



Tending the Ox

"In 1978, I returned to Taiwan to visit Master Ling-yuan, the abbot of the Monastery of Great Enlightenment of Ten Directions in Ji-long. I asked him, 'Do you still remember me? I am that soldier who shared a sleeping platform with you, Old Master, at a temple in Gao-xiong, and you gave me a big shout.' He said, 'Oh! I remember! The person that I taught to put down has come.'"

Chan Master Sheng Yen
from *Chan Comes West*

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From the Editor

"I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God and his was an idol."--Lieut. Gen. William G. "Jerry" Boykin, deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, speaking, in October, to a Christian evangelical church group, of a Muslim warlord he had captured in Somalia.

As I write, on October 23, Gen. Boykin has apologized, President Bush has distanced himself from the general's remarks, Sec. Rumsfeld has defended the general's right to religious freedom...and no doubt, by the time this is published in December, the imbroglio will have reached some form of conclusion. Either Gen. Boykin will have moved on, or the attention of the nation will have.

As those of you who read this column are no doubt aware, I am not above politics, but in this case what interests me is the religion, and despite the general's poor political judgment in airing his religious views in public, and in uniform, the views themselves are of a type that religious people may find it hard to avoid. What do those of us who believe in a Supreme Being think of the supreme beings believed in by others? We can comfort ourselves with the homily of one God with many names, but if yours is forgiving and mine is vengeful, is one of us right about Him and the other wrong? What do we think of the beliefs of pantheists, worshippers of the deities of mountains and rivers and weather? We respect their beliefs, even if they are a little primitive, don't we?

And what about those of us who believe not in an eternal, supreme being, but in the fundamental emptiness of all phenomena? Do we believe, as I have heard prominent Buddhist leaders imply, that the gods of others exist, but that those others understand them incorrectly? They cannot be eternal, for they are impermanent; they cannot be "supreme", and they have no "being", for they are dependently co-arisen--is that what we Buddhists actually think of the beliefs of those deists?

Belief itself would seem to be problematic--it is that part of what we think that's not negotiable. We understand that tolerance of the beliefs of others is a good thing, but is it enough? Tolerance, after all, means withstanding that which is inherently hateful or harmful, and such an attitude toward the beliefs of others, while preferable to intolerance, keeps the seeds of ideological conflict ever alive, just waiting for the cold rain of economic hardship, natural disaster, or political upheaval to bring them back to terrifying life. Perhaps, short of wisdom, tolerance is the best we can do, but then we

need to know that like any other expedient method, it only works if we don't forget to use it.

Corrections

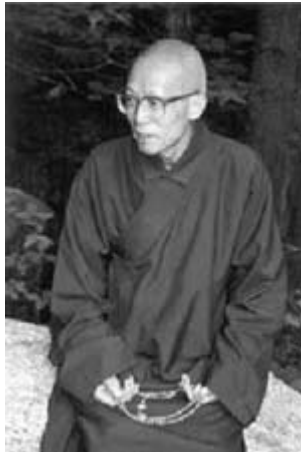
In reporting the appointment of Dr. Les Cole as executive director of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in the Spring 2003 issue, page 30, we erroneously identified him as a Christian minister. Dr. Cole, who has graduate degrees in both theology and psychology, is a Buddhist and a disciple of Chan Master Sheng Yen. We sincerely regret the error and any confusion it may have caused.

The Four Proper Exertions: Part Three

*This is the third of four talks on the Four Proper Exertions, given by **Chan Master Sheng Yen** between October 31 and November 21, 1999, at the Chan Meditation Center, NY. **Rebecca Li** translated live, and transcribed the talks from tape. The final text was edited by **Ernest Heau**, with assistance from **Rebecca Li**.*

So far we have covered the role of contemplation in developing diligence for practicing the Four Proper Exertions, the role of the ten virtues in giving rise to wholesome states, and overcoming unwholesome states, and we have talked about the role of meditation in encouraging wholesome states.

The Need for Virtuous Roots



To practice the Four Proper Exertions well, we need virtuous roots. How do virtuous roots come about? They come about by having virtuous seeds sowed in our minds when we hear the Dharma. When a seed germinates it sprouts roots. After learning Dharma and beginning to practice, we allow the Dharma seeds to sprout and give rise to virtuous roots. These new roots can then grow and take shape in our heart/mind. When the roots develop they give rise to branches, and when they are finally above ground, leaves begin to appear. So, through the virtuous deeds of practice we can give rise to virtuous roots. But it all begins with seeds being planted when we hear the Dharma.

Even as you listen to this Dharma talk, you are collecting seeds that will germinate and grow in your heart/mind. When that happens, it will encourage the growth of your character and raise your spirituality to a higher level.

There are three kinds of practitioners. There are ordinary sentient beings who have heard the Dharma but have not put it into practice, or at least have not been able to practice it very well. Next are sages who have heard the Dharma and have practiced successfully. Their virtuous roots have developed, leading to character and spirituality of a higher level. However, they still have vexations. Third are saints, very accomplished practitioners who have eliminated vexations to the point where they no longer harm themselves or others. Still, there remain subtle vexations that however, no longer manifest.

Diligence in Practice

Without diligently practicing the Four Proper Exertions, we cannot expect to get beyond the level of ordinary sentient beings. But when we practice the Dharma and allow the virtuous roots to develop in our heart, eventually we can become sages. After that, with continued diligence, we become saints, and leave our vexations behind. How, then, do we practice? People may think practice only means sitting meditation. Doing prostrations, reciting the Buddha's name, reading and reciting sutras, copying them by hand, these are all practices as well.

In Buddhism we have analogies that describe diligence in practice. There is the diligence of the mother who always thinks about her child, even when she is away from the child. There is also the diligence of a hen sitting on an egg until it hatches. She won't say "Well, I'll just take a few days off, let the egg cool down, and I'll come back to it." Third is the diligence of a baby who wants to nurse continually. These analogies reflect the attitudes we should have: like the mother, we should be mindful of the practice; like the hen, we should persist in the practice; like the baby, we should hunger for practice. Whatever methods you practice, with these attitudes, you will have diligence, and you will cultivate virtuous roots.

Diligence is emphasized in many different Buddhist sutras and shastras, the latter being treatises based on the sutras. First there is the *Abhidhamakosa Shastra* by the great scholar Vasubandhu, which talks about 75 dharmas, ten of which describe the mental conditions for cultivating goodness. Of these, the first condition is faith. Only when one has faith in the practice can one accept the teachings, and this allows one to put the teachings into practice. And with the practice, one develops virtuous roots. The second condition for cultivating goodness is diligence.

Another shastra by Vasubandhu outlines 100 dharmas, of which eleven are the wholesome mental factors. Of these, the seventh is diligence. There is the *Treatise on Consciousness Only*, also by Vasubandhu, in which he emphasizes the Four Proper Exertions. This treatise talks about diligence as the motivating force to increase wholesome deeds and to eliminate unwholesome deeds.

Diligence is important because it gives us the courage and strength to deal with our own laziness and succeed in the practice. Practicing the Four Proper Exertions can eliminate laxity, which is important in completing the development of wholesome factors. Diligence will help us complete whatever we do, even as we are confronted

with obstacles. That is why we need courage and strength--so that we won't give up easily.



Kinds of Diligence

There are different ways to view diligence. The *Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra* speaks of diligence of the body and diligence of the mind. Diligence of the body refers to using our bodies so that we become more capable of helping others. Diligence of the mind is about cutting off attachments such as greed and desire, so as to eliminate laziness. We like to have fun, to eat, to sleep. Tendencies like these lead to laziness; only when we can cut them off can we eliminate the unwholesome factors in our mind and give rise to the wholesome ones.

The *Treatise of Mere Consciousness* speaks of three kinds of diligence. The first is the diligence that is like armor. Making and keeping vows is like wearing armor that protects our practice from harm. Because of this armor we won't easily give up practicing. That is why it is important to have courage and strength. The second type of diligence mentioned in this treatise is that which comes through the bodhisattva practice of the Six Paramitas. The paramitas are first, generosity, then precepts, then effort; fourth is diligence, fifth is samadhi, and sixth is wisdom. Bodhisattvas do not slacken their practice when confronted with obstacles and difficulties. They will not say " I practiced for a few days and I'm tired, so I will take a break." No, they will just keep up their practice with no thought of the difficulties. It is with this attitude that a bodhisattva practices diligence. The first four paramitas prepare us for samadhi, the fifth paramita, and with that wisdom, the sixth paramita can arise. Therefore, samadhi is not just about sitting still on a cushion; samadhi is about living in the world without being defiled by it. The true samadhi is that which leads us to wisdom.

But what is wisdom? Wisdom is about transcending distinctions between right and wrong, between good and bad, while still dealing with things appropriately. It is being able to deal with subjects and objects while transcending subject/object distinctions.

Practitioners will often feel tired, but the problem is not just bodily fatigue. We refer to something subtler--how the mind can become tired in the practice. That is why we must have diligence. Otherwise, our minds will tire easily and early. Some people think they can just jump into the practice and samadhi will come and wisdom will arise. After practicing a while without experiencing samadhi and wisdom, there is a good chance they will feel fatigue and give up. This is because they lack diligence. Some practice for a year or two, or ten years or more, and then give up. That is already pretty good, because they actually practiced for a while. Or some will say that they'll practice harder the next time around, in the next life. Even that is not too bad, if they sincerely believe they will practice in their next life. All these people can help themselves by practicing the Four Proper Exertions.

The Diligence of Helping Others

Another kind of diligence is the diligence of helping other sentient beings. It is practice arising out of compassion for others without letting up. There are people, such as social workers, who work very hard to help people. After doing that for several years, they sometimes get 'burned out.' However, a bodhisattva takes the view that it may take many lifetimes to help sentient beings attain buddhahood, but in the process, one also helps oneself. What is important is not how much ability or talent we have, but how diligent we are in offering ourselves to others.

I encourage people to volunteer at the Chan Center because in volunteering, one is spreading the Dharma and in doing so, one also helps others. Some of you might feel bad if you keep coming to hear the Dharma without volunteering. But you can still make a vow to make time in the future to volunteer here. Of course, it is better to have some kind of plan, not just a vague wish to do something. If you can make a vow to volunteer, you will at least have given rise to the idea of offering yourself to others, to benefit others. This of course is one of the Four Proper Exertions: to give rise to wholesome activity not yet arisen. But without diligence, your vow will not last long.

Chan in Life and Death

*The following Dharma talk was given by **Chan Master Sheng Yen** to the Meditation Group, the Chan Meditation Center's Manhattan affiliate, on November 6, 2001. It was translated live by **Rebecca Lee**, transcribed by **David Slaymaker**, and edited by **David Berman**.*



This evening's topic is life and death from the perspective of Chan. Before I can talk about life and death from the perspective of Chan, we first need to understand what the perspective of Chan is. Actually Chan is very simple. Chan is about living in a very joyfully positive manner. In Chinese, the term Chan means wisdom, stability and peace. With wisdom, one can live with less suffering and vexation. And with stability and peace one can live without constant emotional afflictions and fluctuations. When we talk about the issue of life and death, most people cherish life, but dislike death. However, from the perspective of Chan, life and death are inseparable--they are actually the same thing.

Yesterday, I talked to a woman at the Chan Center. This woman's husband worked on the 106th floor of the World Trade Center; he died on September 11th. Since the death of her husband, this lady has been coming to the Chan Center very often. So I spoke to her yesterday and asked her how things were going at home, and she told me she was living with her mother-in-law. I asked her if her mother-in-law knew that her son had died, and she said that it seemed she knew, but that they hadn't really told her because she was really afraid of death, so they thought it was better not to tell her. So I asked her, "How old is your mother in law?" And she said, "Well, she's already 94 years old, and she's been looking very hard for a way to immortality, finding a way that she can live forever."

I'd like to ask you: What this old woman is searching for, is it something she will be able to find? Is it possible to find immortality? I believe most of you would answer, "No, it's impossible to live forever." But is it also possible that deep down in your heart you've been hoping that maybe you could? That if there were a way you could live

longer, or maybe not die at all, that would be great? So far, I haven't found such a method; if I find it I will use it myself. Actually, in all human experience, throughout human history, we know of no human being that has not died. Therefore, a Chan practitioner should have the understanding and awareness that death can happen at any time. Wherever there is life there is going to be death. And for some people death may come sooner than for others, but it will happen to everybody. So this evening I'd like to talk about two main topics--one is the issue of life and death, and the other is Chan and its relationship to life.

So what is life? Life is the boundless extension of limitless brightness. Most people think of life as beginning when a baby's born and ending when a person dies. But that is not an entirely correct understanding of life. The existence of the physical body is actually only the expression of the function of life. So one should understand life as having two components, the physical and the spiritual. Without the physical body, the spiritual aspect of life would have no way of expressing itself, but the physical body does not represent the entirety of life. The physical body exists for some limited period of time, but the spiritual component of life exists forever.

There are a couple of interesting analogies some Buddhists use to describe the relationship between the spiritual and physical aspects of life, which make a certain kind of sense though they are not entirely correct. In one of these analogies the spiritual aspect of life is seen as a traveler who goes all over the place, taking a bus, driving a car, staying at hotels with different kinds of accommodation, and the cars and hotels are seen as the physical aspect of life. The idea is that the spiritual aspect of life is invisible and intangible and is always there, whereas the visible, tangible, physical aspect of life exists only periodically. Another such analogy is that the physical aspect of life is like the clothes we put on--the clothes get old and dirty so we take them off and put on new ones. The body that wears these clothes is still the same body, so again the idea is that spiritual life is continuous and eternal while the physical aspect exists only periodically. These analogies illustrate how the physical aspects of life are like manifestations of different stages of spiritual life. Also you might have heard that in Tibetan Buddhism there is a belief in reincarnation, that for example his holiness the Dalai Lama is believed to be in his fourteenth reincarnation. So the idea is that this is the same person in his 14th body.

This one time I met a Tibetan Rinpoche, so I asked him, "Are you a reincarnated rinpoche?" He said, "Yes, everyone is a reincarnated person." I asked him, "Am I the reincarnation of somebody?" He said, "Yes, of course you are too. You are probably the reincarnation of a great practitioner from the past."

Here, I'd like to ask you, do you think you are the reincarnation of someone in the past? I think so, probably. It's just that last time you had a different name, and no one can verify who you were, so no one can say that you are the reincarnation of such and such a person. So that's the idea of reincarnation. One's re-incarnation in the present life can be based on one's karma or on the power of one's vows. The difference between the two is that if one's reincarnation is based on karma, then it is not free--one has no choice--whereas if one's reincarnation is based on one's vows then one is free to choose. So here's a question: If you are reincarnated based on the power of your vow, does it mean that the person you are in this life is exactly the same as the person you were in your past life? *Exactly the same?* So are the two exactly the same? No they are not exactly the same.

I asked the Tibetan Rinpoche, "Since his holiness the Dalai Lama has been reincarnated 14 times, is he the same person as he was 14 lifetimes ago?" The Rinpoche replied, "No. They are not the same person. Actually, in 14 lifetimes, they are 14 different people." "So there have been Changes from the first to the fourteenth reincarnation?" And the Rinpoche replied, "What's Changed is his wisdom and merit."

So, for the Dalai Lama, from his first life to his fourteenth reincarnation his wisdom and merit has been Changing, and it has been growing. The same is true for everyone, however, if one does not practice, one's merit and wisdom can Change in the opposite direction, going downhill.

Earlier I mentioned that life is the boundless extension of limitless brightness. If one practices and makes good use of every lifetime that one has, then one will be adding to this brightness, and that is the boundless extension. That is what I mean by life being the boundless extension of limitless brightness.

What I mean by making good use of one's life is doing things that can benefit oneself and others. So if each physical lifetime is likened to a piece of clothing or a house that one has, then when one is in possession of the house, one makes good use of that house, and then while one is wearing a piece of clothing, one takes good care of it so it can perform its



proper function. Of course however well one takes care of a house or piece of clothing, it will still get old and deteriorate in the end. But in the process of one's taking good

care one is adding to the brightness of life, and if one can do so life after life then one is enhancing the limitless brightness of life.

Recently when I was in Taiwan there were quite a few serious natural disasters happening there; there was serious flooding. I went to an area where a lot of people had died. The family members of the victims suffered greatly, and many were unable to accept the reality of the deaths. A lot of people were asking me, "Shifu, in our family, nobody does any bad things, why do we have to suffer such a punishment?" "There are much worse people than my relative--why does my family member have to die, and those people don't die?" "There are people who are much older and they survived, they're still alive--why does my family member have to die so young?" I was bombarded with these questions. Their thinking was that it's wrong for their relatives to die in a disaster, wrong that older people, like me, should still live. Of course that's not really what they meant, but they were suffering greatly from what had happened.

I have another student who has come to many retreats and four years ago her twenty-year-old son went out to buy bread in the morning and was killed by a car. For this woman this is a very difficult reality for her to accept. She simply could not face that just a moment ago her son was fine and then a moment later her son was dead. So for a few years this woman has been coming to my seven-day retreats, and every time she asks me, "Shifu, where's my son?" Every time she asks me this question. I've been telling her the same answer: "Everybody comes to this life with a mission, and once that mission's accomplished, then that person leaves. Even though you do not want to let go, it is impossible to keep this person around. The next mission in the next stage of life is waiting for him, so he has to move on to accomplish the next mission. He has already moved on to the next lifetime, so you should give him your blessing instead of suffering so much."

Now, after more than three years of meditation practice, this woman has gained a deeper understanding of the nature of her body and mind, and begun to understand that life and death are separated by a very fine line. She also understands that if her deceased son is still around, and if there's still a connection, she will be able to feel his presence. However, if she can no longer feel his presence, then that just means that he's already moved on, and there's no reason to be so attached. Finally she has begun to understand and so is willing to let go. So she no longer asks me the question again and again, "Where's my son?" It's kind of like we were traveling on the same bus, but her son got off this bus and got on another bus. Even though you want to see him or want to communicate with him, it's not that easy, because he's already riding

on another bus. So if we understand the separation between the living and the dead in this way, then it will be easier for one to handle these matters in life. Of course when it happens, when we have to be separated from our loved ones either living or dead, it is not easy to accept right away. But with the practice of Chan and the application of the correct concepts one will become more capable of coming to terms with whatever happens.

I'd like to ask you another question: Have you thought about why you ended up in this room listening to me giving this talk? How are we related to each other that you would come and listen to me talk? Let me tell you this--we have a connection not just from today's meeting, we have a connection from way back when. We have been connected in some way from a long time ago, and even though we don't remember it, our connection brought you all to this room to listen to this talk this evening.

More than fifty some years ago there was a man living in mainland China, but because of the war he had to leave, which meant that he would never see his family again in this life. You can imagine how sad this separation was. But years later he ran into his family again, just totally by accident, so this kind of thing happens, though of course not often. I actually experienced something like this when I was in my thirties. I had accepted a disciple, who was taking refuge with me, and then I never saw this person again until twenty-some years later here in New York in the subway. I didn't recognize him anymore because he looked very different after twenty years, but because I'm a monk, I kind of look the same, so he recognized me right away and ran up to me and said, "Shifu, I'm so glad to see you again." I thought, "Who is this person, why is he calling me Shifu?" It is actually the same for us here. You may think you don't really know me, we haven't met before, but regardless of the time that has passed and the Changes we may have been through--new name, new body--we find ourselves together again.

About six years ago I gave a talk and two of the people who were at that talk are here this evening; one of them is Lindley, who organized this event. She came to that talk and since then she's been following me. So I believe we had a very deep connection before, otherwise why would she come to my talk and follow me after that? There's another person from that talk who's here this evening, and a third person too. It's not like they went crazy, like they didn't know me at all and just suddenly started following me around. It must be because we had a deep connection from before, and causes and conditions were such that we meet each other again now. So despite separations while we are alive, or between the dead and the living, we will see each other again.

Someone gets off this bus and gets on another bus, but at some other time, in some other world, we may find ourselves on the same bus again. If one can use this perspective to look at life and death then one may not suffer so much.

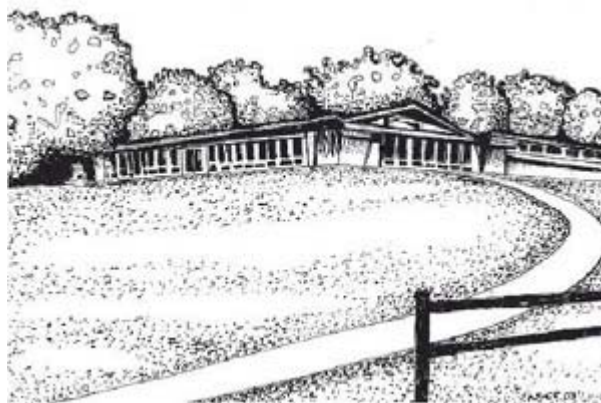
Next I'd like to talk about how the practice of Chan can show us that life and death are actually two sides of the same thing. Through Chan practice one will experience firsthand that the physical phenomena of the body are undergoing constant changes, and that one's mental state is also constantly changing, with phenomena arising and departing continuously. Thus one will come to understand the reality of impermanence and come to see that life and death are really inseparable, really the same thing.

If one applies the method of sitting meditation to pursue the experience of Chan, then one will go through three stages. The first stage involves the relaxation of the body and mind, and as one relaxes the body and the mind, the burden of the body and mind will lessen. As a result one's attachment to the body and the mind will lessen as well. When the body and mind are unified, then the burden of the body and the mind will disappear, at which point one will experience a very comfortable, very joyful state. Once one has this experience, the second stage, one may want to return to it, because in our ordinary daily life we often experience our bodies as great burdens. At this point one can really appreciate the value of putting down the attachment to the physical body. However, rather than becoming stuck in the comfort of this stage, one should proceed to the next stage, where one also puts down the attachment to this blissful state of unified body and mind. At this third stage one will be able to go back into daily life and feel neither aversion nor attachment to the physical body. One's view of the physical body will be that having one is good, that it should be cherished and used well, but that when it has to go that's OK too. Of course it takes time in one's practice to get to this stage. One cannot just start thinking, "Oh, wow, Chan practice is so good, I can just go straight to stage three!" But before we get to the stage of feeling at ease with the body and the mind, or the stage of feeling liberated from the body or mind, is sitting meditation useful? Yes, it is useful, because the practice of meditation helps one's mind remain stable, and clear, and peaceful, even as one confronts the danger of death. As I said at the beginning, Chan is about living a life of wisdom and peace.

I'd like to give you another example, actually this person is also here, sitting at the back there. Her practice of meditation is not that good yet, but it's already been quite useful to her. On the morning of September 11th, Ann was practicing sitting

meditation in the morning before she went to work. After her meditation she made three interesting decisions. She usually wears contact lenses, but that morning she decided to wear glasses. She also decided to go to work in pants and instead of wearing high heels she decided to wear flats. Then she went to her job in a building near the World Trade Center. When the attack occurred, she didn't panic. She escaped from the building, and because she wasn't wearing her contact lenses, the dust didn't affect her vision very badly--by the time she got out of the area she was completely covered with dust--and because she was wearing pants and low shoes she was able to move quickly. So for her, sitting meditation was quite useful that day. We'd like to invite her to stand up so we can give her our blessings; we are happy for her. So Ann, make sure you practice sitting more often.

With practice, when one encounters danger, one will be able to minimize the harm that may occur, because one's mind will remain calm and clear. And even when the situation is such that one cannot escape death, then one will not panic. Instead one will understand that it's time to get off the bus, and that there is this other bus one has to get.



The Wondrous Functions of the Mind: A Letter to Zheng Fang Lian

By Chan Master **Zhongfeng Mingben** translated by **Ocean Cloud**

Zhongfeng Mingben (1262-1323) was an eminent Chan master of the Linji lineage in the Yuan dynasty. He was one of the very few to receive transmission from his teacher, Chan Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao (1239-1295), the protagonist of the famous gongan, "Do you have mastery of yourself when you are in a dreamless sleep?"

Ocean Cloud is a group of practitioners, students of **Chan Master Sheng Yen**, who endeavor to bring the classics of Chinese Buddhism to the English-speaking community in the spirit of *dana-paramita*. They are: **Chang Wen (David Kabacinsky)** from New York, **Guo Shan (Jeff Larko)** from Ohio, and **Guo Jue (Wei Tan)** from Maryland.

The invisible bug is able to rest on everything but not on fire. The mind of sentient beings can relate to everything (as an object of cognition) but not to prajna. But what really is the mind of sentient beings and what really is the essence of prajna? Why this talk about the ability and inability to relate to phenomena? Well, let me explain:

"Reined with golden bridle, the horse whinnies on the fragrant grass; in the jade pavilion, the lady is enraptured by the spring blossoming of Apricot flowers" -- this is the mind of sentient beings. "In the jade pavilion, the lady is enraptured by the spring blossoming of Apricot flowers; reined with golden bridle, the horse whinnies on the fragrant grass" -- this is the essence of prajna. "On fragrant grass whinnies the golden bridled horse; the spring blossoming of Apricot flowers enraptures the lady in the jade pavilion" -- this is the ability and inability to relate to phenomena. If you get this directly without any hesitation, you would have seen [true reality].

Apart from the mind of sentient beings, there is no prajna essence; when the waves subside, the water returns to its original state. Apart from prajna essence, there is no mind of sentient beings; when there is water, waves will naturally arise. When emotive conceptualization of what is saintly and what is worldly is ended, and when the view of subject and object subsides, the worlds of the ten directions become one great field of complete enlightenment. All sentient beings have originally attained Buddhahood. At this place, you would not be able to find the tiniest bit of thing to be the mind of sentient beings; and you would not be able to find the tiniest bit of thing that is prajna essence, let alone finding the tiniest bit of thing to support the theory of being able or not able to relate to phenomena. This is what we call the True Suchness Dharma gate of one taste and universality. Because of it, the Buddhas of the past, present, and

future are able to set the wheel of Dharma in motion; with it, the ancestral masters of the past were able to open the true eyes [of Dharma]; relying on it, the firmament shelters the world; based on it, the earth holds up everything. The saints utilize it to bring order and peace to all places; a noble person accords with it to fulfill the virtue of benevolence and enact policies to administer the land.

It is just that the multitude uses it everyday without knowing it. Having their back turned against it, they get more and more alienated from it. Due to this estrangement, worldly characteristics arise through prajna essence; from these worldly characteristics, the mind of sentient beings is generated; following this mind of sentient beings, different karmic actions are performed. As a result, one wanders around from place to place, leading to endless cyclic existence.

What we call prajna essence is none other than the potent and wondrous awareness from which the six sense functions flow forth. It is like a room that encompasses empty space, having six doors open on the sides, without obstructing each other. What we call the mind of sentient beings is none other than that which habitually follows the six sense objects of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought. It constantly grabs and rejects things it encounters, generating feelings of liking and aversion, grasping and attaching [to things] thought after thought, without interruption.

Prajna essence is analogous to water and the mind of sentient beings to waves. When the ocean of mind is perturbed by the wind of conditions it encounters, waves arise from the water. Apart from the water, the waves have no concrete substance. For one whose great wisdom has shone through in great brightness and openness, he or she would be able to see the unmoving water amidst the thousand convoluted waves, with nothing amiss in both movement and non-movement. If you have not attained this, you are only relying on words that resemble [true wisdom], being profoundly blind to the wisdom essence of wondrous awareness.

[What we call] mind and consciousness are but two names of the same thing. The enlightened ones penetrate consciousness and return to mind; the confused ones turn mind into consciousness. So what is mind? It is just a name given to the wondrous awareness which functions without any confusion. And what is consciousness? It is a name given to the illusory arising of discrimination from the functioning of wondrous awareness. These days, practitioners who discourse in abstruse eloquence mostly hold on to the entity of consciousness, without realizing the mind essence of wondrous awareness.

In reality, what we call wondrous awareness is not itself an object to be known. This is why the ancients said that a mirror does not reflect itself and a fire does not burn itself. If a mirror reflects itself, it would not be able to mirror other objects; if a fire burns itself, it would not be able to burn other objects. The mind essence is the same. If what we call wondrous awareness knows itself as an entity of awareness, it will not be able to know everything else. If one comes to know it as an object of awareness, what is known must actually be the entity of consciousness, not mind essence.

Consciousness is the very object of the Changeability of birth and death. If one holds on to it, how can one transcend birth and death?

The very essence of mind cannot be seen, heard, known, sensed, nor can it be grabbed or rejected. Whatever that can be generated is illusory, unreal, and inverted. If it is not something to be seen, heard, known, or sensed, how can a practitioner attain it as a transcendental realization? Well, all one should do is to depart from everything that can be seen, heard, known, or sensed, to the point that the one who departs and that which is being departed from (object) are brought into emptiness and quiescence. The mind essence will then simply manifest amidst that which can be seen, heard, known or sensed. When the ancients silently came into accord and vividly realized this, the non-obstruction of all phenomena and conditions followed naturally.

However, if one desires to depart from the illness of the seen, heard, known, and sensed, this desire itself will in actuality enhance the illness. This is why the ancients came up with a skillful mean of practice. They put forth a meaningless huatou, instructing practitioners to investigate it thoroughly. If one [throws all one's attention] into the investigation of the huatou, one would naturally depart from the seen, heard, known, sensed, etc., without having to do so with any contrivance. In the various records of the transmission of lamps, we know that the ancestral masters did not generate doubt sensations through the use of huatou. Rather, they spontaneously realized non-arising through some spoken words. This is because they were truly and genuinely determined to resolve the great affair of birth and death. Even before they entered the gate of Chan practice, the thought of impermanence and the gravity of the affair of birth and death had already been palpitating. This thought stuck in their minds and they were unable to bring about a resolution of it. As a result, they traveled and wandered around, going thousands of miles, entering into remote places enshrouded completely by wild grasses, with the wind as their only companion, [seeking for a resolution]. They went forth single-mindedly and diligently, with no other purpose than to thoroughly enlighten to "who they are". If they could not realize the resolution after

practicing for decades, their doubt sensation of birth and death would grow stronger with time, not for one moment would they let go of this intention. If one can practice with such power of wisdom, there will be no need to worry that the light will not shine through.

Alas! Nowadays human minds are shallow and restless. Many people claim themselves to be practicing Chan. The fact is, most only desire to be learned in the forms of practice and use them as material for gossip. Since they do not set their minds on resolving the great affair of birth and death, the more they talk, the more they are entrapped in their conceptions, entwined ever more deeply by the vines, leading to the reinforcement of birth and death. How unfortunate!

If you want to emulate the Buddhas and the ancestral masters, you must generate the proper aspiration of resolving the great affair of birth and death. Hang it on your eyelashes! So that even if you are enmeshed in myriad happenings and you are bombarded by myriad activities of the mind, you do not give rise to even one deviating intention, generating thoughts of discrimination, thus obstructing your aspiration. If this aspiration to resolve [the great affair] of birth and death is not genuine and sincere, it is certain that you will not be able to truly practice in daily living. And if you were to force yourself, it will only be a fleeting effort, not long lasting. Even if you are so intelligent and sharp that you can gain some understanding from the words of the ancients, that will only increase your knowledge, having no benefit whatsoever as far as the affair of birth and death is concerned. This is due to the lack of a genuine aspiration.

There are three essential requisites on the Path of practice: The first is to set your mind sincerely on the affair of birth and death; the second is to see through the illusoriness and fleetingness of worldly concerns such as honor and humiliation, gain and loss; the third is the determination to persevere along the path, never to regress. If one of these requisites is missing, your practice will be crippled; if two of them are missing, you will be lost; and if all three are missing, even if you were to commit the whole Tripitaka to memory and to deeply immerse yourself in cartloads of books, it will only feed into the karmic stream of your consciousness, engendering your pride and arrogance, having no benefit whatsoever to your [affair of birth and death].

In the past, a monk asked Master Zhao Zhou, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" Zhao Zhou answered, "Wu!" This single word "wu" is like the great sword of heaven and the poison smeared drum. Those who come into contact with it will die instantly

and those who engage with it will have their spirits shocked into oblivion. Even the Buddhas and the ancestral masters do not dare to look at it straight on. Since the time it was proffered, many people have been intrigued by it, and as a result many attained realization through it. However, there were also a large number who got it wrong. If you want to thoroughly enlighten to the great intention of the Buddhas and the ancestral masters, and to completely penetrate your true mind, why don't you place this word "wu" among the writing tablets and the desks? Whether you are speaking or silent, on the move or at rest, hang the huatou in there! Look into it closely and unceasingly. What really is it all about? Why did Zhao Zhou say "wu"? Investigate it while you are on the move, examine it while you are seated. Dwell on it and be intrigued by it day and night, without relenting for even one instant. While you are investigating it and examining it, do not try to understand it in the worldly sense or in the transcendental sense. Just go on as if nothing is happening in front of your eyes. If the flow of your investigation is smooth and seamless, do not be joyous because of that. If the flow of your investigation is intermittent and scattered, do not become discouraged. Whether you can truly do it or not, just carry on in a matter-of-fact manner. Do not give rise to the thought of wanting to find some skillful way to enhance the practice. Giving rise to such a thought is in fact creating an interruption in your practice. If you carry on unceasingly in this manner, by and by, your practice will naturally become seamless and it will happen that spontaneously the inner mind and the outer world will both be emptied and cleared. Instantly the saintly and the worldly will be transcended. At that point, you will realize that the Way is to be attained within your very being, not from anything external.

You have suffered in this impermanent world of birth and death for innumerable kalpas without being able to attain liberation. That is not due to any external causes. The very cause of this condition is the confusion and ignorance of your own mind. When the mind is confused, it enters into [birth and death] willingly. Nothing external could make it so. It is not so because of heaven and earth, or spirits and deities. If this willingness has its cause in external objects, it cannot be called willingness. Because it does not arise due to external objects, we say that it arises willingly. Since it is your own willingness that results in the entrapment of birth and death, you will not be able to transcend it and move towards nirvana without generating a profound willingness for such a purpose. If you intend to wait for the guidance and advice of the saints and sages to prod you into action, just consider the fact that when you entered the samsaric flow, it was not due to the prodding of others! Contemplating in this manner, if we can be willing to end the mind that clings to birth and death and turn towards the path, everyone will attain [enlightenment]. This is why the ancients said, "If one were

to set one's mind as strongly on the path as one does on emotional attachments, one would have attained Buddhahood long ago," and, "If you engender a determined willingness [to practice], I can assure you that you will not be fooled." Such words are not said to deceive others!

In the past, Minister Feng wrote the following verse about his practice:

*When not attending to my official duties, I enjoy sitting meditation.
It was long ago that I last laid my body down when sleeping.
Even though I live my life as a government minister,
All across the four oceans, people know of me as an elder on the Path.*

Prince Li had this verse about practice:

*A man on the path is a man with an iron will,
Whatever one encounters, the course of action is made instantly.
Directly coursing towards the supreme Bodhi,
Paying no attention to the disputes of the world.*

Layman Pang said:

*There is nothing special about my daily living,
It is only I being in harmony with myself.
Not grasping or rejecting anything,
Not favoring or opposing any conditions.
Who designated red as "red" and purple as "purple"?
The hills and the mountains are all free of dust.
Miraculous powers and wondrous functions,
Are but gathering wood and carrying water.*

The scholar Zhang Zhuo said in his verse:

*The luminous light illuminates the innumerable worlds quiescently,
The worldly and the saintly--all sentient beings are of my own household.
When not a single thought arises, it manifests completely,
When the six sense faculties move ever so slightly, it is covered by cloud.
To eradicate vexation will enhance your ill-ness,
Working towards true suchness is also deviated.
Flow with the world with no obstruction,
Nirvana and Samsara are both illusory flowers in the sky.*

The respectable Zhao Qingxian composed the following verse:

*Sitting silently in the court behind the desk,
The mind source unmoved--clear as water.
In the crash of a thunderbolt, the crown of the head splits open,
I recall what I have always had long ago.*

These are all gentry who roamed and played in the great field of complete enlightenment without departing from worldly merits and fame. If the ancients could be like this, there is no reason why people today cannot do the same. If one has a profound faith and practices sincerely, there will be no difference between people today and people of old. Do not be hesitant! Otherwise you will be drawing a boundary to confine yourself.

The Buddhadharma is the gate of great liberation. The only requisites are that one should see the issue of birth and death as a grave affair, generate a profound faith, and straightforwardly investigate one's huatou with great effort. One should be most careful against reckoning and weighing one's progress, trying to figure out one's gain and loss. Do not be like practitioners of the two vehicles of individual liberation, who employ various methods such as loathing their bodies, avoiding contacts with the environment, quenching thoughts, relinquishing conditions, discarding what they love, expelling aversions, driving away emotional attachments, trying to depart from the illusory. Moreover, you should not run away from the clamor and seek quietude, or engage yourself in discriminating right from wrong, to grab the saintly and reject the worldly, or to fight against scattered mind and stupor. If you depart from the proper mindfulness of investigating "Wu" and give rise to the tiniest bit of concern for what I mentioned above, the sword would have swung by long before you realized it! It would be impossible for you to realize enlightenment. The only purpose of Chan practice is to realize enlightenment. You should take care not to part with your huatou no matter what happens. If you give rise to any intention other than that of realizing enlightenment, you will not be attuned to the practice. Put utmost care into assuring this!

Practitioners today often preconceive an emotive idea of the saintly and the worldly. This conceptualization stays latent in the storehouse consciousness, and as a result, when thoughts arise, discriminations follow. These people generate the feelings of aversion and annoyance even before engaging in a task; and they constantly reckon and worry even before coming into contact with things. Well, if you cannot penetrate through directly and straightforwardly, you will just be toiling about busily, gaining no benefit in principle. Stay on guard of the huatou in a seamless manner, and make this seamless practice even more seamless. When you are practicing seamlessly, do not entertain any thought about this seamlessness. As soon as you give rise to such a thought, you will fall into [the trap of] seamlessness and you will be no longer attuned to the practice. [If you can just] persevere to the point that your practice is proficient and refined, the deluded emotional attachments of liking and aversion, grasping and

rejecting, right and wrong will all be thoroughly eradicated without any contrivance, without a second thought.

The purpose of the Confucian path is to cultivate and refine the mind while the purpose of the Buddhist path is to enlighten and realize the mind. Cultivating and refining is gradual while enlightening and realizing is sudden. Although the mind is the same, the graduated path and the sudden path are different. And this difference is precisely that of the worldly and the transcendental. If the Buddha were to talk about how one should conduct oneself in the world, he would not be deviating from the [Confucian] teaching of making the mind upright and making one's intention sincere. Likewise, if Confucius were to talk about the way of the transcendental, the teaching could not be other than the essential principle of emptying the mind and attaining complete enlightenment. If one does not truly understand the great expediency of teachings and means of transformation instituted by the saints, one would merely be arguing and debating about them, bringing all sorts of disputes and quarrels.

When one engages in the study of worldly learning, the eight subjects of cultivating the Way, virtue, benevolence, righteousness, proper conduct, music, law, and [sociopolitical] order are not something alienated from the wondrous functions of the mind. When the mind has no obstruction, it is called the Way; if the mind is upright, it is called being virtuous; if the mind is infused with kindness, it is called benevolence; if the mind is objective, it is called righteousness; if the mind is undeviating, it is called proper conduct; if the mind is gentle and tranquil, it is called the joy [of musical aesthetics]; if the mind is straightforward, it is called the law; if the mind is imbued with clarity, it is called order. In fact, not only these eight subjects, but the hundreds and thousands of wholesome conducts--any action that is beneficial to the world and the multitude, all come about due to the wondrous functioning of the mind. A worldly person turns his or her back on it and loses this wondrous function. This is how all sorts of confusion and chaos come into being. As a result, the saints had no choice but to institute their teachings to rectify the situation. To further demonstrate this, I offer the following verses:

*The ultimate Way has always been intimate with the mind,
Having attained no mind, you will see the reality of the Way as it is.
When the mind, the Way, existence, and nothingness are all extinguished,
You become an idle person in this universe of innumerable world systems.
Virtues are to be found in the nature of the myriad objects,
But only the virtues of human beings resonate with the mind.*

*Ever since I came to know of this,
In conversation or silence, clarity shines in accordance with the ultimately just.
The saints instituted a great diversity of teachings,
Transforming, educating, nurturing, and refining the multitude throughout this vast
space and time.
Wanting to be benevolent, benevolence manifests,
There is no need to seek for anything outside the mind.
When the mind has achieved equanimity, the equality of self and others will be
actualized,
Everything in one's daily living will be just fitting and appropriate.
As long as one sees the sameness of the Dharma nature of all,
This does not obstruct one from exercising kindness or authority.
It is not because of etiquette that one conducts oneself in a dignified manner,
When the mind is undeviating, proper conduct will be perfected naturally.
When we meet, there is no need to present elaborate gifts,
One snap of the fingers shows our authenticity and innocence.
The wind ensemble of nature plays a flute with no hole in the middle of the night,
The gushing water of the rivers strums a harp with no string in the morning light.
If you want to know wherefore one can attain this happiness,
It is to be found in your very mind.
To harbor unwholesome thoughts is to bring about punishments for the mind,
Three thousand rules and laws are instituted to govern this body of yours.
A man on the Path forgets all about good and evil,
While Law and order are clearly and vividly administered.
The mind is like a scale, indicating what is heavy and what is light,
When loaded, the weight is clearly shown.
Since time immemorial, all benevolent governings are similar,
For thousands of years, they have served as a standard for human beings to behold.*

The Past

Special 3-Day Retreat at DDRC



Dharma Drum Retreat Center (DDRC) hosted a three-day retreat, just before many folks went back to school or back to work on Labor Day weekend, from August 29th through September 1st. Although only three days, this brief retreat provided many beginners, students, and experienced practitioners some time to settle their bodies and minds and "enjoy the retreat like a vacation," as Guo Yuan Fa Shi suggested in one of his lectures. This "vacation" was special in that it was organized and coordinated partly by The College Dharma Association, *Faqing Hui*, and was attended by approximately 50 young people and first-time retreatants. The event was free for students, allowing them to get a Chance to take an affordable and healthy vacation from the rigors of academic study.

"First, we should collect the mind, then absorb the mind, and thereby pacify the mind." Guo Yuan Fa Shi talked about the process of meditation as simply putting our method into practice and becoming deeply absorbed in it so that we can calm our bodies and minds to achieve a level of stable concentration. He spoke about the view of Chan, often quoting the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Ancestor, "Not thinking of good or evil, what is our original face?" He continued by explaining that this does not mean that there is no good or bad, right or wrong in the world. It simply means that we should not let ourselves be disturbed by what happens in the environment, in our bodies, and in our minds. To understand Chan is to clearly understand what is happening without getting caught up in what we can gain or lose or in what is good or bad. In all situations, we should practice to have a mind

free of self-centeredness. This mind is without bias and is 'originally' ours free from discrimination. It is the Buddha-nature inherent in us.

He continued by saying that with practice, especially on retreat, we first learn about ourselves--our thinking, our habits and views, our biases and judgments of others. We see that we are constantly comparing ourselves to others, criticizing them, putting them down, yet we seek approval and praise from them. This process of self-discovery is the important first step in learning to practice. From this self-observation, we practice putting aside these and other negative, self-centered tendencies and cultivate concentration. Eventually, we can see our true nature is without these illusory, wandering thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance.

At the end of the retreat, the participants expressed their discoveries in letters. Each person wrote a letter to someone about his or her experience on the retreat. What emerged from these short pieces were exceptionally moving and personal accounts of the experience of discovering the self. One participant wrote, "I realized that I was competing with people. Walking with the bowl of water [during the water bowl meditation], I was trying to race other people, or looking at how they were doing, or becoming jealous of how fast they were moving." Others wrote letters to loved ones, expressing their apologies for acting wrongly in the past. As each person read aloud to the group of participants, some shed tears, others laughed hysterically, others listened with all their attention to the touching words of gratitude and realization.

In a seemingly short three days, many retreatants gained the timeless knowledge of how to transform oneself from a state of selfishness and discontent to a state of great wisdom and virtue.

Many thanks to all those who worked so hard on the retreat: volunteers, residents, participants, and especially Guo Yuan Fa Shi, who lectured twice everyday in Chinese and English and tirelessly gave interviews.



Youth Camp 2003

Thunderstorms and traffic didn't keep 30 family members, volunteers, and guests away from this year's Youth Zen Camp held from August 1st through 3rd. Check-in on Friday night launched the weekend as friends reacquainted and greeted one another from last year. Saturday morning started with Guo Yuan Fa Shi leading the morning exercises, guided relaxation, and meditation. He also offered two lectures during the day. Guo Yuan Fa Shi told Chan stories and explained how they applied to our lives today.

Dr. Les Cole led the two days' activities, which emphasized the participants reflecting on the process in which they problem solve and co-operate with others. After the introductions, the participants began working on nine group activities in two days. The groups had to work together by watching, compromising, yielding--and no talking! Laughter, restarts and lots of learning created many fun sessions!

The meals were excellent and the help from the volunteers was immeasurable. Carol Fung, the coordinator, said that everyone was particularly helpful this year. Many of the families pitched in and helped on their own. The campfire on Saturday night with its songs, "some-mores" and veggie-kabobs made it a special part of the weekend. The overall reaction was that DDRC is "the most beautiful place on earth". All the participants made the same wish: Next year, make the camp last one day longer!

Diligent Devotion to Society - An Alternative Career

Nearly 500 people congregated to witness the tonsure rites of 20 postulants on August 27th at Dharma Drum Mountain's (DDM) Nung Chan Monastery in Taipei--by far the greatest number in the history of DDM's tonsure ceremonies.

Chan Master Sheng Yen remarked in his address, "To leave home and take up monastic life is neither a form of escape nor an abandonment of responsibilities. It is in fact an expansion into a new frontier opening up toward an assiduous future. Furthermore, leaving behind the secular world is a choice that requires fortitude and determination in a person. The pursuits of a monastic will no longer be for personal gain in fame, wealth, power and status. Instead, a monastic's pursuit will be for self-purification and advancement through espousing Buddhist practice. A monastic, resilient and versatile, is a determined and courageous practitioner who offers himself selflessly to society."

Shifu pointed out that throughout history there have been people who have offered and sacrificed their lives for the survival of their nations and the continuation of their race. Today, the best way to save the world's human race and put an end to its calamities would be to leave home because a monastic is not held back nor constrained by personal worldly worries or troubles. A monastic works diligently and goes wherever there is danger or calamity to help alleviate people's suffering through the teachings and practice of the Dharma. A monastic's dedication is not limited to one nation or society, but to all sentient beings of the world. The postulants' choice in taking up monastic life is not an act of pessimism to live incognito; rather, it is an active choice to uplift themselves for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore, DDM chooses to hold its annual tonsure ceremony on the birthday of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbharaja (July 30th of the Lunar Calendar), who vowed not to attain Buddhahood until "all the Hells are empty," and who thus epitomizes the postulants' aspirations to benefit others and to be free from the lure of worldly fame or power.

New Sunday Q&A Program

The Chan Center has started a new Sunday afternoon Question & Answer program. This program is a response to some participants' concerns regarding the lack of direct interaction with the resident sangha members and the lack of a formal venue to discuss questions and problems they encounter in their practice. The session begins after lunch at 1:45 pm and ends at 2:45 pm. It is held in the second floor meditation room, concurrent with the Chanting session in the Buddha Hall. Conducted in an open atmosphere, it provides an opportunity for people to ask and discuss questions related to their practice as well as Dharma questions in general. The abbot, Guo Yuan Fa Shi, normally leads the session. Senior members of the Chan Center will serve as the discussion leaders when Guo Yuan Fa Shi is not available. So far the session has been well attended and the response has been positive.

Beginner Dharma Class

One new program being offered now at the Chan Meditation Center is the Beginner's Dharma Class, codenamed Dharma 101. This three-part class for newcomers to the Center covers the basic principles common to all schools of Buddhism as delineated in the Four Noble Truths. The course uses Master Sheng Yen's book on the Four Noble Truths, *Setting in Motion the Dharma Wheel*, as its text. Each session consists of three consecutive Friday night classes, and the classes are being team-taught by the Center's four English-speaking Dharma lecturers, David Berman, Rebecca Li, David Slaymaker, and Bill Wright.

The course has been presented four times so far and has trained over 50 students in the basics of the Dharma. It has been scheduled again for January and March of 2004, in order to coincide with scheduled sessions of the Beginners' Meditation Class, so that new students who learn to meditate at the Center can go on to learn Buddhist concepts and theory.

The Dharma lecturers are already at work on the syllabus for a follow-up course, Dharma 102, which will present the essential teachings of the Chan school, using the Heart Sutra as its organizing principle, and Shifu's commentary *There Is No Suffering* as its text. The course should be ready for its trial run by the autumn of 2004.
