

Repentance and Humility

by Master Sheng Yen

Regulating the body and the mind through meditation can alleviate vexations and ultimately lead to wisdom. To do this you need correct concepts, and you need methods. The concepts and methods of Chan are intertwined --concepts guide the use of the method, and the method must accord with the concepts.



In Chan, there are several means for regulating the mind. The first is repentance. The second is aspiration or vows. The third is great determination. If you are using *huatou*, the fourth is great doubt. The last is transferring merit.

These means begin and end from the standpoint of impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. Shakyamuni Buddha taught the impermanence of all things, especially one's thoughts. To not understand impermanence is to bind yourself to suffering; to understand impermanence is to start on the path of liberation. To directly experience it is to become enlightened. Use this understanding to guide you to great liberation, great wisdom, and great compassion.

Without a sense of shame and humility, repentance is without power, a meaningless ritual. Shame and humility come when we realize that we did things we should not have done and also realize that we did not do things we should have done; we realize that when we harmed or failed to help ourselves, we also harmed or failed to help others. So, repentance has two aspects -the aspect of oneself, and the aspect of others; our remorse is felt both ways. To give rise to shame and humility, we need introspection, to see ourselves as we are.

Some people may seem to be very good practitioners, yet they have negative self-esteem and put themselves down. This is not true shame or humility. In fact this can be damaging to themselves and others. Without introspection it may be difficult for them to realize their error and develop shame and humility, and to repent. For people like this practice is very difficult.

True repentance is taking responsibility for our actions and resolving to change. This shows that you understand the workings of karma, of cause and effect. You no longer hide from the fact that sooner or later, you reap consequences. Most people think we should just repent for our misdeeds. But Mahayana followers also repent for things they should have done, but did not. These are failures of compassion, chances lost to fulfill our vow to help sentient beings. For these errors of omission we should also repent. Repentance is a two-edged sword -it strengthens our determination to practice, and it nurtures our compassion for others.

<p>Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung Commentary by Master Sheng Yen on a seventh-century poem expressing the Chan understanding of mind. This article is the 25th from a series of lectures given during retreats at the Chan Center in Elmhurst, New York. These talks were given on November 27 and 28, 1982, and were edited by Chris Marano.</p>	<p>Commentary by Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>The Practice of Silent Illumination (mo-chao) This is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled <i>Hoofprint of the Ox</i>, which is based on lectures by Master Sheng Yen, translated, compiled, arranged, and edited by professor Dan Stevenson.</p>	<p>By Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>11</p>
<p>The Recorded Sayings of Master Linji Commentary by Master Sheng Yen. This talk was given on May 12, 1997, the seventh day of a retreat held in Poland, and was edited by Ernie Heau.</p>	<p>By Master Sheng Yen</p>	<p>19</p>
<p>Retreat Report</p>	<p>By HR</p>	<p>25</p>
<p>Written on a Plane on the Night of December 5, Somewhere over the Atlantic Poem</p>	<p>By Beata Kazimersica</p>	<p>28</p>
<p>The Saturday Sitting Group</p>	<p>By Nancy Joyce</p>	<p>29</p>
<p>News</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Master Sheng Yen in Taiwan ● Progress at Dharma Drum Site ● Conference and Tripitaka Project ● Chinese New Year Celebration February 14, 1999 ● First Meditation Class at Dharma Drum Retreat Center 		<p>30</p>

This magazine is published quarterly by the Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture, Chan Meditation Center, 90-56 Corona Avenue, Elmhurst, New York 11373, (718) 592-6593. This is a non-profit venture solely supported by contributions from members of the Chan Center and the readership. Donations for magazine publication costs or other Chan Center functions may be sent to the above address and will be gratefully appreciated. Your donation is tax deductible.

Chan Meditation Center

Dharma Drum Publications:

Phone: 718-592-0915

email: dharmadm@aol.com

homepage: <http://www.chancenter.org/>

Address: 90-56 Corona Ave., Elmhurst, New York 11373

Chan Center phone, for information and registration for programs:
718-592-6593

Founder/Teacher: Shi-fu (Master) Venerable Dr. Sheng Yen

Director: Guo-gu Bhikshu

Editors: Guo-gu Bhikshu, David Berman, Ernest Heau, Chris Marano, Harry Miller

Managing Editor: Linda Peer

Section Editors: Chris Marano: Master Sheng Yen

David Berman: practitioners' articles, interviews, etc.

Stuart Lachs: scholars' articles

Buffe Laffey: news and upcoming events

Design: Giora Carmi, Trish Ing

Copy Editor: John Anello

Other assistance: Nora Ling-yun Shih, Christine Tong, Dorothy Weiner

Song of Mind of Niu-t'ou Fa-jung

Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This article is the 25th from a series of lectures given during retreats at the Chan Center in Elmhurst, New York. These talks were given on November 27 and 28, 1982 and were edited by Chris Marano.

***Favor and disgrace do not change it;
It doesn't choose its abode.***

Most would agree that favorable, pleasant situations tend to make us happy and unfavorable or stressful situations tend to make us unhappy. Here on a Chan retreat, however, the first step is to train our minds to maintain a sense of calmness and equanimity. Regardless of the environment or the circumstances, our minds should not be disturbed. If our minds are constantly moved by the environment -whether it be something we like or something we dislike- then we will always be immersed in vexation. In such situations, one can say that our minds "follow the environment." On the other hand, if our minds are undisturbed, then one can say that the environment "follows the mind," not in the sense that our minds change the environment, but that, no matter what the situation, our minds remain clear and unmoving.

It is the first day of retreat. How do you like it so far? Are you adjusting to the schedule and rules? Do you like where you are sitting? Are your cushions comfortable? How are your sleeping locations? Do the people next to you bother you while you are meditating or trying to sleep during the



night? Are there any loud snorers? Our retreats are designed to minimize disturbances, but the truth is that most of you will be disturbed by one thing or another during these seven days. The two lines of verse offer excellent advice: no matter what you are doing-meditating, walking, stretching, working, eating, washing, or sleeping-do not allow your mind to be pulled by the environment. You may not be able to control your surroundings or choose where you want to be or what you want to do, but you can control your mind.

If your mind is not under control, it will be disturbed or pulled no matter how carefully we design the retreat. We once tried to alleviate the problem of two loud snoring men by letting them sleep together in one of the more isolated rooms. It did not matter. In the morning, each one complained about the noise made by the other.

Disturbances can happen even in the seeming quiet of the Chan Hall. One woman who comes on many retreats always has a large shawl which she wraps around herself and takes with her wherever she goes. At the beginning of one retreat, a woman sitting next to her was obviously distressed by this behavior. She told me during interview that she was afraid the retreat would be a waste of time because she could not concentrate with this woman and her shawl sitting next to her. I told her that it was part of the practice to remain undisturbed by what went on around her and that she should use the retreat as a means to cultivate patience. At the end of the retreat, when people discussed their experiences, this woman thanked the other with the shawl for giving her many opportunities to develop an attitude of patience.

Similar occurrences happen at my retreats in Taiwan. Two ladies were given the same room. While they did respect the no-talking rule, one constantly made gestures to the other, asking her to massage her back to alleviate a nagging pain. During work time, while all the others were performing their duties, these women would be in their room doing massage. Finally, on the third day, the one woman came to me and complained, "Shih-Fu, I can't take it anymore. What did I get myself into? If this continues, I'll never be able to sit well on this retreat."

I said, "You don't have to do these things for her."

She answered, "Yes, I know, but when she comes begging me to do this and that for her, I don't know how to get out of it."

What would you do? Would it be easy for you to ignore a fellow retreatant who is in pain and asking you for help? I would imagine that, for some of you, this would be a stressful situation that would undoubtedly cause vexation. What I told the woman I also say to you: This is a Chan retreat, not daily life. Use your time wisely. You have come to this place to devote seven days to intense practice. That is your primary responsibility, your only concern.

These women should have been working with everyone else during the work hour; but situations like these arise all the time on retreats. It requires wisdom to deal with such

situations, but I will make it easier for you by telling you what to do. In any and all situations, pay no attention to what goes on around you. You are here to do whatever is proper on Chan retreats. And, if you are like the woman who had the nagging back pain, or any other problem, then you should come to me or one of the attendants. That is our responsibility. We will help you to resolve the problem.

I remember one young woman who participated in another retreat in Taiwan. She was extremely helpful and enthusiastic. Every time people came to the door, she would jump up and greet them. Whenever she thought I needed something, she would try to help me. It was not her job. Finally, I took her aside and said, "With your attitude you will have a difficult time getting through this retreat. You are not the receptionist or my attendant. I see that you are a very nice, helpful person, but this is not proper behavior for a Chan retreat. In helping others, you are not taking care of your own practice. After the retreat, you can go back to helping others again."

While you practice, your mind is to be turned inward, not outward. Do not concern yourself with other people and their affairs, habits, or problems. Your mind is to be focused on your method of practice or whatever else you are assigned to do. If you are continuously attentive to your method, nothing should disturb you.

During retreat, there is nothing to like and dislike. There are no good seats or bad seats. Everything is as it is, and no matter what the situation, everything is exactly right. The structure and schedule of the retreat are meant to make practice as smooth and easy as possible. For example, there are rules about how we are to use our eyes. For the most part, you are to give your physical eyes a vacation and rely on the eyes of your mind. Use your physical eyes only as much as you have to for safety. The only time you are to use your eyes in a focused way is during Dharma lecture or interview, when I am speaking to you.

When you participate in a Chan retreat, it is best to just follow the rules and accept whatever situation arises. Leave your discriminating, judgmental mind behind. In fact, it would be best to leave your self behind. If you are constantly thinking about your self and your own opinions, you will undoubtedly come into conflict with something and it will cause vexations. For example, today the rice was not cooked properly and so it did not taste that good; but when you are eating, you should not entertain that thought. You should just accept the rice as it is and eat it. If you dwell upon the idea that the rice is not good, you will have vexations. On the other hand, you should also not entertain thoughts like, "Oh, this is delicious! I can't wait to eat more. I better take

more now before it's all gone." Being hungry is a physiological condition, and it is true that some people have bigger appetites than others, but to entertain greedy thoughts about food is also vexation. From the beginning of the retreat to the end of retreat, let go of your usual conceptions about your self, your wants, your needs. For the next seven days, there is only the Chan Hall and your method of practice. There is no self. If you preoccupy yourself with all the goings-on around you, instead of curbing vexations you will be creating more.

The first step on any retreat is to separate yourself from the external environment. The next step is to let go of your likes and dislikes, your opinions and discriminating mind. All you need concern yourself with is your method of practice. Even if a fire breaks out in the building, it is not your concern. Ignore it and continue with your method, even at risk of burning to ashes. This is true Chan spirit.

Song of Mind continues:

***All connections suddenly cease;
Everything is forgotten.***

"All connections" refer to all forms of relationships, of which there are three levels. The first level of relationships refers to things and thoughts that have nothing to do with you. These include all the phenomena that occur outside of and separate from you. The second level of relationships refers to things that happen to you all the time, but not necessarily thoughts in which you actively engage. The third level of relationships includes those things and thoughts that you actively pursue.

It is easiest to let go of phenomena of the first, most removed level of relationships. Such relationships have nothing to do with you and should be easy to disregard. If you dwell on things, people, or events that have nothing to do with you, not only are you not practicing, you are not even minding your own business. Part of a Chinese saying talks about "a dog chasing a mouse." It refers to people who are doing things that are not their business or that are not appropriate for them to do. It is a cat's job to chase mice, not a dog's. Dwelling on things that have nothing to do with you -especially during retreat- is a waste of time.

The second level of relationships includes things that happen to you directly but are not things with which you are actively involved. It includes the thousand-and-one things that randomly happen to us every day, such as bumping into a stranger on the street or dropping a chopstick at the dinner table. Yes, they happen to us, but they are

not things that we would normally dwell upon for any length of time. Obviously, we should not engage in such thoughts during retreat either, but since they are closer to home, so to speak, they are more difficult to ignore.

The third and most difficult level of relationships to ignore includes those thoughts generated by things in which we are actively involved. It might include your thoughts about a loved one, or your job, or what you think should be happening during retreat. How many of you can honestly say that you have not entertained a single thought about a loved one thus far on this retreat? Such thoughts arise naturally and seemingly incessantly, and they are the hardest to let go.

A couple came to the last retreat, and before it started I told them I was going to seat them so they would not be able to see each other. I informed them that they should not think about the other person at all. Both of them replied, "No problem. We have been married for so many years that the last thing we want to do is think about each other during the retreat." It sounded promising, but during personal interview on the second day, the woman asked, "So, how's my husband doing?"

I answered, "Funny, your husband was asking the same about you just a few minutes ago.

During retreat, can thoughts about your spouse, partner, or child actually do anything for them? All it is doing is adding trouble to your practice; and these examples do not exclude those people who do not have any close relationships. The mind can and does dwell on all sorts of meaningless thoughts that have no relevance whatsoever. I am sure that many of you have already experienced spending entire sitting periods pondering nonsense.

The phrase "All connections suddenly cease" can be understood on two levels. The more basic level speaks to beginning practitioners, which we all are, and it encourages us to drop all connections -instantly- to any thoughts generated by the three levels of relationships. It is one of the goals of practice. If you can do this, whether it be for one second, ten seconds, five minutes, or one hour, it is a sign that your mind is on your method and not wandering. The second, more profound level refers to the experience of enlightenment.

The phrase "Everything is forgotten" encourages practitioners to have nothing left in their minds while they meditate. If anything remains, it means that you have not

completely stopped all connections with relationships. It is not an easy level to reach, but it can arise no matter which method of practice -counting breaths, *gong'an* or *huatou*, shikantaza, reciting Buddha's name - you are using.

When counting breaths, eventually you may get to a point where you are no longer aware of breathing and you are no longer capable of counting numbers. There are no thoughts in your mind, yet you are clear and aware of everything. This is one of the stages about which the song speaks.

Shikantaza translates as "just sitting," and the method involves being aware of one's posture and allowing all other thoughts to come and go without clinging to or rejecting them. At first, you will follow your thoughts and your mind will wander. Eventually, you will be clearly watching, but not engaging in, your thoughts. Gradually, however, all thoughts will completely disappear. It is like silt settling to the bottom of a pond. The water becomes so clear that one is not aware that there is water. Again, it is a level of mental clarity where all connections cease and everything is forgotten.

The method of reciting the Buddha's name is one of the five original contemplation methods for halting one's mind. One can get to a stage where the recitation disappears and all that remains is clear awareness. Of course, this can only happen when there are no more wandering thoughts. Therefore, forgetting to recite the Buddha's name because you are too busy thinking about your vacation plans does not count.

The purpose of a *huatou* or *gong'an* is to generate the "doubt sensation" or a "questioning state" in that of the practitioner. Sometimes what happens instead is that the practitioner repeats the *huatou* over and over until it naturally and spontaneously disappears. The method has disappeared, yet the mind is clear, bright, and very much aware. This is not the goal of *huatou* practice, but it is still a sign of progress.

If practitioners cannot reach a level where there are no thoughts left and all external connections cease, then repeating a *huatou* is quite dry, even meaningless. For this reason, many practitioners in the late Ming dynasty started to recite the Buddha's name. They felt that if they could neither reach a level where there are no thoughts nor give rise to the doubt sensation, then they might as well recite something that has meaning and earns merit. Perhaps cultivation of such good karma would allow them to be reborn in the Pure Land, where conditions are perfect for Buddhist practice. On the other hand, if they did reach a point where all connections and thoughts cease,

they would be at the perfect point of awareness and calmness to begin practicing *huatou*. At that point, they could switch their method of reciting Buddha's name to a question, "Who is it that recites the Buddha's name?" and thus turn the method into a *huatou*.

It is important to understand that reaching a state where there are no thoughts left in the mind is not enlightenment. It is the first level of ceasing all connections to relationships and is only a preliminary stage of practice. Actually, it marks the threshold in one's practice where Chan says true meditation and contemplation begin. All methods prior to this point are considered a means to collect, calm, and concentrate the mind.

At the second level, that of enlightenment, there are no thoughts, but vexations have also disappeared. Very few individuals have ever bypassed the first level and jumped right to the second level. We cannot all be of the caliber of Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch. Most of us must work on the first level, that of gathering, focusing, and stilling our minds. That is our practice.

The Practice of "Silent Illumination" (mo-chao)

by Master Sheng Yen

*This is an excerpt from a forthcoming book entitled **Hoofprint of the Ox**, which is based on lectures by Master Sheng Yen, translated, compiled, arranged, and edited by Professor Dan Stevenson.*

The first half of this chapter, which describes the history and nature of silent illumination, was printed in the Spring '99 Chan Magazine. This is how it described silent illumination: "... Hung-chih instructs his students to let go and settle quietly into themselves, leaving behind all entangling conditions and supports, until they reach a point of perfect and unrestrained quiescence. At the same time, this does not imply that mind becomes dark or incognizant. Quite the contrary, it is the distortions of deluded and conditioned thinking that are silenced, not mental clarity or awareness itself. With this silence, the mind's innate wisdom shines unobstructedly, perfectly clear and luminous, without a single speck of dust to impede it. "In this [state of] silent sitting," Hung-chih says, "the mind clearly perceives the details of sensory objects; yet, as though transparent, no constructed image is produced."^[1]

The Concept of Silent Illumination as a Practice

Silent illumination is a simple method, so simple, in fact, that this simplicity becomes its difficulty. Ultimately, it is the method of no-method, in which the practitioner leaves behind all seeking, all attachment, all expectations, and just lives Chan directly. To practice silent illumination, just drop all busywork and discriminating thoughts and be serenely aware, accepting all things fully, just as they are. Do not hanker after anything or dwell on anything. Simply let your naturally aware mind take everything in, just as it is. This is the natural quiescence and luminosity of Chan. When there is discrimination and clinging, such marvelous quiescence and luminosity is impeded. Mind is naturally silent and still and, at the same time, fully aware. No effort is needed to polish it or make it shine for it to be this way. In principle, silent illumination is very simple. But, because we are so complicated, it becomes a difficult teaching to master. The greatest problems arise from doing too much. Because we all tend to do too much -even in meditation- we may require considerable preliminary training and unlearning before we are simple enough to use silent illumination effectively.

Hung-chih Cheng-chueh instructs that the body should sit silently and the mind should be totally open yet unmoving. Through this practice one cleanses the mind until it gains "the clarity of an autumn pool and is as bright as the moon shining in the autumn

sky." Further on he instructs, "In this silent sitting, whatever objects appear, the mind is very clear as to all the details, yet everything is where it originally is, in its own place. The mind stays on one thought for ten thousand years, yet does not dwell on any form, inside or outside."^[2]

In the practice of silent illumination, we say that you should not use your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. If you find your thoughts dwelling intently on objects of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, or feeling anything, you should let go. But even this is not enough. You should not use your discursive mind at all. You should let go of all discriminations, all expectations and regrets, likes and dislikes, desires and goals. You should even let go of the thought of "letting go." Do not think of yourself as an ordinary unenlightened being, nor think that you must rid yourself of vexations and strive for Buddhahood. There should be no thought of enlightenment, no thought of Chan, no thought of gain whatsoever. There should not even be any thought of trying to practice "not-thinking." The "silence" in silent illumination is not one of active silencing or suppressing, but simply letting go and allowing things to take their rest, to be as they are. We simply lay down our mental worries and involvements and remain at peace, free of thoughts, with nothing to do. At first this will be difficult. But as one enters the practice more deeply, this stillness becomes a profound stillness, in which all discrimination ceases and there is no distinction between stillness and marvelous activity. One who experiences profound stillness feels as though wild grass has sprouted from one's eyes, as though boulders have blocked one's ears, as though moss has grown on one's tongue -all complicated human busywork having long since disappeared, wild nature has taken over.

This simile is not meant to suggest that the senses no longer function, that the eyes do not look, that the tongue is motionless, and that the ears shut out all sound. If this were the case, the silence in one's practice of silent illumination would not be profound silence, for the mind would still be conjuring up an image of stillness and effortfully avoiding activity. This is not the complete physical and mental quiescence indicated by the simile. In profound silence and simplicity - with absolutely nothing to do -one is not incognizant, but keenly and totally present. Without a second thought, all things prevail in you and you in all things.

One may wonder how a meditator experiencing this profound stillness would be different from an inanimate object, such as a block of wood. It seems that there would be no conscious awareness or activity whatsoever. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the profound silence of silent illumination and the silence of

incognizance; and it is to make this distinction that we place the word "illumination" (chao) after "silent" (mo). In truth, silence is inseparable from illumination, and illumination from silence. They are one and the same thing. Even before all thoughts and mental involvements are laid to rest, awareness is already extremely direct, keen, and penetrating. In other words, bright awareness occurs inseparably with profound stillness.

Why is this? When the mind is settled and still, discriminating thoughts disappear; as discriminating thoughts disappear, so do the experiential limitations of past, present, and future, inner and outer, this and that, self and other. With no index by which to mark its passing, time cannot exist. Similarly, with no discursive boundaries between self and other, this and that, there can be no limits or points of reference to define space; so spatial delimitation does not exist either. The bright awareness of silent illumination is not limited by anything at all, since there is no thought of self nor any clinging to features that would separate mind and the environment. One's mind is like a boundless mirror that, though motionless itself, takes in everything, just as it is. No detail is excluded; nothing is impeded. The mirror and the world it reflects are so perfectly fused as to be inseparable.

Hung-chih Cheng-chueh likens this state to an autumn pond or autumn sky. With the cool and crisp air of autumn, the waters settle, becoming so still and clear that one can see the fish drifting lazily in their depths; the sky so high and clear that one can see the birds gliding gently high up in the blue sky. He also compares it to the autumn moon, which shines so clear and high that everything in the land is illumined by its cool and gentle light.

In certain respects, silent illumination, with its distinction between silence and illumining, stillness and observation, is reminiscent of the classical Buddhist practice of "calming" (Sanskrit, *samatha*; Chinese, *chih*) and "contemplation" (Sanskrit, *vipasyana*; Chinese, *kuan*), especially as formulated in the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school. The T'ien-t'ai master Chih-i (538-597) says in his *Great Calming and Contemplation* (*Mo-ho chih-kuan*),

One should place one's faith solely in the conviction that this very mind is itself the Dharma-nature. When arising [of thoughts] takes place, it is just the Dharma-nature arising. When perishing [of thoughts occurs], it is just the Dharma-essence perishing.... Returning to the source, reverting to the root, Dharma-nature itself is wholly quiescent. This is known as "calming." When one practices calming in this manner, all

prior mentation comes to a halt. In the practice of "contemplation," one contemplates that, originally, the mind of ignorance is identical with the Dharma-nature. As such, at its base it is fundamentally empty. The entire range of good and evil [deeds] that proceed from deluded thinking is like empty space. These two practices are utterly non-dual. They are not distinct from one another.[3]

In classical Indian Buddhist systems, *samatha* and *vipasyana* are often treated and developed separately. For example, techniques such as the five methods for stilling the mind or visualization of colored disks known as *kasinas* may be used initially to develop the deep calm and absorption of *dhyana*. Once meditative concentration is established, methods of *vipasyana* or contemplation might be applied, such as the four stations of mindfulness. Through the latter, wisdom or liberative insight (*prajna*) is developed. Gradually, after the powers of *dhyana* and *samadhi* deepen and wisdom becomes penetrating, their functions fuse and deep enlightenment occurs. In the Mahayana this is called the "true samadhi devoid of defiling outflows" or the "most supreme of supra-mundane samadhis." Such an accomplishment comes only from a very profound, complete enlightenment, quite unlike short-lived enlightenment experiences of limited impact. Although the path to this samadhi is long and slow, once attained, it never subsides. Samadhi functions constantly within the person, and through the powers of wisdom and skill born of this samadhi the individual is able to function as a bodhisattva intent upon delivering other beings.

Although we have been distinguishing the two aspects of silent illumination in order to clarify its practice, it is in fact inaccurate to treat silence and illumination as two separate things. For to do so misrepresents the true practice of silent illumination as well as the sudden path of Chan. To begin with, silence and illumination are inseparable and must be present simultaneously: In the very act of illumining one relinquishes grasping after thoughts and sensations and directly takes things in, thereby simultaneously bringing the mind to perfect silence. Then again, in the very act of silencing and pacifying thoughts, attachment to specific features and objects is relinquished and awareness comes to illumine all things universally without impediment. Thus one is always illumining and silencing simultaneously, in one and the same moment of awareness.

It is a mistake to think that one must first develop inner calm and, only then, apply open awareness. As the mind becomes clearer it becomes more empty and calm, and as it becomes more empty and calm it grows clearer. The more one is able to forget artificial efforts to cultivate stillness and illumination, the more silent and illumining the

mind becomes. But an equally essential point to remember about silent illumination is that, according to Chan, the mind by nature is intrinsically still, void, and luminous. It need not be cultivated at all! To put too much effort into trying to stop thoughts or to brighten the mind is to compound delusion upon delusion. If there is any notion of practicing a "technique" of silent illumination, it is not silent illumination at all, but clinging and forceful discrimination. This is the real message of the Chan teaching of silent illumination: It is a method that is no-method. Silent illumination as the causal practice and silent illumination as the fruit of enlightenment are ultimately indistinguishable.

The concept and practice of silent illumination is expressed quite well by two lines from the *Diamond Sutra*:

Without dwelling in anything whatsoever, allow this mind to arise.

In practicing silent illumination, one refrains from grasping or dwelling on any particular aspect of the body, mind, or environment. Thus, as the sutra says, one is, "without dwelling in anything whatsoever." If one were to emphasize this aspect of the practice alone, one could calm the mind and enter the states of unified mind of the various levels of dhyana espoused in the Hinayana tradition. In these states there is deep silence but little or no illumination, for the mind is still tied to a particular feature -namely, stillness and formlessness. Its ability to illumine universally or be aware of all things is impeded by attachment to the thought of emptiness. In true silent illumination there is illumination in addition to stillness, precisely because mind does not abide in any thought of stillness or emptiness. The meditator must let go of all notion of seizing and not seizing, letting go and not letting go: this is true "non-dwelling." Non-dwelling does not entail turning away from or shutting out the environment. It means to let go of biased attachment and to freely see right through things and take in the whole, so that one is aware of everything, inside and out, just as it is. For this reason the sutra says, "One should allow the mind to arise and be active."

Hui-neng offers an explanation of this practice and its relation to Chan in the Platform Sutra:

The deluded man clings to the characteristics of things, adheres to [the thought of] the samadhi of Oneness, thinks that straightforward mind is sitting without moving and casting aside delusions without letting things arise in the mind. This he considers to be the Samadhi of Oneness. This kind of practice is the same as insentientcy and the

cause of an obstruction to the Tao. The Tao must be something that circulates freely; why should he impede it? If the mind does not abide in things the Tao circulates freely; if the mind abides in things, it becomes entangled.[4]

At the beginning stages in the practice of silent illumination this letting go and illumining is a thought, a conscious and effortful practice that is born from the mind's discriminative faculty. As such, the meditator clings to it and invests it with expectations, just like any deluded thought. But as the practice itself matures, this thought of practice disappears. When we truly become ourselves and the method of no-method really becomes no method, there is true silence and illumination. The mind no longer fluctuates or discriminates, and silent illumination simply becomes silence and illumination. This is Chan.

Prerequisites and Caveats for Practice of Silent Illumination

To practice silent illumination effectively, several important preconditions must be fulfilled. First, one must have a competent master. Otherwise, it is easy to be waylaid by various obstacles. Being such an effortless and formless approach, it is easy for individuals simply to indulge their bad habits, thinking all the while that they are practicing correctly. Actually, to forego deliberate effort and practice the method of no-method is by no means equivalent to just giving in to our usual ways. The true practitioner of silent illumination knows very clearly that he or she is practicing no-method and knows precisely what this "no-method" involves. Without a teacher, ordinary persons are likely to misinterpret this as a license to do what they have always done, simply affirming it as Chan. Few will have a clue as to what silent illumination means as a living human experience. For this reason, someone who takes up silent illumination must have either prior experience with Chan or an accomplished teacher who can constantly check and clarify points in the person's practice.

Secondly, practitioners of silent illumination should spend an extended period of time in intensive practice, preferably in an isolated or carefully controlled environment. Actually this is as true for the practice of silent illumination as it is for that of *gong'an* and *huatou*. The reasons for this are not difficult to understand. When Chinese practitioners used silent illumination or *gong'an* and *huatou* in the past, they did not work as we do. Normally they arranged their affairs so that they could attend to their practice all day long, with minimal occasion for distraction. Moreover, life itself was not as complex and fast-paced as it is in today's world. Despite its alleged conveniences,

life in modern society is immensely distracting and stressful. If we content ourselves with meditating for an hour or two a day and then spend the rest of our time chasing frantically after this or that, we will never be able to muster sufficient strength to make progress in the practice of Chan. Our efforts at calm and clarity will be too meager to transform the dissipation brought on by the rest of the day's activities. Thus, a complete reorientation of priorities and circumstances, preferably in the form of a period of retreat, is necessary to develop initial power in the practice. This period of isolation need not occur in a lonely place miles from civilization. It may just as well be undertaken in the most densely populated area, so long as the immediate setting is free of disturbance and conducive to a regular routine of meditation.

In theory, persons at any level of training may use the method of silent illumination. Indeed, from the traditional perspective of the Caodong school, everyone, including beginners, should just practice silent illumination. There is simply nothing else to be done. But, since silent illumination is so subtle and elusive, persons whose minds are disturbed and whose powers of concentration are poor have difficulty making much progress with it. If someone comes to me having practiced Chan before, I will still not teach this method if the person's mind is not sufficiently stable and open, regardless of how long he or she may have practiced. On the other hand, if a rote beginner comes along whose mind is by nature calm and stable, I may instruct the person in silent illumination practice right from the start. The deciding factor has nothing to do with one's professed seniority as a Chan or Buddhist practitioner, but one's power of concentration, simplicity of mind, and clear understanding of just what the practice entails. Before one can take up the practice of silent illumination, one must have a solid intuitive or experiential sense of what it means to let go of thoughts and be aware of what is at hand.

As a rule of thumb, concrete methods such as the five methods for stilling the mind are intended for less experienced persons. The keener the person's abilities and practice, the more simple and straightforward the method will be. For persons whose minds are complicated and confused, the method of silent illumination will be too formless to be effective in the face of their overwhelming passions. Initially it is best for them to use the more deliberate methods of gradual samadhi practice, such as the five methods for stilling the mind, to provide an explicit basis for calming and concentrating the mind. For a more experienced meditator, however, this sort of routinized meditation might prove more distracting and burdensome than helpful to one's practice. The important thing is that the practice match the individual's disposition and ability. It has often been said that the expedientless and direct path of

Chan is intended for persons with keen karmic roots. Inasmuch as the practice of *gong'an* and silent illumination both require a highly concentrated and unified mind to be effective, the Caodong and Linji approaches are similar on this point.

[1], [2] Hung-chih Chan-shih kuang lu, T 48.

[3] *Chih-i*, Mo-ho chih-kuan, T 46.5Gb.

[4] *Yampolsky*, The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, p. 136.

The Recorded Sayings of Master Linji Commentary by Master Sheng Yen

This talk was given on May 12, 1997, the seventh day of a retreat held in Poland, and was edited by Ernie Heau.



Tonight we will continue with section two of the sayings of Chan Master Linji. The text goes as follows:

The Master one day had occasion to go to the Hebei prefectural office. Constant Attendant Wang, head of the prefecture, requested the Master to step up to the lecture seat.

At that time Magu came forward and asked, "Of the eyes of the thousand-armed thousand-eyed bodhisattva of great compassion, which is the true eye?"

The Master said, "Of the eyes of the thousand-armed thousand-eyed bodhisattva of great compassion, which is the true eye? Answer me! Answer me!"

Magu dragged the Master down from the lecture seat and sat in it himself. The Master went up close to him and said, "How are you?"

(Note)

Magu was about to say something when the Master dragged him down from the seat and sat in it himself. Magu thereupon walked out of the gathering, and the Master stepped down from the lecture seat.

In this record, we see two monks playing some kind of game of musical chairs. What's going on? This story involves two Chan masters, one of course is Linji, the other is Magu, a disciple of Mazu. In this story Magu challenges Linji with a very difficult question. It is not unusual for a master to throw back a difficult question to the questioner, as Linji does in this case.

A simple interpretation might be that Magu thought, "Is this how you answer my question? You're not fit to be a Chan a master." So he dragged Linji down and sat on

the seat himself. Then Linji, thinking, "Hmm, this is not an ordinary fellow," went up to Magu, and said, "Who are you?" (Note: The translation in this text is incorrect; it should be "Who are you?" - quite different from "How are you?" The Chinese contains the meaning of "I don't recognize you - who are you?") And perhaps Magu, his realization being a level below Linji's, wanted to reply. Before Magu could speak, Linji dragged him down and reclaimed the seat. At this time, you could say, Magu should shut up; but before he could say anything, he was upstaged by Linji.

Let's put this story in a setting. Wang, an enlightened government official, invited his Dharma Master Linji to give a Dharma talk at his spacious office. There must have been many people there, including Magu, an enlightened disciple of Mazu. The dialogue ensued.

Despite his question, Magu was not necessarily challenging Linji. It could be he wanted to give the audience a direct taste



of the Dharma of Chan. Magu was a direct descendant of Mazu, which made him senior to Linji in the Dharma lineage. Linji was two generations away from Mazu, with Baizhang and Huangbo in between. It would seem then that Magu was the older man when this story occurred.

So, Magu took the occasion to question Linji, this young fellow who was giving a Dharma talk. He asked him, "Guanyin has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. All I want to do is ask you one simple question - which of the thousand eyes is the true eye?" According to the Great Compassionate Dharani Sutra attributed to Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin), this bodhisattva has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes to help sentient beings. This is a symbolic description of the bodhisattva's great compassion as he looks upon all sentient beings through many eyes and helps them in many ways. In this symbolism, the number of eyes and hands can be infinite, so great is this bodhisattva's compassion.

Right now when I look at you, I see each of you in a different perspective, each with your unique situation. When I help you with your method, or during interview, I try to help you in a way that suits your situation, your perspective. Even when two of you ask me the same question, I may give you different answers depending on your needs

and situation. Although I do not have a thousand eyes and a thousand hands, I do have about forty-two eyes and forty-two hands to help you with. With this analogy, we can understand the meaning of Guanyin's thousand eyes and thousand hands. The difference is, Avalokiteshvara can simultaneously fulfill all the needs of sentient beings, whereas after a long day helping just forty-plus people, I am exhausted. The bodhisattva can even be depicted with a thousand ears, to hear the cries of sentient beings.

In Chan, a master can also be symbolically described in terms of the eyes and hands, as a way of expressing a master's skillful means -whether the master's eyes and hands are high or low, many or few, correct or deviant. If a master's eyes and hands are described as high, that means his skills in delivering sentient being are quite profound. If a master has many eyes and hands, he has many expedient ways to help. A genuine master is always described as someone whose eyes and hands are correct, as opposed to a false master, who has deviant eyes and hands. So in this sense, Avalokiteshvara is an archetype of all enlightened ones, with reference to their skills in helping sentient beings.

According to legend, once when the Buddha was at Vulture peak, he held up a flower before the Dharma assembly, but said not a word. Among the assembly only Mahakashyapa understood the Buddha's meaning and smiled. When Shakyamuni saw this he knew Mahakashyapa understood the mind Dharma, and transmitted to him the "treasure of the correct Dharma eye." This "correct eye" was what Magu was referring to.

Have you heard this story before? I am sure many of you have. It is so old, its teeth have fallen out. But have you heard that the story was not true? (*Different opinions were given by people in the hall.*) Actually, there is no evidence it ever happened. It was likely fabricated in later generations, but it does describe the kind of thing that can take place in transmission. Nevertheless, it's true that the Dharma has been transmitted from Shakyamuni Buddha all the way to the present. The story is legend, but transmission is true.

Now what is this "treasure of the correct Dharma eye"? This is just a mere name, but generation after generation, this mind Dharma has been transmitted from master to disciple, to the very present day. For example my own master transmitted to me this "treasure of the correct Dharma eye," but as to what this precisely is, any answer given will be off the mark. This is analogous to the thousand-eyed, thousand-handed

bodhisattva. Which one is the correct Dharma eye? It is analogous to the transmission, from generation to generation, of this "treasure of the correct Dharma eye" to all these enlightened people. For example, Mazu transmitted to over 130 disciples. Which one received the "treasure of the correct Dharma eye?" And if you say, "This one did," then what exactly did he receive? So because it was an unanswerable question Linji just threw it back at Magu, like a hot coal. So, what exactly is this "treasure of the correct Dharma eye?" When you are enlightened you will know.



In our dialogue, it is more likely that Magu knew that his question was unanswerable. So when Linji just threw it back at him, Magu thought the younger monk's answer showed real attainment, and seeing there was nothing more to be said, he decided to take over the seat. So it was not an act of aggression, but of affirmation. (Guo-gu Shi: "But then, why did Linji himself drag Magu down and reclaim the seat?") A good question. When Magu took over the seat, he did not think that the first person to ask him a question would be Linji himself. Linji knew very well that Magu was an elder generation Chan master. But being very quick, Linji stood in front of him and said, "Hey, I don't know you, who are you?" Before Magu could say anything, Linji immediately pulled the old monk from the seat and got up there himself. This time, it was Magu who had nothing to say, and left.

The Dharma talk was over; both monks said what needed to be said and left the hall. This kind of Dharma dialogue is of the highest level, and it would have been most interesting if you had been there to see such a high expression of Dharma. If you had been there, being highly intelligent, maybe you would have thought, "No big deal, I could have done the same thing." But if you had good and deep virtuous roots or karmic affinity, upon witnessing this, perhaps you would have been enlightened at that very moment; you would have realized "So this is the Dharma of Chan!"

There are two kinds of meaning in the Dharma: the Dharma of secondary meaning, and the Dharma of ultimate meaning. Whatever can be spoken, heard, understood or learned refers to the Dharma of secondary meaning. The Dharma of ultimate meaning is beyond words and language, phrases, and names. To directly understand the Dharma of ultimate meaning is to be enlightened.

In ancient Chan monasteries, before the master spoke, the assembly gathered, and the chanting leader chanted a verse that begins something like this: "This assembly of

great elephants and dragons gather to hear the Dharma King's Dharma," and concluded with: "The Dharma King's Dharma is just thus. This is the Dharma of ultimate meaning." Usually the first part was chanted before the master spoke, the last part after the talk. The Dharma King is of course the Buddha. Nowadays they just do this as a sort of ritual, so they chant the whole four verses. Actually it is much better, because the Dharma of first meaning is ineffable, so they chant: "The dragons and elephants gather together to hear the Dharma King's Dharma," then before anyone can speak any Dharma, they chant: "The Dharma is just thus." This "thus" is the ultimate Dharma.

In the Linji story, what is this Dharma of ultimate meaning? It is precisely the dialogue of Linji and Magu. This story is an expression of the Dharma of ultimate meaning. Whether you understood or not, tonight all of you assembled here have heard this Dharma of ultimate meaning. Tonight's text is an excellent expression of the style of the Linji school of sudden enlightenment. These stories are quite exciting. They convey the style of Chan, which is beyond words and language.

In Chinese Buddhism, dragons and elephants symbolize people of the highest attainment, the most fit vessels who embody the Dharma and who excel at propagating it. In Chinese legend, the dragon is the most powerful being in heaven, and the elephant the most powerful on earth. So practitioners who epitomize these creatures are of the highest and greatest capacity. For those of you assembled here who are already dragons and elephants, tonight's talk was just rubbish. If you are not yet dragons and elephants, I hope you got some useful message out of this talk.

When my disciple John Crook held retreat here previously, he introduced the silent illumination method of the Caodong School. I would have liked to spend more time on silent illumination, because I also received transmission in the Caodong School. But since you already had some grounding in silent illumination, I thought it would be useful to introduce the Linji school and its practice.

Though I have never before lectured on the sayings of Linji, I feel these have been useful talks. They were very condensed and complete, as I made full use of our limited time. We had just three evenings and two very short sections to bring out the essence and character of the Linji tradition. We got a lot from these stories, simple yet pregnant with meaning. The very little time we had forced me to distill a lot in a very short space of time. So for the purpose of giving you a general sense and understanding of the Linji tradition, whatever is essential to know, I had to give it birth

using just two short stories. That is why I feel the talks were good. I think, I hope, we succeeded, and you may perhaps feel fortunate in that regard and find them useful.

Retreat Report: Chan Retreat, Shawangunk Mountains, New York, November 1998

By HR

It seemed to be right for me to attend this retreat in New York this year. Despite the long journey alone I was not anxious and was delighted to meet up with old friends at the Chan Center. Everyone was so kind and considerate and I felt confident.

I have an affinity for the Silent Illumination method of practice and have attended retreats in Wales, where both Shi-fu and John Crook have taught the method. Spaces have begun to open up in my everyday life, but I have been aware of getting lost within the meditative practice, so more teaching seemed a good idea.

I don't find sitting easy. I find it demands huge energy initially to overcome pain by concentration and then sustained effort to maintain the meditation. I was able to tap into my reserves and found Shi-fu's talks and instructions really helpful. For the first time on a retreat I was able to understand the instructions, keep up with the pace of the retreat, and follow the method. "Sharpen up your mind" was a phrase that I latched on to on the first day, and after my mind calmed down a bit, sharpening allowed patches of illumination. "Don't let your mind move," Shi-fu said to me on the second day, and "Be open, not closed." "Make your mind like a mirror." What perfect instructions, and when scattered thoughts settled, these words became the background to my meditation.

After our group interview on the third day, Shi-fu asked to see me alone. His lecture on emptiness that morning had had a profound effect on me. For a long time, and recently more and more frequently, I have found that I am touching or entering a space of peace, expansion, and joy, an experience of merging which is fundamental to being and where everything is. The only words that I can find to explain this are "Being in the presence of God," not that I believe in God, but I had a traditional English Christian upbringing, and this presence is the only description possible for me. After asking me about this, and some probing questioning, Shi-fu confirmed that I had realized Great Self. He said that I was a very important person and that John, Simon, and I were the "Three Jewels in England." At this we all laughed. It was only after the retreat that I realized that I had misunderstood what Shi-fu had said. At this stage I thought Great Self meant Mind, and thought that Shi-fu had confirmed that I had seen the nature of Mind, Good God I thought, why me? What a responsibility. What an honor. But soon I realized that I had to get on with it and that my karma, not me, had brought me to this situation.

Further sittings brought on more vexations - pride, cockiness, thoughts about how I was going to handle this back home. How do I tell people? Should I tell people? What will my friends think? What does it all mean? Is it all a big mistake? Part of my job was to look after the portable toilets. I ended up shifting the contents of the container (shit) with a stick, cleaning up the mess, and trying to prevent smells. Perhaps this is what I do in meditation too.

Anyway, after a while I began to settle down again, concentrating on the teaching and the method, stilling the mind and making it like a mirror. Sits were difficult, but in between times I found that when sitting on the deck and contemplating the environment, the sun, the moon, and the stars, a spaciousness and a wonderful vastness became apparent.

Another interview on the fifth day. Shi-fu wanted to know how I had been getting on, so I told him. I realize that at times I am contemplating emptiness but have difficulties with language and how to formulate experience in words. What do the words mean and what, if any, are the differences between Buddha Nature, Mind, Great Self; what about impermanence, emptiness, and selflessness? All sorts of other problems of expression were worrying me. Shi-fu told me to continue to practice and that if I did so, one day, in everyday life, perhaps when I am giving an injection to a patient, I would suddenly understand it all and become enlightened.... WOW! Is it really so close? I was joyful. But aware of the impermanence of all these feelings I told myself, "You've just got to get on with it." Back to sitting and back to cleaning the chemical toilets, which were becoming a distinct problem.

The retreat ended; it was my birthday and I felt overwhelmed by the whole thing. Again I was very conscious of everyone's kindness and the huge feeling of friendship amongst the participants.

Silent Illumination is a method that should be used in everyday life. On the journey home I was able to relax in the airplane. In England the train home from the airport usually takes me about two hours. Because Railtrack were digging up the lines, it took me six hours to travel the final part of my journey. I was able to accept this, relax, and become aware of beautiful music, a symphony of angels, coming from the back of my head.

Thank you for pointing the finger - I can see the moon.
My deepest gratitude.

POSTSCRIPT

Misunderstandings can easily arise, especially when one enters an area of no words and especially when the no words are both Chinese and English.

This retreat was a remarkable experience for me and has changed the way I view things. When I returned home, I wrote to John Crook about my experiences. He was corresponding with Guo-gu Shi and told him of my report. It was at this stage that they realised that I was mistaken in my understanding and wrote to me about this.

Following this intervention, I now understand that "the presence of God" awareness that can encompass me is Great Self. This is something that I know and can use as a resource in everyday life. It has huge value, and Shi-fu told me it is the place to which one may be taken by all the great religions. I personally have discovered it through insightful teaching and correct meditation.

I came unstuck in my understanding of the next stage to which one may be taken in Buddhism, which is the stage of enlightenment experiences and Buddha Nature. I had not appreciated the difference between Great Self, where the self merges with the environment, and No Self, where there is no thing there at all. The experience of Great Self allows a feeling of huge liberation, of freedom with responsibility to care, which is the beginning of compassion. In this state my mind is clear and empty, totally aware, and hardly moving, but I am still there with everything else. Within Chan and Zen there is emphasis on the experience of Seeing the Nature, The Nature of Mind, No-self, the attainment of Kensho, which is something that just happens and something that one cannot train for. I had so confused the concepts of Great Self and No Self, so confused the different words used to describe them, that I thought they were the same thing.

In New York I suddenly realized that when Great Self disappears there is No Self. I became aware of the impermanence of the Great Self, which revealed the nothing, no-self beyond - the flip side, as it were. I can now understand this concept as I have never done before. However, I will need to continue serious practice both on the cushion and in everyday life if I am to truly realize this.

I have learned such a lot in the past two weeks. I thank my teachers for their understanding and sympathy and the kindness with which they corrected my misunderstandings.

**Written on a plane on the night of December 5, somewhere
over the Atlantic**

The engines' hum
Somewhere between here and there a plane hurtles through dark space
Suffering

With joy
and complete devotion
I want to share experience
with a small son
Attachment

With joy
and complete devotion
I want to share experience
with a great Chan master
Attachment

Helpless creature torn in two
The scratching of a pen on paper
Emptiness

--Beata Kazimersica

The Saturday Sitting Group **by Nancy Joyce**

There is a Saturday sitting group at the Chan Center, not to be confused with the Friday night sitting group, although people sitting on Friday night come to the Saturday sitting group. The Saturday sitting group is also different from the retreats. (You can easily get confused with all these names.) The Saturday sitting group meets when no retreats are scheduled. One-day retreats are from 9AM to 8 PM or 9AM to 5PM and the resident monks conduct them. The Saturday sitting group meets from 9AM to 3PM and anyone in the group can keep time and lead the exercises. If we are having difficulties with our practice, one of the monks will come in periodically to check in with us to see if anyone wants an interview. So even though we are "on our own," our Chan advisors are near-by to help us out if needed.

Participants in the Saturday sitting group may come for all or part of the sitting schedule. We meet upstairs on the second floor of the Center in the meditation room, or in the back house in the interview room. Both places have room for 12-14 people. So if you get a call or get a flyer about the group, let us know that you are coming. After we end at 3PM we go to a local restaurant for a vegetarian lunch. Everything but the lunch is free.

When asked, "Why do people like going to the Saturday sitting group?" I can only respond to why I like it. The Saturday sitting group has offered me the opportunity to go to the Center every Saturday. I was looking for extended sitting on a regular basis. Trying to do it solo at home doesn't work for me. I need the group energy and support to keep going. Life does not seem the same to me now without this sitting. It's like the difference between night and day, dark and light, moon and sun. Although night, dark, and moon are beautiful in themselves, day, light and sun warm my soul. It's like the difference between feeling locked in a closed space and being let out. It's too easy for me to get caught up with daily activities, responsibilities, and dramas. But they are never ending, always there, always more. Regular, intense sitting opens me up from my self-imposed limits to a consciousness of limitlessness, peace, and joy. I can't believe that I'm actually using these words, especially joy, because for so long my mind went kicking and screaming to the cushion, trying to avoid what it considered to be a demanding experience. So I am grateful to this Saturday sitting group for giving me a bit more of sitting time to help keep me on the path. I am grateful to all the people who sit with us, because without them the group will not exist. Most of all, I am grateful to Shih-fu who supports us in this endeavor. We are a different type of Chan flower growing in the abundant Chan garden. Come and join us.

News

Master Sheng Yen in Taiwan (By Buffe Laffey and Linda Peer)

On January 9, 1999, Master Sheng Yen was invited by the Li-Shu Publishing Company to give a talk on "Religion for the Intelligentsia" as part of its series "Humanity's Renaissance in the Society of Taiwan." On January 21, Master Sheng Yen received The First National Civic Service Award.

Progress at Dharma Drum Mountain Site

In August, 1998, the first permanent structures were begun on the site of the Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery and academic center in Taiwan. By the end of 2000 we expect to have completed five buildings: a residence for monks; a library; a dorm for professors, students, staff and lay practitioners; an administration building including classrooms and the offices of the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies; and the International Conference Building. The second phase of building is expected to be completed in 2001, and includes the Chan Hall, cells for solitary retreat, a dormitory for nuns, and a kitchen and cafeteria building.

Conference and Tripitaka Project

The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, the Central Institute of Research of Taiwan and the Department of Education of Taiwan hosted a conference on internet research for four international electronics research institutes; FBTI, PNC, ECAJ and SEER, from January 18 to 21, 1999. The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies interested in this conference because it is carrying out the CBETA project, which will make the entire Buddhist Tripitaka available on CD and also on-line. Six volumes of the Tripitaka have already been in-putted in preparation for making CDs, and by the end of 1999 twenty-three more volumes should be finished. Within the next five years the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies plans to have all 55 volumes of the Tripitaka complete and on CD.

Master Sheng Yen was installed as the abbot of Zaiming Ssu, a historical landmark monastery (1850) in Taoyuan, on January 22, 1999. The temple, located near Taipei's international airport, is arranged on the plan of a traditional Chinese house with Japanese-style gardens and scenic vistas from many points of the temple grounds. Its carved wooden altar is one of two existing in Taiwan. A rare ancient collection of

sutras is housed in the reception room. Other antiquities grace the altar, adjacent rooms, and brick kitchen. In line with Shi-fu's ecological concerns, traditional rituals which involve burning paper money have been suspended at the temple. Shi-fu will lead the expansion of Dharma practice and community activities at this beautiful location.

A Silent Illumination retreat was held from January 31 to February 7. Two hundred and twenty practitioners, including the Sangha members, attended this seven-day retreat.

The prestigious "Dialogue between Science and Humanity, 1999" was held by China Times on March 1 in its auditorium and televised nationwide by the Taiwan Television Co. The speakers were Yuan-Jer Lee, President of Academic Sinica; Jang-zuan Shih, President of Acer Computer Co.; Bao-Te Han, Dean of the National Taiwan College of Art; and Master Sheng Yen.

The Fifth Buddhist Wedding Ceremony was held at Taipei City Hall on March 14, 1999. Fifty couples were married at the event. Master Sheng Yen encouraged the new couples to apply and exemplify the Dharma in their family life.

"The Dharma Program of Peace Prayer" and "Peaceful Speech-Celebrity Dialogues" were held from March 26 to 28, 1999. The hostess of the program was Miss Yua-chin Chen. Master Sheng Yen's dialogue with Taipei city official In-cho Ma on the first night dealt with how violence, crime, and our anxiety about it can be reduced through practice. The topic of the second day's events was helping contemporary youth gain some equilibrium and equanimity in their lives. Master Shengyen's guest for this discussion was Ms. Chun-kuan Lee. Finally, the vice president of Academic Sinica Guo-shu Yang, academician I-yuan Lee, and Shih-fu explored the topic of life's meaning.

An academic conference was held by Dharma Drum University, with thirty invited scholars from mainland China and Taiwan. "Uplifting the Character of Mankind" was the topic addressed in the 9 symposia and 20 papers presented.

The first National Contribution for Peace awards" were awarded to four individuals and six groups by the Dharma Drum Buddhist Association at a ceremony held on April 4 at the Taipei Grand Hotel.

Chinese New Year Celebration, February 14, 1999 (By Lindley Hanlon)

The Year of the Rabbit was ushered in with a full day of activities and ceremonies celebrating the Chinese New Year on February 14, 1999. The day began with recitation of the Heart Sutra, offerings to the Sangha, and mid-day offerings and blessings. Eric Wulf, Jason Chan, Jennifer Ho, and Hai-Shin Dam graciously presented the offering envelopes on behalf of the assembly. A delicious vegetarian lunch, organized by Amy Yoo and prepared by many volunteers during the previous days, preceded a special talk by Master Jen Chun.

The entertainment portion of the celebration, organized by Guo-pu and introduced by Anselma Rodriguez, included a performance by Yilien Hsu on flute; an improvisation on a text from Silent Illumination (The Poetry of Enlightenment) by Lindley Hanlon (mezzo-soprano) and Ronnie Seldin, master of the shakuhachi (Japanese bamboo flute); and a medley of songs performed by the Dharma Drum Mountain Choir, including songs composed by Guo-yuan Shi. A "buddhadrama" called "The Mind in Motion: a Three-Ring Circus," written by Lindley Hanlon and performed by Lindley (the Ringmaster), Tracy Hui (The Meditator), Symin Chang (The Method), and Amy Yoo, Charlotte Tsai, David Ho, and Brian Tsai (the Vexations) humorously demonstrated how a meditation method (a tightrope walker) calms the vexations (billowing lengths of fabric) and ushers in the peacefulness associated with the Buddha-mind. The program concluded with Robert Lapides' popular Magic Show. The day proceeded smoothly under the leadership of Guo-pu, who (with Virginia Tan) coordinated the efforts of a host of volunteers and (with Sylvie Sun) decorated the Chan Hall. The walls of the dining area were hung with the photographs of the Buddhist Youth Group. Photographers represented in the exhibit were George Chang, Steve Chang, Sharon Chao, Jane Chen, Jason Chen, Tracy Hui, Tina Jih, Victoria Lee, Susan Ngo, Brian Tsai, Charles Wang, Richard Wang, and Kevin Wu. Guo-yuan Shi's closing remarks set the celebration in the context of the practice of Buddhadharma.

First Meditation Class at Dharma Drum Retreat Center (By Buffe Laffey)

On April 17, 1999 Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) held the first beginner's meditation class. A classroom was set up at Sangha's House living room, under the watchful eye of the new Buddha statue. Eleven adults and two teenagers participated, most of them neighbors living close by the Shawangunk facility.

The class started at 9AM and lasted three hours. Instructor Lindley Hanlon presented the basics of meditation, including preparation before meditation, tools for sitting, environmental conditions, and posture. A breathing method and a slow walking meditation were taught. The students sat for three brief sessions and all did very well. Although new to meditation, they looked as if they had been practicing for a while, and all had very positive responses to their first meditation experience. To celebrate the inaugural meditation class, two chefs from Queens (Linda Chan and Luisa Chan) prepared a vegetarian lunch. The meal was very well received; several people asked for recipes. The art of serving Chinese tea, from which the Japanese tea ceremony was derived, was demonstrated by Guo-huan and enjoyed by all. It was a very successful event and a wonderful way to know our neighbors better. The students were eager to attend the second session of the class, which is planned for early May or June.

Master Sheng Yen Travels

On April 15 Master Sheng Yen left Taiwan and traveled to Singapore, where he delivered two lectures to over 3,000 people. The lectures were sponsored and attended by Madam Tan Choo Leng, the wife of the Prime Minister of Singapore. Master Sheng Yen spoke on "Living a Life of Wisdom" and "Living a Life of Joy and Harmony," both from the Chan perspective.

On April 22 Master Sheng Yen arrived in Berlin, Germany, for a historic event, the largest seven-day Chan retreat to take place in Berlin, and especially in East Berlin. About 50 people attended from 12 countries, including Wales, Croatia, Poland, Switzerland and Portugal. John Crook, Gun-yuan Shi and Guo-gu Shi served as assistant teachers, giving interviews to participants. Dharma talks were delivered in Chinese and translated into English by Gun-gu Shi, and into German by Max Kahn. Master Sheng Yen's talks focused on renunciation and compassion. He said that renunciation means seeing through the fallacy of seeking material gain fame, and so on, understanding the source of our suffering, and seeking a more meaningful way of living: the cultivation of Bodhicitta. He talked about humility and repentance as aspects of Bodhicitta. We need to establish high goals and try to follow the Bodhisattva path, but we must also recognize our own flaws. If we maintain beginner's mind we will be able to be diligent without being disappointed.
