



THE DHARMA TEACHER ORDER NEWSLETTER

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We are so happy
to publish Sister
Pháp Lan's
Gathas, writing
so
perfectly
expressed to
honor those
celebratory
occasions in her
path to becoming
a fully-ordained
Buddhist nun.
We congratulate
you and bless
you, dear Pháp
Lan.

Gatha on the Occasion of Her Ordination 2019

These two arms are becoming
Two arms becoming ten,
One hundred,
One thousand arms.
Arms reaching out, embracing all beings.
Unconditionally.
Without exception.

Gatha on the Occasion of Bhikkhuni Ordination 2022

Standing firmly on the path
I offer my life,
And the lamp appears.
The question is:
Who transmits and who receives?
The light endures.

Gatha on the Occasion of my 70th Continuation Day 2023

Not young anymore, I heard him say.
My teacher always makes me think.
I vow to cherish the time that remains:
Precious time to wear the noble robe.
Sitting, walking, eating, sleeping,
Working, praying, loving, helping.
Precious little time to wear the noble robe.
And then, continue.

Another
Way
To
Teach
Buddhism

For several years, I have been honored to compose and recite a Community Prayer for our Annual Mountain Top Interfaith Thanksgiving Program. Every year, we hold it in a different place of worship. This year, we held it in St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church on November 13. The Community Prayer is recited towards the end of the program and I kept it short but it has great meaning.

I decided to speak about His Holiness the Dalai Lama's often-recited definition of The Good Heart so I composed this small prayer. It is so related to what we are doing in our Interfaith Group. I did not go into the more in-depth meaning of Bodhicitta as this is an inter-faith assembly and it was just a taste of Buddhism.

The Good Heart

I have read that sometimes when people first meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama, some ask about his experiences, focusing on anything that might be exciting or fantastical in nature. I think the Dalai Lama redirects them answering, "I am a simple monk. I practice "the good heart". The Dalai Lama is referring to the more inclusive definition. Most people wonder to themselves, "Don't most of us try to have a good heart?" We do have an understanding of the good heart and its characteristic of compassion that generates generosity, patience and kindness, love, peace and good works. What is so different about the Dalai Lama's practice? It's true that all those attributes that I just mentioned are representatives of the good heart that brings happiness and joy but there is something else that the Dalai Lama is including in the definition and what that is the union of compassion and wisdom as the good heart. The Good Heart is that union.

When we have great compassion, our actions spring from that. We meet today as people from diverse religions who take joy and rejoice in their commonalities *and* in their differences as well. The way I see it is that no matter what our religion, we also practice the good heart in the union of compassion and wisdom. Our wisdom comes from the awareness that that good heart inspires, the wisdom that we are united in our efforts to promote peace and acceptance, that we practice peace-making in whatever humble way we can. May our being here this evening - united with intent and prayer - be that wisdom. We pray for that understanding in all parts of the world. May the energy that prevails here tonight exist and expand all over the world. That's the wisdom part of the Good Heart.

I wish to thank you to all for making the time to come here and be present in this united effort.

Blessings to all of you.

Janet Reale, November 13, 2023



IS THIS MY SANGHA ? - The Evolution of a Relationship with the DTO

By Fernando Camacho

August 15, 2006—another birthday celebration. My wife wanted to take me to a “peaceful” place and I agreed. She knew that I had been struggling, trying to find ways to calm my mind and deal with all the stresses of work dealing with very sick patients. I had been studying various spiritual traditions trying to find inner peace, even attending in 2005 a very inspiring, rewarding retreat with Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen teacher. She said that she was bringing me to a place where we had never been before and to keep my eyes closed. When I finally opened my eyes, we were at the entrance of Chuang Yen Monastery in Kent, New York, just about 30 minutes from our home. We began to look around; the architecture, temples and statues were foreign to me but I felt curious. On a poster board, there was an announcement with information about a class in Buddhism being held at the monastery taught by a monastic named Thich Tri Hoang. It felt that the invitation was meant to be for me. Shortly after the visit to Chuang Yen, I enrolled in the class and began to attend. The classes were being held every other Saturday in the library of the monastery for 2-3 hours. The class was composed of many other students who were obviously acquainted with Buddhism for years and who were more advanced in their understanding of the Dharma. I was mesmerized with the Buddhist approach and concepts. I began to realize that a great deal of my suffering was due to my perception of life. I needed to learn to see life “as it truly is”. Eager to learn, I immersed myself in all of the suggested readings. I was asked to be the presenter for one of the classes; not being very sure of myself, I chose a book towards the end of the first year, *Zen Keys*. I had no idea how to present a topic in this setting.

But there was a certain chemistry in the class that presented as unfriendliness and aloofness. I did not know any of the other members of the class and was not sure that I belonged. No one in the class seemed interested in getting to know me. I considered dropping out of the class multiple times but the sweetness and clarity of the Dharma kept bringing me back.

In general, I felt no connection with this group. I was only learning from them. But in the third year of studies, I had a breakthrough. I remember that it was during a walking meditation at the Chuang Yen library. All of a sudden, things began to really make sense to me, it felt like the Dharma had finally opened up for me. I became very conscious of the present moment and realized that this is where I belonged. All of my negative emotions were dissolved by what the Buddhist teachings had shown me. I felt happy, fulfilled, at peace. I wanted to be able to share this feeling and transformation with others. I decided then to become a Dharma teacher.

However, things were not so simple or easy. Our teacher, Thich Tri Hoang, decided to move to Houston to join his family and start his new temple. This left us without a monastic teacher. There were three Dharma teachers that were left in charge of the class but, over the next few months, they also left the class. We had 20-30 students in the class with no leadership. There were rumblings that the other monastics at Chuang Yen were not happy about how the Dharma Teacher Order (DTO) operated without a monastic presence. (continued on page 4)

There was a distinct possibility that the DTO was not going to survive. I was saddened by the sudden deterioration of the class. The DTO lotus flower was stuck in the mud. Would I ever become a Dharma teacher?

Is this the right sangha for me?

How can we survive in a Buddhist monastery without a monastic leader?

(To be continued in the next newsletter with —'From Mud to Lotus—the transformation of the DTO')

A New Plan

By Pháp Lan

I have always struggled with the fifth precept. My chronic issue involves practicing moderation with what I put into my mouth.

I was a very heavy cigarette smoker for 32 years. Eventually I overcame that and have not had a cigarette in 21 years.

I was a moderate drinker in my 20's and 30's, with some excessive consumption from time to time. After that, I settled into the glass of red wine a day lifestyle until my ordination as a novice monk. Since then, I have not consumed any intoxicants.

So, what's left? Food of course. I have thoroughly enjoyed virtually every food I have ever put into my mouth. I have been vegetarian—leaning toward vegan—since 2006, so that is a plus.

However, while I am keenly aware of how and what to eat to remain healthy in mind and body, I don't always do this.

When I am under stress, or when I am depressed or anxious, I tend to overeat and to eat lots of vegan junk food. No animals are harmed, except for this one (me!). I have struggled with my relationship with food since I was a child (I have been a lifetime member of Weight Watchers since the age of 16!) and I am well aware of the causes and conditions that led to this unhealthy behavior. I know through experience that this does not bring true happiness. In fact it brings all kinds of suffering—bloodwork in the red zones, fatigue, physical and mental discomfort, guilt, and shame.

Now that I have this intellectual understanding of what is going on, one would think that would be the end of it. But as usual, intellectual knowledge is not enough. One must practice what one has learned.

So once again, at the age of 70, I am focusing on practicing the fifth precept in general and the five contemplations in particular. (Continued on page 5)

Scary bloodwork and the unforgiving bathroom scale prompted this renewed effort. But this time, the five contemplations burst into my awareness the minute I resolved to do better. Instead of immediately researching and planning a special diet and vowing to follow it 100%, instead of making a rigid daily appointment with the scale, I am using a different, gentler approach.

Yes, I need to lose 30 pounds, but that's not the point. What I really need is to allow the Dharma rain to penetrate my being. What I really need is to understand that trying to force any outcome is an exercise of the ego and is doomed to fail. What I really need is to let go of all those ill-conceived notions of self that I have tried to cling to and badger into submission all these years. What I really need is to remember the truth of no-self, to remember the truth of interbeing.

So here is my plan. Take three deep breaths. Recite the Five Contemplations before I eat and allow them to seep into my being.

And then behave accordingly.

That's it.

Here is the version I use:

This food is the gift of the whole universe, the earth, the sky, and much hard work.

Let us live in a way that makes us worthy to receive it.

May we transform our own unskilled states of mind and learn to eat in moderation.

May we take only foods that nourish us and prevent illness.

May we accept this food so that we may realize the path of understanding and love.



Poetic Inspiration

By Maeve Eng-Wong

The Real Work

By: Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

My last child entered college in September of this year. I felt joy, not just for him, but for myself. The genius of my mother, opening the door at 8 a.m., not giving a thought to where we went or what we were doing unless we didn't return in time for lunch, the same for dinner, and then enforcing the rule to be home when the street lights went on. I laughed when my friend told me that she read an article that said, "Two children is the new four, and three the new six." I felt validated. I feel like I have spent a lifetime in the school, driving to various sporting events and performances (and watching most of them), helping to fund one event or another, making sure academics were on track, being part of various committees, maintaining a career, volunteering for the DTO (LOL), and trying to nurture a partnership of thirty-five years with my husband.

I didn't have my children young and, as they leave, I find myself entering what I hope to be the last third of my life. I have spent so much time being busy, doing, moving forward, caretaking, creating, advocating, fighting, justifying, etc. (sound familiar?). I don't want to continue with what I have been doing, for sure, nor could I if I wanted. Those tasks and behaviors now belong to the next generation. This is confirmed as I watch my children starting to navigate the busyness of their own lives....and so it begins for them.

I have been fortunate to have practiced with the DTO for years, reading mostly Buddhist or Buddhist-adjacent books, and have logged many hours on the cushion. This commitment has prepared me to be still enough to deeply listen to the "singing of the impeded stream" and to be moved by its beauty. I am being reminded, in this empty nest year, little by little, that I am part of something ancient, intelligent, and inclusive. I am learning to not engage in grasping for whatever it is I feel compelled to achieve or complete, and simply remember that it is all okay, exactly the way that it all is, nothing needs to be organized or orchestrated. It is so profoundly clear how much of what is sustaining life is not about me and mine or about what we do or don't, but about the intricacies of developing a relationship to it ALL. The obstacles are there to create a variation in the music. A variation that I can choose to accept, appreciate, and relate to in deep ways, or ignore, buck up against, and enforce my will upon. I am sure I will do both as I clumsily release the notions of knowing where I am going and what I am doing and, that strange and curious belief that I can experience this life with an unbaffled mind. Berry reminds me that there is much more to come, and nothing I need to do to make anything happen, except to let go, and find the courage to be open and present.