

Chan 禪 Magazine

Spring 2006



Chan Meditation Center

Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture

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“Our mind is the same as Buddha. Therefore, for our mind to seek the Buddha is as unnecessary as the Buddha seeking for the Buddha. Likewise, our mind is identical with the Dharma. To use our mind to seek the Dharma is like the Dharma seeking the Dharma—also unnecessary. Buddha, mind and sentient being are not different. There is no Buddha outside of the mind, no Dharma outside of the mind, and no sentient beings outside of the mind .”

– Chan Master Sheng Yen, from his book, *Hoofprint of the Ox*.

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From The Editor

It is fascinating to me that I don't know exactly what happened. Not that I've forgotten – I didn't know at the time.

I live on the Lower East Side and teach at a studio on the Upper West – for those who don't know Manhattan that's one of the long diagonals, in this case almost six miles. I have to allow close to an hour to go to work by public transportation, and can get there on foot in less than an hour and a half, so a couple times a week, weather permitting, I walk, and use the time to practice walking meditation. The method is simple – I just keep track of my experience in the present as I move through what is, especially on the way to my 7 pm classes, a crowded, hectic, unpredictable environment. There's lots to observe, both in terms of the body responding to physical conditions and the mind responding to all the sensory inputs – practicing Chan in the busy intersection, as we say, to the extent that I can.

We had a little break in the bad weather in the middle of last week, so on Wednesday at about 5:15 I started uptown, up Avenue B, catty-corner across Tompkins Square Park, and through Stuyvesant Town to First Avenue, which I'd follow past the hospitals and the U.N. all the way to 57th before cutting crosstown. I'm taking it easy – a hamstring's been bothering me, so I'm not pushing the pace – there's 39th Street, the walk light, the familiar construction site across the street, the sidewalk covered by scaffolding that would lead out onto U.N. Plaza at 42nd, I'm

on my back, I don't know why, but what I feel behind me is the hood of a car, I'm moving, I know that I'll fall and that when I do I could be run over, I am set down and I spin to meet the oncoming car which of course has stopped, further back than I'd expected, a cab, everything has stopped.

I think I'm ok. Then I think that that's unlikely – I was just hit by a cab. I look for obvious problems, blood, limbs that don't function, anything going on with my head...then the driver is coming, and I feel I have to try getting up, I can, I do, and the driver is approaching saying "I'm so-o-o sorry" over and over but coming at me with outstretched arms, why?, he wants to hug me! Are you crazy? "Do not hug me!" "Ok, I'm so-o-o sorry." I'm sorry, but I'm a little shocky, and I still have no idea how badly hurt I am and I'm not giving my body to anyone just now, and certainly not to him.

At this point I see that the cab had a passenger, a young blonde woman who's now getting out, she's on a cell phone, but not talking to a 911 operator, she waves at the driver to let him know that he's not getting paid, not for a ride like that, she doesn't look at me and she leaves the scene to get another cab. I take a moment to resent the hell out of her before finding my own cell phone and dialing 911.

The operator doesn't speak clearly, I can't hear her, and she seems to have to ask me lots of irrelevant questions before getting to business, and I can't remember my own cell phone

number, which worries me, but it worries me more that she's making that a sticking point, so I start saying "I don't know!" louder and louder until she finally says "Ok sir, just wait there, somebody's coming."

And come they do. Two police officers, followed by a couple dozen firemen (probably four or five). They're great, positive, helpful, but they seem to have some trouble understanding what's happened, though I think I'm saying it clearly; I finally realize that my standing there relatively unbroken does not make it self-evident that I, a pedestrian, not I in a vehicle, have been hit by a cab.

So then they ask me, "Do you want to go to the hospital?" Now, I absolutely do not want to spend the night in a New York City emergency room, but the one thing I know is that I'm not yet in my right mind, and though I seem ok to me, and I seem to seem ok to the crowd of New York's finest and bravest surrounding me, in the back of my mind I know that there's someone else on whose judgment I should rely. The officer sees me hesitate and says, "Why don't you wait for the ambulance; it's on its way." I say, "I'm gonna call my wife."

My wife works for a hospital. She's not a doctor, but her job brings her into contact with regulation, and protocol, and medical outcomes, and institutional liabilities, all the things, in short, that can and do regularly go wrong in the world of modern medicine. As much as I don't want to go to the hospital, I don't ever want to go to the hospital without her. And I also know that she'll kill me if I go

home by myself when I should be going to the hospital.

I tell her what has happened. I mess it up. I mean to say "I'm ok" first and "I've been hit by a cab" second, but I mess it up. Her voice goes deadly serious, clear and careful. "You wait for EMS, you make sure they check you out thoroughly, and then you do exactly what they say."

By the time I step up into the ambulance, I know that my right ankle isn't right. It's not broken but it's not right. The med tech knows where to look for injuries, and she finds some – outside my right knee, my right elbow...my left hand is bleeding a little. Still, nothing that requires treatment, heart rate 72, BP 130/80 – she's ready to let me go. We do the paperwork, I get in a cab – not without a second thought – and I go.

Over the next 48 hours, based on where it hurts and where it turns blue, I figure out what actually happened. Outside of my right knee – that's where the bumper hit me. The softball under my right hip – that was the hood. Inside of my right ankle – that's where the stress built up as my shoe stuck briefly to the ground while the cab tried to remove my leg bones from my foot...

...against all of which my body evidently defended itself pretty well, but none of which I experienced. In the midst of practicing awareness, I got hit by a cab and I missed it. I wonder what it was like.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

This is the first of two lectures given by Master Sheng Yen on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in 1999 at the Chan Meditation Center. These lectures will be part of a forthcoming book on the 37 aids to enlightenment. This lecture was orally translated by Guo Gu Bhikshu and edited by Ernest Heau.

Part One: May 9, 1999

The purpose of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is to help us generate wisdom. In other words, they are liberation paths to enlightenment. The Four Foundations are mindfulness of body, of sensations, of mind, and of dharmas (mental objects). Through practicing these contemplations we come to realize the true nature of phenomena and the emptiness of the self.

Five Methods of Stilling the Mind

Although practicing samadhi is not the main purpose of the Four Foundations, samadhi is not separate from wisdom; they go hand in hand. Therefore, as preparation for the Four Foundations, one should practice the Five Methods of Stilling the Mind. These preliminary methods help us to detach from wandering thoughts, collect the mind, and realize one-pointed samadhi. The Five Methods

are: contemplating the breath, contemplating the impurity of the body, contemplating loving-kindness, contemplating causes and conditions, and, depending on the tradition, the fifth may be contemplating the limits of phenomena, or contemplating the name of a buddha.

It is difficult to calm a mind that is vexed and full of wandering thoughts. At such times it is very useful to begin with the first and simplest method: counting or observing the breath. Some schools start with contemplating impurity, others practice loving-kindness. Methods such as contemplating causes and conditions and contemplating the limits of phenomena are less common. Pure Land practitioners will recite Amitabha Buddha's (Chin: Amitofo) name to attain the same result, but one may also recite any buddha's name. One may also recite the name of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (Chin: Guanyin Pusa).

After one has been practicing the Five Methods and one's mind has calmed, one should begin to practice the four contemplations, starting with mindfulness of the body.

The Four Contemplations

The traditional Four Foundations of Mindfulness are contemplating the impurity of the body, contemplating sensations as sources of suffering, contemplating the impermanence of the mind, and contemplating the emptiness of phenomena. Therefore, to practice the Four Foundations is to deal directly with the vexations we constantly generate within us.

We are complacent when things are going well and think it is not so difficult to avoid suffering. When we are warm and comfort-

able, well fed and rested, it is easy to feel there is little suffering in the body. When our mind is at ease, without much worry in our daily life, we tend to think that we don't need diligent practice to maintain that ease. However, it is impossible to predict when sickness or injury will come, or when something will disturb our mind. When these things happen, it is not easy to just put them aside. We often end up seeing a doctor to heal our body, or a therapist to heal our emotions.

A correct method of practice will help us to feel ease of mind and body regardless of circumstances. Whichever method we use, the main principle is to always relax the body and the mind. This way we can greatly reduce both our physical suffering and mental burdens.



What is the Self?

All our problems come from the interactions, and sometimes conflicts, between our body, our mind, and the environment. Of these three the mind is most important because it is that which senses the body and experiences the environment. Body, mind, and environment together make up our sense of self. We think this is “my” body and “my” environment. Who has the idea that this is “my” body and “my” environment? It is “I,” the sense of self. If I ask you, “Is your body you?” you may well say yes. And if I ask you, “Is the environment you?” you’ll probably say no. It should be clear that the body is “me” and the environment around us is “not me.” So when conflict arises between the body and the environment, it is the self that suffers. It is very normal to feel that way.

Are our body and our mind sometimes in conflict? Some may say, “No, I am not in conflict with my body.” But I’m sure everyone has experienced times when your body and your mind are inconsistent with each other. Again, is your body your self? If your body is yourself, then isn’t it odd that your body and your mind should be in contradiction? From that one can reason that your body is probably not your self. But then, you will think that the mind is your self. “Of course the body and the mind are in conflict

sometimes, but surely my mind is my self.” But is your mind really your self? Have you never experienced one thought conflicting with the next thought? What about conflicts between the thoughts you have today, and the thoughts you had yesterday? How about contradictions between your rational mind and your emotions? Only a fool would say they never have contradictory thoughts.

“EVEN THOUGH WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE BODY IS IMPURE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO PAY ATTENTION TO IT. WHEN WE ARE HUNGRY, WE EAT; WHEN WE NEED A SHOWER, WE TAKE A SHOWER; WHEN WE ARE SICK, WE TAKE MEDICINE. WE NEED TO TAKE CARE OF THE BODY SO WE CAN USE IT FOR PRACTICE.”

From experience we can see that our sense of ego can be small or large. When our ego is very inflated, we become very confused. We will take our body as our self and even take our environment as our self. Consequently, we will want to control our body and our environment. Having to deal with our body all the time is already enough suffering. Thinking of the environment as also our self and wanting to control it is a huge burden. Carrying our body around like a corpse is already a great burden.

How much greater a burden is it to carry the environment around all the time?

A disciple of mine complained to me: “Shifu, I’m a person of very low status and what I say has no weight. People don’t listen to me. I feel that I don’t have any freedom. When I ask people for help, they ignore me. I suffer a lot from this. I feel like I’d rather die.” I told him, “Well, even though you are a small person your ego is so inflated that you include the

environment as yourself, and want to control it. You are foolish for not understanding your own limitations.”

Because we identify the body as our self, and because the body interacts with the environment, we also tend to make the environment a part of our self-identity. This creates vexations. One of the sutras says, “Among all attachments that cause vexations, attachment to the body is the most difficult to abandon.” We create vexations within our mind and then we take what happens in the environment and create more vexations. That is why the very first contemplation in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is to contemplate the body.

Mindfulness of Body

We cherish our body and expect it to bring us happiness. We look to our sense organs as a source of pleasure. However, along with happiness and pleasure, the body brings us problems; it is not always as precious or as lovable as we like to think; in fact, the body is impure. By impure I am not referring to sweating and smelling bad, I am talking about the problems that the body generates for our mind. Some obvious examples are when the body feels discomfort, when it is tired, sick, hungry, and so on. All of these are sufferings caused by the body.

Most of all, the body causes vexations for the mind. When the body conflicts with the environment, when it is out of balance with the world, then that creates vexations in our mind. If the body were pure, it would bring us only joy and wisdom. Since it does not do that, we can conclude that the body is impure. Ultimately, what makes the body impure is

our sense of self. Instead of looking at the body as a source of happiness, if we use it to practice, to connect with other people, it can then become a source of wisdom and merit. In this case, the body would be pure.

From the very moment we are born, our body is impure. The other day I had a blood test and my doctor talked about toxins in my blood. He said, “Everyone has toxins in their blood. No one’s blood is totally free from toxins and plaque, unwanted particles and elements.” He wasn’t a Buddhist but when I reflected on what he said, I agreed with him that the physical body is contaminated with all sorts of impurities. When a fundamental constituent of the body such as the blood is impure, that directly or indirectly leads to the suffering of illness and aging. Our mind is also contaminated by its resistance to the nature of suffering, and to our inability to accept it. Contrarily, if we contemplate that our sensations have a high potential for creating suffering, we will not be so excited when we experience pleasure, or grief-stricken when we experience difficulties. This is because we are already armed with the knowledge and understanding that sensation is suffering and that existence is anguish. Not giving rise to vexation when we confront difficulty is itself wisdom. So when we can contemplate sensation as suffering, we will have wisdom, which relieves us from mental afflictions.

The most important thing is to contemplate, to be aware of, our body and its sensations. Please note that this is not the same as being attached to our body and our sensations. For instance, on a meditation retreat, we can accept and enjoy any bodily sensations of comfort and ease, without attaching to them, or wanting them to continue. That way we

will understand the sensations we experience instead of letting them generate worry and anxiety. Even though we understand that the body is impure, it is important to pay attention to it. When we are hungry, we eat; when we need a shower, we take a shower; when we are sick, we take medicine. We need to take care of the body so we can use it for practice.

Mindfulness of Sensations

When we contemplate our sensations, we are less likely to experience so much suffering. For instance, when someone is nice to you, you may feel happy at the time. If right after that, you worry whether next time that person will still be nice, you are now suffering. In that case, that nice sensation of happiness disappeared right away. On the other hand, if someone insults you and you feel resentment, you are just adding more suffering for yourself. If we learn to contemplate our sensations and feelings, we will see them as transient phenomena and suffer less.

A kind of suffering that is related to sensation is bliss, which can be understood as happiness that arises from desire. In Buddhist cosmology there are three realms of existence (triloka) within the cycle of life and death (samsara): desire, form, and formlessness. The bliss that ordinary human beings mostly experience is the bliss that arises in the realm we live in, that of desire. This bliss is coarser than the bliss of the form and formless realms, and it arises basically from the activities of the sense faculties, including the mind.

The form realm is basically the realm of samadhi and in it one can experience different

levels of meditative absorption (samadhi) and therefore, different levels of bliss. The bliss of the form realm is subtler than the bliss of the desire realm because the activities of the sense faculties have greatly subsided. The bliss of the formless realm is the subtlest of all. It is not sensation per se but an approximation of liberation. It is approximate because the individual is not yet really fully liberated from the three realms of existence. Nevertheless, the individual has been liberated from the limitations of body and mind.

So, corresponding to the realm, bliss ranges from the coarsest level of the desire realm, to the higher and subtler bliss of samadhi, and to the highest and subtlest of all, the bliss of the formless realm.

I believe you all have taken lunch here today. Was it good? When you are hungry any food is delicious. When you're not hungry, nothing tastes good. It is a pleasure to eat when we are hungry and to drink when we are thirsty. But after we eat and we drink, don't we need to do it again a few hours later? When we reflect on the pleasure of eating and drinking, it is mostly limited to the moments we are actually eating. After that it is gone. The bliss or happiness in this circumstance is very brief. Did you hear our chorus singing earlier today? It is a pleasure to hear good music, but if you had to hear the same song over and over without end, would you still find it pleasurable? Or, if you are very tired and want to go to bed, at that moment you might find music disturbing.

Let's talk about tactile sensations. It feels very good to relieve an itch by scratching, doesn't it? How long does this pleasure last?

If you go against nature and continue to scratch, the momentary pleasure may lead to pain. The pleasures associated with our sense faculties are momentary and transient.

Is there happiness in our lives? Some may say that they indeed have had happiness. For example, for most people their happiest time is when they are falling in love. Usually, they do not realize that falling in love is also suffering. Consider the popular image of love as Cupid shooting an arrow through the hearts of the lovers. Is this a depiction of happiness or does this image also convey the idea that love is also suffering? If they marry, the couple may strive to prolong that first feeling of love. How often do they succeed? Will their happiness last? People in love embrace but later on the feeling of being happily bonded may turn into a feeling of being stuck to each other.

It may be our natural desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering, yet we need doctors, hospitals, police, law courts, funeral homes, and so on. If the nature of existence is not suffering, why do countries need armies? Why do countries need protection from each other? Why do we need to go through customs when we travel?

No sentient being can escape the reality of impermanence; it inflicts our lives with suffering; it is intimately tied to the nature of suffering. Existence itself is the nature of suffering, and the more we try to resist suffering, the more we suffer.

The bliss of samadhi can be profound and vast, yet those who attain it are still in the realm of impermanence. Sooner or later their samadhi power will be exhausted, and they

will return to an ordinary state. When they do their bliss also vanishes. So even in the bliss of samadhi, we encounter the reality of impermanence.

These are examples to illustrate the meaning of the suffering of impermanence. However, understanding the pervasiveness of suffering in the midst of happiness and bliss does not mean we should fall into pessimism, hopelessness, and self-pity. On the contrary, if practitioners can profoundly contemplate the nature of suffering, they will be more able to face and accept suffering, and that will gradually release them from suffering. So, this contemplation of sensation as suffering is a practice to relieve suffering and also to generate wisdom.







HOLD STEADY, SWIRLING

**A balloon's hot air
casting an iron shadow,
the links weaving me.**

**Words where words will not,
swinging axe handles at stars.
Reflection in wood.**

**Learn enlightenment:
five pounds in a one-pound bag,
seed in a flower.**

**I lose track of truth
in my overwhelming glare.
Seasons overlap.**

**Sound passes through rock,
rattling hibernators.
Even fools wake up.**

**Home from Cold Mountain,
unshakable in earthquakes,
she milks the old cow.**

– Mike Morical



Hung-chou Chan

by
Dale S. Wright

A radical style of spiritual practice that arose in a remote section of China more than a millenium ago informs our understanding of the Chan school to this day.

The origins and history of Chan Buddhism as we know it today owe a great deal to the development that took place in the 8th and 9th centuries CE in a remote and rural section of Southcentral China called “Hung-chou,” today Northern Chiang-si province and still largely rural. Indeed, as contemporary China opens itself to the outside world, visitors interested in the “golden age” of Chan are beginning to explore the temple ruins that are still to be found throughout the countryside in this region. There are excellent reasons for our curiosity. For it was here that a radical style of Chan spiritual practice developed that has defined this tradition since that time. The founding figure of this time and place was the renown Ma-tsu Tao-i (709-788), whose style of spiritual practice constitutes an innovative break with the earlier Chan tradition as we see it, for example, in the Chan of “East Mountain” monastery, or of Shen-hsiu and Shen-hui, or in the voluminous Chan documents found at Tun-huang. This reorientation in style of practice is further developed in Ma-tsu’s successors, such prominent figures as Pai-chang Huai-hai, Huang-po Hsi-yun, and Lin-chi I-hsuan. The influence of these great masters had a profound impact on the Chan Buddhism of the Sung dynasty (960-1260), the development of this tradition in Korea and Japan, and on us in the West today. So, what is this style of spiritual practice?

The word Chan means meditation, and that was no doubt the primary practice as well as descriptive characteristic of early Chan. Meditation had from the beginning been one dimension of Buddhist practice, at least in principle if not in actuality, but the early Chan monks were the first in China to accord it a central place. Without discarding meditation altogether, Hung-chou Chan seems to have once again shifted the focus of concern away from this contemplative practice. Without question, meditation continued to have a role in their practice. But more often than recommending it, the literature of Hung-chou Chan criticizes the practice of meditation, or more precisely, it criticizes the attitude or understanding in terms of which meditation was being practiced.

A famous story in one biography of Ma-tsu’s teacher, Nan-yueh Huai-jang, in the Transmission of the Lamp, has traditionally been taken as the most powerful expression of this point. Ma-tsu, a student eager for spiritual progress, sat long hours in meditation. Observing his absorption one day, his teacher asked the obvious question, “What is the great virtue of sitting in meditation?” Ma-tsu replied, “Accomplishing Buddhahood!” The teacher then picked up a tile and began to rub it on a stone. Ma-tsu asked, “What are you doing?” “Making a mirror.” Ma-tsu asked

again, “How is it possible to obtain a mirror by rubbing a tile?” The story ends with Huai-jiang’s rhetorical question, “How is it possible to obtain Buddhahood by sitting in meditation?”

That it would indeed bring about that goal was an assumption of early Chan. But at least by Ma-tsu’s time some teachers began to conclude that the understanding supporting this practice had the effect of precluding the very realization to which it was directed. What practice aimed at a goal of attainment presupposes is that human beings lack something fundamental, that there is something that is attainable from someplace else. But this is just what the Hung-chou masters denied: “Since you are already fundamentally complete, don’t add on spurious practices.”

One of the most common Hung-chou sayings provides the rationale for this shift of understanding concerning the practice of meditation or any other practice: “This very mind is Buddha!” What Ma-tsu and others communicated through this saying is that what seems to be the most remote, transcendental goal is, paradoxically, nearest to us. Hung-chou monks, like other Buddhists before them, spoke of enlightenment as a “return,” a return to and encounter with one’s own deepest nature. This “original nature,” a spontaneous attunement to the world, is what is most easily overlooked in the act of striving for a remote goal. Therefore, Huang-po, Pai-chang’s most celebrated student, responds to the question “How does one bring about enlightened mind?” in the following way:



“Enlightenment is not something to be attained. If right now you bring forth this ‘non-attaining’ mind, steadfastly not obtaining anything, then this is enlightened mind. Enlightenment is not a place to reside. For this reason there is nothing attainable. Therefore, [the Buddha] said: ‘When I was still in the realm of Dipamkara Buddha, there was not the slightest thing attainable’.”

The act of striving is itself what creates the distance or separation that striving seeks to overcome. A “dualism” separating the practitioner from the goal of practice was the presupposed background that had supported not only the practice of meditation but also the entirety of Buddhist practice. Yet even striving could not be rejected in a dualistic way; somehow the appropriate posture was beyond both extremes, striving and its negation. Thus, *The Extensive Record of Pai-chang* claims:

“A Buddha is a person who does not seek. If you seek this you spoil it. The principle is one of non-seeking. Seek it and it is lost. If one holds onto non-seeking, this is still the same as seeking.”

The admonition not to seek, difficult indeed in an institution centered on spiritual quest, functioned to direct the practitioner to what is already here, that is, to the “ordinary” that one previously hoped to transcend. This redirection of attention to the “ordinary” and the “everyday” is perhaps the most characteristic theme of Hung-chou Ch’an. For them, “Everyday mind is the Way.” Meditation, therefore, need not be a special activity requiring its own time, setting, and posture. Every moment of life, “sitting, standing, or lying down,” ought to be seen as a primordial manifestation of Buddha-nature. This reorientation to the or-

dinary enabled a dramatic transformation of Chan practice—anything could be considered a “practice” if by practice one means, not one activity among others that one does toward a pre-given goal, but just what one does. According to Tsung-mi’s more traditional point of view this went too far, even to the point of regarding “the moving of a muscle or the blinking of an eye” as a sign of Buddha-nature. A sanctification of the ordinary meant that, to be a Buddhist, one need not speak in a classical language; ordinary, colloquial language was even closer to the fundamental attunement within which one dwells by birthright anyway. The manual labor that at least partially supported the Hung-chou monasteries could likewise be taken, not as something menial and base, but as a practice expressing one’s deepest nature. “Chopping wood and carrying water,” the most ordinary of T’ang dynasty tasks, were to be seen as the extraordinary Way itself. Given this reversal of Buddhist priorities, the presumptuous young monk, Lin-chi, could say that what his teacher, Huang-po, had to transmit to him was “not much”.

That the extra-ordinary was to be found nowhere except within the ordinary was perhaps the most important principle in T’ang dynasty Buddhist thought generally, and had therefore been formulated in various theoretical ways before Ma-tsu’s time. What the Hung-chou masters contributed to this principle was twofold: first, a realization that the principle had the effect of undermining the theoretical (and dualistic) formalism within which it was established, and second, a way of integrating the principle into authentic daily life.

Integrating Chan thought and realization into daily life required not only a new way of acting, but also a new way of speaking. No prac-



tice so distinctly characterizes Hung-chou Chan as its discursive practice. In examining the kinds of rhetoric found in the literary traditions of Hung-chou Chan, we need to reflect briefly on our sources. There are numerous texts that transmit this kind of Chan to us. They consist not in the writings of Hung-chou masters but in collections of “sayings” remembered, recorded, rewritten and perhaps totally created, and circulated among monks and laypeople of the area. These include segments of lectures, question and answer sessions, uncontextualized sayings, and descriptions of actions—especially encounters between Chan masters—all of which circulated in manuscript form until they were collected, edited, and printed in later centuries.

The Hung-chou masters did not write for ideological reasons—they rejected the kinds

of formal study that characterized Buddhist practice up until their time. Following Bodhidharma’s criticism of “dependence on words and letters,” they sought a mode of being free from the kinds of closure and rigidity that language and texts suggested to them. They tended to stress their difference from earlier traditions in order to set out a new identity for practicing monks. In retrospect, we can see that these differences, while real, were not as great as Hung-chou rhetoric claimed.

The language of Pal-chang and Huang-po, for instance, is laced with references to Buddhist sutras; clearly, they were accustomed to closing an argument with a sutra quotation, thereby substantiating the point, as was the practice in Buddhist discourse. Sometimes, sayings recorded as the language of the mas-

ter were actually segments from sutras or other texts. Nevertheless, a movement away from dependence on sutras began to take place in Hung-chou Chan. The colloquial language of these monks was also a significant departure from the formal language of the earlier tradition.

Though a great deal of Hung-chou rhetoric is anti-study, anti-text, and anti-language, it would be a mistake on our part to read this “language” literally, without recognizing the fundamental role that study, text, and language did in fact play in Hung-chou Chan. Reading, for example, continued to be an important practice, although what Hung-chou monks read and how they read underwent transformation. The way of reading shifted from focus on the objective content of

sutras to personal, experiential appropriation by the reader, while what they read gradually shifted from sutras to accounts of words and actions of Chan masters. There was also a greater emphasis on spoken discourse, on lectures, question and answer sessions, and what came to be known as encounter dialogues. But whenever spoken discourse seems important, it inevitably gets written down, especially in a society as thoroughly literate as China had become. On this basis a new genre of Buddhist literature emerged in Hung-chou Chan, the “Discourse Record” texts. So eager were these monks to appropriate the language of their masters and other renowned teachers of Chan that they kept

personal notebooks recording significant sayings and events. These eventually circulated, first among copractitioners and then more broadly, becoming in effect the new sutras.

These “sayings,” however, like the words of sutras, were thought to be hindrances to spirituality if they were taken as objects of knowledge, or as somehow sufficient in themselves. Sayings indicated, hinted at, or evoked, elicited, something beyond themselves, which was clearly unattainable through direct reference.

They referred to no spiritual object at all but rather, indirectly, to a disclosure of something that was prior to all conceptualization. In this context, language and its set of conceptual categories seemed to run aground. What they sought to encounter was beyond all categories, and even beyond their negation;

it always stood in the background of focal awareness even when the spiritually adept sought to grasp it. This realization brought the Hung-chou masters to deny their own religious categories—Buddha, Mind, and so on—and then, even further, to deny that negation. Thus, Pai-chang claims: “The ‘nature’ of fundamental existence cannot be specified in language. Originally it is neither ordinary nor sacred. Nor is it defiled or pure. And it is neither empty nor existent, neither good nor evil.” Regarding references to what is revealed in spiritual awareness as dangerous or at least misleading, more often than not texts show greater concern with the stance or posture required for the disclosure to occur than

“THE ‘NATURE’ OF FUNDAMENTAL EXISTENCE CANNOT BE SPECIFIED IN LANGUAGE. ORIGINALLY IT IS NEITHER ORDINARY NOR SACRED, NEITHER EMPTY NOR EXISTENT, NEITHER GOOD NOR EVIL.”

they do with its “source” or referent. “When affirmation and negation, like and dislike, the principled and unprincipled, and all knowing and feeling are exhausted, unable to entangle you, then there is free spontaneity in all situations.”

The detachment called for in this passage is perhaps the primary element in Hung-chou spirituality or, at least, a prerequisite to other elements. Letting go of habitual categories and forms of awareness was essential to the process of opening up a dimension within which deeper awareness might be disclosed. What obstructs this “deeper awareness” or “original nature” is the search for security through fixation and enclosure. Seeking to effect release and freedom by calling attention to forms of human bondage, Hung-chou rhetoric employs the following verbal metaphors: holding on, grasping, fixating, obstructing, losing and seeking, separating, differentiating, blocking and screening ourselves off from more extensive attunement. Detachment requires a “letting go” and “release,” not of things so much as of the kind of self-understanding that holds and grasps at things, unaware of the more primordial background within which both self and things have their existence. Thus, after establishing “detachment as the fundamental principle,” Huang-po claims that one who is “free” is not “separate from all affairs.” That freedom is not an escape from things or affairs takes us back to the Hung-chou concern for the “ordinary.” Freedom, Buddhahood, is available nowhere else but here, within the “everyday.” Thus it is not so much a matter of release from our current situation as it is an awakening to that situation, as well as a deep sense of being situated or contextualized within a larger, encompassing whole.

Although reflexivity (reflecting back on oneself) is sometimes an element in this re-orientation, Hung-chou spirituality does not consist in focus on the self, or subjectivity, but instead seeks to discover a ground of experience and action more primordial than subjectivity. On this point Hung-chou Chan can be seen to be in continuity with the basic Buddhist concept of “no-self.” Although the precise sense in which there is “no-self” can, and indeed did, change, these monks and masters understood themselves to stand in a tradition of spirituality that called them into a dimension that is “presubjective”—prior to and deeper than the separation of self and world, subject and object. Thus in continuity with the world, yet without losing uniqueness and individuality (indeed enhancing it), the practice of Hung-chou Chan was thought to enable an open involvement in and responsiveness to the world. The character of this responsiveness was thus seen in radical opposition to the narrow and enclosed disposition that accompanies self-centeredness.

Polarization of self and world gives way to a reciprocity between them, or, in Huang-po’s words, a “mutual correspondence”. Living within such correspondence meant that the motivation for action derived from a source beyond the willfulness of personal subjectivity. Freedom of movement, therefore, meant something quite different from the liberty to move as one desires. On the contrary, it meant a freedom from the tyranny of those desires such that one could move in accordance with, and thus be moved by, the world around one. This freedom and spontaneity of speech and action became the hallmark of Hung-chou spirituality, which now, at the turn of the millennium, continue to reverberate around the world.

Retreat Reports

Dear brother and sister retreatants,

While I am familiar with monastic settings in the Christian tradition and have done many solitary retreats in nature in different parts of the country, I have not had an experience like this one. I am not a Buddhist, but have read much about Buddhist philosophy, and this experience deepened my understanding considerably, particularly of the Heart Sutra which we recited daily.

I would like to list the parts of the retreat I found especially significant.

1) Shih Fu's talks. He made difficult material accessible, and I was delighted with its content and the wonderful skill of the translator.

2) I loved the chanting and found my whole body and soul resonating with it, and felt very much at one with all the other participants.

3) The most powerful exercise for me was carrying the bowl of water. Symbolically it was so rich. We all received our water from the same source, the lake. We were each given water, a precious gift and symbol of life, to carry without spilling any. The water we each had in our bowls was one, one life, and we each carried it preciousely at our own tempo, each of us holding the bowl in our own way. I could go on about this, but I think you know what I mean.

4) I came to the retreat with a deep hunger for silence and found Shih Fu's explanation

about silence very relevant. I did not get to experience the profound silence I was looking for until the 7th day of the retreat.

5) I was deeply moved by the devotion and sincerity of other participants who formed our little sangha. They gave me joy, warmed my heart, inspired and humbled me.

6) Through most of the retreat I felt at one with everyone and everything. I've had this experience before, but not sustained like this. Shih Fu's explanation about Shikantaza and the body being one with the environment was very relevant to me. I felt my whole life, past, present and future and the lives of people in many different situations all over the world were also in my body.

In closing, I'd like to say that I found the retreat very demanding physically, psychologically and spiritually. Physically, I felt my body in ways I had not before (the pain of sitting for so long and these 66 year old bones in frequent contact with hard wood floors). Psychologically, It was hard not having any solitude or privacy. And spiritually, not being a Buddhist, I found it hard not to hear of the immanence of a Supreme Reality (whatever it may be called) in all phenomena and as a presense to relate to.

I hope your retreat was good too.

Peace,

F.

I'm in the middle of exams so this has to be short.

But I had a really great time at the retreat - it made me so much more mindful of my actions and the Dharma talks helped me understand a lot of Buddhist teachings that previously I had trouble understanding just from reading Dharma books given out at temples. More importantly, it's inspired me to meditate daily, and practicing has definitely helped me stay calm this past week! And it's funny you asked for a poem, because I was trying to work on an idea a friend gave me, about how birds dream in their sleep, and ended up writing about meditation... insofar as I understand my own experiences as a beginner to meditation.

One thing that will definitely stay with me is what Guo Qian Fa Shi said about Zen practice being like cleaning out a 1000-year-old toilet – it will be a never-ending process!

Practice

When I awoke the trees chorused:

Birds dream of song in their sleep
Perfecting scales, trills, arias
Dedicated to trees, tree-dwellers, the universe
The throbbing birdbrain grasping
That special quality of sky
No other creature might possess.

And so my heart dreams of you,
Sonorous melody that fills my chambers,
With every breath
Send my tuning fork trembling
Into perfect pitch
Bruise with absolute precision
The unmarked pathways of my gaping soul.

– R.P.



Dear I. and J.,

I am here at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, participating in an intensive retreat on silent illumination. I started the pilgrimage from Kitchener, Canada on June 23rd by bus. It took 12 hours to get to Manhattan. I arrived early at the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, Queens and joined the group for breakfast and lunch before we all left by bus to the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York.

This was not my first visit to the Retreat Center, but it was, from my experiences, a very special one. At this moment, I find the eight days of the retreat very memorable. I started every day with a beginner's mind or an empty cup.

I could tell you many stories. For example:

The symphony of snoring in the Chan Hall after 10 p.m. and before 4 a.m. every night woke me up. I never knew what time it was. The sound of snoring filled the quarter of Chan Hall, where we slept. Sometimes croaking started with resonance from others who were sleeping. I felt it was very strange that I listened to the sound without judgement. It was like an orchestra playing a symphony, except that there was no conductor. I could relate this situation to frogs praying in the dark night around a pond. I just listened. It did not disturb me at all. In some sense it enriched the silence of the night. Shifu would say it is the unification of the mind and body. I do not know how long this lasted before I returned to my dreamland. I was not tired the next morning.

The emptiness of time: When I was sitting, I could feel that each moment was just like we were filling an empty bucket with drops of water, one drop at a time. It was like looking at a clock with the second hand moving around the circle one click at a time. My mind was totally focused, with no thought at all. After awhile, I was not aware of where I was. You might ask me, "Did you feel anything?" My answer is, "No. I was just with time, or riding with time."

The stopping and running of time together: Zarko led us into the woods to do a direct contemplation exercise. As I was totally absorbed with the surface of the pond with my eyes, I also heard the running sound of water just underneath the road. That's time as each moment passes by. When you are with the moment, you do not realize time is moving and, at the same time, it is not moving, except that you do not realize it. We do not realize that time is both moving and not moving.

My body froze during the walking meditation when David shouted loudly. Normally, I could anticipate what was going to happen when the timekeeper shouted, "Stop!" But David changed the exercise to a slow walk before shouting "Stop!" which I did not expect. My whole body was still. There was no thought in my mind. My mind was empty.

Yesterday, Guo Yuan Fa Shi gave each of us a bowl of water, almost filled, from the lake. The exercise was to walk from the lake back to the meditation hall holding the bowl of water without letting the water spill out. Yes, we had to hold it with two hands. We were warned, not to let the water spill.

I started to walk slowly, one step at a time, while at the same time paying complete attention to the water. I needed total absorption. With each step of my walk, it looked like I was carefully filling the emptiness of time (like filling the empty bucket with water drop by drop.) At the same time I was totally absorbed with the water. It moved, just like a pendulum, for a long time. I must have shifted to a different state of mind. "Is the water moving? Am I moving? Is my mind moving? When is it going to stop moving?" I had no idea how long I was there.

Slowly, without realizing it, the water was still, without movement at all. At the same time, the bowl looked like a deep well. At this moment, it seemed that time-and-space had collapsed. Everything was still and quiet. It was vast and timeless. I do not know how long this lasted. I was nowhere. I just filled in the emptiness of time. Suddenly, I realized that I was holding my "mind." Yes, my mind was still, no moving, and very clear.

From here on I moved without effort, still one step at a time, like riding with time. When I reached the main entrance of chan Hall,

in front of the Buddha, I offered the bowl of water and put down my "mind." I bowed and turned back. In a split second, I realized that there was no bowl, no water, no Buddha, no body and no thought. Slowly, I came to realize that I was carrying an empty bowl. I walked slowly back to my M15 (my seat), prostrated three times and was thankful for Shifu's teachings.

From that morning on, I sat in each session without effort, not even realizing that I was there. I was not sleeping either. Only when I heard the sound of "ting" from the bell did I realize the sitting had ended.

I and J, it was an unbelievable experience. I cannot use words to describe how I felt. I could repeat the story many more times. Yes, there is something there, some meaning, but I do not know what it is.

It's late. You better go to bed.

Love,

Uncle V



The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

New Year's Celebration, Sunday, January 29, 2006

The joyful greeting of welcome and "Happy New Year!" by the monastics, volunteers, and friends brightened our arrival at the Chan Meditation Center on Sunday morning, Lunar New Year 4704. The Chan hall looked splendid with its festive red hangings and sumptuous red and yellow flower arrangements. People continued to stream in and before long there was only standing room left.

Wen Ling and Harry Miller, MCs for the day, opened the ceremonies at 9:00 AM. Guo Chian Fashi led the Litany of Buddhas, a chant in praise of the 88 Buddhas mentioned in the "Sutra of the Two Bodhisattva Brothers of Medicine," the "Sutra of the Fixed and Settled Vinaya," and the "Sutra for the Salvation of the Flaming Mouths," Buddhas with names such as Jeweled Flickering Lantern Illuminating Buddha, Torch of Wisdom Shining Buddha, Virtue Illuminating Buddha, Diamond Firm and Secure Pervasively Scattering Precious Light Buddha, Great Strong Unadulterated Progress Buddha, Great Merciful Illumination Buddha, Compassionate Powered Lord Buddha, Compassionate Treasury Buddha, Sandalwood Cave of Dignity Glorious Victory Buddha, Virtuous Faculty of Thought Buddha, Greatly Dignified Glorious Lord Buddha, Precious Blossom Illuminating Buddha...

This was followed by the Repentance Ceremony, to express regret for our past unwholesome actions and to dedicate ourselves to a better year, and with chanting the Name of Shakyamuni Buddha.

We had great merit on this auspicious occasion to receive a Dharma talk not only from our beloved and revered perennial teacher, the Venerable Jen Chun, but also from another well-loved teacher, the Venerable Bikkhu Bodhi, both from Bodhi Monastery in Lafayette, New Jersey.

Dharma talk of the Venerable Bikkhu Bodhi:

"The beginning of the New Year is always an auspicious occasion when people come together to enjoy themselves with good food and with having a happy life, but for those who follow the Buddha Dharma it should also be a time for reflection. We should reflect upon our personal lives, in the way we interact with others and the world. First in our own personal lives as Buddhists, we should consider whether we are following the path to the utmost of our advantage, to our full capacity. We shouldn't take the fortune of encountering the Buddha's teaching lightly because it is a very precious gift. To find the Buddha's teaching is like finding a precious jewel along a dusty road, or a medicine that can cure every type of illness.

“So when we find it, we should use it to best advantage. At the beginning of the New Year we should consider our own lives and our dedication to the practice. We shouldn’t think it is bitter medicine, because it brings joy and happiness to our own lives and joy and happiness to others. And so, when we reflect, what can we do ourselves along the Buddha’s path? The Buddha’s teaching gives us many methods of cultivation, but they are all included in the Six Paramitas—generosity, morality, patience, diligence, meditation, and wisdom—so we should make a sincere dedication to perfecting, and practicing, and cultivating the Six Paramitas.

“Then one should also consider that our own lives are always closely interwoven with the lives of others and our whole society, and the whole world, so as followers of the Buddha’s teaching we have the obligation to illuminate the world with the light of Buddhism. This is especially necessary at this critical point in human history when the dark forces of greed, hatred, and ignorance are at large.

“The Buddha’s teaching gives us the light of Wisdom and the soft light of Compassion so we can dispel the greed, ignorance, and hatred in the world, to bring in a little peace into the world. So at the beginning of this New Year let us commit ourselves to the teaching for advancing ourselves along the Path, and also to bring the light of the Buddha’s teaching into our communities and into the world.

“Thank you all for your attention, and may the blessing of the Three Jewels be with you throughout the coming year.”

Dharma talk of the Venerable Jen Chun:

“Greetings to all the Venerables present as well as to the lay community. Today with my sincere reverent mind I want to offer to you four verses that I have written:

New Year Verses Offered to the Fourfold Congregation:

1. The most moving words are those that allow people to joyfully transform vexations; those affairs that are most pleasing to the eyes arouse faith, reverence, and the increase of peace and joy.

2. One who is free of self-grasping is able to truly embrace and hold others; a practitioner who gives rise to the intention of offering him or herself to others cannot but start right here.

3. One who is replete with a magnanimous worldview is always mindful of people in every thought and reflection; mindful of people to the point of universally perceiving the affect of the Buddhas, for him or her the Buddhas are ever present, forsaking no one.

4. Changing this world of abnormality and transforming it to a world of equality, where each and every individual is equal and all affairs flow, where people come together with joy.

“The most moving words are those that allow people to joyfully transform vexations. The first verse refers to how human beings interact. The key here is language, words and language. We must be mindful of the way we communicate with each other. If we observe

the world, we see that the words of those who are eloquent are always gentle and penetrating. Their speech conveys the content—even if it is a lofty concept—of their message clearly, in simple terms. Those words will quench vexations. Not only do they have eloquent speech, their words bring joy to people. The joy comes from within, from the Buddha's teachings. Through the Buddha's teachings, people's minds become gentle. People have defenses that are as strong as iron. It requires something penetrating that can make the heart gentle. The Buddhist heart becomes gentle and free-flowing, like water; though free-flowing, the heart becomes stronger. What makes the defense mechanisms so powerful and strong? Craving and greed, hatred, and ignorance. How can we gain an entry into the practice of the Dharma? Which one should we do first? Greed is the first. It comes in many forms. Greed for power, an endless desire to accumulate power. The first task is to diminish and then sever the affliction of craving and greed. Then all the rest will perish of their own accord. So I urge all of you to please remember, out of all our vexations, the most crucial one is greed. That's where we begin.

“Those affairs that are most pleasing to the eyes arouse faith, reverence, and the increase of peace and joy. All of us living, we engage in various tasks, but often we lack a particular attitude, and that is open, bright, upright, straightforward. When one engages in a task in this fashion, then there will be nothing to hide and everything will be transparent, upright. For this reason, therefore, this person engages in an open way in accordance with the Dharma, and whomever he or she interacts with will have confidence in and respect that person. The world-transcending teaching

and the worldly teaching are fused into one another. It leads to peace and joy, not in a worldly sense. In the Buddhist sense, peace and joy means utilization of the Buddha's teaching by oneself. This is the process. The practitioner uses the light of Wisdom to penetrate his or her full being, and the self-grasping tendency diminishes little by little. His or her mind will always be at ease, peace and joy.

“One who is free of self-grasping is able to truly embrace and hold others. This points to the fundamental problem. The cause of our suffering is grasping. Conversely, a person can open up until they are totally free from self and embrace everyone. A side note: Buddhism emphasizes community over the individual. Whatever community and individual finds himself or herself in, they will be able to function freely with others.

“In the second part, a practitioner who gives rise to the intention of offering him or herself to others cannot but start right here, the emphasis is on generating the mind of benefiting others. The major obstacle is our self-centered way of thinking. Because of this hindrance, we wallow in our self-centered needs, but we see that this self is a result of causes and conditions and this opens us up to the world around us. What is a Buddhist practitioner? A practitioner is someone who can thoroughly utilize the Dharma for himself or herself so that this self-grasping mind can perish and vanish. The meaning of the point of departure refers to this practice of freeing ourselves of self-grasping and is where we must begin. This establishes a foundation, how to become a human being, actualizing what I have said.

“One who is replete with a magnanimous worldview is always mindful of people in every thought and reflection. For the person with a big heart, his or her world is not narrow, but they consider the whole nation and the whole world. A bodhisattva practitioner is free from self-grasping, naturally. When they reflect on events, they always think of the complete picture. This is the inevitable result. Such a person always has others in his or her own mind. What he or she thinks always considers the benefit of everyone, whether it’s a single thought or a continuous consideration. It is very important for a person to always abide in the luminosity of Wisdom, simply to accord with the light of Wisdom. If we can do this, then the mind becomes upright and open and free of self-grasping. To whatever extent a person is able to do this, the mind becomes truly powerful and strong.

“The Chinese have an analogy for the mind: an ocean. In the Buddhist’s view the ocean is the Ocean of Wisdom containing all that is virtuous and meritorious. The ocean of mind is able to give rise to civilizations in human history and make connection with all sorts of things that benefit the world. When we come to realize the potential of this ocean of mind, we must arouse and generate this mind and know how it works. We must generate the great mind, to benefit others. The priority is to help those who are less fortunate and in need. Now for a person who is wealthy, their own mental state is like an obstacle. Those people need the light of Wisdom. A single word can break through and allow the mind to open up.

“Mindful of people to the point of universally perceiving them as Buddhas, for him or her the Buddhas are ever present, forsaking

no-one, means extending our care to those around us, helping them. We do not stop there. We are mindful of all people. Shakyamuni Buddha, before he reached buddhahood, his single-most concern was the suffering of all beings. The Buddha interacted with others with the mind of equanimity, with ordinary mind, equal to those around him. Within Buddhism, he was a person who could clearly lay out the teaching to all sentient beings. So, like that, with his self-perception of ordinary mind, being humble that way yet having penetrating wisdom to give the teaching to benefit the people, his followers generated a tremendous amount of faith in him, and reverence. He was also extremely polite and extremely humble. He made his own precept: that he would never receive separate offering from people. He was just one among the rest of the sangha. If we were to study the Buddha way, we would have to study concretely how he carried himself in daily life. As practitioners, we speak of democracy. But in the life of the Buddha, he can be considered the most democratic being in the world. The Buddha is the one who has fully understood and embodied the meaning of democracy. This is something valuable that we should study. We must begin here.

“What do we mean by perceiving the affect of the Buddhas? In all day-to-day interactions with people, the person with a Buddha’s mind is able to respond with precision because he or she perceives everything as in a mirror. At all times they are cultivating their mind. Buddhas are ever-present to this person. For this reason the Buddhas are forever present, and this person forsakes no one. They would never let anyone get the short end of the stick. They would rather endure difficulties themselves than let others endure. For us

practitioners, we must learn to embody what he stood for: a capable person. Who is that capable person? That person who with his or her whole being offers himself or herself to others with wisdom.

“The second aspect of the Buddha is called quiescence or silence: silencing dualistic thinking. The fundamental problem of our conflicts with others and of friction in the world comes from our dualistic thinking: “I” and “the other.” The Buddha has reached the stage of being free from the oppositional mind, so he is free from conflict and in a restful state.

“Changing this world of abnormality and transforming it to a world of equality. In the next verse, the key word is abnormality. Why do I choose this word? There are those who live in such dire poverty, yet there are people who are extremely wealthy and live a very, very comfortable life. This is something that we must think about and reflect on. Abnormality comes in all forms and sizes: in a monastery or in a single family. Sometimes in temples people eat very well. At the same time, there are people in abject poverty. Because of this, there is no equality and no peace. If you are more fortunate, if you see your neighbor in trouble, you should take initiative to help them, then this world of abnormality will slowly change to become a world of equality. On a large scale, those who are extremely powerful should step down and give back what they have gained to the whole society. As practitioners we must learn to face all kinds of abnormality and use a compassionate mind and contribute back to the world so this future of equality will be possible.

“In the last verse, the key here is this equality: where each and every individual is equal and all affairs flow, where people come together with joy. We should strive for it. From the teaching of causes and effect there is naturally inequality. People reap the results of their past actions. But from the perspective of causes and conditions, the interrelatedness and interpenetration, the connection with those around us, then we can generate this heart of equality. Then our self-grasping tendencies will be dispelled and we can flow and connect with other people easily and extend our joy to them.

“When we cultivate this in our daily lives we will be able to spread peace to those around us and connect to them naturally because our negative tendencies will be dispelled. At such time, there will be peace. I conclude my talk here. Forgive me if I have said anything incorrect or made any mistake.”

The Sangha Offering Ceremony followed the Venerable Jen Chun's talk, and then a brand new practice was introduced at the Center, Sounding the Wishing Bell. The audience was invited to listen to the sound of the bell and clear the mind of vexations, and then approach the bell and strike it while making a wish—a wish for world peace and for peace in our mind, or for increased wisdom and compassion, or a dedication to Amitabha, or any other deeply felt concern. After the Venerables Jen Chun and Bikkhu Bodhi and their attendants withdrew, a seemingly endless line of people began making their wishes at the sound of the bell, after which they were given a packet of rice blessed by Master Sheng Yen. The idea is to add a grain of this lucky rice to the rice you are cooking, so everyone who eats it will be blessed. By 1:00 PM many of

us were feeling quite hungry but the line of wishers stretched further than one could see.

Eventually the Wishing Bell Ceremony was interrupted for the Lunch Offering Ceremony, and then: food! Lunch was happy and satisfying, with the customary abundance of good food prepared by the dedicated kitchen volunteers to whom we should all be so grateful. More than 300 guests and volunteers attended the day's event.

During lunch we were offered an unexpected and remarkable entertainment: a visiting swami from the Indo-American Yoga Vedanta Society sounded the conch without stopping for a full five minutes, using the circulating breathing technique. If this weren't impressive enough, one should know that the gentleman is 110 years old! He is able to sound the conch for a full eight hours steadily. The Venerable Jen Chun, who himself is still going strong and now well into his eighties, can be considered a youngster yet in comparison with this venerable swami. It suggests that we could all benefit from some deep breathing practice.

A video presentation of Master Sheng Yen's New Year speech was also shown during lunch expressing his new year's good wishes.

Finally the afternoon entertainment began. The choir sang three songs in Chinese, two of them flowing and gentle, and another livelier one that many in the audience seemed familiar with and bobbed along to. In English the choir sang "What a Wonderful World". Next came a magic show, but while the magician—a gentleman from China—was setting up his equipment, the Wishing Ceremony resumed. Again, the line was endless and once

again had to be interrupted when the magic show was ready. This was fun not only for the children who were invited up to the front to participate and receive gifts magically appearing out of empty containers, but also for the adults who crowded around to enjoy the illusions and who also reached for the flying gifts. Frenzied cries of "Over here, over here!" were evidence that the Venerable Jen Chun's admonition to abstain from self-grasping was going unheeded in the heat of the activity. But it was exiting and so much fun!



Thanksgiving Blessings in New York

Thanksgiving provided the occasion this year for a day-long ceremony of chanting the Sutra of Great Compassion at the Chan Center in Queens, presided over by Guo Min, Guo Chien and Chiang Wu Fashis. Nearly 80 people of all ages were in attendance.

Guo Min Fashi explained that chanting wholeheartedly rouses the most intense compassionate energy, and expressed the hope that it might bring peace and happiness to people around the world, to DDM practitioners and to Master Sheng Yen.

Attendance Surges at DDM in Taiwan

With the inauguration of the World Center for Buddhist Education in Taiwan last fall, the DDM facility has received a growing number of visitors, particularly on weekends. Located in Taipei County facing Chinshan township on Taiwan's northeast coast, DDM provides a wonderful setting for people to get close to nature and practice Buddhism.

According to data compiled by security staff, in the first three weeks of November alone upwards of 6000 people made the trek to the beautiful rural setting. Indeed, to cope with the mounting crowds, additional security staff was hired and two new parking lots were provided.

One Saturday in late November, despite persistent drizzle and overcast skies, almost 400 DDM staff members and their families came to visit on an excursion arranged by the DDM

Foundation to help them get to know the place, absorb its ideas and even learn to put them into practice at home.

In greeting the relatives, Master Sheng Yen said, "Everyone of you here today is a special guest. Each of you gives vital support to full-time staff members so they can give their all to DDM's development. On behalf of DDM, I am here to thank you for your precious contribution. It is my hope," he added wryly, "that everyone can enter into the volunteer spirit, and then perhaps issues like paychecks might not be quite so pressing." Afterwards, he joined the group for photos, with everyone in a jubilant mood.

Children are more than welcome here, and can avail themselves of a range of activities including theater, pottery and drawing. According to head of security Liu Yong-fong, "Practically everyone leaves here with a smile."

One happy grandmother with her son and grandsons in tow said she was overjoyed to see that the Master's dream had finally come true, and brought into being a Pure Land for practitioners. "I find it very encouraging. This place is deeply spiritual."

Seattle DDM Celebrates Fourth Anniversary

In observance of the Fourth Anniversary of DDM's Seattle community last November 13th, Guo Dun Fashi flew in from Taipei to hold a half-day meditation for participants.

In explaining how to practice meditation, Fashi said he hoped the spirit of Chan could

be brought into everyone's daily life, and shared the view of "Living Happily in the Present." Moving on to emphasize Cause and Effect, he urged everyone to try to be diligent, clean, forgiving, frugal, and more free of craving. When a problem comes up, "Face it, interpret it, put it down and let it go."

Fashi said we can embody the dignity of life by leading active and purposeful lives, whose worth cannot be judged by the strength of our bodies or how old we are when we die. We cannot, he observed, control how long we live, but we can try to master how broadly and deeply we live, in order to enjoy more satisfying lives.

Community Director Chen Rui-chuan noted that thanks to everyone's vigorous efforts over the last four years, the Seattle community is now thriving as it enters its fifth year. In the months ahead, a Meditation Class is to be launched, and Guo Chien Fashi will be asked to come and teach. And next October, she said, the dream of having Master Sheng Yen come visit may finally come true.

Settle Your Mind, Clear Your Mind

Every Saturday morning in Taiwan, a group of mostly non-Chinese speakers joins the international Meditation Group's weekly group practice at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Chinese Culture, a branch of Dharma Drum Mountain. Surrounded by elegant spas amid luxuriant banyan groves, the Institute is located in the Beitou district, a popular resort area that provides a tranquil backdrop for contemplation.

The three-hour program begins with the Eight Form Movement Meditation, led by Venerable

Chang Wen and Guo Yuan, both students of Master Sheng Yen. This serves as a preparation for the sitting and walking meditation that follows, and the program concludes with a group discussion on the meaning of Chan.

"The goal," says Chang Wen, "is to attract more non-Chinese speakers so they can learn about Chan, but we certainly welcome local people. The present location has been excellent for meditation practice, but it seems that not too many people know about it yet. Word of mouth between friends seems the best way to let Westerners know about this program, but we are going to put more effort into promoting it. In the future, we hope more Westerners will come join us."

According to Guo Yuan, the IMG has been in existence for at least 7 years.

Student response is enthusiastic.

"I feel great," says Miss Lee, who is retired and lives in the Shilin district. "And every time I come here I enjoy it."

"I have come here at least ten times since I arrived from Hawaii," explains Steven Kang, who is also taking Buddhist classes online in Taipei. "I hope when I go back to Hawaii I can pass on some of what I've learned to anyone who's interested."

Michael O'Connor is a Canadian who has been teaching English in Beitou for four years and has suffered from stomach illness. He said that since he started coming to the IMG his stomach pain has abated somewhat. "It's stabilized," he said. "And that's an encouraging sign."

“The problem today,” says Guo Yuan, “is that we have too many things to do and think about all the time. In fact, we need to give ourselves more time to slow down, relax, and get closer to nature.” However, he notes, our individual mental habits are reminiscent of mischievous children and cannot be reined in so easily. “It takes time to convert a bad habit into a good one.”

“Meditation clears and brightens your mind, making your body and mind healthier and more natural,” he concludes. “Unfortunately, most people don’t realize this.”

For IMG program information and schedule of events, please contact:

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DDM Present at Earth Charter’s Fifth Anniversary

Acting on behalf of Dharma Drum Mountain and Master Sheng Yen, Guo Chan Fashi and Chan Chi Fashi attended the Fifth Anniversary of the Earth Charter celebrated last November 7-9 in Amsterdam.

More than 500 representatives were in attendance, including Maurice Strong, special assistant to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as well as Steve Rockefeller, Kamla Chowdry, and Jane Goodall.

The two monastics shared a letter on “The Rising Great Compassion,” and also set about explaining to all who were interested DDM’s view on the “Spiritual Environment,” garnering an enthusiastic response.

Chan Chi Fashi was appreciative of the fact that the conference emphasized the participation of young people. She noted that at a World Youth Peace Summit held by DDM in October of 2004, Master Sheng Yen had gone so far as to apologize to the world’s youth on behalf of the older generation for not having done a better job of protecting the environment.

“But If we don’t start taking better care of the environment very soon ourselves, we’ll be the ones apologizing to the next generation, just like Sheng Yen,” she said.

As for specific environmental issues, she commented, instead of focusing on legal aspects, as often happens in the West, we really need to focus on purifying our own individual hearts. “If we do, it can actually influence our family, friends, society, and finally the whole living environment.”

As Chan Chi’s speech concluded with the theme of moving “From the Inner heart to the Global vision” and the inauguration of the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education, it was enthusiastically received by the audience, and some even came forward to propose collaborative environmental conservation projects with DDM in the future.

The two DDM representatives were also warmly greeted by Rabbi Soetendorp, Chairman of the Jewish League in Europe, who had himself attended the inauguration of the World Center in Taiwan last fall.

“The world really needs religious leaders like venerable Master Sheng Yen to lead us towards world peace,” the Rabbi said.

Diversity Day at DHS

On November 18, 2005 four members of the Chan Center visited the Department of Homeless Services to give a Dharma workshop that included guided meditation. Echo Wong, Chan Center member and a Program Analyst at DHS, invited the group and acted as emcee. Rikki Asher, Jimmy Yu and Harry Miller also attended.

There was quite a bit of competition. The event was Diversity Day and members of DHS could choose from Chan, African and Hispanic culture and literature, and even voodoo.

The Chan members came with fruit, cookies, flowers, handouts and a borrowed overhead projector. At first we thought that we might be alone, but before long we attracted six DHS members, some of whom were quite enthusiastic at the prospect of hearing about Zen (Chan). All knew the word, but they did not really know the philosophy and practice behind it.

We first asked what people thought of Zen and responded to questions about whether Zen is a religion, a philosophy, a way of life, or all three. Harry Miller gave brief synopses of the Buddha's life and basic teaching of The Four Noble Truths. Rikki Asher outlined the physical and psychological benefits of meditation and led a brief yoga warm-up followed by some short meditation sessions. Jimmy Yu answered a number of specific questions about practice and overcoming difficulties in meditation.

Participants seemed to thoroughly enjoy the workshop and we hope to do similar events in the future.

Retreats at DDRC

Ven. Guo Jun successfully conducted two intensive Chan retreats at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in his debut as the resident teacher. These retreats were traditionally headed by Chan Master Sheng Yen (Shifu), with assistance from his senior monastic disciples. However, since Shifu was not able to come to the US this winter, Ven. Guo Jun, who received Dharma transmission from Shifu in September 2005, served as the guiding teacher in both retreats.

The first of these, a Silent Illumination retreat, was held from November 25 to December 4, 2005. There were forty-four retreatants from the US, Europe, and Australia. The second, a Huatou retreat, was held from December 26, 2005 to January 1, 2006, with 49 retreatants. Participants were very impressed with the guidance of Ven. Guo Jun. One retreatant described his teaching style as a vivid mixture of tenderness and sternness, and was inspired by his ability to bring the often cold abstraction of Chan alive in everyday life. Many others were glad and reassured to see that there is now a second generation teacher at DDRC who is able to help lessen Shifu's load and to continue his legacy.

Please note: In order to increase the effectiveness of intensive Chan retreats at DDRC, retreatants who have never attended one will now be required to first complete a Seven-Day Introductory Chan Retreat. The new format will introduce practitioners to the practices of mindfulness, huatou and silent illumination, all in one week. Introductory retreats will be held throughout the year; please visit the website <http://www.dharmadrumretreat.org> for the schedule and details.

The Future

Retreats, classes and other upcoming events.

Chan Retreats

Chan retreats are opportunities for serious practitioners to deepen their practice and receive guidance from resident teachers. Retreats are held either at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens (CMC) or at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Ridge, New York.

One-day Chan Recitation Retreat (CMC)

Saturday, May 6, 9 am – 5 pm

Ten-day Huatou Retreat (DDRC)

Friday, May 26, 5 pm –

Sunday, June 4, 10 am

Ten-day Silent Illumination Retreat(DDRC)

Saturday, June 24, 5 pm –

Monday, July 3, 5 pm

Chan Practice

Monday Night Chanting

Every Monday, 7 – 9:15 pm

Devotional chanting of Amitabha Buddha; 88 Buddhas Repentance on last Monday of each month.

Tuesday Night Sitting Group

Every Tuesday, 7 – 9:45 pm

Periods of sitting meditation alternating with

yoga, walking meditation, readings, discussion, and chanting the Heart Sutra.

Saturday Sitting Group

Every Saturday, 9 am – 3 pm

Half-hour periods of sitting meditation alternating with yoga or walking meditation.

Sunday Open House

Every Sunday (except May 15 for Buddha's Birthday Celebration)

10:00 am – 11:00 am Group Meditation

11:00 am – 12:30 pm Dharma Talk

12:30 - 1:00 pm: lunch offerings

1:00 - 2:00 pm: lunch

2:00 - 3:00 pm: chanting; Q & A for English-speaking practitioners

Classes at CMC

Taijiquan Classes

Thursdays, 7:30 – 9:00 pm, ongoing with instructor David Ngo, \$80 for a session of 16 classes, or \$25/month.

Yoga

Saturdays, 4 – 5:30 pm, with instructor Rikki Asher. \$10/class. April 1, 8, 15.

Special Events

Earth Store Bodhisattva Recitation

Sunday, April 9, 9:30 am – 3 pm

Buddha's Birthday Celebration

Sunday, May 14, 10 am – 3 pm

"Zen an Inner Peace"

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program on WNYE 25, Friday, midnight.

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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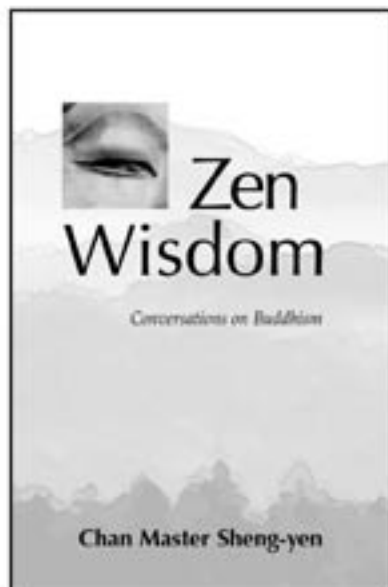
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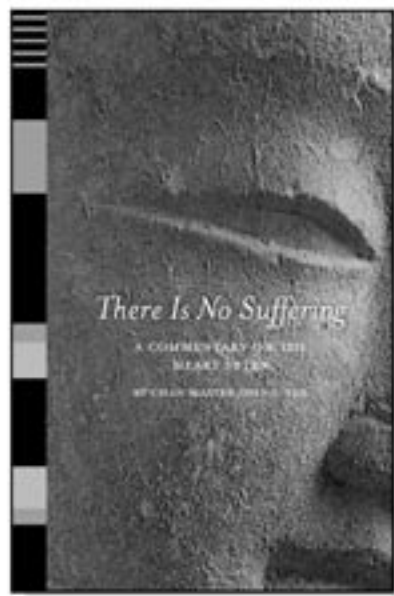


Zen Wisdom

In *Zen Wisdom*, Chan Master Sheng-yen answers questions from his students with clarity and depth. Collected over several years, these conversations focus on the simple yet seemingly elusive principles of Chan (Zen) practice. Combining wisdom with knowledge of the contemporary world, Master Sheng-yen shows us that Chan and Buddha's teachings are still fresh and relevant in the present day.

There Is No Suffering

There Is No Suffering is Chan Master Sheng-yen's commentary on the *Heart Sutra*. He speaks on the sutra from the Chan point of view, and presents it as a series of contemplation methods, encouraging readers to experience it directly through meditation and daily life. In this way, reading the *Heart Sutra* becomes more than just an intellectual exercise; it becomes a method of practice by which one can awaken to the fundamental wisdom inherent within each of us.

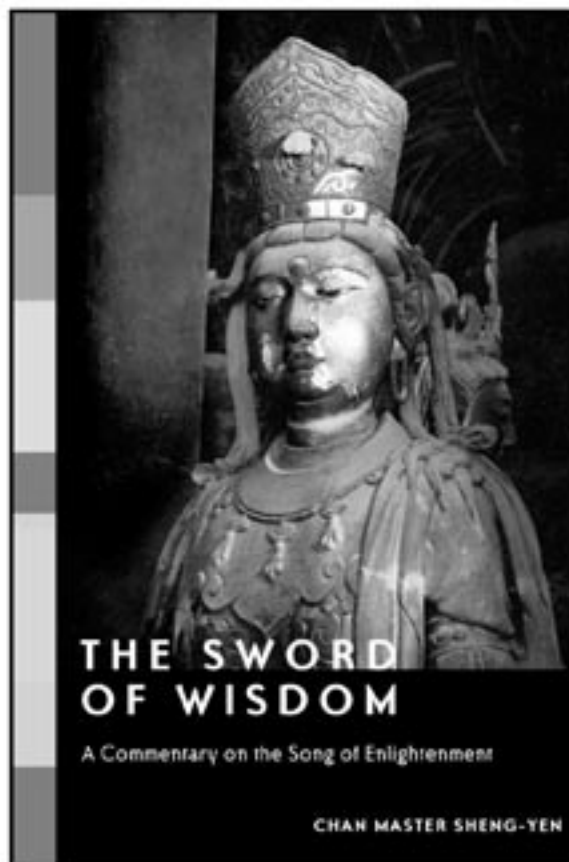


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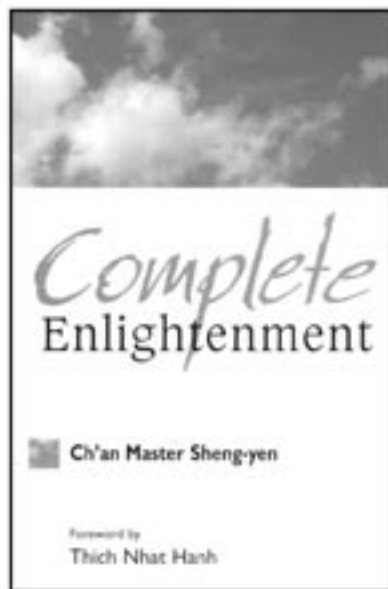
The Sword of Wisdom

The Sword of Wisdom is a penetrating commentary on the Song of Enlightenment, a famous Chan text that speaks of proper methods and attitudes for practice. In this book, compiled from a series of lectures delivered during intensive meditation retreats, Master Sheng-yen gives valuable advice and guidance to those who are practicing Chan meditation. His lucid words offer fresh insight into a timeless philosophy that will be beneficial and inspiring to anyone who is interested in Buddhism.

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Complete Enlightenment

An authoritative translation and commentary on The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment, a text that shaped the development of East Asian Buddhism and Chan (Zen). Please enjoy this beautiful translation of the sutra and also the valuable commentaries and instructions offered by this great and rare teacher.

Published by Dharma Drum Publications

Hoofprint of the Ox

Revered by Buddhists in the United States and China, Master Sheng-yen shares his wisdom and teachings in this first comprehensive English primer of Chan, the Chinese tradition of Buddhism that inspired Japanese Zen. Often misunderstood as a system of mind games, the Chan path leads to enlightenment through apparent contradiction. While demanding the mental and physical discipline of traditional Buddhist doctrine, it asserts that wisdom (Buddha-nature) is innate and immediate in all living beings, and thus not to be achieved through devotion to the strictures of religious practice. You arrive without departing.



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