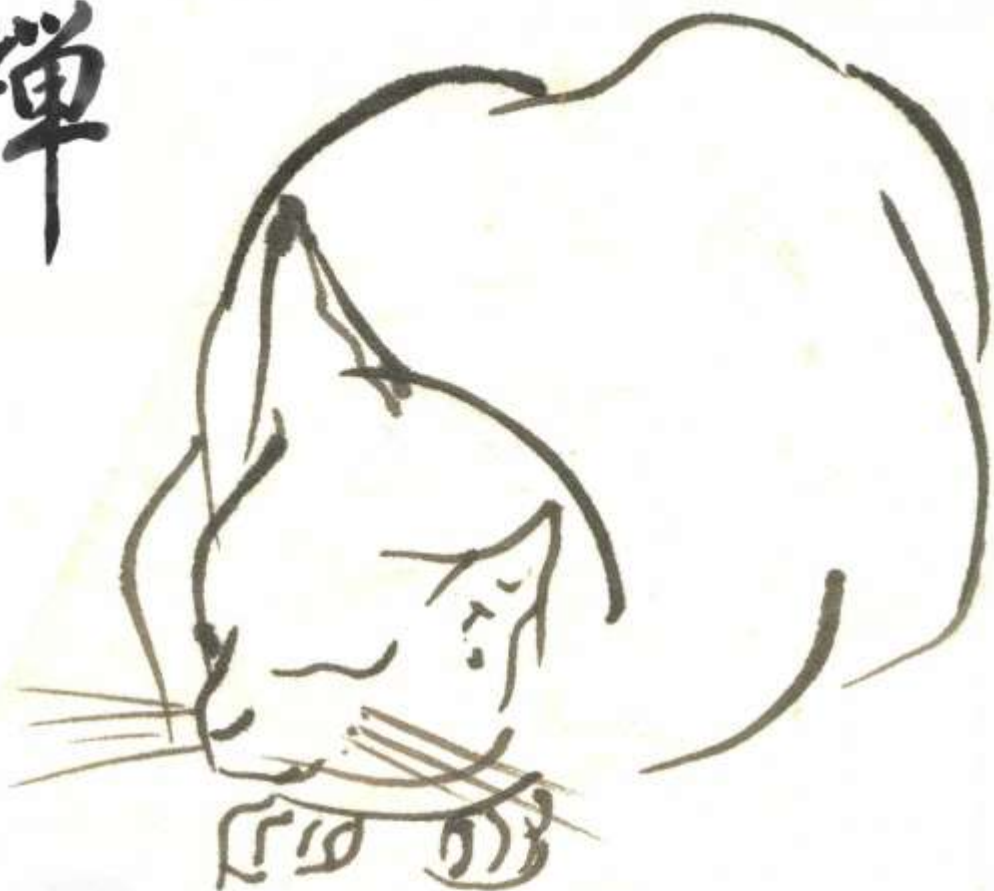


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CH'AN

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The cat watching the mouse is descriptive of a type of meditation practiced in Ch'an. The cat represents the meditator, who sits and watches for thoughts as the cat would sit and watch a mousehole. The mouse, representing a thought, withdraws immediately upon seeing the cat. Similarly, a thought will cease the moment the meditator is aware of it.

MASTER SHENG-YEN'S REMARKS

If one follows the traditional way of classifying Buddhist monks, I must be regarded as primarily a scholar monk specializing in Buddhist doctrines. Ever since I entered the sangha I have always been engaged in the study of the Tripitaka scriptures. Moreover, I later studied Buddhism in Japan and received a D. Litt. degree in Buddhism. Thus I have often propagated the Dharma through the medium of words. However, thirty years ago, I came across by accident the writings of Master Ou-I Chih-hsü of the late Ming dynasty and his criticism of the sangha of his own day made a deep impression on me. He said that those monks who called themselves specialists of scriptural teachings often did not comprehend Buddhist doctrine, those monks who called themselves Ch'an Buddhists often did not know the essence of Ch'an, while those monks who called themselves upholders of the Vinaya and showed enthusiasm in its transmission often did not know what was permitted and what was prohibited by the Vinaya rules, nor the difference between maintaining the Vinaya rules and transgressing against them. Ch'an, Doctrine and Vinaya are three essential pillars of Buddhism and cannot be isolated from each other. Therefore, even though I am firmly grounded in Buddhist scholarship and received high academic honors, I do not regard learning as the totality of a Buddhist's training. In my daily life, I have put special emphasis on the observance of Vinaya. I spent almost three years studying the Vinaya section of the Tripitaka and wrote studies totaling some three hundred thousand words on the subject of Vinaya.

Later on when I was in Japan, I was in contact with the methods of meditation practiced by the Rin-zai and So To sects of Japanese Zen. I also tried the Shingon method of meditation. Japanese Buddhists apply scientific methods to the study of scriptures while also making use of scientific method -- those of biology and psychology -- to explain the techniques of spiritual cultivation. Most importantly, they searched for methods of cultivation among the sutras and instructions of early masters, then added to these a modern interpretation and application. In this way they created a flexible, step by step method of cultivation.

My purpose in coming to the United States was to study English in order to spread the Buddha Dharma to the West. I did not come here to teach Ch'an meditation. Moreover, the type of Ch'an meditation that I teach now is different from both that which is taught in Japanese Zendo and that which is practiced in Chinese monasteries in recent times. I call it Ch'an simply to conform to the current American customary use of the term, but in fact I am here transmitting the method of cultivation taught by the Buddha. This is the Mahayana Dharma gate which enables a person to become enlightened to the wisdom of the Buddha. Just like the Lotus Sutra which combines the three vehicles into the One Vehicle, the method which I now teach accommodated to the mental faculties and spiritual capabilities of people belonging to all the five vehicles. Therefore, when a person comes to me, regardless of his capability, I will accept him as my student as long as he is sincere in his desire to seek the Dharma. Moreover, within a few months I will be able to transform his mind and improve his body.

My specialty does not lie in what is generally known as Ch'an method of cultivation. What I teach now is based on my own personal experience and is a skillful means to help others. If someone, after having learned just my method, should go out to teach others in the same way, he would surely do both himself and others a serious disservice. My emphasis to my students is the correction and guidance I can offer when they reflect on the physical and psychological changes they experience while practicing meditation. In the beginning of our class, a student once asked me if I was enlightened. What he meant was: if the teacher was not enlightened, how could he help his students to reach enlightenment? I told him that if a person broadcasts his enlightenment to the world, even if he were enlightened, it must surely be a very shallow enlightenment. Therefore, I often tell my students that cultivation will surely lead to enlightenment, but if one seeks enlightenment at the start of one's training, then this seeking will become instead an obstacle to enlightenment. One should just till the land but not be concerned about the harvest. The harvest will definitely go to the diligent tiller.

I arrived in the United States on December 10th, 1975 and came to the Temple of Great Enlightenment in New York City on the 16th of the same month. With the support of Reverend Jen-chün (the Reverend Min-chih was in Hong Kong at that time) and Upasaka C.T. Shen and others, I started to train four youths in

Ch'an meditation on May 3rd. Since then, the number of students has increased from four to ten and then twenty-one. Among them, six are Chinese, the rest are Americans, French, Burmese and Hungarian. They include high school students, bachelors, masters and Ph.D's. The youngest is seventeen and the oldest is sixty-eight. Some have practiced Ch'an meditation for over fifteen years, while others are beginners. Every fourteen weeks constitutes a semester. On December 11, 1976 the second fourteen week semester came to a conclusion and we invited all the members of the Board of Trustees of the American Buddhist Association to attend the meeting at which the ten students reported on their experiences in Ch'an meditation. Each person was asked to limit the remarks to five minutes. Their reports were recorded by Trustee Upasaka Kuo-ch'uan Woo and was later transcribed by Mrs. Hsing-yüan Shen Wang. Since the reports were very well received, we believe that they can be of wider use. They may help others who are interested in Ch'an but have not had the chance to practice it. Most of these students came from different religions. In just a few months their understanding of Buddhism is of course still quite limited. But I am happy to report that with the sole exception of Professor Chün-fang Yü who could not continue her training because of her impending trip to Asia, all the rest wanted to study more and asked to be accepted into the next semester. I feel that if they have really learned something, they should be thankful for their own effort as well as the graciousness of the Three Treasures.

December 16, 1976

Recorded by Shen Ta-yung

Translated by Chün-fang Yü

What follows are the reports of students of the Special Ch'an Meditation Class on their experiences. All the reports were in English. The first four were given by members of the first semester and translated into Chinese by Ming-yee Wang. The last six given by members of the second semester, were translated by Chün-fang Yü.

MING-YEE WANG

age 25, graduate student of physics

The principal motive I had for joining this Ch'an class was different from that of most other students. About a year ago, it may be fortunate or unfortunate from some point of view, I began to have some kind of chronic headache, which had withstood either Western or Chinese medical treatment. I joined this Ch'an class hoping that something could be done about it. Before that I was conscious of and worried about the headache all the time, but after some time in the class, I began to be less and less worried and thought very little about it, sometimes even forgot about it. Even sometimes when I sit I may feel a little bit of a headache, or something like a muscle strain, a muscle pulling in my head. If I keep my thought on this thing the sensation will stay there. If I can forget that and concentrate on the method I have been using, eventually the sensation will go away.

This Ch'an class has some special features in that even though most of the students joined the class at the same time, they may be at different levels and they may benefit most from using different methods. From the very beginning Master Sheng-yen has been directing me with special emphasis and attention on my health condition; so I haven't been using the most forceful methods but rather just some of the more elementary methods, even though sometimes I might envy some of the others for using the so-called high-level methods.

I think this class helps in more than one way. Just learning the methods is, of course, one of the benefits, but not the most important one because if we learn methods and just practice them on our own, some problems will arise and we may get scared, and for safety reasons may simply quit. And so another very important benefit is the guidance of the Master. But even more than the guidance, it's the knowledge that somebody is overlooking, is overseeing my practice. Since I never considered myself a person of great determination or persistence, without this sense that someone is watching me, probably I wouldn't be able to stick to the practice regularly. Now that I know someone is watching, I can see to it that I get my homework done.

This kind of Ch'an class is good especially for someone, myself for example, who by profession or habit has been used or forced to have the brain functioning just about every minute of the day. I often find this Ch'an sitting very helpful as rest or relief. So even for no greater purpose, this Ch'an class has been very useful and should be highly recommended.

PAUL KENNEDY

age 21, student of chinese language

The last time the four of us were asked to speak about what kind of benefits we got from the practice. I think it would be kind of foolish for me to speak about this again. So instead, I'll try to explain why I'm continuing and why I'm continuing here rather than somewhere else. I find it difficult to think of things to say, mainly because at the present time I don't really feel too enthusiastic about Buddhism or meditation. Now usually under these circumstances, that is, when I don't feel too enthusiastic about something, I begin to think about giving it up. But when I think of giving up the practice of Buddhism, I ask myself what else is worth doing.

Previously there were many things which I devoted myself to (one thing at a time, of course) and tried to do well. In the course of working at a thing and trying to perfect it, I inevitably came to a point where I would experience great internal resistance. At this point, the only thing which could allow me to overcome this resistance was to know that my motivation for doing the thing consisted of a reason which would justify my having lived. So I would ask myself, "Why am I doing this?" The answer I came up with always dealt with one of the four things which I most desired - fame, pleasure, adventure, or power. However, I felt that none of these four things were basic enough to my life; when once attained they didn't give one a sense of completion. So pursuing these four goals was like a game for me, in the absence of anything more substantial for which to strive. Needless to say, playing a game was not a great enough motivation to overcome that internal resistance, therefore I drifted from one thing to another. This drifting with no purpose greatly depressed me. At that time I turned from trying to do something to trying to find out why I should do anything. I now wanted to

find out why I was living and why I should go on living. Buddhism is the method which I have chosen to find this out. So even if I practice Buddhism for a hundred years and don't progress one step, I still could not turn around and go back the other way, for I know too well that there is nothing there.

As far as continuing here rather than some place else, the first reason is that I began here and then second is that I can get everything I need, at present, right here from Master Shengyen. To go wandering around from teacher to teacher only complicates things. We are trying to accomplish singleness of mind how can this be done if one is not satisfied when one has all that one needs.

PETER CHEMA

age 26, martial arts instructor, civil engineer

I'd like to start by thanking the Master for taking me through the second session, which I found out was needed after the first session. About eight years ago, Frank, who is also studying Ch'an brought me to the temple for meditation and Buddhism. We got interested in meditation through the martial arts, which we were studying.

There are many benefits to be derived from meditation, which I spoke of last time, so I won't talk too much about that right now. I don't want to under-rate the benefits, they are numerous-- I myself can name a dozen so I don't even want to mention them; I'm sure the second group will talk about them. What I'd like to talk about-- even though I'm not fully qualified-- are the methods themselves. The true benefit is the actual practice of the methods themselves. The purpose of my taking the course was the meditation itself-- that was my main purpose and is still the purpose.

I'm sure that most people have heard the analogy that the mind is a lake driven by the winds, and because the lake is being disturbed you can't see the bottom where there is a precious treasure. These winds are the thoughts that are constantly blowing on your mind, so you can't see into yourself. It's

the methods themselves that start to quell the thoughts and slowly but surely the mind begins to settle; the bottom of the lake becomes more visible. This is the purpose of meditation, to quiet the mind and get it to a state which the Buddhas call "Buddha-nature", which is true self.

I applied that analogy of the lake to myself because this is the second session-- in the first session we started early in the morning at six a.m. and we learned the methods-- the second session has been a time for me of working on a particular method that the Master had given me which best serves my purpose. I had heard much about the treasure at the bottom of the lake, but I had never even been able to find the lake. I feel that the first session was actually an introduction, the Master showing me the various paths up to the lake.

In the second session he tells us which path is best for us to take, the easiest path for us. The second session is a time of sitting, practicing your method, with the Master by your side helping you to quell your thoughts and keep to your method. It would be very easy during the second session, after one has learned the paths, to just walk away from them... just go back to the city and forget about them. You know the way to the lake, but you don't want to go any further. This is either, when you can make it and your determination becomes stronger, or you can break it and leave. There will be distractions while practicing, there will be many illusions; you'll want to go out thinking that maybe the treasure is in the woods, not in the lake, and that's when the Master will tell you "No, keep looking in the lake." If one looks long enough, one may glimpse the treasure, and at that point he will decide to go into the lake, although it will take a lot of sacrifice. Meditation is not an easy thing; it takes a lot of time and there's a great deal of sacrifice.

But feel now, entering the third session, I'm entering the lake. There are still distractions, but once one has glimpsed the treasure, one is no longer distracted by the superficial gains. Actually the treasure I'm talking about is only the elimination of what in Buddhism are called the five skandas, or illusion. In order to discover the true self which is yours you only have to dive down to get it. I say this true self is yours to begin with... so it's not really difficult to get if one sits long enough.

FRANK DE MARIA

age 33, new york state police instructor of martial arts,
new york state registered medical technician #2162

Let me start off by saying I consider myself very fortunate to have been chosen by Master Sheng-yen for his first formal class on Ch'an meditation. Like Peter said, I came to the temple many years ago in search of a Ch'an master who could teach me the proper methods of meditation. Unfortunately at that time there were no formal classes to teach the more advanced methods, which is what I was in search of. It wasn't until some years later that Master Sheng-yen came to our temple from China. You can see it took me a great deal of time before my path and that of Master Sheng-yen crossed. The Buddhist name Chang Tao, which Master Sheng-yen has bestowed on me explains exactly how I feel about Master Sheng-yen's teachings. The name translates to read "The Proper Way".

My primary reason for wanting to study meditation is very simple: I was looking to solve those age old questions, "who am I?" and, "what was the purpose of my birth, and the reason for my death?" The Master has given me the tools with which I am now able to discover through my own efforts the answers to some of these questions.

Before I studied meditation if anyone would have called me ignorant that would have been course enough for me to become very upset and rather defensive about my intelligence, however through my meditation I realize what Master Sheng-yen really meant was our ignorance of those age old questions I mentioned before, and not necessarily our educational background.

Before I had the opportunity to become a disciple of Master Sheng-yen I read many books trying to uncover the secrets of meditation. Even with all my readings I realized after the first formal class with the Master I really knew nothing and what I did know I was practicing incorrectly. Without the help of a teacher, a good teacher there's little or no chance that you're going to pursue the right course. You'll probably fail more than you'll succeed and thereby give it up. I feel if you're thinking about meditation, the first and foremost thought should be a good teacher.

The time I've spent with Master Sheng-yen has made my life a bit easier and has made my ability to cope that much better; and hopefully under the watchful eye of the Master I'll succeed in learning the truth about myself, and for this reason I wish to thank him publicly.

(bows to the Master.)

Thank you.



RIKKI ASHER

age 21, art student and art director
of after-school center for children

I've been a member of the second session. We were asked to report on some of our gains and losses, received from the class. I want to say now that any losses that I mention I consider gains even though they may be considered losses. One of them is that I have lost the attraction of going to a party rather than staying home and finishing something that I've started. The gain out of this is that I don't feel I'm really missing anything, missing out on something wonderful by not going to that party. Another loss is that I no longer get any artificial kind of stimulation no liquor, obviously no marijuana, no anything. This I consider a gain rather than a loss, though some may consider it a loss.

I also feel that it's easier for me to relate to people, and I can relate to people very directly rather than going in and out playing all these games. I also feel, which I didn't expect to feel, much more insight into people when I meet them. And if I'm meeting people for the first time and they're telling me all kinds of lies, then I see actually that these are lies. I can tell beforehand usually that the person isn't telling the truth just by the way they're presenting themselves, and I relate this very directly to the discipline involved in meditation, reflecting upon my own thoughts.

Another one of the losses, which again I consider a gain, is that I don't fear certain people that I used to fear, such as authority figures or strict teachers who are laying on some kind of authority role because now I don't take their anger seriously. I believe now that I control my own emotions, and their anger is just something that is coming out of their emotions and not necessarily out of something that I might have done.

I'm also very grateful to have attained this discipline through meditating two hours every day plus yoga exercises because it carries through to every other thing I do during the

day. I find that I complete art projects that I didn't ordinarily complete. Normally, I start and know it will take a certain amount of time to finish, and I'll just say, "Oh, I'll finish it tomorrow," and never get to it. But since I have started this meditation class, I have never just left a project, I've finished everything. Also I feel that I'm using each day to the fullest. I wake up and say to myself, "I know I have to do this, this, and this," and I get them all done, and it's a very good feeling.

One more gain for me was meeting Master Sheng-yen and all the good people in the class, and I would like to thank Master Sheng-yen and all the people. I brought in one of those art projects as a gift to the Temple and to the Master; I worked very hard on it-- it's a wood of the Buddha.

(she presents it to the Master)

DAN STEVENSON

age 24, graduate student in history of religions

I've been trying to think of something all day long, but I guess I should say that I came here knowing something about Buddhism, or at least I thought I did. I'm a graduate student in the History of Religions at a university in New York. I was very proud of myself, I thought I knew something about Buddhism. I came here and I had all sorts of images of what I expected a Zen monk to be like, and what I expected a master to be like-- you know, to beat students over the head with sticks or cut cats in two, like that. And it was very humiliating, because I found out I really didn't know a lot about Buddhism. It's hard; the world of universities and scholarship is full of a lot of pride. I think there's an old saying that says you mistake a thief for your own son. You covet everybody else's literature and at bottom you have nothing that's your own. Because when you die, for example, it's gone. So what can we find out of this? I guess I came here asking certain questions like that, too. Through the meditation class I've begun to see that in all people Buddhism is here, in the heart. Buddhism is not somewhere else, not in a lot of ideas, and I've found

that this meditation class has been very worthwhile. Personally, I think it's helping to straighten out my life in many ways. And I think that's the place to start.

I think if we come to the Temple to be able to say that, "Oh, I know Buddhist monks," or that, "I know something about Buddhism," we come away with nothing. But it all becomes very clear when you have to sit down and face the wall for an hour. You can't do it unless you put your heart into it.

Now I've had the opportunity to visit some other Buddhists; some of them are very renowned, and have many disciples. But it was too crowded, I didn't like what I saw, I felt very nervous there. Then I came here, and it was all very unpretentious: a place in the Bronx, not too many people have heard about it, and it's not very colorful at all. With patience I think I've been able to discover that there's a lot more here than meets the eye. And I definitely intend to keep studying.

CHÜN-FANG YÜ

age 38, Ph.D., professor of religion at rutgers university

I will confine myself to what I have lost and what I have gained during this meditation semester of three and one half months.

For a very long time, of the many defects that I have noticed about myself, the most serious ones have been my lack of patience and perseverance and my tendency of delaying things and eagerness for quick results. Furthermore, I have always disliked doing physical labor. Now if I have lost anything during these few months, perhaps one thing I did lose is this lack of patience, for every day I would sit down for two hours not expecting any miraculous experience but Just sitting there patiently. I think this is something I would have had a lot of trouble doing before joining the meditation class. One incident I would like to share with you is that about halfway through the semester, all of a sudden I discovered that cleaning my room, mopping the floors and cleaning the bathroom-- all of which I used to detest a great deal before-- suddenly

stopped bothering me. When I tried to find out the reason, I found that it was because my mind was concentrated on the simple thing I was doing and I was not thinking about something else and wishing that I was doing something else. For example, when I was cooking dinner, I was not wishing that I could be reading a book, or while I was cleaning the bathroom, that I could be sitting on the sofa listening to Mozart. And because of this the work that usually appeared to be tasteless and onerous suddenly became very different, and I could do the work without feeling impatient and annoyed.

This is due, of course, to the practice of mindfulness, the foundation of all Buddhist meditation. Master Sheng-yen has often told us that meditation is not just limited to sitting. One should be able to carry out meditation in every aspect of one's daily life, in the daily tasks that one has to perform. Now I cannot claim that my mind has reached the state of perfect concentration, for I do have other thoughts either during or after meditation. But what I can say is that there have been some attitudinal changes in my everyday life, and I definitely attribute this to the effect of meditation.

Now let me turn to what I have gained. I think that what I have gained is that I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to get to know a very, very good teacher. I feel that Master Sheng-yen is like a very stern father but also a very compassionate, loving mother. I am sure all of us have our own favorite stories to tell about his concern for us. As for me, I think I would like to share this one experience with you. About halfway through my training in the temple, I came one day to the Master complaining that I did not have enough time and peace to practice my meditation at home because my son who's four years old was very demanding on my time and attention. The Master said right away, "If you cannot even carry out your obligations as a mother, what right do you have to say that you want to save sentient beings or that you want to become an enlightened Bodhisattva." This was like a clap of thunder, and immediately I realized how selfish and egoistic I was. Even though we know that this is the so-called Age of Degenerate Law in Buddhism, but with teachers like Master Sheng-yen, I do not feel that Buddhism will long remain in a state of obscurity or decline.

The second thing I would like to say is that as a result of my training, I have gained a better understanding of myself.

And because of this, my faith in Buddhism has been strengthened. I realize acutely the strong power of the ego, the so-called self-love, self-pride, and self-view, I also realize how difficult it is to uproot the tyranny of habit. At the same time, I also realize that despite the obstacles, with enough dedication one can eventually reduce one's egoism and become free from the control of habit. Once in a while during the meditation, for just one moment perhaps, I did have the experience of living totally in the present, without any thought about other concerns. In that second, I realized the possibility of another kind of existence. Before joining the meditation class, I had studied Buddhism in graduate school for some fifteen years. I understood Buddhist ideas intellectually but I had never experienced them in an existential way. So all these ideas were merely concepts and terms, but they had no real significance for my life. But now I know otherwise, and I am grateful for this opportunity to make this important discovery.

ARANKA GALGOCZI

clerk-typist

For some people Buddhism is a religion, to others it's a philosophy, still some say it is only psychology-- and nothing else. When I came to the Temple, I knew nothing about Buddhism. A special meditation class started fourteen weeks ago, and the Master chose me for one of his students. I felt very fortunate to have the opportunity to learn Zen Buddhism. Since then-- for me-- Buddhism became a way of life, every day.

During the fourteen weeks the meditation class helped me to learn how to curb my selfish desires, pride, which is the cause of all sufferings.

Now I am more patient with people and with things in my life. When something doesn't come right away-- or not at all-- I try not to get angry and frustrated, most of the time successfully.

With the help of the intensive meditation practice, my mind is getting sharper. I analyze life, events, things more deeply.

I see more beauty in things around me, in life, than before. I become more humble, and do not take things in life for granted.

For me one of the greatest achievements is: I can accept and like people as they are, and forgive their faults and remember how much others have to forgive me! Also, I try not to make any kind of discrimination. I am more pleasant generally than before, and more friendly with people and I notice that they like me much more.

It is still a long, long way to go, but I know that I am on the right path, and I believe in my Master and respect him very much. Also, I am grateful for him, because he is very compassionate with each and every one of us, guiding us in our spiritual life, and he also tries to help in general, everyday problems.

I remember every day the Buddha's teaching: mind is the source of happiness or unhappiness-- and it is very important to cultivate the mind. Whatever we do-- good or bad-- our deeds follow us like shadows. Our deeds are our Karma, and the deeds we are free to choose!

ANGELA CHEMA

age 18, Ch'an student and artist

The Master himself holds your fascination by his grace and balance. When he eats, when he drinks tea, every movement is careful, and he looks as if he's never spending too much energy. It's good to have him nearby to watch and learn from. I only say that when I meditate, I feel closer to him and to the inner me. And I feel that I've gained another sense, the awareness of all my other senses that I've already possessed. Also I feel that when we chant here, I'm very close to the other monks; I try to get on the same tone as them and we all share that.

I can now understand why the Master wants you to keep your back straight. Of course, it's the spinal nerves which when kept still allow thoughts to disappear. It still feels a bit stiff, but in order to lose all your conceptions, your back

must be straight.

Perseverance of this meditation brings very good fortune. It forces you to come to odds with yourself and adds to the discipline of this awkward socialized body and mind. It's easy for me to understand the Master's concepts, for they are in the light of goodness. And as for karma, I've known it to be there for a while and accept the teachings to the maximum. I've also found in my meditation that I've experienced much illusion. In illusion, I used to feel that I'd come through some psychic changes, you know, many stages we used to call psychic experience, but the Master says it's just a bunch of illusions.

Now I look and I wonder what all of us have in common. We're all different ages, denominations, and backgrounds. But I think there's something dormant inside and we're just waiting for it to be brought out by someone or something. I feel fortunate to have the Master close by, and I feel that he can lead us to help ourselves find it.

SAM LANGBERG

I've been here for quite a few years; you all know me, you've seen me. Unaccustomed as I am to "public speaking" and unprepared as I am, I thought I'd try out the Zen approach by speaking extemporaneously, spontaneously I hope.

There is a saying in Eastern religions that when the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear. I've had an awful lot of teachers, and I'm not too sure that I was ready for them. Fortunately, Professor Li sought me out at a time when I had stopped coming here, and brought me to Master Sheng-yen. It was a very fortunate meeting, because he seemed to fill in the gaps that had arisen during the years I'd practiced with other teachers. It seems that maybe I hadn't met the right teacher at other times. It might have saved me a lot of physical pain, had I met him then, but that's karma; that's the way the cookie crumbles.

The methods in Zen that I had learned were not too numerous, because, evidently, the two types that exist here in the

city, Soto and Rinzai, and something that calls itself a mixture of the two, offer just two particular routes: one which is the use of the koan, and the other, which has been described as the awareness of the six senses as they arise and which is called shikantaza. There was an array to pick from, on the other hand, with Master Sheng-yen's classes. I discovered along the way that there might be a way out of this jungle of pain that I've been having by being eventually able to zoom in on just one of those methods, which seems to be very beneficial to me.

I have pains. I've sustained various injuries over the years. I can't sit without the distraction of pain and I'm often plagued by pain as an aftermath of having sat. Lo and behold, one of the meditations dispelled it and, indeed, brought me to another place... a warm one, a painless one, one that really allowed a dropping off of body and mind... and left me free of pain afterward as well. The thing that kept me going until now was the fact that I had invested so much time: the loss of face, what could I tell people? What could I tell myself? There were little gaps of insight again, see-throughs; but it wasn't as it had often come to be, something I had kept doing mostly out of habit.
pains I've sustained

I'm not too sure. I have hopes. Maybe I shouldn't have hopes because that's a no-no. Nevertheless, I think that some of my aches and pains aren't as bad as they used to be. This is dukkha all these pains are dukkha they're suffering that we're all enmeshed in, they lead to all the ideas that we have about what is going to happen to us. Now that we're getting older we're feeling these pains. The ideas that constantly make mountains out of molehills (dukkha) were a hard thing to dispel. They were easy to deal with in sitting and for a short while after that. Even with thinking of everything in terms of Buddhism, all day long, it's very hard to gain distance from dukkha without the medium of, somewhere along the line, dispelling it, relinquishing it. I think it has occurred through these meditations that it translates for a longer period in the day afterwards. Again I have hope; I'm thankful for it, that's all I can say. Greedy as I am, I wish it could have been earlier that I met Master Sheng-yen, but I'm thankful that I have met him now.

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