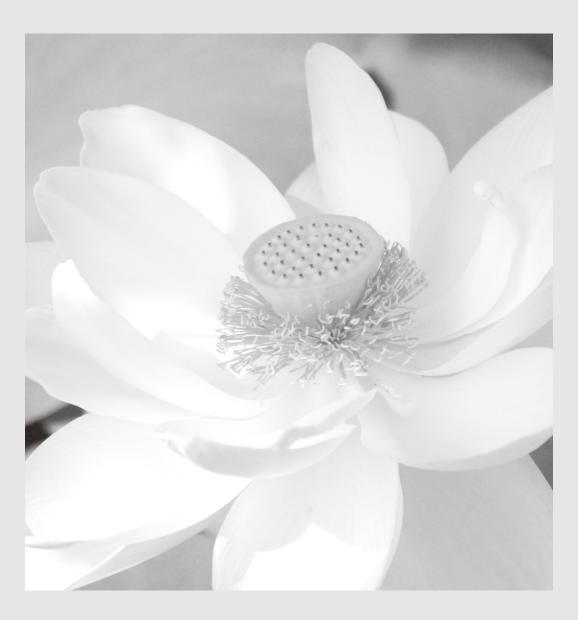


WINTER 2020





#### Real

If there is anything you should seek from practice, it should be to live your life better, more energetically and clearly, and to be at peace with yourself. This is a real and concrete goal to shoot for. Aiming for enlightenment is foolhardy; you will lose before you even begin. If we understand that nothing in this world, including enlightenment, has any real existence, is there anything that we cannot let go of?

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#### CHAN MAGAZINE

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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 Pieonane

**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/

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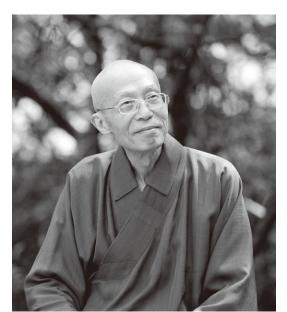
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book by Master Sheng Yen entitled Sheng Yen on Chan Phrases was published in Chinese as 《聖嚴說禪》(Sheng Yen Shuo Chan) in 1996. The best way to describe the book is to let Master Sheng Yen speak for himself, from his preface: "This compilation of essays is not a manual on how to practice Chan; rather, it uses one hundred Chan stories and sayings from the past to illustrate the meaning of Chan, so that readers may comprehend the correct state of mind of a Chan practitioner. Therefore, when you are in dire straits, please use these stories as a safe harbor; when perplexed with pain, use them as cool and refreshing medicine; when confronted with no options and feeling hopeless, use them as temporary shelter; when depressed and desperate, use them as the encouragements from teachers and good friends; when carried away with success, use them as a brakes to soften a possible collision."

In 2017, the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture undertook the English translation of Sheng Yen on Chan Phrases as part of an extensive effort to translate and publish selected books from the Master's complete works. The English edition of the book, tentatively titled Chan Speaks, is to be published by Dharma Drum Corp. at a yet to be determined date. The text was translated by Dr. Jerry Wang, bilingually reviewed by Ven. Chang Chwen ("Sister Jinho"), and edited by Ernest Heau. Chan Magazine is pleased to publish this brief chapter from the book, a talk by Master Sheng Yen on the Lotus Sutra.



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

QUESTION: IN THE PLATFORM SUTRA, SIXTH patriarch Huineng said: "A confused mind is turned by the *Lotus Sutra*; an awakened mind turns the *Lotus Sutra*." Was he saying that when one's mind is confused, one can turn to the *Lotus Sutra* for help, and when one has been awakened and suddenly all things are seen clearly, one can then turn the *Lotus Sutra* to one's own use?

MASTER SHENG YEN: Here, "turn" refers to "turning the Dharma wheel" or in this case, reciting the sutra. A monk named Fada once went to see Huineng and told him that he had spent a great deal of effort studying the *Lotus Sutra*, and Huineng told him that when one is confused, their mind is turned by the *Lotus Sutra*.

There are twenty-eight fascicles in the *Lotus Sutra* that people can read, chant, copy for calligraphy practice, share with others, and practice according

to the Dharma. Buddhism believes that it is good for ordinary people to read aloud and chant the *Lotus Sutra* and other sutras, and to practice in accordance with their words and contents. This way they can be awakened to Buddha's thinking and views, and to allow the *Lotus Sutra* to help them transcend the mundane world.

"An awakened mind turns the *Lotus Sutra*" means that after awakening, one uses the words in the sutra to verify one's inner state of mind; one uses their experience of the Buddhadharma to explain and illustrate the meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*. This is not that easy to do, and ordinary people often do it for personal gain. Many folk religions as well as Daoism use the *Lotus Sutra* and other Buddhist sutras to explain and promote their beliefs, from spirit writing, to self-proclaimed mystical experiences, and so on. In other words, they use the *Lotus Sutra* as a tool to draw wrong conclusions using false analogies with one's own concepts or mystical experiences. This is also called "turning the *Lotus Sutra*" but there are lots of problems with that approach.

For completely enlightened Chan practitioners, how they regard the Buddhist scriptures and their feelings towards their contents is consistent with what flows out of their own mind. This is equivalent to Śākyamuni Buddha helping someone to speak of what is originally in their own mind. In this circumstance, one can use their experience and awakened mind to look into the *Lotus Sutra* to help self and others. This is an awakened mind turning the *Lotus Sutra*, which is very rare.

For someone whose own understanding or attainment has not been confirmed by a master, it could be dangerous if they used their limited or deviated knowledge and views, to turn the *Lotus Sutra* towards their own purposes. Therefore, Master Huineng said that when confused and unawakened, one should be



Photo by Ven. Chang Duo

"turned by the *Lotus Sutra*," but after enlightenment one, can "turn the *Lotus Sutra*" so that one can acknowledge, explain, confirm, and propagate it.

It is the same in the secular world; intelligent people with authentic knowledge and deep views, or with actual experience, often use spiritual classics from our forefathers to help themselves and others, even though their explanations may vary from those of the past. For example throughout Chinese history, annotators of the *Four Books and Five Classics* of Confucianism often varied in their interpretations, depending on their existing milieu, depth of scholarship, thought-realms, as well as personal experience. Hence, we can find similarities in method between secular and spiritual authors.

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# Light & Quakes

BY

CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN

his article is from a lecture given by Master Sheng Yen on Sunday, June 23, 1985. It was originally published in the *Chan Newsletter*, No. 55, August 1986. In 2016 it was included as a chapter in *Until We Reach Buddhahood: Lectures* on the Shurangama Sutra – Volume One.



Chan Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

WHEN BUDDHA EXPOUNDED THE DHARMA, he emitted a strong light that radiated through the universe, and he generated six kinds of quakes that shook through all the Buddha worlds.

Light is that which can be seen; it represents the hopefulness the Dharma can bring. Quakes can be felt; their motion and vibration represent the energy of the Dharma. These two phenomena are sufficient for the Buddha to express his teaching. The Dharma can really be expressed without any words or language at all. It is, in fact, inconceivable; it cannot be truly discussed or approached by reason. There are many sentient beings who see this light or feel the motion, and yet don't understand their significance. Therefore, it is still necessary for the Buddha to use words.

There are many levels of light. Most elementary is the light that all ordinary beings can see. The elementary level of motion is the kind ordinary beings can feel. There exist, however, higher levels of light and motion that ordinary beings will not be able to see or hear. Our eyes are normally receptive only to visible light, a small spectrum. We notice only gross movement; subtle forms of motion elude us.

Depending upon the situation or the occasion, sentient beings may be able to see the light the Buddha emits. The kind of light sent forth may vary from one discourse to another. And each Dharma audience will elicit light that accords with the particular needs of the listeners. But only sentient beings with the proper causes and conditions can see the light the Buddha sends out, and only they can listen to the Dharma.

Sentient beings exist on different levels, and they, too, are able to see different qualities of light according to their attainment. Bodhisattvas can see the same light ordinary sentient beings can see, but light meant for bodhisattvas will be invisible to sentient beings.

The light the Buddhas transmit among themselves is invisible to bodhisattvas.

Light and quakes may also serve as signals; in much the same way that the clapping of boards announces lunch and the sound of the bell, a lecture. When the Buddha generates light and quakes, it may mean that he is about to expound the Dharma to bodhisattvas of a higher level – the first *bhūmi* and above – then no words will be necessary. The light and quakes will be sufficient for the bodhisattvas to understand the Dharma.

Light can also represent the Buddha's wisdom; quakes can represent merit and virtue. Light guides and helps sentient beings. Quakes and motion are the actions of the Buddha helping sentient beings. The Buddha has the totality of all wisdom. He may only use a part of his wisdom, depending on the sentient being in need. When he speaks to sentient beings, he will use sentient-being Dharma to help them. If he speaks to high level bodhisattvas, then Buddha will use bodhisattva Dharma or even Buddhadharma. The light of the Buddha's wisdom can be a small light or a grand, intense light. The light described in the Śūraṅgama Sutra is the greatest kind; the Dharma expounded is the most important.

Some people raise this question: According to the sutras, Śākyamuni lived two thousand five hundred years ago. Quakes occurred and light radiated not just in India, but throughout a myriad of worlds. Why weren't these lights and quakes recorded in history? Only those sentient beings with causes and conditions can see the light and sense the quakes. Otherwise these phenomena are inaudible and invisible.

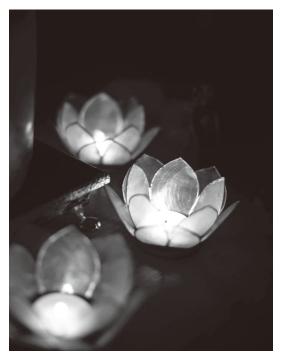
There is yet another function of light and quakes. Light can be the power and ability of anyone to help others. To the extent that we have this power, people will see us as hope itself. In that sense we can give off light. Quakes symbolize the power to move others;

when we do something very good, others will be touched by what we do and when we do something bad, others can be shocked by what we've done. Either way, actions we take affect others.

Before Mao Zedong died it was said that one word from his lips could move the world. Or if someone were to try to shoot President Reagan, one or two bullets could bring incalculable political consequences. Good actions, too, can have global significance. Someone able to avert a war would affect the whole world.

Do you think you are capable of emitting light and moving others? We can all do this. No doubt when I speak I am emitting some light – you in the audience also emit light.

When *Getting the Buddha Mind* [Master Sheng Yen's first book in English] came out, many people liked it and found it helpful. But it wasn't only my



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doing that caused it to happen; many people were involved in its production. The moving and touching of others was brought about by many people. We all have light.

I have just spoken of a kind of metaphoric light. But there are people who, as a result of great practice, wisdom, merit and virtue really have light. You can actually see it. It's not symbolic. It is real physical light.

Over thirty years ago, I was in the army. One day a general came to visit. He was dressed like an ordinary soldier, but I could sense he was someone special. On another occasion I met Chiang Kai-shek. Before I met him, I always imagined that he would be tall and striking. But when I saw him, even though he looked quite ordinary, there was something about him that made me not want to look into his eyes. He gave out a sense of being larger than he really was.

If you have great faith and achievement in practice, you can see the light of a practitioner, otherwise you must have close karmic affinity with him to be able to see it.

In Taiwan there was a woman who had a special power of seeing. Once I was giving a lecture, and as I spoke, she saw a light emanating from me, and she noticed that my translator absorbed the light. The more the light was absorbed the more the translation improved. The woman also saw a third figure standing behind us who seemed to merge with the translator. When told about this, my translator replied, "When I began, I concentrated very hard on what you said because I was nervous and didn't want to make a mistake. Later I felt I didn't have to be nervous. I just asked Avalokiteśvara to help me."

Who was the third person standing behind the translator? It may not have been an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, but it was an extension of his power.

I was unaware of the light myself, so I asked the woman what it looked like. She said that when I first started to talk about the Dharma, a glow came from my head; then as I continued to speak, the light seemed to come from my whole body, spreading in all directions. This is because when I first started to speak, I had no idea what I would talk about. Thus the light came from my head as I thought about what I would say. Later I spoke spontaneously, and the Dharma light emanated from all parts of my body. That is why statues of Buddha are sculpted to show symbolic light radiating out from all sides.

Someone within the range of light will not be able to see the light. He must be outside the range to see it. If you can't see the light, either you don't have karmic affinity with the practitioner or you're already inside the range of the light. This is like hearing about a person's greatness. At a distance he or she may appear great, but the closer you get, the more the semblance of greatness diminishes.

Perceiving a practitioner's greatness is a different story. Whether near or far, the greatness will be apparent to someone who has karmic affinity with him. But strangely enough, with a very great practitioner, even though you may have a karmic affinity with him, if you are not a practitioner, you will sense his greatness when far away, but when close, you will lose the sense of greatness.

There is a Chan story: a certain practitioner visited a Chan patriarch and arrived when it was already dark. After a short visit, the master said, "Isn't it time that you went home?" The practitioner said, "It's dark. I dare not take the road home."

The master said, "It's all right, I can get you a lantern." The practitioner took the lantern and started walking home, but the master soon called him back to the temple. The master took back the lantern



and blew out the light. It was dark in the master's room and it was dark outside – at that moment the practitioner got enlightened. He had been afraid of the dark, but now he could find his way home.

Did he get the light?

This is the light of wisdom. Without wisdom, even in broad daylight, you walk in darkness. When the master blew out the lantern the practitioner got enlightened. He no longer saw the outside as dark and the inside, illumined by the lantern, as light. He saw that there is no difference between outside and inside. The light of wisdom was derived from darkness. The practitioner no longer feared darkness. He was then able to radiate light and move others.

Practitioners must attain a certain level before they can use the light of wisdom and the power of merit and virtue. Before this level is attained, the light of wisdom is dormant; a practitioner can only use the power of virtuous karma. There is still light given off, but it is not the light of wisdom. After enlightenment, the true light of wisdom arises, it's something like an electric generator that has been kept unused in a storeroom. It has been still and silent for a great while, but suddenly it is turned on, and it begins to generate a continuous flow of electricity. People, too, start to generate light as they approach buddhahood. Their light becomes stronger and stronger.

You can generate light to help sentient beings. It will shine even when there is no one there to benefit from it. When you are truly ready, others will sense your light. If you help them, if you move them to practice, then you will give forth light and cause the quakes of the Dharma. \*\*



# Dharma of the One Vehicle

HARRY MILLER

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

THE LOTUS SUTRA (Sanskrit: Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra) has been called the king of sutras. It is profound and multifaceted and it has a message of inclusivity. All beings of every type, capacity, and description are welcomed by its teachings. The Buddha declares:

Within the buddha lands of the ten directions there is the Dharma of the only One Vehicle. There are not two, nor are there yet three, save where the Buddha,

preaching by resort to expedients and by merely borrowing provisional names and words draws the beings to him.<sup>1</sup>

Zhiyi (538–597), the great Tiantai master, divided the Buddha's Dharma into five periods and eight teachings. The *Lotus Sutra* stands at the pinnacle of the fifth and highest period. It contains and expands upon all previous teachings. I will concentrate on the



Harry Miller DDRC Archive Photo

first two of twenty-eight chapters in the sutra. The first is called "Introduction" and the second, "Expedient Means." I will take both chapters as a whole, because the first chapter heralds the coming of the Buddha's ultimate teaching, the *Lotus Sutra* itself, and the second chapter expounds on the difficulty of this teaching and how it must be spread using skillful and expedient means targeted to the capacities of those who would hear and learn from it. Commenting on one chapter without the other will not work. My summary and comments will necessarily be condensed: in three translations that I consulted; these two chapters cover more than forty pages.

The sutra points to a truth that both includes and transcends a variety of different teachings, so it takes a little time to get your bearings. The language, imagery, vast numbers, metaphors, theatricality, and parables demand a certain level of patience and deep contemplation if they are going to make sense. Even though there are a number of chapters that may stand alone, almost as sutras themselves, the entirety of the sutra reinforces the Buddha's message that there is One Vehicle – not three – that leads to Buddhahood.

What's special about this sutra? The *Lotus Sutra* invites all beings to partake of its teachings. It does not discriminate against any group for the most part; there are some discrepancies, but the basic message of the sutra is that everyone can become a buddha and indeed is destined, not just for enlightenment or nirvāṇa, but for buddhahood itself.

The *Lotus Sutra* can help us develop faith in the practice by listening to its teaching and looking deep within ourselves to find the truths that we can access now, and to understand that there are greater truths that we will come to know as we practice. Shifu (Chan Master Sheng Yen) always told us that when he was meditating and experienced a profound insight, he would remind himself, "this is not my destination."



In the same way, the *Lotus Sutra* points to the deepest truths that may be beyond us at the moment.

#### Dealing with the Moment

There is a tendency to look at a religious text, scripture or historical document as advocating a doctrine or describing a series of significant events, often miraculous, that happened long ago and far away. However, as a practitioner, I don't look at sutras that way. Joseph Goldstein, the famous insight meditation teacher, said that he reads sutras as instructions, not simply as descriptions. I will take that one step further and say the sutra can be regarded as taking place at the moment when you are hearing, chanting or reading it. The message or instruction wants your attention right now.

No sutra opens with specificity such as: "Today, July 8, at three o'clock, 525 BCE, the Buddha entered such and such a city and opened a press conference." No, the *Lotus Sutra* opens: "Thus have I heard. At one

time, the Buddha was dwelling in the city of Rājagṛha on Gṛdhrakūṭa mountain, together with twelve thousand great bhikṣus." <sup>2</sup> We don't know the exact date or time, and while it happened in a particular part of India, the mountain peak that bears that name today could never have contained the vast number of beings as cited in the sutra. We really have just the power of the Buddha's words.

Let's look at the way we might react when we encounter the sutra and try to listen to its message. In our normal lives, generally, we're on familiar territory with our family, friends, people in the office, etc. Every once in a while, you might meet a famous person, but we don't often encounter a real buddha in our midst. Listening to the sutra is as close as we can come to meeting a buddha now. The Buddha preaches to a variety of beings that we have probably never encountered: arhats, bodhisattvas and all manner of what we might think of as mythological figures. We don't run into god kings, dragon kings, kimnaras (half horse, half human), gandharvas (musician demigods),

garuḍas (mythical birds), yakṣas (spirits), or nāgas (great snakes). Do such beings seem like they come out of a Marvel movie, or do they point to a deeper message that you can relate to?

If you recognize what a sutra is and the importance of its message, and at the same time you see how difficult and subtle the message is, you may be persuaded to look more deeply into what is presented.

You may find that what the sutra talks about is closer to home than you think. Consider who and what is in your mind at this moment – people, friends, situations, worries – not all present in the place where you are right now, yet they compose some degree of your reality. The *Lotus Sutra* invites you to expand the world you're familiar with into something else.

#### The First Two Chapters in Brief

The sutra opens with the Buddha in the midst of a great assembly of beings. He enters deep samadhi and emits a magnificent beam of light from his forehead that illuminates the universe (eighteen thousand realms to be precise). This is hardly something that can be explained verbally. One of the assembly, Maitreya, the future buddha, himself an enlightened being, does not understand the meaning of this act. He must ask Mañjuśrī, the foremost in wisdom, to explain the import of the Buddha's radiant emanation. Eventually, Mañjuśrī reveals that he has witnessed another buddha in the ancient past perform the same act of illumination, and he states that this act announces the teaching of the Great One Vehicle, which is elaborated upon throughout the Lotus Sutra. However, the actual meaning of the emission of light and the full explanation of what exactly constitutes the Great Vehicle are never provided. In the second chapter the Buddha explains that the true meaning is not directly accessible to ordinary sentient beings.

They can only understand indirectly, through a variety of metaphors, parables, and practices.

#### Lotus Sutra as a Huatou

One way to deal with this seeming indecipherability is to approach the sutra as we might a kind of gong'an (Chinese; Japanese: kōan), or huatou, because the meaning is pointed to, but not directly stated. The huatou is a critical phrase that can be used as a meditation method. In Chan we work with the question "What is wu?" where "wu" is a Chinese word for "not," "isn't," "doesn't," "nothingness," "emptiness." A question like this has no possible conceptual answer. The solution lies outside of conventional understanding. The Lotus Sutra runs to almost seventy thousand characters, so it might seem strange to compare it to a three-word phrase like "what is wu?" but it is not the content that I'm referring to – it is the attitude. If we approach the sutra with the same kind of openness and inquisitiveness that we use with the huatou, then we grow with the sutra in an atmosphere of faith and budding understanding. We can consequently develop a "tolerance of incomprehensibility," a term coined by Robert Thurman. We can develop anutpattika*dharma-kṣānti* – the patience that accepts the unborn unconditioned nature of things. When we meditate, we don't actually know what we are looking for. A feeling? A concept? An experience? We don't know and that's why we are looking. Indeed, it is advisable to be free of preconceptions and expectations when we make our inquiry. These are adventitious mental fabrications that we tend to impose on our practice.

We follow a long tradition of Dharma study and practice, as well as the advice of our teachers and our own experience. This drives us forward to seek an "answer" that may not be an answer at all. The question is not a question as we usually understand it. In

these first two chapters we discover that everything that the Buddha taught in his earlier discourses was not the whole truth, not the ultimate Dharma. This is quite an announcement and demands a leap of faith, a suspension of our usual logic and belief system. The arhats themselves are dumbfounded when they are told that they must continue on a journey that they thought was finished long ago. We who read it now are in much the same position.

We must look to the very core of what the mind is and how it works at the present moment. The *Lotus Sutra* sends a message of salvation, but it is not couched in the usual doctrine, commentary, and techniques that we generally expect. The sutra praises and recommends itself in a way that is beyond technique and conception. Many of us know the warning that says, "when pointing at the moon, don't mistake the finger for the moon." The *Lotus* 



*Sutra* seems to say that it is both the finger and the moon; look no further.

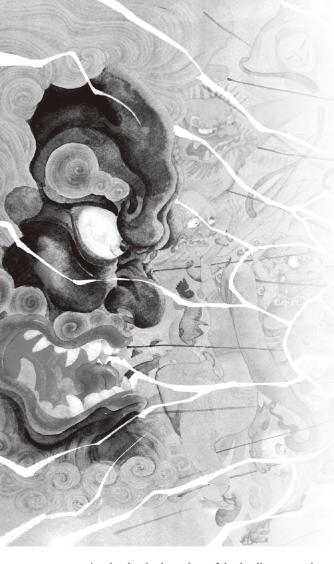
Most scholars look at a work like the *Lotus Sutra* as a major religious text that fits into a historical schema. It shows ideas and developments that can be categorized according to history, sociology, and a variety of other disciplines. For a practitioner a sutra is a living, interactive document, an expression of the Buddha's message and buddha nature itself.

I mentioned at the beginning the inclusivity of the *Lotus Sutra*, which I will now explore in greater detail, dividing it into the following areas: doctrinal, emotional, social, spatial, temporal, sense and nonsense, and expedient means. This comprehensive notion of inclusivity explains much of the power and depth of the sutra.

#### **Doctrinal Inclusivity**

The *Lotus Sutra* speaks of three vehicles before it introduces the practice of the One Vehicle. The three vehicles are those of the *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and bodhisattvas. The easiest vehicle to discuss is the second vehicle, the pratyekabuddhas. These are sentient beings who have reached a high level of enlightenment by their understanding of dependent origination, that is, the teaching of causes and conditions, which underpin and explain the world as we perceive it. Pratyekabuddhas seem to exist only in times and places where no buddha exists. They do not teach.

The first vehicle, that of the śrāvakas, which means "sound hearers," simply refers to the early followers of the Buddha. For them, the arhat, a being who has realized self-emptiness, has achieved the highest attainment. The attitude of the sutra towards śrāvakas is somewhat ambivalent. At times they are praised, and at times they are disparaged for following what now appears to be an inferior path.



The third vehicle is that of the bodhisattvas, beings who have forsaken their own enlightenment and entrance into nirvana, so that they may help all sentient beings. This vehicle is the Mahayana, the Greater Vehicle, and it is supported by a different canon of sutras and teachings from those of the śrāvakas.

The great One Vehicle that the Lotus Sutra proclaims is both inclusive and exclusive of the three vehicles just cited. Scholars have argued over the exact configuration for hundreds of years. Are the

three vehicles contained in the one, or does the one constitute a fourth vehicle? Each of us will have a different view of this question.

The Lotus Sutra addresses a very delicate issue: how to introduce new teachings, yet honor the earlier teachings and those who followed them. As representative of the Mahayana, there is an understanding in the sutra that is referenced again and again – that its revolutionary message will often not be understood or well received.

The general Mahayana argument is that both the first and second vehicles are too narrow in focus, that practitioners selfishly seek only their own salvation, and that their highest attainment, the arhat, falls short of the ultimate; they recognize only the emptiness of the self, and stop short of realizing the emptiness of all dharmas, all phenomena.

From the śrāvakas point of view, there were many arguments against the Mahayana. For example: the Indian teacher and Mādhyamaka philosopher Bhāvaviveka (500-570), in Tarkajvālā (Blaze of Reasoning), cites the following examples of Mahayana blasphemy: 3

- · The Mahayana sutras are not included in the Tripitaka, the traditional collection of the Buddha's teachings.
- The Mahayana says that the Tathagata is permanent, and this contradicts the dictum that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent.
- The Mahayana says buddha nature is all pervasive; this does not relinquish the belief in self.
- Because the Mahayana says that Buddha did not pass into nirvāņa, it suggests that nirvāņa is not the final state of peace and this is wrong.
- The Mahayana belittles the arhats.
- The Mahayana says Śākyamuni was an emanation, thus perverting the entire teachings.

- The Mahayana says that great sins can be entirely absolved and that contradicts the law of karma.
- The Buddha didn't set forth the Mahayana; it was done by demons to deceive.

Bhāvaviveka refutes all of these claims, but the Lotus Sutra resolves all of these issues by proclaiming that there is but one vehicle which is not different from, and not quite the same as, all of the three earlier vehicles. The inclusivity of the sutra negates any counter arguments. Also note that in the early years of Buddhist development, these seeming divisions were less severe than they seem now. Early travelers report finding both śrāvakas and Mahayana practitioners in the same monasteries.

#### **Emotional Inclusivity**

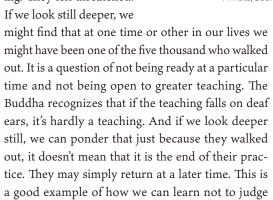
The Lotus Sutra recognizes and accepts a whole range of human emotions. Some of the most accomplished practitioners dance with great joy when they receive the Buddha's teachings and prophecies. Other practitioners are described as abiding in peace and tranquility. There are also many negative emotions - even Śāriputra harbors doubts when he first hears these new teachings. He was so startled that he first thought that he was hearing Māra, the evil one, pretending to be the Buddha. In many of the parables presented in the sutra, people are depressed and discouraged. They lack confidence and are beset by poor self-image. The Buddha describes many unwholesome states: arrogance and pettiness and cruelty, and a whole host of other faults, including ignorance. But the sutra shows that these negative states are part of the spiritual journey. In later chapters, there is the parable of the son of a rich merchant who wanders away and falls into poverty, losing sight of his true abilities. The father continues to show love for his



son and works with him in very skillful ways until he is ready to receive his birthright. His desertion from his true home signifies a descent into lesser teachings. In the Lotus Sutra all such negative states are viewed with love, compassion, and understanding. The true path underlies everything.

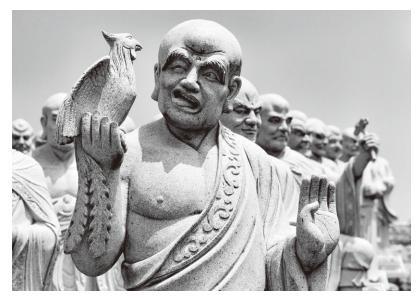
In the second chapter, "Expedient Means," five thousand monastics and lay people leave just as the Buddha is starting to speak about the One Vehicle. They believe that they have reached final nirvāṇa and no one is going to tell them different. The Buddha says that they had great sins and overweening pride, and when they leave, the assembly is then free of branches and leaves; only the steadfast and truthful remain. At first it seems preposterous; how could anyone walk out of the Buddha's teachings? But if we look deeper, we might see that they were not ready to hear the Buddha's teaching. They felt threatened.

ourselves or others.



#### **Social Inclusivity**

Let's look at everyone who is present in the introductory chapter of the sutra. We can recognize all the practitioners who have won the fruits of the Buddha's teaching: the arhats and the bodhisattvas, all his disciples. There are the mythological beings, birds, snake gods, and demons, among others. There are of



Arhats, bodhisattvas, and all beings are welcome. Photo by Muhamad Ikhsan

course lay people, including the Buddha's aunt, his former wife, and his son. There is Kaundinya, one of the first ascetics who practiced with the Buddha, and there is King Ajātaśatru, the man who starved his father to death so that he could usurp the throne. Ajātaśatru suffered something of a mental breakdown because of what he did and asked the Buddha's forgiveness; now he is in the assembly. Everyone is welcome. It is a message for our times. The Buddha does not exclude anyone from his care, no matter what their personal history may be.

It is important to make note of the presence of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, and Maitreya, the bodhisattva who will be the next buddha. These two figures are the main interlocutors, each with histories and attributes essential to the sutra's message. Mañjuśrī represents wisdom and insight. His vájra sword cuts through ignorance, doubt, and confusion. Maitreya represents unconditional love, the source of loving-kindness (Skt.: maitrī; Pali: mettā)

practice, and the generation of good wishes and loving thoughts. By including Mañjuśrī and Maitreya, the sutra incorporates the two all-inclusive wings of the practice, wisdom and compassion. In this way, not only is there the social inclusion of two great bodhisattvas, but there is also a deeper doctrinal and spiritual dimension added to the sutra.

#### **Inclusivity of Space and Time**

Noting the inclusivity of space in the *Lotus Sutra* is not difficult. At various points in the sutra, the Buddha reaches out across the entire universe in the ten directions, in all dimensions, including the six realms from the lowest hell to the highest heaven. There is no place where the Dharma body is not present.

Time is perhaps more interesting; the present moment is all pervasive. Yet the sutra has a historical dimension in that the events are centered around Śākyamuni's actual time on the earth. Since King Ajātaśatru is present, the events take place near the end of the Buddha's life. However, in later chapters, especially chapter 16, we find that the earlier understanding that the Buddha lived only eighty-years is in itself an example of expedient means. The sutra explains that he only seemed to be born near Kapilāvastu and he only seemed to die eighty years later. The Buddha's life is really without beginning or end. The earlier teachings, that never mentioned the One Vehicle or the true nature of the Buddha's lifespan, were presented as they were because the causes and conditions of practitioners at that time demanded a simpler presentation. In the earliest times, people were simply not ready for the Lotus Sutra's message.

But now when we listen to the sutra, it is the right time, the propitious moment, according to our particular capacity and inclination. When we listen to Mañjuśrī's proclamation that he was a Dharma

teacher under Sun and Moon Light Buddha many eons ago and that Maitreya was his disciple, we see the present connected to the past. When we hear that Maitreya is the future Buddha, then the present is connected to the future. When we further hear that the Lotus Sutra's teaching has always been present, and will always be present, then we may understand that there is an immovable but fluid "now." We can perhaps contemplate the Hua-yen teachings of the ten times at work: the past, present and future of the past; the past, present and future of the present; the past, present, and future of the future; and the tenth time that combines the first nine.

#### Inclusivity of Sense and Nonsense

By proclaiming the teaching of the One Vehicle, all other concepts and views are subsumed under a heading which is itself beyond concepts. This expedient means of using words to transcend words is tricky. I'm going to present two examples from other sources, that expound on this seeming contradiction.

In the first example, Donald S. Lopez Jr., quoting Bhāvaviveka's Tarkajvālā (Blaze of Reasoning) cites a passage from the Tathāgata-kośa-sūtra (The Treasury of the Tathāgata Sūtra). 4 Here, the Buddha explains the reasoning behind his use of expedient means:

The Buddha said, "Kāśyapa, it is thus. Some beings are tormented by unfounded suspicion that they have taken poison [...] One skilled in the ways of medicine pretends to remove the unreal poison [...] As a consequence they are relieved of their torment. What do you think, Kāśyapa? If the doctor had not pretended to remove the poison, would those beings have lived?"

Kāśyapa said, "No Bhagavān [The Blessed One]. Just as they were supposedly tormented by an unreal poison, so that torment was removed by another unreal poison."

CHAN MAGAZINE WINTER 2020 23 The Bhagavān said, "in the same way, Kāśyapa, do I teach the doctrine in an unreal manner to childish common beings who are beset by afflictions."

Kāśyapa said, "Does the Bhagavān not speak the truth? How could the Tathāgata not speak the truth?"

The Bhagavān said, "Kāśyapa, are you liberated by truth or untruth?"

Kāśyapa said, "I am liberated by untruth, not by truth. Bhagavān, desire, hatred, and obscuration are said to be untrue. If desire were true, Bhagavān, one could not extricate oneself from desire through meditation on the foul. If hatred were real, Bhagavan, one could not extricate oneself from hatred through meditation on love. If obscuration were real, Bhagavan, one could not extricate oneself from obscuration through meditation on dependent origination. Bhagavān, it is because desire, hatred, and ignorance are unreal that one can separate oneself from them by meditation on the foul, love, and dependent origination. Bhagavān, since all afflictions are unreal, they are completely abandoned by realization that is unreal. Bhagavān, because both the afflictions and that by which they are abandoned are unreal and untrue, unreal knowledge removes one from unreal afflictions."

Lopez continues, "When Kāśyapa says 'I am liberated by untruth, not by truth,' he shows that it is because phenomena are empty that liberation is possible. If things were truly as they appeared, then transformation would be impossible."

The *Lotus Sutra* even dares to ask the question: are these expedient means lies? They may seem to be in many cases – children are promised toys that never existed; a son is guided by a man who is really his father, but does not reveal the fact; a fabulous city is described as a destination, but it is an illusion. The Buddha recognizes that there is no other way to work with us, but to work with the kinds of deception we already embrace.

In the following example, Mañjuśrī reveals the true nature of all words, both true and false:

"Mañjuśrī," said the god Brahmā, "is what you have been telling me the absolute truth?"

"All words are true," said Mañjuśrī.

"Are lies then also true?" asked Brahmā.

"They are," said Mañjuśrī. "And why? Good sir, all words are empty, vain and belong to no point in space. To be empty and vain and to belong to no point in space is the characteristic of absolute truth. So, in that sense all words are true. Between the words of Devadatta and the words of the Tathāgata there is no difference or distinction at all. How is this? All possible words are words of the Tathāgata; there is no getting outside him or outside what is so. Whatever can be said in words is able to say something only by dint of saying nothing at all." 5

What we perceive to be the content in words is often unreliable. What can we know and what can we believe? This is addressed in the *Lotus Sutra*, but the answer lies in perceiving the *li* (理), deep principle, described by the fourth-century Chinese master, Daosheng (360–434) who wrote the first Chinese commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*. <sup>6</sup> *Li* will not be found on the surface of the sutra. *Li* represents the essence of the Buddha's teachings and the path that leads to their fruition. By constantly bringing our attention to *li*, Daosheng warns against being swayed by the trappings of expedient means. He directs our attention to the deepest meaning.

#### **Inclusivity of Expedient Means**

In the *Lotus Sutra* the Buddha is the master of expedient means, and he uses them to reach and teach sentient beings of every description and capacity. The Buddha explains that only another buddha can

truly understand a buddha's wisdom and attainment. This cannot be known directly by ordinary sentient beings. If the Buddha wants to teach sentient beings, he must do so at their level, and that means resorting to the most expedient methods.

According to the Tiantai school, the chapters of the *Lotus Sutra* are divided roughly into what are called the "trace" teachings and the "core" teachings. The trace teachings deal more with the relative, and the core teachings point to the absolute. The trace teachings employ expedient means, the core teachings are deeper. These categories correspond very well to what Thích Nhất Hạnh calls the historical and the ultimate dimensions. He compares the historical to waves, the ultimate to the ocean. Thích Nhất Hạnh says that when people's eyes are fixed on the earth – looking at trees, plants, hills, mountains, or each other, then we know we are in the historical dimension, the world of birth and death. When people look into space or into the parables and histories of

the great sages, then we have entered the ultimate dimension. The trace teachings, ji (迹) in Chinese, constitute the historical dimension. The core teachings, ben (本) in Chinese, are the ultimate teachings, which correspond to Master Daosheng's li.

In his book Wonderful Dharma: A Study of the Lotus Sutra (《絕妙說法》 Juemiao Shuofa), Master Sheng Yen writes: 8

Ji (trace, mark vestige) means skillful or convenient. It is a tentative, for the moment, way of talking, acting, showing. It is like saying my stomach really hurts, but really to what degree does it hurt? What form does the pain take? How am I going to express it? No matter how I describe it, other people will have no way to experience what I experience. But if I don't say anything, there's no way anyone else is going to know that my stomach hurts. Furthermore, perhaps I let everyone know that my eyesight is not good; I don't see clearly. How will you imagine what that's like? You won't know exactly how bad my



to by Koman Grad

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eyesight is. Similarly, if I don't say anything, you're not going to know what I'm going through. This is ji (skillful means) and it is done for the purpose of leading people onto the Dharma path, so I have no choice but to make use of this kind of speech and such apparent gestures to illustrate the true meaning.

It's very interesting that Master Sheng Yen uses two examples of distress, a stomachache and poor eyesight, to illustrate how skillful means works. In chapter two of the Lotus Sutra, as an expedient, theatrical means, the Buddha seems to be distressed, or perplexed. He is coming to terms with the fact that only a buddha like himself can fully understand the teaching of the Great Vehicle. He spends three weeks walking around the bodhi tree where he attained enlightenment pondering what he should do. He puzzles over whether it makes sense to try to teach his marvelous doctrine because it is so subtle and hard to understand, but Brahmā and Indra descend from the heavens to beg him to do so. The Buddha makes a compromise: to teach the three vehicles as expedient means, even though he knows they are ultimately illusory methods. Now, with the advent of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, that compromise is no longer necessary. There is no need to hold anything back, so the Buddha combines and transcends the ordinary and the ultimate. Master Sheng Yen goes on further to say:

The "trace teaching" (skillful means) reveals a kind of manifestation of virtue, it's not really revealing the actual Buddha and it does not express true Buddhadharma. Because sentient beings have different capacities and inclinations, the Buddha makes use of certain words and phenomena, and applies various skillful means and techniques to show Buddhadharma. It's like the track left behind after you've walked on sand, it's a footprint that

lets people see where the foot has been. It's not genuinely the foot itself.

In the Vimalakīrti Sutra's chapter on expedient means, the layman Vimalakīrti is described as having perfected all of the pāramitās. Not only has he perfected the first six pāramitās, but he has perfected the seventh, skillful means. Only a fully enlightened being has the ability to properly use such methods. He spends his time helping people in every walk of life, yet he never tires and has no attachments. He is honored by nobility, lay people and the gods. In order to spread the teachings, he pretends that his body has fallen prey to illness, so that everyone comes to inquire about his health. This may be a falsehood, but it is a proper expedient means, because there is no self-gain involved in his actions, which are entirely altruistic. Vimalakīrti then proceeds to talk about the body, because he is ill, but he is really using it as a metaphor. He proclaims that the body is an illusion, impermanent, and a source of great suffering. Instead he recommends seeking the Dharma body, that is an unborn body, pure and spotless, and not subject to suffering or decay.

But in the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha makes a prophecy that all will attain buddhahood, and he makes the *Lotus Sutra* itself the bridge of expedient means that will lead to true awakening. So, his use of expedient means here is more dynamic than that of Vimalakīrti – not just the body, but scripture itself constitutes expedience.

The Buddha shows how accessible the teaching really is. He enumerates the many ways that one can turn to the One Vehicle: people can make offerings to the Buddha's remains, build stūpas, adorn them, build mausoleums of stone, sandalwood, etc. Even little children can build sand stūpas. All these fulfill the buddha way. People can design and erect



images, adorn images, little children can draw with their fingernails. All gain merit and fulfill the Buddha way. Sentient beings can use flowers, incense, instruments, beating drums, etc. They can praise buddhas in songs, even while distracted with thoughts. An offering can be even a single flower or a painted image and they will eventually see countless Buddhas. They can prostrate, join palms, nod their head, all will save countless beings and enter into nirvāṇa without remainder, just as a fire dies out when the firewood is exhausted. All have fulfilled the buddha way. These are the Buddha's expedient devices to attract people to the way.

All of these examples of fulfilling the Buddha way through the *Lotus Sutra* provide an encouraging metaphor of how approachable and useful the *Lotus Sutra* really is, despite the undeniable difficulty that it may seem to present. The *Lotus Sutra* has ten thousand petals for us to explore. The further we look, the further we can see. I hope that this commentary will encourage you to explore this great teaching of the Buddha.

- Leon Hurvitz, English trans., Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma. Based on Chinese trans. by Kumārajīva. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 34.
- 2. Hurvitz, 34.
- Donald S. Lopez Jr. "The Institution of Fiction in Mahāyāna Buddhism," in Myths and Fictions, eds. Shlomo Biderman and Ben-Ami Scharfstein. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 362–3.
- 4. Lopez, 386-7.
- 5. Brahma-viśeṣa-cintī-paripṛcchā Sūtra. Original Chinese trans. by Dharmarakṣa (T585) and Bodhiruci (T587), in Taishō Tripiṭaka, ed. Takakusu Junjirō, vol. 15. (Tokyo: Taishō Tripiṭaka Publication Association, 1925), 50 & 82. English trans. from Buddhist Texts Though the Ages, eds. Edward Conze, I. B. Horner, David Snellgrove, and Arthur Waley. (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 278.
- Young-ho Kim, Tao-Sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra: A Study and Translation (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 85–89.
- Thích Nhất Hạnh, The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 121–130.
- Chan Master Sheng Yen, Wonderful Dharma: A Study of the Lotus Sutra (Taipei: Dharma Drum Corp., 2005), 22.
   This book is not yet available in English. The passages in this article are translated by Harry Miller.

# The Fruits of Daily Practice NANCY BONARDI

ancy Bonardi has been a student of Chan Master Sheng Yen and a member of the Chan Meditation Center since 1979. She has also been a teacher for the Beginners' Meditation classes and the one- and three-day retreats at both CMC and the Dharma Drum Retreat Center since 1999. In 2018, she retired from public school teaching and moved from the New York/Connecticut area to reside in Virginia and Indiana. The following lecture was given at the Insight Meditation Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana on Tuesday, March 3, 2020.

I THANK ALL OF YOU FOR ALLOWING ME to share this Dharma seat. I appreciate your willingness to change the routine a little. In preparing for this talk, I considered many aspects of the Buddhist path, and the one aspect I want to share is the value of daily practice. I can sit here and share these ideas because I believe firmly that we are all, at this precise moment, beginners with a fresh, clear, relaxed and natural mind. And while there is great value in meeting as a group once a week, it is equally important that I meet with myself, and that you meet with yourself, frequently to meditate. This is the bedrock for spiritual growth.

#### Stick to a Routine

Here are some points that I follow to help maintain my nearly daily practice. I say nearly because there has been a day or two when I skipped meditation: When my grandkids were born and I helped my daughter and her husband; or when visiting friends on a vacation, and there is little alone time or a private corner to meditate; or just when ordinary distractions pull the day away. But never have any of these conditions prevented me from meditating for more than three days in a row. It feels as awkward as if the water were turned off and there'd be no way to bathe for a few days. I'd feel an uneasy, uncomfortable itchiness that can only be refreshed by my meditation routine. I need to rejoin with formal

sitting on my cushion or a small stack of pillows, cover my knees with a blanket, and meditate.

In that way, my ties to Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) are never severed. What I learned from him and from my other teachers – his Dharma heirs, in particular, have remained consistent. Yet, and equally important, I have also been my own teacher, always on the lookout for what might strengthen my vows and my effort.

#### Read Dharma Daily

That said, my first piece of advice that I consistently follow is to read Dharma often. I realize our devices offer an enormous opportunity, giving us immediate blogs, websites, and YouTube videos. I have watched many hours of lectures and talks that have been invaluable and inspiring. And yet, I believe there's nothing like the heft of a book, a book I own so that I can make comments and reread, and study the inspiring parts. I jot down a phrase or two. I turn to the front cover and list the best pages that moved me. I copy quotes that I use as bookmarks or put under a magnet as frequent inspiration. Such as this one from Master Sheng Yen that's on my fridge now:

One who is undistracted by circumstances, this is the result of meditation. One who is at one with circumstances, this is the result of wisdom.



In the mid nineteen-seventies, just a few books were available such as Shunryū Suzuki's Zen Mind, Beginners Mind (Weatherhill, 1970), which was my first book on the practice. I have read all of Shifu's books, some more than once. I have a small library with favorites that I have reread over the years. In fact, when I look at the date on the front page, I can judge just how much the writer had taught me by how much I have incorporated the teachings into my practice. I have been helped by the way the Buddhist writers explained concepts. Here's a very simple, yet helpful example: so often I have heard and read that our minds are scattered; we have wandering thoughts, and discursive thinking. All those phrases identified what I experienced, but I also felt like the helpless witness to a mind gone wild. I felt so overwhelmed that it seemed out of my control. Then one day I read the term "undisciplined mind" and that had the most immediate impact. Since I see myself as being a disciplined person, the idea that I was undisciplined in my attentiveness to the method shook me up. I realized very powerfully that I had a hand in that scatteredness; I am responsible for disciplining my mind. It is on me.

This was an immeasurable turning point.

It's also evident from reading a book on Dharma that the sincerity and the heart of the teacher seep from the pages. How can a person not be encouraged by the Dalai Lama's Good Heart (Wisdom Publications, 1996)?

How can the examples of practitioners' hardships of the past in their caves and mountaintops, and temple training, not be moving? Nowadays the younger generation of monastic writers, I've noticed, use modern day analogies to connect more readily with the next wave of practitioners. The wisdom of past and current teachers is generous and compassionate. They are truly noble friends at the ready.

That's why I encourage reading and keeping books on hand. Respond to what you're reading and review your notes from time to time. Invite many great teachers into your space of practice, let them inspire you and keep company with you as they spur your growth.

#### **Everyday Teachings**

Next, I look around the everyday world for Dharma encouragement. I don't just mean, for instance, that I notice winter turn into spring and think "impermanence." Not just that. For example, I was looking at a cartoon in a book on mindfulness for kids. The first panel showed a man watching television and standing next to him was a young boy explaining a problem he had with another kid. The father kept watching television and barely listened. The boy left dejected. On the facing page, the same scene: the man was watching television and the boy was expressing his frustration. In the next panel, the man turned around to the boy and listened. As the man listened, the artist had drawn a hopeful face on the child, who promptly arrived at his own solution because he was heard and because the man gave his full attention to the boy. That's all it took. It struck me as a plausible contrast and an equally plausible outcome in the second scene: the loving kindness of being present.

I had shared this set of cartoons with my seventhgrade students a couple of years ago, because it illustrated in the most direct way how being mindful, knowing how to be in the present, can generate not only kindness in oneself, but also relief and support for others. It was a convincing lesson that my students understood. I hoped that it had planted a seed for each of them through that set of cartoons.

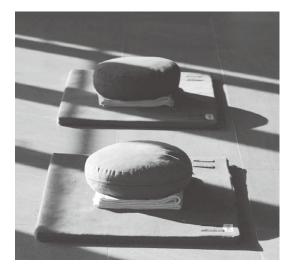
Another example: I came across an essay, describing the writer's quest to "redesign" his life. He was in his early fifties, and set out to read a few memoirs. What he added surprised me: he referred to something he had read: the Buddha's instructions to his monks, urging them to meditate in the charnel (burial) grounds to contemplate not only death around them, but their own death. This encouraged them to appreciate the preciousness of time to cultivate their own practice. The idea of our own death could spur us into action, appreciation, and meaningful priorities. By contemplating our own death, it becomes less a gruesome fear and more of an encouragement to use our time wisely.

When I was younger, this sort of training sounded so odd. I plainly didn't want to think about facing

my eventual death. Yet, Shifu often taught, "Keep death hanging from an eyelash." Just like the reluctant donkey whose owner puts a dangling carrot in front of the animal to get it moving, death is our incentive to focus more, to include in those hours of the day some time on the cushion and effort on the method and to realize the moment-to-moment importance of practice.

#### **Right Motivation**

Very often on retreats, Shifu had us bow to our cushion and generate a strong intention before a meditation session. He spoke often about vow power, a motivating energy that kept us focused and steady on the method. Once the vow was made, we were to pick up the method wholeheartedly. Back at home, I include this step, so before I meditate, I bow to my cushion and make my intention. Sometimes when I feel particularly scattered, I visualize all my past as big as a glacier over my left shoulder. I imagine it slipping away. Over my right shoulder, I see my future as massive and solid, and it too slips away.



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CHAN MAGAZINE WINTER 2020 All I have is the present, my total awareness of the method. Within seconds, thoughts appear and distract me, yet there are fewer than if I had not made the right intention from the start. Again, it's on me to discipline and appreciate the chance to cultivate this training for the right outcomes – knowing time is precious and limited.

I make this suggestion: see if an intention before you formally meditate helps keep you grounded on the method and serious enough to do it for yourself and for others.

In the early years when Shifu taught his classes, he urged us to meditate two hours a day – once in the morning and once in the evening. That is the ideal. The morning connects to the evening sitting, which in turn, influences the next morning's meditation. Like two bookends, it maintains a thread of continuity. It helps the mind settle more quickly because the method is humming alive and fresh from a few hours earlier. When we stop for a short or long while, we realize how much energy it takes to rev up our stamina and focus again. So as a practical approach, keep that link connected. And as far as how long you meditate, you can see how much time your mind needs to settle on your method. Also see how you feel with just a few minutes as opposed to a longer time. On retreats, each session is about forty minutes. You can try that. I set a timer for between thirty and forty minutes. Lately, I've tried this strategy: when the timer goes off, I stretch out my legs for a few minutes, then resume the posture. I don't set a timer, but simply rest in the method in a relaxed manner for just ten minutes more. That short session right after the longer one seems to be deeper at times. This is what I mean by being our own teacher. We get to play with what works best. We sincerely look for ways of putting into our practice the essence of mindful awareness.

#### Gratitude

Despite that at times there might be a break in our practice or commitment to a steady personal path, we can cultivate the ever-present, underlining attitude of gratitude and realization that we have a great jewel in our possession. We reflect that a legion of practitioners have gone before us and have awakened to their true nature, fundamental to all of us. So we accept the process. We accept our willingness, our commitment, and our struggle. That means we are also grateful for what seems unpleasant, challenging, and confusing.

Even if we lose the thread of a consistent practice, as Shifu said, "It's better to break a vow than never having one." Just like we bring our attention back on the method, we can bring our meditation practice back when we consider its great value.

#### **Transfer Merit**

Once a day, even if I haven't formally sat in meditation, I make sure to do a "morning service." Morning and evening services are part of monastic life as well as a fundamental part of retreats. I have maintained the habit of transferring merit so that I can pray for all beings, name the people with whom I share blessings, and name those who have passed away. It could be a relative or a friend or someone I heard about on the news. I pray for our leaders that they make decisions with compassion.

Transfer of Merit:

I pray for the flourishing of Buddhadharma, For peace in the world,

For the joy and contentment of all beings For the freedom and ease of body and mind. May sentient beings depart from suffering. May the vows of all practitioners be fulfilled. May all beings be safe. May all beings be healthy. May all beings be happy. May all beings be at peace.

(You can insert the names of actual people in place of the words "all beings.")

#### Persistence

So many people who start to meditate just give it up. Or after decades, they don't see the point anymore. They don't have time; they hate the body pain; they're too frustrated by not getting enough positive results from it.

So here's an anecdote I read in Elizabeth Gilbert's *Big Magic* (Riverhead Books, 2015):

A famous writer was giving a talk, and at the end of it, a man rose to ask a question. He said that he was also a writer for decades and that he and the successful writer were nearly the same age; they wrote about the same issues and story lines, but one had been in print for many

years, whereas the other had not. The man in the audience wanted to have some advice, but he added, "Please don't tell me to persevere because that's all I've done."

The guest writer was silent for a few moments and then said, "So stop writing! Just quit for a few weeks, a few months, even for years. But then see how you feel. If you find that you miss writing, that

you have the need to spend time doing it, then do it and ...persevere."

That is the best advice for any practitioner as well. If you feel your practice is sketchy or tedious, stop doing it for some time, then see how you feel. If you realize its value, despite what you think the results should be, then pick up the practice with renewed devotion to your path. Always persevere.  $\checkmark$ 

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o by Henri Pico

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# Method of Contemplation in Silent Illumination,

by Venerable Chi Chern









Venerable Chi Chern is the first Dharma heir of Master Sheng Yen. The original article in Chinese is from the book *Every Way Is the Way* (《頭頭是道》*Tou Tou Shi Dao*, Taiping, Perak, Malaysia: Dharma Rain, 2004, ISBN: 983-40976-3-8), page 105. In this pithy instruction, Ven. Chi Chern uses Śamatha–Vipaśyanā (Stillness–Contemplation) to frame the practice of Silent Illumination. It delineates three levels of contemplations under the rubrics of pre-śamatha expedient means, cultivating Śamatha, and cultivating Vipaśyanā. English Translation by Wei Tan. Chinese Calligraphy and Paintings by Ven. Chi Chern.



## I. Pre-Samatha Expedient Means Sitting upright in meditation.

#### Contemplation

I am meditating.
The sitting "I" is the whole body.
Do not focus on any one phenomenon
or any one point
thus enabling the whole body to relax.

#### Contemplation

The body is a whole.
The whole body is sitting in meditation.
Therefore, if any part of the body
experiences any reaction or condition
it is but just a part.
The condition of the part
does not affect the practice of the whole
thus letting go of disturbances
of bodily sensation.

#### Contemplation

The body and the environment integrate into a whole.

With the body and the environment as a whole any external reactions or conditions are but parts of the whole.

Parts do not affect the practice of the whole thus letting go of external disturbances.

#### II. Cultivating Samatha

Before attaining samatha, use the expedient means of silent illumination – relaxing the body and not being affected by disturbances from the body and the environment – and then engage in the method of cultivating samatha.

#### Contemplation

Contemplate the breath and count the breath.

A focused and aware mind counts the breath.

A mind of unified focus and awareness
counts the breath.

Focus unifies with awareness, and as one,
unifies with the breath (object of

Focus and awareness unifying with the method is the unified mind.

The unified mind unifies with the body.

contemplation and method).

#### Contemplation

Body and mind unify into a whole still and unmoving, clearly illuminating.

Each and every reaction and condition of body and mind – any reaction and condition of the body and any thought in the mind – are only minute parts within the whole.

Within this whole of unified body and mind fluctuation does not arise.

The unified body and mind are silent and clear.

#### Contemplation

Let this unified body and mind unify with the space in which they abide.

Body and mind fuse into space and unify with space.

Body and mind, and space the internal and the external unify into a whole.

Body and mind are space;

Space is body and mind unified, not two.

Within this unified whole
each and every reaction of
the body and mind
each and every condition and
phenomenon in space
is only a minute part.

The unified whole is silent and unmoving, clearly illuminating.

#### III. Cultivating Vipasyanā

Abiding in this unified state, exercise emptiness contemplation, illuminating and realizing no-self.

#### Contemplation

Within this unification
whether it is the unification of body and mind
or the unification of the internal and the external
there is some sort of lurking "center"
a functioning subject which
stays in silence and illuminates.

#### Contemplation

This functioning of a lurking "center" within the unified whole is also only a part.

Fuse this part into the whole

use this part into the whole unified and non-discriminating.

Then illuminate all existences

including the whole

seeing each phenomenon clearly and vividly

but with no subject that illuminates and sees.

Each and every phenomenon exists clearly and vividly

but there is no self that illuminates and sees.

Illuminate that the functioning of each and every phenomenon

is within each and every other phenomenon.

Each and every phenomenon does not arise or perish

silent and un-moving.

Each and every phenomenon arises and perishes clearly and vividly functioning.

## Chan Meditation Center Affiliates

NORTH AMERICAN CENTERS					
	Buddhist Associatior	<b>MC) • Chang Hwa Fashi</b> , D n (DDMBA) America (DDM USA F			
90-56 Corona Avenue Elmhurst, NY 11373	(718) 592-6593	chancenter@gmail.com	www.chancenter.org www.ddmba.org		
Dharma Drum I	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 Angel	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.ddmmba.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		
<b>DDM Vancouver Center</b> • Chang Wu Fashi, Director					
8240 No.5 Road Richmond, BC V6Y-2V4	(604) 277-1357	info@ddmba.ca	www.ddmba.ca		

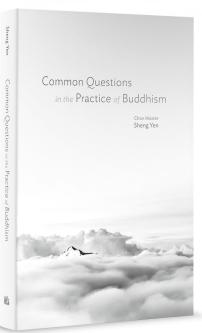
TAIWAN – WORLD HEADQUARTERS			
Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education			
No. 555, Fagu Rd. Jinshan Dist. New Taipei 20842	02-2498-7171 02-2498-7174	webmaster@ddm.org.tw	www.ddm.org.tw

	DHARMA [	DRUM MOUNTA	IN - NORTH AN	MERICA
	Los Angeles Chapter	(626) 350-4388	Tina Wang	ddmbala@gmail.com www.ddmbala.org
California	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
	Fairfield County Branch	(203) 912-0734	Alice Peng	contekalice@aol.com
Connecticut	Hartford Branch	(860) 805-3588	Lingyun Wang	cmchartfordct@gmail.com www.ddmhartfordct.org
	Gainesville	(352) 336-5301	Lian Huey Chen	LianFlorida@hotmail.com
	Miami	(954) 432-8683	May Lee	ddmbaus@yahoo.com
Florida	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@eleganthf.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
Toyas	Dallas Branch	(682) 552-0519	Patty Chen	ddmba_patty@hotmail.com
Texas	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	
Australia	Sydney	(61-4) 1318-5603 (61-2) 9283-3168 (FAX)	Agnes Chow	ddmsydney@yahoo.com.au www.ddm.org.au	
	Kowloon	(852) 2865-3110 (852) 2591-4810 (FAX)	Chang Zhan Fashi,	info@ddmhk.org.hk	
Hong Kong	Island	(852) 3955-0077 (852) 3590-3640 (FAX)	Director	www.ddmhk.org.hk	
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	
		EU	IROPE		
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	Zurich	(411) 382-1676	Max Kälin	MaxKailin@chan.ch www.chan.ch	
Switzerland	Bern	(31) 352-2243	Hildi Thalmann	hthalmann@gmx.net www.chan-bern.ch	
United	Bury	(44) 193-484-2017	Simon Child	admin@westernchanfellowship.org www.westernchanfellowship.org	
Kingdom	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.

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