



Leading China

--- Chinese Living Legend (part2)

<<Leading China>>

--- Chinese Legend

Many people consider him as the innovator of Buddhism

"All of my teachings are based on the most rooted and fundamental Buddhist principles. And this is what Buddhism is all about. "

He believes Buddhism can be learned and understood by everybody.

"Everyone can study Buddhism; everyone can use its method to take control over their lives. If Buddhism is only for some but not for others, then it would not be considered as a perfected teaching"

<<Chinese Living Legend>>, this episode features the true spirit of Buddhism, the trailblazer of Human-centered Buddhism, Vice President of the Sichuan Buddhist Society and Abbott of Baita (White Tower) Temple, Venerable Shi Haikong. 1:01

The famous White Tower Temple located at the foot of the White Tower Hill in ZhongJiang County, Sichuan Province.

Inside the temple, a forest of vertical antithetical couplets and horizontally inscribed boards are hanging on the building walls with carved beams and painted rafters.

The workmanship of the giant Guan Ying statue is so exquisite that it has reached the highest artistic level in China.

Once entering the gate, the brilliant and colourful screen wall can be seen from a far distance. Walking through the Heavenly King Hall, the Great Strength Hall and the 28-metre tall giant outdoor Buddha statue form into one integrated mass. Behind it, lies the great Guan Ying Hall which has golden coloured cornice, glazed roof tiles and well crafted adornments. Beside those main buildings, there also are many secondary buildings such as the bell tower, the drum tower and various pavilions with curving eaves and dragon figures sculpted and casted on top. Moreover, there are the Vajra Chan Courtyard and the multi-function teaching building etc.

All the buildings are not only well designed and structured, they are imposing and magnificent. The entire temple surrounded by beautiful gardens and colorful trees and vegetations.

The reason why this architectural master piece has been presented to people from all over the world is due to this great teacher and the abbot of this temple - Master Haikong, who not only has mastered the essence and very core of Buddhism, but also has tremendous compassion towards all beings.

Based on his in depth understanding of all people, Master Haikong has held advanced trainings in this spiritual site, spreading the Dharma and benefiting beings. His ideology on the human-centered Buddhism has made a great impact on people.

"Within the Buddhist community, due to its recovery and reforming process and it is still new to many who haven't developed sufficient understanding, many things are not done in line with the proper Dharma, which is normal. It is Buddhism itself that has not yet been able to make matters clear to people and caused various misunderstanding in the society. We have to be patient, leading people by ways of our wisdom to deepen their understanding and correct view, and this will resolve this issue. Otherwise, the situation will worsen. Buddhism needs to change from within to improve its quality, strengthen its management, and resolve this situation in a cooperative effort with the society."

Only after the true spirit of Buddhism has been passed on to more people, will Buddhism flourish and thus be able to vastly take across beings. This is not only the main view of the human-centered Buddhism, but also the aspiration from this compassionate teacher. Master Haikong believes that the sociality aspect in Buddhism enables it to be compatible with all historical stages and all human races. And this is the foundation which supports the spreading of the Dharma and the flourish of the religion.

"No matter in which way the society is developed, Buddhism will always fit in. For instance, today people's living condition has improved, technology has advanced and people's knowledge range has widened; does this mean that Buddhism becomes less useful? I believe Buddhism is an education covering the subject on wisdom and awakening, and it has been brought forth by condition. The 84000 Dharma gates refers to all human worldly worries and afflictions. Has today's better life and increased knowledge eradicated our distresses? No, it merely changes forms following the changes of us. For example, the quality of life in the western world has improved along with many aspects in life, but there are great number of people who suffer in depression. When visiting Canada, I noticed that many people have depression, especially those from the higher social classes, many of whom are Psychologists and mental health practitioners and have their own practice or hold psychological trainings, businesses and so forth. They end up becoming my disciples and took refuge with me, as a result of not being able to resolve their own issues and they treat this as an academic or simply their job to solve other people's problems. When people encounter hardships in life and not being able to help themselves, this is caused by their inability to unseal their mind. They live a worldly life without the true view of the nature of their mind and being awakened from the deep mind; therefore, they are definitely unable to uproot any of those problems."

Since Buddhism is the basic education of wisdom and awakening, then where can we start? The classical scriptures has told us to clearly understand our mind and see the true nature of it. From the sound of it, those words are easy to understand, but by adding more thoughts to it, we will realize that it has very profound meaning. In facing the complication of our modern world, how can one get to know his or her true nature of mind? This is something that is worth for us to contemplate on.

"The word 'clearly understand the mind and see the true nature of it' covers a wide range of comparisons. Our mind itself is a series of ever-changing, invisible and untouchable thought rising from the self understanding. There is such statement in the "Prajna Sutra" saying that the mind rises because

of the state. So the mind is a reflection of the consciousness, and it's activated by the environment. Without environment, then it will be activated by our imagination. To clearly understand the mind is to illuminate the truth face of it instead of sticking to the mind created by phenomena or one's imagination. The true mind is not grasping, without obstacle, non-illusory and can be seen in its true form. That is to say that only the mind of the taintless nature and perfection is called the true mind. Meanwhile the 'nature' here refers to the true nature but not people's personality or habit. However once this true nature deluded by worldly worries, chaotic thoughts and karma, it will transform into our personality and habits. Only after those worldly worries, thoughts and karma being eradicated, will our original nature emerge. This is what we called clearly understand the mind and see the true nature of it.

Having attained "clearly understand the mind and see the true nature of it" only shows that we begin to understand the basics of ourselves and are ready for the journey of cultivation, or in other words, to learn Buddhism. The inclination towards Buddhism just starts here. This view point is clearly stated in many classical scriptures: to cultivate renunciation, Bodhichitta and pure view are the three principle aspects of Buddhism.

"With the arising of renunciation, one becomes much broad-minded. Meanwhile, cultivating Bodhichitta is to use the wisdom you've attained to inspire others and make them all to obtain such wisdom and to know the true nature of this world. If we will do so and thus help all to live a life that is obedient to the truth, then your merit generated from this action is endless. And such immeasurable merit is able to eradicate our obstacles accumulated from countless life times. Once our mind becomes broader and our karma is uprooted, then in our day-to-day living and working, only the virtuous retribution will ripen and the cause and condition stays positive as well."

Before the cultivation starts, we need to know about the three principle aspects, then what should we do next during the practice? Buddha said "all sentient beings are equal", we should treat everybody equally. To do so, Buddha Dharma requests us to fulfill the "three non-discriminative", they are: non-discriminative to Dharma, non-discriminative to people and non-discriminative to matters. How can we reach all those in today's society? Master Haikong has given us his advice:

"As long as you can let go and make a firm decision in this very moment, then you will find the way. Cutting off the worldly worries and suffering is like using sharp blades to cut through a tangled skein. Yesterday has already passed; today is evolving; tomorrow is yet to come. The past would become a burden if we kept hanging on to it, so let it go. Today is ever-changing, therefore we need to make a quick decision so that we can take good care of things at this moment and aspire to do well in the future. This will help us not to lose our direction."

Although being able to let go of all attachments and smile at life with ease sounds ideal to many people, Master Haikong believes that this kind of state can only be achieved via one's own effort. He emphasizes that although in the past thousands of years various Buddhist schools / traditions were developed in China, the core purpose shared by all traditions is the same - to purify one's mind. And this is the true spirit of the human-centered Buddhism.

"The worldly worries and affliction in our heart, if we don't use our own effort to resolve them, these problems will never be eradicated. Others can only help or provide guidance, but will not replace us. Nobody can replace others and take over their distress and suffering. The things can be done by others are merely to help and to guide, but even then it still wouldn't be effective unless one is willing to absorb those methods of help. Therefore, to resolve the issue of self-nature and self suffering lies on our

own realization. Once we understand it, we will then let it go, nobody can do this for us. This is the reason why in all Buddhist classical teachings, no matter what type of method they use, be it from the Chan, Pureland or Vajrayana tradition, the only goal is no other than teaching people to purify their own mind - to clearly understand our mind, illuminate our self nature and reveal the deeply buried wisdom and bright awakened nature that is always within us. All Dharma taught by the Buddha - the 84000 Dharma doors, are methods that can help to awake our awakened self-nature."

In Buddhist cultivation, we learn not only the liturgies and the tradition, most importantly, we need to learn the wisdom of the Buddha to awaken the self-nature. As for the human-centered Buddhism, the outlook on life is to eradicate superstition, eliminate all false views, realize the nature of our mind and face life challenges by using peaceful, faultless and honest methods.

"All theories taught by the Buddha - the awakened one, are first asking us not to be fooled by the deluded phenomena and to throw away the false reality returning back to our original simplicity and nature. Moreover, it asks us to awaken. We shouldn't be immersed in our own ways of thinking and our own habits, and go against ourselves. If we insist to use phenomena and knowledge we know to solve our fundamental issues, we will only make things messier and more complex. Because our mind is in chaos to begin with, using a chaotic mind to solve issues arising from this same mind will not work very well. We need to use wisdom, but where does wisdom come from? We develop it on our own."

Developing our wisdom and to awaken our lives is Master Haikong's understanding and realization towards Buddhism. This is also the essential teachings the Human-centered Buddhism has carried on in the new era. For this reason, people from all over the world are thronging into Baita Temple and take refuge with Master Haikong. They come because of his high attainment in Buddhist study and his utmost effort in spreading Dharma and benefiting beings. He has been holding advanced Buddhist training in Baita Temple which has greatly benefited many Buddhist practitioners.

"Through this advanced training, let's say we have more than 100 people in this training, Shifu utilizes this training to help us to help more people in the future. It is as if Shifu has lit up the lamps for these 100 people, then we students use our 100+ lamps to lighten up and to touch more and more people's lives. After many such training courses, the foundation of the Human-centered Buddhism will start to gradually expand"

"...in order to improve the quality of the monastic and lay practitioners, help us to move forward on the path of spreading the Dharma and carrying on the tradition, and let the Chinese Buddhism marching towards the world."

Master Haikong not only grinds deeply into Buddhist Scriptures to perfect his study and understanding, he also carries forward the tradition and spread the teachings to propagate Buddhist wisdom and its education on awakening. Holding the advanced classes is merely an ordinary job that he would take on himself. Via various Buddhist community activities, he has developed his own view on how to develop Buddhism in this new era.

"Under the current social frame, Buddhism is facing serious challenges. First, their educational and ritual formats are not well received by the public. Also the teachings and spreading approach are not as

flexible as other religions such as Catholic, Christian and Islam. For instance, in these religions, over time their religious services, life style and practice method have been improved gradually. They have done many tangible things to spread their teachings and benefit beings in line with the needs of the society. Whereas Buddhism has done equally many things in the past, but its format is still very conservative. The clothes, customs and learning methods of Buddhism are not only very distant from the development of modern science and social culture, but also keeping a gap from our traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, in order for Buddhism to survive in today's world, it has to become more scientific, more socialized, more live-centered and knowledge-based. It needs to follow the timely conditions and the direction where our modern day life is heading towards."

After the reform and the open policy, Buddhism has achieved great progress in China, yet at the same time brought forth many issues such as some people go so far as to flaunt the banner of Buddhism taking advantage of people's devotion for their own profit. Master Haikong thinks this is a social phenomenon which cannot represent the entire Buddhist community. He also addresses that within Buddhism there are many places that indeed need to be improved, for example the monastic management which will provide a better practice environment for the monks and nuns so that their practice will not be interrupted by mundane matters.

"To improve the Buddhist spreading process, we need to split it into three parts: education, cultivation and belief. Belief can be done in one's own home and there is no need to come to the temple; cultivation can also be done at home, the day-to-day work in the temple can be taken over by practitioners who are aspired to do so; the actual teachers in the temples however - the Venerables, have to be qualified as Acharya in order for them to take on the teaching responsibility. All entry, intermediate and advanced level of teaching staff will need to be verified and officially certified by the departments concerned. This process will strictly follow the format that has been used in the society. By doing so, we will put better management to our education and develop it to have the same pace with the society. This development model will benefit the future of Buddhist spreading; this is my point of view."

The notion of the Human-centered Buddhism has been supported by many great Masters and has become the leading principle and practice trend in today's China. Master Haikong earnestly practices what he advocates in tirelessly promoting the Human-centered Buddhism in order to spread the Dharma and carry on the tradition. He not only uses this notion to teach and transform beings, but also widely propagates it to all Buddhist believers. His action has received high regards and praises from both the civil society and the Buddhist communities. He can indeed be considered as the trailblazer of the Human-centered Buddhism.

<< The path of the wise man >>

"Things that I can achieve, I will do as much as I am able to. Planting a virtuous seed will harvest a virtuous fruition. By attending the advanced classes, if everybody is able to grow their wisdom, grasp this method and clarify their goals, and if they would use this wisdom to help, remind, teach and take across people; I think, slowly more and more people will become awakened. Everything that emerges from the heart will lead to a good result."