

CHAN TALKS

by the Venerable Chan Master Hua

We are now investigating Chan, sitting in the same hall together. But in actuality, Chan is not only practiced when you sit. At all times, whether you are walking, standing, or reclining, you are investigating Chan.

Walking, standing, sitting and lying down,
Do not be apart from this.
If you are apart from this,
Then you have made a mistake.

What is "this"? It is stilling your thoughts. If you can still your thoughts, then you will attain singleminded concentration. When your thoughts reach a single focus, you'll be successful in everything you do. Why is it that people don't have success in what they do? Because they have not yet attained singleminded concentration. If your thoughts reach a complete focus, then you will have concentration. And from concentration, you will develop wisdom.

Sitting in Chan, we don't want to seek spiritual penetrations or any kind of special effect. First and foremost, we should try to clean up our bodies so that we won't have any kind of illness. If you have a strong and healthy body, deviant energies won't have a way to encroach upon you. If you are able to maintain a vast flowing, righteous energy that reaches up to the heavens and settles the earth, then you will naturally give rise to proper knowledge and vision, and everything you do will be principled and rational. That is one of the benefits from sitting in Chan.

If in your mind you do not let waves arise, so that at all times you are without afflictions, without feelings of right and wrong, without awareness of self and others, right there you are getting the benefit of investigating Chan. You can personally experience the effects of sitting in Chan. First, you should turn the light inward and examine yourself: "Am I still as gluttonous as I was before I started to sit in Chan? Am I still as concerned with seeking fame as I used to be? Have I changed my faults? When I encounter unreasonable situations or things that don't go my way, do I get all upset over them?" If the answer to all of the above is in the affirmative, then it shows you haven't made much progress in your Chan investigation.

However, if you are able to change your personality defects and lessen your faults, then there's some good news for you. You can further examine yourself:

1. When you eat, are you able to eat delicious food and bad tasting food and treat them just the same? If you are able to do that, you can chase out the ghost of gluttony.

2. In work, is it the case that you only do things that are of advantage to you, and completely ignore things that are of no advantage to you? Are you lazy, trying to scrimp on material and goof off? If you are like that, you don't have any skill to speak of. However, if you have managed to change, so that you are willing to help with things that are of benefit to others, so that you like serving the public and you're no longer so egocentric, then you have expelled the ghost of laziness.

3. Furthermore, if you are able to become more and more energetic each day, and are no longer groggy and moving around as if in a daze, then you have driven out the ghost of drowsiness.

If you succeed in driving out the ghost of gluttony, the ghost of laziness, and the ghost of sleep, then you have made the first step in your cultivation of Chan. You must make a definite change from before, turn over a new leaf, and become a totally new person. As the saying goes, "The temple is the same, but the resident spirit is different." In this case, you can also say, "The temple is the same, but the resident ghost is different." Before a ghost king dwelled in your temple, now it is a Bodhisattva.

Maybe in the past you had an evil and poisonous heart, but now you've brought forth the compassionate heart of a Bodhisattva. Basically, just by the way you eat, you can tell whether or not you have skill in Chan. If you are still obsessed with good flavors and you are picky when it comes to choosing good foods, then you haven't derived any benefit from Chan. You must get rid of your past faults and habits. The most important things of all are your afflictions and your temper. If you can get rid of affliction, then it's like sediment that settles to the bottom of the water. When the water clears up and you are able to see from the top right to the bottom, right at this time, your wisdom will surface. If your mind is always turbid and you haven't swept out your afflictions and ignorance, then you won't attain any samadhi. And if you don't have samadhi, how much less can you speak of wisdom!

Therefore, sitting in Chan, you must have patience. If you make Chan the focus of your life, then you have to make a positive change regarding every aspect of your character and your actions. It's not the case that you are cultivating Chan only when you are sitting. Rather, you are working hard at all times and in all places. After some time, silently and imperceptibly, there will be a change and transformation, and you will have managed to remold your character.

If I have spoken correctly, you can practice accordingly. If I have spoken incorrectly, then you can forget it as if you've never heard me speak. If it is in accord with the Way, progress along with it; if it is against the Way, retreat from it. If you still have afflictions, quickly change. If you don't have afflictions, then all the more spur yourself onward. Don't let it be the case that you come here to sit in Chan, but when you go home you blow up. If people are without a temper, they are like the Buddha. But if they fly off into a rage, they are like ghosts. When they pout and frown, don't they look unsightly? If, on the other hand, you can be cheerful and optimistic at all times, then you have managed to turn things around. Afflictions can be transformed into Bodhi, just like turning over the

palm of your hand. All you have to do is turn it around. There's no need to seek outside.
It's all within yourself.