

Translator's Preface

Master Sheng Yen (1931-2009) delivered the following teachings during a seven-day Chan meditation retreat held in May 2003 during his second and last trip to Russia. He first went to Russia in May 1998, when he led a five-day retreat in St. Petersburg in which a majority of the participants were students of Udzimen (Ch., *wujimen* 無極門), a center for Chinese culture and a martial arts school (website: <http://udzi.ru>). It was at the invitation of the head of the center, Alexander Zhitomirsky or "Sasha," that Sheng Yen went to Moscow, to where Sasha had moved and a new center of Udzimen had been opened. According to Sheng Yen, Sasha's main instructor in Shaolin martial arts had been a Chinese monk, whose photograph I saw displayed in Sasha's apartment, and who had impressed upon Sasha the importance of integrating Chan practice into martial arts training.

For several days before the retreat our party of five (Master Sheng Yen; his monastic disciple Ven. Guoyuan, who led the physical exercises during the retreat; lay disciple Chang Kuang-tou; photographer Ch'en Han-liang; and myself) stayed in a Moscow apartment that was converted to serve as a Korean temple. During these few days Sheng Yen also gave Dharma talks both in the main hall of the apartment-cum-Korean temple and in downtown Moscow in the former Ministry of Trade. He also participated in an inter-religious dialog with Russian Orthodox, Muslim, and Buddhist leaders held in Danilov Monastery, the oldest monastery in Moscow and the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Chan retreat took place in a rural village an hour or two outside of Moscow, in the Vysokoye Guesthouse, a large, aging, red-brick, former workers' recreation facility set behind a pond and surrounded by fields and trees. These surroundings proved an excellent locale for various outdoor meditation exercises such as direct contemplation, walking meditation, and meditation through work. The half-dozen cooks at the facility kept us well fed with excellent vegetarian food, most memorably with the hearty Russian black bread that came with almost every meal.

During the retreat we performed relay interpretation, interpreting from Chinese to English to Russian and vice versa, which made a twenty-minute Dharma talk require at least one hour to complete. Master Sheng Yen spoke in Chinese, I performed the Chinese-English and English-Chinese interpretation, and three of the seventy-some retreat participants, Maria Filatova or "Masha," Alexey Yozhik or "Lyosha," and Eugene Bobkov or "Zhenya," kindly volunteered to share the responsibility for the

English-Russian and Russian-English interpretation.

On behalf of Dharma Drum Mountain, I would like to extend special thanks to Sasha, the three Russian interpreters during the retreat, and to two additional people who worked largely behind the scenes to make our visit to Moscow a success, namely Roman Konyshov or “Roma,” Sasha’s assistant in Udzimen, and Vadim Kotikov, who helped arrange our visit and helped us navigate around Moscow during our first several days there.

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<Final Notes for Ernie

I’m not sure to what extent you will incorporate things that Lyosha has sent. It sounds like there are also other things that **could** be added, such as Shifu’s talk in the Ministry of Trade the night before the retreat, or some of Guoyuan Shi’s instructions. If you do add these, then I would also like to thank Zhenya for translating those, too.>