



THE BLOOMING OF THE LOTUS - THE DTO FROM 2012-2024

It is now September 2012, and we are trying very hard to keep all of the DTO pieces together. Various attempts to keep our home base at Chuang Yen Monastery had failed. In New York, we began to settle in a rented large room on the fourth floor of a very large building at Graymoor Monastery. It was hard to recruit students since our meeting place was not very accessible and this change of location began to decimate participation in our classes. We had 18 participants in the New York Class that year.



In Connecticut, they were able to rent rooms at a Christian Spiritual Life Center in West Hartford. They were able to generate much more interest in the class from the many already established Buddhist groups in that state. There were days of mindfulness arranged so that the Connecticut and New York classes could practice together. The Connecticut sangha was able to succeed through the efforts of Aaron Doyle, Robin Ryan, Bobbie Martin, Richard Zipoli, Michelle Hartel and Craig Hannah.

In Houston, Thay had started a meditation group at his temple, Chua Phap Nguyen, and some of those members were able to start a class in September 2012 under the leadership of Sondra Kaighen and Jeff DeLuca. Later on, Alex Quiros, Pháp Lan and Giang Dao joined the leadership group of the Houston class.

In the meantime in Miami, Noble Silence had continued to nurture a group of practitioners who did not follow the same curriculum as the other 3 classes but yet were well versed in the Dharma. Many of these members were Spanish speaking and could only use translated versions of the DTO recommended books. Teo Castellanos and Susette Couso were very instrumental in the development of this sangha.

So, by the end of the 2012-13 class year, the DTO, which had started in only one state, had now expanded to have branches in four states.

As we tried to re-evaluate the goals and mission of the DTO, it became obvious that we needed to organize ourselves better in order to be able to survive to continue. Who were we? What were we trying to accomplish? How can we communicate the Dharma to the West in the most accessible way? Realistically, we had become too comfortable and dependent on Chuang Yen Monastery...We needed to realign the DTO. The following important steps were taken:

- We hired a consultant to upgrade and redesign the official DTO website. We procured the dharma teacher order.org and .com domains. One of our students, Eduardo Barrios, designed our logo which included two hands holding on to a Dharma wheel. In the fall of 2012, we launched the website. Deborah McDonald and Craig Hannah were instrumental in getting this project going as well as maintaining the website. Craig is our official "webmaster".
- We obtained the services of a lawyer, who worked pro bono to guide us through the process of becoming a religious not for profit corporation (501c3) and registering us in New York State as such. The certificate of incorporation in New York State was filed in June 2013 and was formally registered in October 2013. The tax exempt status was granted by the IRS in December 2013.
- We began in December 2012 to have winter retreats in Thay's temple in Pearland, Texas. These retreats were very useful as we were getting bigger, needed to create more structure and also needed to interact with each other more than just once a year. Unfortunately, these retreats stopped occurring after the COVID pandemic.
- We needed a site to hold our end of academic year retreats in the Spring as we could no longer use Chuang Yen. We searched multiple sites, monasteries and temples in the New York and Connecticut area. In 2013, we went to Won Dharma Center in Claverak, New York (too expensive!). In 2014, we went to Sharpe Reservation in Fishkill, New York (too rustic!). Then, In 2015, we discovered the Mariandale Retreat Center in Ossining, New York, an ecumenical Catholic retreat center run by The Dominican Sisters of Hope. It was a welcoming, comfortable, affordable site (finally!). We have been going there every spring since then, except for 2020 and 2021 (due to COVID).
- In December 2014, at the Houston winter retreat, we decided that we needed to change the Dharma Study Class from 3 to 4 years to try to dedicate adequate time to study all do the Buddhist texts and concepts. The Dharma Training Class, the class for those who aspire to become Dharma teachers, was changed to be of 2-3 years duration, depending on the student's progress.
- In February 2015, the DTO newsletter was launched under the guidance and leadership of Janet Reale. This newsletter was started as a venue for to find out what was happening at all of the various sites. It has transformed to a place where members can publish essays or poems related to Dharma experiences.

Note: Continued on page 2. We realize the font size is very small. Please feel free to enlarge the view using the slider bar, changing view percentage or just zooming it.

THE BLOOMING OF THE LOTUS - THE DTO FROM 2012-2024 , continued

Please note: This is the third installment of a series about the history of the DTO; the other two installments are in the previous two editions of the newsletter.

As the national sangha began to expand and become more organized, the New York sangha continued to have difficulties recruiting new students for the class. By the end of 2016, there were only 12 participants. The decision was made at that time to look for another place to hold the class and we then moved to hold our classes at Mariandale Retreat Center, where we had been holding our Spring retreats. We tried to teach the Dharma Study Class at Mariandale but, after 2 years, we realized that this class was too rigorous for students who just wanted a casual exposure to the Dharma. In 2018, we began to teach the Dharma in different ways. We established the Buddhist Christian dialogues twice a year, taught an Introduction to Zen, How to Conquer Fear using the Heart Sutra, The Four Immeasurable, Eastern Wisdom for Today's Times and currently How to find Peace in Chaotic Times.

In 2016, Thay was approached by monks from a Virginia Beach Vietnamese Buddhist Temple about possibly having our class there. We began to work with students from that temple to begin starting the Dharma Study Class there. There was much interest and effort to make this a possible site for the DTO class. Unfortunately, after the COVID pandemic, it became very obvious that it would be very difficult to get the class established at that temple. The Virginia students then stopped coming to the DTO activities .

In 2019, we were also approached by practitioners from another Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Springfield, Missouri, Dihn Huang Temple. They had an on going class and were interested in starting our curriculum. In spite of the COVID pandemic, they persevered and have become an integral part of the DTO, making Missouri the fifth site for our classes. This has been accomplished under the leadership of Venerable Thay Chanh and Giac Vien.

The COVID pandemic shut down all of our activities at all of the sanghas for 2020 and 2021. In 2020, we started monthly national sangha practices with the advent of Zoom. These were organized by Elena Bravo Cruz and Craig Hannah. These monthly practices allowed all of the sanghas to remain connected during this very difficult time. We did not have any in- person retreats from December 2019 until April 2022. Because of the pandemic, it has been very difficult in New York, Connecticut and Miami to re-establish formal classes or meetings. Small sanghas have been formed who meet for Dharma sharing and teaching. In Houston and in Springfield, because they are affiliated with temples, there has been a return of more of the usual sangha practice activities.

In September 2021, we started Silent DTO Retreats at Mariandale to be held 3-4 times a year to provide more opportunities for DTO members to work on their spiritual practice. These have been very enjoyable and rewarding. Maeve Eng Wong, Teo Castellanos and Fernando Camacho have been coordinating these retreats.



All through these years, the DTO continues to provide strong support for the Buddhist Correspondence Course for the imprisoned. Under the creation and establishment of the program under Richard and Adrienne Baksa to the current leadership of Pháp Lan, the course continues to provide much spiritual nourishment to those who are incarcerated.

So, as we resurfaced from the isolation produced by the COVID pandemic, we faced new obstacles. How could we revive the Dharma Study Class as well as the Dharma Training Class? We had been discussing for years about developing an online version of the DTO classes which would make them accessible to the world. With the success of the Zoom monthly national sangha meetings during COVID, we thought that , perhaps, this was the time. Thay asked Elena Bravo Cruz to pursue the efforts to start the online class, which would be called The Buddhist Institute. A group was convened to plan these efforts consisting of Elena, Pháp Lan, Craig Hannah, Giac Vien and Giang Dao. On September 2022, the classes were started and we are now in the second year of this wonderful project. These online classes have replaced each local sangha's efforts to teach the Dharma Study Class. All students from wherever they are, will be receiving the same teachings. Of course, if the student intends to become a teacher, then he/she will need to align himself/herself with one of the five DTO sanghas. The local sanghas will be concentrating in teaching the Buddhist practices to its members. The future structure of the Dharma Training Class is being developed by a committee led by Maeve Eng Wong and composed of Bobbie Martin and Fernando Camacho.

Also, of major significance, in September 2022, two of our students, Pháp Lan and Giac Vien, were ordained in Springfield, Missouri as a bhikkhu and novice monk respectively. Outside of Noble Silence and Phap Chan, they are the only DTO students to be ordained in the monastic tradition.

In summary, as you can see, the DTO lotus did not know how to bloom in its inception. It took the hardships of moving out of a monastery, establishing its own identity, surviving the COVID pandemic and then trying out a new venture, in order for it to start to bloom . There have been many detours but, through the efforts and kindness of so many, we continue our mission: to try to make the Buddha's teachings available to the West.



Poetry

A brief biographical note from Charlie Gibson; his poem follows:

I live in San Antonio, Texas and I am from Orange County, CA originally. I came to the DTO last year. I am a first year student. I have studied the Dharma and practiced it, with varying degrees of success, for 18 years. My Dharma teacher turned 97 years old last year. His age and deteriorating health caused me to reflect on my Buddhist journey and what I wanted to do next. I searched for and found the DTO because I was looking for a sangha where I could continue to grow and contribute. My Dharma teacher sponsored me and the rest is history. My teacher still lives and he tells me he is pleased with my choices and continued progress.

“in texas”

after midnight

the full moon shines bright

passes an old oak branch

its light enlivens the bed

monkey mind awakens

jumps through hoops

thoughts feelings perceptions

just loop and loop and loop

this makes conscious

happy memories that contain

of a heart that retains

pain sadness tension

so much manure did I mention

to bring to light a yellow rose in texas

Poetry continued on page 4.

Pam Hausner is a mindfulness meditation teacher who often integrates creative experiences using art supplies, sketching, and doodling for visually accessing personal insight. With a desire to deepen her practice and bring the dharma to others, she learned about the DTO through a Google search. She is completing her first year as a DTO student.. Below is her first contribution to our newsletter.

With This Breath

A poem by Pam Hausner

With this breath
I come home
My home includes the presence of all beings everywhere
As I breathe in, I receive their air
As I breathe out, I give them my air
The breath shows me we are one.

With this breath
I am timeless
I breathe in the air of Abraham, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed
As I breathe in, I receive their air
As I breathe out, I offer my air to others
The breath shows me we are one.

With this breath
I am nature
Breathing in oceans, clouds, plants, trees, lichens, soil, and worms
All of nature creates my air
All of nature receives my breath
The breath shows me we are one.

With this breath
I am alive
My heart sees joy, doubt, cruelty, confusion, selfishness, and kindness
As I breathe in, I nurture my body
As I breathe out, I send compassion
The breath shows me we are one.

With this breath
I come home
I see how we are deeply interconnected and interdependent
Expanding to receive and grow
Contracting to give and allow space for others
The breath shows me we are one.

And now, an essay...

Yellow Wildflower

Janet Reale

July 24, 2023



I wrote this last year (date above) and left it in the present tense for this publication.

The current book in the Seekers' Book Club is *Your Guide to Forest Bathing* which all participants seem to relate to and, co-incidentally, is perfect for any time of year but especially so for this time of year as we are probably taking more walks than usual, the songbirds are performing their glorious songs, the trees' canopy shelters us from rain drizzles and we are generally imbibing our surroundings with all our senses without total differentiation. This time, we were asked to "Notice what we are noticing," a directive which narrows one's perspective somewhat but gives concentrated focus to anything in your environment there in the woods. True, everything calls to us and it is difficult to make a choice. That's the whole idea, "notice what you are noticing, "an example of mindfulness". We were not asked to make a rationale for our choice but just to choose.

I am used to seeing diverse yellow flowers blooming in profuse patches in the meadows but the yellow wildflowers on the wooded path are different and most I could not identify but just wonder about for the time being. I stopped suddenly because something caught my attention. It was the gentle swaying, of a very slender and very high stem of a bloom, a tiny bloom maybe 1/4" in diameter with yellow daisy-like petals. It may have been a yellow flax or look alike. Have you ever noticed the extraordinary number of different yellow wildflowers? It is truly astounding to contemplate. On this day, the air was hot and still; there was no breeze. At first, my quixotic and fanciful mind took over and I said to myself, "maybe that flower is dancing to its own internal rhythm" and I continued on my walk, without giving it any real scrutiny. However, I knew there had to be another answer so I went back the next day, another brutally hot and still day with no discernable breeze, and again noticed the flower swaying. Now I was so intrigued that I stood there, mesmerized and feeling somewhat spacey, hoping that no one came along to ask me what I was looking at.

After about ten minutes, I was shocked to feel the slightest, most gentle current of air that I never would have noticed without this concentrated focus. Naturally, the delicate stem was moving in rhythm to suit the slight air current, so slight that it was almost imperceptible. I finally understood and was thrilled to make that discovery. The only thing that was different was that I had stood still and was patient. That is why I became aware, an awareness that I was always capable of but which eluded me because of my customary hurried behavior. I began to feel some remorse at all the learning opportunities I ever had that I wasted because I wanted to take it all in with immediacy and got frustrated when it didn't happen. I began to understand that patience and awareness go together. I started then to look at this experience in a different way. Isn't it wonderful that, even as we age, if we value those two virtues, patience and awareness, they will lead us to lessons in glorious appreciation, lessons that will emphasize our connectedness with nature and enrich our lives in ways that we never imagined.

84,001

By Pháp Lan

I'm drifting in a timeless mist
As though I were a cloud.
When suddenly I touch the earth,
Fall prostrate on the ground.

It takes a thousand years or so
To get me to my knees.
And another hundred lifetimes
To rise and walk with ease.

One step and then another,
And then a million more.
Until at last my weary heart
Discovers one small door.

It opens just a little way—
At least that's how it seems
I think I know the secret,
But it's only in my dreams.

I rest awhile, remembering,
Then blink my eyes again.
And now the door is opened
By a dear old smiling friend.

Come in, come in, she beckons,
It's time to walk with me.
And so we journey heart to heart
Into eternity.

Since the Pali is the most complete, earliest Buddhist canon, the claim appears throughout Buddhist schools. But the interpretation from Zen schools is quite consistent - "84,000 Dharma Gates" is a poetic reference to the fact that anything and everything is a door to enlightenment.

