

## 2018-08-15 - The Grand Master Yuan Ying

Good morning, everyone! This is today's Dharma Espresso on the Grand Master Yuan Ying.

Master Phap Dang (Dharma Lamp) just texted me today to tell me the sad news: The Grand Master Yuan Ying just entered Nirvana at 2:24 AM. I was really stunned and shocked. I couldn't imagine that he was gone since I met him just recently.

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The Grand Master Yuan Ying was one of the most brilliant monks of our time. After World War II, as a very young man, he had already cultivated wholeheartedly. He went to the mountain to recite sutras for those who died in the Korean War. As he told us when he came to the U.S., once when he was doing his daily prayers alone on the mountain, he dreamed that Amitabha Buddha appeared to show him a cave and told him to carve an Amitabha statue there to save the souls of the fallen still unable to get liberated. If I recall correctly, he followed that dream and found the mountain area where the cave was located. He discovered that the soil and rock of that area was soft enough to carve with a pick. He used dynamite to blow out a cave, and with some helpers, started to chisel the statue continuously. From there, he set up a bodhimanda which has lasted over 30 years. During the day, he carved the statue nonstop; at night, he copied the Avatamsaka Sutra. His sutra copying became very special when he first started to write down the Avatamsaka Sutra. Gathering many different copies from China, Japan, and Korea, he combined them and looked for their common points. He left out what he found wrong, and used what was accurate. His first copy was written in pen. When the whole sutra was finished, he used ink for the second copy to make sure nothing was wrong. After that, he used his own blood to copy the entire Avatamsaka Sutra the third time. That version written in blood still remains in his temple. The other copy is kept in Taiwan.

Throughout all his life from his teens to adulthood, the Grand Venerable Yuan Ying dedicated himself to building his monastery which is truly a wonderful solitary retreat place for Zen masters. I've been there a few times and liked it very much because it reflects his refined and serene manner and attitude. It is regrettable that we wouldn't see him in our upcoming Mandala.

In 2014, the Grand Venerable Yuan Ying came to California and stayed with us for almost two months. We always found him joyful whenever we visited him. During those months, he would walk on the beach daily. Although his lungs were weak, his asthma almost stopped when he was here, breathing the fresh ocean air happily, unlike when he was up on the mountain. After that, he agreed to loan us his copy of the Avatamsaka Sutra for exhibition. He asked me how many volumes I would like to borrow. He would have sent me the entire Sutra if I wanted. However, we didn't have enough space then, since the Long Beach Convention Center was too small to display the complete set, so we only asked for a few dozen volumes. He brought along all his exquisite calligraphies to show us and for display. He was all heart to us.

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You must still remember that he was the teacher of the precepts during our 2014 Short-Term Home-Leaving retreat. He transmitted the precepts for novice monks and nuns that year. He had a great affinity for us and helped us with all his heart. That was what made me feel very comforted. Sages or high-ranking masters have no personal motive or private intention. They are willing to sacrifice and give; they do everything wholeheartedly. There is something we can learn from his virtue, the virtue of giving. Once I went to visit him and asked him for some calligraphy, and he readily penned them without hesitation. It was a way for him to give. He said, “I can’t do anything to help, I can only write calligraphy to offer you.”

The first time I met the Grand Master, he thought I was Korean, so he spoke Korean to me. I replied in English that I didn’t understand a word. After that, I looked for an interpreter. Then I asked him about the Avatamsaka Sutra about which he was fluent. In the beginning, I didn’t know what to say, so I started to write words from the Avatamsaka Sutra which he understood immediately, and he replied in writing. Hence I felt a great warmth and bond with him because he deeply understood the Avatamsaka philosophy. He especially understood that the Mandala was the manifestation of the Dharmadhatu of non-obstruction of phenomena and world phenomena. The first time he came, his comment was: “This is the realm of the fact and fact world perfectly harmonized.” It was one of the special dharma assemblies where we visualized the Blue Lotus in the Mandala. When our Mandala ended, he told me that while we were reciting the mantra and visualizing the Blue Lotus, he sat there, not understanding Vietnamese or English, but he could see a huge blue lotus emerging from the center and emitting light. That was his perception but it clearly showed his inner serenity and his ability to see the miracle of the Mandala. Those were some little anecdotes that I remember about him. But I feel that his heart and feelings toward us and the CSS were so tremendous and beyond imagination. He was already advanced in years and didn’t want to travel anywhere, yet he came to us as soon as he received our invitation.

After staying here for a couple of months, he returned to Korea. The following year he got very sick which lasted till this year. Once he fell down and cracked his head. He sent me a photo of his head and wrote, “This is the law of impermanence, you see.” Master Phap Dang translated for me, and I was very concerned since he was quite aged, not a young man any more. But up through the last day, he continued to teach the dharma on the mountain. Over there, everyone gets up very early, unlike us here. They get up for their morning prayers at around 3:25AM. They chanted NA-MU DAE BANG GWANG BUL HWA OM GYONG (*Namo Dàfāng guǎng Fó huáyán Jīng-- Become one with the Great Wide Buddha, the Avatamsaka Sutra*); after that, they meditate, and rest or bow. The Grand Master never missed a morning prayer session.

Those were the things I remember about him. I feel that his life was that of a holy monk, not an ordinary monk. It has been said that anyone studying and writing the Avatamsaka Sutra like him would forever become a bodhisattva. If you want to be like him, you should memorize the Avatamsaka Sutra, or copy it, or do anything to honor it. Then you’ll be

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immortal, become one with the dharma body--no longer an ordinary being. Thus, the Grand Master was a holy monk who merely let go of his ordinary body.

Page | 3 The Grand Master has left this world, but his great work and his bodhisattva-like compassion will shine forever. I feel that his passing away was too sudden for us, but his sangha over there knew that he was very old, in his eighties already. I don't know yet the details of his final moment. I only received a text message from Master Phap Dang that he just passed away. It was 2:24AM here. I'll find out more and let you know later.

In the meantime, let's think of the Grand Master's virtues and merits. Think of how we can be like him and make more sacrifices. Don't think of our personal and mundane matters. Think of ways we can sacrifice more, spend more time for the World Peace Gathering, spend our life to bring happiness to people around us, and always try to transform our ordinary body to the dharma body. The Grand Master Yuan Ying transformed his life to the Avatamsaka Sutra, using his blood to copy the Sutra and carving Buddha statues. Thus, he left behind the Buddha statues and sets of sutras as relics. That was a transformation of an ordinary body to a dharma body. In his case, it is the dharma body of Amitabha Buddha.

Therefore, we should think about transforming our body and reducing selfish activities, things for self-benefits and for personal enjoyment. Let's think of emulating the Grand Master and make sacrifices. Life only has a great meaning when we sacrifice ourselves for others. Perhaps we can never forget the Grand Master Yuan Ying's shining example of his sacrifice for the dharma, his work in building up an entire dharma region, his carving of the Buddha statues, and his copying the Avatamsaka Sutra in his own blood. These are unbelievable achievements.

Perhaps you'll ask me whether we should have some prayer sessions for him. I think we should wait till we have more news from Korea first before praying for him and dedicating our merits to him. Actually, he's already a bodhisattva and is always free and peaceful, so our prayers are just to express our sincerity. But please feel free to pray for him on your own.

Thank you for listening. I wish you a day of peace and serenity.

### **Dharma Master Heng Chang**

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