



Unity Vasak Speech
Jun 9, 2012, at Mel Lastman Square, Toronto,

Canada Namō Buddha YeA. Namō Dharma yah, Namō Sangha yah Honorable high commissioner of Sri Lanka. Honorable Consulate General and staff, Maha Sangha, Bantes, venerable, dignitaries, distinguished guests, fellow Buddhists, Ladies and gentleman. I am humbled by the honor to have this opportunity to speak to you today. The topic of my talk is on “new efforts to promote Buddhist education.” One of our purposes of today’s celebration is to promote Buddhism in Canada. Over the past 2,000 years, the three major traditions and all schools of Buddhism have done a superb job to spread the Buddhist teachings worldwide. For this you have my heartfelt gratitude and congratulations. However, when we try to introduce Buddhism to the west in these modern times, we must recognize there are certain distinct challenges. In the western culture today, science and technology is advance; knowledge and information are overwhelming. We must introduce Buddhism in such a way that is relevant and attractive to the western cultural. How can we do that? Can we learn from our past history? I think so. There is a great lesson we have learnt from the process of how Buddhism spread from India to China. A vivid example is Chinese Zen Buddhism. When the First Zen patriarch Bodhi Dharma immigrated from India to China he did not try to transplant the Indian culture into Chinese culture. China has her own rich culture very different from India. Instead, Bodhi Dharma he settled down at the Shoaling Temple. At Shoaling he implanted the very essence of Buddhism into martial arts, into the Chinese culture. Please don’t be hasty to criticize Bodhi Dharma for advocating “violence” which seems contradictory to Buddhist principles! Did he not embed the essence of Buddhism such as mindfulness, compassion and, mind-body-speech unison in the Shoaling martial arts? After all Bodhi Dharma was not known to be a martial artist in India until he moved to China. Through the efforts of six generations of patriarchs, Zen Buddhism finally becomes firmly establish in China during the Tang dynasty. Zen had become the leading school. From the one Zen school descends 5 major schools, which we have a saying “5 leaflets from the one flower”. Even today our major lineages are descendants from the Zen School. We could say the history of Zen Buddhism is unique to China. A Buddhism “made in China” – A Buddhism enriched with Chinese culture. The living testimonial is that: from the Kung Fu movies, every culture has heard of the Shoaling Temple and can relate martial arts to Buddhism. During one of our preparation meeting for today’s event, the venerable master Shi Yan Chong from the Shaolin Culture Center of Canada offered to have over two hundred of his students to perform Shaolin Kung Fu at this event. We were all totally astonished and pleasantly surprise. But of course this stage is not big enough to accommodate two three hundreds Shaolin students. But this clearly demonstrate how a new brand of locally made Buddhism can preserve the essence of Buddhism yet successfully propagates Buddhism from one great culture to another. Inspired by this success story of made in China Shaolin Zen, I propose to you that Buddhism needs to adapt to the western culture and not the other way around. To launch this new effort, I like to introduce to you three organizations. One is called the Buddhist education network of Ontario in short BENO. Recognizing youth is our future, BENO initiated the first Buddhist day camp in Canada. We are holding summer camps for four age groups Age 6-7, 8-10, 11-13, & 14-

17. And I urge the parents to visit our booth#1 to learn more about bringing your children to the Buddhist summer camp. The other efforts that we have just launched two weeks ago is a virtual Buddhist Collage we called the “Academy of Wisdom and Enlightenment” AWE in short. At this academy, we relate the principles of Buddhism to western philosophy such as metaphysics as well as modern science. I encourage you to visit the AWE booth to find out more about the curriculum of the college. Concern about the environment is in the heart of good people anywhere. Therefore, we have established the Green Think Tank where you can ask what you can do for Mother Nature, not what Mother Nature can do for you. Please visit me at the GTT display at booth #1. The three organizations are inspired by the three realms in the Avatamsaka Sutra (or the Huayen Sutra in Chinese). GTT is concerned with the environmental world, BENO nurtures the 眷屬世間 (Kalatrabhava the World or Realm of Congregation). AWE enhances the 智正覺世間 the Realm of Enlightenment.

How would the future of western Buddhism look like? The 3 organizations I mentioned maybe a prelude to the future. Zen Buddhism was made in China based on that one person, the immigration of Bodhi Dharma from India to China. Today, we witness the presence of hundreds of Sangha and with the support of the government of Sri Lanka and Canadian multiculturalism, I am sure the future of western Buddhism made in Canada will be pleasantly surprising, rich with Canadian culture, locally relevant. I am optimistic that the Made-in-Canada Buddhism will prosper to a panoramic scene unsurpassed by history. To this I thank you, counsellor general for your leadership and generosity in organizing this event and I thank you all for your kind attendance and participation.

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