

*Tallahassee Chan Center*

*Newsletter*

*Five Year Anniversary Special Edition*



*Leaf of the Bodhi Tree*

*Water Color Collage by Rikki Asher*

*Tallahassee Chan Center Newsletter*  
2014  
Volume 3

The Tallahassee Chan Center Newsletter is published yearly by Tallahassee Chan Center, 647 McDonnell Drive, Tallahassee FL 32310. This magazine is a non-profit venture; it accepts no advertising and is supported by contributions from the members of the Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC) and readership. Donations to support the Newsletter, the Tallahassee Chan Center and other Buddhist groups using the Tallahassee Buddhist Center (TBC) may be sent to the Tallahassee Chan Center Tallahassee Chan Center - P.O. Box 10389 -Tallahassee, FL 32302 or We are happy to offer secure online processing of your using our PayPal address: [tallahassee.chan@gmail.com](mailto:tallahassee.chan@gmail.com) the above address. All donations are greatly appreciated and are tax deductible.

The TCC is a community of practitioners learning and living the Buddha's teachings through the tradition of the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan (Zen) Buddhism as established by Chan Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009). These teachings are now taught by his disciple Guo Gu (Dr. Jimmy Yu) who was given inka, or seal of approval, by Master Sheng Yen in 1995.

Chan refers to our intrinsic freedom, expressed in terms of wisdom and compassion.

Realization of Chan is the direct awakening to the interconnectedness of life, beyond language, concepts, and self-referentiality.

TCC is a member of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association which has many affiliate centers and branches throughout the world.

For information about the Tallahassee Chan Group activities please visit the website at

<http://www.tallahasseechan.com>

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## From the Editor

The main purpose of this publication is to introduce the Chan teachings of Master Sheng Yen and to publish Guo Gu Lǎoshī's Dharma talks, to benefit not only TCC members but all people in the Buddhist community. The newsletter will also provide information on major events sponsored by the TCC. Details of our group's day-to-day activities can be found on our website. We invite 'blogs' from TCC and TBC members, as well welcoming contributions of poetry, articles, photography, and artwork. As such, artwork, photos, "blogs" and poetry are scattered throughout the newsletter. If you wish to submit your artwork or essays for consideration, please email me at [levans@comcast.net](mailto:levans@comcast.net).

This edition is a special celebration of the TCC's five year anniversary. As such the edition will provide a summary of major events over the last five years with emphasis on the TCC Sangha which is an integral part and third jewel of the three jewels: the Buddha, The Dharma and the Sangha or local community that have come together as a family to practice the Buddhist teaching in the Chan tradition with Guo Gu Lǎoshī (teacher) as founder and spiritual leader.

Over the last 5 years' Guo Gu Lǎoshī's monthly Dharma talks at TCC have focused on the *Gateless Barrier* (Chn. *Wumen guan*), that classic 13th century collection of 48 cases (Chinese. *gong'ans*; Japanese. *koans*). Having finished all 48 cases the goal is to transcribe these talks for publication to further promote and explain the *gong'an* teachings. Dharma talks now emphasize subjects that have been submitted by students, on Chan practice as it relates to daily life. For the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary special however, we will feature the *Gateless Barrier* Dharma Talk Case 16. *The Sound of*

*the Temple Bell, the Monk's Seven-Piece Robe.*

When life collapsed all around me as a result of the karmic causes and conditions I put into play my only deliverance was to reach out to one of the infinite paths of the Dharma. To seek refuge with folks that suffered similarly yet found salvation by helping each other through sharing their experience, strength and hope and offering a solution through expedient means designed to break the chains of bondage of the Hungry Ghost.

This was an arduous path yet the amazing grace attained from the support and help of other sentient beings gave me the opportunity to help others with similar afflictions of the spirit as others had rescued me. As such, my spiritual practice began to flourish with causes and conditions leading me to the Tallahassee Chan Center and the teachings of Master Sheng Yen and his disciple Guo Gu Lǎoshī.

From a hungry ghost to TCC and Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan I formally took Refuge in the Three Jewels, from a path born of suffering, to a path that saved and changed my life. Therefore I have chosen the Dharma talk Master Sheng Yen offered on taking refuge in the Three Jewels. What seemed at first a flimsy reed has proved to be the loving and powerful hand of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

*Yan Jian (Will)*

"At all times I think to myself: How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?" Chapter 16, *Lotus Sutra*.



## **A History of TCC – The Humble Beginnings of a Sangha**

The Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC) is a community of practitioners learning and living the Buddha's teachings through the tradition of the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan (Zen) Buddhism, as established by Chan Master Sheng Yen and under the leadership of our teacher Guo Gu (Dr. Jimmy Yu), one of Master Sheng Yen's senior and closest disciples. We began as a small group of just a few interested people in 2009, and now we are outgrowing our current rented space.

In 2010 we formed a formal TCC organization as a member of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) which has many affiliate centers and branches throughout the world. The TCC with Guo Gu Lǎoshī as our spiritual leader, consists of a Board of Directors with President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary and several board members as well as regular participants who help with the organization and administering of all the TCC activities (see organization chart). The first goal was to develop a comprehensive mission statement which is the following:

The mission of the Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC) is to *“Share the Dharma Drum lineage of Chan Buddhism and engage with society by benefiting people in their daily lives.”*

TCC operates under the following philosophy and ultimate long-term goals.

- (1) Our Principle: Uplift the character of all mankind; build a Pure Land on Earth.
- (2) Our Spirit: Offer ourselves for the benefits of all.

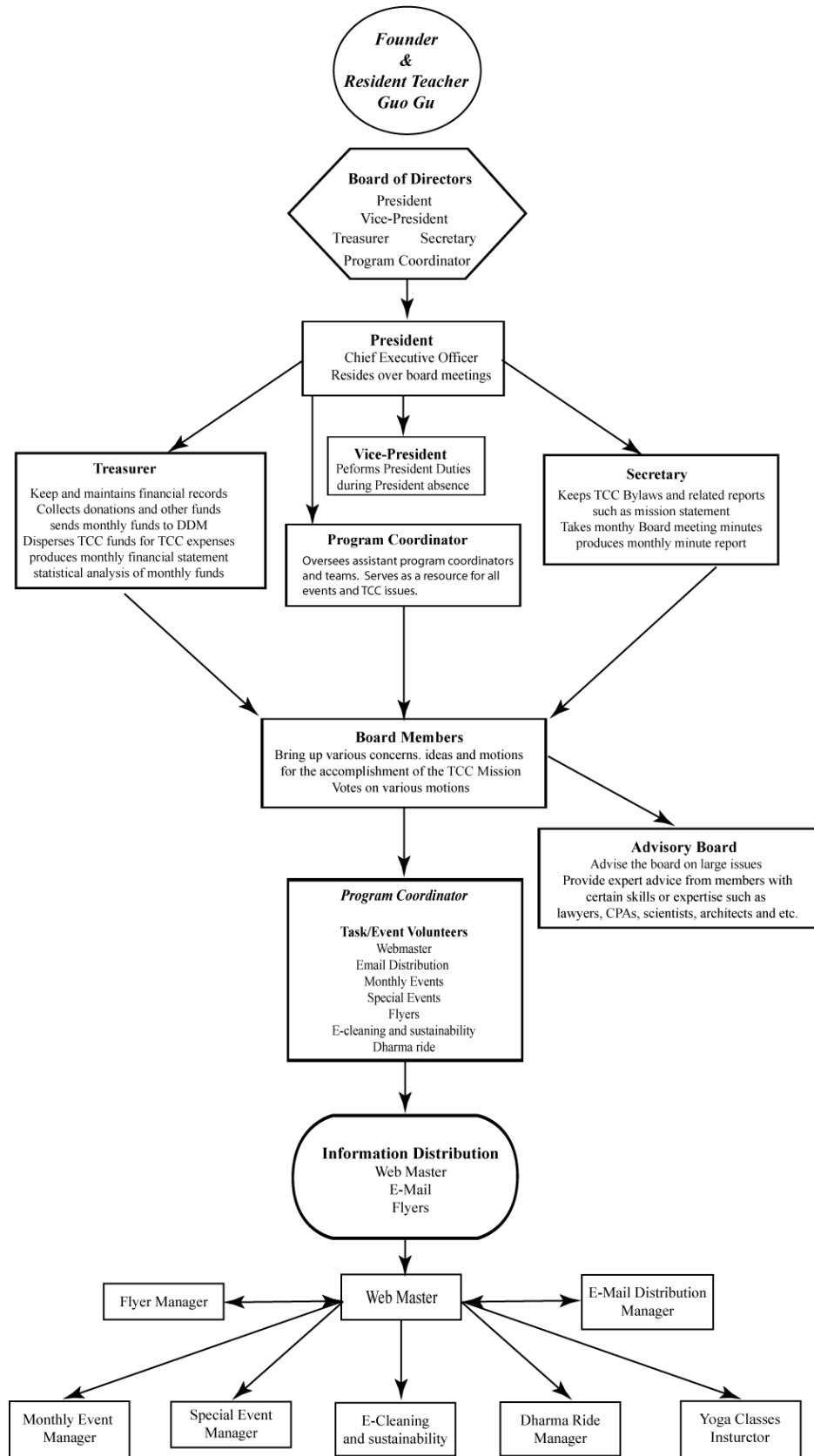
- (3) Our Direction: Embrace the original intention of the Buddha; advance the purification of the world.
- (4) Our Method: Promote comprehensive humanitarian education; deepen the roots of kindness and compassion for all.

Our mission is to spread these teachings and practices to all interested persons promoting harmony internally and externally to all sentient beings, as well as to the well-being to the natural environment.

A positive force in the community helping and providing service to others and causes as directed by the TCC group consciousness and spiritual leader Guo Gu Lǎoshī. The basic goal is to benefit people in their daily lives, promoting harmony and a deeper understanding of self and life, through meditation practice, instruction, and service to others irrespective of religion or creed.

From here the TCC sought to gain not-for profit corporate status and did so on July 22, 2013. Over the years, our group grew and have hosted over 40 meditation classes and 60 retreats, introducing the benefits of meditation to the greater Tallahassee community with the aim of developing focus and clear perception with a proven process designed to bring out our full potential in wisdom and compassion and share it with the world. TCC is now one of the most active Chan groups in the West geared toward English speakers and the only Chan community in the southeastern United States. In order to continue serving the increasing number of people attracted to the Dharma, we have begun raising funds to purchase a building that will provide a stable space for our weekly sittings, workshops, longer retreats, and other activities.

## Tallahassee Chan Center Organization Chart



***Why Take Refuge in the Three Jewels***  
***Chan Master Sheng Yen***

(The following is an excerpt from Chan Magazine  
Summer 2007)

**What is Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels?**

Taking refuge means returning, taking shelter, relying on, trusting. Any action that involves returning, depending, taking shelter, and trusting is considered taking refuge. This phrase is not exclusive to Buddhism. Children take refuge in their mothers' embrace; they rely on and trust their mothers, and, as a result, gain a sense of security. This sense of security arises from the power of taking refuge. Any such action that involves trust and a sense of security can be considered taking refuge, whether it is a secular relationship or a religious belief. However, objects that are temporary, unstable, and unreliable cannot be true objects of refuge. People may climb a tree or a rooftop for safety in a huge flood, but rising water and strong winds may destroy their sanctuary. A mountain would be a far better haven. Who wouldn't choose this option over a house or a tree? Refuge in the Three Jewels is stronger than any of these.

When you see that nothing is permanent and that everything is contingent and interdependent, you come to realize that there is little security in parents, teachers, plans, bosses, fate, strength, wealth—in all the things we take for granted. As objects of refuge they are highly unreliable. Parents pass away, teachings become outdated, plans are thwarted, bosses come and go, and fate is unpredictable. Strength, schemes, and wealth are even more illusory and ephemeral. Today's king is tomorrow's prisoner; today's millionaire tomorrow's pauper. A path that leads you home is a genuine refuge. Places where you can put up your feet and relax are not worthy refuges. A practice like this would be no

different from using a clay ox to cross a river. You may have a sense of security when you first enter the river, but the clay will crumble and you will sink. Why are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha called Jewels? It is because they generate an inexhaustible amount of merit and wisdom that they are considered genuine "jewels." Gold, silver, and precious gems are rare and valuable. That is why they are called "treasures"; the merit and wisdom of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha can bring us benefits in the world and beyond it. They are more precious than ordinary jewels because they bring peace to the world and help us thoroughly transcend our negative emotions and sufferings, and achieve awakening.

The Three Jewels are the best of all jewels. We are originally buddhas, and we are intrinsically connected with the Three Jewels. Because we misunderstand our original nature, we wander the cycle of birth and death without finding the way home. Taking refuge is starting the journey homeward.

**Different Levels of the Three Jewels**

The Three Jewels may be understood on different levels and in many ways. We will first divide them into two groups, that of the Phenomenal and the Fundamental. These two groupings can be understood in the context of the teachings of "two truths" in Buddhism. These refer to the "absolute" truth and the "conventional" truth. The absolute or fundamental truth is the view of reality as experienced by the enlightened. Since it transcends dualistic logic, it cannot exactly be expressed in words and conceptual constructs. The relative truth is reality on a phenomenal level; it is what ordinary people experience, and is expressed readily in dualistic concepts and words. For a deeply enlightened person who has realized the absolute truth, the two truths are inseparable. But for a person who only

understands the conventional truth, absolute truth remains an abstract concept. These two truths provide a framework to understanding the different levels of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. We start by taking refuge in the Phenomenal Three Jewels, that is, a true refuge in this world that provides insight and guidance toward awakening and liberation. The Phenomenal Three Jewels are tangible, so they are easily understood by ordinary people.

Once nirvana is realized—that is, you are fully awakened to the inseparability of the two truths—you embody the Fundamental Three Jewels. At this point, to speak of a refuge outside of you becomes irrelevant; the Fundamental Three Jewels are inseparable from you. This is abstract to most people, but quite clear to someone who has already actualized the true suchness of self-nature. We will return to this issue below. For now, it is important to know that all sentient beings have buddha-nature, the potentiality for buddhahood. It is only because of the vexations and confusion of karma that we cannot perceive this truth. The reason we take refuge in the Phenomenal Three Jewels is to find and manifest our buddha-nature in the Fundamental Three Jewels. The Phenomenal Three Jewels can be divided into the Abiding Three Jewels and the Manifested Three Jewels. The Fundamental Three Jewels can be divided into the Three Jewels of One Essence and the Three Jewels of Principle.

### **The Phenomenal**

#### **The Abiding Three Jewels**

The Abiding Three Jewels describe aspects of the Three Jewels that are directly perceivable in the ordinary, phenomenal world: 1) The Buddha Jewel—statues of the Buddha made of jade, stone, gold, bronze, clay, and wood or images of the Buddha in oil paint, ink, silk embroidery, and drawings.

2) The Dharma Jewel—the three collections of scriptures that include the sutras (recorded words of the Buddha), the shastras (treatises and teachings by eminent practitioners), and the vinaya (the body of texts containing the precepts, which serve as a guide for the behavior of Buddhist practitioners). 3) The Sangha Jewel—Buddhist monastics that shave their heads and wear the prescribed robes. Their work is to perpetuate Buddhism in the world.

### **The Manifested Three Jewels**

The Manifested Three Jewels refer to what brought Buddhism into the world: The Buddha Jewel here is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment and entered nirvana; the Dharma Jewel constitutes the teachings he gave during that time—the Four Noble Truths, the Six Perfections, the Eightfold Path, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination—important teachings that all Buddhists should know; the Sangha Jewel are those who followed him during that time. Thus, the Buddha appeared in the world, gave teachings, and formed a community of monastic practitioners. (For those of you who wish to learn more about the teachings that constitute the Dharma Jewel, please refer to my book, *There is No Suffering: A Commentary on the Heart Sutra*, for a full explanation of these teachings.)

### **The Fundamental**

#### **The Three Jewels of One Essence**

Each of the Three Jewels contains the virtue and merit of all of the Three Jewels. First, the Buddha illuminates and enlightens, so he is the Buddha Jewel. He gives Dharma teachings, is free from the bounds of all phenomenal reality, and has the ability to preserve and maintain the purity of the teachings. Hence he is also the Dharma Jewel. The Buddha is free from transgression and contention, so he is also



the embodiment of harmony, which represents the Sangha Jewel. Second, the Dharma awakens beings to Buddhahood, so it is the Buddha Jewel. It has the function of preserving itself, so it is the Dharma Jewel. Because all Dharmas are equal and mutually non-obstructive, it is equanimous and harmonious. Therefore, the Dharma is also the Sangha Jewel. Third, the Sangha Jewel includes those who are wise and luminous, so it includes the Buddha Jewel. Because its purpose is to preserve the Dharma, it is also the Dharma Jewel. Moreover, it is harmonious, so it is the Sangha Jewel as well.

### **The Three Jewels of Principle**

The Three Jewels of Principle refer to ultimate reality or the absolute truth in the two truths paradigm. It is the world as experienced by someone who is enlightened. For this reason, it is the ultimate place of refuge. Venerable Master Yinshun (1906-2005) explains the Three Jewels of Principle from two perspectives: that of Hinayana, personal liberation, and of Mahayana, universal liberation. The Hinayana and Mahayana are two main paths of Buddhism. The former focuses on the awakening of oneself; the latter on the awakening of all beings. Both paths identify the Three Jewels in terms of their intrinsic virtue. This virtue has many names, as seen above, but the essence is the same—the state of liberation and full awakening itself.

Master Yinshun states: *“The real object of refuge lies in the actual virtues of the Three Jewels. These virtues have been discussed in many ways; two points of view will be introduced here. The first sees the Buddha Jewel as identical with the Buddha’s faultless virtues. According to the teachings of individual liberation, the Buddha’s faultless virtues are the five attributes of the Dharmakaya (or “true body of reality”), although in the Mahayana teachings they*

*are embraced by perfect enlightenment (the fourfold wisdom). The Dharma Jewel is the true Dharma—that is, nirvana itself. The Sangha Jewel is identical with the faultless virtues of those who are still learners and those who are not. According to the individual liberation path, the faultless virtues are those of the four stages and four grades of sainthood; but according to the Mahayana path of universal liberation, they are the faultless virtues of the Bodhisattva Way (or the ‘universal liberation way,’ which includes those who gained individual liberation upon hearing the Buddha’s teachings and those who gained liberation without a teacher by contemplating dependent origination).*

*“The second view of the real virtue of the Three Jewels draws from the Mahayana teachings of universal liberation, according to which the Buddha treasure is identical to the pure realm of ultimate reality—revealed ultimately, completely, and perfectly (in essence, form, action, and function). The Sangha treasure is the pure realm of ultimate reality that is partially revealed. That is, it refers to those who have reached profound states of realization of the teachings. The Dharma Jewel is the universal realm of ultimate reality—without increase or decrease, neither dualistic nor discriminating (and called suchness, reality, and so on). The other standard terms for the Three Jewels—the Three Jewels in One Essence, the Three Jewels of Principle, and the Abiding Three Jewels – all refer to the same Three Jewels discussed above, but they are explained in different ways.”*(The Way to Buddhahood, pp. 23-24; translation slightly modified).

The five attributes of the Dharmakaya refer to the virtues of a fully awakened being. They are: moral perfection, cessation of deluded ideas, the wisdom of omniscience, attainment of nirvana, and the perfect knowledge of the state of liberation.

Nirvana here means the cessation of greed, aversion, and ignorance and the perfection of awakening. This relates to perfect enlightenment, the content of which is known as the four wisdoms. Each of these four wisdoms describes a function of a buddha's insight. They are: the "great mirror wisdom," which reflects all forms exactly as they are; the "wisdom of equality," which is the result of being free from self-grasping; the "wisdom of wondrous observation," which is the ability to discern with precision the various workings of the phenomenal world; and lastly the "wisdom of unrestricted activity," which is the ability to save sentient beings according to their spiritual capacities. We all have these perfect virtues within us—all of the qualities of the buddhas are ours if only we can free ourselves from the bondage of karma, vexations, and self-referential clinging.

It is in this way that the virtues function: when we take refuge in them, we take refuge in what is most intrinsic in ourselves, our potential to be awakened and to perfect that awakening.

Just as conventional truth is inseparable from absolute truth, we must realize that without the Abiding Three Jewels, the Three Jewels of Principle will not manifest. Without the Three Jewels of Principle, the Abiding Three Jewels could not exist. The Abiding Three Jewels are the great function of the Three Jewels of Principle. The Three Jewels of Principle are the whole of the Abiding Three Jewels. Faith in Buddhism should begin with believing in the Three Jewels. The reason for believing in the Abiding Three Jewels is to facilitate understanding of the Three Jewels of Principle.

There are some Buddhist devotees who, without having any real understanding of the true meaning of the Three Jewels of Principle, claim that they only believe in the Three Jewels of Principle. In other words,

they disregard the significance of the Abiding Three Jewels. This is not only an upside down view, but a position that is completely contrary to the Buddhist path. Ordinary people can only perceive the phenomenal Three Jewels, and of these, the Manifested Three Jewels only existed when Sakyamuni Buddha lived. After the passing of the historical Buddha, only the Abiding Three Jewels are left. Within the Three Jewels, the Buddha is most precious, the Dharma is most rare, and the Sangha is most holy.

After the passing of the Buddha, it is the Sangha that safeguards Buddhist monasteries, preserves collections of Dharma teachings, and maintains Buddhist culture. The Sangha also transmits Buddhist culture and teaches Dharma to the laity. When the Buddha was in the world, he was the center. After his passing, the Sangha became the center, so we must take the Sangha as our refuge, and we must take the Sangha Jewel as the object of our veneration. But we must remember that within the Sangha Jewel, there is a mixture of "dragons and snakes," a Chinese term meaning virtuous and non-virtuous people. We should choose teachers who are virtuous, but we should respect all Sangha members. It is said in the sutras that even though a monk has transgressed the precepts, he is still the teacher of men and gods. In our hearts, we should not entertain ideas of the virtuous and the non-virtuous, and criticize others, let alone criticize the Sangha Jewel. Once we take the Three Refuges, we have a strong platform of faith on which to begin our practice. There are five stages to building one's practice:

1. The Three refuges of turning away from heterodoxy—the initial entering of the door of Buddhism.
2. The Three refuges of five precepts when one receives the five

precepts after having developed confidence in the Three Jewels.

3. The Three refuges of eight precepts the traditional ritual days when one maintains eight precepts for the duration of twenty-four hours.
4. The Three refuges of ten precepts — the precepts one receives when one enters the monastery as a novice.
5. The Three refuges of complete precepts—the full precepts of monks and nuns.

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is always a part of all ceremonies involving the receiving of precepts. This is also true for the higher precept ordinations of monks and nuns, when the precept essence is conferred. Taking refuge is also necessary after repentance and making vows during the ceremony of receiving the bodhisattva precepts. The ceremonies of taking refuge and receiving precepts are mutually supportive. Taking refuge is the basis of daily practice for all Buddhists. It is included in the daily liturgy in monasteries as well as at the conclusion of every Buddhist event. South Asian Buddhists consider this ceremony to be of highest importance and they chant the refuge as a blessing to the laity.

### **The Benefits of Taking Refuge**

There are numerous benefits from taking refuge in the Three Jewels which can be reaped in present and future lives and can ultimately lead to the happiness of full liberation. These benefits can be divided into eight categories:

1. Becoming a follower of the Buddhas.
2. Establishing a firm basis for receiving precepts.

3. Diminishing karmic obstacles.
4. Potential to accumulate a vast amount of merit.
5. Avoiding rebirth in lower forms of existence.
6. The quality of not being disturbed by humans and non-humans.
7. The ability to accomplish all virtuous deeds.
8. Ability to become a buddha.

There are also many stories and parables in Buddhist scriptures that detail these benefits. For example, it is said that if you take refuge in the Three Jewels, you will acquire an inexhaustible amount of merit in the future. It is like a great repository of wealth. Even if everyone in a nation were to make withdrawals for seven consecutive years, there would still be considerable wealth left. The merit derived from taking refuge in the Three Jewels is thousands and millions of times greater than all the wealth in such a repository. (From the Scripture of Lay Bodhisattva Precepts) There was once a celestial being in the Indra heaven whose lifespan was approaching its end. His celestial body began to deteriorate and he had only seven days to live. He had a vision that he would be reborn as a boar and he became distressed. Then he asked Indra, the celestial king, to help him, but even Indra could not do anything. Indra asked him to seek out the Buddha for help. The Buddha bestowed the refuges upon him. He was reborn as a human and later met and received teachings from Shariputra (one of Buddha's principle disciples, renowned for his wisdom), and, consequently, reached full enlightenment.

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is something precious. The buddhas have stated that once you take refuge in the Three Jewels, you will be protected by the four guardian gods who protect the four quarters of the universe: In the east, Dhrtarashtra; in

the south, Virudhaka; in the west, Virupaksha, and in the north Vaishravana. These four guardian gods send thirty-six guardian angels to protect the recipient from harm. Each prevents different kinds of harm. Some prevent sickness, hunger, delusion, aversion, greed, thievery, fear, and so on. Lastly, I must stress that taking refuge in the Three Jewels is only the first step in becoming a Buddhist. Once we have taken refuge, we must embark on the path of spiritual cultivation, which involves finding a teacher and developing a regular practice. Doing so will decisively set you on the Buddhist path of awakening to wisdom and compassion.

*Gateless Barrier*

**“Case 16. The Sound of the Temple Bell,  
the Monk’s Seven-Piece Robe”**

Dharma Talk by Guo Gu Lǎoshī

October 4, 2010

(Transcribed by Estelle Gerard)

**The Case**

Yunmen said [to his assembly of monk practitioners], “The world is so vast and wide—why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?”

**Wumen’s commentary:**

All who learn Chan and study the Path must avoid following sound and pursuing form. Even so, awakening to the Path by hearing sound or illuminating your mind from seeing form is quite ordinary. Little do you know, patch-robed monks ride on sound and hover over form, and yet with each circumstance illuminating [this great matter] and taking up each and every wondrous opportunity. But even so, tell me, does the sound come to the ear, or does the ear reach out to the sound? Even if sound and silence are both forgotten, when you reach this point, how do you understand words? If you use your ears to hear, it will

be difficult to understand. But if you listen to sound with your eyes, you would be on intimate terms with reality.

**Wumen’s Verse:**

If you understand, all are one and the same;

If you do not understand, there are  
thousands of differences and distinctions.

If you do not understand, all are one and the  
same;

If you understand, there are thousands of  
differences and distinctions.

**Guo Gu Lǎoshī’s Comment:**

If you are looking for answers as to what is Chan, or what is Buddhism, then tonight is not a good night! *Gong’ans* are not expository explanations of how things are. If they were, it would create more problems as there would be more questions than answers. Texts such as this one is really meant for seasoned Chan practitioners, who would already have established a good foundation in the teachings. The kinds of problems they encounter in practice are not what ordinary people encounter; their obstacles come from routine regimen of rigorous, dedicated practice. Texts like this do not give or explain answers; they put an end to problems. For example, when people who have practiced for a long time, sometimes they think they know what they already know how to practice and they become arrogant. Or, in their practice they have had many and sometimes powerful experiences. But these experiences are not particularly revealing of who they are, or how things actually are.

They are more like altered states of consciousness. They may see light; they may have experienced an intuitive understanding of the scriptures; or they may have experienced samādhi states. When they speak about the dharma, their words are backed up with personal experiences. They are full of confidence. Yet, because their

experience did not help them to let go of their self-attachment, their self becomes more solid without them knowing it.

Another type of problem is when seasoned, long-time practitioners, very familiar with the ups and downs of practice, have found a place where they can rest peacefully accepting things as they are. They are too comfortable with where they are at—and that can be a problem, especially when they have not personally experienced awakening, or they have lost that urge, that drive to practice. For them, things are just fine. When bad things come they say, “Oh, it’s karma.” When good things happen, they say, “This, too, shall pass; it is impermanent.” So they’re resting in this kind of stasis.

Some of you may think, “Since I’ve just begun the practice, will this text benefit me or not”? The key is to not to have too many concepts while you are listening, and see if anything jolts your life, if it makes you wonder, or aware of certain aspects that you are not now aware of. Allow these challenges to resonate within you; keep them in the back of your mind. Put yourself in this story, in the assembly of Chan Master Yunmen Wenyan (Jp. Ummon Bunen, 862 or 864 – 949), asking you this question.

Chan Master Yunmen Wenyan was one of the greatest Chan masters in the history of Chan Buddhism in China. His teachings are direct and to the point. In Chan monasteries, the bell and other instruments govern the activities of the day. Before a dharma talk, a monk would strike the temple bell. When monks hear it, they put on their robes. The five-piece robe is for novices or for full monks or nuns in ordinary occasions. The twenty ordained monks or nuns would wear for formal occasions such as attending a dharma talk. A seven-piece robe is reserved for abbots to wear for special occasions. So here, the bell rings and the monks put on their robes. Yunmen ascends

the dharma seat and took this occasion to say the sky is so vast, so great; you have such freedom in your lives, where nothing binds each and every one of you. Why in hell did you put on robe when you heard the bell ring?

You are so free. Why is it that in the morning when you hear the alarm you get up? Why is it that you do the things that you do? Why do you engage in Chan practice? That’s what he is asking. You may be thinking, “Well, I get up at the sound of alarm clock because if I don’t go to work I’ll get fired!” Yunmen is not functioning at that level. Yunmen is not questioning your obligations or talking about the kind of freedom where you can do whatever you want.

In Chan practice, generally speaking, we should distinguish between right and wrong, benefit and harm, skillful and unskillful activities. We should not hurt people; we should not hurt ourselves. And the two most obvious ways we generate suffering for ourselves and others are through form and sound. That is, through our actions and words. Because of our attachment, we are also easily affected by the actions and words of others. Therefore the text says, “*All who learn Chan and study the Path must avoid following sound and pursuing form.*”

If you examine your lives, when you are miserable, when you’re feeling frustrated, when you are in pain, it’s because of what you have seen or heard. We are conditioned to experience things a certain way. In practice we have to see through the veils of our conditioning, the process through which we ritually and habitually relate to those around us based on our own standard of actions and words. For example, we may see someone walking down the street and without much self-awareness we are already categorizing and judging that person as this or that just by the way the person is dressed. Or if that person says

something, our discriminating mind is already at work. Is what he's saying beneficial or harmful to me?

Here's a story. After I got my M.A. degree from the University of Kansas, I wanted to take a year off to take the time to prepare my Ph.D. applications. I went to Boston because I wanted to go to Harvard to study with another professor. That period was very stressful time. I had one friend living in Boston with whom I moved in temporarily, thinking I would get a job within a week or two, then find my own place and go on with life according to my plans. I was greatly mistaken—there were no jobs in Boston for someone like me with an MA degree in religion. I couldn't find any work for a whole month. I didn't want to take advantage of my friend so I finally took the first job I could find and moved out. It was a low-paying job as a doorman. I had to wear the required blue polyester suit, and stand on the ground floor of a large corporate building filled with new graduates with MBA degrees. My job was to check their identification cards, "Can I see your I.D., please? Okay, you can go in." "No, I.D.? Sorry, you can't go in." It was interesting how people treated me there.

All of my doorman co-workers never went to college; I'm not sure if all of them had high school degrees. Everyone was either black or Hispanic. As the only Asian person at the place, I stood out like a sore thumb. It was especially odd when those Asians with MBA degrees tried very hard to avoid acknowledging me as one of their own, as they went in and out of the corporate building. During this time I was preparing for my GRE test [graduate record examination] for the Ph.D. application. I had in one pocket a list of GRE words and math equations in the other. So, between two "May I see your I.D. please?" I was memorizing words or math formulas to prepare for my test. Most people ignored

me. Some people looked down on me. It felt rather strange to be looked down upon and alienated by people who were categorizing me into a certain stereotype. It was wearing me down.

I learned a lot of slang during this time. One of which I heard a lot. My doorman colleagues always said, "Yo man, it's all good; it's all good." One time, a few young businessmen and women walked passed me as I said my routine, "May I see your ID, please?" As they passed, they stopped chatting, showed me their IDs, and broke out laughing and walked away. Suddenly I overheard two fellow doormen talking, and one said, "It's all good." I said out loud, *it's all good*. I realized that the humiliation I faced was good practice and my colleagues were bodhisattvas.

What is form? What is sound? When you encounter a difficulty in your life, an impasse, you solve it. If you can solve it, it's good. If you can't solve it, it's still good; it's no longer your problem if you can't solve it. It's only a problem when you can solve it. So when you encounter challenges in life, when you are obstructed by form and sound—it's all good!

In our own dream of vexations and obstacles, we are already so busy. Why are we busying ourselves living in somebody else's projected dream of us? People looked down at me, in my silly polyester suit, repeating the same words over and over. They formulate an image of me. But that image is *their* image. What does it have to do with me? If we feel sad, humiliated, we are affected. If we ignore it, pretend it's not there, we are also affected. Reacting to a dream is an illusion. Yet, the sky is so vast and wide, why aren't we free?

In the beginning of our practice we have to figure out, examine within ourselves, just how much we live in dreams in all the projections that we have on the world through our interaction of sound and



form. We avoid fabricating form and sound. This doesn't mean that we move into the mountains and isolate ourselves from the world. No! We live amidst form and sound and through them we see freedom. True practice is to "ride on sound and hover over form, and yet with each circumstance illuminating [this great matter] and taking up each and every wondrous opportunity"—it's all good! And if you discover that somehow it's not all good, then you need to examine form and sound a little harder because they are a mirror reflecting your true nature. The greater the obstacle, the clearer the reflection. Wumen provides us with a hint, "does sound come to the ear, or does the ear reach out to sound? Even if sound and silence are both forgotten, when you reach this point, how do you understand words?" Some seasoned practitioners say that, "Sound and form are okay; they don't bother me." Wumen says that when you have reached this point, you must still manifest form and sound. Tell me, what is this realization?

I got an email the other day from someone who has been practicing for many years. This past summer she had the opportunity to do a long retreat, a couple of months by herself in the mountains, in the mid-West somewhere. She wrote to me a very beautiful email describing her experiences as "utter tranquility." What was there but the sound of the birds in that cabin; the Amish people rolling their horse cart; and her meditation. It was a very beautiful, peaceful time with no vexations, no projections or categorization, no compartmentalization. I wrote to her briefly, "What did you realize?"

She wrote back: *silence*. Then she included a short poem by Zen master Ryokan (1758-1831) from a book she was probably reading. I guess the poem expressed her realization. So this was her realization which she presented to me,

saying, "This, here, read it!" I didn't respond. At that point, I knew she was not ready for any teaching because she was quite satisfied with what she had found. Anything I would have said would either have offended her or may not have been so useful. Had she said, "I'd like to come see you" then things would have been different.

What Wumen is saying is, "If you have found silence and peace, are you free in noise and chaos?" He does not say, "When you reach silence then there's just silence." No! When you reach true peace you should be free, at ease, in sound and form. True practitioners ride the wave of sound and freely intermingle with form.

Last month one of you said to me, "I really can't work well in meditation; I really don't get it. I have a lot of wandering thoughts." Is that bad? What happens if that person said, "You know, Guo Gu, your method really works; I just experienced total silence. Meditation is peace; I'm so glad I found this place." Is that good?

For busy modern people, peace is good. Very seldom do we have peace; perhaps when we're on vacation when we're away from administrative work, away from this and that, we can have peace. Tasting candy once in a while makes the candy just that much sweeter. Parents reward kids with candy. We know candy is bad for their teeth but once in a while it's okay. If you don't allow them any, then you're too strict. If you give them candy all the time, you're not a good parent. Similarly, if one is not a skillful teacher, then the student gets offended, especially after a couple of months of experience with silence. If you challenge their personal experience, they would question anything you say.

There once was a student who felt he was enlightened. He came to my teacher, Master Sheng Yen, seeking *inka* (sanction). My teacher said, "No, that's not it." The student turned around and said, "You know

what? You're not 'it'! You don't know what you're talking about. You mislead people," and went on and on in this tone. My teacher said, "Okay, thank you!" The student asked, "Are you awakened or not?" My teacher said, "Nope." The student asked, "So why do you teach people?" My teacher, "Because people need help." The student, "You can't help me." In this kind of situation, you cannot say anything. Many of us have experiences; some of particular expertise. For example, I teach in the Religion Department. If someone says, "You teach Buddhism, right?" "Yes." "Do you consider yourself an expert with your Ph.D. degree?" How would you answer this question? You do have a degree but what do you say, yes or no? If your answer really doesn't matter, then it doesn't matter what you say. No would be just as good as an answer as yes. If you can't say no, even hesitantly, it might mean that you have a pretty big, ego. How many "enlightened" teachers is very happy to say that they are not enlightened? Very few. Some people will even show you their dharma transmission certificate, saying, "I have a Dharma name and robes, and I can show you proof of my enlightenment!" [Laughter] So my teacher simply said, "no!" Of course, at that the person said, "Just as I thought!" That's when my teacher replied, "OK, good bye!" So if you think you got something, you probably didn't get anything. If you think you're enlightened, you are definitely not.

The next line says, "If you use your ears to hear, it will be difficult to understand. But if you listen to sound with your eyes, you would be on intimate terms with reality." Some of you may be thinking, "I don't think we covered this topic in my biology! How can one ear with eyes and see with ears?!" Wumen's verse is even more puzzling: *If you understand, all are one and the same; if you do not understand, there*

*are thousands of differences and distinctions.*

Just today after my class, someone came to my office and wanted to debate with me about Buddhism and the oneness of all religious traditions. His argument is that basically, "All roads lead to Rome." Everything is basically the same; what the Buddha realized was God. Those of you who have read a little about Buddhism know that the Buddha did not realize God, or the Great Self, or the True Self, or any kind of *thing* that is separate, permanent, and independently existent. So this person asked me, "Why do Zen folks ask people to meditate on silly questions like the sound of one hand clapping?" In this case, we have more: What is the meaning of using your eyes to hear, your ears to see? What does it mean? If you don't know what's the point, then please review my comment on "Case 1: Zhaozhou's Dog."

The meaning of the verse is that usually if one does not understand this case, then one is stuck in the myriad distinctions, discriminations, and differences of form and sound. If one does understand, then form and sound points to the dharma. However, Wumen, being a compassionate teacher, says that if you *do* understand, then you're stuck discriminating form and sound. If you *don't* understand, then everything is the dharma. It cannot get any simpler than that! There are insects, animals and different types of fish that don't have eyeballs yet they know when a big hungry fish is coming their way. Chan masters are said to be able to freely use their sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind—interchangeably. I am not talking about supernatural powers that Chan masters have. The important point is that every one of you has your own understanding which is correct. But there is more. This *gong'an* is to asking each and every one of you: despite your understanding of things, why is it that when

you hear a pleasant sound you respond in a particular way? Why is it that when someone calls you names, “You fool, you idiot!” Or looks down on you, or blames you for something that you didn’t do, you feel sad?

Why is it that all of you are here tonight? I’m amazed by those of you who come week after week. You come here despite the physical discomfort, and that in meditation you have a lot of wandering thoughts. I’m not saying that you should not come any more! Perhaps week, no one will be here! [Laughter] What is it that motivates you to seek out a spiritual path, to practice? Why is that?

**Student:** I’m on the path of liberation.

**Guo Gu Lǎoshī :** You’re on the path of liberation? That’s the path of the devil! Now, upon hearing this, how do you feel?

**Student:** I’m in need of a new path then! [Laughter]

**GuoGu Lǎoshī :** You need a new path just because you heard my words? Why do you want to change your path? You’ve been practicing for years. Because of just a few words you want to change? Don’t follow forms, don’t follow sounds. Speak! Tell me what you really want.

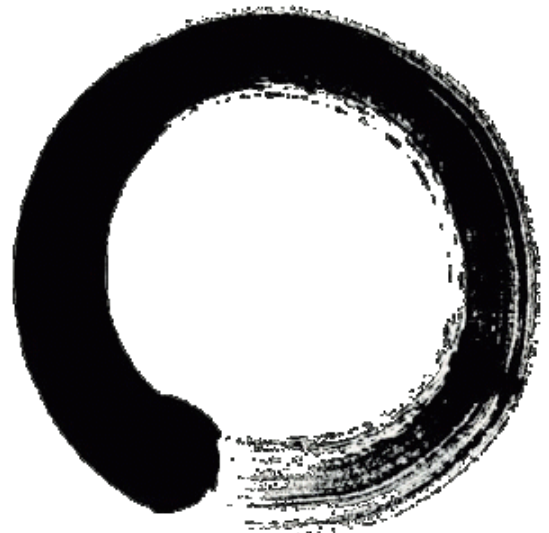
You shouldn’t be fooled by your teacher. Well, sometimes you can, but it’s up to you to figure out when are those times! [Laughter] If my words hit something inside you, you have to examine that, you have to understand it. And if you think you understand it, drop it. So why is it that you continue your practice? Why is it that you read Zen books? Just to pass the time? There are many other books that are more fun!

All things are free; each and every one of you is free. You have to discover that freedom by going vigorously through practice. You may think you know what freedom is conceptually, that you understand what buddha-nature is, and so on, but that

doesn’t mean much. You have to personally verify it through practice and realization.

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*Ensō*



*In Chan/Zen calligraphy, ensō symbolizes a moment when the mind is free to simply let the body/spirit create. The brushed ink of the circle is usually done on silk or rice paper in one movement (however, occasionally used two strokes) and there is no possibility of modification: it shows the expressive movement of the spirit at that time. Chan practitioners “believe that the character of the artist is fully exposed in how she or he draws an ensō. Only a person who is mentally and spiritually complete can draw a true ensō.” Some artists will practice drawing an ensō daily, as a kind of spiritual practice.*

## Distinguished Visitors at TCC

### Dharma Talk and Retreat by Venerable Dhammadipa

From November 9 through 11, 2012, Venerable Dhammadipa, who is a longtime friend of Guo Gu Lǎoshī, visited Tallahassee from Europe. He gave a dharma talk on the importance of loving kindness (Metta) and led a two-day retreat on Sat. and Sun. with the same focus of Metta meditation or mediation on loving kindness towards oneself and all sentient beings. After the retreat Dhammadipa, Guo Gu Lǎoshī and several of the retreat participants and their friends and family gathered together for Sunday dinner at Lucy Ho's Masa restaurant known for its unique blend of Asian and Western cuisine where much of the meal was prepared personally by Lucy Ho. Venerable Dhammadipa is a rare gem in contemporary Buddhism and it was honor for TCC to have had him as a visiting teacher and retreat leader who provided us all with an exceptional experience to further our practice.



Venerable Dhammadipa and Guo Gu Lǎoshī at  
TBC (Photos by Vijay Subramanian)



Friday Dharma Talk  
(Photo by Vijay Subramanian)

Please visit our website, under audio files, if you wish to listen to Venerable Dhammadipa Dharma Talk

Venerable Dhammadipa (Ven. Xingkong) was born in Czechoslovakia in 1949 and is a world-renowned meditation master. He is a learned scholar of Buddhism as well as Sanskrit, Pali, and Chinese philosophy. He received his traditional Theravada Bhiksu Vinaya in 1987 in Sri Lanka, where he practiced meditation under the guidance of his preceptor, Ven. Nanarama Mahathera. In 1989 he received his Three Fold ordination as Mahayana monk in Hsi Lai Temple, Los Angeles.

His understanding of both Theravada and Mahayana is exceptional. He studied Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Prague University in 1969. In 1977, he received his Master's Degree in Chinese Literature and Philosophy from University of Paris, France. He started learning Buddhism in the late seventies when he came to Berlin as a refugee due to Russian invasion. He studied Russian literature at Jerusalem University,

receiving a degree in 1973. He went to Myanmar to practice meditation with the contemporary meditation master Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw in 1996 and was considered by the Sayadaw the very first Western disciple who is qualified to teach meditation. Venerable Dhammapida has been teaching Samatha and Vispassana meditation at various monasteries and universities worldwide. In addition, He has been writing and translating Buddhist text into French and Czech. His translated works include:

*Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (Mahayanasraddhotpada-sastra), Entry into the Bodhisattva Path (Bodhicaryavatara) and a Collection of Han-San's Poems.*



**Sunday dinner at Lucy Ho's Masa restaurant  
The meal was prepared personally by Lucy Ho  
(photo by Fran Berry)**

### **Venerable Guo Dong, Abbot and President of Dharma Drum Mountain**

On October 28-30, 2013, Ven. Guo Dong, the Abbot President of Dharma Drum Mountain visited the Tallahassee Chan Center. He was accompanied by Venerable (Ven.) Guo Lian, (nun) Ven. Chang Gui, Ven. Abbot Guo Dong, & Ven. Chang Zhen.



**From left to right Ven. Guo Jian, (nun) Ven. Chang Gui, Ven Abbot President Guo Dong, and Ven. Chang Zhen At Gabrielle Wu Lee Art Exhibit Tallahassee Art Museum**

On 28 October, Abbot President of Dharma Drum Mountain Venerable Guo Dong was invited to the DDM Tallahassee Chan Center in Florida by Associate Professor Yu Yong-Fong (Guo Gu Lǎoshī) from the Department of Religion at Florida State University, where he led the refuge-taking ceremony. Approximately 100 attendees were present to listen to the teachings of the Abbot President and about 40 of them took refuge to be disciples of the Three Jewels. Participants were almost all Americans, a testament to the universal nature of this splendid ceremony.

The Abbot President was very grateful to Guo Gu Lǎoshī for his teachings of the Buddhadharma and methods of Chan meditation to the public in Florida. He stated that he was very pleased to meet the participants who may have come to the Chan Center for the first time to learn about Chan meditation and Buddhadharma. The congregation allowed for a concentration of good karma, Dharma karma, and Buddha karma for purifying hearts and minds in the community.





**TCC members participating in the Taking Refuge Ceremony (Photo by Vijay Subramanian)**

The Abbot President also mentioned that if people come to monasteries often and are inspired through Buddhadharma, Chan meditation, and mindfulness techniques, they can cultivate the potential buddha-nature of purity and work towards achieving dissolution of their egos. This would also provide relief from pressures in life, encouraging maintenance of a stable, strong mind in a fast-paced, diversified and tense society. Owing to the level of endlessly growing materialistic focus in modern society, accompanied by a general lack of growth in spiritual life, people are prone to cling to their own opinions and focus on the loss or gain of profits, leading to more vexations which further transpire to the people around them.

Thus, the Abbot President encouraged the participants to try to accept positive and negative karmic conditions with gratitude, establish further and better karmic affinity with selfless devotion, to aspire to repay all the merits we have received, to be happy even though we are busy and joyful even when we are tired. When confronted with adversaries, we do not need to respond with anger but treat all circumstances as the nutrients for cultivating wisdom and blessings, which will also become the chance of increasing wisdom and compassion for others. The Abbot President expressed his hope that after taking refuge to be the disciples of Three Jewels, the

participants can come back to the branch monasteries of DDM often to communicate, interact and to show the vitality of compassion and wisdom.



**Abbot President Ven. Guo Dong talking to TCC audience (Photo by Vijay Subramanian)**

At the conclusion of the event, the Abbot President also discussed the Buddha pendant which serves to create karmic affinities. The Buddha pendant has a print of Shakyamuni on one side and a print of Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) Bodhisattva on the other side. If we wear the Buddha Pendant and turn the side of Guanyin Bodhisattva outward, it serves as a constant reminder for ourselves to help others, and to learn the Bodhisattva's spirit of attending to and alleviating the suffering of sentient beings. On the contrary, if we wear the Buddha Pendant and turn the side of Guanyin Bodhisattva inward, it reminds us to be aware of and reflect upon our own behaviors and thoughts. After taking refuge to become disciples of the Three Jewels, all of us become Bodhisattvas, having a heart of compassionate vows to practice the six paramitas and ten thousands acts of the Bodhisattva. We should learn the Bodhisattva's compassionate and altruistic spirit and spread this to others, in the aim of "uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth."





**Taiwan DDM delegation and TCC members at Wakulla Springs (Photos by Karl Bertelsen)**

### **About Abbot President Ven. Guo Dong**

Abbot President Ven. Guo Dong was ordained under Venerable Master Sheng Yen in 1993. He has served as Venerable Master Sheng Yen's personal attendant, as guiding Dharma teacher of both the End-of-Life Chanting Group and the General Association of Dharma Upholders, as supervisor of the Caring Service Department, and as deputy provost of the Monks' Department of the Sangha. He was among the Master's Dharma heirs at the Dharma Transmission Ceremony in 2005. In September 2006, he became DDM's second abbot president. In 2007, he succeeded as president of Dharma Drum Sangha University.

Ever since he joined the Sangha Ven. Guo Dong has been held in high regard by Venerable Master Sheng Yen, and has been entrusted with the work of caring for the followers. During his leadership at both

DDM End-of-Life Chanting Group and General Association of Dharma Upholders in particular, he upheld the ideals of the "Four Kinds of Environmentalism", as advocated by the Master, namely "Protecting the Spiritual Environment, Social Environment, Living Environment, and Natural Environment". Following on several natural disasters the Venerable was often the first to lead relief workers or the Chanting Group to the stricken areas, to comfort the victims, to conduct funerary rites, and offer emergency relief on behalf of DDM. (Biography courtesy DDM Taiwan).



**Abbot President Ven. Guo Dong talking to TCC audience (Photo courtesy of DDM, Taiwan)**



**Great Buddha Hall with Rainbow at Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan TCC 2014 Taiwan Pilgrimage (Photo by Myosen Sprott)**

## **“Pure Land on Earth Pilgrimage” and “Pure Mind Pure Land Pilgrimage” to Dharma Drum Mountain Taiwan**

Two Pure Land Pilgrimages were led by Guo Gu Lǎoshī to Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) in Taiwan. The first pilgrimage took place on May 17-28, 2012. The second one was held this past summer in July 1-12, 2014. The pilgrimages were a unique opportunity that allowed practitioners from the US to meet and practice with other bodhisattvas from the US, Europe, and Taiwan. The first pilgrimage included the first 5-day intensive Chan retreat in English on DDM, commemorating the third year passing of Master Sheng Yen. Twelve people from TCC participated in this trip, as well as eighteen practitioners from other States and Australia. The second trip included a 7-day intensive retreat in English on DDM, commemorating the fifth year passing of Master Sheng Yen.

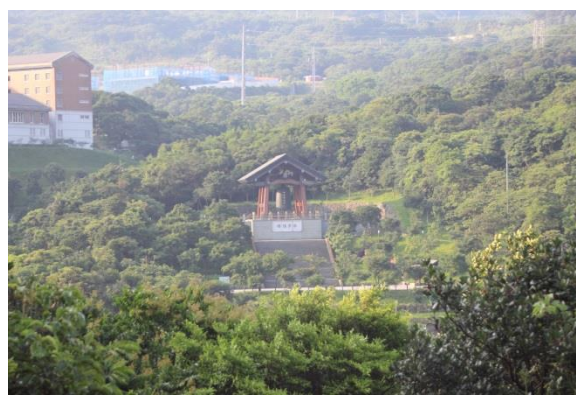


**May 2012 Pure Land on Earth Group  
(Photo courtesy DDM)**

### **Pure Land on Earth Pilgrimage May 17-28, 2012**

The Dharma Drum Mountain Pure Land Pilgrimage is by far the best and most complete and all-encompassing retreat I

have attended. We were given the opportunity to experience all aspects of a Chan monk's or nun's life in a monastery. This included extensive meditation of all types (sitting, walking, and standing) working in the fields, domestic chores within the Chan Hall, Noble Silence, yoga, and traditional morning and evening chanting ceremonies. We ate wonderful meals in the long-established Chinese tradition of using chop sticks and cleaning one's own bowl.



**Great Lotus Bell amongst a light jungle mist  
DDM Taiwan (Photo by Will Evans)**

This practice was under the excellent guidance of Venerable Guo Yuan. It included his daily Dharma talks, articulated with compassion and humor. We were also offered daily one-on-one interviews with Guo Gu. We were thus totally immersed in the Chan practice. In addition, the grounds and buildings were highly functional, modern and breathtakingly beautiful as the architecture integrated into the Taiwan mountain jungle ecology. The monks, nuns and staff were all exceptionally helpful and friendly, and the daily logistics were flowing and flawless.

Although I have read many of Master Sheng Yen's books and teachings, the trip to DDM allowed me to experience on a personal level his wisdom, heart and vision. I was able to spend time in Founding Heritage and Memorial Hall and observe



Master Sheng Yen on video. I learned about his amazing and selfless accomplishments in spreading the Dharma to the world. I left DDM emotionally and spiritually uplifted, determined to take my practice to a higher level. *Gar Tian (Will)*

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**Pure Mind Pure Land Pilgrimage**  
**July 1-12, 2014**



**Medicine Buddha at DDM Taiwan (Photo by Will)**

Going to Taiwan was like entering a completely different mind stream. The embodiment of changing your surrounding conditions and culture to such an exotic place, as well as your daily routine from mundane life to an intense retreat setting, has a very deep impact on one's internal state. It is putting yourself in a situation where everything is so new and stimulating. This provides more means to let go of and return to your method of meditation. Not only has this but it really put so many things into perspective, such as gratitude and truly seeing the power of mind. I have so much gratitude for being graced with the opportunity to attend this retreat; it showed me how dedication to a practice and shifting

to a positive mindset can impact the direction of one's life. This retreat was a very important development in my ability to be strong in my own self. When I say this I mean transcending co dependence and becoming confident in my own abilities to share with and help other beings. The meditation part of the trip was difficult for me. In retrospect I can see I was still very wrapped up in my own space, I could cultivate peace of mind and some stillness but it was still very subjective. Recently I have been applying practice more heavily to daily life, as that is where the impact matters most, the interaction and effect you have on others. Practice is a lifelong endeavor and well worth the effort. *Mary Ellen Zea*

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There are three simple truths that go unnoticed too often in my daily life. The first of these that it is easy for people to get along, as long as the environment is relatively quiet and respectful. The second is that when we are focused on what we are doing, that our mind unifies with the body and the environment. The third is that when we are in good spheres of influence and appreciate this interaction we are in turn changed for the better. All of these things were the simple realization I had while I was on the pure land retreat at DDM in Taiwan. I found peace in this environment.



**Men's Sleeping Quarters DDM Taiwan**  
**(Photo by Will Evans)**

The beginning of the journey was relaxed I did quite a bit of tai chi and some karate right before starting my first flight in the Tallahassee airport and it seemed that as a result the airport security became interested in me. This shows that I indeed effect my environment in a way that draws attention to me. I realized that my actions caused slight increases in stress levels because of the unusual nature of my actions. My first lesson had already come into play, how do I create a peaceful or not peaceful interaction with people in my daily life. I learned that sometimes being the black sheep in an airport in a good way to not make your flight. I realized that the way we portray ourselves in daily life affects others immediately. Seeing the way people in DDM treated each other was so soft and comforting most of the time. The power of quite is emphasized so greatly and truly the golden rule of only speaking blessings and doing no harm through speech creates a powerfully positive environment. The volunteers and monastics work in harmony to make DDM truly a pure land on earth because the way they treat themselves and others. The control themselves in a manner that makes the whole environment warm and welcoming.

The realization that my body and mind can be unified is similar to when a sound is made it is simultaneously heard. It comes from a change in time as it is perceived by the mind. Most of our mind is in the past or in the future while our body does not immediately follow the mind to those places; but, instead stays in the present. This grounding of the mind into the moment takes simple and gentle reminders that are hopefully integrated into the tasks of living. The little reminders of being aware of the body for me was to be less coarse in my movements and to consciously refine my movements in daily life with a gentle energy. This is where on retreats the

metaphor of practicing like a gentle stream rather than a tidal wave spoke to me the most. If I could refine my movements in daily life than finally Chan would manifest itself not only in sitting; but, would translate to my attitude in daily life.

The last realization is as simple as cause and effect. If I put red dye in clear water then the water becomes red. Similarly if I am around good influences I become more good; as it relates to the metaphor I may not be as red as the dye but I will be influenced by it. There were so many Dedicated practitioners that I met while on a retreat to DDM that have influenced my frame of mind. When staying a couple extra weeks at the monastery I got know some of the hard workers that kept the place running. I was especially grateful to the volunteer dish washing staffs influence on me because of their work effort and selfless service. The work so quickly and harmoniously that there is no room for scattered thoughts; this gave me inspiration for my role in life. May I work quickly and harmoniously for the benefit of all beings.

I am especially thankful for Guo Gu's assistants in preparing arrangements for me to stay at DDM as well as the causes and conditions that took place for me to afford my visit in Taiwan. I love all the monastics, staff, and volunteers of DDM.

*Na mo a mi tou fou. Daniel Rozofsky,*



**Walking as a group around a pond at Nong Chan Monastery, Taiwan (Photo by Myosen)**



## An Open HeArt

By Rikki Asher

The story behind the cover page and artwork below



It was my first Buddhist Pilgrimage in Nepal and India. Before I left, I asked Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) how one prepares for such an experience? He said, "Just go with *an open heart*."

Bodhgaya is the place where the Buddah sat underneath the Bodhi tree and became enlightened. The day I arrived, I sat in front of the tree and was very moved. As an artist, I wanted to draw the tree exactly as it was. Using watercolors and paper I began. After a few minutes, I realized that it is not about the tree itself, it is what I feel inside that counts. I put the drawing away, took out 10 small pieces of watercolor paper. Soon afterwards, a young boy selling packets of dried Bodhi leaves walked by. I bought a pack and immediately knew what I was going to do with them. Quickly applying

gold leaf to paper, then blue and green paint, my hands were moving faster than my mind could think about what I was doing, moving the brush faster and faster to capture the emotions I felt being there. I added single Bodhi leaves to form a collage. Finally I added bits of gold leaf and more color. Three nuns from DDM, Taiwan approached me and I gave them each a painting. Soon a group of Tibetan monks and nuns stopped to have a look. I gave each of them a painting. I continued. After a few minutes, a group of local children surrounded me with great curiosity. I handed them materials. They were delighted. We painted together for an hour. People stopped to ask if they could have one, I was happy to give them away. After a while, I started to put some aside for myself. I never experienced this approach to painting from life before. This was my way of painting with an *Open HeArt*.

(Rikki Asher is an artist and one of the dharma teachers in training in DDRC Pine Bush NY.)

## Retreats



Guo Gu Lǎoshī in pursuit of drowsiness with the incense stick at right shoulder arms.

(Photo by Will Evans)

All multi-day retreats are led by Guo Gu Lǎoshī. Retreats offer a rare occasion to deepen one's Chan practice and commitment to the path. Many experiences arise in retreats that would normally not surface in daily individual or weekly group practice.

Each sitting during a retreat is 30-45 minutes, punctuated by short periods of mindful yoga or walking meditation. There is also mindful work practice, which is a way for retreatants to integrate their practice to daily situations. Retreatants also get an opportunity to speak one on one with Guo Gu Lǎoshī in personal interview.

## **Tallahassee Retreats**



**2013 Labor Day Four-Day Retreat  
at TCC Members house.**



**Three-Day Memorial Retreat: In honor of the late  
Master Sheng Yen, Jan 31 to Feb 02, 2014**



**Three Day Intense Retreat: Fri, May 23rd evening  
to Mon, May 26th noon, Guo Gu Lǎoshī led an  
overnight retreat at a member's private house.**



**1-Day Retreat in March, 2014 at TCC.**



**2014 Three-Day Labor Day Retreat at TCC**

*“To make a vow is to set the direction and the goal, and the practice is our vehicle.  
Great vows and diligent practice go together; without both,  
you will waste time and not receive genuine benefit.”*  
~ Master Sheng Yen





In March 2012, Guo Gu Lǎoshī led a 7 day “Gateway to Chan” Retreat, at DDRC, NY. A number of the TCC members participated.



Guo Gu led a short weekend workshop retreat on Silent illumination at the Barre Center of Buddhist Studies, MA on Mar 14-16, 2014



Chinese Dragons atop Mengjia Longshan Temple in Taipei Taiwan (Photo by Will Evans)

## Retreat Poem

Let the sweet sticky sweat dripping down  
forehead, cheeks and clinging to clothes go

Feel the sun

Feel the rain

Observe don't judge or evaluate

Just let it be

Be the method, be empty

Clearing out the cobwebs of yesteryear

Letting it all go-

Softly feel the rain falling all around you as  
your feet dangle in a babbling brook below.

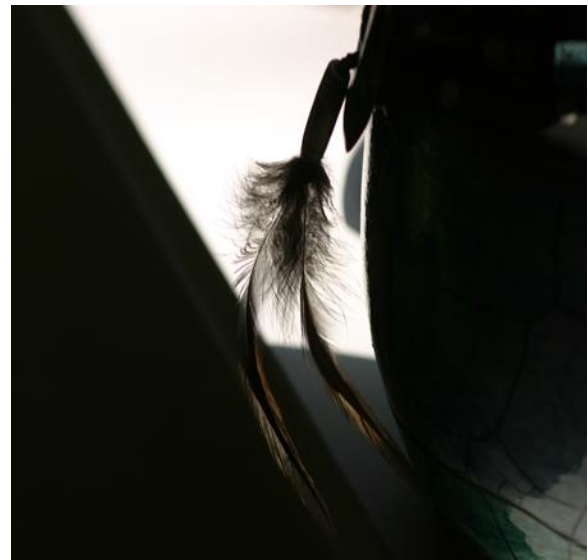
Observing a dragonfly saving another one  
from drowning.

Just observe and let it go

Feel empty and just be with nature and the  
constant sounds of the forest surrounding you

Just be. Just be. Just be.

*Ruth Marie Subramanian*



Feathers in the shadow and light  
(Miksang photo by Will Evans)

## Events at TCC

### First Friday



First Friday's of every month TCC yard sale  
Fund Raiser at Railroad Square

### Tallahassee Community College Employee Wellness Event



Vijay and Ruth Marie at TCC Table showcasing  
the benefits of Chan Meditation at the Employee  
Wellness Event (Photo by Vijay Subramanian)

### Asian Festival

The Asian Coalition of Tallahassee (ACT) a not-for-profit corporation serving the interest of Asians in Tallahassee and Florida. Its main mission is to unite the Asian Communities in the Big Bend Area and promote the Asian culture. As the roots of Chan are Chinese based, TCC has been participating in the annual ACT Asian Festival for three years.



TCC Members at the Tallahassee 2014 Asian  
Festival (Photo by Vijay Subramanian)

### Five Year Anniversary Celebration Fund-Raising Dinner

On September 26, 2014 TCC held a fund raising dinner to raise money for a new TCC Retreat Center. TCC members personally prepared and served superb Asian vegetarian cuisine. Live entertainment was provided by the Take Two Jazz Duet.



Table Settings for Fund-Raising Dinner  
(Photo by Myosen Sprott)

*"What you have results from karmic causes  
that you created, and what you'll gain  
hinges on karmic causes that you're  
creating." ~ Master Sheng Yen*





**Gloria explaining the setup and service tasks to Okechukwu, Fran, and Janette  
(Photo by Myosen Sprott)**



**Guo Gu, Fran and Marie greeting guests at the Fund Raising Dinner (Photo by Myosen Sprott)**

## **Japanese Tea Ceremony and Haiku**

TCC has sponsored Traditional Japanese Tea Ceremonies and Haiku workshops performed by Tea Master Ms Junko Nishida of Gyokusen-en, Japan, and her daughter Chiho Nishida, Tallahassee, Florida in the Urasenke Chado Tradition. Chado, or the Way of Tea, is a comprehensive cultural practice that embraces the arts, religion, philosophy, and social life—virtually every aspect of life. The first was held on January 21, 2013 and the second was performed by Chiho Nishida and Yoshiko Murdick on September 30, 2014 in celebration of the fifth year TCC anniversary.

A practice such as this is truly rare. The ideals underlying the Way of Tea are

known in Japanese as Wa, Kei, Sei, Jaku. In English, these are Harmony, Respect, Purity, and Tranquility.

Sen no Rikyu, the 16th-century tea master who perfected the Way of Tea, explains it: Make a satisfying bowl of tea; lay the charcoal so that the water boils efficiently; provide a sense of warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer; arrange the flowers as though they were in the field; be ready ahead of time; be prepared in case it should rain; act with utmost consideration toward your guests.



**Ms. Junko Nishida and her daughter Chiho and granddaughter Zea carry on the Chado tradition at TCC on January 21, 2013  
(Photo by “Buddha-dog”)**



**Opening of the Tea Ceremony: Tea Masters Yoshiko Murdick and Chiho Nishida  
(Photo by Myosen Sprott)**

As seen within Sen no Rikyu's seven rules, the Way of Tea concerns the creation

of the proper setting for that moment of enjoyment of a perfect bowl of tea. Everything that goes into that serving of tea, even the quality of the air and the space where it is served, becomes a part of its flavor. The perfect tea must therefore capture the 'flavor' of the moment—the spirit of the season, of the occasion, of the time and the place. The event called *chaji*—that is, a full tea gathering—is where this takes place, and where the Way of Tea unfolds as an exquisite, singular moment in time shared by the participants.



Alex learning to make tea  
(Photo by Myosen Sprott)

*“The good are never alone, and the  
kindhearted are the merriest. Those who  
help others and so benefit themselves are the  
happiest.”*

~ Master Sheng Yen



Lola being shown how to whisk tea using Tea  
Bowl made in Zen Pottery Workshop  
(Photo by Myosen Sprott)

### Haiku

A haiku is a non-rhymed verse genre. In Japanese, haiku has five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five again in the last line (they count sounds, not strictly syllables, however, and also write in a single vertical line, but we use three horizontal lines in English). In Japanese, the word "haiku" means "playful verse." More important than form is that a haiku contain a *kigo* (season word) and employ the equivalent to a *kireji* (cutting word), which means that the poem should present two juxtaposed parts in three lines. In addition, haiku should use objective sensory images, and avoid subjective commentary. You also must use imagery to write the Haiku, in order for the reader to visualize what you are writing.



Zen Master Basho and haiku artist, practiced Zen without insignia or ordination. Every decade he experienced a catastrophic reordering of his life. 'Let my name be "Traveler,"' he implored, following the narrow road of poetry to the far north. He shattered clever wordplay haiku to create a new mosaic of language, solitary and raw. 'The old verse can be about willows,' he observed, *"but haiku requires crows picking snails in a rice paddy."*

(Wendy Johnson, "Seventeen Syllable Medicine" Tricycle Magazine, Fall 2014).

TCC Haiku Party was held on Friday, Jan. 18, 2013, from 7:30 - 9:00 pm. The Haiku teacher who gave a public talk and led the event was Haiku Teacher "Umejo" Junko Nishida of Gyokusen-en, Japan. All participants created their own haiku and the two best Haiku poems, selected by the participants, were written by Ann Prescott and are presented below:

*Another winter  
but plum blossoms again  
fills us with joy*

*in the chill night air  
a warm glow in the black sky  
a star of winter*



Ms. Umejo Junko Nishida presents Haiku Award to Ms. Ann Prescott  
(Photo by "Buddha-dog")

## Japanese/Zen Pottery Class

TCC has sponsored several Japanese/Zen pottery workshops taught by Ms. Sara Clayton. She has been making pottery for the past 16 years. Participants learned to make their own tea bowl, plate, or a unique mug! In the first class they make their own pottery and in the second class, they glaze it.



Examples of Japanese pottery  
(Photo from Sara Crayton)

*"In all things, whatever they are, the finish  
of every detail is not desirable:  
one that holds the attention is unfinished "*  
(The Book of Tea – Kakuzo Okakura)

This statement really encapsulates the main concept of "Wabi Sabi," which is essential in the creation of the ceremonial chawan (tea bowl). The deliberate adherence to the "imperfect" form during the making of the *chawan* and its dedicated use in the ritual of the Japanese tea ceremony, has been the most influential in the promotion of this concept in Japanese culture.

The ceramic objects reflect, more than any other aspect in the tea ritual, the spirit of the *Cha-Do* (Way of Tea), based on the design aesthetic of Wabi Sabi. Wabi (*Wa*: Harmony; *bi*: Beauty: "Beauty of Harmony"). *Sabi* represents the beauty that can evolve with age. The changing of appearance with the usage reflected in impermanence, always a condition that is contemplated in the Chan philosophy.

*Raku* (a type of Japanese pottery) was chosen for the creation of the *chawan*

due to the inherent unpredictability in its production. Even a pottery master had to relinquish control and allow the alchemy of nature, combined with a humble servant, to determine the result. As the non-symmetrical form was essential, the *chawan* was always crafted by hand. The continual rotation of the bowl in the hand was believed to enhance the spirit of the creator in the object. Also a simple shape was favored to evoke a serene appearance.

(This article from “Ceramics and Pottery Arts and Resources” at <http://www.veniceclayartists.com/tag/tea-cup/>)



**Sarah Clayton teaching the pottery workshop  
August 2014**

## Lotus Sutra Book Club

On September 12, 2014, the TCC initiated a book club, facilitated by Myosen Sprott, to explore and study important Buddhist literature and sutras as it relates to Chan and our daily practice. Our first text on the reading list is the *Lotus Sutra*.

Of the countless scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, few are more widely read or revered than the *Lotus Sutra*. Its teachings thoroughly permeate most schools of Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan. Yet its origins are shrouded in mystery.

The sutra's name in Sanskrit is *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra*, or the *Scripture of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law*. It is a matter of faith in some schools of Buddhism that the sutra contains the words of the historical Buddha. However, most historians believe the sutra was written in

the 1st or 2nd century CE, probably by more than one writer. A translation was made from Sanskrit to Chinese in 255 CE, and this is the earliest historical documentation of its existence.

Guo Gu Lǎoshī chose the Burton Watson translation for our study so that we can collectively refer to the same text, but he encouraged us to investigate other translations, he suggested that of Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama, sponsored by the Numata Center [on the web as “The Lotus Sutra\_2007 BDK version”] or Leon Hurvitz’s, Lotus blossom of the Fine Dharma—both of these are excellent.

Homework is done for each session with a standard worksheet which is turned into Myosen Sprott for compilation and redistribution prior to the club meetings held every couple of weeks. This exercise allows the members to reflect on the questions and wisdom of others setting the stage for a richer discussion when we meet face to face. Everyone is expected to share their perspectives.

Our teacher asks that we stay focused on the key points in the sutra and ponder how to relate these points in daily practice. After the meetings Myosen Sprott presents any questions the group wishes to pose to Guo Gu and relay answers back depending on the response mode he chooses.



**TCC Book Club facilitated by Myosen Sprott**

## Renovation of TBC

In July and August, 2012, TCC members renovated the Tallahassee Buddhist Center (TBC) inside and out. The exterior of the building and the interior walls were painted; wood flooring was laid down; a drop-ceiling was installed; tiles were laid in the bathroom; the interview room was organized and painted, and a new air conditioner was installed. Special thanks to Dewaine Rester for heading the project and to the many others who volunteered to do the renovation.



Dewaine and TCC members renovating TBC



The final product - TBC as it is today

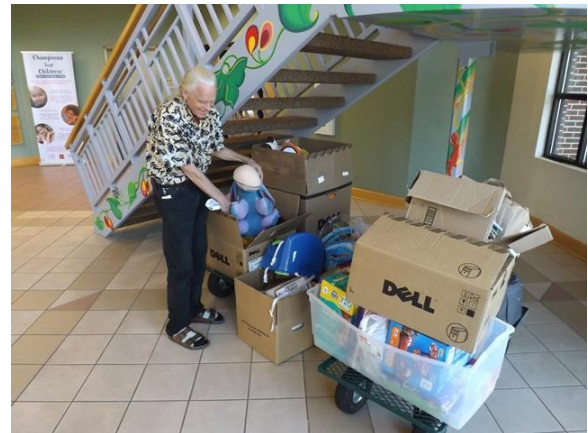
## Children's Home Society of Florida Donation Collections

Every year in the Fall TCC collects items from a wish-list for the Children's Home Society (CHS). People are extremely generous and donate toys, children's books,

diapers and pull-ups, backpacks, luggage and a whole host of wished-for items. CHS always needs backpacks and luggage year-round as some of their children get moved around to different homes and temporary shelters. For gift opportunities to CHS, please take a look at the wish-list at this fine organization's website:

<http://www.chsfl.org/page.aspx?pid=573>

Giving is the first bodhisattva "perfection" (*paramita*) practice. There are three kinds of giving: material, Dharma, and fearlessness. But generally, there are three levels of giving. The first is giving with gratitude; it is looking at those who accept our gifts as providing us with the opportunity to practice and generate merit. The second is giving without motives, without asking for anything in return. The third is giving, but seeing no giver, no receiver, and no gift; it is the awareness that everything is just the interplay of causes and conditions. Please reflect on these levels and consider helping the CHS. There is always something on the list that you can give!



Fred Glock at the CHS Center in Tallahassee with some of the donations collected by the TCC  
(Photo by Guo Gu Lǎoshī)

*"The meaning of life lies in serving; the  
value of life in giving."  
~ Master Sheng Yen*



## New TCC Retreat Facility

Since our founder and resident teacher Guo Gu began teaching the Dharma in Tallahassee in 2009, Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC) has flourished to the point where we are outgrowing our current rented space. TCC is one of the most active Chan groups in the West geared toward English speakers and the only Chan community in the south of the United States. In order to continue serving the increasing number of people attracted to the Dharma, we have begun raising funds to purchase a building that will provide a stable space for our weekly sittings, workshops, longer retreats, and other activities. We ask for your support to help us reach this goal. Whatever contribution you can make will help us collectively make the Dharma available to the wider community. Contributions to Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC) are tax-deductible. May your generosity bring you health, merit, and happiness.

**Checks/Money Orders made out to "Tallahassee Chan Center DDMBA" can be sent to:**  
**Tallahassee Chan Center**  
**P.O. Box 10389**  
**Tallahassee, FL 32302**



Photo from DDM Taiwan Website

## What's Happening at TCC

### *Monthly Calendar*

The following schedule is offered every month (see website for month to month details:

<http://tallahasseechan.com/calendar.html>).

**Weekly Sittings:** Every Monday evening, 7:30-9pm. There are two 30-minute periods of seated meditation, punctuated by a period of either walking meditation or mindful Yoga. Each meeting concludes with a short session of questions and answers.

**Short Meditation Instructions:** We offer brief meditation instructions on Thursday evenings from 7:30-9pm. No registration required. There is no set fee but donations are welcomed. Please feel free to stop by the Center. These instructions cover basic postures and methods of practice. The instructions are not a substitute for the thorough Beginner's Meditation Class. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to get you started on meditation practice.

**Dharma Talks,** The first Monday of each month. The evening begins with a 25-minute period of seated meditation; followed by the dharma talk at 8pm. The audio file of the talk will be posted under Teachings/[Audio Files](#).

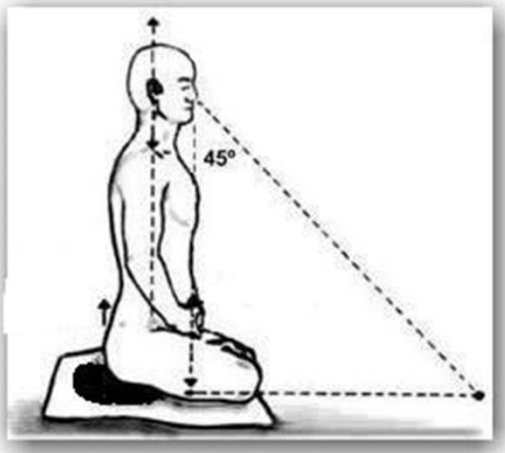
**1-1/2 Day Retreat,** 9am-6pm: Guo Gu leads a day long retreat at TBC. Anyone who has taken the beginner's meditation workshop or have previous experience in Zen practice is welcome to join. Retreats offer a rare occasion to deepen one's Chan practice and commitment to the path.

**TCC Social,** Third Mon., The evening begins with two short periods of sitting from 7:30-8:20pm, followed by an informal social gathering at 8:25-9:30pm. The event is a good opportunity to meet other members and chat with one another over light snacks, soft drinks, and tea.

**Beginners Meditation Workshop,** This 3-part Beginner's Meditation Class is the most systematic and thorough introduction to the



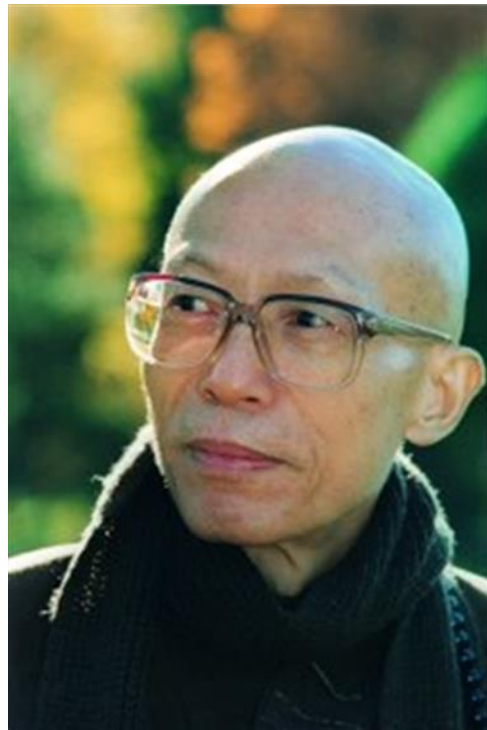
practice of Buddhist meditation available anywhere. Practitioners of all levels can benefit from it. It covers the conditions, methods, stages of meditation, pitfalls, and other supporting techniques to regulate the body, mind, and spirit such as self-massage, yoga exercises, and daily mindfulness techniques.



## Honoring Master Sheng Yen

As part of the 5 year anniversary celebration and during every February a special celebration is held by TCC in honor of the passing and more importantly to celebrate the life of Master Sheng Yen (December 4, 1930 – February 3, 2009). Dharma talks by Guo Gu Lǎoshī emphasize "Teacher-Student Relationship," where he discussed the proper rapport between teacher and student based on the Chan teachings and upon his personal and long term affiliation with Master Sheng Yen. He shared intimate stories not only of his experience but Master Sheng Yen's experiences with his teacher Master Lingyuan, a lineage disciple of the legendary Master Xuyun.

Books by Master Sheng Yen are given away in commemorating his passing. The event concludes with the opportunity to meet other members and chat with one another over light snacks, soft drinks, and tea.



**Master Sheng Yen**  
(December 4, 1930 – February 3, 2009)

*"Those who aid and deliver the suffering are bodhisattvas, and those in the throes of suffering are great bodhisattvas."*

~ Master Sheng Yen

### **Bodhisattva Vows**

Sentient beings without limit

I vow to deliver.

Afflictions without end

I vow to sever.

Approaches to Dharma without number

I vow to master.

The unexcelled enlightenment of a Buddha

I vow to attain.

This means one has given rise to *bodhicitta* ("mind of awakening") and has aroused the ultimate aspiration towards buddhahood.

*Fin*