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American Zen Buddhist Temple
 Vairocana Monastery
 RR3 Box 3361
 Cresco, PA 18326
 Tel & Fax: (570) 895-4600
 Email: azbt@evenlink.com
www.evenlink.com/~azbtnews



AZBT Newsletter

A Day of Living Buddhism

Impressions From the Events on August 11

Miin-Ron Lin

More than 60 people from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts were at the Vairocana Monastery on Sunday, August 11 to attend several events that helped mark the first full month in the start of the third year for the AZBT. Two full years had now passed since AZBT was founded at its current site at Mt. Pocono. Under the spiritual and temporal leadership of Venerable Ta-Yu and the dedicated efforts of the members, the AZBT has not only survived, but also grown steadily with the new Buddha Hall, renovated interview room, renovated library and outdoor compounds, while offering the growing number of members a place of tranquility for gathering, respite and contemplation through the monthly programs that include meditation, Dharma talks and ceremonies.



The largest group is the members of the Youth Buddhism Communications Incorporated from New York City, led by the founder and director, Ms. Joan Wei, who was invited by Venerable Ta-Yu to give the monthly Dharma Talk. Ms. Wei left her successful journalist career in 1985 to dedicate her efforts to

learn, practice and spread Buddhism. In addition to founding and supporting the Youth Buddhism Communications Incorporated, she has written several books, given Dharma talks and conducted programs in television and radio, all based on her belief that Buddhism is omnipresent in our daily life. To practice Buddhism does not require us to escape to the mountains, forests or temples. Buddhahood is in all of us, in our every thought and act. In her speech Ms. Wei emphasized the importance of seeking the right paths to realize Buddhahood and enlightenment with a pure mind, which shall not be defiled by little things, such as people's reactions, judgements and criticisms. Many of us were inspired by her life story, dedication, belief and the Dharma speech.



The next large group was from the State College, Pennsylvania, consisting of the members of the Buddhist Association of Central Pennsylvania (BACP) and students at the Penn State College, led by Shirley Hsi, the president of BACP. They were here to help remove the debris from the on going renovation of the retreat house (old motel) and other wastes left over from the previous owner of the property. They labored for several hours in dusty rooms and under the warm August sun to fill a giant trash bin with tons of debris. It was long and strenuous effort, but the group handled it with joyful spirits and incredible speed and efficiency. One member, an alumnus of Penn State and now a professor in Taiwan in a vacation trip in

the U.S., enjoyed the experience so much that she vowed to come back soon. My daughter Cynthia, in her summer breaks from the university, Jeffrey Huang from Albany, New York, and I also enjoyed working with the group. Removing the debris from the clogged rooms to make way for renovation makes you wonder about the "debris" inside us. It clogs our mind and our heart and obscures our Buddha nature. It is often the cause of our unnecessary sufferings. Yet we cling to it. To remove this kind of debris, we do not need trash bin or hard labors. Often all it takes is inner strength, belief and courage to recognize it, and it can be removed with just a click in the mind.



As usual, the day was highlighted by the sharing of a wide variety of vegetarian dishes during lunch, some brought by the visitors, some prepared by the local members, and some cooked on the spot by our friend and master chef Ben and his wife Bimei with triple delights. (In case you do not know yet, the triple delights reflect the joy of cooking, eating and seeing other people enjoy the food.) Most of us enjoyed the food on the patio under the shadow of the tall trees, feeling the light breeze, listening to the murmuring of the running creek, watching the forests, and immersed in spirited conversations, with all the senses in joyful harmony.



After lunch, many people took a walk in the woods and around the recently revitalized lake. The lake had been left

idle with stagnant water and cornered by wild bushes for several years. Recently, we were able to direct the water from the creek through the canal to the lake to keep it in constant circulation. We were also able to clear up the wild bushes around the lake to create a complete path around lake. Suddenly, the lake and the whole forest seemed to come alive with the cascades of water along the canal, the light ripples of the lake created by the circulation and the wind, the leaping fish, flying dragonflies and jumping green frogs. Walking around the lake, you could not help but feel that the lake seems to become a living part of you, like something that has been dormant inside of us for sometime now suddenly emerges. Like the Buddhahood inside us, it is always there, but covered by the debris and unnoticed by us. All it takes us is clean up a little and become aware of it and we will be blessed by its completeness and tranquility.



In the afternoon, the visitors from New York continued the Dharma programs with the recitations of Amitabha Sutra and a Dharma talk by the Venerable Ta-Yu, while the group from the State Colleges continued to remove the debris. Around four o'clock, we said goodbye to the visitors from New York, then gathered in the library for a round of snacks, dialogs and reflections, bringing to a satisfying end of a pleasant day, a day that offered so many opportunities for us to enjoy and reflect, a day of living Buddhism.



Miin-Ron's Journey to The Heart

Jeannie Chen

On June 9 Miin-Ron shared his journey to the heart with everybody. The key point is that there is no absolutely good or bad in the outside world. It is the perspective of our mind influences our feeling toward the outside world.

There is an example that makes a difference for an assistant in his company. She was upset frequently by the comments or attitudes of her boss. Miin-Ron advised her that if the words of her boss made sense or are reasonable, then it is good for her to accept them without being upset. If the words do not make sense or are not reasonable, then consider them to be like a dog barking. The barking of a dog should not upset you. Why do you want to allow yourself to be upset by a person who may not even care about your feeling? That choice of not being upset is yours and yours alone.

People may feel differently for the same job and salary. Some enjoy their job and some hate their job. By realizing the fact, we are able to go beyond the judgment and to accept everything as it is. If we just focus on whatever we are doing at the present moment without judgment, our life will be more peaceful and joyful.

The Place Where Bodhisattvas Practice

Renovating Vairocana Monastery

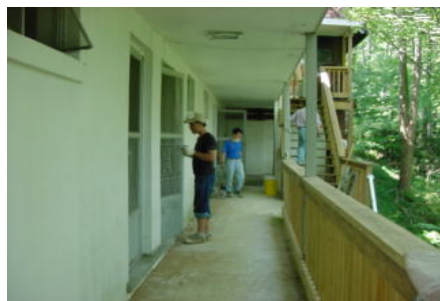
Ven. Ta-Yu

I opened the window in the morning and found that the tips of the woods already started to change the color. It told me that the summer is going to end soon.

Started from the holiday of July 4th, with the help of Kim Wong and Grace Chan, the renovating plan of our temple had begun. Because July 4th is a holiday, people came from different places to contribute their time to the

temple. They came from Allentown, Scranton, New York, Penn State College and Massachusetts. With everybody working together, we painted the whole temple and it looked like new. We replaced the old doors and old carpets with the new ones. The new carpet made the temple looks bright and neat.

There were lots of people to be thankful for. Thanks to Kim Wong, he led everybody to complete the whole project. Thanks to Grace Chan and Jeannie Chen, they drove from Massachusetts around 5:00 a.m. in the morning to Pennsylvania to work at the temple together. Thanks to Pearl Huang, she brought her husband (William) and their friends to help out from New York. Thanks to Shu-Er Lee and her Turkish husband, they led water flow again into the lake in our back yard. Thanks to Wilma Lin and her daughters. After their hard work for a whole day, they slept in the Buddha Hall because there were not enough rooms. Thanks to Beemay Chan and Shu-Chuang Chen, they prepared delicious meals so everybody had more strength to work. Thanks to Larry and Betsy, they came to the temple to help in the early morning everyday. Also, thanks to two little friends, How-Shien and Matt, who came from Massachusetts to help.



After July 4th, Kim Wong enlarged the renovating project to the retreat house. He sacrificed his vacations and came far away from Massachusetts to help out the temple. Every time when he came here, because he only had three days off and he wanted to get more things done, he always got up early at 6:00 or 7:00 a.m. and worked late till midnight, 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. Because of his efforts, we have completed the renovation of several retreat rooms. When you have time to come to the temple and use these clean and pure

retreat rooms, please don't forget these rooms were renovated through many people's efforts. Practitioners should know that we gain too much from others and our contributions are too little.

Because of limited manpower and money, a lot of necessary renovations in the temple cannot be completed as we planed. In the future, we hope you are also willing to contribute your money or manpower to help out the temple and work together to establish a place for everybody to practice.



The Notes of Zen Retreat

- Jeannie Chen

Although there was a 45 min. delay for the initial session to introduce the regulation and schedule of the retreat, the one-day Zen Retreat went pretty smoothly.

Jeffrey's car was overheated not far away from the temple. He came from Albany, NY and picked up Hao Liu near Rt. 287. It was a long way. The unexpected situation throws our schedule out of order at the beginning of the retreat. The first session started around 10:45 AM, after I drove Hao Liu to the temple and Jeffrey was still waiting there for AAA to tow his car.

From time to time, unexpected situations arise in our life. Some of them are good things but some of them are bad things and there are also neutral things. When good things happen, we are satisfied and happy. We feel frustrated when bad things happen. When the neutral things happen we do not care at all. So called good, bad or neutral things are only by our own judgment or from our self-perspective. Without the self, where are good, bad or

Coming Events

Every Tuesday
7:00 p.m.
Group Meditation
 Ven. Ta-Yu

10/12/02, Saturday
1 p.m. — 6:30 p.m.
Hiking
 Hawk Mountain

10/13/02, Sunday
10 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.
Patience
 Ven. Lama Migmar

10/26/02, Saturday, 10 a.m. —
10/27/02, Sunday, 10 a.m.
One Day Pure Land Retreat
(Eight Precepts)
 Ven. Ta-Yu

11/10/02, Sunday
10 a.m. — 12:30 p.m.
Bodhisattva's Activities
 Jeannie Chen

11/27/02, Saturday —
12/01/02, Sunday
10 a.m. — 5 p.m.
Liang-Hwang
Confession Ceremony
 Ven. Ta-Yu

12/21/02, Saturday
10 a.m. — 6 p.m.
Eighty-eight Buddha
Confession Ceremony
 Ven. Ta-Yu

January, 2003
Winter Break
No Activities

neutral things? There is no distinguishing. So, whatever arises, we should just accept and deal with it. Take it easy. Do not mix up things with any feelings and emotions. Just keep everything as it is.

- Larry Pross

Very much aware of how fortunate I am to have the retreat, the monastery, the Dharma and the wonderful teacher. It makes it easier to deal with pain in the knees and back while sitting. The chanting was also wonderful. Seeing others practice so well gives me courage and helps me want to do better.

- Jeffrey Huang

I was in charge of cleaning up the leaves on the deck. In the afternoon of the first day, I cleaned up the branches, leaves and dusts, which had been piled up under the picnic tables and benches for many days. After the cleaning, the deck seemed clean and neat. Yet, during the second day of the retreat, I had an opportunity to revisit the deck, surprisingly, I found new branches and leaves covering the picnic tables, benches and deck again. I picked those branches and leaves and got rid of them one more time.

The defilement inside my mind is like those branches, leaves and dusts. Some of the defilement has already accumulated for a long time and some has just arisen based on the current causes and conditions. The self-nature is emptiness. The defilement is also Bodhi (Enlightenment). Because we (sentient beings) cannot see clearly and cannot let go. We stray away from the Path of Enlightenment and are trapped in the jungle of defilement. May all sentient beings, attain the Buddhahood quickly.

- Beemay Chen

I have never attended any Zen retreat in Hong Kong. In America, since I had chance to practice the Buddha Dharma in Vairocana Monastery, I attended my first Zen retreat last year and this is my second Zen retreat. I felt that the second Zen retreat is much stricter than the first one. Also, there are Americans attending the retreat and it is quiet different from the Chinese Ceremony. I hope I will get more benefits from the retreat in the future.

- Benny Lor

Sight! It is difficult to be born as a human. It is difficult to write. It is also difficult to practice on the right path. And, it is even more difficult to distinguish the true and illusory me. Today, I utilize my illusory body to practice, then tomorrow I will be able to realize the illusory me and achieve the true nature.

- Hao Liu

I was frequently drowsy during the meditation. It might be because lately I just changed to a new environment with huge work pressure and frequent lack of sleep. Until dawn, after Venerable Ta-Yu gave us a teaching, then my mind was able to clam down. I picked up my awareness, and concentrated on counting the breath. During the interview, I was very happy to receive the instructions from Venerable Ta-Yu.

- Joyce McLaughlin

I must also learn more about Zen meditation during the retreat, especially on the chanting meditation part. The rule is complete silence. This is a good thing because I discovered that I don't need outside conversation. There is already enough noise in my mind. I need more concentration. I took a walk down to the creek and spent time with nature. I am so glad to have chance to join the retreat.



One-day Pure Land and Eight Precepts Retreat

Benny Lor

In the evening service, there is a stanza "This day has passed. Our lives, too, are closing.". However, for true practitioners, optimistically speaking it

actually is "Our Karmas, too, are closing". The second One-day Pure Land and Eight Precepts retreat was held in Vairocana Monastery on July 27, 2002 and it exactly proved the above statement. Because all the participants came to the Monastery with one pointed mind to practice Eight Precepts, to forget worldly judgments (right or wrong), to be isolated from greedy, anger and ignorance, and to refrain from creating more Karma. Isn't it "Our Karmas, too, are closing"?

This time, in addition to the participants from the retreat last year, there were two more Dharma friends joining the retreat. The first Dharma friend was Jeffrey Huang. Extraordinarily, he came from upstate New York, and even more extraordinarily that in the middle of August he was going to have a very important qualification examination in his company. He was able to put the examination down and joined the one-day pure land retreat. It was all because that as a true practitioner he knew the importance of the Dharma. The other Dharma friend was Larry. He is one of Ven. Ta-Yu's American students who have just taken Three Refuges. It was so extraordinary, given that he does not know Chinese. Even though it is difficult, but still, in order to practice and clear the Karma, he was able to overcome the language barrier and join the group in reciting Amitabha, prostrating and practicing for the entire retreat.

The one-day pure land retreat officially started after the transmission of Eight Precepts at 10 a.m. In addition to the chanting of Amitabha Sutra, reciting Amitabha, circling Buddha and meditation, Ven. Ta-Yu gave a teaching of Eight Precepts at 8 p.m. The teaching covered the goal and method of practicing and keeping the precepts, including why Buddhas do not eat food after the noontime and keeping five precepts is the essential and fundamental of the Buddhist practice. Jeffrey was sitting beside Larry, concurrently translating Ven. Ta-Yu's teaching into English.

The second day, all participants gathered in the Buddha Hall at 5 a.m. to meditate for one hour before starting the morning service at 6 a.m. After

breakfast, we continued the practice of reciting Amitabha followed by the grand dedication and the completion of the retreat around 12 p.m. Actually, not to mention the seven-day retreat, even one-day retreat, for contemporary people, is difficult to have and practice. In order to join the retreat, there must be sufficient faith as well as the necessary causes and conditions for practicing. Holding the one-day pure land and Eight Precepts retreat is precisely the realization of Buddhas', Bodhisattvas' and great masters' teaching of putting down, being free, emphasizing Dharma and truthful practice.

Hiking Announcement

If you like the colorful foliage in the autumn,
if you like to watch the hawks soar in

the blue skies,

if you like to connect with the nature,

then come join us in the hiking at the Hawk Mountain on Saturday, October 12. Many friends from AZBT, including Ven. Ta-Yu and Ven. Lama Migmar from Boston who has been giving regular Dharma speeches at the Vairocana Monastery, will join us.

Hawk Mountain is located to the west of Allentown, about one hour by car. You can find the directions and other details at :

<http://www.hawkmountain.org/directry.html>.

Be sure to try the wonderful virtual tour on the web. There are many trails for us to choose from, many which have lookout for breathtaking scenery and hawk watching. We plan to meet directly at the Visit Center. Please

arrive before 1 PM to allow time for gathering and a leisure lunch. We will start hiking no later than 2 PM to allow time to complete the trails before 6 PM, before dusk. You are welcome to arrive earlier to enjoy the visitor center, book stores and other attractions described in the web.

If you decide to join us, please inform Ven. Ta-Yu before October 5 with the number of people and expected time of arrival at the center. Please bring food, drink and snack to share during the lunch. You may want to save some snack and drink for hiking after lunch. You definitely need sturdy shoes to hike some of the rocky trails and maybe some rain gear if the rain is in the forecast. We plan to hike even in rains unless the weather makes it dangerous for hiking. Please be aware of the trail fees charged by the Hawk Mountain.

The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta-Yu

Translated by Jeannie Chen

Edited by Miin-Ron Lin

The Garden of The Mind

The spring came specially early this year. Strolling to the garden, surprisingly, I found tulips already sprouting out from the soil. Looking at these little tulips that had gone through the cold winter, my heart was full of appreciation and joy of the life. I bent down and covered those tulips with a layer of dry leaves and grasses, hoping that they would not be eaten by the deer and they will bloom beautifully in the future.

It was a good day for gardening. I took out some gardening tools from the storage and thought about how to start. The evergreen pine trees wore a bunch of furry leaves. They looked quiet different after the meticulous trimming.

Under the fallen leaves, I carefully searched the flowers roots grown last year and realized even more about the importance of "Watching the practice under each foot step". I did not want to step on and ruin any living sprouts because of the lack of awareness in any moment.

Trimming, it gets rid of my bad habit. Fertilizing, it adds more strength to my daily practice. Who says that the realization of Buddha Dharma and experiencing of practice is not within the daily life?

A friend sent a CD to the temple. It's a musical CD with beautiful melodies. The name of the CD is Secret Garden. After finishing up the work during the day, at night, I made a pot of tea and let the music of Secret Garden flow out softly with the full moon.

Inside everyone, there is a secret garden of the mind. According to each individual's preferences, each one's garden of the mind is cultivated differently. If we give plenty of sunshine, water and air, plus the coordination with good care, it will definitely turn into a perfuming and colorful flower garden.

A practitioner has available his wisdom as sunshine, compassion as water, and joyfully giving as air. Be aware during the twenty-four hours of each day and take good care of each one's garden of the mind. Let beautiful flowers bloom in the garden of the mind to benefit self and others. Here I would like to share and encourage everybody with an advice from a great master. "The weeds of ignorance should not grow in the garden of the mind and the flower of wisdom is always blooming in the enlightened garden."