



Leading China

--- Chinese Living Legend

He believes that Buddhism is important for all man-kind

"Buddhist teaching covers the most tangible and ordinary matters in our lives."

He regards Buddhism as a type of education.

Buddhism" means the education of wisdom and awakening."

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

Green water is surrounded by the mountains and the city is embraced by the beautiful river.

Zhong Jiang County of Sichuan province is a city which has long history and spring-like weather all year long.

Great people have brought glory to this place. The well-known two towers stand tall and straight at the two ends of the city.

Beneath the northern tower hill and located right at the heart of Sichuan province, is the ancient Baita Temple.

Baita Temple lies at the foot of a hill and beside a water stream - the Kai river winds around the Temple as if it is a green-colored belt of jade; behind the Temple, a 14-level majestic stone tower stands at the very top of the Northern Tower Hill.

Once stepping on top of the hill, a panoramic view of the city and crop fields is obtained. The stunning site and the cool soothing breeze will make you forget returning to your home.

Baita Temple is the one and only Guan Ying Bodhisattva's Vajrayana Mandala which is used for true Buddhist practice and cultivation.

It also has the one and only 28-metre white-coloured outdoor giant Buddha Statue. The adornment of the Buddha image evokes tremendous heart of respect and longing for refuge from people who see it.

The Chanting music around the Buddha will further promote one to give rise to the desire of being apart from the mundane.

Underneath the Statues Lotus Seat, the words "to develop our wisdom, to awaken our lives" are written side by side of the Dharma Wheel symbol. As if a blow and a shout are given to visitors who see them, to help awakening their insight.

"We are standing on the roof of Baita Temple's Great Strength Hall, and the outdoor giant Buddha Statue is built right here. There is nothing like this in China, this is very unique".

"In order to help people who come here quickly understand what Buddhism is, I've chosen 8 words to summarize it: to develop the wisdom and to awaken our lives."

"All of the Buddha Sutras of the 12 sections in the Tripitaka, are teachings with respect to develop our wisdom"

"Only when wisdom is properly developed, will one be able to become awakened, meaning one will obtain a full awareness of the life path ahead"

"Similarly, once we have wisdom, then we will understand the true value and the purposes of our lives."

"Therefore, the ultimate Buddhist teachings are aiming towards developing human wisdom, letting us walk away from confusion, delusion and distress. In fact, Buddhist ideology is to reach awakening, the awakened mind is the mind of a Buddha. A "buddha "is a representative of both wisdom and awakening."

Venerable Shi Haikong was born in Sichuan Lezhi Country and graduated from Sichuan University. He received full ordination under Guru Qinghai of Wutai Mountain in 1982 and gained his Dharma name as Haikong and Miao Zhen. Later on he went into a ten-year-long solitary retreat.

1993, he was invited to become the Wanshan Temple of Yuen Tai Mountain.

In 2003, was honorably promoted as the Abbot of the Baita Temple, then the Abbot of the Qile Temple of Nanchong City.

He is now the Vice President of Sichuan Provincial Buddhist Society, President of Nan Chong Buddhist Society, honor Scholar of Sichuan University, part-time professor for the MBA program in Sichuan University. Vice president of the World Eminence Chinese Business Association, Vice Dean of the CPPCC in Nan Chong City and so forth....

Ven. Haikong always firmly believes that Buddhism need to not only be implemented in to everyday life, but also adopt the current social system.

"In the past, before I encountered Buddhism, I only wanted to find out the truth of human life. I noticed that so many matters and things in the world are created unequally."

"To unfold the root reason for this, for instance, I would question why although two persons might be given birth by the same mother, their lives can be completely on different path. Some are rich and others are poor; some are sharp and others are dull, and serials of likewise phenomenon such as lucky, unlucky, fortunate and unfortunate and so forth. "

"Determined to find out the answers, in 1966, I started to learn and practice Taoism. At that time, my study included "The Book of Changes", "The Eight Diagrams", Numerology, Astrology and Geological theory of Ying and Yang etc, hoping to find my answer from those studies."

"Until 1978 - after 12-years of Taoist research and practice, I finally completed my first stage of spiritual journey. I realized, however, it still could not explain and resolve some of the fundamental issues. Although I was able to unfold some of the theories and proofs, it was not sufficient for the root issues. "

"After that, I took refuge under the Buddhist Gate, and eventually found the path which leads to full awakening."

It is the courage and determination like this that has enabled him to study in depth through various Buddhist classic books and records, giving him the new understanding of the true spirit of Buddhism.

He believes, in order to understand Buddhism, one need to start off from the basic Buddhist theory called "cause and effect".

"Not just Buddhist teachings are attached to the relationship of cause and effect, each and every matter in this world, is formed by the relationship of cause and effect."

"Because for every single matter, without a cause, there will be no effect to it. Using our modern day language to describe it, it is called the Dialectical Thinking. When we planted certain types of seeds, we will have the correspondent fruitation; equally, if we created certain causes, then we will gain correspondent effects. "

"All the distress and affliction we are experiencing in our current life are the embodiment of our past karmic actions. Everything we see is the effect, and it is created by causes. There will be no effect without a cause, and all causes will lead to a corresponding effect. And this is the very fundamental theory of Buddhist teaching. "

Being able to obtain such a profound insight is a result of Ven. Haikong's diligent in-depth study in Buddhist classical books and records, his solid culture background and unique life experience. One could even say that it is a reflection of his own life journey.

"Through my own spiritual journey starting from studying Confucianism, school education to Taoist practice, I went from being inside the mundane world to leaving it all behind."

"During my 40-years life of spiritual practice, my conclusion is that if we don't believe in cause and effect, there will be no spiritual path we will be able to enter. If we do not thoroughly understand the theory of cause and effect, then our aspiration is not going to be firm, just like building a house on top of the sand dunes."

"So no matter whether you are a Buddhist or a Taoist, you need to know the cause and recognize the effect. Only after this, will we know how to properly deal with life."

It is only a start to know about cause and effect. Buddhism is originated from India, and the word "Buddha" is directly brought over from Sanskrit, it means "the awakened one", meaning the one who has attained awakening.

Then, from this awakened one, what should we be expecting from him?

In Buddhist teachings, this is simple but profound.

"Where did we come from and where will we be heading to; what is the goal for us to live a life in this world; what is the truth of our lives and the world; if we could not give answer to those questions, it means that we are still living a confused life, a life full of delusion."

"If we are still letting distress, phenomenon and environment lead us by the nose, and then we will not be the master of our own lives."

"A person living in this world who cannot master his or her own life and who is still following the deluded reality, this is the saddest thing among all. This is very sad that one has lost his or her own life control."

To clearly realize the meaning of one's life and avoiding being taken over by distresses and afflictions are not easy tasks.

However, through the study and in depth understanding of Buddhism, we will learn that in fact, its teachings are entirely centered on the wisdom of living.

If we can skillfully implement and utilize those teachings and methods to observe and face the world, then we will be able to resolve the issues in our lives - Realizations and experiences from the great enlightened masters can be used as guidance towards finding our own life path.

"In fact, all the teachings in Buddhism are as ordinary as eating meals or sleeping. It mainly teaches us how to conduct ourselves, know not only ourselves but also the world we live in."

"In the past, all the teachings from the buddhas and the bodhisattvas - the ones who have attained wisdom, are insights from their own realization"

"While reading Sutras and studying their teachings will help us to understand that those methods are of benefit to us, but if we don't implement them into our day-to-day life, then no matter how many Sutras or scriptures we've recited or learnt, they will have nothing to do with us".

"Studying Buddhism is to learn from the Buddhas and their methods, which can be used to empower ourselves and to give guidance to our work and daily life."

Master Haikong believes that the aim of Buddhist teaching is to help people live a life led by wisdom.

Buddhism has been spread through a great range of geographical regions in the past thousands of years and hence has taken on various cultures elements to it. In addition, due to the variety of ways in explaining the classics and doctrines, there have been many different Buddhist Schools and traditions created with their distinctive rituals and teaching styles. In spite of that, the true spirit of Buddhism has never changed. 2:03

"When the Buddha was in this world, there weren't any temples and rituals. He did teachings up on the mountains and underneath the trees, telling people the truth of life. He told us how to understand this world, what is the nature of this world and all man-kind, where do we come from - we come from affliction and karma, then once we have finished the journey of this life, where we are heading towards next? "

"That's why the great teachers have summarized Buddhist teachings in to four sentences: not to do evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is Buddhism".

In many people's eyes, Buddhism perhaps stands too far away from our modern day life. Some even hold extreme views thinking that Buddhism is only an old cultural tradition which is worth for research and preservation but has no tangible meaning to people's modern day life. There are also those who believe that burning incense and making obeisance in the temples will enable them to receive the blessings from the Buddha and their future will thus be smooth and successful. These, are biased wrong views of Buddhism.

"Burning incense and worshipping the Buddha merely represent a kind of belief and respect towards Buddhism, people use those methods to show respect and to mold their temperament. They are not useful in resolving our fundamental issues.

To resolve our fundamental issues, we need to adopt the method proved by Buddhas - the enlightened ones, to train our mind, to awaken and take control over ourselves. To explain Buddha Dharma by an analogy, it is a sword of wisdom by which our entire distress, pain and suffering can be cut off."

In learning Buddhism, not only we need to worship and respect the Buddha, it is also critical for us to use its method and theory to make a difference in our everyday life and work. Master Haikong always stands firmly and states clearly with his viewpoint on this. He considers Buddhism to be more like a basic education form regarding wisdom and awakening. In the meantime, he feels that there have been tremendous misunderstanding towards Buddhism in the society, and this is due to the misconception towards its true spirit. And in fact, this misconception has become the obstacle which hinders the teachings and the spread of Buddhism.

"Currently, Buddha worshipping and incense burning are everywhere, some think that the bigger the incense they burn, the greater reward they will gain; the more they burn, the more they obtain. Back when I was doing Sutra teaching in Beijing, some people asked me a question: at the night of the Chinese New Year's eve and on the New Years day morning, there are people who strive to burn the first incense which is worth hundreds of thousands of Yuan, is this really effective? I answered without hesitation, both on and off the Sutra teaching sessions, that this is completed none-sense and fruitless. If peace can be bought by hundreds of thousands of Yuan, then all the benefit in the world must have been taken by the rich and wealthy. It is against the fundamental Buddhist spirit and position. To burn the first incense is just a gimmick; the first incense has no difference from the second one. All things

follow the conditions - in Buddhism, one of the most profound theory is that all things arise upon conditions. The key is the motive such as why do we burn this incense and what is the reason for this to happen. In learning Buddhism, the most grounding issue is regarding the motive. A correct motive and a correct aspiration, without them, how much more incense you burn; it will be of no help.

There is an antithetical couplet in Zhong Jiang County, it says: Deities will grant blessings to the fair and the upright, in vain burning incense for those who deceive and ones who go against their conscience. For people with ill will, burning incense is useless. As a result, spending thousands of Yuan to buy the first incense will not fulfill one's wish."

To change this situation requests more people to understand and teach Buddhism, spreading its true spirit amongst all believers. Furthermore, it is to let the human-centered Buddhism help more and more modern day people who are still experiencing suffering and confusion. Master Haikong has always put forth great effort in practicing the true spirit of Buddhism, tirelessly and vastly taking across beings. It is due to his great vows. With his love to all and great compassion, Master Haikong not only has millions of disciples in the world, but also he continues to study the modern world phenomena and lighten up the roads for those who are still struggling in the afflictive darkness. His achievement is wildly recognized and honored by various levels in the society.

Master Haikong considers the entire special honor he has obtained such as the ambassador of the Chinese Charitable Foundation and honorable professor of the MBA program in Sichuan University etc., as merely a type of affirmation to his past effort. The thing which seems more important to him is what he is currently undergoing.

The ongoing advanced Buddhist training course that is taking place In Baita temple is yet another method of his way to spread the Dharma and benefit beings.

In next episode:

His every word and action has great impact on his disciples.

"I've learned so much from him."

What he has brought to his disciples does not just stop at changes in everyday life.

"For me, he has completely changed my life. Those changes are not just from physical point of view but also from emotional point of view."

Stay tuned for our next episode: the true spirit of Buddhism, the trailblazer of Human-centered Buddhism, Vice President of the Sichuan Buddhist Society and Abbot of Baita (White Tower) Temple, Venerable Shi Haikong.