

Chan|禪|Magazine

Winter 2010



Chan Meditation Center
Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture
90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373

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“The practitioner in Silent Illumination is not concerned with meaning and therefore grasps at nothing. He may see a bird fly through the sky. He does not deny that the bird has flown...yet this is not a focus of his concern. The thing has happened; now it has passed by...but there is no trace of this in his mind, no grasping, no discarding. Rising from the cushion, he drinks a cup of tea, nothing remarkable; he just gets on with whatever needs to be done.”

From Illuminating Silence
by Chan Master Sheng Yen
Watkins, 2002

Chan Magazine

Volume 30, Number 1
Winter, 2010

Chan Magazine is published quarterly by the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, Chan Meditation Center, 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, NY 11373. The magazine is a non-profit venture; it accepts no advertising and is supported solely by contributions from members of the Chan Center and the readership. Donations to support the magazine and other Chan Center activities may be sent to the above address and will be gratefully appreciated. Please make checks payable to Chan Meditation Center; your donation is tax-deductible. For information about Chan Center activities please call (718) 592-6593. For Dharma Drum Publications please call (718) 592-0915. E-mail the Center at ddmbaus@yahoo.com, or the magazine at chanmagazine@gmail.com, or visit us online at: <http://www.chancenter.org>.

Founder/Teacher

Chan Master Ven. Dr. Sheng Yen

Editor-in-chief

David Berman

Associate Editor

Bufe Laffey

Coordinator

Virginia Tan

Photography

John Feng, Jerry Roach, Kaifen Hu, Carol Fong

Contributing editors

Ernie Heau, Kevin Mathewson, Virginia Tan, Wei Tan, Guogu

Contributors

Rikki Asher, Tina Kacandes, Rebecca Li, Mike Morical, Bruce Rickenbacker, Ayn Steele, Chang Ji Fashi, Chang Wen Fashi, Chang Jie

Administrator

Chang Hwa Fashi

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From the Editor

It was just a year ago that I had the good fortune to have Buffe Laffey agree to join the magazine as Associate Editor. Buffe's overqualified to assist me—she was one of Master Sheng Yen's first students in America, back in 1976, and was Chan Magazine's first editor. She is now one of the Chan Center's Dharma Teachers-in-Training, and for the past five years has been Retreat Coordinator at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY, where she leads the weekly sitting group. The following then is Buffe's report from the Dharma Drum Retreat Center.

This has been a noteworthy year at Dharma Drum Retreat Center. Since we lost our Shifu (teacher) in February, one might expect an atmosphere of desolation and loss. Instead, we are enjoying one of the most vibrant periods in the history of the place. More than one person has remarked on it—it is as if, having left the body, Shifu's Dharma spirit is manifesting itself in the heirs and students he left behind. Even the greenery up at Shawangunk was spectacularly lush, and the weather especially sweet, this year.

I overheard a conversation between a visitor to DDRC and a long-time Dharma Drum practitioner—the visitor was commenting on the air of stability and equanimity she observed at the center, which she found surprising in view of our recent loss. The old-timer responded, “Well, you know, our Shifu didn't raise no fools!” This is true. He prepared us very well for his passing. Although we all love him dearly and wished never to lose him, he grounded us in the understanding that the heart and wellspring of our community is the Dharma itself (which he embodied so perfectly).

With Shifu's passing, each of his Dharma heirs has had to reflect on the responsibility

of carrying his legacy forward. Judging from what we've heard at the retreats this year, the Dharma heirs are equal to the challenge. The Dharma Talks this year have been exceptionally clear and precise in presenting the core of the teachings. More than one participant has commented that these talks have been good enough to publish as books.

The retreat center itself seems to be ripening into its full potential. From the time it was purchased a little over a decade ago, the retreats were always well-attended, with often more than a hundred people filling the Chan Hall. However, only a small percentage of those attendees were Westerners, and this was a source of concern for Shifu. He had come to America, after all, to bring the Dharma to Westerners, and he had had many conversations with his senior students about how the percentage of Western attendance might be increased.

In 2005, for the first time, Shifu's health did not allow him to fly to New York to lead the winter retreat. When this announcement was made, nearly half the people who had registered for the retreat cancelled. There followed a sort of dwindling time for the center. Although major retreats continued to be offered

with very qualified leaders, the numbers in attendance were nothing like they had been. With Shifu confined to Taiwan, there was no permanent monastic presence at the center; at times the entire place was deserted except for the caretaker. One wondered whether the place would continue after Shifu was gone.

One needn't have worried. Even before Shifu's passing the center had begun to regain its vitality. A new set of monastics were sent from Taiwan to take up year-round residence, supported by a full-time staff. This constant presence has nurtured the Thursday Night Sitting

Group and Sunday Service into a healthy community of regular local practitioners, some of whom have gone on to attend retreats. New types of retreats have been developed to supplement the traditional intensive retreats: Jimmy Yu (Guogu) designed the Beginner's Mind retreat for people with no meditation experience; John Crook and Simon Child introduced the Western Zen retreats, designed for the individualistic and analytical Western mind; there are "Introductory" retreats of varying lengths, providing basic instruction and preparing practitioners for the more advanced intensive retreats.



Master Sheng Yen in 1999 flanked by his first graduating class of Western meditation instructors, left to right: Chan Magazine Editor David Berman, Nancy Bonardi, Lindley Hanlon, and Associate Editor Buffe Laffey.

On the recent Koan Retreat, John Crook had this to say: *"Here at Pine Bush you are extraordinarily fortunate, because actually, there are at least four kinds of retreats going on here that you can select from. There are of course the fundamental retreats, presumably virtually the same as Shifu taught them. Then you could work also with Chi Chern Fashi, whose emphasis is very, very much upon calming the mind, until you reach a kind of clear one-pointed state and only then do you allow the huatou to drop in, if I've understood his approach correctly. Then you have Guo Ru Fashi who is picking up a quite ancient way, rather a "rough" way, of doing retreats. Rather like old Mazu actually used to do. Then of course you have the retreat that we offer here in its two forms, the Western Zen Retreat and this one that you're on now [the Koan Retreat]. So you are very fortunate in Pine Bush. I don't think there are many places that offer such a variety of intensive retreats..."*

In addition to the teachers already named, retreats are also being led by Dharma heirs Guo Xing Fashi, Zarko Andricevic, and Gilbert Gutierrez. Each offers his own unique personal experiences and manner of teaching, so there is a wide range of "flavors" for practitioners to sample.

The different styles of retreats also allow for a coherent progression from beginner to advanced practice. We're seeing people come for the Beginner's Mind retreat, return for the Western Zen retreat, and then go on to attend the intensive retreats. The variety of styles can enrich the training of long-time

practitioners as well. In my personal experience, after years of training in the traditional style retreats, I derived great benefit from the Western Zen and Koan retreats. The Western-style communication exercises and personal koan investigation led to insights that cleared my mind of a tremendous amount of clutter, which in turn has allowed me to benefit more fully from the training of the traditional style retreats.

Another comment from John Crook: *"Of course our great loss in the last few months has been the loss of our Shifu. This has been a great tragedy for us. But tragedy is not quite the right word, because it also has to be an inspiration. All of us, whether we are beginners or advanced practitioners, need to take up where Shifu left off and press forward with the extraordinarily clear perception and understanding of the Dharma with which Shifu left us..."*

Retreat attendance is steadily increasing. There are many newcomers, the majority of them Westerners, many of whom never met Shifu, but who are energized by their retreat experience and come back for more. I see them all as they arrive for their retreats. I watch them settle as the days pass. They move ever more gently and their faces begin to shine. I hear their Sharing Talks at the end of the retreats. Each one goes away changed for the better. The Dharma is flourishing here. What Shifu set in motion is healthy and strong, and continues to grow.

– Buffe Laffey

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment

Part Two

by

Chan Master Sheng Yen

Between May, 1999 and November, 2003, on Sunday afternoons when he was in New York, Master Sheng Yen gave a series of lectures on the bodhipakshika (Sanskrit), literally, “things pertaining to bodhi,” also known as the “thirty-seven aids to enlightenment.” The 37 aids consist of seven groups of practices expounded by the Buddha. They are: the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Proper Exertions, the Four Steps to Magical Powers, the Five Roots, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, and the Eightfold Noble Path. This is the first of three lectures Master Sheng Yen gave on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. The remaining two lectures will be featured in subsequent issues of Chan Magazine. The lectures were translated concurrently by Dr. Rebecca Li, transcribed by Sheila Sussman, and edited by Ernest Heau. The entire series will be published as Things Pertaining to Bodhi.

Practicing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment

The early Pali scriptures, the agamas, speak of three aspects to the practice of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment: first are the conditions that should exist to begin the practice; second, how to practice the factors; and third, how to use the functions and merits gained from the practice. I will talk about four important conditions for practicing the Seven Factors: having virtuous roots, having faith in the Dharma, having the right view, and having diligence.

Virtuous Roots

The first important condition for practicing the Seven Factors is having virtuous roots. Having virtuous roots and encountering people with wisdom, you should then use every chance to learn Dharma and cultivate faith. This will give you the correct views to guide your conduct in accordance with the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. You also need the right wisdom to do as the Buddha taught, and you need to always protect the six senses. The best way to meet these conditions is to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The

teachings and methods of Buddhadharma are there to guide you but cultivation is your own responsibility. If you follow this principle you will find freedom from vexation, confusion, and struggle and you will eventually attain liberation.

Who among you does not have virtuous roots? You may think you lack virtuous roots because you have vexations. If that is so, why are you here today? Clearly, having virtuous roots gave you the desire and willingness to hear the Dharma and be near people with wisdom. Or, your being here may be due to causes and conditions. For example, by chance you hear on the radio a discussion on Buddhism that makes sense and you want to learn more. After looking into it, you end up at a place like this. Whether you are here by intention or causes and conditions, it was due to your virtuous roots. Either way brings you closer to the Dharma and people with wisdom.

Outside this Chan Center is a bus stop. This place is a little exotic looking, and sometimes people waiting for the bus are curious. They ring our bell; we invite them in, give them some literature and let them look around. We actually have had people come back to hear a lecture or participate in activities. Anyone here stumble into the Chan Center this way?

[Someone in the audience relates an experience.]

Do the people who come in here out of curiosity have virtuous roots? Yes, we can say they do. What are virtuous roots then? It has to do either with having connected with Buddhadharma in the past, or having an outlook that corresponds to what Buddhism teaches.

Hence, when their causes and conditions ripen, it is not too hard for them to connect with the Dharma.

What I call “people with wisdom” is often translated in the sutras as “learned friends.” These are people with whom we interact on a level that is beneficial in the Dharma sense, to either or both parties. Therefore those who want to practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment should have learned friends to help them. Should we remain friends with those who are not beneficial to us? Some feel that if they befriend someone who behaves unwholesomely, they can change them for the better. If that is so, there is no need to discriminate against them. This is a correct view but it really depends on what kind of person you are. If you can befriend unwholesome people without being affected yourself, that’s fine; otherwise, it can be a problem. You may intend to deliver sentient beings, but if you are not careful you can end up being delivered yourself, but to the wrong place. [Laughter]

You may want to be wary of friends who are not benevolent, but when such people are in need you should still help them. On the other hand you also need learned friends with whom you can learn Buddhadharma and cultivate wisdom and compassion. But what are wisdom and compassion? The answer is rather simple. When you give rise to vexation and suffering within yourself or through the environment, that is lacking wisdom; when you cause suffering to others, that is lacking compassion. Now turn that around: when you do not cause vexation and suffering to yourself, that is wisdom; when you do not cause vexation and suffering to others, that is compassion.



Faith in the Dharma

After you have learned something of the Dharma, you give rise to the pure faith that the teachings are useful for yourself and also for others. Then you also have to remind yourself often to use the teachings in your actions. This is the second important condition for practicing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

A disciple asked me to help him with his severe headaches. After he practiced meditation for a while, his headaches went away. After that his faith in Buddhадharma became rock-solid. He also served as my translator for twenty years. Another example is a minister who just wanted to learn meditation but not the Dharma. Later on he brought his wife along and after two meditation classes her insomnia was cured. After that she became a Buddhist. They had an interesting situation — a Christian minister with a Buddhist wife. These things happen not because I have special powers, but because people have the virtuous roots to encounter the Buddhадharma and receive its teachings. Actually, when people complain to me about their headaches, I tell them, well I have headaches too. [Laughter]

“WE NEED LEARNED FRIENDS WITH WHOM TO LEARN BUDDHADHARMA AND CULTIVATE WISDOM AND COMPASSION, BUT WHAT ARE WISDOM AND COMPASSION? THE ANSWER IS RATHER SIMPLE. WHEN YOU DO NOT CAUSE VEXATION AND SUFFERING TO YOURSELF, THAT IS WISDOM. WHEN YOU DO NOT CAUSE VEXATION AND SUFFERING TO OTHERS, THAT IS COMPASSION.”

Faith in the Dharma can come, first, when Buddhism makes sense to you, and second, when you can apply it to your daily life. Because it is logical you have faith in it, and because it is useful you will remember to use it. Here today, we have a couple that learned at the same time that they both had cancer, as if they had planned it. It was a very sad thing but these people also have very virtuous roots. Using the teachings of Dharma, I encouraged them to have

faith in themselves and to make vows. Eventually they recovered their health. They are also dedicated volunteers at the Chan Center. These people's virtuous roots allowed them to be close to learned friends, allowed them to practice the Dharma, and they have a pure faith in the teaching.

Right View

In describing the conditions for practicing the Seven Factors, the Hinayana scriptures say: “After one has

heard the wondrous Dharma, and one's body has the right posture, and one's mind has the right thought, one can then practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment step-by-step.”

“After one has heard the wondrous Dharma” refers to hearing any correct teaching of the Dharma, and thus acquiring the right view.

For example, even though I am not really lecturing on a particular sutra, what I am saying comes from the sutras. Therefore, any of the true teachings of the Buddha is “wondrous Dharma.” Thus, the third condition for practicing the Seven Factors is right view, or right wisdom. Right view means living with one’s thoughts always in accordance with Dharma; right wisdom means living without vexations. The ability to do so comes from constantly applying the methods to one’s daily life.

Diligence

If one has the right view, “one can then practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment step-by-step.” One proceeds step-by-step, starting with mindfulness, then to discrimination, moving on to the diligence, then joy-and-delight, to lightness-and-ease, then concentration (samadhi), and finally equanimity. This is diligence, the fourth condition for practicing the Seven Factors. This does not mean knowing any particular teaching, but knowing what one needs to do, or stop doing, in order to practice. With right view, one will give rise to the factors that have not yet arisen, and keep cultivating the factors that have already arisen. Right view gives rise to diligence and diligence means practicing the Four Proper Exertions.

Protecting the Six Sense Faculties

After having right view and right wisdom, one still needs to constantly protect the sense faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. To protect the senses means keeping them pure, not allowing them to fall into temptation or be defiled. Difficult as that may be, you need to constantly protect your six

senses. Like my eyeglasses — the only way I keep them free of dust and smudges is to constantly polish them.

A young American who has practiced with me for over ten years frequently comes on retreats. After each retreat he takes the five precepts together with the other participants. He told me that at the end of a retreat he could take the precepts sincerely and uphold them purely at that moment. However, a month or so afterwards he would begin to slip up. First one precept was broken and he would say to himself, “Well, I broke one precept already, so what the heck?” After that it became easier to break the others. Then he would feel guilty and go on retreat again, where he would take the precepts once more. The interesting thing is that every time he takes the precepts, it takes a longer time before he breaks a precept again.

He asked me, “What do I do when I break the precepts?” I told him, “You just need to repent.” He said, “But the precepts have been broken already.” I said, “Well, try to uphold them again.”

This is what is meant by constantly protecting one’s six senses — one needs to constantly uphold the precepts in order to keep the senses pure. It does not mean that taking the precepts will suddenly free you from ever erring again. The idea is that you try and when you fail, you repent and try again. When you are able to constantly protect your six senses, then you will realize the teaching in your internal and outward behaviors. And when you constantly protect your six senses, your behavior will be suitable for practice.

When you uphold the precepts, your actions and your speech will accord with the teachings, and as you cultivate the Seven Factors of Enlightenment your mind will accord with the Dharma. Without protecting the senses it would be very difficult to practice the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. One's mind will be confused and one's life in chaos. With a confused mind, you will be emotionally unstable, and with a chaotic life, you will have disharmony. Please make sure to protect your six senses when you embark on the practice of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. Doing this is necessary to deal with the five hindrances of greed, hatred, drowsiness, scattered mind, and doubt.

The Five Hindrances

The purpose of the Seven Factors is to cultivate the wisdom based on contemplation as well as the wisdom based on samadhi. Having gained the two kinds of wisdom, one uses them actively but one has to keep the five hindrances — greed, anger, drowsiness, restlessness, and doubt — from arising, and if they arise, to cut them off. Then one needs to stabilize one's mind in order to cultivate the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

To eliminate hindrances you must recognize them as soon as they arise. For example, greed may come from having favorable circumstances in one's life and craving for more. When one encounters unfavorable conditions one wants to reject them, giving rise to anger. If you are already tired when you start to practice, you may fall into drowsiness. Excitement and stimulation will result in scattered mind, making it difficult to stabilize the mind. Doubt comes from lack of confidence

in the teaching, or lack of confidence in one's ability to practice. These five hindrances, so named because they obstruct our practice, are all obstacles to generating wisdom and compassion.

When you have a very good sitting, when your mind is calm and your heart is joyful, don't you wish it would last longer? Do you ever give rise to such thoughts? Or you may think, "Ah, this feels so good, I want to go deeper." Do you have thoughts like this? Yes, of course you do. This is one of the hindrances. Which one?

Audience: Greed.

Sheng Yen: Yes, greed. Therefore, to practice the Seven Factors well, you will need not only learned friends but also the proper attitude. A young professor was attending retreat for the first time. During the first five days she suffered greatly. She kept saying to herself that the next day would be better, but every day her suffering actually increased. She told herself that if things did not get better by the fifth day, she was going to leave. She blamed herself for not having virtuous roots and not having the capacity to practice Chan. She decided that Chan was not for her and she stood up, getting ready to leave. At that moment she felt she had let me down, and that she had let down the Buddha. She felt embarrassed, so she bowed to the Buddha statue in the Chan Hall. In that moment all the physical discomforts that she had been experiencing vanished. She had been struggling and suffering so greatly for five days, and suddenly all those negative sensations were gone. She was so attached to her suffering that she could not let it go. The moment she gave up on that idea, her discomforts dropped away. She returned to her

cushion and sat very well for the rest of the retreat. The difference was that she no longer wished her suffering to be gone, and she no longer rejected the discomforts of sitting. She was then able to practice very well, and at the end, did not want to leave. In fact, she plans to become a nun.

This is what it means to eliminate the five hindrances. Among the five hindrances, greed and hatred are very difficult to overcome. So, if you want to experience letting go of suffering, I welcome you all to our seven-day, 14-day, and 49-day retreats. Or, go on retreat forever by becoming a monastic practitioner.

How to Practice the Seven Factors

In Hinayana Buddhism one practices the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to ultimately attain liberation. However, in the Mahayana, one also practices the Four Foundations to help deliver sentient beings. We recognize that the early teachings are the foundations of later Mahayana Buddhism. Starting out with the Hinayana practices, it will be easier to gain power. To skip the foundation methods and jump right into the Mahayana methods is impractical because we would be talking about methods that one's body and mind have not quite yet mastered. In fact, some people criticize Mahayana Buddhists for attempting to practice without first understanding the Hinayana foundations. They have a good point.

On a recent tour to China I visited several monasteries, one of them very old. I asked the people there: "Do you do practice Chan?" They said, "Yes." "What is your daily practice?" I asked. They replied that they sat for ten periods a day, each period being the time

for a stick of incense to burn down. Since a stick burns down in about an hour, that means they do sitting meditation all day. So I said, "Many of you must be enlightened already!" One of them said, "Not really, we are just training our legs."

I'm not saying that their practice is wrong. After all in the Caodong (Soto) sect of Chan, the main practice is "just sitting" (Jap. *shikantaza*). Sitting that long everyday for months on end is a real accomplishment, but the point is that practicing Chan is not just a matter of training the legs. One masters the Four Foundations of Mindfulness to always know what is happening in one's mind. Chan teaches that when we sit in meditation, we should always know where the body is and what it is doing, and that is true for the mind as well. You should be clearly aware of whatever thoughts arise in your mind, and whatever you are feeling. This actually is the cultivation of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

To practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, we begin by practicing each of them separately, after which we naturally practice them together. This is similar to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness where we first practice each foundation separately, and then we contemplate them together. At that point, when we contemplate one of the foundations we also contemplate the other three.

To use an analogy, in an extended family you have yourself, your spouse, your children, as well as the grandparents. When you think about taking care of your extended family, you think of them collectively. However, when you actually help them you address each person's particular needs. The problem is, when you take care of each person separately, inevitably

there are preferences and possibly discrimination. You may like some members of the family more than others, and so on. So taking care of the entire family at the same time reflects a higher level of ability. Similarly, being able to practice all seven factors simultaneously reflects a deeper level of practice than practicing them separately. In the beginning one starts with one factor and proceeds step-by-step to the others. When you practice that one factor, you will know clearly what you are practicing. Trying to cultivate all seven factors at the beginning, you will end up not practicing any of them well. It is important to have the proper attitude for practicing the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

Obstructions, Desires, and Vexations

To cultivate the seven factors well, we need to eliminate obstructions, put down desires, and cut off vexations. Removing obstructions means cutting off attachments to people, things, events, anything in one's life that are obstacles to practice. Putting down desires means departing from the five desires associated with the five senses, but also means not having ideas of attaining anything. Cutting off vexations means purifying oneself of the three poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance, and knowing what to do when they arise. After we are able to do all three, we can eventually move to the seventh factor, equanimity, letting go of the blissful states.

Eliminating obstructions, letting go of desires, and cutting off vexations are guidelines for daily life and difficult to do, but as conditions for practice they are essential. Before one is liberated it is impossible to have no vexations whatsoever. The important thing is that at least during the time that one is practicing, one tries not to give rise to any vexations.

In Islam when a child wants to marry, the parents want the spouse to also be a Muslim

or be willing to convert. One of my disciples wanted to marry a girl from a Muslim family. When he met with her parents, they told him that to marry their daughter he had to become a Muslim, as well as bring their children up as Muslims. Being Buddhist, this was a very difficult dilemma for him and he asked me for

advice. I told him that he had to decide what he really want more — a wife or the Buddhadharma.

“Oh, I want a wife,” he said.

I told him that Buddhism does not make its followers do this or that; if he had to choose between a wife and the Buddhadharma that was his decision to make. I said that if he was willing to give up Buddhism, it apparently meant that Buddhism was not that important to him. He asked me if he would be doing something wrong, like committing some kind of sin.

“CONTEMPLATING THE BODY...
THE MAIN POINT IS TO REALIZE
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MAKE UP THE BODY DO NOT
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OF THIS CONTEMPLATION IS TO
REALLY LOOK INTO THE QUES-
TION, ‘WHAT IS THE SELF?’”

I said, "If you don't want Buddhadharma anymore, why worry about your karma?" By speaking of his karma, I meant his not being able to hear the teachings of the Buddha if he left. Before leaving he said, "Shifu, don't be sad, I will always be a Buddhist in my heart and mind I will still be a Buddhist. My heart is forever yours, so you should be happy." And I was very happy to hear that.

This story speaks to the idea that in a dilemma, it is difficult to make a decision without being influenced by one's desires. However, if this person lives as a Muslim but has a Buddhist attitude that is pretty good. Getting married is not necessarily an obstacle to practice. Still, one needs to look at different situations carefully. Some of them can be obstacles, others not. Otherwise, one would have to go to the mountains and become a monastic in order to practice. That is not the case at all. Anyone can practice the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Noble Eightfold Path as well as the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. The Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment are taught to all practitioners, lay and monastic.

Mindfulness is the Key

Although mindfulness is the first factor of enlightenment, in another sense it is also the last because it regulates the other six factors. Under what conditions do we practice the other six factors? In general, when one is lethargic, then one practices the arousing factors: discrimination, diligence, and joy. On the other hand, when one is unsettled, one practices the calming factors: lightness-and-ease, samadhi, and equanimity. When you lack in-

terest in the practice, you should focus on the arousing factors, and when you are unsettled, you should practice the calming factors. With these two complementing approaches, one is constantly cultivating both wisdom and samadhi. The common link among all the factors is mindfulness, being aware of your own mental states and practicing the right method for your situation. Without mindfulness it would be impossible to practice the other factors. One of the sutras says that when one is continuously mindful of the internal body, the external body, and the internal-and-external body, then one is cultivating mindfulness. At that time one will then be able to cultivate the other factors.

We know that we have a heart, a liver, blood, tendons, etc., but we normally do not see or sense them except perhaps when we are not well. When we practice very well it is not that we can see our internal organs but that we are more aware of them. The external body consists of head, torso, and limbs that we experience through our sense organs. The internal-and-external body refers to the integrated inner and external body. It can be likened to a case where one can take care of the entire extended family at the same time. Similarly, here you are contemplating both the internal body and the sense organs and the four limbs, all of the entire body simultaneously.

Don't be concerned that contemplating both the internal and external body at the same time might be too demanding. The main point is to realize that all the elements that make up the body do not make a self. The purpose of this contemplation is to really look into the question, "What is the 'self'?"

Contemplating the body is intimately related to contemplating sensation because sensation can only be experienced with the body. For example, when you sense that something smells nice or bad, do you sense it with your internal or external body? Probably both are true.

Sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, and neither pleasant nor unpleasant. When we are mindful and aware of the quality of our sensations, we are contemplating sensations. We know whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Observing our reactions to sensations is contemplating the mind. The result of that mental reaction is a dharma, or mental object, and contemplating that is the fourth foundation of mindfulness. In our story about the young man who loved a Muslim girl, his desire for her became a dharma, a mental phenomenon. Or, if someone gives rise to a vow to leave home and become a monastic, that idea also becomes a dharma in that person's mind. Starting from the contemplation of the body to contemplating one's sensations, and then one's mental reactions to sensations, and then the dharmas arising from that, these four contemplations are the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. They are very critical for the cultivation of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

The philosopher Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am." His idea was that the ability to think was proof of the existence of the self. In Buddhism one looks at the self as made up of four elements, the first of which is the body. The second element of self is the sensations that the body experiences. The mental reactions to these sensations are the third element of the self. The dharmas, or ideas and concepts arising from one's mental re-

actions, make up the fourth element. If you can see clearly that what we call the "self" is really made up of these four elements, none of which have true selfhood, then you will be able to live with fewer vexations. If you are deluded or unclear about this, you will experience more vexations. That is why it is important to contemplate these four elements of body, sensations, mind, and dharmas.



**Brush and Ink Painting by
Shunso Shoji (1750-1835)**

in Japan too
devils were painted
as having horns on their
heads;
seems a universal belief,
though this one sits
practicing the dharma,
also doing his best,
but the devils on top
of the heap of this world
are not so easy to spot

frank crazy cloud
Friday 13th, March, '09

On the Use of Harsh Methods

by

Venerable Guo Ru

In June of this year Venerable Guo Ru, a Dharma Heir of Chan Master Sheng Yen, led a 10-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat, his first retreat in the US. This is an excerpt from one of the Dharma Talks on that retreat.

Good evening everyone. Today in an interview a gentleman pointed out that, from a Westerners' perspective, my treatment of women could perhaps be a bit more compassionate. On the first or second day, a young woman was asked a testing question, and for her response she received a blow from the incense stick, and she cried. Again this afternoon a couple of the women cried.

This man was concerned that the women receiving this type of teaching are not able to withstand it, and may perhaps lose the motivation to come back on a retreat next time. He works in a school, dealing with children or young adults who have been abused. He was concerned on my behalf, that perhaps this approach might not be appropriate for certain people, such as these women on the retreat. I feel very grateful for his suggestion, because I sense his sincerity and that he is thinking on my behalf.

Of course, I gave him an explanation about this particular approach and method and its effect. Still, this is my first time leading an intensive Chan retreat in the West, and cer-

tainly there are areas for me to learn and to improve. These are precisely the opportunities for which I am very thankful. I will share with all of you the explanation I gave to him.

In intense retreat situations, when practitioners apply themselves to the method of practice, they can reach a state where the sense of discrimination between right and wrong, self and others, slowly begins to diminish. When these kinds of distinctions start to fade away, and the practitioner receives scolding from the teacher, or is hit with the incense stick, they will not give rise to such thoughts as "Have I done something wrong?", "What is the fault here?", "Why is he punishing me?" or "Why am I receiving blows?" These ordinary ways of thinking actually cannot arise in that state of mind. Instead, what the practitioner feels is the expectation of the teacher, who is presenting them, confronting them, with a dilemma or a question. They sense a tremendous presence and power from the teacher, a sense of immediacy. Very often after receiving a scolding, after being hit, they actually will advance and go deeper in the prac-



tice. If not, they will certainly generate a very powerful sense of urgency to practice and use the method. Usually practitioners, at least the ones that I scold and I hit, do not have this kind of discriminating mind that would ask, "Have I done something wrong?" When practitioners are in a certain state of mind, then such distinctions actually do not arise.

But from an observers' perspective, if the observer has not reached this stage where discrimination between self and others, right and wrong, has diminished, then what they see are these distinctions of right and wrong; a person hitting, a person receiving hitting, and on top of that they will perhaps give their own interpretations.

Many of the people here, including the women, have already done retreats with me in Taiwan. That includes the Westerners. They have actually flown to Taiwan and joined my retreats there. They have been scolded and hit. One indication that they do not have a sense of being punished, or somehow feel worse about the practice, is that they keep coming back. Even within this retreat—if they get scolded in interview, they come back for another interview. They come back, not to complain, but for further instructions because they sense this urgency to practice, and they actually sense the compassion of the teacher.

I remember when I was younger on retreats led by Shifu—he used to do the same thing. During retreat people would be sitting and, one by one, he would present them with something and ask, "What is this?" It didn't matter what they answered, they would get hit with the incense stick, and those were the days when Shifu was a lot stronger.

So, I remember sitting in retreats, early on in my practice. Every time Shifu did that, going

down the row of sitters one by one, I would go over the scenario in my mind. "Okay, what's the right answer, what's the right answer? Maybe I should say this . . ." But then, everyone before me already said the answer that I had planned to say. So, by the time he got to me, I actually had no idea how to answer because everyone else had exhausted all the answers. I used to get so tensed up, so nervous. The level of anxiety would have risen so much by the time I heard his footsteps in front of me and he actually stopped. That kind of pressure—I already sensed his presence, his kind of sharp piercing—without even looking I could sense that piercing pressure coming down from his eyes. The anxiety inside was such, by the time I looked up it was as if I would just faint from his gaze. And of course, I would receive his gift of the incense stick.

But one time, on one retreat, I was completely absorbed in the *huatou*. The sense of great doubt had reached almost to the level, not quite, but almost to the level of oneness. In Chinese we say that the practice has become one single sheet of continuity. Nothing pierces through, no leakages, no gaps. So even prior to becoming that state, not even in that state yet, when he walked in front of me I had no fear whatsoever. That time he was dangling a flower in front of everyone, testing one by one, by one, by one. The way he asked everyone was, "You don't call it a flower; you don't call it not a flower, but you have to speak". He stood in front of me, and dangling the flower said, "What is this?" In that state there was no mouth to answer. I had no mouth. Unable to speak, all I could do was look at that flower.

When I saw that flower, unable to say a single word, Shifu saw me and said "uhmm" and used his foot to kick me. Of course, Shifu is

tall; I am short; shorter even when I sit down. No need to lift his foot too high, just kick and here is this ball just rolling off the back of the cushion. I fell on my back. All I could do was, I got up and I looked at the flower. Shifu left and continued his business asking students what it was. In that state no discrimination arose. No fear arose. No concepts, words, language arose. I fell down; no experience of pain. I got up and I looked at the flower. And that was it. It passed and left no trace.

Afterwards however, I was extremely grateful to Shifu. I even felt that I had wasted his time to lift his bony leg to kick me. If he had kicked me hard enough that I could actually spit out some words, then I wouldn't have wasted his time. Such a grandmotherly heart, such caring for each and every one of his students—hoping that they would understand and come out of their shells. At that time it was really a pity that I couldn't come out of the shell to give him an answer. But I felt a tremendous amount of gratitude, and I shall feel this for the rest of my life without end. For I knew, and I know now, that that is Shifu's compassion. That is his teaching. He has exhausted his life teaching his students, for the sake of the students. So this was my particular experience, and I thought I might share this with all of you.

When a person has not experienced the state of unified mind, inevitably they will make distinctions and judgments and comparisons. But when a person is actually in the state of unified mind, then they themselves will not make such distinctions. But inevitably, of course, in a retreat not everyone is in that state. So observers may be shocked or surprised and think that some things are unreasonable.

Even sharing these experiences with non-retreatants after the retreat can be a little bit tricky. For example, those of you who were in this state of mind and received such teachings—you may have the intention to share that experience with someone you know. Tell them that you have walked out from this state and received benefit and so on and so forth. But when the person has not experienced this and they don't really know what is going on, what they hear is actually quite scary.

They may have originally had the intention of coming on retreat, but after hearing this they may run for their lives thinking that this is not Chan practice. That this is some kind of intensive training for some kind of, I don't know, military training or boot camp. They actually may give rise to negative states about practice. So after the retreat you must be careful how you share such secret teachings from this retreat. You can of course, among yourselves ask, "How did you feel after being hit?" or, "How did you feel?" For people that haven't been on retreat, a bit of caution is needed.

Let's summarize. In terms of hitting, there are different types of hitting that serve different functions. Only a limited few have a sort of punitive purpose. For example, a person is drowsy and is struck with the incense stick. That's kind of like saying, "Hey, get with it! Use the method!" Another type is when a person is actually doing well (or so they think). They are going on, using the method, using the method, seemingly nothing wrong. But the person is attached to this pleasant quietude, and not giving rise to the doubt sensation. Or maybe the doubt sensation is present but only weak. So, the incense stick will be applied. So, these examples show two functions. One is a kind of urging on, a kind of

inspirational use. On the other hand, there is a kind of punitive function, like, "Don't get stuck there."

For the first type, if you're hit or you hear someone else being hit because of being drowsy, just by hearing the crisp sound of the incense stick you will be suddenly alerted to the practice and you can focus more. The other function of the incense stick is definitely a helpful one, whether you are in a not so good state, or you're in a very good state. When the incense stick hits you, or you hear someone else being hit, you will be pushed to the next level of practice. All the remaining discursive and subtle thoughts suddenly in that instant vanish.

For a person who is able to use the method according to different circumstances, different states one encounters, when being hit or hearing the sounds of someone else being hit, the crisp clap of the incense board clarifies their mind. If it's a good practitioner, they will in that immediate crisp clarity generate the doubt sensation. That instant of giving rise to the doubt sensation has an exceptional function because in that split moment, one is free from attachment to body and mind. Just suddenly nothing is there. In that vacuity, if one gives rise to this doubt then the profundity and the realism and the clarity of the doubt sensation becomes ever more present.

Ordinarily, it takes a long time to reach that state of clarity relying on one's own effort.

How long? A person has to go through the process of unification, becoming free from scatteredness. From unification they must give rise to the doubt sensation. The doubt sensation must then become the great mass of doubt. After that, if the mass of doubt has not exploded, when one comes out of the mass of doubt one is actually using the method with this kind of mindless state. Not the enlightened no-mind state but a state where body and mind no longer exist. In that instant, it

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is actually the same, or very similar. These two states are very similar. They are in a kind of perfect accordance with one another. So a true practitioner can really use this instant of clarity, free from sense of body and mind and not caught up with fear and pain and this and that. Then you have actually saved

yourself a long process. You can really derive power from the doubt sensation, and you can have an opportunity to understand the nature of mind.

So this is a particular strategy of masters in the Chan tradition, and it is unique. In that instant of clarity, generate the doubt sensation with no body, no mind, no discrimination. That sudden doubt allows one to see the self-nature. This particular strategy is especially used in the Linji tradition although the other tradition uses it, too. But especially in the Linji tradition, and especially in the Linji tradition of Dahui Zonggao, Chan Master Dahui. How else do you think he was able to

bring 70 to 80 people to reach self-nature in one night? Do you think he had to wait for everyone to pick up the huatou, recite the huatou, ask the huatou, and then investigate the huatou? No, the way that he did it was to use tremendous amounts of pressure, and these kinds of explosive expedient devices.

There are two specific types. One is the incense stick. The other is the sharp words of the Chan masters. For example, tests and challenges. So, if practitioners are able, if they are old hands at practice, and they know how to practice, then in that instant is where they save power. They save all those stages, and suddenly perceive their self-nature in that clarity of being pressured, reaching that point of suddenly giving rise to that doubt sensation. In that moment, because of the doubt of not-knowing, they can cast away body and mind a step further—not falling into the state of casting off body and mind, which means the characteristics, the form, the appearance, being stuck in the state of body and mind, or the lack of body and mind. Then in that moment self-nature is perfectly revealed.

Thus, when I ask you questions, raising a gong'an and pressuring you to answer, the real point is not getting an answer out of you, the real point is the same exact thing as the incense stick. So, as soon as you attempt to give an answer, as soon as the mind starts to turn, to give rise to answers, it is already off the mark. It's wrong. The point is exactly the same thing as the incense stick. In that moment of not-knowing, you must demonstrate, or rather naturally use that moment to allow self-nature to reveal itself to you. Allow the answer to flow naturally from your heart.

So even if your answer is correct, as soon as your mind moves and you start to give an an-

swer, it will be wrong. Why? Because when the mind moves in that instant what will flow out will be either one of two things. Sometimes things you have learned just flow out. Or, it's something that has been processed through your thinking mind. So of course, even if you give a perfect answer, by the book, you will receive the blow with the incense stick.

The most important purpose is in that pressure. Whether through the incense stick or the verbal challenges, pressure to completely shatter through and through your attachments to the body and mind. These things must be cast away.

Can you understand now, what's the purpose of these devices?

Participant: I just want to say that I think it is great that you are having this kind of discussion. I assume but I don't know since I haven't been to Taiwan, but I assume in Taiwan you probably don't need to have this discussion. But it is great that you are willing to do that.

Ven. Guo Ru: Yes, you guessed it right. No need to explain in Taiwan. In China, really East Asia, pupils are used to accepting what the teacher says, and children are used to following the orders of the parents.

Participant: My biggest concern is going to be the absence of pressure when I leave.

Ven. Guo Ru: Don't have expectations of receiving pressuring effects externally, through these techniques or what have you, when you practice alone. You should be self-reliant, because if the practitioner is not ripe, then someone can break ten incense sticks over them and it won't have the same effect.

John Daido Loori Roshi

1931 - 2009

by

Victor Sessan Lapuszynski

Victor Sessan Lapuszynski lives in Holland, VT and is responsible for the maintenance of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center. He received the lay precepts from Dr. Rev. Soyu Matsuoka in 1970, and has been a longtime student of James I. Ford Roshi of the Boundless Way Zen tradition. The following is his remembrance of John Daido Loori Roshi, founder of the Mountains and Rivers Order, who passed away from complications of lung cancer in October.

On a Sunday morning last May, at a time when the hills were just fully green, I drove for an hour through the Rondout Valley and into the Catskills to take in a meditation service at Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, NY. The last time I had been there was in 2005, when I had been invited to attend a visioning gathering for the 25th anniversary of the founding of their community. While having a right fine zennish time—doing zazen, listening to talks, and enjoying the presentations and discussions—I had also caught a glimpse into the life of the place. That life had the stamp of John Daido Loori, Roshi, all over it.

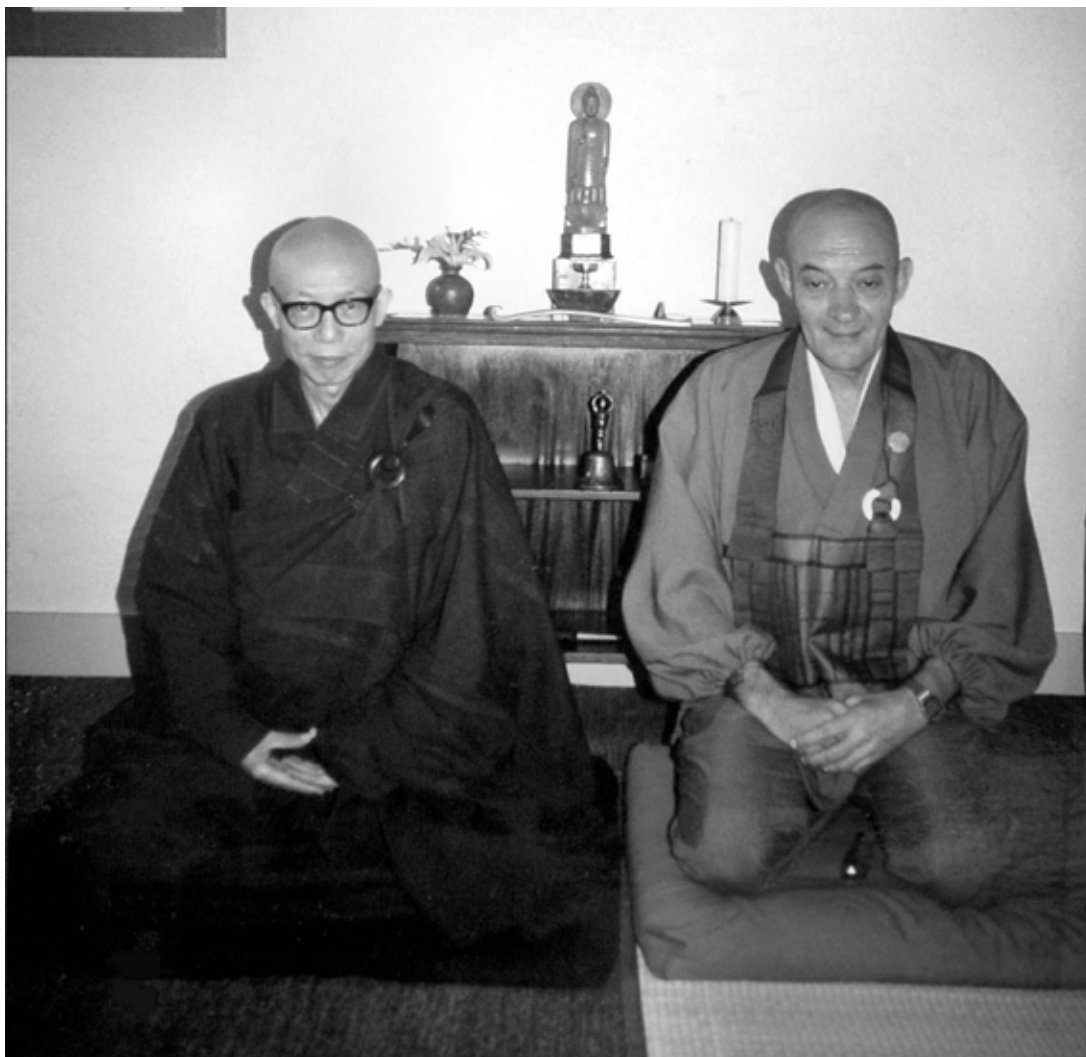
He called his teaching style “Radical Conservatism.” Much of the chanting in the communal liturgy was still in Japanese, ornate ceremonial forms were the norm, and a definite hierarchy of abbot, teachers, monastics, and residents ran the place. A certain order and flavor of things pervaded the monastery, and helped me imagine the context of old stories

from Asia. Daido-Roshi’s military experience likely formed much of it. He had entered the Navy as a teenager, in 1947, and those years no doubt contributed to the cool and solid authority of his presence.

On my visit in May he still retained that authority, although I was surprised by how the last few years had enfeebled him—he needed the support of his attendants to help him to his seat in the zendo. The Dharma talk was about transmission and the passing on of the teachings, and I learned that vice-abbot Konrad Ryushin Marchaj Sensei would join with the Roshi in that ancient midnight ceremony in the coming week.

After the regular service, we went up the hill to the Monastery’s cemetery for a memorial to honor Daido’s teacher, Taizan Maezumi-Roshi. Again, I noticed that Daido’s health was weaker, as he took a ride by car while most of us walked. In his prime, he had had

Photo: Kaifen Hu



Chan Master Sheng Yen and John Daido Looi Roshi in 1992

the skill, strength, and will to manifest these beautiful grounds, the monastery with all its associated activities, an urban practice center in New York City, and an organization of dedicated lay and monastic practitioners called the Mountains and Rivers Order. The naming of the Order reflected two of his great inter-

ests: the teachings of the preeminent Soto teacher, Dogen Zenji, from whose writings the phrase comes, and the pressing ecological concerns of our age. One could say that in all he had achieved, he had applied the wisdom of teachers such as Dogen to the problems humans have created.

The weakness he now showed was restricted to his body—his gaze was clear and his voice strong. At the cemetery altar, Daido offered incense to his teacher and recited:

Great Mountain has always filled all time and space.

Solitary cloud has never had an abiding place.

How then can we speak of arriving and departing?

Ro o o o o o o !

Pink pointed azalea blooms pierce my heart.

The debt of gratitude is not yet fulfilled.

Maezumi-Roshi had twelve successors, whose lineages together are called the White Plum Asangha, and the range of teaching styles among them amazes me. They go from the severe plainness and simplicity of grandmotherly Charlotte Joko Beck, who lets a stone on the altar represent Buddha, to the Path of the Clown as represented by Bernie Glassman, who has retreatants go broke and homeless on the streets of New York City. And yet their lineage easily holds traditionalists such as Daido as well.

Although Daido-Roshi was a “conservative,” the old forms do not fully cover the novel situations of Buddhism coming to another culture. Invention and innovation are called for, and Daido had the creativity—the “radical” part—to fit the ancient teachings to a practice vehicle that seems to work well for Americans.

Daido had a life-long passion for photography. He studied with the reknowned photographer Minor White, who taught him not only a meditative approach to shooting pictures, but actual Zen meditation. Shortly after, he

began formal Zen training with the unusual and artistic pioneering teacher Soen Nakagawa. It is therefore not surprising that Daido should make art an important part of the practice vehicle that he molded.

Along with art and work practice and, of course, meditation, he prescribed the study and application of the precepts, the study of the scriptures, and the performance of liturgy—areas of practice often neglected by other American teachers. He felt that the body also needed attention through yoga and other forms of physical development and tuning. And he believed that an essential part of practice was a personal and face-to-face relationship with a qualified teacher. These eight parts of practice he called the Eight Gates of Zen, and they formed the frame of daily and life-long practice for the Mountains and Rivers Order.

At the memorial in May, as Daido spoke of his gratitude for Maezumi’s continuing presence and ongoing teaching, I thought of the way Master Sheng Yen’s teachings were embodied in the Dharma Drum lineage. He had died just three months earlier, and the urgent poignancy of impermanence was a large and constant factor of my awareness.



Shifu and Daido-Roshi had each held the other in high regard. In 1992, Shifu had been invited to hold a one-day intensive retreat on the text *Faith in Mind* at Zen Mountain. Although he had already taught many retreats in America, this would be Shifu's first retreat at a practice center headed by a Westerner, and he'd be the first Chinese teacher to hold a retreat there.



Zen Mountain Monastery impressed him very much—the laity and monastics in residence led very busy lives maintaining the property and teaching the Dharma, yet all the while exhibiting a consistent happiness. Shifu asked how it was that Daido could make his students practice so diligently, yet keep them so happy? Daido answered that the residents always understood that to create an environment where one could work and practice was exactly the Zen/Chan life. Helping each other to maintain a practice center produced a sense of accomplishment and joy every time a task was completed. The residents knew that all of living was practice, and that service to others actually benefits oneself. Shifu said that what he saw at Zen Mountain helped him grow, and that he used what he learned there in forming his own Sangha structures.

As for Daido himself, Shifu said that he felt a special affinity with him because they each had received Dharma transmission from both the Linji/Rinzai and the Caodong/Soto schools. He admired that Daido had come to New York alone and established Zen Mountain by bak-

ing bread with his gathered students and selling it in the local markets. Shifu knew very well what it was like to come to a new place and begin to develop the Dharma, with only one's own vows to start with.

Although I knew that Daido's health had been poor lately, I was still somewhat taken aback by an email invitation our office received in early October to attend a ceremony of "Coming Down the Mountain," in which Daido-Roshi would relinquish his responsibilities to his successors. But then, just a couple of days later, an email announced the cancellation of that ceremony because of the Roshi's impending death. John Daido Looi Roshi died October 9, 2009. His community is now going through observances of grief and gratitude, much as the Dharma Drum community did after February 3, when Shifu left us. I had watched as our community functioned smoothly in the transition, thanks in great part to Shifu's arrangements right up to almost the last hour. So this part of a recent email circular resonated strongly: "As someone observed in open sozan, Roshi used to say that he'd know he had done his work if all this continued without him. Indeed."

Indeed, indeed.



The Past

News from the Chan Meditation Center and the DDMBA Worldwide

Intensive Chan Retreat in Poland

By Chang Wen Fashi
Photos by Helge Gunderson

From August 6 – 16, 2009, Chi Chern Fashi, accompanied by Guo Xing Fashi, Chang Wen Fashi, and Djordje Cvijic, led a 10-day Chan Retreat in Poland. This was the second time Chi Chern Fashi has led a retreat there, the first having been in August of 2008. Since then, the Dharma friends from Poland had been awaiting Fashi's return, and had been especially excited to have him return with a team of monks and laypersons from Dharma Drum Retreat Center, NY, come to lead them in Chan Practice. The retreat was organized by the Chan Buddhist Union of Poland, an enthusiastic community of lay practitioners who had studied with Shifu for years headed by Pawel Rosciszewski.

The Union had done a great deal of promotion and advertising to reach out to all of Europe, and succeeded in making this retreat an international event. To the organizers delight, the retreat was attended by 45 participants from all across the map, including participants from Greece, England, Taiwan, Russia, Norway, Canada, Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany.

The retreat was held in a "palace" at Dluzew,



situated about 40 miles from downtown Warsaw, in a peaceful area near the town of Kolbiel. The estate, currently owned by the Fine Arts Academy, is surrounded by dairy farms and open fields, and a river that flows through what used to be part of the manor's grounds.

Prior to the retreat the palace had actually been in a state of disarray, with some exhibition rooms covered in paint and graffiti, filthy bathrooms and broken windows. However, the palace caretakers took great pains to renovate the building that came to be the Chan Hall, and cleaned all the main buildings to make them comfortable for the retreatants to use. They even helped build an altar, and the

finished result was a very simple yet dignified Chan Hall, which at first glance gave one the feeling of calm.

Chi Chern Fashi began by teaching all the fundamentals of Chan practice. He especially emphasized relaxation as being crucial to the practice, as a relaxed mind can naturally settle and become unified, so that one can then apply Chan methods, including Silent Illumination and Huatou. Chi Chern Fashi also emphasized the importance of having the Right Views of Buddhадharma, which are essential for one to be able to realize wisdom. Only with the correct understanding of emptiness, impermanence, and no-self will one be able to transcend the attachment to self—the source of all vexations.

All the talks were translated into two languages, first English, then Polish. Participants appreciated the chance to hear the teachings in translation, and many participants commented that the talks seemed to be directed

towards them personally, and addressed many of the problems that they encountered. Many were able to make drastic changes in their use of the method, saying that this had been the clearest explanation of how to actually apply the method that they had ever heard, and they were able to make great progress in their practice. Their transformation was clearly visible from their expressions and postures, which on the first day were cold and stern like samurai warriors, and on the final days were cool yet relaxed.

After the retreat, plans were made for next year's activity, when the Chan Buddhist Union of Poland hopes to again invite Chi Chern Fashi to lead another retreat at the same location, possibly for 14 days. Plans are currently underway, and we will see as causes and conditions determine what seeds of Chan will be planted in Poland, and what fruits will have ripened from this year's crop.

DDBC, National Central Library to Promote Buddhist Studies

On October 8th, Dharma Drum Buddhist College (DDBC) signed an agreement with Taiwan's National Central Library (NCL) to promote Buddhist studies and preserve Buddhist resources.

Venerable Hui Min, President of DDBC, and Mr. Karl Min Ku, Director General of the NCL, were both present at the signing ceremony to mark the beginning of this joint effort to foster the study of Buddhism.

Future activities are likely to include exhibitions of precious scriptures, roundtables and seminars, digital preservation initiatives and building up the library's collection.



Bookfest in Kuala Lumpur

In the last week of August, DDM Malaysia took part in the 2009 Fourth Bookfest at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. The event is the biggest book fair in Southeast Asia. The aim was to promote Venerable Master Sheng Yen's teachings, and the DDM Cultural Centre in Taiwan lent strong support.

It marked the first time DDM Malaysia had occasion to collaborate with the Buddhist Organizations Foguangshan and Tzu Chi in preparing the "Buddhism and the Mind" section of the exhibition.

All books by Master Sheng Yen sold out quickly, and prompted numerous inquiries from visitors about DDM and its activities in Malaysia. In response, Cultural Center Director Venerable Guo Xian hosted a seminar to share her reflections on Sheng Yen's teachings and also provided an overview of DDM's emergency relief efforts in recent years.

Writing As Chan Practice

Venerable Master Sheng Yen observed that our lives are comprised of Chan. Everyday activities such as drinking coffee, eating, watching the rain and even enjoying the view are all occasions for Chan practice—Chan is ubiquitous. It follows, then, that writing can also be an occasion for Chan practice. In line with this view, on August 30th DDM Malaysia conducted an intensive class in news writing.

Twenty-two people registered for the course, the eldest 71 and the youngest 14. In addition to local students, others from Singapore were also able take part through video conferencing arranged by DDM Malaysia volunteers.

Profound Abundance

To help people to begin to appreciate the significance of Master Sheng Yen's legacy, on September 13th DDM hosted a seminar, entitled "Profound and Abundant Teachings from Venerable Master Sheng Yen" at the Taipei International Convention Center.

Some 4,700 people packed the hall before the seminar got started. In addition to DDM Abbot Venerable Guo Dong and Sangha Venerables, His Eminence Paul Cardinal Shan Kuo-Hsi, Director of the Department of Religious Studies at Hsuan Chuang University, Venerable Shi Chao Hwei, Director of the Department of Social Work at National Taipei University, and Dr. Shan Te-Hsing, a senior researcher at Taiwan's Academia Sinica, attended the seminar to share their thoughts.

In his welcoming remarks Venerable Guo Dong said that although the Most Venerable Master Sheng Yen had left us, the Dharma and compassionate teachings he taught, as well as the attitudes he demonstrated in his lifetime, have given us all wisdom to cherish and follow.

His Eminence Paul Cardinal Shan said that he had richly benefited from a dialogue with the Master, noting how both agreed that life is precious and one must therefore respect all sentient beings and alleviate their sufferings.

Venerable Shi Chao Hwei pointed out that the noble and solemn Buddhist ritual of the Master's own funeral had itself challenged a traditional Chinese practice of collecting the relics of eminent monks. By asking followers not to continue this practice in his own fu-

neral rites, the Master had showed that this was merely another form of attachment.

Mid-Autumn Festival at DDM

On October 3rd, the Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education celebrated the traditional Mid-Autumn Festival in the Wish Fulfilling Guanyin Hall.

Abbot Venerable Guo Dong launched the proceedings with a radiant blessing, regretting the rain that hid the moon but celebrating the enthusiasm and compassion in everyone's heart.

The program included a drumming performance by Fu-Der Primary School, a Chinese Guzhang solo by Ms. Xiaozi Wei and an eco-fashion show presented by five volunteer models. Despite windy and rainy weather, all seats were taken ahead of time, and the 2-hour event overflowed with laughter.

Refuge Ceremony at Nung Chan

On the morning of 20 September 2009, Nung Chan Monastery of Dharma Drum Mountain hosted the 2009 Refuge Ceremony. Over a thousand people registered to take refuge in the "Three Jewels." New followers were encouraged to emulate the compassionate spirit of Guanyin by treating others with honor and Dharma wisdom.

Typhoon Morakot

As reported in the last issue, on August 7th Typhoon Morakot slammed into Taiwan, dumping more than 100 inches of rain, killing

more than 500 people, isolating entire towns and leaving many thousands homeless. By August 8th DDM's Social Welfare and Charity Foundation (SWCF) had initiated emergency relief programs to help distressed villagers with emergency supplies and begin to mount clean up efforts.

In addition to distributing drinking water, sleeping bags, instant noodles, lunch boxes and flash lights for local shelters, SWCF organized local volunteers through affiliates island-wide to clean out mud filled-houses. On August 10th as the storm abated, Venerables Guo Mi, Chang Yue and volunteers from XinXing Monastery went to Taimali Township, visiting nearby villages and emergency shelters in the area. Meanwhile, volunteers worked closely with local authorities distributing food, milk powder for infants, instant noodles and bread to sustain the villagers.

Ground transportation had been shattered by the storm, leaving many remote villages in the mountains totally cut off so that relief supplies had to be flown in by helicopter.

In the early hours of August 12th more than sixty Venerables from the DDM Sangha joined by hundreds of volunteers set out for the remote villages of Linbian Township in southern Taiwan's Pintung County to help typhoon victims get back on their feet. All told, about a thousand volunteers responded to SWCF's appeal for humanitarian support.

On August 14th SWCF set up a relief station in Kaohsiung County's Liukuei Township to offer survivors emergency materials and spiritual counseling. They also provided cash stipends for the children of storm survivors.

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*

Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY

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

DDRC holds a variety of Chan practice activities, including weekly group meditation, Sunday services, beginner's meditation classes, beginner's retreats and intermediate and intensive Chan retreats. Novices and experienced practitioners are all welcome at DDRC, whether to begin practicing or to deepen their cultivation. Volunteer opportunities are also available.

Schedule is subject to change. Please check the website for updated and detailed information, or to register for activities online.

Retreats

1-Day Retreat
January 23

Beginner's Mind Retreat
January 29 - 31

7-Day Introduction to Chan Retreat
April 17 - 23

Koan Retreat
May 22 - 29

10-Day Intensive Huatou Retreat
June 18 - 27

7, 14-Day Intensive Chan Retreat
July 17 - 31

Classes

Beginner's Meditation, Parts 1 and 2
January 9 and 16

Regular Weekly Activities

Thursday Evening Meditation
7:00 - 9:00 pm; Sitting, walking, moving meditation and discussion.

Sunday Service
9:00 - 11:00 am; Sitting, walking and moving meditation; Dharma talk; chanting.

Chan Meditation Center Elmhurst, Queens, NY

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

Retreats

1-Day Retreats

January 30, led by Rebecca Li
February 27, leader to be announced
March 27, led by David Slaymaker

Classes

Beginner's Meditation, Parts 1 and 2

Saturdays, January 9 & 16, 9:30 am - 12
Led by Nancy Bonardi

Intermediate Meditation

Saturday, January 23, 9:30 am - 3:00
Saturday, March 20, 9:30 am - 3:00
Led by Rikki Asher

Dharma 102 (The Heart Sutra)

3 sessions, Saturdays, February 27, March 6
& 13, 10:00 am - 12:00

Regular Weekly Activities

Monday Night Chanting

7:00 - 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

7:00 - 9:45 pm: Sitting, yoga exercises, walk-
ing meditation, Dharma discussions, recita-
tion of the Heart Sutra.

Saturday Sitting Group

9:00 am - 3:00 pm
Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation

Sunday Open House

10:00 - 11:00 am: meditation
11:00 am - 12:30 pm: Dharma lectures
12:30 - 1:00 pm: lunch offerings
1:00 - 2:00 pm: vegetarian lunch
2:00 - 4:00 pm: Chanting

(First/Fifth Sunday: Chanting Guan Yin's
name; Second Sunday: Great Compassion
Repentance Service; Third Sunday: Bodhisat-
tva Earth Store Sutra; Fourth Sunday: Re-
newal of Bodhisattva Precept Vows.)

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

Chinese New Year Celebration

Sunday, February 14, 10:00 am - 3:00

Movie and Mind with Lindley Hanlon

Saturdays, dates to be announced.

"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.

NORTH AMERICA

USA

USA Headquarters

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA); Dharma Drum Publications; Chan Meditation Center: 90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373
Tel: (718) 592-6593
Fax: (718) 592-0717
Email: chancenter@gmail.com
<http://www.chancenter.org>
<http://www.ddmba.org>

Dharma Drum Retreat Center
184 Quannacut Road
Pine Bush, NY 12566
Tel: (845) 744-8114
Email: ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org
<http://dharmadrumretreat.org>

California

Los Angeles
Contact: Ashley Chiang
Tel: (626) 350-4388
Email: ddmbala@gmail.com

Sacramento
Contact: Janice Tsai
Email: ddmbasacara@yahoo.com

San Francisco

Contact: Hogan Chang
Tel: (408) 469-0321
Email: ddmbasf@gmail.com

Connecticut

Contact: Ming-Mei Peng
Tel: (203) 972-3406
Email: kontekalice@aol.com

District of Columbia

Washington D.C.
Contact: Jack Chang
Tel: (301) 982-2552
Email: chiehhsiungchang@yahoo.com

Florida

Gainesville
Contact: Lian Huey Chen
Tel: (352) 336-5301
Email: lianflorida@hotmail.com

Miami

Contact: May Lee
Tel: 954-432-8683

Orlando

Contact: Chih-Hui Chang
Tel: (407) 671-6250
Email: chihho2004@yahoo.com

Tallahassee

Contact: Guo Gu
Tel: (850) 274-3996
Email: tallahassee.chan@gmail.com
<http://tallahasseebuddhistcommunity.org/mondayevening.shtml>

Tampa

Contact: Nancy Kau
Tel: (727) 393-9588
Email: skau@tampabay.rr.com

Illinois

Chicago
Contact: Belinda Li
Tel: 773-907-9853
Email: Belindaliddmba@gmail.com

Kansas

Contact: Ching Hsin Wang
Tel: (913) 825-5204
Email: alicewang0618@hotmail.com

Massachusetts

Boston
Contact: Chen Zhang
Tel: (781) 558-1838
Email: ch_cherry@hotmail.com

Michigan

Contact: Li Hua Kong
Tel: (517) 332-0003
Email: lkong2006@gmail.com

Missouri

Contact: Tai-Ling Chin
Tel: 636-529-0085
Email: acren@aol.com

New Jersey

Contact: Chiu-Ling Wang
789 Jersey Ave
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Tel: (732) 549-7134
Email: chiuwang@msn.com

New York

Long Island:

Contact: Hai Dee Lee
Email: Haideelee@yahoo.com

New York City

Contact: Chi-Liu Wu
Tel: (516) 674-0414
Email: ddmbaus@yahoo.com

Rochester:

Contact: Chi An Hong
Tel: (585) 249-0617
Email: chianhong@hotmail.com

Nevada

Las Vegas

Contact: Mabel Lin
Tel: (702) 896-4108
Email: mebalan@go.com

North Carolina

Contact: Shirley Wang
Tel: (919) 852-4860
Email: tsuili2@yahoo.com

Pennsylvania

Contact: Kun-Chang Yu
Tel: (814) 867-9253
Email: ddmdba@gmail.com

Philadelphia

Contact: Thomas Chiang
Tel: (610) 254-5028
Email: tchiang2001@hotmail.com

Texas

Dallas

Contact: Patty Yee
Tel: (972) 660-5971, (817) 226-6888
Email: ddmdba_patty@yahoo.com

Houston

Contact: Theresa Feng
Tel: (281) 589-0718
Email: power26v@aol.com

Tennessee

Memphis

Contact: Dan Tu
Tel: (732) 777-9618
Email: dan_tu@hotmail.com

Utah

Salt Lake City

Contact: Inge Fan
Tel: (801) 947-9019
Email: inge_fan@hotmail.com

Vermont

Contact: Jui-Chu Lee
Tel: (802) 658-3413
Email: juichulee@yahoo.com

Washington

Seattle

Contact: Christine Lin
Tel: (425) 957-4597
Email: christinelin00@hotmail.com

Canada

Toronto

DDMBA Ontario
154 Poyntz Avenue
Toronto, Ontario, Canada M2N 1J4
Email: ddmdba.toronto@gmail.com
Web: www.ddmba-ontario.ca
Tel: 416-855-0531

Vancouver

DDMBA Vancouver Center
8240 No.5 Road,
Richmond, BC
V6Y 2V4 Canada
Tel: 604-277-1357
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Email: info@ddmba.ca
http://www.ddmba.ca

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Mar de Jade Oceanfront Retreat Center

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USA phone 800-257-0532
Mexico phone 01-800-505-8005
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Website: http://www.mardejade.com
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http://www.dharmaloka.org
Teacher: Zarko Andricevic
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Belgium

Luxemburg

15, Rue Jean Schaack L-2563
Bonnevoie GD.DE Luxembourg
Tel: 352-400080

Poland

Warsaw

Zwiazek Buddystow Czan (Chan Buddhist Union):
Contact: Pawel Rosciszewski, Beata Kazimierska
Tel/Fax: (22) 7275663, GSM 0-601-205602
Tel/Fax: (22) 6208446, (22) 6498670,
GSM 0-601-205602

Switzerland

Zurich

Teacher: Max Kalin (Guo-yun)
Tel/fax: 411 382 1676
Mobile: 4179 416 8088
Email: MaxKailin@chan.ch
<http://www.chan.ch>

Bern

Hildi Thalmann
Haus Sein
Bruungasse 16
CH3011 Bern Switzerland
Email: hthalmann@gmx.net
www.chan-bern.ch
Tel: 31 352 2243

United Kingdom

London

18 Huson Close
London NW3 3JW, England
Tel: 44-171-586-6923

Western Ch'an Fellowship:

24 Woodgate Ave. Bury
Lancashire, BL9 7RU, U.K.
Contact: Simon Child, secretary
Email:
secretary@westernchanfellowship.org,
www.westernchanfellowship.org

ASIA

Hong Kong

Room 205, 2/F BLK B,
Alexandra Industrial Building, 23-27 Wing Hong St., Cheung Sha Wan,
Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel: 852-2865-3110
Fax: 852-2591-4810

Malaysia

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhism Information Centre in Malaysia:

30 Jalan 16/6, 46350 Petaling Jaya,
Selangor DE, Malaysia
Tel: 603-79600841, 603-7319245
Fax: 603-7331413, 603-79600842
Email: kahon@pc.jaring.my
<http://www.media.com.my/zen>

Singapore

Dharma Drum Mountain (Singapore Liaison Office):

No. 10 Second Avenue,
Singapore 266660
Contact: Ms. Yeh Yin Shia
Tel & Fax
(65) 6469 6565
Cell 9745 6565.
Email: ysyehsg@yahoo.com.tw

Taiwan

Nung Ch'an Monastery:

No. 89, Lane 65, Tayeh Road
Peitou, Taipei
Tel: 02-2893-3161
Fax: 02-2895-8969

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No.14-5, Lin 7, Sanchieh Village,
Chinshan, Taipei
Tel: 02-2498-7171, 02-2498-7174
Fax: 02-2498-9029
Email: webmaster@ddm.org.tw
<http://www.ddm.org.tw>

Dharma Drum International Meditation Group:

Contact: Antonio
Tel: 02-2893-4646 ext. 6504
Email: contact@ddm.org.tw
Saturdays, 2:00 – 5:00 pm at the
Jiantan Group Practice Center
<http://www.ddm.org.tw>

Australia

Melbourne

Contact: Laura Chan
Email: ddmlaura@hotmail.com
Tel: 61-4-0204-1997

Sydney

Contact: Agnes Chow
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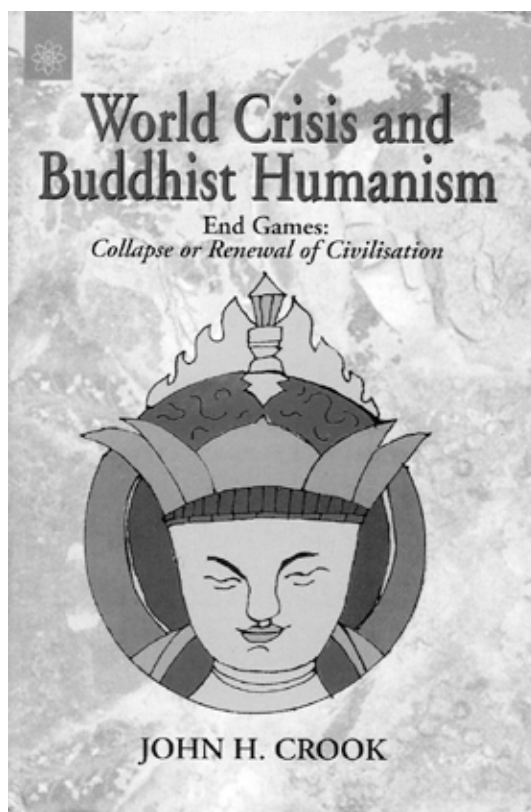
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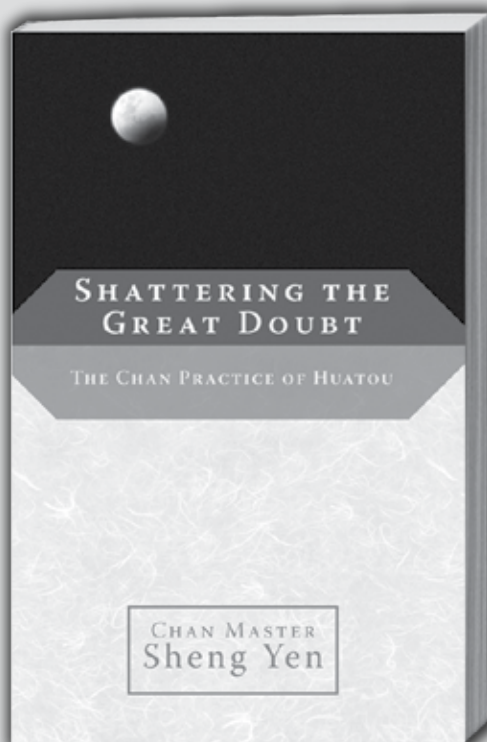
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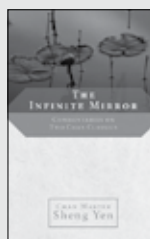
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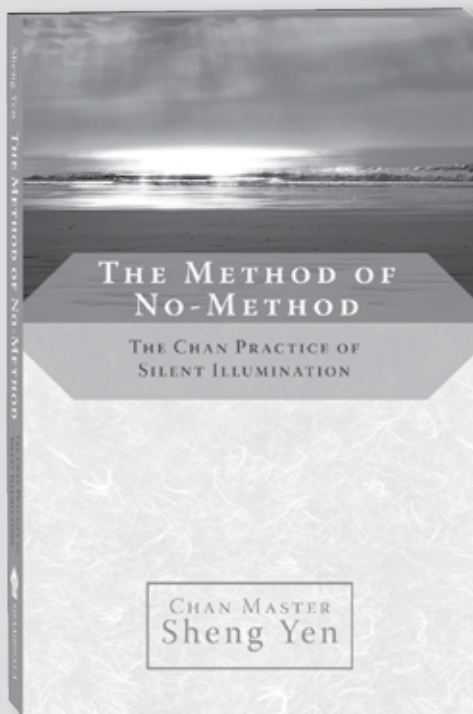
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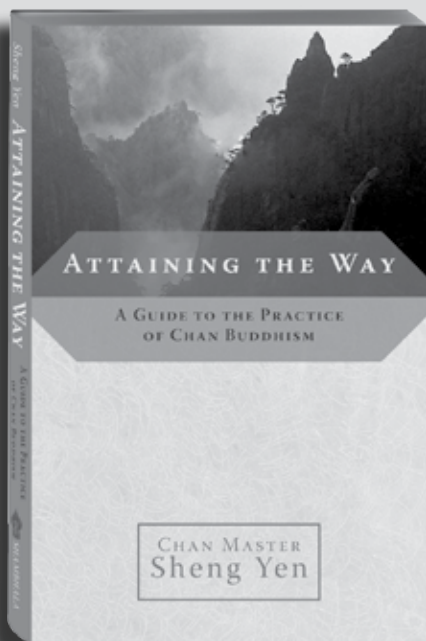
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