

Global Buddhist

Awakening



Master Sheng Yen on Buddhist Practitioners in the 21st Century

2018 The Global Buddhist Village Symposium
Keynote Speeches & Panel Discussion

Bhikkhu Bodhi on Buddhist Practice and Civic Responsibility

Chan Comes West
Simon Child | Max Kalin | Gilbert Gutierrez | Karmen Mihalinec

Global Buddhist *Awakening*

edited by **Humanity**



Dharma Drum

Dharma Drum Publishing Corp.

New York & Taipei

2019

DHARMA DRUM PUBLISHING CORPORATION

5F, NO.186, Gongguan Road
Beitou District, Taipei 11244, Taiwan (R.O.C.)
www.ddc.com.tw

© 2019 Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First Edition
Printed in Taiwan, June 2019

Global Buddhist Awakening
edited by Humanity

ISBN: 978-957-598-822-7

North America distributor:
Chan Meditation Center
90-56 Corona Ave., Elmhurst, NY 11373
Phone: (718) 592-6593
Fax: (718) 592-0717
www.chancenter.org

Contents

Preface

- 06 *Buddhism in the 21st Century* Master Sheng Yen

Coping with Tumultuous Change

- 22 *Changing Times, Immovable Practice* Jakusho Kwong Roshi

- 30 *Buddhism in Times of Radical Changes*

Jakusho Kwong Roshi, Rev. Meian Elbert, Ven. Guo Huei, Ven. Phap Kham

Buddhist Culture on Sharing Wisdom

- 62 *Buddhism is Culture and the Way of Humanity* Ven. Chi Chern

- 78 *Multi-dimensional Development of Buddhist Cultures*

Ven. Chi Chern, Ven. Guo Shyan, Daniel T. Aitken, Sam Mowe, Chien-huang Chen

Chan Comes West

- 104 *What Is Western Zen Retreat?* Simon Child

- 122 *My Buddha Project and Meeting Shifu* Max Kalin

- 132 *A Seeker in the Spirit of Chinese Buddhism* Gilbert Gutierrez

- 140 *Promote Chinese Chan with Zenyoga* Karmen Mihalinec

- 152 *Buddhist Practice and Civic Responsibility* Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi

- 168 *On the Study and Practice of the Dharma from Italy to Taiwan*

Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā



Photo by Tong Yang Lee

Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā

Born in Italy in 1980 and went forth in Sri Lanka in 2012. She studied Indology, Indo-Iranian philology and Tibetology at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and at the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University in Tokyo. She obtained her doctorate in 2010 with a dissertation on the Khotanese “Book of Zambasta”.

On the Study and Practice of the Dharma from Italy to Taiwan

by Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā

I first came to Dharma Drum Mountain in the Spring of 2009, exactly 10 years ago from today, as it happens. And here I am now, on the same Mountain, in my office at the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, in a typical misty and rainy evening.

A few days after my arrival that Spring, a female human bodhisattva, or “pusa” (菩薩) in Chinese, somehow got to know it was my 29th birthday. At dusk she took me to a nearby beach to release a pair of large “Taiwanese” cockroaches, caught in one of the cockroach traps placed in her office. That was the beginning of our friendship, joining in this age-old meritorious Buddhist activity of releasing animals from captivity. We would continue to be friends on this mountain and this island. With little knowledge about Chinese Buddhism, only later did I know that “pusa” is a common way to address committed fellow lay practitioners. At the time, though, I thought it must be an affectionate nickname used by people around her.

I was then a lay Buddhist practitioner and PhD student in my last year of doctoral research. I had spent the previous year in Japan studying Buddhist philology, and had been invited for a short visit by the venerable Bhikkhu Anālayo, with whom I had been collaborating for some time. He would regularly spend regularly at the then Dharma Drum Buddhist



Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā convenes an international seminar on the Saṃyukta-āgama (雜阿含經) in Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2018.

Photo Provided by the Āgama Research Group

College (now the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts), and was here at that time for a collaborative project translating the Chinese Madhyama-āgama—one of the early Buddhist scriptural collections—into English.

I had been studying Indology, Indo-Iranian philology and Tibetology at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” for the past 11 years. During that period I had also been working with the Italian Archaeological Mission to Nepal, at the Embassy of Italy in Myanmar and, in the interim period between my MA and PhD, in the administration of the Rome program of the University of Notre Dame. My PhD project was on the Khotanese “Book of Zambasta” and the formative phases of Mahāyāna ideology and bodhisattva in Khotan in the fifth and sixth centuries.

My own background as a Buddhist practitioner was with the Theravāda tradition. I had spent extensive periods of time practicing in forest monasteries of the Thai tradition both in Thailand and Europe. Back in Italy, I had even moved to live close to one of them.

However, my very first connection with Buddhist meditation had

happened via the Chan tradition, the same tradition that is at the core of life and practice at Dharma Drum Mountain. A teenager plagued by existential and philosophical inquiries, back in Italy, my country of origin, I attended a prestigious grammar school where classical Greek and Latin, Western philosophy, art history, biology, physics were taught in a highly demanding setup. I was attending an equally demanding ballet school in the meantime, seeking some form of release from the unsatisfactory experience of body-mind by pursuing “knowledge” and “beauty” in some form of ethical and aesthetical “discipline” and “perfection”.

At the age of sixteen I attended a summer school of contemporary dance and Tanztheater (“dance-theatre”). I was the youngest student in the group and the only one with no prior exposure to that training, coming from a ballet training and mindset. One of the classes was improvisation. The teachers would use the four bodily postures listed in the “Discourse on the Four Establishments of Mindfulness” (known in Pali as *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*) to persuade us that there were only finite possibilities of placing a human body in space. That is, postures of walking, standing, sitting and lying down as well as the transitions from one to another. All possible movements could only take place within the range of these four postures, not beyond that. Not that they said these four postures had anything to do with a Buddhist exercise. It was only years later that I was able, in retrospect, to relate their instructions to the background they had not openly disclosed.

Then they would instruct us that for any “free” piece of dance improvisation an essential element was the ability to later remember what one had earlier improvised. Absent this ability it would not be Art or Dance with capital “A” and “D” but mere art-therapy or dance-therapy, where we let our emotions overtake our minds without being present to what we are experiencing and expressing. And what was the key to such recollection? Being fully present and receptive to whatever was arising and taking form in the present. Years later I came to know that the idea of enabling recollection is in fact one of the canonical definitions of “mindfulness” according to the early Buddhist discourses.

An instruction that would often be repeated was—I still remember it verbatim—“if you know the stillness, you know the movement.” Knowing

that movement was based on stillness, we had to practice a number of exercises aimed at cultivating physical and mental stillness in each of the four postures. This would only reveal the hopeless restlessness and agitation in the mind and the storms of a troubled soul.

We were once asked to come up with a sequence of movements that would express something—a “feeling”, an “emotion”, an “inner sense”—that we should not have in any way felt or experienced in the past. A truly “creative” expression. I stood practically paralysed in the middle of the hall as I could not possibly find in my heart/mind, or in my body memory either, anything at all that could be called “new” in truth and fact. The intended educational aim of that exercise may well have been that of emptying the mind from discursive thinking and identifications so as to enable the manifestation of “creativity”. Yet what it did for me was to put me in touch with the limits of subjective experience. As professed artists, perhaps our teachers must have still believed in the value and scope of expression. I, however, started to vacillate.

It dawned upon me that there was absolutely nothing that had not been felt or ever thought before in my present conscious life, what to say of the rest? That paralysis in the face of what I would now easily call the saṃsāric predicament marked the end of my hope to find freedom and peace through and within the pursuit of subjective experience as such. It gave me a sense that I wanted to understand how experience was constructed to begin with. I started to lose interest in pursuing more contents of experience. Bathed in sweat, back in our changing rooms at the end of that afternoon session, I overheard from others, who had been studying with our teachers for a long time, that they were “Buddhists” and their own teacher was a follower of “Chan” but they were more influenced by “Zen”. I don’t think I had heard those exotic words prior to that.

The summer school was over and I returned to my home town and my old ballet school—for the last year of my ballet training before the final diploma, and also for the final year in grammar school before the final examinations.

I eventually gathered clearer information that Buddhism and Chan/Zen were related “phenomena,” and that ancient Buddhist texts had been

originally written in Indo-European languages such as Pali and Sanskrit. I was already aware of the existence of these languages through our handbook of Greek grammar, which would occasionally discuss cognate Indo-European words and forms when presenting specific phonological or syntactic developments in Greek and Latin. I found a Sanskrit grammar compiled in Latin with an accompanying reader of Sanskrit texts with some Pali excerpts too. I started to “study” and “practice” these texts at once on the floor of my room, although anxious that my parents would not catch me and question what it was all about.

By the end of the following year I was a student at the then Institute of Oriental Studies of the University of Naples. I slowly came to know that a living Buddhist tradition still existed in the world, and that those early texts were still studied and practiced by monks in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar. I became acquainted with that practice tradition by coming into contact with the Theravāda bhikkhu-saṅgha in Italy. They belonged to the Thai Forest Tradition and I subsequently fully immersed myself in that world. There were also nuns, in addition to monks, in that tradition. But they were not fully ordained nuns, or bhikkhunīs. It was believed that after the ancient Theravāda bhikkhunī lineage had disappeared from India and Sri Lanka, it had simply become extinct and could not be revived. Yet there were these Thai nuns, called maechees, and the newly established order of the sīladharās in England.

A few years passed. I remained always a bit divided, internally, between the generally anti-scholastic approach in the Thai Forest Tradition (to be explained historically in light of the origins of this movement) and my interest in the Buddha’s teachings as preserved in the ancient texts.

The Italian academic tradition of Buddhist studies was not at all strong in the area of early Buddhism, whereas it excelled in the study of the Indo-Tibetan Vajrayāna traditions. For that reason, during my years at Naples University, and undoubtedly due to the influence of the Theravāda Buddhist community I was closely associated with, it was not really clear to me that the Theravāda tradition did not equate “early Buddhism” as such. Even the chronological and doctrinal layering of the Buddha’s discourses vis-à-vis the canonical Abhidhamma was not much discussed, not to speak

of the existence of and importance of the Chinese Āgamas (阿含) as a primary source for early Buddhism.

In Italy at that time there was no subdivision in BA and MA course. One would simply enrol in a university program for 4 or 5 years—often taking much longer than that. All Asian studies curricula had a modern spoken Asian language as a compulsory subject for 4 years. I chose Tibetan as this was the only modern Asian language that—to my uninformed knowledge—would have been of use to the study of Indian Buddhism! I then decided to pursue the study of early Mahāyāna in Central Asia for my PhD mostly due to the intellectual and human integrity—and scholarly generosity—of Mauro Maggi, my then supervisor-to-be, although his field of research (Khotanese Buddhism and Iranian philology) was not close to my main interest in earlier Indian Buddhism. In hindsight, this apparent “detour” into the world of Indian and Central Asian Mahāyāna taught me much. From an academic point of view, it gave me a breadth of perspective on the transmission of Buddhism that I would not have otherwise accessed. Moreover, working on Buddhist texts outside my own area of “practice” made me understand their content in a far less superficial way and enabled me to better appreciate where practitioners in the Mahāyāna tradition came from and the “language” they spoke, so to say.

As time went on, I came into contact with venerable Anālayo about a year before going to Japan. We started to collaborate and exchange ideas. Seeing the possibility of integrating a meditative life with rigorous academic scholarship as a monastic, I could start to picture myself pursuing my earlier monastic aspirations. The two aspects did not need to be in conflict but could be harmonised, and this could benefit both oneself and others.

Venerable Anālayo invited me to come over to Taiwan. Only a couple of days after my arrival, a conversation with Marcus Bingenheimer and soon after a meeting with Master Huimin (惠敏法師), the president of the Dharma Drum Buddhist College, evolved into an offer to stay here as a researcher and faculty member upon completing my PhD in the coming year.

Master Huimin was amenable to the idea of me “returning” to the early Buddhist texts as my main field of scholarly work. The plan was to

edit and translate the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*, a commentary on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* consisting of āgama citations originally written in Sanskrit, now only extant in Tibetan and constituting our main source of Āgama texts in that language. This would put my earlier training in Tibetan language to the service of early Buddhist studies. Part of my “negotiation” with Master Huimin in regard to my stay in Taiwan was that they would later allow me to go forth in Sri Lanka after moving to and spending some time on the Mountain.

I received novice ordination in 2012 and full ordination as a Theravāda bhikkhunī in 2015, both in Sri Lanka. In fact over the last few years I have been increasingly involved, in addition to my work on the early Buddhist texts, with the study of Buddhist legal texts (Vinaya), particularly in relation to the revival of the Theravāda bhikkhunī order.

Although I am not a qualified Āgama scholar given that I am not a Sinologist by training, here I have eventually found myself in the role of Director of the Āgama Research Group (阿含經研究小組). I see this as a role of service to the academic study of early Buddhism and the practice of the Dharma based on the early texts. I feel happy and honoured to contribute to making the early texts accessible and our research findings available to a wider academic community of students and scholars of early Buddhist texts beyond our Mountain on a small island in the East China Sea.

Thanks to the vision of Master Sheng Yen (聖嚴法師), the founder of Dharma Drum Mountain, the leadership of Master Huimin, and the generosity and support of the entire community of four assemblies of male monastics, female monastics, laymen and laywomen, it has been possible for me to grow into an adult human being, Buddhist scholar, meditator, and female monastic.

This convergence may be normal and even seamless in Taiwanese Buddhism and at a place such as Dharma Drum Mountain. Yet, all of these conditions that have made it possible are quite rare in the contemporary Buddhist world, especially for a female monastic ordained in the Theravāda tradition.

And I still go to release our trapped Taiwanese cockroaches, either alone or with my pusa friend.

