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Everybody's Zen Meditation Center

Venerable Ta Yu

If you have the occasion to come back to the temple, you will find that the Zen Meditation Center has been remodeled and is now open for everyone to use. The small but delicate sign Zen Meditation Center written in Chinese is a masterpiece by Mr. Lee's artistic hand. If you read the sign in reverse, starting from right to left, it means practicing Zen in our mind. Aren't these four short characters in Chinese exactly our goal?



Zen Meditation Center

Especially thanks to several people who had selflessly contributed their money and manpower to make possible the smooth completion of the Zen Meditation Center. The Center is a two stories wooden lodge, which was utilized as a guest room by the previous owner. There were many old bunk beds blocking the sunlight. In the old kitchen located at the back of the first floor, several large windows for the view were sealed shut with plywood, transforming this place into a dark and filthy corner. The situation on the second floor was not much better. Perhaps many people do not have a strong impression of this old

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building except that of a large warehouse stuffed with all sorts of items.

This year's spring clean up was held in the Memorial Weekend. In order to let this activity to proceed successfully we needed to make some preparations before hand. At the beginning of this year, Mr. Kim Mu Wong and his father in-law, Mr. Kun Chan drove all the way from Massachusetts to do some cleanup jobs. At first, we tore down all the bunk beds to open up the space. These torn down bunk beds were just right for the renovation projects. We were very lucky to have a volunteer, Luu, who had driven all the way from Lancaster, Pennsylvania to join us to help the remodeling project proceed even more smoothly.



Library

The spring clean up was started on the second day right after the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony. Besides Luu, Kim Mu Wong, Simmie Mu, Bi-Mei, and Shu-Chuan Huang there were Jeannie Chen, Yeh-Ching Yuan, Wendy Wu and Cheng-Yi Yuan who had also came here to join in this project. Mrs. Yeh-Ching Yuan

cooked many delicious vegetarian dishes to replenish our energy when we became exhausted. At the last two days of the spring cleanup, Ben, Peter Huang and his wife Chung also joined in the project of remodeling the Zen Meditation Center, adding significantly to the efforts.



Multi-purpose room

We jokingly called this group of the volunteers for this project the army of the old, the weak, the women and the children. But when they worked, the output of these volunteers was second to none. It was up to the female volunteers to apply the finishing touch after two male volunteers completed all the preliminary heavy jobs. They complemented each other very well. In a few days, we had replaced thirty some old windows of the whole building with the new ones, installed new carpets and repainted the walls. When completed, the Zen Meditation Center, devoid entirely of the rundown look of the old building, was transformed into a quiet and tranquil space for the use of returning practitioners.



Meditation hall

Inside the remodeled Zen Meditation Center, the first floor has a library, a multi-purpose room for conference and audio-visual in the future. In the back is a contemplation room with the

view of the forest and the lake. There are an open meditation hall and an adjacent reading area on the second floor. This layout turns every available space of this building for the maximum utilization.

I remember that at the beginning of my nunnery life, my Master encouraged all the new nuns and monks with the following:

“It is not much a problem for a nun or monk to find a monastery to practice. However, to have an opportunity to be actually involved in establishing and opening a new monastery is a chance not easily encountered without sufficient merits and right circumstances.”

Along the path of my journey, I had realized so much and every day I dared not forget the old proverb, “There are so much that we gain from others and so little that we give from ourselves.” in order to remind myself of the importance of accumulating the merits in my practice. It is not easy to establish a monastery without the continuous support from countless number of people. I hope that there will be even more heartened people to join us.

Earth-womb Ceremony

Grace Chan

American Zen Buddhist Temple held an Earth-womb Ceremony/Great Mong-Sam Ceremony on August 23 at the Vairocana Monastery. The Buddha Hall was decorated and nametags for the passing away were set up few days before the ceremony. Some of the attendees came back to the temple at the night of Aug 22 to help with the decoration of the Buddha Hall and to prepare the food for the offering to the Buddha and the passing away and for the meals for the attendees.

The ceremony began at 10:00 a.m. in the morning. All the attendees gathered in the Buddha hall. Venerable Ta Yu explained to us that the ceremony would be performed in two sessions. The first session is for the recitation of the Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha's (Earth-womb) Fundamental Vows, and the second session for the recitation of the Great-Mong-Sam Ceremony. The attendees followed Venerable Ta Yu to recite the Sutra and Mantra. We enjoyed a great meal for lunch after we finished the first and second chapters of the sutra.



Recitation of the Sutra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha's (Earth-womb)

After lunch and a brief rest, we began the last chapter of the sutra. When we finished the last part of sutra, we rearranged our seats and began the second session of The Great Mong-Sam Ceremony. Venerable Ta Yu reminded us not to leave our seats during the ceremony because it invited all kinds of invisible sentient beings, prior world debtors and families to come to listen to the Dharma and accept our food offering. Therefore, we should not walk around in the Buddhist Hall and we should concentrate in the recitation of the mantra.

At the successful completion of the ceremony, Venerable Ta Yu compassionately dedicated the merit to all the invisible beings so that they could arise and develop the good path, and offered good wishes to all the attendees, the prior world debtors and families so that they could liberate themselves from the enmity and fetters, eradicate the calamity, and prolong their life.



A great meal for lunch

The Teaching on One-Day Pure Land Retreat

Taught by Venerable Ta Yu
Recorded by Wendy Wu

June 21, 2003

For the sentient beings on the path of learning the Buddha Dharma, the road is very long. We often observe that the motivation of great Bodhisattvas and Buddhas is immeasurably and limitlessly large, such as the omnipresent Bodhi mind described in the doctrine of Eight Precepts. The so-called true Bodhi mind never backs up, no matter how difficult the situations may be. Many sutras mentioned that we should develop the pure mind, the diligent mind, the patient mind, the meditating mind, but never the tired mind.

The sentient beings are different from the Bodhisattvas. First, we are ordinary beings and do not have enough merits. Because of it, we sometimes experience sickness and pain in our physical body. As a result, we are tired quickly when we practice Buddha Dharma. The soreness in the waist and the ache in the back during the daily services make us powerless. When we do not have great strength, it causes us to back up easily. Second, we do not have enough wisdom. If we had sufficient wisdom, we could have accomplished twice as much with half of the effort. With insufficient wisdom and without method, the results are naturally unsatisfactory. We realize that our merit and wisdom cannot compare

with those of the Bodhisattvas and therefore we are more likely to get discouraged. But as long as we keep a pure mind, even through we take great vows but cannot accomplish them at the present moment, it will be fine if we can commit ourselves to delivering the sentient beings and we are willing to tolerate any sufferings for the sake of the sentient beings.

We do not have sufficient Bodhi mind but instead have a lot of indolent mind. Sometimes the practitioners forgive themselves too easily. It is also because we have too much scattered mind, we are unable to develop them fully. In ancient China, there was a famous chess player, named Yi-Qiu. He had two students. One student was very concentrated and always paid undivided attention to whatever the teacher was teaching. Thus, he learned very good skills in playing chess. The other student had a scattered mind. Although he was sitting at the same chess lessons, he was not paying much attention. He kept thinking about a bird that was about to fly down from the sky. On and on, his wandering mind was all over the places and flying away with the bird. Therefore, he did not develop as good skills in playing the chess. Same teacher was teaching, while two different students were trying to learn. Of course, the results came out differently.

Similarly, Dharma was taught by Buddha in the same way to every one. Everybody can read the same Buddhist books, do the same daily services, and practice with the same methods, yet each one will attain different merits and results. For example, some people are able to maintain still during the recitation of the sutra, reciting the sutra with one-pointed mind and immediately understand the doctrine of the Buddha and how to put it in practice. As a result, they progress faster in the path of practice. I always believe that there is no shortcut or so-called better or worse instinct in practice. It all depends on how you practice and take good care of your duties, and how you

use the every daily lesson and apply Buddha Dharma in daily life. In this way, you take the path of practice very relaxingly. If we practice like Yi-Qiu's first student, without any scattered minds and with focus on what we are learning, whatever you do will turn out excellent. In this way, "even with a hot iron wheel turning on the top of our head, we will not lose your Bodhi mind because of the suffering." When we do not feel tired in the path of practice, then we can maintain the course and reach far.

In our lifetime, it is not so easy to be able to sit down to recite Buddha's name or meditate for one hour. We should hold on to this opportunity of keeping the Eight Precepts for one day and one night. Utilize this short period of one day and one night to practice diligently. With a pointed mind, there is nothing that we cannot achieve. Just concentrate our mind here to do the things that we should do and to practice the Dharma that we should practice.



The Great Compassionate Confession Ceremony on July 19, 2003

The biggest problem in practice is to have some impurities such as our Karma and habits. The seriousness of our habits cannot be described. We reveal our habits unconsciously. It affects us and is a huge barrier to our practice. The habits, accumulated over time, will destroy our steadfast Bodhi mind and merits. The damage is something that we are not able to notice. The personality of an individual is the individual's habit. Then, how can we eliminate those habits? We should practice diligently of course. Reciting Buddha's name is one of the methods. This is the reason

why the Vairocana Monastery holds this One-Day Pure Land Retreat that requires the attendees to maintain silence during this short period of time. Keeping silence means not to talk in order to calm our mind for a good practice. By reciting Buddha's name and reading the Buddhist books at spare time, you won't have time to create bad Karma and to spread your habit. In this way we can regulate our body, speech and mind.

Then how large is the power of reciting Buddha's name? I recall a story. Once upon a time, there was a woman who was very sincere in learning the Buddha Dharma and her practice was excellent. Although she was very busy with many house chores, she never forgot to recite Buddha's name everyday. She not only recited Buddha's name herself, but also transformed her neighbors, relatives and good friends to recite Buddha's name together with her. Everybody was reciting Buddha's name very well and the whole community was in very good harmony. Although this woman practiced very well and had transformed many people, there was one person that she was not able to transform - her husband. Her husband did not do many good things but created lots of bad deeds. Because of this, her husband was very difficult to be transformed. This woman was thinking what to do. My husband had created lots of bad Karmas in this life. If he did not learn the Buddha Dharma and recite Buddha's name well, he would definitely face serious dangers after he died. She wished that the Bodhisattvas could help her open up her wisdom so that she would know how to transform her husband.

One day, this woman saw a neighbor's kid ringing a bell. When she heard the bell, it dawned upon her a way to transform her husband. In that evening when her husband came back from work, she told him, "The security in the community is very bad nowadays. Thieves steal everywhere. Every day when you come home, first ring the bell as a signal and recite Na

Mo Amitabha. Then, I know you are ready to enter and I will open the door for you. It is safer this way." The husband thought this a very good idea and how clever her wife was. From then on, her husband rang the bell and recited Na Mo Amitabha loudly every time he came home. Her husband did this everyday and after a while got used to it and recited the Amitabha spontaneously. This woman's husband started to recite Buddha's name because of this reason.

Because her husband had created too much bad Karma in this life, his Karmic obstructions had ripened. He got sick and died. Due to his bad Karma he fell into the endless hell to receive extreme sufferings. The iron ring on the large iron fork sounded when the guard of the hell used it to stab and drop the sinners into the huge oil wok to suffer. It sounded just like a bell. This woman's husband was very nervous because it was next his turn. But as soon as he heard the sound of the iron ring he recited "Na Mo Amitabha" immediately. The burning hot hell became cool instantly. Not only this husband felt the coolness. All the beings in this boundless hell also felt the coolness at the same time. Afterwards, he was reborn in the Human Realm because of the power of reciting Na Mo Amitabha.

From this story, we understand that even though this husband recited Buddha's name for other purpose, he still could be reborn from hell to the Human Realm because of the merit of reciting Buddha's name. And we know that reciting Buddha's name is a way of practice. We should clearly understand that the merit would be even more inconceivable and limitless if we recite Buddha's name based on the generation of the Bodhi mind, compassionate mind, and the liberating mind. Therefore, do not overlook the merit of reciting even just once "Na Mo Amitabha".

We attend the One-Day Pure Land and Eight Precepts Retreat today to recite Buddha's name innumerable

times. It is not just for our own practice, we also want to dedicate this merit of reciting Buddha's name to all the sentient beings. Someone said that we can perceive the hell in this world and do not need to wait to get there until after we die. In this muddy world in which we reside, we cannot even breathe freely because we have to wear masks to prevent the infection of SARS. The modern people cannot breathe freely because they get sick due to their grave Karma. Isn't this like a human hell?

Practicing the Buddha Dharma should be like air, which is neither empty nor existing. In order to benefit the sentient beings through practicing Bodhisattva's Path, our practice should be formless as air, serving the sentient beings quietly. It is a great merit and good Karma root to practice Buddha Dharma while we are healthy. Be thankful to the Bodhisattvas who grant us a healthy body so that we can recite Buddha's name. We should recite Buddha's name with gratitude and a sense of rare chance. While practicing in this human world, sometimes you will encounter obstacles that could help your practice progress and increase your merit. You should practice diligently if you want to benefit the sentient beings within your limited life.



Circling the Buddha during the Great Compassionate Confession Ceremony

June 22, 2003

In "the Commentary of Rebirth in the Pure-Land", written by the Vasubandhu Bodhisattva, there was a paragraph mentioning the method of reciting Buddha's name. He

promoted the Five Devotional Gates of the Pure-Land sect:

The First Gate is the gate of prostration. The so-called gate of prostration is to prostrate to Amitabha with the wish to be born in the peaceful Land. We should vow to be born in Amitabha's Pure-Land while we prostrate.

The Second Gate is the gate of praise. We should praise Buddha while we recite Amitabha's holy name.



A picture of Amitabha in the Library

The Third Gate is the gate of resolution. The so-called gate of resolution is to practice our meditation truthfully. When we recite Buddha's name with one-pointed and clear mind, it is meditation. If you combine the practice of meditation with the Pure-Land method at the same time, you will progress like a tiger with wings.

The Fourth Gate is the gate of observation. The gate of observation is visualization. We should visualize ourselves as a sentient being of the Five Kasaya (Polluted) Periods of Chaos. First, we need to learn about the suffering and observe the cause of the suffering. Second, when we have suffering, we need to know clearly the degree of the suffering and the nature of the suffering. To be free from suffering, we must achieve the renunciation of this Saha (muddy) world.

The fifth gate is the gate of dedication. No matter which Mahayana method we are practicing with, we must commit ourselves to delivering the sentient beings when we reach Enlightenment and dedicate the merits of all our practices to all the

sentient beings in the Dharma Realm. The meaning of the gate of dedication is to generate the Bodhi mind to deliver all sentient beings and to reach the shore of Nirvana together.

The dissemination of Buddha Dharma is not just the responsibility of monks and nuns. Much of the responsibility of disseminating Buddha Dharma falls in the shoulders of laypeople. You can introduce the Buddha Dharma that you understand to others to bring out their good Karma roots. If you do not know how to preach the Dharma, you should maintain a diligent practice to refine your body, speech and mind. When other people recognize you as such a good person, full with loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom, they will naturally approach you to become your friends. Then, you can explain to them how you have practiced to reach this stage. Step by step, you can gradually help them.

One of the disciples of the Buddha Sakyamuni named Asvajir practiced very well and had a magnificent appearance with dignified gestures. One day, when Asvajir was almsgiving on the road, Maudgalaputra saw this very dignified ascetic. Maudgalaputra approached Asvajir and asked him: "Could you tell me your name? Which method are you practicing with to make you so dignified?" Asvajir answered: "My name is Asvajir. I learn it from my teacher." Maudgalaputra asked again: "Who is your teacher?" Asvajir replied: "My teacher is the Great Loving, Kind, World-honored One, Sakyamuni Buddha." Maudgalaputra said: "Your teacher must be very good to be able to turn out such an excellent student. I would like to meet your teacher." Immediately Maudgalaputra followed Asvajir to meet Sakyamuni Buddha and in this way started to practice Buddhism.

A Buddhist should have the attitudes and qualities, which are liberated, magnificent, easygoing, happy, compassionate, full of wisdom, and benevolent towards the sentient beings everywhere. These attitudes

and qualities are the most emphasized by Mahayana Bodhisattvas. If you want to know how good your practice is, just observe the reactions from the people around you. They are like mirrors reflecting your body, speech and mind. Therefore, Vasubandhu's Five Devotional Gates is very important for Pure-Land practitioners.

Seeking A Great Teacher

Yuan Ming

Great teachers usually produce bright disciples. We rely on the instruction of a teacher to learn the knowledge, skills, and arts in the world. Although some people can master a subject without a teacher, the case is very rare. Of course, it is no exception when we practice Buddhism, search the truth beyond the world, and hope to attain perfect character. We need good teachers and helpful friends to guide and encourage us. Among the practitioners, there may be a few Pretyaka-buddha, who attain enlightenment without a teacher. But they tend to prefer tranquility and do not burden themselves with teaching. If so, from where arrive these present day self proclaimed living Buddhas, who supposedly have reached enlightenment without a teacher, and who gather crowds to teach Dharma under the banner of Buddhism? The students of Buddhism cannot be too careful!

Where can we find a great teacher who has Path?

In Master Tan Xu's biography, there is a story about his discussion with a layman from the Jing Xing County in China about Have Path or No Path. The layman thought that to be able to fast for seven days, walk in the snow without wearing shoes during the winter, and wear fur without feeling hot during the summer is a great Path. Master Tan Xu said: "These are just

habits. Habits do not count as the Path. If these habits are considered the Path, can the Path of fasting compare with the summer cicadas, who do not eat anything but drinking dew. Ducks take bath in the river during winter and sparrows grasp electric wires with bare feet. How much greater their Path is! Dogs wear fur the whole year and people infected with Malaria shiver even while wearing fur in the summer. Is this also Path?"

Buddhism is not about exhibiting supernatural power and confounding people. It is about being simple and easy to approach. Buddhism teaches us to train our mind and get rid of habits and defilements of desire, anger, and ignorance. It does not teach us only to train our body and develop energy in order to seek longevity. If no one dies, the world will quickly run out of space and we will end up fighting each other in endless tugs of wars. Buddhism makes us realize that physical body is the root of all sufferings and the body is impermanent. No matter how well we preserve our body, we will die eventually. Therefore, do not exhaust all the means trying to preserve it. Also do not abuse it on purpose, because we still need our body for the practice. The mind is the source of all the evils. It is also impermanent. One after another our thoughts arise and vanish just like a stream flowing without cease. Eliminating desire, anger, and ignorance, clearing mind and realizing true nature of the mind absolutely exceed any modes or forms. A person who attains the true nature will never use dazzling imageries or flowery words in order to impress people.

Our original teacher Sakyamuni appeared in this world and became Buddha to turn the pure Dharma wheel. While Buddha resided in the world, Buddha was our teacher. After Buddha entered Nirvana, Precepts became our teacher. Therefore, the so-called great teacher is not necessarily a person. There are four

modes of relying, according to the Buddha Dharma: relying on the Dharma not the person, relying on the Sutra describing ultimate truth not the Sutra describing relative truth, relying on the meaning not the words, and relying on the wisdom not the consciousness. The first one, relying on the Dharma not the person, teaches us to follow the Dharma not the person. Practitioners should follow the teaching not the person. Even when a person is an ordinary being or a non-Buddhist, if his or her speech matches the pure Dharma, then we may follow. On the other hand, if a person has all the good marks as Buddha but his or her speech does not match the pure Dharma, then we should leave and do not follow.



We may give the flowers different names, but they are still colorful.

Relying on the Dharma not the person clearly tells us that our decision to rely on or depart from the teaching should not be based on the person's good or bad image but whether his or her teaching matches the pure Dharma. In other words, we should even accept and follow a serious criminal's speech if what he or she speaks matches the pure Dharma. What we should rely on is the truth spoken by the person, not the person. On the other hand, what we should distance ourselves from is the misleading speech spoken by the person, not the person.

Confucius said: "One becomes red when near red, becomes black when near black," and "Be close to the gentlemen and keep away from the flattering persons." Frequent association with good teachers and helpful friends will help us

Coming Events

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

10/12/03, Sunday
10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Patience
Ven. Lama Migmar

10/25/03, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. –
10/26/03, Sunday, 12:00 p.m.
One-day Zen Retreat
Ven. Ta Yu

11/9/03, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Six Perfections - Wisdom
Ven. Ta Yu

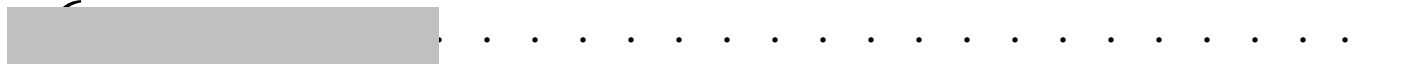
11/26/03 – 11/29/03
Wednesday – Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
11/30/03, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Confession Ceremony of
Empire Liang (Chinese)
Ven. Ta Yu

12/13/03, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. –
12/14/03, Sunday, 10:00 a.m.
One-day Pure Land Retreat
(Eight Precepts)
Ven. Ta Yu

12/14/03, Sunday
10 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
A Gathering to Share
Everybody's Thoughts
Ven. Ta Yu

12/17/03, Wednesday . –
1/23/04, Friday
Winter Break – No Activities

1/24/04, Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
1/25/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Thousand-Buddha
Confession Ceremony
(Past, Magnificent Era)
Ven. Ta Yu



accumulate merits and increase wisdom. However, before a practitioner establishes the right view and attains enough wisdom to use skillful means to deliver the sentient beings, it is good to keep away temporarily from evil persons. But, we should not maintain dislike or hate towards those persons with vehemence or vengeance. As a disciple of the Three Jewels, we need to maintain constant awareness and discipline ourselves based on Buddhism and not to quote phrases from the Sutra to lecture others. All the sentient beings possess Buddha nature. The compassionate Buddha and Bodhisattvas will not abandon any sentient beings. Like a mother towards her children, she will never abandon them because of bad speeches or deeds. Conversely, they diligently nurture the sentient beings to achieve the pure land.

The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta-Yu

Translated by Jeannie Chen

Edited by Miin-Ron Lin



Living With A Grateful Mind



Picking up garbage along Rt. 940 has become my regular route of walking meditation after meals. Sometimes when the weather gets too hot, I will wear a sun-hat and hold a branch, happy that I am very much like an ascetic (who seeks the truth), but with a garbage bag instead of a monastic bag.

A MacDonald's French fries paper bag, a Burger King's Hamburg container, a straw, and a brown beer bottle. Sometimes if I am lucky, I may pick up half of a leftover donut. Smashed under a tree, it then becomes a celebration of the harvest season for the ants.

Delighted by the cool summer night, sometimes I sit on the stone stairs in front of the door to continue my unfinished Evening Service. Amazingly, in the garden and grass appear sparkling lightning bugs twinkling frequently. One bug, two bugs, many lightning bugs are flying as a group, racing in their own space and time. They are truer and prettier than the small light bulbs that decorate the tree during the Christmas season.

Lightning bugs were the dreams in my childhood. As I grow older and older, I have gradually forgotten them. Had they been pushed aside by the contemporary products? Or, had I ignored their presence due to my preoccupied mind? May be both, just like those cars on Rt. 940 that pass by with a blast to catch one and another endless appointments without noticing these little stars (lightning bugs) over the sideways.

A Zen master lived in a mountain cave to practice alone. One day when he was meditating, a thief entered and searched the entire cave but found nothing to steal. When the theft was about to escape, the Zen master who had noticed him long

ago spoke: "You have come from far away. It is a pity that you return with empty hands. Let's do this. If you do not find them much to your distaste, please take these torn cloths that I am wearing."

Terrified, the thief turned around to catch the cloths and sped away.

The Zen master then said:

"What a pity! I couldn't also give him the bright moon on the sky."

With nothing to possess, but he is the richest person in the whole universe. This is the best description of a practitioner. It is a pity that not everyone could understand how great a fortune he or she has.

A mere little garbage could be the condition for a starting point. Sometimes, people casually throw garbage while rushing to their destination. Sometimes, people throw garbage intentionally at that instance. Or, maybe it has become a habit for some people after doing this for a long time. Thanks to all of the people who have thrown garbage to give me this good opportunity to practice and cultivate merit. But, whenever I see that the beautiful environment has been contaminated, I feel very sorry for it each time.

What are you busy about? What are you rushing for? Huge as mountain, river, and earth, tiny as falling leaves and flowers, they all are the blessing given by the great nature. Why can't you learn to treasure and appreciate it? Why allow habit and ignorance to contaminate your mind and affect others. What a pity that I couldn't tell you this in person! Learn to live with a grateful mind. Take a break in your busy schedule. Lightning bugs are very beautiful in a summer night.

(To be continued)