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THROUGH THE CULTIVATION of one's mental stability and calmness, one can achieve balance of the body and mind, improve one's character, lessen self-centeredness, care for others, and purify society. As a result, the objective of my personal reading and writing was to clarify and to give guidance on the theoretical concepts and practice methods. Primarily, my works follow the guidelines of placing emphasis on upholding moral precepts, teaching Chan practice, and clarifying concepts. I am personally compelled to follow the path of placing equal weight on the three Buddhist disciplines of precepts, meditation and wisdom. Thus, I would not be limited to the scope of what ordinary people would call Precepts Master, Chan Master or Dharma Master. For myself, I would always assume the status of Dharma Master because it is best to take its meaning of "taking the Dharma as one's master."



CHAN MASTER SHENG YEN
A Journey of Learning and Insight, 1993

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My Intellectual Autobiography

Childhood and Youth

BY

Chan Master Sheng Yen

This article is excerpted from Master Sheng Yen's book, *A Journey of Learning and Insight*, originally published in Chinese as “聖嚴法師學思歷程” (*Sheng yen fashi xue si li cheng*) in 1993. As a part of Master Sheng Yen's “Complete Works,” it was translated under the auspices of the Cultural Center of Dharma Drum Mountain by Venerable Chang Luo, Bilingual editing by Venerable Chang Wu, English editing by Ernest Heau.

A Carefree Childhood

I WAS BORN IN 1930, in Xiaoniang Harbor, near Wolf Hills, Nantong County, Jiangsu Province. I have no memory of my place of birth because in 1931, the great Yangzi River flood washed everything away while I was still an infant. Not only the properties, but also the land along the northern and southern banks of the river was all under water. As far as I can remember, the place where I was born was already under the Yangzi River, at a distance several miles from its banks.

According to my parents, our family, surnamed Chang, originally lived at the Jiaopen Embankment on Chongming Island located at the delta of the mouth of the Yangzi River. From its name, one can tell it should be a swampy area near the sea. Due to a great flood, my great-great-grandfather moved

to the Wolf Hills area near Nantong County. When I was born my family and close relatives all lived in the area of Nantong and Haimen. The dialect we used still retained the Chongming accent. After 1931 most of our family moved to Changyinsha of Changshu County, though some distant relatives in Haimen County remained there. Thus, the dire effects of the flood as well as the need to relocate deeply affected my family's history and brought tremendous suffering to our family.

Due to generations of moving and loss of home, we lacked the means to raise a large family of three-to-five generations, and we did not have the financial resources to build an ancestral hall. Although I had heard from my father that our family had a genealogy, I have never seen it. My father was illiterate, so he did not pay much attention to that kind of thing. At present, I only know that my grandfather is Chang



Master Sheng Yen visiting childhood home in April 1988 DDM Archive Photo

Xifan, my grandmother's surname is Jiang, and my father is Chang Xuancai, my mother's surname is Chen. Although once there was a *zhuang yuan* (winner of the national civil examinations in the old days) by the name Chang Jizhi who came from our family, as for others, aside from having the surname of Chang, they have no kinship with my family.

After the Yangzi River washed everything away, my family moved to Jiangnan. My parents brought their six children, rented seven acres of land, built three thatched huts, and worked as tenant farmers and day laborers to sustain the family. I remember this during the Japanese invasion: due to the need for strategic war materials, in our countryside we planted a single crop of rice, mint, and beans, and then we alternated those crops with cotton each year. No matter what we planted, we never had enough to eat because the crops were used to pay the landlord

and for army provisions. I was ten years old, had to work as a child laborer, and was drafted by the army to help build military structures. In this period it was said that “the masses live in dire poverty” and the people must face the misery of struggling to survive. I witnessed it but in the eyes of a child, there are not many worries or uneasiness when you think that life has always been like this. But later, hearing grownups relate and discuss historical events, I came to know that in the era of my birth China faced strong external rivalries, and was also torn by internal strife among the warlords. Most unfortunate was the Japanese invasion, causing overall restlessness and turmoil in Mainland China. That was the unfortunate time I was born in, encountering the chaos of war.

Our family was impoverished, and in our countryside even the wealthy were poor because the whole country was poverty-stricken. Seeing

our landlord's courtyard, I could tell they owned more properties, had more land, and had more provisions and clothing, but their quality of life was more or less the same as ours. At the time, it was said that there were three university graduates in Changshu County, and our landlord's son was one of them. Our countryside treated him as a modern *zhuang yuan*. However, in 1948, the landlord's family's fortunes soon deteriorated. To escape the turmoil and dangers of the countryside, and to seek refuge with their relatives in Shanghai, they rode in the same ordinary class railway car as my third eldest brother.

In my memory, there were no intellectuals in our Chang family. The conditions at the time prevented them from being literate and there was no schooling. I have three elder brothers and two elder sisters. Only my second eldest brother was roughly literate due to self-study and the other four were all illiterate. There were no public schools available at the time, only private schools and private tutelage schools. If the parents were to send their children to study, they would endure a double loss: the first being that the school required tuition fees and uniform expenditures, the second, when the children were at school they had no time to do chores at home, and that was a loss of manual labor. For an impoverished family like ours, it was simply unaffordable.

As a child I was feeble and mentally deficient. My body was often prone to illness because it is said that my mother was already 42 when she gave birth to me, and as a poor woman in the countryside, she didn't have any milk to feed me. In addition the food at the time was coarse (poor in quality, lacking in nutrients) and scarce, so I was malnourished. As a child my growth was extremely slow; I did not learn to walk till I was three years old, or talk until I was five. When I was nine, my brothers and sisters had already grown up and helped my parents by earning money, so the family decided to send me to

a private tutelage school. In my first class, four lines and twelve words were taught: "Shang da ren / Kong yi ji / Hua san qian / Qi shi shi." However, I didn't know their meaning. The tutor did not explain then that they meant: "The greatest man is Confucius; he taught three thousand students, and seventy became gentlemen." This was the normal style of teaching of private tutelage schools.

I attended a total of four private tutelage schools for two reasons: first, the tutelage teacher's classes didn't survive very long, and second, my family could not consistently afford my tuition fees, so I needed to work to supplement my family's income. I formally entered primary school when I was twelve. I began in the second semester of the third grade and completed fourth grade in the second year. Due to a poor yearly harvest our family was in wretched poverty, so I left school and went with my father and brothers to the Southern Bank of Yangzi River to build a dike for the new reclaimed land, and so I became a child laborer.

Juvenile without Regrets

In 1943, according to the Chinese method of calculating age, I was already 14 years old. Actually, it wasn't until December of the lunar calendar that year that I would turn thirteen. I left home to become a monk both willingly and compelled by conditions. There were no renunciants (people who leave home to join a monastery) in our hometown, and no formal monastery. The religion we encountered was a kind of folk belief with a mixture of buddhas, deities, gods, and ghosts, the kind of social custom that treats Buddhist faith as the same as praying to gods, making offerings to ancestors, and worshiping ghosts. For example, when someone was ill, and the doctors couldn't cure them, the family would pray to the gods, buddhas, deities, or seek help from a children's medium or shamans. Although my old

home was originally located at the northern bank of the Yangzi River, not far away from the Guangjiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain, Nantong, I had no knowledge of Buddhist concepts and its essence. Occasionally, when the neighbors or relatives in the countryside were in bereavement, they would invite monks, Taoist priests, *zhaigong* (male practitioners) and *zhaigu* (female practitioners) to recite scriptures and perform repentance ceremonies. This was a local custom known as *zuo daochang* (performing Taoist rites). As a child, it seemed to me that people had been like that since the beginning of time, and I was not able to tell whether this kind of custom was good or bad, proper or not.

However, the summer of that year there was a neighbor, Mr. Dai, who had just come back from his trip to Wolf Mountain in Jiangbei. Passing by our house, he encountered heavy rain and came in for shelter. When he saw me, he remembered that the abbot of Guangjiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain had asked him to seek out a young man from the Jiangnan area south of the Yangzi to become a monk. He asked my mother about this, and in a joking manner, she turned to me: "Do you want to become a monk?" I had no thoughts and no idea about what being a monk meant, so I said, "Wonderful! Of course I would!" My mother was dumbfounded but she consented. She gave neighbor Dai my birth date so he could go to the abbot at Wolf Mountain, who would then ask for instructions in front of the Buddha. That autumn, after anxious waiting for a positive response from Wolf Mountain Monastery, Mr. Dai and I traveled across the river and up the mountain where I was to begin life as a monk.

Within Jiangsu Province, north of Yangzi River, the very north starts from Xuzhou, and the south ends at Chongming. Other than Yuntai Mountain of Lianyung Harbor, just nine miles south of Nantong City, there are five mountains facing the Yangzi

River. Their names from right to left on the map are Clay Mountain (Huangni Shan), Saddle Mountain (Ma'an Shan), Wolf Mountain (Lang Shan) in the middle, followed by Sword Mountain (Jian Shan) and Military Mountain (Jun Shan). Among the five mountains, Wolf Mountain is the most majestic, and had been a natural military stronghold since ancient times. It also served as the sacred place for faithful pilgrimages of the people from the Subei district. The information and historical materials concerning Wolf Mountain can be found in two of my books – *The Journey Home* (Chinese Guicheng), and *Source of Dharma, Source of Life* (Chn. Fayuan xueyuan), which include a number of detailed accounts. The oldest source material, in four chapters, is *The Record of Wolf Mountain of the Five Mountains* (Langwushan Zhi) compiled by Fort Commander Wang Yangde in 1616. Currently, only the Library in the Beijing Guangji Monastery has a collection (No. 683.21, 8113:1), and it is a copy of the 1935 printed edition from Guangjiao Monastery on Wolf Mountain. When I was at Wolf Mountain, I saw that my grandmaster kept one collection; however, when I returned to Mainland China to visit Guangjiao Monastery in 1988, this collection had already been lost.

The history of Wolf Mountain began during the period of Emperor Gaozu of Tang Dynasty between 661 and 669. There was a Master Sengqie who came from Xiyu (in the western region) to establish a monastery at Wolf Mountain. Then Chan Master Zhihuan, along with the local lay Buddhists, built the Grand Buddha Hall and named it Guangjiao Buddhist Temple. Even today the front Buddha Hall on the mountain has a statue of Master Sengqie, and half way up the mountain there is a tower dedicated to Master Zhihuan. Legend has it that Master Sengqie passed away in 708 and that during his lifetime, he often performed miracles. He once manifested as the Eleven-Faced Guanyin Bodhisattva. This is why

the later generations treated him as the incarnation of Guanyin. Emperor Zhongzong of Tang Dynasty honored him as the Imperial Master, so his honorific title after his death was Great Imperial Master Grand Bodhisattva. His statue is in a sitting posture, wearing a Vairochana Buddha ritual crown and dressed in the Emperor's Great Dragon robe of the imperial court. It is rare to see such an example that is not completely secular or monk-like in the *Biographical Collection of Eminent Monks*.

The monastic administration at Wolf Mountain underwent many changes, namely, from being an open-door monastery to a hereditary monastery with seven sects (mutual governance from divided sects). When I arrived at the mountain, it was under the sectarian era. The seven sects took turns each year to jointly manage the Grand Buddha Hall and the Great Saint Hall on the mountaintop. In 1943, it was our sect's turn, the fourth branch of the Dharma

Gathering Temple (Faju An), to take care of the duties on the mountaintop.

According to Chinese monastic regulations, if the abbot is selected from monks who came from the "ten directions" (that is, not affiliated with that monastery,) then it is known as an open-door monastery. If the tonsure master (who transmits the precepts and shaves the head of disciples) passes on the monastery to his disciples and so on down, then it is called a hereditary monastery. The early monasteries, however, all belonged to the open-door category, which were supported by government funding. Later, there were privately constructed monasteries and liberty in tonsure (not requiring government approval), so the small-scale monasteries developed into hereditary monasteries. Naturally, after being ruled by the state government, and especially after the ten-year Communist Cultural Revolution, Guangjiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain

combined the whole mountain into one monastery. Furthermore, all the monks within Nantong district were gathered at Guangjiao Monastery. As a result, it was unlikely that Wolf Mountain would return to being a hereditary monastery any time soon.

Guangjiao Monastery and Dasheng Temple

My first impressions of Wolf Mountain were of the tall mountains and of the monastery filled with people. Since it was crowded with visitors, the monks were busy too. Because it was a pilgrimage monastery, tending to the incense at each Buddha Hall was an extremely engaging job, especially during the year that it was our turn to take care of the mountaintop. However, in the winter that year in Subei, random gunfights between the Communist New Fourth Army and the Japanese Army often broke out. The areas up and down the mountain all entered into a state of war. During daytime the Japanese Army would climb up the mountain to dig trenches for warfare. At nighttime the New Fourth Army, dressed in civilian clothes, would come to visit. The young gentries living near the foot of the mountain often disappeared or were found shot dead. As a result, the donations we received diminished day by day, and by the New Year of 1944, the mountain had become extremely lonesome and quiet.

I stayed at Wolf Mountain until October 1944, and then went to Shanghai to a temple affiliated with Wolf Mountain, Dasheng. I returned to Wolf Mountain in the spring of 1946, after which I went to Shanghai for a second time. Afterwards I never went back to Nantong. My stay at Wolf Mountain lasted less than two years. At the time of my final departure, Wolf Mountain was occupied and encamped by the Nationalist Army, with only the troops left, no visitors, only weapons could be seen, and no relics to

be found. The monastery doors, windows, tables, and chairs all became the beds and firewood for the army. Aside from a few monks in their sixties and seventies who were unwilling to wander elsewhere, the other monks all left Wolf Mountain. I witnessed the fall of Wolf Mountain from its flourishing to its decline, from its decline to its perishing. From this I became aware of the impermanence of things as taught by the Buddhadharmā, and I felt heart-stricken and helpless. Impermanence may cause flourishing to decline, but decline followed by perishing is not necessary. The world's survival depends on humanity, so I am still full of hope in the future of Buddhism.

My understanding and introspection into Buddhism began about half a year after I became a monk. Besides the elder generations – master, grandmaster, great grandmaster, and great-great grandmaster – that came at the right place and time to oversee my homework, they also enlisted two elderly teachers to help me with my studies. One of them taught me *Daily Chan Liturgy* every day, and the other taught me *The Four Books and Five Classics*. The former was of course a monk; the latter had also been a monk at Wolf Mountain, but returned home to lay life after he passed the county imperial exam and became a scholar. The two of them were kind and earnest; not only did they teach me how to recite and memorize, but they also explained the content of the lessons. This led me to understand that the sutras were not only for the purpose of reciting to the dead for redeeming lost souls. Actually, they should be spoken to humanity and for us to follow their teachings. The Way of Confucius and Mencius could be used to guide the world, and the principles and methods of Buddhadharmā could be used to transcend the world. If the two work together as sides of the same coin, world peace and a pure land on earth could be achieved. It is a shame that at the time, there was a serious shortage of talent among the Buddhist



Guangjiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain Photo by Frank Ji

community, but there were many ritual monks who mainly performed ceremonies for the dead. Those who could speak the Dharma and guide the masses were extremely rare. The monks at Wolf Mountain more or less had several years of education, and some even became elementary school teachers. However, there was no one who could speak the Dharma, nor was there a venerable (monk) who was revered and respected by the public far and near. I myself had not thought about becoming someone like that. However, I did have an uncontainable wish, and that was to do my best to learn and understand the Dharma and to share it with other people.

Since I had no choice, my course of study was filled with shifts and turns and did not go smoothly. At Wolf Mountain, although I had two teachers, I also had to perform the duties of a young monk: besides the daily morning and evening services, ringing the bell and drum, cleaning the environment, sweeping the courtyard, and cleaning up the kitchen and lavatory. I was even growing vegetables, cooking, washing clothes for the old monks, and disposing the contents of the chamber pot. As a result, during that time, I learned all the skills and means a monk should have. Although it cost me time for studies, in terms of practical living, I learned the concepts and ability to “do everything on my own” and that “all jobs are equal.”

I arrived at the Dasheng Temple in Shanghai, which was a purely ritual and ceremonial monastery. Night and day, I would visit lay families to recite sutras, perform repentance ceremonies, conduct offering and sacrificial ceremonies for the dead, and to bestow blessings and long life for the living. There was no time to study and the temple did not have the financial resources to hire a tutor for me. At that time commodity prices were rising, and the income from performing Buddhist rituals did not balance with the expenditures for maintaining the

temple and daily needs. This made me think about the strong inter-relationship between the turmoil of the country and society and the stability of the lives of the people. A country and society is made up of people, so if the people’s minds are restless, then society will be in chaos. If the society is in chaos then the country will be unstable. For the country to flourish and the people to live in peace, one must start by delivering the minds of humanity. And to deliver the minds of humanity, one must begin with education. This kind of education is not the ordinary lessons taught in school, but an emphasis on Buddhist faith; that is, using the concept of causes and conditions to console and encourage the minds of humanity. One could also say, “To know the past, observe the present consequence. To know the future, observe one’s present conduct.” So that everyone can abide by the law, do one’s duty, do the best of one’s share, persevere in effort, do not escape from reality, do not avoid responsibilities, face all problems, and use compassion and wisdom to correct and improve oneself. It is regretful that even though the Buddhadharmas are so wonderful, yet because there were no talents to widely teach the Dharma, so very few people knew about it, and very many people misunderstood it, and even more people did not know how to use it to save the world and humanity.

Jing’an Monastery

Under such a motivation, for several years I asked my grandmaster many times to allow me to go for further studies. Thus, in the spring of 1947, I ended my small-temple life at the Dasheng, and started my new life as a transfer student at the Buddhist Academy of Jing’an (Quiet Calm) Monastery in Shanghai.

Tracing the history of the development of education by Buddhist monasteries began from the time of the Buddha. Wherever there is a gathering

of the sangha, there must be daily classes, that is, discussions and teachings on the precepts and sutras, as well as the practice of meditation. Therefore, every dharma center and every monastery is in fact a school. Especially Nalanda University at the time Master Xuanzang traveled to India to study abroad during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). He saw that it had nine monasteries, eighteen temples, covered an area of forty-eight miles, and was the largest and earliest comprehensive university in world Buddhist history. At the time, there were more than a thousand professors and tens of thousands of students doing research and studies on various sectarians. Sects such as the Yogachara, Madhyamaka, Mantra, Tantra and all sects of the Mahayana Buddhism were taught at the same time.

When Buddhism spread to China, Master Kumarajiva’s translation bureau at the West Bright Pavilion (Chn. Ximing Ge) and the Free Garden (Chn. Xiaoyao Yuan), as well as Master Xuanzang’s translation bureau at the Great Compassion Monastery (Chn. Da Ci’en Si), gathered both the eminent monks and elites of the time. And during the course of translation of the sutras, classes on various courses were also simultaneously conducted. Until the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties, the monasteries were often the place of academic study for scholars. Even the Academy of Learning for the Confucian school was studying under the same format as Chan Buddhist monastery courses. At the time of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), Buddhism began to decline for many reasons. First, the monastery placed no importance on education; second, the intellectual elite opposed Buddhism, and finally after the upheaval of the Hong-Yang Rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Buddhist monasteries in the sixteen provinces of south-eastern China were almost completely devastated and in ruins. As a result,

at the time of Emperor Dezong of Qing dynasty, Guangxu Period in 1898, the governor-general of Hu-Guang Provinces, Zhang Zhidong, wrote three chapters of *The Request for Education* (Chn. Quanxue pian) to pledge to Emperor Guangxu to adopt Chinese studies as the core and Western studies for application. He also sought to utilize the monastery properties for education purposes, taking away seventy percent of the monastery properties for the use of student dormitories and seventy percent of the monastery possessions for education funding. When the word spread, tens of thousands of Buddhist monasteries and hundreds and thousands of monks in the country were in a panic and a helpless situation. As a result, the abbot of several monasteries turned to the Japanese for help, requesting the Japanese government to negotiate with the Qing Dynasty officials by proposing their own plan for schooling. The first application was from the abbot of Tiantong Monastery in Zhejiang province, he invited the Japanese Soto Sect Buddhist scholar Mizuno Baigyo, and founded the Hunan Sangha Institute (Hunan Seng Xuetao) in 1903. Later, in 1906, Master Wenxi founded the Common Sangha Institute (Putong Seng Xuetao) at Tianning Temple, Yangzhou. In 1908, the lay Buddhist Mr. Yang Wenhui (1837–1911) founded the Qihuan Jingshe (Skt. Jetavana Vihara) at the Nanjing Jinling Sutra Printing Society (Nanjing Jinling Kejing She). Although there were only ten or more lay and monk students, they were all prominent talents, such as Master Taixu (1890–1947), Master Zhiguang (d.u.), Master Renshan (d.u.), and the lay students such as Ouyang Jingwu and Mei Guangxi. Due to financial difficulties, it lasted for only two years; however, its effect on the future of Chinese Buddhism after the Republic Year was far and profound.

The so-called Master Taixu style of sangha education and the Consciousness Only school of

Ouyang Jingwu contributed to the nurturing of talents among the sangha, and talents for Buddhist studies among the academics. Both of them were simultaneously developed from the system of Yang Wenhui, so some people revered Mr. Yang as the father of modern Chinese Buddhism. In 1947, when I enrolled in the Buddhist Academy of Jing'an Monastery, there were more than forty known Buddhist Academies in the whole country. Some were closed after two or three years. They were unable to maintain the sources for teaching talents and students, and especially the financial resources for sustaining the monasteries.

The Buddhist Academy of Jing'an Monastery was founded in the spring of 1946. At the time, the monastery was undergoing a dispute between two sects – the hereditary disciples and the monks from the ten directions. It turned out that the monks from the ten directions gained dominance, and they were determined to reform and reorganize education, winning the sympathy of public opinion. The teachers of this academy belonged to the second generation of Master Taixu.

At the time, the education level of the students in almost every Buddhist academy was unevenly distributed. The oldest students were thirty years old and some, like me, were only seventeen. Some students had been primary school teachers and some, like me, had only a fourth-grade primary school education level. The courses ranged from high school to university level. Math and English classes were junior high to high school level. Chinese classes were high school level, and Buddhist classes were university level. For example, the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (Chn. Dasheng qixin lun), *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts of Brahma Net* (Chn. Fanwang pusajie jing), *Indian Buddhism History*, *Outline of the Eight Schools* (Chn. Bazong gangyao), *Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses* (Chn. Bashi

guiju song), etc. The Buddhism courses were all university level, and the Buddhist studies teachers also included university professors, so it was unclear what level we really belonged to.

Regarding these courses, other than Chinese, English and math, I didn't really understand them. When I was at Wolf Mountain, I learned Buddhadharma from the sutras and from chanting, and it was easier to understand. Now, the theoretical and rational shastras were commentaries written by philosophical masters after they developed their own understanding, organization, and elaboration. And there were many shastras with Sanskrit translations and particular Buddhist terms, so it is very difficult to fully comprehend them in a short period of time. As a result, in the first two to three months I thought about quitting school almost every day. I wished I could understand sutras and comprehend Buddhadharma but after entering the Buddhist academy, I felt powerless and frustrated and didn't know where to begin. At the time, no one told us that Mahayana Buddhism in India had three systems: Yogachara, Madhyamaka, and Tathagatagarbha, and that *Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses* (Chn. Bashi guiju song) belonged to the Yogachara system, and the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (Chn. Dasheng qixin lun) belonged to the Tathagatagarbha system, and what the differences were between them. The Mahayana Buddhism in China had eight systems: Vinaya (Chn. Lu), Consciousness-Only (Chn. Faxiang), Three Treatises (Chn. Sanlun), Tiantai, Avatamsaka (Chn. Huayan), Pure Land (Chn. Jingtu), Chan, and Esoteric Buddhism (Chn. Mi). What were their differences and similarities? The teachers introduced them separately, and they didn't give a comprehensive comparison. This puzzled me. Why were there so many different views originating from the same Shakyamuni Buddha in India? Of course I believed that they were all true and correct, but

which came first, and which was more profound? There should be some kind of explanation and justification! I put my questions to an older student, recognized by others as having deep knowledge, and his answer was: "Don't worry so much! We listen to what the teachers tell us, and then we say the same thing to the others! Otherwise, it would be too much, and you'll get a headache!" This kind of answer demonstrated the learning atmosphere among the Buddhist community at the time, which still lagged in the traditional concept of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next. Aside from a few master level researchers, very few people had a sense of how to conduct comparative research.

From Student to Soldier

So I stayed at the Buddhist Academy of Jing'an Monastery for five consecutive semesters. In the



Young Master Sheng Yen DDM Archive Photo

honor roll of every semester exam, I ranked the top fifth or sixth among thirty students. This consoled me and it made me feel very grateful. The students at the Buddhist Academy of Jing'an Monastery also had to perform Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in order to maintain our living expenditures and educational fees. The Buddhist educational foundation I have established is very closely related to my studies at the Buddhist Academy of Jing'an Monastery. Today, I still cherish the memory of life at the Buddhist Academy, and of the teachers and classmates that I once lived with. In the spring of 1988, I went back to Mainland China to visit my relatives. I also visited the Jing'an Monastery that had been restored after having been used as a warehouse by the government. The Main Buddha Hall in which we did our morning and evening services was already destroyed. Most of the teachers from that time already passed away. Only three of them are still alive: Master Benguang, who had been a professor at Jinling University, Master Yumei of Wolf Mountain, as well as Mr. Lin Ziqing, author of *The Chronological Biography of Master Hongyi* (Chn. Hongyi dashi nianpu). However, I only met with Master Yumei. Among my classmates, I only met three of them. I was deeply moved to see that everything had changed!

Between the spring and summer of 1949, there were about ten or more classmates and teachers who left Mainland China and came to Taiwan. Included are the already deceased Master Nanting, Master Daoyuan, Master Baisheng, and Miaoran, the current Chairman of Taiwan Zhiguang College of Industry and Commerce, as well as Shoucheng, the previous Director of the Taipei Huayan Buddhist Lotus Society, and Master Renjun, who is currently residing in the United States. Among the classmates who left Mainland China, some are currently residing in a foreign country, some are spreading the Dharma, some have returned to lay life, and



Shifu's diploma from the Jing'an Buddhist Academy DDM Archive Photo

to report to the communication corps of the Nationalist army, 207th Division.

People in the ancient times had the great aspiration “to lay down the pen and take up the sword,” and here we were, “shedding the robes of monks and putting on the military uniform.” However, we were still full of strong hope and faith, believing that after the Nationalist army arrived in Taiwan, after reorganization, they would one day return to Mainland China in the future, and let Buddhism shine again. So I still carried my monk’s robes with me. My body had always been feeble and prone to illness, so the classmates who remained at the Buddhist Academy mostly advised me, “Don’t be in such a hasty rush! According to your health and physical conditions, perhaps

some have passed away. One of these classmates is Master Liaozhong, who is the current Secretary General of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and is in preparation for founding the Xuanzang Industrial Institute. He has contributed greatly to the Taiwan Buddhist community for the past ten years, and I respect him greatly. He could be viewed as an honor to Jing’an Monastery.

My youth passed away in such wandering and relocation – becoming a monk, performing ritual ceremonies, studying, and being interrupted in schooling. In the summer of 1949 the situation was that of one war ending (the Japanese invasion) with another on the rise (the Communist revolution). The Nationalist army suffered defeat after defeat, and eventually withdrew from Mainland China and retreated to Taiwan. I reported to the recruitment station for young officers of the 207th Division on May 15, 1949. The second day, I went along with Master Liaozhong, and carried with me some simple luggage and a few sets of monk’s robes, shared a pedicab with him, and left the Buddhist Academy

in the army, you would be burdened to death within three months. At that time, what use is it to talk about spreading Buddhadharma, and protecting the country and Buddhism?” Fortunately, when I asked for leave from teacher Mr. Lin Ziqing, he said: “May you grow firm and strong by being tested in an era such as this!” And under such a belief, I have been growing strong until now. I am very grateful for his words of encouragement.

At the time, I had just turned twenty, but according to the Western way of calculating age, I was not yet eighteen. From becoming a monk at fourteen and joining the army at twenty, to me, these short five and a half years lasted as if they were half a century. From being a country boy who knows nothing, transformed into a young monk, then transformed again to become a young soldier, I experienced much, learned much, and have grown much. To me, that time of my life was both the years of worries and the first golden era. It is worth memorizing, remembering, and cherishing, so it is “toil without complaint” and “pain with no regret.”

Constructing a Sense of Self

BY

Simon Child

This article discusses the importance of not clinging to the idea of “stages” in meditation. It describes how we create the idea of “self”, and how through practice we can experience a state of no-self and emptiness. It is taken from a Dharma talk given at a Silent Illumination Intensive Retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center on May 27, 2015. It was transcribed by Jen Hu, edited by Buffe Maggie Laffey.

Creating Our Own Problems

AS WE GET FURTHER into our retreat some of the difficulties reduce, but they tend to persist. We might still be troubled by discomfort in sitting, drowsiness, and scattered mind. This practice can be quite difficult – isn’t it surprising how tiring it can be just sitting still all day? In the beginning the tiredness may be jet lag, but by now we’ve adjusted to the time zone of the retreat. If we find ourselves still getting drowsy that is no longer tiredness, it’s something different. It’s the mind playing its tricks, trying to discourage you from practice because it’s not wanting you to discover something. I suspect that even if we all stayed in bed till nine AM and then had breakfast served in our rooms, and then maybe came and did a little meditation about eleven o’clock after coffee and pastries, some of us would still be drowsy. It’s just the way the mind is. With some of these difficulties we just have to persist. It’s the same with the posture. We’re doing our

best to find the best posture, but we’re sitting in an abnormal way compared to our everyday life so it’s natural that these discomforts persist. We can make it easier on ourselves if we don’t criticize ourselves for experiencing them.

There can be the tendency to say “I’m not a good meditator, everyone else is meditating so well; I’m the worst.” It’s amazing how many “worst” meditators there are in this room! This reveals our tendency to make assumptions. We look around the room and we see people sitting still. We see some people not taking a break – we imagine that they must be perfect meditators. What we don’t do is take a look inside their minds and see what’s going on there; if we did we might not be so impressed. Or all those people who dared to move their legs before the bell, we imagine they must be absolutely hopeless. But maybe they’re doing twenty minutes of really good practice, much more than those who do two hours of sitting physically still but with a wandering mind. Don’t make assumptions about the people around you,

and make it harder for yourself by judging yourself a failure. There are lots of different ways we can make it difficult for ourselves; let's not add to the list.

Everyone's Path Is Different

There's another way we make it difficult for ourselves; I warned about this when I spoke about stages of practice. I specifically warned you that these do not present a hierarchy for you to progress through. They are just a way of sharing some experiences that may arise during the practice. It's not necessary that they arise, nor that they arise in that order. These are not destinations, not something to seek out. But our natural tendency when we hear about something is to want it. Especially if you think it's something that you *should* be having, because you've misunderstood the explanation. Treat it as a map of what *might* happen. There are some states you might encounter during the practice, and having a map might be useful for orientation when you find yourself in that rather unfamiliar territory. You might have some memory of what was said and so know how to practise with it.

It's not my intention that you track everything that I describe, and go through it, keeping up with me, that's not it. Your route through the practice is your own route. You start from a different place, a different personal life history, a different personality. You start with issues in your life which are different from others. It's perfectly normal that everyone's path through the practice is different.

Again I'm not saying this is a route that you *should* be taking, I'm just saying you might experience these states along the way. If you're comparing your own state of practice with the situations I'm describing, this is another way you can make it unnecessarily hard and judge yourself a failure. Consider this as pre-information. If you encounter a unified state,

then you have some idea how to practice in that state, but if you don't encounter that state then just carry on practicing as you are. There's no big deal really. But if you encounter a unified state, some additional instructions on how to practice in that state are useful so you don't get stuck. In that state the sense of the body awareness fading can be confusing if your practice is body awareness, so it's good to have had some instruction on how to respond to that. That was my purpose in talking about these stages.

As Shifu (Master Sheng Yen) said, these stages are not talked about in the history of the tradition. They are Shifu's own invention just for convenience of sharing the practice and explaining it. These states are not anything particularly important to seek out.

This Is Not What I Seek

Another thing that Shifu said is that whatever state you experience, remind yourself "this is not what I seek." This is an antidote to attachment. Yes, it might seem a bit of a downer to say "this is not what I seek" when you find the mind clear, blissful, beautiful, and wonderful. But if you don't remind yourself then you may become attached to such a state and then you block your further practice. You're trying to hold on to something, and if it slips away you try to regain it, and that's not the practice. The practice is not to regain the state you were in a few minutes ago. Whatever state you encounter, "this is not what I seek." The practice continues.

Try to adopt this attitude to practice: not comparing with others and not even comparing with yourself. Just practice this moment. This moment's practice – just do it. When the next moment arrives, do that moment's practice. This is an attitude which can take you deeper into the practice.

I spoke yesterday about a deeper state that can be found. Again this is not an instruction that this is

where you *should* be. This is simply a state that might be found through practice – the mind before thought, or the mind between thoughts. This is an interesting state to explore; I want to speak more about it now.

Through being fully aware of what's presenting itself to the mind, but not attaching to it, the thought dissolves away. It lets itself go. If it's clearly seen it's no effort for you to let go of that thought. Another thought comes along, and that one is also clearly seen and disappears. I don't know if any of you tested this out in your experience yesterday, but it's an interesting phenomenon. The thoughts really do go, so long as they're fully and clearly seen and you don't attach to them. If you're practicing that way



Photo by Deniz Altindas

then naturally the thought trains get shorter and shorter, because the moment they're noticed the train ends. You get to a point where as a thought begins to appear, it's already dissolved before you.

Purity of Attention

It's difficult to explain this if you've not experienced it. But to give you an example: let's say you hear a sound of a bell. The hearing of a bell sound often leads to the thought "that was a bell," and then "that was the bell of the chant leader," and then "there are usually three bells, there'll be some more to follow." You're going off on a thought train already. But if you could hear the bell, perhaps also recognize it as a bell, and let it go, then you may be almost surprised by the second bell, because you haven't got a thought construct that there'll be another bell to follow. "Oh a bell." And it fades. "Oh, another bell."

I believe there's neurophysiological evidence that meditators can respond in this way. Non-meditators will hear the first bell, notice it, register it in their brain waves (as revealed by an EEG), then they tune out and don't have much response to the second and third bells. But meditators react the same way to each bell. They hear each one distinctly because they're separate events. In between those bells there's been a gap of no bell, and then there's a bell. So there's, shall we say, more purity of attention. For the non-meditators the attention to the second and third bells is rather poisoned and weakened, because they've already decided the bells are not interesting; they'll not hear them. But the meditator hears the bell, and lets it go. And hears completely afresh the second bell, and lets it go, and so on. There's a vitality in the attention. There's freshness in this approach, and a lack of blurring. This is just a way of phrasing it; it's due to the lack of a mental construct of a sequence of bells – you're just experiencing sounds.

The attention could be even sharper; you don't need to go as far as calling it a bell – you just hear the sound. It doesn't need to be labeled as a bell. The mind gets sharper and sharper, and the mind is really very present and attentive – experiencing almost no thought. The moment the thought begins to emerge, before it's even distinguished whether it's a sight, or a sound, or a memory or an idea, it's just witnessed and released. It doesn't need to develop into being a bell sound, and to being a bell, and to being a part of a series of bells. There's a release before it gets that far.

In this way the mind begins to be empty of thoughts. Any thought that starts is not continued for any length of time at all. It gets to a point where you can hardly even say a thought begins, because it sort of disappears as it's beginning – before it's begun. Notice this is rather strange territory to be

describing, because it's difficult to describe when we get into a realm where language fails us.

The Mind Without Thought

Language is created by people out of common experience and more or less mutually agreed labels. But the people who invented language weren't familiar with these states, and didn't develop a proper terminology to describe them. Buddhists invented terminology, and use words in certain ways, and it becomes a jargon. But unless you really know the states, are you quite clear what's behind the jargon? It doesn't really solve the problem.

There is this state, the mind before thought, the mind without thought. What's the experience of that? Pretty difficult to explain. It could sound

to you as though it is an unconscious state, because you're not even registering bells as bells. It might appear that you're not conscious and aware. Yet on the other hand, if there are bells signalling prostrations you'll still do the prostrations. So you must be hearing the bells. There's this paradoxical quality that you're not creating an idea of the environment of bells and prostrations – the mind is not busy doing that – but still you respond to the environment. So you are perceiving the environment, yet you're not creating a mental image of the environment.



Photo by Peter Lin

You might say, what's interesting about this? Is this just some party trick? Why bother? Well there is something else of interest in this state. We're getting near now to an understanding, a realization of this technical Buddhist jargon term, "emptiness." How does that work out?

You're in a state where the mind is not creating any mental construct to represent the world it's experiencing. It's not attaching to ideas and events. It's just fully present with what's experienced, not creating anything to add to it. There's something very interesting that might dawn upon you at some point. The sense of self – which from the Buddhist point of view is a mental construct – the sense of self isn't there because you're not doing any mental constructing. Virtually all our lives we are constructing all sorts of things including the sense of self. But if the mind is not constructing anything, it means the sense of self is also not constructed. This is not a deliberate act, "I'll stop constructing myself now." It's not that, it's just associated with the settling down of the mind.

Absence of the Sense of Self

This absence of the sense of self, it's not like something shouts at you, "Hey look at me I'm absent!", that's not the way it works. It's more like at some point, "Huh, this is different." – perceiving things from a different perspective. It may not be clear what's going on. Sometimes you can be in this state for a while but not notice it, because it doesn't have a particular quality that stands out until you realize it's a different perspective. This is why you hear the stories of the masters, like Xiangyen Zhixian, he heard a pebble hitting the tile. Ping! He realized his perception was different: "That sound, huh, I'm hearing differently from how I would hear it normally." What's happened is that though you

are indeed perceiving the environment you're not constructing anything from the perceptions, including not even constructing a sense of self. This is a route towards the no-self experience.

Buddhists have often read about the no-self experience and understand it to varying degrees – often *misunderstand* it to a considerable degree. There's a lot of confusion and mistaken attitudes around this. Lots of Buddhists say, "There isn't a self, I have to get rid of myself, that's my task." Or, "There isn't a self so I can't engage anything to do with myself and my practice - I'm not responsible for it because I'm not there to do it." This is a sort of nihilism. It's an avoidance; a common mistaken attitude about no-self. Another troublesome attitude is to be afraid of no-self. Sometimes in interviews people say "I'm not ready for it, I don't want to disappear yet, I've got things I want to do in my life, and I don't think my girlfriend will forgive me if I disappeared!"

There's misunderstanding, it's common, and it's based on our sense of self as something, some object that identifies us. The concept of no-self challenges that. It seems that you have to get rid of the self, or that the self will get rid of itself and disappear. This raises a rather strange question as to what does that leave us with? Language is again letting us down. What's also letting us down is our lack of familiarity with it – it's something entirely theoretical, couched in words, and it confuses us.

Importance of Experience

This is why practice is so important. However much we study the philosophy of Buddhism, and however clearly we're able to understand it intellectually, there is still the challenge of actually realizing it in our own experience. That's a very different matter, but a very important matter, because it really helps

counter the misunderstandings of the philosophy. If you've known this in your own experience, then you can read the philosophy the way it was intended to be understood. But if you read it without the experience, it's very hard to understand it appropriately. We distort it. To the extent that we're scared of it we try and defend ourselves against it. Or we misuse it by denying responsibility for our actions. All of this is problematic.

Through practice, you can touch this place where there is no sense of self, because the mind has stopped creating it. This lifelong project the mind has had of creating a sense of self has taken a brief vacation. It's gone off duty for little while, and you noticed it.

You can see language letting us down again when I say "you" noticed it. It doesn't make sense, does it? But we have no other way of expressing it in language. For a time the sense of self was absent, and yet everything else was carrying on as it always was. The birds continue singing, the body continues sitting. If you're doing prostrations the prostrations continue, and the bells continue. But it's sensed differently, and this is what's different about it. It's not self-referenced or self-concerned. The selfishness is no longer there, because the sense of self is no longer there.

Self-Concern

I think you'll recognize, if you're clear what's going on in your mind during practice, that most of your thoughts are self-concerned thoughts. They're referring to how you feel about yourself or how you think others feel about you. They're referring to your career, your family, these types of things. Most of your thoughts are extremely self-concerned. This is perfectly natural; this is part of our biological mechanism for survival. If as organisms we didn't have a sense of self, and an urge to protect it, our

species would have died out long ago. The sense of self has a perfectly useful biological function, this is why it's such a strong instinct, but it turns out it's not essential, at least not all of the time. It's possible to experience not having a sense of self, to experience not being in the slightest bit selfish or self-concerned. Having had that experience changes your perspective on many things. Such an experience can be very valuable.

It might be quite short lived. It could be a fraction of a second, a few seconds, a few minutes, a few hours, maybe a few days, though when it's longer it's usually an intermittent coming and going rather than continuous. Even when you're no longer in that state it's more than just a memory. It's a knowing, an understanding of emptiness. It's a realization of emptiness of self. I spoke yesterday about how when you see yourself about to say something inappropriate, it dissolves away if you see it very clearly; it's not an effort to not say it, it's just not said. This is now extended; if the sense of self is not there then the self-directed actions don't arise, can't arise. Even when the sense of self has returned the self-directed actions that arise are seen in a different way: "Huh, I can see where that action's coming from, but it's coming from a misunderstanding of self," and it's released.

Of course some self-directed actions are appropriate. Someone who's had a realization of emptiness still turns up at the dining hall for meals; it's necessary to eat. But the self-attachment aspect of it is greatly weakened. During experiences it's totally weakened, but after the experience, even when the sense of self returns, it's still weakened. There's a new dimension to your understanding and to your experience of life, and this selfless perspective counteracts to some extent the selfish aspect. Now you will evaluate your actions in a different way, from a different perspective.

Wisdom and Compassion Arise from No-Self

In Buddhism we tend to talk about no-self experience as an aspect of insight, the realization of wisdom. But it's also identically the realization of compassion. If you've followed what I've described, that if the sense of self isn't essential, if we've had experience of it not being there, and if in the light of that experience we find ourselves reducing our self-concerned actions, then a huge space (which was previously obstructed by self-concern) becomes available for compassion to manifest. So wisdom and compassion both arise in their full expression from no-self.

Without a realization of no-self we can still try to be compassionate, but there's always the risk that some selfishness may be involved in it. We should still try. It's not that we should wait until we're enlightened to do anything compassionate, of course not. But there's always the risk of self-concern getting in the way. If one is acting from a position of emptiness of self then there is no self-concern to get in the way. For someone who has experienced lack of self, but is back in it now, still their approach to compassion is likely to be improved. They are more available. They're less self-concerned.

It is worth recognizing that no-self is only a temporary state. You fall out of it and a degree of selfishness does return, but some aspects of self-concern may be permanently dissolved by the experience, and the aspects that remain become more obvious and therefore more trainable because there's now a new baseline against which to contrast them, whereas previously it just seemed normal.

There is the saying, and it's not just a truism, it's *true* – after such an experience, rather than finding it's the end of practice you realize it's the beginning of practice. There's an awful lot to do. You realize this practice needs to continue, because you realize the harm in the degree of selfishness you're still continuing, and you know it doesn't need to be so. You realize you're still obstructed in various ways, and though you may still find it difficult to let go you've gained a greater confidence in the Dharma. By now the Dharma is not just something you've read about and developed faith in; you've experienced it. Your experience supports your theoretical understanding, and your theoretical understanding confirms your experience. So there's solidity here, a strengthening of faith in the Dharma.

That is why this experience is spoken about as something important. But it can also get overinflated, and people can get attached. They might fall into striving and seeking. If someone's had such an experience they may become attached to it and proud. If their selfishness asserts itself strongly after the event there may be problems.

There are cases where people go astray and become proud, and pronounce themselves as enlightened buddhas, and make fools of themselves. Be cautious if you find yourself heading that direction. Have the humility to realize that the need for practice is not over, practice needs to continue.

The importance of this insight is the weakening of self-concern. During the experience, we could say, a total absence of self-concern. After it, likely a weakened self-concern but definitely still present and needing further practice, though now with a clearer motivation to practice, a stronger faith in the power of practice, and hopefully practice continues.

*Experience supports
theoretical understanding,
and theoretical understanding
confirms experience.*





The sense of self Photo by Joshua Earle

This insight is available with the practice that we're doing here now. If you follow the instruction I've been giving it's possible you could find your way to a mind with no thought, even to a mind with no sense of self. This won't be found by cutting off thought, by cutting off awareness of thought, by denying thought, by not allowing yourself to think something. It's almost contradictorily the opposite; simply allowing the thoughts to flow and being aware of them is what can take you there. This is rather different to what you might have expected, but that is the instruction of the practice.

Remember that the practices which point you towards cutting off thought are what Shifu tended to call preparatory or preliminary practices. For someone whose mind is extremely wild, it's useful to use such techniques to gain a certain degree of

concentration – perhaps you will be better able to hear the Dharma talks. Maybe you can begin to cultivate an awareness of the mind, but after you start doing that you let go of cutting off, you open the mind up, and you continue to deepen the practice in that way.

Metaphor of Self as a “Sense”

Talking about no-self is very difficult and we can only talk through metaphor and hope it has some meaning for you. I try out different metaphors at different times, sometimes one works better than another. There's one that I came up with recently, a slightly different tack, which I'll try on you now just in case it's helpful. It might not be, in which case just throw it away.

We assume our sense of self to be a thing and of course in some traditions it's very definitely regarded as an actual thing. It's a soul for example, something which transmigrates, goes to heaven and so on. Some religions and cultures have that common concept of a soul, identifying our self as that thing. Buddhism doesn't have the sense of self in that way, because Buddhism understands no-self. But even in Buddhism we have to talk about the self. It's meaningless to talk about no-self if we're not starting from a position of self. And we do have a sense of self; it's what motivates us to do certain self-directed activities, to look after ourselves.

In the way we construct our language, and in the way we relate with others, we have a sense of “myself” distinct from that “other” person. It's different for different people: some people find themselves more communally minded, but still there's a sense of self there; some people find themselves very individualistic and very definitely separate. We all have this sense of self, which is loosely aligned with this body. We know the body isn't the self, yet we tend to align self with the body – “This is me.” And we know the mind isn't quite the self, but we align self with the mind too. Somehow we have this idea of self, and though it is not clearly defined it is operational and we make use of it. We go through life.

We have other senses. Interestingly in some respect these seem to have the same quality. They're not a thing, but we treat them as such in terms of our language and our response to them. Think of a sense of danger; sometimes we sense danger and we suddenly become extra alert. Maybe we've heard a branch snapping, maybe it's a fire alarm, or maybe it's something not so clear. But for some reason, our senses are alerted and we're aware we're sensing danger. Was that snapping branch due to the footstep of a bear? Or was it due to a rotting branch falling off a tree? Was that fire alarm indicating a serious

fire, and is our life in danger? Or is it just a fault in the alarm circuit? The point being that the sense of danger is a very real sense. We experience it. We respond to it; it drives our actions. But it can also be a false alarm. There may be no danger behind it.

The sense of self is rather like that. It's a real sense. It directs our actions, therefore we assume there's something behind it, but it turns out there isn't. There isn't a self to be found behind the sense of self. This is hard to believe because we're so familiar with this sense of self. But it's easier to believe when you've experienced it. If you apply the practice in a dedicated way, and experience this, then it becomes more credible. Then you won't be the person who goes around saying “I've got to get rid of myself.” You drop that sort of language. If you're the sort of person who goes around saying “I'm not responsible for my actions because I don't have a self,” you'll drop that sort of talk too.

Directly from Scattered Mind to No-Self

It's difficult to find, but important to find and very useful. Useful to yourself and to others because it's an important step on the path of purifying your actions, of cultivating compassion, avoiding making so many mistakes, avoiding being so selfish. And it really can be found simply through the mind settling and resting in awareness – resting even from the activity of constructing a sense of self.

This is not something you can rush off and make happen in the next moment, next sitting period. Or maybe it is; you know, it's not so far away as we imagine. We tend to imagine practice as being something very difficult and taking a very long time. Often we talk about gradual cultivation; we think, “It might be sudden enlightenment, but I've got to wait a long time to get there.” Some of you have asked

me, is there a shortcut? Is there fast food version of Chan practice?

Actually Shifu said yes, there is a shortcut! That's partly what Shifu's article that I mentioned yesterday was about¹. He specifically states in the article that it's not necessary to go through these stages. We can start from scattered mind, it's not necessary to bother with concentration. It's not necessary to bother with unifying the mind. We can go straight from a scattered mind to no-mind – that sounds like a shortcut to me. This is not something which Shifu has invented, he pointed out that this is a strong teaching in Chan practice throughout the ages. He quotes several past masters, pointing to exactly this approach – “Sudden practice, sudden enlightenment.” So let me tell you his method, shall I?

His method: “When thoughts arise, just be aware of them. With awareness of the thoughts, they vanish.” I told you that yesterday didn't I? With a scattered mind you've plenty of opportunities to be aware of thoughts, so also plenty of opportunities for thoughts to vanish. You don't have to wait until you're concentrated; start right away. When thoughts arise, just be aware of them. With awareness of the thoughts, they vanish. When thoughts vanish you're in a mind without thoughts. If another thought comes, you're aware of it and that vanishes too. There's no problem. It really is that simple. You all thought it involved a lot of hard work, and painful sitting, and all the rest of it. You didn't really need to come to retreat did you? You could've just sat and been aware, anywhere.

No Intermediate Stages

There's a second part to the verse which in some respect we can say is not essential. It's not an instruction of what to do; it's just a reminder of what not to do. The second part to the verse is, “Without

a single thought arising let go of all conditions.” If you're in the state where thoughts have vanished, don't attach to conditions, i.e. don't create new thoughts. Don't be trying to remember “Oooh what was that thought that just went away, and I wonder which one will come next?” That just makes a mess of things.

Stick with “When thoughts arise, be aware of them.” The next phrase is not further instruction, just a description, “With the awareness of them thoughts vanish” – the instruction again is: “When thoughts arise, just be aware of them.”

The supplementary instruction, in case you become tempted towards attachment, is “Let go of all conditions, don't create any new thoughts,” and that's it. You can go directly from scattered mind to no-mind, from scattered mind to no-self. There don't need to be any intermediate stages.

In that article Shifu says this verse is quite common throughout the Chan records. He mentions in particular Master Zongmi, Master Hanshan, and Master Changlu, all using slight variations on this same verse. He says “The ancient worthies, the Chan masters of the Tang dynasty, all the way up to Master Xuyun, all spoke in this way and advocated this method.” This is not something strange, something made up. It's standard practice of sudden enlightenment through sudden practice.

Practice silent illumination now. Silence means not attaching to the thoughts, not attaching to conditions, not creating new thoughts. Illumination means, when the thoughts arise see them, and that in itself dissolves them. That very simple instruction drops you directly into no-self, no-mind, emptiness. Maybe you want to give it a try. ☺

¹ Chan Master Sheng Yen, “Directly Practice ‘No Mind,’” *Chan Magazine*, Summer 2013, 4.

Off the Cuff and Over the Cliff

by Frank Charlton

*There are many schools, paths and sects
Yet this fool falls deftly between them all and sex,
Meditation halls where dharma rules
Even hence where the great gong calls
Shining with Buddha's bright spirit truth,
They all sing silence 'cross Shakyamuni's tooth.*

*Hobbling round hell I still cannot tell
Whereupon I lie or 'pon which I shall die
Telling these tales going nowhere fast
I would catch him up at long lost last
As Shakyamuni comes down from the mountain
Through the glade and under the fountain
His feet become rocks and the rock is his standing.*

*Throughout the ages his ignorance becomes enlightenment
Yet this is not ours for to claim entitlement
But for the many innocent who have fallen or been blown apart
In Paris or wherever mad Jihad might start
By agents of the devils' incessant insanity;
May we cleave to our hearts the truth of humanity.*



After glimpsing Zen Master Hakuin Ekaku's painting *Shakyamuni Leaving the Mountains*, following the Paris atrocity, November 14, 2015

The Arising of Conditioned Appearance from the True Mind

Part 10

BY

Abbot Venerable Guo Xing

This is the tenth in a series of articles taken from Dharma talks given by Abbot Venerable Guo Xing at the Shurangama Sutra Retreat in August 2012. The talks focus on the first four chapters of the *Shurangama Sutra*, and include the discussion of Chan theory and practice, stories of the Chan Masters, and how to apply Chan methods in daily life.

ONE CRITICAL CONCEPT in the *Shurangama Sutra* is the Three Subtle Appearances and the Six Coarse Appearances. “From a single unenlightened thought, the Three Subtle Appearances arise. Then external states become the conditions for the arising of the Six Coarse Appearances.” (Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, “Shurangama Sutra and Commentary, Roll Seven,” *Vajra Bodhi Sea* 272, January 1993, 9.) This means, an unenlightened thought has arisen and not been detected, then the Three Subtle Appearances (the Appearances of Ignorance, of the Subjective Perceiver, and of the Objective World) are created.

Initially, the enlightened nature does not contain the mountains, the rivers, and the great earth. Purna Maitrayani-putra asked the Buddha, “Since there were not the mountains, the rivers, and the great earth to begin with, then how did they come to

being?” The Buddha started to expound on the causes and conditions of this phenomenon.

The Buddha said, “Purna, you must have heard me speak often of this: the nature of enlightenment is wondrous in its functions of illumination; the inherent enlightenment illuminates all its wondrous functions.” “The nature of enlightenment” refers to the essence of our enlightened nature. “Wondrous” means it is boundless and infinite. “Illuminating” refers to its functions of cognition, perception, comprehension, etc. The main point of this verse is that our enlightened nature intrinsically exhibits infinite functions of illumination. Yet we, as ordinary people, are not aware of it. We are unaware of the fact that our inherent nature is the same as that of the Buddha. Even so, our enlightened nature remains the same. Ordinary people’s nature can still illuminate, just not as wondrously and not



Photo by Julia Caesar

as infinite. The phrase “the inherent enlightenment illuminates all its wondrous functions” is pointing out the fact that we are intrinsically endowed with unlimited and unbounded ability of illumination, which can be utilized for myriads of wondrous functions.

Another way to put it is: “the nature of enlightenment” refers to the characteristic of the nature which exhibits boundless, unlimited functions intrinsically. Meanwhile, “inherent enlightenment” expresses the usage of these functions. The former focuses on the potentiality, whereas the latter focuses on being able to utilize such ability.

The Buddha further asked, “Does this ‘enlightened illumination’ exhibit the illuminating function intrinsically, so it is thus called ‘enlightened illumination?’ Or does that enlightened nature lack the function of illumination intrinsically, so that only

through perceiving objects does its function of illumination materialize?” Which one is it?

“The enlightened nature” refers to the ability to illuminate. More specifically, through the eye-faculty, this illuminating function is capable of perceiving physical forms, which is called “seeing.” Through the ear-faculty, it can perceive sounds, which is called “hearing.” Through the nose-faculty, it can perceive scents, which is called “sense of smell.” Through the tongue-faculty, it can perceive flavors, which is called “taste.” Through the physical body, it can perceive physical sensations, which is called “sense of touch.” Through consciousness, it can perceive all sorts of thought-forms, which is called “thinking,” “judgment-making,” “analysis,” or “calculation.”

The “enlightened nature” exhibits myriads of functions. “Wondrous in its functions of illumination” captures the myriads and limitless functions



Purna Maitrayani-putra Drawing by Chien-Chih Liu

of this nature. For instance, we can “illuminate” or “attend to” our bodily movements. If we wish to stand up, in order to do so, we have to first illuminate or attend to the physical form of standing up. Consequently our body will stand up. The various maneuvers or functions that are taking place in our mind are all called “illuminating.” Have you noticed? Before the actual act of standing up, in our mind the notion or thought-form of standing up must arise first. Then the movement can be completed. First we retrieve or attend to the mental form, then the body follows accordingly.

In the last chapter of the *Shurangama Sutra*, there is a discussion about how our entire body is composed of false, or illusory, thoughts. Because the body is composed of illusory thoughts, when a new illusory thought arises, all the aggregates of illusory thoughts can reconfigure according to this new illusory thought and manifest the form or movement you desire. It is precisely because this body is a composite of illusory thoughts, that people with spiritual power are able to alter these illusions of physical forms into illusions of empty space.

Purna said, “If the enlightened nature cannot illuminate inherently, then it should not be called the ‘enlightened nature of illumination.’” The phrase, by definition, means the enlightened nature exhibits the function of illumination intrinsically. In other words, it is precisely because the enlightened nature is inherently capable of illuminating, that it can also illuminate external, objective phenomena. We can use the light bulb as an analogy. The light bulb itself is capable of generating light (illumination), so it can shed light onto our external environment. But is the external environment, which has been shone on, equivalent to the light bulb itself? No, indeed. The phrase, “thinking that objects exist means it’s not the enlightened nature,” signifies that the external objective phenomena are not the enlightened nature

itself. The objects being illuminated are not the nature itself.

If so, why does the enlightened nature turn into ignorance, which literally means “the lack of illumination”? The pivotal point is where you believe, falsely, that the illuminating function comes into being via the existence of external objects. Indeed, when we are idle, with nothing to do, we feel bored and anxious. There is the phrase “turning externally to grasp onto phenomena.” It means that our minds are incessantly driven to illuminate or attend to objects/phenomena. Even when external objects, or phenomena, cease to be there, we still do not realize that it is possible to stop and return to our inherent illuminating nature.

Our enlightened nature is inherently capable of illuminating. Thinking it is necessary to illuminate external phenomena in order to prove that we are indeed capable of illumination, is deluded understanding. Our enlightened illuminating nature is not the phenomena that are being illuminated. The things being attended to are called “objects.” For instance, when you illuminate a physical form, it is the object that’s being seen. When you attend to a sound-form, it is the object that’s being heard – following this pattern of interaction, the enlightened nature and the objects being illuminated or attended to become the dualistic subject and object.

When we falsely think it’s necessary to attend to an object, the subject and object of illumination arise. Just so, one deluded thought leads to the rising of the Three Subtle Appearances, which are the appearance of Ignorance, of the Objective World, and of the Subjective Perceiver. The Appearance of the Objective World is the object of your illumination. The Appearance of the Subjective Perceiver is the function of illumination.

You see, we always feel that, “I am able to think; I am able to see.” Isn’t that so? We take that “ability”

as the self. Under this deluded understanding, this ability is a dualistic ability, with the notion of subject and object. It is not an ability that transcends the dualistic mode. This delusion is very subtle, and most practitioners would not think of it as a vexation.

As we’ve discussed earlier, the notion “I see you” generally is not perceived as a vexation, is it? But as the patriarchs had said, “As soon as you’ve seen him, your eyes have turned blind.” This is really saying that your enlightened nature has become blind, not the eyes. This vexation is much too subtle, to the point where we use it as the basic platform, upon which we further “perfect” the Six Coarse Appearances. The Six Coarse Appearances are: The coarse marks of discriminating knowledge, of continuity, of attachment, of defining names, of producing karma, and of the suffering produced by karma – six coarse appearances in total.

The *Shurangama Sutra* states, “false thinking arises based on truth; reverse the false and return to truth – all that is false is indeed truth.” How did “false thinking arise based on truth”? Initially, there was no difference between your true mind, your ability to illuminate, and the objects of your illumination. In the midst of this non-differentiation, there suddenly arises this notion of an object that’s being illuminated. Next, there arises the notion of a subject that is capable of illuminating. Then arises the question whether there is any difference between the subject and object of illumination. They were one and the same initially. However, the notion of prior thought and later thought arises. It can be like the hand, first making a fist, then uncurling to an open palm – the essence of the two are identical. It is just the hand. But when later thought is used to illuminate the prior thought, then the later thought becomes the subject and the prior thought becomes the object of illumination. ☺

(To be continued)

First Twenty-One-Day Retreat in Poland

BY

George Cvijic

*Playing a game with the heart,
Win or lose is not important,
After all, it is just a game.*

EVEN AFTER EIGHT Chan retreats led there by Chi Chern Fashi, the Polish retreat center still existed only as an eccentric place of Dharma presence in the West – a destination for the young in quest of identity or a good story to tell. That alone would, in this turbulent modern world of material and speed, be enough to reward the efforts of Pawel Rosciszewski, the Polish man whose bright Dharma-nature gave rise to this international event. Yet it happened that a seven-day retreat, Pawel's brainchild, run with Tibetans in a half-deserted camp by the Wisla River eight years ago, has grown up into a twenty-one-day retreat, the first one in Europe!

Years ago the seed of Dharma was planted in the fertile Polish plains by Roshi Kapleau and the fragile sprout was reinvigorated by

Sheng Yen Shifu. In the footsteps of these two came another two Dharma-friends – Chi Chern Fashi, the first and for years the only Dharma heir of Sheng Yen Shifu, and Guo Jun Fashi, the youngest and last of Shifu's Dharma heirs. The promise given by Chi Chern Fashi to Polish disciples thirsty for Dharma, that he would revisit and nourish the Dharma tree, has been kept up to this day in spite of other invitations extended from elsewhere in Europe.

The retreat was held in the splendid setting of a palace in Dluzew owned by the Warsaw Academy



Master Sheng Yen with Polish Chan Practitioners in Poland in 1997 DDM Archive Photo

of Fine Arts. The estate lies on a large area of plains near Warsaw, bordered by a river on two sides. The sounds of work in the field and of village life reach across the river to the peaceful palace grounds.

Besides the ancient Dharma that has been brought to the Polish land by Roshi and Shifu, and the primeval echoes of vast plains, the retreat center held an archetypal power due to the simplicity of the surroundings, the lack of modern conveniences, frugal food, hot days and chilly nights, and the starry curtain that fell at bedtime along with the arising sound of mosquitoes. And then there was the “noble silence,” a silence that was discovered by the residents and the staff of the palace, as well.

At the first encounter, the staff wondered, amazed, at the orange-brown robes of the monks and the muteness of the crowd of retreatants, and they talked loudly, as if they wanted to elicit some response from the tongue-tied persons who never seemed to fully appreciate their service, not even when cakes and fruit were served at ten in the evening. But when, after hours of labor by the hard-working and silent guests in a corner covered in brambles and brushwood, uncovered a wrought-iron fence that had been hidden from sight for years, and when the work of painting went uninterrupted even by the bell signaling rest time, the glances cast at the odd crowd changed and the staff attuned their manners to the silent ways of the guests. Over the years the retreat has become an ordinary event, and the hosts have come to enjoy the silent summer days and the variety of silent retreatants who gather leaves and twigs on the large estate; these guests are now welcomed with cheerful smiles and joyful silence.

Having started as an international retreat for participants from Europe, the twenty-one-day retreat ended up hosting people from sixteen countries all over the world. This had a good effect on all participants and their practice in the atmosphere

of the Chan Hall and out in the open air. Over the years the retreat has ripened and become the subject of stories, desires, contacts, plans, and encounters – of the East and the West, of the Dharma and life, of the young and the seasoned meditators.

Among the many stories, there is one about the master, Chi Chern Fashi. The first Dharma heir of Sheng Yen Shifu naturally aroused curiosity among us meditators, who noticed peculiarities in his behavior. He called himself a tea monk, and could be seen by the lake at Dharma Drum Retreat Center, in Pine Bush, New York, after midnight or at dawn. When long journeys to the USA became too strenuous for Shifu, Chi Chern Fashi was received as the emissary we were longing for.

A monk, a traveler, a calligrapher, a mystic, a poet, and an abbot – with a clear mind he observes and communicates a lucid message to us about the Dharma of personal life. He is simple, straightforward, kind, and generous, and never calls himself Shifu, because among Master Sheng Yen's disciples that title is reserved for one person only. Full of admiration for him, young disciples call him Shifu, nevertheless. For us westerners, his knowledge of English is a great advantage. He uses it freely in communication and interviews, which allows for a spontaneous and direct communication with a master. But at deeper levels, subtle and elusive, we need to return to the primary language, which is Dharma. We, the westerners, have a long way to go before we can understand that subtlety and develop Dharma language and Dharma mind. In the meantime, we enjoy Chi Chern Fashi's generous and whole-hearted help on our paths, while some of us have even matured to become teachers of Dharma. It is a great advantage to have a master who is recognized and wise, but is also of the same age as we are. Time is given to us to learn and grow with him and rely on the master's wisdom until our own wisdom arises.



Chi Chern Fashi with Chan Practitioners in Poland in 2015

Dharma talks given by Chi Chern Fashi are clear, precise, and world-wise, always pointing at a specific angle of view, making you wonder why it has never occurred to you to see something so close and logical. That generosity and compassion prevent the practice from turning into a brain exercise, need not be stated explicitly, because the message is conveyed by the whole of his person. After all, the practice is not a flight from reality – some mystic fairy tale of the past – it is quite the opposite. We do not depart from our families for selfish reasons, but return to them and our life as whole, true, functional beings. There is no separateness or opposition between Dharma and life. We are trying to understand conditionality and transcend the limitations of our mind for a more aware, fuller, and happier here-and-now.

The symbolic encounter of the East and the West is readily shown in the traditional exhibition of calligraphies created by Chi Chern Fashi on the walls of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts. The

calligraphies that have made him famous in the East for many years are created during retreats like this one. On the last day of the retreat, after the last Dharma talk, each participant receives a calligraphy piece as a gift-certificate, a memento of hard days. The retreat days were a hard time indeed – in spite of all the beauty, the Polish retreat was not a vacation time, but rather a time of difficulty and challenge. That, however, holds a special value and makes each retreat a memorable experience. Therefore this brief review should not be taken as a general recommendation for the next twenty-one-day retreat in Poland, already arranged for August, 2016. Rather, take it as an attempt to explain why there were more foreigners than locals at the retreat, and why there was a waiting queue of applicants beyond the limit of forty-nine participants. Come to think of it, that number has a symbolic meaning. Why? Well . . . Europe hasn't had a forty-nine-day retreat!

After all, it is just a game. ∞

Chan Meditation Retreats

Led by Dharma Heirs of Chan Master Sheng Yen



7-Day *Silent Illumination*

Led by Simon Child • 19 – 26 February 2016

Dłużew, Poland

CONTACT budwod@budwod.com.pl • www.czan.eu



7-Day *Silent Illumination*

Led by Žarko Andričević • 6 – 13 February 2016

Haus Tao, Wolfhalden, Switzerland

CONTACT hthalmann@gmx.net • www.chan-bern.ch

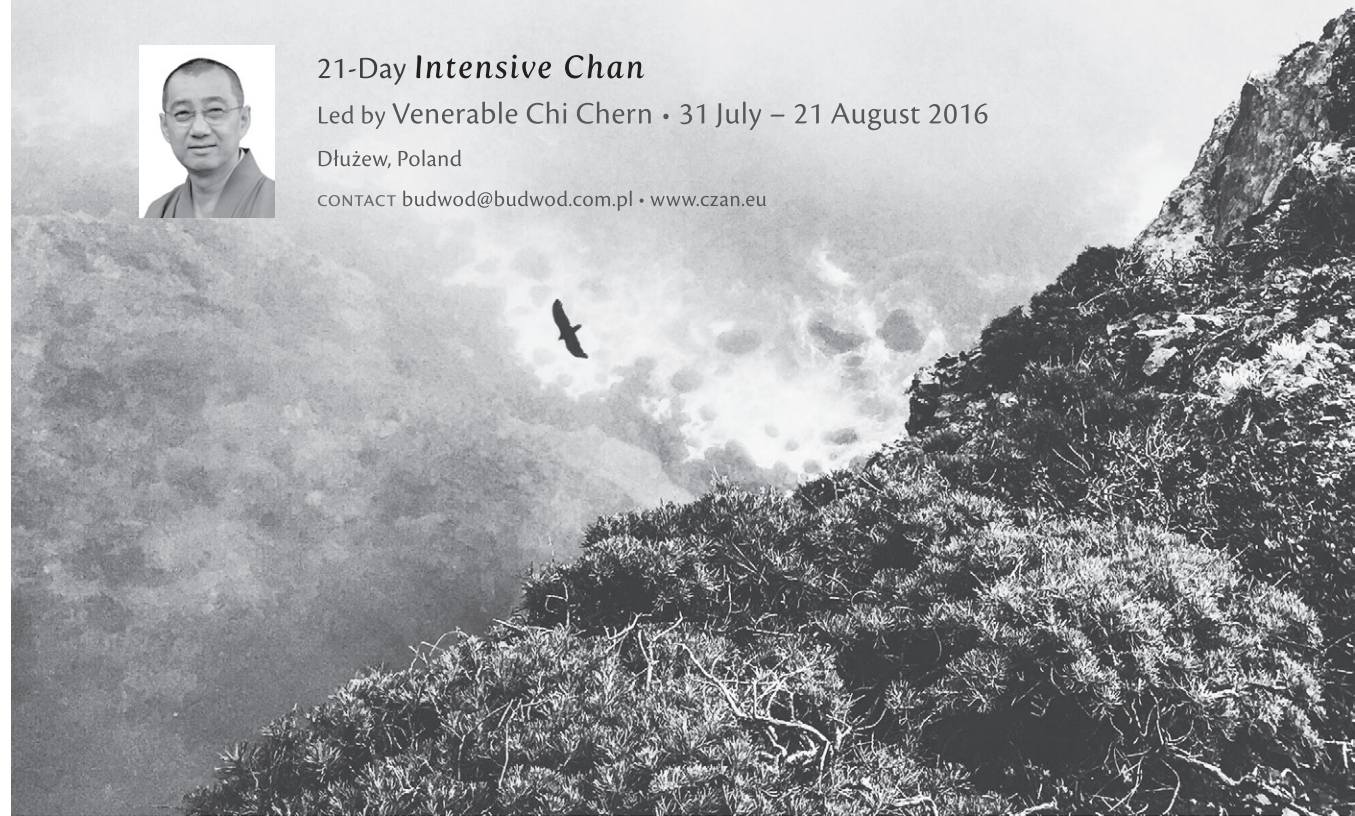


21-Day *Intensive Chan*

Led by Venerable Chi Chern • 31 July – 21 August 2016

Dłużew, Poland

CONTACT budwod@budwod.com.pl • www.czan.eu



The Past

from CMC, DDRC and DDMBA worldwide

A Buddhist Service for Mrs. Helena Kalin

AT THE END OF JULY, we received a letter from Sarah Kalin expressing a request for a Buddhist Funeral Service for her late mother, to be led by a Dharma Drum Mountain monastic. In her letter, she wrote that her parents became Master Sheng Yen's disciples when the Master was in New York and that her father had received Dharma Transmission from the Master.

We forwarded the request to Ven. Chang Hwa, and soon received further guidance on how to assist Sarah's family. After some correspondence, we were able to identify Sarah's father as Dr. Max Kalin, a Swiss scientist and university professor. In the early 1990s, Dr. Kalin and his wife Helena attended many retreats guided by Master Sheng Yen at the Chan Meditation Center (CMC). Dr. Kalin has not returned to CMC in several years; therefore, he is not known to the recent disciples. However, he was well remembered by Ven. Guo Sheng and Ven. Chang Hwa, even before the days when they were ordained. Dr. Kalin's Dharma Transmission Ceremony was witnessed by Ven. Guo Xing, who happened to visit DDMBA Toronto in July when we received Sarah's letter.

Helena passed away in Zurich, Switzerland, where she had resided permanently. A memorial service for her was held in the middle of July, after the cremation of her body. As a descendant of immigrants from Hong Kong, Helena's wish was to

return to Oakville in Ontario where she grew up, and be laid to rest next to her late grandmother. Her family carried out her final wish and sent her urn of ashes to her childhood home.

A funeral service for Ms. Helena Kalin was scheduled for August 16 in a cemetery in Oakville, Ontario. Upon the Chapter's request, Ven. Guo Sheng traveled to Toronto from New York to lead the funeral service for Helena. To support Ven. Guo Sheng, DDMBA Toronto's Chanting Team immediately mobilized its well-prepared team members, who received advanced training in April from Ven. Chang Jian, Director of Caring Services at DDM. In recent years, we have served and supported families with Chinese liturgies, but this was our first time to conduct the whole service in English. We were very blessed to have Ven. Guo Sheng guiding us through the process and providing us the procedures for services in Chinese and English.

In early August we met Max and Sarah at the designated cemetery to discuss the details and set-up for the funeral. It was my first time meeting Max, a tall and thin senior with grey hair and a very scholarly, calm and kind poise. He arrived in Toronto from Switzerland on the same day we met, accompanied by his daughter Sarah, and Helena's sister, Amy. The procedures for the funeral service were explained by Cheng-Wen Huang Shixiong, and the needs of the family were confirmed. Max, Sarah, and Amy expressed multiple times their gratitude toward DDM.

Max listened quietly when Amy discussed the details with us, but he wept when we talked about how the urn would be placed into the ground. A sense of loss and sorrow emerged and surrounded all of us. The Buddha has taught us that nothing is permanent in life, and the body of flesh will be gone. However, we are still saddened by the loss and departure of our loved ones.

On the day of the funeral, it was hot and humid, although the forecast said that there might be a thunderstorm in the afternoon. At 7:30 in the morning, ten members of the Chanting Team gathered at the Toronto chapter to rehearse one more time. After we arrived in Oakville, we helped the family set up and decorate the altar. We donned our service robes and solemnly waited for the arrival of the family and friends of the deceased. At 11:30 AM the service began. Members of the Chanting Team stood next to the families on both sides of the altar and started chanting "Amitabha" in a hushed tone. Everyone stopped talking and participated in the service solemnly, with respect.

The funeral was hosted in English and Cantonese by one of our young volunteers at DDMBA Toronto. Ven. Guo Sheng began the liturgy with the Heart Sutra, later proceeding with Amitabha Verse, Four Words Buddha name, Six Words Buddha Name, and, finally, ending with the Merit Return Verse. We found out that day that everyone attending the funeral was non-Buddhist, except the deceased and Max. Yet, what impressed us the most was that during the service, many attendees held the bilingual liturgy booklets that we had prepared, joined palms together with eyes closed, or chanted along with us. Several workers in the cemetery also respectfully joined their palms together when passing by. Right at that moment, there didn't seem to be any real barriers between languages, religions, nor races. Under the cleansing of chanting the Buddha's name, all sentient beings are equal. We have the same mind of compassion with heartfelt gratitude, sending farewells to the deceased and bringing peace to the family.

Right after the funeral, we quietly collected the equipment and left silently. We didn't stay for tea, nor did we chat with the family. We

didn't accept any form of giving, nor any amount of money. We didn't want to disturb the moment when the family and friends were paying tributes to the deceased.

This is a very unique experience for our DDM chapter in Toronto. We had the opportunity, both to reconnect with Max Kalin as well as plant favorable seeds for a greater affinity with him and his family. It was also a very valuable learning experience for the members of the Chanting Team to conduct a funeral service in English, as well as to expend our capacity in serving the English-speaking members in the future. We were able to provide care and support to the family based on the principles learned from DDM Caring Service Program, and to serve the family's needs based on their unique circumstances. We truly appreciate this opportunity and all the cause and conditions that came with this experience, to live in Buddha's Dharma, to cultivate compassion, and to grow ourselves. ☸

by Evelyn Wang

English translation by Angela Chang

Editorial assistance by Keith Brown

DDMBA Toronto, Canada



Ven. Guo Sheng leading the Service Photo by Richard Wu

The Future

Calendar of retreats,
classes and other
upcoming events

Schedule is subject to
change. Please check
websites for updated and
detailed information.



Great Dharma Drum

Videos from Chan Master Sheng Yen's
television program *Zen and Inner Peace*
<https://www.youtube.com/user/DDMTV05/videos>

Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) in Pine Bush, NY (845) 744-8114 · ddrcc@dharmadrumretreat.org · www.dharmadrumretreat.org		
REGULAR WEEKLY ACTIVITIES		
Thursday Tea Meditation	2 PM-4:30 PM	Eight-form moving meditation, Chan relaxation, tea ceremony, sitting meditation, Dharma talk. Led by Venerable Chang Hu
RETREATS (register online)		
Day of Stillness & Children's Program	Jan 23	Saturday 9 AM-5 PM Venerable Chang Xiang & Venerable Chang Hu Little Bodhisattvas Team
	Feb 20	
	Mar 26	
Foundation Retreat	Mar 4-6	Rebecca Li
SPECIAL EVENTS (register online)		
Dharma Protector Chan Camp	Jan 8-16	Master Sheng Yen videos
Breaditation Weekend	Mar 12-13	Venerable Chang Xiang

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We welcome you to come and practice with us at our new place.

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Every Sunday	10:00 AM-11:00 AM	Sitting Meditation	
	11:00 AM-12:30 PM	Dharma Talk	
	12:30 PM- 1:00 PM	Food Offering and Announcements	
	1:00 PM- 1:45 PM	Vegetarian Lunch	
Chanting & Recitation	1 st , 2 nd , 4 th & 5 th Sundays 2:00-3:30 PM		Guan Yin Bodhisattva Chanting Service
	3 rd Sunday	2:00-4:00 PM	Earth Store Bodhisattva Sutra Chanting Service
REGULAR WEEKLY ACTIVITIES			
Monday Night Chanting	7:30 PM-9:15 PM	Bodhisattva Precept Recitation Ritual Every last Monday of each month	
Tuesday Night Sitting Group	7:00 PM-9:30 PM	Sitting, yoga exercises, walking meditation, Dharma sharing, recitation of the Heart Sutra	
Saturday Sitting Group	9:00 AM-1:00 PM	Sitting, yoga exercises, video teachings by Master Sheng Yen	
RETREATS (Pre-registration advised)			
1-Day Retreat	Jan 30, Feb 27, Mar 26	Saturday 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM - Led by Nancy Bonardi	
SPECIAL EVENTS			
Passing on the Lamp of Wisdom	Feb 6	9:00 AM- 5:00 PM	1-Day Retreat Led by Abbot Ven. Guo Xing
Welcoming Chinese New Year With Mindful Prayers	Feb 7	11:00 AM-12:30 PM 12:30 PM- 3:00 PM	Special Dharma Talk by Abbot Ven. Guo Xing Lunch & Special Activities
	Feb 8-12	10:30 AM-12:00 PM 7:00 PM- 9:00 PM	Universal Buddha Dharma Assembly Medicine Buddha Chanting Service
CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS (Pre-registration advised)			
Three Part Beginner's Meditation Workshop	Mar 5, Mar 12, Mar 19	Saturdays 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM Led by Rikki Asher & Harry Miller	
Taijiquan with David Ngo	Every Thursday 7:30 PM-9:00 PM	\$25 per 4-week month — \$80 for 16 classes First class is free for newcomers	
Sunday Afternoon Movies	Jan 17, Mar 20 1:30 PM-4:30 PM	Led by Dr. Peter Lin, film Viewing and discussion Check website for film title and description	

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Chan Meditation Retreats

Foundation

March 4 – 6, 2016

Rebecca Li

Silent Illumination Intensive

May 27 – June 5, 2016

Simon Child & Rebecca Li

Beginner's Mind

April 29 – May 1, 2016

Nancy Bonardi & Rebecca Li

Investigating Huatou Intensive

June 17 – 26, 2016

Žarko Andričević



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