

Chan 禪 Magazine

Summer 2009



Chan Meditation Center

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“When I was young, I respected old Buddhist teachers. I also felt sorry for them because they were not far from death. Now my turn to be pitied has come! Impermanence is painful when we cannot get what we seek or seek to hold on to what we have.”

*From Attaining the Way: A Guide
to the Practice of Chan Buddhism*
by Chan Master Sheng Yen
Shambhala, 2006

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From the Editor

“Did you read the article in the Times Magazine about the Zen master and the psychotherapist? What did you think?”

Evidently the article caused quite a stir, because I have been asked this question quite a lot in the three weeks since it appeared, both by those who know me to be the editor of a Buddhist journal and by complete strangers. I was asked this question by a student of mine who just finished his doctorate in psychotherapy, and who had given me my copy of *Psychotherapy and Buddhism: Toward an Integration*, by the psychotherapist of the article. I was also asked this question by a stockbroker at a tasting of biodynamic wines from Slovenia, who seemed greatly disappointed that a Zen master should have any need of a psychotherapist, and even though she was not herself a Zen practitioner, greatly offended that in the battle for the man’s happiness psychotherapy had evidently won.

For those of you who did not read about the Zen master and the psychotherapist (you can find the article by searching for “zen psychotherapy” at nytimes.com), here’s a summary: He’d become a monk 35 years before, having experienced *kensho* on his first *sesshin*, described as “floods of light, *samadhi* or oneness, ineffable joy,” and had received transmission in the Soto school. Now, after four failed marriages during decades of learning lessons like “the self is a malignant growth which is to be surgically removed,” and

“what you need to do is put aside all human feelings,” he was “frantic with anxiety,” convinced that “no one could see him.” Nearly a year into his therapy he had a breakthrough, a “tearful reunion” with the self he had evidently buried with his Zen practice, and he now says: “Without the therapy experience I might have died without being reunited with my life! And in that sense, without having truly lived.”

I am not disappointed, nor surprised, that a meditator might experience psychopathology; nor am I offended that in such a case psychotherapy might be a good idea. I am a little concerned though about the impression the story gives of Zen in America, and I am reminded to be grateful for the clarity and simplicity that my late teacher brought to his presentation of the “ineffable.”

Master Sheng Yen taught that there are three experiences of self: small self, great self, and no-self. Small self is the type that most of us experience most of the time. The universe is divided neatly into one subject and many objects, that which is me and all those things that are not me. The important thing about this teaching is that Shifu never treated the small self as an evil to be eradicated or an enemy to be opposed; on the contrary, he taught that a strong and healthy sense of the small self is essential to the self-challenging self-observation that is central to the path of practice.

Great self is a way of naming the unification of subject and object, self and other; it is called “great” because it is as if the small self had expanded to encompass the rest. It often involves the arising of great compassion, because the sense of propriety and care that we usually apply only to the small self—or to those to whom the small self is attached through love—is applied to all others, perhaps to all things. Great self is a well-known experience in most religions—it underpins Saint Francis’ relationship with the animals and Gandhi’s compassion for his enemies. What is important about this teaching is that Shifu was always clear that the experience of great self is NOT enlightenment, that though the sense of self might encompass all beings, it is still a sense of self. He didn’t denigrate the experience—he described it as useful, as profound, as potentially a sign of progress on the path. But he was clear, even strict, in teaching that all mental experiences in meditation—even the floods of light, the sense of oneness, the ineffable joy—are to be treated as illusions.

Shifu didn’t talk much about no-self; he didn’t fascinate his students with the paradoxes generated when one attempts to describe the indescribable. What he talked about was reducing self-centeredness, and how this could potentially, eventually result in the arising of wisdom, the purity of awareness without self-reference.

The Zen master in our story does, however, describe his experience of self-nature: “I felt as if something like an earthquake or implosion was about to happen...Everything around me looked exceedingly odd, as if the glue separating things had started to melt...By the time I got to my room I was weightless...Then the

earthquake or implosion occurred. There was an incredible explosion of light coming from inside and outside simultaneously, and everything disappeared into that light...there was no longer a here versus there, a this versus that...And despite the fact that I had no understanding whatever of what had happened (nor do I now), this experience changed my life completely.”

And this is my enlisting the words of Master Sheng Yen to answer him: “But the experiences of meditation, even at their most illuminating, mystical and profound, are not enlightenment. ‘Seeing the nature,’ or enlightenment, is a completely different thing. Seeing one’s nature is letting go of the mind, be it unified or not. There is no attachment whatsoever. Many people think that mystical experiences are the same as enlightenment. These experiences can come from meditation or religious experiences, but they are not enlightenment.”

And Master Sheng Yen also explicitly discouraged those of us he was training to teach the Dharma from engaging in the seductive practice of comparing and contrasting Buddhism with all those other disciplines—Daoism, physics, cognitive science—with which it has superficial similarities. All of us who pay attention to the human mind will inevitably notice some of the same things; all of us interested in ameliorating suffering will inevitably do some of the same things. But Buddhism and psychotherapy are not the same—they are very different methods, that rest on very different assumptions, for pursuing very different goals, and it is not at all clear that either the science of Buddhism or the art of psychotherapy is improved by conflating one with the other.

The Noble Eightfold Path

Part Four

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

In the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004 Master Sheng Yen gave several lectures at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York, on the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. This article is the last of four in which Master Sheng Yen discusses the Eightfold Path as a liberation process. The articles are part of Master Sheng Yen's forthcoming book on the 37 Aids to Enlightenment. The lectures were orally translated by Dr. Rebecca Li, transcribed by Sheila Sussman, and edited by Ernest Heau.

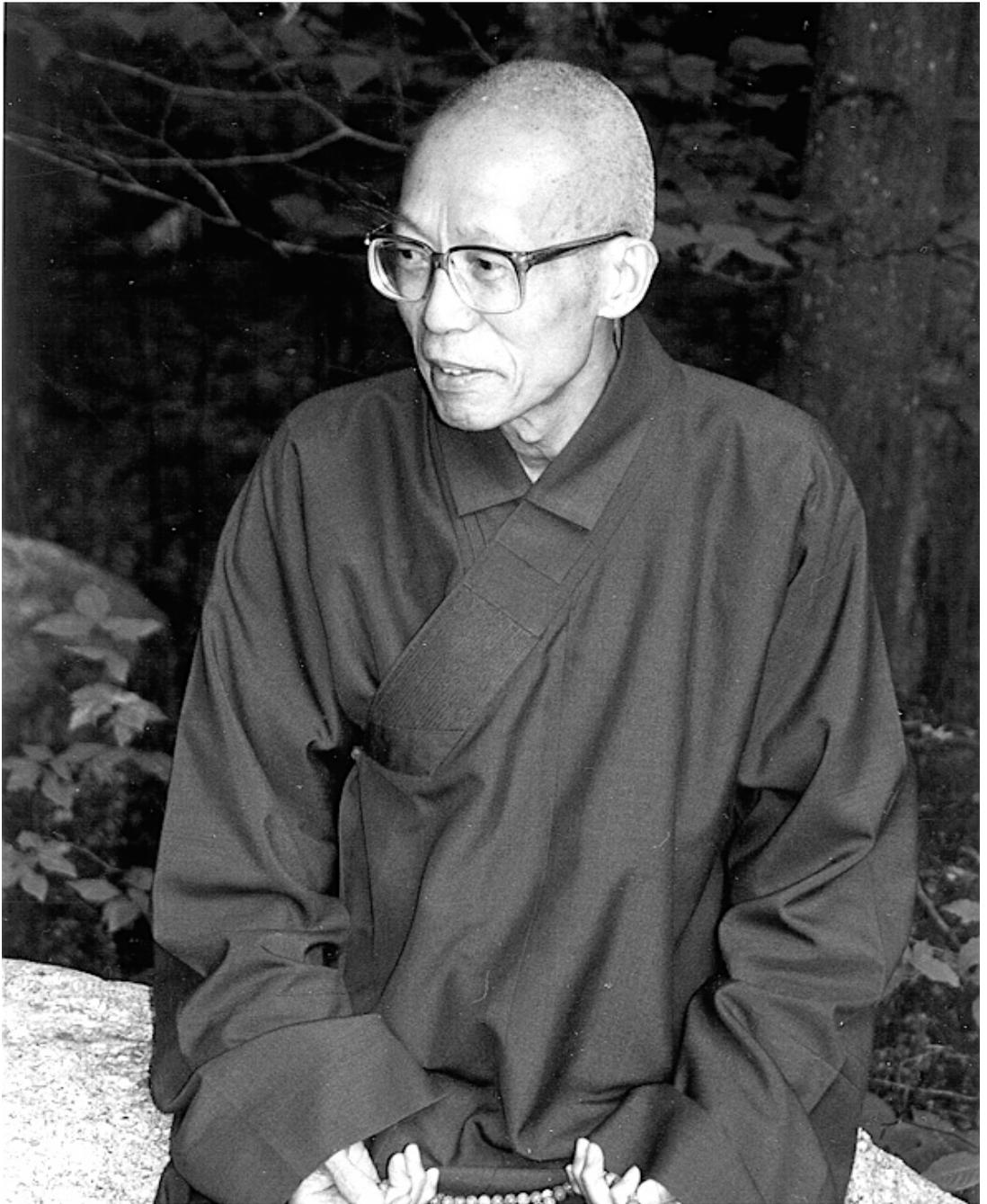
The complete Buddhist path can be seen as consisting of the three disciplines of precepts (morality), samadhi (meditation), and wisdom (bodhi or awakened mind). Since the Noble Eightfold Path is also a complete description of the Buddhist Path, what is the relationship between the threefold disciplines and the eightfold path? The answer is that when one practices the Noble Eightfold Path, one also practices the three disciplines: the first two Noble Paths, Right View and Right Intention make up the study of wisdom; Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood make up the study of morality; Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration comprise the study of samadhi. In this talk I will discuss how to practice samadhi in the context of the Mahayana bodhisattva path.

Right Effort

The sixth noble path is Right Effort, also called Right Diligence, or Right Discipline, or the Noble or True Dharma. This is the path

of practicing Buddhadharma with continuous dedication. Specifically, we mean diligent cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as I will explain later. The purpose is to achieve the path of liberation and give rise to wisdom. As we practice the four kinds of mindfulness, we rely on the Four Proper Exertions to maintain diligence and eliminate vexations. In fact, the only way to practice the Noble Eightfold Path ceaselessly and without regressing is through the Four Proper Exertions. This is called Right Effort and the best way to practice it is by establishing a foundation of practice in the first five of the noble paths — Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

You can say that the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment describe the whole of the practice of Buddhadharma in that they encompass the three disciplines of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. For example, Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood correspond to the upholding of precepts, whereas Right



View and Right Intention correspond to the principle of wisdom, especially Right View. It is through having Right View that one is able to attain deep concentration in Chan practice and give rise to further wisdom.

Even though Right Effort is the sixth path it encompasses all the others. This is because diligence is necessary to successfully cultivate any of the paths. So Right Effort should not be seen as a separate path; rather, it is the equal emphasis on all the three disciplines. So, Right Effort means avoiding any hindrances to upholding the precepts. Similarly, one avoids all the obstacles to cultivating deep concentration. One needs to depart from all the hindrances to attaining wisdom, in whatever form or shape. This is how to practice Right Effort. Just avoiding obstacles is a negative approach; one should also uphold the precepts, practice concentration, and cultivate wisdom. You may think, “I have to avoid all the obstacles and at the same time diligently cultivate the three disciplines! Can I do that?”

My answer is not to worry — with Right Effort, anyone can do it.

Right Mindfulness

Although the Noble Eightfold Path is just one part of the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment, the proper understanding is that it actually encompasses the whole set. In fact, cultivating any of the seven groups of the thirty-seven aids can help one depart from vexation and attain liberation. The difference is that the Noble Eightfold Path is the most complete path of all. Remember that the basic teaching of the Buddha is the Four Noble Truths, and the Fourth Noble Truth is the way out of

suffering through the Noble Eightfold Path. In turn, the first Noble Path is Right View, which one has when one understands the Four Noble Truths. In other words, the Noble Eightfold Path includes all the concepts as well as methods for regulating daily life, cultivating samadhi, and attaining wisdom.

The seventh Noble Path is Right Mindfulness and it refers to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of body, mindfulness of sensation, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of dharmas (phenomena). Buddhaharma teaches that suffering is caused by our holding wrong views about these four categories. Therefore the purpose of contemplating them is to be liberated from vexation. Seeing our body as pure is a wrong view because the body deteriorates, gets sick, and dies; viewing sensations as pleasurable is also erroneous because sensations also cause suffering; seeing the mind as the self is erroneous because it leads to self-attachment; and finally, viewing dharmas — the body, the mind, and the environment — as either belonging to or opposed to us also causes vexation. Because we hold these erroneous views we constantly experience vexation and suffering.

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

Contemplating the Body

To overcome our wrong views we should first contemplate the true nature of the body. When we are young the body is healthy, soft, and smells sweet and easy to love. However, as we age we are often not at ease with the body and can't seem to gain control of it. As we age or get sick, the body does not smell

so nice and we realize the body is not so pure anymore. I ask you, are you mostly satisfied with your body? Is it different now than before?

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

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

He said, "Yes."

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

He said, "But that's disgusting! It's like drinking dishwater."

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

I asked him if he ever kissed his girlfriend.

"Yes," he said, "of course."

I asked him, "So, is your girlfriend clean?"

He replied, "Of course my girlfriend is clean!"

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

He did not answer. He is willing to kiss his girlfriend but not willing to eat something that came out of her

mouth. This comes from an erroneous view as to what is pure and what is impure. If something is clean, isn't it clean in all situations? If it's dirty, isn't it dirty in all circumstances? Where does the discrimination come from? So when we practice mindfulness of the body, we are reminding ourselves that ultimately the body is not always pure, and we should not become too attached to it. Yes, we should take good care of the body and protect it. However, we should refrain from attaching to the idea

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that this body is always so great and wonderful. The body is sometimes pure, at other times not so pure. As we age, we experience more and more the impurity of the body. As I grow older, I increasingly experience the impurity of my body, that there are problems with it.

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

In Taiwan, our recent annual member's conference was attended by about 30,000 people. A guest remarked to me, "Shifu, you are so lucky to have 30,000 disciples!" One of my disciples heard that and said, "Well, actually Shifu has more than a million disciples." I said, "Well, my situation is not as great as it sounds. I just have a lot of people who are sharing me. There is a Chinese saying that a good horse will never lack riders. So I'm just in this situation where a lot of people use me as a tool for their practice."

When my master's master was in his seventies and still in very good health, I told him, "Grandmaster, I hope you live to be at least 120." He said, "Do I really owe that much to you folks?"

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

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

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

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

Contemplating Sensations

Most of the time, we are indifferent or at least neutral to the sensations we experience. At other times we react with pleasure or displeasure, happiness or unhappiness. Sensations we don't like make us uncomfortable but even pleasant experiences disappear quickly, and this too causes discomfort when we crave more. So, we should contemplate how we use the senses to experience the body and the world. For example, the sensations of pleasure and pain are actually very subjective and very relative. One person may say that

work is painful whereas idleness is pleasant. But for people striving to realize a vision, the harder they work the more energized they feel, and the greater the sense of accomplishment. Other people work hard and complain of fatigue and frustration: "What is the point of all this?" For someone like this being tired would be an unpleasant sensation.

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

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

Contemplating the Mind

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

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

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

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

Contemplating Dharmas

To truly realize that suffering originates in our own minds we need to contemplate the selflessness of dharmas. All dharmas are phenomena but we should distinguish between the material dharmas in the environment and the dharmas in the mind — thoughts, ideas, symbols, and feelings. Without the physical body the functions of the mind cannot manifest. The coming together of material dharmas (including the body) and mental dharmas (thoughts) results in the notion of a separate “self.” That self, coming together from constantly changing dharmas, must also be impermanent. Therefore, we can ask ourselves just who it is that is giving rise to suffering. If one’s mind is constantly changing and one’s body is also constantly changing, and if the self is the result of the coming together of constantly changing phenomena, then who am I? What is there in this mix that is “me?” That is one question one can investigate. If we can understand there is no enduring “I,” then it is possible to understand emptiness and realize wisdom.

There are two steps we can take to achieve this. First, instead of thinking of our bodies and minds as our selves, we can think of them as tools to help sentient beings accomplish liberation. At home, our bodies and minds can be used by everyone in the family; in the wider society, they can be shared by everyone. That way, there will remain no

idea of “this is me” and “this belongs to me.” The second step is to contemplate that all phenomena — body, mind, and environment — are constantly changing. There is nothing permanent there. Similarly, regarding the idea of a self that results from the confluence of body, mind, and environment, since these conditioning factors all have no inherent existence, there can also be no inherently existing self. If one can do this, one will be able to realize emptiness and attain wisdom. However, it is important to understand that one can’t just jump into wisdom and emptiness — one needs to start with understanding the impermanence of the self.

Right Concentration

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

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



Photo: Kaifen Hu

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

How do these samadhis relate to the ordinary world? Beings in the desire realm are attached to, and crave sensual pleasures. This desire extends to the quest for comfort, security, and possessions. As a result one attaches to and identifies with these desires and possessions. This typifies being in the realm of desire. In the realm of form, someone in samadhi is released from the burdens of body and environment and feels such joy and happiness that it is easy to become very attached to those feelings. This is also true when experiencing the samadhis of no-form. So, in the realm of desire one is attached to the pleasures of the sensual world, and in the realms of form and no-form one is attached to the bliss of samadhi. Because they all involve attachment and desires, all these states are called worldly samadhi.

I often remind students to adopt a joyful attitude during retreat. But on retreat you are meditating all day, not allowed to talk, the food is very simple, and the sleeping arrange-

ments not that good. Under these circumstances, how can one be joyful? People who have never been to retreat have difficulty understanding this. In fact, some think that people who go on retreats are weird. Interestingly, many retreat participants keep coming back; for them Chan retreat is vacation and they come with a joyful attitude. The enjoyment of peace and calm and the release from the burdens of daily life are the reasons they keep coming back.

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

As we have said, Buddhadharma consists of the three studies of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. However, in the Noble Eightfold Path, concentration is the ultimate path because it is that which leads to the deepest samadhi of all, the world-transcending samadhi of liberation. One who attaches to the worldly samadhis is still in the worldly realm. When one returns from the bliss of worldly samadhi, one is no different from any ordinary being with vexations and attachments. So one must understand that worldly samadhi is not the ultimate samadhi; one needs to transcend one's attachments to the pleasure of the material

world as well as to the bliss of worldly samadhi. When one is finally able to do so one can give rise to the wisdom without outflows, the wisdom that is without self. What is the wisdom without outflows? It is the wisdom in which one does not give rise to vexation and suffering. So long as one can continue to manifest this wisdom one is liberated.

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

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

Summation: Practicing the Wisdom of No-Self

For forty-five years after his enlightenment the Buddha traveled around India, teaching

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

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

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

That is what she did and, in a sense, had the power of samadhi.

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

As a teaching, the Noble Eightfold Path encompasses much of the Buddhadharma. In fact the Noble Eightfold Path *contains* the three disciplines. The Fourth Noble Truth tells us that the way out of suffering is through the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, one can also say that unless one practices the Noble Eightfold Path the Four Noble Truths have no meaning. As a teaching about how to depart from suffering, the Four Noble Truths also encompass the Twelve Links of Conditioned Arising, the *nidanas*, which are a description of samsaric suffering.

What are the *nidanas*? They are the twelve causal links that everyone experiences in each lifetime. Called the Twelve Links of Conditioned Arising, they explain how and why sentient beings transmigrate through uncountable lifetimes until they experience liberation. The Noble Eightfold Path is precisely the means for accomplishing liberation while

remaining fully engaged on the bodhisattva path of helping sentient beings. While it is basic Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path is also an essential practice in the Mahayana ideal.

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

If you do not entirely understand the teachings of the Noble Eightfold path, do not be too concerned. What is important is to remember that the Noble Eightfold Path is the wisdom that Shakyamuni Buddha bequeathed to all of us. Its purpose is to help human beings solve the two main problems in life, those of living and dying. In life we inevitably encounter problems and obstacles arising from our bodies, from our minds, from society, and from nature. The result is that we experience pain, suffering, and unhappiness. The Buddhadharma of the Noble Eightfold Path helps

us to deal with these difficulties by following the Middle Way. In this manner we will not give rise to as much vexation and suffering, and we will feel more at ease with life. We will have a better chance to experience true happiness and joy.

The Buddha's wisdom also helps us with the inevitability of death. Depending on one's merit and karma one may encounter few or many difficulties in life. But however much merit one is born with or accumulates no one will escape death. When we accept and follow the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path, we will not feel as terrified and helpless when we arrive at the final stage of our lives. We

will know that the Noble Eightfold Path will ultimately guide us towards liberation from vexation and suffering.

Notes:

1. The Four Proper Exertions are: to cease unwholesome behavior already arisen, to avoid giving rise to new unwholesome behavior, to continue wholesome behavior already arisen, and to give rise to new wholesome behavior.
2. The nidanas (also known as the Twelve Links of Conditioned Arising, as well as the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination) are: ignorance, action, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense faculties, contact, sensation, desire, clinging, becoming, birth, aging-and-dying. Together they form the causal change of transmigration from one lifetime to another.



Photo: Kaifen Hu



Photo: Kaifen Hu

another day bites the dust

one thousand and one
seagulls stand and sentry pace
on thin rippled ice
watching lined ducks cruise and bob
by in melt channels

two swans in ice pool
with four now half-white cygnets,
three moorhens, one coot

aging friends retreat
into dungeons of despair
suffering in pain
and whining the waiting game;
patience not easy

Bishop's Walk restored
with beautiful mosaic
commemorating
Valentine's Park history,
and most pleasant 'scape,
soon covered with graffiti

walking clockwise linked
to an anticlockwise ring
spells infinity

that lucky old sun
sinking resplendent in fire,
sky becomes magic;
loud treetop crows celebrate
momentary bliss

stumbling on through this
sense-squawking cacophony
where rests the crazed mind?

day dying shrilly;
'is there still time to get out
of the other gate?'

—frank crazy cloud

Presenting the Dharma Within Western Culture:

Finding New Expressions While Preserving Authenticity

by

Dr. Simon Child

Dr. Simon Child is secretary of the Western Chan Fellowship, the European lay Chan organization founded in 1997 by Chan Master Sheng Yen's first Western Dharma heir Dr. John Crook. He attended his first retreat with Master Sheng Yen in 1992, and received Dharma transmission in 2000. Dr. Child will lead a Western Zen Retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Ridge, NY in October of this year. The following is the text of a talk he gave at the Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, Queens in October, 2008.

Upon seeing the title of this talk, some readers may wonder why there is any question of changing the Dharma. But a moment's thought shows that some changes in presentation are required to convey the Dharma to a Western audience, like translation from Eastern languages into Western languages such as English. Translation alone, however, is not sufficient, and I'm going to talk about other considerations in presenting the Dharma in the West.

Translation is an interesting example. All agree that translation from Chinese is required, yet even this has difficulties:

- Nuances of meaning are lost in translation, especially when languages such as English and Chinese are structured so differently.

- Chanting loses its rhythm, and hence may lose the power of its sound, when it is translated.

Some tell me I should learn Chinese to really understand Shifu's talks, but realistically I and most other Westerners are not going to learn Chinese. And in any case a full translation requires changes other than just of language, e.g. cultural references may also need to be translated or explained.

Transmission of Dharma requires communication of Dharma, and I shall discuss how effective communication requires more than just a simple translation of language. This is an important topic not only for me as a teacher, but also for you who may need some explanation regarding different styles of teaching you

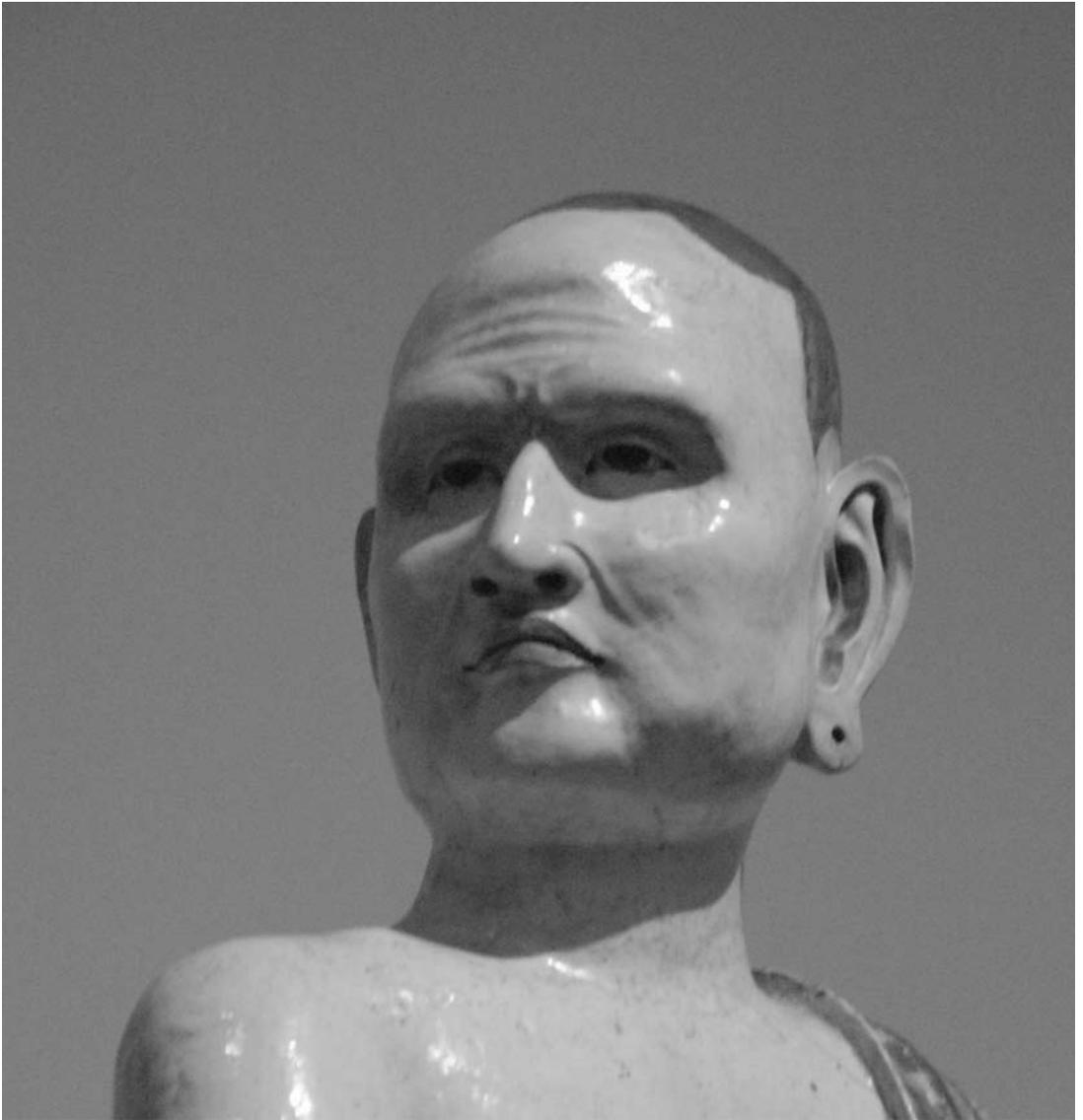


Photo: Kaifen Hu

may receive, and who may well yourselves be trying to communicate the Dharma to your friends and family.

Precedents for Changes

The Buddha initially had no means of presenting the Dharma. He invented methods as required: Formulating the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths; teaching various methods of meditation; using “tricks” of teaching such as the mustard seed parable (Gotami and the Mustard Seed) when he advised grieving mother Gotami to fetch a seed from a household that had not known death.

Chan masters of old adapted the teaching approach of the Buddha to suit their culture:

- The old Chinese Masters developed the Chinese temple, which was not a form in use at the time of the Buddha, with Buddha statues and Guan Yin statues that had not been used by the Buddha but that helped Chinese people.
 - Likewise the Buddha hadn't taught in Chinese, or chanted in Chinese, but this was helpful for Chinese people.
 - The Buddha didn't teach the method of reciting Buddha's name, but this was developed and helped Chinese people.
 - Did Buddha teach methods of Huatou or Gongan? I remember Shifu joking when teaching in Germany in 1998, “Who do these Chinese think they are, inventing new methods like Huatou and Gongan?!”
 - The teachings incorporated and adapted Daoist terminology and concepts, so as to be able to reach those who were familiar with these concepts from their upbringing.
- The old stories illustrate how masters were flexible in their teaching methods, depending on the needs and capacity of the individual they were teaching. The best known response to whether a dog has Buddha nature is Wu, but there are other Gongans where the response was yes. And in other Gongans sometimes Mind is said to be Buddha, but sometimes Mind is not Buddha. The teaching was adjusted to the needs of the individual student.

Shifu also is flexible to the needs of individuals. He says that the group instruction is general instruction for the group, and the individual instruction in interview is the specific instruction for the individual, tuned to the needs of that person.

Shifu has experimented and changed his teaching. His way of presenting both Huatou and Silent Illumination has changed over the years. He used to teach them side-by-side on the same retreat; more recently he teaches them separately. And the actual teaching of the method has changed — in the introduction to Shifu's new book *The Method of No-Method*, Guogu describes the changes Shifu has made in his approach to presenting Silent Illumination.

When Shifu gave Dharma Transmission to John Crook, John asked how he should teach in the West. Shifu replied, “I am Chinese, you are a Westerner, you find out!” Ever since then, John and I have been finding out, and have been testing and confirming some approaches to presenting Dharma to Westerners. Ever since the Buddha's teachings started to spread there has been development and change, in India, China and elsewhere, and it

is natural for this development to continue as Buddhism reaches the West.

Note that in all of the above I am not saying the essential message of the Dharma was changed, but that the methods of communication did change and this was appropriate. All of these are examples of skilful means. Effective communication needs not only translation of language but also adjustment of other aspects of presentation to the needs and understanding of the recipients.

Aspects That May Warrant Changes of Presentation

There are quite a few items here. Listening to them, you may find yourself saying that this or that doesn't need to be changed — you may consider that this potential barrier in communication is one that you can (or indeed have already) overcome by yourself and you don't need adjustments in the presentation. But remember that we are not trying to present the Dharma just to you here but to as many Westerners as can hear it. In fact, just by being here you show that the Dharma that you have been presented has caught your attention. Shifu's mission has been to bring the Dharma to the West, and he has not been afraid to be innovative in doing so. He has succeeded to the extent that Westerners attend and return to CMC and DDRC, and he has created Western Dharma heirs. But now it is the responsibility of those of us (including you) who have received the Dharma to continue Shifu's mission and spread it more widely to those Westerners who have so far not received it, and this will require continuing Shifu's work in developing expressions that are further tuned to the needs of the au-

dience. Those who do not currently attend CMC or DDRC may then find themselves more interested in attending.

A caveat. I shall be talking in generalizations, perhaps you could say stereotypes, in some of what I say, for example, when referring to differences between Western and Chinese personalities. Do not take offence at this. I am generalizing for the purpose of exploration and the idea here is to discover themes that may warrant further development, not to pick on individuals and comment on their particular characteristics.

Note that when I use the terms "Western," "Chinese" or "Asian" I am referring to a person's social background, e.g. where they were brought up, and their education and family circumstances, not to their racial origins. A person with Chinese parents may be a Western person with a Western personality and worldview if they were brought up and educated in the West.

When hearing what I say both Chinese and Westerners may say, "I am not like that." And that may well be true, because there is a great variety in people and of course characteristics overlap. But there are some points that apply more to most Westerners than to most Chinese, and vice versa, so for the purposes of exploration it is quite fair to generalize. Also, the Chinese here in the USA are at least partly Westernised due to living here and being exposed to Western culture, and the Westerners here in this room are perhaps partly Sinitised (and Sinophiles) owing to exposure to Chinese culture.

What I am presenting here is not just my own thoughts of how it might be. Besides there

being academic research to back up some of what I am saying, I am also grateful to those people, both Western and Chinese, who have openly and honestly shared their worldviews with me, e.g. in retreat interviews, which has educated me in the divergence between the Eastern and Western minds.

The generalizations do indeed warrant criticism and further investigation. For example, it is clear that not all Westerners are the same. Even within a small country like England there are clear differences between people brought up in different parts of the country – typically Northerners are more direct and blunt in their expression, and find tentative expressions irritating or perhaps even deceitful, whilst Southerners living just a hundred or so miles away are much more “polite,” express themselves more indirectly and can take offence at a blunt presentation. And there are differences between people from different parts of Europe, and of course in the different subpopulations in the USA. And of course not all Asian peoples are the same.

And again, there are other ways to look at this. Instead of considering East vs. West, as the world becomes more globalised having historically been an agrarian society, perhaps we need to consider how the modern educated mind is able to assimilate expressions that would not have been meaningful in past times. So the topic is broader than just Eastern and Western.

Why am I talking about the characteristics of peoples? Aren't we here to talk about how to express the Dharma? To match the communication to the audience we need to understand the characteristics of the audience.

Translation and Cultural Issues

Western Buddhists typically do not have a background understanding of Dharma from their educations at home and at school, as do the Chinese, who were probably brought up in Buddhist families and so have acquired Dharma concepts as part of their unquestioned worldview. So Westerners may bring more misunderstandings to their practice and usually need more education in basic Dharma.

Westerners do not always understand that when the term “mind” is used in Buddhist literature or by a teacher that it may include “heart” or feelings, since the Chinese word *xin* includes both these concepts in one word. This may lead them into misunderstanding that “mind” refers solely to processes of thinking and consciousness, and to overlook that the teachings are also addressing the emotional world of the practitioner. And a related issue is that the Chinese word for “sensation” includes “sensation of feeling/emotion” — again this can cause confusion when Westerners interpret this to be referring only to physical senses such as touch. For example, when taught about the “doubt sensation” in Huatou practice some think they are looking for a response in their physical senses.

Forms of expression, whether in words, or in physical objects such as statues, or in ceremonies, may not have resonance for people from a different culture who have been brought up with a different symbolism. So translation requires more than just using a dictionary. It may be more appropriate to tie in to the symbolism of the audience rather than trying to explain symbolism from another culture. E.g. many old stories have culturally based

imagery such as dragons and lotus and jade that need explaining to Westerners — why waste time explaining if we can use examples already known to them from their own upbringing? Just as Chan, in coming to China, incorporated features of Daoism, perhaps now in the West Chan can find a way to use Western cultural concepts, perhaps even to replace some of the familiar Daoist and other historical/cultural references.

Education and the Thinking Mind

I'm told that Chinese education is somewhat "authoritarian," with students learning facts from an authority figure that they are to assume are correct. Westerners are taught to question and evaluate for themselves, challenging the teacher if what they are told does not make sense. They are taught to use

thought and logic to approach problems and consider validity of proposals. It is a natural habit for them to respond in this way. This affects their response to Dharma instruction and their relationship to their teacher or teachers.

Hence, typically, Chinese are more willing than Westerners to accept authority figures, to put their own opinions and ideas down when hearing those of an authority, to be more humble about their own views. Westerners are, usually, willing to be proved wrong, but will not accept the word of a "guru" and will not assume they are wrong unless the case against their viewpoint is well argued. This may be arrogance, but more often it is simply the way they have been educated, to have an enquiring mind that respects facts and argument more than authority.



Photo: Kaifen Hu

As a consequence, Shifu says that he finds that Westerners are less likely to just do as they are instructed when explained a method of practice. They will want to know: how it works; what evidence there is for it; how to estimate progress; how long it will take to succeed; percentage success rates; and so on. If these concerns are brushed aside as irrelevant they may decide not to take up the practice, assuming it must be just superstition if there is no adequate theoretical or evidential basis for it.

Model of Self

In general, Asian peoples, not only the Chinese, have what psychologists sometimes refer to as an “embedded self.” The sense of self is embedded in the family and community, and they have much less sense of a self that is separate from others than do Westerners. And culturally it may be regarded as shameful, lacking in humility, to talk about or be concerned about one’s self, feelings, and emotions.

Meanwhile, Westerners have an “individual self.” They do have concern for their families, perhaps an “attachment” to family, but they also have a clear distinction in their minds between self and family. We Westerners naturally do talk about ourselves, which is a way to learn about ourselves as we discuss with friends, and is a way of repentance owning up to our errors and foolishness. It is also a way of compassion, giving another an ear to let them talk about themselves.

Consequent to these differences, people from different backgrounds may hear a very different message when they hear the doctrine of

no-self. Chinese may hear a message about putting down self as being a way to end the social errors of selfishness and hence have no reservation about it. But Westerners may hear a quite different message. Having identified with the individual self it may seem that no-self implies annihilation, and they sometimes interpret this quite literally as meaning they may disappear and no longer be able to relate to their partners or families. This needs explaining to Westerners, and it is not uncommon for me to have to reassure practitioners in retreat interview that they are in no danger of disappearing, but simply that it is their faulty understanding of self that is the only thing liable to disappear if they continue to practice.

So Chinese may experience this doctrine as something very positive and to be welcomed (putting down self is equated to putting down the shameful habit of selfishness), whereas Westerners often feel threatened by a misunderstanding (that this is about “getting rid” of a self that they actually find quite natural and useful). Two very different hearings of the same teaching, based on the differences of the upbringing of the hearer. Westerners still need to address selfishness, but this is to be distinguished from self — selfishness is to be put down, self is to be understood as empty. Selfishness may be got rid of, but self is not removed (it was always empty and is to be understood as empty).

Monasticism

Historically the main training methods evolved almost exclusively for a monastic model with lay people rarely engaging in intensive and ongoing training of the mind. We are now in a different situation in the West

(and perhaps also in the East) and need to adapt to this.

Nearly all Western practitioners are lay people. This means they usually have busy and committed lives and less opportunity for formal sitting practice, so must rely more on continuing practice away from retreat and off the cushion. The challenges of everyday life will lead to a more thorough training if they are given methods to use in their circumstances. Shifu is already doing important work with the lay population in Taiwan. Perhaps more Western people would be reached if this were presented with a Western voice and tuned specifically to Western cultural values.

Karma and Rebirth

Most Westerners do not accept the doctrine of past lives (though many do). In retreat interviews in the UK, Europe and the USA some practitioners raise this with me as a problem for them. A presentation and explanation of cause and effect needs to take account of this. Cause and effect can still be explained without needing to assume a literal acceptance of rebirth. The Buddha didn't ask us to believe his teachings, he asked us to test them for ourselves and see if we find them useful, and so we do not need to impose doctrines on practitioners who do not find them helpful or who may find them confusing or distracting.

Devotional Practice

Whilst many Westerners do engage in a devotional practice such as Pure Land practice, for many others this does not have any meaning beyond the functional aspect of being a concentration exercise — so again these teach-

ings need to be presented in a way that takes account of this to avoid confusing the audience.

Motivation to Practice

Typically Westerners are goal-orientated, seeking self-development, seeking Enlightenment, seeking relief from distress, so at least in the early stages of practice their practice is very self-centered. This is not necessarily so for a Chinese person who has been brought up in a Buddhist family and is simply naturally continuing the family tradition as a “habit” or cultural norm. These different motivations need different teaching approaches to engage such persons.

Possible Changes to Explore

As seen above, methods of practice and teaching have changed over the centuries, in response to the needs of practitioners and the circumstances of their culture, education, etc. This process of change needs to continue, following Shifu's lead as he has brought Chan to the West and innovated in doing so.

It is interesting to reflect that all of this past evolution of the methods of presenting the Dharma occurred in response to the needs of Asian practitioners, and mostly of monastic practitioners, which as seen above may not all be applicable to Westerners and lay practitioners, and perhaps may even be unhelpful in some cases (e.g. where Westerners misunderstand letting go of attachment to self as a denial or annihilation of self).

In some of the cases above, expressing the problem implies a possible response, e.g. the

use of Western cultural symbols instead of Eastern ones when expressing concepts to practitioners. But some other points need further consideration.

- Lay people need methods that can give effective training in shorter retreats — the option to attend prolonged training periods is usually simply not available to them because of domestic and work commitments. This isn't to say we need "fast-food" Dharma, but does mean that their experience of practice must give them some confidence to continue and return for subsequent retreats. We need to find ways to present the Dharma so that in a short retreat participants will understand and experience some benefits of practice. This will encourage practitioners to explore further and continue the practice both in their daily lives and returning for retreats.
- Lay people need special instruction in continuing practice away from retreat, and in making use of the challenges of lay life as training methods, e.g. relationship issues, and cultivation of mindfulness.
- For Westerners, methods that originate from another culture and don't accommodate their Western sense of self may lead to confusion and a suppression of self that is counterproductive. They need explanation or they may not apply methods properly or willingly.
- Both Chinese and Westerners experience confusion over concepts such as attachment, self, thinking, emptiness, acceptance, etc, but some of their misunderstandings are different, based in their different cultural backgrounds, and so different teachings and methods are re-

quired to help them past their individual confusion.

- Westerners are used to learning through interaction and to exploring their problems by discussion. We have found it helpful in retreat interviews to allow some time for discussion with participants of the issues arising in their minds — this can help them to let go of attachment to their concerns and to then settle more deeply into their practice.
- Westerners will tend to think, they have been brought up to rely on this, so we need to accommodate this tendency. Perhaps this is an aspect of gradual cultivation — thinking is not "It" but use can be made of it on the Path. Instead of teaching not to think, teach how to use thought to see the illusory nature of our experience. On our Western Zen Retreat we use a "communication exercise" to help practitioners use thought to exhaust thought — note that we do not teach that the answer is to be found in thought, but we show practitioners ways to use thought to go beyond thought, to use words to go beyond words. The communication exercise is a specially constructed verbal exercise that is not a conversation, and neither is it psychotherapy. Sometimes it is called "communication meditation" because it is actually a form of meditation, and it is introduced with careful and detailed instruction.

In presenting these matters I am exploring the reasons why we sometimes present the teachings differently from the traditional methods, and hopefully establishing the validity of doing so. In turn hopefully this will give you confidence to engage in a variety of

approaches to practice, and perhaps you can also give us some tips on additional problems or solutions for presenting Dharma in the West. Always we must be, and are, careful to preserve the heart of the practice, but for continuation to the next generation we must

also be careful to communicate the Dharma in a manner that is effective and is understood by the recipient. Can we continue Shifu's mission by continuing the development work that he has done, so as to reach out effectively to a wider audience of Westerners?



Photo: Kaifen Hu

Dharma Drum Retreat Center *Presents*
Chan Master Sheng Yen's Dharma Heirs



Chi Chern Fashi
7, 14-Day
Silent Illumination Retreat,
July 18 – Aug 1

Ordained by Master Zhu Mo in Penang, Malaysia, Chi Chern Fashi studied at the Fo Guang Buddhist College in Taiwan. He received transmission from Master Sheng Yen (Shifu) in 1986, becoming his first Dharma heir. Chi Chern Fashi is currently the principal of the Malaysian Buddhist Institute, and is one of the most respected meditation teachers in Malaysia and Singapore. In this retreat, he will lead you in the practice, starting with fundamental methods of calming the mind, leading up to Silent Illumination proper.



Simon Child
Western Zen Retreat,
Oct 9 – 14

Resident in UK, first encountered Chan as a medical student on retreat with John Crook, with whom he has continued training since 1981. His first retreat with Chan Master Sheng Yen was in 1992, and received Dharma transmission in 2000. He is secretary of Western Chan Fellowship, the European lay Chan organization, founded in 1997 by Dr John Crook. In this Western Zen Retreat, he will lead you through individual and paired exercises of introspection that help you to look into the question of "Who am I?"



Zarko Andricevic
10-Day Huatou Retreat,
Nov 27 – Dec 6

Zarko Andricevic has been practicing Buddhism in Croatia for almost thirty years, where he has been running the Dharmaaloka Budisticki Center, conducting intensive Chan retreats and lecturing on various aspects of Buddhist doctrine. He received transmission from Master Sheng Yen during retreat in June 2001. In this retreat, Zarko will lead practitioners in the use of huatou, where one investigates into the fundamental question of birth and death.



John Crook
Koan Retreat,
May 23 – 30

Resident of the UK, long-term practitioner of Chan, John Crook received Dharma transmission in 1993, and is the guiding teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship. John was Reader in Ethology in the Department of Psychology at Bristol University, a science now known as Evolutionary Psychology. In the Koan Retreat, John will lead you in the investigation of koan or huatou, using a methodology most suitable for western-educated minds.



Gilbert Gutierrez
9-Day
Silent Illumination Retreat,
Dec 26 – Jan 3, 2010

Gilbert Gutierrez has over thirty-nine years of meditation experience. In 2002, he received Dharma Transmission from Master Sheng Yen, making him the only western lineage holder currently residing in the United States. He regularly conducts retreats and lectures throughout North America. Gilbert teaches in a classical Chan style which inspires his students to investigate Chan through diligent practice. In this retreat, Gilbert will lead everyone in the practice of Silent Illumination, starting with the basics of relaxation, and lead into the method of no-method.



Guo Ru Fashi
10-Day Huatou Retreat,
June 19 – 28,

At the age of thirteen, Guo Ru Fashi became a monk under the guidance of Chan Master Sheng Yen. For over 20 years, has been teaching Buddhadharma and Chan practice extensively throughout Asia. In 2005, he received Dharma transmission from Shifu, thus taking on the role of one of the Head Trainers at Dharma Drum Mountain's Meditation Hall in Taiwan. For this retreat, Guo Ru Fashi will lead participants in the dynamic use of huatou, characteristic of Linji Chan.

For retreats and center's information: www.dharmadrumretreat.org • 1-845-744-8114

Western Zen Retreat

Led by Simon Child

A Dharma Heir of the late Chan Master Sheng Yen

October 9–14, 2009

A retreat specifically designed for Western-educated individuals, confronting the major paradox: *Who am I?* This huatou is investigated both in traditional manner in silent meditation, and also using a method of verbal inquiry - using words to go beyond words. Participants may gain clarity of mind and understanding of the nature of being and thereby enter the main gate of Chan.

This method can work well both for beginners and for experienced practitioners.

For more information and to register:

1-845-744-8114, www.dharmadrumretreat.org

ddrc@www.dharmadrumretreat.org

Meditation, Original lino print, 5x71/2", 1999, by Rikki Asher

10-day Huatou Retreat

Zarko Andricevic

A Dharma Heir of the late Chan Master Sheng Yen

Nov 27–Dec 6, 2009

Founder of the Buddhist Center in Zagreb, Croatia, in 1985 Zarko started the first Buddhist study and meditation group in Croatia which in time grew into the first Buddhist community there. In June 2001, he received Dharma transmission from Master Sheng Yen, thus becoming one of his five Dharma heirs in the West. In this retreat, Zarko will lead practitioners in Huatou, drawing from the teachings of the master.

This is an advanced retreat; participants are required to have previous intensive retreat experience before being accepted.

For more information and to register:

1-845-744-8114, www.dharmadrumretreat.org



The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Thousands Bid Farewell

More than 30,000 people gathered on February 15 to attend the interment of the ashes of Venerable Master Sheng Yen in the Memorial Garden of the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education. The ceremony marked the close of 12 days of funeral observances following the Master's death on February 3.

All activities during this period were in accordance with the will left by Master Sheng Yen, from the encoffining ceremony on February 6 to the final interment of the ashes. Ceremonies at Sangha centers in Taiwan and abroad included the taking of vows, chanting and recitation of the Buddha's name, and expressions of gratitude for the Master's benevolence, offered in solemn remembrance.

Keep Practicing

On March 14th, representatives of the DDM Sangha set out to visit practitioners in Taiwan and encourage everyone to keep practicing the teachings of Venerable Master Sheng Yen.

They made a point of acknowledging the long-standing contributions of so many volunteers and followers, led prayers for the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and exhorted

all present to practice the Master's teachings in order to allow them to go on flourishing.

The first stop was at Huilien in eastern Taiwan, where Venerable Guo Dong was able to appear via online video, giving thanks to all in attendance for striving to build a pure land on earth. He asked them all to make vows to promote orthodox Chinese Buddhism and DDM's teachings.

The next day Venerable Guo Dong and others visited Keelung in northern Taiwan, where Venerable Chang Ling shared his impressions of having cared for the Master, noting how he had admired his fearlessness as death approached. The gathering was full of laughter and high spirits.

Thai Master Visits DDM

On April 5, Venerable Master Ren De from Bangkok, accompanied by a group of students and lay practitioners, paid tribute to the memory of Venerable Master Sheng Yen at the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education.

Venerable Guo Dong, Abbot of DDM, cordially welcomed the group on behalf of the community and offered them a guided tour underscored by an extensive briefing on DDM.

Master Ren De was one of Master Sheng Yen's closest Dharma friends from abroad, and had visited him at Taipei's Nung Chan Monastery in 2000, and again in 2004, to share ideas on Sangha education. He recalled that Master Sheng Yen had invited him to visit DDM if he were to return at a later date. He also noted that his own students had chosen to further their study of Dharma in Taiwan now that Sangha education there had developed considerably.

A fluent Mandarin speaker and proficient Chinese calligrapher, Master Ren De is the Abbot of Pu Men Bao En Temple in Bangkok, and has been recognized by His Royal Highness King Adulyadej of Thailand as the most eminent Abbot in Thai Buddhism.

Environmental Protection

At the end of March, the 2nd World Buddhist Forum was convened at different venues in China and Taiwan. The theme of the Forum was, "A Harmonious World, A Synergy of Conditions".

During the five-day event, participants exchanged ideas on how best to preserve Buddhist music and the Tripitaka, which is sometimes looked upon as a kind of encyclopedia of Buddhist culture. They also discussed the relationship between Buddhism and science, public welfare, and environmentalism.

A delegation from DDM led by Venerable Hui Min and Venerable Guo Pin attended the opening of the conference in Wuxi, in China's Jiangsu Province.

After the opening ceremony, Venerable Guo Pin gave a speech on behalf of Venerable

Master Sheng Yen entitled "Begin from the Mind," written by the Master before he died. It touched upon what proved to be a recurring motif at the Forum, his abiding concern with "Protecting the Spiritual Environment" and "Building a Pure Land on Earth"

On March 31st a gathering was held at the De-gui Learning Center in Taipei devoted specifically to this theme, organized in part by the DDM Buddhist Foundation, and attended by some fifty guests, including Venerables and Buddhist scholars from all over the world.

In welcoming remarks, Venerable Guo Dong said that the idea of protecting the spiritual environment goes beyond ethnic, religious and national boundaries. He introduced Dharma Drum Mountain as a Buddhist organization engaged in uplifting humanity to build a pure land on earth through the practice of the Three Types of Education and the propagation of Six Ethics of the Mind in society. A lively discussion followed. Venerable Jing Ding, Abbess of Yuan Zhao Temple in Kaohsiung, pointed out that our spiritual world is susceptible to pollution like the earth, and also requires protection and restoration; but that purity of mind can also pervade the environment.

At closing ceremonies on April 1st in Taipei Stadium, Venerable Guo Dong led prayers for world peace and the spread of Buddhism.

Thousands Take Refuge

On April 19, the Nung Chan Monastery hosted a Refuge-taking Ceremony. Some 1500 people followed the directions of Venerable Guo Dong to take refuge in the Three Jewels and vow to uphold the five precepts.

“Mind at peace, life at peace — you are empowered,” the Abbot announced, exhorting the new practitioners to practice the power of goodness at any place and any time. Such power, he noted, can manifest in many ways, and may simply be a virtuous thought or kind words.

Partnership for Buddhist Education

On April 8, Venerable Hui Min, President of Dharma Drum Buddhist College, signed an Educational Partnership agreement with the President of Dongshan High School, Venerable Wu Yuan, to foster Buddhist studies and research. Nearly 200 students attended the signing ceremony.

The partnership will be based on five main areas:

- Coordinating curricula
- Collaborating on research and publishing
- Pooling resources
- Promoting exchanges
- Establishing Dongshan High School as a feeder school for DDM Buddhist College.

After the ceremony, Venerable Hui Min led participants to the seashore to clean up the beach as an exercise in caring for the environment.

Funds for Buddhist Scholars

The Chung Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies has announced a partnership with Columbia University to establish a Fund for Scholarly Publications on Chinese Buddhism. Taiwan's Ministry of Education has approved a grant of US\$250,000 for the fund, and more is expected.

According to the agreement, Columbia University will publish at least two Buddhist publications, which are to be supervised by Dr. Yu Chunfang, Professor of Chinese Buddhism at Columbia University. The Fund will support scholarly research to foster the understanding of Chinese Buddhism in the west.

Chinese New Year 2009

On Sunday, February 1st, 2009, the Dharma Drum Retreat Center hosted a celebration for the Chinese New Year of the Ox. An energetic group of volunteers, led by Agnes Wu, helped to organize the event, which was attended by more than 350 people, most of whom had never visited DDRC before, and knew nothing of Buddhism or Chinese culture. They crowded the Chan Hall to view demonstrations of traditional Chinese crafts including calligraphy, painting, tea meditation, opera face painting, and Chinese knotting. Chang Wen Fashi gave a demonstration of the 8-Form Moving Meditation and many of the attendees joined in, including some tiny toddlers, to the delight of all.





Activities then moved to the Dining Hall, where refreshments were served to accompany a full program of entertainment, including a powerful drumming performance from the DDMBA-NJ chapter, a traditional Lion Dance, an exhibition of martial arts forms (Taiji Fan and Double-Sword), and a performance of classical music played on traditional Chinese instruments by the Celadon Youth Group.

The Town Supervisor was on hand to receive DDRC's annual monetary gift to the Town of Shawangunk. He spoke of watching DDRC grow over the years, and expressed the town's appreciation of the center as a community member who "gives back." As the crowds walked back to the parking area many happy voices were heard discussing how much they'd enjoyed the event.

The Future

Retreats, classes and other upcoming events.

*To subscribe to our new e-bulletin of Chan Center activities,
please send an email to: chanmeditation@gmail.com*

At Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY

Phone: (845) 744-8114
E-mail: ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org
Website: www.dharmadrumretreat.org

*Schedule is subject to change. Please check
the website for updated and detailed infor-
mation.*

Retreats

Beginner's Mind Retreat with Guogu
Friday, July 3 – Sunday, July 5

One-Day Retreat
Saturday, July 11

**7, 14-Day Silent Illunimation Retreat
with Chi Chern Fashi**
Saturday, July 8 – Saturday, August 1

Beginner's Meditation, Chang Wen Fashi
Part One, Saturday, September 5
Part Two, Saturday September 12

One-Day Retreat
Saturday, September 19

Three-Day Retreat with Chang Wen Fashi
Friday, Sep 25 – Sunday, Sep 27

Regular Weekly Activities

Thursday Evening Meditation
7 – 9 pm; Sitting, walking, moving medita-
tion and discussion.

Sunday Service
9 – 11 am; Sitting, walking and moving
meditation; Dharma talk; chanting.

Summer Chan Camps

Three-Day College Chan Camp
Wednesday, Aug 12 – Saturday, Aug 15

Three-Day College Chan Retreat
Saturday, Aug 15 – Tuesday, Aug 18

(For college retreats please contact:
wemeditate@gmail.org)

Three-Day Family Chan Camp
Thursday, Aug 27 – Sunday, Aug 30

(For family camp contact:
ddmbaus@yahoo.com)

At Chan Meditation Center in Elmhurst, Queens, NY

Phone: (718) 592-6593
E-mail: ddmbaus@yahoo.com
Website: www.chancenter.org or
www.ddmba.org

Weekly Activities

Monday Night Chanting

7 – 9:15 pm (On the last Monday of each month there is recitation of the Eighty-eight Buddhas' names and repentance.)

Tuesday Night Sitting Group

7 – 9:45 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma discussions, recitation of the Heart Sutra.

Saturday Sitting Group

9 am – 3 pm
Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation

Sunday Open House

10 – 11 am: meditation
11 am – 12:30 pm: Dharma lectures
12:30 – 1 pm: lunch offerings
1 – 2 pm: vegetarian lunch
2 – 4 pm: Chanting

(Second Sunday of the month, chanting of the Great Compassion Dharani Sutra; last Sunday, renewal of the vows of the Bodhisattva Precepts.)

Classes

Beginners' Meditation

Part One, Saturday, July 18, 9:30 am – noon
Part Two, Saturday July 25, 9:30 am – noon

Intermediate Meditation

Saturday, August 1, 9:30 am – 3 pm.

One-Day Chan Retreat

Saturday, August 15

Beginners' Dharma Class

Part One, Friday, September 5
Part Two, Friday, September 12
Part Three, Friday, September 19
All classes 7 – 9 pm

Taijiquan with Instructor David Ngo

Thursdays, 7:30-9:00 pm, ongoing,
\$25 per month, \$80 for 16 classes.
First Thursday of the month is free for newcomers.

Special Events

One-Day Recitation of the Earth Store (Ksitigarbharaja) Bodhisattva's Fundamental Vows

Sunday, September 6, 9:30 am – 4 pm

“Zen & Inner Peace”

Chan Master Sheng Yen's weekly television program now on CTI Cable in NY, NJ and CT
Saturday, 12:30 – 1 pm (For local cable in your area please log on to chan1.org)

Chan Center Affiliates

Local organizations affiliated with the Chan Meditation Center and the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association provide a way to practice with and to learn from other Chan practitioners. Affiliates also provide information about Chan Center schedules and activities, and Dharma Drum publications. If you have questions about Chan, about practice, or about intensive Chan retreats, you may find useful information at an affiliate near you.

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<http://www.ddmba.org>

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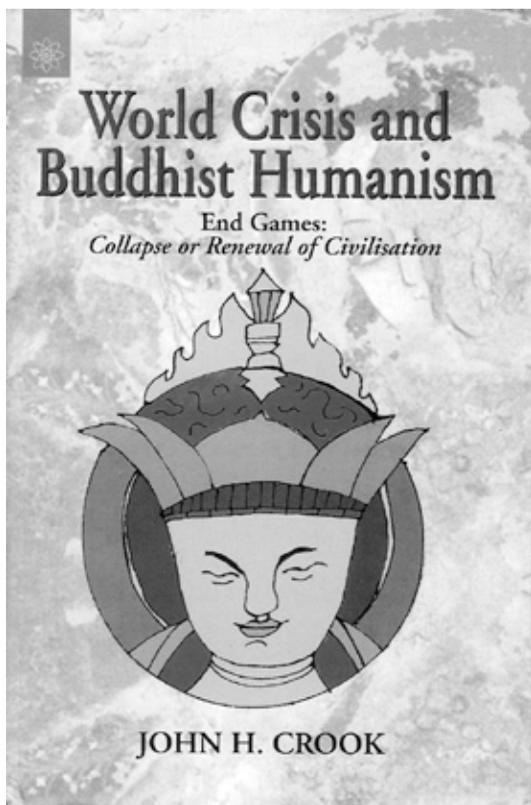
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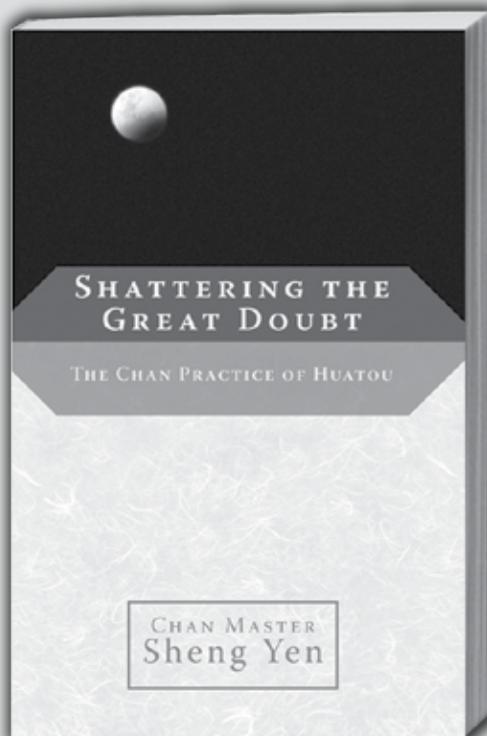
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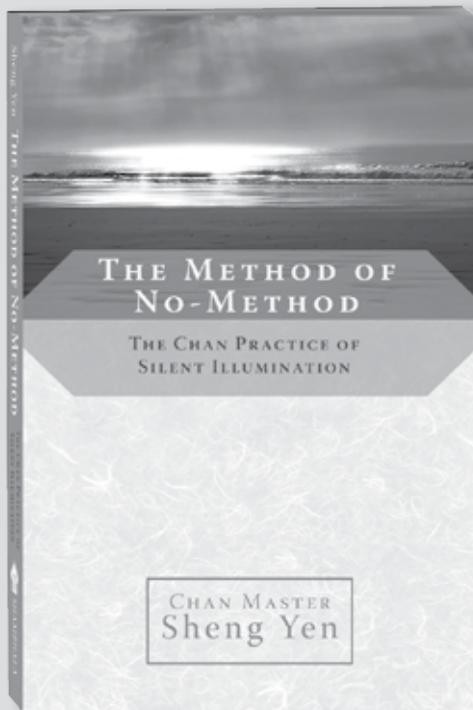
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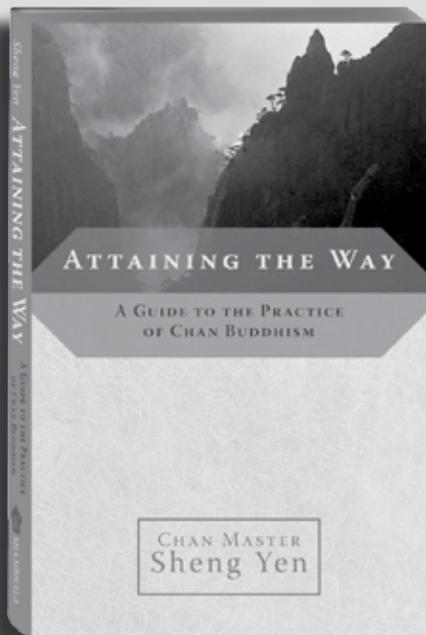


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