

IMMENSE FIELDS

By Thich Man Giac

I left Los Angeles on Monday, October 7, 1996, and flew to Amsterdam, Holland via Delta Airlines. I Arrived on Tuesday, October 8, in misty atmosphere, Sister Dharma Udaka (Phap Thuy) and the delegation from the Noorder Poort Meditation Center welcomed me at the airport. After an impressive and warm greeting, we got in the car together and headed towards the Center.

The way from the airport to the Noorder Poort Meditation Center is mixed with and the early light of dawn. Looking around, I feel as if we are entering immense fields - green prairieland extending to the horizon. On that green canvas are some polka dots moving, the milk cows. Here and there, streams of water curve, supplying their refreshing source to human beings, animals and farmlands full of vegetables.

The opening ceremony of the Meditation Center is to be officially held on Saturday. Thus, I have some free time to accompany our Buddhists in Holland on a visit around the neighborhood. Nature is purely green here, the color of peace penetrated in the wind and sun. Fields are immense; vegetation reinvigorating. The soil is harmonious, containing fertility and prosperity.

Thinking of the contrast between favorable nature here and the hostile nature of my homeland, I feel sorry for my own people and country. The people of Vietnam will be happier if there could be fewer natural catastrophes such as storms and floods; if there could be less poverty and if there could be fewer cold-blooded atrocities that destroy life. I walk in the middle of the countryside, away from urban areas, and I feel completely a salubrious living. As I witness the blessings derived from peace and happiness here. I am more and more compassionate towards my miserable native land. When I entered the gate of the Meditation Center and I watched the Buddhists in Holland paying respects by joining hands and bowing their heads – a cheerful and solemn gesture – I realized that the spiritual brotherhood transcends discrimination between the Occident and the Orient, between the different hair colors.

With such feelings of peace and buoyancy, I preside over the full ordination ceremony of two young men. They are kneeling, heads almost cleanly shaved. They are prepared for the ordination ceremony. The whole congregation recites the Heart Sutra in English. The session is in rhythm, melody and harmony all in one. It solemnizes the occasion in a sacred manner. I transfer the bowl of water from the altar to my hand, and I recite the mantra for purification of hearts and minds. Zen Master Prabhasa Dharma shaves the remaining hair on the ordainees' heads. The whole Center is moved in a tranquil and quiet manner.

The parents of one of the young men are present. He requests pay homage to them, an act of gratitude towards parents who delivered him into this world, who have raised him and love him forever. If this ordination ceremony took place in Vietnam, it would be nothing special. But it is happening in Holland, in a meditation center. Everybody is impressed, and prays for the best. I bestow on the two newly ordained monks a new life of tranquility and beatitude.

The main shrine room of the meditation center has limited space, not enough for all guests and friends from far and near. Therefore, the organizing committee rented tents and set them up in the field in front of the Center for the official ceremony, held this day at 10:30 a.m., Saturday, October 12, 1996. Most of the attendees are European. There is Reverend Thich Minh Giac, representing the Buddhist Congress of Holland, and there is the family of Mr. Le Giao from Amsterdam, among the Vietnamese participants.

At the start of the ceremony, I recited the mantra and sprayed water in the four cardinal directions. Zen Master Prabhasa Dharma and the congregation of the Meditation Center recited the Heart Sutra in English in solemnity and reverence. After the ceremony, Zen Master Prabhasa talked about how the Noorder Poort Meditation Center is not limited in its scope to Holland alone, but is open to all Europe. With the blessings rendered by this ceremony, the Center from now on will be a Dharma realm for total inner transformation for people from all walks of life.

In my message for the "Opening of the Gate of Noorder Poort" I mention the story of a meteorite from Mars that fell to Earth. Geologists found it and devoted time and energy for further study and research. After two years doing so,

scientists at Stanford University and at NASA unanimously declared that there are signs of life dating millions of years ago on planet Mars. The scientists did not stop at this discovery. They launched two space vehicles into orbit for further understanding about celestial physics. Also, they landed the space vehicle Pathfinder on Mars and collected more rocks for additional study.

Brief speaking, people are consuming time, energy and money for further understanding of external phenomena. As for those of us who follow the path of introspection, the insight about people, the earth and thousands of millions of other planets is magic, boundless and liberating.

Upon invitation by Zen Master Prabhasa Dharma, I arrived here and now participate with you here at the opening ceremony of the Gate of Noorder Poort. This means that all of us extend our hands to open the door, so that we are able to look into the realm of liberation. We are opening a path to our hearts and minds within. At the sunset of the twentieth century, there are two avenues of approach: one is in search of external phenomena; the other is in search of internal realms. We are the ones who take the other approach, the internal one, and let the magic happen.

Now that the Gate of the Meditation Center is open, please feel free to inquire within. And, may Lord Buddha shine upon each step ours along the path of liberation.

The Honorable Hensens, Mayor of the City of Havelte, speaks about his joy, the joy of Havelte, especially the joy of the people of Noorder Poort in seeing the blossoming of a spiritual center. Together, Hon. Hensens, Zen Master Prabhasa Dharma and myself cut the ribbon, revealing the lettering "International Zen Center Noorder Poort". We lift the handle, and people start entering the main shrine of pay homage to the Triple Gem. From now on, in the tranquil countryside of Noorder Poort of the City of Havelte, and in the middle of peaceful and green Holland, a meditation center bearing the feature of Oriental reflection is emerging, adding new splendor and fragrance to life.

I cannot finish the congratulatory reception with the congregation because I must go to England for a talk with my fellow countrymen at the Indochinese

Convention Hall in London. The weather is getting cold, but my heart is warm from my interesting encounters in distant places. I met again Mr. Doan, and Mr. Xuan Hong, among many Buddhists who remain a constant factor in the path of the return to Holland for the closing ceremony at the meditation center. While seated on the airplane, I try to remember all the Buddhists I met in London. Among them, there are two elderly nuns whose names I did not have the opportunity to learn.

As I enter the gate of the familiar meditation center at Noorder Poort, I am surprised by a large concentration of bicycles before my eyes. I turn out that people from the surrounding local area have ridden their bicycles to attend the closing ceremony. There is a Liberation of Life Ceremony in which a friend brought to the Center ten cages of pigeons. I officiate the Triple Refuge ceremony for them, and liberate them thereafter.

It is Sunday evening. I am having a meeting with the Vietnamese Buddhist community in Holland. I thought of seeing Mr. Truy and Mr. Thanh on this occasion, but Reverent Minh Giac tells me they are not able to come. At the Van Hanh Buddhist Temple, Reverent Minh Giac introduces me to everybody. The night talk is so interesting that nobody wants to leave. The Talk is over, and people are lingering about the temple. Some stay overnight so that they can send me off to airport next morning. Among the people in poetic Amsterdam, there are the Reverent Minh Giac, the family of Mr. Le Giao and many others.

I have parted with these people, and entrust the new meditation center to the hearts and minds of the people of Holland. As I return to America, I am aware that the tender breeze of Havelte will cross the sandalwood area of the Noorder Poort Meditation Center, carrying with it the sandalwood fragrance throughout the immense green fields of Holland. As I arrive in Los Angeles, I realize that in my mind these immense fields followed every footstep of mine, in eternal harmony and peace.