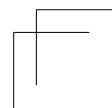
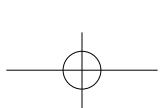
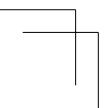
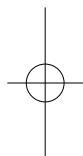
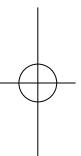
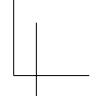
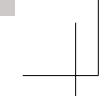
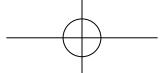
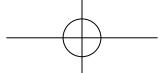


# **Activate Your Self-Nature DNA**

**by**

**Chan Master Guoru**





Activate Your Self-Nature DNA

By Master Guoru

Second Edition

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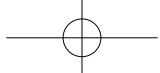
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## Preface: From Elusiveness to Liberation

---

At the age of twelve, I took the vows of a novice under Venerable Master Sheng Yen at the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in Beitou, Taipei. Thus, I became his disciple, and he became my “*shifu*,” my teacher. When *Shifu* was in solitary retreat in Meinong, in Gaoxiong County, Taiwan, and later studying for his doctorate in Japan, I lived and studied with Grandmaster Dongchu. Dongchu was at one time abbot of the large Dinghui Monastery of Jiaoshan in Jiangsu province, China. Originally called Puji Monastery, Dinghui was established in the second century during the Eastern Han Dynasty. Even while he was at Dinghui, Dongchu was renowned for his imposing demeanor. Master Sheng Yen recalled his encounter with Grandmaster in Shanghai: “When he walked, it was as if a powerful wind blew in his wake.” No novice monk dared to engage him in conversation; he often reprimanded his students loudly, earning him the nickname of “Dong Dapao,” or “Big Cannon Dong.” However, due to the turmoil of the civil war, Dongchu left for Taiwan in 1949, and took residence at Fazang Monastery in Beitou, where he be-

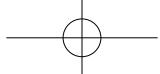


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gan publishing *Humanity Magazine*. In 1955, he established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture, where he promoted and organized the reprinting of the *Taisho Tripitaka*, conducted wintertime relief charity services for the poor, and spread Buddhist culture and education to benefit sentient beings.

### Fierce Grandfather and Unfamiliar Father

Arriving in Taiwan with his imposing demeanor undiminished, Dong Dapao was still a very powerful presence. He put me through much punishing training in daily life. As a youngster, I “ate bitterness,” and even now, I still refer to him as the “Demon King” and the “Bloody Iron Grandmaster.” Of course, I preferred playing to studying, so at times I would sneak out to my classmate’s house across the street to play Chinese chess. For every hour that I was out playing, I punished myself by kneeling for three hours. He also demanded that I write out three hundred Chinese characters every day using a brush pen. At first, I thought I was being clever by writing the numerals which had

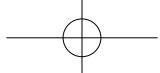


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few strokes, such as 一, 二, and 三. Of course, he did not accept this, and made me start all over.

Taiwan's school system back then required an entrance exam to advance from elementary to middle school. When preparing for the exam, I often needed to study at night. One night, Grandmaster suddenly knocked on the door: "Little monk, why don't *you* be the Grandmaster? Don't you know that keeping the lights on will cost us lots of money? Why can't you study during the day?" The next day, I switched to studying during the daytime. Grandmaster knocked on the door again: "Hey, little monk! I think it would be better if *you* were the Grandmaster. Every day I work hard to ensure three meals in this monastery, and here you are hiding in a cool room! No one cuts the grass outside, and no one cleans indoors."

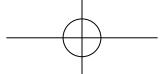
All I could do was pick up a pair of shears to go trim the grass outside. Impatient to finish quickly so I could go back to studying, I began pulling out clumps of grass by hand. Then I saw the Grandmaster walking toward me: "Is this is how you cut grass?



---

A cow can do a better job than you!” Then he pointed to the sign that said “Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture,” and scolded me: “This is a Buddhist institute of culture! Every disciple here should be able to expound the Dharma and teach the sutras! You should be studying; we are not lacking in indentured servants!” Whether I studied at night or during the day, working or pulling out weeds, it seemed like I couldn’t do anything right. Even when I did things right, I was treated to three hits with the *biandan* – a thick, flat, shoulder-wide pole for carrying goods. When I made mistakes, I was also treated to three hits with the *biandan*. Damned if I did, and damned if I didn’t! I was truly confused.

Furthermore, when I needed to take a bus, Grandmaster would often not give me enough money to cover the fare, so I had to beg from other passengers to make up the difference. One time we took a bus together, but he only paid a portion of my fare. When our bus arrived, he just got off the bus, leaving me behind to face the wrath of the ticket lady. I learned later that



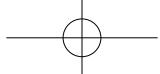
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Master Sheng Yen often had the same experience, and had to beg from strangers for his fare. So, to me, Grandmaster was simply recycling his old tricks.

It got so bad that I tried to escape three times, and failed each time. The first time, I ran away to stay with an elementary school teacher. When Grandmaster found out, he complained to the city's education bureau. Not only did the school's principal receive phone calls from high above, but a legislator came to intervene. Realizing that my teacher could lose his job because of me, I had no choice but to return to the Institute.

The second time, I hid in the house of a classmate, whose mother eked out a living selling noodles from a street stall. But Grandmaster, who would not let anything stop him, used his connections to get the police to investigate the noodle stall's sanitary conditions and fire-code compliance. Since losing the stall would have made it difficult for my classmate's family to make a living, they had to send me back to the Institute.

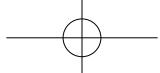
The third time was when I decided not to return. I told Grand-



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master, “I’ve decided to go to the Buddha’s Light Mountain Monastery to study at the Eastern Buddhist Institute.” He mocked me: “Little monk goes away to study! Just remember that you only have one father!” This was his way of reminding me not to imagine that another master would be better than the one I already had, and that I shouldn’t try to switch lineages. At the Eastern Buddhist Institute, I realized that other *shifus* were really much kinder to their disciples, especially those classmates from Southeast Asia. Their *shifus* would personally deliver to them such items as clothing, shoes, socks, powdered milk, and crackers. As for me, I only had a full-length robe that I wore at all times. And just as Grandmaster did not give me enough bus fare, he also did not help me with my tuition. The only way I could get enough money for tuition was to sell books that he had written.

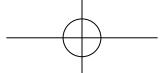
So, I really envied other people who had good Dharma fathers. At that time, my own Master Sheng Yen was in solitary retreat in Meinong. Although he returned to the Buddhist Culture



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Institute to perform my ordination ceremony, he soon afterward returned to his retreat. At the Eastern Buddhist Institute, my grades were very strong, and there were Dharma masters who would have accepted me as a disciple, but strangely, I always recognized that I only had one “father,” and that was Master Sheng Yen, though I still did not know him well. I also knew that I had only one “grandfather,” even though he was a fierce one. Years later, after I became a teacher at Pumen Middle School, I realized that I wanted to devote myself to teaching. It was then that I wholeheartedly appreciated Grandmaster Dongchu. I had come to understand how hard he had worked on me. Grandmaster Dongchu passed away in 1977.

In 1975, when Master Sheng Yen returned from Japan upon receiving his doctorate, I had more opportunities to follow him and study by his side. I was able to experience first-hand the methods of Patriarch Chan, especially that of investigating *huatou*, a unique method of practice Chan, which enabled me to attain liberation. Later in this book, I will extensively discuss this

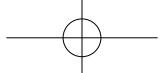


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intriguing method for investigating Chan. Under his tutelage, I eventually became director of the Chan Hall, assisting him in guiding others in Chan meditation. On September 2, 2005, while I was teaching Buddhadharma in China, I was summoned back to Nung Chan Monastery at Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. There, along with eleven Dharma brothers, I received Dharma transmission from Master Sheng Yen.

### **Walking out of Deep Shadows: A Successor to Patriarch Chan**

On February 3, 2009, on the ninth day of Chinese New Year, Master Sheng Yen passed away. A few days later, four Dharma heirs of Master Sheng Yen – Ven. Guo Dong, Ven. Guo Guang, Mr. Simon Child, and me, along with Taiwan’s president, Ma Ying-jeou, planted the master’s ashes at the Eco-Friendly Memorial Garden on Dharma Drum Mountain. From that point on, the “I” who originally hid in the shadow of Master Sheng Yen’s great tree, emerged from the protection of that deep shadow, to

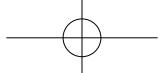


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become a successor and transmitter of the lineage. I now had to face my own responsibilities; otherwise, “repaying gratitude to my master” would be a hollow phrase, and I would not be able bear my Dharma brothers calling me “elder Dharma brother.”

In my years of guiding others in Chan meditation in Taiwan, China, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Germany and Croatia, I have come to appreciate Taiwan as the place where Patriarch Chan is best preserved, and is therefore the best place to learn about it. Indeed, many people in Taiwan already study and practice Patriarch Chan. So there was a need to establish a special center for preserving and extending this lineage. It would also give more people the opportunity to deeply understand it, and to activate what I call their “self-nature DNA.” Later on, I will explain what I mean by this phrase, but for now I will just say that how to activate one’s own self-nature DNA through the practice of Patriarch Chan is the theme of this book.

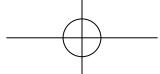
I therefore began to plan to transform our small Jade Buddha Monastery in the Zhonghe district of Taipei, into a place devot-



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ed to the practice of Patriarch Chan. Unfortunately, its location was decreed by the government as a future site for an electrical facility for Taipei's Metro system. Suddenly, my disciples and I were facing the threat of becoming "homeless." This was yet another episode in my life. In my youthful twenties, I had suffered paralysis induced by a brain tumor, which caused me to walk erratically and made my mouth asymmetrical. So, in my most vital years, having become a monk and studied Buddhism for many years, I was already dragging around a decrepit old body. To the "youthful" Guoru, Buddhadharma became very elusive and I could not reconcile the paradox between what I was being taught and what I was experiencing.

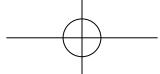
It was only after I began following Master Sheng Yen's guidance in Chan meditation that my body and mind gradually became settled. He never gave me any special breaks due to my physical condition; like any other beginner, I suffered through leg pain and numbness. But under Shifu's severe, intimidating methods, I gradually learned to calm down and settle my body and



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mind. When I first investigated huatou, I was like any other beginner, feeling the dull tastelessness of this method and became impatient. However, bit by bit, I was able to generate the doubt sensation and gradually experience various levels of the meditative state of samadhi. Once, while in samadhi, I experienced total relaxation of body and mind, and felt a cool sensation in my head. My hands and legs returned to normal, and my paralysis was gone. My facial conformation and symmetry returned to normal, and I could walk normally. So, this is what you see when you look at me now.

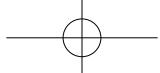
Most importantly, I frankly I came face to face with the reality that every moment arises from myriad interactions of cause and effect, and I experienced the freedom and ease of liberation. While facing the imminent dismantling of our monastery, I kept the attitude that I had to do my best, every moment, to accomplish every goal I had of teaching in Taiwan and elsewhere. Remarkably, soon thereafter, one of my disciples informed me that the siblings of the Cao family – Cao Ziyi, Lin Wenhui, and Cao



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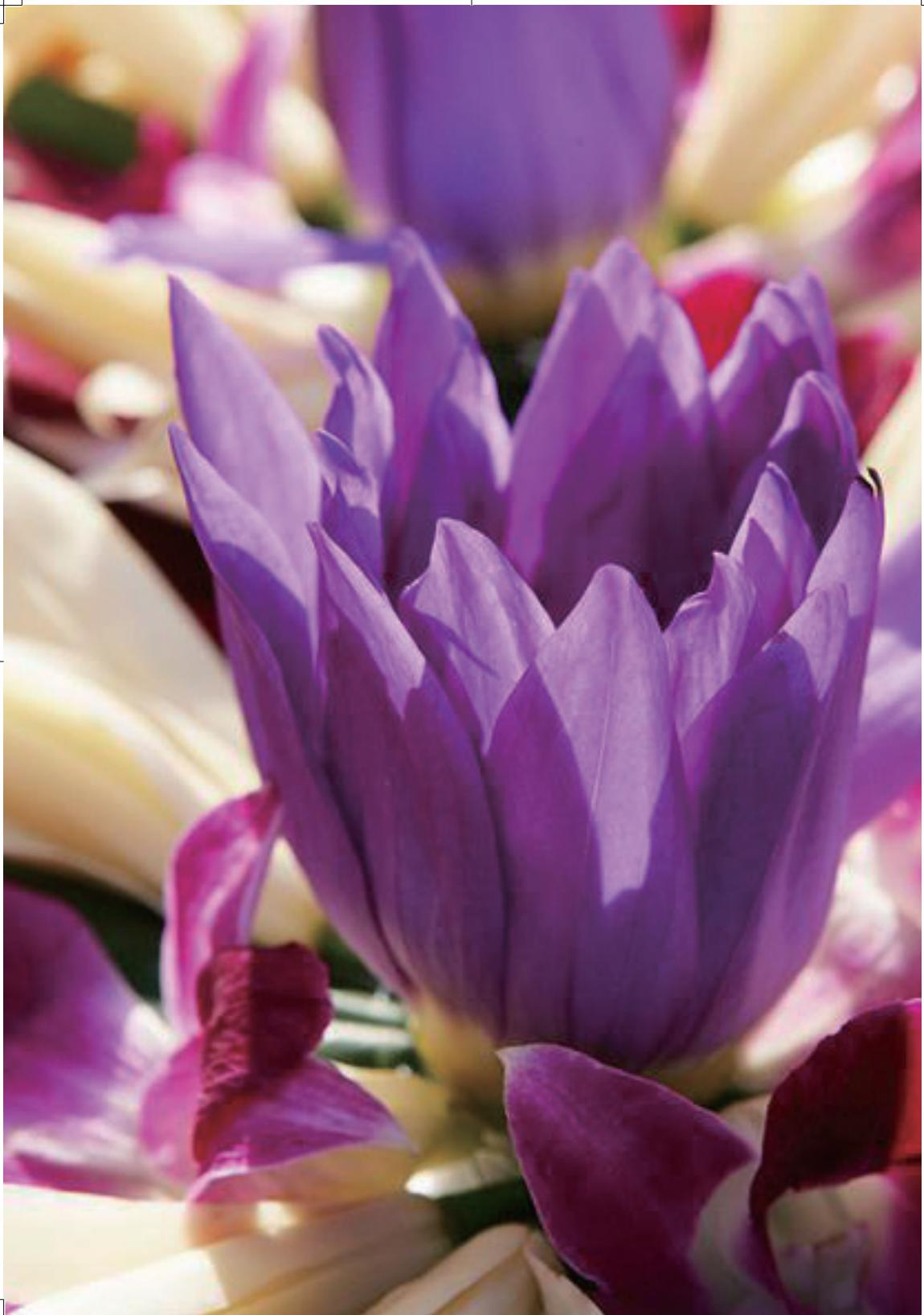
Xianchong – had offered to donate the Daoist temple left by their father as the site for teaching and practicing Patriarch Chan. With profound gratitude, I accepted their offering. And, with help from people from all walks of life, as well as from monastic and lay disciples, we rapidly established Chan Grove, completing the first stage of construction in 2011. Located in Beitou, Chan Grove is somewhat akin to Flying Peak of the Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou, China, in that it is surrounded by the solemnity of huge boulders. Standing in the front garden, one can gaze out at Taipei basin, a treasured sight for Chan contemplation.

I spent my childhood and youth in Beitou. More often than I can recall, Grandmaster and I walked the mountainous road from Fuxing High School up to what is now Chan Grove. So, returning to reside in Beitou was a returning to the path along which I have walked, as if I can still hear the Demon King, the Grandmaster's voice echoing in my ears: "Just remember that you only have one father!"



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Chan Grove specializes in teaching Patriarch Chan. In winter and summer seasons we concentrate on investigating huatou, and in spring and autumn we teach traditional meditation methods to guide beginners. In addition to teaching at this center, I also accept teaching invitations, as long as there are people wishing to learn Patriarch Chan, and as long as there are places in need of Patriarch Chan. My monastic and lay disciples also receive my strict training and guidance. They not only need to delve deeply into their own selves and experience their own states of mind, activating their self-nature DNA; they must also bear the responsibility of spreading and protecting Patriarch Chan. This is the succession of Patriarch Chan between master and disciples. You, too, can be part of it.

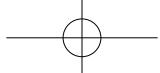


## Acknowledgments

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There are many people I want to thank for helping to make this book possible. First of all, I offer my deepest thanks to Dr. An-yi Pan, for his excellent translation of this book from Chinese to English. An-yi, a professor at the Department of History of Art and Visual Studies at Cornell University, studied in Master Sheng Yen's lineage of Chan Buddhism for over ten years. He and I became acquainted when he attended my 2012 Summer Retreat at the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, in Pine Bush, New York. After the retreat, responding to my request, he began to translate this book. Later on, his wife Robin Burlingham, also began work on this project. Working wholeheartedly to complete the translation, An-yi and Robin visited me at the Patriarch Chan Hall at Chan Grove, and often communicated with me through email. I am deeply grateful to An-yi and Robin for their excellent translation.

As editor of the English edition, Buffe Maggie Laffey put tremendous effort into finding just the right words, and creating headings to ensure that readers in the English-speaking world

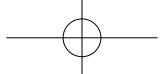


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would resonate to the teachings of Patriarch Chan. As early as 1977, when my teacher Master Sheng Yen first went to the United States to teach the Dharma, Buffe began to study with him. Buffe was not only a participant in Master Sheng Yen's first retreats in America, but also served as cook. Today, Buffe is editor of Chan Magazine, and also serves as assistant to the director of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center. Buffe has also edited retreat lectures of mine that have been published in Chan Magazine. Master Sheng Yen and I have both received such enormous help from Buffe that it's difficult to find words to express our deep thanks.

I am very grateful to my Dharma brothers Venerable Chang Wen, director of the Dharma Drum Retreat Center, and Dr. Jimmy Yu, associate professor at Florida State University, for making many valuable suggestions to enhance the manuscript.

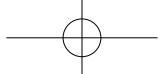
More than ten years ago, Master Sheng Yen urged me to share what I have learned and experienced in Chan through writing and publishing, but I have been carefree in my life, and have nev-



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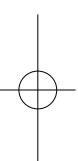
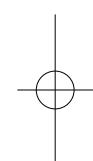
er been a very good or obedient disciple. I always excused myself for being too busy teaching. In 2009, when my master passed away, I was still utterly incapable of taking on the task. This continued until my disciple Linda Huang edited the Chinese version of Activate Your Self-Nature DNA, that I finally authored this, my first book. Linda and her husband Jeremy Wei have benefited from my Chan teaching, and have received Dharma transmission from me. As such, they have my permission to teach independently. My profound thanks go to Linda for making this book possible.

It was a blessing to have Ernest Heau to review and revise the manuscript for accuracy, clarity, and fluency. Ernest has been a disciple of Master Sheng Yen since 1977, and has edited many of the Master's books in English. In addition to helping to disseminate Chan Buddhism, Ernest freely shares his experience with those who are newly engaged in publishing Buddhist literature. For me, Ernest is a treasure in the Dharma family. I cannot express my gratitude enough for his enthusiastic support.

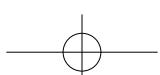


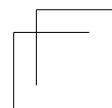
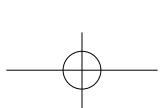
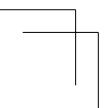
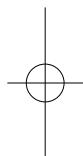
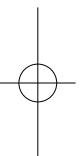
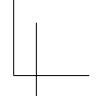
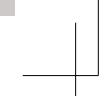
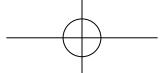
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This book is intended to serve as an introduction to the teachings of Patriarch Chan. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Master Sheng Yen and all masters in the lineage, for their compassion and wisdom to lead us to activate our self-nature DNA.

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*Guoru*

Guoru  
Chan Grove, Taipei, 2015







## Chan: To be Free from Bondage to the Self

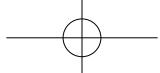
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To offer some context from contemporary culture, let's begin with the wildly popular movie, *Avatar*. After opening in December 2009, it broke all ticket sales records after just six months. In *Avatar*, Jake Sully is a paraplegic Earthling and former soldier who participates in the Avatar project, and travels to planet Pandora to study the ecosystem of the Na'vi people. In order to survive in the planet's unique atmosphere and to assimilate with the native Na'vi life, Jake must rely on his artificially created avatar, an alternate being that possesses the same appearance and abili-

ties of the Na’vi.

But what is an avatar? As early as the sixth century, the term “avatar” was used in India to refer to incarnations of various forms of Vishnu, the Hindu deity. So originally, “avatar” had a spiritual meaning. However, with the advent of the Internet, the term began to be used to denote an alternate identity used for activities like chatting on the Web, or playing online games. Usually, one’s online avatar is a graphic image standing in for the real person behind it. In online games, an avatar is a character assumed by the player as a surrogate; whatever the avatar experiences in the game, the player experiences vicariously.

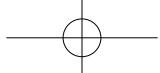
In *Avatar*, the story tells of Earthlings space-traveling to the planet Pandora, in order to enter its environment and live among the Na’vi people. When Jake is transformed into his avatar, he is no longer the paraplegic Earthling; instead, he becomes the tall, strong, agile Na’vi Jake, capable of walking long distances and climbing tall mountains. He even learns how to fly dragons. On Pandora he is free, able to fly anywhere he wishes. The more he assimilates into Na’vi life, the more Jake desires to become a Na’vi. The Na’vi respect life to the degree that when they kill for food, they kill quickly to reduce the suffering of their animal prey. They respect personal relationships, not only with their ancestors but also amongst themselves. When the Earthlings attempt to take over Pandora, a rebellious Jake decides to “go native,” to be a Na’vi sympathizer and abandon his identity as an



Earthling. To the sound of prayer in a ceremony, he is initiated into the Na'vi.

Such is the essence of this extremely popular movie: Jake is unfulfilled as a paraplegic on Earth, so he prefers being an avatar, a healthy, normal Na'vi on Pandora. In Buddhism, the cycle of suffering in the form birth and death, is called “this shore,” while the perfection of the Pure Land is called “the other shore.” Analogously, In *Avatar*, the Earth’s environment has been destroyed by greedy Earthlings who symbolize the contamination of “this shore.” But there are other Earthlings with higher aspirations who want to migrate to the “other shore” – to the “Pure Land” of Pandora, where the Na'vi respect life and the environment. Does this mean that in six months, people spent billions to watch a movie that shows an unfulfilling current life, to imagine a better life by abandoning a contaminated Earth for a purer land elsewhere?

A lay disciple told me about a popular Internet virtual reality site called Second Life. Regardless of their real life situation, players can create new personalities and identities to buy land and build houses, even become real estate tycoons. They can dress their avatars as party queens to capture the spotlight at parties. Second Life relies on selling virtual land, virtual castles, virtual Jacuzzi baths, virtual fancy sports cars, virtual fashionable glittery clothing and high heels, and virtual skin care products, and spa treatments.

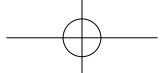


It is not difficult to comprehend the popularity of these phenomena. *Avatar* uses 3D technology to accentuate special effects and captivate the audience. The Second Life website offers glittering, enticing commercial products, and naturally attracts many followers who spend a lot of virtual money on it. When these sites become overwhelmingly successful, it seems to indicate that people in reality feel stifled and unsettled, having nothing to grasp onto in their own lives. They must rely on avatars to fulfill their dreams in an alternate life.

But is this the only alternative? Not necessarily. I know a better method that can help you say goodbye to your avatar, and give up relying on an alternate identity. By activating your own self-nature DNA, you can experience much more meaningful transformations, without having to travel to Pandora. Your current life can be your future life; this shore can be the other shore. Everything is perfect here and now. Would you like to learn about it? I can teach you.

### **Goodbye, Avatar**

In the movie *Avatar*, Jake's options were limited by the script. He could only imagine a next life among the Na'vi, seeking Pandora as the "other shore" – a pure land of sorts. For ourselves, we have a method to activate our self-nature DNA. We need not abandon the contaminated here and now, nor do we need a guru to perform any purification ceremonies, to protect us from suf-

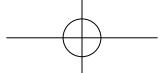


fering, or to enhance our meditative state. In this life, on this shore, through our own efforts, we can live a true life. This is the method of Patriarch Chan.

When I speak of your “self-nature DNA,” I am not suggesting that if you look at your DNA profile – your genome – under an electron microscope, you will find a “self-nature” gene, as you might find an eye-color gene. What I am referring to is the fact that the founder of Buddhism was a human being named Siddhartha Gautama, who became enlightened to the true nature of all beings, which is that of a buddha. Furthermore, he taught that every one of us not only has the potential to become enlightened, but that as sentient beings, we already possess the same self-nature. The science of genetics also tells us that as human beings, we all share the same human DNA. So, just as we have in common the same human DNA of the Buddha, by virtue of being human beings we also share his fundamental nature, which is that of a buddha. Therefore, throughout this book, when I refer to “activating your self-nature DNA,” I am referring to awakening your potential to become enlightened to your self-nature, to attain liberation and buddhahood.

### **Returning to the God to Gain Eternity?**

“Patriarch Chan.” Does that sound old-fashioned and passé, stifling and tasteless? The word “patriarch,” may give you a sense of something like a fossil remains. In fact, although Patriarch



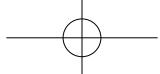
Chan has been transmitted for over 1,500 years, it has never been a daunting process complicated by strict rules of practice. Nor does it absolutely require sitting meditation. Patriarch Chan is a living method that requires practitioners to plant their feet firmly on the ground, and to practice with utmost dedication and honesty. Through this training, people can experience liberation in their life and not be affected by their surroundings, nor be trapped by emotions such as joy, anger, sadness, happiness, passion, aversion, or desire. They will discover that they are originally not bound by fetters; that everyone innately possesses the “DNA” of liberation.

When practicing Patriarch Chan to activate your self-nature DNA, you will discover that you don’t need to depart from your current life to live in solitude, or to deliberately seek the Pure Land. You don’t need to rely on avatars, nor do you need a ceremony from a guru. From the beginning, you possess the ability to live an abundant and liberated life in your current environment, and your current state of body and mind. Furthermore, every moment of this life is irreplaceably wondrous and perfect. After reading this book, we hope you will discover that the liveliness of Patriarch Chan far surpasses the Chan and Zen of popular imagination.

Many practitioners think of Chan as a way to cultivate liberation, or at least meditating to attain tranquility. I often ask students what they think the word “Chan” means. I have discovered

that even Chinese people do not know that in ancient China, “*chan*” referred to a ritual ceremony for the emperor to worship the earth gods. When Buddhism was transmitted to China, the Sanskrit word “*dhyana*,” meaning meditative concentration, was transliterated into “*channa*.” After that it became just “*chan*,” which came to denote the practice of cultivation to reach enlightenment. If you could further understand the transformation from earth-worshipping ceremony to cultivating enlightenment, you would discover that human beings have all along sought liberation from bondage. In the early stages, people sought liberation from suffering caused by natural calamities. Back then, due to limited understanding of natural phenomena, climatic changes, and natural disasters, people believed that there was an omnipotent power that controlled everything. Facing these inexplicable phenomena, humans could only stand in awe, and accept this unpredictable power. This mentality gradually formed the foundation of religious cults, whereby through ritual sacrifices and offerings to appease the unknown powers, people hoped to reduce the frequency of disasters, and gain abundance in life. The ancient meaning of *chan* epitomized people’s desire to use all means of sacrifice and worship to demonstrate their respect for the earth gods, and to submit to them.

People in ancient India were also like this. Back then, Hindus regarded Brahman as the creator of all things. People were believed to be derived from Brahman’s body, so the only way to be



free from suffering was to return to Brahman after death, thereby enabling them to be themselves like Brahman – liberated and immortal.

### **Liberation: Not Bound by Physical or Mental Phenomena**

After some time, early Indians discovered that even though they performed sacrifices and rituals, these methods could not relieve a person from all vexations and enable them to reach a calm and tranquil state in their current life. Gradually, they developed methods of cleansing the body and mind through dhyana practice, to purify their lives and reach enlightenment. This represents a considerable transformation: people no longer needed to depend only on the “will of the gods” to determine whether they could be “saved,” but through recognition of their own faults, and through purifying and elevating their character, human beings could reach liberation in this life. This realization transformed the religious attitude that was originally focused on worshipping, fearing, and pleasing the gods. The focus gradually shifted to contemplation to recognize the origin and essence of phenomena such as guilt, vexation, and suffering, whereby through purification, humans could recover a state of mind as pure and profound as that of their gods.

Although the early Indians still possessed the concept of uniting with Brahman, they no longer relied on appeasing and worshipping the gods to repent for their sins. Rather, the method of

unifying with the gods came from a process of awakening and purifying their own character in life. The meaning of liberation also transformed gradually from freedom from suffering to freedom from bondage. People no longer were bound by their incomprehension of natural phenomena, their imagination of gods and demons, or even body-mind phenomena such as joy, anger, sadness and happiness. From this, it is evident that the early Indians developed various methods of calming the mind and finding peace, and finding a path to liberation through practicing dhyana.

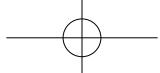




## Siddhartha's Discovery

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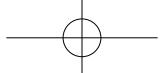
When the early Indian Vedic practitioners shifted their focus from uniting with Brahman through worship and ritual to achieving it through meditation, it was because they came to believe that only through dhyana could they truly achieve ultimate liberation. Hence, devotees of Brahman began to meditate while still children, and became more engaged in dhyana practice as they grew up. As adults, many abandoned mundane life and left home to engage in spiritual cultivation, taking along only the simplest clothing and an alms bowl.



## Neither Dhyana Alone nor Extreme Asceticism is the Path to Liberation

In India, devotees who left home and abandoned the mundane world were known as *pravrajya*. Practitioners of asceticism were also called *shramana*. In China, even before the coming of Buddhism, people renounced the world for monastic life. So, we can say that the Buddha was originally among the *pravrajya*. He was born as Siddhartha Gautama, a prince of the Kapilavastu kingdom, located in modern day Nepal. After Siddhartha became enlightened, he was given the honorific “Shakyamuni,” meaning “sage of the Shakya clan.” In Chinese, “Shakyamuni” is sometimes translated as Shijia Wenfo (“Shakya, the benevolent Buddha”), or Nengren Jimo (“One who is capable, benevolent and tranquil”).

Around the age of 29, Siddhartha abandoned princely life to become a shramana to seek liberation from suffering, studying with masters of various schools. At that time, there were diverse meditation methods being practiced, some still in use, such as contemplating the breath by paying attention to each inhalation and exhalation, noting its character, whether long or short, coarse or refined, etc. By doing this with a concentrated mind, it was possible to reach a state of unity of self with the world. Siddhartha was an excellent student, soon being able to attain samadhi, the deep meditative state in which unity of self with



Brahman could be achieved. But coming out of samadhi, he realized that he was still subject to the senses and illusory thoughts, that he was still bound by physical and mental phenomena. He thus came to understand that the dhyana taught by his teachers, and the samadhi that people aspired to, was not the ultimate path to liberation.

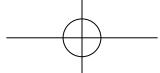
Siddhartha then turned to strict asceticism, through which he sought relief from bondage by reducing the needs of his body to the barest minimum. In other words, he was trying to cure suffering with suffering, using poison to attack poison. Practicing asceticism in the forest, he relied on the earth as his bed, wore coarse hemp and leaves as clothing, and sometimes went naked to allow mosquitoes to feed on him. He reached a state where he barely ate or drank. He became so emaciated that he could feel his spine when he pressed on his stomach; his hair fell out, his skin became wrinkled, and he nearly went blind. Originally, he thought he could use extreme asceticism to cure the bondage of greed and desire, but after six years, Siddhartha was still trapped in his belief that purifying his body would liberate his mind. When he realized his error, he clearly understood that neither extreme asceticism nor dhyana alone was the path to liberation.

### **Siddhartha's Discovery**

So, Siddhartha walked out of the forest. Meeting a cowherd girl who took pity and offered him a bowl of milk, he accepted it.

Then, he went to a spot in Bodhgaya, where he sat under the deep shadow of a pipal tree, assumed the lotus posture, sat upright, and vowed to remain there until he found the answer to suffering. He then entered deep samadhi. In that state, he contemplated the nature of vexations and desires, and of illusory thinking. At dawn on the sixth day of inner struggle, Siddhartha saw the morning star, and at that moment, he awakened to the answer to the question of suffering: he experienced complete freedom from the fetters of body and mind, and attained thorough enlightenment. He exclaimed: “How wonderful, how wonderful, that all sentient beings possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata. It is only because of delusory thoughts and clinging to phenomena, that they have been unable to reach liberation.” Since that time, the tree Siddhartha sat under has been called the Bodhi Tree, the tree of bodhi, or enlightenment.

For six years after leaving home and practicing asceticism in the forest, Siddhartha did not reach enlightenment. It was not until he turned to his inner self that he discovered the truth of ultimate liberation. What did he discover? He discovered that all composite things – all beings and all phenomena – arise out of the uniting of cause and effect, and since all composite things eventually dissolve, they are therefore impermanent. The material world we inhabit, as well as our various vexations, erroneous thoughts, and phenomena of body and mind, all come about and disappear because of the merging and dissipation of cause



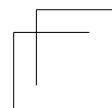
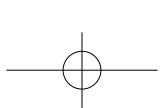
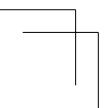
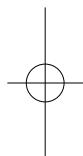
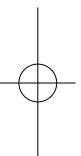
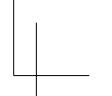
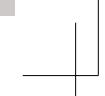
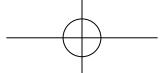
and effect. All phenomena that arise and perish in this manner cannot remain constant or eternal; hence, there is no entity or self-nature that can exist without enduring change. Therefore, the original nature of all things is emptiness (*kong*, Skt. shunyata), or nothingness (*wu*). I want to make it clear, however, that this “nothingness,” is not in the nihilistic sense of “not existing,” but of not having a “self.”

For illustrative purposes, let me use an analogy. Imagine a projection screen that is used to make a presentation. Our self-nature is analogous to that screen before any images are shown on it, in the sense that originally the screen is “empty” of any images. Similarly, all phenomena and conditions of body and mind are only temporarily projected onto the “screen” of our self-nature, one after another. When the source of the images stops projecting images onto the screen, our self-nature is once again revealed in its original emptiness.

In fact, in this analogy even the projection screen (our self-nature), and the self-nature of the projected images (phenomena), are temporarily conditioned by the merging of cause and effect, and are therefore essentially emptiness and nothingness. In later chapters of this book, you will learn the stories of practitioners of Patriarch Chan who experienced true emptiness, that is, “without even a projection screen.” This is not to deny the existence of phenomena (the screen and its contents), but to explain that there is not a permanent, unchangeable subject that can be

bound, nor are there objects (vexations) which can bind the subject. Is there such a thing as bondage then? Siddhartha Gautama discovered that the original state of sentient beings is not one of bondage, but one of liberation.

The true reality of liberation, as well as the innate wisdom to attain it, is stored deep within everyone, in the same way that we all share the same self-nature DNA. There is no need to seek it somewhere else, nor will it disappear for any reason. Everyone is born with the capacity for enlightenment, and everyone is originally that way. Siddhartha reminded us that our self-nature DNA is the origin of all liberation. We do not need to depart from the suffering of this life to seek a second life. As long as we activate our self-nature DNA here and now, we are not bound by body and mind; we will live a free and fulfilled life.





## **Everyone Possesses the Self-Nature DNA**

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Around the age of 35, Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment, and people called him “Buddha,” or “Awakened One.” There are Ten Epithets for the Buddha, among which “Tathagata” denotes his transcendent nature as “one who has thus come, thus gone.” “Buddha” is an honorific that was conveyed upon a human mortal, similar to calling a scholar “Doctor So-and-So.” The difference is that one has to study to earn a doctorate, while the Buddha told us that each of us already originally possesses the wisdom of a buddha. That is to say, the Buddha was a hu-

man person, and every human person innately possesses the DNA of perfect enlightenment.

The enlightened Buddha consequently transmitted to others the truth that he realized, and the method by which he realized it. In his time, the Buddha's teachings were accepted by many followers, and by practicing accordingly, they benefited greatly on the way to liberation. More and more, people came to study with the Buddha, and gradually formed a community of Buddhist believers – the sangha, consisting of ordained monks or nuns, as well as lay followers.

When we study the Buddha's enlightenment and the process of Buddhism becoming a religion, we learn that beyond being a set of beliefs, Buddhism is an awakening of human nature, an enlightening movement for all of humanity. Buddhist faith does not rest on worship or fear of immortal deities, but in believing in the Buddha who awakened to perfect enlightenment and true liberation. And having faith in him, we also study the Dharma and methods he taught, and to respect the sangha that transmits the Buddhadharma. Moreover, Buddhists believe that everyone possesses the wisdom of perfect enlightenment, just like the Buddha. They use the methods that the Buddha taught to activate their self-nature DNA, and to personally experience the freedom of liberation, without hindrance by phenomena, or by the conditions of body and mind in daily life.

## **Not Established on Words, Transmitted Outside the Doctrines**

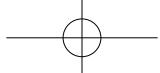
Although the Buddha was enlightened to the one and only truth of ultimate liberation, when guiding practitioners, he adjusted his teachings according to the capacity and situation of each student. His disciples possessed different strengths; for example, Ananda had the best memory, Shariputra had the deepest wisdom, and the Buddha's most senior disciple, Mahakashyapa, was the successor and transmitter of dhyana. Legend has it that one day, the Buddha was at Vulture Peak in Bihar, where he was supposed to give a sermon; instead, without saying a word, he held up a flower to the assembly of monks. Everyone seemed baffled and remained speechless, except for Mahakashyapa, who smiled at the Buddha. Seeing this, the Buddha said to Mahakashyapa: "I have transmitted the treasure of the right views of Dharma, the wondrous mind of nirvana, the real form of no-form, the wondrous method. Not established on words and letters, I transmit this teaching outside doctrines, all to Mahakashyapa."

This is the story of the first mind-to-mind transmission in the Chan lineage. From a scholarly point of view, the flower-holding story may deserve more scrutiny, but from the perspective of Chan history, the Method of Mind was indeed established at that point, to be transmitted to future generations. The Buddha announced to his audience that he had transmitted the Method

of Mind to Mahakashyapa, and Mahakashyapa bore the responsibility, in turn, of transmitting this method. The method the Buddha transmitted is true and wondrous, yet it is without shape or form and does not need to be explicated through language. It was beyond all other Dharma he had taught.

What is the meaning of “not established on words and letters, transmitted outside the doctrines”? One of my teachers, Tang Yixuan a.k.a. Tang Yao (1892-1988) explained it this way: Doctrine consists of the Buddha’s words, and Chan is the method that the Buddha wished to express through his mind, hence the Method of Mind. Although the Buddha relied on words to reveal what was on his mind, the Dharma that he transmitted by holding up the flower was expressed through his mind. Therefore, his use of words was not contrary to mind-to-mind transmission. The Buddha’s emphasis on not relying on language and transmitting outside the teachings was in fact to remind practitioners of the Method of Mind, which means not clinging to the words of the teachings, but to locate the point in dhyana at which they can engage their minds in contemplation, investigation, and attaining enlightenment.

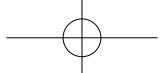
The Buddha’s disciples absorbed the truth of liberation, the methods of practice, and the recollections of his interactions with disciples, and compiled them into what we know today as the Buddhist sutras. The Dharma and the methods that he taught are what we now call “Buddhadharma.” Although Chan



practitioners still follow the lineage traditions outside the doctrines, they do not abandon, disdain, or refuse to read or chant sutras. But they believe that they should not blindly rely on the language in the sutras, nor should they believe that their knowledge and comprehension of the sutras comprises their true body and mind experience. What the Chan School does emphasize is practicing sincerely, faithfully, and through direct experience; it has nothing against language.

Like the Buddha's disciples, followers of the Chan School documented, collated, and compiled the encounters and dialogues of the lineage masters and their disciples in order to spread Chan. This is why even today we can still learn from the recorded sayings of the patriarchs and masters. In the history of Chinese Buddhism, there were indeed many who sincerely and faithfully practiced Chan to reach enlightenment, and we learn how within the various schools of Chan, the lineage masters employed methods of striking and shouting to exhort disciples. These are all treasures of the Chinese Chan method.

Even contemporary Chan masters have left us with many writings; my own Master Sheng Yen is one example. His numerous works exist in many forms, including books, audio tapes, and video recordings, and have been translated into many languages and distributed internationally. The Buddha transmitted the Method of Mind to Mahakashyapa, who in turn, transmitted it to Ananda. The Chan method was thus passed down from gen-

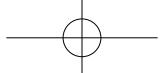


eration to generation until the twenty-eighth generation successor, Bodhidharma, traveled to China by boat to transmit Buddhism there.

### **There is No Merit**

In October 2002, I accompanied Master Sheng Yen on a pilgrimage to some ancient Chan monasteries in China. Our first stop was the Guangxiao Monastery in Guangzhou where we saw the spring in which Bodhidharma washed his begging bowl. In that instant, it was as if we had returned to the time of Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma arrived in China by boat and reached China at Nanyue, modern-day Guangzhou. The first monastery where he taught Buddhadharma was the Guangxiao Monastery. Legend has it that he left Guangzhou and went north to Jinling (modern-day Nanjing), where he had an audience with Emperor Liang Wudi (464-549) of the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Emperor Liang Wudi was a devout Buddhist who promoted vegetarianism and sponsored the building and repair of many monasteries. He respected and venerated monastics, and sponsored Buddhist rituals. The popular modern-day repentance ritual, *Lianghuang Baochan* (Precious Repentance of the Liang Emperor), was a ritual designed by eminent monks summoned by Emperor Liang Wudi.

Upon his encounter with Bodhidharma, the emperor asked, “Since I have ascended the throne, I have sponsored construction



of monasteries and copying sutras to a countless degree. What level of merit have I gained?”

Bodhidharma replied, “There is no merit.”

The emperor asked, “Why is there no merit?”

Bodhidharma replied, “At best, you have accumulated merits of men and heavenly beings. When these merits are exhausted, what will you do then? Merits are like shadows. Although shadows will follow the body’s movements, they are phenomena that only exist while the body exists. This kind of existence is not true existence.”

The emperor again asked, “Then what is true merit?”

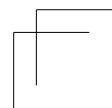
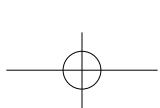
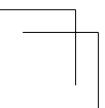
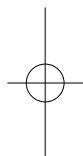
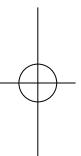
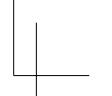
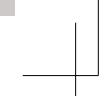
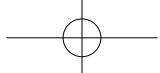
Bodhidharma replied, “Use the pure wisdom that is devoid of picking and choosing, and uncontaminated by myriad things, to contemplate your mind. Use this method to experience enlightenment to your true nature, which is originally empty, tranquil, and without self. This is true liberation and true merit. True merit cannot be obtained through mundane means, and not to be sought externally.”

Bodhidharma’s terse replies reduced Emperor Liang Wudi’s many years of effort in accumulating merit to something mundane and therefore, pretentious. It must have been difficult for the emperor to accept, but Buddhadharma and Chan were not meant to please people. The term that I use, “Method of Mind,” distinguishes Chan from other traditions. Even a person as prominent as the emperor would still need to begin with his own

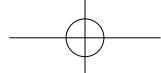
mind to experience enlightenment. There is no advantage in rank, and no grounds for short cuts. Emperor Liang Wudi suppressed his discontent and continued to inquire: “If that is the case, then what is the principal meaning of true liberation?”

Bodhidharma replied, “The void is vast. Where can one really locate the principle of true liberation?”

The dialogue between the eminent Indian monk and the devout Chinese Buddhist emperor thus came to an awkward stalemate. Bodhidharma went to the Yangzi River, broke off a reed and threw it into the water, whereupon he used it as a raft on which he crossed the river to northern China.



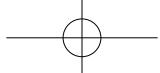




## Everything Begins with the Mind

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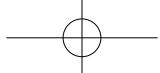
Whether Bodhidharma's encounter with Emperor Liang Wudi really happened, or that he really crossed the Yangzi River on a reed, stories like these suggest that the dhyana that Bodhidharma brought to China was not well received at first. Even as Hindus saw uniting with Brahman as ultimate liberation, the ancient Chinese were also actively looking for ways to become immortal. From the Qin (248-207 BCE) through the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) Dynasties, most emperors regarded immortality as in itself liberation. So, the imperial families thus preferred communing



with the world of spirits, and engaged in alchemy to obtain the elixir to eternal life. Legend has it that Emperor Han Wudi (156 BCE-87 BCE) ordered military officers to collect heavenly dew at the palace gates in jade bowls, believing that drinking this heavenly dew would preserve his youth and extend his life. As it happened, the emperor died from drinking a so-called elixir of immortality.

In this environment, the dhyana methods the Chinese learned were inevitably tinged with the flavor of divine or supernatural powers, and their corresponding ability to commune with spirits. By contrast, the Indian Buddhist methods of dhyana were first introduced in the Eastern Han Dynasty (1st century CE), through the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-577 CE), and relied largely on such practices as:

- Mindfulness of breath through practicing awareness of one's inhalations and exhalations.
- Four Foundations of Mindfulness: cultivating dhyana through 1) mindfulness of one's body, 2) mindfulness of one's sensations, 3) mindfulness of one's thoughts, and 4) mindfulness of one's mental objects as well as external objects.
- Five Methods for Stilling the Mind: 1) mindfulness of breath, 2) contemplating the impurity of the body, 3) mindful recollection of the buddha, 4) meditation on the four



boundless mentalities (loving-kindness, compassion, joy, equanimity), and 5) contemplating causes and conditions

- Four Elements Meditation to rid the mind of desire, hate, ignorance, self, and doubt.

These methods facilitated calmness of body and mind, and further, through samadhi, to gain supernatural powers.

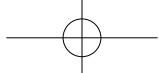
### **Eminent Monk Comes from West Bringing Obscure Method**

The dhyana practiced in the Indian schools was grouped into the Four Dhyanas of the Form Realm, and Four Dhyanas of the Formless Realm, and today, they still serve as guiding principles for dhyana attainment. Regardless of the school, as long as the method is correct and practitioners can focus their minds, they are able to attain the formless dhyanas, and during samadhi may experience body-mind transformations, or even reveal supernatural powers. I warn practitioners to regard supernatural powers are just scenery along the path to liberation. They are fundamentally no different from leg pains during meditation, also part of the scenery in meditation. A true Chan practitioner would neither cling to these phenomena nor deny them – they are part of the process of transformation. The correct attitude is to drop them as soon as one becomes aware of them. This is like Siddhartha sitting under the Bodhi Tree, neither vexed nor afraid, not aroused by need or desire, and neither grasping nor clinging

to maintain that state – just truthfully noting their existence, and continuing to strive.

However, during the era of Emperor Liang Wudi, people developed a taste for the supernatural, and many practitioners mistakenly took these scenes along the way as their real goal. They judged other people according to whether they had supernatural abilities, or they used their own supernatural powers for self-promotion. In addition, they often judged other Buddhists by how much merit they seem to have earned. In this context, we can appreciate why Emperor Liang Wudi would ask Bodhidharma, “What level of merit have I gained?” But 2,500 years ago, Siddhartha already discovered that unification with Brahman was not the ultimate liberation; after one came out of samadhi, one still had the sensations of greed, desire, vexations, illusory thoughts, and being bound by the phenomena of body and mind. On the contrary, the Buddha instructed practitioners to rely on themselves, and to cultivate the inner mind to attain enlightenment.

Therefore, to Bodhidharma, the 28<sup>th</sup> generation descendant of the dhyana method of Indian Buddhism, Emperor Liang Wudi’s building monasteries, sponsoring monasticism, and promoting Buddhist rituals were in effect, seeking Dharma outside the mind. Even if Liang Wudi could have attained unity with the gods, or had a supernatural experience, it would still have been only scenery, not ultimate liberation. From Bodhidharma’s point



of view, to talk about merit one should begin with the mind's experience of liberation in the emptiness and tranquility of selflessness. This is the true merit. That is why Bodhidharma responded to Emperor Liang Wudi's question by saying, "There is no merit."

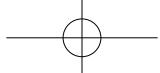
After he was told that all his good works had earned him no merit, the emperor Wudi followed with another question, "What is the highest meaning of the holy truth?"

Bodhidharma respectfully replied, "Vast emptiness, nothing holy."

Emperor Liang Wudi must have been rather frustrated. After being told he had earned no merit, he summoned his courage to ask a pious question, and received an answer that seemed so hollow. But Bodhidharma was possibly also frustrated; he had clearly told the emperor to apply his mind towards becoming enlightened to non-self, emptiness, and tranquility. How could he still ask, "What is the highest meaning of the holy truth?"

At that moment, they had simply arrived at a dead end.

Bodhidharma left, crossed the Yangzi River, and arrived at Mt. Song in today's Henan province, where he meditated at Shaolin Monastery, facing a wall for nine years. And despite the legend, Bodhidharma did not teach gongfu to the monks. Furthermore, the dhyana method he taught was considered too controversial, and was scorned by skeptics. Consequently, he had only a few disciples such as Huike, Tanlin, and Daoyu. He was

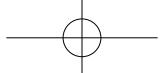


an eminent monk hailing from India, yet so few understood him.

The seed of Bodhidharma's "arcane" dhyana had to sprout in isolation on the cold ground of China. But in time, it was practiced by adherents, and gradually evolved into the illustrious lineage of Patriarch Chan. Bodhidharma therefore has been honored by following generations as the First Patriarch of Chan and the First Patriarch of the East, and became widely known as Patriarch Bodhidharma.

### **From a Single Lineage to Multiple Transmissions**

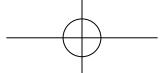
Ultimately, Bodhidharma transmitted to his disciple Huike (487-593), who thus became the Second Patriarch of Chan. From there, Huike transmitted to Third Patriarch Sengcan (?-606), Sengcan to Fourth Patriarch Daoxin (580-651), Daoxin to Fifth Patriarch Hongren (601-674), and Hongren to Sixth Patriarch Huineng (638-713). What this means is that there was a direct generation-to-generation transmission of the Method of Mind from one patriarch to the next. From Bodhidharma to Huineng, the Chan lineage maintained a single line of transmission while preserving the symbolic ritual of transmitting the patriarch's robe and alms bowl. In the Sixth Patriarch's *Platform Sutra* it is recorded that when Hongren passed on the robe and bowl to Huineng, he said, "In the past, when the Patriarch Bodhidharma first arrived in China, people did not believe in his method, so he used his robe as proof of transmission from one generation to



the next, and the Dharma he transmitted was from mind to mind, teaching his disciples to be self-awakened and self-liberated.”

This means that Chan is a “method of mind.” The real focus of Chan transmission was from mind to mind, whereas passing on the robe and bowl was a formality to remind people that the possessor has received the recognition of the previous patriarch. Therefore, people can trust and follow this person in their practice. “Transmitting the robe and alms bowl” (*chuanyibo*) was a special Chan term, but ordinary people later used it to describe passing a family business from one generation to the next. After Huineng, the Chan School discontinued the ritual of transmitting the robe and bowl. At the same time, some masters after Huineng began transmitting to several disciples. Chan Buddhism experienced a surge in following, and the number of practitioners increased dramatically, even among scholars and gentry, high officials and nobility. The Chan methods also became lively and multifaceted, evolving into five major sects: the Guiyang, Linji, Caodong, Yunmen, and Fayan sects. In time, those who were adept at transmitting the methods of their sect were respected as patriarchs.

At least in legend, Bodhidharma used a reed as a raft to cross the Yangzi. Now Chan has evolved into a large tree with multiple branches and lush foliage. Toward the end of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), the people were plagued by constant war-

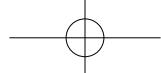


fare. The military was exhausted and national resources were depleted; people suffered hardship and it was difficult to sustain life. Many poverty-stricken families sent their children to become monastics, thus straining the resources of the monasteries. One result was that most monastics had no proper education, and were unable to penetrate deeply into the sutras, let alone experience profound chan attainment. Buddhism then degraded into a religion that mostly performed morning and evening ritual services. On the path of Chan practice, the blind leading the blind was a common theme. As a result, on the cusp of dynastic change from the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) to the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), Chan Buddhism was like a dimly flickering candle in the wind, at the point of being extinguished.

Not until the late Qing and early republican periods did Chinese Buddhism undergo reform and revitalization. By then monastics were required to study sutras and engage in earnest practice. The quality of monastics was elevated, and the Chan lineage was thus able to sustain itself. My teacher, Master Sheng Yen, received transmission in two lineages, the Linji and Caodong, and established the Dharma Drum Lineage in Taiwan. So, besides being the inaugural patriarch of the Dharma Drum Lineage, the Venerable Sheng Yen was also a patriarch of the Chan School. Having been mentored by Master Sheng Yen, and having had some success with his methods, I too transmit the Dharma Drum Lineage. I have thus given a general outline of 1,500 years of Pa-

triarch Chan. My purpose now is to help you unlock the secrets of your self-nature DNA.

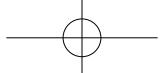




## Working Towards a Life of Liberation

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What do I mean by activating your self-nature DNA? Shakyamuni Buddha said that each of us is like himself in that we all “possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata.” What is this virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata? In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha says, “the Tathagata neither comes nor goes, and therefore is called the Tathagata.” This is saying that the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata is the completely enlightened wisdom that has neither past nor future. Each of us innately possesses the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata, which is like our shared DNA.

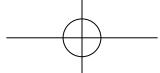


It is innately present, does not come from anywhere, is not going anywhere; it has neither past nor future. Everyone has it, and there is no difference of higher or lower. Its nature does not alter due to internal or external conditions. Being non-arising, it is not something that one can seek and obtain; being non-perishing, it does not disappear for any reason. Extra effort will not make it increase, and neglect will not make it decrease.

### **All Sentient Beings Possess the Virtuous Wisdom of the Tathagata**

This virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata differs from the knowledge and wisdom gained through life experience. Although we are all born with some level of intelligence, it will vary according to one's genes and nurturing. Knowledge accumulates through learning and study, but produces different results depending on one's chosen field. Therefore, intelligence, knowledge, and mundane wisdom enable us to achieve things in life, but they have nothing to do with the ultimate liberation that is unfettered by body and mind. How then is the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata related to liberation? How could the Buddha, who experienced this fundamental wisdom, be no longer bound or affected by the phenomena of body and mind? What really, is this virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata? What is the ultimate truth of the liberation that the Buddha discovered?

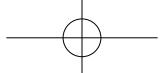
The Buddha learned that our material world, our greed, desire,



our various vexations and wandering thoughts, views, and all body and mind phenomena arise from the merging of causes and conditions as effects. All that comes into being because of causes and conditions will eventually change and disappear. Substances and phenomena have no fixed, unchangeable, eternal existence or “self.” Therefore, there is nothing in the material world that has substance or selfhood. Indeed, the ultimate reality, the self-nature of humankind and the myriad phenomena, is that of emptiness. That is to say, the entire material world and our greed, desire, vexations, and wandering thoughts, arise and disappear because of causes and conditions; they therefore have an illusory existence. The ultimate reality of all these phenomena, including our body and mind, is emptiness. But how can empty vexations fetter an empty body and mind? Conversely, how can an empty body and mind be bound by empty vexations? If vexations as well as body and mind are all empty, where can there be bondage?

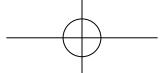
### **Self-Nature Is Empty and Tranquil: Originally There Were no Fetters**

The ultimate reality that the Buddha discovered is that the myriad things are empty and tranquil, and therefore, we are all originally without fetters. Everyone is like this, and this is our self-nature DNA. This is the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata that everyone possesses. Now that we have a better understanding of



emptiness, we can revisit the encounter between Bodhidharma and the Emperor Liang Wudi. Towards the end of the encounter, the emperor asked Bodhidharma, “What is the highest meaning of holiness?” Bodhidharma replied, “Vast emptiness, nothing holy.” The void is vast and all is empty, so where is the distinction between holy and not holy?

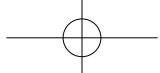
Had Emperor Liang Wudi understood the meaning of emptiness and tranquility, he would have also understood that the path to liberation taught by the Buddha was also empty and tranquil. There would have been no need to ask about the most profound meaning of holiness. Is the Dharma that Shakyamuni taught also empty and tranquil? Would one defame the Buddha by calling his Dharma “empty and tranquil”? In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha said: “If a person says that the Tathagata has expounded the Dharma, then he has defamed the Buddha.” Remember that the Buddha’s universal epithet is Tathagata: “One who has thus come and thus gone.” So this passage in the sutra means that if people say that the Buddha expounded the Dharma, they are defaming the Buddha. Why? The Buddha taught that self-nature is fundamentally empty and tranquil. Indeed, Buddhadharma is the truth and the path of liberation taught by Shakyamuni Buddha, the person. But the words that he uttered were also part of the myriad things that come together because of cause: causes and effects, and as such, they are also empty and tranquil. Therefore, Bodhidharma responded by saying that all is



empty and tranquil; there is no holy method to achieve buddhahood, nor is there a profound meaning to holiness.

Had the emperor understood emptiness and tranquility, he would have also understood that it was a mistake to think that his good deeds earned merit. All his good deeds were phenomena that arose from the merging and dispersal of causes and effects, and their temporary existence would eventually vanish. Though they had shapes and characteristics, they were neither eternal nor immune to change. Therefore, the ultimate true reality of his meritorious deeds was to be empty and tranquil. That being the case, how does one accumulate merit? True emptiness and tranquility cannot be bound by mundane distinctions of good and evil, joy and anger, and so on. As we said earlier, our original nature is something like a blank projection screen. But if even the screen does not exist, where can one project images? If all things are empty and tranquil, how can there be an Emperor Liang Wudi who was still attached to distinctions of good and evil, joy and anger, while accumulating merit? Or who could even receive retribution due to misconduct?

So please do not think that you should perform meritorious deeds in order to earn merit, since all is empty and tranquil. Or worse, misconstrue that there is no need to perform meritorious deeds at all. Worst of all is to believe that you should even intentionally commit evil deeds, since good deeds earn no merit. So, when doing meritorious deeds, the right attitude is to not per-



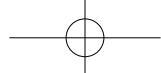
ceive that “I am doing meritorious deeds,” or that there is merit in doing such deeds. Don’t do good deeds just to gain good karma, to make up for past evils, or to please some higher power; just do what you should do, and do what needs to be done.

Similarly, do not stop doing evil deeds because you want to be “good.” Nor should you stop doing evil just because that would bring bad karma. Even more so, do not stop evil deeds out of fear of going to hell, or being punished by a higher power. Just stop doing what is inappropriate, and stop doing what you should not be doing. Therefore, good and evil have nothing to do with you. Because there is no “you,” joy and anger cannot cling to you. This is the meaning of not being bound by the mundane distinction between good and evil, between joy and anger. This way you can gradually recognize your empty and tranquil self-nature DNA.

Because self-nature is empty and tranquil, and there is no permanent, everlasting self-nature, there is no permanent, constant supreme deity who can overpower everything, or provide salvation to sentient beings. There is also no eternal “self” that can reincarnate over and over again due to good and evil deeds, cause and effect, and retribution. The Buddhist teaching on rebirth is closer to the concepts in physics of conservation of energy and mass, because there is no fixed form, and no existence of an everlasting self. Because there is no “God” that can dictate the destiny of all things or provide salvation, you need not be like the

Na'vi in the *Avatar*, praying to the earthly goddess Eywa on planet Pandora to seek a liberated and free life, since originally there was no Eywa. Just like Siddhartha Gautama, your liberation will arise from personally experiencing this empty and tranquil self-nature DNA.

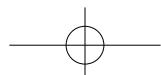


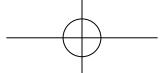


## **“Originally There is Not a Thing” is Not Yet Liberation**

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We say “illusory existence” to express the idea that phenomena come into being through causes and effects, and also decompose through causes and effects. Therefore, the ultimate reality of illusory phenomena is what we call “emptiness,” or “emptiness and tranquility.” Sometimes we use “wu” to express the same idea. If everything is empty, why should one even make an effort since everything is also illusory? And how does one do that? When we finally see illusions as empty, is that liberation? When all be-



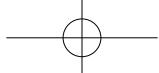


comes wu and there is nothing left, how can one seek perfect enlightenment in this life?

The story of Sixth Patriarch Huineng's enlightenment aptly answers this question. Huineng's father was an official in Hebei province, who was then exiled to what is now Guangdong province. After his father's passing, Huineng and his mother sold firewood for a living. One time, he delivered firewood to a client's home. On his way out of the house, he heard a man on the street recite some words from a sutra. Upon hearing them, Huineng had an awakening. Inspired, Huineng asked the man what he was chanting. The man replied, "*The Diamond Sutra*." He further said, "Patriarch Hongren is the abbot of Dongchan Monastery in Huangmei, where he has more than 1,000 followers. Master Hongren teaches that upholding the *Diamond Sutra* will enable one to see one's self-nature and become a buddha." When Huineng expressed a desire to study this Dharma, someone gave Huineng ten pieces of silver to provide for his mother. Huineng was thus able to leave his mother and travel north to Huangmei to become a disciple of Hongren.

### **Being Empty and Tranquil, Self-Nature Does Not Arise or Vanish**

When Huineng first arrived at Dongchan Monastery he was assigned to the rear of the monastery to chop wood and pound rice, living in this manner for more than eight months. One day



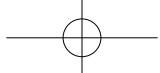
Huineng heard a novice monk chanting this verse:

*The body is a bodhi tree,  
The mind is a bright mirror.  
Diligently wipe it constantly,  
Not allowing any dust to settle.*

Hearing this, Huineng curiously inquired, “What are you chanting?” The novice replied, “You southerners really have no idea what is going on. Master Hongren wants to transmit the robe and bowl to a successor. So he asked people to compose a gatha to express their own level of attainment. The master will transmit the lineage to whoever composes the most profound gatha, indicating he has reached enlightenment.”

The novice continued, “So head monk Shenxiu put up a gatha on a wall in the front hall. When Master Hongren saw it, he instructed everyone to recite this gatha, saying ‘Follow this teaching in your cultivation, and you will greatly benefit from it.’” But in fact, after Hongren read Shenxiu’s gatha, he told the head monk: “You have not yet seen your essential nature. You are just outside the gate but haven’t entered. With this understanding, you will not be able to attain the unsurpassable bodhi.”

How was Hongren able to see that Shenxiu had not seen buddha-nature? The myriad things are illusory phenomena that arise and vanish due to causes and conditions. Although there are

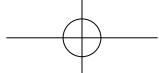


forms and phenomena, there is no constant, unchanging, everlasting existence; so the true reality of the myriad things is emptiness. Since everything is true emptiness, how can there be the phenomena of body and mind manifesting as “bodhi tree” and “bright mirror,” and which can be contaminated with “dust”? Since the true reality is empty and tranquil, how can one find a difference between defilement and purity? Why should one even need to “Diligently wipe the mirror constantly, not allowing any dust to settle?”

So Shenxiu’s gatha still reveals a level of understanding where there can be a body and a mind that can be defiled or pure. Having such a view would constantly generate thoughts arising and perishing in one’s mind. In other words, Shenxiu had not realized the path of true liberation in emptiness. So Hongren told Shenxiu: “In order to reach the ultimate liberation, you must experience your own buddha-nature as empty and tranquil, as non-arising and non-perishing, and the myriad phenomena are also the same. If you can comprehend this, you will have seen the self-nature of an unsurpassable bodhisattva.”

### **The True Reality of Emptiness is Not a Lifeless Phenomenon**

Having learned that Master Hongren had asked the monks to recite Shenxiu’s gatha, Huineng asked the novice: “I also want to chant this gatha. Can you take me to see it?” So the novice led Huineng to the south corridor, where he bowed to Shenxiu’s



gatha. He then said to the novice, “I cannot read. Could you read this gatha to me?” At that moment Zhang Riyong, the assistant to the Prefect of Jiangzhou, was standing nearby, so he read the gatha to Huineng. Upon hearing the gatha, Huineng said, “I also have a gatha. Could you write it on the wall for me?”

But how could an illiterate person like Huineng compose a gatha? Zhang Riyong was baffled, and asked Huineng, “You know how to compose gatha? How remarkable!”

Huineng replied, “Those who wish to become enlightened to the ultimate liberation should not look down upon beginners.”

Zhang Riyong replied, “All right then. Recite your gatha and I will write it for you. After you have become enlightened and received transmission, don’t forget to first help me with my salvation.”

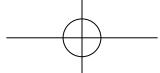
Huineng then recited his own gatha:

*Bodhi has no tree,  
Nor is the mind a bright mirror.  
Originally there is not a thing.  
To what can dust cling?*

His Dharma brothers standing there were amazed by Huineng’s ability and realized that they should not have judged Huineng by his status or appearance. The monks began to talk of this remarkable event, and soon Master Hongren also learned

of it. He came to the south corridor and read the gatha, and then quickly removed one of his sandals to rub out the gatha, remarking to himself, “This one didn’t see his self-nature either.” Why did he say that? Huineng’s verse showed that he understood that “originally there is not a single thing.” This showed that Huineng had already dropped the attachment to illusory existence. Isn’t this true emptiness? So why did Hongren say that Huineng’s verse showed that he had not seen his own self-nature? After all, doesn’t “originally there is not a thing” express wu, true emptiness?

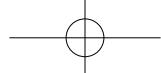
There is a story in the sutras about a man named Fanzhi who made an offering to the Buddha of flowers that he held in both hands. The Buddha asked Fanzhi to put them down. So Fanzhi put down the flowers in his right hand. But the Buddha said again, “Put them down.” This time Fanzhi put down the flowers in his left hand. Once more, the Buddha told Fanzhi, “Put them down.” This left Fanzhi wondering, “But both of my hands are empty! Why does the Buddha still want me to put down the flowers?” Most people perceive that letting go of attachment to body and mind is already emptiness, but this kind of emptiness only emerges when it is juxtaposed with the mental condition immediately before letting go. Before one lets go, there is still a subjective “I,” and an objective “emptiness,” as if it were something tangible to be owned. If while experiencing this kind of “emptiness,” there exists even the trace of a thought that “this is empti-



ness,” that is not true emptiness. That is why Master Hongren remarked that Huineng had not yet seen his true self-nature. Chan patriarchs do not rely on language; instead, they use actions to express themselves. Hongren using his sandal to rub out Huineng’s gatha meant that to arrive at true emptiness, one must erase even wu.

True emptiness is the ultimate reality of the myriad dharmas; it is not a lifeless phenomenon. The perfect enlightened wisdom of liberation does not end at emptiness. “Originally there is not a thing” therefore indicated to Hongren that Huineng had not yet seen his true nature, and was not yet liberated. Although Huineng was able to comprehend the meaning of emptiness that was conditioned by cause and effect, he had not yet understood that in the moment when causes and conditions come together, the myriad things still arise and perish as illusory forms. These are the wondrous functions derived from emptiness. However, as we will see next, guided by Master Hongren, Huineng quickly experienced great enlightenment, and the wisdom that neither comes nor goes.

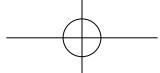




## Every Moment Here and Now is Perfect Revelation

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On the day after reading Huineng's gatha, Hongren went to the room in the monastery where Huineng was pounding rice. Hongren asked, "Is the rice ready?" Huineng replied, "Yes, but it still needs to be sifted." On the surface, this exchange between master and disciple seemed to be about rice. But Hongren was really asking Huineng, "Are you enlightened?" And Huineng's response really meant, "I am, but I await the master's seal of approval." Hongren then asked Huineng to come to his room late that

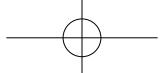


night. When Huineng arrived, Hongren expounded the *Diamond Sutra* to him. When Huineng heard the words, “Not abiding in anything, give rise to mind,” at that moment, he became fully enlightened to the truth of liberation, and that the myriad dharmas do not depart from self-nature. Then, without forethought and speaking naturally, Huineng said to Hongren: “Self-nature is always originally pure; it neither arises nor perishes; it has always been originally complete and never wavers; it is able at all times to generate myriad dharmas.”

### **How Self-Nature Can Generate Myriad Dharmas**

How is it that until Hongren expounded the *Diamond Sutra*, Huineng did not realize that one’s self-nature is originally pure and does not arise or perish? Or that self-nature is originally complete and perfect, that it neither wavers nor moves? How is it that until then, he did not know that self-nature could generate the myriad dharmas? And finally, what is the meaning of “Not abiding in anything, give rise to mind”? Why did Huineng reach enlightenment upon hearing those words?

In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha told us that we should not attach to forms, be it person, event, thing, or realm, but that we should give rise to pure mind from these phenomena, and make good use of the myriad conditions. When Huineng heard the words, “Not abiding in anything, give rise to mind,” he used his pure, non-abiding mind to introspect his self-mind. At that mo-



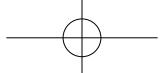
ment, he experienced enlightenment and saw his self-nature. He experienced profoundly that the myriad things and people, and all realms, do not depart from empty and tranquil self-nature.

When we truly experience the rise and fall of phenomena that result from the merging of causes and conditions, in that instant, we will understand that there is originally not a thing – no permanent existence, no enduring, fixed self-nature, and therefore, no need to cling to illusory shapes, forms, or situations. This way, our mind will not generate likes, dislikes, distinctions, nor will it cling to or abandon thinking when encountering shapes, forms and situations. This condition of mind does not come into being nor ceases to be. Even if you have in the past harbored likes, dislikes, and discriminations, you would know in that moment that such thoughts are illusory. The ultimate true reality is emptiness and tranquility; it is the original mind that does not waver according to external situations and forms.

Even so, you should not cling to ultimate emptiness and tranquility. That way, being pure and at ease, your mind will not be contaminated or bound by deluded thoughts and attachments. When using this pure mind at ease to contemplate phenomena and situations, you will experience that all sentient beings and the myriad things share this pure and tranquil self-nature. Even at the instant of cause and effect coming together, the true nature of the myriad things is tranquil; even in that instant, the nature of the myriad things is transient and illusory. This is like a magic

show. We all know that what we see is the trickery of the magician on the stage, who in a moment, can pull a bunch of roses from his hat, and in the next moment, make paper currency appear between his fingers. We, the audience, will applaud and cheer. Some of us will be invited onstage to help the magician complete his fascinating performance.

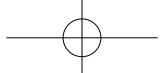
Similarly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chan Master Xuyun (1840-1959), encouraged Buddhists this way: “Even though Buddhist rituals are like illusory flowers, we must perform them constantly; even though monasteries are like the reflections of the moon in water, we still must build them everywhere.” Flowers grow on trees, vines, and bushes, but where can you find them in the sky? From the perspective of Earthlings, the moon is a celestial body floating in space, so the moon in the water is but a reflection. Master Xuyun used this analogy to remind us that though the myriad things on Earth are like the flowers in the sky and the moon’s reflection – they are illusions created by the coming together of causes and conditions. But in life, we must at every moment and in every place, devote ourselves wholeheartedly to what needs to be done. At the same time, we clearly understand that everything is just like flowers in the sky, and the moon in the water. This way, when we deal with people and phenomena, we will not be bound to them or be deceived. If we allow ourselves to be tricked and cling to the myriad things, then we would be like simpletons, doggedly splashing into the water to catch the moon.



After understanding that the true self-nature of the myriad things is empty, one should not cling to emptiness itself. Just earnestly experience these elusive happenings, understanding clearly that each moment is the effect of the previous moment, and the cause of the next. See every moment as the perfect revelation of the unity of cause and effect, and that they are all wondrous; and since they are wondrous, we should use them well and reveal to others their wondrous functions.

Someone may say, “I am overweight and short, my salary is meager, my spouse is talkative, and my kids are struggling in school.” How can these be the most perfect revelations? How can these be wondrous manifestations? Genetics influence one’s height and weight, but if after a full meal you pick up a bag of chips, a beer, and then lounge on the couch to watch baseball, how can you not gain weight? When your schoolmates were playing basketball, and you chose to stay in to play video games, your weight could possibly have increased by a few ounces.

The global economic downturn has hit bottom, causing many companies to go bankrupt. During this financial storm, in order to survive some companies downsize, resulting in lower or stagnating salaries. Your wife is happy to see you home after work, and asks you to wash your hands before dinner. But if you never follow her suggestions for three days, when you arrive home, you will see a cheerless face: “You didn’t wash your hands; you didn’t put the socks in the washing machine; you never put down the



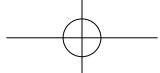
toilet seat; you forgot our wedding anniversary, and so on..."

So you stare at the baseball game on TV. It's the bottom of the ninth with three balls, two strikes, two outs and the bases are loaded. You are waiting for a grand slam home run to reverse the game, and you turn around and see your son, who will have exams tomorrow, standing there watching the game. You shout, "You have exams tomorrow! Go back to your room to study!" If I were your child and had the ability to score 100, I would purposely get only 75.

Don't forget, every passing moment is the result of effect of the previous moment, and the passing of each moment is the most perfect revelation of prior cause and effect. Now, please think again about the fact that you are too fat, too short, you don't make enough money, your wife talks too much, and your kids aren't doing well in school. Then tell me which one of these phenomena is not perfect, and which one of these is not a wondrous revelation. So, the next question is, how can we make the best use of the wondrous function of wondrous existence?

### **Use Well the Most Perfect Wondrous Function**

When playing for the Yankees in the Major Leagues, the Taiwanese pitcher Wang Jianmin set the record for nineteen straight wins. People asked him how he managed the tremendous pressure when facing strong hitters, and the pressure of losing and winning, and how he handled the crucial pitches. Wang an-

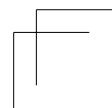
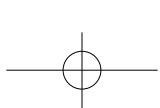
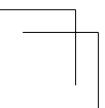
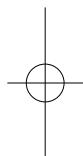
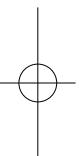
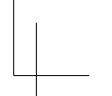
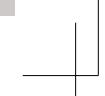
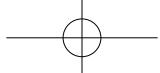


swered, “On the pitcher’s mound, I only look at the catcher and his glove, and I pitch one ball at a time.” Whether facing strong hitters or designated hitters, Wang Jianmin is not affected because at the moment of the pitch, he only sees the catcher and the catcher’s glove. He concentrates on the here-and-now, determining how he should throw that particular ball, and then he throws it that way.

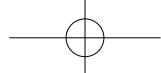
To “pitch one ball at a time” is to use the wondrous function of wondrous existence, and the method to reverse adverse conditions in your life. In each and every moment, here and now, focusing on what you should be doing at that moment is the best way to utilize the wondrous existence. At this moment, you should understand how to deal with your spouse’s complaints, and how best to utilize the wondrous function of this wondrous existence – when you get home from work, just wash your hands.

The story of Huineng’s enlightenment reminds us that experiencing absolute emptiness and tranquility allows one to understand the truth that everybody possesses the self-nature DNA. To experience the self-nature that can generate myriad dharmas is to truly understand one’s original nature; and to see original nature is to truly activate one’s self-nature DNA. One can then truly have a lively and free life. Experiencing emptiness and tranquility is not enough; one must also contemplate the transient and wondrous existence of every cause and effect. At every here and now, one must use this most perfect wondrous function.

To keep our empty and tranquil original nature, we contemplate the myriad human affairs and surrounding environments; we understand that each moment is the perfect union of prior causes and conditions. In every moment and everywhere, we use the perfect unity of every moment. And of course, the most wondrous function of every moment engenders the next perfect moment of unity. There is therefore no predetermined destiny. There is only how you can manage your destiny, maneuver your life and your future. Your future resides in every moment of here and now; in this life you can live a wondrous life. Your life is thus not contaminated, not manipulated; it is to be perfected by you. You are a true, authentic, liberated free person. When Huineng attained enlightenment, he said, “the myriad dharmas do not depart from self-nature...self-nature is able to generate the myriad dharmas.” This is equivalent to activating your self-nature DNA.



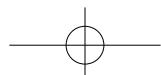


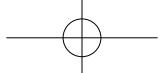


## **Code One: Your Self-Nature is Originally Pure**

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To introduce to you the practice of Patriarch Chan and to give you a better understanding of its methods, I teach what I call the Five Codes from the teachings of the Chan patriarchs. It is my view that these Five Codes are the essence of Patriarch Chan, and if you practice them accordingly, you will be practicing Patriarch Chan. You will learn how the ancient Chan masters used the principles of the Five Codes to help their disciples gain insight into the lively essence of Patriarch Chan; you will see how





the stories demonstrate practitioners activating their self-nature DNA. In fact, Huineng's first teaching had already exhausted the essence and methods of Patriarch Chan, which is that self-nature is originally pure; that it is in fact bodhi, awakening. So, one just has to use their original mind to directly become a buddha who personifies perfect bodhi.

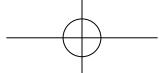
Code One says that the bodhi of your self-nature is originally pure. Everybody's self-nature is originally without fetters, not contaminated by the myriad things and one's surroundings; it is originally empty and tranquil. As the Buddha said, "sentient beings innately possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata." Every person innately possesses the pure self-nature DNA; to activate it one needs only to "use this mind and directly become a buddha"; one needs only to penetrate one's own pure mind and use it to directly reach enlightenment. Thus, every person has the potential to become a liberated, free being.

### **The Sudden Teaching: All Complete and Equal**

The teachings of the Buddha and of Huineng are the origins of the sudden enlightenment method of Patriarch Chan. The essence of the method is not to rely on external sources for cultivation, not to seek beyond oneself, and not to rely on the blessing of the masters. Since we innately possess this perfect and pure self-nature, there is no need to ask for divine assistance. This pure self-nature is analogous to our genetically endowed DNA in

the sense that it is innate to our humanity. Like our human DNA, everyone possesses the self-nature of a buddha, and not a single person lacks it. The method of Patriarch Chan is called “sudden enlightenment” because one needs only to penetrate into their innermost mind to experience in an instant, their pure self-nature. People’s pure self-nature is like their commonly shared DNA, in that it is equal and identical in everyone, and there is no higher or lower. Therefore, in their moment of enlightenment, all sentient beings are buddhas; they only need to activate their self-nature DNA to become perfectly enlightened, liberated, and free.

“Self-nature is innately pure; one only needs to use this mind and directly become a Buddha.” This principle of Patriarch Chan spells out very clearly, honestly and simply, the path to buddhahood. Perhaps because it is too honest and simple, this method has often been forgotten and neglected on the path of practice. Therefore, we can see in various Chan stories or Gong’an (Jpn. koan) how patriarchs constantly reminded and advised us. A gong’an, literally a “public case,” originally referred to an entry in the judicial records used by the government. As used in Chan, a gong’an is a unique and revealing dialogue between a Chan master and a disciple. The dialogue typically reveals the level of attainment of the disciple, but sometimes also triggers the disciple’s enlightenment. In fact, when we study the gong’ans we often learn how the masters guided and instructed



their disciples using the principles of Patriarch Chan. As for the meanings of the enlightenment events in the gong’ans, they are best understood by the master and the disciple in the story.

### **Abandoning One’s Own Treasure and Seeking Outside**

In a Gong’an involving Tang Dynasty masters Dazhu Huihai (c. 730-c. 800) and Mazu Daoyi (709-788), we see how a patriarch’s timely reminder enabled a disciple to instantaneously enlighten to his pure self-nature.

Once, Dazhu went to Jiangxi to visit Mazu Daoyi, who asked him, “Where are you from?”

Dazhu replied, “I came from the Dayun Monastery of Yuezhou.”

Mazu said, “Why do you come here?”

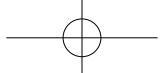
Dazhu replied, “I’ve come to seek Buddhadharma.”

Mazu said, “You’ve ignored the treasure in your own house, abandoned your home and wandered here, for what?”

Confused, Dazhu asked, “What do you mean by ignoring my own treasure at home?”

Mazu replied, “That which is asking me is your treasure. All is complete without lacking a thing. Use it freely. Why seek it outside?”

At that moment Dazhu saw his own original mind. Afterwards, he followed Mazu Daoyi for six years, becoming a Dharma heir.



## If You Want Buddhism, I Have a Little Bit Here

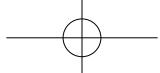
Dazhu was not the only one who had forgotten about his self-nature DNA. Chan Master Niaochao Daolin (741-824) had an attendant named Huitong.

One day Huitong came to Daolin to bid him farewell. Daolin asked, “Where are you going?”

Huitong replied, “In order to seek Buddhadharma I became a monk. Master, I am grateful for all these days that you have compassionately instructed me, but now I am eager to go elsewhere to study Buddhadharma.”

Huitong’s reply, on the surface, was to show gratitude, but his words were full of complaints: “To study Buddhism I became a monk, but every day I take care of you, an old monk, who never instructed me on Buddhadharma. How is this learning Buddhism? Now I want to seek other means, go to other places, to a virtuous master to study true Buddhism, to fulfill my original purpose of becoming a monk.”

Daolin of course understood what the little monk meant, but he replied very mildly, “If you really want to learn Buddhism, you don’t have to overexert yourself by going somewhere else. I have a little bit here.” And he pulled from his garment a few strands of cotton, and blew them into the air. At that moment, Huitong had a spiritual realization. Since everyone possesses the DNA of self-nature, why seek it outside one’s own mind?



## Due to Distorted Thoughts and Clinging, One Cannot Reach Enlightenment

If it is that simple, why can't we all be like the Buddha, experiencing the freedom of liberation without being fettered by the environment? The Buddha told us, "Sentient beings possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata, but because of distorted thoughts and clinging they cannot reach enlightenment." So, why do we have distorted thoughts and clinging? How are distorted thoughts and clinging generated in the first place? Here is how the Consciousness-Only doctrine of the Yogacara School explains it: Our mind is made up of eight kinds of consciousness: the sense consciousnesses of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought, plus the seventh consciousness of the "self," and finally the eighth and all-encompassing "storehouse" consciousness. Each of these consciousnesses functions differently. Through our senses, we come into contact with human affairs, the myriad things, the environment, and we generate the corresponding consciousnesses. The sixth consciousness performs mental functions such as differentiating and discriminating, whereas the seventh consciousness generates the idea of the "self." The eighth consciousness is likened to a "storehouse" wherein the "seeds" of past experiences accumulate from one lifetime to the next. So, stated simply, our ceaseless distorted thoughts and clinging derive from the interactions of these eight

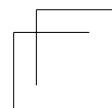
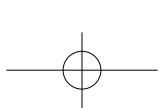
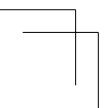
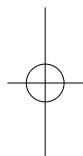
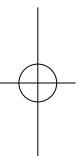
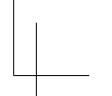
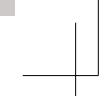
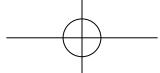
consciousnesses.

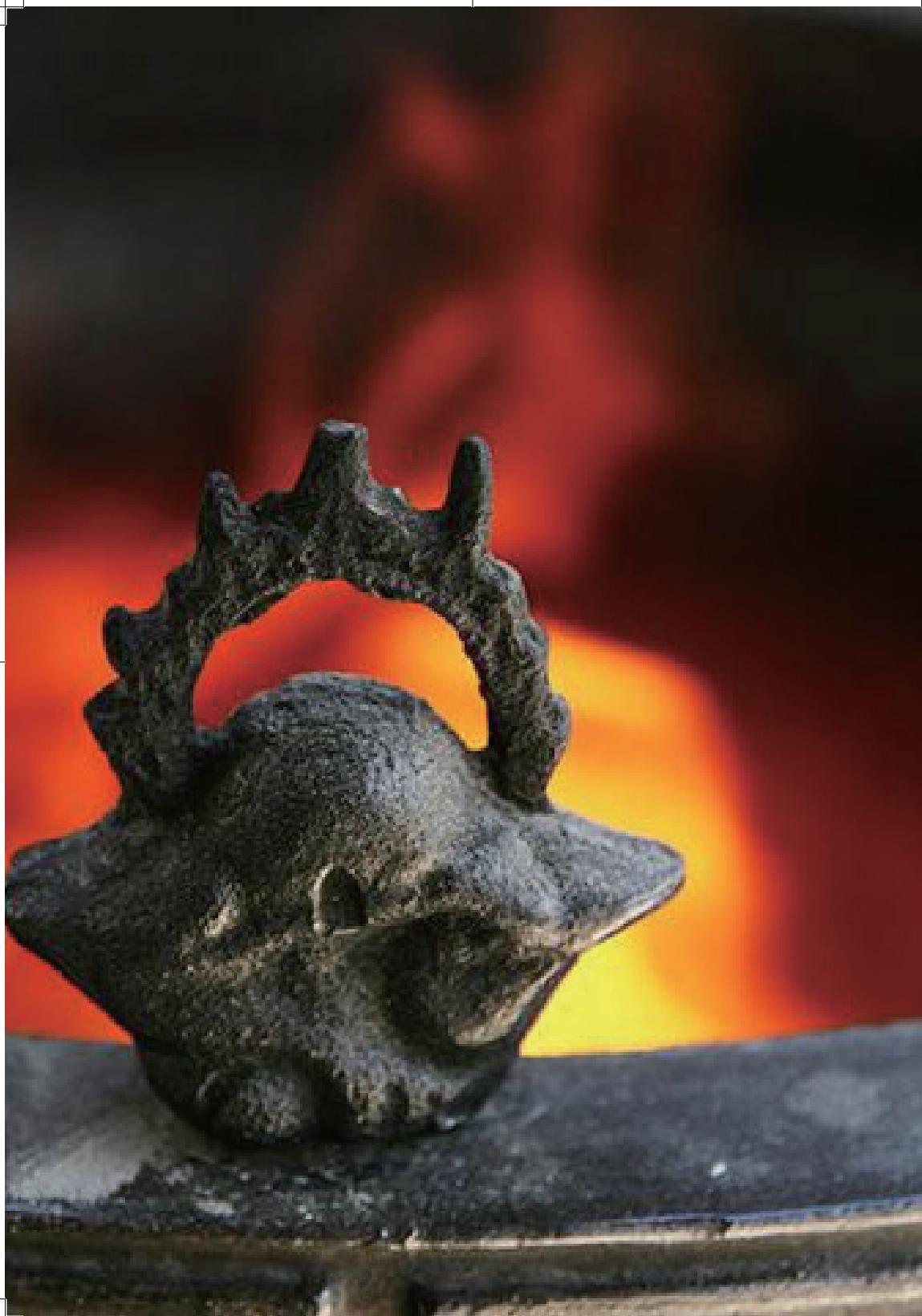
For example, whenever our sense organs come into contact with myriad things in the environment, they generate the five sense consciousnesses. Together with the sixth consciousness, impressions of “the world” are generated. At that moment, the seventh consciousness, the “self,” corresponds with the eighth consciousness, with its “storehouse” of previous experience and understanding. In other words, the sixth consciousness relies on the seventh and eighth consciousnesses – the “I” combined with past “seeds” – to evaluate the current impressions of the sense consciousnesses, resulting in thoughts such as “What I like the most is...; what I really can’t stand are...; please leave me alone,” and the like.

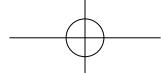
The distinctions made by the sixth consciousness are then “stored” in the eighth consciousness, which then becomes part of the seeds of past experience, and the basis for future discrimination and judgment. Therefore, our mind endlessly recycles among the eight consciousnesses; our mind and our intentions are in constant flux, coming into being and ceasing to be without end. That is to say, we are very easily influenced by the phenomena of body and mind, and mistake the temporary impressions of the lower consciousnesses as true reality. We therefore cling to “self,” and what we imagine to be the true existence of this self. This ongoing cycling of the eight consciousnesses determines our likes and dislikes of the things around us, and insists on discriminat-

ing, picking and choosing from our environment. We are thus trapped and bound by the phenomena of body and mind.

On the one hand, seeing fleeting experiences as real, we generate distorted thoughts without end; on the other hand, seeing as real what is intrinsically empty, we cling to wrong notions. Thus, as we ceaselessly generate distorted thoughts and clinging, we drift further and further away from freedom and liberation.



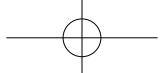




## Code Two: Illuminate all Dharmas without Grasping or Rejecting

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Since our self-nature is originally pure, to generate wisdom we only need to directly use our pure mind. We are originally liberated, but because of wandering thoughts and clinging, we are still enmeshed by myriad things and fettered by body and mind. How then do we free ourselves from bondage? Huineng said, “Wandering thoughts and clinging are like thick clouds that have obscured our pure sun-like nature.” Therefore, we need a strong wind to dissipate the clouds; otherwise, we would never be able

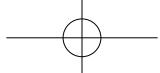


to see our luminous self-nature. What is this strong wind, and how can we experience it? Huineng's answer is, "without grasping or rejecting, contemplate and illuminate all dharmas with wisdom to see self-nature and realize buddhahood."

To illuminate all dharmas with wisdom is to understand that the original nature of sentient beings, as well as the myriad things, is originally empty and tranquil, that all are the result of causes and conditions coming together as effects. We use wisdom to contemplate external realms so as not to give rise to liking and disliking, favoring and not favoring, grasping and rejecting. This kind of contemplation is like a strong wind blowing away the thick clouds of distorted thoughts, and activating our self-nature DNA. Patriarch Chan is as simple as this but the simpler it is, the harder it seems for people to accept; so the Chan patriarchs devised means and detours to teach Chan.

### No-Thought, No-Form, No-Abiding

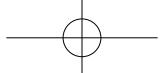
Huineng said, "The method I learned and inherited from the patriarchs of the past is based on three principles: no-thought as the teaching (*wunian*), no-form as the essence (*wuxiang*), and no-abiding as the foundation (*Wuzhu*)."<sup>1</sup> What is *wunian*? Here, "*wu*" means "without," but it also implies "no discriminating, no grasping or rejecting, no being contaminated by the realms of beings and myriad things." The thought, "*nian*," is what arises from our pure mind of self-nature, which is originally empty,



tranquil, and pure. So, no-thought refers to a pure thought that is without discrimination or contamination; this pure thought enables one to see that the myriad things and realms are merely the impermanent result of causes and conditions. Knowing this, one can use it with skill.

So Huineng told us that this pure thought is the essence of Chan, and is therefore the principal concept of Patriarch Chan. Unless we use this pure mind to contemplate dharmas, we won't understand that all dharmas, including the self, are the temporary coming together of causes and conditions; instead, we would imagine that there is a true, eternal, unchangeable self. We would cling to the impressions of the six sense faculties, and be blinded by external realms as well as by the phenomena of self, body and mind, ceaselessly bound to clinging and distorted thoughts. Therefore, recognizing pure mind as the principle, Patriarch Chan endeavors to correct the error of "mistaken self-identity" that is the source of all distorted thoughts and clinging.

What is no-abiding and no-form? When we use pure mind to engage the myriad things, and we do not abide in them by grasping or rejecting, we are liberated from them. When we face the myriad things, we use pure mind to depart from distorted thoughts about them. When encountering the myriad things without abiding in their forms, that is the practice of no-form. Thus, Huineng instructed us to use the wisdom of "no-thought,

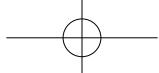


no-form, and no-abiding” to contemplate our self-mind in facing the myriad things and mind-body phenomena. One does not discriminate among things, neither clinging to nor abandoning them. This way, one can see one’s true self-nature and reach liberation. The first time Huineng instructed practitioners he used this method, which enabled students to reach enlightenment instantly.

### **Not Thinking of Good or Evil, What is Your Original Face?**

After transmitting the Dharma to Huineng and giving him the symbolic robe and bowl, Hongren advised Huineng to leave the monastery to avoid the envy of the other monks. While fleeing to the south, at some point he realized that he was about to be caught. So he placed the robe and bowl on a large boulder and hid behind a bush, saying to the pursuer, “This robe and bowl are symbols of faith in the patriarchs. How can they be fought over?”

Huineng’s pursuer was a monk named Huiming, a long-time disciple of Hongren. Huiming approached the rock and tried to pick up the robe, but was unable to move it. At that moment, he became ashamed of himself and shouted to Huineng: “I have come not for the robe, but to seek the Dharma!” Hearing this, Huineng emerged from the bushes and said to Huiming: “Since you are here for the Dharma, let me instruct you. Without thinking of good or evil, at this moment, what is your original face?”



Upon hearing this, Huiming attained enlightenment. So, my advice is to use your wisdom to contemplate your mind. Do not discriminate, grasp, or reject the myriad things, or the conditions of body and mind.

### **One Can't Become a Buddha by Sitting in Meditation**

Many practitioners not only believe that sitting meditation is the main method of practice, but also that meditation alone can lead to seeing one's self-nature and become liberated. People should remember that Chan is the method of mind, and that we must use the mind to illuminate all dharmas with wisdom. There is a story about Master Nanyue Huairang (677-744) instructing Mazu Daoyi. As a young monk, Mazu enjoyed meditation, and would sit all day for months on end. When Master Nanyue heard about this, he decided to see what this diligent young novice had achieved.

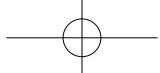
One day, as Mazu was deep in meditation, Nanyue asked, "Worthy monk, what are you trying to accomplish by sitting in meditation?"

Mazu replied, "I am practicing to become a buddha."

On hearing this, Nanyue picked up a brick and began to rub it against a rock.

This aroused Mazu's curiosity, so he asked Nanyue: "Why are you rubbing that brick against that rock?"

Nanyue replied, "I am polishing this brick to make it into a



mirror.”

Mazu said, “How can you turn a brick into a mirror by polishing it?”

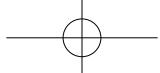
Nanyue retorted, “If I can’t turn a brick into a mirror by polishing it, how can you become a buddha by sitting in meditation?”

Mazu had always thought that to become a buddha, one must sit in meditation for long hours, and had never questioned that method. Shocked as he was by Nanyue’s words, he asked, “Then what is the correct way?”

Nanyue said: “It is like an ox pulling a cart. If the ox refuses to move, do you whip the cart or the ox?”

Mazu was again dumbfounded and could not answer. If the cart does not move, of course you need to whip the ox. What would be the purpose of whipping the cart? This was Nanyue’s way of saying that Chan is a discipline of the mind, not a discipline of sitting in meditation.

Nanyue continued, “Are you sitting to practice Chan or sitting to become a buddha? Sitting in meditation, one cannot grasp the true Chan, since Chan cannot be found in sitting or in lying down. On the other hand, if you are sitting to become a buddha, a buddha has no fixed form, and Buddhadharma is the Dharma of non-abiding. One should neither grasp nor reject the world, but if you insist sitting in order to become a buddha, this is called ‘killing the buddha’!”



Realizing his error, Mazu prostrated to Nanyue and asked for further instruction: “How do I use my mind in accordance with the true form of all dharmas?”

Nanyue said, “Very good. You now know your efforts begin with planting seeds in the mind-ground, and the Dharma I teach you is the rain. Relying on our karmic affinity, you should be able to perceive the Way.”

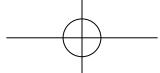
From that point on, no longer insisting on only sitting in meditation, Mazu followed Nanyue closely for ten years.

### **Chan is Not Contemplating Mind and Purity, Not Being Motionless**

Many practitioners mistake sitting in meditation as practicing Chan, and that best of all is to sit there motionless like a dried log, or like spent ashes in incense burners, their minds not moving. Or else, they contemplate the purity of their own mind. But in the eyes of Huineng, neither of these is correct practice. He said, “In the sudden method of Chan seated meditation is not contemplating mind, it is not contemplating purity, nor is it being motionless.” Why not contemplate mind? To contemplate the mind means that there is a mind that can be investigated, and this understanding is itself a delusion.

When Huike went to seek the Dharma from Bodhidharma, he said to the old master, “Please help me to pacify my mind.”

Bodhidharma replied, “Bring me your mind and I will help



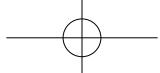
you pacify it.”

After introspecting for a long time, Huike told Bodhidharma, “I have searched for my mind but I can’t find it.”

Bodhidharma replied, “Well then, I have already pacified it for you.”

The myriad things and realms are but the coming together of causes and conditions, all of which did not exist before coming together, nor afterwards. Therefore, the original nature of all things and people is intrinsically tranquil and empty. Since the mind is originally tranquil and empty, how does one put effort into contemplating the mind? Nor does Chan emphasize contemplating the purity of the mind. Self-nature is fundamentally empty and tranquil, and therefore, it cannot be contaminated; it is therefore called “pure.” This empty, tranquil purity is without form; therefore, if you believe in such a thing as purity and endeavor to seek it, that itself is delusion. As such, you are bound by a form called “purity,” and that will hinder you from seeing your empty, tranquil original nature.

Still others believe that practicing means dealing with drowsiness and wandering thoughts to the point where the mind is able to focus on a single thought. This means practicing calming, and then contemplating the mind’s stillness and movements through insight. This is to experience the forms of peace and calmness, and then to unify the body with the mind, as well as between oneself and the myriad things. However, to Huineng these are all

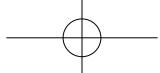


not Patriarch Chan. The purpose of sitting meditation is not to contemplate the mind or its purity, nor to make the mind unmoving. The true meaning of “unmoving” does not mean sitting still like a rock or a log; rather, the essence is in not discriminating, not grasping and not abandoning amidst people and the myriad things, whether they are good or evil. Right then and there is the revelation of tranquil self-nature.

Huineng said, “Those who don’t know how to practice, though they sit motionless, as soon as they speak, they slander and judge others. Their thoughts arise and perish; they never cease to discriminate, grasp and abandon. This kind of meditation does not accord with the principle of unmoving.” Huineng thus resolved people’s confusion about meditation: first, don’t mistake meditation with confining your body in a sitting posture, meaning that the body does not sway, and there are no thoughts in one’s mind. Second, don’t think that seated meditation means fixing the mind on one thought, using that thought to perceive our pure self-nature. These are all incorrect understandings of seated meditation.

### **Non-Arising Mind is Sitting, Unmoving Self-Nature is Chan**

What then is sitting Chan? Huineng, said: “Sitting means having a non-arising mind in the midst of all good and evil conditions. Chan means internally seeing one’s self-nature as unmoving.” That is to say, sitting is a practice in which one reveals the skillful

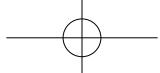


use of wisdom in all things around oneself; it is to clearly understand that the myriad things and their realms are all the temporary unity of causes and conditions. One therefore does not discriminate between good and evil, nor engages in grasping and abandoning. “Non-arising” does not mean that no thoughts arise, but that when a thought does arise, one does not follow it, recognizing immediately that self-nature is empty, tranquil, and pure; the mind is thus unmoving, not trapped in discrimination, grasping, and abandoning.

To meditate means to use wisdom to accord with the mind of Chan, and then to use the elusive wisdom generated to deal with elusive realms arising out of causes and conditions. One who can do this is a true adept, and this would be the real use of seated meditation. This is a very important concept: one should not misconstrue that sitting meditation means focusing the eyes on the tip of one’s nose, and from one’s nose observing the mind. The sudden teaching of Chan emphasizes that meditation is not just sitting in the Chan Hall, but that every moment in life is “sitting Chan.” In every moment there is correspondence between one’s wisdom and one’s pure mind, and one extends this understanding to all conditions.

### **No Sutras, No Chan; Just Teaching You to Achieve Buddhahood**

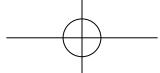
In other words, seated meditation is a wondrous manifestation



of wisdom because one understands that the myriad things are merely the temporary merging of causes and conditions. Though forms come into being and cease to be, original nature is always empty and tranquil. Therefore, there is no need to trap oneself into chasing after forms and shapes; no need to deliberately eradicate vexation, no need to seek buddhahood, or imagine that there is a Dharma that can be obtained. Finally, there is no need to believe that one can be enlightened to the Dharma, that there is a body and mind that can be let go, or that one can accomplish the Path.

This is called “nothing to cultivate.” Since there is nothing to cultivate, why practice? The self-nature of the myriad things is already empty and tranquil, and we are originally like a buddha, free and liberated; the problem is that in our daily lives, we still cling to the illusory phenomena of cause and effect; as a result, we do not experience freedom and liberation. Therefore, we must earnestly practice with the understanding that there is indeed nothing to be cultivated. To what level should one aspire when there is nothing to be cultivated? We should practice to the point that our conduct in daily life is in accordance with the concept of “nothing to cultivate.” This is like a healthy person who normally does not feel the need to intentionally breathe, but when sick or climbing a mountain, they become aware of the need to breathe.

So, one must practice because one has departed from the un-



moving pure mind of Chan, and because one's body and mind have been mired in discrimination. It is then necessary to practice seated meditation. At this moment, you are an ordinary being. If you are enlightened to the concept of "nothing to cultivate," you would be like a healthy person who does not need to consciously breathe; you just breathe naturally, and you are a liberated, free person. To sum it up, in the sudden method, the purpose of sitting meditation is not to use one's eyes to observe one's nose, and one's nose to observe one's mind, nor to focus on one particular method. The Sixth Patriarch instructed that one's wisdom must at all times, correspond with one's pure mind; one must rely on oneself for practice, and enlightenment. Achieving the Way, therefore, does not necessarily depend on seated meditation. Practice also resides within daily activities such as putting on one's clothes and eating. We often see this kind of remonstration in the recorded sayings of patriarchs.

A public official named Wang visited Master Linji Yixuan (d. 866) and asked, "Do monks in this hall still read sutras?"

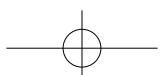
Linji replied, "They do not read sutras."

Wang followed with another question: "So that is practicing Chan, right?"

Linji replied, "They don't practice Chan."

Wang further asked, "They don't read sutras, nor do they practice Chan. So, what are they doing?"

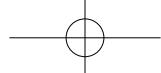
Linji replied, "They are learning to achieve buddhahood, and



to become patriarchs."

There are not any particular sutras that must be read; there aren't any methods that must be learned. The key is to use one's wisdom at all times to contemplate one's pure mind, and to be in accord with it. If that is so, in a single instant, one can become free and liberated, to become a patriarch, and to attain buddhahood.

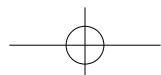


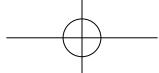


## **Code Three: Not Estranged from the World**

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The Patriarch Chan that Huineng taught was to use wisdom to contemplate and understand that the myriad things and realms are the temporary coming together of cause and effect, so when facing them we do not generate attraction or repulsion, liking or disliking, or the illusion of preferences. In daily life, we use this wisdom to accord with our pure mind, so as not to be clouded by clinging or delusion. If we are able to do so, we can see that our self-nature DNA is as bright and radiant as sunlight. This way, all of us would be liberated, free people. But need purity be





devoid of love, hatred, preferences, and dislikes? Even people in a coma can feel sadness and shed tears. Do we have to be comatose before we can be free of delusions? Let's see how Huineng's judgment on Chan Master Wolun's gatha aptly answered this question.

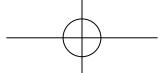
### **The Unmoving Mind in the Ultimate Truth**

Once, a monk read to Huineng a gatha written by Master Wolun (d. 626).

*Wolun has the skills  
To sever all thoughts.  
Facing realms, his mind does not arise,  
And his bodhi increases daily.*

This gatha says that Master Wolun was skilled at practice, capable of severing all kinds of thoughts and delusions. So, when facing myriad people and realms, his mind did not generate intentions, allowing his wisdom to increase day by day. Upon hearing this gatha, Huineng said, "This gatha is not by one who has seen his nature. Practicing this way, one would be further bound, unable to reach enlightenment." Huineng then composed a gatha to instruct his disciples:

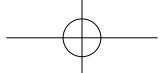
*Huineng has no skills*



*He cannot sever myriad thoughts.  
When facing realms, his mind arises.  
How can he improve his bodhi?*

In this gatha, Huineng says he does not have any particular skill in practice, nor is he able to sever myriad thoughts, and when dealing with people, things, and realms, his mind arises. So how can he improve his wisdom? What is really going on here? We have talked about how delusions and clinging prevent us from activating our self-nature DNA. Shouldn't we therefore try to sever our delusions and clinging? If Wolun is able to sever myriad thoughts and keep his mind from rising while facing realms, how can this be bondage? And if Huineng cannot sever thoughts and his mind arises when facing realms, how can this be liberation?

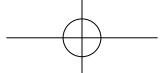
Actually, a person whose mind does not arise when facing realms is just as good as dead. As long as our senses function, we generate delusions through our six sense faculties, so the idea that one must sever from delusive realms is itself clinging to delusion. Therefore, the notion that one must sever from delusions further binds oneself to delusion. By saying that his mind arose when facing realms, Huineng meant that in any situation, he generates the tranquil and empty pure mind, which can be understood as being “no-thought.” He used this pure mind to contemplate the various delusions that come about via the senses, and



understood that the intrinsic nature of delusion is actually emptiness. He therefore had no need to cling to delusive realms. This can be understood as “no-abiding.” Finally, he departed from the realm of clinging to delusion, which can be understood as “no-form.” Having no need to cling to delusive realms, and no need to discriminate among forms, Huineng advanced on the path of liberation.

Huineng’s gatha instructs us not to worry, and not to intentionally deny our sense faculties of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and consciousness. As long as we generate pure mind amidst people, things, and realms, and we clearly understand these as illusory; as long as we depart from dharmas upon encountering them, not clinging or being contaminated, not being swayed, then this is true liberation and freedom. Therefore, in the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra*, the Buddha said: “Skillful in distinguishing all dharmas, unmoved in the ultimate truth.”

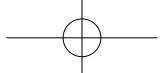
Patriarch Chan does not teach estranging yourself from the mundane world, or severing yourself from joy, anger, sadness, happiness, liking or hatred, and desire; rather, it teaches you to be clear, in each moment, as to your body-mind sensations. At the same time, you clearly understand that these realms and sensations are the temporary coming together of cause and effect; therefore, you do not cling to them, nor are you bound or confused by them. Further, you clearly understand that every moment is the perfect unity of infinite previous moments, and they



are all wondrous revelations; so you don't need to sever from them. You can savor these wondrous realms in accordance with pure mind and act accordingly; you will not be swayed or confused by myriad realms or body-mind phenomena. You can use these wondrous revelations to their highest potential, while your mind remains unmoved amidst ultimate reality.

Earlier we talked about the baseball pitcher, Wang Jianmin. On the pitching mound he clearly knows the batting power of his opponents, and the opposing team's strengths. He hears the fans cheering and shouting, but the moment he winds up on the mound, he sees only the catcher and the catcher's glove, and accordingly, he throws one ball at a time. One ball at a time means whoever you are, in each and every moment you do what you are supposed to do, according to your position. All people, phenomena, and things have their own positions, and they function accordingly. This is what is meant by the saying, "Myriad phenomena have their appropriate places; the forms of the mundane world are always there as they are."

Therefore, do not be afraid. You don't need to cut off your senses, becoming like a dead person, in order to become liberated. In daily life, "be skillful in discerning dharmas, and unmoving amidst ultimate reality." If you apply this accordingly to every thing, in every moment, your practice will not be just hollow words of encouragement, or imagined empty spiritual realms; you will be solidly grounded in daily life, such as when putting



on clothes and eating food. We often see this kind of instruction in the recorded sayings of patriarchs.

### **Go Drink Tea!**

Once, two monks came to visit Master Zhaozhou (778-897) at his temple. Zhaozhou asked one of them, “Have you been here before?”

The first monk replied, “No, this is my first time here.”

Zhaozhou said, “Go drink some tea!”

Zhaozhou then asked the second monk, “Have you been here before?”

The second monk replied, “Yes, I have been here before.”

Zhaozhou also told him, “Go drink some tea!”

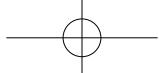
Upon hearing his master’s instructions, one of Zhaozhou’s elder monks was confused. He asked the master, “You told the monk who has not been here before to go drink tea. I can understand that. But why did you also tell the person who has already been here to go drink tea?”

Zhaozhou asked the elder monk to come closer and whispered: “Go drink some tea!”

The miscellaneous things in daily life are the best occasions for practice.

### **Accept It, Eat It**

After Longtan Chongxin (?-838) became a monk, he followed



Master Tianhuang Daowu (748-807) for a number of years. But the master never expounded any Dharma to him. One day, this disciple could not bear it any longer, so he said: "Master, I've been under your guidance for many years, but so far you have not instructed me in anything."

Daowu was quite surprised upon hearing this: "I often instructed you. Why do you say I have not?"

Longtan was even more confused, asking, "What have you instructed me in?"

Daowu replied, "Every day when you bring me tea, I accept it and drink it. When you bring me meals, I also accept them and eat them. When you pay respect to me I nod my head in response. Isn't this instruction?"

Dealing with people and receiving objects or things, wearing clothing and eating meals, what is not practice?

### **Enlightened People Wear Clothes and Eat Meals?**

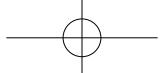
A practitioner asked Master Zhaozhou: "How about those who have already realized the matter of life and death, do they continue to cultivate?"

Zhaozhou replied: "They engage in great practice."

The practitioner asked again, "Are you still practicing?"

Zhaozhou replied, "I just put on my clothes and eat my meals."

The practitioner was baffled, so he asked again, "Putting on



clothes and eating rice are just ordinary things. I asked whether you are still practicing.”

Zhaozhou replied, “What do you think I do everyday?”

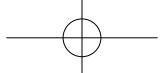
### **Which is Not the Best Piece?**

Chan practice is in walking, standing, sitting, and reclining. Every moment and everywhere, one devotes one’s effort without cessation. So which place is not the place for practice? Which place is not the place for enlightenment? A Chan patriarch could reach enlightenment upon hearing a butcher shouting in the market. Practitioners should devote their effort similarly.

While strolling through a market one day, Master Panshan Baoji (d. u.) heard a customer tell a butcher, “Hey boss, give me a piece of your best meat.”

The butcher threw down his cleaver on the cutting table, crossed his arms and replied, “You tell me which piece is not the best piece!”

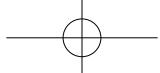
Upon hearing this, Baoji reached enlightenment right at that moment. The butcher was bragging about his product, but to the ears of a practitioner, these words are not about tasty meat, but are related to sentient beings having the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata. The myriad dharmas are all thusness, and all phenomena are equal. So which revelation is not the most perfect revelation?



## Awakening in Daily Life

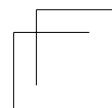
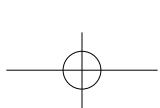
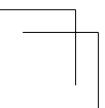
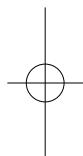
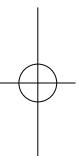
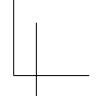
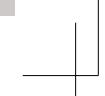
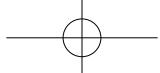
Patriarch Chan teaches us to use our pure and tranquil mind to contemplate the realms of the senses as we experience them; but we should not linger in the liking or disliking of these sensations, nor should we be influenced by these illusory realms. We must not be contaminated or swayed while getting the most benefit from the most perfect revelation. So when we encounter situations, we find the most effective way to handle them and decide accordingly. This is the meaning of, “Buddhadharma is everywhere, so one can become enlightened without estranging oneself from the mundane world.” To depart from the world in order to seek bodhi and reach enlightenment is as futile, in the words of Huineng, as “looking for horns on rabbit.”

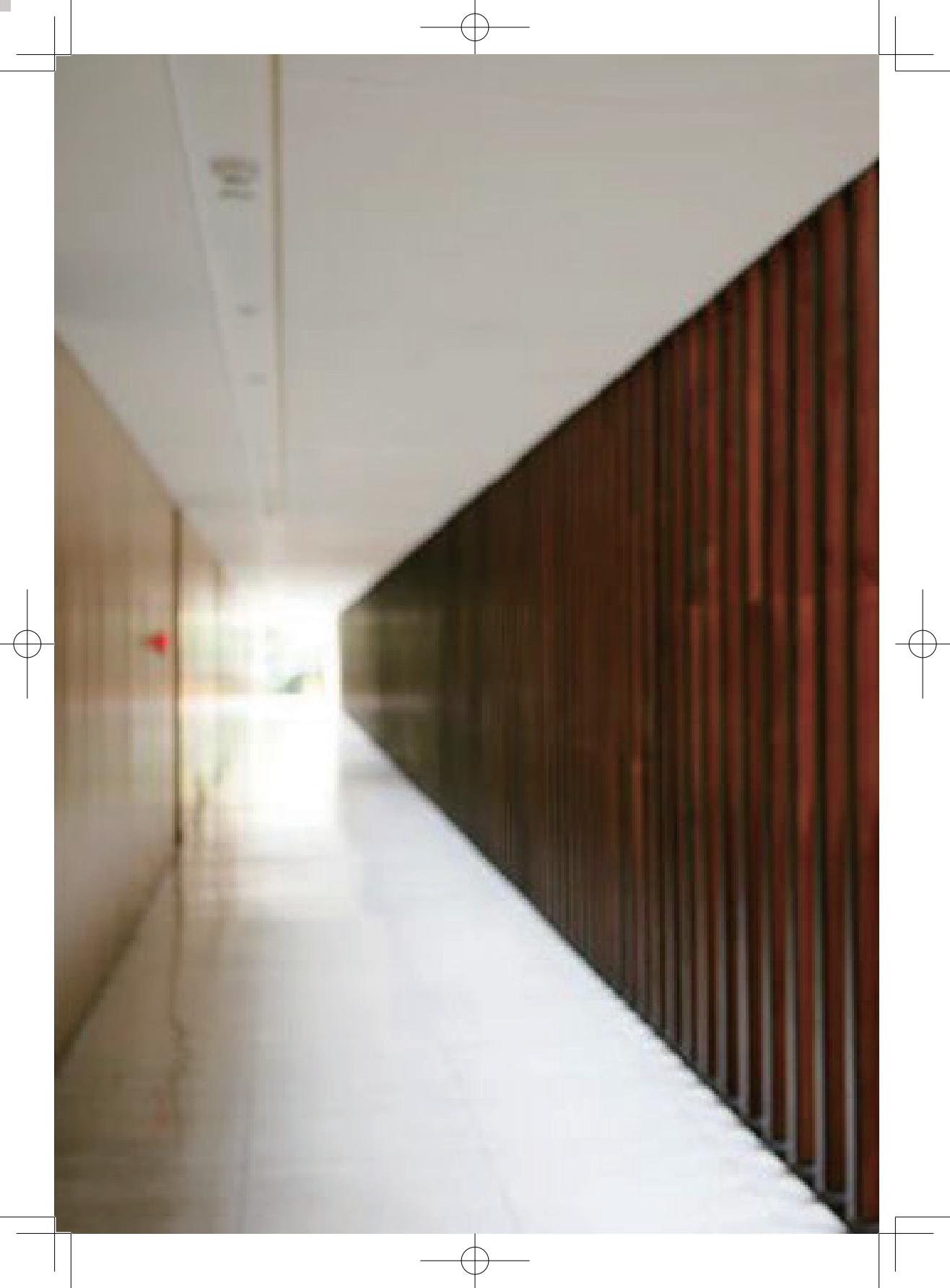
So, you do not need to go into the forest to practice samadhi, nor do you need to go on solitary retreat, or hide in a mountain cave. You do not need to quit your job or leave your family, nor do you need to abandon your feelings about your body and your mind. You can preserve your current lifestyle, you can study hard, earnestly make money, have children, engage in social functions accordingly; you will still have the feelings of joy, anger, sadness, happiness, compassion, disgust, and desire. You will also experience success, failure, birth, aging, illness and death, but you must rely on your pure mind to deal with people and myriad things in your life. Rely on your pure mind to distinguish,

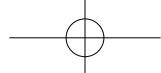


judge, and make every decision in your life. Understand that all illusions are the result of the mind-consciousness seizing on things as if they were real. So, you do not cling to phenomena derived from the mind-consciousness, you are not swayed by realms that you encounter, nor are you bound by body-mind phenomena. Earnestly and kindly, you just deal with every moment.

You understand that every moment is the most perfect unity of myriad causes and effects, so you carefully handle the situation, making the best of it. You clearly understand that your action will be the cause for the next, most perfect coming together of causes and effects. In daily life, each and every thought is your pure mind. You do not cling to the realm of myriad things, nor are you contaminated or swayed by them. Every moment, everywhere, you are a person unbound by conditions. You are your own master, a free being. This is to reach enlightenment and become free and liberated in daily life. So, you don't need to pray for future lives; this life of yours is perfect. You do not need to emigrate to planet Pandora. The Earth is your pure land. This is the practice of Patriarch Chan.





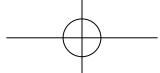


## Code Four: Investigating Wu

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The Chan patriarchs taught us that the path to liberation is not just in sitting meditation but also in daily life, where in each moment there is opportunity to contemplate and to use wisdom. What are some Chan methods to facilitate and expedite one's path to liberation? Chan Master Huangbo Xiyun (765-850) suggested: "If you are a truly earnest and courageous person who wishes to seek freedom and liberation, you should honestly investigate gong'an."

What is a gong'an, and how does one investigate it? Originally,



“gong’an,” literally “public case,” referred to a record in the files in ancient Chinese judicial systems. Later on, practitioners compiled certain records of dialogues between masters and disciples and called these dialogues, gong’ans. Through studying these dialogues, we can learn much about how the ancient masters guided their disciples towards enlightenment, as well as revealing something about the disciple’s level of meditative attainment.

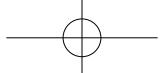
The recorded sayings of the Chan School show how the masters used various expedient methods according to the experience and attainment of their students. Each gong’an in these recorded sayings was indeed based on an actual incident. So, to the Chan School, which emphasized self-practice and self-enlightenment, these recorded sayings were like modern-day medical x-rays or research papers – to be studied for what they reveal. The method of Chan was originally based on the Buddha’s mind-to-mind transmission to Mahakashyapa, and did not heavily rely on studying the sutras. Since Patriarch Chan encourages practitioners to directly “observe their own mind so as to see self-nature,” the school did not develop much in the way of theory or structured methods of practice. Instead, the essence of Chan is found in the recorded gong’ans, and they are the best textbooks for the Chan School.

### **If You Are a Brave Person, Investigate Gong’an**

To some extent, practitioners who study gong’ans are like young

entrepreneurs who read success stories to learn how to succeed in business. But just reading success stories is not the same as making real business decisions, dealing with competitors and internal power struggles, and handling various kinds of financial matters. No matter how many success stories one reads, there is no guarantee for success. Similarly, the recorded sayings document how patriarchs and masters gave instruction to suit the needs and attainment of their practitioners. By studying these accounts we can gain some insight, but the essence of what happened, and the level of realization or enlightenment that occurred, was something best understood between the master and the disciple. So it is often quite difficult for later practitioners to understand what happened, and if they did understand, it was still somebody else's enlightenment.

So, the Chan patriarchs instructed us to wholeheartedly investigate gong'ans. Investigating a gong'an means to focus one's mind in order to penetrate into its ultimate reality. One must wholeheartedly engage one's whole body, mind, and everything else into this focus for it to be truly "investigating." The purpose of the process is not to seek an answer to the gong'an – such as something the Buddha said in a sutra – nor is it to reach a conclusion through rational analysis. To investigate a gong'an means to incessantly ask: "What is this, really?" If one applies oneself with constant diligence in this questioning, eventually one comes to generate a "doubt sensation" (*yiqing*), which is essentially an



urge to resolve the gong'an. If one persists, this doubt sensation, which is not the same as the ordinary doubt of skepticism, will grow into a “great doubt” (*yituan*), until one day, the great doubt “shatters,” and at that moment, one experiences original nature. This experience is what I call “activating your self-nature DNA.”

The tradition of gong'an Chan probably began, at the latest, around the time of Huangbo Xiyun, who encouraged practitioners to investigate gong'an. The typical gong'an that Huangbo asked students to investigate was the word “wu,” which came from a dialogue between Master Zhaozhou and two disciples.

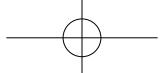
A disciple asked Zhaozhou, “Does a dog have buddha-nature?”

Zhaozhou replied, “Yes.”

Later on, another disciple asked Zhaozhou the same question: “Does a dog have buddha-nature?”

This time Zhaozhou answered, “No.”

In Chinese, “no” would be “wu,” which has multiple meanings, including “no,” “none,” “without,” or “nothing.” So why did Zhaozhou first answer “yes,” and then to same question, “no”? After all, the Buddha himself said that “all sentient beings possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata.” So how could Zhaozhou say that dogs are without buddha-nature? Zhaozhou answered “Wu,” but what is wu, really? Now, if one wholeheartedly and ceaselessly asks this question, and sincerely wants an answer, they would be investigating Chan. Huangbo said: “Inves-

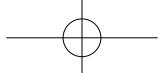


tigate Master Zhaozhou's wu at all times, day and night; when walking, standing, sitting, or lying down; when putting on clothing, eating meals, and going to the toilet; one must use one's mind to contemplate this "wu" After some time, your effort becomes ceaseless, continuous, and all of a sudden, you come to a realization, and you will see your self-nature. You will no longer be confused by the old monks under heaven."

Huangbo encouraged practitioners to invest wholehearted effort into investigating wu at all times, to the point where they are able to generate the doubt sensation, and eventually reach sudden enlightenment. They would see their true nature, activate their self-nature DNA, and discover that all the teachings in the sutras and gong'ans are expedient means used by the Buddha and Chan patriarchs to guide disciples. So, the origin of this method is a very simple one, and after one sees one's self-nature, one will no longer be cheated or confused by an old monk's clever tongue.

### **What is Wu?**

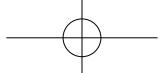
As time went on, some of the recorded gong'ans became too lengthy and their scenarios too complicated, with the result that some were increasingly difficult to investigate. Eventually, it was Master Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163) who simplified this tradition by extracting from a gong'an a single sentence or even a single word, and using it to investigate. The sentence or word that was



extracted from a gong'an was called a "huatou," literally, "head of a thought." When students began investigating huatou, this was called Huatou Chan, and Dahui Zonggao was regarded as the founding patriarch of Huatou Chan.

Zhaozhou's "Does a dog have buddha-nature?" became very popular during the time that Dahui was promoting Huatou Chan. Dahui instructed practitioners to investigate the huatou, "Wu." He said: "Using only this wu, you have a knife capable of severing the notion of life and death. When delusion arises, simply pick up this wu; incessantly pick it up, and all of a sudden when you drop all the thoughts, you will feel like you have returned home, very calm and at ease. You will see your own pure, tranquil, original nature."

Because Huatou Chan asks you to pose the same question continuously and discourages you to seek rational or scriptural answers, many people find huatou practice at first very boring. When I first practiced huatou, I incessantly asked, "What is wu?" As the ancients said, it was like chewing cotton. But as I persevered, I began to gain some benefit from asking "Wu?" and it eventually became my main method of instructing students. To practice Huatou Chan, it is essential to have the right attitude: we need a strong will and determination, insisting on using the huatou to penetrate through our confusion. We must firmly tell ourselves: "I want to earnestly investigate this wu!" This firm determination is an enthusiasm, a strong urge to achieve theulti-

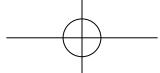


mate goal of penetrating into wu. Strictly speaking, this desire is also a delusion, but when we first practice Huatou Chan, it helps us to elevate our determination. However, we should not let go of everything to attain no-thought, no-abiding, and no-form; instead, we should just maintain a strong and earnest desire to investigate wu until there is nothing left to investigate. Otherwise, you would be like me when I started, lacking any motivation and being resentful: “Why should I keep asking the question this way?” So, after we lay the foundation of strong desire to investigate the huatou, we must still persevere in it.

### **Unify the Huatou with Your Life**

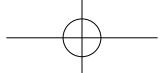
Why investigate wu? It is because we have too many delusions. Therefore, we repeat the question until there is no distance between us and our huatou. We ask it until the huatou cannot be disturbed by phenomena, and appears before us at all times. Only this way can we incessantly pose the question. More importantly, while asking the huatou, we must generate the doubt sensation. “What is wu?” is a question that is very abstract, which therefore prevents our mind from clinging to it like an actual object. Because there is no concrete answer to be sought, after a while you will feel very bored, and that this activity is meaningless.

So, when asking the huatou, you must unify it with your life. Only by doing so can this huatou reveal its true power, and can



you truly feel it. But how do you unify the huatou with your life? On a retreat during walking meditation, a student suddenly heard me ask, “Who is walking?” Upon hearing this question, he was powerfully startled: “I have lived for thirty-five years. How can it be that up until now, I still do not know the person who is walking here?” When this kind of overwhelming sensation, which is generated by ourselves, appears we should apply it to our huatou. For example, we can continue to ask: “I have truly experienced that I am actually alive; I have walked with this person for thirty-five years. How come I don’t know him? The Buddha tells us that emptiness is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, including the life of each one of us. How can this be the ultimate answer to wu?”

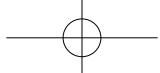
Some practitioners have difficulty breathing when investigating huatou while sitting in meditation; this generates fear, resulting in their becoming nervous and tense. Actually, this is the result of paying too much attention to body-mind phenomena. If it gets more serious, they should continue to investigate their huatou while walking. From what I know of Chan history, and in my own learning and teaching experience, there has never been a person who stopped breathing or passed away because of investigating huatou. So when encountering this situation you should not be afraid; simply discard the thought about the breathing and its effect on your body. The next breath will come and you will continue to breathe naturally.



When situations in meditation develop to the point that we are afraid, it is because we don't understand the ultimate reality of life and death. At this moment, if we simply apply this fear to our investigation, we can unify our huatou with our life. I personally know that when my time comes, I will die. But how is it that the Buddha teaches that there is no birth and no death? What does "no birth and no death" really mean? By asking the huatou this way, we can generate the doubt sensation in our body and mind. In this way, the doubt will naturally become real. When you persevere in investigating huatou, at some point you will feel a real sense of confidence that you can still do better. When you reach this moment, it is a sign that you are really and finally investigating huatou.

### **Being Master of Your Own Mind**

Most practitioners require intensive training and guidance before they can investigate wu continuously. While most beginners cannot seamlessly investigate wu, they can still practice huatou in the midst of daily life, and not only when getting dressed or eating. For example, after six hours of meetings at work, you stare at densely written notes on the whiteboard, and your mind draws a blank. You don't know why you're sitting there, and you are agitated. At this moment you can pick up "What is wu?" While looking at the lottery ticket you just bought, dreaming about Waikiki Beach in Hawaii, don't forget to pick up "What is wu?"



When as sales manager, you win a record-breaking order, and your boss is celebrating your team with a banquet, please try to pick up “What is wu?” and feel its power.

More importantly, practicing huatou, non-abiding, and contemplating with wisdom are meant to help you master your own mind. If you have benefited from these methods and humbly share the joy of freedom and liberation with friends and family, then that is even better. But after having some success with these methods, if you say to yourself, “Amazing!” and you begin telling others how attached and clinging *they* are, you should ask yourself “What is wu?” This is like someone of whom Huineng said, “your body is not moving, but what comes out of your mouth is very judgmental.” You would be stuck in the delusory realm of picking and choosing, and even further removed from liberation. The purpose of practicing huatou, non-abiding, and contemplation with wisdom is to master one’s own mind; not to allow one to criticize, condemn, or demean others. Those who really can’t control themselves and believe that other people need their timely advice should at least look in the mirror: “Before you shave other people’s whiskers, please first shave your own whiskers clean.”

Since I have been able to gain insight into Chan by investigating huatou, I have deep confidence in this method, and teach it on retreats. Dahui Zonggao taught his disciples to investigate wu, and helped eighteen of them to see their self-nature in one

single evening. This demonstrated that wu is a sharp blade that enables us to cut through our delusions to set us on the path to freedom and liberation.

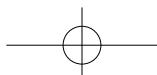


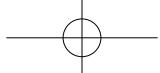


## Code Five: See the Moon with Your Own Eyes

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In the *Platform Sutra*, Huineng taught us that “bodhi is originally pure and tranquil in its self-nature. One only needs to use one’s own mind to directly attain buddhahood.” If one does not know how to use one’s own mind directly, then one should at least use wisdom to contemplate and cease discriminating so much. Huineng shared with us his experience of activating his self-nature DNA. When Master Hongren expounded the *Diamond Sutra* to him, Huineng was able to see his original nature and





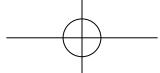
suddenly reach enlightenment. At that time Huineng was using the wisdom of non-abiding to contemplate his own mind. Therefore, he later encouraged his followers to “contemplate their minds and see their self-nature by themselves.”

To contemplate one’s own mind to see self-nature, there is no need to go to some remote forest or live near water to meditate. Nor does it mean sitting in a mountain cave, using the eyes to contemplate the nose, and the nose to contemplate the mind. One can contemplate one’s own mind anywhere, in every moment of daily life, while clearly understanding what tasks needs doing, and doing them accordingly. This way, one will truly awaken in daily life to feeling free and liberated.

As you make progress towards advanced and diligent practice, you should definitely investigate wu – during the day, at night, while walking, standing, sitting, reclining and going to the bathroom. You can pick up “What is wu?” at any time, and make wu an integral part of your life. In time, you will sense the freedom of liberation, as if you have come home. Patriarch Chan is truly as simple and honest as this.

### **After Letting Go, Feel At Ease and Free**

If you practice this and still cannot activate your self-nature DNA, then you should seek the assistance of a good teacher or virtuous friends. Those are folks who understand the truth of enlightenment and liberation, capable of guiding others on the



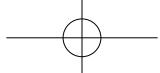
path to liberation. As an example, Master Sheng Yen had an encounter with Master Lingyuan Hongmiao (1902-1988), who was also a great teacher. In his autobiography, *Footprints in the Snow*, Master Sheng Yen shared his experience of letting go.

Once, he was staying at Gaoxiong Monastery. There he encountered Master Lingyuan, with whom he shared a sleeping platform. Master Lingyuan actually slept sitting in the lotus posture, which enabled him to achieve rest without falling into dreaming. Master Sheng Yen decided to join Lingyuan in meditation, sitting next to him. In the middle of the night, Master Sheng Yen could no longer contain himself and spoke: “Shifu, can I ask you a question?”

Lingyuan replied, “Yes.”

At the time, because of the civil war in China, Sheng Yen had been forced to give up being a monk to be enlisted in the army in Shanghai. When the Nationalist government left for Taiwan, the army went along, as did Sheng Yen. He had confusion and doubts about being a military officer who just wanted to be a monk studying Buddhism. So that evening, his questions came pouring out: “Will I become a monk again? With whom should I study? What kind of monk should I become? How should I benefit myself and others? Where should I begin studying Dharma which is so vast and profound? Of the numerous methods, which should I pick to cultivate?”

Master Lingyuan sat there listening, asking Master Sheng

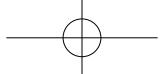


Yen: “Is there more? Is there more?” Thus encouraged, Master Sheng Yen poured out all his worries, confusions, and questions like an avalanche. All of a sudden, Master Lingyuan slammed a hand on the sleeping platform, shouting, “Let go!” Suddenly Master Sheng Yen broke out in a dripping sweat, and then felt a great sense of ease. All his doubts and despair suddenly dissipated; there were no more questions left to ask. Once he let everything go, his mind became utterly calm. From then on, though he would conduct business as usual as well as feel emotions, he was able to immediately let go of all mental phenomena that arose, feeling very free and at ease.

In the records of Chan, we read how many practitioners attained enlightenment by hearing a single sentence spoken by their teacher, a shout, a hit, a kick, or even the teacher sending them to another master. But keep in mind that a good teacher is only someone who points out the correct way. Most important is for practitioners to earnestly and honestly experiencing liberation for themselves.

### **Recite with One’s Mouth and Practice with One’s Mind**

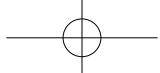
Huineng instructed us to “recite with our mouths and practice with our minds to reach the other shore.” Those who have studied a little bit of Buddhism would know how to “use great wisdom to reach the other shore of great perfect wisdom.” The other shore is often perceived as the Pure Land, also called the



Western Paradise, where one dwells among buddhas and bodhisattvas while cultivating Buddhadharma. Due to the popularity of the Pure Land School, many people, during the Tang Dynasty and after, took as their main practice reciting the Buddha's name to gain rebirth in the Western Paradise.

But Huineng had a different interpretation. He posed a question: "A person in the East commits offenses and recites the Buddha's name to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land, but what if a person in the West commits offenses and recites the Buddha's name – in what Pure Land are they seeking rebirth?" Huineng's point was that the Western Paradise is right in front of our eyes – the other shore is in fact, this shore. He said, "When one's mind rises and falls according to external realms, one is an ordinary person on this shore; if one can depart from the external realms, and one's mind neither rises nor perishes, then one becomes a buddha on the other shore." If one clings to the myriad realms and generates greed, desire, and discrimination, then one is still on "this shore." If one is not moved or influenced by the myriad realms, and one does not yield to clinging or greed, then one has reached "the other shore." So, there is no need to depart from this shore and cross the sea to reach the other shore. As long as one is not bound by the myriad realms, this shore is already the other shore.

In the Sixth Patriarch's eyes, for example, reciting the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra* with a scattered mind would be as illusory

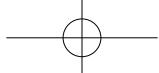


ry as morning dew and lightning. Instead, one must earnestly “recite with one’s mouth and practice with one’s mind” to experience one’s own pure, original nature; one must also understand that aside from seeing self-nature, there is no other path to buddhahood. In other words, conceptually understanding the principle of self-nature has nothing to do with actually seeing self-nature. At best, conceptual knowledge enables one to play with words and make good sounds with their tongue, but meeting a truly enlightened person, they would not hold their own. If investigating Chan were just about learning concepts or reciting huatou, then one is not only forsaking generations of patriarchs, but forsaking oneself as well. That would be truly pitiful.

### **One Fart Sent You across the Yangtze River**

As one of the Song Dynasty literati, the layman Su Shi, also known as Su Dongpo, enjoyed studying Buddhism. He was a friend of Chan Master Foyin (1032-1098), the abbot of Jinshan Monastery, which sits in the middle of the Yangtze River. They often engaged in discussing Chan and the Way. Su Dongpo earnestly practiced sitting meditation. One day after he sat very well and felt quite good and confident, he wrote a poem and sent it by courier to Master Foyin.

*I bow to the heaven that is within heaven  
From my head, rays illuminate the universe*



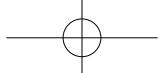
*Thus the eight winds cannot move me  
As I meditate on the purple and golden lotus.*

To paraphrase this poem: "As I prostrate to the Buddha, my head emits rays of light across the universe, to as many worlds as I have hair. The eight worldly winds of gain, loss, defamation, reputation, praise, ridicule, sorrow, and joy cannot move me as I meditate on a purplish-golden lotus flower like an unmoving buddha."

After reading the poem, Foyin picked up a brush and wrote on the scroll, "Fart!" He then asked the courier to return it to Su Dongpo. Quite anxious to read Foyin's praise, Su Dongpo was shocked to read the vulgar comment. Enraged, he immediately took a ferry across the Yangzi to Jinshan Monastery, there to confront Master Foyin. Foyin knew Su Dongpo only too well and anticipated his reaction; so he wrote a couplet, posted it on the monastery door, and then left the monastery. When Su Dongpo arrived, he found no Foyin, but on the door there was the poem which said:

*The eight winds cannot move you  
But one fart blows you across the river.*

Su Dongpo read it and was dumbfounded, and being unable to respond, he went home.



## A Child Can Say It, But an Old Man Cannot Achieve It

On the path, if one only uses one's mouth to recite but does not earnestly practice, no matter how much instruction one receives, it will be of no use. The great Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi visited Chan Master Niaochao Daolin (741-824) and asked about the essence of Buddhadharma.

Daolin replied, "Do not do evil, do only good."

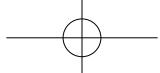
Not convinced, Bai Juyi responded: "A three-year-old can say this."

Daolin replied, "A three-year-old can say this, yet a man of eighty cannot achieve it."

If one does not practice earnestly with mind and body, and if one does not personally experience it, then no matter how much instruction one receives, it is irrelevant to one's ultimate liberation.

## Pissing is no Big Deal, but an Old Monk Must Still Has Do It

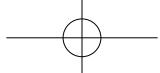
Someone asked Master Zhaozhou to explain what the most urgent thing in practice was, and Zhaozhou replied, "Even a minor thing such as pissing, I still have to do by myself." The practitioner was asking about the most urgent thing, which in Chinese could also be interpreted as having the urge to urinate. Master Zhaozhou turned the meaning around, making the urgent matter



become a matter of urinating. However, in practice, there is no distinction between urgent and non-urgent. Furthermore, both urgent and non-urgent are just phenomena. Going to the bathroom is one's own business; eating is one's own business, but one still needs to practice earnestly and honestly from the heart.

Huineng reminded us that everyone possesses the perfect self-nature DNA to become enlightened. Only when encountering difficulties does one need guidance from an enlightened teacher. If one believes that they must rely on an enlightened teacher to reach liberation, then that is delusion. In the *Shurangama Sutra*, the Buddha compared the Dharma to a finger pointing at the moon. The finger, which represents the Dharma, points to the moon, which represents enlightenment. So, in learning to practice, people follow the direction of the finger to see the moon. But if they mistake the finger for the moon and see only the finger, not only would they miss seeing the moon, they would miss the reason for pointing at the moon. The Buddhist sutras, the recorded sayings, the instructions of the lineage masters, are all fingers to guide those who embark on the path of practice. No matter how many fingers there are and how long they point out the direction, you still have to see the moon yourself. Ultimately, you have to activate your self-nature DNA yourself.

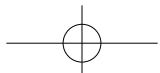


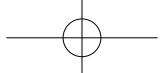


## Simultaneously Striking and Shouting

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After Huineng, Patriarch Chan flourished. To lead students to enlightenment, Chan masters relied on expedient means such as simultaneous shouting and striking, and pushing students to the point of exhaustion, thus creating the very distinctive style that pervaded Patriarch Chan. But Patriarch Chan is in fact daily life; the Chan master's guidance is not limited to the meditation hall. In the records of Chan, we read of masters often using daily life situations and objects as opportunities for teaching. In the Chan Hall, if the master had a fly whisk at his side, he could pick it up





to make a point; if he had a staff, he could use it to whack a disciple; if he had nothing else handy, he still had fingers to pinch with and feet to kick with. To those who first encounter Patriarch Chan, these stories seem animated and exciting, but those who have experienced Patriarch Chan can discern the hidden meanings in these stories. All these seemingly exotic behaviors by Chan masters are in fact, expedient means to break through a disciple's delusions and clinging.

In the next few sections I will present some scenarios in which you will recognize concretely the essence and method of practice of Patriarch Chan. You could also try to apply the method of investigation we discussed earlier to experience for yourself the level of enlightenment described in these stories.

### **Mazu Pinches Baizhang's Nose**

One day Master Mazu Daoyi was walking with one of his disciples, Baizhang Huaihai (720-814). When some birds flew overhead, Mazu asked Baizhang, “What was that?”

Baizhang replied, “Wild ducks.”

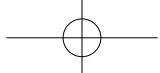
This time, Mazu asked, “Where did they go?”

Baizhang replied, “They flew away.”

Upon hearing this, Mazu turned to Baizhang and pinched his nose, twisting it hard, causing Baizhang to yell out in pain

Mazu said, “Do you still say that they flew away?”

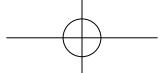
Upon hearing those words, Baizhang had an enlightenment



experience. So, what happened to Baizhang between being pinched in the nose and yelling in pain? In the world of phenomena, the wild ducks indeed flew past them, so Baizhang replied, “They flew away.” But Baizhang was answering his master from the perspective of external phenomena; he was still clinging to the comings and goings of the phenomenal world. In the transient existence of the myriad things, there is coming and going, right and wrong, good and evil, all these sorts of distinctions. But the original nature of the myriad things is empty and tranquil; there is no rising or perishing, or coming and going to speak of. When Baizhang replied “they flew away,” Mazu seized upon this opportunity to wake up the dreaming Baizhang by pinching his nose, hoping that Baizhang would let go of clinging to distinctions of coming and going. The record shows that Mazu’s effort was not in vain; because after being pinched in the nose, Baizhang realized sudden enlightenment.

### The Fly Whisk

Sometimes the Chan patriarchs used the emptiness and tranquility of self-nature to guide practitioners. At other times, they used the wondrous function of the temporary unity of cause and effect to teach Dharma. The fly whisk is one such wondrous tool. One day, a monk came to visit Chan Master Luohan Guicen (867-928). Guicen picked up his fly whisk and held it up to the monk and said: “Like this! Do you understand?”



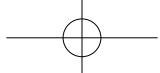
Upon seeing this, the monk replied, “Thank you for your compassionate teaching, master.”

Guicen said, “You see me holding the fly whisk, and you thank me for teaching you. But every day you also see mountains and rivers. Aren’t mountains and rivers also teaching you?”

Another monk came to consult Guicen, who similarly picked up the fly whisk. Upon seeing this, the monk exclaimed and prostrated to Guicen, thus expressing his gratitude for the teaching. Guicen said to this monk, “You see me holding up the fly whisk, and you exclaim and prostrate. Why don’t you prostrate to people holding up sweeping brooms?”

A fly whisk is for shooing away flies, mosquitoes, and other insects. In India, yogis meditate along the river and in forests where they are often plagued by insects. In the *Vinaya*, the monastic code of precepts, Shakyamuni Buddha allowed practitioners to use fabric and tree branches to make whisks to shoo away insects. The Chan School evolved in southern China where there were lots of insects, so patriarchs also used fly whisks to shoo them away.

Guicen’s picking up the whisk was an action to tell practitioners that Buddhadharma is everywhere, and that everywhere and every moment is an opportunity for practice. The mountains and rivers are teaching the Dharma; the broom, similar in appearance to a whisk, is also teaching the Dharma. Why wait till a Chan master picks up his whisk to say, “Oh, this is Buddhadhar-



ma”?

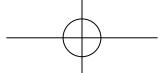
Later on, people regarded the fly whisk as a ritual implement, or a ceremonial implement in esoteric Buddhism, but these uses are far different from the original meaning of the fly whisk in Buddhism. In Chan history, fly whisks were common everyday tools, just like hoes and straw hats. They therefore frequently appear as metaphors in the recorded sayings of patriarchs.

One day Baizhang was attending to master Mazu, and he noticed that the master was looking at the fly whisk next to his bed. Even though Mazu did not say anything, Baizhang knew he was actually being tested. Mazu’s implied question was, “How is this fly whisk used?”

Not waiting for Mazu to open his mouth, Baizhang said: “One who uses it may also leave it.”

In effect, Baizhang was saying, “Right at this moment, I clearly understand the characteristics and function of this object, so I would use it or leave it, accordingly.”

What does this mean? Money for example, can give us happiness and freedom, so we need not be too frugal or deny ourselves the usefulness of money for the sake of practicing Buddhism. On the contrary, we should clearly understand the wondrous functions of money that can bring benefits; this is the “use it” function (*jiciyong*). Since we understand the benefits of money, we should do our best to use it wisely; this is the “leave it” function (*liciyong*). However, if we don’t manage our money well or get

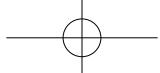


greedy, we will lose sleep, and no matter how much wealth we have, it cannot bring us true happiness and satisfaction; this is not “leaving it.”

After hearing what Baizhang said about the fly whisk, Mazu Daoyi asked him, “Later on, when you are a Chan master using your lips to liberate sentient beings, how will you instruct people?”

Baizhang leaned forward to pick up the fly whisk and held it erect. He was showing that he was not only going to use his mouth to teach the Dharma, but also reveal the wondrous function of any expedient object, anytime and anyplace. This showed that the Dharma is everywhere equal and pervasive.

After Baizhang’s demonstration, Mazu reminded him that even if he were to teach various Dharmas for the benefit of sentient beings, he should not cling to the notion of “sentient beings.” In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha said that a bodhisattva should “liberate all sentient beings, even though there are no sentient beings to be liberated.” This is because “self” and “sentient beings” are the perfect but temporary coming together of cause and effect; as such, they are illusory existences whose essence is empty and tranquil. Therefore, there is no self that can liberate sentient beings, and no sentient beings that can be liberated. After hearing his master’s teaching, Baizhang put down the fly whisk. Even this action was significant – even though he used the



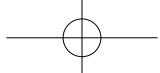
fly whisk expediently, he did not cling to the notion of its various functions.

### **Shouting**

At the precise moment that Baizhang put down the fly whisk, Mazu suddenly shouted. It was so loud that Baizhang could not hear for three days. This is not to mean that Baizhang truly became deaf, but that Mazu Daoyi's shout was so forceful that it severed Baizhang's instinct to discriminate: the instant he heard the shout everything dissipated and emptied out, and there was nothing left to hear. For three days Baizhang was in samadhi though still living normally, and perhaps able to hear and answer questions. Yet all sounds and forms just passed through him.

This is actually a kind of samadhi: Master Sheng Yen also had a similar experience during his solitary retreat. Soon after arriving in Chaoyuan Monastery in Meinong, he had to move nearly 100 boxes of books shipped from Taipei, from the first floor to the second floor. While he was moving the books, he picked up a huatou to investigate: "Who is moving these books?" and without noticing the passage of time, he realized that all the books had been moved upstairs.

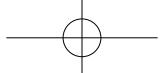
While investigating huatou, I also had a similar experience that lasted for more than twenty days. During that period, even though I was able to live as usual, everything around me was an illusion. This is a process that practitioners go through, so do



not panic or get too excited. As Master Sheng Yen has said, “On your path, if you see a cliff, just walk through it; if you chance upon a divine realm, don’t linger.” Whether cliffs or divine realms, when you encounter a demon or the Buddha, it is has no meaning to your pure and tranquil mind. Just continue to investigate your huatou.

Baizhang’s deafness was not caused by his master’s shouting, or by supernatural power. It happened because he had the correct perception, and had endeavored on the path of practice for a period of time; therefore, at the proper moment and under the right conditions, a stare, sentence, strike, shout, punch, or kick could trigger enlightenment, right then and there. This is like a seed encountering timely rain, sprouting, and growing strong. Everyone can practice it, and everyone can achieve it.

The first shout in the history of Chinese Chan gave rise to Baizhang’s enlightenment. Mazu Daoyi’s shouting method was successfully used by many later Chan masters. Linji Yixuan, the fourth generation successor to Mazu Daoyi, often used shouting to sever practitioners’ delusions. He not only established the Linji lineage of Chan, but also made the Linji shout famous. He described the wondrous function of his shouting thus: “Sometimes a shout is like the precious Vajra sword which cuts through any obstacle. Sometimes a shout is like a golden lion in a ready stance. Sometimes a shout can be used as bait on a fishhook, or a rain cape made of straw. Sometimes, too, a shout is not a



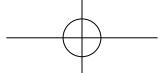
shout.”

Master Sheng Yen reached enlightenment with Master Lingyuan’s Linji-style shout. Back then, Master Lingyuan encouraged Sheng Yen to let go of the confusion and doubt in his mind. And so, asking one question after another, Sheng Yen could not stop, which made him sink deeper and deeper into confusion. All of a sudden Master Lingyuan slammed the wooden platform, and simultaneously shouted, “Let go!” This shocking gesture severed all of Sheng Yen’s delusions and clinging, shaking him to see his original true mind, right there. This is the most typical, classic example of the Linji School teaching method. Master Sheng Yen later received transmission from Master Lingyuan, becoming his Dharma heir in the Linji lineage.

### **Striking**

As we have seen, shouting can be tool for teaching Patriarch Chan. If one loud shout comes really explosively and suddenly, it is capable of severing a practitioner’s attachments, allowing the disciple to see his or her self-nature. Striking has a similar purpose. The Master Deshan Xuanjian (782-865) oftentimes used striking to guide students, leading to nickname the “Deshan Strike,” which became as famous as the “Linji Shout.” One day Deshan told everyone, “Today, should anyone ask me about Buddhadharma, I will just give him thirty strikes.”

A visiting monk from Silla in ancient Korea came forward and



bowed to Deshan, who immediately struck him.

The monk was indignant: “I didn’t even ask a question! Why did you hit me?”

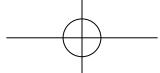
Deshan asked, “Where are you from?”

The monk replied, “From Silla.”

Deshan replied, “You haven’t even crossed over the bulwarks of the boat. I will give you thirty strikes!”

Deshan said that should anyone ask about the Dharma, he would receive strikes in return. This method of teaching in Chan is called “*duo*,” which means “depriving someone a chance to open their mouth.” Deshan’s purpose was to shock practitioners into seeing their nature right then and there. On the surface, the monk from Silla was not asking a question about Buddhadharma, but was just paying homage to Deshan. By cleverly bowing instead of asking a question, he was turning Deshan’s announcement into a different notion, so at that moment, it was not a way to see his true nature.

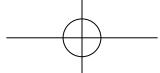
In Deshan’s time, to go from Silla to China, one had to take a boat. So this Korean monk had taken a boat to China to study Chan, but still clung to semantic games. That is why Deshan said that he had not even crossed the boat’s bulwarks, so he deserved thirty strikes. Deshan described his own method of teaching: “Thirty strikes to those who answer, and thirty strikes to those who do not answer.” If you say something, you’ll get thirty strikes; if you don’t say anything, you’ll still get thirty strikes.



The point was not about saying or not saying, but about seeing one's true nature at that moment.

The implements that early Chan masters used to strike their disciples were just random sticks that they could find. Later on, the stick evolved into a specially made flat "incense board." Most incense boards were made of soft wood, which had flexibility, so when they were used they would not injure people. So, if you have a chance to see an incense board or be struck by an incense board, don't be too afraid. In the Chan retreats that I lead, I use an incense board to guide practitioners. Some people feel uneasy when they see me walking back and forth with the incense board. They may feel indignant if I strike them even though they are sitting well during meditation. Some people come specifically to see how I scold people and strike them with my incense board, and then write admiring blog posts on the Internet.

I hold the incense board while I survey the Chan Hall, examining each practitioner's practice carefully. If you think that you are sitting well, yet you receive my strike, then this strike is appropriate because it prevents you from falling into false comfort and delusion. I am not pretentious, and I don't perform. Coming to see me striking people in the Chan Hall not only wastes your life, but also wastes the resources of our Chan Hall. I am further gratified, and I welcome those practitioners who write blogs on the Internet to spread Patriarch Chan, but I am a real person, not a statue made of wood or stone, so there is no need to revere



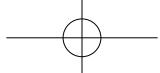
me like one.

I use the incense board to strike and my mouth to shout. These are expedient methods used in particular moments. After a period of concentrated effort, you become drowsy, you fall into delusion; you indulge in the false comfort of meditation. All you need is a kick or a push, so I strike you or shout at you, and the purpose is to use these strikes and shouts to eliminate your drowsiness and delusion, forcing you to come out from the false comfort of meditation. If you are stuck in your practice, this strike and shout may lead you to the correct path.

Sometimes you may not even know why you receive strikes or shouts. Or you may not have a special feeling one way or the other, just sensing a blank interruption. This means that you haven't put in enough effort, or you have not been able to apply your method properly. It is like a soccer ball that is kicked towards the goal, but fails to go through the goalposts. If this is the case, you only need to know that the incense board landed on your shoulder, and you received it earnestly. Don't be upset that this incense board didn't lead you to enlightenment, nor should you be happy about receiving the incense board, thinking you have made significant effort. At that moment, you only need to return to your method and continue your practice.

### **Kicking**

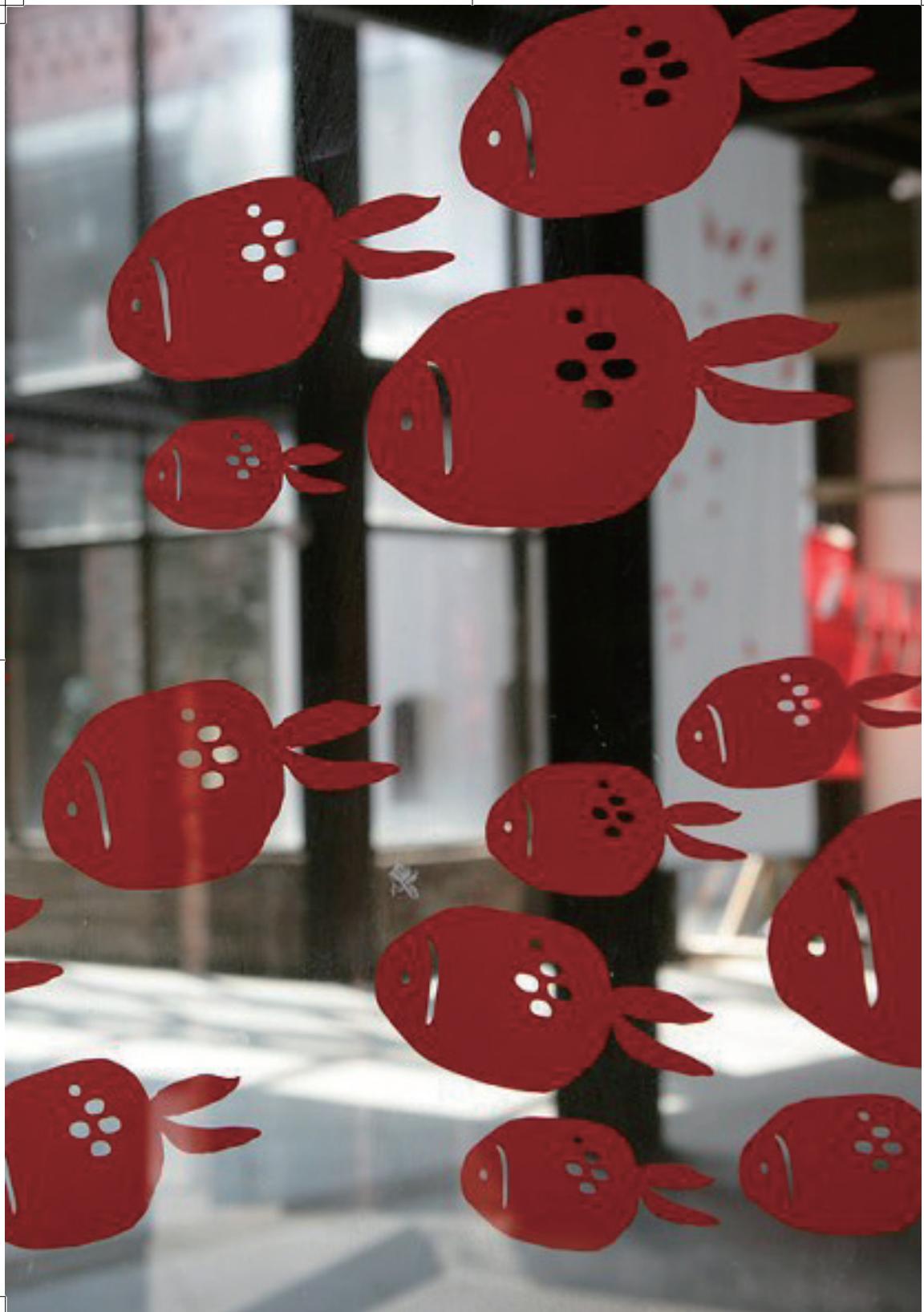
One time, the monk Hongzhou Shuilao (d.u.) went to visit Mazu

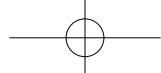


Daoyi and asked, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the west?”

Mazu said, “You, prostrate.”

Just as Shuilao was about to prostrate, Mazu kicked him. Instantly, Shuilao became enlightened. He stood up, clapped his hands and laughed: “This is just amazing, this is just too wondrous. All the myriad dharmas are just as simple as this.” To whomever he met, Shuilao would say, “Since I was kicked by Master Mazu, I have been laughing so much, I can’t shut up!”





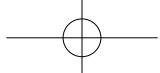
## Using All Expedient Means

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Even as they established their own lineages, the Chan patriarchs of the past often kept in close touch with each other. So, if shouting and striking couldn't lead a disciple to see their true nature, a Chan master might send him to practice with another master. However, on the way to achieving this, the master and disciple may become entangled in conflict.

### **Trading Sons as a Means of Teaching**

Here is a story that shows how a patriarch could be altruistic and



selfless when it came to the needs of a student. Yaoshan Weiyan (751-834) went to see Master Shitou Xiqian (700-790) to ask for instruction. Upon arriving at Shitou's place, Yaoshan said: "I can understand the sutras, but I am not clear how to use the mind to directly see one's nature and become a buddha. Could the master compassionately instruct me?"

Shitou replied, "You can't attain it this way, and you can't attain it another way. Trying to attain it this way or another way, you won't attain it. Do you understand?"

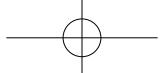
Yaoshan was bewildered.

Shitou then said, "Your affinity is not with me. Go visit Master Mazu." So, after following Mazu for three years, Yaoshan did attain enlightenment. Later, he returned to Shitou to further his practice. So Yaoshan came from Shitou's place and became enlightened under Mazu Daoyi, then returned to Shitou, eventually becoming his Dharma heir.

It also worked the other way, with Mazu sending a student to Shitou. Before he was a monk, Master Danxia Tianran (739-824) was on his way to the capital to take a civil service examination, when he encountered a monk who asked him, "Virtuous one, where are you going?"

Danxia replied, "To the capital to take a civil service examination."

The monk sighed and replied, "Becoming an official is not as good as becoming a buddha."



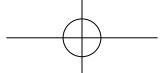
Danxia said, “Where can I go to become a buddha?”

The monk replied, “There is a Master Mazu in Jiangxi. That is a good place for learning to become a buddha.”

Danxia immediately changed his destination to Jiangxi to ask Mazu for instruction. At their first interview, Mazu told Danxia: “Master Shitou is the right teacher for you.” Danxia then rushed to Hunan to follow Shitou, and did reach enlightenment there three years later. After he attained the way, Danxia returned to Jiangxi to pay his respects to Mazu. Shortly after he arrived, Danxia went to the Chan Hall and sat on the statue of a bodhisattva, with his legs around the statue’s neck. Danxia’s behavior caused quite a stir. People did not know how to deal with the situation, so they immediately reported it to Mazu. When Mazu arrived at the Chan Hall and saw Danxia, he laughed, exclaiming, “My natural son!” The Chinese word for “natural” is *tianran*, so upon hearing this, Danxia jumped down and prostrated to Mazu, saying, “Thank you master, for giving me this Dharma name, Tianran!” From that point on, Danxia used Tianran as his Dharma name. So, although Danxia became enlightened under Shitou, he received his Dharma name from Mazu.

### **Father and Son Fighting**

A Chan patriarch may strike and shout to challenge disciples in certain situations to induce them towards enlightenment. If this does not work, the patriarch may want to send the disciple to an-



other master. To achieve this, sometimes a master may annoy a disciple to the point where the disciple would feel resentful.

Linji had studied under Huangbo for a while. One day, Muzhou, the head monk, asked him, “How long have you been here?”

“Three years,” answered Linji.

Muzhou asked, “Have you consulted with the master?”

“Not yet,” Linji replied, “because I really don’t know what to ask.”

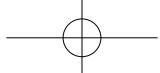
Muzhou offered, “How about this? You ask the master about the meaning of Buddhadharma.”

Following this advice, Linji took this question to Huangbo. Even before he finished asking the question, Huangbo struck him with a stick. After Linji emerged from the Chan Hall, Muzhou inquired, “How did you ask, and how did the master reply?”

Linji replied, “Even before I finished asking, the master struck me. I really don’t know what to do.”

“That’s all right,” said Muzhou, “go ask again.”

Linji asked Huangbo three times, and was struck three times, so he had no choice but to return to Muzhou, saying, “Thank you for your compassionate care, instructing me to consult with the master. I asked him three times and was struck by him three times. I can only blame my own deep, obstructive karma and incapability of understanding the master’s teaching. I want to bid



you farewell and leave this place.”

Muzhou said, “If you really want to leave, you should at least bid farewell to the master.”

Following this advice, Linji went to bid farewell to Huangbo, who said, “If you want to leave, that’s fine. But only if you go to Master Gao’an Dayu (d.u.), who will provide you with clear instruction.”

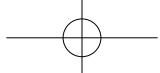
Following his master’s advice, Linji went to consult with Dayu, who asked, “How did Huangbo teach you?”

Linji replied, “I asked him three times about the meaning of Buddhadharma, and I was struck three times, but I don’t where I erred.”

Dayu sighed: “Master Huangbo is like an elderly mother caring for her youngest son, doing everything possible to liberate you from confusion; instead, you come asking me to tell you mistakes you made!”

Upon hearing this, Linji reached enlightenment, and exclaimed: “Huangbo’s Buddhadharma is not so special!” For Linji to say this was not being disrespectful to Huangbo; it meant that he had seen through Huangbo’s trick, and would no longer be fooled by the old monk.

To confirm Linji’s enlightenment, Dayu said, “You little bed-wetting demon! A minute ago, you asked how you erred. Now you say Huangbo’s instruction was not so special. What did you really see? Answer! Quick!”



Linji tried to punch Dayu in the ribs, but Dayu dodged away, smiled, and said, “Your master is Huangbo. This has nothing to do with me.”

Linji thus bid farewell to Dayu and returned to Huangbo’s monastery. Seeing that Linji had returned, Huangbo scolded him: “You! Going back and forth, back and forth, when will you settle down?”

Linji replied, “I have no choice, because my old mother is trying to protect me.” He then recounted to Huangbo his encounter with Dayu.

Upon hearing this, Huangbo said, “Dayu! When he comes tomorrow, I will definitely beat him up!”

Linji replied, “Why wait? I will beat you now!”

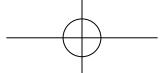
Linji then punched Huangbo, but Huangbo just smiled and said, “This crazy person dares to pull the tiger’s whiskers!”

Upon hearing this, Linji let out a loud shout.

Huangbo then ordered his attendant to lead Linji to the Ancestral Hall to prostrate. Huangbo then announced to generations of patriarchs that they had gained another enlightened Dharma heir capable of spreading the Dharma.

### **Regarding Dharma Brother as Father**

As we have seen, for the sake of disciples’ progress, sometimes Chan masters would send them to study with other masters. As for the disciples, if they did not achieve realization before their



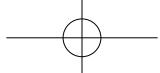
master's passing, they could then continue their efforts by consulting elders in the same lineage. Shitou Xiqian originally studied under Sixth Patriarch Huineng. Before Huineng passed away, Shitou asked the master, "How should I practice after you pass away?"

Huineng replied, "Go to Si." In Chinese, "si" means "to contemplate," and Shitou thought that Huineng was advising him to take up contemplation. So, after the Sixth Patriarch's passing, Shitou devoted his days to contemplation, sitting as still as a statue. Seeing this, the head monk asked him why he was doing that. Shitou replied that the Sixth Patriarch advised him to contemplate. Upon hearing this, the head monk shook his head: "No, the master wanted you to go see Elder Si (Qingyuan Xingsi) for instruction!"

So Shitou went to the Qingyuan Mountains in Jizhou to follow Xingsi (660?-740?) for many years, eventually becoming Xingsi's Dharma heir. Shitou's level of achievement was not compromised because he followed an elder Dharma brother. On the contrary, Shitou trained numerous monks who went on to establish the Caodong, Yunmen, and Fayan schools of Chan.

When Heze Shenhui (684-758?), another disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, went to consult with Xingsi, the master asked, "Where are you from?"

Shenhui replied, "Caoxi," meaning the place where the Sixth Patriarch lived. (Among his adherents, Huineng was also known



by the nickname, “Caoxi.”)

Xingsi asked, “What is the essence of Caoxi’s teaching?”

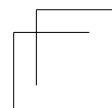
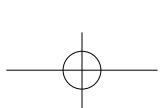
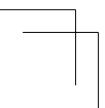
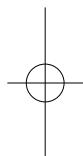
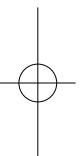
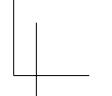
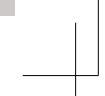
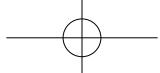
Upon hearing this, Shenhui lightly shook his body, implying that he was not clinging to anything, and that he had no hindrances.

Seeing this, Xingsi said, “There is still some rubble.”

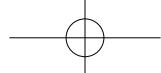
Upon hearing himself described as rubble, Shenhui asked, “Do you have genuine gold to offer to people?”

Xingsi replied, “If I offered it to you, where would you put it?”

What Xingsi meant was that since there is originally not a thing, where would the mind be? So, if he gave gold to Shenhui, where would he put it? Instantly, Shenhui realized that he had yet to see his true nature, so he followed Xingsi for many years. Later on, Shenhui went north to teach the Buddhadharma, and became the master most responsible for spreading Patriarch Chan in northern China.







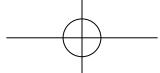
## Severing Clinging to Establish the Truth

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In order to help a disciple sever false clinging and correctly perceive wisdom, a master will sometimes employ methods that seem quite irrational to others. In Chan, these methods are called “simultaneously breaking and establishing.” The Chan records are full of astonishing stories of practitioners burning Buddha statues, chopping off fingers, and even becoming executioners.

### Becoming an Executioner

After receiving Dharma transmission from Master Yuanwu



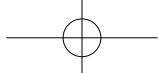
Keqin (?-1135), Dahui Zonggao became the head monk in his order, and taught Buddhadharma to the master's other disciples. Yuanwu Keqin would even join other monastics to listen to Dahui's teaching. One time, Dahui had just taken the Dharma seat to give a lecture, when Yuanwu asked, "If a monk who looks exactly like me sits here, how would you handle it?"

Dahui replied, "How fortunate it would be to see this tender, tasty stuff. Of course I would say something like what Su Dongpo would have said: 'Become an executioner and slaughter this person so that I can enjoy it'."

Not intimidated by his master's imposing presence, Dahui furthermore used irony to express enlightenment: "If you come across the Buddha on the road, kill him; when the demon comes, kill him." He did not cling to forms, nor was he tricked by the old monk's rhetoric. Yuanwu heard his disciple saying that he was going to cut Yuanwu up and eat him, and said with a hearty laugh: "This is a wonderful idea! Why don't you come to my room and hang me up on the wall like a slab of tasty meat?"

### **Juzhi Chopping off a Child's Finger**

This next story shows that compared to having one's finger chopped off, being shouted at and struck with a stick are child's play. The Tang Dynasty monk, Jinhua Juzhi (d.u.), had just been appointed as abbot of the monastery when one day, he was visited by a nun wearing a bamboo hat and holding a monk's cane

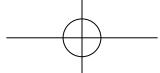


made of tin. As was the custom, she respectfully walked around Juzhi three times then stopped, saying, “If you can say something about the Way, I will remove my hat.”

What did this mean? It was common for a visitor first to remove his or her hat, and then circumambulate the abbot three times, but this nun tried to force Juzhi to reveal his true nature before showing him further respect. She was clearly challenging Juzhi’s authority. She repeated her question three times, but Juzhi could not even answer with a single word. Afterwards, Juzhi lamented that he had been humiliated by a nun, so he made a vow to practice hard and reach enlightenment.

One day, another Tang Dynasty monk, Hangzhou Tianlong (d.u.), came to Juzhi’s monastery. Juzhi recounted to Tianlong his embarrassing encounter with the nun. In response, Tianlong just held up a finger. Seeing the upheld finger, right then and there, Juzhi reached enlightenment. He understood that Tianlong’s upheld finger meant that “one is all.” However much phenomena transform, whatever questions are asked, if we understand the nature of all things and realms as empty and tranquil – that one is all – then we can deal with the myriad illusions. After that, whenever someone asked Juzhi about Dharma, he would just hold up a finger without saying a word. Observing Juzhi’s finger, many practitioners also reached a certain level of understanding.

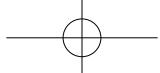
One day, a young boy who studied under Juzhi was asked:



“What method does your master use to teach people?” In reply, the boy imitated Juzhi by holding up a finger. People were truly impressed by this, and the young boy felt smug and self-satisfied. When the boy arrived back at the monastery he recounted his story to Juzhi. When the boy demonstrated by holding up a finger, Juzhi suddenly cut off the boy’s finger with a knife. In severe pain, the young boy cried and ran out. At that moment Juzhi shouted, “Boy!” The boy turned around, only to see Juzhi holding up a finger. In that moment the boy reached a certain level of understanding.

Why did Juzhi cut off the child’s finger, and then hold up his own finger? Juzhi did it because the boy was mimicking the master without revealing any real attainment. So the master used a very severe method to break the child’s clinging to the form of “holding up a finger.” After he cut off the finger and severed the child’s clinging, he immediately stuck up his finger to tell him, “One is all.” Right there, he set the child straight. This method of teaching is called “breaking and establishing” (*jipo jili*), meaning “severing clinging to establish the truth.” You may ask, since the child has lost his finger, in the future how would he teach people that “one is all”? Since one is all, why hold up a finger? What is the difference between a flower, a cup of tea, and a finger?

### Danxia Burns a Statue of the Buddha



As for Juzhi's cutting off his own disciple's finger, as long as the child's parents did not protest, Juzhi was unscathed. But Danxia Tianran burned Buddha statues from other monasteries than his own. It is no wonder that he was shouted at and scolded! Danxia once spent a winter at Huilin Monastery, and one extremely cold day, there was a huge snowstorm. Danxia went to the Buddha Hall, removed a wooden Buddha statue, and burned it to keep warm.

When the monk in charge of the hall saw this, he exploded in rage: "Why did you burn the Buddha statue?"

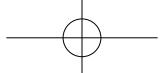
Danxia replied "I wanted to see if I can find some sharira among the ashes.

The Sanskrit word "sharira" refers to crystalized, pearlescent objects often found among the cremated ashes of Buddhist spiritual masters, including, according to tradition, the Buddha. When found in the ashes of spiritual masters, sharira are revered as relics by some Buddhists.

Hearing this, the monk in charge became even more furious. "How can you obtain sharira by burning a wooden statue?"

Danxia said "Oh, is that so? Since it was only wood, why don't we burn a few more?"

Upon hearing this, the monk reached some understanding. Danxia said that he wanted to burn the wooden Buddha to obtain sharira; he wanted to see how the Buddha could leave behind relics for people to treasure. But can one obtain sharira



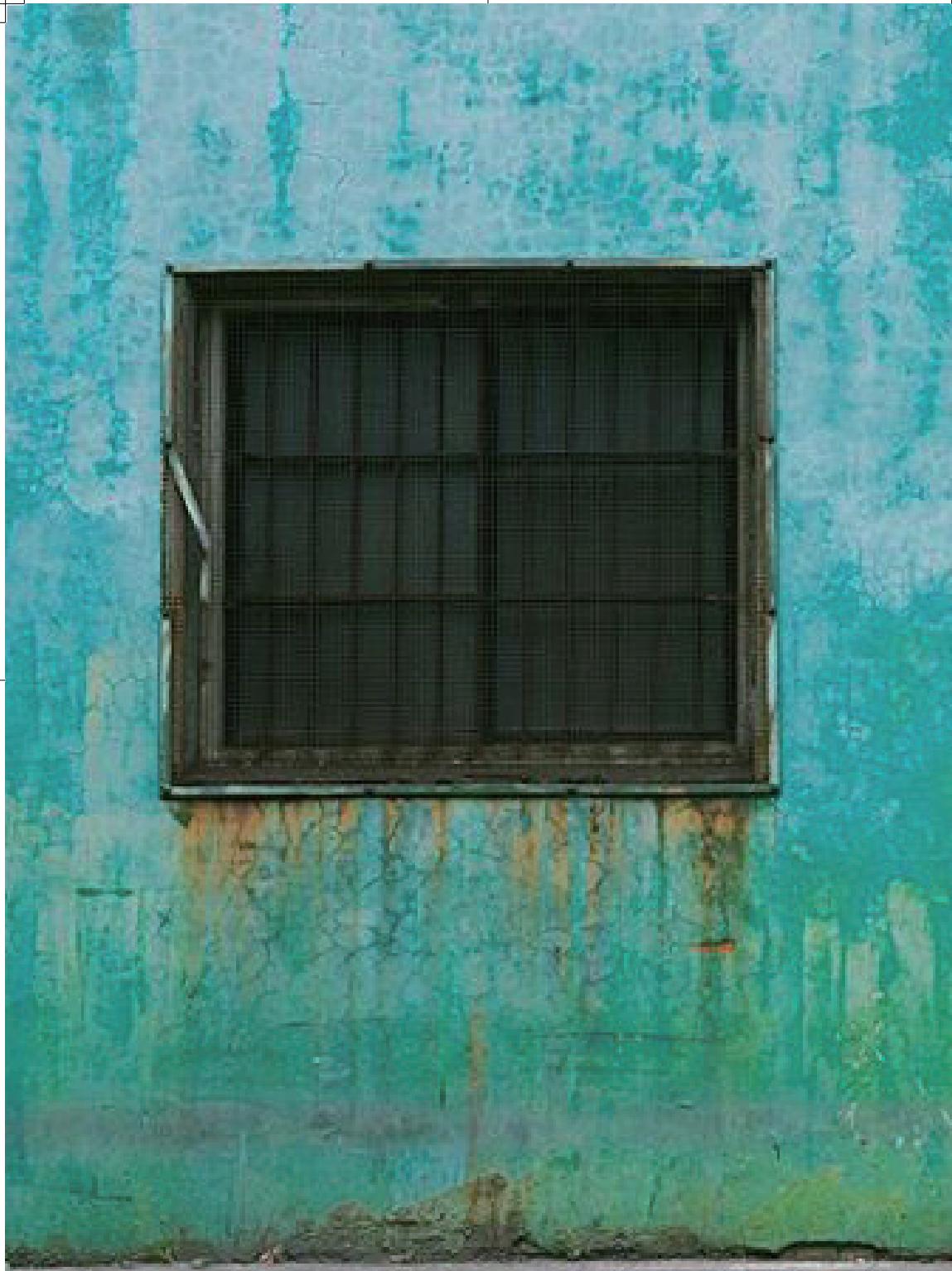
from the ashes of a wooden Buddha? Since wooden Buddha statues are only illusory phenomena called “wood,” and since it was so cold, why not burn statues to keep warm? This story reminds us that the Buddha does not exist in form or phenomena. Since that is the case, what is that thing on the altar that Buddhists prostrate to and revere?

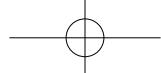
People like to keep photos of endeared ones in their wallets, cell phones, or on their desks. When seeing the images, on some level it is like seeing the actual person; some people even speak to or kiss the photos. This is very similar to the original purpose of Buddha images; people make Buddha images because they pine for the presence of the Buddha. When Buddhists look at a Buddha statue, it brings to mind the real Buddha, so they pay respect, prostrate, and show gratitude for his teachings. Monasteries revere Buddha images for these purposes, and also to remind people that they should follow the Buddha, become a buddha, and use Buddhadharma to save sentient beings.

A Buddha statue is therefore only a form onto which people can project their feelings. If one mistakes this form as real, then one is actually worshipping wood or stone. In Chan, there is no such worship to speak of. Master Linji said, “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him! When a demon comes, kill the demon!” Even if the real Buddha appears, there would still be no Dharma to be obtained. Master Sheng Yen made it clear in his will that after his body was cremated, there should be no search

for sharira. This was to free people from worshipping relics.

Danxia burned a Buddha statue to remind us that the Buddha does not reside in any form or in phenomena. However, this should not encourage anyone to go around destroying Buddhist statues to make a point. In the same sense, you would not want to see children burning photos of their parents. Even today, Buddhists respect Buddhist statues. In the history of Chan, there was only one person who burned a Buddha statue, and that was Master Danxia.

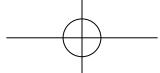




## After the Barbarians, No Shortage of Salt and Sauce

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The recorded sayings of patriarchs allow us to trace the teachings of Patriarch Chan over the past 1,500 years, and to connect with this succession over that period of time. The tradition of master and disciple in Chan has left indelible impressions on us. Reading of masters shouting and hitting their disciples, and the disciples responding in various ways, these behaviors may seem strange and even cruel compared to modern standards of tolerance and human rights. But if that were the case, how could Pa-



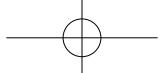
triarch Chan have lasted this long? Are people willing to continue this tradition today?

Actually, it was the masters' earnest hope that their disciples would see their true nature earlier than later, so that they too could spread Buddhadharma and transform sentient beings. The disciples clearly understood the Chan style of teaching, and did not feel apologetic about it. They earnestly pursued their practice in order to attain enlightenment. They further wished to continue the lineage and not let it weaken and die, as that would dishonor the masters. This is the gist of Chan enlightenment and transmission.

Sometimes, a master was aware that an enlightened disciple had begun teaching on their own, but would still challenge the disciple to keep the connection fresh and lively. The disciple would also promote the master's teaching so that it would not lose energy and dissipate. Therefore, the master-disciple relationship in Chan was not what it may seem on the surface – cool and lacking in feeling; on the other hand, it was not ordinary human affection, such as the way a mother cares for her child.

### **This Plum Has Ripened**

Master Fachang (752-839) attained enlightenment under Mazu Daoyi, and then went to Mount Damei to teach others. When Mazu heard this, he sent a disciple to assess Fachang's worthiness to teach. When he got there, the disciple asked Fachang,



“Venerable, what did Master Mazu say that led you to come to Mount Damei?”

Fachang replied, “Master Mazu said to me, ‘This mind is Buddha.’ After that I came here.”

The disciple replied “Now Master Mazu teaches differently.”

Fachang asked “How is it different now?”

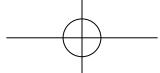
The disciple said “Now Master Mazu says, ‘Not mind, not Buddha.’”

Fachang then said “That old fellow really knows how to confuse people. Where will this all end? He can say, ‘Not mind, not Buddha.’ As for me, I will continue to say, ‘This mind is Buddha.’”

When the disciple returned and told Mazu what Fachang said, Mazu remarked, “This plum has ripened.” In Chinese, *damei* means “big plum,” so when Mazu heard Fachang’s response, he said in praise, “This plum has ripened.”

A truly enlightened person would not be affected by phenomena. When Fachang heard Mazu say “This mind is Buddha,” he did not surrender to the master’s words, nor did he cling to this commonplace saying, but he truly grasped the teaching. Even though later on Mazu changed to “Not mind, not Buddha,” to Fachang, it was a phenomenon of using language. He would not be tricked by the old monk’s words.

### **After the Barbarians, No Shortage of Salt and Sauce**



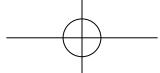
So, in these stories from the records of Chan, we learn of Nanyue Huairang testing Mazu Daoyi, and in turn, Mazu Daoyi testing Fachang. In an earlier encounter between Nanyue and his Mazu, Nanyue says, “If I can’t turn a brick into a mirror by polishing it, how can you become a buddha by sitting in meditation?” Nanyue said this to sever Mazu’s idea that sitting in meditation would enable him to become a buddha. Because of that encounter, Mazu practiced with Nanyue for ten years in Hunan. After reaching enlightenment, Mazu went to Jiangxi to teach Buddhadharma, and attracted practitioners from all directions.

Nanyue heard that Mazu had ended up in Jiangxi, so he asked his disciple: “Has Daoyi begun to teach for the benefit of sentient beings?”

The disciple replied “Yes, elder Dharma brother Daoyi has begun to teach for the benefit of sentient beings.”

Nanyue then asked “Why is it that we have not heard more from him?” So Nanyue sent the disciple to Jiangxi to test Mazu.

After he left Hunan, Mazu traversed Sichuan and Hubei, finally arriving in Jiangxi. In ancient times transportation was quite primitive, so passing along information was not as easy as it is today. Not having heard from him for a few years, Nanyue was truly concerned and thought of Mazu. This kind of mutual heartfelt concern was not about how many followers a disciple had, or how grand his monastery was, but about how he instructed sentient beings, and whether such sentient beings could reach



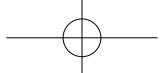
enlightenment and further spread Buddhadharma.

When the disciple arrived in Jiangxi, he followed Nanyue's instructions and asked Mazu: "How do you teach people?"

Mazu replied, "In the thirty years since the barbarian invasion, we have not lacked for salt and sauce."

"Hu" is the general term the Han Chinese used to describe northern nomadic peoples. In Chinese history, Hu peoples came south numerous times to fight the Han and occupy Han territory. In so doing, they caused much warfare and slaughtered many people. In the Han Chinese mind, these episodes amounted to chaos caused by "barbarian invasions." The Chan School often used the terms "kill" and "slaughter" to induce practitioners to sever delusions. Mazu therefore, used the phrase "barbarian invasion" to describe how, on his path to enlightenment, he "killed" and "slaughtered" to break through all sorts of clinging and delusions.

In effect Mazu was saying, "Since I was instructed under my master's strict methods, and after a painful battle with delusion and the cycle of arising and perishing mind, I fortunately survived and have obtained some enlightenment experience. I left my master thirty years ago, and in every moment, I make sure that I have no shortage of salt and sauce, and do not depart from pure and tranquil mind. As for my instruction to sentient beings, to those who are worthy of salt I will give salt, and to those worthy of receiving sauce, I will give sauce. I have never, for a mo-

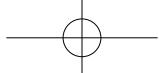


ment, forgotten my master's instructions."

Firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea are the necessities of Chinese daily life. When a housewife has all seven ingredients, she is able to create wonderful cuisine, and thus provide for her family. Mazu used "no shortage of salt and sauce" to indicate that his enlightenment and transmission were like staples in a kitchen, and he had plenty of them. When he instructed practitioners, he was acting like a skillful housewife cooking food. For those in need of salt, he provided salt; for those in need of sauce, he provided sauce. Based on sentient beings' character and level, he provided suitable instructions.

When the disciple reported on his encounter with Mazu, Nanyue nodded and said: "Hmm, good." "After the barbarians, there has been no shortage of salt and sauce," was Mazu's way of expressing gratitude for his master's heartfelt concern. The master who heard this reply thoroughly understood. This kind of exchange shows the sincere master and disciple bond that characterizes the Chan School.

When someone teaches you Dharma for even a day, he or she is your "parent" for life, so disciples respectfully call their teacher "Shifu." Although the Chan master-disciple relationship was similar to a parent-child relationship, it was not founded on the principle of compassionate parent and filial child. On the path to liberation, the relationship is founded on mutual reminding, encouragement, and even mutual instruction. Quoting Grandmas-



ter Dongchu to describe this situation, it is “thirty percent master-to-disciple, seventy percent friendship on the path to liberation.”

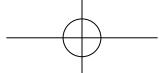
### **Buddhadharma is So Good, Yet So Few People Know about It**

Chan masters expect and hope that their disciples will further spread Buddhadharma, not necessarily remain with them. Disciples would earnestly expound Buddhadharma to others to demonstrate their gratitude to their *shifu*, while putting less emphasis on the formal morning and evening greetings to their master. This is because filial piety begins with not failing oneself. Master Sheng Yen followed Grandmaster Dongchu for two years before he decided to enter solitary retreat in Meinong. To encourage himself, he used the adage: “Putting other people’s salvation before one’s own is the first vow of a bodhisattva.” He further vowed not to cultivate for his own benefit. Master Sheng Yen told Dongchu that he would practice diligently so as not to fail Buddhadharma. Dongchu told him, “The most important thing is not to fail yourself.” A master’s Dharma talks and instructions can enable a disciple to live a true life, and experience wondrous liberation. How can parents’ giving birth to children compare to this sort of kindness? How can a disciple providing clothing, food, and being filial to the master possibly be equal to a heartfelt expression of gratitude?

True filial piety is first, earnestly practicing the path to libera-

tion to see one's own original mind and original nature. Second, remembering that everything one has comes from one's teacher and from learned friends, and therefore, one must show gratitude to the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and the patriarchs. Third, taking on the "family business" of honoring the Tathagata and earnestly spreading Buddhadharma; otherwise showing gratitude to the Buddha and one's teachers, and vowing to save sentient beings would forever be hollow words.

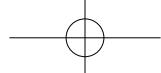
Master Sheng Yen was a paragon who throughout life devoted himself to filial piety. He became a monk at thirteen, and after benefitting from Buddhadharma, said: "Buddhadharma is so wonderful, yet so few people understand it." So he vowed to help all people experience the benefit of Buddhadharma, just as he had himself. Throughout his life, whatever difficulties he encountered, he earnestly moved forward to fulfill his vow. In his youth, he wore a monk's robe, hurrying through the alleys of Shanghai providing penitential rites and funeral services for one family to another, to earn money for the monastery. In his twenties he drafted into the army. Not only was he required to learn how to shoot a gun, he also had to witness military executions. In middle age, he had already obtained his doctoral degree, but for a time was homeless on the streets of New York City, "meagerly hoping not to freeze to death in winter, and meagerly hoping not to starve to death." In his last years, even as he had lost the strength to speak, already frail and on death's doorstep, he creat-



ed beautiful calligraphy to raise funds to benefit the building of schools for aspiring monks and nuns.

He reached enlightenment through self-practice, and he taught the Buddhadharma that he had experienced to practitioners all over the world. He used his numerous publications to announce to the world how he, a successor of Patriarch Chan, could earnestly spread the Dharma during his era. He used his life of practice to tell everyone how they can weave together wondrous existence and use wondrous wisdom in the realm of true emptiness and tranquility. Now, it is up to us all – me, my fellow monastics, and all others who benefit from Buddhadharma, to fulfill Master Sheng Yen's wishes.

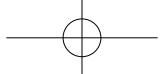




## Epilogue: Be No Longer a Confused Person

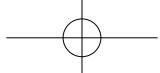
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When I was young, I was afraid of ghosts. When I had to go to the bathroom at night, I often felt a chill running up my spine, I was so scared. One night I held it in until I just had to go; halfway to the bathroom, I conjured up a daytime conversation by adults about ghosts, deities and buddhas. This inspired me to rationalize that ghosts were afraid of deities, and above the deities were the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and being the most powerful, they were the most feared by the ghosts! I therefore began to chant the six-syllable mantra, “*Om mani padme hum*,” while



whipping my hand around in a gesture of subduing demons. I then felt that there was a buddha or bodhisattva protecting me, and seeing this, the ghosts would not dare to approach me. That was my method of getting rid of my fear of going to the bathroom at night!

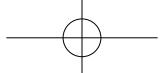
Had the Sixth Patriarch Huineng of the Chan School seen me then, he would definitely have bestowed upon me the epithet “*miren*.” What is a *miren*? This Chinese term appears frequently in the *Platform Sutra*. It doesn’t carry the traditional meaning of “charming person”; rather, it refers to someone oblivious to his or her own pure and tranquil self-nature, someone who does not know how to practice towards seeing their own self-nature, and who does not practice earnestly. Why would one who chants mantras and seeks protection from buddhas and bodhisattvas be mocked by Huineng as a *miren*? “Mantra” is sometimes translated as “true words of wisdom,” and back then my mouth was chanting these true words of wisdom, but my mind was clinging to the wish that the Buddha or a bodhisattva would quickly come to my rescue. I did not understand then that there was no permanent, unchanging existence that could save me, nor did I know that ghosts and gods only existed in my own delusory realm. I did not know then that phenomena were actually illusory; I was just conjuring up ghosts to scare myself, and then to save myself, I made up another illusion – the Buddha and the bodhisattvas.



Huineng said, “A *miren* chatters about *prajnaparamita*, the perfection of wisdom, but often he is stupid to the core.” That was me as a young person! So if you are like me when I was young – in Huineng’s words, a confused person – you need not get too nervous or panic because Patriarch Chan tells us that even a confused person, who “practices for the duration of one thought-moment, is equal to the Buddha in that one thought-moment.” Such a person is capable of “reaching the level of the Buddha once enlightened,” because sentient beings all possess the virtuous wisdom of the Tathagata. You need only to activate the self-nature DNA, and right then and there, you will no longer be bound by the myriad things that constitute phenomena; right then and there, you become a free, liberated being.

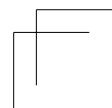
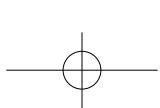
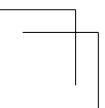
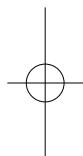
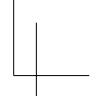
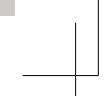
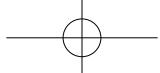
If you want to experience unbound liberation and a fabulous life, or if you still cannot find a proper method of practice, Patriarch Chan may well be your best choice. Patriarch Chan specializes in teaching people how to activate their self-nature DNA to experience unbound freedom. Its theory and practice are united as one: self-nature, or bodhi, is originally pure and tranquil. By simply applying one’s mind, one can directly realize buddhahood. Patriarch Chan is very easy to learn as long as one applies it every moment and everywhere; it is the method of contemplation with wisdom, neither grasping at, nor negating any state; it is seeing your self-nature to become a buddha.

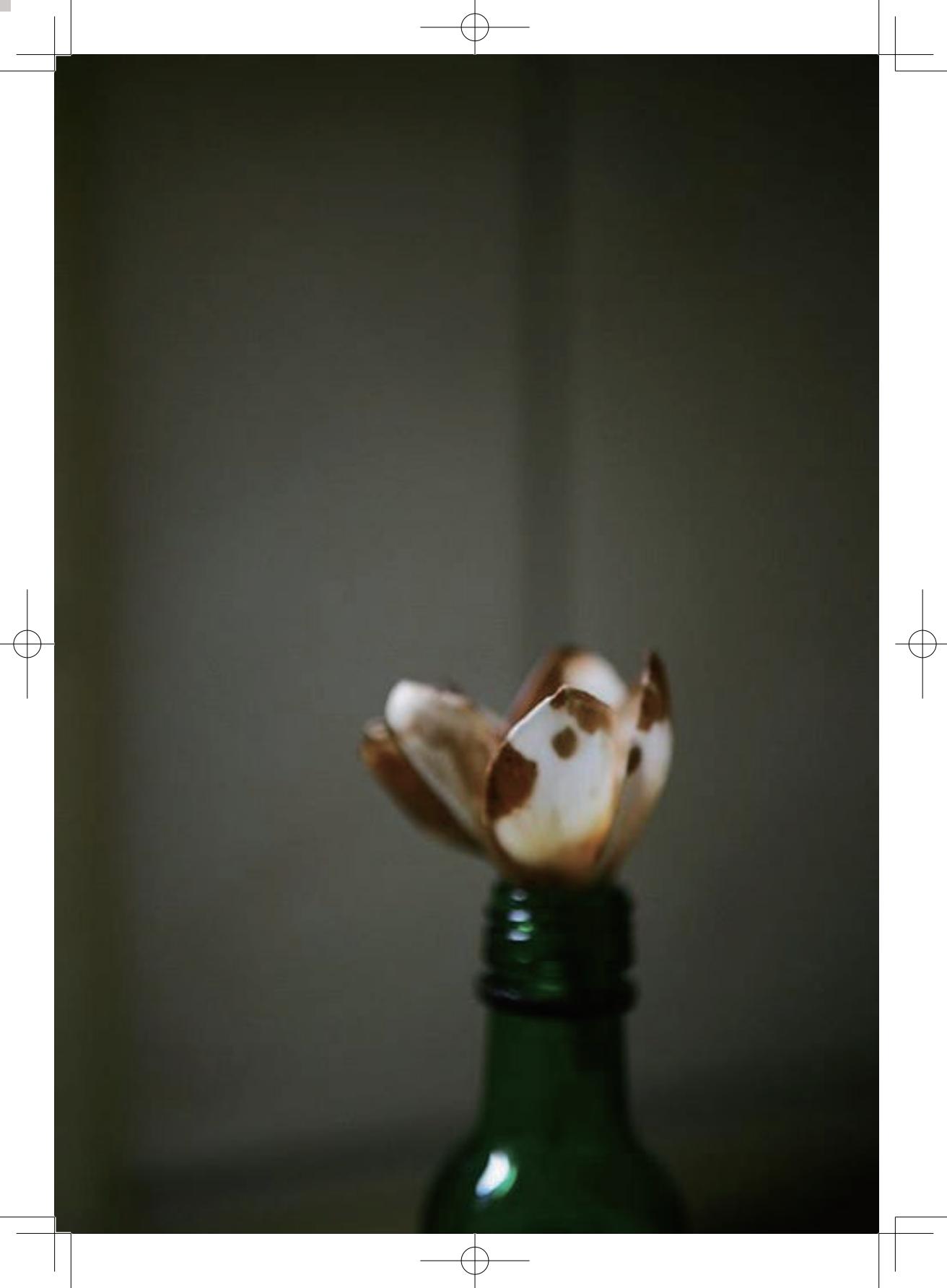
Patriarch Chan is the ultimate realization of daily life. If we



depart from daily life, there would there no method of liberation, and hence no liberation; that is because seeking bodhi beyond this world is like looking for horns on a rabbit. If you do not yet know how to practice in earnest, then you should pick up wu and ceaselessly investigate it. Repeatedly ask, “What is wu? What is wu?” If you focus on your own mind and do this day and night, you will eventually see your true self-nature. If you cannot reach enlightenment by following this method, then you should seek a *kalyanamitra*, a spiritual guide who can point out the moon for you.

At Chan Grove monastery, we teach and practice Patriarch Chan. I look forward to seeing you here. But don’t forget: all the teachings and remonstrations of the patriarchs are only “the chatter of old monks.” You should embark on a journey, as did Siddhartha Gautama, in which you see the moon by yourself; your self-nature DNA is relying on you to activate it. In closing, I sincerely bless you: be no longer a confused person, since originally there is no confused person. You only need to see your true nature. That’s all.





## Glossary

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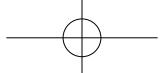
**Amitabha:** The Buddha of the Western Paradise (the Pure Land) who symbolizes mercy and wisdom. The Pure Land practice of reciting Amitabha's name is one of the most accessible and simple forms of Buddhism. Through Amitabha Buddha's vow any person who sincerely invokes his name and expresses the wish to be born in the Pure Land will be reborn there. See: **Pure Land, Western Paradise**

**Ananda:** One of the ten major disciples of the Buddha, Ananda

was also the Buddha's personal attendant for the last 25 years of the Buddha's life. He was also a first cousin of the Buddha's on their fathers' side. Ananda was gifted with extraordinary memory and remembered all the sermons that the Buddha gave at which he was present. At the first council of 500 arhats which took place after the Buddha's parinirvana, Ananda was called upon to recite the sermons of the Buddha for the sake of compiling the Buddha's teachings. Ananda was also instrumental in persuading the Buddha to allow nuns to enter the Sangha.

**Baizhang Huaihai (720-814):** One of the most eminent Chan masters of the Tang dynasty, and a Dharma heir of Mazu Daoyi. One of Baizhang's main achievements was to establish the rules of monastic life. This codification of monastery life became the basis of many independent Chan monasteries, thus furthering the spread of Chan. See: **Mazu**.

**Bodhi:** (Skt. “mind of wisdom”) A central idea in Mahayana Buddhism; its meaning varies in different contexts: 1) the altruistic mind of a person who aspires to attain buddhahood for the sake of helping sentient beings, 2) the genuine actualization of enlightenment, awakening to the true nature of reality and the loftiness of buddhahood, and 3) selfless action. This last meaning is extremely important yet often overlooked. Arousing the bodhi-mind is the first step in establishing oneself on the bodhi-

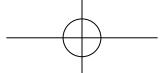


sattva path.

**Bodhidharma** (?-ca. 528 CE): Arriving in China as a solitary monk from India – or by some accounts, from Persia – Bodhidharma was considered to have introduced the style of meditation and practice that ultimately became Chan Buddhism. He is therefore considered to be the founder and first patriarch of Chan. Though he left few written teachings, his brief treatise *Two Entries and Four Practices* is a keystone doctrine among all the teachings of the Chan masters since then. See: **Patriarch Chan**.

**Bodhisattva:** (Skt. “awakened being”) “Bodhisattva” is a term with varied meanings depending on the usage and context: 1) an honorific used with certain great enlightened beings in Buddhist teachings, such as Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva and Manjushri Bodhisattva; 2) a term that describes a practitioner who has given rise to bodhicitta and aspires to become enlightened while delivering sentient beings; 3) a practitioner who has received the bodhisattva precepts and taken the bodhisattva vows; 4) especially in the Mahayana tradition, as a polite form of address to refer to any practitioner, or even non-practitioners.

**Buddhadharma:** (Skt. “truth spoken by the Buddha”) Collectively, the Dharma teachings of the Buddha. The Dharma should

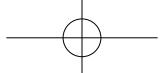


not be understood as a fixed set of doctrines. Thus the Buddha said, “The Dharma has no fixed Dharma.” Essentially, the Buddha taught in response to the different dispositions of sentient beings.

**Buddha-Nature:** A buddha is a sentient being who has attained thorough enlightenment. Buddhist teaching especially in the Mahayana School holds that human beings, indeed, all sentient beings and even non-sentient beings possess an inherent nature that is not fundamentally different from that of a buddha. With this concept in mind, the purpose of practicing the Buddhist Path is to ultimately realize one’s innate buddha-nature. See: **Self-Nature**

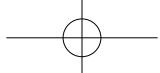
**Caodong:** The Caodong School (Jpn. Soto) is one of the two major lineages of Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen still extant, along with the Linji School (Jpn. Rinzai). The school is typified by the practice of Silent Illumination whose major proponent in later years was Hongzhi Zhengjue. Silent Illumination has been called the “method-of-no-method” because it requires only that the practitioner focus on the act of sitting to bring the body-mind to a “silent” state in order to “illuminate” the true nature of mind and self.

**Chan Buddhism:** Chan is a major tradition of Chinese Buddhism whose special characteristic is the practice towards enlighten-



ment by directly contemplating the mind to realize its true nature as buddha-mind. “Chan” is the Chinese transliteration from “channa,” of the Sanskrit “dhyana” which means “meditative concentration.” This signifies the central role of contemplation in the practice of Chan. As part of the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, Chan practitioners are exhorted to follow the bodhisattva path of postponing their own enlightenment in order to unconditionally deliver sentient beings. See: **Arhat, Mahayana**.

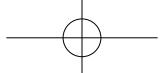
**Consciousness:** In the early Buddhist sutras, consciousness was described as consisting of the five sense consciousnesses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) plus a sixth consciousness, that of mental activity, or cognition. This sixth faculty integrates the information of the senses and perceives the world. In experiencing the world, these six “primary” consciousnesses operate together, resulting in sentient beings generating a separate sense of self. With the development of the later Mahayana tradition around the second and fourth centuries, the Yogacara School, while accepting the validity of the six primary consciousnesses, expanded the description of consciousness in order to explain how the self experiences reality, as well as how it accumulates karma and transmigrates through the cycle of birth and death. The development of this line of thinking resulted in the definition of two additional levels of consciousness beyond the original six: the seventh and the eighth consciousnesses. At the risk of



oversimplification, the seventh consciousness can be called the “ego” since it is the faculty which processes the continuous stream of the data of the primary six consciousnesses, and forms the concept of the self, and along with that all the afflictions of having a self. The eighth consciousness is called the “ground” or “storehouse” consciousness because – based on the experiences of the seven other faculties – it “stores” all the impressions, as “seeds” which become causing conditions for future rebirths. Therefore, the eighth consciousness is the faculty that survives the current lifetime of the individual sentient being, ensuring that any residual karma will be contributive conditions for transmigrating in the sea of samsara. See: **Samsara, Yogacara.**

### **Cycle of Birth and Death: See: Samsara.**

**Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163):** An eminent master within the Linji tradition, Dahui was a great exponent of the practice of huatou. In fact his dedication to huatou practice also led him to become a vocal critic of the Silent Illumination method because he thought it often led to quiescent but non-productive practice. The major exponent of Silent Illumination at that time was Master Hongzhi Zhengjue, but aside from their philosophical differences, they were friends. Dahui was famous for having helped over 128 disciples to attain realization. He also had many lay dis-



ciples with whom he communicated by letters that have become a part of the literature of Chan. See: **Gong'an, Huatou**.

**Dharma/dharma:** (Skt. “holding”) Central “truth” or beliefs of Buddhism, as taught by the Buddha. As a convention often used in English, Dharma (with an upper case D) refers to the teachings of the Buddha, while dharma (with a lower case d) refers to an object, an event, or any physical or mental phenomenon.

**Dharma Transmission:** See: **Transmission**.

**Dhyana:** (Skt. “meditation-absorption”) State of meditative absorption achieved through cultivation of one-pointed mind (samadhi). The wider meaning of dhyana refers to any meditative practice in Buddhism where the purpose is to train the mind towards enlightenment. The narrower meanings of dhyana refer to deep and progressive meditative states whose precise meanings depend on the method being practiced. See: **Four Levels of Concentration of the Form Realm, Four Levels of Concentration of the Formless Realm, Samadhi**.

**Doubt Sensation:** The “doubt sensation” or just “doubt,” is a term that specifically applies to a Chan method in which the practitioner energetically and single-mindedly seeks an answer to

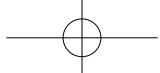
an enigmatic question either posed by the master, or one that arises spontaneously. The question can be answered only by abandoning logic and reasoning, through directly generating and breaking through the doubt sensation under natural causes and conditions. This doubt is not the ordinary doubt of skepticism, but the doubt of sincerely and urgently wanting to resolve a question regarding “life and death,” which is to say, the fundamental nature of one’s existence. In the practice of huatou, the practitioner repeatedly asks the question in the huatou until all wandering thoughts subside, and only the huatou remains in the mind. At that point, one is truly investigating the huatou, and the doubt sensation will arise. With consistent and diligent effort, the doubt sense will grow and increase, and eventually evolve into a “great mass of doubt.” When the great doubt is shattered, the realization that comes with it is the answer to the huatou, and the resolution of the doubt sensation. See: **Investigating Chan.**

#### **Eighth Consciousnesses: See: Consciousness, Yogacara**

**Emptiness:** (kong, Skt. shunyata) A central concept in Mahayana Buddhism referring to the absence of a substantial, unchanging, and abiding “self” in all physical and mental phenomena. Perhaps the best known expression of emptiness in the scriptures is

spoken by the Buddha in the *Heart Sutra*: “Form is not other than emptiness and emptiness is not other than form; form is precisely emptiness, and emptiness is precisely form.” This says that everything that we experience as “form” (phenomena) is without enduring “self” and therefore, “empty.” This can be partly explained through the law of conditioned arising together with the law of dependent origination. The law of conditioned arising says that all phenomena come into being, experience change, and eventually pass away; in other words, are impermanent. This being the case, no phenomenon can be said to have enduring self-identity. The law of dependent origination says that phenomena exist in a milieu of coming into being only through interactions among myriad other conditions and forces, and therefore nothing has separate and independent self-identity. However, it would be a mistake to think of emptiness as either some kind of substance or essence; and equally a mistake to think of emptiness as voidness, except in the sense of “void of selfhood.” Finally, understanding emptiness as a concept is not the same as actually experiencing emptiness itself. As such, Mahayana Buddhism teaches that emptiness is the result of practicing Buddhadharma to the point of actually realizing the self as “empty.” This realization can be called “awakening,” “bodhi,” or “enlightenment.” See: **Shunyata**

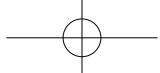
**Four Levels of Concentration of the Form Realm:** This refers to



the four dhyana levels that are progressive stages in meditative concentration in the realm of form. All the four dhyana levels are states free of the five hindrances of craving, aversion, sloth, restlessness, and doubt. Furthermore, these four form dhyanas are characterized by inward concentration of the mind, as distinct from the four formless dhyanas which are characterized by outward expansion of the mind. Although the differences between the four levels of the form realm are complex to describe, they are generally characterized as: 1) relinquishing desires and unwholesome factors, i.e., the five hindrances; 2) absence of discursive thinking; 3) feelings of joy and well-being; and 4) equanimity and clarity of mind. See: **Four Levels of Concentration of the Formless Realm.**

**Four Levels of Concentration of the Formless Realm:** As with the dhyana levels that characterize the form realm, these are progressive dhyana levels that characterize the formless realm. Where the dhyanas of form are concentrative, the formless dhyanas are expansive. Although the differences between these formless dhyanas are complex to describe, they are generally characterized as attainments of: 1) infinite space, 2) infinite consciousness, 3) nothingness, 4) neither perception nor non-perception. See: **Four Levels of Concentration of the Form Realm.**

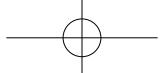
**Gatha:** (Skt. “verse” or “song”) The use of gathas in Buddhism



appeared first in many of the sutras, most often, they were spoken by one of the Buddha's enlightened disciples, to summarize the Buddha's teachings in verse form. The tradition of composing gathas to express deep spiritual insights was widely practiced among the early Theravada, and continued well into the Mahayana development, and continues to this day.

**Gong'an:** (“public case”; Jpn. koan ) A gong'an is a saying or anecdote from the records of the Chan masters that is used as a means of investigating Chan. The purpose is to focus the mind and create a doubt sensation to the point that all attachments and dualistic thinking are dropped, and the practitioner experiences a breakthrough – the direct perception of Buddhist “emptiness.” The gong'an can be resolved only by abandoning logic and reasoning, directly generating and breaking through the doubt under natural causes and conditions. Famous gong'an encounters were recorded and used by masters to test their disciples' understanding, or they served as a catalyst for enlightenment. In Chan, gong'an practice is closely associated with the practice of huatou. See: **Emptiness, Huatou, Wu.**

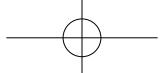
**Hongren Damian (601-674):** Recognized as the fifth patriarch of Chan Buddhism, well-known for having transmitted the Dharma to Huineng as the sixth patriarch of Chan. See: **Huineng.**



**Huangbo Xiyun (d. 850):** Eminent Tang dynasty Chan master who was a disciple of Master Baizhang and a teacher of Master Linji. By the time he died he had transmitted the Dharma to thirteen disciples, of whom the most prominent was Master Linji. See: **Baizhang, Linji.**

**Huatou:** (“head of a thought”; Jpn. wato) Huatou is a meditative practice unique to Chan and Zen in which one investigates an enigmatic question, such as “What is your original face?” or just a single word, “Wu,” to give rise to a “doubt mass” that, when resolved, can lead to realization of emptiness. The method can only be penetrated if the practitioner abandons the conceptual and discriminating mind while continuously practicing the huatou. In Chan, huatou practice is closely associated with the practice of gong’an. See: **Gong’an, Investigating Chan, Zhaozhou.**

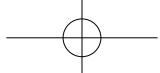
**Huike Dazu (ca. 487-ca. 593):** Legend has it that the monk Huike’s zeal to learn from Bodhidharma was so great that to demonstrate his sincerity, he cut off one of his arms while standing knee-deep in snow. According to the story, Bodhidharma then accepted Huike as a disciple, and eventually transmitted the Dharma to him. Bodhidharma and Huike are recognized as the first and second patriarchs of Chan, respectively. See: **Bodhidharma.**



**Huineng Dajian (638-713):** The Sixth Patriarch of Chan, who became enlightened as a young man when he overhead someone reading aloud from the *Diamond Sutra*. After joining the monastery of Fifth Patriarch Hongren at Dongshan, Huineng received transmission from the latter to become the sixth patriarch. At the time, Huineng was still a layman and did not receive the vows of a monk until years later. See: **Platform Sutra**.

**Incense Board:** (xiangban; Jpn. kyosaku) A thin, flat wooden board traditionally employed by a Chan or Zen meditation master or teacher to strike the shoulder of a sitting practitioner to stimulate more diligent effort, or to rouse them out of torpor or laxity. The purpose is not punitive but rather to help the student, and somewhat paradoxically, it is also used on a practitioner who is in an advanced state of “ripeness” and is meant to stimulate them to realization. In Chan Buddhism, the use of the incense board was most prevalent in the Linji lineage; in modern times the use of the incense board is less prevalent. See: **Linji Yixuan**.

**Investigating Chan:** A term unique to Chan and Zen Buddhism to describe the practice of contemplating a gong'an or huatou in order to generate a doubt sensation, and to resolve that doubt and attain realization. See: **Doubt Sensation, Gong'an, Huatou, Wu**



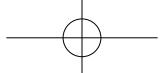
**Koan:** See: **Gong'an.**

**Linji Yixuan (d. ca. 866):** The founder of the Linji (Jpn. Rinzai) School of Chan Buddhism during the Tang dynasty. Linji was famous for his vigorous style of exhorting his disciples to greater effort, using shouting and striking as expedient means. The Linji lineage still exists today, along with its counterpart tradition, the Caodong (Jpn. Soto). See: **Caodong**

**Mazu Daoyi (709-788):** One of the greatest teachers in the Chan tradition and one of the most colorful, Mazu was a second-generation disciple of Sixth Patriarch Huineng. As a teacher he was one of the most influential in developing the methods of directly contemplating the nature of mind as buddha, and the use of vigorous methods of cultivating sudden enlightenment.

**Nirvana:** (Skt. “extinction”) Nirvana is the state of having overcome all mental defilements and achieving liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsara); that is to say, when all worldly attachments and desires have been “extinguished.” Correspondingly, nirvana is the state of being free from karma, the chain of cause and effect. See: **Samsara**

**Original Face:** The term “original face” is synonymous to other



terms that refer to one's true nature as one that is entirely free of attachment to the sense of having a separate self. As such, “original face” is sometimes used interchangeably with such terms as “true nature,” “original nature,” and “buddha-nature.” The meaning and use of “original face” is exemplified in the exchange between Sixth Patriarch Huineng and the monk Huiming, who wanted Huineng to teach him Dharma. Huineng asked: “Not thinking of good, not thinking of evil, what was your original face?”

**Patriarch Chan:** The method of Chan Buddhist cultivation associated with the lineage of great Chan teachers beginning with Bodhidharma of the 6th century as First Patriarch through Sixth Patriarch Huineng of the Tang Dynasty. As such, the guiding tenets of so-called Patriarch Chan can be found in the saying: “A special transmission outside the scriptures, not established on words and letters, by pointing directly to the mind, realize one’s true nature and attain buddhahood.” In terms of practice, for the Chan patriarchs, this meant that practice was more about contemplating the mind than just scriptural study and rituals, and that Chan practice is also found in daily living, not just inside monasteries and meditation halls. Subsequent to the six historical patriarchs, there have been many eminent monks and nuns, some of whom are deserving of the honorific “patriarch” or “matriarch.” However, historically, the six founding patriarchs

of the Chan School are considered to be:

First Patriarch of Chan, Bodhidharma (ca. late 5<sup>th</sup>-early 6<sup>th</sup> CE)

Second Patriarch of Chan, Huike (487-593)

Third Patriarch of Chan, Sengcan (?-606)

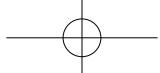
Fourth Patriarch of Chan, Daoxin (580-651)

Fifth Patriarch of Chan, Hongren (601-674)

Sixth Patriarch of Chan, Huineng (638-713)

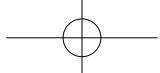
**Platform Sutra:** The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, attributed to Master Huineng, is the only scripture from Chinese Buddhism that has been elevated to the status of being called a sutra. It is also the only written body of teachings left by the Sixth Patriarch, and is considered the full expression of the ideals of Chinese Chan Buddhism. See: **Huineng**.

**Pure Land:** Also known as the Western Paradise, the Pure Land is the realm of rebirth that devotees of Pure Land Buddhism aspire to by reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha, whose vow was to promise rebirth in the Pure Land to those who recite his name. This practice is also known as Mindfulness of the Buddha. The term Pure Land also refers to the Pure Land School, which appeared in China as early as 200 CE, and gained great prominence in subsequent centuries, and spread to Japan around the 12th century. See: **Amitabha, Western Paradise**



**Samadhi:** (Skt. “make firm”) In general, samadhi refers to a state of meditative concentration in which one has reached a degree of single-minded absorption where the sense of time is foreshortened or even temporarily lost. Someone in deep samadhi for hours, upon coming out of samadhi, may think only a few moments had passed. There are many levels of samadhi from shallow to deep enlightenment. In Buddhism, samadhi is not equated with enlightenment so long as the practitioner still retains a sense of self. See: **Dhyana, Four Levels of Concentration of the Form Realm, Four Levels of Concentration of the Formless Realm.**

**Samsara:** (Skt. “journeying”) The continuing cycle of birth and death that sentient beings are immersed and remain in, as long as they carry a karmic burden. As long as one is in samsara, one will be reborn into one of its three realms: the desire realm, the form realm, or the formless realm. Inhabitants of the desire realm include hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, jealous gods, and heavenly beings. The inhabitants of the form and formless realms are spirit beings at various levels, depending on the conditions of their rebirth. But by and large the form and formless realms can be considered as spiritual, i.e., non-material, realms. To fully transcend samsara, a sentient being must practice to achieve complete cessation of the process of producing new karma. When this is accomplished, one enters the state of nirvana. However, Mahayana Buddhism teaches that samsara



and nirvana are not two different realms: the difference is within the mind of the sentient being – one mired in accumulating karma, the other totally liberated from karma.

**Self-Nature:** In Chinese Buddhism, the term “self-nature” (*zi-xing*) is synonymous with “buddha-nature” (*fo-xing*). It is important to understand that “self-nature” is not the “cause” of “buddha-nature,” or vice versa, but that they are essentially one and the same. The distinction, if there must be one, is that seeing one’s self-nature is the result of putting aside delusory thinking, especially that of having a “self,” and directly experiencing that one’s mind is originally pure and buddha-like. This corresponds to the saying of the Chan patriarchs that “Mind is Buddha.” See: **Buddha-Nature.**

**Sheng Yen** (1930-2009): Eminent contemporary Buddhist master, born in Shanghai to a farming family, who became a novice monk in a Chan monastery at the age of thirteen. During the height of the Communist revolution, he was inducted into the Kuomintang Nationalist army and was sent to Taiwan when the government retreated to Taiwan. During his army years in Taiwan, he had an encounter with Chan Master Lingyuan Hongmiao (1902-1988) with whom he experienced realization. After leaving the army he returned to monastic life, taking vows again under Master Dongchu (1907–1977). During this time he spent

six years in solitary retreat in a mountain domicile. After that experience, wanting to learn as much as he could about Buddhadharma, he enrolled at Rissho University in Tokyo. There he earned a master's and a doctorate in Buddhist Literature in six years. After graduation, he returned to Taiwan, and shortly thereafter, went to the United States in order to teach Chan Buddhism. There he established the Chan Meditation Center in Queens, New York. When Master Dongchu passed away, Master Sheng Yen returned to Taiwan to assume abbotship of Dongchu's Nung Chan Monastery. In 1995 Master Sheng Yen established Dharma Drum Mountain, the monastery and educational complex located in Jinshan Province, Taiwan. In 1999 he established the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in New York State. He passed away peacefully in Taiwan, on February 3, 2009.

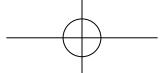
**Shifu:** In Chinese Buddhism, the term “*shifu*” (“father-teacher”) is an honorific that students and disciples use to address or refer to a master or teacher. Although the term has a masculine derivation, nowadays, “*shifu*” can be used to address or refer to either a male or female teacher.

**Shunyata:** (Skt. “emptiness”) Put most simply, shunyata has two aspects, the objective and the subjective. From the objective view, shunyata refers to the emptiness which is the true characteristic of phenomena, in the sense of being impermanent and without

self-identity. In the subjective sense, shunyata refers to the direct experience of this emptiness and, depending on its depth and intensity, constitutes a realization that can be called by such terms as “bodhi,” “awakening,” “realization,” “enlightenment,” and the like. See: **Emptiness**.

**Siddhartha Gautama:** The birth name of the Buddha (“the Awakened One”), a scion of the Shakya clan, in Northern India in what would be modern day Nepal. Born in the later 6th century BCE, there is no firm consensus as to his actual birth and death dates, or his place of birth. What is fairly well established is that, in his late twenties, he left a princely life to become an traditional Indian ascetic, and after six years of austere practice, became enlightened, and began teaching others the way to end suffering. What he taught is called the Dharma (“truth”), or Buddhadharma. See: **Buddhadharma**.

**Silent Illumination:** (mozhao chan) Silent Illumination is the method of meditative concentration in which the sitter focuses with full attention and effort on the present moment of sitting in meditation, leaving behind all other concerns and allowing the mind to gradually settle into “silence” of its own accord. One may also say that this silence is an expression of intrinsic self-nature in which fundamentally, there is neither arising nor perishing. When the mind eventually achieves a deep level of silence, it



enters the “illumination” phase and experiences expansive spaciousness and acute clarity. This spacious clarity is “illumination,” which is to actually experience that in self-nature, there is neither arising nor perishing, and therefore in reality, there is neither gain nor loss. When this state is persevered in, it is possible to experience Chan realization, or enlightenment. In Chan Buddhism, Silent Illumination is associated with the Cao-dong School (Jpn. Soto). Its principal exponent was Master Hongzhi Zhengjue of the Song dynasty. See: **Caodong**.

**Tathagata:** (Skt. “thus come, thus gone”) “Tathagata” can refer to either a transcendent buddha, such as Amitabha, or an incarnated buddha, such as the historical Shakyamuni Buddha. It is also among the Ten Epithets of a buddha, and connotes a buddha’s most universal aspect. See: **Ten Epithets of the Buddha**.

**Ten Epithets of the Buddha:** The Ten Epithets are honorific names for the Buddha which also represent his unique characteristics and powers. Although there are variations among different lists, the one below with the corresponding Sanskrit, is a representative and common one.

Tathagata (“One Who Has Thus Come”) (*tathagata*)

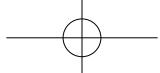
Arhat (“Worthy One”) (*arhat*)

Perfectly Enlightened One (*samyak-sambuddha*)

Perfected in Knowledge and Conduct (*vidya-carana-sampanna* )

Well Gone One (*sugata*)  
Supreme One (*anuttara*)  
Knower of the World (*loka-vid*)  
Leader of All People (*purusha-damya-sarathi*)  
Teacher to Gods and Humans (*shasta deva-manushyam*)  
World Honored One (*bhagavat*)

**Transmission:** In Buddhism, the generic meaning of “transmission” refers to the act of teaching, sharing, or spreading to others, the teachings of the Buddha, called “the Dharma,” or “Buddhadharma.” Thus, the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni Buddha, can be said to have transmitted the Dharma to all sentient beings in general, and to his disciples in particular. In the specific sense, “transmission” refers to a special recognition given by an enlightened Buddhist teacher to one of his or her students who, in the teacher’s judgment, has had a genuine experience of enlightenment. The person who receives transmission thus becomes a “Dharma heir” of the person giving transmission. In Chan Buddhism, as well as in other schools, this special transmission usually occurs within the context of a specific historical lineage of enlightened teachers. In other words, the teacher who gives transmission is presumptively a recipient of transmission from another teacher in the lineage, and so on. Such transmissions are understood to be accepted as authentic to adherents within that lineage. Traditionally, one of the key aspects of giv-



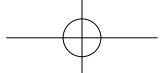
ing Dharma transmission is that it also grants permission to the Dharma heir to teach on their own. Having received transmission from a lineage master, a Dharma heir is presumptively qualified to give transmission to a student of their own.

**Tripitaka** (Skt. “three baskets”) A term referring to the three groups of the Buddhist canon: the vinaya, the codes of conduct; the sutras, the sermons of the Buddha; and the abhidharma, a compendium of psychological analysis and treatises.

**Vinaya:** See: **Tripitaka**.

**Western Paradise:** Another name for the Pure Land of Amitabha. See: **Pure Land, Amitabha**.

**Xuyun (1840-1959):** Master Xuyun (“Empty Cloud”) was one of the most eminent modern Chan masters. As a monk he practiced profound austerity while at the same time being active in teaching, writing, spreading Dharma, and restoring and establishing monasteries. Remaining in China during the Communist revolution, he was captured and tortured by soldiers. Xuyun was one of the leading modern exponents of the practice of huatou. See: **Huatou**.



**Yogacara:** (Skt. “practice of yoga”) One of the most important schools in the Indian Mahayana tradition, which began around the fourth century. The Indian philosophers most associated with the school are Asanga and Vasubandhu. The fundamental idea of the Yogacara school is that all phenomena are manifestations of the activities of the mind with its eight consciousness. This focus gave rise to the designation of the school as the Consciousness-Only school. See: **Consciousness**.

**Zen:** Zen Buddhism was transmitted from China to Japan around the 12th century, after which Zen Master Dogen Kigen (1200-1253) became its most famous proponent. The name “Zen” is a transliteration of the Chinese “Chan,” which in turn is the transliteration of the Sanskrit “dhyana” referring to the methods of meditative concentration developed in the Hindu and early Buddhist traditions. See: **Chan, Dhyana**.

**Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897):** Zhaozhou was one of the most eminent Chan masters of the Tang dynasty, and one of the most often quoted. He was particularly noted for his idiosyncratic and unconventional methods of teaching and speaking, and among Chan masters he is one of the most represented in several gong'an anthologies. Perhaps his most famous single gong'an is the one where he was asked if a dog had buddha-nature, and he replied “Wu,” meaning “non-existent” or “no.” This seeming

contradiction of a fundamental Mahayana teaching has intrigued Chan masters to the point where this one syllable, “Wu” (Jpn. “mu”) is the most frequently used huatou, as in the question “What is Wu?”

## **Soundless Words Carry the Loudest Message**

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—— My beloved mother, Mrs. Rangmei LuoDeng, passed away on May 25, 2014, at the age of 100. I am writing this article to memorize the few moments in her life. From now on, I'll be doing my best on the Buddhist path, so as to repay the debt of gratitude which I owe my mom.

Looking back at my life, I find that all that I have been able to achieve are due to the guidance and strict trainings given by my master Ven. Sheng Yen and grand master Ven. Dongchu. However, few people know that I also have a loving mother who always stands behind me and supports me with her endless love, giving me the strength to keep

moving forward.

My mom is quite short and small. She grew up without any education. When she was very young, she was given away to others by her own parents. Soon afterwards she was arranged to marry my father as a child bride and helped him to start his career. However, once the family got richer and my father had more money, he indulged himself and married a younger concubine, and no longer cared about my mom and me.

When I was 4 years old, my mom left the original home with me and managed to make a living by serving around as a housemaid. At that time we often moved here and there without a secure home. I still remember clearly that one time we went to seek help from a relative who ran a coal plant. However, we did not get much help from that relative. Right beside the coal plant, my mom put up a shed with wood planks and put some meager grocery goods on the shelves outside the shed. In this way we made a bare living by selling these goods.

Outside the coal plant there was a very old cabin. We used some planks to build a small bed, and we eventually had a place to sleep, a simple home, so to speak. Because

the roof of the cabin was broken, we could see the sky day and night. During the day, the sun was my friend; at night, the stars and the moon accompanied me to sleep. Every time when it rained, the raindrops would fall through the broken roof and a “sonata of rain” would reverberate around us. I can remember that melody even today! However, we need to use buckets and jars to hold the rain water, otherwise the rain would soon wet the whole bed. In cold nights like that, my mom and I would always cuddle together to keep warm and sleep.

Because the place is quite rural, the space around the cabin was overgrown with weeds. We cleared the weeds right near the cabin, but in summertime many snakes would still be wandering around. At the beginning we did not have electricity, and had to spend the nights in darkness. Later we had electricity. Although we could only afford to use a very small bulb, that tiny light seemed so bright and warm to me in the dark night.

At that time, we were often bullied and insulted with rough words by other people, but my mom would only swallow down her own tears and did not let out any negative emotions. However, language between kids can be even rougher, and they often jeered at me for being

short, or for being poor. Usually I could still tolerate these words, but if they laughed at me as “a kid without father,” I would fight with them with all my strength. Being short, I always lost the fight. So, when I went home, usually I was blue and black all over the face and crying. Even at that time, I would still continue to say “I have a father, I have a father!” When my mom saw this, she could no longer hold back her emotion and would burst into tears. Seeing mom crying, I felt more suffering inside. Slowly I learned to be tough, and no matter what I have met with outside, I would not go home to tell my mom, because usually she would cry harder than I. So, gradually, I also learned to swallow my own tears.

During difficulties, my mom’s faith and benevolence had given me great strength. My mother always had her faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva. No matter how much we suffered, she would chant the holy name of Guanyin Bodhisattva again and again. And when I was 4 years old, I have already learned how to chant “homage to Guanyin, the bodhisattva of great compassion and rescuer for suffering people.” At that time, we could not afford to buy incense, or any Buddha’s or Bodhisattva’s images. All we could do was to point our hands toward the sky and kept chanting “homage to Guanyin, the bodhisattva of great compassion and

rescuer for suffering people,” and made prostration after each chant. At that time I often met difficulties, but as I did not want to burden my mom with my own sufferings, I would just cry by myself. When that happened, I would remember my mom’s teaching: to chant the holy name of Guanyin Bodhisattva and pray for the strength and courage. As I chanted that holy name again and again, my own suffering seemed to fade away, and real strength and courage would start to well up inside, enabling me to continue facing all the challenges in my life.

Back then, it was really hard for a single mom with a young kid to make a living. To survive, later on mom could only go to a monastery to help with cooking and chores. Compared with society, a monastery is a relatively simple place. At least we could have a place to live, without having to worry about the living expenses. After a while we came to the Yuanhua Temple in Zhongli.

As I grew older, I’ve learned to endure more and more suffering. Nevertheless, deep inside I was filled with resentment: why did my father abandon us? Why do I have to wander around without a home, currying to other people’s whims and bearing all those sufferings? Of all the people in the world, why should I be the only one

condemned to such a miserable life? And why does the Universe treat us so mercilessly, as if we were dogs or pigs? I harbored so much resentment that one day when I was helping in the kitchen, I used long beans to line up on the table to form the word ‘Hatred’. That really made the monastics in the kitchen deeply worried.

On one hand, as Yuanhua Temple is a nunnery, and at that time I was already a fifth grade pupil, about to approach adolescence, it was not quite suitable for me to continue living there. On the other hand, my resentment really worried people in Yuanhua Temple very much. After their discussion with my mother, I was sent to the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture.

At first, I thought I was only spending the summer there. However, when the school’s summer break was over, I came to know that I had to stay in that institute and become a monastic. Why me? I don’t want to become a monk! I was only 12 years old, and I felt so lonely and helpless. I could not see the future of my life. A life like this is almost meaningless to me, so I went up to the hill behind the Institute of Buddhist Culture, and made a noose on a tree. At that moment I thought about my mom: if I commit suicide, how is my mom going to deal with it? Once I

realized that, I abandoned the plan without hesitation.

In the Chinese tradition parents always expect their children to be able to grow up safely, have a successful career, and be blessed with a good marriage and many kids. And when they grow older they can retire and play with the grandchildren. As long as they can raise the children, who would send their own kids to become a monk? So when my mom made that decision, she must have come to the end of her resources. With no one or nothing she could rely on, she probably felt quite helpless and cried deep inside her heart.

Eventually mom and I settled down at the Institute of Buddhist Culture. Mom was assigned to do cooking in the kitchen, while I became a novice monk. Though Master Dongchu has applied much skillful training on me, I was still quite rebellious and did not want to be tamed. I tried to run away, living in a classmate's home. Even though the monthly allowance was meager, mother tried her best to cover my daily living expense. I kept running away, but Master Dongchu kept snatching me back. As the mother of a run-away novice, she must have been stressed very much to deal with a lot of misunderstanding from the surroundings. But instead of letting out any complaints, my

mother kept chanting “homage to Guanyin, the bodhisattva of great compassion and rescuer for suffering people” in her heart. Those soundless words really carried the loudest message and helped her steadily weather out one difficulty after another throughout her life.

I have caused my mother so much worry and suffering, almost endlessly. As soon as I finished study in Eastern Buddhist College (currently part of the Foguang Shan Tsung-Lin Buddhist University), I was diagnosed to have a brain tumor. Then one side of my body became paralyzed, and I was crippled, with my eyes and mouth distorted. Besides, like a hidden bomb inside my head, the tumor could burst up at any moment, and I'll be finished. At that time the medical condition at Taiwan was still not well developed. Even though the surgery might save my life, but I'll probably end up lying in bed for the rest of my life. During those years Taiwan did not have any social security system, and the surgery cost was enormous. As a poor monk, I could never afford that. So once again I was left in a lonely, helpless situation to face the trial in life. And, after spending so many years to bring me up, my poor mom could only watch her young son drag his body around, almost like a living corpse.

At that time I was no longer the rebellious young kid. I had read many Buddhist scriptures and did some years of practice. I even became a Dharma teacher. But when facing the torture of the disease and the fear of death, I could not stay in peace and calm, not to mention using the adversity as a stepping-stone for practicing. It was only after my Shifu, Master Sheng Yen, returned to Taiwan from USA that I was able to follow him and practice successfully. His strict training made me realize the true reality of life! One time after a Chan retreat ended, Shifu asked me to share my experience with other practitioners. Very soon after I began, I burst into tears, and Shifu also wept beside me. Afterwards Shifu came to my mom and told her: "Mrs. Xiuying, It is only until today that I have a real disciple, and you have a real son!"

In 1984, when I returned to Taiwan from Malaysia, my mom was already 70 years old. She told me that she was no longer fit to work in the kitchen. According to the monastic rules no non-monastic could retire and spend the rest of the life in the temple. If my mom could no longer work in the monastery, she would lose her eligibility to continue living there. What should I do? Mom had spent so much effort to bring me up, how could I leave her alone to spend the rest of her life in poverty and disease? After

some inner struggle, I left the Institute of Buddhist Culture with my mom.

Step by step I founded practice centers in Zhonghe and Beitou, in the suburb of Taipei. Mom was living with me in the Jade Buddha Monastery in Zhonghe. Although she was no longer as healthy as before, she kept a regular daily routine, participating in the morning and evening service. No matter whether it was the time for chanting or for prostration, she always kept the chant of “homage to Guanyin, the bodhisattva of great compassion and rescuer for suffering people” in her heart. She often invited other Dharma friends to chant the Holy name of Guanyin Bodhisattva with diligence. When old friends came to visit her, she would also share some stories about Ven. Dongchu and Ven. Sheng Yen, my Grand master and my Shifu. Sometimes she would even mention her own life stories, including the hard time she experienced and the embarrassing things that I did in my childhood.

Although my mother had lived a poor life, she was really fond of giving to the poor and making donation. She saved all the money that she could save, such as the fee to visit a doctor. She believed that all illness, big or small, can be cured without taking medicine as long as one continuously

chants the holy name of Guanyin Bodhisattva. For example, she was very liable to carsickness, so she was not a big fan of taking cars. However, if truly in need of taking a car, she would make pre-arrangement to get the promise from Guanyin Bodhisattva, and, even without taking any carsick drugs, she would reach her destination safe and sound. She donated all the money she saved to the monastery for future constructions and maintenance. She believed that, by doing so, she could help to spread the Dharma, so that more people would know its true benefit.

The biggest enjoyment in my life was holding my mom's hand and taking a walk with her. For many years mom could still walk with me outdoors. Later on, as mom got older and older her physical condition weakened dramatically, so we could only walk for a few rounds slowly inside the temple hall. At that time, just by watching my mom peacefully chanting the Buddha's name, I would feel tremendously joyful. When I was guiding Chan retreats, there would often be some elderly participants, and I always felt as if they were a reflection of my mother.

My mom quite often asked me "have you put on enough clothes" even when I was in my sixties. Every time I heard her question I was amused, because it should be me who

ask her this question. How could she still be treating me like a young child? It probably means that in her eyes I am always a kid. All parents love their children. In particular, a mother's love and care would never vanish even when their children grow older.

In recent years I was often invited to guide Chan retreats in some part of the world, and I had lesser and lesser time to stay with my mom. Every time when I was about to leave, she would always exhort me: "take good care of the students, be sincere and humble, and fully enjoy teaching everyone. If the students don't understand your teaching, do not blame them, and never think of yourself as superior to others." With every word and every sentence mom wished from her heart that her "young" monastic son could use the Dharma to benefit more people.

No matter how far I traveled, I would always manage to call my mom, waiting to hear her voice coming from the other end of the line. Often I would ask: "mom, I've had a good meal, how about you?" And mom would always send back the same question: "I've had a good meal, how about you?" Then I'll reply: "yes, I did." The conversation was usually that simple, but after hanging up the phone my heart was filled with joy and contentment. Mom worked so

hard to earn every meal to bring me up; a simple word of “I am full” means a lot to both of us.

Even though what my father did had broken mother’s heart, she never resented him. When she knew that I still felt resentful toward my father, she told me that I don’t have any right to do so, because what happened between him and her has nothing to do with me. As it was my father who gave me the life, I should still treat him like the father. When my father fell ill, mom persuaded me to send money to him. When he passed away, she also required me to do all the service.

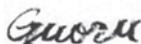
After I grew up, sometimes I would have lost my patience and talked with her not so politely. For example, a couple of years ago when mom could still walk, she would often go around the temple to pick some wild flowers to make offering to the Buddha. And when she saw so much weed at the roadside, she would continue clearing them until she almost got a heatstroke, in order to prevent school children from stumbling and make sure that no snake would hide there. I blamed her for not taking good care of herself, but she answered by saying that as long as she could still do some work, she would not hold back.

In her late age my mom was having a very severe osteoporosis. Two years ago her health condition deteriorated really fast, and she had to be hospitalized. However, she would not obey the doctors' instructions and refused to do any tests. Having no better way out, I challenged her: "if you are not cooperating with the doctors, I won't pay attention to you anymore!" However, my mom was not bothered by my trick and still did no test. At most she would take the prescribed medicine and ate little food. Gradually she lost her ability to swallow, and could only be fed through nasogastric tube. Meanwhile, her organs' functions as well as muscle strength all degraded drastically, and every single movement had to be taken care of by others.

Mom's body was too old to move around, but her mind still remained relatively clear. Sometimes when she felt really well she could still chat a little with me. Even when she got too tired to speak, her eyes were still filled with deep love for me. Because of my busy schedule, the time I could spend with her became lesser and lesser. Even so, mom had never complained about that. And every time when I was saying goodbye to her, I could always feel more loving care and encouragement in her eyes.

On this year's Mother's Day, mom did her usual routine of sitting quietly in the front yard of the temple and enjoyed the sunshine of early summer. Two days later I traveled to Europe to guide a Chan retreat. Soon afterwards I received the call that mom had passed away. At 100 years of age, mom dropped the hand that used to hold to the son and walked onto her own next path, so free and detached! Although I was guiding others in a Chan retreat, I felt a deep loss, with mom's image emerging in front of my eyes from time to time.

It is inevitable that people are born and people die. Hearing my mother's passing I can feel that truth even more! My master's and grand master's training as well as my mom's loving care and encouragement have made what I am today. I, Guoru, have no other way to pay them back but to devote the rest of my life to serve and guide others to realize their own buddha-nature, and to fully enjoy the true benefit of the Dharma. From now on, it will be my sole commitment to repay the kindness of my teachers, my mom, and all sentient beings.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Guoru".

Taipei, June 11, 2014

# DEDICATION OF MERIT

May the merit and virtue  
accrued from this work  
adorn Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land,  
repay the four great kindnesses above,  
and relieve the suffering of  
those on the three paths below.

May those who see or hear of these efforts  
generate Bodhi-mind,  
spend their lives devoted to the Buddha Dharma,  
and finally be reborn together in  
the Land of Ultimate Bliss.  
Homage to Amita Buddha!

**NAMO AMITABHA**

**南無阿彌陀佛**

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