

Venerable Master Hsing Yun's 2016 Letter to Dharma Protectors and Friends

Dear Dharma protectors and friends,

Auspicious greetings!

As we bid farewell to the year of the goat to welcome the year of the monkey and Fo Guang Shan's 50th anniversary, the spring breeze continues to send forth the fragrance of flowers. In the new year, I sincerely wish that everyone can "be smart and agile," and be blessed with merits and wisdom.

It is the people who propagate the Way, not the Way that propagates people. Since education is vital for the development of humanity, it has always been something I have paid extra attention to. Last January, I flew to the Philippines to supervise Guang Ming College's land purchase and opening ceremony. There, I also had a heart-to-heart talk with local devotees and students of the Schools of Performing Arts and Buddhist Studies. Although I was unable to see their youthful faces, their candid and joyful voices gave me firm belief in the fact that education can indeed change their futures.

In March, in spite of my aged body, I took a long flight to Sydney, Australia to participate in the BLIA Oceania Fellowship Conference and the official opening ceremony of Nan Tien Institute. More than 4,000 people were present, including then Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Wollongong City Mayor Gordon Bradbery. Australia is a beautiful and harmonious land, so I gave the students the following words of encouragement, "Nan Tien (The Southern Sky) paves the great path to excellence; the Institute a gateway to leadership." Additionally, the presidents of Taiwan's Fo Guang University (Yung Chaur-shin), Nanhua University (Lin Tsong-ming), and Philippine's Guang Ming College (Helen Correa) gathered here for the Fo Guang Shan Five-in-One University Consortium meeting.

To found a university is not easy, yet Fo Guang Shan has managed to establish five in four countries. I still vividly remember the hardships encountered along the way, and am sincerely grateful to all benefactors and those who have contributed their support. With the quote, "Regard as one's top concern the state's affairs, and place as one's last goal one's own enjoyments," I encouraged all five universities to bring out the spirit of sacrifice and devotion, mutual support, and proactive collaboration in order to nurture even more talented students.

In terms of education, the only nationally accredited Ministry of Education Life Education Center was officially established at Nanhua University in March. Directed by Political Deputy Minister of Education, Lucia Lin, and Deputy Chairperson of the Nanhua University Board of Directors, Venerable Tzu Hui, and also with the support and cooperation from scholars and teachers across Taiwan, the Center has established a new milestone for the advocacy of life education.

In the same month, Tzu Chi Foundation's Neihu District development project drew severe criticism from the media, and also caused a scandal that affected Fo Guang Shan and the entire Buddhist community. Having no choice, I decided to publish a series of articles titled "Hear Me Out: Messages from a Humble Monk" in the *Merit Times*. My original intention was to clarify the truth and state the facts, thus I assumed that one or two articles would be sufficient. To my surprise, when the articles were published, devoted supporters of Buddhism both in and outside of Taiwan, as well as people from all walks of life showed tremendous response, requesting that I continue writing. Feeling touched, I continued the series, bringing to light everything related to Fo Guang Shan's cultural, educational, and philanthropic endeavors for society, serving as an integral report to give back to the public. Additionally, I offered my ninety years of life experience as examples for my disciples at Fo Guang Shan to follow in their practice and cultivation. This includes having the characteristics of compassion, perseverance, and equanimity, as well as beliefs including "the future of Buddhism is on my shoulders" and "peaceful coexistence with one's own illness."

When the articles were published in the newspaper, readers submitted nearly ten thousand reflections. As a monastic, I have never seen such enthusiasm for the propagation of Dharma and the defense of Buddhism. Therefore, I published these forty articles as a book under the same title, *Hear Me Out: Messages from a Humble Monk*, and selected forty of the most insightful and constructive pieces for *Reflections on the Messages from a Humble Monk*. These two books have since been freely distributed to the public in hopes that readers will gain a correct understanding of Humanistic Buddhism. In late October, the Simplified Chinese edition was published by China Citic Press with the book launch held at the National Museum of China in Beijing.

Speaking of publications, Professor Charles H.C. Kao, founder of Commonwealth Publishing, selected

one hundred articles that I have written over the decades on national and social matters, Buddhism and public affairs, and Cross-Strait issues. The compilation was published as *Hsing Yun Wisdom* last August. I may not be sure about how much wisdom I may have, but as Professor Kao said, I am one who is always ready to express my concerns and opinions for the nation as well as all living beings. This in fact, has always been what I have expected of myself.

The 2016 Presidential Election in Taiwan is right around the corner. Whenever there is an election, Taiwan would always be divided by the minority of extremists, causing conflicts and creating opposing stances. Voters and political parties would attack each other. Smokes of upheaval and slander would pervade the entire society, robbing it of the harmony that once existed on the basis of courtesy and fellowship. Born and raised in wartime, I am well aware of the atrocities of war, and am extremely unwilling to see the Chinese people, who share the same heritage and culture, to rekindle the fire of war and turn against their own brothers once more. Therefore, under the pseudonym Chao Wu-ren, I wrote seventy editorials on the Taiwan election in the *Merit Times* in hopes they would contribute to a peaceful future for Taiwan and Cross-Strait relations. These editorials were later published by Commonwealth Publishing as a book titled *Thoughts of Compassion: A Way Out for Both Sides of the Strait*.

On November 7th, after almost seventy years of separate governance in Mainland China and Taiwan, Cross-Strait leaders finally met and shook hands. The meeting between Ma Ying-jeou and Xi Jinping not only brought joy to more than a billion Chinese descendants, it also drew global attention. For this, I also wrote three articles to praise this precious historical moment as well as express my hopes for a peaceful and prosperous Cross-Strait future.

Even after having attained enlightenment, the Buddha was still concerned about state affairs, and kings often consulted him on how to govern a country. The Buddha also eliminated wars between kingdoms with his wisdom. Abiding by the principle of showing concerns for policy without interfering in governance, I suppose I am just doing my part as a Buddhist monk to care for national and social stability, as well as public well-being.

In April, the Praise the Buddha Grand Concert was held at the Buddha Memorial Center. Gathering at the Bodhi Wisdom Concourse, more than ten thousand music enthusiasts of all ages from Fo Guang Shan branch temples across more than fifty countries and regions praised the Buddha with Buddhist hymns, presenting the beauty of a Pure Land on Earth.

Last year, I flew to Mainland China on four separate occasions. In the warm spring month of March, I was invited to the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2015. This year, a religious subforum was added to the Forum, giving Muslims, Christians, and Buddhists a chance to jointly express their perspectives on the world, society, and people, which was very significant. I offered my perspective using four points: 1) Buddhism strives for interpersonal harmony rather than conflicting interests; 2) Buddhism strives for the celebration of differences rather than insistence on conformity; 3) Buddhism strives for harmony within a nation rather than division; and 4) Buddhism strives for peaceful coexistence rather than killing and warfare.

It is heartening to see interfaith dialogue on issues such as the purification of human minds, the development of religions, and the propagation of good deeds!

In April, I was invited by the Yangzhou City Government to give a three-day Dharma lecture on "The Heart Sutra: Perspectives on the Universe and Life" at the Yangzhou Forum in Jianzhen Library to celebrate the city's 2,500th anniversary. The lectures were well received by an audience of more than ten thousand people from Guangdong, Henan, Hebei, Shaanxi, Jiangxi, Shandong, Inner Mongolia, and Sichuan.

I was then invited by People's Publishing House to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing for the book launch of the Simplified Chinese edition of *365 Days for Travelers: Wisdom from Chinese Literary and Buddhist Classics*, and was interviewed by the newspaper People's Daily. 1.1 million copies were printed for free distribution to the public. *365 Days for Travelers* is not only printed in Simplified Chinese for readers in Mainland China, with the efforts of my disciples across the world, it is now also available in Chinese-English, French, and Korean. These editions are currently printed and distributed in Europe, America, and Korea.

After that, I was then invited to the opening ceremony of the One-Stroke Calligraphy Exhibition at Huzhou Museum, and gave a Dharma talk on "Chan

and Life" at Huzhou Grand Theatre to an estimated audience of 1,300. On April 20th, under the invitation of Huzhou City Government and Venerable Yinke, Abbot of Fahua Temple in Huzhou, I presided over the foundation laying ceremony for the reconstruction of Fahua Temple Bhiksuni Daoji Zongchi Shrine at Mount Baique. There, I delivered a Dharma talk and the following gatha:

Bhiksuni Zongchi,

A manifestation of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva;

The shrine of her real body restored,

Universally blessing all in this world.

As for the Vegetarian Expos hosted in Mainland China, the event was in its third year in Yangzhou, and fourth in Yixing, becoming increasingly popular by the year. This time, I also received an invitation to the "Tea and Chan: April in Yixing Cultural Forum" at Yixing Gymnasium and gave a talk on "Tea and Chan" to over 3,000 people.

In August, I attended the first Sangha Offering Ceremony held at the Fo Guang Shan Ancestral Temple, Dajue Temple in Yixing. On October 18th, the inauguration ceremony of Dajue Temple's Main Shrine and Jeweled White Pagoda was held after ten years of restoration. Eleven presiding masters were invited to officiate the ceremony, including Venerable Xuecheng, President of the Buddhist Association of China. Elder monastics from monasteries in various regions also attended to give their congratulations. Nearly 30,000 BLIA members from over 80 countries in America, Oceania, Asia, Europe, and Africa gathered together to witness the ceremony.

On the afternoon of the same day, the 2015 BLIA World Headquarters 1st Meeting of the 6th Board of Directors took place. Since its establishment in Los Angeles in 1992, the BLIA has held general conferences and board of director meetings at different locations every year. This time, the meeting was held in Mainland China, and can be said to have been a historical moment. I would like to thank Chairman Yu Zhengsheng of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Director Wang Zuoran of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, as well as the Party Secretary and the Mayor of Yixing for their contributions to a successful meeting.

On November 3rd, I met with Xu Jialu, Dean of Beijing Normal University's College of Chinese Language and Culture, inside the University's Yingdong Academic Hall for a dialogue on "The Wisdom of Education." More than 500 staff and students attended, offering continuous feedback and questions. To conclude the talk, I told everyone that the Buddha's way of education is about self-awareness. Education does not simply rely on teachers. Rather, teachers are like lamps, illuminating the way to allow students to strive for their goals as well as self-awareness and self-enlightenment.

Of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains in China, I have visited and paid homage at Mount Putuo in Zhejiang, Mount Wutai in Shanxi, and Mount Emei in Sichuan; Mount Jiuhua in Anhui was the only one I had never had the causes and conditions to visit. Therefore, I also found some time during this trip to pay homage there, fulfilling my vow as a Buddhist to make a pilgrimage to all four sacred places.

It is truly lamentable to witness the impermanence of formation, abiding, destruction, and cessation from natural and manmade disasters in the world! In April, the Nepal Earthquake caused severe and disastrous damages. BLIA collaborated with International Headquarters Search and Rescue Taiwan, Kaohsiung Chang Gung Memorial Hospital, and other non-governmental organizations to form the 4-in-1 Nepal Earthquake Relief Aid Team. Together, the team brought out the spirit of love and coexistence through providing aid relief in Nepal.

Moreover, several particularly significant events also took place last year.

Back in 2014, two devotees gifted the head of a white-jade Sakyamuni Buddha statue to me. After several investigations from various sources, it was discovered to have been one of the three Buddha statues enshrined at Youju Temple in Hebei Province. Sculpted in 556 C.E., the 7th year of the Tianbao period during the Northern Qi Dynasty, the statue's head was stolen in 1996.

Buddhist artifacts are important cultural assets of humanity, and I feel that the head of the Buddha statue must be returned to its original place. The State of Administration of Cultural Heritage in Mainland China accepted my proposal to bring the body of the Buddha statue to Fo Guang Shan to be reunited with the head. The statue in its entirety has since stayed in Taiwan for people to revere and venerate, and will be returned in spring after the Chinese New Year.

Hence, on May 23rd, I co-hosted the "Universal

Shining of Buddha's Light: the Sacred Reunion" ceremony with Li Xiaojie, President of Chinese Cultural Relics Association, to present the head of the Buddha statue to Youju Temple, Hebei Province. I hope through the cause of this Buddha statue, people on both sides of the Strait will feel that they are family and kin who share the same faith. In particular, the presentation ceremony was broadcasted live worldwide, which not only promoted Cross-Strait Chinese cultural exchange but also introduced Buddhist art and culture to the whole world for greater awareness on the protection of cultural heritage.

The Buddha's body is his Dharma body, which is as vast as emptiness. Just as emptiness cannot be cut into parts, the Buddha's Dharma body has always been suchness that remains unmoved. However, the physical form of the Buddha has had its torso and head separated because of people's selfishness, immorality, and greed. The reunion of the Buddha statue's head and body should be a significant and valuable event in the promotion of Cross-Strait peace.

In addition, many Taoist gods and deities have made pilgrimages to the Buddha Memorial Center since its completion in 2011. Therefore, the "When Buddha Meets the Gods" event was set to be held on December 25th of every year. More than a thousand statues of gods from different places gathered at the Buddha Memorial Center with the support of their devotees, which is truly a marvelous interfaith unity and harmony!

Under this cause, the Chunghua Federation of Traditional Religious Associations was established in June, with President of the Legislative Yuan Wang Jin-pyng as its first President, and Chairperson of the FGS Board of Directors, Most Venerable Abbot Hsin Bao, Legislator Hsu Tien-tsai, former Kaohsiung County Magistrate Yang Chu-hsing, Chairman of Beigang Chao Tian Temple Tsai Yung-de, and Chairman of Hsinking Fengtian Temple, He Ta-huang as Deputy Presidents. In addition, Kaohsiung City Mayor Chen Chu was elected as Chief Advisor, and Elder Advisor of BLIA Chunghua Central Region Association Chen Chia-Lung as Secretary. To date, the Federation has a hundred temples and 412 individuals registered as members.

I have always advocated that all religions should embrace each other's differences rather than seeking similarities. Followers of different faiths should respect and tolerate one another. Through the Association, I wish for there to be friendly exchanges between temples of righteous faiths, and their followers to achieve interfaith and social harmony.

Humanistic Buddhism is Buddhism; it is the Buddha's teachings. Whether traditional or modern, any form of Dharma ever propagated is Humanistic Buddhism. However, as the saying goes, "out of prevailing rules arises faults," it is inevitable that problems occur after a long-time spread of Buddhism. Therefore, when I attended the First Cross-Strait Fellowship Conference of Middle-Generation and Young Buddhists held by the State Administration for Religious Affairs of Mainland China two years ago, I gave a keynote speech on "Passing the Lineage."

In seeing the middle generation of monastics from both sides of the Strait meet and dialogue for the revival of Buddhism, I thereby proposed the establishment of the "United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua," which carries the very mission of propagating "Humanistic Buddhism." After several meetings and discussions, the Association was officially inaugurated in August. More than two hundred Buddhist temples and organizations have registered as members, including Dharma Drum Mountain, Ling Jiou Mountain Buddhist Society, Yuan Kuang Buddhist College, Xiang Guang Shan Temple, Bliss and Wisdom Buddhist Foundation, Chinese Young Buddhist Association, and the Lay Buddhist Association of Taiwan. Six Chairpersons on duty were elected, including Venerable Ming Kuang, Venerable Hui Chuan, Venerable Ching Yao, Venerable Ru Cheng, Venerable Tzu Jung, and Huang Shu-wei. Venerable Shou Yu was elected as Chief Supervisor, and Venerable Chueh Pei as Secretary-General.

Where there is association, there is power and unity. I pray that, with this organization, we can all reach a consensus, generate our bodhi minds together, and revitalize Buddhism to build a joyful and harmonious Pure Land in this world through sincerity, benevolence, and beauty.

Last April, under the advice of Shanghai Deputy Mayor Zhao Wen, the Hsing Yun Culture and Education Center in Shanghai was inaugurated. Added with the opening of the Beijing Guangzhong Culture and Education Center, various cultural and educational undertakings to propagate the Dharma will begin under the name of the Hsing Yun Culture and Education Foundation to benefit more living beings.

It has been seven years since my One-Stroke Calligraphy began touring the world in 2009. In recent years, the most popular exhibitions were primarily held in Mainland China. Last year, the exhibitions took place at Suzhou Museum, Hubei Provincial Museum, Huzhou Museum, Henan Museum, Ningbo Museum, Yixing City Museum, and Anhui Museum. Day by day, I have diligently written pieces one after another using my degenerating eyesight. I cannot say whether they are well-written or not, but I have completed each piece with utter sincerity. Each word and sentence represents my genuine blessings for all.

The Buddha Memorial Center has celebrated its fourth anniversary. Through the collective efforts of Director Venerable Ru Chang and her team, the Center has become one of the internationally renowned landmarks of Taiwan. Other than paying homage, visitors can participate in enriching, diverse, and in-depth cultural events such as forums, lectures, book fairs, and vegetarian expos. For example, there were exhibitions of Hung Yi's installation arts, Shanghai folk arts, the puppet and marionette arts of Fujian and Taiwan, "Dream of the Red Chamber: Exhibiting the Painting Collection of Lushan Museum," and "Meeting in the Dharma: Ming and Qing Dynasties Water and Land Dharma Service Paintings." There were also performances such as shows by Shandong Provincial Acrobatic Group and large-scale productions including *Xuanzang*, original Chinese Yu opera from Henan, and *Handing Down the Light*, a Huangmei opera based on patriarchs of the Chan School.

One thing worth mentioning is that the Water and Land Dharma Service as well as an exhibition of its paintings and a related symposium were all held at Fo Guang Shan in November, which was a rare historical moment indeed. The Buddha Memorial Center also became partner museums with Anhui Museum and Suzhou Museum, signing five-year cooperation agreements, setting a great example for Cross-Strait museum exchanges.

At the beginning of last year, a ceremony was held to enshrine a statue of Confucius from Shandong and a statue of Guan Yu from Shanxi at the Buddha Memorial Center. The Scholar's Shrine and General's Shrine thus came into existence on the two sides of the Main Hall, beneath the Big Buddha's seat. The Chinese have always placed a strong emphasis on being well versed in both letters and martial arts, since each represents its own talent and virtue. Now that the sages of letters and the martial arts are united with the Buddha, the symbol of harmony between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism is thereby achieved. In September, a bronze statue of Yue Fei also arrived at Fo Guang Shan. It is joyful to see that, in addition to an assembly of all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and utmost virtuous people, Fo Guang Shan has now become a home to ancient sages.

In terms of construction, Pairi Daiza, Belgium was inaugurated last year. In addition, IBPS Paris and Tainan Fuguo Temple were also inaugurated after reconstruction. The beam-raising ceremony at Chao Zhou Vihara marked the beginning of its new construction. The Pilgrim's Lodge at Housuiji Temple in Japan was also completed and opened to the public. It is worthwhile to note that the construction of the Sutra Repository at Fo Guang Shan, a symbol of the Dharma, will be completed this year. As a result, along with the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order, which symbolizes the Sangha, and the Buddha Memorial Center, which symbolizes the Buddha, the Triple Gem of Fo Guang Shan will now be complete and connected by the Fo Guang Boulevard.

Aging, sickness, death, and birth are all realities of this world; they are also incontrovertible truths of the universe. Though I am now ninety years old and aged in physical form, I still practice the Confucian teaching, "diligence to the point eating is forgotten, and attaining the Way to the point sorrows are neglected." I am still persistent in diligently writing calligraphy and articles, giving Dharma talks, being filmed, meeting guests, and instructing my disciples.

I have propagated the Dharma in Taiwan for nearly seventy years, while Fo Guang Shan, which has just reached its 50th anniversary, is in the prime of prosperity, maturity, and stability. May all Fo Guang Shan disciples keep serving the public with enthusiasm and vigor. Lastly, I wish all of you peace and auspicious blessings, and the perfection of merits and wisdom in the new year!

Hsing Yun

January 1st, 2016

Office of the Founding Master