

# CHAN TALKS

by the Venerable Chan Master Hua

## VI. Investigate Chan with Firmness, Sincerity, and Perseverance

DHARMA WEALTH IS LOST,  
AND MERIT AND VIRTUE DESTROYED,  
DUE TO NOTHING ELSE THAN THE CONSCIOUS MIND.  
THROUGH THE DOOR OF DHYANA THE MIND IS ENDED.  
AND ONE SUDDENLY ENTERS THE POWERFUL, UNPRODUCED  
KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT.

-- from *The Song of Enlightenment*, by Great Master Yung Jya of the Tang Dynasty

Why is it that cultivators of the Way do not meet with success? Why don't they get a response from their sitting or any dharmas they happen to cultivate? Why is that although we create meritorious work, our merit and virtue disappears? It happens for no other reason than this: our conscious mind acts up. Our "mind" engages in polluted thinking; our "intellect" is busy calculating; and our "consciousness" is busy discriminating. Because our thoughts have not reached a single concentration, we cannot "still our thoughts."

Sitting in Chan is called "The stilling of thoughts." It means putting all errant thoughts to a complete stop. However, it's not easy for us to stop our automatic thinking system. The invisible wind of karma stirs up the sea of consciousness—huge billows and waves surge up, one wave after another without cease. Do our polluted thoughts have a physical appearance? No. You may be aware that they are there, but upon further scrutiny, you discover that they are baseless. Our polluted thoughts fly everywhere, from one place to the next like ocean waves, crashing on the shore. Sometimes they are like huge breakers; other times they are like small ripples. At ordinary times we are not aware of these polluted thought-waves because we live right in the midst of them and therefore do not recognize them as polluted thoughts. However, when we sit in stillness, even for a short moment, we become aware of how these uncountable numbers of thoughts surge up in our minds like the countless waves on the ocean.

Therefore, the SONG OF ENLIGHTENMENT says, "Dharma wealth is lost, and merit and virtue destroyed, due to nothing else than the conscious mind." When our thoughts are not focused, and we engage in random discrimination, then our eighth consciousness is torn by many thoughts of right and wrong, which rise and sink like waves. Because the mind, intellect, and consciousness are so busily involved in discursive thinking and speculation, we have an uncountable number of false thoughts. As a result, our Dharma wealth and merit and virtue are completely lost.

"Through the door of Dhyana the mind is ended." The door of Dhyana refers to the Dharma-door of Investigating Chan, when one doesn't apply effort on the discriminating intellect but instead one brings all thoughts to a single focus, stilling the mind. Then the mind reaches a state of impeccable purity. For this reason, in the Chan School we investigate a meditation topic, for example, "What was my original face before my parents bore me?" Actually, the meditation topic is also a false thought. That being the case, why do we still want to pursue one? It is because the meditation topic is a "mantra" to keep the monkey in check. If we didn't have a method to keep the monkey in check, then this monkey would scamper all about with wild abandon, jumping up and down. For this reason, we investigate a

meditation topic. We might investigate "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" and try to find out WHO is reciting "Amitabha Buddha."

Someone might say, "It's me who's reciting."

Well, you say you are reciting, but have you ever seen this person who is reciting? Do you truly recognize yourself? Your present body is a false union of the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air. When those four elements disperse, where have you gone to?

For this reason, we look into "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" We penetrate our topic, as if using a drill. The tougher the resistance, the more forcefully we have to bore through. We investigate, boring deeper and deeper into the question,...

Until the mountains come to an end and the waters are no more. Then, right when it's uncertain whether or not there's a road ahead, in the midst of the shadow of the willows and bright flowers, appears another village.

To put it in a nutshell, Chan is not manipulated or controlled by the discriminating consciousness. "

"And suddenly one enters the powerful, unproduced knowledge and insight." At this time, you enlighten to the power of the wisdom and vision that is not subject to production. Before you have understood, then even when you are sitting in Chan you are constantly engaged in false thinking, and that way, will never become enlightened. The requirement for becoming enlightened is to concentrate. If all the false thoughts in your head can be stopped, then your true wisdom will surface. Becoming enlightened means to understand, and to no longer be muddled.

Those of you who sit in Chan should not fear the pain your legs or back. You should bring forth a vajra-like resolve. Use the three qualities of firmness, sincerity, and perseverance. Be resolute, unchanging, and constant in your effort. The virtuous monks of ancient times would practice sitting for several decades. This work is not simple. It's not the case that you can "have peonies today and trade them in for lotuses tomorrow." It's not the case that you can become enlightened after having only sat for one day. You must develop patience and constantly attend this Chan class.

And in what way should you practice concentration? Look at the way a girl pursues her boyfriend or a boy pursues his girlfriend. If you can use the same kind of fervor and dedication in every passing thought of your investigation of Chan, then you will obtain success without fail.

## *VII. Demolish the Root Cause of Illness.*

The purpose of sitting in Chan is to regulate one's body and mind. By regulating your body, you won't engage in killing, theft, or lust. By regulating your mind, you destroy anger, greed, and stupidity. If you involve your body in killing, theft, and lust, you will have to undergo the retribution. If you engage your mind in greed, anger, and stupidity, you will fall into the hells. If you can get rid of your greed, anger, and stupidity, then your body will no longer engage in killing, theft, and lust, and you won't fall into the hells. Therefore, you must first of all subdue your mind.

The Vajra Sutra says, "Produce the thought that is nowhere supported." "Nowhere supported" means not dwelling in greed, anger, and stupidity. If you become attached to those three poisons, you will not be in accord with the Way.

Why do people kill? They kill because of greed. People are greedy for fine flavors or other advantages, and in order to achieve their aims, they kill. Why do we have wars? Because our greed acts up. Perhaps we are greedy for wealth, or for sex, for fame, food, power, and so forth. We go so far as to kill people in order to usurp their power or property. In the process, we create the causes, conditions, methods, and karma of killing.

Why do people steal? It is because they have hatred. Once you become hateful, you want to usurp others' goods and make them your own. You want a "free lunch," and so you steal. If your intention is to take advantage of others, and get off cheap, you are, in essence, violating the precept against stealing. This includes the causes, conditions, methods, and karma of stealing.

Why do people engage in lust? It is because they are driven by their stupidity. Stupidity, in this case, refers to being muddled and confused, thinking that promiscuity is a good thing, not realizing that it can cause one to lose one's precious energy, time, and internal treasures.

If people can temper their bodies, they won't engage in killing, theft, and lust. If you wish to refrain from those three acts, you must first get rid of your own greed, anger, and stupidity. The polluted thoughts in our minds are like the waves in the ocean. One wave comes and goes, then another wave wells up. After one polluted thought has subsided, another one follows in its wake. The mind is not honest and reliable, not obedient. To subdue the mind means that we train it to become compliant and obedient, like a good child. Sitting in Chan is for the purpose of subduing one's body and mind. Once the body and mind have become subdued, you will be free of any illness.

Why do people's bodies become ill? It is because people use their bodies to engage in all kinds of improper behavior, and as a result they develop physical problems. On a deeper level, we find that the root cause of illness lies within the mind. It is because the mind engages in greed, anger, and stupidity that physical illnesses develop.

For instance, let's consider the illness of cancer. One of the main causes of cancer is eating too much meat. Meat contains many toxins. Not only does meat contain toxins, our water and air are also filled with toxins. Although we need water and air for our survival, imperceptibly we are imbibing a lot of poison merely by breathing in the air and drinking the water. Since our drinking-water is contaminated with all sorts of chemical toxins, when we use that water in cooking the food that we eat, we end up taking those toxins into our systems. If, in addition, we add meat to our diet, then the poisonous effect is compounded. Actually, each kind of beast--cows, sheep, chickens, pigs, and so forth--has a physiological resistance system with which to combat the viruses and bacteria that come from outside. A constant battle of forces takes place within the animals' bodies, the internal resistance fighting the external agents. From this prolonged battle of forces, a tremendous momentum is generated, which also contains powerful toxins. When we eat those animals' flesh, the toxins undergo drastic bio-chemical changes in our own bodies, which become cancer-provoking agents.

Then there is the current attitude of promiscuity to consider. People are giving free reign to their passions, to the point of rampantly indulging in homosexuality. After accumulating all those poisonous substances into their bodies, it's no wonder that people are dying from an epidemic of AIDS. The body is a small-scale chemical laboratory, and the world is a large-scale chemical laboratory. Depending on the agents that are put into the chemical formula, a corresponding product will be produced. Since poisons are the agents being used, the results are inevitably poisonous. In fact, the poisonous byproducts from the chemical reactions that are going on within our physiological systems are many times more lethal than nuclear fallout.

Every day in the newspapers we read about how AIDS is taking its toll. People have been getting all stirred up over this current disaster, but now it's too late. Well, is there a way to conquer these vicious

illnesses? You must start by regulating your body and mind. Once your body and mind have been subdued, none of those viruses will be able to get at you. Therefore, Chan cultivators need not fear those illnesses. If you understand the principle of investigating Chan, and you can apply effort well, you will manage to demolish the root causes of all serious illnesses. You should know that this Chan class is not a small causal condition. In fact, it is a large one.