



Sunyata: Losing Face, Gaining Emptiness

By Venerable Jen-chun

Thoroughly examine countless phenomena of the universe.

The Buddha realized completely that all phenomena are dependently originated.

Dependent origination can be clearly verified everywhere.

Wisdom awakens those with delusive attachment to face (false sense of dignity).

In Buddhism we talk about Sunyata. This talk of Sunyata is essentially trying to tell us to widen our eyes, sharpen our vision, and open our hearts, so that we can gain freedom.

Understanding this fundamental meaning of Sunyata, we will be able to thoroughly examine countless phenomena of the universe. These phenomena refer to heaven, the universe, the earth, and all the phenomena around them.

All the Buddhas are called the Great Enlightened Ones. They have thoroughly awakened to everything. What is it that they have realized, what have they been enlightened to? They have seen that all things, transcendent and mundane, arise through dependent origination. Defiled dependent origination gives rise to defiled worlds. Pure dependent origination will create a transcendent world.

If we observe and examine them, we will see that all phenomena, regardless of what they are, arise due to the coming together of all sorts of causes and conditions. Today, for example, we are all gathered here to have lunch. This is one kind of dependent origination based upon the coming together of various causes and conditions. Under these good causes and conditions, we have also come to listen to the Dharma. Therefore, we can say that through “conditioned” dependent origination we are entering the “unconditioned” world of dependent origination.

When we look at all the phenomena around us, it is very easy to understand that everything is due to causes and conditions. However, it takes someone with wisdom to be able to see this. An ignorant person, one who is deluded and arrogant, who has a false sense of dignity, won't be able to see the dependent origination of phenomena.

The self creates an independent substance that harms oneself.

The King of Sunyata generates compassion and incessantly expounds the nature of illusion.

What is this false sense of dignity to which I refer? And what creates it? It is created by our notion of a self. Then what is the meaning of self? It is the subtle consciousness in our mind that inserts into every thought, at every moment, the notion, “this is me,” “this is I.” Without ceasing, it investigates and attaches to everything around us the idea “this is me” and “this is also me.”

This attachment to the ego-self is created by this notion of a self, by the thought that one is real, that one has a true substance, a permanent substance. Being persistently attached to oneself as having a true substance, one will develop this sense of wanting to control. When one has access to great power, then one will come into conflict with other people and will want to get things from them – all because of this “face” – this false sense of dignity. One against another, they will come into conflict and will harm and even kill each other because of this notion of a true essence. For someone who understands Buddhism, the Chinese character for “I” or “self” is quite relevant. It is a combination of two characters that depict a hand holding a sword. This signifies that because of their attachment to an “I”, to a “self,” humans end up killing other humans.

The Buddha is known as the King of Sunyata. After he realized great enlightenment, he saw that most ordinary people are attached to a self, to an essence, and take that essence to be an ego-self. Most sentient beings still living in ignorance always think that there is an ego-self, a self-essence. After his enlightenment,

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Sunyata *(continued from page 1)*

the Buddha realized that there was no such thing. He then generated this great compassion to explain to all that life and all phenomena are all dependently arisen. There is no true substance to anything. Everything is due to the coming together of causes and conditions.

Two kinds of Emptiness interpenetrate, able to free. There are many aspects to Sunyata or Emptiness, but the most important two are: *the Sunyata of selflessness and the ultimate Sunyata*. Most people are attached to a self-essence, to a substance. Because of that attachment, when they interact with each other, problems arise. Through observation and analysis, the Buddha realized there is no true substance, no self-arisen, self-existing substance. This is *Sunyata of selflessness*.

All sorts of conditions are needed to sustain our lives. For example, because we have to eat, we need to go shopping and we need people to cook. So where is that self-existing, independent self? There is no such thing. If we were to open our minds a little and look beyond the farthest horizons, we still could not find a true substance, whether mundane or transcendent. Here we must be careful, however. Buddhism is not saying that nothing exists. Actually, everything is established due to this understanding of non-substantiality.

With brutish face and aggressive attitude, showing prominent supremacy and might. Many people do not understand the Sunyata of selflessness. Because of that they ride on emotional roller coasters. When they become emotional, sometimes their face will turn threatening, brutish, and they will become aggressive, wanting to threaten others. This is a demonstration of the supremacy and might of self. Understanding *ultimate Sunyata* – true emptiness – we will no longer allow the ego-self to get out of control.

The Buddha told us that regardless of whether it is mundane or transcendent, there is no such thing as a true substance, no truly existent phenomena. And all problems arise due to that attachment to a true substance, a true essence, to true phenomena, to the thought that I am a true body, a true essence, and because I have a true essence, I can command and control everything; everything must be under my control and everyone must be under my command and listen to me. And due to this notion of an essence, of true phenomena, human beings come in conflict with one another and the result is unbearable suffering.

Entrapped within space, one falls into darkness – old ways and appearance. As human beings, we need "space," a place to dwell. We live at home or we live in a monastery. If you think that this space that you are living in is yours and yours alone, that "I" is real, then you are wrong. And if you're living in this space and yet you do not make good use of it, then you will fall into darkness. Perhaps in your next rebirth you will be reborn in a lower realm and will have an ugly, unpleasant appearance.

Transcend the era joyfully and brilliantly, voice and face renewed. Those most successful in the practice of the Dharma are the Buddhas, the Bodhisattvas, and the Arahants. These are the Noble Ones who have transcended the world; the truth that they have realized is not confined to time. It is all-pervasive through time and space. Even though Buddha Shakyamuni entered parinirvana over 2,000 years ago, his teachings are still living and are always showing up with this brand new face and renewed voice.

Examine the nature of illusion and realize the delusion, thus the mind-gate opens.

Not being obstructed, not seeking (immediate) liberation – unlimitedly superb.

Understanding Sunyata, one will be able to face everything and examine everything and see the illusory nature of all phenomena. Understanding that everything arises due to dependent origination, the mind-gates will open up. If our mind-gate opens up, we will no longer be hindered in mind and obstructed in our vision. We will not be like those who fear the cycle of birth and death and just seek immediate liberation. Someone who is unobstructed can see those unlimited, superb states that other people cannot see.

What is meant by an unlimited, superb person? 1) *Superb person: free of evil*. This is a superb person who can see through his or her own defilements. Such a person is free from unwholesomeness. 2) *Superb Dharma: Free from attachment*. This is someone who is no longer controlled by emotions, someone who is free from attachments. 3) *Superb state: free from worry*. Those who dwell in such a superb state no longer harm themselves and will no longer be harmed by their own defilements – they will be free from worry. ☸

Six-week Introductory Course on Buddhism and Meditation Starts September 17th

We will be conducting a six-week course entitled "An Introduction to Buddhism and Meditation." It will run on six consecutive Saturday mornings, September 17th through October 22nd, from 9:30 – 11:00 am. This course is designed for people who are relatively unfamiliar with Buddhism and who wish to know more about our religion.

We will cover the Buddha's life, the history and development of Buddhism, and Buddhist doctrines. Students will have the opportunity to learn basic meditation and how to apply Buddhist ethics and practice to daily life. One class will be reserved to learn about Buddhist customs and rituals, participate in a Chinese chanting liturgy, and be guests at our vegetarian lunch.

The classes are taught by both monks and lay people. There is no fee for this course, but donations are appreciated. We recommend that you apply soon. Class size is limited and acceptance into the class is based on the order in which the applications are received. Application deadline is September 3rd. For program information and an application, e-mail contactus@bodhimonastery.net or phone 973 940 0473.

Summer 2005 Dharma Retreat

This summer, the annual Dharma Retreat sponsored by the Yin Shun Foundation was held at Bodhi Monastery from July 2nd through the 8th. The Chinese program ran the entire week, while the English program ran through July 5th during the extended Fourth of July Weekend. As is the tradition, this retreat featured Dharma talks, meditation sessions, study groups, and liturgy – a balanced blend of the intellectual, contemplative, and emotional sides of the Buddhist path. This style of retreat was unique to many retreatants in the English program and they responded enthusiastically, several asking that we hold more long-weekend retreats using this format. Residents Ven. Bodhi, Ven. Xin-xing, and Ven. Hui-yong gave talks and facilitated discussion groups. Michael Roehm was our guest teacher, and he injected dynamic interplay within the English group, stimulating investigation and spontaneity. The English

program had the greatest attendance yet in the four years it has run at the retreat, reaching close to 40 people during the weekend. The Chinese program this year featured Dharma talks and discussions led by four guest speakers from Taiwan and California and by our elder master Ven. Jen-chun. Our two resident nuns, Ven. Jian-dao and Ven. Jian-xun, also each gave a talk during the retreat. Topics ranged from fundamental teachings – such as taking refuge in the Triple Gem and the essential elements of the Mahayana practice – to special subjects in sectarian Buddhism and the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*. Our long-term Dharma benefactor, Ven. Chao-ding from California, especially focused his talks on a summary of Master Yin-shun's thought in memory of his passing. Well over 80 students participated in the Chinese program.

Bodhi Monastery Tsunami Relief Fund Review

The Monastery's Tsunami Relief Appeal for donations to aid victims of the December 2004 tsunami that affected parts of south and southeast Asia brought in a collection of over \$163,000. Of this, we have already disbursed \$125,000 to the following relief organizations or relief agents: Dharma Vijaya Vihara's Tsunami Relief Fund, the International Vihara

Foundation's Tsunami Relief Fund, the International Medical Corps, the Save the Children Fund, Sarvodaya U.S.A., CARE U.S.A., and the Tsu Chi Foundation U.S.A. The balance of \$38,000 is being held until the first anniversary of the tsunami and will then be disbursed to assist ongoing projects intended to provide long-term rehabilitation to victims.

NEWS BRIEFS

Shifu Lectures in Chinese on Saturday Mornings

Upon return from his extended lecture tour, Ven. Jen-chun began giving talks to the Chinese group on Saturday mornings at 9:50 am. He will continue to do so until his next trip to Asia in October.

Bhante Continues Dharma Talks on the "Sutta-Nipata"

Ven. Bodhi continues lecturing on selected suttas of general interest from the *Sutta-Nipata*. The Hemavata, Alavaka, and Vijaya suttas are next. These lectures are on alternate Saturday afternoons at 12:40 pm. Ven. Xin-xing lectures on the other Saturdays. A brief Q&A immediately follows the lectures.

Majjhima Nikaya Class Fall Session Begins

The new session began earlier than intended on August 9th beginning our study of the Sammaditthi Sutta (Right View, MN 9). We will continue with these classes until our break at Christmas.

Bodhi Youth Class Fall Session Begins

This class for kids ages 9 - 13 years old is taught by William Bertolotti and will be held on Saturday mornings, September 3rd and October 1st, from 9:50-11:00 am. For more information contact William at 516 314 0306 or by email, williambertolotti@yahoo.com.

Thank You to Ven. Huo-zong

Ven. Hou-zong, a student of Master Yin-shun and the founder of The Mahaprajna Society in Singapore and Taiwan, gave a series of Dharma talks in Chinese at Bodhi Monastery over the last four weekends in July, based on the *Distinctive Dharma of the Great Vehicle* chapter of Master Yin-shun's *Cheng Fo Zhi Dao*. His exquisite explication was relished by his audience with great appreciation.

Venerable Analayo to Visit Again This Fall

We look forward to another visit by Ven. Analayo, a Buddhist monk from Germany, who will stay at the monastery from September 12th - 30th.

"In the Buddha's Words" – A New Book by Bhikkhu Bodhi Just Published

In the Buddha's Words is an anthology of selected discourses from the Pali Canon, the earliest record of what the Buddha taught. It is translated, edited, and compiled by Bhikkhu Bodhi and includes a foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The publisher, Wisdom Publications, says: "This landmark collection is divided into ten thematic chapters in a systematic presentation that reveals the full scope of the Buddha's discourses, from family life and marriage to renunciation and the path of insight. *In the Buddha's Words* allows even readers unacquainted with Buddhism to grasp the significance of the Buddha's contributions to our world heritage." *In the Buddha's Words* can now be ordered on-line at wisdompub.org.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER DHARMA SCHEDULE

SATURDAYS:

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| 9:50 - 10:40 am | English: Study Group Chinese: Dharma Talk by Ven. Jen-chun or Study Group |
| 10:50 - 11:10 pm | Short Service |
| 11:15 - 12:15 pm | Lunch and cleanup |
| 12:40 - 1:40 pm | Dharma Talk by Ven. Bodhi, Ven. Xin-xing or guest lecturer |
| 1:40 - 2:00 pm | Q&A session |
| 2:30 - 4:30 pm | Pali class |

FIRST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH:

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| 9:50 - 10:30 am | English: Study Group Chinese: Dharma Talk by Ven. Jen-chun or Study Group |
| 10:40 - 11:10 pm | Long Service |

(The rest of the schedule follows as above.)

SUNDAYS:

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| 9:30 - 10:45 am | Meditation Group guided by resident monks |
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FIRST SUNDAY OF EACH MONTH:

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| 9:00 - 9:30 am | Beginners instruction in meditation |
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TUESDAYS:

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| 7:00 - 8:15 pm | Sutta Study Class with Ven. Bodhi |
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DAILY:

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| 4:30 - 5:00 pm | Chanting Liturgy |
| 5:05 - 6:00 pm | Sitting meditation |