

Speech Given by Venerable Master Chin Kung

Lunar New Year's Eve Charity Dinner

14 February, 1999

Mr. Chan Soo-Sen, the Parliamentary Secretary of Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Community Development; Mr. Guan Mu, the Minister-Counselor and Mr. Peng An-Hai, the First Secretary of the Chinese Embassy, valued and respected friends from the religious groups here in Singapore, seniors and guests.

I am very happy to be here tonight, at the World Trade Center, to be able to celebrate the Lunar Chinese New Year with all of you. From Mr. Lee's speech, we learned that there are over three thousand eight hundred fifty senior citizens and children attending tonight's dinner. There are also leaders of Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Taoism and the Moral Society and members of the Inter-religious Organization Council.

All these leaders and seniors representing the different religious groups here in Singapore, are gathered tonight to welcome the New Year. Such a gathering is rarely seen in our society but is crucial in our times. We admire and praise the government of Singapore for their foresight and their outstanding guidance on religious policy and share the hopes of Singaporeans for a happy, prosperous and harmonious future.

I have been speaking on the Buddha's teachings for forty years, during which time I have met with the leaders of different ethnic, religious and cultural groups and in the process have made many good friends. Over the years, I have come to realize that these leaders have great broadmindedness as witnessed in their concern and compassion for all beings. Whenever we

meet, I respect them as Bodhisattvas. In Buddhism, the word Bodhisattva is a title, similar to a degree earned in universities. A Bodhisattva is an awakened being who has the profound wisdom and the great compassion to help all sentient beings; thus, these religious leaders are worthy of the name Bodhisattva.

During the time that I was in Australia, I attended several meetings of the Multi-faith Forum, which is sponsored by the government of Australia. At these meetings, the leaders of different religious groups share their opinions and ideas on how to resolve the conflicts among different religious and ethnic groups. They then forward their recommendations to the government.

The objective of the Forum is to establish a harmonious and prosperous multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-religious society. To have a stable and prosperous society and country, we first need to have harmonious interaction among cultural, racial and religious groups. As the ancient Chinese philosopher, Lao Zi, explained, “The universe and us share the same root, we are one”. To express something this complex, in such an eloquent and clear manner requires a great mind of extensive knowledge and profound understanding.

Buddha Shakyamuni, our original teacher who taught for forty-nine years, also had this great mind. He explained that the universe, everything in it and we are one perfect complete entity. If we could all share this understanding, there would be no need to worry about the stability and peace of our society or world. Using this as a starting point, we will realize that all others are ourselves. To harm others is to harm ourselves; to benefit others is to benefit ourselves.

If we think of a tree as representing our society, we will see that each of us is like a leaf, while different cultures, races and beliefs are like different branches. If we do not understand that we share the same root, but instead only think of ourselves, are only aware of one leaf on that tree, then we will fail to appreciate the perfection of the whole tree, the one entity. When we isolate ourselves from the whole with every rising thought for ourselves, with every ensuing action for our own benefit, then it will be impossible to avoid confrontations and wars among races, religions and cultures.

From the Buddha's teachings, we learn the importance of practicing and advocating compassion and equality. In our society, everybody plays a different role, but everybody's role is equally important and necessary. There is no good or bad, high or low, just the difference between the assignment of task. Just now, Mr. Lee Bock-Guan said that our elders represent history and experience, and that our children are our hope for the future. If we respect our elders, we will learn from the past. If we take care of our children, we will provide for the future.

I sincerely hope that this New Year's dinner will be a starting point for interchange among ethnic, religious and cultural groups and that by harmoniously uniting we will help to create a peaceful, happy and fulfilling society here in Singapore and around the world.