



NanHua

Monthly NEWSLETTER

Forthcoming - Celebrating Chinese New Year on 14 Feb 2010 Sunday

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GLOBAL CITIZENS By Grand Master Hsing Yun

N a n H u a | Dharma Talks

People should expand their vision of the world. Nowadays, people should think of the world they live in as a global village. We should all be global citizens who live in peace, working together as a team and showing respect and tolerance for one another.

2003 was the fiftieth anniversary of my Dharma teaching career in Taiwan. I have spent two-thirds of my life there. If I am not Taiwanese, then what am I? While no one in Taiwan would recognize me as being culturally Taiwanese, if I go back to mainland China, the people there will still call me a monk from Taiwan.

In short, no matter where I go, I am not considered a local. Therefore, I console myself by saying, "I am a global citizen." In retrospect, I do not want to be a citizen of any particular region. As long as the good earth is not rejecting me, I can be a global citizen. So, how do we conduct ourselves as a global citizen? The following are some guidelines:

1. Open our eyes and admire the world. When we look around at the world, we can see that the world is a large place with its myriad vistas and sights that vie in beauty. Mountains, rivers, and forests compete for our attention. Many living beings are there ready to display their beauty. As a global citizen, we must open our eyes wide and thoroughly admire the many noble and beautiful people, deeds, and places the world offers us.

2. Be sure-footed and travel the world. As a global citizen, we should not confine ourselves to small circles. From our travels and daily contacts with the world, we will come to understand it better. What we see and hear will no longer just be the abstract knowledge we learn from books. Instead, we will gain first-hand knowledge from our travel.

How large our world can become does not hinge merely on the extent of our travel, but also on the magnanimity of our perspective.



3. Open our arms and embrace the world. Every great person in the past had the universe in his or her heart. According to the Buddhist teachings, "A mind embraces the cosmos; its capacity can hold as many realms as grains of sand." A Chinese saying also asserts, "One can even row a boat in the belly of a lord." Therefore, as a global citizen, we should have a broad mind. When we open our arms to embrace the globe, then everything is ours. Everything will become very endearing, compelling us to support and nurture it.

4. With the Buddha's light shining, we enjoy the world. The sun shines on every land in the world, and a gentle breeze blows over each corner. It is like the compassion and truth of the Buddha universally and equally providing each sentient being the benefits of the Dharma. Therefore, this world is truly worth our affection and care. Each of us should cherish the sun, the air, the water, the earth in common, and all the produce they provide. With all the beautiful things for us to share, what would be the point of insisting on where one is from, or where one belongs?

Modern means of transportation and telecommunication are very convenient. The entire world is progressing toward globalization, and we are already part of a global village. As its citizens, can we afford not keeping in step with the changing times and become a global citizen?

Youth Spiritual Development Camp 12nd Dec 2009

On 12 December 2009 Nan Hua Temple hosted a Youth Spiritual Development Camp. Fifty young people from different BLIA chapters attended. The opening ceremony was held in the gallery, with the Abbot, Ven. Hui Fang presiding. VIPs that attended included MP Ms Sherry Chen and Overseas Chinese Affairs committee member, Mr Lin. Three former BLIA youth leaders, Ms Zhan Kai Ying, Mr. Lee Zhao Ming and Mr. Lin Qing Qin (leader of the 1994 camp) attended as well.

In his address, Ven. Hui Fang explained that classes were specially organized and he hoped that the participants would learn diligently. MP Chen expressed her feelings saying that she could feel the vitality of the young attendees. Subjects taught were different from previous years. They included yoga, rock climbing, time management, Buddhist Ethics, meditation, compassionate ecology and a discussion with the MP.

Ven. Hui Fang shared with them his thoughts on the experience of death. He said, "life is impermanent, grasp the moment during impermanence" Ms Maredi taught them yoga, relaxing the body through gentle movements that make the mind tranquil, moderate and focused. During the discussion with the Member of Parliament, eagerly asked ques-

tions resulted in a lively discussion. During Ven. Hui Xing's class, he used the four ideas of see (group creativity), hear (firm faith), think (spreading Budha-Dharma) and do (for the sake of Buddhism), in order to appreciate Grand Master Hsing Yun. Upon hearing the vows and dedication of Grand Master, all the young people were moved.

The camp ended on 15 December 2009. During the final evening party the participants expressed their appreciation to parents and friends for their support, love and care, by singing and dancing on the stage. This was followed by chanting the compassionate mantra of Kwan Yin, lead by the Abbot. There were also prayers of gratitude to parents and blessing candles were lit to symbolize wishes for their health, wealth and safety.

During closing ceremony, the final scores and trophies were awarded. A film of the camp had been carefully edited through the night by Li Hao Lu, in order to be ready for the closing ceremony. It showed that throughout the camp, the young people had learned many different things, understood themselves more and hopefully will attend next time.



Lighting Blessing Candles for Parents



Yoga - relax the body & focus the mind



Expressing ideas in a wholesome way

Children's Spiritual Development Camp

17th - 20th Dec 2009

From 17th to 20th December 2009 the Temple held a 'Children's Spiritual Development Camp'. There were sixty children from different parts of South Africa and different Chapters of BLIA Youth co-hosted the camp. Classes given included Buddhist Ethics, how a young Sramanera sees the world, ecology, appreciating nature and singing etc. These were designed to develop their minds and to generate confidence and hope.

Ven. Hui Fang, who was in charge, used questions and play-acting to help the children understand suffering of the world. Volunteers were responsible for short Buddhist stories.

Elder siblings performed these short stories, which allowed the children to easily understand their meaning. Ms Faith led the children in yoga and gentle exercise and walking outside kept them strong and healthy. During the final evening party, the children revealed what they had learned in these three days. Their stories were related to the content of their classes. The Venerables who observed this were moved to see their dedication and creative ability.

In the prayer for parents, Ven. Hui Xing said that offering light to the Buddha shows love to the Buddhas, appreciation of the accomplishment of causes and conditions, love for parents and teachers. He said that it was important to first love yourself, then love others and also to have gratitude for all those who made these causes and conditions possible.

The closing ceremony's theme was 'gratitude to volunteers, sisters & brothers'.

The children showed that they carried hearts of gratitude and expressed what they had learned. When sharing their experiences, the volunteers' eyes were misty, as they thanked the temple for this unique opportunity of growth and cultivation. With Grand Master's heart of love as their example, they were still dedicated to come and help, despite facing obstructions. Ven. Hui Xing encouraged the children to do the following everyday; be a good person, say a good word, do a good thing and sing a good song. He also awarded the children certificates of camp attendance and prizes commending their outstanding efforts.



Children's Camp Group Photograph



Learning with Understanding



Outside Activities for Healthy Bodies

Count down 3, 2, 1 with Sky Lanterns to Welcome the New Year

31st Dec 2009

'Five, four, three, two, one, Happy New Year!' These were the best wishes for the New Year given by every devotee, as simultaneously five hundred sky lanterns were released fluttering up into the sky.

On the 2009 New Year's Eve, the Temple organized various significant events. There was a Refuge & Precept ceremony, the release of the sky lanterns and further calligraphy for the project in Taiwan, which will ultimately achieve the placement of One Million Heart Sutras in a giant statue of the Buddha, situated at the main monastery in Kaohsiung. There was also a display of fireworks and a vegetarian party. Nearly 500 devotees from all over SA came to Nan Hua Temple for the festivities. Initially they went straight to the main temple to offer incense and pay homage to the Buddha and then they checked in for the Refugee and Precept Taking Ceremony.

At 7:30pm, Ven. Yi Chun gave a talk to the participants in the Refuge and Precept Taking Ceremony, explaining the significance of and implications inherent in taking some or all of the Precepts. This information provided the preceptors with the confidence and firm intention needed for attending the ceremony

the next day. At 10pm, everyone went to the main temple to transcribe the Heart Sutra in traditional Chinese script. There were six hundred devotees and other members who attended this rare event. After an hour of transcribing, Abbot Ven. Hui Fang led everyone in a prayer for those who transcribed the Sutras. The origin of transcribing the Sutras and the establishment and progress of the Buddha's Memorial Hall in Taiwan was then discussed.

At 11:30pm the crowd assembled in front of the main temple, in preparation for releasing the sky lanterns. Every lantern had the wishes and aspirations of each person written upon them. Devotees aspired to attain Buddhahood early, young people aspired to improve in their studies and heads of households aspired to have harmonious families. During the count down to usher in the New Year the sky lanterns were released and filled the sky. Fireworks were set off in front of the Guesthouse. The beautiful colors of the fireworks and sky lanterns together shined brilliantly above, ushering in the year 2010. All in all, the New Year's Eve events attracted about two thousand people who came to the temple.



Colourful fireworks welcome in 2010



A little help with writing the Heart Sutra

Refuge and Precept Taking Ceremony 1st Jan 2010

On the first day of 2010, Nan Hua Temple held a Refuge and Precept Taking Ceremony. It was well attended with more than 100 people who participated in this rare event and made their first day of the year very meaningful. Participants included 20 devotees and members of BLIA Youth Group and the president of the Southern Africa Female Commerce and Entrepreneur Association, Ms Chen Yu Ling.

At 10am in the morning, Temple Manager, Ven. Hui Xing explained the ceremony's ethics and the rules of paying homage to the Buddha. At 10:30am the drum was beaten, indicating the official beginning of the ceremony. In the first part, there were four representatives who formally went to request that the presiding Master, Ven. Hui Fang explain the Triple Gem and five precepts, that he invite Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to the ceremony, undertake repentance and vows and hand them the Precept robes when required. The altar was beautifully decorated and the devotees' minds were filled with Dharma joy.

Ven. Hui Fang gave the Dharma talk and said that after the Refuge and Precept Taking Ceremony they would officially be disciples of the Buddha. He reminded them that they needed to:

1. Have deep faith in Causes and Conditions and take and uphold five precepts.
2. Always recite or chant the Triple Gem to gain immeasurable merit and wisdom.
3. Have right understanding & right view and

support the temple/monastery.

4. Research and study books on the three precepts, meditation and wisdom. He instructed everyone to take refuge in the Triple Gem daily and always to walk on the Buddha's path and let their minds be filled with the Dharma. He explained that Taking Refuge in the Triple Gem is a basic assignment for everyone learning Buddha-Dharma, whereas taking and upholding the five precepts is the true practical essence of a Buddhist. If there are no rules, there will be no direction or success. When we put the Buddha in our mind we will naturally start practicing. We will not easily fuss about trivial matters and we will make our speech and actions conform to that of a disciple of the Buddha.

BLIA YAD members, Wang Ren Lou and Ye Zhi Ling said that in the past they had never thought of taking five precepts. However as this was such a rare opportunity and under the guidance and encouragement of the Master, they had gained a lot of confidence and dedication. This had motivated them to attend the Precept ceremony.

Graduate and UNISA student Lescaille Steenbok said that after he took Refuge last year, he felt that taking precepts is an assignment that a Buddhist needs for improvement. He wished that after taking the precepts he would keep them and would continually remind himself that he is a Buddhist.



The Presiding Master enters the Temple to begin the ceremony



Teachings on The Triple Gem and the Five Precepts



A Thousand Years in One Moment One Moment in a Thousand Years

Embracing one million people worldwide each tracing a copy of the Heart Sutra that will be enshrined in the Buddha Memorial Centre's magnificent Buddha statue.

By participating, the multitudes will help build this most auspicious site at Fo Guang Shan Temple - symbol of peoples wishes and prayers for world peace and happiness

History

A Buddha's tooth relic was once kept at the Namgyal Monastery in Tibet. During the Cultural Revolution, however, the monastery was destroyed, and Kunga Dorje Rinpoche found the precious tooth, one of the only three Buddha's tooth relics in the world. To protect this holy relic, he fled to India, a journey that was fraught with much hardship. Once there, several highly cultivated Tibetan rinpoches authenticated the relic and advised him to build a pagoda so that the public could pay their respects and make offerings to the Buddha's tooth relic.

Unfortunately, Kunga Dorje Rinpoche never got the opportunity to build a pagoda as he had vowed, because old age caught up with him. In February 1998, Venerable Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan Monastery held the Bodhgaya International Full Ordination in India, which drew the attention of Kunga Dorje Rinpoche. He, together with twelve highly cultivated Tibetan rinpoches, reached a consensus to donate the Buddha's tooth relic to Venerable Master Hsing Yun. They knew that Venerable Master Hsing Yun had embraced a vow to benefit all sentient beings in the universe. The rinpoches felt assured that he would be able to perpetuate the Dharma and let the value of the relic be recognised once again. Because of these causes and conditions, the Buddha's tooth relic was escorted to Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan on 8 April 1998.

For decades, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has been planning to establish a centre that would perpetually propagate Buddhist culture and art. Due to the auspicious inheritance of the Buddha's tooth relic, Venerable Master Hsing Yun started building plans for the Buddha Memorial Centre in 1998. Once completed, the Centre will encompass approximately forty hectares and include the Central Complex, the Memorial Plaza and Vulture Peak. The Central Complex will house both the main exhibition area and the Buddha Tooth Relic Shrine. It will be surrounded by four stupas that symbolise the Four

Noble Truths. In front of the Central Complex will stand eight Chinese-style pagodas, which signify the Noble Eightfold Path. On Vulture Peak, a majestic Buddha statue will measure 40 metres in height which reflects the Buddha's greatness and benevolence. The Memorial Plaza will be able to accommodate more than ten thousand people.

Merits

- In the years to come, the Buddha Memorial Centre will become a spiritual focal point for many in the world. It is sure to bring harmony and facilitate a sense of compassion, wisdom and peace to the world.
- All the copied sutras will be enshrined in the majestic Buddha statue overlooking the Centre and the prayers which accompany each sutra will bring limitless blessings to all beings.
- It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which will enable people from all walks of life to deeply appreciate the profound spiritual nature of Buddhist education, culture and art.
- With the completion of each line, the Heart Sutra subdues delusion and distraction enabling a mindfulness which can enhance life

One Million Heart Sutra in the Buddha Program

To enable more people to participate in realising this rare event, we have organised the One Million Heart Sutra in the Buddha Program. We would like to invite you to be one of the million people to make a copy of the Heart Sutra, which, together with all the other copies, will be enshrined in the Buddha Statue of the Buddha Memorial Centre with the hope of creating world peace, increasing harmony and happiness throughout the land, and helping to realise each person's dreams.

How to participate

1. Please visit Nan Hua Temple, Bronkhorstspuit and acquire a Sutra Copying Kit for R 250, which consists of instructions, sutra paper and a brush.
2. Submit your sutra in the envelop provided in the Sutra Copying Kit to Nan Hua Temple.
3. You may also sponsor someone to complete the sutra on your behalf, Please contact Nan Hua Temple for more information on (013) 931 0009 or visit www.nanhua.co.za

佛光山佛陀紀念館 百萬心經入法身

一時千載 千載一時

每人虔誠抄寫一部心經 集百萬人的寫經 奉納於佛陀紀念館佛像內 以此功德祈求 世界和平 國家安樂 國家平安 所求滿願

For more information please contact:
11 Fo Guang Shan
Tel: 886(7)556 1981 Fax: 1212-3319
20 Fo Guang Shan temples worldwide
30 Buddha's Light International Association
Tel: 886(2) 762 0112

www.fgs.org.tw

Buddha Memorial Hall
One Million Heart Sutras in the Buddha

**A thousand years in one moment;
One moment in a thousand years.**

Become one of the million individuals who transcribe the Heart Sutra with a sincere mind. Your transcriptions will be collected and enshrined within the Buddha statue inside the Buddha Memorial Hall. With the merit gained from this, let us pray for world peace, national prosperity, family happiness, and all wishes fulfilled.

佛光山佛陀紀念館
Buddha Memorial Hall
Fo Guang Shan
The Mindfulness

Wheelchairs & Walkers Donation to Leratong Hospice, Atteridgeville on 13.1.2010

On 13.1.2010 Ven Hui Fang and Ivan Frimmel from Nanhua Temple donated 4 wheelchairs and 2 walkers to Leratong Hospice, Atteridgeville, Pretoria.

In the picture, on the left of Ven Hui Fang is Fr Kieran Creagh, the hospice founder and director, and on his left Mrs Remigia Tloubatla, the matron, and the rest of the hospice staff. The hospice which opened in July 2004 is a community-based non-government, non-profit organization, with 18 beds, caring for terminally ill people of all races and religions, offering the physical & emotional care that befits a dying person. The wheelchairs & walkers will be used in the hospice by patients unable to walk. Leratong means "The Place of Love" in Sesotho language.



A Joyous Occasion at Leratong

ABS Report

African Buddhist Seminary

MY 7 DAYS ISOLATION PRACTICE

6th-12th Jan 2010



By Ben Zhao

To derive benefit from isolation practice, I had to first understand how isolation practice helps a person in his or her daily life. I came to realize that the longer I stay away from the outer world, the better I shall see what really happens there. This is like watching soccer, where a spectator is able to see more mistakes made by the players, than the players themselves. In this way, it is very easy to describe the source of a problem, what causes it, who does it and who is right or wrong.

The Isolation practice allowed me to experience many of the benefits of meditation, since I was already meditating regularly. This is necessary because in order for one to experience these benefits, it is necessary to practice regularly; the same as for any activity- the more you dedicate your whole energy to it, the more possibilities there are to succeed. The main reason why I decided to do this Isolation practice was the desire to look inside myself and try to calm my mind, so that I could understand how to generate love and compassion by reflecting on the predicaments of all beings. Many human beings have wished to experience true happiness but are unable to achieve this. We also wish to avoid suffering but this never stops and we continually encounter it. So for me to develop courage to help with these issues, I need to develop great understanding in how to deal with them. This purpose made me practice meditation using the process of isolating myself.

I have since managed to achieve "self-renewal", which has made me look bright and different from the others, since my face now smiles and shares joy and happiness with my fellow beings. This kind of meditation is an especially powerful method which is very skillful, utilizing our innate blissful mental energy. Before this Isolation practice, my good mind was blocked by negative energies like anger, jealousy, desire, ignorance, and pride which prevented me from functioning positively. The more I meditated, the more I rid myself of attachment, anger and other emotions. Now, I have developed a spontaneous positive control over all the actions of my body, speech and mind.

Summing up the results of my Isolation practice experience, let me say, within every human heart and mind we all feel the call to be simple, special, to be loved. But unfortunately we are at war with ourselves and other people. We worry about the past, are anxious about the future and hungry for what we don't see, but often dissatisfied with what we do see. We feel guilty, important, bored and many ideas and emotions float around in our minds and hearts. We fail to accept the reality of nature that says; "It is as it is". What I have found out is that when something is simple and pure, then we can experience the possibilities of this natural state as well. All that is needed is "Letting Go", since a mind that learns to let go, gradually returns to its inherent wholesomeness, happiness and simplicity.



7 Day Meditation Retreat

FEEDBACK

21th-27th December 2009



Heinrich Viana A meditation retreat at the end of the year is a good Christmas present.

Why?

Well, sometimes when coming up to a "wall" in one's life, one needs to retreat in order to see the "door" in the "wall". A meditation retreat gives one the "tools" to find the "door". No-one can show and take you

through the "door", but they can give you the "tools" or "map" – if you wish – to find the "door".

The December 2009 meditation retreat at Nan Hua was precisely that; the receiving of "tools", the training with those "tools" and the utilisation of those "tools".

What are the "tools", the training and benefit of the "tools"?

Space regrettably does not allow me to go into detail, but briefly it entails the observation and awareness of the breath, body and the mind. This method sounds like three separate observations, but it is something that occurs simultaneously, because the breath, body and mind are inter-related. By applying the method given to us, I was able to be aware of my breath and body sensations and the reaction of the mind to the sensations. The "tricky part" is to observe those sensations without judging them as being something conceptual i.e. pain or joy.

And so we shall practice continually for the benefit of all.



Nathalie Martin Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make use of the Temple for the seven day retreat.

I gladly share with you my experience:

The retreat offers an authentic environment in which to meditate. The Masters disciplined yet friendly manner is dedicated to encouraging pupils to uplift themselves, urging them forward in compassion and understanding of our challenges in today's turbulent times. Each one of us knows that we alone are responsible for implementing the Buddha's teachings and the insightful Dharma talks allows for self reflection and contemplation, bringing us back to focus.

When I drove away from Nan Hua Temple, I took a little part of it with me, given freely by yourselves and the community. Such is the love of Amitabha Buddha that his teachings radiate both within and without the temple walls.

I look forward to seeing you again and again...



Tsholofelo Monare I was asked to write a 200 word essay on my experience at the 7-day retreat. At first I knew exactly what to say, but as time moved on, it became more challenging to describe what I had gone through because experience is motion, the memory is altered by every moment.

I suppose the consequences are felt much more when you walk through the doors of Nan Hua on the last day and are re-introduced to society again. THE NOISE, THE BUZZ, the contact with other sentient beings, their rambling and busy minds, their scattered souls--all consumed by something strong and clouding, none of them are unable to understand what it is.

I suppose I did not go to the retreat looking for peace. I went to the retreat to find the peace within myself. I knew that I will always be surrounded by chaos, and that the chaos will always be there. It will get worse as I get older. I know this because it is my second time doing the retreat. I have also practiced meditation for a long time, but one thing that I have learned is that the longer you practice, the harder it seems to get. I am a young woman and have become aware that when one gets older one gains more responsibilities and life becomes more complex. This is why one needs to be more consistent and more diligent with the practice as they grow older.

Meditation is like being forced upon your own reflection against your will. It is almost devastating and often shameful to look at. I think that is the reason why many of us avoid it, because unless we can deal with it, the image will haunt us. The meditation had made me aware of all the anger, regret, sadness and guilt I have accumulated over the years. One doesn't realize the bricolage surrounding one's mind, the things we hold on to that have imprisoned our spirit. Yes there are other pains, like the pains experienced after hours in the Yogi position, the aching back and the itching forehead, the feeling of anxiety in one's stomach. All those experiences are unpleasant and very challenging. But nothing is as challenging and more unpleasant to view as the scattered mind.

How did I deal with it? I followed the breathing technique as well as observations of the sensations of the body. As the master said, observing your breath is like allowing a guest into your home, enjoying their company and bidding them farewell. Observing your bodily sensations is like staring into an unsettled river until finally it was calm and you could see your own reflection. During outside meditation, I remember looking at a tree once, it was late in the afternoon so the tree had cast it's shadow. What I realized during this meditation was that the shadow of the tree probably did not realize that it was not a tree but merely the reflection of the tree.

There is nothing more rewarding as being the observer of ones mind and learning to find peace within yourself, especially when there is none to be found in the world. We are the architects of our own world just as we are the masters of our own minds. The more we have control over how much peace we have within ourselves, the more we can influence the peace of the world we live in. The world is the mind. The war cannot be fought in the battle fields with explosives and machines. The true war can only be fought from within.



Ben Yi The retreat was another great success for me. As usual, my mind was more than ready but my left leg rebelled drastically. This time I could sit in half and quarter lotus much longer than ever before, but unfortunately my focus on the breath decreased this time. I had a tsunami of thoughts bashing

around in my mind, so to pacify the mind was quite a mission. Breath control proved very effective in disciplining the mind. I also realized my memory power was increasing so I took advantage of the insightful dharma talks from the masters. The yoga sessions were very tough. I felt pity for the visitors, yet admired their determination. The Tai Chi sessions were rejuvenating for the body and mind; even in moments of extreme fatigue due to insufficient sleep, I found myself feeling renewed physically, my smooth breath spontaneously bringing the mind under control. I was quite encouraged by those visitors who continued with the retreat even on Christmas day, up to the seventh day. I realized the importance and value of meditation retreats in this fast-paced, highly stressed world that we live in. The bodily, emotional and mental detoxification is a 'must' and no longer a 'want' for those who seek peace, happiness and success in their lives.



Ben Lai This seven days meditation retreat was the best of all retreats and the days past quickly. At this level I am able to see how important meditation is. My mind has improved in terms of calmness, acceptance, compassion and thinking capability. As this was the end of the year, the dharma talk I received

from the masters during the retreat will be my practice in the coming year.



Ben Jie Each time I attend meditation retreats, I experience many changes and improvements. Examples of these would be the observation of impermanence, that the body is impure and the breath. From these practices I really liked and practiced the observation of impermanence. From this I realized that everything

will pass and we should not be attached to things. Everything happens due to causes and conditions. Meditation is not an instant cure-all. You need to meditate regularly for a while at least before you begin to appreciate its benefits. The effect on your life is so subtle that at first you may not feel any different. It gives you the self-esteem to be true to your self in the way you live your life. Daily practice is a precious mirror that reflects and reveals our original face. Let the mind and heart always remain in the condition of emptiness accepting and tolerating all obstacles.



Ben Yuan This meditation retreat has helped me to see where I am in my practice. Due to the pains in my legs, it was difficult at first to calm down my mind, also because I kept thinking of what happens outside during this festive season. By observing all these thoughts and pains I found myself concentrating for each and every moment of the seven days. This helped me to work hard in improving all weak aspects of my practice, resulting in a great improvement.



Ben Shi As this was my third time attending a seven days meditation retreat, it wasn't very difficult for me. There was some pain, but this was really not a problem as I knew how to deal with the pain.

The only problem I faced was losing concentration, as my mind was scattered. I tried to count the breath, but this was the worst method for me, because it was as if I'm 'playing'. When I recited the Buddha's name, I was able to focus on my breath and in this way I calmed down my mind and gained tranquillity. Again when we were doing walking meditation, my mind would start to wander around, as I was able to look around. So I decided to count how many times we walked around. As I was on the outer circle, sometimes we would walk around 22 times, 21 or 23 times. This method helped a lot, since it forced me to concentrate on what we were doing. All in all it was really a nice retreat for me. I enjoyed being led by my fellow practitioners and copied them in what they were doing, as they were working hard to achieve what they wanted.



Ben Ru As this was my third time attending a 7 day meditation retreat, there were not too many difficulties, as I was prepared. Everything started well but on the third day I developed a problem with my spine and this made it difficult for me to sit properly and concentrate.

The following day I started using the teachings of Ven Hui Shang. He explained that everything in this world is impermanent. This concept encouraged me and I started thinking that the pain is impermanent too. Without wasting time I started observing the pain and slowly my concentration improved despite the pain.

I want to say thank you to Ven. Hui Fang and Ven. Hui Shang for the important teachings they gave us and also for giving us the opportunity to attend this retreat.

Buddhism Works for me

By Helen Terre Blanche

I first began exploring Buddhism in 2006, after some conversations with a Buddhist friend. I began reading, but soon this was not enough; I wanted to learn to meditate. Nan Hua temple was an obvious place to start, so I booked a beginner retreat there. For me it was a step into the unknown, and it became a step which significantly changed my life.

I have always enjoyed silence, but was not sure what to expect from meditation instruction and it was with more than a little nervousness that I drove to Bronkhorstspuit one winter morning. The beautiful and awe inspiring sight of the temple rising out of the flat highveld plain, shrouded in mist, did little to dispel my nervousness, nor did the fact that I realised, as I entered the guest house, that I was entering another world. The culture was different, the food was different, and the architecture was different. In addition, I knew no-one else on the retreat; but the warm welcome, the beauty; the peaceful atmosphere and the kindness of everyone set my mind somewhat at rest.

The meditation sessions were challenging. For the first time I was attempting to look at my own mind, and I quickly became exhausted. Most of the time I was also in physical pain because I was not used to sitting so still for so long. Once my legs became completely numb and I felt a real sense of panic.

Early morning meditation sessions were held in the meditation room and began while it was still dark. Here the seats of the retreatants face long glass windows looking out onto rolling highveld grassland. During the Sunday morning session I became so caught up in counting my breath that as the session ended, I noticed for the first time that while we had been meditating the sun had risen, and a vista of grasses glowing with light lay beyond the windows. I had been so absorbed in the counting that I had forgotten to look out the window, and the possibility of what might happen if I explored meditation further fascinated me enough to keep me trying to meditate, in spite of all the challenges.

It is now almost four years since that retreat. In those years I have been on other retreats, at Nan Hua and at other centres, listened to teachings from different Buddhist traditions, explored different Buddhist practises, read, taken refuge; and... I am still trying to meditate! All

things considered, not that much progress -- so what has made me persevere?

Simply this: Buddhism has made me happier.

To start with, Buddhism helped me to accept myself. Throughout my life I have felt "different"; I have not "fitted in". Meditation has helped me realise that my problems are of my own making, and if the problems are created by me, then I also have the ability to solve them. Being different will only matter if I let it matter. There is no "right" way of being anyway, and accepting myself has made it easier to accept others and feel compassion for the pain they are experiencing, which is not that different to mine.

Buddhism has also helped me with big changes in my life, some extremely painful. In recent years my father died, my children left home, I got divorced, and moved house. I saw a good friend murdered, and weathered various family crisis. Buddhism has helped me understand that change and suffering happen the whole time, and there is nothing I can do to stop this. What I can do something about are my reactions to change and suffering. Meditation has helped me become aware of the insubstantiality and insignificance of thoughts and emotions, and if I am able to become aware of this, then I can let the thought or emotion go and it no longer has the power to make me unhappy. Often this is easier said than done, but practise helps.

So Buddhism has given me practises such as meditation that make me happier and more at peace. Buddhist philosophy and teachings have given me a way of looking at life that makes sense to me, and guidelines for acting more compassionately towards myself and other beings. And this makes for even more happiness. Although I keep waiting for Buddhism to fail me, it hasn't failed me yet! Buddhism works for me, and I am very grateful to Nan Hua and the people there for starting me on this path and continuing to provide guidance and support to me and many others.



**You are your biggest enemy.
Subduing yourself is your greatest victory.**

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