

An Introduction to the Chinese Esoteric Buddhist School & Vajracharya Charlotte M. Steen

I was raised Catholic, although because my father was Lutheran, I always knew and honored other spiritual paths. In 1992, as I went off to graduate school out East, I decided that one of my personal goals for this time period would be to explore, develop and strengthen my spirituality. This decision led me on a wonderful path of fully embracing Christianity, singing for my church in a Gospel choir, and opening my heart wider and wider to the oneness and the holiness of humanity. In 2001, I decided that I needed to continue my spiritual development (keep growing!), and so started to seek out other spiritual teachers and other spiritual paths. In April 2002, I met my guru, Great Master Dechan Jueren, 49th lineage bearer of the Chinese Esoteric (Hanmi) Buddhist school. He was teaching to a large conference of over 2,000 people, and yet, when he spoke, my heart opened. I knew then that I wanted to become his student.

Over the years, I have heard Great Master Dechan Jueren teach many, many times, often reiterating basic principles which I refer to as Hanmi Buddhist guiding tenets. They are: Expect the best from yourself; Respect all, as if they are your mother and father; Forgive all; Help all, without expecting anything in return; Give others the easy and happy path, take the difficulty for yourself.

When anyone follows these tenets, it is as if one is planting wonderful vegetables and beautiful flowers in one's garden of life. One's luck improves. One's health is better. Simply, one's path is smoother, lighter, and easier.

When we are born into this world, we have received the most wonderful gift of human birth. It is a precious gift, because it is the only realm in which we have the possibility to transform spiritually. It is the only realm in which we have the opportunity to awaken our Buddha-natures, to become a Buddha. Because we have received this wondrous gift of birth from our father and mother, it behooves us to respect and to honor them all of their days. Following this tenet is a holy act. Also, when we respect and honor others as if they are our father and mother, we have seized the opportunity to create sacred ground among us.

As we go about our lives, invariably, we make mistakes and hurt others. Others also make mistakes and hurt us. When we can forgive others for the mistakes, we release ourselves and we release them from our endless karmic cycle of suffering with them. Actually letting it go, forgiving even when “they were wrong,” is a holy act.

Helping others without expecting anything in return is also holy. It is through these many small and large kindnesses to others that we can not only make our larger world a better place, but we can make our own worlds better, our own paths easier, our own bodies healthier. When we are able to focus on others’ happiness and wellness, then ours invariably improves as well. Importantly, it is in helping others without talking about it, without wanting to get noticed for it, without fanfare, that the greatest spiritual blessings are received. Humility transforms our service exponentially.

The final tenet, to allow others the easy and happy path and to take the difficulties instead, is another way of helping one another. Perhaps it is a simple choice to let the car pull in ahead of you on the freeway, even though it will slow you down. Perhaps it is giving up your seat for someone on the bus, and standing, so that they can sit. Perhaps it is any one of the many ways that most parents selflessly give to their children, and how children can learn to also do this for their parents. This way of going through life creates holy moments for all involved.

It is amazing how simple these spiritual practices are, and yet, they are often not easy. If we are also practicing Hanmi Buddhist dharma meditation, we are able to use the practice of the Hanmi Buddhist tenets to know ourselves, to change ourselves, to overcome ourselves. As we transform and purify ourselves, our actual meditation practice improves, and gradually, with Buddha’s blessing, we are able to awaken our own Buddha nature.