

禪
CHAN MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2019





禪
修

至
嚴



Chan Practice

I SEE THE CHAN PRACTICE THAT has evolved in the West as a stable, continuing process. It is not a fad about to fade away. The practice of Chan does not seek what is exotic or exciting. Rather it follows a rational, reasonable and useful way of life. I have been traveling to the United States for about fifteen years. I have not really had that many students compared to the number I have in Taiwan. But those that I do have, even those who have participated in only a few retreats, are strong in the practice. Even if they don't come for a retreat for ten years, they still remember the benefit they first received.



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN
University of Toronto, October 18, 1991

禪
CHAN MAGAZINE
Volume 39, Number 3 — Summer 2019

CHAN MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture
Chan Meditation Center (CMC)
90-56 Corona Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373

FOUNDER/TEACHER Chan Master Venerable Dr. Sheng Yen

ADMINISTRATOR Venerable Chang Hwa

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Buffe Maggie Laffey

ART DIRECTOR Shaun Chung

COORDINATOR Chang Jie

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARTWORK Rikki Asher, Kaifen Hu, Taylor Mitchell

COVER ART Photo by Javardh

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS David Berman, Ernie Heau, Guo Gu

CONTRIBUTORS Venerable Chang Ji, Venerable Chang Zhai,
Rebecca Li, David Listen,
Ting-Hsin Wang, Bruce Rickenbacker,
Dharma Drum Mountain Cultural Center

CHAN MEDITATION CENTER (718) 592-6593

DHARMA DRUM PUBLICATIONS (718) 592-0915
chanmagazine@gmail.com

<http://chancenter.org/en/publication/chan-magazine/>

The magazine is a non-profit venture; it accepts no advertising and is supported solely by contributions from members of the Chan Center and the readership. Donations to support the magazine and other Chan Center activities may be sent to the above address and will be gratefully appreciated. Please make checks payable to Chan Meditation Center; your donation is tax-deductible.

From the Editor 4

Life in a Chan Monastery 6
BY Chan Master Sheng Yen

Checklist for Sitting Meditation 14
BY Gilbert Gutierrez

**Commentaries on Zongze's
Procedures of Seated Meditation – Part 1** 24
BY Guo Gu

Chan Meditation Center Affiliates 38

Articles published in *Chan Magazine* contain the views of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Dharma Drum Mountain.

From the Editor

THE THEME FOR THIS ISSUE is “instructions for practice.” I participated in the retreat from which Gilbert’s talk is taken, and I found his checklist for sitting meditation very useful. Next I found an old *Chan Newsletter* article where Shifu mentions Eihei Dogen’s classic (known by most Westerners as *Rules of Zazen*), and points out that the original source of Dogen’s document was *The Procedures of Seated Meditation* by Changlu Zongze. This led me to Guo Gu’s translation and commentary on Zongze’s document, which is full of solid advice for sitting on a retreat. (The bulk of Guo Gu’s commentary, as well as his complete translation, will be in the Autumn issue to follow.)

Using Gilbert’s checklist made me feel “Finally! After all these years, I know how to do this practice!” (I’ve had that thought before, and expect to have it many times again.) In my happiness I thought “I should have had this years ago!” But in retrospect I think that checklist would be difficult for a beginner to use. That may not be true for everyone but I know it is for me. We need actual experience of cultivating the mind before we can grasp the difference between, say, awareness and contemplation. When you have not yet learned to dial down the constant radio-chatter of the mind, there is danger that too many instructions can become too many wandering thoughts.

Once I spoke with an American Zen student who came to our center. She had been practicing shikantaza for many years and her teacher advised her to attend a silent illumination retreat led by our Shifu. She was not happy after the retreat. “This is not shikantaza,” she said, “shikantaza has no instruction,

you just do it!” That may be true, but I myself could never have cultivated the silent illumination method without trying the myriad hints and suggestions from Shifu and his heirs.

When I was in college I learned transcendental meditation (TM) which gave me a mantra to hold on to. I was able to establish a regular practice which became a good foundation for when I started training with Shifu a few years later. One of the beginning methods he gave us, after the breath methods, was the *dantien* (energy center) method. He told us to visualize a tiny red light, or a tiny buddha, sitting about three finger widths below and two finger widths behind the navel. I really took to this method, eagerly practicing two hours each day. It was easy to keep the method even when I was off the cushion.

There were two influences in my life at that time which supported my dantien practice. One was a book by Mary Caroline Richards, *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1964). I was a potter then and loved the meditative aspect of centering



Photo by Quino AI

clay on the wheel, impossible to do if your mind is not clear and focused. The other influence was an introductory lesson in karate. I did not pursue karate, but often exercised the *kiba-dachi* (horse riding stance), which put me in touch with my center of gravity and gave me the feeling of being physically grounded. Throughout my day, if something distracted or upset me, I would rock back on my heels, find my center, find my dantien, and take a deep breath. These simultaneous actions would stop my thoughts and put me in the present moment.

When Shifu returned to Taiwan at the end of 1977, I somehow fell away did not return to him for fifteen years. I kept up my Chan practice, but not in a regular way. I began to explore other, outer path practices. For a long time I did a meditation I learned from a western new-age healer, based on the Hindu seven-chakra (energy center) system. In this practice you focus on each chakra individually, using visualization techniques, until you can feel that center sort of awake and humming. When you’ve opened all the chakras from the base to the crown, you imagine energy moving through them, in a circular flow. (One great benefit was that my focus expanded from just my dantien.) It was quite a laborious practice, and eventually I dropped it. But still today I can easily get in touch with that feeling of all the energy centers being open, balanced, and unobstructed.

When I returned to Shifu in the mid-nineties, he was teaching the silent illumination method. The first instruction is to be aware of the entire body. I had no idea how to do this, until Shifu taught us a practice that begins with putting awareness on the scalp. Hold awareness there at the top of the head until you can feel that patch of skin sort of itching or vibrating. Once that happens, move awareness to the forehead, and so on, systematically moving down the body until every section of skin surface has been covered. Shifu said it takes a long time at first but gradually you will

be able to do it very quickly. I wholeheartedly took up this practice. By the end of a week I was able to be aware of the entire skin surface simultaneously. Full body awareness came naturally from that; I never had to practice the skin-patch method again.



Chakra system meditation Archive Art

Not everyone will have an affinity with such painstaking methods. Our personal paths are unique. Over my years of practice, various procedures have allowed me to craft my own approach to meditation, building one on top of the next. There is no ultimate, conclusive, set of instructions for doing this practice. If we are fortunate to have good teachers we can collect notes along the way. But we can only learn by doing, by cultivating personal experience. With consistent practice, eventually we drop all the little tricks and techniques, and just do it. ☯

by *Bufe Maggie Laffey*
Editor-in-Chief

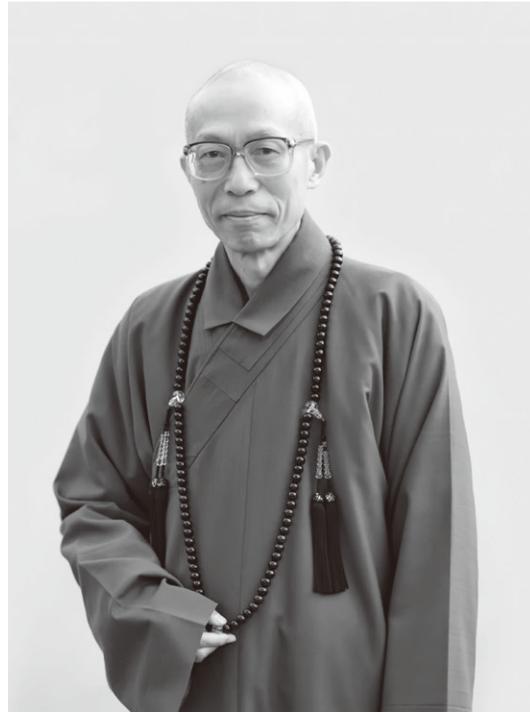


Life in a Chan Monastery

BY

Chan Master Sheng Yen

This article is taken from a lecture given by Master Sheng Yen at the University of Toronto on October 18, 1991. It was originally published in the *Chan Newsletter*, No. 92, May 1992.



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

TODAY I WILL SPEAK ABOUT practice in a traditional Chan monastery, and I will tell you something of my own early experiences practicing in such a monastery. There really are no authentic Chan monasteries in America. You can't visit one here. To find an authentic monastery you must go back to the China of the past. In ancient Chinese monasteries a practitioner's time was divided between meditation, attending Dharma talks, and daily work. Morning and evening was spent in meditation. Daytime was for working.

We are somewhat ignorant of the daily schedule in early Chan monasteries before Master Baizhang Huaihai (720–814). But from the Song Dynasty (960–1279) onward, we know that there was chanting and reading of the sutras as well as meditation in the morning. Likewise, in the evening there would be some chanting or reading before meditation.

In the *Platform Sutra* the sixth patriarch Huineng (638–713) does not put a lot of emphasis on sitting, rather he emphasizes practice in daily life. His disciple, Nanyue Huairang (677–744), continued this tradition. But the fourth and the fifth patriarchs, as well as Master Baizhang in his *Pure Rules*, specifically mention sitting as an important method of practice. Thus sitting meditation became one of the major methods of practice in the Chan tradition.

Again, in the *Pure Rules* of Master Baizhang there is no mention of a Buddha hall for performing prostrations, but a Dharma hall for listening to lectures is detailed. At that time chanting sutras and performing prostrations were considered less important than listening to the Dharma.

From records and stories we know that Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850), a disciple of Baizhang, taught prostration. There is, for example, a gong'an of an emperor in the Tang Dynasty (618–906) who, before he became emperor, spent some time as a novice monk at Huangbo's Chan monastery. His curiosity about prostration when he encountered the master performing this practice is duly recorded.

Once we reach the Song Dynasty, there seem to have been both Buddha halls and Dharma halls. The Buddha hall was used for chanting sutras and liturgies both in the morning and in the evening. Were Dharma talks given regularly? That does not seem to be the case. Within any given month, Dharma talks were scheduled rather infrequently. We don't know which days were specifically designated for them.

Universal Invitation

There was also an important practice called universal invitation (Chinese *puqing*). This was a time when everyone was invited to do work at the monasteries. This was sometimes called *chupo*, literally "going to the mountains," but it did not necessarily entail field work. It might include various chores around the monastery. Under certain circumstance, attendance at Dharma talks might be excused. Universal invitation was mandatory for monks and nuns.

Huatous and gong'ans became the principal means of practice in the Song Dynasty. However, in the Yuan Dynasty (1264–1368) many practitioners adopted the method of reciting Buddha's name. Since Chan was transmitted to Japan mainly during the Song period, this method was not adopted by the Japanese. Often people do not realize the influence of Chinese Chan on the development of Japanese Zen. For example, Zen Master Dogen's (1200–1253) *General Advice on the Procedures of Seated Meditation* (Japanese *Fukan zazen gi*) is really taken from the work *The Procedures of Seated Meditation* (Chi. *Zuochan yi*) by a Song Dynasty Chan master, Zhanglu Zongze, with only a few words changed here and there. Master Dogen never explicitly said that this was his own work, but many people take it as such.

Fortunately, much of the Song tradition can be seen in modern Japanese temples, both Rinzai and Soto, especially Myoshin-ji and Eihei-ji. Temples such as these no longer exist in China.

Establishing a monastery was never easy. Land and buildings had to be donated by wealthy individuals or officials or the government itself. Typically, the monastery grounds would include a field cultivated by the monks. Some temples had fields quite far off which were donated by people who attended the temple but who lived at some distance from it. These fields we often leased because there

were not enough monks to work them. Working the land was simple in the early monasteries. Later on, with the increase of donated land, leasing became common, and some monks took on bureaucratic functions and had to work in the temple office or see to the management of the land.

When I left home, the monastery in which I was a disciple owned much land, so I first learned to work in the fields, those near the monastery and also those in the mountains. Since most of us who left home were quite young, we had to learn traditional household tasks such as those learned by a young housewife. I had to make, mend, and wash my own clothes. I had to learn to plant rice and vegetables, and I had to learn how to cook them. This is the way life is to this day in my own temple in Taiwan, which is called Nung Chan. "Nung" stands for agriculture. Thus it is a place where farming and Chan are practiced together.

When a novice first enters my temple, he or she is first sent to the kitchen to learn to cook. We also ask a professional tailor to come and teach people how to sew. But most of my disciples know only how to mend; few can really make clothes. They don't really have the patience. However, everyone must learn how to shave his own head. Now we have razors. In the past we only had knives and we left lots of scars on our heads.

Everything Is Practice

When I first left home, I was given no formal introduction to meditation or the practice of Chan. When I asked my master if he would teach me practice, he would say, "Aren't you already practicing? Isn't eating practice? Isn't sleeping practice, working practice, walking practice?"

Once you leave home, you come to see that everything you do is practice.

Most people who begin practice have the idea that there is a specific mode of cultivation, a specific form, a specific method. Most people usually see a physical and a mental aspect to the practice, a need to train the body as well as the mind. But when I was a young monk, there was no such idea. People saw living as practice. They did not delve into the deep philosophy of the teaching.

When I was first at the temple, we simply practiced. We worked and prostrated. Every day we chanted and read sutras. We were not told their meaning. It didn't matter. We simply went through the process. We cut down on our attachment to the things around us, cut down on the things in our heads, cut down on our discriminations. This was a good method for us. However, for modern lay people such training would be inadequate.

Many of my disciples have questioned these methods. With no emphasis on what they think practice is (meditation, prostrations, chanting) they feel that life in the monastery is not particularly different from their lives at home. What's the point, they ask. At home we work, here we work. At home we cook, and we cook here, too. Why did we bother to leave home? Where is the practice?

What Is Practice About?

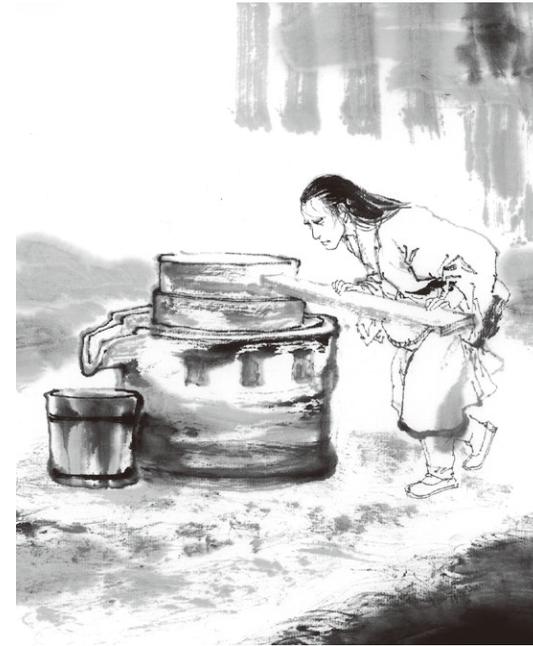
What would you say to such disciples? Is life at home and life at the monastery the same? Someone just mentioned attitude, and that is entirely correct. The way we approach what we do at the monastery is not quite the same as the way most lay people approach what they have to do. We practice not for personal gain, but simply as a way of life. Once a practitioner has trained himself to the point where the mind is very stable and few discriminations arise, it is very important that he rely on the principles and concepts of Buddhaharma as his guide. Otherwise,

practitioners might develop a nihilistic attitude and conclude that there is nothing in life worth doing. This is a mistake and very much misses the point of what practice is about.

Relying on the principles and concepts of Buddhaharma, a practitioner will live his life in such a way that he is selfless yet very much involved in the goings-on of the world. Such a person has a genuine concern for all living beings, and works in a diligent manner for the benefit of others. You may recall the story in the *Platform Sutra* when the sixth patriarch, Huineng, met with the fifth patriarch, Hongren (602–675). Huineng was sent to the kitchen to grind rice, and it was not until at least six months later that Hongren finally explained the *Diamond Sutra* to him.

Guided by the same principles, I continue to send novice monks to work in the fields or in the kitchen when they first leave home. At first there really is no opportunity to listen to Dharma talks. Many complain. Usually I tell them that if they want to learn, they must do what the sixth patriarch did – work in the fields and in the kitchen. To simply begin by listening to Dharma talks will make enlightenment that much more difficult to attain. Life in a Chan monastery brings the body and mind into a gentle and harmonious state. In this way you become receptive to the teachings of the Buddhaharma. Then you can genuinely practice Chan Dharma.

It has been a slow process establishing a good foundation for Buddhaharma in Taiwan. Buddhism there did not have the kind of historical base that it had on the mainland. It is only in the last forty years that we've had real progress. We still have much to do. However, we are working very hard to build a new monastic environment in Taiwan. We have close to one hundred acres where we will build a complex inspired by the discipline and the way of life of the great monasteries of the Tang Dynasty.



Huineng ground rice in the kitchen Art by Chien-Chih Liu

Of course I have benefited greatly from the time I spent in Chan monasteries, but this was not my exclusive practice. It is because I have continued to work diligently on my own that I have reached my present attainment. In fact, two recent Chan masters, Xuyun (1840–1959) and Laiguo (1881–1953), both attained enlightenment outside of the monastery, even though they had practiced in the confines of Chan temples for many years.

Let me stop here and take some questions about what I have said today.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION What do you mean by an authentic, genuine Chan monastery?

ANSWER By this I mean a place where people live a monastic life in the Chan tradition throughout the

year. In many of the famous monasteries in China today, monks do nothing more than sweep the floor and sell tickets to tourists. In Taiwan there are three or four places that have arrangements for people to spend time and practice, but for a limited time only. Practice does not continue throughout the year. People usually go for five days or seven days, after which a new group arrives.

The Chan Center in New York is similar. We have morning and evening services and sitting, so it looks something like a Chan monastery, but we have only four week-long retreats throughout the whole year. In traditional Chinese monasteries there are long summer and winter retreats which last either forty-nine or one hundred twenty days. At the present time there are very few temples in China or Taiwan that provide such extended opportunities to practice.

QUESTION I have two questions. First, what method do you teach your students, gong'an or reciting Buddha's name? And second, what do you think of the prospects for the flourishing of Buddhaharma in the West?

ANSWER First, I do not use one particular method. To some I give a gong'an, to others a huatou. Some beginners simply use the counting-breath method. I rarely recommend the method of reciting Buddha's name, but there are some people who have begun with this and are resistant to other methods. To such people I teach a method whereby they recite Buddha's name and follow it by counting a number. It is quite similar to the counting-breath method. When reciting Buddha's name leads them to the point where there are few wandering thoughts and their minds are very clear, I have them ask this question: "Who is reciting Buddha's name?" This is asked continuously without interruption. That is really the huatou method.

Second, I see the Chan practice that has evolved in the West as a stable, continuing process. It is not a fad about to fade away. The practice of Chan does not seek what is exotic or exciting. Rather it follows a rational, reasonable and useful way of life. I have been traveling to the United States for about fifteen years. I have not really had that many students compared to the number I have in Taiwan. But those that I do have, even those who have participated in only a few retreats, are strong in the practice. Even if they don't come for a retreat for ten years, they still remember the benefit they first received.

QUESTION Do the attitudes of the western and oriental students differ? Do you have a different relationship with each group?

ANSWER Yes, in fact it seems that I have something of a closer relationship with my western students. The western perspective is direct, whereas oriental students are often less decisive and more prone to ambiguous thinking. Westerners are more receptive to the teaching. At the very least they are no worse than the oriental students. I'm not trying to make western students feel good. This is simply the way I see the situation.

QUESTION It seems to me that the Chan approach really celebrates personal insight. It seems very narcissistic and practitioners seem uninterested in anyone else's benefit but their own. I notice a tendency to boast about spiritual achievement. This really seems to isolate the individual.

ANSWER It is correct to say that Chan practice is a pursuit of personal wisdom. But how can you judge what wisdom is? Within, it manifests as freedom from vexation. Without, it manifests in the way we interact with what is around us. True wisdom is without discrimination and is always at one with the environment. It is in this external manifestation

that you see that the practice is not simply the pursuit of personal spiritual gratification. If you are only interested in your own freedom from vexation and your own benefit, then you are not practicing Chan. If you practice only for yourself, you may achieve some level of samadhi, a very concentrated mental state, but genuine Chan is always turned outward as well as inward.

QUESTION Then Chan seeks to change the world by changing the individual?

ANSWER Yes, Chan begins at the logical point of changing yourself. Once your mental state has calmed and changed, there is a natural tendency to help others. This will effect change in the world around us.

QUESTION Chan practice seems quite different from that of Pure Land, but Chan practitioners still chant Amitabha Buddha's name. Why is this?

ANSWER First, there is a historical reason. Toward the end of the Tang Dynasty, Pure Land practice was very popular. A Chan master by the name of Yongming Yanshou (904–975) was a master of the Fayen school, but he was also a great proponent of Pure Land practice. His influence was so great that after his time there were few monks who did not recite Buddha's name.

It is also important to note that there is no intrinsic antagonism between the recitation of Buddha's name and Chan practice. For example, in the *Infinite Life Sutra* (Sanskrit *Sukhavativyuha Sutra*), many methods of contemplating the Buddha are described, including that of reciting his name. Recitation of the Buddha's name may be considered Pure Land practice, but as it is described in the sutra there is no emphasis on seeking rebirth in the pure land. Likewise, in the *Amitabha Sutra*, one passage describes reciting the Buddha's name with a single-

pointed mind. This can be a method of practicing samadhi. Likewise, the *Sutra of Manjushri Inquiring on Prajna*, speaks of reciting the Buddha's name and similar methods. In fact, in that sutra, the name of any Buddha will do. It doesn't have to be Amitabha's. Even though all of these methods involve the recitation of Buddha's name, they do not imply an aspiration to be reborn in the pure land. Thus a Chan practitioner and a Pure Land practitioner may both recite the Buddha's name, but they do so with different attitudes.

QUESTION I am curious about what you said about the difference between left-home and lay practice. You said that monks practice purposelessly. They just practice. But how can that be possible for lay people who must continually set and achieve goals in their daily lives?

ANSWER In the beginning of the process there is always a purpose whether you are a householder or a monk. You are always seeking something. Eventually one can go from seeking something to not seeking something. It is also possible that a person may be seeking something, yet not be seeking it. In other words, what is purposeful and what is purposeless can coexist. A genuine practitioner knows very well that the result of practice is non-attainment, but to be truly in a state of non-seeking, he must reach at least the eighth bhumi on the bodhisattva path, which is a very high level of attainment. Even when a person reaches the first bhumi, his vow to deliver sentient beings is still in force, which is to say that there is still a sense of seeking something.

QUESTION Is there any program in your temple in Taiwan that does work for the community and the environment? Do you plan to build another large monastery like the one in Taiwan here in America?

ANSWER As to the first question, this is the *Year of Environmental Protection* in Taiwan. Before I left Taiwan ten days ago, I appeared on television with the head of the Environmental Protection Administration to discuss the Buddhist perspective on protecting the environment. In fact, my temple has been working to improve the environment for the last three years by advocating and practicing recycling of products and conservation of resources.

For the second question, I can tell you that new complex in Taiwan demands so much of my time that it is pointless for me to think of anything like it in America. But if the causes conditions in the future seem to be ripe, we will start to think about it.

Thank you very much for your questions. They're very good and helpful in explaining the Dharma. ☸



Photo by Ven. Chang Duo



Checklist for Sitting Meditation

BY

Gilbert Gutierrez

Gilbert Gutierrez is a Dharma Heir of Chan Master Sheng Yen with over thirty-nine years of experience in meditation, various martial arts, and Chi Gong. He lectures regularly at DDMBA centers throughout the United States and gives weekly classes at his own group in Riverside, California. His Riverside Chan website (www.riversidechan.org) includes a lively “meet up” site and a weekly Dharma Talk podcast. Access to written transcripts of the weekly lectures is also available. This article is taken from Dharma talks given during the Footsteps of Ancient Masters retreat, October 2018. Transcription and editing by Buffe Maggie Laffey.



Gilbert Gutierrez Photo by Ven. Chang Hu

IN THIS RETREAT I have reviewed what the ancient masters thought was the essence of Chan, and of how to practice. I have been bringing up to you various practice points, some of which you are used to hearing about, others you are not. For some of them we were able to come up with deeper descriptions or explanations. I want to go over all that with you so you are clear about it. The reason I want to recap now, is because you can use it for the rest of the retreat.

We can essentially list out the elements that are needed in a proper practice:

- Present moment
- Relax
- Awareness / illumination
- Method
- Contemplate
- Concentrate
- No thinking
- Sublime

You will notice that faith¹ and right view² are not on this list. The reason is, these list items all pertain to the method, and to sitting meditation. I have isolated the component parts you need to use when you are meditating. Obviously right view has to be there, faith has to be there, but those are pre-supposed within this list, overlaid over all of this.

This list is also about knowing what you are doing when you are on a retreat. All of these are prerequisites to the practice of Chan. The ancient masters held the bar very high. If you want to practice Chan, this is what you have to do.

Present Moment

The present moment is a very big key, because right from the very beginning, you have to put your attention there. What is the present moment? You are here in this room; you know exactly where you are and you know exactly what is in this room. So if thoughts come up, which inevitably they will do, then you compare it to the present moment. If it doesn't fit, you have to let it go and keep your mind in the present moment.

You rest in the present moment. You are just relaxed, and it brings up a sublimeness in you. You are just content. You don't need this moment to go away. You don't need for another moment to come. Just letting go and resting in the present moment enables you to appreciate this moment.

There was a movie called *Click*, where the person had a remote control that could fast forward through life, so he could speed past the undesirable moments. You can kind of guess what would happen: he's at work and, zip! he's going home from work, zip! After a short while, his life was over, because he had just sped through all the parts he didn't like. But that took him right past the good parts as well. You don't want to be that way.

Relax

Relax the body and mind. Don't think that you have reached the highest level of relaxation. There's relaxation beyond what you think is there. As you begin to let go of the illusory consciousness, the body will become extremely relaxed and the mind will lose its tension, will become literally brighter. So just keep relaxing and relaxing. There's going to be a time when your upper body will feel buoyant, like a balloon, tethered to the cushion. Then the mind will feel the same way. This is the freedom and ease of body and mind.



Awareness

Your awareness extends beyond what your consciousness is capable of receiving information on. When you are sitting in meditation, your consciousness can't extend too far beyond the windows in this room. But just let awareness go out, unlimited; give your mind a very broad pasture to roam in. Now, we're not talking about consciousness; it's important to understand the difference. In

Photo by Ritu Anya

the present moment we know what is here; our awareness goes out and illuminates the mind ground.

Awareness is different from consciousness; there's no thinking here. It's tied with contemplation, more to mind than thinking. Because you've been practicing for a while now, the right view has been imprinting into mind. So now you are realizing it experientially. You can't really call it thought. Right view is just something that is there, but it's tacked into the awareness. Your present awareness is what enables you to see things clearly, to realize how contemplation works.

Method

In order to meditate properly, whichever method you are working with, you have to know very well what the method is. If you are not familiar, or comfortable, then ask a well-knowing advisor about the method. Read books. For instance, if you are doing silent illumination, pick up Master Sheng Yen's books *The Method of No Method*, or *Illuminating Silence*. If you are doing huatou, read *Shattering the Great Doubt*. Be very well acquainted with how your method works.

To me, I am not a person who likes to list out stages of practice, because then you think you have to go through each stage. Sometimes the stages can go from a basic all the way up to a "top stage." It is different with different people; sometimes you might have an experience on a lower stage and you need to get to the next one, and the next, like a ladder or a staircase going up. Other times if you get it just right, you go right there. Then you read about the method and you say, "well, I didn't go through these stages." Actually, you went right past them. The thing is, you should *know* about your method. Be very knowledgeable about it, so that when you come to the retreat, you know what you are doing. That is very important.

Contemplate

What is the difference between contemplating the method and using the method? Contemplation is not thinking. Contemplation is looking directly at the method. You are looking at it very clearly, and so your awareness is broad. Your contemplation is right on the method.

A lot of time when people are using a method, they are thinking about the method. They think, “all right, the method is to ask, “What is wu?” and they start wanting an answer from the question. But when we are contemplating, we are looking directly with no thought; there’s nothing there. If you’re using it in the right way, you’re just asking the question. When you are using silent illumination, you are just contemplating the mind ground. You are not adding anything to it, like “Oh, it looks so wonderful.” You are just there contemplating it.

You don’t *think* of the method; rather you bring up the method for the mind to contemplate. If you can do that, then you’re using the method properly.

Concentrate

Concentration is connected with the “right effort.” You are using your mind to put these things all together. You are contemplating the method; there is awareness there. You are in the present moment. So you are concentrating all of your practice in the right way, and giving it the right attention. We call this *Madhyamika*, the middle way. Not overdoing it, and not being too lax. It is not that we crank up the effort, like a powerful stereo that you turn up all the way to ten. You are doing it just enough to hold it; don’t squeeze your practice. On the other hand you don’t just let it just drift away, because then you’ll be taken by thought bubbles and you’ll be gone.

By now, at this stage of this retreat, you should be able to do this. You should be able to regulate your concentration in a proper way; know what needs concentration and what doesn’t.

No Thinking

There’s no thought in what you are doing. You use the method, which is one thought. Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) used to say, it’s like a fat bullfrog sitting on a lily pad, where the lily pad is the thought. You can’t even see the thought any more because it’s just a recurring thought that becomes meaningless. The bullfrog is contented, he doesn’t need to move, just sitting. But as to any other thinking – “oh, I’m getting there now, it won’t be long. I’m tired. I’m hungry. I’m this, I’m that.” – the thing is that you don’t think. **You have to get used to that.**

Thinking in this practice is not going to get you there; it’s going to pull you down. And the thinking is always coming in. Eventually you will wear it down and it will get so weak that it won’t come in as frequently or as strong. After that thinking just doesn’t come up at all. That’s when the mind can lock in and work in the right way. When that happens, it’s a sublime state. But you don’t get to the sublimeness right away; this will come in due time.

Sublime Attitude

Sublimity is an interesting state of mind. It’s simply a feeling of contentment in the present moment, wanting nothing. You are just there, comfortable with your method. It’s hard to be sublime when your legs are killing you. But now that you are settled into the retreat you will be surprised, when you check into sublimeness – all the last little bit of leg pain will be gone. You are just sitting there. All this stuff is starting to work now.



Photo by Ven. Chang Duo

When you are in this sublime state, you can let go of all the emotional attachments to the moment. If you are eating a strawberry, you can taste the sourness of it, the sweetness, the coolness, you can appreciate its texture and when it’s gone, you just put it down. You don’t say, “I want another strawberry,” you are just off doing something else. But you are content in that moment; you don’t need another strawberry. Whatever you are doing: if you are walking, you are just walking.

What we do is we choose; we can choose whether or not to suffer from our leg pain, or to suffer from the passage of time, or whatever it is. To be sublime, we choose to rest in this moment. After a while what happens is that everything just locks in, and sublimity comes that way. We don’t put down the effort; it’s the right effort. Everything is right: the right awareness,

right being in the present moment, right all of these things. Everything is still there. To say that you are sublime doesn’t mean that you are not working. You are just perfectly content in whatever you are doing.

The sublimeness will permeate all through the body as well. But we’re not worried about the body. We’re tuning to the state of mind, awareness. It’s all there, your body, my body, it’s the same thing – it all belongs to mind. Don’t try to equate that to a physical sensation. Equate it to just a form of contentment; it is very very subtle. Some of you have probably already experienced it a little bit in this retreat when the method is working right. You are just there and you feel you are coasting, like going downhill on a sled, it’s just easier to do.

When you get there you don’t have to have a grin like the Joker from *Batman*. I remember I did

that once; now I'm very embarrassed. I was in a very sublime state (mimes body grinning and relaxing in bliss) and Shifu came by and was kicking my back trying to straighten me up. Finally he just said "Bah!" and walked away. I deserved that because I was just indulging in this semi-pseudo-sublimeness of my body. So don't make that mistake; I've already done that one for you.

It All Clicks In

Sublime is a very subtle feeling. It's not some kind of psychological, body/mind orgasmic type of sensation. It's just contentment. What happens is, when you dial in the present moment, when you relax, and awareness is there, there comes a place where all these tumblers click in and it's like opening a safe. You are hitting the right numbers on each of them, click, click, click, and you don't have to move, don't have to adjust anything. Everything is perfectly in its place, and that's a sublimeness. You don't have to put more effort in, or less effort in, more awareness or less; it's just there, perfect.

It is a very subtle feeling and I almost hesitate to put it on this list, but all of the other things have to lock in, and then that can come in. So you don't start with sublime, and mimic it. It will come and you will feel it, and in that moment you know you have this all dialed in the right way. And all you have to do is just stay there. Don't go "I am in a state of sublimeness," and the ego says, "Oh no, you're not, let's go home." Don't do that. Just feel... not necessarily the body because the body at that point begins to fall away, if it hasn't fallen away already. But the state of mind is there and it's illuminated, it's not a dead state. In a dead samadhi one would not have the state of sublimeness. It would just be like you flipped the switch and all of the lights go out and nothing's there.

How to Use the List

When we practice it is like we are going to prepare a dinner. When we prepare a dinner for somebody we lay out a nice tablecloth, we put the plates and goblets out, the utensils, the flowers, and then we can bring out the food. The Dharma food is the method. You've already laid out everything and it's already in place. You're going to be aware of all of that, of right view: if I keep doing this, eventually these thoughts will stop.

Without first setting up the practice in this way, when you start doing it you could easily just be taken away, watching a mind movie. You wouldn't even realize that there was right view any more. But now you've got right view in place, everything is perfectly set up, so that when you meditate it's all ready to go for you. And that's how these principles help the practice.

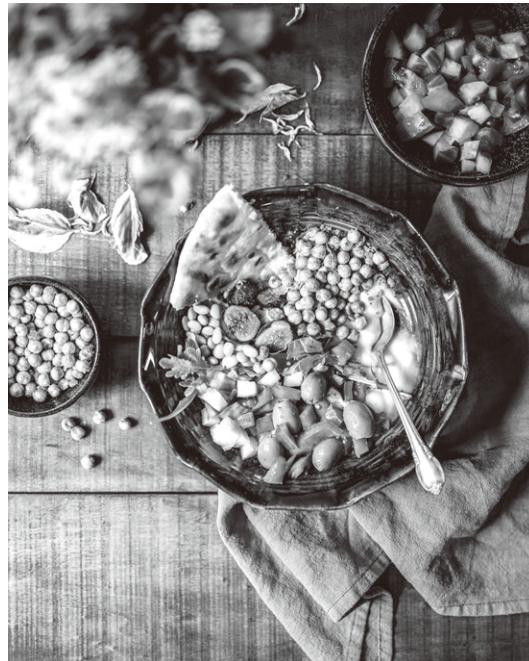


Photo by Edgar Castrejon

There is no confusion here. You are in the present moment. You should be relaxed. You spread your awareness out. You have your method; you contemplate your method. You concentrate. You concentrate with the right effort. With this awareness, you are aware when thoughts are arising, right? So there's no thinking.

All of these elements tie in very well. They're all one and the same, really, they all fit together. If one of these things is missing, it's going to mess the whole thing up. If you're doing all this but you're still thinking, it doesn't work; you're not going to contemplate, you're not on your method, because there's no awareness there. So all of these things are just elements that are there. It's not necessarily a punch list, where you can go wrong. If you do them right, it's where you go right with it. All this stuff is starting to work now.

Playing the Game

Some of you are getting frustrated because you're trying to do this and the thoughts are taking over, which is okay. You don't have to worry about that. Try to see it a little bit like a game. You have to understand how this game works. The first thing you do is, you set the game out. You have the game clock, which is the present moment. The present moment is always moving but in any present moment, what is it that's present? This is the point we are setting now: we know what is present in this room. Then you have your awareness; you spread your awareness as far as you can. Your awareness is there, now we put the method in the game. You have contemplation; you're contemplating the method. All you do have to do is hold the method; that's what you do. The method is very clear and you see it there.

So we have an awareness that this is all appearing in, this is our playing surface, and this includes our

mind. All we have to do is keep this, and we are aware that all of this is happening in the present moment. We are ready to play the game.

So, boop, we play the game. Something is going to come up. All of a sudden, a car comes up, because we are interested in buying a car. We see it coming up in the awareness. Awareness looks at it. Mind is just contemplating the method, just staying there. But this car keeps coming up and it sends ripples through the mind like "look at me." If the awareness sees it, awareness just naturally shines its illumination on the car. So when this car comes up in the playing field it's illuminated, and as soon as it's illuminated, it's out of the game. You don't have to put pressure on it and blow it out of the playing field. All you have to do is just know that it came in. Illuminate it, and, whoop, it's gone. It's like that game we played when we were young, statues or red-light-green-light; the person who is "it" turns his back to the other players and they try and get closer to him. Then "it" turns around and everyone freezes; if you're still moving, you're out of the game.

Something else comes up, maybe money coming to you or going out, and it sends ripples. You spot it and you know that it doesn't match the playing surface; it's not the present moment. So you don't look, because all you are aware of is the present moment.

It can become more subtle, or it can be something very strong. Let's say it's somebody that you care for, and right before you came here you had a big fight with them. They could come very quickly because their force is strong. They could come here and take over the playing field. So the method is gone now, and that person is here; they took center stage. You lost the game. So what do you have to do? You reset the game. Once you reset it, this person's gone, boom.



Reset Button

How do you reset the game? First thing: present moment. What's in the present moment? Well, you are not in the present moment if you are thinking of something not in the Chan hall. You ask, where is my method? The method is back again, contemplation – you set the playing surface again. And then you wait. Things will come in and you can knock them out by illuminating the arising thoughts. If something comes and takes center stage and you've been thinking about this arising thought for five minutes, then you are going to have to re-boot. Start the game over again, and it will work. Just keep resetting the game until the method is stable.

You can try to push the arising thought out but it will keep coming back in and you'll get frustrated. You just reset it: "Okay, fine, no problem, I see how this works." So you gently go back to the method.

Later on when that arising thought pops up again you go, "No, I know what you are." The arising thought's energy is going to be about the same as the car, easy to spot, and it's gone.

It's easy to play the game. You can play it with your eyes closed. You are there in the present moment. You know that you are just seeing the back of your eyelids. So if any image comes up you illuminate it out and win the game right away. But the habitual tendencies are always there, and will continue to come up with very sophisticated ways to take you off the method and bombard you with a relationship or an emotion; it will bring up a whole bunch of different thoughts hoping one of them is going to get through.

So this list of elements can be a reset button for your practice. Your method is your method, and these elements should be there in a proper meditation. These elements were topics that the ancient masters were bringing up, every single one of them. If you keep this, then it will keep your practice in a proper way. If you practice these sincerely, you are going to get there. Where is there? There's no "there;" so you don't have to worry, you are already there. The only difference is, you will realize that. Right now you are just hearing it, but later mind will be realized. And you already have it so that is the biggest part of the battle. There's nothing you have to pick up, nothing you have to put down. So if you can practice in this way then your practice will be very fulfilling. ☯

1. Faith in the teacher (including Buddha), in the teaching, and in one's own ability to carry out the teaching successfully.
2. Right View: a sufficient grasp of Dharma through which to frame the experiences of meditation and no thinking, particularly, the Three (or Four) Marks of Existence or Dharma Seals (*anitya, anattman, dukkha, [Nirvana]*), the Four Noble Truths, and Dependent Coorigination (*Pratityasamutpada*).

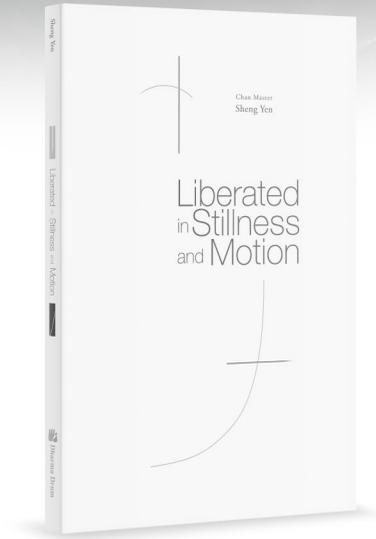
Photo by flattop341 / CC BY 2.0 / Desaturated from original

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."

Dharma Drum Publishing · ISBN 978-957-598-7-8-4



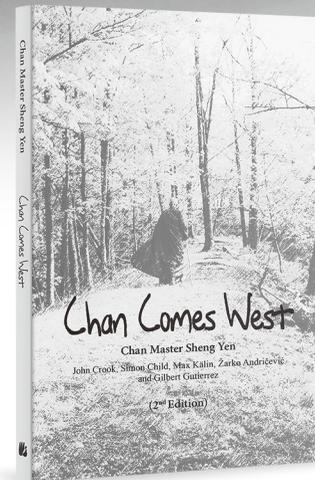
Chan Comes West (2nd Edition)

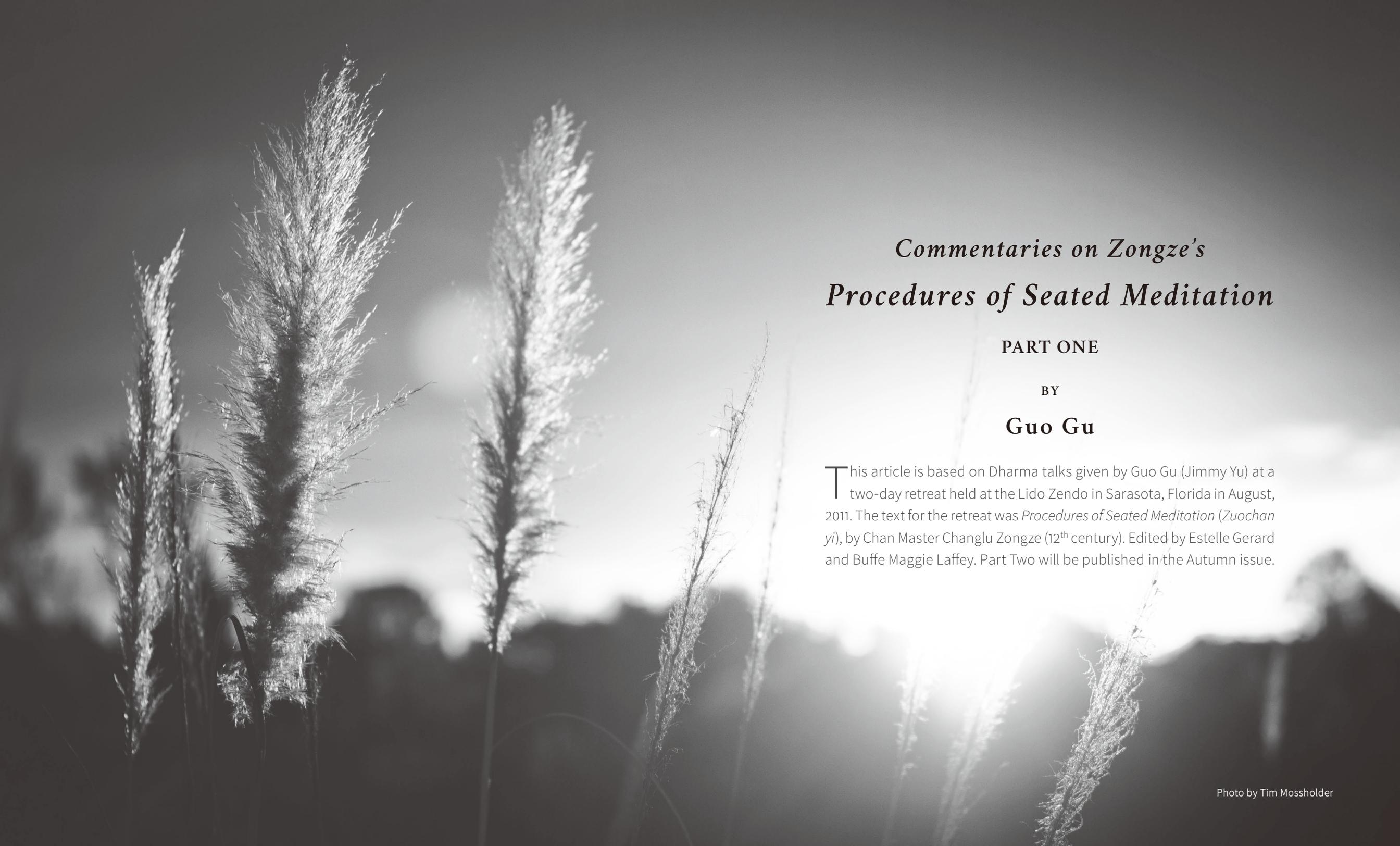
Chan Master Sheng Yen

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.

Dharma Drum Publications · ISBN 1-890684-04-x





*Commentaries on Zongze's
Procedures of Seated Meditation*

PART ONE

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 Two will be published in the Autumn issue.



Guo Gu TCC Archive Photo

Introduction

THE FIRST THREE DAYS OF an intense seven or ten-day retreat are torturous; one day feels like one year. Then there's bliss on the fourth! But on this shorter retreat we only have two days and then it's over. Since I don't want you to sit through pain and struggle, I urge you to take an expedient way to go straight to the method and enjoy yourself! In a longer retreat, people need to go through the pain and struggle, to stir things such as defense mechanisms of "I want this, I don't want that." Only when you face it can you accept it. Once you accept it, you can listen to a Dharma talk and respond to it properly.

In a two-day retreat, sit whichever way you want as long as you don't lie down. You may use a chair or bench; make yourself comfortable so that your physical condition is not in the way. Then use your method the way you do things when you're on vacation: don't allow yourself to get caught up with the past or future, or with the external environment, or your body. Don't get frustrated with your mind by questioning yourself, for instance, about the

method. When any thought comes out of the past or the future, tell yourself, "I'm on vacation. Good bye!"

The Environment

As far as you're concerned, unless you're practicing with everyone [such as chanting, walking, or doing yoga exercises], then you're alone. Practicing in this zendo, there is only you and your method. If the ceiling collapses, you don't look and you don't care. Your neighbor, who also belongs to the environment, is not there. Some of you came as couples and are sitting next to each other. A problem often arises when one of the two seems a little uncomfortable and the other gets concerned. However, they shouldn't worry as their partner is well taken care of. As far as you are concerned, you are the only person here.

The Body

Take a vacation from your body. How do we respond to physical pain, wandering thoughts, and drowsiness when we sit? When we know that our tiredness or fatigue during sitting does not come from a bad posture or from our habitual tendencies, the best way to recuperate is to just keep on sitting, in a relaxed way, without using the method. If you fall asleep, it's fine. When you wake up, keep on going. If we try to use the method when we are exhausted, we will be even more tired. But we must be able to distinguish the nature of our tiredness. Although some people, especially seasoned practitioners who are used to sitting for long hours, don't have many wandering thoughts and are not really drowsy, their minds may not be that clear. This hazy awareness is a poison that they need to uproot. It takes a long time to uproot it because it comes from fundamental ignorance, expressed as a subtle form of grasping and rejecting. We have to be careful of this state.

It is natural for the body to feel pain; however, if the pain is not due to poor posture, then you ought to deal with it. If the problem is caused by poor posture, you must adjust it. The body should be as comfortable as possible. If the physical discomfort is natural, just leave it alone. If your legs sometimes fall asleep, it is because of poor posture. To avoid this problem, do not sit right in the middle or towards the back of the round cushion. If you do, the bottom of your thighs will press against it which may cause the legs to fall asleep. Only the buttocks should be on the cushion.

After the sitting period, we will massage the body to smooth out the energy blocks and aching areas. This will be followed by yoga to make the body more agile. So, slowly, slowly, your body will adapt and will get accustomed to discomfort. When we have old injuries, the bones and the muscles are healed but the energy block is probably still there. The only way to deal with this is to allow the pain to go through. I'm not talking here about self-inflicted violence, or asceticism. It's simply that the bones and muscles are healed but there is a blockage. When we have pain in strange places like the mid- or lower back, just allow the pain to go through.

Pain vs Sensation

Most people when they have physical pain feel that their entire body is painful; they cannot differentiate the specific area. When they have pain their whole body tenses up. But the fact is that the pain is in only one or two areas of their body; the rest is not experiencing pain. So, as far as we're concerned, our attitude is that our whole body is relaxed, like a cloud. Only some parts of the cloud are a little bit tense because of the pain, but the rest of the body is completely relaxed. So, you must, first, localize the pain. Secondly, do not label the sensation as

"pain." Actually, it is just sensation. Sometimes it is throbbing, sometimes it is sore, or numb; it constantly changes. If you don't label it but just observe it as a sensation that changes, then you can be free from all of your ideas of what it is. Localize it, identify the areas, and observe the quality of these experiences as they change. The rest of the body can relax. If you think, "I'm having pain," then your whole body will start to tense up.

If the sensation is disturbing your method, then put the method down and focus on relaxing the body, section by section. When you get to that specific area, realize that it's just a different sensation which is actually a healing process. But if your body tenses up, then no healing takes place as it congeals and locks up the pain in the area where it does not go through. If you relax into it then the energy will go through and unblock these areas. After sitting, rub your hands until they are warm and massage the body; this is very good for healing old wounds. When we sit, numbness, soreness, itchiness, stinging pain, all are quite normal sensations. Just allow them to be; take a vacation from these body sensations.

Discursive Thinking

Drowsiness and scatteredness, or discursive thinking, are two-way obstacles. Discursive thinking is a signpost that tells us where we are in the practice. If you are very scattered, you will think about the past or the future. If you are somewhat scattered, you will probably think about relatively close things such as the external environment, or you get involved with your body. Wandering thoughts that are not of the past or the future, or about work, or about the immediate environment, are probably very subtle like fragmented images or thoughts that come and go, and don't really leave a trace. This state of scattered thoughts is slightly better.

Or, even subtler, are thoughts that revolve around the method. These thoughts have no particular content but you sense that the intention of your mind has strayed away from the method. In other words, before the formulation of a concrete thought, you already sense that the mind is straying. There is no thought, no concrete content as, for instance, you hear a sound which you recognize as a car but you don't think, "That's a car." You hear a sound; you recognize it and you continue with the method. This is subtle. The method is still there predominantly, but you do recognize sound as a subtle thought.

Present Moment

Discursive thinking can be playing mental movies about the past or the future such as, "After the retreat I'm going to do this or that." Slowly, as the mind is able to stay in the present, it perceives things in a more subtle way. What is the gauge through which we assess where we are? The gauge is the present moment. The further you are from the present moment, the more scattered you are.

If you're using the method and just sitting and you notice the environment, this perception is a kind of thought. No matter what the thoughts are, we don't get caught up. However, sometimes, when we are physically very tired thoughts just come which we can't stop. Don't get upset; face it, accept it, and respond to it by just resting and relaxing. Don't even use the method. If you're tired after a meal, just lean against a wall with legs out straight, and rest. Or lie down and take a nap.

Ghost Cave on a Dark Mountain

Drowsiness is the other obstacle. How do we deal with it? It depends as there are different types. Today, being the first day of the retreat, our body is still

trying to adjust to the retreat schedule, to long hours of sitting, so naturally, we will be tired. The way to deal with that situation is to just relax, relax, relax. Just go with the flow and you will quickly get on with the retreat.

For some seasoned practitioners, there is another type of drowsiness: often when they sit, they get into a state that we call, in Chan or Zen, "a ghost cave on the dark side of the mountain." We just sit there with nothing to do. We don't have wandering thoughts but the method is not clear. Is this practice? No. I was in that state for a couple of years when I was in the monastery. I was very busy as I was in charge of the publishing house. I would sit in front of the computer, work deep into the night, and then fall asleep on the chair. I'd wake up the next morning as soon as I heard the morning boards. I never fell down;

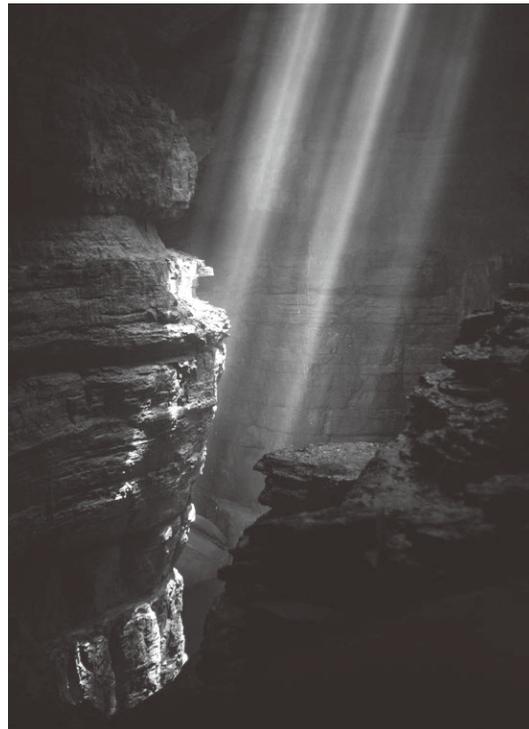


Photo by Ivana Cajina

the body never moved. While I slept, my breaths were long and deep. Sleeping and wakefulness, meditation and sleep, all blended together. I did this for a long time; it takes a lot of effort to pull oneself out of it.

Seasoned practitioners are often comfortable when they sit, with seemingly no wandering thoughts and no method either; they are just there. It's like a person driving a car from point A to point B. They stop driving somewhere in the middle because the scenery is so nice. Don't stop. Otherwise, we would not be able to be free from our vexations. It's like you take a rock and soak it in cold water. When you take it out of the water, the rock is still the same: it has gained no wisdom. That's dwelling in a ghost cave, on the dark side of the mountain. There is no luminosity.

Stagnation

A long time ago, I was reading a text by Tibetan Buddhist master Milarepa about meditative states. He was saying that people who cultivate a thoughtless state are actually cultivating low intelligence and therefore their future rebirth will be in the animal realm. Why? Because their practice perpetuates stagnation. It is not a samadhi of either perception or non-perception; it is like a blank piece of paper, of nothingness. So, of course, it is cultivating a type of consciousness that corresponds to low intelligence.

Within the six realms of existence, the human realm is very conducive to practice. We have a little suffering, a little pleasure, and suffering makes us feel that we should practice. On the other hand, the animal realm is characterized by low intelligence. Some animals may be very fortunate, for instance, a stray dog kicked around on the street compared to Paris Hilton's dog who gets a \$3000 pedicure. But this dog, who must have cultivated a lot of merit, has absolutely no wisdom. You can cultivate a lot of merit by doing a lot of good deeds, but if every

time you sit for hours you cultivate only stagnation and nothingness, this is mixed karma, like these dogs who are very blessed. I was amazed when I first read this; it took me a long time to pull myself out of it because I love meditation. This is giving us a warning of what can happen. If you have a tendency of enjoying this no-method, uproot it now. Even though there are no wandering thoughts, it is not samadhi or meditative absorption.

Cycle of Drowsiness

There is another, more common state of drowsiness. This type is a vicious cycle: we have a period of scattered thoughts, we fight it, and of course we get tired. We wake up, we fight it again, and we fall asleep. This vicious cycle comes from incorrect attitude about practice. What is behind it is grasping and rejecting: we want to sit well, so we work very hard and we make ourselves tired.

Big waves cause damage; what we want to be is a fine stream – steady, unhurried, step by step in the present. We are very clear about our method. At each stage, we are clear of what is present, of what is absent. As we proceed and are very relaxed, we observe: is the body a burden? No. Is the body still there? Some parts of it, in our experience, may not be there: our head or legs may disappear. We know exactly what is happening. We know that wandering thoughts are absent; this is very clear. Also that in this moment, scatteredness is absent. The body is still there but the posture may disappear. Although the body may be completely relaxed, the sense of some bodily weight may still be there. What is the mind doing? The mind is not doing anything else but sitting. Wandering thoughts, scattered thoughts, drowsiness are all absent. Without the slightest trace of haziness present, that is correct shikantaza, or just-mind sitting.

Another feature of shikantaza is the flavor of “don’t-mind-anybody-else’s business, just mind-your-own business” sitting. Just take care of that which is the act of sitting. If the breath is your method, you know what is present and you know what is absent. With every step, you are only with reality, you are with what is actually happening. You are not fantasizing about how you would like things to happen. This above describes just one method but every method is the same.

Only mind yourself with the act of sitting: this is how to cure drowsiness. If it is fatigue as I’ve explained before, then just rest. You have to be able to distinguish between fatigue and drowsiness. You have to be honest with yourself; if you are meditating and your mind is somewhat hazy, something that you get used to and even find pleasant, then you have to be careful. If you don’t uproot it early on, it will take two or three times as long to uproot it later.

The Text

The text for this retreat is *The Procedures of Seated Meditation (Zuochan yi)* by a Chinese Chan Master, Changlu Zongze, a 12th century teacher in the Chan lineage. He was quite influential a century before Dogen Zenji (1200–1253), a Japanese Buddhist teacher who went to China to study Chan. Upon his return to Japan, Dogen wrote his well-known *General Advice on the Procedures of Seated Meditation* which is ninety percent copied, word for word, from this Changlu Zongze text! Dogen presented it as a new introduction to Zen, but he basically changed a few words here or there of Zongze’s concrete instructions to his disciples on how to meditate.

This Zongze text is appended to manuals of rules or regulations of monastics and is given to all novices, when they first come to a monastery, as instructions on how to sit. This is a useful text for beginners, to

set them on the right track, so they may have a clear foundation on how to proceed.

I will now read the text and provide comments as needed.

The bodhisattva who studies prajna must first arouse the thought of great compassion; make great extensive vows; diligently cultivate samadhi; 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.

The word “bodhisattva” is composed of two words: *bodhi* means wisdom, *sattva* is a person. A bodhisattva is anyone who practices the path of wisdom. But bodhisattvas are also characterized by something quite unique: they aspire to wisdom for the benefit of everyone else. The words *bodhi* and *prajna* both mean wisdom, but *prajna* is a particular type of wisdom: it is wisdom that perceives liberating emptiness. So, to rephrase the text, “*For a bodhisattva who aspires to the liberating wisdom of emptiness, the first thing he or she must do is to arouse the thought of great compassion; make great vows; and diligently cultivate samadhi.*” Why is that? Because wisdom and compassion in Buddhism are not like two wings of a bird or two wheels on a cart: wisdom and compassion are actually the same thing. People misunderstand the word “emptiness” to mean something lacking.

Relationship and Connection

Wisdom means relationship; emptiness means relationship. Does this sound strange to you? For instance, this paper, here, is empty. Why? Because this paper is made up of non-paper. It is not empty because it is not there: if I toss it around in the air, we see it and hear the sound. But paper is made up of non-paper, which means that it is made up

of everything else. In this piece of paper we see the paper mill; the lumber jack. We see the rain, the soil, tree bark; and all the skills it took to make it into this final product. It’s all about relationships.

Everything is like that: dynamic, inseparable. It’s actually the same as “form.” In the *Heart Sutra* we chant, “Emptiness is form.” This is not an esoteric, secret message. It’s reality! Form is empty because it is interconnected with everything else. The form of this cup is made up of all the forms of everything that is not a cup: it is made from paint, porcelain, factory workers, the designer. Think of all the people who work in the cup factory and the food that they eat; the plants that are grown, and the grocery stores. Everything is connected to this cup. So emptiness is not dead; it is not nothingness. No. Emptiness is form; it is connection. So, if you really want to help yourself, you have to help other people.

Open the Grasping Hand

The very first mistake a person makes when they want to help themselves is to think, “*Me, I want to help myself.*” This first concept is wrong from the onset because there is no “me,” just as there is no cup. This cup is made up of non-cup, but if you keep chasing after a “cup,” you are congealing, holding on to the *idea* of this fixed entity called “cup.” It is the same with “me” or “I” as in, “*I need help which is why I need practice.*” Your *I* is made up of everything else. As long as you keep holding on to that, of course you won’t get liberated because you are the one who keeps on holding on to it. It’s as if you’re repeating, “*I want to throw the cup away; I really want to throw the cup away,*” but if you keep holding on to it, how will you ever throw it away? Open the grasping hand and just do it.

The very first step of a bodhisattva who wants to study *prajna* or emptiness, is to arouse the thought



Photo by Edgar Castrejon

of compassion. Through helping others, their own vexations will diminish. If we hold on to our own vexations because we want to cut them off or end them – and we always have vexations – we don’t let them be free. It is just like the pain I spoke about: if, when we have leg pain, we label it “pain,” then we kill the experience. There’s actually much more to experience than just that one label called “pain.” There are all kinds of sensations which you won’t experience because you’ve already killed them. But pain is made up of non-pain; it is made up of numbness, soreness, jabbing, throbbing – all kinds of sensations.

One day, on the New York City subway, a young child kept asking his father about everything he saw, “What’s that?” He had probably just learned that phrase. “What’s that?” A bench. “What’s that?” A handle. “Where is the train?” The dad was stuck for

a while. He finally answered, “We’re on the train!” The child answered, “I thought that’s the floor!” Train is made up of non-train. The very first step is to wake up from this idea of rigidity, “I want this; I want that.” A bodhisattva who practices the transcending wisdom of emptiness must understand emptiness. Emptiness means relationships. To help others is to help yourself. To offer yourself is to gain everything.

You must give rise to great compassion; make extensive vows such as *The Four Great Vows* to save all sentient beings. How do we do this? We have to get rid of the obstacles that prevent us from saving sentient beings. What are the obstacles? Our self-attachment; our vexations that cloud us so we can’t see things clearly and make right judgments. So we end vexations. By ending vexations, we learn to practice. Once all these are perfected, we become a buddha.

Self is the Biggest Obstacle

I make an offering to each one of you, but any benefit that you may receive from the talk or the practice has nothing to do with me. If it did, then each and every one of you would get the same result. But because you each have your own karmic disposition, your receptivity will be different. Your benefit comes from your own merit.

Our practice is to benefit sentient beings through our vow to help others. The biggest obstacle is our own self. Some people may be enthusiastic and always want to help others; but they insert their own views into others. They may not be able to see it but others do. We have to become good listeners and give in an appropriate way. We don’t let this obstacle prevent us from seeing things clearly. Why? The text says, “*Do not seek liberation for oneself alone.*” If you do that, whatever liberation you find, whatever virtue you cultivate will be limited to the one small self.

The same act, if done for oneself *and* the other, with the great compassion to benefit all beings, will have different results. The bodhisattva makes great merit. Although the practice of a selfish person is a good act, it is limited to one small karmic deed. Karma is conditioned, first and foremost, by the *intention* that colors the act. According to the intention, it will lead to either retribution or reward. Of course, other conditions must also be there.

Samadhi and Wisdom

The text also says to “*diligently cultivate samadhi.*” This is very important. Because the framework of this text is for beginners, samadhi here means the ability to settle the mind, to focus. But traditionally, in Chan, samadhi and wisdom are the same. In the *Platform Sutra* of Huineng, the sixth lineage master, samadhi is inseparable from wisdom. Huineng, the greatest master from whom stems all the lineages of Chan, said, “Samadhi is the essence. Wisdom is the function.” Samadhi is the flame; luminosity is the wisdom. A light bulb’s *function* is to illuminate; the light bulb’s *essence* is brightness. They are the same; they are not separate, not sequentially cultivated.

This is something very distinct in Chan. From this, we have the development of Chan methods such as shikantaza or silent illumination, or gong’an (koan). Both methods involve simultaneous cultivation of samadhi and wisdom. If you practice shikantaza and you enter into a stagnant kind of samadhi, you’re actually doing it wrong. The correct way is to not allow yourself to enter into absorption: the mind, awake and clear, does not stir up thoughts. When ordinary people say they are clear, they actually mean that they are thinking; their train of thought is clear. That’s very different. Wakeful yet no wandering thoughts, relaxed yet fully awake. It is simultaneous samadhi and wisdom.



Photo by Malcolm Lightbody

The purpose of working with koans is not to enter into some kind of absorption. Neither is working with a koan a concentration exercise. The purpose of a koan is to generate the great doubt which allows a person to still function in activity with no wandering thoughts. There is just the doubt. It is still simultaneous; luminosity and samadhi are inseparable. That’s the true nature of our mind which is able to know, and is free from any fixations and rigidity. Naturally there is free flow because we are human beings and not a wall. So, essence and function are simultaneous. But, here, because it is for beginners, the text says, “*cultivate samadhi.*” Although it is true that our true nature is originally free from wandering thoughts and naturally clear, it is hard to

recognize that. Beginners may think of it this way: if you see a pearl in a muddy pond, you need to first settle the mud so the pond can become clear and transparent to the bottom. Then you can see the gem, reach down and get it.

How to Practice Samadhi

How do we practice samadhi? The instruction is to first cast aside all appearances of “this and that, long and short, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, I’d rather sit next to this person than that one, how come no one else is moving?” To have these thoughts is to be involved with appearances, so cast them aside. You are the only one in the zendo so you don’t care.

Second, put to rest the myriad affairs. This is the ancient way of talking about it – the modern way is “take a vacation.” This means that you are taking a break from your daily life, from your past and future, from the environment, the body, even from your chattering mind.

Third, make the body and mind one. How? In sitting, we use a method. Do we have a method in walking? Yes: whatever the body is doing, the mind is right there.

Fourth, there is no division between activity and stillness. This is a key. People think that practice has something to do with their cushion, and that as soon as the gong rings, it’s break time! So there is a division, a distinction between break and work. Even seasoned practitioners do this, especially those who really love sitting meditation. That’s wrong!

Practice and the Nature of the Mind

Today, during interview, a gentleman came in with a question about the benefits of practice. I talked about stages of practice which were foreign to this practitioner. He asked whether they led to happier states: should he strive for them or should he be satisfied with his situation right now? I replied: “In the course of cultivating the mind, many types of scenery arise. The different states of meditation are merely sceneries for which we don’t have to strive. But they may be signposts. If you encounter them in the future, you will know what to do.” As for their usefulness, I gave the analogy of the sun: the sun’s radiance is scattered throughout all directions. The natural function of the sun is to shine. Using a method is like using a magnifying glass. The sun without a method is kind of scattered, but if you use a magnifying glass the energy can focus and can accomplish a lot. Does that process affect the nature of the sun to shine? No.

The natural ability of the mind is to have all kinds of thoughts, to be aware, to think. When we use the method thinking subsides and as a result, we have all kinds of psycho-physiological states, or ultra states of consciousness. Thoughts become unified. But does this have anything to do with the nature of the mind? No. Practice has nothing to do with the nature of mind. Now, you may think, “Why are we here, then?” We are here because, without going through the practice, we will not appreciate the nature of mind.



Direct Understanding

In the course of practice, we recognize something very important: the nature of mind giving rise to thoughts, the wonderful ups and downs. In that course, we understand how we get caught up in these thoughts, how we are completely controlled by them. We think happy thoughts and we become happy. We think sad ones and we become sad. We are usually caught up with forms and appearances. Therefore, the purpose of practice is to understand forms and appearances until you understand your true nature. If you don’t go through this process, but instead just

Photo by John Baker

listen to me tell you what your true nature of mind is, there will be no effect whatsoever because you are completely caught up with the words and language, with forms and appearances. You use these forms and appearances to process my words, and you take these to be real as you exclaim, “Oh, I understand now!” But you are tricked! You must have a *direct* understanding, an engagement with these thoughts. You must go through them, subside them, and not be influenced by the principle of not grasping and not rejecting. That’s how you weed through these forms and appearances. Then, one day, you will understand the nature of these thoughts: that the words you have previously read and have understood are impermanent, fleeting, they have no intrinsic self nature. All this will come alive in you. This is the course of practice.

Essence and Function

The essence and the function of mind are inseparable. But we have no way to understand how they are inseparable by just *hearing* what the essence is. It’s as if you were wearing red colored lenses and I was trying to explain to you what it is like without those colored lenses. You can’t possibly understand it by just looking at me. The only way to get to the essence is through form and function. Through function we understand essence. Through wandering thoughts, drowsiness, ups and downs, we understand the nature. And once we understand it, we realize that essence and function are inseparable.

After a person is *deeply* enlightened – and “deeply” is emphasized here – the person will still have thoughts, but he or she will be thinking a lot more clearly. Their thoughts will no longer be centered around this fabricated “self,” as if it were non-changing. The enlightened person’s thoughts will be a natural response of the mind. At this time,

in Chan or Zen, we no longer call it “thought;” we call it “wisdom” because, in the midst of the thoughts, there is no self-referentiality, no self-attachment. The thoughts are now the natural function of the mind. Essence and function are the same.

Some people practice “witnessing,” they observe the passing of emotions and thoughts. That’s just an expedient means. The natural function of the mind, which is to be aware, needs no extra “thing” called a witness, or watcher. There is just a natural response in the moment. A watcher is like a mirror able to reflect. Can we separate out the function and the essence of the mirror? Ultimately, it’s the same thing.

What about wisdom and compassion? Wisdom is the nature of emptiness, our true nature. We are made up of everyone and everything else, past, present, continuously. So, when a person becomes enlightened, compassion is naturally there. This just means no self-referentiality; this is to understand the dynamic, inter-connectedness of all things. It would be silly if the left hand waged war against the right hand, since they are connected. So, a compassionate person can be yelling or scolding. When my teacher, Master Sheng Yen, scolded me and treated me a certain way, he was showing compassion, feeling no hatred or anger inside. It was exactly what I needed because, being an idiot, I did some stupid things and needed to be dealt with. But his inner feelings were not a factor in his scolding.

Repentance

I once did something wrong [treated my teacher badly], and my action always remained in my mind. I was rather absent-minded when I was a young novice. What was important to me was what *I* wanted to do such as deepen my practice, but I’d forget what my teacher’s needs were, even though I was his attendant and was supposed to take care

of him. One day he was to give a public lecture on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, attended by over one thousand people, and I forgot to bring his notes! Luckily, he was an eloquent and spontaneous speaker. I felt so guilty afterwards, especially each time I saw him as it reminded me of that incident. In fact, I noticed that even as recently as two years ago this strong remorse still lingered in my mind!

Master Sheng Yen, during most of his retreats, led a period of slow, full-body prostrations, a ritual of repentance for our past harmful behavior, which led most participants to burst into tears. One day after participating in such a ritual, I went to him for an interview. I said, “Shifu, I am sorry for all the things I’ve done! I feel very bad.” He answered: “Shifu (referring to himself) does not see that. Shifu sees you *now*, in this moment.” With these few words, much of the burden that I had been carrying just dropped. It was such a relief! That is a good teacher! A good teacher has to be a mirror. This is the function of wisdom. Is that compassion? Yes.



Essence is wisdom. Function is compassion. Essence and function are inseparable. Because Master Sheng Yen was completely genuine, he saw me as I was, in this moment.

One-Minute Meditation

I often advise my students to do a one-minute Zen, which I call a *Manhattan One-Minute Zen* since Manhattan is very busy. I ask my students to pick a certain event, something they do routinely every single day at the same time, for example, when they climb the same flight of stairs; or when they eat lunch, to concentrate on their first bite; or to just pause for one minute at a specific time, at whatever time is convenient. As their assigned moment comes, they need to discipline themselves, drop everything they’re doing, relax the body, naturalize the breath, and clear themselves. Even if they’re very busy at work, they must take time for a cup of water or tea. They should very mindfully make their tea say, at ten o’clock; smell the tea bag; pour a little milk or whatever they use, and just taste. In other words, be there, completely. Make the body and mind one; there should be no division between activity and stillness. Just for one minute. If they use the flight of stairs as their discipline, they should not do slow walking meditation or it will cause a traffic jam, but just go up naturally, using their whole body.

If they tell themselves that they’re going to practice every moment of the day, they’ll end up practicing haphazardly, only when they remember to. So they have to insert practice in their life, in activity, in five situations a day. And then, after they’ve disciplined themselves to do this, they will have a chance to extend this into other areas of life. If they say to themselves that they will practice 24/7, the likelihood of their doing so is very slim. ☺

(to be continued)

Photo by Matthew Fassnacht

Entering the Gateless

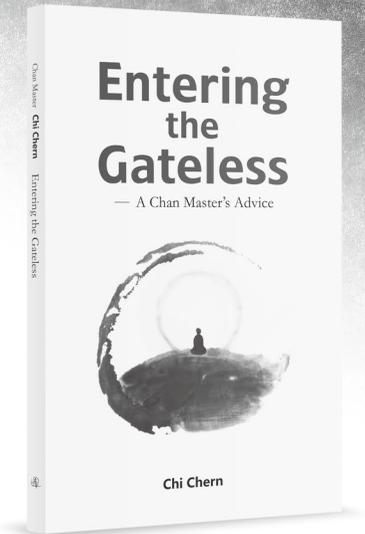
A Chan Master’s Advice

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.

Candlelight Books • ISBN 978-0-9970912-1-2



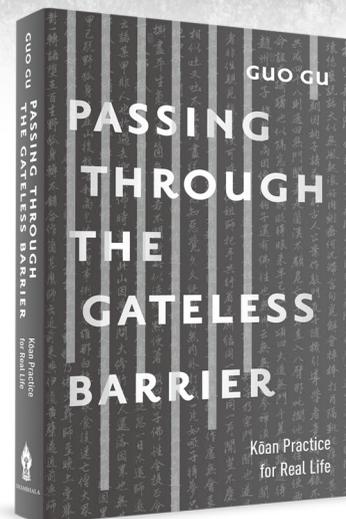
Passing Through the Gateless Barrier

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.

Shambhala Publications • ISBN 978-1-61180-281-8



Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

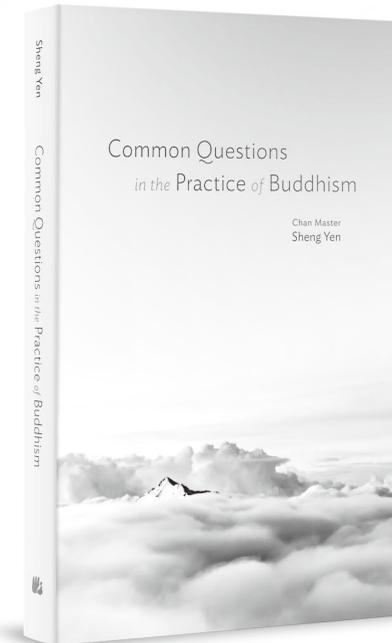
NORTH AMERICAN CENTERS			
Chan Meditation Center (CMC) • Chang Hwa Fashi, Director Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association (DDMBA) America (<i>DDM USA Headquarters</i>) Dharma Drum Publications			
90-56 Corona Avenue Elmhurst, NY 11373	(718) 592-6593	chancenter@gmail.com	www.chancenter.org www.ddmbsa.org
Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) • Guo Yuan Fashi, Abbot			
184 Quannacut Road Pine Bush, NY 12566	(845) 744-8114	ddrc@dharmadrumretreat.org	www.dharmadrumretreat.org
DDM Los Angeles Center • Guo Jiann Fashi, Director			
4530 North Peck Road El Monte, CA 91732	(626) 350-4388	ddmbala@gmail.com	www.ddmbala.org
DDM Massachusetts Buddhist Association (aka DDM Dharmakaya Center)			
319 Lowell Street Lexington, MA 02420	(781) 863-1936		www.massba.org
DDM San Francisco Bay Area Center • Chang Xing Fashi, Director			
255 H Street Fremont, CA 94536	(510) 246-8264	info@ddmbasf.org	www.ddmbasf.org
DDM Vancouver Center • Chang Wu Fashi, Director			
8240 No.5 Road Richmond, BC V6Y-2V4	(604) 277-1357	info@ddmba.ca	www.ddmba.ca

TAIWAN - WORLD HEADQUARTERS			
Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education			
No. 555, Fagu Rd. Jinshan Dist. New Taipei 20842	02-2498-7171 02-2498-7174	webmaster@ddm.org.tw	www.ddm.org.tw

DHARMA DRUM MOUNTAIN - NORTH AMERICA				
California	Los Angeles Chapter	(626) 350-4388	Tina Wang	ddmbala@gmail.com www.ddmbala.org
	Sacramento	(916) 681-2416	Janice Tsai	ddmbasacra@yahoo.com www.sacramento.ddmusa.org
	San Francisco Chapter	(408) 900-7125	Kyle Shih	ddmbasf@gmail.com www.ddmbasf.org
Connecticut	Fairfield County Branch	(203) 912-0734	Alice Peng	contekalice@aol.com
	Hartford Branch	(860) 805-3588	Lingyun Wang	cmchartfordct@gmail.com www.ddmhartfordct.org
Florida	Gainesville	(352) 336-5301	Lian Huey Chen	LianFlorida@hotmail.com
	Miami	(954) 432-8683	May Lee	ddmbaus@yahoo.com
	Orlando	(321) 917-6923	Anchi Chang	achang1117@gmail.com
	Tallahassee Chapter	(850) 274-3996	Frances Berry	tallahassee.chan@gmail.com www.tallahasseechan.com
Georgia	Atlanta Branch	(678) 809-5392	Sophia Chen	Schen@elegantfh.net
Illinois	Chicago Chapter	(847) 255-5483	Shiou Loh	ddmbachicago@gmail.com www.ddmbachicago.org
Massachusetts	Boston Branch	(978)-394-1391	Jinghua Zhou	ddm.boston@gmail.com
Michigan	Lansing Branch	(517) 332-0003	Li-Hua Kong	lkong2006@gmail.com
Missouri	St. Louis Branch	(636) 825-3889	Tai-Ling Chin	acren@aol.com
New Jersey	Edison Chapter	(732) 249-1898	Jia-Shu Kuo	enews@ddmba-nj.org www.ddmba-nj.org
Nevada	Las Vegas	(702) 896-4108	Mabel Lin	yhl2527@yahoo.com
North Carolina	Cary	(919) 677-9030	Ming-An Lee	minganlee58@gmail.com
Ontario	Toronto Chapter	(416) 855-0531	Evelyn Wang	ddmba.toronto@gmail.com www.ddmbaontario.org
Texas	Dallas Branch	(682) 552-0519	Patty Chen	ddmba_patty@hotmail.com
	Houston	(832) 279-6786	Yi-Peng Shao	g9g9@msn.com
Utah	Salt Lake City	(810) 947-9019	Inge Fan	Inge_Fan@hotmail.com
Vermont	Burlington	(802) 658-3413	Jui-chu Lee	juichulee@yahoo.com www.ddmbavt.org
Washington	Seattle Chapter	(425) 957-4597	Gary Lin	ddmba.seattle@gmail.com seattle.ddmusa.org
Washington, DC	DC Branch	(240) 424-5486	Jack Chang	chan@ddmbadc.org

Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

MEXICO				
Nayarit	Chacala	(800) 257-0532 (800) 505-8005	Dr. Laura del Valle	info@mardejade.com www.mardejade.com
ASIA and OCEANIA				
Australia	Melbourne	(03) 8822-3187	Tess Hu	info@ddmmelbourne.org.au www.ddmmelbourne.org.au
	Sydney	(61-4) 1318-5603 (61-2) 9283-3168 (Fax)	Agnes Chow	ddmsydney@yahoo.com.au www.ddm.org.au
Hong Kong	Kowloon	(852) 2865-3110 (852) 2591-4810 (Fax)	Chang Zhan Fashi, Director	info@ddmhk.org.hk www.ddmhk.org.hk
	Island	(852) 3955-0077 (852) 3590-3640 (Fax)		
Malaysia	Selangor	(60-3) 7960-0841 (60-3) 7960-0842 (Fax)	Chang Zao Fashi, Director	admin@ddm.org.my www.ddm.org.my
Singapore	Singapore	(65) 6735-5900 (65) 6224-2655 (Fax)	Gan SweeHwa Joe	ddrumsingapore@gmail.com www.ddsingapore.org
Thailand	Bangkok	(662) 713-7815 (662) 713-7816 (662) 713-7638 (Fax)	Porntip Chupinijsak	ddmbkk2005@gmail.com www.ddmth.com
EUROPE				
Belgium	Luxemburg	(352) 400-080 (352) 290-311 (Fax)	Li-chuan Lin	ddm@chan.lu
Croatia	Zagreb	(385) 1-481 00 74	Žarko Andričević	info@dharmaloka.org www.dharmaloka.org www.chan.hr
Poland	Zalesie Górne	(48) 22-736-2252 (48) 60-122-4999 (48) 22-736-2251 (Fax)	Paweł Rościszewski	budwod@budwod.com.pl www.czan.org.pl www.czan.eu
Switzerland	Zürich	(411) 382-1676	Max Kälin	MaxKailin@chan.ch www.chan.ch
	Bern	(31) 352-2243	Hildi Thalmann	hthalmann@gmx.net www.chan-bern.ch
United Kingdom	Bury	(44) 193-484-2017	Simon Child	admin@westernchanfellowship.org www.westernchanfellowship.org
	London		Orca Liew	liew853@btinternet.com www.chanmeditationlondon.org



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.

Sheng Yen Education Foundation • ISBN 978-986-6443-92-3