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“Today, there are over five billion people in the world, but not many of them have heard the Dharma, and few actually know about Buddhism. Fewer still have been trained in Chan practice. I myself am not some kind of extraordinary teacher, but if you’re looking for a teacher like me to guide Chan practice, there are only a handful left in the whole world. The Chan Meditation Center has limited space, and its facilities and environment leave much to be desired, but there are few Dharma centers in North America that can serve as the venue for an intensive Chan retreat. So you are all actually a minority of a minority, and should count yourselves lucky to have the opportunity to hear about and practice the Dharma. So in the coming week, whether it’s pain or pleasure, just accept it in a mindset of appreciation and enjoyment.

Among all sentient beings, only those that possess a human body can cultivate the Buddhist Path and achieve enlightenment. A ‘smelly sack of skin’ we might be, but we still need to use our body for spiritual practice. Our physical body is the best vehicle for practice. Everyone, please work on your method whole-heartedly. Your only concern is to give your body to the meditation cushion, and your mind to the method. A Chan retreat is like a war. For the duration of the retreat, you are all brave warriors on the field of battle. But superior warriors are masters of their emotions, unhurried, and deliberate. By maintaining calm and clarity, and conserving your energy, you can definitely win this war.”

— Chan Master Sheng Yen  
*From a retreat at the Chan Meditation Center  
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# *Be a Buddha in Mind, Speech, and Action*

by

*Chan Master Sheng Yen*

This Dharma talk was given by Master Sheng Yen to the Meditation Group at Nung Chan Monastery at Dharma Drum Mountain in Beitou, Taiwan, on March 5, 1995. It was included as a chapter in the book, *Key to Chan* (禪鑰), published in Taiwan. The lecture was translated by Chiacheng Chang and Robert Dougherty. The English version was edited by Ernest Heau.



Photo by Jerry Roach

To be a buddha in mind, speech, and action is to be a buddha in everyday life – in our thoughts, our gestures, our every word and deed. Many people study Chan to illuminate their mind, see their true self-nature, become enlightened, and attain buddhahood. But where is the Buddha in all this? The Buddha is in our self-nature, in the mind of every one of us. As the saying goes, “The Buddha is in the mind; lead not a life in vain.” Since we believe that the Buddha exists in our mind, it would be such a shame to waste our time, going through life dazed and confused. So we should apply ourselves diligently every day.

Some people think once they become enlightened and attain buddhahood, everything is taken care of; they will have great ease, great blessings, and great wisdom. As a result, they are always waiting expectantly and dreaming: “I hope I can become enlightened and attain buddhahood soon!” Such people have no idea about how to really do spiritual practice. Many people seeking enlightenment think it’s probably best to go all-out and meditate as much as possible, that as long as they make some progress, they can illuminate the mind, see self-nature, become enlightened, and attain buddhahood. In itself, this thinking is not particularly wrong. Before attaining buddhahood under the Bodhi Tree, Shakyamuni Buddha spent quite a long time practicing meditation in the Uruvilva Forest, a gathering ground for ascetics in the Himalayas.

The World Honored One had to make his way as best he could for such a long time because Buddhism had not yet appeared, and there was no one to expound to him the doctrine that there is a buddha in everyone. No one told him about the impermanence of conditioned phenomena, in which there is no self to be found; no one taught

him that those who are born suffer because they don’t realize that all dharmas are without self. Being unaware of impermanence and no-self, they cling to life and fear death, harbor hatred and jealousy, and thus cannot illuminate the mind and see self-nature. But today we do know about the Dharma. The World Honored One spent so much time to reveal the truth of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, and no-self. Knowing that all sentient beings possess buddha-nature, we don’t need to spend so much time, because Buddhism tells us that we need only believe the Buddha’s teachings, and apply them in our daily life. That’s why the Chan school puts so much emphasis on the experience and practice of the Dharma in everyday life.

When we take refuge in the Three Jewels and learn to use the Dharma, we are already embarked on the great Bodhi Path of perfection. We already know the methods and concepts of Buddhist practice, though we still lack skill in actual practice. So we need to practice more in accordance with the Dharma and follow the teachings. That means we should accept and uphold the Buddha’s teachings, and continue to exert energy and effort. Before attaining the Path, practitioners need not spend six years sitting in meditation like the World Honored One, in order to illuminate the mind and see self-nature. The Chan school holds that as long as we follow the Buddha’s teachings and constantly put aside the attachments of self, this can be accomplished here and now.

So the Buddha taught that our own mind is buddha-mind, and if our buddha-nature fails to manifest, it is only because our buddha-mind is obscured by our afflictions, so we only see afflictions and not bodhi. Nonetheless, when



we take refuge in the Three Jewels, learn about Dharma, and keep the Three Jewels forever in mind, we are in accord with buddha-mind.

As for being a buddha in speech, the words of the Buddha are words of wisdom, compassion, gentleness, comfort, encouragement, and praise; they are words of guidance and education, words that influence and inspire. What about our own words? If we learn and practice the Dharma, we may still have afflictions and not realize bodhi, but at least we know that in the sutras, the Buddha spoke in the words of the people. Since we know that, why can't we follow him and do the same? But people have many excuses; they say they have so many afflictions and heavy karmic obstructions, or they haven't illuminated their mind, their wisdom eye remains unopened. So they can't possibly be like the World Honored One and the great bodhisattvas, using words of wisdom, compassion, gentleness, comfort, encouragement, praise, guidance, and education; words that influence and inspire, words of gratitude. These are actually all ways we pardon ourselves for our misdeeds and avoid blame. What we should do, we don't really feel like doing, and have no great desire to do. So much of what we say, without thinking, is coarse and crude, encourages discord, is deceptive or frivolous, and is rarely the language of the Buddha, violating the principle that the Buddha is in our speech.

So the Buddha is in our mind, and the Buddha is in our speech. At the same time, the Buddha is also within our actions. Even if we are already enlightened, have illuminated the mind and seen self-nature, we should still act like the Buddha. Therefore, practicing Buddhism should mean emulating the Buddha's mental,

verbal, and physical behavior. To constantly do this is to practice Buddhism in the truest sense. Otherwise, if we merely sit in meditation imitating the Buddha, that's learning about sitting, not learning about the Buddha, and is not consistent with the Dharma. If we want our actions to be in harmony with the Dharma, then we need to express Dharma in our daily life. Our everyday behavior should aspire to the Four All-Embracing Virtues – giving, speaking kindly, helping others, and cooperating. We should also practice the Six Paramitas of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom. That way we are doing our best to benefit ourselves, others, and all sentient beings. That's what emulating the behavior of the Buddha and bodhisattvas really means.

If we don't examine our daily behavior and have no definite standards for the three modes of activity, we create disaster for ourselves while also creating afflictions for other people. This would be far from a life emulating the Buddha. Are we acting hastily and thoughtlessly from morning till night? Is our every act benefiting others or only ourselves? Actually, if we can truly benefit ourselves, we might influence future events that also benefit others.

In Chan monasteries there's not much time to practice sitting meditation, as significant time is devoted to work. Sitting in meditation and listening to Dharma talks mostly take place in the morning and evening. Monastics get up quite early and go to sleep quite late. "Work from sunrise and rest at sunset," living more like a farmer, has been a Chan tradition since Master Baizhang Huaihai (720-814) of the mid-Tang Dynasty. Chan monasteries of that era were built in the mountains, and monastics spent time

everyday cultivating crops up in the hills. Such work came to be known as *chu po* ("going up the hills"). Everyone, from the abbot down to all resident monastics, even novice monks and lay practitioners, was supposed to go up the hills. Everyone participated in a communal form of work known as *pu qing* ("universally invited").

Daily work in the fields was part of cultivating benefits to self and others, making the sangha self-sufficient, while developing harmony through mutual support and cooperation. With communal effort and sharing, they supported the monastery and sustained the Three Jewels, so that genuine Dharma could abide in the world, and the Buddha's light forever shine on us. So this labor service was indispensable in a life of Chan

cultivation. Even today, working also takes up a good portion of a normal day at Japanese Zen and Korean Son monasteries, while not much time is allocated for sitting in the meditation hall. Nonetheless, they do several seven-day meditation retreats a year, called a "meditation period," otherwise known as *jie xin* ("connecting with the mind"), or *she xin* ("collecting the mind"), for intensive sitting meditation, setting a time frame to attain realization.

In China there were two such periods of retreat: one during the harsh winter when the ice can be three feet thick, and the mud in the fields frozen as solid as a rock. Since it's not possible to work in the fields, they stay inside and practice sitting meditation during this period of winter



Master Dongchu and disciples harvesting at Nung Chan Monastery

retreat. The other period is during the heat of summer when the sun is fierce, and the time suitable for working the fields is extremely short. If you want to work, you can only do a little bit in the morning or late afternoon. Summer also has more frequent thunderstorms and showers, and more worms and ants burrowing in the soil, making farming more troublesome. Chan practitioners thus developed a Chan practice method similar to the ancient summer retreat. In India there is a rainy season retreat from mid-April to mid-July, and according to local custom, monastics are not allowed to travel about spreading the Dharma.

But today, society has moved away from agriculture to industry and commerce, so no matter the season, people can work in a heated or air-conditioned environment. And they can work day and night. The environment and conditions at a modern Chan monastery and the lifestyle of modern Chan practitioners is different from the past. To adapt to modern lifestyles, attract, and benefit most lay practitioners who come to Chan monasteries to practice on weekends, we have Sunday Chan meditation groups. Our seven-day meditation retreats, whether in Taiwan or the United States, are always coordinated with school summer and winter vacation schedules, and long holiday weekends. Although working people don't have summer and winter vacations, they have their own annual leave, so we encourage them to use their vacations to participate in seven-day Chan retreats.

When do the monastics at Nung Chan Monastery engage in Chan practice? We try to schedule seven-day retreats for monastics to coordinate with most of our lay member's vacation schedules. We also organize

Bodhisattva Camps for monastics. Normally, we only have sitting meditation sessions in the morning and the evening. During the day we're all taking or giving classes, doing administrative work, and attending meetings, contributing to our practice center, to laypeople, and to our country and society, working to benefit others and ourselves, and sharing and supporting the Dharma. We're certainly not sitting all day in meditation! In this kind of living environment, the monastics apply the guidelines of Chan teachings in their daily lives.

We practice Chan with an attitude that actualizes the idea that Buddha is in our mind, our speech, and our actions. While monastics prepare vegetables, wash dishes, carry bowls and pans, set up tables and chairs, sweep the courtyard; drive, clean, and wash the car; operate computers, use calculators, write articles, take or give classes in Chan, publish books and magazines, they also experience unity of body and mind, purity of word, thought, and deed. They are also emulating the compassion, wisdom, aspirations, and practices of the Buddha. Although the tasks may appear similar to most work in our society, our intention is never the pursuit of fame, gain, and material desires. In performing these tasks, we seek to emulate the Buddha and practice the Dharma, as well as contribute our time. We use this method of cultivation to help sentient beings and benefit our monastery, which helps us on our own path to enlightenment.

The three aspects of benefiting sentient beings, benefiting the monastery, and helping us on our path to enlightenment, represent the Chan saying, "be useful in daily life." Since Buddha is in our everyday life, even if we have not yet seen our self-nature and illuminated the

mind, not yet become enlightened and attained buddhahood, we have heard the Buddha's teaching. So we use it as a standard for our deeds, words, and thoughts, reflecting the idea that "the Buddha is in our mind, our speech, and our actions." When our thoughts, words, and deeds are not consistent with the Dharma, we should feel great shame and repent sincerely.

In our practice, "Chan" and "Buddha" should have the same meaning. Chan consists of the concepts and methods to help us illuminate our mind and see our self-nature, to become enlightened, and to attain buddhahood. Therefore the mind of Chan is equivalent to the mind of Buddha: "the Buddha is in our minds, the Buddha is in our speech, the Buddha is in our actions." That means using Chan in our daily life.

What the lineage masters of the ancient Chan schools spoke of as "the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West" refers to the mind of the Buddha, his words, and his deeds as revealed in daily life. When our every act and every thought reveal the Buddha's compassion and wisdom, then that is real cultivation.

I now ask you: When you are arguing with someone, where is the Buddha? When you are sulking, where is the Buddha? When you are working, where is the Buddha? When you are resting or sleeping, where is the Buddha? At those times, are you hiding the Buddha away somewhere, or is the Buddha clearly an integral part of your life? Please be forever asking yourself: Where is Chan? Where is the Buddha?



*Master Sheng Yen and disciple cultivating the garden at the Chan Meditation Center.*



# What a Splendid Life

by

Venerable Guo Ru



Photo by Lan Xu

This article is taken from the book, *Knocking Gently on the Door of Chan*, published by Chan Grove, Venerable Guo Ru's temple in Taiwan. This lecture was given on the final day of a retreat that took place at the Dharma Drum Mountain affiliate center in Taoyuan, Taiwan, in May, 2011. The book was translated by I Jung Fan. Lisa Shen, Echo Bonner, Ernest Heau, and Harry Miller prepared the English manuscript for publication.

Everything in the world manifests as formation, continuation, decline, disintegration, impermanence, arising and perishing. As Buddhists we should see in all impermanent phenomena the original face of neither arising nor perishing. It doesn't mean that we negate the causes and conditions of these fluctuating phenomena, but that we have to see the ultimate reality of permanence in everything that seems to come and go, and to cherish the causes and conditions of each and every phenomenon. Therefore, I would like to repeat some advice here. First, don't become trapped in words. I constantly remind people to just practice diligently. There was once a practitioner

on retreat who was assigned to take care of the bonsai plants. He sat there attentively trimming a small plant little by little. Three days passed and he didn't finish trimming even one bonsai. I told him that what he was doing was not practice but being trapped in words; he was trying to remove all distractions from the present thought, and focusing on what was happening without deluded ideas and discrimination. In fact, though he was engaged in the practice, it is just the preliminary measure. While our minds are badly distracted, we need this measure to concentrate. However, in dealing with everyday matters, if we act at a snail's pace like this fellow and fail to take everyone and everything into consideration with insight, how can we live in this world? If all Buddhists behaved that way, no one would want to learn the Buddha's teachings.

True concentration refers to clearly knowing what is happening without speculating on the future with personal discrimination and attachment or clinging to the past. If your job is to cut the grass, just do it; if it is to trim twigs, just do it; whatever your task is, just do it with wisdom. Don't mistake this for discrimination. Don't make a fool of yourself after learning the Dharma. Instead, you should become wiser, make good use of what you've learned or experienced and attentively do your duty as well as possible.

As we face situations in daily life, besides keeping a peaceful mind, we need wisdom with which to see clearly. We had better not be controlled by emotions or consciousness in a fluctuating mind, but try to see things with a simple mind or one-mind. You are on the right track if, in the process, you don't get caught up in personal views, discrimination or moods, but simply know what to do and try your best. As

to the result, it doesn't matter whether it meets your expectations. This way you truly live in the present moment.

Given the causes and conditions in a certain time and space, you have tried to cherish and make the most of them, so you don't have to care about the result or strive for something better. There's no need to compare with others or yourself. Once trapped in comparison, your mind gets entangled in discriminations, attachments and arguments. Under these circumstances, how can you concentrate on the present job or practice? Moreover, it will take more effort later on to deal with a situation that you did not attend to properly in the first place.

When our mind becomes calm, we see that so-called differences and conflicts derive from our own discrimination and the failure to act with wisdom. For example, I'm observing the bonsai on the desk; I see plants, stones and dead wood, which are all arranged artistically. But without wisdom one may see nothing but some grey stones and decayed trees. Our consciousness is easily caught in discrimination and argument. The problem is that there are always discriminated phenomena that we long for. That's why we suffer a lot. If we can let go of discriminated forms and see them as a whole, what is present in front of us is harmonious and beautiful. At the same time we see different forms in the whole and appreciate the artistic arrangement of these forms. Seeing this way, we can find the bonsai full of life. This is a perfect world, a perfect universe.

We not only experience suffering, emptiness and impermanence, but we also find life's eternity, happiness, self and purity. We need wisdom to

do so. Whatever we see or encounter, we should first go beyond the differences and duality among phenomena and discover equality, harmony and unity in life. And then in the harmony and unity we skillfully see the differences, with which we enrich and harmonize our lives.

Life is full of various changes. That is its true face. Therefore, arising and perishing are also perfect forms in the world. Imperfections are part of the perfect life. In other words, without them life wouldn't be perfect. Do you get it? But how to make life perfect with all its imperfections depends on skill and clarity of mind, which comes from seeing with wisdom. Take the art of the Japanese Zen garden for example: there are neither trees nor lawn in the garden, only gravel which is raked daily by monastics to create the visual effect of ripples. Sitting on the deck and appreciating this simple landscape with no arising thoughts, we won't feel bored but

find the diversity and beauty of life. The subtler and more concentrated the mind is, the fewer deluded and discriminating thoughts there will be. And aesthetic sensibilities will be pervasive in the mind. Even a dead leaf will be seen as the manifestation of splendid and perfect life; listening attentively, we will hear it whispering its experience of all the beauty in life without regrets. True life is free and easy like that. If we can exceed our own physical and mental limits to experience everything around us, the universe, or even the dharmadhatu, we will see why the Buddha said that life is infinite. Then why do we have to narrow our focus and argue about trifles? Even if we haven't thoroughly penetrated into the reality, as long as we see the world with selfless wisdom, give up personal views to eliminate discrimination, and then see the perfect, harmonious and unified whole, we will discover how rich and splendid life is!



Photo by Jerry Roach

# *The Arising of Conditioned Appearance from the True Mind*

## *Part 5*

by

*Abbot Venerable Guo Xing*

This is the fifth in a series of articles taken from Dharma talks given by Abbot Venerable 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.

How do we, amidst the realm of phenomena, find the mind which is formless? Where is the formless mind? Both methods of huatou and silent illumination share a common principle, which is to find the formless mind amidst the realm of phenomena. But the true mind is not something to be seen by you. When you are searching, everything that is seen by you is phenomena, not the mind. The true mind which has the function of cognition and awareness presides everywhere at all times. But we often mistaken whatever is seen by us, heard by us, and thought of by us, as the true mind.

When investigating the huatou, "What is 'Wu'?" we are in fact looking for this true mind. It's the same with investigating, "Who is reciting Buddha's name?" Buddha's name is what's being recited. Then who is that mind that has the ability to recite? What is it? [That huatou] is a means

Where  
is  
the  
formless  
mind  
?



to look for the mind. Also, during breaks, when the body is taken to the washroom, we call it “dragging the corpse.” What is it that is dragging the corpse to the washroom? When you find it, it is enlightenment.

You say, “Wow, I’m so tired.” “You are tired” is the object/phenomenon that is being perceived. What is it that can perceive the phenomenon of being tired? You say, “I cannot investigate anymore. I cannot go on anymore.” Are [the thoughts of] “not able to continue investigating” and “not able to go on” phenomena or are they the mind that can

perceive? When you feel a lot of pain in your legs, what is it that can perceive that the legs are in pain? Would the true mind feel pain? No. So when you are in pain, then you investigate what it is that does not suffer from the pain.

There may also be times when you feel very calm and peaceful. Is it your true mind? No. When you feel scattered and disoriented, is it your true mind? When you feel scattered, does the true mind still exist? It does. Do you need to get rid of wandering thoughts before proceeding to search for the true mind? There is no such need. This is because, even in the state of chaos,



Photo by Ernie Heau

the true mind is still in there. So, this is something we can practice/investigate at all times.

When there remains an object for which you search, you will not be able to find the true mind. In fact, we are trying to use the mind that has the ability to search, to search for the mind that has the ability to search. We should not try to use the mind that has the ability to search to search for some other searchable object. Whatever is being perceived by you is not it. In other words, you need to find out. Through the process of searching, you continue to pare down all the dualistic functions of the mind. At the end, the non-dualistic mind will emerge.

It’s the same with the method of silent illumination. The third stage of silent illumination is “contemplating totality.” You can become aware of the breaths. You can become aware of sensations, such as soreness, pain, itchiness, and numbness. You can become aware of thoughts. But the true mind is not some thought that can be perceived or known. It is not the same as the breaths that are perceived by you. Nor is it the same as the sensations that are perceived by you. Then, what is the true mind? What you can know is that the true mind is none of those objects/phenomena. That is why silent illumination is also a *huatou*. The only difference is that it’s not done through “asking” *per se*. When you are contemplating (using the method), you need to watch whether the mind is grasping and whether it’s dwelling in any particular state. The true mind is formless, and you find out what it is.

When we are experiencing leg-pain or having a lot of wandering thoughts, we tend to treat it as an object. What if we don’t regard the

leg-pain as an object, then how should we deal with it? Do you ever say, “It’s all good whatever type of pain it is”? If so indeed, this is called “the mind does not reject any one phenomenon/dharma.” You do not reject any sort of pain. At the same time, “the mind does not grasp onto any one phenomenon”—don’t turn it into something you like, either! Similarly, even if you have a lot of wandering thoughts, there is no need to reject or get rid of them. At the same time, do not interact with them. All you have to do, amidst the many wandering thoughts, is simply to observe whether the mind is trying to grasp onto anything or to reject anything.

Under any circumstance, thoughts manifest according to their own causes and conditions. Our present mind does not come in contact with any of these thoughts. It’s just like images appearing in the mirror. When there’s a red object appearing in front of the mirror, the mirror becomes red. But once the object is gone, the red color disappears as well. Similarly, your mind is always like that. It does not grasp onto any one phenomenon/dharma; at the same time, it will never reject any one phenomenon/dharma, either. If you have a lot of wandering thoughts, you neither reject them nor grasp onto them. You don’t do either of those. Phenomena come and phenomena go, just like the relationship between the mirror and the images it reflects.

Remember, the true mind is non-dualistic. It is not an object/phenomenon. Then, you have to look and find out.

*(To be continued)*

# Being With

by

Simon Child

This article describes some common misunderstandings that arise among practitioners, and explains the correct attitude one should have towards thought in meditation. It is taken from a Dharma talk given on the fourth morning of a 10-day Intensive Silent Illumination retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, May 23 to June 1, 2014.



Photo by Simon Child

## Common Misunderstandings

Yesterday everybody had an interview. One of the purposes of interview is to respond to your questions. Perhaps we also need to respond to the questions you didn't think of asking because you thought you knew (but you were wrong.) We [the interviewing teachers] were looking out for some common misunderstandings. Some of them are so common we don't really have to look for them; we can just assume they're there, and yesterday you didn't let us down.

There are two common misunderstandings I want to mention. One is, those who've read perhaps too much (or maybe they've not read quite enough.) They've not understood what they've read, but they've picked up ideas and pointers, and then they think they *know*, and they follow this sense of knowing and delude themselves further. We hear people saying things like: "The task of my practice is to get rid of myself. I am a delusion, I am not here." or, "You are a delusion, you're not there." or, "I don't need to face this problem, it's all imaginary." This is a person who's read something about emptiness and thinks they know what it's about, they are making themselves more confused.

There is actually quite an easy remedy for someone who believes they don't exist. You say, "Oh, that's great! So please now stop taking your share of the food; there will be more for others to eat." Some try and brave that out, and pretend it's okay, because it's in the future. They don't actually have to commit to it until the next meal, they've got thinking time left. Another approach is: I can pick up the stick and say "I've seen a delusion on that chair and I want to beat it away. You don't mind, do you?"

Certainly there is a teaching about no self, no mind, emptiness. But it's one that is easy to misunderstand. So be wary of being caught in your own cleverness. You've read something, you believe you've understood it but you haven't, and you are creating difficulties for yourself. For example if you believe that situations in your life don't need to be confronted because they're delusions, you are setting yourself up for a life that's more painful than necessary. We need to respond to the demands of life.

## Awareness of Thought

Another common misunderstanding is: how we handle *thought* in the practice. This is revealed by people who state that the purpose of their practice is to empty the mind and get rid of thought, to have a blank mind. Some people take this to quite the extreme. Yesterday somebody told me their strategy was to have an ax ready for each time a thought appeared: cut off the thought. On a previous retreat, someone gave me a very clear image of his practice. He was watching a rabbit hole waiting for the thought to appear, and the moment the thought appeared, he was ready—with his machine gun. [*laughter*] That's a true story. This wasn't a teaching he got from me, though.

This reveals an attitude that thought is somehow bad, it's in the way, it shouldn't be there. "It's rather a nuisance, it's disturbing my mind!" It's easy to see where this mistake comes from; again it's really just being a victim of our own cleverness. When we start off with practice we are taught methods of calming the mind. We experience for ourselves how a mind which has very many thoughts tumbling over each other can indeed, through training, become a mind

with much fewer thoughts. So it's natural that we extrapolate, and think "obviously the objective is to have NO thought! So I will get myself there! I will get rid of the remaining thoughts!"

We might hear people talk of experiences of indeed having no thoughts, and this confirms our sense of "to be a better practitioner we must get rid of every thought." No. That's too extreme an extrapolation. Indeed we do have practices to calm the mind, and they may involve cutting thought off to some extent by limiting the awareness, focusing on a single point. We narrow the awareness and thereby cut off "awareness of" of the thoughts. Do we really cut off the thoughts? Or do we just cut off awareness of them? See, there is maybe the first trap—if we narrow the mind down, it can *seem* as though there are no thoughts. But maybe we're just overlooking them, because we're not looking at where they are. We've trained ourselves to focus intently on our object of practice, and we get good at it, so we're training ourselves to overlook what else is going on.



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This is a very useful start to practice, when you have a mind that is so wild, full of thoughts and videos of all sorts, you know that experience. You can't really engage in much practice until it's calmed down to some extent. So there are various methods to help it calm down. But the extrapolation was incorrect. Even though people may have the experience of no thought (and some of you have had that experience) that doesn't mean that's your destination. Here is a somewhat different interpretation: The purpose of calming the mind is so that you can become very clearly aware of what IS there. And that's a different endpoint, isn't it? It's not cutting off, denying, overlooking or avoiding. It's saying "this mind is somewhat calmer now; I can really see what's going on. Before, I couldn't see the beginning, middle, and end of a thought; they overlapped too much, and crowded each other out. And now, with this mind that is somewhat calmer, I can observe the process of thought. I can see indeed how a thought has a beginning, a presence, and an end. I can see that thoughts are transient" and so on.

## Investigate the Mind

So you can investigate the nature of thought, the nature of mind, when the mind is calmer. This is not something you can do if you've cut the mind off, trained yourself to ignore it. You then don't have that opportunity to observe the mind and see how it works. So these are two different ways of developing the understanding of practice, and the first one, the extrapolation "my task is to get rid of thoughts as completely and as quickly as possible" is a misunderstanding. I would put forward the alternative which is: when you've calmed the mind sufficiently, you're in a position to investigate the mind.

Remember again these two aspects of practice, presented to us by the Buddha. Often we need to do *samatha* (calming the mind) first, because of the state our minds start in. Then we investigate the mind (*vipassana*.) In silent illumination, we're doing both. *But* the calming of silent illumination is not a cutting-off sort of calming, it's rather different than that. So how does that work?

It's worth bearing in mind that if you compare practices, you could say that the two main methods of Chan (*huatou* and silent illumination) are more advanced than the other methods which can help to prepare the mind. The other methods can help illustrate different aspects of mind, while silent illumination and *huatou* can take us all the way to enlightenment. The advanced methods don't have these built-in limitations of awareness, constricting the mind in that sense.

Being a more advanced method therefore gives us different challenges. One of these challenges is how we handle thought. It can be particularly challenging because maybe, until picking up this advanced method, you trained yourself to this attitude that thought is something "in the way", the enemy of your practice, a disturbance, a distraction. And now you're being told that's not quite so. This is confusing for people; it's counterintuitive. It even feels almost dangerous sometimes in the sense that you've

put in a lot of effort, long hours of painful legs, to develop a certain calmness of mind and now it seems at risk of being disturbed by a shift in the method. You feel a sense of "this is not right, I don't believe this, I disagree" and you resist opening the awareness. But if you're going to be moving yourself forward along the path towards enlightenment, at some point you need to be able to have a mind which is wide open.

YOU'RE WATCHING HOW  
YOU CONSTRUCT  
YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE  
OF THE WORLD.  
YOU ARE WATCHING  
IT HAPPENING  
AND YOU REMAIN SILENT  
AND YOU CONTINUE  
WATCHING.

If I want to paint a caricature of the Buddha, do you imagine the Buddha as someone who had a rather narrow attention? Someone who didn't dare open his attention wide in case it disturbed his practice? That's not my image of the Buddha. So you could say you're preparing yourself, testing it out. You're finding out what the difficulties are, and through practice you find ways of handling these difficulties, and indeed you find it is possible to have the mind open wider. Ah! Hmm, that's interesting. You could say you're nudging yourself towards enlightenment. Still, in silent illumination we talk about sudden enlightenment, we don't talk about gradual enlightenment. But certainly we talk about gradual cultivation; that would be reasonable. We're gradually exploring and getting to know the mind, getting to know its obstructions, getting to know how to handle them, and finding that indeed we can! There *are* ways forward. We find that, yes, we can keep the attention wide open, confront an obstruction, and keep the mind open and handle it. We don't have to retreat into our



rabbit hole. That's a dangerous place, a rabbit hole, isn't it? [laughter]

## Opening the Awareness

So we're exploring the capacity of our own mind, our own awareness and yes, we are challenging it. Opening the awareness is challenging, it makes it more likely that the mind wanders away because you are giving it more things to be interested in and attach to. If you are sitting here with a very narrow focus, very intensely concentrated, you're not so distracted. People walking around the room, traffic outside, birdsong—you're not paying any attention to that, it can't disturb you. You hardly perceive it. But then if you open the awareness and you perceive the richness all around you, it can be almost overwhelming and you immediately attach to something, start having a discussion with yourself about it. So opening the awareness is tricky and challenging but also crucially important. In terms of this practice of silent illumination we can trace the origins of it, in some ways, back through history. But we can also find the basis of it in the sutras. In Shifu's book *Hoofprint of the Ox* when he is talking about silent illumination, he uses the *Diamond Sutra* as an illustration of the approach to practice. There is a famous line in the *Diamond Sutra* from which Hui Neng the sixth patriarch became enlightened:

*Without dwelling in anything whatsoever,  
allow this mind to arise.*

"Without dwelling in anything" points toward silence, towards nonattachment. "Allow this mind to arise" points towards illumination, towards the mind being fully awake and present.

It doesn't say, "without dwelling in anything whatsoever, make sure the mind doesn't arise." It doesn't say, "without dwelling in anything whatsoever, be very careful if the mind arises." Just, allow the mind to arise. Brighten the mind, be fully awake. Be fully attentive without dwelling in anything whatsoever.

That phrase "without dwelling" that's pointing to nonattachment, brings up another area which people find difficult sometimes. Nonattachment is perhaps a little bit difficult to describe. But if we think of it in terms of attachment, it's becoming over involved, over identified, over immersed in a particular thought and it's drawn you off-center. You've lost your wide-open awareness, you're preoccupied with something. The other extreme is avoidance of attachment, and this is where the phrase non-Buddhists often use about Buddhists comes from: "Buddhist detachment." Detachment is not quite the same as nonattachment. Detachment has a negative quality about it, an avoidance, a dualism. So it's not about avoiding, and it's not about attaching. It's somewhere in between. We can call it nonattachment. To put it another way: you're not so concerned whether you end up involved or not involved; there is no strong preference, there's just an acceptance. "Yeah, this is in the mind, or this isn't in the mind. I'm really open to either possibility." If you are attached, you want to keep it in the mind. And if you're detached, you're trying to keep it out of the mind. But nonattached means, well if it's there, it's there, and if it's not it's not. No big deal. I'm not shaken by its presence or its absence.

So without dwelling in anything, without being concerned about what's there, nevertheless let awareness arise and inform you what's there.

It's tricky; it's finding a balance, and we easily lean one way or the other. Of course our personal histories lead us to have certain avoidant behaviors and certain attaching behaviors. We feel safety in certain objects and circumstances and we don't want to let them go. Then we feel risk and danger in other situations and we put effort into avoiding them. The mind which is not dwelling, the mind of nonattachment, allows itself to experience *all* that is present. Now that doesn't mean that it doesn't respond to dangers; of course it does. It doesn't mean that it doesn't respond to need. It can go and eat that food that the other person is no longer eating. That's not attachment; attachment is when you get obsessed with food. The *Diamond Sutra* is pointing towards us having a mind functioning in awareness. It's not telling us to restrict the mind, to only allow certain types of mental activity to occur. It's just saying, be present with the mind.

## Trains of Thought

Another way of looking at the issue of attachment and nonattachment (this is a metaphor that I've made up but I think it works for most people), Master Hsu Yun used to talk about the host and the guest. There's a slight variation on that which we can look at this way, if we are aware of the phenomenon of a thought becoming a train of thoughts. A thought arises in the mind and there's no particular problem with that. But thoughts link to other thoughts. They create ideas and another thought joins them and maybe these become problems, or solutions, or opportunities. Images are painted in the mind by thoughts congregating. The common phrase in English is "a train of thought"; one thought leads to another. Sometimes it's interesting to reflect on, when you find yourself thinking

about something, how did you get there? Often we have no idea because we've not been paying attention. I once caught myself out and I thought "How on earth did I find myself thinking about this?" I was able to trace it back; maybe 15 thoughts had linked together and ended up at a completely different place to where it started.

Now, there's no problem with thoughts doing this, they create these trains and it's okay. We can just let these trains of thought pass through the mind and show themselves to us. But we don't attach to them; we're not engaging with them. The problem is our tendency to board the train and follow it to its destination. We hop on the train and it takes us away to some future fantasy, or back in time to something that we want to fix (even though it's already happened). We get tangled up in these trains of thoughts. The image that works for me (rather than Hsu Yun's host and guest) is: you are the railway station master, and the trains are your guests. There's no problem with trains coming and going in a railway station. But it *is* a problem if you hop on one and travel off 300 miles; then you've abandoned your duty.



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So by all means have thoughts coming and going through the mind, forming trains of thoughts, congregating. But don't jump on them. Observe them, but don't board them.

There is another example from the sutras, of how we can handle thoughts during our practice. This is from the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*, and is also taken as one of the koans in the *Book of Serenity* (Case 45). I'll just read you the first part of it:

*At all times do not produce delusive thoughts,  
Also don't try to stop or annihilate  
delusive states of thought.*

Now, we don't have any great difficulty agreeing with the first line: "At all times do not produce delusive thoughts." That's fairly straightforward, isn't it? The challenge comes after the comma: "also don't try to stop or annihilate delusive states of thought." That's a bit more challenging, if you have the idea that your task is to purify the mind by ejecting unwholesome thoughts. But the sutra tells us, "Put away your machine gun, put away your axe. Don't annihilate deluded states of mind." Hmmmm. So that means that if a deluded state arises, you don't stop it. Huh! Maybe that's a rather different idea of practice to what you thought you were doing. Sitting there with a deluded state of mind—that actually makes practice easier, doesn't it? Sitting there deluded is quite easy, and quite a common experience really. Maybe we're better at practice than we thought...

No, it's not quite meaning that either. If you have deluded states of mind, and they are held within awareness, it's not saying that *you*

should be deluded. But if there's an obstruction in the mind based on a misunderstanding of some situation, maybe provoking an anxiety, don't annihilate that. Use it as an opportunity to investigate how you create your own delusion, a sort of case study. The mind is holding this painful idea, this anxiety, fear, or grief. Positive feelings, negative feelings, whatever has arisen in the mind, here is your opportunity to investigate it. This word "investigate" is a little bit difficult to understand, so let's look at how this might work. Investigate, illuminate, floodlight—we're not in denial about this thought, because we're clearly aware of it. We don't regard it as an aberration that shouldn't be there, or should be got rid of. We just say "Oh, yes that's what's in my mind; I'm feeling anxious, sad, negative, confused. I'm feeling happy, joyful, free." Anything. Any state of mind, don't annihilate it—investigate it.

## Silently Investigate

Master Hongzhi was the one who gave the name to the practice "silent illumination". These phrases like "silently investigate" come from his writings. How do we "silently investigate," what does that mean? When we find ourselves holding one of these states of mind, we silently investigate, which means we illuminate it; we allow the light to shine on it. We allow it to be seen, felt, tasted. There's no aversion or avoidance; we fully experience it. Rather than our usual habit of trying to shy away from some experiences and pull towards others, we just continue sitting in the presence of the state. No avoidance, no denial. Here it is; I'm experiencing it. At this moment, I'm feeling this way. It is so. No running away. To investigate "non-silently" would be to start a wordy, intellectual analysis, a review of past experiences and personal history

(which can be useful, because it can sometimes illustrate the origins of some of these states). But a silent investigation is just sitting there with it, no deliberate delving back in history, no deliberate classification.

Indeed, classification and naming can actually get in the way; here's an example of how the sheep pen exercise I mentioned a couple of days ago has its limitations. Some of you have found that a useful exercise, and it *is* useful, that's why I mentioned it to you. But the reason that sort of approach is useful is *because* of its limitation. What it does is take a number of thoughts about the same topic and put them together to make it more manageable for you. But that loses some subtlety. If the thoughts were about your boss at work there are probably overlapping issues, different examples and problems. Since they all have a common theme of "problems with your boss at work", the sheep pen method worked to help concentrate the mind. But now with a silent investigation, if you just label it as "boss at work" it sort of turns off the investigation. You have no incentive to pay any attention. "Oh I know what that is." You've categorized it, labeled it, put it in the cupboard and forgotten about it. "Silently investigate" means not applying words and labels, because these are limiting. It is simply "being with" and maybe noticing the mixture of feelings. Maybe the complexity of memories arising is not just one incident, maybe there are various similar

things jumbled together. But if you jump quickly to saying "I know what that is" and you name it, you are in a sense detaching from it. You are shutting it away. So, silently investigating is just "being with". A thought arises in the mind and you are just with it. A feeling moves through the body and you are with it. A sound touches the eardrum and you just let it do that. If you jump to naming the species of bird because you are a birdwatcher, in a sense you've lost contact with the bird—it's just become something in your tick list of "birds I've heard." You've distanced yourself from the actual hearing experience.

THE PURPOSE OF  
CALMING THE MIND  
IS TO BECOME  
VERY CLEARLY AWARE  
OF WHAT IS THERE.

IT'S NOT  
CUTTING OFF,  
DENYING,  
OVERLOOKING  
OR AVOIDING.

So, to "silently investigate" is just "being with", and being with *as it changes*. A more analytical investigation would be looking back in history deliberately. Silent investigation might include some awareness of the history of the situation, because it just comes to mind. That's the way the mind works; thoughts get triggered and thought trains form themselves, you don't have to go and create them. You're sitting, something has arisen, something else arises, and then something else arises. There may or may not be a connection between them. You're not *trying* to make connections; sometimes the connections are obvious. You just continue sitting. This full awareness, this openness to what's arising, IS the silent investigation. Disconnecting from experience means there's no investigation. Controlling the experiencing; labeling it, categorizing it—is not silent.

So you are bringing yourself to just “sitting with” whatever is there. You’ve been starting that off by sitting with the body; every sensation it gives you, you experience it. You don’t start saying “Hmmm, I need more of this sensation and less of that; I wonder why that one is gone.” You simply sit with whatever the body is bringing you at this moment. This extends to whatever the wider awareness is bringing you. It’s arrived, it’s with you and you accept it. The sound of bird song that is so prominent here. The sunlight coming through the windows at different angles. Brightness, shadow. A memory. A sadness. A joy. All of these things just present themselves to our awareness, and we remain silent but we also remain present and bright, which is the investigation.

## Constructs of Mind

If you are cutting off thoughts, you are missing the chance to get to know the constructs of your mind. Because what’s presenting itself to you is partly the direct perception of a sound, but it’s also the construct of the mind that gives a name to the sound. It’s also the construct of the mind that joins the sensations together, creating objects, creating stories. We don’t need to do this deliberately, it’s doing itself out of habit. And by watching the mind you are watching your own habits in play. You’re watching how you construct your own experience of the world, you are watching it happening and you remain silent and you continue watching. This watching is a very deep investigation. It can be quite challenging; watching yourself displaying your habits, you begin to feel embarrassed about them, uncomfortable for some of the ways that you think and behave. But here they are playing themselves out in front of you. You remain silent.

The video of “me” can be quite uncomfortable, can’t it? But we don’t switch it off—watching it is the investigation. We make sure the projector for this video is on full brightness, fully illuminated. We don’t want to miss anything.

This points to the value of this investigation process. It’s teaching us about how we view, react to, and actually construct our own world. Because we have habitual patterns of behavior, certain perceptions become something wonderful and we attach to them. Certain other perceptions become something frightening and we shy away. We create our own world to a very large extent as the *Avatamsaka Sutra* tells us, in the opening verse of the evening service: “*To know all the Buddhas of the past present and future, (i.e. to become enlightened) perceive that all worlds of experience are created by the mind.*” You are creating your own world of experience, and if you practice silent illumination you can observe it happening. Mind grows more still and you actually observe this process from beginning to end. You observe for example a direct perception of sound, but you notice how you name it; the name is coming from a person or an animal, or from the building. Then an attitude attaches itself, an attitude of joy or irritation or judgment. This usually happens in a flash, unseen. Because you’ve cultivated a habit of watching the mind, of observing and being present with whatever the mind presents to you, you find yourself noticing far more than just body sensations. You notice the activity of mind. You notice how you are creating your own sense of irritation from simply the perception of a certain type of sound. Well, it’s not that that particular sound is inherently irritating, because 20 other people around you are hearing the same sound and they are not irritated. So it’s something about you.

## Silent and Non-Silent

There may be another slight point for confusion here: with silent illumination, I’m telling you that “silence” is you not adding anything to it, but then here you are finding yourself adding something. You’re adding an interpretation, a reaction. So does that mean you should cut off these things? No. What it means is, you take them as something to be observed. What you *don’t* do is react by cutting it off. The deliberate action of “cutting off” would be non-silent. Allowing the mind to show you how it behaves and acts, IS silent. It’s the interfering which is non-silent. I hope that’s not too confusing. But the point is, you stay with whatever the mind presents you. There’s no plan to steer the mind a certain way, no plan to avoid negative, unwholesome, deluded thoughts. And there’s no plan to amplify pleasant, happy, generous thoughts. You observe what the mind brings, you observe how it reacts.

You are investigating the nature of your mind in quite a deep and challenging way. Sometimes it takes you to difficult areas, but then, that’s very useful. Because if you investigate a difficult area, you can begin to understand the nature of *why* you find that difficult, and this can be very important. If you habitually shy away from difficulty, you’re limiting yourself. There are certain things in life that you don’t do, that you avoid. You may shape your life so that you are not confronted by these things. But in silent investigation you may find that something you’ve always assumed is challenging or frightening turns out to be a mistake. You drew a conclusion in the past from some particular event, and it got stuck in the mind and you haven’t challenged it. Now as you sit there you find yourself challenged

by the circumstance arising in the mind and you also find, “Oh, that’s why I feel challenged.” That presents itself to you, and you find, “Oh, that isn’t challenging anymore. My life has changed; I see things differently.” You can release this rather stale, habitual reaction and find freedom from fear of that particular situation which always led you to avoidance before.

This type of practice takes you deeply into some of the dark corners of the mind, and this is very useful. It’s useful in the sense of your worldly life experience because it can free you from some restrictions you’ve put on yourself. And it’s useful in terms of your meditation practice because it frees you from some obstructions. Certain obstructions to your practice have to do with fears and anxieties and the way you build yourself to be safe from them, keeping the mind closed. But actually if you dissolve these away by confronting them, you find that practice flows more freely. The mind takes one more step toward stillness—one of the guards has gone off-duty permanently, he’s retired. So there’s less noise in the mind; the mind is more open and freer. Clarifying the mind in this way has benefits both in terms of your personal life and in terms of your practice; they go together. It’s useful either way.

I’m saying these things to point you towards why it is that we say “allow the mind to arise”. Allow yourself to experience whatever arises. There is no editing, no filtering. There’s no judgment on whether this is an appropriate thought to be here now or not. It’s already here; it’s in the mind. Watch the process triggered by that thought. Watch how you react. Get to know yourself, and get to know how you limit yourself. Find your own way towards freedom.



## Having No Obstructions

Since this is somewhat stepwise as you move through different obstructions, we can call it “gradual cultivation.” Hopefully you can see how it is leading you towards a mind which is ready for enlightenment; a mind which is ready to become totally open and not waver, not retreat or be afraid—because it’s already dealt with all its fears, there’s no longer any obstruction. But at the moment, obstructions *are* there. They’re waiting for you to investigate them by simply allowing them to be there in full awareness. Allow them to show themselves and tell you about themselves, if you are willing and have the strength and focus to stay there with them.



*Meditative Rabbit Pointing at the Moon* by Gwen Duda

They are often not at all what you assume. We live by assumptions, habits of thinking. But when we confront our obstructions we are very surprised by what’s going on. They’re often actually quite minor concerns which have become amplified and fossilized. They’ve become stale and outdated and no longer relate to our current situation. So actually it’s safe to investigate these even when it feels scary.

Commit yourself to your practice. Commit yourself to a fully open mind. Commit yourself to confront what the practice presents you with, and in that confrontation, rather like the Buddha confronting Mara, be present with what is there. The Buddha didn’t close his eyes and pretend that Mara wasn’t there. He just said “Oh, Mara, this is what you’ve brought me now, is it? Okay, what’s next? Bring me some more.” Take that attitude. Don’t be fixed on the idea of closing the mind down, having a sort of limited silence and a dull mind. Commit to opening the mind, letting whatever arises be fully experienced, and whatever follows that to be fully experienced, and whatever follows *that* to be fully experienced. If they link themselves together you will see those links. If they don’t, that’s okay too. You have no program here, no expectations. You are just watching the mind, investigating the mind, and it is a very deep practice. So see where it takes you.

## Song of the Thatched Hut

by Chan Master Shitou Xiqian

吾結草庵無寶貝	<i>I've fashioned a grass hut, made from nothing of the world.</i>
飯了從容圖睡快	<i>I've finished eating. At ease, content, I go to sleep.</i>
成時初見茅草新	<i>At the time of completion, the thatch seemed new.</i>
破後還將茅草蓋	<i>Now it is fallen to disrepair. I will add more thatch.</i>
住庵人 鎮常在	<i>The one residing within the hut is ever present,</i>
不屬中間與內外	<i>Belonging not to within, without, or in between.</i>
世人住處我不住	<i>Where people of the world dwell, I do not dwell.</i>
世人愛處我不愛	<i>What people in the world crave, I do not crave.</i>
庵雖小 含法界	<i>Though the hut is small, it encompasses all dharma realms.</i>
方丈老人相體解	<i>Ancient masters and this old man penetrate appearance and essence.</i>
上乘菩薩信無疑	<i>Bodhisattvas of the supreme vehicle have faith unsullied by doubt.</i>
中下聞之必生怪	<i>Followers of the middling and lesser paths hear this, and are surely puzzled.</i>
問此庵 壞不壞	<i>They ask if this hut will fall apart.</i>
壞與不壞主元在	<i>Falling apart or not, the original master has always been here.</i>
不居南北與東西	<i>He dwells not North or South, nor East or West,</i>
基址堅牢以為最	<i>With unsurpassable foundation, firm and fast.</i>



Drawing by Reene Laffey, based on Tenshō Shūbun's Painting

青松下 明窗內  
 玉殿朱樓未為對  
 衲帔幪頭萬事休  
 此時山僧都不會  
 住此庵 休作解  
 誰誇鋪席圖人買  
 迴光返照便歸來  
 廓達靈根非向背  
 遇祖師 親訓誨  
 結草為庵莫生退  
 百年拋卻任縱橫  
 擺手便行且無罪  
 千種言 萬般解  
 只要教君長不昧  
 欲識庵中不死人  
 豈離而今這皮袋

*Among the green pines, by the bright window,  
 No jade palace nor vermilion tower as destination.  
 Seated in patched robe, head covered, the ten thousand things at rest.  
 In this moment, the mountain monk encounters no thing and no one.*

*Dwelling in the hut, all understanding at rest,  
 Who would boast of accomplishments to entice seekers?  
 Turn the light around, illuminate within – and then return,  
 Wide and far reaching, the luminous source – neither face it nor turn away.*

*Come meet the ancestral teachers and be intimate with their teachings.  
 Fashion yourself a grass hut, and do not fall back.  
 Let go of the life you think you have, be unrestrained and at ease.  
 Walk at leisure, arms swinging free, blameless and innocent.*

*A thousand instructions, ten thousand interpretations,  
 Only teach you to be forever free from delusion.  
 If you wish to know the person in the hut who will never die,  
 How can you possibly separate from this skin bag, here and now?*

English Translation by Harry Miller

## CMC Expansion Project

On the front page of this magazine you will see this quote from our founder, Chan Master Sheng Yen: “The Chan Meditation Center has limited space, and its facilities and environment leave much to be desired, but there are few Dharma centers in North America that can serve as the venue for an intensive Chan retreat.”

Some things have changed in the twenty years since Shifu made that statement. Since then, the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) established the Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in the beautiful mountain setting of Shawangunk, New York. DDRC has become a thriving venue for Chan retreats year round. More recently, our “mother” center, the Chan Meditation Center (CMC) in Queens New York, purchased three adjacent buildings in order to expand and renovate its facilities.

CMC has been established for 35 years. The space of the original single building had become inadequate for all kinds of activities. The expansion project is imperative for the needs of the community and practitioners. The renovated CMC will include a larger Chan Hall, dining room, kitchen and library, as well as new activity rooms for children and youth. There will also be small classrooms and meeting rooms. These new, larger facilities will enable CMC to continue Chan Master

Sheng Yen’s mission to spread Mahayana and Chan Buddhism and the concept of Spiritual Environmentalism in the West.

Currently CMC is still short on funds. With your generous donations, we will be able to continue so current and future generations will attain spiritual fulfillment and find the gateway to peace and happiness.

## Calligraphy Fundraiser for DDU

Venerable Chi Chern, one of Master Sheng Yen’s Dharma heirs, held an exhibition of his calligraphic works in Hong-Gah Museum, Taipei City in February and March 2014. Over 300 guests attended the opening party, among them were the Abbot President Venerable Guo Dong, Li Xin-Jie, a Malaysian celebrity who studied meditation under Venerable Chi Chern’s guidance for many years, and the president of Hong-Gah Museum, Chiu Zai-Xing.

For this event, Venerable Chi Chern donated over a hundred exquisite calligraphic works including some valuable collector’s pieces. With the sound of *guqin* (Chinese zither) music in the background, Venerable Chi Chern wrote some inspirational Chinese calligraphic characters and said that although he didn’t formally learn how to write or paint calligraphy; he always writes with a joyful and carefree mood to convey his

thoughts and interests. With such a mood, one can experience pure joy instead of hindrance in the creative process.

Venerable Chi Chern also encouraged the public to support Dharma Drum University (DDU) and participate in DDM’s meditation activities and Buddhadharma courses. He believes that the ways in which combinations of Chan meditation, paintings, and music are used to spread Buddhadharma are very meaningful.

He gave the example of celebrity Li Xin-Jie, who also embarked on a journey of exploring Chinese calligraphy, which is increasingly filled with Chan themes. Li Xin-Jie explained that she started to learn meditation after becoming acquainted with Venerable Chi Chern in 2008. She said that as a celebrity, she often feels nervous and fatigued because of a heavy workload and has found meditation to be very helpful to relieve pressure.

## Great Compassion Water and Land Dharma Service

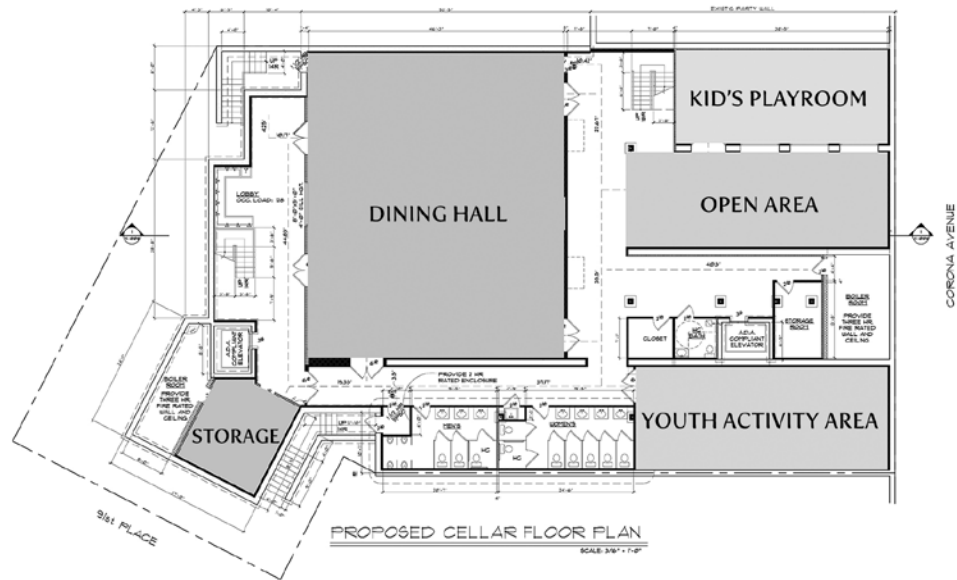
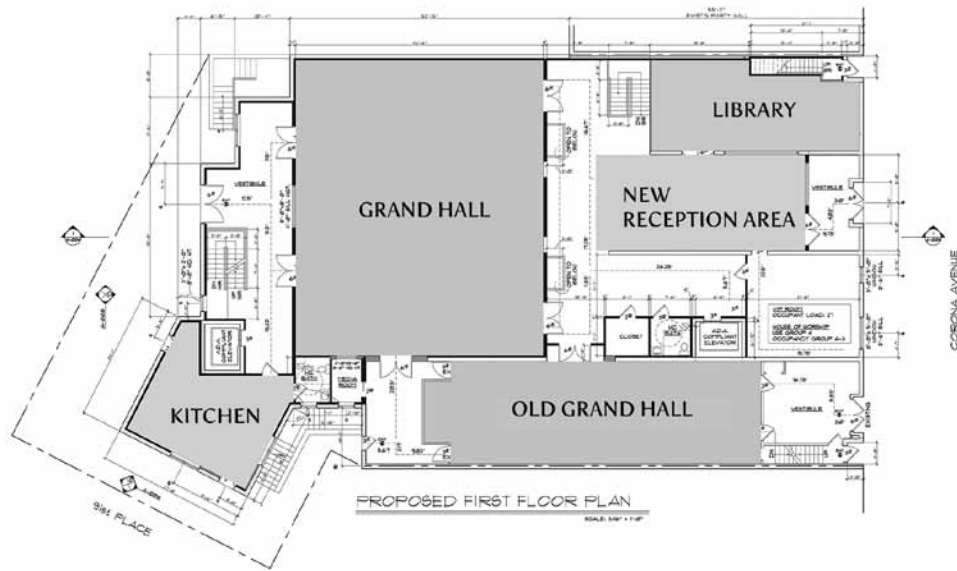
Combining tradition, innovation and the protection of the environment, Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM)’s 2013 Great Compassion Water and Land Dharma Service broke through the traditional sutra-chanting Buddhist ceremonies by adding the elements of modern internet technology. The service created a new look for the 1500-year Buddhist event in the 21st Century, with people using digital tablets to pray for blessings and provide offerings to the deceased.

This respectful innovation to reform this traditional Buddhist ceremony reflects the view of our founder, Master Sheng Yen, to allow dharma assemblies to have the dual functions of education and care. Thus, DDM at this time specially promotes the use of cloud (digital) tablets for people to participate in the service and pray for blessings for the self, family members, friends, and deceased relatives. Moreover, in order to resolve bad karmic ties, some people even pray for blessings for those who they used to have enmity with.

During the event, the Abbot President Venerable Guo Dong offered care at every altar where he saw elders and people with disabilities diligently participating in the event. Children of kindergarten age with their grandmothers participated in Buddhist ceremonies at the Wish Fulfilling Altar where they recited the Mantra of Great Compassion fluently. Such dedication moved the Abbot President to praise all the participants.

The website for the event was visited over 800,000 times through computers and cell phones from 42 nations globally. In addition, 21 video sites at the affiliates of DDM in New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Vancouver, Singapore and others also took part in the line of joint practice. The use of this technology allowed people worldwide to participate in the event and share a collective Dharma joy. As it was necessary to recite Buddha names ten times when filling in a digital tablet, it was noted that the tablets collected more than 8,000,000 Buddha names that resounded between people who prayed for blessings – exactly the strength of a virtuous circle.





# Fundraising Luncheon & Charity Sale

To benefit the Chan Meditation Center Expansion

**Sunday, Oct 5th, 2014, 12:00 noon**

Mudan Banquet Hall

136-17 39 Avenue 2nd Floor

Flushing, NY 11354

\$300 per ticket — Contact CMC at 718-592-6593 for details





# Chan Meditation Retreats

Led by Dharma Heirs of Chan Master Sheng Yen



## 7-Day *Shattering the Great Doubt*

Led by **Simon Child** · 6 – 13 December 2014

Maenllwyd, Wales, UK

CONTACT [www.westernchanfellowship.org](http://www.westernchanfellowship.org) · [www.w-c-f.org/Q487-220](http://www.w-c-f.org/Q487-220)



## 7-Day *Silent Illumination*

Led by **Žarko Andričević** · 21 – 28 February 2015

Haus Tao, CH 9427 Wolfhalden, Switzerland

CONTACT Hildi Thalman · [info@chan-bern.ch](mailto:info@chan-bern.ch) · [www.chan-bern.ch](http://www.chan-bern.ch) · [www.haustao.ch](http://www.haustao.ch)

## 10-Day *Intensive Chan*

Led by **Guo Ru Fashi** · 26 February – 7 March 2015

Chan Grove, 198 Fuxing 3<sup>rd</sup> Rd, Taipei, Taiwan

CONTACT [inquiry.ccc@gmail.com](mailto:inquiry.ccc@gmail.com) · +886 2-2891-5205 · [www.changrove.org](http://www.changrove.org)



## 7-Day *Silent Illumination*

Led by **Simon Child** · 21 – 28 March 2015

Dluzew, Poland

CONTACT Pawel Rosciszewski · [budwod@budwod.com.pl](mailto:budwod@budwod.com.pl) · +48 601224999 · [www.czan.eu](http://www.czan.eu)



## 21-Day *Intensive Chan*

Led by **Chi Chern Fashi** · 1 – 22 August 2015

Dluzew, Poland

CONTACT Pawel Rosciszewski · [budwod@budwod.com.pl](mailto:budwod@budwod.com.pl) · +48 601224999 · [www.czan.eu](http://www.czan.eu)



# The Future

Calendar of retreats, classes and other upcoming events


Schedule is subject to change. Please check websites for updated and detailed information.

Zen  
and  
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



<b>Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY</b>		
(845) 744-8114 - ddrcc@dharmadrumretreat.org - www.dharmadrumretreat.org		
REGULAR WEEKLY ACTIVITIES		
Thursday Evening Meditation	7:00 pm–9:00 pm	Sitting, walking, moving meditation, Dharma talk.
RETREATS (register online)		
1-Day & Children's Program	Saturday Oct 14	9:00 am–5:00 pm Led by Venerable Chang Wen
	Saturday Nov 1	
	Saturday Dec 13	
5-Day Western Zen Retreat	Oct 10-15	Led by Simon Child
3-Day Retreat	Nov 4-16	Led by Venerable Chang Wen
10-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat	Nov 28 - Dec 6	Led by Zarko Andricevic
7-Day Intensive Silent Illumination Retreat	Dec 26 - Jan 1	Led by Guo Gu
SPECIAL EVENTS		
Gardening Meditation Weekend	Oct 25-26	DDRC Residents

## 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 & 4th Sundays 2:00-3:30 pm	Guan Yin (Avalokitesvara) Bodhisattva Chanting Service
	2nd Sunday 2:00-4:00 pm	Great Compassion Repentance Ceremony Dharani Sutra
	3rd Sunday 2:00-4:00 pm	Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra Chanting Service
<i>(If there is a 5th Sunday in the month, there will be a Guan Yin Chanting Service.)</i>		
RETREATS (Pre-registration advised)		
Saturday Half-Day Retreats	Oct 4, Oct 18	9:00 am - 3:00 pm
	Nov 1, Nov 15	
	Dec 6	
1-Day Retreat	Saturday Oct 25	9:00 am - 5:00 pm
2-Day Thanksgiving Retreat	Nov 29-30	9:00 am - 5:00 pm
2-Day Reflection Retreat	Dec 27-28	9:00 am - 5:00 pm
CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS (Pre-registration advised)		
Beginner's Meditation I	Saturday Sep 27	9:30 am - 12:00 pm Led by Rikki Asher PhD.
Beginner's Meditation II	Saturday Oct 4	
Intermediate Meditation	Saturday Oct 11	
Taijiquan with David Ngo	Thursdays ongoing	7:30 pm-9:00 pm \$25 per 4-week month—\$80 for 16 classes First class is free for newcomers
SPECIAL EVENTS		
Sunday Afternoon Movies	Oct 19 Dec 21	2:00 pm-5:00 pm Film Viewing and Discussion Led by Dr. Peter Lin
Dharma Drum Young People (DDYP) Gathering	Every 3rd Saturday 2:30-5:00 pm	Buddhists and non-Buddhists between the ages of 16-38 are welcome!



# 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			
<b>Chan Meditation Center (CMC)</b> • Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) America • Dharma Drum Mountain for Young People	90-56 Corona Avenue Elmhurst, NY 11373	(718) 592-6593 Fax: (718) 592-0717	ddmbausa@yahoo.com www.chancenter.org www.ddmba.org www.collegedharma.org
<b>Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC)</b>	184 Quannacut Road Pine Bush, NY 12566	(845) 744-8114 Fax: (845) 744-4753	ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org www.dharmadrumretreat.org
TAIWAN - WORLD HEADQUARTERS			
<b>Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education</b>	No.14-5, Lin 7, Sanchieh Village, Chinshan, Taipei	02-2498-7171 02-2498-7174 Fax: 02-2498-9029	webmaster@ddm.org.tw www.ddm.org.tw
<b>Dharma Drum International Meditation Group</b>		02-2893-4646 ext. 6504	contact@ddm.org.tw www.ddm.org.tw
<b>Nung Chan Monastery</b>	No. 89, Lane 65, Tayeh Road Peitou, Taipei	02-2893-3161 Fax: 02-2895-8969	
NORTH AMERICA - CANADA			
<b>Toronto</b>	1025 McNicoll Avenue Toronto, Ontario Canada M1W 3W6	(416) 855-0531	ddmba.toronto@gmail.com www.ddmba-ontario.ca
<b>Vancouver</b>	8240 No.5 Road Richmond, BC Canada V6Y 2V4	(604) 277-1357 Fax : (604) 277-1352	info@ddmba.ca www.ddmba.ca
NORTH AMERICA - MEXICO			
<b>Chacala, Mexico</b>	Mar de Jade Oceanfront Retreat Center Chacala, Nayarit	(800) 257-0532 01-800-505-8005	info@mardejade.com www.mardejade.com
NORTH AMERICA - UNITED STATES			
<b>California</b>	4530 N. Peck Rd El Monte, CA 91732 Los Angeles	(626) 350-4388	ddmbala@gmail.com www.ddmbala.org
	Sacramento	(916) 681-2416	ddmbasacra@yahoo.com
	San Francisco 255 H Street Fremont, CA 94536	(408)469-0321 (Chinese) (510)996-8572 (English)	info@ddmbasf.org www.ddmbasf.org

NORTH AMERICA - UNITED STATES			
<b>Connecticut</b>	Fairfield County	(203) 972-3406	contekalice@aol.com
	Hartford	(860)805-3588	cmchartfordct@gmail.com http://www.ddmhartfordct.org
<b>Florida</b>	Gainesville	(352) 336-5301	LianFlorida@hotmail.com
	Miami	(954) 432-8683	ddmbaus@yahoo.com
	Orlando	(407) 671-6250	chihho2004@yahoo.com
	647 McDonnell Drive Tallahassee, FL 32310	(850)274-3996	tallahassee.chan@gmail.com www.tallahasseechan.com
<b>Georgia</b>	Atlanta	(678)909-0068	Schen@eleganthf.net
<b>Illinois</b>	Chicago 1234 N. River Road Mt. Prospect, IL 60056	(847)255-5483	ddmbachicago@gmail.com www.ddmbachicago.org
<b>Massachusetts</b>	Boston	(781)708-9255	baipang@gmail.com
<b>Michigan</b>	Lansing	(517) 332-0003	lkong2006@gmail.com
<b>Missouri</b>	St. Louis	(314) 277-5640	acren@aol.com
<b>New Jersey</b>	789 Jersey Ave. New Brunswick, NJ 08901	(732) 249-1898	enews@ddmba-nj.org www.ddmba-nj.org
<b>Nevada</b>	Las Vegas	(702) 896-4108	yh12527@yahoo.com
<b>North Carolina</b>	Cary	(919) 677-9030	minganlee58@gmail.com
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	Philadelphia	(610) 254-5028	tchiang2001@hotmail.com
	State College	(814) 867-9253	ddmbapa@gmail.com www.collegedharma.org/ddmbapa
<b>Texas</b>	Dallas	(817)274-2288	ddmba_patty@hotmail.com
	Houston	(713)628-8058	
<b>Utah</b>	Salt Lake City	(810) 947-9019	Inge_Fan@hotmail.com
<b>Vermont</b>	Burlington	(802) 658-3413	juichulee@yahoo.com www.ddmbavt.org
<b>Washington</b>	Seattle 14028 Bel-Red Road Suite 205, Bellevue WA 98007	(425) 957-4597	mhwong77@gmail.com seattle.ddmusa.org
<b>Washington</b>	District of Columbia	(301) 982-2552	chiehhsiungchang@yahoo.com

# Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

ASIA and AUSTRALASIA			
<b>Australia</b>	Melbourne 1 / 38 McDowall Street, Mitcham Victoria 3132, Australia	(03) 8822-3187	info@ddmmelbourne.org.au www.ddmmelbourne.org.au
	Sydney	(61-4) 131-85603	ddmsydney@yahoo.com.au www.ddm.org.au
<b>Hong Kong</b>	Room 203 2/F, Block B, Alexandra Industrial Building 23-27 Wing Hong Street Lai Chi Kok, Kowloon, Hong Kong	(852) 2865-3110 (852) 2295-6623	info@ddmhk.org.hk http://www.ddmhk.org.hk
<b>Malaysia</b>	Block B-3-16, 8 Avenue Pusat Perdagangan Sek. 8 Jala Sg. Jernih 46050 Petaling Jaya, Selangor	(60-3) 7960-0841	ddmmalaysia@gmail.com www.ddm.org.my
<b>New Zealand</b>	9 Scorpio Place, Mairangi Bay Auckland NZ	(09) 478 8430	
<b>Singapore</b>	Singapore	(65) 6735-5900	ddrumsingapore@gmail.com http://www.ddsingapore.org
<b>Thailand</b>	1471. Soi 31/1 Pattnakarn Rd. 10250 Bangkok Thailand	(662) 713-7815 (662) 713-7816	ddmbkk2005@gmail.com www.ddmth.com
EUROPE			
<b>Belgium</b>	15, Rue Jean Schaack L-2563 Luxemburg	(352) 400-080	ddm@chan.lu
<b>Croatia</b>	Dharmaaloka Buddhist Center Dordiceva 23, 10000 Zagreb	(385) 1-481 00 74	info@dharmaloka.org www.dharmaloka.org www.chan.hr
<b>Poland</b>	Zwiazek Buddystow Czan ul. Promienna 12 05-540 Zalesie Górne	(48) 22-7362252 Fax: (48) 22-7362251 Cell: +48601224999	budwod@budwod.com.pl www.czan.org.pl www.czan.eu
<b>Switzerland</b>	Zurich	(411) 382-1676	MaxKailin@chan.ch www.chan.ch
	Bern Haus Sein, Bruungasse 16, CH3011	(31) 352-2243	hthalmann@gmx.net www.chan-bern.ch
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Western Chan Fellowship 24 Woodgate Avenue Bury Lancashire, BL9 7RU	+44 (0) 1934 842017	secretary@westernchanfellowship.org www.westernchanfellowship.org
	The Old School House Weeton Lane Weeton LS17 0AW UK	(44) 7787 502 686	
	28 the Avenue London NW6 7YD UK		liew853@btinternet.com