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AUTUMN 2013



“**Y**ou could say that it has been my long-held aspiration to convey the correct Dharma, and to convert difficult Buddhist concepts into words that are easy to understand and accept, and to provide them to people who wanted the Dharma. As a result, I was really grateful for these few magazines which provided a place for me to publish them. The writers received no remuneration. However, money was not the issue for me. As long as someone could read my article and accept Buddhism as a result, I would feel very satisfied.”

— Chan Master Sheng Yen
“*A Journey of Learning and Insight*”

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Chan in Life-and-death

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

A talk given in Manhattan on November 11, 2001.

This evening's topic is the issue of life-and-death from the perspective of Chan. Before I can talk about this, we first need to understand what the perspective of Chan is. Actually this is very simple. Chan is about living our life in a joyfully positive manner. In Chinese, the term Chan means wisdom, stability and peace. With wisdom, one will be able to live with less suffering and vexation. With stability and peace, one will be able to live without constant emotional afflictions and fluctuations.

When we talk about the issue of life-and-death, most people cherish life like light, but dislike death. However, from the perspective of Chan, life-and-death are inseparable, they are actually the same thing. At the phenomenal level life-and-death seem to be two different phenomena. However, from the wisdom of Chan, life-and-death are inseparable from our experiences in everyday life.

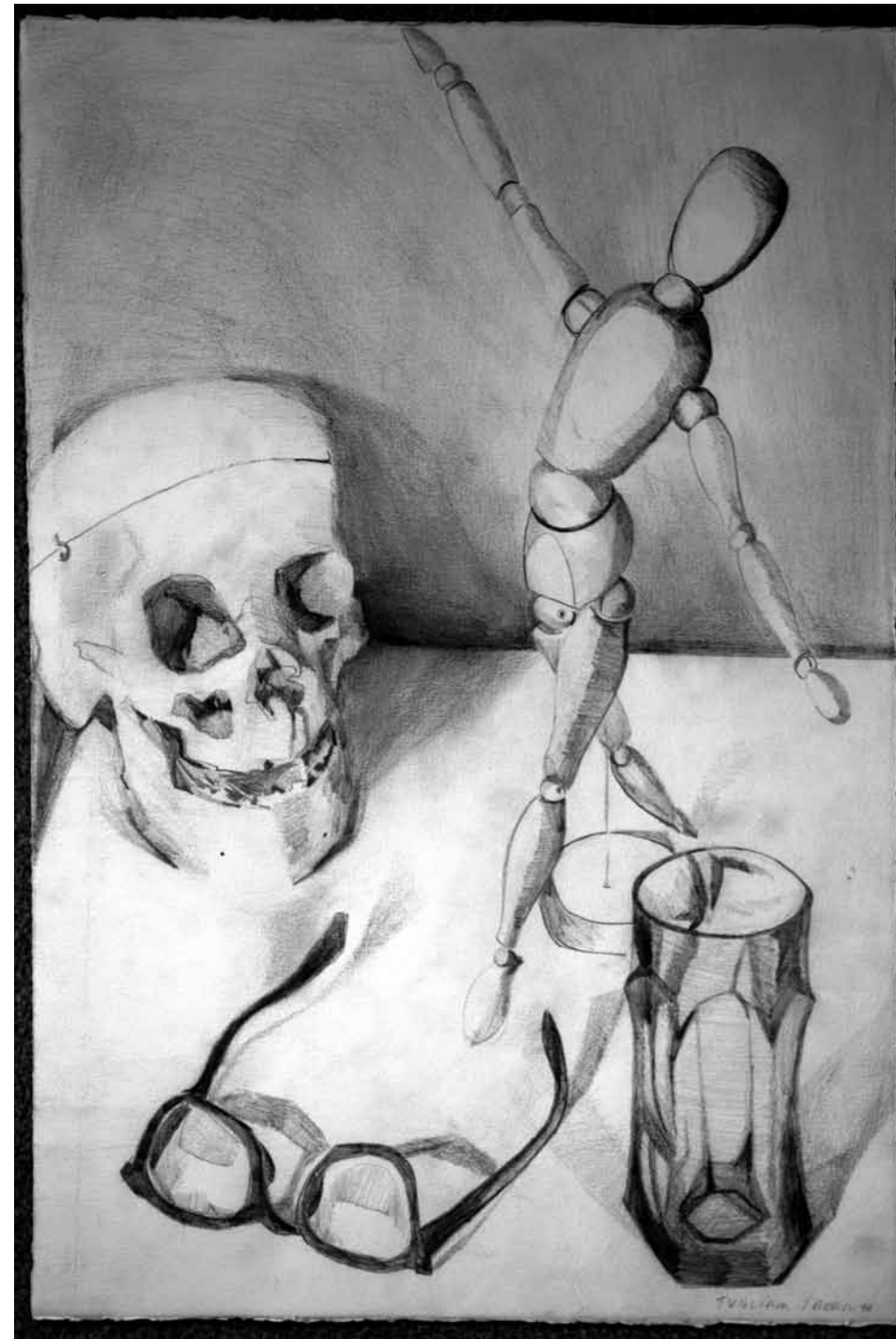
Yesterday, I talked to a woman whose husband worked on the 106th floor of the World Trade Center. He died in the event of September 11th. Since the death of her husband, this lady has been coming to our Chan Center very often. I spoke to her yesterday and asked how things were going at home. She told me she was living with her mother-in-law. I asked her if her mother-in-law knows that her son has died. She said it seems she knows but they haven't told her because she is really afraid of death, so they think it's better if they don't tell her. I asked the age of her mother in law, she's already

94 years old, and she's been looking very hard for a way to immortality, so that she can live forever. I'd like to ask you, what this old woman is searching for, is it something she will be able to find?

Is it possible to find immortality? I believe most of you will answer, "No, it's impossible to live forever." But is it also possible that deep down in your heart, you've been having this hope that maybe if you don't need to die at all, that would be great? So far I haven't found such a method. If I find it I will use it myself as well.

Since we humans have been walking on this earth with written history, we have not found a human being that has not died. Therefore, from the perspective of a Chan practitioner one should have the understanding and awareness that death can happen any time. When there's life there is going to be death. For some people death may come sooner than others, but it will happen to everybody. So this evening I'd like to talk about two major topics, one is the issue of life-and-death, and the second one is about Chan and it's relationship to life.

So what is life? Life is the boundless extension of limitless brightness. Think of a baby who is born and lives for a few hours or few days and then it dies. For most people life is only about the period of time that this being was alive. However, that is not an entirely correct understanding of life. The existence of our physical body is actually the



Painting by Tim Jundo Williams

expression of the function of our life. So one should understand life as having two components, one is that of the physical component and the second is that of the spiritual component. Without our physical body, the spiritual aspect of our life will have no way of fulfilling its function of expressing itself. However, the physical body of this life does not represent the entirety of life. The physical body exists from one period to another, however the spiritual component of life exists forever.

Some Buddhists draw analogies to describe the relationship between the spiritual and physical aspects of life. These are interesting analogies and can kind of make sense but are not entirely correct. One of these analogies looks at the spiritual and physical aspects of life as travelers. The traveler goes all over the place, taking a bus, driving a car, staying at hotels with different kinds of accommodations. The traveler is the spiritual aspect, and the car or the hotel that this traveler stayed in for a period of time is the physical aspect. The idea is that these hotels or cars are tangible, visible aspects of life which exist only periodically, whereas the spiritual aspect of life is invisible and intangible and is always there.

Another such analogy is that the physical aspect of life is like clothes one puts on. The clothing gets old and dirty so we take it off and get new clothes. The body that wears these clothes is still the same body. So again the idea is that spiritual life is continuous and eternal while it is invisible and intangible, and the physical aspect of life is visible and tangible and exists for a period only. These analogies illustrate how the physical aspect of life is a kind of manifestation of different stages of the spiritual life.

Also you might have heard that in Tibetan Buddhism there is this belief of reincarnation, you might have heard his holiness the Dalai Lama,

the current one we have now is the fourteenth reincarnation. Another *tulku* [recognized reincarnation] is believed to be the 17th reincarnation. So the idea is that this seems to be the same person just having the 14th or 17th body.

One time I met a Tibetan Rinpoche, and I asked him, “So are you a reincarnated rinpoche?”

And he said, “Yes, everyone is a reincarnated person.”

I asked him, “So am I the reincarnation of somebody?”

And he said, “Yeah, of course you are too. You are probably the reincarnation of a great practitioner from before.”

Here, I’d like to ask you, do you think you are the reincarnation of someone before? I think so, probably. It’s just that last time you had a different name from what you have now, and no one can verify who you are, so no one can say you are the reincarnation of such and such person. That’s the idea of reincarnation; one’s reincarnation in the present life can be based on one’s karma or one’s vow power. The difference between the two is that if one is reincarnated based on karma, then one’s reincarnation is not free, one does not have choice. Where as if one’s reincarnation is based on one’s power of the vow then one is free to choose and has control. So there’s a question, if you are reincarnated based on the power of your vow, does it mean that the person you are in this life is exactly the person you were in your past life, are the two exactly the same? No, they are not exactly the same.

I asked a Tibetan Rinpoche, “His holiness the Dalai Lama, since he’s reincarnated 14 times already, is he the same person as he was 14 lifetimes ago?”

This Rinpoche replied, “No. They are not the same person, actually 14 lifetimes, they are 14 different people.”

I asked him, “Is there any change from the first reincarnation to the 14th reincarnation of this Dalai Lama?”

The Rinpoche replied, “There’s been changes since the first lifetime to this 14th life, what’s been changed is this person’s wisdom and merit.”

So from his first life to his 14th reincarnation the Dalai Lama’s wisdom and merit has been changing, and it has been growing. As for everybody, from reincarnation to reincarnation it’s the same thing, one’s wisdom and merit change. However, the difference is: if one practices, then one’s wisdom and merit can grow. If one does not practice, one’s merit and wisdom can change in the opposite direction, going downhill.

Earlier I mentioned that life is the boundless extension of limitless brightness. This is because if one practices and makes good use of every lifetime one has, then one will be adding to this brightness of one’s life, and that becomes the boundless extension. What we mean by making good use of one’s life refers to doing things that can benefit oneself and others.

So each period of one’s life is likened to a piece of clothing or a house that one has. When one is in possession of a house or piece of clothing, one takes good care of it so it can perform its proper function. Of course however well one takes care of a house or piece of clothing, it will still get old and deteriorate in the end. But by taking care of this house or piece of clothing, it can perform its function to its fullest. In the process taking care, one is adding to the brightness of life. If one can do so life after life then one is enhancing this limitless

brightness of life. I’d like to ask you to ponder this: everybody usually comes to this world comes with a mission, and once that mission is accomplished then that person will leave.

Recently when I was in Taiwan there were actually quite a few serious natural disasters happening there, some serious flooding. I was in an area where a lot of people died. The relatives of the victims suffered greatly for their lost family members, and were unable to accept the reality of the death. A lot of people were asking me, “Shifu, in our family, nobody does any bad things, why do we have to suffer such a punishment? There are much worse people than my family member, why does my family member have to die, and those people don’t die? And there are people who are much older and they survived, they’re still alive, why does my family member have to die so young?” I was bombarded with these questions. That was their thinking: it’s a mistake that someone as old as I am is still alive, and it is also a mistake for the family member to die in the disaster. Of course that’s not really what they meant, the truth is they are suffering from this psychological imbalance.

There is a student of mine whose been participating in many seven-day retreats. Four years ago her twenty year old son went out to buy bread in the morning. Right after he got out of the door he was killed by a car. For this woman this is a very difficult reality for her to accept. She simply could not face it that just a moment ago her son was fine and then a moment later her son was dead. For a few years this woman has been coming to my seven-day meditation retreats, and every time she comes she will ask me, “Shifu, where’s my son?” Every time she asks me this question, so I’ve been telling her the same answer, “Everybody comes to this life with a mission and once that mission is accomplished, then that person leaves. Even though you do not want to let go, it is impossible to

keep this person around. Because the next mission in the next stage of life is waiting for him, so he has to move on to accomplish the next mission. He has already moved on to the next life time, better you should give him your blessing than suffer so much.”

Some people may say they still want to see him, to see how he’s doing. Since this person has already moved on to the next stage of life, it’s not that easy to call that person back to meet you and perhaps you may not want to meet him at this point. However, after more than three years of meditation practice, this woman has some experience in gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of her body and mind. She has begun to understand that life-and-

death are separated by just a very, very fine line. She also understands that if her deceased son is still around, and there’s still a connection, she will be able to feel his presence. However, if she can no longer feel his presence, then that just means he’s already moved on to a different realm and thus can no longer communicate, and there’s no reason to be so attached. So after more than three years of practice she begins to understand and so is willing to let go. She no longer asks me the question over and over, “Where’s my son?”

It’s kind of like we were traveling on the same bus, but her son got off this bus and got on a different bus. Even though you want to see where



Photo by Tina Bush Rester

he is now, or communicate with him, it’s not that easy, because he’s already riding on another bus. It’s unreasonable for you to expect to be able to keep calling out to that person, “Don’t go, stick around.” If we can apply this kind of concept and attitude to understand the separation between the living and the dead, then it will be easier for one to handle these matters in life. Of course when it happens, when we have to be separated from our loved ones either living or dead, it is not easy to accept right away. But with the practice of Chan and also the application of the correct concepts, one will become more capable of coming to terms with what’s going on, and accept it.

I’d like to ask you another question: have you thought about why you ended up in this room listening to me give this talk? How are we related to each other that you would come and listen to me talk? Let me tell you this, we have a connection not just from today’s meeting, we have a connection from way back when. So we have been connected in some way from a long time ago, it’s just that we have forgotten. But our connection brought you all to this room to come listen to this talk this evening.

More than fifty some years ago there was a man living in main land China, but because of the war he had to leave, and at that time separation from family can mean that they may never see each other again in this life. So you can imagine how sad this separation was. But years later he ran into his family again, just totally by accident. So these kind of things happen—of course they don’t happen that often. I actually experienced something like this. When I was in my thirties I accepted a disciple taking refuge with me, and then I never saw him again until twenty something years later here in the New York subway. We ran into each other, but I didn’t recognize him any more because he looked very different after twenty years. But because I’m a monk, I look the same and this person recognized

me right away and ran up to me saying, “Shifu, I’m so glad I’m seeing you again here.” For me I thought, “Who is this person, why is he calling me Shifu?” It is actually the same for us here, you may think, you don’t really know me, we haven’t met before. However, with people who have connection with each other, whatever changes they may undergo, like a different name, a different appearance, maybe very different circumstances, different location, people with a connection with each will still find themselves together.

About six years ago I gave a talk at a theater, and two of the people who were at that talk that day are here this evening. One of them is Lindley, she organized this event. What happened was, she went to that talk and since then she’s been following me. So I believe we had a very deep connection from before otherwise why would she come to my talk and follow me after that? There’s another person from that talk, she’s here this evening, and a third person too. So it’s not like you were crazy that year, one day we don’t know each other and then you decide you want to follow me. It must be because we already had a deep connection from before and causes and conditions are such that we meet each other again now. Despite the separation while we are alive, or between those alive or those dying, even with this separation we will see each other again, maybe in this world or other worlds. It’s as if this person got off this bus and got on another bus to go to work, and maybe after working for a while this person will take a vacation and come here again. If one can use this perspective to look at life-and-death then one will not suffer so much.

Next I’d like to talk about how experiences from the practice of Chan can show us that life-and-death are actually two sides of the same thing. Through Chan practice one will be able to experience and understand firsthand that the physical phenomena of the body, and also one’s mental state, undergo

constant changes, arising and falling continuously. Because of that one will be able to understand the reality of the impermanence of one's physical and mental body. We do not understand impermanence because we are not accepting enough to really see this continuous arising and falling, these constant changes in our physical body and our mind. But once we can do so through Chan practice, then we can accept this reality of impermanence.

If we apply the method of sitting meditation to pursue this experience in Chan, then one will go through three stages. The first stage involves the relaxation of the body and mind, and as one can relax, then the burden of the body as well as that of the mind will lessen. As a result one's attachment to the body and the mind will lessen as well. When the body and mind are unified, then the burden of the body and the mind will disappear, at that point one will experience this very comfortable and joyful bliss state.

Once one has had this blissful state of the unified mind and body, one may find oneself wanting to go back to this blissful state, because in our ordinary daily life we often experience mental and physical obstacles and burdens, so we will always want to get back to this blissful state.

At this point one is at the stage where one can see the value of putting down the attachment to the physical body. However, one should proceed in the practice to the next stage, where one would also put down the attachment to this blissful state of the unified body and mind. At this stage one will be able to go back to daily life and feel neither aversion nor attachment to the physical body. The way one would regard one's physical body is, "Well now that

I have this physical body it is good, I cherish it and make use of it, but when this physical body has to go I will not be sad either."

Of course it takes time in one's practice to get to this stage. Apparently one can not just start thinking, "Oh, wow, Chan practice is so good, I could just get to this stage right away." It would probably be impossible for that to happen, so it will have to take time. But before we get to this stage of feeling this ease of body and mind, or feeling liberated from the body or the mind, is sitting meditation useful? It will still be useful, because as one confronts the danger of death, then with the practice of meditation one's mind will remain stable and clear and peaceful. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this talk, Chan is about living a life with wisdom and peace.

At this point I'd like to also introduce another example, actually this person is also here, sitting at the back there. Her practice of meditation is not that good yet, but it's already been quite useful to her. On the morning of September 11, Ann was practicing sitting meditation in the morning before she went to work. After she finished with her meditation she made three interesting decisions: She usually wears contact lenses, but at that time she decided to wear glasses. She also decided to go to work in pants, and instead of wearing high heels she decided to wear shoes with low heels. Then she went to work in a building near the World Trade Center. When the terrorist attack occurred on the World Trade Center, at that time she didn't panic. She just escaped from the building, and because she wasn't wearing her contact lenses, all the dust didn't effect her that much. Otherwise it would be quite dangerous for her and she probably wouldn't have been able to see anything at all, because by the

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WITH WISDOM,
STABILITY AND PEACE.

time she got out of that area, she was completely covered with dust. Also if she was wearing high heels or a skirt she wouldn't have been able to escape as quickly. So for her, doing the sitting meditation was quite useful to her that day. Well we'd like to invite her to stand up so we could give her our blessings, we are happy for her. So Ann make sure you practice sitting more often.

With Chan practice, when one encounters danger, one will be able to decrease harm. Because when a dangerous situation occurs, one's mind remains calm and clear, so one will know what to do more clearly. Even when the situation is such that one discovers that they can't escape death, then one will not panic. Instead one will understand that "Oh it's time for me to get off this bus, and there's this other bus I have to get."

Now I'd like to give you this mantra. This mantra consists of four lines and is based on the experiences of Chan training as well as the concepts in Chan and is very useful when one faces and encounters dangerous situations, including the death of oneself or other people around you. It's these four lines:

*Face it
Accept it
Handle it
Put it down*

Whatever has happened, you have handled the situation, using your wisdom and any resources that you can mobilize, as well as your own capability. Whether or not you can entirely handle the matter, you no longer suffer from what has happened. If you can handle it completely then it is done. If you can't handle it completely, you just put it down so you don't suffer any more from it. If you do not put it down then you will cause yourself more suffering. This is like getting shot by an arrow, the

most important thing is to pull the arrow out and heal the poison that has entered the body. But if you were so ignorant as to not to put it down, that would be like stabbing yourself one more time with another arrow.

Recently a psychiatrist encountered this four-line mantra, he felt that this mantra is very useful so he used it himself and gave it to his patients to use. Do you remember what the first line is? [*Shifu has the audience repeat the mantra*]

Now we have about twenty minutes, and if you have questions about life-and-death issues then you can raise such questions, but I'd like only to limit the questions to life-and-death issues.

Question: I have a question about the Vietnamese monks during the Vietnam war who committed suicide by setting themselves on fire as a form of protest, and I know that suicide is supposed to be not allowed. I was wondering if they are just taking on this karma onto themselves, what is the Buddhist thinking about how this works?

Answer: From a Buddhist perspective, whether or not it is a monastic person, killing oneself is not in accordance with Buddhist theory. It is incorrect to take one's life. When we look at what happened in the Vietnam War among the Buddhist monks, if we look at what effect the action had for Vietnam as well as Buddhism we can probably say that the effect has been largely negative. The Chan people really felt that in setting himself on fire in protest it is probably an action out of ignorance.

Question: During the talk you explained that the physical body has a mission, maybe the Vietnamese monk finished his mission? Everybody lives this life for a purpose, we don't know what the purpose is until after, but maybe that was the reason for him to be alive?

Answer: One can also interpret the event in that way. That is why some people interpret it that this bodhisattva came to save Vietnam at that time. From my own understanding of Buddhism then I agree.

Question: I have been trying to understand for some time about reincarnation. If there's no self, then what in fact is reincarnated lifetime to lifetime?

Answer: It is important that we do not misunderstand this notion that there is no self. In the practice what we try to do is to be liberated from the self of vexation, the self of suffering, the self of emotional afflictions. However, there is the



Painting by Tim Jundo Williams

self of wisdom and compassion. This vow of great compassion, that's there. If even the self of wisdom or self of great compassion is not there, then there's not even any Buddha.

Question: What is Nirvana:?

Answer: Nirvana is liberation. There are two kinds of nirvana. The first kind is the idea that one has escaped the cycle of birth and death, that one no longer returns to this existence in this realm. This is the notion of nirvana in Hinayana Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism the notion of nirvana refers to the liberation from both the fear of life-and-death and attachment to life-and-death. So one transcends both the fear and attachment to life-and-death, and when there are sentient beings that need us to come back to this realm of life-and-death, then we'll come back. When there is no further need from sentient beings then we don't come. So one is free in this nirvana.

Question: In this saha world [the world that must be endured], if you're a good person you stay shorter and if you're a bad person you stay longer?

Answer: In the Buddhist concept of suffering, suffering mainly refers to the suffering of life-and-death. And in this daily life, most people do not think that life is suffering. Most people think that life is actually pretty fun. Some may even find what is supposed to be suffering to be enjoyable. So it is actually impossible for us to find an objective criteria to gauge what is suffering. There are people who live in very materially deprived condition but live in a very meaningful way. Would we say that this person is suffering, or not suffering? So it is impossible for us to use material objective ideas to measure suffering here with the larger issue of the subject of life-and-death.

The Arising of Conditioned Appearance from the True Mind

Part 1

by

Abbot Venerable Guo Xing

This is the first in a series of articles taken from Dharma talks given by Abbot Ven. Guo Xing at the Shurangama Sutra Retreat in August 2012. The talks focus on the first four chapters of the Shurangama Sutra, and include the discussion of Chan theory and practice, stories of the Chan Masters, and how to apply Chan methods in daily life.

Today I would like to discuss the Chan theories that can help us deepen our Chan practice. Practice requires both understanding and experience. Chan theory serves as the roadmap for practice. If the map is not clear, we will get lost in practice.

The Shurangama Sutra is one of the most important sutras in the Chan school and is the main text for guiding Chan practice. Throughout the Shurangama Sutra the Buddha explains the mind, making a distinction between the true mind and the deluded mind. In the sutra, the Buddha first points out that Ananda had taken the deluded mind as the true mind. He then further demonstrates that sentient beings have the same true mind as the Buddha. However, sentient beings use the true mind incorrectly, thus cannot manifest its wondrous functions as the Tathagatas do. As a result, sentient beings continue to dwell in the cycle of birth and death within the six realms. On the other hand, if we can understand where our

error is and then learn not to misuse the true mind, the mind in samsara can be transformed into the mind of wisdom.

The true mind has the functions of seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, knowing, and moving. The fundamental difference between the true mind and the deluded mind, or wisdom and consciousness, is that the true mind is formless and non-dualistic (i.e. there is not a subject that can "know," nor an object of "knowing"). With the rise of the dualistic view—where there is a subject "I" seeing the object "you", "I" hearing sounds, or "I" feeling sad, or "I" thinking—this is the deluded mind, consciousness, or a mind with forms. It is not the true mind.

When the deluded mind with the dualistic view is transformed into the non-dualistic true mind, we call it "transforming consciousness into wisdom", or "illuminating the mind and seeing the nature".

To achieve this goal, we first need to recognize how we operate with the deluded mind, then we need to learn and apply methods to realize the true mind.

The Buddha asked Ananda, "Where is your mind located?" Ananda said, "The mind dwells within my body."

Buddha then answered, "If the mind is inside the body, then it would be as if there is a person in the house who is going to see the things inside, then see the things outside the house. If your mind were indeed within your body, when exactly do you see the internal organs inside the body?"

"Within the body" is the first of the seven locations of the deluded mind. Most of us think that the mind is within the body. How do we prove it? You are looking at me right now. Aren't you seeing me through your eyes? When you listen to my lecture, aren't you also hearing me through your ears? Basically, our body serves as the focal point through which we interact with external environment via our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. Master Sheng Yen said, "An enlightened person's body and mind are united as one. Their minds are not confined by the

body, while a sentient being's mind is confined by the body and hence is in opposition to the environment." As long as you still feel your mind dwelling within your body, you are not yet enlightened.

In the sutra, the Buddha explains what make us feel that the mind is within body:

"Mental dimness turns into dull emptiness. This emptiness, in the dimness, unites with darkness to become form.

Stimulated by false thinking, the form takes the shape of a body.

As causal conditions come together there are perpetual internal disturbances which tend to gallop outside. Such inner disturbances are often mistaken for the nature of mind.

The primary misconception about the mind and body is the false view that the mind dwells in the physical body."¹

Originally, within the true mind, there is no mountain, river, land, the world, nor space. It is the "true emptiness, and true seeing" and it is without dualistic view. With the rising of a single ignorant thought, the perceivable space came into being, along with the perceiving

mind. This space is called "dull emptiness". The original mind, which could function without a perceivable object, turned into a perceiving mind that needs an object to function. We called this perceiving mind the "deluded mind" or "ignorance". The sentient beings, who lost their "true emptiness and true seeing", function in the dualistic way of the "dull emptiness and deluded views". Continuously interacting with the dull emptiness, the deluded mind creates illusory forms and all sorts of phenomena made from the four primary elements, i.e. earth, water, fire and wind. From then on, space and world come into being. Among these phenomena made from the four primary elements, the deluded mind grasps onto a little portion of the four elements (e.g., the zygote), and considers it as "my" body. In the sutra, it says "Stimulated by false thinking, the form takes the shape of a body."

After having the conception of the body, inwardly, the mind interacts with our own thoughts continuously. Through these thoughts, outwardly, the mind interacts with the external sensory objects (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch), forming consciousness. These thoughts are called "conditions." The sutra describes this process: "As causal conditions come together there are perpetual internal disturbances which tend to gallop outside."

"Galloping" refers to how the mind uses the body as the focal point, and outwardly grasp onto forms. Through the five sensory organs (i.e. the eyes, ear, nose, tongue and body), the mind interacts with the five sensory objects. Inwardly, it interacts with our inner thoughts. We then take these ever-shifting thoughts as our own mind. These ever-shifting phenomena are called "inner disturbances." It is like a stream of sunlight beaming into the room, revealing particles of dust in the air. We take the

floating dust as our mind, forgetting that our true mind is really unmoving and still like the empty space. Once we mistake the moving thoughts as our own mind, we then feel that the mind dwells in the body. Therefore, Master Sheng Yen said, "Sentient beings grasp onto thoughts with the mind, and grasp onto forms with the mind."

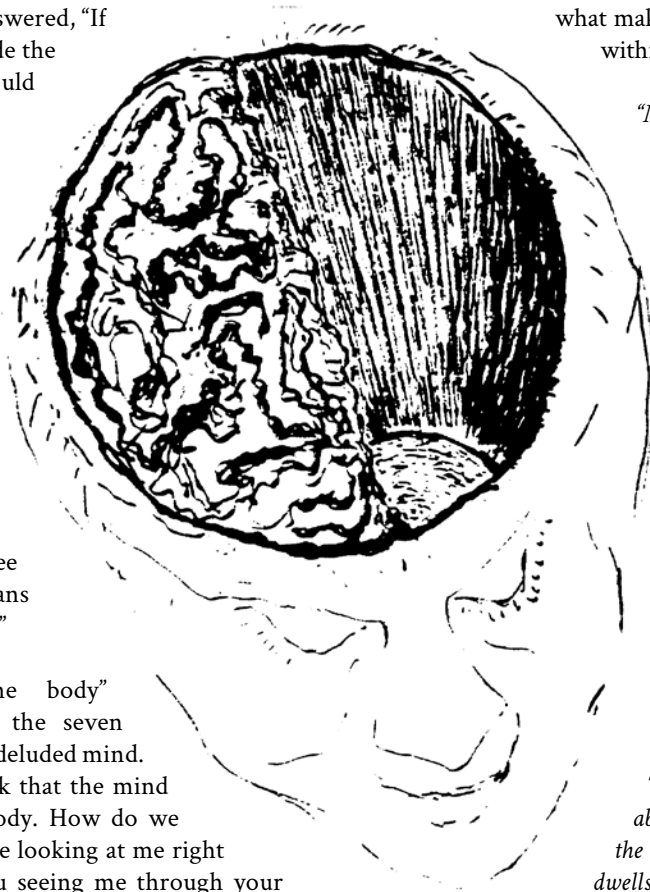
At this very moment, you are sitting here. Are you using your mind to attend to the sound of my voice, my physical form, and then further using the mind to make connections to your own previous experience? "What is this monk talking about?" you may wonder. Outwardly, our mind relates to sight, sound, even smell; inwardly, it relates to our feelings, our thoughts. In the twelve links of dependent arising, this chain of reactions is called "contact, feelings, craving, grasping, and becoming." In other words, taking the body as the focal point, the mind makes contact with external sight, sound, smell, taste, and internal thoughts, then generates feelings.

Then we mistake the ever-grasping, ever-shifting thoughts as the mind itself. Further, since this mind functions through the six sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body), consequently we form the illusion that the mind dwells in the body. This is how the "deluded mind" functions.

Once we mistakenly take the moving phenomena and thoughts as our own mind, we forget that the physical body, as well as the mountains, the rivers, empty space, and the great earth are all phenomena within the true mind. As said in the sutra:

"It is like ignoring hundreds of thousands of clear pure seas and taking notice of only a single bubble, seeing it as the entire ocean, as the whole expanse of great and small seas."²

WHERE IS
THE MIND
LOCATED?
THE TRUE
MIND IS
NEVER LOST.



Drawing by Rick Hozza

Physical bodies, surroundings, empty space, aren't these all objects we see? The sound of our own voice, external sounds, aren't these all sounds we hear? Aren't these phenomena all within our own mind? However, we sentient beings, often separate what we perceive into two, i.e. my physical body versus the external environment outside of the body.

If we become liberated from the misconception of the mind dwelling in the body, our mind can actually function like a mirror, reflecting everything equally and as a whole. At that point, one will no longer consider that there is a portion that is me, and the rest as others. If the mind is unmoving, it will be just as Master Sheng Yen said, that the internals and the externals are united as one. We will realize that all phenomena are within our mind.

When each one of us returns to the unmoving mind, and realizes complete awareness, we call this "All Buddhas are the same in essence". The mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings are one in essence, and there is no difference between them. The Buddha's mind is unmoving, and has

complete awareness. Similarly, the mind of us sentient beings is also unmoving and is capable of complete awareness. But when we function in the dualistic way, separating our physical body from external phenomena, we remain "sentient beings". Yet, even as we function in this dualistic way, the true mind of sentient beings remains the same as the Buddha's.

One of the goals in practicing Chan is to learn to liberate the mind from the confines of the body. The first step is to unite the body and the mind. Once we experience the unification of the body and mind, we would realize that the mind indeed does not dwell in body.

(To be continued)



¹ 2:52–2:54 *The Shurangama Sutra* translated by Buddhist Text Translation Society

² 2:55 *The Shurangama Sutra* translated by Buddhist Text Translation Society

http://www.cttbusa.org/shurangama/shurangama_contents.asp

Drawing by Rick Hozza

Acceptance and Appreciation

by

Žarko Andričević

A martial arts and yoga teacher since the 1970s, Zarko first encountered Buddhism in 1975. Ten years later he started the first Buddhist study and meditation group in Croatia which today is known as *Dharmaloka*. He met Chan Master Sheng Yen in 1996 and received Dharma transmission in June 2001, becoming one of five western Dharma heirs. Each year he travels to the U. S. to lead an intensive retreat at DDRC; this year he will be leading the November Silent Illumination retreat. The following talk is taken from a Silent Illumination retreat held in May 2012.

Observing Versus Reacting

Good morning to everyone. How do you feel this morning? Better? Did you sleep well last night? Not everybody? Okay. So we can bring up again this question of difficulties in practice. The retreat is not very different from life in general. We all pass through this upside down feeling as the retreat goes on and that is a very natural thing. It's normal that we meet favorable and not so favorable conditions in our practice. There is nothing strange or wrong about it. I don't think it is a matter of what it is that we are experiencing; it is much more a matter of how we are experiencing it, don't you agree? I think that's a very important distinction. Because it's natural for us to wish for only nice, pleasant experiences, and also it's natural for us to dislike the so-called bad experiences. This is a very basic pattern in our minds. When we have a nice experience we would like to maintain it somehow. As soon as an unpleasant experience arises we want to escape from it. This is a very basic function of our everyday mind. We grasp at what we like and we reject what we don't like.



What we experience in our daily life is not very much different from what we experience on retreat. What is different is the fact that on retreat we try to be fully aware of all the changes which are happening in our body and in our minds. In normal life we don't do that; our minds are usually occupied with what's going on around us and also occupied with creating pleasurable situations and escaping unpleasurable ones. But on retreat we don't have that possibility. You know, if you are fed up with sitting you can't just go out for coffee, or call your friends on the phone and chat with them. Here, when you are sitting, you sit until you hear the bell, and the bell sometimes seems very far away. So these are retreat conditions, on retreat we are facing ourselves. We don't escape. We don't run for pleasurable things and we don't run away from unpleasurable things. We are just where we are and we are facing these experiences, trying to understand them.

It is extremely important to understand all the experiences which arise in ourselves. If we just react to them whenever they appear, in a very predictable, habitual way, then nothing will change. We shall stay the same. We shall have the same kind of reactions to similar experiences forever.

But instead of blindly, unconsciously reacting to what arises in ourselves, we can turn our minds towards those experiences and look at them very, very closely without reacting. Just observe them, just allow them to come and go in the field of our awareness. In practice this is precisely what we do. Whether it is pleasant or not so pleasant, even when pain arises, we just allow it to appear in

the field of our awareness. Whatever appears we clearly know what it is, and we don't run in panic or we don't grasp at it. Instead of moving towards it or away from it, we just stay and observe. We try to be clearly aware of what it is.

Appreciate Difficulties

This is what is definitely different from our daily life, and this is what practice really means. This is a way in which we can discover things about ourselves, by stopping and deeply looking into ourselves. If we just run here and there escaping from this and grasping at something else, there is no way we can discover who we are, there is no way we can change ourselves.

Of course our life seems to be changing all the time. We're constantly having new experiences and we are tricked by that, thinking that life will change for the better, and of course we are very active in the sense that we are not just allowing experiences to come

to us but we are looking for them. But actually nothing is changing on the level of this basic pattern, whatever experiences come we always react in the very same habitual way. This is what imprisons us and precisely because of that we can't get outside of ourselves; we can't become different. If we want real change to happen we have to look at this basic pattern of ours. Whenever good experiences come, let them come, wonderful! When good experiences are gone, wonderful, they are gone. Whatever bad experiences are coming, wonderful! Bad experiences are coming! When they leave us, wonderful! They are leaving us.

This is how we learn about ourselves. This is how we learn what is underneath the surface of ourselves. This is how we go deeper and deeper into what we are, who we really are, by clearly observing and not following our usual reactive behavior. So instead of being reactive, we try to be creative. And in what way are we creative? Precisely in this looking closely, wanting to find out, wanting to see, wanting to discover.

So don't be discouraged with the difficulties you might experience. You should appreciate those difficulties in the same way you appreciate the pleasant things when they appear. And why? Because we should appreciate the practice first of all, and practice contains both of those things. Practice is not just about nice spiritual experiences. Practice is about looking deeply into ourselves and realizing who we are. But we can't look deeply if we are just reacting to whatever appears in our mind; running away or chasing after something.

Body, Mind, Drowsiness

Going back to difficulties in practice, we could say there are three groups of difficulties which usually appear in meditation. The first one would be everything which could bother us with the body. Then there is the mind group of difficulties which are wandering thoughts, not being able to concentrate, and not being able to apply ourselves fully to the method. Then there is drowsiness; I'm sure you have experienced that already? So these are the three main problems which trouble our practice and it is extremely important that we learn how to deal with them when they appear.

There is one general principle in meditation: whatever is not the method, don't treat it seriously. Everything except your method in practice, you treat as illusions. Whether they are bad experiences or nice experiences, you just look through them,

you're looking for the method. Where is the method? You just stay on the method. But I have to say that there are four things which ARE serious and which you have to pay attention to. What are they? First, if you are shaking because of a cold feeling in your body. The second one is if you feel very warm, if you have a temperature. These two things you shouldn't ignore, you should take care of them. The third thing is a very strong headache. If you have a really heavy headache then it's not right to continue with the practice, you have to take care of your headache somehow. The fourth thing is if there is pain going through your left arm upwards towards your heart; that is also something you definitely have to take care of. Everything else you should just treat it as illusory appearances which come and go. You don't pay any special attention to them, you just return to the method and stay with the method.

Dealing with Pain

Most people experience problems with the body. The biggest problem with the body is of course tension and pain. Pain is usually the result of the body being very tense. So how do we deal with that? Well I said it already, it's very simple, treat it as illusions. But that's sometimes very difficult to do, do because pain seems very real, when it's there. How can we say it's an illusion? We can feel it, it's there! But despite that, whenever pain arises it's usually because of tension in the body, or because we are just not used to such long sittings. As we sit for such a long time the muscles start to stretch, and as they stretch they bring this sensation of pain. Whenever that happens, first of all you should ignore it; just go back to the method. But if you can't ignore it, if it becomes overwhelming, then you can turn towards the pain and just observe it for a while. Don't stay with your method any more, instead turn your mind towards the pain and don't run away from it, look at it and come closer to it,

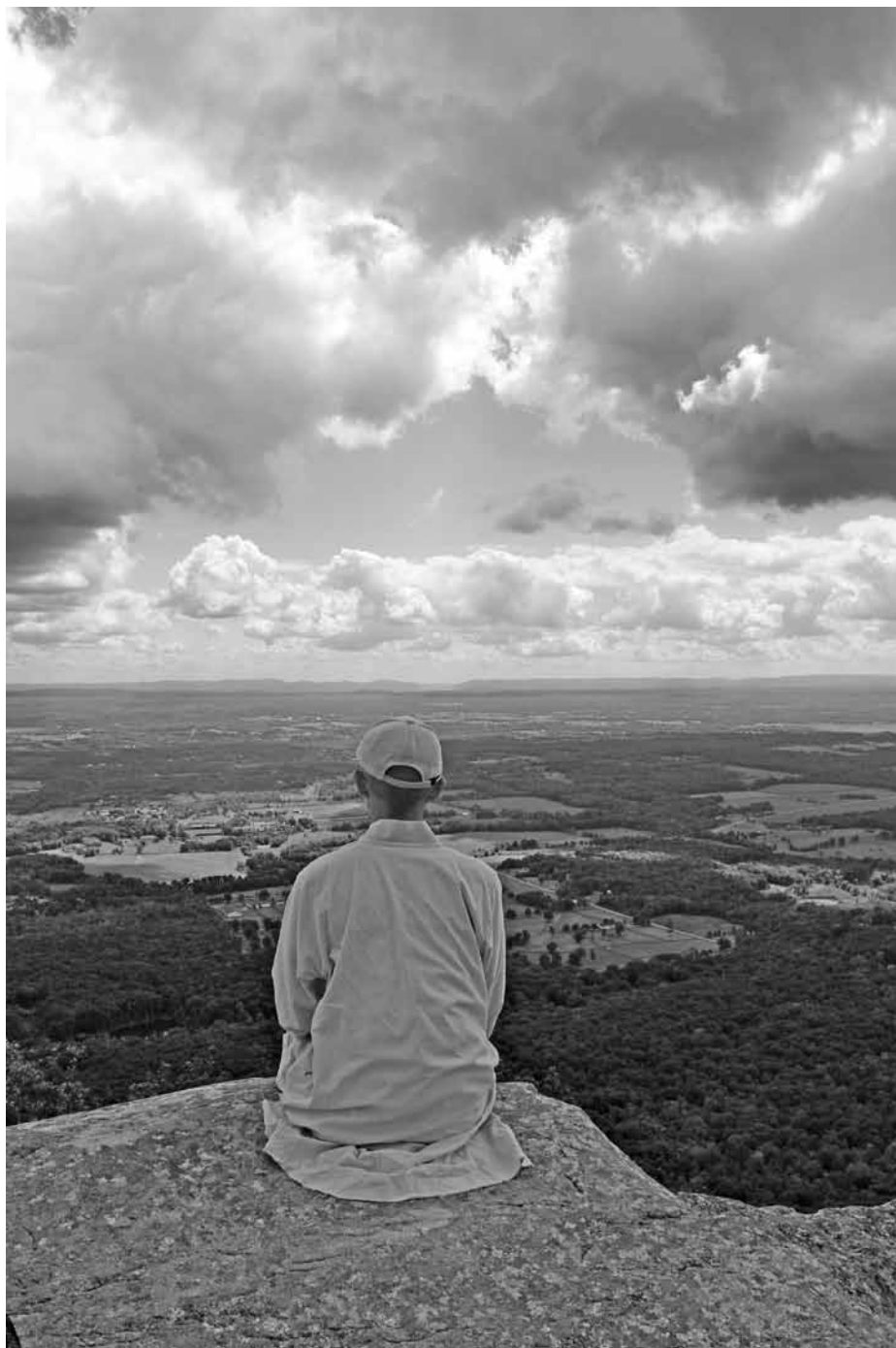


Photo by Taylor Mitchell

try to see what is it. What kind of pain is it? Is it sharp? Is it concentrated? Do you know what color is it? How does it look? Where does it arise? Is it constant or is it pulsating?

Don't give up immediately. If the pain does not subside, if it is still very strong and you can't go back to the method and you can't look at it anymore, then just relax your posture, stretch your legs and allow the pain to go away. Then come back into the sitting posture and continue.

There is not much point in enduring pain. We are not here doing ascetic practices, torturing ourselves. If you are thinking continuously "Oh I have to move, I shouldn't move, I have to move, I shouldn't move..." then you have moved already! Your mind already moved so there is not much point holding this position and being in agony. So just stretch your legs and allow the pain to go and then continue with practice. I'm sure you know there are additional ways of sitting when pain arises; you can just bring your body into this position (demonstrates the Guan Yin pose) and continue with the practice, and of course you can change with the other leg. So there are different ways of dealing with the pain. Knowing this, you can be quite relaxed, knowing that whatever arises, you have a way of using it and dealing with it and learning from it. This makes practice much more polite, but also interesting, it is not just this black and white situation.

Pain, Tension and Relaxation

So this is how we deal with the pain. Of course the nature of pain itself is illusory, there is no such thing as pain. Pain is a feeling which arises out of causes and conditions at a certain point and it does not stay the same; it is continuously changing and then it disappears. When these conditions change it disappears; so there is no one thing called pain. But

whenever pain appears, we have this impression that pain won't go away if I don't do anything. So then you start to be involved, you develop all kinds of strategies to avoid this pain and then you start to move your body, you do this, you do that, and you are not practicing! This is not what I said earlier, allowing pain to appear in the field of our awareness and then closely observing it. This is completely different, when you develop different strategies to avoid the pain you are back in this old pattern of yours, of grasping and rejecting and this is what makes the mind very tense.

When the mind is very tense, the body is very tense. When the body is very tense, of course pain is there. We created the conditions for the pain to be there. That's why the best remedy for pain is relaxation. Just completely relax your body and you will relax your mind. What does it mean to relax the mind? We know how to relax the body, what does it mean to relax the mind? We can relax the mind precisely by not grasping and not rejecting; this is what makes the mind relax. When we allow everything to appear and everything to go away, then the mind is relaxed. When the mind is relaxed, the body is relaxed. When the body is relaxed, there is no pain. You can sit for a very, very long time without any pain.

Wandering Thoughts

The second group of difficulties is wandering thoughts. What can we do about wandering thoughts? Nothing, really. We shouldn't really be bothered by them. It is completely natural and normal that wandering thoughts are there. This is just our own thinking mind which we trained so well that it can't stop, it just continues. Basically we shouldn't pay attention to those thoughts. We should just pay attention to our method of practice. If we confront those thoughts, if we create some kind of opposition towards them, then it will just be

more wandering thoughts. It's creating a conflict, and when conflict is there of course emotions arise and we end up in a very terrible inner state. So don't confront your wandering thoughts, don't oppose them, just allow them to be but don't pay attention to them. Consider it to be normal and just pay attention to your method.

You have to develop interest for the method, and our interest in the method should be much greater than our interest in what the wandering thoughts are offering to us. If this is the case, there is no problem, the mind will go in the direction we want it to go. In that way we will be more and more with the method and less and less with our wandering thoughts, and our mental scenery will change. This is extremely important in the practice, that this mental scenery through which we are passing is changing in that way. It's as if we start in cloudy and rainy and stormy weather, and as we continue with our practice the weather is changing. First there is no rain, then no clouds, then the blue sky appears and the sun comes out. This is how this mental scenery can change.

The basic principle in relation to the wandering thoughts is as I already said, not opposing them and not following them. We are ignoring them, in other words. And where do we put our minds? We put it on the method. The method is considered to be the only right thought. All other thoughts are wrong thoughts, however clever they appear, and however stupid they appear (we have the whole spectrum, I'm sure, in what we are thinking.) So just ignore them and go back to the method.

Drowsiness

What about drowsiness? That's a very heavy condition. This is how we feel when that condition appears [demonstrates] we just can't open our eyes. Our eyelids seem to be very heavy and our mind is

just sinking and sinking and sinking and sinking. In one moment we are awake and then we fall asleep, and then before our head falls on the floor we jerk back again [demonstrates] continuously like this. Sometimes the whole period can be this way; this is really exhausting. There are different ways to deal with this. First of all you have to make your posture very straight; you have to straighten your spine. Then you have to take a few deep breaths in order to bring the oxygen to the brain. And you shouldn't have closed eyes when you are sitting, your eyes should be half open, looking down at a 45° angle but not looking through them. We keep our eyes open in order for light to come in, not in order to look around.

If all of this doesn't work you can think about impermanence, you can think about the fact that the retreat is passing very fast and it is not very appropriate to spend it sleeping in a sitting. Or you can use a little bit more drastic measures; you can imagine that you are sitting on the edge of a cliff, something like where I am sitting here [on a high teacher's chair] can you imagine if I fall from here? You can imagine something dangerous like that, and that sometimes can keep us awake. If nothing works—this is what Master Sheng Yen usually says—then just go and sleep. Because really sometimes nothing works; we can be so exhausted physically that we just can't keep ourselves awake and then of course we need to rest. You know we have to give our body what it needs.

Getting Stuck

It is very easy to get stuck on something in our practice. Our mind is used to always being stuck. It can be something so simple as for example, swallowing; if you think that something is wrong with your swallowing, with the saliva, then you can be bothered so much that your whole practice can be spoiled. Almost insignificant things can attract



Photo by Taylor Mitchell

our attention and we can be stuck on them and not be able to proceed harmoniously with our practice.

Interviews are very important in the context of retreat, because in our conversation you can free yourself from those problems and your practice can develop harmoniously. I am encouraging you, these remaining days of the retreat, that whenever you have a problem you just come for an interview. In this way we shall be able to work together, and I am sure we will be able to somehow overcome all the problems which appear.

We have to work with ourselves on retreat, we have to work with whatever we find when we are facing ourselves. Whatever we find, this is our working material, it is not something to dislike, it is not something to suppress or hate or form some kind of a negative relationship towards. After all, this is US, you know? Whatever we face in our practice, this is who we are and there is no point in running away from it. We *can't* run away from it. However difficult that can be sometimes (because we can find ourselves in quite a difficult state, physically and mentally) there is no point in running away from it. Quite the opposite. We have to face ourselves. We have to find a way to deal with ourselves.

What is good about it, even in the case of very difficult situations, is that there is nothing fixed in ourselves. And this is something really wonderful, that there is nothing fixed and unchanging in

ourselves. Whatever situation we are in at the moment is something which we have created, and whatever is created can also be uncreated. This is why I give this constant reminder in our practice that you shouldn't worry about anything.

Piling Bad on Top of Bad

When we are worrying about the state that we are in, when we oppose the state we are in, we are actually creating another bad state on the top of the one which is already there. You see

that? You can feel very bad physically, or you can be in emotional distress, but once you realize this and then start to hate yourself because of it, that is another bad mental state on the top of the one already present. It is as if someone shot you with an arrow and then you shoot another arrow into yourself because you were hit. You see? It's completely pointless. But this is what we very often do to ourselves. Something

goes wrong and then we hate ourselves because of it. There is no use in doing that at all; we just make our situation worse and worse. Sometimes it's difficult to get out of this. It's like a vicious cycle which we enter into without even knowing how got there. And if we don't know how we created all this of course it's difficult to uncreate these states and situations.

So what do we do? I already said at the beginning of this talk that whatever state we find ourselves in,

we should appreciate it. This is our own creation, and we should appreciate that. At the same time we are appreciating it, in the midst of this situation we have to relax. Relaxing means actually accepting whatever is there. So, physically we relax, mentally we accept. We say, "Okay this is the state I am in. Fine. This is who I am at this particular moment. This is the result of my living which I am facing now." And of course we have to accept that.

Changing the World

By appreciating what we find, by relaxing and by accepting, we create a completely different internal atmosphere which is of such a quality that this state of body and mind, whatever it was, starts to melt down, starts to change. This attitude is extremely important, an attitude of appreciation, of acceptance, of fully relaxing in the midst of our own situation in which we find ourselves. If we can do that, the situation will drastically change. And once we see that our situation is changing, we develop confidence, we develop trust in ourselves and in the method of practice. Then we become very enthusiastic about engaging ourselves more deeply into the practice. You know, the whole world changes.

So I would like you to take seriously these words and try to apply them, try to apply this in your sittings and also outside of the sittings. This is extremely important, to accept ourselves, to appreciate the fact that we are in a position to face that, and to accept that, and to change that.

Normally in life people are not in such a position. Either they never met the Dharma or they live such busy lives that they don't have space to reflect on themselves in this way. Whereas all of us, we have met the Dharma and we are on retreat, we can actually use Dharma in order to understand ourselves. This is something

which we have to appreciate. If we think about these things in this way it would be very natural for us to appreciate this. This attitude is extremely important. It could be explained in a different word like "mood"; we have to change this mood in which we are practicing. This attitude definitely changes the mood and altogether we change the whole atmosphere in which we are practicing. Then everything which does not correspond with this new attitude and new mood just disappears, melts down, goes away.

Fertile Soil

This is how pain can leave our body. This is how wandering thoughts can leave our minds. This is how difficult emotions can just disappear. The presence of all these things is telling us that the atmosphere and the mood in which we are practicing is conducive for those things to be present. If you put the seed of some plant into land which is not fertile, it won't grow. If something is missing, water or light or warmth, if any of those conditions are missing the seed will die out, it won't give birth to the plant. For our minds, this attitude and mood is like a soil which is favorable to certain kinds of seeds; if it is conducive to the seeds of pain and wandering thoughts and negative emotional turbulence then these are the things which will grow.

So the first thing we can do is change our attitude and the mood in which we are practicing. This means of course we have to use and apply our method. Once we appreciate our whole situation and once we relax and accept ourselves, then we have to put our mind on the method. These are the basic steps with which we can change our situation, and open a completely new perspective, and build up confidence and faith in ourselves. We can see that what seems to be impossible, becomes possible and we are able to do it. In this way we develop

faith in the method, in the teaching, in the path itself. This is why we are here. All the time we have in this retreat is for us to do precisely that. There is nothing else you have to do here. You don't have a busy schedule, meeting with these people meeting, with those people, doing this job, traveling here, traveling there, nothing. We are here all day long in one place doing only one thing, following these steps.

Judging Progress and Looking for Results

When we work on a method there are several things which are very important to remember. The first thing is that you shouldn't judge your progress. You shouldn't judge yourself continuously wondering "Am I doing good? Am I doing wrong? Where am I now? What stage is this?" If you find out that you are not on the stage you think you should be, you'll be disappointed. And of course you can judge

yourself wrongly most of the time. Any kind of judgment is actually wandering thoughts, which just take us away from the method and from the practice itself. So don't judge yourself. Just practice for the sake of practice. Another thing is of course expectations; you can expect a lot from your practice. You took ten days off in order to come on this retreat so it's natural that you expect some results. But if you start to think about the results you will be very disappointed, because whenever you think about the results they never come. It is as simple as that, they never come. Any expectations and thoughts about the future are just ways of being absent, being not present right here and now.

This is something you have to be aware of: you have to see when you are practicing whether you are continuously commenting on your practice, continuously judging yourself, comparing this sitting with that sitting, this retreat with another retreat and so on. All these kind of activities are just wandering thoughts and something which separates us from the method. Thinking about the results is also something which separates us from the method, and this is not the way to use the method.

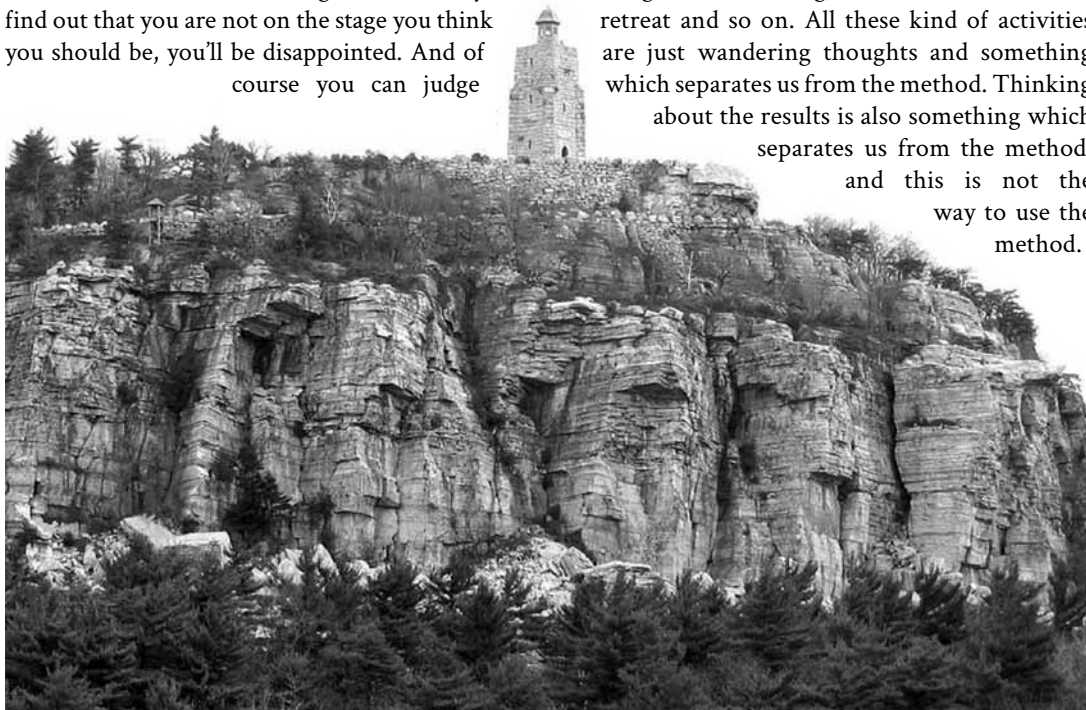


Photo by Papa Bear

In using the method we have to clear our minds of those extra things which we tolerate because they seem to be somehow connected with the method. We may think, "If I am looking at whether I am practicing well or not well, that's part of the method, so it's a good thing to do." Also it may seem that, if we are thinking about the results of practice, we're not thinking about being somewhere on the beach enjoying ourselves, we're actually engaged in the practice, so it seems a good thing to do. But actually it's not. It is something which separates us from practice. And when we realize we are doing it, we have to put it down. Just clear your mind and allow only the method to be in your mind. When we are following breath, it has to be just breathing, nothing else but breathing. There is nothing there to judge. All these thoughts about how you were doing before and how you are doing now, they are not breaths; they are not breathing. So instead of thinking, you have to experience the breath. Instead of conceptualizing about it, you just go directly to it and experience it, becoming one with it. This is very important.

Circling the Mountain

Another thing which is important about how we use the method is that we have to somehow adapt the method to our own state. You may ask, "But isn't that judgment? If I have to adapt the method to my present abilities I have to judge." But it is one thing to be aware where you are with your method, and another thing to be continuously thinking about it. Of course we know where we are when we practice, we know whether our mind is wandering or whether our mind is on the method. But we don't need to add some kind of qualification to that; we don't need to interpret it or start to think about it especially. This is just, the mind is on the method or it is not on the method, and you know it. If your mind wanders very often from the method then you might go a step back. If you are

following the breath you can go back to counting breath; use something stronger which will enable you to stay with the breath. Or if that doesn't work you can go back to just relaxing the body, and once you are relaxed you can go back to following the breath.

But again this doesn't mean that you change your method all the time; because if you are changing the method all the time you're going nowhere. It's like circling under the mountain. There are many roads leading to the top; when you take one road it seems difficult so you go back and take another road and that road is also difficult, so you come back and you take a third road, and you are circling around at the base of the mountain and not going anywhere near the top. It is essential that we stick to our method; but what I am suggesting now is just a slight adaptation to the circumstances which are changing, which can be changed by applying ourselves correctly to it.

So what is the hardest of these things I just described? What do you think is the most difficult to do? Attitude? Appreciation? Acceptance? Working on the method? Start in this order, it's very important that you start in this order. Just change the way you look at your practice and that will help you to accept, that will help you to relax. As when you relax and accept, you're already there; you've arrived. You know you are in the present moment; your breath is there. It's a very natural progression and will bring a lot of joy in your practice if you follow these steps. Joy is also an essential ingredient of the soil of our minds.

To close this talk I will just remind you of what I said at the very beginning: appreciate your practice. Whether it brings pleasant experiences, whether it brings unpleasant experiences, appreciate your practice, appreciate the difficulties and stay with your method. Continue with your method.



Painting by Tim Jundo Williams

C r o w s

It is of dubious merit, and yet
we claim it as our very own,
a private space in the universe;
what else but an unremitting self
can feel the weight of being-time?

We sojourn within the dream,
looking for the invisible gate
which stands 'twixt confusion
and the clear light of wisdom
that will settle all questions.

In the space between thoughts
do you not see, not perceive,
that within that space dwells
all that can be conceived,
all that has been forgotten?

And when crows gather at night
in the Bodhi Tree that stands
in far-far-off Bodh Gaya,
which among hundreds of them
is not crow, and which is not you?

Ernie Heau

For People Who Wish to Investigate Chan

Advice by
Master Lai Guo

Master Lai Guo (1881-1953) was one of the most important Chan masters of the 20th century. He presided over Gao Min Monastery in Yangzhou during one of the most difficult times in China. He was an associate of the famous reformer Master Hsu Yun (Empty Cloud). This talk was translated by Harry Miller, with help from Abbot Ven. Guo Xing, Jimmy Yu, and Lingyun Wang.

If someone investigates Chan, but lacks determination in daily life, then he will not be steadfast and his investigation will be short-lived. That is why it is not easy for people to learn the method of investigating Chan.

Chan is like a thin piece of paper. Tear it apart and it is gone. Chan is like the dust on a mirror. Wipe it clean and you can see (what is reflected). Chan is like a hand formed into a fist. Loosen your grip and where has it gone? Chan is like the center of a hollow plantain, scrape away the trunk and nothing is left.

Chan is like clouds and foggy mist, one sweep (of the wind) and they're gone. Chan is like a beautiful flower in the spring, a puff of wind and it falls off the branch. Chan is like ice in mid-winter, a blast of heat and it turns to water. Chan is like setting a torch to firewood, cover it and the flame goes out.

Chan is like the earth covered in darkness, the sun emerges and all is bright. Chan is like the illusory thoughts of sentient beings; with realization, illusion vanishes. Chan is truly "no understanding,"

with the Great Doubt, there is enlightenment. Chan is neither delusion nor enlightenment; once experienced, you know. Therefore, Chan is the seed of both sentient beings and Buddhas.

People do not easily see and realize (the true nature of things), because their (karmic) seeds give rise to body and mind, full of hatred, craving, joy, and anger, the way that a seed is nourished by water and soil, so (for those who do not awaken) the continuation of (these seeds) from time without beginning can never end.

Today - plan to gather the seeds, eradicate the roots, pluck the leaves, and pick the flowers and fruit, all at once all are empty. If you wish to behold the emptiness of sentient beings, you must first investigate Chan.

Chan is the seed of both sentient beings and Buddhas. Investigation is the tool that lets us destroy these seeds. Once the seeds are removed, (the perception and experience) of the self as well as (the perception of) others as (separate) sentient beings will perish without remainder. Once again, Chan (when held onto) is like a root obstruction.

Once the obstruction is gone, all Buddhas manifest. Know that the gap between sentient beings and all Buddhas is just one deluded thought. That thought is "Chan." Think through it.

Even all the Buddhas with complete wisdom do not know if there is any place where Buddhas do not reside. The "being" of sentient beings resides in our thoughts. So can it be that our deluded thinking at this moment is not far from the Buddhas? No. (Buddhahood) is not obtainable in terms of near or far. So according to this line of thinking, am I identical to the Buddhas and are the Buddhas the same as I? Still wrong! Even though sentient beings and Buddhas are not to be distinguished from one another, what does separate them is the word, "Chan." If you can smash through this barrier of Chan, then there will truly be no separation.

It is only "Chan" that separates sentient beings from Buddhas, so I hope that everyone in the world will clearly understand that they must investigate Chan today, investigate Chan tomorrow, investigate unrelentingly until you reach the goal of steadfastness and do not fall back until you straight away shatter the gate of Chan, then there are no Buddhas and no sentient beings. Continue to practice very hard, then (once again) there are Buddhas and sentient beings.

Searching throughout vast emptiness, pervading the dharma realms, all the Buddhas of the ten directions and the profane worlds are forever present. These two words "forever

present" mean firm and steadfast. Even though space is empty, it cannot be said to be truly empty; even though the earth is solid, it cannot be said to be always solid; even though sentient beings exist, they don't always exist, even though there are non-sentient beings, they cannot be said to be always without consciousness. The "forever present" is only attained by the self, but ultimately there is nothing attained in this self-attainment.

This is the great advice I extend to all over the world: when you put an end to the mind of attachment, then you put an end to (the idea of having) Chan; if you put an end to Chan, then you put an end to (the existence of) barriers, to do this you must investigate with a sense of urgency. If you dawdle, you will never have the wherewithal to break (any) barrier.

Therefore, investigate urgently, investigate without end, and investigate with determination and steadfast resolve. At long last you will shatter the barrier of your own mind. The barrier of the mind is precisely the barrier of Chan.



Master Lai Guo and Master Hsu Yun, date unknown

The Past

News from CMC, DDRC and DDMBA Worldwide

Big Events at DDRC

In the season just past DDRC hosted some of its biggest events of the year, each attended by more than fifty practitioners. In June Ven. Guoru led a 10-Day Intensive Chan Retreat. This was a first for him at DDRC, since his previous retreats at the center have been exclusively Huatou. He also led a study retreat called “A Flower with Five Petals: Studies in Chan Theory” offered in a 3-day English language session and a 3-day Chinese language session.

In July Ven. Chi Chern also led a 10-Day Intensive Chan Retreat. As usual on the last day of the retreat there was a charity sale of Ven. Chi Chern’s calligraphies. His new paintings this year include dual themes of tea and incense smoke. Several paintings were donated to CMC for their own charity fundraising.



Photo by Maria Balog

DDRC Monks in Europe

Ven. Chang Wen, Director of DDRC and Ven. Chang Xiang, resident teacher at DDRC travelled to Europe again this year to assist Ven. Chi Chern in leading several retreats. Ven. Chang Wen served as translator for two of the retreats and some lectures. They began with a retreat at the Plein-air House of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in Dluzew, Poland from August 1- 11. Next was a retreat at Haus Tao in Wolfhalden, Switzerland, from August 17-24. Finally, from August 25 to September 1, there was a retreat in England at Hourne Farm, East Essex, just an hour’s journey from London.

Guest Monks from Taiwan

While DDRC’s resident monks were traveling in Europe, DDRC was in the capable hands of two guest monks from Taiwan: Ven. Chang Shun, who is the Dean of Students at Dharma Drum Mountain’s Sangha University, and Ven. Yan Qing (originally from Malaysia), a 4th year student at the Sangha University. Ven. Chang Shun filled in as the interim kitchen supervisor, while Ven. Yan Qing served as the temporary director, both getting on-hand experience in running a retreat center.

During their visit they led the weekly Thursday Night Meditation group, giving Dharma talks and leading group discussions. They demonstrated the Chan Tea Ceremony at DDRC, at the DDMBA New Jersey Chapter, and for CMC’s Young People’s Gathering. They assisted with programs during DDMBA’s Family Chan Camp, and led a 2-Part Beginner’s Meditation Class.

Hiking Day

On August 17 the guest monks led the “Hiking with Monks” event. Forty-six practitioners followed the monks in a silent hike on the Eagle Cliff and Mohonk Lake Trail and the Sky Top Trail along the Shawangunk mountain range in upstate New York. Many of the participants stayed at DDRC the night before the hike, and again the night after, enjoying group meditation, informal discussions, and post-hike late pizza dinner.

Sky Top Tower is shown in the photo on page 26. The historic, scenic hike to Sky Top is perhaps the Shawangunks’ most popular outing at the 6,400-acre Mohonk Preserve. Sky Top Tower is the memorial erected for Albert K. Smiley, one of

the Quaker brothers who purchased the Mohonk property in 1869 and developed the first boarding house that eventually evolved into the present-day Mohonk Mountain House.

Family Chan Camp

DDMBA held their annual Family Chan Camp at DDRC this past August. The adults were led by Chang Hwa Fashi in various spiritual workshops on such topics as Inner Needs, Transformation and Purification, Compassion and Empathy, and the Art of Seeing. The teens were led by Chang Zhai Fashi and Facilitated by Alan Chang. They also participated in various workshops. In one they learned to be chef’s assistants and prepare a dish. In another they worked in DDRC’s garden after



Photo by Maria Balog



Ceremony for Tai Chung Monastery Construction

The morning of 30 June 2013 marked a momentous event in the history of Tai Chung Branch Monastery. The whole sangha of Dharma Drum Mountain, together more than four hundred lay supporters from the central Taiwan area assembled to place the central roof beam on the newly constructed monastery building.

The ceremony was led by Venerable Guo Dong, the Abbot President of DDM, Venerable Guo Yuan, Managing Director of Chan Practice Center and Venerable Guo Xing, Abbot of Chan Meditation Center and Dharma Drum Retreat Center in New York. Traditionally, the embedding ceremony signifies the offering of blessings for the smooth running of the monastery in the future. During the ceremony, seven treasures including

gold, silver and lapis lazuli, together with a scroll of the Heart Sutra as well as the Chinese calligraphy of the word Buddha (*fo*) handwritten by Master Sheng Yen (the items represent the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) were fastened to the central beam. It was then gradually raised and placed on the top of the Hall of Guan Yin in the new Tai Chung Branch Monastery.

This is a new milestone for the monastery since its ground-breaking ceremony on 9 January 2011. Upon the completion of the interior design, this 12-story building with three basement levels is expected to open in 2015. The Abbot President explained that the ceremony of securing the treasure symbolizes securing the Three Jewels extensively in the society so as to lead the public to return to the purity, wisdom and compassion of their Buddha nature and to rediscover the treasure within each and every one.



hearing a talk which presented the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Paths with the garden as a metaphor. They also learned to be kindergarten teachers, working with the children of the camp. The camp children weeded the garden and planted flowers, built a world out of modeling clay, and had a calligraphy lesson where they decorated paper lanterns and learned to paint a fish.

Everyone enjoyed the mild summer weather and the beautiful natural landscape at DDRC. Many enjoyed a trip to Storm King Art Center, an open-air museum in Mountainville, NY. One evening all watched the movie *The Pursuit of Happyness*. Another evening everyone sat around a bonfire. The last day came too soon, with the group photo, the closing ceremony, and a final tea ceremony. Then it was time to clean up and pack up until next year.

Photos by Ven. Chang Lin



10-Day Intensive Patriarch Chan Retreat

Huatou
and
Silent Illumination

Led by Guoru Fashi
a Dharma heir of Master Sheng Yen
February 7-16, 2014

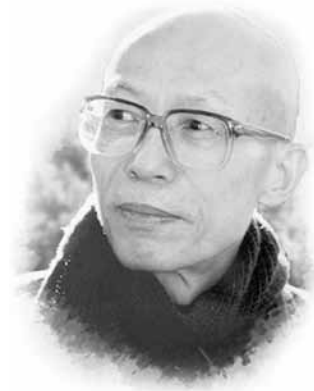
The Future

Retreats, classes and other upcoming events

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

“Zen & Inner Peace”

Chan Master Sheng Yen’s weekly television program
Now on ICN Cable
Channel 24.2 in NY
Fridays 6:45 pm - 7:00 pm



Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY (845) 744-8114 - ddc@dharmadrumretreat.org - www.dharmadrumretreat.org		
REGULAR WEEKLY ACTIVITIES		
Thursday Evening Meditation	7:00 pm –9:00 pm	Sitting, walking, moving meditation, Dharma talk.
RETREATS		
1-Day & Children’s Program	Saturday Oct 5	9:00 am–5:00 pm Led by Ven. Chang Wen
	Saturday Nov 9	
	Saturday Dec 14	
5-Day Western Zen Retreat	Oct 11-16	Led by Simon Child
3-Day Retreat	Nov 15-17	Led by Ven. Chang Wen
10-Day Intensive Silent Illumination Retreat	Nov 29-Dec 8	Led by Žarko Andričević
7-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat	Dec 26-Jan 1	Led by Guo Gu (Jimmy Yu)
SPECIAL EVENTS		
Gardening Weekend	Oct 26-27	Check www.dharmadrumretreat.org for details

Chan Meditation Center (CMC) in Elmhurst, Queens, NY

(718) 592-6593 - chancenter@gmail.com - www.chancenter.org - www.ddmba.org

REGULAR WEEKLY ACTIVITIES		
Monday Night Chanting	7:30 pm–9:15 pm	Last Monday of each month: Recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas’ names and repentance.
Tuesday Night Sitting Group	7:00 pm–9:30 pm	Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma sharing, recitation of the Heart Sutra.
Saturday Sitting Group	9:00 am–3:00 pm	Sitting, yoga exercises, video teachings by Master Sheng Yen
Sunday Open House	10:00 am–4:00 pm	See below
CHAN MEDITATION CENTER (CMC) SUNDAY OPEN HOUSE		
Sunday Schedule	10:00 am–11:00 am	Sitting Meditation
	11:00 am–12:30 pm	Dharma Talk
	12:30 pm–1:00 pm	Food Offering and Announcements
	1:00 pm–1:45 pm	Vegetarian Lunch
Chanting and Recitation	1st Sunday 2:00 pm–3:30 pm	Guan Yin Bodhisattva Chanting Service
	2nd Sunday 2:00 pm–4:00 pm	Great Compassion Repentance Ceremony Dharani Sutra
	3rd Sunday 2:00 pm–4:00 pm	Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra Chanting Service
	Last Sunday 2:00 pm–3:30 pm	Bodhisattva Precept Recitation Ritual
	(Please note: If there are five Sundays in the month, there will be a Guan Yin Bodhisattva Chanting Service on the 4th Sunday.)	
RETREATS (Pre-registration advised)		
1-Day Retreat	Oct 26	Saturday 9:00 am–5:00 pm Led by Nancy Bonardi
2-Day Thanksgiving Retreat	Nov 30-Dec 1	9:00 am–5:00 pm Led by Ven. Chang Wen
2-Day Reflection Retreat	Dec 28-Dec 29	9:00 am–5:00 pm Led by Ven. Chang Hwa
CLASSES (Pre-registration advised)		
Beginner’s Meditation Parts I & II	Nov 2 & 9	Saturdays 9:30 am–12:00 pm Led by David Slaymaker
Intermediate Meditation Class	Oct 5 Nov 23	Saturdays 9:30 am–12:00 pm Led by Rebecca Li
Dharma Drum for Young People (DDYP) Gathering	Every 3rd Saturday except otherwise noted	2:30 pm–5:00 pm. Buddhists and non-Buddhists ages 18-35 are welcome!
Taijiquan with David Ngo	Thursdays	7:30 pm–9:00 pm \$25 per 4-week month—\$80 for 16 classes First class is free for newcomers
SPECIAL EVENTS		
Film Viewing and Discussion	Oct 20 Dec 15	2:00 pm–5:00 pm Led by Dr. Peter Lin; check website for film description.

Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

Local organizations affiliated with CMC and DDMBA provide a place to practice with and learn from other Chan practitioners. If you have questions about schedules, activities or publications you may find useful information at one of our affiliates near you.

NEW YORK - USA HEADQUARTERS			
Chan Meditation Center (CMC) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) • Dharma Drum Publications • Chan Magazine 	90-56 Corona Avenue Elmhurst, NY 11373	(718) 592-6593 Fax: (718) 592-0717	ddmbausa@yahoo.com www.chancenter.org www.ddmba.org
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Dharma Drum International Meditation Group	Contact: Antonio Saturdays, 2:00 – 5:00 pm Jiantan Practice Center	02-2893-4646 ext. 6504	contact@ddm.org.tw www.ddm.org.tw
Nung Chan Monastery	No. 89, Lane 65, Tayeh Road Peitou, Taipei	02-2893-3161 Fax: 02-2895-8969	
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The hundred rivers flow to the ocean, the thousand mountains face the loftiest peak.

- Hongzhi Zhengjue

7-Day Chan Meditation Retreat “Silent Illumination”

February 2-9, 2014

Felsentor, Vitznau, Switzerland

Led by Žarko Andričević, a Dharma heir of Master Sheng Yen

For more information contact Hildi Thalman | info@chan-bern.ch | www.chan-bern.ch



Bodhidharma taught that we are intrinsically free from vexations and afflictions, and our true nature is already perfect and undefiled. *Two Entries and Four Practices* is one of the few texts that Bodhidharma composed. This short scripture contains the marrow, or essence, of all his teachings. Chan teacher Guo Gu offers a translation of this significant text, as well as an elaboration on the teachings on life and practice that it presents, which reflect the essence of Chan itself.



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eBook available online: <http://www.shambhala.com/the-essence-of-chan.html#>