

Becoming a Great Vessel of Dharma

By Venerable Jen-Chun

One who accomplishes greatness changes the fate of the world.

The word “greatness” in the Buddha Dharma means something different from ordinary greatness. Ordinary greatness is a relative greatness, being greater than things of the same kind. The term “greatness” in the Buddha Dharma refers to absolute greatness. Many doctrines are included in the world-transcending teaching of Buddhism, and that is why we say that greatness means a large amount. “Greatness” also implies depth. Because of its depth, the Buddha’s teaching is difficult not only for ordinary people to comprehend, but also for Buddhist followers. It challenges them as well to understand its truth.

Greatness also means perfection – perfection in the sense that nothing is missing or deficient. The term “perfection” in Buddhism refers to the enlightenment of a Buddha as well as that of a Bodhisattva. No matter what period of history we might be living in, no matter what place in the world we might occupy, the truth of perfection realized by enlightenment always remains valid. It cannot be disproved by any great philosopher or thinker. The perfect enlightenment of the Buddha can dispel all illusions. It cannot be broken by anything.

To accomplish greatness is to become a great vessel of the Dharma. Those who can accomplish greatness, those who can become great Dharma vessels, are those who can learn greatness, vastness, and depth; they are those who can learn to excel. If one can accomplish this kind of greatness, one will be able to turn around the fate of the world. The fate of the world today is terrible because the world is filled with terrorists, with violence, with suffering. In order to become a limitless vessel of Buddha Dharma, one has to possess great wisdom and great compassion. With great wisdom, one comprehends the truth of non-self and does not cling to anything. With great compassion, one will be able to devote oneself to eliminating the suffering of all sentient beings and be able to turn around the fate of the world.

Level 1: Internally he establishes great moral integrity.

As Buddhist followers, we do not believe that the mind is the only element of the world, but we do believe that the mind plays an instrumental role in creating the conditions that determine the quality of our lives. If you can understand the importance of the mind, you will be able to build up character; you will have a sturdy backbone. A Buddhist follower does not consider as important what ordinary people pursue. They seek more important goals. Having a sturdy backbone means that you will be tenacious. You will be able to withstand any kind of distraction: to stand in midstream, to withstand the current, and to move in the other direction.

Level 2: Externally, he sustains a great atmosphere of viability.

If internally a person has true great moral integrity, then he will have a character that is totally different from that of ordinary people. He will be able to pass the external test, which means that when he is experiencing many problems, he will be able to maintain a great atmosphere of viability to present the spirit of the Buddha Dharma to the world.

Level 3: He opens up internally and externally to a great capacity.

This means that if internally a person can build up great character and moral integrity, and externally has great tenacity, this person will have limitless capacity. Unlike an ordinary person, whose capacity is limited, a person such as this will be able to transcend all, to receive all, and to transform all. If one is able to do this, one will reach the beginning of limitless capacity.

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Great Vessel *(continued from page 1)*

Level 4: Everywhere he goes, he exerts great influence.

Thus, whether you are a monastic person or a householder, you will be able to exert a great influence stemming from your great aspiration. There is a word in Chinese that represents the point of maturity, the boiling point, for something that has been brewing. This word represents the ability to truly develop and demonstrate one's great aspiration.

One who can exert great influence creates opportunity and fortunes for the suffering world.

The word "able" is very important in Buddhism. To illustrate the importance of this word, take as an example when we receive the five precepts. We are asked, "Are you able to keep the five precepts?" Our answer is, "Yes, I am able." However, most of the time, when ordinary people say that they are able, they are referring to a limited ability; they are not talking about a limitless ability. Thus, if we are able to keep the five precepts and perform the ten good deeds to perfection, then we will be able to do what others cannot do. This is the true meaning of "being able."

If we want to be able to exert great influence, to create opportunities and fortune for the world, we need to understand that we are currently facing an age in which there is a general explosion of all defilements. Therefore, if a person can create and exert true influence, and make the most sincere resolve, he will be able to pass through the test of great calamities. He will be able to cultivate the aspiration of great deeds and then be able to create new opportunities and great fortunes for the world. In Chinese, the word "opportunity" is translated as organic, which is defined as operating according to Buddha Dharma without being hindered by defilements. If one cannot operate organically, one will not be able to operate with a deliberate mind. One operating organically will be able to develop his karmic roots with utmost sincerity, as well as help others to develop their karmic roots with utmost sincerity.

In order for a person to turn around the fortunes of the world, he needs to pay special attention to time. Time is very precious. In Chinese history two thousand years ago, there was an emperor in the Xia Dynasty who was famous for treating the irrigation problem of the Yangze River. He was famous for never wasting any time and thus it is said that he spent 365 days outside of his house, never returning home. Even when he was traveling, if he passed by his home, he did not go in because for him every moment was precious; he did not want to waste any time. We need to learn from this emperor to pay attention to precious time. Not even one moment should be wasted. Drinking, wandering the streets, and conducting immoral deeds are all a waste of time. If one wastes time like this, one will not make any contribution to the world. A wasteful person has no trace of value and is not qualified to be a human being because this person has basically wasted his whole life. According to the karmic law of the Buddha, a wasteful person will fall down to a lower realm.

Use time and space to accomplish greatness.

One should treasure precious time so that the passing of each thought is very clear.

When we are mindful of the passing of time, we can make good use of it. Although it is difficult to be mindful of every single thought, if a person is truly sincere in practicing the Buddha Dharma, he would be alarmed if he did not pay attention to a passing thought, and would immediately start to be mindful and pay attention to the next thought. When one is able to begin practicing such clear mindfulness, from one thought to the next, the Buddha Dharma will become a mirror for oneself. The Buddha Dharma will be able to reflect everything internally, and externally one will be able to clearly see through the mirror of Dharma without being muddled.

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When one is able to thoroughly observe the meaning of emptiness, one will be able to reach purity wherever one goes.

First I have spoken about the importance of space, or emptiness. One needs to respect the deep meaning of emptiness because if one is able to thoroughly understand the true meaning of emptiness, one will have purity wherever one goes. Purity means nonattachment. If a person is without attachment, he will be able to pass through every kind of obstruction and can transform and change everything.

If one can make good use of time, one will be able to develop space or emptiness to guide this age.

This means that if one is able to precisely use time, one will be able to broadly develop space and to grow or extend one day at a time. One will be able to be guided by the wisdom of emptiness and then be able to guide the world. Therefore, whether you are a monastic person or a householder, if you are not able to grasp time, you will gradually be left behind. You will then be left without a stand and whatever you do or whatever you say, no one will pay attention to you or want to be close to you.

One realizes the meaning of emptiness and inspired by this age, one will frequently practice the doctrine of emptiness.

If we are able to verify both existence and emptiness, then we will be able to rejoice in what others fear. What are people afraid of? Most people fear death. If one truly understands the wisdom of emptiness, one will be able to gladly devote oneself and will rejoice in the devotion of life. One will then be able to realize the meanings of nonattachment and nonobstruction within emptiness and be able to inspire and guide the world. How is this accomplished? If you are a householder, do not be attached to your physical or mental being, or to your families. If you are a monastic person, do not be attached to the monastery you live in. If you can truly practice in this way, then you will be able to truly practice nonattachment and nonobstruction.

In closing, my great wish for you is that you will be able to become a great world-transcending vessel of the Dharma. ☸

Vesak Celebration to be Held on May 21st

On May 21st, Bodhi Monastery will celebrate the international Buddhist holiday of Vesak, the day commemorating the birth, Enlightenment, and Parinirvana (passing away) of Lord Buddha.

The Vesak program begins at 9:50 am with a devotional service that will include a traditional ceremony of "bathing the Buddha." A ladle is used to pour water over a statue of the baby Buddha while a special chant is recited. One is to bathe the Buddha with reverence

and a purified mind with the inspiration to realize our own Buddha nature.

Also included in the program is a morning lecture and an afternoon lecture. A special buffet luncheon will be served.

For more information on the tradition of Vesak, please visit our website at www.bodhimonastery.net. Also posted is Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's 2000 keynote address to the United Nations on its first official celebration of Vesak.

English Program at Dharma Retreat July 2nd - 4th

The English program of the 2005 Summer Dharma Retreat will begin in the early morning of July 2nd and will end at 4:30 pm on July 4th. You may attend all or portions of the retreat. The program includes several lectures, question/answer sessions, discussion groups, meditation, and liturgies.

To access the program schedule and application (in PDF format), please go to our website on or after May 2nd. If you have any further questions about

the program or do not have internet access, contact us at 973 940 0473.

In accordance with Buddhist monastic tradition, there is no charge for attending the retreat. However, please remember that such retreats are made possible through the sponsorship of the Yin Shun Foundation and the generous donations of our friends and supporters, whether large or small.

NEWS BRIEFS

Dharma News:

Shifu Scheduled to Return on May 5th

We look forward to the return of Ven. Jen-Chun and Ven. Guo-Ching from Asia. In the course of his Asian tour, Ven. Jen-Chun visited Singapore, Hongkong, China, and Taiwan. His lectures were greatly appreciated and many people commented on his remarkable vigor and vitality so soon after his major operations less than a year ago. While in Taiwan, they were also able to participate in the birthday celebration of Ven. Yin-Shun.

Bhante Dharma Talks on Selected Suttas from the "Sutta-Nipata"

Bhante has finished lecturing on what he considers to be the "Blessings" Suttas (the Mangala, Ratana, and Metta suttas). He is continuing with a selected series of general interest. The Uraga, Kasibharadvaja, Parabhava and Vasala suttas are scheduled sequentially beginning in May.

These lectures are on alternate Saturday afternoons at 12:40 pm. Ven. Xin-Xing lectures on the other Saturdays. A brief Q&A immediately follows the lectures.

Venerable Analayo to Lecture on May 14th

Ven. Analayo, who is visiting the monastery until May 19th, will give the afternoon lecture on Saturday, May 14th. The topic of his talk will be the concept of happiness in Early Buddhism.

Bhante's Majjhima Nikaya Class Continues

The Spring Session started on April 5th and will continue through June 21st, at which time we will take a break. The Fall Session will start on September 6th.

Bodhi Youth Class on May 7th

This class for kids ages 9 - 13 years old will be held on Saturday, May 7th, from 9:50-11:00 am. For more information contact Duke DeGroat 973 940 0711 or email, duke@thedukeagency.com.

Of Special Note:

Two Nuns to Reside at Monastery

Two bhikkhunis from Xiang Guang Monastery in Taiwan, Ven. Jian Dao and Ven. Jian Xun, are due to arrive on June 4th to take up residence at Bodhi Monastery. Their main purpose in coming to the monastery is to study Pali and Early Buddhism, but they will also help with the general activities of the monastery.

Lectures in Chinese on "The Way to Buddhahood"

Ven. Hou Zong, a Taiwanese monk who will be lecturing at the Dharma Retreat, will stay on for the month of July and give lectures on Master Yin Shun's "The Way to Buddhahood" (in Chinese only). The schedule for these classes is yet to be determined.

Listen to the Morning Chanting Liturgy Online

A digital audio recording of the Bodhi Monastery Morning Liturgy chanted in Chinese is now available on our website. We have also posted the Liturgy booklet with pin-yin and English translation so that you can follow along.

MAY/JUNE DHARMA SCHEDULE

SATURDAYS:

9:50 - 10:40 am	Study Groups in English and Chinese
10:50 - 11:10 pm	Short Service
11:15 - 12:15 pm	Lunch and cleanup
12:40 - 1:40 pm	Dharma Talk by Ven. Bodhi, Ven. Xin-Xing or guest lecturer
2:30 - 4:00 pm	Pali class

FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH:

9:50 - 10:30 am	Study Groups in English and Chinese
10:40 - 11:10 pm	Long Service

(The rest of the schedule follows as above.)

SUNDAYS:

9:30 - 10:45 am	Meditation Group guided by resident monks
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FIRST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH:

9:00 - 9:30 am	Beginners instruction in meditation
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TUESDAYS:

7:00 - 8:15 pm	Sutta Study Class with Ven. Bodhi
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DAILY:

4:30 - 5:00 pm	Chanting Liturgy
5:05 - 6:00 pm	Sitting meditation

PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW PHONE SCHEDULE

The monastery will answer telephone calls between 8:00 and 11:00 am and between 1:00 and 4:00 pm.

If you call at any other time, please leave a voice mail and your message will be directed to the appropriate bhikkhu. Please leave use voice mail if your call does not need immediate attention. Thank you for your cooperation.