



BUDDHIST CACHE

I N T E R V I E W

Master Da'an

In conversation with Buddhist Cache

Pure Land Buddhism • Donglin Temple • Practice • Teaching



Gilded Buddha images in the temple hall

INTRODUCTION

BUDDHIST CACHE Master Da'an, thank you very much for joining Buddhist Cache for this interview. Our mission is to help preserve, share and promote Buddhist teachings and traditions for future generations, and we sincerely appreciate you taking the time to share your knowledge and experience with us.

MASTER DA'AN Thank you. I am very pleased to have been invited by an international organisation such as Buddhist Cache. It is a meaningful opportunity to share some of my experience and understanding of Buddhism, and I hope our conversation can help more people encounter and understand the Dharma.

INTERVIEW

01

What kind of Buddhism do you practise and teach?

MASTER DA'AN I practise and teach the Pure Land tradition. At its heart is faith in Amitābha Buddha, the aspiration to be reborn in the Western Pure Land, and the practice of reciting Amitābha's name. The method is simple, but its doctrinal foundation is profound. For ordinary practitioners, the essential elements are faith, aspiration and sustained recitation of the Buddha's name.

02

What first brought you to Buddhism?

MASTER DA'AN I was not originally a Buddhist. In fact, when I was younger I regarded Buddhism as pessimistic and insufficiently modern. A serious illness changed my perspective. In hospital I confronted the reality of death very directly, and I realised that the question of life and death was more fundamental than career, scholarship or worldly achievement. After I recovered, I began searching through different religious traditions for an answer. Eventually I encountered Pure Land Buddhism.

03

Was there one experience that made Pure Land Buddhism feel real to you?

MASTER DA'AN Yes. I obtained a recording of Amitābha Buddha's name and listened to it at home. Unexpectedly, I began to cry. I had not cried for many years. That experience affected me deeply and led me to begin studying Pure Land texts seriously. I came to feel that this tradition addressed the question that had troubled me most: how to face birth and death.



An early photograph beside a stone inscription

04

You were an academic before becoming a monk. Did you come to Buddhism through scholarship?

MASTER DA'AN Not initially. Although I had an academic background, my encounter with Buddhism began through the existential problem of death rather than through intellectual study. Scholarship came afterwards. That distinction is important: Buddhism cannot be reduced to philosophy or academic knowledge. It ultimately concerns how one lives, practises and faces death.

05

What is the essential practice of Pure Land Buddhism?

MASTER DA'AN Recite "Namo Amituofo" — Homage to Amitābha Buddha — with faith and the

sincere aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land. A practitioner may recite hundreds, thousands or many thousands of times each day. The external method is very simple. The deeper work is developing genuine faith and aspiration.

06

Why do you place so much emphasis on faith?

MASTER DA'AN Pure Land teaching asks us to trust something that cannot be grasped solely through ordinary worldly reasoning. Modern people often find that difficult. But in Pure Land practice, faith is not peripheral. Faith in Amitābha's vows, together with the aspiration for rebirth and the practice of recitation, is central to the path.

07

Does Pure Land Buddhism mean relying on Amitābha instead of making personal effort?

MASTER DA'AN It is not an excuse for passivity. One must practise, cultivate faith, make vows, observe ethical conduct and recite the Buddha's name. But Pure Land Buddhism also recognises the limitations of ordinary beings. Amitābha's compassionate vows provide support beyond our individual capacity. The practice brings self-effort and the Buddha's compassionate power together.

08

Why does Donglin Temple sometimes count the number of Buddha-name recitations?

MASTER DA'AN Because the ordinary mind is easily distracted, lazy and inconsistent. Giving oneself a definite number creates discipline. At first, quantity can help establish continuity; over time, sustained recitation can deepen into greater concentration and quality. A beginner should not wait for the mind to become perfectly calm before practising. Practice itself gradually trains the mind.

09

What happens when someone recites Amitābha's name but experiences even more distracting thoughts?

MASTER DA'AN That does not necessarily mean the practice is failing. The distractions were already there. Recitation simply makes you more aware of them. It is like sunlight entering a room and suddenly revealing dust that was always present. When distracting thoughts arise, do not follow them. Return attention to the Buddha's name.

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It is like sunlight entering a room and suddenly revealing dust that was always present.

10

Is Buddha-name recitation itself a form of meditation?

MASTER DA'AN Yes. When the name is recited clearly and heard clearly, concentration and awareness are both being cultivated. In that sense, recitation contains elements of stillness and contemplation, concentration and wisdom. Something apparently very simple can contain profound meditative practice.

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What makes Donglin Temple different from many other temples?

MASTER DA'AN Donglin is traditionally regarded as the ancestral monastery of the Chinese Pure Land school, associated with Master Huiyuan and the early White Lotus community. Its central identity remains Pure Land practice. The temple is not simply a historical monument. Monastics and lay practitioners continue to practise together through chanting, retreats, precepts and intensive recitation.



A bronze guardian lion before the temple hall

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What does an ordinary day of practice at Donglin Temple look like?

MASTER DA'AN Traditionally, the community begins early with morning liturgy. There is Buddha-name recitation during the day, evening liturgy and further recitation at night. The temple also organises intensive seven-day retreats, overnight walking recitation and longer closed retreats devoted to large numbers of recitations.



Walking in a line along a country road

13

Why are intensive retreats important?

MASTER DA'AN Ordinary life constantly pulls the mind in different directions. Intensive retreat removes many distractions and makes sustained practice possible. Donglin has used seven-day

retreats, day-and-night recitation and closed retreats precisely because prolonged continuity allows practitioners to encounter their minds more directly and strengthen faith and aspiration.



A tree-lined road

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Should Buddhist practice be complicated?

MASTER DA'AN Usually not. For lay practitioners especially, practice should be simple and consistent. A person can recite a Pure Land scripture, recite Amitābha's name, dedicate the merit and maintain regular morning and evening practice. It is often better to go deeply into one method than constantly chase many different practices.

15

Does becoming Buddhist mean withdrawing from family and ordinary responsibilities?

MASTER DA'AN No. Genuine Buddhist practice should make family and social relationships more harmonious, not less. A Buddhist still has responsibilities as a parent, spouse, child and member of society. If someone neglects those responsibilities while constantly travelling from one religious event to another, that is a misunderstanding of Buddhism. Practise within your actual life and fulfil your duties.

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*Practise within your actual life
and fulfil your duties.*

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What if family members do not share your Buddhist beliefs?

MASTER DA'AN Do not force them. Practise with patience and skilful means. If you are vegetarian and another family member is not, you do not need to turn the home into a battlefield. Buddhism should cultivate compassion and harmony. Your conduct may eventually communicate the Dharma more effectively than argument.

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Does Buddhist practice guarantee health, prosperity or good fortune?

MASTER DA'AN No. That is not the purpose of taking refuge or practising Buddhism. If someone expects Buddhism to guarantee more money, higher status or perfect health, they misunderstand the path. Buddhist practice is ultimately concerned with awakening and liberation. Both favourable and difficult circumstances can become opportunities for cultivation.

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How should a Buddhist respond to suffering and misfortune?

MASTER DA'AN Do not assume that hardship proves the practice has failed. Suffering can awaken a deeper awareness of impermanence and

strengthen the wish for liberation. Even difficult circumstances can become conditions for spiritual growth if they are met with reflection, humility and practice rather than resentment.

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What is distinctive about the Donglin style of chanting Amitābha's name?

MASTER DA'AN Donglin developed a slow and contemplative style of recitation intended to express qualities described in Pure Land scripture — clarity, openness, poignancy, brightness, subtlety, harmony and refinement. The chanting should not merely sound beautiful; it should be treated as spiritual practice. The voice, breath and state of mind should gradually become unified.

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If you had to summarise the purpose of your teaching in one idea, what would it be?

MASTER DA'AN Take the question of life and death seriously. Develop faith in Amitābha Buddha, make a sincere aspiration for rebirth in the Pure Land, and establish a steady practice of Buddha-name recitation. At the same time, live responsibly, treat others sincerely, fulfil your obligations and cultivate compassion. Buddhism should transform both how we face death and how we live now.

CLOSING

BUDDHIST CACHE Master Da'an, thank you for sharing your time, experience and teachings with us. We are grateful for the opportunity to help preserve and share this wisdom with an international audience.

MASTER DA'AN Thank you. I am pleased to have had this opportunity, and I hope these words may encourage more people to learn about the Dharma and bring its teachings into their lives.



A group gathered on the temple steps



A warm exchange of greetings