



# AZBT Newsletter

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## A Letter to Dharma Friends

Miin-Ron Lin

December 26, 2002

Dear Dharma Friends,

Soon, we will be ushering in another new year. It is our hope that the past year has brought joy and peace to your family. Back in July, the AZBT was also able to celebrate the start of the third new year of its existence. It was an occasion to remind us of the early difficult days when we struggled to continue the existence of the AZBT after the sudden passing of our beloved founder, Venerable Hung-Yuan. Thanks to the generous contributions of our growing congregation and the selfless efforts of many individuals in so many different ways, the ABZT was able not only to survive but also to thrive under the leadership of Venerable Ta-Yu. You can clearly see the progress in the continuous renovation of our monastery, in the Dharma activities, and in the growing friend of our congregation.



We have constructed the new Buddha Hall that allows the

gathering of more than 100 people at one time. We have renovated several retreat rooms that allow our Dharma friends to stay overnight. We have added landscapes and trees in our front property. We have also revived our extensive wooded areas and the lake in the back property that offer several paths for relaxing strolls and walking meditation.



From the start, we have offered weekly program of meditation classes and monthly Dharma talk, given both by Dharma masters and fellow practitioners. Venerable Ta-Yu has also led regular spiritual programs such as various Confession Ceremonies and one-day meditation retreats. These programs were attended by existing and new Dharma friends from a wide range of places: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Massachusetts. Under Venerable Ta-Yu's spiritual leadership, the Vairocana Monastery has indeed become a peaceful refuge to our Dharma friends for spiritual respites, retreats and exchanges, just as was envisioned by our founder, Venerable Hung-Yuan.

All these achievements would not have been possible without the generous donations and selfless

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efforts of our friends. To stretch every donated dollar, we have always tried very hard to minimize the expenses. With the help of our attorney, we have successfully petitioned the Monroe County to partially waive the property tax for the Vairocana Monastery. In the coming year, we plan to petition the same tax exemption for the entire front property including the retreat rooms and old office. In order to justify the tax exemption, we would need to complete the renovations of the retreat house and convert the old office into places for meditating, meeting and reading. The renovations were started in 2002 and we hope to complete some time in 2003.



With your support, AZBT has not only survived but also thrived and our presence in the community has also begun to be recognized and appreciated. The future of the AZBT however will continue to depend on your participation and generous support. Your donations can come in several ways: one-time, monthly or yearly. Please make your check payable to AZBT and mail it along with the AZBT Fund Raising Form to RR3 Box 3361, Cresco, PA 18326. You will receive receipts for your tax-deductible donations.

May the New Year bring you peace and joy!

In Dharma,  
Board of Directors of AZBT

## Preview of 2003 Activities

Jeannie Chen

Just as in the past, in 2003 we will have weekly meditation class, monthly Dharma talk given both by Dharma masters and fellow practitioners, and spiritual programs such as various Confession Ceremonies and one-day meditation retreats.

The meditation class led by Venerable Ta-Yu will be resumed in February on Tuesday nights at 7 p.m., after the winter break. It provides an excellent environment to practice meditation so that the mind will become more pure and clear. With the purer mind, we are able to see the phenomena and their causes, conditions and results more clearly. Naturally and gradually, our compassion and wisdom will be increased and become more capable to help and benefit others and ourselves in an appropriate and gentle way with less attachment.



The teaching on "Patience" given by Venerable Lama Migmar based on Bodhicharyavapara by Shintideva will continue on the first or second Sunday between 10 am to 12 pm in February, April, June and October 2003. Patience is the antidote to anger. Anger creates bad enemies, destroys good relationships, and burns down all merits, while patience brings happiness and other

good results to our life. True patience comes from the realization of complete wisdom, the right view, which transforms anger completely into compassion.

Other than the teaching on "Patience", the Dharma talks to be given by Venerable Ta-Yu and fellow practitioners will be held on the first or second Sunday between 10 am to 12 pm in March, July, August, September and November 2003. The topics will be announced in the future.

In order to put our study into real practice, there will be Zen and pureland retreats in April, June, October and December 2003. Other ceremonies to purify our bodies, speeches and mind are scheduled as follows:

- Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony (the past Buddhas of Magnificent Era) in February,
- Medicine Buddha Confession Ceremony in March,
- Sakyamuni Buddha's Birthday Service and Thousand Buddha Confession Ceremony (the present Buddhas of Moral Era) in May,
- Avalokiteshvara (Guan-Yin) Bodhisattva's Birthday Service and Great Compassion Confession Ceremony in July,
- Earth-womb Bodhisattvas Ceremony and Great Mong-Sam ceremony in August,
- Thousand Buddha Confession Ceremony (the future Buddhas of Stars Era) in September and Liang-Huang Confession Ceremony in November.

A special fundraising event, Zen Festival, will be held on the second Saturday between 11 am to 3 pm before Mother's Day in May 2003. At the festival, we are going to have a variety of booths including the introduction of Buddhism, Buddhist books and arts, different vegetarian foods, soft drinks and desserts.

At the end of year, on the second Sunday between 10 am to 12 pm in

December 2003, we plan to hold a special gathering, which will be open to everybody to share and exchange the experience and thought with each other. Through this interaction, each individual may benefit from other's experience and thought and become more mature in his/her practice and spiritual life.



For the latest update of AZBT activities in 2003, please visit our website at:

<http://www.evenlink.com/~azbtnews>

## Confess and Repent Karmic Obstructions

Yuan Ming

*The following is Bodhisattva SAMAN-TABHADRA'S fourth vow from his Ten Great vows mentioned in Jeannie Chen's talk, "Bodhisattvas Great Vows and Activities" on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2002.*

Confessing and repenting all Karmic obstructions is very important for our practice. The Karmic obstructions are the obstructions that block our practice. It is accumulated from the bad actions during countless lifetime in the past. We need to confess and repent all bad karma creating from greed, anger and ignorance since time without beginning, arising out of Body, speech and Mind with two aspects:

1. Confess and repent the bad deeds created in the past.
2. Make resolution not to commit the bad deeds again in the future.

The force of the Karma is very powerful. It can block the goodness of human, heaven and holy path to the Buddhahood. Therefore we should not commit any bad actions even though they may be very tiny and we should diligently practice all good actions even though they may not be worth to mention.

Sentient beings have three kinds of obstructions:

1. Defilement (causes): like the seeds.
2. Karma (conditions): like the water and soil.
3. Consequence (results): like the fruits.

If we confess and repent our Karmic obstructions effectively, the conditions (Karma), like water and soil, will be eliminated. Without water and soil, the seeds (defilement) will be dried and the fruits (consequence) will not be produced.

All Karmic obstructions arise from the wondering thoughts. If we wish to confess and repent the Karmic obstruction, we should meditate on the truth of all phenomena (emptiness). All the sins are like the frost and dew before the sunrise, they disappear when the wisdom emerges. Therefore we should sincerely confess and repent the Karmic root of the 6 realms. The sincere confession requires a pure and clean mind, a nice and neat appearance and the respecting and serious physical actions. In this way we confess with the sincerity of the entire inside and outside, body and mind.

There are three types of confession rituals:

1. Practice the Dharma: In front of the Buddha's stature, we confess and repent all sins and Karmas, with the sincere mind and regret via prostration (body), chanting (speech) and visualization (mind). This kind of practice cleans up all the sins and Karmas created by our body, speech and mind. There are many confession ceremonies written in Chinese. In AZBT, we hold quite a lot of confession ceremonies every year, such as the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony, Medicine Buddha Confession Ceremony, Great Compassion Confession Ceremony, Liang-Huang Confession Ceremony and Eighty-eight Buddha's Confession Ceremony. For those who have not joined any confession ceremony, it is good to join at least one in the future. The confession ceremony helps us clear the Karmic obstructions so that we are able to accumulate merits and wisdom, which are the essential elements for our practice.



2. Obtain the good phenomena: In order to eliminate the nature of the sin arising from the defilement, we may meditate and visualize the confession in order to reach the purification with cool and concentrated mind. Through the sincere request, the practitioner will obtain the effect, the good phenomena, which proves the success of the confession.

3. No arising: In order to eliminate the ignorance of the nature of the sin, one must mediate and visualize the body of the sin, which is no arising (emptiness). Do not think about the goodness and do not think about the badness, just examine where is the nature of the sin coming from? When the mind arises, all Dharma arises. When the mind ceases, all Dharma ceases. Three realms are all in one mind. Outside of the mind there is no Dharma. Everything is created by the mind. In the Sutra, it says: "Sin originates from the mind. Therefore confess with the mind. If the mind ceases, then there is no sin to arise. When Mind ceases and sin is extinguished. They both are empty. This is the true confession."

If we cease the one pointed mind, then we are liberated from the existence of the three realms. The nature of the mind is boundless like the space. When we see the true nature (emptiness) of our mind, it is the true confession, which purifies our mind completely.

## Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony

### The Future Buddhas of Stars Era

Wendy Wu

September 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> were Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony—prostrating the One Thousand Buddhas in the Future, Stars Era. At 6:00 p.m. of September 20<sup>th</sup>, the people from Shrewsbury of Massachusetts drove approximately five hours and arrived Vairocana Monastery at 11:00 p.m. Jeffrey Huang was in Jeannie and Charles Chen's house to recover from illness. He also came with Jeannie Chen's family to attend

the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony despite his illness.

The Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony was divided into five sessions to prostrate the One Thousand Buddhas in the Future, Stars Era. We prostrated two hundred Buddha per session, and it took approximately one and half-hour. The attendees were divided into east and west sides to prostrate the One Thousand Buddhas in the Future, Stars Era with adorn and beautiful chanting.



Venerable Ta-Yu gave a brief and useful teaching to the attendees after prostrating of two hundred Buddhas in the first day morning. She said, "Live and death is within each inhale and exhale. We should practice Buddha Dharma diligently so that we are able to see clearly and ready to put down at any moment. We also need to generate the Bodhi mind and practice the Buddhisattva path." After the grand offering, we had delicious vegetarian food and fruits prepared by Yeh-Ching Lu Yuan and Shu-Chuan Huang. Mr. Chau-Fe Huang, the husband of Shu-Chuan, had attended the Thousand-Buddha Ceremony before, but had not had the chance to complete the Thousand-Buddha Ceremony because of his busy schedule. Chau-Fe Huang made a vow this time - he wanted to complete prostrating of the One Thousand Buddhas in the Future, Stars Era. Chung and Peter Huang from Allentown also attended the

first day of the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony. September 21<sup>st</sup> was the Chinese Moon Festival. For the celebration of the moon festival at that day, we had gourmet moon cakes brought by Shu-Chuan Huang. We also had the fortune to enjoy the vegetarian fire pot prepared by Ben and Bee-May Lor for dinner.

In the second day of the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony, everybody continued the prostrating of the remaining four hundred Buddhas diligently. Mr. Chau-Fe Huang came with his wife Shu-Chuan to complete his vow of prostrating the One Thousand Buddhas in the Future, Stars Era. Miin-Ron Lin also came to the temple to take the pictures for the record of Thousand-Buddha Ceremony. Two-day's Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony was completed with enthusiastic participation by everyone.

## Let's Talk About Liang-Huang

Venerable Ta-Yu

The November sky with the light now is filled with deep gratitude and with extraordinary Liang-Huang is filled with great compassion.

Just as last year, the Liang-Huang Confession Ceremony was held this year also around Thanksgiving holiday. Because it is rare and sacred, there were more Dharma friends joining the Liang-Hunag Confession Ceremony than other ceremonies. With a sincere and respecting mind all the attendees used the precious Thanksgiving vacation to practice rather than entertain, to progress rather than relax, making their vacation very different.



The ceremony started on Wednesday and completed on Sunday. All together, Liang-Huang Confession Ceremony had ten chapters, averaging two chapters per day. Normally, we practiced one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the afternoon. But, in order to allow everyone some time to rest after five contiguous days of practice, and to enable the attendees coming from the distance to go home earlier to get ready for the work next day, we arranged a special session to practice one more chapter on Saturday night, allowing the ceremony to complete at noon on Sunday. In order to develop the correct understanding and the right view of practice, the confession ceremony in each afternoon was preceded by a thirty minute Dharma talk to let all attendees realize that study and practice are equally important.

Due to the cause and condition of the Queen of Wu and the compassion of the King of Wu, Liang-Hung Confession Ceremony is able to carry on for thousands of years. Holding a ceremony relies on many causes and conditions to support and complete the whole ritual. It is especially more difficult with longer ceremonies. A ceremony needs sufficient time, location and people plus many other conditions to make it happen. In thinking of it, we particularly appreciate the consequence of merit and conditions that we have. It is very sacred that we are able to

practice the magnificent ceremony based on very few manpower and limited material support.

According to the causes and conditions in very ancient time, Liang-Huang was a ceremony only practiced by Kings, Queens and royal families. For ordinary citizen, it was not easy to have the opportunity to practice Liang-Huang. With the passing of time, nowadays Liang-Huang is open to everybody, but, because it is an intensive and long confession ceremony, not everybody is able to be free from the worldly activities in order to join the complete ceremony. If there are no great causes and conditions, how could we have such great consequence of merit?

I still remember last year when the attendees of Liang-Huang Confession Ceremony had to crowd together in library and interview room or sleep on the floor because of the lack of retreat rooms. Before this winter, with Kim Wong and Grace Chan's support, we renovated four retreat rooms to allow most of the attendees to stay in nice and clean rooms and have sufficient rest every night to restore the energy to participate in the confession ceremony during the daytime. However, there are only four renovated rooms, which only provide the lodging for eight people. At such cold winter nights, some attendees still had to sleep on the floor or sofa. It is my wish that by next year, your contributions and supports either of finance or manpower can help the temple compete the renovation as soon as possible, so that Vairocana Monastery will be able to provide a comfortable location to practice Buddha Dharma. Your generous support will accumulate limitless merit.

## Coming Events

### Winter Break

No Activities in January 2003

### Starting in February

Every Tuesday

7:00 p.m.

**Group Meditation**

Ven. Ta-Yu

2/9/03, Sunday

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

**Patience**

Ven. Lama Migmar

2/23/03, Saturday

10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

2/24/03, Sunday

10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

**Thousand-Buddha**

**Confession Ceremony**

The Past Buddhas of

Magnificent Era

Ven. Ta-Yu

3/9/03, Sunday

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

**Dharma Talk**

Ven. Ta-Yu

3/22/03, Saturday

10 a.m. – 6 p.m.

**Medicine Buddha Confession**

**Ceremony**

Ven. Ta-Yu

4/6/03, Sunday

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

**Patience**

Ven. Lama Migmar

4/26/03, Saturday, 10 a.m. –

4/27/03, Sunday, 12 p.m.

**One-day Zen Retreat**

Ven. Ta-Yu

# The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta-Yu

Translated by Jeannie Chen

Edited by Miin-Ron Lin



## The Gift of the New Year



A big snowstorm in December brought the chilliness of winter. The beauty of the four seasons is the most selfless gift from the nature.

This is the third New Year since I came to America. From Thanksgiving, Christmas to New Year day, Americans have a really long holiday season. I like the sense of holiday season a lot. I remember, every New Year day, I always received a surprise gift from my great master. Among many other gifts, the gifts from the master represent the precious and greatest connection between a master and a disciple.

A tiny square personal seal made of jade, an plain little ruler and a regular ear cleaning stick. To me, these ordinary and easily obtained things have the most extraordinary meaning.

Every time when I remember my grateful master who had originally given me the ordination and passed away years ago, these gifts given by him to the Sangha members always trigger my endless reminisce and appreciation of him.

After several years since my ordination, these little gifts never leave me even when I studied overseas, they were always there to accompany me. These gifts represent my compassionate master's sincere teaching and deep expectation. Perhaps due to destiny, I did not bring them with me when I left quickly for America and had to stay unexpectedly. But they have already resided deeply in my mind for a long time.

From time to time, my great master reminded us. As Buddha's disciples, our determination to practice the path should be indestructible like a hard rock. Despite the passage of time, after much beating by wind and rain, our practice should remain more and more unshakable. A tiny stone carved with personal name is a very important personal seal. In Taiwan, important personal documents have to be stamped with this tiny stone to be official, just like the signature in America. In Taiwan, personal seal represents power and approval. That is the reason why my great mater gave every disciple a personal seal made of jade.

Before we become Buddhas, sentient beings always like to measure and judge others based on our personal views. A ruler reminds me of my great master's intense teaching. No matter how difficult the causes and conditions are, no matter how much the environments have changed, we must remain keenly aware in every moment at days and nights to learn the Bodisattvas' loving kindness, compassion, blessing and renunciation and to examine

whether our body, speech, and mind are suitable for the Dharma and not stepping beyond the normal rules and customs. So, the little ruler is a gift to measure ourselves, as my master told us.

An ear cleaning stick can dig out our earwaxes. Ears are the most sensitive organs for the sentient beings in Jambudvipa (the muddy world). But, good advice is the most difficult thing for people to hear and accept. Instead, people open their ears everyday waiting for flattering, untruthful compliments or some impure sounds, which confuse our mind. Accumulated day-by-day and month-by-month, these untruthful words and impure sounds create misunderstandings, confusions and arguments among people. From time to time, the arising of a thought of ignorant anger burns and destroys the supreme merits in our mind.

So, Buddhist practitioners should frequently clean up our ears. With a pure and wisdom mind, let the pure words of Dharma enter our ears and follow the teaching to practice in order to eliminate the obstructions in our mind.

To a person who knows how to appreciate, even the nature's phenomena will be received as a supreme gift. The impermanence and alteration of the human life is like the dew in the early morning or the lightening in the sky that disappears at a glance. The great dream of the human life is so short yet filled with more suffering than happiness. In order to avoid suffering and obtain happiness, the ordinary beings are busy all day long in pursuit of the sources of happiness. Yet, what we do not know is that the real source of the happiness is in our mind. If we understand the interdependent origination of the causes and conditions as the Buddha taught us, there is nothing we could not let go. Only when we truly let go everything can we realize the true skillful means to detach our enjoyment when we are successful, to reinforce our practice when we are faced with difficulties and to achieve the ultimate happiness of the liberation.

Over a year ago, we experienced the most impermanent stroke of September 11. While everybody lived under the terrifying and depressing shadow without much happiness, the rescue of nine miners in Pennsylvania again brought us the hope of life. When we have hope in our mind, even if we sow the seeds on the ice and snow, there is still a possibility that the seeds will sprout and grow.

Wish everybody that everyday is a good day and every year is a good year in the future.

Happy New Year!

