

WINTER 2018





Bright Eyes

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

A QUALIFIED TEACHER SHOULD demonstrate right knowledge and the right view, keep pure precepts, have the ability to guide others, and emanate compassion. With such qualifications, one can at least teach beginners. However, serious practitioners should find a teacher with "bright eyes" – someone who has experienced genuine wisdom. Only teachers who have experienced enlightenment can discern whether or not others have experienced emptiness. Without such experience, a teacher might mistake clear mindedness and samadhi for enlightenment.

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN Zen Wisdom: Conversations on Buddhism, 2001

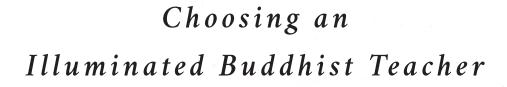


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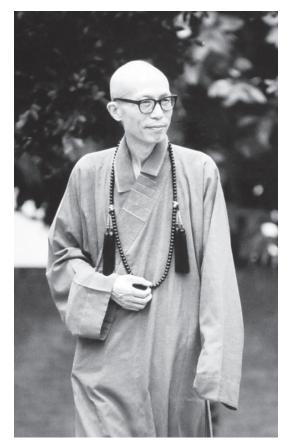
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<sup>BY</sup> Chan Master Sheng Yen



Chan Master Sheng Yen's book *Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism* is written in the Q&A format and consists of seventy-five questions about Buddhist practice, submitted by practitioners. The book has been translated into English and published by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation in 2017. 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 chapter 54 of this book.

## **QUESTION** How does one choose an illuminated Buddhist teacher?

**Answer** The Confucian scholar Han Yu (768–824) once said: "Skills and trades are specialized fields." Therefore, to enter a field of practice, one needs to find a good teacher who is an expert and excels in his or her own field. This principle applies to all pursuits, whether scholastic, arts, or crafts. It also applies to studying Buddhism. An illuminated teacher of Buddhism may not always be a student of another illuminated teacher, and an illuminated teacher may not produce a brilliant student. But by studying with an illuminated teacher at least one would not be misled onto a wrong path, or be taught the wrong principles. It would in fact be much safer than being in a "blind leading the blind" situation.

But who is an illuminated teacher of Buddhism? It is often hard for a beginner to know whether someone would be a good teacher, especially with regard to their depth of religious experience and meditative cultivation. Such a teacher does not have to be famous, but a teacher who has been widely recognized would be better and more reliable than a self-proclaimed one with no known reputation. When we are in no position to judge whether a teacher is good or not, it would be safer to follow a recognized teacher. It would also be better if a relatively unknown teacher is recommended by a recognized teacher.

It would also be acceptable to have a trustworthy teacher to introduce you to another one. In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, the lay practitioner Sudhana visited fifty-three great spiritual mentors, each new one being introduced by the previous one. Thus, those fifty-three teachers formed a chain of relationships, and each was an illuminated teacher. Therefore, we know that Sudhana was not blindly seeking teachers, like a sick person frantically searching for a doctor.

DDM Archive Photo

Throughout history, there have been those who proclaimed themselves as great lineage masters. They would speak fallacies to puzzle and overwhelm people, reverse right and wrong, and mislead the public. They would freely recruit disciples and followers to exaggerate their strength. If one fails to recognize this kind of situation, it is easy to mistake a famous and deviant imposter as an illuminated teacher. The Confucian scholar Mencius said: "The big peril with people is that they all want to be other people's teacher." Because deviant teachers misguide people, they create turmoil, imbalance, confusion, and disorder in our society. Not only will one who learns their deviant ways, thoughts and skills fail to broaden one's horizons, one will end up harming one's own body and mind, and cause tension and conflict in one's family. It's a pity that people cannot discern these imposters' true characters, and their false and evil identities.

From the Buddhist standpoint the standards of good and evil, as well as honesty and deception, are based on the examination of a person's selfcenteredness. A person with strong tendencies of greed and anger would certainly not be a good teacher. Someone who appears to be kind, with pleasant countenance and high morale, but is arrogant, overbearing and rude, is also definitely not a good teacher.

In Volume 9 of Master Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (Chinese *Dazhidu Lun;* Sanskrit *Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra*) there are four critical points – the four principles of reliance (Chn. *siyifa;* Skt. *pratisarana*) that we may apply to our search for an illuminated teacher:

First: Reliance on the Dharma or Teaching Rather Than the Person

A good teacher is not self-centered, nor does he or she regard any particular individual as the authority; instead, a good teacher uses the common

principles and criteria of Buddhism as the standard. This standard teaching is based on the principles of cause-and-effect and causes-and-conditions. If a teacher violates these principles, he or she is not considered a good teacher. Because cause-and-effect makes us responsible for our own actions, causesand-conditions teach us not to develop greed or anger towards any phenomenon. Otherwise, even if students see a teacher as a sage, if the teacher propagates the wrong teachings, he or she is no different from a deviant teacher.

Second: Reliance on the Meaning or Spirit Rather Than the Words

True laws and principles can be applied everywhere in the world and at all times; they are not different because of the differences in race, regions, or cultural backgrounds. If a teacher claimed that religious taboos or mysterious language were part of the teachings, then what they teach would not be considered as the right laws. The right laws emphasize consistency and connectedness in term of reason and signification; they are not to be constrained by differences of words and languages. For instance, Arabic Muslims stress the importance of the Arabic language, while Judaism focuses on the Hebrew language; these are contrary to this principle. Buddhists study Sanskrit and Pali for the purpose of investigating the sutras for their original meanings, not because these languages are sacred or have any special spiritual power. In contrast, the importance of Sanskrit and the sound of the words in and of themselves are emphasized in Hinduism, making it different from Buddhism.

Third: Reliance on Wisdom Rather Than on Discursive Thinking

Wisdom in Buddhism refers to the realization by sages of the great wisdom of no-self and unconditional great compassion. Therefore, as long as there is self-centeredness, whether for oneself

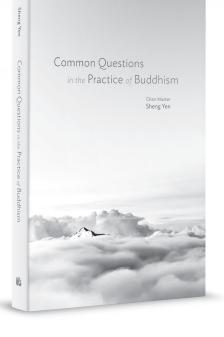


Master Sheng Yen and his disciples DDM Archive Photo

or others, for all sentient beings, or for seeking unsurpassed buddhahood, and as long as there is a sense of self, whether it is the small-self, large-self, pure-self, or supreme self, it will be impossible to generate true wisdom; one's understanding will still belong to the scope of knowledge, intellect, and consciousness. Knowledge comes from the functions of differentiation, memory, and reasoning in the learning experience of the self. However, in true wisdom there are only objective phenomena without subjective referencing; only functioning without reference to any substance or essence. If a person does not teach in accordance to this principle, he or she is not a good teacher.

Fourth: Reliance on the De finitive Meaning Rather Than the Provisional Meaning As far as definitive meaning is concerned, there is no Dharma to be taught, no Dharma to be attached to, no Dharma to be learned, no Dharma to be practiced, and no Dharma to be attained. Just as the teachings on no thought, no form, and no abiding in *The Platform Sutra* of the Sixth Patriarch indicate, there is no need of any reason and there is nothing extraordinary; just carry on with eating, dressing, living, benefiting self and others, diligently practicing without slacking.

According to these four principles, you should be able to distinguish without difficulty who is a good teacher and who is not. Then, as long as you follow these four principles to investigate and visit the teachers you wish to follow, nothing much can go wrong. With time, even if you can't find an illuminated teacher, you might become one yourself.  $\infty$ 



## 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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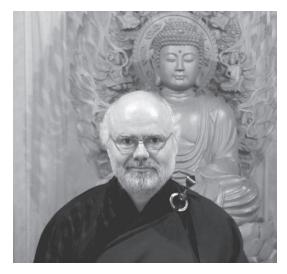
# The Edge of a Cloud

BY

### Simon Child

Simon Child is the principal teacher of the Western Chan Fellowship, a lay Chan organization based in the UK. Simon started his training with John Crook in 1981 and trained with Chan Master Sheng Yen from 1992, from whom he received Dharma Transmission in 2000. His teaching approach uses the orthodox methods of Chan Master Sheng Yen with some adaptations to help the Western personality engage with traditional practice.

This article is taken from a talk given at a Silent Illumination Intensive retreat, at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in May, 2017. It is an imaginative exploration of the Buddhist concept of emptiness. Transcribed and edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey.



#### Defining a Cloud

TODAY WE HAVE A BLUE SKY, with a few little clouds. Yesterday we had plenty of clouds but not so much blue sky. Weather changes. Clouds slide around in the sky. Of course, the sky is always blue, but we can't always see the blue because of the clouds. How do we understand the cloud? A fluffy object floating in the sky; if we know what it's made of we think of it as water drops. Sometimes it sinks down to the ground and creates a mist or rain. Some of us know different names for different types of clouds. We all have a general idea of what the object we call a cloud is.

But, like most things, it's not quite as simple as that. If you were to get a nice long ladder and I asked you to climb up to where the cloud begins, would you know where to stop climbing? Where is the edge of a cloud? If you're pointing, you'd say it's just there, between the white and the blue. But as you get closer, I don't think you're going to find a border. You're going to find a bit of the sky where there are some drops floating. If you move one way there are more drops, but if you move the other way there are fewer drops. Maybe you get to where there's only one drop every three inches, or every six inches, or one drop every foot. Are you still in the cloud? Or are you outside the cloud? How many drops do you have to have, to count as "inside" the cloud?

It's not as though we've got a thing which stops. If we've got a piece of cable, we can follow it to the end. But what about a cloud? There isn't an edge, is there? This seemingly discrete object floating in the sky doesn't quite fit that rule in our mind that something will have an edge. What we call the edge of the cloud is when it's dense enough to stop the sky looking blue. When it's not dense enough to do that, we say it's not the cloud. Then there's the inbetween bits where we say, that's just a bit of haze. It is really determined by our vision, and maybe by the brightness of the light, as well as by the density of the drops. It is completely arbitrary.

#### Density of Water Drops

You might think I'm being a bit fussy and silly, but there is a genuine point here. The idea of a cloud as an object that we can manipulate in our weather forecasts, and in our paintings and poems – it's really just a construction of mind, based on rather arbitrary criteria of the density of water drops being enough to make the sky look white or gray. The idea of the cloud is a creation of the mind.

There are water droplets in the sky, even in a blue sky. We know that scientifically. Sometimes there's a greater density of water drops, and for convenience we label that phenomenon as "cloud." We're easily tricked into thinking there's something we can label, especially with a noun, as an object that has its own existence. Actually, it's simply a name for a particular phenomenon which happens to be manifesting at this moment. The so-called cloud only has to thin itself out and it's no longer a cloud. All the water droplets can still be there; they're just spread out wider. Where did your cloud go? Or, indeed, clouds can appear in a clear blue sky. Warm air rises, water condenses, and suddenly a cloud is there in the middle of nowhere. Where did your cloud come from?

We tend to fix this phenomenon of "cloud" in our mind by applying convenient labels. These labels are useful for making weather forecasts and assessing air turbulence for flights. I'm not saying the word "cloud" doesn't apply to something that's out there in the sky. But our understanding of a cloud as an object goes a bit too far. It makes an assumption that there's a thing there. In relation to clouds, this might not seem very important. But, this is just an example of where we're heading with this Buddhist word "emptiness."

#### Arbitrary Labels

Emptiness doesn't mean "vanish" or "nothing there." You could expand the phrase (because it's really a shortcut); the full meaning is "empty of inherent or independent existence." There isn't a cloud

"thing" there which stands alone and carries its cloud "nature" around with it. It's an arbitrary label that we apply to a certain density of water drops, without even knowing that's what we're doing. It's rather like how the Inuit have many words for snow, more than most other cultures. Snow is a big part of their lives, so they distinguish more finely between different types of snow. I suspect that trying to build an igloo with powdery

snow could be a frustrating process. It's important to get the right sort of packed snow and ice. Having labels for different types of snow is useful to the Inuit, and having words for different types of clouds is useful to us in practical ways such as forecasting weather and turbulence.

It helps us in understanding or manipulating our environment if we can apply labels, because behind the labels there are recognizable processes which can be useful for us to know. But the label doesn't point, as we tend to assume, to the nature of the object that we've created through our mental processes. These labels are functional.

A common example for an object when talking about emptiness is a table. Here's a table sitting in front of me. It's a bit small, a bit different from some tables which have longer legs, but I've got my notes on it, and my recorder. We have an object which I'm using as a table. I use the word "table" and you recognize it. But, what if I wanted to reach a high shelf? If I put my foot on it and stand – is it still a table? Or is it a step? Is it a table that I'm using as a step? Or is it a step that I'm using as a table? Now it



Inuit People building an igloo Photo by Frank E. Kleinschmidt

seems less clear. We all have a common-sense idea of a table sitting here, and it works, it fits. But it's not so clear cut. The nature of "table" turns out to be the nature of "step."

We take it as a table, we use it as a table – no problem, it works. But it is not inherently a table. This is the point, it's really in the eye of the beholder, the function you want to apply to it. The name relates more to the function and to our manipulation of the object than it does to any intrinsic quality of the object. This table is empty of being a table. It has no inherent "table-ness" in it, nor any "step-ness."

#### A Virtual World

We use examples of objects like this to show how, naturally in every day usage, we slip into dividing the world into objects so we can manipulate them in the mind. We're not relating directly to the nature of what's behind the so-called object. We're creating a mental model. You could say we're inhabiting a virtual world, manipulating raw sense data into discernible objects so we can make use of them. But, these are not really the objects they appear to be. They're illusions on the computer screen of our vision. A white blob on your computer screen could be a cloud. An object with a flat surface and some legs could be a chair, or it could be a table, or it could be a step.

I'm laboring this because it's not always easy to get, but it's quite important in understanding this rather tricky concept we call emptiness. Emptiness is not a very good word; we have not found a better one. The original Sanskrit word, *sunyata*, isn't a very good word either, according to those who understand Sanskrit. There isn't an everyday word for this concept because it's not one we deal with every day. We bypass it and go directly to getting by in our lives in this world of objects that we have some understanding of and can manipulate. It's useful. It's expedient; we just get on with it. But, like all expediency, it can lead to problems. It can lead to a quick solution, but it can also lead to confusion. This is why it's important for us to try and have some understanding of the Buddhist teaching of emptiness. That teaching is trying to release us from that misunderstanding called "ignorance" which leads to confusion and mistakes.

#### The Edge of "You"

The prime object of emptiness for us to consider is ourselves, but we resist this. You're willing to go along with me when I'm saying the table is empty and the cloud is empty. But what about you? Or me? Does the same thing apply? There is particularly strong objectification and identification with "me," with "I." Ultimately, materially, we're not so different from a cloud or a table, are we? We might imagine we have a definite edge, the so-called skin bag – outside that is not me, and inside that it is me. But even physically it's not as simple as that because this skin bag has holes in it. Air gets into our lungs, crosses past the skin bag and gets into the bloodstream. That bit of oxygen, that's come in through your mouth or nose and dissolved into your bloodstream, is that "you" now? Or is it not you until it becomes part of a cell? At what point does that oxygen that's come from the air into your lung, into your bloodstream as dissolved gas, and later gets incorporated into a cell, at what point does that molecule of oxygen become "you?". That boundary is not quite so clear after all. It's a bit like the cloud – where's the edge of you?

Carbon dioxide takes the reverse route. Chemicals in your body become carbon dioxide, which becomes dissolved in the blood, which crosses the lungs and gets breathed out. It's a flowing process here. The same with food particles that take a different route down and get into the intestines and get absorbed, travel down the bloodstream, and get incorporated into the body.

I've been talking about us as a physical object. This boundary of ours that we imagine as clearly saying "this is me," is really quite fuzzy and literally porous. It's also not so clear what we are as a mental object. Again, we assume it is clear; we have a sense of identity and we might assert it if people question it. But through your meditation practice you might be starting to doubt that as well.



This is me? Photo by Braden Collum

We commonly get identified with our particular personality qualities, our habitual tendencies, our style of being: "This is my value, this is what I believe." And we find ourselves, perhaps unexpectedly, questioning these fixed factors when they arise in meditation. Maybe a value you picked up from parents or school teachers, and that you internalized and live from, maybe awareness of that arises in the clarity of meditation and it seems a bit alien. We might find ourselves saying, "Well, this WAS my value, but it doesn't seem to work for me anymore." By this means a value slips away, a value that you had thought you'd defined yourself by.

#### Nothing is Fixed

A way of being in the world that may be a defensive, self-protective way of being, can be seen through your meditation to be unhelpful. Around that attitude of self-protection, there's a whole cluster of behaviors developed and fossilized. But the underlying motivation for behaving that way now seems a little bit less solid, a bit less appropriate than it did.

These behaviors may be what you're known by; your friends recognize you as someone who behaves this sort of way or that sort of way. This is edging towards the emptiness of "you" – what you assumed was fixed, definable, identifiable, turns out to be in flux just as much as the cloud that can expand and contract, can fall out of the sky and turn into snow. Just as much as the water that can be swallowed by you and become part of your body, and then be expelled and go into a river, and eventually evaporate and become a cloud again. You're part of a big cycle that's moving physically and mentally, as flow, as change.

Is there anything that's fixed in there? Have you found anything yet that's fixed? This is part of the purpose of meditation – to reveal to you that you have assumed certain things are fixed, to reveal to you that they're not fixed. And then to reveal to you: there's NOTHING fixed.



At this point people sometimes get scared. It challenges our fundamental sense of existence, of "me" being the center of this universe. Does anyone doubt that they are the center of the universe? Everything refers to "me"; that's how we work our way through the world. It's not so surprising that we have different ideas of certain things, because we're looking at them from different reference points. This is how we can get into clashes and confusions. Two people can experience the same event and come away with very different perceptions of it. It wasn't what happened at the event, it's how it relates to their view of themselves and their world, and what use it is to them, and what threat, and they will perceive it differently. Also, they can change their perceptions because they're not fixed. It's all very fluid.

Our sense of our self largely hinges on these patterns of behavior and thought that we've identified with. But when you see through these patterns as no longer being appropriate or useful, there's this challenge to your sense of "you." Are you willing to change that view of you? Why are you going to hold on to this old behavior, even though you see it as no longer helpful, or even as harmful?

There can be a tendency to hold on, because there can be a fear of feeling lost if you don't hold on. It can be difficult to shake these things off. It's rather like long-term prisoners who finally get out of jail and they find the world outside confusing and difficult. Some will commit another crime so that they can go back to the place that feels like home, the only place they feel they can really fit. That happens. There is a sense in which we do that, too, when we

discover something which is binding us, but can't bring ourselves to let it go. Are you holding on to something? Probably many things, through fear of not having them to lean on, not knowing what to replace them with.

#### **Fossilized Behaviors**

If you've done a certain behavior all your life, it's filled a lot of gaps where you might not have known what else to do. What will you do, next time that particular situation arises, if not to follow your usual

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potentially unhelpful response? You might find the presence of mind to respond in a more appropriate way next time. You might do the same behavior as you always did, because on some occasions it is appropriate, but you do it in awareness and by choice rather than as a habit. Disidentifying from a particular behavior or attitude doesn't mean it is taken away from you as such; it means you become more skillful in making use of it, or not making use of it when it's not appropriate.

The emptiness behind this highlights the way we get stuck in patterns of behavior which become objects of identity; they become fossilized. The technical word is "reified"; they get turned into things. There is no inherent you there – there's a collection of behaviors and attitudes and experiences and sensations, rather like a cloud is a collection of water droplets. To go further than that is to trap yourself into a fixed way of thinking. It's quite challenging to un-think your way out of this.

I've been talking about emptiness arising through your practice in relation to mental phenomena, attitudes, habits – it can also arise through your sensations. One of you commented to me that, he's been trying really hard to find his body awareness. He can find the sensation, say, of the leg, but he can't find the body that's having the sensation. Yes, that's correct! No body to be found! But, don't we automatically add one? We jump from a sensory contact with the environment into a whole structure of me being a body sitting here meditating. Actually, there's just the sensation.

#### You Should Train Yourself Thus

I've brought with me the *Bahiya Sutta*, one of the short sutras from the Pali collection. Bahiya was a seeker; it sounds like he wasn't a Buddhist seeker at the time the sutra starts, but he had a sense of "Am

I getting anywhere? Am I already there? Where am I?" And in the sutra a *devata*, a heavenly being, said to him "No, you're not getting anywhere. But if you travel and see the Buddha, he can teach you, because he knows."

Bahiya went and found the Buddha. The Buddha was out on his alms rounds, so Bahiya interrupted the Buddha and said, "Oh blessed one, teach me the Dharma! For my long-term welfare and bliss." And the Buddha said, "Not now, Bahiya, we're doing our alms rounds."

A second time Bahiya said, "It's hard to know what dangers there may be for the blessed one's life, or what dangers there may be for mine." (Meaning, you might not live until the end of the alms rounds; you'd better tell me now!) And a second time the Buddha said, "This is not the time. We have entered the town for alms."

A third time (Bahiya was quite persistent) he said, "It is hard to know what dangers there may be for the blessed one's life, or what dangers there may be for mine. Teach me, oh blessed one, teach me, teach me!" The Buddha gave in and taught him, in a very direct teaching, which bears on what I was saying just now.

The Buddha said, "Okay then, Bahiya, you should train yourself thus: in reference to the seen, there will be only the seen. In reference to the heard, only the heard. In reference to the sensed, only the sensed. In reference to the cognized, only the cognized. That is how you should train yourself."

In relation to this "in reference to the sensed, only the sensed," there's the sensation of the leg. That's all there is; there is no need to add the idea of a body.

If something is heard, there's no need to add a story about it. But we so easily jump into making a story that creates a mental object which explains a sound for us. If we heard a particular sound, instantly, in a second, the whole process would be over. We'd recognize it as the bark of a dog. We'd assume there's a dog there. Then we might start a story in the mind about "I wonder who's walking a dog past here? I wonder where they're going? What sort of dog is it?" And then there's the attitude of "I don't like dogs, I'm scared of them." Or "I like dogs. I'd like to see it and stroke it."

This all develops within less than a second. If you're watching your mind you can see this happening. But the whole story may be a complete fantasy; maybe I hid an electric dog-barking machine outside the door earlier! We like the sound to be identified and labeled and have a place in our mental model, because then we know how to react. We know whether to move towards the sound because we like dogs, or to move away because we don't. We have to have a response ready to deal with even sounds like that.

The Buddha is saying, drop out of that. In reference to the heard, only the heard. If a sound is heard – there's only a sound. Any more than that is a fabrication. Statistically, you'll get it right quite a bit of the time. But not all the time, because people like me will try and trick you with electronic dogbarking machines. We all tend to feel safer having a story and knowing which way to move, but I'm just saying "there was a sound; no need to create a story to explain the sound."

#### **Awareness Operating**

The Buddha is saying, "You should train yourself thus: in reference to the seen, there will only be the seen; in reference to the heard, only the heard; in reference to the sensed, only the sensed; and in reference to the cognized, only the cognized." If there is a thought, leave it at that – don't develop it into a train of thoughts. That is how you should train yourself. Very simple, direct instruction, and very close to what we've been doing here. In reference to

the seen, there will be only the seen – "only" means silence, not adding anything, and "the seen" means illumination. Awareness is operating. Likewise for the other senses.

The sutra goes on: "When for you there will be only the seen in reference to the seen, and only the heard in reference to the heard, and so on, then Bahiya, there is no 'you' in connection with that."

If there's just a sound out there which is not yet identified as "dog," and there's a sensation somewhere down here in the position of "leg"; the senses are operating, but nothing is developing beyond that – no "you" is developing either. "You" are a construction of the mind, and the idea of a body behind senses is a construction of the mind. The idea of "your" cognizance, "your" thinking, "your" mental processes, which you so quickly identify as "your" thoughts take out the word "your" and they're all just ideas presenting themselves to awareness.

It's no different from a bird that flies in front of you when you're sitting outside, and flies away again. An idea flies into awareness, and flies away again. A sensation, which wasn't there before, is there now, and then is no longer there. There is just this passing flow. Where's the "you" in that? It's only there when you put it there. Until you put it there, there's just the flow of experience. The habit is to refer this flow of experience to "me," to create a model of the world in which I'm in the center and everything is judged in its importance in relation to me. But now, practicing like this, it's different - there is just what there is.

#### Form is Emptiness

There are indeed various mental phenomena. "Emptiness" isn't saying there's nothing there. It's saying the way we understand what is there, the way we manipulate it and use it and respond to it, is misled. It's ignorant. We're deceiving ourselves.

This isn't to deny the material world. It's not to deny the phenomenon of a body. Form, of course, is one of the five skandhas, and we recognize form. But form (the body) is empty of inherent separate existence; the *Heart Sutra* repeatedly tells us this. It's a creation of the mind. Still, there's the phenomenon of the body which the mind creates. Sensations, similarly – think of the five skandhas which form the body, the body which experiences sensations, sensations which within that one second develop into a perception. A sound becomes a dog bark, and then the volition, the impulse to react a certain way to the perceived presence of a dog. The mental cognition

of a dog in the neighborhood. That whole process can be dropped, and, if there's a sense phenomenon, we needn't create a sense of form out of it.

We could create a sense of form out of it. and that would be "emptiness is form." But just now we're doing "form is emptiness." At this moment, no, we don't create a form.

It's not wrong that we sometimes create a form. Emptiness IS form, these are the same thing. This is another case where it's not split into two. Reality has these two aspects of form and emptiness, emptiness and form. And sensation and emptiness, and emptiness and sensation, and volition, and so on.

The five skandhas are empty of inherent existence. But still there are phenomena we call "form" or "sensation"

or "perception" or "volition" or "mental cognition." These phenomena really exist, but not in the way we've tended to treat them.

Getting this conceptually is tricky, but this is what it's pointing at. Through practice there can be a realization of it. These little things I've been pointing out, that you could experience in your practice, could point you that way. But this is not something you should be trying to do from now on. That would be a huge mistake. If you've started to think, "Okay, my task is to not be here. I'll have the body awareness of not having a body," - that doesn't work, does it? No, your task is to practice.



#### Notice Your Tendencies

The main purpose here is to notice your tendency to create a mental world. You may, every now and again, catch yourself out doing that. You can catch it when you hear a sound that you don't immediately recognize, and then there's a certain anxiety – "what was that sound?" Something in the environment unknown? That's uncomfortable for us, and we're listening really sharply, to see if it comes again and we get a second chance to identify it. This is an example of you trying to fit something into the model you've built up in your mind of what's around you. And if it's something we don't recognize – we focus on it, don't we? If there's a coiled shape on the road; we don't just walk past it. We inspect it, trying to work out, is it a snake? We have this strong urge to fix things in our minds, so that we know what they are. We reify them. We can't rest until there's an explanation. We have to make one up, if there isn't one.

Again, this is a way of getting by. It enables us to put that thing on one side and move on to the next thing which needs attention. We're creating a story the whole day long. The story is empty of true reality. Our nature is emptiness, which is shorthand for saying we're empty of inherent existence, we're not fixed objects in the way we tend to assume.

#### Impermanence

We accept impermanence. We know the body changes, ages, dies. But the nature of impermanence means that our attempt to fix things is doomed to failure. The cloud spreads out across the sky and is no longer a cloud. There never was a cloud thing, there was a temporary phenomenon of water droplet density, and it dispersed or evaporated or it fell to the ground.

There is a temporary density of various chemicals and molecules sitting in front of you here, gurgling

<sup>3</sup>hoto by Federico Be



And this mind has changed; various phenomena have passed through it, diverse thoughts and ideas and mental constructions have been created, or seen through, or both. This is an ongoing process. We can give the name "me" or "self" to this process. It's something just rolling along in its own way, and we can witness it through sitting, watching the mind. We can experience it. But can we do that without then taking the next step of creating a story about it? Can we just simply sit and watch the show, without being a critic reviewing the show and trying to improve it? We find that harder to do because

we've invested a lifetime in this particular show. It's really special to us and we can't just leave it alone. But maybe we can at least entertain the possibility of that. And maybe, as the mind settles, there can be some moments when we don't automatically leap to a story, but just allow something to be as it is.

and making some noises into a microphone. I'm

quite interested in this particular phenomenon, it's

quite special to me, but it's still just a temporary

phenomenon, which will pass. It has already

changed from when it first sat down, breakfast being

digested, various body cells being renewed, chemicals

transported around the body. This body has changed

while I'm sitting here, and so have all of yours.

See if you can trust yourself to just sit here, whatever comes. In that way the mind can become very deeply silent. The narrator, the raconteur, goes off-duty and takes a break, and there's only bare perception. Of course still there's a habit to build on the perception, and you may witness that happening, and in the spotting of it, it can release itself.

#### Thoughts Arise and Disappear

There was a very interesting article by Master Sheng Yen in the *Chan Magazine* \* a few years ago. It's not his own teaching, it's one that's been used

throughout the history of Chan. The earliest I have found it dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century but it's been used since then in various poems and so on. It's simply the observation: whenever a thought arises (thought here means any mental phenomenon – memory, feeling, perception, etc.), just be aware of it and by itself it will disappear. You don't need to make it go away. You don't need to develop it. If you simply genuinely allow it to be seen, are clearly aware of it – that is the whole of the practice. The rest looks after itself.

If we deflect ourselves from seeing it clearly by immediately launching into a story, a categorization, and a reaction, then it's not seen clearly. It's sort of glimpsed, and then we go into automatic pilot mode and do something with it. But if you just allow yourself to clearly experience it, by itself it will disappear.

If the phenomenon arises and by itself it disappears, there isn't that in-between step that we tend to do of creating the self and working out how it relates to us.

If, in relation to the sensed, there is only the sensed, and there isn't a story added, then there is no "you" there! It's not as though you've slipped away or gone off to one side, no, you're not there. Because the "you" is just one of your stories, albeit a very persistent pervasive story, and in this case you haven't developed the bare sensation into a sensation woven into a story of you. Yet there is still this phenomenon of you; again, this is not denying that. It's more a way of expressing our understanding the nature of you.

Another way to put this is: it's more like the sense of self that's under investigation here. We're not doubting the processes of self, such as your having the intention of walking to the dining hall and your body getting up to do that. It's the sense of ownership of the process, the identification with it, the sense of "me" in it, which is confusing us. If a sound unrecognized creates a sense of danger, but on investigation it turns out there is no danger – then the *sense* of danger doesn't mean there *is* danger. Having a *sense* of self doesn't mean there *is* self.

#### The Release of Suffering

We tend to slip from a sense of self into an assumption of self, into operating from self. But these teachings are pointing out to us that that's going a step too far. You know that saying of Descartes, "I think, therefore I am." That's a rather big leap. He might've shortened and just said "I think, therefore there seems to be thought." Better still, he should have stopped at "There seems to be thought." Because the rest is just a story that we create to explain it. The sense of self that arises strengthens it for us and traps us into believing it.

There are the phenomena of physiology and biology, chemistry, feelings, memories; all this stuff is in motion and we dip into the experience of it, catch a sensation and tell ourselves a story. We build up a story and we believe it. It creates a sense of self. This fiction is quite a long novel we've been writing during our lives. The reason why this is important is because it's the key to releasing our suffering. We can refer back to the second noble truth, craving and aversion.

Craving and aversion are largely anchored around defending this sensed self. Our prime objective in life is to defend and support and develop the self that we sense. We've been tricked, by evolution, by biology, into putting ourselves as number one. That creates a certain survival instinct which is why evolution has done that, but it also creates tension, unhappiness: "I'm not getting what I want, oh dear, I won't survive." Or, "I'm getting too much of this, I don't like it." Suffering, dissatisfaction, virtually all in relation to "me." Of course, we have some sense of the suffering of those around us. I'm not saying we're completely selfish; only about ninety-five percent selfish! You may think about somebody else's suffering, but even then, how much of that is related to your part in their suffering, or your wanting to feel good for having helped them? It all gets tangled up.

We could say the center of our self-concern is ourselves, and that's perfectly reasonable from the biological point of view. However, most of us are fairly well-assured of biological survival, for a few more years at least, yet we create so much fuss around unnecessary things like food preferences or minor aspects of our social identity; our concerns about them are excessive. A lot of our mental fussing is totally unnecessary when we realize that our basic needs are already largely fulfilled. We can just simply sit here and find peace, freedom from craving and aversion and from the ignorance of assuming a self to be what it is not.

#### Don't Get in the Way

I've been presenting it theoretically here to try and give you some conceptual understanding that practice has the potential to give you a personal realization of this - those moments when the sense of self isn't even there to be found because you're not creating it at that moment. As the mind settles into practice, and as your attention sharpens and becomes more continuous, you stumble over these moments, these "gaps in the matrix", shall I say. Something is experienced differently from your usual mode of being. Usually you just gloss over it or are too busy to notice. But when the mind is settled, you can come across these moments where you realize that the identification with a certain value system is not intrinsic to you. It's been created through a thought process, an impregnation of the mind, but it's not you. There's that sudden gap which can be sensed as a vulnerability, a risk. It can feel uncomfortable, but it can also be sensed as an openness, an opportunity, freedom. It can slip by you because it can be brief. Or it can be clearer and bring with it implications that other things are also not intrinsic to you.

We've built a whole superstructure, a belief system, around this sense of self and the urge to protect it. Again this has some biological value, I'm not dismissing it entirely, but hasn't it gotten way out of hand? Almost entirely our twenty-four hours are taken up fussing about this particular story of "me." Take a break from it and you'll be surprised: the world continues to work okay without you interfering. Actually, you are totally unnecessary, even to yourself. Bit of a shock, but with that shock is an understanding of the depth of how far this goes. It really is that radical, it really does cut to the root.

The root of our suffering is this fossilization of a sensed self into something to be protected at all costs. All energy, all time and attention is used in that direction. But we can cut ourselves free from that painful and pernicious habit

of thinking and of acting and being. The sharpness of your practice, the sharpness of your attention, the silence of the mind, allows things to be noticed which are usually overshadowed by mental activity.

Keep practicing with sharp attention, with a mind that's as still as you can find it to be, using the method, being present with the mind, watching the show without writing the review or creating the script.



Just watch the show and, maybe, the emptiness of the show will become apparent. But don't try and force that – just sit there with what comes. The practice looks after itself. You can get in the way of it but you can't speed it up. Your task is simply not to get in the way.  $\infty$ 

<sup>\*</sup> Master Sheng Yen, "Directly Practice 'No Mind'," *Chan Magazine*,vol. 33, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 6–10.

Dharma Practice in an Age of Technological Dystopia

Guo Gu

BY

Guo Gu first learned meditation in 1972 when he was four years old, studying with a respected Chinese meditation master in Taiwan, Master Guangqin (1892–1986). In 1980, he began learning meditation from Master Sheng Yen, who was residing in New York at the time. In 1991, after college, Guo Gu was ordained as a monk and became Master Sheng Yen's personal attendant. In 1995, he had his first Chan experience, and was given permission by the master to teach Chan independently. In 2000, Guo Gu left monasticism and re-entered the world. He received his PhD in Buddhist Studies from Princeton University in 2008 and began teaching Buddhism and East Asian religions as an Assistant Professor at Florida State University. In 2009, he founded the Tallahassee Chan Center, where he is the guiding teacher. This article was edited by Sandra Fiegehen.



devices fulfill them. Our addiction to technology is a form of being controlled where we are being subjected to the world of cyber dystopia. We need to expose this addiction, accept its true nature, and work with it in order to free ourselves and regain our humanity.

#### The Imagined Dystopia

Dystopia is the opposite of utopia, and it refers to an *imagined* world where we are dehumanized and our human potential for freedom deteriorates. Technology, in a certain sense, lessens our humanity. We create digital personas, façades, and personalities. We create an imagined world. We usually understand the word *imagined* as something unreal or insubstantial. But that's not the meaning here. In fact, all of us share an imagined society, an imagined world. We have always done this. We share an imagined or agreed-upon consensus of normalcy through social practices, in the way we dress, walk, love, and greet each other.

Twenty years ago, if I were to greet you by raising my arm and pushing my fist out toward you, you might have taken it as a hostile gesture. Today this is called a "fist pump" and it just means "(Hey), what's up?" This is a shared social practice. Such conventions exemplify our socially constructed, consensually imagined world. So imagination is not just fantasy – it has that element – but it is a shared belief and practice of what is normal.

Technology has created a dystopia. App designers invent applications and platforms that target our needs. Even notifications and displays are carefully crafted to grab our attention and to lure us to come back for more, and more, and more. Advertising and casino gambling strategies are operative here. Marketers, designers, promotional strategists and all of us users create, incorporate, and reinforce a socially constructed imagined reality.



When people constantly share details of their social lives with others, those who are not included may feel left out. FOMO, the Fear of Missing Out, is a recent addition to our language. If people receive an alert on a social media platform or text and they are not able to respond, they experience anxiety. They want to be seen, heard, and don't want to be missing from the conversation. So whenever an alert comes, they feel compelled to respond, perhaps with an emoji, a thumbs up, a "Like" or some other way that expresses that they are in on it, that they are part of whatever is going on.

We are social beings in a society which, paradoxically, favors individualism. However, in the absence of social support and strong family ties, we experience estrangement, isolation, a deep sense of lack. This is the unfortunate flip side of individualism. In premodern times, societies were founded on social networks of family, neighbourhood and village, and the self was embedded in a connectedness within these structures. By contrast, the modern self is conditioned to feel estranged and anxious; more socially mobile but ever more isolated – hence, our attraction to being seen, heard, and loved in this imagined, technological dystopia.

### The Hook

In every context of our life, from our nine-to-five job to school, transitioning from home to college to a new work place, our need to be seen, heard, and loved is greatly exploited by technologies that purport to meet those needs. We are told that we must be "connected." We can't not be connected! Advertisements stress our desire to be connected and offer a particular product as a solution to this "problem" of disconnect. These ads work because we feel isolated. We feel alone and estranged in a fast-paced world.

The programs that are developed to make us feel connected provide a substitute connection, but this is not the real thing even though the neurological pathways involved may be the same. When we are part of a cyber-community, when we are recognized and when we are seen, when people click a "Like" on Facebook or respond positively to our Snapchat posting, our brain activity is the same as when we interact with each other in real life.

The imagined cyber dystopia caters to our need for instant gratification and that has a detrimental effect on who we are. Because of neuroplasticity, our brain constantly adapts to circumstances as we learn to restructure ourselves. We rewire ourselves, gradually and imperceptibly. Reading a book and taking notes with a pen on paper is a very different experience than swiping and tapping bits of information. Different parts of the brain become activated. There's a tactile sensation, there's a time lapse, and neurological processes have time to register information and lay down patterns. When we are on our apps and social media feeds, we merely glance over information and type short messages - typically 150 words or less - and consequently and inadvertently, we train our brain in a different way. The more we repeat these actions, the more these neurological pathways strengthen. These are pathways that favor speed over nuance, simplicity over depth in our reading and our thinking, and fragmentation over narrative coherence.

On social media, we can join the conversation in the middle and we can leave before the end. We condition the mind to de-contextualize and oversimplify our understanding and to favor impulse over responses that are measured or tempered. The conversations continue, and most people feel little incentive to be responsible for it. We come simply to "post" our own projections and further our own agenda. Like potluck, we bring our own meals to these cyber conversations.

Twitter posts are increasingly simple, impulsive and uncivil. This is a whole new way of processing information. Because we don't experience real people, we dehumanize others as mere screen names. We are changing how our brain relates to others. This shift in how we interact with each other has profound implications not only on individual relationships and social relationships but even on our political life. Technology changes the way news is conveyed to us and the way we are absorbing it. Tweets are often shocking, sensational and attention-grabbing but they are not informed or contextualized analyses of important events.

#### The Deep Tones of Emotions

We as Dharma practitioners must expose the illusion of our deep-seated emotions, beneath our discursive thinking. The feelings of isolation, separateness, and lack do not define us. Living in a world of technological dystopia is not the solution. When we practice in the context of worldly life and expose the ways in which we are conditioned and controlled, we naturally aspire to free ourselves from this imagined dystopia of our own making.

The point of technology is to use technology and not be used by it. Our humanity cannot be swapped for it. The first step to recovering our humanness is to expose our addiction to our imagined dystopia. The Buddha didn't speak about "dystopia." He used a very simple word: "dream." That is, an imagined world, a shared reality of saṃsāra that we continually participate in, create, and fortify. Great technological advances have occurred as a result of our imagination. I am not advocating social regression. What I am advocating is that we endeavor to not cede control to our technologies. We are much more than that.

"Exposing" is my way of expressing the Buddha's teaching for waking up from the dream of saṃsāra; it is insight into seeing how things truly are. We have to see the dream, see how we actually create the dystopia, perpetuate stories and imaginary projections of who we are and should be. This imagined dystopia is only run by having and lacking, gaining and losing, success and failure, victim and perpetrator. Exposing these binary ways of experiencing things is humbling. Actually, the more we expose these dualistic habit patterns, the more we are free. We realize that we have more options and choices; we are much more than our addictions.

Exposing is not a cerebral or psychoanalytic process. It is to directly change the subtle tones of emotions. It does not work to simply see what's happening and then command ourselves to let go. Body and mind are inseparable. When we have certain perceptions, our body responds in a certain way – chemicals are being released throughout the body because of our reactive states. So when we are working through compulsions or addictions, we must direct our attention to the tones of emotions and learn to relax our body, harmonize the breath. Exposing is an embodied practice.

According to Buddhist psychology, there are five factors of mind that are always present in both waking and sleeping life. They are: sensory contact, sensation,



intention, conception, and attention. Sensory contact is always present in one way or another - this is a given. When there's contact, there's always sensation, of which there can only be three: pleasure, pain, or neutrality. They can be very subtle and in any given moment only one of these three feelings is present. On the basis of these subtle sensations or emotions, we create karma. This is intention. our impulse to act. Conception furthers our intention through discrimination, which is either correct or mistaken. Attention is our ability to focus. For example, once we are karmically and conceptually lured by smartphone devices, our attention keeps us addicted. All the apps need to do is to create the platform for our need to be seen, heard, and loved, then we do the rest to keep ourselves locked in the technological dystopia.

#### Practice in an Age of Dystopia

What is important is to expose the presence of subtle tones of emotions in our addiction. Are we feeling attraction, repulsion, or neutral? It is the subtle, undercurrent tones of emotions or moods that shape our experience in this moment. Even as you read these words now, you are experiencing different emotional tones – some of which might be carried over from before you started reading, or may have arisen when you came across one particular passage in this article. You might be experiencing engagement, receptivity, openness, or, if you disagree, you might experience an emotional closing, a subtle aversion or suspicion, perhaps doubt. Most people are not aware of this level of subtle mental continuum. It is the presence of the emotions that shape our experience from one moment to another.

For practitioners, once the body is relaxed, the breath will be harmonized and the mind clear; wandering thoughts diminish. But this type of clarity is not sufficient. We need to be aware of the undercurrent of feelings within us in this moment.

I'll give you a simple example. When you are in a good mood and someone texts you an annoying message, you feel fine, no problem. But if you are in a bad mood and they text you the same message, you may immediately become aggravated. The text is the same, but your attitude is different, and you give rise to a particular intention (karma) accompanied by some stories about this person (conception), and then you fixate on that (attention). If we are not clear about our present emotions, our attitudes, we may be practicing what I call spiritual substitution or suppression. For example, even though we practice Buddhadharma, little things may still annoy us. The difference is just that now we have collected a whole bunch of Buddhist ideas, like "compassion" and "lovingkindness" but we're not really exposing the undercurrent of our feelings in this moment. Because we're not exposing the undercurrent, we cannot see its true nature and cannot embrace it, and we definitely cannot work with it. Our dystopia, then, continues.

#### Freedom

Once we expose the undercurrent tones of our emotions or attitudes in the present, we work on accepting them. Of course, there is a history to our emotions and attitudes and there are reasons why we feel the way we do. But now you can accept them and choose not to get caught up with or repress them. We see their true nature. This process is not linear. The more we expose, the more we embrace and accept. The more we accept, the more we expose other aspects of ourselves. And the more we expose, the more we are able to work our way out of this dystopia.

How to change our attitude? Be gentle. Just look at our need for gratification and accept it without necessarily following or rejecting it. If we can relax and be present, then all it takes is a gentle shift in attitude. The source of the problem is really not technology or anything else. It is identifying with feelings, our attitudes. All the Buddhist teachings on virtues can be used to make that shift. Gently bring up gratitude, or contentment, or loving-kindness, or contrition. If we're relaxed and present to what's there, the tones of our emotions are freed from an owner, a self. The sense of lack or whatever we may feel easily shifts into gratitude and contentment. This freedom and fluidity is our humanity.

The moment-by-moment present liberates. When we expose, embrace, and work through our deep-seated feelings by shifting negative emotions to wholesome factors, we come to personally experience the fluid nature of our mind. This is a testimony of our intrinsic freedom. *Being* in this way is freedom, is becoming human, becoming buddha.

With regard to dealing with the dystopia of modern life, we need to expose our addictions and recognize the ways in which we participate in those technologies that feed our addictions and perpetuate our habit patterns. We need to expose our fears and the ways in which our needs are shaped and manipulated. Our lives need no longer be driven by "If I do this, I will get more 'Likes.'" Our need to be seen, heard, and loved, through the system of intermittent rewards is no different from a compulsion to gamble on a slot machine. Expose our fears and habit patterns and we are freed. Our tendency to see things in opposition, in duality, dissolves.

The twelfth-century Chan master, Hongzhi once said "Multi-task amidst chaos." He didn't say when faced with the complexity of life, "Move to the mountain!" He said:

Multi-task amidst chaos. Manifest in full in places of encounter. No situations exist outside your mind. The two primaries of heaven and earth have the same root. The myriad forms are of a single body. Adapting to changes, you can transform freely without being coaxed or manipulated by brown-nosers. This is to realize great freedom. Travel like the wind, illuminate like the moon. You may encounter things but they are not obstructions. Then you may rest and retreat but still shoulder your responsibilities.\* Change is freedom. It is being human, being alive. There is no need to run away from chaos or the world. There are two lessons in Hongzhi's teaching above. First, nothing exists outside you. Second, take up responsibility. The manner in which we normally experience the world is dualistic. We think that the culprit behind our problems is outside: "It is *those people* who are doing this to me! It is the technology that is at fault. I am the victim; the smartphone designers are the perpetrators."

From Chan perspective, nothing exists outside of you. We create our imagined world of dystopia and live in it. Our emotions, feelings, thoughts and reactions are completely ours. This imagined dystopia is what binds us and frees us. With no seed of addiction, a feeling of FOMO would be impossible. If we didn't have addiction, we wouldn't have to engage in practice to be free. Nothing exists outside our mind. Yet everything we encounter can be our source of freedom.

We must shoulder our responsibilities. Don't blame others or the world. If we try to correct the world while we ourselves are filled with angst, aggression, or sorrow – if we don't expose these emotions within – we are not going to correct anything. We are only going to perpetuate the imagined dystopia, our samsaric dream. So we must completely engage with the world yet maintain our mind at ease. Hongzhi says "Travel like the wind, illuminate like the moon. You may encounter things but they are not obstructions." This is not to take up an attitude of passivity, nor to follow our tendency to always correct things, control others, and change situations based on our own opinions. That would be self-attachment.

Nothing obstructs. Everything reveals Buddhadharma. Everything reveals how the world of dystopia works. This world is our arena, our path. Exposing our deep-seated emotions yet refraining



from identifying with them, we "travel like the wind." Wind does not obstruct. Wherever we go, we are like a spring breeze.

"Illuminate like the moon," not like the blazing sun – cool yet brilliant. Flowing with change, transforming freely without being fixed in rigid ways. When we can respond in this way, we won't be "coaxed, controlled or manipulated by brownnosers." We stop living in our own stories and stop living in other people's dreams. At the same time, fully being in the world. What freedom!

With regard to our relationship to our devices, do we need to cut ourselves off from them? No. We don't need to stop using them, but we do need to expose the habit patterns that have developed around their use. We cannot be seduced and manipulated by them and our feelings of wellbeing cannot be dependent on how many "Likes" we get on Facebook. We need no longer perpetuate the dystopia. Nonetheless, we continue to participate in it.

To do that, we need to practice. Dharma practice is not an intellectual, cerebral exercise. It is an embodied practice that requires a level of mastery over the body and mind. The depth of our practice depends on our ability to expose, embrace, work through, and set ourselves free. We can engage with the world, utilize technologies, but not be defined by them. Once in a while, we have to engage in intensive retreats where we are unplugged, temporarily. One day, three days, five, seven days. Then, we return to the world with greater clarity to free ourselves and others.

Hongzhi chanshi guanglu 宏智禪師廣錄 (The Extended Record of Chan Master Hongzhi), fascicle 6, Taisho no. 2001, 48:6, 74a22.

## Buddhism and the New Global Society

BY

## Venerable Chang Ji

Venerable Chang Ji was ordained as a nun in the Chinese Mahayana tradition of Buddhism under Dharma Drum Mountain in 2004. In her role as the International Affairs Special Assistant to the late Chan Master Sheng Yen, she participated in many international conferences, including the World Economic Forum and World Bank, as well as meetings at the United Nations. Committed to teaching the tenets of contemplative action to young adults, she has led many youth leadership workshops and meditation retreats to this effect. She has participated in and facilitated programs for young leaders in conflict and post-conflict areas from Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Cambodia, and works to spread awareness of Spiritual Environmentalism to young people all over the world. She is currently DDMBA's representative to the UN and is leading workshops on Global Citizenship around the world.

IN THE PAST TWO HUNDRED YEARS, the world has undergone a transformation more fundamental than at any period since Neolithic times, whether in terms of technology or the world of ideas. The material achievements of developed societies are attained by social conditions which breed a profound sense of insecurity and anxiety, of restlessness and inner confusion. Lonely, alienated men and women of the industrial era created meaning out of life from various forms of consumption or achievement – whether career building, homemaking, or shopping. However, poverty, war, oppression, and other social conditions that arose as a result also brought about unprecedented suffering in the world.

As a response to this, nations of the world pledged in solidarity to shift development of the world, over the next fifteen years, towards sustainability based on the principle of leaving no one behind, and growth is to be achieved within our planetary boundaries. They also pledged to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. These global agreements are the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement respectively.

Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA-US) in partnership with the Global Peace Initiative of Women and the Earth Charter have been organizing a series of regional gatherings of young people to explore the crisis of our times and the emergence of a new global society. Inner Dimensions of Climate Change – Europe, the third in the series



of this gathering, was held at Bonn, Germany, on November 10–14, at the same time as the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23).

Having engaged in programs related to youth leadership, empowerment, climate change, interfaith, and peace around the world for over fifteen years, I witnessed the emergence of a new global society in response to the crisis around the world. It is a society that is based on a culture of sharing and connection. The key actors birthing this society are young people. They are proven collaborators regardless of background, as they have not yet learned to put up artificial boundaries around their location, disciplines, or fields. Their sense of "me" transcends ideologies and they identify themselves as citizens of the planet. They are skilled when it comes to identifying gaps on a local level and developing innovations that fit the needs of communities. Their quest for a new meaning to life and a way of being in spirituality brings them to question current worldviews and the unexamined assumptions that drive them.

At the crucial time of this new emergence, crafting a new meaning to life to create a global society grounded on connection and a broader definition of equality, it is important that we undertake it with wisdom and compassion and not violence and hatred. I see that the historic task of Buddhists in the twentyfirst century is to interpret perennial Buddhism in terms of the needs of industrial man and woman in the social conditions of our time, and to demonstrate its acute and urgent relevance to the ills of this society.

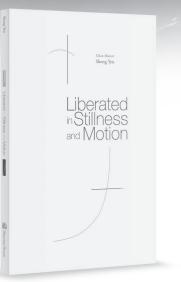
Change can be brought about with non-violence. Instead of being overwhelmed by our suffering, isolation, helplessness, apathy, and the baggage we carry from our past, this crisis is an opportunity placed in front of us, and we are left with an opening for action and an empowerment to act. What are the internal shifts required in order to sustain the transformations of this world? It is neither the performance of individuals nor institutions; rather, it is about inclusivity and community building while respecting diversity. It is about service and not about competition. When we could support others to fulfill their dreams and see what they are capable of, the world is better off for it. We can't make progress if we repeat all the mistakes of the past.  $\infty$ 

### 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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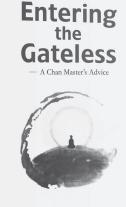
### **Entering the Gateless**

A Chan Master's Advice

#### Chan Master Chi Chern

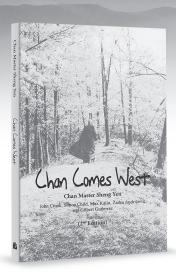
If you have read or heard about Chan (Zen) retreats, and you are curious about what a silent meditation retreat might be like, this little book of introduction will walk you through a landscape of the meditation world where, eventually, you will find nothing except that your original self is immaculate.

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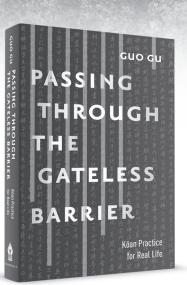


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#### Chan Master Sheng Yen John Crook, Simon Child, Max Kälin, Žarko Andričević, and Gilbert Gutierrez

In this book Chan Master Sheng Yen shares his experience in the practice and his views on Dharma transmission. His five lay Dharma heirs share their stories on the path, including how they came to the practice, their inner struggles along the path, and what receiving Dharma transmission has meant for them. The Master has sown the Dharma seeds, and it is now the task of these Dharma heirs to cultivate the field so that Chan will flourish in the West and benefit people for generations to come. It is hoped that readers will find these stories inspiring and be encouraged to make great vows in their practice.

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Dear all, Amitabha Buddha!

In order to implement the concept of environmental protection, save energy and reduce carbon emissions, *Chan Magazine* will launch a survey of the demand for the print edition of *Chan Magazine* from March to December 2018, to maximize the benefits of each issue.

If you are already a recipient of *Chan Magazine* and still wish to continue receiving hard copies, please complete the renewal process by **December 31, 2018** as described below.

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