

“Building a Harmonious World Starts from Our Mind” A few suggestions to share with the first World Buddhist Forum

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I appreciate very much this opportunity to join the forum and to learn from all respectful friends. I also would like to humbly take this opportunity to share some thoughts. I sincerely welcome everyone's comments.

It is indeed a wise decision to use “Building a Harmonious World Starts from Our Mind” as the theme of the forum. Being the Buddha's students, we all know that “all dharmas arise from our mind,” and that “away from our mind, there are no dharmas.” Since “all dharmas arise from our mind,” it naturally follows that building a harmonious world must start from our mind.

As reflected in the forum announcement, Buddhist doctrine and Buddhist sutras are the richest resource for solving all kinds of issues. The Buddhist Tripitaka embraces the ultimate truth of the universe. If we can develop a profound understanding and practice the Buddha's teaching in our daily lives, all issues can be resolved. The difficult task facing us is to enable people to recognize and accept the Buddha's teaching, and to willingly follow the teaching in order to actualize it in all daily activities. This should not only be the focus of the discussions at this forum, but is also an undeniable duty of every student of the Buddha.

Although I am a beginner Buddhist, I have had the good fortune to engage in the distribution and circulation of Dharma materials for more than three years. Since late 2002, I have coordinated and donated, worldwide, over one hundred sets of the Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon, and a vast number of Dharma books and materials in Chinese, English, and many other languages to national libraries, university libraries, and research institutes. Through the donations of these items, I have also established good affinities with these organizations.

Among the organizations I contacted, the National Library of China, the United States Library of Congress, and the Jewish National and University Library, Israel, which specializes in Hebrew and Judaic research, all accepted the donations. Many northern and eastern European national libraries also applied for the Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon and Dharma materials in Chinese and English through the donation program.

I have been in the United States for more than twenty years. In addition to the distribution and circulation of Dharma materials in recent years, I have also participated in many voluntary community service programs. I follow one of the Buddha's teachings, and generously practice offering and giving. By doing so, over the years I have also established good relationships with many museums and charitable organizations in the United States as well as in other countries.

Through my participation in charitable programs, community service, and the distribution and circulation of Dharma materials, I have deeply realized that the *Four Siddhanta* (Four Kinds of Generous Giving) and the *Catuh-samgraha-vastu* (Four All-embracing Virtues) are the most effective ways of interacting with people from different areas, ethnic backgrounds, standards of living, and value systems, as well as from different religions.

Through my interactions with people, I have realized that “sincerely helping each other” is always the key to resolving all differences. The Buddha provided us very clear guiding principles in this regard in many important and fundamental sutras. The foremost important principle is from the Ten Great Vows of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, “Sincerely respect all Buddhas and the Buddhas to be.”

If everyone can truly follow the principle “Sincerely respect all Buddhas and the Buddhas to be” in all activities, truly treat others as if they were one’s parents in the past and the Buddhas to be in the future, then the sincerity within will naturally reflect without and influence others. Even if the differences cannot be completely settled at first, they would most likely be reduced, and eventually resolved.

Guided by the Buddha’s teaching, and based on the experience from my own practice and activities in Buddhism education-related work, I would like to humbly share my thoughts on the three areas of the forum discussion as laid out by the forum committee. I sincerely welcome everyone’s comments.

A. Unification of Sangha Groups

“Sangha members praising each other is the key to propagate Buddhism.” The Buddha laid out the Six Harmonies as the standard of learning and living for Sanghas. It is one of the most important of the Buddha’s teachings. We, as the Buddha’s students, are learning from the Buddha. Although we are still far from “being the teacher for all humans and heavenly-beings,” at a minimum we should endeavor to be a role model for the community. Therefore, the unification and cooperation of Sangha groups is the first step.

Below are my thoughts from a layman’s perspective.

1. Fostering and Promoting the Dharma Teaching:

Encourage all Dharma friends to actualize the principles “Sincerely respect all Buddhas and the Buddhas to be” and “Praise the Buddhas’ virtues” of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva’s Ten Great Vows. We should also help all Sangha members realize the importance of mutual respect, mutual assistance, and mutual existence.

Starting from ourselves, everyone should apply the Four Kinds of Generous Giving, the Four All-embracing Virtues, and the Six Harmonies to the interactions between individuals and between Sangha groups. Through everyone’s dedication, Buddhist groups will all be in conformity with the definition of a Sangha. In this way, they will be able to serve as role models for all other types of community organizations.

If all Buddhists can establish themselves as role models for communities, it will be easier to teach others to follow the Four Kinds of Generous Giving, the Four All-embracing Virtues, and the principles of to “Sincerely respect all Buddhas and the Buddhas to be”, and “Praise the Buddhas’ virtues.” This will directly help to promote the harmony of society.

2. Promoting the Interaction between the Dharma teaching and the Worldly Education:

Fundamentally, the Buddha's teaching is for all Dharmahatus (the sentient beings in all life planes); worldly education is the major factor for a stable society and its continuing development. The Buddha's teaching is flexible. As long as the fundamental principles are kept, his teaching can be easily adapted to local needs without losing its effectiveness.

Today, moral education and standards are declining. As a result, confrontations arise everywhere due to conflicts in interests. People do not know the law of causality; therefore, terrorism and retaliation are prevalent and everyone is living in fear. As the Buddha said: "We are in a polluted age."

I suggest that a permanent institute be formed to proactively unite Buddhist groups and to promote the education based on the awareness of cause and effect, on the orderly human relationships, and on morality. Early in this century, Patriarch Yin Guang advocated two books *Liaofan's Four Lessons* and the *Stories of Causes and Effects*. They can be used as the books for Buddhist beginners. In recent years, Master Chin Kung following Patriarch Yin Guang's teaching, has endeavored to promote the education taught in the *Standards for Being a Good Child and Student*, the *Ten Virtuous Deeds Sutra*, and many other Chinese traditional moral education books such as the *Book of Triple-Word Sentences*. All these books are core educational materials for promoting morality.

If the forum can facilitate, by combining the support from the Buddhists' societies and seeking the support of the Chinese government, the creation of a permanent institute, then I am confident that through advocating moral education and encouraging the younger generations to read these traditional moral educational books and understand basic Buddhist sutras, it will be very helpful in reversing the downward moral trend and contributing to nurturing our next generation.

I am in charge of the Amitabha Buddhist Library in Chicago. All Dharma friends of the library and I deeply recognize the importance of the three books recommended by Master Chin Kung and the importance of nurturing the next generation. Therefore, next autumn we will begin to offer Buddhist beginners' classes to children and adolescents. If the forum can successfully help form a permanent institute to promote moral education, we will do our best to help if such help is needed.

B. The Social Responsibility of the Buddha's Teaching

"The Buddha's teaching is for the world; therefore, it cannot be separated from daily activities." It is apparent we cannot avoid our daily duties. In fact, our practice, cultivation, and meritorious deeds must be accomplished through interactions with people, serving others, and repeatedly correcting and polishing our behavior.

As students of the Buddha, our most important responsibility is to continue and spread the Buddha's teaching to benefit all beings. Specifically, this includes:

- (1) Fostering and promoting interactions between the Dharma teaching and worldly education.
- (2) Promoting the moral education of society and harmony between people by utilizing the Buddha's teaching.
- (3) Continuing to help the general public recognize and accept the Buddha's teaching, and in this way gradually benefit all people around the world.

I have already discussed the first two points. I will now elaborate on the third.

I have been involved in charitable activities and voluntary community service for more than twenty years. As a long-term sponsor for several museums and worldwide charitable organizations, I have a few thoughts to share.

1. Promoting Engagement in Charitable Activities

As mentioned above, as students of the Buddha, our most important duty is to continue and spread the Buddha's teaching to benefit all beings. Contributions to community service and charitable activities are also essential. However, if we overly commit our energy and effort to this regard and fail to do our cultivation or we compromise our fundamental duty, then we are moving in the wrong direction.

There are many large charitable organizations in the world, for example, the Red Cross, the Buddhist Compassionate Relief Tzu-Chi Foundation in Taiwan, and Doctors Without Borders. These organizations are well organized and very efficient in disaster rescue and assistance, and in the providing of humane medical help as witnessed in recent years.

I suggest a single point of contact to coordinate and cooperate with these organizations. When a disaster occurs, we could contact these organizations and get involved in the rescue activities. We would still fulfill our charitable responsibilities through such participation. As long as we act appropriately, the Buddhist's compassionate image will be imprinted in people's mind. This will also help people recognize Buddhism and be willing to learn the teachings.

I also would like to suggest the following principles regarding the efficient use of resources when committing to any charitable activities.

- (1) Emergency needs take priority over poverty. In helping the poor, we should focus on providing proper education and teaching the necessary skills to enable people to support themselves.
- (2) Physical and spiritual help are of equal importance. When emergency needs are met, timely and adequate education on the skills to make and maintain a living should be provided. In the meantime, moral education should also be provided.
- (3) We should actualize compassion and equality. Buddhists should extend helping hands without discrimination to people in all regions, and of all races, cultures, and religions as soon the needs arise.

After taking care of the cultivation and daily duties, in addition to the giving of wealth, if a Buddhist could also contribute to the community by offering the Dharma teaching, and kindly removing people's fears, then we fulfill the duties of compassionate help. All in all, the emphasis of participating in charitable activities is at the realization of the Four All-Embracing Virtues and the Four Kinds of Generous Giving.

2. Buddhism and Environment: Enhance the harmony between human beings and the environment

The spirit of respecting and according with natural conditions, which is followed by Buddhists, also lies at the heart of environmentalism, which advocates the harmony between human and environment. The damage to the ecosystem has reached an alarming level that cannot be ignored any longer. Many environmentalists have endeavored to protect the environment and to foster human-environmental harmony.

Like the above, I also suggest a single point of contact to cooperate with those involved. Specifically, there are two areas to promote:

- (1) Vegetarianism. Eating vegetarian foods not only fosters the growth of our compassion and improves our health, but also helps to protect the environment. Many advocates of a vegetarian diet have collected substantial data to persuade people to stop the consumption of meat. For example, it takes twelve pounds of grain and about twenty-five hundred gallons of water to produce one pound of meat. Eating organic vegetarian food reduces pesticide use and fertilizer consumption. All these measures protect the environment and reduce killing.
- (2) Recycling. Recycling conserves natural resources, and at the same time reduces waste production and improves pollution.

C. The Peace Mission of Buddhism

Today, most confrontations and wars arise from the standoffs between regions, ethnic groups, cultures, and religions. The underlying reasons for such confrontations are due to a lack of mutual understanding. When mutual understanding is absent, misunderstanding arises, which is then aggravated into conflict, and even worse, into wars. The Buddha told us: "These are the misguided and pitiable people."

Harmony is vitally important in the Buddha's teachings. If we, as the students of the Buddha, want to promote world peace, the best approach would be to demonstrate the harmonious characteristics, to expound the Buddha's teaching with regard to harmony and peace, and to influence and promote the mutual understanding and respect among regions, ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and religions.

I have engaged in the distribution and circulation of Dharma materials for more than three years. I deeply recognize that it is difficult for people around the world to encounter, understand, and accept Buddhism. The underlying problem is the language barrier.

While donating the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon*, I realized that many national libraries could not accept the donations simply because it is not available in English. Actually,

except for the bigger organizations where there are staff members capable of reading and comprehending Chinese, there are few people outside Asia who can make use of and benefit from the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* and other materials in Chinese.

Considering how to utilize the Buddha's teaching to promote the peace mission and to help dissolve local conflicts, I propose a grass-roots level of activity to help promote harmony of the world with my deepest sincerity and expectation.

The forum could seek support from Buddhist societies world wide and from the Chinese government to establish a national institute of sutra translation to continue the sutra translation done by patriarchs in the past. People could gradually translate the sutras and other collections in the *Qianlong Great Buddhist Canon* into English. Then they could properly select a few fundamental sutras and other collections and translate them into Spanish and other widely-used languages.

Sutra translation is not an easy task. The translators must not only proficient in both languages, they must also profoundly understand the Buddha's teaching. Furthermore, they must profoundly understand the sutra being translated, and also be familiar with the customs and cultural context. Supported by all these prerequisites, the translated sutras will then be able to deliver the true spirit of the Buddha's teaching to the readers and benefit them. Also, it will be easier for the readers to accept Buddhism.

Below are the two incidents we recently ran into in our library which reflect some difficulties of sutra translation.

1. The library has copies of the Chinese/English bilingual edition book *Standards for Being a Good Child and Student*. One of our American volunteers read it and was very confused by the translated literal "When your parents are ill, taste the medicine first before giving it to them." We all know that we should never take medicine without a reason. This American friend could not understand why in China children should taste the medicine for their parents. It is not only unreasonable but could also put the child's health at risk.

I called him as soon as I learned about his confusion and explained that ancient Chinese used herb medicine that would normally be consumed in a very warm liquid. By tasting the liquid the child could make sure that the medicine was not too hot for that would hurt their parent. The literal translation is accurate, but it did not means to say the children should take the medicine for their parents. In these situations, it would be good to footnote the translation to avoid any misunderstanding.

2. Recently, we received a request from an Argentine Bhikkhuni to fund the publication of the *Ten Virtuous Deeds Sutra*, Spanish edition or bilingual Spanish/Chinese edition.

The library normally sponsors sutra publications when the need arises. However, no one at the library knows Spanish, therefore, we cannot validate Spanish translations. After some effort, we were able to locate and contact an organization which had previously translated sutras into Spanish. Unfortunately, the experts who did the work

are no longer with them. Consequently, we could not validate the translated material and the publication of the translated sutra was shelved.

From these examples, we can see how extremely difficult it is for an individual or a privately funded group to assume the sutra translation work. We also know for fact that the patriarchs and organizations in the past were all sponsored by the current imperial government. The sponsorship enabled the groups to successfully translate the sutras. Today, the forum receives the sponsorship from the Chinese government to host this conference. The maturing favorable conditions for the forum are not any less than those for the patriarchs in the past.

I suggest that the forum proactively seek the support from Buddhists' societies and from the Chinese government to create a sutra translation institute. The charter of the institute would be to nurture sutra translation experts and to translate the sutras from Chinese into English, Spanish, and other widely-used languages. In this way, the Buddha's teaching can be brought to other parts of the world. People in those areas will have the opportunity to be exposed to Buddhism, and thus be able to understand it and benefit from it. In this way, we will fulfill the Buddhists' mission to continue and to propagate the Dharma teachings. In this way, we will promote harmony and peace of the world.

The friends at the library and I have been in the United States for quite some time and have developed adequate understanding of the customs and value systems. Also, I have had the good fortune that allowed me to visit many parts of the world and interact with people from different cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. If the sutra translation institute can truly be established, we will do our best to help if such help is needed.

Once again, I want to thank the forum committee for giving me this opportunity to join the forum and to share my thoughts. As Buddhists, we carry tremendous social responsibility. This is an outstanding opportunity to repay our gratitude to the Buddha. Therefore, I take this excellent opportunity to articulate my thoughts and suggestions.

I sincerely hope the forum in-charges will consider my suggestions and take favorable actions.

Amitufo!