

Chan Talks

If Someone Can Sit Quietly for a Split Second

by Tripitaka Master Hua

***If someone can sit quietly for a split second,
The merit he acquires surpasses that of building seven-jeweled stupas as
many as the grains of sand in the Ganges River.***

A split second, that is, the shortest period of time, includes within it limitless great kalpas. Limitless great kalpas are not apart from our present single thought; our present single thought can unfold to encompass limitless great kalpas. When you can sit quietly for even a short period of time, during that moment you have no mark of self, others, living beings, or a life span. You are completely devoid of false thinking. At that moment, when not even a single thought arises and the myriad conditions have all been relinquished, you can compress limitless great kalpas into a single thought, and a single thought can be unfolded to include limitless great kalpas.

Having reached this stillness in your meditation for that very short period of time, you can go on to sit for half an hour, three hours, five hours, ten hours, or maybe seven days and nights, and you will still be sitting in stillness for that entire time. You can reach a place where inside you have no notion of a body and a mind, and outside you have no notion of the world.

The merit and virtue accrued from that stillness surpasses that of building seven-jeweled stupas as many as the grains of sand in the Ganges River. Why? Because the merit from building jeweled stupas still has shape and form and will eventually perish; however, if you can reach a point where inside you forget your body and mind, and outside you forget the world, then right at that point your prajna wisdom will appear. This wisdom has no tangible form: you can't see it, hear it, or smell it, yet it exists in and of itself. It is the enlightened nature of Bodhi.

If, for the shortest period of time, you cast off the mark of self, others, living beings, and a life span, then you interact with your fundamental Buddha nature. This fundamental Buddha nature illumines the true appearance of all dharmas. It is neither produced nor destroyed, neither increased nor diminished, neither pure nor defiled. It is only because we are stifled by our ignorance that the wisdom-sun of our nature does not appear. It is covered over by dark clouds of ignorance, which render us incapable of discerning right from wrong. We take right for wrong and wrong for right. We mistake a thief for our own son, engage in upside-down false thinking, and flow in birth and death, unable to pull ourselves out. We don't even want to pull ourselves out and separate from the false thinking of birth and death. How much suffering this is!

In Hunan province during the Tang dynasty, there was a cultivator known as the Old Man of Wei Mountain. He had achieved the samadhi that comes from sitting in stillness for even the shortest period of time. Having achieved this power of concentration, he was oblivious to the pleasures of money and wealth, and to emotional bonds between his family and friends. He had put down all notions concerning the five desires, that is, the desires for wealth, sex, fame, food, and sleep.

That's how true cultivators of the Way are. Even if they don't deliberately strive for fame, eventually people learn about their virtue in the Way. And that is what happened in the case of the Old Man of Wei Mountain. People began to flock to him, seeking to draw near him to make offerings and plant blessings and wisdom. His good reputation even reached the ears of the prime minister Pei Syiu. Pei Syiu himself went up the mountain to pay his respects to the old Dhyana Master.

When Pei Syiu arrived at the mountain, the only thing he found was a broken-down thatched hut. There wasn't even a bed inside the hut; there was only a sitting mat on which the old cultivator sat day and night. He didn't pay attention to visitors. When they came, he didn't budge; when they left, he didn't move. He didn't exert any undue effort to try to greet guests or send them off.

Pei Syiu thought: "This old cultivator doesn't even have a temple. Since I have a lot of money, I should make an offering to help him build a temple!" He then told his attendant to take out three hundred *taels* of silver. The Old Man of Wei neither accepted it, nor refused it. He sat there unmoving.

In the middle of the hut was a cluster of wild grass. Pei Syiu put the three hundred *taels* of silver in the grass and left. Three hundred *taels* of silver at that time would be equivalent to three million dollars in our current currency.

Three years passed, and one day Pei Syiu thought, "The temple is probably finished by now. I should go and take a look!"

When he reached the mountain, to his surprise he found only the same broken-down thatched hut. No new construction was in sight. Pei Syiu had this false thought: "Even when people give him money, he does not put it to good use. Here he is posing as a wretched and miserable old cultivator. Who knows what he did with the money?" Then he asked the Old Man of Wei, "What did you do with the funds I gave you for building a temple?"

The Old Man of Wei casually replied, "Where did you put the money in the first place? You should look for it right where you last put it."

Pei Syiu went to the cluster of wild grass, and the silver was still there! It hadn't been moved an iota during all that time. Then Pei Syiu had another false thought: "This old cultivator is extremely lazy. I offer him money, and he doesn't know how to make use of it. How could someone become progressively more stupid as he cultivates?"

Right then the Old Man of Wei spoke up: "Since you feel that I'm incompetent at handling funds, you should take them with you and use them for something else. I'm not interested in outwardly building any phony temples anyway."

Only then did Pei Syiu recognize that the Old Man of Wei was an extraordinary person. He then brought forth the resolve to personally oversee the building of a temple on that mountain and proceeded to carry out his resolve. However, Pei Syiu only knew how to build temples outwardly; he wasn't like the Old Man of Wei who knew how to build the temple of wisdom inside his own nature. Therefore, Pei Syiu's wisdom did not match up to that of the Old Man of Wei.

If you can manage to not have any false thoughts about the five desires, then you are someone who truly cultivates. Chan cultivators should emulate the spirit of the Old Man of Wei Mountain. Your mind should not move when faced with money. Don't sit there having false thoughts: "Right after meditation class, I'm going to take care of my next business transaction, and I'm going to make a lot of money..."

If you want to settle your bean curd accounts, figuring out how much money people owe you for how many cakes of bean curd, you'd better do it at home, not at the monastery.

From now on, people intent on making money should watch over themselves. Don't bring your old accounts to Gold Mountain Monastery and try to settle them here!