

CHAN TALKS

by the Venerable Chan Master Hua

Don't Be Speedy! If You're Too Speedy, or You Won't Get There

When they first enter college, many students have a definite idea of what they want to do after graduating from school. Whether students study science, philosophy, computer science, or other subjects, if they become caught up in their final goal but don't concentrate on their studies singlemindedly, they will not reach their final goal. That's because they have created a mental block that impedes their progress. For instance, a student wants to get a Ph.D. in medicine. Instead of focusing on his studies, he's always entertaining thoughts of how he will be a great doctor in the future. He'll probably never get there that way. He must for the time being get rid of those thoughts, and singlemindedly address himself to his studies. Then, in the future, he might realize his aim.

Sitting in Chan works by means of the same principle. The purpose of sitting in Chan is for us to become enlightened, to open up great wisdom, and to end birth and death. However, when you are sitting there, don't entertain these ideas: "When am I going to get enlightened? When will I open great wisdom? When will I end birth and death?" Instead, you should, with utter concentration, investigate the topic, "Who is mindful of the Buddha?" Don't pay attention to whether or not you will become enlightened, whether or not you will open great wisdom, whether or not you will end birth and death. If you constantly harbor those thoughts, you will never become enlightened. And why is that? Because you have something blocking your mind. You must, instead, forget about your body and mind, be completely free and at ease be without impediments or hangups, and singlemindedly look into the topic, "Who is mindful of the Buddha? When you investigate to the point that

*The mountains have all been scaled,
You've reached the river's end,
And you wonder whether there is a road ahead;
Then right among the dark willow shadows and the bright flowers,
Another village appears.*

That's the time you will come upon a totally different experience, something totally new to you. However, you don't need to harbor those kinds of thoughts, either. When your skill matures, you will naturally arrive at that stage. Don't be greedy for speed.

*Don't be Speedy. If you are too speedy, you won't get there... Don't set
your vision on small gains. If you set yours vision on small gains, big
matters will not come to success.*

-Analects of Confucius

Chan cultivators must bring their thoughts to a single focus and not entertain any polluted thoughts. If you're able to reach this level of concentration, then everything you do will work out fine. You will obtain the results you deserve. However, you shouldn't have thoughts of wanting to get something for nothing, such as, "I have just begun to sit, and I want some kind of miraculous response..." Don't be greedy for miraculous responses; don't go looking for them. If you are greedy for responses, you will easily take a wrong path and end up catching a demon. Demons will see that you are greedy for a bargain, and since you have left the door wide open, they will worm their way in. If you aren't greedy for speed and you aren't looking for a cheap deal, then the demons will have no way to bother you. All

of you should recognize this principle clearly before you attempt to sit in Chan. Don't overlook this important point.

Why did I just bring up the analogy of studying? It is because this general principle applies to studying as well as Chan. In whatever you do, just aim to go forward. Don't harbor thoughts of getting something out of it. If you have ulterior motives, you have already gone against the Way.

Now I will bring up a very simple analogy to illustrate my point. When you're hungry, all you have to do is eat, and then you will get full. However, if you only think about how hungry you are but you don't eat, then you will never get full. When you don't have enough clothes on you feel cold. All you have to do is put on more clothes, and you won't feel cold anymore. But, if you merely think about how cold it is and fail to put on more clothes, you'll not get warm.

The same principle applies to sitting in Chan. All you have to do is sit. You don't have to entertain thoughts such as, "When am I going to get enlightened? When will I open great wisdom? When will I end birth and death?" All you have to do is simply proceed with your investigation.

*The Way has to be walked.
If you don't walk it,
How could it be the Way?
Virtue has to be put into practice.
If you don't put it into practice,
How could it be virtue?*

You must apply whatever you have learned, and then you will obtain a response.

If you wish to obtain a response in Chan, first cast out six contradictory thoughts. Why do I call them "contradictory"? Say that on the one hand you want to get enlightened and to get great wisdom, but on the other hand you continue to fight, be greedy, seek, be selfish, seek personal advantage, and lie. Then you'll never achieve your goals, because those six contradictory thoughts go against the grain of enlightenment. So you must build a firm foundation in the Six Principles. Building a good foundation means smashing ignorance. The whole purpose of sitting in Chan is to smash your ignorance. Ignorance is not understanding. The very root of ignorance is love and desire. Therefore cultivators of Chan must be careful to cast out desire and sever thoughts of love. If you don't cast out desire and sever thoughts of love, and you try to get enlightened through sitting in Chan, you are attempting the impossible. This is an important point!

