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## The Complete Meal

After the winter break, the first activity in our temple this year was the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony. Because this Ceremony was held during the Chinese New Year, there were many more people attending this activity than usual. In addition to those familiar faces, a few people whom we hadn't seen for a long time had the rare opportunity to come back to join us to prostrate and practice. We did not forget to wish each other a happy New Year and more at ease in the practice, more determination in the mind and more complete in their Buddha-Path in the New Year.



*A Picture of AZBT's Winter*

Last year's winter was cold and snowy. This winter is not less than the last one. Several snowstorms in last December brought a genuine white Christmas to us. The beauty of white snow also adds a little more chilliness in our heart in this depressed economy and ceaseless wars. People in different countries and of different races, all gathered in the streets at the same hour and minute, hoping to stop the war through the protests. But, their good will could not overcome

the force of Karma. The shadow of wars makes the winter's sky even darker and the white snow falls down like wordless tears.

Wars plus natural disasters and man made catastrophes made everyone experience an uneasy year. In the beginning of this year, we dedicate all the merits accumulated by prostrating the Thousand-Buddha to all the sentient beings to be free from wars, to a peaceful world, and to the growth of the roots of good fortune. One and an half days Ceremony was concluded with everyone's sincere recitation of the Thousand-Buddha's names in the Past.

To celebrate the Chinese New Year, we organized a complete meal with vegetarian hot-pot at the end of the first day of the Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony. Because of the large number of people, we were divided into two tables. Everybody was joking that one table was for Mandarin style while the other for Cantonese style. After a day of sincere prostration to the Buddhas, does not the enjoyment of delicious foods match well the phrases in the Five Contemplation Gatha? "Take the food as medicine to keep our body from fading away. This food is taken in order to accomplish the Path."



*The complete meal of vegetarian hot-pot for Chinese New Year*

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

# Teaching on The Ceremony of Emperor Liang

Taught by Venerable Ta Yu  
Recorded by Wendy Wu

November 28, 2003

Once there was a king who went to visit the residence of Buddha and Sangha. There were five hundred monks living with the Buddha. The king was afraid to enter the residence when he arrived because he did not hear a single sound. He concerned that it could be a trap, therefore he was very afraid. From this story, we can tell that the Buddha had trained those five hundred monks very well. Buddhists should be conscientious, efficient and sincere with their thoughts, speeches and actions. For example, our hand should follow the door all the way when we close a door.

There was a saying in Buddhism: "We would rather stir the water of one thousand rivers than disturb the mind of a practitioner." Once a practitioner reaches enlightenment, he can benefit innumerable sentient beings. It would be a grave mistake if you disturb a practitioner's mind with even a slight noise of moving a plate when the practitioner is at the precise moment of reaching enlightenment. This is something that we should be very mindful of.

Offering of Bodhi Mind accumulates ultimate merit. Bodhi Mind is to cultivate the Bodhisattva Path, to be the same as the Bodhisattvas. Even if your giving has accumulated as much merits as the sands of the River Ganga, they still cannot compare to the merits that would be accumulated by offering your Bodhi Mind. When a practitioner initiates the Bodhi Mind, all the sentient beings will benefit by that practitioner. Because once a practitioner initiates the Bodhi Mind,

he or she will cultivate the Bodhisattva Path to deliver pervasive sentient beings. All the Buddhas will rejoice and all the Dharma Protectors will support because there is one more person joining in the cultivation of the Bodhisattva Path.



*A Lunch buffet during Emperor Liang's Confession Ceremony*

If you understand the way of practicing and do your daily practice sincerely, you can accomplish a lot with very little time. Can a practitioner who practices the Pure Land Method truly be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha? The Amitabha Sutra describes that if you recite the sacred name of the Amitabha in seven days with a still and one pointed mind, you will be reborn in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha. If we can keep a still and thoughtless mind just for few minutes, it is a start of our practice. You should practice faithfully because there is no short cut for practicing. You should not try to compare whose instinct is better and whose perception is better, because our worldly knowledge is only an operation of our senses and does not indicate a good practice. We practice because we want to reveal our wisdom. Just as suggested by the character of the Chinese words for wisdom, you not only "know" but also your mind as brightly and clearly as the "sun". The worldly knowledge gained through the perception of our senses will fade but your wisdom remains unaffected. If you have wisdom, it will stay with you even after you have taken your retribution and be reborn as a human being in the Cyclic Existence.

Wisdom does not change while worldly knowledge varies.

Attending a Confession Ceremony is a beginning of lighting the light in your mind. A lightened mind enables you to see more clearly. We attend the Confession Ceremony in order to sincerely absolve our bad Karmic obstructions and uncover our original nature. Our original nature is the Buddha nature and it is pure and clear.

November 29, 2003

The first step in the procedure of learning and practicing the Buddha Dharma is to understand what Buddhism is. We should go to the temples to take refuges in the Three Jewels, which are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Taking refuges in the Three Jewels is like registering in a school. We register in front of the Buddha to become a Buddhist so that we can do our practice faithfully. After taking refuges in the Three Jewels we should take precepts. Five Precepts are the most basic precepts for lay people. They are: not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to tell lies, and not to drink alcohol and not to use drugs. The lay people should keep these Five Precepts truthfully. The best is to become a vegetarian. If you cause killings for the satisfaction of your mouth and stomach, your practice will be negatively affected.

Although Buddha had entered Nirvana, his teachings still remain. We should follow Buddha's teachings to practice. Sangha, monks and nuns, are the ones to propagate Buddha's teachings. Monks and nuns are supported by lay people and live in temples to concentrate in the study and practice of the Buddha Dharma in order to propagate Buddha Dharma.

Offering to the Three Jewels does not require expensive things but must be made with a pure mind. There was a little kid who made an offering to me with a quarter, which was her pocket

money. Although it was a small amount of money, which can be easily found in everybody's purse, no body's quarter can compare with this girl's quarter because she offered this quarter to me with great happiness. She also told me, "I am too young to have lots of money right now. When I grow up, I will make a lot of money to offer to Shi Fu." Although it was only a quarter, it was the greatest offering. When we make offering to Three Jewels, we should keep the concept of no giver, no receiver and no object in order to maximize the merit. If we make offering to Three Jewels with an impure mind, the merit will be blemished.

Once there was a little girl who was playing with the mud when Buddha came to her village. This little girl was very happy to see Buddha when Buddha passed by. She held up a mud ball with her both hands to make an offering to Buddha. Buddha's attendants, thinking that since the mud ball cannot be eaten and it should not be offered to Buddha, were going to stop the little girl. But the Buddha said to his attendants: "Do not stop her. Today if you let her make this offering to me happily, she will have ultimate merit. Because in the mind of the little girl it is not a mud ball but the best thing in the world and she is offering it to the Buddha. She will accumulate the ultimate merit because of it. If you stop her from making this offering to me, she could damage Buddhism afterwards because of the unhappy experience with Buddha."

The Bodhisattvas worry about the causes while sentient beings fear the results. We the sentient beings always wait until we face the retribution then begin to think about what we have done in the past to cause the consequences in the present. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can see a seed and know how big the tree will grow, what colors of the flowers the tree will have, and what kind of fruits the tree will bear. Some people have a good seed (the cause) but don't know how

to plant it. It is just like you have a seed of learning the Buddha Dharma but are not willing to practice the Buddha Dharma diligently. If you have good roots but do not practice Buddha Dharma in accordance with various causes and conditions, it is just like a seed being planted in a wrong place. Therefore, our each step in practicing the Buddha Dharma is very important.

The "Four Unbreakable Faiths" in Buddhism are Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and Precepts. The "Four Unbreakable Faiths" will assist you in your practice. Having a temple with the Three Jewels for us to practice together is strength. You should keep your Precepts whether you are a monk, a nun, a layman or a laywoman. Precept is a regulation and a way of protecting our merit. We should understand the spirits of the Precepts. Precepts keep us not to be engaged in greed, hatred, ignorance, killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lies, and alcohol and drugs. Although time is different, the spirits of the Precepts remain the same. Precepts are very important and you must keep them. However, the Precepts are for the regulation of oneself. We should regulate ourselves strictly and be kind to others. We should not use the Precepts to find the faults of others.



*A Picture of the attendees of Emperor Liang's Confession Ceremony*

We practice and do lessons to smooth our sharp edges. As our sharp edges get rounded, we become a flexible person. Everyone will like you and want to become a friend with you. Learning the Buddha Dharma is a

most difficult thing to do in Buddhism. We frequently say that we are learning the Buddha Dharma. But we should examine ourselves honestly. Buddha became a monk, and have we become a monk or a nun yet? Buddha attained the Buddhahood, and have we attained the Buddhahood yet? Buddha became a pure person without any greed, hatred, and ignorance, and have we become a pure person without any greed, hatred, and ignorance yet? In this way, when we are aware of any rising thoughts that we are having and any actions that we are taking that may produce Karma, the words "Learning the Buddha Dharma" will remind ourselves to act like the Buddha. Constantly keeping the words "Learning the Buddha Dharma" in our mind will help our practice and assist us in the path to attain the Buddhahood.

*(Completed)*

## The Teaching on Mind Training

Taught by Venerable Lama Migmar  
Recorded by Wendy Wu

February 8, 2004

There are many ways of practices in Buddha's teaching. Not to steal is a cultivation of body and not to tell lies is a cultivation of speech. In Buddhist tradition, these cultivations of body and speech are the means to help us transform our mind and see the Truth. In India, some of the practitioners engage in very special and harsh practices, such as staying naked in the cold winter and always walking without rest. However, in these types of harsh physical practices, their mind, instead of being transformed, becomes more restive. Mind is guided by its habits and stays unbalanced. At one time, Buddha also used these harsh physical practices by not wearing

clothes, only eating little food, and meditating under a tree for six years. But he did not attain any realizations because of that. At the end, a farmer lady offered him some rice pudding and he reached some kind of realizations after that. Therefore, if you only focus on physical trainings, your practice may not work. On the other hand, traditional India people use verbal trainings by the recitation of sutras to attain some realizations. By the same token, the sole reliance on this kind of verbal training will not transform our mind and will not help us attain enlightenment.

The key of the Buddhist teaching is to transform our mind. The purpose of the physical and verbal practices is to tame our mind in the interactions with outer world. If we focus on one object, it may liberate our mind from other objects; but we still find our mind restless and we become frustrated. Therefore, the essence of the Buddhist training is not just physical and verbal practices but also the transformation of our mind. All these physical and verbal practices, different kinds of yoga and meditations, are methods to help us transform our mind. Mind is more reliable than our body and speech because only mind has the potential and the power to see the Truth.

According to Buddha's teaching, mind stream continues from the time without beginning. It follows the cycles of rebirth – our birth, life and death. When we die, our body and speech cease, but our mind continues. Our mind is profound and experienced. We need to cultivate wisdom in order to see our mind clearly.

Our mind interacts with our body when we feel and see things. The basic mind is the consciousness, the basis of our rebirth. When we meditate, we try to slow down our senses and activities. We meditate with our mind, inside which are clinging, memories, and many

negative and positive mental activities. This mind never dies. It continues forever.

There are good thoughts and bad thoughts in our mind. Therefore, a spiritual practice is to help the sentient beings retain their good thoughts and purify their bad thoughts. The essence of Buddhism practices is to transform the mind, not merely to recite sutras and keep precepts. It is to strengthen our good mental activities so that we can purify our negative thoughts in our mind. No matter what kinds of physical practices we do, they should help us strengthen our positive mental activities. Similarly, our verbal practices should also help us strengthen the positive mental activities of our mind.



*White snow, red flowers,  
and green leaves*

In Buddha's teaching, there are many methods of meditation to tame our different delusions and to cure our negative thoughts. Buddha had diagnosed that all our negative thoughts are derived from three defilements: desire, anger and ignorance. They are the main causes of all the negative thoughts. Buddha's teachings are the methods to purify the basic defilements. He gave the teaching on wisdom to purify ignorance, the practice of meditation to purify anger, and the teaching on discipline to purify the desire. Cultivating wisdom, meditating, and keeping precepts are the methods to transform our mind by purifying these three basic defilements. From three basic defilements arise all kinds of

negative thoughts in our mind, which are the sources of the agony and stress in our lives.

Meditation, accompanied with the cultivation of wisdom and some physical precepts and disciplines. Wisdom is the most important thing. It is the wisdom that has the power to transform our mind. The more wisdom we have the more we will be able to transform our mind in any situations.

We are human beings. We have desires and the habitual tendency of desires. Whenever we are attached to a desired object, for example music, there is a feeling of happiness and pleasure. But at the end, when the pleasure and happiness disappear, we feel pain and loss. If we understand that the nature of things is impermanent and changing, even while in pleasure and happiness, we are conscious of the truth of impermanence. In the same way, if we know the true nature, it will help us develop some practical ways of dealings in our lives. Knowing the truth is the wisdom. After knowing the truth, then we can study and contemplate the Dharma more deeply.

The Heart Sutra says that the truth of the eyes is emptiness. We can see things because of our eyes. But if we are color blind, can we see the colors correctly? Only under certain conditions can our eyes distinguish things correctly. Wisdom is unconditional and it is not born of conditions. It is as it is. Wisdom enables us to see things as they are and avoid sufferings. Only by seeing the truth clearly can we liberate ourselves. Only through the transformation of our mind will we attain true happiness.

The teaching of the cultivation of mind in Tibet came from many different disciplines in India. The essence of the cultivation of mind is to transform the mind. In order to transform the mind we need to start

with some meditations. Meditation is not just for realization. We have to see how our mind works, thinks, and reacts. There are so many activities in our mind. We can only see them clearly through meditation. The more things in our mind that we can see clearly, the more the possibility we can see the real mind. It is the clarity, the wisdom that sees the empty nature of the mind. The unity of the clarity and the emptiness is the true nature of the mind. We need to meditate and train ourselves to realize the true nature of the mind. The more we meditate, the more we are able to transform our mind in our daily lives. When we realize the true nature of our mind and maintain the awareness, we will not create more Karma, we will not have any defilement, and we will distance ourselves from all the troubles.

When our mind is pure, that is when we realize the empty nature of our mind, all our physical and verbal actions also become pure. Then we will not create Karma. This is the purpose of practicing Dharma. According to the theory, meditation cleanses all our defilements and illusions through the calming and taming of our mind. When all the illusions are cleansed, you will attain wisdom. With the wisdom we can cleanse the defilements and Karma. This is the purpose of the cultivation of the mind.

Buddha Dharma with language, action, idea, concept, etc., then sentient beings would not be able to learn the Absolute Truth in order to enter the Nirvana. People can spread the Path but the Path cannot propagate people. The four types of reliance on people mentioned in Buddhism refer to four types of people that sentient beings can rely on, so called four reliable mighty beings or Bodhisattvas. They include the first stage up to the fourth stage of the Arhat in the Teravada tradition and the liberated Bodhisattvas of the Three Sages and the great Bodhisattvas of the Ten Bhumi in the Mahayana tradition. These Sages and Saints are not necessarily famous and they may not have a lot of followers. Of course some of them are very famous and have many followers. But with our ordinary eyes, we often cannot recognize these Sages and Saints even if they are right in front of us.

1. Developing Bodhi mind, practicing Bodhisattva's Path, rejoicing good deeds and making offerings.
2. Having a kind heart.
3. Acting properly.
4. Temperate, cooperative and loyal.
5. Diligent, thrifty, persevering and regarding suffering as teacher.
6. Able to overcome difficulties.
7. Possessing wisdom (having complete wisdom called Buddha).
8. Having a compassionate heart, treating sentient beings as self.
9. Treating people and handling things with equanimity.
10. Embracing Mahayana, neither away from it nor attached to it.

Virtuous and knowledgeable beings are our good teachers and helpful friends. Not only we should be grateful and close to them realizing the difficulty of finding them, but also we should serve them with respect and ask them to turn the Dharma wheel (give teachings). Here, we should clearly understand that a virtuous and knowledgeable being is still a Buddhist practitioner, and not yet a Buddha. Therefore, we need to open our wisdom eyes, adhere to the spirit of relying on the Dharma not the person and follow the truth taught by the virtuous and knowledgeable beings to diligently cultivate discipline, meditation, and wisdom in order to extinguish desire, anger, and ignorance. It is very unrealistic to demand perfection of a teacher. The truth is that due to our defilements, we often mistake a Buddha as a sentient being. If we look for a great teacher with our ordinary eyes, we will end up nowhere even after we wear out the shoes made of iron. By opening up our wisdom eyes, we can find one without any effort.



*The Great Compassion Confession – holding incenses and flowers to make offerings in accordance to the Dharma*

After Buddha entered Nirvana, the spreading of pure Dharma is totally dependent on the unbroken lineages from Buddha passing on to monks/nuns and virtuous and knowledgeable beings. A virtuous and knowledgeable being must have the unbroken lineages of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings, know the right view, understand the bright Bodhi (enlightened) Path, and have one of the following virtues:

## Seeking A Great Teacher

Yuan Ming

(Continued)

### Recognize Great Teachers With Wisdom Eyes

Although we should rely on Dharma and not on individuals, however, if there is no individual to explain

### Flowers In The Mirror and Moon In The Water

When our mind is still without a thought, all things will appear fine to us without faults. The most important part in our practice is to calm our delusive mind and not to judge others' right or wrong. If we observe with our awareness, we will see our body, mind, and the world as flowers in the mirror and moon in the water. When we see other people's defilements and faults and cannot let go of them and start making judgments, what we see are in reality a reflection of our own delusive mind. The problems that we see in others are in reality our own problems. If we do not have problems, why cannot we let go of others'? What is there to judge?

Our emotions and feelings are the false concepts arising from our interactions with environments. They are as unreal as flowers in the mirror and moon in the water. But we often take our emotions and feelings as real and get carried away by them from our true nature. If we can see clearly the unreal nature of our emotions and feelings, we will not be influenced by them. When we recognize our problems, they are the places to work on. Gradually, our mind and environment will cease to interact and both subjects and objects will be forgotten until we see everyone as Buddha. Then we ourselves are not too far from Buddhahood.

The sentient beings are innumerable. How can a Buddha deliver himself, deliver others, and completely deliver all the sentient beings? Mind, Buddha, and sentient beings are actually not differ. Our mind is neither internal nor external, neither existing nor non-existing, neither coming nor going, and neither rising nor diminishing. Separate from the mind, there is no Buddha or sentient beings. To deliver others does not mean there are real sentient beings existing outside our mind to be delivered. It does not

require seeking accomplishments and developments as a career. Helping the sentient beings in our mind is helping ourselves. Transforming our delusive mind will further benefit the sentient beings in our mind. Others and I are not opposites, but closely connected in every breath. The relationship between sentient being and me is inseparable since the time without beginning. Therefore, to benefit others is to benefit myself. Purifying my own mind will purify others', all the way up to purifying the whole world. Others and me are non-dual, supporting and complementing each other until all becoming Buddhas by reaching complete enlightenment.

*(Completed)*

## Echo From An Empty Valley

Charles Chen

To study Buddhism does not mean to observe the defects in others, but to recognize our own defects and correct them. The precepts are the means to examine ourselves and not to be used to judge others. All Dharmas are Buddha Dharma. All Buddhist practices including reciting Buddha's name, prostrating to Buddha, and performing Confession Ceremony, etc. can help us reach enlightenment and achieve Buddhahood. Even though a certain practice does not work out for us, it doesn't mean it will not work out for others. Slandering any Buddhist practices is the same as slandering Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which are the causes to fall into hell. Even after Thousands of Buddhas have manifested in the world, the repentance will not be completed. Even though we do not believe in the causes and effects, they are still effective. Therefore, we have to be cautious in our speech and actions.

## Coming Events

**4/11/04, Sunday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Dharma Talk - Mind Training**  
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

**5/29/04, Saturday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Bathing Buddha Ceremony**  
Ven. Ta Yu

**5/30/04, Sunday –**  
**6/5/04, Saturday**  
**Yearly Clean Up**

**6/13/04, Sunday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Dharma Talk - Losing Job and Getting Job**  
Charles Chen

**6/26/04, Saturday**  
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
**6/27/04, Sunday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony Present, Moral Era (Chinese)**  
Ven. Ta Yu

**7/11/04, Sunday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Dharma Talk - Cutting Off the Endless Defilement**  
Ven. Ta Yu

**7/24/04, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. –**  
**7/25/04, Sunday, 10:00 a.m.**  
**One-day Pure-land Retreat Eight Precepts (Intensive)**  
Ven. Ta Yu

**7/25/04, Sunday**  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.  
**Release Lives**  
Ven. Ta Yu

# The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta Yu

Translated by Wendy Wu  
Edited by Miin-Ron Lin

## The Fog

There comes the fog.

Pocono is a most famous honeymoon spot in America. One day, everybody was joking that Pocono is the most suitable place for the "R" type people to live. For example, Pocono is a honeymoon place for Romantic people, a vacation place for Rich people, a retirement place for Retired people, and a good practice place for Religious people. Because of wonderful causes and conditions, Vairocana Monastery was established in the place, which is not only beautiful with its sceneries, but also suitable for practices.

Pocono's mountains are very beautiful. The beauty of these mountains lies in its untreated purity and in its natural creation: the awakening of spring, the clearness of summer, the colorfulness of fall, and the pure whiteness of winter. Amid the occasional clouds and fogs, the mountains look especially misty and interesting.

In the rainstorm of a spring night, the flowers in the garden took a serious beating. During a stroll in the morning, I saw that the Rhododendrons, which were blooming red just last week, were left in a state unbearable to watch. Even the always standing tall Aris was near its last breathes. Such a scene of impermanence reminded me of a poem I learned before:

Last night, the rain was sparse and the wind gusty.

I was drunk and couldn't finish the remaining wine.

I asked the maid who rolled up the blind.

She said the Haitang flowers were still the same.

Do you know? Do you know?

Rainstorm should make the green plants strong and the red flowers slim.

Did the maid answer carelessly? Or did she look without seeing? How could the Haitang flowers, severely beaten by the wind and rain last night, possibly remain the same as before? I could not remember who the author was or whether the author was a Buddhist, other than the sentiment of the poem about the impermanence in the poem and the fact that the author, while drunken and dazed, was still able to sense the changes and phenomena of cause and effects in the surroundings. It was exactly the author's clear and

aware mind that made this poem unforgettable since I read it when I was in the Middle School. We should try to examine ourselves whether in the tides of birth and death with complex causes and effects we can have the same aware mind as the author, or we also look without seeing just like the unaware person who rolled up the blind.

Strolling in the morning fog is my favorite. Neither fixed in a certain direction nor bound by time, I forget myself and all I had was a clear mind. When the fog was thick, it felt like I was in a heaven on earth. Walking and walking, I unknowingly got wet by the misty fog.

A Japanese Zen Master described that practicing Zen is like a person walking in the fog; it takes long time to taste Zen gradually. Just like a person entering in the fog; it takes long time to get wet. Some people relate that learning language is like a person entering in the fog. The longer person stays in the fog, the more he/she gets wet, and the more he/she progresses in his/her learning. On the other hand, aren't our habits also like that? The more we get wet, the heavier we are (defiled). The heavier we are defiled, the harder we can clear it up. At the end, we could harm ourselves. We may create Karma just in a second but we will pay it back for many lifetime. I remember my Master had warned us more than once:

"When you practice, the demon may enter through the door of your habits. We should maintain clear awareness twenty-four hours a day, just like a cat guarding the mouse hole, not giving the mouse any opportunity to come out and create troubles."

Many people are wondering that why we need to practice for many eons instead of achieving Buddhahood in an instant? We should try to examine our heavy habitual delusions accumulated through our many past lifetimes. If we do not practice diligently and honestly for many lifetimes, how can we clear up such heavy defilement and get enlightened some day?

After Coming back from the morning stroll in the fog and taking a short break, I put on the Monastic robe (Kasaya) and lighted up incense. The morning service began in the sound of magnificent chanting.

