

NanHua

Monthly NEWSLETTER

Wednesday, 31st Dec 2008. Nan Hua Temple Begins New Year Festivities with a Bang . See Page 2

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Even the Inanimate Teaches the Dharma

By Grand Master Hsing Yun

We can divide the kaleidoscopic phenomena of the world into two different groups, sentient beings and the inanimate. Sentient beings are humans, birds, and animals, while the inanimate are mountains, rivers, trees, flowers and the like. When a sentient being teaches the Dharma, we can hear it; when the inanimate teaches, it is even more pleasant and moving. "When Master Daosheng speaks the Dharma, even the hard rock nods." Here, it is not only Master Daosheng teaching the Dharma; the hard rock is also teaching. If the hard rock were not teaching, how could it nod?

We see white clouds floating freely in the sky and rivers meandering wistfully toward the sea; the ease of the white clouds and the wistfulness of the rivers show us how carefree they are. We see the change of the seasons, the passing of time, the blooming and wilting of flowers, and the aging of life; these are nature's way of teaching us the meaning of impermanence.

We can use our ears to listen to the teachings of sentient beings, but we need to use our hearts to listen to the inanimate. Actually, everything in our daily lives teaches us something. The spring blossoms and autumn moon are pleasant to behold, and the singing birds and chirping bugs are delightful to hear. Even the tea of Chan Master Zhaozhou and the cookies of Chan Master Yunmen were used to teach the Dharma. Be it the sound of the temple drum, the ringing of the temple bell at dawn and dusk, or the symphony of the different Dharma instruments, all of these things teach us the

Dharma.

Natural disasters are the earth's way of reminding us how fragile our world is; wilting flowers are nature's way of teaching us about the impermanence of life. War and battles show us the suffering and emptiness of life; sickness, aging, and death teach us that our bodies are a source of suffering. Look around in your daily life. No matter what you are doing—whether it be getting dressed, eating, resting, traveling about, walking, waiting, sitting, or sleeping—you see the arising, abiding, changing, and extinction of all phenomena. We witness the birth, aging, sickness, and death of sentient beings. These things all teach us the Dharma.

A Chan master picked up a duster and said, "Do you understand?" If you understand the meaning of this, you are enlightened. A Chan master may point to a tree in the garden and ask, "Do you know?" If you know, then you are a Chan practitioner. However, the echo of a deep valley or the music of nature is not so easily understood. "Eat when you are hungry and go to bed when you feel sleepy" is the Dharma of daily life. "To give without attachment and help others selflessly" is the highest form of teaching. If you can hear not only the teachings of sentient beings but also understand the teachings of the inanimate, then you have discovered the meaning of life. You can then rid yourself of ignorance and become enlightened.





Ven. Hui-Fang, abbot of Nan Hua Temple, presided over the chanting and praying function

Nan Hua Begins New Year Festivities with a Bang

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Ven. Hui-Xing, temple manager, involved everyone in the musical gesture of Manjushri Bodhisattva



Get ready for the release of the traditional Chinese lanterns



Releasing the traditional lanterns



The resemblance of a galaxy of stars containing wishes and prayers



Herald the New Year with a bang

The New Year's Eve celebration signifies the launch of a series of New Year's celebrations that aim to promote traditional Chinese culture and racial diversity for all South Africans. Well over 1000 people arrived at the Temple on 31st December 2008 from around the country to take part in the New Year's Eve festivity.

The celebration set forth a pilgrimage tour to every shrine in the temple where everyone offered either a candle or incense with their prayers. The highlight of the tour was the all-new exhibition by Venerable Jue-Kai which focuses predominantly on the Chinese New Year, and apart from highlighting significant cultural aspects, it also shows and explains the various components making up the aspects of this significant cultural celebration. The feedback has been phenomenal especially from the local tourists.

After supper, Venerable Hui-Xing, temple manager, and youth members from the Nan Hua Young Adult Division (YAD) demonstrated and involved everyone in the musical gesture of Manjushri Bodhisattva which consists of the chanting of his popular mantra (om • ah • ra • pa • tza • na • dhi) and synchronized aerobic movements.

An hour before midnight everyone assembled at the Main Temple for the new year's eve prayer. Venerable Hui Fang, Abbot of Nan Hua Temple, says "During this year, we have tasted the bitter as well as sweet in life and have experienced the warmth as well as the coldness of human emotion. Through the Buddha's teaching, we have learned not to be discouraged and to reach the end of the year safely; Through His blessing, we have developed the courage to face reality and to overcome dangers and difficulties." The Abbot added that from this day on we shall extinguish the fires of anger with tenderness and still the winds of ignorance with Truth; we shall also dam the torrents of greed with joyous giving and level the mountains of arrogance with humility.

Immediately after the prayer, all the participants made their way to the Main Temple Courtyard to get ready for the countdown and the release of the traditional Chinese lantern. According to Venerable Yi-Chun, elder to Nan Hua Temple, the lantern has had a long tradition in Chinese culture and was first used by the famous Chinese military strategist Zhugeliang (AD 220-280) to inform the alliance on military intelligence. The early Chinese immigrants to Taiwan also used lanterns to inform their family in China that they had arrived on the island safely. Thousands of the same lanterns were also released at the Opening of the Beijing Olympics to mark the beginning of the games.

Venerable Yi-Chun encouraged everyone to be a human lantern and bring light, peace and hope to families, friends and communities in the new year. At exactly midnight, 500 lanterns were released into the boundless African sky accompanied by a magnificent fireworks display which resembled a galaxy of stars containing wishes and prayers.



Spectacular midnight fireworks display



Ven. Yi-Chun explained the origin of Chinese lantern

Taking Refuge in the Vastness and Boundlessness of Buddhism

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Just as precious stones such as diamonds, rubies and sapphires are treasured gems of this world, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are treasures that pertain to the mundane and are the gems of true wisdom. To learn and practise Buddhism, the first step is to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Nan Hua Temple organized a Triple Gem Refuge Taking Ceremony on the first day of 2009 when over 200 people accepted the Buddha's teachings and became His true disciples.

Venerable Hui-Fang, Abbot of Nan Hua Buddhist Temple and Presiding Monk of the ceremony on behalf of Venerable Master Hsing-Yun, told the 1500 congregants in the Main Temple, "In the dark night, the Triple Gem is the illuminating light; In the blazing house, the Triple Gem is the benefiting rain; In the uncertain forked road, the Triple Gem is the guiding compass."

The Abbot explained that the Triple Gem is like a navigator who can bring the ship through the stormy seas into a safe haven. Everyone knows one has to return home at the end of the day. Taking refuge in the Triple Gem and being mindful of its merits, we can rely on its protection and sail through the sea of life, eventually reaching home by returning to our true nature.

It is impossible to fill a contaminated vessel with clean water. Similarly, we cannot accept the Triple Gem if our minds are filled with arrogance, skepticism or impure thoughts. In preparation for taking refuge in the Triple Gem, the Abbot led everyone to repent in earnest, "All the unwholesome karma that was created in the past by greed, anger and ignorance in innumerable kalpas¹ and from the body, speech and mind: I now repent for them all".

Venerable Yi-Chun, elder of the temple, encouraged everyone, "As a Buddhist disciple, from this moment on, we should understand cause and effect and karmic retribution and follow Mahayana Buddhism to liberate self and others. We should also cultivate meditation, disciplined conduct and strive for enlightenment."

We pray to the compassionate Buddha:

*May we all extinguish violent behaviour;
May we all eradicate angry and hateful crime;
May we all remove suspicious and jealous thoughts;
May we all be able to learn the tranquility of a compassionate heart;
May South Africans be tolerant and practice loving-kindness;
May South Africa be filled with peace and harmony.*

kalpas¹ – a measuring unit of time in ancient India, a kalpa is an immense and inconceivable length of time.



Ven. Hui-Fang, abbot of Nan Hua Temple, presided over the Refuge Taking Ceremony



Welcome the Presiding Monk



The Way to Buddhahood



Today I kneel before you to take refuge in the Triple Gem



Refuge Taking Ceremony



Dharma Talk by Ven. Yi-Chun



The abbot blessed the congregation



May I realise the truth of Buddhism; May I learn the Dharma zealously

7 DAY MEDITATION RETREAT Feedback



The Seven Day Retreat – Journey into the unknown.

During December 2008 I had the good fortune to attend a Seven Day Retreat at Nan Hua Buddhist Temple. As this was my first seven day retreat I did not know what to expect and decided to

approach the matter with a “beginners mind”. One might ask how one approach things with a ‘beginners mind’. Well, it is not my intention to have a discourse on this matter - I leave that for people far better qualified and more experienced than myself - but briefly I would say that it means to let go of all concepts and expectations I might have for seven days. To this end I left my cell phone at home and had no watch with me. In addition we as participants were required to keep silent during the duration of the retreat. The reason is quiet simple, to observe what is happening without judging phenomena as they arise.

Again one might ask, “But how did you know when to do what and what about news from home?” Easy! Firstly we were given a schedule of events and the time periods when they would take place and secondly, the temple personnel has a simple but effective system to let one know when to be where. What is a seven day retreat like?

Each person has a different experience of the seven day retreat and therefore I am unable to supply a general answer to that question. In my experience it is like a journey of discovery. Not unlike the journey my ancestors took when they came to Africa across the sea and later travelled during the Great Trek into the interior of this vast continent. One soon realises that the mind is as difficult to tame as a wild elephant. Getting to tie the mind down so that you can control it takes as much patience and compassion as it would take to tie a wild elephant to a tree. But the mind is not a wild elephant or an enemy. The Venerable Abbot Hui Fang quite correctly stated that the mind is just a complex object. The mind is not keen to be quiet or to stop thinking. And that is not surprising, for 365 days of the year the mind keeps itself busy with thinking and reacting to stimuli. The mind even sometimes wakes one in the middle of the night with its thinking.

By sitting quietly and observing ones breath the mind slowly – though very unwillingly – starts to calm down. Starved of its daily exposure to stimuli it abides in relative quietude. To a certain extent this is the easier practice. When I say “easier” I mean relatively easy. Ones behind is not used to sitting quietly for ten hours. Ones legs also do not like being crossed for a similar time period. There is thus a constant striving of the mind and body to escape from the position it is placed in. Patience and forbearance with a sprinkle of compassion helps to ease things.

The real challenge, however, starts when the retreat finishes. The challenge is then to sustain the effort started during the retreat and to keep on the road of progress. It is for that reason that I need to be back when the next scheduled retreat takes place.

It is with a sincere heart that I thank all the people who contributed to make this retreat a successful journey for all who participated.

by Heinrich Viana (from South Africa)



Recently, I attended a seven day meditation retreat marking the end of 2008. It was held at Nan Hua Temple. It was difficult attending the retreat since it was held during Christmas, a time when most people are sharing joy and laughter. But still there were

those who came to attend the retreat despite the time of year.

As one of the practitioners, I experienced a good retreat and improved in many aspects of meditation such as sitting and now I can sit a bit longer than before. My concentration is also gradually improving, mostly only affected by the pain in my knees. At a certain point, I thought of quitting but something deep inside me urged me to continue, I also felt committed and could not leave half way through the retreat. In the end my mind was calmer and more at peace than when I started.

I am looking forward to the next retreat and seeking the ‘unseekable’.

by Ben Dun (from Malawi)



My experience during the 7-Day Meditation Retreat at the Nan Hua Buddhist Temple allowed me to rediscover an inner strength that helps me cope with life's challenges and understand a higher state of consciousness.

The simple yet practical meditation techniques teach me to focus on the present moment and to look after my thoughts.

On my 13-hour long flight leaving South Africa to the Far East, I was sitting next to two young children who continuously made unbearable noise and there was no way one could take a rest. Just when I have almost reached the limit of my tolerance, I suddenly realised, “Isn't this is a perfect opportunity to test what I learnt from the retreat?”. I sat upright and visualised the aeroplane as the monastery and within seconds all my anger and frustration were gone. I no longer heard the noise around me, instead I felt a sense of gratitude and tranquility – this is the best flight I ever had.

We come across endless calamities and disturbance in our daily life, I have no doubt that if we apply meditation when circumstances arise we would have a much better life filled with joy and contentment. My wholehearted appreciation to the venerable for their valuable teaching and everyone else involved in making the seven-day meditation retreat an unforgettable experience.

by Yu Zhou Chen (from China)

Three camps held during Dec at Nanhua Temple

During the summer vacation Nan Hua Temple organized three camps. The Youth Life Orientation camp started on 7th December 2008 and lasted five days. Sixty young people attended. The Administration Department meticulously arranged classes that were different from the past camps, in order to help the participants understand the Dharma and to get with team/group work. They included activities designed for teenagers, such as leading art, time & pressure management, originality of fine arts, recognizing drugs, skills of communicating with parents and a general understanding of HIV & AIDS.

Young adults used this opportunity to attend a religious rite that was arranged for them to wish them a good and responsible life experience.

The Children's Camp was the second one that followed on 13 December 2008. Fifty children attended. They were delighted to be attending summer camp activities hosted by South African BLIA youth. Many classes were arranged to help the children understand and nurture good morals, compassion, kindness, gratitude and a mind of tolerance.

Other classes were Basic Buddhism, gymnastics, cookery, meditation and world games. Every class was enlightening, creative and intellectually stimulating, emphasizing the essence & meaning of learning. Children were learning in a comfortable & supportive environment during their stay.

The last camp organized by the temple was on 19 December 2008 for the staffs' children. Seventeen children attended who were between the ages of seven and fourteen. Classes included Children's Buddhist Stories, Making Christmas cards, Mantra songs, General understanding of how to prevent fires and other calamities and a soccer match.

We hope that through these simple and easy classes the Bodhi seed of compassion and wisdom will be planted, enabling them to practice right thought, right speech and right action.



Beginner's Meditation Retreat 2009

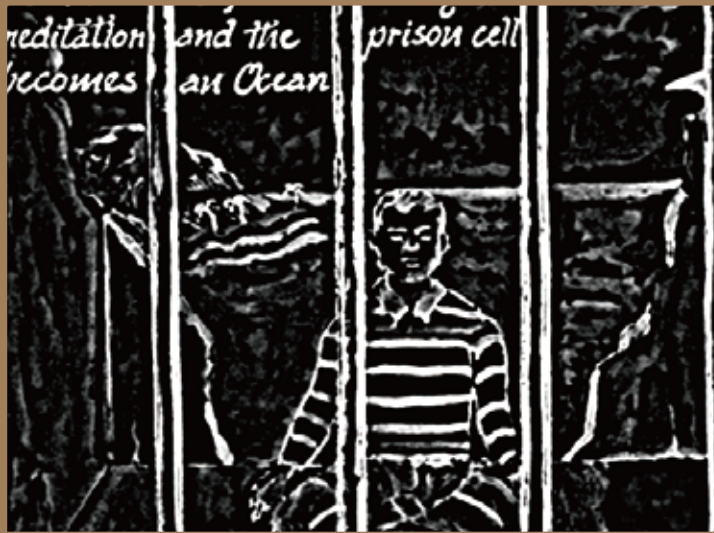
Feb 7-8 • Mar 7-8 • Apr 18-19 • May 16-17
Jun 13-14 • Jul 11-12 • Aug 8-9 • Oct 10-11
Nov 7-8 • Dec 12-13

Intermediate Meditation Retreat 2009

Mar 21-22 • Jun 20-21 • Oct 17-18

Meditation helps you:

- * increase positive states of mind
- * reduce stress and anxiety
- * experience greater contentment and well-being
- * improve concentration
- * develop better relationships and,
- * maintain greater physical health



PRISON REFUGE AND PRECEPTS CEREMONY 2008

By Peter G Just

Early on Tuesday, 2 December 2008, we arrived at Pretoria Central Prison to do a refuge and precepts ceremony, which was officiated by the abbot of Nan Hua Temple, Venerable Hui-fang, and assisted by Venerables Hui-liao and Hui-pei.

Once the usual problems of gaining access, being escorted to the venue, and waiting for very long periods was over, we were ready to commence with the formal part. Of those who had previously taken refuge there were two new preceptees, while all others renewed their previously taken precept commitments. Once the formal part of the day was over we enjoyed a vegetarian lunch which we had specially brought in with us, and the offenders had the opportunity of putting questions directly to the monks.

Due to medium and maximum offenders not being allowed to be mixed we were obliged to do a second ceremony in another part of the prison for the maximum offenders. As they are all new to Buddhism there were only three taking refuge with none taking precepts, and accordingly the ceremony was also a little bit shorter. As a rule I do not allow people to take refuge and precepts both on the same occasion. Preferably they should first live life as a Buddhist and practise after having formally taken refuge, before committing themselves to any specific precepts.

Wednesday we went much further north to ODI Prison in Mabopane, which is approximately 125km from the temple one way. Regrettably, in spite of applying for permission long in advance, there was nobody to receive us at ODI Prison, and also nobody had been informed about our arrival. Gaining access was thus a lot more cumbersome, and also took much longer. But in the end we were

escorted to a somewhat noisy venue, and after cleaning it a bit we were ready to set up a temporary shrine. Due to our visit not having been pre-announced, only three offenders took refuge, and only one person who had previously taken refuge could formally take precepts.

A number of offenders had also been paroled since my last visit, and thus the group is currently a bit smaller than they had been for the greater part of the year. The ceremony was officiated by the temple manager Venerably Hui-xing, and assisted by Venerable Hui-liao, and Zando Bakari filling the role of translator.

Finally Thursday we went to Modderbee Prison near Springs/Benoni. Here we were also preauthorised, and fortunately our visit had also been announced, making access to the facility a whole lot easier. However, four of the offenders who were supposed to take refuge could not be found, and in spite of this being the nosiest facility which I normally visit, we were yet able to have four offenders take refuge. At this prison we had not been given permission to bring in a precooked meal, and thus we enjoyed sandwiches and snacks, while the monks answered questions and gave explanations.

Over the past close on seven years that I have been regularly going to mainly Pretoria Central and Pretoria Local Prison, I have encountered close on 100 offenders who have shown a keen interest in Buddhism and meditation. Unfortunately many are not ready to make a firm connection, for a variety of reasons. And though this is so, at least I can console myself that the seeds have been sown, and if not in this, then definitely in future lifetimes they will be drawn back to the Dharma.

Refuge and Precepts Ceremony 2008			
	Refuge	Precepts	Precepts Renew
Pretoria Central	9	2	6
ODI	3	1	0
Modderbee	4	0	0
Total	16	3	6

Learning Experiences of **ABS** Students

African Buddhist Seminary



By Ben Ke

1. No self

The concept no self teaches us not to be attached to anything. We are normally misled by names given to things or human beings but names are just for the sake of making life

convenient and to understand each other. If we analyze all the causes and conditions that come together to make things we find we are not left with a solid identifiable thing. For example, when I was a kid, my father bought me a football. I was very happy. After few days of enjoying it, my football got a puncture and burst. I cried a lot, I could not even eat. I thought my football was real and I would have it for the rest of my life.

2. Impermanence

Each and everything depends on causes and conditions. When we realize that we are responsible for cause and conditions it is easier to deal with situations whether they are happy or not. When you are angry you understand that it is only temporary and not a permanent state. Before coming to the Seminary I was very short tempered. After understanding impermanence, I slowly started to gain control of my anger. One day a student took my room key and lost it and I could not get into my room. I had to wait for my roommate to come with his key. I did not get angry I

simply just observed the impermanence of the situation.

3. Right speech.

Right speech means refraining from telling lies, gossiping, speaking with a forked tongue, over praising or flowery speech, as well as using harsh or provocative speech. For example, in the working groups at the seminary, one student was not happy and wanted to change and have me work with him. He went to the members of my group and told them that I did not want to work with them and told me that the members of my group did not want to work with me and I should join his group. I agreed with him but my members were amazed and asked me why I decided to leave the group. I told them the story and they became very angry saying that they did not say such things. A conflict developed between the students.

4. Sickness is suffering

Sickness teaches us that having this body is the beginning of suffering. So we have to practice and get rid of our attachment to the body. It is by not being reborn into a human form that we will escape sickness and experience true liberation, Nirvana.

When we get sick we are afraid and think we are going to die. Our suffering is much more when we fear death. We take medicine to cure our sickness but sooner or later we face another kind of illness.



By Ben You

1. The concept of Cause, Condition and Effect: This concept tells us that things exist in this world as a result of causes and conditions. Whatever we do be it good or bad, will have a result. When the conditions change, the result will

also. For example, if you plant two flowers of the same variety, but apply the correct amount of water and fertilizer to the one but not the other obviously the results will not be the same because of these different conditions.

This concept is helpful to me in understanding that good causes and conditions bring good result and vice versa. I try to improve my conditions in order to harvest better results. It has also helped me to reduce jealous thoughts towards others even though it is often difficult. For example, I do not really mind if I see someone being loved more than me because I know it is a result of causes and conditions.

2. The concept of impurity of the body: This concept says that our body is impure. It is so because whatever our body produces is unclean. For our body to be presentable causes and conditions apply. For example, we have to bath and brush our teeth everyday. If we stop doing this we will smell and not be pleasant to be around. So where is the beauty in this? Beauty is only there when we make-up and pamper our bodies but naturally it is not as beautiful as we like to think. For example, we excrete from nine openings on our body. So although we may be able to beautify our exterior body there is still dirty waste inside. From there I can understand that beauty is neither real nor

lasting.

This concept helped me to reduce sexual desires. For example, if I see a beautiful girl, I bring to mind the bodies' impurities in order to subdue my desire although sometimes this is difficult.

3. The concept of gratitude: This concept emphasizes how one can develop and express gratitude toward others. As ordinary beings, sometimes it is difficult to express our gratitude because we bear grudges or take other people for granted. For example, some youth take their parents for granted. They always cause problems and complain how unfairly they are treated, showing disrespect for their elders. They cannot see the positive influence their parents have on their lives they only see the negative. This concept tells us how one can express gratitude in different circumstances regardless of whatever unfavorable conditions we encounter in our daily life. It emphasizes that in daily life we should appreciate that a single grain of rice is the culmination of many hours of labour and the result of various causes and conditions. We should appreciate and respect the cause and conditions that make us who we are.

This concept helped me to stop complaining and comparing everything and to see the value of my life. For example, sometimes we complain that we may only have one pair of shoes, never stopping to think that there are some that do not have any shoes at all. Furthermore there are some who do not have feet in order to wear shoes. We should be contented with what we have and appreciate the clothes we have and the food we eat.



Viewpoint

My Introduction to Buddhism

By Simao L. Muhai

from Mozambik



My name is Simao Lourino Muhai, I am a Mozambican, 55 years old, married and father of two. I am a Mathematician and Software Engineer by training and trade, I also hold a MBA degree and currently I have a management position. My wife is a Psychologist and my two children are Chemical and Civil Engineers.

Together with my wife, I first learnt Transcendental Meditation (TM) in 1988 from an Ayurveda teacher associated to the Maharish School of Indian origin and based in Holland. Again with my wife, in 1995 we had an advanced training in TM from teachers of the same school.

The main emphasis of the practice I was taught was to create positive conditions through TM in order to reduce suffering in our life, communities and even in the country if enough critical mass of TM practice was created. We were also encouraged to invite other people to learn TM, to meditate in groups and to practice the religion of our choice with humility, sincerity and compassion.

I think, in Maputo City, the capital of Mozambique, there should be more than two hundred people who have attended these courses and practiced TM to some extent, mainly from the high education professionals and middle class social extracts.

Later on I developed an interest in reading books of high spiritual content, including Tibetan Buddhism.

In April 2006, during a very difficult time of my life, I realized that one of my Johannesburg friends was a Buddhist and, at one point he invited me to a Sunday Service at Nanhua Temple in Bronkhorstspuit, were I was also introduced to the activities of the Temple and offered a number of Buddhist books.

In 2007 my nephew and adopted son joined the Nanhua Temple Seminar to start a three years course for Buddhist monks.

During 2007 I paid three very important visits to the Meditation Centre of the Temple. In the first one I was privileged to have a long (about 3 hours) and one to

one Dharma Talk, compassionately given to me by the eminent Venerable Master Hui Re. He expounded the fundamentals of Buddhism in general and the Pure Land in particular and introduced me to the practice of Pure Land Buddhism. In the second and third visits I attended retreats.

Apart from the above, I had other three exclusive and blessed opportunities to meet Venerable Master Hui Re and one to meet Venerable Master Huisang, during which time important topics of Buddhism theory and practice were compassionately taught to me.

Thanks to the above compassionate orientation, today I practice almost everyday in the morning and before sleeping. I do sessions of seated and a few hours of Buddha name recitation and mindfulness while I carry out my daily and layman affairs.

Mere coincidence or not, the main transformations I have witnessed in my life are:

1. Serenity, interior peace and even joy that is becoming increasingly solid so that almost nothing gets to disturb me emotionally in a serious and continued way;
2. In January and in April to May of 2006 I underwent very serious radiotherapy medical treatments for prostate cancer. Apparently I am experiencing a very strong and unusual recovery according to doctors;
3. For the last seven months or so I can do perfectly without my daily tablets for high blood pressure that have been inescapable for the last six years. I am still monitoring the situation but it is already good enough for rejoicing;
4. Sometimes it seems that my daily life is full of favorable and happy coincidences.

Anyway, I am not looking for any other, greater or more explicit, miracle than the one of finding and bringing to my life the practice of Pure Land Buddhism.

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