

March 2021. Dharma Talk at Beeh Low See Temple, Singapore, Mahakaruna Buddhist Center and Vihara Mahavira Graha Medan Temple, Indonesia.

By Most Venerable Thich Nhu Dien

Dear Most Venerable Sangha members,
Dear Lay Buddhists.

Today, once again, I have another opportunity to talk to you through this online Dharma Talk, proposed by Master Hui Siong. He is Vice President of the World Buddhist Sangha Council and General-Secretary for Chinese Language Department. He is also abbot of Beeh Low See Temple, Mahakaruna Buddhist Center and Vihara Mahavira Graha Medan Temple in Singapore and Indonesia. The connections which lead to this opportunity could be traced back through the founding Congress of the WBSC in Colombo, Sri Lanka in 1966 and the second Congress held at Vinh Nghiem Pagoda in Saigon, Vietnam in 1969 by the Most Venerable Thich Tam Chau, co-founder of WBSC. At that time, I had just moved from Hoi An to Saigon; so I did not have the opportunity to participate.

In 1989, for the first time, I participated in the Congress held in Taipei, Taiwan, thanks to the recommendation of the Most Venerable Thich Minh Tam. Two years later, in 1991, the First Executive Committee Meeting was held from April 12 to 18 in Hannover, Germany. At that time the Most Venerable Wu Ming, president of WBSC, from Taiwan also attended the Meeting, even though he was over 80 years old. The Most Venerable Kuak Kuang from Hong Kong, the Most Venerable Liao Chung, current President, and 16 Vice Presidents representing 16 Buddhist countries around the world were present at Vien Giac Pagoda, Hannover, including Master Hui Siong as well as Master Ming Kuang and others. On the Vietnamese side, we were honored to welcome Most Venerable Thich Tam Chau from Canada, Most Venerable Thich Huyen Vi, Most Venerable Thich Thien Dinh, Most Venerable Thich Minh Tam, Most Venerable Thich Minh Le from France and Most Venerable Thich Man Giac from the US. We have known each other for more than 30 years now and still often attend the Congresses in Taiwan, Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Macau, etc. How great these supreme conditions are to serve human beings in the name of the Buddha Dharma!

Buddha has taught us that each sentient-being has a total of 404 (four hundred and four) types of diseases. There are 101 (hundred and one) of earth-based diseases, 101 of water-based diseases, 101 of wind-based diseases, and similarly, 101 of fire-based diseases. The Buddha, with his transcendent observation wisdom, saw through that. Nowadays, I wonder if medicine-science, which thrives in every profession and all aspects, has found all of these 404 diseases yet? If a doctor does not know the illness of his patient, he could not give a prescription either.

After attaining Enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree, Buddha had thought a lot about the suffering of humans and then headed towards Varanasi, next to the Ganga river. He used the Four Noble Truths as the prescription to help the 5 brothers of Ajanta-Kaundinya, and this prescription is still being applied to heal all sentient-beings by all Buddhist traditions whether Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana. That prescription contains the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the eightfold path leading to complete cessation of suffering.

The Pali Canon mentions about Meditation on Perception - Ten healing practices - to cultivate mindfulness that Buddha taught Venerable Ananda when he saw that Bhikkhu Girimananda was sick. Buddha did not come in person since he was in Savatti, but he instructed Venerable Ananda to bring these 10 practices to Venerable Girimananda. After hearing Buddha's teaching, Bhikkhu Girimananda recovered from his illness. Illness is caused by suffering of the body; but thanks to the mind mastering of these 10 contemplations, the illness was cured. This is the Dharma that can be used to treat both body and mind, especially for monastics. Certainly, lay people can also practice these contemplations to heal their illness; however, it requires an intensive cultivation of this practice to heal the illness of the body and the mind.

Buddha has also taught about the beginning of the world in the Abhidharma that this world and many other worlds are created by the accumulated karma of all sentient beings and must go through 4 main stages. They are forming, dwelling, decaying and destroying. Also, in each of these 4 stages, the lifespan of each world depends on the merits and karma of its beings. Furthermore, each of such worlds must go through Three Small Disasters and Three Great Disasters. Three Small Disasters are Wars, Famines and Pandemics. Humans are occupied with disputes among themselves, fighting over food, status, money and ideals; and thus, starting aggression with neighbouring countries. Many of us may have experienced these things before.

As a result of wars, there are always one winning side and one losing side. Either win or lose, innocent people died because of the aggressors. After the wars, poverty spread widely. The result of World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) caused so many people with starvation and misery; words cannot even describe the suffering of human lives. After the wars, disease raged again and the world fell into another tragedy, such as disease, starvation, poverty.

The period of Three Great Disaster will occur after the period of Three Small Disasters. That is: the sea-level will rise to the end of the realm of Desire. Fire will burn in the ground, causing the earth to burst open. The wind will carry each piece of soil drifting with water to the unknown place. Finally, only those who have gained merits can survive and remain on those last plots of land. Many of them have morality, faith, and have taken refuge in the Triple Gem. A new world will then be rebuilt. Time is not defined, because all of these disasters are caused by humans, and we must bear the consequence ourselves.

The Buddha and Bodhisattvas are like good doctors who can cure and give medicines; however, if we refuse to take medicines, the blame is not on the doctors, but rather on the patients. If a patient, citing any reason, like the medicine is too bitter, hot or acrid, and thus cannot be taken, the illness will then last forever. This means that the bad karma of sentient beings has a higher chance to occupy the body and mind; hence, longer treatment time will be needed.

The Buddha Sutra also teaches that “Bodhisattvas are afraid of causes, sentient beings are afraid of results”, that is that the enlightened ones know exactly that a certain cause is bad, and never let the result happen by mistake. However, human beings do not care about the causes, but are only afraid of the results. This goes against the teaching of Buddha and Bodhisattvas because if the present cause is good, the future result certainly cannot be bad. Most of us are afraid of the coming results and do not try to understand and practice the teaching of the Buddhas thoroughly to eliminate ignorance in samsara for many lives and kalpas through our causes.

Since February 2020 till now, it has been more than a year. The whole world with more than seven billion of people, no one has not heard about the Covid-19 virus. Religious leaders as well as ordinary people, young people, cannot escape the scythe of death, while everyone is afraid of death. It is now March 2021, in Germany, 70.000 (seventy thousand)

people have died because of Covid 19 and more than 2 million are infected. The German President Steinmeier has called people to take the date of April 19 as a Memorial Day for the people who died because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Throughout the world, there are countless tragic cases, because hospitals do not have enough beds for the sick. Oxygen machines are badly lacking, like in Jordan recently. In rich countries with small populations, people have already been vaccinating Covid-19; so, they have been somewhat reassured. However, in most populous countries like India, China, Indonesia and others, the local governments still have difficulties solving this problem.

On March 6, 2021, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama received the first Covid-19 vaccination shot at a hospital in the Dharamsala region and two weeks later, he received the second one to prevent the sickness. The press and media have reported on this. His Holiness also advised everyone to get vaccinated so that the epidemic is less likely to spread to others.

According to health officials who say that if the virus is locked up in one place, the volume of this virus is less than a can of Coca Cola. Yet, it has made the world go crazy. During the past year, the world has faced difficult situations like never before since World War II. Children cannot go to school, parents have no job, grandparents live alone and sad because their children and grandchildren cannot visit them. Airplanes, cars, trains, ships are limited to a minimum. Crowded places are now heavily restricted; people are only allowed to gather on the advice of the government and health ministry. Even churches, mosques, Temples, religious places, are suffering the same fate.

Several countries in Europe, America, Asia, Australia and Africa have begun vaccinating people over the age of 80, then over 70, and hospital staff like doctors, nurses, etc. However, the progress is very slow, while everyone is looking forward to their turn to be vaccinated. Soon, everyone will be vaccinated; but probably until the end of 2021, the world will hopefully return to normal activities as before.

Under such a crisis, what has Buddhism done for people who were seriously ill? There are of course many things that Buddhism has done so far. For example, distributing free masks, making the field hospitals to help local government, encouraging Buddhists to volunteer in hospitals, helping to buy food for old people who have no one to take care of, helping children feel secured at home with parents. It is obvious that when parents and children face each other daily in their narrow home,

there arise lots of psychological shocks and tensions. Monks and nuns, as well as lay Buddhists everywhere have used their abilities to support local governments to prevent the spread of Covid-19 as good as they could.

In Germany, some facilities like Kindergarten, schools, market, barbershop, etc., have been partially reopened, depending on the number of infected people in that area. In some places however, after reopening, the government had to order social isolation again because the spread has become even worse. What a vicious cycle. When one is tied up, one always wants to be free and when they are free, they are unable to obey the rule of freedom; so, the law will bind people back the way they were. Just like that, the world appears and goes away through 4 stages of forming, dwelling, decaying, and destroying.

As Buddhist, we always know that Buddha established the precepts for the monastics and laypeople, not to threaten or constraint. Keeping the precepts is rather a protection for our body as well as mind from suffering and if it is committed, it can easily be healed. We can use the river water to wash our body and clothes. However, wrong deeds can only be corrected by repentance, changing of our bad deeds in this life and many lives in the past. Only then this world can have a brighter future and the epidemics will less dwell in this world.

No matter how severe illnesses are, they will end, leave room for joy and happiness; but how long that joy and happiness will last depends on each of us and not those talented Doctors. Even though the Buddha, a great Master who is called "The Ultimate Master of Medicine"; cannot save us all from suffering, if we ourselves do not take the medicine.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Master Hui Siong. Without him, I would not have had the opportunity to meet Chinese Buddhists, Buddhists from Indonesia, from Malaysia, from Singapore and Vietnamese Buddhists on such an online forum like this. Should I receive any merits through this dharma talk activity, I wish to dedicate them to the Triple Gem to approve and bless all of the Most Venerable Sangha members and everyone to always be joyful, beneficial and may the world be peaceful, and Covid-19 pandemic will soon be gone so that everyone can live peacefully and work happily.

Namo Maha Bodhisattvas, treasury of Happiness

Translated in English: Ven. Dr.Thích Hạnh Giới, Reverend MA Thích
Thông Giáo and Samanera: BA Thông Tuệ