

禪
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Chan is wisdom, peacefulness, and purity.
Wisdom is not being disturbed by the environment;
peacefulness is not being confused by the environment;
purity is not being defiled by the environment,
not being influenced by its chaos
and not being chaotic within.



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

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90-56 Corona Avenue
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FOUNDER / TEACHER Chan Master Venerable Dr. Sheng Yen

ADMINISTRATOR Venerable Chang Hwa

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Buffe Maggie Laffey

ART DIRECTOR Shaun Chung

COORDINATOR Chang Jie

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS David Berman, Ernest Heau, Guo Gu

CONTRIBUTORS Venerable Chang Ji, Venerable Chang Zhai,
Venerable Chang Xun, Rebecca Li, David Listen,
Rikki Asher, Kaifen Hu, Taylor Mitchell,
Ting-Hsin Wang, Bruce Rickenbacker,
Dharma Drum Mountain Cultural Center

CHAN MEDITATION CENTER (718) 592-6593

DHARMA DRUM PUBLICATIONS (718) 595-0915

chanmagazine@gmail.com

<https://chancenter.org/en/publication/chan-magazine>

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The Noble Eightfold Path

Part II

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 Winter 2009 issue of *Chan Magazine*, is the second 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 NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH CAN BE SEEN from the point of view of the threefold division of Buddhist practice into precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. In this representation, the first two noble paths, right view and right intention, comprise the path of wisdom. Precepts, or ethical behavior, include right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Samadhi, the practice of meditation, consists of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. With that in mind, in this article we will discuss right view and right intention, the noble paths of wisdom.

Right View

Right view is the foundation teaching of the entire eightfold noble path. Without right view one cannot properly practice the eightfold noble path. For a practitioner, not having right view is like trying to drive on a mountain road at night without headlights. With right view traveling the path is relatively easy – we understand that unless we cultivate the path we will surely experience continued suffering. Unless we understand that we create the causes of our own suffering, we cannot appreciate the importance of practice. However, it is also within our power to create the causes and conditions that can end our suffering. So, both the aggregation of suffering and the cessation of suffering result from causes and conditions.

Soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha expounded the four noble truths to his five original disciples. In this sermon he communicated just four ideas: suffering, aggregation, cessation, and the path. Suffering is a fact of existence and is caused by our accumulating (aggregating) the causes of suffering. However, suffering can indeed be ended and the way to cessation is through the path. Therefore, right view is also precisely about the four noble truths: understanding that this world is suffering, and knowing how we can depart from suffering.

The Origins of Suffering

As human beings living in this world we need to acknowledge and understand that in life there is suffering. Where does this suffering come from? What causes it? Suffering comes from the countless past lives in which we have been creating karma. We create karma and then we experience the retribution from that karma. At the same time, in this life we create more karma and as a result we experience more retribution. That is what we have been doing life after life – creating karma and experiencing retribution. When karma is created we call that “aggregation.” And when causes and conditions ripen, retribution is experienced as suffering. Therefore, we suffer because the causes of suffering still exist in our lives, and being ignorant of this we create more karma. In trying to escape suffering we create more causes of



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDRC Archive Photo

suffering, and pursuing happiness we create more causes of unhappiness.

Therefore, to liberate ourselves from suffering we need to eliminate the causes of suffering. To stop a pot from boiling over, you remove the heat. If you want to stop suffering you have to remove what causes suffering – the creation of new karma. To depart from suffering, stop creating more causes of suffering. Put simply, that is the approach.

We can speak of two kinds of cause and effect: first is “worldly cause and effect” that brings about the aggregation of suffering; second is “world-transcending cause and effect” that brings about cessation of suffering. Worldly cause and effect is that which creates more retribution karma, and world-transcending cause and effect is that which

does not create retribution karma. Those who do not understand how suffering accumulates can be said to be ignorant, while those who do can be said to have wisdom.

Understanding the aggregation of suffering is the wisdom of right view but it is not yet the wisdom of cessation and liberation, not yet the wisdom of nirvana. The Sanskrit word *nirvāṇa* literally means “extinction,” or in the Buddhist context, the state of non-arising and non-perishing. Having right view is to understand that causes and conditions bring about the aggregation of suffering, and that causes and conditions also bring about the cessation of suffering. But this understanding is not enough for one to become liberated; one still needs to cultivate the eightfold noble path.

Take a person who commits a crime and goes to jail. If he serves out his sentence, one day he will be free. Let's say that before his sentence is served he tries to escape. He is caught and is sentenced to even more time in prison. Trying to put an end to his suffering by escaping, he creates more suffering for himself. Similarly, in order to be liberated from life's suffering, one needs to cease giving rise to the causes of suffering. It is not enough to want to stop unwholesome behavior and attitudes, because we have created a lot of karma in numerous past lives. This karma manifests as habit in our present life, and though we want to stop unwholesome deeds, we still have extremely strong entrenched habits. That is why it is necessary to cultivate the path. We need it to help us regulate our actions, speech, and thoughts so that we will stop generating more causes of suffering, and really bring suffering to a stop.

Unless we actually cultivate the path, just understanding suffering and its causes will not help us that much. When we have problems we will still

suffer, and we will continue to generate the causes for more suffering. Therefore, it is important to also understand the meaning of samsara, which is made up of the cycles of our previous lives, the present life, and our future lives. A new cycle recurs every lifetime that we live without attaining liberation. These cycles of past, present, and future lives make up the transmigration of birth and death, otherwise known as the *nidānas*, the twelve links of conditioned arising.

If we can understand how the links lead from one life to another, thus continuing the pattern of suffering, we will understand that to depart from suffering we need to cultivate the path. That is how to generate wisdom and attain liberation. This transmigration will then cease because the first link in this chain, ignorance or *avidyā*, will have been dissolved. The Sanskrit *avidyā* translates in Chinese as "without brightness." In the ordinary mind there is no brightness and no wisdom because it is obscured by vexations. If by cultivating the path we eliminate vexations, then this ignorance will be eliminated as well, and wisdom will



Photo by Siyan Ren

manifest. Once we eliminate ignorance the remaining links will not arise. In this manner, the cessation of the cycle of birth-and-death is accomplished.

Precepts, Samadhi, and Wisdom

In Buddhism, there are three approaches to cultivating the path: upholding the precepts, cultivating samadhi, and generating wisdom. The first, upholding the precepts, has two aspects: regulating errors of the body and regulating errors of speech. Committing errors of the body means causing suffering to others with our actions; committing errors of speech means saying things that bring suffering to others. To cease causing further suffering through these kinds of mistakes, we need to constantly retake the precepts whenever we make such mistakes. This is what it means to uphold the precepts.

Merely upholding the precepts does not mean that one will no longer have vexation. It is also important to keep the mind stable and calm, so that whatever happens in one's body or environment, one's mind does not suffer. Some uphold the precepts very diligently yet still have internal conflicts and serious vexations. For example, they may have a strong desire for something, but know that to uphold the precepts they should not give in to the desire. Still, if the desire is strong enough in their minds they will be vexed. This is particularly true for romantic and sexual desires. A man will desire a certain woman but feel that he should not even be looking at her. Or a woman will hear gentle words from a man, and feel that she should not allow herself to feel attraction. Such people may be very pure in their actions and would not do anything unwholesome but these internal struggles are still vexations.

As long as there is desire one is immersed in samsara, giving rise to more and more suffering. The

reason why we can have vexations even though we uphold the precepts is because we do not have a mind that is stable and calm, one that is not affected by the environment. Therefore, besides upholding the precepts, we should also cultivate samadhi to generate a calm and stable mind.

There are two approaches to cultivating samadhi: the gradual and the sudden. In the gradual approach one begins with the five methods of stilling the mind, then one proceeds to the four foundations of mindfulness, progressing all the way through the rest of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment, ending with the eightfold path. This gradual approach proceeds step-by-step towards becoming liberated as an arhat. In this process one will naturally cultivate samadhi as well as wisdom.

Instead of going step-by-step through the thirty-seven aids, the sudden approach of Chan proceeds directly to realization through such methods as hua-tou or silent illumination. Through these practices one can cultivate a mind that is always in accordance with Chan samadhi. This is a direct way to attain a calm and stable mind, one that will not be affected by what's going on in the body or the environment. In the gradual approach, one first cultivates samadhi and the arising of wisdom follows; in the sudden approach, one cultivates and gives rise to samadhi and wisdom simultaneously.

So is it clear now how one departs from suffering?

Student: Cultivate the path.

Master Sheng Yen: What path? One cultivates the noble eightfold path. But what makes up the noble eightfold path? The path consists of the three disciplines of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. Among the noble eightfold path, right view is the most important because it is the foundation for all the others. If one understands right view, then the remaining paths will be relatively easy to understand.

Right view is a necessary aspect of wisdom but it is not complete without also understanding the reality of phenomena. In my autobiography I wrote that I wept when I visited my parents' graves after being away for many years. A journalist who read about this asked me, "Shifu, you are a highly attained monk. Why would you weep over your dead parents?" I said to him, "I am not a highly attained monk, just an ordinary person. When my parents died I couldn't even be by their side. When I returned, I could only find their gravestones. Knowing there was no way I could repay everything they did for me, all my feelings for them came to mind. It was impossible not to shed tears." Was I being ignorant or is there some wisdom there?

Recently I did a pilgrimage to some of the sites where the Buddha taught. In one place I saw a memorial to the place where a great Brahmin asked the Buddha to teach him Dharma. Upon seeing the monument, I knelt down and couldn't help but shed tears. One of my disciples asked me, "Shifu, why are you so sentimental, crying at the sight of this monument?" I said that I was crying out of gratitude to Shakyamuni Buddha for remaining in the world after his enlightenment to teach the Dharma. Had he not done that, we would not be able to hear the Dharma and use it to help ourselves as well as others. Therefore, I am really moved and grateful to Shakyamuni. Is that ignorance or wisdom?

In 1977, when I had recently arrived in the United States, I received a call from Taiwan with news that



In 1989, Shifu visited Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhi Gaya. Photo by Parth Acharya

my master Dongchu had passed away. I became very emotional and speechless. I just cried. A Dharma brother said to me, "Brother, you are not a child any more. That your old master has died is a fact of life, so why are you crying?" The thought that I no longer had my master made me really sad. But then I felt grateful to this Dharma brother for reminding me that it is normal for old people to die. It was ignorant

of me to feel so sad, but I couldn't help it because he was my master.

From the perspective of right view, these stories have to do with the wisdom that comes from understanding the reality that all phenomena, including birth and death, have their place. Whatever roles we play in life – as parent, child, teacher, student – we should fulfill our responsibilities. We do not just say, “Oh, dying is just proof of impermanence. If phenomena are empty and there is no self, why feel sad?” If one thinks this way, one is truly ignorant. From the perspective of Buddhadharmā, we have our relationships and we have responsibilities to fulfill. Denying their existence is an erroneous view. Before we are liberated we experience the causes and effects of the three times – past, present, and future – and denying that is also an erroneous view. On the other hand, affirming social ties as well as causes and effects is the right view; it is the wisdom of understanding the reality of phenomena.

People fear death; they also fear the dangers in life, anticipating misfortune. Is that wisdom or ignorance? After returning to America from conducting a retreat in Moscow, I was very exhausted. One of the lay disciples took pity on me: “Oh, Shifu you are so exhausted, poor thing.” So she said, “Shifu, with this SARS epidemic, are you sure you want to go to Taiwan?” Now, I am old and do not have a robust immune system, so this person was apparently worried. I told her there was a time when a lot of planes were crashing and people advised me not to travel by air. I told them that if it were time for me to die it would happen whether I travel by air or not. If it's not my time to die, that is because I still need to experience retribution karma. When it's time for me to die it will happen. At the same time I am also very careful to take preventive measures. I am not going to Taiwan to get SARS on purpose, but I am nevertheless not

afraid to go there. Is this ignorance or wisdom? If it is wisdom, it would be the wisdom of understanding the reality of phenomena.

Right view includes having the wisdom to accept the reality of phenomena. Just wanting to escape suffering would be failing in our responsibilities and denying causes and conditions. Wanting liberation without understanding the reality of phenomena is an erroneous view. Therefore I offer you these words to remember: “Before liberation one ought to fulfill one's responsibilities; before attaining buddhahood one should first be a good person.” This is the wisdom of understanding the reality of phenomena.

Attaining the wisdom of nirvana is our ultimate goal but the wisdom of understanding the reality of phenomena is the process. The wisdom of nirvana is realized when one has attained self-understanding, self-verification, and self-enlightenment. When that happens, one has accomplished everything that one needs to on the path. It is the complete realization of understanding the reality of phenomena. At this time there is no longer any arising and perishing of causes and conditions. This is the wisdom of nirvana.

Verification means that we completely understand that life arises from causes and conditions and also perishes with causes and conditions. We recognize two kinds of arising and perishing. One is the arising and perishing of the entire life of the body that we now have. This begins with conception in our mother's womb and ends with death. Second, within one's life, there is also the moment-to-moment arising and perishing of microscopic events in the tissues and cells of our body. This is the process by which we grow, mature, get old, and deteriorate both in mind and in body. This is all due to the moment-to-moment arising and perishing that goes on within the larger arising and perishing of birth-to-death.

Two years ago I met an elderly practitioner who could recite the entire *Śūraṅgama* mantra, which is very long. I said to her, “It’s very good that you can recite the entire mantra even though you are an older person.” She said, “Oh, this mantra is nothing; I can recite the entire *Śūraṅgama Sutra*.” She has known the mantra since she was young, so she knew it by heart. A year ago I met her again and learned that she was no longer reciting the *Śūraṅgama* mantra, but another shorter mantra. I asked her why she was not reciting the *Śūraṅgama* mantra anymore. She said, “Oh, the *Śūraṅgama* mantra is way too long and wordy. I’m reciting a mantra that is more concise.” But the truth was that she could no longer remember the whole mantra. This past spring I saw her again and this time she was reciting an even shorter mantra, the mantra of the deceased. I am afraid that next time I see her she will only be reciting Amitabha Buddha’s name. Within the larger arising and perishing of one’s life, there are many smaller arisings and perishings and memories are among them.

Therefore, the idea of arising and perishing refers not only to our entire life; more important, it also refers to every moment of our life. With the wisdom of nirvana we understand very clearly that in every mental, physical, and environmental phenomenon, there is simultaneous arising and perishing. As soon as dharmas arise they are already perishing. Each of you here, do you believe that in every moment, there is constant arising and perishing in your body? In fact, if this were not the case, you would not even be alive. For a living thing, there must be motion and change. If there is no change, there is no life. As long as we are alive there is metabolism: cells and tissues constantly moving and transforming. How about when we’re dead? Actually, when we die we change even faster. Therefore, those who have realized nirvana, those who have attained self-verification,

clearly understand that everything that arises simultaneously perishes. Whatever arises is on its way to perishing. But from whence do things arise? Things arise out of causes and conditions.

This is different from the view that we are all creatures of a god, and when we die we return to that creator. The Buddhist view is that everything arises and perishes due to causes and conditions. The Buddhist scriptures do not deny the existence of a god who created everything; rather, a deity would have been born out of myriad causes and conditions along with the universe. In Hinduism, this is the Brahman god-king who lives until the death of the universe. When the universe disappears, the Brahman god-king disappears with it. This Brahman king god does not experience human mortality and therefore, appears eternal. From the perspective of a buddha this world is only one of myriad worlds all of which arise and perish eventually. Buddhists do not say that belief in god is superstitious. However, from the Buddhist perspective even such a god must experience birth and death. Therefore, in the wisdom of nirvana there is a very clear understanding that all phenomena, even universes, experience arising and perishing.

So if one looks at the stage between the birth of the universe and its death, there is arising and perishing, and within this period there are also infinite momentary arisings and perishings. Take planet Earth, which is undergoing constant moment-to-moment arising and perishing. These changes occur on other planets as well. One can only completely attain this wisdom after one has realized nirvana, which is why it is called the wisdom of nirvana.

To the question, “From where does everything arise?” the wisdom of nirvana answers that things do not arise from anywhere. Rather, everything arises from causes and conditions. So when we think, “Oh, I’m from Taiwan, or India,” as if there is something



from these places that could come to America. There is something that comes from those places but from the perspective of wisdom of nirvana that something arose from the coming together of causes and conditions in every moment. So, I was born as a result of many causes and conditions coming together, including karma that I created from previous lifetimes. Then there were my parents, the environment I grew up in, whatever I consumed growing up, that's how I arose. According to physiology, our body replaces all its cells every seven years, so if I stayed here for seven years, only eating Western food, after seven years, I would have a Western body even though I will still look Chinese. You see the point: our body is undergoing arising and perishing all the time.

Several years ago a mother brought her teenaged child here. When I asked him, "Are you Chinese or American?" this boy said, "I'm American." And I asked, "How about your mother?" "Oh, she's Chinese." Upon hearing that the mother was very upset:

"This kid can't even remember his own heritage!" I said to her, "Well, he is right. He grew up here in America, he eats American food; everything he has experienced is American. Of course he is American. And you came from China and grew up in Taiwan, your experiences all came from Chinese society. Of course you're Chinese." Upon hearing this, the child was very happy: "I'm right, I'm American."

So according to the wisdom of nirvana, all phenomena are the way they are because of the coming together of causes and conditions. All phenomena are unique because they come together as a result of different sets of causes and conditions. But as phenomena arise they also perish. And to where do they perish? They don't perish to anywhere; they become new causes and conditions for further arising and perishing. From the perspective of the wisdom of nirvana, there is no place to which phenomena perish. Nirvana means extinction, no arising and therefore, no more perishing.

Right Intention

The second of the noble paths, right intention, is also referred to as right thought, right discrimination, or right enlightenment. The essence of right intention is using the right view that one has acquired. One could say that when we have right view, right intention should follow. This does not mean just thinking about it abstractly but to understanding it through the practice of meditation, or dhyana. With the resulting clarity and stability of mind, you will be able to understand phenomena from the perspective of the four noble truths. For example, normally we are pleased with our body but at times the body is also a burden and a source of suffering; it is not entirely under our control – we get sick, we age, we die. Or, trying to relieve or suppress the problems of the body may result in more suffering. Observing the body and

the mind with right intention, we come to understand that impermanence is at the root of suffering. This is an opportunity for some wisdom to arise, but an intellectual understanding of suffering is not enough to liberate us from suffering. One also needs to perceive that suffering is also illusory and empty, and so is the self that suffers. Only when we thoroughly penetrate this understanding of emptiness and no-self can we depart from suffering.

I met someone who felt that his life was filled with so much suffering that he saw not much point in living. He saw his body as falling apart, capable of dying anytime. From his point of view, one may just as well commit suicide to escape suffering. Is there wisdom in thinking this way? Actually, while having some understanding of impermanence, he does not understand that there is also emptiness and no-self. Theoretically, understanding impermanence



Photo by Berenice Melis

should lead one to understand emptiness as well as no-self, but that is only conceptual. Without experiential realization of emptiness, this person is unable to see that there is no self behind the suffering. He does not understand that wanting to end one's life is actually clinging to the self because it is a self that wants to escape.

There can be no true realization of emptiness when we cling to the self. To truly realize emptiness one needs also to give rise to bodhi mind. In fact, emptiness and bodhi mind are two sides of the same coin; one cannot truly realize one without the other. Trying to realize emptiness without giving rise to bodhi mind can only result in a nihilistic kind of emptiness. That will not help one depart from suffering nor experience liberation.

The mind of bodhi is not centered on one's own problems, so when we are suffering, at that moment, we would be more concerned about the suffering of others. When I am ill, I use right intention and think about an infinite number of beings who are suffering more greatly than I am. This way I hope to use the power of my vows to help deliver people from suffering. In that moment, of course I haven't really decreased anybody's suffering, but just by giving rise to that thought I am already suffering less. So, giving rise to bodhi mind and thinking about the suffering of others can definitely help to decrease one's suffering. For example, if you feel that you lack certain necessities, remind yourself that many have even less. In your bodhi mind, give rise to the wish that they will all have a better situation soon, and that you will form an intention to help those who have less than you. You will find that this thought will bring warmth to your mind and you will feel less unfortunate.

On one seven-day retreat, a participant was in so much physical pain that she felt like she was in hell. Feeling that practice was not for her, she was

about to leave the retreat. I said to her, "Perhaps you can go back to the Chan hall to deliver other sentient beings."

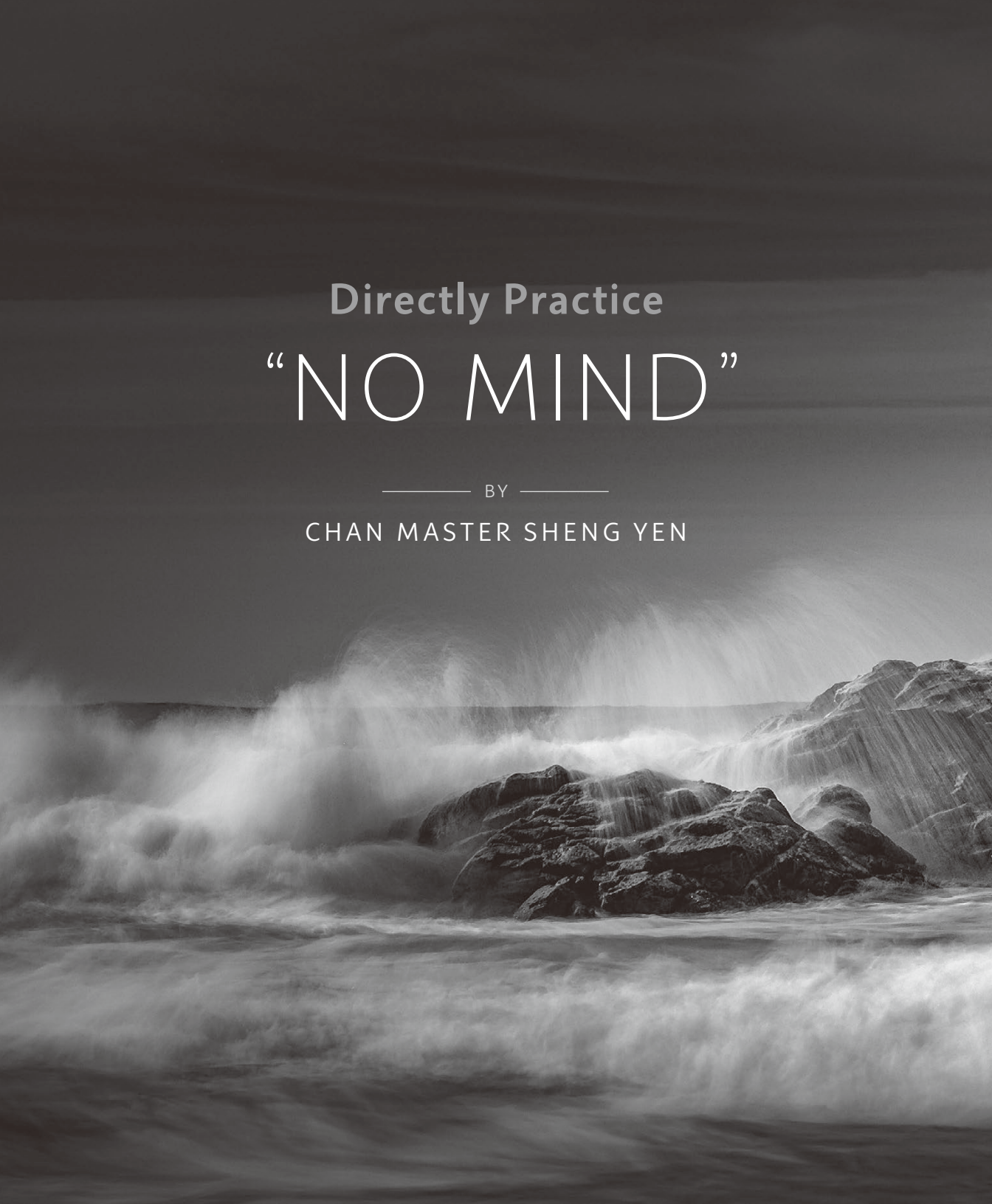
"How am I supposed to deliver sentient beings?"

I told her, "When you go back to the Chan hall, tell yourself that you are there to sit well and inspire your neighbors to practice diligently." She accepted my suggestion and went back to the Chan hall. There, she thought, "My body aches, but if I am not willing to go to hell to help others, who will?" By thinking this way, she had a very good retreat.

After studying Buddhadharma and the teachings of suffering, impermanence, and no-self, someone can conclude that they have experienced emptiness. While thinking that, this person may continue to suffer a great deal. This person understands that everything is empty and without self but their suffering is there and it's real. So with all this understanding of emptiness and no-self, there's still a lot of suffering. What is missing here? What is missing is bodhi mind. When you have bodhi mind, you will not be so concerned about yourself. When you put the welfare of other sentient beings at a higher priority than your own, you will naturally be less concerned about yourself. When you are not so attached to your ego, you are already experiencing no-self and realizing the nature of emptiness.


Emptiness does not mean that there is nothing there; it is the idea that you are not so attached to your self-concerns. When you are less attached to yourself, you can begin to have a true understanding of emptiness and are able to give rise to wisdom. When you can do that you are on the path towards liberation. You will be able to depart from the five desires of wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep, and truly be able to depart from suffering. 🌿

(To be continued)



Directly Practice
“NO MIND”

————— BY —————
CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN



This article is an excerpt from a lecture given by Chan Master Sheng Yen to the monastic sangha at Dharma Drum Mountain, Taiwan, on June 17, 2007. It originally appeared in our Summer 2013 issue, and has become one of our most popular pieces. Translated by Chang Wen (David Listen) and edited by Antonio Hsieh.

Sudden Enlightenment

TODAY, I WOULD LIKE TO INTRODUCE TO everyone how we can practice Chan in the midst of daily life. The practice of meditative concentration (Chinese *chan ding*) can be divided into four stages: one begins with having a scattered mind, and goes on to a concentrated mind, then to a unified mind, and lastly no-mind. However, the Chinese Chan school's approach is to make an effort to go directly to the fourth stage. It doesn't matter whether or not one previously has a concentrated mind, or a unified mind; one directly begins with no-mind. We all know that a scattered mind is when there are many wandering thoughts. We begin the practice from this scattered mind, and then we skip over the middle stages of the concentrated and unified mind, to directly enter into no-mind. This is called the Chan of "sudden enlightenment."

How is it possible to attain no-mind by skipping over the states of concentrated and unified mind? The ancient worthies – the Chan masters of the Tang dynasty, all the way up until Venerable Master Xuyun (1840–1959) – all spoke in this way and advocated this method.

First Level

The method can be divided into two levels; the first is a state of "scattered mind." In this state our mind is simply deluded. We may feel that we are not working on the method, or that we are unable to gain any strength from the method. At this point, what should

we do? Even a person who is unable able to count the breath, simply unable to calm the mind down, can directly practice no-mind. This refers to:

*"When thoughts arise,
just be aware of them;
with awareness of the thoughts, they vanish."**

At all times, one can practice in this way. What is the meaning of "when thoughts arise?" Right now, your scattered mind is the deluded mind, which is just wandering thoughts. These thoughts rise and fall in a flurry in the mind, as you're thinking in a very random and chaotic way. We call this "wandering thoughts flying about in disorder." In this state, we are not aware that they are wandering thoughts; we just know that we're unable to settle down our mind.

We should be aware that they are wandering thoughts, aware of how they arise or appear. We pay attention to the wandering thoughts, and know what we are thinking about. When we are not paying attention, when we don't care about them, these wandering thoughts continue on forever. Yet, once we are mindful of how the thoughts arise and what kind of thoughts they are, they immediately stop. This is what "with awareness of them, they vanish" refers to.

"When thoughts arise, just be aware of them" refers to being aware that there are wandering thoughts. When we are aware that there are wandering thoughts, we will have immediately departed from them, and thus at that time, they'll no longer exist. We should practice this way at all times. However,

* This quote can be seen in a variety of places within the Chan records. Some notable texts are *The Three Principles of Chan* by Master Guifeng Zongmi (780–841), *Contemplating Mind* by Master Hanshan Deqing (1546–1623), and *A Guide to Sitting Chan* by Master Changlu Zongze (1037–1106). They all have the same general meaning, with slight variations in the words: with awareness of [deluded] thoughts, these thoughts vanish instantly.

it's not possible that as soon as we practice we'll get enlightened. Rather, we should practice ceaselessly.

Whenever there are wandering thoughts, just know about them and don't bother with them. When the next thought appears we should just say again, "I know these are wandering thoughts, and I'm not going to follow them." In this way, you'll have pulled yourself away from these wandering thoughts, and will have left them behind.

At the next moment, if wandering thoughts still appear, you should continue to use this method of "when thoughts arise, just be aware of them." Know that these are wandering thoughts, and then immediately leave them behind. If when you have wandering thoughts you are continuously wallowing in them, neither wanting to be aware of them nor wanting to depart from them, then you'll forever be amidst these wandering thoughts, without hope of leaving them behind! So when there are wandering thoughts, we should practice "When thoughts arise, just be aware of them; with awareness of them, they cease." This is the first level.

Second Level

The second level is "To depart from all thoughts, and let go of all entangling conditions." Since at all times you are aware of these wandering thoughts and let go of them, you would not be wrapped up in them or pulled along by them. This is "When thoughts arise, just be aware of them." After becoming aware of them, we should not get involved with them, thinking, "What was I just thinking of? I wonder if I'll think of it again..." Don't bother with any of this; just leave wandering thoughts alone. At this time, just "let go of all entangling conditions;" let all inner and outer circumstances be. In this way, you'll very quickly enter the state of no-mind.

Because you have already let go of all conditions, you are able to not generate wandering thoughts; not generating wandering thoughts, you are able to let go of all conditions. So the thoughts that were previously in the mind are gone, and the grasping mind is not generated. Since there are no wandering thoughts or grasping, the following thought would not arise. At this time, one would be in a state of no-mind.

In this condition of no-mind, the previous mind does not exist and the following mind will not arise; there are no thoughts – no scattered thoughts and no wandering thoughts. This condition is a shallow no-mind state.

Sudden Practice

Well, this is "sudden practice, sudden enlightenment!" Everyone hopes that they can attain sudden enlightenment through sudden practice, but they didn't know that there is such a Dharma gateway. Usually we are wallowing amidst our many wandering thoughts, completely unaware of them, and do not want to depart from them. In that case, there is no hope of enlightenment.

When neither the previous thought arises nor the following thought is generated, this is "no-mind." This just means that when the previous thought does not arise and no wandering thoughts are generated, then let go of all conditions so no wandering thoughts are generated. Venerable Master Xuyun gave this state just such a name, called "Without a single thought arising, let go of all conditions." When not even one single thought arises, you once again have let go of all conditions.

"All conditions" means that in the following moment you again start thinking of this and that, and again other thoughts appear. So if thoughts appear again, what should we do? Just start again from the

first level, “When thoughts arise, just be aware of them promptly; with awareness of them, they cease.” Then follow with “Without a single thought arising, let go of all conditions.” Ceaselessly, incessantly utilize these two levels of practice.

Practice Ceaselessly

When there are wandering thoughts, we cannot say that this is “without a single thought arising,” because thoughts have already arisen. Yet when one is able to discover that there are wandering thoughts, these thoughts will immediately disappear. For example, when we see darkness, maybe we don’t know that it’s darkness. However, when we turn on the light, we immediately know what darkness and light are. As soon as the light appears, darkness disappears; this amounts to “with awareness of them, they cease.”

*“When thoughts arise,
just be aware of them;
with awareness of them, they vanish.
Without a single thought arising,
let go of all conditions.”*

If we practice like this continuously and ceaselessly in our daily lives, we would be practicing Chan.

When practicing meditative concentration (of gradual stages) there’s a definite process. Yet, Chan is the sudden approach to enlightenment; there’s no mention of any method for cultivating meditative concentration. For example, the levels of “scattered mind,” “concentrated mind,” “unified mind,” and “no mind,” are stages that I designated. The ancestral masters of ancient China did not speak of any methods where one progresses level by level. Nevertheless, I have found that the cultivation of these eminent masters is actually not without levels.

Their levels of practice began with “When thoughts arise, just be aware of them promptly; with awareness of them, they cease.” Afterwards, when thoughts again arise, immediately become aware of them. Then they will cease. When there aren’t any thoughts in your mind, as in “without a single thought arising,” just don’t give rise to any other thoughts. At this time, you are not grasping at anything or any condition, because as soon as you grasp at any condition, thoughts arise. This is the method with which Masters from the ancient times all the way up to Venerable Master Xuyun taught people. Now I want to tell you all: this is what we should strive to practice in daily life. However, in order to practice this, we don’t always have to be sitting on the cushion in the Chan hall.

Work Is Practice

We know that throughout his life, Venerable Master Xuyun didn’t spend a very long time in the Chan hall. Since he embarked on the spiritual path, he devoted most of his time to practicing austerities, traveling on foot, reconstructing monasteries, and extensively delivering sentient beings. There are not many records of him actually residing in the Chan hall. There’s also Chan Master Laiguo (1881–1953) of Gaomin Monastery in Yangzhou, who spent his life dedicating himself to the building of monasteries and maintaining places of practice, all for the sake of sentient beings. Chan Master Baizhang (720–814) advocated “A day without work is a day without food.”

To practice Chan, we don’t have to be constantly doing sitting meditation, all day and night, or all year long. In the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, when Śāriputra was deep in the woods sitting peacefully in meditation, Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti scolded him saying, “Your meditation is useless.” In the history of the Chan

school, this kind of story has been evolving ever since, as the periods before and after Chan Master Mazu Daoyi (709–788) there were many instances where people were scolded for sitting in meditation. However, the example in the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* is the best.

Listen, everyone, don't think that you don't have enough time to spend for sitting meditation. You may think that you're busy all day, doing this and that, and don't have any time for practice. Actually, your mind should be unified with the work at hand. Whatever you're doing, the mind is just doing that – without any wandering or scattered thoughts. If you can do this, then you'd be practicing Chan. If on the other hand, you're doing one thing, and your mind is doing something else – thinking about all sorts of things in a random and chaotic way – then you'd certainly not be practicing.

When we eat, we just eat; this is practice. When we are working, this is also practice. It's like what Chan Master Baizhang said, "A day without work is a day without food." When we are sleeping, this is also practice. Within twenty-four hours a day, there is not one moment that is not considered practice.

If we are ordinarily full of vexations and irritable in our daily lives, always thinking that there's something wrong with other people, and that there's something wrong with this and that, or that we're always being taken advantage of by others, and that other people are in conflict with us – we'd feel incredibly unhappy, almost like we're in hell. This is because we would not be practicing. If we were practicing, no matter what we'd see, it would be pleasing to the eye, pleasing to the ear, pleasing to the mind – we'd be very happy. In this way, we'd really be practicing, otherwise, you'd feel that there's always some kind



of contradiction, or discomfort, unhappiness, and feeling of being restricted. In this way, we'd be in a terrible mess.

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has another name called "Contemplating Freedom" (Ch. *Guan Zizai*). Although she is incredibly busy, always looking for sentient beings who are suffering and responding to their needs, she is still so at ease, and therefore the name "Freedom" is given to her. For those monastics who really know how to practice, they are truly happy, free, at ease, and full of Dharma joy; taking the bliss of Chan as their nourishment. Therefore, all of you should have confidence that Chan is amidst daily life. 🌸





Expanding Practice Into Daily Life

———— BY ————
VENERABLE CHI CHERN

Venerable Chi Chern is the first Dharma heir of Chan Master Sheng Yen. Born in Malaysia in 1955, he is one of the most respected meditation teachers in Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan. What follows is a Dharma talk given by Ven. Chi Chern on July 22, 2011, during an intensive Chan retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY. It originally appeared in our Winter 2012 issue. The talk was translated by Chang Wen (David Listen) and edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey.

Changing Perspective in a Playful Way

GOOD EVENING FELLOW PRACTITIONERS. I see a lot of people wearing shirts with the tags sticking out. (Editor's note: on retreats at DDR, participants are asked to turn printed t-shirts inside out to hide words or images that might distract other participants.) Sometimes this happens to my shirt as well. One of my students may see it and whisper to me, as if it is something embarrassing, "Hey Master, you're wearing your t-shirt inside out." Then I tell them (whispering back) "It's a designer shirt, see the tag?" as if it were something fashionable. Just changing the perspective makes it seem very different.

At the master's quarters there's a wooden walking stick that Master Sheng Yen used to use. I take it when I go for a walk. Sometimes when people see this they will ask me, "Hey, Master, is something wrong with your legs?" and I'll say "No, my legs are fine. It's the stick that has a problem; it can't walk. I'm actually just taking the stick for a walk."

Occasionally people ask me, "Can you drive a car?" and I'll say, "Well, I can open the door." (In Chinese the words *kai che* could mean drive and *kai* could also mean open.) Something that was originally negative quickly changes to be positive. If people ask me, "Can you drive?" and I say, "No, I can't drive," that's a little negative, it diminishes me. But instead of looking on the downside where I can't do something, I look at what I can do. I say, "Yes, I can open the door and I can sit in the car and ride." Just by changing perspective the whole situation changes.

We can transform the way we view our daily life and respond to situations. With the first example, someone points out that your shirt is inside out. One type of response might be, "I only have a few clothes and no place to wash them so I have to turn

it inside out to wear it twice." Or, "They told me to turn it inside out so the writing doesn't distract others." Giving all those explanations is a downbeat response, long-winded and unnecessary. Why not just say, "Well, this is a designer shirt, you see?" and show them the tag. A simple response like that gives a unique perspective. You take something that was originally troublesome, a lifeless thing bringing everybody down. Change the outlook and suddenly there's a creative space, there's joy. It's the same thing with the walking stick example, a dull situation becomes something lively. This is really the purpose of Buddhism, to be able to see things from a fresh perspective. With practice we can apply this attitude. We can look at things differently and have a straightforward approach of expressing our viewpoint. In doing so we get a message across that's lively and creative.

Greeting Yourself in the Morning

The same goes for how we view ourselves, and this is an important point: How do you look at yourself in the mirror when you wake up in the morning? For me, I smile and say, "Good Morning!" I feel good. There's a sense of joy there. But some people look at themselves and [makes a dour face] they see something dull and lifeless. Or the first thing they see is another white hair! Maybe some of the younger folks see another pimple. These people, the first thing they see when they look in the mirror are all the blemishes and imperfections. They use all sorts of makeup and goop until their original face is completely out of sight. At that point it's just a mask to cover up all the imperfections. If we look at ourselves this way every day what happens after a while is that when we wake up in the morning we feel lifeless and don't see any hope.

Looking in the mirror for imperfections is just an analogy for how we look at ourselves in general. We may look at the state of our mind and always see only the flaws. We may think, “Oh, even after studying Buddhism I have so many vexations. Every single thought, every single move I make is karma.” We are filled with self-pity and think of ourselves as a terrible person. Here we thought Buddhism was supposed to help us be joyful. But it turns out that we use Buddhism to look down on ourselves and see only imperfections.

Cultivating Wholesome States of Mind

If we see only the negative side we weigh ourselves down with negativity. We may eventually lose all faith, and then Buddhism becomes a vehicle for self-criticism. In fact Buddhism teaches us that while we have flaws, we should recognize our positive traits as well. We should know our faults but it's more important to know our wholesome qualities and nourish them. Then we have a sense of confidence; we have self-worth and value. We have creativity and the potential to bring joy to others. We are full of hope; this is the liveliness we get from adjusting our attitude. So how do we maintain this positive perspective in daily life? By cultivating more wholesome states of mind.

Of course there are vexations. The Buddhist school of Consciousness-Only analyzes the different states of mind and subdivides them into categories of unwholesome and wholesome states. According to this analysis the unwholesome states may be more in number, but it's just a way of describing these states of mind. Some people who study Buddhism seem to forget that there are wholesome states of mind and that these are what we want to nurture. Usually our mind fluctuates from wholesome to unwholesome



states. By cultivating wholesome states of mind we counterbalance unwholesome states.

When we practice meditation for the most part we're focused only on ourselves, using the method and taking care of this calm yet clear state of mind. However in daily life our practice is not only limited to ourselves. We have to interact with others and take care of various affairs. How do we extend our practice into these activities and relationships? Precisely through cultivating wholesome states of mind.

Reaping What You Sow

When a person always has a negative outlook, it's almost as if they emit a dark energy. It seems they're calling for some negative reaction from the environment to come back to them. This constant feedback of negativity multiplies and the person comes to feel flawed. On the other hand we know that when we cultivate positive states of mind we have a brightness about us. We may know people who are like this; they have a joyous quality about them. They emit a wholesome energy and it seems that the response that they get is also wholesome.

We can see this very clearly in our own interactions. What happens when we scold someone or pressure them? Do they smile and give a happy response? Of course not. Most of the time the response we get is negativity bounced back at us. In the beginning we have a stronger will. Then it seems we win. They listen to us, but they're afraid of us. When they see us they immediately get tense. When we're pressuring people we ourselves are agitated and uncomfortable. We also fear that one day they might retaliate. What about the day when they have the stronger will? Then they may give us pressure. On the other hand if we have a very joyous approach to interacting with others we get a joyful response.

Giving Joy and Removing Suffering

We are practicing Buddhism because we want to relieve ourselves of suffering. If we are sensitive to this we realize that other people also want to be free of suffering. So we start to see that in interacting with others the practice is cultivating wholesomeness, sharing joy. This in fact is compassion, one of the cornerstones of Buddhist teaching. The two Chinese characters for compassion mean "giving joy" and "removing suffering." This practice is actually the whole of Buddhism.

We cultivate this simply by nurturing wholesome states of mind. This begins with having an optimistic perspective on life, beginning most importantly with an optimistic perspective on ourselves. If we look in the mirror every day with the attitude of seeing our own faults, are we able to help others with their suffering? Or bring them joy? Most likely we will just bring them down.

Just by changing our attitude and the way we express ourselves, we change our perspective. We can use a certain physical or verbal expression to

communicate this wholesomeness. For example, to some of my younger students I may say [in a playful friendly voice], "Wow, you have so many pimples on your face! What happened?" I smile and say this in a very cheerful way and do you think they get upset? Actually they don't. Because the way I express myself is very lighthearted.

It's not that I want to hurt them. I may say something like this to loosen them up or cheer them. But I'm also trying to show my care for them. Because actually if many blemishes suddenly appear it could be a sign of some imbalance in their health, something they need to pay attention to. It's a way of saying, "You've got to take care of yourself," a cheerful way of expressing concern. It's not like I'm saying [in a harsh annoyed voice], "Look at all those pimples on your face! What are you doing?" and giving them pressure. Some parents do that to their kids. Every day they say, "Ah, look at you, you're failing, you're worthless!" using a constantly negative attitude. For parents who drill their kids like that, do you think the kids feel comfortable with their parents? No. When their parent comes near them, they cringe to block that negativity.



慈悲 Cí Bēi: Compassion, Chinese calligraphy by Ven. Chi Chern

Genuine Compassion

On retreat sitting in meditation the emphasis is on ourselves, harmonizing our body and mind, having this calm yet clear state of mind. But in daily life, because most of life is interacting with others, the emphasis should be on compassion. And how are we compassionate? First we change our attitude, seeing things in a positive light and cultivating positive mental states. We are sensitive to the needs of others. We use a wholesome way of interacting and this becomes something mutual. We should be aware that compassion is the foundation of our practice in daily life.

When we say we are practicing compassion, are we really? Even something as simple as saying good morning to others, is it just obligatory? If we say [in a low-energy downbeat tone], “Oh, good morning,” do they feel that it’s a good morning? I think they would wonder how you could be having a good morning when you sound that way. Do you start by smiling in the mirror and saying a cheerful, “Good morning!” to yourself? When we interact with others is our compassion genuine? And how do we make it genuine? It has to come from within our own experience. Only then can we genuinely express this wholesome energy to others. It’s crucial that in order to authentically practice compassion towards others we have to be compassionate towards ourselves.

Expanding Practice Outwards

We say that a person who practices compassion for the sake of all sentient beings is a bodhisattva. Some bodhisattvas go deep into the mountains on solitary retreat. People may criticize them and say, “How can you deliver sentient beings by isolating yourself?” The bodhisattva may respond by saying, “When I go

into the mountains to do solitary practice I am cultivating wholesomeness, I am cultivating joy within myself. This gives me the energy and the aspiration to help others.”

I think we can all relate to this. When we are using the method well, when our body and mind are relaxed and we have fewer wandering thoughts, we feel a certain joy. In our body there is lightness and ease, in our mind a wholesome energy. This pleasant sensation arises from personal cultivation, the harmonization of our own body and mind. Naturally when we express ourselves to others from within that state of mind they sense that it’s truly coming from our heart and is something real. This joy can influence others and encourage them to practice, or at least it helps relieve their suffering.

So, practicing compassion, we have to work on ourselves. But at the same time we must be careful not to isolate ourselves in a bubble, concerned only with our own vexation. Some people when they practice meditation just get wrapped up in themselves. Instead of cultivating joy it may just do the opposite and become self-criticism. But the practice of Buddhism is not about emphasizing the negative aspects of yourself or the world. It’s about cultivating calmness, clarity of mind and wholesome joy. When we do this we want to be able to expand it outwards.

How do we do this practically? Well, we start here on retreat with our practice on the cushion. We gradually extend this to the whole of the Chan hall activities, then to the whole of the retreat center. Then when we go home to our daily lives we continue to extend our practice outwards into our personal relationships with others. Our point of effort at that time becomes compassion, taking this genuine joy and wholesomeness and sharing it with others. This is Buddhadharma. This is the heart of Chan practice. 🌿

A misty, snow-covered mountain landscape. In the foreground, several evergreen trees are heavily laden with snow. The middle ground shows a dense forest of similar trees, and the background features a large, misty mountain range. The overall atmosphere is serene and quiet.

Solitary Practice:

“To the Noble Monk Cheng”

BY

CHAN MASTER ZHONGFENG MINGBEN

Zhongfeng Mingben (1263–1323) was an eminent Chan master of the Linji lineage in the Yuan dynasty. He was a student 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?” Mingben attended to his teacher for several decades in the mountains, living in arduous material poverty and hardship. He became one of the very few to receive transmission from Yuanmiao. Later on, he traveled a great deal around the country. There were times when he would live in a boat for months. Wherever he stayed, he called it the *illusory abode* and called himself the “dweller of the illusory abode.” Translated by Guo Jue (Wei Tan), a student of Chan Master Sheng Yen and an enthusiastic reader of the classics of Chinese Buddhism. This article was originally published in our Summer 2003 issue.



PRACTITIONERS OF OLD OFTEN WENT TO live in solitude when they had not yet awakened from their own affairs of birth and death. Living in a thatched shack to work on themselves, they did not get involved in the world initially. They practiced in all daily activities, be it: planting rice, working in the field, wearing straw cloth, surviving with food gathered in the woods, drinking from the streams, cooking with a broken utensil, making a bed out of withered tree trunks, or fashioning a stove using pieces of wood. Some of them lived solitarily for twenty or thirty years in the remote mountains, making no contact whatsoever with the outside world. When interacting with those who came to learn from them, some showed the woven bamboo belt they wore, some raised their fists, some pointed with a finger, some threw around huatous such as “the stream is deep and the handle of the spoon is long.” Manifesting all sorts of actions, their styles and dispositions were lofty and awesome, sending shocks through the eyes and ears of those who came into contact with them. The light of their splendors shone, illuminating thousands of years of time. All these actions occurred without an iota of contrived intention or expectation.

Later on, the way of living became more decadent; human minds became weaker. Practicing in solitude became a scheme to live in idleness and laxity. People did so to avoid the restrictions and rules of a large monastery. They did it so that they could sleep and go freely whenever and wherever they wanted. By and by, they all became outer path followers who searched only for physical freedom. Not only is this practice useless in aiding one along the path, it causes one to drift farther and farther down the stream of desire to the point of no return. These people would unconsciously start to engage in all sorts of inverted and discriminating practices

of mundane affairs, in addition to a life of idleness and laxity. Such people would become engulfed by the mundane and worldly.

One should understand that when the Buddha and the ancestral masters established a place of practice, whether it was a place large enough to accommodate ten thousand people or just big enough for one person, the essence and substance is having the mind on the path. If one were clear with the path, even if one lives among ten thousand people, one would not feel the excess of the multitude; if one were to live in solitude, one would not feel the want of companionship. Because of the absence of such a feeling of excess or want, one might as well call living among the multitude as living in solitude, and call living in solitude as living among the multitude. If one can assume the attitude of living in solitude when one is among the multitude, one would not be bothered by the presence and interactions of people around oneself; if one can assume the attitude of living among the multitude when living solitarily, one would not be deluded by the sorry physical condition of leaking roof and unlighted shack.

Living solitarily in this manner, thought after thought, one would be in touch with all humans and devas; in all places, one would be meeting with the saints and sages of old. Even events that happened thousands of years ago could be felt as if they are happening in front of one’s very eyes. Thus, it would be alright if one is poor, and it would be equally alright if one is not poor; it would be alright if one has visitors, and it would be equally alright if one has no visitors; it would be alright if one engages in all sort of functions and affairs, and it would be equally alright if one engages in nothing at all throughout the day. Whatever one encounters, be it affliction or joy, unfavorable situations or favorable situations, to the point that if myriad conditions were to manifest in



front of one's eyes simultaneously, all moments are the right moments to raise one's fists and fingers. There would be no shack dweller to be found, and there would be no non-shack dweller to be found; there would be no happenings to be seen inside the shack, and there would be no happenings to be seen outside the shack. At this point, true reality would permeate everything; all deluded thinking would have completely subsided; the feeling of being right or wrong would have been ended, and the dualistic understanding of subject and object would have been gone. Then one would know that when the old lady burned down the shack, and when the old adept scribbled the word "mind" on the door, they were all painting a golden hue on a piece of gold, adding light to the brightness of the sun. This is the proper way of practicing solitarily in a shack.

If this is not the case, it is unavoidable that one would feel the outward presence of the shack, engendering feelings of opposition and expectation, parting and coming together; bringing about the constantly-changing emotional vicissitude of grabbing, releasing, liking and aversion. Alas! This condition is precisely why we said that the affair of birth and death is grave and impermanence strikes fast and unexpected. One should understand that if one goes into solitary practice without the utmost essential motivation of resolving the affair of birth and death, when the end of life comes, the realm of birth and death would be the shack in which one dwells, amidst broad daylight. One would be engulfed by it.

You should always contemplate in this manner. Do not let yourself drown in delusion during daily activities and lose focusing the mind on the path. ☘

Admonitions to Disciples

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 *Yijiè Ménrén* (遺誡門人), 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 Autumn 2003 issue.



THERE IS NO WAY FOR YOU to understand Buddhadharma! There is no way for you to escape from birth and death! Our bodies are like candle flames in the wind and sparks flying out from flint stones. Even if you were to practice with every thought as if your head were aflame¹, you still would not be able to resolve this affair thoroughly. There is no need for you to do it impatiently, in a blind manner. Going about recklessly and confusedly, in a blink of the eye, you would have reached the age of forty and fifty...

What do you think Buddhadharma is? Even if the smartest person in the world were to come along and write impeccable and irrefutable commentaries on all the scriptures², gong'ans³ and philosophical classics⁴, he or she would still be moving about outside the door. When these smart people speak of the Dharma, it often seems that they are enlightened; but when they encounter challenging conditions in real life, they are lost.

It has always been said that there is no way for you to understand this affair! The more you want to understand it, the more you will be in discord with it. Do not give rise to some sort of conceptual response upon hearing this, thinking that if you can enter into a state that other people cannot enter, you will find some lively things there. Alas! All you can come up with are none other than the deluded thoughts of "wanting to understand it."

Only those who have the profound root of faith, who are willing to genuinely investigate themselves until true enlightenment is realized can take up this affair. But if they hang on to the thought of "taking this up," they still have not gotten it. That is why the ancient teaching says that: "Even if a world full of people as wise as Śāriputra were to come together and hold a discussion, it is still impossible for them to fathom the wisdom of the Buddha."

These days there are people who go about proclaiming what they know and advocating a particular way of practice. These people are like those who have found a piece of orange peel and mistook it as fire. They claim they know what Buddhadharma is and demand that people respect them. What good can they really gain? I have been practicing for more than thirty years and I am still not in accord with the Buddhadharma. That is why I am constantly humbled and shamed. I do not dare to accept the position of a teacher casually. When good things are said about me and generous offerings brought to me, I see them as poisoned arrows striking my mind. I have been running away from them to no avail. There is no doubt that they are brought about by karmic relations from my past lives. They are the very source of delusion, not a result of virtue on the path.

So many people claim to be on the path, and yet when they encounter a little thing that goes against their will, ignorance will take hold of them, unleashing their habitual ways. Letting their minds run wild, unwholesome actions manifest. They will use what they call justice⁵ to harm others, pushing others around. They do not know that since time immemorial, this so-called justice of theirs has been binding them to ignorance. Not once through this justice did they engender a true mind on the path. Moreover, never do they notice that this justice of theirs reeks so much that it causes people to cover their noses instantly.

There is no way for you to escape from birth and death! This great affair of birth and death belongs to you yourself; it sticks to your skin and your bones, thought after thought without relenting. For innumerable kalpas, you have exhausted all contrivances but your mind just will not stop and rest! As a result, you have made serious vows time and again, having thousands of Buddhas and numerous ancestral



You should know that sentient beings are bound and tied up gravely and there is nothing you can do. If you do not have the ability to live together with others, you may as well put down everything, go and live in a thatched shack. That way, you can live your life in apathetic solitude, surviving on alms, wearing a patched robe, working only on your own salvation. That way, at least you will not be hurting the field of others, living like a shameless person with no humility.

Therefore I say that there is no way for you to understand the Buddhadharma and there is no way for you to escape from birth and death! If you cannot understand it or run away from it, why don't you simply abide in this place of "no avail" and practice? Do not worry whether it

masters as your witnesses. Continuing in this way, you left home again in this life, becoming a monastic with three robes in your possession⁶, calling yourself a person on the path! The truth is, you still cannot see through what is happening in front of your very eyes. Everything causes you to move your mind in reaction. What you do only adds to the knot of birth and death that binds you, making you betray your original aspiration to leave home.

If you go about in such a confused and reckless manner, even if you were to be given thousands of lifetimes to practice, you would only reinforce the wheel of karma, bringing no benefits in principle.

will take you twenty years or thirty years. When you suddenly penetrate through this place of "no avail," you will find that I have not meant to deceive you. ❧

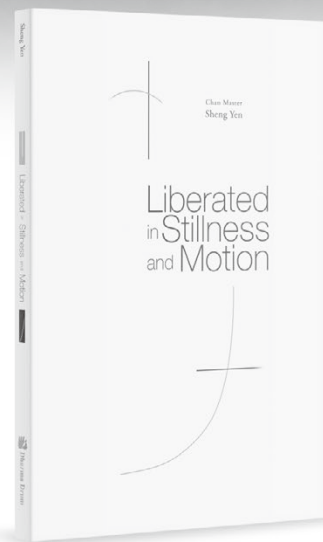
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1. Refers to Bodhisattva Samantabhadra's admonition.
 2. Literally, "the twelve divisions of teachings in three vehicles."
 3. Literally, "one thousand seven hundred pieces of intertwining rotten old vine."
 4. Literally, "the classics of the sages and the hundred philosophical schools."
 5. Literally, "public consensus."
 6. Refers to monastic Vinaya requiring monks to have no more than three robes.

Liberated in Stillness and Motion

Chan Master Sheng Yen

“Correct Chan does not use miracles or the summoning of spirits as its appeal, nor does it emphasize other-worldly phenomena. Chan takes simple normal living as its basis, lessening afflictions as its purpose, being relaxed and at ease. One does not regret the past; rather, one actively prepares for the future, moving steadily ahead while being fully in the present. Although I introduce Chan in contemporary language and words, my perspective does not deviate from the teachings of the Buddha and the lineage masters.”

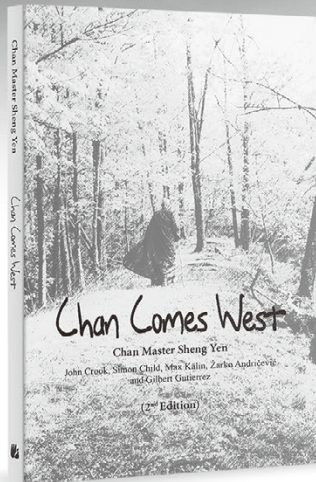
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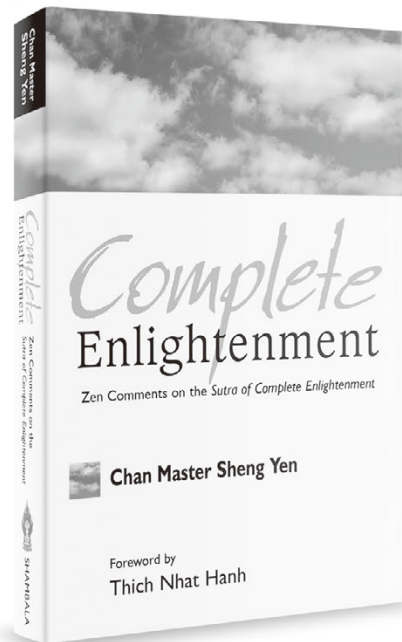
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Dharma Drum Publications

90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373

(718) 592-6593

chancenter@gmail.com

www.chancenter.org
www.ddmba.org

Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) • Guo Yuan Fashi, Abbot

184 Quannacut Road
Pine Bush, NY 12566

(845) 744-8114

ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org

www.dharmadrumretreat.org

DDM Los Angeles Center • Chang Yue Fashi, Director

4530 North Peck Road
El Monte, CA 91732

(626) 350-4388

ddmbala@gmail.com

www.ddmbala.org

DDM Massachusetts Buddhist Association • Chang Xuan Fashi, Associate Director

319 Lowell Street
Lexington, MA 02420

(781) 863-1936

ddmmba.boston@gmail.com

www.ddmmba.org

DDM San Francisco Bay Area Center • Chang Xiang Fashi, Director

255 H Street
Fremont, CA 94536

(510) 246-8264

info@ddmbasf.org

www.ddmbasf.org

DDM Vancouver Center • Chang Wu Fashi, Director

8240 No.5 Road
Richmond, BC V6Y-2V4

(604) 277-1357

info@ddmba.ca

www.ddmba.ca

TAIWAN – WORLD HEADQUARTERS

Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education

No. 555, Fagu Rd.
Jinshan Dist.
New Taipei 20842

02-2498-7171
02-2498-7174

webmaster@ddm.org.tw

www.ddm.org.tw

DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN - NORTH AMERICA

California	Los Angeles Chapter	(626) 350-4388	Tina Wang	ddmbala@gmail.com www.ddmbala.org
	Sacramento Branch	(916) 681-2416	Janice Tsai	ddmbasacra@yahoo.com
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	Orlando Branch	(321) 917-6923	Anchi Chang	achang1117@gmail.com
	Tallahassee Chan Center	(850) 888-2616	Frances Berry	tallahassee.chan@gmail.com www.tallahasseechan.org
Georgia	Atlanta Branch	(678) 521-5483	Ricky Lee	www.ddmbaatlanta.com
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Massachusetts	Boston Branch	(978) 394-1391	Jinghua Zhou	ddm.boston@gmail.com
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Missouri	St. Louis Branch	(636) 825-3889	Tai-Ling Chin	acren@aol.com
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Nevada	Las Vegas	(702) 896-4108	Mabel Lin	yhl2527@yahoo.com
North Carolina	Cary	(919) 677-9030	Ming-An Lee	minganlee58@gmail.com
Ontario	Toronto Chapter	(416) 855-0531	Meili Chen	ddmba.toronto@gmail.com www.ddmbaontario.org
Pennsylvania	State College Branch	(814) 687-9253	Kun-Chang Yu	ddmbapa@gmail.com
Texas	Dallas Branch	(682) 552-0519	Patty Chen	ddmba_patty@hotmail.com
Utah	Salt Lake City	(801) 947-9019	Inge Fan	Inge_Fan@hotmail.com
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Washington	Seattle Chapter	(425) 957-4597	Gary Lin	ddmba.seattle@gmail.com seattle.ddmba.org
Washington, DC	DC Branch	(240) 424-5486	Jack Chang	chan@ddmbadc.org

Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

MEXICO				
Nayarit	Chacala	(800) 257-0532 (800) 505-8005	Dr. Laura del Valle	info@mardejade.com www.mardejade.com
ASIA and OCEANIA				
Australia	Melbourne	(03) 8822-3187	Tess Hu	info@ddmmelbourne.org.au www.ddmmelbourne.org.au
	Sydney	(61-4) 1318-5603 (61-2) 9283-3168 (FAX)	Agnes Chow	ddmsydney@yahoo.com.au www.facebook.com/ddmsydney
Hong Kong	Kowloon	(852) 2865-3110 (852) 2591-4810 (FAX)	Chang Zhan Fashi, Director	info@ddmhk.org.hk www.ddmhk.org.hk
	Island	(852) 3955-0077 (852) 3590-3640 (FAX)		
Malaysia	Selangor	(60-3) 7960-0841 (60-3) 7960-0842 (FAX)	Chang Zao Fashi, Director	admin@ddm.org.my www.ddmmy.org
Singapore	Singapore	(65) 6735-5900 (65) 6224-2655 (FAX)	Gan SweeHwa Joe	ddrumsingapore@gmail.com www.ddsingapore.org
Thailand	Bangkok	(662) 713-7815 (662) 713-7816 (662) 713-7638 (FAX)	Porntip Chupinijsak	ddmbkk2005@gmail.com www.ddmth.com
EUROPE				
Belgium	Luxemburg	(352) 400-080 (352) 290-311 (FAX)	Li-chuan Lin	ddm@chan.lu
Croatia	Zagreb	(385) 1-481 00 74	Žarko Andričević	info@dharmaloka.org www.dharmaloka.org www.chan.hr
Poland	Zalesie Górne	(48) 22-736-2252 (48) 60-122-4999 (48) 22-736-2251 (FAX)	Paweł Rościszewski	budwod@budwod.com.pl www.czan.org.pl www.czan.eu
Switzerland	Zurich	(411) 382-1676	Max Kälin	MaxKailin@chan.ch www.chan.ch
	Bern	(31) 352-2243	Hildi Thalmann	hthalmann@gmx.net www.chan-bern.ch
United Kingdom	Bury	(44) 193-484-2017	Simon Child	admin@westernchanfellowship.org www.westernchanfellowship.org
	London	(44) 7826-566-353	Xin Li	info@londonchanmeditation.org www.londonchanmeditation.org