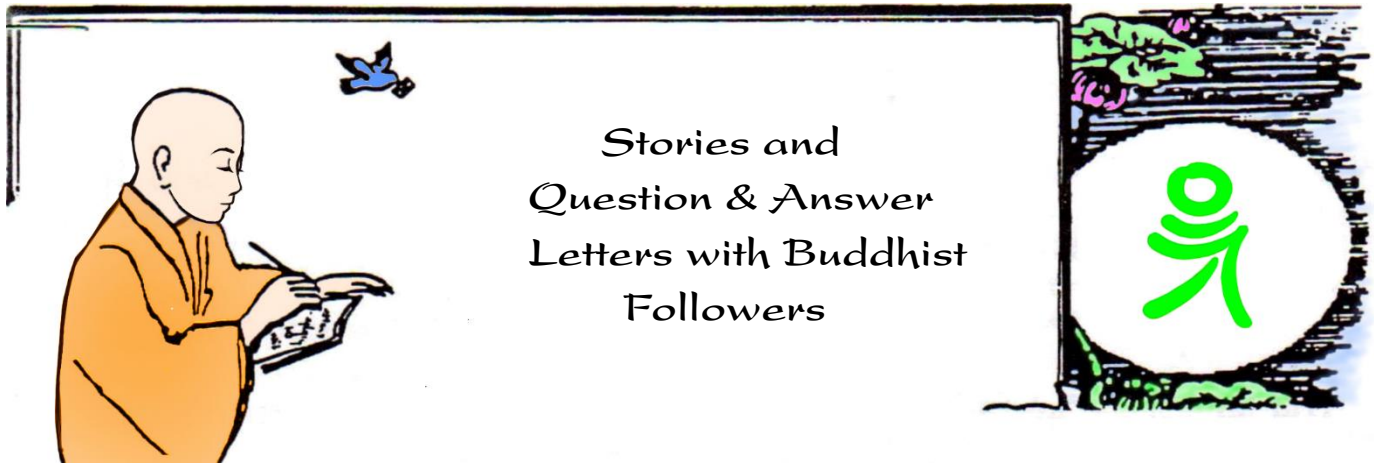




Interview from Bamboo Magazine 2008

Question :

To : Bodhisattva-Precept BAO-DANG (Velvet-Bias)

“What reasons do you have to take on the role as a foster and spiritual mother and personal representative to initiate and plan the engagement and wedding for your foster children at your Temple?

Answer:

Discussing this matter in full would be extremely lengthy, so I will only provide the following brief and generalized answer:

Foremost, this endeavor is not a business transaction, but a task filled with love and spiritual conduct for these young people.

However, if I am to provide the reasons, then there are many, but I will only mention a few general ones:

The majority of the **Foster Children** (*God (Buddha Children)*) that I have represented and planned for the events surrounding their engagements and weddings were children who left home (*Vietnam*) by themselves, without being accompanied by their mother and/or father, and eventually settled in the United States. Some of them have not lived with their parents since childhood, and some of them have been orphans, or not had a Mother or Father since the age of two or three

The reason for taking on these foster children (*whether boys or girls*) started when I established the Dharma Flower Buddhist Temple in Tucson, Arizona in 1985. At that time, the children's ages ranged from two to early teens. The wholesome karmic roots in Buddhism that these children planted in their past (*lives*) influenced them to find their way to the Temple to learn and to cultivate the Buddha-Dharma. I love them and genuinely guide and teach them from both standpoints of Life and Religion. Some of them have been with me to cultivate from childhood to the time they have grown into adulthood, graduated from College, found work, and became productive members of society.

During that long period, I and the children coexisted in a simple manner under the

shadow of the Buddha as we shared our sadness, happiness, failures, and successes. I sincerely guided them in Sutra reading and Dharma chanting in Buddhism, teaching them the way to live in a Temple, in Buddhism, as well as the way to live in society (*in ways that others will love and help them in time of need*).

For this period of almost twenty years, I have been extremely busy because my Seminal Master, Dharma Master Thich Hai-Quang has retreated indefinitely to a small isolated area in the Midwestern part of the United States. Four times a year, the Master would return to the Temple to perform Buddhist prayer services and open cultivated sessions (*retreats*).

The remainder of the time, I have to oversee all Buddhist Tasks directly whether internally or externally as well as prepare for various Dharma practices such as Prayer ceremonies, funerals, memorials, House-Warming prayer services, guiding and encouraging Buddhists to practice, elucidate the philosophy of Buddhism, answer letters, take telephone calls, duplicate tapes and CDs of Dharma Talks, print Sutras and send the Dharma to Buddhists everywhere domestically and internationally.

At night, I also have to type Sutras and Commentaries written by my seminal Master Thich Hai-Quang (*he handwrites everything and faxes them for me to type*). We published two books annually (*this will continue as long as Master is still in this world. All these books have been translated into English to help English speaking people as well as young Vietnamese and American people of the future*).

When we first build this Dharma Flower Buddhist Temple, it was quite small, and we were rather poor. Moreover, we had so few Buddhists followers that we almost received no help from anyone. Adults who were competent and had a good mind and genuine intent were exceedingly rare. The young children were not familiar with Buddhism and, thus, could not accept any responsibilities.

In 1993, with the opportunity of visiting my Father in Vietnam after twenty years of separation, I was able to order the sculpturing of Buddha statues for the Temple as well as printing the Great Jeweled Collection Sutras set for free distribution (*9 volumes, each volume over 700 pages*). Several months later, the Nine Buddha Statues arrived in the United States. I was so happy that the Buddha statues had arrived safely in California. However, I was crying my eyes out because the customs authority would not release the statues from the warehouse since Vietnam and the United States did not have an open trade policy at that time. Therefore, people living the US were not allowed to receive any gift from Vietnam that exceed two pounds. The authority informed me of the following:

"The nine Buddha statues have been confiscated and have been transported to the government distributing office."

At that time, I did not know what to do because I did not know anyone in California or had I ever been to that state. I searched for the address from several Temples in California asking those Masters to help, but all of them said they could not help me.

I contacted so many places for help, but my effort was futile, so I cried uncontrollably.

Suddenly, a small ray of light emitted in my head, and I quickly got in my car and drove to the Temple. I was crying but also reciting the Avalokitesvara Maha-Bodhisattva's (*Kuan Yin* or *Quan The Am*) name begging and pleading Her Holiness to help and rescue me from this pain and suffering. When I arrived at the Temple, I lit incense, rang the bells loudly, cried, and prayed the following report with the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and the Dharma Guardians.

"The nine Buddha statues that I ordered for the Temple have been confiscated and placed in 'confinement'. I do not know what to do. Master is far away in retreat. For the past ten years, I have sincerely devoted myself to carrying out the Buddha's Works properly; I'm begging the Buddhas for love and compassion to aid me to encounter a 'Good Person' to help me bring the nine Buddha statues to the Temple. Please guide me to the right person at the right place and time."

After praying, I sat down to focus my mind to recite mantras and pray for three hours, which seemed to pass without me having awareness of the time. Thereafter, I felt much lighter. I then prostrated to the Buddha and got into my car to go shopping for fruit and flowers to make offering to the Buddha. When I arrived at the market and had only taken a few steps from my car, I heard someone calling my name. When I turned around I saw an American Friend who was a lawyer. He was calling my name, walking and waving at me and then looked right at me and asked:

"Is everything okay?"

Why are your eyes so swollen?"

I was unable to say anything except to start crying profusely and then subsequently told him what was happening. He stood there and thought for a moment. Then he was smiling as he said:

"Don't cry anymore, don't worry, I will do my best to help you. The next day, at eight o'clock sharp, call Phoenix to the office of Mr. Jim Kolbe. Someone will be there to answer your call. Meanwhile I will also contact the custom authorities in Washington DC to see what is happening. Hopefully, we will not encounter many problems."

While waiting for 8 AM the next day, I recited Buddha and Mantra throughout the night without sleeping. At eight o'clock sharp, I called Phoenix and received an answer from the person who was awaiting my call. I then told him all that had transpired. Throughout that morning I was on the phone in a three-way conference call to Phoenix and Washington DC. While talking, I prepared paper documents that they instructed me to type and fax to California and DC. As I waited for a response, I heard the person from DC said:

"Okay, everything is complete. Right now all we need is to pay the fine in order to post 'bail' for the Nine Buddha statues."

I was overcome with joy and started crying as I thanked them wholeheartedly. I then called California to arrange payments for the fines from the Port Custom. Another concern I had was how I was going to transport the nine Buddha statues to Tucson. I called many transporting companies, but no one was willing to do it. Once again, I rang the bell praying the Dharma Guardian Angels to help influence someone to accept the transportation of the

Buddha statues. The Buddha influenced me accidentally to dial the wrong phone number to the office of a Chinese woman. She asked me why I called before I realized I had dialed the wrong number. Nevertheless, I asked for her assistance because I lived far away and was afraid to drive to California. Moreover, I would not know where to go.

This woman was extremely kind and patient. After hearing my story, she happily helped me arranged everything including paying the tax money and finding a company to transport the Buddha statues from Confinement to the Warehouse in California to await the vehicle necessary to deliver the statues to Tucson.

Two days later, she was able to locate a company willing to travel to Tucson. A week later, the nine Buddha statues arrived and lay crowdedly in the front and back yards of the Temple, blocking all the walkways. I was filled with both joy and sadness as I prostrated each Buddha statue to demonstrate my gratitude for not abandoning me and had approved of my sincerity that I was able to establish the unfathomable connection with the Buddhas. The entire sequence of events that made this possible was truly miraculous.

Therefore, the Sutra taught:

*"Genuine Prayer will be answered,
Answer will not be given without prayer."*

The joy has not subsided but the worries began accumulating because the nine Buddha statues were too large, the Temple's roof is too low, and the entrances are too narrow; therefore, I had little choice but to renovate the Temple.

Once again, I had to come up with a design and direct the Temple's renovation project. At that time, the young people (*foster children*) were all in high school or college and no one had any extra money. All of them lived (*some part time and some full time*) at the temple, and I helped them with food, clothing, and cultivation as well as sharing whatever we had whether rich or poor, in good and bad times.

At that time, the Temple was very poor, and no one was making offering to help renovate the Temple or to help clean up, cook, etc. These young people were all that we had for help. The older children would do the heavy tasks and the younger children would do lighter tasks. Since we did not have money to hire professional help, these children from age 6 to 20 all pitched in to help, working day and night, sometimes staying up all night to work because no one had any experience in building a Temple, including myself. Thus, we just kept going back and forth to fix things until we determined it was satisfactory.

One of the most touching moments was when I had no money to purchase nails, bricks, a door for the Temple's Prayer Hall, etc. One of the children applied for a Credit Card, and another used his extra book money (*but only photocopied texts from the library to study*) to purchase the necessary materials to rebuild the temple. We also did not have a truck, but the young people used their four cylinder compact cars to transport bricks, woods, cements, etc. to the point that the brick sellers were amazed and applauded their efforts.

Each time we ran out of money, I would pray to the Buddha to give us more because without it we would have to stop working. While we were laying tiles for the roof, black clouds gathered in preparation for rain. I again would pray to Buddha for protection, and, miraculously, although the black clouds covered the sky and rain was pouring throughout the immediate surrounding areas of the temple, not a drop fell on the Temple's roof.

For several hours as the roof was being laid, I and the children were working and reciting Buddha continuously, pleading the Lord Buddha to hold off the rain so the workers could complete the Temple's roof. I went inside to cook and suddenly heard the children yelling and screaming, so I ran outside and oh my goodness! What was supposed to be rain had turned into white snowflakes, lightly descending from the sky. The tile roofers were astonished as they put their palms together to pray to the Heaven. They said Buddha is truly miraculous. One of the Hispanic workers said:

"This is prayer answer from Heaven and Buddha for the sincere mind of Bao Dang and the young people here."

That day, we were able to complete the roof. Everyone felt happy and despite working extremely hard, no one felt tired. Then at eight o'clock that night, rain start pouring down and continued throughout the night. When I saw the children sleeping soundly (*because they had put in a long day of work*) on the floor, I made sure all of them were covered with a blanket so they would not catch cold. Thereafter, I sat in front of the Buddha, and put my palms together to chant mantra. I was unaware that tears had fallen from my eyes as I focused on looking at the Buddha's statue. I love Buddha and I have been known to engage in Buddha Recitation from the time I was six years old when my mother passed away. Thereafter, I lived with a Buddhist Nun (*paternal grandmother*) in a small shrine and learned to practice vegetarianism, dharma cultivation, and engaged in other wholesome deeds.

From childhood until now, I always have been of one heart and mind in my sincerity; therefore, I have never prayed for anything that has not been answered.

I also remember when we tore down the Temple's walls and found that they were eaten by termites, we had to replace them with brick walls, yet we could not find any bricklayers who were willing to take the project immediately, saying we had to wait three to four weeks before their schedule would allow it. Moreover, the Temple did not have enough money to hire a "contractor," so of course you all know what I did next.

Once again, I had to "*plead for the Buddha's help.*" At that time, a "Vietnamese" contractor (*long time acquaintance*) was passing by to see how things were going. I immediately asked for his assistance, but this person said he already had promised to fix another person's home. I pleaded with him for an hour but was unsuccessful. However, patience is my specialty, so I continued to beg him but to no avail. It was now late in the evening, and this person had taken a few steps after bidding farewell when suddenly a brown truck stopped in front of the Temple's gate. A large Hispanic male stepped out of the truck and asked:

"Is it true that you need someone to build your wall? I was ecstatic and asked how he knew I needed him. He replied:

I was driving to work and when I turned on the radio to listen to music, but there was no music. Instead, I heard a broadcast that this Temple needs someone to help build walls and provided the address. Therefore, I drove here. Tomorrow at six AM, I will be here to build and will need helpers to mix the cement and transfer bricks.

I then asked him what he was going to charge me for his service so that I could make sure I had enough to pay him. He shook his head and laughing said:

"No worries. Whatever you want to pay me is fine. I'm not asking for anything; as long as I'm well fed, everything will be okay."

I was so happy. I could not express the words of gratitude that could possibly justify what had just happened. The next day, the children stayed home from school, and at six o'clock everyone was present from the age of ten to twenty years old. I oversaw the mixing of the cement, organized the bricks beforehand, and prepared lunch for him and the children. I also made trips to purchase more bricks or cement whenever we were running low on supply. Because we did not have a lot of money, we only bought whatever was needed. If we had two extra bricks, I would return them in exchange for nails, etc.

After building these walls, that bricklayer disappeared. It has been more than a dozen years that we have looked for him to show our gratitude, but to this day we do not know where to look for him (*perhaps he was sent to the Temple by the Buddha to help us*). On another occasion, I did not have a dime, but I had to pay the Contractor at week's end, so I was overcome with worries and then continued praying Buddha to grant me enough money to pay for the contractor's services.

That night while sleeping I saw myself swimming across a large ocean. The water was crystal clear blue and there was an island. On it were many large trees as well as innumerable Pagoda shrines that were tall and large. The red tile roofs were curved, the breeze was refreshing, and there was an aura of pure energy. I saw a large white lotus throne situated in the middle of the island, but there was no one there. I saw myself climbing onto the island and with both hands holding the lotus throne and crying profusely while calling out the Avalokitesvara Maha-Bodhisattva's name and praying to Her Holiness not to abandon me.

While I was crying and pleading my hand touched a thin, soft velvety shirt sleeve. Looking up, I saw the Bodhisattva wearing a white gown while being extremely tall and imposing. The Bodhisattva's compassionate eyes looking at me (*it is absolutely impossible to describe the great love and compassion of the Maha-Bodhisattva's eyes*), smiling and saying softly (*Oh my goodness! The sound of the Bodhisattva's voice is so soft, soothing, and clear. I had never heard any sound like that in my whole life. It is impossible to describe, and there is not a sound in this world that is comparable. Should I ever hear it again in the future, I will recognize it immediately*):

"I left to attend the Buddhas expounding the Dharma in the other worlds and have traveled from one world to the next to help rescue Sentient Beings that need my assistance. I come and go, and it is not that I have abandoned you that you have to cry so much."

I was overjoyed and quickly embraced the Bodhisattva's leg similar to being fearful Her Holiness would disappear.

I immediately reported all the Buddha's works that I was doing, such as not having enough money to print the Great Jeweled-Collection Sutra, to renovate the Temple, etc. The Bodhisattva looked at me with the kindest smile and admonished me:

"A poor home, but you are in too much of a hurry to do things, but okay, I will give you money to print the Sutra and complete the Temple's renovations."

Hearing the Bodhisattva's words, I was ecstatic. My body fell toward the water, and my right arm hit the head of the bed. I awoke suddenly while remembering everything clearly, particularly the Bodhisattva's enchanting voice still resonating in my ears.

The next morning, when I went to the Temple to assist the contractor, I received a telephone call from New York. The young lady on the phone was the older sister of Buddhist Minh-Dat (*who lived at the Temple for a period of time*) to tell me the following:

"My story may be a bit long, but the shorter version is that I won a case in court and have received a large sum of money. I had prayed that if I won this money, I would donate a third of the winning to the Triple Jewels. However, even now I have not decided which Temple I am going to make this offering because there are so many Temples. I was still undecided when I had a dream last night. I saw an older lady coming to me and saying:

"The money that you received and promised to make offering to the Triple Jewels should now be divided into two halves. One half should be sent to Bao-Dang and the other half to Vietnam to a temple in the village, directly to the name of such and such Master. You are not to send it anywhere else."

I suddenly woke up and immediately called you.

Thanks to this large sum of money, we were able to finance the renovation of the Dharma Flower Temple without borrowing from the bank or from any other Buddhist from the local Tucson area.

When the Temple was completed, I had to decorate the Prayer Hall as well as stay up all night making plans. Subsequently, all of us slowly opened the wooden cartons to take out the Nine Buddha statues.

Oh my goodness! Some had broken arms, some had broken legs, broken lotus petals, some had cracks, but the statue that had the most damage was the Thousand-Hands-Thousand-Eyes Ten-Faces as many of the arms were broken. I picked up the arms and fingers while crying profusely. The Master, me, and the young disciples together tried to restore the Bodhisattva's image. After we had finished, there was still a basket full of fingers and arms, so everyone started laughing heartily. Our seminal Master said:

"Perhaps the Buddha influenced having these extra arms to help Bao-Dang to have more 'Buddha's Arms' in order to complete the Buddha's works more quickly."

Everyone laughed and nodded their heads in agreement.

This is the first primary reason.

I have only related a few general events here; otherwise, if I give detailed accounts of

each period starting before the Temple was built until the present, no amount of writing could complete this. A number of Buddhists have requested that I write the Buddha's Works Memoir to recount the time that I have done and am doing the Buddha's works. However, it has been more than ten years, and I have not found the time to put all of this down on paper.

Some people are perplexed as to why I am so obsessed with doing the Buddha's works, willing to sacrifice myself to serve the Triple Jewels but do not sacrifice myself to serve or devote myself to the family and relatives. The reason is as stated above.

This relationship between teacher and student is difficult to have and difficult to find and develop in a short period. The relationship between "Spiritual Mother and Children" through many years of enduring hardships together is difficult to fade away. Each time I needed them, they have always been there, and later on whenever they needed me, I was by their side to help them accomplish whatever was necessary. Regardless how difficult, I always gladly accepted and sacrifice myself to help them without declining their requests.

During this period, aside from the Buddha's works, I also taught cooking classes to the Day Caretakers working for the state of Arizona. I also worked on a variety of jobs such as an Interior Designer for the home, tattooing eyebrows, eyelids, lips, etc. make floral arrangements for various National Holidays, hair designer, make-up artist for Brides, wedding gown alterations, wedding planner, and directed camera and video recordings (*Bao Dang Production*).

At the same time, I also participated in providing guidance and psychological counseling to orphan children because of divorced parents or parents who work all days and nights so that they do not have time to teach their children. Consequently, these children were abnormal (*delinquent*) in comparison to children their age. Some of them would quit school, become runaways, use drugs, etc. The Parents of those difficult-to-teach children would ask me to help teach their children (*this not only applied to teenagers but also to young children as well*). Some of them range from ages 4 to 12, but their parents already had given up on teaching them.

The unique part of this is when they came to me they were willing to follow my teaching, willing to return to school, no longer using profane language. They suddenly became kinder and know to love and appreciate their mother and father. The funny part is that some of the girls would refuse to eat no matter how much their parents pled with them. Consequently, they were frightfully thin. However, after coming to my daycare, I would teach them and tell them funny stories, and they were willing to eat, but only in my presence! They enjoyed coming to my daycare and were fond of eating the food I cooked. A few parents asked me, "*How do you make the children behave so well?*"

My goodness! I didn't do anything. My daycare has a large prayer room that I use to cultivate nightly and to type various Sutras and Commentaries. My shrine has four levels (*length is 2 meters, depth is 1.5 meters, a level on the ground, the second level is half a meter high, the*

third is one meter, and the fourth level is 1.5 meters). On each level, I have many beautiful Buddha statues with several large statues including the size of one and a half, one, and half meters tall. On the surrounding walls are many adorning images of different Buddhas. I also play tapes of Buddha and Mantra recitations (*of Dharma Master Thich Hai-Quang*) resonating throughout the day and night. The children were fond of going into my prayer room to observe the Beautiful Buddhas and would mimic the sounds of Buddha and Manta Recitations. Seeing this, I immediately taught them to practice Buddha and Mantra recitations so they would be Beautiful like the Buddha statues. After practicing Buddha and Mantra recitations, they became gentler and kinder on their own.

This is why it is said, the *Buddha-Dharma is extremely deep and profound*. Anyone who has Faith and is willing to single-mindedly and devoutly cultivate will establish the *extraordinary connection with the Buddhas* instantaneously. Through many years of experience, I am certain although young children are stubborn, difficult to teach, and some of them are burdened with bad karmas that their father, mother abandon, abuse, and neglect them, they still have the pure Innocent-Children Minds (*they are still naïve and have not become corrupted by the worldly minds of the adults*). Therefore, each time they engage in Buddha or Mantra Recitation, they are able to reach the state of *Single-Mindedness* much more quickly. Consequently, they are able to quickly and easily penetrate the Buddha's compassion, forgiveness, no greed, no hate, and no ignorance nature. Thus, they are able to abolish their Karmic Obstructions of the present. For adults, with worldly attachments getting stronger with each passing day, it is difficult for them to see results quickly from cultivation similar to young children.

With many years of experience, I also realized the following clearly:

Following the (*old-fashioned*) Asian Traditions and particularly from the Vietnamese people, the vast majority of Parents prefer not to be their children's friends. They only use their **authorities as parents** to force and coerce their children to follow their orders without questions. This is true despite the fact the children know, see, and hear their parents say and do wrong or have a wicked mind teaching the children falsely. However, those parents use their positions as Father or Mother to force their children to be **obedient**. If the children question or disobey, then they are scolded as ungrateful and ill-mannered children. Because of this dictatorship mentality, it is difficult for the children to honor and respect their parents. Moreover, it is difficult to be close to their father and mother to share their joys and sorrows and this is not to mention children who encounter immoral parents who have selfish and envious minds, teaching children principles that are contradictory to the Law of Karma (*causality*). Consequently, with each passing day, the relationship between child and parent becomes more and more distant.

Currently, I am retired and am focusing on my cultivated path and engaging in Buddha's works to demonstrate gratitude to the Buddha, Master, and Patriarchs as well as guiding Buddhists who have **connections** with me. Otherwise, I do not dare to go beyond my duties and responsibilities.

I will now return to the matter of fostering and planning weddings for the children. Although the children are now grown, part of their maturation process is influenced by the modern education of the West. They grew up far away from their homeland as well as living separate from their parents at a young age; therefore, naturally, they are not familiar with the customs and traditions of the Asian engagement and wedding ceremony. They must depend on an older person with experience as well as someone competent in both Life and Religion to help them get **engaged and married** in a complete manner (*as consistent with their cultural heritage*).

Because of the **deep love** worthy of remembering, the relationship between teacher and disciple, spiritual mother and children that endured the last twenty years, the children love and respect me. In their own quite way, they looked upon me as a Kind Mother and respect and honor the Master as a Spiritual Father of the cultivated path (*otherwise this is not coerced or requiring any term or condition*). The brothers and sisters in our Dharma Family love and adore one another, sincerely help and guide one another. Moreover, they are very spiritual and have a truly Genuine Nature. They cultivate diligently, and for more than twenty years, they have rarely missed weekly services and have not neglected to engage in their daily practices. In addition, at the present, they have all become adults with fame and high positions in society. Their Talent and Virtues are equal, and they are highly educated and well-versed in the Philosophy of Buddhism, worthy of being role models for people their age at the present and future.

Because of work, some of them have moved far away. However, rather than traveling or visiting their friends, without hesitation they save their vacation days to return to the Temple to visit the Master and myself in order to cultivate as they did when they were children. During these occasions, they learn more about the Buddha-Dharma and all the brothers and sisters happily gather under the Buddha's roof. While gathering to cultivate at the Dharma Flower Temple, an inherently warm family from childhood, they share their happy and sad experiences in Life and Religion.

When they were ready to have a family, they met their **soul mates** who practice the same Dharma Door and have the same Master under the same Temple from the past. Before the dharma brothers and sisters, they verbally and in writing expressed to the Master and myself their feelings and asked for all the help possible to complete their marital unions. How could I or the Master decline their requests? Therefore, we gladly accepted and wholeheartedly concern ourselves with this matter while teaching them beforehand what needs to be done to fulfill the Vietnamese tradition of engagement and marriage as well as the proper marriage ceremony in Buddhism.

I have always used the advice of "Ancient Sages" to remind the children during their wedding that:

If husband and wife are tolerant of one another, then they will live together for the rest of their lives. Oppositely, if they are not tolerant of each other, then their children will become

orphans.

Through this intention, in the position as a Teacher and a Spiritual Mother (*the children's American friends often referred to me as a God Mother" or Mother Goose because I always care for them like a mother protecting her children*), during their wedding ceremonies (*that I often become the wedding planner as well as the adult representative*), I would give the bride a pair of Gold Earrings as well as the young couple a special ring¹ (*in addition to their own wedding rings*), which is:

Tolerating what's difficult to tolerate is a great ability.
 Tolerating the Obstructive Conditions is truly talented.
 Tolerating the Immovable Mind gives rise to true bliss.
 Tolerating and then Forget will avoid all sadness.
 Tolerating all Ten-Thousand Tolerance is like gold.
 Tolerating the mind-body will lead to achieving the jeweled throne².
 Tolerating life is full of sadness and suffering,
 Tolerating perfectly will lead to Happiness without question.

Furthermore, I also taught them the following at their weddings:

Happiness does not come from any single person, is not a wish to you from friends, and is not granted to you from a supernatural force. From this point forward and for the rest of your lives, if you two wish to achieve happiness, it is necessary to place the word Tolerance as your first priority in everything that you do.

Happiness is planted, created, and nourished by the husband and wife under the condition of genuine love and tolerance for one another in everything you do for the rest of your life.

I have heard many elders teach and say (*falsely*) the following:

"The husband is the master and the wife is the servant, wife insulting or speaking badly about husband, husband hitting wife, or quarrels between husband and wife are all 'normal.' A happy home is a home that has fights and arguments."

This sometimes escalates to cracked skull, broken arms, bruised body, swollen face, shattered dishes, broken pots and pans, yet their mentality such is Happiness (*this is truly mistaken; this is not love*).

At the present, (*Buddhism refers to this period as the Dharma-Ending Age*) this is the period of decline in "virtues, ethics, and morality, mixing of pure gold and imitation metals, and indistinguishable between gems and rocks. Therefore, for the most part, Humans only value money, materialism, and luxuries, but the Virtues, Morals, Philosophies, and Principles worthy of respect and admiration left behind by Ancient Sages are cast aside and considered old-fashioned.

¹ **Ring:** translated from "Nhan" which depends on the context can mean two things in Vietnamese. One meaning is a "ring" and the other is "tolerance."

² **Jeweled Throne:** is Enlightenment

Consequently, in a gradual manner, the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, etc. will become diluted, bland, and white as powder!

What sort of Love is there between a husband and wife that is thin as the wings of a dragonfly, when happy, everything is rosy, but when sad, it turns sour. Or husband and wife are like a drifting cloud, if love (*money*) exists, it stays; if love (*money*) does not, it flies away.

Sometimes a couple lives together until old age and all the children are grown. When outsiders see this, they assume such a couple is so happy! Am I right? However, in truth, the love between the husband and wife does not exist as the public assumes, but has died at some point at which the couple is not even aware. Only at a ripe old age do they realize:

"Although the couple have coexisted all these years, neither one really 'understand' ('get') each other. Two people remain two separate individuals rather than harmonizing into 'one genuine love.'"

This is truly sad!

All of you already know, being a spiritual mother (*like myself*) is not all that wonderful! It requires a lot of time and energy to teach and guide them on the Buddhist path as well as guiding the couple to complete the worldly duties that inherently has many thorns and dangers mixed in there. In this day of declining virtues and ethics, it is difficult to separate good and evil; sometimes I am burdened with worries, thoughts, and suffering to the early morning hours because I am unable to sleep as my hair turns gray. Thus, there is no benefit in this that I would yearn to be someone's foster mother or accept foster children!

People who have both their Mother and Father, complete with a loving relationship between parents and child, naturally, would not ask for my help.

If these young people are not the Dharma Flower Temple's disciples and are not part of the Dharma-Family who have often cultivate diligently and loyally follow the Master as well as cultivating with me from childhood under the same temple for all these years, then I am certain I do not have the honor nor do I have the spare time to represent and plan for anyone's engagement and wedding.

Moreover, I retired a long time ago, have gotten older, and am not unsettled like when I was younger. In addition, this task is so exhausting, worrisome, and time consuming that sometimes I have to stay up for several days and nights to coordinate thousand of details and is certainly not a simple and easy task. Once I engage in anything, no matter how large or small, I will immerse myself fully with all my abilities to organize and complete the task from beginning to end in a happy and responsible manner.

Consequently, once the wedding is complete, having many guests and friends praise them, the couple is grateful for my advice and guidance on their life and religious paths, both as an Aunt/Mother and a Teacher. Subsequently, in silence, their minds spontaneously develop love and affection for me and look upon me as a Kind Mother in such a manner that they are not aware when this happened.

This is all. Otherwise, I have no other intentions or agendas.

Below are the Names of some of the individuals (*children*) who have grown up in the Dharma Flower Temple:

1. Chon Phuoc, Ng.L.Thoai (*came to the Temple at age 20 and is now above 50*).
2. Chon Hoan, Ng.Q.Huy (*at age 15 and is now above 38*).
3. Chon Toan, Ng.Q.Bao (*at age 18 and is now nearly 48*).
4. Chon Dien, Ng.Q.Vinh (*at age 17 and is now above 46*).
5. Minh-Dat, L.D.Phuc (*at age 18 and is now above 41*).
6. Minh-Duc, Ng.Q.Vinh (*at age 17 and is now above 40*).
7. Hien-Tri, Ng.A.Tho (*at age 4 and is now above 44*).

Next are other Buddhists who attend the temple regularly but have never lived in the Temple:

8. Chon Hoa, Ng.M.Khang (*for 9 years and is now above 45*).
9. Vien-Chon, L.T.S.Thuy (*at age 14 and is now above 40*).
10. Vien-Nghia, T.M.T.Chi (*at age 2 and is now above 40*).
11. Hanh-Duc, Ng.T.T.Thao (*at age 6 and is now above 50*).
12. Tam-Hoa, Sh.Bias (*at age 10 and is now above 46*).
13. Bao-Chan, K.V.Bias (*at age 5 and is now nearing 41*).

Below are other Buddhists who also follow and practice faithfully:

14. Hue-Ngo, L.H.Do (*for 8 years and is now 38*).
15. Tue-An, A.T.Do (*for 6 years and is now 36*).
16. Tue-Man H.Q.Dung (FL) (*for 21 years and is now 46*).
17. Tue-Chon, Ng.A.Vung (*for 22 years*).
18. Hue-Ngoc, Jenny N.Ng. (*for 32 years and came since 10*).

In addition, there are many other Buddhists who practice diligently and faithfully who live in other counties, states, and countries who have gathered annually for many years during the Learning and Cultivating Periods (*Retreats*).

All the Buddhists above have always put the Triple Jewels first and share the following view:

*Fortune and talent is like dirt,
Virtue and morality is like gold.*

Under the shade of the House of Buddha, all have one heart and one mind to cultivate single-mindedly, praying to find liberation from the cycle of rebirths in this present life through the Pureland-Esoteric Dharma Door of the Dharma Flower Temple, Tucson, Arizona.

Head Master Bao-Dang (Velvet-Bias)
Director of the Dharma Propagation Committee

www.dharmaflowerbuddhisttemple.com