

# *Instructions in Dhyana Meditation*

*Talks by the Venerable Master Hsu Yun*

Continued from issue #173

Ch'an Instructions:

4th Day

Already four of the seven days have gone by and all of you are working hard. Some people have submitted poems and verses for me to look at and this is really special, but using effort in this way shows that you have forgotten the instructions I spoke two days ago. Last night I said that cultivation has only this one method: simply recognize the right road. We are now investigating the hwa tou (Chan topic) . It is the road we should walk. Our goal is to accomplish Buddhahood and resolve birth and death. Wishing to resolve birth and death, we use the hwa tou like we would use a Vajra Jeweled King Sword.

*When the demons come, slay the demons.*

*When the Buddhas come, slay the Buddhas.*

Don't hang onto a single feeling; don't set up a single dharma. Where do we find the time to do so much polluted thinking and come up with all these verses and poems, or to see emptiness, or to see lights and other such things? If you use effort on such things as those, then I really don't know where your hwa tou has run off to.

The Old Masters did not put their emphasis on talking. Those of you who have just brought forth the resolve should be careful! Because I fear you don't know how to use effort, therefore two days ago I lectured on: the causes and conditions that created Chan sessions; the value of our School's method; and, the technique for applying your skill--each and every one I lectured.

Our method of applying effort is simply bringing up the hwa tou. In the six periods of the day and night don't let the hwa tou be interrupted; it should be like a flowing river. You want to be bright and sharp, alert, and constantly aware. With a single slice of the knife, slice all common emotions and sagely understandings.

The Ancients said,

*Studying the Way is like guarding the Forbidden City:*

*Alert and wary on the City's ramparts, always prepared for battle.*

*If the plum tree didn't endure the bone chilling winter,*

*How could the plum blossoms smell so sweet!*

This was spoken by Chan Master Hwang Pi. These are four sentences and two distinct meanings. The first two sentences are telling us to guard the hwa tou just like protecting the Forbidden City (the Emperor's palace and grounds in Peking). In olden times the Emperor was crowned "Son of Heaven," and was regarded as someone most high and noble. Afraid that evil people would make attempts on his life, his palace was tightly guarded. Outside the palace was a moat to guard the

Forbidden City. Nobody could enter these gates unless they were sanctioned by the Emperor. These city gates were under maximum security.

All of us have a Mind-king called the eighth consciousness. Outside the eighth consciousness there are the seventh, the sixth, and the front five consciousnesses. The front five consciousnesses are the five thieves: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and the body. The sixth consciousness is the mind thief. The seventh consciousness is the *manas* and is considered to be the "self" (the ego). It draws out the sixth consciousness and commands the front five consciousnesses. Greedy love for such dusty states binds us and confuses us without cease. The states seize the eighth consciousness Mind-king and harrass it so that we are rigidly bound and unable to turn ourselves around.

Today we want to take hold of the hwa tou and slay these mad thieves, thereby enabling the eighth consciousness to turn into Great Perfect Mirror Wisdom; the seventh consciousness to turn into Level and Equal Wisdom; the sixth consciousness to turn into Wonderful Contemplative Wisdom; and the first five consciousnesses to turn into Accomplishing What Must Be Done Wisdom. But the most important is to turn the sixth and the seventh consciousnesses because they are the leaders. Their strength lies in skillful discrimination and calculation. Now, when you compose verses and poems, or you see emptiness and lights, those two consciousnesses are in action.

We are now borrowing the hwa tou to use it to transform the discriminating consciousness into Wonderful Contemplative Wisdom and the mind that calculates self and others into Level and Equal Wisdom. To do that is to turn the consciousnesses into Wisdom. It is to turn from being ordinary and turn into a sage. We want to prevent the thieves that have all along been so greedy for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, and dharmas, from encroaching upon us. Therefore, we say it's like "guarding the Forbidden City."

The latter two sentences of the verse, "If the plum tree didn't endure the bone chilling winter, How could the plum blossoms smell so sweet!" are an analogy for us living beings within the Triple Realm who sink in the sea of birth and death, who are tied up by the five desires, deluded by the dust fatigue, and unable to get free. We use the metaphor of the plum blossom because it blooms in the snowy season. The vast majority of the myriad things in the world are born in the spring, bloom in the summer, bear fruit in the autumn, and hide in the winter.

Winter weather is cold and so the insects, plants, and trees all freeze to death or go into hibernation. Even the dirt and motes of dust underneath the snow become cool, clear, and still, and they can't come up or fly. These insects, grasses, trees and things buried in the dirt and dust are like the false thoughts, discriminations, ignorance, jealousy and the other three poisons and afflictions within our minds. When we get rid of these things then the Mind-king naturally attains comfort and mastery. And this is just like the plum exuding fragrance. But we should note: the plum flower blossoms in the ice and snow of winter, not in the bright, bewitching light of spring, with its favorable winds and balmy weather.

We should be aware that when the flower of the mind blossoms, it doesn't come forth amid the conditions of happiness, anger, grief, and joy, nor does it appear where there is self and others, or rights and wrongs (gossip). Because as soon as these eight kinds of thoughts confuse us, our nature becomes indeterminate. Then if we do evil, our nature becomes evil. As soon as we do good, our nature becomes good. Amid this indeterminate state there is the blankness of dreams and the

blankness of dull emptiness. The blankness of dreams refers to the unconsciousness that occurs while dreaming--there is a totally illusory state of mind which makes us totally unaware of our activity during our waking state. This is one of the states of the "solitary consciousness," also known as the "indeterminate solitary."

The blankness of dull emptiness is similar to our situation while meditating when, in the midst of stillness, we lose our hwa tou. We become so profoundly empty and dazed that there's nothing at all and we are exclusively greedy for this state of purity and stillness. We who use effort want to stay far away from this "Chan sickness" called the "blankness of dull emptiness." We simply want to take hold of this hwa tou around the clock and be alert, bright, and not covered in darkness. We should maintain a penetrating understanding and be constantly clear. Walking it's this way, sitting it's this way, too. Someone of old said,

*Walking is Chan,  
Sitting is also Chan,  
Speaking or silent,  
In movement and stillness,  
The body's peacefully secure.  
Atop a lofty mountain peak,  
Gazing off into the four directions, boundlessness at every side;  
One sits in stillness, unaware of people.  
The lonely moon shines on the wintry pond,  
Yet there is no moon really in the pond.  
The moon is in the deep blue sky.  
I hum this song myself.  
But there is no Chan in the song.*

We, all of us here, have affinities with each other, so I've shared with you these words on applying effort. I hope you will all work hard and advance. Don't let your mind scatter into trivia. I'll tell you another public record:

In the past, at Pure Sandalwood Monastery on Chicken Foot Mountain, the First Patriarch of that monastery, after he left home, set out to wander in search of the teaching. In his cultivation of the Way he applied himself and was exceptionally vigorous, one night while staying at an inn, he heard a maid singing a song from the tofu shop outside the wall. The song went,

*Dofu Jang and Dofu Lee  
Travel a thousand highways in their dreams.  
But the next morning at break of day,  
They'll be selling dofu just the same.*

The Patriarch heard this while absorbed in meditation. Upon hearing her song he enlightened instantly. We can see that those of old used skill all the time, not just in the Chan hall, and so they could also get enlightened anywhere, not just in the Chan hall. In cultivation and in using effort, the essential point lies in being single-minded. Don't ever let your mind split up and become scattered. If you let the time pass in vain, then "next morning at the break of day, you'll be selling dofu just the same."

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