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SUMMER 2021





Love

Buddhadharma aims to use love as the basis to cultivate selfless compassion. While buddhas and bodhisattvas are selfless, ordinary sentient beings are not; therefore, it is necessary for sentient beings to cultivate and gradually transform from self-centered love to selfless compassion, and from conditional love to unconditional love. [...] Without love a family would be like a machine that may break down anytime because it lacks lubricating; without love serious damage may result. The purpose of Buddhadharma is nothing more than educating and cultivating lay people to transform conflict into harmony.



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism, 1988

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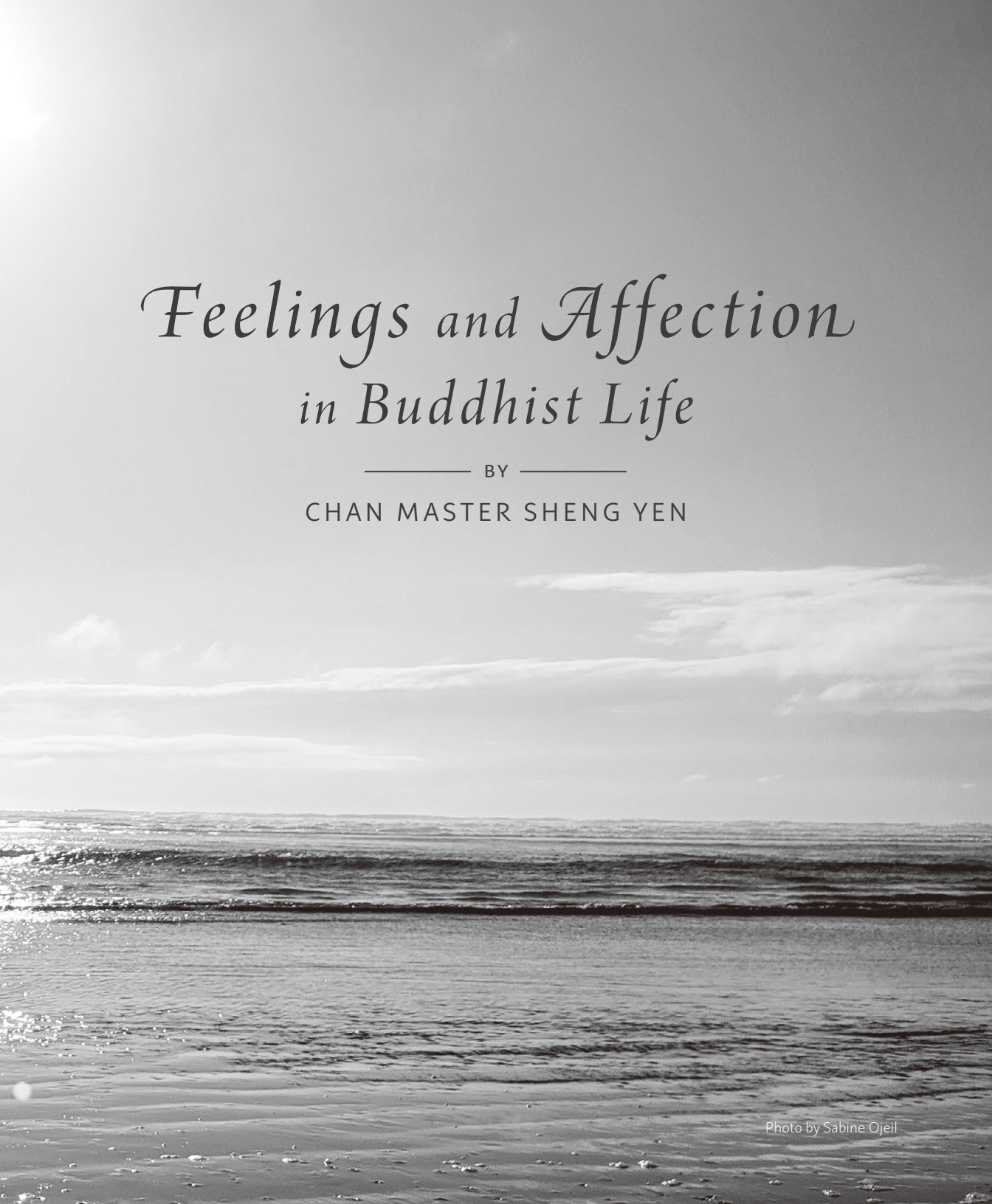
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Feelings and Affection in Buddhist Life

————— BY —————
CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

Photo by Sabine Ojeil

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

In 1988, Master Sheng Yen published in Taiwan, the book that he considered to be a sequel to *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*, entitled *Common Questions in the Practice of Buddhism*. (From his preface: “Many readers urged me to write a sequel in similar style, while exploring an even deeper and wider range of topics.”) Like *Orthodox Chinese Buddhism*, this book was written in question-and-answer format, and consists of seventy-five questions about Buddhist practice submitted by practitioners. This book was translated into English and published by the Sheng Yen Education Foundation in 2017. The English translation is the product of collaboration between Ven. Guo Chan coordinator, Hue-ping Chin translator, Jerry Wang bilingual reviewer, Weitan Wu reviewer, and Ernest Heau, editor. This article is a chapter from that book.



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

QUESTION: What is the proper role of feelings and affection in the lives of Buddhists?

ANSWER: In Chinese, the term “*ganqing*” refers to the feelings and affectionate relationships between men and women, parents and children, and among friends; as such, it includes romantic love, parental love, and friendships. Buddhists are ordinary people, so it is natural that they have parents and friends, and except for monastics, they may also have spouses. Buddhism refers to sentient beings as “beings with feelings,” and as sentient beings we experience the three affectionate relationships mentioned above.



Photo by Felipe Salgado

So, it is ultimately human beings who should practice the Dharma, and everyone who practices begins as an ordinary person. Therefore, their engagements and interactions must be in accordance with affection, reasons, and laws. If Buddhism only speaks of detachment from desires, it would be difficult to bring ordinary people into the gate of Buddhism. Furthermore, if Buddhist teaching is devoid of feelings and affection, it would be difficult for people to cultivate Buddhism and transform themselves.

In Buddhadharma, “compassion” seems to differ from “feeling and affection;” however, the foundation of compassion lies in the relationships of affection between people. Some would call it love, but just as love can be conditional or unconditional, there is also selfish love and selfless love. The compassion of the Buddha and bodhisattvas is selfless, while the love between humans involves a sense of self. The love between parent and child is unconditional,

while romantic love and friendship can be conditional. Buddhadharma aims to use love as the basis to cultivate selfless compassion.

Family Is the Foundation

While buddhas and bodhisattvas are selfless, ordinary sentient beings are not; therefore, it is necessary for sentient beings to cultivate and gradually transform from self-centered love to selfless compassion, and from conditional love to unconditional love. Thus, Buddhism does not ask people to leave feelings and affection behind right from the beginning. So, how should Buddhists handle feelings and affection? The family is the foundation for affectionate relationships; its ethical principles flow from the bond between parents and children. It starts out from the relationship between the spouses, continues with other immediate family members

and from there it evolves and extends outward to relatives and friends. Affectionate relations thus become necessary due to the bond in the family and the emerging of friendships in our social activities. An old Chinese saying goes, “Depending on parents when at home, relying on friends while away.” There is another saying, “When there is harmony between husband and wife, they will live to a ripe old age of marital bliss.” These are the relationships based on affectionate feelings.

Without love a family would be like a machine that may break down anytime because it lacks lubricating; without love serious damage may result. The purpose of Buddhadharma is nothing more than educating and cultivating lay people to transform conflict into harmony. Therefore, Dharma has the two constant teachings of wisdom and compassion. Wisdom derives from reasoning, while compassion arises from emotions; using wisdom to guide compassion will transform one’s emotional life from chaos to order, and conflict to harmony. If feelings and affections become separated from wisdom, emotions can run rampant and cause harm to oneself and others.

Six Directions

The *Shrigalavada Sutra*, known in the Chinese Tripitaka as *Six Directions Homage Sutra* (Chn. *Liufangli Jing*), recounts that in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was in India a religious practice that instructed followers to face specific directions during worship. Once, the Buddha saw a young man named Shrigala piously facing six different directions as he worshipped. The Buddha asked Shrigala what he was worshipping. The young man replied that his father worshiped in the six directions when he was alive, so Shrigala was just continuing to do so.

The Buddha told him that Buddhists also worshipped in six directions: to the east to revere parents, to the south to respect teachers, to the west to be considerate toward a spouse, to the north to love and care for children, to the position below to show concern to servants and subordinates, and to the position above to show respect to monastics. This custom expresses the attitude and duties that individuals should have towards the important people in their lives. All of these are within the nature of feelings and affections, and they are the basis of ethics in human relationships. When one can handle emotions and live a normal life with feelings, it is the beginning of practicing Buddhadharma.

In the chapter “On Buddhahood” in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*, there is a conversation between Vimalakirti and Sarvarupasamdharsana Bodhisattva. The bodhisattva asked Vimalakirti, “You have parents and a wife at home and dependents and relatives, as well as subordinates and friends. Isn’t that burdensome?” The bodhisattva was implying that Vimalakirti was a bodhisattva, yet he had family and relatives, so how would this free him from worldly concerns? Vimalakirti replied, “My mother is wisdom; my father is the instrument to deliver sentient beings; my wife is Dharma joy from my practice; my daughter represents compassionate mind, while my son represents kindness and honesty. I do own a home and family; but they symbolize emptiness. My disciples are sentient beings; my friends represent various methods of Dharma practice. The attractive women performing around me are the four convenient ways of gathering and transforming sentient beings.”

This chapter in the sutra speaks of the great variety of people and matters in a lay practitioner’s living environment. Vimalakirti did not feel burdened or restrained by them; on the contrary, he showed great

compassion and great wisdom. He lived a life full of feeling and affections like other ordinary people, yet he encompassed an inner world of liberation and freedom.

Feelings and Reason

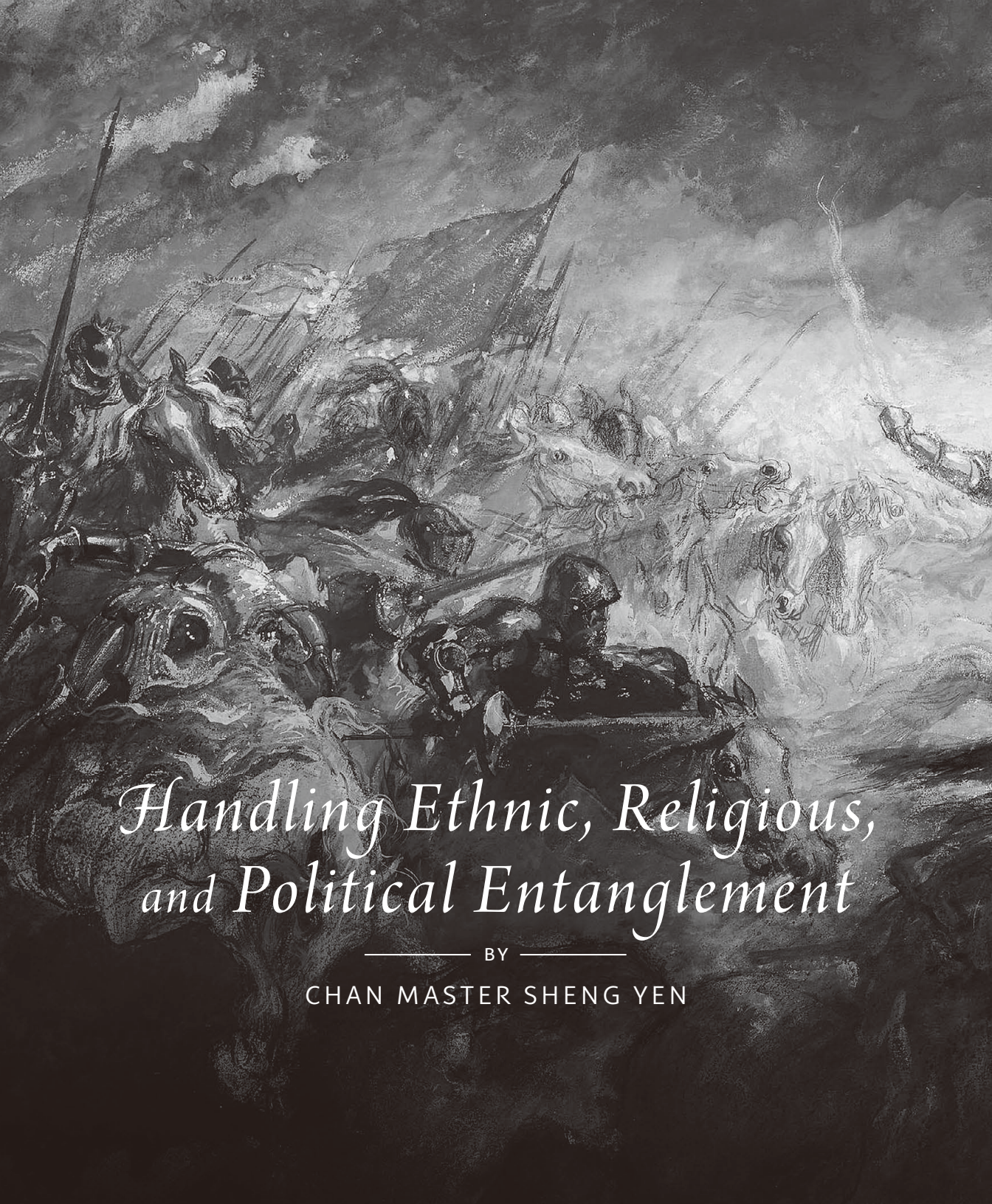
As one can see, Buddhists don't need to reject feelings and affection in their lives; rather, it depends on whether one can guide their feelings with reason and merge reason with feeling. If we can guide our emotions with rational wisdom, then life will be richer and smoother and we will achieve success one way or another; it will certainly benefit oneself as well as others. The so-called Dharma guidance and principles of wisdom are to teach us how to handle sentimental issues; they are not asking us to

abandon, reject, or loathe emotions and feelings. Yet, if we misplace our emotions and feelings, it would bring puzzlement or release emotions without control, it would create suffering.

For instance, parents naturally love and protect children; but overindulgence can harm them. There is love between men and women; but extramarital or complicated premarital affairs will not only bring about problems in family life, but also create conflicts in society. Besides, in terms of relationships among relatives and friends and between teachers and students or master and servants, affection between them should also be based on reason. Otherwise, it would generate anxiety and disturbance. Buddhadharmas does not oppose feelings and affections in life; rather, it gives us guidance to lead a life of feelings based on reason and in accordance with common laws. 🌿



Photo by Timo Stern



*Handling Ethnic, Religious,
and Political Entanglement*

— BY —

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN



The Phantom Horseman, 1870–93, Sir John Gilbert
Collection of Birmingham Museums Trust

This article is excerpted from *The World of Human Realm* 《人間世》 (Ren Jian Shi, Dharma Drum Publishing, 2018). In the author's preface, Master Sheng Yen (Shifu) explains how this book came to be: In 2001 Mr. Shengkai Zhang started a periodical named *Open Weekly*, and asked our Shifu to contribute a weekly article. A journalist would interview Shifu on current issues facing society. The transcripts of these interviews were edited by Ven. Guo Chan and Ms. Ligui Hu. The column ran for a year and a half until in 2003 Mr. Zhang had to discontinue *Open Weekly*. To honor Mr. Zhang's dedication, it was decided to publish the essays in book form. About that work, Shifu wrote: "When I was initially interviewed, I responded colloquially and did not pay enough attention to the importance of phrasing, as well as the universality of the topics, and the logical structure of the ideas. [...] It wasn't until I returned to New York, when I was already affected by aging and ailment, though still busy from morning until night, that I had time to go back and work on this book, making the final touches [...] I went through nearly every paragraph and word, revising and enlarging to make the book more readable. I take this opportunity now to offer readers a taste of how to apply the Dharma to daily life." Editing by Ven. Chang Wu, Chiacheng Chang, R. Dougherty, and Ernest Heau.



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

THERE HAS OFTEN BEEN MUTUAL TENSION and hostility between members of various religious groups and traditions. Actually, what is commonly referred to as a "holy war" between religions usually involves political factors. If the issue is solely between two religions, it is unlikely matters will escalate to an armed conflict; but when political powers are also involved, there will be the possibility of mutual slaughter in war. It is terribly unfortunate that throughout history, religions are so often manipulated by ambitious political figures. This is partly because religions often rely on the help and protection of political forces for their existence and growth. When politicians seek to consolidate and expand their power, they often exploit religious obedience and people's absolute faith in God or the kingdom of heaven, as a pretext to wage war on other religions, countries, and ethnic groups.

As for the religions themselves, sometimes when a tradition or denomination seeks its own

self-preservation, or hopes to strengthen its own power, it will avail itself of political power to handle the opposition, which can result in war. Often, when the losing side has been subdued or decimated, they are forced to accept the religious beliefs of the victors. There is no shortage of historical examples of religious warfare, including conflicts between new and old sects of the same religion. And the situation only appears more complicated when politics, religion, and ethnic survival are involved, because when the group is not strong and developed, there is the threat of being eroded, split apart, or extinguished. This is especially true when an ethnic group and a religion are inseparable, mutually dependent on each other for their existence. They have no room for freedom of belief; in these cases, where ethnicity and religion are two sides of the same coin, it is also hard to determine the boundaries between politics and religion.

Because politics manages an ethnic group's affairs and religion is the source of the group's beliefs; if religion disappears, then a people's ethnic identity will be lost. Therefore, religious followers feel that they must take a stand and fight to the end to preserve that ethnic group's existence. If there were only one religion left in the world, it would still not guarantee there would be no religious wars. As long as people have different understandings of deity and different interpretations of scriptures, even if they are from a single religion, there will still be conflict.

People Are the Problem

Based on this we can argue that the problem does not lie in the nature of religion or god, but with people. The problem with people pertains to different forms of government, ethnic characteristics, and cultural backgrounds. This also includes disagreements among religious people about the meaning



Photo by Anton Dmitriev

and interpretation of religious beliefs. In principle, Buddhists are concerned with politics but do not utilize political power. Although Buddhism also needs political protection, it will not exploit political powers to oppress non-Buddhists. Religion should extend beyond ethnic and national boundaries, especially in the twenty-first century. In the multicultural societies of today, we must remember that religion belongs to religion, politics to politics, and ethnicity to ethnicity.

We should not let religion become a tool of politics, nor should religion be viewed as the foundation of ethnic survival. Religious beliefs, ethnic survival, and political upheaval should never be entangled and mixed together: ethnicity is based on genetics, religion on beliefs, and politics on governing. Ethnicity is inherited from previous generations, beliefs are based on free choice, and politics are subject to frequent reform. The very natures of these three are completely different, so how can we fail to separate them? 🌿



Loneliness

— BY —

VENERABLE CHANG WU

Venerable Chang Wu is the Abbess of the Dharma Drum Vancouver Centre. She teaches classes in Buddhist philosophy and meditation, and leads intensive meditation retreats in Canada and the USA, as well as England, Luxemburg, Mexico and Taiwan, and she organizes and participates in scholarly conferences and interfaith dialogue around the world. This article is from a Dharma talk given on May 13, 2020. Transcription by Helen Ho, editing by Buffe Laffey.

I HAD A CHAT WITH A MAN WHO HAS SUFFERED from depression for a good number of years. He lives by himself, and in this pandemic crisis, he is feeling quite lonely. Wanting to know how Western psychology defines loneliness, I gathered information from articles in *Time* magazine and *Psychology Today* magazine, from publications of the Canadian Mental Health Association, and also from Wikipedia. These define loneliness as: an unpleasant emotional response to perceived isolation. It's often associated with an unwanted lack of connection and intimacy.

Loneliness overlaps and yet is distinct from solitude. In other words, loneliness is not the same as being alone. Not everyone who experiences solitude feels lonely. Conversely, some people who are surrounded by others throughout the day, or perhaps in a long-lasting marriage, may still experience deep and pervasive loneliness.

Loneliness is actually a very subjective emotion. One who feels lonely, is lonely. The causes of loneliness are varied; they include social, emotional, and even environmental factors. Many life events may cause it, such as lack of prenatal care, lack of love during infancy, an absence of friendship during childhood and adolescence. Loneliness may come after a divorce, or after losing a partner or close companion (or even pets) to death, or when grown children move out (empty nest syndrome), or after retirement. People who have chronic depression also experience loneliness.

It was not until the later part of the twentieth century that Western psychology really started looking into loneliness. In 1973, Robert Weiss published his book *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation* (MIT Press) and this brought the attention of scientists to this topic. A few years later, in 1978, UCLA created the loneliness scale which has

been revised several times and is still in use. It is a set of statements such as "I lack companionship" to which the subject responds "never," "rarely," "sometimes," or "often." The responses are rated numerically to produce the loneliness score.

After the creation of the loneliness scale, scientific interest in this topic increased and broadened. The majority of researchers, in any articles I have read so far, seem to come to the same conclusions and overall opinions: loneliness is an emotional response to how one perceives and experiences isolation. They seem to think the root of the problem is lack of social connection or intimate relationships. Do you agree? If that conclusion is true, it means that if one has good social connections and intimate personal relationships, one will not feel lonely, right?

The Buddhist Perspective

So what is the Buddhist perspective on loneliness? First, being solitary doesn't mean one is lonely. You can be alone, like when we are in a solitary retreat, but not feel lonely. So, being alone and loneliness are two separate things. We all are born into this world alone, and we will die alone. If we look back on our life, there were many important experiences we faced and dealt with it by ourselves, because no one else could do it for us. Our karma is also uniquely our own. In truth, we're alone; this is not something we can deny or run away from.

So how does this feeling of loneliness develop? How does this sense of separateness or disconnection come into being? When we are born into this world, we rely on other people to take care of us, mostly our parents. When we do not receive the care we need, for example, when we are crying and hungry for food but don't get any. We develop a sense of being left out, neglected or alienated.



Art by Chien-Chih Liu

When we grow older, we start to establish this notion of me and other, here and there: There is a toy that my friend is playing with, and I like to play with that too, but I can't, because he is playing with it and I'm not. The toy is out there and not here; he is the one playing with the toy, not me. Here you see the notion of me and them, here and there. This apple pie, my favorite, if I'm going to eat the very last piece of it, no one else can have it. But if someone else eats it, I can't have it. There are so many real events in our life that we directly experience through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. This corporate experience reifies our perception of the world of duality. There is distinction: I and others, giver and taker.

When we become an adult, go to college, get a job and earn a livelihood; if we want to win the grand

first prize or get a job promotion, we have to beat others. So others become our competitors, we are in opposition to them. Opposition arises with self-interested involvement. Here comes conflict, disharmony, more obvious duality. This is how most people experience and perceive the world. A world of duality: there is subject and object, giver and taker. I and others are separate individuals and disassociated; this is not only our attitude towards other humans, this is also how we perceive our environment. Nature, the trees, the forest, the mountain, the rivers; all are separate from us, disconnected. If we do not have a good, harmonious, caring relationship or have a good connection with other people, very likely, or inevitably, we experience loneliness, feeling that we are disconnected, not being cared for, not accepted, not heard, not seen and not understood.

So what is Buddhism's view on this? How can Buddhist practice help to deal with the feeling of loneliness? Is being alone or solitary a bad thing? Loneliness is indeed a feeling of being separated and disconnected from others. It is also a revelation of how we perceive others. When one feels accepted, understood, and cared for, this feeling of separateness and loneliness will naturally dissolve. We all want to be accepted, understood and cared for by others, but have we treated others the way we want to be treated?

Unified Mind

What is a Chan approach to it? Chan practice is the cultivation of the mind. Most people's minds are usually scattered, discursive. When your mind is scattered, you can hardly accomplish anything. Chan practice is to train the mind from a state of

scatteredness to a state of concentration. The mind has to be concentrated to be able to generate power, then from a concentrated mind we continue to move on to a unified mind. When reaching the stage of unification, you will experience that you, others, the environment, the plants, the trees, the butterflies, the dog, the cats, the mountain, and the rivers are all unified as one. Not separated, not disconnected. In that state of unification, there is no differentiation of inner and outer, here and there, better or worse. All are inseparable in one totality. Having this experience, your views and perceptions of others starts to change. You have more understanding of others, your acceptance of other people increases, and you feel your world expanding. This is doable, this is achievable. The good news is that you don't need to be enlightened to see the change. You start witnessing the change when you have an experience of unified mind. It can happen to you, if you persist in practicing diligently and in a correct way.

This is how we are related to other people and the environment, this is Buddhism's perspective. But it comes back to the question, if one has good social connections and intimate relationships, would one be able to be free from the feeling of loneliness? Or would one still feel lonely? There is another kind of loneliness that comes from a deep down sense of lacking, that has nothing to do with other people, or the outside world. It is the root of loneliness and a form of vexation that exists in every one of us. This is about the relationship with oneself. How much do you understand yourself? How much have you accepted this so-called "I" that we know is not really who we are. The "I" is what you project, what you think you are with your brain, a very complicated mental construct. It is what you want others to see, this "I".

In our life, we all have to play certain roles involuntarily, sometimes being forced to act in a certain

way, or do something we don't really want to do but couldn't stop it, suppressing our true feeling, or to do certain things to please others to get what we want. It may be a survival mechanism, to try to fit into an image approved by the others in society, or to fulfil our duty. There are so many shields and armors that we put on, so much and so heavy that we don't recognize ourselves at all. That's how we become who we are now and why we are. Not only do we not recognize ourselves, we may not like ourselves, or perhaps to a certain degree, resent or despise ourselves. We may not feel at ease when we are alone, or not at ease with what we are doing.

At Ease with Oneself

The truth is we don't really have a genuine harmonious and honest relationship with ourselves. And more over, our body and mind are separate and disconnected most of the time. The mind is somewhere else, doesn't know how the body feels and what the body is doing. This disconnection creates a gap and a disassociation to the inner self, so we can't stand being alone. When we are by ourselves, we have to turn on the television, play music, open the refrigerator and eat something, get a phone and text friends, do SOMETHING. If you cannot be alone and at ease, feeling content with yourself, you will not be able to run away from this loneliness that deeply integrates in you. There will be no peace in you.

Chan practice is a journey of self-discovery. By knowing and affirming oneself, exactly seeing your strengths and weaknesses, maturing oneself, and finally dissolving or shattering one's self-centeredness. If you are using silent illumination, you will be dissolving yourself. If huatou is your method, yes, shatter yourself! When successfully reaching the final stage, you will experience awakening, and

see your true self nature. But that's not the end, it's actually the beginning of real practice. The truth is, the path to buddhahood is lonely and solitary, yet once you reach buddhahood, you will never feel alone again because sentient beings throughout time and space will seek your help and lessons. It comes naturally, you don't have to do anything. Before that, we need to practice, use the method to cultivate the mind, so our mind will be settled calmly on the method, and also live in the present moment. This is how a true practitioner should live their life. Practicing this way, loneliness will have little chance to sneak in.

Alone But Not Lonely

I have quote to share with you, a very fine line from the verse of *Song of Enlightenment* by Chan Master Yongjia Xuanjue (665–714). He was a great Chan master in the Tang dynasty. He received Dharma

transmission from the sixth patriarch great Chan master Huineng, he is his disciple. In his verse there is a sentence, “Always acting alone, walking alone, together the enlightened travel the Nirvana road.”

I'd also like to share with you Shifu's (Chan Master Sheng Yen's) commentary on this sentence, from his book: *The Sword of Wisdom: A Commentary on the Song of Enlightenment* (2002, North Atlantic Books). Shifu said, “Each practitioner must walk his path alone, but although a practitioner is alone, he is not lonely. He doesn't need company, his companion is the Dharma and his life is the practice. To enter the realm of no birth and no death, you must have this kind of attitude.”

So being alone is not a bad thing at all, it's something a practitioner should cherish and should work on, make use of. Every practitioner needs to walk this path alone. Each practitioner must learn how to make this solitude not be loneliness; how to turn it into nutrition for our practice. 🌿



Photo by Daniel K Cheung





Sex, Love and Practice

— BY —

GUO GU

Guo Gu (Dr. Jimmy Yu) began studying with Chan Master Sheng Yen in 1980. In 1991 he was ordained as a monk and became Master Sheng Yen's personal attendant. In 1995, he had his first Chan experience, and was given permission by the master to teach Chan independently. In 2000, Guo Gu left monasticism and re-entered the lay world. He is a professor of Buddhist studies at Florida State University. He is also the founder and teacher at the Tallahassee Chan Center, and the founder of the Dharma Relief. This article is the first of a series titled: *Between Life and Death: A Series of Teachings on Life as Chan Practice*.

Tendency to Reify

TODAY WE HAVE A SPECIAL TALK. I SOLICITED topics from people, and this topic came up again and again: sex, love, and practice. Many people have a lot of things to say about these topics. They're very important for people. As practitioners, especially Chan Buddhist practitioners, we have a particular embodied approach to practice that may be very different from other spiritual traditions. Buddhism itself is known as a path of understanding the nature of mind. Mind here includes heart and the range of what we would consider cognition, perception, feelings, emotions. For Chan practitioners, we investigate the mechanism of how the mind works through experiencing the present as free from discursive thoughts and trappings that allows for a deeper, more embodied and connected way to navigate our lives with others.

Whatever problems that you have with work and family, physical health, relationships – they all have one commonality that strings them together: our mind's tendency to reify, solidify, objectify things into fixed things through words and language. This tendency is at the heart of vexations. It is this reification that create obstacles. But originally, there's not a single thing – everything is just a continual flow of possibilities. As soon as the aliveness and freshness of experiences become a thing, we kill it.

Look at all the things we solidify, and the narratives we tell ourselves: “I tend to be this type of person,” “I have this problem,” “I don't have this problem.” We objectify ourselves into a thing, and then we have to deal with that thing. When we take a look at ourselves, we realize there are so many problematic things! Just as we have fixed ideas about our sense of self and self-image, we also have fixed ideas about sex, love, and relationships. When we

look deeply, the commonality of where, we see that much of our ideas about them come from our culture.

Sex is at the top of the list of things we value in this culture, along with other things we place great importance on, such as beauty, youth, health, and wealth. Culture inscribes value to these things such that they become central in our lives. Industries capitalize on these values, perpetuating and objectifying them, to shape our choices, obsessions, and actions, normalizing them in what we see online, experience in life, habituate in our everyday practices. We're bombarded with the objectification of sex that makes people into objects of possession. When we examine how we value sex against this backdrop, its significance goes beyond just sex. We need to question to what extent are we conditioned?

That's not to say that everyone should be celibate – that's not the point. Sex is part of our biological make up. The primal regions of our brain, as part of our animal instinct, are hard wired to procreate. Unlike other sensory experiences, such as eating food,



Photo by Sharon McCutcheon

or looking at art, sex engages all six senses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. So it is powerful. But sex is also institutionalized in our society. While each person's biological drive is different, and varies in intensity in different phases of the same individual, the values our society places on sex blurs the boundaries between our biological needs and culturally inscribed wants such that we can't tell them apart. We lose ourselves in this process and become just another product of the society.

Culture and Conditioning

When practitioners deepen their practice, despite the biological stage of their bodies, they begin to shed the culturally inscribed imprints of the importance of sex. This is because our conditioning is very much tied to the most superficial layer of our being: words, language, discursive thinking. As our discursive thinking or wandering thoughts diminish, the imprints of culture have less hold on us. Cultures are tied to words and language. Our everyday thoughts and feelings reflect the conditioning of culture that dictates what we want, what we should possess, who we ought to be, how others should be, who we should be with, etc. Most of our energies are spent chasing after them.

I'm not advocating celibacy, because everyone is different. But the Buddhist message is that there is something beneath the layers of conditioning and the biological sex drives that dictate our lives: there is freedom and love. We are so much more than discursive thinking, transient feelings, biological energies, and the cultural imprints. What makes it possible for all these to exist is our true nature, our buddha-nature, variously called in the Buddhist literature awakening, intrinsic awakening, liberation, or nirvāṇa. Simply put, it refers to freedom.

This freedom is the aliveness and freshness that allow things to be. It is the absence of conditioning, and the presence of openness. For example, when we are pushed and pulled by our conditionings, we are probably having some strong emotions. But in the energy of these emotions, if we remove the notion that "I am" and suspend discursive descriptions, and just experience them, we discover that any intense emotion is actually just aliveness and freshness – this is how our intrinsic freedom manifests. When we make the experience that we're having to be about us, favorable ones we want to hold onto, negative ones we want to get rid of, then we lose that aliveness and freshness. While we are disassociated from the immediate present embodied experiencing, it's very easy to fall back on our conditioning off personal dramas. When we're not in tune with what we are actually feeling in the moment, it's easy to interpret what we're experiencing in ways that are most familiar to us – in ways that we are conditioned to think. Chan teaches that the present experiencing has always been freedom.

Embodied Experiencing

Our connection to the present can also be understood as love, whether we're with someone else or by ourselves. In all practice of embodied experiencing, we return over and over again to the immediacy of our embodied, non-discursive, experiencing. With this practice, we can always find clarity and intimacy. When we are with others in this embodied way, we're completely present and our presence is felt by others as genuine connection. Without being strayed by our neurotic tendencies of our craving, aversion, and ignorance – our self-referentiality – we love without agenda, without self. Our Chan practice of embodiment and intimacy towards everything we

experience and everyone that we meet is freedom. We discover that less and less our experience is about us; we become happier people; we naturally support and help others; we are willing to be sad and vulnerable; we are freed from the stories we have about our life.

On one retreat there was a young man with high metabolism, very energetic. He said to me, “Teacher, I have a lot of sexual thoughts.” I said, “It’s just physiological; these thoughts have no thinker. It’s not a problem. Don’t make it into a thing.” As practitioners, sometimes we have to see our emotions as similar to weather. The weather happens. We may have to respond to it, because it affects us, but it is not about us. So for that young man I told him to do some prostrations, and experience the movements and sensations in the immediacy of the present. Just experience. No interpretations. Even when urges arise in the form of thoughts, there’s no need to suppress

or follow, just experience them as energies in the body. When we experience our feelings and thoughts at the level of energies, we experience aliveness and freshness – we experience their freedom, moment by moment. In the embodied experiencing of the prostrations, these energies naturally become settled. Being settled, the sexual thoughts also vanish. The young man was amazed by transformation and was able to continue his practice.

When we engage in embodied experiencing as a Chan practice, we naturally loosen the grip of our own discursive thinking. Loosening the grip of words and language and becoming more grounded in the body, we no longer take our thoughts to be “that’s how things are.” Instead, you see the coming and going of experiences, allowing them to be like waves in the sea of experiences from one moment to the next; it’s freeing. Thoughts and feelings liberate themselves when we recognize them without letting them to be



Photo by Jeremy Bishop

about us. Instead of being enslaved by them, we can let them be and we will know what needs to be done.

Love and Intimacy

Normally, people don't have the space of mind to have a choice. They think about happy thoughts, they become happy. They think about sexual thoughts, they become aroused. There's no gap, no space, no freedom. There's no autonomy; people are just puppets under the conditioning of cultural imprints and biological drives. When one is free from the grip of conditioning, then it's quite liberating. Feelings can flow. The more we lose our narrative, our self, experiences emerge that are less self-referential. We see what is actually happening within and are able to truly love. People say love has many shades of meaning. It does not have to be completely tied to sex. It can be the intimacy of being connected, being grateful, being joyous, just being. A kind of intimacy that's not necessarily physiological or possessive, but open and embracing. This potential is in all. Freedom and love are our true nature.

Student: "I just want to thank you for tackling this really fun subject. I have a couple of comments. I was thinking that we can also concretize and objectify celibacy as a path that we can become attached to."

Guo Gu: Yes, a lot of people do that. People can reify celibacy as some ideal, something holy. But as soon as we reify anything, it becomes a problem. And then when we can't live up to it, it becomes more of a problem. This is the result of making it into thing.

Student continues: "My other thought was I think that we are simultaneously socialized to 'sex, sex, sex, sex' in everything and, at the same time: 'sex is dirty and it's wrong and you're going to hell.' I think that part of liberation and fluidity is to express,

and for me, that sex is wonderful, one of the best expressions of becoming close to my lover and my partner. It is beautiful and exciting and it nothing to do with procreation. So I just wanted to make that comment and see if you have a comment."

Guo Gu: Sex can be an expression of love and intimacy. Everyone is different; people can express it all kinds of ways. I noted that you said "your lover"—maybe you can tell me this: is it a pure material, corporeal, thing or are there a whole range of experiences that you are experiencing? If we see it as a physical thing, then that can be a problem, you know. What I am saying is, that flow itself encompasses a full range of human experiences. Some people have a tendency to express it in that form and others not necessarily. But the range of experiences can be quite broad, quite wide and wonderful, and liberating. If we make a thing out of it, then it will lead to disappointments.

Your other comment, about making sex "dirty" and "wrong:" everything has a history. There are always causes and conditions behind why we are socialized to feel a certain way. Sometimes it comes from the society, and sometimes the family, and sometimes just human history and even different geographical regions. The West, in general, is a civilization rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has particular discourses on sex tied to heaven and hell. This has had a deep impact on the collective mental continuum of people living in the West.

So there are these two sides that are struggling. One is the deeply entrenched "We must obey" authoritarian religious views that repress sex, the other is a reactionary movement that resists the conservatism and celebrates sex. These two poles are bound to each other. The latter may feel free, but it's not the freedom in Buddhadharma, which asks us to examine the process of conditioning and the way we reify things through selfing. 🌿





Avoiding Stagnant Practice

— BY —

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Gilbert Gutierrez is an attorney practicing in Riverside, California. He is also a Dharma Heir of Chan Master Sheng Yen with over fifty years of experience in meditation, various martial arts, and chi gong. He gives introductory and advanced Dharma talks and leads retreats at DDMBA centers throughout the United States, and also gives weekly classes at his own group in Riverside, California. His website www.riversidechan.org includes a lively “meet up” site and a weekly Dharma Talk podcast. Gilbert teaches in a very casual and accessible yet deep manner, drawing on every-day life situations as well as on the works of great masters. This Dharma talk is from an intensive retreat held at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in July, 2020. Editing by Buffe Laffey.

Attachment to Quiescence

WE'LL CONTINUE WITH THE ANCIENT masters and their instructions on how to meditate. All of these master's exhortations are worthwhile to explore. I'm giving you a sampling so you can find whatever may be useful in the moment to help you.

Master Boshan 博山 (a.k.a. Dayi 大巖 and Wuyi Yuanlai 無異元來 1575–1630) cautioned against settling into a state of stagnation, or a sinking mind. Sometimes you don't feel that it's sinking; you think you're making progress but you're going nowhere, like pedaling a bike but the chain isn't connected. In the course of practice the most fearful thing is to settle into a comfortable attachment to quiescence. To become dry and lifeless, unknowing, detesting activities while taking pleasure in quietude.

Since practitioners have always lived amid noisy and busy situations, experiencing quiescence is like eating candy. It's like an exhausted person enjoying a long nap. Sometimes meditators aren't really practicing, they are just enjoying this good feeling. They've stopped pushing. This can come up in the first year or maybe way down the line. You feel no leg pain, no back pain, no scattered mind, no drowsiness. You feel really comfortable. But you're not going anywhere; there's still the "I" there. Master Boshan says that when you get to that point is when you really have to get moving.

But in order to push yourself through that you have to have right view. In the midst of the stillness, you must discover this precious source of all thought. This is like the story of the prodigal son who was having trouble making his way in the world. Prior to his leaving home, his father had sewn a precious gem into the lining of the son's garment. After leaving home, the son was suffering all these adversities,



Photo by Evie S.

never realizing that he had this gem in his pocket; he was totally oblivious to it. Unlike that son, you on this retreat *know* you have this precious jewel. But because of ignorance you don't take heed of it. To the contrary, you keep weaving this dream around you. But if you stop and use self-introspection, you will see. You have to do that self-introspection, Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) was really adamant about that, saying "people you don't become enlightened just by sitting on the cushion." So you ask, what am I doing here? Well, you're sitting there until you realize that you don't become enlightened by sitting on the cushion. Then you'll see, for sure, your original nature.

Taut Impenetrable Practice

Your practice must be taut, impenetrable, integrated and pervasive. — *Master Boshan*¹

Taut means very, very tight. Impenetrable; like if you were going to rappel down the face of a very steep mountain, almost completely vertical, I'm sure you

would knot the rope very, very tightly. It wouldn't be like the way you tie your shoelaces; you'd make sure it doesn't slip. Just so, in meditation practice you hold the method tight, not with stress but with right effort. Tight means it's seamless, nothing can get in. Impenetrable. Like room darkening shades, not even one little ray of sun comes through. When you're on the method seamlessly, and a thought comes wiggling around, you spot it a mile away and it doesn't get in. Why? Because you're so dedicated to holding the method that these things cannot generate enough mind power to come to center stage.

What is taut practice? Our human life exists in the in-and-out of our breath. Without resolving this great matter of birth and death, when the next breath does not come you will be completely lost as to your destiny. Since you don't know where you will go after you die, you have no choice but to be taut in your practice.

Master Boshan is saying that when you die you're not going to have that choice to do taut practice. If you want to get out of samsara, you choose Buddha; you don't choose the default program which is ignorance. If you continue to practice, I guarantee you will make progress. Every time you sit, your samadhi and your quietness will get stronger and stronger, and you will get into samadhi faster. But if you're doing a fifty-fifty practice (50% mind movies and 50% method) then that's what you're going to get. And it won't improve until you decide to kick it into gear.

No Clinging

What is impenetrable practice? It is like the nonexistent gap between the hair of the brows and space. Needles cannot penetrate

it and water cannot wet it. Your practice should not have any gaps. If there is even the tiniest gap, that is where demonic situations can gain entry.

Don't get scared by the word "demonic." *The Shurangama Sutra* talks about fifty demonic states, and they are all good things that happen to you, except that you cling to them – it's the clinging part that makes it demonic. For example, if you can see the future; that's pretty good. But if you cling to it and identify yourself as "I can see the future," then it's a demonic state. Anything that you experience, you want to put it down, not cling to it.

What is integrated and pervasive practice?
When the world expands ten feet, the ancient mirror expands ten feet.

What is the ancient mirror? That's mind, everything is reflected on it, in the right way. To you, it's the reverse way because you're on the other side of the mirror.

But when the ancient mirror expands ten feet,
the firing furnace also expands ten feet.

All potentiality of phenomena expands as well. Everything is connected.

You shouldn't attach to or abide in any place.
Do not seize the snake's head nor snatch at both ends of it. Just be boundless and limitless.

The snake's head is just phenomenal occurrences, vexatious thoughts. You don't have to try to capture the snake, you just have to understand how the snake appears.

An ancient worthy said “The way is perfect like great space / Without lack, without excess.”

When you have really attained the stage where your practice is integrated and pervasive, then internally you will not perceive a body and a mind. Externally, there will be no such thing as the world. This is the beginning of gaining an entry into genuine practice.

I remember, at one of the first retreats I came to, a very sweet old western gentleman said to Shifu (Master Sheng Yen), “Shifu, I hope I die before you do.” And Shifu asked “Why would you say that?” The man responded “If you die before me, I will miss you quite a bit.” To which Shifu responded “If you die before me, I won’t miss you.” And that’s the correct thing to say. It wasn’t that he didn’t care about the man at all. He was just stating Chan; stating the way it is, just a matter-of-fact. This is the same thing Master Boshan is talking about, seeing things exactly as they are. Our human self will laugh at it and think, well that’s kind of funny but that’s kind of cruel too. It’s not cruel. It’s just seeing things as they are.

Once at the end of a retreat, I had some of my students that I brought with me. We were all looking at Shifu’s books laid out there for people to buy. Shifu came up behind me and I picked up one of the books and, pointing to his picture on it I asked, “Shifu what do you think of this fellow here?” Shifu didn’t miss a beat, he said “Him? I don’t know him.” Not a bad response. I must admit that I still miss him a little bit.

Mind Versus Thinking

Yesterday we heard from Master Linchi about the faults of the students in his time – they didn’t have faith in themselves. Master Boshan is even more to the point:

In the course of practice, most people complain that they cannot apply their efforts well. Precisely because they cannot “apply themselves,” they should apply themselves even more!

When you really you can’t do it, do it harder! This is a true Chan master, so plain and simple. My dad used to have a saying, “You don’t go to school to eat your lunch.” And this is kind of the same thing: you didn’t come to this retreat center just for the food.

Now we will read from the sixth patriarch Huineng’s (638–713) *Platform Sutra*:

Learned audience, what the ignorant merely talk about, wise men put into actual practice with their mind. There is also a class of foolish people who sit quietly and try to keep their mind blank. — *Master Huineng* ²

I go all over to different places to spread the Dharma. There’s a lot of people with this kind of view, of keeping their mind blank. They want to push out all of the thoughts. They don’t understand you can’t do that because the thoughts are naturally arising. It’s like putting the top on a teakettle: sooner or later it’s going to blow, because the force is there.

They refrain from thinking of anything and call themselves “great.” On account of their heretical view we can hardly talk to them. Learned audience, you should know that the mind is very great in capacity, since it pervades the whole dharmadhatu (the sphere of the law, i.e., the universe). When we use it, we can know something of everything, and when we use it to its full capacity we shall know all. All in one and one in all.



What Master Huineng is referring to is that if one begins to get realizations, one gains access to mind. Since it pervades the whole dharmadhatu, when we use it we can know something of everything. Mind will reveal a little tiny portion of itself to you. But if you think that that's enlightenment, you've messed everything up. Because it's just a revelation, nothing more. Sometimes I call them epiphanies or realizations but it's just a little bit. It's as if, at the concert, you get to move out of the balcony and down closer to the stage, but it's not the full backstage pass.

Huineng says: "When we use it to its full capacity..." That's why whenever we practice, we always try to bring the mind to full awareness even though we can't quite do it. Full awareness is using one hundred percent of the mind. You're not going to get all of it, but the more you work this way, the more the

mind will reveal other portions of it. It's all in one and one in all.

Self-Nature

When our mind works without hindrance and is at liberty to come and go, then this is a state of *prajna* (wisdom). Master Huineng says:

Learned audience, all *prajna* comes from the essence of mind and not from an exterior source.

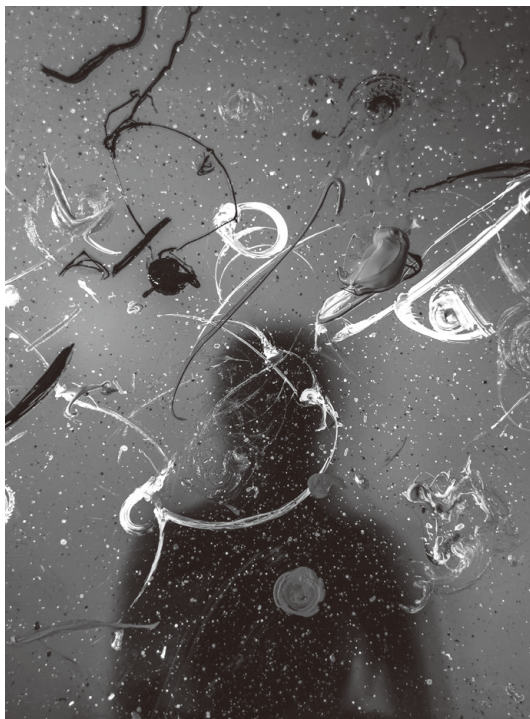
What is the essence of the mind? This awareness that you're using right now; that's the mind. Nothing is separated from the mind, that's why Huineng says it's not exterior to you. You don't go looking in the exterior, you turn the mind's eye inward. You are

using your innate wisdom to use greater wisdom. Another way the ancients said it: you derive power from your power. What power do you have? You have the power of wisdom, just a little flicker of it. Wisdom is seeking wisdom. Even the Bible says that: seek and ye shall find; ask and it will be given to you.

Have no mistaken notion about that.

This is called “self-use of the true nature.”

Self-use of the true nature – can you figure that out? We say that there is no self, no ego, no personality. But does Huineng mean that kind of self? Sometimes we refer to the tathagata as the self-nature of mind. In our liturgy we say “I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings of self-nature.” This used to confuse me to no end; what does self-nature mean? Self-nature



is mind. The sentient beings are created by the mind; they are illusory. But they are nevertheless part of mind. We have to reorganize our way of seeing things so we understand that this very mind we are using is the buddha mind. This very mind is the one that can be awakened; the self can't be awakened. If the ego self goes to sleep and it has a dream, when it wakes up it's still in a dream. But when the Buddha wakes up it's no longer in the dream. It may be spatially in an apparent reality in the dream, but mind knows where it's at.

Once the tathata (suchness, the essence of mind) is known, one will be free from delusion forever.

Well, yes and no. I mean you can have realizations where you can see that it's delusions. But you'll still have to work. Just simply knowing it is not enough, you have to realize it yourself, not from book knowledge but from the experience itself.

Wisdom Factory

Do not talk about the “void” all day without practicing it in the mind. One who does this may be likened to a self-styled king who is really a commoner. Prajna can never be attained in this way, and those who behave like this are not my disciples. Learned audience, what is prajna? It means “wisdom.” If at all times and at all places we steadily keep our thought free from foolish desire, and act wisely on all occasions, then we are practicing prajna.

We say we derive power from our power. One of the things that we have to do in order to extricate ourselves from this dream is develop wisdom. We

Photo by Irkorpa

have to become a wisdom factory. How? Moment to moment, choose the Buddha. Don't choose ignorance, don't choose foolish desires, vexations and discriminations. Keep coming back to "mind is the Buddha," see things in this way, that it's a dream. Just because you see it as a dream doesn't mean you don't interact with all of the fictitious people that are here. Because they too are buddhas just like you are. When you see things in this way, after a while the world becomes very curious. You see everything as a dream yet you still function in it. You function in it better than you do if you were just simply walking around in it; you know exactly why things are happening. Sometimes you know that they're going to happen before they happen simply by utilizing that wisdom.

Learned audience, when rain comes in a deluge, plants which are not deep rooted are washed away, and eventually they succumb. This is the case with the slow-witted, when they hear about the teaching of the "sudden" school.

Master Huineng was the teacher of the sudden school, which teaches sudden enlightenment. The philosophers call it subitism.

The prajna immanent in them is exactly the same as that in the very wise man, but they fail to enlighten themselves when the Dharma is made known to them. Why? Because they are thickly veiled by erroneous views and deep rooted defilements, in the same way as the sun may be thickly veiled by a cloud and unable to show his light until the wind blows the cloud away. Prajna does not vary with different persons; what makes the difference is whether one's mind is enlightened or

deluded. He who does not know his own essence of mind, and is under the delusion that Buddhahood can be attained by outward religious rites is called the slow-witted.

You don't want to be called slow witted, right?

There's No Thinking in Meditation

He who knows the teaching of the "sudden" school and attaches no importance to rituals, and whose mind functions always under right views, so that he is absolutely free from defilements or contaminations, is said to have known his essence of mind.

That's what we're doing here in this retreat; we are returning to the mind's essence.

Learned audience, the mind should be framed in such a way that it will be independent of external or internal objects, at liberty to come or go, free from attachment and thoroughly enlightened without the least beclouding. [...] Learned audience, when the fifth patriarch preached to me I became enlightened immediately after he had spoken, and spontaneously realized the real nature of tathata. For this reason it is my particular object to propagate the teaching of this "sudden" school, so that learners may find bodhi at once and realize their true nature by introspection of mind.

What is introspection of the mind? Turning the mind's eye inward. When caught up in the dream we only use the consciousness of human sentient beings. We know that the five skandhas are empty;

they cannot be used to do this introspection, only mind can look into mind. The consciousness is not capable of doing it; it would be like a flea trying to lift a mountain, or trying to see the mountain top.

This introspection of mind is that we look into mind. How? Through contemplation. In contemplation there's no thinking. This is what you have to begin to see – there's no thinking in meditation. When you are contemplating, you're looking directly into it. There's a self-introspection – but the self is not *your* self, it's the self-nature of mind looking into mind. That's the only way it can do it; the ego is not invited to the party. You are aware that you're using your awareness contemplating the method; that is self-introspection. You are looking at it not via thinking, but via contemplation. That's why this will work for you.

Clear Light

Should they fail to enlighten themselves, they should ask the pious and learned Buddhists who understand the teaching of the highest school to show them the right way. It is an exalted position, the office of a pious and learned Buddhist who guides others to realize the essence of mind. Through his assistance one may be initiated into all meritorious dharmas. The wisdom of the past, the present and the future Buddhas as well as the teachings of the twelve sections of the canon are immanent in our mind; but in case we fail to enlighten ourselves, we have to seek the guidance of the pious and learned ones. On the other hand, those who enlighten themselves need no extraneous help. It is wrong to insist upon the idea that without the advice of the pious and learned we cannot obtain liberation.

“Those who enlighten themselves...” are called *pratyeka-buddhas*. It's very difficult to do that, it's like pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Only people with the deepest roots who have practiced before would be able to do something like that. Almost like Huineng, because he got it right away simply by listening to a portion of the *Diamond Sutra*. But it was because he had practiced for many lifetimes before, that it came immediately to him. So when they talk about subitism (sudden enlightenment) it's not so sudden. You still have to put in your time.

It is wrong to insist upon the idea that without the advice of the pious and learned we cannot obtain liberation. Why? Because it is by our innate wisdom that we enlighten ourselves, and even the extraneous help and instructions of a pious and learned friend would be of no use if we were deluded by false doctrines and erroneous views. Should we introspect our mind with real prajna, all erroneous views would be vanquished in a moment, and as soon as we know the essence of mind we arrive immediately at the Buddha stage. Learned audience, when we use Prajna for introspection we are illumined within and without...

Illumination is not like the Buddha shining a thousand watt light bulb at you. Illumination is seeing clearly how things work, using the mind in the proper way without obstructions. The Tibetans call it *dzogchen*, or clear light; sometimes it's referred to as clear mind. It is clarity of the mind that sees things just as they are, not going through the ego filter and coming up with an opinion about it.

We are illumined within and without, and in a position to know our own mind. To know our

mind is to obtain liberation. To obtain liberation is to attain samadhi of prajna, which is “thoughtlessness.”

No thinking! You see? I’m not making this stuff up, I’m just following what the masters say. It makes sense there’s no thought there – it doesn’t need to have thought, it’s the buddha mind. There is no place the Buddha is not. Why would the Buddha have to talk to the Buddha? The Buddha would already know what the Buddha was going to say.

“Thoughtlessness” is to see and to know all dharmas (things) with a mind free from attachment. When in use it pervades everywhere, and yet it sticks nowhere.

This mind of thoughtlessness is everywhere, but there’s no sticking. If it would stick it would produce *akusala* (unwholesome) thought. Sticky thought.

Sixth Consciousness

What we have to do is to purify our mind so that the six *vijnanas* (aspects of consciousness), in passing through the six gates (sense organs) will neither be defiled by nor attached to the six sense-objects. When our mind works freely without any hindrance, and is at liberty to “come” or to “go,” we attain samadhi of prajna, or liberation. Such a state is called the function of “thoughtlessness.” But to refrain from thinking of anything, so that all thoughts are suppressed, is to be dharma-ridden, and this is an erroneous view.

In the six consciousnesses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, thought), we have the senses, and then we

have what’s called the *manovijñāna* consciousness (sixth consciousness) which puts it all together. It says “it smells like this, it’s red, it has seeds, it comes from a tree, it’s sweet; it’s an apple!” The sixth consciousness says it’s an apple.

The term *vijnana* is very interesting. The first part *vi* means “to cut” and *jnana* means consciousness, so together it means “cut the consciousness.” The *vijnanas* are cutting the full consciousness that belongs to mind, so there is where the obstructions come. Because you’re only getting a partial feed, you’re not getting the full information data that the mind can give you. The sixth consciousness is cutting it off and saying “it’s a red apple.” And then the *manas-vijnana*, the seventh consciousness, says “that’s a red delicious.” But it may not be, it might be a fuji and they made a mistake. We don’t know. Actually more of the defilement comes in the *manas-vijnana*, the



seventh consciousness. It's just kind of guessing at it because it doesn't want to say it's wrong. Anyway it's cutting the consciousness; mind would know what it is without even naming it, it's just that way.

Thoughts Disappear on Their Own

One last little bit for today. This is from Tibetan Lama Thubten Yeshe; it's pretty good in terms of describing what we've been talking about today:

By concentrating our stream of consciousness, in meditation we can be led naturally to the spacious experience of non-duality.

— *Lama Thubten Yeshe*³

We know what non-duality is, right? It's not two things, it's just connected – one thing.

As we observe our thoughts carefully, we will notice that they arise, abide, and disappear themselves.

This is important because it speaks to our meditation, when we observe thoughts very carefully. Your awareness is there contemplating the method and here comes a bunch of thoughts. Because you are aware of the thoughts, you're seeing them clearly, and this is what you see: thoughts arise, they stick around for a while, and then they disappear all by themselves. All by themselves – you don't have to do anything to them. That's why Master Huineng was saying, if you're trying to push the thoughts out, that's wrong. You don't have to push them, they'll go by themselves, they know the way out.

There is no need to expel thoughts from our mind forcefully, as each thought arises

from the clear nature of mind, so too does it naturally dissolve back into this clear nature.

Lama Thubten Yeshe is referring to the clear nature of mind. He's looking all the way down to the bottom, and it's clear. He can see the potentiality of ideas and thoughts arising. He's saying, I know where they're coming from. Where are they coming from? From the mind ground. And back they go.

So too does it naturally dissolve back into this clear nature.

When the thoughts eventually dissolve in this way, we should keep our mind concentrated on the resulting clarity as undistractedly as we can. So when thoughts cease to arise, just stay right there with the method. Hold it, be clear that the method is there. When you do that, because now the thoughts aren't coming up, you have more of a chance to hold the present moment in clarity. When the thoughts no longer arise, mind doesn't disappear, it's just clear, unobstructed. That's when you've got a shot at it. The longer you can hold it there, the more chance you'll have some form of a realization. Even if you don't have a realization, simply keeping it there will stabilize the mind, and even that experience will affect you during your everyday life. It will pay off for you.

We should train ourselves not to become engrossed in any thoughts continuously arising in our mind. Our consciousness is like a vast ocean with plenty of space for thoughts and emotions to swim about in, we should not allow our attention to be distracted by any of them. It does not matter if a certain fish is particularly beautiful or repulsive, without being distracted



one way or another we should remain focused on our mind's basic clarity.

Even if a magnificent vision arises, the kind we've been waiting for years to see, we should not engage it in conversation. We should of course remain aware of what's going on – it is not the point of our practice to become dull-minded and not notice anything. However, while remaining aware of our thoughts as they arise, we should not become entrapped by any of them. Instead we should remain mindful of the underlying clarity out of which these thoughts arose. That's what's important,

not the experience, but keeping that underlying clarity there.

Sometimes I refer to it as being a transparent fish in the ocean. You don't have to have this magnificent display of neon colors or big teeth or anything, you're just a transparent fish. You carry all your functions there, but the goal is, if I have Gilbert, then just let me use this body; I don't need all of his vexations. He's not quite transparent yet but one day he'll turn. Just imagine a transparent fish in the ocean samadhi. We don't leave any trace. The only traces you leave is just trying to deliver people, but you don't leave vexatious traces. ☸

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