

Chan 禪 Magazine

Spring 2005



Chan Meditation Center

Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture

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“The great calamity caused by the powerful earthquake and the subsequent tsunami was indeed devastating; eleven countries stretching from South Asia to Eastern Africa were affected. More than one hundred thousand people lost their lives, many hundreds of thousands were injured, and millions lost their homes. Two weeks have gone by since the disaster struck. While immediate relief has been provided by many countries, the lives lost cannot be recovered, and it is certain that the surviving victims who have suffered great material and psychological losses will need long-term, sustained care and support. Material relief should be provided urgently and immediately. As for the wounds to their hearts and minds, all of us in the global village must be prepared to provide sustained support with patience, loving-kindness and compassion. The project of psychological healing is a long-term one that may last for years into the future; we should take care not to let our spirit and energy burn out in an impulsive rush.”

**– Chan Master Sheng Yen
Nung Chuan Monastery, Taipei
January 9, 2005**

Dharma Drum Mountain has dispatched teams of relief workers to areas affected by the tsunami. In addition, Dharma Drum establishes service centers for psychological healing, as well as scholarships and tuition assistance for young victims. Donations in support of these efforts can be sent to DDMBA, 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, NY 11373. Donations are tax-deductible in the United States.

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Chan 禪 Magazine

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From The Editor

This morning I got an email from a Dharma friend: "David, could you say something to me from the Dharma, something to give me heart after this calamity? The loss and the suffering are beyond human words..." I wrote her something, and she seemed heartened by it, but I didn't feel entirely comfortable with it – I hadn't been entirely honest. The honest answer would have been, "No. I can't."

And I was reminded that the previous day I'd seen a Buddhist monk in Sri Lanka asked essentially the same question by a journalist – "What do you say to help people?" – and that he'd said something about impermanence, and that – forgive me – I'd doubted that he'd been entirely honest either. I'd wanted to say to him, "Yeah, everything is impermanent, but are you really saying that to people who have just been confronted by the overwhelming permanence of their still unthinkable losses, and do you really think it helps?"

Does it help to reflect that the sea has always swept us away, just as the earth has swallowed us up – that in fact our environment is so antagonistic to us we use the term "exposure" to refer to the cause of death that is nothing more than being out in our world for too long?

Does it help to consider that natural disaster, even one of this enormity, pales in comparison to human atrocity – half a million dead in Rwanda, two million in Cambodia, two million in Sudan, fifty-seven million in World War II?

The strategy is to contextualize, to say that this terrible thing that has happened is in some way understandable, is like other things, is part of a larger system, is indeed the world we all know. But that's not precisely true, is it? Most of us don't know a world in which 500-mile-per-hour walls of water wipe us out in an instant. What most of us know is a world in which we hear about, and see images of, and read commentary on, and send dollars to relieve the catastrophes that have happened to others, and it is from this point of view that contextualizing helps.

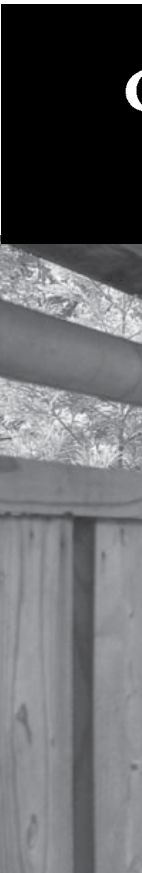
But for those who survived the tsunami of December 26, 2004, it is the very context, the world itself, that has been entirely revised. And what humans do to integrate such profound revisions of our world is remember them. We build monuments, establish holidays, write songs...like the one about the hurricane and tidal wave that decimated Galveston, Texas a century ago:

"It was the year of 1900,
Children, sixty years ago,
Death come a-howlin' on the ocean,
When death calls you got to go.

Wasn't that a mighty storm,
Yes, what a mighty storm in the
mornin', Lord,
Wasn't that a mighty storm,
Blew all the people all away."

May the departed find peace; may the survivors find joy; may the rest of us, the witnesses, find compassion.





Dear Readers,

Buried in the masthead of every issue of Chan Magazine is the sentence, “The magazine is a non-profit venture; it accepts no advertising and is supported solely by contributions from members of the Chan Center and the readership.”

Unfortunately, in the last few years the first half of that sentence has been more than true – we’ve been losing about \$10,000 a year – making the last half less than true – contributions have not actually supported the magazine.

Thanks to the generosity of Alex Gou at United Printing, and to the many volunteers who report, write, edit, proofread, photograph, lay out, and mail the magazine, costs have remained pretty stable. The problem is that contributions have fallen off.

The logo for Chan Magazine Winter 2005. It features the word "Chan" in a white serif font on the left, followed by a vertical line, the Chinese character "禪" (Chan) in a white, stylized font in the center, another vertical line, and the word "Magazine" in a white serif font on the right. Below "Magazine" is the text "Winter 2005" in a smaller white serif font. The entire logo is set against a black background.

Chan 禪 Magazine
Winter 2005

We’re sure that the fault is ours, that one sentence buried in the masthead just doesn’t give our dependence on your generosity the prominence it deserves.

Just as we’re sure, by our growing circulation, that you want to continue receiving Chan Magazine.

Please help support Chan Magazine today. Your contribution is entirely tax-deductible in the United States. Please send your contribution to:

Chan Magazine
90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373

On behalf of Chan Master Sheng Yen and the Chan Meditation Center, we thank you.



Dharma of Teachings, Dharma of Mind

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

In May of 2003, Master Sheng Yen held a Chan Retreat in Moscow that was organized by Wuji-men, a Russian martial arts club. During the retreat, Master Sheng Yen lectured on teachings from the Platform Sutra by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng. This is the third of six articles based on those lectures. Douglas Gildow made the oral translation from Chinese to English. Transcriptions were prepared by Chang Wen Shi, Bruce Rickenbacher, and Victor Ku, and edited by Ernest Heau with assistance from Chang Wen Shi.

May 12, Morning Lecture The Huatou Method

Yesterday, I talked about silent illumination, a method that is rather easy to use, and when you use it, you are fully doing silent illumination. When one practices this method, one is already illuminating, and when one's mind is not distracted by anything outside or inside, that is silence. Those who are using silent illumination well, please continue to use it. Now I'm going to talk about the method of huatou.

As in any method of meditation that I teach, the first step is to relax. If your mind, your body, and your emotions are very tense, it is difficult to use the huatou method and benefit from it. Before each session of meditation, you need to relax. Although you can also use the huatou method in daily life, you will not

be able to use it as intensely or stick to it as closely as when you are sitting in meditation at a retreat.

The huatou method of the Chan School comes from what is called a gongan, or koan in Japanese. The name literally means a "public case," and in the Chan tradition, it is a story about an enlightenment encounter between a master and a disciple. The huatou is usually a key word or key phrase that is extracted from the gongan. I will give you an example of the difference between a gongan and a huatou.

In the Tang Dynasty around the 8th century C.E., there was a Chan master named Zhaozhou. One of his disciples asked Zhaozhou, "Master, I have heard that all sentient beings have buddha nature. Please tell me, does a dog have buddha nature?" Zhaozhou replied, "Wu," meaning "not," or "without." And so,

as this famous “public case” was used to investigate Chan, the word “wu” became a huatou. The entire story is the gongan, and this one word, “wu,” taken from the gongan, is the huatou.

This gongan about Master Zhaozhou is very strange. Since Buddhists believe that all sentient beings have buddha nature, why did Zhaozhou reply that a dog does not have buddha nature? It’s like a mystery story, and it seems illogical. To resolve this mystery is the reason we need to investigate the gongan about Zhaozhou. If, instead of investigating the whole story, we try to resolve the mystery by asking the simple question, “What is wu?” or just “Wu?” the question becomes a huatou.

Here is a famous gongan about another great Chan master named Xiangyan. One day, Xiangyan addressed the assembly of monks saying, “It is like a person hanging by his teeth from a high branch of a tree. He cannot reach out to grasp a bough, and his feet rest on nothing but air. Below him someone asks, ‘What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?’ Out of respect, he must answer the question, but if he does, he will fall to his death. What should he do?”

If you were this person hanging from a branch by your teeth, with nothing to support you, and someone asked you that question, you would know that whatever you said would probably be wrong. If you kept your mouth shut that would also be disrespectful. What would you do?

When a disciple asked for the answer, Xiangyan said, “Get up the tree now!”

The disciple replied, “I’m already up there.”

Xiangyan said, “Then say something.”

The disciple said, “If I say something I’ll fall down.”

Xiangyan said, “You’ve already fallen.”

From this incident, we can investigate either the whole gongan or we can investigate a huatou. In the gongan method we would investigate the meaning of the whole story; in the huatou method we would investigate one word or phrase from the story. The huatou in this case would be, “What is the meaning of Xiangyan’s telling his disciple to climb a tree?”

As Buddhists we believe we have an uncountable number of past lives. Therefore, we can ask a question based on what happened even before this process of birth and death began: “What was my original face before birth-and-death began?” This original face is called buddha nature, which never changes. So, we have this original buddha nature, but once we enter the birth-and-death cycle of samsara, we are no longer aware of our buddha nature. Based on this theory of countless prior lives and yet having a buddha nature existing somehow prior to this, we ask ourselves, “What was my original face before I was born?” This question is another huatou that one can investigate.

So, generally the practice is that we just investigate a huatou, not the entire story of the gongan, which can be very complicated. A gongan can be a story, or it could also be based on a theory, as in the case of the ques-

tion of the original face. In other words, we use the huatou method, as opposed to the gongan method, because it is more simple.

Another example of a huatou based on a theory is as follows. As Buddhists, we do not believe in the existence of a soul. We believe that after death the body is just a corpse. There is no soul attached to it. Why is it not a corpse when we are alive? Because there is an “I,” or a self that is using the body. Therefore, based on this theory we ask ourselves, “Who is dragging this corpse around?” In other words, what is this “I”? This is also a huatou.

Practicing Huatou

I have introduced four huatous that you may use. The first one was “Wu.” The second one was Xiangyan Xiangshu’s “What is the meaning of Xiangyan’s telling his disciple to climb a tree?” The third is “What is my original face before I was born?” And the fourth is “Who is dragging this corpse around?” If you want to practice a huatou, just choose whichever you might find useful. If you want something very simple, then I suggest asking “Wu?” The huatou, “The myriad things return to one; where does the one return to?” also implies a returning to wu. So that is a fifth choice.

While you are asking the huatou, disregard any answers that come up because they will be based on conceptual thinking and will be incorrect. If you try to analyze it instead of just asking, you will just get a big headache. Your responsibility is not to think about the answer to the question, but just to continue asking, and allowing the huatou to answer itself. While asking the huatou, you will have wandering thoughts and “answers” will arise

in your mind. When you become aware of that, remember the two admonitions: “Let go of all forms” and “Let all affairs come to rest.” Return to the huatou and focus all your attention on just asking the huatou. After asking just two or three times something may pop into your mind and you may think you have a great discovery: “Wow! Great! I’ve solved this huatou!” That would just be an incorrect thought.

Right now please choose between practicing silent illumination and the huatou method. Those who wish to practice huatou, please relax your body and mind and then begin asking the huatou that you have chosen. I will continue speaking about huatou later. If you want to use huatou but are still not sure how, for now just practice relaxing and contemplating breath.

Eventually [if we practice huatou the way it should be practiced], we will be doing it 24 hours a day without break. At a later stage we no longer have the huatou as a question in our mind; we just have a state of mind that really wants to know the answer. We just have this basic mind-state which is no longer a question. But to progress to this level our practice must be like a waterfall, cascading continuously without a gap. While it is our hope to practice in this manner, at the beginning it is impossible to succeed. Especially when we are eating or sleeping, in the beginning it is quite difficult to maintain the huatou continuously. Also, it is inevitable in the early stages to have many wandering thoughts.

There are three essential points to bear in mind in investigating huatou. First, you should not combine this method with any

form of breath observation. Second, your mind should be relaxed. Third, your body must not be tense in any part, because we are not using our brain, or our body, to investigate the huatou, and we are not using the breath to investigate huatou. Rather, we are using our mind and mental energy, and if you mix up a breath contemplation technique with huatou practice, you're liable to get sick.

Those who are using silent illumination, please continue. Those who are using huatou, please remember these three essential points that I just described.

Evening Lecture Prajna and Emptiness

The intention in realizing no-form is not to deny the existence of forms, but to remind oneself not to cling to them, whether they are spiritual, material, mental, or environmental forms. Samadhi and enlightenment are also forms we should not cling to. Anything that is a concept, that has shape, structure, and is expressible in language, anything that can be thought of and experienced — all of these are objects of perception and can be called “forms.” These forms have existence



and we are not denying that. It is a matter of not seeking and grasping after them because they are ultimately impermanent, unstable, and unreliable.

Only if we can attain no-mind, or formlessness, can we become enlightened and thereby generate wisdom. The Sanskrit word “prajna” that we translate as “wisdom” in English is a technical word in Buddhist philosophy. For lack of a better word in English, we conventionally translate it as wisdom. However, the English wisdom does not have the same meaning as the Sanskrit prajna. Prajna is the wisdom of knowing formlessness, or the wisdom of “seeing one’s self-nature,” in other words, the Dharma of the Mind. Prajna in Buddhism is the experience of emptiness, or realizing no-form. People who are conventionally called “wise” may not necessarily have this same wisdom in the Buddhist sense.

We can explain the generation of prajna by the phrase, “Abiding nowhere, give rise to mind.” To “abide nowhere,” means not clinging to, not relying on, not seeking, and not rejecting forms. Still, as long as we live we must deal with phenomena. When we are hungry we need to eat; when we are cold we need covering; when we are sick we need healing; when there’s a fire we need to put it out. We still do whatever is needed according to the situation. “Give rise to mind,” refers to wisdom that responds according to the needs of phenomena, not self-interest. This wisdom functions consciously without clinging to phenomena, as in ordinary consciousness.

The wisdom of such a mind is what we call, in Buddhism, prajna. What really is this wisdom, or prajna? I have a definition for wisdom that says three things that it is not. Wisdom is not

knowledge or scholarly attainment, it is not logical thinking, and it is not life experience. Wisdom is a state of mind devoid of selfishness and of all volition to cause harm to self or others. It is an attitude that does not take the self as the center of all perceptions.

Only if we have this prajna can we see emptiness and remove vexations and realize formlessness. If we have an incorrect understanding of formlessness, emptiness, or wisdom, then it is likely that one of two situations may arise: one is thinking we are enlightened when we are not, and the other is the fear of becoming enlightened.

I’m going to tell two stories that will illustrate what I mean. The first is about a graduate student who attended one of my Chan retreats in Taiwan. When he returned home he gave away all of his belongings. Those things that nobody wanted, he just threw away. He stopped eating, stopped drinking, stopped reading, and everyone around him thought that this was very strange. When they asked him what was going on, he said, “I have seen emptiness. Since everything is empty, everything is impermanent. Since everything is empty, why would I want anything? Since everything is impermanent, my life is impermanent. My present life and my next life are all the same, so it really doesn’t matter if I live a few days longer or not. It’s all the same.”

When his family heard of his situation, first, they sent him to a mental clinic and second, they came to me: “What have you done to our son? What happened during your retreat? You must have some problems, perhaps you are a demon!”

Here’s what happened. This young man had

only listened to my talks about impermanence and emptiness. He started contemplating emptiness immediately. When I gave other discourses, he viewed everything I said as likewise empty and impermanent, and did not hear anything else I said, much less understand. This resulted in his bringing upon himself various illusions and delusions and he even thought he was enlightened. But he didn't tell me that he thought he was enlightened, so when he went home he had all these problems.

It is the same right here. If you just hear me talk about emptiness and impermanence and you do not hear anything else, when you go home you might have some problems. Although I say that we should observe the emptiness and impermanence of things, I use this as a method whereby we can release attachment and let go of clinging. Myself, I still eat, I drink, and I work.

The second story also occurred on retreat, this time in America. A student listened to my lectures on no-form, emptiness, and non-attachment. After hearing these teachings, including teachings on dropping one's self-centered mind, he continued practicing. On the third day he had a long meditation session, not moving for more than two hours. When he came to an interview I asked him, "How is your meditation going, what have you seen?"

He said, "I really want to go home now."

I asked him why. He said, "I'm afraid that when I go home, I will no longer recognize my parents. In addition, I am especially concerned that I will not even recognize my girlfriend. We are waiting to get married. Even if I could accept this condition, it would be far too cruel to my girlfriend. Therefore, I want to stop meditating now."

I asked him, "What really happened during that session?"

"ANYTHING THAT IS A CONCEPT, THAT HAS SHAPE, STRUCTURE, AND IS EXPRESSIBLE IN LANGUAGE, ANYTHING THAT CAN BE THOUGHT OF AND EXPERIENCED — ALL OF THESE ARE OBJECTS OF PERCEPTION AND CAN BE CALLED 'FORMS'."

He said, "I had such a great session, it was such a fantastic session, I almost got enlightened. And I got afraid that if I got enlightened, if I had a real understanding of no-form I would no longer recognize my parents and I would no longer want my girlfriend. So I want to go home."

I asked him, "Well, look at me. Is it the case that I don't recognize anyone? Actually I have quite a good memory, and I recognize all of my students."

He replied, "Well that's because you are a monk. I have no intention of becoming a monk."

What really happened with this young person? It seems that he had been using his method really well, that his body was no longer a burden for him. And also, the environment around him temporarily seemed to disappear.

He was so immersed in the method that he temporarily forgot who he was. We can be like this if, for example, we continuously use a huatou without any break. We can be so immersed in the method that nothing else seems to remain. When his mind slipped from the method, he thought, "Who am I? And what are these things around me?" He temporarily forgot who he was, and he forgot the names of the things. This caused him great fear. Other than this falling off the method and giving rise to fear, he was practicing very well. His mind had become unified with the method. He practiced like water running down a waterfall, continuously and without interval. Temporarily forgetting himself and the things around him, he became afraid that if he became enlightened, it would get even worse.

After I explained to this young person his situation, I told him to not be afraid of enlightenment, formlessness, or emptiness. I told him that actually he was quite far from realizing emptiness. It's just that he had been using the method very well, continuously, sticking close to the method. He was using it so that each moment was connected to the next like the links in a chain. However, he was still very far from enlightenment. With such close and continuous practice, he could enter samadhi, but he was not even close to becoming enlightened.

I told him not to go home. I said, "If you really became enlightened, not only will you not forget your parents, you will be even nicer to them. You will also be nicer to your girlfriend because you will have more compassion for her; you won't behave selfishly. You'll be acting for the sake of other people, not to possess or extract things from them. This kind of love is called compassion and the people you in-

teract with will feel even safer. You will have fewer vexations and troubles and so will the people around you." So I told him, "Wouldn't this be even better?" and convinced him not to go home.

These stories illustrate two situations: one is the delusion that one is already enlightened, and the other is the fear of becoming enlightened. I hope none of you here have these confusions and problems.

This relates to the next line in the verse on formlessness by Huineng that goes:

Only by transmitting the Dharma of seeing the nature,

Can one emerge into the world and shatter erroneous doctrines.

What we call the "Dharma of seeing the nature" is actually realizing buddha nature, or emptiness. Only through this Dharma can one fully deal with vexations and become free from deluded views, free from wrong views, free from clinging and a self-centered mind. Through this realization, which is the same as formlessness, one can shatter these "erroneous doctrines." In this verse, "erroneous doctrines" means clinging to wrong and distorted views and understandings. All the delusions we cling to can be called "erroneous doctrines," and in these two stories I have just told, the protagonists could be said to hold erroneous doctrines.

How many of you used silent illumination yesterday and are still using it today? I see there are many. Did anyone use the huatou method? It seems there are at least ten people using huatou. I have already spoken about the methods you may practice on this retreat.

For the remaining three days please do not switch your method. Although there are different methods of practicing Chan, the principles behind all these methods are identical. Therefore, whether you practice silent illumination or huatou, it can still be useful to you. I am also aware that there are people who are not using either silent illumination or huatou. If you are one of these, it is all right to continue if you can at least stabilize your mind. Of course, it is also very good if you can be guided by my discourses and practice what I have been teaching.

I have said that we don't want our mind to become like a flock of magpies, but more like an ox. How many magpies have you seen today, that is to say, has your mind been full of wandering thoughts that pull you away continuously? Even if you do not chat, if you cling to wandering thoughts, you are still like a magpie. I don't believe that anyone has not seen at least a single magpie. There have probably been many magpies flying around in your minds.

If you are continuously on the method, then you should have seen the ox [meaning your mind has been calm and stable]. However, if you rejoice too much the ox will instantly transform into a magpie. Has anyone not seen at least a single ox today? You are raising your

hands. Does this really mean that the entire day, you have not seen the ox? If you are using the method [and still haven't seen the ox], you must be simultaneously indulging in wandering thoughts.

Russian translator: He [referring to a student] said, "I saw an ox when he walked past me."

Master Sheng Yen: Of course it should be walking, if it wasn't walking it would be a dead ox. [Laughter] Please keep looking for your ox.



In Memoriam: Professor David Chappell

by Chan Master Sheng Yen

I learned of Professor David Chappell's passing on December 3, 2004 from the obituary section of the New York Times. Although he was and his family is Christian, he was very enthusiastic about Chinese Buddhism; it was his specialty. Professor Chappell attended two of the four International Conferences on Buddhism hosted by the Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies (CHIBS, the graduate institute of Buddhist studies of Dharma Drum Mountain) as a delegate from the University of Hawaii. Through his initiative, the University of Hawaii and the CHIBS entered into a partnership and initiated an exchange program. CHIBS has granted two scholarships to the University of Hawaii for research on Chinese Buddhism at the Master's degree level, and I have given a public lecture at the University of Hawaii through Professor Chappell's kind sponsorship.

The professor and I corresponded throughout the years and he often shared his papers and research with me. For his book, "Buddhist Peacework," published in 2001, he invited me and other renowned Buddhist masters to submit essays on working for peace; my essay, "Pureland on Earth" appears in the book, along with one by the Most Venerable Master Zheng Yen, also from Taiwan.

Professor Chappell passed away of heart complications at the age of only 64, ten years my junior. I will miss him very much. I would like to extend my deepest condolences to his family.





In Memoriam: Zen Master Sueng Sahn

by Chan Master Sheng Yen

The internationally renowned Zen Master Sueng Sahn (secular name Xing Yuan Lee) was born in North Korea in 1927 and was ordained as a monk in 1948. While studying Western philosophy at Dong Guk University, he also studied Chinese Chan masters extensively. In 1969, Master Sueng Sahn became the abbot of the Hwa Gae Sah temple in Japan; in 1970 I went to Kyoto to pursue graduate studies. There were many Korean monks studying in Kyoto during that time and they often gathered at his temple. Master Sueng Sahn also often invited me.

In 1972, he left for Los Angeles; I myself went to New York at the end of 1975. By then Master Sueng Sahn already had a small Zen center in an apartment in Manhattan and was moving to a larger one. In 1978, a temple in Chinatown invited three monastics, among them Master Sueng Sahn and I, so that they could make *Dana* offerings to venerated monastics. We met on several more occasions in the States, and exchanged our first published books in English. I knew that he had many followers all over the world; wherever I went, I always met his disciples.

I knew that Master Sueng Sahn suffered from diabetes for many years. On November 30, 2004, I learned that Master Sueng Sahn had passed away; I pray that he will return to this world quickly and continue to deliver sentient beings. I will cherish my memories of Master Sueng Sahn.

“What Is Wu?”

Retreat Report by M.L.

Due to the complexity of my impressions on the subject at hand, I have to go back in time to put all of my Chan experience in a clear perspective.

At the time I first met Shifu, I had come to the Chan Center to take my first class in Tai Chi. I came one hour early to have some time to investigate a little bit about Chan itself. So I was quite happy to see the Abbot, whom I had met days earlier, sitting at the front desk at the entrance of the Center.

After saluting him in a very friendly manner – “Hello! How are you!” – I went to the usual corner to take my shoes off and walked toward him. Then I realized that this genteel buddhist monk was... another person!

“You are not the Abbot!” And pointing to a big poster picture plastered at the back of the entrance door of the Center, I said, “You are that person!”

“I don’t think that picture looks like me”, he calmly answered.

Getting myself nearer to the picture I took a closer look: “You’re right. This picture doesn’t look like you at all!” And showing the picture with open hands, I continued, “In here you are flat, two dimensional,” and coming back with my open hands pointing now to him, I said, “And in here you are... Tridimensional!”

Now I was excited. Here I was, talking to the

famous Chan Master Sheng Yen himself! I talked as much as I could about...myself, of course – my long years of training in Zen, the lineage of my former teacher in New Mexico, etc., etc. He asked a few questions, here and there, always very calmly. At one moment his eyes turned inquisitive and suddenly, pointing his finger to me, like a civil court judge giving me a sentence, he shouted at me, “WHAT IS WU?” I closed my eyes and I thought to myself, “Here it comes again, the old Zen game.” Then I answered, “I don’t know.” “You should read my books!” He sentenced me. And turning his back, he ended our first Dharma talk.

That night I left the Chan Center with a book of his in my hands and a big question on my mind: “WHAT IS WU?”

Months later, I went to a three-day retreat given by the Abbot Guo Yuan Fa Shi. This was my first taste of the Chan tradition. The Abbot guided us with great care, compassion and prajna in directing this retreat. He asked me to work with the huatou, “What is wu?” Knowing that in the Dharma there aren’t any coincidences, I felt quite sure that this was the right road to follow.

A year later I had my first retreat with Shifu. At the group interview, I asked him, “How do I know that I haven’t seen my original face yet?” His answer was, “If you are here asking such a question, that is proof enough that you haven’t seen it.” At this retreat, my sitting was very unstable, with a lot of pain and

a lot of doubts like: "What am I doing here? I have so many things to do and I am here doing nothing? Is it worthwhile?"

This is the only time I can remember having had "movies" at my sitting meditations. I got literally possessed by them as if they were my real life, losing complete awareness of myself and my surroundings. I didn't like not being "in control" of my self. Some of the "movies" lasted a whole sitting period and I knew of them after waking up, but without having any recollection of their subject matter afterward! The Abbot told me that I was just cleaning my mind of garbage. Another year passed before my third Chan retreat, my second and last with Shifu. I came full of great expectations. It was the end and the beginning of the year. The second of January would be my fifty-fifth birthday and I thought it was time for me to be "liberated" before going to the cemetery. It was a time to grow once and for all. In the first regular group interview I was asked, "How have your two days of sitting been so far?"

"It has been quite fine, like home. No problems and very content, relaxed, no pain and, as a matter of fact, my best retreat ever," was my answer.

At this retreat I reached high states of concentration very similar to my best experiences in Zen, but not beyond there. I started to feel frustrated. This wasn't what I was aiming for. I was fifty-five! One night, stretched in my sleeping bag, I felt so grateful to be able to lie down and give rest to my aching body, to give rest to the millions of cells that give form to this human being. I felt so indebted to them, to have come together just to give me a chance to experience this marvelous, marvelous moment...millions of them are dying. (Millions are being born at this very moment; samsara and nirvana at once.) Colonies upon colonies of millions of cells working together for the same purpose – microcosms of consciousness. I felt overwhelmed by gratefulness and respectfully said to them, "From now on I declare you all to be free from my selfishness. You never have belonged to this



entity I call 'me.' Help me to be mindful of this body. Thanks for your patience and be what you have to be or not to be in spite of me."

I fell asleep in a sea of joy, and dreams came, as an answer maybe: I was in sitting meditation with my eyes looking at the wooden floor. Then two hands supporting a just-born black puppy came into focus. I took the little puppy on my lap, caressing him, thinking that now I would take care of this present and love it as much as I had with my black Great Dane long before. (A monk asked Chao-Chou, "Has the dog Buddha nature or not?" Chao-chou said, "Wu").

Then another dream came to me: I was with a group of kindred souls in a very happy gathering at the outskirts of a town. The sun was setting and the sunset illuminated everything in the best pastel colors. We all knew each other from endless time. Nothing could separate us. Our togetherness was beyond time and space and we were well aware of this. I started to walk away from the group and as I looked back to wave goodbye, I saw them at the top of a small hill and me on the top of another, from where I could see them far away waving their hands to me. Then a restless crowd of people, a sea of people manipulated by the mass media, fighting with each other and very noisy, started to fill the valley between us. But it didn't matter. One was with me. And we started to walk down the hill, away from the crowd, with a sensation of oneness.

The third and final dream of the night came: I saw my self dealing with a real-life situation in which I had the same but somehow a different personality. I saw very clearly that my

vexations were still there. But instead of their being a disadvantage to my development as a fully human being, they became the gold of my soul, the tool to know my self, to become selfless. My vexations, the ore, have become the golden tool to reach "NO SELF TO BE SELFISH."

Almost at the end of the retreat, a second group interview was given by the Chan Master. When it was my turn I said, "I don't have anything to say." The Master insisted on my talking. So I did.

"I came with a lot of expectations, trying to celebrate my birthday in this retreat and looking forward to a real breakthrough in my consciousness (enlightenment perhaps). But nothing has happened. Maybe I'm not good for this. Maybe I don't have a lot of potential. Perhaps it would be better just to give everything up and concentrate on my worldly affairs only. Now the only thing I have to say about any progress made is this. During my first retreat with Shifu I had a lot of movies which totally took over my consciousness, leaving me unable to be aware of anything but the movie itself. In this retreat, on the contrary, it hasn't happened even once. And each time my consciousness started to fall into one of those catatonic states, a big electric shock hit one of my arms or hit my spine with a force almost painful, waking me up instantly to be aware of my huatou."

The Master then told me, "You don't know how much you have changed since you started this retreat. You are not aware of it, but people will see your change. This state in which you now are will last at least two months."



Five-Day Western Zen Retreat

Dharma Drum Retreat Center, Pine Bush, NY

March 11 – 16, 2005

“A simple retreat designed for Westerners enabling the practitioner to face the major paradox, ‘Who am I?’ in creative mutual questioning set within a framework of silent Chan sitting. We utilise a tested communication exercise in which people work in pairs to explore this fundamental gongan (koan). The intensive focus drives each into a self-presentation that is difficult to experience in other ways. The outcome may be a profound journey through the unity of self and the acceptance of self to ‘self at ease.’ This may possibly lead further to a direct insight into the ground of being. Participants share a rich experience in new self-knowledge, understanding others and the human condition. This western Chan method is not psychotherapy or psychology. It simply makes use of words to go beyond words and thereby enter the main gate of Chan. Open equally to beginners and established trainees.”

The retreat will be led by two of Chan Master Sheng Yen’s European Dharma heirs, Dr. John Crook and Dr. Simon Child, with the assistance of Hilary Richards.

Please call (718) 592-6593 for further information and registration.

Homage to Guan Yin Pusa

For Dorothy Weiner

Rounded by a splendor
of morning light
she rides atop a snail
that inches through
the tall dewy grass
as the waking world
shudders in silent awe.

Guan Yin
who watches over all
and protects us
from the snares
of delusion
and the rough demons
of wayward desire.

She sits there
with lightness and ease
elbow on uplifted knee
dwelling in Dharma delight
and yet there is no cry
of pain or suffering
that she does not hear.

Touching all hearts
and all minds
with boundless compassion
ever renewing
her cherished vow
that all beings may taste
the sweet dew of awakening.

– Ernest Heau



Drawing by Rikki Asher

The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Tsunami Strikes; Dharma Drum Responds

Sumatra, Indonesia: On the morning of December 26th an earthquake of magnitude 9 on the Richter scale off the coast of this Indonesian island initiated an intense tsunami that struck seven countries in South Asia. (Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, the Maldives, Burma, and Malaysia)

Throughout the succeeding weeks the estimated death toll continued to rise; at the time of this printing it has exceeded 233,000.

Dharma Drum Mountain's Master Sheng Yen was in New York conducting a Chan retreat when he heard the news. He immediately





contacted the Dharma Drum Mountain charitable foundation in Taiwan and set relief efforts in motion.

By the morning of December 28th an initial donation of 500 tents and canned goods was on its way to Indonesia, accompanied by the charitable foundation's Deputy General Manager Wong Che Hsiung, nine other relief workers from Dharma Drum and members of the foreign rescue service of the Taipei City Fire Department.

Upon their arrival at Medan it became clear that the telecommunication system in Aceh

Province had collapsed, and that it would be necessary to ascertain conditions on the ground. They therefore continued by military aircraft to Aceh Province, and confirmed that Meul Adoh City had been the most seriously hit by the disaster – approximately two-thirds of the residents had been killed, leaving approximately 3000 survivors.

Master Sheng Yen expressed his deep concern about this catastrophe, and especially beseeched all his followers in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Hong Kong to practice the Bodhisattva spirit to rescue those in need. He asked his followers in nearby ar-



to learn about conditions in the disaster area and to inform DDM. He also asked that all the bodhisattvas helping the victims in the disaster areas take care of their own security as the first priority, and provide help to the neediest victims.

The Dharma Drum Mountain Social Welfare and Charity Foundation will establish several relief centers in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Indonesia to assist the disaster survivors, to rebuild their facilities and to advise them how to cope with their emotional trauma.

Deputy General Manager Wong and his team returned to Taipei on the morning of January 2. Mr. Wong reported that despite his long experience as a disaster relief worker, he had been shocked at the scale of the devastation, which included many unburied corpses, survivors seemingly in shock, and quickly deteriorating sanitary conditions.

Mr. Wong emphasized that while there was an immediate need for food, clean water and medical aid, there would be an equally serious need for long-term assistance, and that,

consistent with Master Sheng Yen's Spiritual Environmentalism, the Dharma Drum Mountain Social Welfare and Charity Foundation would be involved in providing spiritual counseling to help strengthen the survivors and reduce their suffering.

To support Dharma Drum's relief efforts, please make your check out to "Dharma Drum Mountain Social Welfare and Charity

Foundation," and write "Tsunami Earthquake Charity Fund" in the memo area. Kindly send your donation to:

The Dharma Drum Mountain Social Welfare and Charity Foundation
2F, No. 388, Chengde Rd., Sec. 7, Peitou 112, Taipei, Taiwan
Tel: 886-2-28276060 ext.209
Fax: 886-2-28238204



Master Sheng Yen To Women's Middle East Peace Conference: Healing, Not Revenge

Dharma Drum Mountain was invited to participate in a four-day conference entitled "Towards Justice & Reconciliation" sponsored by the Women's Partnership for Peace in the Middle East in Amman, Jordan from December 15 through 18. DDM was represented by three female Buddhist masters, including the Sangha Deputy Provost Ven. Guo Guang.

Master Sheng Yen, the only Asian – and the only Buddhist – on the conference organizing committee, although unable to attend, sent a message in the form of a parable entitled "Healing More Important Than Revenge." His article stressed that because there are no purely objective standards for fairness and justice, these concepts must be set aside in the quest for reconciliation, and that inner peace is the foundation for external peace. The conference participants, devoted to resolving disputes and seeking reconciliation, responded enthusiastically to both ideas. During the conference, the three masters from DDM conducted the Buddhist "Four Great Vows" ritual, as well as leading "Dharma Drum's Eight-Form Moving Meditation." Both the ritual and practice were welcomed by the attendees, making a profound impression. Many conference participants expressed that both activities allowed them to relax and experience a sense of peace. They also found these Chinese Buddhist methods of spiritual practice, designed to develop wisdom, very inspiring.

In the fable, read to the conference by one of Master Sheng Yen's representatives, a hunter

was accidentally struck by a stray arrow, and was filled with rage. The hunter suffered not only from physical injury, but also from hatred and the desire for revenge, until he ran into a hermit who dispelled his enmity by saying, "Let me help you remove the arrow and dress the wound; that's more important than getting revenge." Master Sheng Yen pointed out that, from the very beginning, this story was all about misunderstanding, with the hunter feeling that as he was injured through no fault of his own, he deserved justice. If the wise hermit had not appeared, and the wounded hunter had died, his descendants would have then taken revenge for him, leading to an endless cycle of retribution generation after generation. As there is much misunderstanding and conflict today among various ethnic groups around the world, it would be better to listen to the wise hermit's suggestion, "Healing is more important than revenge," an idea that Master Sheng Yen believes will bring true peace.

In discussing how to choose a suitable approach for reconciling the long-standing conflicts and disputes between Israel and Palestine, Master Sheng Yen's message explained that achieving peace and reconciliation based on "fairness" would be impossible. Because each side has a different standard for justice, and a different historical background, it would be very difficult to achieve so-called "fairness." Master Sheng Yen thus suggested to the conference that the quest for reconciliation would require the temporary setting aside of the pursuit of fairness.

At an interfaith prayer ceremony on the afternoon of the 15th, Vens. Guo Guang and Chang Hua recited the Four Great Vows as a blessing for the conference. Upon hearing

that for practicing Buddhists, this is a daily ritual for repenting one's wrong actions, speech, and thoughts, and vowing to continuously uplift one's character, the Palestinian attendees were deeply moved. The conference also provided time for each religious group to lead a spiritual ritual, so the DDM representatives led the attendees in "Dharma Drum's Eight-Form Moving Meditation." While doing the physical movements, conference participants experienced how to mindfully observe changes happening to themselves, and relax their bodies and minds.

Following the opening ceremony on the afternoon of the 16th, a series of discussions ensued on the feasibility of "moving toward fairness & reconciliation." The agenda for the morning of the 17th included Nobel Peace laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire sharing her experience promoting dialogue in Northern Ireland, as well as speeches and experience-sharing from representatives of the "Families of 9/11 Victims for Future Peace" group, and other women representatives from various countries. The conference also provided an open forum for Q&A between Palestinian and Israeli participants and speakers.

On the afternoon of the 17th, the conference moved into round-table group discussions on six topics including "Youth Participation in Future Peace and Development," "Healing and Reconciliation," "Non-Violent Education & Broadcasting," "Raising Women's Status through Small Business Development," "Utilizing Media to Establish Positive Images & Disseminate Positive News," and "How to Transform the Anger & Fear in Our Minds," making concrete proposals for a viable future peace.

It's worth mentioning that during the conference, both Israelis and Palestinians indicated that their efforts towards communication and reconciliation were greatly enhanced by the third-party perspective offered by the participating international public figures and different religious groups.

DDM Delegates Attend Pan-Asian Youth Leadership Summit

From September 19 to 21, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Millennium Campaign and the Global Peace Initiative of Women, in consultation with the United Nations Program on Youth, held the Pan-Asian Youth Leadership Summit in Hiroshima, Japan, based on the theme of "Mobilizing the Next Generation for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals." Five youth delegates from Dharma Drum Mountain attended the Summit as international participants.

The Pan-Asian Youth Leadership Summit is bringing together young parliamentarians, entrepreneurs, academics, civil servants, television and film personalities, representatives of non-governmental organizations and youth groups, activists and development specialists with proven leadership skills who are making a difference in their communities. The Summit provides a platform for delegates to share ideas and develop and lead projects in their regions aimed at achieving the Goals, eight global targets, including cutting poverty and hunger in half, stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS and ensuring that all girls and boys attend primary school, all by 2015.

“This summit is taking place at an important time for Asia, home to 60 percent of the world’s population and 60 percent of its young people,” said Masaru Todoroki, Deputy Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Asia. “While some countries in the region are making significant progress towards achieving the Goals, areas like life expectancy and literacy, HIV/AIDS and other emerging challenges, coupled with persistent problems such as gender inequality, threaten to reverse the hard-fought development gains of recent years.” Extreme poverty remains a major challenge in the region which is home to 66 percent of the world’s poorest people.

The second in a series of regional youth gatherings, the Hiroshima meeting follows the Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit during which some 150 young leaders from across Africa met in Dakar, Senegal in June. They signed on as Millennium Development Goal Advocates and promised to use their networks and energies to help their countries fight poverty and push back HIV/AIDS. The plan of action they crafted was presented to more than 40 African Heads of State during the July African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A Pan-American Youth Leadership Summit for Latin America and the Caribbean is being planned for early 2005 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The Hiroshima Summit kicks off Asia Pacific 2015, a campaign spearheaded by UNDP to boost on-going efforts to achieve the Goals in the region.

“There is an increasing appreciation within the international community of the important place that youth hold in the future of the planet,” said Djibril Diallo, Director of UNDP’s Communications Office of the Administrator. “The Hiroshima Summit is offering the next

generation of Asian leaders – those who will be at the forefront of government, business and many other important sectors in just a few years – an opportunity to say with a collective voice and through a structure that they will design, how they intend to help their communities and their countries achieve the Goals.”

Against this backdrop, Summit delegates discussed a wide range of topics relevant for Asian and Pacific countries, including the connection between gender equality and HIV/AIDS, the impact of urbanization and deforestation, how to leverage sports and culture to achieve the Goals, and literacy and education, especially for women and girls. During the Summit, participants had the opportunity to debate and exchange ideas and develop their own plan of action and establish a permanent network designed to monitor progress and shape future activities. Their discussions included contributions from selected participants from the Dakar Summit. A highlight of the meeting was a walk for peace at Hiroshima Square, a global symbol of rebirth after the horrors of war.

Practitioners Flock to DDRC

After returning to America on October 28, 2004, Master Sheng Yen conducted two Chan retreats at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York. To date, he has personally led 108 intensive Chan retreats, the longest of which lasted 49 days.

Master Sheng Yen’s popularity in the West has steadily increased as practitioners have gathered at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center to train under his guidance. In the most recent

Christmas retreat, although two new dormitories had been opened for use at the Center, the 114 retreatants plus 15 volunteers filled the meditation and dining halls completely. In addition to lay American practitioners, there were six monastics from Taiwan, as well as lay practitioners from England, Italy, Poland, Russia, Croatia, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, Portugal, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. Guo Yuan Fa Shi and Guo Jun Fa Shi each supervised one of the two retreats, with Guo Jun Fa Shi and Professor Rebecca Li serving as interpreters, and Guo Ming Fa Shi as logistics coordinator.

Prayer Service For Wei Tan's Father

Mr. Tan Kim Wa, father of dedicated Chan Center member Wei Tan, died in a tragic car accident in Malaysia on November 20, 2004. Wei, a frequent contributor to Chan Magazine and a DDRC board member, flew to Malaysia to be with his family for the funeral service.

Meanwhile, on November 22nd, a prayer service was held from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. at the Chan Center for Mr. Tan combining the regular Monday night chanting practice and prayers for the deceased.

Nearly a hundred black-robed participants – including Shifu, 10 sangha members who manned various instruments, and a number of Western practitioners – attended this auspicious and solemn service chanting the Amitabha Buddha Sutra and Amitofo, Buddha's name in Chinese, while circling the hall.

Shifu gave a short talk reminding us that the end of life is the beginning of a new stage in the next. He stressed the importance and

power of prayers for the deceased, as well as for those near death, to help them face the eventuality in peace. Hopefully, the merits derived from collective prayers will lead the deceased into the Western Pure Land. To encourage the practice of prayers, Shifu quoted a passage from the Earth Store Sutra: those who pray benefit much more than those who are prayed for.

Many came to the service because they wanted to show their support and respect for Wei Tan during this sorrowful period of his life. They left with a sense of peace and love knowing that they were with Wei in spirit.

Tolerance Across Religions Forum

Saint Joseph's College in Brooklyn, NY held a "Tolerance Across Religions Forum" on November 18. Bill Wright attended on behalf of the Chan Center along with representatives of Catholicism, Judaism, Ifa (an Afro-Cuban religion) and Islam.

The participants gave short presentations about how their respective traditions would answer the question "What Does It Mean to Be a Good Person?" After these presentations there was a lively question and answer period with the audience of about 100 people.

N.B. The editors would like to express our gratitude to Ms. Ivy Cheng and Mr. Wong Che Hsiung for their contributions to the article, "Tsunami Strikes; Dharma Drum Responds."

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.

Five-day Western Retreat (DDRC)

Friday, March 11, 6 pm –
Wednesday, March 16, 10 am

Two-day Recitation Retreat

Friday, March 18, 9 pm –
Sunday, March 20, 5 pm

Ten-day Silent Illumination Retreat (DDRC)

Thursday, May 26, 6 pm –
Sunday, June 5, 10 am

Ten-day Huatou Retreat (DDRC)

Thursday, June 24, 6 pm –
Sunday, July 4, 10 am

Chan Practice

Monday Night Chanting

Every Monday, 7:30 – 9 pm
Devotional chanting of Amitabha Buddha;
88 Buddhas Repentance on last Monday of
each month.

Tuesday Night Sitting Group

Every Tuesday, 7 – 9:30 pm
Periods of sitting meditation alternating with
yoga, walking meditation, readings, discus-
sion, and chanting the Heart Sutra.

Saturday Sitting Group

Every Saturday, 9 am – 3 pm
Half-hour periods of sitting meditation alter-
nating with yoga or walking meditation.

Sunday Open House

Every Sunday (except April 24 for Earth
Store Recitation and May 15 for Buddha's
Birthday Celebration)

10:00 am – 11:00 am Group Meditation
11:00 am – 1:00 pm Dharma Talk
1:00 pm – 1:45 pm Vegetarian Lunch
1:45 pm – 2:45 pm Chanting
1:45 pm – 2:30 pm "Ask the Abbot"

Wednesday Night Sitting Group at DDRC

Please call 845-744-8114 for details.

Classes at CMC

New Meditation Class Series:

Beginners' Meditation

Two Saturdays, 9:30 am – 12 noon, \$40

Intermediate Meditation

Two Saturdays, 9:30 am – 12 noon, \$40

Please call for Spring dates.

Pre-registration required

Beginners' Dharma Class

Three consecutive Fridays, April 1, 8, and 15,
7 – 9 pm

Taijiquan Classes

Thursdays, 7:30 – 9:00 pm,
with instructor David Ngo, \$80 for a session

of 16 classes, or \$25/month. First Thursday of every month free for newcomers.

Yoga

Saturdays, March 5, 19; April 2, 16; May 7, 14, 3 – 4:30 pm, with instructor Rikki Asher. \$10/class

Special Events

Public Lectures by Chan Master Sheng Yen

Sunday, May 8 and 22; June 19, at CMC, 11 am – 12:30 pm. Master Sheng Yen will speak on the Surangama Sutra. (On other Sundays Guo Chian Fa Shi will lecture on the Heart Sutra.)

The Great Compassionate Dharani Repentance Ceremony

Friday, March 12, April 9, 2 – 4 pm

Dharma Gathering

Friday, May 13, 6:30 – 9:30 pm. Welcome Chan Master Sheng Yen on his return from Taiwan.

Buddha's Birthday Celebration

Sunday, May 15, 10 am – 3 pm
Dharma talks by Master Jen Chun and Chan Master Sheng Yen; bathing of the baby Buddha; chanting, vegetarian feast, entertainment.

Earth Store Bodhisattva Recitation

Sunday, April 24, 9:30 am – 3 pm

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Sunday, May 22, 9 – 10 am

Transmitted by Chan Master Sheng Yen

"Zen and Inner Peace"

Chan Master Sheng Yen on WNYE (25) every Saturday at 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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Daily meditation; regular retreats;
2005 residential period

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including courses in Buddhism and Chan
meditation, meditation group meetings,
and retreats.

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Email: webmaster@ddm.org.tw
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Contact: Guo Chii Shi
Tel: 886-02-2778-5007~9
Fax: 886-02-2778-0807
Email: gchiis@ddm.org.tw
Saturday, 8:30-11:30 am, meditation and discussion in English at An Her Branch Monastery

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Melbourne

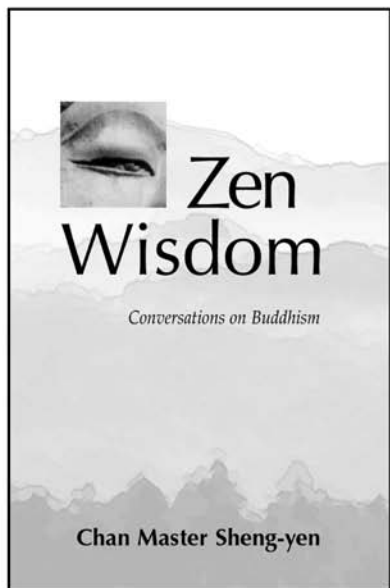
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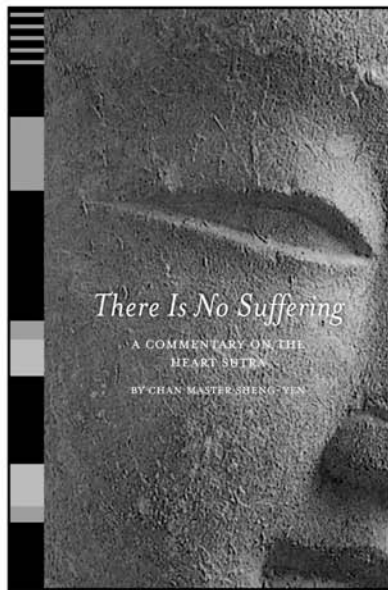


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In *Zen Wisdom*, Chan Master Sheng-yen answers questions from his students with clarity and depth. Collected over several years, these conversations focus on the simple yet seemingly elusive principles of Chan (Zen) practice. Combining wisdom with 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.

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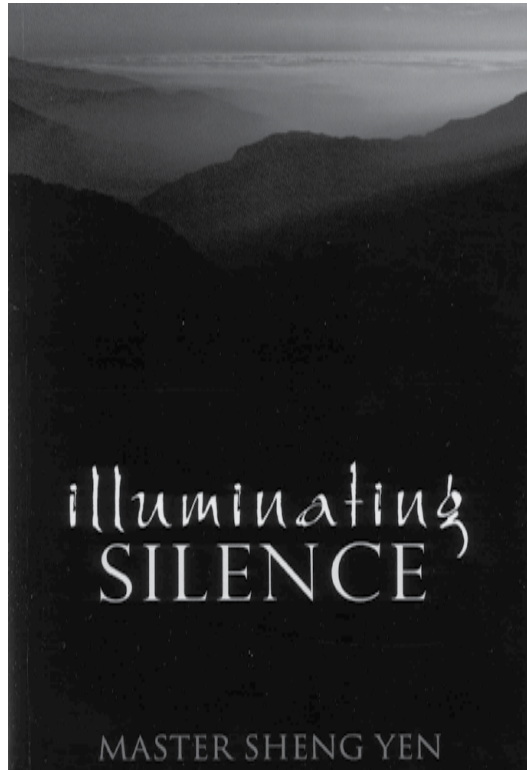


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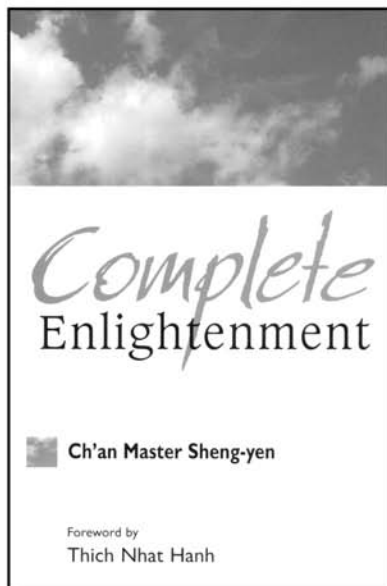
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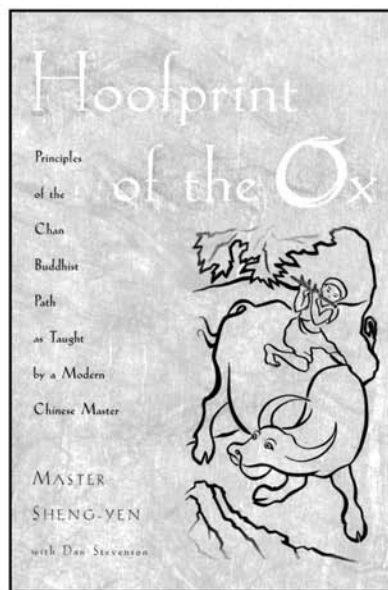
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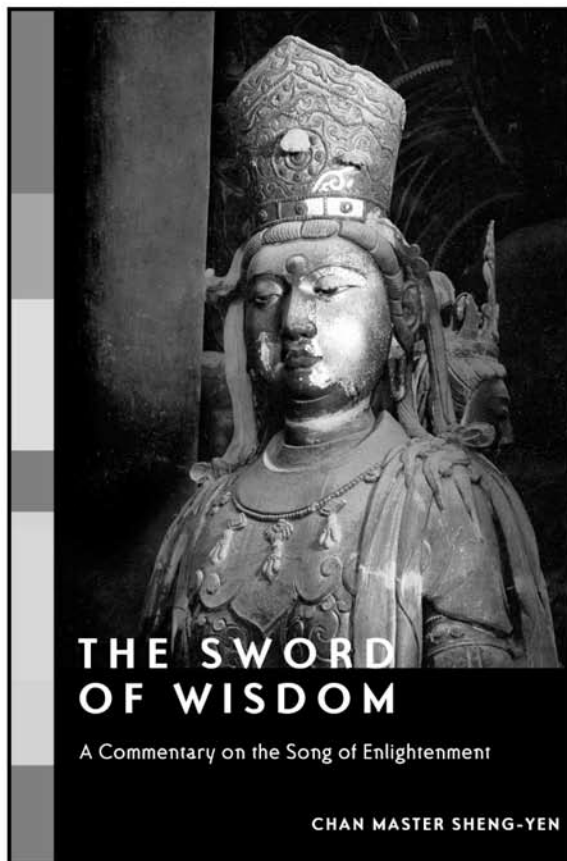
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