

Supreme Master Ching Hai
A Master from the Himalayas
Three-time invited lecturer for the United Nations
Recipient of the World Peace Award and the World Spiritual Leadership Award



Master Tells Stories
A collection of spiritual teachings by
Supreme Master Ching Hai



I do not belong to Buddhism or Catholicism. I belong to the Truth and I preach the Truth. You may call it Buddhism, Catholicism, Taoism, or whatever you like. I welcome all! Since the ancient time there is always a way to go back to the kingdom of God, there is always a way to see God.

The most important thing in this world, regardless of our mission, is to love one another. You have to have a mighty determination, like a lion. You have to have a very loving heart, so soft like a feather, that every little thing moves it. We have to be like an audience. We have to be wise enough, enlightened enough to watch all the games of the universe, and get out of the suffering.

Only if we find God will we find true happiness, true peace, everlasting bliss, even in this life and the life after.

There's only one religion: The religion of God, of love and of understanding. There's only one church, one temple: The temple of enlightenment. Come to that temple; then we'll know all religions of the world.

I dream that the whole world will become peaceful. I dream that all the killing will stop. I dream that all the children will walk in peace and harmony. I dream that all the nations will shake hands with each other, protect each other and help each other. I dream that our beautiful planet will not be destroyed. It took billions of years to produce this planet and it's so beautiful, so wonderful. I dream it will continue, but in peace, beauty, and love. Yes, that is my dream.

**Contents and original words in this book are permeated with
grace and blessings of Supreme Master Ching Hai**
The Supreme Master Ching Hai International Association
Offices in all major cities and countries around the world
Headquarters: PO Box 730247, San Jose, CA 95173-0247, U.S.A.
P.O. Box 9 Hsihu Hsiang, Miaoli Hsien, Formosa (Taiwan 36899)
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A little message:

In speaking of God, or the supreme spirit, Master instructs us to use original non-sexist terms to avoid the argument about whether God is a She or a He.

She + He = Hes (as in Bless).
Her + Him = Hirm (as in Firm).
Hers + His = Hiers (as in Dear).

Example: When God wants, Hes makes things happen according to Hiers will to suit Hirmself.

As a creator of artistic designs as well as a spiritual Teacher, Supreme Master Ching Hai loves all expressions of inner beauty. It is for this reason that She refers to Vietnam as 'Au Lac' and Taiwan as 'Formosa'. Au Lac is the ancient name of Vietnam and means 'happiness'. And the name Formosa reflects more completely the beauty of the island and its people. Master feels that using these names brings spiritual elevation and luck to the land and its inhabitants.

The logo's characters, SM, stand for Supreme Master, signifying the Supreme Master power within everyone. The logo is an interweaving of red and gold colors. Red symbolizes the physical body, while gold represents the radiant Buddha nature or kingdom of God within.



Preface

This book is a compilation of original stories sampled from numerous lectures and informal talks given by Supreme Master Ching Hai. With the help of many fellow disciples who transcribed and translated dozens of lectures, a book began to take form. Through dedicated patience, devotional love, help from fellow disciples and the grace of the Master, this work is now presented to you. The entire contents of this book are the original words of the Master, recorded verbatim. Editing has been done only on the order of quotes, and on the grammar and punctuation of the transcriptions themselves.

Through the spoken words, a living Master can bring ancient wisdom to life. To experience these discourses in person, the seeker is affected on all levels of understanding, beyond space and time, far beyond any mental concept. These types of Masters, having become fully conscious of their supreme nature within, offer a perfect mirror of the most noble and divine qualities within each of us, a reflection of our own potential for self-mastery. As one comes into contact with this perfect image, one's life begins to turn away from fear and self-doubt and to move toward more tolerance and compassion, more hope and joy. Such is the experience that countless hundreds, thousands, millions of people have had in the presence of Supreme Master Ching Hai. She speaks above and beyond general philosophy and theology, echoing the Truth, which lies directly in the hearts of all seekers. This kind of experience is beyond the words alone, but rather an invisible connection all of us share with the infinite. Through Her words, Her eyes and Her voice, one can obtain limitless blessing and inspiration. With Her help and the practice of the Quan Yin method of meditation, one can quickly progress along the path to full enlightenment.

Supreme Master Ching Hai is world-renowned for Her great wisdom, sense of humor, humility and deep compassion. She has traveled to all parts of the world dedicating Herself and Her time in order to teach others that the Truth we all seek is not far away. Her multi-cultural background (She is fluent in five languages English, German, Chinese, French and Aulacese) allows Her to express one ageless Truth in a multitude of ways, so that each individual receives his or her own answer, according to his or her own needs.

Through daily practice of a non-denominational meditation technique call the Quan Yin method (contemplation of the inner Sound stream); we can all attain understanding of the great joy, compassion and heavenly bliss described within religious and spiritual scriptures around the world. More than just a simple meditation technique, this living teaching brings to anyone who sincerely desires it the ability to carry the meditative state into all parts of their lives. It offers each of us a way to have true love and understanding for our fellow beings, to play our part in society while still keeping our mind clear of worry and attachment, and a way to find freedom here and beyond this world.

All of this, Master Ching Hai offers free of charge and conditions to anyone seeking the Truth. She does not personally accept any donations, all of Her public lectures are offered free of charge, and initiation into the Quan Yin method of meditation is given to anyone who is truly dedicated to their own spiritual development. Master says that a spiritual Teacher should never charge the student for what they already own. She simply opens the

door to our own inner wisdom and then guides and protects us until we have fully realized our own treasure inside.

May the Truth guide you along the path to your own great awakening.



Introduction

Every human being has, at one time or another, wondered about the deeper meaning of his or her life. We witness on a daily basis the suffering caused by our ignorance, often feeling helpless to change it. But, we are also blessed with brief glimpses of deep insight and joy, which bring temporary comfort and hope to our lost souls. Regardless of the tides and turns of our lives, the recurring questions still remain, 'Where do I come from? What is the purpose of my life? What am I here for? And where am I going after I die?' Should we search for answers to these questions, we would open the door to a multitude of philosophies and practices, some safer than others, some quicker than others, yet not an easy choice for anyone to make.

Searching alone may seem like wandering in a maze, not knowing what turn to take next. Countless road signs may seem to point in different directions, leaving us confused and constantly searching outside of ourselves. We seek relief from an undefined longing, a void which lays buried behind the distractions of our lives. But, the day we find ourselves in the presence of a true spiritual Master, we know that the search has come to an end, for this living Teacher proves to us that complete liberation and self-mastery is possible in this lifetime and we only need to claim it, for it is ours.

When we take away all that divides us from the world around us, we find that only love remains, and this is our true essence. Once a living Master introduces us to our own divinity, all of our previous illusions of self-identity begin to fall away and instead of having to learn more, we begin to unlearn, to let go of useless, negative habits and ways of thinking. Our path is now set before us on our journey back Home.

When a traveler is lost, he must find a higher vantage point in order to obtain a better view. The higher he goes, the wider and clearer his vision becomes. Soon, the ominous dark shadows that once petrified him are discovered to be only mere shrubs in the wilderness! Likewise, the higher we go on our inward journey, the more our fears and false limitations are revealed to us. We learn to see them for what they are and let go of them just as we would discard an old worn-out garment. As we shed the outer appearance of ourselves, we no longer see separation and we feel united with everyone. The color of our skin and the language we speak may vary, but our innermost fears and aspirations are identical. So as we get to know our true selves, we gain comfort and understanding both within and far beyond ourselves.

If you feel that you are ready to embark upon such a journey, this book should provide you with priceless guidance and blessings, much needed in our present times. Supreme Master Ching Hai addresses in a very specific way some of the most frequently asked questions posed by seekers around the world. She clarifies often-misunderstood concepts without oversimplifying them. This collection of Her teachings is very much like a practical guide to your own treasure hunt. It will provide you with an overall map, warning you of obstacles ahead, teaching you how to prepare yourself. With Master Ching Hai by your side, you will surely find your way Home.



The heavenly cardinal Supreme Master Ching Hai

Throughout the ages, mankind has been visited by rare individuals whose sole purpose is the spiritual upliftment of humanity. Jesus Christ was one of these visitors, as were Shakyamuni Buddha and Mohammed. These three are well known, but there are many others whose names we do not know; some taught publicly, and were known by a few, and others remained anonymous. These individuals were called by different names, at different times, in different countries. They have been referred to as Master, avatar, enlightened one, savior, messiah, divine mother, messenger, guru, living saint, and the like. They came to offer what has been called enlightenment, salvation, realization, liberation, or awakening. The words used may be different, but in essence they all mean the same thing. Visitors from the same divine source, with the same spiritual greatness, moral purity, and power to uplift humanity as the holy ones from the past are here with us today, yet few know of their presence. One of them is Supreme Master Ching Hai.

Master Ching Hai is an unlikely candidate to be widely recognized as a living saint. She is a woman, and many Buddhists and others believe the myth that a woman can not become a Buddha. She is of Asian descent, and many western people expect that the savior will come from their own culture. However, those of us, from all over the world, and from many different religious backgrounds, who have gotten to know Her, and who follow Her teachings, know who and what She is. For you to come to know this will take a measure of openness of mind and sincerity of heart. It will also take your time and attention, but nothing else.

People spend most of their time earning a living and taking care of material needs. We work in order to make our lives, and those of our loved ones, as comfortable as possible. When time permits, we give away our attention to such things as politics, sports, television, or the latest scandals. Those of us who have experienced the loving power of direct inner contact with the divine know there is more to life than this. We feel it is a pity that the good news is not more widely known. The solution to all of the struggles of life is sitting quietly inside, waiting. We know that heaven is just a breath away. Forgive us when we err on the side of over enthusiasm and say things that may offend your rational mind. It is difficult for us to remain quiet, seeing what we have seen, and knowing what we know.

We who consider ourselves disciples of the Supreme Master Ching Hai, and fellow practitioners of Her method (the Quan Yin method of meditation), offer this book to you with the hope that it will help bring you closer to your own personal experience of divine fulfillment, whether it be through our Master or any other.

Master Ching Hai teaches the importance of the practice of meditation, inner contemplation, and prayer. She explains that we must discover our own inner divine presence, if we want to be truly happy in this life. She teaches that enlightenment is not esoteric and out of reach, attainable only by those who retreat from society. Her job is to awaken the divine presence within, while we lead normal lives. She states, 'It is like this. We all know the Truth. It's just that we forgot it. So sometimes, someone has to come and remind us of the purpose of our life, why we must find the Truth, why we must practice

meditation, and why we must believe in God.’ She asks no one to follow Her. She simply offers Her own enlightenment as an example, so that others may gain their own ultimate liberation.

This book is the original verbal teachings of Supreme Master Ching Hai. Please note that the lectures, comments, and quotes by Master Ching Hai contained herein were spoken by Her, recorded, transcribed, sometimes translated from other languages, and then edited for publication. We recommend that you listen to or watch the original audio or video tapes. You will get a much richer experience of Her presence from these sources than from the written words. Of course, the most complete experience is to see Her in person.

For some, Master Ching Hai is their mother, for some She is their father, and for others She is their beloved. At the least, She is the very best friend you could ever have in this world. She is here to give to you, not to take. She takes no payment of any kind for Her teachings, help or initiation. The only thing She will take from you is your suffering, your sorrow and pain, but only if you want this!



A biography of Supreme Master Ching Hai

Master Ching Hai was born in Aulac. Her father was a highly reputed naturopath. He loved to study world literature and was especially interested in philosophy. Among his favorites were the writings of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, and these were available to Master Ching Hai as a young child. She read these and other Buddhist texts before She entered primary school.

Although Her parents are Catholic, they were open to Buddhist thoughts. Her grandmother was a Buddhist. Master loved to spend time with Her grandmother, and she taught Her the scriptures and Buddhist worship. Master Ching Hai developed a very open attitude toward religions due to this background. She would attend a Catholic church in the mornings, a Buddhist temple in the afternoons, and in the evenings would listen to lectures on the holy teachings. This left Her with many spiritual questions, such as 'Where did we come from? What is life after death? Why are people so different?'

At one time, there was a shortage of doctors and nurses in Her town, so Master helped in the hospital after classes. She washed patients, emptied bedpans and did errands in Her efforts to ease people's suffering.

Master has always had a soft spot for animals, and would often take a wounded animal home, care for it and release it. When She saw an animal slaughtered, She would cry, wishing that She could prevent such unnecessary suffering. She has been a vegetarian, and has always been repulsed by the sight of killing or of meat, all Her life.

She worked for a time in Germany as a translator for the Red Cross. She translated between the Aulacese language, German and English, and also volunteered to work long hours in the service of Aulacese refugees. She did so at the expense of Her own health and comfort. Her work with the Red Cross put Master Ching Hai in contact with refugees from many countries. She was continuously faced with the suffering and turmoil brought on by wars and natural disasters. Master suffered a great deal trying to alleviate the pain She saw, and She realized how impossible it was for any one person to stop the suffering of humanity. This drove Her more strongly toward finding enlightenment, as She realized that only this could help alleviate mankind's pain. With this as Her goal, She practiced meditation even more seriously. She sought out new teachers, read everything She could find, and tested many different methods. She felt, however, that these efforts were not working, and that She was not experiencing the spiritual phenomena She read about in the scriptures, nor was She reaching the enlightened state. This was extremely frustrating for Her at the time.

While in Germany, Master Ching Hai was happily married to a German scientist, with doctorates in two fields. He was a kind, attentive and supportive husband. He became a vegetarian, traveled with his Wife on pilgrimages and was very supportive of Her charitable works. Eventually, Master felt that She needed to leave Her marriage in order to pursue Her spiritual goals. She discussed this at great length with Her husband, and their separation was with his agreement. This was an extremely difficult decision for both of

them, but Master felt very strongly that this was the right decision. She needed to devote Her undivided attention to the pursuit of enlightenment.

After leaving Her marriage, Master sought to find the perfect method, which could lead one to attain liberation in one lifetime. In the Surangama sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha said that the Quan Yin method is the highest of all methods. None of Master's teachers knew it, so She traveled and searched everywhere for the right Master. Finally, after many years, She found a Himalayan Master who initiated Her into the Quan Yin method, and gave Her the divine transmission that She had sought for so many years. After a brief period of Quan Yin practice, She became fully enlightened. She continued practicing and improving Her understanding, and remained in retreat in the Himalayas for some time.

Eventually, Master Ching Hai traveled to Formosa. One evening, during a typhoon with heavy rain, as She meditated in a room behind a small temple, a group of people knocked at Her door. Master asked them why they had come, and they answered, 'Quan Yin Bodhisattva (The Goddess of Mercy) replied to our prayers and told us about You, saying that You are the great Master and we should pray to You for the method to reach liberation.' Master tried to send them away but they would not go. Finally, Master, touched by their sincerity and devotion, agreed to initiate them, but only after several months of purification and their agreement to adhere to a vegetarian diet.

Shy by nature, Master Ching Hai did not seek out students to teach. In fact, She ran away from people who sought Her initiation. This happened in India, and in the United States where She was living the unassuming life of a Buddhist Nun. When She was 'discovered' for the third time in Formosa, She realized that She must not run away from the inevitable tasks that lie ahead. She began sharing with all who wished to hear Her message of Truth, and She began initiating sincere students into the Quan Yin method.

Master Ching Hai's work has spread by word of mouth from this first small group in Formosa to many millions of people around the world. She has traveled and taught throughout Africa, Latin America, the United States, Asia, Europe and Oceania. Many people from all walks of life, and from many different religious backgrounds, have made great spiritual progress with Her help. Grateful friends and disciples are to be found all over the world, ready and willing to help others learn from their beloved Supreme Master.

In addition to helping countless numbers of people through Her spiritual teachings and initiations, Master Ching Hai has used Her boundless love and energy to assist those who are suffering or in need. In recent years, Her humanitarian efforts have touched the hearts and lives of millions of people all over the world. Master does not discriminate between suffering caused by spiritual ignorance, material privation, or circumstantial events. Wherever there is suffering, She will help.

Some of Master Ching Hai's humanitarian activities in the past few years include aid to: The homeless throughout the United States; victims of fire in southern California; victims of many floods in the Midwest United States, central and eastern Mainland China, India, Malaysia, Aulac, Holland, Belgium and France; disadvantaged elderly in Brazil; those displaced by the eruption of Mt Pinatubo in the Philippines; disaster victims in northern Thailand; destitute families in Formosa and Singapore; lepers in Molokai, Hawaii; spiritual communities in India, Germany and Uganda; families of mentally retarded children in Hawaii; victims of the 9-11 tragedy in New York and victims of the Los Angeles, Turkey and Formosa earthquake; veterans of the United States; orphanages in Aulac; institutions of medical research on AIDS and cancer in the United States; and many, many others. Of

course, we must also mention Master Ching Hai's never-ending and tireless efforts to help the Aulacese refugees, those both inside and out of refugee camps.

Although She has not ever sought acknowledgement of any kind, Master Ching Hai has been recognized and honored for Her humanitarian work by government officials throughout the world. For example, October 25, 1993 was proclaimed 'The Supreme Master Ching Hai Day' by the Mayor Fasi of Honolulu Hawaii, and February 22, 1994 was likewise proclaimed by the six Governors of the States of Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, Missouri and Minnesota. She also received the 'World Peace Award' in Honolulu, and the 'World Spiritual Leadership Award' at a ceremony in Chicago on February 22, 1994. Congratulatory messages were sent to Her at the Chicago ceremony by many government officials worldwide, including Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Reagan.

In recent years, Master Ching Hai has also devoted Herself to creative expression of the beauty She enjoys within. Her creative works include paintings, decorated fans, lamps, dress and jewelry designs, and songs. Many of these items are made available for purposes of fundraising.

Master Ching Hai has told us that She is not always enlightened. She lives a normal worldly life, and knows from experience about our problems, our heartaches, passions, desires and doubts. She also knows the heavenly realms of kingdom of God, and how to get there from here. Her sole function at this point in Her life is to help us with our journey from the suffering and confusion of the un-awakened state to the bliss and absolute clarity of total divine realization. If you are ready, She is here to take you Home.

Master Ching Hai takes an unusually broad view of all religions. She has studied and taught the words of Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Lao Tzu and many others. She always emphasizes the similarities among the great teachings, and lets us see through Her eyes how all the great Masters are preaching the same Truth. She often explains how different religious opinions have arisen, due only to the difference in opinions of different people in different countries at different times.

Master Ching Hai gives initiation and a variety of lectures to interested students and people, according to their backgrounds and cultures, including Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Taoists, or atheists, et cetera. She speaks fluently in English, German, Chinese, French and Aulacese languages. Those who wish to learn and practice the Quan Yin method with Master Ching Hai are welcomed to receive Her initiation.



Master tells stories

BETTER TO KNOW OF THE PROBLEMS THAN TO THINK YOU HAVE NONE ¹

This is a story of one of the Arabian people. There was a man called Mohammed, son of Issa. He was one of the very good friends of a commander of the religious order of that time. He was a big one, always very wealthy and respected by everyone. He could think very well, and he could talk very well. He was eloquent. So, he was above everyone else at that time.

One day, he was riding on his horse. The horse was bedecked with all kinds of beautiful cloth and beautiful carpet and gold: 'Clink, clink.' Accompanying him were a lot of attendants. Everyone worshipped and praised him, and it looked like a very grand procession. So, the people were asking each other, 'Who is this man, so dazzlingly bedecked, so well mounted, so rich, so magnificent?' But then, one of the old women who was hobbling along said, 'Oh no, that is a poor man; he is not rich. Because Allah has denied him favor, that's why he has such vanity.'

After hearing this, Mohammed, the son of Issa, dismounted at once from his gorgeous horse and admitted that indeed, this was his condition. And from that moment, he abandoned all desire for outward show and wealth, and lived a humble and simple life devoted to God's knowledge. He was a lucky guy, yes? He was lucky that he knew he had problems. The one who knows he has problems will be cured of problems. The one who thinks he doesn't have problems dies with problems.

HONEST EARNINGS ²

Now, there is another story about a Muslim king in Delhi. In all true religious orders, all enlightened saints in that order act similarly. Either they earn their own money as householders and save it until they have enough to go and preach the dharma, or if they have to rely on public donations, then they take only enough to survive in order to serve people spiritually.

So, there was a king who was a Muslim and who ruled Delhi at that time. His name is Nasruddin. I will read to you also the preface of this story, called 'Honest Earnings.' It is from a Hebrew saying of the Jews. Can you imagine this? By chance we came into Jewish tradition, too! Here it is: 'Let your conversation be without covetousness,' (meaning without greediness) 'and be content with such things as ye have.' This means whatever you have, be happy with it; no greed, no wanting any more than you already have or what is naturally coming your way. 'For Hes have said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' The Lord is my shepherd, my helper, and I will not fear what humanity shall do unto me.'

1. International three-day retreat, Paris Center, France, August 23, 2007 (Originally in English).

2. International five-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 24, 2007 (Originally in English).

If you have faith in God, you become fearless; that's what it means. Just be happy with whatever you have, you see? All religions say the same thing: Be honest, earn your living and live simply. Now, the King Nasruddin was one of those who lived exactly according to what we were saying, from the Jewish religious tradition. He was a Muslim ruler who stayed in Delhi, and he never spent a penny out of his treasury for himself; he always earned his own living.

So, what did he do to earn his living? How does a king earn a living? Most kings and royalties are not allowed to work actually, for fear of losing their dignity and authority. You become like a commoner then; you become like a worker, a money-earner like everyone else. And how would he rule if he did that? It's a wonder; we shall see!

After taking care of all the court matters in the daytime, at night he went home and copied the Koran by his own handwriting, and told his servant to go sell it in the market. So, it's just spiritual work. And whatever he earned from that, he spent for himself and his family. Now, isn't that a very honorable king? We should clap for him! [Applause]

In China, we have a similar tradition. There was a Master who worked all day, and he said that if one day he doesn't work, for one day he won't eat. His name is Bai Zhang. Until he was very old, he continued working, working and working. One day, he was so old already that his disciples hid his tools, because he would usually go out and plant vegetables to eat. So, they hid his tools so that he could not work anymore. And that day he didn't eat. One day, no labor; one day, no food. That's it. That was his motto. And he lived his example until his ripe old age.

Okay, now we go back to Delhi. One of the king's servants had not gotten any money for many months. And then one day, he received a letter from his family from far away, asking him to come home immediately for some urgent matter. So, he needed money to go home and give to his family, of course. You must know that a servant of this kind of a king must also have been a very good spiritual practitioner. So probably he just worked; he didn't even care about salary. But the king probably would give him some pocket money, for monthly snacks. [Master laughs.]

So, the servant needed to go home. And the king said, 'I'm sorry, I don't have any money just now.' [Master laughs.] Oh! What a king! Poor king. 'So could you wait a little bit?' Then some months passed by, and the servant really needed to go home because he received again a message from the family saying that he must come immediately. Some family member had been sick and perhaps dying, and they needed some money for that. So, he begged the king to please let him go home.

When he was ready to leave, the king gave him two rupees. My God! That's about two cents in Formosan money, not even two cents in American money! The king told the servant, 'Although this money is very little, it is from my honest earning. Therefore, it will attract abundance. It has God's heavenly blessing. Everyone will know it's very pure money – heaven knows that. So, don't worry; you just be happy with it!'

The servant was very surprised at such a 'great' amount of two rupees equaling two cents in Formosan NT, meaning nothing at all, even at that time. But the king said, 'God will bless you in abundance because my money is honest. So, please go on your way and don't worry about it! God will bless you!' So, the servant went. He could not do anything. The king had no money; what could he do? So, he went away with the two rupees. But, even though he had trust and faith in the king, in his mind he still wondered: How would he face his family with empty hands? When he came home his family would expect some

gifts. Being a servant of the king and coming home with empty hands, how would he explain to his family? Because the world's people are like that: If you work for the king or if you have a high position in the world, your family or relatives expect you to provide grander gifts, monetary or otherwise. This is normal, no?

So, the servant was having a hard time, walking with a heavy heart, thinking what to do. Meanwhile, on the way home he did not have money for any luxury items or a car or anything like that. But he happened to see some delicious, ripe, red, juicy pomegranates. Do you know pomegranates? They're like red apples, and inside they have transparent, ruby-like, small, small seeds and flesh. It's very beautiful construction inside, like a piece of a jewel when you open it. So, he gave the two rupees, he gave it all; he thought he could buy only one pomegranate to satisfy his desire, so he might as well. Since two rupees wouldn't buy much anyway, there was nothing much he could spend them on. And he wanted to buy the pomegranate to eat. But he was surprised: For two rupees he got a big bag of pomegranates! He was very happy! And he ate just a little bit and then he was satisfied already.

It just so happened that he still had pomegranates in his hand and in his bag, when he passed over the border to another country. Now, the queen of that country was very ill at the moment, and the physicians of that country had advised the king that only the juice of the pomegranate would heal the queen's sickness. But, in that country, there was none such thing, and they didn't know where to find it. So, they put up announcements everywhere: 'Whoever can find pomegranates, please bring to the court and the king will reward abundantly.'

Now, the servant had a big bag of pomegranates, and he was next to the palace already! So, he asked to come in and give them to the queen, of course. And the queen took as many as she needed, and the king was so happy that the queen recovered that he rewarded this servant of the Indian king of Delhi with one thousand rupees for each pomegranate! Wow! Now, can you imagine how much he has? At least ten or twelve thousand rupees; that's a lot of money. So, he was very, very happy! He gave a little bit to the two soldiers who were sent by the king to accompany him home, since it was feared that with so much money he might be robbed or in danger. What an honor! So, after he reached home, he gave the two soldiers a little bit of money, and then the rest he gave it to his family.

Everyone was overjoyed, praising the king of Delhi for his generosity. And the servant said nothing. [Master and audience laugh.] Just as the family expected, the servant of the king brought home lots of money and gifts, because he also bought a lot of gifts on the way home to give to them. Everyone was happy and praising the king to heaven.

So, just from two rupees, the servant earned a rich harvest of property and possessions and made the whole family and clan happy. From now on, of course the servant would be more faithful to the king, even though he was already faithful before. But he probably believed more in the king's dignity, saintliness, honesty and pure heart inside. End of story! [Applause]

THE STORY OF A HAPPY ANIMAL VILLAGE ³

A very long, long time ago in Scotland, there was a very, very, very beautiful sheep who lived in a very, very beautiful countryside. Apart from saying 'Baahh, baaahh,' he never

3. International five-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 22, 2007 (Originally in English).

made any noise or disturbed or did any harm to anyone. He minded his own business; he produced his wool on time, and he just ate a little grass in the meadow. He was a perfectly contented, wonderful, peaceful sheep.

One day, near Christmas time, the husband or so-called owner of the sheep talked to the wife and said, 'Hey, darling, Christmas is coming. We're going to have to kill that beautiful sheep of ours for Christmas Eve dinner.'

Wow! The sheep heard that and he almost had a heart attack. 'Oh! Baaahhh! Poor me.' What could he do? He was just a sheep; he did not have fingers to grab any weapon, even if he wanted to. He had only a very simple pure mind, just to think of nothing but the nice meadow, beautiful weather, nice white clouds, green grass and clean water. That was all he could think about, because in the sheep's world there is no such vocabulary like 'fight,' 'war,' 'hatred,' 'killing' or 'murdering' – nothing like that in the dictionary of the sheep's world. So, he tried to think but didn't know what to do. He decided to run away. He had never been away from the surrounding hills and meadows; he had never been anywhere, but he was so afraid that he had to run for his life.

So, he kept running, running and running, until he didn't know where he was anymore. Lost, he stood there, wondering what to do next and where to go. Suddenly, he saw appearing from behind the little hills two big vicious horns, coming up and up, up and up, higher and higher. And there it was: A big buffalo, with black, big eyes, big horns, a big mouth and big drooling, as he was still chewing his last night's dinner while running. And he was running towards the sheep! The sheep was a little scared, but the buffalo said, 'Oh! Mouuuh, I won't harm you. Mouuuh, no, no, I won't harm you. Mouuuh; don't move.' So, the sheep didn't move but said, 'What are you doing here, brother Buff?' The buff said, puffing, 'You know what? The farmer has been feeding me all this time good grass and good water, so that he can kill me today for Christmas. I didn't know what to do, so I had to run away! I've been running and running, I don't know how far already, and I'm so tired. I hope I'm safe here. Mouuuh, mouhhh, mouhhhh.'

And then he almost collapsed on his feet, and he was panting for a long time. So, the sheep waited until he calmed down and then said, 'Brother Buff, I am in the same situation. I also ran away from my keeper because they planned to kill me for Christmas Eve dinner. So, I think we should join together, me and you, and we will go find somewhere else to stay and we'll look after each other. What do you think?' And the buffalo said, 'Yes! Mouuuh. Good idea! Let's go!' Together they felt much safer and better. So, the two buddies kept walking as far as possible. They didn't sleep or dare to take a rest. They didn't stay too long at the stream water, and they didn't eat too much grass on the way. They just grabbed a sandwich or something quickly, and drank a little juice on the run.

Shared kindness creates solidarity

After a while, they found a little goose that came running up, panting and panting, and said, 'Quack, quack, quack! Oh, quack, quack, quack!' Then he stopped and almost dropped dead at their feet. The sheep and the buffalo had to go and get some water and sprinkle it on the goose's face. And then he woke up. They said: 'Brother Goose, what's wrong with you? Are you in trouble?' 'Yes, yes, quack, I'm in trouble. I'm in big, big trouble. Quack, quack, quack!' [Master and audience laugh.] 'So what is the trouble?' The goose said, 'The ones who have been feeding me all this time, they want to slaughter me for Christmas Eve dinner. I don't know where I am anymore, or what to do. I'm at a loss. Can you help me? Tell me what I am to do since you are bigger. Protect me from these people!'

So, the buffalo and the sheep said, 'Don't worry, don't worry. We'll take care of you. You look so tired. Why don't you go to the stream, drink a little bit of something and eat a little bit of these fruits here that we have brought from the forest nearby.' The buffalo said, 'And then you can go on top of my back and hang onto my horns. I will carry you. You don't have to go too far since you are so tired.'

The goose was so happy. Yes, together we are something or someone. So, he drank some spring water, ate some fruit and hopped on top of the buffalo. Then, together they were going on their way. After a long while, what did they see again? Another panicking one, a chicken! 'Pok, pok, pok, pok, pok!' He came running, panting, flapping his wings and bumping into the three. So, they said, 'What is the matter with you, sister Chick? Are you in trouble? Are you in need of help?' 'Oh yes! Pok, pok, pok, pok... I need it so much! I need help; I need it right now! The ones who keep feeding me, they want to eat me for Christmas dinner. I have to run for my life. Help! Help! Pok, pok, pok...'

So, the three of them, again, said, 'Don't worry! The three of us have the same problem. Why don't you join us? And if you are too tired, jump on top of brother Sheep and then we'll both carry you far away from your danger. We're going together to where there are no humans, where there is no one to harm us, but only peace and love among us. Okay, so let's go!' So, the two big animals carried the two winged brother and sister on their backs and they were well on their way.

After a little while, there came another running creature again towards them. This time it was a pig. 'Groooooon, groooooon, help! Help!' The pig was running and panting and bumped into the four. And then the same story was told again: 'I was happily eating my dinner, and then I overheard my keepers saying that they were going to slaughter me for Christmas Eve to celebrate the birth of the most compassionate Jesus Christ. I wonder what they have learned from the Master Jesus Christ. But they are thanking Him and want to slaughter me to give thanks. So, I had to run for my life and I don't know where I'm going now. I don't know how to protect myself from these humans or where to go to be far away from them. I'm in distress. Please help me! I haven't eaten for a long time, and I'm very exhausted. If I continue like this, I will die.'

So, the buffalo felt very sorry for the pig and said, 'Oh, don't worry, brother, we also have the same problem you do, but we have a better solution. We are going together as a herd so no one can attack us alone. It is better if we unite and stand together; we'll be powerful and we'll protect each other. So, please join us. Here, we have a little fruit left over and we have some water for you. Please eat and drink; make yourself strong and we'll be on our way.' So, voila! The pig joined them.

After a while, they encountered another one. Imagine who it was! A Chinese dog who was also running, barking, 'Wouf, wouf, wouf!' all the way. After he also almost ran into the buffalo, they stopped him and asked, 'Where are you running?' And the dog said, 'Oh, I have to run away from my owners because they are going to kill me!' The other animals said, 'Why are they going to kill you?' 'Oh, they think I'm too old now and I can't work anymore, so they want to kill me and by the way they can eat my flesh, for Christmas dinner.'

Oh dear God, what a dinner! So, the chicken said, 'Pok, pok, pok, pok! That's no good. You just join us, yes? We are already going away from humans and we're going to find a very peaceful, safe place for all of us to settle down and make an animal village. So, just come with us. We're strong, we're big, and together we are even stronger. Don't worry

about it. Now take a little bit of food that we have for you here and some water, and then we'll be okay!

The friends find sanctuary together

So, they were going, going, going and then when they got to the edge of a village, they saw one house. It was a very broken down house, but it was still a house. Everyone stopped. And the dog said, 'We'd better hide first to see if there's anyone around before we proceed further.' And the goose said, 'Okay, I will fly up to the top of the tree to see what's going on in that house, if there are any humans or if anything is going on, and then we will see what to do.'

Everyone retreated into the woods behind, and the goose flew up to the top of the tree and looked. First he looked far and near but didn't see any houses yet and no humans in sight. Then he looked into the house in front of him, and he heard something. There were some human noises inside. At first he was shuddering a little bit, but he was very high and hiding behind the foliage, so he felt a little bit safe. He looked through the crack of the broken roof and saw six thieves busy dividing loot among them. There was a lot of gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, emeralds – all kinds of precious stones, precious utensils and precious necklaces, and pearls, all worth a king's fortune. So, the goose flew down to tell everyone. He said: 'We should wait until it becomes dark and then we can go inside. I will do this and you will do that, and then you can do this and you do that, and then we will scare them away.' So, they made a plan.

The buffalo stayed near the front entrance; the sheep stayed at the side door and the dog at the other side door. The goose stayed at the back door and the chicken on the other side of that door. They were all together. Suddenly, they made different noises but in a big togetherness and then it sounded very weird. The thieves were so concentrated on their thieving money that when they suddenly heard such a terrible noise like that, they all ran! They ran away into the forest. So then all the animals entered the house, and they said, 'This should be okay; this will be our house.' But the dog said, 'What if they come back?' The goose said, 'Don't worry. I have a plan.' So, he flapped his wings to turn off all the oil lamps. It became dark and he said, 'Okay, Buffalo brother, you guard the front door. Sheep, guard the back door. The dog is on the right door, the chicken on the left door and the pig in the middle under the table.'

Now, after the thieves went into the forest, they didn't hear anything anymore. No one was chasing after them, and they thought, 'Oh, maybe we've just been scared of nothing. Let's go back to see who is there.' So, they slowly, quietly and secretly tiptoed back into the house. But the animals already had a plan. As the chief of the thieves went inside, it was all dark. He heard nothing, but he entered and suddenly the buffalo kicked him in the 'behind' so that he went from the front to the back door. And then there, the sheep also used his head to nudge the thief in the stomach. And then, as he ran to the right side, the dog also gave him a little 'teeth souvenir' on his leg. Running to the left side, the chicken pecked him, flapping wings and altogether very noisy. The animals were stamping their feet, barking and shouting, all at the same time.

So, the chief was very afraid. He was trying hard to get out, but every time he bumped into an animal, he got another 'souvenir.' Finally, they edged him out to the front door, and he ran for his life. After he ran back to the forest, he told his waiting subordinates, 'Oh! We better run! I don't know what's in there, but the house must be haunted by many ghosts and devils. Let's run quick before they come and take our souls!' So, they all ran away, while the animals stayed in the house, dividing the treasure between themselves.

After that, each one built a big, beautiful house. Slowly, they also got more and more prosperous and made an animal village, which was very beautiful. It was next to a beautiful stream, with a lot of water for everyone and a forest with enough shade and shadow to protect themselves and enough fruit and all kinds of grass and herbs for them to survive. And they lived together, happily ever after. [Applause] More animals also joined them later, and their village expanded. It got bigger and bigger all the time. It was so big that even if any human happened to pass by, they ran away. They knew they better not mess with this village, because it had become very strong now.

Love the animals

So, that is the story of the smart, beautiful, innocent animals. I do hope. [Applause] We together do hope that one day the animals do not have to run away from us, but can stay with us like our domestic friends: The dogs, the cats, the birds, the ducks, the chickens, the geese and the pigs. We hope that every kind of animal will feel safe with us and will feel the friendship and love from humans, and will never have to run away like that again. Suppose it is us who are the pig; suppose it is you who are the buffalo or you who are the geese, how would we feel? We would feel helpless like that, and they are really like human beings. They have a soul, and they have understanding. They understand more than we do; they understand our language, and we don't understand theirs. So, who is more clever? Really! You know that already, if you have dogs, pigs or geese; even they understand it.

GOD IS THE GREATEST PROVIDER ⁴

The story of prince watermelon

This is a story from Au Lac about a prince, who although he had once been an ordinary poor person, was adopted by the king of Au Lac. And of course, after being adopted by the king, he lived like a prince and had a princely kind of life. He had everything he needed and was happy and well taken care of. He wore beautiful silk clothes, lived in a beautiful palace, and had beautiful servants and concubines and nice facilities of every kind.

So, everyone envied him and told him, 'Wow! You're such a lucky person! Suddenly you have everything that anyone could ever wish for: Wealth, fame, health, convenience and honor. Everyone respects you and everyone brings you anything you ask at your beck and call. You're a very lucky guy!' So, the adopted prince said, 'Oh, yes, but I thank God for all this. God is the only one: God is the provider; God is so full of grace; God is good to me; God gives me everything!'

Overhearing this, the king became angry, saying, 'You ungrateful son of a... something! I'm the king! I'm the one who gave you all this comfort, wealth and convenience and the good life and you never even say 'thank you' to me. Instead, you thank God and I don't even know who God is! Have you ever seen Hirm? Has Hes ever given you anything? You thank that guy while I'm the provider. I'm the one who's the king. You should remember that!'

But the prince still didn't budge and said, 'Even your wealth and power, everything you have is also given to you by God! We're all indebted to God alone. I can't say, 'Thank you' to you, Your Majesty! I can only thank the one and only provider of the whole universe, which is God!'

4. Group meditation, Florida Center, Florida, U.S.A., June 16, 2001 (Originally in English).

Then the king became even angrier than before and said, 'You still don't repent, you unfilial son! Well, I'll show you who the real provider is. Without me, you'll see how you can live. Let's just see if that God of yours will provide you with anything like I've given you here. Now, go! You're going to be exiled to a very faraway, remote, isolated island. No one lives there and it's hard to survive because it's far away from civilization and far away from everything. So see if that God of yours will give you survival.'

That was it: Said and done, ordered, stamped and sealed. The prince and his wife were sent away on a small ship, with a little survival kit to last only a month. So, he sailed away with his wife and went to the island. And after one month, they had nothing left to live on and the wife became scared, but the prince said to her, 'Don't worry! God gave us birth and God has given us our life until now. God will continue to provide for us.'

So, they both sat and meditated, reciting the name of the Supreme Master. And lo and behold, something happened! Sitting in meditation one day, they saw a black bird. And then there were two birds and then three birds and then a whole flock of birds, all eating something not too far away from them. It was something that looked green on the outside, red on the inside and had black seeds.

As we know, whatever a bird eats, we can eat. It may or may not taste good, but if a bird can eat it, it means it's not poisonous. So, the wife said to the husband, 'It looks like we have something to eat now after all.' So, they went over to check it out, and they tasted the leftovers from the birds. Oh! It tasted delicious! So, they went looking for the source of these plants in order to get more of the fruit. And they didn't have to go too far away because the fruit grew everywhere on the other side of the island, where they hadn't been before. So, they went there and collected the fruit every day and ate it all. And that's how they survived. The melon provided liquid, and the seeds inside were full of protein.

So, they survived. They had protein, liquid and fiber, like vegetables and protein in one meal. They ate the melon and felt good and every day they had a wonderful time. There was nothing to worry about, and they were very happy. Then the husband said to the wife, 'This life is even better than life in the palace. In the palace you have silk, gold and all kinds of delicious food, but you have to keep to the rules and maintain the etiquette and you have to wear decent clothes. You have to always appear princely, noble and decent for everyone to look at you. As for the king, you always have to bow to him. Morning and evening and every time you talk to the king, you have to kneel before him and hurt your knees and so on. So, I think this life is much, much better! We sleep with the sun, we get up with the sun and we meditate all day long. We stroll around on the pristine white sand and hold hands under the pine trees. We sing beneath the moon shadows, we walk for miles along the beach and breathe in all this pure, one hundred percent beautiful fresh air, without one worry in the world. I wouldn't exchange the whole kingdom or the whole world for this.' And the wife said, 'You're right, darling. You're right. We're really lucky!'

So, day after day, they enjoyed their life. They enjoyed it very much until one day the wife thought of something and said, 'Such fruit as this we'd never enjoyed before in our lives. Before, we never saw this fruit, but now we know that it's delicious and good for the health and it makes you feel very cool and beautiful! So, we'd better share it with whomever we can. But, since no one comes here, maybe we'll just put it into the sea and whoever gets it can eat it.'

The husband said, 'That's a good idea! Maybe we could also draw a map of this island so that people can come here and take even more back to their homeland to eat.'

So, they wrote notes with charcoal on leaves and cut a hole in each watermelon and stuck a message inside along with a map and then sealed it somehow. And then they let them go so they could float all around the island and the waves of the ocean would carry them in all directions. And soon after, some merchants who were doing business by way of the sea caught some of the watermelons, opened them and then saw the message inside and ate them and loved them very much. So, they found a way to go to the island and get these melons.

And when the merchants arrived there, they got the melons but they also traded for some things like basic necessities. Whatever the couple needed, the merchants would bring in to trade for the watermelons because at that time the melons were a delicacy, a rarity. No one had ever had them; even the king had never had them. So, the merchants brought the fruit home and sold it. And they made a big profit because it was so rare that people would pay any price, especially wealthy people. They would pay any price to get watermelons so they could show them off to their friends and give presents to their precious loved ones, or even to the officers in the king's court and also to the king himself. So, the people paid a lot of money and the merchants brought the couple everything.

Soon after, the island became like a big trading center and the husband and wife didn't even have to take care of the fruit. The birds would eat it and then throw the seeds out on the sand, where the melons would grow again. All year round, they always had enough fruit for everyone.

And it wasn't long until this couple became very rich once more, even richer than before. They had every precious and rare thing in the whole world because the people who came from different nations brought all kinds of presents to trade for the melons. Even though the couple didn't take money, they were grateful for such beautiful fruit and the good profit made at home, and they got many presents that they didn't even want.

Then one day, the king also had a taste of that fruit, asked where it came from and wanted more! So, the merchant said, 'We can get some more, but you have to wait for a few months. We have to go to the island and then get it.' So, the king said, 'Where is that island? What kind of island is it that has such good fruit as this?'

And they said, 'It's the very island where you exiled our prince a few years ago.' So then the king remembered. In fact, he had been remembering the couple very often and missed them so much that he felt very sad inside. Repenting to everyone for his previous anger, he said, 'In just one moment of anger I didn't think straight. But now, I think they're right; I think God is the only provider. What would I do without God anyway? So, I think it's better if they come back.'

Thus, it was because of this fruit that the father and son and daughter were reunited again, and it became a very happy time for the whole nation. The king made a big, big national holiday and party, where everyone drank, danced and sang happily for one whole month, and some people continued into the next month or even for three months. And of course, the couple brought a lot of these melons back home to give as presents to the king and to the whole court. Also, they took plenty of seeds to the mainland, where they cultivated them. And ever since then, we've had many, many watermelons, and every time we eat them we can think of God. That's what we should do when we eat watermelons.

So now, you know the story. It's a very nice story and that prince must have been a very good spiritual practitioner because after that the king devoted his time to finding God and enlightenment. So, the watermelon spoke more than volumes! It converted the king and

nearly the whole nation into becoming enlightened so that they would remember God every day, just from eating watermelon and from the king setting such a good example. And he devoted himself more and more to meditation practice, to prayer, to remembering God, to praying to God and to being one with God.

RETURN TO THE SOURCE OF CREATION ⁵

There was a story about a person who tried to look for heaven and someone said, 'I know where heaven is; I can show you.' So, he took him to a small well, where he showed him several people sitting and meditating happily, living together in that hole in the ground. And he said, 'This is heaven!' The seeker said, 'No! Are you kidding me? This is just a dark hole in the ground.' So, the person said, 'No, no! Heaven is in the saints who are sitting there, not in the hole.'

The Quan Yin method is the method for returning to where you came from, and where we came from is heaven. We came from God. We came from the greatest source of creation. We're not the human physical body. So, if you concentrate and return, step by step, back to where you're from, you will know where enlightened Masters live. 'Everything is created by the mind,' Buddha said. So, just go back and see the real creator.

That's you! You and me – one! You and everyone – one! You and nine generations of your family – one! That's why it's possible for me to help you go back; it's possible for you to liberate nine generations; it's possible for the Buddha to be enlightened and to say all sentient beings are already delivered or already liberated. When you go back to the source, you see nothing but just the 'oneness' of us – no Master, no disciples. You're one part of me; we're one part of God.

So, it's possible that when one person is enlightened, everything's already delivered from inside, and everyone knows already. I don't need to deliver you; I don't need to give you initiation. You'll be saved because your soul knows from my soul connection inside. But the mind doesn't understand. So, I have to continue teaching you and telling you this and that and the other, so that you'll feel peaceful here. And so that your life, this fixed physical karma, will be smoother, more bearable and more joyful until you leave this physical world.

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TEAMWORK ALWAYS HELPS ⁶

There was a man who had a horse, a blind horse named Peter who couldn't see anything. So, whenever he wanted Peter to do something, the man would just stand there and shout: 'Marco, come on, boy, pull now. Keep pulling, pulling!' Then nothing would happen. Peter would just stand there, doing nothing. So, the man would shout again, saying, 'Come on now, Martin, pull; let's pull together!' And Peter the horse would stand there and do nothing.

5. Group meditation, Seoul Center, South Korea, May 17, 2000 (Originally in English).

6. International six-day retreat, Bangkok, Thailand, December 28, 1999 (Originally in English).

Finally, he'd say, 'Peter, let's pull!' And then, Peter would pull. So, his friend asked him, 'Why don't you call for Peter in the first place? You have only one horse, why do you keep calling Marco and Martin; what for?' So, the owner said, 'My horse Peter is very lazy. Because he is blind and he doesn't see, if he thinks he has to pull all alone, he won't do it.' When you sit together, you say, 'All the women do it, and since I am a man, if I don't do it, I'll look so bad.' And all the women think, 'All the men also sit here; I have to show them who is better.'

So, when we sit together, everyone does the same thing. We feel encouraged; we feel that we have a big, strong support group. So, we just do it. That's very easy! And that's why when you sit here, you feel more settled, more calm and more up to the meditation than when you sit alone at home or somewhere. That's why Jesus said you should meditate with one more person, like two people or more. It's just better like that; you feel better. That's a psychological way.

Another way is because two powerful gods sitting together is better than one. That's why retreat and group meditation is very, very important to your spiritual development. I don't know why some other groups tell people they don't have to come for group meditation and can just sit at home. I don't know. But, I always found out, as you did as well, that group meditation and retreats together are always beneficial. [Applause]

Is it easier to concentrate here? [Audience: Yes!] You see, it is all about the set-up of the mind. If we set out to do something and we determine that we are going to do it within a certain period of time, our mind will understand that and then it will cooperate. And because you come here, you know that the purpose here is just to meditate. For this one week, there will be no social contact, no business, no phone calls and nothing to worry about. There's no cooking to worry about, for example; someone cooks for us. You just know that you already set out, you already made up your mind that we've come here just to meditate. Therefore, when you sit down, you're more settled, and you just sit. You know what time you have to sit, and that everyone does it. So, the mind is happy to cooperate.

GO DRINK SOME TEA ⁷

There once was a Chinese Master, and whenever someone came to visit him he'd invite them to drink tea. So, if a person came along, the Master would say, 'Have you been to our Center before?' And when the person said, 'No,' the Master would say, 'Okay, go drink some tea.'

Then a monk would come. So, the Master would say, 'Have you been here before?' And when the monk said, 'Oh, yes. I've been here a couple of times,' the Master would say, 'Okay, go drink some tea.'

But the abbot of that temple felt strange about this. So, he came to the Master and asked him, 'Master, why do you say 'go drink tea' to everyone? You tell a guy who's been here before to go drink tea and you also tell one who's never been here before to go drink tea. Why is that?'

So, the Master said to the abbot, 'Abbot, go drink tea.' Then the abbot asked, 'What's wrong with you, Master?' And the Master replied, 'What's wrong with you!'

7. Group meditation, Florida Center, Florida, U.S.A., February 14, 1999 (Originally in English).

Similarly, you sometimes ask me so many nonsensical questions that I have a hard time finding nonsensical answers for you. So, in keeping with your standards I have to invent something or say just anything. Because if I kept saying ‘Go drink tea!’ all the time, you’d wonder why and think something was wrong with me. Or, you’d think that saying ‘Go drink tea!’ was the best answer you could give anyone.

Really, it means that you can relax. You’re already the Buddha. The whole universe knows that but if you don’t know it, it’s okay. It doesn’t matter. Sooner or later you’ll know.

USE YOUR WISDOM TO KNOW WHEN IT’S TIME TO LET GO⁸

There once was a master who went to India. In those times, we didn’t have the communications or airplanes or many kinds of transportation that we do now. So, the master went to India on foot. He had never been to India before; perhaps he came from Persia. And when he got there, he saw a lot of fruit. In India they have plenty of fruit to sell, but much of it is expensive because they can’t grow much due to the water situation. So, he saw one basket, a big basket of some very red, long fruit. And it was the cheapest in the shop, not expensive at all.

So, he went up and asked, ‘How much per kilo?’ And the shopkeeper said, ‘Two rupees.’ Two rupees in India is nothing; it’s like dirt. So, he bought a whole kilogram of the fruit and started eating it. But after he ate some of it: Oh, my God! His eyes watered, his mouth watered and burned, his eyes were burning, his head was burning and his face became red. As he coughed and choked and gasped for breath, he jumped up and down, saying, ‘Ah! Ah! Ah!’

But he still continued to eat the fruit! Some people who were looking at him shook their heads and said, ‘You’re crazy, man. Those are chilies! You can’t eat so many; they’re not good for you! People use them as a condiment, but only a little bit to put into food for taste. You can’t just eat them by the handful like that; they’re not fruit!’ So, the stupid master said, ‘No, I can’t stop! I paid money for them, and now I’ll eat them. It’s my money!’

And you think that master was stupid, right? Similarly, we sometimes do a lot of things like that. We invest money, time or effort in a relationship, business or job. And even though it’s been a long time, bitter experience tells us it won’t work, and we know there’s no more hope that things will change in the future – this we definitely know by intuition – we still continue just because we’ve invested money, time, effort and love into it. If so, we’re kaput in the brain. Just like the man who ate the chilies and suffered so much but couldn’t stop because he didn’t want to waste the money he’d paid.

So, even if you’ve lost something, let it go and move on. That’s better than continuing to lose; this you must know. Don’t say, ‘Master says we have to be tolerant and unconditionally loving,’ and then let the husband kick you in the butt anytime he wants to or let the wife continue abusing you. It’s no good! I don’t advocate that; I’ve said so many times.

In another story about a snake and a monk, the master taught the snake to be non-violent. But then, the snake let everyone abuse him; they threw stones at him, spun him around and so on. So, the master said to the snake, ‘I told you not to bite, but I didn’t tell you not to hiss,’ meaning he should scare people away; that’s what we have to do. We have to protect ourselves in whatever ways are possible.

8. Group meditation, Florida Center, Florida, U.S.A., October 4-5, 1998 (Originally in English).

SINCERITY ⁹

There was a student who asked a Zen Master how one could get enlightenment quickly? He said, 'You have to want it. You have to want it so much.' The student said, 'How much? How can I measure how much I want enlightenment?' So, the Master dragged him to the river and put his head in the water until he nearly died. He struggled and fought to get free, crying for help, 'Please!' [Master and audience laugh.] Finally, the Master pulled his head up. As soon as the Master let him up, the student said, 'Master, you nearly killed me! I was desperate for air. Didn't you know that? The Master said: 'I knew, I knew. That's how you should feel about enlightenment. As long as you are desperate like this, then you will get it.'

WE NEVER KNOW WHO IS WHO ¹⁰

One time, Buddha went around to get alms. But then, a rich man chased the Buddha away and scolded him. So, the Buddha said, 'You are a very ignorant idiot 'Buddha'! You married your own mother, and you eat your father; yet here you stand and scold me.' The owner of the house was very perplexed, and he asked for an explanation.

So, the Buddha said to him, 'The wife you're married to now is your previous life mother. The pig that you're eating now is your previous life father, and the dog was your grandmother before. Yet you kick the dog, you eat your father and you sleep with your mother. So, what do you think?' When the Buddha said it like that, suddenly the owner had a realization that it was true. He became repentant and he followed the Buddha afterwards.

So, we never know who is who. But it's better if we don't recognize or we don't know much about the past life. Because actually, it's just energy that's left; it's not the same body. The energy of the left-over magnetic field, the energy of the desire and the unfinished wish from the last life of that person is left over, in another body. So actually, it was our mother, but then it is not. You see what I mean? It is our mother, but it is not, because when she is born again, she is mixed with another kind of energy. There is something left over, but something new. And it's a different body also.

So, don't go around complicating life by messing with the past or the future. Just let it be! Whatever we have now is what we have.

BEING GOD OR THE DEVIL – THINKING MAKES IT SO ¹¹

There's a story about the spirit of Cholera. One day, he passed by a meditation practitioner and said, 'Hallo, I'm going to China.' And the spiritual practitioner said, 'Oh! You're going to make trouble again!' And Cholera just smiled and flew away to China.

So, about a month later, when Cholera came back from China, he just passed by again and said, 'Hallo! I'm back.' And the practitioner, perhaps a Quan Yin method practitioner, said, 'Oh, so you killed fifty thousand people in one month?' And the Cholera ghost said, 'No, no, only twenty-five thousands.' He added, 'The other twenty-five thousands died from fear. I didn't even have to touch them.'

9. International seven-day retreat, Youngdong Center, South Korea, May 7, 1998 (Originally in English).

10. Group meditation, Los Angeles Center, California, U.S.A., August 31, 1997 (Originally in English).

11. Group meditation, Bangkok Center, Thailand, June 13, 1996 (Originally in English).

So sometimes, the actual situation is not as terrible as we imagine. And if we face it, it won't be so bad. It's just that if we're very afraid and fearful and run away, we make a lot more trouble than if we just face it.

We've heard it said by the Buddha: 'I am the Buddha; you will be the Buddha; everyone is equal.' So, what's the difference? Why are we not the Buddha? It's just because we don't think in the way of the Buddha; we don't do things in the way of the Buddha. We don't act in the way of the Buddha; we don't live the life of a Buddha.

The Buddha, He meditated, and then He was not attached to any possessions. People might have given Him a golden bowl for food or some beautiful silk for His dress, but even though He would take it or wear it, He was never attached to it. He always sacrificed His life and His time to teach other people. He used His time to remind people to set an example of the noble ideal of humankind, of a Buddha. And all the time, His mind and His thinking were always set on the Buddha, on the highest ideal, on the noblest goal of humankind and of the universe. He never thought of anything else, and He never feared anything. So maya, the so-called negative force, came and bowed to Him. But here, we sit and bow to the negative maya. That's the difference. Fear makes a lot of trouble for us; it pushes us below our dignity. So, we have to choose a different way of life.

If you don't think of these negative things, they won't exist. That's why I tell you not to watch all those bad movies. Don't watch ghost movies, and don't go to see all those mediums. Then you believe, 'Oh! There's a ghost coming inside of him.' And then you come home and think, 'Oh! Maybe that ghost followed me home. Maybe the ghost thinks I'm handsome.' Things like this affect us, too.

But this is just our feeling; it's not real. Sometimes fear and attachment stop us from doing many things that we originally could have done or would have been able to do if we hadn't felt so afraid or weren't so attached to more comfort and an easier way of life. So, try to concentrate all the time on the Buddha, not on ghosts.

A WISH OF THE MASTER ¹²

A humble saint

There is a good story about what a Master should be. Would you like to hear? [Audience: Yes, yes!] Suppose you want to be a Master, so listen carefully. Here is the way, the method and the secret. Now, there was a man, so holy, so pure, that even the angels would rejoice every time to see him. However, despite his great purity and holiness, he had no idea that he was holy and great. That was the only problem with this guy. So, he just went about his business, and tried to humbly distribute whatever goods he had, or whatever goodness he possessed without even thinking about anything, just like a flower emitting a beautiful fragrance without even knowing that it has the fragrance, like the sun diffusing all its warm and beautiful nourishing sun rays without ever knowing it. That was the way the man was.

His holiness laid in this so that he forgot every person's past and looked at them as they were now, and at the person only. He looked beyond each person's appearance to the very center of their being where they were innocent and blameless. Even too ignorant to know what people did. He saw nothing extraordinary about his behavior or in the way he

12. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 15, 1996 (Originally in English).

looked at people, because it was the result of perhaps the purity inside or the way he lived his holy life.

So one day, an angel came to him and said, 'We have been sent by God and Hes has thrown upon you favors that whatever you wish will be given to you, so ask now.'

The holy man was speechless in his very innocent way and didn't know what to wish for. The angels had to give him a kind of idea. They asked him, 'Would you like the gift of healing, for example? The man said, 'No. I would rather God did the healing Hirmself.' Yeah, a clever man. [Master laughs.] He didn't want to do anything. Yes, if we were asked, then we'll tell our wish. We would say, 'No, we'd rather go to heaven and don't have to meditate even; or God can come to make a better, no leaking meditation hall for us Hirmself.'

The angel continued to ask him, 'Would you like to bring the sinners back to the path of righteousness?' 'No.' [Master laughs.] Funny man. 'No,' he said, 'It's not for me to touch the human's hearts. That's the work of the angels.'

Pooh! Then what does he do? Oh, I could say the same thing and I'd be finished. So, the angels continued patiently, with all reverence, and asked him, 'Would you like to be such a model of virtue that people would be drawn to imitate you?' 'No,' was the man's astonishing reply, 'What for? For that would make me the center of the attention.'

Wow! He's clever. That's the worst thing you could be – the center of attention. Yuck! I know what it's like. How did this man become so clever? He has not been the attention and he knows already. Yes, I should have known this before.

'Then what do you wish for?' the angel asked.

'I wish for the grace of God,' was his reply. 'Having the grace of God, I will have all the contentment, and all my desires fulfilled.'

The angels were thinking that this man, despite his holiness, is so stupid. God doesn't grant favors that often, and God doesn't dispatched an angel to anyone that often in order to grant him boons. This man, how come that he is so holy but stupid? So, they forced him. They said, 'God's will shall be done. Now, you must have a wish, or one will be forced upon you.' [Laughter]

I thought God was liberal, but Hes is a dictator. We always thought God gives us free will, and lets you do what you want. Is that not true? How come here Hes is like a dictator? Hes forces people to want something. That's the problem with Hirm. [Laughter]

Okay. Then, the old man was kind of forced into this situation. He had to obey God's will. So, he said, 'All right, all right. Then, I shall ask one wish. Whatever good be done through me, don't let me know it.' Wow, that was nice!

Master's holy wish

I remember when I first wished for something, when I wasn't enlightened, before I became acquainted with the Quan Yin method. It was the first Buddha (statue) I took home in Germany. That was not the first Buddha but the first Buddha in Germany. My Buddhist teachers believed that if I took a Buddha alone home, without the presence of a master, a teacher, a nun, then the Buddha is no good. I mean the Buddha will be good for nothing.

So, if you want to worship a Buddha, you have to ask a monk or nun to bless it for you. Bring it to your house and have a ceremony with flowers, incense and food. Just symbolic. Then, you have to bow to the Buddha, then to the teacher and then make a wish. If your wish is to be granted, all the incense will curl like a spiral and never drop on the floor. Normally, when incense burns, it drops like cigarette ashes. But, when your wish is sincere and accepted, then all the incense will curl like a spiral.

We burned a lot of incense, not only one. That was the problem. I don't know why the Buddha has to test people's sincerity to this extent. So many incense and each of them had to curl like this. Oh, God! I was thinking, I don't think I will make it. Ha! Look at all the incense; and I always saw the incense ash drop immediately after it burned. So, anyhow I just did as I was told. I wished, 'Okay! I don't mind that people told me that human life is very suffering, and that we have to make a lot of merit in order to get out of human life. I don't mind if I stay in human life because it's not so bad for me. So, whatever good I have, it should be distributed to people who need it most, and don't let me even know about it.'

That was my wish. Then, all the incense curled like this. [Master laughs.] [Applause] I was thinking that my teachers had bought special incense for me, that was for sure. A special one already curled in advance, or not the spiral incense, the incense stick very straight and they have to curl by themselves with the ash, you know. [Audience: Yes!] That's how the Buddha tests the people's devotion. But I was thinking it was the blessing of my teachers. Yes, they were very holy, these people – the Buddhist nuns and monks at that time. The whole family had become nuns and monks. I think they helped me a lot in my time in Germany, taught me a lot of things. I thought they were very holy, and due to their blessings, the incense dared not go straight or drop but just curled. I thought that they had magical power, something like that.

So, they were very happy for me. They thought, 'Oh, whatever You wished will come true.' I was not supposed to tell them what I wished inside, I just did it alone. So, today I am telling you just to let you know that I am very good. [Master laughs.] Okay, anyhow, you don't have to believe it. [Applause] But after I've told you I don't know if I am good anymore. I don't know if I should have told you. It was just by the way. When I read this, it reminded me of my thing. At that time I didn't practice the Quan Yin method yet. I just recited Buddhist's sutras, recited the Buddhist's great compassionate mantras and recited the Quan Yin Bodhisattva's name and the name of the Medical Buddha and whatever. Everyday I was busy with all these thick books, of which I didn't understand half. [Laughter]

The saint's shadow

So, it was accepted that the holy man's wish would be granted. Now, because the holy man didn't want to know whatever good done through him, God had arranged it that his shadow would be a great blessing for anyone or anything, anywhere that it fell upon; and the man would never know anyhow because he would look in the front. So, wherever the holy man went this shadow fell on the ground and fertilized the land; it made the rain fall where it was needed, and made the sun shine where there was not enough sun; it made the people become healed of all diseases and healed the afflictions of their souls; and made the place prosper. Mountains became green, springs and fountains also sprang forth in different places. Many people who had been weighed down with karma and bad fortunes began to look more alive and became more healthy and more hopeful.

That was the benefit of the shadow of this holy man according to God's arrangement. All the while, the man never knew anything about it; because he always looked in the front

and did just his things, busy with his business. He didn't know what was happening behind him through his shadow.

This is the true Master. Therefore, you've never heard of any Master who says that he knows anything about what he's doing to you. So, don't be surprised. Many disciples always praise the great Master for helping him, helping her do this, that or heal their sicknesses, change their misfortunes and bless their houses or do anything. But the Master never knows about it, and don't be surprised. If the Master says he knows, he's not a Master. [Master laughs.] Maybe sometimes the Master, through initiates and through the blessing of God, knows once in a while; but it's not always conscious to the Master about the good things that he or she does for mankind.

Also, in Buddhism, the Buddha said, 'The one who says he's the Buddha, he's not the Buddha.' That doesn't mean that after Buddhahood, you can not say you have attained the Buddhahood, you may say so. But that doesn't mean that you are very, very aware about it; because Buddhahood has no definition. Truly, if we say we've attained something, that is not yet.

There's nothing except God

In the Diamond sutra, the Buddha emphasized again, again and again that there's nothing to attain, there's no Buddhahood to realize. It's not because we couldn't become holy, but everything holy belongs to God, belongs to Buddha nature. If we have attained our simplicity and purity enough; then, that Buddhahood and that God power will reveal itself accordingly without us having to know about it. How can we use the mind of a human brain to understand the limitless, expansive nature of God, or the Buddha nature.

If we ever profess that we know that we are Buddha, we truly know that, or that we know we are holy or we know God or things like that, it's just a way of saying, but it's not truly so.

If God can be described and can be known by human's brain then it's not the true God, it's not the true Buddha nature. Buddha nature is within and without us. God is within and without, in heaven and on earth. We are swimming in God, breathing in God, eating in God, have our lives in God, have all the essence in God. There's nothing except God, around and about us. There's no need to say that I've come in touch with God, I am looking for God. He is everywhere.

So, whenever we feel that we have attained something, stop and remember this story. If we ever want to know what a Master is like, remember this story.

A Master never knows that he's holy

A Master never knows that he's holy, doesn't matter what he acts or what he is like. Sometimes he admits it or whatever, whether it is for the sake of sentient beings or just for the sake of just to get it over with; because they keep asking all the time. So, then they say 'Okay, okay, I am a Buddha, so what, what next.' Something like that.

People sometimes insist you admit that you are something in order to argue around. Just like sometimes you come on a bus and sit there and someone next to you or opposite you keeps looking at you all the time and says, 'Are you American?' for example like that. Then you say, 'No, I'm not.' She says, 'But I'm sure you are American.' Then you say, 'Certainly not, ma'am.'

She continues looking at you and says, 'But you look like. Just admit it, won't you. You can just tell me that you're an American. It's free here.' So, finally, you're fed up, you say, 'Okay, I am an American!' [Master laughs.]

Then, she keeps looking at you again, and says, 'Well, on second thought, you don't look American.' [Master and audience laugh.]

When I first came out into the world (preaching), and had contact with the human brain, I went on and on about the blessings and Buddha's power, the Quan Yin method and all that, according to their requests. Then, they kept insisting that I tell them that I am a Buddha. I said, 'Well, there's no need to say that, and I don't even know if I am a Buddha.'

But they said, 'You are the Buddha. You must tell us! Like Shakyamuni Buddha said, 'I am the Buddha. I'm the one and only.' You should say the same.'

And they kept insisting and pressing me on and after a while I said, 'Okay, I am a Buddha.'

Now, when I remember the Buddha's Diamond sutra, it says, 'The one who knows he's a Buddha, is not a Buddha.' [Master laughs.] [Applause] Now, you tell me!

We cannot win. So, just know yourself or don't know yourself. Whatever you're comfortable with, it's okay. We cannot argue back and forth with all these people. Humans, their brains are made this way, just to make trouble where trouble is not, just to ask a question where a question is not necessary, and to give an answer when an answer is not sought, things like that. Always the same. What we do is just continue with our daily business, do the best of our ability according to our knowledge, according to our conscience about what a good human being should be. What we should do in this life is our duty, our daily work, just do the things that we feel good with, that we think that we should do and that's it. If God is pleased with our behavior and purity, then He would grant us whatever we need, or whatever is beneficial to mankind through us.

There is no need to worry about your level or whether you have attained Buddhahood or you have gone to the ninth level or not yet. I'm still on the fifth, but you have gone to the ninth already. The Master is supposed to be at the fifth level, but some people think they're on the ninth. Congratulations! It's a little bit too far for us, but it's okay if he likes to go there.

It's God's power who's doing all this

According to this story, the saint didn't know much about the good things that were attached to him and his shadow, because the people were very centered on the shadow that they forgot about the man. So, his wish, that whatever good had been done through him should not be revealed to him, had come true. God has granted him this wish. This is exactly what the Master is, according to my humble knowledge, opinion and experience.

So, if you want to ask me what the Master is like, he's like this man, nothing more. [Applause] If you ever want to know what the Master is like or thank the Master for anything, it's not necessary really, because it's God power who's doing all of this. The Master is always free naturally. He's like one of us. Never having the burden of carrying the holiness on these shoulders all the time or having to take care of this holiness or this Buddhahood, so that it doesn't slip away or that he doesn't fall down to another level or things like that. Once you've attained Buddhahood, once God is pleased with you, He

does not withdraw the favor. He will continue to have this all his life without even knowing about it.

If we do good to mankind, what for should we know about it. It's mankind who is benefitted. That's the main important thing. Because we wanted to benefit people, so if they got the benefit, doesn't matter where from or how it was done. There are not many Masters on earth, but some of the Masters that I've met, the true Masters, they are like that, very, very humble and very ordinary. They don't really know their supremacy inside, they don't know their holiness. Maybe they love people, they bless people according to their wish, but they don't feel themselves is a 'blesser.' Yes, maybe they act like a Master because people expect it. Just like the lady who kept asking, 'You're an American, aren't you?' Then finally you say, 'So, yes.' Just okay, okay, why not? Keep refusing all the time makes so much trouble. So, the Master is like that. Just act accordingly so that everyone is pleased and happy and just to make things simple. Otherwise, the Master never thinks, never feels that he or she is a Master.

Why we can't integrate with Master

That's why I don't have problems integrating with you, but you have problems integrating with me; because you always carry a Master in your head and I don't carry any disciples at all in my mind. I look at you as one of the persons. That is why I don't like it when you are too humble or you are over-acting that you love me so much, respect me too much, whatever. I don't feel natural. If I come to know a person and said, 'Oh, you can be my friend, no problem.' And for me no problem, but for him it was a problem; because he always thinks I'm a Master. I said, 'I never think of you as a disciple.' So, it has never been any obstacle from the beginning.

But you always have problems being my friends and that's why I don't have friends because you put me too high and you put me separately. That is why we have problems communicating with each other. That's why you misunderstand what I tell you, often, and that is why you don't do the things I request; because you think whatever you do for me must be very special, extra special. Whatever it is, it turns out terrible, because you do it with the ego, with the way you think, not the way it should be done. That is why everything done for me is a mess. Always never the way I want – simple, logical and common sense. They have to make such a big deal about everything and I end up suffering. [Master laughs.]

No one knows how a Master suffers

To be a Master is such a difficult job, and such a suffering position; because people heap upon you their own opinions about what a Master should be, how a Master should have, what a Master should like, how a Master should live. Therefore, the Master becomes like a prisoner in your heart; and when there are so many hearts put together, the Master is finished. The worst criminal has only one solitary cell, but the Master has thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of solitary cells to live in. Do you understand? Because our minds are very narrow and limited, the love in our hearts is human-made. So, the Master has to stay there and do work the way we think. Otherwise, we give the Master hell. Like you don't expect the Master to do this, you don't expect the Master to wear that, you don't expect the Master to speak like this and blah, blah, blah, blah. You give this rejecting and refusing atmosphere to the Master every time in your hearts. That's how you make a Master a prisoner in your frame, in the narrow walls of your minds; and that's how the Master has to suffer.

It's like a bird, you put it in a cage. Doesn't matter if it's an iron cage or a golden cage, it's still a cage. The Master can not be free because of the Master's love for mankind; he or she will not be free until everyone is free. But it's no problem, just to let you know what it's like because you always ask me, 'What's it like to be a Master and what would the Master feel like or how is it, what is a Master made of?' The Master is made of simplicity, just like every of us. Just because we complicate our lives, therefore we can not be one with the universe and God can not contact us. We build walls of prejudice, of religious expectations, of social behavior patterns, anything to separate ourselves from the natural way of life. That is why we can not become a Master; originally everyone could.

So, as long as we still occupy ourselves with such things as, what other people think, or what the Master should be like, we can never be one. Just drop every idea, be as a child, and then you will know what's it like. But it's better still that you don't know people, you don't go out teaching, you don't lecture and all that; because then you're finished. People will surround you with all kinds of troubles, all kinds of walls and frames. Then, it's very difficult to move in your life. You still can try it, but it's difficult and a lot of suffering – mentally inside, not outside, outside you don't see much. If some people cut your arms or bruise your leg, people see it and sympathize with you; but if it's bruised inside, very difficult, no one knows.

THE GOLDEN DEER – ONE OF THE SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA'S PREVIOUS LIVES ¹³

This is a story called 'The Golden Deer.' There are a lot of 'golden' stories inside, [Master refers to the book She is reading from.] but I just picked this one. I don't know why; maybe I like deer. This is the story of one of the Buddha's previous births. When you hear of anything being 'golden,' it refers to the Buddha. So, I have no need to try and introduce it.

A long time ago, there was a very wealthy businessman who lived in Benares. He had only one son whose name was Mahadanaka Ananda. This means a person who knows only money. This is a very bad name. Because 'Ananda' means bliss. So, perhaps he derived bliss only from money, or perhaps it was a nickname.

Since the time he was young, his parents spoiled him very much, because he was the only son. So, he grew up with no knowledge except that of singing, dancing, feasting and making merry with his friends with money from his parents. And when he came of age, his parents found a wife for him. Then shortly afterwards, they died. And after their death, the youth spent all his time with his idle good-for-nothing companions, passing whole days drinking and gambling.

As a result, his father's money quickly vanished, and the young man was forced to borrow money from other people, but he had no means of repaying his debts. He never knew how to work to earn money, and he never knew how to keep it. Perhaps he wasn't taught how to be economical. Perhaps his parents were at fault too, because they should have taught him how to be a human being, and not just how to be the son of a wealthy person.

So, because he owed a lot of money to different people, they constantly came to his house and pressed him. He became very desperate with fear and worry and did not know what to do. Finally, he decided upon a plan of action. He was very, very depressed and desperate, so he called all his creditors and told them that he had a treasure buried near the bank of

13. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 14, 1996 (Originally in English).

the Ganges. And if the next day they would come with him, they could all go and look together for the treasure. And then he would repay all his debts to them.

So, all the creditors were very happy and followed him to the river's bank. He tried searching here and there, and everyone followed him, even though he seemed perplexed as to what he was doing. But this guy intended to commit suicide; all this was just for show. So, when he came to a place in the river with a very fast current, he just jumped in. All the creditors were very horrified and helplessly stood by. No one dared rescue him because the water was very swift.

When they saw that he was completely gone, all the creditors sadly returned home. They thought he was dead and drowned. Because he had been swept away very, very far in a very swift current. And they didn't see him anymore downstream; therefore they left. But when his unconscious body flowed down the river, he passed by a flowering grove and mango tree forest. And a deer that was very beautiful and fleet footed lived there, away from the rest of the deer herd. His skin shone like burnished gold, and his feet looked as if they were polished with lacquer. His horns were like spirals of silver, and his eyes glittered like precious gems.

He was nibbling some tender grass roots when he heard wild cries echoing through the forest. Running down to the river's edge, he saw the unfortunate merchant's son struggling in the water. At once he called out, 'Wait! Do not be afraid! I am coming to save you.' So, he plunged into the river, and swimming strongly against the current, reached the man. Then the deer put the man on his back and brought him safely back to shore.

But the merchant's son was very exhausted, and collapsed. For three days and nights, he was unconscious, and the deer nursed and fed him with wild fruit. When the man recovered, the deer said to him, 'Now, I will lead you out of the woods and show you the road to Benares. But I ask you one favor. Please don't tell the king or any of his nobles that a golden deer lives in this forest. Because they will come here and try to catch me if they know.' So, the merchant's son readily promised, and the deer put him on the road to Benares.

That morning, Queen Kama, wife of the king of Benares at that time, had a dream. In the dream, she saw a golden deer speaking in a human voice. She thought to herself, 'Surely there must be such an animal. Otherwise, I would not have dreamt about it.' So she went to the King Brahmadata. She told him about her dream and that she desired to possess such an animal. Otherwise, she would die.

This is a trick of the woman. She would die sooner or later anyhow, so what's the big deal? But the king, like most men on this planet, was also very stupid. [Laughter] He was very afraid of his wife, that maybe she would really die. If she died for the king it would be very understandable. But if she died for a deer, however golden it was, it just sounded funny. [Laughter] But the king bought it. Anyhow, that's just to let you know that you are not the only ones who are so stupid, and who the real boss in the house is. Even in Buddha's time it was the same.

So, I don't know why the women of today are wasting their time, demonstrating and giving speeches for all kinds of women's rights and women's equality. Women have never been equal to men. They are superior to men! I don't know who should be fighting for equality. So, tell all these stupid women to stop it. Don't degrade us. We are superior; what are they fighting about equality for? [Laughter]

So now, the king immediately sent for his sages and asked about this golden, precious and very rare deer. And his wise men replied in the affirmative: 'Yes, there is such an animal.' But they didn't know where the deer lived. So, the king ordered a richly decorated elephant and told the herald, 'Take the elephant and a thousand pieces of money and go to all parts of the city. Proclaim that whoever can bring me news of a golden deer shall get both the elephant and the money as a reward.' Now, you know who the boss is, right? He immediately spent all this money for his wife. At that time, maybe she was already old. But maybe her power as she got older was even stronger.

So, the herald mounted a white horse and rode through the city proclaiming aloud the king's order. The merchant's son, who had just entered Benares, heard the news and went up to the herald, saying, 'I can bring the king news of the golden deer that he seeks. Take me to him.' And the herald took the merchant's son to the palace and requested an audience, saying, 'Sir, this man says he knows where a golden deer can be found.' So, the king was very delighted and asked the merchant's son to bring him there.

Then the king took a very large troop of soldiers and the informer, and set out for the forest where the golden deer dwelled. When they arrived, the merchant's son said, 'Sir, within that clump of flowering mango trees dwells the golden deer that you seek.' So, the king told his men, 'Surround the grove and keep your bows and arrows ready. On no account should you let the deer escape.' And the king rode a horse himself to go and capture the deer just for his beloved wife. Now, can you see what it's like to be a king, and what for? [Master and audience laugh.]

The deer, who had been resting under the shade of a tree, heard the noise and was instantly alerted. He rose to his feet and saw the king standing at a distance with the merchant's son and a group of courtiers. He thought to himself, 'I shall be safe where the king is, so I shall go to him.' That's what the golden deer thought, so he ran to where the king was. Swift as the wind, he ran toward the king. But the king immediately raised his arrow and prepared to shoot. Because he thought that if the deer was wounded in the leg or something, it would be easier to capture him. But the deer called out very loudly, saying, 'Great king, stand still. Please do not let your arrow fly.'

The king was very astounded by the clear ringing tones of the deer's voice, and he dropped his arrow and bow. The soldiers and other people also crowded around in amazement, for none had ever heard a deer talk in human language before. So, the deer went up to the king and asked him in a voice that was as sweet as honey: 'Who brought the news to you, oh king, that I was to be found here?'

So, the king pointed to the merchant's son and said, 'He did.' The deer then turned his head to the traitor and said very sadly, 'It would have been better to pull a wooden log out of the river than to rescue such a person as you.' So, he scolded the betrayer. The king was very surprised and asked the deer, 'What wrong has he done to you?' And the deer replied, 'Your Majesty, I saved this man's life when he was drowning and brought him to safety and nursed him for three days and three nights back to life. And I told him not to tell anyone where I was to be found, and he promised me thus. Now, because of his ungrateful act, I am in danger.' It was because he loved gold and money that the merchant's son sold out his rescuer.

On hearing this, the king became extremely angry. He turned to the merchant's son and said, 'You have repaid a merciful deed with base treachery. For this, you shall die.' So, he raised his bow and arrow and held it ready to shoot the traitor. But the merchant's son was very afraid and trembling in every limb. He fell on his knees and begged for mercy.

Seeing his plight, the deer was moved with pity and said to the king, 'Please let him go. Do not have the blood of this wretched being on your conscience. Give him the money that you promised him, and send him away.' The king hesitated for a while but finally listened to the deer's plea for mercy. And he said to the merchant's son, 'You owe your life twice over to this noble deer.' Then he said to him, 'Depart from here at once, and never return to my kingdom again or you shall be executed.' The merchant's son straight away took to his heels and vanished into the depths of the forest, never to be seen again.

Turning to the king, the deer, who was not only noble but wise said, 'Great king, the cry of jackals and birds is easily understood. But the words from man are often full of guile. You may think that a man is your friend but you will find that he has betrayed you.' The king marveled at the wisdom and intelligence of the deer and decided to grant him a boon. 'Tell me what you wish, Golden Deer. And it shall be yours. Whatever you wish, even if I lose my kingdom for it, I will grant to you.'

The deer thought carefully and said, 'The boon I ask, great king, is that all the animals in your kingdom will be forever free from danger.' The king was moved by the compassion of this golden deer and consented. And he made a proclamation that whoever harmed any animal in his kingdom would be punished severely, from that day forward. So, the king and the golden deer returned to Benares, and queen Kama was overjoyed to behold the handsome deer with the coat of gold that she had seen in her dream. She listened with delight while the deer spoke to her in a human voice that sounded like the tinkling of a silver bell.

For many days, the golden deer remained in Benares with the king and queen. The city was decorated, and festivities were held in honor of the animal. Then he returned to the woodland grove where he had dwelt for so long. There he spent the rest of his days in peace. [Applause]

It's a good story. If we human beings can imitate even a small part of the noble qualities of this golden deer, then our world will become paradise. But sadly, many of us always try to grasp everything for ourselves, in every circumstance. Even in spiritual practice, we still cannot stop being greedy and selfish, trying to snatch spiritual blessing at the expense of others. This is even graver than trying to snatch property or possessions from other beings in the mundane world, because we are already on the spiritual path. So, whatever we take, we must earn ourselves. We can ask for blessings, guidance and help whenever we need it. This is okay when the need arises or when it's necessary, but never at the cost of other people's happiness and convenience. Try to remember this.

In every situation in life, we must always be considerate and fair-minded. It's not that I ask you to always sacrifice yourselves, even if it's for other people's happiness or gain. But at least play fair. Because if we as practitioners cannot play fair, how can we expect the world outside to be fair to us or to be a fairer place for everyone to live in? So, if it is not fair here, I cannot believe that you will be fair outside to other people. And I cannot accept this kind of disciple, especially after you have been studying a long time with me already. Even if you are a newcomer, I still don't have an excuse for you. Because you have available to you videotapes, audio cassettes, books and everything. You cannot tell me that you are new so you don't know anything. Your soul knows what is right and what is wrong. That's why you came.

If you want to turn yourself into a fox, that's your problem, but not at the expense of the assembly. You don't come here to steal the blessings of the whole group. You don't come here to compete with each other for the best seat in the theater, like outside people. Even

outside people, if they want the best seat in the theater, they pay for it! They are fairer out there. So, you pay for the best seat with your spiritual practice and with your earning efforts. Don't try to steal anything here, because I know. I know what belongs to whom. If you try to steal here, you might just as well throw the five precepts away and not bother to come any more. Because this is the place where you should be the most exemplary of your spiritual status. If you can't show me here, where else will you show it?

We should never forget our dignity and our noble purpose everywhere, for whatever price. If we practice well, if we love the Master and love God, God knows. The Master knows, for sure. You can see from the deer story that even the deer is better than many human beings. So, we should learn from all these golden animals. We don't care whether they were Buddha's previous reincarnations or not; their actions bespeak their inner spiritual achievement. So, don't be too proud that we are human beings, if we are not up to it.

Actually, I don't know why we should be proud that we are human beings. For example, I read in the newspaper, I hear on the radio, and I see on television about so many noble animals that rescue people. They rescue their own kids, even at the expense of their own lives. There was one picture of a cat. She was totally burned, blind and scarred all over because she came back four times into the fire of a burning house to rescue four of her kittens. She was burned and blind and beyond recognition. But she brought them all out to safety, this cat.

A cat is very independent. After she is pregnant, I think she doesn't get help from any male or father cat. She raises her children alone. And I have seen many cats in our surroundings sometimes who do all these beautiful things for their children. I saw one bringing beautiful food – I'm sorry, this is not a very beautiful thing to say – but I saw her bring the best food, like a mouse or some other big food for her children. And she just caught flies, insects or any small thing to eat for herself. I don't approve of a non-vegetarian diet, but I cannot reason with a cat. And I am touched by her devotion. Because a cat can only eat this, and she did her best to provide nourishment for her children while eating garbage for herself. I saw it with my own eyes. I would not scold her for eating non-vegetarian food or killing mice. I am only very moved by her love.

This picture is still vivid in my mind every time I think about cats. So, I don't know why we human beings treat animals so cruelly, most of us, and think of them as low-level beings. I think many animals are very noble. They are so noble and so loving to their own kind, as well as to others. And sometimes you see a cat or a dog swimming in a very dangerous river to rescue his friends. Be it a human friend or a dog friend, or a cat's friend, they do that – at the risk of their own lives. But not many of us human beings dare to do this. When we see a situation that's dangerous, we don't risk our life. But when animals see danger, they still risk their lives, out of love.

So, if we human beings cannot return to this natural instinct of basic compassion and love, which the animals still possess, then we should feel more sorry for ourselves than proud of ourselves. And that is the reason we must be vegetarian, because the animals are truly noble. They truly possess the human quality and a soul within them, just like we do. So, I think it's also good when we learn from the animals. It's not that we learn to become an animal, but their good qualities we should remember so that we don't feel ashamed of being lower than animal standards.

We should rise to the noble position of a saint. To do that, we must possess compassion and love and understanding and unselfish sacrifice at all times, be it in retreat, at home, in a supermarket or anywhere else, even in the forest where no one else can see us and no

one else is there to record our good deeds or to praise our noble efforts. We must always be noble alone, because we alone know what we are. And God knows.

FIVE LANDS OF THE SPIRITUAL PATH ¹⁴

There was a Master, supposed to be very enlightened, and one day he was sitting there in a very expansive mood, so the disciples asked him about the stages of consciousness that he had passed through. The Master told them that, one by one, God led him from one stage of consciousness to another. He told the disciples that God first led him by the hand and walked with him into the Land of Action. There the Master dwelt for several years. God came back again and led the Master to the Land of Sorrow. There the Master lived until his heart was cleansed of all the inordinate attachment. That was when the Master found himself in the Land of Love, whose burning flames consumed whatever was left of the self (meaning the small self). This brought the Master to the Land of Silence where the mysteries of life and death were reviewed before his wondering eyes.

The disciples asked him, 'Was that the final stage of your quest for the divine?' The Master said, 'No, no. That was not the final stage.'

One day, God said to the Master, who was at that time a seeker of the Truth, 'Today I shall take you to the inner most sanctuary of the temple, to the heart of God Himself.' So, the Master, at that time, was led to the Land of Laughter. In the journey to the Land of the Absolute, I think we have to pass through many stages of understanding, many stages of consciousness in order to understand the complete Truth at the end.

The Land of Action

So, let's see where God has led the seeker of Truth who later became a Master. First, God led him to the Land of Action and let him stay there for several years. What is meant by the Land of Action. Anyone know? I think that the Land of Action means that when we first came into contact with the God power, the incredible energy and blessing that we received from within after the initiation or after we came in contact with the Truth or the absolute power, we became very overwhelmed, very excited, very charged with all kinds of incredible creative thinking. Then, all this thinking will be translated into actions during our daily life. So, we would like to do this, we would like to do that, we would like to give charity, we would like to spread the teaching, we would like to become a renunciate, we would like to rescue people, we would like to print books, we would like to do many, many, many things.

Also, we can certainly discover that we have many dormant talents. Like suddenly, we will be able to write very beautiful poetry or beautiful essays, and we were not able to do this before. Or we'll be able to talk eloquently, and for a long time maybe. [Laughter] Sometimes we bore the audience to sleep. [Laughter] That's good, at least for the insomniac people; they can benefit from our teaching. Then, we'll probably be able to do some handicrafts, maybe some exquisite paintings or many, many things.

Then we stay there. We see our work, our talent, our ability benefits mankind in different ways and benefits ourself. We like it, we enjoy it, we feel so good. We feel life is happy, lively and full of creative energy; and we love that. So, God will let us stay there for some years in order to act out our excitement and to let the steam off our chest, because we have too much bubbling energy that suddenly came into us and we are so overflow with it.

14. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 14, 1996 (Originally in English).

So, this is the first stage of our enlightenment. That is perhaps what the Master has described as the Land of Action.

We see some of our new initiates, so absolutely enthusiastic. You can't stop him, you can't stop her going out and distributing sample booklets to the dogs, cats and mice on the streets or whatever. Any sentient beings he sees he just distributes sample booklets, [Laughter] or gives photos to stray dogs or something. This consequently leads us to many over-doing actions. Sometimes this is very difficult. We will be very, very proud of this, that we are spreading the teaching of the Master, and that we do this, that and the other. Okay.

Doing and doing are different. Many of you are still doing the same thing right now, but with a different attitude. I don't mean the way you are doing now is like this enthusiastic, enlightened fool, the first newly initiated; but, you know now what you're doing. You do it with a more calm manner, and with the more realization that this is okay, we should do it. But before, if you did it and someone stopped you for some reason, you'd kill him! [Laughter] You told him, 'You are the devil. You are stopping the teaching of the Master. You are stopping the doings of a saint like me, et cetera.'

We try to convert every being into our belief. That's how sometimes we clash with other people, like our family members, our friends, our dogs and cats even; because we force them into our system without having a deep enough wisdom to handle the human psychology, to let them understand our good will and the benefits and the truth of our path. We just have a lot of tremendous energies, creative ideas; but, we do not have enough wisdom yet to handle this energy.

Therefore, in the beginning of our practice, when we're still in the Land of Action, we often committed a lot of mistakes and created more enemies than friends. Sometimes, luckily, we happen to catch a small fish; but we have lost a lot of bait, too, because of our beginner clumsiness. So, I think that's what the Master meant by the Land of Action. He just simply said the Land of Action, but we can imagine what it is like to dwell in the Land of Action. I think that's just about it.

The Land of Sorrow: Reflect on the ephemeral nature of life

Then, the next stage of consciousness is the Land of Sorrow. What is meant by the Land of Sorrow? It is that after we have done so much, we have achieved so much, and maybe we have failed so much in many of our endeavors, then suddenly we realized; or we came into contact with so many ungrateful beings and then many things we wanted did not come true because of our hastiness, because of our clumsiness, because of our exasperated expectation of the Lord's power or because of the over-use of God power. Sometimes we use it for magical power, we use the God power for healing purposes, or we use it for just small gain like for material comfort, for family reunion or the harmony of our relationship.

Then after that, after several years of trying in the Land of Action, trying our best to do things, to serve people in our way, in our good, well-meaning but clumsy way – we fail a lot of times, we don't have appreciation from people, and sometimes we find that the people are not as enthusiastic as ourselves, or do not cooperate – then we feel very disappointed, very, very lonely and very terrible. Then something that we have prayed for, like the best for our relationship, things like that, we get. But these things we prayed for turned out to be more burdensome to us, more of a sorrow than a happiness. Then we begin to experience a lot of disappointment, a lot of unhappiness, a lot of discontentment.

That is the time that we begin to reflect on the ephemeral nature of life. We begin to feel that, 'Oh! After all, everything amounts to nothing at the end. It doesn't matter how much we struggle in this ephemeral life, we don't gain much, we can not keep much.' God lets us into this Land of Sorrow so that we will be able to detach ourselves from all these mundane desires, from all these ephemeral expectations, so that we will be free – free of desires, and free of all these unhappy phenomena which are caused by our own desires for these material, short-lasting things.

Enter the Land of Love

After we detach ourselves from all these inordinate desires and attachments, then we will feel more calm and contented, and that is when we enter the so-called Land of Love. The Land of Love is the stage of consciousness in which we will feel that our desires, our attachments and our expectations are all gone; and now we begin to feel very peaceful, and we feel we can love.

After we have experienced so many disappointments and sorrows, then we begin to feel more settled down within ourselves, and we begin to feel the indiscriminating love between us and all sentient beings. Perhaps at that time we are willing to sacrifice just about anything, because of this love, because we feel that 'you and I are the same and all sentient beings are the same.' This is the stage, I think, in Taoism that they call 'all beings are one' – something like that.

This is the stage that many of the Masters and many religious groups have mentioned. But then, after we lost our self, lost the ego of the individual self, we will begin to find ourselves in absolute quietness, absolute silence, because we feel there's nothing more to talk about. We feel that we have understood everything. We feel that all beings are just peaceful and okay the way they are. Then we will not have to worry about them or even try to help them. After we have understood the deep love within ourselves, there's nothing more we should do. That's what we feel. So, we become more quiet, more introverted. We do not like to speak much. We do not like to discuss anymore. We do not like to criticize people even, because we know everything is just arranged the way it is.

Perhaps this is also in Taoism. They call it at that stage where we feel that everything is okay under the sun. The same like in Buddhism, it is mentioned that, 'I have rescued sentient beings but no sentient beings have been rescued. Something like we resign to the will of the most high. Perhaps that's what it is. Many people mistake this stage for the final achievement of enlightenment.

The Land of Silence: Searching for the secrets of life and death

After the Land of Sorrow the seeker of Truth entered the Land of Love, and after that he entered the Land of Silence. Then, when in the Land of Silence he has experimented with the mysteries of life and death, there was nothing more to be experienced. He knows what life is about, what death is about. He doesn't fear death anymore and he doesn't cling to life anymore than death itself.

The disciples asked him if that was the final stage of achievement. Also the master said, 'No, because one day God took him to a higher sanctuary of inner realization. That land is called the Land of Laughter. Now, you wonder why, after this troublesome practice we just end up in a house of laughing. Do you believe that? According to this book. So, the Land of Laughter is suppose to be the inner-most sanctuary of God. Can this be true?

The Land of Laughter: Live life with a sense of humor

Now, after the life and death mysteries have been revealed to the seeker of the Truth, then, after some times of more effort and sincerity, God will take us to the Land of Laughter. That's where we have a lot of jokes and everything is funny to us. There are no more miserable Buddhas, there are no serious Bodhisattvas that walk around trying to show people that they have worked hard, that they are devoted to Master, that they love Master so much that they have to jump in front of everyone just to see the Master, et cetera. That's why you have often heard that most Masters have a lot of humor, they can laugh at everyone, even God and themselves. That is the landmark of an enlightened person. They have arrived at the Land of Laughter, because they know everything is really just a game. It is very difficult for us if we don't understand that person. If we don't, we are not near there; and it's difficult to laugh with them. If such a Master or such an enlightened sage has to mix with serious Buddhas or miserable Quan Yin Bodhisattvas, [Master laughs.] then they suffer; because they will be dragged back into the Land of Sorrow, and that's very suffocating.

I hope all of you in the future will transform yourselves from whatever stage into Bodhisattvas. Then we will all go into the Land of Laughter, share jokes, and look at life in a very funny way, in a very light manner; that we can bear this together because, actually, life can be fun.

When I am in private, I laugh all day long. [Master laughs.] You can not understand it. Sometimes some of the disciples or some of my friends, they come and stay with me for a while, or if I invite them sometimes, I am always laughing. I make jokes with them. They all laugh; and if they are also funny, they make jokes and we laugh and laugh all day long. Sometimes when I have dinner, if I have time, we laugh for about three, four hours until the dinner is finished and for no particular reason. Sometimes it's not a very funny joke; just we joke, so we feel so full of joy, we laugh all the time.

APPRECIATE EVERY MIRACLE IN YOUR LIFE ¹⁵

There once was a man who took his new hunting dog to try her out for the first time. He happened to shoot a duck, and the duck fell into the water of a lake. The man couldn't swim, but the dog was watching, and she understood. So, she just walked on the water, dragged the duck back and gave it to the owner.

The hunter couldn't believe his eyes and said, 'The dog, walking on water!' He kept rubbing his eyes and looking. 'Was that the dog walking on water?' he kept murmuring to himself, and then asked his neighbor, 'Did you see something strange about that dog? Did you see it too, or is it just me?' The neighbor had been looking at the dog as it walked on top of the water, and he said, 'Yes, now I know: That dog can't swim!' He just thought the dog couldn't swim. He didn't notice anything else.

This is similar to us because in life many miraculous events happen, but we don't take them seriously. We don't notice because we just take them for granted. It's like that. Just like our heart beats every day, but we don't appreciate it until one day it stops or causes us trouble and reminds us that it's there through some pain or something. Then maybe we feel wonder and say, 'What a miraculous thing, that such a small heart like this keeps beating every day without us controlling it!'

15. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 13, 1996 (Originally in English).

It's a miracle. Life is a miracle, and it's full of miracles every day for most people. Unfortunately, however, sometimes we make a hell out of our lives. By listening to the ego, listening to our illusions and listening to the stubborn habits that we accumulate over the years, we make life hell. Even if we live in heaven, we make it a hell. That's why heaven can't be a place for too many stubborn, stupid people because they would make a hell out of it.

It's not that God or saint Peter doesn't want to let too many people come to heaven. But if they go there, it will become a hell. So, we don't always have to ask God or the Master to be indiscriminating; we just have to know that even though the Master or God is compassionate, a person must be ready for that precise place or precise blessing.

A STORY OF A GOLDEN GOOSE ¹⁶

This is a story of a golden goose, and I suspect it's about Buddha's previous life. A long time ago, there was a king. His name was Bahuputtaka. This name actually means 'the father of many sons.' His queen was Khema. Both of them ruled in Benares. Benares is one of the holy cities in India.

One day, the queen, Khema, dreamed of a golden goose who spoke with the wisdom of a sage. She told the king that she greatly desired to see and hear such a wonderful bird. The king consequently made inquiries and was told that there were such birds as golden geese, but they were rare and not easily found. People informed the king that it would be very difficult to find these kinds of geese in his kingdom. But nevertheless, they existed. So then, many of his attendants were sent out to look for the geese, which were supposed to be near a lake, very far away somewhere.

They also employed hunters to try to look for them and bring them back to Benares. Many people also advised the king to construct a lake near the city so that maybe the goose or the geese would be attracted, and would fly to live near there.

At that time, there were many geese that lived on Mount Cittakuta. Their king was called Dhatarattha. And this Dhatarattha goose king was an absolutely beautiful bird, with feathers of shining golden color. Wow... [Master jokes.] He was inviting trouble!

In the course of time, a large lake was made near Benares, and the king named the lake Khema, after the name of the queen. Flowering trees, flowers, and beautiful rare botanical species were planted around the lake. Also, water lilies, lotuses and some water vegetables and flowers were planted in the lake. And every day, the people would come and scatter some corn and cereal to attract birds and things like that. Then the king's herald, one of the attendants, would call out very loudly: 'The king of Benares welcomes all birds to come and live in peace in this beautiful lake! They will be protected from danger by the king's order and the king's men.'

So, news of this lake reached the wild geese on Mount Cittakuta. They went to the golden goose, and said, 'Lord! The king of Benares has made a large and sweet-smelling lake near the city. He guarantees protection for all birds who settle there. The birds will also be fed by the foresters. Let us go and see what sort of place it is. We are weary of living on this mountain top and having to search for food ourselves.'

16. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 13, 1996 (Originally in English).

So, the golden goose, king of the geese herd, agreed to their proposal. And then he and some of his flock flew towards Benares.

The king had ordered his hunters to watch regularly by the lakeside. He told them that if they saw a golden goose approach the water, they were to immediately set a snare for him. The head hunter ringed the lake with his men at all hours of the day and night, waiting to capture this golden goose.

Early one morning he saw a huge flock of geese and a larger bird in golden color whose feathers gleamed in the sun rays, flying towards the lake. Quickly the hunter set a snare amongst the water lilies and lotuses. He knew that the golden goose, being the leader, would alight first on the water.

Like a dense white cloud, the nine thousand geese drifted down towards the lake. The golden goose settled on the water, and at once his foot was caught in the snare. Seeing that their leader was trapped, the flock of geese circled around, honking in distress, but none were brave enough to attempt to rescue him. They rose up and flew back towards Mount Cittakuta in safety. Sumukha, the chief captain of these geese, alone remained with the king.

The golden goose turned to him and said, 'The other geese have all flown away, Sumukha! Without hesitation, they deserted me. Why do you wait here? Fly away quickly while you have the chance. If you remain here, you will be captured as well.'

Sumukha, the chief captain, maybe the next attendant to the king goose, sat floating gracefully on the water by the side of his king and replied, 'I will never leave you, royal goose. Now that danger draws near, I will remain and either live or die by your side.'

As they were talking, the chief huntsman came close to the lake. Sumukha decided to try and soften the huntsman's heart and flew up to him, begging him to let the golden goose go free. The huntsman was struck by the regal beauty of the golden bird, and asked him, 'Your comrades have all fled, oh noble goose. Did you not see the snare from afar?'

The golden goose answered him: 'When life is coming to an end and death draws near, it is of no use to struggle against fate; thus, I did not see the snare.'

The huntsman was greatly impressed by the wisdom of the golden goose. He asked Sumukha, 'And why do you also alone remain here? The other geese are no longer to be seen. You are free, yet you have remained by the side of this noble bird. Who is he that you have not left him in an hour of need?'

So, Sumukha answered, 'He is my king, my comrade and my friend. I will never forsake him though I die for it.'

Hearing this, the hunter thought, 'Indeed, these are brave and noble birds. If I were to harm them, the gods would punish me. What do I care for the king's reward? I will set them free.' He said to Sumukha, 'Since you are prepared to die for friendship's sake, I will set your king and comrade free. Then fly where you both will.'

Tenderly, he loosened the golden goose's foot from the snare and washed the blood away in the clear, pure water of the lake. He set the dislocated muscle and tendons, and by a miracle the foot became whole again. Not a mark showed where it had been caught.

Sumukha was overjoyed at seeing his king free, and said to the huntsman, 'May you and yours always live in prosperity, oh hunter, for your merciful act in setting my lord free!'

The golden goose asked the huntsman, 'Did you capture me for yourself or was it at someone else's command?'

'It was by order of the king that I set the snare, oh noble goose.' The hunter told the golden goose the truth and how the queen desired to see the wonderful bird.

The golden goose thought to himself, 'Perhaps it would be best if I went to the city. The hunter will be rewarded, and King Bahuputtaka is known to be a wise and virtuous monarch. If I appear before him of my own free will, he will be satisfied and may decide to give me the freedom of this beautiful lake.'

So, he said to the huntsman, 'Take us to the king. We will speak with him, and then if he wishes, he will set us free.'

The huntsman said, 'Noble goose, kings are not always merciful. He may decide to keep you both as prisoners.'

But the golden goose said to him, 'I have softened your heart, huntsman. Surely I can find favor with a great king. Leave that to me! You do your duty, and take me and Sumukha into his presence.'

So, the huntsman put both birds on his carrying pole, and took them to the palace. When the king and the queen saw the two magnificent birds, one with feathers of shining gold, and the other as white as the snow on the mountaintops, they were absolutely delighted. The king set them both on a golden perch, and with his own hands, gave them honey and fine grain to eat, and sweetened water to drink. The whole night through, the king and the golden goose conversed together on the duties of kingship, and the virtues of kings.

The golden goose told the king, 'He who puts off until too late the effort to do good will sink low. He loses all knowledge and great will be his loss. He who does not see the truth, gains no wisdom. Cherish your sons so that they may grow wise and always follow the path of virtue.' Thus the golden goose advised and encouraged the king.

When dawn came, he bade farewell to the king and queen, and with the faithful Sumukha, flew out of the northern window and far away to Mount Cittakuta.

Finished! [Applause]

Now, we would wonder why being geese together, there are only two so noble geese and the rest were cowardly, ordinary geese. Nine thousand in number, only two were noble beings!

So actually, even in the animal kingdom there are differences, not only in humankind. Perhaps this is the way it should be. I don't know why it should be like that. Perhaps there are different developments within sentient beings as well. Even with the same species there should always be this difference, because one chooses to go upward in a more noble direction, and the others choose to go the ordinary way, the easy way and the more materially beneficial way. Perhaps our choice makes us noble or lowly. And if we do not struggle within ourselves, trying to better our thinking and our ideals, or our work and our actions, then we will always remain at the same level as before – a very ordinary goose.

We fear everyone else's fears, worry everyone else's worries, eat everyone else's food, dream everyone else's dreams and do everyone else's actions and habitual expectation. There's nothing better about us, nothing improves, and we're nothing more than the geese that eat the grass and drink lake water and pass their life like this. Their life is also peaceful, harmonious and stress-free, and they also look good. But they achieve nothing more than just grass and lake water.

So now, we should ask ourselves whether we would desire such a so-called peaceful life, too. Therefore, I have asked you before not to be proud of your harmonious family, your peaceful surroundings, your material gain and your whatever benefit that you think comes to you through the blessing of the Master, or through the practice of the Quan Yin method. It is true that the Master will bless us with whatever we desire, but we should not be satisfied with that and feel proud of that achievement, because this is just nothing! The stinky fertilizer is necessary for the flowers, but the flowers are what we want, not the fertilizer.

Perhaps that's why the golden goose looked golden and so magnificent and wise; and the other geese looked ordinary, you see, like in this story. Perhaps the Buddha had been a golden goose at one time, or perhaps not. Perhaps this is only an exemplary story, so that we understand the loneliness of being a king or a Master. It's just like talking to a mass of ignorant geese that don't have human brains or intelligence. So, whether this story is true or not, it has a ringing truth in it. This story does not have to be perfectly true. The reincarnation theory doesn't have to truly exist, and the Buddha didn't have to truly have been reincarnated as a golden goose or golden hare, or whatever that was before. It's just the story has a truth. The loneliness of being a king or a Master or a wise person is obvious in this story. It doesn't matter if the Buddha had been reincarnated as a goose or not, or if He just made it up to illustrate the same principle through different stories.

APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING ¹⁷

There once was a person who was very rich and very addicted to alcohol. One day, he had to go out and he worried that his house servant would try to eat some of his food or drink some of his good wine while he was gone. Of course, he had already been very careful: He had picked a very stupid-looking servant, one who wouldn't be too tricky and wouldn't know how to steal food or make excuses. Even then, the man was careful and worried about the servant.

So, he said to the servant, 'Now, stay home and take care of my house. There's a piece of pork hanging in the kitchen, but just look after it: Don't touch it! And there's a live chicken next to the kitchen. Don't touch it, either. And take care that all the dogs and cats don't come and eat them.' And then he said, 'There's a pot over there which is covered very carefully. That's poison for the mice so don't touch it.'

Then after he left the servant took down the pork, roasted it and ate it. Next he got the chicken, killed it and ate it, too. At the same time he drank the alcohol to accompany the food. So, feeling very good and then drunk, he lay down and slept very peacefully.

When the boss came home, he saw the servant sleeping on his sofa and also smelled alcohol and saw some of the chicken bones scattered all over the place where the servant had kicked them around while he slept. So, he woke the guy up and said, 'Hey! What

17. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 12, 1996 (Originally in English).

about my chicken and my pork spare-ribs? And how about my wine – I mean, what happened to the poison over there?’

Then the servant started to cry, and crying hard he kneeled down on the floor and said, ‘Please forgive me! I've really been very obedient. I tried to look after your house and everything, but unfortunately, a cat came by and climbed up to the kitchen roof and took the pork and ate it. Then the dog saw the cat do that so he took the chicken and went out to eat it. I was so worried that you would come home and scold or kill me that I took the poison! But how come I haven't died yet?’ [Master and audience laugh.]

The servant wanted to kill himself, but he didn't die. So, you should be careful with people. Even if some people look stupid, it doesn't mean they're truly stupid. And someone who looks sweet is not necessarily that sweet. Watch the way she or he does things and see the outcome of his business or her efforts. Then you'll know that person from the inside. Don't ever look only at the outside and try to judge whether that person is okay.

Similarly with us, when we're searching for a Teacher, most of us love sweet things so we love people's sweet talk: A soft voice, good manners, a very cordial way that's pleasing to our ego, eyes and habits. So, we find it very easy to look for a Teacher or Master with a very sweet nature, one who's always soft-spoken, gentle and so on.

But that's only one part of the personality, perhaps like a trained airline stewardess. It's not necessarily true that such a person will do us any good or have a real teaching inside. Because many people are soft-spoken, but the things they do are very destructive to themselves and society, with outcomes that are always bad or negative. In that case the person may look sweet or soft-spoken but is doing no good for him or herself or the society at large.

So, it's the outcome of our lives, our work or our effort that speaks volumes. It's not how we look, how we react or how we live our life. You've heard that in the old times Jesus even used a stick or something similar to chase the money-changers away from the church, and then He turned the tables there upside-down. It may have looked very ungraceful for a Master to do that, but He did tremendous good for humankind. He even sacrificed His life for His disciples at that time, and His teachings still have a very good impact on the human race as a whole.

But many other soft-spoken housewives or even officers have never done anything as great as that, and perhaps have even done harm to themselves, to their family members and society because they don't know any better. Perhaps they were born with slightly defective vocal cords so they speak very softly or can't speak very loudly. Or maybe something got stuck in the person's throat; you never know. So, we have to be careful about what we want and how we judge people. Don't judge the appearance because it's always very deceptive.

THE GOLD RAT MASTER ¹⁸

There was a so-called Master, maybe even a Supreme Master. He was supposed to be very virtuous and also very clean and pure. For example, you couldn't offer anything to this Master; otherwise your I.D. card would be confiscated. So, he was that kind of Master, and he happened to have a wife and kids and an ordinary life. Many Masters have wives and kids. I have a lot of children, just no husband. That's the only difference!

18. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 12, 1996 (Originally in English).

So now, this guru had a wife and kids and so on, and he was very famous for being incorruptible, and very pure. And some of the politicians in his country like in many countries, professed democracy. In such democratic countries people can vote for whoever they want to govern their country, district or state. So, in this Master's state some of the people were advocating themselves for the governorship of that state.

So one day, these politicians came to the so-called Master's house and tried to talk the Master into telling his disciples to vote for them because many of the Teachers or Masters had a lot of big followers, which made a difference. Even one vote could make a difference! So, they came to try and woo the Master's disciples, but they also knew that this so-called Supreme Master could not be talked into bribery or taking things.

So, they tried the wife. Normally this worked because the wives were always the ones who made the arrangements for any big officers or very great personages. So, these subordinates came and talked to the wife, saying, 'Please, help us! Just tell your husband to do this one thing for us, and then anything else you want later will be taken care of!'

But the wife said, 'This is very difficult. You know my husband! He's a very clean and pure Teacher; he won't accept this. I don't dare tell him. How can I do it? He'll scold me! Do you know that many people get their I.D. card confiscated because they give him some chocolate? Just one bar of chocolate and their I.D. card is gone. How could I tell him anything like this?'

So, the politicians said, 'Oh, madam, you can! You can try. Just tell us what the Teacher needs, and we'll do it! Just try; at least try. We won't blame you if it's not successful. Just try!'

So, perhaps the Master's wife was infected by the husband or was just very compassionate by nature or from the teaching, and she said, 'Alright! I'll try. I'll tell you something that might work: My husband was born in the mouse year. According to the Chinese zodiac, he's a mouse. So now, go home and make a golden mouse for his birthday next week, and I'll try my best!'

Then the politicians were very happy and said, 'Oh, yes! Yes! Thank you, madam, let's go!' And after they got home, they went to the jewelry store, where they had a golden mouse made. It was exactly like a mouse, but solid gold. The wife had already instructed them, 'It must be solid, not gold-plated. We don't accept false things; we're teaching the Truth!'

So, the following week, the politicians brought the golden mouse to the wife, and the wife tried to find a way to give it to the Teacher. But he asked, 'Where is it from? How did you get the money to do this?' So, the wife had to confess everything. She said, 'These people are absolutely sincere, and their devotion is so overwhelming that I couldn't refuse. So, I told them that this week is your birthday and that your Chinese zodiac sign is the mouse. I told them to make a golden mouse for you so please accept it!'

But the Teacher was very frustrated and angry and raising his voice he said, 'Ah! After all these years I've been teaching you, you still don't have any wisdom! Why did you tell them that my zodiac sign is the mouse? You should have told them that I belong to the buffalo sign!' [Laughter and applause.]

THE BEST PRAYER ¹⁹

Today I'm going to read you a story to let you know what people think about prayers. Because some of you might think that your prayers are the best. Now, do you know how to pray to the Lord? Maybe you know better than I do. Okay, let's see if you know better than these people.

There was a village somewhere, at some time on our planet or maybe on another planet. In this village, there was a holy man. Every time the people had some problem, some difficulty or disaster, or something that didn't go right in the village, they would come to this holy man and ask him to help them, like to pray to God and meditate for them, and see what was wrong. Then the holy man would retreat into a very special forest, and he would sit in a very, very special place. And then he would say a very, very special prayer. And then it happened that God always listened to his prayers somehow. So, the villagers always got the help they needed.

But then one day, as with everyone else, he died. So now, the villagers didn't know what to do. Because their troubles didn't die. The holy man died, but the troubles were still alive. And new troubles were born every day. It's funny how we die, but our troubles never die! So, after the villagers thought for a long time, they decided that they would take their troubles to the holy man's successor.

The successor of this holy man was not that holy; people knew that. But there was no one else now who was better than he. So, people came to him and laid their problems in front of him, and asked him to help. So, this not-so-holy man also went to the forest. And then he sat there and said a very special prayer. He didn't know what his master used to say, but now he said something special like, 'Oh, my Lord! You know I am not a holy man.' Well, at least he was a very honest man. 'But surely You are not going to hold that against my people, are You? So, listen to me and come to my assistance.'

And God thought, 'That's reasonable enough. Even though this man is not holy, the village people have nothing to do with his lack of holiness.' So, God listened to this, and then helped the people all the same.

So, people continued to come to this not-so-holy man, to have him pray to God and solve their problems. So far, so good. But you know what? It happened that this not-so-holy man also died. Ah, gosh! We have no end to the problems and no solution. The people also felt very confused now: What were they to do? So, they tried to find another man, not even a holy one, and not even the successor of the other master, but someone more special, like maybe one who was sweeter than anyone else, or perhaps more diligent in his prayers.

So, they just picked one of the people from the congregation. And then they said, 'Now it's your job. You pray for us. We have such-and-such problems. You must try.' But it happened that this man didn't know anything about the previous two people. So, he didn't even know where the forest was. Well, he knew of the forest, but he didn't know where the special place was. And he didn't even know any special prayers himself. So, he didn't know what to do. He just came near the forest and sat anywhere, not in a special place. Because before, the two persons used to go to that very special place. To them, it was very sacred. So therefore, every time they prayed, their prayers were answered. And for the successor, it was also the same. At least he knew a very special prayer, and he knew of that very special place where his master used to sit in that very special forest.

19. International seven-day retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, May 11, 1996 (Originally in English).

But now, this man knew nothing about that. So, what did he do? He just knelt or sat there, and said to the Lord, 'Oh my Lord! If it's the formula or the prayer that makes You listen, then I am helpless. But please don't be attached to a special formula or prayer, and just listen to me. Our villagers have a lot of problems. Why don't You help them?' And with that, he just stood up and went home to sleep. And God listened all the same, because no one else prayed to Him. That was the only man. So, He said, 'Okay. I'll help.' So, God helped the villagers all the same, just like before.

Now, this man suddenly became a very special person, and he continued to do his special job every day like that. But it happened that this man also went to see saint Peter one day, like all of us. So, this man died, too. It was terrible! What kind of luck did these villagers have? One died after another. But the village still existed, and the problems still existed. Perhaps the children of the villagers continued, and they kept their customs. So now, they looked again for a man to do this job of praying for them. Funny! Why don't people pray directly and why do they think they have to find someone? It's a habit. We rely on something, and we're attached to something because it works one time, but it never works again. Even then, we feel attached.

So, after this man died, the people were very much troubled. No one came near this category of holiness, or diligence in prayer. There was no virtuous person in the village. So, they were very much troubled. They didn't know how to get in touch with the Lord anymore. And their troubles kept mounting and mounting, and nothing helped. So, they just thought hard and then gathered together, and decided to pick just any man. And they happened to pick a businessman.

This man was very wealthy. He didn't have to work very hard, so he could afford the time to pray for the people. That's what they thought. That would do. Money is better than nothing. If you don't have virtue and you do have money, that's also not bad. So, the man became a reluctant priest, just like that.

So now, people entrusted to him the job of getting in touch with the Lord and praying for them. But this businessman, what did he know about praying? All he knew about was the bank, money, accounting, taxes and things like that. But everyone begged him to do it, so he accepted it finally. As he was always more interested in money than in God, he was nonsense. He would speak directly. He just sat in his house, in front of his accounting machine, and looked up to heaven, or maybe he looked into his computer, and he said, 'Now then, what kind of God are You, that You are perfectly capable of solving any problem in this world, which You have caused?' (This means the problems you have caused yourself.) 'You're capable of solving them, but You just don't do anything about it. So, what kind of God are You? And then You refuse to do anything that is Your duty. Now, you're waiting for what? You're waiting for us to get on our knees and beg You to do it? What kind of God is that? Just do Your job, won't You?!' So, God felt embarrassed. But He listened, and He helped the people anyhow. So, there is a different manner of praying for different people.

Now, you pick what kind of prayers you like to apply for yourself. For me, I don't care. I don't think He has to be told what to do, but sometimes He does like that. Maybe it's because He does what we expect Him to do. For the holy man, he expected that God was difficult like that, and that He was a very holy and pure being. So, we have to be very pure and holy, and go to a very special, isolated place in order to pray to God. And then maybe God will be moved by our holiness, our purity, our time, effort and respect for God. And therefore God will grant an answer to our prayers.

But the second man expected differently. He was not holy, so he expected that God didn't care whether he was holy or not, but Hes would help the people and it had nothing to do with his holiness. So, God also fulfilled his desire because the man expected Him to be this way. And so Hes waited for this man to go to that special place. But at least this man, even though he wasn't holy, knew about the holy man, and he knew that the holy man always went to a very special place and said a special prayer. So, at least this man thought that the answer from God was connected somehow with that holy place, with that special place in the isolated forest. So, he clung to that notion and believed. That's why if he had prayed at home, it probably wouldn't have worked. Because his mind expected that, even if he was not holy, he had to at least be connected with that holy man through the special place. So, God waited for him to fulfill all this, and then Hes granted the blessing.

And now the third man didn't know anything about it. So, he could not expect himself to go to find a special place in a special forest, or say a special prayer. Because he didn't have that kind of idea in his mind, so he just did what he thought. He prayed to God, 'Please help the people.' And because he prayed straightforwardly, sincerely and from his heart, God granted this prayer, too. And why not? God has nothing else to do. Don't you think? If even in that small thing Hes doesn't help, then what kind of God is that?

After all these three people, so sincere and so humble, the villagers were short of holy and humble persons. So, they had to resort to any kind of person they thought would have time to pray for them, and this time they picked a businessman. Businessmen are no-nonsense; they care about their money and their business. So, if they have to do a job, they just do it like it's a business. If you know how to do the thing, then you just do it. Why wait for people to beg you?

I would say the same thing. Sometimes I say, 'Well, please do it. But if You don't, it's all right.' Because you know what to do. You don't need my prayers. You have to do what is in your heart. We cannot imitate one, two, or three of these prayers and say, 'Well! Master Ching Hai read this story for us, and She said it's okay.' Because even if I tell you to pray like that, you cannot. You cannot pray the way I do, because you don't think the way I do. And when you pray, your attitude is not like my attitude. I'm like that, so I pray like that. But you are like this, so you pray like this. So, every prayer is okay; it's no problem. And in my opinion, God or the Master power will work before we even have to pray – especially in an emergency. We just do our best whenever we can in each situation. And then God or the Master power will help accordingly. But do our best, we must.

And now, why couldn't the village people, even though they were not worse than the businessman, pray themselves, and why did they have to rely on some medium like this? It's because of attachment, habit and preconceived ideas. That's why most people, when they have a problem, come to a priest or go to a monk. I don't know what the difference is between a priest, a monk or any other being.

For example, in the Buddhist tradition, the monks of the Mahayana eat vegetarian at least, and they are unmarried. And then the ordinary person's mind probably thinks, 'Oh! Yes! He's a very holy man. He eats vegetarian, and he's not married. He's very pure.' Okay, then maybe the people have an excuse. So, whenever they have a problem, they think that because the man is pure, they can come to him to make a connection with God through him, like a very good bridge. That may be excusable. But in some of the other religious practices, the priests or monks get married, too. They eat meat and they drink wine; it's very liberal. They do the things that you do at home. They eat the things that you eat every day. And they pray through the book that you yourself pray through, and read,

too. So now, what is the difference between you and that priest, that you have to come to him? Or that monk, that you have to come to ask him to pray for you? Think about it. You see: There's no difference, or not much! Except that he lives in a very beautiful temple, while you live in a very shabby house or something like that. Maybe the temple, the place where he lives, is different, but I don't know if the people are different. So you see, what a ridiculous life some of us are living!

And what kinds of nonsensical habits do many of our planet's people keep and still believe in, life after life, that one generation passes on to another generation. And people never stop and think what nonsense it is. That's why I teach you the direct path – to pray yourself. If I have a method, I'll tell you, and you do it yourself. Why do I have to keep everything special for myself? Then you have to think that I'm a special person. There is no one special. You have to believe in yourself and do everything according to your own standard, your own belief, and your own idea of how God should be, how God should respond to you, or how God should do His job. That, I think, is the best.

THREE STUBBORN SERVANTS²⁰

A rich man, a billionaire, had three servants. One was very thoughtful, one was very prudent and the other one was very polite. The rich man was very pleased and liked them very much.

One time, the son of the rich man fell into a river by accident and was drowning. The second servant, who was very prudent, saw this. But he was so prudent that he went back to tell his master, 'Master, your son just fell into the river. [Laughter] May I save him? [Laughter] Do you think we can save him or not? What's the best way? Both of us must discuss it.' Of course, the rich man was very angry and threw him out.

By the time the rich man ran to save his son, it was too late. So, he ordered the first servant who was very thoughtful to buy a coffin to bury his son. Since this servant was a person who prepared for things that had not yet happened, he bought two coffins. [Master and audience laugh.] He was too thoughtful! His master was so angry and said, 'I just had one son who died, why have you bought two coffins?'

The servant replied, 'In case your second son dies, maybe drowns or any other kind of other accident, [Laughter] we don't need to buy again. Saves time, saves gasoline!'

That rich man was extremely angry and threw him out!

Now, there was just one servant left. The one who was very polite. The rich man was still very pleased with him. One day, he and another porter went out sightseeing with their master by sedan-chair. On the way, they passed a swamp where the water was not so deep. But if they crossed the water, their clothes would get dirty and wet. The porter hesitated. He didn't want to dirty his clothes, so he wanted to return home. However, the polite one said, 'Don't go back! As long as our master is happy, we should go ahead. We, ourselves, are not important.' Then they crossed the water without caring about themselves.

When the master heard that his servant was so loyal to him, he was very happy. He then said to the servant, 'Since you are so thoughtful, so devoted and so faithful to me, I will give you many new clothes and raise your salary on arriving home.'

20. International retreat, Phnom Penh Center, Cambodia, March 28, 1996 (Originally in Chinese).

As soon as the polite servant heard that, he put down the sedan-chair (that was the very moment while they were standing in the middle of the river), and answered with his palm joined, 'Thank you for your goodness, master!' [Master and audience laugh.] He was too polite.

You see, there is not much difference comparing them with my disciples, is there? [Laughter] They don't know how to see the situation and make a move. Everyone has his own quality, but uses it in the wrong place.

You remember that Confucius had many well-known disciples. Tzu Lu was very brave and Zan Chio was very prudent. But everyone only had his own quality. If you are too prudent, you won't know how to relax. If you are too brave, you won't know when to be humble. So, we know that it is not good to be an extremist. Although they were so good, they still came to learn from Confucius because he embodied all kinds of qualities – brave but not too brave, humble but not too humble. He knew how to behave under any circumstances. He handled everything in a neutral manner and not too fanatically.

But most of us have a stiff-necked quality. If we used it in the right place, it would be good. If we used it in the wrong place, it would be bad. Just like we can use the electricity to light up a bulb, to make cold or hot air; but if we touched the electricity directly, we would be in trouble. Also, there are many remedies that can cure people; but an overdose will be harmful. We come to this world to learn how to be perfect, so we should have every quality and know how to use them appropriately. We can not say that because we are very brave, then we can rush without caring about anything. In ancient times there were many brave men who died due to a lack of wisdom. There are many examples in the stories of 'The Feudal Regimes Of The East-Chou Dynasty.' If we are brave but have no wisdom, we can hurt ourselves and others.

THE DETACHED MIND IS THE ENLIGHTENED MIND ²¹

There was once a Zen Master who had some disciples and one of them wrote to the Master every now and then after initiation, just like you write your spiritual diary and send it to me, or sometimes report to me on what kind of 'progress' you've made. So, that disciple wrote to the Master and said, 'Master, I'm really deeply involved with enlightenment right now. I spend all my time in search of my inner true self.' The Master only read the first line of the letter and then kicked it into the dust bin.

A long while later the disciple wrote another letter to the Master, saying, 'Oh Master, now the whole universe responds to my innermost thoughts. How incredible the Truth is! How magnificent human wisdom is! How great the universal power is!'

But the Master just blew his nose with the letter, [Laughter] and threw it into the toilet. Then in a third letter the disciple wrote, 'Oh Master, I now have compassion for all humankind and all underprivileged beings! Even an ant, I hear his heart throbbing and feel his soul striving! Oh Master, what a wonderful discovery! I'll strive even more, I promise you! I'll be your best disciple, you'll see.'

So then, the Master wiped something with the letter. [Laughter] You know where; I won't say [Master and audience laugh.] and then threw it into the toilet and felt hopeless.

21. Group meditation, Los Angeles Center, California, U.S.A., March 13, 1996 (Originally in English).

Later, in a fourth letter, the disciple reported, 'Master, now I'm one with the universe! Everything is me and I am everything! There's nothing that's not me. I'm everything. Oh, I congratulate myself!' [Laughter]

But the Master didn't even bother to touch it, just let the wind blow it anywhere it might go and didn't want to say anything anymore.

Then, for a long time the Master said, 'Don't bother writing to me anymore. You're just wasting paper and pen.' So, the disciple didn't write anything anymore.

Many years passed by and the Master was kind of feeling a little bit sorry for having been so harsh to the disciple the last time. Remembering his fantastic disciple – long time no see and no hear from – he kind of sent a message to him and said, 'Hey! What's happening now? How's your spiritual progress?' [Laughter] Perhaps he missed his nonsensical, 'big universal' letters.

So, the disciple wrote back only two words on one big piece of paper: 'Who cares?' [Laughter and applause.] Do you know how the Master reacted then? He went and drank coffee, tea or non-alcoholic beer with Seven-Up. [Master and audience laugh.] That's the way it should be.

Only when you know that you're okay do you not care. Otherwise, it doesn't matter how much you write to me, saying, 'I love You, the universal power, compassionate me,' and whatever; all this is nonsense, theory. That's why many teachers of theory open their mouths and talk about compassion, enlightenment, wisdom and all that, but they don't do anything about it. They don't even know; they just talk about it. That's very boring, and it's very difficult to make them realize that we don't need talk.

Why I talk all the time is because you like it. [Audience: Yes.] Besides, I don't talk to teach you. If you think I'm teaching you, you're wrong because I'm hopeless with you, too. I know I can't teach you anything. I just amuse you with my different expressions, hoping that you might catch something you like and hold onto it. Then you'll remember me and won't forget to practice. One day you'll know everything yourself; not only through my teachings, maybe thirty percent through my teachings. But it's more or less just so that you'll remember me and then we can connect inside.

To be honest with you, I don't believe that anyone can teach anyone else at all. But whatever I can do, I just try my best because you ask for it. You demand it so I do it, not because I believe I can teach you through words, through talking, through language. But I believe that we can establish a very deep connection with each other, and through that deep connection we can communicate inside. That's the only teaching that might perhaps happen. Otherwise, you're already a Buddha. You're an entity just like I am.

What's the need of me telling you what to do? You have everything I have. It's just that through our inner connection with each other you're willing to be reminded of your true self inside through my inner true self. Then our inner true selves become one together, and there's no teaching at all. Originally there was no need and there will never be any need for any soul to learn anything.

WE SHOULD NOT COPY A MASTER'S OUTER PERFORMANCE ²²

There was a Master who trained his disciples in wisdom. Some of the people came to the Master and wanted to be trained in wisdom. So he said, 'Yeah, of course to be a future Master, future Buddha, we must be endowed with at least two gifts. There are many important qualities for a future Buddha but there are two important gifts that one must have in order to advance quickly in spiritual practice.'

So, the disciples asked him, 'What are they? What are these two gifts?'

The Master said, 'The first is the power of endurance. Endurance means you endure anything that other people cannot. The second is the power of observation – look, look, look.'

To demonstrate, the Master immediately told the attendant to bring in a bowl with a lot of filthy things inside, that once you even smelled it you'd want to vomit. But the Master was very unmoved. He put his finger inside the bowl of very filthy, disgusting things; full of the things that you don't even want to look at – maybe straight from the rest-room. He put his finger inside, then took his hand and put his finger in his mouth. His face didn't move, just like the wall in front of you or me.

So, the future Buddhas surrounding him were very eager to try to show the Master that they were qualified to be his disciples. So, all of them came, put their finger in the bowl and then put it in their mouths, and managed not to move their faces. No expression of disgust or anything.

The Master laughed and said, 'Congratulations, you have passed one test but not two. The one test that you have really passed is the test of endurance. But the second test you failed because you didn't have the power of observation.'

The disciples said, 'Why?'

The Master then said, 'I put this finger in but I put the other finger in my mouth.'

He put the index finger in the filthy bowl but he put the middle finger in his mouth. [Laughter] The disciples didn't see anything. They put the same finger in the bowl as they put in their mouths.

So, you see what it is now. Those are the stupid disciples. That's the way many of the disciples. They just copycat the Master. Copy anything, anything, anything; then they make the fool of themselves. That's the trouble, so we don't copy anyone. Even the Master wouldn't copy anyone. If we want to be like the Master, then we don't copy anyone. Everything is original because each one is endowed with the power of creativity. Everyone can create everything, according to his and her ability and artistic tendency.

We don't have to copy anyone, including the Buddha, the Master or the patriarch of the whole world. That is why you see many Masters they don't look like the others. The patriarch Hue Neng didn't look like the Buddha and didn't act like the Buddha. Jesus didn't act the same as Lao Tzu. Lao Tzu again didn't do anything that resembled Krishna, et cetera. So, if we copy the Master or we expect the Master to look like the one that we read about in the Bible, or the one we have imagined in our head, then we never can find a

22. Group meditation, Hsiu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 22, 1996 (Originally in English).

Master. We shouldn't find the copy, we must find the original. The Master is always original. We don't want a copy, do we?

So, in our spiritual practice, we must always be vigilant. The Master does things differently, sometimes very, very differently. We just look like that, and then we think we can do it – touch the head, touch all over, like I told you yesterday. Looking in the eyes, giving candy – candy we can buy even more. Things like that. It is not the outer performance from which you can judge whether that person is a Master or not, it is something inside.

WE ARE ONLY VISITORS IN THIS WORLD ²³

There was a hermit. He had only books in his house, a cushion to meditate on, a sleeping bag to cover in winter, a Quan Yin cloth, a loving hat and an initiation I.D. card. So actually, it sounds like he had a lot, but when you count, you know, he had absolutely nothing. And poetry and MTV – 'I'll Forever Love You,' something like that. Nothing else. No chair, no bed, no table, no kitchen, just very few necessary for living things.

There was a passer-by who came in and visited him. Seeing his room was all bare of necessities, he asked him, 'How do you live like this? Where is your furniture?'

So, the Quan Yin practitioner, the disciple of the Supreme Master Ching Hai Tzu asked the guest, 'Where is yours?' So, the guest said, 'But I'm only a visitor here.' The Quan Yin practitioner said, 'Me too!'

We are all visitors on this planet. We're all passers-by. We're all tourists in this wonderland; and one day we'll all have to go Home. No one can stay forever, and everyone knows that. Including myself, I think I'll live forever. We all have this illusionary dream about eternity. In fact, the body cannot endure eternity because it is made of perishable materials. One day it will perish. But life continues forever, doesn't matter where and how. So, make sure we remember this; or else after we die, we will find out too late.

It's not late for you because you already know the secret of eternal life. Without this secret no one can ever walk over the threshold of life and death and be free. That is the wisdom since ancient times. No one can change that. Just like clouds, no one can change them. Just like water, it's the way it is, no one can change it.

So, there is the law of crossing birth and death, that is the Quan Yin method. If we don't know that, too bad, no one can help us. That is the only secret and the most important secret that every being should know. But sadly most beings don't know. That is why the world is suffering like it is and has continued so since time immemorial. That is why the Master, the messenger of the Truth of God will always have to come here again and again, in order to suffer with them, then to lift them back to where they should belong, and lead them back to their House, to their original place where they can be safe and happy forever.

CONCEPTS IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE SHOULD BE LOGICAL ²⁴

Once there was a spiritual practitioner who was sitting on the road, when a lot of people ran past him saying, 'Hurry and run! A giant crazy elephant is chasing after us. It may kill someone. Hurry and run!' Then the so-called practitioner said, 'I believe in God. God is

23. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 20, 1996 (Originally in English).

24. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 19, 1996 (Originally in Chinese).

inside the elephant; so I am not afraid.' After a while, the elephant charged along and killed him.

Since he believed that God was inside the elephant, why didn't he believe that God was also inside those people bringing him the message? Why didn't he believe in this more normal God instead of believing in that crazy god? So, this is the part that is illogical.

There is another story from India. Once a very dangerous plague was spreading around India. But there was one place that still had not been affected. The government decided to give vaccinations to the people there, but some Indians resisted. They did not know what vaccinations were, so they resisted strongly. Later, the government, a charity organization and some doctors decided to sneak into their houses in the middle of the night and vaccinate them by force. This was because even if one person got the disease, everyone in the city might be infected. You all know very clearly that if one single person were left unvaccinated, it would be very difficult to conduct the prevention work. Therefore, they decided to do it this way.

One night, a group of doctors and nurses went to the house of a family. They forced the whole family outside for their vaccinations. Of course, the family members resisted very strongly. Despite this, the doctors still had to do their job and gave the vaccinations. They set the family free only after finishing with the vaccinations. Then the head of the family stood up and said to them, 'Because of our religious beliefs, we did not want the vaccinations. We tried our best to resist you, but since you used force to bring us to submission, we were not able to withstand you. However, this event has passed. Now, you are my guests. I have nothing in my home to offer you, except a cucumber.'

This is because, according to their Indian custom, when you come to a person's home, you are God, and he should treat you in the way he would treat God, bringing out everything he has in order to offer you something to eat and drink. Therefore, the man offered them water and a cucumber, since at that time those were the only things he had in his house. He told the doctors that, according to his religious beliefs, when God wants someone to be sick, that person will be sick, and we should not go against God's will. That was why he was steadfastly against the vaccinations. On hearing this, the doctors all felt ashamed and regarded that man as very religious.

However, I feel that this man's beliefs can be compared to a one-way street. He was not hearing what God was talking about, but decided on his own that God's view was such that anyone will get sick if God desires it to be so. However, God also sent these doctors along, thus showing that God meant them for them to be vaccinated. This is more obvious, isn't it? Why reject people without hearing what God is saying? If God had really talked to him and said, 'You do not have to be vaccinated, because I do not want you to be sick. When I want someone to be sick, that person will be sick!' It is possible that it could have been this way. However, God produced some doctors, meaning that God had another idea. God wanted to help some people who did not want to be sick, and arranged for them to receive vaccinations, et cetera.

Therefore, we so-called spiritual practitioners should not be too stubborn and strong-headed. Whatever the condition, we should manage according to the situation. If we are sick, apart from meditation and praying hard, we should take medicine if it is available. If there is no medicine, of course we have to depend entirely on prayer. And then we will see how God has arranged things, and go along with it. If God has arranged a doctor to come to your house, and you still say no, how do you know that he was not sent by God? Didn't you say that everything is God's arrangement? So, since the doctor has come, that means

God has made Hiers arrangement. Why then take such trouble to reject him, and be that stubborn?

Besides this, there are many similar stories. This world is like that. Many people regard themselves as having very great faith. However, it is very simple just to talk. When encountering real situations one tends to cry out loud. Like that family, if they had not gotten the vaccinations and had gotten sick afterwards; they would have been in great agony while dying. At that time they would surely have cried out loud, and then would have complained about why God had not saved them, had not taken care of them, and had allowed them to get sick.

We spiritual practitioners should be quick and efficient. We should not say, 'I believe in God, so then it's okay' just because we are lazy or stubborn. If this is the way, then why bother to eat food or to dress up! You believe in God, so then it's okay; people will not be able to see you naked; you believe in God, so then it's okay, you will not feel hungry. That is too illogical! It is just too convenient to use our mouths to talk. We like to talk in whatever way is convenient for us, because we do not want to act otherwise. So, we say we believe in God, and then blame God for everything, using God as a shield for everything. Therefore, spiritual practitioners should be careful!

THE 'SAINT'S SYMPTOMS' ²⁵

Today I'm going to tell you the story of a saint. This story is about a person who didn't know that he was a saint, unlike you. [Laughter] Each of you are aware of your sainthood. He didn't know that he was a saint – the only 'remaining' person (the words 'saint' and 'remaining' sound similar in Chinese). [Laughter]

The name of this person was Long Shu, and he went to see a doctor named Wen Zhi. I think Wen Zhi was born in the Era of Spring and Autumn in the Warring States. Long Shu went to see Wen Zhi, a very famous doctor who could cure any illness. Someone said that he once cured Emperor Wen of Chi State in the Era of Spring and Autumn in the Warring States. Emperor Wen suffered from an unknown disease. He went to consult Wen Zhi, who didn't prescribe any medicine to heal him but only made him angry, and his illness was cured! Have you heard this story? [Audience: No.]

Long Shu consulted Wen Zhi, 'Your medical skill is so wonderful – this the whole world knows. Now, I am suffering from a strange disease. Will you please treat me?'

Wen Zhi said, 'Of course! But first let me know what is wrong with you. Tell me about your symptoms.'

Long Shu then explained, 'I don't know the name of this disease, or from where it came. The situation is this: I have been living in my village for a very long time, but now I find myself feeling alienated. I feel myself as a total stranger, having no deep relationship with anyone. For instant, when people in my village all praise me, I don't feel honored. When people in other villages insult me, I also don't feel upset. Even when I get some precious things, I am not delighted, nor do I feel agitated or sorry when I lose something. I feel that life and death are the same! I could even die tomorrow. I see no difference between wealth and poverty. The worst thing is that I see people the same as pigs. [Laughter] I also see myself the same as them – a pig. [Master and audience laugh.] I live in my house as if staying in an inn. I live in my village as if living in a foreign country – it doesn't feel like my

25. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 4, 1996 (Originally in Chinese).

hometown. Apart from these strange habits and thoughts, I also have many shortcomings. For instance, I look down upon positions, fame, palaces and governments. I think they are just common things for which I have no respect. I have no fear of punishment – life, death, goodness or evil; all of these things do not touch me! Therefore, I cannot help my country, or be loyal to the king. I cannot maintain close relationships with relatives and friends, nor can I handle my children or wife. I cannot educate them or mix with them. Unable to think in the same ways as my wife and children do, I find it hard to live with them. I cannot manage my wife and children, nor can I manage the servants and maids in my household. I am perplexed! Do you know what type of illness this is? Can you cure me?’

Doctor Wen Zhi then told Long Shu to turn around and stand in a brighter place under the sun, so that he could observe him with his heavenly eye. Then he yelled loudly, ‘Oh! I saw it!’

Long Shu asked him, ‘What have you seen?’

‘I saw your heart.’

Long Shu asked, ‘What about my heart?’

‘Your heart is square and fair, spacious and empty, very much like the heart of a saint! The six apertures are open, only the last one remains blocked.’

Perhaps it was because this aperture was not opened, he didn't know what was wrong with himself. If the last hole had also been opened, he would have been certain about his own illness.

Long Shu then asked, ‘What kind of disease is this?’

Wen Zhi explained, ‘In this era, people regard the wisdom of a saint as an illness. Perhaps this is what you've got. If you are really infected with the ‘saint's symptoms,’ my medical treatment will be futile on you!’

Do you understand? [Audience: Understand!]

I also don't know what his illness was, but it is fine if you know. Do you really understand? Do you really know? Good grief! How do you manage to understand? Perhaps you are similar to him. Is that right? Are you all saints, so you understand each other? Maybe this is the reason. However, when I ask you to forsake your wife and children, and come here to help Master to spread the Truth, you would say, ‘I can't do it!’

Perhaps you have transcended the level of this person! He couldn't maintain relationships with relatives and friends, but you are more advanced; you have such close relationships with your relatives that you cannot forsake them. It is easy to talk, but difficult to act.

As an after thought, perhaps we are all similar because many people have these symptoms. I seem to have these symptoms, but I am not a saint. Perhaps I have been infected!

There are many types of illnesses in the world! For instance, people who indulge in meat eating, smoking, drinking, and sexuality, will incur a specific disease – some hard to cure diseases, like AIDS or others! Then, when you go around outside, and use other people's

bathrooms or toilets, sometimes you may also be infected with that disease, though you have not indulged yourself.

When people exert themselves excessively, they may get a lung disease. If you had a relationship with them, or got too close to them and were in contact with them for a period of time, you would also get the disease.

I am not a saint! However, it seems that I've also got the 'saint's symptoms.' Who is the one who dared to infect me, raise your hand and show me? [Laughter] You should acknowledge your own faults! Don't pretend that you don't know. Do you? [Laughter]

Normally, I only interact with you. I never go anywhere and socialize with other people. Therefore, if I ever got any disease, it must be you who infected me. Who is the one? You dare not admit it now that you know it is a disease. [Master and audience laugh.]

It must be you who infected me. Otherwise, why would I have become like this? Previously, I also loved to stroll on the streets, go shopping, or find someone with whom to dance or sing. Otherwise, I would feel very lonely.

Now I feel nothing even if I sleep all day long. If you had not come, I would carry on sleeping, and only get up to eat when hungry. One, two or three meals – I eat when I feel like eating, but most of the time I don't.

Most probably I've got this disease, now that I have no special feelings towards my relatives and friends. Not that I do not love them! I love them as much as I love you. However, love remains love, and it vanishes when it should. I love them dearly when they are here, but I forget them immediately when they are gone, and don't even need to wait till tomorrow. As soon as they turn their backs, I also turn. [Laughter]

Even my mood and emotions are changed. It is strange! Most probably I've got this 'saint's symptoms' disease. Perhaps I was infected. I shall go to consult Wen Zhi! [Master and audience laugh.]

Perhaps Long Shu was a spiritual practitioner! Do we become like him after we have pursued spiritual practice? It seems to be the case. Haven't you? [Audience: Yes.] Oh! So, you are the ones who infected me. Now, you finally admit it.

I was not like this before; well, perhaps a little bit. However, it is getting worse. For instance, I used to hate something, but then I stopped hating it later. I just don't mind anymore!

Anyone may come or go as they want, I won't be very upset! You too would only be upset for two or three days. [Audience: Yes.] Not as much as before. Previously, we would suffer a lot when we lost something, or failed in our business. Now we don't mind too much; we won't blame others or heaven, but will work harder instead.

So, there were saints in the Era of the Warring States, not only in Miaoli now! [Master and audience laugh.] Don't think that you are the only saints in China. They existed long ago.

I have told you, the method of spiritual practice exists in every age; the problem is whether or not we have the affinity to study under an enlightened Master. If we have an affinity with a certain enlightened Master, we will follow that Master.

Perhaps Long Shu practiced spirituality in his previous life, so he came back only to complete it. Maybe he had reached the fourth level, [Master laughs.] so there was only a little way to go!

Had the doctor told him to look for an enlightened Master, he would have been cured! Only one more aperture to open; once it was opened, he would have been immediately enlightened, and would not have felt that he was sick.

Perhaps initially he didn't think himself as being ill, but he was in contact and associating with people, and everyone told him. 'Why are you so odd, so unemotional and aloof?'

Being unemotional and aloof is not the same as treating people badly. All of you, after listening to this story, should not behave like pieces of ice, [Laughter] and then proclaim this is the 'ice quality' of saints. [Master and audience laugh because Chinese words for ice [ping] and quality [ping] are almost similarly pronounced.]

I notice that some people do have this 'ice quality' – ice cold personality – when talking to people, and do not seem to pay attention at all. When people ask them something, or whether they understand or not, they don't answer even if they know. Or, they would respond very slowly. People ask them on the first day of the month, but they don't answer until it is the fifteenth. [Laughter] This is really awful.

Besides, people are very busy sometimes, and have many things to do; they don't have time to tolerate your sluggishness. These kinds of people must rectify themselves. Theirs is a sickness of ego. They love to make things difficult for people, and love to hear others begging them. They desire constant attention from people, so they deliberately delay their response. They don't reply, or do it very slowly, thinking that they are very great, very elegant. This is not elegance, this is being stupid and senseless!

Perhaps for the first few times, people may feel embarrassed, and will continue to implore you politely, and maintain a relationship with you. Gradually, they will get tired of you. Since there are so many people on earth, why should they go to you – a senseless and sluggish piece of ice? Do you understand what I mean? [Audience: Understand!]

Therefore, being unattached to the world doesn't mean that we should detest the world! Long Shu was sick in that he was not attached to his relatives, friends, or his hometown and country. However, he was not aloof, only that he was in a very ordinary and calm state of mind. He didn't deliberately make things difficult for people, or demonstrate that he was a saint; nor did he act coldly, or speak very slowly – unable to finishing one sentence in half a month.

He also didn't deliberately refuse to reply or respond when people sought his help. He didn't say, 'What do you want? Could I possibly help you?' Unlike some people, instead of sincerely and promptly rendering assistance to people, they talk extremely slowly for half a day, as if something – maybe karma, has got stuck in their throat. [Master and audience laugh.]

Perhaps they have just descended from the snowy mountains. Maybe they are great masters from the snowy Himalayas. [Master and audience laugh.] They want people to realize the intensity of the cold! I really dread having relationships with those cold and aloof people. They deliberately act very sluggishly to attract people's attention, so that people have to beseech them.

In fact, this is a serious disease of heavy ego and an inferiority complex. If a person is confident, he would not behave like this; he will act frankly and earnestly. There is no reason to 'um and 'aw'. Maybe he (or she) hanged himself (herself) previously, and the impression extends to this life; the rope is still tightly tied around a certain spot, so he (she) cannot speak. [Laughter]

We human have plenty of illnesses, but we often do not think that we are sick. Long Shu thought that he was ill, but actually he was not. Many of us think that we are all right, but we are actually sick.

We should be aware of where our illness lies. Others may be able to correct us several times, but we must know where our illness is, and save ourselves quickly. If we cannot save ourselves, then consult books, or find someone to help us, instead of doing nothing. If our fault is not rectified, we have to come back next time, with or without following an enlightened Master. It is because we cannot forsake that corner, and keep clinging to it, using it as a weapon to make things difficult for others or to win their attention. Then we have to come back!

The law of this world is very impartial – you get whatever you want. Even the enlightened Master cannot force you to get liberation, unless you want it yourself! The doctor also cannot force you to take medicine, or forcibly operate on you without your consent. Right? [Audience: Yes!] Even if you cannot make the request because you are unconscious, your relatives can speak for you. It means that you have consented in the first place. It can only be done with your consent.

If you deliberately cling to your faults, you have to come back next life, and may not meet an enlightened Master! Then you will also run around like Long Shu, carrying a heart with six open apertures, not knowing what is wrong with you. And it will be very difficult to open the seventh.

All of you should reflect and quickly rectify your faults, if any. If you do not rectify it today, you have to do it tomorrow or the day after anyway. The longer you delay, the more serious the trouble, because the interest multiplies. The bad habit will become strong and entrenched, then it will become more difficult for us to eradicate. Good day!

THE STORY OF DANDELIONS ²⁶

There was a priest. He cultivated a beautiful, large, lovely, fresh, green, flowering garden. He loved flowers, so he spent a great deal of time in caring for them so that his garden blossomed with life and all kinds of colorful flowers of choice. But then some weeds grew in the garden, such as dandelions.

These weeds actually taste very nice if you want to eat them. The tender leaves of dandelions are very very good in salad. I used to go for walks in Germany, when I was still there, to the countryside with a basket. When I came back, the basket was full of weeds, wild plants like dandelions or something else, I can't remember the names. Maybe what Milarepa used to eat – nettles. Some leaves are very prickly if you touch them, but you can eat the heart of nettles and many other plants along the countryside. Then I made beautiful, fresh, nourishing salad.

26. International seven-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 23, 1995 (Originally in English).

In the garden of the man, he loved flowers of all kinds, so he planted a lot of flowers. But the dandelions were always there invading his country, his garden. So, he tried all kinds of means to get rid of the weeds, but he could never ever succeed. The weeds were always there.

So, he was very fed up and he asked all kinds of experts what to do about the weeds. No one had any clue. Then one day, someone recommended to him a father superior in another monastery, 'He has never turned anyone away without a solution. He must, probably, have a solution for your weedy garden.'

So here went the priest, 'bon-bon-bon-bon,' over there. He asked the abbot, the father superior what to do about the weeds. The father asked him, 'Do you weed them out?' He said, 'Yes, I do every day. But they grow again the next day, even more.'

'Did you put some of that stuff like chemicals?'

'Yes, I did, but after some time the dandelions got used to the chemicals and then they grew fatter, greener and lusher than before.'

So, the father superior continued asking him if he used all kinds of expertise methods to weed out the dandelions from his garden.

So, the priest said, 'Yes, Yes. I did this, did that, did everything; and the dandelions are still there.'

So, the father superior sat there with the man for a while, meditated, and maybe prayed to the supreme Father in heaven. After a while, the father superior told the priest, 'Okay, if you can't get rid of them, then you have to learn to love them.'

Sometimes we have a lot of weaknesses on our spiritual path and in our daily lives. We try all our best to get rid of them. If we can, well and good. If we truly, honestly try our best and we can't get rid of them, it's fine. If we cannot, learn the dandelion way. Love them and just ignore them. Don't fight with them. Just do our job. Just look at the other flowers that you like. Try to develop other qualities in yourself that are more suitable for a practitioner, are more beautiful for your personality. Just ignore the weaknesses. Maybe they'll die alone. If not, and no one looks at them, then you just forget them, like they don't exist. It's difficult but you can practice.

BE CONTENTED AND HAPPY! ²⁷

A man went to his Master to tell him his problem: 'Master! You must help me. I can't stand my life anymore. I am in great trouble! If you don't help me, I will surely die!' 'What happened?' The Master asked.

'My family is very poor, and we have only one house. We cannot afford a big house, yet we need to squeeze in a lot of people, including my grandpa, maternal grandma, aunts, uncles, cousins, my sister-in-law, and my elder sister, plus my own three or four children,' the disciple replied. 'Besides, my elder sister will be having a baby soon, and my younger sister is getting married and plans to live with us with her husband!'

27. International seven-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 17, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

The Master shook his head, thought and meditated for a while, then tapped his wisdom eye and said, 'Ah! I have a solution! You keep animals at home, don't you?'

The disciple was a farmer, so he replied, 'Yes! Yes!'

The Master asked again, 'What animals do you have at home?'

'I have two cows, two sheep, four geese, three pigs, ten chickens, twenty chicks, one cat, and two dogs,' the farmer replied.

Wow! Do you see how 'poor' he was? Then the master said, 'Now, move all the animals into your house, and everything will be okay!'

The farmer was bewildered by his Master's words. But since he had heard that the Master was omniscient, efficacious, and wise, he had no choice but to follow his instructions and give it a try. He went home and moved all the animals – cows, sheep, geese, chickens, cat and dogs, into his house and locked them in with his family. [Master and audience laugh.]

A week passed and the man came again to see his Master. He must have lost twenty pounds, and his clothes were a mess, covered with animal dung and urine. God! He really stunk! He rushed in and fell on his knees, saying, 'Master! I am going to die very soon! Please save me; I can't stand it anymore! Now there are animal excretions everywhere in my house. The animals wander around everywhere, on our beds and tables, into the kitchen and bathroom. The whole house is filled with these things, and we are busy the whole day trying to clean it up, but it's all in vain. Just see what I have become!'

The Master strolled to and fro, tapped his wisdom eye, and contemplated for a while. Suddenly, he said, 'Ah! I got it! Go home and take the two cows out of the house, and everything will be fine.'

'Thank you very much, Master,' said the disciple, before rushing home to push the two cows out of his house.

Another week passed and the disciple was back again, 'Master! I still cannot stand it! The floor is covered with animal dung, and the animals make so much noise all day long. I really cannot stand it anymore! Do you have any other solution?'

The Master again strolled back and forth, touching his beard, tapping his wisdom eye, and then said, 'Oh! Go and take the sheep out, and it will be okay.' The farmer followed his Master's instructions and went home and took the sheep out.

Two weeks later, he came back again with the same complaint: 'We can't stand it any longer! How can we live like this? I listened to you, but I truly cannot stand it!'

Again, the Master tapped at his wisdom eye and said, 'All right! Go home and chase the geese out.' Again the man did as instructed, thinking that the problem had been solved.

However, he came back two weeks later with the same complaint, so his Master said, 'Then move the chickens and ducks out, too.' And he did accordingly.

However, two weeks later, he came back with another complaint. 'Good grief! Now the two dogs fight with the cat all the time and chase it around everywhere. As soon as we lie down to sleep, they jump on our faces. It is really unbearable! What should we do?'

The Master said, 'Then you might as well drive out the dogs and cat, too!' The disciple acted accordingly, and then he felt much better. [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause]

A month later, he brought some flowers and bananas to his Master, and said, 'Master, you are always the best. Now all our siblings, uncles, grandparents, all of us are living in peace and harmony.'

Whatever God gives us is always the best. If you complain about having three children and two husbands. Oh! No! [Master and audience laugh.]

If you complain that it is too much and you are too busy having one husband and three children, later God may give you several more! We ought to be contented with what we have. This world is only a playground for us, so do not be too serious. If you give it a thought, then you will feel the fun. With some organizing effort, your family will become much better. Meditate more and contemplate on it, then you will find the solution to your problem. Therefore, do not be nervous and do not complain. This is how our life is supposed to be, no matter how much we complain.

BE A COURAGEOUS AND HONEST EXAMPLE ²⁸

There was a story about a man in Chi country. His name was Tien. One day, he held a very big festival to make offerings to the god of the road and the land. Many thousands of people came to participate in this festival, and also they had a lot of cooking, eating, merry making and things like that.

Then one of the guests came and offered Mr. Tien a very rare species of fish and bird, and a rare swallow's nest. It was very expensive in China and was supposed to be very nutritious. To make the nest, the swallow had to spit out its own saliva. But then when people came and robbed the nest, it had to continue by making another nest. But by that time, the bird would have no more saliva left and no more nutrition in its body to spit out any more. So, it would spit until it bled. And the saliva on the nest at that time became bloody red. But the red ones were even more expensive than the white ones. And that's how people ate them.

So, be careful. Not all that's vegetarian is vegetable. Even if you don't kill the birds, they die from suffering, starvation and undernourishment all the same. Because the season comes when they have to make ready the nest for their offspring. That is a spontaneous, natural reaction of the birds. If we take away their nest, they will just make a new one. And so they keep spitting and spitting until they make their nest. Maybe it's not completed, and maybe it is completed, but at the expense of their own lives or their precious health. They probably become exhausted, and by the time the offspring come, no one can take care of them. Of course, the humans are there; they 'take care' of the children by putting them in their own warm stomach and keeping them forever. So, things like that always happen.

Now, at this festival of Mr. Tien's, when someone offered him such a rare species of the bloody swallow's nest, for example, or a very rare fish, Mr. Tien was very touched and elated. He probably was a very highly important person in the society; otherwise, he wouldn't have had such a festival and not so many people would have come like that. So, he was very touched and elated, and then he let out a sigh, saying, 'Oh! God is so loving to us. Look at what Hes gives us every day to eat. Hes creates all kinds of animals to satisfy our hunger and taste.'

28. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, November 3, 1995 (Originally in English).

So, everyone heard his sentence, praising God like that, and they all clapped their hands in praise and agreement. But among the guests was one boy, just twelve years old. Perhaps he was a vegetarian; perhaps he was a just newly and fully initiated 12-year-old from Supreme Master Ching Hai. [Laughter] He stood up and said, 'Dear sir, it's not so, the way you said.' And the 'sir' was very surprised and taken aback. He asked the boy, 'What do you mean, it's not so the way I say? Do you have another opinion, you who are so young? Do you know anything?'

The boy said, 'My Teacher taught me differently.' My Teacher said, 'All beings are equal in this world. God created all beings with the same love, the same artistic, creative talent and creative intention.' So, there is no one in this world who is better than any other being in this world. God created different beings with different purposes and motives. If you say that all the beings like fish, birds, buffalo and so on are for us to eat because God created them for us to eat, then I think you are wrong. Because look at the mosquitoes: They sting our skin and draw our blood. And look at the lions and the tigers: They eat human beings. Do you think then that God created human beings for the mosquitoes, and for the tigers and lions as well?'

So, the sir, the VIP, did not know how to respond.

The boy continued, saying, 'My Teacher said, 'In this world, every being is equal. But most of the time, human beings use their intelligence, strength and craftiness to harm and take advantage of other weaker, softer, sweeter and more harmless sentient beings. That's all.' We cannot say that God creates any beings for us to eat or for us to use.'

So of course, the VIP and all the other, smaller VIPs in the party shut up.

I think some of our boys one day will make the same statement somewhere, maybe in the White House. [Master and audience laugh.] I'm just kidding. It may not be in the White House. It could be in the 'Blue House,' the 'Pink House' or the 'Yellow House.' And now most of our children are so clever as well. Sometimes they say directly what they think or what they have learned from here without being fearful of offending anyone.

On the contrary; it's we adults, the more intelligent, stronger, grown-up wise persons who are sometimes afraid to speak. Even within the family, we are afraid to say to people that we follow Master Ching Hai, follow the five ethical precepts and follow a vegetarian, compassionate diet. Because we fear that people will ridicule us. We fear that people will fall away and won't be friends with us anymore. We fear that our position will be shaken. We fear that our boss will withdraw favors from us. We fear that our wife will not love us anymore. We fear that our children will think that we have gone nuts. And we fear that our friends will go away from us. We fear that everyone will look upon us or look down upon us as if we are crazy or from another planet.

We fear everything. We even fear that the butcher shop will look at us with different eyes every time we pass by now. We fear anything, because we have learned negatively that everything different makes people stay away. But it's not necessarily the case. If we make a shining, good difference, then maybe people will follow. Otherwise, why should we live our lives differently if we so fear? We might just as well bow our heads, kowtow to everyone and live the way they do. This way we'll have peace, forever, perhaps. Because we will be forever here. And then we'll always have peace with all these beings, but not with the animals, perhaps. And then everywhere we go, the dog will bark at us and the bull might even gorge us.

I have seen many pictures of the bulls in the bull ring. Sometimes when he can get at the matador, he really gorges him – into heaven. Well, that's the way we say may be karma. So now, if every one of us can be as courageous as this boy who was twelve years old (it's a true story), then I think the world will be a better place. And we will have more brothers and sisters, less blood, less violence, less war and less talk about peace. Because peace will be there naturally.

And we don't have to spend a lot on five-star hotels in Geneva, and all these private airplanes and body guards and 'guard-bodies' and first-class champagne and caviar. We don't have to spend all that mouth water to talk about peace, when peace actually visits upon our planet. If everyone follows the way of the saints, follows the way of non-violence inside-out from childhood on, then all our children will be like the child in this story. Because there must be one day when the people in this world become fed up with war and fighting and violence. There must be one day when they will sit together and put a stop to all this nonsense.

That we human beings can't even speak with each other in our own language is a shame. We have degraded ourselves to an animal state. And then we always use it to curse someone else, like, 'You're a dog, you animal,' and things like that. But animals are not that bad; they are not even as bad as some of us human beings. Animals sometimes fight because they are hungry. They eat and kill because they are hungry. But after they're satisfied, they are tame; they don't go and do any harm.

Sometimes animals fight others, but they defend their own kind. But sometimes we humans, we fight with anyone: Our neighbor, our children, our anything, because we can't settle our own differences through words or arrangements or a gentleman's way of peace. It's very difficult for us. So, if we truly think about it, some of the animals have many, many good qualities, sometimes even better than we do. The dog is very faithful, the horse is very loyal, and the cow is very peaceful. The cow gives and takes nothing in return except some dry grass. And I don't know if we have the right, or the mighty dignity to look down on the animals, which we always think of as inferior to us in the human race.

So, if we continue to behave the way the world's people behave today do, by making war and everything being settled with guns, blood, human life and things like that, I don't think we have enough dignity or the right to look into the animals' eyes, much less to look down on them. So, let's hope that and let's teach our children by good example. Let them be courageous and outspoken and honest, like the boy in this story. That is your duty; you have to make a good example for them.

THE BEST WAY TO RULE A COUNTRY ²⁹

During the Song dynasty in ancient China, there was a scholar named Hui Ang who practiced spiritually and seemed to have great wisdom. On one occasion, he went to pay his respects to Emperor Song Kang. The emperor greeted him warmly and, without wasting any time asked, 'I only like courageous men who have warrior skills. I do not like men who preach righteousness. Is there anything you can enlighten me on?'

Emperor Song Kang made it clear that he only loved to use force and gave no consideration to righteousness at all. What else could anyone say to him? Yet there were people who would visit such a ruler. Ancient people were more patient. I would not go to see such a person. Would you? I would not! [Master laughs.] I have less patience.

29. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, October 15, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

Nonetheless, the emperor asked courteously, 'What can you enlighten me on?' We should give him a copy of volume one of 'The key of immediate enlightenment.' [Laughter]

'I have a special magical power. With this power, no matter how daring the enemy is, his sword cannot pierce your body; and no matter how fierce and powerful he is, he cannot touch you,' Hui Ang said. 'Would Your Majesty like this kind of magical power?'

'Wow! I would love it! I would! I would love this kind of magical power,' replied the emperor.

Hui Ang then tempted him further, saying, 'Although their swords cannot pierce you or touch you, you will nonetheless suffer humiliation. This is still not good enough.'

Hui Ang first tried to entice the emperor with minor magical power, and then instilled higher truths in him. 'I have yet another magical power that will make the enemy, however brave, afraid to strike or hurt you with his sword when he sees you. This will be even better! I wonder if Your Majesty would like this?' Of course, the emperor loved it very much.

Hui Ang continued, 'Although those people dare not hurt Your Majesty, that doesn't mean they do not want to hurt you. Perhaps they want to do so very much, but they dare not. I have yet another magical power that could make those people dismiss even the idea of hurting or killing you. Would Your Majesty like this kind of magical power?'

Would you like it or not? You are so quiet! [Master and audience laugh.] I do not possess this kind of magical power; don't expect it from me. My only feat is the Quan Yin method.

Of course, the emperor would have loved it so he said, 'I want it! I do! Please tell me more! Tell me more!'

So, Hui Ang said, 'Now, although those people stop wishing to hurt or kill you, that does not mean they respect you or are eager to help you. I have another magical power that can make those people abandon the thought of hurting and killing you, and further respect you and help you. Would Your Majesty like that?'

Wow! Emperor Song Kang could hardly contain himself! [Master and audience laugh.] He could hardly sit still on his throne and wanted very much to come down and shake hands with Hui Ang. 'Please tell me quickly! Tell me quickly,' he said.

'I have this magical power, with which all men and women, upon seeing Your Majesty, will immediately be eager to help you, and respect and admire you from the bottom of their hearts. As such, Your Majesty will not only be powerful, but also wise and virtuous. Therefore, I think this power is superior to all those I have just mentioned. How can Your Majesty not be fond of this magical power?'

Of course, the emperor said, 'Yes! I like it! I love it dearly!'

Finally, Hui Ang revealed, 'Your Majesty is aware that this magical power belongs to Confucius and Mocius. Take Confucius and Mocius for example. Although they did not rule a country or possess wealth, they were kings all the same. People respected them. Everyone admired and loved them.'

He was referring to the kind of king in people's hearts. One does not have to sit high on a throne and have huge armies, weapons or nuclear bombs, to be a king. Therefore, Confucius and Mocius were kings of some kind. That was what he meant. 'They had no

official titles; they did not have an army, yet they were lords.’ Hui Ang meant ‘the Lord.’ This was like how we revere Jesus Christ as ‘the Lord.’ If we translated Sanskrit into Chinese, we would revere Shakyamuni Buddha as ‘Lord Shakyamuni.’ During His lifetime, Jesus Christ was called ‘my Lord’ by His disciples. When Shakyamuni Buddha was living, His disciples also called Him ‘my great Lord!’ ‘my Lord!’ and ‘my Master!’ So, what Hui Ang meant was that though Confucius and Mocius did not have an army they were still kings and lords.

Then Hui Ang continued, ‘Not one single soul in this world upon seeing them could refrain from standing on tiptoe and straining their necks to get a look at them. People never tired of watching them and didn’t even want to blink their eyes. Furthermore, no man or woman in this world, upon seeing them, could refrain from helping, supporting and revering them. This feeling rose naturally from their hearts. All people in the world would bow and worship them. They loved them so much that they would protect and do anything for them, even die for them.’

What Hui Ang meant was that Confucius and Mocius had won the true heartfelt admiration of the people, without having to sit on the throne to be loved. Many people sat on the throne but no one liked them! They were even cursed or overthrown by revolutions. Therefore, when you sit on the throne and call yourself a king, it is not definite that people will like you. Conversely, Mocius and Confucius did not even have a piece of land to their names and had no wealth, officials, weapons, nothing, yet everyone who saw them loved and supported them. They wanted to stand on their toes and stretch their necks to see them for a long time, the longer the better. Therefore, Hui Ang said, ‘Since Your Majesty is already the king of the country, if you carry out the magical power of Confucius and Mocius, Your Majesty will definitely be even wiser and more virtuous than the two of them!’

THE FAIRY TALE KING LUDWIG II ³⁰

The king in seclusion

When Ludwig II, the king of Bavaria (Germany), was alive people said that he was insane. Therefore, they locked him up somewhere, and a few days later he died. After taking a stroll by the seaside, he died! I feel that he was assassinated but history has recorded that he committed suicide, and even his doctor also committed suicide. It's strange! If he committed suicide, why were two gun shots heard?

If a king really was insane, how could he build such beautiful castles with the interiors decorated as beautiful as in heaven? Not only did he build castles, he also built theaters so that the musicians whom he highly respected could play there. All the buildings were very glorious and highly artistic.

He was a man of great wisdom, and his words and behavior had the air of a spiritual practitioner. He said that one day we would be able to fly in the sky, that swans would pull our carts, and that we would not have to drag along our heavy body and so would not get tired. He talked about what is in heaven. His castles depicted the heavenly realms. That is why people later called him the fairy tale king.

Due to the political situation at his time, Ludwig II did not like to cooperate with others in Germany. So, people could only say that he was insane. When the doctor declared that he was insane, Ludwig II asked the doctor, ‘How do you know whether I am insane? You

30. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, September 10, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

have never seen me and you have never had conducted medical check-up about me. Is it not strange?’

Because he desired neither fame nor fortune, it did not matter whether he was seated on the throne or not. He felt that he was in prison. Therefore, he often moved his abode. He did not stay in the splendid palace but went to places very, very remote.

Can you imagine in the nineteenth century, he was going to a very remote place. One had to cross a lake so big that it was like an ocean to reach the place he lived. He went to a very remote mountain. In the nineteenth century it was not easy to travel by road. The boats were not very advanced either. It was really inconvenient to ship building materials there. But then he often looked for such remote places. It would still be very difficult to go to see him nowadays – could not wear high heels if one was going on foot. [Master and audience laugh.] One would have to climb mountains and so forth.

Therefore at that time, some people said that he was a king who retreated to practice. I feel that he might not have been insane. Only the politicians had to say that he was like that in order to get rid of him. Then they could find another person to be the king who would listen and cooperate with them. It was all politics.

A solitary swan that longed for Home

Ludwig II was a very good-looking person. He seemed intelligent and beautiful and never treated others badly. He was very good to his subordinates. According to the historic records passed down by his subordinates, he was a very nice person. Maybe Ludwig II fell in love with a princess, but the princess married the king of Austria; so Ludwig II could not bring himself to marry another person. He stayed in solitude and then built castles. He longed for ‘Home,’ and talked about the things in heaven everyday. People said that those things did not exist and that he must be insane to talk about things such as carts pulled by swans. He liked swans very much because he felt that swans represented purity and beauty.

We know that also. When someone has attained the fourth realm, people in the spiritual world call him a swan (hansa). When someone reaches the fifth (pronounced ‘Wu’ in Chinese) realm, of course he is Wu Shang Shih (meaning ‘Supreme Master’) the fifth realm! [Master and audience laugh.] I am not talking about you, I am referring to that Ching Hai. [Laughter and applause.] It’s just a joke.

Ludwig II was very fond of swans. He practiced spiritually. While he was dying, he still told the people beside him that if they were to make requests to God, to find God, they must not indulge in materialism. He said that the majority of people lived like animals – without noble ideals and without noble wisdom. How could someone who said these words be insane?

Also, he was very fond of music. He liked many wonderful things. He had enough wisdom to build such beautiful castles with the interiors decorated like fairy palaces. However, I would not want to live inside them. Once inside, it is so bright and shiny. How could you close your eyes? If I lived inside, I would quickly cover everything with black cloths, then I could meditate better. [Master and audience laugh.] When it is too bright it is not easy to find the Light within us. [Master and audience laugh.]

Perhaps it was because he was depressed – having lost his lover – that he kept building material things like houses and all that in hope that perhaps one day the princess might

come back and stay with him. He felt that since she was a queen and very beautiful, he should build the kind of castle that would be worthy for her to live in. Ludwig II always told her that. But that queen was also a very responsible person. Being married and having her country somewhere else, she could not return.

Because they grew up together and perhaps treasuring such a deep love for her, Ludwig II was not able to have any kind of relationship or whatever with any other girls. Once he was engaged to be married to her sister, but he kept postponing the wedding to tomorrow, to the day after tomorrow, to next year. Eventually, being pressed by people, he said no [Master and audience laugh.] and canceled the engagement.

A person must attain enlightenment to not mislead others

Therefore, records in history and the facts are not necessarily the same all the time. When we read history, some stories, or the scriptures, we should judge carefully for ourselves. Otherwise, we will mislead ourselves and then mislead others because we feel that our understanding is right. Then it becomes even worse. It is best that if we don't understand then we remain quiet. Wait until we are truly enlightened and have gained a complete understanding, then we can explain or teach others. Okay! [Applause]

EMPTINESS AND ZEN SICKNESS ³¹

A student once asked Zen Master Joshua, 'Master, if I have nothing in my mind now, what shall I do now?' He meant that his mind was already empty, relaxed and without desire, lust or want of anything anymore. And the Master replied, 'Throw it away!'

But the student insisted, saying, 'I have nothing, Master! So, how can I throw it away?' And the Master answered, 'Okay, then, keep it!' [Master and audience laugh.] The student said that he had nothing, but then he insisted so much. So, the Master said, 'Okay, then keep it.' He had too much to throw out.

Many people think that they're empty and that they've attained the Tao or realized Buddhahood and so on. They think they have no more desires – nothing, nothing, nothing – and that since they wear baggy clothes and shave their head, they're okay, meaning they're all empty.

But actually, it's not so. Emptiness is not from the outside; it's from within. So, as soon as you realize that you're empty, you're not because there's still a realization there. And the Zen smell is very strong. People call it 'Zen sickness.' So, in case you have that, you'd better go see a doctor and have it removed.

When we're just ordinary people, we don't know so much and we know we don't know. Yet, as soon as we meditate for just a short time, we think we do know. But after some more time, we know we don't know again. So, that's the best time, when we don't know; that's the time when we do know best. Because if we're still full of knowledge and knowing and so on, it means we're really still only half-way realized.

So actually, all the things I'm telling you are just to amuse you and to pass our time together so that when you go home you feel that your emotions, your human mind and heart, have gotten something from the Master. But all this is garbage: Whether beautiful garbage or bad garbage, it's all garbage. The things you realize are inside, not from my

31. International three-day retreat, Hamburg Center, Germany, August 25-27, 1995 (Originally in English).

words. Of course my words of encouragement and reminders perhaps sometimes help comfort you in some situations and help change some of your undesirable personality traits. But that's not enlightenment.

Enlightenment has nothing to do with personality, good or bad, moral or imperfect. Enlightenment is just our pure self; it never changes, never becomes better, never becomes worse, has never been ignorant and never has to become enlightened again. It's always there. It has always been, it will always be and it is now.

All these stories and explanations and all my so-called secular knowledge are just for amusement, just so that we have contact with each other on a personal level and so that we're happier together. But don't carry too much garbage with you; that's not the true teaching. The true teaching is always without language, and you always know it. You know it inside: Precisely, perfectly, without any explaining and without any words exchanged. But meanwhile, we both have to pretend. We need all this so that I have a job to do, so that you have a reason to come and you have some good memories to bring home with you. That's all.

ENLIGHTENMENT RETURNS US TO OUR NATURAL SELF ³²

There once was a stone mason who was very diligent. Every day, he broke stones into pieces and made things with them or perhaps sold them. Even if it was extremely hot in Miaoli, he never stopped. He worked and worked continuously, using a very large, powerful hammer and broke all the stones into pieces. These stones were then used by people to pave the roads, the area where they sat in the meditation hall, and any place where small pieces of stone (gravel) were needed. This was the result of his work.

The mason inherited this job from his great-grandfather, and then from his grandfather and then from his father. So, there were many generations of stone masons in his family. He was a very diligent and strong man. Sometimes he also worked during his lunch break because he wanted to earn extra money for his family; he would work until very late in the evening then go home and sleep. That's all.

Many of his friends and neighbors were envious of his health and his extremely free lifestyle. He seemed very much at ease and independent. However on the contrary, this man (his name meant 'power') didn't feel contented about his lot, but always wished to have a nobler kind of life – richer, with more luxuries and higher living. So, he wasn't always happy.

One day, he was breaking stones, perhaps next to the Nectar River. It was morning, and the sun was rising. Suddenly, he saw a lot of dust coming toward him, like a big cloud. And then in the middle of the dust cloud appeared a big, beautiful four-horse carriage, on top of which sat a very big, fat and dignified officer of the king. He had so many bodyguards around him and so many other horses surrounding him and behind him that he looked very terrific, majestic and distinguished.

A miraculous transformation

Upon seeing this sight, the stone mason stood aghast, with mouth open and eyes wide, and felt very miserable. Deep, deep in his heart, he suddenly had a wish and said, 'I wish I could be a great Mandarin, a great officer of the king.' Then suddenly there came a huge,

32. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 10, 1995 (Originally in English).

thunder-like noise from the mountain top: ‘Boom!’ Because the king of the mountain had heard the stone mason’s wish and made it come true. Next the stone mason instantly became a very big officer. He changed into a prime minister, and everything he ever wished for came to him. He had money, a big palace, bodyguards and a great, great, great estate. And all the people respected him: Everywhere he went, people just crawled in the dirt and dared not look up. And he would spill dust over them and they remained cheerful; they dared not say anything.

The stone mason was very proud of himself. Every day he had to go around, take care of the country for the king and report to him when he came back. And every time he entered the court, he had to kneel down and prostrate himself before the king. He also had to wear official clothing, which was very thick and studded with all kinds of precious stones like diamonds and pearls. So, it was a pretty heavy outfit. And in addition he had to wear a hat, which was also studded with precious stones and gold and silver, befitting his rank. Every time he had to bow down, his back ached, and he tried to keep his waist stuck together; otherwise it would break in half. So, he felt very bad, but he never dared to take off his official clothes.

One day, while he was still bearing this situation for the sake of glory and wealth and the adoration that people all around him bestowed on him, the king sent him to a very faraway place to take care of some state business. And in order to get to the area, he had to go through a very great desert, which was exceedingly hot. But he couldn’t take off his clothes because of his rank. Everywhere he went, he had to be a big minister and nothing else. It was so hot, he nearly died there. And then his hat became three times heavier than usual. He was also sweating inside, and his clothes were thus soaked and heavier than normal. So then he thought, ‘Oh my God, being a prime minister is really, really terrible. I don’t want to be a prime minister anymore. I think I’ll just die here! I think I’d rather be a king. If I could be a king, it would be better. I wouldn’t have to go through the desert like this, and I wouldn’t have to take orders from anyone. I could do what I wanted, and would have many wives. So, wow! That would be fantastic, to be king. I want to be king. I only want to be king, nothing else; I want to be a king, all right?’

A wish for the glory of kingship fulfilled

And then unexpectedly, he heard another ‘Boom!’ a very loud sound, and then the king of the mountain, his friend, the god of the mountain, made his wish come true. So, the stone mason was transformed into a king who ruled a very great nation, and had great wealth and many beautiful wives. And everyone knelt before him and did everything he wished.

So, he was contented for a while. But then the honeymoon was over and he had to work very late into the night because many reports from different ministers and provincial chiefs and the state governors came to him every day. And each day he had to discuss the country’s problems late into the night with many of his ministers. So then he couldn’t sleep very well at night. He worried about his job, matters of state and the urgent business related to things happening in his country that he couldn’t resolve quickly and peacefully.

With continuous problems both around and within his country, he couldn’t sleep very well, he couldn’t eat and he couldn’t enjoy all his beautiful wives. He was too miserable to even look at them. When you’re miserable, you don’t enjoy anything. So, he couldn’t eat; he couldn’t even enjoy the food that he wished to have, and he couldn’t enjoy the women that he had always desired to possess. He became very miserable and only ensconced himself in his duties, worries and anxieties, and the demands of his subjects, enemies, friends and anyone who desired things from him. Because he was the king, the top, the only one,

everyone came to him with problems, both within and without, and thus he began to feel that now his kingship was not really a blessing but a punishment. He felt very tired and worn out.

Even the sun has its dark moments

Then one day, a neighboring country invaded his nation, and because he was defeated he had to run away and hide. He had no food to eat during his fight, and he was also very tired and felt hot. With his enemies at his heels and his life at stake, he began thinking that it was terrible to be a king, absolutely terrible! It was a mistake that he had wished to become a king. And then he looked up and saw that the sun was very free and very high; no one could touch it, and it was shining and beautiful! So, he said, 'Oh, my God! To be the sun; it's better to be a sun. I'd like to be a sun. I don't like being a king. I'd like to be a sun.'

And so, 'Bang!' he was up, and found himself on top of the universe, shining his love and warmth on all things from atop the earth. He was very glad bestowing his blessings on all the beings in the world. And he felt very magnificent, happy and noble indeed because he thought he was the highest in the universe. He looked down on all beings feeling very noble and delighted.

So, he closed his eyes and meditated for a while and then suddenly said, 'How come it's so dark? It was so dark that his wisdom eye opened and he said, 'Oh!' There was a big cloud in front of him, daring to cover him completely! And then he began struggling inside it and didn't know how to get out. It was all dark, covering his wisdom eye as well. [Laughter] So, he saw nothing and was very mad, saying, 'I have to be a cloud. I must be a cloud! A cloud is greater than the sun. The sun is no good.'

Discontented with being a cloud and a mountain

So then, 'Boom!' You know what happened again! [Laughter] The never-satisfied man got satisfied once more. He turned into a cloud. Then for a while, he was very pleased. He rained down on the people, destroying many things, and then blessed the land by making all the flowers grow with the water from his cloud. He made everyone happy, and he was happy, too. For a while he was very satisfied. And then suddenly, the wind came! And it reduced him to nothingness. He grew thinner and thinner, smaller and smaller, until he was like a thread, just hanging around trying to keep himself alive. And then he again got very angry. Still, he thought that he was okay, that maybe he could get together and return to being big again.

But then the wind blew him across a mountain top, and the mountain caught him, like someone catching your clothes. And he was caught there, hanging on top of the mountain, and he became irritated, saying, 'Everything comes and goes, but the mountain always stands there; it never disappears, never gets destroyed, nothing! It's always strong. Oh! I wish I were a mountain! I must be a mountain. A mountain is the best.' So, 'Boom!' That sound came back again! And you know what he turned into? [Audience: A mountain.] A mountain! So then he was again very joyful. He had become a mountain. Not even the rain, wind, snow or sun – nothing could disturb the mountain. He sat like this [Master extends Her elbows outward in a mock show of sturdiness.] just like me. [Laughter] He was feeling that the mountain was very great, and stuck his nose up to the sky. He felt he was very great. Every day he looked up and felt that he was very grand. [Laughter]

And then one day, he felt like someone was poking his feet with a knife or nails or something like that, and as he looked down he said, 'Oh!' There was a stone mason breaking the stone of his feet down there. Of course, he got crazily mad and yelled, 'How dare you poke my feet! That hurts!' But the mason didn't care. He used his big hammer and very pointed chisel and just broke away the stones, one by one, and he was enjoying himself, singing and whistling at the same time. So, wow! He then got even angrier and said, 'W-a-a-h ha-ha, I must be the stone mason!' [Laughter]

After enlightenment we truly possess the ordinary mind

This is similar to us. Sometimes people say, 'The ordinary mind is the Buddha's mind,' but we don't believe it. We don't know what that is. And we actually don't know until after enlightenment, and then we come back to being normal again. Then we know that everything is okay and realize that we know what the ordinary mind is. Before that, even though we have it, we don't know.

The so-called normal way that people lead their lives is not the ordinary mind. The real ordinary mind is one that's peaceful and calm, that takes everything as it comes and reacts to everything as needed. There's no desire, no wanting, no rejecting and no agitation of any kind. That's the ordinary mind. But the way people lead their daily lives is not what's meant by the ordinary mind.

So, take care that you don't mistake the unenlightened with the enlightened, the enlightened with the super-enlightened, and the super-enlightened with the non-enlightened state of mind. After we become very enlightened, somehow we begin to stop talking. At first when we aren't very enlightened, we talk a lot; we know everything. We know what 'the Buddha' means, as well as nirvana, samsara, karma, transmigration – everything. We know all the big words from all the religious sects. We know it all.

Then, after we become somewhat enlightened, we talk even more but our words have more essence. Our speech has a better meaning than before because we have a greater understanding of the meaning of words that we often said before but didn't know the true meaning of. So, there are two stages of talking. The latter stage of talk is of course more meaningful and honest because it comes from our own realization. And then after that, after the talking stage, we begin to be quiet. We don't want to talk anymore. So of course, you wonder why I talk [Master laughs.] because you want me to talk.

Not talking doesn't mean keeping quiet all day long. Because if a person doesn't talk, it doesn't mean he's quiet. And if a person ceases all activity, it doesn't mean she's peaceful. So, talking or not talking is not an external thing; it's from the inside. At that time, you talk but you know it's not necessary to talk. You talk at the request of other people or just to be a normal person or to make others happy. Or you just talk because talking or not talking is the same to you. It's not such enthusiastic talk; it's not such impressive talk anymore, like we want to make others convert to our beliefs or anything like that. It's very casual and very normal. So, that's it. That's the story of the stone mason. It's amazing isn't it? It's exactly like we are.

IMPORTANCE OF PURITY ³³

There was a story about a monk. I think it was in America, also an American monk. He wrote a book about his experiences as a monk in a monastery before.

33. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 30, 1995 (Originally in English).

When he was a monk, in that monastery, he abided strictly by the rules of that place. Just like what time to do what, you know, working in the garden, time to eat, time to pray and time to sleep again. Any kind of thing he abided strictly by the rules, and was always concentrated. He didn't think of complaining and wanting to change the policy of the monastery of that order.

When he ate, he was not used to the food in the monastery; it was kind of simple food. Sometimes the monks, mostly bachelors, young and didn't know how to cook, so the food was awful. He had to admit it. But then later, as he lived there longer, he tried to accommodate himself and ate without thinking. He ate whatever food was in front of him, and that's how he felt more peaceful within his heart.

Then he had really some spiritual elevation, even without initiation, the Master or anything like that. Perhaps that's how many secret Catholic or Christian orders attained their enlightenment to some degree. So, he had attained sainthood in some degree by surrendering entirely to God and completely accepting whatever fate brought him. Therefore, his mind never wondered about whether it was good or bad, whether to change the habits or the monastery's rules, anything like that.

He wrote some very, very good experiences. So, I just mean to tell you that the purity of the heart is very, very important for spiritual practice.

WISDOM ONLY BEFITS THE RIGHT OCCASION ³⁴

Once there was a king in Au Lac who was a tyrant and also was very arrogant. This king disliked very much an official in the royal government. This official was very honest, and often counseled the king in a straight forward manner. Therefore, the king disliked him very much!

One day, the king and all the top civil and military officials went to the ocean in a dragon boat to sightsee. Those corrupted officials were good at overly pleasing the king. They also very much disliked the honest official, and came up with ways to ridicule him, making lots of nonsensical sarcastic remarks. Finally, the king was fed up, so he asked the honest official: 'I heard that you are a learned person, so you must know what the duty of a citizen is.' The honest official replied: 'One must be loyal to the king and love the country. Everyone knows that, and it does not take a learned person to know it.'

Hearing those words, the king was even more disgusted with the official. So, he continued to ask: 'Suppose that you are a loyal minister. Does that mean that if the king wants you to die, you will die?' The king was planning a trap for the official to fall into. The loyal minister replied immediately: 'Yes, Your Majesty.' Then the king said: 'All right. Now I command you to die! Quickly jump into the ocean and kill yourself!' As a result, the official quickly jumped off the boat.

Is this person more serious than Qu Yuan*? [Audience: Yes.] No! It's nonsense! Why die? [Master laughs.]

Then, all the civil and military officials on the boat started to cry loudly, squeezing out a few drops of crocodile tears: 'It's so pitiful that he died! My God! Such a good person, good to die! Oh!' [Master and audience laugh.] Everyone was crying and making chaotic noise. They threw some plastic flowers into the ocean to see the loyal minister off.

34. Three-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 2, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

It seemed that the loyal minister heard everyone's sad crying, so he emerged from the water. [Master and audience laugh.] He seemed to not want to die. He climbed up onto the boat, looking like a wet bird. The king said: 'Oh, you didn't die.' The minister said: 'Yes, I must have been dead already. But when I was down there I came upon Qu Yuan.' The king said: 'Really, how could Qu Yuan be down there?' He said: 'Yes, Qu Yuan was originally drowned there. The whole ocean is his! [Master laughs.] His soul was moving around everywhere. He knew I was going down, and quickly came to see me. Then he was chatting with me, and told me to go up.'

The king said: 'How could he tell you to come up? I commanded you to die. Why did he tell you to come up?' The official said: 'Qu Yuan scolded me so much. He said I was stupid! When Qu Yuan was alive, he met a bad king. So, he had to commit suicide. But now I have a good king. Why should I die? [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause] I felt that his reprimand was reasonable. I could not die, so I came up here!'

Did you hear that? This ending is good. If he had died, I would have beaten him up! [Master laughs.] I would not liberate him!

This was a true Aulacese story. Maybe Aulacese officials were a little smarter. [Master laughs.] They knew better how to protect themselves and how to counsel their king. It's not necessary to use the serious ways! There are so many people in the world. If you can not convince a king, why should you die? Maybe after a while the king will die. [Master laughs.] If you can wait until his death, you can serve another king. You should devote your talent, intelligence and wisdom to the country, not just to the king.

If the king is good, we serve him and respect him, and contribute all our talent to him. If the king is not good, we should reserve our talent and wisdom given by God, because God gives the talent and wisdom to us, not the king. God gives us the talent and wisdom so we can serve the country, and serve the world. If a king does not know how to utilize people, we can wait and find another one.

Our purpose is to serve the country, serve people, and give people peace and happiness. It is not to serve a king, and allow the king to judge us. For example, we have a very beautiful peacock. Then we make her reluctantly marry a toad. But the toad says that she is not good, and does not want to get married to her. So, should we feel so sad and kill the peacock? Should we? [Audience: No.] It's nonsense! So, no matter what we do, if we do it at a wrong time or a wrong occasion, there is no use. This is wisdom. If you are very smart, but do things in a hasty way, it won't be good.

* Qu Yuan (340 BC – 278 BC) was a Chinese official in Chu dynasty. He committed suicide as a form of protest against the corruption of that era. His death is commemorated on Dragon Boat Festival.

QUALITIES ARE INFECTIOUS, BE THEY PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL ³⁵

Scientists have concluded from experimental data that if the same action is performed daily for forty days at a stretch, it will become a habit. The same is true for meat eating, drinking, and smoking. Initially this happens for a day or two, or three, but a month later, it develops into a habit. Many other things take a similar course as well.

35. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 2, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

Girl turned snake companion

I recently read a newspaper report about a seventeen-year-old girl who is an expert snake trainer. The sight of snakes may fill us with fear, but this girl sleeps and eats with them every day. She holds them close, embracing not just one, but dozens of them, all at once. And some are deadly. But she is accustomed to them, for her father fed her some snake venom in lieu of milk when she was just born. [Master laughs.] As she grew up, this became a habit. Now she has developed such a strong immunity to snake venom that snakebites will not take her life.

Snakes are her constant companions. They stay very close to her, and the girl sometimes holds their heads in her mouth. The snakes slither onto her face, kissing and licking her, and sometimes, at her deliberate provocation, bite her until she bleeds. If the venom is too much, she sucks it out and spits it away. She cannot sleep unless she has enjoyed some snakebites. Can you believe anyone having such a habit? But this is a true story.

It is common among snake breeders, who are also called artists. It may be weird, but it is an art anyhow. There are many weird arts in the world; the weirder they are, the more popular they become. In contrast, normal people like myself are not very well-known. [Master laughs.] The way she is dressed tells you that this woman is only seventeen or eighteen, but she is already an expert snake trainer in her neighborhood. She performs the art as a living. She has grown so accustomed to snakebites since infancy that she loses sleep if she has not been bitten. However, people are afraid of her because she has become as venomous as these creatures. This is a fact. She leads a lonely life. She reckons that perhaps no man would have the courage to marry her.

When she touches or plays with the dogs, cats or birds that occasionally approach her, they drop dead as soon as she accidentally scratches them. Just as we get poisoned when we are scratched or wounded by animals, this girl causes death to animals when she scratches them, because she is filled with venom. Even her nails are poisonous. This is very frightening! It is not her blood or the venomous discharge from her body that infects the animals. Nor does she bite them until they bleed. No! The animals die from mere scratches. This has occurred several times. So, people are very afraid of her. Fortunately, however, she says that she has never hurt a human being.

It is good for her that her immunity has increased during the many years she has spent in the company of snakes. But her body has to have sufficient toxin to develop that type of immunity. It is like injecting a toxin in the form of germs (a vaccine) into our blood so that we become immune to a disease, that is, fighting poison with poison. The same is true for this girl, who has absorbed snake venom – either through oral feeding or injection – since she was a baby. Her father trained her to be an expert snake tamer from the time she was a child, keeping her in close company with snakes, the way we are with dogs and cats.

Snakes are harmless and non-aggressive, she says. Although they attack when disturbed, they are usually harmless. She often lets snakes bite her and goes to bed only after enjoying a few snakebites. How horrifying! Even though she sucks out the venom if it is too much for her, a small amount is still left inside her body. Such daily intake, and the snake venom she has absorbed since childhood, has turned her into a poisonous snake. A scratch from her, however unintentional, is enough to kill an animal. This is the result of developing an immunity to snakes, just as we survive by becoming similar to the person we want to be with. The only difference between this girl and a snake is that she knows she would never intentionally bite or wound other humans, whereas snakes do not.

HONOR OUR PROMISES ³⁶

The following story reminds us to always honor our promises. Should we fail to do so, we will create a lot of trouble for ourselves. Sometimes, when we have vowed to do this or that, we should do it precisely. Otherwise, our faith will weaken, our prayers will receive no response, and we will not be able to accomplish anything we do.

There are times when we might cheat God. We promise that we will do certain things, but never do them. Thinking that no one hears us, or God does not need it, we ignore it and fail to keep our promise. I have told you several times, for instance, about when some refugees were escaping on the sea, they vowed to the Quan Yin Bodhisattva (the Goddess of Mercy): 'If we can reach a third country smoothly, we will definitely keep a vegetarian diet for two years.' But they didn't fulfill their promise afterwards and postponed the two-year vegetarian diet for a very long time. They should have eaten vegetarian every day for two years, but later they could not do it or just forgot about it. Therefore, they said, 'Oh! Never mind. I will eat vegetarian once a week or once a month.' In the end, the two-year duration was extended to last very long.

This is a similar story. One day, a child had a high fever. He was seriously ill and his parent was anxious. After seeing the child, the doctor declared that his illness was incurable. Therefore, the parent prayed to a goddess named Durga (the first manifestation of goddess-energy in the Indian pantheon, her main task being to punish the wicked). She is a very famous goddess in India, and many people pray to her for help. Perhaps she was an enlightened Master in the past.

Indian people worship many deities, who must have been enlightened Masters and who were famous in different places in the past. Perhaps they were very efficacious when they were alive, so everyone worshipped them. Therefore, when we say that Indian people worship many gods, it is both correct and incorrect. Actually, they are worshipping past Masters. Similarly, the goddess that the Chinese call 'Matsu' was most probably a famous Master in ancient times. At that time, anyone who prayed to her received a response, so everyone did that and it became a tradition that is still practiced today. It doesn't matter that she may not be efficacious, because it has become a custom to pray to her.

The Quan Yin Bodhisattva was also a living Master in the past. When She was alive, anyone praying to Her would get a response. Suppose Her disciples kept praying like this and the neighbors of the disciples also did the same and also got a response. Later, their children prayed, and people continue to do so today. The Quan Yin Bodhisattva departed a long time ago, yet people are still praying to Her because it has become a custom. They do not know that it is more efficacious to pray to a living Master.

Well, in this story, the man went to pray at a temple of the goddess Durga. Most probably, at that time, this goddess had not left the world for long, so she was still efficacious. His prayer was: 'My child is sick. Can you save him? If he is cured, I will bring him here to worship you. I will also make an offering of a hundred rupees to you.' Perhaps a hundred rupees was a lot of money then, perhaps equivalent to a hundred or even a thousand U.S. dollars today. Money was more valuable at that time.

The goddess Durga was really efficacious, and the child recovered naturally from an illness that even doctors could not cure. Obviously, the goddess had blessed and helped him. His father remembered his promise of making an offering of a hundred rupees. But

36. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 22, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

then he started to think, 'Good grief! I have already spent a lot of money buying medicine for the child. Now that the doctor has prescribed lots of tonics for him, I have to spend more. My financial situation is now rather difficult. Perhaps I can just offer fifty rupees to the goddess. I am sure Durga will know my situation; she will understand.' He thought the goddess would understand, but still, he didn't act immediately.

Several weeks passed and he came up with another idea: 'No matter how, surely the goddess Durga cannot eat fifty rupees worth of food all by herself. Since she is a goddess, how can she consume so much food? Besides, I have read in the scriptures: 'If we make an offering to God with sincerity, the quantity of the offering is unimportant. God will be delighted with even a small offering, provided we are sincere.' God will not demand material offerings; our sincerity will be sufficient. All the scriptures say the same thing. This goddess also definitely knows that. Therefore, I think it will be good enough for me to go to the temple, piously do some very special worship, and then give an offering of five rupees.' These thoughts went through his mind, but still he didn't take any action.

Then one day, he heard the temple bell chime. When people worshipped at the temple, they would sound the bell. It reminded him of the offering that he had promised the goddess. He quickly went out, hoping to find a five-rupee item as an offering. He met a friend, who asked where he was going. He told his friend the whole story, and that he was going to buy a five-rupee item as an offering to the goddess. His friend said, 'Come on! Don't be so silly! Why would a goddess eat an offering of five rupees? You are so stupid! Let me tell you, it will be fine enough for you to worship her piously in the temple. Just buy a coconut worth about a rupee, and it will be okay! The importance lies in your sincerity, not the quantity, understand?'

This sounded very reasonable, and since the man was a very thrifty person, he went to the coconut stall to buy a coconut for one rupee. The coconut vendor told him, 'Fifty paise for a coconut.' One rupee was equal to one hundred paise. The man said, 'What? How could it so expensive? Sell me one for forty paise, okay?' The vendor said, 'If you expect such a low price, you have to go to the wholesale market.'

The man then walked a long way to the wholesale market. The coconuts there were really forty paise each. Yet he bargained with the seller at the market: 'I have walked such a long way here. If you are still selling a coconut for forty paise, then it is not much cheaper! You'd better give me a bargain at twenty paise each.' The seller laughed and said, 'If you really want to get one for twenty paise, then you have to go to the plantation. It is cheap only at that place.' Hearing that, the man decided to make his purchase at the plantation.

Again, he walked very far before he came to the coconut plantation. The coconut farmer there said, 'Okay! I can sell one to you for twenty paise.' Again the man bargained, 'I have walked so far to come here. You should sell me one for ten paise instead of twenty. Twenty paise a coconut is not much cheaper. Why would I have spent all the effort to come here?' The farmer said, 'If you want one for ten paise, you have to climb the tree yourself to get the coconut.'

Very stingy by nature, he wanted to save the money and really climbed the tree. He climbed all the way up, but because he was inexperienced, he slipped and almost fell from the tree. He could barely hang on to a branch and yelled for help. At that time, the spirit of the goddess Durga spoke through the coconut farmer, demanding a hundred rupees to save him. [Laughter] To save his own life, the man agreed to pay a hundred rupees. After he was saved and had climbed down the tree, he took the coconut farmer home and paid him a hundred rupees. There was no room for any bargain. At that time, he understood.

The next day, he went to the temple and cried. He realized that all this had happened because he had failed to honor his promise of making a one-hundred-rupee offering to the goddess.

ENDURE HUMILIATION IS A SAINTLY QUALITY ³⁷

The title of this story is ‘Enduring Humiliation is a Saintly Quality,’ meaning that a person with great tolerance is a saint. For me, all the people in this world are saints because they can bear such living conditions! Every day they shed tears and sweat, just to earn a few bowls of rice and a few sets of clothes. People rub elbows with each other and put up with one another. They put up with their bosses and colleagues, their spouses and family members and their friends and enemies. Oh, to be able to endure all this is truly a saintly quality! If I were God, I would appoint all the people on earth as deities [Applause] because I feel that it requires great endurance to live in this world. But let’s see how the Indians view this. Many Indians engage in spiritual practice but their views may not be the same as mine.

One day, an Indian man who wanted very much to find a spiritual path called on an enlightened Master and asked the Master for initiation, imploring him to impart a method of practice that could allow him to see God quickly. Since the man was so eager, the Master granted him the initiation and then instructed him to meditate for a certain period of time each day, follow a vegetarian diet and observe the five precepts. The Master also told the man that if he wished to advance more quickly in his spiritual practice, he should find a cave in which to meditate and only eat one or two simple meals a day. He also told the man to avoid mingling with worldly people so that he wouldn’t be distracted. If he continued to work in the mundane world, he would have lots of trouble, and would not be able to concentrate on his spiritual practice.

Life was simpler for the ancient people. If they wanted to find a cave to meditate in, they could just go, unlike us modern people who have too many things to worry about: ‘I haven’t paid off my car loan or my mortgage yet.’ ‘My credit card payment is due soon.’ ‘I haven’t paid my utility bills! Oh, it’s impossible!’ In the olden times, if people wanted to go off to a mountain cave to meditate, all they had to do was tell their spouses, ‘I’m leaving. I’ll return in six months or a year. Please bring me some food every day during this period.’ It was so simple!

Today if we want to go anywhere, we have so many things to deal with. Also, there’s so much red tape that entangles us. It’s not only the rich people who get tied down. Any ordinary person, as long as he has a house or car, gets tied down, too. And as long as he lives in this world, he has to fill out countless forms. If the forms aren’t filled out properly, he can’t go anywhere. That’s why people aren’t free. It’s the same in every country. The government has your visa information so they can track you down very easily.

Now back to this man in India. His Master told him, ‘After one year, when you’ve meditated very well and have gotten good results, come back to see me. But before you come, first bathe yourself three times in the river. Come here only after you’ve cleansed yourself thoroughly. Then I’ll have a look at the results of your spiritual practice.’ So, the man followed his Master’s instructions well. He found a small cave in the mountains and diligently meditated there daily, eating only one simple meal a day.

37. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 8, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

A year passed by very quickly, and one day, the Master knew that the disciple would be coming to see him the next day so he told the attendant who swept his room, 'Tomorrow that disciple will come here from the cave. Go and wait for him at the gate. When he arrives, dump all the garbage you've collected today on him.' Of course, the disciple had to follow his Master's instructions so the next day when the man came, he had already bathed three times and his whole body was scrupulously clean. Besides, after a year of meditation and eating only one meal a day, he had become very holy. One could sense his saintly smell from miles away. He was anxious to see his Master and tell him about his spiritual experiences. But as soon as he came to the gate, the attendant dumped the garbage on him.

Whoa! Do you know how the disciple reacted? He was furious! He shouted at the guy, 'You, of fathomless karma! Don't you know who I am? I just came back from one year of seclusion! Don't you know I'm a saint? How dare you dump garbage on me?' [Master and audience laugh.] Then he snatched the broom from the attendant and went after him, but the attendant hurriedly hid behind the Master so the man couldn't catch him. The disciple could do nothing but go back to the riverside to clean himself up. Afterwards, he came back to see his Master and said, 'Master, I've meditated for one year. I've done everything you told me to do so when can I see God?'

And his Master replied, 'Good! But you still can't completely control your mind and heart. You lose your temper and want to beat people up. Yes, indeed, my attendant acted foolishly but look at you! You acted like a tiger, a viper! You chased after him and tried to beat him. There's no way that you can see God like this. You have to return to the cave, do penance and meditate for one more year.' Then the disciple said, 'Okay, I understand. Thank you, Master, for enlightening me about my ignorant behavior. I'll surely amend myself.' So, he went back to the cave and meditated very seriously and diligently.

Another year passed by and his Master again called his attendant and said, 'Tomorrow the disciple will again return from the cave and come to see me after taking a bath. Go and wait for him at the gate. When he comes, pour the contents of the night pot over him.' So, last time it was garbage and this time night soil. The ancient people had no toilets so they used night pots. The attendant dutifully obeyed and waited for the disciple at the gate. When he arrived, the attendant poured the whole pot of night soil on his head with nary a drop left! [Laughter] The odor of the night soil was so strong that it overpowered the man's saintly smell. [Master and audience laugh.]

Again, the man was outraged and shouted, 'If I catch you, I'll turn you into dust! How dare you pour such foul stuff on my holy body! Don't you know I've already meditated for two years? I've been meditating twenty-three hours a day and eating only one meal a day! How dare you do such a thing to me!' His face turned crimson, and he ranted and raved at the top of his lungs, but since he couldn't catch the attendant he gave up and went back to the river to clean himself up. Then he returned to his Master and said, 'Master, I've followed your instructions and meditated for another full year and I've kept the precepts strictly.' But since there was no one else in the cave, there was really nothing to cause him to break the precepts. [Laughter] Then he continued, 'Every day I had nothing but sesame powder, brown rice and some river water. So, when can I see God? Master, you promised that I could see God after another year of meditation. Now I've already meditated for two years. Why can't I see God yet?'

The Master said, 'Child, you still can't control your mind. You've just behaved like a mad dog. The attendant only poured a little bit of stuff over your body. It's nothing but yesterday's chapatis (Indian pancakes). [Laughter] And you chased after him, screamed at

him and threatened him. Do you think a saint would behave like that? Can you see God that way?' So, the disciple was very ashamed of himself and said, 'I understand now. Thank you, Master. I'll surely make amends. What should I do now?'

The Master replied, 'I'll give you one more chance. Go and meditate for one more year but if you don't pass the test next time, I won't teach you anymore. Neither will God give you another chance so be vigilant! This is your last chance.' Then the man returned to the cave again to meditate. Every day he prayed and meditated earnestly, and followed all his Master's instructions. So, this man was really pretty good; he truly wanted to see God.

Soon the third year was over and his Master was up to his old tricks again. He always taught others to do good deeds, but he himself would do such mischievous things to challenge his disciples. The disciple had just finished a one-year retreat with great difficulty and thought he could now be free so he happily left the cave and took a good bath. But the Master had garbage and foul night soil poured all over him again. What kind of Master was that? The Master always taught his disciples to be good, polite and gentle, not to challenge people, to take care of others and to make others happy. Doesn't every Master teach these things? But this Master himself would do such bad things! He caused his disciple so much trouble! He was truly one of a kind! [Master laughs.]

This time the Master called his attendant and said, 'Tomorrow that disciple will come back from the cave. Take the garbage and night pot to the rooftop over the gate. When he enters, pour all the dirty stuff over him again.' And so the attendant did as he was told.

But by then the disciple was able to control his mind and didn't blow up. I wonder if he was really able to control his mind or it was just that he had already had two prior experiences so he wouldn't get mad anymore. [Laughter] Perhaps this Master wasn't very enlightened himself. If he always gave the same test the disciple would have been prepared, but maybe not. If a man is very ignorant or possessed by demons, he won't understand anything. He'll forget everything, including his own good qualities and kind nature. Luckily, however, the disciple remembered. Maybe he had strong determination and a good memory. He knew that he'd better not get angry under any circumstances. He knew that if he got dumped on again, all he had to do was take another bath. That was all! So, maybe he got smarter. But could he truly control his mind? We don't know. Nonetheless, this time when the attendant poured the dirty stuff all over him, not only was he not angry; he even thanked the attendant. [Laughter]

Doesn't Supreme Master Ching Hai also teach the same trick? When others scold us or beat us, we have to thank them. Does She teach you this? [Audience: Yes.] I remember hearing Her say that a couple of times, but have you applied Her teaching in daily life or do you still feel like beating people up?

This time the Indian disciple thanked the attendant. Perhaps he had indeed gained control over his mind. He said humbly, 'Brother, you just did me a big favor. If you hadn't treated me this way, I wouldn't have been able to break away from my own anger or the negative power that bound me. I thank you from the bottom of my heart!' He then bowed to the attendant three times and went to see his Master.

Right after that, his Master gave him the real initiation. Perhaps what the man had learned earlier from his Master was only the convenient method, and only after he had changed his attitude toward the attendant did he receive formal initiation from the Master. Indeed, during his initiation he immediately saw the inner Light and heard the inner Sound. He saw God! So, he was exhilarated.

THE TRUTH BEHIND FEAR (1) ³⁸

There was once an Indian woman named Devi. Indian people usually have sacred and great names related to God. A 'Devi' is a female Deva (heavenly being), and the name bears great meaning. Sometimes Indians name their children after Indra (the mythological king of the abode of the gods) in hopes that they will be better humans.

This Indian woman Devi had a young son named Lahuve. The mother and child had to flee their home, which was occupied by an evil spirit that had killed many members of their family, including Devi's parents-in-law and Lahuve's six uncles. Therefore, she decided to take her teenage son away from the haunted house for they were the sole survivors in their family. Devi took her son to another place, where she ran a business for a living.

Several years later, Lahuve, now grown up, asked his mother: 'Mom! Where did we come from? My friends always ask me this question and I don't know how to answer them. They want to know why we left our ancestral house.' Indian people, like the Chinese, the Aulacese and other people in Asia, highly treasure their ancestral homes.

Thus, his mother told him this story: 'In our old abode, eight members of our family were killed by a ghost. Fearing that we would be his next victims, I decided that we shouldn't live there anymore for it would bring us harm.' And Lahuve said, 'Well! What's so strange about people dying in a house? Where there is birth, there will be death. People die when their time comes. They have already died. Why should we leave our ancestral home? We should return; nothing will happen to us!' His bravery was so convincing that his mother finally consented. They then packed their luggage and went home.

Nevertheless, fear dwelled in Devi's heart. Every day, she would make offerings to the ghost before each meal, and Lahuve was very curious about her behavior.

One day, Devi prepared one of her son's favorite dishes, and he wanted to have the ghost's share as well. Of course, his mother forbade him. So he asked, 'Why? For whom is this food reserved? I like this dish very much and I didn't have enough.' Devi said, 'This is an offering to the ghost. He has already killed eight of our kin. If we don't offer him food, he will kill us, too.'

Lahuve was unconvinced by his mother's explanation, and said, 'How could this be? Why do you pay so much attention to the ghost? He might not have been responsible for our relatives' deaths.' Devi firmly believed that the ghost was behind the family tragedy, for her eight relatives had died one after another. But she had never seen the ghost; she just imagined everything. Her disbelieving son insisted: 'Just let me eat it! There is no ghost!' He wanted the food very much, despite his mother's disapproval. She then said, 'Please! Don't eat it, don't! Let the ghost have it. If you eat it, the ghost will kill you. What will I do then?'

That day, the ghost really came to enjoy the food. Lahuve sat there waiting for him to appear. When he did, Lahuve asked, 'Hey! Ghost! Who are you?' and the ghost told him, 'Young man, I am the third brother of your grandfather. After I died, I killed your grandfather and your uncles, because they robbed me of my wealth and let me die in poverty and pain. Therefore, I took my vengeance by killing them all.'

38. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 8, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

Lahuve then asked, 'What power do you possess?' The ghost said, 'I am extremely powerful. I killed your uncles and grandfather as easily as you swat flies. No problem at all! I could have killed your mother as well, but she fled. Though she has come back, she offers me food every day, so I spare the two of you. Listen carefully. I can fly to heaven, the abode of the angels, in an instant. I can also fly to the abode of the ghosts. Don't you think that I am terrific?'

Lahuve said, 'If you are really so powerful, can you take me to the deities and angels?' The ghost said, 'No, I can't.' Lahuve said, 'Then, can you convey a message to them for me?' The ghost said, 'Sure! What do you want to say to them?' The young man said, 'Please ask the angels how long I will live here? How old can I live to be?' The ghost said, 'Okay, I will.' Then he left.

The ghost came again the next day and said to Lahuve, 'The angels said that you can live to the age of sixty.' Lahuve asked, 'Please ask them again if it is possible for me to die earlier, say around forty to fifty? Can I be killed earlier? If this is not possible, then can they let me live longer until I am a hundred years old?' The ghost said, 'Okay, I will ask again for you.' He then departed again to ask the angels.

The next day, the ghost came back and said to Lahuve: 'I have conveyed your request to the angels, but they wanted me to tell you that it is not possible. You can die neither a moment earlier nor later, because the length of human life is predestined.'

Upon hearing these words, Lahuve immediately swallowed the offerings set aside for the ghost and rushed into the kitchen. He picked up a big piece of wood, lit it, and used it to beat and chase the ghost away. He said: 'If you do not get out, I will kill you; I will continue to beat you.' The ghost displayed his deadly fangs and claws trying to scare them. Devi implored her son to stop doing that. But Lahuve said, 'Mom! Don't you worry! The angels told me that we can't die any earlier or later. So, why are you still afraid of the ghost?' The ghost threatened to kill them both if they did not offer him food. However, he had also heard with his own ears the angels say that it is impossible to die earlier or later. Therefore, he had nothing more to say, and was beaten out of the house by Lahuve. After Lahuve had learned the truth, the ghost could not threaten him anymore, and the ghost was aware of that, too. [Applause]

If we have God and Buddha in our heart, will we still fear ghosts? God and the Buddha are the highest. If we are still afraid of ghosts, that shows we do not have enough faith in God or Buddha. Our faith is still too weak. Therefore, ghosts can only intimidate weaker people; they fear those people who practice spiritually and have stronger willpower.

TRUE OFFERING TO GOD ³⁹

This is a story of the mental worship. Mental worship means a devotee, a follower don't use any external object such as flowers, incense, drums, gongs or statues, et cetera to worship, or food offering.

You remember Ajuna? The devotee of Lord Krishna recounted in the Bhagavadgita. Ajuna was very fond of doing long and ostentatious external worship of God. He had a spacious worship room lit up with countless lights. He used gold and silver vessels. He spent several hours in ceremony and worship Lord Shiva. He would sit for many hours and throw cart loads of flowers at the image of Lord Shiva. You know Lord Shiva, one of the gods in

39. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 5, 1995 (Originally in English).

Hindu – Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Shiva supposed to be the Lord of destruction. Actually he destroys evil, he doesn't destroy good person.

There is a brother of Ajuna called Bhima. He never sat to do any worship, he never went to the temple, he always goes to Miaoli. [Laughter and applause.] He used to close his eyes for a few minutes just before dinner, just a few minutes before dinner, and do mental worship of the Lord. Perhaps he makes offering or recite the five names or something like. Ajuna thought that he was a great devotee of the Lord and that he was highly pious and devoted. He thought that his brother Bhima had no devotion. Therefore, he looked down upon him with contempt. [Laughter]

Lord Krishna found out the attitude of Ajuna and wanted to teach him a good lesson and bring him to his senses. He proposed to Ajuna to take a trip to Mount Kailash, the abode of Lord Shiva.

When they are on their way, they met a man dragging a cart loaded with flower of diverse kinds. Ajuna asked the man where he was taking the flowers to. But the man kept silent as he was very much absorbed in his work, very concentrate. So, Lord Krishna said to Ajuna, 'Let us follow the man and find out the things for ourselves.' Ajuna agreed and they both followed the man, they saw him empty the cart by the side of a huge heap of flowers which was as big as a hill of Hsihu Center. They further saw several hundreds of carts, all loaded with flowers, approaching the same spot and empty their contents there. There's a huge mountain of flowers, fresh flowers there.

Ajuna became more and more curious. He could not control his curiosity anymore, so he asked the man, 'Please tell me where these carts of flowers came from.' None of them bothered to reply. But one man said after repeated questioning from Ajuna, 'Venerable sir, kindly do not disturb us. We are too busy with our work. We have no time to talk to anybody. We have brought only seven hundred and fifty carts of flowers and more than seven hundred and fifty more are still in the temple. They are all the flowers with which one Bhima, a son of Pandu, worshipped our Lord yesterday.' Understand?

That means these mountain of flowers only half of what they have to carry out, it still half laid somewhere in the temple, and all these flowers came from Bhima, the brother of Ajuna, the lazy one, the one who never went to the temple, never worship the Lord, apparently, and never do anything, never get a flower or incense to the Lord, the one that Ajuna always look down upon as useless, as atheist, as not devoted to God.

'Now, it's hardly four more hours before his worship today and we must remove all the flowers within that time. Everyday he worships, the mountain of flowers come.' So, they have to remove everyday there are so much flowers from him, from his worship.

Ajuna was struck with wonder. He asked, 'Is it Bhima or Ajuna that you speak of? Are you sure you don't make mistake, you mean Ajuna, right, Ajuna, not Bhima!? My friends, think, think about it. You're mistaken. The name is Ajuna, Ajuna, A-J-U-N-A. Must be.' So, the man replied, 'Poo! Don't talk about Ajuna. No, no, no, no, no! Not at all, not that one. It is Bhima, who does such glorious worship with intense devotion, and not his brother Ajuna, who merely makes an outward show of his worship.'

Just then another man came with a basket of flowers, Lord Krishna asked that man, on purpose, on purpose, not that he doesn't know, 'Ah, my friend, who's offering are these flowers?' Of course, you know the answer. The man said, 'They were offered yesterday by an ostentatious man who lives on the earth, his name is Ajuna, [Laughter] and he makes a

display of his worship without any real love and devotion.’ Therefore, one basket of flowers and talks so much about it.

Ajuna lowered his head in shame and said to the Lord, ‘Oh, Krishna, Ching Hai Wu Shang Shih, [Laughter] why did You have to bring me here? Let us leave this place at once. You could point it out, my defects, my self conceit, hypocrite and ostentation at home, and save all this trouble and exertion. I do admit that I thought very highly of my worship and devotion. I treated Bhima with contempt. Just now I realized that Bhima's short meditation with sincere devotion is more valuable than all my showy worship all day long.’ Lord Krishna smiled [Laughter] and kept silent.

So, you know in our place, in our none-temple temple, we don't bother with flowers and incense, or drums and gongs or anything. We just bother with sincerity and inner devotion. That's why I tell you concentrate and meditate, no need for outer performance so much, no need to even bow to me or bow to any Buddha. If you saw him inside, saw the Buddha inside, you may bow to the Buddhas if you want to. But the Buddhas do not expect these things. They expect that you are devoted to yourself, so that you can find your Buddha nature and became Buddha or became one with God. Found your own glorious nature and be of help to yourself and many other beings, and that is what the Buddha expects from us.

A STINGY OLD WOMAN ⁴⁰

At the foot of a mountain in India, there lived an old women. This woman, she loved ‘seclusion.’ Most of people when they love seclusion, it means they want to be one with God, they want to be alone so that they can think of God, they can meditate on God, they can remember God, they can love God, they can see God, they can hear God, they can talk to God, et cetera. That is a true seclusion.

But this woman is not this case, she was the worst of all the misers in the country, means she is very stingy. She lived alone in seclusion, just because she don't like to share her possession, her food with other people. Charity was unknown to her. She knows nothing about charity. She did not part with even one grain of rice for the Cambodian people. [Laughter] During her lifetime, never ever she give anything at all, not even her cleaning mop. When it's worn out, she would repair it, keep it somewhere in case and never give it to anybody.

Now there is a God, called Lord Vishnu, you know Vishnu, second world God and he watched with interest the life and action of this famous old lady. He found that she was to die soon, after New Year. [Laughter] After she eats the first rice cake, she's probably going to be choked to death. Actually, there are many Japanese old people choked on rice cakes during New Year festival. Make sure you don't eat too much rice cakes, you know, the sticky rice cake? I don't know how they can choke on it, but actually someone did. Maybe this lady will choke on sticky rice cakes on New Year and she'll die soon.

And the Lord saw that she has only three more days of her life on earth. How good! So that people can share some of her possession after she's gone. The Lord, therefore, called Busandi to his side and say to him, ‘My very dear beloved Busandi, snatch something from her at least today, because tomorrow she has to die. When she dies, she will have some merit to her credit in that case if you stole something from her, at least some chocolate or

40. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 5, 1995 (Originally in English).

something, [Laughter] or maybe popcorns.’ [Laughter] Busandi nodded okay, in the modern language, okay.

And he took the form of a crow and sat on the tree near the house of Kachani; Kachani is an old woman's name. It was the time when she was washing a handful of black gram, soak in water for cooking her food. Now, Busandi decided to snatch away a beakful of it, and suddenly, at one leap, he flew near the vessel and took a beakful, a mouthful of grain with lightning speed, ‘Chi!’ [Laughter] But the alert old woman grab him with the greater speed still, grab him in the neck like this. She wrung his neck, yuck! [Laughter] And kept it twisted, so that the grain would not slip down in his stomach. [Audience: Oh!] My goodness. Meanwhile, with her other hand, she parted the beak of the bird, and squeezed out, took out the grains to the last grain from the throat of the struggling crow. Oh!

This really... she deserves the award from us, [Laughter] ‘the most miserly woman in history.’ I don't know if there is such a story, there must be. I don't know, could be huh? Some people are so stingy and stupid, cruel, cold blooded. Busandi struggled for his life, gulp, gulp, gulp... [Laughter] At last, he was let free after she thought all the grain have been poked out by her.

He flew to Lord Vishnu and fell at his feet, half dead. Lord Vishnu questioned him as to what had happened after he left him. Busandi grasped out the whole story, pantingly and said, ‘Oh Lord, I was almost strangled to death. I could not succeed in my mission, I'm very sorry. But I could not get even a grain of food from that wretched old woman.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Oh, Busandi, do not say so. Come, let me examine in your mouth. [Laughter] Open your mouth, let me have a look.’

So, Busandi opened his beak, and the Lord Vishnu used his wisdom eye with the magnifying glass look into his throat, and find, ‘Ah, there is something there. [Laughter] What is it, let me see what is it, let's see what is it, must be something.’ He saw a little bit of husk, the outer skin, shell of the grain, sticking to his palette. [Laughter] Thanks God at least he has not wasted his time and struggled for nothing. And say, ‘Look, Busandi, there's a small bit of husk sticking to your palate. I am satisfied,’ the Lord says. Oh! The Lord is easy to satisfy.

So now, the old lady has earned some merit. Oh, bless be the Lord, so compassionate and loving and merciful! Now he said, ‘Busandi, when she goes back to the world after her death, let her be fed on the husk of the particular grain which is found sticking to your palate. So, the old woman will be eating that all her life long.’ And then, the Lord so saying, disappeared. Great and marvelous are the benefits of charity and righteousness, even involuntarily. Infinite and overwhelming is a love and compassion of the Lord, such is the mysterious potency of even the least act of kindness and charity. Probably she didn't want to take it out because she knows it is useless. Ah, it's not much there as you know. [Laughter]

The Lord himself in his great love creates opportunities for the redemption and deification of the sinning human. When the old woman who did no meritorious act was ordained to get bread made of husk, and if we give people a lot of things more, how much would we have? That is the conclusion, huh, that's the meaning of it.

SUPREME HONOR IN THE UNIVERSE ⁴¹

Shankaracharia was a great Master of India and a great philosopher at that time, and he had four disciples. He was an enlightened Master. He had four disciples and one was very stupid. His name was Togata. This disciple was a very stupid one, Togata, but he was very, very devoted and sincere to his Master.

One day, they gathered in the temple to study the sutra, called Brahma sutra, and the class was about to begin. But the devoted disciple, Togata, took a little more time to clean the clothes of the Master in the river, that's why he was a little bit late coming. All the disciples pressed the Master to begin the class without waiting for Togata. They said, 'Ah, Togata is a stupid student anyhow, there is no use to teach him. Whether he comes or not comes, it makes no different. It's a waste of your time, so we begin the class'.

So, Sri Shankaracharia wanted to teach a lesson to these arrogant disciples. He at once showered his grace on the devoted, da da ga, da da ga, cha ga ra ya. You know the stupid one yeah, and here he has more name. Da da ga da cha ri ya had immediate illumination and knowledge dawned in him; he came to the class brilliant and enlightened. And he was, of course, very... ah in ecstasy and he came exclaiming, 'Oh, Master the ocean of nectar of the love, of the compassionate mercy, limitless power, almighty Supreme Master Ching Hai, bla bla... [Laughter] of the whole universe, I prostrate unto You, I prostrate in front of You. You have blessed me with limitless wisdom. I understand everything in the universe. I understand everything, oh You absolute, merciful, almighty, compassionate, loving, beautiful, adorable, respectful, noble, virtuous... I have no more words for Your absolute highness.' [Laughter] Okay. Just anything you want. I exaggerated. Any praise that you can tell that's fine. Actually, it's not all in the book; I made it up. So, all the disciples were struck with amazement and their pride was quelled at once, of course. They became humble, yes, they became very humble.

They mean in India or in this book, actually they say, also in Indian custom they believe and they know that the service to the Master, the guru is the supreme blessing and the supreme honor, not only honor but the blessing, yes. And devotion to the Master is a great purifier of the heart. Now, Master's grace alone can help the aspirant, the disciple, you know the beginner, to cross this formidable ocean of worldliness, the attachment of the world. The Master's grace can help them overcome any attachment, any obstacles of this world. The guru is Brahma, the guru is Vishnu, means the guru is everything – is God, is angel, is Bodhisattva, is everything in everywhere. So, they say glory to the guru, glory to the Master, may the blessing of the Master be upon you all. [Applause]

INVALUABLE FAITH ⁴²

The title of this story is 'Guru Bhakti.' In Sanskrit, guru means Master, enlightened Master. Bhakti means devotion, absolute obedience to the Master, thinking only of him / her, and offering all actions, speech, and thoughts to him / her. Whatever a Master or enlightened Master says, we obey completely without any argument. That is called guru Bhakti in Sanskrit.

A long, long time ago, there was a person who was a sincere seeker. Each time he heard that a great Master was giving lectures or a virtuous person was delivering a discourse, he would waste no time in going to the venue with his wife. He learned from the lecturers that

41. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 3, 1995 (Originally in English and Chinese).

42. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 1, 1995 (Originally in Chinese).

one must have the blessings of an enlightened Master to attain the Truth or sainthood, and become one with God, so he began to search for a perfect Master. He traveled to many places and met one Master after another, but always found faults that made them imperfect in his eyes. Therefore, he could not find a real Master.

Those Masters were not good enough for him because he had the wrong notion in his mind. He had read too many books, including all the scriptures, which made him very arrogant and put him on a constant lookout for faults in other people. He would, for instance, be dissatisfied with a highly enlightened but illiterate Master who couldn't read and knew little about the scriptures. He would turn away from a Master who could not outdo him in debates or did not know which scripture a particular verse came from. So, he could not find an enlightened Master. If we still have this critical attitude and arrogant thinking, certainly we will not be able to find our own nature. Even if an enlightened Master were right before our eyes, we would not see him / her.

One day, the man was feeling very frustrated and dejected at home, thinking that he had no hope of ever finding a Master good enough to deserve his devotion. When his wife came to console him, he poured out all his anxieties. He said that because he had yet to find a Master capable of giving him liberation, he was very worried that he would die unenlightened. Being purer in mind and not so learned, his wife comforted him, saying, 'Why don't we simply go into the forest and meditate there? We will pray, chant the names of the saints and God, and beg God to send a Master to us. We will revere the first person sent by God as our Master.' Unable to think of a better idea, the husband agreed. The next day they went into the forest and sat down by a path to pray.

Just at that time, a bandit escaping with valuable booty passed by. The couple immediately pounced on him and prostrated before him, begging him to accept them as his disciples. [Laughter] They implored him to teach them how to meditate and bless their mantras. In India, Masters or more advanced spiritual practitioners sometimes grow very long beards, dress in saffron robes, and sit there for people to bow to as their disciples. Although the Indian people are already very familiar with mantras like 'Om Mani Padme Hum' or 'Nam... Nam... Nam,' the Master blesses these mantras at the time of dedication, making their mantra chanting effective from that day on. This is called blessing the mantra. Though they still chant the same mantras, it seems to be more effective after they become disciples of a Master. Therefore, many Masters in India perform this kind of ceremony.

The couple forced the bandit to be their Master and, like everyone else, asked him to bless their mantras. They didn't know then that he was a bandit. Unable to break loose from them, the bandit was both surprised and frightened. The couple then told him about their unsuccessful search for an enlightened Master, and their vow to sit in the forest that day and become disciples of the first person who came along. They urged him not to run away, for he was their Master. Their words touched the God nature deep within the bandit. He felt that he could not deceive them, but when he tried to reveal his true identity, the couple simply would not listen. If he refused to accept them as his disciples and teach them the holy mantras, they definitely would not let him go. They did not care who he was; they were absolutely certain that he was their Master.

Initially, the bandit was deeply touched, but he soon began to feel scared and nervous. If they continued to hold on to him, he would be in deep trouble when the police caught him. In his desperation to break loose, he promised to teach them, and commanded them to kneel down. The couple knelt and prostrated in a solemn ceremony of devotion. He then instructed them, 'You will now sit here, put your hands over your ears, close your eyes, and remain still. If you move, God will go away. Keep this posture and do not stand up

without my instruction. Then you will definitely see God.’ He commanded them to do this so he could tear himself away, since they had grabbed his legs with both hands and refused to let go.

The grateful couple sat still, obediently holding their hands over their ears. All day and all night, they sat in the same spot without taking any food or water. They dared not move or open their eyes to see if their Master was still with them. After a long time, their feet became numb, their bodies ached, and their hands were sore. However, they had no other thoughts but the sincere yearning to see God. They continued to sit there with total faith.

Vishnu and Lakshmi were extremely touched by them. For the Indian people, Vishnu is one of the divine Lords. In terms of yin and yang energies, Vishnu is yang and Lakshmi is yin, representing the feminine heart. Deeply moved, Lakshmi asked Vishnu to manifest to the couple. Touched by their sincerity and the fact that they had remained seated for so long even though they had been deceived, Lord Vishnu appeared to them. The couple was delighted, but dared not open their eyes or get up to worship him. They dared not do anything because their Master had instructed them not to get up or open their eyes without his permission.

Lord Vishnu said to them, ‘Now that you know I have come, you may get up and stop suffering so much.’ Still, they dared not get up. They were very grateful to him for coming to see them, but they could not disobey their Master in order to obey him. How humiliating!

The bandit was greater than God. [Laughter] Lord Vishnu could not bear the sight of their suffering, so he went to the palace and appeared to the king in a dream. By that time the bandit had been arrested by the police and thrown into the royal prison. He had committed far too serious offenses to be jailed in an ordinary prison. When Lord Vishnu appeared to the king in his dream, he instructed the king to release the bandit quickly. However, the king, burdened with heavy karma and often haunted by nightmares, thought this was another bad dream and ignored him. Vishnu again came into his dream, but still the king did not understand. Only when he had the same dream for the third time did the king realize that something must be wrong.

Meanwhile, Lord Vishnu also appeared to the bandit in a dream and asked him to liberate the couple in the forest as soon as he was released. He told the bandit that they were still sitting there holding their ears and had not eaten a morsel or taken a sip of water for days. They were almost dying and God could not stand it. When the king released the bandit after his third dream, the newly free man rushed to the forest as he had been instructed in his dream. He commanded the couple to get up, open their eyes, and let go of their ears. As soon as they did so, the couple expressed their deep gratitude to their ‘Master,’ because it was due to his grace that God had appeared to them. The bandit then shared with them his own encounter with God in his dream.

Suddenly, they heard a voice in the sky say to them, ‘I am really touched and delighted by your total devotion to your Master without the least trace of doubt. I promise that I will come to see you again. From now on, you shall continue to chant the holy names, worship God, and meditate two and a half hours each day. Do not forget to observe a vegetarian diet and keep the five precepts strictly. I will definitely take you to liberation when you die.’ From that day on, the bandit turned over a new leaf and joined the couple in spiritual practice. That’s too wonderful! [Applause]

There is a comment in the book that says, ‘When we are truly faithful to a Master, even if he might not be a real enlightened Master, it is still effective. However, if we can have such

faith in a bandit, it undoubtedly means that our own Master has come, our wisdom has opened up and we no longer discriminate against others. We will thus certainly attain the fruits, but not because of the Master or the method.' That is what the Indian people think. But do not forget that this Vishnu is only from the second realm. It is not easy to see the highest God. Even so, it is unusually great for an ordinary person to see the Lord of the second heaven immediately after revering a bandit as his Master!

Your faith in me has touched me deeply, and I too will pray to God to help you. You will definitely be liberated when you die. [Applause] The vital point is that you should meditate well and have great faith, forgetting me as a person. Then you will definitely have spiritual attainments. When you have true faith and devotion in a Master, even God will come. When you meditate, you will behold brilliant Light and hear heavenly music. You will have lots of responses. This shows that it is good enough to have faith; never mind whether the Master is good or not. Whether I am good or not, you will find out when you die.

A MAGICAL CHAIR ⁴³

Long ago there was an old man. He lived at the foot of the mountain and was very poor. He had no possessions. His straw hut was his only property. In fact, this person was very lazy so he deserved it! One day, he heard that in a certain place there lived a very powerful yogi who had the supernatural power to create anything he desired. After hearing this, the very lazy person, who did not want to work, wished to go there to ask the yogi to use his supernatural power to create things for him so that he does not have to work any more. After thinking in this way, he left.

He walked a very long way to the mountain cave where the yogi lived. When he saw the yogi he prostrated. The yogi was quite nice, he politely entertained him and asked him about his purpose. The lazy man said, 'Respected and beloved Master, I am a very poor person. Besides a small straw house, I have nothing else. Now I am very old and not able to work, so please, compassionate Master, please help me. Grant me some possessions to live on. I know you have a lot of supernatural power. You can immediately create anything you desire. I believe you are able to help me.'

That yogi closed his eyes and sat there quietly without a word. Perhaps he was too tired listening to all of this. This old man then continued to ask him. After requesting for a long time, this yogi reluctantly gave him a chair and said, 'After you go home, anytime you think of something you want, you can sit on this chair. But you have to wash your hands, face and take a bath before sitting on the chair. Then think about anything you desire. This way you will surely get it.'

After thanking the yogi, the old man took the chair and immediately rushed home! After reaching home, he did not waste a bit of time. He immediately washed his hands, face, took a bath, then he sat on the chair right away. At that time he was very hungry, so he immediately thought about food. Then food immediately appeared. Oh! Very beautiful, very nice and a very bountiful meal. So, he enjoyed all the good food until he was very full. After eating he felt tired and desired a bed to rest. Immediately a bed with a thick mattress appeared. He lied down to sleep, but he could not really rest, because in his heart, he was always thinking of wanting things and money. He jumped up from the bed and sat on the chair. Now he started to think about transforming his straw hut into a palace. As he was thinking this, the straw hut immediately disappeared!

43. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 31, 1994 (Originally in English and Chinese).

This old man's palace was very, very beautiful with jewels all over. The doors were made of gold. The floors and the ceilings were made with gold, even the pillars were of gold inlaid with very precious jewels. Thus he was very happy and felt very comfortable. He continued to think, 'Ah! Such a big palace should not be without any servants.' He just thought and many servants appeared waiting for his commands. Later he thought, 'The servants, the palace can not be without money!' He thought of a lot of gold, silver and money. Suddenly all these appeared together. It made this old man very happy in deed. But he suddenly became worried. He thought, 'Ah! My palace is so beautiful, with so many possessions, if it happened that an earthquake should come, what to do?' [Master and audience laugh.] He just finished the thought and the earthquake came. [Master laughs.] His possessions and the palace were squashed into the earth.

What does this story tell us? Our mind has to be clean and pure first. It is not good enough having supernatural power or power of practice. Therefore, we have to clean our body, speech and thought before having the power. If we have the power but our body, speech and mind are not clean, precepts are not kept properly, then we could do bad things. Our own power could hurt ourselves. Sometimes this power could hurt others. Thus, since ancient times, those Masters, before taking in any disciple, would test the disciple for a long time until his body, speech and mind were completely clean before giving him the power.

The Master often tells you not to practice supernatural power. The ordinary people outside can practice the supernatural power easily. They do not have to keep any precepts and do not have to be vegetarian. When we still cannot control our mind, if we think about bad things they appear at once, because at that time we get whatever we think. The power in the universe is immense, but we should know how to use it. Otherwise, it can cause a lot of harm, harming ourselves and damaging the world. Some disasters we see in the world are sometimes not necessarily the karma of the people, but due to some people who practice supernatural power. They practice towards the bad direction or because of their messed-up thinking, they then mess up the world. We can say that these people created trouble or were possessed by the negative power. Really there are such people.

Thus, when we practice we have to think about God everyday, think about those fully charged names of the Buddhas to protect ourselves. Sometimes it is not entirely our own karma that causes our obstructions, but sometimes it is the negative, maya power around us that affect us. Therefore, we have to always remember our goal, remember the power of the most high, and recite the five Buddhas' names to protect ourselves. Thinking a lot about God almighty, our mind becomes clean and then we do not desire anything. To us, at that time supernatural power would be of no use, because we would be one with God and there would be nothing we could not have.

At that time, we would be very satisfied inside and we would know that after we have left this illusive world, we would go back to our homeland where we have everything. Compared to that place, this world is junk. Nothing could be offered to us here. After our soul has returned many times to the homeland to take a look, our mind would understand and would be very stable. Then we would not want anything. Even if we want we would only want those things that are good for others. Our heart would be very kind, always thinking of positive things. Once thinking about positive things then the positive things would come.

GOD ALMIGHTY TAKES CARE OF EVERYTHING ⁴⁴

There was once one very conscientious Indian yoga practitioner. One day, his very old and sick mother died. He became very happy and immediately ran to the big hall, kneeling there he thanked God almighty, perhaps the inner Master! He was there prostrating and saying, 'Thank You God! I had not asked and had not prayed to You, but You had already given me a great blessing. Now that my mother had been taken away by You, I am very free and I'm able to think about You wholeheartedly everyday without any encumbrance. Thank You!'

He was there joyously dancing and singing. The neighbors felt it very strange: How come? His mother has died, and he did not shed a tear, and he was even dancing and singing. Meaning he was dancing a type of dance as to make an offering to God, not that he was going to a karaoke, it's not the same! Perhaps it was about the same, moving and shaking, they looked the same. But his mother would not be sad because his mother was also very pious spiritual practitioner, just like himself. They both knew that the world is ephemeral.

Thus, his mother was very happy when she passed away, and he was also very happy after she passed away. They were both strange people!

After burying his mother, he went to the bank of the Ganges everyday reciting the five names, meditating, and communicating with God almighty. It had been three days and this person did not eat or drink anything. He totally forgot about it. He was sitting on one very secluded bank of the Ganges where no pilgrims pass by, thus he did not get anything to eat. Everyday he very happily recited the five names and meditated, so he forgot about hunger.

God almighty spoke to the people beside Hirm, 'Alas! What a pity! My disciple down there is dying of hunger and it seems like I am not being any responsible; not giving him anything to eat. He is there, remembering me every moment of the day, yet I am here forgetting to protect him.' Then God told the angel beside Hirm to bring some good food to the riverside for him. A lot of blessed food was put on a gold plate: Chapati, milk, apple, et cetera and brought to that person. That angel had never seen a human being before, not mention a boy. She was a girl and a bit shy to see a boy, so she silently put the plate beside him and flew away.

That person saw the food but did not see anyone come. He thanked God thinking it must have been sent by Hirm. He finished the food and continued to recite God's name, meditate, and enter samadhi. Suddenly a lot of people surrounded him and woke him up. They were carrying sticks and broad swords wanting to arrest him. Very puzzled he said, 'Why? What is the matter?' They said, 'You thief. You dare to steal this gold plate from God's temple. We want to take you to the king to punish you.' No matter how he tried to explain, the soldiers would not believe him. Because they saw this poor boy in tattered clothes sitting by the river, they could not imagine that he could possess such a precious gold plate, thus they assumed that he must have stolen it. The plate looked like the ones used in the church to make offerings to God, so they were to take him back to be punished.

After taking him back, the king was very angry. He told his subordinates to beat him. He was beaten for a long time, very hard and very seriously, but that yogi did not feel anything at all, and continued to laugh. [Master laughs.] Not laughing like I am, but about the same.

44. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 31, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

He was not only laughing, he was also very happy like being tickled. They got tired of beating him; their hands were sore. [Master laughs.] Then they stopped beating him and let him go. The king also felt strange, feeling as if God was protecting him, thus he dared not continue with the beating. But he was very curious and ran to the temple to see if such a plate that had been stolen.

When he went to the temple, he saw blood flowing from God's statue. He was very surprised, 'How could it be so? How could an idol bleed?' Not only that, the places that were bleeding were exactly the places as on that person which had been beaten. Therefore, he knelt there repenting not knowing what sins he had committed. Later he realized that perhaps that person was innocent, beating him was like beating God, thus God's statue was bleeding. At that point, the king and his ministers were all very frightened. They all hurried to the riverside, knelt, and repented to that small, penniless yogi; they also offered him food everyday. When they went back to the temple, they saw that God's statue was no longer bleeding, hence they knew the reason.

Because this person was very earnest in his meditation, he thought only about God everyday, so God felt guilty because he did not have anything to eat. If it was because of the food that he was beaten, then of course it was God's fault. Thus he bore the punishment himself. Understand? It is not that after being God or Buddha you care about nothing. If we truly practice sincerely then God will take care of everything. This is the meaning.

THOSE WITH KINDRED SPIRITS ATTRACT EACH OTHER ⁴⁵

This is an Indian story. There was a man whose name was Ayah. He was originally a slave, but for some reason, he was later appointed the prime minister, and the king liked him very much. Because of this, other officials were jealous of him. They tried many ways to make the king get angry with him, so that he would not be in such an important position any more. But no matter how hard they tried, it was in vain. The king liked him all the same, even more.

One day, those officials asked the king, 'Your Majesty, please tell us why you like this slave so much.' The king replied, 'Sure, I have a reason. You will know in time.' About two or three months later, the king summoned all his officials and told them, 'My dear officials, I will hide myself in the royal garden tomorrow. You should start searching for me early in the morning and find me before sunset. The one who finds me will be rewarded with a wonderful present.'

Hearing that, the officials were all very happy, and wondered 'Ah! What present will the king give us?' After they went home, they kept on thinking about the present and imagining what kind of present they might get the next day, so they did not sleep a wink. The same night, the king gave orders that the next morning, all of the most beautiful girls, who were experts in singing and dancing, should perform on each of the roads leading to the palace.

The next morning the officials set off early to search for the king. But on seeing those beautiful girls singing and dancing on the way to the palace, they could not help being attracted, and were gradually lured away to enjoy the performance. All the officials was thinking, 'The road from here to palace's royal garden is quite near, and it is small. It will just take a few minutes to find the king. No need to be in such a hurry. [Master laughs.] I can enjoy the singing and dancing first.'

45. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 30, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

Being convinced of what they thought, they further indulged themselves in the performance until it was very late, about sunset. After realizing the time, the officials hurried to search for the king, but the sun had dipped below the horizon when they arrived at the royal garden. At that moment, they felt very ashamed and disappointed, since they saw Ayah, that slave, had already been with the king for some time. 'Oh, why did you come here so early?' the officials asked, 'Didn't you see people singing and dancing on the road? So beautiful! You didn't see?' The slave said, 'Who was dancing? Who was singing? I didn't see anyone. In the morning I came here right from home, and I never saw anyone singing and dancing. The only thing I kept thinking in my heart was how I could quickly find the king. I had been thinking about him since last night, and I could not afford to wait even one minute to search for him.'

Then the king said to the officials, 'Now you know why I like Ayah so much. It is because the only one he loves is me. In his eyes, the whole world does not exist. No matter how beautiful a girl might be, no matter how glorious a banquet might be, no one can win his heart. It is just like those who have kindred spirits, they attract each other. He loves me so much that I can not treat him other than myself. I just cannot help loving him.'

This story is to remind us that we should devote ourselves completely to God, to Buddha without swaying one way or the other. Don't be tempted and let the worldly attractions lead us astray, away from our destination. Only in this way can we receive the grace of God. If we only think of God and our hearts house only God, then we are one with God. There would be no need to pray to God or to request anything from God, since everything is created by our mind. If we only think of God in our hearts, we become God. Do you understand? [Applause]

EVERYTHING IS CREATED BY THE MIND ⁴⁶

A long time ago two friends took a trip together to visit and tour around. As they passed by an Indian temple, they heard someone reciting the Bhagavadgita inside. The Bhagavadgita is a very famous sutra in India. One of the friends said to the other, 'Come on! Let's go inside to listen to the sutra.' So, both of them went inside; however, only one stayed to listen, and the other took one glimpse and went out to look for girls in a brothel.

The one that went to a brothel soon felt bored. He regretted what he had done and felt quite ashamed. He thought, 'Gosh! This is really nonsense! I am so ashamed. Why did I come to such a place instead of listening to the holy teaching? My friend is listening to the sutra now and receiving boundless merits while I degraded myself at a place for prostitutes. How demoralizing!' He felt repulsive and ashamed, so he went back to the temple to listen to the sutra. But when he arrived there, it was already over. He was truly sorry and repented for several days afterwards.

While he was feeling ashamed at the brothel, his friend in the temple was unable to calm his mind to listen to the sutra. [Master laughs.] His mind kept wondering to the brothel and thought, 'Gosh! This is really boring! Why do I stay here listening to the sutra? My friend is now eating and drinking and having a good time, while I sit here listening to some sutra. How boring!' [Master laughs.] As he thought about it, he got into a bad mood.

After a long time both of the friends died. The angel of death pulled the friend who listened to the sutra to hell, and dragged the friend who went to the brothel to heaven. [Master laughs.] Do you know why? You don't know! It is because everything is created by the

46. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 29, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

mind! God does not look at our conduct alone. He looks into our hearts! Sometimes we see a person's behavior but we don't really know if he is that way. Unless we can measure from within, it is very difficult to judge the inner person. He may appear very kind, but his heart is not kind; or he may have a very loving heart, but it doesn't seem like that from his outer appearance.

The same with some of our fellow initiates. You know that they were not so virtuous in the past; some were big gangsters and some were lady gangsters. [Master and audience laugh.] Some have killed others or have committed some deeds that were not acceptable to society. But after they repent, they try to purify themselves and practice self-cultivation sincerely. Eventually their sins will be eliminated. While there are some others who may not have committed any crime during their life time, but they roam around, refuse to learn meditation, and take only half a glimpse at the Master and feel nothing. They leave to look for other Masters. They are always 'shopping' around; we might say that they are 'shopping around the mountains' because most of the enlightened Masters lived in the mountains. [Master laughs.] They jump from one mountain to another because the other seems greener and prettier. Due to their lack of sincerity in spiritual practice, they are not successful in the things they do.

Therefore, we cannot fool God by our seemingly kind outer appearance. We cannot fool God because to fool God means to fool ourselves. We are fully aware of what we want; and whatever we do, whether we are sincere or not, we know it clearly.

You have also read some stories of the ancient Masters. Some of them were pretty weird, like Jigong (a Chinese Master). We heard that he ate meat and drank wine, and was always drunk and falling down without dignity. Then there was the Chin-Shan living Buddha. He was also a weird monk. [Master laughs.] He was always very sloppy and undignified. But they practiced and knew their own level of spiritual attainment; and the Buddhas knew as well. Therefore, even though it is not easy to judge from the outside, but as spiritual practitioners, we know from the inside whether we are sincere or not. Even if we don't know, God knows. It is not due to our outer performance that other people will believe in us, not necessarily so! God makes the judgement.

Being truly sincere is the most important in spiritual practice. At group meditation, some people may sit there quietly, but their mind is not focused. That's why Master often tells you that when you go to group meditation, you must keep your body, speech and mind clean. [Master laughs.] Otherwise, you receive no merit from sitting there; it is worse than those who meditate sincerely at home. They are very sincere and humble when they meditated every day; thus they receive more merit. [Master laughs.] But of course we will receive a lot of merit when we attend group meditation anyway, because the sincerity of the others will affect us. For example, when we come here and see hundreds and thousands of people meditating intently and sitting so seriously, we might feel ashamed and try to sit quietly for a while; [Master laughs.] thus very naturally we will receive a lot of merit through concentration and purification of the mind.

SOMEONE WHO IS EVEN GREATER THAN MASTER ⁴⁷

There was an enlightened Mster who belonged to the Brahmin caste. In India there are many castes and the Brahmin caste is one of the higher ones. This Mster was very poor. He had a wealthy disciple who was a cloth merchant, but he was a miser, and very narrow-minded.

47. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 29, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

One day, this Brahmin Master needed a good quality, beautiful cloth to wrap up his religious items in, such as his small bell, 'wooden fish' and scriptures. Indian Brahmin practitioners had great respect for these religious items, so he went to ask the wealthy, cloth merchant disciple if he had such a cloth that he could give him.

The disciple said to him, 'No, Master! I am sorry! If only you had come a little earlier, I would definitely have had such a cloth, but you have come too late. I have just sold it. I don't have such a good quality cloth now. I am very sorry.' He continued, 'But I shall remember that you want a cloth like that. I will not forget. I will remember. Please always remind me and I will give it to you when I have it.' Still, he always never had such a cloth. [Master laughs.]

Another day, the Master came again. This time the wife of the wealthy disciple eavesdropped on their conversation. She immediately sent a servant to get the Master. She asked the Master, 'What was it that you requested and my husband did not give you?' The Master then told her the story about his need for a piece of precious cloth to wrap his religious items, et cetera. 'But your husband doesn't have such a cloth,' the Master said. The wealthy disciple's wife said, 'Don't worry! You will definitely have it tomorrow morning, and not only one piece of cloth, but two pieces. I promise you.'

Later, when the husband came home after selling his cloth, the wife asked, 'Have you closed the shop?' The husband replied, 'Yes, I have.' She said, 'Hurry back to your shop now and fetch me two pieces of such and such cloth.' Her husband was surprised, 'Oh! What is the rush? Can I give them to you tomorrow night? I definitely have some, but I will give them to you tomorrow. Is that alright?' The wife said, 'No! I want the two pieces right now! At once! You are not willing to give them to me, are you? Ah?' Of course, the husband said, 'No, no. Immediately, I will go and fetch them right away. Okay!' The poor wealthy husband, he was not talking to the kind and simple Master; he was talking to this great wife.

That is why the Chinese call their wives 'tai tai' (meaning great). Is that not so? No just 'ta ta' (meaning big), but 'tai tai'! Not just one 'tai.' 'Tai yang' (the Chinese characters for 'sun') only has one 'tai,' but your wives are called 'tai tai,' with two 'tai.' This means that nothing is greater than them. Even the kings are only called 'ta wong' (great king), while the wives are 'tai tai.' From this one can see how much the Chinese respect women, how much they respect their wives. Therefore, when the wife said something, he immediately ran back to the shop. Even though it was very late at night, he had to reopen the shop and bring back the two most beautiful pieces of cloth that his wife wanted.

Early in the next morning his wife sent a servant with the two pieces of cloth to the Master. She also wrote a note to the Master, which said, 'Master, from now on please tell me if there is anything that you need. I promise you that you will have it immediately. You don't have to talk to my husband about it.' [Master and audience laugh.] This means that this wife is even greater than the master. It is like that in this world, I am sorry to say! These facts are difficult to accept, but [Master laughs.] such situation happens! Sometimes certain situations are like this.

There are similar cases with many of our fellow practitioners. After receiving initiation, they say, 'I am sorry, Master! My wife does not allow me to be a vegetarian.' [Master laughs.] I don't dare ask further, 'Whom do you really want to listen to?' It is obvious! [Master laughs.] Then life after life they listen to their wives. Under such circumstances, what is the use of an enlightened Master's appearance on earth? Many people ask me, 'Since Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are so compassionate, why don't they initiate everyone when

they descend?' Even initiation is of no use to some people, is that not so? They won't listen to you! Therefore, everyone goes his own way, and chooses different ways of life.

EMPTY AND FULL ⁴⁸

This is a story about a Japanese Zen Master and his disciple. One day, the disciple asked his Zen Master, 'Master, now that nothing is on my mind, what should I do?' He meant that he was empty! He had attained the level of complete tranquility. Substances are not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from substances. Having something is the same as having nothing. There is little difference between keeping a vegetarian diet and eating meat... [Master and audience laugh.] something like that! So, he asked his Master, 'Master! I am doing very well in my spiritual practice. There is nothing on my mind. What should I do now?' He meant that since he had attained the highest level, what else could he do!

His Master then said to him, 'In that case, you discard it!' The disciple replied, 'But I have nothing at all. How can I discard nothing?' At that time his Master became impatient and said, 'Well, then bring it out.' [Master laughs.] Do you understand? You don't! [Laughter] Ah! What can we do?! Maybe you have nothing inside, so you don't know what to take out. [Master and audience laugh.]

Think about it and you will understand. If a person has nothing on his mind, then why would he ask this question?! Being worried about what to do means that he was still full inside. Do you understand? It is just that he thought he did not have anything. That was why his Master asked him to discard it, to put it down. However, he still argued, 'I don't have anything. What can I put down?' So, his Master said, 'Very well, take it out.' He meant that since you could not put it down, then take it out and show it to him, and he would put it down for you. He wanted to show him that he still had something, still tied up in knots! A person without any knots has no need to worry about what he does today, what he will do tomorrow, what happens after he attains enlightenment, or what happens if he is not enlightened, or what he should do now that he is at such a high level or at such a low level in his practice... Do you know what I mean? If one is empty inside, why ask any questions?! What else can one do when one has nothing? Isn't that right? For example, if there is not a drop of water in this cup, and he still says, 'There is no water in this cup. How can I drink it?' Without any water in it, there is no need to ask the question of drinking it or not. His questions meant that he was still full inside, only that he thought he was not.

Most spiritual practitioners are like this. After practicing for a while, they are full of theories. They read too many Zen stories, and listen to too many of their master's lectures. Then they speak in a haughty tone, 'Substances are not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from substances,' and those kinds of sayings. They go on and on, and think that they are great, that they have learned everything. There were a few persons, monks and lay persons, who were like this. They followed me for a while. They had listened to all the cassettes, [Master laughs.] and had watched all the video tapes. Then they said, 'I have learned everything. I don't want anything any more. What should I do now?' [Master laughs.] Let's just say that as an example. Then they left and went outside. In a while they knew what they should do. Only when they were outside and confronted by trials did they know that they were not that good!

We need to be careful when we feel that we do not have anything! We lock everything up, and then look from the outside and say, 'There is nothing at all in our house.' In fact, we

48. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, October 24, 1994 (Originally in English).

have only locked them up. Many people do this, not just those who practice the Quan Yin method. Most of the people who practice other methods are also like this. They all think that they are great. You have met this type of person, have you not? They always argue, and claim that they are full of knowledge of the scriptures! They think that they are empty, and that a vegetarian diet is the same as a meat diet... Everything is the same, and so on. In fact, they still have too many attachments. Their hearts are filled with knots. They cannot become open-minded.

I understood this story the moment I read it. How come you still do not understand it after I have explained to you for half a day? [Applause] Therefore, don't ask me, 'What should we do when we are empty?' If you are truly empty, you will have no need to ask. You should not have any questions, and you will not mind anything. By then you will not be concerned about attaining Buddhahood or not attaining Buddhahood. You will not worry about anything. It does not matter to you whether you go to heaven or hell, or whether you have merits or karma. You will care about nothing at all! Do you understand now? [Audience: Yes!]

'Master, now that nothing is on my mind, what should I do?'

'In that case, you discard it!'

'But I have nothing at all. How can I discard nothing?'

'Well, then take it out.'

THREE POISONOUS SNAKES ⁴⁹

According to madam Alexandra David-Neel, in 'Magic and Mystery in Tibet,' there was a temple with a lama. 'Lama' doesn't mean monk; lama means anyone who has passed the examination in the Tibetan monastery. But all the monks have to pass this lama degree, if they are learned monks. Some of the laborer monks and some kind of guarding monks are different. Now there was a lama who studied very hard and meditated. He always did retreats alone and was really very, very diligent in his practice. He could sit all day long without moving, et cetera. Can you do that? No. I can't, even. I sleep. He had practiced and could even control his breathing so that his breathing had become very fine. The people whom they say have stopped breathing, that doesn't mean they've really stopped breathing. Those yogis control their breathing until it's so fine that even if you put a hair in front of their nose, it doesn't move. Because they breathe inwardly, the breathing becomes so fine. In the Chinese Zen tradition, it is called, 'turtle-breathing.' That's why the turtles can live in the sea, in the water, because they turn their breathing in a different way. In yoga they call it 'stopping breathing,' but actually it doesn't. It's so fine that it becomes like nonexistent.

Now this lama had already reached the level of non-breathing or turtle-breathing. Men become turtles; great progress! [Laughter] Then he wanted to learn another step further, 'tummo' heat. The heat from the solar plexus in the abdomen is used to heat the body when they go into the Himalayan Mountains, and when it's cold in the winter even. They never get cold. They don't have to wear any clothes. They just clothe themselves with a thin cotton sheet or some things like that.

49. Group meditation, Austin Center, Texas, U.S.A., August 27, 1994 (Originally in English).

However, the Master of that place did not accept him. The lama meditated twenty hours a day, he ate only once a day, and he kept the precepts; but the Master did not accept him to learn this tummo heat. The lama thought that his meditation was not enough, so he shut himself up, and made a retreat again for a long time. He meditated without sleeping, without eating, even. He thought, 'Okay!' And he came back again, and asked the Master to accept him. Everyone thought he would have no problem, but the Master still wouldn't accept him. It must have been something from inside, not outside. Everyone thought that something was wrong with the Master. Why was he so unfair?

People talked, talked, talked, about the Master who was unfair. Most of the Masters in Tibet or India, when they don't accept you, they don't accept. They don't talk. They don't explain; there's no need for that. They have enough power, reputation, and privilege to do that. But this Master, perhaps he was humble, perhaps he was gentle, perhaps he wanted to avoid gossip about his unfairness in the temple, so he explained to this man. He said: 'I think that you are not yet ready, but if you want, I'll give you a test, all right? If you pass this test, then I will accept you. Fair enough?'

Anyhow, the test was easy. The Master told him, 'If you can meditate, sit in this room for one day without moving, then I'll accept you.' Oh, it was so easy. For the lama, it was like a child's game because he had practiced every day. Everything is just practice. Even to sit without moving, is just practice. It's like people in the circus who practice until they can walk on a thin rope without falling. We can do that with practice. He had practiced very well, 'Oh, just one day to meditate, no problem!' he thought this to himself. He dared not say that openly, but inside he was very proud. He accepted right away. Everyone knew about that and thought the Master must have been joking, trying to make fun, or something. Otherwise, maybe he was bored in the temple with nothing to do, and was trying to make trouble for the disciple; because this man, not to say one day, but for one week, didn't have to move. No problem, he had already practiced for a long time like that. To practice the heat, first you have to meditate and cleanse yourself. There are many regulations before the Master accepts you further even. So, before you want to learn tummo heat, you practice with me to sit and meditate one day without moving, at least. [Laughter]

Everyone thought this lama had already fulfilled all these preconditions, so why didn't the Master accept him? Nevertheless, the Master said, 'Okay, you sit here one day, and I'll accept you.' Before the test began, the lama asked once more to make sure that was all there was to it, 'just to sit one day in this room?' The Master said, 'Yes, nothing more.' Also just to make sure everyone heard it, [Laughter] so that the Master would not make another test again, because they do; Masters do. Like the Master of Milarepa, Marpa – he was famous for not keeping any promises. [Laughter]

Also, like the story I told you of one monk in India, I've forgotten his name, who never kept his promises. The Masters don't have to. Ordinary people can scold them and say, 'You don't keep your promises! You're terrible!' But the Masters don't care. They don't care what others think of them. Sometimes the disciples wanted to hold this Master, lock him in the house, even. He was so scared that every time people invited him, he promised, 'Okay, I'll come the next day or next week.' Yet he never came, so he was very famous for breaking promises. Milarepa's Master was also very famous for breaking promises. He made him build a house and then promised that after he built the house he would give him initiation. But then another house was built and another house was built, and he had him bring a stone here and bring a stone there. However, he never kept his promise, and this lama was afraid of a case like that. He read too many books. [Master and audience laugh.] He had to make sure the Master promised in front of everyone that the lama would just have

to sit one day here and then he would be accepted. 'Fine,' the Master said, 'No problem. Just that.'

Then, in front of everyone, the lama went into the room. Suddenly the Master threw in three snakes and shut the door. He said, 'You sit in there.' [Laughter] The lama sat throughout the day. He had no problem being shut in there. After the whole day, the Master opened the door, but still refused the lama. Being very kind and gentle, he explained. Some Masters never explain. Most Masters don't explain what they do to you. They scold you, and they don't say why. Even if you think, 'It's not my fault,' they still don't explain until you know it yourself, or you don't know it. It's your problem. [Master laughs.] They're very sparing with words. Actually, you know why? It's good enough that they already accept disciples, say a few words, and teach inside. [Master points to Her wisdom eye.]

How would you like to go and talk and teach people all the time? It's scary. You have only a few children at home and you can't even teach them. It's very difficult to teach people when they have already grown up and have a lot of fixed ideas inside their heads. They are a lot of trouble; they misunderstand you all the time.

Anyway, the Master here was very kind and explained to him. He said, 'How can a person like you progress any further? In the room, there were poisonous snakes and you didn't drive them out. You just sat there with them. You're so stupid! [Laughter] It doesn't matter how high a level you practice, what is the use of such a stupid and a no-commonsense person?' He continued, 'You only pay attention to the technique, to the appearance of things, like how to meditate well, sit all day, don't move, and sit correctly. But you don't pay attention to your inner movement, your inner turbulence. It doesn't matter how you practice or even if you practice the tummo heat from the solar plexus, it's no use to you. It's no use to anyone. What is the use?'

Then the lama finally understood that the three poisonous snakes the Master threw inside were his own poisonous snakes: Greed, anger and attachment – lust for things. Can you understand clearly what the Master meant? [Applause] The lama was so stupid. He thought that the Master had tested him to see whether he was courageous enough to sit there with the three poisonous snakes. Also, the snakes represented his own inner qualities that he did not try to control. He just tried to sit, and to sit perfectly, which is an art we can perfect, we can master. Just like the people who walk on the rope in the circus, they have no magical power. They have no meditation practice. They just practice. It is just like walking in the air or walking on the water.

I forgot to tell you how to walk on the water. You want to hear? This is also practice, but for twenty-five years at least. People can walk in the air because they concentrate on one thing. They might concentrate on the stars. Some people concentrate on the stars at night and can walk, but when the stars 'set,' they have to stop. Some people are so good at the skill that they can keep this star always in their mind. Therefore, they can continue to walk many days, nonstop, with no eating, no sleeping. No problem. This is the power of the mind, the power of practice. Anything you practice well, you can do well. In English, they also say, 'Practice makes the master.' So, the Master also practiced for many lifetimes.

When you master the art of egolessness, then you become a Master. Master yourself first, and then you become Master of the universe. Very simple. Nothing more. No one else you have to fight with, no army you have to battle with – just yourself. Once you master yourself, you are the Master. Everyone in the universe will recognize it. It doesn't matter how many people you win; it doesn't count. Master yourself. Always check inside, what is

the rise and fall of your own habits, thinking and personality. Keep on with your business. Mind your own business. Talk less. If it is not necessary, don't talk. Eat just enough, sleep just enough, et cetera. When you become a Master, you can do anything you want. You can eat all day long, you can talk all day long, [Laughter] can sleep all day long. Really, I promise you. Then you work or not work, do or not do, it's up to you. You meditate or don't meditate, it is your choice. You eat or not eat, it's also your problem. No one cares anymore because you've become the Master already. You've mastered everything. You control, you decide what to do. You will not harm yourself or anyone else anymore. [Applause]

After that, the lama bowed to the Master and thanked him for explaining what it was all about. The test was finished and he had failed. Everyone thought he had won because he was so courageous to sit there with the three poisonous snakes.

Yes, many of us do that. Many of us shut our hearts and minds and sit day and night with our three poisonous snakes and are not afraid. But we're afraid of guns and thieves. We're afraid of the neighbors who are vicious. We're afraid of scorpions, even afraid of cockroaches. [Laughter] We're afraid of other people who are not nice, who are not gentle, but we're not afraid of the poisonous snakes that we lock up inside our own being. This is also a good lesson for us. Try to throw these poisonous snakes out, and then we're free. [Applause]

Sometimes we are so used to these kinds of habits that we don't even know they are there. Sometimes you tell lies without even realizing you are telling lies. Some people try to scold or blame you for something, and you say, 'No, I didn't do it.' These habits pop up right away, and you know you did it. But it doesn't matter; it's all right. These things are not so harmful. Only when you truly deliberately lie to harm other people, or try to cover a very great mistake so that other people get blamed instead of you, then it becomes a very grievous thing. Try to take care that you don't do that. But those that are just habits, and you know and repent right away, it's all right. You don't do it on purpose, and you don't harm people. You don't deliberately harm people. Although this is also no good, at least you know you have it. You know it is no good and you try to minimize it. These are the things that you should take care of. Only you have to answer to your own conscience. It is not I who accuse you or tell you that you are a bad person or that you try to tell lies to me. It's not true. These are just habits. You don't check yourself that clearly. You think you're okay. You think you meditate very well with the three poisonous snakes inside. [Master laughs.] You're very courageous, yes, indeed. People who climb Mount Everest are not as courageous as you.

Also, there are many things that you think you're not greedy about. We talk about the three poisonous snakes like greed, anger, and lust – the kinds of attachment. 'Lust' means attachment to material things and even emotional pleasures. Like greed – many people bring their children or their own selves here just so that I can heal them of sickness or things like that. It's not necessarily so. Master knows inside, and if it's your destiny to be healed on that day, then Master will do it. There is no need to force the issue. We think that outside we are greedy for money and things like that. But inside, as practitioners, we should not be greedy even for blessings. This is a kind of poisonous snake also. Not necessarily you are greedy for money or fame. Anything that doesn't belong to you and you try to snatch – spiritually, emotionally or financially – is greed. When you go outside, you tell the non-initiated people, 'Oh, Master knows everything. You just pray to Her, and then She knows.' But you, yourself, shove the problem in front of me, and even have to make noise so that I know, so that I pay attention to you. In that case, you also keep the poisonous snake – the poisonous snake of ignorance, the poisonous snake of very little

faith. Jesus always said, 'Our Father / Mother makes everything in the world. How would He not clothe or feed you, oh you, of little faith?'

We have to keep our speech and actions the same way. If you say, 'Master is omnipresent; She knows everything,' then let Her do Her work. There's no need to tell Her anything, or come rushing up. What for? It's not yet time for the child and you rush me to deliver her. [Laughter] What for? We practice patience, endurance and everything else. This is also a kind of greed that most people who have a problem always commit. They think they're not greedy and that already their body, speech and mind are all clean. I tell you, some of you come and I get a headache for three days. All clean! Very clean indeed! Your clothes are clean; your hair is clean; your nails are clean, but you are not that clean.

So, we try always to mind our own business. To see how we fare with our own business is better than criticizing the next person and the initiates. Make sure you understand that the poisonous snakes are inside. Also, try to avoid the poisonous snakes outside, please. Don't say Master Ching Hai says inside is more important than outside and then just walk on the heads of snakes and things like that! [Laughter] Don't try that. Don't try to sit inside with the three live snakes like this monk. That's stupid! If it were up to me, I'd also scold him. Not every Master is as kind as this Master who explained to the lama about the three poisonous snakes, and the reason why he did not accept him.

TO ERR IS HUMAN, TO REPENT IS SAINT ⁵⁰

There is another story about a man, probably Japanese. He had an affair with the wife of a district chief or something like that. Then it was found out. So, he was forced to kill the husband, and took the wife and ran away. Now both of them became thieves. But the adulterous woman was very greedy, so eventually this man was disgusted with her and left. He went to another place and did not steal anything anymore but became just a beggar. In the daytime, he would go out and beg for some food; and at night, he would come home. He began to dig a mountain, because there was a pass which was very dangerous. Many people had died there. He tried to do something good before he died; because he felt sorry for what he had done before, he thought he was very bad. Now not only did he repent his mistakes, but he tried to make up for them by doing something else better. Not only say, 'Oh, I am sorry, I'll never do it again,' and finish; but we have to do some counter-actions to make up for what we had done before.

So now this man, he dug the mountain pass everyday, every night alone. Then one day, the son of the district chief, the man whom he killed before caught up with him and wanted to kill him. So, this digging man said, 'I am willingly to give my life to you, you can kill me; but let me finish this, the only good thing in my life first; then you can kill me.' The boy said, 'Okay.' So, he stayed around, hung around, and waited. But then he got bored, nothing to do. So, he helped the man to dig the mountain pass also. After sometime the tunnel through the mountain was finished and everyone could go through it safely. The man, the killer said to the son, 'Now you can kill me.'

But then the son of the enemy knelt down, cried, and said to the man, 'How can I kill you? You have become my teacher.' Because during the years that they worked together digging the tunnel, the son, the boy had become very impressed by the good qualities of the man whom he wanted to kill, and who was supposed to be his enemy before. But now, he changed completely. He only thought of good and positive things – of offering, of sacrifice, and not other things.

50. Group meditation, Austin Center, Texas, U.S.A., August 14, 1994 (Originally in English).

Before perhaps, he was originally a good man. But he was probably seduced by this bad woman and then because of her, he did these bad things. Then because he was good, therefore he knew that was bad and left her, and became his original self. Therefore, it doesn't matter how bad he was, it doesn't matter whether he was bad or he was originally good. But because he repented and he completely wanted to change himself and he wanted to do something for the society, for other people, therefore he also impressed his enemy, the one who wanted to kill him. And not only impressed him, but changed him into a nonviolent person.

It didn't matter how good the son was, if he wanted to kill that person, he would be in trouble. He would have this killing guilt within his heart all the time, and it would be no good for anyone. Therefore, he transformed that person into another good person. Not only he transformed himself, but he transformed the enemy and he transformed the hatred between the two families into goodness and friendship. This is a great thing.

Therefore, you see cultivating ourselves is very, very important and it is truly the only way. If we want to cultivate the world, if we want to help the world, we must truly cultivate and improve ourselves. There is no other way. So, the way we are practicing together is inside and out. Inside we contact the almighty power through the Quan Yin method, through the Light and Sound everyday; so that we can have more strength to transform the outer character, and the outer habits that we have accumulated not only since birth but since many thousands, hundreds of thousands of births.

This is very strong indeed, so we have to use the inner power and the determination to change it. It's very difficult, I know; but we must do it. If we don't do it this life, we have to come back and do it again next life. Next life don't do it, have to come back again and again and again, suffer a lot of things. If you are lazy now and don't want to practice with me the method that I have taught you, well, it's up to you. You can come back again, many times; you are welcome. I don't need to come back, I have other things to do.

THE TRUTH BEHIND FEAR (2) ⁵¹

This is the night I will tell you a ghost story to test your courage, and see how you will sleep tonight. You will know, okay?

Now, there was a very young and beautiful wife, who became sick and nearly died. She was on her death bed and told her husband, 'I love you very much, and I don't want to leave you. Please, after I die, don't marry another person. You promise me! Okay?'

Then she worried that her husband would not keep the promise, so she threatened him. She said, 'If you marry another wife, I will become a ghost and take care of you.' It's terrible! That's what she said to her husband, 'I will make you suffer, always, forever, and eternally!' So, the husband was maybe afraid of the wife. But here [Master points to the book.] they say, 'respected the wife.' We always respect the wife, do we not? We respect the wife, but we're not afraid! So, the husband respected the wife and didn't think of remarrying another person.

But as God always makes trouble for human beings, he met another beautiful woman, younger, charming, sweeter and more attractive, and richer even! Rich! Oh, terrible! And she even loved him very much and maybe more than the wife. Oh, too bad! That was only three months after the funeral service. Now what can we do about that?

51. Group meditation, Austin Center, Texas, U.S.A., August 14, 1994 (Originally in English).

So, he got engaged to her. After the engagement (the engagement happened during the daytime), that night the husband saw the ghost of the wife coming. 'Ah ha! As promised, here I come.' She appeared in front of him and scolded him and nagged him, saying that he had broken his promise; that he did not love her; that he was not sincere; that he was a bad husband; that he had no conscience; that he was a lousy man; that he was a terrible human being; that he was not a virtuous Quan Yin practitioner, et cetera.

Then the husband got very scared! Because this ghost was so terribly intelligent; she knew exactly what had happened between the husband and the new fiancée. She told him what time he did what with her, and what time he gave her what, and talked to her about what. She knew everything, everything! So, he couldn't deny it. But he was very scared.

He was so scared that he could not sleep, he could not eat, and he dared not go to see his fiancée often. And their love affair nearly went on the rocks. So, some people told him that he should go to a temple and talk about his suffering to a Zen Master, and maybe the Zen Master could help him. Oh, my God! The Zen Master takes care of everything, including ghosts and marriage.

So, the Zen Master truly helped him. He said to the husband, 'Your ex-wife has become a ghost.' This we knew. 'And she is very intelligent. So, she knows everything that you did with your fiancée. Actually, you should respect such a ghost. But there is a way to drive her away. Now, next time if the ghost appears, you have to make a bet with her.' The Zen Master said that she knew everything; she knew too much already. But probably there was something she didn't know. If she answered incorrectly, then she should not come back and bother him any more. Then he could marry the one he loved.

Because she was dead! She could not serve him in any way. She could not cook for him. She could not take care of anything. So, the husband asked the Zen Master, 'What can I do? What should I ask her?'

And the Zen Master said to him, 'Next time when she comes, take a handful of mung beans in your hand and ask her how many beans are inside. She surely cannot answer that. And then she will disappear. Because, if she cannot answer that question, you will know this is only an illusion of your own mind, your own conscience or your own imagination because you're already too scared, afraid of the wife and imagining, an illusion of your mind. If she doesn't answer, if she cannot answer, then you know it's an illusion and she will vanish.'

So, the next night, truly, the ghost appeared. And the husband told her, 'Oh, yes, you know everything. You are very intelligent; I cannot do anything about it.' And then the ghost said, 'Yes, I know. And I also know that today you went to see a Zen Master and you talked about us.'

So, the man said, 'Okay, since you know everything, now, can you tell me how many beans are in my hand?' As soon as he asked this question, the ghost disappeared.

So, you know, was there a real ghost? No! Then you shouldn't be afraid tonight.

CANDY AND GOD ⁵²

There is an Indian story about a bar of candy that came to see God in heaven and complained: 'Dear God, I am so sweet. I am so nice! I keep the five precepts. I meditate all the time.' The sugar candy, as you know, it always sits on the table doing nothing. He says he never does harm to anyone. 'But anyone, even the ants, the flies – anyone who comes near me wants to eat me. Why? What have I done? Doesn't the law of karma exist anymore?' Because God says that if you do something bad, if you harm someone, if you are sour, then people will return sourness to you. But if you are sweet to people, if you are nice and you don't do any harm to people, then they will never harm you, right?

So, the candy said, 'Why me? I am a candy. [Laughter] I am so sweet, and people always eat me and abuse me, why?' And God said, 'You better step a little bit further before I answer you.' And the candy said, 'Why, You don't like me?' So, God said, 'Just do it! Stand away, please!' He's nearly lost his temper. Oh, He's shouted very hard, very loud. And the sugar was shaking, thinking that God got angry with him and didn't like him. He said, 'M-m-m-y G-g-god, but what did I do?' So, God said, 'You didn't do anything, but if you stay too near, I will also want to eat you!' [Laughter and applause.]

Everything in this world has a nature of its own. Some are charming, some are seducing, like the candy, chocolate, the cakes, and some burn everything like fire, as soon as you get near. It's like the Master: You can never understand Him or Her. She is one minute like that, the other minute like this. She does a lot of things, but we never see Her do anything. Everything is so incomprehensible. That is the Master. The so-called Master is like that. So, we can't blame the Master for doing this and that or for scolding us, but we should just be careful. If we are around, keep our mind pure. But sometimes you cannot catch up with your mind. Before you catch up with it, it's already thought about something. It's too late. And then the Master already caught it, because it is already there. So, it's too bad. Or maybe you did something yesterday and you happen to see Her today, and you may have forgotten about it, but the Master doesn't. So, that's the thing.

DIFFERENT LEVELS, DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS ⁵³

Now, I will tell you a story about Zen. In a temple in Japan lived two monks. The senior monk was very intelligent, enlightened, dignified and good looking. The junior was less attractive and had only one good eye. He was also rather dumb, perhaps still in the astral level.

One time, as the senior monk had exerted himself from busy work, he retreated to take a rest and to meditate, and he told his one-eyed junior brother to take care of the 'sun plaza,' the temple where they lived. That day, a wandering monk came from afar to their temple; he requested a vegetarian meal and to spend the night there, as he would be leaving for another place the next day. Although the junior was just at the first level, the astral level, which was nothing much, he still wanted to follow the rules to test the visiting monk. He seldom had a chance to act as the abbot! Since his senior was sleeping, he was the king, and he was going to test the monk. As he sat on a table covered with a saffron cloth, he asked the visitor to sit on the ground [Master and audience laugh.] and then asked, 'Where are you from?' The visiting monk replied, 'I come from Tokyo, and I would like to stay here for the night, because I have to hurry on my way tomorrow to attend a funeral.'

52. Group meditation, San Jose Center, California, U.S.A., July 16, 1994 (Originally in English).

53. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 5, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

The junior said, 'You are welcome! If you are capable of answering my questions, I will let you stay as long as you wish.' The monk from Tokyo said, 'Of course! I am aware of this rule. Please ask any question, as you wish.' However, the junior was at a loss as what to ask until he came up with an idea. He thought, 'This is best done in a Zen manner, where no words are necessary. Then he will definitely lose, because his answers will always be wrong since it is entirely up to me to say whether the answer is right or wrong.'

After a speechless question-and-answer session between them, the visiting monk went to the senior, saying, 'Well! I have to leave now because I lost. I just came here to say farewell to you. Your junior brother is truly terrific and incredible! I am very sorry. Since I was defeated, I can no longer stay here to learn from you. If your junior brother is so fantastic, you must be even more superb! Unfortunately, I have lost, and according to the rule, I must leave now.'

The senior monk who had rested enough, asked, 'What were your questions and answers? How could you lose so easily?' The visitor said, 'He let me express myself first, so I showed him one finger, as a metaphor of the almighty respectable one in the whole world – the Buddha, the fully enlightened one. Immediately, your junior showed two fingers in return, [Laughter] and so I lost! I knew what he meant, which was that the Buddha alone would be useless if He just sat there and did not go out to give lectures and spread His teachings. The Buddha and His teachings must go side-by-side with one another. Of course, I was defeated and admired him very much. Then, in an attempt to turn things around, I raised three fingers like this, [Laughter] indicating that if the Buddha, the dharma (the teachings) and the sangha (assembly of monks and nuns) are unified as one, then it is truly perfect. What I meant was, though living together in numbers, the monastic order is harmonious as one; the Buddha was the only one and most precious in the world; His teachings are also the one and only Truth. Therefore, I showed him three fingers, representing the Buddha, the teachings and the monastic order.'

'Oh! Your junior immediately clenched his fist and punched at my nose here. [Laughter] He almost hit me! It represented a person who had attained immediate enlightenment. [Master laughs.] [Laughter and applause.] What he meant was that, although the Buddha, the teachings and the monastic order are supposed to give people liberation in one lifetime, this 'immediate enlightenment' is even better. Just give the person a punch and he will be enlightened immediately. I was at the end of my wit; this was beyond me. Therefore, I immediately came to see you to extend my apology and admiration, and then I will be on my way.'

After the visiting monk had left, the junior ran panting from behind and asked his senior: 'Where is that monk from Tokyo? Where has he gone?' The senior said, 'He has been defeated by you, so he left. You are terrific! You are really terrific! I never knew that you were so enlightened! I am sorry. All these years I have always looked down on you. Only now do I know that you are so superb!' The junior said, 'What do you mean I defeated him? I was going to hit him but he escaped.' [Master and audience laugh.] The senior asked, 'Why did you want to hit him? He said you defeated him, so why did you want to hit him? Tell me about the contents of your questions and answers.'

The junior said, 'What you don't know is that this monk was extremely arrogant. He challenged me as soon as he arrived. Observing that I had only one eye, he made fun of me. [Master and audience laugh.] He immediately held up one finger in mockery to laugh at me. However, I remembered that you had told me to practice humility, and to tolerate even when people hit or scold me. Since I am a monk, I had no choice but to endure his humiliation. I also remembered the Buddha had taught us to repay hostility with

benevolence and refrain from taking revenge. Therefore, I tried hard not to be angry with him or insult him in return. I praised him by holding up two fingers to indicate that he was really blessed to have two eyes. [Master and audience laugh.] Even then, he was not satisfied. Observing that I was giving in, he continued to insult me further.'

The senior asked, 'How did he insult you? He is a monk! How could he possibly insult you?' The junior said, 'He showed me three fingers. He meant that the two of us together had only three eyes. [Master and audience laugh.] I was really mad! I could not tolerate any more so I raised my fist at him, but he managed to escape. [Master and audience laugh.] That was why I chased after him. Lucky for him that he fled; otherwise, I would have given him a few more punches!' [Master and audience laugh.] The monk had fled. Otherwise, there might have been more stories.

Use wisdom to perceive the Truth

This is a funny story of course, but it conveys a serious moral. I often tell you some funny stories, not just to make you laugh, but for you to understand the meaning behind them. Most of the stories I tell have meanings in them, even though sometimes I explain and sometimes I don't. If I explain, you will understand one aspect, and later you should continue to think about other aspects; if I don't, you should think about it yourself and explain to yourself. We understand according to our level.

This story means that if our levels are different, our perceptions will be different. If our hearts are pure and positive, what we see will be positive, comfortable and beautiful; if our hearts are not pure, but negative, everything we see will turn out to be bad. So, if we show one thing to different persons, each will look at a different corner and have different perception.

Why should we pursue spiritual practice? It is because after practicing, our wisdom will develop, our mind will open and our perception will be accurate. That is all. Looking at the same thing, if we can see through to its Truth, we will not misunderstand and will not be confused or cheated by illusions, which lead to misinterpretation and misconception.

That's why after we have practiced spiritually for a while, we will become happier living in this world. Perhaps we still have suffering; it's not that we have none, but we will not become violent, nor do we have hatred, because we understand the ephemeral nature of the world as well as the law of cause and effect. If someone takes something from us, it is not necessarily bad for us. We know this very clearly after we have practiced spiritually and become enlightened. Otherwise, no matter how many times we read the story about an old man losing his horse and that it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, or how many other similar stories we read, we don't practice what we learn. We already know enough morals, but if we don't quiet down each day and meditate in order to digest what we know, we cannot use them. We just study them, read them and forget about them. Very few people can put the teachings of the saints into practice.

After practicing spiritually, we do not take this world and everything too seriously, nor do we get lost in passion or fame and name like before. Nothing can upset us or bind us. We can have children and fulfill our duties or the needs of the body, but we are not lost in it, which we know very clearly.

THE BEGGAR AND THE MILLIONAIRE ⁵⁴

There once was a beggar, and in his home town there lived a millionaire. But that person was very, very stingy! So, everything he had, he stuck somewhere in a cupboard or dug a hole in the earth and hid. No one, not even he, [Laughter] knew where it was. In this way, he didn't have to spend!

So, he was very, very stingy! He never gave anyone a penny, not to mention refugees or the Red Cross; he didn't even want to hear about such things. He wanted to keep his money intact. As for spending in the home, he was also very, very expert in stinginess. So, his wife, his children, his mother, his brother, his sister – everyone – was miserable.

Then one day, a beggar came to the millionaire's door and wanted a piece of gold from him. The millionaire had a lot of gold, but of course, he kicked the beggar out and also told his workers and family to throw him out.

The next day, however, the beggar came back again and wanted the same thing, a piece of gold. So, the millionaire once again kicked him out. But the beggar came back again yet another day – and again and again, day after day, month after month, year after year. He really practiced patience! [Laughter] He must have meditated or something because he was so persistent. Patient endurance is one of the virtues the Buddha taught His disciples, one of the six perfections.

Year after year it went on like this until one day the millionaire was so fed up with the beggar that he finally cut a piece of gold, a very small one, and gave it to him. [Master comments that we should learn from this story: Whatever we want to do, we should persist in, and maybe we'll succeed!] [Laughter]

Then the beggar became very, very happy. He jumped around and sang 'Hallelujah!' And then he took the piece of gold to his bosom and went back to his place and went to sleep. He put his piece of gold next to him, on top of his meditation cushion, and went to sleep.

But when he woke up, it wasn't there anymore. [Laughter] Of course! Maybe another initiate had thought it was a play toy and brought it home with him or he left it alone and someone else took it, but he didn't know who. Because the beggar just slept anywhere: In front of the supermarket, under a bridge, in front of the theater, in an empty field, anywhere! So, if he put his piece of gold there, people could just take it away. Then the next day he went back and requested another piece of gold from the millionaire.

And the millionaire asked, 'But why? I just gave you one yesterday. What did you do with it?' So, the man said, 'Yes, yesterday I had it. I put it beside me, and I just closed my eyes, and when I opened my eyes, it was gone. So today I have to come back again for another piece.'

When the millionaire heard this, he immediately became enlightened! [Laughter] He realized the truth about the things of this world: Today you have them; tomorrow you don't. Or you might have them now, but later you don't. He suddenly somehow became enlightened about the detachment that we should have concerning all possessions in this world.

54. International seven-day retreat, Taipei Center, Formosa, May 21-27, 1994 (Originally in English).

And after that, he changed his behavior. He began to give in charity to people and to live a very normal, relaxed life. He didn't cling to gold or money anymore. So, the people around him thought that the beggar was a heavenly being who had transformed himself into a human in order to teach the millionaire the lesson of detachment, and maybe enlightenment. [Applause]

This book [Master holds up the book She has been reading from.] is really my benefactor, my teacher. After I read this book, I also became enlightened; I also became very detached. I don't think about money and gold anymore because I don't have any! [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause]

I wasn't born with any gold, and I won't go out with any gold. Whatever I have is yours. It belongs to the world. Just like you take it from here and give it there. It's the same with every one of us. We take water from the river, put it in a water tank, and then the water tank distributes it to the whole village or town.

We should live our lives just like a water tank. Whatever we have is for distribution. We're only the receivers. For example, I have a lot of money, but I never consider myself as having any. It's very relaxing. You don't worry because you already don't consider that it's yours. So, whether it's there or not, it doesn't matter.

THE STORY OF A JAPANESE SWORD MASTER ⁵⁵

There was a Japanese man who wanted to learn the famous national martial art of kendo. The man visited a sword master and wanted to become his student. But the master didn't want to accept him; so he begged the master sincerely, 'It doesn't matter if you don't teach me. Please let me stay, and I will sweep the floor, wash the toilet, cook, sew and polish your shoes for you. I look up to you very much. Teach me when you want to, and if you don't want to, it's okay. I won't ask for too much!' Therefore, the master let him stay.

The man lived there for a period of time, and the sword master didn't teach him anything, but told him to do the daily household chores, which were boring. After some time, in spite of what he was doing, be it cooking, washing, cleaning during the daytime, or even sleeping at night, the master would suddenly appear howling, with sword in hand, ready to duel with him. So, the man had to be on constant alert. Even when he was cooking or cleaning the toilet, he had to be on the lookout. [Laughter]

That's what it's like when you 'train' me. I have to be ready at all times. [Master laughs.] When I go to the bathroom, I have to check if there are any cameras around, or if there are any disciples nearby. I am so 'tense' that it makes me be in 'Zen' for twenty-four hours! [Laughter] I couldn't bear it before, but now I'm getting used to it. Sometimes it happens to you as well, like when I come to see you without informing you. So, you have the expectation all the time. You might see me around the stairway or when you're eating. Then we will always miss each other! [Master and audience laugh.] Because I'm constantly afraid of being seen by you, and you expect me to appear suddenly, we are ready to communicate at any time. That's nice! [Master laughs.] [Laughter and applause.]

Now, let's go back to the sword master. In the end, the disciple became a very famous sword master. His success came from the special teaching method of his master, and not from the common kind that begins at 7 A.M. and ends at 9 P.M. and everything is taught in a common way. The master used an uncommon method. He often attacked the disciple

55. International seven-day retreat, Taipei Center, Formosa, May 21-27, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

when the disciple was not prepared, like when he was cooking, bathing or sleeping at night. So, the disciple had to be on constant alert, and later he became a very good and famous kendo master!

It is the same with our spiritual practice. We have to be prepared at all times. We should not say, 'Well, I'm happy now and I want to hang around here and do nothing.' This is an ephemeral world. We have to be ready to handle any sudden situation. Why is this world ephemeral? It is for us to learn the spirit of preparedness, and to learn to be cautious at all times. This world is neither good nor bad. It just depends on how we make use of situations, and learn the lessons that are good for us. We have to always be learning. We should be in Zen twenty-four hours a day.

THE STORY OF THE SADDLE ⁵⁶

This is a story of the saddle. Originally, there were no saddles for horses. It was later, perhaps derived from the benefit of some spiritual practice, that saddles were used.

There was a man named Liao Hu. Unlike us being kind, he was a very, very mean and very, very vicious government official. He died when he was sixty two years old and went to see the king of hell. This king of hell was from Formosa and was somewhat peculiar; he was black on the left side and white on the right. I wonder why? [Laughter]

The king of hell flipped through the book of sins and merits to see what good and bad deeds this man had done before his death. He found out that this man had created so much bad karma, and had never given to any charity. He had never protested for the sake of the refugees and had never been to Hong Kong. [Laughter] He had never given any offerings to the temples and had never been in a church. He had never given money to the beggars and never donated a penny to Tse-Chi Charity or any other charitable organizations.

He was not a vegetarian, but he didn't eat meat either because he was very stingy. It wasn't because he wanted to become a Buddha that he didn't eat meat. Therefore, I have told you that being a vegetarian won't make you a Buddha; it depends on your purpose. This man didn't eat meat because he didn't want to spend money to buy meat for the rest of the family. Sometimes when he craved it, he would hide in the bathroom to eat a piece of meat all by himself, and come out after he had finished eating so his family wouldn't know. This is how bad he was.

He had never attended the Supreme Master Ching Hai's lectures, and besides, he thought all the clothes She had designed were too expensive. [Laughter] So, the king of hell looked around and couldn't find anything to save him; there was only bad karma, no merit at all.

Once, it was said that a disciple of the Supreme Master Ching Hai tried to give him a sample booklet; it was free you know. But he refused because he said the booklet would take up the space in his plastic bag for groceries. [Laughter] How could anyone possibly save him?!

So, the king of hell said, 'No good! Forget it! Forget it! I have tried my best to search every corner of the book, but it was full of bad karma. So now, you have to be born as a horse to pay for your past bad deeds.' After he said so, he made a hand mudra and a foot mudra

56. International seven-day retreat, Taipei Center, Formosa, May 21-27, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

and gave him a kick. Thus he fell and was born as a horse. This horse had its name on an I.D. card, that was how it was known that it was the reincarnation of Liao Hu.

This horse named Liao Hu grew bigger and bigger. It ate a lot of grass and was very comfortable. Because in its past life, it didn't want to buy meat, not even tofu, so eating grass was much easier for it, and it was quite content. It never complained about eating grass; besides, it was all free! Even being a horse, it was still very stingy. It would eat the cheap, rotting grass, and save the fresh grass to sell to the other horses. [Laughter]

When it grew up, its master put it to work. It had to carry firewood, cooking oil, rice and other groceries home. Sometimes, it had to pull a wagon with forty or fifty fat people on it, et cetera. Oh! It couldn't bear it, but if it didn't keep walking, the horseman would whip it. So, it hated the whole thing and couldn't take it anymore. The horseman was mean to it also. He would kick it, whip it, and treat it cruelly. When he rode the horse, there was no saddle, so it was quite uncomfortable and even painful for the horse. This horse had just been reincarnated from a human being, it still carried the temperament of a human instead of a horse, so it was very annoyed, very sad and finally went on a hunger strike. It quit eating for three or four days and then died.

Some of the disciples of the Supreme Master Ching Hai took pity on it, and recited sutras, sang Hallelujah, and prayed for it. But even then, its karma was still too much, so it went down to see the king of hell. The king of hell was angry and kept yelling at it. 'Are you trying to escape your bad karma? Can you? No, you cannot! I tell you, if I want you to be a horse, then you'll be a horse; if I want you to be a dog, then you'll be a dog. You cannot escape in such a way. Don't you know that before you have fully paid for your bad deeds you cannot run away?'

The king of hell scolded him until his own face was red-hot. 'You cheated me! You cheated me! Your time was not up yet, your karma had not been paid in full, and now you've starved yourself to death on purpose. This is cheating!' So now, the king of hell made him into a dog. He waved at him from head to toe and gave him a kick. Thus it fell into the womb of a mother dog and was born as a puppy.

Even though he was a dog now, Liao Hu still had some human qualities and intelligence. So, he was feeling very sad, very annoyed, very miserable, very worried, very depressed, very helpless, very powerless and very bored (which in Chinese sounds similar to its name Hu, Liao). [Master and audience laugh.] But he dared not commit suicide again, knowing that the king of hell would punish him more. He sat there and thought, 'I cannot starve myself now! This dog food is really unappetizing, but I have to eat it; otherwise, I don't know how the king of hell is going to punish me!' So, he thought and thought using his own dog thinking, you know. Then, oh, suddenly he was enlightened! He said, 'Now if I bite my master hard, he will kill me. Ha! [Master and audience laugh.] Then I would die without committing suicide!'

He got started right away. He recited some sutras, 'Da, da, da, da...' in order to liberate itself while he waited for his master to return. After smoking and drinking his master came back. The dog wagged his tail then bit the master's behind and front. It was so painful and he was drunk and angry, so he picked up a big bat to hit him. And the dog went kaput!

So, he went to see the king down of hell again. The king of hell was mad and of course, scolded him severely again. 'You bad dog! How dare you cheat me again! Now, hmm, you'll get fifty beatings first.' After the beatings, he was to be born as a snake. Gosh! Being a dog wasn't that bad, but to be a snake is really troublesome. The more he tried to

escape, the worse it got, right? After he became a snake, the king of hell threw him in a dungeon and locked him up, so he had nowhere to go. Nevertheless, he was able to dig a hole and slip away. Now he dared not commit suicide or bite others, knowing that'll only make him more guilty. So, hmm, he thought and thought with his snake brain, and finally decided to crawl into the middle of the road and lie down to sleep. [Master and audience laugh.]

That person was full of ideas. Sleeping in the middle of the road at night! In ancient times, there were no street lights, so when a car went by, he was chopped into a few pieces and liberated!

Looking at the pitiful sight, the king of hell felt sorry for him and decided he had had enough punishment. Finally, he was victorious! The king of hell felt sorry for his sufferings and miseries and couldn't bear to punish him anymore. Ah! The king of hell was quite compassionate after all! He must have practiced the Quan Yin method, half way only, that's why he was half white [Master and audience laugh.] and the other half black! So, he was forgiven and was allowed to be born as a human being. Once again, he was to be a government official. But he was reminded to be virtuous and to govern his people wisely and kindly. He must not be greedy or corrupt; he must not be vicious or mistreat people. 'Otherwise,' the king of hell warned him, 'I will not forgive you! Understand? You must keep the five precepts.' He even told him to go find the Supreme Master Ching Hai and get initiation! [Applause] Just kidding! These kind of people are very hard to save; it's better he doesn't come to us! [Master laughs.]

But he really looked Her up! And She taught him to keep the five precepts, be a vegetarian, meditate two and half hours everyday, attend group meditation, speak up or protest for others in suffering, et cetera. From that day on, he became a very good person, and later became a very virtuous government official. He would instruct his subordinates to use saddles when they rode the horses, not to kick the horses with their knees, and not to whip them too hard, because he remembered how much he had suffered when he was a horse. He was also very gentle and generous in treating his people. Therefore, later all his bad karma was erased. The end!

The warnings of war to mankind

We are lucky to be human beings, but some human beings' lives are not much different from those of the cows or horses. There are times when we run into some unfortunate situations where we have to depend on others to survive. Like the refugees from Au Lac, when they have to depend on others' compassion, to survive on their leftover food, et cetera, they will be treated like the animals, without any human dignity. Even a horse has some freedom. After working, it can run around outside, breath some fresh air, and eat some sweet grass. The refugees are very pathetic sometimes, not only those from Au Lac, but most of the refugees are the same. All the war victims are all similar, truly pathetic!

However, our world never learns. Up till now, we still haven't learnt to stop the wars; we still haven't learnt that we should protect one another, love one another, and help one another. Sometimes, I am reminded that it's now the brink of the twenty-first century, yet those people still refuse to make progress, still are so vicious, still creating wars, and injuring so many others. For example, one place in Africa, over two hundred thousand people have been killed up to now! If you just read the newspaper everyday, you won't want to eat anything anymore! Do you read newspapers?

Over there in Africa, even the children and the babies were being brutally sacred. They beat and kill whoever they run into, using machetes. There were some pictures. One of them showed a big gash left on the back of a girl's head after being struck by a machete. We don't have any holes here on our head, right? Her head had a big gap so deep after being chopped. I'll show you those pictures sometime later. Actually, it is not so good to look at those things, but we have to see some to remind us never to go to war; whether we are right or wrong, it is best not to kill! Therefore, our five precepts are to protect everyone in the world. If everyone takes revenge on each other, then when will it ever end?

The importance of having enlightened beings

That area became like that because they took revenge on each other. Originally, there was no war. But some people killed the president, and then the tribes that supported the president took revenge for him and killed the men, women, old and young... whoever they saw from the opposing party. Some of the children were very small and their heads were already injured. They were chopped at the nape till almost chopped off. They would die even if chopped only halfway! I don't know how people could do such things!

In the newspaper, a woman cried when she was interviewed. She said that she was trained and was sent to kill people, but she couldn't bear it sometimes. Then better don't kill! But you see, even a humane person like this, a twenty-three year old girl, was trained and brain washed. She was instructed, 'Whenever you see the people from the other tribe, regardless of whether they are children or infants, you have to kill them all!' When she was caught, she cried and said she couldn't bear to do it at all, and when she did it she felt terrible.

Even if we still have some sympathy for others like this girl did, but if we stay with bad friends or so-called bad leaders, we will become like them. We will continue to kill, and eventually get used to doing it. Later, we have no more tears or sympathy left. So, you see how horrible it is!

It is very important to have enlightened beings with us. If we have some good, benevolent friends who talk to us about virtuous things, give us good advice, and lead us toward the right direction, then we will become better each day. Our virtuous qualities will expand and manifest, and we will know better each day which is the right direction for us. But if we stay with those without moral ethics, without any manners, those who prefer violence, then gradually, we will follow them and become just like them. Eventually, our loving compassion will be diminished and eradicated, and we become vicious people.

Who is the real culprit

I saw in the newspapers there is a phenomenon in America. Because the number of American troops in action have been reduced, many of the so-called special force soldiers feel very insecure. Originally, they were trained as assassins to kill the enemy. Later as the cold war with the Russians came to an end, there were no more enemies, no more targets for assassination. But their training procedure, those techniques, and the consciousness are still deep rooted in their heads. Now that they do not have an enemy to fight, they sometimes feel insecure as if they have lost their job. Thus they now see their relatives, friends, wives and children as enemies, so they begin to beat them and sometimes kill them.

Since the end of the cold war, every week, there have been people killed at the hands of these soldiers. Because many of them have very little to do or have lost their jobs et

cetera, the atmosphere in their families has become like a war zone. Having been in the war zone or in the habit of being trained daily as assassins, now anybody not to their liking would look like the enemy. Though they sometimes do not have the intention to kill, but on the spur of the moment, they just pick up a gun and ‘bang!’ the other person is dead without even thinking.

If we are not trained in this manner, we would not at any time, take a gun out to shoot people. If we do not have the habit of carrying a gun, of having been trained to shoot people, then perhaps other people would not die so easily. Without that kind of training, the habit of quickly reacting to kill someone, we would not be able to kill people so easily. If we do not have a gun in our hand or do not carry any weapon, then we would not be able to kill people so easily. Therefore, this kind of situation, this kind of training of assassins is really not good. You see, originally the intention was to kill others, later we kill our friends and relatives and kill even ourselves.

Being together with whomever, we learn whatever. Thus, the direction we decide to take is very important indeed. Before there wasn't any, this kind of phenomenon, of the special force killing their own children, wives, friends and relatives. Later on because the fighting with the Russians had been reduced, and there were defense cut, then friends and relatives became the enemy. Very horrible indeed!

Of course, those retired veterans or those still in the force who killed others would be penalized. But I feel that this is not fair. Although they personally killed their friends and relatives, but they are not the only murderers. At least they are not the main offenders, there are many accomplices. Who are the accomplices? The accomplices are the society that make up this training system, turning a kind, innocent, very young, easy-to-be influenced person into an assassin. Then because he has no target to kill he would come back to kill people close to him. It has become a habit. Understand what I mean? After becoming a habit, he has become numb! Truly horrible!

Our world could turn into anything we want, right? Intending to turn it into a paradise then we have to turn to Truth, virtues and beauty, learn from enlightened beings, and look for noble ideals and inner wisdom. Then it turns into paradise. Intending to turn into hell is also quite easy. Train all those growing, very innocent, very soft, very easily trained young people into soldiers, then later they will kill anyone! If not kill, they will abuse, beat, and turn their own family into a war zone. If the family unit is not stable then the country will also be unstable! Right? Country unstable, then the world will have many wars.

Water can carry a boat, it also can sink a boat

Where did most of the wars in the world come from? All came from the armies, right? A lot of innocent presidents were toppled by the might of the armies. Then a lot of people, using the power of the armies, killed people indiscriminately. I remember one American president, I think Eisenhower, said, before he died, that our enemies are not the foreigners, not the Russians, et cetera, but are those murderers in the armies, those with special power in the armies, those more evil armies or organizations. He said that before he died.

Because he had seen the statistics, he seemed to know a lot about the armies' secrets. Those armies controlled all the secret defenses. They could do anything they wanted. Whether or not those things were harmful to the people, to the American people, they would continue to do them. Sometimes it was because of greed for power, sometimes it was because of the habit of command that they continued to do them.

In this world, it would not be very difficult if we wanted to have power, fame and fortune, as long as we strived a little, were smart a little, were slick or schemed a little, or were a little ambitious! But to control this power and put it into good use would be difficult, understand? If we do not control this fame, fortune and power well, that power will in return hurt us, hurt our friends and relatives, hurt our countries and the whole world.

Thus fame and fortune is a very terrible thing. Why terrible? People with fame and fortune are not terrible. Fame and fortune itself is not terrible. People are terrible because they do not know how to handle the fame and fortune and do not have the technique to put it to good use. Most people are very ambitious. They are not satisfied with whatever they possess. Then because of fame and fortune, because of trying to retain their own power, they would dare to do anything. Thus fame and fortune is said to be terrible, because most people do not know how to use it and have been used by it in return.

If we know how to use it, then there would not be any problem! Like in world history, many so-called Masters became emperors or held high positions in the governments and had done a lot of very important things in societies, yet there were no problems. It is just that fame and fortune in the hands of lay people, in the hands of those with very delicate morality, with very high ambition, would be very dangerous indeed. Understand what I mean? [Audience: Understand.]

Practicing yourself is basic for managing a country

Thus, the Chinese say: 'If we practice ourselves then we can manage the family, can manage the country, and make the world peaceful.' At that time, we do not need to make the world peaceful, yet the world would be peaceful already! Right! We do not have to manage the country, yet the country would be stable. We do not have to worry about the family, yet the family would be fine. For example, before we practiced, sometimes everything would turn out wrong. After we have started to practice, we feel we are getting better and better. Right? Like wherever our organization goes, it would be very orderly, and make people feel comfortable. Would not be too noisy. With so many people and being so peaceful, it is not too bad at all! Even going for an outing with a few thousand people and being so peaceful would be very difficult, let alone doing a seven-day retreat.

No one could do a seven-day retreat with over fifty people. Go ahead and ask. Has there ever been a seven-day retreat with four, five thousand people? No! No where in the world. Seven hours still impossible, let alone seven days. Also all from different countries. Arrangements and everything are quite an effort. Thus people kept on praising me thinking I am so great. He said to me: 'Wow! You are wonderful. Oh! You are great. You are so... et cetera. Oh! You really know how to organize! With so many thousands of people, it is still so quiet. Everything is so good.' I said: 'I have done nothing, really! They did it all by themselves.' Yes! I only taught you how to do things. I should not control you, understand? I only taught you how to control yourselves; how to organize your own lives; how to organize your own qualities.

I do not have to be here saying from morning till night: 'You should do this...' I taught once, then everyone understood. Then everyone manages his own things. That is the real managing of a country. Really, no need to manage. Everyone has wisdom. Who manages whom! No one should say: 'I am better than others.' No one could manage others. In fact, everyone has inner wisdom, has Buddha nature, has one Buddha inside, has God inside. Who could manage whom! If we said so, it would have been too much – saying we managed a god or a group of gods, or a group of buddhas. It would have been too proud, right?

Lao Tzu said that the past enlightened emperors did not have to manage the people, did not need to manage the country, but the country was naturally taken care of. It was because they did not manage the country that the country took care of itself. The more you are there managing the people, the more rules you give to the people, the more chaotic it will be, because each person has a different personality, right? Without teaching him how to manage, how to handle his own life, but just there using whatever regulations, whatever laws, whatever violence to control people is not workable.

In the refugee camps, they used force to control the refugees. On April 7, they used army force; they used lots of tear gas, let them vomit blood and froth at the mouth, and let them shed tears. Yet they are still not afraid. Even though they were half alive and half dead, they have become tougher and tougher. Now they will not listen to anyone. They will not do as told they are; will not obey or trust anyone.

Use love to treat refugees

Later we went to Hong Kong to demonstrate and show love towards them. Then they felt better. But the government was still very tough saying: 'No! No matter what you do, it still will not work. We are still forcing you out.' Later they committed suicide. Up to now over eighty people attempted to commit suicide. Some were successful, and some were revived; some remain badly hurt and burnt over the whole body, and some their legs are incapacitated. Very bad condition. Later the government there saw that their method was not working, so they started to use our method, they became softer and softer! Then the conditions became better; fewer people committed suicide! I hope that they will continue to be softer and softer, then fewer and fewer people will commit suicide. It is best not to force them, then they will not commit suicide. It is just that simple, right? It is best to use love! [Applause]

THE TRAP OF SUCCESS ⁵⁷

The meaning of this story is greed for life! Some people like to die, are not afraid of death. This person is afraid of death – is greedy for life and fears death. So, he is greedy for life.

Once, there was a king who came from the country His Li and he went to war with another country. Everyday he noticed one particular army soldier who was very, very courageous. He was very enthusiastic in fighting at any moment, and was basically not afraid of death, volunteering to go to the most dangerous places. Any place that no one dared to go, he would go and this won the king's great admiration.

So one day, the king summoned him in order to reward him. When the king saw him, he felt very strange and wondered why this soldier was so skinny, his face was so green, the skin was not good and his body was very weak. The king was very surprised and asked, 'Why you have become like this?' Then the soldier told the king, 'I have an incurable disease, so my health is not good.' The king pitied him and ordered his personal doctor to take care of him daily until his illness was cured. He was brought the best medicine and the highest quality food for his consumption because he was the national hero, a very courageous person, and needed to be taken very good care of. Of course, the king's doctor also admired him very much and took very good care of him. Money was no problem because he was the national hero and also it was the command of the king.

57. Group meditation, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, April 19-20, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

After a while, this person recovered and became very strong, and healthy looking. Everything was fine, he was totally cured. But at that moment, he lost his courage completely. [Laughter] Now he dared not go anywhere, dared not rush to dangerous places, he always hid in the back, his courage was all gone. The king was very disappointed and also felt strange. He summoned the person over and asked, 'Why you were so courageous before but now after I have taken good care of you, have fed you well, have cured your illness, you have betrayed my grace, not sacrificing yourself for the country like before? Also, you hide and refuse to fight in battle. Why? Huh! We have all been so nice to you, have trusted you so much yet you have betrayed our good intention and have betrayed our trust in you. Why?'

The soldier told the king honestly, 'It is because you have treated me so nice that I have become this way.' The king said with surprise, 'Why is it that because we are too nice to you that you have become this way?' He said, 'Because you have been so nice to me, have cured my illness, have fed my body well and made it beautiful that I have now become very greedy for life and dare not die.' [Master and audience laugh.] He was near death before, thus death was nothing. The pain of the illness made him uncomfortable so maybe death was better. Therefore, he had charged forward in the battlefield not because of courage. [Master and audience laugh.] Now because he had a good and strong body, he became greedy for life and dared not sacrifice his life anymore. [Master laughs.]

Sometimes it is the same with our practice. If we have met with difficulties or undesirable situations, we would practice with all our devotion. But after being too rich, too free, too comfortable, perhaps we would become somewhat lacking in diligence. Thus, Shakyamuni Buddha also said, 'Rich people, people with money or with high position, will find it difficult to practice! If a certain person who has a high position, with a very comfortable life and with a lot of money and leads a very smooth life still likes to practice, we should know that he is a Bodhisattva coming to this world to help the beings.' How much he helps would depend more or less on his mission. It is not that he helps the beings a lot then he is a real Bodhisattva.

Then Jesus Christ also said, 'It would be very difficult for the rich to go to heaven! It would be as difficult as a camel passing through the needle hole.' Because we are too comfortable, too happy, we would be reluctant to leave. Drowning there in enjoyment of the happy, comfortable and rich conditions, then we would not think anything about practice.

The ordinary people would practice because of having a little pain and thus would think of liberation. That is the reason why it is no good if life is too comfortable. Sometimes a person in a high position such as a public official, a reporter or any other position, would become proud if he was too successful. So sometimes, it is all right if we have a little of nonsuccess! Of course, we have to do things successfully, but we still have to know the trap of success.

[Master's reading a story.] A man bought a plot of land from his neighbour on the last day of the golden age. What was the golden age? It was a time when most people were kind and valued righteousness above material gain. They were gentle, clean, courageous and noble. In other words, they were very virtuous at that time.

Nowadays we are also in the 'golden age' – everyone likes gold so much that it is even more important than the life of a human being. That was the reason why Au Lac people were able to use gold to escape Au Lac in order to save themselves. Some very rich used gold in exchange for water to bathe when they were in Thailand. The outcome was that

they were labeled economic refugees; meaning they were living 'in poverty' so they escaped from Au Lac.

Some of our disciples who came to know about this said that they bought water for a bath with gold, because water was scarce and there was not enough to quench their thirst let alone to have a bath! Nevertheless, there were some people who were able to use gold to buy water for a bath, not just once a while but everyday. No doubt, some were rich but not everybody. Others probably had lost their possessions at sea or did not have time to bring them along. Some refugees were poor but not all of them.

The story I am going to tell you was from the real golden age, not this 'gold-grabbing age' [Master laughs.] in which everybody's eyes sparkle when they see gold. They hold it tightly and will not give away.

This reminds me about a man who went to a goldsmith shop to steal a piece of gold in broad daylight. Of course, he was caught on the spot and put into jail. The judge asked him, 'Why did you try to steal the gold in broad daylight when the shop is so crowded? Didn't you realize? Why did you try at that time making it so easy for you to get caught?' The man sighed, 'Oh, I could only see the gold, not the people!' [Laughter] This is so-called 'gold-grabbing age.'

Going back to our story in which a man bought a plot of land from his neighbour. This happened on the last day of the real golden age. The next day it turned into the age of darkness in which people were immoral and had no conscience; they killed each other, they, for the sake of money, cheated and squeezed one another without showing any sense of courtesy or humility. Whereas, in the golden age, people did not regard gold as important. They placed greater value on morality and supreme wisdom derived from practice, et cetera.

So, that was the last day of the golden age and the next day would be the beginning of the age of darkness. That man, after buying the land, started to dig the soil so as to place the pillars in the building of his house. He did not realize the change from the gold to the dark age. He just happened to be in that situation, but of course God almighty knew that. While digging, the man discovered a vase full of gold and immediately he took it to his neighbour who sold him the land. It was still the golden age and not yet tomorrow. The man told his neighbour, 'Oh! When I was digging today, I found this vase of gold. I want to return it to you as I bought the land but not the gold, so it doesn't belong to me. I paid for the land but not this vase of gold. It's something extra and I should return it to you.' The real golden age was truly like that.

His neighbour, the previous landlord, replied, 'Oh, congratulations, it's yours! You need not return it to me. By the very fact that you bought this land, whatever's underneath it, also belongs to you; I have no right to keep it!' So, both of them were trying very hard to give way and neither of them was willing to keep that vase of gold because both thought that it was not right and would feel embarrassed to do so. One thought that the land and whatever underneath once sold, should belong to the buyer. The other thought that he only paid for the land not the vase of gold underneath and hence it was not his. Both of them were right and rational, they both tried to give way to the other and neither wanted to keep the vase of gold.

At last both were too tired to discuss and they said, 'Alright, we'd better go and rest and meditate for a while and we should ask our inner Masters for help!' [Master laughs.] Ah, oh, no! They said, 'It's getting dark, we are tired, let's go back and rest. We'll leave this

gold aside and discuss this tomorrow after we think it through clearly!' Then they went back home.

However, after midnight, God almighty turned the world into the age of darkness. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew across the earth and all the earth's morality was instantly influenced and turned into immorality. As this was done naturally, nobody was aware of it.

So, the next day, as previously agreed, both came back to the same place where the gold was left. Upon their arrival, the buyer, the new landlord promptly said, 'Oh, I have considered very thoroughly. Whatever you said yesterday was true and right, [Laughter] I agree a hundred percent. Since I bought that piece of land, whatever is underneath should be mine. You are absolutely correct! So, I am coming to take that vase of gold back. Thank you, thank you very much!'

His neighbour immediately replied, 'Oh, no! No! No! It's wrong, completely wrong! Today I have also considered it thoroughly. I feel that whatever you said yesterday was correct. I agree with you absolutely, because it's impossible for you to buy something unexpected. Moreover, you only paid for the land but not the vase of gold and therefore, this vase of gold is mine. I am going to take it home! Thank you!' Hence, both of them wanted to take the vase of gold away. They argued and quarrelled over it, neither of them was willing to give in. So they, originally good friends, suddenly became enemies, mortal enemies.

They went to court to sue each other and to accuse the opposite party of wrong doing. For a vase of gold, their relationship had change from one of good neighbours, gentlemen, good friends to be enemies.

If it were not for this vase of gold, they probably would not have become enemies, although not friendly, they would lead their own lives separately; one building his house, the other carrying on with his own business despite the fact that God had changed the world into the age of darkness.

Therefore, it is bad if we do not use money appropriately. It is equally bad if we are attached to it. As I mentioned earlier, we should not sacrifice our soul and elegant demeanor for money, it's truly not worthwhile! Do you think that either of them was worthy? In the beginning, they were gentlemen, noble friends and suddenly for the sake of gold, both became like that. They were affected by the world, the influence of the age of darkness. But that was also partly due to the fact that their consciences and morality were not strong.

If we understand moral values and have deeply realized the spiritual teachings, we will not change under any circumstances. This is because we know what is right and what is wrong. We will not see wrong things as right. Hence, we always do the right thing in whatever place or situation, because we know what is right. This is the most important thing. Or else we keep on blaming by saying this golden age, platinum age... In fact, any time is golden and platinum. If we know how to seek our inner noble quality, find our own supreme wisdom, then it does not matter which age we are in. Otherwise, it will be tough and difficult on us to live in any age.

This story was from India, even the ancient Indians were like that. Perhaps an enlightened Master was telling this story to educate his disciples. It may not be a true story but good times should be like this.

In China, the dynasties of 'Yeow' and 'Soon', were the real golden ages. At night people did not need to close their doors. Nobody would pick up things that did not belong to them, because if they picked them up, the owner might not be able to find them when he returned.

Nevertheless, in this modern age, you don't even have to drop it and somebody has already picked it. [Master and audience laugh.] You have to move quickly when someone drops something, because if you do not pick it up, someone else will. What a pity! [Master laughs.]

So now, you know which one is a golden age and which one is the age of fear. [Master was playing with two similar sounding Chinese words 'golden' and 'fear'.] This age has more fear. As you practice, have you noticed that your greed, the craving for money has reduced? [Audience: Yes.] How delightful! It means it will not matter to you how many vases of gold we have here. It also means that we are in the golden age.

THE METHOD OF THE BIG BOOTS ⁵⁸

In India, long time ago, there was a very, very nice and kind good king. He loves his subject very much, and so he rules with the love and compassion and consideration for his people. But then every time when he sees one of them, you know, he saw always their feet. That's in the old day, you know, people don't have shoes yet, so their feet are always hurt by the stones and the thorn, the thorn from the bushes. They sometime fall on the street. So, people walk all over and the thorn stick into their feet and it hurts, and sometimes it bleed and is infected.

And so the king feel very, very heartbroken about this. So then, he orders his armies to get the fur and the skin of the dead animals to pave, spread it on every road so that his subjects, his citizens will walk on it and don't feel hurt. Not only the road but he orders his people to put skin all over, on top of all of the earth of his country.

So, there was a very old and wise minister told the king he has a better idea. He says, instead of spreading skin all over on the earth, this is not convenient and it took a lot of time and a lot of money. Instead you can just put them on each bodies' feet, his peoples' feet and then they can walk anywhere they want.

This sounds a very funny story, but it just symbolizes something. Yeah, just like many people or ourselves sometimes we want to make the world equal, peaceful, prosperous, friendly, loving and et cetera, et cetera, but then it's not possible. Just like the thorns or the stone, it keeps falling on the road or sometimes even from the sky, and on top of the earth. Doesn't matter how much time you cover, there would be stones and thorns falling back again, even on top of the skin. So, it is better then we just take care of our own feet.

So, the Quan Yin method, it is just like the shoes for your feet. Even though the world it's still full of trouble, with thorns and stones, but we can just walk over them. And we feel safe in the world of trouble. Because as long as many people do not practice the Quan Yin method, the world still has trouble. So, if we want to be free from the trouble, we just protect our individual person. Then no problem. Perhaps problem still exists, but not so much for ourselves. You feel less and less affected by the trouble of the world. Sometimes if we do feel affected, it is because we have love, compassion for the one who is affected. Thus, identify their feelings as ours.

58. Group meditation, Seoul Center, South Korea, April 15, 1994 (Originally in English).

TOUGHNESS AND GENTLENESS – TOGETHER MAKE PERFECTION ⁵⁹**Confucius and four of his disciples**

Liezi had written a story about Confucius and his disciples. There was a person named Zixia who asked Confucius, 'What kind of a person is Yenhui?' Confucius had many disciples, one of them was called Yenhui, right? [Audience: Yes.] Confucius said, 'Yenhui is more compassionate than I!' More compassionate than Confucius, not I! I don't have anything, anyone is more compassionate than I! [Master and audience laugh.] He continued to ask, 'What kind of a person is Zigong?' Confucius answered, 'Zigong is more eloquent than I.' Meaning more eloquent than Confucius, not I. I don't have any eloquence to be included. I worry that sometimes I say 'I', 'I', 'I', and you don't know who 'I' refers to. [Laughter]

Zixia continued to ask Confucius, 'What about Zilu? What kind of a person is Zilu?' Confucius answered, 'Zilu is more courageous than I am!' meaning more courageous than Confucius, don't you mistake it for me. [Laughter] I am pretty courageous. [Master laughs.] If anyone beats me, he'd know how courageous I am, because I'd run away immediately! [Master and audience laugh.] Zixia inquired further, 'Then what about Zizhang? What kind of a person is Zizhang?' And Confucius replied, 'He is more solemn than I.' Meaning he was more serious, unlike me, telling jokes all the time! We laughed for quite a while in the cave before I came down to see you.

Then Zixia stood up and questioned Confucius, 'Then why do the four of them come here to learn from you?' [Master laughs.] The four of them were better than Confucius in a certain way, why do they come to learn from him? Confucius then said, 'Sit down!' [Master laughs.] He was so disturbed that he stood up. 'Sit down and I'll tell you why. Don't you understand, that Yenhui knows about compassion, but doesn't know when not to be compassionate.' That is being compassionate without knowing when not to be. 'Zigong who is articulate, but doesn't know when to be silent.' He meant being a person who doesn't know arguing, understand? Not to act like one who knows everything and argues all the time to bore others! Right? But let me finish reading before I make comments. It may be more satisfactory or I can just comment freely. Whichever, I am not 'Jin Shentan' who added his comments under every article he saw. I'll just make comments freely, whether under or over, head or top.

Confucius continued to say, 'Zilu knows about bravery, but he doesn't know when to be afraid.' Understand? He did not know when to pretend to be fearful or when to be afraid. Well, not really 'afraid,' but to be meek at times. He doesn't know when to be meek. And 'Shih!', means Zizhang, 'Shih is serious and stately, but doesn't know when to accommodate and compromise with others. If you were to add all of their talents together and exchange them for all of my imperfections, I wouldn't take them!' Since they were so great, then add up all of the parts which were better than Confucius; and exchange them for the parts which were not as good as theirs. Confucius said he would not take the exchange. Therefore, those four people should come and bow to him as their teacher; they followed him wholeheartedly, without any thought of losing faith, without any thought of regret.

59. Group meditation, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, April 6, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

To be or not to be compassionate

This is a great story! Have you read it before? Why do you think it is this way? Why should we know about being compassionate and also know when not to be compassionate sometimes? Who knows? In our world, we all respect the compassionate people, right? Then why does it say here that sometimes we should be unmerciful? Who knows why?

What does being compassionate mean? It means that a person is very loving towards all, is that right? He is very generous, very understanding, ready to forgive others, never blame others, and is always loving. This is being compassionate. When we see others in difficulty, we love them and help them; when others make mistakes, we forgive. Then why shouldn't we uphold this quality? Why shouldn't we do so every time? Isn't this a better way? Why did Confucius say that we should know when not to be compassionate? What does it mean? Who knows? Quick! [Audience: When we deal with bad people.] [Audience: It means capable of being a loving person and also being able to treat someone unlovingly. Being unkind to people means being unmerciful. We should have both qualities.]

Right! We should have both; yin (negative) and yang (positive) must be balanced. Be compassionate when we should be; but when we need to be unmerciful, we have to be unmerciful, this is what I mean to be truly good.

Under what conditions should we be or not be compassionate? For example, if we have a friend who is having difficulties. Being his good friend, of course we should help him, give him some money to run some business. Later he may become independent. If he has money, he may return to us, but even if he doesn't, we don't really care. If we have a lot of money, we don't mind if our friends use it, or if our brothers and relatives use it.

But if that person does not use the money to run a business but to do some bad things such as gambling, smoking, drinking and all kinds of terrible things, and he comes to us for more money, then at that time, we cannot continue to be compassionate! If we help him to be a bad person, a dependent person, then the more we are compassionate towards him, the more we hurt him. He will gradually become a person without an independent spirit and will not develop his abilities. Eventually, he becomes a person who relies on others, a weak person, someone without a sense of shame or guilt, without conscience, without any integrity, and is not worthy of being our friend. Thus we not only lost a friend but we also hurt him. His life will become more vanquished and he will not be able to stand up on his own.

The story of how a scholar mercilessly helped his friend

There is a Chinese story, I am not sure whether it is a Chinese or an Au Lac story, a story about Liu Ping and Yang Li. Whether they are Chinese or Au Lac people, anyway, there were two friends who were studying to take the imperial examinations. One studied diligently, and he was selected to be the top scholar after the examination. He was given a high post in the Imperial Court and returned gloriously to his hometown. While the other friend, who enjoyed playing around and did not study as diligently, and even though he was very talented, as talented as his friend, he did not succeed in the imperial examinations because he was lazier and did not study much. The friend who became the high official was very good hearted. He remembered his friend for they used to be close buddies. He thought his friend must not be in good shape now, so he sent for him.

When the friend arrived, the scholar pretended to be busy inside and let his friend wait outside for a long time. When his friend asked for him again, he purposely sent a little clerk out to entertain him and serve him a lousy meal. He was given the same kind of food given to the lower class workers or the very poor people, and was not treated well. When the friend asked to see the scholar, he pretended he was busy again and told him to wait or come back another day, et cetera. On another day, the friend came back to see him, the scholar treated him the same way as before. Later, the poor, discouraged friend was very upset and felt very angry and insulted, so he did not come to see his scholar friend anymore. He went home feeling very disturbed! [Master laughs.] He felt very upset everyday. When he was feeling very down, didn't want to do anything, didn't even want to live, then, unexpectedly he met a girl. She was very beautiful, very graceful and noble, but was dressed in ordinary clothes.

She appeared suddenly from nowhere. After they met, she encouraged him and she understood his feelings, knew his difficulties and how he was betrayed by his friend, et cetera. She decided to support him and told him, 'Don't worry. You continue to study, and I can weave and make lots of handicrafts to support you. I will also pray to the inner Master to help you. Don't worry.' [Master and audience laugh.] Therefore, the young man was able to focus his attention on his studies. He promised her that he would study hard and succeed in the imperial examinations and marry her. The girl didn't say much, she only said, 'We'll see at that time! You study hard first. This is a minor affair, we'll talk about that later!' She always said that and refused to let him get close. She always said that he must study hard, not to divert his attention on love affairs, that this matter is still very far away, and he must prepare to take the imperial examinations first! She continued to work and supported his studies, and at the next imperial examinations, he was selected as the top scholar!

After he also became the top scholar, the first person he wanted to see was his ex-friend, the other top scholar who was mean and wicked and betrayed him. He went to see him immediately, bringing along many subordinates to show his friend that he was also a top scholar now! He wanted to scold this bad friend on how he mistreated him before. While he was lashing out his anger, the old friend whispered something to his subordinate. The subordinate went inside and came out with a girl. The new scholar immediately recognized that it was the girl who worked and supported him while he studied for the past three years! He asked her, 'Why are you here?' The previous scholar replied, 'She is my wife!' [Master and audience laugh.]

Do you understand? He sacrificed his wife to help his friend. He sent his wife there to work and support him, to encourage him to study so that he would not degenerate, waste his talent and bury his brilliance. This friend of course couldn't understand his scholar friend's good intention. He kept thinking that his friend had mistreated him and wanted to scold him in revenge. Later he understood. He kneeled and bowed down to him and they hugged each other and cried touchingly. You must know this story; is it a Chinese story? It is very famous in Au Lac. [Master laughs.] This is the mercilessness of a gentleman. Sometimes, the compassion of a mean person might hurt others instead. But the mercilessness of a gentleman is truly hard to come by; it can help many people, help himself and others. It is the true compassion. Therefore, sometimes we need to know how to be merciless. Do you understand what I mean?

The truly good person knows when to be tough and gentle

Through this story we can understand Confucius when he said, 'Know compassion and have compassion, but also know when not to be compassionate.' This means that we

should know how to manage toughness and gentleness effectively. Otherwise, we get attached and get stuck in our compassionate qualities. But it is also not good if we cannot let go. Sometimes we must let go! For example, we have some treasure. When a war breaks out, of course we will gather all of our diamonds, gold, agate, coral, et cetera into a pack; we carry it on our bodies and do not want to let it go. Wherever we go, we carry it with us until we reach some safe place. But after we have arrived at the safe place, we have to put the package down. Or if our friends or relatives are hungry, we need to take some out to sell in exchange for money in order to buy food for them. We cannot hang on to the treasure and not care about others. Therefore, compassion and mercilessness should be used accordingly. If we know how to use it appropriately, mercilessness is compassion; otherwise, compassion becomes mercilessness, compassion becomes malevolence.

Many people misuse the word 'compassion.' They think a person should be compassionate and merciful all the time. Everyday they smile and say to whomever comes 'Good! Good!' [Master and audience laugh.] That is stupidity; only a wooden Buddha would do that. Human beings shouldn't be this way. A gentleman should know how to deal with others; he should know when to go forward and when to retreat, when to be tough and when to be gentle. That is a truly good person. Therefore, Confucius said here that he was not as compassionate as Yenhui. This is the reason; because he was not compassionate sometimes. There were times that he seemed to have let go of his compassion and was rather merciless to some people. That's why he said Yenhui was more compassionate than he was. Perhaps Yenhui was compassionate all the time, and didn't know when to say 'no,' 'I don't understand,' or 'I cannot.' Understand! To take everything as 'yes,' 'yes' 'yes,' is not compassion, but stupidity.

A higher form of compassion

Therefore, even if Yenhui was very compassionate and very loving, he lacked the part of mercilessness and didn't know when to let go of his compassion. So, in order to have a truly loving heart and greater compassion, he must come and learn from Confucius. You now understand what I mean! It is not that Confucius didn't know how to be compassionate, but he knew a higher form of compassion. Therefore, we say that a fully enlightened person is not all compassion. He is not as compassionate as we human beings imagine him to be; his behavior and methods are not what we expect them to be, within the framework of morality, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faithfulness. Understand? He has transcended this level. When he should step inside this framework, he will come in. When he should step outside in order to help more people, to fulfill higher ideals, then he will step out, understand? He comes and goes freely. Most of us can only stay within this framework, do not know how to get out or come back. If we don't know how to get out, then it is not the same; it is more rigid, like a one way street, we only know to go forward and don't know how to come back!

The same way like Zigong. He was very articulate, very good at debating; but he didn't know when not to argue and be a simple person. When he didn't know, he should say he didn't know, for he shouldn't know about everything anyhow. All that we should know, we know; that which we should not know, we don't need to know. If I don't know, I can say that I don't know because I don't need to know about that, and I will not die because I don't know about that! I know all of those things that I should know, and all that I should do; for those that I shouldn't know and shouldn't do, then I leave them alone!

Even if we say that we know, but sometimes we don't really know. There are some people who always have an answer for you regardless of what you ask. [Master laughs.]

Understand? Nobody can convince them otherwise; sometimes people are just too tired to argue with them, but it doesn't mean that they know everything. They are too curious, too fond of winning. They wanted to know everything and understand everything. Thus it becomes a big burden sometimes, understand? And then you cannot afford to lose, you cannot become someone who sometimes is very ordinary, very simple, just like a child who does not know how to debate, and does not care who wins.

The ordinary way is the Tao

Reading this story today, I feel rather comforted. It's because sometimes when I got into a debate, I could not convince the other party. The other party kept citing a lot of sutras and a lot of theories, that I thought made sense also. [Master and audience laugh.] So I lost. After I came home, I felt, 'How can I be a Supreme Master yet lose my face?' [Master and audience laugh.] Oh, then I thought, 'Well, since I didn't have a face anymore, who cares whether it got lost?' [Master laughs.] Today I read about what Confucius said that when we talk, we need to stumble for words once in a while. What he meant was, Zigong was very eloquent, he had excellent articulation, but he didn't know when he needed to stumble, understand? What good is it when we stumble for words? It does not mean that we don't have the eloquence, but just that we don't have to win every time, we don't have to be so great every time. Understand? If a person has to be so fantastic at every moment, then nobody can stand him! And he can't stand himself either, understand? If we don't know that we need to stumble once in a while, we are not used to that way, and we always win, then one day if we lose just once, we would commit suicide, because we are not used to it and we cannot take it. This type of person is just too rigid!

Therefore, in this world one cannot be too perfect, understand? Slightly imperfect is perfection indeed! This means to know when is a good time to do what; when we should explain and when not to argue. It is alright to be a deaf mute; it doesn't matter. Then, we can truly be uninhibited and free! If we try to be a good person all the time, try to keep our good names in perfect order, and are able to argue back no matter who says what, then this is too boring and too inflexible. It is not perfect and not fun. [Master laughs.] When things are the same all the time, then it is not fun anymore!

An enlightened master handles situations humbly and accordingly

Confucius said Zilu, who was more courageous, but he did not know that he needed to be a meek and timid person sometimes. Sometimes it should be this way, really should! I have told you about what happened in the Philippines last time, that they tried to control us by force. There were a large number of us, and of course we could have reacted; but if both sides got tough, a fight would have erupted. Do you think the result would be good? Certainly not! Isn't it so? First, I was a guest in their country. Second, we are a spiritual persons. Third, we were there to help, not to complicate the situation and cause further misunderstandings. It would not have been beneficial for either side, right? Therefore, at that time, if I was not meek and did not leave, if I did not pretend to be afraid of their power and gave in, then there would have been big trouble! It would have become very complicated and terrible, and may not have been beneficial for the Au Lac refugees. What would have happened if we won? We still would have had to buy plane tickets to go home after a short while! [Master and audience laugh.] We were not meant to stay there forever. We must not be too impulsive, and not judge a true hero merely by the outcome of an incident.

Since ancient times, all the martial arts practitioners, teachers or masters in China always forbade people from showing their martial arts randomly. They were instructed to be

patient and tolerate it until they had to defend themselves. They were not to provoke a fight, accept a challenge to fight, or to show off. Am I right? It is not that they were not brave or had no ability to fight, but the true martial arts is tolerance and not fighting.

When we are being pushed against the wall, then of course we have to fight back. But it is not for us to show off any time, so that others know that we are not afraid of anyone, or to show how terrific our martial arts are, how talented, how powerful we are. Therefore, in this world, sometimes an enlightened Master handles matters according to the natural flow of the situation and in a humble way. Such as Shakyamuni Buddha, even though He possessed great miraculous powers, He refused to compete with others when challenged. Jesus Christ was also full of miraculous powers. He heard that He would be crucified, He knew that was His destiny, He should be crucified to be able to save sentient beings, so He allowed Himself to be crucified. It was not that He couldn't escape; He could have run away without using any miraculous powers, because He had a lot of disciples, and He knew His time was up beforehand. It was not that He did not know, and He could have simply run away without using any miraculous powers!

THE YEAR OF THE DOG ⁶⁰

This is the year of the dog! I'll tell you some stories for those children who were born in the year of the dog.

A very clever dog

There is a story called 'The Clever Dog.' How was it clever? Once there was this family with a dog. One day, they invited a guest to dinner. When the guest arrived, the dog did not say a word. It didn't bark, nor bite. However, when the guest was having dinner with the family, the dog kept staring at him. It was also growling, not very loud, but it sounded very angry. It kept fixing its stare at the guest and growling at him nonstop. The guest was feeling very nervous. His heart was beating hard, and he kept looking back at the dog. The man and the dog were staring at each other, until the man could no longer stand it. He said to his host and the family, 'Why, your dog looks so vicious!' Before the host could utter a reply, the little girl named Shiao Ling said, 'I don't think so! Normally it is not that violent! It is behaving like this because you are using its bowl!'

She was only a little kid, who knew nothing about human affairs, so she just told the truth! Do you understand?

'Mini' got lost

There was a small child who had a dog. One day, the dog got lost; no one knew where it went. The child cried his heart out. Everyday, he would cry and tell his mother, 'My Mimi ran away! My Mimi ran away!' Then his mother told him, 'It's alright, my child. It's alright! Your daddy has already put an ad in the newspaper. Very soon Mimi will come back and you'll be together again!' But the child cried even louder: 'How will Mimi come back to me? Mimi can't read the newspaper!' [Master and audience laugh.] It didn't recognize any Chinese characters, how could it read Chinese newspaper?

60. International three-day retreat, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, April 1-3, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

The gentle dog

There was a thief who went to a very outstanding looking mansion to steal something. Outside of the mansion, there was a sign with a picture of a dog's head which said, 'MEAN DOG INSIDE, PLEASE KEEP OUT!' You know that?! Most of the rich people do this; they hang a sign with a picture of a dog's head and claim that there is a mean dog inside. It is just to scare people away so they don't come inside to steal things.

But the thief went inside and stole all the things he wanted. After he put them all in a bag and was on his way out, the thief added something under the sign. It said, 'That dog was very gentle. Don't misjudge it.' [Master and audience laugh.]

Where are you, dog?

This story happened in Au Lac, or over in Kuangtong, as people there like eating dog's meat. I don't know whether that is true or not, but the story is very funny.

Once there was a man who went around selling dog's meat. Normally, in those areas, people carry a shouldering pole, hawking by the roadside. What I meant was, they carry things on their shoulders, and then go around selling them, trying to attract customers. Just like the people selling meat dumplings, buns, things like that. They travel about everywhere, yelling at the tops of their voices. People who eat these things know what they are yelling about. Sometimes I don't understand what they are saying, but all their customers do.

So, this man carried a shouldering pole, with dog's meat on both ends. He went about everywhere, shouting, 'Who's... dog...' [Master and audience laugh.] What he meant was, 'Who wants dog's meat? Any one wants dog's meat?' But when he was hawking, he said, 'Who's... dog...' [Master and audience laugh.] And so he travelled everywhere, hawked along everywhere. After he had been yelling for half an hour, suddenly someone said, 'Hey! Dog, Dog, Dog, come here Dog!' [Master and audience laugh.]

He could not work out where the customer was. He kept looking at all directions, but still he could see no one, so he just said, 'Where's... dog!' [Master and audience laugh.] As there was no answer, he said, 'Where's... dog?' [Master and audience laugh.] I wonder if they could decide, after having eventually met with each other, who was a dog and who was not a dog, or perhaps they were both dogs.

Sometimes when we speak, we tend to be like this, our speech seems incongruous. Sometimes it sounds rather lovable, or funny, or rude. So be more careful when you speak!

The story of a new recruit

Oh! These are all stories for the children. There was a new marine, you know, like a soldier. He went to report to the navy headquarters and enlisted himself to be in the navy. After they examined him the commander said, 'Your qualifications are good enough, but can you swim?' The new marine was horrified and asked the commander, 'How come? Don't you have ships?' [Master and audience laugh.]

The shortsighted teacher

This story is called 'The Shortsighted Teacher.' Do you know what having shortsightedness is? It's that kind of person who, like me, has big eyes, but cannot see properly. [Master and audience laugh.] We use our wisdom eyes. Once there was a teacher or a professor. One day, he was taking this history class. As soon as he stepped in everyone stood up to salute him, to show their respect, and to greet him. After the salutation, everyone sat down. Everyone was sitting quietly, except for one person, who kept going about his own business at the window. A while later, when the teacher or professor could no longer stand it, he asked, 'Hey! Do you know when Mao Tse Tung died?' [Master laughs.] Just an example! For example! Okay, leave it alone. Let's not talk about Mao Tse Tung. Let's talk about – Mao Tse Hsi! [Master and audience laughed.] If we talked about Mao Tse Tung, people would think that I talked about politics, and would, again, bring me trouble.

The teacher asked the person by the window, who was neither standing up nor sitting down, but was stirring things about, and was disturbing the class very much, 'Do you know when Mao Tse Hsi died?' He asked a question about history. The man replied, 'I don't know.' The teacher said, 'Why! Such a little thing and you don't know? I'll ask you another question, 'When did the Japanese withdraw from China?' The man said, 'I don't know that either! How would I know such things!' The teacher said, 'Are you kidding? What did you do yesterday? Why didn't you do your homework?'

Then that person who was messing about by the window said, 'Why? Last night I was at the movies. After the movie, I went home and had a few drinks with my brother next door! Then I went home and slept with my girlfriend!' And then this professor, wow, he became very, very angry. He was so furious that he could have died. He pounded on his desk, making a loud bang, and then he said, 'Shame on you! What kind of student are you? What are you doing here then?' [Laughter] The man replied, 'I came to repair this window! I am the carpenter!' [Laughter]

The government was more frightening than the tigers

This happened at the time of Confucious. One day, Confucious was passing through a place and saw an old woman sitting by five graves, crying very hard. Confucious ask, 'What happened? What is the matter with you? Why are you crying so hard? Who is that in the five graves?' The old woman cried even louder and said, 'All five members of my family were killed by tigers. I have just buried them; that is why I am crying here! Now I am all by myself and I am very lonely.' Then Confucious said: 'Why don't you move to the city and live with other people? Isn't that safer? Didn't you say that the tigers here are very vicious?' She said, 'Yes, yes, yes, yes! Very, very vicious! People are killed very often! Just yesterday, they killed all the turtles!' Then Confucious said: 'How strange! Since the tigers here are so vicious and dangerous, why don't you move down there in the city and live with everyone else. Isn't that much safer?' The old woman shook her head, waved her hand and said: 'No, no..., thank you!' Confucious said: 'Why not?' She said: 'Because down there has a government; it's even worse!' [Master and audience laugh.]

If someone asks me why do I live up in the mountains, where are mosquitoes, the caves are murky and dark, the houses are so small, the tent is leaking and so on..., I will say: 'Down there I have disciples; it's even worse!' [Master and audience laugh.]

Tea break

The time table in hell is just like office hours; there is punishment time, resting time, et cetera. Once there was a man who had fallen to hell. The devils came to show him around hell, allowing him an opportunity to 'shop around' to see which type of torture he'd prefer. He was given freedom of choice. So the man went about looking everywhere. But all he saw were people being sawn, burned, fried, axed, having their noses or ears cut off, et cetera. Everything was so horrific, and none of it could he stand.

Then they came by this place where he saw a bridge. The water under the bridge had a terrible smell, like sewage. All the prisoners just stood there immersed in the water. The water was only up to their chests and everyone was having a cup of tea! The prisoner said to himself, 'Oh! This is not bad!' [Laughter] 'Not bad! It doesn't matter. You just stand for a while and then you may have tea, biscuits, and blessed items.' So he said, 'Okay! I'll stay here to endure this torture then!' [Laughter]

So, he got down and stood in the water. A little while later, when he was just about to have a cup of tea, the devil said, 'Resting time is over; everyone turns upside down!!'

Dreams of wealth and status

Once there was this person who was in hell and was just about to be reincarnated. Even the king of hell could not stand him any more. [Master laughs.] If he was allowed to stay on, the king of hell would surely go crazy, so he was looking for ways to quickly send him away.

This person was very bad, very naughty. Even though he was now free to go, he did not want to. He just wanted to, shamelessly, hang around in hell, for the king of hell now allowed him to do anything. If he was not allowed to do what he wanted, he would throw a tantrum, make trouble and turn hell upside down. He would put all the equipment for punishing people out of service, and would not repair them, so that when they wanted to punish someone, they had no equipment..., and so on. He would wait until the devil policemen were asleep, and stick chicken feathers up their noses, so that they could not sleep even though they were dead tired. And when there was work to be done, the king of hell could find no one, all the devils were fast asleep, et cetera. Although he kept making trouble there, the king of hell dared not let him go because his time was not up, and the king was fearful that the 'Jade Emperor' might scold him.

Oh, how annoyed the king of hell was! He had no choice but to look for excuses to send him back to the world. He sent for this man and tried to talk him into it, 'Why, we've just had a meeting, all the officials, 'large and small,' from the Grand Imperial Court of the king of hell. We have decided that you have been a wonderful citizen here. [Laughter] You are very clever, sharp, and 'Huo Po' ('Full of life' in Chinese).' [Master laughs.] Everything was already 'Po' ('broken,' another Chinese word), so they said 'Huo Po.' 'We feel that you are worthy of the grace from heaven and earth, and you may return to the human world sooner.' Normally, anyone would have been happy to hear this, but not that person! [Laughter] Instead he said: 'What is the big deal about going back to the human world?! It is just the same here. I can play around here too! [Laughter] Moreover, there are so many interesting tools here. There aren't any tools like these for punishing people in the human world. Where can I play then?'

The king of hell was getting scared. He was afraid that the person would keep clinging on and did not want to leave. He said, 'When you get there you will begin a human's way of

life. It's dark here, so it is not as much fun. As for the tools, I can send some up to you later. [Laughter] Don't you worry, later on I will tell the ghost genius here to invent more interesting ones, and deliver them to you free of charge. Just relax and go in peace. If you need anything give me a ring, and I will help you.' [Laughter] The king gave the man his fax and phone numbers, and all the secret codes, but he still did not want to go. So the ghosts, devils, small officials and large officials, all knelt down and begged [Laughter], 'You are so noble, and of such uncommon brilliance. If we don't see to it that you get back to the world, the 'Jade Emperor' would surely hold us responsible for burying such brilliant talent! [Laughter] Please spare us; for the sake of our existence, please go!'

He was still standing there thinking, taking his time considering! [Laughter] His beard was so long, because he had been in hell for a very long time. His beard had grown very long. In hell there aren't any knives suitable for shaving, only those used for chopping people, so he had grown a very long beard. He was standing there stroking his beard and thinking. As he was deciding, the king of hell, ranking officials, the civil and military officials, 'black' officials, and ghosts were all nervously waiting. They were afraid that he might stay put for another thousand years. He had done this before. One little stay and it was a full three thousand years. [Laughter] It did not look like he was ready to leave. Heaven knows what it might be like should he decide to stay. The king of hell or the ghosts would have to suffer for a long long time.

Now they looked very nervous. They kept reciting the five names and prayed for the inner Master's help. Perhaps there would be answers if they kept praying. They all say that the Supreme Master Ching Hai is very responsive. All one needs to do is to recite the five names and ask for Her help. Even in hell they have heard about the name of the Supreme Master Ching Hai! [Master laughs.] They all knelt down and recited, 'Namo Supreme Master Ching Hai, please send this person away quickly, or we will have to suffer here in hell. [Laughter] We, the citizens of hell, would not be able to endure it anymore.'

Sure enough, their prayers were answered. The person suddenly said, 'Alright! Alright! Seeing that you are so intense in your prayer, I will be merciful, and set you free. I will go in a minute!' Yes! Everyone was delighted. But then he said, 'It's true that I am going. It's alright, but not without a few conditions. I can't just go in vain like this.' The king of hell said, 'Tell us quickly! Whatever conditions they might be, we will all agree!' So the prisoner said, 'I'd like, when I go up there, to be reincarnated into the most wealthy family, and I should be the only son of that family, and the highest ranking minister in the Imperial Court.' He almost wanted to be the king. [Laughter] I was also very surprised that he did not want to be the king. Perhaps it requires a lot of good deeds and merits to be the king; something that is destined. But a man's destiny can be changed so that he becomes a little prime minister. It is more difficult to become a king. Perhaps it is like that. He did not ask for much. He was quite modest actually! [Laughter] It's beneficial to stay in hell for a little while; you develop a humble spirit.

In addition, he said that, later on, his son would have to be the most successful candidate in the imperial examination. My God! He wanted everything! Then he continued, 'I also want ten thousand acres of land, a large lake which is full of fish and prawns, and my land should be full of fruit trees, with a lot of exotic flowers and plants, et cetera. I will have a most beautiful wife, and about one thousand beautiful maids. They should all follow my wishes. Whatever I want, they will do it. No matter how crazy I am, how illogical I might be, they will all do as I say. And they should absolutely, wholeheartedly be in love with me, and will swear that they love absolutely only me. Also, my storeroom will be filled with pearls, agates, gold, diamonds, et cetera. All the other warehouses will be filled with rice, all sorts of grains, and all sorts of food, and nothing will be in short supply. I will hold the

utmost power, and no one will be able to resist me. I will enjoy life like that for one hundred years, [Laughter] no sickness, no misery, [Laughter] and when I die I will die a beautiful death.' He knew that we could live only for one hundred years in this world, otherwise he would have asked for an eternity.

Then the king of hell heaved a sigh, and said regrettably, 'Look, mister, if there were so many wonderful things in the world, I would have long been reincarnated up there!' [Laughter and applause.] 'I would take your place and be reincarnated up there.' [Laughter]

We all feel that he has gone over the top. However, most people are like this. People all like it that way; it is just that they can't have it that way! Most of us are like that, aren't we? Deep inside, in our dreams, in our heart, we would all like it like that. We all wish to have no worries or sorrow, no sickness or old age, with virtuous conduct and high prestige. We would love to have a lot of money and big mansions. We would all like to be healthy, and have our children become useful and famous individuals. We would like ourselves to be happy forever, with many wives, or husbands, wouldn't we?

When we read the story, we all laugh at him, but in fact, most of us are like him, aren't we? Especially those who do not practice spiritually.

But then spiritual practitioners want it the most! Since we are unable to achieve it here, we want to go to heaven to get it. That's why we are practicing, aren't we? We practice so that we may go to the relatively happy and everlasting place, where we will have whatever we desire. Do you understand? However, when we reach that level of existence, we will not want anything any more, because everything is so abundant there.

For example, now that you come here, every day you meditate when you want to, eat when it is time to eat, and go to sleep when it is time to sleep. What else is there that you want? Is that not so? At home sometimes you don't have time to eat, then you worry. Then you want to find time to eat, or find time to meditate. When you come here for three days, or seven days, you feel so contented. You lack nothing, and you do not think that you want this or that, do you? [Audience: No.] It's because we don't have them here in this world that we want them. Once we are in heaven, we don't want them any more. That's why we call that place nirvana. Nirvana means without any desire; no wish, no passion, no want, or the place where you desire nothing. Why desire nothing? Because we already have everything. Do you understand?

BEYOND THE MORAL STANDARDS ⁶¹

Once Jesus was speaking in public, and suddenly many so-called reputed, intellectual and learned people came with some highly esteemed people in the church, like priests, for example. They dragged behind them a woman who had committed adultery. At that time, any woman who committed adultery had to be stoned to death. There were about three ways of executing sinners at that time: One was to stone them, another was to throw them into the lion's cage, and the other was to crucify them. Jesus was crucified, but this woman was supposed to be stoned to death.

Those honorable men challenged Jesus by asking, 'According to Moses' laws, this woman should be stoned to death. What do You think?' Jesus said nothing, just wrote on the sand with His finger, 'A group of liars.' Those people kept pushing Him, so He finally said, 'Any

61. International three-day retreat, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, April 1-3, 1994 (Originally in English).

of you who has not sinned and who considers himself the purest and holiest may cast the first stone.’ Upon hearing this, everyone slipped away silently and quickly. [Master and audience laugh.] At last, Jesus was left alone with the woman who had sinned. He asked her, ‘Where are your accusers? Has no man condemned you?’

She replied, ‘No man.’

And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I want to condemn you. You may go home now.’

[Master sighs.] This story reminds us of something. There is no one in this world who has not sinned. Besides, whether one has sinned or not depends on the situation, background and your level of enlightenment. The so-called morality and ethics of this world are different from what real saints perceive. Those who have attained the highest level of enlightenment see no such things. They do not even imagine or think about these words. I don't know how I can describe this level to you.

When you first begin spiritual practice, you see the difference between good and bad. But the distinction gradually fades away as you practice more. This is very strange and hard to explain to other people, but you just know it. And you won't think so much about what is good or bad, except when you teach your disciples because they are at those levels that you have to explain to them in those terms. Otherwise, you don't really want to talk about such things, and nothing really matters to you, because you have a different point of view.

You look from the top down and become very tolerant, like seeing a movie. You won't be scolding the bad guy angrily, because you know he is only playing his role. And you won't be praising the good guy profusely, because you know he is playing his role, too.

What we call good or bad in a person is the habit or the behavior, not the soul in that person. Our souls can realize a lot of things, but I can't name them all; and they are hard to describe, although I know them very well. Regarding the so-called very serious crimes in our society, I have a different point of view, but I can't tell you every detail. Many people would not understand, and I could not put it very clearly either.

That's why I told you to meditate every day, and then you will realize it on your own. I just gave you an overview to direct your spiritual realization. As you go further, you will gradually understand why I said we would not discriminate between good and bad when we have had more results from spiritual practice.

When we are free from this discrimination, we will forgive our enemies easily, and then we will not be very angry about those who hurt us. We will forget about the whole thing very quickly and will not feel so bad. Even if we do feel bad, it will be for those people instead of for ourselves.

THE STORY OF AN INSECT ⁶²

The more we practice, the less serious we become. We do not see things as either right or wrong. We think that everything is all right. We become more and more relaxed. It is not that people have stopped performing good or bad deeds, but that these deeds, good or bad, have nothing to do with us. This is because we think differently now. We are not contaminated or influenced by them, so we become more and more relaxed. Even if we sometimes do not treat our family members or friends well, or we make mistakes, we can

62. International three-day retreat, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, April 1-3, 1994 (Originally in Chinese).

still forgive ourselves, and thereby become relaxed. That's why we speak of one-life liberation.

Otherwise, we are influenced by this physical world. We are bound here and there, and we tie ourselves down. Of course, we feel bored the whole day. If we go on like this every day, we will never get out of this boring atmosphere. Spiritual liberation is like this: We become liberated when we are alive; we feel relaxed and happy; we are no longer worried and burdened as before, when we could hardly tolerate others' actions.

But let me tell you something, I am not so liberated! [Master and audience laugh.] I just stepped on an insect and my heart aches over it. I told the guard that it wouldn't have mattered so much if it had died. But it was wounded, I don't know where it was hurt because it can't talk! So my heart aches terribly. I said sorry, but I knew it wouldn't help. So I put it on the wet grass, sprayed some water on it, and baptized it. I hope it will be better. Maybe it will, but when it was wounded, it must have felt terrible, and I don't know where it was hurt. Although it can still move, it must hurt. Its feet may have gotten hurt or its nails may have been broken. Maybe it had been manicuring the whole day and I broke its nails. Maybe it had just had a manicure and was beautifully dressed for a meeting, but was wounded by me. I heard a 'crack!' And it hurts my heart! I have been apologizing to it until now.

Therefore, I don't know if I am really liberated. It seems that I am not liberated. I am still attached! [Laughter] Right? Gee, I am not liberated from this sort of situation: I feel hurt when others hurt; and especially when animals suffer, I suffer more because they can't talk. If we are injured, in most cases we are sent to the hospital and we can tell the doctor where we are wounded. He can treat us at once and we will feel better, or we can get some injections and take some pills and the pain will be alleviated. But the animals really hurt terribly! [Master sighs.] This is the price we have to pay in this world.

Can you imagine how boring our world would have been if God hadn't created the animals, such as deer, bears, rabbits, and cats? God created many things, both for us and for embellishing the world. But the price is high. Animals suffer, because they too have a soul, life, and feelings, which let them stay active and appear alive. Because of this life or vital energy, they feel pain when they get wounded or die. This is the price we have to pay for this body and this life.

We have to pay this price in order to live or feel. Otherwise, we will feel nothing when people kiss or touch us. Cold or hot drinks, or food will not taste good to us. We enjoy this world through sensations. Only through sensations do we know a flower's fragrance, sweet fruit, great tea, and delicious food. Therefore, we pay a very high price to have these good feelings and sensations. The same goes for animals.

We pay the price to have the feelings of life. Actually, there is nothing in this world that doesn't have a price. A robot can do many things, quite like we humans, and sometimes it can even 'think,' almost the way we do, but it has no emotions or perceptions. It doesn't know the taste of good food, the warmth of the sun, the coolness of the breeze, or painful sensations. Without this life, there can be no feelings. Where there is feeling, there is pain.

We often ask why God created such a world of suffering. Actually, we should know that this is the price we have to pay for free will and feelings. Only in this way can we enjoy this beautiful and wonderful world. It is no fun if the animals are like machines and have no feelings. It is no fun if we are like machines. Nevertheless, since we have fun, we have pain as well. But we don't like pain. Again, if God benumbs our feelings, we cannot enjoy

the world. Therefore, the more we practice, the more we identify with our fate. We realize that we made the choice to have fun here. We have all these tools that give us many feelings. When pain comes, we cannot escape, we cannot just feel nothing.

This same theory applies to karma. Some time in the past, we had everything—money, power, and free choice, but we got lost in them. We chose to indulge ourselves in them. We did not treat people well; we had no consideration for others; and we wasted our talents, money, and property. As a result, we lost everything. This is how the world works: There are ups and downs. When we reach the downside, we have nothing; we are poor, sick, and agonized. So, we turn to God and ask why we were born into such a life. Actually, it's not God's fault, because there are always the bright and the dark side. There are always ups and downs, good things and bad things. We will be rising to the upper side, anyway.

The saints and good spiritual practitioners understand that the good and bad things in this world are no big deal. But the worldly people cannot see beyond the brief present moment. They cannot see the past or the future, so they suffer and dislike it, and thereby create more suffering because they are not peaceful or balanced within. They keep seeking more, but the more they seek, the more they suffer and struggle. They make the situation even worse, and they suffer more. Then, they turn to killing, robbery, or feuds. Or they are bullied or put into prison, and their suffering grows even greater and they can't escape. Therefore, we are responsible for creating the good and the bad in this world. Because of our own preferences, sometimes we unconsciously do things on purpose. This is the way of life we enjoy in this world.

A DOG CATCHING MICE ⁶³

There are many stories that are kind of like parables, reminding us about life and all the funny things in life. For example, there is one story about a dog who could catch mice. This book is a collection of the jokes of the saints. Before, we heard non-saint stories; now we hear saint stories, saints' jokes, the jokes of the saints, which are a little bit dry, but that's what people expect of saints; always talking about big philosophy and many parables about the cosmos, the microcosms, macrocosms, and macaroni... So a saint can never laugh in public. Maybe he can laugh alone; maybe the saint just buys this kind of book, a joke book, and then sits in his bathroom and reads alone. And when he comes outside, he says, 'Emptiness is reality; reality is emptiness.'

So, he is one of those kinds of people. After the saint has studied in his bathroom and laughed his heart out, he comes out and talks about this kind of thing. If you don't tell everyone else, I will continue to read jokes to you, later.

This story is about a dog who could catch mice. Now we have heard that only cats can catch mice. How come this dog could catch mice?

Who knows? Please raise your hand. Now, don't laugh. You're not allowed to laugh in such a 'serious congregation.' If you have the least bit of 'education,' you don't laugh like that. Who knows why the dog could catch mice? No? How come? You are supposed to be enlightened!

Okay, there was a country in China a long time ago. We'll call it the Chi Dynasty. There was a person who could read the palms of dogs. In other words, he was a dog palmist. His

63. Group meditation, Los Angeles Center, California, U.S.A., March 12, 1994 (Originally in English).

neighbors heard about his talent, so they asked the dog palmist to go and buy a dog for them so that they could catch mice.

One year passed by. Then the dog palmist eventually bought a dog, brought it to the neighbor, and said, 'This is a German shepherd; it's very good, a number one dog.' So the neighbor thanked him and kept the dog. Many years passed, and the neighbor people never saw the dog catch any mice, not any mice at all, not even the hair of a mouse, and it did not even look at a mouse.

So, they went to the dog palmist and asked him whether he had read the palms wrongly, whether the dog was really a German shepherd or whether it was a Beijing terrier. Then the dog palmist said, 'No, no, no, it's definitely, one hundred and twenty percent German shepherd. This dog is sehr gut, muy bien (very good)! But, you must know, this dog is trained to catch sheep or antelope; he does not want to catch mice.' And the neighbors said, 'Then what shall we do? We just want a dog who catches mice. We told you.'

So, the palmist said, 'Don't worry, just bind him in one corner, and don't let him eat anything. Then if a mouse passes by, he will surely catch it.' And after that, the dog began to catch mice. Then afterwards, even when they let him free, he also caught mice, because it was a habit.

This is similar to the story of humans. We are normally from heaven; we have everything that we could ever want or not want, and we are almighty. We are powerful, and glorious. Now, we come here into this physical world and we are bound in this physical prison, this small room. Some are bigger rooms, but, still... my room is very small! [Master and audience laugh.] Well, we are practitioners; we can only talk from personal experience.

Therefore, we catch mice. The mice in this world are money, fame, name, profit, competition, you know, fighting, bickering, being bitter, and back biting among each other – these are all mice. And pitifully, we enjoy them, because we have been bound in these physical chains. And then we know nothing else. We forget our origin; that's the way we live our life.

Well, it's not a dog's life; it's just a parable. Some people do really live a so-called 'dog's life,' because it's really miserable. We work sometimes very hard. Some people work eighteen hours, if they have a lot of children or they have a lot of debts to pay off. Or if they had a kind of sickness or illness that suddenly left them bankrupt, they might have to work hard day and night, just to pay for their two or three meals a day and some clothes to cover their body. That's it.

Because we have really forgotten our real self. It's very difficult to remember, but you do remember now, a little bit, one by one, slowly. It takes time, because now to stop the dog from catching mice is very difficult. Before he wouldn't do it, but now he won't stop. Everything is like a habit. So I think we should always remember, in the midst of all this suffering and confusion, we should always remember our own, real origin. Never give in to the negative power of this world that always wants us to think we are nothing, we are sinful, we can never be anything, we can never do anything, and we can never want anything more than just a few morsels of food and a few pieces of clothing every day.

So, this is very good. I have nothing to say any more because the story is very clear.

A LION AND A PRIEST ⁶⁴

A Christian priest went to Africa with the highest ideal to convert the heathen Africans into Christians. Halfway through, he met a lion, so he knew that his life was going to be finished. The lion said to the priest, 'Now say your last prayer, alright?'

So of course, the priest could do nothing else but kneel down and pray to God that Hes would save him from this terrible Christian lion. While he was saying and praying very hard, the lion also knelt down. The priest was very surprised and said, 'I am praying to God because I want Hirm to save my life and my soul. What business have you to pray to God?'

So, the lion said, 'Well, we have to give thanks before a meal.'

I tell you this story and by the way, we can kind of emphasize and learn something from even a joke. Because we, human beings, are funny sometimes. Like one enemy prays, 'God, let me kill them. Let me win over our enemy.' And the other one prays the same thing, 'Oh Buddha, or God almighty, help me to kill all of them today. Then I'll worship You forever and ever. You are my true God.' So God just sits up there, stroking Hiers beard and doesn't know what to do, because both of them are Hiers children, especially when they believe in the same God, when they profess to be the same Christian people, Buddhists, Jews, Moslems or whatever.

We have different opinions, we have fights amongst ourselves on earth because of different religious beliefs. But then even within the same belief, we fight with each other, and kill each other for the same God that we believe in. It happens around the world. In some countries, the Christians fight with each other. So, what do you think God should do? If you were God what would you do? Today kill this one and the next day kill the other one? Because they both pray, 'Please let us win over our enemy, kill them all, destroy them all.'

So actually, we have to stop and rethink, that among these different religions it's really no good to fight with each other. If there is one God, just let people believe or not believe in Hirm the way they want. God will know. We don't have to compare who is who and which God is bigger than the other one, because we don't know Hirm. We only know Hirm through an opportunity of getting in touch with Hiers power. We know how Hes loves us, takes care of us every day.

Like through the Quan Yin method, we know when we're in trouble, when we're in danger, we pray and then God comes. It doesn't matter in which form Hes appears to us to help us at that time of trouble. We know we always can rely on Hirm. That is how we know God; otherwise, we can never know Hirm enough.

PERSONAGES IN 'THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST' ⁶⁵

'The Journey to the West' is a book about experiences and pitfalls in spiritual practice. The more I read it, the more I admire the writer. He has given very vivid descriptions about our lives and inner qualities and uses all kinds of metaphors to depict the obstacles in spiritual practice and ways to overcome them. The more we practice, the more we will understand the meaning of this book, and the more strongly we will feel that this is not just a fairy tale.

64. Group meditation, Los Angeles Center, California, U.S.A., March 9, 1994 (Originally in English).

65. International retreat, Shatin Center, Hong Kong, October 1, 1993 (Originally in Chinese).

Truly, there are very good teachings in the book. After you have started to practice the Quan Yin method, you will understand it better; you will see your true self and become enlightened!

In 'The Journey to the West,' Xuan Zang (also known as Tripitaka) is a very kind and solemn master. But what about his three disciples? They look ugly, and they kill. Ordinary people are scared to death just from seeing them. But Xuan Zang is not afraid. He accepts them as disciples. And they wholeheartedly support him in his successful quest in search of the scriptures. Without these three ferocious disciples, Xuan Zang might not have been able to reach the West. Therefore, everything has its use. If we understand the laws of the universe and the secret of creation, we'll be able to make use of everything. There is nothing that's not useful.

Don't ever think that the Monkey King, Pigsy and Sandy don't exist. They represent our very inner nature and the struggle that Xuan Zang goes through in his journey to get the scriptures. The Monkey King represents his intelligence and wisdom, and the almighty power. He seeks help from the Buddha and gets his problems solved each time. Pigsy stands for his laziness and fondness for women. Sometimes he finds a beautiful woman alluring and becomes greedy when he sees good food. Sandy represents the time when he is peaceful, balanced and in a state where neither good nor bad exists.

The Monkey King described in the book is very, very smart. He has the power to transform himself into seventy-two different forms. Before he attains enlightenment, he causes tumult in the heavenly court and calls himself the great sage equal to heaven. That represents our inner struggling quality. If he were as high as the lord of heaven, he wouldn't have had to stir up anything! He's just like us. We know we have the qualities of God inside, which are the highest. But since we haven't attained that level, we can't believe in ourselves. Or we have faith in ourselves today but not tomorrow, then again the day after tomorrow, and then lose faith in ourselves the day after that. If it happens that we are enlightened and know who we are, we feel very noble and one with heaven and earth and everything.

But there are many difficulties in this world. When we run into obstacles and a lot of trouble, we fall down to the level of a mortal. We doubt ourselves, and feel we are very weak, helpless and powerless. Then we feel very frustrated. No matter how people may tell us that we are Gods or saints, we don't want to listen. We lose our confidence. All Quan Yin practitioners go through the experiences of the Monkey King. That's why we struggle and cause a lot of trouble. One day we want to become God, and the next day we don't. Today we are God and tomorrow we are not. One day we are God, the next we are maya and run around. This is Xuan Zang's inner conflict. The writer uses the monkey as a metaphor for our unsettled minds. But the mind is very smart and powerful. It can have whatever it wants and go wherever it wants. But no matter where it goes, it's still within the realm of the mind and can't go beyond the three worlds.

You have read in 'The Journey to the West' about the Monkey King accompanying Xuan Zang on a westward journey in search of scriptures for the sake of saving sentient beings. But God keeps sending demons and spirits to harm them. The eighty-one sufferings are all created by God. What does this mean? It means that without trials and tribulations, we can't grow up, just like a soldier cannot become good without training and a child won't study hard without tests. Therefore, tests are good for us so we know whether we've made any progress and whether our faith has wavered.

You have seen in the novel how both master and disciples are hurt by trees, shackled by flowers or hurt by mountain deities, et cetera. That's just like what I've told you: The

outside world is sometimes unsafe and dangerous for us. If we look too long we'll get lost there and forget our original nature. Then it's easy for us to be bound there. Just like when we are used to living in one place, we don't want to go anywhere else or can't sleep when we go to a different place. It's the same with a spiritual practitioner. Sometimes he passes through some places and wants to stay there. His original goal is to find the scriptures and attain Godhood. When he arrives in some places and sees the beautiful scenic landscape, pretty trees, blooming flowers and bountiful fruits, he just wants to stay there rather than move on. He thinks, 'Okay, why do I want to become God? I'll stay here to enjoy the flowers and trees, and then write and recite poems!'

Therefore, in 'The Journey to the West' some tree and flower deities come to tempt Xuan Zang. And he almost falls in love with them. That's because he is beginning to become fond of the scenery, not because there is a real tree deity to trap him. He is attached, which is the same as being bound by trees and flowers. Moreover, the trees and flowers have their own spirits, too. If we come to like them, they will communicate with us. Then the more we like them, the more they will bind us there. And our level will stop there. We should keep moving ahead in our spiritual practice and not stop anywhere. That's why we say that it's dangerous to look at the outside world. That's all it means.

The Monkey King represents our more mature wisdom. Therefore, if he's not careful and complies with the worldly habits of Xuan Zang, he will get stuck in disasters, too. But because he is the Monkey King, he escapes sooner or later and is not stuck for too long. But Pigsy is! [Master laughs.] Therefore, at one time, God manifests as three beautiful girls. Pigsy, not knowing about it, is deluded by lust and is caught in the net. Even though he is not hurt, he is bound for a while. What is the bondage? Even if a person is truly beautiful and is a true transformation of God, and you fall in love with her, you are tied down by your feelings. Your initial intention is to go to the West to get scriptures. But you stop there because of your love for her. This delays your spiritual journey. Therefore, even if the person is God's manifestation, we shouldn't mind! Be careful not to be bound by so-called good and beautiful women, or the good things of this world.

Once, Xuan Zang is trapped in a spider's cave. He is bound by beautiful women and many children, who are transformations of spiders. This is the idea of the family. Maybe at that time he wanted to have a family, wondering why he should go through so much hardship to get the scriptures. Why not marry, and then have a few lovely karmas? Wouldn't that be nice? [Laughter] As soon as you have that kind of thought, you are tied there! Even if you don't have a real wife or children right next to you to bind you, when you think of it, you are already bound and your level changes! Then, if you let that idea stay with you for a long time, you are tied there during that whole period of time. Therefore, it is not that there are real spider spirits or little spider spirits to tie him down. These are his own thoughts. He ties himself to that situation. Sometimes because of the length of the spiritual path, we inevitably change our minds every now and then. The writer uses these stories to describe Xuan Zang's mind and his spirit in overcoming all kinds of inner obstacles.

There is also a white-bone spirit that can transform itself into a beautiful woman to entice people and then suck their blood. What is this white-bone spirit? It's the spirit within us, or our quality of wanting to entice other people sexually. Therefore, spiritual practitioners from the old times used the method of white-bone visualizing to control their lust. They practiced until they could visualize everyone as white bones. That's also correct. If you see through a beautiful woman or a handsome man, what they have within them is nothing more than white bones or a skeleton!

When we see the Monkey King tricked into wearing a golden ring on his head by the Quan Yin Bodhisattva, we may think, 'Why is it that the Bodhisattva has no mercy?' But if She didn't do this, there would be no way to control him. The Quan Yin Bodhisattva wanted to teach him and help him. So She had to give him this golden ring. Otherwise, there would be no way to change his personality. And he wouldn't be able to attain any level. Therefore, God and saints don't always smile and give you candy. That would spoil you. It would be like buying you a ticket to hell!

Do you understand the metaphors in this story now? We all have the qualities of pigs and monkeys within us. Animals also eat, bear children, and take care of them. They are not much different than us. Therefore, if we don't practice, we are not much different than animals. Thank God we practice meditation and develop our wisdom. Animals can't know as much as we know. Therefore, you need to take good care of your Xuan Zang spot [Master points to the wisdom eye.] and your corner of compassion. Don't let your pig and monkey qualities control your everyday life and dirty your precious 'home.'

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SAINT AND AN ORDINARY PERSON ⁶⁶

This is the book of Chuang Tzu, chapter three, the Secret of Growth. 'Life has a limit, but knowledge is without limit. For the limited to pursue the unlimited is futile.' Life has a limit, but knowledge is without limit. It is because our life is ephemeral. And if we use the whole span of our life in trying to learn this and that in the space of our world, that means we are doing the impossible. For example, if we are expert in the medical field, we are not necessarily expert in the electrical engineering field. And should we try to learn one thing after another, we would never actually finish with learning in this world. Even more so if we would like to use our life to pursue wisdom, which is even vaster than this knowledge of the world. To become a Buddha is not measured by the extent of your knowledge of bibles, scriptures, or whatever the worldly instrument can afford, but just to rediscover your vast storehouse of knowledge which already exists within us. Then, we know, and the knowledge of the world we will know also.

Therefore, as you see from your own example, you didn't know many things before or you couldn't do this and that. But after initiation, after practicing for some time, you discover yourselves that you know many things. Right? [Audience: Yes.] You have experienced, and I have experienced. For example, when I write music, play the piano, or things like that, people think I have studied or played music for many years. It's not true! I play whenever I want. I don't need preparation. The same with painting, interior design, or even clothing design. I don't need preparation. I did not learn in any school.

This knowledge, even worldly knowledge, already exists within us. And if we open the whole door, then everything is there in the daylight. I have never gone to medical school, but when you are having an operation or when you have trouble with sickness or something, many of you have seen the Master comes and helps you. And you recovered quickly, better than with ordinary medical treatment. That is because within me there is knowledge of medical secrets. Many of us have been here for thousands of billions of years, and we have done all kinds of things which have collected within our memories. And when we open the whole storage of wisdom, everything is there. We have learned everything already! There is no need to relearn it. Once we have learned everything, we are qualified to go further into the higher development, which is sainthood, which is Buddhahood.

66. Group meditation, Seattle Center, Washington D.C., U.S.A., April 8, 1993 (Originally in English).

But actually, everything in the universe is already printed within the seeds of wisdom before the whole cosmos came into being, even. Therefore, everything we try to learn in one corner is just a waste of time. That's why people call a saint the king of all the medicinal doctors, the king of all this and that – because a saint knows many things. The Buddha never practiced magical skills, but He has magical power! The Buddha did not practice medical knowledge, but He can heal people.

Similarly with our school, you have always credited me with a lot of magical power, of healing, of knowing your thoughts, of helping you when you are in trouble. But this is no big deal. Everything is within the storehouse of wisdom. And if you try to remember that every day in your meditation, you subconsciously renew your knowledge of all fields, which gives you extraordinary wisdom about everything. Then you think, 'How come? I didn't learn all this. How do I know?' If it happens that you come into contact with a special situation, which requires difficult and expert knowledge, you suddenly find that you can do it. Or if you can't, you just ask the inner Master Ching Hai to do it for you. You are very expert in asking Master Ching Hai to do whatever you want accomplished!

The power is within yourself really. While in training, of course, if you are not yet expert in using your wisdom, then you pray for the inner Master to help you. That's what the Teacher is for. But later, you do everything yourselves. It's just like you are learning in an apprenticeship with a carpenter, for example, and sometimes you encounter some difficulties in some corner. You still don't know what to do yet, so you call your teacher to come, and of course he'll help you immediately. But later, you will know how to do it yourselves.

If we want to learn all the time about everything in this world, we do not have time. So, it's best to open our storehouse of wisdom, and then everything is there. If you want to be proud of yourselves, of your greatness, then you should be proud properly. If you want to think that you are very great, then think properly, know that you are truly great. First, be enlightened, and then more will come. During the time that you are observing the Sound in meditation, many ideas come, much knowledge comes, many answers come. That is the direct line of study. No need for a Teacher to be around because we communicate inside. That is when you truly know we have 'some' teaching.

All of the verbal lessons or lectures I give you are just a very small part of it – thirty percent of my teaching, and seventy percent you learn through silence, through meditation, through your sleep. While you sleep, you'll be taken up to a higher school, and then study there. That's why even though you sit in meditation and you don't see much sometimes, your wisdom still increases tenfold, twentyfold, one hundredfold. Your loving kindness, your level in every aspect rises up. It is because of the teaching in silence.

No Master ever uses words to enlighten the disciple. Even though She might appear to speak or to teach the disciples through some verbal expressions, that is not all. And once we are connected within, we always have the direct teaching. That's why you become wiser, you become more knowledgeable in all things, and whenever the situation arises, you know what to do. Even though before you would not react so quickly, now you can. It is because every day you learn with the Masters, past, present, and future also, during your meditation, during your sleep, and / or during your daily activities. You are blessed twenty-four hours. That is the difference between the enlightened person and the not-enlightened person, between an initiated person and a non-initiated person.

Sometimes I myself also forget the differences, but I do have the chance to know. And you always have the chance to know because you have more opportunities to mix with the

people of the world, who are very highly knowledgeable in their field, who are very intelligent, who are very capable of many things, and who are highly positioned in the society. When you are in contact with them, you know the difference. That person may not know. That's why in the sutras it says, it takes a Buddha to understand the Buddha. While you have not yet fully realized your saint-potential, at least you know that you are on the way to sainthood. And when compared to those who still stay down there or outside, you know how much you have gained through meditation in our practice, in the Quan Yin method. Otherwise, no amount of knowledge, talk, or lecture would qualify a person to be a saint or to be enlightened. It's truly a world apart!

For example, we grow up, become adults, and occasionally we play with the children and with their toys. We pretend to enjoy very much and all that, and maybe we do enjoy, also. We love the children, and we want to share happiness with them. We play with them, and they are happy, so we are also happy. Maybe we remember our childhood, and we're happy for a while, but no adult would be mesmerized by the children's toys like when we were young. Similarly, the enlightened person through the Quan Yin method may appear to be like ordinary person with all their emotions, sometimes their anger and their frustrations. But on the other hand, they never sink into that level, not for long. Maybe they know it, but they do not sink. They do it, but they're not mesmerized by it. Just like we play with the children, but we are never so attached to the toys the way children are because we are grown up.

Similarly, the enlightened people in our group look like ordinary people, but they are never ordinary. You know that very well, or not? [Audience: Yes.] I am glad that you know. Sometimes you have to remind me, because I don't know. I look at everyone as a saint. Then sometimes I discover that, 'Oh, yes, they are saints, but they are ignorant saints.' Just like children sometimes grow very tall. Some children are bigger than I am – wider and taller. And from afar or from appearance, we think that it is an adult until we talk to him. Then we discover, 'Oh, he is only ten years old!'

The worldly people sometimes appear to be very intelligent, but that is not enlightenment, not deep. You talk a little bit further, and then you'll discover the difference. Therefore, if you have doubts about your enlightenment and about your level of understanding, you go and talk to people. Don't pray all the time that you only meet saintly persons. It's okay to meet 'unsaintly' persons. It's good for you, so that you know how much you have progressed. White is only more distinguished when compared with black. If the whole world is white, no one ever thinks that it is white because it is taken for granted that it is so. But when it's coupled with black, we know that it is white. Similarly, if we do not have contact with other people sometimes, we never know for sure. So, it is also good for us to be with the people at large. It's all right.

Just accept whatever situation, and then you learn from it. Otherwise, how do you know? You've forgotten how beneficial it is to be in the circle of sainthood. It's only one hair difference; the door is only that bright. But once we step beyond it, we are forever changed. Whether you stand at the door or you move further into the higher dimensions, you are different than before you stepped in the door. Absolutely different! Of course, the further we go, the more discoveries we make, and that makes our life different.

LOVE IS DEVOTION, NOT POSSESSION ⁶⁷

There was a man called, I think Krishna. He had a lot of disciples, especially female disciples. He was very, very beautiful, and black – black and beautiful. His face was little bit of a dark complexion, so people called him black beauty. And whoever just saw him once, fell in love with him – men, women alike. But don't think that was a kind of physical attraction; it was a kind of spiritual love. Everyone who saw him just loved him. Therefore, he had a lot of disciples and a lot of male disciples. Of course, other women, they did not forget their jealousy. Even though they followed any Master, they kept their jealousy in the pocket. Therefore, sometimes they vied with each other for his special attention. But among all these female disciples, he especially loved one female called Rada. Of course, she was very beautiful, but apart from that she had many other qualities probably other people did not possess. Not only the females, I mean including the males as well. Maybe she was very loving, very attentive and knowing his mind before he even had to speak about it. Therefore, he loved her very much. And she took care of him in every way. Also she loved him very much. Everyone loved him, that was for sure, but both of them had a special relationship. Yes, yes. Very loving toward each other and loved each other very much. Maybe they both were very great and they knew each other's minds.

So now, all the females, apart from their immediate enlightenment, they had a little jealousy in the corner of their pocket. Now, they were thinking: 'What is the big deal about that Rada. She may be beautiful, but so am I. Master loves me most.' Everyone thinks Master loves him most, loves her most. But then when they saw that Krishna always showed a little more special attention to Rada, the female attendant, the jealousy which they were hiding in their pocket popped up now and again. And they'd feel: 'What's the big deal about her? What she can do, I can do.' But sometimes they could not, because each one has a different affinity with the Master. Also maybe each one had a different personality and talent. You know Masters use different persons in different ways. It doesn't mean we are better than the others or others are better than us. But everyone can not take care of the Master; the master would be smothered to death. Therefore, only one took care of him, and then everyone else was jealous.

Now one day, Krishna could not bear this atmosphere anymore, so he intended to demonstrate something. He called all the female attendants, just like this, we are having an assembly here. Then he pretended to have a terrible headache. He said, 'Oh, my head is...! Oh, it's near splitting in two! Oh, I cannot bear it! Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!' He had a headache but sometimes he'd forgot, he hold his stomach, 'Oh, I'm hurt!' Because he just pretended to have a headache. [Laughter]

Sometimes a Master pretends to have something or another, or to ask some questions in order to get closer to the disciples, or to make them not afraid of the Master, or to encourage them in their specialty or different talent. Not that the Masters don't know this subject or needed to ask your advice. Yeah, just different. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha said, 'Have to use eighty-four thousand kinds of methods.' This is what it is. So, one of the methods is called the 'headache method.' Krishna used it. 'Oh, my head! Oh! It hurts here, oh! Hurts so much!' Then everyone panicked. They asked the Master what could they do to eliminate his suffering. The Master said, 'Oh, if someone would stand on my head...' If a female put the feet on the head of the Master, he would get cured immediately. 'Would you please, one of you come and do it?' They smelled their feet. 'Oh, no! Oh, no, no, no, no! Oh, no, no, no, no, no!' [Laughter] Maybe forgot to wash their feet for three days, because too busy running with Master's lecture and distributing sample booklets. 'Oh, no, no, no, no,

67. Group meditation, Melbourne Center, Australia, March 13, 1993 (Originally in English).

no! How can we dare to step on your head? You are God personified. You are God's manifestation on earth. You are our Master. Our dearest most beloved, the most reverent person on earth. How can we dare to step on your head? No, no, no, no! Anything we'd do for you but not that!

So, Krishna pretended to have more of a headache: 'Oh! Then I'll die. I will die. I'll die immediately. I might die tomorrow. I'll die today. I'll die tonight. I will die and then all of you will be happy.' He lamented, and he made a lot of fuss. Ah, the big theater he played. The female disciples just stood there, speechless, helpless and actionless. Just then Rada, the female attendant came. When he saw Rada, he made even a worse performance. 'Oh, I'm dying! I'm dying! Oh, my head! Oh, can someone...! It's going down here, it's going down there. Oh, going here and all everywhere.' He made more troubles. He was kind of groaning a lot and made a lot more miserable fuss.

Everyone turned to Rada when she came in. Rada asked, 'What's the matter? What's wrong with you? What can I do for you?'

Then Krishna related the same request: 'My head is burning with pain. Please step on my head so that I can be relieved of the pain.' Because that was the only way.

So, Rada immediately stepped on his head. She didn't care whether she wore the shoes or whether she had bathed, she stepped on his head. Then Krishna was immediately so-called relieved of the pain, no more pain, and was laughing and eating blessed food. Now, Rada looked like nothing had happened, but then all the females in the congregation started to look at Rada with such eyes... firing eyes, like they are going to swallow her in one gulp, make a soup out of her. 'You dare! You terrible person! You have disrespect for Master. We're going to, to...'

Rada said, 'What? What? What's wrong with you?'

'We will kill you!'

Then Rada asked them, 'What's wrong? What have I done? Why do you want to kill me?' For the Master, they were ready to kill. Even Master said, 'Don't kill.' But in that case they forgot. Jealousy is very terrible and it blinds everyone, even in that situation. So, that's what happened to Rada.

Then the people said, 'How dare you step on the most revered head of the Master. You don't know he is God? How dare you do that with your dirty feet? You lousy and you, you, you... For this, you will go to the lowest hell and suffer there forever. I am telling you.'

Rada just smiled and said, 'Is that it? Is that all you're worried about? Then don't worry because I will smile happily staying in hell if I can make him better. If I can relieve him for one second, I will happily go to hell. So, don't you worry about this.'

At that time all the females suddenly understood how selfless she was, and how much she was devoted to the Master, even at the cost of her own spiritual attainment and happiness. So, they all bowed to her and said, 'Excuse me. I'm sorry.' Things like that. After that, everything was fine and okay.

So, doing everything for the Master – according to Indian philosophy, is the highest attainment, the highest devotion; because sometimes we have different ideas about how

to serve a Master. We think we do this, that and all these; but actually, we don't do what the Master requests us to do.

What is the problem in this? What is wrong with this that we don't do what the Master requests? Will we go to hell? No! Will we make the Master angry? No! Maybe the Master pretends to be angry, scolds you, or something like that. Whatever way the Master uses is to open your understanding, let you know that in this situation where you were wrong, try to teach you to become better next time. But the Master will not be truly angry inside. Just like loving parents never truly hate their children. They just sometimes pretend to smack their bottoms, scold them, or give them some kind of reprimanding in order to rectify the children to make them become better persons in the future. That's all. But parents always love children dearly.

Rada, being so devoted and selfless to the Master, of course, got a lot of love and special attention from the Master as well. Therefore, she had, for some time, become conceited and arrogant; she felt that she was okay, she was high, and she was better than the rest. And also, the Master loved her so much, so she enjoyed the love of the Master; she became kind of possessive. She thought the Master belongs to her alone. Well, I have these experiences with some of my attendants as well. Therefore, I learned better than Krishna. I don't use the same attendants all the time. I change. So anyhow, in that case of Rada, the Master probably one day had enough of it. He decided to teach her a lesson.

One day, he told her very secretly, lovingly, in a romantic rhythm, 'I'm fed up with these people. Why don't we both go together to some place alone? I only trust you.'

So, wow! She felt: 'That's it! That's the thing I want to hear. You belong to me alone, then we'll have a good time together. That's the best.' So she immediately followed him. Krishna kept walking and walking all the time, in a high and deep mountain and river and so very difficult way to walk. Rada got exhausted and said, 'I can't walk anymore, why don't we stop?'

Krishna said, 'No, no, no, no! We're nearly there. Keep walking.' Rada eventually could not walk anymore. So Krishna said, 'Oh, so what do you want me to do? Carry you?'

She said, 'Yes, of course! You carry me.' She was so used with being spoiled. She thought Master belonged to her, just like an ordinary husband. So, she could do what she wanted with him and get away with it; or using him just like an ordinary human being. Krishna pretended to agree with her and said, 'Okay, come.' And wanted to carry her on his back. But as soon as she jumped up on him, he disappeared. She fell flat on the ground, bleeding nose; her flat nose become flatter. [Laughter] She sat there and cried. Then she realized that she had been wrong. She knew that he was not the body, she should not be possessive and get hold of his body like her own possession, like something that she could own.

Therefore, she apologized to the Master and said, 'I'm very wrong. I was wrong. I have been wrong. Please forgive me. I understand now. I shouldn't possess you. I should respect you and only help you unconditionally without any request for reward for myself.' If she didn't do that, she'd harm the Master. She'd tie the Master down, and also affect numerous sentient beings who follow him. He would always have to spend time with her alone, and do all her whims to please her, just like an ordinary husband. Then how could he have time for other people. So he had to be in control, otherwise she'd control him.

That's how most people are tied down in this world and forgot their greatness. Sometimes great politicians, because they are tied up with their emotions and family ties, they became used to it and forgot their duty. Therefore, many things happen to the nation and very bad effects on the people of that country. Many kings failed because of beauties. Many great high officers or heroes sold their position and country just because of emotions, so-called passion. Therefore, if a Master is not in control about this, then the Master's also kaput, finished. 'Kaput' is a German word for finished, no good, up to no good. So you see, even then, if you attain that once, you have to polish it. Therefore, we need to meditate everyday because our habits, bad habits have accumulated life after life, many centuries, many ages. Now, if we have only one lifetime to rearrange it, to break it, therefore, the Master has to use the supreme power inside to readjust you – not ordinary means.

Therefore, without initiation, without truly making use of your own greatness, you can never get out of this mess. Doesn't matter how much you use, because whatever you use it's only the brain. You use your brain which already has recorded many bad habits. Now you can not catch up with just a short span of one lifetime. So you need the Supreme Master power inside which you have. You only need the Master to touch it for you, to let it open for you. By your own sincerity, you get it again and regain everything you have lost.

REMINDER FROM GOD ⁶⁸

A man arrived to report himself to the king of hell after his death. The king of hell proclaimed, 'You have been greedy and vicious your whole life. You were rich but never helped anyone. And you did not practice spiritually. You will go to hell.' The man argued, 'That's unfair! I didn't know that I would die one day. Neither did I know that I should give charity and that there were differences in retribution. I didn't do any good because you didn't remind me. Please give me another chance to be a human being, and remind me when I am not doing good things.'

After hearing him out, the king of hell consented, 'All right, I will send you back.' Not long after, the man died. The king of hell again sentenced him to hell. Again, the man argued, 'How strange! This is unfair! I told you to remind me lest I forget. You didn't remind me that life was ephemeral or what I should do.' 'Oh, yes, I reminded you several times,' the king of hell insisted. 'When?' 'A beggar once went to your door, didn't he?' the king asked. 'Yes,' the man replied. 'Did you give him anything to eat? That beggar was me!' the king said. 'That was you! Why didn't you tell me?' the man exclaimed. 'Another time, I sent a sick old man to your door. Did you see him?' the king asked again. 'Yes, I did,' the man admitted. 'Did you take care of him?' 'No. I sent him away. I didn't want to see him,' the man revealed. 'That was me.'

'Yet another time, you saw a corpse lying in front of your house when you opened the door. What did you do?' the king asked. 'I threw it in the garbage,' the man confessed. 'That was me again! I reminded you many times of the ephemeral nature of the body and the world. But you didn't listen to me. This time you must go to hell. You have no more excuses.'

Similarly, sometimes we encounter unpleasant situations in life. We sustain physical injuries or fall sick. We should know that it is God or the Buddha reminding us to seek the eternal world within. Because of our suffering, we begin to reflect on our actions and seek eternal happiness. Suffering is a kind of blessing. It shouldn't be considered a bad thing.

68. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, February 28, 1993 (Originally in English).

We should be more openhearted, then we would know that what God sends us is not what we imagined.

THE STORY OF A SAINTLY KING ⁶⁹

A river in exchange for sparing the people

Ananda (Shakyamuni Buddha's attendant) asked the Buddha: 'My Lord, could You please tell us disciples what You've done in Your past lives that is beneficial to sentient beings?' In reply, the Buddha told Ananda the following story:

Eons ago, on our planet earth there were four rivers and two great kings. One of the kings was named Brahmadeva, which means the Brahma (supreme force of creation), and his land contained three rivers. His country was rich, and so were his people. However, they were weak with respect to military power. The territory of the other king, called Vajradati, had only one river and a smaller population, but his people were superior in terms of military strategy.

'My soldiers are valiant, yet there is only one river in my country, and it's barely large enough to supply us with water. King Brahmadeva's army is weak, but his land contains three rivers. We should ask him for one,' thought King Vajradati. 'If he agrees, we'll make friends and maintain good relations with him. Should he refuse, I'll plan an invasion of his country. If he gives me a river, I'll share everything with him, and come to the rescue of his people should disaster befall them. Otherwise, I'll attack him!' So King Vajradati summoned his counselors to discuss the issue, and then wrote a letter to King Brahmadeva.

When King Brahmadeva received the letter, he was reluctant to yield and thought to himself, 'Hey! This nation was passed down to me by my ancestors. I didn't seize it from King Vajradati. On what grounds can he make such a demand?' So he told the messenger, 'I didn't found this country. It was passed down to me by my father and ancestors. It's very unreasonable for your king to demand that I cede my land! If you wish to wage war, we too will not be courteous!' Then the messenger returned to his country to report the situation to King Vajradati.

Soon King Vajradati sent a powerful army to invade King Brahmadeva's country, and Brahmadeva's army was totally defeated. Next King Vajradati marched straight into the capital and besieged the royal palace, causing King Brahmadeva to be so overwhelmed by fear that he dared not confront the aggressors. Observing the perilous situation, his counselors advised him, 'Your Majesty, their men are brave and powerful, while ours are weak. Why do Your Majesty remain so attached to a river and thus place his people in jeopardy? Should you remain so, we might even lose our country. Please reconsider your decision and give King Vajradati the river.'

King Brahmadeva consented, and his counselors went out to talk to King Vajradati, saying, 'Our king has conceded to your demand. He'll also offer you a princess. From now on, our two countries shall maintain a good relationship, share good things with each other and protect and help each other when in danger.' Then the two kings were reconciled, each returned to his own country, and King Vajradati brought home the princess to be his wife.

69. International two-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, September 27-28, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

One virtuously benefits all

After some time, the princess became pregnant and during her pregnancy, a precious canopy appeared over her head. No matter what she did – sleep, walk or sit – the canopy followed her constantly. When the time came, she gave birth to a baby boy whose body shone radiantly like gold, and whose hair was beautiful. After his birth, the canopy followed him instead of his mother because it was for the child that the canopy had come.

Many soothsayers came to see the child and had only words of praise for him: ‘Your Majesty! This baby is exceptional! The prince’s appearance and countenance show that he has great blessings and virtues that are supreme in the world. No one can match him.’ The king and queen were delighted to hear this, and tradition had it that the child should be named according to two conditions: First, the occurrence of a peculiar phenomenon; and second, the child’s natal horoscope (the position of the stars and planets at the time of birth). ‘Your Majesty, did any fantastic phenomenon occur during the queen’s pregnancy?’ asked the soothsayers. ‘When the queen was pregnant, a canopy composed of seven priceless items* constantly hovered over her head and followed her wherever she went,’ replied the king. Thus, the prince was named ‘Precious Canopy.’

When the prince came of age, King Vajradati died and the prince succeeded him to the throne. As king, Precious Canopy often left his palace to observe the lives of his people, and one hot summer day he went out and saw some farmers cultivating their fields unprotected by clothing under the scorching sun. He also saw cows laboriously plowing the land, trudging through the mud dragging heavy plows, and noted that both men and animals were exhausted from their arduous toil. Then the king asked his entourage why the farmers were working so intensely.

‘Our country relies on agriculture, and most of our people are farmers. If they don’t work hard, we can’t survive and our people will starve. And if the people live in poverty and starvation, our country will be in danger,’ replied the officials by his side. On hearing this, the king made a vow: ‘If I am truly a king with great blessings, my people will have no need to toil so diligently in farming, and yet there will be enough rice and other crops to satisfy everyone’s needs.’ After Precious Canopy made this vow, for every family in the country, all sorts of rice and other produce grew naturally in sufficient quantities for all. Whatever kind of rice or vegetable the people wished for would appear in their homes.

Some time later, the king again went out to see his people, and this time saw many chopping timber, carrying water and pounding rice. They were sweating profusely and looked exhausted so he asked his counselors, ‘Why are my people working so hard?’ And the counselors replied, ‘Your Majesty, thanks to your grace, our people now have enough rice and vegetables to eat, and no longer need to work in the fields. However, they nonetheless have to pound rice and chop timber in order to light fires to cook the rice. So they still have to work relentlessly.’ Upon hearing this, the king made another vow: ‘If I truly have the divine sanction and virtues to be king of this land, may my people have whatever cooked food they desire appear automatically in their homes. Then they won’t have to expend so much effort in cooking their meals.’ And as before, the king’s wishes came true. From that point onward food appeared automatically for his people without having to be cooked.

After some time, the king again went out to have some fun, and on this occasion he saw some people working vigorously spinning cotton yarn and weaving cloth. Again he asked his counselors about the situation, and they reported, ‘If the people don’t weave cloth, they won’t have any clothes to wear, and they will thus suffer from the cold so they still have to

work.’ Again, the king made a vow: ‘If I truly have the grace and righteousness to be king of this land, may my people have any clothing they wish, and not have to labor so hard spinning and weaving.’ And indeed, it came to pass that from that day on, his people had whatever garments they desired. Instead of growing leaves, the trees yielded clothes. People simply chose the items they liked and took them home. It was fantastic!

Later, the king again went out to have some fun and saw many people making musical instruments so he asked, ‘What are these people doing? Why do they have to work so arduously?’ And the counselors replied, ‘Now that the people have enough to eat, drink and wear, they want to listen to music. They wish to play musical instruments to amuse themselves.’ Oh! So again the king made a vow: ‘If I have the merits and noble qualities to be king, may music sound from the trees in my country, and entertain my people with any music they wish to hear.’ And so it was realized! Countless musical instruments grew from trees for the people. And if they didn’t want to play the instruments themselves, music would still come from the instruments automatically.

Then after a while, the king’s counselors went to see him, and it was mealtime so the king invited them to share a meal with him. After sharing the king’s food, the counselors found it delicious and the best they had ever eaten. It made them feel healthy, spirited and happy so they said, ‘Your Majesty, we’ve never enjoyed such good food before. It’s delicious and healthy, and makes us feel joyful in both body and mind!’

‘Should you wish to enjoy the same food that I do, you have to eat at the same time I do. Then you’ll definitely have the same good food at home,’ the king replied. So the king issued a nationwide proclamation that all his people should eat at the same time he did. And from that moment on, when the king ate, drums were sounded to let the people know it was mealtime. As they all ate at the same time, they could enjoy the same good food that the king ate, which enlivened them both physically and mentally.

Brahmadeva seeks the river’s return

Meanwhile, King Brahmadeva sent a messenger to pay his respects and convey the following message to King Precious Canopy: ‘When your father was alive, we ceded one of my country’s rivers to your country. Now that your father has passed away, would you please return the river to us?’ And King Precious Canopy’s reply was: ‘I did not seize your river to build my country. Now that I’m king, I won’t let my people suffer. This is a trivial matter. Please be patient. I’ll try to meet with your king to discuss issues that are more important to our two countries.’

The messenger then conveyed the message from King Precious Canopy to King Brahmadeva, who consented to the proposed meeting, and they agreed about a time to meet. So the kings, accompanied by their armies, arrived on the bank of the river, which now separated the two countries. They met on a ship in the middle of the river, where they held their negotiations.

Upon seeing King Precious Canopy, King Brahmadeva was filled with admiration, being impressed by his dignified figure, which was radiant like a gold mountain, his hair which shone like crystal, his eyes which glittered like stars, his mouth which was as beautiful as a flower, his nose which was high and straight, his face which was square and majestic, and his ears which were long and authoritative. Oh! The more he observed King Precious Canopy, the more awestruck he was. He thought perhaps that he was an incarnation of the great Brahma for this king was no ordinary human!

Then the two kings talked about the weather and how good the climate was. 'People in my country have enough food to eat and objects to use, which all come naturally with little effort. They don't need to offer me anything. We don't collect taxes or fines, and don't need to enforce the law. For these reasons, I cannot return this river to you and let my people toil for you. In my country, our citizens do virtually nothing for the king. Everything they want to eat, drink or use comes naturally. Even their clothes and music arise naturally. They have everything so they don't have to do anything to serve the king,' said King Precious Canopy.

This extraordinary account brought tremors to the heart of King Brahmadeva, who was terrified even further when King Precious Canopy's men began to beat the drums that signaled lunch time. Brahmadeva began to tremble, thinking that they were going to seize and kill him, and stood up to apologize, his limbs weak and quivering. King Precious Canopy also stood up to pacify him and asked him to sit down, saying, 'You have no cause for alarm. It's time for lunch so my soldiers are beating the drums to notify our people for if they eat at the same time I do, they will surely get delicious and exotic food. This is a custom in our country!'

Upon hearing these words, King Brahmadeva closed his palms and said, 'Your Majesty, please extend your love to our people, too. Please also give us food that appears spontaneously as it does in your country. Then we'll become your subjects. We'll surrender to you today!'

The perfect reign of a saintly king

King Precious Canopy consented to King Brahmadeva's request, and from that day on ruled both countries. Thereafter, all his counselors were on standby day and night in a solemn court that governed with diligence.

Then early one morning, a precious vehicle with golden wheels flew over the kingdom from the eastern sky. It looked beautiful and glorious, its radiance illuminating the great earth below. Witnessing this event, King Precious Canopy descended from his throne and knelt down to pray to heaven and earth, saying, 'If I had the blessings and high merit to become a chakravartin (Sanskrit term for a ruler whose virtue, earned by good deeds in former lifetimes, allows him to effortlessly subjugate all lesser kings and govern the world), please let this awesome vehicle stay!' Just as he spoke, the vehicle stopped in mid-air in front of the palace, and many sacred objects fit for a chakravartin flew over as well, including priceless elephants, women, pearls and electronic soldiers, which were perhaps robots. There were all kinds of items. This vehicle sent to the holy king might have been a UFO of ancient times because UFOs existed even in those days! It came from another planet and was wonderful! There were many blessed instruments fit for the holy king.

From that day forward, King Precious Canopy became a chakravartin possessing opulent treasures and ruling the four continents. His grace and merits brought peace and happiness to all sentient beings, and allowed their every need to be met. Under his reign, the people observed the following ten precepts: 1. No killing; 2. No stealing; 3. No sexual misconduct; 4. No lying; 5. No sowing discord (meaning no gossiping and stirring up disputes between parties by talking badly about one to the other); 6. No malicious speech; 7. No exaggeration (for instance, about what really happened in a given situation, without adding fabrications that confuse people); 8. No greed; 9. No wrath and 10. No infatuation. Everyone in the land adhered to these precepts and ascended to heaven after their demise.

Cause dating back eons

At this point, the Buddha said, ‘Ananda, you have to realize that King Precious Canopy was actually ‘me’ in a previous incarnation! And King Vajradati is now my father and his queen is now my mother.’

The Buddha continued by saying, ‘At that time, I was very compassionate and loved everyone like my own child. I shared my wealth and teachings in order to edify them. It’s for this reason that I’ve become a Buddha today, supreme in the three realms, and paralleled by no one. It’s also for this reason and affinity that those who followed me during that period learned how to practice spiritually, to show compassion for the benefit of others and to meditate together.’

Ananda then asked the Buddha, ‘My Lord, may I ask what cause and affinity led King Precious Canopy to become a chakravartin and to be protected by the precious canopy even before his birth?’

So, the Buddha replied, ‘Ananda, long, long ago, innumerable eons ago on this planet earth was a holy mountain. And a Pratyeka (self-enlightened) Buddha living on that mountain fell ill after suffering a stroke, and his doctor prescribed milk for his condition. So the Pratyeka Buddha went to see a merchant named Seng You, told him about his illness and asked for some milk. The merchant happily offered the milk to him, and after drinking milk for three months, the Pratyeka Buddha recovered from his illness. Then out of gratitude to his benefactor, he wished that Seng You would receive enormous amounts of divine grace and merit. So he flew into the air and manifested in the form of an arhat. Perhaps he manifested in a massive form as huge as the sky, and then shrank into a very small form as thin as a strand of hair. In this way he changed shape alternately thirteen times, and Seng You was overjoyed at the sight. Finally, the Pratyeka Buddha descended from the sky and accepted his offering. Some time later, the Pratyeka Buddha entered nirvana, and Seng You missed him very much. So after the Buddha was cremated, Seng You gathered his sarira (sacred pebble-like relics left after cremation of a saint) and put them in a golden urn. He next built a costly pagoda to house the urn, and a precious canopy as a shade over the pagoda. He then made offerings to it for the rest of his life, providing incense, flowers, fruit and music; nothing was missing.’

The Buddha then said to Ananda, ‘You ought to know that the merit derived from making offerings to the Pratyeka Buddha earned infinite blessed reward for Seng You, and so both in heaven and on earth he always enjoyed a glorious status and lived in great contentment. Each time he was in the embryonic stage of life, he was protected from above by a precious canopy. You should also understand that the Seng You of that time was actually ‘me.’ So, everyone, both lay people and monastics, should practice to accrue merits, and then life after life they will enjoy infinite reward.’ Upon hearing this discourse, everyone became very delighted and vowed to make offerings. This is the end of the story! [Applause]

Perfect alms-giving

Everything we have, we’ve earned on our own. There’s nothing great about it! No one gives us anything. Everything is created by us, be it wealth or poverty.

What do you think of this story? You see, the people of that country couldn’t enjoy peace and contentment without relying on the merit of their ruler. So, we can’t simply become a leader or an enlightened Master just because we want to. We must have sufficient

blessings to share with our disciples, citizens and subordinates. So, in ancient times, people were overjoyed to meet a wise king, saying that they relied on the king's grace, and acclaimed him as a 'saintly king' or 'saintly lord.'

As the bible recounts, when King David committed a number of mistakes, God punished his people with three days of plague (see Chronicles 1:21). There's also an account in Chinese history stating that if a king were perfect with respect to his divine sanction, his prayers could move heaven and earth. But if he were foolish or tyrannical, his prayers would be futile, he wouldn't be able to save his own life and his empire would fall with great loss of life.

This historical story brings to mind why we should practice spiritually. We already have the Quan Yin method today so why must we continue to practice? Why must we make our blessings, merits and virtuous qualities more sublime? It's good enough to practice the Quan Yin method and attain liberation. Why do we have to be upright and honest? Master has guaranteed us liberation so why do we have to practice to become moral? The answer is that it's still necessary so that we can thus influence others, just in case in the future God wants us to become a king or high minister, lead the people or become an enlightened Master. If we have perfect sanction from God, all of our followers or subordinates will benefit from our grace and enjoy contentment and bliss.

So, we shouldn't rush to become a spiritual Teacher, king, president or high minister. If it's so arranged by destiny, it will eventually be ours. We can't refuse it even if we want to; it's our fate. If it's not our destiny but we obtain it by force, the result won't be good, and our karmic hindrance will increase. In hell, there are many so-called false masters, kings and so-called saints and monastic practitioners! So we shouldn't desire such fame or superficial positions but instead abide by God's arrangements. When we're asked to do something, we must do our best. If no one asks us, we should simply sleep and eat.

This King Precious Canopy didn't do anything great in his previous life to have earned so much merit. All he did was make offerings to a Buddha. However, he was very natural when he made the offerings, and that was the good part. That's 'perfect alms-giving' – both the giver and receiver should be very pure in their actions, speech and thoughts, and free from any intent involving greed, anger or infatuation. Precious Canopy was just happy to make the contribution, and didn't wish to earn merits, and the Buddha gladly accepted the offerings. Neither party felt indebted to or obliged to repay the other. Only in such cases is it a perfect offering that benefits both parties. That's why this person definitely profited from his acts.

The inconceivable merit of a living Buddha

From this story, we realize that a person who's become a Buddha or a great spiritual practitioner can help innumerable people! He [Pratyeka Buddha] benefited the merchant who made offerings to him, and when the merchant later became a chakravartin, he too assisted billions of people. Can you imagine that? It wasn't a direct benefit but an indirect one! This means that the power originating from innumerable eons ago still existed! Can you imagine how inconceivable such merit is? So, for a spiritual practitioner, an enlightened or a living Master who has come into this world, whatever He or She does, be it eating, drinking or playing, everything is for the benefit of others! Do you understand? [Audience: Yes.] [Applause] Besides, this advantage doesn't last just a couple of lifetimes; it continues for innumerable eons! What terrific merit!

Thus, you'll also be terrific once you're accomplished in spiritual practice. [Laughter] Whoever makes offerings to you will be great; the merit too will be great! That's why we have to make our merit more sublime, and not just think of ourselves. This benefit is too immense, too inconceivable and immeasurable.

However, we can't gain blessed rewards simply by giving alms to others. We can't earn God's grace just by randomly forcing people to accept our offerings. No! No! No! This merely abuses them. Pratyeka Buddha, for instance, was truly in need at the time. He had no money; he was old and infirm, and couldn't work. He was in an emergency situation and was ill. So, at that moment, whoever willingly made an offering to him was doing it at the right time and in the right situation! We shouldn't give alms randomly just because we want to earn blessings, or force people to accept things from us just because we have too many possessions; because then we'll be forcing them to accept the items even when they don't want them. It would be like wanting to get rid of something but not wanting to throw it into the garbage bin, so we dump it on someone else. This is also not good. We shouldn't desire merit.

Giving alms or making offerings to spiritual practitioners can bring great rewards, but we mustn't abuse them mentally. We should only give when they need it. If they don't, we shouldn't offer.

From Shakyamuni Buddha's case we can see that the merit derived from making offerings to a great spiritual practitioner is inconceivable! That's why people say, 'It's very rare to meet a Buddha.' It is indeed very difficult to meet an enlightened Master! Whatever He or She does is only meant to bring you benefits. He or She only gives, gives and gives. By comparison, whatever you give Him or Her is garbage; it's nothing! It's just an excuse to let you feel comfortable. So you see, giving alms to a spiritual practitioner can accrue more benefits than giving to a billion people. It's never mentioned in Buddhist stories that offering charity to countless ordinary people earns great merit. No! All that's ever mentioned is that someone being charitable to a great spiritual practitioner earns enormous merit that lasts millions of eons!

I've told you before that whatever an enlightened Master eats or drinks here is only meant to assist the world. When He or She goes to a certain country, it's to bless that country. If He or She accepts anything, it's also to give blessings to the people of that country. In fact, He or She doesn't need anything.

Now, do you know why we have to make our blessings and merits more sublime? Just in case God needs us for a certain reason in the future, people who follow or believe in us will also derive perfect grace and rewards.

Revelation: Cultivate the self before pacifying the world

Shakyamuni Buddha mentioned the grace of the country and the grace of the ruler – the four kinds of grace. If the ruler is good and the political situation is good, people will enjoy peace and happiness, depending on the divine mandate of the king. If there's economic stability and political openness, and the citizens are living in peace and harmony, they ought to feel grateful for the blessings of their country and leaders.

But how do we express our gratitude? By becoming more sublime so that the country's merits will increase further!

Suppose we have enough wealth and material comfort, begin to feel contented and become sluggish, thinking that we have no reason to progress spiritually. This should tell us that we possess far too greatly the qualities of an ordinary human. However, if we have a large amount of money and enjoy a comfortable life yet still aspire to renounce the world, realize the ephemeral nature of existence and become free from greed and attachment, then we know that we've practiced spirituality for many lifetimes and have the qualities of a saint.

No grace can surpass that derived from spiritual cultivation. Once we've reached perfection, whoever serves us will derive rewards. This is how we bring blessings to the world. Otherwise, the insignificant merit of ordinary humans can never bring about spiritual elevation.

When reading such stories, we should delve deeply into their real meaning and learn the moral within, instead of just being entertained. Oh! This man became like that. That person transformed into such a shape, became a chakravartin and so on. Oh! There was food, there were drinks, rice appeared magically and so on. These elements are not the story's main essence. Instead we ought to realize the great moral behind it. Only spiritual practice is the highest source of divine grace. Only sharing the supreme teachings is the best form of alms-giving for we thus let people know how to practice the supreme method and how to earn the highest merit.

So, since ancient times, people have said that accomplishing perfection in spiritual development is the best way to deliver the world. And after reading these stories, we come to realize that similar accounts may be found in the bible, the Buddhist sutras, the Taoist scriptures and others. So, no matter what we want to become, we have to first cultivate ourselves before we can manage the family, govern the country and bring peace to the world. The ancient sages weren't given to exaggeration or excess.

(*According to the Buddhist scriptures, when a chakravartin is born, the Seven Treasures, namely, the precious wheel, precious elephants, precious horses, able ministers, loyal generals, divine pearl and precious women descend to earth at the same time.).

A TRULY HAPPY PERSON ⁷⁰

This is a folk story passed down by the Jewish people. There was a very rich man who had plenty of property. One day, he suddenly fell seriously ill and couldn't recover. Since he was very rich, his family invited many famous doctors from places around the country to cure him, but none succeeded.

The man's health deteriorated and he seemed to have no hope of getting healed. Just when his family was in utter desperation, a spiritual practitioner who came from afar passed by and told them, 'If you can find a very happy person, take his clothes and let your father wear them, then he'll be cured.'

Upon hearing this, the rich man's family set off in all directions looking for a happy person. However, after searching high and low, they could not find a truly happy person. The so-called happy people they found weren't perfectly happy in every way so they couldn't be regarded as truly happy people. The family carried on searching until they finally gave up. Nevertheless, one of the rich man's sons was extremely filial. Unable to bear separation

70. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 12, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

from his father, he was determined to see his father healed. Thus he left his hometown and went to faraway places, with his mind set on finding a truly happy person.

One day, the rich man's son became exhausted by his tedious journey. Dusk was falling so he tried to find a resting place and came upon a cave where he decided to spend the night. As he approached the mouth of the cave, he heard a resounding voice from within saying, 'Oh! I'm such a happy man! I had such a wonderful day today. I'm happy every day! Everything is fine with me. I'm delighted and happy with everything! I'm the happiest person in the world! I'm a truly happy man!' These words were repeated over and over, accompanied by joyful laughter. Finally, the voice said, 'Oh! I'm sleepy now. I'm going to sleep in happiness. Even if I were to die now, I would still be very happy!' [Master and audience laugh.]

The rich man's son rejoiced to hear this and thought, 'I've found the cure for my father's illness!' He then quickly slipped into the cave, hoping to find the person and take his clothes from him. But when he went inside, he found that the man was completely naked! [Master and audience laugh.] He wasn't wearing anything! The son stood there stunned, not knowing what to do.

Seeing his disappointment and frustration, the happy man asked, 'What's wrong?' And the rich man's son replied, 'I failed to find something that I'm looking for.' So the happy man asked, 'What are you looking for?' The rich man's son replied, 'My father is critically ill, and a spiritual practitioner told us that if we could find a truly happy person, we should take off his clothes and let my father wear them, then he'd be cured. That's why I'm here to take your clothes. I never dreamt that you wouldn't be wearing anything!' The happy man said, 'Sigh! If I were wearing something, I wouldn't be so happy now!' [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause]

What he meant was that if he possessed any property, he would be burdened and wouldn't be so happy. Precisely because he had nothing, he was free of any pressure, not having to worry about losing anything, about his things being stolen or destroyed. He also didn't have to worry about what to do should he not have a certain thing the next day. Since he had nothing to compare with others, he didn't have to worry about other people having something better. Therefore, he was free of worries. He didn't have to worry about anything, such as people stealing his things or hurting him. That's why he was so happy.

This story is quite relevant to spiritual practice. It doesn't mean that we'll be happy if we don't have any property; it also doesn't mean that we'll have worries or be happy if we have a lot of wealth. Whether we're happy or unhappy can't be measured by our wealth. It mainly depends on our heart. If we have some wealth, but we don't cling to it and we use it in the right place, then we can say we possess no wealth and aren't attached to it. Suppose we have no wealth and can't earn money, but then we say that the grapes are sour because we have no grapes to eat, [Master and audience laugh.] then we're not truly happy people.

The man in this story most probably was a truly happy person. We can tell from the way he talked. In fact, true happiness at heart is not to be derived from wealth or poverty. However, for most people, excessive wealth can easily lead to bondage. Even if they hate to be bound, sometimes, they will still be bound unknowingly. They have to take care of their wealth, develop and manage it. Besides, they worry that others may take possession of their wealth, that they may arouse jealousy, or that their wealth may be squandered by their children; many conditions worry them. It's not that we're being greedy. However, if we

do have some property, we have to manage it. If we don't have anything, then we don't need to bother.

THE FARMER AND THE SNAKE ⁷¹

This story is called 'The Farmer and the Snake.' Every day, a farmer went to the city to sell his flowers and farm produce and then went home after selling all his things. One day, he left home very early, so early that when he arrived at the city, the gate was still closed. So he lay down to take a nap, when he awoke he found that the storage bin containing his farm produce had become empty except that there was a gold coin inside. Although all the things in the bin had vanished, the gold was much more valuable so he was still very happy. He thought most probably someone had taken his things and left the payment there, and went home happily with the money.

The next day, the farmer again went out to sell his things but again arrived too early so he slept outside the city gate just like he had done the day before. And the incident repeated itself. All the produce that the farmer had brought disappeared, and there was a gold coin in the bin! At that time, gold was very valuable. One gold coin had a value many times higher than the farmer's produce.

Then one day some time later, the farmer's father asked him, 'Where have you gotten so many gold coins lately? Where did the money come from?' So the farmer revealed to his father what had happened. After listening to his story, the father thought, 'One day I'll follow my son as he goes out, and see who's been consuming his things and leaving the money in the bin.'

So one day, when the farmer went out to do business, his father quietly followed him. While the farmer was sleeping near the city gate, his father saw a snake crawl up to his bin and eat his produce. Having finished eating, the snake once again spat a gold coin into the bin as payment to the farmer before leaving. Seeing this, the farmer's father thought, 'If I kill the snake, I'll be able to seize all its gold coins!' He then picked up a stone and cut the snake into two parts.

At that time, the head and trunk of the snake were already in its den, and only the tail was outside. The father thought that there must be a big treasure in the den so he told his son to reach inside for it. But unexpectedly, when the farmer reached his hand into the den, the snake bit and killed him! Even though it had been cut into two, the snake could still bite! I understand how this could have happened because that was how I got bitten when I was small. At that time, I saw a centipede that had been beaten and squashed by someone, leaving only the head intact. I thought it was dead, and to make sure, I poked it with my foot. It bit me hard and I cried for three days. [Laughter] I was really dumb! Remember! Don't play with a centipede even if it looks dead. Sometimes it just fakes death; it's not really dead.

Perhaps that was what happened to the snake in the story. Its head wasn't dead yet. Thus, it bit the farmer, who subsequently died. Seeing his son killed, the farmer's father cried brokenheartedly next to the son's dead body and asked the snake, 'You snake! Why did you kill my son? Why did you bite my son and kill him?' Instead of answering him, the snake asked, 'Why did you break my back with the stone? There was no animosity between us. I had never done anything bad to you, nor had I done you any harm. If you had been more patient and waited, I would have given the entire treasure here to you.'

71. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 12, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

However, because you struck me, I bit and killed your son. Had I killed you instead, you would not be in such deep sorrow. I killed your son so that you'd live the rest of your life in agony.' This snake was venomously wise! Instead of biting the man who tried to kill it, it bit his son so that the father would be in agony for the rest of his life. It was truly amazing!

We can also learn something from this story. Sometimes you may ask me, 'Why don't You take me to the fifth realm immediately? As such I'll be liberated from suffering and promptly become a Buddha. Wouldn't it be better? Why do You tell me to meditate for two and a half hours each day, and observe the five precepts and a vegetarian diet? This is too slow, way too slow!' Actually, this isn't slow! You can digest it only in this way. If I gave you too much at one time, you'd be filled to death! Because you're too greedy, in the end you get nothing at all.

Sometimes we spiritual practitioners have no obstacles. We understand very well why we're pursuing this spiritual path. Every day we meditate diligently without any doubts and never create obstacles for ourselves. However, when maya can't hinder us from practicing spirituality, it annoys our relatives, using them to obstruct us and cause us harm. Shakyamuni Buddha once said that when maya couldn't attack the Buddha, it would attack His disciples. So, when the disciples sometimes encounter many troubles, the Master is also involved and affected. It's because the Master can't look on without doing anything when the disciples are in danger. This is like when parents see something happen to their children. They don't have the heart to just stand there watching so they're definitely affected.

In the course of spiritual practice, it's inevitable that you'll sometimes have friction with relatives and friends. We all have such experiences. Just try your best to endure, explain to them, neglect them, leave them, ignore them or be as cordial as you can. We should react depending on the situation. Each person has different situations; there's no way that I can set an exact example for you. You have to apply your wisdom to handle problems to reach a satisfactory result as best you can. Nonetheless, you mustn't give in too much and sacrifice your spiritual progress.

THE STORY OF A MONK'S TWO PIECES OF CLOTH ⁷²

There was a monk in India who devoted himself to God, like all monks are supposed to do. So, he had only one piece of cloth with which to cover his body. And he had only one pot, in which he would put water and also cook and put milk and so on. And it so happened that the lid of the pot broke. But the monk didn't buy a new one; he just used one corner of his cloth to cover the pot. Anytime he sat, he would sit near the pot. So a man came along and said, 'Why don't you buy a new lid for your pot?' And he said, 'I've already sworn that whatever I have here, I'll never get more, and just use what I have.'

And then the man said, 'But why are you so stubborn? One lid is no problem; how about buying a new pot?' The monk said, 'No, no. You increase this, and tomorrow it's that and the other. Just like one monk...' He then told the story of another monk. It was a true story, and went like this:

There was a monk in India, who used to go out begging for things. He had a loincloth that covered where he thought he was supposed to cover. [Laughter] But it was no problem; he was content. Every day he went out and got alms from people; he would beg and get

72. Group meditation, New Jersey Center, U.S.A., June 20, 1992 (Originally in English).

enough to eat, and then he would go and meditate. It was very beautiful. And he had a small hut.

The problem was that he had only two cloths: One that he washed and one that he wore. So, sometimes when he went out, he put his cloth on the roof to dry. And then came a mouse that always tore his cloth into ribbons. And then he would have to go out and beg for another piece of cloth. It happened many times like this.

So the monk was at a loss as to what to do. Then the neighbors advised him, saying, 'You can't go on forever begging for cloth. Why don't you just keep a cat, and the cat will take care of the mouse. Then you'll have no problem. Otherwise, who's going to keep donating cloth to you all the time like this?'

So, the monk, after many times begging, said, 'Okay, that's not bad.' So he kept a cat. Someone came along and gave him a cat. And then now the cat was there. But he had more trouble. He had to go out and beg for milk for the cat. And then some good-hearted person came along and told him, 'You can't go on forever, going out begging for milk and food for the cat. Just keep a cow. [Master and audience laugh.] Because we don't mind giving you milk, but if we have to give milk for the cat as well, it's a little bit too much. It's okay that we give, but everyone else is not the same. They won't give it to you every day. Then you'll even have to sacrifice your own milk for the cat. So keep a cow. We have a cow; we can donate it to you. It can be very convenient for you to have milk for yourself. And the cow will also give you some whey that you can use for cooking; everything will be convenient.'

So, they also had a cow ready for him. But in India, you can get a cow at any cost. They just walk around, and maybe you can just take one; some of them are ownerless, homeless cows.

Anyhow, after much consideration, the monk accepted the cow. But now he had to milk the cow and all that. And now he had to go out and beg for straw for the cow. Because he was a monk, he didn't know what else to do. And he lived in the part of the Himalayas with not much grass. He had to beg for straw and build a shelter for the cow.

Now, so far, so good. But then someone else came along and advised him by saying, 'You can't go on begging forever for straw. Who's going to give you straw all the time for the cow? We'll feed you, but we're not obliged to feed your cow and your cat and all that. So, keep a housemate. Or marry a wife; get married.'

So now, the monk was having serious problems. Because he didn't know how to cultivate land. Therefore, a good adviser said to him, 'You can keep a housemate, like a male farmer. Or, marry a farmer so that you can cultivate the land. There's so much land around here, all over; you can cultivate it, and have enough straw for your cow. And also you will have enough corn, wheat and so on for you to eat.'

Now, the monk was getting more and more serious. So he married. And afterwards, he and his wife cultivated a farm. Then they had children and they had to take care of the children, and then they had to get a teacher for the children and so on. And it was getting to be a bigger and bigger business.

So one day, his Master came back. And he kept asking for the so-and-so monk that was supposed to have been living in a thatched hut next to the river three years ago. But no

one knew if there was such a monk at all. So he kept asking his way up to the farm of the monk.

And then he realized what had happened all because of a piece of loincloth, one extra piece more. If he had had only one, and wore it, there would have been no problem. But he had two – one to wear and one to wash – and that's why there was a problem. So that's what happened, and that's a true story.

The monk had much regret after his Master came back. But the Master didn't want to stay. He said, 'I told you to practice spirituality. I didn't tell you to keep cows, dogs, cats, a wife and children.' And then he had a whole farm. He had to hire many farmers, because so many things grew, and they kept expanding. It had become a farm. He left everything in the world to become a monk, to be detached from the world and to have the minimum necessities for his life. And then he ended up wealthy: A big farmer, with many cattle and a wife and children and many workers. It was getting bigger and bigger all the time. And he was so busy counting money and checking the harvest that he had no time for meditation anymore. It was all finished. The monk's job was finished; he had gotten another job.

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE IS SUPERIOR TO EMPTY THEORIES ⁷³

In ancient China, a general was dying and the king asked him, 'After your demise, who would be an appropriate successor to you?' Then, instead of his own son, the general recommended someone else.

Surprised, the king asked, 'Your son has comprehensively studied military books since childhood. His strategic analyses are very convincing. Wouldn't he be the most suitable candidate?'

'No! No! That son of mine can only talk big,' said the general. 'Although he's well-versed in military theories, he has absolutely no practical experience on the battlefield. This is why I don't recommend him.'

However, when the general died the king didn't follow his advice. He firmly believed that the general's son would be superb, given his fluent responses and familiarity with strategic deployments and appointed him general. As a result, the son suffered defeat after defeat, much unlike his invincible father because he had no practical experience in warfare, and relied solely on military books for his knowledge.

Conditions on a battlefield change constantly and can't be countered by theories learned from books. Furthermore, geographical settings and climates differ from place to place so how can military theories apply to every battle? The enemy forces are different each time. The morale and physical state of our armies are affected by the climate and terrain at different sites so we can't always 'go by the books' when conducting a battle. The general's son had never fought alongside his father and had no practical experience of his own so a victory was beyond him.

The same applies to everything else we do. The more we do it, the better our natural responses become, and this gradually develops into a habit.

73. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, April 25, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

THE UNRECOGNIZED FOOTPRINTS ⁷⁴

There is a story about a man who meditated all the time and was very sincere. But one day, he complained to his Master, saying, 'Master, when I meditate, I can see that on my many walks on the spiritual path there have always been two sets of footprints: One from me and One from You. You have always been with me then, but when I've needed You most, like when I've fallen or I'm the most desperate I see only one set of footprints. Why have You forsaken me then? Why have You not been with me when I've fallen or am desperate?'

So, the Master said, 'No, I have always been with you. The one set of footprints are mine. That's when I've carried you.' [Applause]

THE HORSE TAKEN TO WATER ⁷⁵

A man rode his horse to a place where there was a waterwheel. In ancient times, the waterwheel needed to be kept going so that there was water to drink. The man rode his horse there because he wanted his horse to have a drink of water. However, when the horse went inside and heard the sound of 'ku-lon, ku-lon' coming from the waterwheel, it got frightened and ran out not wanting to drink! Then the owner of horse asked the man who looked after the waterwheel to stop the waterwheel for a while, because his horse could only drink water when it didn't hear the noise. After drinking water he and his horse would continue down the road.

However, what happened was once the waterwheel stopped, there was no water so his horse could not have a drink. The owner said, 'Okay, you let the waterwheel turn again.'

But as soon as it began rotating, the horse ran away.

The waterwheel operator then said, 'You should force your horse to drink water now, because when the waterwheel stops although there is no noise there is also no water. Do you want your horse to have a drink or not? This is the way it is.'

Sometimes when we have no time to meditate, that is when we love to meditate most. If we live a very comfortable life, like in heaven – it is very hard to practice in heaven – there will be no goals, no motivation to stimulate us to practice spirituality. Therefore, in a situation with longing and hunger, our food will be very tasty. Yet if we have too much, we will have the problems of a rich man who has no appetite to eat anything.

COMPENSATE FOR OUR MISTAKES ⁷⁶

Once, when Mahatma Gandhi was on a fast in India, a Hindu came to him and said, 'I will surely go to hell and no one can save me. But I still want to offer you some food because you are fasting for us. I don't want you to starve to death and make myself responsible for yet another crime when I go to hell.' The man then offered Gandhi a piece of bread and asked him to eat it, saying, 'Please eat it. I won't be ready to go to hell until you've eaten this.'

74. Group meditation, Kuala Lumpur Center, Malaysia, February 27, 1992 (Originally in English).

75. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 26, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

76. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, January 1, 1992 (Originally in Chinese).

Gandhi asked the man why he thought he was going to hell. The man replied that he was a Hindu, and that his child had been killed by Muslims during a fight between the Muslims and Hindus. So, in revenge, he cruelly killed a Muslim child, but felt very guilty afterwards. Gandhi then said, 'I know one way to save yourself from going to hell. Find a Muslim child who has lost his parents, or any child without parents, take him home, bring him up and educate him so that he grows up as a Muslim. Then you won't go to hell.'

Dissolving guilt in a positive way

I don't think Gandhi's suggestion would have immediately erased that man's karma, nor do we know if such a method could really have saved the man from hell. However, this idea is very good. At least his feeling of guilt might have been alleviated while he was alive. What's more, while raising the child, he may have experienced the happy bond between father and son. It would have given him comfort and a sense of personal worth to see a child grow up and learn, and adopting an orphan would have given him more self-confidence and contentment; thus, it was a remedy to assuage his guilty feelings.

Had the man continually complained about his guilty feelings, it would not have helped in any way. Who would it have helped? It would have helped the man even less! No matter how severely we reproach ourselves each day, we cannot erase the guilty feelings in our hearts when we know we have done something bad unless we experience a happier feeling to dilute the previous guilt, and weaken it as if it does not exist. When we achieve something or feel happy, our attainments can dissolve and melt away our guilty feelings.

For instance, when the sunlight is very strong, even if there is a large patch of snow on the ground, it will melt. I once had such an experience in Japan. Sometimes it snowed for three to four days there. It was very cold and the snow was very thick. But when the sun came out, the snow disappeared in a few hours! Originally, the whole area had been covered with white snow due to several days of steady snowfall, but when the sun came out, all the snow gradually melted and disappeared.

Thus, we should dissolve guilt like melting snow. Otherwise, if we indulge ourselves in feelings of guilt, it is not only meaningless, but also makes us depressed and stressed. In addition, it brings stress to the people around us. When we sink into darkness, we cannot communicate with others; we become indifferent to whatever they say. Even when they say something funny, we manage a smile at most and then bury ourselves again in our negative feelings, being unable to make ourselves happy; because that joy has nothing to do with our guilty feelings. So, only by doing something to compensate for our wrongdoings can we truly feel happy. There is thus a cause for every effect.

It's important for us to be repentant and humble, but it's more important to love ourselves. How can a person love anyone else if he can't love himself? Loving ourselves doesn't mean selfishness; it doesn't mean snatching everything for ourselves, or only thinking of ourselves in all circumstances without considering the feelings or convenience of others, or doing nothing to make others happy, or only caring about our own happiness and blaming others when we are unhappy. That's not loving ourselves, but displaying despotism, autocracy and selfishness! That's different.

Loving ourselves includes understanding that our spiritual level is not high so when we meditate we can't concentrate well. Maybe, in our past lives, being without the guidance of an enlightened Master, we were rather ignorant, and incurred more karma than others did. So, in this life we can't practice well or we progress slowly, and that's why we should love ourselves more. When we see anyone like that, we pity him, so should we not pity

ourselves? Thus, we should try to do as well as we can and improve ourselves as much as possible instead of only saying, 'I am remorseful; don't you see? I've repented. Isn't that good enough?' No, that's not right. True repentance is teaching ourselves, helping ourselves, encouraging ourselves, and reminding ourselves to do better in the future. We should write down all that we know that's good for ourselves and for others, and do it as well as we can. Meanwhile, we should change our bad habits one by one until there are none left.

So, we need to take care of both aspects rather than focusing our minds on our guilt every day and staying in darkness without applying some positive remedy. That's of no use and of no good to us. We should think of ways to apply remedies, and when we do good deeds, we will feel comforted and encouraged and gradually forget our sins. In this way, our bad habits will naturally change and we'll forgive ourselves.

Otherwise, we won't be able to forgive ourselves. It's not that others don't forgive us, but that we're pressured to death by our own guilty feelings. Hell is created in this way. The wrongdoers cannot find a remedy so they can't forgive themselves; it's not that God or anyone else will punish us. We are the masters of all beings; no one can punish us except ourselves. We allow ourselves to sink to such a degree just to teach ourselves.

We hear that evildoers go to hell in order to be taught a lesson and make up for their wrongdoings. But there's a better way, a more positive way. For example, if we have stolen money from others in the past, now we should not only stop stealing, but we should also give; we should perform charity and help the needy. We shouldn't just be passive and negative. Instead, we should be active and positive! If we simply stop doing the negative action, it's still very passive. We should do good things to make up for our past mistakes. That's active and positive, and it can erase our sins.

HUMAN WISDOM MAKES US MASTERS OF ALL CREATURES ⁷⁷

An Indian farmer and his child were toiling in the fields. It was almost dark by the time they had finished their work and the farmer said to the child, 'Wow! It's getting dark! Quickly pack up the tools and run. Let's run quickly!'

'Relax. We're not far from home and we know the way home. Why are you in such a panic?' asked the child.

'There's something you don't know. I'm generally fearless. I'm not afraid of tigers or lions. I'm only afraid of the night. When the night comes, I'm completely powerless. The night is most terrifying to me. I'm really frightened of it. I can't stand it,' answered the farmer.

It so happened that a lion was hiding nearby and overheard their conversation. 'What's this thing called 'the night'? How could it be more fearful than I am? I must find out about it,' the lion mused as it moved closer to the farmer, hoping to learn more about this 'night' that was even more frightening than itself.

Then darkness fell and the farsighted farmer couldn't see nearby objects clearly. He only saw the vague outline of an animal approaching, thought it was the donkey he had recently lost, and beat the lion several times, saying, 'I've been looking for you all day. Where have you been? How dare you come back so late?'

77. Group meditation, Tokyo Center, Japan, October 26, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

'This is the end of me,' the lion thought with regret. 'How could I have been so stupid as to come so close to this thing called 'the night' that beat me just now? It's really horrifying. What should I do now?' As these thoughts flashed through the lion's mind, the farmer again slapped it several times, urging it to go home with him. The petrified lion then obediently followed the farmer back to his house.

It was even darker when they reached home. Since the farmer continued to mistake the lion for his donkey, he tied it in a corner outside his house before he went to bed. That night, the lion stayed out in the cold, starving, petrified and not knowing what to expect of 'the night' when morning dawned. It believed that the farmer was 'the night.'

Early the next morning, before dawn broke, the farmer got up and took his 'donkey' to the fields. On the way, another lion passed by and found it hilarious to see a lion obediently following a farmer. It then approached the captive lion and asked, 'What are you doing? Why are you walking behind this man?'

'Shh! Keep your voice down and leave quickly. Don't you know that this being walking in front is something called 'the night.' He's very terrible. Last night, he beat me and shackled me, leaving me cold and starving the entire night. I have no idea where he's taking me now. Run along or your life will be in danger!'

After hearing this story, the other lion said, 'You're incredible. You idiot! You're a lion, the king of animals! You've been deceived! Just roar at him now and you'll know who is more terrifying.' The lion accepted his advice and roared loudly, so the farmer took a closer look. Now that the sky had become brighter, he saw that it was a lion. Wow! He bolted like lightning, and the lion was free again.

The moral of this story is that we humans have wisdom, immense power and status. However, if we're stupid, ignorantly follow the prince of the devils, and are thus controlled by karma, we can't possibly be liberated. However, if another soul who knows who he is and is not afraid comes to teach us what to do, we can be liberated. This is what an enlightened Master does.

There's a similar Aulacese story that I may as well tell you.

A farmer and his buffalo had a hard day plowing the fields. Both were exhausted, but since the work wasn't finished, the farmer beat the buffalo repeatedly, urging it to work faster. The buffalo was panting, with saliva dripping from its mouth and its tongue hanging out, and it was almost breathless, yet it still had to work ceaselessly.

A tiger was hunting for food nearby and saw the man and the buffalo, but couldn't decide which one to eat first. As it looked on, its curiosity was aroused. 'This is strange! How could it happen?' It decided to postpone its meal and continue its observation. The buffalo was so huge and strong, yet it was subservient to a little farmer and obeyed its instructions. It dared not resist even when beaten. The tiger was baffled and dared not take a chance for fear of a hidden mystery.

After some time, the farmer stopped for a rest and found a place to take his meal and nap. The tiger then quietly approached the buffalo, which could only take a break and eat some hay during that time. The tiger came closer and shook its head, saying to itself, 'How pitiful! It works so hard and yet eats so little. I really don't have the heart to eat it!' It came up to the buffalo and asked, 'Excuse me! I don't mean to offend you, but I really must ask. You're so huge and strong and you have two sharp horns. You can kill the farmer with one

kick. So why do you obey him? You've toiled for half a day. He beats you and you still continue to work. Only now has he given you a break but he only feeds you hay. What kind of animal are you? Why are you afraid of him? He's many times smaller than you!

'You have no idea. I'm stronger and bigger than he is, but this little man has a very terrific weapon,' said the buffalo. 'I have no choice but to obey him because his weapon is truly powerful! Don't ask any more questions because you're filling me with shame. We don't have this weapon and that's why we're inferior to him!'

Then the tiger became even more curious and said, 'Oh! Please! Please tell me. I've never heard about this. I've never been here before and have never seen such things!'

The buffalo took its time chewing the grass, and then closed its eyes and said, 'Aah! Why must you ask about this?'

'I want to learn. This is a rare opportunity!' The tiger implored the buffalo. 'I may not run into the same situation again. I usually stay in the mountains and have never seen this. I have the chance to see it only because I ventured down here today!'

'Since you're so sincere, I'll tell you!' said the buffalo. 'The weapon is wisdom. Since humans have this thing called wisdom as their weapon, we animals are all dominated by them, no matter how big, fierce or strong we are. Do you understand?'

'No! I've never heard of it!'

'All right! Enough!' the buffalo continued. 'Please stop annoying me and let me take a nap!'

The tiger then pondered for a long time, thinking, 'What exactly is this weapon that's so powerful? I must see it. My mother never told me about it. If I can learn about it, I'll be more powerful than anyone, including my grandma, grandpa, dad and mom because they don't know about such a thing. We were never taught about this weapon in school.'

Next the tiger waited patiently for the farmer to return. Though it remained skeptical, never having been conquered by any other animal before, fear stirred its heart and generated in it some respect for human beings. When the farmer arrived, the tiger held its forepaws together and respectfully asked him, 'I heard that you have a 'weapon of wisdom' that gives you control over everything, including huge, strong animals like me. I beg you to let me take a look at it. I've never seen such a thing. Besides, I'm still skeptical about what I've heard. Your body is very small so how can you carry such a big weapon that allows you to control enormous animals like us?'

'Of course, this weapon is so big that I can't carry it with me all the time, so I left it at home,' said the farmer.

'Will you please go home and bring it here so I can have a look?' asked the tiger.

'Of course, but I think this is a hoax. You don't really want to see my weapon. You only want me to go home so you can eat or abduct my buffalo,' said the farmer. 'What if I don't find you or the buffalo when I return carrying the huge 'weapon of wisdom' with such great effort? I won't do it.'

‘That’s not true. I sincerely want to see your ‘weapon of wisdom.’ I’ve never seen it before. Oh, please! Go home and bring it here so I can take a look,’ the tiger begged. ‘Really, I’m not deceiving you. I won’t eat your buffalo. I’ll wait for you here.’

‘All right, if you want me to believe you, then you have to let me bind you to a tree before I go home to fetch it. Otherwise, I’m afraid you’ll do something evil after I leave,’ said the farmer.

‘Of course, that’s no problem! Tie me up quickly,’ said the tiger, extending its legs and allowing the farmer to tie them to a tree trunk with rattan. And before the farmer walked away, the tiger even urged him, ‘Please come back soon!’

The farmer did return very quickly with a huge stick. ‘This is my wisdom,’ he said, as he killed the tiger with the stick.

The on-looking buffalo laughed until it was breathless! It laughed so hard that its head rolled back and forth, hitting a rock and knocking out its teeth. Since that day, old buffaloes have been without teeth. This is one of our Aulacese stories, very similar to the previous one about the lion, though the moral is not very similar.

Therefore, we humans are truly the masters of all animals. We’re honored to be the king of animals. Originally, God told us to take care of the animals, but in the end we dominate them instead. Good grief! We’re truly ‘honored!’ So these are our stories. The story about ‘the night’ is lovelier, isn’t it?

THE DEMEANOR OF A SAINTLY KING ⁷⁸

The first precept that we have to observe in spiritual practice is ‘ahimsa,’ meaning ‘non-violence.’ This story discusses the ahimsa ideal.

One day, a poor man was walking through a mango grove, where he saw many mangoes on the trees that looked extremely luscious and tempting. He was very hungry because he had not eaten for three days. So he quickly picked up a stone and threw it at one of the trees. A few huge mangoes fell on the ground and the man was very happy. He then picked up the mangoes and had a hearty meal.

It just so happened that the king was playing chess with his beautiful consorts in the mango grove at the time, and the stone that struck the tree had felled the fruit and then landed on the king’s head. Fortunately, the king’s hat protected his scalp, but the stone knocked it off, and thus the poorest man met the richest man in the kingdom. The king, feeling very lucky about his close call, showed no interest in investigating the cause. However, the consorts and ministers by his side were very angry, and they hunted for the offender who had thrown the stone. They could not figure out why someone would dare to throw a stone at the king. On the other hand, they were also eager to earn some credit for their work. They soon arrested the poor man, held court hearings on the spot, and condemned him to death for assaulting the king.

Then the king rose from his seat and questioned the ministers about why they had condemned the man to death. He then ordered the stone thrower to be brought before him and asked, ‘Why did you throw the stone?’ ‘To get mangoes from the tree,’ replied the

78. Group meditation, Tokyo Center, Japan, October 1, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

man. 'Did you get any?' 'Yes, Your Majesty.' 'Have you eaten the mangoes?' 'Yes, Your Majesty.'

The king next turned to his ministers and said, 'The poor man was hungry, and he struck the tree with this stone. He got some mangoes and ate them. Now tell me, how long will he be free from hunger after eating those mangoes?' 'About twenty-four hours, Your Majesty. He won't be hungry for a whole day.' 'That's right. Now I will pronounce my judgment.' The entire crowd waited anxiously, thinking, 'Could there be anything worse than the death sentence? We have already condemned the man to death. How else does the king want him to be punished?'

Then the king announced, 'I command that from this day on until the end of his life on earth, this poor man shall receive from us enough food to feed himself. Convey my order at once to the minister of economics.' Everyone was amazed and confused. What kind of punishment was this? They had never heard of such a judgment. The queen thought that it was because she had served the king well, and thus put him in a good mood. She smiled, thinking that it was her merit.

'My dear!' said the king to the queen, 'Tell me, is the mango tree a sentient or an insentient object?' 'An insentient object, my lord,' answered the queen. 'And how about me?' asked the king. And the queen replied, 'What a question to ask, great one. Humans, the highest of creatures, are sentient beings, and you are a jewel among humans, saintly, great, virtuous and wise.'

The king continued, 'Then, my beloved, since I am a sentient being, how am I worthy of my human status if I fail to prove that I am better than that tree? What good is there for God to give me this human status?' The queen said, 'You are, my lord, worthier than all other men for the human status that God has given you. But why do you say this? What do you mean?'

'Look! That poor man struck the tree with a stone, and the tree gave him luscious fruit to eat, which fulfilled his hunger for a day. That stone also hit me. Since I am the lord of all sentient beings and the gem among humans, should I not prove myself worthier than the tree? [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause] That's why I have ordered that his food be provided for the rest of his life.'

Immediately, the queen, consorts, ministers, subordinates and servants all fell at the king's feet, prostrating to him. They glorified him, proclaiming, 'Oh! Your Majesty! You are truly a saintly king so rare. Who but God Himself could manifest such compassion and magnanimity? God is inside you. Your merit, blessing and love are comparable to Lord Buddha and Lord Jesus, and the great saints and sages of all times. Only rulers like you can inspire people to cultivate their compassion and inner cosmic love. Inspired by your glorious example, people will love and serve each other. They will purify their bodies, speech and mind, and change their bodies and souls to become cultivated people. Please bless us, so that we may be your worthy servants and followers forever.'

This is a very good story. This is how we ought to behave. Sometimes, we may not be any better than a tree. When you punch a tree or shake it, it drops down fruit to feed you. But when you shake or punch a person, he might kill you for it. [Laughter] Some people are really no better than trees!

RELY ON OURSELVES ⁷⁹

Long, long ago, two birds and their fledglings lived near a farm. Every morning and evening, the parents would go out to find food for their little ones. One day, when they brought the food home, the baby birds said to them frantically, 'Pa! Mom! This is the end of us!' Startled, the parent birds asked, 'What happened? Tell us quickly.'

The baby birds said, 'We heard that the owner of the farm has asked his relatives and friends to come and help harvest the crops tomorrow. We will have nothing left to eat.' Their parents comforted them, saying, 'Don't worry about it. No matter what, his relatives and friends will definitely not come.' The baby birds were confused, but they believed there must be some truth to their parents' words, because they were older, more experienced, and must know everything. Reassured, the baby birds ate heartily. Several days went by, and true enough, none of the farmer's relatives and friends came to help with the harvest.

Then, a few more days later, when the parent birds came back with food, their little ones told them again, 'This is the end! We heard that the farmer has asked all his children to come home tomorrow to help reap the crops. We will have no more food. We are in serious trouble!' Their parents laughed and reassured them, 'No! It won't happen! Don't worry. Their children will definitely not come to help them. Don't be afraid.' The baby birds were happy to hear that. Their parents had made the correct prediction last time, so they must be right again this time. The family enjoyed their dinner joyously, and truly, as predicted, none of the children came to help the farmer harvest his crops.

Again, several days went by, and when the parent birds returned to the nest with dinner for their babies, the little ones again told them, 'We are in trouble! We are in danger! We heard that the farmer and his wife have decided to harvest the crops by themselves tomorrow. They are not going to rely on others or ask for help.' This time, the parents were really worried and said, 'This is indeed the end!' [Master and audience laugh.] The little ones asked, 'This is strange! Why is that? The last two times we told you that they were going to get help from their relatives, friends, and children, you were delighted and said that nothing would happen. Why are you so shocked this time that they are going to reap the harvest by themselves and not rely on others?' The parents explained to them, 'You don't understand. If they really rely on themselves, they will definitely do it. You cannot depend on others. Now that they have decided to be self-reliant, they will definitely do it. We will have no more food. We had better move to another farm.'

The moral of the story is: We spiritual practitioners should rely on ourselves rather than on others; the Quan Yin method teaches us how to rely on ourselves. Even this body does not belong to us, so practicing with the body only is not ideal either. That is why I emphasize that we should practice with our inner, original self, and remind our original self to practice spiritually every day. Only this is the best way. This is why we derive so much benefit from practicing the Quan Yin method.

THE DAY ADAM STARTED TO WORK ⁸⁰

I came across a very funny story in a book about 'A-dumb' (Adam) and 'Idiot' (Eve). (The Chinese pronunciation of these two names sounds like these meanings.). Do you know them? [Laughter] [Audience: Yes! Adam and Eve.] They lived in the Garden of Eden

79. Three-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, September 22, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

80. Three-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, Septemember 22, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

peacefully just like in heaven. Everyday they ate, lay under the sun, held hands, talked about sweet nothings and then went to bed. They were happy.

One day, when Adam was lying in the hammock, [Laughter] a snake climbed up and whispered in his ear: 'Hey, Adam, do you know what's the most recent style in popular clothes?' Of course, Adam didn't know, because he'd never known what clothes were before. So he asked, 'Clothes? What are clothes?' The snake said, 'Those are the things that cover your body! For example, the outer skin on my body is my clothes. But the clothes you're wearing have never been changed since your birth. That kind of 'skin-type' clothing is not in fashion now! The most popular color is orange.'

Adam said that he had no idea about this kind of thing. So the snake said, 'Oh! You are so ignorant! What do you do every day?' Adam said there was no need for him to do anything every day. He just found food to eat whenever he was hungry, went to sleep whenever he was tired and chatted with Eve whenever he was lonely. He was very content this way.

The snake said, 'There are many things that you don't know, but I am willing to teach you because you are so uncivilized and ignorant. You don't even know how to change your clothes.' But Adam asked why he had to change clothes. His wife never changed hers, either. It saved money and they were both happy. Why would they have to change? The snake said, 'We have to mix with others, wearing whatever they wear. It is more fun to have competition. Besides, we can meditate in order to communicate with God.'

Adam said, 'I am already communicating with God every day. I live in Hiers garden, which means I communicate with Hirm every day. Why do I need to meditate?' The snake said, 'If you have already communicated with Hirm, then you should learn to be independent and to communicate less with Hirm. I will teach you meditation in order to be separated from Hirm.' [Master laughs.] Originally, the snake was talking about communicating; now he changed to separating. Adam was dumb and so he stood there listening.

The snake said, 'If you do not want to live a boring life, you can find something to do, such as going to work.' Adam replied, 'Work? What does that mean? What do you do at work? What kind of thing should you do?'

The snake said, 'Well, you can go pick fruits and gather a lot every day.' Adam asked, 'Why do I need to pick fruits? I only pick enough for me to eat. What's the use of picking so many?'

The snake said, 'If you gather four hundred and fifty apples, I will teach you how to become a civilized man.' Adam said, 'I have never picked so many before. Why should I do that?' The snake explained that this was his tuition fee. Otherwise, he wouldn't teach Adam.

Adam said he would rather not do it. But the snake said, 'You must do it for your wife.' Adam asked, 'Why does my wife need so many apples?' The snake said, 'Because she just learned from me and she has graduated. Now, she owes me four hundred and fifty apples.'

So, Adam started to work very busily for his wife. He originally didn't need to pick so many apples, but now because his wife had become a civilized person, he had to pick apples every day in order to gather four hundred and fifty of them. Later when 'Idiot' (Eve) came home, she had become a civilized person, wearing the most popular makeup and hairstyle. Her hair used to be long and straight, but now it had become like an African

hairstyle. [Master and audience laugh.] Her clothes were also very beautiful and the most fashionable. And the more clothes she wanted, the more fruit Adam had to pick.

Gradually, Adam felt embarrassed because he saw his highly civilized wife changing clothes every day while he himself wore no clothes. He then started to have guilty feelings. Do you know now where the guilty feeling comes from? It came from right then and there. Later, he started to learn so-called meditation on how to be separated from God. [Master laughs.] Every day he was busy picking fruits and then buying clothes. In order to afford more clothes, he had to work more. Soon he became too busy to lie in the hammock, enjoy the sunshine and live a leisurely life like before. Eventually, he became more and more separated from God. The more he meditated, the more he was separated from God. From that time on, they started to give birth to humans. Previously, when they had no clothes on, they didn't make any children. Now that they were covered with clothes, they became more curious about each other. That's the end of the story! [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause]

WHY SENTIENT BEINGS CAN'T BE DELIVERED ⁸¹

The one-dollar offering

There was a very stingy person who never practiced spiritually. Since he also never gave charity, he was very much afraid of monks coming to beg for alms. His wife had strong faith in Buddha, however, and liked chanting the Buddha's name and practicing spiritually, which the man abhorred. One day, the man's mother passed away and his wife suggested, 'Let's make a pilgrimage to the Ganges, where we can perform a ritual to ask for the Buddha's blessing so that our mother will be elevated.' The man replied, 'Okay! But let's not take such a long trip for it will be very expensive! We can go somewhere nearby.'

Halfway on their pilgrimage, they decided to visit a certain temple. However, they were worried that there might be some monks around when they arrived and they would have to make the customary offering to the monks. So, they went there when all the monks were asleep. Indeed, when they entered the temple, there was no one in sight, only a few statues of the Buddha and the Quan Yin Bodhisattva.

Detecting the man's stinginess, the Quan Yin Bodhisattva manifested as a monk and sat there. After paying respects to the Buddha statues, the man was astounded to see a monk! The monk, who was the manifestation of the Quan Yin Bodhisattva, said to him, 'You've earned infinite merit by paying respect to the Buddha and offering incense. Would you like me to perform a ritual of elevation for you?' The man replied, 'No! It's not necessary! I can do it myself.' But the monk insisted, 'It's all right. I can do it for you. You don't have to make an offering to me now; you can pay later. Just let me know how much of an offering you want to make.' It's a common practice for worshippers to make offerings at temples.

Then the man thought, 'It's all right for me to promise him now. Later, I'll just leave, and he won't be able to find me.' So, the man said, 'Okay! I'll make an offering of one dollar.' And the monk said, 'Fine! One dollar is enough, as long as you're sincere.' Then the monk went on to chant many scriptures for him. After the ritual of elevation was over, the man told his wife, 'Now that the ritual has been done, we've made the pilgrimage and paid respect to the Buddha, and a monk has chanted the scriptures for us, we can go home tomorrow.'

81. Three-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, August 5-7, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

A few days after they got home, the monk suddenly appeared at their house. The wife went inside and told her husband, 'The monk from the temple is waiting outside. You promised to offer him one dollar. Now he's come to collect it.' The man was terrified and said, 'Good grief! I don't want to give him a dollar. Go and tell him that I'm seriously ill, and can't entertain any guests now. Ask him to leave.' Of course, the wife knew very well how stingy her husband was. She could only go out and tell the monk, 'I'm very sorry, but my husband is very ill and can't entertain you. Will you please return to your temple?'

The monk said, 'So he's sick! Then it's even more proper that I should fulfill my obligation. [Laughter] I'll chant the Buddha's name for him, hoping he'll recover soon.' The wife went inside again to report to her husband and the man said, 'No! No! Tell him that I'm dead [Laughter] and ask him to leave.' The wife had no other alternative but to go out and tell the monk, 'I'm sorry. My husband has just passed away. I think you had better leave.' But the monk was eager to offer his services. Not only did he refuse to leave, but he also insisted, 'If this is true, then I definitely must go in to chant the scriptures for his elevation.' Now that the man was 'dead' he couldn't object any more [Laughter] and his wife couldn't stop the monk from entering the house to chant the scriptures, recite the Buddha's name, and perform a lot of rituals. Finally, the man was placed in a coffin and sent to a crematory. But just as he was about to be cremated, he jumped out of the coffin, shouting, 'Hey! Don't burn me! I'm still alive.'

At that time, the monk resumed his original form of the Quan Yin Bodhisattva and said to the man, 'I'm delighted to see you make so much effort and express so much sincerity in making the pilgrimage. Now I'll grant you a wish, which I'll realize for you.' Then the man knelt down and cried, and do you know what his wish was? He said, 'Please forgive me, Quan Yin Bodhisattva, and please waive the one dollar that I promised to offer!' [Laughter] Hearing his words, the Quan Yin Bodhisattva shook Her head and left. This is how sentient beings behave. It's useless even when Buddhas descend to save them.

One who worshipped wooden Buddha statues

A person practiced austerely under a spiritual Master, who gave him a statue of the Earth Store Bodhisattva and taught him to recite the incarnation mantra. He also instructed him to bow to the statue of the Earth Store Bodhisattva several thousand times each day, and repeat the mantra tens of thousands of times. His Master told him that he definitely would progress by following these instructions.

The disciple practiced diligently for a year, but did not feel anything. So, he complained to his Master, saying, 'Master, I beg you please! Will you teach me another mantra and give me another Buddha statue that's more powerful and merciful. I'm giving up the Earth Store Bodhisattva. I've worshipped Him for a year and chanted the mantra until my throat was dry, yet He never gave me any blessing or response. I don't want to worship Him anymore. Will you please give me a better Buddha statue?' So his Master said, 'Okay! Now I'll teach you the Amitabha Buddha mantra, and you may worship the Amitabha Buddha. The Amitabha Buddha is very compassionate. He made grand vows, and has great affinity with sentient beings. You'll definitely progress by worshipping Him.'

The disciple believed his Master, carried a small statue of the Amitabha Buddha home and started reciting the mantra. He persisted in chanting the mantra and the holy name of Amitabha Buddha very sincerely. However, a year passed and he received no response. Again, he complained to his Master, 'Master, the Amitabha Buddha is not efficacious. He didn't make any response. Please don't test me any more! Please give me initiation and

teach me a better method of spiritual practice. Otherwise, I can never make it on the spiritual path!

Knowing that this disciple was very sincere, the Master told him with a smile that he would definitely be enlightened this time. However, the disciple still had to practice and become enlightened himself. 'I now give you this statue of the Quan Yin Bodhisattva to worship at home,' said the Master. 'The Quan Yin Bodhisattva is very merciful. All of Her worshippers find Her very efficacious. You'll surely get a response through worshipping Her.' This disciple had great faith in his Master's words and was much delighted. He decided to worship the Quan Yin Bodhisattva piously at home and chant Her holy name day and night.

That day, upon reaching home, he immediately lit the best sandalwood incense before the statue of the Quan Yin Bodhisattva and worshipped piously. He placed the statues of the Earth Store Bodhisattva and Amitabha Buddha on the bookshelf and paid no more attention to them even when they were covered by dust. He thought that these two were not efficacious, so he didn't worship them any more, but let them rest on the bookshelf. He now worshipped only the Quan Yin Bodhisattva statue.

While worshipping, he noticed that the fumes of the sandalwood incense drifted towards the nose of the Amitabha Buddha statue and thought, 'This isn't right! I'm only worshipping the Quan Yin Bodhisattva. This Buddha statue isn't efficacious at all, and so isn't worthy of enjoying my incense.' [Laughter] Then he took the Amitabha Buddha statue and sealed its nose with plastic tape, so that it couldn't smell the fragrance. Suddenly, the wooden statue of the Amitabha Buddha vanished, and the original form of the Amitabha Buddha appeared right before his eyes. The disciple was frightened to death, and quickly fell on his knees to beg for forgiveness. So Amitabha Buddha said to him, 'I'm impressed by your faith and sincerity in seeking the Truth. Now, whatever you ask for, I will realize for you.' The man said, 'I'm overjoyed to see You, and meanwhile I don't know what to ask for. However, will You please explain why You only appeared after I sealed Your nose? What does that mean?'

Amitabha Buddha said, 'It's because previously you only regarded me as a Buddha statue, just a wooden statue. When you thought of worshipping me, you bowed to me. When you didn't feel like worshipping me, you pushed me aside. When you were fond of me, you bowed to me. When you didn't like me, you stopped offering any incense. Also, you didn't pay attention to me when you were busy. This is a wrong concept. Now your thinking has changed and you regard me as a real Buddha, which was why you wanted to seal my nose. Being worried that my nose would really be sealed by you, I had to appear quickly.' [Master laughs.]

Correct concepts in spiritual practice

In spiritual practice, if we're sincere and our concepts are correct, even a wooden Buddha statue will turn into a real Buddha. If our spiritual cultivation is poor and our concepts are incorrect, however, even a living Buddha will become like a wooden statue. Therefore, how we see things is very important. If we don't have a correct concept about an enlightened Master, it will be futile even if a real enlightened Master descends here.

In the first story, the man knew that the real Buddha had come, but he didn't ask for liberation, Buddhahood, or great wisdom. All he asked for was the Buddha's pardon and waiving of a one-dollar offering. Can you imagine that? This is why enlightened Masters can't deliver sentient beings. Sentient beings don't pray for great things. Instead, they're

trapped by worldly habits, bound by secular habits and concepts every day. Every word they utter is about worldly things; every thought they have is about worldly things; every wish they make is about worldly things. Therefore, it's useless for enlightened Masters to come down here!

In the second story, though the disciple treated the wooden Buddha statue rudely, his concept was more correct, which meant that he was relatively enlightened. He no longer treated the Buddha statue as a piece of wood. At that moment, he saw that everything was Buddha so he even regarded the wooden Buddha statue as a real Buddha. What I mean is that only the concept underlying the wooden statue is important. It's important that we worship the real Buddha, and not the wooden statue. When we have right concepts and are enlightened, whatever we do to the Buddha, He won't mind. When our concepts are wrong, even if the real Buddha appears before us, it's useless. When our concepts are correct, even a wooden Buddha statue will turn into a real Buddha, but when they're not right, even if we're in the company of a living Buddha, it will be as though we were with an ordinary human.

There is an ancient story that goes back to the times of Shakyamuni Buddha, when Sariputra built a huge ashram for Him. At that time, Sariputra found a giant ant beneath a tree. Pointing to the ant, he told the people around him, 'This ant has been here for many lifetimes and has listened to the lectures of several Buddhas. However, it's still not enlightened because it continues to cling to the level of an ant.'

Of course, an enlightened Master is capable of helping us to transcend the level of an ordinary human, but we ourselves must be willing. If we're unwilling, but love to stay at the childish level, the enlightened Master can't force us. This is similar to a doctor treating a patient. He can prescribe medication for us, but if we refuse to take the medicine, and cling on to our illness instead, the doctor too can't force us to do otherwise.

BEWARE THE MONSTERS ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH ⁸²

You see, everywhere Xuan Zang went, there were monsters and spirits anxious to capture him and eat his flesh. Here, 'flesh-eating' doesn't mean cutting the flesh into pieces and eating it; rather, it means giving spiritual torment, making life unbearable, causing the loss of appetite and sleep, and zapping one's physical strength. Such spiritual torture is the same as having one's flesh eaten.

Some monsters can zap people's energy or vital life force. The greater our yang energy, the more hungry the yin monsters are for our vital life energy. Excessive loss of life force to these monsters can lead to loss in our level of consciousness. Some monsters take human form. In 'The Journey to the West,' there was a 'white skeletal spirit' who killed a person by draining him of his vital life energy, occupying his body, and then seducing more people through him. We cannot recognize the spirit from its outward appearance. Some people who are possessed are monsters in human form. When they come near us, we feel weak all over and become unlike our usual self. If we fall victim to their seduction, we lose our original nature. I have seen people who have succumbed to maya's temptations. They look different. Even after they regret it, they still look different and it takes them a very long time to recover. They may not even know that they have given in to temptation, just like a person asleep is not conscious of his state, a drunk person doesn't know that he is inebriated, or a mental patient is unaware of his mental condition.

82. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, August 1, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

Sometimes, a little carelessness or too many bad thoughts can let maya make use of an ordinary person. Maya finds its way into him and contaminates him. He becomes half-human and half-maya, acting strangely and having weird thoughts. He will not behave like his usual self. How terrifying! Therefore, we must keep our actions, speech and thoughts pure, and refrain from having negative or dark thoughts, otherwise we will have trouble. You all have free will. The Master cannot always forbid you to think about something. You have the right to think. You must take care of yourselves. Only when you let the Master protect you can She do it; otherwise She cannot intervene. It's fine if you don't seek Her help, but do not resist if She tries to help. You have free will. If you resist, neither God nor the Master can intervene. This is the law of the universe and this is why the world is in chaos. If God could interfere with our minds, we would be fine, but then there would be no play, no suffering and no joy. All realms would be the same. All the people would be transported to paradise.

You must understand that you have to rely on yourselves to pursue spiritual practice, kindle your own light, and walk by yourselves. If you are sick and cannot walk, of course, the Master will carry you. But if you resist the Master and walk in the opposite direction, She can only follow you. Although She knows that you will walk farther and farther away, She still will follow you. She cannot abandon you, and She cannot intervene.

So, beware! There are many monsters. It's not that you encounter monsters only when you go on a pilgrimage to the West to get the Buddhist scriptures. Here, you are also a pilgrim who is headed West in search of Buddhist scriptures every day. It is farther away than India and your journey is more difficult. You may stumble and fall, but you must remember to come back. When you fall, you should know that you must not resist the person who helps you up. Only then will danger be minimized. Even when you fall, do not lie by the roadside. Do not intentionally let yourselves roll down, thinking that you are still very good.

PENETRATE WORLDLY ILLUSIONS ⁸³

This is a story from India. Once an enlightened Master asked his disciple to renounce the world and join his monastic order. However, the disciple said that his wife, parents and siblings all loved him very much, and he could not forsake them. His departure would bring unbearable pain for his family. 'Well, let me show you how much your family members love you,' said his Master.

Together, they came to the home of the disciple. Then the Master gave the disciple a pill and hid himself outside, pretending to be a stranger. After swallowing the pill, the disciple became like a dead man, with no heartbeat or breathing. His body turned stiff and icy cold. His family members burst into tears, crying and imploring God to save him, but to no avail.

Suddenly the Master entered and said to them, 'I can save your relative.' On hearing this, they became very happy. They bowed down and begged him to waste no time saving the man. 'But there is one requirement,' said the Master. 'For him to be revived, one person must die in his place, because this is the law of cause and effect. If I raise him from death, then I have to die for him. But I am not his kin! He is your relative. Since you love him so much, you must be very happy to die for him. I am just a passer-by. How can I die for him? So, if one of you is willing to die for him, I can immediately bring back his soul. As we cannot transcend the karmic law of cause and retribution, an exchange has to be made.'

83. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 21, 1991 (Originally in Chinese).

None of the relatives were willing to die for him. They found very good excuses. 'If I die, who will take care of this home?' 'If I die, who will take care of this business?' Though the wife of the disciple loved him very much, and had cried desperately and rolled on the floor, she answered, 'No, no! If I die, there will be no one to take care of my two children.' Then they said, 'Oh, well! The man is already dead. Then let it be so. Let us just send the body for cremation.' Hearing that, the disciple got up immediately and said, 'I am not dead yet!' Then he said good-bye to his family and left with his Master.

There are many stories like this. Sometimes when we love someone, or when someone loves someone else, there are always some aspects of imperfection. Usually we do not love others to the extent of forgetting ourselves, or to the extent of being willing to die for them. Hence, with certain things, we do not know the truth without personal experience. We perceive only the outside appearances, which are not correct.

The attachments that we feel for this world are not the ultimate. It is best that we do not have to come back anymore because no matter how deeply attached we are, after a while we still have to leave. So, it is best to be prepared beforehand, and at the time of departure, to be gone forever. Otherwise, the next time we come back, we will again become attached, and get tied up with one another. After a while, we will have to leave once more. Again at that time, our relatives will feel great pain. Therefore, it is best to just be gone once and for all, without any need to come back again to trouble others. This is also an act of filial piety. Don't you think so? [Audience: Yes.]

It is this way between husband and wife. After a while, each goes his or her own way. Since both feel so attached and miserable at the time of separation, do not repeat it. Hence, we should be prepared spiritually. It is better to leave in a clear-cut manner. Do not come back again to replay these painful scenes. Otherwise, we will be miserable and so will be the other party. What good will it do us?

FROM STONE TO SAND ⁸⁴

That's the Indian custom, to always run to the seat of the saints. They believe that saints are like the sandalwood tree, transferring to every tree around it the fragrance of sandalwood. Yes, this is true.

Relocating for a child's sake

In China, there was a story about Meng Tzu. Meng Tzu was a very wise man of China, one of the saints. But he had a saintly mother, so that's why.

When he was a child, his house was next to a slaughtering house that killed animals. So he went to see the people who slaughtered the animals. When he came home, he began to catch all the small animals, like frogs, cats and dogs. And he also began to slaughter them, because he imitated what he saw.

Children imitate everything, good or bad. I didn't; I did not imitate. I remember many of my cousins and the neighbor's children always went and fetched birds, and would roast them and eat them. And they killed all kinds of insects, making them become like their toys. I never did this; I never liked it. But most children imitate things, whether good or bad.

84. Group meditation, San Jose Center, Costa Rica, June 2, 1991 (Originally in English).

So, when the mother saw that the child had developed this very bad habit due to their neighbor's influence, she moved, because of him. She said, 'This is not a good place for my child.' She was a saintly mother. And they were not wealthy. I think she was alone. Her husband wasn't there; maybe he was dead. She raised the child alone as a weaver, weaving cloth. She was very poor and didn't earn much money weaving cloth. Even then, she sacrificed her time, energy and money for her child. Can you imagine how saintly that is? That's why I say she was a saintly mother. And in ancient China, moving was not easy. There's no transportation, no one to help you, only the mother and the child. You can imagine how difficult that would be.

So, she moved to another neighborhood. Some time later, she discovered that her child came home every day wailing and crying, making a ceremony for the dead. He was making a funeral service every day. And then she discovered that they lived very near a funeral home; that's where he learned it. So she said, 'This is not a place for my child.'

She moved again, for the third time. Then, at last, she moved next to a school, where they taught about Confucius and all the saints' teachings. And the child came home behaving like a saint! He had all the manners of a good scholar and the thinking of a saint – very polite, very noble and very saintly. So, the mother said, 'Wow, this is the place for my child.'

And then, when this child grew old enough, of course, he went to school. He liked going to school. He said, 'I like it!' He liked to be like the scholars, so he went to the school. But one day, he became fed up with the school for some reason. Probably the teachers had scolded him or his roommate wasn't nice, or else he was lazy. So he went home and went to sleep, in the middle of his classes. He didn't want to go to school any more.

A cut in the cloth

The mother used all her logic to persuade him to go back to school that day, but he didn't. He said he didn't want to and was very insistent and stubborn. The mother was weaving a piece of silk at that time. After he had been so stubborn, she took a knife and cut across the piece of silk she had woven. And then she asked the child, 'Can we use this piece of silk now? Can it be useful?' And the child said, 'Of course not! Why did you destroy it? Why did you cut that piece of silk when it was so perfect?' And the mother said, 'Well, it is like your education. If you don't continue, it's of no use. If you break it in the middle, what is the use of before and after? Something broken in the middle is of no use.'

It's the same with our practice. We should also continue every day. Otherwise, even though it's beautiful before and it might be beautiful after, if it's broken in the middle, it's not a continuous flow. And we will experience some kind of difficulty or obstacles or uneasiness in our life. We cannot expect things to go smoothly and easily, the way we want, all the time. We must learn to take and to give, to be strong and also to be flexible, when the situation requires. Otherwise, we will have a lot of trouble during our life, and we will never grow up.

The forgotten mother-saint

If the mother of Meng Tzu had been a very ordinary mother, then today we would never have heard of the name Meng Tzu. He would never have left his name in the history of sainthood. And in China, there are so many people, a vast number of people, with vast lands. To be listed in the names of these vast people and vast lands – as one of the handful of saints – is not easy. To make a name for yourself in China, where there are so

many people that you cannot count them all – to make a name distinguished from these masses – it's not easy! And they have four or five thousand years of history; to be distinguished as one of the few is not common.

But people have forgotten his mother. They don't know who she was or what she did, only that she cut pieces of silk and moved three times. But her actions were worth more than all the lectures that Meng Tzu ever offered to the public. She is worthy to be a Master, a Master of all time. She was Master of all mothers, of all the Masters! If she weren't a saint and a wise woman, she could have never sacrificed so much in her situation and in her poverty.

Can you imagine what Meng Tzu would have become without such a mother – a brilliant saint who would have been contented with killing animals every day for a living? So you see how saints are made. We can make saints out of stones. I think I will start a manufacturing plant for building saints. We could! Just give them good examples, a good environment and good lectures, and they will become saints.

The importance of childhood education

The Tibetan people train their monks from childhood. Most of the monks learn from childhood. They come into the monastery when they are young, mostly as orphans or poor children whose parents cannot afford to raise them; they get offered completely to the temple and never go back home. So, they are trained from childhood, and that's how they grow up. Even if we don't say anything about their levels of sainthood, at least their manner and behavior are very sweet.

So, everything we were taught in childhood is very important. I guess my grandmother and my father were good teachers for me. My grandmother used to make me read a lot of books to her because she couldn't read; she was very old. I read her all the philosophical books that were meant only for adults, but she was very fascinated by them. And I loved her; I was always sticking around her, so I was the one who read a lot for her. And I was more fascinated than she was. Sometimes she went to sleep or she was busy, and I would read them all by myself. So I read all the things that a child should not read, like Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu and all kinds of Chinese and other cultures' philosophies. In the evening when I slept, I would fly around meeting saints and things like that. And I had all kinds of magical powers in my dreams. Anyhow, I guess that's what made me become what I am today; it had an influence. In the world today, people teach pregnant mothers to read good books and imagine beautiful faces, or hang beautiful pictures in the bedroom or around the house, just to make a beautiful baby, to plant noble ideas into the fetus. It helps.

The parents' sacred mission

Actually, the parents are commissioned by God to teach His children. But most parents do not remember their duty. They love the children but they think of the children also as property, that the children should grow up and make a name and make money for them, to repay them for their kindness. So, most of the time, they emphasize more to the children that they have to go to school, they have to learn a craft, or they have to do this and do that. There's really no moral motive behind it at all, just a monetary motive. This is just most of the time; I don't mean all families are like this. But the people who are like that teach each other – that you have to spend ten years or twenty years in education just to get a position, to earn good money, to get a good husband or wife and to be secure in life. This is always emphasized in our society. And then if they have a religious background, they send their children to the priests, and the priests know nothing.

So, that's how we are left alone to struggle for ourselves spiritually in this world. If we are not lucky enough to happen to stumble into a saint or the saintly teaching of a living Master, can you imagine how we carry on with our life? You're born and you die and you have only one ideal in your head: Making money, gaining position, and raising children, like raising ducks, pigs, or any other animals. If we as humans don't have a higher ideal about life and God, we are just like the animals. But how do you find a Teacher who will teach you anything like this? We have been brainwashed for fifteen or twenty years in school, just for money! Let's face it; that's the only motive. It doesn't matter how much flour they put around it or pepper and chili on top to cover it, it is all for monetary purposes, nothing else. And not only to earn enough money for a living; sometimes money tricks people into selling their dignity and forgetting all their moral standards.

That's how the society teaches us, even our family members. Of course, not all families are like that. Thus, we should earn money or have a position to take care of ourselves, but not to the extent of forgetting everything else. That's why we are very far away from God. If we are near God, it must be a money god, or a banker god!

A thief's story

There was a story about a thief, a very, very great thief. He committed so many crimes and killings that the government decided to hang him. So, before a person is executed, he is entitled to one last personal wish. He was very famous; they had hunted him for many decades before they caught him. He was a big robber, without any repentance and without any conscience. He killed people like chopping bananas.

Now his last wish was that he wanted to see his mother. Everyone was surprised that he even had affection for his mother. But they thought, 'Well, in the whole world no one probably loves him, so he must have love for the mother. And the mother is the only one who loves him, so it's natural that he wants to see his mother.'

So, the mother was fetched to see him. And many people came to see his execution because everyone knew about him. It was a big gathering, and he was in the middle. Then the mother came, and he embraced her. Suddenly, the mother began crying very loudly and then fainted on the ground. On the side of her head, she was bleeding. Then people saw that in his mouth there was her ear. And the people rushed up to him, saying, 'What happened? Why did you bite your mother's ear off?' So, he took the ear up and pointed to the mother and said, 'She is the real criminal, not I. You made the wrong judgment.'

And he started to tell the story. When he was a young schoolboy, his family had enough to live on; they weren't poor but weren't wealthy. One day, he forgot his pen and he borrowed one from his classmate. But he forgot to give it back, and he brought it home. And he told his mother, 'Oh, look, I forgot to give back my classmate's pen that I borrowed! I must go back and give it to him now because otherwise he will miss it.'

And the mother said, 'No, no! You keep it! Keep it! Tomorrow you borrow ink and then books, and don't give them back. See what happens. Then I won't have to buy them for you. If they forget, it's good. What's in your hands belongs to you. What you can take is yours.' But when some of the classmates wanted their things back, the child didn't know what to do. So, he came home and said, 'Mother, they want their things back! Can I give them back? Is it okay?'

And his mother said, 'No, no! Next time you have to punch them! Say, 'No, it's mine!'' She taught him how to steal by force, even in childhood. So, slowly he stole bigger and bigger

things for himself and for the mother, at the mother's command. First he bit people, then forced them, and later he killed. He killed even when it was not necessary; it became a habit.

Seek the company of saints

So you see, originally he was a very honest child; he wanted to give back the things that he borrowed. He was even better than Meng Tzu, the Chinese saint; he was better! In childhood, he could already discriminate between good and bad, and Meng Tzu could not. Meng Tzu just imitated everything, but this child knew what was good and what was bad. Meng Tzu just had a good mother, that's all, who turned a bad child into a good saint.

Therefore, our company is very, very important. In Vietnam we say we have to pick our friends, meaning we have to be careful in choosing friends. But how can we choose our family members? That's very unfortunate. Therefore, it takes a strong will to get out of the influence of the family. And if we don't happen to stumble into some saintly person, we will never know anything better. You can see from the examples of these two children: One was an ignorant, bad, stupid child who turned into a brilliant saint, and one was a very honest, pure child who turned into a vicious, deadly criminal. Therefore, sometimes if we want to judge a person, we also have to know their background. And we cannot know that unless we are enlightened.

That's why in the bible it says don't judge people so you won't be judged. But when you are enlightened, you don't want to judge anyone. You only want to help. That's the good part about enlightenment. If we want to have good judgment we must be enlightened, and when we are enlightened we don't have any judgment. We look at everyone as erring children, lacking in good information, and we try to provide it. And that is the very good part of enlightenment, if there is nothing else.

That's why in India people tell you that we should always seek the company of the saints. That's because in India, saints are very precious; everyone runs after them. In the West or in other countries, people run after money, but in India they run after saints. They hunt for the saints until all the saints are scared. Sometimes they have to run away. They do; they hide! They're scared of people.

THE STORY OF A CRAB ⁸⁵

There is a story concerning myself in Costa Rica. I tell you these things to let you know a little bit of my inner feelings. When you feel pain and sorrow, I sympathize with you. If you tell me inside, I know. I'm not without feelings. But sometimes being in a Master's position, I have to be strong and let you rely on me. I do what is best for you. So sometimes I have to be tough. I have to cut off or minimize your sorrow in different ways. I cannot encourage you to be miserable and to always remain sunken in your feelings and melancholy. So I use different ways to cut down this feeling. It's not that I do not sympathize with you. I can sympathize with birds and worms. Will I not sympathize with human beings? But I cannot walk around with moist eyes all the time and cry with you and make you feel worse. We have to live on, whatever happens.

Once, I lived with disciples on a beach in Costa Rica for two weeks. Some of them had stayed behind after an international retreat. There was a group of about thirty persons of different nationalities. But that is not important. I just want to tell you that I wasn't there

85. Group meditation, Panama Center, Panama, January 28, 1991 (Originally in English).

alone, enjoying by myself. Even though I was on the beach, as long as there was one disciple, I had to work. So you can imagine that the days were filled with scolding, laughing, cooking, and all kinds of other things.

One day, the sea rose very high. The waves surged against the beach, almost hitting our feet. I walked around with my umbrella. I like rain, especially heavy rain. I am not scared of getting wet. I opened the umbrella because I didn't have enough clothes. I didn't want to change all the time; therefore, I needed it to protect my clothes, not myself. If I had had enough clothes, I would have gone without the umbrella.

Then, I saw a very huge crab trying to protect itself from the huge waves. Whenever the big waves came and tried to pull it into the sea, it tried to clutch onto the sand on the beach. I said to a sister initiate, 'Come and help it. Take it to a safe place.' The sister came, but she was very clumsy. She made the crab very afraid as she dropped it many times. But I could not scold her because she did not understand English. I could not instruct her either, because she wouldn't understand. She kept saying in Spanish, 'Master, please tell me what to do.'

I stood there, very frustrated, as she struggled with the crab. I only knew how to say 'crab' in Spanish. All that I could say to her was, 'Yes, yes, cangrejo.' Can you imagine how she picked up the crab? She used a spade, which you use to dig the ground. She dug it up and it fell; and she dug it up again and it fell again. I said, 'No, you cannot do that.' But she couldn't understand, and asked, 'What is it, Master?' I replied, 'You will hurt it. It keeps falling; it will break its legs.' But she didn't understand a word. So I said, 'Oh, my God!' Finally she got tired of playing with it, picked it up by one of its legs, and carried it farther up the beach. She caught hold of one of its smallest legs because she was afraid it might bite her. The two of them seemed to be having fun. She was very happy holding it by its smallest leg, but the crab was not happy at all!

I thought, 'It's all over!' My heart beat fast. 'My God, if she breaks its leg, I will not forgive her. I will throw her into the sea,' I thought. But there was no other choice. I could only pray to God that the crab would be okay. Now, because there was no other choice, if she dropped it there and it wasn't prepared, the waves would sweep it away anyhow. Either way, it was not good. So I had to suffer as she caught it by its leg, held it upside down, and ran up the beach, where the waves would not reach. Now when I tell you about it, it sounds funny, but at that time, I was very sad. Do you know why? Because later, something happened to the crab.

The sister initiate finally put it down on the beach, but not far enough from the waves. I didn't like that, but it was okay. It was better and safer up there. I touched it with my umbrella to see if it was okay, if it was still there or if anything had happened to it. It looked at me and raised its pincers, trying to frighten me. Or perhaps it was very frightened and defensive. And then, it started to move toward the water. I said, 'No, no. Don't go there. It is dangerous.' But it didn't understand English. So I ran after it, and the faster I ran, the faster it ran. It kept looking at me very defensively.

'Why are you so frightened? I am harmless. I only want to save you,' I thought. But it didn't understand, because the sister initiate had frightened it by holding it by its leg. So now, it looked at any human being like an enemy. It didn't trust me either. I saw the big waves coming and panicked. I tried to scoop it up with my umbrella. And I did succeed, but then a big wave came. Even my umbrella got washed away. I was nearly dragged into the sea and the crab was gone. I was very sad. I knew that it lived in the water, but under such circumstances, it was not prepared to defend itself from the waves. It might even die. I

stood there for an hour. I was sad for its misunderstanding and for fear that it might get hurt.

You probably think that I was crazy and wonder why I cared about a crab. But that was how it affected me. I can even be affected by a worm or an ant or a fly, not only by a crab. Oh, I always remember the way it looked. It looked so defensive. It wasn't very frightened of me, but it was on the defense. It looked as though it knew me, and didn't feel frightened, but even then it didn't want to take a chance, so it kept moving. That was how it got dragged away by the waves, and I blamed myself for it. Later, I walked up and down the beach looking for it. Maybe I would have a chance to see it, but I didn't. That night, I could not sleep.

TRUST MASTER'S POWER ⁸⁶

This is an Indian story. There was a woman who practiced very well spiritually. Many people were jealous of her because she was liked and respected very much. Even the king was jealous of her. Many people heard about her practice and did not believe that a woman could practice so well. Therefore, the king asked someone to take her to the palace, with the intent to insult her. Under such circumstances, being pressured and pushed too hard, she tried to escape this difficult situation. She kept trying with her own mind, but in vain. Occasionally, she remembered to call her Master, once or a couple of times, mostly out of habit, not very sincerely.

She was still trying to use her own power, not believing that the Master would save her entirely. While asking for her Master's help, she was still trying to struggle, not truly, sincerely asking for her Master's help, not leaving everything for her Master to take care. That's why her Master didn't show up.

Finally, there was nothing else she could do, she surrendered and relied on her Master wholeheartedly. She said, 'No matter what happens now, Master, please take care of it.' At that moment, her Master came in the form of a Light body and saved her immediately.

Most of the time, it's more difficult if we struggle with our own strength. Who is the Master? Actually, it's also our own power, the higher self, the perfect self being – who knows everything, who is omnipresent, and can handle everything. If we use our own mind, we are just relying on that low conscious self – just ourselves, our past experiences. For example, 'What should I do when I encounter a certain situation? How should I react when I encounter certain types of people? I have encountered this before, how should I take care of this?' This is all using the past experience stored in our mind. However, you should know that sometimes the past experience is different from this one, because the situation is different. Sometimes just a subtle difference will make it totally different.

A PURE HEART SEES MAYA AS GOD ⁸⁷

An east Indian person who truly believed in God treated everyone like God; even cats and dogs were God to him. One day, a dog stole the chapatis that he had baked and put aside. He quickly chased after the dog with a pot of butter in his hands, saying, 'Oh God, please wait, I have not put the butter on the chapatis. It won't be tasty if you eat it that way.' His profound belief in the almighty power made him see God in all beings.

86. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, December 12, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

87. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, October 15, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

One day, maya came to get him. He was afraid that this man might surpass his position with his strong belief in God, so he tried to harm him. The man was fetching water from a well when maya appeared and tried to throw him in. However, upon seeing the two horns on maya's head, his black face and mouth so big and red, with two protruding teeth, [Master shows the protruding teeth.] the Indian man said with a smile, 'Oh, my dearest God, my Buddha, let me humble myself before your infinite merit. How blessed am I to be able to see you in person.' After that he sang an ode, 'God is the highest and the prettiest, with teeth this long, [Master is singing this.] [Laughter and applause.] complexion so dark, a mouth so huge, horns so big and nails so pointed. Hes doesn't even need to wear clothes. I really want to take Hirm home, to offer Hirm a set of beautiful clothes, and feed Hirm milk and chapatis.' As he sang, he danced and prostrated. Stunned by his naivete, maya didn't know what to do with him. He could only laugh and say, 'All right, all right! You win!'

Thus, we must preserve our purity of mind at all times to live a happy life.

GOD'S ARRANGEMENTS ARE ALWAYS THE VERY BEST ⁸⁸

There once was a king from a very rich and powerful country who had everything he needed. One day, he became bored because there was nothing that he didn't have. So, he and one of his most trusted advisors disguised themselves as ordinary citizens and left the palace to mingle among the people in order to understand more about his subjects, just like what was done by Emperor Chien Long of the Ching dynasty in China. The king also wanted to be free of his royal responsibilities and to relax and enjoy a carefree life for a while.

After a long walk, the king became hungry. So he said to his advisor: 'I'm hungry. Can you go find something to eat?' The advisor set out to look for food right away. He found a mango tree nearby, picked some mangoes, washed them, and offered them to the king. He also offered the king a knife to peel the fruit. As the king was peeling a mango, he accidentally cut his finger and cried out, 'Oh, it's bleeding!'

The advisor replied, 'God's arrangements are always the very best. Hes always arranges the best for us.' The king became very upset and said, 'I'm hurting terribly from the bleeding, and here you are talking about God arranging the best. I've had enough of your theories every day! I can stand it no longer! Go away!' He then beat his advisor, threw stones at him, and drove him away. The advisor became so afraid that he fled.

After the advisor was gone, the king tore a piece of cloth from his clothes and bandaged his wound. He cried, pitied himself, and ate mangoes at the same time. Then, all of a sudden, two strong men rushed up to him, pushed him down and tied him up. The king asked, 'What are you doing? Why are you doing this to me?' The men answered, 'Today we will offer a sacrifice to the sacred mother Kali.'

In India, the people worship a sacred goddess called Kali. She's the goddess of negativity, of destruction and killing, who supposedly destroys the bad people in the world. So some people are afraid of her. However, those who are good aren't afraid, and they respect her. But of course, there are always those who are superstitious and worship her as a threatening deity. The people often made sacrificial offerings of living creatures to her as part of a barbaric tradition passed down from ancient times.

88. Group meditation, Taichung Center, Formosa, October 15, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

The two men said, 'Today we're making offerings to our sacred mother Kali. We're looking for a good man to offer her as food.' She certainly doesn't eat it. All that the believers do is kill people and throw them away, all the while saying that the deities ate them. There are other countries that have similar traditions. We kill cows and pigs and say that they're to be offered to the gods. But who really eats them? We, ourselves! That's lying to the gods. But it's all right! I don't want to criticize. I'm just telling a story. You'll understand.

The king said, 'No! I'm the king of your neighboring country. You can't do this.' Upon hearing his words, the two men were even more delighted, and said, 'The sacred mother will be even happier today because of this special gift. Let's take you to her quickly.'

So, the two strong men carried the king away. At the ceremony, while music was playing and offerings were being prepared, the king, all tied up, was carried up the altar to be burned as an offering. The high priest came up to inspect his body, and when he saw the wounded finger, he said, 'No! He's not perfect. His finger is wounded. We can't use him as an offering! Let him go and find someone else.'

The king was very happy! He quickly ran away, and remembered what his advisor had said, 'God always arranges the best for us.' He felt ashamed, and regretted having driven his advisor away so badly. He made his way back to the forest to look for him, calling his name over and over again. Finally, he found the advisor. Then the king hugged him and said, 'I'm so sorry. You're a good person. All that you said was true. I not only didn't thank you, but I even beat you, scolded you, and drove you away. It was all my fault. When you said God's arrangements are the very best, I didn't understand then that it was good for me. If I hadn't cut myself, I would have been dead by now.' So, he told the advisor the story, and the advisor said, 'Yes! It's the same for me, too. God's arrangements are always the best. If you hadn't hit me and driven me away, I would have been captured as well. And when they found that your body wasn't perfect, they would have sacrificed me instead, and I would have been dead by now.'

If we believe in God, we shouldn't complain under any circumstances. For instance, sometimes after I scold you and send you home, when you reach home, you find out, 'It's good that I came home, or else this or that might have happened!' Right? [Audience: Yes.] Or when you were sent away, you made a phone call, and found out it might have been too late otherwise. Or you found out you avoided an incident, such as a car accident or explosion.

There's another mysterious story about an experience of a spiritual practitioner. This story is set in France. In a village, there was an old lady who had become hunched with the years. She had great faith in God, and no matter what happened, she would say it was God's arrangement. Even when it was an unpleasant situation, she would say it was God's test or arrangement. No one ever heard her complain. But they didn't know about all this until later. This is the background of the story.

Once some people passed by the village, looked down from a bridge, and saw no one there, not even a dog or cat. They wondered why. The reason was that a war had broken out, and most people had fled the village. These passersby wanted to find out if anyone had remained behind. They were hungry and wanted to find a place where they could get some food. If they could see that there was no one in the village, they would not bother coming down from the bridge.

As they looked down, they saw an old lady come out of a house and walk into another one. Just then, the house that the old lady had just left exploded. A bomb had dropped on

the first house. She came out of the second house to see what had happened to her home, and stood there, shaking her head, 'Why?! It was there a few minutes ago, but now it's gone!' Just then, the second house which she had just left also blew up! She stood there, speechless. All she felt was that something strange was going on, and she knew that everything had been arranged by God.

The people up on the bridge came down to talk to her. They asked, 'Why are you here all by yourself? Where are the others?' The old lady answered, 'They have no faith in God. I told them that it was all right and that no matter where we were, God would protect us and we would be safe. Did you see how strange that was? As soon as I came out of one house, that house exploded. And when I came out of another one, it blew up as well. Don't you see that all these things are God's arrangement? Otherwise, it could not be such a coincidence. Because I believe in God, I won't run away. If I die here, then I die. I won't leave. My children, grandchildren and the rest of the people in the village have left. Only I have stayed.'

The people told her they were hungry, so she began to prepare a meal for them. While waiting for the meal to be ready, the visitors went outside for a walk. They walked a bit further away to another house and found a woman and child. The child was still clinging to his mother. Both had been killed by a bomb. When they returned to the old lady's house, they told her of the two people who had been killed there. When she heard about it, she stopped cooking, and rushed out to see. Then the house she had just left suddenly exploded!

With this happening for the third time, she again thought that it could not just be a coincidence. It must be that God didn't want her to die, so that she could tell others of her faith and conviction. She just shook her head, not knowing what to do. She then went over to take a look at the two bodies. When she saw them, she knelt down and began to cry. They were her daughter and grandson. They didn't listen to her and were leaving the village when they were killed. But still, she just shook her head and said it was all God's arrangement. It was nothing! She went back and looked for another house to cook some food for those people. This time the house didn't explode. Three explosions one after another were enough. Both of these stories about God's arrangements inspire and encourage us to have faith in God.

THE ROC AND THE BIRD ⁸⁹

Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time, there was a little bird. One day, it was trapped and confined in a cage, which was pretty and spacious. The cage was so sophisticated that it was hardly visible to the bird, which tried to fly out but bumped around in it and got hurt instead, until it finally came down with an illness. The one who caught it, loving it so much, offered it the best food and water he could. Initially it ignored these things. Later as it got more used to the environment, it began to drink or eat when it was thirsty or hungry. As it missed the freedom it used to have, it still flapped around in the cage in an attempt to escape. It tried but failed every day. The master then gave it more things, and visited it more often. He did a lot for its entertainment. He tried to caress it too, but it wouldn't let him unless it was too tired to resist. If it wasn't tired, it would have dodged him for sure.

Across the valley lived a roc (gigantic bird of Eastern tales) which had practiced for millions of eons and reached a high spiritual level. Some animals can practice. Have you heard of that? Human beings don't practice, [Master laughs.] but the animals do. You can tell from

89. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, October 10, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

Shakyamuni Buddha's stories. In His previous incarnations as the king of the deer, peacocks, birds or lions, He had been pursuing spiritual practice all the time.

Now, this roc was a spiritual practitioner, too. It had practiced for eons upon eons, or maybe billions of years, and it had great magical power – very great power. It lives without food or water. It could become invisible and enlarge or shrink as it wished. As it was very big, it had to climb up to the top of the mountain whenever it wished to fly, and then one or two flaps of its wings would take it as far as millions of miles away.

The roc practiced every day, and heard the painful sobs of the bird. As the former was bestowed with all kinds of magical powers, ranging from telepathy to celestial vision and celestial hearing, it looked out from its celestial eye and saw a little bird flapping around in agony, its body injured all over, its wings ragged, and its feathers fallen off.

The roc then listened with its celestial ears. Wow! Only to hear the heartbreaking cries of the bird. I don't know if they would break a human heart as well. Probably not, otherwise its owner would have set the bird free. Anyway, the cries broke the roc's heart. By telepathy, the roc perceived the bird's yearning for liberation, which was so strong as if to explode the roc's head. As the roc could not bare such a painful, longing and ailing heart, it used magical power.

One night as the bird was asleep, the roc finally shrank itself to exactly the size of the bird. Well, it could enlarge or shrink as it wished, but only when it was alone. It wouldn't let other beings see it perform the magic, so it used its magic only when no one was around – could not make it public. Anyway, it shrank itself, flew into the cage and slept beside the bird.

As the bird woke up, the roc introduced itself by saying, 'Hallo, I'm your friend. Last night I came in here of my own will. At the sight of you suffering, I couldn't help coming here to console you. Just take it easy. Don't flutter your wings in the cage, or else you will get hurt and break your wings. Then if you're to be free again, you won't be able to fly as you did before.'

The bird scowled, 'Nonsense. I used to fly thousands and even millions of miles, but now you're telling me I shouldn't fly?'

The roc said, 'You could fly before, but now you can't. You only bump into the cage, hurt yourself, and weaken your body.'

The bird didn't listen. It stood up and flapped its wings. It fluttered and pecked around in the cage until it fell and lay flat with a bleeding beak and broken wings. The roc then healed the bird with its saliva and wings. It massaged and fanned the bird until it was cool, and applied its saliva on the wounds of the bird.

A few days later, the bird got better and tried to fly again. As expected, it got hurt again.

The bird was so badly injured that its saliva was not nourishing enough. So, it went back to its shape as a huge roc, and set out for mountains millions of miles away, like the Himalayas, to get a most precious herb. It chewed the herb into tiny pieces, mixed it with its own saliva and hid the mixture under its wings. It shrank itself, came back into the cage and fed the mixture to the bird, which got much better and a little more enlightened, realizing that it shouldn't fly in the cage.

It no longer tried to flap around or struggle in the cage, but only when the roc was there comforting it, reasoning with it or singing to it. When the roc was away, the bird would again attempt to take flight and ended up getting hurt. Therefore, the roc had to shrink itself every day. Besides, the roc couldn't go out of the cage, because if it had to be with the bird at all, it had to act the way of the bird, so that the bird would not get suspicious. The roc had to eat and drink the same things as the bird did.

The roc would sometimes tell the bird, 'I'm not an ordinary bird. I shrank to what I am just to keep you company and make you feel better, but I can get out and back in again any moment I want. I'm a huge roc, able to travel thousands of miles with only one flap of my wings. I can fly higher than the clouds if I want to.'

Well, sometimes the bird believed the roc, thinking that this loving friend would not lie to it. Sometimes the bird got suspicious, because it, having stayed in the cage for a long time, could hardly imagine such a creature that could fly so far and high – even higher than the clouds – shrink and enlarge as it wished, and get into and out of the cage at any time. After all, it had never seen the roc getting out of the cage. [Master laughs.] Since the roc only slipped out when the bird was asleep, the bird never knew it.

The bird became suspicious that the roc might want to take advantage of it. [Master laughs.] Perhaps the bird coveted its food and water that its master had brought it. It told the roc in suspicion, 'Don't be too boastful. You are just like any other bird. Probably you were starving outside, you saw my delicious food, so you came in here for a bite. I don't see any difference between you and me. You can't fly away either. Both of us are confined in the cage. Why did you say you could fly thousands of miles with a flap of your wings? You had better keep your mouth shut.'

The roc replied, 'I wouldn't lie to you. Believe it or not, it's up to you. I came here for you, to comfort you, to keep you from further injury, and to protect you from getting into a worse condition. That's why I came here, to share your joy and sorrow. I ate the terrible, stiff, lifeless food and drank the lousy, rotten, polluted water with you while I could have used the pure nectar dew and taken pearls for food. In the mountains where I come from, I didn't eat these uninteresting things.'

But it was only too natural that the bird didn't understand, because it only saw the roc hang around, eating and drinking as it did, unable to fly out. How could it have imagined that the roc actually flew out for a cruise around the world while it was asleep, and then came back again to keep it company?

One day, the master, having two birds right now, was very happy. He thought he should get them a bigger cage to give them more comfort and convenience. He made a more beautiful, sturdy but more visible one and planned to move them there. But before he had time to move them into the new cage, he had to take a trip somewhere on business.

He told his son, 'I'm taking a trip on business and will not be here for a couple of days. You move the two birds to the new cage and prepare fresh water and food for them. I have painted the outside of the cage and planned to move the birds when the paint dries. But now something urgent has come up. I need to go right now. I can't wait until the paint dries, but I don't want the birds to wait until I come back either; they would have to suffer the inconvenience of the small cage for a few more days. So move them to the large one as soon as possible.'

The son replied, 'Okay.'

The paint dried in three days. So, three days later, the son planned to move the birds during the day. But he went out for a picnic with his girlfriend [Master laughs.] and didn't come back until nearly midnight. After he got home, he wasted no time in moving the birds, for his father would return the next day. If his father should see the birds still in the old cage, he would be harshly scolded.

But when he was about to move them, strangely enough, there was only one bird. The other one must have got out. Where had it gone? The cage was almost empty. There was hardly any corner to hide in. Unable to find the bird, he began to panic. And the bird – I mean the real one, the small bird, not the roc – was confused too, because it woke up and found only itself. 'He was sleeping beside me, but now he is gone. Where is he?'

Only now did it realize that it was all alone. It began to panic and struggle. Meanwhile, it saw a person reaching his hand into the cage to grab it. It didn't know he was trying to move it to a larger cage, so it struggled even harder, bumping itself everywhere in the cage. What a terrible sight! Its wings were virtually broken. The man struggled to catch it but it struggled to run away from him. Both of them struggled there for a very long time.

At this moment, the roc came back from afar. At the sight of the situation, it became hesitant, wondering if it should go inside. If it didn't, the little bird would be in danger. If it did, it would be seen using its magical power and then it would end up in danger, too. If it should be caught, it could no longer perform its magic. Once it was tied up, it could never get out. It hesitated for quite a long time until it couldn't help it anymore, because it saw the bird struggling desperately and bleeding all over with its wings broken. The roc flew right in.

Meanwhile, the bird was calling the roc's name, because the roc had told it before, 'If you have any problem, just think of me, and I will be here to help you. I will be by your side if you think of me. This way you won't be alone or afraid.'

Therefore, at that time, the bird kept calling the roc's name. The roc couldn't stand it, so it went right into the cage. The bird, seeing its friend, was very happy. The person was also very happy to see the second bird come back. [Master laughs.]

The person then tied up the roc's legs. He tied up the two birds and waited for his father. If he didn't do so, the roc would fly away again, and he would be in trouble. [Master laughs.] The bird asked the roc, 'Where have you been? Where have you been hiding? Are you keeping something from me?'

The roc replied, 'I saw you were sound asleep, so I went out for a cruise. It's so small in here. I needed to go out for a break.' The bird snarled, 'You can't go out as you wish, you are tied up now, just like me. You are confined to the cage and your legs are bound together. If you can really get out any time, show me! If you can still fly, show me!'

Because the bird had been caged for too long, it was very much bothered and a little violent in its attitude. If we are confined to a house for too long, we will become upset, too. Those who have been deprived of their freedom are usually very upset and snappy, [Master laughs.] because they are very unhappy. So, all day long, the roc was busy comforting, saving, helping, and healing the bird, whereas the bird kept pecking the roc with its beak and fierce tone of speaking. But the roc put up with all this. It understood that the bird had no magic or power and couldn't possibly know how great it was, so it remained silent.

While it was bound together with the bird, it was very tolerant and kept healing the bird with its saliva. The bird was deeply touched after what the roc had done, so it offered the roc the delicious food that it had incidentally caught sight of. The roc smiled but didn't take it.

The bird had no idea why it suddenly had such good food today. It had never seen things like this before. In fact, the delicacies were brought back from the Himalayas by the roc, but the bird didn't know this. It thought the food was its own, and then offered it to the roc. [Master and audience laugh.] The roc was fairly touched and delighted, and it gladly took the food. Then both of them were very happy, waiting for their master to return.

After the master came back, he would surely set the roc free. He would loosen their ties. After that, the roc would be free to go around again and take back more good food for the bird. It would give the bird more training and win its confidence, little by little, as the bird had not trusted the roc very much yet. Because of the disbelief, the bird had not been very interested in whatever the roc was trying to teach. Even if the bird did listen, it listened to only half of it. However, the roc waited patiently.

When the bird believed in it completely, it would teach the bird its magic, and then the two of them would fly away together. Let's hope that some day they will make it. That's all. [Laughter and applause.]

You feel very touched after hearing this story, don't you? [Audience: Yes.] Touched by the hearts of the birds. I don't know if human's hearts would feel touched or not? [Laughter] Do you feel touched? [Audience: Yes.] Why? Are human beings the same as birds? [Master laughs.] Which part is the same? Not enlightened! [Laughter]

WHO IS WHO ⁹⁰

This is an Indian story. In a city in India there was a very honest and benevolent Hindu. The Hindus worship God, and any of His symbols, including stones or so-called God's shadows – past enlightened Masters. They worship all of them and chant their names the way we chant the names of Amitabha Buddha, Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and Shakyamuni Buddha. That is how they pray for blessings. Some Hindus are very pious and pure at heart. Although they do not have the power of being omnipresent or omnipotent, any magical powers, anything spectacular, or many disciples, they are pure at heart and live a very comfortable life. They are poor but they live a life of ease are full of faith, and free of worries. Indian people are always laughing; they may be very poor or even have nothing to eat the next day, but still they laugh. Of course, the dying people are too ill to laugh, but we really can't blame them.

One day, two great 'masters', perhaps Hindu monks or Brahmans, arrived at the city where this Hindu lived. Being a pious believer, he would pay respect to any great master, spiritual practitioner or monk that he knew. When he went out that day, he met one of the masters who lived near his house. Forgetting that he had not brought any gifts, milk or fruit for offering, he prostrated and said, 'Oh, great master! Please have mercy and protect my family. You have immense blessing, so please bestow a little on us, and your humble servant would be extremely happy! Allow me to prostrate before you!'

The next day, he bought some fruit as an offering to the master, and took the opportunity to ask, 'Master, I heard that another great soul has come and he is staying on the west

90. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, September 28, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

side.’ The title they use is Mahatma, which means a great soul, great wisdom, great sage or great master, as in Mahatma Gandhi whom they revere. It simply means a very great person. The Hindu asked, ‘Master, do you know about that great master living on the west side, the other side of town?’ The monk accepted his offerings and said, ‘Hmm! I know him; he is a bull!’ [Master laughs.] ‘Really?’ The man was amazed. ‘So he is a bull! How grateful I am for your guidance. I am such an ignorant person that I am not able to tell a bull from a human. I am really sorry! Thank you very much, master. Now I understand.’

He went home and quickly bought some fresh grass [Laughter] as an offering to the master on the west side. He laid the grass before the master and prostrated. ‘Please accept the prostration and modest gift from this humble servant and ignorant being. Will you kindly give protection to my family, and bestow a little wisdom and blessing to your humble servant? I will be extremely grateful to you, master.’

As he bowed down, do you know how the face of this master change? [Laughter] It was not a bull's face; it became a horse's face because it was stretched very long. He asked, ‘What do you mean by making this offering of grass to me? I don't understand!’ The Hindu said, ‘Oh! It is because the master on the east side told me that you are a bull, so I thought you will definitely love fresh grass.’ [Laughter] The monk exclaimed, ‘That man is an ass! You go and tell him that he is an ass.’ [Laughter]

Hearing his words, the man said, ‘Oh! I see, so he is an ass! Thank you very much for your guidance, and I am sorry for having offended you just now. Being an ignorant being, your humble servant knows nothing, has no knowledge, no aspiration, nothing... Owing to my ignorance, I didn't realize that you were a great soul. Instead, I thought you were a bull as that master had told me. If you hadn't denied it, an ignorant being like me would never have known the truth.’ He kept apologizing and then left.

He went to buy some cotton seeds to make an offering to the first master. ‘Master, will you please accept my humble gift and bestow some protection and blessing on me in return? Your modest servant is truly ignorant and has no blessings at all. I will be grateful if you would give me some blessings and accept my sincere offering.’ The face of the monk turned green and he didn't look like an ass, but like grass. [Master plays with the words.] ‘What do you mean? How can I eat this? I am a human being. Why did you buy this instead of other things?’

The man replied, ‘How do I know that you are a human? As an ignorant being, I know nothing. Your humble servant has never studied any Vedas or practiced with any enlightened master. I am just an ordinary person, so how can I discern what a great soul like you truly is? Thanks to the guidance of another master, I know that you are an ass. [Master laughs.] That was why I quickly went to buy this to make an offering to you. Please pardon my ignorance.’ The monk was furious. ‘Take me to see that man; I'll teach him a lesson and show him the way to treat his elder.’

When the two monks eventually met, they had a fierce quarrel. Watching on one side, the farmer (the Hindu) was extremely amused to see a bull quarreling with an ass. [Master and audience laugh.]

Because of their ignorance, they didn't realize that they were in fact alike! They behaved that way because they were not enlightened. If they had been enlightened, they would have known that speaking ill of others is speaking ill of ourselves. Instead of talking face to face, they talked behind each other's back, not knowing who the bull was and who the ass was.

The world is really funny! Everyone indulges in these games; no one is serious. They really have nothing to do! You don't have to feel frustrated either. Nothing truly happens in the world; all troubles are self-created. If we could recognize our original nature, we would feel very peaceful and happy within, knowing that nothing is happening. We create everything, just for fun. It is true, and it is real fun!

Transform into a butterfly and see how it feels. For the same reason, some take the form of an ant, a bird, a lion or a tiger. Oh! Everyone is having great fun with the game. Actually it is the same electric current flowing through, only the connecting cables are different. Some are very thick, some are very thin, some very beautiful, some very dark. The color and thickness may vary, but it is the same electricity inside, coming from the same powerhouse. [Applause]

THE PRINCESS'S BUBBLE NECKLACE ⁹¹

There once was a princess who lived in a palace and had all kinds of pearls, agates and other gems. Being an only daughter, she was pampered by the king and queen, and was never in need of anything.

One day, as she was watching the rain from her balcony, the raindrops hit the surface of the nearby lake, creating myriads of bubbles that glittered in beautiful colors when illuminated by the sunbeams. Enchanted by this spectacle, the princess said to the king, 'I want a necklace made of these bubbles!'

'That cannot be! If you want pearls, I can get you bigger ones. All right?' said the king.

'No! No!' exclaimed the princess.

'If you will settle for diamonds, I can also give you plenty,' said the king. But the princess refused to be compromised.

You know there's no way you can coax such spoiled children, and being at a complete loss, the king summoned his officials, but no one could offer a solution. No one knew how to satisfy the princess's adamant demand for the bubbles. She then cried loudly and made a big fuss, refusing to eat or drink. Very soon, she became emaciated and fell ill. Everyone was at their wits' end. Not even the best doctor in the country could cure her. As a last resort, the king issued a public decree, stating, 'Whoever can cure the princess will receive half of his majesty's kingdom.'

Then one day, an old man came forward with a solution and the king let him in to see the princess. When the old man told the princess that he could realize her wish by making her a bubble necklace, she jumped up in delight and her illness vanished immediately. Then the old man said, 'I am old and my eyes are failing me. I cannot see which bubble is more beautiful. Would Your Highness please go down and bring me the beautiful bubbles so that I can string them into a necklace for you?'

The two of them – the old man and the child thus beguiled – went together to the lakeside. The princess tried in vain to hold the bubbles in her hands, while, afraid to laugh out loud, [Laughter] the palace maids by their side snickered stealthily. Embarrassed, the princess said to the king, 'Father, I don't want these bubbles anymore. I'm content with pearls and diamonds. I cannot hold these bubbles.' Looking at his lovely daughter, the king replied,

91. Group meditation, Tainan Center, Formosa, July 13, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

'You're right! They are merely bubbles.' They then returned to the palace, with the princess fully cured.

By this same theory, we think that life and death exist only because we don't understand what they are. They're merely illusions, just as a mirage in the desert is an illusion. Sometimes, when you're driving on the highway, there may seem to be a pool of water somewhere in front of you. However, it's not really water, but rather a result of light refraction. Sometimes you may also see many people, horses or palaces in the desert. Or on the ocean, you may hear sounds or see palaces or mermaids. You may think that they're real, but they're actually illusions. People's vision is blurred by the enormous space. Sometimes, when the sun shines, vapor rises from the roads and appears to be water. I was once deceived by this phenomenon when I was little. I was going to school on foot, and thought I saw water on the road ahead. I ran forward quickly, but there was no water when I reached that spot. When I looked ahead, again I saw water, but again the water disappeared when I ran up to that spot. Later I discovered that it was just a mirage.

Similarly, in this world, we transmigrate life after life, trying to seize all kinds of things and clinging to everything because we are not awakened; we don't know that all these things are just illusions. However, one day we'll know. We'll encounter situations that will awaken us. We only need to let our soul become focused and practice, and it will be awakened.

BIBLE STORY: THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE ⁹²

Do you know why Jesus Christ was so famous? Because He was an enlightened Master! An enlightened Master is a great person who has wisdom. Jesus was born in heaven, and then helped people when He grew up – with respect to their souls, not money. Jesus Christ didn't have money, but He had great virtues and wisdom. Therefore, He was loved by many.

As He was growing up; His parents loved Him deeply. He was good at learning anything and was benevolent, so many people loved Him. God also loved Him. He looked very dignified and was very clever.

Every year His so-called parents, Joseph and Mary, went to Jerusalem for the Jewish holy festival (Passover). During this festival, they would say prayers of gratitude to God to thank Him for helping the Jews, life after life, since ancient times; especially for delivering them from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, once a year they would hold a celebration to thank the inner God and the inner Master. They must have had an enlightened Master then. Jesus was twelve years old and was more than happy to accompany His parents. There they would celebrate an exciting, delightful and boisterous festive day.

When it was time to go home, His parents, Joseph and Mary, prepared to return. Assuming their child was either in front of or behind the group of travellers, they didn't notice that Jesus was not with them. Usually children seldom stay close to their parents; they either walk in the front or behind. In the evening, they discovered that Jesus was missing. They started to search among their friends and others for Jesus, only twelve years old, where could He have gone? Joseph and Mary were so worried that they couldn't sleep the whole night.

Early the next morning, they returned to Jerusalem to look for Jesus. After a whole day of searching, they finally found Him. Guess where He was found? [Audience: The temple.]

92. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 8, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

Right! In the temple! They eventually found Him in the temple, sitting among the spiritual practitioners asking the teachers and priests about spiritual practice, about God's law and about morality, which were things adults discussed. Everyone there was so amazed and delighted to see a twelve-year-old child having such intense interest in spirituality, so respectful toward God and with the ability to ask so many intelligent questions.

As you know, if we are not intelligent enough, we may not be able to ask a question even if we have one. Just like when you are in the school, the teacher may ask you: 'Do you understand? Any questions?' Then, some ask very clever questions, but some ask stupid questions. Jesus Christ was not stupid; He asked very clever questions, so everyone was amazed and delighted.

'I must be in my Mother / Father's house.'

When His parents found Him, His mother, Mary, asked Him, 'Child, why have you done this to us? Why did you leave without saying a word? We have been so worried that we couldn't sleep.' She reproached Him just like your parents would if you were not behaving well, or when they found you after you had been missing. Usually the mother has more to say. As His mother began to chide Him, Jesus seemed surprised at what she was saying. He thought His mother shouldn't question Him like that, so instead of answering her, He asked, 'Why didn't you know that I would be here? You should have known that I would be in my Mother / Father's house!' He meant the temple. He was amazed and asked His mother, 'Did you not know that I would be in my Mother / Father's house?' Mary and Joseph didn't know how to answer His questions. Perhaps they were not as enlightened as Jesus was.

Parents are not necessarily more clever than their children. Very often this is the case. Some children are geniuses; they are already great when they are only ten, seven or four years old. They can ask many questions that their parents could never answer. At that time they had forgotten that Jesus was not an ordinary child and that His Mother / Father is God. God only borrowed their bodies to give birth to Jesus, and to bring Him up for a certain time; they were not really Jesus' true parents. Nevertheless, Jesus went home with them, and was obedient and nice to them just like He used to be.

Why was Jesus Christ so interested in the temple and God's teachings? Do you children know the answer? [Audience: I know.] What do you know? [Audience: It was because He is the son of God!] The son of God, right! It was because He is the son of God! He had this enlightenment when He was born. He had practiced spirituality for many lifetimes, and He is the son of God.

I would like to ask you another question. If He is the son of God, then who are you? [Audience: Human beings!] So you are human beings! Who do you think you are? [Audience: We are spiritual practitioners.] You are spiritual practitioners, at least you are slightly better than Him. You are initiated and He is not. Correct! We are spiritual practitioners, not bad!

Is there anyone who has any different ideas? Who are we? [Audience: Sons of God!] Sons of God? Who is that? Who dared to say this? Show your face and let me see you. So you are the son of God. When did He tell you? [Audience: We are all God's children. As human beings were created by God, so we are God's children. That was what Master told us.]

So it was my words. [Master and audience laugh.] There is no point in quoting my words. I thought you realized it yourself. All right, if we are all God's children, then why are we different from Jesus Christ? [Audience: It was a different time and we are of a different race.] You are too enlightened. Since we are from a different race, should we reincarnate as Jews to become God's children? What do you mean by different races? Didn't you just say that we are all God's children? [Audience: They were from a race different from the Chinese.]

We are all God's children

We are all God's children, sons of God. However, some of us are obedient and some are not. There may be three or four children in a family born of the same parents, but some are obedient and some are naughty, some are clever and some are not. Some are pretty, but some are ugly. Some are disabled, and some are even mentally retarded. They are born of the same parents, who did not discriminate when they gave birth to the children. They would not make the decision of wanting one child to be born wiser than the other. And, when they have another baby, they could not say, 'Wow! I dislike this baby even before he is born. I want him to look ugly.' No parents would have such thoughts. Parents give birth to children and love them wholeheartedly. Nonetheless, some children are ugly, some are pretty; some are obedient, some are naughty; some are stupid, some are clever. All the same, we are God's children, not only Jesus Christ. It was only because He had already recognized His Mother / Father, so He could say with confidence, 'I know who my Mother / Father is.'

We are separated from our parents, severed from our Mother / Father. So we don't recognize Him. The truth is, we are all the same. We have the same status as Jesus Christ, no difference at all. He was very diligent because He deeply missed His Mother / Father – the real Mother / Father, the God in the heavenly kingdom – so He persistently pleaded with God, His real Mother / Father, to show Him where He is and reveal to Him their true relationship. However, we don't miss our Mother / Father. All the time we only miss our worldly friends and relatives. Since we don't long for our true parents, they cannot force us to think about them, nor could they appear to us. We are too busy to think about them. Why are we so busy? Because we are engaged in worldly matters, fame and wealth, all kinds of things, and in taking care of our so-called friends and relatives in this world.

In this story Jesus Christ didn't say: 'You are my parents.' He really knew that He is the son of God, so He told His parents: 'How could you not know that I would be in my Mother / Father's home working for Him?' He had this realization when He was only twelve. He knew who He was. He knew the power of the creator, but He didn't understand the ephemeral human relations and emotions. He didn't recognize the ephemeral human feelings. Well! Jesus Christ realized this when He was twelve, and He admitted that His true relationship is with God. However, He was still filial to His parents and continued to be an obedient child.

So, our children who pursue spiritual practice should do the same. We know that the world is ephemeral, and that we are related to our friends and relatives by karma only. We know our true parents is the creator. However, while in this world, we still have to be obedient and respect the elderly, our parents and teachers, and love all our friends and relatives, just like what Jesus Christ did. If Jesus Christ respected His parents, we should do the same, and even more so! He knew that His Mother / Father is God, the most high, yet He still fulfilled His obligations to the world. We should do the same, and even more so, since we have yet to attain this realization!

TWO STORIES ABOUT THE SEEDS OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE ⁹³

People liked to listen to Jesus Christ speak. Jesus often used short stories to explain the Truth to the audience. The following is one of these stories.

Once there was a farmer who went out and sowed seeds to grow corn. As he was sowing, some seeds fell by the side of the road, and then birds came and ate them up. Some seeds fell upon stony places, and when the sun rose, they were scorched. Some seeds fell among thorns, and as the thorns sprung up and choked them, they couldn't grow big. Yet other seeds fell onto good and fertile ground and they began to germinate and gradually grew into stalks of corn.

Jesus Christ explained that this story was a metaphor for the teachings of God. Upon hearing God's teachings, some wicked people might obstruct the teachings and not let other people know them.

Some people might like to listen, but after a while when they experience difficulties and trails, they might lose their faith. These people believe in the teachings when they first hear them. However, after a period of time, they might feel that the worries in their daily lives or the feelings of the husband and wife or their families are more important than God's teachings. Therefore, when they are oppressed by their worries or bound by their feelings, they forget God's teachings.

However, some people are like the corn seeds that were sown on good and fertile soil. They clearly listen to and understand the teachings, develop the teachings that they have understood, and make the teachings a part of their lives. We know this by looking at how these people live, because they've made God's teachings a part of their daily lives. That is, when we look at their lives, we can tell whether they meditate or not; whether they keep the precepts or not, or whether they're enlightened or not. It's very clear and there's no need to explain much!

Many people have come for initiation and only a small percentage of them have lost their faith. Whatever I sowed has grown, and very few of them have fallen by the wayside and been eaten by birds, or very few have fallen on stony places and are unable to grow. Most of you grow quite well, while some of you grow slowly but are trying to grow. [Master and audience laugh.] You can't be seen since you're blocked by your taller, initiated brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, you still try to compare, 'All my neighbors are taller than I am. [Master and audience laugh.] But that's okay! Some people who come after me are shorter than I am.' So you just grow happily and slowly.

However, those who grow very slowly give me a lot of headaches. No matter how much I water them, they can't grow taller and hence make trouble for me. Sometimes I get fed up with them and then stop watering them. I say, 'You just grow by yourselves!' [Master laughs.] Some of you are like seeds that fall on stony places or by the wayside and are eaten by birds or dried up by the sun, unable to grow.

Similarly, upon hearing the teachings of God, our lay or monastic disciples sometimes understand right away. Their souls realize and their minds also suddenly understand. However, after a while, due to their carelessness or ignorance, the newly germinated sprouts will fall when blown by the wind or will dry up when the sun rises. Worldly worries

93. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, July 7, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

and any suffering and trials are like the sun, the wind or the rain. If you aren't strong enough and don't grow up, you can't pass the trials.

Sometimes I'm very surprised to see that some people change their minds very quickly. Today they are very faithful, enthusiastic and have the ideal, but tomorrow they just go 'Pu, Pu, Pu,' [Laughter] like a leaking balloon that is pierced by a needle. When a balloon is pierced by a small needle, it'll go 'Tzz, Tzz, Tzz' and becomes very small. The balloon looks big originally. But since it's empty inside, when it's punctured by a needle, it'll go 'Tzz, Tzz, Tzz' and disappear. If a big piece of bread is poked by a needle, it won't be affected.

Many people like to boast about big things. They talk about something before they actually do it. They criticize others for not being able to do it and boast that they can do such-and-such. However, as soon as they encounter obstacles, they just go 'Tzz, Tzz, Tzz,' like a leaking balloon. This surprises me sometimes!

Do you know why these people are like that? Because they've accumulated too many impressions in their previous lifetimes. Among them there are too many bad seeds and very few good ones. This is just like the story that Jesus Christ told. Some seeds fall among thorns, so they're choked and can't grow. Even if they sprout a little, they can't compete with the thorns, so they just die!

As to our lay or monastic disciples or anyone who comes to get initiated by me and follow me, I treat them equally and give each one of them the same thing, just like a farmer who sows seeds with the same effort and the same expectation. However, some seeds can grow while some can't.

Here's another story about a farmer. This farmer cultivated his land and planted wheat. However, an enemy of the farmer destroyed his work. When the farmer and his family were sleeping one night, the enemy went to his land and sowed weed seeds without letting anyone know. When the weeds started to sprout and grow, the servants of the farmer came to ask him, 'Should we remove the weeds?'

The farmer said, 'No. You can't tell which are weeds and which are wheat plants. I'm afraid that you may root out both.' He then said, 'Just let them both grow until the time comes and we can root out the weeds and gather our harvest of wheat.'

After Jesus finished telling this story, people left. Then His close disciples asked Him, 'What does this story mean?' [Master laughs.] The closest disciples understood Jesus 'the best,' and that's why they could ask such a 'bright' question! Everyone else understood the story and went home! [Master and audience laugh.]

Jesus Christ answered, 'I'm the farmer and the field that I cultivate symbolizes the world! The good seeds are those who belong to God and believe in God and me. The weeds are the negative and satanic power that belong to the enemies of God. Nevertheless, the time of harvest will come eventually. Although the two kinds of seeds grow together, look similar, and mix when they are just growing, it's no problem. When they all grow up, we can tell which is which.'

After some thought, I think that our initiates or spiritual practitioners all look similar when they first start to practice. In the beginning they don't feel its significance hence don't have much faith. They believe in the Master for one day and don't believe for three days.

They're just like a mixture of one corn seed and three weed seeds. They follow the Master for one day and then follow the world for three days.

Today they want to become monastic disciples and follow me, but tomorrow they want to go home and get married or be with their parents, sons or other lovely debtors, et cetera. They're just pulled around and struggle hard inside. They don't listen to me but argue, 'I believe in Master. Master is a saint. But anyway, I have to leave. [Master laughs.] I'm going to do what I want to do. It is right only when I think by myself. I know how to take care of my life and know what I should do.'

They're all like that. However, after a while, they'll regret it and come back again. But then they'll leave again and come back again, wasting a lot of time. However, after struggling for a while, they'll settle down and realize that we're different than worldly people who don't do spiritual practice. When they know this clearly, they'll become very stable, and then even lightning can't shake them.

If you read the magazine that was published in Tainan, you'll see an article about a person who isn't our initiate but does spiritual practice. Many people did spiritual practice in their previous lifetimes and also practice other methods in this lifetime. So they have some experiences. Not to say whether their experiences are the ultimate or not, they just have some experiences. One can have experiences if one's sincere.

So, when that person read my books, he saw bright Lights. And when he came to listen to my lecture, he saw many heavenly beings coming down onto the stage with me in the venue where I was lecturing. He also told an interesting story. He said that he noticed a big difference between those who were initiated and those who were not! Those who were initiated all had Light, whether bright, dim or in different colors. [Master and audience laugh.]

Why are you laughing? Do you think that those who aren't initiated have no Light? They do! Some of them are brown or black colored. [Laughter] But only our initiates had Light of different brightness and vibrations. We all had Light, but some of those who were not initiated had no Light at all. That was what that non-initiate person said and this happened in Tainan.

Although we look like ordinary people and are similar to them, our invisible power and invisible Light are really different! I look no different than you, but some people say that I have tremendous power. For instance, yesterday, the Au Lac person who played the zither said that he couldn't sit too close to me, because he felt a great power, like a great electrical current, which was unbearable to him but not to others.

There was a person in Penghu who did spiritual practice quite well, not just ordinarily. So he was very arrogant. He was never initiated by anyone and never listened to any discourses. When I went there, he knew it in advance and had seen my Light. He liked it and then came to listen to my discourse.

One day, he told me, 'Master, Your power can kill!' I asked him why. He said, 'There's a cloudy thing around You. When I come near You, it feels like it can kill and it's oppressive.' I told him, 'If you have no bad intentions, you won't have any problem. It's because you aren't pure.' So the invisible power is protective! He could feel it because we two had different vibrational levels. If our vibrational levels had been similar, he wouldn't have felt anything.

When we people sit together, we feel comfortable. But what do we feel when we sit together with animals? For example, can you imagine sitting alone with goats, pigs, cows and chickens around you? You'd smell different things and the atmosphere would be different, too.

So, if our spiritual practitioners truly practice the Quan Yin method for a long time, we don't have big egos. When our levels are higher, our egos can't exist. Even if they did exist, we wouldn't feel how great we are. We look like other people. Gradually we'll know that we're different. However, we don't have anything to grasp, to prove, or to tell others. That's why in the Heart sutra, it states, 'There's nothing recognizable nor can we tell that we've attained the Truth.'

When we meditate to a high level, we don't even have bodies, speech or thoughts. So how can our egos exist when our bodies don't exist? And how can we possess anything if our bodies do not exist? Therefore, it's not bad to practice this method. [Applause]

The more we practice, the less ego we have; the more we practice, the less we get. However, it's not that we don't get anything, but that we don't have anything to feel proud of. The more we practice, the more relaxed we become; the more we practice, the less burden we have; and the more we practice, the less we have to talk about. Those who don't practice much talk more, while those who practice more talk less. That's why Lao Tzu said, 'The one who has wisdom doesn't talk, while the one who talks doesn't have wisdom.' Therefore, it's very safe to practice this Quan Yin method. Besides, this method is very simple, not complicated.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ⁹⁴

Moses led his people out of Egypt to the desert and then came to settle down at the foot of Mount Sinai. One day, the Lord spoke to them through Moses. The Lord said, 'I've taken you out of Egypt to this place. I've been protecting you and given you plenty of good food, because you're my favorite people! I'd like you to become my special friends. Would you obey my words?'

They answered together, 'We would!' Then the Lord said, 'The day after tomorrow, I'll come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.' So, the people started to cleanse themselves and wash their clothes, because the Lord was going to see them.

Keep the commandments in order to become special friends of the Lord

Indeed, when that day came, the people all heard thunder and saw lightning and a thick cloud upon Mount Sinai. They all trembled, because they knew that the Lord was coming! Would you tremble when you saw God? No? Of course, you wouldn't, because you haven't seen Him. [Laughter] However, they deemed, as what's recorded in the bible, that the thunder that they heard and the lightning that they saw were in the sky. In fact, that wasn't true! They were from inside. We all have had these kinds of experiences. When Moses and Aaron, two friends of the Lord, climbed up Mount Sinai, the Lord bestowed on them the 'Ten Commandments' and instructed them to tell the people that only when they kept these commandments could they become special friends of the Lord.

The Lord also said, 'I'm the Lord. You should worship me and respect me only. You must not make any graven images or bow down to them. Each time you mention the name of

94. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 24, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

the Lord, you must do it with veneration. Also, you should rest on Sunday (meaning meditation).’ Originally, the sixth day was the Sabbath Day. Since Jesus Christ resurrected on Sunday, the Sabbath Day was shifted to Sunday. However, the Jews still observe Saturday as their special Sabbath Day. On this day, people aren't supposed to work, but only do things for God, such as chanting scriptures, reciting God's name, meditating, or getting together at church to remember God's name. It simply means to stop doing any worldly work!

An example of this is that you come here today and we study the scriptures of God and do God's work together; and we meditate and remember God's great name in order to serve Him. This is correct and is to His liking. So you see, the wind stopped as soon as you came here today. [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause] After you meditated for a while, even the rainstorm stopped. There was supposed to be a heavy rainstorm! This shows that God is pleased! [Master and audience laugh.]

The commandments include being filial and respectful to parents, not harming other sentient beings, being loyal to one's spouse, and refraining from having relationships with other men or women. They also include refraining from stealing, telling lies, and coveting things that belong to others.

This is just like what I've told you, that you shouldn't covet things from other people. We shouldn't take anything that doesn't belong to us or that people don't personally give to us, even if it's only a blade of grass, because it's not worth ruining our reputation and gentleman's manners, not to mention breaking the precepts. It's very bad already that our self-esteem has been damaged! Do we have to wait for people to put us in jail?

Being human beings, our self-esteem is very important. There's no need to wait for others to tell you whether you've broken the precepts or to judge whether you were right or wrong. No matter what other people say, we know what we've done. This means that God knows or that our inner Master or God inside knows that we've done bad deeds. This is bad already! Therefore, we actually keep the precepts only for ourselves.

What I've just read to you are the 'Ten Commandments' set out by the Lord. The Lord explained to Moses about how to apply these commandments in various worldly situations and wanted Moses to explain them to the people. When the situation was different, the commandments were to be applied accordingly. The commandments were meant to protect people, not the other way round.

For instance, a person almost starves to death and is very weak. He and his wife and children are dying of hunger or his parents are dying of hunger. If he goes out and steals some bread or rice to feed his family, he doesn't break the commandments. I'm speaking frankly, if this person stole from me, I wouldn't accuse him; instead, I'd give him more. By doing that, he wouldn't break the commandments. In that kind of situation, we can't say that he stole.

On the other hand, if we have enough to live on or people have offered us enough to live on, yet we desire to be more comfortable, more beautiful and more glorious, in this case, even if we steal only a blade of grass, it's stealing, because it's unnecessary! Therefore, we should make a judgment only after we've clearly understood the commandments and considered the intention and situation.

In another instance, I've told you not to accept other people's offerings and not to casually accept gifts from others. However, if you're ill and have no money because other people

have not repaid you, in that case, if I give you some money, but you still refuse to accept it, you're being really stupid! [Laughter] At that time, it's not that you're coveting it, but that you truly need it. If you don't need it, even if you accept only a dime, you'll incur heavy sin! However, if you really need it, it's no problem no matter how much you accept.

Therefore, we shouldn't cling to the commandments. We should see whether it's suitable to apply any of the commandments to a situation. Of course, we ought to strictly keep the commandments in the event that we may harm others by doing otherwise. Sometimes when others try to harm us, we should do our best to protect our lives. In case we're killed, we shouldn't harbor any hatred against them, nor should we kill them for our own lives. It might not be bad for them to kill us, because they might help us to get liberated from the life and death cycle sooner. [Master laughs.] In that case, we ought to be grateful to them! Therefore, when Jesus Christ, Shakyamuni Buddha and all the other Masters of all the ages were harmed by others, they wouldn't resist like the worldly people usually do. Although the worldly people may be good in some respects, when they aren't treated well, they still have the notion of killing or taking revenge. As spiritual practitioners we leave everything to God no matter whether it's good or bad. So we have nothing to fear.

Then Moses began to explain the commandments to the people. Hence, those people promised to keep and respect the Lord's commandments. Then Moses went up to Mount Sinai, because the Lord told him that He would write the ten commandments on a big stone tablet. He climbed up to get it.

However, Moses might have stayed in samadhi for too long this time. He didn't go up there only to get the commandments. He might have studied the commandments while sleeping. He might have meditated, become tired, and after some rest, continued to meditate. He might have wanted to have a retreat. Before he received the commandments written by the Lord, he might have wanted to purify himself and strictly kept the commandments first in order to have more wisdom to understand them. So he might have meditated there for too long.

Knowing that he had been away for forty days, people who were waiting for him down the mountain became impatient. They began to get angry, sway, and their faith became weakened. They murmured to each other, 'Well! I wonder what happened to Moses and why he hasn't come back!' They told Aaron, 'We want another God and a different master. Moses led us from Egypt to this place. So he's our only master. However, now since he's gone now, we need another one. Let's have one quickly, okay?' [Master laughs and says: They even placed a fast delivery order for a master!]

Aaron was rather dumb. He agreed with the people and asked all of them to give their gold and gems to him. Then he molded the gold into a calf. He proclaimed, 'This is your new master.' He then made an altar to put the calf on to let people bow down to it. Then the people were pleased. With the passage of time, they forgot what had happened before and said, 'Oh! It was this golden calf, this master, who led us out of Egypt to here and liberated us from slavery.' They kept worshipping it. Then they reveled in dancing and singing, while worshipping the god of the golden calf.

Seeing that in such a short time period, people broke what they had just promised to Him and worshipped another god, the golden calf, the Lord became angry. It's written here that the Lord was in wrath. I don't know whether God would be angry or not. However, if He was angry then, I wouldn't blame Him. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw the people dancing, singing, and worshipping the golden calf, he also became angry. At that time Moses' anger was very intense. He cast the tablet carved with the

commandments of the Lord down the mountain and it was broken into pieces. He then burnt the golden calf and ground it into powder.

Moses scolded the people, 'How could you do such a terrible thing? You're senseless and stupid!' He kept scolding them, not simply like that. He might have scolded them a lot, but only a couple of sentences are written here. After the reprimand, since Moses always loved his people deeply inside, he prayed to the Lord to forgive those ignorant people, not be angry with them, and give them another chance to repent and become good again.

The Lord was also very patient. So He wrote down the commandments for them again. This time when Moses took the ten commandments back to the people, they behaved well, didn't sing or dance, hadn't molded another golden calf as their master, and didn't worship other gods. They became very humble, and listened attentively and patiently to Moses when he expounded on the decree of the Lord, the ten commandments. From then on, a covenant was made between the Lord and the Israelites, and everyone was pleased.

'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.'

To comply with your request, I'll explain more about the commandments. The first commandment is, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.' When people follow Buddhism, they need to keep a similar precept. The Master will demand the disciples to vow, 'From now on, I follow the Buddha, the noble teachings and the practicing assembly. I won't follow any immortals, celestial beings, gods, ghosts or any other beings.' That means the same thing! Following the Buddha is the highest level, that is, the level of supreme enlightenment or the level of God. The noble teachings come from the Buddha, as only the noble teachings spoken by a Buddha are the true teachings. So they are also the supreme teachings. The practicing assembly is also developed by the Master. People in the practicing assembly are the children of the Buddha or the children of God. Therefore, they're the supreme sentient beings.

Of course, it wouldn't be good for us if we go in the direction of an inferior level. For instance, if we want to make a friend, we should find the best person; or if we're going to elect a king or a president, we should go for the best, the most virtuous and the wisest person. If a bad president is elected – we wanted the best president but we voted for an inferior person – it's of course no good for us! Similarly, if we want to worship, we ought to worship the supreme and the highest God. It's not right if we worship demons and deities such as local gods, water deities, mountain deities, a sun god or any other gods, because their powers are all limited.

Only the supreme God has the supreme and boundless power. No matter whether you venerate Him as the supreme God, the true Lord or the Buddha power, He is the highest. You should understand inside that He is the supreme power of the universe. So you shouldn't bow down to local deities or local gods, or it would be no good for you. Therefore, the Lord said, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.' He wasn't being autocratic, but only speaking the truth.

For instance, since we have a president in our country, we may just as well respect him. Why should we pay respect to a false president or a presidential candidate as our president? Even if such a person claims, 'I'm the president. I would like to be the president,' but he hasn't been elected. If we pay respect to him as our president just because he says that he would like to be one, is that appropriate? If we entrust our feelings and our political opinions to him and ask him to manage the national affairs, for sure it's not appropriate! We already have a president who was elected by the people. We

know that he's the best and superior. So we may just as well support him. Therefore, when our president tells us, 'I'm the president, the chief official of the country. Don't listen to any other president. Listen to me only.' Is it appropriate for him to say so? [Audience: Yes.] Similarly, God also told us to worship Him only.

In fact, God is the inner Master, the highest power. He had been taking care of those Israelites' ancestors for many lifetimes until the time of Moses. This was because their ancestors practiced the Quan Yin method, which had incredible power! Even after many generations, God still continued to take care of their offspring. Since He had been taking care of them so meticulously, He had the right to say, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.' When the Israelites as well as us happen to meet God, the inner Master, who takes good care of us, of course we should worship Him only and not seek elsewhere. When the Lord told His people, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me,' it was not for His own benefit! He knew that it was good for the people who worshipped Him. The more the people worshipped Him, the better they would be. It was not due to His arrogance, but He told the truth for the benefit of the people.

Similarly, those who have children take care of their children in every possible way every day. The children get whatever they want, including an allowance for school. Their parents also take care of their physical health, cook nutritious food for them, and prepare sufficient clothing for them. If the children then take the people next door as their parents, there must be something wrong! Those people have nothing to do with the children and they didn't even give the children a dime or a set of clothes. They don't love and care for the children. So the children can't just take whomever they like as their parents simply because of a similar outward appearance. Only their real parents are their parents!

Therefore, if our parents tell us, 'You should only take us as your parents, not anyone else,' they aren't being arrogant. They are saying this for the good of their children. If we always go to our neighbors, today this neighbor and tomorrow that neighbor, to take them as our parents, what will happen to our physical health? What will happen to our identity? Then even our real parents can't take care of us, because we aren't around. So this won't be good for us.

God loves His people just like parents love their children. So, He tells them to recognize Him, and believe in Him, and only then will everything be fine. This is His intention.

Sometimes, a Master tells us to believe in Her, and pray to Her in any situation, but not pray to any other gods. This is for our own good and She knows that She can give us everything. If we go to someone else, we won't get anything but will waste our time and miss the opportunity for the Master to take care of us. That's why She tells us, 'It's enough for you to believe in me only. Don't believe in anyone else.' She isn't being jealous. Why should She be? The whole universe belongs to Her. She can get anything that She wants. So why does She have to compete with other people and be jealous? Whether we believe in Her or not, She won't lose anything, because we're Hers in the first place, just like we're our parents' children. Our parents don't need to compete with others for this, because it is the fact! However, if some children don't recognize their parents, they may have hard lives, which is no good for them. They may not get the legacy, and their parents may not be able to look after them. If they're never around, how can their parents take care of them? They don't know the children's whereabouts. So it's bad for the children, but not for the parents. [Applause]

When we follow a Master, we know that She'll take care of all our major and minor things within and without. Therefore, when She tells us to believe in Her, it's easily

understandable. The more we believe in Her, the more opportunities She'll have to take care of us. She tells us so only for our own benefit. If we're ignorant, we'll think that we belong to ourselves and have nothing to do with Her. However, She knows clearly that She has affinity with us. We're just like insensible children.

Sometimes when parents are strict with their children, their children will get upset and run away, thinking that their parents don't care about them and don't love them. This isn't true! Parents are strict only for the good of their children. They know that their children are related to them. They know that they want to take care of their children out of love. They wish their children to be brought up well. However, children may not understand this. So, they may run around, blame their parents, and do strange things that make their parents worry and make it hard for the parents to look after them.

The same thing applies to God (or a Master) and His disciples. God clearly knows that we're His children and He ought to look after us. He will do anything that we want Him to do. But it's us who don't understand this. We think that we have sovereignty and we take care of ourselves. So we make a mess. The more we do, the more trouble we make.

We're just like a child who tries to take care of himself when he hasn't grown up yet and has no wisdom, intelligence and ability. The more he messes around, the more upset he'll feel and the further away he is from his family. This will only make his life more dangerous and difficult, and make his parents worry more about him. Therefore, we should recognize God and believe in Him, because He is our supreme wisdom! He is no stranger; He is our most beloved kin. If we reject Him, go out to worship wooden Buddhas, mountains, deities or ghosts, we'll only become more upset. This is all because we have forsaken Him, rejected Him, and won't let Him take care of us.

I teach you meditation to find your own nature. I want you to recognize your own God and wisdom, and let Him appear to you so that He has opportunities to guide you and make your lives more bright and comfortable. That's why I tell you not to worship the outer deities, ghosts or Buddha statues. All statues are useless! The Buddha is in our hearts and God is within us. If we don't look for Him inside, where else can we find Him? All methods of seeking outside are wrong. [Applause] So I don't have to tell you a lot to get you to understand.

Here the Lord said, 'Thou shalt have no other gods besides me.' He was right! Worship 'me,' the inner wisdom, not any idols. What He said was correct! He didn't try to intimidate people. He is indeed the supreme, the greatest and the highest. He doesn't need anyone to worship or admire Him. If we recognize Him and believe in Him, it's only our good fortune. He teaches us only because of our suffering and our sincere prayers. So He says, 'All right! If you want to feel good, want comfort, and to be wise, intelligent and relaxed, believe in me and worship me only. Then you'll be fine.'

God didn't force anyone. He only spoke the truth. Apart from the truth, what can you tell your child? You can't, only out of politeness, tell your child, 'All right! It's fine whether you recognize us as your parents or not. You can go next door and take the people there as your parents.' Can you tell your child that? If he does what you tell him, he'll go astray, live a difficult life, wander around, and have no money and no food, and no one will take him as their child. People usually don't take care of other people's children. Although he may get food and clothes in an orphanage, he won't have a comfortable life, family feelings and the pampering love of real parents. Humans not only need food and clothes, but also the love of the parents. If children are brought up by their neighbors and have no relationship with their parents, they'll look dull when they grow up.

Due to love for their child, parents should clearly tell him, 'You're my child. If you leave home, you'll have a hard time. If you want to have a comfortable and nice life, just trust us and let us take care of you!' Do parents have to be polite or feel embarrassed to say that? When we tell the truth without being arrogant, we shouldn't feel embarrassed.

Sometimes when you hear what I say, you think that I ought to feel embarrassed, but I don't. I would feel afraid and embarrassed if I were deceiving you. Could I deceive so many of you? No way! Some of you are teachers, doctors and business people with high I.Q.s. I couldn't deceive you for long. So I just tell you the truth. Since I tell you the truth, it's all right whether you believe me or not. I won't feel embarrassed. If we want to be good to a person, we should always tell the truth. Only when someone has a bad intention for others, then he will speak cautiously.

We've gone too far away from God if we worship graven images of Hirm

We've gone halfway through the second commandment, which is, 'Thou shalt not make any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to it.' Why was God especially concerned about these things? Because human beings have intelligence, wisdom and the ability to do things. So, if we worship a piece of wood or a stone which doesn't move and has no consciousness, aren't we being very dumb? Then why do some people still do it and think that they're fine?

The father of our nation, Dr. Sun Yet Sen, was wise. No wonder people all revere him as a national father. He broke a wooden statue and asked people why they said that it was the Buddha, didn't he? [Audience: Yes!] I think that he was great. A person who has wisdom possesses strong charisma. No wonder he succeeded and is venerated by people until today. We can't envy him, because he deserved it!

I heard that he saw Quan Yin Bodhisattva when he went to Putuo Mountain. This indicates that he had faith and was pure. He was a Catholic. If he had been attached to the Catholic idols, he would have seen only Jesus Christ. Since he saw Quan Yin Bodhisattva, it meant that he had no discrimination and was really pure. Hence, the Bodhisattva didn't discriminate against him, 'It's all right that you worship Jesus Christ. I'm just appearing to you to let you have a look.' This indicates that he was very pure and was a very good person.

Of course, he had taken part in battles and possibly killed some people, but that was inevitable. I've told you that you should apply the precepts according to the situation! If you're a soldier and you have to kill the enemy to defend your country or due to your national law, then you don't commit a crime. Even if you kill a hundred people, you don't commit crimes or break the precepts. However, if you only injure a person due to personal animosity, you incur heavy karma. It's because of your intent to kill. But soldiers are different; they're compelled to do it, so they don't break the precepts.

Therefore, you can't judge yourself by how many times or how badly you've broken the precepts, how many people you've killed, or what your morality is like, but by the situation and your intention. We can't only look at actions. Sometimes it's very difficult for ordinary people to judge others. We have to be very careful distinguishing between good and bad. Otherwise, we always misjudge. When we see that a person kills, we say, 'Oh! He's bad!' When we see a person donating money to build a temple or a hospital, we say, 'Oh! He's good!' It's not necessarily true! We don't know where his money came from and what the intention is of his donation. He may want to become famous or get other things by donating the money. In that case, he won't gain any merit by his action.

If we worship an image, it means that our level is too low to be repaired, that we have no wisdom and no ability to make a judgment, and that we don't know that the image is only made of a piece of wood. If we worship this piece of wood, it would be same as worshipping any piece of wood. Then it'd save the time and effort of carving and painting as well as the money. To worship an image means that we can't tell good from bad, don't know where our wisdom is, and don't understand what's recorded in the scriptures, that 'The Buddha is in our hearts,' or 'God is within us.' We just ignore the scriptures, ignore the teachings of all the Masters, and ignore the words of God and the saints. We've gone too far and been too ill! Even if we have a little bit of wisdom left, when we bow down to an image, our wisdom is gone.

There is an Indian story. A woman acknowledged a Master. Once she saw her Master appear to her inside, and she was very happy. However, when she mixed with other people, she forgot about it. Hearing people making pilgrimages to mountains and rivers, she followed them. One day, she was ill and wasn't healed after she prayed to her Master. Perhaps her Master deliberately let her become ill in order to erase her bad karma. But she blamed her Master for not helping her. So she worshipped images! There are many gods in India. If you go there, you can see all kinds of big gods, small gods, medium gods, fat gods and thin gods. So she just bowed down to them. Before that, she could see her Master appear to her for a while. But after she bowed down to the images, her Master disappeared.

When she came home, she thought, 'How strange! How could this happen? The Master was there a moment ago. But as soon as I bowed down, he disappeared.' She felt sad and kept thinking about it for several days. She didn't want to eat, but meditated, demanding her Master to appear to her and explain why he had suddenly left her. She blamed her Master again. Since she was quite sincere, her Master was moved, appeared to her, and told her, 'When you worshipped the wooden statues, you degraded me to be even lower than they were! So I didn't have a place to stand. Since it was too low for me to stand, I had to run away.'

Why are we called 'human beings?' Because we're different than animals. We can distinguish between good and bad, high and low, moral and contemptible. We have the ability to make our own choices. Animals are different. They'll become whatever they are trained to become. Even tigers can be tamed to behave like cats by people in the circus. Lions and elephants can also be trained to do whatever they're told to do and dare not resist. In this respect, animals are rather stupid, and they can easily lose their independence.

Human beings aren't like that. Sometimes even when people are imprisoned, they'll try to escape. When they're oppressed, they'll try to resist. When they're wronged, they'll try to clear themselves. This is because human beings have wisdom. If our great wisdom has been deceived and becomes confused so that we worship the statues of ghosts and deities, of course we'll become the most miserable and drift too far away from God! It's stated very clearly in the Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha is in one's heart, and you can't perceive the Tathagata (Buddha) through tangible light and sound. Rather than worshipping tangible forms, it's more meritorious to go home and worship our parents. This is the truth.

If you like to worship, go home and worship your parents. They're living gods and they have God nature within them. If you break wooden statues to have a look, you won't find anything inside them. Even if your parents are ignorant and haven't recognized their God nature, at least they have God nature within them. It's just that they don't know about it.

However, there's nothing inside wooden statues! If you truly want to worship wooden things, just worship trees. At least there's a little bit of God's power inside living trees. Without God's power, nothing can go on living. So, if we worship dead wood, a material form of a very low level, of course our wisdom and level will be degraded to an inconceivably low degree.

Therefore, God particularly reminds us to be especially cautious! He keeps telling us not to create images and worship them. This is because He is very compassionate and wants us to preserve the tiny bit of wisdom remaining in us. If we keep on worshipping images, we'll be finished! Our tiny bit of wisdom can be developed or be destroyed. When we're with spiritual people and wise friends, our wisdom will glow more brightly and develop more. But when we're with ignorant people and follow them to worship images, we'll be contaminated and pulled down by them and our level will be degraded further. The Lord wanted His people to avoid this undesirable situation, so He told them not to do such things; because if they did, the tiny bit of wisdom that they had would disappear.

Suppose you have a little money left. If you save it, you can use it to buy bread. However, if you're cheated by people and use the money to buy stones, you'll lose the money and then starve to death. Besides, you'll have to carry the stones and become more exhausted. You're tired already, and yet you have to carry the stones. How can people be so stupid and be cheated to such an extent? How can stones be edible?

Therefore, your parents advise you not to buy stones and save your money, because they know that this is all you have. If you save it, you can sustain yourself for a while and think of a way later. Perhaps when you have regained your strength, you can find a job. But if you use it to buy stones, you'll be finished. You're weak and hungry already, but you'll have to carry the stones; then how can you survive? You'll die immediately! Similarly, when we worship images, we're incurable! Unless someone quickly pulls us up and imparts to us the superior wisdom, then we'll be cured; otherwise, we keep sinking down.

Yesterday, I let you watch a documentary film, which was about a group of people in India, how they make pilgrimages to mountains and rivers, how sincere they are when they bathe in the Ganges, and how sincere they are when they worship gods. However, you can see that the population in India hasn't decreased, but it's increasing, instead. And they're getting poorer. This is because they apply their sincerity in the wrong place!

Therefore, before, when I saw them doing such things, I got furious. I kept scolding as I came down the Himalayas. [Laughter] I wasn't satisfied to scold by myself. So I told some monks about it and let them scold with me. [Master laughs.] I was angry with those gods! I pointed at their noses and scolded them fiercely. Of course, they didn't hear me; I was only venting my wrath. They were made of wood, so how could they hear me? I knew that very well, but it's just that I was really mad.

I saw that millions of people were being deceived, and had wasted a lot of effort, vitality and money, as well as risked their lives to climb up to the summit just to make a bow. They didn't know whether they would be able to make it home alive, because the road was very dangerous. Some people were very poor. They could only borrow or earn just enough money for the trip and they would have no money after they returned home. In order to gain merit and to worship the wooden statues, they had to come a long way. Sometimes they had to walk on foot and their soles cracked and bled. Some of them were too poor to have shoes, so they had to walk barefoot on the icy road. I cried when I saw that! Innumerable people were deceived. Even though they were sincere, it was useless.

If we have no spiritual friends, our wisdom will become smaller and smaller and gradually disappear. Then, we will transform into animals, plants, stones or minerals. The less wisdom we have, the lower our status will be; while the more wisdom we have, the higher our status will be. It's similar in society. If you're more knowledgeable and more intelligent, your work is more effortless, your social status is higher, your job is better, and you can make more money. But if you have no knowledge, aren't intelligent, and have no ability, you have to do low level work. The lower level your work is, the more toilsome it is and the less the money you'll make.

A similar situation happens in the universe. If we have more wisdom, we'll become superior sentient beings; conversely, if we have less wisdom, we'll become inferior beings. Therefore, due to differences in wisdom, there are all kinds of sentient beings in the world, including insects, frogs, animals, cows, human beings, immortals, enlightened beings and God. We should aim to go upward instead of downward, because we'll suffer more on lower levels. It's not that we're afraid of anything, but that if we have a choice, why choose to suffer? If you choose to suffer for the benefit of others, like what I've told you earlier today, I agree with you. However, if you choose to suffer not only alone, but also involving your offspring of five or six generations, I'd beg you not to do it!

I've chosen this hard path and I'm willing to stay here, because of other people's needs, and because I want to make them happy and encourage them to pursue spiritual practice and rise to higher levels. Therefore, I willingly take on this hardship. If I had chosen the hardship because I liked it, it would be different, understand? [Applause] Our world is very painful already. So, if you can choose happiness, just do it. Don't say, 'Since Master has chosen hardship, we should do the same.' Then you're being too stupid! If we can make many people happy by our individual suffering, it's worthwhile. However, if we deliberately look for suffering, we're idiots just like committing suicide, which isn't good!

'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.'

Now let's talk about the third commandment, which is, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.' Who is God? How can we respect God if we don't even know Hiers name? If we don't know Hiers name, we can't revere Hirm as God, the Supreme Master, Anuttara Samyak Sambodhya or Buddha power! We must not make use of Hiers name to swear, to vow or to curse others. Even when we use it to swear to God, it's no good. You shouldn't say, 'I didn't do this. If I'm lying to You, I'll be struck by lightning...' or things like that. We must not force others to take oaths, nor must we swear in the name of God. Some people are even worse. They use God's name to wage wars. They use God's name to kill people, to invade another country, or to abuse other people's children or women. These are examples of making bad use of God's name.

When God sends a person to earth to represent Hirm, such as Jesus Christ or Shakyamuni Buddha, when He's in the world or after He's gone, we must respect His name, too; that is, we must respect God's name or a Master's name. We must not slander or joke about their names nor must we say their names casually without respect.

Why does God want us to respect Hirm or Hiers representatives? It's because, the more we respect them, the greater blessings we'll gain. Otherwise, we may never see Masters and the sun for many lifetimes; we may fall in a dark place where there's no sunlight, no parents' name and no Masters. That's why God tells us to respect Hiers name or Hiers representatives' names, that is, the Masters' names. Only then will we have Light and our inner Master will have a chance to develop. When there's a cause, there's a consequence.

Like attracts like. If we don't respect God, we'll have bad consequences. God reminds us about this only out of His compassion.

It's not that God needs our respect. Many people have been worshipping Him or not worshipping Him throughout the ages, but He has never changed a bit. He is forever neither unborn nor destroyed and neither defiled nor cleansed. He only gives but never takes. He doesn't need anything, because everything in the universe is created by Him.

The seventh day is the day for group meditation

The next commandment is, 'On the seventh day, thou shalt not do any work. Respect the Sabbath Day!' In the bible, it's stated that God created the universe in six days and hence rested on the seventh day. I'm doubtful about why God needed a rest. He doesn't need it at all! You also think that I don't have to rest. So, every Sunday and holiday, you always come here for a vacation and tire me to death. In that case, God is more fortunate than I am, [Master laughs.] because He can take a rest on the seventh day.

He even asked us to rest with Him. Why? Because He worried that we work so hard throughout the whole week that we don't have time to remember our selves and God. God is our inner kingdom and our inner Buddha nature. What He meant was that we should get together for group meditation on the seventh day! It's stated clearly in the bible that people must not do labor or physical work and can only get together to worship God. It implies that we should practice spiritually to look for our highest status and the greatest wisdom within.

This tradition has been passed down to today. Every Sunday, people group together in church to recite the scriptures written in the past. However, they just come to a church, read the bible, and then go home. Besides, they have some refreshments. They eat biscuits that aren't blessed. In the past, biscuits symbolized the blessed food from the Masters, for biscuits were convenient to store, cheap and light. Since there were too many people, they made biscuits very thin. People ate them not for the taste but for the blessing power contained in them.

Our popcorn here is also not very tasty but looks rather cheap. You can buy popcorn easily with money, yet you like to get it here, because ours is different! You'd be even happier if I personally gave it to each one of you. This is what it meant. It's possible that when someone outside sees me handing popcorn to each one of you, he'd think that you came here only for popcorn. Then he may build an ashram and hand out popcorn every day, without knowing the real meaning. The person who gives popcorn must have power so that the popcorn will be blessed; otherwise, doing it is meaningless.

We spiritual practitioners naturally emit loving power that attracts people to us. After they leave us, they feel that they've lost a very important thing, as if their vitality had been taken away. When I left Costa Rica, people cried like babies. They said, 'Oh! It seems like my flesh is being cut off, or a part of me is being cut off and taken away.' That's why we like to stay together with spiritual practitioners, not because of their attire or that they're Buddhist monks with their hair shaved, but because the intangible vibration emitted from them makes us feel very comfortable. This is just like if we have water to drink when we're thirsty, have food to eat when we're hungry, or have effective medication when we're ill. We feel very comfortable, but we can't describe it.

Similarly, the blessed biscuits are good only when they're given by a powerful person; otherwise, they're nothing if they're bought from outside. However, the biscuits are useful.

They can remind people of God. Then when they go home, they may ask, 'Who is God?' They may long to see Hirm.' Later, they may hear someone giving a lecture and saying, 'I can help you to find God.' Then they'll go to that person quickly out of curiosity. In that case the biscuits are useful; otherwise, they're virtually useless. It's not that we should group together and recite all day long, 'I long to see God. I love God.' No! Although God is within us, Hes can't help us if we don't find Hirm.

Respecting our parents is respecting God

The next commandment is, 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' Perhaps, in Moses' time, children were not filial, so this commandment was necessary. If everyone was filial, no one would know what 'being not filial' is. If people are all beautiful, we wouldn't know what 'ugly' is. If all the people in a country are rich, no one would talk about poverty. For instance, this is a Buddhist country, so there are monks here. However, people in some other countries have never seen monks, so they don't know what monks are and won't talk about monks at all. Similarly, people then were not well disciplined. The bible describes the chaotic situation at that time. After Moses was away for only forty days, the people gave up the Lord and worshipped a golden calf. They were low in spirit and lacked morality, so they changed their Master in only forty days.

Of course, we're becoming more civilized and more advanced. We used to live in caves and eat raw food and live animals. We had no fire, no houses, no airplanes nor any civilized tools. Now we're more civilized, because throughout the ages, extraterrestrial beings have been coming to impart modern knowledge to us and make us become more intelligent and our children more clever.

For instance, you're now following me to practice spiritually and the children that you bear are also different! Those who were vegetarians since they were in their mother's womb look plump and rosy. Have you ever seen their arms? They have at least three to four folds of flesh. I wonder where they get the nutrition from. They only drink milk! These kids will definitely grow up to become more intelligent than we are. And those who've been initiated in their mother's belly may become even more extraordinary when they grow up! And their children, of course, may be even more outstanding, being morally stable, emotionally steady, mentally happy, and more developed in wisdom. So our offspring will become better and better.

Look at the time of Moses. It was really chaotic. People's wisdom was very low. God had given them a lot, manifested Hiers magical power many times, and protected them in every way. Yet, after the Master was away for only forty days, they abandoned God and worshipped a golden calf, instead. Can you imagine that? In modern times, some people are also like those who worshipped the golden calf, but they're relatively few in number. Few people who follow me will regress. This means that you're more stable and you have more wisdom. It's possibly because I have more merit so that God sends me the best disciples. Don't take my word for it before you check your own hearts. [Master and audience laugh.]

Why must we respect our parents? Because God's love takes care of us through the law of cause and effect and through the love and physical forms of our parents. Respecting our parents is respecting God. In fact, it's not the physical forms of our parents who look after us; but it's God's love that does so. We should understand this point clearly! Life after life, the Supreme Mother through our physical mother and the Supreme Father through our physical father have been taking care of us, teaching us the basic virtues, compassion and love. Because our parents love us, we know what love is when we grow up. This is a fact!

If we're raised in a stable and loving family, we'll become more loving, and feel more secure when we grow up. Sometimes, we see that some children do evil deeds, become scoundrels, or are accused of being criminals and imprisoned. Don't blame them too quickly! It may be because they lacked loving care and education when they were young. It may be because their parents died very early or were too busy to look after them. Or it may be because their parents were not loved by their own parents before so that they couldn't treat their children with love.

As the sequence repeats itself, people will have less and less love and will make more and more trouble. When they go out into society, they may be treated unfairly or oppressed and lose their sense of security. Later, when they're bullied or misunderstood, due to their inferiority complexes, they'll resist, revolt, and resist society more and more. The more they resist society, the more they'll lose themselves and their love, and the more their hatred will grow. Eventually, they'll end up miserable in jail.

For the above reasons, we should be filial to our parents. If our parents don't treat us well, we ought to think that it's our retribution and unfavorable destiny. Perhaps we owed our parents something in our previous lives and didn't repay it. Perhaps we were bad parents in our previous lives so that we have to have bad parents in this lifetime to learn our lesson. So, we have to endure it and be filial. This will be good for us as well as for our parents.

In Costa Rica, there was a fellow initiate who was a little more than twenty years old. Two or three days after she was initiated, she came to me crying! I asked her why she was crying. She said that she couldn't get along well with her family, especially her father. Her mother had passed away and her father didn't treat her well. He was cold, stern and hard to communicate with. He always oppressed and dominated her. So she couldn't bear it.

I asked her, 'Have you ever thought that you might be just as cold and stern to your father and that you've shelved your love for him? Have you ever thought that your father also needs your love? It's not only that you need his.' She was stunned and then said, 'What should I do? It's possible that I've never expressed my feelings to him.' I told her, 'When you go home today, buy a most beautiful red rose. Then kneel down in front of your father and offer the flower to him, hug him, and tell him, 'Although I've never shown my love to you because I forgot, I was young and not sensible, nevertheless, I love you very much.'" So she did what I told her. As a result, the two hugged and cried together. Since then, they have become very good to each other.

So, one of them has to open his / her heart first. Parents work outside. They're often exhausted physically and mentally. They have many worries and many debts. In addition to heavy family responsibilities, they can hardly laugh when they're home. However, children may not understand the hardships of their parents. They may keep demanding and expecting a lot but don't realize that their parents also need some support and love. On one side, parents may be stern: 'We're your parents!' They may be strict because they worry that their children won't respect them; and in addition to their heavy work pressure, they can't laugh out loud. On the other side, the children think, 'Our parents are very strict. They don't love us and don't give us this and that.' Then the children may get upset or harbor enmity. This will deepen the misunderstanding between both sides and broaden the generation gap. In fact, both sides are anxious and eager to hug each other. They love each other very much, but they can't express it.

You can just try to express your feelings; you don't have to feel embarrassed. They're your family members. If you really can't communicate with them, try this method, that is, hug

each other first and talk later. When you tell them truly out of sincerity, your words will be touching. You'll gradually communicate with each other and understand that the other side also has feelings and love, and then you'll reconcile with them. Family members always love each other. But sometimes they're too proud to be the first to speak out. So both sides lock themselves up and wait for the other to knock. However, no one ever knocks first. [Master laughs.] And then both sides become anxious.

Sometimes this happens to husbands and wives, too. They want very much to reconcile, but both are waiting and no one takes the initiative. As days go by, the atmosphere remains tense and stern. Although they've forgiven each other inside, they can't put aside their pride but worry about losing face and what the other party may think of them. 'Will he / she ridicule me for giving in?' In fact, that won't happen. It doesn't matter even if your husband laughs at you; he's your partner! It's also fine if your wife laughs at you! In fact, she won't. She's only waiting for you to apologize to her. Now you understand!

Why do we have to respect our parents? Because they work hard for us. The precious bodies that we are able to have were given by our parents; not by the physical entities of our parents, but by the grace of God's love acting through them. Therefore, we should respect them in order to respect God. Everything is created by God. He gives us birth through the bodies of our parents, but not that our parents do that themselves. However, since our parents have God's love within, that is, since they have God inside them, when they love us, they have God's loving power. They're very noble, gracious and superior beings. So how can we not respect them?

The subtle meaning of 'Thou shalt not kill'

Now the next commandment is, 'Thou shalt not kill.' It means to refrain from killing. I've expounded on this millions of times. However, don't always think that it's good enough if we don't kill; sometimes when we try to save a life, we're killing. Have you heard me tell the story about two nuns trying to save a centipede? I don't have many examples to cite on this; I only remember that story.

One day, when I went to take a bath and brush my teeth, I saw a centipede in my cup. The cup was covered with a piece of cloth. When I lifted off the cloth, I saw a centipede in it. I was frightened, of course. The centipede was also frightened. [Laughter] So I screamed, 'Ah!' [Master laughs.] That was a natural reaction. Since the centipede couldn't go 'Ah,' it jumped. So both of us were scared. Hearing this, two attendants outside quickly ran in and asked, 'What's the matter, Master?' I said, 'I'm all right. There's a centipede.' [Master and audience laugh.] Then they said, 'Okay. Master, you may go out and let us handle it.' I said, 'Okay. Be careful! Handle it if you wish!' There was a basin outside. So I brushed my teeth there.

A long time after I had brushed my teeth, I still didn't see them come out. [Laughter] So I asked, 'Are you done with it?' They replied, 'Not yet!' I said, 'How can two of you not be able to handle only one centipede?' [Master and audience laugh.] I went inside to have a look. Well! I heard a noise, 'Tze, Tze, Tze, Tze.' I asked, 'What are you doing?' They said that they were trying to drive it away to with the shower head, but the centipede wouldn't move! I said, 'Of course, it won't. It's surrounded by water.' [Laughter] If I spray you like that with the shower head, wouldn't you drown? The centipede was very small and was surrounded by water. It could hardly breathe. How could it possibly run away? It didn't know where to run!

Well! The centipede almost drowned. I saw it going 'Hu, Hu, Hu.' It was calling for help. So I said, 'Stop! Stop! Stop! Let me handle it myself.' They were really great and compassionate for 'not killing it,' but trying to drive it away with water, flushing and surrounding it with water... Even if we were the centipede, we would have drowned. The centipede was very small. When they kept doing that, the centipede couldn't withstand it! So I said, 'Forget it! Leave the centipede alone!' So that was how they were trying to save a life.

Therefore, it's not good enough to just refrain from killing. We have to be cautious. When we walk, we have to be careful and watch out for insects. The sink where we wash our faces and brush our teeth should be covered up or be drained to prevent insects from drowning inside. The oil lamps in temples are also professional killers. They're supposed to be offerings to the Buddha, but they're filled with corpses of insects. Since the oil lamps are uncovered, insects are killed instantly as soon as they fall in.

When I lived in a temple before, each morning when I wiped the altar table, I always saw the lamps filled with dead sentient beings. I supposed that the Buddha wouldn't be pleased with it! In ancient times, since there were no other kinds of lights available, people had to use oil lamps. But now we have electric lights, yet people still stubbornly insist on using oil lamps. In ancient times people used oil lamps and fragrant oil to make offerings to the Buddha.

Why did people light oil lamps to make offerings to the Buddha? Because oil lamps could illuminate the road for Him. In addition, they were to light up the face of the Buddha to let people see. They were also used to light up the hallways in the temples, just like our road lamps here. However, in ancient times, people covered up oil lamps. Shakyamuni Buddha also instructed that when oil lamps were lit or put out, they should be covered up to prevent insects from being injured or burnt. Nowadays, people use big pots of oil as oil lamps. In the temples in Tibet, hundreds of oil lamps are lit all day and all night. First of all, they waste oil. Secondly, they kill lots of sentient beings. When we pursue spiritual practice, we're supposed to refrain from killing and deliver sentient beings' lives, but we actually harm them, instead.

Therefore, we must be careful. Refraining from killing includes a broader sense. Not only killing with a knife is killing. Of course, we should avoid killing if possible. We don't intend to kill by lighting oil lamps. However, we can avoid it, by not using oil lamps. The Buddha didn't say that we must make offerings to Him with oil lamps. In case some places have no oil, how can people make offerings? Whatever we offer, the most important thing is our intention. Besides, the lamp actually refers to the lamp within us! Of course, the scriptures point out that all temples should light lamps or fires all the time so that people can see the paths and go to meditate. It's the same in our ashram! When you come at midnight, or during a seven-day retreat we get up at three or four o'clock. If there were no lamps in temples or ashrams, how could you see where you are going? You might step on other people's heads, or some male practitioners may go to sit in the females' place and some females may go to sit in the males' place, causing embarrassment. So this is the reason for having lights. It's not that the Buddha needs any lights!

For instance, when I sit here, you always shine bright lights on me to let people see me, but it's not that I need the lights. So all kinds of lights are fine as long as you can see me. However, as to the wooden Buddhas, no one comes to see them at night. Visitors only come in the daytime. So no lights are needed at all in the night. Besides, all the temples have electric lights now and it's easy to turn them on to allow people to practice their morning and evening services.

What I mean is that we should avoid killing if possible. There are many other things, but I can't go through all of them. As to any insects or bugs, we should avoid killing them if possible. Similarly, we should avoid cutting grass and trees if possible. If there is no other way, we can cut them, of course, to build houses or for hygiene. We can do it when necessary. However, it's different if we destroy them with a vicious heart for no reason.

'Thou shalt not commit adultery, not steal, not lie.'

Another commandment is, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' That is, to refrain from having more than one husband or wife. I've explained the reason. If you have too many husbands, you won't have any next time. Suppose you have seven husbands. Then in the next seven lifetimes, no one will marry you, because you once had too many! For example, you make ten thousand NT a week. If you spend it all in one day, of course you have no money left for the rest of the week.

The next commandment is, 'Thou shalt not steal.' This, everyone understands, and I've talked about it many times. There are many kinds of stealing, and stealing money is only one kind. It's okay to steal if you're starving, but don't do it if you have money. Stealing also includes casually receiving offerings from people. As well, you must not hint at people to offer! Sometimes when we talk for too long, we're also stealing, that is, stealing people's time. When people are impatient with you, you still keep on babbling. That's also stealing.

If we sell something for ten dollars when it's actually worth only two dollars (if we say that it's very good when it's actually not and only worth two dollars, but we sell it for ten dollars) and cheat others to buy more, this is wrong and is stealing, too. Stealing doesn't only mean to go out and steal. When we go to work and see that the boss isn't there, so we slip away and go home early, it's also stealing. If we take home something from the factory that the boss didn't give us, it's stealing, too. When we live in a group, there are many things there for the public, not only for us. It's stealing if we take something that isn't given to us.

The next commandment is, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.' You understand this one already, and I've also talked about it many times. It's explained at the time of initiation, too. There are many kinds of lying. The worst kind is that, our spiritual level is low, but we cheat others that we've attained a higher level by saying some mysterious things. We coax people into believing that our level is higher than theirs by talking about mystical things. We hide our real level and make people think that we know many things that they don't know. To cheat people in this way is the biggest lie. For another instance, after a Master passes away, some people like to become masters and then cheat people that they're the successors. By doing that they incur the worst karma.

Sometimes we make a mistake. And when people ask us about it, we don't admit it but let Master or our boss punish the whole group. This is also lying and is bad, too! If we admit our mistake, it'd be fine. Don't involve other people in it. Sometimes I have to punish those people. It's okay if they make a small mistake. But they don't admit it and the issue becomes worse and involves the whole group. They wouldn't be punished because of the small mistake, but since it involved the whole group and made a lot of noise, I have to punish them. They didn't admit it, but forced me to bother the whole group and question people one by one, and still didn't confess, of course I'd have to punish them. I'd punish them for lying, but not for the trivial matter.

Do not covet other people's belongings

Another commandment is, 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.' Of course, we shouldn't covet other people's belongings. We wouldn't accept them even if people gave them to us, not to mention coveting other people's things. I've told you that if we accept other people's offerings that we don't deserve, we're only taking their karma. However, we don't know whether we deserve it or not, so we had better not accept any, unless people really force us to accept it. If we have no alternative, we should just accept it and then give it to someone else or give them something in return.

I think that the Chinese understand this rule very well. During the Chinese New Year, people give gifts to each other. After gifts are passed on too many times, the gift that you gave earlier may come back to you. Is that not so? This is also fine! At least we won't owe others anything. The Americans have a tradition, that is, when two people go out for coffee, each one will pay his own bill. This is also good! They don't have to display false courtesy, and then fuss about who drinks more and who drinks less, [Master and audience laugh.] or they may feel embarrassed.

There is a very funny Aulacese story. Two people went out to eat a kind of food called jackfruit. It's a kind of fruit that has spines outside and looks very ugly. It's this fat and this big with many seeds and sweet knobby flesh inside. These two people reached an agreement, 'We don't know who will eat more and who will eat less, of course. So we'll count the seeds, and then we'll know how much each person should pay.' After they both agreed, they went out to share a big jackfruit together.

One of them was very honest, but the other swallowed all the seeds. [Master and audience laugh.] Seeing that, the first person didn't say anything. After finishing eating, the first person suddenly screamed, 'Oh! My stomach hurts very much! My stomach really hurts!' He rolled on the floor and kept on screaming. The second person wasn't done eating yet. While eating, he asked, 'What's wrong with you?' The first person said, 'I accidentally swallowed a seed. Now it's growing. Oh! It's getting bigger and bigger. Oh! It has grown up to here now! [Master points to Her chest.] Oh! It's up to here now! [Master points to Her throat.] Oh! Quickly think of a way to save me! Why is it growing so fast?' The other person was frightened to death. He asked, 'You swallowed only one seed and it has grown this big. [Laughter] What will happen to me since I've swallowed five seeds?' [Master and audience laugh.] [Applause] So don't swallow any fruit seeds! [Master and audience laugh.]

THE EXODUS⁹⁵

One of Abraham's descendants was Jacob, who had many descendants. When his country Israel was passed on to one of his descendants, his country became very big, famous, powerful and wealthy. At that time, there was another country called Egypt and the Egyptians started to be afraid of the Israelites. Therefore, the newly enthroned Egyptian king decided to deal with Israel before it was too late. He wanted to attack them before they would fight against his country.

So the king took all the Israelites back to be his slaves. He sent many fierce taskmasters to ruthlessly watch over the slaves. Each day the slaves were forced to build houses and palaces with stones for the king and the royal family. They had to work from morning till night and couldn't rest. Although they worked hard, they still bore many children. Well! It

95. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 17, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

was strange. So the Egyptian king was afraid and gave an order: 'Cast all new born Israelite boys into the Nile and drown them.'

The birth of Moses

At that time there was an Israelite woman called Joahebed. She had just given birth to a son. She had two children already – a boy called Aaron and a little girl called Miriam. When the woman saw that her newborn baby was a boy, she was worried for his life. So she hid her baby in a small house for three months. However, the baby couldn't just lie there all day long and wouldn't always be a baby. What would she do if he grew up and ran around? So she kept thinking about it and then came up with an idea.

She found a basket and daubed its exterior carefully with pitch so that it wouldn't sink when it was put into water. She made the basket into a small boat and put her baby in it. Then she brought the basket to the river bank and hid it in high reeds. She let her daughter watch over it, because she knew that the king's daughter would come to take a bath there.

As expected, when the princess came to take a bath, she saw the basket. When she picked up the basket and opened it, she saw the baby in it. Oh! It was a very beautiful baby boy. She had never seen such a beautiful baby before. Although she knew that he was an Israelite baby, she liked him very much. It happened that she didn't have a child, so she took the baby home to raise it. She named him Moses. When she found the baby, she also saw Miriam, the daughter of the woman. Miriam went to the princess and said to her, 'I'll find a woman to nurse him.' The princess was pleased about this. Of course, the daughter went to get her mother to nurse the baby. Great! [Master laughs.] It was truly convenient.

So Moses grew up in the palace. He learned all that he could learn there and he learned from the Egyptians very well. Gradually, he grew up and became a person who had good manners and who was handsome, tall and big. However, one day, he found out that he was an Israelite. Seeing that his countrymen were treated so ruthlessly by the Egyptians every day, he was annoyed.

One day, he saw an Egyptian soldier beating an Israelite worker and treating him cruelly. When the soldier almost beat the worker to death, Moses couldn't resist fighting with the soldier and in fact killed him. Oh! Moses was now in danger, and he was afraid that the king would create trouble for him. So he ran away into the desert and became a shepherd. He then married a shepherd's daughter and took care of his father-in-law's sheep.

The messenger chosen by God

One day, when he was taking care of the sheep, he saw a fire constantly blazing around a bush. However, it was strange that the bush wasn't burnt. He felt curious about it and went closer to have a look. Then there was a voice that told him, 'Don't come near! Take off your shoes. You're now standing on holy ground.' Upon hearing this, Moses was afraid. Trembling, he backed up a few steps and took off his shoes. Then the voice said to him again, 'I'm the God that your ancestors worshipped frequently. Since I see that the Israelites are suffering a lot, I choose you to be my servant. Go to Egypt, free the Israelites, and bring them here to see me.'

Moses answered hesitantly, 'What shall I tell them? What shall I do? They won't listen to me. Please choose someone else!'

God said, 'No. I've chosen you. Find your brother Aaron. He will speak for you.' He was more eloquent. 'However, I'll give you another language (meaning the sound stream). This language, a special Sound, will give you great magical power and you will be able to do anything with it.' What God meant was that Hes could do anything with it and there was nothing that Hes could not do.

Then Moses and his brother Aaron went to the Egyptian king and said, 'We have a demand. Our God said that you should let our people go into the desert and give them a farewell party.'

The Egyptian king answered, 'I don't know your God. What does your God have to do with me? What use is Hes to me? I won't let the Israelites go.'

The king became more and more angry and unreasonable. He gave an order that from that day on no straw was to be given to the Israelites. The Israelites mixed straw with clay to make bricks. That was why the king gave the order not to give straw to the Israelites anymore. Instead he made them find the straw themselves. However, he still required them to produce the same amount of bricks as before. He deliberately made trouble for the Israelites.

Moses was very disappointed. He asked God for help. Then God said, 'Just wait and see what I shall do to the hard-headed Egyptian king. I shall let him know that I'm God and I shall make him release my children. Now go to see the king again and tell him that if he doesn't free my children, I shall make many disasters for the Egyptians and Egypt.'

Then Moses and his brother went to the king again. The king said to them, 'You should show me your magical power to make me believe you.' So Moses or his brother Aaron cast a rod onto the ground and then the rod became a serpent. They thought that this would be enough but some Egyptian wizards could also do the same thing. So the king laughed at them and said good-bye to them. [Master and audience laugh.] He drove both of them away.

A very stubborn king

Then God got angry. Because Hes said that Hes would make all kinds of disasters, many terrible things truly began to happen. Each time before a disaster happened, God warned the Egyptian king. However, he neither listened to God nor believed God because he believed in another god of war.

First, the water in the Nile became like blood – red, dirty and smelled stinky. Then the fish in the river all died. This meant that the water had become poisonous. One week later, frogs were crawling all over the country. So the king asked Moses to take the frogs away. After Moses got rid of the frogs, the king still wouldn't free the Israelite slaves. Therefore, later, God sent many insects down to eat all the crops and destroy everything. There were insects, flies and damaged crops everywhere except where the Israelites lived.

At that time, the king cried and said, 'All right! All right! You can go!' Then the insects disappeared. However, the king went back on his promise and said that they couldn't go. He always deceived the Israelites like that. Ordinary people all behave capriciously like that. So God sent another disaster. This time many cows, sheep and other animals died of pestilence. All the animals died except those that were where the Israelites lived. However, the Egyptian king still insisted on not letting the Israelites go.

Then another disaster happened. God made all the people in the country get painful and dirty boils all over their bodies. Even the wizards had boils. However, the king still wouldn't let the slaves go. Oh! This king was truly terrible. I don't know what his head was made of. His head must have been harder than our fellow initiates' heads. [Laughter] Fortunately, he didn't come to get initiation. [Laughter] Otherwise, what could we do with him?

Then Moses and his brother Aaron went to see the king again. They told the Egyptian king, 'Now you've seen the power of God. If you don't listen to His instructions and let the Israelites go, bigger and greater troubles will befall your country.' Moses told the king, 'There will be a typhoon tomorrow.'

Truly! People had never seen that kind of typhoon. Well! It destroyed everything and killed all the animals. Of course, nothing happened where the Israelites lived. Right after this, many locusts appeared all over the country except where the Israelites lived, of course. The locusts ate up all kinds of things and all the green plants. Then there was no sun for three consecutive days. It became very very dark everywhere, except where the Israelites lived. [Master and audience laugh.] Maybe the Israelites were initiated. It might have been.

At that time, the king began to feel frightened. However, he still wanted to bargain with God and didn't want to release the Israelite slaves. Well! He was so strange. How could this kind of person become a king? Even until that time, he still wouldn't let the Israelites go. Then an even more frightening thing happened. In one night only, the eldest sons of all families suddenly died, including the eldest prince who couldn't escape even through good fortune. This happened as well to the eldest sons of the Egyptian lowest class slaves. Of course, the Israelites were not affected by it.

The next day, the Egyptians couldn't wait to drive the Israelites away, because they couldn't bear it anymore and couldn't do anything about it. What happened was already too much for them. If they kept the Israelites one more day, they would have more disasters. So they were frightened. They not only drove the Israelites away, but also gave them many gold and silver vessels, good material for clothing, good clothes and good food upon the Israelites' request. However, by the time the Israelites had walked half the way, the Egyptian king changed his mind and sent his army to try to capture them.

By then, the Israelites already had come to the ocean. There was no road in front of them and there was the Egyptian army chasing after them. So the Israelites were scared and cried. Moses waved his hand over the ocean and God sent a wind from the east that suddenly made the ocean part. The Israelites quickly ran across the ocean. When the Egyptian army chased them and were crossing the ocean, it closed and all of them were drowned. Therefore, the Israelites all escaped.

Settled in the desert and began a new life

The Israelites were not slaves anymore. They had money and food. When they came to the desert, they sang and danced very happily and had a banquet to show their gratitude to God. They worshipped God, sang for many days, and kept dancing. After a period of time, they forgot their miserable lives of the past, but began to complain and miss Egypt. They forgot God but thought about onions, fish and meat. They said, 'Well! The fish in Egypt tasted good. Oh! The watermelons in Egypt were juicy. The onions in Egypt were delicious!' [Master laughs.] They even missed onions. For them, onions were more important than God. They said, 'Oh! Don't forget the cucumbers there. Well! What can we eat in the desert?'

Since they had eaten all the food, they started to complain. They forgot about the rods that had beaten them in Egypt before. They forgot about the fierce hearts of the Egyptians. They even forgot the time that they shed tears, sweat and blood, and were beaten almost to death and oppressed. They only thought about food and drink. They began to blame Moses and Aaron for taking them to this remote place where there was no food to eat. Of course, they had water to drink. When God took them to the desert, He produced water in the wilderness. However, the Israelites were not satisfied with that. They all complained, 'Oh! We'd rather die in Egypt than die of hunger here.'

When God heard their complaints, He told Moses, 'Tell your people that I shall give them everything that they ask for. I saved their lives. How can I not provide food for them to eat? Do not complain too much. Today I shall give them a lot of food. Tomorrow I shall give them bread. Each morning I shall make food for them to eat. However, on Friday I shall give them double the amount, because I shall take a break on Saturday and you won't have to work either.' So Moses conveyed what God had said to the people. That night God truly gave them many things to eat. From that day on, each morning, bread and other food appeared for them. They just lived on like that. They wouldn't starve to death and didn't have to work.

However, they encountered another problem. Since the sun was very hot, they didn't have enough water, so they complained again. Upon hearing this, God told Moses, 'Go to such-and-such place and hit the stone with your walking staff. Then water will come out.' As expected, water did come out. There was enough water no matter how much they drank. It was no problem. The author of the story writes, 'They shouldn't have tested God!' Even though they did, God forgave them and gave them food to eat and water to drink for forty years. He took care of them like this every day. He gave them food to eat and all they asked for, because He wanted them to believe in Him. Gradually, He taught them to have faith in Him so that they wouldn't have any more problems.

I don't know why God liked the Israelites so much and had such patience. He gave them food to eat for forty years and gradually taught them to have faith in Him. However, do you think they would have faith? [Audience: They would.] For how many days would they have faith? All right, whether they had faith or not, I'll tell you about it next time. If we have faith in God, we'll have everything. People will suddenly give us food, come to chat with us and resolve our problems and difficulties. All these will be done by God. If we truly have faith in Him, He will take care of everything for us, no matter whether it is a big or small thing. He truly will.

God's grace is infinite

Otherwise, how can we take care of ourselves? Where are we from? Do you know that? You don't know it at all! You also don't know where you'll return to. Some people know it and some don't. Those who practice more and have attained higher levels know it. Those who don't practice much don't know, but only have some ideas about it and know that there must be a safe place for them to go. Now we've repented and been saved. Even if we did something bad in the past, it's no problem, because we were ignorant at that time. Now we've been enlightened and know that we should repent. So God will forgive us and help us.

Although there were so many Israelites, God took care of the whole country for forty years. It was even in the desert, and yet He bestowed everything on them, not to mention living in a city. Why won't He take care of us? It's just that our situation isn't urgent and we can take care of ourselves. So God doesn't have a hand in it. But He has been silently taking

care of us. If Hes hadn't done it, we wouldn't be alive. Even if people in the world who don't believe much in God occasionally have difficulties and ask God for help, Hes will help and do it for a long time. However, later we forget and complain again. Then we'll have difficulties again.

The reason that we have difficulties sometimes is because God wants to remind us to look for Hirm inside: 'It'll be all right if only you ask me! Why don't you call me?' Hes lets the situation develop and forces us into difficult circumstances where we have nothing to depend on; when doctors can't even cure us, and our relatives and friends can't help us. Only at that time will we kneel down in front of God and beg for something. Hes is waiting for us! Hes has many gifts [Master laughs.] and will give them to us at any time, but it's a great pity that most people don't believe in Hirm.

One person practices, many generations are blessed

Why did God take care of the Israelites so well? It was because their ancestors practiced spirituality and believed in God. The Israelites were Noah's descendants. Remember that in the stories of Noah and Abraham, God promised to take care of their descendants. That's why we say that if one person practices, his five, six, seven, eight or one hundred generations will be liberated. God will take care of our many generations, not only this one. That's why even though the Israelites didn't practice spirituality, were not even vegetarians, and they thought about God for a while, then about fish for a while, God still took care of them.

God is very merciful! If your father believes in Hirm, Hes will take care of you and your children, because Hes is very merciful and generous. Hes gives us things endlessly. Unless we truly refuse Hiers love, then Hes can't help us. Because of these stories, the Israelites believed in God very much. Each time God appeared, Hes would remind them: 'I was the God worshipped by your ancestors!' This means the inner Master's or God's loving power. Since God promised to take care of their five or six generations of descendants, Hes just continued to do it. But later the descendants became more and more degenerate and did more and more excessive and unforgivable deeds, so their merit and loving power became less and less, and gradually disappeared.

One day, another person who practiced well emerged from their country and reminded the people to believe in God again and to be connected with God. Then God promised to take care of them again. Otherwise, why did God love the Israelites so much? It was because Noah, Abraham and his wife worshipped God, so his sons, grandsons and later generations also received the bounty. That's why people say, 'If one practices spiritually, his nine generations will go to heaven.' Those stories are not ordinary. Even the Israelites knew them. Although the Israelites didn't have a Master now, they continued to believe in God because of these stories. It was just that they couldn't communicate with God. So it was a pity. Some Israelites may have been able to communicate with God. If they found a Master and the method, they definitely could; but not everyone in the country could.

Even until now, the Jews still roam about in many countries and not every country welcomes them. This is because they haven't really been able to communicate with God. Besides, they've done many nonsensical things and killed too many, which doesn't comply with God's rules. So their merit has been greatly reduced. God doesn't seem to take care of them much. Besides giving them a lot of money, Hes doesn't give them many other things. God has said that since they did many bad deeds, they wouldn't have their own country for a long time and would become a roaming race. That truly happened and it's

recorded in the bible. If the Jews can really find God like their ancestors Abraham and Noah did, they will definitely regain their position and their country's reputation.

Those who truly believe in God are rare

Most of us haven't learned to believe in God. That's why we have many problems. Sometimes we say that we believe in God, but we don't. It's just like when you say that you believe in me, but you don't. How many of you believe in me? Very few! When you're tested a little, you'll be different. If I personally test you, you'll be even more different. When I scold you, how many of you are glad about it? Raise your hands and let me see. Right! Only two or three people are. It's good that you're honest. I admire you for this merit, [Master and audience laugh.] to be true to people and not to deceive others. Only those who were truly glad about it raised their hands. [Master laughs.] There were only five, six, seven or eight of you. As for the other people, you may become angry; but do not be angry for too long. [Laughter] The longer you're angry, the less your merit will be. Remember to repent after you calm down, all right?

Ordinary people can beat and scold you, but why can't I do the same? Sometimes gangsters have nothing to do with you but when they see you, they beat you. You don't dare to do anything to them and don't dare to get angry, but beg them for your lives. [Laughter] I've saved your lives and taught you many things, but you get angry when I scold you only once. This is a contradiction within human beings.

Therefore, you say that you believe in me, but you don't believe in me for long and don't believe in me much. Your faith is very thin. [Master laughs.] It'll break when touched. It's hard to take care of your faith, but that's why you should take care of it. The more faith you have, the more comfortable and happier your lives become. Then when you encounter any situation, your faith won't shake, which is a very comfortable state. However, I know that it's hard to attain this state, so I have to train you. God took good care of the Israelites and gave them all kinds of food to eat for forty years, but they still had problems. Later, God had to slowly teach them to believe in Him.

GOD'S TEST OF ABRAHAM ⁹⁶

Once there was a family. The patriarch of the family was called Abraham. He did very well in his spiritual practice and was God's friend. One day, God told him to leave his home town promising, 'If you follow my instructions – leave your home town, and do what I tell you to do – I'll make you the father of many nations.' This meant that God would make him the national father of many nations.

God also promised to give Abraham a son and many other children to make his family very big. He said, 'You'll have numerous children, as many as the stars in the sky.' However, at that time, Abraham and his wife were very old. Although they had faith in God, they wondered, 'How can that be? We're too old to bear children.'

Many years passed. Each night when Abraham looked at the stars in the sky, he remembered God's words and felt very annoyed. He thought that God might have been joking. Finally, Abraham and his wife gave up hope completely.

96. Group meditation, Hsiu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 10, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

The child given by God

However, unexpectedly, Abraham's wife conceived and gave birth to a boy. They rejoiced over his birth and named him Isaac. Many years later, Isaac became a big, tall, strong and handsome boy. Then God decided to test Abraham.

One day, God appeared to Abraham and said, 'Abraham, I want you to take your only and most beloved son Isaac into the land of Moriah and offer him to me.' Here, to 'offer' means to kill or to sacrifice. Ancient people made sacrifices to gods or ghosts that way. Sometimes they sacrificed little boys or girls and sometimes cows, horses, pigs, et cetera. Abraham couldn't believe this. He kept asking himself, 'Does God really want me to kill my only son? Hes once promised me many children. How could Hes ever want to take away my only son?' He kept struggling within himself. However, he had learnt all his life to believe in God. Some people might believe in God only fifty percent, but he believed in God wholeheartedly. Therefore, the next morning, he prepared a lot of wood and matches, and then set out for Moriah with his son.

It took three days to get from their home to Moriah. They had to walk a long way to get there. With the passage of time, Abraham felt more and more pained and sad. Although he believed in God, he still struggled within and didn't have the heart to face the moment when they reached Moriah. Although he was hurting immensely, he didn't tell his son. No one knew about it except him.

Abraham offers God his son

When they were close to Moriah, his son Isaac asked him, 'Father, we've prepared wood and matches in order to make an offering to God, but where's the lamb?' In the old times people killed a lamb and burnt it to make an offering to God. That's why Isaac asked Abraham where the lamb was and why they had only wood and matches. At that time his father sighed and replied, 'Don't worry. God will Hirmself provide a lamb.'

After they arrived at Moriah, they built an altar and piled the wood orderly. Then Abraham bound his son's arms and legs and placed him on the altar ready to sacrifice him. He told Isaac, 'You're the lamb to sacrifice to God, because God wants you.' Then he picked up the knife to slay his son.

However, at that moment, Abraham heard God call his name and say, 'Abraham, don't kill him. Now I know that you truly have firm faith in me. This was only a test. Now I know to what extent you would follow my instructions. You don't need to kill your son. There's a lamb nearby. You may sacrifice that for me.' That lamb was produced by God. God truly provided Hirmself with a lamb by producing one. So it wasn't a real lamb.

Abraham and his son were very glad and showed their gratitude to God. From then on everything that God had promised Abraham came true. Abraham had many descendants, generation after generation. The story ends here.

Do you think that Abraham was a good father? [Audience: Yes.] It was very good to have such faith in God. Since all things are created by God, if God wants any of them back, we should return them to Hirm, for they belong to Hirm originally. Abraham and his wife were very old and had no hope of bearing any children, but they eventually had one. What a marvelous thing that was! The child was given by God. Since he came from God, why couldn't he go back to God? Right? [Audience: Yes.]

The lesson of detachment

Why do most of us live in suffering? Because we hate to part with anything. We can't even part with a pair of ragged shoes, let alone our sons. Therefore, when we're separated from our lover or family, we are in a lot of pain and feel sad. That's because we don't understand that we'll all die sooner or later and no one can live forever. Even if we say that we love a person very dearly, if he dies tomorrow, will we die with him for love? [Audience: No.] Of course not! We should live on.

Among ancient romantic stories, there is one about a couple named Liang Shanbo and Juh Engtai (known as 'the butterfly lovers'). It's said that they reincarnated seven times as human beings and wanted to get married during each lifetime, but they were always hindered. During their last lifetime together as human beings, even though they were not hindered, one of them died first and the other, due to extreme sorrow, fell ill and soon passed away too. Then they turned into two butterflies. They had to become butterflies to overcome the obstacles between them. That was a very difficult situation.

Therefore, if we cling to anything, our souls are harmed and our freedom is limited. Being butterflies seems carefree, but how many of us would like to give up our precious human bodies and become butterflies? Those two turned into butterflies because they clung too much to their love. They both had very strong willpower, so they stuck together and became butterflies. Since they loved each other so much, God couldn't be too harsh on them, because if they had reincarnated as human beings again, they would definitely have suffered and been hindered again. They were destined not to be together as human beings.

In these kinds of stories, people who are indebted to each other or have an adverse affinity with each other always like to stick together, while those who have a smooth affinity with each other don't like each other much. The person in front of your nose, you don't like him much, but rather like the one who lives in the mountains very far away. The worse the affinity we have with each other, the more we like each other. This is human nature. People like complicated things or things that they've obtained through fighting. Only then do they think that these things are valuable.

The reason why the world is full of suffering is because people don't understand that there's actually no suffering at all. Even when we lose our own lives, we shouldn't feel sad, let alone when others lose their lives. We've had many children, life after life. We also have had many spouses, life after life. Even when we don't have any, God will arrange one for us.

You can see that the world population has long been balanced between numbers of men and women. Don't think that there're more women than men. No, that's not true. It's possible that there're more women in this place and less in that place, but the total numbers of men and women in this world are balanced. For example, there're more women in one country, while there're more men in another country. There would no longer be any problem if they could get together. But there're problems because worldly people don't get together. It's not that God hasn't given us what we need.

It's said that during wars, many men are killed, but many more women will get pregnant and give birth to more male infants. Is that true? [Audience: Yes.] This is a statistical conclusion, which has been obtained after lengthy research. So there's always one man for one woman. That's why God has made the rule that no one can have more than one spouse at a time, because should you have two, someone else will have none. Or if you're too greedy and have two spouses in this lifetime, you may have none in your next lifetime,

because you'll have to compensate. Therefore, God has said that each person should have one spouse only so that he / she can have one in his / her next lifetime.

It was possible that Liang Shanbo and Juh Engtai each had had two or three spouses in their previous lifetimes. As a result of the law of cause and effect, they couldn't have any in their later lifetimes. They couldn't even marry their most beloved. This was due to the law of cause and effect. If they wanted to break free from this retribution, they had to become another kind of sentient being. Since they had strong willpower to break free from the retribution, they became butterflies.

Precepts provide a balanced life for us

The precepts are intended to enable us to live a balanced life and not have too much of everything this time and too little next time. This applies to eating or spending money. Don't consume anything too much, because you may run short of it tomorrow. Whatever we use, we should use only the proper amount of it. Similarly, the precepts are set up to enable us to balance the yin and yang. They're designed to save us from suffering, not to oppress or restrain us.

In the first story that I read to you about Adam and Eve, why did God withhold the apple from them? Because they had too many things already. The entire Garden of Eden had been given to them. The Garden of Eden refers to heaven, where there were all kinds of things. Adam and Eve didn't have to work or look for anything. They had enough of everything. However, consuming one apple made them suffer a lot.

If our so-called ancestors hadn't eaten that apple, we probably wouldn't have to suffer today. If they hadn't eaten the apple, they would have been pure and not aware of good and bad and had no discrimination.

They wanted to become like God. I don't know what's the good of becoming like God. Is it possible that God is a miserable person? I think that He is, because He had to create everything and take care of all the planets, all the people and all the sentient beings. He must be exhausted. Those who want to be God must be the most stupid.

So, I advise you that you don't have to become God and you don't have to become a Buddha, as long as you're happy and peaceful, live moderately, and live with an ordinary mind. Why do you have to pray for eternal happiness? What for? The more we covet, the more we suffer. Yearning for anything is painful because we covet what we lack. Yet the more we covet, the more hurt we feel.

Take the romance of Liang Shanbo and Juh Engtai as an example. If they hadn't yearned to marry each other, they wouldn't have suffered. Why did it matter to marry? They could have taken their time looking for someone else. Even if they couldn't find anyone, it would have been fine for them to become a monk and nun. They suffered simply because they desired and coveted each other. Why bother?

Similarly, we spiritual practitioners shouldn't ask for too much. We should practice step by step. When the time is ripe, we'll have the results. Of course, we must practice diligently. However, our sincerity is the most important. 'The Buddha is in our hearts.' When we're sincere, He will come out. If we do everything and even pursue spiritual practice for His sake, we'll eventually get to know Him and become one with Him.

Three kinds of practitioners

There're three kinds of spiritual practitioners. The first kind believes in God and obeys God, the second kind works for God, and the third kind, the highest of all, becomes one with God. Those who are one with God or become God attain this state naturally, not because they expect it. They're very sincere, of course, but they aren't expecting anything. Sincerity is different than expectation. I don't know how to tell you the difference between them, but it comes naturally. It's difficult to explain this in words. Sometimes we may get confused and think that expectation is sincerity, but they're actually different.

The first kind of spiritual practitioner likes to worship God and obey God, and then they're satisfied. They're happy to be able to worship God every day and think that there's a God who's higher than them and is taking care of them. If they can pray to Hirm every day, they're happy and don't ask for other things. This is the first kind.

The second kind of spiritual practitioner recognizes God, so they like to work for God. Whatever they do is for God. However, after they work for a while, they become more fond of their work than of God. So they begin to find more and more work to do and forget that their goal is to work for God. This kind of spiritual practitioner can earn a lot of merit. They can do many good deeds to liberate sentient beings, such as giving lectures, building temples, becoming monks or nuns, et cetera.

However, after they have worked for a long time, people may worship them, adore them, and think that they're virtuous. People may keep praising them. The more people praise them, the more they indulge in their work. Gradually, they become attached to doing good deeds and hence are never able to become one with God. These two kinds of spiritual practitioner can't attain the highest level, because one is attached to worshipping God and the other is attached to working in order to please God.

The third kind of spiritual practitioner may also worship God and do good deeds to please Hirm, but they know that these things are only secondary. What interests them the most is: 'Who is God?' They not only want to worship God, not only want to work for God to please Hirm, but also want to know who God is in order to get hold of Hirm. This kind of spiritual practitioner will ultimately become one with God. However, very few people can attain this level. It's easy to talk about it, but it's hard to realize it.

What we see in our meditation every day represents our inner qualities. If we see the Light, we know that we're the Light. If we see darkness, we know that our inner qualities are still in the dark. Therefore, we can't stop our spiritual practice even for one day. We must keep seeking, just like we must eat every day and can't stop eating for one day. Well, not eating for one day may be fine, but not for many days.

The same applies to spiritual practice. We may think that it's boring to be vegetarian and meditate for two and a half hours every day. However, we eat every day, why haven't we gotten tired of eating? The food is similar every day, but we still eat it, because our bodies need it to grow and our cells need it to be nourished. Similarly, we meditate for two and a half hours every day, we do the same every day, because our souls need this to develop.

Don't think that spiritual practice has to be complicated, and you should do this hand gesture today, that head gesture tomorrow, and another foot gesture the day after tomorrow in order to do spiritual practice. No, you don't have to. For example, it's good enough if our food is simple. The more sophisticated our food is, the more trouble we'll make for ourselves, because the purpose of eating is to nourish our bodies anyhow. The

more sophisticated the food we eat, the heavier the karma we incur. Besides, sophisticated food may not really be good. Our stomachs may not be able to take it. So we won't digest it and then get ill.

When we encounter a painful situation in which we have to part with something that we cherish, we shouldn't sink into sadness. Instead, we should think, 'Will I die if I don't have it?' or 'Is there any substitute that may be better than it?' In fact, there is. Sometimes we think that the person whom we have is the best, but after he leaves, we'll eventually find another person who is better and more suitable for us. Is that not so? When we get hold of something, we forget to look at anything else. Actually it might have been better if we had taken time to search for something better.

Attachment is a kind of habit

There's nothing that we really can't part with. We hold onto a thing because of habit and because we cling to it too much. When we stand in a place, we just stand there and don't want to move. When we get hold of a person, we just hold onto him and don't want to switch to another one. If two people get married and have a good relationship, of course they should be loyal to each other. However, if there is a problem such as he / she dies or one of them doesn't love the other anymore, the other person should retain an ordinary mind and shouldn't lose him / herself because of that person or because of anything.

When we're in grief, do we usually forget about our faith? Do we? [Audience: Yes.] If we grieve over the loss of a person, we may forget that all creation is one, that nothing has ever existed, and that everything is from the same origin. We shouldn't cling to the physical form of a person. When the form disappears, the person will go to another place and find himself another form.

For example, sometimes we love a rose or another kind of flower very dearly, and when the flower withers, we feel sorry. We can't bear to part with it and wish that it could exist forever. However, if every rose existed forever, how could there be more roses to come?

For another example, supposing there's a beautiful mango and we don't have the heart to eat it. We think that such a beautiful mango should swing on the branch forever; so we don't eat it. However, if we don't eat it, its seed can't fall onto the ground. When the mango tree gets old, it won't bear any more fruit, nor will we have another mango tree to replace it.

This applies to all other things in the world. We shouldn't grieve too much when we lose anything. It's possible that we'll get something more valuable tomorrow. There's a Chinese story about an old frontiersman who lost his horse. You're all very familiar with the story, but you still don't appreciate the value of pain and suffering.

Each time I've undergone surgery or gotten ill, my karma has been cleansed a lot. I was very grateful! You may find this hard to believe. Sometimes I've even said, 'If this can truly cleanse a lot of disasters, suffering and karma, let me get more illnesses.' I was really glad. Of course, when I was ill, I cried because it was very painful and couldn't stand it, but that didn't mean that I was unhappy or unwilling to accept it. No. Even though the pain was great, I was still willing to accept it.

When we're ill, it's truly the most glorious time of our lives. It can eliminate a lot of our darkness and heavy karma. If I hadn't had suffering, illness or pain in my life, I could not stand it, I could not digest the karma of sentient beings. Even if one has a lot of merit, one

still cannot digest that much karma all at once. I could have repaid it slowly, but then when would I be finished with it? There're many sentient beings, I don't have enough time to do it slowly.

So, God has His own system. He can help us to cleanse our karma. Since He has let us take along so much 'garbage,' He will help us once in a while by sending a 'vehicle' or people to transport our 'luggage.' So, when you have a disaster or illness, don't complain, but be grateful to God instead. Without suffering and illness, our spiritual level can't be elevated, because we have too much karma. Even if we have no karma ourselves, we're still carrying the karma of our ancestors.

DON'T TAKE THE DEVIL'S APPLE ⁹⁷

Adam and Eve ate just one apple, yet they incurred so much karma. Do you have any idea how much we have eaten in our lives? We have eaten everything including cows, horses, chickens, ducks and pigs. How can we endure so much karma? Adam and Eve shared only one apple, each taking only one half of it, but ended up falling from heaven down to earth. Then they had to endure great pain, tiredness and hardships to earn their bread. Their descendants, generation upon generation, were involved in this karma as well, not to mention the additional karma we create by ourselves. What I mean is anything that is not given by God bears karma. Its price and interest are beyond imagination. That's why we have to offer the food to God and recite the holy names before each meal in order to cleanse the karma. Otherwise, we would be eating the devil's apple. Later he will ask a lot in return.

That apple was actually created by God and placed in Eden. Why is it that nothing carried karma in Eden but this apple? Since they were all from God's creation, why must this apple, of all things, bear such a high price? It's because God had not granted it to them. They stole it, so it wasn't blessed by God. They listened to the devil, so it was blessed by the devil instead. Not that God had to be fierce with them; not that God had the heart to punish them, but that they belonged to the devil once they had eaten from him. At least they became his subordinates, tools, relatives or friends. In addition, they lost the privilege of being God's friends.

If they had informed God in advance, things would probably have been different. God might have said, 'Well, since you want it so much, all right. Feel free to take as many as you want.' There wasn't anything that God couldn't do; but because they ate it furtively and received the blessing from the devil, they brought disasters upon themselves. Similarly, if you follow me and practice, you will have to keep a vegetarian diet and meditate for two and a half hours, but it's no big deal. There are other people who eat vegetarian as well. Besides, they eat only one meal a day, live in graves instead of mansions, and meditate eighteen hours a day. Yet they have received nothing from all this effort! What does your two-and-a-half-hour amount to anyway? And you might eat several meals a day, consuming more food than non-vegetarian people do!

However, why do you still benefit from it? It's because you get the blessings. It's because you are doing it correctly, and God has accepted you. He promised, 'Okay, if you do these things, I will give you this and that.' However, if you do it alone, who will ever know what you are doing? For example, suppose there is a boss who runs a very big store. He hires you to take care of his business. Then even if you have no customers coming to you for two or three days, you will still get paid; because he has made a deal with you by

97. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 10, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

saying, 'If you work for me, I will pay you this amount of money each month. You'll get health insurance, I will take care of your security benefits, you'll get a pension when you're old, and there's special financial assistance when you're ill.' Later, the deal is done, and you have to look after the store. It doesn't matter if there isn't a lot of work to do. You'll even get additional money when you're sick or have an accident. You still get paid even if you haven't sold a thing. However, if there is someone who hasn't been hired by the boss, will he get paid for standing in the store for fifteen years? Will he get anything for staying awake all day and night looking after the store? No! Who cares if he stands there by himself? Similarly, God has His own system in this world, and some people work on His behalf. If we get in touch with them, they will introduce us to God so we are connected with Him. If we just follow ordinary people's footsteps, or even the devil's footsteps, we won't do ourselves any good even when we have done as much, if not more. You get benefit because we are connected with a totally different system.

BIBLE STORY – THE ANGELS RESCUED LOT⁹⁸

There was a person called Abraham. He and his wife called Sarah lived in the city of Ur. One day, God said to Abraham: 'I want you to leave the city of Ur quickly and go to a very far away place. The place is called Canaan. If you follow my instruction, I shall make you the leader of a great country.'

Sarah had no children. However, they very much believed in God and therefore did what He had instructed. They had a nephew called Lot. They brought along some servants, animals and some possessions and left the city of Ur. To leave their relatives, friends and all the familiar places to go to a very foreign country was very unpleasant to them; they had a hard time and hesitated about leaving. During the migration, they used camels and walked very slowly. The country was very far away. Nevertheless, they finally arrived. There they set up their tents.

From that day onwards, they lived very happily together. However, their herds and flocks – cows and sheep – continued to grow in number. Therefore, their location did not have enough water, and could not provide enough grass for them to eat. Gradually, they started to quarrel – 'This land is mine,' 'That tree is yours,' 'This lake was mine and that was yours,' 'My sheep can drink but yours cannot.' They started to quarrel for these things.

These people who quarreled were the servants who looked after Abraham's and Lot's animals. Since they quarreled, Abraham and Lot decided to separate. Abraham let his nephew Lot choose first where he wanted to go. He did not want to use his position as an uncle to overpower him and therefore he let him choose first. Lot decided to go down the mountain to the plain because there was a basin in the plain. There was water there as it was close to the Jordan River and it was close to a city called Sodom. Besides, it was very green looking and seemed to have plenty of grass. Since he thought that there was plenty of grass and water for his animals, he then walked away with his flock.

This decision meant that Abraham should stay on the very dry, bare mountain. The grass there did not seem to be plentiful and the water there also seemed scarce. The basin that Lot was going to looked very abundant and all green. However, Lot's decision was wrong. Although the basin area seemingly looked good, there was something unpleasant which he discovered after he went there. This was that the people living in Sodom were proud, cruel, greedy and lazy. They had a very ferocious character. Very often many horrible things happened in Sodom. However, no one felt ashamed, no one would take

98. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, June 3, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

care of such matters, and there was no one to protect the weak ones and to punish those wicked ones. However, God was very fair. He would not close His eyes to such unfair happenings; He would not close His eyes to allow those ferocious people, those who intentionally did wicked things to continue to act freely. Therefore, He decided to let the city of Sodom be punished since the people there did not feel ashamed of themselves and had done many evil things.

One day, the weather was very hot and Abraham was resting in his tent. He saw three strangers walking towards his tent. Abraham stood up to greet them; he invited them into his tent to rest and gave them something to eat. Since the visit was not expected, Sarah and the servants hurried to prepare some food. They baked some fresh bread and cooked some fresh food for their guests and also gave them milk and cheese. After eating, the three strange men started to explain why they had come.

At that time, both Abraham and his wife Sarah were old already. However, God gave them very good news. He said: 'You have longed for a son. He will be born not too long from now.' After hearing this, they were very surprised and happy. Although they were already old, but since they believed in God and God would not cheat them, therefore they knew that it was going to happen and so they were very happy. However, those three men also told them something which made them worried: God decided to punish Sodom and destroy it. Since their nephew Lot was living in Sodom they were worried. In Sodom the only virtuous people were his nephew's family and some servants; all others were not good and God did not forget them.

God sent His messenger to Lot's home and warned him of the coming disaster and told them to flee. However, Lot's family did not want to leave Sodom as they were living very comfortably there. There they had everything – rich in material and there was no lack of grass and water. They had become very rich there and life was very comfortable.

Therefore, they did not want to give up everything to leave. At the last minute, God's messenger had to push them outside the city to a safe place. When they were just outside, there was great fire in the city. They almost did not make it. Before they were far away from the city, the earthquake and fire had already started in the city. Falling from the sky, blowing up from the ground; the wind and fire seemed to come from nowhere and destroyed the city! The air was full of dust.

When it was already so serious, Lot's wife was still not willing to leave quickly. She was still hesitating and slow to move. She stopped to look back and therefore, she was killed. Her husband and two little children were not hurt. But the wife and all the others were killed because they did not listen to God and did not run quickly. They did not think it could be so serious and thought that it might be all right. They were still attached to their possessions, their homes; and consequently, they were all killed. Only Lot and his two daughters ran away safely. God rescued them.

God is the inner Master – called God or Buddha. When God wants to appear to us as a human being, He transforms Himself to be the inner Master. Otherwise, as God is omnipresent and great, how could we catch Him and talk to Him? It was the inner Master's instruction and they said it was God's instructions.

There were not too many tests in this story, but there were some. It was actually not a kind of test, God just spoke the truth. But because their mundane minds did not want to listen – thinking that these kinds of things would not happen: 'It won't! Nothing will happen!' So

their minds were slow to accept and then a lot of disasters occurred. It's all because we do not listen to the instructions from the inner Master.

Sometimes we depend on our limited brain and ideas and then there are a lot of disasters. It's all created by ourselves. Therefore, Lao Tzu said that troubles are made by ourselves. A practitioner, if being looked after by God, being looked after by an inner Master, usually would not have any serious problems. Even sometimes when they do happen, the inner Master would take care of them. It's when we don't listen to Him that we cause trouble for ourselves.

Just like in the story – Lot's wife, even when God had already sent people to warn them to leave quickly, she was still attached to their possessions. As a result, the possessions were gone but her life was also gone. When we have life, the human body, we can get back some possessions after a while. But when the body is gone, it's not useful anymore. So sometimes most of us do not know what is of secondary importance and what is the most important. Just like those sent by God to deliver the warning, they seemed to be illogical. To tell them to leave their family, their relatives and friends, to leave their possessions – all seemed to be illogical to them. It was like asking them to do something bad, something wrong and detrimental to them.

Being attached to our possessions and homes is very common and seems to be very logical. However, it is those who use an urgent tone of voice to push you out who are really helping your life. What use are those who spend time to comfort you, to shake hands with you only to die together? Because Lot's wife was still attached when she left, was still squandering her time and looking back. She still wanted to go back. Those servants who sympathized with her died with her. Those who hastily pushed them out and raised their voices were the real saviors.

Sometimes we find it difficult to distinguish who is good and who is not good. It is because our mundane minds are used to sweet talk and do not use wisdom to judge. Many kings of old were the same. Since they listened to the sweet talk of those bad ministers, their kingdoms collapsed. Those good ministers were usually straight in their talk and very often were not placed in important positions by the king. Being a Master is just the same. Since the talk from others is so different, many do not wish to listen to the Master and relatively few people like the Master.

In United States there was a monk called Yogananda and he was very famous. He said his Master was very direct. He said if his Master was not that direct, his Master would have become the most famous teacher in India and had the most number of disciples. Since his Master did not always talk sweetly, the number of disciples was less.

He wrote in a book that there was a person who practiced the Quan Yin method and had contact with the inner Master. One day, there was war in India and he ran quickly from the street into another person's home so that he could escape the bombing for a while. However, though the house was very big and not crowded, the family wanted to kick him out and pushed him away. They were very unkind to him and pushed and kicked him out, so he had to leave. He was rather surprised, 'Why was it like that? Why was Master not protecting me? I have run for such a long way to find a family and go in to hiding, but I was kicked out.' He was complaining all the way on his way out. However, soon after he left, the family received a 'bang!' and everyone inside was all killed by the explosion.

Sometimes we think that some situations are not good for us or are harsh to us. But after a while, we know. It's similar in this story. Those strange people went in to persuade them to

leave their possessions, to leave their home and friends, and to leave their many flocks of animals. This seemed not to be good to them. However, it was the only way to save them. What was important was their lives and not their possessions.

Sometimes we cannot understand how the inner Master works. We think that He should be very gentle to us everyday or that everything should be very smooth and good. It's not always like this. Sometimes the situation is not smooth, but after a while it becomes better for us. Therefore, we'd better not ask to have smooth sailing all the time, we should only ask the inner Master to do whatever is good to us. Whether it is smooth or not, it doesn't matter. After a while, it will become smooth. In our daily living, unavoidably we will encounter many difficulties and many situations that are not smooth. We cannot be happy everyday. If we are happy everyday, we won't treasure it. It's really like this.

Just like the story of the 'stupid' and the 'daring' who were living in the Garden of Eden that I told you last week. I called Eve and Adam stupid and daring. Being too ignorant therefore they were stupid. God had given her everything except an apple, yet she was still calculating and wanted to possess it. She stole the only possession left behind for God. That was no good and therefore she can be called stupid. Being too happy and too comfortable everyday, one would not treasure it and subsequently one would do silly things. If there were no lessons from society, no turbulent situations to educate us, we would never learn. In very good circumstances, one just lays there. Then, the spirit could not be strong, the body would not be good, and our disposition would be corrupted. Besides, there would be a very high sense of dependence and no humility. Therefore, no matter whatever difficulties we encounter, don't just think that it is not good.

THE TOWER OF BABEL ⁹⁹

Now the time of the deluge had passed. Noah had lived to be eight hundred years old, and had many sons, probably thousands of them! The book says that Noah and his children cultivated the land and grew grapes on it. His children had many children, who in turn had many more children. There were generations upon generations. Before long, there were too many people, and many families had to move somewhere else. If they didn't, there would not be enough grass for the livestock. Because all of them spoke a very simple language, they understood each other very well, so it was easy for them to cooperate on any project or task.

Some of them moved to a place called Babylon, where they invented a way to make bricks. They learned to fire the bricks making them hard and strong. They also learned how to adhere the bricks together with an ancient material very much like the cement we have today. This way they were able to build houses.

One day, one of them said, 'We should build ourselves a very large city and in that city a sacred tower, as big and tall as never before, so we can make a name for ourselves.' Nonsense! [Laughter] They wanted to build it to become famous. Then everyone in Babylon agreed, thinking it was a very good idea. From then on, everyone worked very hard to build the Tower of Babel.

God began to observe their work from heaven. Seeing the walls getting taller and that human beings were having more opinions and becoming busier in their minds, God knew there would be trouble. Human beings started to think too much, and their egos and mundane notions were expanding. At that time, human beings began to believe they were

99. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, May 30, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

deities and were capable of everything. Therefore, before they finished the tower, God came up with an idea. He thought that if human beings spoke different languages, they would not understand each other and therefore wouldn't work so aggressively.

Then God began to confound their languages and sent people to different corners of the world – to the north, south, east and west. Some settled on the coast and some on the islands. Some moved to places very far away. Some went to Egypt, some to Africa and others to Arabia.

Noah's descendants multiplied and became more and more. Each lineage generated many more men and women. Each of the families grew larger and larger. Finally they became nations. In each nation, people spoke a different language. From then on they were unable to work together or communicate with each other.

So far, every time people think of the Tower of Babel they are reminded why people speak so much babel, which means they 'blah, blah, blah' a lot. The word 'babel' means speaking like children babbling, so the tower was named the 'Tower of Babel.' Like what babel implies, we always speak too much.

This is a story about God and Noah's descendants. There is a moral to this story and we can learn from it. What is it? The more comfortable human beings become, the less they think of God. Back when their parents were still alive, everything was very simple. Everyone lived in the ark and remembered God all the same. Not too long after God gave them comfortable lives. There were no floods, no punishments and no reminders; so they began to feel they were great.

Sometimes when we live a more comfortable life, we become more fanciful, just like Eve the Idiot (sounds similar in Chinese) and Adam the Bold (sounds similar in Chinese). When they were still in heaven, they were carried away by their illusion, thinking that they did not have enough and that they should be like God. But what's the point of being like God? It was just an apple that they didn't have, and they were tricked into doing a foolish thing. They already had the whole world and the whole of heaven to themselves. They were happy every day and had whatever they wanted; but they still wanted to be like God. How foolish they were! No wonder God punished them by sending them down to earth. Only in this way could they learn their lessons. Then they would know: 'The life before was good; it's painful now,' and they would begin to cherish it. They had already had everything except one apple, but they still coveted it to be like God. What egos they had! Hopeless!

Therefore, we have to reflect on ourselves once in a while. When we live a good life, we should not fantasize too much; or else we would regret it later when it would be too late to come back. Usually in a comfortable life, people are likely to forget, and do unpleasant things or things they shouldn't do. Therefore, even in a relaxed and happy situation, we should not forget, indulge or pamper ourselves and end up getting weak and unable to survive in more difficult situations. Instead, we should keep our courage and maintain a balanced heart.

NOAH'S ARK¹⁰⁰

After Fool (sounds similar in Chinese) (Eve) and Bold (sounds similar in Chinese) (Adam) had gone down the hill, they gave birth to many children who later scattered and lived in different places and countries. Gradually the world became chaotic and people became

100. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, May 30, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

worse and worse. They didn't follow God's instructions and didn't respect Him, nor did they care about how He wanted them to live. That is they didn't care about virtue and the commandments of God. No one listened to God.

God regrets creating human beings

Then God began to regret having created human beings. There was only one thing that He could do, that was to re-create human beings. Since He felt very annoyed, He decided to destroy the entire world. However, this decision brought Him a lot of anguish. He wanted not only to destroy human beings, but also to destroy the entire world. Therefore, He decided to flood the world, to submerge everything.

However, there was a person who was very good, who had lived according to God's instructions, rules and precepts and who also loved God very much. This friend of God was called Noah. God told Noah about the flood and explained His plan.

God said to Noah, 'I want to save you and your family. You should build an ark big enough for all your family members. With the remaining space, you may bring some animals – two of each type, a male and female, so that they can multiply.' You see, God was very thoughtful! If He had let Noah plan it, Noah might have brought three females and two males of each type, and then they would have quarreled and not even been able to lay an egg. [Laughter] God also said, 'There should be enough space to store food for you to survive a long time.'

Noah followed God's instructions and began to build the ark as He had asked. This work required a very long period of time. Many people came to see him and always asked, 'What are you doing? Why are you building such an ark?' Noah told them God's plan, but no one believed him. They all thought that Noah was crazy. They thought that he must have had a mental problem to do such a thing. Can you imagine that? Noah lived on a high mountain, which was far, far away from oceans or rivers, several thousands of kilometers away, yet he was building an ark! They all said, 'How stupid he is!' and laughed at him. But Noah still believed in God and his faith didn't waver.

The flood submerges everything

The ark was finally built, and then it started to rain. So Noah, his family, the birds and other animals in pairs all ran into the ark. God then told them to lock the door, so they did. They saw that the rain was pouring down and it kept pouring down each day. Soon all the rivers and seas overflowed and the water level kept rising. Gradually the ark was lifted up and Noah and his family floated on the water. However, the rain didn't stop and one day, everything was submerged, even the highest mountain disappeared. Nothing could be seen, nothing was alive, and nothing could be saved. Noah, his family and the animals were in the ark with only water around them, nothing else.

Can you imagine that the world could become like that one day? Suppose we are drinking tea here, but suddenly water is everywhere. It's hopeless even if we go to the top of the roof, and even the highest mountain disappears. At that time, the world became a very lonely, quiet and pitiful place.

Eventually, the rain stopped and the water level gradually fell. One day, the water receded sufficiently so that the ark came to rest on a mountain top. After some time, Noah wanted to know whether the land had become dry or not. He had to make sure before he went out. So he opened a window and sent an animal out. But the animal didn't come back. It might

have drowned, because it had rained for a long time and the forests had become rotten and muddy. Then he released a pigeon. But for the pigeon, the land wasn't dry enough, so it flew back. Pigeons are trained to fly back. Noah opened the door and let it come in.

After another period of time, he sent the pigeon out again. This time when the pigeon returned, it was carrying a green leaf in its mouth. Noah knew that the trees were beginning to grow and the land really had become dry enough for them to go out. He opened the door allowing everyone to go out. All his family and the animals were very happy so they went out cheering and dancing. They had stayed in the ark for a long time, so they must have felt bored.

God told Noah, 'Now you can leave the ark and go out to start new lives.' They thanked God for protecting them. They then collected many stones and built a very big and tall altar. They cooked food and made offerings to God. At that time, a rainbow appeared in the sky, with which God showed His compassion, and kindly promised Noah, 'From now on I won't destroy the world again.' God made this promise so that people could start new lives.

Do you know why God did that? It's true that when God created human beings, He gave us His spirit, to let us have His wisdom and love. However, when they wanted to use them, these qualities were filtered by their minds. If our minds don't work well, we'll reduce the love or use it to do evil deeds. So the mind is a very important instrument. If our minds don't work well, we become different. So God didn't destroy human beings but only their damaged instruments. When He did it, He knew that He had done it correctly and it was nothing fantastic. However, to create such a beautiful world, it takes a long time. It takes millions and billions of eons to create such an earth.

Even diamonds are created from coal

You all know that in the beginning our earth was chaotic. There was no life, no human beings, no animals or anything. It was like a fireball. No one could live on it and nothing alive could survive. After a long, long time – millions and billions of eons – the surface of the earth cooled down; but its center is still hot even now. Occasionally the center explodes and then we say that a volcano has erupted. The heat from the lava can melt stones and minerals, which gradually cools down and becomes different materials. That which cools down more quickly becomes harder materials, while that which cools down more slowly becomes stones, et cetera. Although they're different kinds of materials, they're all similar in quality. So you see, wood can turn into coal after being compressed for a long time.

What can coal turn into if compressed for a long time? [Audience: Diamonds.] Yes, diamonds. That useless black material can become diamonds, precious stones. It consists of the same elements, but the different pressure turns it into different things.

Similarly with us human beings. We're all equal originally. But what we become depends on how much effort we put into it. It's true that we're all equal and we all have the Buddha nature within, but it depends on whether we train ourselves to become Buddhas or not. We can't just half-heartedly hope to change ourselves, or we'll only be like coal and emit black light. Nevertheless, diamonds also come from coal. All precious stones are created from coal or from ordinary wood.

It takes a long, long time to create a world like this. We say that it's not perfect and sometimes we dislike it. But in fact it has taken a lot of hard work to create it. Even an

insect, a mosquito or a fly is of a great design. The creator had a great plan and made a special design for each kind of living creature, not only human beings. It took a lot of time to create even a small animal. So God was also in anguish when He destroyed the world.

But one has to give up an instrument after using it for a while. Just like when we drive a car for a long time, and it becomes old and damaged. What can we do about it? We have to discard it and leave it in a junk yard. Later it'll be crushed into a piece of metal, which will then be used to make other things or parts for another car. Similarly, after this world was destroyed, it could have been re-created by other instruments.

Only the instruments are destroyed

The human brain becomes bad when used for too long a time, because it collects bad influences. When it's filled with bad information, a person will become bad. After a while, it becomes too bad to be used anymore. Then it has to be erased and re-created all over again. However, our souls exist forever.

God has given everyone a living-loving spirit. He can take it back and integrate it within another instrument, then He won't lose anything. It's the instrument that has been damaged or destroyed, not the person, not the soul, not God or the Buddha nature. This is what happens when we die. If we can separate our Buddha nature from the instrument, we'll be free to find another instrument to attach to; but if we can't, we'll be attached to our old instrument unable to disassociate from it.

After initiation, God's power helps us to repair our instruments. In case it can't be repaired, after we die, He will help to permanently separate it from us, and then we'll be free to find another useful instrument – better, more perfect, more useful and more easily maintained and repairable. That's all. It's not that we lose anything. We'll still be the same, but our instrument will be new.

It's just like buying a new car when our old one doesn't run. But we have to have the money. The initiation gives us the 'money' – makes us wealthy, and gives us merit to buy a new instrument later, since we can't repair our old car and can't sell it for the time being, even though we ought to drive it away to discard it. That's why we still drive it for the time being. That's why it's said that fixed karma can't be changed. We have to wait until we buy a new one. That's all.

The world can be saved if more people practice spiritually

This world is really not a big deal and nothing happens actually. It's just that if it's repairable and if we can repair our own instruments, there's no need to destroy the whole world. We can gradually repair our instruments one by one. For example, if you've fixed your car, you can help to tow another car or fix it, or you can give people a ride so that they don't have to drive their damaged cars and have an accident. So you save your own car, then take others with your good instrument – tow their cars to the airport or to the garage to get repaired.

Therefore, if many people practice spiritually, this world wouldn't be destroyed but could be repaired gradually. It'd be enough to repair a portion of the human being population. Then these people could carry others. If everyone carries some and takes care of his share, then it would be balanced and everything would be all right.

We can see from this story that at that time, no one believed in God except Noah's family, who followed God's instructions. That was why God destroyed the entire world. If more families in many places had believed in God, He might not have done that. Since there was only one family, it was very simple for Him to handle.

Our world will not be destroyed, because there're some people practicing spiritually. However, I think that it's very difficult. After practicing for a while, they become sluggish and forget their purpose in coming here. They quarrel over trivial things, struggle with nonsensical feelings, and forget the matter of life and death. We should first strengthen our faith regarding life and death; and then whatever we do, we won't forget God.

It's not that we can't do other things. For example, Noah had a family – he had a wife, children and many animals – but he didn't forget God. This is why he was different from others. Other people also have spouses, children, businesses and animals; but they're completely attached to them. So we spiritual practitioners should know what's the most important thing and what's secondary.

SAMUEL ¹⁰¹

There was a village named Ramathaim-zophim. It was located in a hill near Jerusalem. Here lived a man called Elkanah and he had two wives. One was called Peninnah and she had many sons and daughters. The other wife Hannah did not even have one child and she felt sad about this. Although she knew that her husband loved her more, she still felt very sad.

Every year her husband would take the whole family to a place called Shiloh to worship their so-called God. After their worship, they would have a party and everyone would assemble in the temple. The wife that had many children would be surrounded by her children. But Hannah was always alone.

Seeing that the other wife was surrounded by so many people, Hannah looked at herself and felt more sad than before. When the feast finished, she left the party and walked alone to one corner. She felt very bitter and told God in her heart that she was very sad. Then she prayed: 'If the Lord gives me a child, then I will let him serve the Lord all his life.'

God had heard her prayer, just like He had heard any of our prayers. However, priest Eli, when he saw this wife, thought that she was drunk. This wife said to him, 'Priest, do not think that I am a wicked woman. I am also not drunk. I only feel very unhappy, very grieved.' Then she told Eli about her circumstances. Eli then said to her, 'If you want to have peace, you can pray to the Lord to grant you the child that you are yearning for.' Having heard the priest's words, Hannah wiped her tears and felt better after going home.

The Lord really replied to her prayer and gave her a very beautiful child. She named him Samuel. Hannah said, 'When my little child is a little older, I will bring him to Shiloh to become a monk. He will stay there all his life to serve the Lord. This is what I had promised Him.' She really did keep her promise and brought the child to priest Eli, saying, 'This is the child that the Lord has granted me in response to my prayer. Now, I give him to you because I want to give him back to God. Please take good care of him and train him to work for the Lord.' A few days later, their family returned to Ramathaim-zophim. Samuel was left behind with priest Eli.

101. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, May 27, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

God knew that to be separated from her own child was a very painful and very difficult decision for Hannah. But He did not disappoint her. With the passage of time, He granted her three more sons and two more daughters so that she could make use of her motherly love to take care of more children. Every year when they went to Shiloh, Hannah would go to see her little Samuel and brought him clothes that she had made herself by hand.

Samuel had now grown up to be a very lovely child. Anyone who saw him loved him. Now that Priest Eli was old, he very quickly had to prepare his children to minister the temple of God. However, Eli's children were unlike their father. They were all greedy and had no love nor respect for God. God warned Eli that He would not give the job of a priest to people like his children. The Lord said: 'I will choose a priest. This priest must be loyal to me, listen to me, and do everything that I request.'

One night, Samuel was sleeping in the temple of God. At that time he was somewhat awake and he heard someone calling his name. Samuel ran to Eli, but the old priest had not called him. A similar thing happened again. Then Samuel asked Eli, 'Are you calling me? I am here.' But Eli had not called him.

However, the old priest knew that it must be the Lord calling Samuel. Therefore, when the voice came again the third time, Samuel answered because Eli had taught him what to say when he heard the voice again. At that time Samuel said to the Lord, 'Speak, for Your servant hears.' The Lord said to Samuel: 'I want to punish Eli's children. No one from their family can become my priest!'

The next morning when Eli asked Samuel what God had said to him, Samuel did not tell Eli what the Lord had told him the night before. The old priest then commanded Samuel to tell him. Reluctantly, Samuel had to tell him. Having heard that, Eli felt very sorry. However, he said, 'Let the Lord do what seems right to Him.'

After a while, Israel had a battle with a race called the Philistines. Israel sent a special box, an 'ark' to Shiloh. The ark contained God's power and they thought that the little box would bring them luck in the battle field. Therefore, Eli's two children brought it to the camp. However, the box seemed to be of no help to them, the Philistines still won the battle. Not only that, they got hold of the holy box and also killed Eli's children. Eli was now very very old and was almost blind in both eyes. When he heard the terrible news of the defeat, he broke his neck.

The Philistines returned to their city in glory and placed the holy box in their temple of the 'Dagon' (the Dagon was a Philistine idol) as a symbol of victory. The next day, their idol – the statue of the Dagon – fell down before the holy box and the nose was broken. They put the statue back to its original place. However, it fell down again the next morning. This time it was completely broken. Then plague started to spread throughout the city. Everyone was very scared. They said, 'The God of Israel is starting to work now. Let us quickly get rid of this holy box!'

Therefore, they sent it to a place called Gath. However, the plague still continued to spread. This time the Philistines were very worried and confused. They discussed with their sorcerers and priests, 'We have to send this box back to Israel quickly. As well there should be some present as an offering to God.' They were now afraid of the God of Israel, thinking that He was the real God with unlimited power.

Some wise people in their race gave the following advice: 'Only by doing this can we be saved. You have to remember what God had done to the Egyptians before!' Therefore, they sent it by putting the box in a cart pulled by two bulls. Then they waited to see what was going to happen.

The two bulls were very tame. Just like being trained, they brought the box across the border and walked straight to a village in Israel called Beth Shemesh. When they arrived at the village, the people rejoiced at seeing God's holy box back. By this the Philistines knew that the God of Israel should be well respected.

Do you know what was the most touching part of this story? It was the woman who was yearning very much for a child. Because of having no children, she felt so lonely, painful and was teased by others. Then she ran to God and cried. Even after having longed so much, the little child was offered to God after being born! When I see someone offer their child to God, I am very touched. One could only do this when the heart is the most pure. If it were us, probably we couldn't let go because it is really very difficult to do so. Getting one after such yearning and then offering it to God. However, because she had offered one, therefore she got five children.

That's why it is said that we should not be greedy. We also should not think that when we get something then it is supposed to be like that. One really can't say! Never forget God, then we will have everything. If we want to get something, then we have to know that everything belongs to Him. When He gives us, we should not think that it is ours. If we need to use it, then use it. When other people need to use it, it could also be shared. It would be best if we offer everything to God. The more we offer Him, the more we will have.

Just like with her child, she could have said, 'I offer to God but no need to give. Offering just in my heart is enough.' Are we not also always like this, 'It's good enough for me to have the intention! God knows my sincerity. It's the same wherever it is! When my child is here, he also belongs to God. Since everywhere belongs to God, then being next to me would also mean belonging to God! Then simply put him next to me, God is omnipresent! Since He is everywhere, it would be enough for Him to know that I have the intention to offer!'

It's not the same, because the love between a mother and a child is very deep. To be really separated from the child is different. Also, to be able to put down the heart and offer the child to God is really different. Wasn't it said that: 'To say it in the heart is good enough, then no matter where he is all would belong to God. It's the same whether he is in the church or at home.' It's not the same. When we give a total offering from the heart it is not the same as just saying it. If we are able to put down our heart or not able, it's not the same! Because of this, God was touched and then gave her five more children. Originally she had no children and there was no hope. Eventually she had six!

This is not just a matter of children, it's all the same. If we are not greedy and we can put down everything, then we will have more. Really, this is my personal experience. I have not given anything that I have not been able to get back! Besides, I do not even think about it and then it comes back. It really comes back by itself!

Just like a story I told you before: When a farmer went to cultivate the land, he dug up a jar. He took it out to have a look. Oh! It was real gold and glistening. He put it to one side and continued to cultivate. After that, he went home and told his wife, 'Hey! You know what? Today I dug out a jar of gold! It's full and very shining.'

His wife said, 'Where is it? Where?'

He said, 'It is still in the field. I dug it out and put it to one side.'

The wife said, 'You are so stupid. Why did you leave it there and not bring it back?' Then she continued to scold him.

He said, 'Ayah! If it is really meant for us according to our fate, it will 'crawl' here! Only when it crawls to my door then I will think that it's mine, because digging it out doesn't mean it's mine!'

Maybe that person had practiced the Quan Yin method so he was like that. One would not think like that if one didn't practice the Quan Yin method.

The wife was aggravated to death after hearing that. She couldn't say anything because the field was rather far away from home and the path was not that easy to walk. The farmer comforted her, saying, 'It doesn't matter. If it is ours, it will 'crawl' to our door.'

He really said 'crawl'. Using a word like this is more fun! Otherwise, how can gold crawl?

While they were talking to each other, there happened to have been two burglars outside and they heard everything. Originally they wanted to steal their things. Having heard the story, they were very happy and did not want to steal their small things! They hurried and ran to the field to take the jar of gold. When they got to the field, there was really a jar. They said, 'Ayah! Our fate is so good. We will be billionaires!' The two of them sang and danced for a while and then opened the jar to have a look. Oh! Inside there were only snakes! Not one piece of gold! They were scared to death and closed the jar immediately. Then they left it there and quickly ran away.

The next morning, the farmer went to the field again. After cultivating the land, he saw that the jar was still there. He opened it and saw that the gold was still inside. He closed it and left it there. Then he went back to tell his wife, 'I just want to tell you, the jar is still there. It wasn't stolen. Old woman, you just worry too much!'

The wife was very agitated and said, 'Why did I marry such a stupid husband, not bringing the gold back? Why do you just keep looking at it over there all the time?'

The farmer said, 'No hurry! If it is ours, I tell you, it will 'crawl' to our door!' He continued to say that.

It happened that the burglars were outside, wanting to hear what was the matter with them. Therefore, they were also much agitated after hearing that, 'He thinks the snakes are gold! Okay, we'll just let it 'crawl' to your door!'

Both of them then ran to the field. Seeing that the jar was still there, they opened it and that it was full of crawling snakes. They said, 'All right, we'll let it 'crawl' to his door!' Then they laboriously took the jar to the farmer's door and left it there. Before they put it down, they looked very clearly into it again to see if it was really gold or snakes. Then they very happily hid themselves and waited for the drama the next morning.

On seeing the jar in the morning, the farmer said, 'Hey! Old mama you see! I told you that it would 'crawl' to our door!' When the jar was opened, both of them could see that it was full of gold. They then took it and became rich.

The two burglars could not believe it and continued to watch. At last, they could not bear it and asked them, 'How did you turn the snakes into gold?' At that time, it was really gold, not snakes. Before, when the two burglars saw it, it was snakes.

Then the burglars spoke frankly to both of them, 'It's really surprising. Why did we see snakes and when you saw it, it was all gold?'

The farmer then said, 'Ayah! Because it belongs to me that's why it changed like that. It 'crawled' to my door! I really didn't want it.'

Then the farmer felt sorry for them and gave them one or two pieces. At that time, what they were holding was real gold. If they had opened it themselves, it would have been all snakes.

Why do I tell this story? The meaning is that it's good enough for us to be natural in our work sometimes. There is no need to push too hard. Therefore, some people who try very hard still can not earn much money. On the other hand, some people basically didn't bother about money and the money just keeps coming in, and can not be used up. It's all because people have fate.

To us practitioners, we have God. Meaning that our highest wisdom, God will take care of everything for us. If we believe in Hirm, our life will be more comfortable. No matter under what sort of circumstances, we can live very freely and won't worry too much.

Just like Jesus Christ knew that He would soon be crucified. Though He could have run away, He still accepted it! He understood clearly and told His disciples beforehand, 'After a while, you will not see me!' Yet He still accepted the arrangement, although this was not a happy thing. Because we have faith, practice, the unhappy circumstances will be less. Because our hearts are consoled, we have insurance, have a sense of security, have a kind of courage, therefore we can face problems more bravely. It's not that we escape the unavoidable problems of this world.

We can never avoid the things of this world. Even if your driving technique is the best, sometimes you still might have a car accident. It's not that your driving is no good, it's because someone else's driving is no good. It's not that you are drunk, it's others who are drunk. Sometimes your car is no good. For example, the tire is perforated, you ran over a stone, some animal bumped you, or someone suddenly ran in front of your car, so that you could not brake the car in time, et cetera. All these could happen. Therefore, it's really hard to be a human. If there is no faith, no practice, ayah, I don't really know how you can get through the days in your life!

Why do all of you like to practice with me? Because you get some benefits! Just like when you get ill and need an operation. Although it's painful, you still have to go. Without that little while of pain, it would be even worse later. Then, after the operation, you still need to recover and take care of yourself. It's not that after the operation all is well. Similarly, we also need to train ourselves through work. After accumulating many experiences then we can get what we want. Therefore in practice, you cannot always ask me to give the sweet and bright side to you only. This is also no fun!

Even in such a comfortable and full of fun place like the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve still felt bored, so bored that they had to listen to the snake and ate the senseless apple! The taste must have been no good, there was nothing good to taste! With so much fruit, what did they lack that they had to eat that one? Everything was theirs. Only the fruit of

that tree could not be eaten. But still they could not bear it! Because it was so boring, even when they had so many things, they still wanted something else, just wanted to change the scene.

Therefore when we practice, sometimes it is very difficult. I know this. Sometimes the faith decreases, because the things we asked for we are not able to get, thinking that God is not taking care of us, that the Master power doesn't care, et cetera. Not really! Because sometimes what we requested is not good for us.

Just like the apple that God asked not to be eaten. It was not because He wanted to reserve the apple for Himself. It was because it was not good for them! After eating that, then really the mind changed and became different. Both of them became impure and complicated. They started to know what was shame, and started to say what was good, what was bad, and made a mess. It was unlike when they were like children, so pure and so happy.

Similarly, our brain wants many things and it does not mean that everything is good for us. Therefore, sometimes when we ask for some lousy things and we can not get them, then we blame and say, 'God is not taking care! Master is not listening to my prayer.' It's not like that! Even I have to work according to rules. I cannot avoid things like operations. Like a doctor, if he needs an operation then he has to be operated on by others. You cannot say that because he is the best person to operate, then when he gets ill he should not allow the other person to operate. He cannot operate on himself!

Just like Master Vimalakirti, sometimes he got ill. Then people asked him, 'Why are you sick?' He said, 'Sentient beings are sick, therefore I am sick.' He could not be without sickness! Sometimes he had to get ill to let others know that he is the same. Otherwise, everyone would think that being a Master means you can avoid all kind suffering from birth, getting old, being sick and death. It's too good! Then everyone would want to become a Master because of this and not have the courage to be a human, thinking that one can avoid one's responsibilities or avoid human suffering.

Therefore, most of the so-called Masters suffer. They have to show some of their sickness and suffering so as to console the sentient beings. Everyone is the same! Then when we are sick, we would remember that even our Master got sick, so what about us? If a Master is too happy every day, people would wonder, 'Is She made from iron or copper? Because She is different from us, that's why She can practice. I am different from You, how could I possibly practice!' It's the same! The bodily structures are the same.

The real Master is very ordinary, just the same as you, and has everything. It's only that She can use what She has in a relatively good way. The average person has the same, but uses it in relatively not so good ways. For example, we have human emotions. A Master who has reached the Tao has also human emotions. But She uses the emotions to help others, to be compassionate to others, to let others know that She can understand them since She also has it Herself. She can accompany others and simply chat with them. After chatting, the feelings are deeper and it would be easier to liberate them. We ordinary people use this human emotion to bind others and ourselves.

Therefore, though it is the same thing, the use is different. Like money, two people have the same amount of money. One uses it to scare others, to force others' wives, pretty ladies, to bribe people and to do other senseless things. On the contrary, the other person uses that money to help the poor and do something good. The value of money is the same, but the use is not.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN ¹⁰²

Adam and Eve

A long time ago, when God created the universe, He created our world. He created day and night, the stars and moon, as well as the sky, the oceans and the land. He created birds that flew in the sky, fish that swam in the oceans and animals that roamed the land. God was pleased at the sight of His creation. As the universe was meant for human beings, He started creating man and woman. God made Adam and Eve and had them rule the world, which included the plants, birds, animals and fish. He gave them a beautiful place to dwell, where there were cool streams, shady trees and a variety of fruit. That was the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were delighted with all they had, except for one thing that God had forbidden – the eating of the fruit from a special tree. If they ate it, they would die. Adam and Eve obeyed God and lived as His friends.

However, there was someone else who had his mind set on ruining God's world. One day, as Eve passed by this special tree, she heard a sweet serpent voice calling her. The Westerners give the snake a bad name, saying that it always looks for a chance to seduce human beings. They have embodied Satan in a snake. Anyway, the tree was named 'the tree of good and evil knowledge.' The voice told her, 'Look at the wonderful fruit! Your mouth must be watering. Taste it, and you will become very smart, as smart as God has ever been.' Upon hearing the serpent's gentle voice, Eve forgot about God's warning, because she wanted to become as smart as God and do whatever she wanted. She reached for the fruit and ate it. Then she saved some for Adam.

That was where things began to go wrong. God knew what Adam and Eve had done, because no one could ever hide anything from Him.

From then on, they were no longer God's friends. He asked them to leave the Garden of Eden. They had once lived such happy lives in the garden, where they had walked and talked with the Lord. Now the angels stood on guard at the gate of the garden with swords in their hands, never to allow the return of Adam and Eve. They had to work very hard till they were exhausted. Now they experienced pain. What was worse, God gave them a most horrible message, that they would age little by little, and eventually die.

After they left Eden, Eve gave birth to Cain and Abel. Cain grew up to be a farmer, cultivating the land and growing grain on it. Abel was a shepherd, taking care of his father's sheep. At harvest time, Cain offered part of his crop to God in gratitude, while Abel offered a flock of sheep. We know both are very good gifts, but we can't give them in exchange for God's love, because He knows what we really are. Abel was a righteous man, so God was very much pleased with his gift. Cain was jealous and angry. He hated his younger brother Abel, and God did not like his gift as much. One day, in the field, Cain rose up against Abel and slew him, believing no one witnessed it. But God did, He punished Cain by driving him and his family away forever. A world once so attractive was thus brought to ruin.

Do you understand the story? It's not that eating one piece of fruit brought about all this misfortune, but that we know what's right and wrong and have the right to make choices. We shouldn't do what we know we shouldn't. If we do know but still do it deliberately, we will make a mess of our life, turning it into something complicated and painful. The fruit was just a symbol of what we shouldn't do. Following God's instructions means acting in a

102. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, May 27, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

reasonable way, and not harming other people for our entire life. Even if you have not taken up spiritual practice, you may well have done yourself and the world a big favor by staying on a vegetarian diet and keeping the precepts. It's the same with my students. We choose to do what we should and avoid what we shouldn't.

God's wishes are not extraordinary

God had taken such good care of them, gave them every kind of food or pleasure. There was nothing else they needed, which implied God's love knew no boundary. Where else could anyone have lived such a carefree and pleasurable life without having to work? All they had to do was have fun. Did God ever ask anything extraordinary of them? Never. All He said was, 'You may eat anything, but that tree is mine. Leave it for me. You shall not eat from it.' But they didn't even spare that one. Not that they were starving. Was there anything they needed that they didn't have? God had only one requirement for them, but they weren't able to do it. He created so many things for their pleasure, but they still made mistakes. Today we are in a worst situation, tantalized and forced to drift in the ocean of suffering. Our world is full of distresses like birth, aging, illness and death. But at that time they knew no illness, aging or death. They didn't even have to fight for their bread. All they were asked was just one tiny favor, which they actually fell short of fulfilling. What came from God's mouth, they disobeyed, not to mention what it would have been like had it been from my mouth. What would it have amounted to? They knew very well that God had created everything for their enjoyment. They knew He was their master and that He offered them whatever they wanted except the fruit of one special tree, yet they decided that they must eat it, of all things.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing special about the tree. It was just like any other tree. But God wanted to see if they could keep themselves from eating the fruit for His sake, but they failed even such a simple request. They turned a deaf ear to God, yet they listened to the serpent! It was a serpent, of all beings! The words of a serpent were more important than those of God? Now you see, if anyone should fall into the circle of transmigration, there is absolutely no one else to blame. If this story is true, we can't put the blame on God anymore. He was so nice and hospitable to human beings. He asked for nothing, only the keeping of a tree for Himself. But they had to get the fruit of this very last tree. They had faith in everything but God. They even believed in a serpent and ate what they shouldn't have. Not until they swallowed it did they realize what sufferings they had created for themselves, and what was good or bad. By then, God had also known that they hadn't had enough faith, and that they didn't deserve to be His friends.

There are many things in this world, each a different price. For example, if we buy a diamond, we have to pay a huge amount of money, but we don't have to pay that much for gold. We pay even less for a piece of silver. A piece of iron costs us a few hundred dollars, but gold of the same size may cost ten times more. Similarly, if they wanted to be God's friends and enjoy whatever there is in Eden, they had to follow the rules. If they couldn't even spare a tree, how could they live there? People have to respect each other if they are to stay together. I may have a request for you and you may have one for me too, and we just have to cooperate. That's the moral of this story, not that God really wanted something from Adam and Eve. God thought that if He gave them everything but no rules, it would be monotonous and boring. Therefore, He granted them everything but this tree, just for variety. Alas, they didn't understand this, and wound up listening to a serpent rather than to God, their benefactor. That's disgusting! So they went 'kaput' after they followed the serpent. If you think more highly of a serpent than of God, you surely don't deserve to be a friend of His, do you? You have betrayed His trust and spoiled the cooperation between you and Him. You want your own way. You don't respect His opinion, even

though it has not harmed you at all. With so many things in your hand, what else could you possibly want? So, that's the ego, the eagerness to be as great as God.

Beware of the ego

If you weren't as great as God, so what? It's good enough to live in Eden. Every day you have enough to eat and wear. You have whatever you want, but you still want to become God. What for? We human beings always have this troublesome ego. We want to be the king, the highest and the best. That's why we have been cheated into this world of hustle and bustle. We earn a lot of money to be richer than other people; we use a lot of make-up to look prettier than others; we buy expensive clothes to look better, too. Everyone races against each other. The better we are, the harder we race because there always seems to be someone ahead of us no matter how good we are. This biblical story is not just about a piece of fruit; it has a moral. The ancient Teachers, for fear of trouble, didn't dare put things in a straightforward way, so they used various parables to get the ideas across to the people. If you read this book, 'The Bible Stories,' that's all you need. This book has selected quite a few good stories. Good, but simple. Even children can understand them.

Even by reading this story, you can feel how horrible and inconvenient it was for ancient people to pursue spiritual practice. Most of the time, they were envied and in danger of being captured or killed. The spiritual practitioners must have been better, wiser, smarter and more talented than ordinary people in every way, so they were very much envied and in danger. Just reading the bible, you will know how hard it was to practice in the past.

The first story of the bible has given us many good points to ponder and study. It's not just a matter of fruit; it's a matter of discipline, mutual respect, cooperation and ego. Adam and Eve didn't want to follow the instructions. They just wanted to be greater than others, even God. But they were pretty stupid in their attempt. If they really wanted to surpass God, there must have been some other way. They could have asked Hirm, 'Why are You so great? Can You tell us how You did it?' Being so great meant God must have had Hiers own virtues and ways of practicing. Hes couldn't have become what Hes is in one day. So they should have told Hirm their wish. Stealing behind people's back is by no means a good quality. God had treated them so well, but they ended up doing nasty things behind Hiers back. That's human beings!

The greater the goal, the higher the price

I have told you, everything has a price. As you follow me in your spiritual practice, you have to obey strict rules. But you get something in return. You know this very well. Otherwise, why are you still here? Buying gold is different from buying iron. If you want to get something, work for it. Take me for example. I underwent an operation some time ago, but that was not the end of it. I had to work my muscles and nerves for three to four hours a day to help them recover because of the anesthetic and the surgeon had sutured them. If I hadn't exercised them they would have become stiff and gone on strike. I was told that I'd have almost, if not complete recovery after working the muscles three or four hours a day for six months. Similarly, if it is a higher goal that we are after, how can we not work hard every day? This is a rule that we just can't ignore. You may know it very well, but you haven't worked very hard. Still, you have gotten something in return, but not as much as a hard worker. It is more difficult to obtain worldly things. For example, you have to pay hundreds of thousands of NT dollars for an operation, and you feel very terrible afterwards. For the first few hours, you are unconscious. After you come to, you will discover a lot of tubes all over your body. It's a painful mess. On top of that, you may not yet have

recovered completely. The suffering continues, because you have to exercise for several hours a day. Nothing in this world is simple or free of charge.

It seems that God's offer is easier. He's created the whole Garden of Eden solely for the two of them, except for one single tree. However, they took even that. That means man is never satisfied, no matter how much he has been given. So, if anyone should treat you badly or walk out on you, don't always think that you must have done something wrong. Probably it's just another human being with an insatiable heart, demanding one thing after another. Have you ever noticed that our mind is really nasty? It keeps bothering us all day long. Once we have settled for one thing, it says, 'No, I want that one, too.' Thus we are always busy with a lot of things. That's why we have to examine it and keep a spiritual diary. We have to watch closely to see whether it really needs something. If it doesn't, don't comply with it. The more you give, the more it demands and the busier we get, although we may never figure out what makes us so busy. For example, you may have accumulated a lot of stuff in your house, which you don't use even once a year. Sometimes it was used only once after you bought it, and then it was forgotten forever. There are many things like that.

Don't mistake a lack of discipline for freedom

If we make our lives simpler, they won't be complicated anymore. We have to watch our minds carefully, to see what they demand, how they get what they demand, how they bother us, and how they get hold of us. Once we have made a clear analysis, we will have better insight. We have to be strict with ourselves, observing ourselves as if out of our bodies, and ask, 'What do you want this for? What else do you want after you get this? How much time, money and effort do you have to pay for it? What can you do with this?' Probe deep into these questions, or else we might become slaves to our own minds while still believing that we are free enough to do whatever we want. No, that would be undisciplined, not freedom. Freedom means doing something when you need to, and not doing it when it's wrong. On the other hand, doing what our mind tells us to do is just pampering ourselves. We can never improve in this way.

It will only do us good if we are strict with ourselves, not with other people. Nothing is free of charge in this world. We have to work very hard to get what we want. We have to be strict with ourselves, very strict, to acquire the characteristics and level that we pursue. If we just want to pamper ourselves, that would be too easy. We might just as well follow what our mind dictates and believe it's freedom. No one would interfere, no one would care; we ourselves wouldn't care either. But that's wrong. That's slavery, not freedom. The whole world is upside down. It always finds my rules and teachings difficult to accept, even though I'm telling the truth. People think I'm too harsh on them and they can't stand it. They want to do whatever they want because that's easier. But where does this easy way lead us? We are accustomed to walking the easy way, regardless if it's right or wrong. Because it's an easy and comfortable way. We keep walking on and on and never want to turn back. To keep on going is more convenient than to turn our car around, even though we are actually getting farther and farther away from our destination.

It's all right to keep going, but we have to first make sure that it's the right way. Just because it's a big freeway it doesn't mean we always have to take it. If our home is in the other direction, we have to make the necessary turns or even turn our car around, no matter how hard it is. We can't speed on and on just because it's a big freeway, nor should we give up because it's a narrow path. If we give up, we will never get back to where we want to go. Freedom is not going straight ahead all the time – stupidity is. The difference lies in the lack of self-control. Irresponsible people may look just like those who have

freedom, because they do whatever they want and they believe they are free. No, that's being negligent of one's duty, and they are being too easy with themselves.

So now you see. This 'Garden of Eden' story is not just about a piece of fruit. It's a parable which tells us that it's not easy for us to obey others. When people tell us not to do something, we have to do just that. Our mind always messes things up this way, doing what it is warned not to do. That's why Adam and Eve listened to a serpent just because of one piece of fruit. They knew how nice God had been to them, giving them the whole world for their use, but they were not grateful. They believed in the hypocritical serpent and ate what God had told them not to. We shouldn't steal anything from our benefactor no matter how attractive it seems. If we really want it, we have to tell him. They were given the whole world, but they were not satisfied. They were told not to eat the fruit, but they ate it anyhow. The moral is: It's not easy to keep ourselves in line, because we always listen to the bad guys.

Introspect at all times

There are two people inside us: One is the good guy, the other is the bad guy. The serpent is the bad guy in us. We know we shouldn't do something but we still allow it to happen – carelessly, or even intentionally – because we don't have enough wisdom or good judgment. Therefore, we have to examine ourselves every day in order to know what our mind demands. Is it really necessary, or is it just a mountain made out of a molehill? Something to consume our time which could otherwise be spent in thinking about what we really need? Sometimes when we go grocery shopping, we get carried away by the advertisements outside the shops and forget about the important things we have to buy even before we reach the store we have set out for. We hang around and buy this and that. Later we may run out of money, the store may be closed, or we may forget all about it. Anyway, we end up coming home with lots of useless things, and nothing we intended to buy.

Now that you have read this story, you can figure out why some people treat us badly even though we have been very nice to them. Even God can't satisfy human hearts, how can we? That's what human beings are like. So we have to keep ourselves from becoming like that. We have to remember this story and remind ourselves not to become that kind of person. But it's very difficult, because we make mistakes very easily and we like listening to the 'serpents.' There is no one worse than those with a sweet tongue. That's why we Au Lac people are afraid of sweet people. Be careful when someone speaks sweet words to you. Sugar and candy don't do us any good. Sugar spoils all the vitamins we consume – so I was told. So now you see why those who have high sugar intake, or have a lot of sugar in their coffee, look very nervous – because they don't have enough vitamins. Besides, too much sugar causes tooth decay.

Sweet thing doesn't help us. We will put on weight, get high blood pressure or heart disease if we have too many cookies. They are fatal diseases. So, sweet things are no good at all, and neither are sweet words. But the whole world is fond of sweetness. That's the trouble. Had the serpent's words not been so sweet, stupid Eve would probably not have taken the fruit. But as they were sweet, she bought them and ate the fruit; then dragged her husband down as well. Because of this story, people believe women are like serpents, in that they all seduce men. I dare not say it's wrong, but who was the original seducer?

The latter part of Eden

When Adam and Eve fell to earth, they were captivated by worldly pleasures and virtually forgot about repentance. Since then, they have been mesmerized. Intoxication alone is still acceptable, but why are they so ferocious? It is because of what I have just told you. When they wanted to eat a fruit in heaven the fruit would drop into their hands. Such things never happen in this world. You shake the tree with all your might or even use a hook, and the fruit still won't come off. So, they began to rack their minds, trying to conceive of a way to get a lot of fruit in the most civilized and speedy manner. They got some inspiration from the power of the rains and storms. They saw the trees wavering in the wind, so they imitated and blew at the trees. The trees didn't move an inch. Then they began to practice Chi-kung and energy exchanging. At first they could only bully the small trees. As their Chi grew stronger, they affected the bigger trees. Consequently, their faces started to look flushed, and their voices also became very loud and coarse. Previously, they didn't have to speak in heaven. Everyone could communicate by telepathy and understand each other's thoughts.

Here they had to learn from the animals because they wanted to defend themselves. It was still all right when they first came here; but later, the animals smelt them and threatened to eat them. Terrified by the roaring animals, they didn't know what to do. So, because the animals roared, Adam, Eve and their children also began to roar. Observing that they were more fierce, even the tigers ran away – it worked! Their method worked. So, they continued and became more fierce, just like tigers and lions. If we sometimes see people who are very fierce, you know that was how they first learnt it. Originally, they practiced it to protect themselves, but gradually it became a deep-rooted habit. That is how we became like we are today – fierce and raucous Buddhas. If people still remembered what they were like in the very beginning, they would speak in a softer manner. When they don't remember, they roar. So now we know it is only our habits that make us speak softly or loudly.

Then came the whistling sound of the wind, very much like the rumbling sound of tigers and lions. However, Adam still couldn't talk to his wife, because they didn't have to speak in heaven. As soon as other people thought, they understood. Not a word was required. When they fell to earth, their power was gone. It was different when they were deprived of the blessing power. Once they left this power, they got lost in the secular world. Therefore, they needed to speak. Then they felt the shame that estranged them from each other. They dared not hold each other's hands or do anything. It was not the same anymore. So they began to charm each other. In doing so, they had to learn from the animals, because they could no longer communicate inside, and they didn't know how to speak either. They observed the animals and imitated their voices. That was how they learnt their ABCs.

Having no one else to learn from, they could only imitate the chaotic behavior of the animals. When they were up there, they learnt from God, from the immortals, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (enlightened beings), which was much more elegant than the human world. When they first came, there were no other humans, because they were our ancestors. They didn't have an enlightened Master to teach them here, so they had to teach themselves. However, their wisdom had been severed and forgotten! As soon as they left the spiritual center, they got lost and couldn't return. They were intoxicated by passions and sensual pleasures! The secular world is full of worries which made them forget their wisdom, so they had to take care of themselves. Having no teachers, they learnt from the wind, the rain, the fearful thunder, the sun, and the extreme phenomena of hot and cold. They learnt everything from nature. They also learnt from the animals, how to protect themselves. Sometimes they were not really angry, but when the tigers came

roaring, they also roared. They imitated them so well that they started to look like them. They were not really fierce at heart, but sometimes Adam would forget and roared even at his wife. His wife also roared back at him. So the two acted in the same way. Human language was initiated from there, which was a compilation of animal sounds.

We shouldn't blame ourselves really; we should blame God for giving us such a severe punishment. Anyhow, God is impatient in the first place. He has the greatest patience, but He is also the most impatient. He is the most merciful, but also the most apathetic. He has two faces. He is the most yin and the most yang; the most gentle and the most forceful. This is what makes Him so interesting.

It is similar in our world. If there is only sunshine every day, we cannot bear it, and the crops will not grow. We need rain. However, if it rains constantly. It is very inconvenient for us who live in tents. So, both are essential. However, although we are aware of the law of the yin-yang equilibrium, it is still unbearable when the effects come to us. We know there are rainy days and sunny days; there is winter and summer. Nevertheless, we often complain about the hot, sticky and humid weather of summer. When it rains, though we know it is essential for agriculture, we still cannot stand it. Especially when we are having a one-day or seven-day retreat or gathering. Everyone is completely wet, the steel cups are filled with rain water and cannot be used to drink Oolong tea. [Laughter]

The same also applies when we encounter trials in our spiritual cultivation. The Master has told us a hundred and eight times that there ought to be trials, and that we should keep a balanced mind, see good and bad things as the same, and take praise and reprimand equally. However, when we are being scolded, we still pull a long face, feel hurt, and show all our protesting gestures. One here and one there, with many little signs. We show all our hands and feet in protest – against whom we don't know, even when there is no one watching us.

History of the earth

Actually, there weren't any extreme climatic conditions on our earth. There weren't any hot summers and cold winters. There might have been some rain, but not so distressing. Our climate used to be more pleasant. There were sunny days and rainy days, but it rained only when necessary. It was not that cold and humid, and it would dry when the sun came out. Summertime was not that hot. Our climate now is a result of a war that we waged against heaven. We didn't listen to God, and wanted to challenge the angels just after we had learnt a few things. Therefore, they destroyed our weapon system with another powerful weapon, and locked us up in here. That is why we cannot get out of the three realms. The angels set up a protective layer surrounding our earth, just like the magical spell that confined the Monkey King. We are imprisoned by this invisible control. Every moment, the beings in heaven are observing us, and they won't allow any of us to advocate revolutionary ideas as we did before! That is why the machines we have now are lousy ones; we cannot invent really good things.

But we have started doing it again. In the last century, we have built atomic bombs based on our past-life memory. Instead of feeling remorseful, we are creating trouble again. Therefore, the angels are monitoring us continuously, and they keep warning us with a chain of calamities. Besides, our resistance also generates a destructive power that will destroy ourselves. When we are angry, don't we feel heartache, physically irritated? When we are in trouble and cry, don't we feel very exhausted just like when we are exhausted from working? [Audience: Yes.] This is how we are hurting ourselves.

At that time the angels prepared to destroy us. Their attack was so forceful that the earth was struck slightly off its orbit, which resulted in the extreme hot and cold climate of today. After that the angels locked us here. In addition, we ourselves generate this kind of ambiance, so we live and die by ourselves. Although God has confined us here with His magical spell, He still keeps an eye on us, fearing that we might sneak into heaven. Some people tried to liberate themselves through meditation, but they ended up being possessed. Who are the devils? They are the guardian angels. Observing us trying to escape, they think we are trying to revolt and fight again, so they push us down. When we come back, we are like an idiot, separated from our soul, extremely confused, and unable to recognize anyone. People call this 'being possessed.'

They forbid us to go up. So, if we get out ourselves, they regard us as revolutionaries, and take prompt action to keep us from ruining the universe. We are under constant observation, and we cannot go up alone without the guidance of an enlightened Master. However, there are some very sincere people, so the Buddhas often come to teach and encourage us: 'We know where you are hiding. Quickly come out and surrender; you don't have much time. You will be forgiven. This is the final warning!' Some enlightened beings go out and put up posters, distribute leaflets and sample booklets just to edify us. There are people who really repent and want to be liberated from life and death. They really want to get out of this barrier. If we are truly sincere, we can enroll, observe a vegetarian diet for three months, then a Master will come and accept us. This is the initiation. Other people still cannot go out! Here we are just like prisoners. Some prisoners behave better, and they are not that evil in nature. Their offense is light, and they truly repent and behave well; so they can be released when a lawyer comes to help them. This is what happens to the initiated people. If we truly want to get out of jail, the Buddhas will open the gate and take us out. Other people are not allowed; they must first repent, and stop producing atomic bombs. Only a small group of people who really repent and want to get liberation can break through this intangible barrier.

We are not supposed to go out. If we stealthily escape, there will be graver consequences when we are caught. We will be condemned to a small cage where we can neither stand nor sit, and forbidden to talk to anyone. Similarly, those who attempt to seek liberation by themselves will face an even more tragic end. They will become more strange than before. Originally, they could still understand something. After they meditate by themselves, they do all sorts of hand and feet mudras and talk nonsense. Their minds become confused and run amuck. Like the prisoners, if we escape and get caught by the police, we will be treated more harshly than ordinary inmates. We will be chained, locked up in a small place. There is no light – very dark. Severe criminals are jailed there, and they are not allowed to talk with anyone. The situation is worse than before we escaped. The initiated people are those who are sincere about getting out. If you are not really sincere, and you have cheated the Buddhas, later you will be thrown in and locked up again. The enlightened beings have nothing to lose; it is we who have to bear the consequences.

The two-and-a-half hours of meditation each day is to remind us, and to let God know that we are very sincere, that we are determined to go out. God tests us to see if we always remember or not. We have only said once: 'I want to go out!' One statement is nothing. Besides, there is no proof. It is not enough! Therefore, we must repeat it every day. Because we were so bad before, God wants to make sure that we are truly sincere this time. For two and a half hours each day, we have to recite: 'I want to go out. I want to go out. I really want to go out. I am determined to go out!' It is the same when we want to marry someone. It is not enough just saying: 'Doctor So-and-So, I want to marry you!' We have to show it by our actions, present gifts, and chant every day: 'I really want to marry you. I definitely want to marry you.' Furthermore, we have to prepare for the wedding

ceremony to show our sincerity. We must work towards that, step by step. Similarly, we have to meditate for two and a half hours each day and keep chanting until we are 'married' to God.

THE ENLIGHTENED FAIRIES ¹⁰³

There is a story in India. It seems that we, Chinese, have a similar story. One day, the king of hell organized a very big party. He invited the ghosts, gods and fairies to come to eat together. The king of hell was very naughty. This was his character. He purposely put large delicacies in the middle, the chairs were very far from the table, and put very long ladles in the dishes. All the rare delicious food from the mountains and the sea – heavenly peaches, grape wine and everything you could think of – were there. They were the most delectable and the best, making everyone's mouth water.

However, the king of hell had one condition: During eating, one could not bend one's forearm. Normally, one should bend one's forearm in eating. The ladle was that long, the table was so far away, the forearm could not be bent, and yet they were told that they could eat everything. Those ghosts, astral beings complained, quarreled, scolded the king of hell and then they were all gone! Only the fairies stayed behind to think about a method. In a second, they understood! They began to spoon-feed one another. Thus, there was no violation of the rule, no need to bend the forearm, and yet they were able to eat. There was a difference between the enlightened fairies and the ghosts.

For us, some ordinary people, if we cannot eat, then we will make destruction so that others also cannot eat. As a result, both cannot eat. This is the quality of maya. Although we have the human body, some of us are maya. If our actions are like maya's, then we are maya. Without a spirit of sacrifice, what we cannot have, others also cannot have; only destruction. Just like the ghosts, pressuring each other but not taking care of one another. When we take care of others, God will also take care of us. I can guarantee this. During practice, don't be afraid of losing business. One should learn the spirit of those fairies. The ladles were that long, and to spoon-feed each other must be very easy and lots of fun. They must have played happily. Everyone was laughing. But those ghosts went back with empty stomachs, very angry, and could not eat anything.

An enlightened person lives very comfortably, because we are able to see through things and think clearly. If we are not enlightened, maintaining our mood all the time, thinking that, 'I am the most important person,' then there will be a lot of trouble! Thinking that 'There is no other people in the world, only me alone, we have to bear the sufferings; and happiness can also be enjoyed by me alone.' In this way, this would be a nonsense realm.

A TOPSY TURVY WORLD ¹⁰⁴

There was a great enlightened Master and he had a disciple. The disciple had followed him for only a short time. The enlightened Master had already attained the Truth, and he often travelled around the world to liberate any person with whom he had affinity. The disciple followed him everywhere. This Master was so pure and upright that he was reluctant to even beg. Therefore, he always hid himself and walked on the concealed mountain paths. On the way he just randomly picked some fruits or wild vegetables to eat; he ate whatever was available. In this way, and after a long time, of course the disciple

103. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, March 4, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

104. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, March 2, 1990 (Originally in Chinese).

couldn't stand it anymore! One day, the disciple went into town alone, hoping to find a wealthy household from which to beg for something.

Eventually, he came to a household where many people were rejoicing and having a feast. Everyone could go in and eat the food. Extremely delighted, he went in and filled himself fully. He also took some back for his Master. Since the disciple had brought the food, the Master ate it. While eating, the Master laughed and said, 'It is a foe and creditor coming back to claim a debt. There is nothing to rejoice at!'

The disciple was perplexed by these words and didn't understand what his Master meant. A baby has just been born to that family. They are so delighted and have invited everyone to the feast.

They are so happy, yet Master said that it is their foe and creditor coming to claim a debt. He thought, 'Perhaps Master has eaten too many sour fruits, so his mind is not very normal.' [Master laughs.] He didn't say anything. He still had some faith in the Master, so he didn't leave.

That family had prayed many years for a child. Now that they were given a son, they planned to celebrate continuously for several days. The next day, the disciple again went to beg for food. Since this household was entertaining guests free of charge, it would be a great pity if one did not go to enjoy it! In a delightful mood, he hoped to enjoy the food again. Unexpectedly, before he entered the door, he saw everyone running around in confusion and crying noisily. There was no food at all. Yesterday, the parents of the child were very happy, but today they were lying on the floor blaming God. It happened that the child who had been born yesterday had just died. Having had nothing to eat, he wandered around to see whether there was anything left over. People were preparing for the funeral, so there was nothing to eat. Therefore, he just quickly snatched something and ran away! No one paid any attention to him. He came back and told his Master, 'Master, something has gone wrong! The child who was born yesterday is dead now. There is no good food today, so I just brought you something left over from yesterday.'

The Master then laughed loudly. The disciple asked him, 'What are you laughing at? Their child is dead and they are so sad. Why are you laughing?'

The Master said, 'The world is topsy-turvy! The foe came yesterday. Today the foe has gone!'

The disciple questioned the reasoning of this statement.

His master explained, 'Originally, that child was the neighbor of this family. He lent some money to them before, which they never repaid. Later, when they became rich, they forgot the debt. After their neighbor died, he reincarnated as their child, hoping to consume their entire wealth. Because of the birth of the child, they entertained many guests and spent all the money. The amount that he wanted to reclaim was spent in one day, so he had no reason to stay any longer. He left after the debt had been paid.' [Applause]

Ignorance is the cause of delight, anger, sorrow and happiness

We, humans, experience delight, anger, sorrow and happiness, all because of ignorance. We don't know why we are delighted, why we are angry, why we are sad, and why we are happy. There are many similar stories in China. For instance, take the story of Emperor Zhou and Tanji in 'The Merit Roll of Gods: Tanji originally came back to take revenge, but

eventually Emperor Zhou loved and pampered her so much that he destroyed the kingdom. That was exactly what Tanji wanted, but Emperor Zhou was completely in the dark; he even thought that she was the most lovely person. He never knew that she was actually his creditor and enemy. Therefore, it is very difficult for us to judge who is our relative or friend, and who is our foe. Unless we pursue spiritual practice, we have no way to find out.

COMMUNICATE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT – THE STORY OF BERNADETTE ¹⁰⁵

I read a book today about the story of a French nun named Bernadette and the detailed descriptions of her visions of Mother Mary. The vision she saw did not claim to be Mother Mary; rather, it was a conclusion later reached unanimously by other Christian countries.

Before she first saw the vision, Bernadette suddenly heard the sound of the wind. At the time, the weather was cold and people wore long shawls and stockings to keep warm. Bernadette suffered from a chronic cough that often gave her sleepless nights; she was physically weak and sometimes out of breath. Therefore, her mother forbade her to go to the other side of the river. However, when she saw others cross the river, she too wanted to follow suit. As she took off one of her stockings, she heard the sound of gusty winds but the trees nearby were still. She thought she had not heard right and prepared to take off her other stocking. Again, she heard the wind but did not see the trees move or any other sign of it. There was a sudden movement in front of her and she beheld a Light. From within the Light, a beautiful lady emerged in great radiance. She looked very pretty, as Bernadette so described, 'Her face was so beautiful that after one look at Her, one would die willingly just to see Her a second time!'

Bernadette's family was not well-off. She often had to go hungry when they no longer had any bread. Her family used to live within their means; however, they had treated their customers too well and saw their profits dwindle away as they gave away more than they earned. Nevertheless, the hospitable family continued to serve every customer with cheese, bread and wine. A growing imbalance in their accounts and increased losses drained the family's wealth, leaving them without food at times.

Bernadette was a sick child, her health deteriorating as she grew older because the family could not afford her medicine. She did not attend school. She had to work in order to help her parents make ends meet. However, she had great faith in God and Mother Mary. She had not seen them, but her faith was strong. Very often she felt ashamed of her illiteracy and inability to be like other girls. According to the Christian tradition, when children reach the age of twelve or fifteen, they go to church beautifully dressed for a grand baptism ceremony and become a formal Christian believer before the attendees. Bernadette saw many girls her age going to church for the ceremony, but she could not go because she did not know how to recite the verses. She felt even more ashamed. Some people tried to teach her but she seemed to be too dumb; she could not memorize a word even when she had been taught two or three times. Feeling even more humbled, she thought she was the most dumb and unworthy person. Little did she know that it was for this humility of hers that God chose her to witness Hiers manifestation in the form of Mother Mary, something that was to make her name well-known throughout the world even today.

Some of us have found the Master and a distinct path of spiritual practice, yet we do not have the faith of those whom we consider dumb. Bernadette had never seen a vision, and

105. Group meditation, Kaohsiung Center, Formosa, February 21, 1990 (Originally in English).

no one ever taught her anything; all she had was faith, and God bestowed Hers grace upon her. Therefore, we should examine whether we have enough faith in our spiritual practice. Bernadette had not seen anything, yet she had faith and was eager to see it. Mother Mary had been her most beloved since childhood. She would pray to Her when she was in trouble or hungry, or when her family was in a predicament. She had immense faith even before she perceived any vision. Sometimes even if we have seen a manifestation of God, we do not yearn that much. Therefore, the bible says, 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' This means that God blesses those who have not seen but have great faith.

Sometimes we practice a very good method and follow a good path, but our faith is not strong enough. Subsequently, we make little progress in spiritual practice. On the other hand, some people may have received initiation, learned the method, and do not practice well probably because of their exceedingly heavy karma or lack of time. They do not see much but have faith. These are blessed people as well. We do not have to perceive higher levels or brilliant Light to be blessed. Our progress can be measured by observing our life and faith. We might not have perceived wonderful visions, but if we have a humble heart and pray piously every day, God's grace will shine on us. Take Bernadette, for example, she was not learned, and no one ever told her who God is; she just prayed consistently.

Eighteen times she went to the spot where Mother Mary appeared to her, and eighteen times she saw Mother Mary. On one occasion, two persons went with her, but the vision whom we call Mother Mary told Bernadette that her companions were not allowed into the cave; they could only wait outside. Why were they barred outside? The book did not say. Perhaps their faith was not strong enough, or their aura was impure. Don't think that the saints do not discriminate. Sometimes they might accept certain people and reject others. Why? It is because people are different in their levels of attainment. To receive God's grace, we do not necessarily have to be learned, or to demonstrate our sincerity in certain ways. But we must be perfectly pure at heart. Since childhood, Bernadette had been subject to rigorous tests in the form of hunger, poverty, contempt by others, and lack of knowledge. She suffered constant repression from both people and circumstance. Most likely she no longer felt attachment for the world. Every time she fell ill, she felt the world was ephemeral. Unlike the superficial feelings we have, she realized profoundly that there was nothing to keep her in this ephemeral world. That was why her soul was so clean and pure, and she could remain undistracted and enter samadhi so easily. After a brief prayer, she could just close her eyes and go into samadhi. Though no one taught her to do so, she always prayed with her eyes closed, which is a form of meditation. When we close our eyes, direct our hearts inward, and concentrate our thoughts toward divinity, we call it 'meditation.'

Many people behold visions when they pray. Of course, some are illusions, which are different from visions. Visions like what Bernadette perceived were real because she became very humble, happy and wise. Once ignorant, she changed completely after her encounter with the so-called Mother Mary. She became very fluent in speech and debate, answering people with words of great wisdom despite her former ignorance. Though humble, she carried herself with a dignity that made her a different person altogether. Sometimes, at the end of her communication with Mother Mary, she would stand up and tell everyone, 'You should repent, repent, repent!' She spoke like a priest or nun who had practiced for a long time. Her confident and dignified bearing was uncommon in a young girl of fifteen or sixteen. She had never learned to behave in this way. She saw the vision eighteen times, which was proof enough that it was not an illusion or a state of being possessed.

I am not saying that Bernadette experienced the highest vision; I am citing her story just to let you know why some people experience spiritual visions and samadhi while others do not. An extremely pure person, she had had no possessions since childhood. All she had was the agonizing torment of illness, which gave her little time to think of worldly things. That is why I sometimes say, 'To be ill is to be blessed.' Illness makes us a little more compassionate and sympathetic toward others. It is then that it comes to mind how we have failed to extend kindness to those in suffering.

Many great spiritual practitioners come from a very humble background or a very poor and miserable environment. A small number of people receive some experience through sincere practice of asceticism. However, their attainments do not come from such practice. It is the pain they suffer in the process of their ascetic practice that awakens them to the pains of life, touches their hearts, and increases their compassion and mercy. When we are in pain, we deeply feel the pain of others. Our hearts expand; we communicate with the wisdom and compassion deep down in our hearts. Our attention turns inward so we get close to our original nature and receive some experience. I don't mean that we have to punish ourselves to get it, but when we are in pain, our hearts open up more. However, this depends on the person; not every suffering soul is understanding. When some people are in pain, they find ways to hurt others in order to get something or to make themselves happy. Everyone is different. If we understand this logic, we will find it easier to get close to God when we are in pain. This applies to me as well. Sometimes I dare not eat the good food that you bring, and I really don't want to accept the big, expensive cars you offer. I have no desire for these things; I fear that I might get used to this kind of luxurious life and forget the people's suffering.

While in this world, we should maintain a fair, open heart and a balanced state of mind, free from prejudices and biases. If we, as spiritual practitioners, do not have humility, sincerity and divine faith, it is very difficult to receive an experience or to realize our sacred self. We are still on the outside, just like we are scratching our itching foot with our socks on, which cannot relieve the itch within. Therefore, many differences remain among spiritual practitioners. They may have the same Master and have received the same experience at the initiation, but they will become different after some time. Each of them will go their own way and perceive different experiences, depending on their faith. You might not have experienced higher visions in meditation, have not seen much Light or made much progress with Sound, but as long as you have faith, you will definitely have them, sooner or later. If we are only keen about seeing visions and do not maintain our faith, then it is not very safe. Anything that strengthens our faith is good for us. Therefore, do not talk too much about inner experiences. Most people boast and want the whole world to know when they have a tiny bit of experience. Sooner or later, they become possessed. I have warned you of this long ago.

There is a story about a person who claimed that if he could have a lot of land, he would fear not even the devil. He desired for land because he was a farmer. He was still a little afraid of the devil because he did not have enough land then. Unfortunately, the devil overheard his arrogant statement and quickly terminated him. It was just for that tiny bit of arrogance. Sometimes we take pride in our beautiful clothes, or when we put on perfume, we enjoy it and feel arrogant; the devil can detect all these. There is another Chinese story about a monk (Master Wuda of the Tang dynasty) who had been a great monk for ten lifetimes. Unfortunately, he was arrogant just once, and that was enough to produce an ulcer on his leg. It is by no means easy to maintain a balanced heart in this world, so please be very cautious. Take care!

THE PIRATE SAINTS ¹⁰⁶

This is a Buddhist story. There was an elderly layman named Pong who had many possessions. One day, having met an enlightened Master, he realized that possessions were poisonous. They could be harmful to a human being's nature and breed greed. Therefore, he packed all his belongings onto a large ship with the intent of throwing them into the sea. By the time he was ready to throw them, five hundred pirates appeared to plunder his ship. Pong was certainly not afraid, so he stood and waited for them. When they started to board the ship, Pong told them, 'You want this. Come on, take it all!' The pirates were so surprised. Never had they seen this kind of voyager who, instead of being terrified, asked them to take away everything with pleasure. They asked him, 'Why are you different? Why are you letting us take your possessions without a bit of attachment, sadness or fright?'

Pong replied, 'What should I be attach to? What should I dread? I know they are nothing but poison and was ready to throw them into the sea. If you feel they can be of some benefit to you, I give them to you.'

After listening to him, these five hundred so-called pirates were shocked awakened. They knelt down before him in repentance, and begged to be his disciples. Pong accepted them with open arms. He donated all his wealth to a temple as an offering for these five hundred 'arhats' (saints). Later on, they became monks, practiced spiritually, and attained the sainthood of arhat.

Only half enlightened

We can learn from this story that it is not a bad thing to own a fortune. In the story, seeing Pong was about to throw all his wealth into the sea, we may think, 'Wow! This is a true enlightened being! Marvelous!' However, at the end of the story, seeing him offer his wealth to the monks, and transform the pirates into monks, I think he acted in better way. It could be said that he was not wrong in throwing his wealth into the sea, but only half enlightened. It is because he was still judging what is good and what is bad with an attached frame of mind and a discriminating spirit. At that time his thinking was rather extreme. He thought it was good to renounce everything and it was bad to keep a fortune. This kind of discriminating mind exposed the incomplete enlightenment of his spiritual level.

There is nothing bad to a truly enlightened being. He can make use of everything. Without encountering the five hundred pirates on the sea, he wouldn't have been fully enlightened. It seems as if it was Pong who delivered the five hundred pirates. In my opinion it was the five hundred pirates who delivered him. [Laughter and applause.] Why? Without them, Pong would still be stuck to the discrimination of the good and the bad. He thought he should forsake his wealth in order to be great and non-attached, to be a truly enlightened and righteous being who is free from the worldly desires and possessions. It was after encountering the five hundred pirates that he was awakened and realized that there is no good and no bad in having a fortune. It could even help five hundred people practice spiritually. Isn't that better? Consequently, it is not evil to possess a fortune. It depends on how we use it.

If we have many belongings without knowing how to make use of them, we wouldn't be better than the pirates. For instance, if a rich man of high position takes advantage of his

106. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, August 30, 1989 (Originally in English).

power to harm or oppress others, that is outrageous. There are some who damage others' property because of poverty, no money or being in an oppressed situation. Maybe they are forced by an overwhelming pressure that triggers an outburst of their anger. They are not worse than the former. Thus, we have to discern with insight the different backgrounds and situations. The rich or the powerful are not always the good or the blessed. The poor, the oppressed or the needy are not the bad ones. This is why Shakyamuni Buddha could transform two so-called felons into spiritual practitioners, and why Pong could transform the five hundred pirates into monks.

Everything is useful

If you read 'The Adventures to the West' you will know that the eminent monk Tang was a virtuous and majestic master with three scary-faced disciples. One was long-nosed and large-eared. Another one was hairy, while the other had skulls strung together as his rosary. Ordinary people would be frightened to death at the first glance. However, Tang was not afraid of them. He even took them as disciples. This is why they supported Tang and succeeded in bringing back the holy scriptures. Without these three so-called bad disciples, Tang might not have reached the western land. Everything is useful! Since their appearances were so scary, the devils feared them. Even devils fear other devils. [Master and audience laugh.] Hence, if we realize the law of the universe, the secret of creation, we can make everything become useful.

UTILIZE YOUR INTELLIGENCE WELL ¹⁰⁷

There is a story in India. There was a person who had been practicing very well. One day, he went to hell to visit and saw a ghost being burnt very miserably by the fire of hell. That person asked Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha: 'Why is he in so miserable a situation? Why is he being burnt so severely by fire that he cannot be burnt to death, is burnt again if he did die, like this for hundreds of lifetimes?' Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha said: 'That person was too ferocious. His ferocious heart ought to be burnt away so that the good merciful qualities can be uncovered later.' Seeing that the ghost was so young and was being punished so severely, this practitioner felt lots of clemency for him and said: 'Let me take care of him at home. He will not need anything if he is next to me, because I will give him everything. I think he certainly will not do any bad things, the greedy heart will not come out, and he will not have any desires. Just let me try!' He begged Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha very sincerely to let go of the ghost, to allow him to take him home to take care of him. 'All right,' said Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha, 'I, of course, don't like to do this because you will make trouble for yourself. However, since you are so sincere, I'll give him to you to take home.' The first one to two days after going home were all right, because this master asked the little ghost to help him to do a lot of things. The little ghost was very happy and did not cause any trouble, so long as he had some work to do. However since he was a practitioner and did not own too many possessions and that the ghost was very powerful and had magical power, he could move things very quickly and finished moving all the things in two to three days' time. Having nothing to do, he waited there and asked the master if there was any other work. Without work given to him, he wanted to kill the master; because he was having a lot of power, and when there was nothing to do, he did not know how to handle the power. The little ghost quarrelled with the master and wanted to kill him. The master ran for his life and went to hell to ask Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha for help. Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha said to him: 'I already told you that his ferocious quality had not been eliminated yet. With so little good qualities and yet you still took him home, you, of course, will bring trouble for yourself.' Nevertheless, Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha told him a method

107. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, August 30, 1989 (Originally in Chinese).

that could control the little ghost. He said: 'When you go home, you ask him to build a very tall tower with very long and very high stairs.' After finishing the tower, the little ghost asked for work again! The master could not think of any. Then he chased after the master until the master went to hell. Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha said: 'You go back and tell him to run everyday from the first step of the stairs to the highest step, then run down from the highest stair, and then run up again from the lowest stair. You tell him to run like this everyday, then he will not bother you again!'

Our brain is just the same. No matter what work we give it, it is all right so long as it has work to do. If there is no work, it will think nonsense. However, our brain being so smart, so talented, it would be such a waste if we used it to do small things. We should know our value and don't waste it. Most people do things wrong because they can not find a work that will match their so-called intelligence. Therefore, they feel upset and go out to do illegal things, just to satisfy the proactive abilities inside themselves.

Having talents and yet cannot use them is a very upsetting feeling. We used to say: 'A hero who has found no place for himself.' Therefore, if we have the chance to choose work in the future, we better choose the work that serves society. We think at a leisurely pace and there must be a way out. Don't be too rushed, make the wrong choice, and then do nonsense, wasting our ability and our power.

THE BUDDHA IS IN OUR HEARTS ¹⁰⁸

I once heard a very interesting story from India.

People were looking all over for God or the Buddha. They had heard that God was love or the Buddha was mercy, so they all wanted to look for Him, but no one knew where He was. Finally they heard that He was in a quiet cave by the Ganges and went there to find Him. They asked Him for all kinds of things. 'God, please give me this!' 'God, please give me that!' 'God, I want my child to graduate!' 'God, I want a wife!' 'God, I want a husband!' 'God, I want money!' 'God, I want a social position!'

God was exhausted and said, 'This is too much. I can't take it anymore. I want to hide myself. But where can I find a quiet place?'

God's advisor's called the 'Grand Master!' So Hiers Grand Master said to Him, 'You can go to Mount Everest. There no one will bother You.'

God replied, 'This is an excellent idea.' So He went up there and hid Himself. After a while, a couple of people climbed up the mountain, and then more people followed suit.

God found that the quiet serenity was gone.

Again, He complained, 'Oh! This is too much! I can't take it anymore.'

He sought Hiers Grand Master's advice again about where He could hide, and the Grand Master responded, 'Aha! I know a place where You can hide and no one will find You. No one will even think of that place.'

God asked, 'Where? Where is it? Tell me quickly!' The Grand Master replied, 'It's in people's hearts. If You hide in there, they won't find You.'

108. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, March 11, 1989 (Originally in Chinese).

Then God exclaimed, 'Yes! That's right! What a great Grand Master You are!' So He quickly went into people's hearts and hid in there. Indeed, no one looked for Him there; only the adventurous and the 'foolish,' who dared to get initiation, thought of looking for Him there.

It is true that God is within us. Whatever we seek, we should seek within ourselves. If we look for the most beautiful thing, we should look for it inside. If we look for almighty power, we should look for it inside us. Don't be afraid of the ghosts and demons outside, don't be afraid of the fierce people outside, and don't beg sentient beings outside who have good merit for help. We should beg ourselves. We should hide inside, pray inside, and enjoy ourselves. Everything is inside us. We cannot find anything outside.

I think that this story is very interesting. [Applause] So, if you want to see me, you should look for me inside yourselves. God is within you. That is why it is said, 'The Buddha is in our hearts.' If you think that I am a Buddha, you should look for the inner Master within; He has inconceivable power and can protect you, guide you, and illuminate you. However, you should be patient, because good things are not easy to find.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT ¹⁰⁹

One day, many people came to see Jesus, including His disciples and followers. The followers were those who believed in Him but hadn't practiced with Him, and probably hadn't been initiated into the Quan Yin method by Him. They only followed Him and came to see Him. Then Jesus went up onto a mountain and sat down. It might have been like that, because there were so many people; He had to speak on a mountain to let them see Him.

Jesus first said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' This means that those who are humble and know that they lack wisdom will be blessed and loved by God. Then Jesus said, 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' This is just like what I often tell you: Our sickness is also a reward, because we're blessed in that situation. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Here Jesus meant that those who comply with the will of God will be rewarded. He also said, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' I translated this into Chinese only briefly. Then Jesus said, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' And, 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

We know this already. Among our fellow initiates, those who are the most clumsy, the most humble and the least troublesome have the best inner experiences; and those who make the least noise and never show off in front of me gain the best rewards. During the experience report sessions at meditation retreats, a few people, whom we have never noticed before, may suddenly come out and report their very high-level inner experiences. They are the most pure and humble.

Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, that is, those who pacify the world and reunite enemies, for they shall be called the children of God.' 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' And, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.' 'For my sake' meant for Jesus Christ's sake at that time. That is, if one is humiliated and slandered for his Master's sake and for believing in his Master, one is greatly blessed. When Jesus was in the world, His disciples were slandered,

109. Group meditation, Penghu Center, Formosa, March 6, 1989 (Originally in Chinese).

persecuted, and bothered. Jesus said that those disciples were greatly blessed. He told them to be at ease and not to worry about such tests.

Then Jesus continued, 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.' That is, if you're persecuted and slandered that way, you'll become a Master and attain God-realization. Therefore, all the religions say similar things. Jesus Christ said, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.' That is, giving two pieces all together to that person would make him look better.

When we read the bible or the Brahmajala sutra, we know that we shouldn't treat those who slander us and act badly toward us in the same way that they treat us. We should treat them with double love and kindness. If you only let him slap you on your right cheek without reacting, he may think that you're afraid of him or you don't know how to react. But when you also turn your left cheek to him, he may wake up and wonder, 'Well! Why did this person react this way? It's not that he couldn't react, but that he didn't care about being slapped and has forgiven me.' Only then will he benefit. That's why Jesus told us to turn the other cheek to him also. Otherwise, Jesus would have said, 'When anyone slaps you in the face, don't slap him back.' If we turn the other cheek also to him, he'll think, 'This person is alert and not muddled. He's capable of reacting, only his reaction is the opposite of my action.' Only then he may wake up. Therefore, I think that Jesus Christ was the greatest. What do you think? [Audience: Yes!] [Applause]

Shakyamuni Buddha reacted in the same way when a person who had killed ninety-nine people wanted to kill Him. The Buddha didn't fight with him but lifted him up to the level of arhat. That was the correct reaction. Because we've pursued spiritual practice and sown virtuous seeds in many lifetimes, we'll react the same as what Jesus said, 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' We'll naturally react that way and won't know why. It's because we've become used to reacting that way and we react that way automatically.

For instance, when we're young, we can't ride a bicycle. Then we keep practicing riding and then know how to ride it. In the beginning we feel happy about it. But after we get used to it, we feel that it's not difficult. We can talk while riding a bicycle and don't feel that it's a big deal. Some people can even get onto the top of a bicycle and stand up there while riding. Some can ride a bicycle backwards and feel that it's easy to do that. Similarly, if we do virtuous deeds and feel that it's natural, it means that we've sown spiritual seeds in many lifetimes and that we're blessed and virtuous.

On the other hand, if any one of us or other people do bad and vicious deeds to us or other people, we should pity him, knowing that he hasn't sown virtuous seeds in his previous lifetimes or his virtuous seeds have become rotten or haven't grown. Then we should pray to God to help him to open his heart and make him understand. We can't let him stay that way. To those who are bad to us, we should give them a chance to introspect on themselves. Having no reaction when they slap us in the face isn't good enough. We should do something that's better for them.

Now I understand the reason why I always treat people better when they treat me worse. That's why I was called a 'living saint.' I was lovingly called a 'living saint' by some people even before I started to pursue spiritual practice. They didn't mean that I was actually a 'living saint.' What they meant was that no matter how badly they treated me, I treated them better and better; so they couldn't do anything about me except to say, 'She's a living

saint.’ It was those who treated me badly who later called me a ‘living saint,’ not other people. Other people didn’t know who I was, because they didn’t know me. Only those who knew me called me that.

This speech of Jesus Christ on the mountain is exactly the same as what is stated in the Brahmajala sutra in Buddhism. This speech is very famous and everyone knows it. It is called ‘The Sermon on the Mount.’ Jesus said, ‘Ye (the disciples) are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?’ This means that we spiritual practitioners represent virtue, but if we aren’t diligent and virtuous, who else can help us? Who else can make us become virtuous? Who else can be our role model? We should be our own role models. Jesus was correct.

This is why I emphasize that we pursue spiritual practice not only for ourselves, but also to be role models for others and to let others feel our sincerity and hence follow us. If we say that we’re spiritual practitioners, but we seek pleasures, eat meat, and drink alcohol like ordinary people do, if we harm sentient beings instead of protecting them; if we slander other people, quarrel with others, fight with others and gossip about others, who else can help us? Who else can save those who don’t pursue spiritual practice?

I’ve been telling you this for a long time, so you can’t say that you don’t have to be serious about the precepts when you pursue spiritual practice. If one isn’t virtuous, no matter how high a level he has attained, no one respects him or trusts him, because no matter how high his inner level is, if he looks low outside, people are afraid of him. People are ignorant, so how do they know that his level is high? If he doesn’t look good outside, people will say that he’s bad. We can’t blame them. Therefore, even if some people say that one who eats meat and drinks alcohol can also attain God-realization, we shouldn’t listen to them. We want people to know that we can give up certain foods in order to be diligent in our spiritual practice, in order to be role models, and for the sake of pitiful animals who are mortally afraid of death.

Jesus continued, ‘Ye are the Light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.’ This means that everyone will notice it. If we practice diligently, we’ll emit Light and a kind, virtuous and peaceful atmosphere. Then people will feel it and sense it, so we can’t hide and we don’t have to hide. Even if we don’t say anything, people will notice us. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house. Jesus said, ‘Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Mother / Father who is in heaven.’

This means that when they see how great we are, they’ll know that our Mother / Father is even greater, and that if we want others to adore God, we should first purify ourselves and be good role models to let them know that we truly represent brilliant virtue and noble ideals, or in other words, the noble God. Was Jesus correct? Yes or no? [Audience: Yes!] [Applause] So you see why I praise Jesus Christ? Because what He said was very good! Since you don’t know how good Christianity is, I’m introducing it to you today. Because whatever I say is also correct, I have reasons for praising Jesus Christ and I have reasons for praising the biblical teachings or the Christian teachings.

Some Christians may go to extremes, do bad deeds, show disrespect for other religions, or be more violent; but this is the problem of individual people. It’s maya who uses them to sneak into the group and ruin it. It’s not that Christianity isn’t good. There are also many extreme, disturbed and violent individual sects or individual people in Buddhism, which isn’t a problem of Buddhism as a whole. If there are such people in any religion, including

in Christianity and Sikhism, we can't say that that religion isn't good. If I happen to purchase a Sikh scripture, I will read it to you. There are also good teachings in it.

Jesus also said, 'Whosoever therefore shall break one of these commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you (Jesus was referring to the monastics and followers) that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.' The reason Jesus said that, might be because at that time the so-called priests and monastics were not righteous. They sought pleasures, and took donations from others to build big churches but did not do anything good. They had a lot of money and became arrogant but were respected. They were not righteous but were praised. They didn't have merit but were worshipped. They didn't do any work but accepted offerings from other people every day. That was why Jesus said that their karma was heavy. He said that His disciples should be more righteous and pure to be able to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Just as I told you, the monastic disciples here should be better than the monastic disciples outside. You shouldn't look at the monastic disciples outside and wonder, 'Why can they accept offerings? Why doesn't Master allow us to accept offerings?' You can accept offerings. It's no problem, but then you won't be my disciples anymore. If you stay with me, you shouldn't accept offerings. When you go out alone and have no money, you can accept one or two meals and some money; and I won't say anything about it. But most monastic disciples outside have accepted too many offerings and enjoyed too much without having done anything beneficial for the country and society. Maybe they don't fulfill their duty, have no manners, and aren't virtuous, so we can't blame other people if they think that the monastic people aren't good.

When you follow me as monks, you should take care of your manners. If I'm strict with you, you should know why – otherwise you will have bad habits. Seeing that the monks outside are more relaxed and have many good clothes, but our clothes are simple, self-made and we only have a few of them, and we don't have personal money, you may wonder what kind of monastic life this is. However, our manners and ideals can't be purchased with material things. So you should remember this clearly and not forget that our manners and virtue can't be purchased with money and can't be represented by good clothes. We have inner Light that can be projected to make others feel good and respect us. These are our natural impressive manners and dignified clothing. It's not that we'll be respected if we wear good clothing; it's not necessarily that way!

Jesus Christ continued to explain to His disciples, 'Ye have heard that it was said by them of olden times, 'Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother (our neighbors or people we know) without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment, and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council.' It can be to such an extent! If we're angry with others for no reason, that is, if we abuse others mentally, we'll go to hell or incur karma. How horrible this is! Don't think that we'll go to hell only when we kill, but we should also keep our thoughts, speech and actions clean.

Therefore, Jesus said, 'If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.' Jesus meant that it would be useless when we made offerings to God if we weren't pure and kind. Jesus also told His disciples many other things, 'Agree with thine adversary quickly, whilst thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver

thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.’ This means that we shouldn't engage in lawsuits and shouldn't fight with others; we should reconcile with them quickly.

Jesus continued, ‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of olden times, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.’ Jesus was referring to our thoughts, speech, and actions, which is the same as the Buddhist teachings, isn't it? [Audience: Yes.] What Jesus said previously about not engaging in lawsuits but being at peace with others was the same as what's stated in the Brahmajala sutra in Buddhism or the Buddhist monastic precepts. Therefore, we can't say that Christianity isn't the same as Buddhism. They're the same.

Jesus said, ‘And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.’ It was to such an extent! But don't pluck it out. Please take it easy. [Laughter] That was not what Jesus Christ meant. He was merely emphasizing virtue and the commandments. He said, ‘For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.’ This means that we should be strict with the commandments. If we have bad thoughts, we should repent immediately and not wait until they become actions. You should quickly repent, recite the holy names, and think of me or God, but don't pluck your eye out, or you'll look ugly. [Laughter] I wouldn't.

Jesus said, ‘Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of olden times, ‘Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.’ But I say unto you, swear not at all, neither by heaven, for it's God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is Hiers footstool.’ This means that every place belongs to God. So we mundane people can't swear in the name of the noble and holy spirit. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head. For example, some people swear, ‘If I treat you badly or something, I'll be beheaded or be struck by lightning.’ Well! That's horrible! Jesus said that we can't swear like that; and that if we do, we're looking down upon heaven and earth. We should respect them and shouldn't swear in their names. We shouldn't even swear in the name of our head, because thou cannot not make one hair white or black. We don't have the right to swear in the name of anything. This physical body is also created by God, so we can't use it in any way we want. Jesus said, ‘But let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.’ Jesus explained this very clearly! Well! He was more strict than I am. Oh! Congratulations! [Applause] From today on, I'll learn from Him [Laughter] and become more strict with you.

Jesus continued, ‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee; turn not thou away.’ This means that we should help the needy. But if anyone wants to borrow money for gambling, of course we should turn him away; if he borrows money for alcohol, we should persuade him not to and not give the money to him.

‘Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.’ But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Mother / Father which is in heaven, for Hes maketh Hiers sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ So we should learn the indiscriminating attitude of God. [Applause]

‘For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans do the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans do so?’ This means that we spiritual practitioners should be higher, less discriminatory and better than they are. ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Mother / Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ Jesus Christ said that His Mother / Father is perfect. The Buddhists say that their Buddha is perfect. They all say the same thing.

Jesus said, ‘Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.’ This is the same as what Shakyamuni Buddha said: ‘When one does alms without thinking that one is doing alms, one is truly doing alms.’ It’s truly like that. What I have taught you is exactly the same as what Jesus and Shakyamuni Buddha taught their disciples. [Applause] We do good deeds out of benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, faith, duty and love, not to be praised. So we shouldn’t sound a trumpet and advertise it in the market.

Jesus said that those who sound a trumpet while doing alms have their reward, but those who do alms quietly will have the reward of their Mother / Father which is in heaven. The ‘noisy Bodhisattvas’ who sound a trumpet while doing alms will only have earthly and ephemeral rewards, but we’ll have the eternal reward.

Jesus said, ‘And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. And but thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Mother / Father which is in secret; and thy Mother / Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.’ Jesus explained this very clearly. Only we who practice the Quan Yin method understand where the secret closet is! [Master laughs.] [Applause] This is very beautiful! Jesus also said, ‘But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathens do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. But be ye not therefore like unto them, for your Mother / Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.’ So don’t pray to God repeatedly outside. You don’t need to do that loudly. Don’t pray with loudspeakers or you’ll wake up the whole village. [Laughter]

THE UNIVERSAL LAW OF COMPENSATION ¹¹⁰

I once talked about the ‘law of compensation,’ but I’m not the only one who has discussed it; people spoke about it in ancient China as well. For example, The Book of Liezi (a Taoist philosophical text written during the Warring States Period of ancient China) contains a story about a very rich man who had many servants. The man was mean to his servants, making them toil until they were exhausted, but giving them very little food in return. And when they fell ill, he didn’t give them medicine, nor did he allow the elderly workers to rest. One of these very old servants had to work all day without rest. However, when he slept at night, he often had very good dreams. Perhaps this was similar to the experiences of spiritual practitioners like us. I wonder if he practiced the Quan Yin method. In his dreams he became a king, waited on by many attendants and living a happy, prosperous life.

However, when he woke up in the morning, he would resume his role as a servant. This went on day after day. Therefore, every day he longed for the night to set in. After he finished his work, he would quickly go to bed to enjoy his dreams. [Master and audience

110. Six-day retreat, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, February 13-18, 1989 (Originally in Chinese).

laugh.] His world was happier at night. So every day, he waited for the sun to set to enjoy himself.

However, the situation was just the opposite for the rich man. He also had dreams every night, but they were nightmares. In his dreams, he became a slave and servant who was punished by others. He had to work all day until he was fatigued, but he hardly had enough food to eat or clothes to wear. He suffered from hunger, the cold, exhaustion, ailments, hard labor and all kinds of distress. Every night, the two of them dreamt, but one enjoyed sweet dreams while the other was tortured by nightmares.

It was exhausting to have nightmares every night, and one day, the rich man couldn't bear it any more; so he went to a dream analyst and told him about his agonizing situation. The dream reader said, 'It's because you've been abusing your workers too much during the day that you have to bear your karma by going through this painful dimension at night. The law of the universe is fair. No one has to suffer too much, and no one should enjoy himself exceedingly.' Illuminated by these words, the wealthy man immediately went home and began treating his servants better, gave them enough provisions, and took loving care of them. So, his illness healed gradually, and he stopped having so many bad dreams.

Such examples of karma-bearing really exist; they're not fiction. When someone scolds us, our karmic hindrance transfers to him. So don't fear being scolded by people; just worry that no one scolds you, that no one is so compassionate as to scold you. Even when people treat us badly, we should still be grateful to them. This world is truly topsy-turvy! Occasionally, we also have to train ourselves by allowing ourselves to suffer a little instead of being too comfortable. When we're too comfortable, we become uncomfortable in other respects, for instance in spiritual respects. Very few people can feel good in both the material and spiritual domains; because if we're too comfortable in every aspect, it's difficult to develop our compassion and wisdom, and our blessed rewards are also reduced.

A LONG PURSUIT! ¹¹¹

Once upon a time in China, there was a man who had set his mind on becoming a government official. When he was young, he diligently studied literature because the emperor at the time held scholars in high esteem. However, by the time the man had become learned, another emperor had ascended the throne before he could become an official. The new emperor happened to place greater emphasis on the military, [Laughter] so the man immediately switched from studying literature to learning about military skills. But by the time he had mastered these skills, a third emperor had ascended the throne. This emperor valued neither scholars nor great warriors; [Laughter] instead, he preferred those who could entertain him, or possibly play chess with him. He especially liked to play with chess champions. By this time, the man had become advanced in years and could not learn to play chess quickly, because it required intelligence and talent to become a champion and thus be qualified to play with the emperor. Thus, the old man cried on his way home, 'I have wasted my whole life!'

Similarly, in this world, we pursue worldly things all the time, which is why we become exhausted. If we do not pursue worldly things, do not seek to fulfill our desires, and do not go after fame and wealth, but do things as time and our background and situation allow, we will be able to live more freely and have more opportunity to pursue spiritual practice.

111. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, November 26, 1988 (Originally in Chinese).

We should be satisfied as long as we make an adequate living. Therefore, we should be smart and not be bound by this world, or overwork for illusory fame.

THE STORY OF THE HORSE APPLES ¹¹²

In ancient times, there was a king who ruled over a very beautiful kingdom. He was an ethical and spiritual person; he even practiced the Quan Yin method! We know very well that taking up spiritual practice doesn't make one become a saint overnight, so His Majesty still had some faults.

One day, he made a mistake. Do you know what mistake he made? That day he was taking care of his beloved horse, and was going for a ride on it. A monk happened to pass by, and he begged for some food from the king. Busily caring for his dear horse, the king became impatient and annoyed. He told the monk to go away, but the monk didn't move. The vexed king said, 'All right, you may have these!' He gave him some apples used to feed horses. This type of apple is very small, and is not meant for human consumption. Of course, they are edible, but they taste so bad that humans rarely eat them. He said, 'All right, go quickly and bother me no more!' The monk took the apples and left.

After having taken care of the horse, the king was a bit remorseful. He thought, 'Rarely does a monk come by and beg from me. He was so pitiful; his clothes were ragged; he had nothing to eat; he was skinny, so old and pathetic looking. I should have taken good care of him and given him some food!' He was remorseful, so he went home and made a mark on the 'selfless service' column of his spiritual diary, because he failed in this respect.

That day in his meditation, he saw the merit accrued by his horse-apples had grown to the size of two big hills. He gave something to a person, but he did it with ego and aversion instead of love. Therefore, his accrued merit turned into horse-apples as numerous as two big hills. Good heavens, the hills were tall! God told him, 'You have to consume these two hills of horse-apples before you can become one with me!'

Good grief! He was frightened to death. 'How could I possibly swallow so many horse-apples?' Shedding tears, he went to seek help from his Master. I wonder whether his Master was named Ching Hai or not. [Laughter] Perhaps it was another name, a different name in ancient times.

He cried, 'Master, I am in grave trouble!' The Master asked him what it was, so he narrated the whole story, and asked the Master to save him.

His Master replied, 'I can't do anything. I have told you what to do and yet you didn't follow. You have to save yourself by consuming the two big hills of horse-apples!'

He cried like a baby and begged his Master to help him. The Master said, 'All right, you may try this. Tomorrow, you go out with your daughters. Bring along a clear glass wine bottle with red liquid inside and pretend that you are drinking wine. Then, start to talk nonsense like a crazy person while fooling around with your two or three daughters. Observing your behavior, people will gossip and talk ill of you. In this way, your karma will be eliminated.'

112. Group meditation, Tainan Center, Formosa, October 20, 1988 (Originally in Chinese).

He followed the instructions and acted accordingly. He pretended to drink wine, and fooled around with his daughters to make people think that they were his girl friends. The whole day he ran around the city like an insane person. Recognizing him by his clothes, people began to gossip, 'Do you see how bad our king has become? He is fooling around with women, and drinking a lot of wine...' The news spread throughout the city, and everyone began criticizing him. When he went home and meditated that day, he saw one of the hills was gone, but there was still a big hill of horse-apples left.

He again went to beg his Master, 'Master, there is a hill of horse-apples. What should I do?'

The Master replied, 'Why, you just eat them.'

The disciple said, 'Master, I am not a horse. How can I finish them all?'

One of the hills disappeared so fast because all the inhabitants in the city ate them; it is impossible for him alone to consume the other hill.

The Master thought for a while and then told him, 'All right, I'll see how I can help you.' Later, She told the king to repeat the same actions in another place, and let the people there criticize him. Unfortunately, the population was smaller in that place. In his meditation that day, he saw the hill of horse-apples had reduced by half, but there was still half a hill left behind! Again he went to his Master crying. [Master laughs.] Disciples always trouble their Master in this way. They make the mistake, and then ask their Master to solve their problem. This time his Master told him, 'I really have no solution. You must eat them yourself.'

The king kept pleading and crying, 'Master, please have mercy on me... please!' He used all the sweet words that you know too well.

The Master said, 'All right, stop it! You are giving me a headache! On the other side of this hill, there is a spiritual practitioner who is an arhat, a saint. Go to him and provoke him, or make up a story so that he will malign you. Then he will consume the remaining half of the hill.'

A saint can digest fast, so he can consume half a hill alone, which is equal to the digesting power of a whole city. You see, when I or any enlightened Master scolds you, it is to help you eliminate your karma quickly. The karma of some people is too heavy that it cannot be eliminated by other methods – not even through scolding by ordinary people, because they are not powerful enough. Therefore, the Master has to scold you personally.

Unfortunately, you are not grateful to the Master, but speak ill of and hate the Master instead. Isn't this a topsy-turvy world? However, I won't mind. You can always take your horse-apples back, [Master laughs.] no problem. If you cannot tolerate my scolding, the horse-apples will be returned to you immediately.

The king went to the other side of the hill and found the saint. While pretending to give him a massage, and told the story, 'Master, are You aware that our king (he was wearing ordinary clothes to disguise his identity) has been acting contemptibly lately. He goes about seizing women and frightening everyone; the ladies especially all hide from him. He also drinks profusely and talks nonsense. He despises heaven and earth, and has stopped practicing spiritually. He is no longer the ethical person he was, and seems to have become possessed. Now he is an evil man practicing devilish ways...'

Despite his lengthy speech, the saint didn't react at all. The king repeated his words, 'Master! Do You know that our king has become an evil person? He is seizing women everywhere. The women are so afraid that they all are in hiding. Having become a drunkard, he talks nonsense and has become immoral. He is not managing the country and the court, and neglects all his duties. Now he looks like a ghost – a very evil one. What do You think? Don't You think that he is very bad?'

The saint remained silent [Laughter] as though he had not heard anything. Oh! The king thought he was deaf, so he repeated loudly: 'Master! [Master and audience laugh.] Do You know that our king has become very evil...?' Then the saint hit him once and said, 'I am not going to eat your horse-apples! Take them back with you.'

In great shame, the king went back to his Master crying, 'Master! It is useless. He saw through my plot and refused to eat them. What should I do now?'

His Master replied, 'Well, you have to eat them yourself!'

THE INCONCEIVABLE PROTECTIVE POWER ¹¹³

An Indian farmer brought a cow and traveled over a tall mountain because he was going to sell the cow. They had to go through a big forest where there were many lions and tigers hungry to devour humans and cattle. Other farmers in the vicinity advised him not to make the journey. 'It is already very late. Are you not afraid of being swallowed by a lion?' The man said, 'I am not! I have a Master who will protect me. I must go today; I cannot wait until tomorrow morning. I must make the journey now because I have promised my customer who needs this cow. I cannot wait until tomorrow.' The farmers could not stop him, but they were very worried about him.

However, the man himself was not afraid at all. Pulling his cow along, he recited the holy names silently all the way. After a while, he really heard a dreadful roar, precisely like what you sound like when you are mad and roaring at your husband. [Laughter] A lion then appeared, and walked with them side by side. The lion wanted very much to devour the cow, but something was stopping it, so it could only keep on roaring and follow its would-be victim. The man carried on walking and reciting his holy names, with his cow on one side and the lion on the other. The three of them made good company, [Laughter] but each of them had different things on their mind. The farmer was thinking: 'Better get there as soon as possible and sell the cow.' The cow was thinking: 'He made a nice deal again!' The lion was thinking: 'How disheartening! There are two pieces of meat right before my eyes, yet I can not enjoy them.' The three of them thought of different things, though they walked together. The strange thing was that the lion could not eat the man or the cow!

When they were approaching the next village, the farmer was delighted to see the houses of the villagers. He rejoiced at heart: 'Now that I can see people, they will certainly help me.' He felt that he was safe and he could rely on those people to keep the lion at bay. His heart therefore was no longer with his Master. All the while he had been reciting the holy names and praying for his Master to help him. But now that he had forgotten the Master, the lion immediately jumped on him; he was then relying on people and not his Master. This notion made him forget his Master and feel delighted in seeing people. This happens to most of us; when we see people outside, we feel safe thinking we can rely on them. The instant result was that the lion attacked him and almost got him. He promptly recited the holy names again and the lion stopped; it could not attack any more. So the three of them

113. Group meditation, Hsihu Center, Miaoli, Formosa, September 24, 1988 (Originally in Chinese).

carried on walking as if nothing had happened. Finally, after a while, they really reached the boundary of the forest. The lion knew that the other side belonged to the humans. Not daring to take the risk, it excused itself from the other two and headed back to the forest in frustration. 'Forget it! Business is bad today; I'll just go home.' [Laughter]

The holy names are really powerful! When we have faith in our Master, many incredible things will happen. Another story is related to one Master, who is no longer living. He had a disciple; it could have been His son also, according to what I heard, who raised cattle. One day, he was sick and could not go to take care of the cattle, and three thieves came along trying to steal his cattle. Before they could get close to the cattle, they saw five stout men, slightly taller than ordinary men, and they attacked them with the sticks in their hands. The thieves were too slow to escape and were almost beaten to death. They went home and applied some medication. After getting better, they said to each other: 'Well, we are out of luck today. Let's try again tomorrow.' On their second attempt the next day, they ran into the same five men, and again they almost got killed. They were really terrified and fled quickly. On their third attempt, they were still attacked by the five men, and it was very lucky that they managed to escape.

Absolutely terrified, they stealthily went to the house of the cowherd and peeped inside. All they saw was an ordinary sick man, and the five men were not there. They crept inside the house, and next to the man's bed they saw the photo of his Master, who was his father, too. They were really shocked when they saw the photo. 'God! He is the five men who beat us up every day! [Laughter] The five men look exactly like him!' Instead of being five different persons, the five men all looked the same. Very frightened, they went in and asked the sick man: 'How long have You been sick?' He replied, 'It's been three or four days. I have to rest in bed and can not go to attend the cattle.'

The three thieves asked him, 'Then who is this person?' He replied, 'He is my Master.' The men asked again, 'What kind of person is He?' 'He is omnipotent, above life and death, omnipresent, and has billions of manifestation bodies.' [Laughter] Then they were really terrified, and understood why there were five men with the same appearance. They went down on their knees and confessed their sin. 'We are really ignorant! In the last few days, we tried to steal your cattle, but were almost beaten to death by five men manifested by your Master. We don't know what to do now. There seems to be something wrong with our bodies; we feel like we have some incurable disease.' The cowherd told them, 'It is all right! You can never steal anything from me! Just repent sincerely to my Master and go home.' The three men recovered and later received initiation! This is a true story that happened only more than a decade ago!

THE KING WHO BECAME A FARMER ¹¹⁴

In ancient India, a king went to pay his respects to a saint – a genuine and omnipresent saint practicing the Quan Yin method. He had heard from many people that by seeing a living saint, one could receive immense blessings and benefits, and the karma accumulated through many lifetimes could be changed completely. When the king went to the saint, he asked, 'I've heard that my karma can be changed very quickly by seeing a saint. How is this done? What benefits can I derive from seeing You?' The saint answered him briefly, 'As you sow, so shall you reap.' Then he sent the king back to his palace.

The king was very disappointed. He had heard that one could derive great blessings and benefits from seeing a living saint, but all he got was this short reply, 'As you sow, so shall

114. Public lecture, Pingtung Cultural Center, Formosa, January 30, 1989 (Originally in Chinese).

you reap.’ He thought, ‘I already knew this. So what good was there in visiting Him?’ He was frustrated. His country had received a bad reputation and he had hoped to see improvements after his meeting with the saint. He had never dreamt that the saint would only offer him these few words. Feeling bored, he left the palace and went out hunting. He got lost deep in the mountains while pursuing a rabbit. Overcome by exhaustion, he lay down for a rest.

In his sleep he dreamt that he was a poor farmer. There was a famine and the village had run out of food. He had a dozen children, a wife and his parents to feed, but he was so poor that he didn't have any food left. In desperation he went out searching for food. He saw some sour fruit on a tree and attempted to climb the tree to get some. But he was so weak that he fell from the tree before he had plucked any fruit. The fall woke the king from his dream. He found himself lying under that very tree, his clothes covered with dirt. He became even more frustrated. ‘I have gained nothing from my visit to that saint today; and now I have this strange dream. I had better not see Him again!’

The king was alone, having lost his way and been separated from his entourage. He had awoken from his dream feeling hungry. He got on his horse to go and look for food. As he came to a village, a large crowd rushed towards him yelling, ‘So here you are! We've been looking for you all over. Where have you been hiding? Your family is starving to death. You were supposed to go and find food, but you hid yourself. Instead of bringing food for your family; you have stolen these handsome clothes and this horse. Why have you suddenly become so wicked?’

The king was perplexed. ‘What is wrong with all of you? I am the king!’ Of course, no one believed him. ‘How dare you speak such nonsense and call yourself the king?’ The crowd dragged him into the village, reprimanding him all the while, ‘Your parents, your wife and your many children are here starving, and you claim to be the king. You are really talking nonsense!’ Thinking that he was dazed, the villagers beat and admonished him. There was no way the king could convince them.

In the nick of time, his entourage arrived, as did the saint. The king quickly entreated, ‘Oh, saint, what is this all about? These people insist that I am this woman's husband and that these are my children.’ The king was terrified by the sight of what was allegedly his large group of children. The saint explained, ‘As I have said, ‘As you sow, so shall you reap.’” The king still did not understand. He pleaded with the saint to elaborate further. ‘It was your fate that you should be a hungry farmer for sixty years, and be obliged to feed your parents, wife and children,’ said the saint. ‘However, because you came to see me today, I have turned your predestined karma into a dream lasting five to ten minutes. This is what has happened.’ The king nodded, ‘Now I understand.’ The villagers also understood and comforted the farmer's family, ‘He should have been your husband, but his fate was changed; he has become the king even though he looks very much like the farmer.’

A fully enlightened saint is capable of changing the whole universe; there is nothing that She cannot change. You must have read in the scriptures that a fully enlightened saint can reduce the size of the universe until it is small enough to be put in a pore of Her skin. Have you heard this before? Maudgalyayana was only an arhat (a liberated saint), yet he could make two countries so small that they could fit into his alms bowl. A fully enlightened saint can change fate. She can easily put the whole universe in Her heart without anyone knowing where it is. None of the myriad beings in the whole of creation are aware that they are in a pore of the skin of a fully enlightened saint. This goes to show that a fully enlightened saint has inconceivable power.

THE FIRST ZEN PATRIARCH MAHAKASYAPA ¹¹⁵

Mahakasyapa was the first Zen patriarch. Without his organized collection and compilation of the scriptures, we wouldn't have Buddhism today. Soon after Shakyamuni Buddha went into nirvana, Mahakasyapa gathered together the high-level disciples of the Buddha – the great saints – to compile scriptures for their fellow practitioners and the later generations. Mahakasyapa and Ananda have brought us immense benefits. For this we are extremely grateful. So I think that it is appropriate to talk about the Zen patriarchs.

Mahakasyapa and Shakyamuni Buddha began pursuing spiritual practice at about the same time. Mahakasyapa was of Brahman descent. The Indian people were divided into four classes – the Brahmans, the royal families or saints, at the upper end; and slaves or labor workers, who were not learned and had no social status, at the other end. As the most respected in society, the Brahmans formed the dominant and highest class in India at the time. Mahakasyapa was born in the country of Magadha. His father was Yingzhe and his mother was Hsiangzhi. At a young age, he looked dignified and handsome, his body radiating a golden hue which manifested from his spiritual vibration that was invisible to ordinary folks. His golden Light shone far and wide long before he renounced his layman's life. At his parents' request, a highly reliable fortune-teller prophesied, 'This child has great, inconceivable merit. He seems destined for monkhood.' Upon hearing these words, his parents feared that they might lose their son to the monastic order. As you all know, people often say, 'It is great for other people's sons to become monks, but not mine!'

Mahakasyapa's parents decided, 'No way! When he grows up, we must find a beautiful girl and have him marry her immediately. Once he is bound by a female, he won't be able to think about becoming a great man or a monk, or getting liberated.' His parents' plans were set. So when Mahakasyapa reached the age of fifteen or sixteen, they wanted him to get married. But each time, he refused. His parents coerced and threatened him, trying all kinds of tricks and using a teary approach, 'If you don't get married, I will take my life...' Mahakasyapa refused many times but finally gave in to their persistent efforts. 'Well, I respect your opinion, but you must find a girl who is the same color as I am,' Mahakasyapa said to his parents. 'She must radiate Light, have a golden body, and look like me. Only then will I marry, otherwise I will remain single!'

Have you noticed that some couples look very much alike? The name 'Mahakasyapa' means 'absorbing all other Light.' This means that Mahakasyapa radiated such an intensely brilliant color of golden Light that all other lights paled in comparison and seemed as though they had disappeared. So Mahakasyapa means 'great Light.' Once Mahakasyapa's parents learned that he wanted to find a girl of his own likeness, they had a sculpture of him carved in gold, because not only did golden rays of Light shine forth from him, but his physical body was like gold as well. A nationwide search was made for a girl resembling the sculpture. Finally, one such a girl was found, and Mahakasyapa had to honor his promise and marry her. This story explains why Mahakasyapa married the girl.

Now let me tell you about this part. Why was there a girl who had such noble looks? A long, long time ago, before the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there were seven enlightened saints. One of them was called Vipasyin. When Vipasyin went into nirvana, his believers built a temple where his relics were worshipped and a statue of him was molded. Many years later the statue became worn out and the gold plating on its face cracked. A poor woman went to the temple to worship the saint and noticed that the statue needed repairs. She took her only nugget of gold to Mahakasyapa, who was a goldsmith at the time, and

115. Group meditation, Hsintien Center, Formosa, July 5, 1987 (Originally in Chinese).

asked him to melt it for the facial repair. Moved by the poor but sincere woman, Mahakasyapa was very happy to help her. They became good friends. Later, this common objective of restoring the saint's statue united them in matrimony, their nuptial bonds founded on a shared sentiment, mutual understanding and respect rather than sexual desire. They vowed that they would be husband and wife in the lives to come.

Therefore, in their last lifetime, Mahakasyapa had to marry her even though he wanted to join the monastic order. Until the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, they had been reborn ninety-one times, each time with golden bodies and happily sharing their lives together because of their vow, the merit of repairing the saint's statue, and the offering of gold to the saint. At the end of each lifetime, they went to the Brahma (god of creation) heaven, where they enjoyed their time before descending to earth as human beings again. In this last lifetime, they were both born into wealthy families, again because of their merit. And it was their parents, their karmic relationship, and sincere vow that united them in wedlock.

So, sometimes when we see people getting married, we cannot assume that it's not good and based only on sexual desire. They might have made a vow that now ties them together. Therefore, we cannot say that all marriages are no good. After Mahakasyapa married the girl, they lived like intimate friends but slept separately, treating each other like fellow practitioners and not having a sexual relationship. A long time after their marriage, they both sought permission from their parents to become monastics, pleading until their wish was granted, whereupon they joined the monastic order and went to different places to pursue spiritual practice.

After practicing asceticism in the mountains for some time, Mahakasyapa heard a voice in the sky, 'Now a Buddha has descended to the world to teach people. You must go look for Him and follow Him.' Mahakasyapa went to Shakyamuni Buddha's bamboo grove and, with utmost sincerity, requested that the Buddha accept him as a disciple. Shakyamuni Buddha said, 'You are a monk with good merit. Please go shave your hair and beard.' Mahakasyapa was thus initiated into monkhood and followed the Buddha. He progressed very quickly, easily understanding the profound teachings of the Buddha, and becoming His favorite. He practiced diligently and soon attained arhatship.

On one occasion Mahakasyapa returned from far away to see Shakyamuni Buddha. Although he had been born into a wealthy family, he practiced asceticism and cared little about his outer appearance. He came in tattered clothes, looking thin, awful and undignified, most probably because of his ascetic practice and lack of sleep and food. He did not deliberately make himself appear so. At the time of his arrival, many other monastics and disciples were gathered around the Buddha, listening to His lecture. They looked at Mahakasyapa with disdain because of his appearance. These disciples were usually by the Buddha's side, their ample supply of food and clothes ensuring that they looked good and healthy, while the penniless Mahakasyapa practiced asceticism in seclusion in the mountains. Thus, the monks and nuns looked down upon him.

Shakyamuni Buddha noted their reaction and said, 'Mahakasyapa, come here. I'll share my seat with you.' Mahakasyapa dared not comply and sat on the floor instead. 'I have great mercy, samadhi (joy from meditation) and boundless merit to dignify myself,' said Shakyamuni Buddha to His disciples, implying that one should be dignified through merit rather than clothes. Some people look ordinary, but we respect them all the same when we meet them. Here, Shakyamuni Buddha is quoted as saying He had boundless merit to dignify Himself and so did Mahakasyapa. He praised Mahakasyapa for his merits and wisdom, as well as his high spiritual level that put him on a par with fully enlightened saints. Thus the Buddha wanted to offer half of His seat to him, that is to say that

‘Mahakasyapa is the same as I am.’ These words shocked the monastics, who finally understood and immediately became respectful toward Mahakasyapa.

One day, during a lecture on Mount Grdhrakuta, Shakyamuni Buddha held up a lotus flower. The audience did not understand the gesture. Only Mahakasyapa smiled with understanding at this revelation. This is the Chinese ancient saying about ‘Mahakasyapa smiling at the Buddha holding up a flower.’ ‘I have the profound method for the complete opening of the wisdom eye and attainment of nirvana. It is not expressed in words and is transmitted beyond my verbal teachings,’ said Shakyamuni Buddha. ‘Today I pass it on to you, Mahakasyapa. You must carefully protect this method and ensure that it is passed down forever without getting lost. You may pass it to Ananda in the future.’ The Buddha asked Mahakasyapa to go to Him and offered him half His seat. He put His robe – the so-called ‘Sanghati’ (patch-robe) – around Mahakasyapa in a gesture signifying the passing on of the masterhood and that this disciple was no different than the Buddha, sitting on half His seat and wearing the most noble robe. This robe was later passed down to the sixth Zen patriarch Hui Neng.

Here, Shakyamuni Buddha recited a poem, ‘This method is not a method; it is one without form. Yet even a formless method is a method.’ Today I pass on this formless method; but no method is a method. Mahakasyapa’s inheritance of the masterhood from Shakyamuni Buddha earned him the title of the first patriarch later in Buddhism. Shakyamuni Buddha was acclaimed as the Master and the Great Guide, while the first patriarch, His successor, is called the first patriarch.

When Mahakasyapa received news that the Buddha was entering nirvana, he and five hundred other disciples rushed back to Kusinayara to see Him but arrived too late. A sad Mahakasyapa walked around the Buddha’s golden coffin three times. The Buddha, though gone, was moved by the disciple’s action and stretched out His feet for Mahakasyapa to behold. Mahakasyapa was so touched that he prostrated before the Buddha’s feet. This is the story behind the saying ‘prostrating before the Buddha’s feet.’ When Mahakasyapa touched and prostrated before the Buddha’s feet, he felt much consoled. Because he had arrived too late to see his Master, the Buddha, who loved him dearly, let him see His feet for the last time. After the Buddha’s cremation, Mahakasyapa said to the monastics, ‘We shall ask the celestial beings and guards to protect the Buddha’s relics. However, we monastics shall be responsible for compiling the scriptures for future generations. The disciples of the Buddha shall not yet enter into nirvana. Those of you who have magical powers shall gather together to compile the scriptures.’ Seven days after Shakyamuni Buddha went into nirvana, Mahakasyapa assembled five hundred arhats to carry out the compilation work in a big cave on Mount Grdhrakuta.

However, there was one man who could not participate. Do you know who that was? It was Ananda. At that time, Ananda had not yet attained the level of a perfect arhat. He still had ‘leaks’ – dark and gloomy sides. He had not been cleansed and had yet to attain one hundred percent purity. Therefore, Mahakasyapa did not allow this incomplete saint who still had the qualities of a mundane person to join in the work and even reprimanded him, ‘You are not pure! Don’t come here to contaminate the gathering of the saints.’ Well! If an ordinary person had heard these words, how do you think he would have reacted? He would have said, ‘How dare you speak to me like this?’ An ordinary person would have objected and problems would have arisen. He might have waged a battle, argued, fought, broken cups, or hurt his legs. He might even have resisted or begged to go home.

However, Ananda was a saint. Though annoyed, he knew that he was unclean and had not done well in his spiritual practice; he talked a lot each day and did not keep the

precepts strictly; instead, he relied solely on the Buddha's love. He was a relative of the Buddha and thought it was enough to remember everything that the Buddha had ever said. Shakyamuni Buddha had warned Ananda several times and instructed him to practice more diligently. However, he took things easily and did not work hard. Only now that the Buddha had gone did he realize there would not be another one who would spoil him like the Buddha did. There was no one to rely on and there was nothing to do. Ananda had served as the Buddha's attendant and attended to Him every day. So he had excuses, 'I'm very busy!' 'I don't have time to meditate.' 'The Buddha asked for me just as I was about to meditate.' 'I'm sacrificing myself for the Buddha and the people.'

After Ananda was sent away, he remained awake all night, meditating sincerely and entered samadhi. In just one night, he became a true arhat (with 'no leaks'). He immediately went to the cave to see Mahakasyapa, who knew what had happened as soon as he saw Ananda. So he did not reject Ananda but rather praised him in front of the other monastics, 'Our monk Ananda is our primary source of information. He often listened to the Buddha's lectures and remembers everything that the Buddha said not forgetting a single thing, just like a bottle that does not allow a single drop of water to leak out. We shall invite him to compile the scriptures with us to make the work perfect. We shall also ask the nuns to compile the precepts.' The monastics happily agreed. The compilation of the scriptures marked the end of Mahakasyapa's mission of delivering sentient beings. He summoned Ananda and said, 'When the Buddha was about to go into nirvana, He instructed me to pass the method of opening the wisdom eye to you. I will be leaving soon. So now is a good time to pass the method to you. You must carefully protect it. Do not let it become lost.'

That was the story of Mahakasyapa. Without him and Ananda, we wouldn't have known who Shakyamuni Buddha was. To them, we are truly grateful. By studying their stories, we may be inspired to pursue spiritual practice. And as the story goes, Mahakasyapa was not an ordinary man. He was born with a golden colored body which emitted brilliant Light. He also had the noble inclination to become a monk. You may have heard that people saw that I have a golden body. My Master had seen it before I practiced the Quan Yin method and became a nun. In 'The True Meaning of the Amitabha Buddha Chant' – The Key of Immediate Enlightenment, Chinese version Volume III, some people saw my body as a colored glaze emitting very strong Light; some said that my body radiated white Light and others said that it gave forth other kinds of Light. People see different kinds of Light depending on their spiritual levels. But if I were to go grocery shopping with you, you might ask a peddler in the market, 'Do you know that my Master has Light?' He would say, 'You are crazy! What are you talking about? I'm only selling vegetables. Why do you ask me that? I don't know what 'Light' is!'

The story here says that Mahakasyapa had Light, because the writer must have been a high-level disciple who might have seen Mahakasyapa's golden colored body. Why do I say that? Because the book says that Mahakasyapa's golden Light shone far and wide. It would have been invisible to one who did not pursue spiritual practice and had no great wisdom. The writer was a high-level disciple of Mahakasyapa's, so he perceived his Master's appearance and the story he wrote was closer to reality. An ordinary disciple could only have written about how learned his Master was, where he was born, how old he was, what method he taught, whether he had a merciful personality or not, whether he worked hard or not, how many disciples he had, how many hours he slept, and how many meals he ate each day, and so on. I'm sure that this story was written for us by a great practitioner.

Another thing is that Mahakasyapa's parents objected strongly when they learned that he wanted to become a monk. We all know that people of any country or religion hold monastics in great reverence. People like to visit churches and temples to worship Masters or eminent monastics and respectfully make offerings to them. They like monastics, but they make trouble when their own children want to renounce lay life. This is understandable. Parents have been the same throughout the ages. They like monastics, thinking, 'It's fine for someone else's child to become a monastic, but not mine. My child must get married and have a son to carry on the family line; he must get a Ph.D. or become a lawyer to earn big money; he must marry the most beautiful and well-behaved girl and become a father.'

From ancient stories we know that the life of monastics is the most noble. That's why Shakyamuni Buddha gave up the whole world and the kingdom. His son Rahula was only nine years old and was supposed to inherit the throne, but Shakyamuni Buddha also took him along and made him a monk. Shakyamuni Buddha even allowed his own wife to become a nun. This means that being a monastic is better than being a king. If we have an accident tomorrow, we will have to leave everything in the world behind. When we go to hell, the king of hell will not ask us what academic degree we earned. When we go to the western paradise, Amithabha Buddha will not ask us whether we graduated or not. If we are virtuous, we can go there; if we are not virtuous, we cannot, even if we have ten academic degrees. Therefore, it's not that monastics give up good things, but that the worldly people truly give up good things – they give up nirvana, give up great power and freedom, and give up eternity for some small things.

One other thing I have noticed in many scriptures is that when Shakyamuni Buddha said, 'You are now a monastic with good merit, that person's hair would fall out automatically.' But this story is the first one that recounted Shakyamuni Buddha as saying, 'Please go shave your hair and beard.' So this story may be more accurate, because I know very well that Shakyamuni Buddha wouldn't have used magical power. Why would He use magical power to make a person's hair fall out? He did not need to; it was a trivial thing that could be done with a razor. He did not even perform big deeds with magical power, so why would He shave people's hair through magical power? That is only like child's play. I don't believe that Shakyamuni Buddha would have done so. Of course, He could have, but He wouldn't. Why would a Buddha do such things to attract people to Him? If He had done that kind of thing, I think that the entire nation would have become His followers, because it was cheap. So I believe that the translation of this story is closer to how it was, while the translated versions of other stories are exaggerated (or just symbolic).

When we respect a person, we exaggerate about him – we say that he did this when he actually did something else. For example, many people maintain that Master Kuang Chin performed spiritual healing, but I don't believe it. I don't think he did it intentionally. Because of his high spiritual level, people who had an affinity would naturally feel better when they came near him. Also for example, you may have heard that I have healed many people, but it was done invisibly. I did not recite mantras to heal them. No. I did not do anything intentionally, but the power of my spiritual practice has become medicine and comfort; when people who have an affinity with me come close to me, they feel comfortable and are healed immediately.

There is a grandmother in Tainan, whose home is open for group meditation on Sundays. She was once unable to walk and was confined to bed. But when I visited her, she was healed immediately and could sit up and walk. She was very happy and talked all day long. Now she can walk and work as a gatekeeper. I did not do anything intentionally, but a spiritual practitioner has the power to help others. When people come near him, they are

healed immediately. I wouldn't heal you intentionally with magical power to entice you to come for initiation, nor would Shakyamuni Buddha. So, this translated version says, 'Now you are a monk with good merit. Okay, please go shave your hair and beard.' I'm glad that I finally found an objective and wise scripture, which is not superstitious and does not exaggerate. Shakyamuni Buddha detested the use of miraculous powers to attract others. I too do not allow you to use such powers. I'm an ordinary person, yet I know this; so why would Shakyamuni Buddha show off His magical power in public and make a person's hair fall out?

When Shakyamuni Buddha was transmitting the masterhood to Mahakasyapa, He chanted the poem, 'This method is not a method; it is one without form. Yet even a formless method is a method. Today I pass on this formless method; but no method is a method.' I say the same thing when I give initiation: I initiate you with this method, but I do not have a method to teach you, not that I do not teach you the method, but that you will not get a method. To put this into worldly language, I should say that when I initiate you, I give you a method which is formless. All methods come from 'the formless method' and are nothing. The statements, 'Nothing is happening in the world' and 'Fundamentally no Bodhi (wisdom) tree exists,' both mean the same.

Only after I practiced the Quan Yin method and was able to initiate others did I understand that this method is formless. When I was initiated and first practiced the Quan Yin method, I did not realize that right away. However, without a Master to initiate you, you cannot learn this formless method. Who would understand what I say? Only you would. Those who are not initiated cannot understand. The Master who teaches this method understands it the most clearly, because She doesn't teach anyone and has no method to teach. That's why when Shakyamuni Buddha passed this formless method to Mahakasyapa, He said it was not a method, because all methods were formless and no methods were a method.

ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ¹¹⁶

Even a demon could be enlightened by Buddha's teachings

At the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was a woman who lost her little boy to no apparent illness. Devastated by this heavy blow, the mother buried herself in tears. She sought Shakyamuni Buddha, who happened to be delivering lectures in the area, poured out her grief, and begged Him to revive her son with His magical power and great wisdom. 'Yes, I can save him,' the Buddha promised. 'However, you must first find a family that has not lost a single member in the past five or six generations, and bring me a piece of clothing or some other item from their family. I can save your child only when I have that item.'

Following the Buddha's instruction, the mother went from house to house, day after day, but she failed to find any family that had no one die in five or six generations. Totally exhausted and disappointed, she came back to the Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha asked her, 'Is there any family that has not lost a member in five or six generations?' She replied, 'No, there isn't such a family.' Shakyamuni Buddha then told her, 'That is right! Life is ephemeral. No one born can ever escape death. Sooner or later everyone must die and leave this world. You should not feel too upset over this ephemeral body.' When the Buddha pointed out this truth, the mother was immediately enlightened. She then became a devoted disciple to the Buddha and practiced diligently.

116. Group meditation, Penghu Center, Formosa, February 11, 1987 (Originally in Chinese).

There is another story about an ugly and horrible Yaksa (a demon). But even more terrible was her habit of devouring humans, just as tigers love eating humans, and ordinary humans eat cows, pigs, and poultry. This Yaksa had a special appetite for children, and every child she saw became her food. Very soon, she had eaten almost all the children in the village. The parents in the village came to seek help from Shakyamuni Buddha.

Yaksa had a child whom she loved dearly, the way tigers love their young and do not eat their own cubs even when they eat all other animals and humans.

‘Go home and wait until Yaksa leaves her house. Then hide her child from her. I will tell you what to do next,’ said Shakyamuni Buddha to the villagers. When Yaksa left her home, the parents in the village hid her child. When Yaksa returned and could not find her child, she was in deep grief and agony, weeping and rolling on the ground. Finally, she also went to seek help from the Buddha. You see, even the demons respect the Buddha. The ghosts and demons respect all genuine and serious spiritual practitioners.

Shakyamuni Buddha asked Yaksa, ‘Do you love your child dearly?’ She replied, ‘Yes!’ The Buddha asked, ‘Is your child the most precious thing on earth to you?’ She replied, ‘Yes!’ To this, the Buddha said, ‘You love your child dearly, as other parents love their children. Then why have you eaten almost all their children? If you promise to stop eating others’ children, then I will help you find your child.’ Yaksa immediately made the promise. Even demons can be enlightened. Is that not right? After Shakyamuni Buddha explained the truth to her, she was immediately enlightened and dared not eat others’ children any more.

In our eyes children are very small; they cannot speak or walk, and are quite different from adults. However, we know that they are sentient beings all the same and will grow up to be like us. From this story we can further deduce that animals are also sentient beings. In the future, as they practice more, they will also be born as human beings and become Buddhas. Therefore, if we really want to study the way of the Buddha and develop our compassion, we should not eat animals.

From these two stories, we realize that wisdom or enlightenment is not naturally attained. Sometimes it takes an explanation from someone to be able to understand it. Take the mother in the first story for instance. Her son had died, but she did not realize that the children of other people would also die one day. Everyone must die, but she did not understand that. Suppose at that time Shakyamuni Buddha had tried to comfort her with such words of wisdom as: ‘Why are you crying? You ought to know that life is ephemeral. Sooner or later we must go. Where there is cause, there is retribution. If your child has bad karma, of course he will die early because he is short of blessed retribution. Therefore, there is no need to cry so sadly.’ The woman would not have listened to these words. However, in this kind of situation, most of us would only know to offer comfort in this way.

Shakyamuni Buddha did not do it this way. Instead, He sent the mother out alone to find a family in which no one had ever died. Of course, she could not find one. At this time, whatever teachings that Shakyamuni Buddha said to her, she would comprehend immediately, because she had personally experienced it. In the beginning I also talked about spiritual experiences. If we are unable to realize the ‘Truth’ by ourselves, then we will need someone who has attained it and is capable of teaching us how and where to find it. Later, when we have had a personal inner experience, we can realize the Truth by ourselves.

For example, in the Amitabha sutra, we read about Shakyamuni Buddha saying, ‘Amitabha Buddha is the infinite Light; He always radiates His Light to save us. In the Amitabha

Buddha's world, there are such and such realms. There are chirping birds and wondrous music, et cetera. When we hear that music, our mind will become tranquil and concentrated to recite the Buddhas' names, the saints' names and to remember the teachings.' This is what we heard the Buddha say, and we have also heard about people going to the western paradise to enjoy those wonderful realms. However, without personal inner experience, we would not believe or truly understand what the western paradise is like. Therefore, reading the scriptures or listening to discourses on them is merely listening to other people talking about their spiritual experiences and spiritual level, which have nothing to do with us. Whoever aspires for enlightenment and true realization should have the same inner experiences, or at least have a glimpse of the western paradise.

If at that time, Shakyamuni Buddha had immediately summoned Yaksha and ordered her, 'Stop doing such evils and stop eating other people's children. Don't you understand the grave pain in the hearts of the parents? What you are doing is wrong. You should not break people's hearts.' If Shakyamuni Buddha had talked to Yaksha directly like this, she might not have listened, because she did not know and had not experienced the feelings of the brokenhearted parents. Therefore, Shakyamuni Buddha did not reason with her in the first instance. Instead, He told the people to take away her child, so that she, too, would experience the pain of losing her child. After that she understood immediately when the Buddha talked to her. We ordinary humans also have a similar saying: 'We can only realize the feeling of our parents after we ourselves have become parents.'

ENLIGHTENMENT AND IGNORANCE – A TALE OF TWO BROTHERS ¹¹⁷

Once upon a time, there was a rich man and his two sons who were equally rich and intelligent. They were born into the same rich family and grew up in the same wealthy environment. One day, the younger brother had the urge to experience a different life, so he told his father that he would like to venture outside to gain new life experiences.

In the world outside, he encountered many predicaments and lived through great difficulties, but he had also learned a lot of truths. Therefore, he became more intelligent, wiser and more capable. He knew how to handle many different situations and discovered his own potentials. Previously, he was not aware he had these abilities because he was living in a wealthy family and attended to by slaves, laborers and servants in everything. He could get anything he wanted without having to lift a finger. Therefore, he did not know what kind of abilities he had. Only after venturing outside to experience life, did he discover that he possessed so many incredible abilities and talents. He became happier and happier, realizing more and more that he had such great power.

Nevertheless, before realizing this truth, he ran into many hardships. Finally, the gravest situation befell him: He was left seriously ill, penniless, had no one to take care of him, had no home, nothing and was treated badly. At that moment he really missed home. He thought: 'I cannot carry on like this; I must go home. I can live comfortably at home, so why must I go outside and live like a beggar?' At that time he longed to go home and contacted his family. When he finally came home, his father was extremely delighted and welcomed him warmly. He immediately gave his son the best clothes, food and the best gifts. A grand banquet was held to welcome him home.

At that time the elder son asked his father: 'What about me? You have never held a banquet for me or given me anything special! Why? I have been faithful to you all this time and I have never left you! I attended to you every day and stayed close to you, yet you

117. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, December 1, 1986 (Originally in Chinese).

never gave me anything.’ His father then told him: ‘All the things that I have belong to you brothers.’

Now, the circumstances of the two brothers were exactly the same as before. The younger brother didn’t lose anything; he was still as wealthy as before. However, he had gained something that his elder brother had not. Do you have any idea what? He had gained more life experiences, more intelligence, more wisdom, more capabilities and more self-realizations. Thus, he understood himself better than before. Is that right?

On the other hand, the elder brother was like a spoiled son. He enjoyed a comfortable life, but that was all he had; nothing really useful. He had the same wealth as his younger brother had, without the wisdom. Now, his younger brother understood many things, had a better realization and understanding of himself, and became more independent. Yet, the elder brother had none of these.

It is true that a Buddha is originally a Buddha, but we can only realize this after we have gone through the stage of a sentient being. Otherwise, we do not know that we are Buddha. Without going through the stage of a sentient being, even though we are still Buddha, we are useless. Therefore, we have to come to this deluding world to study, to learn how to be a human being, how to overcome difficult and painful situations, and eventually understand what ‘happiness’ is. We have to learn about ‘ephemeral’ situations in order to realize what ‘eternity’ is. We have to learn about the ‘ignorance’ of this world before we can understand what ‘wisdom’ is.

Before you have completed your learning, although you are still a Buddha, you are an ‘ignorant Buddha.’ Slowly you will become an ‘enlightened Buddha,’ a true Buddha, exactly the same as we originally are. We already had everything in the first place; we don’t have to wait until we are enlightened to have it. It is just that we are not aware of what we have.

There is no difference between before enlightenment and after enlightenment. We still have the same power after enlightenment as before, except that we did not know we had such power before. Now you understand. That was why Shakyamuni Buddha said: ‘Vexation is wisdom,’ and ‘Sentient beings are Buddhas.’ He was not lying. Today I am explaining to you what He meant: Why Buddhas are sentient beings, and why Buddhas have to come to this world to become sentient beings and endure great sufferings?

The truth is sufferings are not really sufferings; we are merely learning, just like learning in school. Whether we go to elementary school, secondary school or university, all of them are challenging. However, after we have learned the various subjects, we will become more intelligent. After growing up, we will earn our own place and become independent. Therefore, we must learn. Otherwise, we will not be aware of what abilities we have.

If all sentient beings have the Buddha nature and are originally Buddhas, then why do people say women cannot achieve Buddhahood? This is nonsense! Attaining Buddhahood is attaining Buddhahood; there is no difference. That is why I have told you many times that both heretical paths and orthodox paths are spiritual paths, and good beings and bad beings are Buddhas. There is no good, or bad. But that’s speaking from the point of view of the highest level. Before we reach this level, we must learn and we still need to do good deeds. We cannot say: ‘Since good or bad is the same, there is no need to learn. Since I am already a Buddha, I don’t need to practice.’ We must not embrace such ideas!

It is true we are originally Buddhas, but we still need to practice spiritually because we have not yet truly realized that we are the Buddhas. When I tell you all this, you believe,

because you believe in me. However, you still have not truly known this for yourself, so you must practice spiritually. Otherwise, you will have a lot of suffering. Before knowing ourselves, we feel very hurt when people reproach us however lightly; we hate whoever hates us, because we still have not realized that all sentient beings are Buddhas. We have yet to reach the level where we treat all beings equally and without discrimination. That is why we should pursue spiritual practice until our hearts become still and we see all sentient beings as ourselves. At that time we can say we have truly realized ourselves.

MORALITY, COURAGE AND SELF-RESPECT EARNS RESPECT FROM OTHERS ¹¹⁸

A man joined the army and was immediately assigned to serve a captain. The captain was very severe and required lower ranking soldiers to strictly obey his commands without any reservation. Of course, the inherent duty of a soldier is to absolutely obey command. One day, the captain told the soldier to paint his residence. After painting it, he told the soldier to wash the brush. However, the soldier could not find a cleaning rag to wipe the brush. The captain pointed to a stack of clothes nearby that belonged to other soldiers, and told the new soldier to take one and wash the brush. At that time, the young soldier faced a dilemma; he did not know how to handle the situation. If he obeyed the captain's command, he would have to steal clothing for use as a cleaning rag. Stealing from others, once found out, would be a violation of law. However, disobeying a command from a superior officer would violate the military law.

After struggling with his thoughts, he decided not to steal the clothing. So answering the captain with a firm voice he said: 'I will not do that.' His captain was very surprised that he dared to disobey his command, and immediately asked him: 'Why won't you do it?' The new soldier did not answer, and only looked at his superior with a decisive facial expression that conveyed his determination not to steal. The captain then knew that the soldier had made a firm decision, so he did not say anything more.

To be respected by others, you must have the attitude to earn that respect. If you respect yourself, others will naturally respect you. Since the military law also barred stealing, the new soldier set a firm resolution not to steal under any circumstance.

However, it was not easy for him to make such a decision at that time, because the duty of a soldier is to 'obey.' But his 'morality' caused him to make a reasonable and courageous decision for himself. Our free will gives us choice, and we can do whatever we want. That is why heaven and hell are created by us. No one can force us to do anything. If we follow the words of an unenlightened person and do whatever he wants us to do, we will not get respect from others, because we lack independent thinking and will power.

THE ROPE TO GOD ¹¹⁹

A long time ago, there was a husband who loved his wife very much. They were never apart, but once his wife had to go home to see her parents, and in the middle of the night, he missed her so much that he ran after her, and went to her parents' house. It was so dark and late that the whole house was closed; the gate was closed, and the wall was very high. He couldn't get into the house, and so he went around the house. Then finally, he found a big rope.

118. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, September 24, 1986 (Originally in Chinese).

119. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, September 27, 1985 (Originally in English).

The rope was strung from the wall, hanging down to the ground. So he held onto the rope, and climbed up to the second floor; then he saw his wife. His wife was very surprised, and said, 'How did you get in here?' Her husband said to her, 'I held onto the rope that you put down for me. That's how I could come in to visit you; don't you know? I thought because you knew I was coming, you had hung the rope down for me!'

She said, 'Oh, nonsense! I didn't know you were coming at this time!' So the husband said, 'If you don't believe me, you can come down and have a look!' Then they both went down and had a look at the rope. And they saw that it was not a rope, but a big snake hanging on the wall. However, since it was dark, he hadn't noticed this, and in his blind love, it seemed that it was from his wife, but he had nearly killed himself!

So, his wife said to him, 'Oh, my goodness! How much you love me! But what can I give you? If only you loved God as much as you love me, with the same love, you would have found it. If you loved enlightenment so much, if you loved God so much, you would have found God and become a great saint by now! But from the love you give to me, what can you gain? Nothing!' Then the husband suddenly became 'enlightened' – his eyes were opened. With the same snake, he slid down to the ground again and ran away, never to see his wife again! After that, of course, he became a great saint and attained enlightenment.

So you see, everything else in the world is like that also: You take care of the wife, children, husband, but you don't take care of yourself. However, 'yourself' is the most important thing! What is the good of looking up to the whole family and losing your own self?

We are not to leave our family; we are to look after our family also. But we must look after our selves, find our selves, who we are and what we are meant to do in this world. If you don't know this, after you die you'll have nothing.

A MASTER'S TEST ¹²⁰

Once there was a very famous Master, who had many disciples. And before he died, he didn't know which one to give the successorship to. He already knew one to give the successorship to, to replace him when he died, but he was not so sure. So he made a test. He told all his disciples to go into a big field, and instructed each one to build a house for him. He said whoever built the best house, he would give the successorship to that person, to that disciple. But, everyone built a house and then he came when they were finished, and said, 'No, I don't like them, tear them down and build them again.' He ordered them many times like that, and so his disciples became fewer and fewer. They thought, 'Our Master is crazy. Because he's old now, he doesn't know what he's doing anymore. So, we'd better leave him, and not waste our time.' or 'What kind of Master is that? He doesn't even know what he wants, and he always makes trouble for us. Building houses and tearing them down again and building houses and tearing them down again – what's the use of that?' This is almost the same as the story of Milarepa.

So at last, nearly all of the Master's disciples left him, including one who built a house sixty-nine times. Then there was only one disciple left. He built a house seventy times, the last one. So then of course he gave the successorship to this person.

120. Group meditation, Taipei Center, Formosa, August 3, 1985 (Originally in English and Chinese).

It's not because of his patience that the disciple stayed behind, but because this disciple had inner knowledge; he knew how great his Master was from his own experience and wisdom. If a disciple doesn't reach a certain level, there's no way for him to understand how great his Master is for they are at different levels of consciousness. For example, a child is not able to completely understand what his father knows. Even though his father teaches him, he may not understand at all. Only when he grows older will he understand those things.

The no-sense of war

There was once a yogi who went into a palace, and then he lay down and slept on the king's royal bed. When the king came back, he said, 'Who are you?!' And the yogi said, 'I'm nobody.' 'Then why does Nobody sleep on somebody's bed?' So, the yogi said, 'Well, this is a hotel, so I just sleep wherever I want and as long as I want.' The king said, 'But you know this a palace, not a hotel.' 'Well,' said the yogi, 'That is your opinion, but in my opinion, it is a hotel!' The king said, 'How so?' And the yogi said, 'Before you claimed that this was your bed, whose bed was it? Whose place was this?' The king said, 'Well, it belonged to my father. My father slept there.' The yogi said, 'Okay, then before your father, who was there? Who was in this place?' 'Oh, it was my grandfather.' 'Then before your grandfather, who was there?' 'Well, somebody else.' 'And before that somebody else, who was it?' 'Some other king.' So, the yogi said, 'Well, then this bed doesn't belong to just one person. If it's not a hotel, then what is it?' [Master and audience laugh.]

Now, we all fight for this ephemeral hotel, and it's really a funny thing. We are all comedians but we don't know that we are comedians. Especially some of the people who are fighting for their so-called piece of land, their country or their so-called boundaries, their policies or their so-called ideal of a nation, whatever that is. Whatever it is, it never lasts, especially nowadays. Even most countries that have things like presidential elections, after four or five years, or maximum, eight years – you're nobody again.

So, it is definitely a hotel, the office of the president. And moreover, this life is a hotel. I have told you many times, and it's 'scientifically proven.' For example, this house: Before we came here, other people were here. And then we rented the place and we decorated; we made it a little different. But it's still the same house. And after us, maybe somebody else will come and redecorate it and make a different one, but it's still the same house. So, it's another hotel, just a different kind of hotel.

But because of this ephemeral and transient hotel, we are fighting with each other, we are killing each other, we are shooting each other! This is really out-of intelligence, yes? You will make a fool of yourself if you're doing that, don't you think so? [Audience: Yes.] All the heavens are looking down and seeing what kind of people are populating this planet. Everyone must be shaking their heads; all the angels must feel very weird. And they don't know how to protect us anymore, because everyone is praying to kill the other guy. The angels are just standing there and both are praying to the angels: 'Please let me be the winner of this war, or win over him, or take his country or possess his oil mines or diamond mines. I want them!' One guy prays to the angels. And the other guy also prays to the angels: 'Please protect my oil mines and my diamond mines.' And so the angels, what do they do? They probably go back to heaven and say to God, 'Oh God, we give up! Your children are crazy! How do we protect crazy people?' And God also doesn't know what to do then.

I told you the joke already before: One guy kept praying for world peace, and then for a long time it didn't happen. So he blamed God: 'You know I have been praying to You for so

long for world peace; why has it never happened? What are You doing?' So God said, 'Oh, I'm sorry; I'm also still praying for world peace myself!' [Master and audience laugh.]

Here is another story: There was a man who meditated very, very diligently. Then, he saw an angel appear to him and say, 'I'm the Archangel Michael.' He was kind of drifting between big consciousness and waking, and dreaming and non-waking; you know, all these big Buddhist words. Then he opened his eyes, 'What? Angel?... Who?... Angel?... Okay... Angel?' The angel repeated again, 'I'm the Angel Michael. I've been sent to you to deliver some very important message, because you have a big mission in life, to deliver all sentient beings.' You know sentient beings? Mexican beans? Black beans? [Laughter] So now, the meditator was awakened out of samadhi, 'Huh? What did you say?' The angel repeated again, that he has been sent to him because he is virtuous and he has a mission for God, blah, blah, blah. But the meditator said to the angel, 'Oh, I think you are mistaken. I am not that virtuous. I am not that holy. I think I don't deserve an angel being sent to me. So, go look elsewhere.' As soon as he realized that the angel disappeared.

Now, test your I.Q.. Why? Just W-H-Y? [Laughter] Don't know? Good! That's just what I expected from you. [Master laughs.] Because there wasn't a real angel. Ahhhh! Now, you know everything. It was the devil, His Majesty the devil himself who came and tested him. Luckily the meditator had strong enough will power, humility and self-knowledge and no greed for fame, praises and acknowledgments, doesn't matter from where. We, the meditators, should remember this. As soon as we desire for quick profit, fast enlightenment, complete one hundred percent like a whole pizza on a plate and we hurry, then we might fall into the trap of the devil. As I told you during the time of initiation, the king of maya, the king of illusion or the devil himself, can anytime manifest exactly like the Buddha, a devil, an angel, God or any past, present and future saint in order to mislead the sincere or careless practitioner or the less vigilant, the less careful practitioner. In a Buddhist sutra it mentions also the fifty kinds of traps that the devil often used to waylay the practitioner, to lead him astray... well, no need to know many things about the devil even. Just keep pure, sincere and honest with yourself; then you will never be in any traps, in any trouble, and no one can ever trick you, not even the king of devils himself. Should we desire fame and profit, high position even in the spiritual hierarchy, then we often will fall into the trap of the negative force because that's just what they wait for; wait for us to be caught off guard and then they will brainwash us into believing that we have already become Buddha, that we are great, that we have a mission, that we this and the other. Then we become proud. We become trapped in the field of false pride, of arrogance, and we're finished.

Yes, maybe we could come back again to humility and to continue the practice as before, but it might be very difficult then. We might be led too far, far away and then to come back, takes a long time. We waste a lot of our effort and time. So, as a practitioner we cannot afford to be careless, to be proud of our practice, or to want quick spiritual position in the spiritual world. Many people meditate just a little bit, don't keep the precepts even very well, vegetarian diet is so-so, just have a few misleading visions, and they believe that they've become Masters and Buddha and things like that. You can become what you wish to become. You can boast of your achievement but the fruits, they speak for themselves. Sometimes it ruins our life. We ruined ourselves and then it's very late to be able to get back to where we were before. So, humility is very important in spiritual practice. We must be humble within ourselves, not that we act humble only. Sometimes people don't act very humbly, but inside they're humble. Some people they play humble; but, in fact, inside they're very, very arrogant. Sometimes the outward appearance misleads people. Mostly, we, the Quan Yin practitioners, if we reached a spiritual height high enough, we can sense the other person, what he or she's inside, not the appearance. Or, if we practice further

and further, sometimes a person will come next to us, near to us, not come to our face yet, we did not even see who that person is, and we immediately know who that is. Have you experienced that sometimes? You have. You can sense the person's aura and energy and you know that person. Of course, not a stranger; because when it's a stranger, you don't know who that is. But if you have many friends or family members around you, and whoever comes to the door, before you see him you already know that person is coming; and it will be so. Not that you see or hear him or anything. When you know that person is coming, and immediately he comes or in a few minutes he appears in front of you, then you know that you are right; because all your sense of psychic ability, physical sense and spiritual sense will be sharpened and sharpened very, very much after some time of spiritual practice. Not only Quan Yin method practice but any other kind of practice will sometimes offer this kind of clairvoyance, clair-audience or psychic ability. But this is no big deal. These are just some of the small psychic abilities which are latent within ourselves. There are much greater aspects of wisdom for us to discover if we practice Quan Yin method.



Initiation into the Quan Yin method of meditation

Supreme Master Ching Hai initiates sincere people longing to know the Truth into the Quan Yin method of meditation. The Chinese characters 'Quan Yin' mean contemplation of the Sound vibration. The method includes meditation on both the inner Light and the inner Sound. These inner experiences have been repeatedly described in the spiritual literature of all the world's religions since ancient times.

For example, the Christian bible says, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' This Word is the inner Sound. It has also been called the Logos, Shabd, Tao, Sound stream, Naam, or the celestial music. Master Ching Hai says, 'It vibrates within all life and sustains the whole universe. This inner melody can heal all wounds, fulfill all desires, and quench all worldly thirst. It is all powerful and all love. It is because we are made of this Sound, that contact with it brings peace and contentment to our hearts. After listening to this Sound, our whole being changes, and our entire outlook on life is greatly altered for the better.'

The inner Light, the Light of God, is the same Light referred to in the word 'enlightenment.' Its intensity can range from a subtle glow to the brilliance of many millions of suns. It is through the inner Light and Sound that we come to know God.

The initiation into the Quan Yin method is not an esoteric ritual or a ceremony for entering a new religion. During the initiation, specific instruction in meditation on the inner Light and inner Sound is given, and Master Ching Hai provides the 'spiritual transmission.' This first taste of divine presence is given in silence. Master Ching Hai need not be physically present in order to open this 'door' for us. The transmission is an essential part of the method. The techniques themselves will bring little benefit without the grace of the Master.

Because we may hear the inner Sound and see the inner Light immediately upon initiation, this event is sometimes referred to as 'sudden' or 'immediate enlightenment.'

Master Ching Hai accepts people from all backgrounds and religious affiliations for initiation. We do not have to change our present religion or system of beliefs. We will not be asked to join any organization, or participate in any way that does not suit our current life style.

However, we will be asked to become a vegetarian. A lifetime commitment to the vegetarian diet is a necessary prerequisite for receiving initiation.

The initiation is offered free of charge.

Daily practice of the Quan Yin method of meditation, and the keeping of the five precepts are our only requirements after initiation. The precepts are guidelines that help us to neither harm ourselves nor any other living being. These practices will deepen and strengthen our initial enlightenment experience, and allow us to eventually attain the

highest levels of awakening or Godhood for ourselves. Without daily practice, we will almost certainly forget our enlightenment and return to a normal level of consciousness.

Master Ching Hai's goal is to teach us to be self-sufficient. Therefore, She teaches a method that can be practiced by everyone, by themselves, without props or paraphernalia of any kind. She is not looking for followers, worshippers, or disciples, or to establishing an organization with a dues paying membership. She will not accept money, prostrations, or gifts from us, so we do not need to offer these to Her.

She will accept our sincerity in daily life and meditational practice to progress ourselves to sainthood.

The five precepts

1. Refrain from taking the life of sentient beings. *
2. Refrain from speaking what is not true.
3. Refrain from taking what is not ours.
4. Refrain from sexual misconduct.
5. Refrain from using intoxicants. **

* This precept requires strict adherence to a vegan or lacto-vegetarian diet. No meat, fish, poultry, or eggs (fertilized or non-fertilized).

** This includes avoiding all poisons of any kind, such as alcohol, drugs, tobacco, gambling, pornography, and excessively violent films or literature.



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P.O. Box 9 Hsihu Hsiang, Miaoli Hsien, Formosa (Taiwan 36899)

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The books entitled *The Dogs in My Life*, *The Birds in My Life* and *The Noble Wilds* share the loving feeling between any pet and their Master. The deeply personal relationship between a human and an animal companion is intimate, touching and full of unconditional love. Reading these books helps us to build an interactive intimacy with our own loving pets.

We invite the readers to experience the beautiful and blissful love between a humanitarian and spiritual Teacher and Her noble, loving pets. Supreme Master Ching Hai has millions of adoring fans around the world, but none so close as Her own loving pets.

Book descriptions

The Dogs in My Life

In the newly released *The Dogs in My Life* (Volume 1 & 2), the first publication lovingly written and personally designed by Supreme Master Ching Hai, readers will rediscover the simplicity of the love and rejoice in the sincerity of friendship, as exhibited by the 10 canine friends, with names like Benny, Lucky, Happy, Goody, and Hermit. Learn about the Scholar, Fruity, Princissa, Chip Ahoy, the Shadow Hunter, and others; listen to their engaging tales. They all have diverse life stories and distinctive personalities, yet their devotion for their 'human pet' is unequivocal, and their humor, intelligence and many other noble qualities are truly from the same source.

The Birds in My Life

Following *The Dogs in My Life*, Supreme Master Ching Hai wrote another book entitled, *The Birds in My Life*, for the twenty-three beloved winged members of Her household. In this beautifully illustrated book, each feathered creature is described in a biography lovingly composed by Master, together with pictures from the bird's daily life and captions with 'bird talk.'

Each of these beautiful birds comes from a different background and has an interesting and unique personality. Some of their stories will move us into tears, while others may make us smile. Their cute mannerisms have brought much joy and laughter to Master. Hidden inside these tiny creatures are highly developed and loving souls. Master said that She has often been touched by the expressions and actions of the birds, and even inspired by them. She hopes that all of us will understand other living beings such as birds, and love and respect them as equals.

The Noble Wilds

With a rhythmic, meditative tone, the words of *The Noble Wilds* flow gracefully along the pages, complemented by the luminous photos of God's creations in nature. Turning the pages, one is transported to Amoura, the place where the lady lives and is visited by cherished beings of the wild. The lady is none other than Supreme Master Ching Hai, and *The Noble Wilds* is yet another of Her simple but deeply touching gifts. Written, photographed and compiled personally by Master, this precious gem opens the door to a world of unique beauty. Here, the reader can witness firsthand the noble spirit and dedication of our co-inhabitants whose homes are under the open sky the swan, the goose, the squirrel, the beaver and even a tiny garden snail. Although generally shy of humans, these animals allow themselves to be photographed, and indeed can even be seen eagerly approaching the lady's gentle offering of favorite foods. The love conveyed is unlike any other full of dignity and grace, yet as deep and enduring as the eternal. All books are printed by soy ink for environmental protection. Such ink is not only nontoxic but also very helpful for environment of the mother earth, which is a good example of 'time to act.'

Through these books, we will understand how deeply our animal friends can feel and how intelligent they can be. They are absolutely loyal to partners, friends and human caretakers. They can be very sensitive and tender in expressing their love, and when they lose a loved one, they suffer the same sadness as humans do. That's why Master Ching Hai says, 'If humans could love each other that much, peace and happiness would be ours forever.' These three hundred pages of wonderful pictures and stories will lead us to a world populated by beautiful birds and help us understand their lives, their deep emotions and thoughts.

Read *The Dogs in My Life*, *The Birds in My Life* and *The Noble Wilds*, and fall in love with some of the most special beings on earth. *The Dogs in My Life*, *The Birds in My Life* and *The Noble Wilds* are also available online at: www.amazon.com/dp/9866895084/ ; www.amazon.com/dp/9866895149/ and www.amazon.com/Noble-Wilds-Supreme-Master-Ching/dp/9868415233.

These books are beautiful gifts for yourselves and your loved ones. Have them delivered as soon as possible to our doors and begin experiencing God's love and blessing flowing on every page!

Celestial Art

Celestial Art is a distinguished volume in which the author interprets artistic creation from a spiritual perspective to reflect Truth, virtue, and the beauty of heaven. As readers are invited into the boundless world of Supreme Master Ching Hai's celestial art and uplifted through its resonance with the divine, they will be profoundly touched by the deep emotions of a poet, the subtle touches of a painter, the unique ideas of a designer, and the romantic heart of a musician. Above all, one is blessedly introduced to the wisdom and compassion of a great spiritual Teacher.

Supreme Master Ching Hai personally named this book *Celestial Art*, to bring the beauty of heaven to this world. The works of art collected in this book symbolize a noble way of living in real practice.

As a collection of Supreme Master Ching Hai's creative works of art throughout the years, this book is presented in exquisite color photographs and simple yet profound comments

by the author Herself. She speaks of the natural process behind Her creativity and Her source of inspiration, revealing for readers an appreciation of the true meaning of Her works. She also shares ways to help us develop our own creative talents. Although Supreme Master Ching Hai never received formal training in the arts, She is gifted with refined creative ability. Many of Her works, inspired by spontaneous intuition, are natural, expressive, and tenderly graced with divine love: 'If we can find our Truth, virtue, and beauty again, then the material world will become more meaningful to us and the world will be more beautiful. We can find the Truth in this illusionary world because we can always track down the real thing by following its shadow.' says Supreme Master Ching Hai.

About the author Supreme Master Ching Hai

Supreme Master Ching Hai is a world-renowned spiritual Teacher, artist, and humanitarian, whose loving assistance extends beyond all cultural boundaries. Born in central Au Lac (Vietnam), Supreme Master Ching Hai studied in Europe and worked there for the Red Cross. She soon realized that suffering exists in all corners of the globe, and Her yearning to find a remedy became the foremost goal in Her life. She was happily married at the time to a German physician, and although it was a difficult decision for both of them, Her husband agreed to a separation. She then embarked on a journey in search of spiritual enlightenment. Eventually, in the Himalayas in India, She received from a true Master the divine transmission of the inner Light and Sound, which She later called the Quan Yin method. After a period of diligent practice, She attained the great enlightenment.

Soon after Her return from the Himalayas, at the earnest request of those around Her, Supreme Master Ching Hai shared the Quan Yin method with others, encouraging them to look within to find their own divine greatness. Before long, invitations arrived from the Americas, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa for Supreme Master Ching Hai to give lectures.

Supreme Master Ching Hai's compassionate heart has also been reflected in Her meticulous care for the less fortunate in different circumstances. The funding generated from Her artistic creations has enabled the support of Her mission of comforting God's children in times of need.

More recently, Supreme Master Ching Hai has authored books that have become number one international best-sellers, namely '*The Dogs in My Life*,' '*The Birds in My Life*,' and '*The Noble Wilds*.' These volumes reveal many insights into the deep emotions and thoughts of our treasured animal co-inhabitants, highlighting their gracious spirit and unconditional love.

Wishing to acknowledge others for their actions and influence toward developments of goodness in the world, Supreme Master Ching Hai founded the Shining World Leadership Award in March 2006. Since then, She has also established other prestigious awards, such as Shining World Compassion Award, Shining World Hero and Heroine Awards, Shining World Honesty Award, Shining World Protection Award, Shining World Intelligence Award, and Shining World Invention Award. This honor is bestowed on individuals, nations, and organizations – such as the second President of the Republic of Slovenia, Dr. Janez Drnovšek, Dr. Jane Goodall, and Save the Children – whose exemplary works have significantly contributed to the harmony, beauty, and sustainability of our earth.

Supreme Master Ching Hai is among notable pioneers in our society today who wisely and courageously express concern about climate change. In fact, for more than twenty years, She has talked about preserving the environment. She catapulted the Alternative Living

and SOS global warming campaigns to promote a benevolent lifestyle without animal products. 'Be Veg, Go Green, Save The Planet' is now a well-known motto that originated from Supreme Master Ching Hai.

In our era, Supreme Master Ching Hai is truly a selflessly dedicated individual, tirelessly helping world citizens create a bright future for our beloved planet.



Benefits of a vegan diet and harms of meat consumption

Benefits of a vegan diet	Harms of meat consumption
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower blood pressure. • Lower cholesterol levels. • Reduce Type 2 diabetes. • Prevent stroke conditions. • Reverse atherosclerosis. • Reduce heart disease risk by 50%. • Reduce heart surgery risk by 80%. • Prevent many forms of cancer. • Stronger immune system. • Increase life expectancy up to fifteen years. • Higher IQ. • Conserves up to 70% clean water. • Saves 80% of the cleared Amazonian rainforest from animal grazing. • Free up 3,433 billion hectares of land. • Free up 760 million tons of grain every year (half the world's grain supply). • Consumes 1/3 less fossil fuels of those used for meat production. • Reduces pollution from untreated animal waste. • Maintains cleaner air. • Saves 4.5 tons of emissions per United States household per year. • Stop 80% of global warming. <p>Plus more...</p>	<p><i>Some diseases related to meat consumption production</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swine flu • Blue tongue disease • E.coli • Salmonella • Bird flu • Mad cow disease and pig's disease (PMWS) • Listeriosis • Shellfish poisoning • Pre-eclampsia <p><i>Some of the costs of meat eating</i></p> <p><i>Heart disease</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 17 million lives lost globally each year. • Cost of cardiovascular disease is at least USD1 trillion a year. <p><i>Cancer</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 1 million new colon cancer patients diagnosed each year. • More than 600,000 colon cancer-related mortalities annually. • In the United States alone, colon cancer treatment costs about USD6.5 billion. • Millions of people are newly diagnosed with other meat-related cancers every year. <p><i>Diabetes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 246 million people are affected worldwide. • An estimated USD174 billion spent each year on treatment. <p><i>Obesity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worldwide 1.6 billion adults are overweight with 400 million more who are obese. • Costs USD93 billion each year for medical expenses in the United States alone. • At least 2.6 million people die annually from problems related to being overweight or obese. <p><i>Environmental</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use up to 70% of clean water. • Pollute most of the water bodies. • Deforest the lungs of the earth. • Uses up to 43% of the world's cereal. • Uses up to 85% of the world's soy. • Cause world hunger and wars. • 80% cause of global warming. <p><i>Some of the costs of milk consumption</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast, prostate and testicular cancer from hormones present in milk. • Listeria and Crohn's disease. • Hormones and saturated fat leads to osteoporosis, obesity, diabetes and heart disease. • Linked to higher incidences of multiple sclerosis. • Classified as a major allergen. • Lactose intolerance.



Alternative living

Change our life
Change our heart
Change our diet



No more killing
Be healthy and loving

Examples of nutritious, life saving food:

Foods	Protein concentration (% by weight)
Tofu (from soya).	16%
Gluten (from flour).	70%
Corn.	13%
Rice.	8.6%
Soy beans, kidney beans, chick peas, lentils, et cetera.	10 – 35%
Almonds, walnuts, cashews, hazel nuts, pine nuts, et cetera.	14 – 30%
Pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, et cetera.	18 – 24%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrated multi-vitamin tables / capsules are also a good source of vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants. • Fruits and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals and anti-oxidants and contain high-quality fiber for maintaining good health and a long life. • The recommended daily allowance: 50 grams of protein (average adult). • Calcium from vegetables is more absorbable than from cow's milk. 	

- To diminish the real threat of a worldwide pandemic from bird flu;
- To avoid the danger of mad cow disease (BSE) and pig disease (PMWS), et cetera; and
- To stop the continuing gruesome sacrifice of billions of our sweet domestic animals, marine life and feathered friends daily.

It's wise to change to a vegetarian diet for good:

- It's health;
- It's economy;
- It's ecology;
- It's compassion;
- It's peace; and
- It's noble.

For more information, visit our websites: www.Godsdirectcontact.org / www.SupremeMasterTV.com.



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Africa	Intelsat 10 (68.5°E) KU Band & Intelsat 10 (68.5°E) C Band
Australia & New Zealand	Optus D2 (152°E)
Europe	Eurobird (28.5°E); Hotbird (13°E) & Astra 1 (19.2°E)
Middle East & North Africa	Eurobird 2 (25.5°E) & Hotbird 6 (13°E)
North America	Galaxy 19 (97°W)
South America	Hispasat (30°W) & Intelsat 907 (27.5°W)
United Kingdom and Ireland	Sky Channel 835