

February 3, 2010

Today is a special day. The man who changed our lives left his physical form on this day last year. Let us remember him and his teachings. Even though he is not physically with us, his teachings live on in our lives.

Shifu would have wanted us to continue benefiting sentient beings through our practice, in accordance with causes and conditions, without thinking of self and others or gain and loss. Shifu also taught us to remember the source of the water—the Three Jewels—as it quenches our thirst and that of others. This was the way he lived his life using buddhadharma. Even though our practice is poor, we must try, each in our own way, to repay our gratitude to Shifu and the Three Jewels by helping others.

Let us reflect on his last teaching to us:

Busy with nothing, growing old.  
Within emptiness, weeping, laughing.  
Intrinsically, there is no “I.”  
Life and death, thus cast aside.

Looking out the window just now as I write this, I share with you my feelings...

Here or there, within or without—you are everywhere.  
Twenty-eight years of emptiness, I wipe away my tears.  
Outside the window, the sun shines, wind blows.  
Silent—everything is perfect in itself.

Three prostrations to Shifu...

May you all be well,

Guogu

## Chan Magazine

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*Cover and table of contents art courtesy of Ven. Chi Chern*

# From the Editor

I recently received a letter from a longtime reader of Chan Magazine who made contributions in the past but is “no longer willing to do so because of the absence of female voices and viewpoints.” She asks, “Is spiritual practice served when all the authorities are male? Isn’t it time we moved beyond the ‘caveman’ approach to spiritual inquiry and practice?”

I was quite surprised, first because our recently departed founder Chan Master Sheng Yen was well known for his advocacy of equality for women in Chinese Buddhism, and second because my own experience of the Chan Center is one of being surrounded by women in positions of authority: Buffe Laffey is Chan Magazine’s Associate Editor; Virginia Tan is the magazine’s administrative head; Kay Hu contributes most of the photography and Rikki Asher most of the artwork; recent issues have featured articles by Rebecca Li and Nancy Bonardi who, along with Rikki, Buffe and Echo Wong, regularly give Dharma talks, lead short retreats and teach meditation at both the Chan Center here in the city and the Dharma Drum Retreat Center upstate. And for most of my nearly two decades of membership, the center has been managed by a rotating group of monastics who have been predominantly women.

Nevertheless, I am aware that my view of things is a man’s view, and that in fact the highest level of spiritual authority in our organization is dominated by men: The Abbot/President of Dharma Drum is a man; the major retreats are led by Dharma masters who are men; Master Sheng Yen’s Western Dhar-

ma heirs are all men. I have to entertain the possibility that the long history of sexism in East Asian culture might still be expressing itself in the hierarchy of Dharma Drum, in the teachings of Chan, and possibly even in the pages of the magazine that I direct with my iron editorial fist.

So I put the question to Buffe, and she proposed that we look into it. This is my first look; the following is hers.

David Berman  
Editor, Chan Magazine

## From the Associate Editor

I have to admit that I too was surprised by this letter. I came of age in the 1970’s, when it seemed that everyone was hyper-aware of the issue of women’s rights. I began to study with Shifu in the mid-seventies, along with Rikki Asher and Nancy Bonardi. We were liberated young women, fresh out of college, empowered by the generation that had preceded ours. I would not have remained with any teacher or organization that oppressed women, and I’m confident I can say the same for my Dharma sisters. All three of us are still in the organization today.

Shifu was newly arrived in America when we began to study with him. I expect he learned a lot about the psyche of Western women from dealing with us. Young women of our age could be a bit militant back then. One day I heard that some sects of Buddhism believed that only men could be enlightened. When I

arrived at Shifu's class that week I confronted him, demanding to know, "Can a woman be a Buddha?" I'm sure my posture indicated that I was ready to run out of the place if he said no. Shifu responded with amusement and kindness. He said, at the level of a Buddha, there is no longer man or woman. I was satisfied with that answer.

I have never experienced anything in our organization to indicate that it is male-dominated. Coming from Catholic school, it never seemed strange to me that we have a Women's side and a Men's side in our practice halls, and segregated dorms. When new students question this, I remind them that our organization was founded by a celibate monk. When we are practicing at our center, we are temporarily living a monastic lifestyle. The environment is carefully designed to support the practice by minimizing distractions of all types. The segregation of men and women lessens the distraction of interest in the opposite sex.

Beyond this, I have my own personal theory about the gender segregation in our practice halls. It comes from an experience I had the first time I served as timekeeper on an intensive retreat. I had been dismayed to be assigned timekeeper duty, thinking it would diminish my own practice. I discovered instead that it can be a very intense practice in itself. Part of the timekeeper's duty is to patrol up and down the rows of sitting practitioners, armed with the incense board in case anyone asks to be hit. I took this duty very seriously. I walked slowly up the men's side, striving to keep my awareness focused on the seated practitioners. As I passed the middle aisle and crossed over to the women's side, I received a shock: I could very palpably sense the difference in energy between men and women.

This was several weeks into a 49-Day retreat. There were about 40 women and 40 men, all practicing with diligence, so I suppose a lot of *qi* had built up and that's why it was so palpable. Also, perhaps my own state of practice allowed me to perceive it more clearly. It was unmistakable. As I repeated the circuit around the room, again and again, I could very clearly perceive the difference between male energy and female energy. My personal theory is that the separation of the genders in the practice setting helps to concentrate these energies and keep them harmoniously balanced, in a way that would not happen if everyone was all mixed in together. It goes along with the instruction to always enter the room from a certain direction and leave it from the other direction, always making a circle. The intention here would seem very obvious to anyone who has trained in nature-based spiritual rituals. But this is my own personal theory, not anything spoken of by my Dharma teachers, so I will leave it at that. I will say with certainty that the gender division in our practice halls is a matter of equality and balance, and not a matter of one side being dominant over the other.

Our Correspondent wrote: "I ceased to attend retreats at DDRRC because of the bullying I endured at the hands of cowardly, reactive men. I include Shifu in this assessment."

I have never witnessed bullying in my long history of attending and helping to manage retreats at DDRRC. Granted, I know nothing of this particular woman's personal experience. When I try to imagine what might be perceived as bullying, the "group scolding" comes to mind. On many intensive retreats, at some point Shifu would give us, instead of his usual Dharma Talk, a fierce scolding. With

a frowning face he would tell us we were all lazy, that our practice was worthless, that no one was even trying, that he was disgusted with us.

Now, long-time students become very familiar with this particular scolding talk. It seems to be a standard tool in a Chan Master's bag of tricks. When you've heard it a few times you tend to chuckle about it with other senior students, even those from other schools, who will tell you that their teachers do the very same thing. It is a useful tool. When the scolding is given, those who have not been working hard may feel chastened and will tighten up their practice. Those who have been working hard may examine themselves and work with even greater diligence. If they have been practicing correctly, they are moving away from the mind of discrimination and the scolding words will not easily blossom into wandering thoughts; the student will simply return to the method. The Chan Master will clearly see who has been disturbed by his words and who has not.

I recall one retreat in earlier years when I felt I was sitting exceptionally well. Surely, I thought, it's only a matter of time before someone notices. I fully expected to be called into the interview room and praised for my progress. As the days passed by this didn't happen, but I was patient. Then, on the next-to-last day of the retreat, Shifu gave the group scolding. I was outraged. I felt a huge injustice had been done to me personally. I spent the remainder of the retreat composing a letter in my head to Shifu. The gist of the letter was, "I was practicing so well, and you didn't even notice, and after you scolded everyone and didn't give me any credit, I was so disturbed, I couldn't practice anymore."

I was consumed by these thoughts for the remaining two days of the retreat, and for the duration of my solo five-hour car trip afterwards. When I arrived in Boston and met my longtime friend (himself a Zen practitioner) I immediately blurted out my tale of injustice. When I got to the part about how "Shifu RUINED my retreat!", somehow hearing these words aloud shattered my delusion. I stopped with my mouth hanging open, saw the glint of amusement in my friend's eyes, and we both roared with laughter over how stupid I had been. I may have thought I was practicing hard, but clearly I was not practicing correctly. Full of thoughts of self and expectations of recognition, I was greatly disturbed when my deluded view of myself was not reinforced. I had wasted my own time.

Our Correspondent wrote: "That Shifu left (as far as I am aware) no female Dharma heirs is a lapse...that I find simply unacceptable."

It occurs to me that Dharma Transmission should not be an equal-opportunity affair, in which an organization is required to meet a certain quota of gender distribution in order to retain its funding. Regardless, the fact is that Shifu left four female Dharma heirs, all of them nuns currently residing at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. We have not yet heard much about these Venerables here in the West. But Chan Magazine proposes to seek them out, and present their voices in coming issues. We also invite our readers, men and women both, long-time students or people who have never practiced at our centers, to speak up. Let us hear your views on these issues.

Bufte Laffey  
Associate Editor, Chan Magazine

# The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

## Part Three

by

**Chan Master Sheng Yen**

*Between May, 1999 and November, 2003, on Sunday afternoons when he was in New York, Master Sheng Yen gave a series of lectures on the bodhipakshika (Sanskrit), literally, "things pertaining to bodhi," also known as the "thirty-seven aids to enlightenment." The 37 aids consist of seven groups of practices expounded by the Buddha. They are: the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Proper Exertions, the Four Steps to Magical Powers, the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Eightfold Noble Path. This is the third of three lectures Master Sheng Yen gave on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. The first two lectures were featured in previous issues of Chan Magazine. The lectures were translated concurrently by Dr. Rebecca Li, transcribed by Sheila Sussman, and edited by Ernest Heau. The entire series will be published as Things Pertaining to Bodhi.*

### **Samadhi and Wisdom in the Seven Factors**

The purpose of practicing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment is to cultivate samadhi and wisdom. As we develop the power of samadhi, we balance and stabilize the body and mind; as we develop wisdom, we reduce our suffering and vexations and enhance our ability to help others. Unless we clearly understand this we may wonder whether the Seven Factors of Enlightenment have anything to do with practice. There are two aspects to using expedient means in practicing the seven factors. The

first is to be always clear about your method and the second is to regulate your body and mind according to the method. Following this approach, you will practice effectively.

What are expedient means? From the perspective of Buddhadharma, any teaching transmitted through language, words, actions or ideas is expedient means. A teacher with wisdom and compassion will instruct students according to their situation, understanding, and level of progress. This is expedient means. This is like a doctor prescribing the appropriate medicine for the patient's particular prob-

lem. There are all kinds of illnesses, all kinds of medicines, and all kinds of patients. Even a single patient may have different problems at different times. The doctor knows there is no one cure that will be effective for everyone at all times. Therefore, the doctor prescribes for the patient's situation and needs at that time. Similarly, practitioners have different needs and expedient means are used to help them. The teacher will instruct according to one's needs from different perspectives and at different levels of the Dharma.

Once I was out in cold weather without a coat. This lay gentleman offered me his own coat. Wearing that coat, I did not look like a monk anymore. Another practitioner offered me her fur coat saying, "Shifu, my coat is warmer than that coat. You should wear mine." I did not think it was appropriate for me to wear a woman's coat, but she said, "Well, Shifu, what about expedient means?"

The Dharma itself is beyond words but the Buddha needed to use words to help sentient beings depart from suffering. The words he spoke were dharmas of expedient means. So we have the Dharma, which is the ultimate truth of the Buddha, and we have dharmas, the language, words, and ideas used as expedient means to give the teachings. Even with expedient means, one should follow certain principles. Under some conditions, one may not be able to do much about someone's suffering. You may ask, "You may look silly wearing a lady's fur coat but if you got sick you might not be able to teach. So isn't her offer expedient means?"

What do you think?

**Student:** What about the fact that the coat came from animals?

**Sheng Yen:** That is also an issue to ponder. Maybe you can use it as a koan. According to the precepts, a monk or nun may use a fur coat to keep warm, but the fur should come from animals that died naturally.

## Contemplating External Phenomena

An example of expedient means is to use thoughts that arise in your mind to illuminate external phenomena. Remember though, that external phenomena include things within your body that you can sense, whereas internal phenomena refer to thoughts arising in the mind. To cultivate samadhi you can collect your scattered mind by focusing on certain phenomena. You can concentrate your mind either on a specific external phenomenon or on external phenomena as a whole.

Is the breath an external or internal phenomenon? A lot of people may think it's an internal phenomenon. When you think, "I am breathing," that thought is an internal phenomenon, but your actual breathing is an external phenomenon. So when you are observing the breath, you are already using the mind to focus on an external phenomenon.

There are people who meditate without a specific method and very often, if they are not just resting or dozing, their minds are chaotic and fluctuating. In this scattered state they are basically watching movies in which they are the scriptwriters, the directors, as well as all the actors. They can be daydreaming about a girlfriend or boyfriend, or about making a

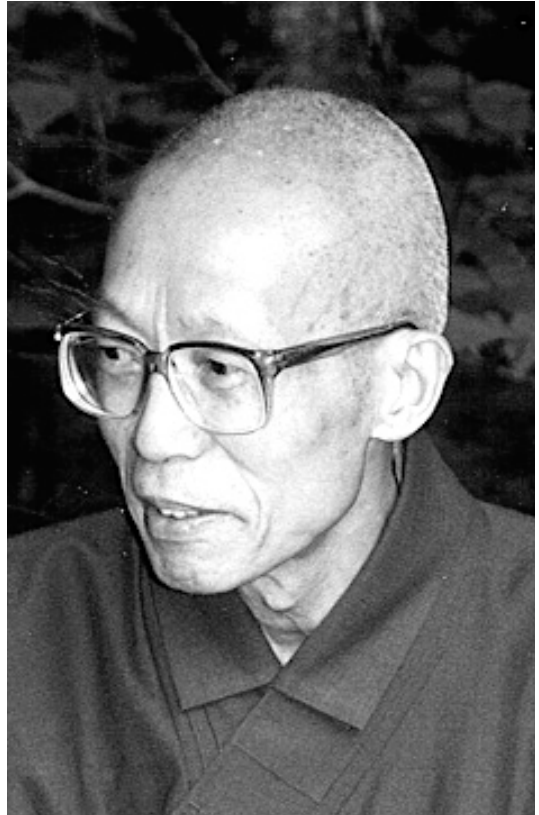


lot of money, and on and on. When not practicing a specific method, watching a movie in your head is at least entertaining; otherwise you will get very irritated, feel very uncomfortable, and fidget a lot. In this kind of scattered state you need an expedient means such as the method of observing the breath. With this expedient means the chaotic thoughts can eventually be replaced by a single-minded focus on the method. It is very important to understand this principle of the method as expedient means.

### Tying the Mind to Phenomena

After applying expedient means, the next step is to tie the mind to phenomena and to abide in that. This means connecting the mind to the phenomenon that one is focusing on. It is like this meditation bell here. As you can see, there's a little chain tying the bell to the striker so the striker does not get lost. Tying the mind to a phenomenon means that there is a linkage such that the object of focus does not get lost. It is like placing a banana in front of a monkey, but in a place where it cannot reach it. If the monkey is hungry, he will sit and gaze at the banana for a long time. So while the monkey's mind is tied to the phenomenon, he is abiding in that phenomenon.

This is what Nagarjuna, the great Indian scholar, meant by tying the mind to a phenomenon — one is always focused on it, not forgetting that it's there. Abiding in the phenomenon means one's mind is so focused that it becomes very stable. If the mind is not abiding in the phenomenon, it is like the monkey wanting the banana but walking away every few moments, and coming back. His mind is tied to the banana but is not abiding in it;



he keeps losing his focus. That describes the state where the mind is tied to the phenomena but not entirely stable yet. When the mind is entirely stable, it does not lose its focus.

Once when I was using this monkey analogy, a student said, "I can totally relate to that, because this whole idea of tying the mind to phenomena is about cultivating samadhi, right?"

I said, "Yes."

And he said, "Well, that's what I did when I was pursuing this attractive woman."

I told him, "It's not the same thing. Instead of the clarity and calmness that one develops in samadhi, your mind was completely controlled by your desire." [Laughter]

When you can tie your mind to phenomena and abide in them, you can clearly perceive the previous thoughts as they fall and the following thoughts as they rise. You know clearly the thoughts that just arose in the mind. You are aware of the upward and downward movements of the mind. The upward movement of the mind is when one knows what's going on clearly but there is also a feeling of excitement. The downward movement is when the mind is not as clear. In samadhi the mind is supposed to be very stable, without upward and downward movements, but before entering samadhi it is almost impossible for the mind to be completely without any ups and downs.

The important thing is to make an effort to maintain a stable and even mind. If the mind gets too excited it will become scattered; if the mind drifts downward too much it will lose clarity. In the process of stabilizing the mind, it is normal to have upward and downward movement. When one is clearly aware of these movements, one should perceive clearly the previous thought and the following thought. Without the fluctuating movement, there will neither be previous nor following thoughts. So, the idea is to be very clearly aware of every thought, of every movement of the mind, but at the same time, not to allow the mind to move upward or downward too much.

A mind that is doubtful in the midst of practice is not sure what is going on or what to do. "Should I do this or that? Doing that felt nice before, but now it does not." And so on. This doubt is due to lack of confidence, an inability to gather mind-power in practice. At this point one needs to use the Seven Factors of Enlightenment properly to take care of the situation. For example, when meditating, someone will be sitting there slowly becoming drowsy. Then, when they wake up they will think that everything is fine, that they were meditating well. This sequence can recur again and again. There is nothing seriously

"WHEN YOU CAN TIE YOUR MIND TO PHENOMENA AND ABIDE IN THEM, YOU CAN CLEARLY PERCEIVE THE PREVIOUS THOUGHTS AS THEY FALL AND THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS AS THEY RISE."

wrong with this, but this is a downward movement of the mind where one becomes increasingly unclear, confused about what's going on, and doubtful.

The other case is when one has been sitting well and is excited about it. "I have

been sitting well, and it's going to get better!" This is an upward movement of the mind and one may find oneself having happy ideas, joyful thoughts. Then, one may think, "I am sitting well, but can I keep it up, can I keep getting better? Should I be feeling good?" And this is doubt again.

So these upward and downward movements of the mind lead to doubt, and constantly asking oneself questions. That is because one doesn't know whether one's situation is positive or negative. In principle it is a good thing to be sitting in a very calm and relaxed way. However, when one has been calm to the point

where the mind has gotten dull, that means that the mind is unclear and moving in the direction of drowsiness. Also, in principle being relaxed is a good state. However, if one is so relaxed that the mind is getting too lax, then one is heading towards scattered mind. These are the situations that one needs to be clearly aware of, and how to adjust accordingly.

Being aware of one's mental state is applicable not only on the cushion but also in one's daily life. For example, there are people who are considered dull-minded, who live in a kind of confused state, as if their brains were buckets of glue. There are also people whom we may call oversensitive, who react to things very quickly, actually sometimes overreacting. Some may think these people are a little crazy. These are polar states of mind that one can have in daily life and they can even occur in the same person at different times. Perhaps I am one of those people. Sometimes, when I don't quite know what's going on, Guoyuan Fashi [the abbot] tells me, "Shifu, you need to go do such and such." And I say, "Really?" But the same thing happens to him too, and I have to tell him. [Laughter]

Once we had a bodhisattva here who I asked to deliver an object to Guoyuan Fashi, and he said, "Okay," as if he were going to do it right away. But in the meantime another person asked him to do something else in the basement. So he put my object down and went to the basement. While he was down there, somebody else wanted him to do something else. By this time he completely forgot about the thing that needed to be taken to Guoyuan Fashi. Originally, I could have delivered this thing by myself. Now, half a day had gone by and this thing was still sitting in the reception area in front of the Guanyin statue.

When I saw that, I asked this person, "What happened? Didn't you take this to Guoyuan Fashi?" And he responded, "What? You mean I didn't deliver it?" So I ended up delivering it myself, and this person said, "Shifu, I only have one pair of hands!"

I felt, well, he has a point. So while it is true he had only one pair of hands, he was still a little bit scatter-minded. Anyone can be scatter-minded once in awhile but one should recognize it and adjust one's mind to stabilize right away. If there are many things happening in daily life, one learns to take care of the things that need to be done one by one.

Practicing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment also helps maintain the health of the body and the mind by calming the mind and eliminating vexations. This is because the practice requires both body and mind to be relaxed. This promotes mental health through keeping a stable and balanced mind, one that does not agitate easily and does not fluctuate all the time. Cultivating the Seven Factors will help eliminate the vexations in the mind so that our interactions with others are harmonious. Taking care of business, one will not be confused or doubtful.

## A Review of the Seven Factors

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment are seven practices that guide us towards samadhi and wisdom. The first six factors — mindfulness, discrimination, diligence, joy, lightness-and-ease, and concentration — focus on cultivating samadhi, while the seventh factor, equanimity, focuses on both samadhi and wisdom. The Seven Factors are important in the Hinayana as well as Mahayana traditions, the main difference being that the Hinayana empha-

sizes samadhi, while the Mahayana emphasizes wisdom, including wisdom in daily life. Put another way, the Hinayana is more about individual practice; the Mahayana is more about relations in social settings. As one who received transmission in Chan Buddhism, I try to express the spirit of the Mahayana.

The Mahayana sutra, the Vimalakirti-nirdisa, has this passage: "Though [the bodhisattva] observes the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, [the bodhisattva] understands all the points of the Buddha's wisdom. Such is the practice of the bodhisattva."

This passage says that though one practices the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, one is not limited by them. If one also realizes the Buddha's wisdom, then one is practicing the bodhisattva path. And what is the Buddha's wisdom? It is the wisdom of emptiness in which one sees that all sentient beings possess buddha-nature. In the Hinayana there was no emphasis on seeing the buddha-nature in either oneself or others, while in the Mahayana, buddha-nature was seen as shared by all sentient beings. The fundamental difference between buddhas and sentient beings is that buddhas have seen their buddha-nature while ordinary sentient beings have not. Therefore, practitioners of the bodhisattva path should apply the Buddha's wisdom in daily practice and in interacting with people. This way, though one is not yet a buddha, one's behavior is in accordance with the Buddha's. When our wisdom is in accordance with that of the Buddha, our wisdom is the same as that of a buddha. The Hinayana goal is to obtain individual liberation. In this view, if other sentient beings have virtuous roots, they will eventually also begin to practice to-

wards liberation. On the other hand, in the Mahayana view, sentient beings are regarded as already being buddhas.

Some people may think that Westerners have a strong sense of individuality and are disposed to practice only the self-liberation path. That is not necessarily the case. Westerners, especially those that have a religious faith, believe that because God loves humanity, they should also love humanity. There is also among Westerners a very strong sense of justice, a belief that we should not tolerate unjust treatment of people. These sentiments in Western society gave rise to the ideas of democracy and equality. Were it not for such ideas, there would not be the American Constitution, nor would slavery have been abolished. These principles are also in accordance with Mahayana Buddhism, which transcends culture and nationality. Now, let's consider how the seven factors are regarded in Nagarjuna's Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra.

## Mindfulness

As we have said, in the Hinayana, the first factor, mindfulness, is actually the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The method begins by contemplating the body, and then contemplating the sensations experienced by the body. Since sensations are experienced by the mind, we next contemplate the mind's reactions to sensations. The mind's reactions to sensations are mental constructs, or dharmas. We then contemplate that dharmas are all just symbols or ideas, and after they arise, they disappear. We contemplate that these dharmas have the same nature as all phenomena, impermanent and empty.

What do you use to listen to this lecture? You use your ears. And where are your ears? In your head. And where is your head? On your body. That is contemplating the body. When you hear this talk, what do you hear? Whether you understand or not, at the very least you hear sound. What is sound? It is a sensation. That is contemplating sensations. How do you experience this sound? Do you find it interesting or boring? What is experiencing these sounds? Your mind is experiencing these sounds as interesting or boring. That is contemplating mind. But these notions of “interesting” or “boring,” what are they and where do they come from? They are mental objects or dharmas; they are symbols, things that represent something else. This is contemplation of dharmas. This gives you a rough idea of how to practice mindfulness in the Hinayana tradition.

What is the Mahayana approach to mindfulness? The Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra says that the bodhisattva treats all experiences as phenomena — anything that the sense organs and the mind can experience, all sensations, feelings, objects, ideas, concepts, and events. This includes physical, biological, mental, emotional, and social phenomena. These can all be seen as phenomena. The shastra goes on to say that as bodhisattvas encounter phenomena, they immediately let go of them without any attachment. It is not that one does not remember anything but that the memory does not become a burden. My memory is not that good, but I still remember a lot of things from my youth, the processes I went through, and the knowledge I acquired. Of course I have forgotten a lot. Even though I still remember much, I never allow memory to become a burden in my life.

In the Buddha’s time, there was a scholar who knew everything there was to know about philosophy, religion, and other subjects. He wore a metal band around his head to keep it from bursting from all the knowledge. One time, he challenged the Buddha to a debate. This scholar said to Buddha, “Ask me any question. If there is any question I cannot answer, I will become your disciple. Then I will ask you a question, and if you cannot answer, you become my disciple.”

So, Shakyamuni Buddha agreed to that. The first question the Buddha asked was, “Perhaps this is not quite a question, but it is about liberation.” The scholar said, “Well, ask me the question.”

Shakyamuni Buddha kept silent while the scholar waited and waited for the question to be asked. Then he said to Shakyamuni Buddha, “Well, if you don’t want to ask me a question, I will ask one.” Then he asked the Buddha, “What is liberation, then?”

Shakyamuni Buddha still would not say anything. Finally, the scholar became upset; “Why aren’t you answering my question?” Shakyamuni Buddha responded, “If one is already liberated, what need is there for questions?”

On hearing this the scholar realized that his knowledge was useless, so he said to Shakyamuni Buddha, “I will be your disciple now.”

This great scholar was so attached to all this knowledge he had that other people did not, that he was not able to attain true enlightenment. In itself, having knowledge is not the problem. The problem is allowing knowledge

to become a burden. If he hadn't been so prideful of his knowledge, this scholar would have had a better likelihood of being liberated.

## Discrimination

The second factor of enlightenment, discrimination, is interpreted in the Hinayana tradition as knowing true from false Dharma, following the true teachings and putting aside false teachings. The Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra has this passage: "Seeking wholesome dharmas, unwholesome dharmas, or dharmas that are neither wholesome nor unwholesome, these are all unattainable."

For the most part, we respond to phenomena by seeing them as pleasant or unpleasant, or as neither pleasant nor unpleasant. However, when cultivating the factor of discriminating between true and false, as described in the Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra, that should not be the case.

A student of mine who had married about a month before came to see me. I asked him how his new bride was doing. He said, "Before we got married, everything about her was good. After we got married, some things about her were good, some not good, and some things I really can't determine whether they're good or not." I thought that was interesting. Before he got married, everything was good and afterwards there's some good, some bad, and a new discovery of his wife. Is that the case with you, P, that after you got married you found your wife changing as well? [Laughter] Actually, I have heard the same thing from women. One woman, after getting married, told me: "Before my husband and I got married we went to a psychic to see if our horoscopes were compatible. The psychic said

everything was fine. Before the wedding, my husband agreed to everything that I wanted, but afterwards his real nature emerged; he began to grow a fox's tail." [Laughter] Do the Westerners among you know about [this Chinese saying] of someone growing a fox's tail?

I tell married people that they should adapt to each other's shortcomings because there is no such thing as a perfect person. They should try to understand and accommodate each other instead of being attached to the idea of an ideal spouse. There is no absolute good or absolute bad, and as one's attitude changes one's environment will change as well. For example, some people think that if the spouse does something mean, the spouse does not love them. An outside observer might ask, "Why would anybody want to be with such a person?" But the abused spouse might feel that their partner really does love them in spite of being mean occasionally. So, there is nothing that's absolutely good or absolutely bad. It's all in one's perspective of what's going on. The thing is to understand that as one's attitude about what's going on changes, one's environment will change as well. This does not mean that there are no good people or no bad people, but that one should not allow other people's actions to give us vexation. When encountering these situations, handle them not with a mind of vexation but with a mind of wisdom.

One scenario that sometimes happens is that a member of this Center passes away and leaves behind a lot of Buddhist material — sutras, books, tapes, and so on. Sometimes the heirs are not Buddhist, so they will gather up these items and bring them to the Center in boxes, leave them in the reception area,

and say, “We have all this stuff for you.” Then they leave without telling what it is all about. So what do we do with all these things? Often, we sort them out and leave them in the reception area for people to take. But we try to handle the situation without getting upset. There is no use in getting upset, so we just take care of the matter.

## Diligence

In the Hinayana tradition, diligence means exerting oneself in practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. In the Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra, Nagarjuna describes the Mahayana point of view. For him, diligence is exerting oneself to help sentient beings without being influenced by the three realms of desire, form, and formlessness. One should not be attached to the world of sentient beings; at the same time, one tries to deliver sentient beings from the three realms.

## Joy-and-Delight

In the Hinayana, the fourth factor of enlightenment, joy-and-delight, refers to the happiness that arises from the cultivation of dhyana. Speaking from the Mahayana view, the Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra says that when encountering phenomena, one does not attach to what is happening, nor does one give rise to vexation.

## Lightness-and-Ease

The fifth factor is lightness-and-ease. In the Hinayana, this refers to mental pliancy in the practice of dhyana, where there’s no burden of body and mind, where the mind does not attach to anything, where there is nothing to

attain, and because of that, there is no burden. This lightness-and-ease is equivalent to the first of the eight worldly samadhis. In the Mahayana view one does not attach to the good feeling of lightness-and-ease, one sees it as an opportunity to practice simultaneous samadhi-and-wisdom.

## Concentration

The sixth factor of enlightenment is concentration, or samadhi. This is the state where the mind remains on one thing without moving, where one knows clearly that there is no movement or chaos in phenomena at all. There is the same idea in the Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament) Sutra, which says that all dharmas (phenomena) are originally “thus,” and have their own place in the world. Samadhi is approached sequentially in the Hinayana tradition, beginning with the Five Methods of Stilling the Mind and moving on to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. In the method of Chan, however, samadhi is attained simultaneously with wisdom and can occur at any stage. Chan samadhi is also the samadhi of daily life.

## Equanimity

In the Hinayana, equanimity is the idea that as one continues in samadhi one lets go of any mental state that one is experiencing. At a deep level of samadhi, any thoughts that occur are subtle and mostly symbols and even these must be let go. For the Mahayana, equanimity means that one does not attach to any phenomena, including a mind that lets go. There are neither phenomena that can be put down, nor a mind that does the putting down. This state is wisdom, or enlightenment.

# INK AND WATER

An Interview with Venerable Chi Chern

by  
Bufte Laffey



Venerable Chi Chern was Master Sheng Yen's first Dharma heir. He is also one of the most respected meditation teachers in Malaysia and Singapore. Venerable Chi Chern was born in 1955 in Malaysia. He was ordained as a monk by Master Chuk Mor (Zhu Mo) in Penang. Master Chuk Mor was a student of Master Tai Xu, who is well known for having brought revolutionary changes to Chinese Buddhism by developing the concept of Humanistic Buddhism.

Two years after his ordination, Venerable Chi Chern went to Taiwan to study at the Fo Guang University. In 1980, he participated in four consecutive seven-day retreats led by Master Sheng Yen. It was at this time that he had a deep spiritual experience. After his experience was confirmed by Master Sheng Yen, Venerable Chi Chern returned to Malaysia and began to teach meditation classes. He undertook a solitary retreat in Malaysia from the end of 1982 to 1985. In 1986 he returned



to Taiwan where he received Dharma transmission from Master Sheng Yen. His Dharma name is Chuan Xian Jian Mi (Seeing the esoteric, transmitting the exoteric).

Venerable Chi Chern currently resides in Malaysia and is the principal of the Malaysian Buddhist Institute. For the past few years he has been coming to the Dharma Drum Retreat Center once or twice a year to lead retreats; he has a growing body of loyal students in this country. He is well-loved for his serene and genuine nature (he has been seen walking barefoot in the rain) and his plain good humor. He is also greatly appreciated for his mastery of the Dharma; his presentation is clear, organized and methodical.

When Venerable Chi Chern is in residence at the retreat center he spends a great deal of his free time practicing calligraphy. At the end of his retreats, each student is delighted to receive an original calligraphy, usually a single character such as “Wu” or “Chan”, which the Venerable has written himself during the retreat. He writes larger pieces as well, sometimes the entire Heart Sutra, and then generously donates much of his work to the center. Visitors in recent years will have seen many examples framed and hanging in the Contemplation Hall. It is not unusual, after one of Venerable Chi Chern’s retreats, to see a huge pile of unframed calligraphies on the table in the Reception House, and many of these have been sold to happy donors to raise funds for the support of the center.

In the past couple of years we have seen something new: paintings as well as calligraphies. The Venerable has taken up painting and is having so much fun with it that he has become prolific in his output. After his last

retreat we strung lines in the Reception Hall and hung the paintings with clothespins. The room was quite filled with his work, and most of the pieces were sold in a very short time. This was repeated a month later at a retreat in Poland.

It’s been great fun to watch his style progress. In Poland someone suggested to him that he paint a version of the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures. He thought that he didn’t know how to paint an ox very well, but that he could paint the moon. So he produced a series he calls the Ten Moon Pictures, which he presented during a talk at the Chan Meditation Center this past Fall.

When he was at Dharma Drum Retreat Center this past Summer, I was able to interview him about his work.



***B: Your ordination master, Venerable Chuk Mor, is a well-known calligraphy master. Did you first study calligraphy with him?***

I really didn't study calligraphy at all with my Dharma teacher. Most people who have that really high level of mastery of calligraphy have a natural talent. My teacher was one of those people, just so skillful and talented that his level of calligraphy was excellent. But at the same time he wasn't able to teach anyone. It was too easy for him. So easy for him and then so difficult for other people.

***B: He didn't even know how he did it, he just did it?***

Yes. In my earlier days studying under Master Chuk Mor I did spend some time practicing calligraphy, just every once in a while. But I didn't really start practicing seriously until my solitary retreat. During that time my teacher gave me some practice books that show the calligraphy of older generations of teachers. So I would just look at them and practice according to those old masters' styles.

***B: Your calligraphy can have a very playful and free style, very varied.***

This came from the beginning when I started to write the Heart Sutra. Because there are a lot of calligraphy teachers that will write a sutra, or write some phrase, and then have many, many copies printed and distributed. When people get it they feel it's nice, but it's just a print. It's all the same; everyone has the same one. So I thought of writing the Heart Sutra completely new each time, rather than distributing prints of the same one. This way everyone gets a unique copy of the Heart Sutra. In the beginning I wrote it more for-



mally, more properly. After a while I started writing in a freer style, and then it became more lively.

Afterwards I thought, well, it's still kind of plain, it's just characters, writing the Heart Sutra again and again. So then I started to draw a picture first, perhaps some kind of image, or write a big character, and then add the Heart Sutra around it. Then it became much more lively, much more expressive.

***B: Yes, in some of these, the big character has more water in the ink, so it's more grey, and then the little characters are sharp and black, a nice contrast. These are very attractive. So your style just keeps evolving and evolving?***

Yes. Calligraphy itself is just another kind of art that of course existed before the Chan School appeared in China. However, if you are a practitioner of Chan, then you can actually borrow these different arts, whether it's calligraphy or the study of literature or any other kind of art. As long as you have the attitude of practice, you can borrow this as a way to cultivate the mind. But if you just write calligraphy for the sake of the art and you're just enjoying it that way, then it's not a method of Chan practice.

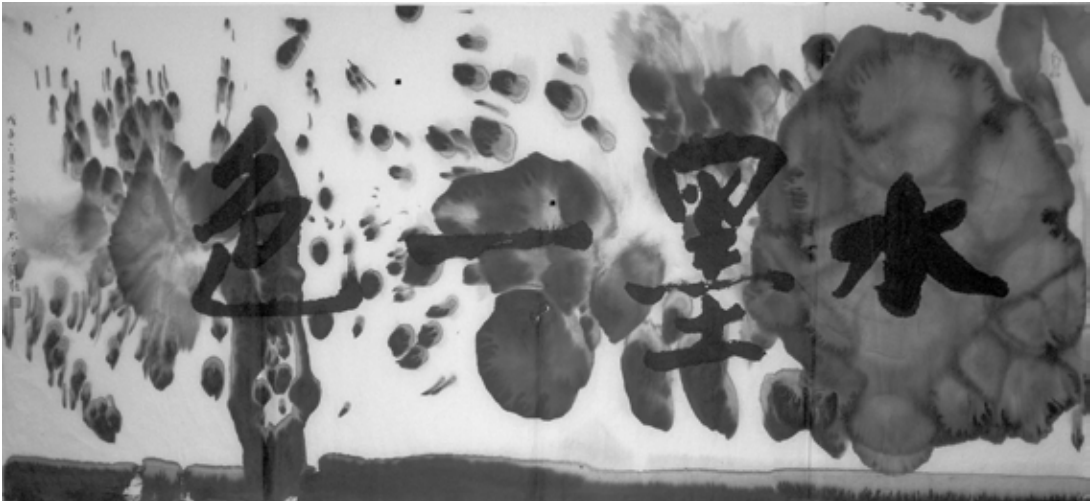
Another way it can be used is as a way to actually spread the Dharma. So that when you write calligraphy it becomes a thing that you can share with someone else. You can give it to a disciple or someone who is interested in the Dharma, and when they are actually appreciating it, the art aspect of it, at the same time they can also learn the Dharma from reading it. So it can be a tool for helping others, for teaching the Dharma to others.

Calligraphy didn't appear as this kind of tool in the Chan School, another kind of method,

until after the Chan School had been flourishing for quite some time. Then some Chan teachers started using it as a way to cultivate the mind and also to share the Dharma.

One thing about calligraphy, it's different from painting in that you're just working with lines. You need to be very focused and precise in order to be expressive with just lines. If you just want to learn to write calligraphy and write pretty well, it's quite easy. You just look at something and practice according to what you see. But if you want to be able to write excellently, write very precisely in fine calligraphy, then it takes quite a lot of practice and quite a lot of effort. Again, because you're just using lines. To be expressive you have to be very precise.

In this way calligraphy can also be a way to cultivate the mind. For example, if you start to write calligraphy and you're kind of agitated and your mind is unsettled with a lot of emotions going on, then you can see right away when you start to write that the characters will actually not look so pretty. Because





the mind is agitated, so what you write down is almost the very expression of the state of mind that you have.

And it may be that it may not look so good in the beginning when your mind is agitated, but the more you write it can actually be a way to harmonize the mind and body. So in that way it can be a practice in itself. On the one hand it's an expression of a state of mind, and on the other hand it's a method of practice. It's a great hobby this way for people who have the time. You can set aside the time and write calligraphy and use this hobby as a way to harmonize the mind. But if you really want to have excellent and fine calligraphy, then that will take quite a lot of practice, and quite a lot of work.

In Chinese art, you could say calligraphy is an art that requires the highest level [of expertise]. If you want to be able to reach the highest level of attainment this can be done through writing calligraphy. There are actu-

ally a lot of well known and accomplished painters, but there are not so many accomplished calligraphers. Because it is much more difficult to reach this highest level of attainment in art through calligraphy than through painting. Again the reason is, in calligraphy you just have lines, you just have one color ink, and you're working with only that. Whereas in painting there are different colors, different shades, and all this to work with. But again to be able to work with this black ink and these lines, it's very difficult to reach that level of achievement in art.

*B: I thought I remembered you saying at the sharing the other day that you didn't really get into doing calligraphy much until you were here at DDRC? Did I misunderstand that?*

Actually I do practice calligraphy almost every day in Malaysia. I've got a place to write calligraphy there. What I said was that I didn't really start drawing or painting pictures until

coming here. In February of 2008, I taught a Silent Illumination retreat here. Afterwards I went to Australia, then later in the Summer I came back here, July of 2008.

**B:** *So you've done calligraphy for many years, but in 2008 you started to paint pictures. What made you start?*

Around Chinese New Year that year, when I was in Malaysia, I actually started then a little bit. I thought, hmm, let me give this a try—let me see if I can paint. Because I'd never studied painting before and didn't really know how to do it. So I just started trying, using different degrees of darkness and lightness, different thickness of the calligraphy water, or ink, different levels or shades. I just started painting. Actually I thought it looked kind of good, and it was fun. Enjoyable. Then I just continued after, when I came here to lead those retreats.

**B:** *So this was for enjoyment and not really as a meditation practice?*

Even though it was fun in the beginning the actual content of the paintings came from my experience in Chan practice, different states of mind or different experiences of the mind. I get the inspiration from these states of mind in Chan practice. Also some of the paintings can be a way to express some ideas from Chan poems, Chan literature. All of the content that I am painting has something to do with Chan. It is also a way for me to express my state of mind.

**B:** *This painting here, the paper is almost covered with ink, lots of dark blotches and many varied grades of shading. Someone told me this was supposed to represent drowsiness?*

No, not drowsiness. When I painted that I thought of a saying, a brief verse to explain Chan, which is: "Tea and Chan are of a single flavor." So this could be the same with water and ink, it's of one color. That's what it means. "Ink wash is of one color."

**B:** *When you sit down do you have an image in your head of what you want to make?*

Sometimes I do have an image or an idea first. Other times I only know after I start painting, after the water and ink are put on the paper.

**B:** *That must be the most fun.*

Yes.



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TEACHINGS ON METHODS OF RELAXATION,  
SILENT ILLUMINATION AND HUATOU

Led by: **Chi Chern Fashi**  
(Master **Sheng-yen's** Dharma heir)

Date: **August 5-15, 2010**

Location: **Dluzew near Warsaw, Poland**



**Contact:** Pawel Rosciszewski, ul. Promienna 12, 05-540 Zalesie Gorne, Poland, **e-mail:** budwod@budwod.com.pl  
**mobile phone:** +48601224999, **phone** (48) 22 7362252, **fax** (48) 22 7362251

## DHARMA EVENTS WITH GUO GU

Guo Gu (Jimmy Yu) is an experienced Chan retreat teacher and is one of Master Sheng Yen's closest disciples. In 1995, he received sanction (*inka*) to teach Chan from Master Sheng Yen and is currently the guiding instructor for the Western Dharma Teachers, the Dharma Teacher of the Tallahassee Chan Group, and an Assistant Professor of Buddhist Studies at Florida State University.

The following is his travel itinerary:



**March 26-29 in Chicago, IL:** Friday evening talk and three-day retreat.  
*Contact Ms. Iris Wang: [iwang123@yahoo.com](mailto:iwang123@yahoo.com)*

**April 16-18 in Orlando, FL:** Friday evening talk and two-day retreat.  
*Contact person, Ms. Chih Ho: [chihho2004@yahoo.com](mailto:chihho2004@yahoo.com)*

**August 13-22 in Upstate NY:** Silent Illumination Chan retreat.  
Intermediate & advanced practitioners are welcome.  
*Contact DDRC: [ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org](mailto:ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org)*

# Comparing the Methods: *Huatou* and Silent Illumination

*In June of 2009, Guo Ru Fashi led a 10-day Huatou retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, during which he gave the following talk. It was translated live by Guogu (Jimmy Yu), transcribed by Diane Kennedy and edited for the magazine by Victor Lapuszynski.*

**Guo Ru Fashi:** Even though the retreat has not ended, I want to sit closer with all of you. One can never be certain when causes and conditions will be such that we will meet again, so we have to savor each and every moment. It is important to understand that, in practice with a teacher, the physical distance between teacher and disciple does not matter, so long as we engage in practice. The closer and harder we work on the method, the closer we are to our own true nature, and the closer is the bond of relationship between a teacher and a student. All that was given during the retreat – the words spoken, the actions taken – I hope that they have planted a positive, wholesome seed deep within you, in what is called the Eighth Consciousness in Buddhism. My hope is that this seed will sprout and be nurtured through various causes and conditions, and become a guide to your practice in your own lives. Then, as long as you practice, you and I will be inseparable. It is already several months since Shifu himself has passed away, but I feel closer to him now more than ever. His teachings and his Dharma are seeds that he has planted within me, guiding my path. I wish the same for all of you. I wish for all the teachings that we have received here, now, and previously with



Shifu, to blossom and serve as a compass for our practice so that there will be no distance between you and me.

So, if you have any more questions, ask them freely.

**Participant:** I have two questions. The first is, if we are practicing the Huatou method, should we stay exclusively with Huatou and not also integrate Silent Illumination? My second question has to do with the book, *Swampland Flowers*. Is that the book you are using?

**Guo Ru Fashi:** Some of the teachings that we have given are in *Swampland Flowers*, but not all of them. In his translation, Christopher Cleary has excerpted parts of these letters of Master Dahui to lay people. It may be difficult to find the exact pages for particular teachings – they are jumbled together.

**Participant:** The book that you do have is called . . .

**Guo Ru Fashi:** Our book is called *Shattering the Great Doubt*. And that's available.

To answer your first question: The general course of all methods of Chan is the same, that is, bringing the scattered mind to the concentrated mind, to the unified mind, and then the shattering of this unified mind to a state of no-mind, of self-awakening. As for specific methods, they may take different paths, like different entry points that actually lead to the same thing. If they did not lead to it, they wouldn't be Chan methods, and that same thing is realizing our true pure mind.

When one is used to practicing Silent Illumination at home, one sits in stillness and clarity, reaching the state free from distractions, from discursive thinking, and, definitely, wandering thoughts. That is precisely the point where one can go deeper. How? By illuminating the true nature of the mind. What does this mean? The stillness and clarity that one experiences itself is a *xiang* – it's a characteristic, an appearance, a phenomenon, a state of mind. Earlier in one's practice, where the mind is very scattered, that too is a *xiang* of the mind. How do these two actually differ in their nature? Though they seem comparatively very different – one is scattered and the other still and clear – in nature they are the same. So if one separates oneself, as the text says, from these *xiang*, from these phenomena, appearances, characteristics, then that is the true mind. If a practitioner of Silent Illumination is content to rest there when they reach the stillness and clarity, then that is no longer Chan practice. Chan practice points to realizing the true mind, not realizing the true mind that is resting in phenomenal appearance. At that moment, one must engage in... you may call it doubt or you may call it in-

vestigation... of this state of clarity and this state of silence. You must know the nature of silence and the nature of illumination. Investigate it so that you can understand the true nature of the mind. Now if, at that moment, you want something concrete, say, generating a phrase like "What is this?" then that is fine. In Silent Illumination, they don't talk about the word *tsan*, or "investigate," which is typical of the Huatou method. Instead they use the word *zhou*, which roughly can be translated as "investigate" or "examine," but essentially this points to the same thing. Once a person reaches this mind, he or she must not be self-satisfied in that state of stillness and clarity – that would just be one more kind of phenomenal appearance to be stuck on. On reaching that state, instead, one investigates deeper into "What is this? What is this state? Is this the same thing as the scattered mind, or is it different? How is it different? How is it the same?" One must penetrate through this state with all one's body and mind.

**Participant:** Is there a difference between *tsan* and *zhou*? You said they are roughly similar, but is there a difference that matches the difference between the two practices?

**Guo Ru Fashi:** Strictly speaking, there are no differences. The basic point is, you must understand truly and personally what your true nature is, what this true mind is. That's the basic point of investigation and examination.

Specifically, however, the word *tsan*, as in *tsan huatou*, "investigating the Huatou," has the etymological connotation of participation, involvement. In actual application, investigating *Huatou* involves creating the doubt, creating the sense of dis-ease, this unsettlement, this not being clear about things, through asking a question. In that kind of... you may even call it agitation... in that kind of agitated

Photo: Kaifen Hu



state you are involved with participating fully with *this doubt, this doubt, this doubt!* You must understand the nature of the mind in the midst of this complex struggling. In this active participation, fusing oneself with this unsettled, agitated doubt, this not knowing, this impenetrability and wonderment, one is



not trying to escape from that, instead, *stick to it, stick to it, stick to this doubt, stick to this doubt, gluing oneself to the doubt!* Yet, at the same time, one does not generate discrimination. Usually, when we are agitated, we have all kinds of discriminating mind, but in *Huatou* practice, we don't have to. So on the one hand, complete absorption and participation, and on the other, the discriminating mind kind of dies down in the midst of this. It is this process of doubting, the sense not of suspicion but of doubting, the sense of doubting arising from asking "*What is Wu?*" "*What is Wu?*" "*What is Wu?*" and not giving an answer from discrimination. *What is Wu? What is Wu?* This doubting will bring oneself to a state of complete absorption and union, and eventually, when all of the gaining and losing mind, the discrimination, the attachment drops away, one then perceives the self-nature. This participation is much like the dust particles in the air right now in this space – there are all kinds of things floating around right in this space and it's impossible really to separate space and these dust particles. They are together throughout – where there are dust particles, there is space – throughout this space, there are particles. It's complete involvement, complete participation, not separate, and yet not giving rise to discrimination. Investigating in this manner one realizes the true nature of mind. Investigating *Huatou* is quite an interesting process. We have all kinds of vexations, we have all kinds of agitation, yet we do not try to run away from them. Be with this agitation and dis-ease and you will discover their nature, their true face. When you use them like this, you will be able to practice correctly.

Because of the subtlety of the distinction between these two characters semantically, they are almost indistinguishable. We must be very careful and subtle in our practice as well. This complete involvement with the agitated mind – actually self-generated agitated

mind – and asking “*What is Wu?*” “*What is Wu?*” is a process through which one actually understands the difference between the mind of illusion, or delusion, and the true mind.

OK ... deluded mind and true mind are actually just one split instant of difference apart. There is not really any such concrete thing as this deluded mind, separate from this true mind. “Deluded mind has all these vexations that are real and concrete, and apart from them there is this true mind that somehow, when this dies down, one realizes”...that is *not* what is meant here. When you hear such a thing, it is only metaphorically speaking. The real discovery is that the nature of the deluded mind and the nature of the true mind are actually the same thing. It is just that, in the instant when you give rise to discrimination of self and other, gaining and losing, then the true mind becomes the deluded mind. So, it is not of two natures, but of one single reality. Similarly, when in an instant you reach a point where discrimination, attachment, self-referentiality suddenly drop away, then deluded mind becomes true mind.

A long time ago in imperial China, there was a local official of high status who studied with a certain Chan Master. He did not really understand what is meant by “the deluded mind is the true mind,” or that the true mind – which we all originally have – suddenly becomes deluded mind. So he went to ask his very compassionate teacher, who was ordinarily very kind to him, about this, because the teacher was someone of whom you could ask and always be sure to receive an answer. He asked, “Teacher, how is it that the true mind can become the deluded mind?” The teacher became quiet and just sat there. Did not reply. He thought, *Maybe he didn't hear me.* “Teacher, how can the true mind become the deluded mind?” The teacher still did not reply. Again he asked, and again received no reply, now for the third time. *How come my*

*teacher still does not reply? Usually he is so compassionate, whatever I ask him, he answers. Maybe I did something wrong?* As he was engaging in such thoughts, the teacher opened his eyes and said, “You see the true mind become deluded mind!” He reflected on the discriminating thoughts he was just having, and he understood. So, in the *Huatou* method, the process is one of inseparability of delusion and awakening. In the midst of delusion, one awakens. In the midst of sam-sara, there is bodhi. So that is the way practitioners of *Huatou* engage in practice.

I am very appreciative of this question. I have never been asked this question back in the East. Perhaps Western minds are just a little tad bit more advanced than the Eastern mind. If they don't understand something, they confront you, and they ask, ask, ask until they get it. Those who speak Chinese, you already heard it once, but if you understand English, you can hear me say it again. If you don't understand something, you must be thorough-going in your practice, you have to understand it clearly so that when you use it, you will be able to practice correctly.

Because the subtlety of these two characters is really almost indistinguishable with regard to semantics, even Chinese speakers just go right past them and don't really think twice about the matter. We must be very careful and subtle in our practice. As for *zhou*, the word used in the writings of Hongzhi Zhengjue when he talks about Silent Illumination, sometimes we see it coupled with *ming*, which can mean various things. Coupled together, *zhou ming* can be translated two ways. One is to “examine the radiance,” so in that sense, the *ming* is a noun and not a verb. So examining or investigating or whatever active verb you want to use for this *zhou*, examining this luminosity, this radiance, that interpretation really points to the wondrous function of the enlightened awakened mind. A second way of using this

*zhou ming* is understanding it so both words are used as verbs. Now, in Chinese grammar, especially classical Chinese, sometimes the referent, the noun, is not explicitly stated, so that when a translator inserts it they have to put it in square brackets, as words added to the text. Sometimes even the verb is not explicit, so it really depends on one's practice to translate text correctly, especially with the subtlety of classical Chinese terms. Semantically, a non-practitioner would not be able to work with these words and have any legible phraseology come out. This second meaning is an active way of understanding the implied referent, which is, of course, the true mind. Luminosity now becomes a verb: illuminate. Silent Illuminating. Illuminating in the sense of examining such that, in this sense, the examination and the illumination become intertwined.

In the practice of Silent Illumination, the Chinese character is *mo zhao*. The *zhao* here has a similar function to this examination: first, examining, and secondly, radiance. The whole point of Silent Illumination is to go progressively through deeper and deeper stages, from a scattered mind to a concentrated mind, to a unified mind, reaching a state of still clarity. In that still clarity, one must examine the nature of this mind of clarity, and in that sense illuminate this state of mind, understanding that this state of mind is merely another form, yet another characteristic, though it's true nature is its enlightened nature which is free from attachments and free from any characteristics. This is the goal. The process is quite different from *Huatou* practice – with *Huatou*, the beginning of the process and the end is never separate from agitation, a kind of disease. One is trained from the beginning not to attach to any form, not to pay any attention to these bodily and psychological states one goes through, so in that sense it is kind of formless practice, where one is with form yet not attached to form. Again and again during

the retreat, we have been saying, don't pay any attention to these phenomena, characteristics, or forms, but just stick to the *Huatou*, the question. With this expedient means, one is with form but not attached to form, so one can call it formless practice. But with Silent Illumination, the end result is the same but the practice involves form in the sense that, as one goes through the stages of Silent Illumination, one is clearly aware of all the physiological and psychological states, from unification of body and mind, clearly aware of unification of self and others, clearly aware of the experience at a deeper level of the unification of time. In each of these phases, one is with form, just like *Huatou* practice. You can't say a person is attached to form just because they are with form, but one should be very clear about the states that one goes through and all of their transformations. In the process, one becomes very familiar with states of body and mind, but that itself could be a trap. When a person reaches a state of stillness and clarity and becomes satisfied to rest in that state, that is no longer Chan practice. The important thing is, once you reach that stillness and clarity, to examine the nature of this clarity while being free from it. This is the course of events that occurs with both of these methods. I am delighted indeed to have the opportunity to answer this question. If you gain benefit from hearing this particular discourse, you should thank the questioner.

With regards to *Huatou* practice, for the term's first interpretation, "examining the radiance," the purpose is to participate actively with the agitated mind, the unease, the "not-clearness" of *Huatou*, so in that sense it is inseparable from the active mind. In Silent Illumination, the point of the practice is to reach this radiance, this luminosity, this clarity, but, as I said before, one must not be self-satisfied with that state, but understand by examining. "Examine" here may be understood as investigation – examining and thor-

oughly understanding. Understanding how? Understanding this radiance, without being settled or satisfied with this radiance, but examining it. That is how to understand the true nature of this clarity.

We can also understand these two paths another way, through a doctrinal perspective. Silent Illumination is a practice where one enters the realm of reality through illusions, through provisional truth. When we talk about the two truths in Buddhism, we mean ultimate truth and provisional truth. Silent Illumination can be said to enter enlightenment through the path of provisional truth, that is, understanding the nature of body, understanding characteristics, and the different shifts and experiences of body and mind, which are essentially just illusion. Understanding all of the changes and shifting characteristics and the different states of realization in that way and, finally, realizing that true form or true characteristics are no characteristics, and true luminosity is free from luminosity. But the *Huatou* method is entering the path through the truth of emptiness, or the ultimate truth that, in the midst of delusion, there is enlightenment, which is empty. Again, form is emptiness, emptiness is precisely form. It does not engage in the practice by understanding the states of body and mind, but goes directly to the mind of vexations, understanding that the nature of this vexing mind is none other than the true mind. When discursive thinking and discrimination suddenly vanish, vexing mind becomes the true mind. This is how one can understand the two paths from a doctrinal perspective. Now, in speaking of ultimate truth and provisional truth, we may think in hierarchical terms, but that is wrong understanding. In Buddhism, the two truths are mutually penetrating, mutually dependent, and inseparable. We should not think that ultimate truth sounds better, and provisional truth is only provisional and therefore lower. Both meth-

ods have their strengths and also their weaknesses. These are simply two paths of Chan, both equally gems of the tradition.

Any questions?

**Participant:** Does Fashi teach Silent Illumination retreats?

**Guo Ru Fashi:** There are two ways to answer that. One is that the *Huatou* method is the one through which I gained entry into Chan, so it is something that is very intimate to me. It is something that I am extremely familiar with in its process and subtleties, and how to exercise wisdom in guiding practitioners using it. I do not practice Silent Illumination, but yes, I understand Silent Illumination and its basic principles, and it is not separate from Chan. In my own Chan hall in Taiwan, I don't really separate Silent Illumination retreats and *Huatou* retreats; I just use whatever methods retreatants will be able to derive benefit from. Shifu has already laid out two clear pathways for his disciples. In accordance with the Dharma Drum lineage, we have these two distinct ways of practice. From one perspective, I prefer to lead *Huatou* retreats, since this is where I derive the power from my practice. As for another, less serious, perspective – if I were to come here and start leading Silent Illumination retreats, that's like stealing business from someone else who is already selling the product. One can't be that greedy. There are people here, Shifu's disciples, that have deep experience in the practice and understanding of Silent Illumination, so there is no need for me to sell that product. They are selling it pretty well.

Every Chan method is suitable for each and every one of us. The difference lies in our understanding of how to use the method, and how we exert our effort in practice. If either or both of these two are lacking, then we don't derive power from it, or from any method.

But my own preference, my *bias* [laughter], is that the *Huatou* method is really an excellent method. It is able very quickly to allow the practitioner to gain an entry into the practice because, right from the beginning, they are told not to attach to these psychophysiological phenomena that arise during sitting meditation or other forms of practice, and they are told that they are not separate from this agitation, vexations, or the ordinary mind, if you will. With the method itself, you are being asked to question *What is Wu?* *Wu* is already nothing. It is not something concrete. There is nothing for the conceptual mind really to hold onto and chew. From the very beginning, you are not given something to hold onto, so in that sense it's a more direct way to realize your self-nature.

Of course, if you are selling some kind of watermelon, you have to say this kind of watermelon is really good. [laughter] So I say to you, if you don't want to err on your path, practice the *Huatou* method! Moreover, because of the pressuring techniques and strategies of the Linji tradition Chan Master, using scolding and hitting in appropriate circumstances, he is able to free practitioners immediately, inducing them to let go of the deluded mind and awaken to their true nature. So that's the best method to use. It is not something that is seen in other forms of Chan practice, such as that of Caodong. So follow me! [laughter]

It's time for eating now. Like the text says, a Chan Master following formulas and forms! Thank you, we will eat lunch now.



# The Past

## News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

### Sheng Yen Memorial

On Sunday, February 21st, there was a gathering at the Chan Meditation Center to commemorate the one year anniversary of Master Sheng Yen's passing. The event began with a sharing from Professor Jimmy Yu (Guogu), Professor Chun-Fang Yu, and the Abbot Venerable Guo Xing. After a wonderful vegetarian lunch, there was a video retrospective of the life and works of Master Sheng Yen. Next was a sharing from the Dharma Teachers in Training. The assembly then separated into small talking groups for personal sharing. After this, everyone assembled in six long rows, and each person was handed a lit votive candle. The group together recited Shifu's vows, then each individual silently made their own personal vow, meditating on the candle flame as a representation of the vow. Finally, the assembly placed the candles on the altar in front of the image of Shifu, symbolically offering the vows.



### Ven. Chang Chi in San Francisco

On December 19, Venerable Chang Chi arrived in San Francisco to give a Dharma talk on happiness and lead a Chan meditation program.

Prior to taking up residence as a teacher at Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York, Venerable Chang Chi held a number of positions at DDM Taiwan. He began his talk, entitled *Meeting Happiness*, by expressing his appreciation to Venerable Master Sheng Yen, with whom he worked closely up until the time of his death in 2009.

The talk was hosted by DDM San Francisco. In addition to those who listened in person, a remote audience was able to attend via videoconferencing.

Reflecting on what he learned during time spent attending to his mother while she was in the hospital, Chang Chi Fashi explained how we must cultivate honesty and gratitude toward others. In this period, the hidden Buddhist seeds in his heart ripened as he witnessed death, aging, sickness and birth.

The next day, he concluded his visit with a one-day Chan program including sitting meditation, walking Chan and Eight Form Moving Meditation.

## DDM Malaysia Celebrates Decade

On November 13, DDM Malaysia hosted a gala party in Kuala Lumpur to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and show its appreciation to the community for its unstinting efforts during this first decade.

The festivities opened with a riveting performance of percussion by DDM's Drum Team, followed by a film of a talk by Venerable Master Sheng Yen on Dharma Joy.

After hours of celebration, the party ended on a high note with practitioners renewing vows to build a pure land on earth.

### Guo Yuan Fashi in Indonesia: "It's always the first time."

Venerable Guo Yuan, Vice Director of the Chan Practice Center in Taiwan, made a 12-day Dharma tour of Indonesia from October 23<sup>rd</sup> to November 3<sup>rd</sup> last fall. The tour included Dharma Talks and Chan Retreats, stopping first at Medan, then Yogyakarta and Jakarta.

In Medan, Guo Yuan Fashi gave a talk entitled "Chan and Life," sharing his ideas with students on how to live in the present moment. The following day, he led a One-Day Chan Retreat at Vihara Mettayana, practicing meditation with a total of sixty students.

The next stop was a Five-Day Chan Retreat for 30 students at Omah Jawi Retreat House in Yogyakarta, with morning and evening Dharma talks. At one point, Guo Yuan Fashi noted that it was his first trip to Indonesia, but then reflected that "everything is always the first time." On the last day of the retreat, 12 students took refuge in the Three Jewels.

Pressing ahead, he arrived at Sadhana Amityayus Retreat Center in a hilly area about 20 miles outside of Jakarta. The center is a quiet place with a 4-storey wooden house as the main building, and four smaller wooden houses for sleeping quarters. The Chan hall is on the third floor of the main building, and it was here that Guo Yuan Fashi wound up his tour with a Two-Day Retreat attended by 75 students.

In addition to the students, 17 volunteers from Dharmajala, a practice community in Jakarta, signed up to help with registration, transportation, meals and logistics.

One student approaching his interview felt his questions were stupid, but Fashi told him they weren't stupid at all, and proceeded to ask, "What is 'no-self' ? What is Buddha nature?" The student answered, "I don't know."

"Of course you don't know!" But this, he said, is the most important question in life.

When it was all over, the response to the retreat from both students and volunteers was highly positive.



# The Future

*Retreats, classes and other upcoming events.*

*To subscribe to our new e-bulletin of Chan Center activities,  
please send an email to: [chanmeditation@gmail.com](mailto:chanmeditation@gmail.com)*

## **Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY**

Phone: (845) 744-8114

E-mail: [ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org](mailto:ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org)

Website: [www.dharmadrumretreat.org](http://www.dharmadrumretreat.org)

*DDRC holds a variety of Chan practice activities, including weekly group meditation, Sunday services, beginner's meditation classes, beginner's retreats and intermediate and intensive Chan retreats. Novices and experienced practitioners are all welcome at DDRC, whether to begin practicing or to deepen their cultivation. Volunteer opportunities are also available.*

*Schedule is subject to change. Please check the website for updated and detailed information, or to register for activities online.*

### **Retreats**

#### **Young People's Chan Retreat**

Friday - Sunday, April 9 - 11

#### **7-Day Koan Retreat**

Saturday - Saturday, May 22 - 29

#### **10-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat**

Friday - Sunday, June 18 - 27

## **Regular Weekly Activities**

### **Thursday Evening Meditation**

7:00 - 9:00 pm; Sitting, walking, moving meditation and discussion.

### **Sunday Service**

9:00 - 11:00 am; Sitting, walking and moving meditation; Dharma talk; chanting.

## **Special Events**

### **Gardening Day**

Saturday, April 24

### **Hiking Trip**

Saturday, May 15

## **Chan Meditation Center Elmhurst, Queens, NY**

Phone: (718) 592-6593

E-mail: [ddmbaus@yahoo.com](mailto:ddmbaus@yahoo.com)

Website: [www.chancenter.org](http://www.chancenter.org)

### **Retreats**

#### **Monthly One-Day Retreats**

Last Saturday of each month (except Dec.)

9:00 am - 5:00 pm (8:45 am arrival)

Fee: \$25



## Classes

### **Beginner's Meditation, Parts 1 and 2**

Saturdays, April 17 & 24, 9:30 am - Noon

Led by Dr. Rebecca Lee

Fee: \$40

### **Intermediate Meditation**

Saturday, May 1, 9:30 am - 3:00 pm

Led by Dr. Rikki Asher

Fee: \$40

### **Dharma 101 (The Four Noble Truths)**

3 sessions, Saturdays, June 5, 12, 19,

9:30 am - Noon

Free of charge

### **Saturday Night Movie and Mind**

Saturdays, March 13, April 10, May 8,

Sep 11, Oct 9, Nov 13, Dec 11

6:30 - 9:00 pm

Led by Lindley Hanlon

Screenings and discussions of movies from a Buddhist perspective, free of charge.

## Regular Weekly Activities

### **Monday Night Chanting**

7:00 - 9:15 pm (On the last Monday of each month there is recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas' names and repentance.)

### **Tuesday Night Sitting Group**

7:00 - 9:30 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma discussions, recitation of the Heart Sutra.

### **Thursday Night Taijiquan**

7:30-9:30 pm, ongoing,

Led by David Ngo

\$25 per month, \$80 for 16 classes.

*First class is free for newcomers.*

### **Saturday Sitting Group**

9:00 am - 3:00 pm

Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation

### **Sunday Open House**

10:00 - 11:00 am: meditation

11:00 am - 12:30 pm: Dharma lectures

12:30 - 1:00 pm: lunch offerings

1:00 - 2:00 pm: vegetarian lunch

2:00 - 4:00 pm: Chanting

(1st & 5th Sunday: Chanting Guan Yin

2nd Sunday: Great Compassion Repentance

3rd Sunday: Bodhisattva Earth Store Sutra

4th Sunday: Renewal of Bodhisattva Precept Vows.)

## Special Events

### **One-Day Recitations in Chinese**

Saturday, April 3, 9:30 am - 8:00 pm

AM: Bodhisattva Earth Store Sutra

PM: Amitabha Buddha Sutra in three sessions

### **Buddha's Birthday Celebration**

Sunday, May 16 (time tba)

Chanting, bathing of the baby Buddha, Dharma talk by Ven. Ren Jun, vegetarian feast and entertainment.

### **Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels with Abbot President Ven. Guo Dong**

Date tba; please check DDMBA website

## "Zen & Inner Peace"

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program now on CTI Cable in NY, NJ and CT Saturday, 12:30 - 1 pm (For local cable in your area please log on to chan1.org)

# Chan Center Affiliates

*Local organizations affiliated with the Chan Meditation Center and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association provide a way to practice with and to learn from other Chan practitioners. Affiliates also provide information about Chan Center schedules and activities, and Dharma Drum publications. If you have questions about Chan, about practice, or about intensive Chan retreats, you may find useful information at an affiliate near you.*

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### USA

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Email: info@mardejade.com  
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Email: info@dharmaloka.org  
<http://www.dharmaloka.org>  
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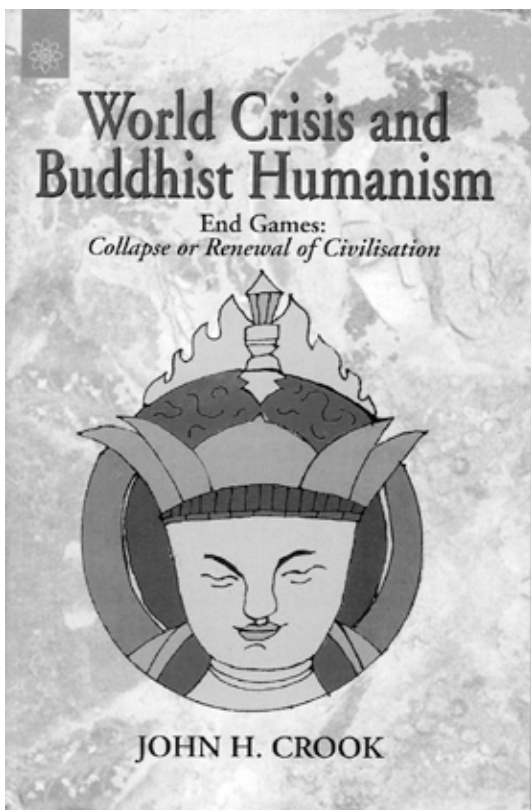
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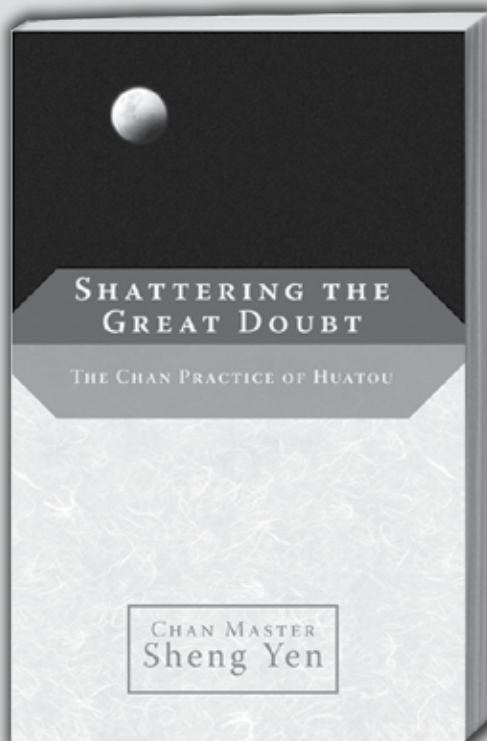
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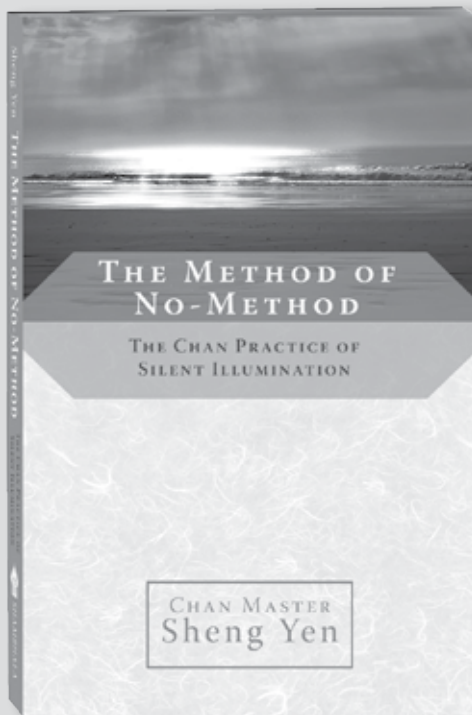
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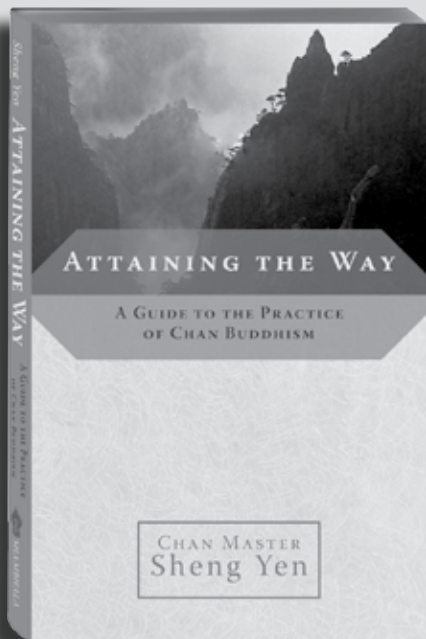


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