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CH'AN

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Artwork: see inside back cover

REVEREND JEN CHUN

This is the third time you come here to participate in this ceremony of the ending of the Ch'an class, the third Ch'an class. Ch'an is a major section of Buddhism and it has intricate relationships with all the other various sections of Buddhism. To put it simply, Ch'an has intimate relationships with every individual's life, living and death. The average person only knows about life, and is also limited to and surrounded by physical considerations; he is completely ignorant and does not consider the important problem of life and death. To practice Buddhism, the main thing is to create a forceful life, to enjoy the most meaningful life, to train and create the most valuable life and death. To practice Ch'an we at least have to recognize and understand these three major aspects, so that we may grasp the main values of Ch'an. To make a simple conclusion, that is, for you to come to this temple to learn to practice Ch'an, the main thing is to create a forceful, a resourceful new life, to enjoy, to make use of a very meaningful new living, to create a life and death that is most valuable. For you to come here to practice Ch'an a very important and basic thing is to make the determination to create a new life. I hope that all of you will be able to carry through these three aspects thoroughly.

12 April 1977

Temple Of Great Enlightenment

BUFFE LAFFEY RETREAT REPORT

age 23, photographer

This past May, eight members of our class along with Master Sheng-yen and Rev. Jih Chang held a week-long meditation retreat at Bodhi House on Long Island. A retreat of this kind is a very rare and special occasion. During this time a practitioner is removed from the worldly situation and devoted to practice through ten daily hours of meditations with continued concentration in the work and rest periods. With these conditions, under the guidance of a master, one may have an experience impossible to achieve at any other time.

No amount of Ch'an practice is worth the effort unless there is a master. Of all human relationships that of master and student is the most profound. Often when I faced Master Sheng-yen in our daily private interviews I was overcome with tears; his presence and the nature of our involvement moved me in a way I can't explain. Watching each one of us at every moment of the day he used intuitive wisdom to determine our individual needs. His questions were right to the point and never failed to reveal to me some crucial aspect of my practice. For example, around the second day I felt I was hopeless. I'd been practicing my method with all my strength but the thoughts never stopped filling my head. I thought I was merely going through the motions and getting nowhere. I went in to our interview and the Master asked me, "What were you feeling when we were walking today?" I answered, "There're no words for what I was feeling, I was just walking," and I realized this was true. The thoughts did not stop coming but I was not involved with them.

Of course I was greatly encouraged to continue. That evening as we sat I saw that no amount of shifting around would relieve the pain in my legs. If I wanted to continue the retreat I would just have to take it. So I began to concentrate on the pain instead of trying to avoid it. Suddenly, for just a few moments, there was nothing else in the world but pain. I hadn't overcome the pain, but I felt that I had discovered a great secret and was overjoyed. When I told the

Master about it he said that I had had a little taste of Ch'an, that pain was one way to get there.

After this I made much progress in my sitting because the pain was easier to deal with. However it never went entirely away, so I began to sit in the cross-legged position which was less painful than my usual half-lotus. My reasoning was that it was more important to concentrate on the method than to deal with the pain. I wasn't too sure about this, though, so in my next interview I told the Master. He cut the interview short and sent me away, saying only, "work harder". I felt bad, I thought he was disgusted and had given up on me. Later in the meditation hall I was agonizing in the half-lotus when he came up behind me and hissed, "more hard!" Then I was mad, "Alright," I thought, "I'll show ya who can sit." I was determined not to take my leg down for the rest of the week, not even if it twisted off at the knee. I sat hard, and of course my concentration improved. At the next interview he was as kind as ever. I realized that all my anger had been directed at myself. I did take my leg down when the pain got too bad, but I always started in the half-lotus.

My concentration continued to improve. For the first few days I had often thought how nice it would be to get back home when it was over. My mind would wander over all the things I'd like to do and I'd make plans. However as my concentration increased these things ceased to matter. I would look at my boyfriend, who was also on the retreat, and it was as if there had never been love between us. I didn't think anything would ever again have meaning unless I could achieve something through my practice.

During the late morning of the last day while I was sitting my heart started to pound. I'd never felt that before and thought I might be having a heart attack. But dying was just another stray thought and I stuck to my method. I could see the inside of my eyelids and hear the birds and the sounds of room. I felt my pulse increase and then abate. Still I stuck to the method. I was waiting for the sounds to cease and my body to fall away, I wanted to be floating in that golden void. But the sounds, my body, and the method were all still there.

The end of the retreat brought a peace and clarity of I mind far surpassing anything in my experience. The feeling

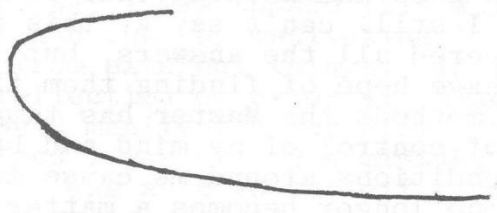
was one of absolute stillness; it seemed that there could never again be any anxiety, because the only thing in the world was the present moment and it was taking care of itself. The outcome of whatever was happening simply didn't matter, and yet it was infinitely amusing and interesting. Of course, coming down the highway into the complexity of daily life, this feeling quickly faded. It wasn't many days before I felt the old frustrations and depression, but with a difference. Not once since the retreat have I been caught up in a problem without being able to step outside it and see it for what it is. The practice is the reality, not the vexations, and the practice is always there.

During the time that I was at Bodhi House it seemed to me that I would never again have a problem in discipline. After this, I thought, sitting two hours at home would be a cinch; I'd be able to get up when I wanted to, and eat properly at the right times. Well, I was disappointed. The intensive week has not changed my deep-rooted habits. What has changed, however, is my determination in dealing with these habits. Now I know what I'm sitting for.

(Master Sheng-yen: You have merely experienced the taste of the mango, but now the mango is not inside your mouth. If you don't continue to practice hard, you'll even forget the taste. I hope that you'll treasure the little experience that you have had. From now on practice even harder.)

PETER DINK

END OF THIRD OR FOURTH



REPORTS: END OF THIRD CH'AN CLASS

FRANK DE MARIA

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

When I first came to the temple to meet Master I had many problems and questions: unanswered. I was not sure of the right course to follow. My life followed the patterns that most of ours normally do. I had troubled times, I had happy times, and there were times I wasn't sure of what life was even worth. I feared death, and life had no answers for me on how to eliminate my problems. It was through the teachings of the Master that I began to realize the unhappiness and discontent are everywhere, and that money, success and fame do not in the final analysis bring us any closer to real peace of mind. The Master, by way of his teachings, showed me that it is not the circumstance in which a person finds himself that determines his well-being, but rather his mastery over them. Whenever I had mounting problems the Master would direct me to sit in zazen and then I would come to realize that there is nothing that is good and nothing that is bad, only a misguided viewpoint. I still can't say at this point in my life that I have discovered all the answers, but for the first time in my life I have hope of finding them through Ch'an meditation. Using the methods the Master has taught me I have gained a fair amount of control of my mind and because of this the situations and conditions around me cause me less suffering and confusion. It no longer becomes a matter of solving a problem it becomes a matter of ceasing to arise problems in my mind. At first when I sat in zazen I looked for results in our meditation. However, the results are very clear in our daily life. Master Sheng-yen has pointed the way for me and he has shown me the road home when I was lost And now I know if I stay on that road its end will be my beginning.

PETER CHEMA

age 26, martial arts instructor, civil engineer

Today I will mention four realizations I have had which are due to my Ch'an training: That opinion and differentiation are the disease of the mind. Ch'an practice is the means of eliminating duality and returning to the one, the Tao. Ch'an must be practiced at every moment, as well as in sitting meditation. The more one talks, the further he strays from the truth.

(Master Sheng-yen: If you try to see the flowers through a layer of fog, you cannot see the flowers. But you have faith that flowers do exist on the other side of the fog. You need strong sunlight to get rid of the fog before you can see the flowers. You shouldn't think that you have seen shadows of the flowers.

Otherwise you will never see the flowers.)

PAUL KENNEDY

age 22, student of chinese language

When I first began to practice meditation my way of thinking was that I was tossed this way and that by external things, and that by meditating I would become strong and detached from external things. In this way my personality which was a reflection of external things would die off and my true self would manifest. Recently, particularly in the past week, I realized I was making a mistake in my calculations. In meditation I was able to cut off enough of my wandering thoughts to allow me to separate from myself to some extent. At this time I could see concretely that it was not external things which I was attached to, but myself which I was attached to. And this self in turn was attached to external things. All I could see before were thoughts, I was unable to see desire or self, so naturally I thought that these thoughts were stimulated by external things. It's like looking down at a tree from the sky. The leaves are comparable to thoughts, the branches to desire, and the trunk to the self. As long as all the

leaves are on the tree, you can't see the branches or the trunk. Tear off some of the leaves and you can see that they grow from the branches and the branches grow from the trunk. It is the same with the deluded mind: thoughts grow from desires and desires grow from the self. But this self only exists in thought. Weed out thought and desire is exposed. Weed out desire and the self is exposed. Although I split them into three, it is only necessary to remove one thing, that is selfish thought. What I call thoughts and desire and self are really all thoughts, yet they are different kinds of thoughts. For lack of a better way to describe it I would say that it is the weight of them which differs, not the quality. To conclude, I now feel I know where to place my effort when meditating. I know more precisely what it is that has to be weeded out. I am now able to make a more concentrated and continuous effort to weed out this self. Every moment has become an opportunity to cultivate the mind.

SAM LANGBERG

I have been told that I tend to think too much, and I am inclined to agree. I feel that I am now somewhat free of that preoccupation however. By what has been the simple expedient of watching my thoughts or watching for the arising of thought there has been an inner hush of a sort. Then everything seems different: sounds are clearer, more distinct fresher in some indescribable way, as are sights and tastes, Indeed all of the senses. This is an ongoing process which occurs at any time that I resort to this method, which is throughout a good deal of the day. What's more it does not entail having to sit or to assume any particular position. Using this approach I am really at a loss as to how to accurately describe what happens during its application, except to say that thought of the usual discursive sort seems to be arrested.

(Master Sheng-yen: Your main attention is on meditation and not on Ch'an, You still don't know what Ch'an is. Meditation is the fundamental of Ch'an. However if one stays at the level of meditation, one cannot enter Ch'an. Do you know what Ch'an is? Of course, not yet.)

RIKKI ASHER

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

I would like to say that a person can expose themselves to Ch'an meditation in two ways. One is the theory, the other is the practice. Actually there is a third way: The combination of the theory and the practice. In the past I've read books on Ch'an and meditation and though I've found that the books have been very interesting I always felt unfulfilled by the information I got from them. I found that the theoretical exposure just didn't satisfy me. I think that a clearer understanding of what Ch'an is and meditation can only be gotten through practice and learning the theory. It's kind of like, you could read books and books and books on what a bicycle is, and you could know every component of the bicycle, you could know about the maintenance of a bike, the necessity of balance involved in riding one. But never having gotten on a bicycle a person would have a totally different understanding of the bike when they're on and riding for the very first time. I feel that that's kind of an interpretation of what Ch'an and meditation are all about.

At this point for me Ch'an is like a person sitting in a dark room with the hall lit outside and the door of the room is closed, and someone passing opens the door just enough to let a crack of light in. For the person who's inside the room that little bit of light is a whole lot because there's not total darkness any more. So for me the door's been opened enough for me to see a glimpse of what it's all about. And Ch'an isn't a total mystery: it's a practice, it's a way of doing things, and as a result of practice I've gotten more peace of mind, and what I'm working on is maintaining that peace of mind throughout my day-to-day existence. In this way I plan to continue to practice and I think anyone interested in knowing anything about Ch'an or themselves would do a good thing to study with a good teacher. Master Sheng-yen is a dedicated teacher and an excellent example for his students.

(Master Sheng-yen: You have a lot of karmic obstructions but after merely fourteen weeks of practice, to have such ideas already is not easy. I hope that you will continue to work hard and overcome all obstructions. Among my students, you have good prospects.)



REVEREND JIH-CHANG

I am very delighted to attend this wonderful gathering, to have the opportunity to listen to the instructions given by Rev. Jen-chun and Master Sheng-yen, and to share with you the experience of Ch'an practice by each individual.

The Buddha's Dharma is profound and comprehensive, but the basic method to learn it is only by meditation. Although what you have so far practiced is just the beginning, it is, however, where the center of gravity is.

The modern practice of Ch'an has generally put too much emphasis on its theory, or too much bias on mere sitting practice. However, here in the Buddhist Association of the United States there is a unique feature of balanced training, as exemplified by Rev. Jen-chun, who is well versed in Buddha's teachings with a thorough understanding of Buddhism's ins and outs, but does not neglect meditation. He has a daily schedule to practice Ch'an. Also Master Sheng-yen, with his expertise in Buddhism, is teaching you Ch'an practice. He gives you the right guidance. Under such good leadership, there is no imperfection here.

I have also spent a great deal of time in practicing Ch'an and since I have been in intimate contact with Rev. Jen-chun and Master Sheng-yen, I have had the above feeling. I trust all of you, under such an environment and good tutorship, are sure to realize good results.

12 April 1977

Temple of Great Enlightenment

MASTER SHENG-YEN

I believe you all must be more tired today (after listening to more than three hours of reports) than after attending a four hour regular lesson. I hope that those who cannot continue to attend the classes of the next session because of work or other causes will keep on in their everyday life realization of the Ch'an spirit. To effectively carry out the Ch'an spirit, you must diligently practice Ch'an sitting. Remember, although you do not attend class, you must practice Ch'an everyday at a regular period of time in your daily life.

Those who cannot join the next sessions must remember that the mother cow is still here. Do not hesitate to come back when you are thirsty. The mother cow will never be miserly to offer you the Dharma milk. You may not need further care from the mother cow, if you are as strong as, or even stronger than, the mother cow! However, none of you so far has come to this stage.

12 April 1977

Temple of Great Enlightenment

POSTSCRIPT

On the afternoon of April 12, the students of the special Ch'an class gave their individual reports. They expressed their sincere gratitude to Rev. Min-chih and the other Reverends, also to Upasaka C. T. Shen and all other Board Members of the Buddhist Association of the United States. Just like members of an educated audience after they have enjoyed the performance of the actors on the stage, they did not forget that there were many people behind the scenes who contributed their effort to make their show a success.

After ten months of ploughing and watering our work here has developed from merely training a few assistants to being able to accept many general students. We have made smooth progress, and the most consoling fact is that all the students who underwent Ch'an training felt that the benefit derived from Ch'an meditation had a very positive effect on their lives.

We now have quite a few zealous students who in spite of the fact that they are ever-so-busy, have managed to take the time out to seriously sit in meditation and also to help us in our endeavor to spread Ch'an. Out of their own effort, money, and wisdom, they have started this indefinite periodical in English- Ch'an. Because of efforts like these, we believe the future of Ch'an in the U.S. will be far-reaching and unlimited.

This time the tape recording was handled by Mr. Henry K. C. Woo. Interpretation from English into Chinese and Chinese into English was done by Mr. Chuan-Pong Yu and Mr. Ming-Yee Wang. The transcription of the English version of the tape recordings was done by Ms. Buffe F. X. Laffey and Mr. Dan Wota. The transcription of the Chinese version was done by Mrs. Shin-Yuen Shum Wang.

Eighteen students gave reports however only eight of these reports have been included in this issue ; the reason being repetition of ideas from reports in the previous issue. Also, this issue's reports have commentary by Master Sheng-yen. In addition to the regular reports a retreat report and a lecture by Master Sheng-yen have been included.

Master Sheng-yen
22 April 1977

THE ADVANTAGES ONE MAY DERIVE FROM CH'AN MEDITATION

There are many problems of human existence which can never be solved, even in this age of scientific and technological advances. The earth's energy supplies are always diminishing, the human body is constantly decaying. Still, in the face of inevitable destruction we strive to improve the conditions of human life. But science alone is not the answer. The human mind and body can derive great strength from Ch'an meditation. In those most gifted, it works naturally and unconsciously. But even persons of the most ordinary talents, at any time, in any situation, can achieve power, serenity and understanding if they master the technique of meditation with the help of a Ch'an master. Even the first step of learning to meditate-- enduring the physical discomforts of sitting in a particular position for a long time-- teaches the beginner the discipline needed for transcending human frailty.

Professor of Psychology at Kyoto University, Dr. Sato Yukimasa, has listed some psychological effects of meditation: increase of patience and reasoning power; stabilization of emotion and mind; refinement of personality; and finally, attainment of enlightenment. H.U. Zaburo, M.D., cites physical conditions which can be relieved through meditation; namely, nervousness, insomnia, high blood pressure, etc. While psychological and bodily results are not the main concern of Ch'an meditation, these aspects may be interesting and persuasive for beginners. Later they will learn to focus on spiritual enlightenment as the supreme goal.

Much of human mental and physical energy is diverted from useful application through distractions, random thoughts and emotions. This disturbs the mind and upsets the balanced workings of the organs. When the workings of one's nervous system are out of balance, the effects are seen in the personality. Various aspects of the character become dominant. Only an unusually superior individual can channel these strong energies in positive ways. Most often the nervous imbalance produces negative personality traits. But the mental serenity which results from correct Ch'an meditation practices, promotes the proper functioning of all bodily systems. The

practice of meditation is greatly concerned with the process of breathing. Proper breath control induces the optimum functioning of the nervous and circulatory systems. When the flow of blood is stimulated through deep breathing, the regenerative capabilities of the body are enhanced. Thus many ailments can be corrected and longevity is promoted.

Human personality can be shaped by external training, like study of arts, religion, etc. But the personality can only be effectively perfected from the inside. Ch'an meditation imposes no external restraints on the character, but instead molds it through self-realization and self-liberation. When meditation is practiced properly and consistently with the instruction of a Ch'an master, one's true and perfect character is gradually revealed, and perfect enlightenment is brought nearer and nearer.

Master Rev. Dr. Chang Sheng-yen

If you are interested in learning Ch'an meditation please feel free to come to our temple. There is a five-week course for beginners in meditation which meets every Saturday morning at 9:00, and a ten-week intermediate course which meets every Saturday afternoon at 3:00. Also, there is an open meditation every Sunday afternoon following a Buddhist lecture at 1:30. The lecture is in Chinese with translation. Call us for directions.

ARTWORK

Cover: Rikki Asher, What is Wu?

Wu is one of the methods of meditation practiced in Ch'an. The meditator concentrates on this question: What is wu? What is wu? Wu is also the Chinese word meaning nothingness. The drawing shows the different paths we all come from that lead us to this point. We all live in different places, come from different religious backgrounds, had different thoughts about Ch'an yet we are all studying together now. You are too!

Page 7: Sam Langberg

The drawing is from a haiku by Matsuo Basho (1644-1694);

Old pond:
frog-jump-in
water-sound.

Page 13: Sam Langberg

An interpretation of Chopping Bamboo at the Moment of Enlightenment.

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