

# CHAN TALKS

*by Tripitaka Master Hua*

## *The Three-Cart Patriarch*

The purpose of investigating Chan and sitting in meditation is to investigate the nature of our false thinking: how do these thoughts arise? And how do they subside? Who is behind controlling those thoughts which arise and subside? The reason for sitting in Chan is to understand what we don't understand. If you want to understand, then you have to sit quietly. In Chinese, meditation is called "striking up a sit". It implies that you have to be beaten, and that it is painful. However, you have to bear it. Only with patience can you come to an understanding. You will understand:

"Why am I not in control of those thoughts which come into and then go out of being? I don't want them to arise, but they arise anyway; I don't want them to go away, but they stop on their own. If those thoughts are 'me', then why am I not in control? Since I am not in control, I must develop my wisdom!" The way to develop wisdom is to sit in meditation. "When stillness reaches the extreme point, light penetrates." When you can sit quietly to the extreme point, then your wisdom light will connect, and you will have a breakthrough.

However, during your investigation, do not be stuck to emptiness, and do not become attached to states of stillness. Sometimes people get stuck to the idea of emptiness. They think that everything is empty: killing is empty, committing arson is empty; robbing and stealing are empty, taking drugs is empty. All is empty, and so one can do anything one wants with a total disregard for the consequences.

On the other hand, people may get attached to states of stillness. Sometimes they come upon euphoric, blissful states in their meditation. Maybe a sense of lightness and ease appears, or some sublime vision, and they become attached to the flavor of Chan, thinking that this kind of state is more euphoric than smoking opium. This happens when people start to develop a little skill in their meditation. They feel extremely sovereign and at ease. However, they should not become attached to these states of euphoria. If you become attached to either emptiness or states of euphoria, you will not make it through the gate. You won't pass the test.

Now I will bring up a true account to illustrate this principle. When Tripitaka Master Sywan Dzang was on his way to India, he passed by a mountain, and in a cave he saw an old cultivator who had entered samadhi. It's not known how many years the cultivator had been in samadhi, but he must have been sitting for ages! The birds had built a nest in his hair. They would regularly lay eggs and raise their young while the old cultivator remained in samadhi. This proved that he had considerable skill! Dharma Master Sywan Dzang rang a bell to bring him out of samadhi.

At first, the old cultivator blinked his eyes and could not speak. After a while, he regained his power of speech. Dharma Master Sywan Dzung asked him, "Why have you entered samadhi?"

The old cultivator replied, "I'm waiting for Shakyamuni Buddha to come into the world. Then I will help him propagate the Buddhadharma."

Dharma Master Sywan Dzung said, "But Shakyamuni Buddha has come and gone already. He has already passed into Nirvana. You've missed your opportunity!"

"Oh, is that so?" said the cultivator, "Well, in that case I will go right back into samadhi again. I'll wait till Maitreya Buddha comes to this world before I come back out of samadhi."

Dharma Master Sywan Dzung said, "Don't go back into samadhi! It would be better if you came to China to help me propagate the Buddhadharma. Although Shakyamuni Buddha passed into Nirvana, the Buddhadharma still exists in the world. However, your body is old and decrepit, and so you need to switch to a new body. You need a new house."

The old cultivator asked, "How do I go about getting a new house?"

"Go to Chang An in China, and when you come to the house with the yellow glazed tiles, get reborn there. When I return from India, you can help me propagate the Buddhadharma."

In the past this old cultivator missed many opportunities. He wasn't there in time for Shakyamuni Buddha's birth, and now, although he had received specific instructions to get reborn in the house with the yellow tiles, he somehow managed to get it wrong, and instead went off to rebirth in the house with the green tiles. He was reborn as the nephew of Yu Chr-gung, the Defense Minister. From this we can see how he must have had a habit of procrastinating and getting mixed up in the process, to the point that he got reincarnated in the wrong house.

After about seventeen years, Dharma Master Sywan Dzung came back from India. The first thing he did was to congratulate the Emperor Tai Dzung on the birth of his son, "I sent back someone to be your son. He should leave the home-life."

But the Emperor said, "No. I didn't have a son while you were away."

"No?" said the Dharma Master, and he looked into it and realized that the old cultivator had gotten off the track and been reborn in the house of the Defense Minister instead. From the moment of his birth he was a strong and robust child, filled with heroic spirit. However, he was mischievous. He drank wine, ate meat, and, by the time he was thirteen or fourteen, he was already fooling around with women. Because his uncle was so influential, this young man did as he pleased and was pretty much his own boss.

Dharma Master Sywan Dzang went to see the Defense Minister Yu Chr-gung and told him the whole story. Yu Chr-gung replied, "This boy is so unruly that I have no way to manage him. It'll be perfect if you can convince him to leave the home-life!"

Thereupon he went and had a chat with his nephew. But the nephew glared and said, "Well, I certainly am not going to leave home! If you want to leave home, you can do so yourself!" Even Yu Chr-gung couldn't do anything about this nephew.

Finally Dharma Master Sywan Dzang related the circumstances to Emperor Tai Dzung, who said immediately, "I'll issue an imperial command and order him to leave home."

"Fine", said Master Sywan Dzang, "But it's likely he'll want to make it conditional. Whatever conditions he demands, just agree to them."

Then the young man came before the Emperor, and said, "If your Majesty wishes me to leave home, I will comply. However, I have my conditions. I want a cart of wine, a cart of meat and gems, and a cart of beautiful women to follow me wherever I go."

"Agreed," said the Emperor. So it was decided and the nephew headed for Da Sying-shan (Great Flourishing Goodness) Monastery to leave the home-life. Since he was the son of an official, there was quite a fanfare, and when the procession neared the temple gates, the big bell was rung and the big drum was beaten to welcome him. As soon as he heard the bell and drum he awakened: "Oh, that's the way it is. To start with I was an old cultivator on that mountain." With a flick of the hand he waved away the carts, "Take them back. I don't want them anymore."

But although he dismissed his carts, people still called him the "Three Cart Patriarch."

From this true account we know that even an old cultivator can get on the wrong path. Fortunately he met a good teacher who pointed out the right way so he could come back. Later on, he became Great Master Kwei Ji, the most brilliant and learned disciple of Tripitaka Master Sywan Dzang, and an important figure in the Consciousness-Only School. And yet at the start he took a wrong road and got reborn in the wrong house. Therefore, we should be careful not to be greedy for bargains when we sit. We should not be greedy for spiritual powers or euphoric states. At all times we should be on the alert. We don't want to become satisfied with a small achievement, and thereby draw limits on our own cultivation.