

# May We Meet at Maitreya Buddha's Dharma Assemblies

Translation of Venerable Yen Pei's talk, delivered in Mandarin,  
on 1 July 1958, at Long Hoa Pagoda, Cholon, Saigon, Vietnam

I have been in Saigon, Vietnam, for almost two weeks and residing here at Long Hoa Pagoda. As I have deep affinity with Venerable Chao Chen, I feel very much at ease here at Long Hoa Pagoda, just like dwelling at my temple. On this trip, I have been propagating Dharma (Buddhist teachings) in other places most of the time. Today, I have some time to share Dharma with you here at Long Hoa Pagoda.

My talk today is entitled May We Meet at Maitreya Buddha's Dharma Assemblies. This line is taken from Ode to the Buddha Gem. Those of you who are familiar with this ode would know this line. Maitreya Buddha's Dharma Assemblies will be held under the Dragon Flower Tree. As this temple is called Long Hoa (Dragon Flower) Pagoda, I have specially chosen this topic for my talk today.

Firstly, I shall explain the connections between Shakyamuni Buddha and Maitreya. According to Buddhist discourses, Maitreya and Shakyamuni made the greatly altruistic resolve for Buddhahood at the same time. One who has resolved to attain Buddhahood has to fulfil the bodhisattva (Buddha-aspirant) practices. There are two different paths that can be followed. One path involves putting self-improvement before benefitting others to help them attain the same goal of Buddhahood, while the second path involves benefitting others to help them attain Buddhahood before one reaches the same goal of Buddhahood.

Maitreya and Shakyamuni made the greatly altruistic resolve for Buddhahood at the same time, but they took different paths of practice. Maitreya took the first path of self-improvement before benefitting others, while Shakyamuni took the second path of benefitting others before self-improvement.

Even though the paths trodden by Maitreya and Shakyamuni were different, they eventually reached the same goal of Buddhahood. However, in terms of the original intent of the altruistic resolve to attain Buddhahood, one's quest for Buddhahood should be based on the premise of benefitting others to help them achieve the same goal. This is what is meant by the phrase "aspire to attain Buddhahood for the sake of benefitting sentient beings".

In the Buddhist teachings, both paths are right paths, but one should first form good affinities with sentient beings in one's quest for Buddhahood.

In Chinese Buddhism, there is a popular saying that Buddhists often quote: "Form good affinities with people before you attain Buddhahood." Why?

We need the support of many people to protect and perpetuate Dharma in our world. After attainment of Buddhahood, a Buddha also needs support from many people, in order to propagate Truth in the world. There is a saying which drives home this point: "The appearance of one Buddha in this world has to be supported by thousands of Buddhas."

If a person does not form good affinities with sentient beings, it will be very difficult for him to attain Buddhahood.

Even after he has attained Buddhahood, very few people will embrace and uphold his teachings. Therefore, a person who makes the altruistic resolve for Buddhahood should cultivate himself spiritually, based on the premise of helping sentient beings attain the same goal of Buddhahood. When the sentient beings whom he ought to help have matured in spiritual capacity, he will certainly attain Buddhahood.

Maitreya made the altruistic resolve for Buddhahood at the same time as Shakyamuni, but as Shakyamuni had focussed on benefitting others in his spiritual cultivation, he attained Buddhahood before Maitreya.

According to a Buddhist legend, Pushya Buddha observed the spiritual capacities of both Shakyamuni and Maitreya, to see which one of them would attain Buddhahood first.

Pushya Buddha discovered that in terms of individual spiritual cultivation, Maitreya had already achieved perfection of his mental functions in purity and goodness, so Maitreya ought to attain Buddhahood first. However, in terms of helping sentient beings, Shakyamuni's disciples had already achieved perfection of their mental functions in purity and goodness, so it was reasonable that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood in advance.

The maturity of sentient beings' spiritual capacities meant that Shakyamuni had achieved perfection in the meritorious virtues of benefitting others. However, his own mental functions were not matured for Buddhahood yet. Neither had he completed the meritorious virtues for self-benefit. Yet, individual issues could be overcome easily. As long as he strove more diligently, he could accomplish them, so Shakyamuni eulogised Pusya Buddha with diligent concentration and attained Buddhahood before Maitreya.

In the case of Maitreya, as the sentient beings whom he should help have not matured in spiritual capacity, so even though Maitreya had achieved perfection in meritorious virtues for self-benefit, he could not attain Buddhahood before Shakyamuni due to inadequate meritorious virtues of benefitting others. This was because the problems of many sentient beings could not be overcome as easily as the issues of an individual.

If you have to help many sentient beings attain Buddhahood, it is absolutely impossible to make them mature in purity and goodness of their mental functions within a short time. Therefore, Maitreya will only attain Buddhahood after Shakyamuni.

Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood in this samsaric world. Maitreya also followed Shakyamuni to this world, to be Shakyamuni's disciple as well as assist Shakyamuni Buddha in the edification of sentient beings. Many of the Bodhisattvas mentioned in Mahayana Buddhist discourses assist Shakyamuni Buddha likewise, in propagating Truth and helping sentient beings overcome suffering.

Many Bodhisattvas are mentioned in Mahayana Buddhist discourses, such as Avalokiteshvara (Guan Yin), Mahasthamaprapata (Shi Zhi), Manjushri (Wen Shu), Samantabhadra (Pu Xian), Kshitigarbha (Di Zang) and other great Bodhisattvas.

However, in Theravada Buddhist discourses, only Metteya Bodhisatta (Sanskrit: Maitreya Bodhisattva) and Sakya Bodhisatta (Sanskrit: Shakya Bodhisattva) are mentioned. "Sakya Bodhisatta" refers to Shakyamuni Buddha when he was fulfilling the bodhisattva practices in His past lives before attainment of Buddhahood.

So, only two Bodhisattas are mentioned in Theravada Buddhism. One is Sakya Bodhisatta who is already a Buddha now, while the other is Metteya Bodhisatta who has not attained Buddhahood yet.

In Theravada Buddhist countries, such as Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka), Burma (now called Myanmar), Thailand, Khmer Republic (now called Cambodia) and Laos, only the image of Shakyamuni Buddha is enshrined in Buddhist monasteries. No other Buddha images can be found. There are no Bodhisattva images either. This is different from the Mahayana Buddhist faith embraced in China and Vietnam.

In countries where Mahayana Buddhism is prevalent, the images of Shakyamuni Buddha, as well as other Buddhas, are enshrined in Buddhist monasteries and temples. There are also images of Maitreya Bodhisattva, as well as other Bodhisattvas, enshrined in monasteries and temples. Now, we shall specially talk about Maitreya Bodhisattva, who has the deepest connections with Shakyamuni Buddha.

As mentioned earlier, Maitreya and Shakyamuni had deep connections, since they made the altruistic resolve to strive for Buddhahood at the same time, as well as associated with Pusya Buddha to learn from Him together. After spiritual cultivation over three great aeons, a Bodhisattva must further cultivate the marks of excellence and awe-inspiring forms over another period of one hundred aeons, before he finally attains Buddhahood. This is the course of attainment for each and every Buddha.

Shakyamuni had surpassed Maitreya, by attaining Buddhahood earlier within ninety-one aeons, shortening the required hundred aeons by nine aeons.

Maitreya is the most important Bodhisattva. He will become the next Buddha after Shakyamuni Buddha, being the first to attain Buddhahood in this world in future. Therefore, he is also called “The Next Buddha to Descend to Our World”. It is thus clear that we shall have close connections with Maitreya Bodhisattva.

According to Buddhist discourses, Shakyamuni Buddha stated that Maitreya Bodhisattva will attain Buddhahood around 5.6 billion years later.

Then, where is Maitreya Bodhisattva now? He is residing in Tushita Heaven, the fourth heaven in the Six Heavens of Desire. This heaven has an inner court in which ordinary celestial beings dwell and an outer court in which Maitreya Bodhisattva dwells.

How did Maitreya get born in Tushita Heaven? This is explained in detail in Discourse on the Ascent of Maitreya.

When Shakyamuni Buddha made the prediction of Maitreya’s attainment of Buddhahood, Venerable Upali asked Shakyamuni Buddha in amazement, “From our viewpoint, Maitreya neither cultivates meditative concentration nor strives to eradicate defilements, then why does Venerable Sir readily predict Maitreya’s attainment of Buddhahood in future?”

A Buddhist practitioner must cultivate himself through spiritual practice to eradicate defilements, whether for the goal of Arhatship or Supreme Enlightenment. Without spiritual cultivation and eradication of defilements, how could one attain Arhatship and Buddhahood?

At that time, Maitreya was perceived by fellow Buddhists as a careless person who did not pay attention to spiritual cultivation. He was always running around and not much different from ordinary people, so how could he attain Buddhahood?

However, the truth was not so. Maitreya seemed to be neither striving in spiritual cultivation nor striving to eradicate his defilements. Actually, he had put profound efforts into spiritual cultivation and tamed his defilements very skilfully, but this was not easily perceived by ordinary people. Shakyamuni Buddha knew Maitreya's state very clearly and so made the prediction of his Buddhahood.

Even though Maitreya has not attained Buddhahood yet, he has close connections with sentient beings in this samsaric world, so every Buddhist practitioner should form good affinity with Maitreya. In future, upon descent of Maitreya to attain Buddhahood in our world, we shall participate in the three Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree, hear Maitreya Buddha's teaching and gain emancipative edification.

Next, I shall explain briefly the name of Maitreya. "Maitreya" is a family name, just like "Shakya". The true name of this Bodhisattva is "Ajita".

"Maitreya" is also translated as "one with loving-kindness", so he is also referred to as "the Bodhisattva embodying loving-kindness".

It is stated in Mahayana Discourse on Contemplation Upon the Mind-Ground of Essential Nature, "Maitreya, the venerable Bodhisattva embodying loving-kindness, does not consume meat from the time that he first made the altruistic resolve for Buddhahood."

In Mahayana Buddhism, it is most important for a spiritual practitioner to care for sentient beings. This means not harming or killing sentient beings and even not consuming the flesh of sentient beings. Only then can the practitioner develop his loving-kindness and compassion to perfection.

Maitreya Bodhisattva made a firm resolution, at the time of his initial aspiration for Buddhahood, not to consume the flesh of sentient beings, so he is referred to as “the Bodhisattva embodying loving-kindness”.

After he made the resolve for Buddhahood, he often practised loving-kindness meditation. In meditative concentration, he often contemplated everything with loving-kindness and compassion. This is why he is called “the Bodhisattva embodying loving-kindness”, as he has deep empathy and loving-kindness for sentient beings.

In Buddhism, the names of Bodhisattvas reflect their virtues, such as Manjushri Bodhisattva of Great Wisdom, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva of Great Practice, Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva of Great Compassion and Kshitigarbha Bodhisattva of Great Vows. We refer to Maitreya as “Maitreya Bodhisattva of Great Loving-Kindness”.

Loving-kindness is the excellent meritorious virtue of Maitreya. No other bodhisattva can surpass Maitreya in loving-kindness, so he is also called “Ajita”, which means unsurpassed in Sanskrit.

Maitreya will come to this world and attain Buddhahood here 5.6 billion years later. Isn't it very difficult for us to see Maitreya then?



This is not true! Bodhisattvas often manifest in our human world, in order to benefit sentient beings.

During the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420—589 A.D.) in China, Maitreya Bodhisattva manifested in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, where he preached Dharma to Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty.

Then, during the Five Dynasties (907—960 A.D.) in China, Maitreya Bodhisattva manifested again in Fujian province.

Subsequently, he manifested in Siming, Fenghua, Zhejiang province, as the “Monk with a Cloth Sack” whom everyone is familiar with.

The Monk with a Cloth Sack always bore a smiling face. This was his manifestation of loving-kindness and compassion. The image of this smiling Maitreya Bodhisattva is enshrined at the entrance of each temple and monastery in Chinese Buddhism. The sight of this Bodhisattva image makes us full of joy and at ease.

Thus, it will not be only 5.6 billion years later that we can see Maitreya. If we have affinity with Maitreya Bodhisattva, we can see his manifestation body anywhere and at any time. Maitreya Bodhisattva may just be right before our eyes!

Venerable Chao Chen established Long Hoa Pagoda to draw you all here to attend Dharma talks. How do you know if he isn't a manifestation of Maitreya Bodhisattva?

I hope that you will associate frequently with the Maitreya Bodhisattva before you. Do not miss the Bodhisattva manifested before you!

However, if you cannot perceive Maitreya Bodhisattva before you, what shall you do? This brings us to the Three Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree and the future circumstances at the time of Maitreya Buddha's descent to our world.

We all know that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi Tree. When Maitreya descends to this world, he will also attain Buddhahood under a tree, which is called the "Dragon Flower (Nâgapuspa) Tree".

After Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood under the Bodhi Tree, He had three important periods of preaching to help sentient beings realise Truth and attain liberation. These are called the "Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma".

When Maitreya attains Buddhahood under the Dragon Flower Tree in future, he will also preside over three Dharma Assemblies.

According to Discourse in which Buddha Spoke on the Descent and Supreme Enlightenment of Maitreya, in the first Dharma Assembly presided by Maitreya Buddha, He will enable ninety-six hundred million hearers to be freed from defilements and accomplish the liberation of Enlightenment.

In the second Dharma Assembly, He will enable ninety-four hundred million hearers to be freed from ignorance and cyclic rebirths, thus attaining Enlightenment.

In the third Dharma Assembly, Maitreya Buddha will enable ninety-two hundred million hearers to be skilful at taming their impure and immature minds, as well as subdue evils and subjugate faults.

Why will there be three different Dharma Assemblies? All sentient beings who ought to be enlightened by Maitreya Buddha's edification will achieve liberation. Those who do not gain liberation in the first Dharma Assembly will achieve it in the second Dharma Assembly. If they still do not attain liberation in the second Dharma Assembly, they will certainly be liberated in the third Dharma Assembly. This is the reason for these three Dharma Assemblies.

Now, as disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, as long as we hear Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings or the noble name of Maitreya, we form Dharmic affinities with Maitreya Bodhisattva. If we have not attained liberation within the long time interval of 5.6 billion years, we will certainly accomplish liberation at the Three Dharma Assemblies of Maitreya Buddha under the Dragon Flower Tree.

Thus, when Maitreya descends to attain Buddhahood, may we meet at the first Dharma Assembly, see Maitreya Buddha together, hear the essence of His teachings together and attain liberation together.

If we are unable to meet at the first Dharma Assembly, then may we meet at the second Dharma Assembly.

If we still cannot meet at the second Dharma Assembly, may we meet again at the third Dharma Assembly.

Thus, all of us will be participants in the Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree. We all have Dharmic affinities and shall meet again in future. We should thus aspire for reunion at the Three Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree!

Who will achieve liberation at each of these three Dharma Assemblies? According to Shakyamuni Buddha's explanation, the order in which sentient beings attend the Three Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree will mainly be due to differences in their affinities with Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching.

For sentient beings who have learnt Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, developed unwavering faith, made the altruistic resolve for Buddhahood, as well as practise the Six Perfections, they will hear Maitreya Buddha's teaching and accomplish liberation at the first Dharma Assembly under the Dragon Flower Tree.

For sentient beings who have learnt Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, taken refuge in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) or undertaken the observance of Five Precepts, and moreover, practise the teachings earnestly, they will achieve liberation at the second Dharma Assembly under the Dragon Flower Tree.

There is another group of sentient beings who glimpse Buddha images, browse Buddhist texts by chance, or meet Buddhist monastics inadvertently, thus forming a little Dharmic affinity with the Triple Gem, they will gain liberation at the third Dharma Assembly under the Dragon Flower Tree.

Thus, all sentient beings in this samsaric world, whether they are Buddhists or not, will certainly gain enlightening edification, as long as they have some connections with the Buddhist teachings.

Maitreya will attain Buddhahood in a pure and stately world in future. This future world will be different from our present world, which is full of impurities.

Therefore, Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood in a defiled world, while Maitreya will attain Buddhahood in a pure world. Yet, the purity of our world will not be accomplished by Maitreya alone, but established by virtue of the collective aspirations and cultivation of Buddhist practitioners.

I earnestly hope that all of you will make the vastly altruistic resolve for Enlightenment and fulfil the extensive spiritual practices, so as to dignify this world and receive Maitreya Bodhisattva early for attainment of Buddhahood in this world.

How do we dignify our world? We should “start practically on a small scale, but be far-sighted in vision”. Start small and gradually extend our scope. For instance, we could first dignify this small world at Long Hoa Pagoda, by renovating the Shrine Hall and constructing a Dharma Hall. After we have made this small world more awe-inspiring, we could further transform Cholon and Saigon into purelands, then even transform this cosmic system into a pure, stately world!

It is thus clear that the descent of Maitreya Bodhisattva to attain Buddhahood in a pure human world will mark the fulfilment of pureland in our world. Let us strive together in creating a pureland in our human world, by gradually purifying our world to become a land of bliss and tranquility, so that we may receive Maitreya’s descent earlier for his attainment of Buddhahood here! Then, we shall meet at the Dharma Assemblies under the Dragon Flower Tree.

Let us meet again, to perfect our realisation of Truth and attain the freedom of liberation!