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AZBT Newsletter

Pure Bathing Buddha Ceremony

American Zen Buddhist Temple-Vairocana Monastery held the Bathing Buddha Ceremony on May 29 this year. The attendees came from Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland and Massachusetts. Some of the members of the Tuesday night meditation class also attended. Inside the Buddha Hall, a large bowl of water, surrounded by colorful flowers held the crystal-like statue of Sakyamuni Buddha. The right hand of the Buddha statue pointed to the heavens and the left hand pointed to earth.

Before the Bathing Buddha Ceremony, Venerable Ta Yu gave a lecture. "The bathing Buddha Ceremony is a common celebration for Theravada (Hinayana), Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions. This ceremony is held yearly usually on or before the Buddha's birthday. Vairocana Monastery's Bathing Buddha Ceremony is behind schedule this year because I have just returned from visiting Taiwan. Most attendees here today have participated in the Bathing Buddha Ceremony more than once. Most of you already know why we celebrate the Bathing Buddha Ceremony. Therefore, I will not repeat the explanation of the meaning to this ceremony. Briefly speaking, the main point of the Bathing Buddha Ceremony is to purify ourselves and all sentient beings' bodies, speech and minds".

Venerable Ta Yu then asked Jeffrey to show us how to bathe the

Buddha. She then told us a story. "Once upon a time, there was a very kind rich man. All beggars' wishes were fulfilled if they begged in front of his house. Therefore, there were always many beggars in front of this rich man's house. But never had any beggar entered his house. One day the door was unlocked and a beggar, out of curiosity, entered the rich man's house. The beggar was astonished upon seeing this beautiful and expensive mansion. Suddenly, a man asked him; "Who are you? Why have you entered my house?" The beggar turned and saw the rich man. He felt guilty and very sorry for what he did and replied; "I am terribly sorry, I entered your house out of curiosity upon finding the door not locked. I will leave immediately. Then the rich man said; "Since you are already here, I will not let you leave without giving you something. Please tell me what is your wish and I will fulfill it." With that, the beggar replied; "I don't have any needs other than please fill my bowl".



The Shrine of Bathing Buddha

The rich man then asked his attendant to fill up the beggar's bowl with food. Strangely, no matter how much food was put into the bowl it could not be filled. At last, in order to keep his word, the rich man sold all his properties and used up all his money

but still could not full the beggar's bowl. By sunset of that same day, the rich man also became a beggar but without regret. He thought that the beggar must be a god. Otherwise, why was he unable to fill the beggar's bowl no matter how much food or money he put into it. He asked the beggar to please tell him the truth. The beggar said to him, "Because I have no money, I picked a human's skull from a cemetery and polished it to become a bowl. Since I've had this bowl it has never been filled." This story reminds us that our desires are like a bottomless pit. We can never fill it and be satisfied.



Each attendee knelt down and bathed the Buddha reverently

After giving the lecture, Venerable Ta Yu led the attendees in chanting the Praise of Bathing Buddha, The Praise of Buddha and the name of Sakyamuni Buddha. She then led the attendees in the circumambulating procession around the Buddha. For each section, we recited the Bathing Buddha text in English followed by the traditional Chinese Buddhist chanting. Upon starting the Buddhist hymn, The Bathing Buddha Gatha, each attendee came to the Bathing Buddha table, knelt down and reverently bathed the Buddha. The atmosphere was joyous and serene.

A Visit of the Students from ESU

Leona J. Maury

On Tuesday, March 30, the Venerable Ta Yu welcomed approximately 30

young women and men from East Stroudsburg University to our Temple. We were honored to have been chosen to participate in their class project for the Intra Cultural communications class.

The students listened attentively as the Venerable spoke of our Lord Buddha and the basics of Buddhism. Venerable then held a question and answer session in which the students readily took part. Afterwards each student received a book that would help to further their understanding.

The students were then introduced to meditation. I was honored to be asked by Venerable to briefly explain the practice of meditation to our visitors and to lead them in a brief practice session. The students followed instruction and sat very well. One student commented on the difficulty he had in focusing his mind. The harder he tried to let go of his thoughts the more that entered his mind.

Before saying our good-byes. The students were invited to join us in mediation every Tuesday.

In this time of uncertainty, economic unrest and violence, we look at these young men and women as our future and hope when they left our Temple they took with them a little more wisdom, compassion and tolerance for all sentient beings.

The Yearly Cleanup

Wendy Wu

May 30 to June 5 was this year's AZBT yearly cleanup. Dr. Chau-Fe Huang, Shu-Chuan, Bill and Ed from Pennsylvania; Jeffrey from New York, Jing-Ru from Maryland; Jeannie, Wendy, Mrs. Yuan and family from Massachusetts attended the yearly cleanup. Mrs. Yuan was the cook and provided everyone with

wholesome and delicious vegetarian dishes.



The students from ESU were listening attentively to Venerable's lecture

The first day of the yearly cleanup (May 30) was a sunny day. After breakfast, Venerable Ta Yu led Jeffrey, Jing-Ru, Jeannie and Wendy in cleaning the front yard. Jeffrey's responsibility was mowing the lawn. Venerable Ta Yu, Jing-Ru, Jeannie and Wendy weeded the front yard and got rid of unwanted branches. Venerable Ta Yu planned on getting rid of the bushes in front of the Retreat House and to build three flowerbeds instead.

Around 10:00 a.m., Bill arrived bringing a chain saw and other tools. He started right in cutting down the bushes. Later on, Shu-Chuan also arrived at the Vairocana Monastery and joined us. After an hour's effort, the bushes had all been removed. Then, everyone went into the main building to a lunch of gourmet vegetarian dishes prepared by Mrs. Yuan. After lunch, Bill took us shopping for bricks to use for building the outer wall of the flowerbeds. Bill had to get back to work at 3 p.m. and we continued our shopping for suitable bricks at Home Depot with Venerable Ta Yu's leadership. Our determination paid off. We found the bricks we wanted. Coming back to the temple, we had a pleasant surprise. The front yard, including the ground in front of the Retreat House had been cleaned up by Ed from the Tuesday night Meditation class.

Starting on May 31, Jeannie planned and led the remodeling of Retreat

Room #10. Venerable Ta Yu and Wendy were Jeannie's assistants. Although they were three unexperienced people remodeling the retreat room, everyone worked very hard and cooperated with one another. They added a new insulating wall against the existing outer wall, put in a new window on the insulated wall and installed a new door and doorframe for the bathroom. Also, sheetrock was placed on the inner and outer bathroom walls. Holes and seams were patched and two light switches were replaced. After four and a half days effort, the remodeling of Retreat Room #10 was almost completed. The remaining work to be completed was to fix some tiles in the bathroom, replace a small piece of vinyl flooring and paint the room.



Removing the bushes in front of the Retreat House

At noontime on Wednesday, June 2 Bill brought his friend to help tear out the small concrete walls containing iron reinforcing pipes in front of the Retreat House that surrounded the bushes that were removed. Bill's friend drove a truck with a small winch on it. With cooperative effort they were able to remove the structure in just forty-five minutes.

We were very grateful to Shu-Chuan. On Thursday, June 3, she went to New Jersey in the morning to buy fruits and vegetables for us at the temple. She also told Venerable Ta Yu that she would come to the temple on Friday to help out. That afternoon Bill brought a small truckload of soil to the temple. He unloaded it where the new flowerbeds were going to be built and flowers planted.

On Friday, June 4 the bricks from Home Depot were to be delivered. The bricks finally arrived at Vairocana Monastery around 4:30 p.m. Ven. Ta Yu, Jeannie and Wendy began building the outer walls for the flowerbeds. Shu-Chuan had told us it was to rain all day on Saturday. We hoped the rain would not be too heavy. Fortunately, the weather cooperated with us and it only drizzled on Saturday. Dr. Huang and his wife Shu-Chuan arrived at the temple at 9 a.m. to help out. With the combined effort of 5 people--Venerable Ta Yu, Dr. Chau-Fe, Shu-Chuan, Jeannie and Wendy all the borders of the flowerbeds were completed within two hours. Looking at these beautiful borders of red brick; everyone was very pleased. It also marked a beautiful ending to this year's cleanup.



The completion of building the outer walls for the flowerbeds

Meditation in Six Perfections

**Taught by Venerable Ta Yu
Recorded by Wendy Wu**

September 14, 2003

It is very important to implement the Six Perfections in our daily practice. If we do not utilize the Six Perfections as the foundation of our daily practice, then our practice will not progress. There are many people who like to meditate but if the first

five perfections--giving, keeping the precepts, endurance, diligence, meditation, and wisdom - are not implemented in our daily practice our practice will not be strengthened. Therefore, you should practice giving, keeping the precepts, endurance, diligence, and wisdom while practicing meditation in your daily life. We cannot eliminate any one of the Six Perfections in our practice as one is dependent on the other.

Meditation is one method of practice. If our mind is not affected by any phenomena or situations, then we will have a good meditation. So-called "There is no mind when facing any phenomena" is that your mind is not affected by any phenomena but is crystal clear. The most fearful thing in practicing meditation is falling into "Nothingness". If you fall into "Nothingness" your wisdom will not be revealed and you will not be able to attain the ultimate liberation.

Su Dong Po and Master Fo Yin were friends. One time Su Dong Po asked Master Fo Yin; "Master, what do I look like?" Master Fo Yin answered; "You look like a Bodhisattva". Su Dong Po was very happy to hear that. Then Master Fo Yin asked Su Dong Po the same question: "Mr. Dong Po, what do I look like?" Su Dong Po replied; "You look like a pile of cow dung". Master Fo Yin did not have any reaction after he heard what Su Dong Po said. Therefore, Su Dong Po was very happy about it because Bodhisattva is much better than a pile of cow dung and he thought he won today. Su Dong Po went home very happy and told his sister Su Xiao Mei what had happened. But his sister told him; "Brother, you shouldn't be too happy. You lost today because all phenomena are created by your mind. Master Fo Yin has a Bodhisattva's mind so he sees everybody as a Bodhisattva but your mind is just like a pile of cow dung and that is why you see everyone like a pile of cow dung".

What is meditation? Meditation is that you are not affected by the Eight Winds. What are the Eight Winds? The Eight Winds are gain, loss, defamation, compliments, praise, criticism, sorrow and joy. These are the obstacles to our practice. Gain, compliments, praise and joy are good situations but usually we do not have enough awareness when we are in these good situations. The assertion that "The Unfavorable Conditions Reinforce Our Practice" in Buddhism is that we progress while facing unfavorable conditions. If we bumped into the Eight Winds on our way to practice, we should clearly know what directions these Eight Winds are going and we should know how to use the antidote to respond. We should practice diligently to prevent being attacked by the Eight Winds.



The daffodils in the front yard of Vairocana Monastery

One day Su Dong Po was meditating at home and felt that he had a very good meditation. Immediately he wrote a poem to describe the good experience that he had and asked his servant to cross the river and to deliver his poem to Master Fo Yin. The content of the poem that Su Dong Po wrote was; "Meditating is the heavenly heaven. The majestic lights illuminate the universe. Eight Winds will not affect my mind. I am peacefully sitting on a golden lotus seat". Master Fo Yin answered Su Dong Po's poem with a letter that had only two words "Bull Shit" and asked the servant to take the letter back to Su Dong Po. Su Dong Po became

very angry after he read Master Fo Yin's letter. He immediately took the boat and crossed the river to argue with Master Fo Yin. Master Fo Yin asked his attendant to deliver a note to Su Dong Po. The note contained only one sentence: "Although the Eight Winds have no effect on your mind only one letter with "Bull Shit" has the power to make you cross the river to argue with me".

If your meditation is good then your mind will not be disturbed by any phenomena. In Sanskrit, meditation is Dhyana and Samadhi. What is Dhyana and what is Samadhi? Dhyana means tranquil contemplation without wandering thoughts arising in our mind. Samadhi is a mental state of concentration without falling asleep or unnecessary thoughts. Our wisdom will be revealed because we practice meditation. There are ten benefits acquired from practicing meditation.

1. We will be settled by following good conditions for meditation. We can practice meditation as many times as we want because we will peacefully reside in concentration.
2. We practice meditation and our mind is continuously full of loving kindness. Our compassion will be spontaneously initiated.
3. There will be no defilements. Practicing meditation makes our body, speech and mind pure. Our senses are calm. As a result greed, anger, ignorance and other defilements will not arise.
4. Practicing meditation can prevent our six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and thought) from being deluded.
5. We will be filled with joy and satisfaction because the wonderful experience of meditation is similar to eating a delicious meal.

Coming Events

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

8/15/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk - Mind Training
Ven. Lama Migmar

8/21/04, Saturday
10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Earth-womb and Great Mong Sam ceremony (Chinese)
Ven. Ta-Yu

9/12/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk – Mastering the limitless methods for Learning the Dharma
Ven. Ta Yu

9/25/04, Saturday
10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
9/26/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Thousand-Buddha Confession Ceremony Future, Star Era (Chinese)
Ven. Ta Yu

10/10/04, Sunday
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Dharma Talk - Mind Training
Ven. Lama Migmar

10/23/04, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. –
10/24/04, Sunday, 10:00 a.m.
One-day Zen Retreat (Intensive)
Ven. Ta Yu

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| <p>6. We will depart from desire. We will not be affected by emotions or phenomena after practicing meditation.</p> | <p>8. We will be liberated from demonic webs, which are our defilements and the Cyclic Existence.</p> | <p>will not only help us to mature and to be a better person but it will also let us achieve ultimate liberation.</p> |
| <p>7. We will not fall into nothingness from practicing meditation. The result of practicing meditation is to realize the true emptiness of all phenomena.</p> | <p>9. After practicing meditation, we will be unshakably set in Buddha's teaching.</p> | <p>The benefits of practicing meditation are not only limited to these ten benefits. You have to experience meditation yourself to receive the benefits from the practice. Wishing you all a good practice.</p> |
| | <p>10. We will attain ultimate liberation. Practicing meditation</p> | |

The Enlightened Garden

Ven. Ta Yu

Translated by Wendy Wu
Edited by Leona J. Maury

A Nest in the Storm

One summer afternoon, a cool breeze woke me from my afternoon nap. Opening the window, the burning sun was moving to the west. The sunlight was warm; the clouds and wind were light. It made me feel comfortable and cool.

Suddenly, a brownish gray image caught my eye. Wow! I don't know when that palm-sized nest was built in the big tree in front of my window. The big tree had abundant branches and leaves. The birds had skillfully chosen a concealed place for building the nest in it. If it wasn't for the wind blowing the leaves aside that made the nest visible, it would have been very difficult to locate. Although the nest was small it was very strong. The birds must have put a lot of earnest effort in constructing it. It appeared as if nothing were in the nest but with closer scrutiny two small eggs appeared tucked safely in the structure of the nest.

Since I discovered my new "neighbors" I always loved to say hello--"Be with Buddha"--to them when passing by the nest. They weren't scared at all. They kept still and at ease. My neighbors were a pair of gray birds. What kind of birds I had no idea. Everyday they busily flew in and out of the nest. It seemed as though they were preparing for a great event. This continued for several days. When I passed by again, newborn baby birds had hatched in the nest. The baby birds kept chirping and stretched out their tiny necks. It seemed as though they couldn't wait to see the world. The bird family was full of happiness. They

didn't seem to care when sometimes they found me, an unexpected stranger, peering at them. It almost seemed as though they weren't scared of strangers at all.

Two more days had passed and the weather began to change. Patches of black clouds started to move in and appeared to be a sure sign of a storm approaching. I found a rope and tied the tree branch holding the nest to the tree trunk to prevent it from being damaged by the strong winds and heavy rain. Silently in my heart I prayed for their safety.

The storm arrived soon after. Rain poured heavily but the winds were even stronger. The flowers and plants in the flowerbeds were all damaged but my greatest concern was for the nest in that tree. Seeing the tree branches bent by the strong wind the whole tree looked like an old woman with messy hair. I was extremely worried but didn't know what else to do.

I couldn't fall asleep during the night. The storm was still roaring outside my window. It looked as though the nest would not be saved. It is so impermanent. Suddenly, I thought of myself that my situation wasn't any better than those birds in the storm. I am just a negligible life in the great universe. I could be attacked by the storm of impermanence at any time. Eventually, I would not escape from the attraction of my Karma if I do not practice sooner. Then my situation might be worse than those birds in the storm.

