

Venerable Master Hsing Yun's 2012 Letter to Dharma Protectors and Friends

Dear Dharma protectors and friends, auspicious blessings!

The four seasons continue to come and go. As an eighty-six-year-old, having witnessed the Xinhai Revolution, the Centennial of the ROC, and days of destitution, being homeless, famine, and danger caused by wars, I feel especially appreciative of the blessings of stability and joy today. This year, I have written “Heavenly Blessings & Protection” out of my sincere wishes to buddhas, bodhisattvas, and heavenly guardians for world peace.

The most exciting event of 2011 was the inauguration of the Buddha Memorial Center. In April 1998, the Buddha’s relic presented by Kongadorjie Rinpoche was escorted to Taiwan from India via Thailand. It was indeed a blessing and an honor to all of humanity. It has taken thirteen years from the search for land to final construction. During this period, issues of location choice, personnel matters, construction meetings, and abiding by the government's various rules and regulations raised a number of problems. Fortunately, under the Buddha's blessing and good conditions from all directions, we have been able to overcome these challenges. Under the expectations and wishes of many, the official opening of Buddha Memorial Center has finally happened.

A series of events to celebrate the inauguration include: International Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony, Dedication Ceremony of the Fo Guang Buddha, Buddha's Relic Enshrinement Ceremony, Bodhi Marriage Vow Renewal Ceremony, Buddhist Wedding Ceremony, Recognition Ceremony for Outstanding Three Acts of Goodness Families, Centennial Ten-thousand Buddha Precept Ceremony, International Buddha's Light Young Adults Meeting, and Prayer Ceremonies. These spectacular gatherings will allow Taiwan to shine on the international stage, letting the world appreciate the spirit of altruism and selflessness achieved by a thousand temples and a million contributors who have joined in constructing a Buddha's pureland in the human world.

Some have asked, “Why build the Buddha Memorial Center?” The truth is, the Center shares the same epochal significance with that of the MRT and HSR system. The only difference is that the latter are infrastructural constructions, while the Buddha Memorial Center also bears historical, spiritual, educational, and cultural significances. In order to prepare for the inauguration, I began training lay and monastic members six months earlier. It is hoped that every visitor to the Center can establish heart-to-heart connections with the Buddha, feel physically and mentally enriched, as well as spiritually refreshed.

At the Buddha Memorial Center, there is the Vulture Peak in the south, Jetavana Grove in the north, and the Front Hall and Eight Pagodas that serve as guest centers. Inside the Main Center are three shrines, eight exhibition halls, and the Great Enlightenment Auditorium that seats two thousand people. In addition, the Fo Guang Buddha measures 108 meters and watched over all with auspicious blessings. On the Bodhi Wisdom Concourse, there are statues of patriarchs from the Eight Schools and the Eighteen Arhats, three of whom are female to signify gender equality, and that every sentient being possesses the

Buddha Nature, breaking the tradition of including only males in the names of arhats. Along the corridors are “Stories of the Buddha Teaching the Dharma,” “Chan Art and Stories,” and “Life Protection Murals,” all of which can serve as teaching materials for school excursions and educational outings. Admission to the Center is free, and all visitors will be greeted with a complementary bowl of congee that symbolizes peace and blessings.

The beauty of the Buddha Memorial Center is world renowned. For this very reason, Dr. Charles H.C. Kao of Commonwealth Publishing especially assigned one of their best writers – Pan Xuan to write the book, *Humanistic Buddhahood*, to describe the Buddha's spirit of compassion, wisdom, altruism, and equality. Through this book, readers will feel as if they are in buddhaland when they come to the Buddha Memorial Center, and that the Buddha is in their hearts.

In time of the completion of the Buddha Memorial Center, I accepted a request from the Academia Historica to complete the book - *A Century of Buddha's Affinities* with a word count of about seven hundred thousand words. This book contains stories how I made acquaintance with Buddhists as well as those of other circles. Hopefully it will contribute to the Buddhist history of this century.

Last year, newly published books included: *A Compassionate Ferry: Knowing the Existence of Guanyin Bodhisattva* by Route Culture following previous publications of *The Heart Sutra*, and *The Diamond Sutra*. In addition, Phoenix Publishing & Media Network also published *Life Between Joined Palms*, *An Enlightened Life*, and fifty other titles. I am grateful to the Chinese government for allowing the development of culture to continue, so that my books can be circulated across the mainland, for the Chinese people to be nourished by the nectar of Dharma. In addition to the above, *Sakyamuni Buddha* was published in comics in Malaysia; *Le Sūtra du Diamant Commentaire*, and *Four Insights for Fulfillment* by Buddha's Light Publishing; *Pearls of Wisdom: Prayers for Engaged Living* audio book and *Hsing Yun's Hundred Saying Series* by Gandha Samudra Culture Company; and *One Hundred Lessons on Monastery Language and Affairs* DVD set by the Television Dharma Propagation Committee. In particular, *The Rabbit's Horn: A Commentary on the Platform Sutra* and *The Diamond Sutra in Chinese Culture* have been selected as finalists in *ForeWord Reviews' 2010 Book of the Year Awards*. Furthermore, over a million copies of *Humble Table*, *Wise Fare* have been sold. It is truly encouraging to see these books so widely accepted by the public.

Thinking back to sixty years ago, I came to Taiwan all alone, and found a place to stay at Yuan Guang Temple in Chungli. While doing hard labor during the day to serve the temple, I worked on my writings at night under dim light. This was the beginning of my Dharma propagation work. Now that my books have been published in different parts of the world, I have decided to establish a public trust fund with the royalties received as a way of repaying the kindness and support people have shown me. Over the past few years, I have given out the Power Teacher Award, Hsing Yun's Award for True, Good and Beautiful Journalism and Media, Outstanding Three Acts of Goodness School Award, and Hsing Yun's

Global Chinese Literary Prize. Through recognizing those who have contributed to better education, culture and media, it is hoped that people can follow their exemplary examples of bringing truthfulness, goodness and beauty to society.

In order to ensure sustainability of the public trust fund, I volunteered to write the One-Stroke Calligraphy works for charity sale. Not only has it contributed to funding, I have also been able to broadly develop good affinity and create many good causes. For this reason, regardless of season changes or hectic traveling, I have continued to write at dawn without stopping for even a day. One sheet of rice paper after another, I write with the same mind as that of writing sutras on palm leaves with blood, out of the hope that I can spread the Buddha's compassion to the world.

Many years ago, I raised funds for Hsi Lai University (now University of the West) by writing calligraphy, and later founded Nanhua University and Fo Guang University in Taiwan, and also Nan Tien Institute in Australia with the idea of the Million Member Fundraising Campaign. Six months ago, these four universities announced their involvement in the Fo Guang International Consortium. With former Minister of Education and current Fo Guang University President, Dr. Yang Chao-hsiang, as chairperson, this is the first international university consortium that allows students to enroll in one university and receive credit from four universities. Through exchanges and shared resources, students will have wider learning opportunities in different countries and cultures while developing greater care for humanity.

At the same time, Stanley Yen, President of the Alliance Cultural Foundation has assumed the position of board chairperson of our Jiun Yi Elementary and Junior High School. In the future, the school will work towards a bilingual learning environment and twelve-year basic education program to nurture students with various skills and talents.

Speaking of young adults, the BLIA YAD Headquarters celebrated its 15th anniversary last year, and held the International Buddha's Light Young Adult Executive Conference at Nan Tien Temple in Australia. In the following month, 1,500 university students from forty countries, regions and four hundred world renowned universities gathered in August at Fo Guang Shan for the International Youth Seminar on Life and Ch'an. Having overcome the boundaries of race and religion, these students experienced life in a Ch'an monastery, became good friends, broadened their horizons, and enriched their lives with strength and hope. Together, they have vowed to do good deeds, speak good words, and think good thoughts. Buddhism needs youth, while youths also need Buddhism. It is hoped that more young adults can become a part of Buddhism with the patient guidance provided by many.

Other than the above, I also traveled across South and North China on a university tour. To begin with, I was invited by President Zhou Qifeng of Peking University, the place of the May Fourth Movement, to give a talk on "The Culture of Ch'an and Life" inside the president's office building, and received an Honorary Doctorate. Later in the year, President

Zhou also led a group to visit Fo Guang Shan and Fo Guang University. I said to Dr. Zhou, “Buddhism is a way of education, as the temple is co-owned by the two assemblies, and that Buddhism works on purifying human minds and the construction of a better society.”

In April, as a part of Xiamen University's 90th anniversary celebration, I was invited by the university's president, Zhu Chongshi and the Dean of the College of Journalism and Communication, Zhang Mingqing to give a lecture on “The Relationship Between Emptiness and Being.” In addition, I was also invited by President Xu Ningsheng of the Sun Yat-Sen University, a one hundred year old institute in Guangzhou, to give a talk on “The Wealth of Life” inside the Swasey Hall. In the same month, I was invited by Dr. Zhao Wei of Macau University to give a talk on “Buddhism and Life.” One month later, I went to the 90-year-old Nanchang University in Jiangsi to receive the title Honorary Professor from the university president Zhou Wenbing.

In September, I gave a talk at the Yangzhou Forum in Jianzhen Library on “Life Planning” based on the nine stages of my own life as a reference for the audience. On the next day, I went to Yangzhou University to give a talk on “A Discussion of Mind” to the students and teachers, where I also received a Certificate of Appointment as Honorary Dean of the Institute of Buddhist Studies by the university president Dr. Guo Rong.

Amongst the various talks, topics on life and wealth were the most popular ones. The truth is, Buddhism does not entirely deny the value of wealth. Rather, lay Buddhists are encouraged to acquire wealth through appropriate means. The practice of Buddhism is not about piety through living in poverty; instead, joy, liberation, compassion, and wisdom are the spiritual wealth that should be acquired to maintain physical and mental tranquility. Therefore, at the Refuge Taking and Five Precepts and Bodhisattva Precepts Ceremonies that I presided over in Taichung, Kaohsiung, Hong Kong, Taipei, and Hualien, I have encouraged everyone to create their own history by making resolutions and practicing the Buddha's way so as to acquire infinite and unlimited wealth in this life.

Speaking of spiritual wealth, last year's Jiangsi Ch'an and Culture Trip left a deep impression on me. Invited by the Jiangsi Religious and Cultural Exchange Association, I visited the renowned “Mazu Daoyi's place of cultivation,” You Ming Temple in Nanchang, and also the ancestral temple of the Pureland School - Dong Lin Temple. I also visited the ancestral temple of the Caodong School - Zhen Ru Ch'an Monastery on Yunju Mountain, and the ancestral temple of the Linji School – Huang Bo Ch'an Monastery, where I paid respect to Ch'an Master Huangbo Duanji's Patriarch Pagoda.

I cannot help but get emotional when I think of the examples set by Ch'an masters from the past. Ch'an originated in China, and thrived in Jiangsi. Ch'an practitioners traveled across Jiangsi and Hunan on one pair of straw shoes just to find the answer to life. The spirit of Ch'an should continue to thrive in the future, as it will contribute tremendously to those in search of inner peace and self recognition.

In late September, after visiting Yancheng City, hometown of the red crowned crane, I traveled north to Shanxi Datong to attend the celebration for the 1,600th anniversary of Yungang Caves. Having visited the world's most beautiful cave twice, and also Hua Yan Temple, Shan Hua Temple, Fa Hua Temple, and Fo Guang Temple, it will not be hard to understand why people say go to Shaanxi for underground treasures, and Shanxi for above-ground treasures.

I have traveled between the two shores many times throughout these years, yet the most memorable trip was my first visit back to my home in 1989, where I made the vow to restore my ancestral temple – Yixing Da Jue Temple. This vow finally saw the beginning of its accomplishment in 2005. Third stage construction of Da Jue Temple will begin this year, and I will do my best to contribute to its planning and construction.

Many have asked now that I have reached all five continents in Dharma propagation, what other wishes do I have left? The truth is, my sincerest hope is peace between the two shores, where people can enjoy stability, joy, freedom, safety, and happiness. Hence, in all my various activities, I keep promoting a life of “Three Acts of Goodness” and “Five Harmonies.”

Last March, I was invited by Phoenix Television Executive President Liu Chang-le to speak at the “Phoenix Television 15th Anniversary Celebration” inside The Great Hall of the People in Beijing. This also gave me the chance to meet with Wang Yi, Director of the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, Chen Yunlin, Chairman of the Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits, Ye Xiaowen, and Wang Zuoan. My gratitude goes to these talented leaders for their support and friendship that has allowed me to contribute my part to peace between the two shores. In particular, Chen Yunlin has met with me on over five occasions across China, and Wang Yi always received me whenever I visited Beijing. Their goodwill has strengthened my determination to encourage peaceful exchanges between the two shores.

In May, I attended the National Buddha's Day on the Ketagalan Boulevard for the third year in the company of Wu Po-hsiung, Honorary President of BLIA Chunghwa. Taiwan's Vice-President Siew Wan-chang said in his address, “The third consecutive National Buddha's Day held on the Ketagalan Boulevard by BLIA has shown the world that Taiwan is a country of democracy and freedom, the significance is extremely profound.” At the same time, Mr. Siew also expressed his recognition for Fo Guang Shan's Three Acts of Goodness and Five Harmonies, which have contributed to the purification of society. Furthermore, in the “China in One Hundred Years: Between Ignorance and Enlightenment” Documentary, I also expressed that ever since the Opium War, the various calamities have all been caused by confrontations of opposite sides. The only way to bring happiness to humanity is by eradicating disputes between people and showing respect and compassion to one another.

On August 23rd, the Love and Peace Prayer Ceremony, initiated by the Council for Cultural Affairs, and organized by Buddha's Light International Association was held at the Buddha Memorial Center to celebrate the Centennial of the ROC. Together with President Ma Ying-jeou, and Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi S.J., we lit up the globe and made a wish for "Love for Humanity; Peace for the World" along with religious leaders and devotees from Catholic, Christian, Muslim, and Daoist faiths. Also participating was the I-Kuan-Dao association as well as a gathering of thirty-thousand people represented by Song Kosal, young Ambassador of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and Dr. Harvey Marshall, Deputy Lord Mayor of Westminster from London.

Immediately after that, I attended the 1st International Peace Forum in Matsu with Cardinal Paul Shan and President of the Red Cross Society Chen Charng-ven, and gave a speech on "Public Welfare and Peace." I stated, "Public welfare needs to be accomplished by people, while peace requires selflessness. Through the practice of the Three Acts of Goodness, peace will be possible." I was also very grateful to Cardinal Shan for his words, "The power of the Three Acts of Goodness is much greater than that of guns and bullets."

These inter-religious exchanges have enabled me to experience the beauty of fellowship in this world. In addition, other exchanges also took place last year, for example, two hundred members of the World Association of Chinese Writers including Zhao Shuxia, Chen Ruoxi, and Shi Shuqing held their general meeting at Fo Guang Shan. I have the highest respect for literary writers. Their pens mark the eternal beauty of humanity, and leave behind timeless influence like that of the sun and moon.

Another matter that gives me pleasure to mention are my disciples: Miao Le, Miao Zhang, Chueh Yuan, Chueh Chu, Ru Hong, Miao Ching, Miao Zhao, Chueh Yu, Chueh Zhang who invited the district chiefs of Kaohsiung, Pingtung, Taipei, and Taichung, Yuan Lin, Tai Nan, Hsin Chu, Chia Yi, and Miaoli areas to visit the Buddha Memorial Center. Among the thousands was Lin Ping-chang, chairperson of the Board of Kaohsiung City District Chiefs. I interacted and spoke to each of these community leaders, hoping that they could benefit from the Dharma and bring joy and peace home with them.

At the International Triple Platform Full Ordination Ceremony, which was planned and organized by Venerables Hsin Ting, Hsin Pei, and Tzu Hui, five hundred monastics were ordained. During the same period, three thousand devotees also attended a Bodhisattva Precept Ceremony at the end of November. The five hundred preceptees went on a 22-day "Buddha Tours Taiwan: Peace and Prosperity for the People" alms procession across Taiwan. Under the support of devotees at each city stop, the monastics traveled by foot to pray to Buddha's relic for blessings for this land and all the people, and also to express their sincerest wishes for the entire world. Peace is indeed a yearning of the whole world.

Indeed, the natural disasters in 2011 such as the Northeast Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, flooding in Queensland, and Thailand's floods have caused catastrophic damages and casualties. Venerable Hui Chuan of Fo Guang Shan's Executive Council, Venerable Tzu

Jung and Venerable Chueh Pei of BLIA immediately called upon members across the world to offer aid. Local monastic and lay members delivered supplies and comforted the victims. Wherever BLIA members are, they always serve like a lamp of hope in an ocean of suffering.

These natural and man-made disasters remind us of the fact that life exists between breaths, and that we are fellow global citizens coexisting as one. Not only must we emphasize protection of the physical environment, preservation of the spiritual environment is just as important. By eradicating unwholesome tendencies of greed, anger, and ignorance, we improve and purify our individual selves, and this shall enable the restoration of Mother Nature.

As I look back on life, everything feels like the flash of a moment. Often, I feel helpless with this aging body. Sometimes I sit by myself at dawn and feel thankful that the Buddha's compassion and love is in my heart. No works of Dharma propagation that took place last year would have been possible without the accumulation of virtuous causes, thus the merits belong to every single person in this world who has ever been involved in the process. It has been a while since I last visited Japan, Europe, Australia, America, Canada or places as far away as South America and Africa in the Southern Hemisphere. I certainly wish to go to these places again to visit friends and devotees and thank everyone for their contribution to the universal shining of Buddha's light, and eternal flowing of the Dharma stream. However, for the sake of the Buddha Memorial Center, I had to suppress these feelings. Although the Center is officially inaugurated, it is just a beginning. Much care and support is still needed, and we hope our friends and devotees can continue to show your support.

In this time of the Centennial of the Republic, may there be heavenly blessings and protection, where every individual can shine in radiance and live out the infinite value of each small but precious life. Furthermore, may every heart be like Buddha's heart, and every world like Buddha's world, where there is no war but eternal peace, and no disasters but universal serenity. Best wishes to you all.

May all wishes be fulfilled.

May you be in perfect ease and auspiciousness.

Hsing Yun

New Year's Day, 2012

Founding Master's Office