, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Burmese, or Sri Lankan---at some time or another you changed your residence. You may live in one "house" for a while, but eventually you will have to pack up and move. The principle of cause and effect works in human life in the same way. There's nothing strange about it at all. In the world:

The good flock together, and the evil run in packs; People seek out their own kind.

Buddhists associate with Buddhists. Those who believe in ghosts gather with those who believe in ghosts. Those who have faith in demons stay with those who have faith in demons. Students associate with students. Politicians associate with politicians, businessmen with businessmen, laborers with laborers, ginseng growers with ginseng growers. (this was added during translation) So that's what is meant by, "The good flock together, and the evil run in packs; people seek out their own kind."

Now we are all investigating the Buddhadharma, and we did so in former lives. In former lives we made vows to propagate the Buddhadharma, and in this life, quite unconsciously, we have gone down that road again. This is because we vowed to spread the Dharma in past lives. Here in this country where there is no Buddhadharma, because of past vows, we have come to help the Buddhadharma grow and prosper. In past lives we made such vows, in the present we are carrying them out, and in the future they will be fulfilled. So don't ask what nationality you were in a past life or how you have been reborn in America. No matter what nationality you were in your last life, you were a person. So you don't need to ask. Do you understand? You still don't know? Then you're really dreaming.

No matter what nationality people are, they should be good towards everyone. They should think, "If someone is bad to me, I will forgive them. I will treat everyone well. I

will forget the evil done to me. I will look for the good points in others and not for their faults.” If everyone were like that, there would be no war in the world. Why are there wars? It’s because everyone looks for the faults in others, and no one looks for the good points. So, day by day, there is more and more trouble in the world.

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**Saturday, August 23, 1975 (evening)**

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**Disciple:** When I was three or four years old, I suffered a fall. At that time, I had a feeling of going far away to a place that was filled with golden-yellow light. It felt steady and mellow, and everything was okay. The way everything has been going for the last few weeks for me, as I’ve said before at the monastery, I felt like I was coming home. Now, I was wondering what this experience I had when I was really little amounts to in relationship to my present experience.

**Venerable Master:** Of course there is a relationship. It’s telling you not to forget. It’s like crystal, through which you can see from one side to the other. It’s telling you to see through things.

**Disciple:** Ever since I was little, I have had a lot of strange sicknesses.

**Venerable Master:** No Matter what sickness you’ve had, you haven’t died, and so now you ought to cultivate.

**Disciple:** Okay, I will cultivate.

**Venerable Master:** Does anyone have anything to say?

**Disciple:** The Master has likened the experience of enlightenment to earning a college degree. Shakyamuni Buddha had to cultivate for three great eons before he became a Buddha. Is the “schedule” for enlightenment fixed in any way or could one, through diligent cultivation, exhaust one’s karmic obstacles in a single lifetime and manifest one’s original face, that is, obtain the Buddha’s wisdom very quickly?

**Venerable Master:** Have you heard the story of Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao?

**Disciple:** Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao? Was he the one with the human-faced sore?

**Venerable Master:** No. He's the one who went to sit in meditation on top of a mountain which looked like an inverted lotus. When he fell asleep, he fell over the edge, and Weitou Bodhisattva caught him in mid-air.

**Disciple:** Yes, I've heard the story.

**Venerable Master:** You heard it told by Guo You, but I don't know if his is the same version as mine. Probably they're about the same. You can find the answer there. Do you remember how the story goes?

**Disciple:** I have to think about it.

**Venerable Master:** Weitou Bodhisattva said, "You are so arrogant, I won't protect your Dharma for eighty thousand great eons." Why did he say that? Isn't that what he said?

**Disciple:** Yeah. And later Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao repented, and Weitou Bodhisattva...

**Venerable Master:** He fell over the cliff again, and Weitou Bodhisattva caught him in the air again. Then he asked, "You said you wouldn't protect my Dharma for eighty thousand great eons. Why then have you come to save me?" And what did Weitou Bodhisattva say?

**Disciple:** Weitou Bodhisattva said, "There are tons of arrogant people. But if you have a single thought of sincere repentance, I will come to protect your Dharma again."

**Venerable Master:** It's not "if," it's "because." "If" indicates a possible event, whereas "because" states that it definitely occurred. So it should be, "because you repented." "If you repent" means you haven't repented yet. Right?

**Disciple:** Yes.

**Venerable Master:** “Because you repented, you surpassed eighty thousand great eons.”  
Isn’t that what he said?

**Disciple:** probably. I don’t remember.

**Venerable Master:** Do you understand the answer to your question now?

**Disciple:** Yes.

[This is the synopsis of the story given in the book---compiled from what the Master and the translator said and filling in a bit.]

**Venerable Master:** Dhyana Master Gao Fengmiao always fell asleep during his meditations and so to prevent this he went to sit on top of a mountain. He sat atop a rock which looked like an inverted lotus, and the drop was who knows how far. He knew that if he fell asleep he would fall over the edge and be smashed to a pulp. The first day he sat very well. The second day went fine. But on the third day he dozed off and slipped over the edge. “I’m finished!” he thought, but just then Weitou Bodhisattva reached out his hand and snatched him out of the air.

Gao Fengmiao thought, “Weitou Bodhisattva is protecting me. How many cultivators are there like me in the world?”

“There are as many as the hairs on a cow,” answered Weitou, “and since you are so arrogant, I won’t protect your Dharma for the next eighty thousand great eons.”

Hearing this, Gao Fengmiao was deeply ashamed. He repented earnestly. He cried and cried until he even forgot about sleeping. He cried himself into a stupor, forgetting everything, until suddenly, as if waking from a dream, he realized, “Before I knew that Weitou was protecting my Dharma, I cultivated the Way. Now, I will continue to cultivate whether he protects me or not. And he sat down again, more determined than ever. It wasn’t long, however, before he fell asleep again and fell over the edge. Oddly enough, the same hand reached out and caught him.

“Who’s that protecting my Dharma?” he asked. “It’s me, Weitou Bodhisattva,” came the

reply. “Hey, Old Wei,” said Gao Fengmiao, “You don’t keep the precepts either. You told a lie.” “I did not,” countered Weitou. “You said you wouldn’t protect my Dharma for eighty thousand eons and here you are protecting my Dharma,” challenged Gao Fengmiao. Weitou replied, “Because of your one thought of genuine repentance, you overstepped eighty thousand great eons of retribution and so I came to save you.”

The important point was that in his one thought of repentance, he was able to cancel out, to pass beyond, as it were, eighty thousand eons. That should answer your question. If the “schedule” for enlightenment was fixed, it would turn into a dead dharma, not a live dharma. It would be a fixed dharma, and there simply are no fixed dharmas. Shakyamuni Buddha cultivated for three great asamkhyeyas of eons, but that’s just a manner of speaking. Three great asamkhyeyas of eons don’t go beyond a single thought; one thought is just three great asamkhyeyas of eons. Haven’t you been listening to the Avatamsaka Sutra? Do you know how many great asamkhyeyas of eons you have already cultivated? Maybe you have been cultivating for six great asamkhyeyas of eons.

**Disciple:** Perhaps not.

**Venerable Master:** How do you know that you weren’t a louse on the body of a Dharma Master who recited “Om Mani Padme Hum”?

**Disciple:** Perhaps I still am.

**Venerable Master:** Guo Lin, what question did you want to ask? You can’t come out to ask questions during the time when people are reciting the Buddha’s name. That shows a total disregard for the rules.

**Disciple:** The Gold Mountain Doctrine in two separate places says that “we do not change,” and it also contains the phrase, “make revolution in the Sangha.”

**Venerable Master:** The phrase “making revolution in the Sangha” is not part of the doctrine itself. The first three statements are the Gold Mountain Doctrine: “Freezing, we do not scheme. Starving, we do not beg. Dying of poverty, we ask for nothing.” What

follows is the transmitting of the Buddha's mind-seal in accord with true principle.

**Disciple:** I was wondering, since you are the Orthodox Dharma, how can you advocate revolution?

**Venerable Master:** It is just because we are the Orthodox Dharma that we need a revolution. Every place else, it's the Dharma-ending Age. If you don't reform the Dharma-ending Age, you're neglecting your responsibility. Revolution refers to revolution in the Dharma-ending Age, not in the Orthodox Dharma.

You don't realize how things are done in Asian Buddhism. For example, during the Incense Praise, the abbot lights the first stick of incense and when he is done he signals to the lay people to offer incense. The one who wants to light the first stick has to pay \$5,000 or \$50,000 [added during translation] and only then can he approach the altar. Not just anyone can go up and light incense. The first person to light incense pays \$5,000, the second, \$4,000, and the third, \$3,000. That's a fixed rule. In the Dharma assembly, the one who gives the most the money is the greatest Dharma protector. Do you think this is right?

Here, everyone is equal. It's not the case that if you give more money you go first, and if you give only a little you must stand behind. In China, monks recite Sutras for people, to help the dead, and for this service one pays \$10,000 or maybe \$100,000. It's not fixed. In general, "the more money, the better." "If you have a lot of money, you are good." Asian Buddhism is this way. Here, if you give a lot of money, it's okay. If you don't give money, it's also okay. If you like to do good things, it's okay. If you don't like doing good things, it's okay. Everything's okay. That is what is meant by "making revolution in the Sangha." We are not like Asian Buddhism, which sees money as all-important, and sees other things, such as the Sutras, the Dharma, the Buddha, and the Sangha, as really low.

That's how it is in Asian Buddhism. The monks play the wooden fish---"dong, dong, dong"---and hit the bell, and then ask for money. If you bow to the Buddha, you have to give money. Otherwise, the Buddha won't notice you. If you give more money, the Buddha's eyes may open wider. This is the kind of attitude that leads to the Dharma-

ending Age.

At Gold Mountain Monastery, we don't do it that way. Here, the poor and the rich bow to the Buddha on equal ground. There is no discrimination. It's not the case that if you give more money, you're number one. At gold Mountain Monastery, it's not that we don't accept money, rather we don't place such great importance on it.

This kind of an attitude is revolutionary! This is "revolution in the Sangha." We are making revolution against the improper elements of Buddhism. All the improper customs and habits must be eliminated. Thus, we uphold the Orthodox Dharma by purging it of its "unorthodox" elements. We want to do away with the Dharma-ending Age and usher in the Orthodox Dharma.

That was a good question. How can the Orthodox Dharma conduct a revolution?

The following sentences say, "We accord with conditions, but do not change." This means that we follow the conditions, but do not stray from the basic doctrines. We don't go around criticizing others and in this way we "accord with conditions." If other people do things differently, we don't hinder them.

However, we never change in our basic principles. We insist on doing things correctly ourselves and that's what is meant by "we do not change, but accord with conditions." Do you understand?

This afternoon we spoke about the Buddhas of the three periods of time throughout the ten directions. It is said,

*Among the Buddhas of the three periods and the ten directions,*

*Amitabha Buddha is foremost.*

*In nine grades, he saves living beings.*

*His awesome virtue is infinite.*

**Amitabha Buddha is number one.** This is because of the power of his vows. This power is so great that when you recite "Na Mo E Mi Tuo Fo," you can very quickly realize

Buddhahood. To become a Buddha, all you need to do is recite the Buddha's name. The Dharma-door of Buddha Recitation works on the same principle as the mother-son relationship. Those who recite the Buddha's name are like the "sons" and the Buddha is like everyone's "mother." Whoever recites Amitabha Buddha's name is like Amitabha Buddha's son.

In the Shurangama Sutra, in the section in which the twenty-five sages explain their ways to enlightenment, the Bodhisattva Great Strength says,

"It is like a mother thinking of her son. If the son has gone to roam..."

If the son leaves his mother, it is hard for his mother to find him again. But if the son wants to find his mother, all he has to do is return home. If the mother thinks of her son, but the son cares not for his mother, he will run farther and farther away. If the mother thinks of her son and the son is mindful of his mother, then they will always be together. We are all the sons and daughters of Amitabha Buddha. All we need to do is wish to return home and we can. If we don't want to return home, our father and mother might wait for us, but there is nothing they can do. So it is said, "Amitabha Buddha is foremost."

**In nine grades, he saves living beings:** There are nine grades of lotuses:

1. superior-superior
2. superior-middle
3. superior-lower
4. middle-superior
5. middle-middle
6. middle-lower
7. lower-superior
8. lower-middle
9. lower-lower

Each of the nine grades further subdivides into nine grades, making eighty-one grades in all. Whoever recites Amitabha Buddha's name causes a lotus flower to bloom in the water of eight meritorious virtues in the pools of the seven jewels in the Land of ultimate Bliss.

The more you recite, the larger your lotus blossom grows. If you recite just a little, your lotus will be small. If your lotus is big, you will rapidly become a Buddha. If your lotus is small, it will take a little longer. If you recite for a while and then quit, your lotus will wither and die. If you want to have a high grade of lotus, you should recite more. Recite sincerely. If you don't care whether or not you have a low grade, then you can be lazy and not recite---but your lotus will vanish.

**His awesome virtue is infinite.** The power of Amitabha's great awesome virtue is incomparable. No other Buddha can compare with him.

If anyone's got anything to ask, you should ask it now, because in a day or so we're going back to Gold Mountain Monastery.

**Disciple:** Sometimes children have invisible playmates. I was wondering if they are real human beings. I had a friend whose child played with a whole bunch of them, but when he misbehaved, he blamed the invisible playmates for his mistakes, and they all disappeared.

**Venerable Master:** Who knew about this?

**Disciple:** His mother.

**Venerable Master:** Could she see them?

**Disciple:** No, but he played with them for hours and hours.

**Venerable Master:** They may have been ghosts or immortals. But because he didn't recognize them as ghosts or immortals, he treated them as playmates. Some children can see such beings. When children cultivate the Way, they can very easily succeed. I've often said that for boys under the age of sixteen and girls not yet fourteen, it is very easy to become enlightened, provided they sit in meditation, work hard at their cultivation, and meet with a teacher of genuine wisdom. It's easy for them to accomplish the fruits of the Way. This is because they don't discriminate all the true and false things going on in the world. They don't deal with all those "you cheat me and I cheat you" affairs that go on. As soon as they go to school and learn how to use a "cheat-sheet," then it's no longer as

easy for them to realize the Way.

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**Sunday, August 24, 1975 (afternoon)**

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**Venerable Master:** Questions?

**Disciple:** I was wondering if living beings come into existence at a given point in time or if their existence is beginningless. If the latter is the case, then is there a fixed number of living beings? If they do have a beginning, an origin, what is it?

**Venerable Master:** Their origin is the zero: 0. As for the zero, where does it begin and where does it end? That's the "beginningless and the endless." When you break open the zero: 0, it becomes the number one: 1. In English it stands up on end like this: |. When this happens, there is a beginning.

When there is the one, then "two" comes into being. With two, comes three, with three comes four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and on up to infinity. So how many living beings are there?

**Disciple:** If you twist the zero, it turns into the sign for infinity:  $\infty$

**Venerable Master:** That's just the yin-yang symbol. Westerners just draw it differently.

In cultivating the Way you must cultivate to attain the one, and then turn the one back into the zero. That's called "returning to the root and going back to the source." Does that answer your question?

**Disciple:** Yes. It's a question of cultivating the Way.

**Venerable Master:** When you cultivate, you return to the root and go back to the source; you cultivate the one to return to the zero. Everyone has forgotten about the one, to say nothing of the zero. They don't even know what the one is all about.

*When the heaven attains the one, it's clear.*

*When the earth attains the one, it's serene.*

*When people attain the one, they become sages.*

When heaven attains the one, the sky is clear. For ten thousand miles, there's not a cloud. When the earth attains the one, there are no earthquakes. People who attain the one are sages. If you can then cultivate and get back to zero, that's Buddhahood.

**Disciple:** Could the Master please explain the five precepts?

**Venerable Master:** As to the five precepts, they prohibit killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and taking intoxicants. Why should one keep the five precepts? In order to "do no evil, but reverently practice good deeds." Do not kill; do not steal; do not commit sexual misconduct; do not engage in false speech; do not take intoxicants. If you observe the five precepts, you do not do these five kinds of evil deeds and you instead practice good acts.

Why should one refrain from killing? It is because all living beings have a life; they love their life and they do not wish to die. Even one of the smallest creatures, the mosquito, when it approaches to bite you, will fly away if you make the slightest motion. Why does it fly away? Because it fears death. It figures that if it drinks your blood you will take its life. From this you can see that all living beings love life and do not wish to die. Especially people. Everyone wants to live and no one wants to die. Although people sometimes commit suicide, ordinarily people do not seek death. Suicide is a special exception to the principle. That is why we should nurture compassionate thoughts. Since we wish to live, we should not kill any other living beings. That explains the precept against killing.

Stealing: If you don't steal, in the future no one will steal from you. Many of you have heard this verse:

*If in this life you don't cage birds, in future lives you will not sit in jail.*

*If in this life you do not fish, in future lives you will not beg for food.*

*If in this life you do not kill, in future lives you'll suffer no disasters.*

*If in this life you do not steal, in future lives you won't be robbed.*

*If in this life you commit no sexual misconduct, in future lives you will not have marital troubles.*

*If in this life you do not lie, in future lives you will not be deceived.*

*If in this live you do not take intoxicants, in future lives you will not go insane.*

This covers the general meaning of the five precepts.

Some people say, “Of the five precepts, the four which prohibit killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying are very important. But taking intoxicants is a very commonplace thing. Why prohibit that?” When you consume intoxicants, it becomes very easy to break the other precepts. Thus, we ban such things as drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco, and taking any kind of intoxicating drugs. Some people say, “The five precepts don’t specifically prohibit smoking tobacco or taking drugs. Doing those things is not in violation of the precepts.” These people are wrong. The precept against intoxicants also prohibits smoking tobacco, taking drugs, and using all intoxicating substances---including marijuana and opium.

Once there was a layman who received the five precepts. At first they were very important to him and he strictly observed them. After a time, his old bad habits surfaced and he longed for a taste of wine. He thought, “Among the five precepts, the one against drinking is really unnecessary. What’s wrong with a little glass of wine?” He bought several pints of brandy and downed them.

As he was drinking, the neighbor’s little chicken ran into his house. “They’ve sent me a snack!” he thought. “I’ll put this chicken on the menu to help send down my brandy.” He then grabbed the bird and killed it. This is a distinctly Chinese story and not a Western story. Why? Chinese people like to eat hors d’oeuvres with their alcohol. Westerners don’t need snacks to send off their wine. So, this layman couldn’t possibly have been a Westerner. Anyway, because he drank the wine, he wanted the meat and thus broke the precept against killing. Since he took the chicken without the owner’s permission, he also broke the precept against stealing. Then the neighbor lady walked in and said, “Say, did

you see my chicken?”

Drunk as he was, and full of chicken, he slurred, “No...I didn’t see no chicken. Your old pu...pu...pullet didn’t run over here.” So saying, he broke the precept against lying. Then he took a look at the woman---she was quite pretty---and forthwith he broke the precept against sexual misconduct. A little drink of brandy led him to transgress all five of the precepts. Therefore, the precepts against taking intoxicants is also very important.

You may be wondering, “You have said that to keep the precepts is to do no evil and to practice all good deeds, but I wonder if this is really the case?”

If you have your doubts, then of course there will be problems. But if you have no doubts, your good roots will certainly deepen and grow stronger. What is more, when you receive the five precepts, for each precept you receive, five Dharma-protecting good spirits come to support you and protect you. After receiving the five precepts, if you keep them well, you can turn disasters into lucky occurrences and transform difficulties into auspicious events. You will encounter no tragedies or calamities. Those are the advantages of keeping the precepts.

Last night we talked about Amitabha Buddha, and today we shall continue. Everyone has now taken refuge with Amitabha Buddha; we are now Amitabha Buddha’s disciples. We should be deeply ashamed of our past conduct and repent of the offenses we have committed through the three types of karma. What are the three types of karma?

1. The karma created through the body, of which there are three types.
2. The karma created through the mouth, of which there are four types.
3. The karma created through the mind, of which there are three types.

The three types of evil committed by the body are killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct.

The mind creates three kinds of evil karma: greed, hatred, and delusion. Greed: You might say that greed is just insatiable desire. Then, if you fail to obtain the object of your desire, you grow hateful. Once you are hateful, you become deluded. You then pay no attention

to heaven and earth; you heed nothing and no one, and you do things that are upside-down.

There are four evil committed with the mouth. The first is irresponsible speech, speech in which deviant knowledge and views are expressed, rather than proper knowledge and views. The second is false speech, that is, lying. The third is abusive speech, that is, scolding people.

Double-tongued speech involves talking about the faults of one person to another person, and then relating the second person's faults to the first party. "Do you know what Lee said about you?" he says to John, and then to Lee he says, "Do you know what insulting things John has been saying about you?" This is like the question yesterday about the invisible playmates. She said they disappeared as soon as the child started to slander them. If invisible friends disappeared as soon as the child started to slander them, you can bet that the visible ones would be even more upset. Now "double-tongues. It means that you speak in two different ways. You cause dissension and generally create trouble.

All these kinds of bad karma together form the ten evils. Not committing the ten evils is called practicing the ten good acts.

Students of the Buddhadharmā, stop doing the ten evils! Always practice the ten good acts! The ten evils and the ten good acts are created through the three karmas of body, mouth, and mind. When the three karmas are pure, you will not commit the three types of bad karma. We who recite the Buddha's name should make vows together to have a response manifest before us at all times. That is, when we approach the end of our lives, all the various qualities of the Land of Ultimate Bliss will appear very distinctly before our eyes. As a result, people who see and hear the recitation of the Buddha's name will all cultivate vigorously and all be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss together. We who recite the Buddha's name should have this aspiration.

**Venerable Master:** Who's got a question?

**Disciple:** (Guo Jie – Fruit of Precepts) Please clarify some things about the precepts. Does the precept against sexual misconduct prohibit all sexual conduct between men and

women, or does it allow it between husband and wife? My girlfriend and I are not officially married, but in our minds we are already married, and it's very clear to us that we're not going to have sexual relations outside of our relationship.

**Venerable:** That's fine.

**Disciple:** As to the precept of not lying, there is the so-called "lie of silence." For example, the American government would allow us to make war on Vietnam because the people of this country did not stand up to say it was not alright to do that, so those officials say, "Well, we're doing fine, because no one says we're not doing fine. If you don't stand up and speak out against evil, then you're complying with the forces that bring it about. Is being silent in this case a form of lying?"

**Venerable Master:** Yes, it is, but it is still a little better than actually speaking a lie. Of course, lying through silence is not allowed, but actually speaking a lie is even less correct. It is to be hoped that such things would not occur. But if you are not able to keep these precepts, that is none of my business. It is beyond the power of one individual to single-handedly stop all people from lying.

**Disciple:** As for intoxicants, I looked that word up and the root word is toxin. There are a lot of toxins in our food. Monosodium glutamate and other chemicals are sneaked into our food. The caffeine in the coffee we drink is a drug. Ginseng has drugs in it. On the other side of it, peyote, although it has toxins in it, it's a spiritual tool that's traditionally been used by the American Indians for a long, long time. And it's a Dharma door, so to speak, that leads to single-mindedness.

**Venerable Master:** I've eaten that kind of mushroom. Back in the days when I was practicing filial piety by my mother's grave, I ate that kind of mushroom, and it made me want to laugh. That's called the "laughing mushroom." After you eat it, you have a strong urge to laugh. I think this mushroom is quite commonplace. They are probably here in this country, too, but I don't remember what they look like. After I ate it that time, I never ate that kind of mushroom again, nor did I see them again. I just ate that one mushroom.

**Disciple:** There are many poisons in the food we eat, like coffee and ginseng. A lot of

people use mushrooms as means of cultivation of the Way or as a Dharma door. Does the Venerable Master have any suggestion? What should we do?

**Venerable Master:** The reason for the precept against taking intoxicants is that intoxicating substances can make people go insane. They can make people go crazy and act in upside-down ways. If you take a small amount and it doesn't confuse you, that's okay. It's only to be feared that you start out taking a little, but you end up taking a lot. For example, people who drink alcohol may start out with one glass, then drink another glass because they don't realize they are tipsy. People who drink usually won't admit that they are drunk. Even if they are drunk, they say they aren't. I've seen a lot of people who are like that. They drink a little, and then some more, and then more. That's the reason for the precept.

If you use a little bit as medicine to cure an illness, it is acceptable. If you are not sick, then you don't need to use this medicine. Just now ginseng was mentioned. Ginseng is not poisonous. It is sweet in nature. "Ginseng has a sweet flavor and is very bolstering to the constitution. It quenches thirst, helps to produce saliva, regulates the complexion, and nurtures the stomach." What advantages does it have? If you are thirsty and you eat it, it will quench your thirst. It also produces saliva. It nourishes your inherited constitution (*yuan-qi*). The *qi* or energy in your *dan-tian* (near your abdomen) is called central energy (*zhong-qi*). The inherited constitution is the energy that gives rise to your central energy. It is the source of energy. Ginseng bolsters your energy. If you are weak, eat some ginseng and you will feel invigorated.

Many Chinese Dharma Masters, when they give lectures, have to drink ginseng tea, because lecturing drains their energy, and the ginseng tea helps to replenish it. So, "ginseng has a sweet flavor and is very bolstering to the constitution. It quenches thirst, helps to produce saliva..." If you are very thirsty, drink ginseng and it will cure your thirst. It "regulates the complexion, and nurtures the stomach." Regulating the complexion means regulating the blood, and nurturing the stomach means nurturing one's energy. That's ginseng.

You have to know the functions of each medicinal herb. You can't just take a little of this

and a little of that. If you do that, then even if you were healthy to begin with, you could end up getting sick. Medicines are for curing sickness. If you aren't sick, you don't need to take them. Some people say, "I feel tired, I think I'll take some drug to make my tiredness go away." If you feel tired, just take a rest and then you'll be fine. You don't need to take medicine.

**Disciple:** Regulating the complexion refers to regulating blood?

**Venerable Master:** It regulates the blood so that the blood circulates well and doesn't get clogged up like a sewage pipe. If a person has good blood circulation, he will not get sick. Who else has a question?

**Disciple:** What about taking ginseng during Chan sessions? Is it appropriate to take ginseng at that time? Does it count as curing illness?

**Venerable Master:** It helps your cultivation. If your legs tend to go to sleep a lot, you can take some ginseng to help them wake up. That's okay.

**Disciple:** We ate some ginseng here. It creates a very yang state that some people have a hard time handling. The tide flow will block up in the shoulders or the back for awhile, and some people were uncomfortable with that yang state. I find that just by hanging on for awhile, the blockage will stop. Is there some exercise you can do, or some other medicine that can be taken together with it?

**Venerable Master:** If it's too yang for someone, he doesn't need to take it. With the human body, excess is as bad as deficiency. Too strong is as bad as being too weak. Don't overdo it. Just follow the middle path.

For example, if you can carry a hundred pounds and you take some ginseng so you can carry 150 pounds, that's going overboard. If you have a cup, you want to fill it up full. But if you keep pouring after it is full and it overflows, it's the same as not being full.

Suppose you feel very weak and lacking in energy, so your voice is very soft and you can't speak any louder. If your vital energy is weak and you pant when you walk, then

ginseng can help to bolster your energy.

It's not the case that everyone should take ginseng, especially when they are not sick. If one is not sick, then one should take it very sparingly. Even once a month is already quite substantial. One should not take it every day. If one is taking pure ginseng, one should only take one or two qian (1 qian is 1/10th of a Chinese ounce), or about half an ounce. And one should take ginseng only in the three winter months, not during the rest of the year.

OK, it's time to send off the plaques.

**Disciple:** As to the precept against taking life as it relates to not eating meat, I want to ask how we can live without taking life. Plants, for example, seem to have a higher consciousness than most animals. They have a consciousness that's everywhere at once. They display emotions such as fear and recognize individuals. Personally I don't feel any more comfortable eating plants than I do eating animals. According to scientific experiments, you can pinch one plant here and its partner will feel the pain at exactly the same time even though it is a thousand miles away. Since they have emotions, how can we kill and eat them any more easily than we can kill and eat animals?

**Venerable Master:** That which has a life is said to be "sentient." Plants are said to be "insentient." This includes the earth, wood, rocks, and minerals. Rocks may appear insentient, but they are alive. Their "life" is a bit less, however; it's not as complete, and they cannot be compared with human beings, who have eight consciousnesses. Although we can say that plants have some sort of awareness, it is incomplete. That's why we have the term, "senseless rocks." Although they are said to be senseless, they actually do have emotional feelings. What proof is there?

In China, Dharma Master Dao-sheng lectured on the Nirvana Sutra at *Hu-qiu* Mountain. The first half of the Nirvana Sutra said that icchantikas, that is, unbelievers, did not have the Buddha nature. Dharma Master Dao-sheng said, "Icchantikas also have the Buddha nature." When he said that, all the other Dharma Masters objected. "The Sutra plainly says that icchantikas don't have the Buddha nature; how can you say that they do?" and

they told everyone to avoid his lectures. So he went up to *Hu-qiu* Mountain and lectured to rocks. He addressed them, saying, “I say that icchantikas have the Buddha nature. What do you say?” At that point the rocks nodded their heads! It is said,

*When Sheng, the Venerable, spoke the Dharma,  
Even the rocks nodded their heads.*

Thus proves that insentient things, such as rocks, also have the Buddha nature.

Well, then, how can one remain alive in this world? If you were to be very strict in your interpretation, then even eating plants is killing. But it’s a bit less serious. If you did not eat, you could not stay alive. “Killing” vegetables is less offensive to one’s compassionate sensibilities than wantonly killing animals for food. Killing animals creates thoughts of hatred, not of compassion. Your compassion grows lighter while your hatred increases. His question is pretty tough to answer.

Since plants have no blood or breath, how can we prove that they have “life”? Ginseng, for example, after 1500 years can turn into a human being. It can transform into a child and run around. These transformations are called “ginseng immortals.”

**Disciple:** In some people’s view, when you eat one bowl of rice, you take the life of all the grains of rice, whereas eating the meat of, say, one deer, you take only one animal’s life.

**Venerable Master:** On the body of one single animal are a hundred thousand, in fact several million little organisms. These organisms are fragments of what was once an animal. Why did they become organism? Because they did not believe in Buddhism.

All animals are fragments of the consciousnesses of people. The spirit of a human being at death may split up to become many animals. One person can become about ten animals. That’s why animals are so stupid. The spirit of an animal can split up and become, in its smallest division, an organism or plant. The feelings which plants have, then, are what separated from the animal’s spirit when it split up at death. Although the life force of a large number of plants may appear sizeable, it is not as great as that of a single animal or a

single mouthful of meat.

Take, for example, rice: tens of billions of grains of rice do not contain as much life force as a bit of meat the size of a grain of rice. If you open your Five Eyes, you can know this at a glance. If you haven't opened your Eyes, no matter how one tries to explain it to you, you won't understand. No matter how it's explained, you won't believe it, because you haven't been a plant! Do you understand?

**Disciple:** Not for sure.

**Venerable Master:** I know you aren't sure. Another example is the mosquitoes. The millions of mosquitoes on this mountain may simply be the spirit of one person which has transformed into those bugs. It's not the case that a single human spirit turns into a single mosquito. One person can turn into limitless, boundless numbers of mosquitoes.

At death, the nature changes, the spirit scatters, and its smallest fragments become plants. Thus, there is a difference between eating plants and eating animals. What is more, plants have very short life spans. The grass, for example, is born in the spring and dies within months. Animals live a long time. If you don't kill them, they'll live for many years. Rice, regardless of the conditions, will only live a short time. So, if you really look into it, there are many factors to consider, and even science hasn't got it straight. Okay, that's all I'm going to say. The more I say, the more you will disbelieve.

**Disciple:** The Dalai Lama, the highest lama in Tibet, eats meat, because Tibet is a very cold place. What is his view on eating meat?

**Venerable Master:** Are you asking these questions because you can't stop eating meat?

**Disciple:** I've been asking myself this question for twenty years now. I can eat meat, and I can also not eat meat. I believe it's a matter of degree.

**Venerable Master:** Do you believe in the Dalai Lama or do you believe in Shakyamuni Buddha?

**Disciple:** Well, I believe in the Buddha, but I, well...

**Venerable Master:** Well, I don't know if the Dalai Lama eats meat. I've heard that he is vegetarian, but that many Lamas under him do eat meat. Even if the Dalai Lama himself does eat meat, Shakyamuni Buddha did not advocate eating meat. Now are you going to follow the Dalai Lama in eating meat, or follow Shakyamuni Buddha in not eating meat?

**Disciple:** Do Buddhists have some way of counteracting the effect of eating meat on a karmic level? I understand the karmic retribution involved in eating meat. I know that we shouldn't eat meat. But I've heard that there are certain circumstances in which Buddhists can eat meat. I was wondering what your views on this were, and whether there was a way of counteracting the bad karma of eating meat.

**Venerable Master:** The Buddha ate meat. But he did not advocate eating meat. He himself did not want to eat it, but it was offered to him. Also, he did not kill the animals he ate. He condoned three kinds of pure meat which could be eaten by Bhikshus and lay people.

What are the three kinds of pure meat? If you did not see the animal killed, it is pure. If you did not hear its cries as it was being killed, it is pure. If it was not killed expressly for you, it is pure. If you didn't see the animal killed or hear its screams as it died, and if the animal wasn't killed just for you to eat, in that case, if your body is weak, you can eat it. In the Buddha's day, the monks went out begging for food and they ate whatever they were given. It wasn't that they could cook whatever they wanted to eat. They just ate whatever was offered to them.

But why is it that cultivators of the Way should not eat meat? It's because eating meat increases people's sexual desire. Cultivators should have no sexual desire, and so they should consume food and drink which do not stimulate desire. That's the most important reason, really, for practicing vegetarianism. Cultivators must be pure and undefiled. That is the most important reason for not eating meat.

Okay, we can do the Great Transference now and recite the Buddha's name. Burn the

plaques when we recite the Mantra for Rebirth in the Pure Land.

\* \* \* \* \*

**[Epilogue]**

The assembly then drove in a caravan to the ocean and performed the final Great Transference of Merit at the beach as the sun set, recalling the first of the contemplations listed in the *Sutra of Sixteen Contemplations*: “Contemplate the setting sun, its appearance like that of a suspended drum...”

- The End -