

# New Year letter from Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Dear Dharma Protectors and Friends,

May spring herald prosperity, and may everything go perfectly for you in the New Year!

As autumn falls and winter arrives, as winter ends and spring comes, Fo Guang Shan has entered a mature age amidst the interchanging seasons. Weathering forty summers and winters, the thorny bamboos and the various plants and trees on the hilly slopes have all grown considerably; the majestic shrines and halls have become a place of practice for Humanistic Buddhism.

On New Year's Day 2007, I reflect on the path I've taken in the past decades: founding Fo Guang Shan, passing down the lineage, retiring from the abbotship, closing the doors of Fo Guang Shan, building schools and universities, starting a newspaper, establishing a television station, providing the sangha community with a place of abidance, teaching to the multitudes, traveling and propagating the Dharma everywhere... All of these things that have taken place are like drawing a map of the world. I hope that sentient beings in the Saha world can all find a place of refuge.

Last year, Fo Guang Shan's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration began with the Festival of Light and Peace and Fellowship Meeting for Fo Guang Shan Disciples with Master and Doctorate Degrees. At the same time, there was the "Ah Fu Welcomes Spring Huishan Ceramic Figurine Sculpture Exhibition" which provided colorful daubs of Chinese culture for the spring festivities. At the end of March, we started forty-nine-day meditation and chanting retreats for monastics and laity as well as "Pilgrimage and Cultivation" for one year. From May 16 up to the present, there have been over a million people making pilgrimages. In recalling the early days of founding the order, the purpose for starting the pilgrimages was to encourage devotees to come to Fo Guang Shan to pay respects to the Buddha. Since then, we have received many devotees who were happy to come visit. Gradually, by word of mouth, the name of Fo Guang Shan has progressed into society, onto the world stage, and further developed the diverse enterprises for propagating the Dharma. With the endless passing of time, forty years have gone by.

To celebrate this auspicious occasion, Fo Guang Shan hosted the International Association of Religious Freedom Congress, the International Association of Religious Freedom Congress for Women, General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB), International Buddhist Youth and Leadership Conference, World Buddhist University Conference, and World Scout Inter-religious Symposium. Buddha's Light International Association also held the 2006 Asia-Region Fellowship Meeting and International Young Executive Conference. Its General Conference for members world-wide was conducted at both Fo Guang Shan and in the Taipei Arena. My keynote speech for the conference was entitled, "Change the World and Benefit Humanity," in which I shared with all BLIA members the following: 1) self-awareness and integrity, 2) resolve and energy, 3) participation and involvement, and 4) bodhi wisdom and the power of vows, encouraging those attending the conference to "change the world and benefit humanity."

In March, I was invited to Yuelu College in Hunan, China renowned for being an educational institute for more than a thousand years. Amidst the rainy, misty weather, I gave a lecture on "Chinese Culture and the Five Vehicles of Buddhism." Afterwards, I also spoke at Fooyin, Fu Jen, Central, and Taipei Universities. In early April, I accidentally broke three ribs in a fall. I'd like to offer many thanks for the care and concern I received from people of all walks of life! Although I am already advanced in years, I still upheld my principle of never breaking a promise and went as scheduled to Hangzhou in Zhejiang to attend the First World Buddhist Forum. The subject of my speech at the forum was "How to Build a Harmonious Society." I only hope to do my best for the beautiful harmony between religion, culture, and ethnicities in the future.

Due to endless causes and conditions, my travels to propagate the Dharma did slow down. I went to the Stockholm University in Sweden, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, and International Conference Center Geneva to speak about "Harmony and Peace." Though religions may be different from one another, their emphasis on peace and pursuit of harmony is the same. Therefore, I also went to the St. Paul's Cathedral in Vatican and met with Pope Benedict XVI with the hope of enhancing further understanding and cooperation between Buddhism and the Roman Catholic Church. Through exchanges and interaction, we can strengthen our mutual understanding and work towards the common goals of peace and harmony.

In India, I spoke at Osmania and Delhi Universities. In America, I conducted a course on current issues at the University of the West. Employing distant education via the Internet, I connected with students and devotees around the world, discussing the Buddhist perspective on issues such as social problems, ethic issues, ethnicities, funeral traditions, cosmology and life, as well as the *Heart Sutra*. Immediately afterwards, I went to Hong Kong and spoke at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Polytechnic University, Hong Kong University, and also at Chung Shan University in

Guangzhou. Through the technology of the Internet and live television, Buddha's Light members around the world were able to listen to the Dharma and take refuge in the Triple Gem simultaneously. Technological advancements have indeed further realized the ideal of a global village.

In mid-October, with a weakening heart and an irregular heartbeat, I flew in the company of Dr. Chi-woon Kong, my family doctor, to Hyderabad in India to conduct a refuge ceremony. This was done because India is the birthplace of the Buddha who advocated equality, of Nagarjuna who founded Mahayana Buddhism, and of Dr. Ambedkar who actively propagated the spirit of equality. For the future of Buddhism in India, I encouraged all present at the ceremony to learn and practice the great spirit of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and courageously walk out of the bondage of the caste system.

At the end of 2006, based on the causes and conditions arranged by Venerable Man Lian for me to speak annually at the Hong Kong Coliseum for twenty years, I delivered three lectures on the "Teachings of Precepts, Meditative Concentration, and Wisdom within Humanistic Buddhism." It is hoped that under the verification of the Three Dharma Seals, the torch of the Three Teachings will be lit, shining on the universe with the Dharma and establishing a piece of pure land of peace and ease in the world. Days later, at the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my annual Dharma lectures in Taipei's Dr. Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, I conducted discussions with Stanley Yen, President of the Landis Taipei Hotel on "Managing Affairs and Managing People," Cardinal Paul Shan on "When Christ Meets the Buddha," and with Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou on "Harmony of the Supramundane and the Mundane." The panel of moderators was chaired by Wu Po-hsiung, with Lee Jih-Chu, Chai Sung-lin, and Charles H.C. Kao as members.

While Fo Guang Shan's propagation of the Dharma has not ceased around the world, the building of temples and promotion of culture and education continues as well. Foundation laying ceremonies were held for the Tokyo Fo Guang Shan Temple and the Paris Fo Guang Shan Temple. After seven years of construction, the New Zealand North Island Fo Guang Shan Temple was completed with a Sangha Offering Dharma Function and Jade Buddha Enshrinement Ceremony. The Kuantan Buddhist Center in Malaysia and the Fo Guang Shan Geneva Conference Center were both inaugurated. In Japan, the Fukuoka Fo Guang Yuan was renamed the Fukuoka Fo Guang Shan Temple. In Taiwan, Tainan Temple, Nan Ping Temple in Kaohsiung, Jiao Hsi Lodge in Ilan, and Feng Shan Vihara were all officially opened. At Fo Guang Shan, the Fo Guang Shan Peace Bell is being crafted and a bell tower will be built next to the Lumbini Garden.

Last year, University of the West was granted full-member status by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), with many thanks to years of dedication by President Dr. Lewis Lancaster and Dean Dr. Ananda Guruge. Fo Guang University, on the other hand, is now under the leadership of a new president, Weng Cheng-I, former Chairman of the National Science Council and former President of National Cheng Kung University. The university has been approved by the Ministry of Education to establish two new departments: the Department of Science and Engineering and Department of Buddhist Studies. This means that Buddhist studies will now be formally included in the government's higher education scheme, in which degrees on religious studies will be awarded. Furthermore, Nan Hua University has been evaluated by the Ministry of Education and praised for excellence. The foundation laying ceremony for the new Pumen Junior High School campus has been completed, and preparation for the new Jun-Yi Junior High and Elementary School has also begun. The school will begin construction in Taitung, by Ji Guang Temple.

The *Fo Guang Shan Records of Extraordinary Phenomena* published by Venerables Yung Ming and Yung Jin of the FGS Cultural Council has inspired the hearts of many devotees in continuing with their spiritual cultivation. The ten-volume *Fragrance of Books* was published by Tsai Menghua of the Gandha Samudra Cultural Company, the four-volume set of *Ancient and Present Talks* was written by Venerable Tzu Hui, and the ten-volume *Amazing Persons and Extraordinary Matters* was edited by Venerable Miao Yun. The television program *Journey into Buddha's Lands* produced by Liao Wen-yu that aired on ETTV, TVBS, and BLTV won the Golden Bell Award. In order to celebrate Fo Guang Shan's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Commonwealth Publishing Company published *80 Years of Star and Cloud* and *Yun-Shui-Ri-Yue*. Written by Fu Chi-ying, not only is it a biography about me, but also a shared-record of how the Buddha's Light members of the world have stood by my side in the past few decades and assisted in the endeavor of changing the world and benefiting humanity.

Good news continued to pour in to Fo Guang Shan throughout last year. The *Merit Times* is now distributed on China Airlines, Air Macau, Far Eastern Air Transport and TransAsia Airways. The "Sounds of the Human World" Music Competition is now entering its fifth year. This music has reached into communities, radio stations, jails, high schools, and colleges, and the compositions have been released on CD.

Therefore, we have taken the opportunity to establish the "Sounds of the Human World Buddhist Music Orchestra," led by conductor Dr. Wang Ching-ping and *erhu* player Weng Chin-lung, in hopes that with music, the Dharma can spread further to help people.

The Sixth "Assessment of Outstanding Professional Organizations Engaged in Cross-strait Cultural and Educational Exchanges" conducted by the Mainland Affairs Council has conferred awards of excellence on the Fo Guang Shan Foundation for Culture and Education and also Beautiful Life Television in the areas of art, literature, academics, and education. BLIA Chungwa has received the Award for Outstanding Social Group from the Ministry of the Interior, which also selected Fo Guang Shan's branch temples Lanyan Temple, Yuan Fu Temple, and Fu Shan Temple for Outstanding Religious Organizations. Pumen Junior High School's Gymnastic Team came in second in the Junior High School Division and also the High School and Vocational School Division of the National Gymnastics Competition. The school's basketball team also made the finals in the National High School Basketball Competition, defeating Taiwan's top high school Taipei First Girl's High School in the games.

I am embarrassed that though my calligraphy is unskilled, my works have been exhibited at Hunan Provincial Museum, Hong Kong Central Library, and in other countries on the "To Enlighten Sentient Beings" World Exhibition Tour. I hope that the audience will not look just at the calligraphy but at my heart, for I use calligraphy as a vehicle to express my most sincere wishes and gratitude for those who have supported Buddhism.

I would like to express my gratitude to Griffith University in Australia and Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan for conferring upon me an Honorary Doctorate and Honorary Doctor Degree of Law. Phoenix TV in Hong Kong also presented me with the Phoenix Award on its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, while the Chinese Writer's Association, the United States Republican Party's Asian Committee, and Chinese Writers' & Artists' Association honored me with the Award for Lifetime Achievement, Award for Outstanding Achievement, and Award for Cultural Contribution. I am grateful for the blessings of the Triple Gem and all those who have supported me. If it were not for everyone's recognition and kind love, these achievements would not have been possible.

In addition, many of my disciples have also received honors. Venerable Tzu Hui was given the Literary and Art Works Award from the Chinese Writers' & Artists' Association, Venerable Tzu Jung received the Award of Excellence for Contribution to Education from Taiwan's Ministry of Education, Venerable Hsin Ting was presented with the National Welfare Award, Venerable Yifa received the Juliet Hollister Award for Interfaith and Peace Work at the United Nations, Venerable Yi Lai won the Australia Day Cultural Award, Venerable Man Shin was made a Justice of Peace by the Australian Government, Venerable Chueh Shan won the Rankin Australia Day Award, Venerable Miao Hsi was commended by Los Angeles County for her contribution in providing relief on Community Day, and Venerables Hui Kai and Chueh Pei received the Award for Contribution to Social Education from Taiwan's Ministry of Education. I am delighted to see the efforts of Fo Guang Shan being recognized by society and am very happy for those who have stood by the organization for the past forty years.

Looking back on the eighty years of my life, I have spent sixty of them propagating the Dharma. For the sake of Buddhism, I have studied at monasteries and traveled to different parts of the world, brought Buddhism into people's lives and given Dharma talks. My intentions were to allow the light of Dharma to shine far and wide, so that all sentient beings may be blessed with compassion and wisdom, and the pure land and virtuous people may be everywhere.

I am getting old now. In the sixty years that I have been working, I have never taken a day off but remained steady in my progress. Therefore, I am confident that I have lived a life worth three hundred years. I announced at an interview in August last year that I will be scaling back my public appearances after touring the world in 2007. From then on, I will no longer give large-scale public lectures. Instead, I will focus on reading, writing, instructing my disciples, and providing guidance under appropriate conditions. Nevertheless, to continue promoting education is a goal that I never intend to give up. I shall fulfill my duty as a monk for every day I have been one. Your continued support and protection of the Dharma and Humanistic Buddhism is gratefully appreciated. With the New Year and spring approaching, I would like to express my best wishes to you all.

May everything go smoothly for you and may all be auspicious!

Hsing Yun  
New Year's Day, 2007

