

LITTLE STEPS, JOYFUL STEPS



THE HUMBLE BEGINNINGS OF A
DHAMMA SPEAKER

Chan Kah Yein, Ph.D.

By the Author

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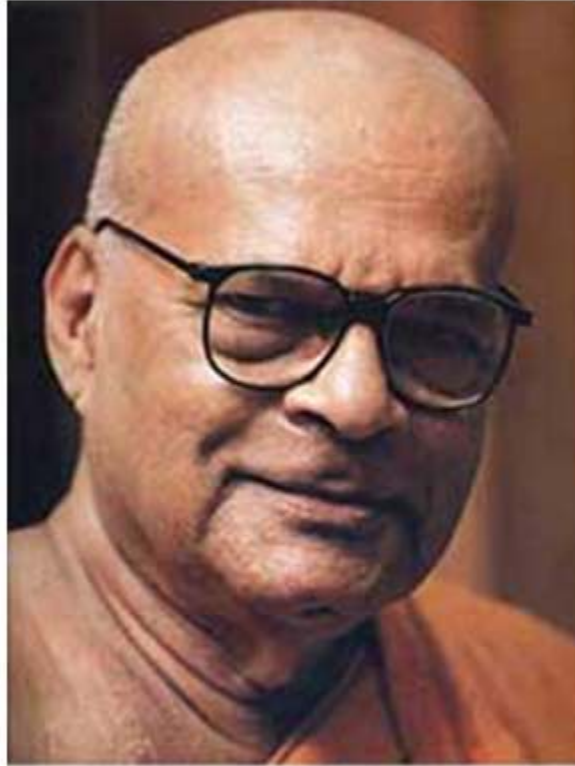
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**Dedicated with utmost respect and humility to
the late Chief Reverend,
Ven Dr K. Sri Dhammananda Nayaka Maha Thera**



**Late Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda
Nayaka Maha Thera JSM
18 March 1919 – 31 August 2006**

**Dedicated with gratitude,
to the coordinators and mentors
of the DSC, Class of 2006.**

**Dr Phang Cheng Kar, Bro Lim Chin Kah,
Uncle Vijaya Samarawickrama, Bro Tan Siang Chye,
Bro Charlie Chia, Bro Wong Tin Song,
Bro Benny Liow Woon Khin, Sis Ng Ah Lan,
Bro Tan Huat Chye, Bro Tan Buck Soon,
Dr Tan Ho Soon and Bro Chim Siew Choon**



**To the devotees of all the Buddhist societies who had given us their
unfailing support and encouragement throughout the two years,**

**And to all my fellow-coursemates and kalyanamittas
of the DSC, Class of 2006.**

**Sis Angie, Sis Barbara, Sis Guat Cheng,
Sis Kah Hong, Sis Nicole, Sis Siew Mee, Sis Vicky,
Bro KT Chong, Bro Daya, Bro Edmund,
Bro Jaik, Bro Jason, Bro Khing Wee,
Bro Kian Foh, Bro Kon, and Bro Wee Fah.**

About the Author



Chan Kah Yein teaches tertiary-level mathematics in a private college in Subang Jaya. She holds a first class honours degree, a Masters and a Ph.D. in Mathematics Education.

Having been a practising Buddhist since the age of twelve, Kah Yein is now a regular *Dhamma* speaker in the Klang Valley. She was the best student in the United Malaysian Dhammafarrers' 1st *Dhamma* Speakers Course, and a moderator for the 2007 Global Conference on Buddhism. She is also an associate editor of *Community*, a journal for Malaysian Buddhist educationists.

Kah Yein is very passionate about promoting kindness to animals as part of her practice of *metta*, and she rescues stray animals and fosters them at home. Her first *Dhamma* book is entitled *Pawprints on My Heart*.

With a love for all things small and simple, her motto is to embrace simplicity and travel light in life.

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All her e-books can be downloaded free at <http://tiny.cc/cky> and <http://tiny.cc/paws>

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Foreword

I am most delighted to be given this honour to write this message for my *kalyanamitta*, Dr Chan Kah Yein.

Dr Chan Kah Yein was a participant of the first *Dhamma* Speakers Course, organised by the United Malaysian Dhammafarrers. She was conferred the Best Student Award in honour of her excellent achievements exhibited during the course. Within a short span of 18 months from June 2006 to December 2007, she had given a total of 73 *Dhamma* talks at 14 different *Dhamma* centres.

I had the privilege of helping Kah Yein in some small ways during the two-year *Dhamma* Speakers Course. She amazed me as an extremely hard-working and diligent *dhammaduta* worker. She would spend weeks preparing her talks, often working for long hours – doing research on the internet; reading *Dhamma* books; checking her facts with monks and lay *Dhamma* teachers. Her main concern was to give the correct *Dhamma* to her audience.

She continues to receive numerous invitations from *Dhamma* centres and her talks are very well-received as evidenced by the large crowds of people attending them. She has a fresh, energetic and vibrant voice that exudes excitement and confidence – a voice that invites people, young and old, to come and listen to the *Dhamma*. Her personal stories very often touch the hearts of the listeners too.

Kah Yein has the gifted ability to deliver the teachings of our Teacher, the Lord Buddha, in very simple and clear ways, thus enabling the sublime and lofty teachings to reach out to the masses. If there is one phrase that best describes Kah Yein's *Dhamma* speaking skills, it would be this: *Simplicity is her trademark; Brilliance is her hallmark.*

In the Samyutta Nikaya 1.86, the Lord Buddha was quoted to have said that some women would excel men, in their perfected feminine role. In the role as a *Dhamma* speaker, Kah Yein has shown that she can equal the brilliance of her fellow male *Dhamma* speakers.

This book captures Kah Yein's journey towards becoming a *Dhamma* speaker and her struggles at fulfilling a promise she made silently to our late Chief Rev Dr K. Sri Dhammananda. This book also serves as an inspiration to future aspiring *Dhamma* speakers to follow Kah Yein's footsteps. It is hoped that more lay people, especially females, will take up the task of *Dhamma* speaking.

I congratulate Kah Yein for fulfilling her aspiration to become a *Dhamma* speaker. We are very proud to have her join the community of *Dhammadutas*. The Buddhist community shall continue to hear more of her in the years to come.

Lim Chin Kah

Joint Coordinator,

UMDF's 1st *Dhamma* Speakers Course, 2006–2008.

Acknowledgements

Jean Baptiste Massieu, an 18th century French monk, says, “Gratitude is the memory of the heart”.

I would like to thank Uncle Vijaya Samarawickrama, Dr Phang Cheng Kar and Bro Lim Chin Kah for encouraging me to write this book. Bro Chin Kah, thank you once again for being my second pair of eyes, and for helping me proof-read my numerous drafts.

I am also very grateful to Bro Sumanananda Premaseri for giving me the confidence that this book would be beneficial to many people. I hope that this book would not only benefit those who are aspiring to be *Dhamma* speakers, but also anyone who is involved in any *Dhammaduta* work, or anyone who is striving hard to go the extra mile, to achieve their dreams and ambitions.

I would also like to thank my Fifth Form English teacher, Mrs Wong Yew Choong, for her meticulous proof-reading and for “lending” me her ever-reliable treasury of English grammar and creative vocabulary.

In my personal aspiration to do *dhammaduta* work, the *Dhamma* Speakers Course started me off as a *Dhamma* speaker. But I had always been interested to dabble in writing, and it was Bro Ong Khing Wee who first encouraged me to write. And while I promised him I would “think about it”, he never gave up reminding me every now and then to start doing it. Bro Khing Wee, if my books manage to reach out to the masses and bring some happiness to their lives, whatever merits gained by this deed are also yours.

To all the generous sponsors who have contributed to the publication of this book, may all of you be blessed for your *Dhamma-Dana*. Indeed, as the Buddha says, “The gift of *Dhamma* is the highest gift”.

This book is also written as a token of gratitude to the many people who have made my two-year journey so beautiful and meaningful because in their own ways, they walked the path together with me. Some of them took me by the hand and guided me, while others cheered me on.

To all my friends who have shared in this journey, I thank you from the depths of my heart. This book is written for you.

With *metta* and *katannuta*,
kahyein
April 2008

Prologue

Shortly after writing my first *Dhamma* book, *Pawprints on My Heart*, I was inspired to reminisce in writing, my two-year journey towards becoming a *Dhamma* speaker. I was motivated to do so for two reasons.

First, I thought my experience and the challenges I faced may be able to motivate others to pursue their dreams, no matter how impossible it may seem at first. In my case, I had wanted to be a *Dhamma* speaker for some time, but the opportunity never came until the United Malaysian Dhammafarrers initiated the first *Dhamma* Speakers Course in late 2005. Joining the course was the first step, but struggling and persevering through it was a challenge. I hope that by sharing my humble experience, others would be motivated to persevere in achieving their dreams too.

Second, in the course of the two-year journey, I had been extremely blessed to have found friendship in so many people. While I know I would never be able to truly thank all the people who have supported me, I hope that this book, would, in a small way, serve as a token of gratitude to all my friends and comrades without whom I would never have achieved my dream.

“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it”, writes William Arthur Ward.

Let this little book then, be my present to everyone who has touched my life with warmth, kindness and love.

Before it all started

It was around July 2004 that I finally completed my Ph.D. in Mathematics Education after what seemed a *very* long and arduous journey of waking up at 4am every morning and going to bed past midnight for four long years. As a teacher and an academic, doing this final degree or reaching the so-called “pinnacle” of the academic quest had always been my dream. I did not know how I was going to do it, having to work and look after my family, but things somehow worked out, and I fulfilled my ambition.

It was very hard at the beginning. As a mother of two relatively young children, my life was already packed to the brim with household chores and responsibilities. I would go to work in the morning, rush back with lunch for one child, then take him to school and fetch the other back from school. Then, it was often the endless rounds of ferrying them to and fro until late at night. This was of course thanks to the ubiquitous tuition classes, a malady that has afflicted modern-day society due to sad and uncontrollable circumstances (and this issue can be a topic for another book which I shall certainly not attempt to write!). Besides being an unpaid chauffeur, I also had to run errands, clean the house, cook – well, pretty much everything that a modern-day working mother has to do. I had no domestic helper too.



My family with me at my Ph.D. graduation, October 2004.

So, with such a packed schedule, I wondered how on earth I could possibly fit “studying for a Ph.D.” into my life. The first few months was “difficult”, to say the very least. I had chosen to study part-time by distance-learning because I certainly did not have the luxury of giving up all my duties and fly off to a university to study full-time. Studying part-time was *very* difficult and was a very lonely process. There was no access to a proper library; only an electronic one. I had no

friends to interact and share my thoughts with. After six months, I went into depression and withdrew from the course. I told myself that it was beyond me, and given all my household duties, I just could not cope.

After a period of rest, life became boring, so I re-enrolled to give myself another chance. This time, I persevered through thick and thin, and I finally completed my thesis after three-and-a-half years. I remember the day I received the email from my supervisor – the subject was, “Congratulations, Dr Chan!” I could not believe my eyes. It had been such a difficult process. Finally, it is done, and I passed! I remember telling my colleagues about it as I was at work during that time. Everyone rejoiced with me – that was one of the rare times I experienced *Mudita* joy in my life. *Mudita* is one of the Four

Brahmaviharas (Sublime States). It means “altruistic joy”, that is, feeling happy for the success of others. It is the opposite of jealousy.

A few months after my graduation, I was bored and needed a new challenge in my life. I tried various things. My husband suggested that I tried my hand at improving my cooking skills and diversifying my culinary repertoire. Yes, I was (and still am!) a hopeless cook because I have never quite understood why food must be so lavishly prepared. After all, to me, the less you mask the food, the healthier it is, the more you’ll get to savour its natural tastes, and of course, the less you’ll have to do in the kitchen! I have never had a penchant for cooking, unfortunately (for others, not for me, though!). So, cooking did not quite work out.

I tried public speaking classes, and I ran away after one lesson. Somehow, it felt strange to me, watching people having their “er”s and “ahh”s counted. Isn’t it quite natural to speak like that, I thought. So, public speaking did not interest me as well. Or rather, I wasn’t game for it.

Dhammaduta work

I finally decided that I had always wanted to do more *Dhammaduta* (messenger of the *Dhamma*) work. I had wanted to do this earlier, but being so bogged down with raising a family, coping with work and studying for my Ph.D., I had shelved it. Now, I was as free as a bird, so I went to my neighbourhood temple and asked if I could be of use to them. They welcomed me, and I found out that I could help out in a few different areas. There was the kitchen, of course. Er...no thanks. I'm not much use there. There was charity work, helping out in orphanages or old folks' homes. But these were not on a regular basis. Any animal charity, I asked? No, we don't have that yet, they said. Later, I found that I could volunteer to become a *Dhamma* School teacher. Now, that's something I'd like to do. Although I may not be too good with young children, having been a teacher of older teenagers and young adults in college, I could certainly try. Then, I was told that I would have to undergo training first. Ok, fine, I'll wait. And I waited for a long time, but the training never came.

During this time (even during my Ph.D. studies), I had been faithfully attending our (now late) Ven Chief, Dr K. Sri Dhammananda's weekly talks every Wednesday evening at the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association (SJBA). Rain or shine, I would be there. And rain or shine, our dearest Chief (who was then past eighty years old) would also be there. I learnt so much *Dhamma* from Chief. He had an extremely charismatic personality. I remember being enthralled by his soft yet magnetic voice. The *Dhamma* came alive through Chief.

One day in December 2005, I read in an internet e-group that this organisation called the United Malaysian Dhammafarrers, was starting a "*Dhamma* Speakers Course". Participants would be trained to share the Buddha *Dhamma* with beginners in Buddhism. Now, that's interesting, I thought. Since teaching IS already my profession, and I have been a practising Buddhist since I was twelve years old, I thought I should be able to contribute in this area.

More importantly, I wanted to enrol because of Chief. By now, Chief had been getting sick very often. Yet, in sickness or in health, he never failed to come for the weekly *Dhamma* talks at the SJBA. Sometimes Chief would be coughing very badly. And I remember vividly Chief saying these exact words, "Look at me, I am so old, and I am sick, yet I never refuse an invitation to give a *Dhamma* talk. Do you know why? Because there are not enough *Dhamma* speakers. There are so many people who want to learn the *Dhamma*, but there are not enough speakers." And Chief would look at us, those sitting in front. And every time, I would respond quietly, "I want to share the *Dhamma* too, Chief, but how can I?" I would compare myself with all the existing, seasoned and popular speakers like Uncle Vijaya and Bro Charlie Chia. Goodness, I can never be anything like them, not in a few lifetimes! And sometimes Chief would ask us, "Where are the women *Dhamma* speakers? Women have so much potential to share the *Dhamma*, where are they?" And again, I would say quietly, "I'm here, Chief, I'm

here...but how?" I cannot simply volunteer myself, can I? *Who* on earth would want to listen to me? What credentials do I have? I am nothing but just a humble Mathematics teacher and a practising Buddhist. I am not a qualified *Dhamma* speaker...

Now, suddenly, this United Malaysian Dhammafarrers (the UMDF) was actually starting a course to train interested participants to be *Dhamma* speakers. This is my chance, I thought. So I emailed for a form and applied.

The form asked for several things. Have I attended any formal Buddhist courses? Er...no, I have not. I have no certificates or diplomas in Buddhist studies but would decades of Buddhist living compensate for the lack of paper qualifications, I wondered. Am I a meditator? Er...no, I am not. But I am very mindful in daily life, does that count? So I found that I did not really qualify by many counts (and later on, I was told that if the committee had gone by the book, none of us would have qualified, anyway!).

The reply came after a few weeks, and despite my lack of "qualifications", I was accepted. Oh, hooray! I waited eagerly for the start of the course. We were told that there would be three modules in all. I was exempted from the first module because I was already a teacher. The first module was on public speaking (!!). Phew...that was close, but honestly, I would have liked to attend that as well (provided they don't count the number of "ahhs" and "errs" that we make, that is). The second module was where we all would come in – this would be the *Dhamma* lectures given by reputable and seasoned *Dhamma* speakers like Uncle Vijaya. Gee, an opportunity to meet Uncle Vijaya up close. How lucky!! The third module would be the practicum. Just like teacher training, I thought. I won't be on totally unfamiliar ground after all. Later, we were informed that there would be a formal "launching" of the course in February 2006.

The Launching of the DSC

17th February 2006 was the day of the launching. We had been told that (then) Chief Rev Dr K. Sri Dhammananda would be there for the launching. Two days prior to the launching, I fell sick. It was the flu, and I had the whole works. I hoped like crazy that I would recover so that I could attend the launching.

The evening of the launching came, and I had not recovered. In fact, I was burning with fever, had a runny nose and a terrible sore throat. But Chief was coming, I told myself. If Chief could still travel around and give talks when he is sick, what is the big fuss about a common fever on a relatively chronologically-younger body like mine? I am going, I said to myself. I am going, because Chief is coming.

So I wrapped myself in two layers of clothing and armed with a small towel (in case I needed to sponge myself if my fever ran too high), I drove to SJBA that evening. I registered, made my way into the hall, found a chair amongst the participants' seats and slumped onto it. Luckily I did not faint – my fever was at its all time high. Wrapped up in thick layers of clothing, I could have easily passed off as an Eskimo girl that night.



Receiving my books from Chief. Notice the two layers of clothing?

In that feverish stupor, I looked around and noticed many familiar name-tags. Being one who was merely a face amongst the audience all these years, I did not know the “big guns” in the *Dhammaduta* world in the Klang Valley. I had heard of their names, and was now seeing their faces for the first time. Sitting in my chair, burning with fever, and hence being unfit to engage in any intelligent conversation with anyone, I looked at the name-tags of everyone who passed by and tried to put a face to each well-known name.

Bro Chim Siew Choon (president of SJBA and Chairperson of the DSC, and also my friend) came over to say hello. I asked him if anyone else from SJBA was joining the course (so that I would have a friend, at least), he said he did not know, but he would find out. Bro Steven Quah came over and sympathised with my sickly condition.

Meanwhile, I looked all around me and saw some of my fellow coursemates. They all scared me to bits! Many of them were talking, and they were quoting the *suttas*, mind you. And here I was...someone who knew absolutely nothing in *Pali*, except for the *Puja* verses. At that moment, I felt like running out. Can I say I have a fever and postpone my enrolment, I thought?

Too late...the ceremony was starting now. Uncle Vijaya was the master of ceremonies and he had everyone in stitches, as usual. We had a few speeches, and this was finally followed by the presentation of our books by Chief. Dr Phang Cheng Kar (one of the two coordinators of the DSC) was the emcee and I waited anxiously for my name to be called. Being someone whose surname started with "C", I was very used to always being amongst the first few to be called in everything that I did. However, the names on Dr Phang's list were not arranged in alphabetical order, so I started to wonder if my name was even on the list.

"Sis Chan Kah Yein!", finally, Dr Phang called me. I made my way to the front and paid reverence to Chief by bowing low. As I was receiving my books, Chief looked at me, and quipped to the audience, "Now, I can retire." I was very sure (and still am, today) that Chief quipped that coincidentally when it was my turn to receive the books since Chief did not know me personally. But I could not help feeling a sense of responsibility when I heard that that evening (yes, I was burning with fever, but I know what I heard – and it's on tape too, though barely audible now). When Chief said that as I received my books from him, I felt a responsibility that by hook or by crook, I would complete this course, and I would go out and share the *Dhamma*, just as Chief did. I know I would never even come close to Chief, Uncle Vijaya or Bro Charlie Chia, but I will do whatever I can, within my limited means and capabilities.

So that was my first encounter with the DSC. Module 1 started (I was exempted from it) and I waited eagerly for Module 2. Meanwhile, we were told that we would have to service the various centres all over the Klang Valley once we were qualified (*if* we eventually qualified, that is). I had a problem with that because I was hopeless with directions and had trouble with night driving. I also had unexplained fits that could come on anytime it liked. So I wrote to Dr Phang to ask if I could just service the nearby Buddhist societies due to my medical reasons, and he said "ok." That was a relief. I would hate to commit myself to something which I could not fulfil later on.

The First Lesson

17th May 2006 was the first lesson of Module 2. Module 2 had six parts in all and each part would be mentored by distinguished and experienced speakers. Uncle Vijaya was the mentor for Part 1. I was early for the lesson (it was held in SJBA) and I chose a seat in the middle. Everyone was busy talking...again, quoting the *Dhamma*. And again, I felt like fleeing for my life. Of course I had read the two books that we were required to read. Umpteen times, too. But I truly felt I was so green, so new, and I did not know enough. The fact that almost everyone was talking so authoritatively really frightened me.

Again, it was too late to back out. Uncle Vijaya had come. As always, Uncle Vijaya was in his element. Although he made us laugh, he was also very serious at the same time, telling us our responsibilities as *Dhamma* speakers. As I listened to him, I felt extremely fortunate to be able to learn from the best in the field, and I marvelled at this jewel of the *Dhammaduta* world. He must be heaven-sent, I was very sure of that. Our coordinator, Dr Phang, greeted everyone and talked with us.

Somewhere in the middle of the lesson, in walked the other coordinator, and this was Bro Lim Chin Kah. I had read quite a lot of his group mails through the internet e-groups and heard about his *dhammaduta* work – he has a book project which disseminates *Dhamma* books all over the world, and he also runs an e-group called *Dhammafriends*. I had never met Bro Chin Kah “officially” before but had spotted him during the launching when I was a wrapped-up Eskimo girl sitting in the corner that night, on the verge of falling into feverish delirium.

I did not make any new friends that night. The closest I got to a friendly chat was with Bro Dayananda who had sat in front of me. He was very nice. Bro Wee Fah offered to be monitor of the class (thank goodness for someone so selfless) and I remembered he asked me later if I would like to be secretary of the class. Of course I chickened out totally. And Bro Jaik volunteered to take on the toughest job – Class Treasurer.

Uncle Vijaya told us that from the following lesson onwards, he would want three participants to do a ten-minute presentation of a *Dhamma* talk each week. He asked for volunteers. Under normal circumstances, I would have volunteered (I normally do so so that I can get the chore out of the way and enjoy the rest of the course). But this time, I made an exception. I felt I did not know enough, and I was just too green.

Just Ten Minutes

On the second lesson, the three brave volunteers spoke their hearts out, each for ten minutes, as agreed. Uncle Vijaya then asked for the next three volunteers. This time, the chicken left me, so I put up my hand, albeit sheepishly.

All throughout the week, I searched for a topic. I finally decided on “Anger” as it is a common affliction amongst us modern-day folks. I searched the internet for a suitable *sutta* and found the *Aghatavinaya Sutta* from the *Anguttara Nikaya*. It was a *sutta* about subduing hatred. Aha...perfect. Something new, something I had not heard of before. I decided I should prepare powerpoint slides for it. I figured just in case I wasn't good enough, maybe my pictures would help save the day (and save me)! I was new at preparing powerpoints as I did not use them in my teaching, but I thought “this shouldn't be too hard...” So I tinkered with the powerpoints and came up with something “presentable”, in my opinion. I used cartoons in it. Yes, I am still quite young at heart (!!).

Lesson Three. D-Day for me. As luck would have it, I was coughing so badly (again?) that week. I thought this was too coincidental already – is this a sign? Anyway, armed with a few lozenges, I drove to SJBA that evening. Praying hard that I would not cough, I volunteered to go first since that was my usual habit. Get it out of the way, then you can relax, and watch others....*and* learn from them. So I made my way to the front, opened my powerpoints, took a deep breath, smiled to everyone, and started.

“Have you ever felt like this before?”, I asked my audience, showing them cartoon pictures of three angry people. Ten minutes passed, and I must say, I enjoyed the process very much. Uncle Vijaya had good things to say, of course, as did he for everyone. Believe it or not, I actually did not cough at all throughout my ten-minute talk. But I coughed *after* my presentation!! And very badly too, until Bro Dayananda, bless his kind heart, had to offer me a coughdrop!

As I was listening to my fellow participants presenting their ten-minute talk, suddenly I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I turned around, and it was Dr Phang. He asked me, “You free this Sunday?” I asked, “Why?”, and Dr Phang said, “I have a talk at Nalanda, I will give you ten minutes of my time to present this same talk of yours.” Of course I almost fell off my chair! Me?? A rookie giving a *Dhamma* talk at Nalanda Dharma Centre? Dr Phang, you must be joking!

But he wasn't. He was dead serious, and he said to me, “Think about it, and let me know.” The chicken in me (yes, it was still there) started giving all sort of excuses, “But, I'm coughing, you see...and Nalanda is so far...I have no transport...” “Think over it, and let me know. I can take you there. I know you're coughing, but the *Dhamma* works in mysterious ways...”, Dr Phang said. I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about. Here I was, coughing myself silly. Granted, by some miracle, I had not coughed during

the ten-minute presentation that evening, but how was I to know it won't happen again at Nalanda? I can't be *that* lucky, can I?

At the end of the lesson, I went up to Uncle Vijaya and whimpered, "Dr Phang asked me to give my talk at Nalanda this Sunday!!" (which was just two days away). Uncle Vijaya looked me in the eye and said, "GO!"

I had no confidence at all and using my cough as a convenient excuse, I chickened out and told Dr Phang, "Thanks, but maybe next time." The next day, I thought it over and decided that if Dr Phang and Uncle Vijaya thought I was ready to give a ten-minute talk, why must I disappoint them? So I called Dr Phang and told him I would go with him the next day. Dr Phang said, "I knew you'd come." Was he psychic, I wondered...

The Warmth of Nalanda

11th June, 2006. It was a beautiful Sunday morning, and Dr Phang drove me, Nicole (our youngest DSC participant), Tiffany (Nicole's sister) and their mother, Sis Ai Lin, to Nalanda. I had butterflies in my stomach, and since this was the first time in my entire life travelling to Serdang, the journey felt very long. Luckily the three girls and their mother were very pleasant company. I remember arriving at Nalanda and being totally and completely enchanted with the ambience. It had a Balinese flavour, and I felt completely relaxed as I entered the centre – like going into a spa? But what was most memorable was the warmth of the devotees at Nalanda. They welcomed me with so much hospitality, I actually felt a little bad if I deserved such thoughtfulness and kindness.

Dr Phang introduced me to the audience as a “new speaker” and handed the microphone over to me. It was very kind of him to let me start first, else I would have been completely overshadowed if I were to speak after him! So I went up and gave my ten-minute talk on anger. The Nalanda audience was the kindest audience I had ever met – they gave me their undivided attention, with nods of approval and smiles of agreement as I spoke. In those ten minutes, they exuded so much warmth and hospitality that I felt very comforted and reassured. Until today, I will never forget that first experience at Nalanda. I am so thankful for their hospitality. This, was the true spirit of *Mudita*. This, was *Mudita* in Action.

And...surprise, surprise! I did not cough!! The *Dhamma* does work in mysterious ways, as Dr Phang had said. I decided it must be a mind-over-matter phenomenon.

I left Nalanda feeling very reassured, especially when Dr Phang was so kind in his evaluation. The audience at Nalanda and Dr Phang had planted in me a confidence that was instrumental in shaping me to be the *Dhamma* speaker that I am today. First impressions are most lasting, as they say. Nothing can be truer than this. I am very thankful to the devotees of Nalanda Dharma Centre and Dr Phang.

During my ten-minute presentation on the evening of the third lesson with Uncle Vijaya, there were two guests in the audience. One was a visiting Australian *Dhamma* friend of Uncle Vijaya. He was a very kind person and later wrote to me to tell me that he liked my talk. I was very touched, especially with this coming from a traveller who had probably heard seasoned *Dhamma* speakers in many different countries. He even asked for my powerpoint slides. Another guest that night was none other than Bro Chim, the president of SJBA and the chairperson of the DSC himself. He too had sat in to watch us in action.

A few weeks later, Bro Chim wrote to invite me to give a full-length talk at SJBA on a Sunday. SJBA! A full-length talk!! Oh wow...I had only listened to talks at SJBA and had always remained a face in the audience, not even daring to put my hand up to ask questions. Now, I was going to be in the limelight, giving a talk, up there, in front, at the podium?

This time, there was no chicken in me, so I accepted Bro Chim's invitation. I would still give my talk on Anger, but I would expand it to a full-length talk (for one hour). I decided to call it "Mercury Rising, Anger Management, the Buddhist Way.

“Mercury Rising” at SJBA

30th July, 2006 was the day of my first-ever full-length talk. I drove to SJBA that morning, feeling extremely jittery. Bro Chin Kah said he would come and support me. I remember writing to him telling him my fears. And I remember what he said, “Even if the whole hall walks out, I will still be sitting there listening to you”. His assurance was comforting.

The emcee introduced me, and I walked up to the front. It felt like a sea of audience before me in SJBA’s main shrine hall. The hall was so big. All eyes were watching me. I searched the audience for a friendly face and found Bro Chim’s and Bro Chin Kah’s. I took a deep breath, smiled at everyone, and began.

When I finished, I searched for immediate feedback by gauging the audience’s facial expressions. I had worked very hard to develop this talk (I must not disappoint Bro Chim, I had told myself. If he has enough confidence to invite me to SJBA, I must never ever disappoint him – and that was my sole motivation as I prepared the talk for weeks). And now, amidst the chants of *Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu*, I looked amongst the sea of faces and caught a glimpse of Bro Chin Kah. He was smiling radiantly, and he gave me the “thumbs-up”. And there was a sparkle in his eye. That single simple gesture was a great boost to my confidence because Bro Chin Kah is someone who hardly praises – he is an extremely critical person. Now, a “thumbs-up” from him??



At the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association.

Much as we Asians are often taught not to rely on praise since it might inflate the ego, a good word or a kind gesture, given at the right time, does wonders to a person’s confidence. And praise, when taken in the right spirit, can bring a lot of benefit to the recipient too. I took that “thumbs-up” as a motivation for me to always strive to give my best for each talk.

Uncle Vijaya had told me earlier that we were not only very short of women *Dhamma* speakers, but also *Dhamma* speakers who would talk about women’s issues. “Why don’t you do it?”, he suggested. After my first talk at SJBA, Bro Chim invited me for another talk. Hmm....maybe I did do something right after all, so let me do even better in this next talk.

I did not know much about Buddhism and Women except for the fact that women were accorded equal rights by the Buddha and that there was nothing that men could do which we could not (and that was enough for me!). I researched on this topic day and night.

My next talk at SJBA was well-received...even by the men! I had called my talk, "A Woman's Place, What the Buddha Taught", and Bro Teoh from the audience quipped, "Now someone must do a talk called "A Man's Place, What the Buddha Taught", or else we would be at a disadvantage now that the women know their rights!"

A devotee from SJBA, Bro Eddy Tan, was particularly happy that I had chosen to incorporate quotations from various philosophers into my subsequent talks. I was glad that he saw the message that I was trying to share – that the *Dhamma* is universal and can be seen by all wise people. In a world that is sometimes torn and divided by bigotry, I have always believed that for the sake of peace and harmony, we should be looking at similarities rather than differences. After all, the Buddha himself had said that the *Dhamma* contains the truths of the universe, and, He said, "If you find truths in anywhere, accept them." These truths are always there, and they will always be seen by the wise and the noble ones. It is the same truths for everyone. That is the *Dhamma*.

And Life Begins...

The next centre to invite me was Ti-Ratana Community Centre in Taman Eng Aun, Klang. Sis Lian Loo called me and said she would like me to share the *Dhamma* with the devotees of Ti-Ratana Klang. She also told me that most of them were beginners in the *Dhamma*, so would I be able to make the *Dhamma* simple enough to be understood, and applicable to daily life? Simple? Oh yes, absolutely, dear Sis. Simplicity is my motto in life. My job as a teacher is to make things simple and easily understood. I have been trained for that!



At "home", in Ti-Ratana, Klang, where is there an endless flow of love and warmth.

18th August 2006. Sis Lian Loo came all the way from Klang to drive me to Ti-Ratana. At the centre, I was met by extremely warm and charming devotees. They made me feel so welcome, and they gave me something priceless during the talk, something every speaker yearns for – their undivided attention. I thanked them profusely after the talk and told them how much their warmth and attention had meant to me, especially for a brand new speaker.



My singing bowl.

The following week, Ti-Ratana invited me again for another talk. I remember there was a huge thunderstorm that evening, and Bro Chin Kah said he would give me a lift since I could not remember the road to Ti-Ratana. He had also just bought an LCD projector with the intention of lending it to all of us when we delivered talks at centres which did not have this facility. I was given the honour of using his one-day-old projector for the first time. When Bro Chin Kah dropped me off after the talk, he gave me a Tibetan singing bowl, the type

that "sings" when you rub its rim with a wooden handle. As Bro Chin Kah was showing me how to make the bowl sing, he said, "Let this be a token to signify the start of your *Dhamma* speaking career."

I have since had many memorable *Dhamma* sharings with the beautiful devotees at Ti-Ratana. Each time I go to Ti-Ratana, I tell them that I am "coming home". It really feels like coming home to much love and care. Here was the true spirit of *Metta* and *Mudita*

(loving kindness and altruistic joy)! And more importantly, I have seen the crowd of Ti-Ratana grow (and swell!) to a full house now. It is indeed gratifying to see that more and more people are coming forth to learn the sublime teachings of the Buddha.

31st August 2006. We were supposed to hold our first DSC meeting to evaluate the effectiveness of the course thus far. But on this day, our beloved Chief passed away. As a mark of respect, we postponed the meeting. Weeks before that, as Chief lay in his hospital bed, I had visited Chief a few times. Once, I remember I was kneeling down to pay respects to Chief, I said silently, "Chief, remember you said there were not enough *Dhamma* speakers, especially women *Dhamma* speakers? I am already out giving talks now, Chief. I promise you I will uphold in whatever little way I can, the torch that you had so lovingly carried all these decades. I will share the *Dhamma* with anyone who is interested to learn, with the same enthusiasm just as you did." And when I looked up at Chief, he nodded his head. This would be my second experience with Chief – how Chief, in his own quiet ways, inspired me to persevere as a *Dhamma* speaker. Now Chief was gone, and as I paid my respects and looked at Chief's serene face for the last time on the day of his funeral, I made the same promise to him again. After that, I cried very bitterly. I knew I would miss Chief very much.

When the Buddhist Maha Vihara at Brickfields gave me the honour of gracing the very hall that our late Chief used to speak in every Friday, I again felt that great responsibility of holding up the torch that Chief had left us.

Sg Long Buddhist Society which is situated a LONG way away extended their invitation to us to share the *Dhamma*, and I am very thankful to Bro Chang who would come all the way to fetch me to Sg Long. Bro Benny Liow invited me to give my first talk at Kota Kemuning Buddhist Centre, and I was very touched when he specially chose a topic close to my heart – Kindness to Animals. Seremban Buddhist Vihara, Kinrara Metta Buddhist Society and the Buddhist Gem Fellowship also opened their doors to all of us, the new speakers who had not graduated yet.



At Mudita Buddhist Society, Klang, where *Mudita* (altruistic joy) reigns supreme.

Bro Albert Tan of Mudita Buddhist Society even took the trouble to specially create slots for us so that all of us would have a chance to practise speaking at Mudita. Just like Ti-Ratana, Mudita's devotees are also extremely warm and friendly, which later made me conclude that there must be very "friendly *qi*" in Klang! Shortly after that, Bro Danny Teh of Ti-Ratana organised a whole Introduction to Buddhism course for its devotees and invited us as the speakers. That was such a great honour because all of us were still rookies. Just like Ti-Ratana and

Mudita, at Klang and Coast, I was similarly touched by the warmth and friendliness of its devotees (I had no doubt by now that it must be the Klang *qi!*).

All these societies and their devotees played a very important role in providing the platform for us to practise without which we would not even have had enough exposure to graduate from the course! Most importantly, they accepted and welcomed us with such open hearts. They certainly praised us more than we deserved too! We will always be grateful to their generosity and thoughtfulness.

Bandar Utama Buddhist Society (BUBS) opened their doors to us too, and theirs was a “come once, speak twice” contract – you had to do two talks, back-to-back, because there were two Sunday School sessions and the parents would listen to a *Dhamma* talk while waiting for their children. My first talk there was “Taming the Green-Eyed Monster”, a talk about jealousy from a Buddhist perspective. I had the devotees in stitches that morning. Was I funny, or were they just being kind to me? I was convinced that it must have been the latter as I do not have the gift of the gab, especially to make people laugh. As a speaker, you would know that your worst nightmare is when your joke (or so you think!) falls flat. Uncle Vijaya gave us a way out of that. He said, “Never say you’re telling them a joke. Just say you’re telling them a “story”. That way, even if it falls flat, hey, it was just a story, right?” You’ve got to leave it to Uncle Vijaya. He knows exactly what to say.

Two days after that first talk at BUBS, I was pleasantly surprised to see a group email written by one of the senior members, Bro Lee Yu Ban, posted at the TMY, a Theravada Buddhist website. The email read:

April 10th 2007

Dear all,

I had the pleasure and benefit of attending Chan Kah Yein's Dhamma talk at BUBS last Sunday on the topic "Taming the Green Eyed Monster - Jealousy". What a great talk it was - humorous, informative, and applicable with suitable references to the Suttas. Clearly it's not a talk done lightly but is a result of effort and time invested in preparation. The topic really hit home with me as very early into the talk, I realised I had become jealous of her speaking ability. So this recommendation is to compensate for that bit of bad kamma.

We have a new Dhamma speaker prepared to go on the circuit and I'd recommend her to Buddhist Societies. I think she'd be particularly appreciated at Colleges and Varsities. So go on and invite her.

rgds

It meant so very much to me to receive such encouragement from a senior member of the Buddhist community. If I had several milestones in my journey towards becoming a *Dhamma* speaker, this was certainly one of them! Until today, I am still very thankful for the generous encouragement I received when I first started out. It was such encouragement that spurred me on to strive even harder. It is thus no wonder that the Buddha placed *mudita* as one of the Four *Brahmaviharas* that we should cultivate.

Ever since my first talk at BUBS, I have had regular monthly “marathons” at BUBS. Their devotees also exude the same warmth and hospitality that make me feel like “coming home”. I am thankful to Bro Jeff, Sis Cheng Cheng and the many devotees of BUBS for giving me their continuous support and assurance. One thing that people might not know is how much their assurance means to a new speaker. And by “assurance” here, I mean being invited back for more talks. I have since then made so many friends at BUBS. They are like family to me now. BUBS' devotees are very committed *Dhamma* learners and they give me their full attention at every single talk, with lively Question & Answer sessions thrown in as a bonus, too!

A Wesak Eve Address and Other Honours

In April 2007, Bro Chim gave me the unexpected honour of delivering the Wesak Eve address at SJBA that year. I was thrilled to bits! A Wesak Eve address! There would be hundreds of people in the main shrine hall and this would include those who only come to the temple once a year. For some, it might be their very first time listening to the *Dhamma*, and I realised what a huge responsibility that was. I thought hard for a suitable topic and finally I decided to focus on the basics. I called it, “The Buddha’s Message to the Modern World”.

30th April 2007 was Wesak Eve, and I stood before at least three hundred people in SJBA’s main shrine hall. I recounted the Buddha’s birth and his life, then talked about how the basic teachings can help make our world a more peaceful and harmonious place to live in. It was a totally different experience from the usual Sunday talks – there was an air of importance and seriousness on this night. Somehow, there was definitely something special, almost “magical”, sharing the Buddha’s words on such an auspicious occasion. It was an unforgettable experience.

When the Shah Alam Buddhist Society (SABS) started the English Language *Dhamma* talks, Bro Benny Liow gave me another unprecedented honour of being the first to kickstart the talks. I remember him saying, “Ladies First”. I was extremely honoured. And I was very pleased too, to see that SABS had taken the initiative of “adopting” the UiTM Buddhist society. At this first talk and also subsequent talks, I was met by young and eager faces. It is such a pleasure (and challenge!) to share the *Dhamma* with the younger audience. I see them as our hope for the future. They always remind me of flower buds, waiting to bloom. And our duty is to provide them with the proper nutriments.

Before all the Buddhist centres opened their doors to me, I was actually invited to give a talk at a Sikh Temple. I saw this as an excellent opportunity to promote interfaith understanding. They had wanted me to talk on Vegetarianism from a scientific perspective, but I said I could only do it from a Buddhist perspective of compassion, and they agreed. At that time, Bro Tan Siang Chye was our mentor (it was Part 2 of Module 2) so he very kindly consented to come observe me. I remember having to cover my head with a scarf, and Bro Siang Chye covered his with a handkerchief! Bro Jaik and his wife, Sis Jessie, too came to support me that day. The devotees at the Sikh temple welcomed us very warmly, and they asked many questions after my talk. I even had the privilege of listening to one of their teachers speak on Vegetarianism from the Sikh perspective. I was impressed by how motivated the Sikh devotees were to learn about their own religion – there were so many questions from the floor! Later, we were all treated to an authentic Punjabi lunch! That was indeed a most memorable experience for me.

Sometime in early 2007, Bro Benny Liow invited me to be one of the moderators of the 5th Global Conference in Buddhism which would be held in November that year. I had the privilege of moderating the session entitled, “The Destructive Mind: How to Transform it”. The speakers were Ven Robina Courtin and Roshi Dr Jan Chozen Bays. It was a great learning experience. Later, many well-wishes commented that I looked “calm and cool” up there. If only they had known that I had actually been shivering throughout the entire session! This was the first time I had close to one thousand pairs of eyes looking at me, on the big screen too. I actually fumbled in my introduction and referred to Ven Robina Courtin as a “monk”!



Can you see me shivering?



One for the album. An experience of a lifetime.

The 5th global conference was a resounding success in every way. Everyone came away with a great sense of having learnt something new, and being inspired to put the sublime teachings into real-life practice. I was very thankful to be a part of this event. I count this as another memorable milestone in my life.

Our Guardian Angels



My first Dhamma Audio CD

During the course of two years, Bro Chin Kah had given me tremendous support and encouragement. Not only did he attend many of my talks to evaluate me, he also helped me edit the talks which he had recorded. He was the first person to sponsor one of my very early talks given at the Buddhist Maha Vihara, “How to Practise Right Livelihood and Still Be Rich”. It was one of my first talks, and it must have been very amateurish, but Bro Chin Kah decided to sponsor it for production just to encourage me.

At the rate I was going, with both my talk schedule and the amount of time and energy I spent on preparing each talk, Bro Chin Kah and Dr Phang were often worried that I would burn myself out very soon. I assured them that I was okay. If I was enjoying the process so much, I know I would not burn myself out. We are often told that very few people can actually do what they like, so we might as well like what we do. I was fortunate that *Dhamma* sharing gave me the best of both – I liked what I did, and I was doing what I liked!

Till this day, even after the DSC, Dr Phang continues to be one of my mentors and confidantes. I know I can always bounce off ideas with him, and he would always help me whenever I was at a loss, be it with the *Dhamma* or when I felt disheartened and needed a psychological “push”. That’s the advantage of having a psychiatrist as a *Dhamma*-friend!

The Blessings of Kalyanamittas

Bro Kon was also one who spurred me on when I first started giving talks. He and his wife, Sis Siew Ee, would come for my talks, after which I know I could rely on him for an honest-to-goodness evaluation. He was the one who told me to improve on my eye-contact by scanning the entire audience and not focusing on just those who pay attention to me. When I needed an opinion about my interpretation of the *Dhamma*, I could always discuss the issue with Bro Kon.

Bro Jaik and his wife, Sis Jessie, also came to give me their moral support in my initial talks. I remember when my little kitten had just passed away and I was trying my best to compose myself to deliver a scheduled talk, Bro Jaik, Sis Jessie, Bro Kon and Sis Siew Ee turned up at the talk. Although nothing was said, their presence made me feel that I was not alone. It helped very much.

Bro Khing Wee was a *kalyanamitta* (spiritual friend) who gave me very constructive feedback. He made me realise that I was using a lecture style (well, call it occupational habitual tendency!) in my talks and he suggested that I tried using a “talk style” instead, and engage the audience more. Bro Khing Wee, until today, I still say a silent “thank you” to you each time I am able to engage the audience in my talks. We cannot see the faults in ourselves. Only true *kalyanamittas* (spiritual friends) will willingly point our faults out to us because they want us to be better. Bro Khing Wee left us before the DSC ended as he had to go overseas to work, but we still correspond regularly. Even across oceans, Bro Khing Wee continues to support me in my talks. Whenever he hears about my talks, he would be amongst the first to write to me, and rejoice with me. True *kalyanamittas* are indeed blessings from heaven!

Whenever I came up with wild ideas to perk up our DSC lessons, Sis Kah Hong would be always amongst the first to support me. In the planning of all the surprise parties, I knew I could always count on Sis Kah Hong. Sometimes when I got frustrated, she would say to me, “Don’t worry, I will always support you.” Being older, she kept me well-grounded (!!) in case I went overboard with my crazy ideas. When I came up with the wild idea of singing for our graduation (which you shall read about later in this book), I was especially touched that Sis Kah Hong volunteered to participate. She told me, “I cannot sing at all, I can only croak, but I will support you.” Sis Guat Cheng too could also be counted upon when it came to jazzing up things. We all had a lot of fun, in the spirit of *puthujjanic* (worldly) camaraderie.

Bro Kian Foh was the highly intellectual one amongst us. When he spoke, we would all keep quiet and nod in agreement. And rightly so too, because what he said always made a lot of sense, *and* made us think, “Now, why on earth didn’t I think of that?” He also had this quiet demeanor which may seem a little “scary” at first, but when he “let his hair down”, he was nothing short of being fun-loving just like the rest of us! Bro Dayananda, now he could definitely be counted upon when we needed a spokesperson.

He had the literary prowess to craft a treatise out of a simple phrase. He had a big voice, and an equally big heart.

Sis Angie was the serious meditator whom we all respected since most of us could not even sit still enough or long enough to claim what we do as “meditation”. Her interpretation of the *Dhamma* was always unique, and was proof that a meditator always looks at things...differently – definitely very much more astutely and profoundly compared to the rest of us! Sis Barbara was the environmentalist who would blow us away with the depth of her research in her talks. Having had decades of experience as a medical social worker, she was the one we took our hats off to. Sis Siew Mee would ask analytical questions, with an inclination towards theory and the *Abhidhamma*.

Bro Edmund, despite his heavy family responsibilities, still found time to come for classes. He was a clear reminder to me of the cliché, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” Bro Wee Fah was the perfect monitor who not only looked after us well but serenaded us too! Bro Jason and Sis Vicky were the *Dhamma*-speaking duet who would grace the floor with their sweet and accurate delivery of the *Dhamma*.

Bro Chong KT was the ever witty and I-want-to-be-different one amongst us. He had this “direct cut” (in the words of Sis Angie), and you could always count on him to look at the *Dhamma* from a totally different angle, one that none of us had ever seen before. When it came to any serious discussion, trust Bro Chong KT to break the monotony with his very profound thoughts.

When I was writing this book, I wrote to all my *kalyanamittas* to seek their permission so that I may write about them. This is how Bro Chong KT replied:

At first I did not know whether should I say "yes" or not as I did not contribute very much. But I also could not say "no" and worse of all, keeping silent would also be not appropriate. Just as I was in a fix, a message came in:

"Be in the spirit of the Laughing Buddha. Life is like the stage show. They are many actors on stage, some sorrowful, some happy, some rich, some poor etc. There are also many supporting actors and similarly, they have many different roles. There are also some who act as passers-by on busy streets, some may just be sitting quietly at a corner of a coffee shop drinking tea.

In one show an actor may be "poor and sorrowful". But then in next show, the same actor can be a "rich and happy" person. As we watch our lives, we are like seeing stage shows, and also seeing impermanence. When the show comes to an end, when there are no more actors or actresses --- everything will be empty, then...we see EMPTINESS.

So I said to myself, you may be a passer-by in this DSC show, but you also have made this show a bit richer, or not so dry -- as a passer-by."

Bravo, Bro Chong KT! Well said. To me, no one is a passer-by. All of you are the main actors and actresses in this DSC show. And I am merely the scribe who chose to write our story. Ven Thich Nhat Hanh says that emptiness is not nothingness. Emptiness is the fullness of interbeing and interconnectedness. So when this show ends, all of us will indeed disappear into the void of emptiness – all of us will be interconnected.

Towards the end of 2007, after Module 3, our coordinators and mentors decided that it was time to let us loose and fend for ourselves. No longer would they hold our hands and tell us what to do anymore. Now, we would have to be on our own. It was time to graduate... Time to disappear into emptiness?

Taking off the Rose-Tinted Glasses

In the course of training to be a *Dhamma* speaker, life had not been a bed of roses. While the highs had certainly surpassed the lows many times over, I had to put in a great deal of hard work in the preparation of my talks. But I love to work hard, and I would not have felt the satisfaction if things had come easy for me.

I remember how challenging it was at the beginning when I first started giving talks. Just as I had woken up at 4am every morning and got to bed after midnight during my Ph.D. years, now was not much different again. I would be working on my research and preparation of my talks and powerpoints late into the night. There was just so much to do. And this responsibility was even greater than doing a Ph.D. because I was only accountable to myself in my Ph.D. In *Dhamma* speaking, I am accountable to the audience, to my mentors, to the whole Buddhist community, and to the Buddha himself, if I dared to say so. The responsibility of expounding the *Dhamma* correctly was tremendous, especially for a new speaker. I would cross-check my facts with my mentors, endlessly hounding them with questions on details, splitting hairs, so to speak. Bhante Kumara was our spiritual advisor, and I hounded him with questions too. Thank goodness that *khanti* (patience) is one of the Ten *Paramis* (Perfections) and my mentors and spiritual advisor had ample supply of that!



Researching late into the night AND hounding mentors with questions, through the email.

In the initial days, I would actually rehearse and time myself for each talk, making sure I did not exceed the given one hour, taking care that I used the correct words for each slide. After some time, I did not need to rehearse anymore. I used my slides to prompt me on what I wanted to say. But there was one thing that I needed to do before any talk (and I still do it now), and that would be to psych myself up to a “climax” (waiting to explode?) two hours before I was due to speak. That is why before any talk, I would tell my friends, “Please give me some time alone, I need to psych myself up now”. I do this by going through my slides and mentally putting myself completely into the topic, or in other words, completely LIVING the topic. Then, I know, I am ready to give my best.

However, no matter how well-prepared I am, sometimes I had to endure harsh criticisms too. I remember getting very upset after one talk and later writing to Bro Chim to ask if I had done wrong because he had been in the audience during that talk. Bro Chim assured me what I had said was not wrong. It just goes to show that you can never please everyone. Somebody is bound to find something wrong with what you say.

The Buddha was so right when he said that no one is free from blame. I suppose as long as your intentions are noble, it does not really matter how others perceive you. On the other hand, it also made me realise that I was not free from my egoistic self. It is because of my own ego that I felt offended and upset. Ahh...a lesson learnt. I must strive harder in my own practice of subduing the ego. And I must learn to take criticisms, no matter how they are delivered, in a constructive way, and use them to improve myself. Isn't it wonderful that every cloud has a silver lining?

As I learnt to welcome constructive criticisms, I took every single criticism very seriously, and would write to my other coursemates and my mentors for their opinions. With more feedback, I then decide if I would maintain my stand or find a better way to do it the next time. Bro Chin Kah was an especially tough critic. If he attended my talk, I would search his face for his initial feedback after I finished. If he came up to me and said, "That was a *very* good talk", I knew I was safe. If he was silent and I had to ask him, "Er...so how did I do?", I was sure I would be in for some very hard times. It was hence very comforting having my coursemates to talk to after every talk and to bounce off ideas with. Sometimes it is a matter of interpretation or our own individual values that shape how we understand and deliver the *Dhamma*.



Using Powerpoint slides to get the Dhamma across.

I have always been a person who loves pictures, so preparing powerpoint slides for my talks became such a joy for me. After having conceptualised a topic, I would begin to hunt for the "perfect" pictures for my slides. Sometimes, I even took my own photographs. Initially, it took me up to one whole month just to do sufficient research on one single topic and prepare a fairly satisfactory set of slides for it. However, I do know that powerpoints slides are not necessary, especially if they do not serve the purpose, and they sometimes take the focus off the speaker, actually. If one had the prowess and charisma of our late Chief, one would not need any "crutches". I always tell people, "I need to use powerpoints because I am not good enough!!" And that is the truth.

Small IS beautiful

I also learnt another very important lesson throughout my journey towards becoming a *Dhamma* speaker. There would be times when the turn-out at certain centres would be quite small, especially during public holidays or the school breaks. At the beginning, I did feel a little de-motivated. However, I remember how late Chief would expound the *Dhamma* with the same enthusiasm and fervour at the weekly Wednesday evening talks at SJBA, whether the crowd numbered 5 or 100. I had attended so many of Chief's talks. He had never allowed the crowd size to affect his enthusiasm at all.

Uncle Vijaya also rightly reminded me that just as the Buddha would address big crowds, He also talked to a crowd of one. Ever since then, I had never let crowd size douse my spirit. All I needed to remember would be the memory of Chief speaking at SJBA's shrine hall on Wednesday evenings. Sometimes there were only five of us, yet Chief would speak in his usual happy manner, for a full hour. In sickness or in health, nothing would deter Chief's spirit. Now, that is something that we must emulate.

I was usually invited to give talks to adults, so when SJBA invited me to talk to their youths and little children, I had the jitters. As a teacher of teenagers and young adults, I have never been good at dealing with children, so I thought I should concentrate only on the youths and adults. However, I remember on one occasion, I had managed to bring five of my students to Chief's talk. When Chief saw them, Chief was so happy, he changed the entire topic just to cater to the five boys. To Chief, our future lies in our young. I shall always remember that. And although I would really prefer to address adults, I would still endeavour to give my best when invited to share the *Dhamma* at the teen camps.



The greatest challenge is to speak at children and teen camps.

The Buddha was a teacher of all gods and men, He could expound the *Dhamma* to anyone, young or old, human or non-human. Who am I to select my audience? I must try and cultivate the skill of speaking to children – let that be a new challenge for me. At one time, I gave a talk to little children (from ages four to twelve) at SJBA, and later a few parents told me that their children quoted what I had told them, at home. Another time, a little boy and his uncle came up to me. The uncle told me that his nephew was very touched by what I had said and was shedding tears as he listened to me. Ahh...a big heart in a small body...

Talking about small being beautiful, I must also always remember Uncle Vijaya's most important rule of public-speaking: "Stand up, Speak up, and Shut up!" This is very true because our audience have come prepared to only give us this much of their time, and we should not take things that have not been given to us (do not break the 2nd Precept!). So, "Less is More", as they say. I must learn to talk less and say more within the given time. One of my coursemates, Bro Chong KT often reminds us of this Zen saying, "When confused, a thousand words are not enough. Once enlightened, even one word is too many."

So, shh... Noble Silence is "wise speech".

The Day Murphy Paid Me a Visit

In Module 3, we were assigned mentors who would observe us and decide if we were fit to graduate. Uncle Vijaya was my mentor. The day came when Uncle Vijaya would observe me and I was due to give a talk at SJBA. Unfortunately, that day coincided with a Buddhist Arts and Cultural Festival in Kuala Lumpur and the crowd was extremely small. In fact, what crowd? There was virtually NO crowd when I reached SJBA that morning. Bro Chim said maybe I should just cancel the talk since nobody had turned up. I went into panic mode and said, "But today is my evaluation..." It was already so difficult to get Uncle Vijaya to be free to observe me since he was so heavily booked for talk engagements. I only had this one slot and Uncle Vijaya would be arriving any time now. Please...can the show go on? Bro Chim said he would leave it to me, and then he left for the Buddhist festival. I was on my own now.

As luck would have it, that was the day Murphy (as in Murphy's Law) decided to pay me a visit. After arriving at SJBA, I checked my handphone and found a message from Bro Swee Aun (the Vice-President of SJBA) asking me to bring my own notebook as they had taken theirs down to the Buddhist festival to be used there. My own notebook? Oh dear, my cat had just accidentally knocked over a tumbler of water onto the keyboard and the circuit was cranky in that it took ages to start up, and would sometimes die on me whenever it liked. But I had no choice that morning, so I rushed home, packed my cranky notebook and rushed back to SJBA. By hook or by crook, "Please work! Don't die on me today!", I pleaded.

Murphy was not done with me yet. The usual large screen had also been taken to the Buddhist festival so SJBA had brought down a smaller screen for my talk that morning. This screen was far too small, and also too light, and somehow it kept falling as I was setting it up. Oh dear... "This is a test, it's just a test. Stay cool, Kah Yein," I said to myself. It certainly did not help that that morning was the morning of my evaluation by Uncle Vijaya. The audience had trickled in by now and it was just one-third of the usual turn-out.

Uncle Vijaya arrived and I apologised for the small turn-out. Uncle Vijaya was surprised, and that was when he said to me, "Don't forget that the Buddha spoke to a crowd of one. I have spoken to crowds that are much smaller than this." Instantly, I saw, in my mind's eye, late Chief, sitting right there in the same hall, on a Wednesday evening, addressing a crowd of five. Moreover I would always remember what Sis Choon Lai had always told me, "You think the hall is empty? It is never empty. The *devas* are always there."

As I delivered my talk that morning, I could not help wondering when the screen might fall on me, but it did not. I also wondered if my notebook was going to die on me, but it did not. Ahh...the *Dhamma* works in mysterious ways. Dr Phang was right. When all

things seem to go wrong, place your faith in the *Dhamma*. If your intentions are noble and sincere, things would somehow work out...in mysterious ways.

Murphy's visit to me, though unwelcome, was not without a silver lining. I learnt from this experience how important it is to have no expectations in whatever that we do. I had expected everything to be perfect for this important day, and instead, I had the whole works of Murphy's Law acting on me. Ajahn Chah, the great *Dhamma* master, taught that having expectations is the cause of our sufferings, and he was absolutely right. If only we could learn to truly live in the present moment, maintain ourselves in it and do the best that we can under *whatever* circumstances, we would realise the wisdom of the Buddha's words. Why dwell in the past and why worry about the future? Live in the present moment, for this is the only reality that we have.

Uncle Vijaya was pleased with my talk that morning, and was extremely generous in his evaluation. Thank you, Uncle Vijaya. Does this mean I can graduate?

Graduation...at Long Last!

The graduation of the UMDF's 1st *Dhamma* Speakers Course was to be held in January 2008. After two long years, fourteen of us who had fulfilled the minimum requirements would be allowed to graduate. We planned eagerly for the ceremony. We would have an organic vegetarian dinner – as our gift to our coordinators, our mentors and all our supporters from the various Buddhist societies. They had given us something priceless – their time, energy, love and commitment. We would never be able to give them anything else to reciprocate their priceless gift to us. Since the Buddha said that “Health



Food, Glorious Food!



Sis Barbara, Jas, my mother, my daughter, Ming-Yi, and Sis Angie.

is the Greatest Gain”, we shall give them good health then!

My mother had come down all the way from Ipoh to attend my graduation. She is seventy-five years old, but being the bubbly lady that she is, nothing could stop her from travelling down by bus, and later, helping out with the food preparation *and* commenting on our singing too! I only wish that I can have my mother's energy when (and if) I reach seventy-five! My Sikh friend and colleague from work, Jas, also came to support me. Although Jas had never been for any of my talks, she had always encouraged me whenever we chatted at work. I felt so very blessed to be surrounded by loved ones, and this certainly made the day more meaningful for me.



Our supporters who came in full force to cheer us on.

What touched me most of all that night was the presence of the devotees from the various centres who had come in full force to support us and rejoice with us, particularly the devotees of Ti-Ratana and Mudita, from Klang. As I saw them coming in, I recognised the familiar friendly faces who had graced the room during my talks there, I was extremely moved. Not only had they given us their undivided love and support during the

many talks that we had delivered there (and goodness knows how much we must have fumbled too), but here they were, sacrificing their Saturday night to be with us. We shook hands and hugged. It was exhilarating. The energy was like nothing I had ever experienced before. Here were friends, true *kalyanamittas* (spiritual friends) coming together to rejoice in a very significant occasion for all of us. Even Uncle Vijaya was impressed with the turnout and commented so.



More supporters!



Our mentors and friends.



All of us dressed in white, in the spirit of camaraderie.

Having more *Dhamma* speakers would mean that there would be greater opportunities for Buddhists to learn more about the Buddha's sublime teachings. I felt a great responsibility on my shoulders that night – it felt a little scary, but the memory of Chief's unfailing energy in teaching the *Dhamma* would always remain deeply ingrained in my heart. I had promised Chief. I will always remember that. Very often now, whenever I go to the Buddhist Maha Vihara, I would stand before Chief's memorial and renew my promise. I would tell Chief what I had done in my *Dhamma* talks, and hoped Chief's consciousness would receive my message, somehow. And be happy.

We had also been practising hard for more than a month to present some songs for our audience for our graduation. I have always believed that a present that comes from the heart means the most, so I tweaked the lyrics of ten popular songs for the occasion. We

finally selected three, based on our vocal range and the suitability of the lyrics for the occasion. Due to lack of humanpower (or should I say “voicepower”), I had to stand-in as a reluctant singer for the performance. I could speak and maybe I could write, but I know for a fact that I could not sing even if my very life depended on it.



Bro Wee Fah leading us in reciting our DSC Aspiration

The rehearsals were always in a mess, with us changing the songs almost every time, changing the key and the arrangement. But thanks to Bro Wee Fah (who was the “anchor” singer) and my daughter, Ming-Yi, who provided the accompaniment on the keyboard, we pulled through. Ming-Yi had to change keys on the spot during our practice as we struggled to find that one perfect key that would suit our diverse vocal range.



The few DSC "graduates" belting their hearts out on graduation night.

We were exactly what you might call “a motley crew” in the truest sense of the word! I still remember Bro Wee Fah teaching me the tenor part of the song “The Dharma Shines in Me” one day before the ceremony! Yes, miracles do happen, and we did not drive the audience away that night. In the true Buddhist spirit, our audience was extremely *metta*-ful and *karuna*-ful to us! Now, that’s compassion in action!



Receiving the certificate from Ven Saranankara

I was deeply honoured that the DSC committee had decided to give me an award. I felt that all I had done more than my coursemates was the number of talks that I had delivered, so I wrote to the committee to humbly decline the award. But I was told that it would serve as an



Bro Chin Kah reading the citation for me.

inspiration to aspiring new speakers (there would be a 2nd DSC, and a 3rd, etc. in the years to come), so I would be doing some good by accepting the award.

I was extremely touched that night when Bro Chin Kah read out his citation for me. I told myself that I must never, ever let my mentors and coordinators down. They have done so much to mould me into the *Dhamma* speaker that I am today, I must strive to improve myself as time goes by.



Reciting the *Okasa* (seeking reciprocal forgiveness).

Towards the end, Bro Kon led us in seeking forgiveness from our mentors. He chanted the *Okasa* in his very resonant and reverberating voice, we followed after him while prostrating before our mentors. Everyone in the audience was deeply touched. Ven Chief Saranankara commented on how meaningful this gesture was. Humility and gratitude are indeed supreme blessings – they awaken the purity of the heart.

The DSC started with a bang, and we all hoped it ended with a bang too. As I said in my address to the audience that evening, this graduation marked the beginning, not the end. Now comes the hard part where we would have to go out, be on our own, and spend the rest of our lives fulfilling our pledge of sharing the beautiful Buddha-*Dhamma* with others.



Kalyanamittas who came to rejoice with us.



One for the family album - my mother, my daughter and me.



I am here today because of Chief.



We thank you from our hearts, dearest mentors



Dr Phang and me.



Bro Chin Kah and me.



Going forth...to spread the *Dhamma* far and wide!

A lifelong career.

A lifelong passion.

Yo Dhammam desesi. Adikalyanam, Majjhekalyanam, Pariyosanakalyanam (This *Dhamma* that I have discovered is Excellent in the Beginning, Excellent in the Middle, and Excellent in the End).

Water-Coloured Memories

I will always remember the good times we had during the DSC classes. From grilling us with the *Dhamma* for two or three hours at a go to having brain-racking Question & Answer sessions, our mentors had given us so much. Most importantly, they shared with us their invaluable experience of having been in the field far much longer than we had.



A gathering at Bro Chin Kah's house in July 2006.



A gathering I hosted in December 2007.

However, it was not all work and no play. At the end of 2006, we planned a “double celebration” because it was time to thank Dr Phang for standing in as our mentor for Part 3 of Module 2, and it was also Bro Chin Kah’s birthday. I managed to find out our coordinators’ favourite songs, and then got everyone to sing while I accompanied them on the piano. Sis Kah Hong and I carried the cake and the presents on the train all the way from Subang Jaya to Sentul as our lessons were held at the Siri Jayanti Buddhist Temple in Sentul. We quietly asked permission from Rev Saranankara if we could sing a few songs that evening and he was kind enough to grant us our *puthujjanic* (worldly) wish! So we serenaded and feasted our coordinators that night with pomp and galore.

Apart from these celebrations-within-lessons, we also had a few fun gatherings. With all the hard work from discussing and analysing the *Dhamma* and spending hours on end preparing our talks, we needed to unwind. It is really nice that even after the DSC had ended, we now continue to keep in touch through the email and have gatherings every now and then.

We will always be indebted to our mentors for having spent six lessons each with us, not only to teach us the *Dhamma* but more importantly, to share with us their vast and long experience in *Dhamma* speaking. Uncle Vijaya showed us, by example, that a *Dhamma* speaker must never rest on his or her laurels. Despite having expounded the *Dhamma* for almost four decades, Uncle Vijaya continues to put in 100% effort in the preparation for his talks. Bro Siang Chye, by virtue of his deep practice in meditation, epitomises

peace and calm. His ever serene demeanour reminds us not to neglect our own mental cultivation.

Bro Charlie showed us how he makes the *Dhamma* so down-to-earth for easy understanding, and how he makes people feel good about themselves, and this motivates them to practise harder. Bro Wong Tin Song brought life to the *Dhamma* by presenting it with wit and humour while Bro Benny Liow shared his extensive knowledge of the history of Buddhism with us.



A belated birthday celebration for Dr Phang in April 2008.

Later, in Module 3, we had mentors who volunteered to observe us and give us constructive comments, and these included Bro Tan Huat Chye, Dr Tan Ho Soon, Sis Ng Ah Lan and Bro Tan Buck Soon. We are all very grateful for their help.

In the course of delivering so many *Dhamma* talks, there were times when I was sick. Yet, what Dr Phang said was true – that the *Dhamma* works in mysterious ways. Even in the midst of a bad cough, when I delivered a talk, I would not cough at all. Once, I even had a mouth ulcer in a “wrong” place that gave me a most embarrassing lisp at a time when I was due to deliver a talk to beginners at the Buddhist Maha Vihara. I shuddered to think what the beginners would think of me and what a bad impression I would be creating as a *Dhamma* speaker. Wonder of wonders! I did not lisp throughout the talk. On two occasions, I had to travel very far to deliver a talk, and the journey made me terribly unwell because I suffer from motion-sickness. Before the talk, I remember feeling so nauseated to the point of wanting to throw up and even the audience commented that I looked pale, but the moment I started speaking, all nausea totally disappeared instantly and I was my usual self, feeling on top of the world. These episodes are proofs that the mind is indeed the forerunner of all things (Dhammapada, 1). And they have taught me that when one’s intentions are pure and sincere and effort is put in where required, we should not be too unduly worried about the outcome. Things would work out, somehow. Mysteriously, maybe?

In the process of becoming a *Dhamma* speaker, I am very thankful to my husband and children for their patience and understanding in allowing me to spend much time and energy doing research for my talks and preparing my powerpoint slides. There were times when I would spend hours on end inside my room, pounding away on the keyboard. For someone who previously never went anywhere except to work and to buy groceries, suddenly, I was out on weekends (and sometimes weekdays), giving talks at the various centres. My family had to get used to this new routine, and in some ways, it was a great sacrifice on their part too. I am thankful that my family understands

how much it means to me to be able to finally do some *Dhammaduta* work after having spent the last two decades devoting all my time to the home and the family.



The painting that hangs on my wall. A reminder...to be like the lotus.

Shortly after I started giving talks, my husband bought me a gift from one of his overseas trips. It was a beautiful painting of a lotus. It hangs on my wall, right above my computer, where I spend hours studying the *Dhamma* and preparing all my talks.

I guess in life, there is a time for everything. As the *Karaniya Metta Sutta* says, "Have few duties, be simple in livelihood." We should not do too many things in life. Just a few would do, but we must do it well. After taking

on the challenge of becoming a *Dhamma* speaker, I was offered a few more challenges which I would have loved to take on, but I know there is just so much I can do. Taking on too many duties would dilute my energy and devotion to each task. I need to prioritise, and *Dhamma* speaking is my priority for now. I have given my all in these two years of learning to be a *Dhamma* speaker, and I would continue doing so in the years to come. After all, I have promised Chief, haven't I?

The Unexpected Rewards

As a *Dhamma* speaker, one plays many roles. Sometimes at the end of a talk, members of the audience come up to tell me their problems. At times, I feel very inadequate as I am not a trained counsellor, yet I try, by using the *Dhamma* as my guide, to help them as best as I can. From problems about their children and spouses to problems in their jobs, I try to help them reach the best possible decision, supported by the *Dhamma*. For more severe cases, I refer them to the experts, but isn't it wonderful that as a *Dhamma* speaker, one also gets the opportunity to help alleviate people's suffering? This is a practice of *Abhaya Dana* (the gift of fearlessness).

Often, the devotees just like to share with me their stories, or they need someone to listen to them. To me, it is a great honour that people trust me enough to open up to me. As a teacher in the academic field, I am guided by the words of the renowned educationist, feminist and propagator of the caring culture, Nel Noddings. She says, "I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and non-selectively present to the student – to each student – as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total." Now, isn't that present-moment living? I am humbled and incredibly honoured that people share their life's stories with me. These are precious and meaningful encounters for me.

Perhaps one of the most poignant moments was when I delivered my talk "Dewdrops of Emptiness". In this talk I had narrated how the Buddha guided His father, King Suddhodana, to realise emptiness and the inter-connectedness of all beings before the great King passed away. The Buddha told His father that he must let go of his body because he already had lived on in the lives of all whom he had touched. After the talk, a gentleman came up to me with his family, and introduced his sister, who had tears in her eyes. She told me that as she listened to my narration of King Suddhodana's passing away, she could come to terms with her own husband's recent death. She said she could now find peace knowing that her beloved husband continues to live on in her life and those of her children. The whole family came up and shared this moment with me. I was deeply touched. I hugged her and shed tears of joy with her.

There have also been times when I learnt a lot from the audience through their sharing, especially from more seasoned *Dhamma* practitioners. I was truly thankful when they came up to me and told me if I had misquoted or misinterpreted the Buddha's words. The Buddha's message was delivered more than two thousand five hundred years ago, and in the process of it being passed down through the generations, we now have various translations, interpretations and schools of thought. Sometimes when we are not careful enough, we might accidentally attribute to the Buddha what was actually found only in the commentaries. Our spiritual advisor, Bhante Kumara, often reminds

us to verify our facts before presenting them in a public *Dhamma* talk. This advice is very timely, and ought to be duly adhered to.

One of the greatest rewards of being a *Dhamma* speaker is that in the course of preparing for the talks, one's own learning is deeply enhanced. Besides acquiring a better understanding of the *Dhamma*, and inevitably, learning more in these two years than I had ever done before, becoming a *Dhamma* speaker has also entrusted me with a bigger responsibility of living the *Dhamma* in my daily life. When I share the *Dhamma* with the audience, I am expounding the lofty virtues that the Buddha embodied and lived by. In doing so, I too carry the responsibility of ensuring that I do my best in actualising these values in my personal life. If I cannot practise these virtues myself, who am I to tell the audience to do so? Granted, we tell the audience the "gold standards" (in Dr Phang's words) of Buddhist practice, and although we ourselves are not there yet, we must at least strive our utmost to reach there. There must be honesty and sincerity in what we say to others.

In this area, I must thank my *kalyanamittas* for acting as, what I fondly call, "sledgehammers" to bonk me on my head whenever I forget my own practice. For example, when I was mourning (and quite miserably too) my kitten who had passed away, it was Bro Chin Kah who reminded me to practise *upekkha* (equanimity) and to reflect on *Kamma*. "You tell your audience all about *upekkha*, but look at yourself now. Where is your *upekkha*?", he says. Or, when I get emotionally worked up over trivial matters, Bro Kon would tell me, "Who's the one who is always telling others to travel light in life? Your "traveling light" is only in the material sense? Why are you carrying so much emotional baggage? Drop the burning charcoal, please (referring to the Buddha's simile of anger as being a burning charcoal that we hold on to)." Bro Khing Wee, even from overseas, would constantly remind me to look after myself, not to get unduly upset over petty things, and not to burn myself out. I am very thankful to my *kalyanamittas* for bonking (!!) me on the head when I need it. True friends, as the Buddha says, are those who are willing to point out our faults and admonish us when we do wrong. They are the treasures that we ought to hold on to (Dhammapada, 76-77).

Being a *Dhamma* speaker, I often remind myself of the Buddha's Simile of the Cloth in the *Vatthupama Sutta* (Majjhima Nikaya, 7) where the Buddha likens us to a piece of white cloth which appears to be very clean to others. But what if that piece of white cloth had hidden stains which are not visible to others? If one tries to dye that cloth, it will never be able to take the dye well because of those hidden stains. Similarly, to the outside world, we may project a well-disposed, benevolent and magnanimous image, but we know ourselves if we are truly that image that we project. Honesty is the starting point towards self-purification. With this simile as my guide, I carry the responsibility of improving my own practice because I cannot possibly tell others to try their best to practise the virtues if I do not do it myself.

In the words of William Shakespeare, “To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” *Dhamma* speaking has heightened the need for a higher level of honesty and sincerity in my own speech, thought and action. I am very thankful for that. From my short experience, I only have this one thing to say – Sharing the *Dhamma*...is priceless.



Moderating a session at Wacana 2008



Sharing the Dhamma with the young and old

Sharing Joy

While it takes a lot of effort, perseverance and commitment to become a *Dhamma* speaker, the joys and rewards are tremendous. Not only have I learnt so much more in my own knowledge and experience of practising the *Dhamma*, I also find myself practising certain aspects of the Ten *Paramis* such as *viriya* (effort), *sacca* (honesty) and *aditthana* (determination).



Youth Camp at Klang & Coast Buddhist Association.



Youth Camp at Buddhist Maha Vihara.

Sharing the *Dhamma* also brings me the joy of cultivating the Four *Brahmaviharas* of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *upekkha*. *Metta* (loving-kindness) to all beings who would benefit from our talks. *Karuna* to the devotees who trust us enough to share their problems. *Mudita*, when we share the success and happiness of others, and when others rejoice with us. And *Upekkha* when things get tough, and the tough must rise up and remain standing. *Upekkha* is also called upon when everything is running smoothly because we must remember that all conditioned things are impermanent, and change is the only truth in our *samsaric* existence.



At Ti-Ratana Community Centre, Klang



At Mudita Buddhist Society, Klang

Sharing the *Dhamma* has brought a new meaning into my life. At the end of every talk, I feel a sense of achievement and reward of having done my small bit in propagating the Buddha's sublime teachings to others. And I hope that in doing so, I have managed to plant a *Bodhi* (awakening) seed in the hearts and minds of my audience so that they would put the *Dhamma* into practice and realise the joy themselves.



Speaking to Catholics on Buddhism



Speaking to students about kindness to animals

My New Beginning



Thank you, everyone.....

As I now begin on my journey as a *Dhamma* speaker, I remind myself of the Buddha's words, *Yo Dhammam desesi. Adikalyanam, Majjhekalyanam, Pariyosanakalyanam*. I am thankful that I have been given this beautiful opportunity to continue turning the wheel of the *Dhamma*, as others have before me.

When the Buddha expounded the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* to the five ascetics at the Deer Park in Sarnath, He set the wheel of the *Dhamma* in motion. The wheel has not stopped turning ever since then. Each time we share the *Dhamma*, and put the sublime teachings into practice, we are turning the wheel. We are fulfilling our duty to spread the *Dhamma* for the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings.

May the Buddha *Sasana* continue to prosper far and wide.

May all beings be well and happy.

Epilogue

As I was finishing this manuscript, I took time off to attend Nalanda's Fifth Anniversary celebrations on 1st May 2008 and was greatly inspired by the speeches of Nalanda's honorary secretary, Bro Aggavamsa, its adviser, Dr Tan Ho Soon and its favourite lecturer, Uncle Vijaya.

Bro Aggavamsa very modestly said that five years should not be viewed as an achievement for Nalanda. Rather, instead of looking back, we should now look forward and aspire to achieve more for the future. There is much to be done, he said. I cannot but agree with such words of wisdom.

In the course of writing this book, I have looked back on the two years of my DSC course, with fondness and gratitude. Now, it is time to look forward. Where do I go from here? Each time I co-speak with Uncle Vijaya nowadays, I realise how much more superior the quality and depth of his understanding of the *Dhamma* is, compared to mine. I must strive to learn more from my seniors, deepen my understanding of the *Dhamma* through study, practice and consultation with others.

Dr Tan Ho Soon reminded everyone that in serving the Buddhist community, one must do whatever one does best in. Be it in arranging tables and chairs, helping in the kitchen, organising retreats or giving *Dhamma* talks, everyone has a role to play, and nobody is more or less than the other. In whatever that we do, we must remember that we are here to serve, and we should fulfil that duty earnestly and wholeheartedly, and do our very, very best.

Uncle Vijaya reiterated Dr Tan Ho Soon's message, and paid tribute to everyone who has contributed in his or her own ways, to the propagation of the *Dhamma*. This includes, he said, not only those of us who are present to contribute our services, but also our families who are willing to sacrifice time with us, and allow us to indulge in our passion to serve the Buddhist community.

Uncle Vijaya ended his speech with a verse from George Elliot's highly-acclaimed novel, *Middlemarch*. I too would like to end my book with that verse because it aptly describes one of the important messages I aimed to convey in this book, that is, that each of us have to find our own "calling" in *Dhammaduta* work.

*For the growing good of the world
Is partly dependent on unhistorical acts:
And that things are not so ill with you and me
As they might have been,
Is half owing to the number
Who lived faithfully a hidden life*

And rest in unvisited tombs.

- *George Elliot (1874), in her novel, Middlemarch*

I have found mine for now in sharing the *Dhamma*. But all conditioned things are impermanent, so come what may, whatever *Dhammaduta* work I may do in the future, let me do so with wholehearted fervour and passion, humility, gratitude, and selflessness.

To all the *Dhammaduta* workers out there, we may lead “hidden lives” and we may finally rest in “unvisited tombs”. Yet, let us continue to strive on with diligence.

We do not need recognition.

We live to serve.

ACHIEVING YOUR DREAMS

No one can know the potential,
Of a life that is committed to win;
With courage, embark on the challenge,
To be more than what you have been.

Explore the road less travelled,
And believe that the world can be won;
By a mind that is fully committed,
Knowing the task can be done.

Greatness has no place for the skeptic,
No room for the doubter to stand;
To weaken your firm resolution
That achieving your goal is at hand.

We must have vision to see our potential,
And faith to believe in our dreams;
Then courage to act with conviction,
No matter how hard it may seem.

So, possess the strength and the courage,
To conquer whatever you choose;
It's the person who never gets started,
That is destined forever to lose!

~ Author Unknown ~

AN EXPRESSION OF HEARTFELT GRATITUDE

It was Meister Eckhart who said that if the only prayer we said in our whole life was “thank you”, it would suffice. I count myself extremely blessed because I am now able to say “thank you” to so many people, so many times.

I was very touched by the support and encouragement received from my coursemates and mentors in the DSC when I told them I was writing this book. I hope this book may serve as a “trip down memory lane” for all of us in the years to come. When we look back at our lives, we will remember that these two years have been very special for us. Not only did we come together to do our bit to propagate the Buddha-*Dhamma*, but in the process of doing so, we cultivated this wonderful friendship and camaraderie that will always hold a special place in our hearts.

Albert Schweitzer reminds us that nothing that is done for us is a matter of course. Everything originates in a will for the good, which is directed at us. So we must train ourselves never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude to those who have lighted the flame within us.

Let this book then be my humble word and action for the expression of gratitude to everyone who has helped me in this journey.

To my guardian angels, mentors and *kalyanamittas* in the DSC – thank you so much for the lessons and the sweet memories. If I may paraphrase Henry Ward Beecher, you are the charming gardeners who have planted fair blossoms in my Buddhist “soul”.

To the many devotees in the societies and centres who had welcomed me into their hearts when I first started – I will never forget my humble beginnings. I will always be grateful to you.

To the kind donors who sponsored the publication of this book – May your generous *Dhamma-Dana* inspire more people to embark on this journey of sharing the beautiful teachings of the Buddha for the happiness of the many. To everyone – may you achieve their dreams, no matter how impossible it may seem to be!

Signing off into Emptiness,
With lots of love,
kahyein
28th April 2008

Gratitude is the memory of the heart.
- Jean Baptiste Massieu, translated from French

*Garavo ca nivato ca
Santutthi ca katannuta
Kalena dhamma savanam
Etam mangalam muttamam*

Reverence, Humility,
Contentment, Gratitude, and
Opportune Hearing of the *Dhamma*,
These are Supreme Blessings.

*Maha Mangala Sutta
Samyutta Nikaya 2.4*

A journey of a thousand miles begins
with a single step

- Lao Tzu



Little Steps, Joyful Steps is the memoirs of a beautiful two-year spiritual journey.

Chan Kah Yein writes on her personal experience, and the many trials, tribulations and the rewards of learning and striving to become a *Dhamma* speaker. Written from the heart, she humbly and respectfully hopes that this book would serve as an inspiration to motivate readers to pursue their dreams, no matter how impossible it may seem to be at first. *Little Steps, Joyful Steps* is a tribute to all her friends who have travelled on this journey with her.



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