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AZBT Newsletter

Preview of AZBT's 2004 Activities

In 2004 AZBT will continue to hold meditation class, Dharma talks, spiritual ceremonies, and one-day retreats.

The Tuesday nights' meditation class led by Venerable Ta Yu will be resumed after the winter break on January 20, 2004. Through meditation our mind will become more pure and clear, which helps us to understand the causes and conditions of all phenomena more clearly and to accumulate our compassion and wisdom for helping and benefiting others and ourselves with skillful means and in a non-attached manner.

Other than January and July 2004, Dharma talks will be held on the second Sunday of each month between 10 am to 12 pm. The topics will be announced in the future by email before each Dharma talk. Venerable Lama Migmar has completed "Patience" based on Bodhicharyavapara by Shintideva in 2003. He will continue on the teaching with new topics in February, April, August and October 2004.

In order to provide the opportunity for practicing Dharma to more people, there will be one casual and one strict Zen and Pure-land retreats in April and July; and October and December 2004. Casual retreats are especially designed for people who have never attended any retreats. All are welcomed to attend the casual retreat for any sessions and there is no requirement to stay overnight at the temple. Also, the casual retreats allow some conversations, and have

shorter meditation sessions. For restrict retreats, attendee must stay overnight at the temple and keep silence through the entire retreat. There is a fasting requirement for one-day retreat.

Other ceremonies to purify our bodies, speeches and mind are scheduled as follows: Thousand Buddha Confession Ceremony (past, Magnificent Era) in January, Avalokiteshvara (Guan-Yin) Bodhisattva's Great Compassion Confession Ceremony in February, Medicine Buddha Confession Ceremony in March, Sakyamuni Buddha's Birthday Service in May, Thousand Buddha Confession Ceremony (present, Moral Era) in July, Earth-womb Bodhisattvas Ceremony and Great Mong-Sam ceremony in August, Thousand Buddha Confession Ceremony (future, Stars Era) in September and Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang in November.

Yearly clean up is scheduled from May 29 to June 5, 2004. Welcome all to join us as a team to clean up both outer and inner garbage. For the latest update of AZBT activities in 2004, please visit our website at:

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



A Picture of AZBT's fall

Teaching on The Ceremony of Emperor Liang

Taught by Venerable Ta Yu
Recorded by Wendy Wu

November 26, 2003

The word "Liang-Hwang" in the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang refers to an emperor of the Liang dynasty in ancient China whose name was Wu. Emperor Liang Wu studied and practiced the Buddha Dharma very diligently. He supported Buddhism and made offering to the Three Jewels very faithfully. His nickname was the Emperor of Buddha Mind. Emperor Liang Wu had a queen named Chi Shi. She was narrow-minded, evil and very jealous. Any ladies in the palace who were favored by Emperor Liang Wu were subjected to being abused by Queen Chi Shi. Queen Chi Shi died from illness afterwards.



Venerable Ta Yu's Preaching

One day when Emperor Liang Wu was strolling in his garden, suddenly there was a large boa constrictor climbing down from the edge of the roof. That boa constrictor said to Emperor Liang Wu, "Emperor, please do not be scared. I was your queen, Chi Shi. Because of all the non-virtuous deeds that I had committed in

the past, I was reborn to be a boa constrictor as my retribution. I come to you because you are very sincere in studying and practicing the Buddha Dharma and you are the only one who can save me." Emperor Liang Wu told his Zen Master, Bao Zhi Gong about this and asked what he should do. The Honored Master, Bao Zhi Gong told Emperor Liang Wu, "We should invite all the great monks in our country to edit a Confession text, ask them to hold a Confession Ceremony to recite this Confession text, and dedicate all the merits to the boa constrictor."

After those great monks had completed editing and reciting the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang, Emperor Liang Wu smelled a heavenly scent and saw a bright and majestic view while he was strolling in his garden. A very beautiful heavenly goddess appeared in front of him to thank him, "Thank you emperor. Because you had invited all the great monks to write the Confession text, to hold the Confession Ceremony, and to dedicate all the merits to me, I was absolved of all my non-virtuous deeds and reborn in the good realm." Emperor Liang's Confession Ceremony exists because of this cause and condition between the Emperor Liang Wu and his queen Chi Shi. Originally, the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang could only be held inside the palace. But later it was spread into the ordinary population, making it possible for us to hold the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang today.

A snake is laden with heavy Karma. But it was able to absolve its Karmic obscuration and leave the snake body in the rebirth in a good realm after the great monks dedicated all the merits from reciting and prostrating the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang to it. Our Karmic obstructions are much more less than those of the boa constrictor because we are still in the human forms. We have wisdom. If we know how to practice and confess our sins, the merits that we

may accumulate are even more inconceivable.

Keeping good intention or faith when attending the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang is very important. The Buddhism inspires us to have faith, to make vows and to take action. If you do not have any faith all the vows that you have made were useless. If you make the vows but do not take any actions on those vows then it was just like you have written a pile of non-cashable checks. Doing so, you will not accumulate any merits. Our shortcomings and bad habits lead to all the above situations. We have so many defilements and bad habits. We may attend the Confession Ceremonies to absolve our Karmic obstructions and our bad habits.



Attendee were listening Venerable Ta Yu's preaching

Buddha had already attained the Buddhahood. We should feel ashamed of ourselves why we still have not reached the Buddhahood and we are yet still fooling around? We are just like ants busy with carrying rice and candies every day, so busy that we do not even realize what is wrong with being like ants. We should realize that we do not want to be trapped in the force of Karma and that we should start to practice and to have a liberated mind.

November 27, 2003

There are many people who don't understand the connections between our practice and the Confession Ceremonies. Who should attend those Confession Ceremonies? We may think that we have not done any non-virtuous deeds since we were born, we

have not made others miserable, we have not damaged any temples properties or dishonored the Three Jewels, and we have led a simple life. But the Sutra said, our Karmic forces are innumerable and boundless and our wisdom is very limited. The things that we know are only limited to this life, but Sutra has described the beginning of our existence as "From the Time Without Beginning". It is from the countless eons ago and you do not know in which eons you might had created bad Karma that made you trapped in the Cyclic Existence. You cannot find the beginning. Because of our ignorance, we do not remember what have happened in our previous lives. But we should know that whatever retributions we are facing right now are the result of our previous actions and what we are doing right now is the cause of our future result. Cause and effect is not vanished.



Dinner was ready

If you do not have great merit you would not be able to attend any Confession Ceremonies. Similarly if you have heavy Karmic obstructions, you could not attend any Confession Ceremonies. Vairocana Monastery holds the Confession Ceremony of Emperor Liang every year. There were few people that would like to attend the Confession Ceremony this year, but cannot make it due to some unexpected events. Because the cost per bag for garbage collection will be increased next year, some people are not able to attend the ceremony because they want to clean up all the trashes in their house. There are some people who work very hard to earn money but they are not able to enjoy the earned money because they do not

have enough merit. The Sutra says that you must to have merit to enjoy everything that you have. Because those people have Karmic obstructions, they are not able to enjoy hard earned money. Then how do we absolve Karmic obstructions? By attending the Confession Ceremony we can absolve our Karmic obstructions.

Everything is selfless. Because of our clinging to self, we are not able to see the complete picture. It is just like a frog living in the bottom of a well that can only see a part of the sky defined by the entrance of that well and thinks that is the whole sky. We could not see the whole picture of causes and conditions because we manage and analyze things all according to our form, feeling, ideation, formation, and consciousness. We always judge the right and wrong or good and bad by our own standard and interpret cause and effect from our own angle. Our self-centered habits result in vexations and obstacles. People, who are able to come here and prostrate to the Buddhas, must have precious causes and conditions. Therefore, we should feel precious to prostrate to the Buddhas with our grateful mind.

Time passes quickly. Time is so impermanent. But we do not want to face the impermanence. We wish everything would remain permanent and we want to hold on to things. But we should understand that money does not really belong to us. Part of it belongs to the government and part of it belongs to natural disasters, hurricanes, flood and fire. If you have some unruly descendents, they could spend all of your saving in just few days. Therefore, your properties are not exactly yours. There is nothing that really belongs to you, not even your own body.

We Buddhists should try to examine our body, speech and mind to see whether we are making any mistakes and to look inwards. Some people think that we attend the Confession Ceremonies for our own blessings. That is a wrong view. The contents of

the confession text were put together based on the Sutras. They are all Buddha's teachings. All the methods described in the confession text are designed to teach us how to practice. After we have confessed our non-virtue deeds through the ceremony, we will have more courage to face our Karmic forces that produce bad results. The Karmic force itself is not that terrible. The most terrible thing is if you do not understand it and you do not want to face it. When you have the courage to face the Karmic force, you will realize that it is only so. You should face the Karmic force with your ease and clam mind in order to absolve your bad Karmas accumulated from your former lives. The purpose of practicing the Buddha Dharma is to lighten your body and mind, to face your future, and to face your path of attaining the Buddhahood. Therefore, everybody should attend Confession Ceremonies.

(To Be Continued)

The Patience in Six Perfections

Taught by Venerable Ta Yu
Recorded by Wendy Wu

July 6, 2003

In this modern twenty-first century, everyone's pace is very fast. It is best that we can deal with things in a fast and effective way. However Buddhism taught us that we should be clam, poised and patient when we deal with most things. For some matters, a little patience can lead to very good results. Similar with the practice, you cannot be hurried. If you hurry with your practice, you will make many mistakes.

It is a real strength if you can endure when people treat you badly, take advantages of you or insult you in the public. If you succeed in endurance, you could obtain merit. In many daily events, people lose control of their emotion and as a result lost a lot of

merits all because of the inadequacy of their endurance.

We know that anyone can purchase a gun in America very easily. You can buy a gun in WAL-MART just within five minute's drive as long as you have a clean police record. In every election, some prominent politicians make great argument on whether people should carry gun or not? We should think about it: Why do we need to carry gun? I believe that 99% of the people who support the need to carry gun would say they support it because they want to protect themselves. However many tragedies occur simply because it is so easy to get hold of a gun. For example, if a student who does not want to follow a teacher's guidance or has a fight with his classmates, he would bring his father's or mother's gun next day to school and shot randomly, not caring how many people get killed. This student would say that his teacher didn't treat him well, and his classmates bullied him. He had to kill these people to protect himself. What is protection? In the point of view of sentient beings, I don't want to lose something that I have, or I don't want others to take advantages of me. These are the reasons why sentient beings want to protect themselves. On the other hand, in the point of view of Bodhisattvas, the true meaning of self-protection is to protect your interests without harming others. We lack sufficient wisdom. Just take the case of this student. He no longer has a normal life after he killed so many people. He had to stay in the jail and lost his freedom because of the killing. When he gets out of the jail, he will have already lost the most precious time of his life. His life is totally different. Therefore, to practice patience is the most important thing to us.

This Saha world is where Saints and ordinary beings dwell together. The Saints are the people who have practiced for all their lives. The ordinary beings are average men and women who have not practiced enough and misbehave most of the

time. For people with such extreme differences to live together, they will sooner or later go crazy if they do not keep up the practices. This is the reason why we should practice patience and apply it in our daily lives. I believe that before each couple get marry, the man always appreciates his girlfriend's beauty and the woman always appreciates her boyfriend's good-looking. They get married because they appreciated each other. Why then do most couples only perceive other other's weaknesses but not their strengths after they get marry? If you want to practice the complete patience you should combine the compassion with wisdom. Each one of us has different attainment and wisdom in previous lives. If somebody has different opinion on many things and argues with you, it does not mean that he or she wants to reject or trouble you. It is because this person does not have sufficient wisdom to understand things to the same degree as you do. And this is why we should apply compassion to those ignorant sentient beings. If you do not have any compassion you would always look outward to ask others to satisfy your demands. When you attain the compassion of Bodhisattvas, you will give others necessary time and space to grow. After Sakyamuni attained Boddhahood, he still led his disciples to accept alms food from givers every morning even though he no longer needed any alms food from any donors to support his physical body. Buddha still dwells in the world with all the sentient beings. The reason why we can accept the doctrine taught by the Buddha is because Buddha has good relationship with sentient beings.

The Buddhaksetra chapter of the Vimalakirti Sutra says: "Patience is the Pure Land of Bodhisattvas. By practicing patience one can obtain thirty-two forms of adornment." When someone gets angry, his or her face looks so scary and ugly that nobody dare to look at him or her. When someone is not angry his or her face looks kind and peaceful. We

could tell what we had done in our past lives just by looking at the retribution that we receive in the present life. If you had practiced patience in previous lives then your future forms will be dignified and very beautiful. All sentient beings would wish to be born in your Pure Land and to become a member of your Pure Land.



Peacock Turns Poison into Colors

There was a story of Sariputra practicing patience. Sariputra was an ascetic who had practiced in many lives. For his practice of the patience of the Six Paramitas (or Six Perfections), he vowed that he would not generate any hatred or thoughts towards any sentient beings no matter what they might do to him. A Deva (Heavenly God), who had perceived the vow of Sariputra, decided to test him. The Deva transformed himself into a young man crying sadly by the side of the road. When Sariputra saw this young man, he asked him why he cried so sadly and whether there was anything that he could do to help him? The young man told him that he was crying so sadly because his mother was sick. The doctors they had visited all said that his mother's illness was very difficult to cure because his mother's eyes were unable to see. The doctor said if someone is willing to take out his or her eye as medicine to his mother, his mother's eyes would be cured. After Sariputra heard what the young man told him, he was very happy because this was a chance for him to practice the vow that he had made. Therefore he was willing to do it. Sariputra immediately took out his right eye with a knife and gave it to the young man to take home to his mother to eat. The young man

looked at that right eye, smelled it and then threw it on the ground. He said - why did you react so fast, the doctor said my mother needs a left eye not the right eye. For the sake of practicing patience, Sariputra didn't mind that he had taken out the wrong eye. So he poked out his left eye immediately with the knife and handed it to that young man. The young man grab the left eye, smelled it and then said - your left eye is too stinky, it doesn't smell good at all, I don't want it. Sariputra could not take it any more. He said to that young man - I had already poked out both of my eyes for practicing the vow that I had made but still you think my eyes are stinky. It is so difficult for me to practice patience. I don't want to practice it any more. Because of this, Sariputra lost his vow totally. That young man, transforming back to the Deva, said - it was all because of you I had came down from the Heaven to see you. I had heard you sing with too many good melodies that you wanted to practice this and that and you wanted to practice patience for the sake of all sentient beings. So I came all the way down from the Heaven to test your patience. But it turned out your practice were too good to be true. Sariputra was very ashamed of himself after he heard what the Deva said. Even though Sariputra was willing enough to poke out both of his eyes to save the sentient beings, he still did not pass the test, not to mention the ordinary beings that could not even take an insult from others sometimes. This story reminds us that we need supreme determination to practice patience. Patience is not easy to practice because you could not contemplate patience just by discussing it. Sometimes, it is very difficult for us to apply patience in our daily life even if we have contemplated it already.

One day, a young pregnant woman walked into the middle of the disciples who were listening to the teaching of the Buddha. She pointed her finger at Buddha and said: you are

an irresponsible person, you made me pregnant but still sit here preaching and pretending nothing had happened. Hearing what this woman had said, some of Buddha's disciples, who did not have good meditation, began to whisper to each other and generate some doubts in their mind - If a monk had sexual misconduct with someone else then he had broken a great precept of the Buddhism. Meanwhile, the Buddha calmly sat on the stage and did not say anything. This woman was sent by non-Buddhism cults to vilify Buddha, because Buddhism was very popular in India at that time and the followers had grown more and more. The non-Buddhism cults could not stand the fact so they sent this woman to vilify Buddha. A Dharma Protector (Heavenly God) transformed himself into a mouse. The mouse climbed up to that woman's belly where a bowl was tied to it with a rope. The bowl felt to the ground after the mouse had bitten off the rope. Everybody saw it very clearly. Some things are best dealt with by silence. "Silence is the gold", according to a Chinese proverb, is a good demonstration of practicing patience.



Heart Shape Stone at AZBT's Lake

The patience of Dharma without arising is the ultimate truth that we are talking here. Therefore, relying on the pure land of the patience of Dharma we should apply no arising to deliver sentient beings. This is the reason why the following stanza is the supreme self-nature and also the supreme practice for us in practicing patience:

“The pure land of the patience of Dharma, which no arising delivers sentient beings. The nature is unmovable with no Dharma and no arising.”

I hope that everybody will concentrate on practicing patience after going back home.

Seeking A Great Teacher

Yuan Ming

(Continued)

Pure Dharma and Right View

Simply speaking, the pure Dharma is any teachings that match the truth. What is the truth? Teravada Buddhism talks about the Four Noble Truths – Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering, and Path. By knowing Suffering is the worldly result, we subsequently remove the cause of suffering, which is the collection of defilement, desire, anger, and ignorance. By wishing to cease the defilement and entering Nirvana, we practice the Eight Right Paths.

1. Right View

Truly understand the relationship of the worldly and non-worldly causes and effects, correctly recognize the truth of the universe and existence, and carefully contemplate the nature and phenomena of all things. Right View is tied to wisdom, such as suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and selfless. The right view departs from the view of self that attaches to self-existence and the idea of one's body, mind, and possession. It also departs from the views that attach to the real existence of sentient beings; to the certainty of causes, effects, and longevity; to the capability and accomplishment as a result of high education; to the eternality of non-ceasing soul; to the nihilism of nothing after death; to the real existence of all appearances; and to the nil of nothing as the nature of

everything. Master Yin Shung summarized the right view in his books, "The Collection of Wonderful Clouds". There are two worldly right views - "There are causes and results" and "There are Karmas and consequences" - and two non-worldly right views - "There are ordinary and enlightened beings" and "The nature of interdependent origination is emptiness".

2. Right Contemplation

Contemplate the meaning of Four Noble Truths, cease bad desire, and arise correct resolution.

3. Right Speech

Do not tell lies, nonsensical words, divisive words, and nasty words. Speak sincere, peaceful and good words.

4. Right Activities

Do not kill, steal, make sexual misconduct, drink alcohol, and use drugs. Enthusiastically protect life and carry out virtuous deeds.

5. Right Career

Maintain life with Right Activities, do not engage those immoral professions with killing, stealing,

6. Right Diligence

Stop any bad deeds that have already manifested; make those non-manifested ones not arise. Make those non-manifested good deeds arise; increase any good deeds that have already manifested. Practice virtuous deeds without stop.

7. Right Thoughts

Such as Teravada's visualizations that our bodies are impure; receptions are sufferings; mind is impermanent; and there is no self in all Dharma. Mahayana's arising of Bodhi-citta (enlightened mind) that vows to deliver the innumerable sentient beings, to cut off the endless defilements, to master the limitless methods for learning the Dharma, to attain the supreme Buddhahood, and four immeasurable mind - giving happiness, eliminating suffering, rejoice and equanimity.

8. Right Meditation

Practice pure meditation that ceases defilement and enters liberation.

Other than the Eight Right Paths, Buddhism introduces Absolute and Relative Truth. Abhidharmamahavibhasa-shastra defines that all understandable phenomena based on worldly common sense or rational traditions and customs that people agree upon with is the Relative Truth and that the truth of the reality that is clearly observed by those Saints without any defilement is the Absolute Truth. The commentary of the Middle Path (Mulamadhyamakakarika) explains the absolute and relative truth by the empty nature of interdependent origination. The understanding of interdependent origination, that is, all phenomena arise or cease based on co-existing interdependent relationship, is called the Relative Truth. Interdependent origination is a temporary phenomenon. All things do not have permanent and unchangeable nature. Therefore, arising or ceasing is just a false image that has false name and function but no real substance. The arising is not real arising and ceasing is not real ceasing. The reality of no arising and no ceasing is called the nature of emptiness. Realizing the empty nature is the Absolute Truth.

The Absolute Truth and the Relative Truth, one is the empty nature of all phenomena and the other the temporary occurrence and function of all things, are in truth an indivisible method of non-duality. Even though the Relative Truth is not the ultimate, yet we may rely on it to search for the Absolute Truth. For example, language, action, ideal, and concept etc. are all Relative Truth. Yet, if we do not apply them, we are not going to be able to explain the Absolute Truth, which is beyond the Relative Truth, to sentient beings. If there is no way to realize the Absolute Truth, then there is no way to enter the Nirvana.

(To Be Continued)

Coming Events

12/17/03, Wednesday . -
1/19/04, Monday

Winter Break – No Activities

After Winter Break

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

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
(Chinese)
Ven. Ta Yu

2/8/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk
Ven. Lama Migmar

2/28/04, Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Avalokiteshvara (Guan-Yin)
Bodhisattva's Birthday
Great Compassion
Confession Ceremony
Ven. Ta Yu

3/14/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk
Ven. Ta Yu

3/27/04, Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Medicine Buddha Confession
Ceremony (Chinese)
Ven. Ta Yu

4/11/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk
Ven. Lama Migmar

4/24/04, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. -
4/25/04, Sunday, 10:00 a.m.
One-day Zen Retreat (Casual)
Ven. Ta Yu

The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta Yu

Translated by Wendy Wu
Edited by Miin-Ron Lin

Reply A Letter From A Distance

Dear Friend,

You told me that you are very tired, unsettled and therefore are especially missing me aboard in America.

This is not the first time that I have received your letter. But it is the first time that I have heard you complain. In the past, you were always full of joy and you could not wait to share your successful stories with me, such as your full and busy schedule and all the assignments from your Master that keep you going like a horse galloping nonstop through the days and nights. I could always see your high spirits from the pride that is evident in the words and sentences of your letters.

My friend, it is very dangerous to base your happiness on your achievements. Because of the impermanence of this world, your mind will be forever unsettled if you continue to try to hold on to or pursue something with this ever arising and ceasing phenomena. In the current depressed economy, how many people face the gloom of losing their job. And as a result, many people have buried themselves and lose the direction of their life. They get drunk, use drugs, and even commit crimes, totally destroying themselves. Why? Because they have the same view as yours that always looks outwards and forgets to taking care of their own mind.

Someone told me that he could not stand being alone in a place. If his family are not at home, he has to turn on the television very loud because a quiet place makes him scared. Therefore, I always praise the members of the meditation class that they have such merit, wisdom and courage to enjoy the happiness of peace and tranquility.

Because the Emperor Liang did not appreciate his teaching, Master Bodhi Dharma crossed the river on top of a straw of reed to Shao Ling Temple where he meditated facing the wall and waited for someone

who would have the right connection with him to receive his teaching. After the passing of nine summers and winters, finally Hui Ke appeared. In order to show his determination to seek the teaching of Dharma, Hui Ke cut off one of his arms without any regret. Master Bodhi Dharma was finally moved.

Master Bodhi Dharma: "What kind of Dharma are you seeking?"

Hui Ke: "My mind is unsettled. Could Master compassionately settle my mind?"

Master Bodhi Dharma: "Show me your mind and I will settle it for you!"

Hui Ke: "I cannot find my mind!"

Master Bodhi Dharma: "I have already settled your mind!"

Hui Ke achieved great enlightenment at that very moment. Afterwards, he became the second lineage holder of the Zen sect. Master Bodhi Dharma did not actually settle Hui Ke's mind. When Master Bodhi Dharma asked him to find his unsettled mind, for the very first time he visualized inwards for his mind and at that moment his mind was settled.

My dear friend whether we have a settled or unsettled mind does not depend on external gain or lose. If you are always seeking outwards, then you will never have a peaceful mind. You should learn how to visualize inwards to know yourself, to listen to your nature and to find your true mind. It is just like a mother whose child is playing outside. When it gets dark, afraid that the child might be lost and not able to find home, she hurriedly goes out to look for her son. Only you know what your child looks like and only you can guide him home safely.

Please write to me more often and let me know your situation. OK?

Wishing you well!

