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CHAN MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2023





With Bantetsugu Roshi, a disciple of Harada Roshi, I attended winter-long retreats at his temple in the harsh environment of northern Japan. He was particularly scathing about my learning and studying at university. When I left him, he told me to go and teach in America. I complained that I did not know English. He said, ‘Do you think Zen is taught with words? Why worry about words?’



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

Illuminating Silence: The Practice of Chinese Zen, 2002

CHAN MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture
Chan Meditation Center (CMC)
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Elmhurst, New York 11373

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The magazine is a non-profit venture; it accepts no advertising and is supported solely by contributions from members of the Chan Meditation Center and the readership. Donations to support the magazine and other Chan Center activities may be sent to the above address and will be gratefully appreciated. Please make checks payable to Chan Meditation Center; your donation is tax-deductible.



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Volume 43, Number 4 — Autumn 2023

| | |
|--|----|
| The Noble Eightfold Path – Part IV BY <i>Chan Master Sheng Yen</i> | 4 |
| First Year in America BY <i>Chan Master Sheng Yen</i> | 16 |
| Warnings and Encouragements BY <i>Chan Master Zhongfeng Mingben</i> | 20 |
| The Wondrous Functions of the Mind: “A Letter to Inspection Officer Zheng” BY <i>Chan Master Zhongfeng Mingben</i> | 26 |
| Chan Meditation Center Affiliates | 38 |

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The Noble Eightfold Path

Part IV

— BY —

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

In the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004 Master Sheng Yen gave several lectures at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York, on the Buddha's noble eightfold path. This article, which originally appeared in the Summer 2009 issue of *Chan Magazine*, is the final of four in which Master Sheng Yen discusses the eightfold path as a liberation process. The lectures were orally translated by Rebecca Li, transcribed by Sheila Sussman, and edited by Ernest Heau.

Overview

THE COMPLETE BUDDHIST PATH CAN BE seen as consisting of the three disciplines of precepts (morality), samadhi (meditation), and wisdom (bodhi or awakened mind). Since the noble eightfold path is also a complete description of the Buddhist path, what is the relationship between the threefold disciplines and the eightfold path? The answer is that when one practices the noble eightfold path, one also practices the three disciplines: the first two noble paths, right view and right intention make up the study of wisdom; right speech, right action, and right livelihood make up the study of morality; right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration comprise the study of samadhi. In this talk I will discuss how to practice samadhi in the context of the Mahayana bodhisattva path.

Right Effort

The sixth noble path is right effort, also called right diligence, or right discipline, or the noble or true Dharma. This is the path of practicing Buddhadharma with continuous dedication. Specifically, we mean diligent cultivation of the four foundations of mindfulness, as I will explain later. The purpose is to achieve the path of liberation and give rise to wisdom. As we practice the four kinds of mindfulness, we rely on the four proper exertions¹ to maintain diligence

and eliminate vexations. In fact, the only way to practice the noble eightfold path ceaselessly and without regressing is through the four proper exertions. This is called right effort and the best way to practice it is by establishing a foundation of practice in the first five of the noble paths – right view, right intention, right speech, right action and right livelihood.

You can say that the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment describe the whole of the practice of Buddhadharma in that they encompass the three disciplines of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. For example, right action, right speech and right livelihood correspond to the upholding of precepts, whereas right view and right intention correspond to the principle of wisdom, especially right view. It is through having right view that one is able to attain deep concentration in Chan practice and give rise to further wisdom.

Even though right effort is the sixth path it encompasses all the others. This is because diligence is necessary to successfully cultivate any of the paths. So right effort should not be seen as a separate path; rather, it is the equal emphasis on all the three disciplines. So, right effort means avoiding any hindrances to upholding the precepts. Similarly, one avoids all the obstacles to cultivating deep concentration. One needs to depart from all the hindrances to attaining wisdom, in whatever form or shape. This is how to practice right effort. Just avoiding obstacles is a negative approach; one should also uphold the precepts, practice concentration, and cultivate wisdom.

You may think, “I have to avoid all the obstacles and at the same time diligently cultivate the three disciplines! Can I do that?”

My answer is not to worry – with right effort, anyone can do it.

Right Mindfulness

Although the noble eightfold path is just one part of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, the proper understanding is that it actually encompasses the whole set. In fact, cultivating any of the seven groups of the thirty-seven aids can help one depart from vexation and attain liberation. The difference is that the noble eightfold path is the most complete path of all. Remember that the basic teaching of the Buddha is the four noble truths, and the fourth noble truth is the way out of suffering through the noble eightfold path. In turn, the first noble path is right view, which one has when one understands the four noble truths. In other words, the noble eightfold path includes all the concepts as well as methods for regulating daily life, cultivating samadhi, and attaining wisdom.

The seventh noble path is right mindfulness and it refers to the four foundations of mindfulness: mindfulness of body, mindfulness of sensation, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of dharmas (phenomena). Buddhadharma teaches that suffering is caused by our holding wrong views about these four categories. Therefore the purpose of contemplating



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

them is to be liberated from vexation. Seeing our body as pure is a wrong view because the body deteriorates, gets sick, and dies; viewing sensations as pleasurable is also erroneous because sensations also cause suffering; seeing the mind as the self is erroneous because it leads to self-attachment; and finally, viewing dharmas – the body, the mind, and the environment – as either belonging to or opposed to us also causes vexation. Because we hold these

erroneous views we constantly experience vexation and suffering.

Because the four contemplations are so fundamental to cultivating the path, I would like to briefly review them here.

Contemplating the Body

To overcome our wrong views we should first contemplate the true nature of the body. When we are young the body is healthy, soft, and smells sweet and easy to love. However, as we age we are often not at ease with the body and can't seem to gain control of it. As we age or get sick, the body does not smell so nice and we realize the body is not so pure anymore. I ask you, are you mostly satisfied with your body? Is it different now than before?



Once I held a Chan retreat in a converted barn in Wales. The facilities were primitive and for seven days we could not take a bath. After the retreat we stayed at a hotel in London. When I took a bath, I noticed grime around the tub and I thought, “The water here is really dirty.” When I mentioned it to the others they laughed and said, “Shifu, the water is very pure in London. It’s been seven days since you had a bath!” So my body was not as pure as I thought it was. In fact it was quite dirty.

On another retreat I was teaching everyone how to clean up after a meal. I asked them to pour hot water into their bowl, rinse their utensils in the water, and finish by drinking the rinse water. When one participant refused to do it, I asked him, “Weren’t you just now eating from this bowl?”

He said, “Yes.”

And I said, “Well, you were using the utensils and it’s your mouth that’s been touching them. So what is wrong with drinking the water?”

He said, “But that’s disgusting! It’s like drinking dishwater.”

I suggested that he should still do as instructed. His response was, “Shifu, why don’t you spit something out of your mouth and then swallow it again?”

I asked him if he ever kissed his girlfriend.

“Yes,” he said, “of course.”

I asked him, “So, is your girlfriend clean?”

He replied, “Of course my girlfriend is clean!”

I said, “But if your girlfriend ate something and spat it out would you go ahead and eat it?”

He did not answer. He is willing to kiss his girlfriend but not willing to eat something that came out of her mouth. This comes from an erroneous view as to what is pure and what is impure. If something is clean, isn't it clean in all situations? If it's dirty, isn't it dirty in all circumstances? Where does the discrimination come from? So when we practice mindfulness of the body, we are reminding ourselves that ultimately the body is not always pure, and we should not become too attached to it. Yes, we should take good care of the body and protect it. However, we should refrain from attaching to the idea that this body is always so great and wonderful. The body is sometimes pure, at other times not so pure. As we age, we experience more and more the impurity of the body. As I grow older, I increasingly experience the impurity of my body, that there are problems with it.

We tend to think of the body as somehow belonging to us. For example, as long as I am using this microphone I can refer to it as mine but when I don't need it, it is not mine any more. It is only at this moment that it is mine. If I think about my body in the same way, does it actually belong to me? Well, when you think about it, right now this physical body doesn't really belong to me. If I thought of this body as mine, I would be engaging in self-indulgence, thinking, "This is my body and I feel wonderful!" It actually belongs to whomever is using it as a tool in their practice. We are just sharing this body as a tool.

In Taiwan, our recent annual member's conference was attended by about thirty thousand people. A guest remarked to me, "Shifu, you are so lucky to have thirty thousand disciples!" One of my disciples heard that and said, "Well, actually Shifu has more than a million disciples." I said, "Well, my situation is not as great as it sounds. I just have a lot of people who are sharing me. There is a Chinese saying that a

good horse will never lack riders. So I'm just in this situation where a lot of people use me as a tool for their practice."

When my master's master was in his seventies and still in very good health, I told him, "Grandmaster, I hope you live to be at least one hundred and twenty." He said, "Do I really owe that much to you folks?"

To lessen our vexation we can at least tell ourselves that the body really belongs to everybody to be used as a tool. If we can't really be useful that way, at least we can remind ourselves that the body does not really belong to us. If you can do this you will be less concerned about yourself and be willing to share yourself with others.

I once told someone, "You are truly a very fortunate man. Your parents are still healthy and alive, your children are well behaved, and your wife is so nice. You are indeed very fortunate to enjoy such great merit."

He responded, "Yes, I am indeed very fortunate. However, I am really my parents' crutches, my kids' playmate, and my wife's servant."

People who can really feel that they belong to their families and not to themselves are indeed fortunate and wise. Others may think, "My wife and children belong to me, and as for my parents, what they leave behind will belong to me." Someone like this will have a lot of vexation.

Contemplating Sensations

Most of the time, we are indifferent or at least neutral to the sensations we experience. At other times we react with pleasure or displeasure, happiness or unhappiness. Sensations we don't like make us uncomfortable but even pleasant experiences disappear quickly, and this too causes discomfort when

we crave more. So, we should contemplate how we use the senses to experience the body and the world. For example, the sensations of pleasure and pain are actually very subjective and very relative. One person may say that work is painful whereas idleness is pleasant. But for people striving to realize a vision, the harder they work the more energized they feel, and the greater the sense of accomplishment. Other people work hard and complain of fatigue and frustration. “What is the point of all this?” For someone like this being tired would be an unpleasant sensation.

What constitutes suffering depends on one’s attitude and point of view. For example, most people think that poverty, sickness, and old age are all forms of suffering. However, one can experience these things without necessarily suffering. Some sick people do not feel suffering. Some might even say, “This sickness is a blessing because through it I encountered the Dharma.” Does this person experience pain? Probably, but pain is not necessarily the same as suffering. Pain is physical, but suffering is an emotional response to what one feels physically. Even while experiencing your own pain, you should help other sentient beings that are having even greater troubles. When you can use your own discomfort to comfort others, you will suffer less.

The Buddhist sutras tell of bodhisattvas who vow to go to hell if necessary to deliver sentient beings. There, they would encounter the discomfort and pain of hell without experiencing emotional suffering. The reason is that they are protected by their vow to help sentient beings. For these bodhisattvas being in hell is no different from being in the Pure Land. That is not to say that hell is the same as the Pure Land but since these bodhisattvas are not in hell to be punished, they experience no suffering. The point is that our responses to sensations are intimately related to what

is in our minds. After all, it is because of our minds that we are able to experience sensations.

Contemplating the Mind

We speak of the mind and imagine it to be some kind of real entity. Sometimes the mind seems very abstract but in Chinese philosophy the mind is considered an organ of the heart, so “mind” also includes what is in one’s heart. A constant flow of thoughts passes through the mind; thought after thought they change constantly, each new one different from the previous. Even though it seems like there is a “self” behind these thoughts, if our thoughts are constantly changing, how can there be a permanent thing called the “self?”

When this constant flow of thoughts ceases, it is possible for wisdom and compassion to arise. But when the mind is not stable, it knows only vexation and suffering. One moment we can be very good-hearted and the next moment very mean. This is because when the mind is not calm there is suffering and there is neither wisdom nor compassion. And when the mind is neither all good nor all bad, one is confused.

It is possible to improve your mind to the point where you have fewer vexations. When you are unhappy, tell yourself the feeling is not only impermanent, but it is also possible for you to change things for the better. Tell yourself there is nothing inherent about suffering, and that you are suffering because of the way you view and respond to things. There is a Chinese saying, “If you step back and look at the situation in a different way, you will be able to see open skies and the vast ocean.” Why plunge forward into more suffering when you can step back and see the situation in a better light? However, when experiencing very heavy vexation, ask yourself, “Who



is giving rise to these vexations?” But do not come up with answers like, “Oh, it’s my wife (or husband, boss, etc.) who is giving me all this vexation.” Truly, these vexations result from one’s own mind. When you realize that, you will know that it is not necessary to give rise to all these vexations.

Contemplating Dharmas

To truly realize that suffering originates in our own minds we need to contemplate the selflessness of dharmas. All dharmas are phenomena but we should distinguish between the material dharmas in the environment and the dharmas in the mind – thoughts, ideas, symbols, and feelings. Without the physical body the functions of the mind cannot manifest. The coming together of material dharmas (including the body) and mental dharmas (thoughts) results in the notion of a separate “self.” That self, coming together from constantly changing dharmas, must also be impermanent. Therefore, we can ask ourselves just who

it is that is giving rise to suffering. If one’s mind is constantly changing and one’s body is also constantly changing, and if the self is the result of the coming together of constantly changing phenomena, then who am I? What is there in this mix that is “me?” That is one question one can investigate. If we can understand there is no enduring “I,” then it is possible to understand emptiness and realize wisdom.

There are two steps we can take to achieve this. First, instead of thinking of our bodies and minds as our selves, we can think of them as tools to help sentient beings accomplish liberation. At home, our bodies and minds can be used by everyone in the family; in the wider society, they can be shared by everyone. That way, there will remain no idea of “this is me” and “this belongs to me.” The second step is to contemplate that all phenomena – body, mind, and environment – are constantly changing. There is nothing permanent there. Similarly, regarding the idea of a self that results from the confluence of body, mind, and environment, since these

conditioning factors all have no inherent existence, there can also be no inherently existing self. If one can do this, one will be able to realize emptiness and attain wisdom. However, it is important to understand that one can't just jump into wisdom and emptiness – one needs to start with understanding the impermanence of the self.

Right Concentration

Why is right concentration the last of the noble paths when in fact, from the very beginning, we practice meditation? The answer is that from the beginning our goal is to cultivate a mind that is not disturbed by our emotions, our bodies, or the environment. This is what we call worldly samadhi. However, as we progress on the liberation path we also need to cultivate the transcendent samadhi of right concentration. The difference between worldly samadhi and transcendent samadhi is that the latter is the samadhi of liberation. This is also called *samyak-samādhī*, the noble samadhi, the true samadhi, or the supreme samadhi. Worldly samadhi stops the mind on one point while *samyak-samādhī* transcends even that.

An ordinary mind that does not fluctuate greatly in daily life can be said to have some level of samadhi power. But if one seriously cultivates samadhi we are then speaking in terms of the four dhyana levels and the eight samadhis. Buddhadharma sees the world of samsara as

containing three realms – the desire realm, the realm of form, and the formless realm. The desire realm has nothing to do with any of the dhyana levels, but in the realm of form one cultivates the four dhyanas: the joy of non-production of thoughts, the joy of production of concentration, the bliss of leaving joy, and the joy of casting out thought. The dhyana joys in the realm of form are also worldly samadhi. The realm of no-form involves the samadhis of infinite space, infinite consciousness, unmoving ground, and neither cognition nor non-cognition. So between the realm of form and the realm of no-form there are eight levels of worldly samadhi in all. The ninth samadhi is the non-worldly *samyak-samādhī* of true liberation.

How do these samadhis relate to the ordinary world? Beings in the desire realm are attached to, and crave sensual pleasures. This desire extends to the quest for comfort, security, and possessions. As a result one attaches to and identifies with these desires and possessions. This typifies being in the realm of desire. In the realm of form, someone in samadhi is released from the burdens of body and



Photo by Olga Thelavart

environment and feels such joy and happiness that it is easy to become very attached to those feelings. This is also true when experiencing the samadhis of no-form. So, in the realm of desire one is attached to the pleasures of the sensual world, and in the realms of form and no-form one is attached to the bliss of samadhi. Because they all involve attachment and desires, all these states are called worldly samadhi.

I often remind students to adopt a joyful attitude during retreat. But on retreat you are meditating all day, not allowed to talk, the food is very simple, and the sleeping arrangements not that good. Under these circumstances, how can one be joyful? People who have never been to retreat have difficulty understanding this. In fact, some think that people who go on retreats are weird. Interestingly, many retreat participants keep coming back; for them Chan retreat is vacation and they come with a joyful attitude. The enjoyment of peace and calm and the release from the burdens of daily life are the reasons they keep coming back.

I encourage those who have not been to a Chan retreat to give it a try. Some may have been to retreat but feel ambivalent about going again. They are comfortable with life as it is and don't want to change it too much; on the other hand they also recognize the benefits one can gain on retreat. So they feel these conflicts. If you put aside a period of time every day to practice, you will find your mind becoming more stable, and you will find more peace and harmony within yourself. But you can enjoy even greater benefits if you can set aside a longer period of time every year to practice. Going on retreat is a good way to do this.

As we have said, Buddhadharmā consists of the three studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. However, in the noble eightfold path, concentration is the ultimate path because it is that which leads

to the deepest samadhi of all, the world-transcending samadhi of liberation. One who attaches to the worldly samadhis is still in the worldly realm. When one returns from the bliss of worldly samadhi, one is no different from any ordinary being with vexations and attachments. So one must understand that worldly samadhi is not the ultimate samadhi; one needs to transcend one's attachments to the pleasure of the material world as well as to the bliss of worldly samadhi. When one is finally able to do so one can give rise to the wisdom without outflows, the wisdom that is without self. What is the wisdom without outflows? It is the wisdom in which one does not give rise to vexation and suffering. So long as one can continue to manifest this wisdom one is liberated.

Buddhadharmā speaks of the four fruition stages of an arhat. At the first fruition, the arhat has an initial taste of liberation, while in the second and third fruitions the realization gets deeper. It is only at the fourth fruition level that one is constantly in a liberated state in which one manifests wisdom and samadhi simultaneously.

Worldly samadhi is entered through sitting meditation. When this samadhi is deep and the mind and body are not moving at all, there are no unwholesome thoughts or behaviors and no vexations. So long as one continues in samadhi one enjoys a great sense of freedom. Nevertheless, however deep, any worldly samadhi will inevitably end, as will the sense of freedom that goes with it. On the other hand, one who attains world-transcending samadhi will enjoy the sense of freedom and ease even when not meditating. While engaging in all the activities of daily life one would continue to be undisturbed by the environment. You are truly liberated when you can experience that at all times. Therefore, if one wants to cultivate samadhi, one should cultivate the samyak-samādhi of the noble eightfold path.

Summation: Practicing the Wisdom of No-Self

For forty-five years after his enlightenment the Buddha traveled around India, teaching and delivering sentient beings. During this time he was not constantly sitting in meditation, enjoying worldly samadhi. As a completely liberated person the Buddha was in samadhi at all times. Similarly, his disciples who were arhats and bodhisattvas also lived ordinary lives. Like the Buddha, they did not experience suffering while living amidst the human world because they had already realized samyak-samādhī.

You may think that because you are not yet an arhat or a buddha, all this has nothing to do with you. That would be a mistake. In Mahayana Buddhism, especially in Chan, the emphasis is on cultivating samadhi simultaneously with the wisdom of no-outflows (i.e., no new karma) and to use that in daily life. As you encounter problems in body, mind, or the environment, you can practice not being affected by them and not giving rise to suffering and vexation. Even without being an arhat or bodhisattva, one who practices this way will derive immediate and great benefits.

How does one practice so as not to be afflicted by life's inevitable problems? A woman I know discovered that she had a large tumor. Even as she consulted doctors to diagnose the problem the tumor was growing. But this woman remembered hearing me say that the best time to practice was when you have a very serious illness. You turn your illness over to the doctors and you give your life to the bodhisattvas. After that you have nothing to do but practice. During this whole crisis she was very calm while her family was devastated. What this woman did was apply the wisdom of no-self. Though one has not realized the wisdom of no-self, one can still make use of the

wisdom of no-self taught by the Buddha. That is what she did and, in a sense, had the power of samadhi.

Therefore, when you are in a crisis that you cannot avoid, please remind yourself that whatever the problem is, it is not you. Your mind will be more stable, calmer, and you will give rise to less suffering. But if you try to escape or reject your problems, you will suffer a great deal more. In the journey of life there will be many obstacles, crises and problems you cannot completely eliminate. But it is possible to survive them peacefully and safely by using the wisdom of Buddhadharmā. When you do that you are in fact practicing right concentration. Chan teaches that samadhi and wisdom are not separate from daily life. This is the meaning of wisdom and samadhi arising simultaneously.

As a teaching, the noble eightfold path encompasses much of the Buddhadharmā. In fact the noble eightfold path contains the three disciplines. The fourth noble truth tells us that the way out of suffering is through the noble eightfold path. Therefore, one can also say that unless one practices the noble eightfold path the four noble truths have no meaning. As a teaching about how to depart from suffering, the four noble truths also encompass the twelve links of conditioned arising, the *nidānas*², which are a description of samsaric suffering.

What are the *nidānas*? They are the twelve causal links that everyone experiences in each lifetime. Called the twelve links of conditioned arising, they explain how and why sentient beings transmigrate through uncountable lifetimes until they experience liberation. The noble eightfold path is precisely the means for accomplishing liberation while remaining fully engaged on the bodhisattva path of helping sentient beings. While it is basic Buddhism, the noble eightfold path is also an essential practice in the Mahayana ideal.

In theory, the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment is a sequence of gradual practices leading to liberation in the noble eightfold path. In this view, one goes from one practice to the next in each category, ultimately completing all thirty-seven practices. However, in actual practice this would not necessarily be the case. If one rigorously and diligently practices any of the seven categories and focuses one's efforts on that practice, then that can take one all the way to liberation. For example, if you focus on the four foundations of mindfulness, delving deeply into them, you can surely attain liberation. Or, if you choose to focus on right concentration, that can also carry you all the way to liberation. The teachings of the thirty-seven aids seem complex, involving many steps, stages, and levels. But when you engage in the practice all you need is to delve deeply into one method and stay with it until it takes you to liberation. It is not that complicated and actually quite simple.

If you do not entirely understand the teachings of the noble eightfold path, do not be too concerned. What is important is to remember that the noble eightfold path is the wisdom that Śākyamuni Buddha bequeathed to all of us. Its purpose is to help human beings solve the two main problems in life, those of living and dying. In life we inevitably encounter problems and obstacles arising from our bodies, from our minds, from society, and from nature. The result is that we experience pain, suffering, and unhappiness. The Buddhadharma of the noble eightfold path helps us to deal with these difficulties by following the middle way. In this manner we will not give rise



Dharma Wheel Metropolitan Museum of Art

to as much vexation and suffering, and we will feel more at ease with life. We will have a better chance to experience true happiness and joy.

The Buddha's wisdom also helps us with the inevitability of death. Depending on one's merit and karma one may encounter few or many difficulties in life. But however much merit one is born with or accumulates, no one will escape death. When we accept and follow the teaching of the noble eightfold path, we will not feel as terrified and helpless when we arrive at the final stage of our lives. We will know that the noble eightfold path will ultimately guide us towards liberation from vexation and suffering. 🌀

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1. The four proper exertions are: to cease unwholesome behavior already arisen, to avoid giving rise to new unwholesome behavior, to continue wholesome behavior already arisen, and to give rise to new wholesome behavior.
 2. The *nidānas* (also known as the twelve links of conditioned arising, as well as the twelve links of dependent origination) are: ignorance, action, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense faculties, contact, sensation, desire, clinging, becoming, birth, aging-and-dying. Together they form the causal change of transmigration from one lifetime to another.

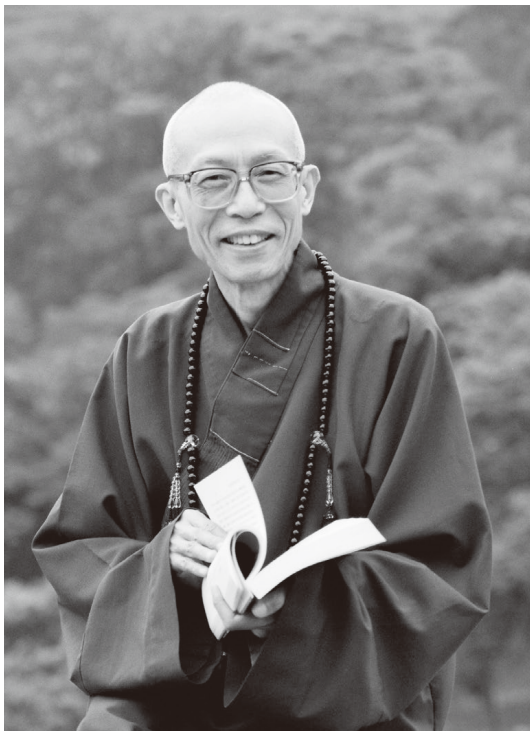
First Year *in* America

BY

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

On December 16, 1976, the one year anniversary of his arrival at the Temple of Great Enlightenment, Master Sheng Yen recorded the following remarks which provide a fascinating insight into the progress of his first year in America. Shortly after, he asked his students to begin producing this very *Chan Magazine* which you are reading right now. Shifu's remarks became the first article published, and served to introduce the practitioner reports which fill the rest of that first issue. Shifu felt that the voices of practitioners were just as important as scholarly articles and Dharma talks, in spreading Buddhadharma. That's why the first editions of his first English book, *Getting the Buddha Mind*, included many retreat reports. Recorded by Shen Ta-yung, translated by Chün-fang Yü.





Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

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 DLitt 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 Ouyi Zhixu (1599–1655) 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 Chan Buddhists often did not know the essence of Chan, 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. Chan, 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 Rinzai and Soto 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 Buddhadharma to the West. I did not come here to teach Chan meditation. Moreover, the type of Chan 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 Chan 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 the Chan 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.

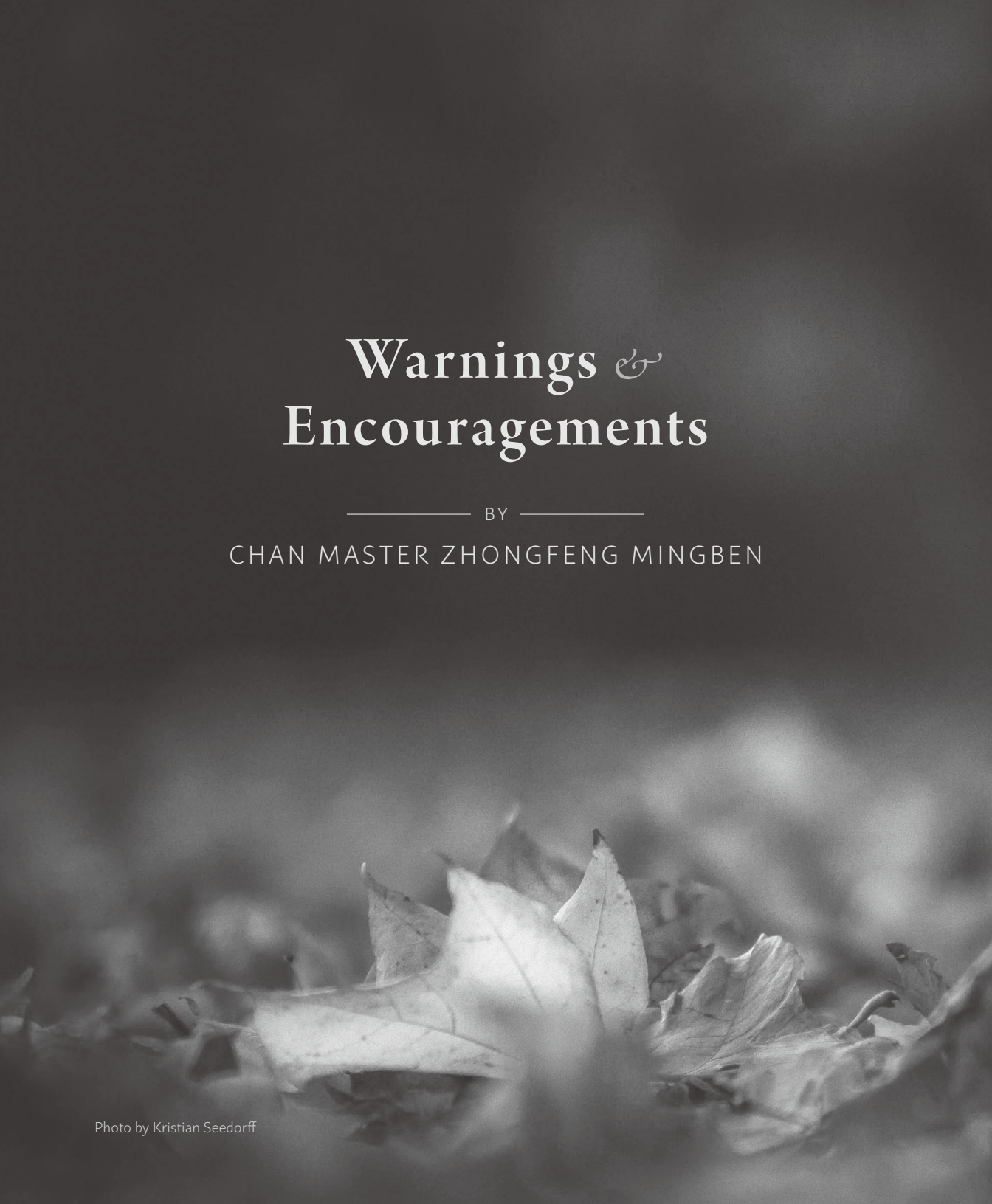
I arrived in the United States on December 10th, 1975 and came to the Temple of Great Enlightenment in New York City on the 16th of the same month. With the support of Reverend Jenchün (the Reverend Min-chih was in Hong Kong at that time) and Upāsaka C. T. Shen and others, I started to train four youths in Chan 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 PhDs. The youngest is seventeen and the oldest is sixty-eight. Some have practiced Chan 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 Chan meditation. Each person was asked to limit the remarks to five minutes. Their reports were recorded by Trustee Upāsaka 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 Chan 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. 🌿

Warnings & Encouragements

BY

CHAN MASTER ZHONGFENG MINGBEN

Photo by Kristian Seedorff



Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323) was an eminent Chan master of the Linji lineage in the Yuan dynasty. He was a student of Chan Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao (1238–1296), who entered into the mountains when the Mongols took over the country. Yuanmiao was the protagonist of the famous gong’an, “Do you have mastery of yourself when you are in a dreamless sleep?” Translated by Ocean Cloud, a group of practitioners, students of Chan Master Sheng Yen, who endeavor to bring the classics of Chinese Buddhism to the English-speaking community in the spirit of dana-paramita. They are: Chang Wen (David Listen), Guo Shan (Jeff Larko), and Guo Jue (Wei Tan). This article was originally published in our Winter 2006 issue.



True Mind

BROTHERS! IT IS BECAUSE YOU HAVE NOT generated the true mind that you have exhausted all contrivances and return time and time again for thousands of lifetimes receiving myriad retributions. What do we mean by the “true mind?” It is that which arises spontaneously without thinking or intention, no matter what one encounters. For example, as soon as someone reviles you, anger immediately bursts out. Right away everything – the state of the body and mind, all that you see and hear, and the very functioning of your awareness is engulfed by anger; even to the point that you would forget all about food and sleep. Anger would fill your dreams, and some even carry this hatred and enmity to the end of their life. Well, anger is but one of the eighty thousand afflictions. The rest are all the same. In fact, these afflictions mutually influence each other, intertwining into birth and death, flowing forth into infinity.

For those who cultivate the Way and aspire to resolve this very affair of birth and death, make it so that as soon as you hear the words “birth and death,” you react to them immediately as if someone is reviling you. Spontaneously, without any contrivances and thinking, let the words fill up your very bosom. If you are not able to penetrate to sudden enlightenment, do not give up until you die. If you have such an aspiration, there will be no need to worry that this great affair cannot be resolved.

Earnestness

Practitioners of old had profound faith in the path, their view well grounded, their understanding of the principles clear, their minds meticulous, their aspirations unwavering. In their practice and study,

even hundreds of obstacles and failures could not sway their intentions. Not only were their intentions immovable, all those obstacles and failures became means to refine their aspiration and strength. That is why they were able to attain realization rapidly.

In light of this, the circumstances and conditions we encounter are not inherently auspicious or adverse. It all depends on whether our heart is genuinely on the path or not. If our heart were genuinely on the path, then a household life would be the same as a left-home life, and adversity and loss would be the same as propitiousness and gain. All of our ancestors who had profound realizations emerged from trials, toil, and hardship. Reflect on this!

The Lure of Profit and the Way

There are people who live as servants. They toil and exhaust themselves, not daring to stay idle. When they commit even a slight error, they will be angrily scolded and even whipped – no punishment is spared. However, you don’t see them run away in disgust. How can they disregard the suffering caused by anger and enmity so easily? Well, it’s none other than the lure of profit and sustenance. They worry that if they react to the mistreatment, they will be driven away from the household and thus lose their means of survival. As a result, they willingly accept the mistreatment of anger and enmity in exchange for profit and sustenance.

You who cultivate the way! How easily you regress and fall back into laziness when you encounter ever so slight an adverse situation and condition! To compare the way and the lure of profit is like comparing heaven and earth. And yet how earnestly people run after profit and how half-heartedly they seek the way! You should awaken to what I am saying here to encourage yourself.

Effort

Confucian classics say, “When heaven is about to bestow a great responsibility on a person, he or she will first be put through the trial of hardship of the mind, tests of aspiration, physical toil, and deprivation of bodily nourishment.” Well, the supreme great path of bodhi is much more than just a great responsibility. The saint in India (the Buddha Śākyamuni)

gave up his lives for kalpas to strive for the fruit of the way. His bones from all those lifetimes, if piled up, would be as high as Mt. Sumeru; the milk he had taken as nourishment, if pooled, would be as vast as the ocean. One cannot even total the lives he has undergone in his training. And thus he exclaimed, “I do not treasure my body and life, I care only about the supreme Path.”

Nowadays, when we look at the lives of those who call themselves practitioners of the path and who shelter themselves in a quiet place free of responsibilities, what we discover is excess – eating before they are hungry, sleeping before they are tired, engaging in many kinds of self-indulgences. If their demand is not met, complaints and grudges will be discharged instantly. When they hear of diligence, hard work, and energetic effort, they cover their ears, turn around and shrink away.

Nothing in this world can be accomplished without working for it and nothing can be reaped if you do not plant the seeds. Consider the great masters in



whose footsteps we tread. Even possessing the great karmic capacities that they did, they still toiled diligently before they attained thorough enlightenment. Some served in the kitchen as a cook or worked to pound rice – doing all sorts of menial work without shying away from the toil and hardship. What are we compared to them? How could we dare to live a life of indulgence, with no introspection?

In the past the famous prime minister Guan Zhong admonished the Lord of Qi, “To give in to pleasure and be idle is like drinking poison, do not harbor such a thought!” We would think that it is fitting for a lord or king to indulge in pleasure idleness. Yet even he was admonished against just that. What about us who are gravely mindful of the great affair of birth and death?! Having disregarded physical appearances and turned away from lay clothing, we should be working as if our heads are aflame. How could we fall back into the indulgence of pleasure and idleness? When Guan Zhong talked about indulgence as poison, he was referring to it as poison to the

body for just this lifetime. For us, it is a poison that can harm our wisdom lives for tens of thousands of kalpas. The harms cannot be compared.

Practice as If Our Heads Are Aflame

One of the verses we chant says, “People! Practice with great diligence and effort, as if your heads are aflame!” This is an analogy used to describe an attitude that is profound, earnest, cohesive, clear, unreserved, and straightforward – an unsurpassed serious attitude of practice. For if your head is burning, even if you are starving and food is given to you, you could not even entertain the thought of eating it without first extinguishing the fire; even if you are exhausted and would have laid down to rest, you would not be able to do so without first putting out the fire on your head. To eat when one is starving and to rest when one is exhausted are most personal things that one does naturally. But without first putting out the fire, it is not possible to do so. If one has the desire for indulgence and idleness while one’s head is still aflame, one should realize that even saints and sages such as Buddhas and ancestral masters are not able to fulfill that desire.

If you can instill in your mind this need to practice diligently as if your head is aflame, spontaneously your body and mind will be well guarded and inviolable, like a well-fortified castle guarded by a mighty troop. That way, the samsaric karmic stream of consciousness, and the inverted delusory emotions will naturally melt away, leaving no trace to be found, with no further contrivance.

According to the regulations and rules of the monasteries¹, on the eighth day of each month, the residents will gather and the assembly will be gravely and sternly reminded of this admonition. Nowadays,



those who hear of the admonition respond to it like people living in the country of Qin looking at the lands in the country of Yue, staying indifferent to whether those lands are fertile or barren², and like clay statues being exposed to the performance of the clowns and the jesters. Not only aren't they inspired and motivated to practice diligently, they are disgusted with what they hear and see, wanting only the pleasure of idleness. Alas! This is how negligent and lazy people have become. Even if Baizhang³ were to come back, what could he do with them? What could he do to them? 🍃

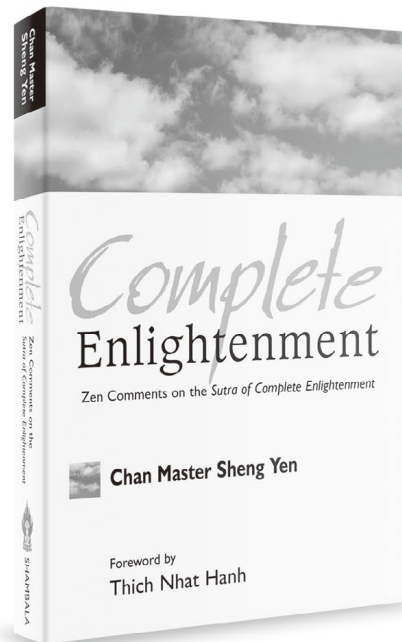
1. The *Chanyuan Qinggui* (Rules of Purity for the Chan Monastery). Compiled by Chan Master Changlu Zongze (1037–1106) but originally (allegedly) created by the Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814).
2. People in the country of Qin are indifferent to the condition of the lands in the country of Yue because it is none of their business.
3. See note 1 above.

Complete Enlightenment

*Zen Comments on the
Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*
Chan Master Sheng Yen

This book is the first authoritative English translation and commentary on *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*, a central Mahayana text that shaped the development of East Asian Buddhism and Chan. Master Sheng Yen incisively applies the sutra to practice in contemporary life. This is truly a manual for the spiritual journey toward complete enlightenment, providing the key to the deep, poetic, and practical meanings of the scripture.

Shambhala Publications • eISBN 978-0-8348-2909-1



The Wondrous Functions of the Mind:

“A Letter to Inspection Officer Zheng”

BY

CHAN MASTER ZHONGFENG MINGBEN



Chan Master Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323) was a prominent teacher of the Linji school in the Yuan dynasty. He drew students from all over East Asia, and influenced the development of the Rinzai school of Zen in Japan. This work, originally titled *Shì Zhèng Lián Fǎng* (示鄭廉訪), is selected from the *Extensive Record of Preceptor Tianmu Zhongfeng*.

Translated by Ocean Cloud, a group of practitioners, students of Chan Master Sheng Yen, who endeavor to bring the classics of Chinese Buddhism to the English-speaking community in the spirit of dana-paramita. They are: Chang Wen (David Listen), Guo Shan (Jeff Larko), and Guo Jue (Wei Tan). This article was originally published in our Winter 2004 issue.



THE INVISIBLE BUG IS ABLE TO REST ON everything but not on fire. The mind of sentient beings can relate to everything (as an object of cognition) but not to prajna. But what really is the mind of sentient beings and what really is the essence of prajna? Why this talk about the ability and inability to relate to phenomena? Well, let me explain: “Reined with golden bridle, the horse whinnies on the fragrant grass; in the jade pavilion, the lady is enraptured by the spring blossoming of apricot flowers” – this is the mind of sentient beings. “In the jade pavilion, the lady is enraptured by the spring blossoming of apricot flowers; reined with golden bridle, the horse whinnies on the fragrant grass” – this is the essence of prajna. “On fragrant grass whinnies the golden bridled horse; the spring blossoming of apricot flowers enraptures the lady in the jade pavilion” – this is the ability and inability to relate to phenomena. If you get this directly without any hesitation, you would have seen true reality.

Apart from the mind of sentient beings, there is no prajna essence; when the waves subside, the water returns to its original state. Apart from prajna essence, there is no mind of sentient beings; when there is water, waves will naturally arise. When emotive conceptualization of what is saintly and what is worldly is ended, and when the view of subject and object subsides, the worlds of the ten directions become one great field of complete enlightenment. All sentient beings have originally attained buddhahood. At this place, you would not be able to find the tiniest bit of thing to be the mind of sentient beings; and you would not be able to find the tiniest bit of thing that is prajna essence, let alone finding the tiniest bit of thing to support the theory of being able or not able to relate to phenomena. This is what we call the true suchness dharma gate of one taste and universality. Because of it, the buddhas of the past, present, and

future are able to set the wheel of Dharma in motion; with it, the ancestral masters of the past were able to open the true eyes of Dharma; relying on it, the firmament shelters the world; based on it, the earth holds up everything. The saints utilize it to bring order and peace to all places; a noble person accords with it to fulfill the virtue of benevolence and enact policies to administer the land.

It is just that the multitude uses it every day without knowing it. Having their back turned against it, they get more and more alienated from it. Due to this estrangement, worldly characteristics arise through prajna essence; from these worldly characteristics, the mind of sentient beings is generated; following this mind of sentient beings, different karmic actions are performed. As a result, one wanders around from place to place, leading to endless cyclic existence.

What we call prajna essence is none other than the potent and wondrous awareness from which the six sense functions flow forth. It is like a room that encompasses empty space, having six doors open on the sides, without obstructing each other. What we call the mind of sentient beings is none other than that which habitually follows the six sense objects of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought. It constantly grabs and rejects things it encounters, generating feelings of liking and aversion, grasping and attaching to things thought after thought, without interruption.

Prajna essence is analogous to water and the mind of sentient beings to waves. When the ocean of mind is perturbed by the wind of conditions it encounters, waves arise from the water. Apart from the water, the waves have no concrete substance. For one whose great wisdom has shone through in great brightness and openness, he or she would be able to see the unmoving water amidst the thousand convoluted waves, with nothing amiss in both movement

and non-movement. If you have not attained this, you are only relying on words that resemble true wisdom, being profoundly blind to the wisdom essence of wondrous awareness.

What we call mind and consciousness are but two names of the same thing. The enlightened ones penetrate consciousness and return to mind; the confused ones turn mind into consciousness. So what is mind? It is just a name given to the wondrous awareness which functions without any confusion. And what is consciousness? It is a name given to the illusory arising of discrimination from the functioning of wondrous awareness. These days, practitioners who discourse in abstruse eloquence mostly hold on to the entity of consciousness, without realizing the mind essence of wondrous awareness.

In reality, what we call wondrous awareness is not itself an object to be known. This is why the ancients said that a mirror does not reflect itself and a fire does not burn itself. If a mirror reflects itself, it would not be able to mirror other objects; if a fire burns itself, it would not be able to burn other objects. The mind essence is the same. If what we call wondrous awareness knows itself as an entity of awareness, it will not be able to know everything else. If one comes to know it as an object of awareness, what is known must actually be the entity of consciousness, not mind essence. Consciousness is the very object of the changeability

of birth and death. If one holds on to it, how can one transcend birth and death?

The very essence of mind cannot be seen, heard, known, sensed, nor can it be grabbed or rejected. Whatever that can be generated is illusory, unreal, and inverted. If it is not something to be seen, heard, known, or sensed, how can a practitioner attain it as a transcendental realization? Well, all one should do is to depart from everything that can be seen, heard, known, or sensed, to the point that the one who departs and that which is being departed from (object) are brought into emptiness and quiescence.



The mind essence will then simply manifest amidst that which can be seen, heard, known or sensed. When the ancients silently came into accord and vividly realized this, the non-obstruction of all phenomena and conditions followed naturally.

However, if one desires to depart from the illness of the seen, heard, known, and sensed, this desire itself will in actuality enhance the illness. This is why the ancients came up with a skillful mean of practice. They put forth a meaningless *huatou*, instructing practitioners to investigate it thoroughly. If one throws all one's attention into the investigation of the *huatou*, one would naturally depart from the seen, heard, known, sensed, etc. without having to do so with any contrivance. In the various records of the transmission of lamps, we know that the ancestral masters did not generate doubt sensations through the use of *huatou*. Rather, they spontaneously realized non-arising through some spoken words. This is because they were truly and genuinely determined to resolve the great affair of birth and death. Even before they entered the gate of Chan practice, the thought of impermanence and the gravity of the affair of birth and death had already been palpating. This thought stuck in their minds and they were unable to bring about a resolution of it. As a result, they traveled and wandered around, going thousands of miles, entering into remote places enshrouded completely by wild grasses, with the wind as their only companion, seeking for a resolution. They went forth single-mindedly and diligently, with no other purpose than to thoroughly enlighten to "who they are." If they could not

realize the resolution after practicing for decades, their doubt sensation of birth and death would grow stronger with time, not for one moment would they let go of this intention. If one can practice with such power of wisdom, there will be no need to worry that the light will not shine through.

Alas! Nowadays human minds are shallow and restless. Many people claim themselves to be practicing Chan. The fact is, most only desire to be learned in the forms of practice and use them as material for gossip. Since they do not set their minds on resolving the great affair of birth and death, the more

they talk, the more they are entrapped in their conceptions, entwined ever more deeply by the vines, leading to the reinforcement of birth and death. How unfortunate!

If you want to emulate the buddhas and the ancestral masters, you must generate the proper aspiration of resolving the great affair of birth and death. Hang it on your eyelashes! So that

even if you are enmeshed in myriad happenings and you are bombarded by myriad activities of the mind, you do not give rise to even one deviating intention, generating thoughts of discrimination, thus obstructing your aspiration. If this aspiration to resolve [the great affair] of birth and death is not genuine and sincere, it is certain that you will not be able to truly practice in daily living. And if you were to force yourself, it will only be a fleeting effort, not long lasting. Even if you are so intelligent and sharp that you can gain some understanding from the words of the ancients, that will only increase your knowledge, having no benefit whatsoever as far

THE ENLIGHTENED ONES
PENETRATE CONSCIOUSNESS
AND RETURN TO MIND;
THE CONFUSED ONES
TURN MIND
INTO CONSCIOUSNESS.

as the affair of birth and death is concerned. This is due to the lack of a genuine aspiration.

There are three essential requisites on the path of practice: The first is to set your mind sincerely on the affair of birth and death; the second is to see through the illusoriness and fleetingness of worldly concerns such as honor and humiliation, gain and loss; the third is the determination to persevere along the path, never to regress. If one of these requisites is missing, your practice will be crippled; if two of them are missing, you will be lost; and if all three are missing, even if you were to commit the whole *Tripitaka* to memory and to deeply immerse yourself in cartloads of books, it will only feed to the karmic stream of your consciousness, engendering your pride and arrogance, having no benefit whatsoever to your affair of birth and death.

In the past, a monk asked Master Zhao Zhou, “Does a dog have Buddha nature?” Zhao Zhou

answered, “wu!” This single word “wu” is like the great sword of heaven and the poison smeared drum. Those who come into contact with it will die instantly and those who engage with it will have their spirits shocked into oblivion. Even the Buddhas and the ancestral masters do not dare to look at it straight on. Since the time it was proffered, many people have been intrigued by it, and as a result many attained realization through it. However, there were also a large number who got it wrong. If you want to thoroughly enlighten to the great intention of the buddhas and the ancestral masters, and to completely penetrate your true mind, why don’t you place this word “wu” among the writing tablets and the desks? Whether you are speaking or silent, on the move or at rest, hang the huatou in there! Looking into it closely and unceasingly. What really is it all about? Why did Zhao Zhou say “wu?” Investigating it while you are on the move, examining it while you are seated.



Photo by Jaycee Xie

Dwelling on it and being intrigued by it day and night, without relenting for even one instant. While you are investigating it and examining it, do not try to understand it in the worldly sense or in the transcendental sense. Just go on as if nothing is happening in front of your eyes. If the flow of your investigation is smooth and seamless, do not be joyous because of that. If the flow of your investigation is intermittent and scattered, do not become discouraged. Whether you can truly do it or not, just carry on in a matter-of-fact manner. Do not give rise to the thought of wanting to find some skillful way to enhance the practice. Giving rise to such a thought is in fact creating an interruption in your practice. If you carry on unceasingly in this manner, by and by, your practice will naturally become seamless and it will happen that spontaneously the inner mind and the outer world will both be emptied and cleared. Instantly the saintly and the worldly will be transcended. At that point, you will realize that the way is to be attained within your very being, not from anything external.

You have suffered in this impermanent world of birth and death for innumerable kalpas without being able to attain liberation. That is not due to any external causes. The very cause of this condition is the

confusion and ignorance of your own mind. When the mind is confused, it enters into birth and death willingly. Nothing external could make it so. It is not so because of heaven and earth, or spirits and deities. If this willingness has its cause in external objects, it cannot be called willingness. Because it does not arise due to external objects, we say that it arises willingly. Since it is your own willingness that results in the entrapment of birth and death, you will not be able to transcend it and move towards nirvana without generating a profound willingness for such a purpose. If you intend to wait for the guidance and advises of the saints and sages to prod you into action, just consider the fact that when you entered the sam-saric flow, it was not due to the prodding of others! Contemplating in this manner, if we can engender a willingness to end the mind that clings karmically to birth and death, turn it towards the path, everyone will attain enlightenment. This is why the ancients said, "If one were to set one's mind as strongly on the path as one does on emotional attachments, one would have attained buddhahood long ago." It was also said that, "If you engender a determined willingness to practice, I can assure you that you will not be fooled." Such words are not said to deceive others!



In the past,
Minister Feng wrote the following verse about his practice:
*When not attending to my official duties, I enjoy sitting meditation.
It was long ago that I last laid my body down when sleeping.
Even though I live my life as a government minister,
All across the four oceans, people know of me as an elderly on the path.*

Prince Li had this verse about practice:
*A man on the path is a man with an iron will,
Whatever one encounters, the course of action is made instantly.
Directly coursing towards the supreme bodhi,
Paying no attention to the disputes of the world.*

Layman Pang said:
*There is nothing special about my daily living,
It is only I being in harmony with myself.
Not grasping or rejecting anything,
Not favoring or opposing any conditions.
Who designated red as "red" and purple as "purple?"
The hills and the mountains are all free of dust.
Miraculous powers and wondrous functions,
Are but gathering wood and carrying water.*

The scholar Zhang Zhuo said in his verse:
*The luminous light illuminates the innumerable worlds quiescently,
The worldly and the saintly – all sentient beings are of my own household.
When not a single thought arises, it manifests completely,
When the six sense faculties move ever so slightly, it is covered by cloud.
To eradicate vexation will enhance your illness,
Working towards true suchness is also deviated.
Flow with the world with no obstruction,
Nirvana and samsara are both illusory flowers in the sky.*

The respectable Zhao Qingxian composed the following verse:
*Sitting silently in the court behind the desk,
The mind source unmoved – clear as water.
In the crash of a thunderbolt, the crown of the head splits open,
I recall what I have always had long ago.*



These are all gentry who roamed and played in the great field of complete enlightenment without departing from worldly merits and fame. If the ancients could be like this, there is no reason why people today cannot do the same. If one has a profound faith and practices sincerely, there will be no difference between people today and people of old. Do not be hesitant! Otherwise you will be drawing a boundary to confine yourself.

The Buddhadharma is the gate of great liberation. The only requisites are that one should see the issue of birth and death as a grave affair, generate a profound faith, and straightforwardly investigating one's huatou with great effort. One should be most careful against reckoning and weighing one's progress, trying to figure out one's gain and loss. Do not be like practitioners of the two vehicles of individual liberation, who employ various methods such as loathing their bodies, avoiding contacts with the environments, quenching thoughts, relinquishing

conditions, discarding what they love, expelling aversions, driving away emotional attachments, trying to depart from the illusory. Moreover, you should not run away from the clamor and seek quietude, or engage yourself in discriminating right from wrong, to grab the saintly and reject the worldly, or to fight against scattered mind and stupor. If you depart from the proper mindfulness of investigating "wu" and give rise to the tiniest bit of concern in what I mentioned above, the sword would have swung by long before you realize it! It would be impossible for you to realize enlightenment. The only purpose of Chan practice is to realize enlightenment. You should take care not to part with your huatou no matter what happens. If you give rise to any intention other than that of realizing enlightenment, you will not be attuned to the practice. Put utmost care into assuring this!

Practitioners today often preconceive an emotive idea of the saintly and the worldly. This

conceptualization stays latent in the storehouse consciousness, and as a result, when thoughts arise, discriminations follow. These people generate the feelings of aversion and annoyance even before engaging in a task; and they constantly reckon and worry even before coming into contact with things. Well, if you cannot penetrate through directly and straightforwardly, you will just be toiling about busily, gaining no benefit in principle. Stay on guard of the huatou in a seamless manner, and make this seamless practice even more seamless. When you are practicing seamlessly, do not entertain any thought about this seamlessness. As soon as you give rise to such a thought, you will fall into the trap of seamlessness and you will be no longer attuned to the practice. If you can just persevere to the point that your practice is proficient and refined, the deluded emotional attachments of liking and aversion, grasping and rejecting, right and wrong will all be thoroughly eradicated without any contrivance, without a second thought.

The purpose of the Confucian path is to cultivate and refine the mind while the purpose of the Buddhist path is to enlighten and realize the mind. Cultivating and refining is gradual while enlightening and realizing is sudden. Although the mind is the same, the graduated path and the sudden path are different. And this difference is precisely that of the worldly and the transcendental. If the Buddha were to talk about how one should conduct oneself in the world, he would not be deviating from the Confucian teaching of making the mind upright and making one's intention sincere. Likewise, if Confucius

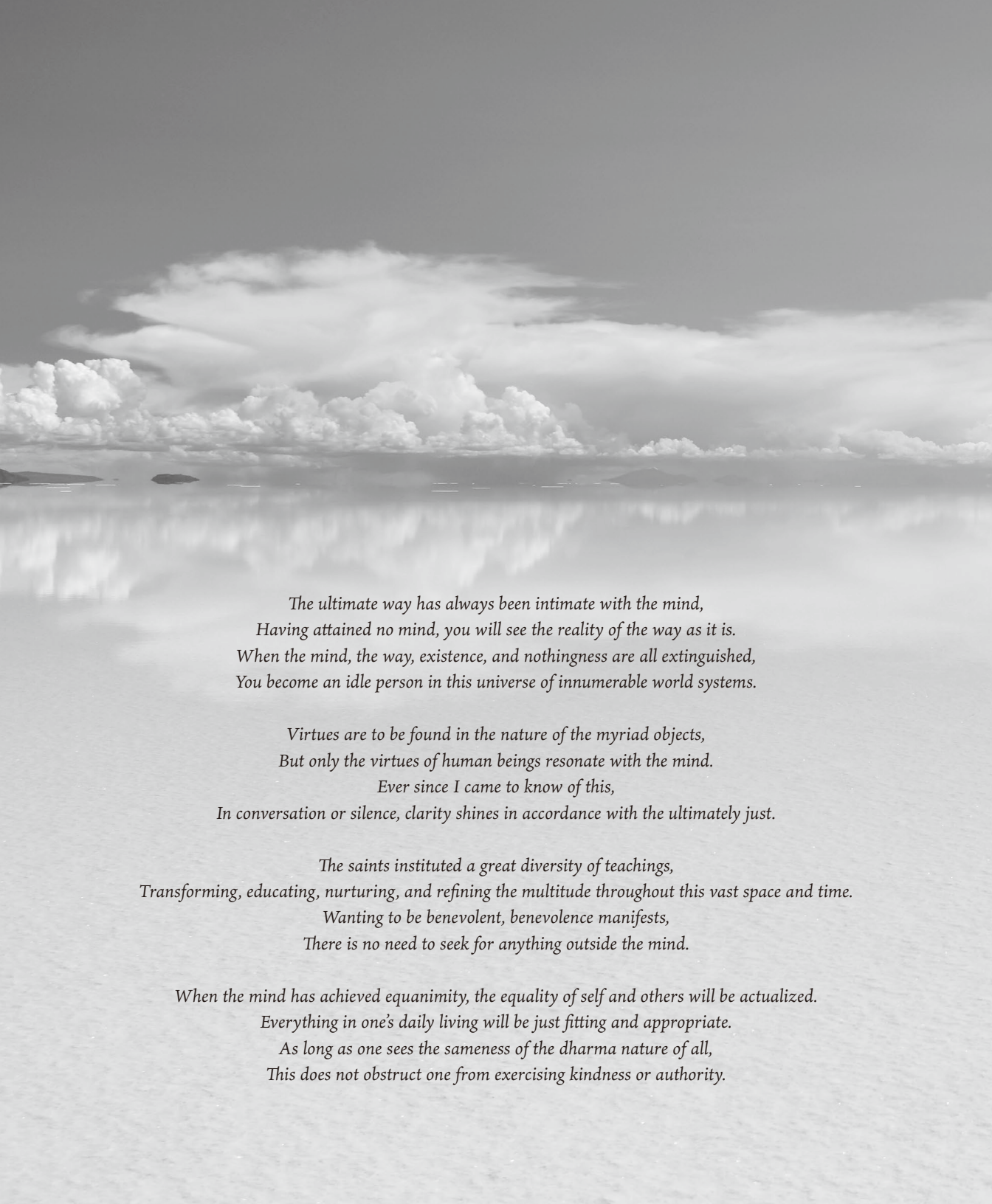
were to talk about the way of the transcendental, the teaching could not be other than the essential principle of emptying the mind and attaining complete enlightenment. If one does not truly understand the great expediency of teachings and means of transformation instituted by the saints, one would merely be arguing and debating about them, bringing all sorts of disputes and quarrels.

When one engages in the study of worldly learning, the eight subjects of cultivating the way, virtue, benevolence, righteousness, proper conduct, music, law, and sociopolitical order are not something

alienated from the wondrous functions of the mind. When the mind has no obstruction, it is called the way; if the mind is upright, it is called being virtuous; if the mind is infused with kindness, it is called benevolence; if the mind is objective, it is called righteousness; if the mind is undeviating, it is called proper conduct; if the mind is gentle and tranquil, it is

called the joy of musical aesthetics; if the mind is straightforward, it is called the law; if the mind is imbued with clarity, it is called order. In fact, not only these eight subjects, but the hundreds and thousands of wholesome conducts – any action that is beneficial to the world and the multitude, all come about due to the wondrous functioning of the mind. A worldly person turns his or her back on it and loses this wondrous function. This is how all sorts of confusion and chaos come into being. As a result, the saints had no choice but to institute their teachings to rectify the situation. To further demonstrate this, I offer the following verses:

ANY ACTION THAT IS
 BENEFICIAL TO THE WORLD
 AND THE MULTITUDE,
 ALL COME ABOUT DUE TO
 THE WONDROUS
 FUNCTIONING OF THE MIND.

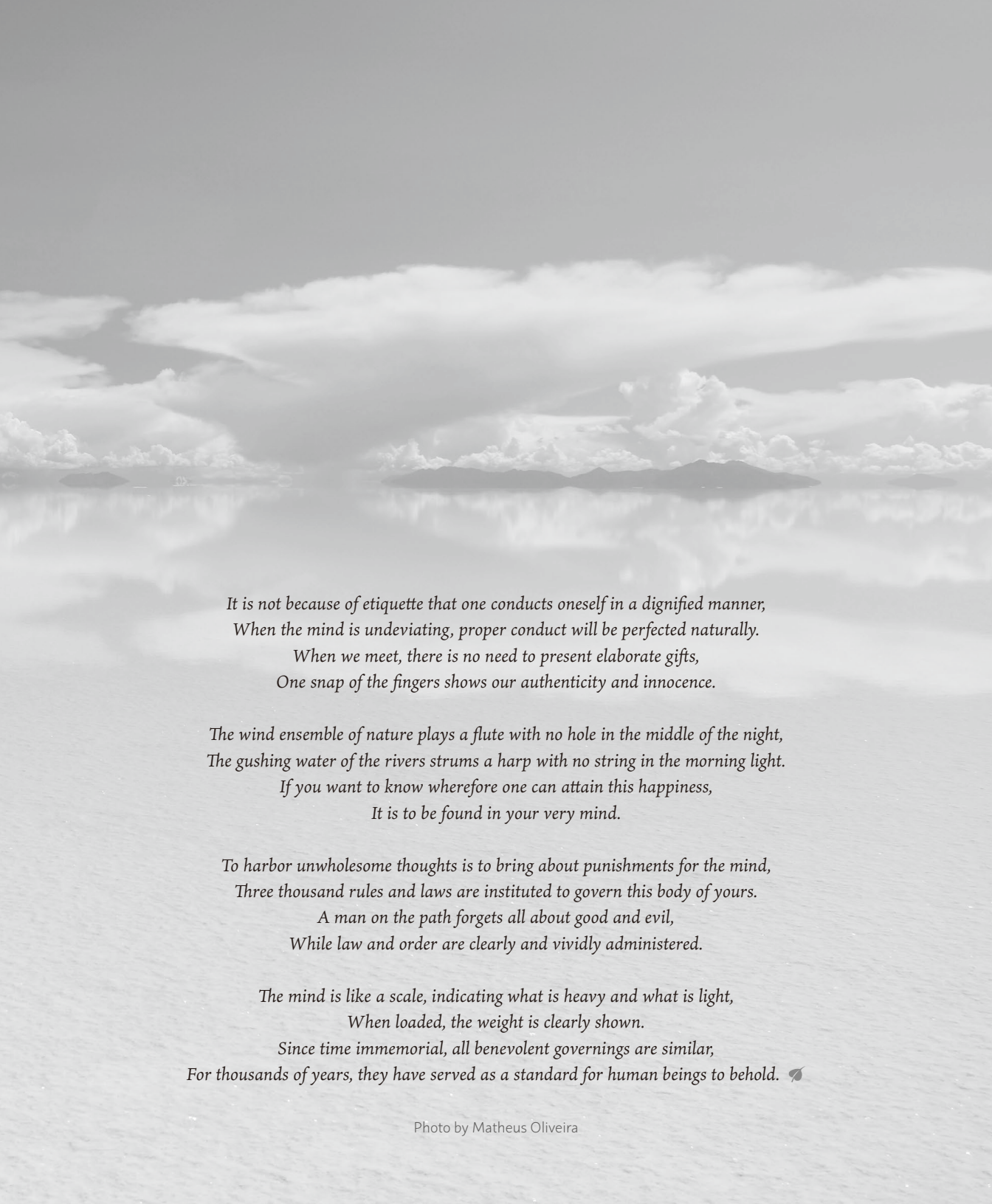


*The ultimate way has always been intimate with the mind,
Having attained no mind, you will see the reality of the way as it is.
When the mind, the way, existence, and nothingness are all extinguished,
You become an idle person in this universe of innumerable world systems.*

*Virtues are to be found in the nature of the myriad objects,
But only the virtues of human beings resonate with the mind.
Ever since I came to know of this,
In conversation or silence, clarity shines in accordance with the ultimately just.*

*The saints instituted a great diversity of teachings,
Transforming, educating, nurturing, and refining the multitude throughout this vast space and time.
Wanting to be benevolent, benevolence manifests,
There is no need to seek for anything outside the mind.*

*When the mind has achieved equanimity, the equality of self and others will be actualized.
Everything in one's daily living will be just fitting and appropriate.
As long as one sees the sameness of the dharma nature of all,
This does not obstruct one from exercising kindness or authority.*



*It is not because of etiquette that one conducts oneself in a dignified manner,
When the mind is undeviating, proper conduct will be perfected naturally.
When we meet, there is no need to present elaborate gifts,
One snap of the fingers shows our authenticity and innocence.*

*The wind ensemble of nature plays a flute with no hole in the middle of the night,
The gushing water of the rivers strums a harp with no string in the morning light.
If you want to know wherefore one can attain this happiness,
It is to be found in your very mind.*

*To harbor unwholesome thoughts is to bring about punishments for the mind,
Three thousand rules and laws are instituted to govern this body of yours.
A man on the path forgets all about good and evil,
While law and order are clearly and vividly administered.*

*The mind is like a scale, indicating what is heavy and what is light,
When loaded, the weight is clearly shown.
Since time immemorial, all benevolent governings are similar,
For thousands of years, they have served as a standard for human beings to behold. 🌿*

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