

AZBTL NEWSLETTER

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The Natural Beauty of Vairocana Monastery



and calm forest. The famous Paradise stream runs through the property. Beside the stream, there is a little pond and a large lawn. Vairocana Monastery is open to the public. Everybody is welcomed to visit the temple and to join the practice in this extraordinary and gorgeous Paradise.



Although many are aware that Vairocana Monastery is located on a beautiful site (about 15 acres off Rt. 940, two miles east of Mt. Pocono), yet few have actually taken the time to walk in the beautiful forest out back. On a special occasion, Ven. Ta-Yu led a walking-meditation in the pure

◆◆◆◆◆ The Bathing Buddha Ceremony ◆◆◆◆◆



AZBTL's first bathing the Buddha ceremony was held on April 29th, 2001. It was a joyous occasion for all who attended. For many, it was their first time experiencing this Chinese style ceremony. "We approach to bathe the Tathagatas, for purity, wisdom, dignity, merit and virtue all. May the five-fold polluted sentient beings be rid of impurity, and all realize the pure entity of the Tathagatas." We would like

to dedicate the merit of the bathing the Buddha ceremony to all beings. May the root of practice be planted in the minds of all.



The Wonderful Teaching By Ven. Lama Migmar

Since December of 2000, Ven. Lama Migmar has been very compassionate in coming a long way from Boston, MA to Vairocana Monastery (in Pocono, PA) to give the monthly teaching on the introduction of Buddhism. Up to now, he has given wonderful talks in English on “What is Buddha?”, “What is Dharma?”, “What are Sangha?”, “Parting from Four Attachments”, “What is Karma?” and “Four Noble Truths”. Ven. Lama Migmar has brought a lot of interests among the local people for Buddhist studies. The number of attendees has grown steadily to 20 to 40 people during the recent sessions.



Starting on July 15, 2001, he will give a series of teaching on “Heart Sutra” which is the heart of the Prajnaparamita (wisdom) collections in Buddhism. We are very fortunate and honored to have Ven. Lama Migmar teaching here. But, due to Lama’s busy schedule, after July, the monthly teaching on “Heart Sutra” will resume in October 2001. It is our hope that Lama will come regularly in the future.

Spring Clean Up

An Email From Miin-Ron Lin

Hi,

I want to thank everyone involved for the wonderful experience that I had in the Spring Cleanup at the Monastery in the weekend of April 28 and 29. We were blessed with the wonderful weather to work all day outside. Thanks to the well-organized plans and the lead by the experts - Tony for landscaping, Jeff for the bonfire and Dave for the work in the Buddha

Hall, we had accomplished a lot during the day. Everyone worked hard and the results are clear for all to see. In addition, at least to me, the work was good for the spirit (plenty of friendship and camaraderie), for the body (I expected to lose a few pounds despite the abundant and delicious lunch on the patio) and, most importantly good for the soul as Gil put it so well.



I would never forget the two bonfires. We burned mountains of scrape woods and dead tree branches in the first bonfire. We enjoyed it so much that the group could not resist in starting another one down near the pond and we quickly cleared out and burned most of the dead tree branches in the woods near the pond and along the stream. Meanwhile, Tony led the team to apply the seemingly brutal but necessary surgery to the landscaping in the front of the monastery to bring about an almost *tony* look. Dave worked inside the Buddha hall to install the beautiful stained glass lamp and patch up the walls. All in all, the members should see a different look around the monastery, both inside and outside. During the good weathers, it should be a very delightful and tranquilizing experience to walk in the wood areas up near the monastery and down near the pond and along the stream, with plenty of choice spots for sitting and walking meditation.



I cannot wait for the next project. With the monastery, motel, woods, ponds and streams in the 15 acres of properties, the opportunity is endless for us to apply our imagination and team efforts to renovate, to create and to make this piece of land truly ours in all the physical and spiritual senses. Among the projects to consider, I might suggest to improve the stairways leading down to the bridge to the woods for safety reasons, to clean up the motel rooms for the members to stay, and to open some meditation walk paths as the meditation group has already suggested.

Thanks again and best regards,
Miin-Ron

Fund Raising Yard Sales

On May 12th, 2001, just before Mother's Day, we decided to have a yard sale to raise funds and open the temple to the public. Early in the morning, visitors from different areas came and entered the temple. During the yard sale, we distributed free English Buddhist books. Our Dharma volunteers also introduced Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to local people. Since the yard sale, several local people have started joining the temple's activities.



Additional Notes From Miin-Ron Lin

I had the fortune and pleasure of participating in the Fund Raising Yard Sale at the Monastery on May 12. The event was not only a success in raising funds for the Monastery; it also provided opportunity to introduce Buddhism and the Monastery to many people in the local community. The event would not have been possible without the vision and the dedicated efforts of the Meditation Group and the donations of sale items from several members of the congregation.

Despite the constant threat of rains, the visitors never stopped coming to the yard sale. In fact, the sale got to an early and fast start the night before the official day of the sale. By the time the sale was over, we had sold most of the items and netted nearly \$800. The brisk sale sustained the spirit and joy of the members at the sale through out the day: Jeff, Marsha and Gil expertly handled the actual sales, managed the introduction and tour of the Monastery. Several others, Ven. Ta-Yu, Peter, Chung, Dave, Tony and myself providing whatever support needed. We were boosted by the delicious lunch prepared by Ben and his wife. Steven and Shirley came from the State College. Ven. Ta-Yu's English teacher also dropped by and had a wonder experience with the sale and the tour of Monastery. The day proved to be eventful in many ways.



Several families that came to the yard sale actually had very limited resources. Many of us were heartened by the smiles and the joy on the faces of the parents and children of these needy families when they were able to find useful items that they normally cannot afford: clothing, books, toys and many other household items that have been gathering dusts in our homes. I see this as an example of the transformation and purification that Gil described.

The joy was not limited to the people that came to the yard sale, it also created a sacred energy and vibration, borrowing the words from Gil, among those of us that helped organize and manage the yard sale. There is no better example than the *triple happiness* that Ben enjoyed. All morning, Ben and his wife were busy in the kitchen preparing the lunch with many delicious vegetarian dishes, which all of us enjoyed as usual. But no one was

happier than Ben. As an experienced and happy chef, he enjoyed the cooking. He enjoyed eating the meals that he himself prepared. But most of all, he was very happy that all of us enjoyed his cooking.

In the morning of the yard sale, I accompanied Ven. Ta-Yu to the bank to prepay \$40,000 of AZBTL's mortgage. Given the flexible policy of the bank, we were able to reduce the monthly payment from \$2200 to \$1660 without having to refinance. Our plan is to prepay the mortgage whenever we can, while we maintain sufficient funds in the bank accounts to support at least six months of operation at the Monastery.

The day of the yard sale is eventful because it reflects in many ways the progress that we have made since the passing of Ven. Heng-Yuan almost 10 months ago. Evident among them are the commitments of the members of the congregation and the growing spiritual connections among the members and with the community.

The Buddhism

Jorge Luis Borges

This is a translation of the excerpt of one of the seven lectures given in Buenos Aires, Argentina in July 1999, by Jorge Luis Borges, one of the greatest writers, thinkers and philosophers in the Spanish-speaking world. Although he has never been in China, his writings are full of references and deep meanings influenced by eastern cultures and permeated in his works are his reflections on the meaning and the eternity of life, much of which has their roots in Buddhism. The lecture was given in Spanish. The translation is based on the transcript, but I have taken liberty of excerpting only the portions that are more directly relevant to the topic. In the future, I plan to translate a series of his actual writings from his literature work that I believe reflect his understanding of Buddhism.

Miin-Ron Lin

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The theme of today is Buddhism. I will get into the long history that began 2500 years ago in Benares when a prince of Nepal, who had come to become the Buddha, turned the wheel of the Dharma, proclaimed the four noble truths and the eight right paths. I will speak on the essences of this most widely spread religion of the world. The elements of the Buddhism have been preserved since five centuries before Christ. First we consider the longevity of the Buddhism.

This longevity can be explained by historical reasons, but such reasons are fortuitous or, better said, are debatable, fallible. I believe that there are two fundamental causes. The first is the tolerance of Buddhism. This amazed tolerance does not correspond, as in the case of other religions, to different times: Buddhism was always tolerant.

It has never resulted to iron or fire, has never considered that the iron or fire were persuasive. When Asoka, the emperor of India became a Buddhist, he never tried to impose his religion on anyone. A good Buddhist can be a Lutheran, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Shintoist, a Taoist, or a Catholic, can be a proselyte from Islam, from the Judaism, with all the freedom. Instead, a Christian, a Jewish or a Muslim is not permitted to be a Buddhist.

The tolerance of the Buddhism is not a weakness, but pertains to its own nature. Buddhism was, before all, a discipline that a person imposes on himself. If we understand what Buddha taught in that first sermon in Margadava (the Garden of the Gazelles) of Benares 2500 years ago, we would understand Buddhism. Except that it is not a matter of understanding, it is a matter of feeling it in a deep way, of feeling it in the body and soul; except also that Buddhism does not admit the reality of body or soul. It tries to expound it.

In addition, there is another reason. Buddhism demands much of our faith. It is natural since all religion is an act of faith. What is, I have asked myself many times, being an Argentine? Being an Argentine is feeling that we are Argentines. What is being a Buddhist? Being a Buddhist is not to understand, because this can be accomplished in a few minutes, is to feel the four noble truths and the eight right paths.

The Legend of the Buddha

There is further more the legend of the Buddha. We can disbelieve this legend. I have a Japanese friend, a Zen Buddhist, with whom I have maintained long and friendly conversations. I said to him that I believed in the story of the Buddha. I believed and believe that 2500 years ago there was a prince of Nepal called Siddhartha, who came to this world to become the Buddha, that is, the Awaken, the Enlightened – different from us that are sleeping or dreaming the long dream of our life. I remember a phrase of Joyce: “The history is a nightmare from which I want to wake up.” Well enough, Siddhartha at the age of thirty years came to wake up and become the Buddha.

With that friend, who is a Buddhist (I am not sure that I am a Christian but I am sure that I am not a Buddhist), I discussed and said to him: “Why not believe in the Siddhartha prince, who was born in Kapilovastu 500 years before the Christian era? He responded to me: “Because it has no importance; the important is to believe in the doctrine”. He added that believing the story of the Buddha or being interested in it would be like confusing the study of mathematics with the biography of Newton. One of the themes of meditation that the monks have in the monasteries of China and Japan is to doubt the existence of the Buddha. It is one of the doubts that must be imposed in order to reach the truth.

The other religions demand much of our credulity. If we are Christians, we must believe that one of the tree persons of the Divinity condescended to be man and was crucified in Judeo. If we are Muslims, we have to believe that there are no other gods than God and that Muhammad is his apostle. We can be good Buddhists and deny that Buddha existed. Or, said in a better way, we can think, we must think that our belief in the history is not important: the important is to belief the doctrine. However, the legend of the Buddha is so beautiful that we cannot leave without referring to it.

French people have dedicated special attention to the study of the legend of the Buddha. Their argument is: the biography of the Buddha is one that happened to only one man in a brief period of time. It could have been this way or other. But the legend of the Buddha has enlightened and continues to enlighten millions of people. The legend is one that has inspired so many beautiful paintings, sculptures and poems. Buddhism,

beyond being a religion, is a mythology, a cosmology, a metaphysical system, or, said better, a series of metaphysical systems that are not understood and that argue among themselves.

The legend of the Buddha is illuminating and his belief is not imposed. In Japan, the non-history of the Buddha is insisted. But yes in the Doctrine. The legend begins in the sky. In the sky there is someone who during centuries and centuries, we may say literally during an infinite number of centuries, has been perfecting himself until he understands that in the next reincarnation he will be the Buddha.

He chooses the continent in which he has to be born. According to the Buddhist cosmogony the world is divided into four triangular continents and in the center there is a mountain of gold: the Meru mountain. He will be born in the one that corresponds to India. He chooses the century for his birth; chooses the caste, chooses the mother. Now, the terrestrial part of the legend. There is a queen, Maya. Maya signifies *illusion*. The queen has a dream that may sound extravagant to us but not to the Indians.

Married with the Suddhodana king, she dreamt that a white elephant with six tusks, which wandered in the mountains of gold, entered in her left chest without causing her any pain. She wakes up; the king summons his astrologers and they explain that the queen will give birth a son that can become either the emperor of the world or the Buddha, the Awaken, the Enlightened, the one destined to save all the men. Predictably, the king demands the first destiny: he wants his son to become the emperor of the world.

We now turn to the details of the white elephant with six tusks. The elephant of India is a domestic and everyday animal. The color white is always a symbol of innocence. Why the six tusks? In India, it is believed that there are six dimensions in the space: up, down, back, front, right and left, A white elephant with six tusks is not extravagant to the Hindus.

The king summons the wise men and the queen gives birth without pain. A fig tree leans over the branches to help her. The son is born on foot and takes four steps at birth: to the North, to the South, to the East and to the West, and says with the voice of a lion: “I am the incomparable; this will be my last birth”. The Hindus believe in the infinite number of anterior births. The prince grows up, is the best archer, horse rider, swimmer, athlete, calligrapher. At 16 years

old, he is married.

The father knows – the astrologers have told him – that his son runs the danger of becoming the Buddha, the man that saves all the rest if he learns the four facts that are: the old age, the sickness, the death and the asceticism. He keeps him in the palace and provides him a harem. I would not give the number of women because it corresponds to an evident Hindu exaggeration. Well, why not say it: they were eighty four thousand.

The prince lives a happy life; does not know that there is suffering in the world, since they hide the old age, the sickness and the death from him. In the predestined day he goes out in his carriage from one of the four gates of the rectangular palace. Should we say by the North gate. He goes a good while and sees a being different from all that he has seen. It is crooked, wrinkled and does not have any hair. He asks who this man is, if it is a man. The coachman answers him that he is an old man and all of us will be like this man if we continue to live.

The prince returns to the palace, perturbed. At the end of six days, he goes out again through the south gate. He sees an even more strange man with the whiteness of a leper and the emaciated face. He asks who this man is, if he is a man. He is a sick man, the coachman answers; all of us will be like this man if we continue to live.

The prince, already very concerned, returns to the palace. Six days later he goes out again and sees a man that appears asleep, but whose color is not alive. Other people carry the man. He asks who he is. The coachman tells him that he is a dead man and that all of us will be the dead man if we live the life enough.

The prince is grieved. Three horrible truths have been revealed to him: the truth of the old age, the truth of the illness and the truth of the death. He goes out a fourth time. He sees an almost naked man, whose face is full of serenity. He asks who he is. They tell him that he is ascetic, a man who has renounced everything and who has reached the beatitude.

The prince resolves to abandon everything, he, who has carried so rich a life. Buddhism believes that the asceticism can come to a person but only after he has experienced the life. It is not believed that any one could begin by denying everything. One has to exhaust the life of all the sediments and later see the

light of it; but not without the knowledge of it.

The prince resolves to be the Buddha. At this moment they bring him a news; his wife, Yasodhara, has given birth to a son. He exclaims: “A link has been forged.” It is the son that attaches him to the life. Because of it, they name him Rahula. Siddhartha is in his harem, looks at the women, who are young and beautiful, and sees only horrible and leprous old women. He goes to his wife’s room. She is sleeping. He has the baby in her arms. He is about to kiss her, but he understands that if he kisses her he will not be able to separate from her and he leaves.

He looks for teachers. Here we have a part of the biography that cannot be legendary. Why present him as a student to the teachers that he will later abandon? The teachers teach him the asceticism, which he exercises during much time. At the end, he is thrown in the middle of a field, his body is immobile and the gods, who see him from the thirty-three skies, think that he has died. One of them, the most knowledgeable, says: “No, he has not died; he will be the Buddha”. The prince wakes up, runs to a stream that is close by, takes a little food and sits down under the sacred fig tree: the BODHI Tree.

A magic interval follows, which has its correspondence with the Gospel: it is the fight against the demon. The demon feels that he dominates the world but that he feels the danger and he comes out of his palace. The strings of his musical instruments have broken and the water in his cistern has dried. He prepares his armies, rides on an elephant of several miles in height, multiplies his arms, multiplies his arms and attacks the prince. The prince sits in the late afternoon under the BODHI tree.

The demon and his armies of tigers, lions, camels, elephants and monstrous warriors hurl the arrows at him. When the arrows reach him, they become flowers. They throw him mountains of fires, which form a canopy over his head. The prince meditates, immobile with his arms crossed. Perhaps he may not know that they are attacking him. He thinks about life; he is arriving to the nirvana, to the salvation. Before the fall of the sun, the demon has been defeated. A long night of meditation follows; at the end of that night, Siddhartha already is not Siddhartha. He is the Buddha: he has arrived to the nirvana.

(To be continued)

