

ENCOUNTERS
with Master
Sheng Yen VII

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Preface

To share with the public the thoughts and life experiences of Dharma Drum Mountain founder Master Sheng Yen (also known as Shifu, meaning “Master”), the Sheng Yen Education Foundation embarked on a series of talks beginning in September of 2009. Fifty-three talks were given at the Sheng Yen Lecture Hall (located in the official residence where Master Sheng Yen lived in his final years). The talks were titled *A Living Example, Countless Teachings—Encounters with Master Sheng Yen* and we invited all his monastic and lay disciples to share with us their stories about Shifu, how he taught them through his living example and words. Listening to these speakers’ personal accounts of the interactions between teacher and student allowed the audience to commemorate Master Sheng Yen’s journey, and once again hear his gracious teachings.

The talks include stories of Master Sheng Yen’s everyday life, how he would give detailed guidance to his disciples regarding their speech and actions. There are also accounts of his travels to share the Buddhadharma locally and overseas, reaching out to the public, and teaching them skillfully and flexibly based on the existing circumstances. Even in his later

years when he became quite ill, he was an example of how to face life and death with freedom and ease. All of these examples, no matter how small the story or how short the conversation, radiate Shifu's compassion and wisdom. They inspire us to vow to "Emulate the worthies and sages, practice what the Dharma has taught us, and repay through our heartfelt gratitude."

At the end of the series, we felt that the interactions from these true life stories were brimming with the Dharma spirit. Hence the audiences initiated and organized transcripts of the talks, to be compiled and published by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation, hoping to allow the general public to learn from the wisdom of Master Sheng Yen, so that together we can realize his vision to create a pure land on this earth.

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Wholehearted Commitment to One Single Method and One Single Master

Liao Jinrong

*Shifu said, “When you want to practice Buddhism,
do not run around among different Buddhist centers.
There may be many Dharma methods,
but when you find a suitable place to practice with
trustworthy Dharma teachers
and correct Buddhist teachings, you should focus your
mind on it.”*

These words from Shifu had always been on my mind.



Introducing the Speaker

Liao Jinrong

Liao was born in 1943. She started to practice at the Nung Chan Monastery in 1984 and became the first chairperson of its Merit-Wisdom Amitabha Chanting Group, which started in 1986. In 1989, when Dharma Drum Mountain was founded, following which the Association of Dharma Supporters was also formed, Liao became the first full-time staff in Dharma Drum Mountain. She had served as Master Sheng Yen's chief secretary and special project secretary. Liao died of illness in 2013. In his later years, the Master gifted her a piece of calligraphy that says: "Wholehearted commitment," which best reflects Liao's steadfast contribution to Dharma Drum Mountain for 30 years.

It has been almost 25 years since 1984 up to today (2009). Today is my first time to give a presentation in public. Since I was asked to share a story, I would like to first talk about the book *Dharma Drum Mountain Story* narrated by Master Sheng Yen, founder of Dharma Drum Mountain. In this book, there is a statement that is often misunderstood, which refers to a piece of land that is difficult to come by. For those of you who joined Dharma Drum Mountain one year before its founding, you probably still remember that construction could not be done in an area behind the main parking lot. Because as of that time, we had not acquired that piece of land yet.

To settle with what is at hand: many stories to be told regarding the land

In this book, Shifu said, “As long as he agrees, it is final!” This statement has been misunderstood by some of our followers, and I have always kept this in mind. My take is that we cannot really blame those who spread their misunderstanding about this. It is because we failed to let people understand and that is why Shifu wrote the book

Dharma Drum Mountain Story.

In addition, I would like to talk about a miraculous response from Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara through our sincere prayers. This is about the origin of Dharma Drum Mountain. Now, allow me to share how we found this piece of land in the Jinshan District.

I think all of the volunteers knew that Dharma Drum Mountain found this piece of land as a result of a group chanting of the Great Compassion Mantra. At that time we were under great pressure to find land, as Nung Chan Monastery was located within the designated area for the Guandu Plain Development Plan, and the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies needed to relocate too. Therefore we organized a land acquisition team, and many volunteers in the Amitabha Chanting Group also joined this new team. With the pressing activation of the Development Plan, we worked even harder. At one certain Amitabha Chanting Group meeting, Shi Jianchang brought up this issue at the Chanting Group to elicit full support from all group members. Xiong Qingliang proposed that

the members of the land acquisition team also chanted the Great Compassion Mantra 108 times. Shifu then said that it would be more effective if he lead the entire Chanting Group as well as the land acquisition team to chant the mantra during the Amitabha chanting session. The chanting took place on Saturday, March 25, and was proven to induce a miraculous response.

On the afternoon of March 28, 1989, Lin Xianzheng called and asked to talk to Shifu when Shifu was receiving guests. He then said that he would come right over. Shortly after, Shifu and Prof. Fang Ningshu stopped by the office and asked me, "Chairperson Liao, are you free this afternoon? Let's go to Jinshan to check out a piece of land there." I said, "But I don't know how to drive there." Prof. Fang then said it was not going to be any problem as he and Lin Xianzheng had just been there that very morning. They would give me detailed direction and I only needed to drive. So we took the Yangjin Highway and turned left at the Taipei International Hotel. Then Prof. Fang told me, "Alright, Chairman Liao, now all you need to do is following the yellow line and we will be there soon."

Why was Shifu so keen to take a look at this piece of land? It was because Shifu was scheduled to travel abroad soon after.

After being to Jinshan personally, Shifu was very pleased with the land, so our next task was to procure it. There were actually several people expressed interest in that piece of land at that time, so we sped up negotiation and signed the contract on April 4. After that, the following step was to transfer title of the deed. Following the principle of “settle with what is at hand,” I then took over this job.

On April 21, Shifu sent a fax from America reminding us how to secure the ownership of the acquired land. As Shifu said quite often, he always made the most use of people’s donation. If we were not careful while spending donated money, we abused the donors’ trust in us.

To Yang Zhengguo, and layperson Wang, Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies

1. I am very happy that the procurement of the land in

Jinshan had been completed before I left Taiwan. Now the next step is to transfer the deed and to complete the legal rights in designation/mortgage registration so as to avoid any possible potential dispute in case of any reorganization. Please make sure the legal procedure for the property and re-consider this deal if we end up without full ownership after making full payment.

2. Transfer the deeds of woodland and new construction land first, then transfer deeds of the cropland and dry-land only after proper legal procedures such as recordation of the mortgage had been done so as to gain trust from our supporters.

3. Start a thorough investigation and make a first development draft on soil and water conservation, as well as road development and construction. After we found appropriate and reliable people, then further research and operation can be carried out efficiently.

4. Please continue to procure the 2 hectares of paddy field located on the flat land on top of the mountain and the land in the triangle area by the brook, (where Ven. Quan Du proposed to be the future meditation hall) and apply the same procedures mentioned above to ensure all legal rights.

5. This is a major task in the Buddhist circle. By participating and facilitating this endeavor, one will incur

immeasurable merits. Please send my best regards to Ven. Quan Du, Lin Xianzheng, Shi Jianchang, and Fang Ningshu, among others who have made a significant contribution.

6. Please discuss all matters with Prof. Fang in my absence.

Sheng Yen, April 21, 1989

After that, many people seemed to start referring to me as the “Land Lady,” since I had been at the very forefront of this task. Most people seemed to think I was the only member of our land acquisition team. Actually, it was because compared to others, I had a lot of free time at hand that this task naturally lands on me. In fact, I would like to clarify that different people were involved in different land acquisition projects.

The stories regarding land acquisition can go on for at least two more months. If I could finish sharing the stories within two months, then it would have been a piece of cake for Shifu to establish Dharma Drum Mountain. That was indeed extremely difficult.

Entering into Nung Chan Monastery, involving in the Amitabha Chanting Group

I started to become close to Shifu and Dharma Drum Mountain thanks to an inconceivable opportunity. The daughter-in-law of the president of the company I used to work for happened to be Yang-Huang Yushu. I suppose most of our volunteers in Tainan know her. She enjoyed meditation so much that she signed up for a seven-day Chan retreat at Nung Chan Monastery. At that time, an interview was part of the application to the retreat, so she flew to Taipei from Tainan. When she came back to the office after the interview, she asked me, “Do you know that there is a Nung Chan Monastery in Beitou?” I said I had no idea. Incidentally, I was just thinking about taking up meditation, so I asked her, “Could you wait for me to the retreat?” She kindly agreed and changed her schedule to wait until I finished my work.

When we got to Nung Chan Monastery (1984), it was at dusk when the monastery was in the middle of the

evening chanting session. My first impression was that this is a very nice place, so I decided to join the meditation class immediately without knowing who the abbot was. I had no clue at all even after I went back to the office and my colleagues asked me if the abbot was Master Sheng Yen or not. This is how I got into contact with Nung Chan Monastery.

Back from New York, Shifu, still young at that time, gave a lecture at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall in Taipei. Barely knew any Buddhism at that time, I did not really understand the lecture. The venue was jammed pack and felt very hot and stifling. Watching Shifu walking out of the venue followed by some organizers, with much admiration, my sister and I stood wondering what good cause and condition that lead those organizers to be so close to this Dharma teacher. Little did I know that exact thought of wanting to be close to Shifu sustained till this moment.

So I started to participate in Nung Chan Monastery's activities by joining its Amitabha Chanting Group. Later, I came across Issue 24 of *Humanity Magazine*, in which Shifu

mentioned the poor quality of Buddhist paraphernalia in Taiwan and wondered if anyone would take the initiative to make things better, as a meritorious deed. I was genuinely interested in this issue rather than earning merits, so I quit my job to prepare myself for it. I took a trip to Thailand and Japan to survey and look for higher-end Buddhist items. When I came back from the trip, someone told me that Shifu and Ven. Guo Jing wanted to see me. At that time, Shifu and I were not acquainted at all, so I wondered why he wanted to see me.

In that year, the Amitabha Chanting Group was going to elect its chairperson. Shifu asked me if I could join the group to serve others. I told Shifu, “No, I can not. My greatest fear in life is to talk on stage. A chairperson is supposed to speak on stage, right?” Shifu said, “That is fine, you can always read from your notes.” So I had the permission to do so today. Also, as I am old, I am afraid you might have problem understanding me.

At that time, we elected [chairman in the Amitabha Chanting Group] by show of hands and it was accidental

that I was even being considered. Ven. Guo Chang, a committee member of the Amitabha Chanting Group, heard that Chun Hui Sutra-Printing Society had asked me to help them with something. They had a few interactions with me personally, so they thought I could be a possible candidate. Another reason was that the chanting group would give offerings to Ven. Le Guan on a monthly basis. Since I had a car and often drove them there, they thought I was the right person for the chairperson.

Having finished two terms of chairmanship, I went to Japan and Thailand to survey their Buddhist religious paraphernalia again. Therefore, Shifu asked me, “Is your shop opening soon?” I asked Shifu is there any thing the matter? Shifu then ask me to help out for two more years if my shop was not opening any time soon. Without any hesitation, I answered “yes.” So I started working at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. The “two years” turned into 20 years to date, in which I have benefited a great deal.

Committed to a right practice place, concentrating on the cultivation

It is Shifu's words that made me willing to stay with Dharma Drum Mountain for over two decades. The words that struck me the most are as following: "When you want to practice Buddhism, do not run around among different Buddhist centers. If you do that, it is highly likely that you will start going around and gossiping about them. There may be many Dharma methods, but when you find a suitable place with trustworthy Dharma teachers giving correct Buddhist teachings, you should focus your mind on it."

After I came here, there are so many things to keep me occupied. I never went to different practice places as I always kept those words of Shifu in mind, which I found so true to my own experiences later on. Shifu wanted me to help out because there were not many people available at Nung Chan Monastery. There were only a few dozens of people in the chanting group. So, as the saying goes, "The early bird catches the worm," I got to become very close to Shifu. Every time I drove Shifu to the airport, I would take

a photo with him. As a popular Taiwanese expression goes, “One should settle with what is at hand”. There might be other more capable candidates out there, but I happened to be available in the right place at the right time, which are the causes and conditions that drove me to where I am today.

Shifu was truly admirable. He was aware of everything big or small about Dharma Drum Mountain, be it concerning construction projects or the Association of Dharma Supporters related. When I first saw the manuscript of *Dharma Drum Mountain Story*, I was so moved. We might have forgotten all the work we had done, but Shifu could remember every single happening in great detail. This exemplifies how concerning and grateful Shifu was towards all of us.

Making full effort and wholehearted commitment

During all these years that I followed Shifu, he always encouraged instead of reproaching or blaming people. I

want to share Shifu's words of encouragement to me with all of us here.

Being aware of all of us working very hard in Taiwan while physically in the US in November, 1991, on the 22nd, Shifu sent me a fax full of instructions. Towards the end of the fax he wrote: "You should develop Dharma Drum Mountain further by doing many more important tasks." What did Shifu mean by "more important works"? My interpretation was that all tasks contributing to building a pure land on earth are important, including sweeping the floor, wiping the table and preparing vegetables.

On December 12, 1992, I received another words of encouragement from Shifu: "The land-acquisition job shall be extremely demanding, so I am relying on you to do this meritorious deed." I'm sharing it here because many of you serve in the Association of Dharma Supporters as well. By repeating what Shifu said to me here, it is as if Shifu also encouraged all of you who volunteered.

When planning and preparing the "Free Mind and

Chan Delight: Exhibition of Calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen,” Shifu gave me his calligraphy that reads: wholehearted commitment. I shed tears at the moment of receiving. I took it that he wanted me to devote myself wholeheartedly, which is what I am doing now. Shefu’s passing away prompted all of us to make vows, so I made a vow before his spiritual tablet by saying, “From now on, I will put in full effort and devote myself wholeheartedly to the promotion of Dharma Drum Mountain’s vision by working in coordination and cooperation with its monastic sangha.”

*(This talk was given in the “A Conversation between Teacher and Student: A Meeting of Minds” event at Dharma Drum Mountain
on May 15, 2009)*

Accumulating Merit in The Merit-field, Accomplishing The Path

Chen Jianan

*Being close to Shifu, I learned the value of faith.
Faith means belief
in looking after oneself, one's family, and society,
one level after another
practically and realistically,
Thereby I realize that blessings do not lie in personal
enjoyment.
Working for the greater good entails ample of blessings.*



Introducing the Speaker

Chen Jianan

Chen Jianan (born in 1940) has served as chairman of DDM Association of Dharma Supporters (later reformed as “Dharma Drum Mountain Fellowship”) since October 1994. By long advocating practicing Buddhism in daily life, he found gratitude, shame, and repentance to be the core in practicing Buddhism. In addition, the essence in protecting the spiritual environment lies in looking after oneself and caring about others. He values culture and education, expects himself and urges others to practice Buddhism and to invite more people to support Dharma institutions.

There is a Taiwanese saying that goes: “In sunny days, one do not forget to save crops for the rainy days.” It means that one should save enough food needed for rainy days; it also reminds us to live within our means. For people who have paid jobs, regardless of the amount of salaries, it is important to manage one’s wealth nonetheless. If you do not learn how to spend money wisely, you can never make ends meet no matter how much money you make. Buddhism teaches us to acknowledge, count, accumulate, and cultivate our blessings. This is the practical wisdom in life.

Most people have many wants, but we actually do not need that much. After coming to Dharma Drum Mountain, you will realize what your real needs are, and then you will learn to be content and grateful. People who are content and grateful tend to be happier in life. On the other hand, people who are not content and grateful are less likely to experience true happiness. From my own experience, I find that happiness depends on one’s mindset.

Master Sheng Yen, the founder of DDM, advocated

the protection of the spiritual environment by changing oneself and becoming more mature. I used to believe in the Western lifestyle, which was to work hard, and play hard. So my life was either this or that, i.e., if it was not black, then it had to be white. After I started learning Buddhism I changed my concepts and mentality, and thus my life became colorful.

Accessing Buddhism through my spouse, starting from the Heart Sutra

Before I started learning Buddhism, my spouse always described me as “a very stubborn person.” In general, I would never accept other people’s suggestions unless I was truly convinced. She had tried many different ways to expose me to Buddhism, and I am very grateful to her for this. One day, she told me: “There’s a master called Sheng Yen at the Nung Chan Monastery. He teaches people how to practice Buddhism in daily life. I’m sure you will like his teaching.”

In August 1991, Shifu gave Dharma talks at the Taipei

International Convention Center for two consecutive evenings. The topic were “love and hatred” and “right and wrong.” That was the first time I attended his Dharma lectures. The concepts Shifu talked about were so clearly illustrated and applicable in our daily lives that I agreed with my wife that Shifu’s teachings were indeed very practical and beneficial. Admiration and reverence to Shifu arose in me during that talk, so I decided to support this Dharma teacher right after the talk. Seeing the change in me, my wife was even more pleased than I was.

It was around that time when Yang Zheng, the chairman of the Association, wanted to resign his position due to his old age. Shifu agreed to his request on the condition that he would find a suitable person to take over the position. Later I learned that Yang recommended me. At that time I had been in culture-related business for almost four decades and was about to retire to find something that would serve others and interests me at the same time. After making several personal inquiries with my acquaintances in either business or personal circle, Yang finally presented me as his successor to Shifu. This

was another contributory factor.

The significant event that helped felicitated the decision, I think, was Shifu's visit to the Staff Training Center of Taiwan English Press in Sanxia in July 1992. Shifu came with members and volunteers from the Nung Chan Monastery, Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, and DDM Association of Dharma Supporters for a training session. This gave me an opportunity to work for Dharma Drum Mountain. After that meeting, Shifu got to know more about me, and I also got to know Shifu and DDM better.

At that time I was at the peak of my career—being the general manager and director of several companies—I was always busy. But Shifu told me: “The busiest man makes the most of his time.” This amazed and puzzled me at the same time as I could not see how a person as busy as I was could possibly make the most of my time. Shifu said that it was precisely because I was busy that I should delegate my work by training people to share my workload. Therefore, I will have free time for tasks that benefit others. Shifu's

wisdom really impressed me. Indeed, it is essential for both businesses and charities to make good use of manpower and train employees; making good use of workforce is half the battle.

Valuing family in the Four Fields of Cultivating Peace

Shifu's vision and ideals for Dharma Drum Mountain—to help uplift the character of humanity, purify people's minds, and build a pure land is another element that touches my heart. The younger generation in Taiwan at that time enjoyed too much freedom and many parents found it difficult to guide their children. This led to a decline in moral standards in the general public and insufficient moral education. Even though the subjects and the knowledge in worldly and Buddhist teachings are not the same, there is a similarity in Shifu's campaign for moral education and my involvement in cultural education, which is the importance of moral education in the society.

Being aware of this same perspective, I was not

entirely devoid of any confidence toward Shifu and Yang's job offer. On the contrary, I thought this could be promising. However, my previous publishing-related multi-business lines were for profit after all. To work for a non-profit organization meant that I had to adjust myself and learn everything from scratch. So, Shifu appointed me as the vice chairman in the spring of 1994, and then I became the chairman in October of the same year.

It was a great honor that one of my suggestion was well received when I just started serving as the chairman. As DDM was developing the Peace of Mind, Body, and Activity campaign, I suggested "peace of family" be included. Throughout my career, I had always stressed the importance of family, especially when training my staff. With the support of their families, employees will commit to work and spend their income toward the well-being of their families. On the other hand, without the support of family or the intent to look after one's own family, one tends to spend all the salary on personal enjoyment, which might ruin the family. This is why I valued stability in staff members' families so much. Shifu agreed with me, and so

“peace of family” was included. Along with the original “peace of mind, body, and activity,” these made up the Four Fields for Cultivating Peace campaign as promoted by DDM later.

Being close to Shifu helped me to see the value of faith. Faith, essentially, is a belief. It starts from looking after oneself, to one’s family, and then to the society. It is systematic and sequential, from one level to another, in a very practical and realistic manner. So I regard Shifu as my spiritual teacher who changed my long-cherished value, and prompted me to retire earlier to join Dharma Drum Mountain.

Handing over TEP and heading toward DDM

I joined DDM when I was 55. I thought to myself that having accepting Buddhist faith, I should identify myself with it and live it out. The essence of Buddhism is delineated by Shifu through protecting the spiritual environment. In other words, to know oneself will lead

to changes in oneself, and then one will further mature and develop fully. That is why I said that my life before practicing Buddhism was only in black and white. Practicing Buddhism has changed my mindsets and allows me to live a life filled with colors.

The deepest personal experience I valued the most is how to acknowledge, count, accumulate, and cultivate our blessings in life. I had an easy life: a happy family, a successful career, and a good reputation. I owe my career to my father, who was the founder of the Taiwan English Press. His English was excellent. Without any formal education in English, he picked up English from interacting with the Englishmen as he was an official interpreter during the time of Japanese occupation. After World War II, my father frequented the U.S. Information Service in Taipei at Nanhai Road so that he could immerse himself in magazines in foreign languages. He had a feeling that English would become the most popular international language in the future, and that people in Taiwan could use some global perspectives. Therefore, my father set up the Taiwan English Press (hereafter TEP) and started to

introduce magazines in foreign languages to Taiwan.

I would think how I got to inherit TEP exemplifies the Buddhist concept of causes and conditions. All my father's five sons and three daughters have university degrees except for me. I'm the only one with vocational school diploma. Right after my graduation, I told my father that instead of going to a university, I wanted to learn how to do business. My father did not object to that, he simply observed what I did. My first job was a salesperson for the then Taipei Mutual Loans and Savings Co. Ltd (later the "International Bank of Taipei"). I was committed, meticulous, and I actually did quite well. So my father asked me if I wished to work at TEP and helped him with his business later.

Indeed, the key was that I was interested in this industry. Another practical reason being at that time, my brothers and sisters were still studying. I recall driving an old Mazda three-wheel automobile taking my father around to explore new outlets. Over time, distributors grew from 800 to over 3,000 while sale grew many-fold.

So my father saw the business acumen in me and finally decided to leave the business to me.

Since early days, TEP has been the distributor for *Reader's Digest*, and *Time*, among other magazines in Taiwan. They were often the top-selling magazines at major bookstores in Taiwan. Not only that, numbers of copies sold in Taiwan had always been the top in Asia. Therefore, *Reader's Digest* invited me to its headquarters, Pleasantville in New York, in a private jet. At that time, the dispatch operation at most magazine companies in Taiwan was rather rudimentary. The visit to Pleasantville made me realize that there is a lot of room for improvement in many aspects in the cultural industry. The workspace at Pleasantville feels like a museum or library to me in that there were paintings hanging everywhere. As a result, it creates a strong cultural ambiance. So the first thing I did after I came back to Taiwan was to reshape our corporate culture.

From my experience at TEP, I found the formula to a successful enterprise. Firstly, it should offer products

in high quality; secondly, it needs effective and efficient sales channels; thirdly, it should foster excellent staff; and fourthly, it is essential to be honest with customers. In terms of marketing, TEP introduced ground-breaking options such as paying in installments, mail-order, credit purchase and direct marketing. Also, I strongly believed in providing the best benefits possible, and that a good part of revenue should be distributed to the hard working employees; not only to those owners. As a result, employees would be happy to commit strongly to their work, and the company will become a better business. Essentially, this is a win-win situation. However, money is a double-edged sword. It can help a family, but it could also sink a family. Therefore, I am concerned how my staff spent their salary in that whether they hand it over to their wives and families or not.

I was rather proud of myself for being the first person in Taiwan to fly on the Concord, and having been on the luxurious cruise Love Boat 5 times. I lived by the Western value to “work hard and play hard.” After I turned 40, I spent two winters and summers at San Francisco

University to get a degree in MBA and eventually got the degree in which I did not enrolled decades ago.

I now live in a Japanese style house which is designed by a Japanese architect, and all materials were imported from Japan. The Great Dharma Drum TV series were once filmed here. Yet later I started to feel ashamed of the house as this house is exactly the result of my material desires. But Shifu taught me that being able to live in such a house is a karmic blessing. Other than acknowledging and counting our blessings, we also need to accumulate and cultivate further blessings. This made me realize that blessing is not about personal enjoyment but lies in benefiting others, which will, in turn, bring forth more blessings.

Shifu's teaching reflects Bodhisattva deeds

I am grateful to be able to devote myself to a non-profit undertaking in the second half of my life. Non-profit organizations are meant to serve others. DDM's vision,

as reflected in the Protecting the Four Environments, the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, and the Common Endeavor of Buddhists, are all Bodhisattva deeds aiming to help others. The more often you practice it, the more you can benefit from your acts. We can only take care of others after we took care of ourselves by applying Buddhist teachings.

As a saying in the service industry goes, “You are successful when your customers are satisfied.” I believe the same spirit applies to non-profit organizations while different values involved. In other words, one has to manage and be at peace with oneself first before one can take good care of one’s family and career. If one can live in harmony with one’s family members and colleagues, then the harmony entails communal power. These are the values DDM upholds: to transform an aggressive mind that fights for one’s own benefit into one that aspires to serve and give. Nonetheless, this particular service can only base on certain internal substantial qualities, which is to learn to master one’s mind, instead of merely giving material goods.

I remember clearly the regulation of silence at three-day or seven-day Chan retreats. A silent mind makes us perceive the environment more clearly. I often talk about “stillness, concentration, and wisdom.” With serenity/calmness, and stability, wisdom will arise from within. Shifu advocated practicing Buddhism in daily life and moral education. Protecting the spiritual environment, social environment, living environment, and natural environment are actually the most fundamental elements in moral education.

I followed Shifu around to visit devotees, and sometimes we stayed at supporters’ places. Before we left their houses, Shifu would remind us to tidy up and put things where they were. This shows what Shifu valued: to be considerate to others at all times.

In August 2005, Shifu and 30 some disciples went to Japan for the commissioned Lotus Bell. At one breakfast talk, Shifu directed our attention to Japanese etiquette. For example, they always keep their environment clean. When they stay at a hotel, they would treat it as if it were their own home. They would do things to make it easier for the

cleaning staff such as cleaning the bathroom floor after taking a shower and putting all used towels in one pile.

In October 2002, Shifu led 500 monastic and lay disciples to a pilgrimage in China. At the first morning talk, he reminded us to take the trip as a seven-day Chan retreat that we should refrain from entertaining random thoughts and idle chatter. We were required to remain silent everywhere, either we were walking, eating, traveling, or worshiping. All 500 of us were as quiet and disciplined as a group of five or 50 people. Scattered thoughts and idle chatter are like dust in that they cloud you from seeing your original image. Whereas placidity is like a pristine lake that pebbles of all shapes and sizes in the bottom can be seen clearly from above. This reflects Shifu's wisdom.

Setting up the system to spread practical daily Buddhism

The founding of DDM is a group effort led by Shifu. From the mountain headquarters to all the affiliated subgroups, including the Dharma Drum Mountain

Fellowship, the Dharma Practice Society, and the Dharma Affinity Society, DDM has welcomed people from all walks of life to participate and made a significant impact on the society. I have always been honored to be part of DDM's endeavors.

I was very impressed by Shifu's respect for expertise and professionalism. Shortly after I started to get involved in DDM, one particular incident made a very strong impression on me. At that time, the Association of Dharma Supporters and the DDM Sangha worked together in caring for people in need. Sometimes, due to the differences in perspectives between the Sangha and the Association, an agreed-upon decision might be changed later. One time, a monastic in charge was once reprimanded by Shifu because I was so single-minded at introducing my practical tactics and ideas. In retrospect, I was ashamed of myself for not being aware of perspectives other than mine.

The first thing I did after I took over the Association was to set up a regional management system by establishing

seven districts in Taiwan, each with one convener and two vice-conveners. It would not be easy for a huge group of people to take care of the general public if there is not a system in the organization. Take army as an example, there are eight to twelve soldiers in a squad and then several squads will form a platoon, a company, a battalion, and so on. I proposed to set up small groups as units to promote Buddhism through sharing personal experiences of Buddhist elements in life. In addition, we will invite people successfully implemented Buddhism in their lives to be the unit leaders or assistant instructors. I asked that members share personal problems in their real experience rather than vague imaginary scenarios. Then all members would brainstorm and raise possibilities to solve those actual problems that happened before.

Practicing, protecting and promoting the Dharma has to start with ourselves. What have you benefited from learning Buddhism? What can you offer to others? As a saying goes, “Nine out of ten incidents in life do not meet one’s expectation.” Since things hardly go as planned, it is a common place to encounter difficulties in life. If we are

willing to face it, then we will feel less afflicted. Affliction results from our selfishness. Learning to find the silver lining rather than focusing on the undesirable will reduce complaints in life drastically.

A father once told me that he was such a loser that his family members kept a distance from him when he got home from work. I asked if he had ever thanked his wife and his children. He said he was the breadwinner and so it was they who should be thanking him. Therefore, he had a bad temper at home and yell at them often. I told him that it was exactly because he had never shown gratitude and always yelled at his family that they shunned him. If he could thank his wife, ask if the children helped their mother, and praise his children, then his family would feel more peaceful and happy.

Looking after ourselves and caring for others

First thing in practicing Buddhism is that we change ourselves, learn to look after ourselves, and be one with the

Dharma. It would not be compassionate to demand others to look after you without you trying to look after yourself first. Only after you learned to take care of yourself, then you can take good care of your family. When you can look after your family, you will then be able to look after the community, your supporters, and the general public.

It is essential to know how to look after ourselves. I have been sick for the past few years, but I still try my best to look after myself and care for my family. I say good morning to my two grandchildren every morning. Children copy adults' behaviors; so parents should be good examples and give children opportunities to learn and develop good habits since they were young. For example, I always put my shoes back on the shoe rack. As a result, my grandchildren follow me and behave the same as I do. They also tidy up their toys after playing. In fact, young people nowadays have relatively good morals. They show respect to the elder, give up seats to older people, and help the elderly to walk cross the road. In this aspect, our society is in good shape.

Buddhism teaches us how to develop our wisdom that benefits both ourselves and others. The Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign, the Protecting the Four Environments, and the Common Endeavor of Buddhists cover all aspects. If you do not practice Buddhism in your life, then you do not really know even the first thing about Buddhism. By practicing Buddhism you will benefit a lot, start to be grateful, and naturally be aspired to repay others for their kindness.

As Shifu's lay disciples, we actively act out, facilitate, and advocate DDM's concept. When inviting young talents to join our Association, we do not merely encourage them to give money. Because there are many forms of giving, including volunteering, speaking kind words, doing good deeds, and performing wholesome actions. As far as I am concerned, engaging in fund-raising, is not unlike facilitating people to care for and look after one another with kind words, good deeds, and positive power of wholesome actions; regardless of whether they are supporters of DDM or not.

A frail body with an unfailing mind, practicing along with illness

Under Shifu's vision and guidance, the Association has evolved to its present scale. All I did was learning by his side, and so I have always felt grateful for that. When I wake up every morning, the first thing I do is to recite the Common Ethos of Dharma Drum Mountain and the Common Endeavor of Buddhists. I do this every day. When I feel upset or troubled, I would ask myself, "Have I actually practiced DDM's vision as much as I should?" If the answer is no, I would immediately feel ashamed and then repent.

I often share with my children that learning Buddhism is all about being grateful, knowing when to feel shameful and remorseful. Since we were born, we had been relying on other people's contributions for food, clothing, accommodation, and transportation, among other aspects of life. So we should show gratitude towards heaven and earth, our parents, as well as all people who have helped and benefited us. Thoughts alone this line will make people

happy and feel content.

Toward the end of 2009 I had a fall, and since then it has been challenging for me to move about. Later I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and my whole body often felt heavy to me. In addition, I had trouble falling asleep, particularly within the first three months after being diagnosed. When I read *My Wonderful Later Years*, I was almost in tears learning that Shifu actually suffered so much more than me in his later years. It was very noble of Shifu to regard life as wonderful despite his physical suffering.

I often heard Shifu said, "We can only help those who suffer by experiencing suffering ourselves." Now I can relate to that deeply. I constantly remind myself that I need to be grateful, have a sense of shame, and practice repentance. When I am not feeling well and have difficulty sleeping, I recite Amitabha Buddha's name, and in no time I would fall asleep. I am still learning to face, accept, handle, and let go of whatever happened. By accepting our physical pain from within us, it would not seem to be that troublesome anymore. I realized that if we refused to

accept the reality while kept expecting a different future, then suffering is inevitable for sure.

After I fell sick, I talked with the Abbot President about my resignation several times. I did not want my health issue to affect the organization inadvertently in any way. He encouraged me that the vice chairman could help with my care service work and that he wished that I would finish the terms of the chair and vice chairman and set up the specifications for the jobs. So I felt a strong sense of responsibility.

In recent years, I could not attend all the activities organized by the Dharma Drum Mountain Fellowship. If I needed to give a presentation, then I would read from my notes. I am grateful to the abbot president, the monastics, and the supporters for being considerate. The Abbot President gave me some kind words of encouragement, “a frail body with an unfailing mind,” wishing me not to feel frustrated. Instead, I should take this ailment as a lesson to be learned, and to experience, learn, and mature in the Dharma. Now I am trying to adjust my lifestyle from

different aspects and not to overtire myself. At the same time, I also practice what Shifu said, “One can be physically sick yet mentally healthy, and grow old comfortably.”

Protecting the Spiritual Environment: happy people and a healthy Earth

All DDM local and overseas branch centers have been expanding in recent years. The work did not come to a halt after Shifu passed away. We are united and committed as usual, and this is because we have vowed to repay Shifu’s kindness with our actions.

Shifu was my spiritual teacher in life. He helped me to purify my mind, and was a religious teacher highly respected by many. Now my wish is to wholeheartedly help establish Dharma Drum University (approved by Ministry of Education and renamed as Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts in August 2014). I hope to see the school starts functioning and over time receive recognition from society through words of mouth. As for myself, I would be happy as long as I do not make any negative affect on

the development of our organization. As Shifu said, “For the sake of humanity’s well-being and the Earth’s health, we need to build a university dedicated to protecting the spiritual environment.” People in modern time are not happy, nor is our planet healthy. So such a university is exactly what modern society needs.

I have learned a lot at DDM, but have done very little. So every morning I chant the Common Endeavors of Buddhists and the Common Ethos of Dharma Drum Mountain, and ponder gratitude, shame, and repentance. I have always reminded myself to be grateful for having met my life-long Buddhist teacher, for having connected with Dharma Drum Mountain, which is an embodiment of my karmic blessing. But I haven’t done enough, as I still have many habitual tendencies waiting to be corrected, and that is why I still feel ashamed and repent. And I vow that no matter where I am in the future, as the chairman of the Dharma Drum Mountain Fellowship or not, I will support Dharma Drum Mountain to the best of my capacity.

(An interview on May 11, 2011, at Yunlai Monastery)

Discourse between Religion and Arts

Ye Rongjia

Shifu had no predisposition towards arts.

*He examined every piece of artwork,
and asked me what made those artworks significant,
and how artists convey the artistic sentiments.*

He grasped the idea fairly quickly.

In some way, arts and religion are similar.

*The beauty of arts lies in their artistic sentiments,
while that of religion in the compassionate yet reasonable
interpersonal interactions.*

Shifu comprehended that perfectly.



Introducing the Speaker

Ye Rongjia

Born in 1940, Ye Rongjia has been the vice-president of Dharma Drum Mountain Fellowship since 1999. As an architect and art collector, Ye was invited to serve as an engineering consultant for DDM to offer his professional advice as well as introduce influential people in the artistic circle to DDM in 1992 . He curated the “Free Mind and Chan Delight: Exhibition of calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen” to showcase Shifu’s calligraphy in his later years that helped made the master’s wish to set up a Buddhist university possible.

In late September 2006, I got a phone call from Shifu and we chatted about the 70-odd calligraphy works he had composed recently. “Come and have a look at them,” so Shifu invited me to Dharma Drum Mountain that day. By the time I arrived at the Mountain, all the calligraphy works had been hung up at Lian-hua-zang (the school history room). That was the first time I had ever seen so many of Shifu’s calligraphy works on display. It was truly majestic.

Calligraphy, our shared passion

That day, apart from some monastics, calligrapher Zhang Liquan and his wife from Miaoli as well as Chief Secretary Liao Jinrong were there. Everybody was very happy and felt that we could all do something to help. But Shifu, being modest, thought that his calligraphy was not good enough, he had grown tired of writing calligraphy, and he did not feel like writing calligraphy in the future anymore. Being frank and direct as usual, I said to Shifu immediately: “Shifu, you must have confidence in your calligraphy.”

I have long engaged in arts and started collecting artworks since my twenties. Therefore, I was confident in my taste in art: acute, avant-garde, and forward-looking. Judging from the artistic perspective, Shifu's calligraphy embodies his lifetime Buddhist practice, wisdom, experience, and cultivation. So I suggested Shifu to write whatever he felt like; as long as he follows his heart when he writes, his calligraphy would be in the one and only "Sheng Yen style." In fact, some of Shifu's strokes are bold and unconventional, particularly in his semi-cursive style.

Calligraphy is the deepest passion which I shared with Shifu. Since I began serving at DDM in 1992, I have involved in architecture consulting and exhibition curating, such as the organization of the "Free Mind and Chan Delight: Exhibition of calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen," an event that took place in Shifu's late years. I am honored to have been part of all these significant historic events at DDM in their various stages of development. Individual lives and human history cross paths here and there. We should seize the moment when causes and factors arise. The purpose of seizing the moment is not

only for personal sake, but also to amplify good deeds and achieve communal meaningful tasks.

My encounters with Master Sheng Yen can be summed up in four aspects: architecture, arts, calligraphy, and Shifu's Chan teachings.

My first encounter with Shifu as an engineering consultant

I knew Shifu a long long time ago. In October 1986, a friend of mine invited Master Sheng Yen to give a talk on "Chan and Our Life" for a Rotary Club at the Lai Lai Hotel, so I got to listen to that Dharma talk. After the lecture, my friend introduced me to the master and said, "If shifu ever needs any help in architectural construction, you can count on Ye Rongjia." This was my first encounter with Shifu.

A few years later, Dharma Drum Mountain was founded, and soon afterward the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies Relocation Construction Committee was also set up. A construction consultant team of academics,

architects, and landscape designers was formed to facilitate the construction. Among these elite consultants were Yang Yingfeng, the famous sculptor, Professor Qian Xuetao, and Professor Chen Hongyu. I was also chosen as a specialist in architecture. The reason I was chosen was because Shifu visited my art park in Hsinchu once and identified with my ideas in architecture. To this date, I still keep the historic official letter of appointment which was issued on March 31.

All DDM's events have a far-reaching and profound impact. Even the boring and tedious construction meetings could serve as a channel through which Shifu shared his teachings with people. Touched by Shifu's concepts and inspired by DDM's vision during those meetings, I started attending Chan practice activities. That was an entirely different influence.

As mentioned earlier, I have always worn my heart on my sleeve and am confident of my taste and knowledge in art. So I raised two issues in the advisory meetings without any reserve. Firstly, DDM should explore and develop

its own path; and secondly, its resident monastics should pay more attention to their health. In retrospect, the first suggestion had become a reality over the years. I do not take credit for this because it was a natural consequence of the maturation in causes and conditions. Even as early as when we were still waiting for approval to develop the hill area, Shifu's vision had enlightened people to realize that the future DDM was not merely a small scale Dharma center. I have good reasons for saying so.

From an early stage, Shifu raised two principles for the construction of DDM: Firstly, we will abide by all the laws and regulations of the government; secondly, it had to be environmentally friendly. All the trees and plants, especially the native species, would definitely remain intact. This is a reflection of Shifu's wisdom. After the DDM complex was completed, we perceived a unique ambiance which is indeed very different from any other places. During the spring and summer, when the wild lilies and ginger flowers blossom, it really transcends DDM into heaven on earth.

Hill land development was a very important phase in

the construction of DDM. It involved complex application procedures that required frequent construction meetings. Shifu learned from the process, and over time, had become an expert in architecture construction.

During the design and construction phases, Shifu had led many research tours overseas to study ancient Buddhist architecture. He hoped to give DDM's construction an innovative touch by re-introducing the essence in traditional Buddhist architecture. Therefore, Shifu made the final decisions himself on all elements such as form, layout, color, and material. DDM's construction might have involved many architects, but I would venture to say that the real architect was Master Sheng Yen himself.

Planning an auction of contemporary artworks

Out of reverence, most people tended to interact with Shifu with reservation, and found it hard to exchange ideas with him on topics in question. In fact, if you had the chance to really talk with Shifu in depth, you would

realized that he is actually an avant-garde-at-heart. This is a side of Shifu that most people had never knew about.

I consider my concepts rather advanced already. Even now that I am older, I still embrace creative ideas. I am honored that I was involved in several important fundraising functions during the construction process of DDM.

“DDM Fundraising Auction of Contemporary Art” was organized for the first time in 1993. It featured the theme “creating a pure land on earth” with an aim to raise money for the construction project of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. This was the first fundraising auction combining art circle and Buddhist educators in Taiwan. At that time, DDM was not really well known so it could use more social resources. Therefore, after receiving Shifu’s assignment, I thought I could start with my connections in the artistic and cultural circles I had developed for decades. I reported to Shifu that even though the event was held in the form of a fundraiser, more importantly, it would serve to introduce influential

people in the artistic and cultural circles to DDM. I would bring prominent artists, art collectors, gallery owners, and auction house owners together so that more people could be familiar with DDM. Moreover, other than in Taipei, this event would tour to other major cities such as Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung so that the Dharma supporting groups in different areas could work together. At the same time, all regional groups could invite new blood to join this endeavor. Shifu agreed to my plan and delegated me to be in charge of this event.

This auction, which combined Buddhism and art resources, was not only the first of its kind in the artistic circle in Taiwan, but also groundbreaking in the Buddhist circle. The event turned out to be very successful, so other groups followed suit later.

Five years later, the “1998 DDM Fundraising Auction of Contemporary Art and Jewelry” was held for the purpose of raising money for the Dharma Drum College of Humanities and Social Sciences (the present Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts). This phenomenal exhibition/

auction with over 200 pieces of artworks from leading contemporary artists toured several cities in Taiwan again.

These two auctions helped expose DDM to the art circle. As a result, prominent artists such as Cai Guoqiang, Lin Xinyu, and calligrapher Du Zhonggao had close contact with DDM and Shifu had frequent communications with those artists. To my knowledge, Shifu often had telephone conversations with the Chinese-American artist Cai Guoqiang when Shifu went to New York. Shifu was inclined to interact with people in the art circles.

An ordinary person can make extraordinary endeavor sometimes. The ideas I proposed were approved by Shifu because Shifu is very open-minded. I would especially like to thank Liao Jinrong and Hong Zhimei, who worked day and night for those events. They worked hard in everything from planning, execution, liaison, to reception. Liao and Hong may not always work at where others could see them busy helping because they were in fact busy working everywhere behind the scene.

Arts that soothe our minds

Shifu had no predisposition towards arts. He examined every piece of artwork, and asked me what made those artworks significant, and how artists convey the artistic sentiments. He grasped the idea fairly quickly. In some way, art and religion are similar. The beauty of arts lies in their artistic sentiments, while that of religion in the compassionate yet reasonable interpersonal interactions. Shifu comprehended that perfectly.

Shifu also came into contact with installation art. Installation art is different from graphic arts in that the latter is a static reconstruction of lines and colors to represent the visual perceptions of the world. While the former is beyond 2-dimensional that employs temporal and spatial elements to engage the viewers proactively. In my opinion, a series of installation art exhibitions organized in January 2001 by DDM for the “Rebuilding the Minds in the Time of Aftermath” after the 921 Earthquake constitute a remarkable chapter in DDM’s history.

In September 1999, the 921 Earthquake was the most devastating one in Taiwan of the past century. After the earthquake, most religious and charity groups lent their helping hands by providing material support, in which DDM also participated. But was there anything else that DDM could do to help the survivors? At that time Shifu convened a disaster relief meeting, and a variety of different ideas were raised. My thought was that art should be part of the disaster relief. So I proposed that DDM could use installation art to convey concern, and to soothe the unsettled catastrophe stricken minds.

“Great idea, we shall make some installation art,” Shifu concluded the meeting. Nonetheless, not all DDM supporters identified with my proposal. They failed to see the connection between installation art and disaster relief and was afraid that the general public might not receive the idea well. Some even wonder if these seemingly irrelevant installation artworks would illicit ill comments from the public.

In January 2000, the installation art was showcased

in the square of National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts featuring pieces by Cai Guoqiang, Li Mingwei, Yang Maolin, Xue Baoxia, and Chen Jianbei. The Chinese-American explosive artist Cai Guoqiang created the “Burnt Scar of 921 Earthquake” on the spot which was so compelling that the piece was purchased by the owner of a ceramic glaze factory right after it was completed. In 2009, this work was auctioned at Christie’s in Hong Kong, for the amount 10 times of the original purchase price. This generous collector kept one-third of the gain, donated one-third to the Sichuan earthquake relief fund, and gave the rest to DDM. Due to his wholesome kindness, Shifu learned about this circle of meritorious boomerang of the good deed before he passed away.

In general, if it were not for Shifu’s openness and receptivity, my idea would not have been realized. Shifu also learned from the process about installation art, and this exemplifies how remarkable Shifu was.

The causes and conditions of Chan practice changed my life

Shifu was the most influential person in my life. He was my spiritual teacher and mentor. I had been following Shifu's footsteps since I came into close contact with him. How honored and fortunate I was to have been close to Shifu.

During the time serving as the construction consultant for DDM, I became interested in Chan practice taught by Shifu. So my wife and I took the month-long weekly Beginners' Meditation course at Nung Chan Monastery. After completing the program, with the recommendation from Shifu's secretary, Ms. Liao, I went on to attend the Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals.

That was the second Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals, held in September 1992, at the temporary quarters in Dharma Drum Mountain. The weather started to get quite chilly at that time. Sometimes the roof would leak when it rained and that was what made this retreat unforgettable. Among the participants were Yang Yingfeng,

an artist and also the construction consultant for DDM, as well as Yang Zhengxiong and Liu Weigang, whom later became supporters of DDM. All participants rejoiced the Dharma they perceived during the retreat regardless of the less than ideal conditions at the temporary quarters. Being born in a poor family, I did not always have food to eat as a child, had to walk to school barefooted, and was often dressed in rags. Having been through all those when I was growing up, challenging conditions such as cold weather and leaking roof were nothing new and did not bother me at all. I am grateful that I was able to attend the retreats. I would venture to say that Chan practice changed my life entirely.

From 1993, I attended retreats annually for seven consecutive years, either in Nung Chan Monastery or Dharma Drum Mountain. The four-day Chan retreat gave me a taste of what Chan practice was. I finally felt that I had entered into the gate of Chan practice after attending the seven-day retreat seven times. Actually, I found it challenging every time I was in the retreat. There were all sorts of physical sensations such as soreness, aches,

numbness, and itches; but once you got through those, you would feel wonderful. That is why I enjoy it and am never tired of it.

Once, during a seven-day retreat at Nung Chan Monastery, I had a terrible cold that my nose was runny all the times and I coughed with blood. My symptoms were rather serious. I was not sure what I should do since the first day I arrived. On the one hand, I was in such a terrible shape that I really needed to see a doctor. On the other hand, it is not allowed to take time off from the retreat. After a long and thorough debate with myself, I reported my situation to Shifu. Then Shifu found himself caught in a dilemma. In the end, Shifu decided to grant me a sick leave so that I can go see a doctor. I was diagnosed with inflammatory bleeding at the National Taiwan University Hospital. After getting the prescription medicine, I returned and continued the retreat.

Chan practice has helped me keep a calm and stable mind. Even when I encounter tough problems, I can always sort out my thoughts among complicated entangled matters

and find the underlying nature of a still mind. In essence, I realized that there is nothing in life that I can not deal with.

Overcoming challenges in life with the concepts of Chan

Taiwan experienced two major financial crises in 2001 and 2009, which were also the two major challenges in my life.

In 2001, my business took a big hit that made a serious dent in my company. The company was devastated and yet there was no other way around it. Under such circumstance, most victims would probably choose to fight hard against the firms that managed to let their checks bounce without any penalty. Instead, I learned to face it, accept it, be strong, and tried to stand on my feet again. At that time, both my home and my company were in Hsinchu. When my company got into trouble, I had to be responsible to my clients. In other words, I strove to keep my feet on the ground with tremendous patience and resilience so that I would not trip and fall again. I stood up

firmly, and kept moving forward. This is how I benefited from Chan practice.

After the incident, in one late afternoon while I was on my way to Taipei, Shifu called me from New York. Shifu encouraged me to look ahead because setbacks were only temporary so there was no reason for us to feel frustrated. He advised me to chant Guanyin Bodhisattva's name more often to develop faith and confidence through my belief. This timely phone call was exactly what I needed at that very moment, and it encouraged me enormously. Shifu had so many followers and yet he always manages to appear at the most critical moment in response to everyone's need. An example was in 2006 when former Taichung Mayor Hu Ziqiang's wife had a serious car accident, Shifu wrote him a letter upon hearing the news in new york and asked a follower to take the letter back to Taiwan overnight so that Hu would receive it the following day. That was indeed most touching.

In 2007, when "Free Mind and Chan Delight: Exhibition of Calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen" took place in Taichung,

the then mayor Hu was invited to attend the opening. If he did not mention this heart-warming happening, no one would have known about it. Hu said he could not believe his eyes and kept sobbing uncontrollably when he read the letter written by Shifu. Similarly, I also shed tears when I received the phone call from Shifu. The warmth and concern Shifu showed toward people are most touching. Shifu received and transformed numerous people with his practice and wisdom, and that is not an easy task. I started my own business from scratch and went through setbacks, so I took this experience to heart.

The financial crisis in 2009 affected my business too. Compared to the previous one, I was able to get back on my feet again quicker and even more firmly thanks again to Shifu's warm regard. In January of that year, Shifu summoned several laities for a talk. My wife and I were very grateful for being able to see Shifu for one last time. Shifu encouraged my wife and me to face the challenge without any added emotion. Shifu passed away two weeks after that and we all cherish Shifu's kindness dearly.

After attending the Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals, I was appointed the convener for participants of the following retreat. I also suggested a liaison organization to be set up so that participants could keep connected to DDM regularly. For example, a quarterly reunion retreat and a golf team as platforms that members get together on a regular basis and provide resources to DDM. These two regular liaison activities run actively as of today.

In fact, I had wished to attend a 49-day Chan retreat. Retreats as such had been given by Shifu in Taiwan and America before. But I regret that I was too busy with my business then. As a septuagenarian, it might be physically challenging for me to participate in a 49-day retreat. But I still hope I can take it one day.

“Free Mind and Chan Delight: Exhibition of Calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen”

Finally, I would like to talk about Shifu’s calligraphy. This is the deepest connection I had with Shifu. In

September 2006, I had a chance to see his large-scale calligraphy works. Shifu, being modest, thought that his calligraphy was not good enough, he had grown tired of writing calligraphy and did not feel like writing calligraphy in the future anymore. But my observation was that apart from his physical condition, the only matter was that he was not confident enough at that time. So I offered my two cents that there was no need to compare his calligraphy with those by famous calligraphers and eminent monks in the history. All he needed to do was to follow his free mind in composing the Sheng-Yen style calligraphy.

Maybe this comment made sense to Shifu because Shifu kept on writing more than 1,000 pieces of calligraphy afterward. I also suggested his attendant prepare proper settings for him to write calligraphy. In Shifu's residence, his quarters on Dharma Drum Mountain and the Zhongzheng Dharma Center, there were tables designated for writing calligraphy. On top of a plywood board sized 4 feet by 8 feet, writing kits were placed over a military blanket so that Shifu could write whenever he wanted to. To have all elements ready for writing is crucial because then Shifu

would not need to spend time looking for inkslab, paper and brushes when he felt like writing. When the writing kits were all set up and all conditions were filled, then Shifu could write whenever inspiration emerged. This is what I proposed at that time.

As to the calligraphy style, I suggested that Shifu try various styles, including the running script. As to the content, it could be anything that came to Shifu's mind or what Shifu felt like writing, from expounding Dharma to transcribing passages from Buddhist texts. I perceive Shifu's calligraphy from an artistic perspective. When appreciating and analyzing art, form proceeds content. The structures and the brushstrokes of characters are the artistic elements, while the content is of no relevance to the artistry itself. With Shifu's unique identity, his brushstrokes exemplify his Buddhist practice, knowledge, personal cultivation, and life experience. In addition, to the later generations, the form and content are also influential. Some of Shifu's brush strokes are light and almost emaciated with a touch of avant-garde spirits. I was particularly impressed by his cursive script. Over

time, Shifu's calligraphy had become more and more free, capricious, and spectacular. It is fair to say that Shifu had found his own idiosyncratic style in calligraphy.

In 2007, Shifu entrusted me to organize another large-scale exhibition. Instead of introducing more art and cultural resources to DDM, this time the subject was Shifu's calligraphy. Over 100 pieces of calligraphy written in his late years was shown in the "Free Mind and Chan Delight: Exhibition of Calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen" that toured Taipei, Taichung, Tainan, and Kaohsiung during the second half of 2007. Between 600 and 700 of pieces of Shifu's calligraphy were printed in the catalog, "Free Mind and Chan Delight: Master Sheng Yen's Calligraphy Collection".

The purpose of this exhibition was to raise money for the Dharma Drum University (later as the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts). The first building of the university, Chanyue building, was made possible by support from across the society. Shifu decided to keep his transcriptions of sutra passages and descriptions of the scenes of Dharma Drum Mountain in DDM. Two pieces

of his calligraphy were collected by the National Palace Museum as important historical documents, which was unprecedented.

Still room for improvement in fundraising and caregiving

It was my greatest honor to have met Shifu in this lifetime, be close to him, and be able to exchange ideas with him on various issues and topics. This experience allowed me to appreciate the open-mindedness, vision, and virtuous temperaments of a prominent monk in our times. Shifu taught himself into an architect, artist, and great calligrapher. This impressed me immensely as I had been proud of myself for being innovative and an avant-garde.

After coming into close contact with Shifu, I had been moving forward by following his footsteps. I did this not only when I am in DDM, I also implement DDM's ideals in my own architecture practice by incorporating education, culture, and the beauty of arts together. Shifu visited my art park in Hsinchu twice. In March 1994, the

great sculptors Yang Yingfeng and Zhu Ming exhibited their landscape sculptures in my art park. The two artists gave Shifu a private tour talking about the process of each artwork. That was such a lovely memory.

I am especially grateful for how much the Dharma helped my family. In 1996, my mother died at the age of 85. After we left the hospital, we chanted Amitabha Buddha's name incessantly for three consecutive days. My mother's corpse was still soft as if she was sound asleep when she was being put into the coffin. That was such a heartfelt moment. Afterward, we adopted the Buddhist funeral service. We did not burn any paper money, nor did we build towers of canned goods for the deceased. All our family members dressed in lay Buddhist robes as if the service was a group practice activity. As Shifu said, "Death is a solemn Buddhist service in itself," and I sure experienced as such.

Up to this day, I have benefited a lot from DDM, which has helped my family, my business, and my interpersonal relationship a great deal. I attended many of DDM's

activities and so do my family. I would not venture to say that they learn and support Buddhism under my influence. I rejoice from the bottom of my heart seeing Buddhist lifestyle perpetuates in the younger generations in my family.

As the vice president of the Dharma Drum Mountain Fellowship, I pay close attention to the fundraising and social care activities carried out by DDM. I do my best to support the organization fully with my creativity and ideas. I will commit my full support to DDM's endeavors, and I am very concerned about the aspects of fundraising and social care. If DDM wishes to continue to prosperity, then it is imperative to provide social service. If there were no followers, then DDM would not have existed. These are my utmost honest and sincere thoughts.

(An interview on November 29, 2013, at Yunlai Monastery)

A Promise to Build a Permanent Place for Dharma Practice

Liu Mingshan

As Shifu urged us: “We should relish what we have accomplished.”

*the future generations should cherish the construction of Dharma Drum Mountain,
make the most of its architecture and environment as a whole.*

*Every piece of brick, tile, door, and window embodies Shifu’s ideals
and the result of people’s joint efforts.*



Introducing the Speaker

Liu Mingshan

Born in 1961, Liu Mingshan became the first full-time staff member of the Construction Office at DDM in 1991 and is currently the chief engineer of DDM Department of Architectural Construction. Joining DDM's construction team three years after the DDM construction project started, Liu and his professional expertise had been with DDM in every step of the way. He experienced and realized Shifu's teachings during the construction process: to perceive difficulties with a mindset that "great things do not come without toil"; to strive to achieve the goal even all existence is temporary after all, and to relish the results of hard work.

As Master Sheng Yen often said, “The Dharma is so great, but so few people know about it and yet so many people misunderstand it.” This prompted him to found Dharma Drum Mountain and promote the humanistic Buddhism. But on the other hand, Shifu also said that he did not particularly need to build DDM for his personal sake. It was for the sake of sentient beings that Shifu would bring together people’s aspirations and beneficial conditions so as to materialize a place of Dharma practice for everyone.

I remember Shifu was invited to the opening of the Juming Museum, located to the north of the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education in 1999. The artist Ju Ming said in his speech that “Alas, after more than a decade, the museum is finally open today!” Shifu, on the other hand, simply said, “Maestro! It might take you more than a decade for your museum to be completed, it has been more than a decade for the construction of the ‘Dharma Drum Mountain’ and it is far from completion!” This juxtaposition reveals the amount of pressure that Shifu had. After all, ten years is not a short time and for sure is

important in the development of any organization.

Joining DDM on the recommendation from my former CEO

My connection with DDM harks back to 1991, when I was working as a manager of the Construction department in a construction company. One day, the CEO summoned me for a talk. He told me that a Buddhist organization called “Dharma Drum Mountain,” situated in the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in Beitou at that time, had to relocate due to its need to expand. In addition, its place of origin, the Nung Chan Monastery, also needed to relocate urgently due to the Guandu Plain Development Project proceeded by the government. “They had already purchased a 36-acre (14.5-hectare) plot in Jinshan and are applying for its development permission now. They are looking for a professional construction manager. Would you like to give it a try?”

I have never had any contact with any Buddhist group before that, nor did I heard of DDM before. I was only

wondering what was on my boss's mind. Since the CEO made the request, I presumed he thought it was a good idea. And it elicited my curiosity about DDM. Meanwhile, I thought to myself: with a high population in an island as small as Taiwan, apart from constructing tall apartment buildings in order to alleviate the shortage in living space, hill-land development has been a trendy alternative. I figured it was work anyway, so I agreed to check it out.

Accompanied by my CEO, I met with Shifu for the first time at the reception room behind the main Buddha Hall in Nung Chan Monastery. The reception room has been remodeled into the Founding Farmhouse now. In our first meeting, I introduced myself by giving Shifu my c.v. orally. Then Shifu talked about the reason for building DDM, and its vision and ideals. Yan Zheng, chairman of the relocation project committee, Shi Jianchan, vice-chairman of the committee, as well as architect Chen Bosen and secretary Liao Jinrong, who were responsible for the overall planning of the entire complex construction, were present that day. Shifu estimated that it would take 3-5 years for the DDM construction project, and was hoping

that I would consider to help out. A construction project of that size is a medium one so I thought I might give it a try. Therefore, we set up a date for me to start working for DDM officially. My first impression of Shifu was how amiable he was, and that he had a demeanor of an ancient immortal and practitioner.

I started working for DDM at the Nung Chan Monastery in July 1991. For the first 2 years, I was the only staff working in the Construction Office. After DDM got the permission for construction development project, three more colleagues joined this office. In 1995, Shifu appointed Chen Qiayou, who had been one of the consultants on the relocation project committee advisory team, as our chief engineer to take charge in the construction section.

Knowing this relocation project will be a grand task involvings a huge amount of volunteered or donated effort, material resources, time, and money, Shifu set up a relocation project committee to safeguard the quality of construction on a reasonable budget and be responsible for the general management and the relevant

execution matters. In the meantime, an advisory team was established so as to consult with professionals in all fields. There were seven people on the relocation project committee, consisting of construction professionals, scholars, experts, as well as representatives of DDM supporters and followers.

In the workplace, it is uncommon that a chairman would recommend his employee to work for another organization. One of the reason was that in general, religious organizations seldom involved people from the construction circle in their development projects. There may be many construction projects to build temples, but most religious groups would set up their own construction affairs office rather than hiring outside professionals to be in charge. Take my case for example, probably they had been looking for someone suitable for the position for a while without any success. So my former boss who was on the relocation project committee decided to recommend me for the job.

Since my office was in the Nung Chan Monastery, working at a monastery sure was overwhelming to

me. Everyone I encountered here, regardless if I knew him or not, was very polite and would greet each other with “Amituofo!” They answered the phone by saying “Amituofo!” as well. At the dining hall, we chanted the food-offering verse before each meal, and the closing verse after each meal, which were all new experiences for me. I often saw many volunteers helping in the kitchen, and always over-crowded with devotees whenever there were Dharma services. But there is one thing I could not figure out: why were there corrugated iron buildings in different colors all around the monastery?

Constant up-scaling the construction

The first phase of DDM development project, which focused mainly on the CHIBS relocation project, was originally scheduled to be completed within three to five years. The hill lot development proposal was filed in 1989 and was finally approved by the Taipei County Government (Now New Taipei City) in 1992. It took another year for miscellaneous licenses and all other required preliminary paperwork transferring titles of the

deeds to be granted and approved. During the three years of application, what the organization requires had been changing constantly.

The initial planning for DDM was a complex of a Dharma center and a university. However, expansion of the monastics and followers far exceeded our estimation and revisions for bigger and more offices were called for. Seeing a gap between the initial design and the actual scale at the moment, the committee made several revisions before physical construction even took place.

When I just started working for DDM, members of the relocation project committee often spent a lot of time discussing the requirement in architecture. Everybody had a high expectation for the future of DDM and wanted to make the indoor space as big as possible. However, it was not easy for all of us to reach an agreeable conclusion. In addition, whenever the requirement for building mass and space is changed, it would cast a domino effect on the subsequent permit process. In order to follow a proper proceeding timetable, it were imperative to make

some executive decisions sometimes. The Chief Engineer Chen Qiayou once told us that it was a very long process applying for a development permits. Nevertheless, everything in the draft could be amended while it was in the process, right to the last minute before the final official approval. Therefore, from time to time, before the relocation committee could reach any conclusion, relevant construction applications were actually put into process so as to race against the clock.

It is hard to fathom how devoted Shifu was to the DDM construction. Things seldom went as planned and yet Shifu always stayed on top of everything. When he was in America, we reported to him via fax, and he would inspect the construction site and gave us instructions and requirements first thing when he landed in Taiwan.

Even though Shifu would say that he knew nothing about construction and architecture, the blueprint of DDM's construction as a whole was entirely Shifu's idea. Of course, the architects were committed as well. Back in that time, the 3D software was not available, so architects had

to make physically detachable models that could be opened up and revealed the interior space, fundamental layout, spatial relationship among buildings, their circulations, and purposes. Often times, the discussion and planning were tedious and might take a very long time. If there were any changes during any discussion, then the architects had to modify the draft and made necessary adjustments to the model. So the following meeting could be four days or even one week later. We met fairly frequently and Shifu would make the final decisions at every meeting.

In the process of building DDM, we felt that Shifu considered DDM a responsibility to the society and the devotees, which was clearly declared in DDM's vision: to uplift the character of humanity and build a pure land on earth. Therefore, DDM had to be completed under all circumstances.

More challenges on the way

On construction per se, there was nothing special in the DDM development project from its planning and

design to its outsourcing. The main reason why it took DDM 16 years to finish the construction was because the site was on a hill land. The government had always been more cautious about hill land development. Especially after the incident of Lincoln Community Mansions Landslides in 1997, regulations for hill land development had become even stricter. This was something that we had not anticipated.

In terms of law, hill land development indeed requires rules and regulations; after all, it involves a wide range of issues, including soil and water conservation, and slope safety, which concern living conditions and environmental protection. It might lead to catastrophes if slope lot development is not closely monitored. After the Lincoln Community Mansions Landslides incident, almost all the hill land development applications were suspended. By suspension, I meant the government would re-evaluate all approved cases again. The central government imposed stricter laws in general, making fewer lots approved for development. For those applications that had been passed, new stricter regulations were imposed on land-use control,

building coverage ratio, and floor area ratio. In other words, stricter and more cautious procedures were adopted regarding application for development, and it took longer to process the application. Many cases, including DDM's construction project, that had previously been approved by the central government were sent back by the Taipei County government at that time for re-evaluation. All these processes and procedures took time.

The first step in applying for hill land development was to apply for a development permit. Hill land is mainly farmland, so it has to undergo land use change designation before it can be used for construction purpose. In 1989, DDM applied for the construction project in the name of CHIBS, with the Ministry of Education as the regulatory authority. Non-urban hill land development projects had to be reviewed and approved by the Regional Planning Committee of the Ministry of the Interior. Therefore, the overall development project had to be reviewed and approved by the relevant agency of the central government first before it can be further processed by the local district government.

In the year I started working at DDM's Construction Office, the DDM development project had already been approved by the Ministry of the Interior's Regional Planning Committee and we were in the process of applying for the development permit to the Taipei County government at that time. We had to wait until the local district government reviewed and approved it before proceeding to the application for the miscellaneous license. Once we obtained the license, we could then proceed with the work to change the use of land, converting it from agricultural land to construction land. These procedures had to be completed before we could apply for the construction permit and start the construction work formally.

It took DDM 16 years to complete the first phase at 2005. Compared to other construction projects, it took much longer than expected and created some pressure for Shifu, the DDM organization, and its construction staff. Some devotees even challenged us by asking: "Is the Dharma Drum Mountain construction project going to fail?" But Shifu simply replied, "In the process of building

a place that is going to have great influence in the future, it is most certain to encounter more difficulties and obstacles [than most other projects]. And this is exactly the common saying ‘All good things come with challenges.’” Indeed, the application for the construction permit took a very long time. Whenever the work got stuck, Shifu would always encourage us to just do our best. If we were really at our wits’ end, then we could pray to the Buddha or Bodhisattva and keep reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name. And then we could deal with the problems with a positive attitude.

All good things come with challenges; indeed, we had so many obstacles on the way. During that period of time, Shifu often said to us, “If you are prepared, then you will not feel frustrated.” There were many voices of concern at that time. Some people thought that the construction was so slow that it had affected the development of DDM as a whole. What they meant was that the progress of the construction was directly tied to the outcome of fundraising. Even though thoughts like this came from a different perspective, they nevertheless gave the construction staff some unbearable heavy and painful

pressure. On the flip side, this is a driving force to keep our construction work moving forward.

Relishing the results

Generally speaking, the application for a hill land development project is an enormous undertaking. By law, it is allowed for private sectors to acquire land plot by plot, but not for a hill land development projects. According to the previous regulations, the minimal size for hill land development was 25 acres (10 hectares). For the first stage of DDM's construction project, we applied for a permit for a plot of 15 hectares, so it would conform to the regulations.

According to Shifu's secretary, Liao Jinrong, who was in charge of the land acquisition, the process was extremely complicated. Some of the landowners passed away already and their descendants had not gone through the legal procedures to inherit the properties; while in other cases, surviving family members never interacted with each other over the inheritance dispute. In order to acquire all

those lots, sometimes Liao and the land acquisition team members had to help those successors to deal with their family affairs and serve as mediators between parties. That was extremely tough, and it took determination to get the project done.

Take the access road as another example. Some people thought that the some two-kilometer road stretching from the DDM Emblem Rock to the Main Entrance was purchased in one go. But it was not the case. In early times, people relied on the little country road next to the Sanjie Shrine to get into and out of the mountain. When applying for the development permit, we were required by the County goverment to create our own connecting road in the plan. The reason being once the construction was completed without new roads, the high traffic would cause great inconvenience to local residents in Sanjie Village. We were supposed to have the road built before applying for the usage permit for our first building. That is to say, if the road was not completed, we would not be permitted to use the building after it was constructed. Without the permit, the following works, such as water supply,

electricity delivery, and usage of the building would all be problematic. Therefore, building the road required by the government was crucial and hence became a source of stress to all of us.

After all, the land is unlike industrial products, which can be purchased with money easily. As a result, the process was really challenging. Each land acquisition is unique. Secretary Liao and other members would share with each and every landowner the reason why Shifu wanted to build the DDM and what DDM's visions were about. Some landowners were very kind. When they understood Shifu's compassionate vow, they not only identified with it but also decided to donate their part of the land in question as a gesture to show their support.

This access road stretching from the DDM Emblem Rock to the Main Entrance is over two kilometers in length. It took two phases of construction to complete. This is mainly because it involved many different plots of land in various sizes. So it was indeed not an easy task that we could eventually acquire those plots of land one by one,

and complete the access road before applying for the usage permit for our first building.

Each and every inch of land in the DDM complex is the result of collective efforts. All architectural structures on the mountain witnessed Shifu's full participation in all the construction meetings with the architects. Shifu would inspect the construction site again and again, and went through changes after changes until the complex came into being gradually. Shifu urged us: "We should relish what we have accomplished." I think the future generations should cherish the DDM complex and make good use of its architectural structures and environment. Each element such as a brick, a tile, a door, and a window, as well as every corner at DDM all embody Shifu's visions and are the result and contribution of all volunteers and workers.

Harmony among people is more important than achievements

In retrospect, the first phase of DDM construction project may have been completed, but we regretted that it

took several times as estimated of 3-5 years to finish the complex. As for me personally, I had no idea that I would learn so much on so many different levels: from how to fine tune and control my body and mind, be in close proximity of a true spiritual teacher, and to all the hands-on learning, experience, and confidence I developed related to my job.

I used to be very impatient. I always spoke very fast, even much faster than I do now. I remember when I attended the construction meeting for the first time, Shifu said to me, “Mr. Liu, could you please speak a bit slower? Take a moment to think again before you start talking. If you say too many things at one time, people tend not to hear you clearly.” I always keep Shifu’s reminder in mind. Although sometimes I still forgot about it and spoke way too fast and too much, as if bullets were coming out of a machine gun.

Speaking in a fast pace reflects my hasty temperament. Shifu advised me to learn and practice Chan. So I took a Chan meditation training class and started with the basic concepts and methods of sitting meditation. Then I signed up for seven-day Chan retreats. In the beginning, I thought

the basic sitting meditation class would have been the easiest and most relaxing. But as I later found out, it was not the case at all. Turned out the word “basic” was just a name because I sat between veteran practitioners who could sit there for a very long time without moving at all. I felt great peer pressure, and was wondering how could this be a “basic” sitting meditation class?

I might have limited experience in sitting meditation, but what Shifu taught us about how to adjust the body and mind sure was of great help to me. Especially after I had developed a more stable body and mind, I found myself much improved in terms of my temperaments, particularly the tempo of my speech.

Another influence was that I learned to consider harmony of a group of people first priority over simply trying to get things done. I admit that when I first came to DDM, I still had many unpleasant habits. For example, I tended to get into conflicts with people over things. One day, Shifu took me aside again and told me “The resources of Dharma Drum Mountain come from people’s support,

so our followers and devotees are our biggest asset. At Dharma Drum Mountain, other than getting things done, we value how to be a person and get along with everyone much more [than finishing the tasks].” Shifu considered being friendly to everyone is the key to success, and that we should relish the results of our hard work. I can deeply relate to the fact that there is bound to be full of difficulties and hardship when working with a group of people. Furthermore, none of the results came by easily as everything only happened when all the necessary causes and conditions came together.

I consider myself blessed because when I came to work for DDM, Shifu led a three-day Dharma Drum Inheritance Camp for monastics and core volunteers. In my recollection, the theme was “dissolving the self.” We learned about the concept and practiced how to make it into reality, which I took to my heart deeply. In his Dharma talk, Shifu told us to “stay humble upon meeting people” which helped me tremendously. My work requires me to make frequent contact with government agencies. I found out Shifu’s suggestion enables people to feel less pressured and be more

comfortable. It helps draw each other closer that in turn makes it easier to come to a consensus. From my experience, combining the ideas of “being humble upon meeting people” and “every one of us represents Dharma Drum Mountain” proven to be very practical. It can help us solve problems and engage in sincere communication with others.

I had been feeling inadequate in my professional domain in construction engineering for a while but I had no idea how to make breakthroughs. At that time, the Chief Engineer Chen Qiayiu saw my problem and he encouraged me to go to a cram school to study for professional technicians’ licensure. I had never fathom getting a technician’s license, nor did I have much confidence in myself. Since I graduated from school over a decade ago, I wondered what the point would have been to take the examination at my age. Chen told me something that took me by totally surprise. He said “You parents sponsored you through college in the past. Do you think you should show them some fine result? It is never too late to do anything as long as you set your mind to it.” I was so compelled by his argument, so I decided to attend a cram

school. Since I had left the school setting for too long, I spent a whole year getting back on track. One year later, I successfully obtained the certificate in civil engineering. With that experience, I regain my confidence and was not intimidated by the professional technician examination anymore. Afterward, I kept on getting more licenses in structural engineering, geotechnical engineering, as well as soil and water conservation engineering.

After I had obtained the certificates and done the studies, I was thinking how I could maximize their marginal benefits. At that time, Taiwan had started to take soil and water conservation seriously. In addition, knowledge on this issue was needed for the DDM construction project. So I started to ponder going back to school to study soil and water conservation. At that time, there were only two universities that offered graduate programs in soil and water conservation: National Chung Hsing University and National Pingtung University of Science and Technology. I chose the former as it was closer to Taipei, so I enrolled in an in-service master program. After more than two years of intensive classes during

Friday evenings and the weekends, I got the master's degree. So I often refer to Chief Engineer Chen Qiayiu as my benefactor/mentor, to whom I owe a great deal.

Soil and water conservation was an essential issue for the construction of DDM, and I find it very helpful for me and for the organization as well.

Creating and embracing causes and conditions at the same time

Shifu once commented that it was meaningless when people compared DDM with other major Dharma centers in Taiwan. DDM has limited resources, so it is best to simply do what we should be doing. DDM is committed to transform human minds through concepts, and to uplift society by helping purify human minds; these are the most important duties of DDM.

Since the second year I worked for DDM, there had been constant rumors that I was going to leave that Shifu had to have a talk with me. But I said to Shifu that

the thought of leaving had never come across my mind because the construction project was not complete yet, and I would never leave any project unfinished. So I assured and promised Shifu that I would finish the first-phase construction no matter what. At that time, it was estimated to take 3-5 years for the construction. Even though the target timetable was extended, I kept my promise; a promise to Shifu and to myself as well. Finally, in 2005, the first-phase construction was completed.

After Shifu passes away, I left the position in 2011 briefly. During those two months, I dreamt of Shifu twice, and both times I awoke from the dreams feeling uneasy. The first dream was at a lecture, where Shifu entered the venue and walked past in front of me. Right before approaching the stage, he suddenly turned around and went out quickly. Somebody on the spot then shouted, “Shifu has passed away!” I awoke at this point and was beside myself for quite a while.

One month later, I dreamt of Shifu again. Shifu walked right past me again and dropped a book in front of me.

So I went up to pick up the book and handed it to him. Shifu smiled at me nodding his head, and then kept going forward. After the dream, I decided to go back to DDM because I didn't want to dream of Shifu again the following month.

When I went back to work at DDM this time, I embraced a mindset to adapt to conditions as they arise. Since causes and conditions are constantly changing, it is important to do things according to the current situation. So I often encouraged my colleagues with an adage: Always do what we should be doing at all times. Talking about “adapting to conditions as they arise,” I remember once a monastic from DDM asked me how I was doing. I replied that I just adapted to conditions as they arise. He immediately corrected me: “Before ‘adapting to conditions as they arise,’ you should create the causes and conditions first. After you create the causes and conditions, and then you adapt to conditions as they arise.” This was such an alarming insight to me. Adapting to conditions as they arise does not mean simply getting by passively. Now I have understood that before adapting to conditions as they arise, I should seek to create the causes and conditions first.

Honestly speaking, construction engineering is a complex specialty with uncertainties in every step of the process. Therefore, setbacks are the most normal happenstance. How should we face setbacks then? “We do not have the right to feel pessimistic” because this is the value and meaning of our existence. By changing our way of thinking, we will find every process and aspect to be a test. I also often share with my colleagues these words: Causes and conditions are constantly changing. Nevertheless, we shall always make our greatest effort no matter how ephemeral the existence might be, even though we knew it is impossible for us to do everything correctly to the full mark. If we do not do anything, we will not make any progress. By moving forward, at least we are making some progress.

Shifu’s compassionate vow was to build a unique university. This was the driving force for the construction team, and we simply tried our best to accomplish this mission.

(An interview on October 18, 2013, at Yunlai Monastery)

Appendix

DDM Pocket Guides to Buddhist Wisdom

- E-1 Meeting of Minds*
- E-2 In the Spirit of Chan*
- E-3 A General Introduction to the Bodhisattva Precepts*
- E-4 The Effects of Chan Meditation*
- E-5 The Meaning of Life*
- E-6 Why Take Refuge in the Three Jewels?*
- E-7 The Buddhadharma in Daily Life*
- E-8 A Happy Family and a Successful Career*
- E-9 Chan Practice and Faith*
- E-10 Establishing Global Ethics*
- E-11 Wu Ming Exposes Ignorance*
- E-12 The Buddha Mind, Universe, and Awakening*
- E-13 The Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan Buddhism*
- E-14 Master Sheng Yen*
- E-15 The Six Ethics of the Mind*
- E-16 Living in the 21st Century: A Buddhist View*
- E-17 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen I*
- E-18 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen II*
- E-19 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen III*
- E-20 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen IV*
- E-21 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen V*
- E-22 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen VI*
- E-23 Encounters with Master Sheng Yen VII*

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What I am unable to accomplish in this lifetime, I vow to push forward through countless future lives; what I am unable to accomplish personally, I appeal to everyone to undertake together.

– Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009)