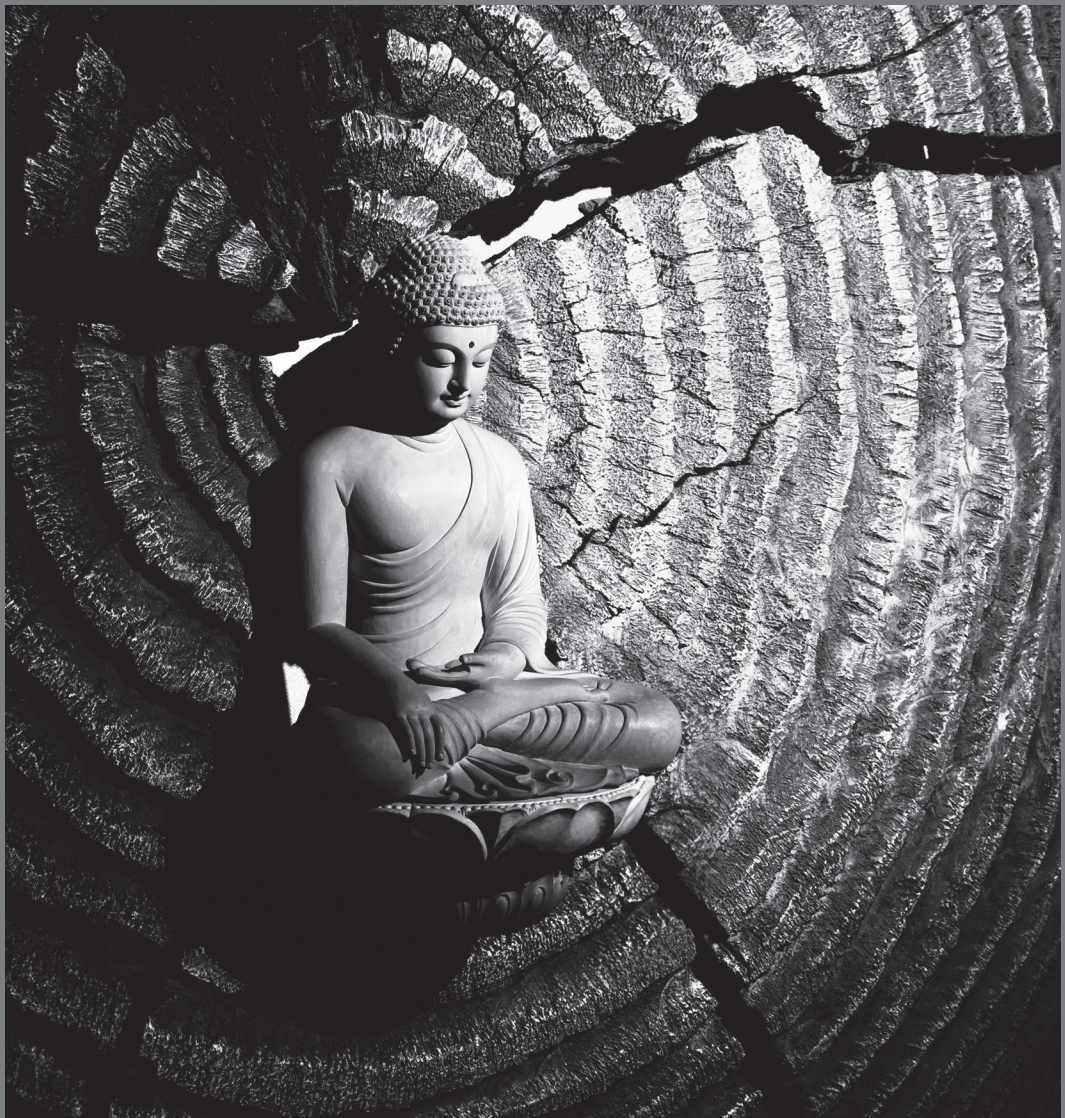


禪 CHAN MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2017





Monastic

Dear Reader, please see an important message on the inside back cover.

TO INDIVIDUALS, THE MONASTIC LIFESTYLE allows them to devote their life to studying and practicing Buddhadharma, and to the growth of their blessings and wisdom. To society as a whole, this means that monastics can offer their whole body and mind to concentrate on promoting and teaching Buddhadharma without distraction, and to make their utmost effort to uplift sentient beings. Although they ceaselessly work for their own and others' salvation, they are still able to savor the joy of being free of attachments and being at peace and at ease. They do not need to worry about tomorrow, or to search for livelihood; their daily living embodies their vision and mission of life.

”

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN
Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism, 2017

CHAN MAGAZINE

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From the Editor

WE STUDENTS OF MASTER SHENG YEN who are English-only readers are always hungry for new (to us) material from our Shifu, harder to come by since his passing in 2009. Fortunately, we are blessed with the “complete works” team, who are steadily translating works until now only available in Chinese. In this issue we are happy to announce the English publication of *Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism*, a book that Shifu considered to be a sequel to *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism* (his most popular book in the East).

Common Questions offers a wealth of varied topics, and we will share some of them over the next few issues. In this one we present an article on Chan monasticism, a subject about which most Western lay practitioners know very little.

The examination of lay practice as contrasted with ordained practice is ongoing, as Buddhism

continues to evolve its American form (see James Ishmael Ford¹ for a discussion of this inquiry as it relates to American Zen). Our Chan monastics are celibate (while Zen priests are not). They come from a culture long familiar with, and reverential towards, ordained monks and nuns. Americans have scarce reference points for understanding or relating to monasticism. Very few Americans have taken the Chan robes, and few have kept them. There is culture shock on both sides.

Our Shifu said: “Things are different in the United States. It will never be the same here as it is in China, so I have had to restructure things and modify the way I teach. Chan and Zen will have to change and adapt if they are to survive in modern cultures, whether Eastern or Western.”²

Recently Abbot President Venerable Guo Dong spoke at the opening of the new Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC): “In our system we have Dharma Drum offices, branches, and chapters, and the next level is full monastery. [...] Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM) is still very much a monastic organization, so this place [TCC] is unique. Guo Gu is here to teach the lay people, and this center’s constituents are nearly all Westerners, English speakers, so within DDM the chapter is quite unique. We are making a special exception for the Tallahassee Chan Center

so that Buddhadharma may continue to flourish. [...] we have to recognize the different causes and conditions at work and be more flexible in a place like Tallahassee.”

Our Chan school has been in America for a little more than forty years; we have been without our founder for less than ten years. We are in the infancy of our American form. Whatever it becomes, it is guided and informed by the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

In this issue we also offer a wonderful study of some verses from *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*. I read Harry Miller’s opening paragraph with a sense of recognition because I, too, had been strongly affected by those verses on first hearing them. In my case I encountered them on a calligraphy which I came across a few years ago, stored away in the office at our retreat center. I learned from David Listen (Chang Wen Pusa), who was the director at the time, that Shifu had painted this calligraphy especially for Dharma Drum Retreat Center, but that it had somehow been misplaced. We were very happy to have found it again. Since I can’t read Chinese I asked David to translate it, and he gave me this:

*At all times,
do not give rise to deluded thoughts.
[Yet] when deluded mentalities [arise],
do not extinguish them.
Amidst deluded perceptions,
do not add any discrimination.
When in [the state of] non-discrimination,
do not distinguish it as being real.*

I felt something like an electric shock when I read those verses; they rang me like a bell and have informed my practice ever since. I think I was ready to hear those words because I had previously been struck by another teaching:

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

I came upon the above teaching when editing one of Shifu’s talks for this magazine³. Beautifully simple, these words profoundly changed my approach to the method. Again, they rang me like a bell, and again, I think I was only ready to hear them because of a previous teaching about the nature of thoughts. That teaching came in the year 2000, in the early days of a forty-nine-day retreat. During a free period, I was sitting on the steps of the Reception Hall, feeling sorry for myself because my practice didn’t seem to be going well. Silently I complained to myself, like a pouting child, “My thoughts are NEVER going to stop!” Shifu was walking past just then, and smiled, as if he’d heard me. Later that day his Dharma talk was about dealing with thoughts: rather than energetically working to suppress them (thereby creating more thoughts), calmly observe them and don’t add to them. Yet again, that teaching rang me like bell and my practice greatly improved as a result.

I am forever grateful for these jewels of the Dharma, stepping-stones to liberation. My dearest wish is that the readers of this little magazine may find their own Dharma jewels in its pages and be rung like a bell. ☸

by Buffe Maggie Laffey
Editor-in-Chief



Master Sheng Yen, Ven. Guo Dong, and DDM’s Western disciples DDM Archive Photo

1. James Ford, “Soto Zen Buddhism in North America: Some Random Notes from a Work in Progress,” and “Lay Practice Within North American Soto Zen: A Meditation,” *Monkey Mind: Easily Distracted...* www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/.
2. Chan Master Sheng Yen, *Zen Wisdom: Knowing and Doing* (New York: Dharma Drum, 1993), 280.
3. Chan Master Sheng Yen, “Directly Practice ‘No Mind,’” *Chan Magazine*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Summer 2013): 6–10.

Chan Monasticism

BY

Chan Master Sheng Yen

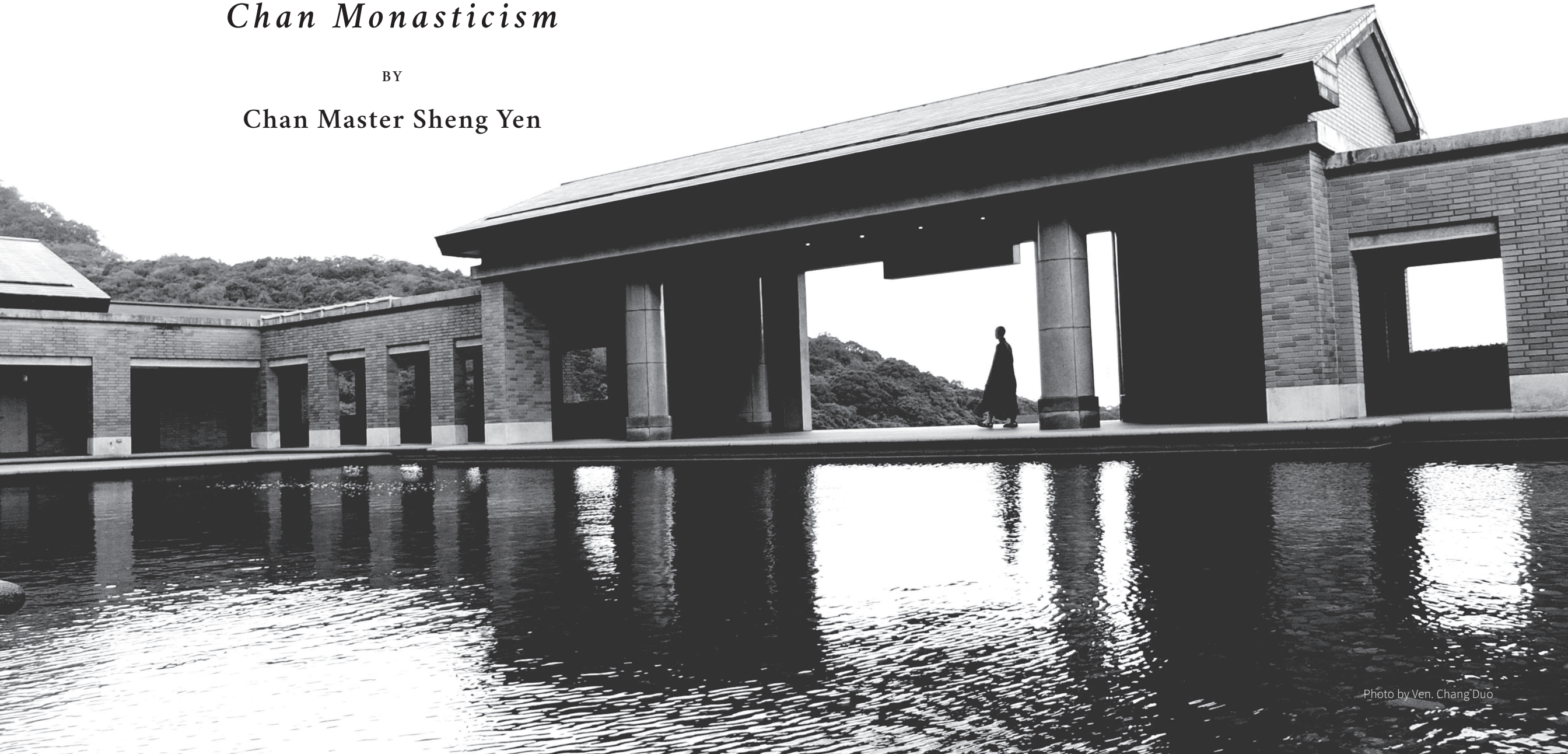
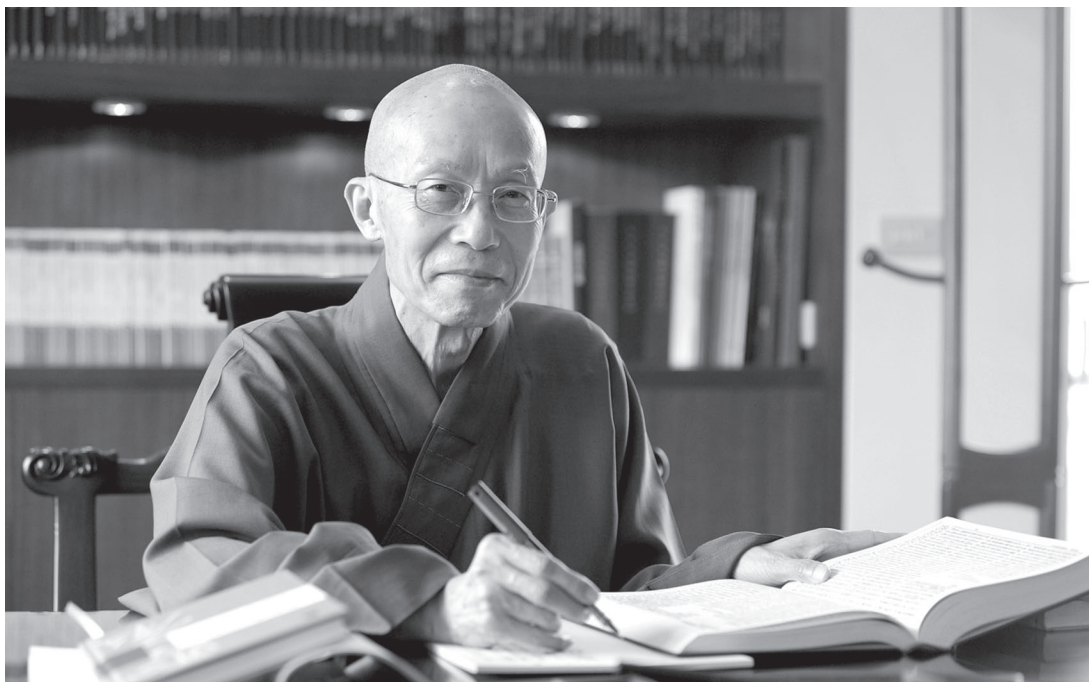


Photo by Ven. Chang Duo



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

In the early 1960s while on solitary retreat in Taiwan, Master Sheng Yen wrote *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*. In the Preface he said “my efforts were directed at explaining and clarifying what Buddhism really is.” Written in Q&A format, the book was published in Taiwan in 1965, and eventually became his most popular book in the Far East. In 2007 the English translation was published in the USA by Dharma Drum Publications and North Atlantic Books.

In 1988, Master Sheng Yen published in Taiwan the book that he considered to be a sequel to *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*, entitled *Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism*. (From his preface: “Many readers urged me to write a sequel in similar style, while exploring an even deeper and wider range of topics.”) This book was also written in the Q&A format and consists of seventy-five questions about Buddhist practice, submitted by practitioners. Now, this book has been translated into English and published by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation. It was translated by Dr. Hueping Chin, with bilingual reviews by Dr. Jerry Wang and Dr. Wei Tan, and English editing by Ernest Heau. The following article is taken from chapters 66, 67, and 68 of this book, edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey.

Differences between Lay and Monastic Practice

QUESTION What are the differences between practicing as a lay person and as a monastic?

ANSWER There are six commonly asked questions about the role of lay practitioners. Can a lay Buddhist 1) conduct ceremonies for taking refuge in the Three Jewels, 2) expound sutras, 3) seek alms, 4) become the abbot of a monastery, 5) provide services such as sutra recitation, repentance practices, and deliverance of the deceased, and 6) intervene in monastic affairs?

In principle, these six activities are the duties of monastics, not to be carried out by lay practitioners. If lay people somehow conduct them, they would breach their status as lay practitioners. In that case, they should become monastics since one should not cling to secular life while imitating the monastics and enjoying monastic privileges. That would be contrary to the original intent of practicing as a lay person. The laity practices to benefit from Buddhadharma and uphold the Three Jewels, but they are not the core of the Three Jewels; their role is to be exterior protectors or guardians of the Three Jewels.

Transmitting Refuge

Nevertheless, today there are fewer monastics, yet there are increasing numbers of people who need Buddhadharma and Buddhist activities. Where there are no monastics or only a few, it has been permissible for a lay practitioner, for example, to transmit refuge in the Three Jewels. It must be recognized, however, that the meaning of taking refuge is to respectfully offer one’s life to following the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Originally, the intent was for the sangha to conduct refuge taking, not a lay teacher. Moreover, taking refuge in the sangha does not mean taking

refuge in a lay teacher. (On this matter, I have written a short essay titled, “The Sangha Is Not Necessarily the Sangha Jewel.” The article can be found in the book *Buddhism of Tomorrow*.)

In short, although lay practitioners should not appropriate the monastic role and proclaim themselves as a refuge master, when there is no one else to do so, a lay practitioner may, on behalf of a virtuous Dharma master in the sangha, transmit refuge in the Three Jewels. Moreover, any Buddhist may bestow refuge in the Three Jewels to non-human sentient beings any time, including animals alive or dead, to help them sow seeds of good roots as causes for future transcendence.

Expounding Sutras

As for expounding the sutras and interpreting Dharma, during the Buddha’s time, there were examples of lay Buddhists explaining Buddhadharma on behalf of the Buddha, and even that of lay elders lecturing on the meaning of Dharma to monastics on behalf of the Buddha. In the Mahayana sutras there are records of sermons given by eminent lay practitioners such as Vimalakirti, [whose teachings on liberation are the subject of the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra*] and Queen Srimala, [whose teachings on buddha-nature are the subject of the *Srimaladevi-simhanada Sutra*]. Therefore, there’s no problem with lay people giving lectures or sermons to others.

Since ancient times the custom has been that lay Buddhists should not make a living giving sermons. They have other means of making a living, and should not rely on giving sermons for livelihood. However, today, society values professionalism, so the teaching of Buddhadharma has also become a profession. Therefore, for lay Buddhists whose profession is disseminating the Dharma, it is appropriate to receive reasonable fees

for livelihood and to cover their expenses. However, using the Dharma as a means for financial gain and receiving payments without constraints would not be the right attitude and conduct for a Buddhist. Other than that, lay Buddhists who provide professional services in education, culture, and administration in Buddhist organizations should accept reasonable compensation.

Seeking Alms

Regarding the question on alms seeking, the original intent of the custom of giving alms to monastics was to provide people with opportunities to encounter Buddhадharma. When bhikshus went door to door begging for alms, their goal was not really for the food; it was to sow the seeds for people to become acquainted with the Buddhадharma. Nowadays, when giving alms or making offerings is mentioned, people right away associate it with asking for monetary donation. That is not the original intention of Buddhадharma. Of course, seeking alms will give the laity an opportunity to make offerings, thereby benefitting both parties. However, we should not promote the Dharma with the ulterior motive of seeking monetary gains.

Today, soliciting donations is mainly to raise funds to build monasteries; it is very rarely for the livelihood of monastics. Some monasteries, organizations, and individuals also raise funds for educational, cultural, and charitable purposes, such as printing sutras, building schools, hospitals, orphanages, and nursing homes. These kinds of purposes should be supported by both monastics and lay people.

In the relatively recent past, there was a so-called “beggar educator” Mr. Wu Xun who begged for alms to build schools; this is admirable and should be encouraged. It’s not a matter of whether a lay

Buddhist should or should not ask for donations; rather, it’s about the purpose of the request. If it aims to support the Three Jewels or social welfare, that would certainly be fine, but if it means using the names of monasteries or private temples for personal gain or to attain personal enjoyments, it would bring about negative karmic consequences.

In the *Lotus Sutra* monasteries are called “stupa temples;” they were originally used to safeguard the Buddha’s relics, but later evolved to house sutras. In places where the Buddha and the Dharma are worshipped, there must be monastics to take care of them, so there are monastic quarters near a stupa. With the Sangha Jewel now in residence, the image of the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is complete. Lay practitioners who want to pay homage to the Three Jewels can live in a monastery, a custom called “close living.” This gives lay practitioners a chance to learn about the lifestyle of practice and from the conduct of monastics. While living there, they will also offer their services to the sangha and the laypeople. This is called cultivating the field of blessings.

Monastic Abbots

There’s no record in the scriptures of lay Buddhists serving as abbots of monasteries. However, in modern times, Japanese Buddhism has centered on the laity, having non-celibate Buddhist priests and their families living in the monastery, passing down their duties generation after generation. They are families of professional Buddhist priests and different from ordinary lay Buddhists. Additionally, in late 19th and early 20th century China, people like Yang Renshan, Ouyang Jingwu and Han Qingjing were all lay Buddhists, and managed Buddhist educational and cultural organizations. They had their own practice and learning centers, which

were not called monasteries; instead, they had names such as Jetavana Vihara (Chinese *Qiyuan Jingshe*), Jinling Sutra Publishing House (Chn. *Jinling Kejing Chu*), Chinese Institute of Inner Study (Chn. *Zhina Neixue Yuan*) and Society of The Third Period of Buddha’s Teachings (Chn. *Sanshi Xuehui*), and so on.

Therefore, in recent times, there have been many famous lay Buddhists who established an array of Buddhist studies and practicing organizations with names like “vihara,” “society,” “institute,” “lotus society,” “laity association or society,” but none were called “temple” or “monastery.”

It’s possible for certain non-celibate lamas of Tibetan Buddhism, or acolytes of Japanese Shinto, to manage temples, but they are not abbots of monasteries. In a Buddhist monastery, the abbot represents the abiding and upholding of the Three

Jewels, and since lay practitioners are not part of the Sangha Jewel, how can they be abbots? Since their lay status is not consistent with the real meaning of the Jewel Sangha, if they acted as abbots, that would be contrary to Buddhist ethics.

Rituals and Services

[Regarding the question of laypeople providing sangha services] all Buddhists should recite sutras and perform repentance practices. Since Buddhism encourages practitioners to organize and practice in groups, when a practitioner dies, fellow practitioners should of course also conduct assisting recitation sessions of Amitabha Buddha’s name to help deliver the deceased. Therefore, lay Buddhists can certainly assist in recitation sessions and help deliver others. The problem is that some people have become



Photo by Chun-Tai Shih

professionally engaged in sutra recitation, repentance services, and deliverance services. This has happened in folk religious groups such as Xiantian, Longhua, and Yiguan Dao.

These people do not usually respect monastics, but they show up at funerals, going from one to another, conducting deliverance rituals normally conducted by Buddhist monastics. Since they have become professional sutra reciting groups and repentance ritual teams, they would inevitably request compensation based on their services. This is not permissible according to Buddhadharma.

May lay Buddhists play Dharma instruments to accompany chanting and recitation at Buddhist services? Yes, there is no problem as long as they use the instruments for the purpose of engaging in sutra recitation, repentance practice, or liturgical practices, and not for profit making. The issue is, after being trained to use Dharma instruments in chanting and recitation, this person may be invited to perform in all kinds of situations. They may be overwhelmed by this, and be led to give up their normal job and make this as a new profession. This must be avoided. There are many ways for lay practitioners to make a living. Providing Buddhist services may not lead to poverty, but neither would it lead to great wealth. So, why should a lay Buddhist with the right beliefs hop on



Photo by Jean Li

the bandwagon of performing deliverance services for the dead to make a living?

Monastic Affairs

As to laypeople being involved in monastic affairs, all sangha affairs should be attended to by monastics and the laity should not intervene or interfere. Doing so would be like a non-member intervening in an organization's internal affairs; it is inappropriate to participate, let alone interfering. By monastic affairs, we refer to their daily living, bearing and etiquette, their observance of precepts and rules, as well as conflicts among monastics. If lay practitioners intervened in these monastic matters, it would be like a civilian intervening in disciplinary issues in the military.

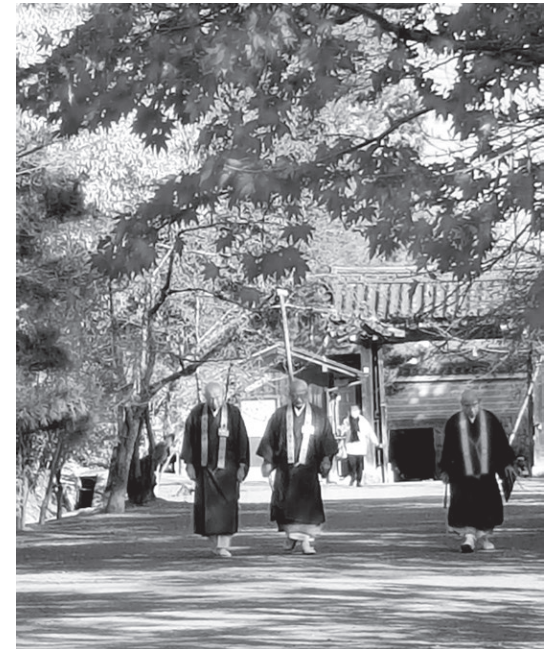
Insofar as monastics are also human, they are like ordinary people; therefore, there can also be tensions and conflicts. However, monastics do not carry resentments or grudges overnight, let alone holding unrelenting animosity towards others. Small frictions are simply put aside, as monks and nuns often settle such trivial matters nonchalantly by leaving it unsettled. If lay practitioners waded into monastic affairs, they may expand and exacerbate the situation and create gossip. Therefore, when lay practitioners go to monasteries, they need only to enthusiastically support the sangha with devotion without taking sides, talking about right or wrong, gossiping and creating discord. There is a saying, "If one doesn't want to spare the monastics, at least spare the Buddha." Lay practitioners go to monasteries for the purpose of cultivating their faith in the Buddha, studying and practicing the Dharma, and supporting the Three Jewels; therefore, they should refrain from criticizing or slandering monastics because what they don't like what they see. This would be inviting vexations upon themselves.

Buddhism and the Monastic Sangha

QUESTION Can the tradition of monastic-centered Buddhism continue to exist as in the past?

ANSWER This is certainly a very pertinent issue. Over the past 2,500 to 2,600 years, Buddhism has spread from India throughout Asia, including China, then into Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and so on. For a long time, it never had to face this question about the sustainability of a monastic-centered Buddhism. Yet, due to changes during the Meiji Restoration (1868–1912) under Emperor Meiji, and Japan's desire to increase population to engage in outward expansion, Buddhist monastics in Japan were pressured to raise families and eat meat. Since then, Buddhism in Japan gradually transformed into a tradition in which lay practitioners serve as abbots in temples. Since they operate temples [formerly called "monasteries"] as their profession, [in Japan] these lay practitioners are still considered ordained members of the sangha.

After World War II, lay Buddhist orders also began to appear in Korea. Today there are two co-existing but irreconcilable Buddhist factions in Korea: one monastic-centered, and the other laity-centered. In China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and North America, independent lay Buddhist organizations have also gradually appeared. Although they are not against monasticism, as lay organizations they may not function as external guardians, or protectors of the monastic sangha. According to the traditional concept of the sangha, the laity certainly cannot represent the Sangha Jewel; therefore, lay Buddhists leaders have not openly accepted disciples taking refuge through them. How long into the future will this trend stay unchanged? It will depend on the quality and quantity of talents in the monastic sangha, and the strength of that sangha in upholding and promoting the Dharma. If there are



Japanese Buddhist priests Photo by Sunny Chang

no talented monastics who are capable of leading followers, it would not be long before Chinese Buddhism would change to a laity-centered practice.

Laity-Centered Practice

During the time of Shakyamuni Buddha and several centuries after his enlightenment, many outstanding, great monastics appeared; therefore, it became standard for lay people to follow monastics to learn and cultivate Buddhism. When Mahayana Buddhism started to become prominent, the idea of laity-centered practice also began to appear. Vimalakirti, whose teachings are contained in the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra*, is the best example.

After the Ming Dynasty in China, the influence of lay Buddhists began gradually to rise. In the early 20th century, there were many gifted lay practitioners.

Even Grandmaster Yin Guang (1861–1940) mostly focused on guiding the laity. We can only guess that his intention was to use his renowned status as a great master to focus on the lay people so that they would be inspired to become disciples of the Three Jewels instead of staying away from the monastic sangha altogether. Whether the monastic sangha can maintain its traditional status depends on the presence of talented monks and nuns who are capable of inspiring lay people to become disciples of the Three Jewels.

As far as I know, today there are many meritorious lay practitioners who do not seek to take refuge in the Three Jewels from the sangha. This may have to do

with the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, which says, “If you practice Buddhism, you may practice as a householder, not necessarily as a monastic. A householder who practices well is like a kind-hearted person of the East; a monastic who does not practice is like an evil-minded person of the West [meaning “India”]. Just keep a pure mind and that is the West of self-nature.” Sayings like this may cause some lay people with high self-regard to be unwilling to pay homage and prostrate to monastics and carry themselves as disciples of monastics.

Pure Land and Confucianism

Also, according to Pure Land scriptures, it is not necessary to take refuge in the Three Jewels to be reborn in the Western Pure Land. However, the *Contemplation on Infinite Life Sutra* says that taking refuge in the Three Jewels and upholding the various precepts are necessary conditions to attain above the middle-grade middle-level [among the nine grades of rebirth in the Western Pure Land]. To attain rebirth at the middle-grade lower-level and below, there is no need to take refuge in the Three Jewels; it is sufficient just to recite Amitabha Buddha’s name sincerely before death.

It should also be noted that Confucianism has been orthodox Chinese thought for several millennia without fading away. As a result, whether people come to respect Confucianism because of their Buddhist faith, or come to believe in Buddhism as a result of practicing Confucianism, their attitudes towards Buddhist monastics have mostly been one of keeping other-worldly friendship, [not one of devotion as disciples]. While there were examples of dignitaries such as emperors, empresses, prime ministers, and high officials who carried themselves as disciples towards eminent Buddhist monastics, including Emperor Wu of Liang (464–549), Empress

Wu Zetian of Tang (624–705), Emperor Xuanzong of Tang (810–859), and Prime Minister Zhang Shangying (1043–1121) of the Song Dynasty, they were the minority. [This is due to the dominance of Confucianism in Chinese culture.] Therefore, although there have been many Buddhist followers in Chinese history, not many actually took refuge in the Three Jewels and called themselves disciples of the Three Jewels.

Reliance on the Dharma

Buddhism emphasizes that one should rely on the Dharma or teaching rather than on the person; therefore, the sangha should center on the Three Jewels, rather than on specific individuals. However, the Chinese hold the view that “It is people who propagate the Way (Dao), rather than the Way propagating people,” thus valuing prominent individuals over the Dharma. As a result, a situation where the sangha continues to be the center of practicing and promoting Buddhism would naturally form only if there were eminent monastics who excel

in scholarship as well as practice, and who embody wisdom and compassion.

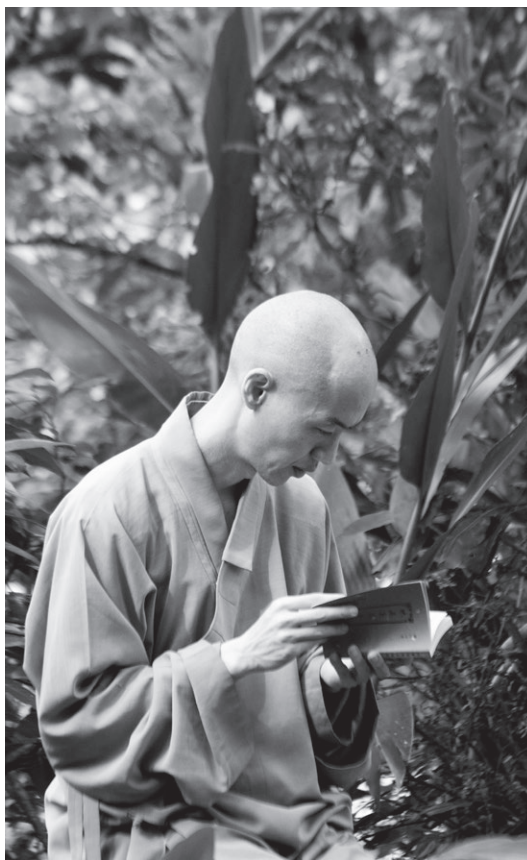
Maintaining a monastic-centered Buddhism may be even more challenging in the future. In the face of scientific and technological advance, democratic movements, and people’s strong passion for freedom, if monastics want to attract wide support, and be embraced as the center of refuge, they must be equal to the task, and pay the price to earn that respect. In fact, whether we can keep monastics as the center of Buddhism should not be a problem. If we pay attention to programs for developing ample monastic talents and appropriately use their talents in the right places, since monastics are not burdened by family or secular affairs compared to lay people, on average they should excel in practice, scholarship, wisdom, and compassion. Therefore, there is no need to worry or debate over who would be at the center of Buddhism in the future; it will all depend on the vision of monastics on the future of society, how they respond to that, and whether they can continue to accord with causes and conditions without changing their principles.



Grandmaster Yin Guang Art by Chien-Chih Liu

DDM Archive Photo





Monastics in the Future of Buddhism

QUESTION Will there still be monastic practitioners in future Buddhism?

ANSWER In the previous discussion we mentioned passages in Sixth Patriarch Huineng's *Platform Sutra*, as well as the *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra* to show that lay people can indeed cultivate Buddhism, and one need not become a monastic to practice Buddhism. Moreover, owing to changes in society as well as in lifestyles, fewer and fewer people have the desire or are able to become monastics. Today, there are large

factories and businesses with tens of thousands of workers, yet it is rare to see a Buddhist monastery with hundreds or thousands of monastics. Factory or corporate workers have their own families, and therefore their working and personal environments are separate. After a long day of intense, strained, or drab work, they still have time to relax and enjoy their family life and some entertainment. Monastics are quite different in that they live a shared life from dawn to dusk, day after day, and year after year; their living is monotonous, disciplined, simple and plain, diligent, and regulated without indulgence. Hence, it would be very difficult for people to adapt to monastic life unless they possess depth of character, good nature, perseverance, determination, and the strength of great vows.

Modern Distractions

In the past, monastics lived in monasteries located in deep mountain woods or on the shores of great rivers; they were not distracted by the temptations of the material world. Yet today, many monasteries open their doors to tourists, and monastics must interact with lay followers and tourists. Furthermore, in order to manage monasteries and promote Buddhism, it is necessary for monastics to engage more deeply with society. Both these conditions impact the simple, pure, peaceful and quiet way of monastic life. Hence, besides keeping a monastic bearing and following rules such as vegetarian diet, celibacy, and no personal possessions, today monastics are in some ways similar to lay people.

Therefore, unless they are encouraged and mentored by virtuous masters, most lay people of ordinary capacity lack the motivation to voluntarily become monastics, and even if they do become monastics, it would be challenging for them to keep their monastic vows throughout their lives.

Photo by Tong-Yang Lee



Benefits of Monastic Lifestyle

Certainly, buddhas of the past, present, and future attain buddhahood as monastics. Historically, arhats, whether male or female, were also monastics. Moreover, the absolute majority of the patriarchs of the various lineages in the ancient times also appeared in the world as monastics. That is because the monastic lifestyle, in which one abides by the precepts and the Vinaya, allows people to live a life free of worry, disturbance, and entanglement.

To individuals, the monastic lifestyle allows them to devote their life to studying and practicing Buddhadharma, and to the growth of their blessings and wisdom. To society as a whole, this means that monastics can offer their whole body and mind to concentrate on promoting and teaching Buddhadharma without distraction, and to make their utmost effort to uplift sentient beings. Although they ceaselessly work for their own and

others' salvation, they are still able to savor the joy of being free of attachments and being at peace and at ease. They do not need to worry about tomorrow, or to search for livelihood; their daily living embodies their vision and mission of life.

Therefore, as long as orthodox and authentic Buddhism exists, the door of monasticism will be always open. There will always be people who follow the monastic path. Even though there might no longer be a long-term living arrangement where hundreds or thousands of monastics can cultivate the Dharma under one roof, the footprints of monastics will never disappear. While we do need wisdom to think and plan with deliberation to establish an environment for monastics far into the future, as long as there are people who aspire to be monastics with the great vow of compassion, regardless of any difficulties and obstacles, they will overcome all challenges and pave a promising path forward. ☸

Photo by Ven. ChangDuo



Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism

Chan Master Sheng Yen

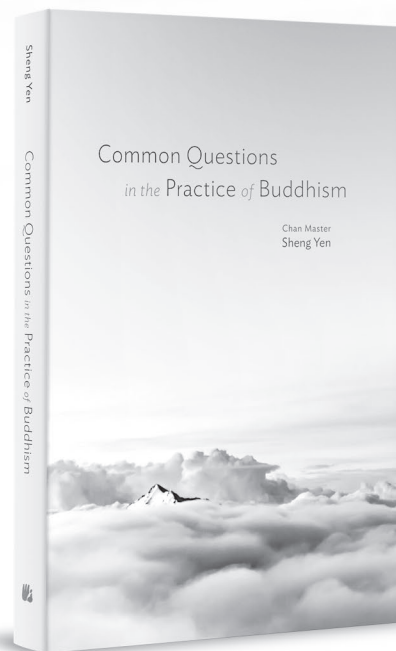
*If someone believes in and practices Buddhism,
should they also take refuge in the Three Jewels?*

*Is special knowledge and advanced learning required to
practice Buddhism?*

Are there any taboos concerning practicing Buddhism at home?

In *Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism*, Chan Master Sheng Yen addresses these and many other spiritual and worldly problems in a simple question-and-answer format. He clarifies common areas of confusion about Buddhist beliefs and practices and gives practical advice on leading a life that is “full of wisdom, kindness, radiance, comfort, freshness, and coolness” in the contemporary world.

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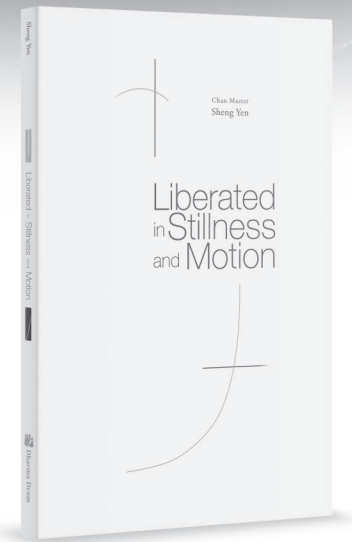


Liberated in Stillness and Motion

Chan Master Sheng Yen

“Correct Chan does not use miracles or the summoning of spirits as its appeal, nor does it emphasize other-worldly phenomena. Chan takes simple normal living as its basis, lessening afflictions as its purpose, being relaxed and at ease. One does not regret the past; rather, one actively prepares for the future, moving steadily ahead while being fully in the present. Although I introduce Chan in contemporary language and words, my perspective does not deviate from the teachings of the Buddha and the lineage masters. I avoid the ‘wild-fox Chan’ of some who talk of going beyond the Buddha and the lineage masters, who say outrageous things, scolding as if they were ancient buddhas from the past.”

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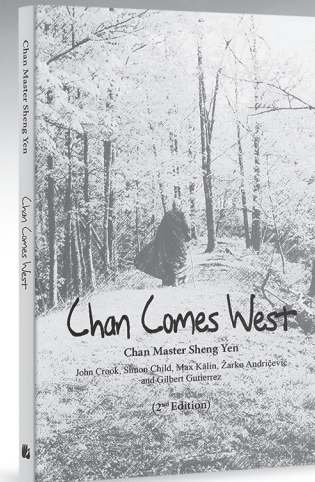
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John Crook, Simon Child, Max Kälin,
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Deluded Thoughts, States of Mind, and Discrimination

BY

Harry Miller

Harry Miller has studied Buddhist meditation for over forty years and was a student of Chan Master Sheng Yen for over thirty years. In addition to leading the Westchester Chan Meditation Group, he leads a meditation group at the CUNY Graduate Center, and he teaches meditation and philosophy at the Chan Meditation Center in Queens. He has given talks at the Columbia University Buddhist Association, Hunter College, St. Joseph's College, All Souls Unitarian Church, and at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, NY. Harry holds a BA in French and English literature from Sarah Lawrence, an MA in Chinese Literature, and an MPhil in Comparative Literature from Columbia University. He recently translated Master Sheng Yen's book *Right and Wrong Require a Gentle Approach* from the Chinese which is scheduled to be published in 2018.



DDRC Archive Photo



Photo by Jonathan Pie

SOME YEARS AGO, I was on a retreat with Simon Child and he read a passage from *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*. Hearing this was an insightful moment. I found it to be a very helpful teaching that leads to a way of orienting the mind so you do not have to be caught up in illusions about what you are experiencing in any given moment. As a wise guide to any form of meditation, this passage points the way to recognizing the subtle tricks of the mind. This is a profound explication of mindfulness – being aware of, or conscious of, consciousness, with clarity and freedom, we do not have to be controlled by the actions and content of the mind.

From a Chan point of view, we try to see the direct nature of the mind, seeing things just as they are, with no discrimination. This is Dongshan's "just this" and Juzhi's "one-finger Chan," or the moment

when Master Sheng Yen's master yelled at him to "put down." These are moments of direct clarity when the fabrications of the deluded mind cease. These moments may appear to be the apotheosis of simplicity – the ordinary, unadorned mind, just as it is. But we deluded sentient beings are driven by complexity and we are in love with the fabrications of our own mind. Anything that might shake us away from our ordinary perceptions can be troubling, and this passage even speaks about the fear that we might feel if we abandon deluded thinking.

In *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*¹, Manjusri, the bodhisattva of pure wisdom, asks the Buddha, "What are the differences in the actualization and attainment between all sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and the world honored tathagata?" In his answer the Buddha speaks about illusory projections of the mind



Bodhisattva Manjusri, 1761 Painting by Ding Guanpeng

that sentient beings make: that since beginningless time they have a deludedly conceived “self” and have never known the succession of rising and perishing thoughts. The Buddha goes on to say that when these processes are fully understood, the distinctions between sentient beings, bodhisattvas, and buddhas that Manjusri is asking about will no longer be valid.

At the end of the chapter, the Buddha gives a teaching on how one should orient the mind and practice to come to know this true reality. The Buddha declares:

善男子，
但諸菩薩及末世眾生，
居一切時不起妄念，
於諸妄心亦不息滅，
住妄想境不加了知，
於無了知不辯真實，
彼諸眾生聞是法門，
信解受持不生驚畏，
是則名為隨順覺性。

Translated into English:

*Virtuous man or woman
All bodhisattvas and sentient beings in
the Dharma Ending Age
Should at no time give rise to
deluded thoughts!
Yet when their deluded minds arise,
they should not extinguish them.
In the midst of deluded concepts,
they should not add discrimination.
Amidst non-discrimination
they should not distinguish true reality.
If sentient beings upon hearing this
Dharma method,
Believe in, understand, accept, and uphold it
and do not generate alarm and fear,
They are “in accordance with the
nature of enlightenment.”*

The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment provides guidance for very advanced practitioners, but I believe that its teachings are relevant to the day-to-day lives of most of us ordinary sentient beings. The simplest Buddhist teaching can be

shown to have enormous complexity and the most complex teachings can be shown to have relevance to what is here and in this moment. So, I will go through this passage line by line and look closely at the implications.

I start by making a slight but necessary change. Many of the sutra passages begin with the phrase “virtuous man.” There are certainly cultural and historical reasons for this, but I chose to render it virtuous man or woman. I don’t think the Buddha would object to this.

Then there is the issue of “virtuous.” What is meant by that? Ancient India had a caste system, determined by birth. The highest caste were the brahmins. The Buddha had many discussions and sometimes confrontations with brahmins who believed that they were assured of a happy life and a fortunate rebirth because of their caste. But the Buddha believed that a person’s life was determined by the qualities of their actions, not the condition of their birth, so he said:

*Who has cut off all fetters and is no more by
anguish shaken. Who has overcome all ties,
detached. He is the one I call a brahmin. Who
has cut each strap and thong, the reins and
bridle as well [...] Who does not flare up with
anger, dutiful, virtuous, and humble [...] Who
has laid aside the rod against all beings frail or
bold. Who does not kill [...] Who leaves behind
all human bonds and bonds of heaven [...] Whose
destination is unknown to gods, to spirits, and to
humans. An arahant with taints destroyed. He
is the one I call a brahmin.*

By invoking the word “virtuous” the Buddha is indicating that his words will be heard and appreciated by someone on the bodhisattva path. For us ordinary practitioners, being virtuous just means

being sincere and having a willing heart. We may not have cut off all fetters and be immune to anguish, but we recognize the problem of suffering and the issues involved in understanding our minds.

So, line by line:

*All bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the
dharma ending age should at no time give
rise to deluded thoughts!*

Bodhisattva, many of us know, refers to a being who has the ability to attain buddhahood but has postponed its final attainment in order to remain in the world to help sentient beings. The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment is addressed to bodhisattvas of the highest achievement and renown such as Manjusri, Samantabhadra, and Maitreya. These are beings who are very close to buddhahood, yet they are asking the Buddha important questions about proper understanding and the proper way to practice.

However, there is a broader, more down-to-earth understanding of bodhisattva, which can include anyone sincerely on the path, or anyone you encounter, even and sometimes especially those who give us a hard time. To reinforce this point, the Buddha directly addresses bodhisattvas as well as ordinary sentient beings, so it is clear that the message is for everyone, that there really is no distinction to be made among sentient beings. The sutra actually states,

*In absolute reality, there are indeed no
bodhisattvas or sentient beings. Why? Because
bodhisattvas and sentient beings are illusory
projections. When illusory projections are
extinguished, there exists no one who attains or
actualizes. Because sentient beings are confused
they are unable to eliminate illusory projections.*

There is a relatively simple explanation of why there are really no bodhisattvas or sentient beings: we tend to label, characterize, and judge everyone, including ourselves. Those labels, characterizations, and judgements are superficial and impermanent, yet we hold on to them as if they were absolute truth. A more profound understanding lies in seeing through the mechanism (desire, cause and effect) that produces these illusory projections and the states of mind we cling to. To penetrate this thoroughly is to see the nature of the mind itself.

So, the purport of the sutra is, among other things, to help us eliminate illusory projections and perceptions. Our whole lives have been conditioned by this illusory mental activity. Our projections and perceptions are seductive and give us an unreliable sense of “who we are.” Recognizing that unreliability and its cause is not easy.

A note about the phrase “dharma ending age.” Master Sheng Yen cites two definitions. First, as time goes on fewer and fewer people will even hear the Dharma, and fewer still will practice it. Second, there are people who are geographically and perhaps culturally cut off from hearing the Dharma. Once the Buddha passed into parinirvana (passed away), there is an understanding that in some instances the teaching could be watered down or weakened. Sometimes the period in which we are now living is called the dharma ending age. It’s not a doomsday scenario, just a wakeup call to practice.

The sutra says “at no time give rise to deluded thoughts.” Literally it says “at all times dwell such that you do not give rise to deluded thoughts.” What would it be like to dwell without deluded thoughts? What are deluded thoughts? Generally, they are additions or subtractions and spin-offs from what the mind is actually experiencing. There are many levels to deluded thoughts. Superficially, a thing is just a thing. If you have a watch, that’s what you have. But



Photo by Ahmed Saffu

you may think it’s expensive or cheap, better or worse than your friend’s. You may regret having bought it, or are very proud of your ownership. The delusions, illusions, or confusion inherent in such thinking are based on an original misapprehension – that it is “my” watch. Before you bought it, it belonged to the store or someone else. Once you’ve purchased it, the watch itself hasn’t essentially changed, but your perception of your relationship to it has. That relationship is impermanent, incomplete, and conditional, and exists only in the mind. Based on this original false premise, we create and proliferate thoughts in an almost endless cavalcade, and believe that what we perceive and think is reality itself. In the example of the watch, one thought links to another so your thoughts are not really “watch-related.” The watch itself was left out of your thoughts a long time ago. What is left are only self-engendered, ever-changing thoughts and feelings.

This kind of *prapanca* – the continual percolation and proliferation of thoughts – not only applies to objects, but to the environment, other people, ideas,

relationships, and even your thoughts about your thoughts. If you get upset about something, it’s quite possible that you will get upset about getting upset. Ultimately, deluded thoughts derive from the illusory sense of self, others, sentient beings, and an entire lifespan – concepts that we take as absolutely real, despite the fact that our perceptions of them are incomplete and subject to change moment by moment. We are caught in the basic idea that we and what we perceive is the “subject” and everything outside of that is the “other.”

There is a passage in Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* where Huck comes into a small town on the Mississippi that has been embroiled in a bitter and bloody feud for years. Huck tries to find out what caused the feud, but nobody remembers who started it or for what reason they’re fighting. Thinking and perception have become entirely divorced from the causes that first engendered them. Our minds engage in this kind of behavior all the time, on both gross and subtle levels.

To dwell without deluded thoughts would be quite an accomplishment. The instruction to refrain from deluded thinking should not be surprising to anyone who has done even a little meditation. This instruction should be all we need, so why doesn’t the sutra just stop here? What more is there to say?

The next line is:

*Yet when their deluded minds arise,
they should not extinguish them.*

The sutra doesn’t stop at the previous line, because Buddhadharma recognizes how difficult it is to perceive deluded thinking and tame the mind. This next line begins to deal with that difficulty. It can be divided into two parts. The first part, “Yet when their deluded minds arise,” refers to the deluded mind arising: When we begin to practice, we are exhorted

to strive diligently, to practice hard, to tame the monkey mind. We understand that our mind will wander away again and again, and we must make a continual and unrelenting effort to bring it back to the method.

That seems to be Shenxiu’s intent in *The Platform Sutra* when he wrote this gatha (poem):

身是菩提樹 心如明鏡臺
時時勤拂拭 莫使有塵埃

*The body is a bodhi tree
the mind is like a standing mirror
always try to keep it clean
don’t let it gather dust²*

Diligent striving is also the concern of the four noble exertions. These are four of the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment (explained in Master Sheng Yen’s *Things Pertaining to Bodhi*³), which are found in both Theravadin and Mahayana teaching. After one has calmed the mind using the four foundations of mindfulness, the instruction is:

*To keep unwholesome states not yet arisen
from arising
To cease unwholesome states already arisen
To give rise to wholesome states not yet arisen
To continue wholesome states already arisen*

These are straightforward instructions that concern right and wrong expressions of body, speech and mind. In this way, we keep the defilements (dust) off the mirror and we keep the mirror bright and shiny. Of course, we distinguish – dualistically – wholesome from unwholesome.

However, the next part of the line from the sutra is striking: “yet do not extinguish the deluded thoughts.” How can this be? Letting deluded thoughts

stay undisturbed in the mind would almost seem like letting a thief have the run of your house. Imagine all the damage that could be done! But that would only happen if you attached to the thoughts, and that is discouraged by implication in the first line, “do not give rise to deluded thoughts.”

It is the wisdom of the sutra to acknowledge that the mind does not follow our wishes. Whether or not we’d like deluded thoughts to arise, they will arise. One Japanese master compared the mind to the stomach. Just as the stomach secretes gastric juices, the mind secretes thoughts. It is quite natural. The problems arise when the thoughts are reified, attached to, identified with, taken as self, and made into a story or narrative. That is when we start seeing flowers growing in the sky – one of the metaphors for illusion in *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*.

However, if thoughts, deluded or otherwise, are left alone and observed mindfully, they are self-liberating. That is, if left alone, they naturally extinguish of their own accord. That is because what generated the thought is now in the past. Causes and conditions have changed, and what originally initiated the thought is no longer salient or important. The illusion of continuation can only be reinforced by a new, deluded thought. Without the support of subsequent thoughts, a thought, once orphaned and unnourished, will just fade away.

Thus, Huineng, who was destined to be The Sixth Patriarch, answered Shenxiu’s poem with a rebuttal:

菩提本無樹 明鏡亦無臺
佛性常清淨 何處有塵埃

*Bodhi doesn’t have any trees
this mirror doesn’t have a stand
our buddha nature is forever pure
where do you get this dust?*⁴

All of the givens in Shenxiu’s poem have been taken away. There is no mind, no body. There is nothing to generate thoughts and nowhere that they are contained. This translation says all is void, but the literal Chinese is that buddha nature is always pure and clean, which amounts to much the same thing.

Thus, there is no need to extinguish deluded thoughts because there is nothing to extinguish.

The next line reads:

*In the midst of deluded concepts they
(practitioners) should not add discrimination.*

In the last line we learned not to extinguish deluded thoughts. They should have gone away by now, right? Not exactly. Deluded thoughts have a way of seeping in through the slightest hole or crack.

At this point it might be in order to explain the three Chinese words that are used for mental activity in this passage.

In the line that introduced “deluded thoughts,” the Chinese word is *nian*, which does mean thought, as in one thought after another. In the line above, what is translated as “concepts” is *xin* in Chinese, literally heart/mind. This can also be interpreted as “states of mind.” In the next line (which we haven’t spoken about yet) the Chinese word is *xiang* and this can be translated as thinking or perceiving. The sutra covers every kind of mental activity, so that emotions, moods, symbols, etc. are all included. In all cases, when “deluded” is used, the Chinese word is *wang*, meaning deluded or illusory.

At this point in the sutra now, deluded concepts are still present. Despite our best efforts, it is nonetheless the case that mental activity transpires in the mind, so that it is in a particular state – happy, sad, angry, desirous. Now what?

Even though a particular state of mind has arisen, the understanding here is that the

菩提本無樹
明鏡亦非臺

至心殿



*Bodhi doesn't have any trees
This mirror doesn't have a stand*

Master Huineng and His Poem
Chinese calligraphy by Master Sheng Yen
Painting by Chien-Chih Liu



practitioner is nonetheless mindful and aware of that state. Why not simply let it go and not attend to the mind state? Possibly that would work, but now there is more activity and the allure and seductiveness of the mind state have risen to the point where there is temptation. What kind of temptation? It is the temptation to add a sense or concept of “I,” to insert one’s own viewpoint. The translation says “add discrimination,” but it could also mean to “add understanding or knowledge,” that is, to further conceptualize.

How would this work in real life? Let’s say you are at a meeting at work and have given a presentation and a colleague is disparaging your work, unfairly, as you perceive. Your state of mind is anger. Here many of us would say, “I’m angry,” or “you’ve made me angry.” However, a more skillful response or acknowledgement, is that “anger has arisen in me.” “I’m not anger itself.” There are many more examples of how you could add discrimination, such as giving your opinion when it’s not called for or acting out of lust or power when it’s not appropriate.

If you were by yourself and meditating, any kind of mind state might arise. There might be a temptation to analyze rather than just witness it. You might make some clever observations about the state of mind and relate it to other experiences that you’ve had. And you might feel very proud of yourself. Or, if you found that your state of mind escalated and you couldn’t control it, you might become angry at yourself.

The mind can move from simple thoughts to subtle and complex states. Single thoughts may be more noticeable, but subtler states are harder to detect because they can be fainter and yet more pervasive. They endure longer than single thoughts. States of mind are a kind of mental environment where it is easy to add observations, ideas, make determinations and judgements.

The sutra alerts us to be aware of these subtle states.

Amidst non-discrimination they should not distinguish true reality.

This is the last and most subtle line of the core teaching about illusory states of mind. It is understood that you are following the earlier instructions and you are aware of concepts and states of mind and you are not adding discrimination. I wouldn’t exactly call this a state of non-discrimination, as stated in the translation, but the effort not to discriminate is being made. What can be left in the mind now, if you are not attaching to thoughts and they are self-extinguishing, and you’re not adding judgement to any given state of mind? There is still discrimination itself, still consciousness and awareness, still subject and object. There is still dualism – this is real, this is not. I am here, you are there. This is a very subtle level, very strong and pervasive, at the deepest, uttermost core of our conditioning. Master Sheng Yen makes an analogy comparing this most subtle state to someone looking out of a window. Everything outside is perceived clearly, but there is still a window. At the last stage, the window is completely removed. This is a state beyond conceptions and illusions, so the sutra states; if you say there is or is not enlightenment, then you’re wrong. Eradicate labeling and attachment. Remember, the sutra says that “Attaining illumination and realization is a hindrance. Thus, a great bodhisattva is constantly in realization without abidance, where the illumination and the illuminator simultaneously become quiescent and vanish. [...] The teachings of the sutras are like the finger that points to the moon. When one sees the moon, one realizes that the finger is not the moon.” We are cautioned not to make a too literal interpretation of the teachings.

If sentient beings upon hearing this Dharma method, believe in, understand, accept, and uphold it and do not generate alarm and fear, they are “in accordance with the nature of enlightenment.”

These last three lines contextualize all the lines that have come before. They stand back from these intense instructions of how the mind works and give some perspective about how this teaching should be encountered and understood and what its implications are.

Cutting to the chase, so to speak, diving into the heart of the matter, the sutra shakes the listener into waking up to what has been presented. So, when you hear this Dharma door (a direct teaching by the Buddha that when followed can lead to liberation), how do you react? If somehow you are struck or moved by this teaching, if it makes sense and seems like it could be explored, then perhaps you believe it, you investigate it to the point where you understand it, realize the implications of that understanding, and you accept it. You then try to integrate it into your life and seek to become more familiar with it. Finally, you will try to uphold it – master the sutra so that you can explain it to other people. That’s one reaction.

Another reaction is that you find the whole thing unsettling. Non-duality? That’s too much for me. Give up my thoughts and prejudices, my likes and dislikes? I would lose my identity. I wouldn’t recognize myself. It’s really too difficult to understand.

By the way, I don’t think that this second reaction is unreasonable. You really must have the right set of causes and consequences, the proper interest, mindset and timing before you can give a method like this the proper attention. If it is unacceptable today, that doesn’t mean that it will be unacceptable tomorrow.

But to someone who does take up the challenge, if you will, then the sutra says that when you follow these teachings and integrate them into your mind and life, you will comport yourself in such a way that you are in accord with the awakened mind.

The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment explains that it provides both gradual and sudden teachings to adapt to the needs of sentient beings. In practice, we may find ourselves practicing, partially practicing, and sometimes forgetting to practice at all. We may find that sometimes the sutra makes sense and sometimes it doesn’t. We may try and give up, try and give up, two steps forward, one step backwards. This is a very natural process. The sutra calls this teaching a Dharma door. We each have to find our own door.

We have discussed one passage from *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* from the chapter “Bodhisattva of Pure Wisdom.” Contained within that same chapter is an important teaching about the origination and continuation of the deluded mental activity that we have been talking about. That is the issue of the illusory self that chauffeurs us around samsara.

The Sutra states:

Virtuous man, since beginningless time all sentient beings have been deludedly conceiving and clinging to the existence of self, as the essence of a real self, thereby giving rise to dual states of like and dislike. Thus, based on one delusion, they further cling to other delusions. These two delusions rely on each other, giving rise to the illusory paths of karma. Because of illusory karma, sentient beings deludedly perceive the turning flow [of cyclic existence.] Those who detest the turning flow [of cyclic existence] deludedly perceive nirvana, and hence are unable to enter [the realm of] pure enlightenment. It is not enlightenment that thwarts their entering; rather, it is the idea that “there is one who can

enter.” Therefore, whether their thoughts are agitated or have ceased, they cannot be other than confused and perplexed.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche said that

*The idea of an enduring self has kept you wandering endlessly in the realms of samsara for countless past lifetimes. It is the very thing that now prevents you from liberating yourself and others from conditioned existence. If you could simply let go of that one thought of “I” you would find it easy to be free and free others, too.*⁵

But do we really perceive of a thought that is “I?” I think for most of us it is a very abstract idea.

Sometimes on retreat a teacher will ask, “who is sitting?” “who is walking?” These can be very misleading questions because we don’t immediately identify any such activity with a “who.” We just sit or walk in a fog. Perhaps someone calls our name and then we partially wake up. This is not to say that the deep concept, the understanding, and the functioning of self are not operative within us. If we weren’t

misled by a false sense of self, there would be no need to study Buddhadharma. The illusion is powerful, but the underlying reality is not directly accessible to us. If we try to look for the self, we have to look for its traces, the subtle underlying motivation for all of our actions. Otherwise, when we think of self or identity, we imagine getting out our driver’s license, social security number, or pay stubs to prove who we are. If we were to actually try to behold the workings of the self, we’d have to look through infinite time and space, so strong is the fabrication and connection to what ultimately turns out to be an illusion.

So the self, or the way we know ourselves, is not really a thing to be identified.

That is why it is so confusing when someone first hears the teaching of *anatta*, the concept of not-self or no-self. It’s common for someone first introduced to this concept to ask, “you mean I don’t exist?” Of course, anyone who asks that question is neglecting to ask “who is it who’s asking the question: ‘you mean I don’t exist?’”

In short, the idea of self, as central and important to us as it is, is rather abstract and unreal, even though it is the only reality ordinary sentient beings

tend to know. We don’t wake up in the morning and say, “well, here’s my self waking up, my self drinking coffee, my self getting on the bus.” We’re concerned with all our plans and desires and fears and conceptions in general. This concept of “self” is rarely foremost in our minds, yet there is something that seems to be motivating us.

Rather than look for the self as a thing or something that defines who you “are,” try to understand the self as a pattern of actions.

If I’m planning to have dinner with a friend tonight, a flurry of thoughts will pass through my mind. That activity is the self. If I think about a problem I’m having with my car and I want to get it repaired, those thoughts are the self. If I think about an argument I had with my wife or child five years ago, that memory is the self. There is a cliché of something that is hidden in plain sight. That is an accurate characterization of self. “Self” is a noun and nouns seem to have “thingness” associated with them, even if they are abstract nouns like “injustice,” “love” or “beauty.” They may seem abstract but they are often solidified in the mind – they are “mind things,” which we hold on to or push away.

But then when we look at the self as a pattern of actions, another problem comes up. Buddha said, “So indeed, these states not having been, come into being. Having been, they vanish.” Then the Buddha counsels, “Regarding these states, abide unattracted, unrepelled, independent, non-attached, free, not identified, with a mind free of barriers.” Recognizing impermanence, it is possible to elude the clinging that often comes with thinking.

These things that we identify and reify as our “self” come and go in an instant. Thus, we are basing an enormous amount of energy on false identification, which is unreliable, and in the final analysis non-existent. But the identification with our experience is very compelling, hard to see, and

hard to overcome. This is why there are so many teachings that point out some very basic errors in our perception and understanding.

As Wei Wu Wei said, “Whoever thinks that they exist objectively is like a dog barking up a tree that isn’t there.”⁶

So, I will close with a teaching that may seem simpler than the passage from *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*.

The Buddha gave his son, Rahula, very straightforward instructions as to how to orient his mind towards whatever is experienced:

Rahula, any form whatsoever that is past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle; common or sublime; far or near: every form is to be seen as it actually is with right discernment as: “This is not mine. This is not my self. This is not what I am.”

This is perhaps a more accessible and understandable passage than the one that we have been discussing, but in essence, it is no less profound. It is applicable at anytime, anywhere, to any mind state. With this observation and understanding, there will be no room for deluded thoughts, states of mind, or discrimination. ☸

1. Master Sheng Yen, “Bodhisattva of Pure Wisdom” in *Complete Enlightenment: Translation and Commentary on the Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* (New York: Dharma Drum, 1999).
2. Translation by Red Pine, *The Platform Sutra: The Zen Teaching of Hui-Neng* (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint, 2009).
3. Master Sheng Yen, *Things Pertaining to Bodhi: The Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment* (Boston: Shambhala, 2010).
4. Translation by Red Pine. Ibid. 2.
5. Joseph Goldstein, *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening* (Louisville, Colorado: Sounds True, 2016), Chapter 22.
6. Wei Wu Wei, *Posthumous Pieces* (Boulder, Colorado: Sentient Publications, 2004), 187.

Photo by Erik Sandybaev

Grand Opening of Tallahassee Chan Center

BY

Evonn Elaine

FALL IS THE SEASON OF ENDINGS, thus for Buddhists, a logical time to celebrate beginnings. With immense generosity, dozens recently did so at the grand opening of the new Tallahassee Chan Center (TCC), in Tallahassee, Florida, USA.

Monastics, friends and guests traveled from Taiwan, London, New York, New Jersey, California, Missouri, Wisconsin, and other states, in honor of Chan Master Sheng Yen whose vow to spread Buddhism in the West and promote world peace inspired his student Guo Gu to found TCC in 2009. The Tallahassee Chan group has been a chapter of Master Sheng Yen's Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) since 2014. In August 2017, Guo Gu opened the new Tallahassee Chan Center as a home for the group to continue Master Sheng Yen's teachings.

Approximately seventy-five visitors and volunteers attended ceremonies of purification and consecration at the new center. The Venerable Guo Dong, Abbot President of Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM), presided over both the outside and inside purification and consecration events on Friday, October 13. According to TCC's president, Dr. Fran



TCC Archive Photo



TCC Archive Photo

Berry. “throughout the ritual,” she said, “the Great Compassionate Dhāraṇī was continuously chanted by everyone as the Abbot President led us in walking through the inside of the Chan Center, the outside land, and around the three buildings.” She also said that “A willow branch tipped in pure water was repeatedly waved over the property, and used to spread purity throughout the land.” She quoted the liturgy, “a single sprinkle of ambrosia on the tip of the willow leaf extends throughout the ten directions; it dispels all the odors and filth – causing every corner of this sacred space to become pure!”

The outside purification set the stage for the next day's Consecration Ceremony on Saturday October 14, in which the Buddha statue was sanctified with the power of wisdom and compassion. The Buddha statue, which had been hidden by a large cloth mantle, was then unveiled. The mantle was removed by Abbot President Venerable Guo Dong,

pulling from the center, with Charles Huang of the DDM Fellowship of Honorary Directors in Taiwan, Chiu Ling Wang of the North America DDM Dharmapala Organization, and Fran Berry pulling on the sides. *The Hymn of Genuine Fragrance from Precepts and Samadhi* followed, chanted in both Chinese and in English. All the recitations were translated from Chinese into English.

After the verse for transferring merit, the Abbot President spoke about the new Chan center: “In our system we have Dharma Drum offices, branches, and chapters, and the next level is full monastery. Each location has its causes and conditions, depending on the efforts of all the practitioners. DDM is still very much a monastic organization, so this place [TCC] is unique. Guo Gu is here to teach the lay people, and this center's constituents are nearly all Westerners, English speakers, so within DDM the chapter is quite unique. We are making a special

exception for the Tallahassee Chan Center so that Buddhadharma may continue to flourish.”

Referring to TCC’s Western majority, he said, “we have to recognize the different causes and conditions at work and be more flexible in a place like Tallahassee.”

After the food offering, the consecration resumed with the transmitting of the three jewels to about eight participants, including this writer who joined spontaneously. After the ceremony, a message on the significance of seeking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha was delivered by the Abbot President.

Two visiting teachers were also invited to attend the festivities: Meido Roshi of Korinji and Narayan Liebenson of the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center. On each of the evenings, from October 13 to 16, visiting guest teachers gave Dharma sharings. On October 13, Guo Gu gave a Dharma talk on the history of the Tallahassee Chan Center, in which he shared

his relationship with Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) and how the new Tallahassee Chan Center is dedicated to Shifu. Rikki Asher also shared her experience with Shifu, highlighting her Chan experiences and Shifu’s wishes for her. On October 14, Meido Roshi shared how he first began his path in Zen through seven-day retreats with Master Sheng Yen, and that he was delighted to be here with Guo Gu twenty-seven years after they were both on retreats together in New York. On October 15, Narayan Liebenson also shared her experiences practicing with Shifu and how his teachings still continue in her own Vipassana teachings. On October 16, Meido Roshi, Narayan, Venerable Chang Hwa (Director of the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, NY), and Guo Gu engaged with the local Tallahassee Chan practitioners and answered their questions on Buddhism in the West, advice on relationships, and intelligence versus wisdom.

The causes and conditions for this event were truly amazing. These events were all part of Guo Gu’s wish to continue the legacy of Master Sheng Yen. Guo Gu shared that “This place [TCC] is really a bodhimaṇḍala of gratitude (報恩道場) for the benefit of all people in the West. To continue Chan teachings is my way to repay my gratitude to Master Sheng Yen.” We all feel honored and grateful to have a place to practice and learn about Chan and Buddhadharma. Through Guo Gu’s effort we feel Master Sheng Yen’s presence continuing. ☸



Narayan Liebenson, Guo Gu, and Meido Roshi TCC Archive Photo

Entering the Gateless

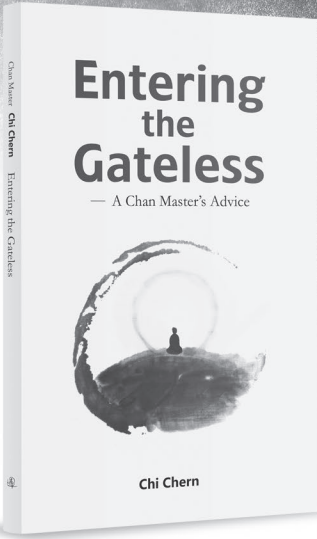
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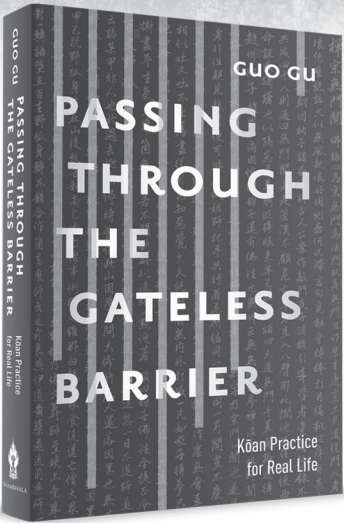
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