

CHAN PROSTRATION: SPIRITUAL EVOLUTION IN THREE EASY STEPS

The act of prostration in its various forms can be found in religious practices and rituals the world over. It is not possible to generalise as to its meaning in different religious, social and cultural contexts, even within Buddhist traditions.

Venerable Guo Jun demonstrated a method of prostration within the Chan tradition at the NSW retreat in July 2005 and explained that far from 'idol' worship, it is a practice rich in metaphor and symbolism.

Step One: the opening bow

To begin, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and then bring your palms together before the chest in what is known in yoga as 'prayer position'.

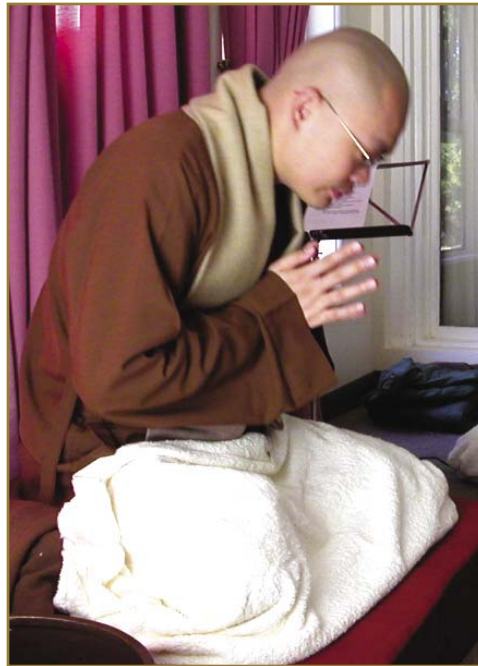
This is done to centre one's attention, physical balance and other energies. It brings one back to the moment and to the sacredness of the act in which one is about to engage.

Venerable Guo Jun explained that each finger represents one of the ten realms of existence, the dharmadhatu. The six mundane realms are: the hell realm, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, demi-gods (titans) and heavenly beings (devas). The four saintly realms are those of the arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

Bringing our fingers and palms together before our heart symbolises that all ten realms of existence are created by the mind. The space between the gently clasped hands symbolises the emptiness of existence.

To perform the bow, one bends at the hips with the upper body straight until it is parallel with the floor, maintaining the hands in prayer position. After bending to 90 degrees, adjust the hands so that the last three fingers of the right hand are wrapped around the outside of the last three fingers of the left hand. The index fingers should be slightly bent and touching at the tips, and the thumbs adjacent and touching with the thumbnails facing back.

This hand position or mudra symbolises a lotus bud on the verge of blooming. The lotus flower floating on filthy water is a traditional metaphor for the paradox of stainless enlightenment embedded in impure samsara. After forming the mudra, one stands upright and brings the hands to the level of the eyes as an offering to the Buddha.



ABOVE: Venerable Guo Jun, Dharma Heir of Master Sheng Yen, at the Chan meditation retreat in July

Step Two: the three prostrations

After the opening bow, one performs three prostrations.

First, take the hands back to the prayer position and begin bending towards the ground, initially at the hips, and then slightly at the knees. As one bends, place the right hand on the ground leaving the left hand in prayer position.

After the right hand is grounded, shift the weight onto this hand so that one may comfortably plant the knees on the ground. The left hand is then placed slightly ahead of the right hand on the other side of the knees.

Then slide the right hand forward so that it is in line with the left. During this process the fingers should be kept together. With both hands and knees on the ground one dips the head so that the forehead comes into contact with the ground between the hands.

This act of obeisance represents an admission of one's own imperfection and, implicitly, one's resolve to transform oneself.

The hands are then closed into fists, upturned and then reopened, so that the palms face upwards and the backs of the hands touch the ground. Close the hands again and turn them back down and then open them so that our palms touch the ground once more.

This act of opening and closing the hands symbolises one's receptiveness and

acceptance of the gifts of wisdom and compassion.

From here the process is reversed. The head is taken from the ground, the right hand slides back, the left hand is brought back to the prayer position, and the body weight is transferred to the right hand so that it can support the body as it comes back up to standing. Upon standing, one takes the hands back to the 'prayer position' to complete a prostration.

This entire process is repeated twice more.

Step Three: the closing bow

After you have completed the three prostrations, a closing bow is made in precisely the same manner as the opening bow.

TREASURE WITHIN ONESELF

When talking about the treasure within oneself, are we saying that the most valuable and precious thing that a practitioner seeks is within their own mind, and that there is no need to search outside it?

The term 'treasure within oneself' is derived from a conversation between Chan Master Ma Zu Dao Yi and his disciple Chan Master Wei Hai. When Wei Hai went to see Ma Zu, Ma Zu asked him, "What are you doing here?" Wei Hai answered that he wanted to learn about the Way and begged for the treasure of the Buddhadharmas. Ma Zu replied, "You have not looked after the treasure within yourself and have even yet to discover that there is a treasure within your house, but instead, you have travelled East and run West searching aimlessly. In actual fact, wherever you search, there is no treasure more precious than your own. The real treasure is inside your home."

Normally people begged for the Way or the Dharma from experienced Sangha and journeyed west for sutras. Indeed, throughout China's history there have been many experienced Sangha travelling from China to India in search of the Dharma.

Also, there is a view that 'transmitting the Dharma' means that there is an object that can be transmitted from generation to generation just as parents pass on a family estate to their children. There are also people who believe that when they take refuge in the



ABOVE: Jubilant youths with Venerable Guo Jun at the 5-day youth meditation retreat

FLEETING MOMENTS IN CHAN MEDITATION RETREATS JULY 2005

So many scenes jumping from one to another continuously but all only in a breath. It sustains life, it kills life, all in this one little breath. How many of us are able to appreciate the little things in life. In order to keep sustaining a little mindfulness in every breath it takes so much mental effort (not brainy matter) and you can't use brute force.



Crap. The Venerable has told us to talk to one another for this exercise, just when I was really getting into the noble silence and relieved to be free of all the idle chatter in the world. Then I realised that the noble silence hasn't been so noble or silent – there's a bloody televised drama going on inside my mind, well into its two millionth episode, but no-one is watching the TV – all the actors are just trying to outdo each other in the melodrama and grand sweeping narrative. All of them try to be in centre stage, and they all want to be furnished with the best setting. Who's going to look at me if I'm in a crappy white-set background? ... Oh this suffering is stupid. It's gross.



I learned that happiness is not dependent on the outside world. No partner, no job, no money, nothing can make us happy but ourselves. It is our attitude in life which we are able to choose. If we mindfully experience the precious present moment and be one with what we are doing. To be aware that the present moment is all we've got. To taste the flavours of the things we eat, feeling them on our tongue. I learned to walk, to hear, to eat, to see. To see the sun and the earth in a mandarin, to see everything in everything and everybody in everybody. I realised that happiness lies in simpleness, pureness. I learned that a wise life comes from a clear mind.



Of course there was pure physical pain like the throbbing in my brain, and when it's given a name it's called a migraine

But when I just think of it as sensation it becomes a heartbeat in my head,

a pulse in my skull

When I accept that it's not forever the pain begins to dull

I have learned there is pain without suffering

I have also learned there is suffering without pain

Pain is a natural healthy condition of the body

Suffering is unnatural and caused by the mind

So I must accept the pain

And leave the suffering behind.



The retreat is closed

And I am changed.

The cultivation of merit and virtue is possible.

Inspired

I shall return home

And clean the bathroom.

My mother shall be pleased



It is refreshing to see the Venerable being such a young (person) to have such wisdom. I certainly hope when I reach that age I will mature and continue to be more compassionate and wise. I guess that is my aspiration.

TREASURE WITHIN ONESELF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Triple Gem, accepting the Buddhadharmā, precepts and so on, that there is something that is being transmitted. These views seem reasonable on the surface when in fact they are not.

From a Chan perspective, Dharma is not something that is transmitted by mouth or by hand. Dharma is not transmitted from teacher to disciple as there are no words or physical objects or observations that can be used as content to transmit it. The highest Buddhadharmā is beyond thought and cannot be derived from language or logical thinking. This being the case, there cannot be anything outside the mind.

If both Master and disciple are passers-by, then there only needs to be a hint of understanding; there is no other object to transmit. When referring to a 'meeting of the minds', this is when the teacher's wisdom and the disciple's wisdom resonate with each other; where any word, expression or action can deliver a message that confirms that the disciple has discovered the treasure within himself.

The treasure within oneself is the understanding of one's mind and seeing one's true nature. The transition of a vexed mind to that of a wise mind is the 'understanding of one's mind'. The 'seeing of one's true nature' is seeing the unmoving and unchanging Buddha-nature. Since it does not move nor change, then there is no object with which it can be compared; it cannot be spoken of, but only experienced. Once enlightened, the treasure within oneself is discovered.

If a person in their daily life chases after resources or seeks help, they will never be satisfied or solve their problems. The only way is to turn around and seek help from within oneself; 'helping oneself to help others, helping others and being helped by the heavens'.

First recognise yourself and then others will recognise you and have confidence in you. Otherwise, if you don't have confidence in yourself then you will definitely not be recognised by others. Recognising oneself is not egotistic or arrogant but solid and practical.

TRANSLATED FROM 'DISCOURSE ON CHAN'
BY MASTER SHENG YEN

The stream has no purpose,
the water is simply flowing.
Let it be so with practice.

Master Sheng Yen

CELEBRATION OF VESAK, SYDNEY DDM – MAY 2005

Sydney DDM celebrated Vesak by participating in the Combined Vesak Celebration and Art Exhibition at the New South Wales Parliament House from 23rd to 27th May 2005. We were one of thirteen Buddhist organisations on the Steering Committee convened by the Buddhist Council of NSW for the event. The Celebration was launched by the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir and the Premier of New South Wales, Mr. Bob Carr.

This celebration of Vesak is of special historical significance as it represents the NSW Government's recognition of the contribution of the Buddhist community to Australian society. It also increases awareness in the general public of important festivals of Buddhism, the nation's second largest religion.

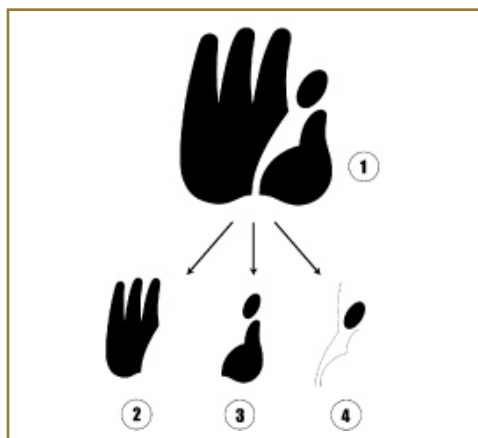
The exhibition included works that celebrated the birth, enlightenment teachings and nirvana of the Buddha, as well as the contribution and role of Buddhist temples and organisations to Australian society.

Sydney DDM contributed three pieces of artwork for the exhibition. These included a picture of Akshobhya Buddha's head with a caption explaining its odyssey and return. We also volunteered to design and create 20 montages of 200 photographs, arranged in the colours of the Buddhist flag, to depict the diverse activities of Buddhist organisations. The volunteers practiced 'mindfulness' in creating the montages and completed the task with ease and enjoyment.

On 28th May, we continued to celebrate Vesak at a different venue, Bankstown Town Hall, by hosting a book stall and distributing free books to the public. We also conducted a 'Fun in Mindfulness' game where participants were given the rather challenging task of balancing a ping-pong ball on a piece of cardboard and walking a designated course. Our volunteers enjoyed the game as much as the participants.



ABOVE: Melbourne meditation retreat



ABOVE: The Dharma Drum Mountain emblem

WORLD CONFERENCE OF RELIGIONS FOR PEACE INTER-RELIGIOUS FORUM

The Buddhist Council of NSW organised this forum in Sydney last year. Several leaders of different faiths, including Venerable Master Sheng Yen, gave their perspectives on the subject of 'Inner calm and outer peace'.

Venerable Master Sheng Yen made a most significant comment when he said, in response to a question about which religion is the best, "We should practice them all."

He elaborated on his answer with a quotation and a further comment. The Buddha said, "Nothing I have said can be taken as absolute; each person, situation and time is different." Therefore, we should not attach to any deep religious feelings we have had as these are self-centred attachments that do not reflect selflessness.

MELBOURNE MEDITATION RETREAT

A two-day meditation retreat was conducted by Venerable Guo Jun at the new Melbourne DDM Meditation Centre from 29th to 31st of July. Eighteen members participated in a program of sitting, walking and working meditation, morning and evening services, and Dharma talks.

The Dharma talks included a range of themes: relaxation, a simple mind, attachment to our bodies, and facing and accepting the reality. The talks were easy to understand, informative, and inspirational.

The discussions at the conclusion of the retreat were very lively. All shared their personal feelings, albeit that some were so moved they could hardly speak. Others wished for a longer retreat to deepen their practice as they felt they had only begun to warm up near the end.

All were very grateful to Venerable Guo Jun for his guidance and to the volunteers who prepared the delicious vegetarian meals.

THE DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN EMBLEM

The Dharma-Preaching Mudra

The emblem represents a symbolic hand gesture (1), the 'Dharma-preaching mudra'. It portrays the raised right hand of the Buddha and indicates that he has, through teaching the Dharma, 'untied the knots of vexations' in the minds of sentient beings.

The emblem of Dharma Drum Mountain also represents the doctrines of Buddhism and the vision and values of DDM. These are encapsulated in the three peaks, the profile of a monastic practicing Chan meditation, and the human figure, that together comprise the entire emblem.

The Three Peaks

The profile of the three mountains (2) represents the:

- Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha
- Three gates of liberation: emptiness, marklessness and desirelessness
- Three undefiled practices: precepts, concentration and wisdom
- Three Dharma seals: impermanence, no-self and nirvana

The Monastic

The element on the right (3) is the profile of a monastic immersed in meditation, sitting in deep contemplation of the Path before the mountain. This figure represents the spirit of Chan: wisdom and compassion.

The Delivered Sentient Being

The flowing human figure (4) represents all delivered sentient beings who are like water flowing through the mountains and symbolises liberation through the Buddhadharmas.

The Five Fingers

The entire emblem also portrays five fingers, representative of the common teachings of the five vehicles: the human vehicle, the heavenly vehicle, that of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the bodhisattva vehicle, and the Buddha vehicle.

The five fingers and one hand combined can also be seen as symbolising the six perfections: generosity, precepts, patience, diligence, concentration and wisdom.

The Four Fingers

The thumb and forefinger can also be regarded as one, making four fingers. These four represent the foundational teaching of the Four Noble Truths: suffering, the origin of suffering, the extinction of suffering, and the path to the end of suffering.

The four fingers also symbolise the four bodhisattva methods for transforming sentient beings and leading them onto the Path: giving, speaking lovingly, acting beneficially and intermingling.

NSW ACTIVITIES

Da Bei Chan

Second Sat of the month, 10 am - 12.30 pm
413 - 425 Beamish Street, Campsie NSW
Contact: Melody Lin buddalin@tpg.com.au
If you are coming, please confirm attendance.

1-Day Chan Meditation Retreat

Third Sat of the month, 9am - 5.00 pm
413 - 425 Beamish Street, Campsie NSW
Contact: Diana Sim dhyana1@bigpond.com
If you are coming, please register.

Chan Wisdom Discussion Group

Last Sat of the month, 11am - 1 pm
Multi-faith Room, Level 3 Tower Building, UTS
(University of Technology), Sydney NSW
Contact: Zhao Zhang
ddmyouthsydney@yahoo.com
If you are coming, please confirm attendance.

Eight-Form Moving Meditation

Classes and/or demonstrations can be organised for community groups or events on request.
Contact: Diana Sim dhyana1@bigpond.com

VICTORIA ACTIVITIES

Dharma Drum Eight-Form Moving Meditation & Group Sitting Practice (English Class)

Saturday 9:30am - 12:00pm
115 Serpells Road, Templestowe VIC 3106
Contact: info_ddm@yahoo.com
Tel: (03) 9846 8801 Mobile/p: 0421 850 290

Dharma Drum Eight-Form Moving Meditation & Group Sitting Practice (Mandarin Class)

Saturday 2:00pm - 4:00pm
115 Serpells Road, Templestowe VIC 3106
Contact: info_ddm@yahoo.com
Tel: (03) 9846 8801 Mobile/p: 0421 850 290

Dharma Chanting Assembly Group Practice

Friday 7:30pm - 10:00pm
115 Serpells Road, Templestowe VIC 3106
Contact: info_ddm@yahoo.com
Tel: (03) 9846 8801 Mobile/p: 0421 850 290

Greening Australia

Monthly Date (TBC) 10:00am - 1:00pm
Venue: To be confirmed
Contact: Coordinators
Charles Huang Mobile/p: 0407 388 166
Richard Yuan Mobile/p: 0422 238 289

VICTORIA ACTIVITIES

CONTINUED FROM THE PREVIOUS COLUMN

Red Cross Blood Donation

Quarterly 10:00am - 12:00pm
Southbank Blood Centre
Corner Kavanagh & Balston Streets
Southbank VIC 3006
Contact: Leslie Yang Mobile/p: 0425 756 256
Paco Chien Mobile/p: 0418 816 286

NEW HOME FOR DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN MELBOURNE LIAISON OFFICE & MEDITATION CENTRE

Dharma Drum Mountain (Melbourne) is happy to announce its relocation to bigger and better-equipped premises at Templestowe. The new premises, in use since 1st July, are on a one-acre site blessed with a beautiful landscaped garden and stunning views. The new Meditation Centre can accommodate up to twenty people for group and retreat activities.

The establishment of the Centre is in keeping with Venerable Master Sheng Yen's mission of promoting Buddhist studies, building a pure land on earth, and propagating spiritual-environmentalism.

The new Centre was officially opened by Venerable Guo Jun on Thursday 28th July. A grand Mass Chanting was followed by blessings throughout the Centre. The ceremony, although formal, maintained a compassionate and serene ambience.

A two-day meditation retreat conducted by Venerable Guo Jun commenced the following day. Eighteen DDM members participated in this retreat designed for people who were interested in further developing their meditation skills.

The DDM Melbourne Liaison Office and Meditation Centre provides a range of activities including meditation workshops, weekly group sittings, meditation retreats, Mahakaruna repentance and chanting, a Buddhist library, Dharma lectures, group discussions and community projects. It also sponsors activities and events for the general public.

All are welcome. For further information about Melbourne DDM activities, please contact our office at (03) 9846 8801 or contact us at:

115 Serpells Road, Templestowe
VIC 3106 [Melway page 33 H7]
Phone: 98468801 Mobile: 0421 850 290
Email: info_ddm@yahoo.com.au

VISIT TO TAIWAN DDM - CHIBS CONFERENCE 2006

The Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies (CHIBS) will be hosting the 5th International Buddhist Conference from 4th - 6th March 2006 in Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) Taiwan.

The main theme of the Conference is 'Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Guanyin) and Modern Society'.

We are pleased that Dr Crangle, University of Sydney, and Dr Pecenko, University of Queensland, will be presenting papers at the conference. It is the first time that Australian academics have participated in this conference series.

If you are interested in attending the entire conference and/or in visiting DDM centres in Taiwan with the possibility of partaking in some voluntary work at the conference, please register your interest with universe28@hotmail.com by 30th November 2005.



ABOVE: The blessings ceremony led by Venerable Guo Jun at DDM Melbourne's new premises

DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN AUSTRALIA

www.ddm.org.au (Australia)
www.ddm.org.tw (International)

NEW SOUTH WALES

Lucy Gardens, 413-425 Beamish Street,
Campsie NSW 2194, Australia
[Near the Canterbury Road intersection]
Phone: 0413 185 603 Fax: (02) 9283 3168
Email: ddmsydney@yahoo.com.au

VICTORIA

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