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CHAN MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2019





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Attaining Full Awakening Together

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT transcending the ordinary and surpassing the holy are contingent on the condition of meditation; shedding the body while seated in meditation and dying while standing are necessarily dependent on the power of samādhi. Even if one devotes to the practice his entire life, he may still make mistakes. How then could one who procrastinates possibly overcome karmic obstacles? Thus, an ancient person has said, “Without the power of samādhi, you will meekly cower at death’s door. Shutting your eyes, you will end your life in vain. Just as you are, you drift in saṃsāra.” Friends in Chan, go over this text again and again. Benefit yourself and others. Let us together attain full awakening.



CHAN MASTER CHANGLU ZONGZE
Procedures of Seated Meditation, 1103

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*Daily Practice and
Intensive Practice*

BY

Chan Master Sheng Yen

This article is taken from a lecture given by Master Sheng Yen at the Chan Meditation Center (CMC) on November 4, 1984. It was originally published in the *Chan Newsletter* – No. 44, March 1985.



Chan Master Sheng Yen Photo by Ven. Chang Chen

TODAY I WILL SPEAK ABOUT two different kinds of practice: practice in daily life and practice during a specific time and at a specific place – as in a retreat, for example. Many people have spoken to me about the problem of maintaining their practice. One practitioner said, “I’ve been listening to the Dharma for many years, and I have been practicing very hard. But it seems to me that whenever vexations arise, I’m unable to get rid of them. So it seems to me that my practice has been useless.”

Another said, “Every day I have to manage two hundred people. I have to give them assignments. If I don’t give them their assignments, they won’t know what to do. When they have problems, they bring them to me to solve. Their problems become my problems. Two hundred people bringing problems to me is too much, and I don’t like my job at all.”

A third person told me, “I am sixty years old. During my life I have helped many people, and now I feel that it is time for me to practice seriously. But I can’t let go of all the people who need my help. For example, I had a dream recently where I was with a large group of people and I heard a voice which said, ‘You can’t forget other people and just work on your own problems; you must still take care of other people.’ This bothers me because if I am to practice, I can’t take care of all these other people at the same time. I must practice alone. But it is difficult for me to let go of all these other people. Even in my dream I was unwilling or unable to forget them.”

Clear Glass, Colored Water

I have given these three examples because I believe that they are relevant to many people. How many of you have similar problems? I doubt that most of you are capable of making vexations go away the moment that they arise. Ideally, you should not allow other peoples’ problems to cause you vexation. You should not feel that their problems cause problems for you. But very few people can do this.

This ideal can be better understood through the analogy of a glass container filled with colored water. No matter what color the water may be – whether dirty or clear – the glass always remains clear and unaffected. If you were faced with the kinds of problems mentioned in the examples above, could you actually say, “I am just like that piece of glass; the colored water does not affect me?” Even if you

could do this only sometimes, it would still be very good. Most people are not like the piece of glass. Most people are like a piece of cloth which absorbs the paint which a painter applies to it. Most people, when confronted by a problem which has nothing to do with them, assume that it’s their problem.

The sixty-year-old man would like to practice, but he’s not determined enough or he can’t give up his old habits and the surroundings he’s accustomed to. Many people are like this. Some people feel that they have not yet fulfilled their responsibilities to their family, their job and to other activities. When you can’t put down responsibilities, habits and interests, you can’t really practice.

Really, all of you have the problems I have described. If someone who was mentally unbalanced were to spit on you or kick you, how would you respond? You might say, “This really hasn’t happened to me, because this guy is crazy and can’t be held responsible for his actions.” But if it really did happen, do you think you would be so unconcerned? In fact,

I actually saw something like this happen: someone out of his head went up to a man in the street and beat him up. This man went to the police and complained. The police said, “But that guy is crazy.” The man was persistent and said, “So you should have him locked up.” But the police responded, “He was put in an asylum, and then he was released.” The man exclaimed, “Since he’s clearly still crazy, he should be put back in the asylum.” The police added, “You shouldn’t be so angry; he’s insane.” But the man concluded, “Angry or not, he should not be out running around on the street.” If this had happened to you, what would you have done? If you had the right attitude, you would have felt that the problem belonged to the insane man; you would have been unconcerned and been free of the vexations that troubled the man in my story.

Daily Practice Not Enough

Why have I asked you these questions? It is to point out that practice in daily life is generally insufficient. It is very difficult to reach a state of purity and peace just by daily practice. This is because in our everyday lives we live in the midst of constant confusion and agitation. It is difficult to achieve the kind of tranquility which allows the mind to be unconcerned with external events. That is why periods of sustained practice once or twice a year are essential. It may be necessary to devote a long period to intensive practice sometime during your life.

If you don’t practice daily, you may not be able to maintain an enthusiasm for practice. And without periods of extended practice, it is impossible to experience even a brief period of true peace. Daily practice is useful for two reasons: it maintains your interest and enthusiasm for the practice, and it reminds you that you are a practitioner. In being so reminded, you should feel how inappropriate it is



Photo by Michal Jarmoluk

to be vexed by life's ups and downs. But the deeper sense of peace can only be known through intensive practice for an extended period.

Karmic Roots

Because of the relative importance of daily and intensive practice, I found it necessary to give three different answers to those who complained to me about their difficulties. To the first person, who was discouraged by the persistence of his vexations, I said that it was very good that he recognized that he was unable to transcend his vexations, because it indicated that he was already practicing. If he hadn't been practicing, he wouldn't have been able to recognize this. Thus I told him that he had very virtuous karmic roots. I said to him, "You are like someone who has eyes to see, a brain to think, but hands, arms and legs that don't listen to you. You look ahead, and you see that if you keep walking in the same direction you will step in a pile of shit. You decide to change direction, but your legs don't listen to you, and you end up stepping in it."

To how many of us here does this analogy apply? To everyone, I think. But at least having an idea of what is about to happen is better than blindness or idiocy. The idiot doesn't even know what shit is; the blind man can't see it right in front of him. It takes someone who has tried to practice and who has some understanding of the Dharma to know how to proceed. Someone with no understanding of the Dharma can't recognize shit or vexation because his eyes are closed or simply because he doesn't care.

When I related this to the one discouraged by vexation, he was reassured. He told me he was happy that I said he had good karmic roots even though he experienced so many problems. I said that he would never have been able to recognize his vexations without good karmic roots. "Then," he said,

"practice is really very difficult; when will I ever be able to recognize vexations and still be unaffected by them?" I told him that although such an achievement is possible, there is no way I can predict when he might attain that state. I said, "You must continue to practice, so that vexations will gradually cease to disturb you. With practice there can come a time when we are not affected by vexations at all."

Three Stages

Practitioners deal with vexations in three stages: recognizing, identifying, and dealing with. Recognizing and identifying vexation is the beginner's stage. As to dealing with vexation, when a problem comes up, you should be very clear about the nature of the problem, and how it has arisen. You should feel no resentment towards the vexation; it should simply be accepted. You should repent the fault which caused the vexation, and hope that it does not arise again.

Vexations can arise only once; they then disappear, never to return again. Further vexation may arise, but it will likewise disappear forever. Problems are terminated part by part. Many people, when they begin practice, hope that their vexations will immediately end forever. Is this really possible, completely overcoming vexation when you first begin to practice? It is, but only for practitioners whose karmic roots are profound and immensely virtuous. Only bodhisattvas who are reborn can begin practice at such a high level.

If you are a beginning practitioner, when intense vexations arise which can't be tamed, you should not feel disillusioned or disappointed. It is just like working in the little garden behind this building: once we weed it, the weeds will soon return. So we must weed again and again. If we decide not to weed at all because the weeds will just grow again, then



Vexations are like weeds. We must weed again and again. Photo by Ven. Chang Duo

the whole garden will become overgrown, and the backyard will never be clear. However, if we never cease in our efforts, then at least there will be times when the garden will be clear and ordered.

To anyone who thinks it's useless to strive to cut off all vexations because they can't be terminated at once and will continually return, I would say this: from now on you need not clean yourself after you go to the bathroom, and you need not clean your dishes after eating. After all, you will go to the bathroom today, tomorrow, and the day after that. If you feel that cleaning yourself today is not worth the effort because you will have to do it tomorrow, why do it at all? If your dishes will be soiled tomorrow even though they are cleaned today, why bother with cleaning? This might do for animals, but humans are different. If you recognize vexations, you should make an effort to

terminate them every time they arise.

To the man who manages two hundred people, I said, "Don't you realize that you should practice Chan in daily life? You say that you must assign jobs to others and then deal with their problems, but this is a splendid opportunity to practice Chan." He replied, "I understand what you say, but I feel that I am not practicing at all in my everyday life. I realize only that I am angry or in a bad situation." Then I said, "Meditate at least two hours a day, on Sundays meditate throughout the whole day, and every year

participate in two week-long retreats. Then you will certainly be able to deal with any problem in your life as simply an occasion to practice Chan."

Everything is Chan Practice

If what you do in life is done for the benefit of others, then everything in life is the practice of Chan. An example: Yesterday we held a day-long retreat at the center. After the first meal, one participant volunteered to wash the dishes. By the end of the day, he had done the dishes for two meals. I asked him whether he was especially interested in washing dishes. He replied, "No, not at all." Then I asked him whether he had done this to accumulate merit. He told me, "No, I never thought of that. I did it only because no one else was willing to do the dishes." His attitude seems to be reasonable and justified,



Serving others is essential to Chan. Photo by Ven. Guo Yue

one of the participants and said, “Now here is an opportunity for you to be a great practitioner.” He was interested. He said, “All right, I’d like to be a great practitioner.” So I told him about the towels that needed to be taken to the laundry, and all the odds and ends that had to be cleaned up. Then his enthusiasm waned, “Well, I think I’ll wait until next time to be a great practitioner. I think I’ll go home now.” Although the purpose of a Chan retreat is to train people to

but actually it is incorrect. It is good because he at least volunteered to do the dishes. But his attitude is not correct because he did not perform the activity as a service to the others on the retreat. Serving others is essential to Chan. We should treasure any opportunity to practice, even in a difficult situation. With this attitude we will see the one who provides the opportunity as a bodhisattva, someone who helps us in our practice.

If someone insults you or gives you a hard time for no reason, shouldn’t you feel thankful that you have been given an opportunity to practice? The answer is yes, but only for the great practitioners, not for us. I have asked people if they would like such an opportunity to practice. Most say, “No, I don’t think that I’d want to tackle that now. First let me practice and build myself up, and then I would welcome such an opportunity!” Once, at the end of a retreat, there was a lot of cleaning to be done at the center, but everyone was in a hurry to go home. So I grabbed

become great practitioners, at the end of this retreat, I was the one left to be a great practitioner; everyone else went home!

To the last practitioner, I said, “You are already sixty years old and you understand the importance of practice. I advise you to put away everything else and direct all of your efforts to practice. Without sufficient, deep practice, the help that you give to others will be limited, regardless of how much effort you put forth. The help you give won’t be thorough or complete. But if you practice, there will be no limit to the help you can give to others. This is why I tell you to make practicing your first priority.”

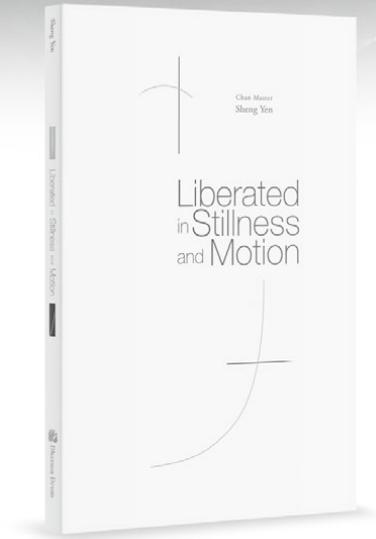
Becoming a great practitioner is not easy. You begin as an ordinary person, with all of the problems, difficulties, and doubts that ordinary people have. From there you must continue to strive with all your effort, always trying harder and harder until you reach your goal. Only by doing this can you become a great practitioner. ∞

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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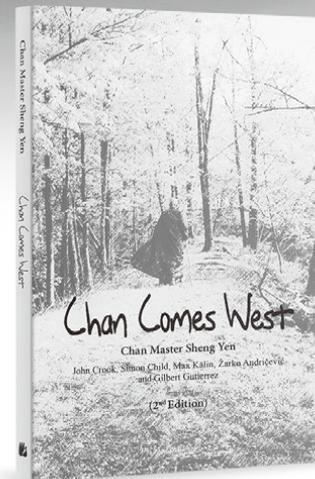
Chan Comes West (2nd Edition)

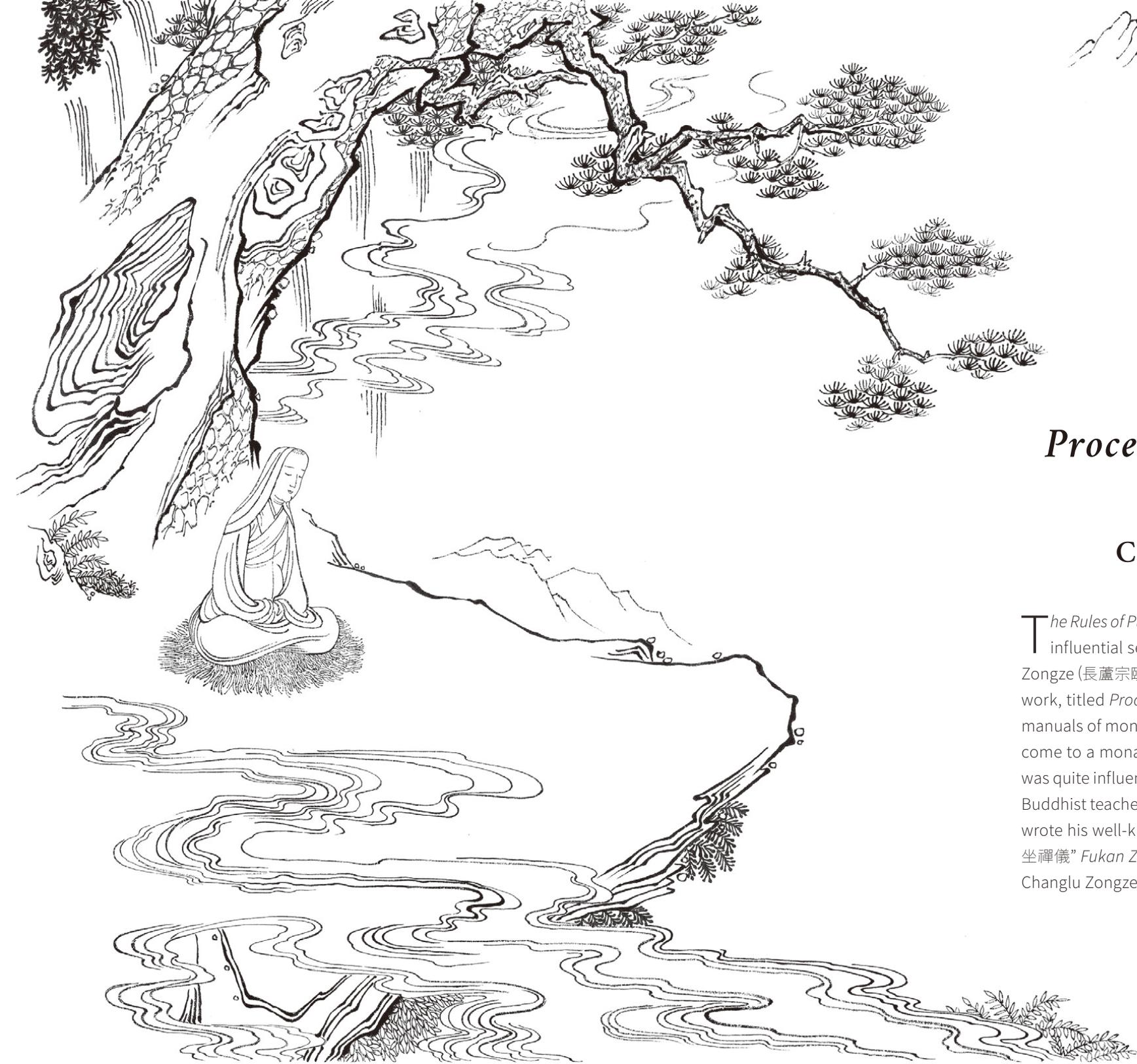
Chan Master Sheng Yen

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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Procedures of Seated Meditation

BY

Chan Master Changlu Zongze

The *Rules of Purity in the Chan Monastery* (“禪苑清規” *Chanyuan Qinggui*), is a highly influential set of rules for Chan monasteries compiled by Chan Master Changlu Zongze (長蘆宗頌) in 1103. It is the oldest extant work of its kind. An excerpt from this work, titled *Procedures of Seated Meditation* (“坐禪儀” *Zuochan yi*), is appended to manuals of monastic rules or regulations and is given to all novices, when they first come to a monastery, as instructions on how to sit. Changlu Zongze (died c. 1107) was quite influential a century before Eihei Dōgen (永平道元, 1200–1253), a Japanese Buddhist teacher who went to China to study Chan. Upon his return to Japan, Dōgen wrote his well-known *General Advice on the Procedures of Seated Meditation* (“普勸坐禪儀” *Fukan Zazen gi*), which is ninety percent copied, word for word, from this Changlu Zongze text. Translated by Guo Gu on November 23, 2009.

夫學般若菩薩，先當起大悲心，發宏誓願，精修三昧，誓度衆生，不為一身獨求解脫，爾乃六捨諸像，休息萬事，身心一如，動靜無間。

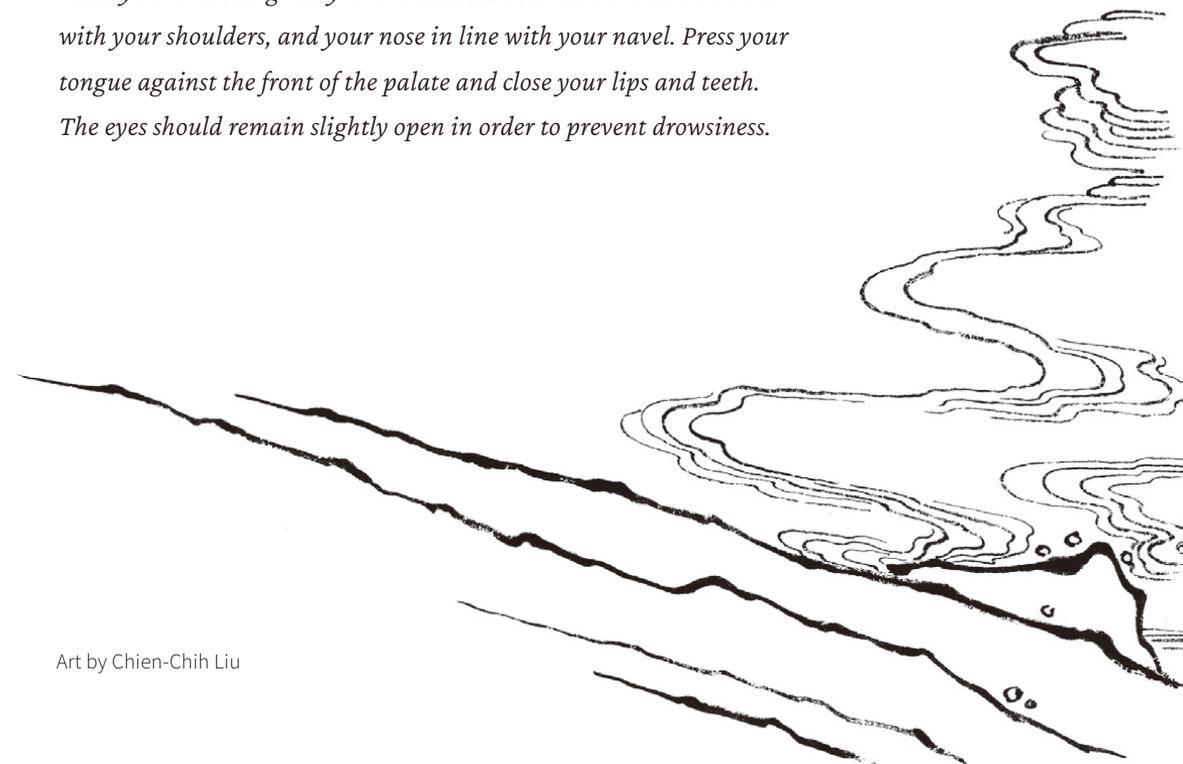
The bodhisattva who studies prajñā must first arouse the thought of great compassion, make great extensive vows, diligently cultivate samādhi, vow to save sentient beings, and not seek liberation for oneself alone. Then he should cast aside all appearances, put to rest the myriad affairs, and make the body and mind one with no division between activity and stillness.

量其飲食，不多不少。調其睡眠，不節不恣。
欲坐禪時，於閑靜處，厚敷坐物，寬繫衣帶。
令威儀齊整，然後結跏趺坐。先以右足安左髀上，左足安右髀上。
或半跏趺坐亦可，但以左足壓右足而已。

In order to practice, regulate food and drink, so that you take neither too much nor too little; adjust sleep so that you neither deprive yourself nor indulge yourself. When you sit in meditation, spread a thick mat in a quiet place. Loosen your robe and belt, and assume a proper demeanor. Then sit in a full cross-legged posture. First place your right foot on your left thigh, then place your left foot on your right thigh. Or you may sit in the half cross-legged posture; simply rest your left foot on your right thigh.

次以右手安左足上，左掌安右掌上，以兩手大拇指面相拄。
徐徐舉身前向，複左右搖振，乃正身端坐。不得左傾右側、前躬後仰。
令腰脊頭項骨節相拄，狀如浮屠。又不得聳身太過，令人氣急不安。
要令耳與肩對，鼻與臍對，舌拄上腭，唇齒相著。目須微開，免致昏睡。

Next, place your right hand on your left foot, and your left hand on your right palm. Press the tips of your thumbs together. Slowly raise your torso and stretch it forward. Swing to the left and right; then straighten your body and sit erect. Do not lean to left or right, forward or backward. Keep your hips, back, neck, and head in line, making your posture like a stūpa. But do not strain your body upward too far, lest it make your breathing hasty and unsettled. Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel. Press your tongue against the front of the palate and close your lips and teeth. The eyes should remain slightly open in order to prevent drowsiness.



若得禪定，其力最勝。古有習定高僧，坐常開目。
向法雲圓通禪師，亦訶人閉目坐禪，以謂「黑山鬼窟」，
蓋有深旨，達者知焉。

If you attain samādhi with the eyes open, it will be the most powerful. In ancient times, there were monks eminent in the practice of meditation who always sat with their eyes open. More recently, Chan Master Fayun Yuantong criticized those who sat in meditation with their eyes closed, likening their practice to a ghost cave on the side of a black mountain. Surely this has a deep meaning, known to those who have mastered meditation practice.

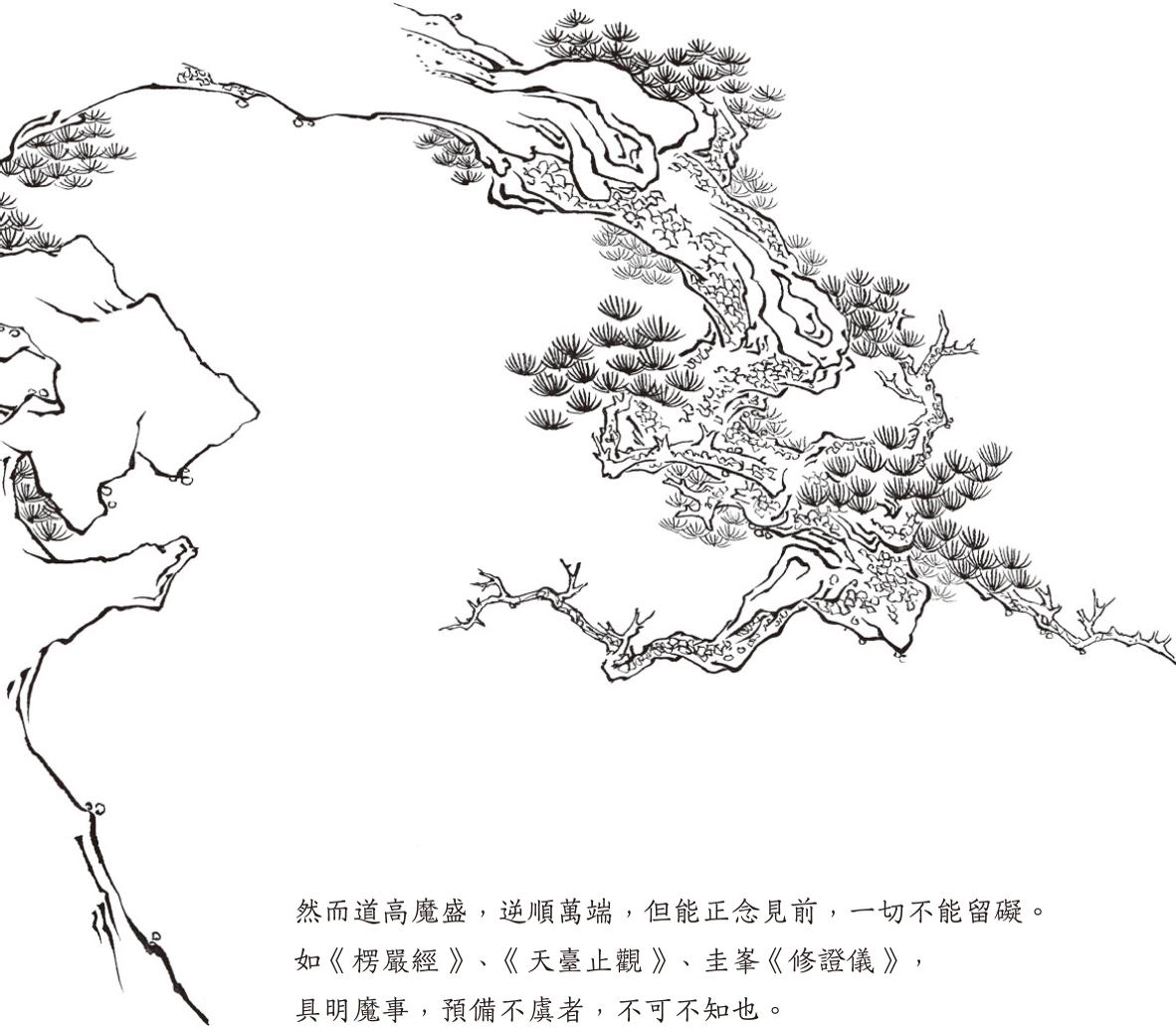
身相既定，氣息既調，然後寬放臍腹。
一切善惡都莫思量，念起即覺，覺之即失，久久忘緣，自成一片。
此坐禪之要術也。

Once you have settled your posture and regulated your breath, you should relax your abdomen. Do not think of any good or evil whatsoever. Whenever a thought occurs, be aware of it; as soon as you are aware of it, it will vanish. If you remain for a long period forgetful of objects, you will naturally become unified. This is the essential art of seated meditation.



竊為坐禪乃安樂法門，而人多致疾者，蓋不善用心故也。
若善得此意，則自然四大輕安，精神爽利，正念分明，法味資神，寂然清樂。
若已有發明者，可謂如龍得水，似虎靠山。
若未有發明者，亦乃因風吹火，用力不多，但辦肯心，必不相賺。

Without doubt, seated meditation is the Dharma-gate of ease and joy. If there are many people who become ill by practicing seated meditation, it is because they do not know how to apply their heart and their mind. If you understand the significance of this practice, then the four elements of your body will become light and ease, your spirit will be fresh and sharp, thoughts will be correct and clear. The flavor of the Dharma will sustain your spirit, and your heart-mind will be still, pure, and joyful. Those who have already clarified the truth are like dragons in water and tigers in the mountains. For those who have not yet realized the truth, just let the wind fan the flame; there's no need for much effort. Just assent to it and you will not be deceived.



然而道高魔盛，逆順萬端，但能正念見前，一切不能留礙。
如《楞嚴經》、《天臺止觀》、圭峯《修證儀》，
具明魔事，預備不虞者，不可不知也。

Nevertheless, as the path gets higher, demons flourish, and agreeable and disagreeable experiences become manifold. Yet if you are able to bring forth the correct thought, none of them will obstruct you. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Tiantai Zhiguan, and Guifeng Zongmi's Xiuzheng yi give detailed explanations of these demonic states. Those who would be prepared in advance for the unforeseen should be familiar with them.

若欲出定，徐徐動身，安詳而起，不得卒暴。
出定之後，一切時中，常依方便，護持定力，如護嬰兒，即定力易成矣。

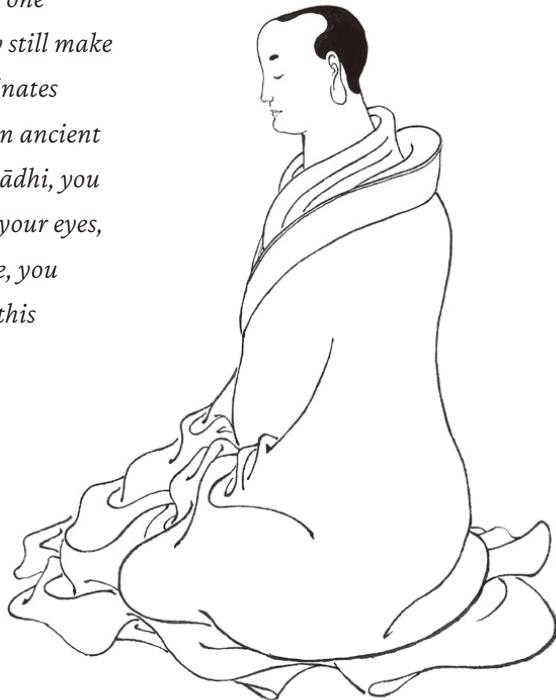
When you move out of samādhi, move slowly and calmly. Do not be hasty or rough. After you have left samādhi, employ expedient ways to protect and maintain the power of your samādhi at all times, just like you're protecting an infant. Then your samādhi power will easily develop.

夫禪定一門，最為急務。若不安禪，靜慮到這裏，總須茫然。
所以探珠宜靜浪，動水取應難。定水澄清，心珠自現。
故《圓覺經》云：「無礙清淨慧，皆依禪定生。」
《法華經》云：「在於閑處，修攝其心。安住不動，如須彌山。」

This single gate of samādhi is our most urgent business. If you do not practice meditation and somehow experience a quiet state, you will be at a loss. Therefore, in order to seek the pearl, the waves must be stilled; if the water is disturbed it will be hard to get it. When the water of samādhi is clear and pure, the pearl of the heart-mind naturally manifests. Hence, the Sūtra of Complete Enlightenment says, "Unimpeded and immaculate wisdom arises dependent on samādhi." The Lotus Sūtra says, "In a quiet place, one cultivates the control of the mind, abiding motionlessly like Mount Sumeru."

是知超凡越聖，必假靜緣，坐脫立亡，須憑定力。
一生取辦，尚恐蹉跎，況乃遷延，將何敵業？
故古人云：「若無定力，甘伏死門。掩目空歸，宛然流浪。」
幸諸禪友，三復斯文，自利利他，同成正覺。

You should know that transcending the ordinary and surpassing the holy are contingent on the condition of meditation; shedding the body while seated in meditation and dying while standing are necessarily dependent on the power of samādhi. Even if one devotes to the practice his entire life, he may still make mistakes. How then could one who procrastinates possibly overcome karmic obstacles? Thus, an ancient person has said, "Without the power of samādhi, you will meekly cower at death's door. Shutting your eyes, you will end your life in vain. Just as you are, you drift in saṃsāra." Friends in Chan, go over this text again and again. Benefit yourself and others. Let us together attain full awakening.



Art by Chien-Chih Liu

Entering the Gateless

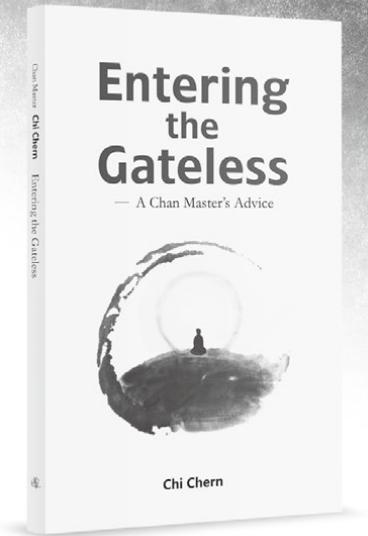
A Chan Master's Advice

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.

In this collection of short writings, Master Chi Chern's profound teachings are delivered in an easy to understand manner that both long-time meditators and beginners greatly enjoy and benefit from. With a poetic style of friendly advice, he offers you encouragement and guidance as you are inspired to learn further and take on a meditation practice.

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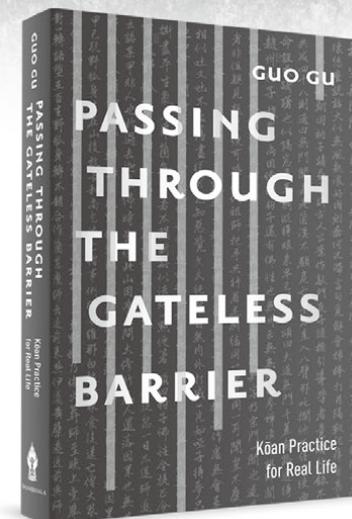
Passing Through the Gateless Barrier

Kōan Practice for Real Life

Guo Gu

The forty-eight kōans of the Gateless Barrier (Chinese: *Wumenguan*; Japanese: *Mumonkan*) have been waking people up for well over eight hundred years. Chan teacher Guo Gu provides here a fresh translation of the classic text, along with the first English commentary by a teacher of the Chinese tradition from which it originated. He shows that the kōans in this text are not mere stories from a distant past, but are rather pointers to the places in our lives where we get stuck – and that each sticking point, when examined, can become a gateless barrier through which we can enter into profound wisdom.

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*Commentaries on Zongze's
Procedures of Seated Meditation*

PART TWO

BY

Guo Gu

This article is based on Dharma talks given by Guo Gu (Jimmy Yu) at a two-day retreat held at the Lido Zendo in Sarasota, Florida in August, 2011. The text for the retreat was *Procedures of Seated Meditation (Zuochan yi)*, by Chan Master Changlu Zongze (12th century). Edited by Estelle Gerard and Buffe Maggie Laffey. Part One appeared in the Summer 2019 issue.



Guo Gu TCC Archive Photo

Samadhi Power

AS MY TEACHER WAS AWAY when I had my first Chan experience at age twenty-six, I wrote him about it. He replied, “Very good. Wait until I come back. There’s no need to interpret it one way or the other.” After that awakening experience, my mind was clear. I remained in samadhi for about a month, in all situations, whether I was in motion, while interacting with others, even when people were fighting. Everything was inseparable – pissing, showering, taking a shit. During that one month, my interaction with others changed. For example, one day the Chan Center’s bookkeeper (often referred to as “Miss Accomplishment” as she was always so full of energy) was arguing with someone in the third floor library. Although I said nothing, as soon as she saw me she calmed down, her attitude totally changed.

Another example of the power of samadhi was told to me by a Czech friend of mine, Dhammadipa, a long-time monk in the Thai forest tradition whom I’ve known for twenty years. His first teacher in

Thailand spent time in the forest where there are numerous animals including monkeys. We may think monkeys are cute, but they can be large and strong, and often live in groups of twenty or thirty. When they fight right in front of your hut, they’re no longer so cute as they can rip your head off. One day, while meditating, Dhammadipa, at the time a novice, got very scared. He went into his teacher’s hut and said, “There’s some monkey business going on outside; they’re fighting.” The teacher went outside, sat down, and began to meditate on loving kindness. All the monkeys settled down! The power of samadhi, indeed!

If you direct that mind to something, you can often change it. For instance, if you direct it to flowers, they will bloom, although, of course, you have to take care of them, add nutrients to the soil, and so on. The mind of vexation, on the other hand, is in the form of control, in the form of grasping, rejecting, gaining and losing. In terms of practice, we have to learn to let go. Seeing your own vexations, your own wandering thoughts, even if they are many, you have peace. Learn to do that. Then, with this kind of attitude, even the wandering thoughts will be at peace. If you try to change the situation, using some strategy to correct it or get away from it, it will become worse.

The Text

This text, *Procedures of Seated Meditation* by Changlu Zongze, is simple and actually very easy. Yesterday I spent some time explaining the introduction. We said that the bodhisattva who studies *prajna* should give rise to compassion, make great vows, and practice to save all beings rather than practice for one’s own self alone. The bodhisattva should also make no division between activity and stillness. Here is the formal instruction:

In order to practice, regulate food and drink, so that you take neither too much nor too little; adjust sleep so that you neither deprive yourself nor indulge yourself. When you sit in meditation, spread a thick mat in a quiet place. Loosen your robe and belt, and assume a proper demeanor. Then sit in a full cross-legged posture.

This may be a little difficult!

First place your right foot on your left thigh, then place your left foot on your right thigh. Or you may sit in the half cross-legged posture; simply rest your left foot on your right thigh.

You can sit in any posture as long as your back is straight.

Next, place your right hand on your left foot, and your left hand on your right palm. Press the tips of your thumbs together. Slowly raise your torso and stretch it forward.

This means that the small of your back can maintain its natural curve. The easiest way is to sit on the cushion so that your buttocks are higher than your knees; then your torso will naturally be raised and stretched forward a little bit.

Swing to the left and right; then straighten your body and sit erect.

Find your center place.

Do not lean to left or right, forward or backward. Keep your hips, back, neck, and head in line, making your posture like a stūpa.

To better understand, you may substitute “pyramid” for “stupa.”

But do not strain your body upward too far, lest it make your breathing hasty and unsettled.

Why? If your posture is too straight, your abdomen will tense up; your shoulders will be a little bit tense and hence your breast upward, which will make your breath hasty and unsettled. Your energy will be thrust upward. You want to sit just right so you can settle down. Your upper body should therefore be naturally straight.

Your ears should be in line with your shoulders, and your nose in line with your navel.

This is common sense enough but some people’s ears are not in line with their shoulders.

Photo by Caroline Cavalli



Press your tongue against the front of the palate and close your lips and teeth. The eyes should remain slightly open in order to prevent drowsiness.

This is very important.

If you attain samādhi

(or unification, oneness)

with the eyes open, it will be the most powerful. In ancient times, there were monks eminent in the practice of meditation who always sat with their eyes open. More recently, Chan Master Fayun Yuantong

(a contemporary Chan master, 1027–1090)

criticized those who sat in meditation with their eyes closed, likening their practice to a ghost cave on the side of a black mountain.

I spoke about this last night.

Surely this has a deep meaning, known to those who have mastered meditation practice.

If you are used to sitting with your eyes closed, it is very easy for you to indulge in quietude, stillness, nothingness. Keep your eyes slightly open, allow light to come in, avoid drowsiness and be awake. These subtle states are what we call being inside a ghost cave on the dark side of the black mountain. There is slight drowsiness embedded in these states. The mind is hazy and not clear. The mind no longer has a method; it is just kind of resting there. Having no method is like driving from point A to point B and stopping in the middle to watch the neighborhood or

the scenery. We don't get anywhere. That is why my teacher used to say that it is like soaking a rock in cold water. Even after one hundred years, the rock will still be a rock with no wisdom.

Once you have settled your posture and regulated your breath, you should relax your abdomen. Do not think of any good or evil whatsoever.

If I may, I will substitute “grasping or rejecting,” or “gaining and losing,” instead of “good or evil.”

Whenever a thought occurs, be aware of it; as soon as you are aware of it, it will vanish.

Thoughts liberate themselves; there is no need for you to come up with a strategy to free yourself from them. Instant by instant they free themselves.

If you remain for a long period forgetful of objects,

(and here's the punch line.)

you will naturally become unified. This is the essential art of seated meditation.

This sentence, “if you remain for a long period forgetful of objects,” is the key. Here “object” is actually a character for “condition.” All things arise out of conditions; all things perish because of various causes and conditions. All of us are under the influence of external conditions. When external conditions are favorable, we become happy; when unfavorable, we become sad. Here, Zongze says, “without conditions, then naturally you enter samadhi or unified mind.” Do you think a method of practice is a condition? Is a method, a condition? Yes! So what is the text saying? If you use



the method continuously, without thinking of good, evil, gaining, losing - as soon as a thought arises and you become aware of it, it vanishes. This is all connected. If you continually do this, then you will reach a point where even the method is dropped off, let go, and vanishes. Then you enter a unified state. This is the key. It is very different from being inside a ghost cave on the dark side of the mountain.

Fork in the Road

In my monthly beginners' meditation workshop, we go through these stages of practice. There is a juncture in practice – a fork in the road – in which the mind is settled with not too many wandering thoughts, although there may be a few. Two possibilities can happen at this juncture: one, the mind becomes hazy which actually translates as lazy. The feeling here, if you sit for a long time, is that the method is extra and you let go of it. That's when the mind rests in a kind of dark state, in nothingness. No wisdom can ever occur there.

The other fork in the road is when the person enters into samadhi. How? By continuously using the method, on and on and on. Samadhi states are like a plane taking off. It takes a tremendous amount of effort but once it is airborne, there is smooth sailing. But just when you think that you have no wandering thoughts, you must sharpen the mind and clarify. As soon as a thought occurs, your power of awareness dissolves it. You don't follow it. It is like a little dust mote appearing in the bright sun; it just vanishes. It appears, then vanishes. That's the strength of the mind. Then it continues naturally, on and on until the mind is completely unified, like a person riding a horse. The horse no longer feels burdened by the rider; the person no longer feels awkward riding this horse, and they gallop. They completely become one. Is there a horse? Yes. Is there a rider? Yes. They continue as one. That's the unified state. The momentum of concentration does not stop; it does not look at the scenery; it just continues. That is why we let go of the object, even of the method.

I must add that illusions also can occur at this juncture. For example, with hallucinations, there are not too many wanderings thoughts; the mind is settled but is a little bit unclear. This is when things buried deep in the unconscious come up. One may also see light or other phenomena.

Without doubt, seated meditation is the Dharma-gate of ease and joy. If there are many people who become ill by practicing seated meditation, it is because they do not know how to apply their heart and their mind.

How do we apply it? See the previous instruction.

If you understand the significance of this practice, then the four elements of your body

Solidity (earth), fluidity (water), motion (wind), and heat (fire) – the ancient Buddhist way of talking about the body.

will become light and ease, your spirit will be fresh and sharp, thoughts will be correct and

clear. The flavor of the Dharma will sustain your spirit, and your heart-mind will be still, pure, and joyful.

Have you ever seen seasoned practitioners in any kind of spiritual tradition, walk around in Dharma or other religious centers? Some, after many years of practice, actually become more rigid. This means that something is wrong in their practice. Practice makes us more natural, more at ease, more joyful, more “normal.” That should be the result.

There is a fascinating book by Bill Porter (a.k.a. Red Pine) called *Road to Heaven* in which he journeys through a Chinese mountain range called Zhongnan-shan, very famous throughout the dynasties because of the Daoist and Buddhist hermits who live there. As Porter speaks Chinese fluently, he is able to easily communicate with them. The friendliest people he meets are all Buddhists. The others, somewhat cocky and arrogant, not wanting to be bothered with visitors, quickly close their doors as soon as they see them. Those are the Daoists! I’m not discriminating, just describing the content of his book which is fascinating.

The first paragraph of our text talks about compassion. Some people are friendly and welcoming, with smiling faces. Some are guided by the kind of view that says, “the world is so full of dust, it’s best to practice in solitude and not get entangled with those worldly affairs.” If you are guided by that view, then you will probably behave like this: when you see people in the midst of hustle and bustle, you will shut the door. One should be able to practice Chan or Zen not only in the Chan hall or zendo, but amidst activity, for instance when working in the garden, or in interactions with others like right in the middle of Forty-Second Street (Times Square) in Manhattan. We practice while interacting with our family which can be rather complicated. How do we love a person? How do we raise one or more human beings and interact with them? That’s practice.

Those who have already clarified the truth are like dragons in water and tigers in the mountains. For those who have not yet realized the truth, just let the wind fan the flame; there is no need for much effort. Just assent to it and you will not be deceived.

Dragons and Tigers

You probably know the film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. This is the Chinese way of describing people of great abilities. In China, the king of beasts is not the lion as there were no lions in ancient China (we have them now as they were introduced by south Asians). But there are tigers in China, and also dragons which people paint and talk and write about. Although we don’t see them in modern times, they perhaps did exist once upon time. A dragon in China exists in water. It is not like the dragons in European fairy tales, which must be killed as a beast or a demon; Chinese dragons are nice. They are the rain gods and are associated with water. The tiger is the king of the forest. So those who have clarified the truth are like dragons in water, and tigers in the mountains. This means that they are in their domain, not in some out of the way place, isolated from everyone else. They are right in the middle of the complexity, among other animals in the world. This is Chan, or Zen. For those who have clarified their eye of wisdom, interactions with others are like dragons in water. This is their arena. This is where they exercise their power – the





power of compassion which is to help all beings. This is the arena where they attain buddhahood; this is where the zendo is. This is practice after enlightenment. It is the same with tigers.

Ease and Bliss

We have been talking about correct views of practice – not thinking of good, not thinking of evil; not grasping this, not grasping that. That’s the path. Meditation is the path of ease and bliss. Grasping and rejecting, gaining and losing, are precisely the culprits that cause us dis-ease and anguish, as in, “I want this; I don’t want that.” The path of ease and bliss is simply to be free from these culprits. How do you keep that flame alive? Let the wind naturally keep the flame alive, without much contrived effort. Effort, here, can be understood as the will to control, to modify or change, to get rid of, or to seek. Without contrived effort, you will be at peace.

We are talking here only about a state of mind – being at peace. It does not suggest that you should have no job, or stop taking care of your family. You

must still be engaged with the world; that’s your arena. And the good news is that each and every one of you is a dragon, a tiger. You may not recognize this, as you now wonder, “What? My arena is actually the world outside? No, I’d like my arena to be here, in the Lido Zendo, a pleasant little space with air conditioning and a nice floor!” Your true arena is out there, taking care of your loved ones, raising kids, taking care of your business, yet you are at peace.

Nevertheless, there is a warning shot.

Nevertheless, as the path gets higher, demons flourish, and agreeable and disagreeable experiences become manifold.

What are the demons? These are the agreeable and disagreeable experiences. If you get caught up in them, you are already in trouble.

Yet if you are able to bring forth the correct thought, none of them will obstruct you. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra, the Tiantai Zhiguan (The

Calming and Contemplation Treatises of the Tiantai School), and Guifeng Zongmi’s Xiuzheng Yi (Principles of Cultivation and Realization) give detailed explanations of these demonic states.

The Chinese expression “demonic state” is a little different from the western idea of a demonic state. It does not refer to exorcism as seen in movies. The word means “off the right track;” it has the sense of deviancy, or being incorrect.

Those who would be prepared in advance for the unforeseen should be familiar with them.

The last sentence, simply means, “be prepared.” If you are prepared, then you will be fine. Don’t be obstructed by agreeable or disagreeable experiences.

When you move out of samādhi

(When you move out of meditation.)

move slowly and calmly. Do not be hasty or rough. After you have left samādhi, employ expedient ways to protect and maintain the power of your samādhi at all times,

Which means five times during the day when you exercise your practice.

just like you’re protecting an infant. Then your samādhi power will easily develop.

When our daughter Zea was born, we, as parents, naturally developed the awareness of needing to take care of her. In the Chinese and Japanese traditions, babies sleep with their parents for a long time. So even in our sleep, we knew not to roll over the baby.

Our eyes and hands became like those of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara; they knew what would potentially happen, what will happen, what might happen. We were in full control, taking care of a baby. This is how we take care of samadhi. With the practice that we have developed, we take care of it.

This single gate of samādhi is our most urgent business. If you do not practice meditation and somehow experience a quiet state, you will be at a loss.

If it comes on spontaneously, you will be at a loss. So you practice it, familiarize yourself with it, and when different states or stages arise, you won’t be at a loss.

Therefore, in order to seek the pearl, the waves must be stilled; if the water is disturbed it will be hard to get it.

Although not impossible, it will be hard.

When the water of samādhi is clear and pure, the pearl of the heart-mind naturally manifests. Hence, the Sūtra of Complete Enlightenment says, “Unimpeded and immaculate wisdom arises dependent on samādhi.” The Lotus Sūtra says, “In a quiet place, one cultivates the control of the mind, abiding motionlessly like Mount Sumeru.”

Mount Sumeru is a mythological mountain in Indian cosmology, dating to pre-Buddhist time. It is the center of the universe which holds up all of the cosmos. All the manifold appearances do not move Mount Sumeru. If you want to look further into this, the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* is translated with commentaries by Master Sheng Yen. The *Lotus Sutra*, in many translations, is widely available.

You should know that transcending the ordinary and surpassing the holy are contingent on the condition of meditation; shedding the body while seated in meditation and dying while standing are necessarily dependent on the power of samādhi.

There are many Chan masters who die in the seated meditation posture. There was one Chan master who said, “Since everyone dies in seated meditation, I’m going to die standing up!” He then got up and died right there! Chan is the path of wisdom. Because Chan practitioners are liberated through wisdom, their samadhi power may not be that strong.

Liberation Through Wisdom or Samadhi

There are two types of liberation in traditional Buddhist contexts: some practitioners are liberated through wisdom, and others are liberated through samadhi. There are many instances in early Buddhist texts of liberation through wisdom, in the *Agamas* and *Nikayas*, where we see the Buddha uttering just one or two words to a lay person, for instance, “Come here.” Even though this was the very first time the person may have ever heard a Dharma talk, he (or she) immediately became an arhat, a perfected being. The Buddha knew exactly what to say and always gave the right medicine. Did these people have samadhi power? Of course not, as they had not yet learned to meditate – at least in that lifetime. But they must have practiced for many, many lifetimes.

Those who are liberated through wisdom understand the meaning of things immediately upon hearing what is said. Their self-attachment drops off. Those who are liberated through wisdom are said to have very sharp karmic roots and high

potential. These people who can usually get quick access or break-through, are like a sheet of cloth. Their aptitude is like a needle which can very easily go through. Does their piercing through have any affect on the cloth? Not too much; the important point here is that they go through. The *Lotus Sutra* talks about it, using the analogy of sentient beings crossing a river. Some people are like a rabbit: when it crosses a river it does not touch the bottom but just floats on top. Others are like a horse: at the beginning of the crossing, they’re able to touch the ground but in the middle of the river, although they’re unable to touch the bottom they still get across it. Yet others still are like great elephants: Bong! Bong! Bong! They go right across the river, fully touching the bottom. These are the beings liberated through samadhi. Their practice is very strong.

Buddha of Self-Nature

After Chan practitioners see their self-nature – the initial enlightenment – they have to cultivate samadhi. Otherwise, when faced with heavy vexations, they will have no power. They are like a cloth of self-attachment: the needle will go through but the hole is minuscule. On the other hand, when a fist rips through a cloth, it makes a hole so large that it cannot be mended. It may perhaps be sewn back together but the cloth has been greatly weakened. This can be compared to samadhi. All aspects of perfection are samadhi. So when Chan says, “See your self-nature; become a buddha,” it implies the buddha of self-nature, not the kind of buddha personified by Shakyamuni Buddha. It means to cut off vexations of our self-nature; to master limitless approaches of our self-nature.

Although everything in our self-nature is of course already perfect, we still need to practice, to continue, continue, continue. That is why for



Photo by Ven. ChangDuo

the attainment of full buddhahood, samadhi is essential. Those masters who have great samadhi power have to first experience enlightenment, and then, experience it again, again, and again. They have to keep practicing samadhi. There are some Chan masters who are able to do this, like my great-grand Dharma master in the Caodong (Japanese *Soto*) line, Master Dongchu, who expired during sitting meditation. He took a bath one evening and said to his attendant, “You don’t need to prepare breakfast tomorrow morning. I’ll wear my new robes.” The attendant thought, “Is the master going out somewhere that he needs to wear new robes?” The following morning he discovered the master in his new robes, dead. This is what this is: shedding one’s body, one’s life in seated meditation. I haven’t met anyone who died while standing, although I read about it. Ordinary people may have great wisdom but they cannot do this. We need samadhi power to do this.

Even if one devotes to the practice his entire life, he may still make mistakes. How then could one who procrastinates possibly overcome karmic obstacles?

He is urging us to practice.

Thus, an ancient person has said, “Without the power of samādhi, you will meekly cower at death’s door. Shutting your eyes, you will end your life in vain. Just as you are, you drift in saṃsāra.”

Birth and death, birth and death, again and again.

Friends in Chan, go over this text again and again. Benefit yourself and others. Let us together attain full awakening.

So, let us all together attain full awakening! ☸



On Samatha-Vipasyana and Silent Illumination

by Venerable Chi Chern

止觀與默照



心住而不動為止
心無住而不動為默

*When the mind abides on something and becomes immovable,
that is Samatha.*

*When the mind abides on nothing and yet stays immovable,
that is Silence.*

English Translation by Wei Tan



心止而深細思惟為觀
心默而清楚覺照為照

*When the mind contemplates deeply and subtly, having attained Samatha,
that is Vipasyana.*

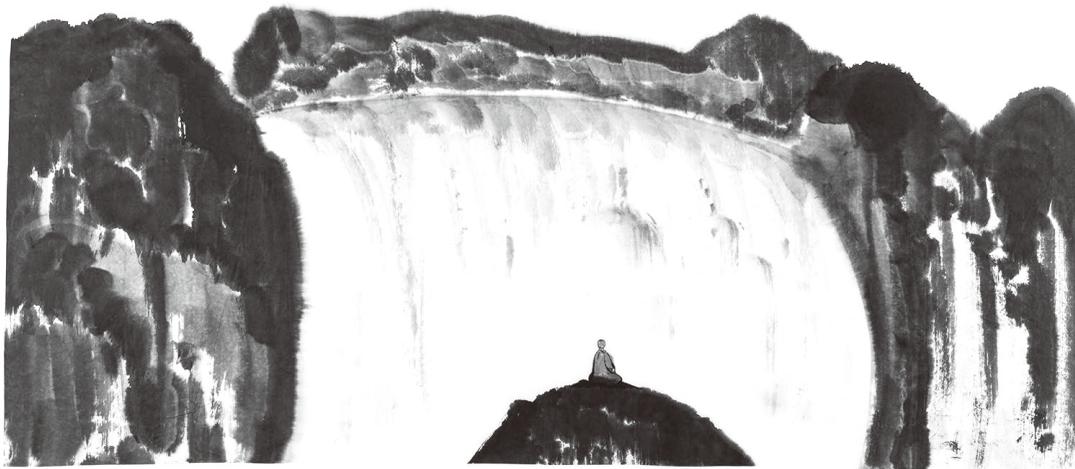
*When the mind is clearly aware, while being Silent,
that is Illumination.*

Chinese Calligraphy and Paintings by Ven. Chi Chern

依止視悟一切法無我空
是修止視得定慧

*Enlightening to no-self and emptiness of all phenomena
relying on Samatha-Vipasyana*

*Is the attainment of Samadhi-Prajna
through cultivating Samatha-Vipasyana*



依默照而直見一切法無我空
是默照而定慧一體

*Directly realizing no-self and emptiness of all phenomena
relying on Silent Illumination*

*Is the unity of Samadhi-Prajna
in Silent and Illumination*



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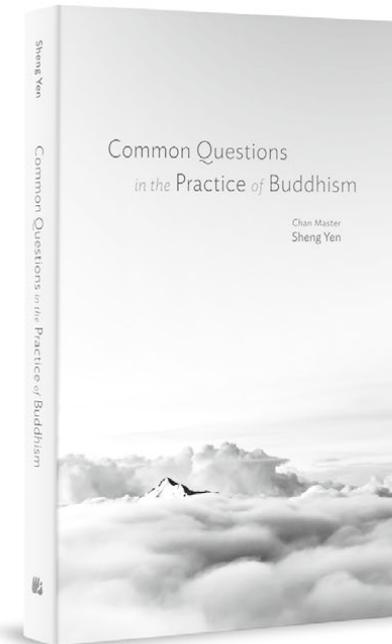
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Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism Chan Master Sheng Yen

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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