

WORDS OF  
WISDOM

Walking is Chan;  
Sitting is also Chan.  
In speech or silence, in movement or stillness,  
my substance is at peace.

*Great Master Yong Jia of the Tang Dynasty*

W O R D S O F  
W I S D O M  
v o l u m e 2 *practice*



VENERABLE MASTER HSUAN HUA

TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED BY

Buddhist Text Translation Society • Dharma Realm Buddhist University • Dharma Realm Buddhist Association  
1777 Murchison Drive, Burlingame, CA 94010-4504

Published and translated in North America by  
Buddhist Text Translation Society  
1777 Murchison Drive,  
Burlingame, CA 94010-4504

First Edition.

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Series ISBN 0-88139-311-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Hsuan Hua, 1908-

Words of wisdom : Practice / Venerable Master Hsuan Hua; translated and published by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, Dharma Realm Buddhist University, Dharma Realm Buddhist Association.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-88139-303-7 (soft : alk. paper)

1. Meditation—Zen Buddhism. I. Title: Chan meditation. II. Title.

BQ9288.H77 2005

294.3'4435—dc22

2004010453

Printed in Taiwan on acid-free paper.

W O R D S O F

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volume 2 *practice*



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Q

What is the primary purpose of meditation?

A

The advantages to meditation are manifold. Whether we study, work, or take care of the house, daily meditation increases our concentration, lessens the pressures of life, and increases our physical health. If we honestly want to develop our wisdom and become liberated, then we should meditate regularly. We must be committed to meditation so that in the long run we will be able to transcend the cycle of birth and death.

**DON'T** be **APART** from **THIS!**

Moving or still, awake or asleep,

Don't be apart from this.

If you depart from this,

Then you've gone amiss.

MASTER HUA



## SEIZE THE TIME AND MEDITATE

The basic rule in Chan meditation is: "Let your eyes contemplate your nose; let your nose contemplate your mouth; let your mouth contemplate your mind." This allows us to control the monkey of the mind and rein in the wild horse of our thoughts, so that they stop running outside seeking things. As we sit in the meditation hall, we may not stare left and right, because if we gaze all around, then



our mind will wander outside, and we won't be able to investigate Chan. Please pay heed to this point, everyone! The time in a meditation retreat is extremely valuable; you could say that there is not a second to lose. We must seize the time and investigate Chan, because only through this investigation can we attain wisdom.

Cultivators of the Way should not treat their skin-bag of a body as a treasure. Only people who are free of this idea can apply effort in cultivating the Way. If we treat our body as a precious thing, then we will become its slave and serve its whims all day long. Therefore, genuine cultivators treat the body as a "stinking bag of skin" and don't prize it highly. Valuing the body is an obstacle to cultivation. We should merely "borrow the false to cultivate what is true," and see it as just an expedient means.

Most meditators have two problems: restlessness and torpor. That is, if they aren't indulging in idle thinking, they'll be dozing off. Those who know how to work hard, however, will be concentrating their energy on their inquiry; they will absolutely not be sleeping.

The key to meditation is to investigate the meditation topic in thought after thought. A saying goes, "After long-term investigation, you will naturally attain enlightenment." Keep searching until "the mountains vanish and the rivers disappear." Then, "beyond the shadows of willows and vivid blossoms, another village appears." You arrive at a whole new place; you gain an awakening. Someone says, "I've been practicing so long, why haven't I become enlightened?" You haven't been able to endure all kinds of suffering with only the wish to become enlightened. You should realize enlightenment comes from the accumulation of merit and virtue. In time, your merit and virtue will become full, and you will naturally attain enlightenment.



## TIPS on CHAN MEDITATION

Be innocent and buoyant, free of improper thoughts.  
Tame the mind, let go of things: that's the essential clue.  
When earth melts away and dualities are gone,  
Empty space is shattered, discriminations cease.  
Your magic light shines by itself, illumining the universe.  
The wisdom pearl is in your grasp—guard the Mani-jewel,  
For it is neither defiled nor pure and does not come or go.  
When the pulse stops and thoughts cease, and the  
madness ends.

MASTER HUA



## PATIENCE WITH STATES

When we sit in meditation it may feel as if we were being beaten. Our legs may hurt just as if someone were taking a club to them. And yet we should still bear the pain. Don't put your legs down. If you can keep from putting your legs down and can sit through the pain for an hour or two or even three, then your skill will develop. And there are a lot of experiences which can occur when our skill becomes well-developed. Sometimes our entire body will feel cold or hot, or our whole body will move. It moves involuntarily; such movement indicates that the pulse of blood in our veins and arteries is penetrating. Sometimes we will find ourselves blinking rapidly a dozen or more times, again quite involuntarily. States such as these will occur. Perhaps certain parts of our body will suddenly move. Or perhaps while we are sitting, our tongue will slip down our throat. It will go back in itself and at that time the breath will no longer go in and out.



So your tongue has slipped down your throat. What are you to do about that? How will you ever be able to eat again? You won't ever know taste again, will you? Do not be afraid. When your tongue goes down your throat and your breath is cut off, your inner breath takes over. And when you have progressed in meditation to a certain point, your tongue will come back up by itself and it will naturally return to position and will fold back up on the roof of your mouth. You will then have to swallow a lot of saliva, more than the usual amount. It will be a sweet dew that descends. There are many states such as these, too numerous to mention. Why don't you have any states? Because you sit a little and it starts to hurt and you start to think about it, "Such pain! I can't wait for the bell!" You shouldn't have to think of the bell, you should have patience. Don't fear the pain. You should be determined to break through that gate. And if you are like that, there will be a way to do it. It's not that with the first bit of pain you can't take it, you can't bear it. You have to definitely bear what cannot be borne. You have to endure what cannot be endured.

If you can merely sit in full lotus, the merit from just sitting is inconceivable. It's very easy to enter samadhi when you sit in full lotus, and it's also easy to increase your wisdom. When you sit in full lotus, just that is the precepts; just that is samadhi. Sitting in full lotus is just the power of wisdom. Full lotus increases all kinds of merit and virtue.



Q

So, how do we cultivate?

A

You should cultivate according to your ability,  
 doing what you can and not forcing yourself into  
 doing what you can't.



## DISCONTENT AND DEPENDENCE

In the Chan hall, walking subdues the body and sitting subdues the mind. The body stays healthy; the mind is free of random thoughts. When our body is strong and healthy, then we can do whatever we want to do. When our mind is free of random thinking, then it can be concentrated. When our mind is concentrated, our nature is in samadhi.

When the nature is in samadhi,  
     demons are subdued and we are happy every day.  
 When random thoughts do not arise,  
     then we are peaceful no matter where we are.

If our mind isn't concentrated, then we can't subdue the demons. But if our mind is concentrated, then there are no demons at all. Gluttonous demons are no longer gluttonous. Lazy demons are no longer lazy. Heavenly demons lose their celestial stance, and earthly demons lose their earthiness. Human demons no longer have human form.



A concentrated mind can subdue internal and external demons. Having done that, then we will experience on-going bliss. Not a day passes when we're not happy.

If our random thoughts cease, then our mind will be as still water. The mind will be as water that has no waves. Why do we experience discontent, thinking that when we are here, it would be better to be there and when we are there, it would be better to be here? We have allowed our random thoughts to control us. That's what makes us feel dissatisfied with the way things are. An old saying expresses this discontent.

Standing on this mountain,  
we notice that yonder mountain is taller.  
After we've scaled yonder mountain,  
we still want to stand on tiptoe.

Why are we discontent? We haven't developed the skill to subdue our bodies and our minds.

When we run around the Chan hall, some people take it as a race to see who's going to come in first. However, from the way I see it, everybody in the Chan hall is first, because we are running in a circle. From where I stand, I'm first, and from where you stand, you are first. From each person's perspective, each gets to be first. But that kind of being first is superficial. Who is truly first? Whoever runs right to enlightenment is the one who is truly first.

Running in the Chan hall is not a track meet where the emphasis is on who finishes in first place. We are interested in who will be the first to wake up. When we run in the Chan hall, we want to run right to enlightenment. The goal of our Olympic games is to become enlightened. If we don't become enlightened, it makes no difference how fast we run. We still won't be a winner. We have to truly awaken to become a winner. Whoever becomes enlightened is number one; whoever doesn't become enlightened comes in second.



Those of you who want to be first should hurry up and become enlightened.

You might say, “Well, how does one become enlightened?” How? You do that by being reliable and diligent in your cultivation. Be dependable in your investigation of Chan. Be dependable in your sitting meditation. That means that we should not allow random thoughts to arise when we’re sitting. Nor should we depend on things.

What is an example of depending on things? It’s when you say something like, “Now, I’m going to investigate Chan, and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are going to bring about my awakening. They are going to help me become enlightened.” Or, “I’m going to meet a wise advisor who will teach me how to become enlightened.” Or perhaps, “If I believe in a certain person, he will teach me to become enlightened.” All of those views are erroneous. You won’t get enlightened that way; you are fundamentally mistaken. Why? It is because you are depending on something.

You’re depending on someone to teach you to become enlightened. How is that possible? If someone could tell you how to become enlightened, he would be like someone else’s eating making you full. That’s impossible. When somebody else eats, you don’t get full. Becoming enlightened is the same way. The most that a wise advisor can do is tell you how to cultivate, how to sit in meditation. Although that is pointing out the Way to you, it’s still necessary for you to walk down the road yourself.

Life is but a dream;  
Death, a dream as well.  
While dreaming, we enjoy glory and wealth,  
Upon awakening, we’re as poor as ever.  
Day in and day out we dream on,  
Unaware that dreams pass in a flash.



If we don't wake up from this dream,  
Then we've dreamt it all in vain.

MASTER HUA







## SUDDEN AND GRADUAL SHARE A COMMON GOAL

Great Master Shen Xiu composed a verse that says:

The body is a Bodhi tree,  
The mind a bright mirror stand.  
Time and again wipe it clean,  
Do not let dust alight.

Those of us who wish to become Buddhas must rely on the false to cultivate the true. We have to apply effort using our physical bodies as the vehicle. Our physical body is a false combination of the four elements: earth, fire, water, and air. Our bones, ligaments, muscles, and joints, the hard components in our bodies, belong to the element earth. Our saliva, mucus, and so forth, belong to the element water. The warmth in our bodies belongs to the element fire, and the breath in our bodies belongs to the element air.

The body is a false combination of those four elements. However, within our bodies there resides yet another thing—the Buddha-nature. If that nature is cultivated to perfection, we can become Buddhas. If we don't know how to cultivate that nature, then in the future, we may well become ghosts. The human body is like a chemistry laboratory. The result of the chemical process of cultivation depends upon what kinds of ingredients we put in. If the ingredients we use in cultivation are not pure, then the chemical result will be spoiled.



Basically, the Buddha-nature should be able to control the physical body, but sometimes our bodies do not want to follow the rules. They become disobedient and engage in all kinds of improper actions. We try to teach our bodies to cultivate, but they don't like it. If someone allows his body not to cultivate, then it's delighted! You try to teach your body to be patient, and it feels that it is very difficult, but if you teach it to blow up, it would find that very easy. To bring up another analogy that further illustrates this point: if you tell most young men and women to cultivate the Way or leave the home-life, they will be dead set against the idea. But if you urge them to find a close boyfriend or girlfriend, they'd be delighted at the prospect!

The Buddha-nature abides in our human bodies, much like people dwelling in their houses. Just as a house needs to be built with earth, wood, water, and fire, so, too, our bodies are the same way. What is the purpose of a house? It's a place for people to live in. If all the inhabitants move out, a house will very quickly become run down and come to ruin. Likewise, at the time of death, after the Buddha-nature leaves our human bodies, our bodies start to stink and rot. Earth, water, fire, and air each return to their origins. When the Buddha-nature arrives in a physical body, a person becomes endowed with consciousness and efficacy. But when the Buddha-nature leaves the body, then the four elements return to their natural source, and the human life-force is lost.

However, if we want to cultivate and realize Buddhahood, we have to rely on this body which is a false union of the four elements. This body can help the Buddha-nature. For this reason, Great Master Shen Xiu wrote his verse:

“The body is a Bodhi tree.” “Bodhi” means enlightenment to the Way. Our body is like the Tree of Enlightenment.

“The mind is a bright mirror stand.” Basically, this Buddha-nature cannot be seen. However, we attempt to describe it,



comparing it to a bright mirror stand.

“Time and again wipe it clean.” At all times we have to keep our Buddha-nature shining and pure.

“Do not let dust alight.” We must not allow ourselves to be covered over by filth. This verse represents the method of gradual enlightenment. Having not yet become enlightened, we have to cultivate gradually, in successive stages, going through all the necessary steps along the way. We can’t push ahead, saying, “All I have to do is sit for a split second, then I am going to get enlightened!” That’s called “wild fox” Chan. Only something devious would yield such weird and outlandish results, such as instantaneous enlightenment. People who truly apply effort do not have scattered minds. Instead, they remain in unmoving thusness, and at no time would they forget to work hard.

We have already mentioned this. Place your tongue on the roof of your mouth when you are sitting in Chan, and if there is saliva, swallow it. This saliva can regulate the internal mechanism of your body and is able to cure many illnesses. It’s called “sweet-dew water.” It can nourish our Dharma body’s wisdom life.

Above, we have finished explaining Great Master Shen Xiu’s verse. Now let us look at the Sixth Patriarch Hwei Neng’s verse.

Bodhi is basically not a tree,  
And the bright mirror is not a stand.  
Originally there’s not one thing,  
So how could dust alight?

“Bodhi is basically not a tree.” Because the Venerable Sixth Patriarch was someone who had become enlightened suddenly, he understood the basic substance, and therefore he insisted that “Enlightenment to the Path” is not a tree. Enlightenment cannot be confined to something with a tangible shape or form.

“And the bright mirror is not a stand.” The bright mirror, of course, is an analogy for the brightness of the Buddha-nature. But



this Buddha-nature is not a mirror stand.

“Originally there’s not one thing.” The Buddha-nature is completely devoid of anything. It is spotlessly clean.

“So how could dust alight?”

The two verses represent the two methods of sudden and gradual enlightenment. However, they are mutually aiding and interpenetrating. They do not oppose each other. Do not mistakenly say that Great Master Shen Xiu’s verse was wrong, and that only the Venerable Sixth Patriarch’s verse was right. In actuality, the two verses are simply describing two stages that all Chan cultivators must traverse. In the end, they share a common goal.



Q

Why are there sicknesses?

A

Because people are unhappy. As it is said, “Since the times of old, immortals have had no other elixir except to always be happy and never be sad.” This is the secret to a healthy body and mind.



## SEVEN EMOTIONS AND TEN INJURIES

Let’s talk about the seven emotions, which are happiness, rage, grief, fear, love, hate, and desire. When these seven emotions are used inappropriately, they have a harmful effect on people. If used correctly, they do not have a harmful effect, but they don’t bring any great benefits either. Therefore cultivators must learn to control their emotions, and not let emotions overpower them.

What are the seven emotions and how do they harm people?

1. **Happiness:** If people experience too much elation, that can be harmful because too much joy always brings sorrow in the end. Extreme happiness is quickly supplanted by grief. Too much happiness also hurts the heart; it can cause heart trouble.
2. **Rage:** Too much anger is also harmful. Of course, a little bit won’t hurt; but if our anger is too great or if we get angry too often, then our system cannot take that. Too much anger will hurt the liver. People can get a liver malady



from losing their tempers too often.

3. **Grief:** Sometimes people indulge in excessive grief and cry too much. That can hurt their lungs.
4. **Fear:** If people experience too much terror, they will be injured by it. Fear hurts the gall bladder.
5. **Love:** Don't think that emotional love is such a good thing. Love really hurts the spirit.
6. **Hate:** Intense dislike is also harmful. We shouldn't indulge in emotional love, and we also shouldn't indulge in loathing. Too much loathing can cause psychological aberrations. A person can become mentally deranged or go crazy.
7. **Desire:** Desire means excessive craving for anything whatsoever. Too much desire will hurt the spleen.

These seven emotions can bring about these seven injurious effects. Therefore cultivators must learn moderation. Confucius put it well when he said:

Before happiness, rage, grief or joy arises, the Middle abides. Should these emotions be tempered by moderation, harmony abides. The Middle is the basis of heaven and earth. Harmony is the Way that penetrates heaven and earth.

Before any of the seven emotions arise, one's mind is in a state of equilibrium—stasis. Should any of these seven emotions arise, we need to take care that they be tempered by moderation. One should only experience these emotions in the proper amount—not too much, and not too little. In that way, one attains harmony. The Middle Way is the origin, the fundamental basis of everything in the universe. Harmony is the path that penetrates everything in heaven and earth. Therefore, cultivators should take care never to overindulge in the seven emotions.



Aside from the seven emotions, there are also ten kinds of injuries that cultivators should be aware of. They are:

1. Too much walking injures the sinews: If you walk for a long time without resting, it can injure your sinews, muscles and ligaments.
2. Too much standing injures the bones: On the other hand, if you remain stationary, standing in one place for a very long time, you can, in turn, injure your bones.
3. Too much sitting injures the blood: This type of sitting refers to ordinary sitting, as in the workplace, for a long time without getting up to exercise. Meditation does not fall under this category of sitting. Sitting for a long time can injure your blood.
4. Too much sleeping injures the pulse: You shouldn't think that a lot of sleep is necessarily a good thing, because it can harm your pulse.
5. Too much listening injures one's vitality: If you're always intent on listening to this and listening to that, your energy and vitality get depleted.
6. Too much looking injures the spirit: Too much seeing, for example too much reading is also dangerous. Reading continually without rest, to the point that your eyes get so tired that you can't even pry them open, will lead to injuring your spirit.
7. Too much talking injures the breath: There's a saying: "Opening our mouths causes our energy and breath to disperse; wagging our tongues will surely create disputes about rights and wrongs." So, talking too much can hurt your breath.
8. Too much eating injures the heart: If you over eat, you



strain your heart. People who regularly stuff themselves are more prone to get heart diseases for that reason.

9. Too much thinking injures the spleen: People who think all the time, so that their thoughts race madly and shift all over the place will harm their spleens. At that time you lose all appetite for food and nourishment.
10. Too much promiscuity injures the life-force: If people indulge in too much sex they will deplete their very life-force.

For these reasons, we can see that there are definite principles which rule our lives, and we can't carry on without any heed for decorum or rules, dissipating our very life-force and energies. We who cultivate the Way must pay special attention to the principles that accord with heaven and earth.





Q

How do we eliminate our bad habits?

A

Getting rid of bad habits is like shaving off the skin of pineapples. It's useless to cut away only the surface. The thorns that are in the pineapples need to be pulled out and tossed too.



## IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME

Sitting in meditation is like pulling silk out of a cocoon. What do I mean? Ordinarily, we are like a silkworm that spins a cocoon around itself. We are wrapped up in and bound by our seven emotions (happiness, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire), and the five desires (wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep). Although we cannot completely sever our seven emotions all at once, nevertheless, we want to lessen them bit by bit. We sit in meditation to unravel our shroud.

We should try to lessen those seven emotions by “time and again wiping them clean.” Lessen them until they completely disappear, and then, we will always be in samadhi. Walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, we will be working hard at investigating Chan. Then at some point, we will recognize our original face and will know which way our nostrils point—upwards or downwards.

In the past, the first time I read the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra*, I discussed this question with others. At the time I was seventeen. I saw that the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra* talked about sudden and gradual,



the Southern Sudden School, and the Northern Gradual School, “Southern Neng, Northern Xiu.” Since, at the time, I was still attached to the mark of literature, I wrote a matched couplet.

Although sudden and gradual are not the same,  
Upon completion they are one.  
Why make divisions of north and south?  
Sagely and common are temporarily different,  
But the basic nature is identical.  
Do not discuss east and west.

Sudden implies immediate enlightenment. Gradual implies eventual enlightenment. In their manifestations, they seem to be two, not the same. But when we come to accomplishment, they are the same. The sudden brings enlightenment and so does the gradual. With sudden, the time’s a little shorter. With gradual, the time is a little longer. But the sudden doesn’t start out sudden, all by itself. It exists because of the gradual. This means that in the past, a person cultivated and nourished and tended his seeds until they reached maturity. Then, in this life, the opportunity suddenly presents itself and that person becomes enlightened. If the person had not cultivated in the past and had nothing invested, how could he go into business? How could we become enlightened without any initial input through practice?

The eyes of ordinary people who are unaware of former causes and latter effects don’t see how a person who gains a sudden awakening actually nourished and tended his good roots in past lives. All they see is that he became enlightened this time around, and so they say his awakening is sudden. The Tian Tai School discusses this point. It says that “for the sake of the sudden, the gradual is dispensed. The opening of the gradual manifests the sudden.” That school describes “dispensing the provisional for the sake of the actual,” and “opening the provisional to reveal the actual.” Sudden and gradual are an example of opening the provisional to reveal the



actual. So I said, “Upon completion they are one.” When we reach accomplishment, the two are one and the same.

“Why make divisions of north and south?” We don’t have to identify what method is from the Northern Gradual School and which one belongs to the Southern Sudden School. Those are just temporary appearances, after all. How do you know that in the future the sudden won’t go north? How do you know that in the future the gradual won’t go south?

When I heard the Elder Dharma Master Ce Guo lecture the *Vajra Sutra*, he deliberately switched the directions, saying, “The Sixth Patriarch was a northerner and how can you northerners become enlightened?” The Elder Dharma Master was indulging in a little bit of banter, but at the time I didn’t understand. So afterwards I was naive enough to ask the Elder Dharma Master, “When did you move the Sixth Patriarch to the north, Elder Master?”

“Sagely and common are temporarily different, but the basic nature is identical.” The basic nature refers to the Buddha nature. No matter whether one is a common person or a sage, each of us has the Buddha nature. The Buddha said it very clearly, “All living beings have the Buddha nature; all can become Buddhas.” It’s just a matter of time, that’s all. Confusion and awakening may be slow or quick.

“Do not discuss east and west.” Don’t contend that the place to go is the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss or the Eastern Crystal Azure World. That’s from the perspective of the Saha world. Don’t make so many discriminations. “Do not discuss east and west.”

That’s the kind of madness I indulged in when I was seventeen. I spoke like that. I hope you disciples won’t follow me in going mad like this, raving like a maniac. Anyone who wants to make such wild statements must first be a madman, which means that first you have to run around the Chan hall for a while. Or if you don’t want to run, you can just sit there for eighty thousand great eons and try it out.





Q

What are the steps for laity to cultivate the dharmas of entering yet transcending the mundane?

A

Layman Pang and his wife and children are all members of the laity. If you want to know how to cultivate at home, go and ask them. They're not in this world anymore, but there are some stories:

Mr. Pang said, "Difficult, it's so difficult. It's like trying to balance sesame seeds on the leaves of a tree."

Mrs. Pang said, "Easy, it's so easy. It's as if the messages of patriarchs were written on the tip of every blade of grass."

Miss Pang said, "It's neither difficult nor easy. We eat when we're hungry and sleep when we're tired."

We should study Buddhism honestly. Do not build a trap for yourself.



## ALIAS THREE POISONS

All the dharmas within the universe are relative dharmas. This means they are complementary to each other. They work in pairs. Therefore, good complements evil, right complements wrong, yin complements yang, brightness complements darkness, demons complement Buddhas, and so forth. In Way-places where there



are true cultivators, then it's for certain that demons are also not far behind. Demons come to help cultivators, to urge them on. And cultivators can influence demons to become good. Therefore, they mutually aid each other. So although on the outside demonic obstacles seem to be undesirable, in actuality, cultivators should not pit themselves against demons. Lao Zi said:

It's when evil exerts itself that good is made obvious.

It's when children are unfilial that filial virtue  
becomes apparent.

It's when treachery surfaces that the loyal  
assert themselves.

It's through failure that success is revealed.

The same principle applies to demons. If nothing special is happening in a Way-place, if things are just ordinary, then demonic obstacles won't arise. But in a Way-place where people are truly trying to cultivate, then demonic obstacles will certainly appear. As I tell you often:

Demons come to polish the Way;

Those on the true path have to endure demons.

Someone truly cultivating can reach the point where inside there is no body and mind, and outside there is no world. They are not greedy for wealth, sex, fame, food, or sleep. They've cut off those five roots of the hells. On the other hand, people who don't really cultivate are very fond of the five desires. So right here is another example of complementary dharmas.

By the same principle, people who have Way virtue wish to ascend, while people lacking virtue will fall. Some people can see through everything and put it all down; others cannot see through anything nor can they put anything down. But when you come down to it, putting everything down and seeing through it all really isn't so easy. People who are readily able to put everything down,

who are able to remain in a state of unmoving suchness, who are constantly bright and clear, who aren't turned by the eight winds, are people who have cultivated for an uncountably long time—for hundreds of thousands of millions of asamkhyeya eons.

As for those who can't see through things or put things down, they are people who have just started to cultivate. They haven't even entered the door! Such people find it very hard to put down their attachment to people and things. They get stuck in thorns and thickets everywhere they go. They feel that others do not treat them well. Even if they clearly are in the wrong, they still rationalize for themselves and do not admit their mistakes. People like that are hard to save. They are like people suffering from a terminal illness yet who still remain completely without shame and remorse. They act as their own defense attorneys. When we look into this kind of situation, we find that the three poisons are acting up again.

Lao Zi said,

If we are able to constantly chase out the five desires,  
then our mind will naturally be still. If we can clarify  
our heart, then our spirit will naturally be pure.

He's talking about how the three poisons can be eradicated. "Constantly" means always and forever. One is at it all the time, without ever letting up or growing lax. "To be able" means to make a firm resolve based on true determination, firmness, and great wisdom. To "chase out" means to drive away, to cast out. "Desires" include desire for all things—for food, sex, fame, sleep, and so forth. It is desires that cloud our minds and make us stupid. If you can constantly chase out your desires, then your mind will naturally be still. "If we can clarify our heart, then our spirit will naturally be pure." This is also what Great Master Shen Xiu was referring to in his verse:



The body is a Bodhi tree,  
The mind a bright mirror stand.  
Time and again wipe it clean,  
Do not let dust alight.

Our minds are as if polluted with sediment and grit, therefore at all times we have to clean them out. What does the sediment and sand refer to? Our idle thoughts. Those idle thoughts have muddied the water of our self-nature. If we purify this water, then our spirit will naturally become pure again.

In this way, “quite spontaneously, the six desires will no longer arise, and the three poisons will be eradicated.” The six desires are what the six sense organ pursue—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch, and mental constructs. The three poisons refer to greed, anger, and stupidity. That’s the way we talk about them in Buddhism. In Taoism, they are called the three corpse spirits. I’ll introduce you briefly to these.

The three corpse spirits dwell within our bodies, acting as spies who report whatever good or bad deeds we have done. On the days of keng shen and jia zu (according to the Chinese calendar system of stems and branches) they go up to heavens to make their report. The three corpse spirits are:

1. Peng Ju, the upper corpse spirit, resides in the upper third of the human body. (also known as the upper warmer). On the mornings of keng shen and jia zu, this upper corpse spirit ascends to the heavens and reports on every single act we’ve carried out with the upper region of our body.
2. Peng Zhi, the middle corpse spirit, dwells in the middle section of the body (also known as the middle warmer). At noontime of keng shen and jia zu days, this spirit ascends to the heavens and reports on all the deeds whether good or bad, we’ve carried out with the middle region of our body.





3. Peng Xiao, the lower corpse spirit, lives in the lower section of the body (also known as the lower warmer). On the nights of keng shen and jia zu, this spirit goes up to heaven and makes a complete report of everything we've done with the lower region of our body.

They tell absolutely everything, hiding nothing. Now in Buddhism, the three corpse spirits are called greed, anger, and stupidity. Greed abides in the upper warmer, anger abides in the middle warmer, and stupidity abides in the lower warmer.

The upper corpse has a specific location. It lodges in the bone which slightly protrudes from the back of the cranium, the occipital protuberis, which is the yu jen gate. That spirit lodges at that gate, guarding it, and monitoring a person's brainwaves. This is the first of the three big gates that a cultivator has to break through in order to have any success in his cultivation.

The middle corpse spirit lodges in the middle of the spinal column. This is the jia zhi, the second gate. The lower corpse spirit lodges at the wei lu gate—the coccyx—the very tip of the spinal column. That's where this spirit lives.

Those three gates are very hard to break through. Besides the three gates, there are also nine worms (gu) which dwell in different parts of our bodies.

How do people get hexed (gudu = worm poisoning)? It's because within our own bodies we have these worms, and so if we're not careful a poison can come from the outside which conjoins with the worms inside.

What are these nine worms called? The first is called crouching worm (fu gu); the second is called dragon worm (long gu); the third, white worm (bai gu); the fourth, flesh worm (rou gu); the fifth, red worm (chi gu); the sixth, splitting worm (ge gu); the seventh, lung worm (fei gu); the eighth, stomach worm (wei gu); and, the ninth,



intestinal worm (chang gu). Each of them lodges in a different part of the body, guarding the nine crevices.

Whereas the three gates mentioned earlier are large openings, these nine crevices are smaller cracks, like little holes. It's not at all easy to get through them, for the nine worms are constantly creating mischief and making it difficult for the cultivator to come to any success. Let's list their functions and locations.

1. The first worm, crouching worm, is so named because it crouches. Curled up like a ball, it is seemingly dormant. It sleeps by the occipital protuberis, the yu jen entry.
2. The second worm is dragon worm, because it is shaped like a little dragon. It hides in the nape of the neck, the ligament that joins the head with the shoulder blades, at the tian chu entry.
3. The third worm is white worm, which abides in the tao dao entry, a section of the digestive tract where the solids separate from the liquids. This variety of worm is just the fatty tissues and lymph nodes in our body which are whitish in color.
4. The fourth, is the flesh worm, because it looks like a blob of flesh. It lives in the shen dao entry, the "pathway of the heart," and monitors our spirit. This is the worm which is responsible for heart trouble.
5. The fifth is the red worm, because it is a scarlet color. It dwells in the jia zhi entry, the spinal column.
6. The sixth is the splitting worm, which lives in the xue shu entry, the "gateway of mystery." It also rules over a part of the digestive system.
7. The seventh is the lung worm, which lives in the ming men entry, the "life gate" and rules over the lungs.



8. The eighth is the stomach worm, which lives in the lung hu entry, the “tiger and dragon” cave, which is the seat of the reproductive organs.
9. The ninth is the intestinal worm, which lives in the wei lu entry, at the tip of the spinal column, and rules over the large intestine.

Some of these worms are responsible for the maladies of the different organs. For example, the lung worm is responsible for lung diseases, the stomach worm is responsible for digestive problems, and the intestinal worm is responsible for intestinal disorders, and so forth.

Above has been a brief and general explanation of the three corpse spirits and the nine worms. They are undercover agents who specialize in sabotaging a cultivator’s efforts, making it difficult for him to go towards the good. They constantly urge you not to cultivate but to go out to play. Most of us aren’t even aware that right within our own bodies there are these really undesirable elements. Moreover, these spirits and worms have impressive powers. They can transform into gold, silver and valuable jewels, or beautiful creatures, that come in your dreams to entice you. They can either make you happy and seduce you, or make you terribly afflicted, causing you to experience depression. Therefore, when you have certain dreams do not be overjoyed, thinking them to be magical responses. They could very well be these three spirits and nine worms playing tricks on you. Don’t be cheated by them.





Q

You say that while we're meditating, we should be patient with what we feel. But I find that strange. Can we express our feelings, or should we keep them inside? Sometimes when I stuff them inside, I find that I want to explode afterwards. What should I do?

A

Be patient with them, which means emptying them so that they disappear. It's not about hiding them inside. What's the use of hiding them inside? Why do you need to keep in garbage? Forget them! Things that are suppressed only get worse. As powerful as the atom bomb may be, the power of suppression is even greater. If you're not afraid of exploding into pieces, go ahead and hide them. But watch out!



## ATTACHMENTS CAUSE KARMA

According to the cosmology of the *Flower Adornment (Avatamsaka) Sutra*, there are limitless seas of worlds, each with its own particular properties and various distinctions. Our world, for example, takes earth as its substance. Within our bodies are bones, blood, and the circulatory system. Upon the earth are rivers, lakes, and oceans. These bodies of water form the circulatory system of the earth.



Beneath the earth lie gold, silver, copper, iron, and other metals which can be likened to the bones of the body. Just like a person, the earth has its skin, blood, flesh, bones, and marrow.

Since the earth is so huge, however, it differs from a human body. Within the earth are hot substances just as in the body there is warmth. We need not go into the specific reasons why volcanoes erupt and the lava flows forth, why the earth quakes, or why the substances inside are boiling hot; just note that it is that way. When mountains crash together and the seas dry up, you could say the earth is sick. When it quakes, it's like a person afflicted with such a serious illness that he suffers convulsions. The sickness of the earth differs from the ills of people in that it takes a long time to develop, whereas people can in the short span of perhaps a few years pass through many illnesses.

Magnetic fields bind the planets and stars, as the gravitational pull of the sun holds the earth in space, causing it to orbit around the sun. One revolution of the earth around the sun is a time span we call a year. One rotation of the earth on its axis is called a day. However, even if you calculate these motions by means of mathematics, the reason for them is still inconceivable. Even if the sun, the moon, or the entire galaxy were to perish, one would still never be able to comprehend the reason for them. And yet if this world were destroyed, another would be born because when one world is annihilated, another comes into being. The substances they are made of vary greatly.

I'm just briefly mentioning some of the principles discussed in *The Flower Adornment Sutra*. Although each phenomenon expands into ten, and the ten in turn can expand to a hundred, a thousand, and so forth, still the scope being discussed is in limited terms. In truth, there are no limits, and the principles can be expanded ad infinitum.

People are attached to their own bodies, their own homes,



their own clothes, their own food, and to the notion that this is a great world. Because of these attachments they create all the false and empty realms that exist. Originally, there is not one thing; the Buddha-nature is empty. It is just because of attachments that the stars, moons, suns, and all the worlds come into being. The production, dwelling, decay, and extinction of all worlds results from the karma generated by the vain and false attachments of living beings.

People are tiny, like particles of dust within the entirety of space, so there is no way they can totally comprehend all of space. Like ants that scurry around in an airplane, people have no idea of where they are and what is happening to them. The ants are totally unaware that they are flying through space in a machine. In the same way, we don't know the magnitude of this world system we live in. You may say, "Oh, the scientists figured that out a long time ago." But I ask you, have they figured out exactly when they themselves will die? The point is that all of us need to deeply realize that this world is impermanent. Then, we need not be so attached to trying to figure it all out with our calculating minds. Realizing just that much would be great!







Q

Is there really an end to this world?

A

The day each person dies is the end of the world for that person.



## THE POWER OF INSIGHT

Dharma wealth is lost and merit  
 And virtue both destroyed due to  
 No other than the conscious mind.  
 Through the door of concentration  
 The self-conscious clever wily  
 Mind does cease. That mind is ended.  
 Suddenly one then enters in.  
 Into the power of insight.  
 Into knowledge of the unproduced.

*The Song of Enlightenment*

BY GREAT MASTER YONG JIA

We cultivators of the Way cannot afford to lose our Dharma wealth or destroy our merit and virtue. If Dharma wealth is lost, we won't have any wealth or blessings to speak of. If merit and virtue are destroyed, then we end up severing our own good roots. Instead, we should daily deepen our wealth of Dharma and daily increase our merit and virtue. Then our cultivation will bring about some response.

Why is Dharma wealth lost, and why is merit and virtue



destroyed? For no other reason than that people are constantly using the mind, intellect, and consciousness. They use the mind to calculate, intellect to guess and speculate, and consciousness to make discriminations. People stay incredibly busy calculating, speculating, and discriminating non-stop. Since most people put their effort into exclusively using the mind, intellect, and consciousness, they end up losing their Dharma wealth and destroying merit and virtue.

Investigating Chan is called “stilling one’s thoughts.” It means training our thoughts not to move, but to be quiet and still instead. The method of Chan aspires to the highest attainment. It is a practice designed to penetrate the true mind directly. We separate from the activities of mind, intellect, and consciousness in our cultivation of Chan. For this reason, the verse says, mind does cease. The “mind” here also includes the intellect and consciousness. We have to put a complete stop to the activity of those false states of mind. Only then can we be considered to have stilled our thoughts. If we manage to still our thoughts, then suddenly we can enter into the power of insight, into knowledge of the unproduced. We can obtain patience with the non-production of dharmas and be certified to the four stages of warmth, summit, patience, and foremost in the world.

1. Warmth is the stage where we start to generate some heat from our investigation of Chan.
2. Summit indicates that our skill has reached the highest level, the crown of our head.
3. Patience means that sustaining that state is very hard to bear. Nonetheless, we are able to endure it.
4. Foremost in the world indicates that we become a great hero in the world and beyond.

If you wish to realize these four positions, the very first thing you have to learn is how to still your thoughts. This means not being turned by your mind, intellect, or consciousness. Our thoughts are



like waves in the ocean; they come up one after another and never stop. Now we must learn to stop them—to still our thoughts. When stillness reaches the extreme point, we bring forth wisdom. Once wisdom is produced, there is penetrating light. For this reason we say, “When stillness reaches the extreme point, the light breaks through.” This is also the meaning of the line: Suddenly one then enters in. Into the power of insight. Into knowledge of the unproduced.

If you are able to put an end to the activity of your mind, intellect, and consciousness, you will open up great wisdom. Therefore, cultivators of the Way need not look for the esoteric or pursue spiritual powers. Once the stillness of your mind reaches the ultimate point, you will naturally produce great wisdom. And then you will be able to slice right through any problem that comes your way. When you have wisdom, you will no longer be upside down. This is the first step in sitting in Chan. Therefore, when you sit in Chan, be sure not to engage in false thinking. Seek to still your thoughts and bring them to a complete stop.





## THE WAY to CULTIVATE

A vast, proper spirit needs to be nurtured.  
Firm resolve sustains the Way and righteousness.  
Never miss, never forget and take no shortcuts.  
Know yourself, know others and the Way will prevail.

MASTER HUA



## VAST AND PROPER ENERGY

**Vast and proper energy pervades the Dharma Realm. It encompasses the myriad things, and shines throughout all time, illumining both past and present. It is the mother of truth, goodness, and beauty, and the vanquisher of falseness, evil, and ugliness. If heaven and earth were without it, they would not be fit to be heaven and earth. If sages and worthies were without it, they could not be called sages and worthies. If rulers and high officials are without it, they are not qualified to be rulers and high officials. If ordinary people obtain it, they turn into sages. If sages and worthies increase in it, they can become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Therefore, this vast and proper energy is the stairway to Buddhahood.**

**Vast and proper energy pervades the Dharma Realm.** “Vast” means so great there is nothing greater, and “proper” means not having any deviant energy. You should understand that vast and proper energy is free from all personal desires. If it has the least bit of personal desire or defiled thinking, fighting, greed, seeking, selfishness, self-benefiting, or lying in it, then it is deviant, not proper energy. Vast and proper energy is the incredibly great energy that sustains all between heaven and earth. All sages, worthies, and Buddhas come forth from this proper energy. Since it is not located



either inside, outside, or in-between, you could call it the human mind, or the soul of the myriad things which sustains everything. In Confucianism it is called vast and proper energy. One could call it the Buddha-nature, but most people would not understand what that means.

Vast and proper energy does not come from inside, outside, or in-between. It extends throughout the Dharma Realm and is neither excessive nor deficient. Everyone has it, and no one lacks it. And no one has either more or less of it than anyone else. Sages do not have more of it than ordinary people. It's just that ordinary people are unable to use it, whereas sages are able to use it. Consider a person who studies books. He is the same person whether he studies or not, but if he doesn't study, he won't have the same kind of wisdom he would have if he did learn how to use books.

Vast and proper energy is something you nurture. It develops from the Five Constants: humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. Embodying these, we gradually nurture our vast and proper energy, rendering it full and complete. That vast and proper energy connects with all the myriad existing things between heaven and earth, and so it pervades the Dharma Realm. The Dharma Realm itself is all-pervasive, and so is vast and proper energy.

**It encompasses the myriad things, and shines throughout all time, illumining both past and present.** It includes everything, whether of proper or deviant energy. Even demonic ghosts and goblins have vast and proper energy, but they cannot use it properly, only improperly. If used properly, correctly and appropriately, then it is vast and proper energy. Used incorrectly, it is deviant energy. That is how it encompasses the myriad existing things. Even demonic ghosts possess it, although they are unable to use it. Vast and proper energy is totally equitable, without the least bit of partiality or favoritism.



Vast and proper energy is always luminous, its light pervading everywhere, and so the Buddha-nature illumines both past and present. If we can use vast and proper energy, then a kind of light is emitted. The light comes from humaneness, righteousness, refraining from sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking intoxicants. Not killing is humaneness, not stealing is righteousness, refraining from sexual misconduct is propriety, not lying is trustworthiness, and not taking intoxicants is wisdom. Humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom come from the mind. They are developed from the mind, based on the mind, and exist within the human mind.

Vast and proper energy is very stern and unmoving. It is not the least bit casual in any situation or towards anyone, no matter who. There is absolutely no favoritism involved. An “iron” face is shown to all, with no courtesies or polite talk, no fussiness or demeaning behavior. If riches and honor cannot make you decadent, you have vast and proper energy. If poverty and lowliness cannot change you, you have vast and proper energy. If force cannot make you succumb, you have vast and proper energy. Not becoming debauched by wealth and honor, and happy although poor and of low station, means one is sustained by vast and proper energy. As the saying goes:

Untainted by wealth and honor;  
Happy though poor and lowly;  
Humane even to the point of death: a true hero.

Nurturing this vast and proper energy, then, starts from practicing humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. From them develop beauty, greatness, sageliness, and spirituality. Mencius said:

Humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom  
have their bases in the mind. They produce a



coloration that appears on the face, can be seen from the back, and extends throughout the four limbs.

If you are full of humaneness, rectitude, propriety, and wisdom, your face will naturally have an air of kindness and compassion, of wholesomeness and goodness. It will show on your entire body, and your four limbs will speak without words. Without you having to say anything, everyone will understand.

**It is the mother of truth, goodness, and beauty, and the vanquisher of falseness, evil, and ugliness.** Truth, goodness and beauty come from vast and proper energy. If you have vast and proper energy, then you will have truth, goodness, and beauty, and so it is their mother. If you do things in a phony, untrue way, you are being false. If others are good, but you do evil, or if you do evil and make trouble within the good you do, you may think you are going to become famous and rich, but actually, you are being very ugly, and people recognize it. As soon as they see the way you are, they are sure to look down on you. They know you completely fail to understand the Dharma and are only using effort on the surface. If you have vast and proper energy, you won't have falseness, evil, and ugliness; and if you have falseness, evil, and ugliness, you won't have vast and proper energy.

**If heaven and earth were without it, they would not be fit to be heaven and earth.** Lacking vast and proper energy, heaven and earth would not be adequate to being heaven and earth. **If sages and worthies were without it, they could not be called sages and worthies.** If sages and worthies lacked this vast and proper energy, they would not deserve to be called sages and worthies. If proper and superior people were without it, they would not be proper and superior people. If someone seems proper or superior, but actually lacks vast and proper energy, then he would not really be a proper or superior person. He would simply be cheating the world and stealing a false reputation. **If rulers and high officials are without it,**



**they are not qualified to be rulers and high officials.** If the leaders of countries—the chiefs of state and high-ranking ministers and officials—lack vast and proper energy, they are harming people. That is because without proper energy they are only concerned with benefiting themselves and achieving position and fame.

**If ordinary people obtain it, they turn into sages.** If ordinary, everyday people understand this vast and proper energy, they can become sages, reversing the ordinary so that it becomes sagely. **If sages and worthies increase in it, they can become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.** If people who are already sages and worthies can go on to increase their vast and proper energy by tending and nurturing it further, they can become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Someone who does nothing all day but chatter and gossip will never achieve sagehood. Such a person does not understand vast and proper energy, but is full of deviant energy. **Therefore, this vast and proper energy is the stairway to Buddhahood.** If you want to become a Buddha, you first must have vast and proper energy. To have vast and proper energy is the foundation for going to the Land of Ultimate Bliss, or for recognizing your original face.

**Vast and proper energy nurtures Qian and Kun.**

**From past to present, at home and abroad,**

**only this is true.**

**It is great and solid to the utmost,**

**nurtured and not harmed.**

**It illumines heaven, illumines earth,**

**and establishes all creatures.**

**It fills the six directions,**

**spreading to worlds as many as grains of sand.**

**It includes the myriad things,**

**pervading lands as many as dustmotes.**

**Tend and irrigate it well; it is the seed of Bodhi.**



**Do not neglect or help it;  
it is ultimately without a trace.**

The Verse Says: **Vast and proper energy nurtures the Qian and the Kun.** Qian and kun can mean men and women, and in general refer to the yang and yin, which produce heaven, earth, and the myriad things, as well as worthies, Buddhas, and sagely people. They all come forth from vast and proper energy. **From past to present, at home and abroad, only this is true.** “At home and abroad” could also mean “inside and outside.” Anything lacking vast and proper energy will not last. Only what has vast and proper energy endures. Whatever has it can remain forever in the world. If you are in the world, but lack vast and proper energy, it would be better for you to die fast, since your deviant energy harms the world. You are here just doing things for your own advantage, always looking for benefit for yourself. Believing in the Buddha is in order to benefit other people, not only to benefit oneself and gain advantage for oneself.

**It is great and solid to the utmost, nurtured and not harmed.** Mencius said, “I will nurture my vast and proper energy.” Vast and proper energy is what allows one to be fearless, not fearing heaven, not fearing earth, and not fearing the ghosts and spirits. With vast and proper energy, one has no fear of demonic ghosts and goblins. There is nothing greater or stronger, nothing more dynamic. However, you must nurture it well. Don’t let the least bit of personal desire remain within it. Don’t be selfish and looking for a way to benefit yourself. If you can’t stand the least bit of hardship, can’t stand the tiniest amount of suffering, can’t bear to be even slightly hungry or thirsty, then your vast and proper energy goes flat. A popular Manchurian term for people like this is “flattened eggplants.” You should tend and nurture your vast and proper energy. If you have deviant energy, then you lack vast and proper energy, and that is what is meant by harming it.

**It illumines heaven, illumines earth, and establishes all**

**creatures.** If you nurture it well, it will emit light which shines throughout heaven and earth, and can benefit all living beings, all your fellow creatures. **It fills the six directions, spreading to worlds as many as grains of sand.** This vast and proper energy fills the entire Dharma Realm, extending throughout worlds as numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. **It includes the myriad things, pervading lands as many as dustmotes.** Vast and proper energy is everywhere; it's just that you are unable to use it. **Tend and irrigate it well; it is the seed of Bodhi.** Vast and proper energy is the Buddha-nature, and you need to tend and cultivate it. **Do not neglect or help it; it is ultimately without a trace.** You shouldn't forget about it, but you also shouldn't assist it, like the man of Song who pulled up his sprouts, trying to get them to grow faster. That won't work either. Don't neglect it, but don't try to get it to grow quickly. It is very natural, without any traces. All you have to do is get rid of your deviant energy, rid yourself of selfishness and self-benefiting attitudes and your shameless behavior, and that will be sufficient. That is why it is ultimately without a trace. There is no deliberate application of effort involved. It is what Mencius was talking about when he said:

Fullness of truth is beauty;  
Fullness of truth with radiance is greatness;  
Greatness that can transform is sageliness;  
Sageliness which cannot be known is spirituality.

His "fullness of truth" refers to fullness of essence, energy, and spirit, which makes one a beautiful person. "Fullness of truth conjoined with radiance is greatness." If your essence, energy, and spirit are full and complete, and in addition you can emit light, then you have some vast and proper energy and are a great person. "Greatness which can transform is sageliness." If you are great and also have the wonderful functioning of spiritual penetrations, then you are a sagely person. "Sageliness which cannot be known is



spirituality.” If you reach the point that even sages do not know, then you are a spiritual person. Vast and proper energy is the foundation for that.



Q

What exactly is Dharma?

A

Dharma means energy, energy that can penetrate heaven and earth. All Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and we are one because our energies are connected.



## CHAN AT ALL TIMES

Investigating Chan meditation, we sit in the same hall together. But in actuality, Chan is not only practiced when we sit. We should be investigating Chan at all times, in all aspects of our behavior.

Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down,  
Do not be apart from this.  
If we part from this,  
Then we have gone amiss.

What is “this?” It is the stilling of our thoughts. If we can quiet our thoughts, then we will have attained concentration. When our thoughts reach a single focus, we can be successful in everything we do. Why is it that people don’t have success in what they do? They have not yet attained concentration. When we can be completely focused, then we can gain concentration. And from concentration, we will develop wisdom.

Sitting in Chan, we don’t want to seek spiritual penetrations or any kind of special effect. First and foremost, we should try to clean up our bodies so that we won’t have any kind of illness. With strong, healthy bodies, deviant energies won’t have a way to



encroach upon us. If we are able to maintain a vast flowing, proper energy that soars to the heavens and stabilizes the earth, then we will naturally give rise to proper knowledge and vision, and everything we do will be principled and rational. That is one of the benefits from sitting in Chan.

If we do not let the waves of thoughts well up in our minds, then at all times we will not experience afflictions, including feelings of right and wrong and awareness of self and others. Right there we are getting the benefit of investigating Chan.

First, we should turn the light inward and examine ourselves, “Am I still as gluttonous as I was before I started to sit in Chan? Am I still as concerned with seeking fame as I used to be? Have I changed my faults? When I encounter unreasonable situations or things that don’t go my way, do I get all upset over them?” If the answer to any or all of those questions is “yes,” then that shows us that we haven’t made much progress in our Chan investigation. But if we can correct our personality defects and lessen our faults, then we are getting some good news and we can proceed to examine ourselves further.

In eating, are we able to eat delicious food and bad-tasting food and treat them just the same? If so, we can chase out the ghost of gluttony.

In work, do we only do things that are advantageous to us, and completely ignore things that would bring us no direct advantage? Are we lazy? Do we try to scrimp on materials or waste time? If so, then we have no skill to speak of. If we can manage to change, so that we are willing to help with things that are of benefit to others, so that we like serving the public and are no longer so egocentric, then we have expelled the ghost of laziness.

In making an effort, are we able to become more and more energetic each day? When we are no longer groggy and moving around as if in a daze, then we have driven out the ghost of



drowsiness.

If we succeed in driving out the ghost of gluttony, the ghost of laziness, and the ghost of sleep, then we have made the first step in our cultivation of Chan. We must make a definite change from before, turn over a new leaf, and become a totally new person. As the saying goes, “The temple is the same, but the resident spirit is different.” Or in this case we could say, “The temple is the same, but the resident ghost is different.” Before a ghost king dwelled in our temple, now it is a Bodhisattva.

Maybe in the past we had an evil and poisonous heart, but now we’ve brought forth the compassionate heart of a Bodhisattva. Basically, just by the way we eat, we can tell whether or not we have skill in Chan. If we are still obsessed with good flavors and we are picky when it comes to choosing good foods, then we haven’t derived any benefit from Chan. We must get rid of our past faults, habits, and afflictions, especially our tempers. If we can get rid of affliction, then it’s like sediment that settles to the bottom of the water. When the water clears up and we are able to see from the top right to the bottom, right at this time, our wisdom will surface. If our mind is always turbid and we haven’t swept out our afflictions and ignorance, then we won’t attain any samadhi. And if we don’t have samadhi, how much less can we speak of wisdom!

Therefore, sitting in Chan, we must have patience. If we make Chan the focus of our life, then we have to make a positive change regarding every aspect of our character and our actions. It’s not the case that we cultivate Chan only when we are sitting. Rather, we are working hard at all times and in all places. After some time, silently and imperceptibly, there will be a change and a transformation, and we will have managed to remold our character.

If I have spoken correctly, you can practice accordingly. If I have spoken incorrectly, then you can forget it as if you’ve never heard me speak. If it is in accord with the Way, progress along with



it; if it is against the Way, retreat from it. If you still have afflictions, then all the more spur yourself onward. Don't let it be the case that you come here to sit in Chan, but when you go home you blow up. If people are without a temper, they are like the Buddha. But if they fly off into a rage, they are like ghosts. When they pout and frown, don't they look unsightly? If, on the other hand, you can be cheerful and optimistic at all times, then you have managed to turn things around. Afflictions can be transformed into Bodhi, just like turning over the palm of your hand. All you have to do is turn it around. There's no need to seek outside. It's all within yourself.





Q

How can we avoid hunger?

A

If we have enough vital energy, then we will not feel hungry. With enough vitality, we can go without eating for several days without any problem. We can talk with a booming voice still; our voice does not wane and our health does not become poor when we don't eat. This is because we have developed our real qi, which pours in endlessly like running electrical currents.

Q

How can we avoid sleepiness?

A

If we have enough spirit, then we will not be so sleepy. Why do we sleep so much? That happens because our yin energy is dominant. If our yang energy were dominant, we would sleep less.

Q

Why are we afraid of the cold?

A

If we have enough essence (reproductive energy), we will not be afraid of the cold. If we can keep the precepts and not violate them, we will not be afraid of the cold. There's nothing special to this. If men don't get near women and women don't get near men, we will be fine without food and can do without much clothing.





## HOW TO EAT, SLEEP, AND WEAR CLOTHES

Eating is a very important matter in everyone's life, as are wearing clothes and sleeping. It seems to me that since eating, wearing clothes, and sleeping are the most fundamental aspects of our lives, we should learn how to do these things properly. In that way we won't be wasting our energy.

When we eat, we shouldn't eat too fast. We shouldn't get nervous because if we do, then we'll suffer from indigestion and all kinds of stomach complications. That's why there's this saying:

Sicknesses enter through the mouth,  
Calamities come out from the mouth.

During mealtime, we should be very respectful. We should maintain an attitude of gratitude and thanksgiving, because this is a country of plenty where we are all able to get our fill. Since this is the case, we should take our meal slowly.

Although eating is a necessity, we shouldn't be greedy for the flavors of the food. It's said:

The superior person does not pay attention to food.  
He places emphasis on the Way.

The very best way to eat is to ignore the flavor. If you are able to do that, it will be very easy for you to digest your food, and the food won't make you sick. If we can learn to eat without being greedy



for flavors, then we will also be able to apply the same principle to everything we do. Everything we do has both benefit and harm in it. Everything we do has some good and some bad in it. Everything we do has the potential for victory or defeat.

In eating correctly, we should eat wholesome food in order to preserve our health. We should be very calm, natural, and at ease when we eat. It would be best to not think about other things while we eat. And if we could eliminate discursive thought altogether while we take our meal, then we could truly “eat without knowing the flavor.” Eating in that way would allow the food we ate to be used to its maximum potential. In a sense, we would have saved its benefits by not savoring them.

Clothes are the second necessity. Our clothes should be clean. They don't have to be elegant or costly. There are many problems involved with wearing expensive clothes. You're afraid to sit down and afraid to stand up. You're reluctant to sit for fear that the place where you are about to sit is dirty and the expensive clothes you're wearing will get soiled. You are reluctant to stand for fear that you will brush up against something that will ruin the appearance of your clothes. Wearing expensive clothes becomes as burdensome as donning armor. The clothes we wear need only to be clean. This is my simple opinion.

If we don't go after the best food and the finest clothes, then we will be properly managing the first two necessities.

When it's time to sleep, we shouldn't think about yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Then we can sleep easily. Many people in this world rely on sleeping pills so they can go to sleep and stomach medicines so they can digest their food. Many people also never feel warm no matter how many clothes they put on. Other people never feel cool enough no matter how few clothes they are wearing. If we can be peaceful at heart when doing things, being in harmony with ourselves, then none of the many kinds of sicknesses will come



to trouble us. My words have been very simple and yet, if you've listened, you'll find a lot about how to conduct oneself in my message.



Q

What is the meaning of life?

A

Hurry up and die if you feel life is meaningless. If you feel that there is meaning to your life, then that means everything.

Q

What was the Buddha's attitude toward life?

A

One of compassion, joy, generosity, and equanimity.



## A WAY OF LIFE

**The superior person does not try to get full when he eats, does not seek comfort in his dwelling, and is prompt in doing things. He is careful in his speech, and follows those who have the Way in order to rectify himself. Such a person can be said to really like to learn.**

*Confucian Analects, On Learning*

Confucius said that someone with virtue who is intent upon Way does not try to get full when he eats. Why not? The desires for food and sex are instinctive. People all like to eat well and also wish to eat their fill. If they aren't filled, they constantly feel they haven't done right by their stinking skin bags. But people who want to cultivate



shouldn't try to eat so full or so well.

The superior person is concerned about the Way, and not concerned about food. However, to go hungry is also wrong. At each meal we should eat so we are eighty percent full and that's sufficient. The remaining twenty percent can remain for people who have nothing to eat, so that no one in the world will have to die of starvation.

“But,” you may ask, “If I leave it, can they eat it?”

You don't need to pay attention to that. You haven't eaten it, you haven't been a big rice-eating bug and depleted the world's resources, and so you've fulfilled your responsibility. Most people talk about eating their fill and letting it go at that, but a superior person who truly cultivates the Way not only doesn't eat his fill, he fundamentally does not intend to get full. He always leaves twenty to thirty percent room in his stomach.

A superior person also does not seek comfort in his dwelling. We cultivators don't reside in mansions. Some people may have a building that towers to the heavens, but they still don't take up more than eight feet of it at night when they sleep. And however much good food and fine flavors are available to you, you can only eat three meals a day. People in our tradition eat only one meal a day, and so this applies even more to them.

We should be content simply to have a place to live. For example, Confucius' disciple Yan Yuan ate from a piece of bamboo and drank from a hollowed-out gourd. He didn't own a single teacup, let alone a teapot. The hermit Chao Fu rested in a nest. He built himself a bird's nest in a tree and lived there. He didn't even use a ladle to drink from, but scooped up water with his hands. Someone had given him a gourd, which he had hung on the tree, but it made an irritating noise when the wind blew, and so he threw it away. Those are examples of people who did not want any external possessions.



A superior person is prompting in doing things; he doesn't put things off. We should be prompt and expeditious in doing things, and quickly get done what it is we should do. However, we should not become frantic either, for excess is equivalent to deficiency, and to get nervous is also wrong. We should do things in moderation, neither overdoing nor underdoing.

He is, in addition, careful in his speech. We must be very cautious in what we say. We must not casually say whatever we please. As it is said:

One word can make the nation flourish.  
But one word can also destroy the nation.

If we are over-talkative, then we aren't being careful in our speech. A superior person follows those who have the Way in order to rectify himself. If we don't understand something, we should draw near to a virtuous person, either someone of refinement, or someone with gung fu, or someone learned. It must be a person loftier than we are. We should inquire of him, "Am I right or wrong? My wisdom is insufficient, and I can't tell. I lack discernment. Please help me know myself." Such a person is one who really likes to learn. Anyone who can be that way, who is attentive to virtue and wisdom, is someone who truly wishes to learn.







Q

What should we do with kitchen staff who gossip?

A

We will eat food made of gossip.

### TAKING ANOTHER STEP at the TOP of the POLE

After being mindful of the Buddha,  
begin to meditate.  
Sliding down is easy; going up is hard.  
If you can take another step at the top of the  
hundred-foot pole,  
You will discover that beyond this world is  
another world.

MASTER HUA



## VIGOR

Some people come to sit in Chan, and as the weeks pass, they feel they have made progress. Their bodies have gotten healthier, they feel spirited and happy; their afflictions daily decrease, while their wisdom daily increases. They are no longer worried, upset, or hateful. And these are signs of gaining skill in meditation.

However, there are others who come to sit in Chan, who feel restless and agitated, their wild thoughts flying everywhere. The more they sit, the more restless they become. They can't bear to sit down. Originally, they had no afflictions, but sitting there they start



to worry. Some people start to entertain thoughts of money when they sit; others think desirous thoughts. Still others think, “This is not as much fun as eating out at a restaurant.” Still some others think, “It would be much more comfortable if I stayed at home and slept in.”

And so there are those two kinds of people. The first kind are discovering their good roots. They want to build a solid foundation in Buddhism and to cultivate. If they can put down the ten thousand conditions bit by bit, their good roots will ripen, and eventually they will become Buddhas. As for the other kind—their karmic obstacles are too heavy. As the saying goes:

If you wish to be good,  
your former karmic obstacles look you up.  
If you wish to become a Buddha,  
you have to undergo the demons.

Demons come to polish our nature, to refine us. They test us to see how solid our resolve is, whether or not we really want to sit in Chan. Face to face with a test, don't be turned by the situation. We should be vigorous whether we meet a pleasant or an adverse situation. Faced with a pleasant situation, we want to push forward and make progress. Faced with an adverse situation, we still want to go forward. Since we know that sitting in Chan has many good benefits, then even if false thoughts arrive, and we find it very hard to sit, still we should be patient and continue to sit. That way we will make progress in our skill. Making a strong commitment to attain Bodhi, in the future we will most certainly become Buddhas.

Moreover, we should rely on three things to overcome all difficulties.

1. **Resoluteness:** Our resolve should be firm. Be unwavering and keep on working hard no matter what test arrives.
2. **Sincerity:** Be earnest and intent to the utmost in doing your

work. Do not entertain idle thoughts.

3. **Perseverance:** Be unchanging and constant. If you start out with doing something, make sure that you pursue it to the very end. Since you have begun to sit, you should keep on sitting until you come to some success. Then you will experience a breakthrough, and reach a penetrating understanding. Only then can you end birth and death, and arrive at the Buddha's position of Bodhi.

Don't forget those three conditions. Don't forget to remain vigorous when faced with either pleasant or adverse situations. Those are your provisions for your journey to the Buddha's land. With them you will most certainly arrive at your destination.

### DON'T BE APART from THIS!

Moving or still, awake or asleep,  
Don't be apart from *this*.  
If you depart from *this*,  
Then you've gone amiss.

MASTER HUA





Q

Could the Venerable Master please point out the way for me? When someone is meditating, who or what is the meditator?

A

You find out.

### PICK IT UP and PUT IT DOWN

Pick it up, put it down.  
 Who is mindful of the Buddha? Ha, ha, ha!  
 Put it down, pick it up.  
 Who is the Buddha mindful of? Hee, hee, hee!  
 It is not you, it is not me; between you and me there  
 are too many people.  
 It is you, it is me; when Mount Sumeru is knocked  
 down, who can there be?

MASTER HUA'S VERSE  
 FOR STARTING A CHAN SESSION



## WHO?

Someone has asked about the meaning behind the meditation topic “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” The *Vajra Sutra* says, “Bring forth the mind that does not dwell anywhere.” To “not dwell anywhere” means to not think about good or evil. We work hard in the place where there is no distinction of good or evil. To make discriminations between good and bad is to still have attachments.



The whole purpose of cultivation is to get rid of all attachments, to the point that we even forget our body. If we truly forget even our own body, what attachments could we possibly have?

When we are investigating Chan, we should not think of anything at all. So why is it suggested that we think of “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” Actually, we’re looking for “who.” When we find out who, we’ll become enlightened. Before we have found out, we need to keep looking—whether for one day, ten days, a hundred days, a thousand days, five years, ten years, a hundred years, a thousand years, even ten thousand years—still we must discover “who.” When we finally succeed in finding out who, then our job will be done.

But you can’t seek quick results. Using a meditation topic is not like smoking dope to get an instant hit. It’s not that heady. The fast effects of drugs and stimulants only cheat people. Cultivation is a true method devoid of any deception whatsoever. But we have to really work hard at it. You can’t pull on young shoots in an attempt to make them grow faster. If you do that, they will certainly die. Don’t make the mistake of seeking for speed in cultivation.

The meditation topic “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” can intercept all other thoughts. It can sever all desirous thoughts, even smash the ten demon armies. The word “who” is a vajra king’s jeweled sword. It can slice through anything. But in investigating this meditation topic, we must not become attached to any physical place or state of mind we may experience in the process.

As the *Vajra Sutra* says,

All appearances are false and empty.  
If you see all appearances as no appearances,  
Then you see the Thus Come One.

All attachments arise from people’s thoughts. Getting rid of all attachments is what the resolve to take this Path is all about. If we don’t look into the topic “who” while sitting in meditation, it’s



easy for our stray thoughts to come and swamp us. If that keeps happening, we will never become enlightened. Investigating a meditation topic is “fighting poison with poison,” using a single sustained thought to subdue all other thoughts. When you drill to the place where the mountains are leveled and the seas dry up, and at that point you turn around—that is the moment of true awakening.







Q

Master, if the law of cause and effect never errs, how can dharmas not be fixed? What does that mean?

A

The fact that dharmas are not fixed does not mean you don't need to cultivate and that you can kill, commit arson, and rob. No fixed dharmas means that we should do no evil and do every good. We do them but we're not doing them; we are doing nothing but we are doing everything. Don't be attached.

### NEITHER HAPPY nor WORRIED

When you're enlightened, take no delight.  
 Before you're enlightened, harbor no worry.  
 Just continue working hard;  
 Hand-in-hand I'll walk with you.

MASTER HUA'S VERSE  
 FOR ENDING A CHAN SESSION



## HEROIC PROGRESS

We people who cultivate the Way should be extremely careful not to become self-satisfied, arrogant, or haughty. If we are self-satisfied, then we won't make progress. If we are arrogant, then we won't be able to learn from those beneath us. We should feel that what we know is very little, and we should welcome the chance to study



with other people. Learn from other people, seek wisdom from everyone.

We should be open to both favorable and adverse situations. We should be able to accept not only pleasant states, but also unpleasant ones. We shouldn't say that we can't stand unpleasant experiences, nor should we just endure what is unpleasant and remain unreceptive to what is agreeable or pleasant.

If we become attached to either extreme, then we won't be able to obtain samadhi. For example, if someone praises us and we like it, then we have been moved by the wind of compliance. If people slander us and we react to that, then we have been moved by an adverse wind. Whether situations are compliant or adverse, we should progress right through them. Both situations provide us opportunities to learn. Both can be said to be good and wise advisors.

It is said that adversity creates heroes. Heroes are made from situations that are not easy to get through. When adversity comes we should respond to it as though it were an agreeable state. And yet the same holds true for compliant states. We must recognize both these states for what they are and be careful not to go to extremes.



Q

What is wisdom?

A

Wisdom is about always knowing the right thing to do and say.



## FULL LOTUS POSTURE IS A GOLDEN PAGODA

Chan Master Gui Bi's name means "Pressured by Ghosts." Here's his story. Originally, this monk did not practice Chan meditation. He performed ceremonies. But once when he heard some people ridiculing him for being a monk who took offerings for doing funerals, he got to thinking about that.

On the same day he heard the criticism, he was walking on the road returning from a funeral when it began to rain. Disgruntled, he ducked under a bridge to try to keep dry. There he was, under that bridge with nothing to do. There were no dead people under the bridge, so he couldn't perform a funeral. So he thought, "Well, I could try meditation. I've heard that it's not bad. I'll try sitting in meditation and see what it's like." So he sat down and pulled his legs into full lotus. He got his legs all arranged and sat there, and immediately a wonderful state appeared.

What state? Two ghosts appeared. Here he was, day after day crossing over ghosts, and although he had never seen a ghost, he wasn't afraid of them. He was more or less in the retinue of ghosts—he was that far gone in his involvement with them. So when he saw



the ghosts, he wasn't afraid.

One ghost said, "Hey, what's a golden pagoda doing here? I've never seen that here before."

The other ghost said, "Oh, a golden pagoda has the Buddha's relics in it. We'd better go bow to it. The Buddha's Dharma Body is there." So the two ghosts started bowing like chickens eating grain. They bowed over and over and over and over again. But they didn't knock their heads on the ground when they bowed because, after all, they were ghosts. There was just this yin energy there bowing.

They continued to bow in a very agitated way. Standing up, bowing, standing, kneeling, bowing, and standing up. Now since this monk was on pretty friendly terms with ghosts (he crossed them over every day), he considered all the ghosts he crossed over as his special friends, and so he wasn't afraid.

But soon, after he had sat for a while, his legs refused to cooperate. His legs said, "It hurts, it hurts, it hurts." They started crying, "Pain, pain." As soon as they yelled "pain, pain," he listened to them. He listened to his legs talking to him. He said, "Fine, I'll liberate you." So he eased out of full lotus posture into half lotus.

Meanwhile, the ghosts kept bowing and bowing. But once when they stood up, they glanced at what they had been bowing to and they stopped to confer with each other. One said, "Hey, that was a golden pagoda. How did it turn into a silver one? That's really strange."

The other ghost said, "Oh, what difference does it make? Gold pagoda, silver pagoda...Silver pagodas also have the Buddha's Dharma Body inside. We ought to keep bowing." So they started bowing again, but by now they probably weren't as fast as chickens eating grain. They were bowing more and more slowly. They kept it up for another half hour or maybe even an hour. Let's not quibble about how long it was.

But eventually, the monk couldn't take it any longer. His



legs were complaining again. They started making an uproar and screaming, “Oh, the pain is unimaginable. It hurts, it hurts, it hurts. We just can’t stand the pain any longer.” The legs made such a ruckus that he thought, “All right, already, I’ll liberate you.” So he slipped out of half lotus and just sat there in crossed-legged fashion, as casual as he pleased.

Well, that really woke up the ghosts. They said, “Look, that’s not a gold pagoda or a silver pagoda either. Basically, it’s just a mound of mud. We’ve really been fooled. Let’s kick it. Let’s kick this mound of mud.” To them, the monk now sitting casually, looked like a mound of mud. But as soon as he heard the ghosts were going to kick him, he immediately got back into full lotus. As soon as he got his legs crossed over each other, the ghosts blinked in astonishment. They said, “Look! It’s a gold pagoda again. It transformed into a gold pagoda again. We’d better keep bowing.” So, the two of them continued to bow.

They bowed until dawn, until a cock crowed. Then they left. The monk mused, “Oh, full lotus is a golden pagoda, half lotus is a silver pagoda, and sitting any way you please is a mound of mud. That’s really inconceivable. Well, I’ve decided. From now on I’m not going to recite for ghosts. I’m going to change my trade. I’m going to make a jeweled hall of gold for the Buddha. I’m going to become a golden pagoda.”

And after that, every day he sat in full lotus. After sitting for a time, he became enlightened, and after becoming enlightened, he thought, “Amazing! Who were my good and wise advisors? Turns out they were a couple of ghosts.” So after that he called himself Chan Master Gui Bi—Pressured by Ghosts. The ghosts forced him into cultivating.





Q

You just talked about how the full lotus posture is equivalent to a gold pagoda and a half lotus position is equivalent to a silver pagoda. Now will you please discuss meditation?

A

Don't be too anxious. You will only bite off more than you can chew. If you cannot sit in full lotus yet, sit in half lotus. The faster you want to go, the slower you're going to get there. Study one day at a time; don't try to graduate from college right away.

Q

I just want to learn more.

A

You have to empty your brain if you want to learn more. If you don't empty your brain and all that falsehood in it, you will not be able to put any dharma in there.

Q

You just don't want to put it in for me.

A

You're always discontent. You first have to build the foundation to the house well. If the foundation of the house is not well-built, the house will not be solid either. A house is useless just sitting there unless it's been well-grounded.

Q

Now that I have taken the first step, what is the second step?

A

Take it slow. You don't even necessarily understand everything that I am saying right now. Wait until you can understand what I'm saying, that way you will also understand why I don't say anything.



## WISDOM

The whole purpose of sitting in Chan is to open wisdom. From beginningless time until now, because we have not known to sit in Chan and not known how to cultivate wisdom, we have grown more and more deluded. We have allowed our random thoughts to accumulate and proliferate. The purpose of investigating Chan is to become fully awakened. But awakening has no shape or color; it's not something we can reckon or try to fathom with our ordinary human intellect.

What's meant by awakening anyway? It means coming to understand how we are born and how we will die. We need to understand where we came from at birth and where we will go at death. With that understanding, we smash through ignorance. Once we smash through ignorance, we will no longer have afflictions. Without afflictions, we won't generate errant thoughts. Once those errant thoughts die down, deviant thoughts will also lessen. With not so many deviant thoughts cluttering our minds,





proper thoughts will appear. With proper thoughts in mind, our wisdom will increase day-by-day.

Consider the grass in springtime. We may not notice its growth, yet it keeps getting taller and taller every day. Wisdom develops in the same way. Once we have proper mindfulness and lessen our deviant thoughts, our wisdom will grow. Can wisdom be seen? No, it can't be seen because wisdom is a very sacred and spiritual thing. But whether or not someone has wisdom can be detected. As long as we continue doing stupid things, then we still don't have wisdom. But if we can refrain from our former stupid and upside-down ways, then we can be said to have acquired some wisdom.

Wisdom is found by returning to the source and going back to the origin. That process is the opening of our inherent wisdom-mine. As this mine is opened, we begin to truly understand. Ultimate true understanding defines a Buddha. A Buddha is really not that different from an ordinary person. The only difference lies in the fact that a Buddha has opened wisdom. Those of us who believe in the Buddha do not have to seek spiritual powers or wonderful functioning, such as the three bodies, the four wisdoms, the five eyes, and the six spiritual penetrations. All we have to do is to believe in the Buddha's wisdom. It is the wisdom that we all have within ourselves. It's not an exclusive possession of the Buddha. It's a potential that everyone has. The Buddha simply pointed out the road for us, and if we can follow that road, we too, can open up our original wisdom-mine.

The scientists, physicists, chemists, and many philosophers search outside for answers. In actuality, everything we need is contained within our own nature. In investigating Chan, we open up our own chemical laboratory and carry on all kinds of chemical experiments. Investigating Chan is a chemical process. In fact it is the mother of science and the mother of philosophy, and is able to help us develop great wisdom. Once we develop great wisdom, all



problems will solve themselves. People who investigate Chan can open up great, perfect, mirror-like wisdom; wisdom of equality; wonderful contemplative wisdom; wisdom that accomplishes that which needs to be done. Once we uncover those four kinds of wisdom, then the five eyes and the six spiritual penetrations will come quite spontaneously, without seeking. Therefore, it is not necessary to pursue anything external, including spiritual powers; everything is already contained within our own nature.

However, we must have patience. Day and night we should focus on our work. In the morning we should find time to sit, and in the evening sit again before sleep. That way we can lessen our desires and purify our thoughts. In essence, we are carrying out all kinds of experiments in our own chemical lab. Whatever kind of ingredient we put in, we will obtain a corresponding result. Therefore, it is important that we maintain proper mindfulness when we sit. Be focused at every moment. That kind of concentration will hone our wisdom in much the same way a stone is polished. One who is careless in the grinding, however, may grind the entire stone away to nothing. That refers to how, if we keep on doing upside-down things and abusing our precious energy and resources, our bodies will weaken from dissipation and eventually die of it. On the other hand, if we cherish our primal energies and do not abuse our bodies, then we will remain in good health and our wisdom will increase daily.



Q

What kind of talk is wise?

A

To be truly wise, we would speak simply, clearly, and to the point, not saying any more than is necessary.

Q

What is the “first thought”?

A

It’s that very first understanding before you consciously deliberate. Whenever you think, you are using your human brain and not your enlightened mind.

## WINTER MEDITATION in SAN FRANCISCO

Ten thousand Buddhas shine their lights upon  
this city;

Ten thousand people meditate on the Way eternal  
and equal.

Ten thousand Dharmas return to one;  
we all become enlightened.

Ten thousand people light their blazing wisdom lamps.

MASTER HUA’S VERSE  
FOR STARTING A CHAN SESSION





## SPEED AND GREED

University students have to choose a major. But once they have done that, if they fantasize on their goal, rather than focusing on their studies, they may not succeed. That's because they have created a mental block that impedes their progress. For instance, a student wants a degree in medicine. If instead of focusing on his studies, he's always entertaining thoughts of how he will be a great doctor in the future, he'll probably never get there. He must, for the time being, set aside such thoughts and single-mindedly address himself to his studies. Then, in the future, he might realize his aim.

Sitting in Chan works much the same way. The purpose of sitting in Chan is for us to become enlightened, to open up great wisdom, and to end birth and death. However, when we are sitting there, we should not entertain such ideas as, "When am I going to get enlightened? When will I open great wisdom? When will I end birth and death?" Instead, we need to be completely concentrated on investigating our topic, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" Don't pay attention to whether or not you will become enlightened, whether or not you will open great wisdom, whether or not you will end birth and death. If you constantly harbor those thoughts, you will never become enlightened. And why is that? Those very thoughts create a mental block. We must, instead, forget about our body and mind, be completely free and at ease, be without impediments or hang-ups, and single-mindedly look into the topic,



“Who is mindful of the Buddha?” When we investigate to the point that:

The mountains have all been scaled  
And the river traced to its source.  
One wonders whether there’s still a road ahead.  
When suddenly among the dark willow’s shade  
Bright flowers emerge and another village appears.

That’s the time you will come upon a totally different experience, something totally new to you. However, you don’t need to harbor those kinds of thoughts either. When your skill matures, you will naturally arrive at that stage.

Don’t be greedy for speed. Don’t be in a hurry. Go too fast and you won’t get there... Don’t set your sights on small gains. Being fixed on small gains will prevent you from succeeding in big matters.

ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS

Chan cultivators must focus their minds and not entertain any random thoughts. If we’re able to reach this level of concentration, then everything we do will work out fine. We will obtain the results we deserve. However, we shouldn’t hope to get something for nothing. “I have just begun to sit, and I want some kind of miraculous response...” Don’t be greedy for miraculous responses; don’t go looking for them. Those who are greedy for responses will easily take a wrong path and end up possessed by a demon. Demons will see that such a person is greedy for a bargain, and since that greed leaves the door wide open, they will worm their way in. If you aren’t greedy for speed and you aren’t looking for a cheap deal, then the demons will have no way to bother you. All of you should recognize this principle clearly before you attempt to sit in Chan. Don’t overlook this important point.



The analogy of focusing I mentioned just now applies to studying as well as to Chan. In whatever we do, we should just aim to go forward. Don't harbor thoughts of getting something out of it. If we have ulterior motives, we have already gone against the Way.

Now I will bring up a very simple analogy to illustrate my point. When you're hungry, all you have to do is eat, and then you will get full. However, if you only think about how hungry you are but you don't eat, then you will never get full. When you don't have enough clothes on, you feel cold. All you have to do is put on more clothes, and you won't feel cold anymore. But if you merely think about how cold it is and fail to put on more clothes, you will not get warm. The same principle applies to sitting in Chan. All you have to do is sit. You don't have to entertain thoughts such as, "When am I going to get enlightened? When will I open great wisdom? When will I end birth and death?" All you have to do is simply proceed with your investigation.

The Way has to be walked.

If we do not walk it,

How could it be the Way?

Virtue has to be put into practice.

If we do not practice it,

How could it be virtue?

We must apply whatever we have learned, and then we will obtain a response.

If you wish to obtain a response in Chan, first cast out six contradictory thoughts. Why do I call them contradictory? On the one hand you want to get enlightened and to possess great wisdom, but on the other hand you continue to use these six things that contradict the Way: contention, greed, seeking personal gain, selfishness, pursuit of personal benefits, and not telling the truth. Using these, we will never achieve our goals, because those six

contradictory thoughts go against the grain of enlightenment. So we must build a firm foundation in the six guidelines. Building a good foundation means smashing ignorance. The whole purpose of sitting in Chan is to smash ignorance. Ignorance is lack of understanding, but the very root of ignorance is selfish love and desire. Therefore, cultivators of Chan must be careful to cast out selfish desire and sever emotional love. If you cannot do that, then your attempts to gain awakening through sitting in Chan will be impossible. This is an important point!







Q

What's the fastest route to Buddhahood? How should we study? Which Sutra or mantra should we recite? Which Dharma should we cultivate?

A

You should recite the Sutras of not getting angry, not getting upset, and not scolding people. You will become a Buddha quickly with these three Sutras.



## DON'T JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS!

When investigating Chan, inside we regulate our minds and outside we temper our bodies. Body and mind coordinate and function as one. As the saying goes, "Our words should match our actions, and our actions should match our words. Body and mind should blend together." Sitting in Chan, we must try to gather in the wild horse and playful monkey that wreak havoc with our minds. Don't let them run outside and jump around. Instead, our every move should be in accord with proper decorum, and we should conduct ourselves in an upright and composed manner. When we walk, sit, stand, or lie down, everything should be done in a proper way.

Walk like a gentle breeze,  
 Stand like a pine tree,  
 Sit like a big bell,  
 Lie down like a bow.

When we walk, we should move like a gentle breeze, not a



hurricane that whips up trees and knocks down houses. The same principle applies to when we stand, sit, or recline. At all times, we should conduct ourselves as if we were still meditating. Be relaxed, calm, and centered. That way we will gain control over the wild horse and mad monkey that cavort in our minds. We should coordinate our Chan investigation with our walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. That way we will gain a response in our skill.

What kind of response? We will experience a state of light ease. You can't pinpoint this state. It's as if there; as if not there. But in general, we feel a sense of lightness, ease, and joy. Our random thoughts will diminish; we'll be like still waters on which no waves arise. Look at the ocean. Waves surge up one after another. The waves inside our minds are the same—random thoughts arise one after another. However, if we develop samadhi, then inside we can gather in our mind and outside we can regulate our body. When both our body and mind have gotten on the right track, we will experience a sense of light ease. This is a preliminary stage in the process of Chan. It is a foretaste of the first dhyana stage, the ground of happiness arising from concentration. It's a stage that many people go through as they start to apply effort in Chan. Therefore, don't take it as some very far-out or extraordinary state. Don't become attached to it. If you think this is some sort of incredible state, then you are finished. You won't be able to make progress. You have drawn your own limits and all of your former efforts will be wasted. You won't come to any true accomplishment.

For this reason the *Shurangama Sutra* says, "If you don't consider it a sagely experience, then it can be called a good state." You shouldn't think of it as some kind of fantastic achievement, that you've accomplished something extraordinary, that you've become enlightened or that you have verifiable fruition. Don't become smug and self-satisfied. That very self-satisfaction will call in the demons. Demons and those of deviant paths got to be where they



are because they were greedy for spiritual powers, for extraordinary states. That's why they became demons in the first place.

The *Shurangama Sutra* goes on to say, "If you consider it a sagely experience, then you will be subject to deviant influences." You will very easily go down a wrong road and experience demonic possession. If you are greedy for small bargains, for small states, then you will easily go the wrong way.

Therefore, do not become attached to any state that might arise in Chan. Do not become attached to a good state or a bad state. "When the Buddha comes, slay the Buddha. When a demon comes, slay the demon." Even if a Buddha appears before you, you should not be moved. Consider it a minor incident in your application of effort. Do not make a big deal of it. When demons appear before you, don't be scared. When the Buddha comes, do not be happy; when the demons come, do not be afraid. If you allow yourself to be happy, you can easily get off the right track; if you allow yourself to be turned by fear, you can also become possessed by a demon.

In general, do not be moved by the seven emotions: happiness, anger, sorrow, fear, love, hate, and desire. Getting turned by happiness, losing your temper, becoming depressed or fearful, giving in to emotional love, loathing, or desire—any one of these states is not proper. You should put a stop to the seven emotions.

In walking, sitting, standing, and reclining, be like still water, which has no waves. Once the seven emotions and six desires move, the waters are stirred up, waves appear, and your mind will know no peace. The host of your mind, the mind-king, should remain unmoving. When your nature is still and settled, the demons will be subdued, and everywhere, at all times, you will feel comfortable, calm, and serene. You won't feel afraid or worried. You will be quiet and composed, like still waters, and your wisdom will appear. Only when your mind is without distractions will your wisdom be revealed. Therefore, you should coordinate your daily actions with



your investigation of Chan and work hard!



Q

Are mediums, those who channel and so forth, part of the Buddhadharmā?

A

All dharmas are the Buddhadharmā; none can be obtained. Or we could say that all dharmas are no Buddhadharmā. Anyway, we must let go of any attachment as we study Buddhism: sweep away all dharmas and leave every mark.

Q

What is true?

A

Anything that is true helps others and not us. This applies without regard to profession, faction, sect, or school of religion. To be more explicit, too often we appear to help others but really mean to benefit ourselves. If we were not interested in money, then we're interested in sex; if not sex, then fame and fortune. In so doing, we are always haunted by a shadow.



## PASSING OUR TESTS

If we want to become Buddhas,  
We must first undergo the demons.

Who helps Buddhas become Buddhas? Demons help them. If there



weren't any demons, there wouldn't be any Buddhas. And it's just because there are demons that there are Buddhas. Demons serve the purpose of helping Buddhas become Buddhas.

Demons come to test us. Those tests help us progress. Each time we take another step forward. It's said:

If we hope to see an additional thousand miles,  
We have to climb another flight of stairs.

Demons come to see if we are really up to it. They check us out to see if we have true spirit. If you've got it, then in the face of a hundred hardships you won't retreat from your resolve to attain Bodhi (awakening). The harder and more difficult the tests become, the more determined we will be to cultivate. Then, no matter what difficulty or opposition comes our way, we'll get through it with ease. We'll never feel there's anything unfair about our predicament; we'll never curse heaven and blame people.

If we can be that way, then whether things go our way or not, we will be developing our skill in the perfection of patience. That patience will allow us to accept and recognize the tests that come our way. We won't bear enmity towards the demons. We will find it doesn't matter if we must undergo a little bitterness. We will even be able to make the vow to rescue the demons, so that they too will take refuge with the Triple Jewel and set their minds on Bodhi.

Never think of anything or anyone as an enemy. Don't harbor the least bit of vengeance in your thoughts. Being free of resentment, we can then change lances and spears into jade and cloth. We can change enmity and hatred into kindness and compassion. Look for the good side of everything; don't get caught up in your own self-importance. Don't always be arguing in your own defense, saying, "Look at who I am. You are being so impolite to me!" We shouldn't even entertain such thoughts. If something isn't going right, we should examine ourselves and recognize that the problem—and its

solution—lie within us. Always look for your own mistakes, not other's wrongs.

Truly recognize your own faults  
And don't discuss the faults of others.  
Other's fault are just my own.  
Being one with everyone is called Great Compassion.

Being one with everyone includes all living beings, not just Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and other saints and sages. It also includes demons. It means being of the same substance with demons, too.

Why are there demons, anyway? They are part of our own nature. Because we have demons in our own nature, then other demons can come in from the outside as well. What are the demons of our own nature? Greed, hatred, and stupidity, known as the three poisons, invite the demons from the outside to come in. So there's a popular expression,

If you don't set out a dish of cat food,  
You won't attract flies.

Demons are like that, too. They will congregate if they detect that you have some scummy water which they can stir up in order to catch some fish. They'll figure they can get something from you. They want to show off their abilities, display their spiritual penetrations. All that exists right within our own nature. And so, in our every move, in our every word and thought, we must be honest and extremely careful. It is said:

Keep your words credible;  
Keep your conduct respectful.

We must live up to what we say. What we say must be true and genuine. We should not tell lies. We should not, out of fear for our own mistakes, try to cover or gloss over our own shortcomings. We have to be very frank, open, and forthright. Our minds should be



big and generous. We should possess a righteous spirit. The things we do must be based on truth, must be virtuous, must be in accord with the Way, and must be done with a good heart. We should simply not do anything that does not fulfill those requirements. It doesn't matter how great an advantage we might gain by doing something, if that thing is not virtuous, does not accord with the Way and is not based in goodness, we absolutely must not do it! Anyone who cultivates the Way must be endowed with true and actual wisdom. That includes never praising oneself or denigrating others. True cultivators would never say, "Look at me, I'm tops! I'm better than all of them. They are all so inferior; I'm the only one who's pure and lofty."

Cultivators of the Way must not be selfish or seek for self benefit. Benefit others; do not harm others to benefit yourself. This is extremely important. Take care not to look down on other people. Don't display discontent with what others are doing, making it obvious that only you are right. Many people here in the past were like that. Most people who had that fault did not make it. Their failures can act as a mirror for us all. Each of us should examine ourselves. We should review our past, pay attention to right now, and consider the future. If we can be mindful so that we never forget our good heart and virtue in the Way, then, over time, very naturally our good roots will increase. And if our good roots increase, then our resolve for the Way will deepen. With a deep resolve for the Way, we will be able to practice the Bodhisattva Way and benefit all living beings. It is all connected.





Q

Sometimes we meet people who are very unreasonable.

A

Don't develop negative affinities with anyone. Use kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity with everyone. Be positive even if faced with sacrificing your life. Always forgive others and don't hate, be jealous, or obstruct others. Otherwise, you'll be miserable later when the retributions resulting from indulging such afflictions become ripe.

### A PLACE BEYOND

Dhyana Paramita is a Sanskrit term,  
 Meaning still reflection and subtle investigation.  
 The mountains are lofty and the waters are deep,  
 but there is nothing to fear;  
 One begins to know that there is a place beyond here.

MASTER HUA'S VERSE  
 FOR STARTING A CHAN SESSION

Q

Could I become enlightened?

A

Are you scared to die?

Q

Am I enlightened?

A

Do you still have sexual desire?





## STILLNESS

Sitting in Chan means stilling our thoughts. When we reach the point of utmost stillness, we will have a breakthrough. The *Shurangama Sutra* says, “When stillness reaches the extreme point, light penetrates.” However, we must reach stillness to the extreme point, only then will our wisdom manifest; only then will we become enlightened. If we do not reach the extreme point, the light will not penetrate, and we will not become enlightened. If you wish to be still to the ultimate point, you should base your cultivation upon the following six guidelines:

1. *No Fighting*: Why is it that the world is getting worse and worse each day? It’s because everybody is fighting: fighting for fame, profit, authority, and position. The fiercest kind of fighting is that which involves lust. People fight with themselves all the time: one moment they want to cultivate the Way; the next moment they want to strike it rich; or they want good food to eat. And at no time are they peaceful within themselves. Since people fight in their thoughts, they cannot get along with one another, and so there’s strife among people. Confrontations and strife also happen among people, because most are competing for personal advantages. Why do they want to compete for advantages? Many do that out of a wish to sustain their families. And the foundation of the family unit is built on sexual desire. In order to sustain this sexual desire, people have to fend



for their own families, and this leads to mutual strife and struggle.

From mutual strife among families develops strife among countries. The reason for wars between nations remains by and large the same: it starts out with contention between different citizens within the same country, then it goes on to wars between different countries. Soon this battling extends to world-systems battling with other world-systems, and eventually to star wars. The result is one great battle filling the universe, staged in monumental proportions. But all that fighting begins with a single thought of strife. Therefore, when sitting in Chan, the very first thing we want to get rid of is our propensity to fight.

2. *No Greed:* Investigating further, we find fighting is the result of greed. Compelled by greedy desire, we fight for name, profit, wealth, sex, food, sleep, and so forth. Since our greed can never be satisfied, we must get rid of it.
3. *No Seeking:* Why are people greedy? Greed is motivated by seeking—pursuing things that lie outside one’s rightful range. We are seeking outside, for example, when we want for ourselves what others have.
4. *No Selfishness:* Why do people seek outside? Selfishness pushes people into seeking. They calculate for their own interests alone, without regard for other people. Selfish people are afraid of everything. Because their minds are dark and they cannot see the light, they don’t want to take a loss, and so they are often riddled with fear and paranoia.
5. *No Pursuit of Personal Advantage:* Prompted by selfishness, we work only for our own advantage and think nothing of other people’s interests.
6. *No Lying:* People who have violated the previous five rules against fighting, being greedy, seeking, selfishness,



and pursuing personal advantage, will go on to lie. The fundamental motive behind lying is self-centeredness. One wishes to protect one's private interests, and therefore one thinks up all sorts of ways to cheat others.

Cultivators of the Way must stop their random thinking, and then they will attain peace. If we hold on to these six afflictions day and night, then we won't enjoy a moment's peace. However, if we can put a stop to those deviant thoughts, then not only will our mind be at peace, the world will be at peace. There won't be any more trouble.

Always remember, "Off by a hair's breadth in the beginning, you'll be off by a thousand miles in the end." We may be only a little off at the start, but because of that little bit, we will grow increasingly worried and apprehensive. We'll start being afraid the sky will fall in. We'll start fretting that the earth may quake. We'll fear that the sun will fade away. By engaging in so much worrying, our vision will dim, our teeth will fall out, our hair will turn white, and our face will become wrinkled. We'll be waiting with apprehension for the day when we must see Yama, ruler of the dead. This all comes about from not understanding the fundamental principles involved in being a person. Through cultivating the Way, we will come to understand these six guidelines, and then we will attain great wisdom, great peace and comfort, and great self-mastery.

Finally, Chan has to be practiced. It can't just be talked about. For instance, you might say, "It's really good to study; it's really good to study." However, if you don't actually study, you will never derive any benefit from your talking about it. You say, "Sitting in Chan is really good, sitting in Chan really good." But if you don't actually sit, then you also will not derive any benefit. We must use our precious time to cultivate this subtle, wonderful Dharma door. Whoever manages to reach ultimate stillness will have penetrating light and will open great wisdom.



Q

According to the law of cause and effect that applies to the three periods of time, are the “I” who will be receiving the effect in the future and the “I” who is creating karma in this life the same one?

A

“To know what we have done in our lives past, just look at what we face in this life.” What happens to you in this life is a result of your deeds in lives past. “To know what we will face in our future lives, just watch what we do in this life.” What you will get in your next life depends on what karmic obstacles you create in this life. For example, if you always kill, you will have a short lifespan in the future. If you always steal, you will be robbed in your next life.

Q

There are many things in this world that you won’t get if you don’t fight for them. But the Master talks about “no fighting, no greed, and no seeking.” How should we give and take here?

A

When it is mealtime, we should eat; otherwise, we should not.





## WHY WORLD WARS START

There's one more important point I'd like to mention, and that is that we should not get angry. We should try to get rid of all our afflictions. In other words, we shouldn't let anything upset us... Our temper and afflictions, the things that upset us, are our biggest enemies. They are the biggest enemies of each of us as individuals, they are the biggest enemies of our families, and they are the biggest enemies of our nation and of our world. If we didn't have anger or affliction, then the world would be peaceful.

The very basic reason why world wars start is because people are upset about something. If we could all just learn to yield rather than contend, if we could all learn to be patient with what most people find it impossible to be patient with, if we can bear what others cannot bear, and eat what others cannot eat, and take what others cannot take, and practice what others cannot practice, then we will be much better people and better educators ourselves.



Q

What is more important, to save myself or others?  
Which is of higher priority?

A

Neither one is more or less important. They are equally important. It is a mistake on your part to want to differentiate them by order of importance.

Q

Why does Buddhism encourage vegetarianism?

A

Those who eat meat have strong desires, while vegetarians have less. Buddhism believes in compassion and treating all living beings as if everyone was the same. Buddhism maintains that we should avoid killing and protect life because we see all living beings as having the Buddha nature and believe that all can become Buddhas.

Q

What is delusion?

A

Delusion is when we don't feel that we're deluded.





## SUBDUING AFFLICTIONS

With your fist, smash the yellow-striped tiger  
in the heavens above.

With your foot, kick the red-bearded dragon at the  
bottom of the sea.

In composing this couplet, I'm teaching you to strike back and not to take a loss. But in striking back, don't strike people! Strike the dragon and tiger! Those two are the fiercest creatures in the world. If you cannot subdue the dragon and tame the tiger, you are not a great hero. To be heroic, you must do that.

Tigers are yellow, and some dragons are red. Tigers represent people's tempers; dragons represent their anger. Subduing the dragon and taming the tiger means getting rid of your own fire. When that fire is gone, you won't get angry; the dragon will be subdued. When your temper is cooled and you're free of afflictions, then the tiger is tamed. "Smashing" with your "fist" is analogous to the heroic spirit you must use in subduing your anger. Another saying goes

Reaching the heights of the Way,  
You will have subdued the dragon and tiger.  
Achieving fulfillment of virtue,  
You will be protected by ghosts and spirits.

Hotheads lack virtue. When your virtuous nature reaches perfection, you will have no temper. "Does that mean I just stand





there and take it?” you ask. If you have the concept of “standing there and taking it,” then you still have a temper. You must reach the level where you are not even aware of being insulted. Then, no matter how anyone acts toward you, you will be able to bear it.

Content with our lot in life,  
We'll find our vexations gone.  
Sounds and sights won't entice us.  
Even less will name and gain.  
  
Glare at me. I won't even notice.  
Scold me. I'll graciously acquiesce.  
Strike me. I'll quickly kneel down.  
I'll only laugh, never cry.  
  
Search the world for this rarest of gems.  
Hardly a person has it.  
But the patched-robe monk from the West,  
Cradles this pearl in his bosom.

Content, we always feel satisfied; discontent, we experience continual suffering. Content, we won't have even a trace of affliction. I'm beyond grasp, as a light, a breeze, or as the bright moon. If someone scolds me, I assume it's because I've truly done something wrong. If I was not wrong, others wouldn't scold me. I use principle to silence my opponent.

If someone hits me, I will kneel before them and allow them to strike the other cheek. I will turn the other cheek, lest one cheek get jealous of the other. “I'll only laugh, never cry.” A person with understanding will not suffer; a wise person doesn't know suffering. Such a person won't be distressed by his situation; he will use laughter, not tears. But it's hard to find someone like that. There is, however, the unassuming monk in his patched robe who holds the pearl of patience in his heart. Anyone who can be like that is truly extraordinary!





Q

According to Buddhism, rather than retaliating against someone who has humiliated us, we should be patient. But, in the eyes of others, that makes us little wimps. What should we do, really?

A

Don't be moved by others. Who cares whether they think we're wimps or not. We're not being patient if we're affected by what other people say. We must have our own guiding principles.



## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Right here, right now, nothing's happening;  
We muddled people make things happen.

People basically feel that they do worthwhile things. But actually it's not certain that they are performing good works. Why do I say that? If they have an ulterior motive, if the seed of their deed itself is impure, then the work is not necessarily good. When personal greed becomes the motivation for doing good things, then personal greed is the impure seed.

So how should it be then? We should do things as if nothing were happening. We should feel that whatever we do is our basic responsibility and not seek outside. Don't look outside for anything. Look upon all the activities of the day as if nothing were happening. The *Sixth Patriarch Sutra* says, "Basically, there's not a single thing, so where can the dust alight?"



If we see things and awaken to them,  
Then we can transcend the world.  
If we see things and are confused by them,  
Then we remain in the cycle of rebirth.

It is not easy for the people of this world to change behavior that's based on upside-down motives. But if we can leave behind upside-down dream thinking, then we will be able to obtain ultimate Nirvana, where emptiness is not empty and form is not form. Nirvana is our natural habitat, our original home. But all of us have turned our backs on enlightenment and are pursuing the things of this world. We no longer recognize our natural environment; we can't find our true homes, so we are very upside-down and muddled. We run from east to west, seeking fame and fortune. We chase after profit and gain. Then we die. And why does it happen? We people make it happen.



Q

I still don't understand the nature of living beings. Also, what is the Buddha nature?

A

It's the Buddha nature once you have become enlightened; it's the nature of living beings while you are deluded.



## CHAN MEDITATION POINTERS



During the Chan session, nobody should talk. Get hold of your Chan topic, keep to it, and develop your own skill. Don't talk to anybody! Don't say hello to anybody, because there's no view of self and no view of people anyway. So when people come and go, what has come or gone? Even if you recognize them, ignore them. You have to be single-minded and absolutely put your mind to it.



A Chan session is without an appearance. There's no characteristic to it, because everybody's going back to find his or her original face. So, we don't want to be like our usual selves. We want to be very free and at ease, unhindered and natural. When walking, trying to go too fast may cause you to bump into people; going too slowly, it's easy to go to sleep and fall down. When we walk, we should keep our eyes open, but we



shouldn't look straight ahead. We should look down at the peoples' feet in front of us so we don't step on them. When there are a lot of people, the walking will have to be slower. When there are fewer people, you can go faster if you want. When you walk, you can't clasp your hands in all sort of ways because you will just be tying yourself up. Let your arms hang naturally.



From the moment the session begins, don't talk too much. Apply your skill. What skill is it you're going to develop? Maybe you will look into the question, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" Or maybe you ask yourself, "What has no end?" Everything in the human realm is subject to extinction, so you can inquire into what is that that will not disappear. What is it that will never be finished? Use whatever effort you prefer and you'll have some good news. If you single-mindedly apply your effort, you will definitely obtain some advantage. Everything in the world will disappear. What won't disappear? Ask yourself.



Don't be afraid of suffering. Don't be afraid of trouble and difficulty. When you're sitting here and your legs hurt, don't pay any attention to them. You want to end birth and death. So, in order to do so you definitely have to have a kind of fearless spirit and not be afraid. Don't even speak of pain. Tell yourself: "Even if I die, I'm going to sit in Chan! I want to cultivate."



You also have to be patient with wanting to fall asleep. Well, how do you bear that? Open your eyes when you want to sleep. Investigate Chan with your eyes. Don't even entertain thoughts of wanting to fall asleep. Don't close your eyes. Don't give into it. Adversity helps us on the Way. Do not just go along. Fight back against



the pain. It hurts? Well, the more it hurts the better. The more pain the better. The more you think you want to sleep, the more you're going to investigate Chan. When you have investigated to the point that your yang energy is full, then the demon of sleep will run away. If you don't fight off the demon of sleep and just admit defeat, then you're going to sleep forever. You're going to be caught up in sleep. If you can come to truly understand this principle, then you will not be so compelled to sleep.



It's when you have a view of self that you're afraid of pain. If there weren't any self, any ego, then you wouldn't be afraid of pain. You say, "Well I'm here! I exist! How can we say I don't exist?" You're here. Well, who isn't here? Who's the one who's not here? There isn't any here nor any not here. That's not having a self. Because there's nobody here, there's no self. Having the idea that you are here, you have a self. If you're here, you should at least be free and at ease about it. You shouldn't harbor a view of self. If there is a view of self, then you're not free and at ease and there are a lot of problems. It's not easy to express what these problems are. Perhaps because you don't get enough sleep, you feel uncomfortable. If you don't eat enough food, your stomach complains. If you don't wear enough clothes, your body gets cold. All of these things happen just because you have a self. You may say, "Well, I'd like to be without a self, but how do I do it?" Just sit in Chan meditation and once you've sat long enough you will reach a point where you don't have a self.



No matter what we set out to do, in the beginning it's



difficult. If we can get past that difficulty then things get easier. In sitting in Chan, although we're not doing other kinds of work, nonetheless, if we sit there long enough, we will begin to feel very uncomfortable. At that point, if we can be patient, no matter how uncomfortable we are; if we can bear it and not be moved by this situation, then we develop some concentration—some samadhi power. With some samadhi power, we can strengthen our wisdom.



Sitting in Chan, we hold the precepts. Holding the precepts relates to suffering and pain. If we can sit here and single-mindedly inquire into who is mindful of the Buddha, if we can keep our mind on our meditation topic without ever letting it cease or forgetting it, then at that point we need to ask ourselves if we have a lot of offenses. Have we created much bad karma? The point being, can a person commit a lot of offenses while investigating Chan? Would a person be having false thoughts about wanting to kill somebody? Would someone be thinking that a certain person is really horrible and be thinking of ways to do him in? Would someone's meditation topic be about how to kill people? No, I don't think so. While investigating Chan, would a person be thinking about how to steal things? No, I don't think so. Just that absence of killing and stealing is holding the precepts. It's called holding that is not holding. Without there being any self to hold the precepts, they're naturally held. When the precepts are naturally held, then the meditator can gain samadhi power.



People who don't investigate Chan are subject to all kinds of random thoughts, which may include





fantasizing that involves killing, stealing, lust, lying, and drinking. The potential to do those things is always there. So you see, the difference between holding the precepts and committing offenses lies in our state of mind. If we're here investigating Chan, circumstances that lead to creating offenses simply do not present themselves. That's what's meant by holding the precepts without really holding them. Without really being in samadhi, we have samadhi. Although we are aware of the physical discomforts that initially occur when learning to sit in meditation, we manage to bear them and get through them.



As we develop real samadhi, the power of our wisdom unfolds. Thus, investigating Chan is a process of diligently cultivating precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. Diligently cultivating precepts, samadhi, and wisdom is putting to rest greed, hatred, and stupidity.



Are you lump of gold? To find out for sure, you will have to be smelted by some fire. If you're not true gold, you'll just burn away. If you are true gold, you won't fear the glowing furnace. Gold never loses anything. No matter how much it is smelted, it still weighs the same. Fools' gold, on the other hand, will burn up. Start with ten ounces of fools' gold and after smelting it, you'll end up with one ounce. In the Chan hall, we are being smelted as if in a furnace. We're being smelted to the point that we forge Vajra indestructible bodies.



Some people say, "I can't take the suffering. This is too much suffering, too much pain; I can't stand it."

Well, let me ask you, who knows it is suffering? Who knows it



is pain?

“I know.” You say. “I know the pain. I know the suffering!”

Well, who are you?

“I’m this body right here.”

Oh, so your body is you? Well, when you die, is your body still there? If someone were to bite your dead body, it wouldn’t register suffering or pain. If someone were to scold it, it would have no reaction. It wouldn’t be aware of any of those problems.

“Of course,” you say. “It’s dead. It doesn’t have any problems at all.”

You can be as if you were dead right now if you want to be. There’s a saying:

If you do not want to undergo death,  
You must first be a living dead person.

That saying means that if we want to learn how not to die, we have to go through the experience of being as if dead.

“Well, are you talking about suicide?”

Absolutely not! The object is to be as if dead, that’s all. If we can be as if dead, then we won’t contend, we won’t be greedy, we won’t be hateful, and we won’t be stupid. What we’re discussing is just a method. It’s not that I’m telling you to really die. There’s no need to be afraid. Don’t take me literally and jump to the conclusion that investigating Chan is like being dead. I’m just talking about acting as if you were dead. I’m not talking about real death. If you would like to end birth and death, then try out being a living dead person.



## UNDERSTANDING the MIND and SEEING the NATURE

Multitudes from the ten directions come to investigate Chan.  
Cherish every minute and second.  
Moving or still, awake or asleep, carefully investigate.  
When empty space is smashed, you'll understand your mind.  
Though the Dharma Realm is still the same,  
    you see your own nature.  
Where do you search for your original face?  
Right here at Old Gold Mountain.

MASTER HUA'S CHAN VERSE



## A HINT OF SKILL

When you sit and do this work, you should sit properly and very straight. You shouldn't lean back and tilt your head back, nor should you lean forward and bow your head down. You should keep your head erect. Your eyes should regard your nose and look to see if your nostrils are pointing up or down. Look at the nose clearly. The nose regards the mouth. Does a nose have eyes that it can see the mouth? In time, the nose will produce eyes. You just tell it to look, and it will look and look, until eventually the nose will be able to see the mouth. Then you'll say, "Oh, basically that's the way the mouth is."

The mouth knows the heart. Is the heart black? White? Yellow? Red? Is the heart green, white, red, yellow, or black? What kind of heart is it? Ask it and see. If you see a black heart, then day by day you can change its color. Change it to white until it becomes the



great storehouse of light that unites the Dharma Realm. Then there will be a little hope for you.

When you breathe, don't use your mouth. That is, if you are able to, breathe through your nose. Now, some people find it very, very difficult to breathe through their noses. But try. Using your nose to breathe, breathe in and put the breath behind your naval. Stop it behind your naval, not below. That place is empty—vacuous. There isn't anything there. It's just what is meant by, "Basically, there isn't anything at all." "Basically, there's not one thing," is just referring to that place. You want to stop your breath at that point.

When you can do that, then you will know what people mean when they ask each other, "Are you able to link your breath? Can you link your breath?" That's a very important question. If you can link your breath, then the outside breath is just the inside breath, and the inside breath is just the outside breath. So, someone who has the Way can cease his outer breath, and yet his internal breath moves. Although no breath is coming in and out of his nostrils or his mouth, every pore in his body is able to breathe in and out. He looks like a dead man, yet he's "...dead and not gone." What does that mean? It means he's living, but he does not need to use his outer breath, because the internal breath has come to life.

When someone gets to that level of skill,  
then the eyes see forms, but inside there is nothing.  
The ears hear sounds,  
but the mind does not distinguish them.  
Contemplating within, one finds no mind.  
Contemplating without, one finds no forms.  
Looking into the distance,  
all the myriad things are empty.

But when a person reaches that point, he should not think that he's such great stuff. What's being experienced is a preliminary expedient. It's a glimmering of light ease. One should not mistake



a thief for one's son and think that because of this bit of light ease one as become peerless. What's so peerless about that? Anyone who thinks that way is really shameless. Such a person has failed to recognize himself. Getting a little hint of skill, he's become satisfied. In fact he's still miles away from Buddhahood. So the lesson here is: don't obtain a little and be satisfied with that. Don't be like a child who becomes overjoyed by one little piece of candy. That kid is delighted by one piece of candy without realizing that in his own home there's a stash of sweets so vast that it's beyond conception. It's always there, it's just that he's unable to get hold of it and eat it. That's the way it is with people who get a little and are satisfied.





**Q** Why is it that “one sees but does not see”?

**A** It is because one is reflecting and being introspective.

**Q** Why is it that “one listens but does not hear”?

**A** It is because one is turning one’s hearing inward to listen to one’s inherent nature.

**Q** Why is it that “one sniffs but smells nothing”?

**A** It is because one’s body and mind are collected so that they are not turned by the objects of scent.

**Q** What kinds of states are real?

**A** States that occur before a thought has arisen are real. Once deluded thoughts wiggle their way to the surface, you have already begun thinking about what you would like to see; consequently, most of what you perceive false.



## CONTINUOUSLY and WITHOUT a BREAK

During this Chan Session in 1978,  
Be neither fast nor slow, and don't be nervous.  
Perpetual diligence and undaunted vigor  
Will bring you soon within reach of Buddhahood.

VERSE FOR START A CHAN SESSION



## SUDDENLY, STEP-BY-STEP

### **Sudden enlightened understanding**

**Comes through the Chan of the Thus Come Ones.**

**Sudden enlightened understanding.** Most people interpret the meaning of **sudden** here as “instantaneous”. But in the context of this verse, it should mean “right now”. What is the difference between “instantaneous” and “right now”? “Instantaneous” lacks a before or after. It is not connected with anything previous nor with anything to come. One gets enlightened instantly. It has nothing to do with what has gone on before or with what is going to happen later. It is very abrupt. “Right now” means at this moment, but it is different from instantaneous. “Right now” still has connections with both past and future. It is not cut off from what has gone on before or with what is going to come after. It means right at this moment. “Instantaneous” has a sense of being cut off; “right now” is not cut off. That is an analysis of the words.

For most people, **sudden** enlightenment means awakening very fast and so they explain it as meaning “instantaneous”. But if we look at the word in detail, **sudden** means reaching a certain place. When do we reach there? We reach there based on where we were





before. From where we were before, we reach there step by step. It is certainly not the case that without taking a single step we get enlightened. That is not the meaning of sudden. “Off by a hair’s breadth to start with, we will miss by a thousand miles in the end.”

Thus, most people explain sudden enlightenment to mean instantaneous awakening. But that seems to imply that they never cultivated before and they need not cultivate in the future. They are finished. But that is not the meaning. **Sudden** actually means that a person cultivated before, and now, reaching this point, he becomes enlightened. But after that enlightenment, he must continue to cultivate. The noumenal principle can be awakened to suddenly, the phenomenal aspects of principle must be cultivated gradually. Now, why do I say that? We should know that everything has to be logical. Things in the world follow logical progression. Take a large tree for example. When did the tall tree first sprout? Oh, probably several hundred years ago. A tree cannot be that large, that tall, on the day it sprouts. Trees are like that and so are people. We gradually grow as we age until we reach adulthood. In China, adulthood is marked by being capped. When is a person ready to be capped? A child is born and progresses from being a one-year-old to being twenty years old. At twenty, that person is considered an adult; he is capped. Now a person cannot be twenty years old when he is first born.

Comparing that example to **sudden** enlightenment, the same principle applies. Sudden enlightenment is a culmination that comes from gradual cultivation. It is not that someone immediately awakens without having ever cultivated. Even if he didn’t cultivate in the previous life and became suddenly enlightened in this life, it would still mean that he had cultivated in the past in order to reach this point. In this life his conditions are mature and he suddenly becomes enlightened. That is why I say that sudden enlightenment comes from gradual cultivation and after enlightenment, one still



has to cultivate gradually. We cannot say that the enlightenment is immediate and has no connection with what came before and what will come afterwards.

**Sudden enlightened understanding.** Enlightened understanding means awakening, becoming clear about the principle. But after you understand the principle, you still have to cultivate. If you do not cultivate, then the awakening is of no use at all. Let us use the example of putting together a computer. We understand the principles involving in putting together a computer. We know how we put in the software and what hardware to use. We know how to put everything together so that the computer will function. But if we only know the principles involved and we do not actually put the computer together, then our knowledge of how to set up a computer will not be any use. Thus, after understanding the principle, we need to go ahead and put the computer together. Only then will a computer exist. Before the first computer was assembled, I am sure that many people had the idea of assembling a computer, but they never got around to doing it. All they did was think about it, but nobody went ahead and invented it.

If you understand a principle but do not apply it, you do not put it into practice, then, nothing actual will come of it. If you become enlightened, you still have to actually cultivate. Even more must you apply effort. Those of old said:

Before you understand the great matter,  
It is as if your parents had died.  
After you understand the great matter,  
It is even more as if your parents had died.

Before you understand the great matter means before you get enlightened. After you understand the great matter, after you are enlightened, you are even more serious than if your parents had died. You are even more careful in all that you do. That is what getting enlightened is like. After we understand the principle, we



must strengthen ourselves even more and keep on pushing forward in our cultivation. That is the only way that the computer (literally: electric brain) and the spiritual brain will manifest.

**Comes through the Chan of the Thus Come Ones.** Thus Come One is one of the ten titles of Buddhas. The other nine titles are: Worthy of Receiving Offerings, One with Proper Pervasive Knowledge, One Who has Perfected Clear Conduct, Well Gone One, One who Understands the World, The Unsurpassed Knight, Regulating Hero, The Teacher of Gods and Humans, Buddha, World Honored One. Adding the title Thus Come One makes the ten titles of Buddhas. Originally, every Buddha had 84,000 titles. But that was too much. People could not remember them all. Gradually the Buddhas' titles were reduced to ten thousand. Then they were reduced to one thousand and then further reduced to one hundred. Even then people still found that there were too many; they couldn't remember one hundred titles for the Buddhas. Even computer might freeze. So they came down to the ten titles listed above. These ten titles are shared by all Buddhas. The path all Buddhas traverse is the same; all Buddhas are equally entitled. It is said: "The Buddhas of the ten directions and the three periods of time share the same Dharma body." Therefore, they also share the same ten titles.

**Thus Come Ones.** **Thus** refers to the principle; **Come** refers to the specifics. That indicates how the noumenal principle and the phenomenal specifics are not obstructive of each other. **Thus** also means riding on just such a path, they **come to** realize Proper Enlightenment. Essentially, the Buddhas do not come nor do they go, because the Buddhas' Dharma body pervades all places. They do not come or go. **Chan** refers to Dhyana, a Sanskrit word that means stilling thought. Stilling means becoming tranquil. Thought refers to mental processes. **Chan** can diminish your thoughts so they do not move so much. Movement of thoughts is the manifestation of



false thoughts. No movement is the true mind and proper thought. Thus, we should still our thoughts so that we do away with false thinking. **Chan** also means “cultivation of reflection.” You ask, “Since stilling thought means getting rid of all false thinking, how could there be any reflection going on?” Reflection seems to exist and yet seems to not be there; it does not necessarily exist, nor is it necessary not there. Reflection is actually the investigation that goes on in **Chan** meditation. When you investigate a meditation topic for example, you are supposed to investigate the topic, (literally the head of the words) and not investigate what might follow (literally, the tail of the words). Investigating the topic, the head of the words, means you focus on the point before language starts to take over, before anything is said. Does that investigation have any thought in it? No! It merely investigates the topic.

Investigation is like using a chisel to drill a hole or a drill to dig a well. You drive a drill into the ground and drill in further and deeper until you make a hole. The process of drilling a hole is like the process of investigation. The difference being that the process of investigating Chan is devoid of visible form whereas drilling a well is a visible process. Nonetheless the tangible can be used to represent the intangible. You drill and drill. Even when it seems you can't get in, you still keep drilling. When at some point you drill through, then you have a breakthrough in your investigation. That's what we call investigation. But what is investigated? The investigation pertains to cultivation of reflection; that is **Chan**. **The Chan of the Thus Come Ones** is devoid of false thought, devoid of deviant thought, devoid of confused thought. Only proper thought is used to investigate and drill that hole. When you have actually broken through, then you become enlightened. That is called having a breakthrough in your investigation. The skill that brings **sudden enlightened understanding** is itself **the Chan of the Thus Come Ones**.

Q

Master, if you were to say that you were enlightened, would that mean that you are not enlightened?

A

If I were to say that I am not enlightened, it wouldn't mean that I'm enlightened either. Why do people have to say they are enlightened?



## CONCENTRATE!

The work of Chan meditation resembles a mother hen sitting on her nest. As the mother hen is thinking of her eggs, she never leaves the nest; she simply concentrates and keeps the eggs warm. She wouldn't sit on the eggs for five minutes, then run away to do some other business, and later return to sit on the eggs once again, only to run away again five minutes later. The chicks would never hatch at that rate.

The principle we observe in Chan meditation is the same. We must concentrate in each successive minute. Don't fear an aching back or sore legs. Don't be afraid of difficulty or pain. Simply concentrate with single-minded effort. Why? We investigate "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" until "The mountains topple, the waters dry up, the tides recede, and the rocks appear," and it is at that moment that we can get enlightened.

Investigating Chan is also similar to the way dragons nurture their pearls. Dragons watch over their precious pearls at all times; they carefully attend to them at every moment. Therefore, these



precious pearls glow brighter each day, as the dragons guard them attentively day and night. People who practice Chan meditation are just the same, in that they never allow their minds to ramble with scattered thinking. An ancient worthy said, “When not even a single thought arises, the entire substance comes into view.” We can rephrase it to say, “When idle thoughts no longer arise, the entire substance comes into view.” When one is free of idle thoughts, then one can have some success.

Meditators don’t think about becoming Buddhas, getting enlightened, or gaining wisdom. They simply work hard and cultivate vigorously. When the time comes, they naturally become enlightened. You can’t think about when you will get enlightened. If you think like that, you can think to the ends of time, but you’ll never get enlightened. If you stay in the Chan Hall, and sit and walk, walk and sit, then after a long time, you’ll have a chance to get enlightened. As it’s said, “Chan comes with long-time sitting.”

Investigating Chan is done the way a cat stalks a mouse. The cat concentrates its energy and focuses its attention, patiently sitting beside the mousehole, waiting for the mouse to appear. As soon as it comes out, the cat pounces on it. The cat cannot slack off. Once it becomes distracted, it will no longer be able to concentrate. Chan meditators are the same. At all times, they maintain proper thoughts and avoid idle thoughts. This is basic knowledge for beginners in Chan meditation.

### CALMLY COMPLYING with ADVERSITY

Accept your lot and be content;  
Then all your afflictions will go away.  
Don’t crave pleasant forms and sounds.  
Don’t be greedy for fame and profit.  
Glare at me, I won’t even notice.  
Scold me, I’ll applaud you.  
Hit me, and I’ll kneel down.



I only laugh; never cry.  
Among people, there isn't anyone like this.  
Nowhere in the world can such a one be found.  
But there is a true monk from the West,  
Who holds this mani pearl in his heart.









# THE STRENGTH OF PATIENCE

*Essay by Master Hua*

As to we people who are born in this world, some of us have come to repay our debts. Some have come to make debts. Some have come to cultivate the Way. Some have come to create karma. Some have come for fame. Some have come for profit. Some have come for food. Some have come for sex. We ourselves do not know the causes and effects of our past existences, nor how to cut off the delusions and put a stop to the flow. Moreover, most do not wish to understand the good and evil karmic conditions of their past lives or to change their faults and start anew. Instead, we discharge our responsibilities in a perfunctory manner and act in reckless ways.

Even though there may be those who possess wisdom and who wish to know their past lives and perpetuate the causes for sagehood. Still, it is not easy. Nor is it easy for them to suddenly arrive at an understanding, to remain forever unchanging, and to endure suffering and toil. That is because ignorance is difficult to break through and obstructions pile up layer upon layer. Outflows are hard to replenish and doubts billow like thick clouds.

Those of us who truly wish to understand, must seek within ourselves when things do not go our way. We should not curse heaven and blame others. We should subdue ourselves and return to propriety. We should not contend, not be greedy, not seek, not be selfish, not pursue personal benefits, and not lie. In dealing with situations, when adversity comes, accept it compliantly. We should



**be friendly and humble toward all people. We must bear what others cannot bear. Yield what others cannot yield. Eat what others cannot eat. Accept what others cannot accept.**

**That's because you should know that most ordinary people repay virtue with enmity. But they are the very ones who help us perfect the strength of our patience! Whenever unreasonable and adverse situations feed on each other and others slander us, we see them as our Good and Wise Advisors intent upon helping us increase our virtue and our cultivation of the Way.**

**A verse says:**

**When adversity comes,  
accept it compliantly all the way to Paramita.  
Advisors like Devadatta help us.  
Retributions for past lives' kindness and enmity are  
being received in this life.  
Distant ones' grievances and affinities are being  
cleaned up now.  
In reconciling accounts and repaying debts,  
we should not delay our payments.  
We should establish merit, atone for our offenses,  
and not let life pass in vain.  
Clearly understanding good and evil.  
Be careful about cause and effect.  
Be as if perched on the edge of a deep abyss,  
as if treading on thin ice: how could we expect  
escape to be easy?**

What is meant by “adversity”? Adverse conditions are anything that you do not want to experience; things that go against you. If there are things that you like, then they are not considered adverse conditions. But the things that you don't like, or the situations that go against your grain, are called “adversities.”

For example, there may be things you don't like to hear, but people will say exactly those things to you. There may be things you don't like to eat, but you will be given that very food. There may be things that you absolutely can't bear, but you have to bear them.

**When adversity comes, accept it compliantly.** Tolerate what comes along in an harmonious and gracious manner. For example, if someone scolds you, you should think, "Oh, this person is singing a song for me. I should enjoy listening to this song." What's so bad about getting a scolding? Just accept it compliantly and happily. In that way you can **cultivate the strength of patience.**

Adverse conditions create heroes. Situations can be either favorable or adverse. But if things go against you, they are the very things that increase your resolution and your will power so that you will bring forth the determined resolve to be a genuine person. That's the meaning behind "adverse conditions create heroes."

When you cultivate, you shouldn't be greedy for people to make offerings to you, thinking, "Oh, if people would give me food and clothes, that would be very good." That's a pretty meaningless attitude. Rather you should think, "There's nobody making offerings to me and I should be happy about that. If I don't have food to eat, I'll just go on a fast. If I don't have enough clothes to wear, I'll just fortify my body so that I'm not turned by either cold or heat. I can bear it. And if I don't have a place to stay, I can live under a tree." You should train yourself that way.

You shouldn't be greedy for people to give you things or feel happy if you get some little thing from them. If you don't have virtue in the Way and you accept offerings from other people, it's not easy to digest them. That's why it's said, "If you haven't done away with the three aspects of thought, it's hard to digest even water." The three aspects of thought are thoughts of the present, thoughts of the past, and thoughts of the future. If you always have those three aspects of thought and strike up a lot of false thinking,



then even if you were to drink just one swallow of water offered by someone, you wouldn't be able to digest it. Therefore, it is said:

A single grain of rice from a donor is as heavy as  
Mount Sumeru.

If, having eaten it, one does not cultivate the Way,  
One will have to repay it by becoming an animal.

In the future one will have to reborn as a cow or a horse to pay back the debts. Or one will be a chicken and have to lay eggs. When a chicken lays an egg, she says “Guo da! Guo da!” “Guo da” can mean “My offenses are great!” If interpreted this way, then she sounds like she is honestly repenting and reforming. But does she really understand? No. She's not really admitting that her offenses are great.

Actually, she's saying, “The eggs I lay are larger than anyone else's” Because “da” can also mean “exceptionally big!—oversized!” And so she's still exaggerating. You should know that when a chicken has to lay eggs, she's paying back for the offerings she received from other people in the past.

To “cultivate the strength of your patience” means you train yourself to take things that go against you. You fortify your strength of patience to the point that you can endure what cannot be endured.

**As to we people who are born in this world, some of us have come to repay our debts.** This means that in the past, some of us overspent; we overdraw our accounts. As a result, we have to come to this world to pay back our debts. All of us have some debts to repay. What debts might we have? If you are someone's son, you are repaying debts by being a son. If you are someone's father, you are repaying debts by being a father. If you are someone's husband, you are repaying debts by being a husband. If you are someone's wife, you are repaying debts by being a wife. And if you are a disciple, you are repaying debts by being a disciple. But if you are my disciple and



you don't want to repay them, that's all right.

**Some have come to make debts.** Some of us want to take out more loans. What do people like that do? They are always trying to get off cheap. They are always mooching off other people. They refuse to ever take a loss. People who are not willing to take losses are here to make more debts.

**Some have come to cultivate the Way.** That's like some of you here who have left the home-life to cultivate the Way. **Some have come to create karma.** There are people who come to this world to kill, to commit arson, and to steal. All that creates karma. I'm just speaking in general terms. If you analyze this in depth, you will see that there are numerous variations. Many, many people have come here to create karmic offenses.

**Some have come for fame.** All day long they want to be number one. They are trying to buy a name and fish for a reputation. They want a name, even though it is false. **Some have come for profit.** Some people have come into this world only in order to strike it rich. They just want to make money. They don't know about anything else. You tell them about something else and they say, "I don't care about that. Just as long as I have money, everything is fine." For money, they would do anything. Once the rooster crows and they get out of bed, the only thing they have in their minds is to rake in the dollar bills.

**Some have come for food.** They say, "If a person lives his whole life without knowing how to eat, he's really an idiot! I've got to eat delicious dishes and rare delicacies every day!" As long as the food they eat is delicious, they don't want anything else. Just take a look at the way pigs eat soybeans. If you feed them soybeans, they shove their snouts right into the soybean mix, flapping their ears up and down. In the past, I've fed pigs and I know the way they eat. The way chickens eat is to peck at their food non-stop, to the point that they entirely forget everything else.



**Some have come for sex.** They think that the pleasure between men and women is the greatest pleasure—that there’s nothing higher. If they can’t enjoy that pleasure, they feel they might as well die.

**We ourselves do not know the causes and effects of our past existences, nor how to cut off the delusions and put a stop to the flow.** Most aren’t willing to cut off the flow of birth and death.

**Moreover, most do not wish to understand the good and evil karmic conditions of their past lives.** They don’t want to learn about what karma they have created and what effects they will reap. For example, a good act will reap a good result. An evil act will reap an evil result. But most people do not wish to know these things. They just go about life in a very muddled way. They don’t want **to change their faults and start anew.** They would never say, “The reason why I’m going through so much suffering now is because in the past I didn’t cultivate. And so now I will change my faults and really cultivate well.” They wouldn’t do that.

**Instead, we discharge our responsibilities in a perfunctory manner and act in reckless ways.** They say, “Hmm. Just live day-to-day. Just muddle along.” They are sloppy and casual.

**Even though there may be those who possess wisdom and who wish to know their past lives**—there may be people with some wisdom who want to know about their previous lives. Someone may find out that in his last life he was a dog because in times past, he always liked to fight with people. He liked to bite people. Wise people will want to know their past lives **and perpetuate the causes for sagehood.** Say in the past they planted causes that will lead to sagehood and so in this life they want to continue those causes. But, **still, it is not easy.**

**Nor is it easy for them to suddenly arrive at an understanding**—to suddenly understand their past lives. Nor is it easy for them **to remain forever unchanging.** That is, they may think, “No matter



whether I get a response or not, I'm still going to cultivate. I'm going to be forever unchanging," but it's not easy for them to **endure suffering and toil**. Most people would say, "I've already taken too much of a loss." They don't wish to endure suffering. **That is because ignorance is difficult to break through**. Ignorance is very hard to smash. **And obstructions pile up layer upon layer**. There are many obstructions that impede our cultivation.

**Outflows are hard to replenish**. Our outflows are like a leak in a bottle. You can fill the bottle up, but the water leaks out again. **And doubts billow like thick clouds**.

You talk to people about the Buddhadharma, and they start having doubts. They say, "Is it really that way?" Their doubts are as thick as clouds. You talk to them about the truth and they don't want to believe it. Just now someone said that he doubted whether virtue in the Way—virtuous behavior—was a true principle. That's really a pity!

**Those of us who truly wish to understand, must seek within ourselves when things do not go our way**. When things are going the wrong way, for example, when people are not treating you well, you should "return the light and illumine within." Always return the light. "See within yourself." This means find your own faults, do not put the fault on others.

**We should not curse heaven and blame others**. People shouldn't say, "Heaven is unfair; people are unjust. Why is it that I'm so poor and he's so rich?" **We should subdue ourselves and return to propriety**. This means that we should restrain our selfish desires and always comply with proper principle.

**We should not contend, not be greedy, not seek, not be selfish, not pursue personal benefits, and not lie**. **In dealing with situations, when adversity comes, accept it compliantly**. **We should be friendly and humble toward all people**. Being friendly doesn't mean that one fawns on people, trying to play up to them. It's not that



when a wealthy person shows up, one makes bows and fusses over them, fawning in a disgusting manner, but that when poor people come, one won't even look at them. One won't pay the least bit of attention to them. That's not the way to be.

**We must bear what others cannot bear. Yield what others cannot yield. Eat what others cannot eat. Accept what others cannot accept.**

**That's because you should know that most ordinary people repay virtue with enmity.** Most people in the world are quite mundane. The better you are to them, the more animosity they feel towards you. And so they repay kindness with enmity. Why do they do that? They behave that way out of stupidity. That's how stupid people are, the kinder you are to them, the more they return your kindness with resentment. But even though that's the way things are, still, we have to be kind to people. We should still behave virtuously towards people. Let them be as they will.

We must use this attitude as we cultivate the Way. But we must also understand that there are two sides to most questions. That means that every person has his or her own reasons for doing the things they do. When we cultivate, we must focus our attention on one thing: we must make sure that we ourselves are behaving correctly. But we don't need to pay attention to whether other people are behaving correctly. It suffices that we ourselves are doing the right thing.

Whether other people are good to us or not doesn't matter; they may be among those who repay virtue with enmity. **But they are the very ones who help us perfect the strength of our patience!** If we are good to people, we shouldn't seek a reward from them. When we bestow kindness, we don't ask for recompense. And after we have given something to someone else, we don't regret it. When we are kind to people, we don't want them to pay us back. Why? We should say, "I am representing the sages. I am representing





Heaven and Earth by holding to true principle.” We should do things that benefit others. We shouldn’t make other people benefit us. “I want to help others; I don’t need other people to help me.” If we want others to help us, then we will be weak and reliant. If we lack sufficient resolve, we will keep asking other people to help us. We will be sticks-in-the-mud—listless and procrastinating. We won’t be able to muster any energy.

We should have a firm will. Adverse conditions mold great people. When people are not good to you, it may be because they are testing to see whether you are true. If you are true—if you are not seeking for any rewards—then what does it matter whether they are good to you or not? It’s best you don’t believe the principles I am explaining. Once you believe them, you will always be taking a loss!

**Whenever unreasonable and adverse situations feed on each other**, to the point that people are being very discourteous to us—and others slander us—we should **see them as our Good and Wise Advisors intent upon helping us increase our virtue and our cultivation of the Way**. They are helping us nurture our blessings, develop our wisdom, and amass virtue in the Way. They are actually helping us out.

I always say to you that there are many people who scold me and slander me. Often the ones who scold me are monastics, ordained monks and nuns. I’m telling you the truth! Some people say, “I haven’t seen monks and nuns scold you.” Well, how many monks and nuns do you know? Actually, among lay people there are many who slander me as well. There’s a saying that goes, “If you don’t attract jealousy, then you must be a very ordinary person.” But we should look into it, “Why are people scolding me?” It’s because they are afraid their Dharma protectors will believe in me and then they won’t have anything to eat. They think that if they scold me, then their Dharma protectors will protect their Dharma and then they



will have food to eat.

And so, it's a good thing! Indirectly, I'm giving to them. If they scold me, and, after scolding me they get food to eat, then isn't that a case of saving a person's life? Isn't that a good thing? And so, because they scold me, they get Dharma protectors. Because they scold me, they obtain benefits. That's excellent! Buddhism advocates compassion, and this is one kind of compassion. Therefore, it's fine. I'm helping them.

**A verse says:** What follows is a verse. I call it a verse, gatha in Sanskrit. It's not a poem. The words don't have to rhyme and it doesn't have to adhere to a fixed meter. These eight lines have a looser structure.

**When adversity comes, accept it compliantly all the way to Paramita.** This is a method of crossing to the other shore.

**Advisors like Devadatta help us.** Shakyamuni Buddha himself said, "Devadatta is the very one who helped me realize Buddhahood." Devadatta was willing to fall into the hells himself, so as to help the Buddha realize Buddhahood.

**Retributions for past lives' kindness and enmity are being received in this life.**

Whether people are kind to us or unkind to us is a matter of conditions from past lives. Now we should pay them back and clear up our accounts. Someone may say, "I don't believe in past lives." Well, I ask you, do you believe there was a yesterday? "Yes, I do." Do you believe there was a last year? "Yes, I do." Well, if you believe that, that's just past lives. Suppose you killed a person last year, and this year someone kills you. If you kill someone's father, then someone will kill your father.

If you kill someone's brother, then someone will kill your brother. If you scold people, then people will scold you back. If you kick somebody, then someone else may slap your face. That's called repayment in kind. You say you don't believe in past lives'

retributions. But if someone were to hit you now, would it hurt? If it would hurt, then that is also a retribution.

**Distant ones' grievances and affinities are being cleaned up now.** Past feuds and grudges are being cleared up now.

**In reconciling accounts and repaying debts, we should not delay our payments.**

People are too concerned about progress. But can it end birth and death? If you can progress to the point that you don't have to die, that's real progress! "Well," someone says, "I don't believe in the principle you are discussing." I didn't ask you to believe. You are so smart that you are unable to believe something that a stupid person like me says.

**We should establish merit, atone for our offenses, and not let life pass in vain.**

We must own up to our debts. We must pay them back. Don't drag them on. Don't seek foreign aid, so that you accumulate more debts. Instead, we should establish merit and redeem the offenses we created in the past. Don't let life pass in vain!

**Clearly understanding good and evil. Be careful about cause and effect.**

We should understand that if we do good, we will get a good reward; if we do evil, we will get an evil retribution. As is the cause, so is the effect.

**Be as if perched on the edge of a deep abyss, as if treading on thin ice: how could we expect escape to be easy?** It's as if we were approaching a deep abyss or treading on thin ice. It's very difficult to get out of cause and effect. We have to be very careful. Now someone is saying, "Dharma Master, I can't believe a single sentence of what you have said today." Then, I haven't uttered a single sentence!





Q

Please explain, “One’s character is naturally noble when he seeks nothing. All the victories that have been won since ancient times are solely because of patience.”

A

Don’t expect anything from people. Patience means that one bears what one cannot bear. However, a master cannot be completely tolerant of his disciples, he has to use both kindness and strength. He spoils his disciple by being too patient with them.



## YOU’VE GOT TO WALK THAT ROAD YOURSELF

Let me explain a bit more. When someone certifies to the actual appearance of things, then, it is as if he had taken a bath and washed away all the dirt and filth. You wash clean, and the karmic offenses disappear. But you have to wash yourself in order to get clean. This is just like what Great Master Shen Hsiu said: “The body is a Bodhi tree. The mind is bright mirror stand. At all times wipe it clean and let no dust alight.” When you do that, you are traveling the road that leads to certifying to the actual appearance devoid of people and dharmas. But you have not yet arrived at that.

However, the Sixth Patriarch said: “Basically, Bodhi has no tree.” He already didn’t need a Bodhi tree. “Bright mirror has no



stand either.” There is no need for a mirror on a stand to shine and reflect. “Originally, there is not one thing.” Reaching the point at which not a single thought comes up, the totality is revealed. There is nothing at all. “Where can the dust alight?” Where would any dust settle? The dust represents karma. It becomes empty.

But you have to walk the road of cultivation to attain certification. It is not enough if you just listen to it or talk about it. You have to be mindful of it and personally practice it every day. You can investigate Chan, learn the Teachings, study the Vinaya, or cultivate other Dharma doors. You must actually cultivate. If you do not cultivate, you will never attain certification. Nothing is gotten without effort in this world. I do hope all of you will not be irresolute and give up on your own future. I do hope that you will not fail to cultivate or decide to stop half way down the road and drag your heels so that you cannot go forward.

### RECOGNIZING the TRUE YOU

Fourteen weeks of Chan are now over,  
But have you seen your true face?  
In the days to come, work hard, be diligent.  
With no dwelling and no thought,  
awaken to non-production.

VERSE FOR ENDING THE 98-DAY CHAN SESSION,  
*February 20, 1971, San Francisco, California,  
Buddhist Lecture Hall*





## NO PLACE FOR COMPETITION

The participants in our Chan Session are working at a very superficial level. They've turned meditation into a contest to see who'll win first place. They are thinking: "If you meditate for three hours, then I'll meditate for five hours, so that I can keep the upper hand." If you let such thoughts control you, can you really expect to get enlightened? Even if you sat still for eighty thousand great eons, you'd still be unable to understand your mind and see your nature. Why? Because you have thoughts of victory and defeat.

Fighting brings an attitude of victory and defeat  
That stands in opposition to the Way.  
Further, it provokes the four marks,  
Which sends samadhi-power far away.

This verse warns cultivators not to fight to be number one. When your spiritual skill matures and your wisdom appears, other people will spontaneously acclaim you as number one. Then you can be considered truly number one. But if you contend to be first, then your attitude of victory and defeat stands in opposition to the Way.

Cultivators of the Way should be like water, humble and modest, neither contending for merit nor striving for virtue. They bestow advantages on others and keep the disadvantages for themselves. Lao Zi said,



The highest kind of goodness resembles water,  
As it benefits all things and never contends.  
It stays in places that most people despise,  
And thus it resembles the Way.

“The highest goodness” refers to the best kind of cultivators who resemble water as it flows into the lowest places. Although water benefits all things, it refuses to compete for merit and virtue. Whether it is birds, fish, beasts, plants, or creatures born from wombs, eggs, moisture, or transformation, water treats them all with equal kindness and gives them all whatever they need. Cultivators of the Way are just like water, in that they regard all living beings as their parents from lives past and as Buddhas of the future. We make kindness and compassion our duty and expedient resourcefulness our practice as we rescue living beings from the sea of suffering. A cultivator is willing to dwell in places where most living beings are unwilling to stay. With this attitude, he stays close to the Way. Any thoughts of victory and defeat do not accord with the creed of a cultivator and stand in opposition to the Way.

Cultivators of the Way want to be free of the four marks. They want to have no mark of self. Ask yourself: “Who is this here cultivating the Way?” You’ll find that there isn’t anyone cultivating. They want to have no mark of others; they have no thoughts of competing with others. They want to have no mark of living beings. Since they have no marks of self or others, quite naturally, the mark of living beings is also emptied out. They want to have no mark of a life span: Since the mark of living beings has been emptied out, how could there be any mark of a life span? But once you indulge in thoughts of victory, the four marks will arise. Once they arise, how can you attain “proper concentration and proper reception?” Why don’t you try this out in practice? In a word, anyone who maintains the four marks is an ordinary person. But someone who can be free of them is a Bodhisattva.





Cultivators should remember this verse from the *Vajra Sutra*,

All things born of conditions are like dreams,  
Like illusions, bubbles, and shadows,  
Like dewdrops, like flashes of lightning.  
Contemplate them in these ways.

Anything with shape or form is considered a “dharma born of conditions.” All things born of conditions are like dreams, illusory transformations, bubbles of foam, and shadows. Like dewdrops and lightning, they are ephemeral. Contemplating everything in this way, we will be able to understand the truth, let go of attachments, and put an end to random thoughts.

The *Vajra Sutra* also says, “Past thoughts cannot be obtained, present thoughts cannot be obtained, and future thoughts cannot be obtained.” Why can’t we get at past thoughts? Because they’ve already gone by. What’s the point of worrying over them? Why can’t we get at present thoughts? Because the present moment doesn’t stop for even an instant. If you claim that this moment is the present, as soon as the words leave your mouth, that “present” has already gone by; time never stops. Why do we say that future thoughts cannot be obtained? Because the future hasn’t yet arrived. You may admit that it hasn’t yet come, but right then it arrives, so the “not-yet-come” (literal Chinese translation for “future”) doesn’t exist either. Therefore, the past, the present, and future are three thoughts that cannot possibly be obtained. If we can cultivate according to the Dharma that the Buddha spoke, then straightaway, we can realize the state of Nirvana.

Cultivators of the Way must use proper knowledge and views as their standard and cultivate vigorously. Our goal is to “leave behind the mark of speech,” so that there’s nothing left to say. We also want to “leave behind the mark of the mind and its conditions,” so that there’s nothing left to climb on. We want to “leave behind the mark of written words.” Once words also are gone, they can’t represent



our speech at all. Since there's no way to express with words, what is there to remember? What is there that we can't put down? What is left to take so seriously? We should apply ourselves to this, and stop toying with the superficial aspects.

Someone is thinking, "Today in meditation, my legs didn't hurt and my back has stopped aching. Before I knew it, it was time to stand up and walk." That's because you were sleeping! Of course you knew nothing at all! Don't misinterpret this state. If you become attached, then you can easily enter a demonic state and be taken in.

Pay attention to this, everyone! Pay no heed to external states. Ignore them completely. Let states come and go naturally. Don't let them influence you one way or the other. The *Shurangama Sutra* explains this matter quite clearly. I hope that all Chan meditators will look into the details of the Fifty Skandha-demon States of that Sutra very thoroughly. The *Shurangama Sutra* serves as a precious mirror for Chan meditators, and every cultivator of the Way ought to be thoroughly familiar with it.

### WIELD the WISDOM SWORD

Ten weeks of Chan are completed today.  
With a new life, Bodhi starts to sprout.  
Always wield the Vajra wisdom sword  
Vertically, horizontally, and in the north,  
south, east, and west.

VERSE FOR ENDING THE CHAN SESSION,  
1983, *City of Ten Thousand Buddhas*



## SMASH EMPTY SPACE to PIECES

Though the session has ended,  
We must continue to work hard.  
Smashing empty space to pieces  
Allows our original face to emerge.

MASTER HUA'S VERSE  
FOR ENDING THE CHAN SESSION,  
*August 11, 1973, Gold Mountain Dhyana Monastery*



## WHO SAYS YOU'RE EMPTY?

Someone just heard me talking about space and how wonderful it is. That person now wants to become space. He thinks, "Once when I was meditating and several times when I was listening to the Sutras, there was nothing at all. It was empty. It really was! I saw it! I felt it!"

Hah! In that case, you aren't empty yet. If you were really empty, how would you know you were empty? If you were empty, how could you see emptiness? If you were empty, how could you feel you were empty? How could you have the sensation of being empty? Take a good look at yourself. Are you empty or not? If you are empty, why is there still a "you"? How can there be the notion of "I feel"? Is that empty?







## THE RICE CRUST

Now I have a story for you. Tian Tong Monastery is located at Loyang in China. It is one of China's largest monasteries which can house over five hundred monks. Dhyana meditation was conducted every year during the winter months. "Dhyana in the winter; study in the summer." During the winter, meditation sessions were held and during the summer Sutra lectures and Dharma talks were given. Why practice Dhyana in the winter? The cold weather in the winter helps people work hard. When you feel cold, you will want to work hard. How does one work hard? You have to turn on your own personal heater and fight the cold, then you won't fear the cold. The colder it gets, the more energy you have. Therefore, when we are conducting a Dhyana session in the winter, once you have turned on your internal heater, not only will you not be cold, you'll perspire! And so now is the best time to investigate Chan. In warm weather it's easy to fall asleep. In cold weather, if you fall asleep, you will be awakened by the cold and so it is not as easy to fall asleep. Therefore, when we cultivate, we should not be afraid of the cold.

Long ago in China, those who investigated Chan in the winter did not eat after noon. What does not eating after noon mean? It means they ate rice gruel in the morning, but in the evening they did not eat anything. At that time, someone was working hard, but because he couldn't eat at night, he felt hungry. Feeling hungry, he began to have false thinking, "Oh! It is hard to bear the hunger. It's very uncomfortable." Everybody felt hungry and started to have



false thinking. They said, “Ah! We could steal something to eat! Could we steal Chinese buns? No, they are locked in the kitchen. Could we steal rice? No, it is kept in the storeroom. There is no way to steal it.”

Well, the monitor had spiritual penetrations. Taking a look, he thought: “Oh! Everyone is so hungry they are having false thinking about stealing food. This person wants to steal ginseng. That person wants to steal cottage cheese. How can we allow that to happen!” So the monitor thought, “I am going to help them.” He used his spiritual penetrations to enter the storeroom and took all the rice crust. Rice crust is the crisp layer of rice at the bottom of the pot. In Canton it is called *fān jau* “rice crisp.” In the north we call it *guo ga zi* “pan crackle.” That’s a hard name to pronounce. Because in a large monastery several thousand people were in residence, there was a lot of rice crust left each day. It’s not that the rice crust wasn’t wanted, that it was thrown in the garbage can and taken away with the rest of the trash. No, the rice crust was kept and cooked with the next day’s rice and eaten. When many people live together, if such food were wasted, it would amount to a lot of waste. So things were kept. Each day they kept the rice crust in the storeroom. The monitor used his spiritual penetrations to go into the storeroom, grab a lot of rice crust, and set a piece in front of each person. When the bell rang at the end of the sitting period, each monk saw a piece of rice crust right there in front of him. Stealthily each stuffed it into his mouth.

Every person stole his bite to eat. Here, we can steal ginseng and steal cottage cheese.

Master to disciple: “You said that there is plenty of that in the storeroom? You may go to the storeroom and steal it. Any one of you who has spiritual penetrations can show them off.”

Master to another disciple: “Don’t lock the door, however. If you lock the door, their spiritual penetrations won’t be sufficient to

let them get in.”

And so each monk ate his rice crust and after eating it felt that it helped him use effort—that he was able to work hard. The monitor stole today, stole tomorrow, stole the next day, and so on for many days until he had stolen all the rice crust in the storeroom. The cook asked the storeroom manager, “Where is the rice crust?”

The storeroom manager said, “Didn’t you cook it in the rice?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“No? Then where is it?”

“How do I know? I don’t know.”

Then the store manager said, “This will never do! We have to go see the Abbot.”

They went together to see the Abbot. Abbot Mi Zu also had spiritual penetrations. The storeroom manager said, “All the rice crust in the storeroom has disappeared. We don’t know why.”

Abbot Mi Zu said, “How could it have disappeared? Of course you cooked it and ate it and so it’s gone.”

The storeroom manager said, “No, the rice cook said he did not cook it, but there isn’t any in the storeroom either.”

Abbot Mi Zu said, “Maybe it was eaten by mice. Ok, forget it!”

When the Abbot looked into it: “Oh! It is you, monitor. You act like that! Ah! You have broken the precepts. You have stolen things. All right!” And so on that day Abbot Mi Zu also went into the Chan hall to meditate with the assembly. Sure enough, the monitor went off to the storeroom to steal things. However, he used his spirit—his spiritual soul—not his physical body to go to the storeroom. His physical body remained seated there.

How were his spiritual penetrations? He could retrieve things back with him just by contemplating. He brought things back with him. But meanwhile Abbot Mi Zu had stashed the monitor’s physical body, still holding meditation posture, under the



meditation bench. When the monitor who stole things returned, he could not find his body on the bench. He looked about for it and finally discovered it under the bench. He had to wiggle his way out from under the monitor's meditation bench. As he was crawling out, the Abbot said, "What are you doing coming out from under there? You are stealing things in this monastery! You've stolen all the rice crust and you are still doing it! You have to leave. You can't stay here anymore."

The monitor said, "Fine. You can kick me out, but the monks in this assembly are too hungry to work. If I have to leave, I want to request that you allow these people a little something to eat in the evening."

The Abbot said, "You just go. That is none of your concern. You go. I am kicking you out."

"But if you do not promise to give them something to eat, I will not leave!"

"All right! All right!" Abbot Mi Zu told the monitor, "After you go, I will give everyone two vegetarian buns each evening." Then the monitor left, and from then on, buns were served each night.

The monitor used his spiritual penetrations to travel from Tian Tong Monastery to Nanking. Once he reached Nanking, originally he planned to go on to Guei Yuan Monastery in Hangkew in time for lunch. But when he passed through the bustling city of Nanking, he stopped to watch an opera. Afterwards, he used his spiritual penetrations to go to Guei Yuan Monastery. At that time, the Abbot of Guei Yuan Monastery also had spiritual penetrations and so he said, "Today a monk is coming to lunch. We will eat first and then hit the *bong*. When he hears the sound of the *bong*, he will come for lunch. And so first we eat and then we hit the *bong*." The *bong* is a wooden board carved in the shape of a fish. When it is hit, the sound is "*bong, bong, bong*," and so it is called a *bong*. Why did the Abbot want everyone to eat first? It's because he knew that



the monitor had stopped to watch an opera in Nanking and so he thought, “All right! You watch a show and I won’t let you eat.”

After the monitor finished watching the show, he went to Hangkow. When he arrived, he heard the *bong* and went to eat lunch. But he saw that all the people at Guei Yuan Monastery had already eaten. Everyone ate first and then the *bong* was hit. He said, “Why aren’t you eating?”

“We’ve already eaten.”

“You don’t follow the rules here. You should hit the *bong* first and then eat.”

The Abbot said, “Who told you to watch an opera?”

The monitor thought about that and had nothing to say in reply so he left. He went directly to Szechwan. It is quite a long distance from Hangkow to Szechwan, but he reached there quickly by using his spiritual penetrations. When he arrived there, he sat beneath two cinnamon trees to meditate. Later he established a monastery there named “Twin Cinnamon Hall,” which is also very well known.





Q

Why is it that some monastic and lay cultivators cultivate so that they emit a light, while others do not? Some have radiated a light since they were young. What's the reason behind that?

A

Don't be attached to that. Cultivate whether there's light or not. Don't be full of yourself if you have an aura. The aura disappears as soon as you're attached. People who don't have any light can have that light if they cultivate. Don't be attached to these superficialities, just work hard and cultivate honestly. Proceed boldly and vigorously according to the Buddhadharmā. Don't back down. Don't be concerned about light or no light. When the time comes, you'll radiate light even when you don't want it. When it's not yet time and you haven't reached that level, there will be no light even though you want light.



## WHO IS ASKING?

As to investigating the meditation topic, "Who?" it's said that while inquiring,

If a big doubt comes up,  
then one's enlightenment can be big.



If only a minor doubt arises,  
then one's enlightenment will be small;

If no doubt is generated by the topic,  
then one will obtain no enlightenment.

Before a Chan Meditation Session, we always have a Buddha Recitation Session. After the recitation session, we hold the Chan Session; this way we can expect better results. First we recite the Buddha's name, and then we investigate the question, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" To "investigate" means to look, to look for the one who is mindful of the Buddha. Is it a ghost? Which ghost is it? Is it a person? Which person is it? Is it me? After I die, will I still be mindful? After I'm put in the coffin, will no one be mindful? Find the final answer to the question "Who?" How about the asker of "Who"? Can you tell who is mindful of the Buddha? Who is asking? You can't find out. No matter how long you look, you won't find out who it is. If you actually find out "Who?" then you won't have the least bit of idle thinking left. Why do you still have idle thoughts? It's because you haven't found out "Who?"

This question of "Who" can be sought for a great eon. When you see those meditation adepts sitting absolutely still, it's because they are working on finding the "Who." Their search for this one word brings them to a state of concentration where not even one idle thought arises. Suddenly at that point, they can get enlightened and, in the midst of darkness, bring forth bright light that shows them absolutely everything. It's said:

When one is confused,  
an entire library of books is too few;  
But when one is enlightened,  
even a single word is too many.

This expresses the principle we use to investigate the meditation topic. Anyone who can be entirely free of idle thoughts is a person



with skill. Anyone who entertains idle thoughts is someone whose spiritual skill is still immature. This is the central idea underlying the practice of Chan meditation.

The skill of Chan meditation comes from concentrating the mind and looking into the topic, so that when walking, sitting, and reclining, you are investigating at all times. To sum it up, you must work at it constantly. Don't pass up this opportunity to investigate. This is why during the Chan session no one bows to the Buddha, recites Sutras, does ceremonies, or eats in the formal style. At lunchtime we take our meal, then we hurry back to the meditation hall and continue to meditate. When one has to go to the bathroom, one takes care of business and then returns immediately to the hall to continue to meditate. We don't want to waste even one minute or second of the session, because who knows in which minute or second we'll become enlightened? This is why we treasure every moment of time.

As it's said, "Do not depart from this!" Don't depart from what? Don't depart from the question, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" This "Who" is a wisdom-sword that cuts through the seven emotions and six desires. Once you've gotten rid of your faults and habits for good, your fundamental nature can appear. Once your fundamental nature appears, the fruition of Bodhi will be accomplished.





Q

Master, which Dharma Master do you most respect in this lifetime?

A

Venerable Master Hsu Yun.

Q

Please describe the spirit of Venerable Master Hsu Yun.

A

He did not sleep.



## EXTRAORDINARY DILIGENCE

*Brings Elder Master Hsu Yun's Awakening*

When those of old applied their effort, they would renounce death and forget about life. They weren't afraid of toil. They wouldn't waste a single second. They were totally concentrated, worked hard, and hoped that by using their effort in the right way they could one day recognize their original face and obliterate the wheel of birth and death.

When the Venerable Hsu Yun was residing in a thatched hut on Zhong Nan Mountain, he heard that the cultivators at Gao Min Monastery were going to hold a ten-week Chan Session, which would begin on July 19. The Master decided to attend the session and left for Gao Min Monastery, determined to end birth and death.



While he was descending Jiu Hua Mountain, it began to rain, and it rained so hard that the roads were all submerged in water. He remembered that along the road there was a bridge, but he didn't know that it had been wiped out by the torrential rain. So, as he walked along that particular road, because the bridge had been wiped out, he slipped and fell into the river. For a day and a night—24 hours—he was tossed by the waves and bobbed up and down in the current. How could he have lived through that?

It so happened that there was a fisherman working along the river and when he cast his net, by chance he caught the Venerable Master Yun and pulled him out of the river. At first the fisherman thought that he'd caught a huge fish, but as soon as he reeled in his net and took a closer look, he realized that this was, in fact, a monk! The fisherman observed that the monk had taken in a lot of water, so he lifted him onto a large rock and proceeded to empty the water out of his lungs.

Now it's reasonable to suppose that after being submerged in water for 24 hours like that, one could not possibly have survived. But the Venerable Hsu Yun came back to life. The fisherman next went to a local monastery and told a monk there, "I caught a monk in my net while fishing." The local monk returned with the fisherman to the scene of the accident to take a look. When he saw the Venerable Master he exclaimed, "Oh, this is the Venerable De Qing," [referring to Master Hsu Yun by his other ordained name.] So he took Venerable Hsu Yun back to his monastery to rest there for a few days.

If the Venerable Master had not been so determined in seeking the Way, he might have thought, "Oh, I was on my way to the session and just about drowned in the river, so I'm not going to that session now. I'm going to retreat. I'm going back to the mountain and stay there in my thatched hut." But he wasn't like that. He maintained his resolve to go on and participate in the session.



So he proceeded to Gao Min Monastery after a few days and registered as a participant. Because he had been in the water for a day and a night he was seriously ill. In what way was he ill? His nose, his eyes, his ears, his mouth all constantly bled. Even his anus and urinary tracts flowed with blood and his vital energies drained away. But even though he was so sick, he still didn't retreat. It never occurred to him to resign from the session.

Now no one at Gao Min Monastery was aware of the Venerable Master's condition. No one has heard news that he had almost been drowned in the river. Nor did the Master bother to tell anyone. He was prepared to enter the Chan Hall and join the session.

A preparatory session was held on July 15. Since the Abbot of Gao Min Monastery himself wanted to participate in the session, he requested that the Venerable Hsu Yun act as Abbot in his place so that he would be able to attend the session without having to be distracted by monastic affairs. But Master Yun wouldn't agree to this. And so, according to the tradition of the Chan Hall, the Abbot had him beaten with an incense board and scolded him, saying things like, "You haven't brought forth the resolve of a Bodhisattva!" and gave him a big harangue.

By that time, the Venerable Hsu Yun was like a living dead person, so that even when people beat him he did not feel pain. When people scolded him, that living dead person did not even hear it. He endured insult in that way. He was able to endure it all. Shortly after that, the Abbot of the local monastery where Master Yun had stayed after his accident showed up at Gao Min Monastery, and he explained to everyone there, "The Venerable High Monk, De Qing, descended Jiu Hua Mountain and on his way to this session he fell into the river and remained in the water for a day and a night—24 hours—and then he was fished out and revived. He came back to life." On hearing this bit of news, everyone knew that Master Yun was one who had truly forsaken death and forgotten about life in



order to participate in this session.

Then the participants in the Chan Session got together and discussed the situation among themselves. It was the custom that those who participated in a session took turns taking the incense board and going on meditation patrol. While everyone else was sitting, the one on meditation patrol would carry the incense board around the hall to see who was sleeping, and whoever was sleeping would get hit with the incense board. But because the Venerable Hsu Yun had forsaken death and forgotten about life in order to attend the session, everyone felt sympathetic toward his resolve and they all agreed among themselves and said to him, “You nearly drowned and you’re really sick so you needn’t take a turn on the meditation patrol.” Thus, he was relieved of his turn on the meditation patrol. Not having to do that, he was able to single-mindedly work hard. He concentrated with a single focus, day and night, without ever interrupting his effort. But his illness still raged. His nine orifices kept on bleeding and his vital energies ebbed away, even from his urinary tract. In spite of this serious illness, he didn’t rest; he still worked hard just as always.

One evening, during the session, it came time for tea. Because Master Yun was intent upon investigating his meditation topic, his eyes were closed. As he held out his cup something happened. Maybe the tea server was sleepy. Anyway, the tea server accidentally poured hot tea all over Master Yun’s hand and scalded it, causing the Master to release the cup and let it drop to the floor. The cup fell to the floor with a crash and the sound prompted in him an instantaneous enlightenment. It was a far-reaching and profound awakening. Recalling that moment, Hsu Yun wrote this verse:

The cup crashed to the floor  
With a sound crisp and clear.  
Empty space broke apart,  
And the mad mind suddenly stopped.

When the cup smashed to the floor, his ignorance was smashed to bits, and he found his original face. He understood everything and immediately became enlightened. Becoming enlightened, he immediately understood everything.

Reflect upon this story. Elder Master Hsu Yun, a lofty and virtuous monk, worked so hard and subsequently was able to open enlightenment.





Q

Why is the Master's memory so excellent? How should most people develop that?

A

Practice without outflows in life after life.

Q

How do we cultivate having no outflows?

A

Go back and read the *Shurangama Sutra* more often.



## LETTING GO

Let the four elements go. Do not grasp at them.  
 The nature of still quiescence accords with drinking  
 and eating.  
 All activities are impermanent; everything is empty.  
 That is the great and perfect enlightenment of the  
 Thus Come Ones.

What are the four elements. They are earth, water, fire, and wind. And they all pervade the Dharma Realm. Earth, water, and fire have appearance. But wind does not have any appearance. Our bodies are falsely united by these four great elements. When four great elements are unified together, then, a body is formed. When the four great elements dispersed, then the body is gone.



Flesh and bone and all the hard things belong to the element earth. Mucus, saliva, tears, and all liquids of the body belong to the element water. The heat of our bodies belongs to the element fire. And our breath belongs to the element wind. When these four great elements come together, they form a human body. When these four great elements scatter, then we no longer have our body. They each return to their own kind. The earth element of our body goes back to the element earth. The water element of our body goes back to the element water. The fire element of our body goes back to the element fire. The wind element of our body goes back to the element wind. They all go back to where they belong. Therefore, we say that the four great elements are falsely united.

Since our body is made out of the false unity of four elements, what relationship does our bodies have with us? If we can understand that our bodies truly are not anything special, there is nothing for us to cling to in our bodies. Then why is each of us so attached to our body? Why can we not see through it? Why can we not put it down. “Do not grasp at them.” We must break our attachment to those elements that form our bodies. We have to see the body for what it is. “Do not grasp at them” means to see through and put down. To put down is just to loosen up, or to untie, or to get rid of these attachments. Rather, one should let go and not be attached to the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and wind.

“The nature of still quiescence accords with drinking and eating.” The nature of still quiescence is simply the Buddha nature. It is the enlightened nature inherent in us all. “Accords with drinking and eating” means we should just be natural. We should not feign anything. Everything should simply happen spontaneously. Each act we do, such as drinking water and eating food, should be done naturally. The Buddha nature is found in everyday things. “Accords with drinking and eating means that all acts should be natural and not forced.



“All activities are impermanent; everything is empty.” Since all activities are impermanent, then they are empty. As it is stated: “All the marks are empty and false. If you can see all the marks as no mark, then you can see the Thus Come One.” Thus, all activities are impermanent. And since all activities are impermanent, they are mere emptiness.

“That is the great and perfect enlightenment of the Thus Come Ones.”

Some versions use all Buddhas instead of Thus Come Ones. All Buddhas and Thus Come Ones are the same. It is just that Thus Come Ones sounds a little better than all Buddhas does here. Because this verse is part of a song, using Thus Come Ones makes the song harmonious. “Everything is empty” means everything is found in the original self-nature of the Thus Come Ones of the ten directions.







Q

How can we accomplish great things?

A

Someone who can do great things will do what others cannot do. To be able to withstand the worst form of misery, one becomes the best among the best. But this is not about being different or competitive.



## GRADUALLY ARRIVE AT SUDDEN UNDERSTANDING

The Dharma-door of Chan meditation points directly to the human mind. It teaches us to see our nature and to become a Buddha. It is also called “the sudden teaching.” The teaching of sudden enlightenment is brought to success by cultivating the gradual teaching.

One may suddenly enlighten to the principles,  
But putting those principles into practice  
happens gradually.

Now in our daily department, whether moving or still, we are cultivating gradually. Then in the future, there will be a day when we truly understand and become suddenly enlightened. That’s what we mean by sudden. The sudden, in fact, is not apart from the gradual, and the gradual also aids the sudden.



Sudden enlightenment is a result of daily cultivation. When you get a response from your daily efforts, you can suddenly be enlightened. If you normally don't cultivate, then you can never gain sudden enlightenment. Similarly, after a child is born, he is steeped in words and sounds every day. When the time comes, he is naturally able to talk. When he says his very first word, it's analogous to the enlightenment experience. When the time comes, he'll naturally be able to walk, and that first step he takes is like the enlightenment experience. How can he take his first step? Because he watches adults walking all day long, every day. Being steeped in that environment, very naturally he'll be able to walk. Cultivation works the same way. We cultivate today, we cultivate tomorrow, we cultivate back and forth until our skills elicit a response. Then, when not a single thought is produced and our idle thoughts are dispelled, we'll be enlightened.

Such an enlightenment may be the result of having worked hard at cultivation all the time, every day in this lifetime. When our skill is mature, we become enlightened. This enlightenment results from our cultivation in this lifetime. You may say, "I saw a person who hadn't been vigorous at all in cultivation, but he got enlightened as soon as he started to meditate. How do you explain that?" That's an exceptional case. Although he may not have been cultivating in this life, he did cultivate in previous lives. Not only did he cultivate, he cultivated ceaselessly. He was only a hairsbreadth away from enlightenment. In this life, as soon as he encountered this kind of environment, he was enlightened.

Although sudden enlightenment is instantaneous, it depends upon all of the good roots one has carefully and continually nurtured in past lives. It is just like a farmer planting a field. In the spring, he sows the seeds. In the summer, he weeds and hoes. Then in the autumn, there are crops to harvest. If in the spring the seeds are not planted, how could there possibly be a harvest in the



autumn? That is to say, one share of plowing and weeding yields one share of harvest. We cultivators of the spiritual path are the same. Whether or not we've become enlightened, we should still be vigorous and courageous in our cultivation. We should energetically stride forward. Then we have hope of gathering our harvest in the final moment. We can see our true identity, know our original face.

When we hold a Chan session, we are taming our bodies and regulating our minds. Taming the body keeps it from acting in random, impulsive ways. Regulating the mind means not allowing it to indulge in idle thoughts, so it's always pure and clear. Then no matter where we go, to the ends of space or the limits of the Dharma Realm, we're still right within our self-nature. Our inherent nature contains absolutely everything. Nothing falls outside of it. It's just our fundamental Buddha-nature.

From limitless numbers of eons in the past, in life after life, in world after world, wherever we appeared, we've been deeply deluded and defiled by deviant knowledge and views. So it's not very easy for us to understand our minds or to see our natures. For this reason, we need to participate in a meditation session. A session is a period of time set aside for seeking realization. During this special period, we are determined to gain benefit. We must certainly apply effort and seek understanding.

If we want to truly understand, the very first thing that we need to do is to learn to be as if we don't understand anything at all. Here in the Chan meditation hall, what is our method of cultivation? We don't know. We are not aware of heaven above, earth below, or people in between. What did we do all day long? We don't know. What did we eat? We're not aware. What clothes are we wearing? We don't know. In this state of complete absorption, where we bring ourselves to know nothing at all, we approach a state like this:



When one can train oneself to appear as if foolish,  
Then one's genuine cleverness comes forth.  
If one can study until one appears dull,  
Then one's real talents begin to appear.



## DON'T be GREEDY for ESOTERIC WONDERS

Investigate Chan every hour, day, month, and year.  
Don't misuse the mind in being greedy for esoteric wonders.  
If you can reflect within at all times,  
After leaping out of the wheel of rebirth,  
there's another world.

VERSE FOR STARTING THE CHAN SESSION,  
*December 25, 1983, City of Ten Thousand Buddhas*



## SITTING QUIETLY FOR AN INSTANT

The Old Man of Mount Wei said,  
When an old monk sits once in meditation,  
He can digest ten thousand ounces of gold.

Today I will relate a true account about “sitting quietly for an instant.” Long ago, Dhyana Master Ling You lived on Mount Wei in Hunan province in China. He was known as “the old man of Mount Wei.” He built a hut and cultivated on the mountain, and after several years many people came to know of him as a cultivator who had virtue in the Way. Many people came to pay their respects. When the news reached Prime Minister Pei Xiu, he too went to call on him.

As soon as he had a conversation with the Old Man of Mount Wei, he felt the affinities were very deep and, inspired by his faith in him, he thought, “You are really a lofty monk who has the Way! But you are living in such a shabby, broken-down hut. It leaks when it rains and the wind blows through it. It's too bitter! You can build



a monastery here. I'll give you the money." On the spot he gave the Old Man three hundred ounces of silver. The value of silver at the time was such that three hundred ounces could have built ten monasteries like the one we are in now, [the former Gold Mountain Dhyana Monastery]. In those days a piece of silver could buy a lot of things. Prime Minister Pei Xiu, acting as a great Dharma Protector, offered up three hundred ounces of silver. But the Old Man of Mount Wei didn't have a safe, or a safety deposit box, or even a special place to put it in. And so Minister Pei Xiu simply set the money outside the hut in the grass and left.

Three years later, Prime Minister Pei Xiu returned to call upon the Old Man of Mount Wei and found him still living in the same shabby hut. He thought, "Oh! I gave this monk three hundred ounces of silver. What did he do with it? Did he use it to buy wine? Did he buy meat with it? How strange! Three hundred ounces of silver and he didn't build a monastery. He's still living in this broken-down hut!" He went in and saw that the Old Man of Mount Wei was just the same as before. And so he asked him, "Three years ago I gave you three hundred ounces of silver and told you to build a monastery. Why didn't you do it? What have you done with the money?"

The Old Man of Mount Wei said, "Silver? Where did you put it? Go look for it there." Pei Xiu thought to himself, "At that time there was no place to put it, and so I left it in the grass." Then he went to search in the grass and sure enough, the silver was still there. It hadn't moved an inch. The Old Man of Mount Wei hadn't even gathered up the money to put it in a safe place out of fear that someone might steal it. Prime Minister Pei Xiu thought, "Oh, he's really a lofty monk who has attained the Way. For three years he didn't even touch that three hundred ounces of silver. I should build the monastery for him. Then he took out some more money and built a huge monastery that could house more than three



thousand people.

After the monastery was built, many monks who practiced Chan meditation went there to cultivate. The monastery could house over three thousand people, and more than two thousand people had already gone there to reside. Pei Xiu thought, “Ah, so many monks are living here together. I will tell my son to leave the home-life.” Then Pei Xiu sent his son, a Hanlin scholar who was extremely learned—on a par with a present-day full professor—to leave the home-life.

What did the Old Man of Mount Wei tell this son of the Prime Minister to do? He said, “Since you have just become a left-home person, first you have to practice austerities. I appoint you water-carrier. You must haul water every day for the two thousand and some people who live here.” Thus, he had to rise each day shortly after two o’clock in the morning and carry water all day long until midnight. The other monks sat in meditation while he hauled water. Back and forth, back and forth he went, hauling water for several years. During those several years of hauling water, he didn’t do anything else. He had no time to study the sutras, no time to bow to the Buddhas, and no time to formally recite the Buddha’s name. His cultivation consisted solely of carrying water and reciting the Buddha’s name as he went. He did not have a fixed time to concentrate on studying the sutras, or any opportunity to recite the Buddha’s name together with everyone else. He was a novice; he had to do hard work.

After carrying water for several years, he thought: “Everyone resides in the Chan hall. I’m going to take a look and see what goes on in a Chan hall.” It just so happened that when he stole a peek into the hall, this monk was snoring and that monk was sleeping and the more he looked, the more he saw they were all like that. He said to himself, “Wow! I have been working so hard every day carrying water for you to drink and to use in cooking. All along I thought



you were working hard at your cultivation. But, in fact, you've only been sleeping here. Really! Here I am a Hanlin scholar toting water so you have the opportunity to sleep!" He was extremely upset.

As soon as he got upset, the abbot sent an attendant to summon him. In all those years he had never seen his teacher. Now he had a chance to see his teacher and the Old Man of Mount Wei said to him, "Pack up your things and get out. We can't use you here. You are being kicked out."

Pei Xiu's son said, "But what have I done wrong? Why are you throwing me out?" The Old Man said, "What have you done! Why did you say that all those people were sleeping—that you came here and worked—you a Hanlin scholar hauled water to feed a bunch of people who like to sleep. Did you or did you not have those false thoughts?"

He replied, "Yes! I saw them all sleeping in the Chan hall!" The Old Man of Mount Wei said,

When an old monk sits once in meditation,  
He is worth ten thousand ounces of gold.

"You are not worth even one ounce of gold. You are not able to even stand being a Hanlin who hauls water. Just take a look at yourself, you don't have the least bit of patience. You'll have to go. I refuse to keep you here."

Pei Xiu's son, whose name was Fa Hai, then knelt before the abbot and begged, "Please don't kick me out! Please forgive me this time."

The abbot said, "No! I can't forgive such a useless person. Pack up and get out fast!"

He was kicked out and that was that. After Fa Hai had packed his things, he asked, "Please tell me where I should go. Where should I live?" The Old Man gave him eight and half cents and said, "Dwell right where you happen to be when you have spent the last of this eight and half cents. As long as you have even a half





a cent left, you should keep moving.” Carrying that eight and half cents, Fa Hai went down the mountain. He begged for food as he traveled, because he dared not spend the eight and half cents. He went straight through Hunan to Nanjing. As he crossed the river at Zhenjiang, intending to climb the mountain on the other side, the ferryman didn't ask for more and didn't ask for less—he wanted exactly eight and half cents for the fare. Since all the money was spent for the fare, once he reached that mountain, he didn't leave. He stayed on Gold Mountain. Originally, that mountain was not called Gold Mountain. What was its name? There is no way to trace it. Well, how did it come to be called Gold Mountain? When Fa Hai first arrived on the mountain, he found a cave and lived in it. One night the cave radiated light. He went further into the cave to trace the source of the light and discovered two crocks full of gold there. He then used the gold to build Jiangtian Monastery. And so in China that mountain is named Gold Mountain because two full crocks of gold were discovered there by him.

He established a Way-place there and to this day,  
it is one of China's most famous Way-places  
when it comes to Chan meditation.





## WALKING TOWARD BODHI

There is an August 9th in every year.  
This year we all walk toward Bodhi together.  
Stop the pulse, stop the breath, and stop thoughts as well.  
Attain the Four Dhyanas, the Four Fruitions,  
up to great enlightenment.

VERSE FOR STARTING THE CHAN SESSION,  
*August 9, 1976, Gold Mountain Dhyana Monastery*



## THE FOUR DHYANAS

When we sit in Chan meditation, we shouldn't be greedy for flavorful Chan, meaning the bliss of the dhyanas. When meditators sit for a period of time, most will begin to experience a sense of lightness and ease. If that comfortable sensation makes them indolent, or if they become greedy to remain in that state, then it will not be easy for those meditators to progress. They will want to linger there; they will keep trying to return to that state of flavorful Chan. When the state subsides, they will pursue it, thinking, "When am I going to have that kind of state again? In that state there was no self, no others, no living beings, and no life span; no afflictions, and no hassles. It is so blissful, so comfortable and I feel so free. I wonder when I will ever have that experience again." When meditators get stuck like that, they just keep waiting for that flavorful experience to reoccur. Waiting, they forget all about applying effort. That's known as attachment to flavorful Chan.

Cultivators of Chan need to be free of obstructions and hang-ups. We cannot be craving anything. We cannot get excessively happy, or depressed, and we shouldn't have any fear or terror.



We should see our body as being the same as empty space and the Dharma Realm. There's no need to cling to anything or crave anything. As soon as practitioners crave something, they fall into a secondary level of truth.

Those who can sit in meditation until they reach a state where “inside there is no body and mind, outside there is no world, and afar there are no objects,” can then realize the state where there is “no trace of self, no trace of others, no trace of living beings, and no trace of life spans.” This state is also described as, “Thoughts of the past cannot be obtained, thoughts of the present cannot be obtained, and thoughts of the future cannot be obtained.” Even if you do reach this level of attainment, it still cannot be considered actual skill. It is not all that special. Suppose you can sit still for one hour, ten hours, one month, or ten months. That's only a sign that you have had a bit of response in your work, that you've attained a state of lightness and ease. You must keep up your practice of meditation continuously, pass beyond the stage of lightness and ease to actually reach the level of the first dhyana concentration.

The first dhyana is known as “the stage of happiness that leaves living beings behind.” It means that you have reached a stage of happiness beyond that which ordinary living beings enjoy. Leaving the afflictions of living beings, you obtain the happiness of “taking dhyana bliss as food” and of “being filled with the joy of Dharma.” Leaving the confusion of living beings, you start advancing along the Bodhi path of the sages. Arriving at the first dhyana isn't something you can fake. It isn't something you can claim for yourself; a good and wise advisor must certify the state for you.

When you are at this stage in your meditation, you quickly enter samadhi-concentration. In this samadhi, your breathing stops, and you no longer inhale nor exhale; the breath neither comes nor goes. You're like a turtle hibernating in the winter, with its head drawn back into its shell. External breathing comes to rest; internal



breathing comes alive. Creatures in winter hibernation abide in a state like that. Chan meditators can enter samadhi to the point that their breath stops, but as soon as they leave samadhi, their breathing returns to normal. Please attend to this point, everyone! When you reach this stage, you cannot have the false thought, “Oh! I believe my breath has stopped!” As soon as that thought occurs to you, your breath starts right up again, immediately. You can’t be careless, or else you’ll lose your chance and have to start all over again.

When you reach that state, there is proof—the proof is that you no longer inhale or exhale—your breath has stopped, although you aren’t dead. You have entered the samadhi of the first dhyana. It’s different from sleep, so you shouldn’t think that going to sleep is the same as entering samadhi. When you are sleeping, you continue to breathe, and you may even snore so loudly that it sounds like thunder to your neighbors. An experienced mentor can tell immediately whether or not your breath has stopped. To simply announce, “I feel like my breath has stopped!” doesn’t make it so. If you know, then you haven’t even entered the first dhyana! So don’t try to put up a false sign and sell counterfeit goods.

If I were to go into this in detail, there are a lot of principles that could be talked about, and I could write a whole essay on this. But if I say too much, it only creates obstacles. So I’ve just said a little bit to prevent you from becoming arrogant and misled by deviant views and claiming to have entered the first dhyana.

From the stage of the first dhyana, if you can make vigorous progress, you enter into the second dhyana. This stage is known as “the stage of happiness that brings concentration.” When you are constantly in this samadhi, it brings along a quality of happiness which is completely unparalleled and indescribable. It’s a further advance in “taking the joy of Chan as your food, and being filled with the bliss of the Dharma.” When you meditate at the stage of the second dhyana, not only does your breathing stop, but your



pulse stops as well. Please note that “stop” does not mean it’s cut off for good. When you leave this state of concentration, the pulse returns to normal.

Again, you will not know it when you arrive at this state, and you cannot claim you have reached it. If you say you feel like you have, how do you know? You haven’t even entered samadhi yet, so are you trying to fool people by faking it?

In the third dhyana, “the wonderful bliss of leaving happiness,” your breath, pulse, and even your thoughts will have ceased. In these heavens, you have left happiness and renounced flavorful Chan. You don’t have the slightest attachment or greed for the comfort of flavorful Chan. This state is much higher than that of the first and second dhyanas. All the hairpores on your body are blissful when you enter the third dhyana. They are really, really delighted!

That is to say, you leave coarse happiness behind and reach a level of subtle bliss that is most wonderful. In this stage of bliss beyond happiness, when you enter the state of concentration, not only do both breath and pulse stop, but also the thoughts in your mind stop, and you appear to be just like a dead person. When your thoughts stop, then you obviously have no more idle thinking. Your breathing comes to rest, and your blood receives no more oxygen, so it stops circulating. When your heart no longer beats, then your pulse stops. At this time you entertain no further scattered thoughts. It’s as if the breath were the wind, the pulse were the waves, and the thoughts of the mind were the water. If there is no wind, then there are no waves, and the water is naturally calm. As the saying goes, “The wind is calm and the waves are still.” This is a temporary experience which occurs in samadhi. It’s not as final as death. You can recover your normal breathing and pulse any time you please.

When you continue to apply vigorous effort in Chan meditation past the third dhyana, you can enter the fourth dhyana, known as “the pure stage free of thoughts.” You have now left behind the



wonderful bliss of the third dhyana, and the mind is pure. With the breath, pulse, and thoughts stopped and left behind, the pure, inherent, wonderful nature of true suchness manifests. You should not think that just because you can enter this state that you are special. It is only the fourth dhyana and not a sign of having realized some fruition of sagehood in the Way. It is still the state of an ordinary person.

Because you have not cut off all desire, if you make vigorous progress in cultivating the deviant concentration of externalist sects, you will enter the Heaven of No-thought and enjoy a state of bliss. If instead you cultivate proper concentration, then you can enter the Five Heavens of No Further Return. Only then have you actually reached the state of certifying to sagehood.

In the fourth dhyana, you experience nothing at all. “When not a single thought arises, the entire substance manifests.” You reach that state where:

A thousand pools contain water,  
The moon is reflected in all of them.  
For ten thousand miles there are no clouds.  
There are ten thousand miles of sky.

Everything is speaking the Dharma. “Falling flowers and flowing water proclaim the Mahayana.” But you don’t know it when you are in this state, and you can’t say, “I’ve reached the Heavens of the Fourth Dhyana.” That would be gross arrogance on your part, and you would be telling a big lie. One must be certified by a good and wise advisor for it to count.

A good and wise advisor is called a “clear-eyed person,” because he can take one look at you and know what your level of cultivation is. If you want to test him out, go ahead! But he won’t pay any attention to you. A true good and wise advisor will not be tested by you, and he won’t tell you all the secrets just because you asked. You must draw near such a mentor for a long time, and then he



may tell you, but not in a very obvious way. Sometimes he might use an analogy, or just say a few words. So you can't go around proclaiming, "We've all become Buddhas!" You would be telling a big lie. But the joke will be on you, because in the future, those who tell big lies have to endure the hell of Pulling out Tongues. To have that happen would be really pathetic!

So please pay special attention to this point, everyone! Don't say that you've realized what you haven't realized, or that you've obtained a state you haven't actually obtained. To say such things breaks the precept against false speech. In the future, people who say such things will fall into the hells where tongues are ripped out. Whether or not you believe my words is up to you. I'm simply giving you advance warning. In Buddhist circles you can find people who claim to be already enlightened. To make this claim is wrong! Even if you're enlightened, you can't boast, "Did you know that I'm enlightened? I have the five spiritual eyes and the six psychic powers!" Don't advertise yourself. It's totally meaningless.

### PLAYING a FLUTE with NO HOLES

With heaven and earth rent topsy-turvy during a  
Chan Session,  
Stars can be plucked and the moon replaced.  
In front of the shadowless mountain,  
turn around and look.  
A true person always plays a flute with no holes.

MASTER HUA







# MASTERS HAN SHAN “COLD MOUNTAIN” AND SHI DE “THE FOUNDLING”

Even Buddhas and Bodhisattvas do not advertise themselves. When it becomes known that a certain person is a Bodhisattva, or that a certain person is a Buddha who has come into the world by transformation, those people will promptly leave. During the Tang Dynasty, there were two such Great Masters: Hanshan (Cold Mountain) and Shide (The Foundling). Great Master Hanshan was Manjushri Bodhisattva's transformation, and Shide was Samantabhadra Bodhisattva's transformation. The two were the best of friends. Great Master Shide was an orphan, found on the roadside by the Abbot Fenggan of Guoqing (National Purity) Monastery and raised in the monastery. He worked in the kitchen boiling the water. He would pack leftover rice and vegetables into a bamboo crock and save them for Great Master Hanshan, who lived in Moonlight Cave behind the monastery. Great Master Hanshan came down to Guoqing Monastery every day to get the offering of leftovers. Since the two fellow-cultivators constantly joked and laughed together, the other monks thought they were fools and left them alone. Nobody knew they were actually Bodhisattvas' transformations who had come into the world playfully to take



across living beings who were ready to be saved.

One day the Magistrate Lu Qiuyin visited Abbot Fenggan (who was the transformation of Amitabha Buddha) and asked, “Venerable Sir, in the past, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas often sent their transformations into the world. Do they still come to the world or not?” Abbot Fenggan said, “Yes, they do! It’s only that we don’t recognize them. Right now, the monk who boils water in the kitchen at Guoqing Monastery on Tiantai (Heavenly Vista) Mountain is the transformation of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. His fellow cultivator is Hanshan, who in reality is Manjushri Bodhisattva. Who claims that they no longer appear in the world?” Lu Qiuyin was delighted by this news, and took his leave. He headed directly for Guoqing Monastery, intending to pay sincere homage to the two Bodhisattvas, Hanshan and Shide.

When he arrived at Guoqing Monastery, the guest prefect recognized him as an honored guest and received him with all due courtesy. When he heard that the Magistrate wished to see Hanshan and Shide, the prefect thought it quite strange. He couldn’t understand why the Magistrate was interested in meeting those two fools. Although he was puzzled, he led the Magistrate into the kitchen, where Hanshan and Shide were talking and laughing hysterically, looking truly comical. The Magistrate Lu Qiuyin, nonetheless, made very sincere bows to the two of them, and then stated with utmost reverence, “Disciple Lu Qiuyin asks the two Bodhisattvas for their compassionate regard; please give instructions to this confused mortal.”

Great Master Shide asked him, “What are you doing?” The Magistrate replied, “Abbot Fenggan said that you two are the transformations of Manjushri and Samantabhadra Bodhisattvas. I came out especially to bow to you and to earnestly seek your instructions.” Great Master Shide heard this reply and stepped backwards. He said, “Fenggan has been prattling. Fenggan is a



tattletale! He's the transformation of Amitabha Buddha! Why didn't you bow to him instead of coming to bother us?" As he spoke, he continued to walk backwards out the door of the temple and all the way to the front of Moonlight Cave in the face of Tiantai Mountain. Great Master Hanshan followed him and when the two reached the rock face, they both vanished right into the mountain.

The Magistrate watched in amazement as the two Bodhisattvas hid themselves, and he felt deep disappointment. He thought, "I must quickly go bow to Amitabha." But by the time he returned to the Abbot's place, Abbot Fengan had already entered the stillness of Nirvana. The Magistrate had mistaken what was before his very eyes. This is known as "Being face to face with Guanshiyin, yet failing to recognize him." Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is also here in the Chan Hall with us now, but I don't want to tell you who he is, for fear that once you know, you'll drive him away.





Q

Master, may I leave the householder's life?

A

There wouldn't be too many with you; there wouldn't be too few without you.



## WAKE UP FROM THIS DREAM!

Do we live in the world only in order to pursue meaningless things? No! Then what are we living for? Our sole purpose on earth is to wake up from this dream we are in. Don't dream on within a dream, lingering on in your dream, not willing to let go. You should awaken from it! Not only should you awaken yourself, but you should help everyone else wake from their dreams as well.

After you wake up, you will no longer be so upside down. Before you awaken from your dream, if someone were to tell you, "Hey, do you know? You are living in a dream! No matter how much wealth you have, no matter what high official post you may have gained or how successful your career has been, it's all happened within a dream!" you would certainly not believe that person. But just wait until you wake up from your dream, then you will know, "Oh! Originally it was just a dream!"

What do I mean "living in a dream"? If you weren't living in a dream, then why have you forgotten everything about the past? Why can't you foresee events of the future? Why can't you make the present remain? You do not have a grasp on any of these things. Tell me, what in this world is ultimately yours?

Someone says, "My body belongs to me."



Well, if your body really belongs to you, can you keep your eyes from becoming hazy? Can you stop your ears from growing deaf? Can you keep your teeth from falling out?

You say, “I can take care of all of that, no problem. If my eyes grow dim, I can put on a pair of contact lenses, and then I’ll be able to see.”

But that is borrowing from external conditions. They are not your own.

“If my ears grow deaf, I can use a hearing aid.”

That’s also borrowing from external conditions and not using your own resources.

“If my teeth fall out, I can put on dentures.”

That is also borrowing from external conditions. None of those things belong to you. Only people who are spineless borrow from external conditions.

People with back-bone stand on their own two feet. They try their best without cease, and they do not rely on outer conditions. If this body really belongs to you, you will be able to tell your hair not to turn white, tell your feet not to hurt, tell your head not to ache, tell your body not to get sick—only that can be counted as having some control. But since you are not in control, you should realize that the body is just a false combination of the four elements: earth, water, fire, and wind. If it’s all false anyway, why should you become so upside down because of it? Even if you become so upside down over it, in what way will it repay you? Tell me.

Therefore, we in this world should put down all of our attachments. Put down the false, take up the true—only then will our lives have some meaning to them. Do not dream on within a dream, taking your dream as real and not waking up from it.





## THE DHARMA-SELECTING EYE IS ESSENTIAL

Students of the Buddhadharma must have the Dharma-selecting Eye so they can recognize right dharmas and wrong dharmas, black dharmas and white dharmas, good dharmas and bad dharmas. Be sure you never take right as wrong and wrong as right; or black as white, and white as black; or good as bad, and bad as good—that’s all upside-down. If you want to recognize these dharmas, you must certainly have the Dharma-selecting Eye.

First of all, cultivators must not have the mark of self. If we have the mark of self, all kinds of obstacles will arise, and we will have no wisdom. Once there is a mark of self, selfish thoughts arise, followed by thoughts of benefiting the self and thoughts of seeking and greed. If people do not obtain what they seek and crave, contentious thoughts arise, and they will struggle with others to see who is stronger.

If we must be rid of the mark of self, then we must inquire into what the self is. Who am I? Ponder and investigate, “Who is mindful of the Buddha?” The question “Who...?” isn’t meant to be recited. It’s of no use if you keep reciting it. You must investigate it. Investigation can be compared to drilling a hole. When you drill all the way through, you will thoroughly understand.

If in any given moment we don’t understand,  
Then in that moment we must investigate.



For every moment we don't understand,  
In every one of those moments we must investigate.

Investigating doesn't mean guessing. Some people make it a guessing game, "Well, I'm mindful of the Buddha, you're mindful of the Buddha, and he's mindful of the Buddha, too. So who's mindful of the Buddha?" They may keep guessing, but they won't get the answer. Rather, you must search for the "who." The word "who" is the Vajra King Jeweled Sword, the sword of wisdom. You must use the wisdom sword to cut through all other idle thoughts, and then wisdom will spontaneously appear.

If you don't understand how to investigate Chan, then you may think that the more you recite "Who?" the better. You treat it like reciting the Buddha's name. But that's a mistake. Continually chanting "Who?" isn't the way it's done. Ideally, you stretch out the sound and keep it going for a few hours, or even for eighty-four thousand eons, without a break. Then you're really investigating Chan.

Why do we want to investigate "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" The word "who" is basically superfluous, but we are like monkeys, always looking around for something to do. If there is the word "who" acting as a shield, then it can combat all those idle thoughts so they disappear. This method uses poison to fight poison. To investigate Chan simply means to diligently wipe the mirror of the mind clean. Only when we are free of all random thoughts are we "diligently wiping it clean at all times." We want to wipe it clean so it won't get dusty. This is the Dharma-door of "sweeping away all dharmas, and separating from all marks."

If people don't avail themselves of the Dharma-selecting Eye, they won't recognize the true Dharma. Not recognizing what's true, they won't know how to investigate. Not knowing how to investigate, they end up just wasting their effort, or worse.





Not recognizing the proper Dharma, people may pursue deviant dharmas. That's why the Dharma-selecting Eye is so important.







## NO BACKSLIDING!

*Cultivation is like paddling upstream:  
If you don't go forward, you drift back.*

If you are swimming upstream and you don't use effort, you won't get anywhere. You may even drown. Here, we are all swimming. Everyone should apply effort. Don't retreat.







## WHY?

Cultivators must concentrate their minds and not be influenced by external states. In the investigation of Chan, you should remember the principle in the *Vajra Sutra*, “Produce the mind which dwells nowhere.” The Great Master, the Sixth Patriarch, was enlightened to this principle. Countless people have heard and recited this sentence, but have any of them become enlightened? When I explained the *Vajra Sutra*, I asked, “The Sutra is still around, but who has become enlightened?”

The Sixth Patriarch was an illiterate woodcutter who chopped wood in the mountains every day, but he was enlightened as soon as he heard this sentence. Because the Sixth Patriarch had cultivated diligently for many lives in many past eons, he became enlightened as soon as he heard the *Vajra Sutra*. Why is it that most of us listen to sutras for so long and still don’t become enlightened?

That happens to those who didn’t cultivate in the past, who only wanted to watch movies, watch TV, hold parties, and eat, drink, and be merry, and who never studied any sutras.





## THE TUNE of BIRTHLESSNESS

Upon first hearing the tune of birthlessness,  
Initially listening to the song of deathlessness,  
I realized that the Dharma was that way all along—  
Neither too little nor too much.

MASTER HUA



## HANG “BIRTH” AND “DEATH” FROM YOUR EYEBROWS.

You must suspend the three words “birth and death” right between your eyebrows and forget that you haven’t slept long enough. Don’t enter the “sleeping samadhi” right there on the meditation bench, or else success in Chan will forever elude you.

In this meditation session we must “renounce death and forget about life.” We must truly and earnestly work hard at meditation. Make a determined resolve to get your rightful share of results from your work. Don’t simply follow the crowd, sitting when you see others sitting, walking when your neighbors do, and sleeping when you see others sleeping. That kind of practice isn’t effective. It will only waste your time, without bringing you any benefit.

In my younger years, I participated in several Chan sessions in a variety of places, but never once was I hit by the hall monitor’s stick. Why not? Because I never slept during the entire session. I sat in meditation during the day, and I also meditated through the night. I sat in the Chan hall twenty-four hours a day. The words “rest” and “sleep” were not part of my vocabulary. Without wasting a single moment, I worked relentlessly at my investigation, constantly



applying my effort to it.

All of you have abundant and deep good roots. You are all clever and wise. You should give this matter serious consideration and not be casual in the least. In this year's Chan Session, there has to be someone who attains enlightenment.

Once the session begins, you must stay until the end. You can't withdraw early. According to the rules of the Chan hall, you've already said good-bye to birth and death. Even if someone dies during the session, we can only toss his corpse under the bench. No one is allowed to remove the corpse from the hall. And if nobody dies, then even less can you quit and skip out as you please.

We've set up a "life and death" threshold at the Chan hall door. If you don't live, then you'll die. If you don't die, then you'll live.

If we can't renounce death,  
then we won't experience real life.  
If we can't renounce what's false,  
we'll never accomplish anything true.







## AFTER A WHILE, PRACTICE WILL COME NATURALLY

If you're just beginning to cultivate, it's easy to get lazy. People need to spur themselves on in order to get going and keep going. If you just do what you feel like doing, and don't discipline yourself, it's easy to fall into a pattern of advancing one step and retreating two. So there's a saying,

In the beginning, practice feels forced;  
After a while, it comes naturally.

When you first start out, you have to force yourself to do it. But after you've practiced for a while, you get better at it and it comes more easily and naturally for you. At that time, when you're walking, you're not aware of it; when you're sitting, you are not aware that you're sitting; when you're standing, you don't realize you're standing; and when you're reclining, you don't know you're reclining. This is because you've gained freedom to do whatever you want in every respect. You're no longer hindered. When this happens, no matter what you do you'll always be cultivating—whether coming or going. Then, even if you're talking to people or hosting guests—no matter what you're doing—you'll still be working at your cultivation. That will happen at the point when everything comes together for you.

So, in cultivation you must bear bitterness. I always say, "everything's okay." You can say that everything's okay, but it's



really not easy to be that way. It's one thing to talk about it; it's another to experience it. Cultivation is not always easy, at times you have to force yourself. Things come up that you really can't see through, and you have to gather in all your energy to put things down, to let go of things.

That's not easy at all; sometimes it's very, very difficult. In saying, "It's okay, it's okay," sometimes you may think, "Well, everything's okay," and it will be okay for a while in a certain respect. But then something else will come up that is not okay. And just when you get that one worked out so it's okay, something else comes up that's VERY MUCH not okay. So it's very easy to say "everything's okay," but it's very hard to be that way. When you cultivate, you have to be prepared to do so bit-by-bit. And when you do your work, you have to do that bit by-bit as well.





## A VAJRA-INDESTRUCTIBLE BODY

What is our purpose in the Chan hall? We are smelting and forging our “vajra-indestructible body.” Once our body is made of vajra and is indestructible, then we won’t be aware of pain and suffering discomfort. If we fear both pain and suffering, then we certainly can’t achieve a vajra body. This vajra-indestructible body comes about through tempering and perfecting our skill. Enduring that tempering process is our current work. We’re forging our bodies to make them extremely durable and tough, so they’ll never go bad.

As soon as you hear this, you may be thinking, “Well, I’m not cultivating for the sake of this stinking bag of skin. Where is the sense in refining this thing so it will not go bad?” Right you are! There’s a lot to what you say. However, the vajra-indestructible body I am talking about is not the stinking skin bag that you are referring to. What is it then? It is the vajra-indestructible self-nature. It is the vajra-indestructible body of your “Dharma-body and your wisdom-life.” It is the purity at the source of your self-nature. That’s the vajra-indestructible body I’m referring to.







## MAKE A CLEAN SWEEP

The topic “Who is mindful of the Buddha” is like a broom used for sweeping the floor. Sweep a bit and things get a little cleaner. Sweep a bit more and things get a bit more clean. Each time you contemplate “who,” many false thoughts are eradicated. If you contemplate “who” twice, the amount of false thinking decreases even more. The process of contemplating “who, who, who, who” sweeps the false thoughts away and leaves us clean. You say, “I want to try some other method.” There isn’t any better method. This is the very best method. If you recite mantras or are mindful of the Buddha, then those are methods for counteracting your false thoughts. If you can use them, then those kinds of false thoughts can lead to the truth. But if you can’t use them, then those kinds of false thoughts turn into falseness. If you can use the Dharma—if you can develop your skill—then it is true, true, true—all of it is true. If you aren’t able to develop your skill, then it is false, false, false—all of it turns into falseness. And so it remains to be seen to what level you are able to develop your skill. If you always hold aloft the regal jeweled Vajra sword to illuminate everything that is empty and false, then what is empty and false will vanish. It will disappear.

Time passes in the blink of an eye. Those who have had some response from their work should not be pleased with themselves; those who haven’t had any response should not be distressed. You should continue to work hard. You now know the method used in



investigating Chan meditation. And so you can continue to work at your cultivation even at home. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you can investigate this meditation topic until you awaken to its meaning. As long as you maintain the investigation, it is for certain that one day you will become enlightened. By being single-minded in your work, you will be successful.



Q

Why shouldn't cultivators be emotional?

A

Emotions represent selfishness. If we let the seven emotions control us, then we are being selfish and are straying from the path to Buddhahood. The path to Buddhahood is about being altruistic and impartial.



## THE CHAN SCHOOL

*Essay by Master Hua*

The Chan School is the leader among the Five Great Schools of Buddhism, in that it transmits the Buddha's mind seal, pointing directly to the mind so that one sees the nature and becomes a Buddha. When Patriarch Bodhidharma came from India, he widely propagated this method. At that time the practitioners of Buddhism were still very enamored of literary prajna, exerting their efforts in composition and phrasing, vying to outdo one another. Even in lecturing the Sutras, they argued over long and short points, and in speaking Dharma, they would praise themselves and deprecate others. Different sects were set up, and to do battle with words was the mode of the times. Some resorted to individualism, and in an attempt to be unique, they set up theories that were distinctly different from the mainstream, and perfected the art of unobstructed and clever debate. People wrote books and set up doctrines, disparaging others while advertising themselves. In this way they forsook the root and ran after the branches, and the



theories of the Teaching School flourished widely.

Everybody had a different opinion, and one was at a loss as to which one to follow. One stood perplexed at the crossroad, not knowing which way to turn. Gazing out at the vast ocean of different teachings, one heaved a big sigh.

In light of such circumstances, the First Patriarch Bodhidharma made amendments for such biased teachings and patched up the flaws. His compassionate instructions were apart from speech; his teachings were not imparted through words. He taught that this mind of ours is just the Buddha, that the precious pearl hidden within our robe is not something gotten from outside. One only needs to concentrate one's energy and refine the mind to a single focus, and in an instant one will open profuse enlightenment. At that time, the outer and inner aspects of all things, whether subtle or gross, are completely penetrated without remainder, and the great functioning of the entire substance of our minds is completely made clear. One opens vast and ultimate enlightenment, returns to the source and plumbs the origin. At that time one can appreciate the subtlety behind this interchange: the Golden-Hued Ascetic, broke out in a smile—originally it was like this!

This method is one in which the mind seals the mind, transmitted outside of the teachings. One crosses over one's self-nature. And, after one has made one's way across the river, one leaves the raft behind. How can there be anything else but this?





Q

Great Master, let me first ask you, how come you became a monk?

A

I was probably meant to become a monk.



## THE MIDDLE WAY

When we investigate Chan, we must fix our attention on what we are doing. At all times, we should return the light and reflect within. Don't be too tense, and don't be too slack. It's said:

Wound too tight, things break.  
 Left too loose, things get slack.  
 Being neither too tense nor too lax  
 Is the way to succeed.

Being neither tense nor slack is the Middle Way.

Walking, standing, sitting, and lying down,  
 Don't be apart from this.  
 Once you leave this,  
 You will go amiss.

What is this? It's the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way.

In investigating Chan, we must maintain a balance and not go overboard. Don't go too far, and don't fail to go far enough. If we go too far, or not far enough, we are not holding to the Middle Way. If we don't fall into the two extremes of emptiness and existence, then we are abiding in the Middle Way.



It's said, "The Middle Way is neither emptiness nor existence." It is True Emptiness and Wonderful Existence. Do not be attached to true emptiness, and do not be obstructed by wonderful existence, for true emptiness and wonderful existence cannot be grasped or renounced. You cannot take hold of them or let go of them. That's the state of true emptiness and wonderful existence.

In developing our skill, we need to finish what we start. That's the only way to accomplish anything. "Carry it through from beginning to end" is a wise idiom. We shouldn't retreat in the face of difficulty or give up halfway there, "sunning something for one day and then freezing it for ten." People without backbone act like that. The ancients said:

In cultivation, don't worry about going slowly.  
Just be afraid of standing still.

Those who apply effort in cultivating the Way must have patience. No matter how hard the going gets, we must patiently forbear. With patience we can reach the other shore. When we join a Chan Session, we should not be afraid of hardship. It's said, "When bitterness ends, sweetness comes." If we don't start at the very bottom, we can't reach the top. Remember that a ten thousand foot skyscraper is built from the ground up. It isn't built in mid-air. Therefore, Chan cultivators must start with the basics, the first of which is to get rid of idle thinking. If you can stop your idle thoughts, then at that point,

The moon appears in the waters of a pure heart;  
No clouds obscure the sky of a calm mind.

When our minds are at peace, all problems go away. When our minds are still, the myriad things are in harmony. As it is said,

True wealth is stopping the mind and cutting  
off thought;  
True fields of blessings are devoid of all selfish desires.



We investigate Chan in order to get rid of the false and keep the true. The process of Chan is like panning for gold. Searching for gold dust in the sand is a difficult task. But someone who wants to find gold has to patiently search in the sand. Do you want to realize your inherent Buddha-nature? Do you want to understand your mind and see your nature? Then you must patiently cultivate, study, and investigate, and when enough time has passed, you will suddenly penetrate and enlighten to the fact that it is originally this way!

When our investigation of Chan is progressing well, we need not meddle in other people's business. Each of us should concentrate on the topic "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" No matter what, we have to find out "who" it is. When we find the answer, then things will stop. When the intensity of our efforts reaches a peak, good news will arrive.

### NO WORDS AT ALL

Your verbal expressions are false,  
your excuses too many.  
Value your energy. You too can become a Buddha.  
During this dream, stay silent,  
have not the slightest thought.  
Awake to know that there never were any words at all.

