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## **Teaching, Learning, and Upholding the Way in Chan Buddhism**

Dear Friends,

Good evening everyone! Tonight I would like to discuss the special characteristics of Chan Buddhism by looking at teaching, learning, and upholding the Way.

First of all, what does Chan have to do with us? What benefits are there to understanding and practicing Chan? Once we understand Chan and find Chan, our worries will be fewer in life; our views will no longer be distorted; and many contradictions and phenomenal differences will find resolution. With Chan, we will feel as light as a cloud, and be at ease. Being rich or poor, or having or not having will no

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longer matter. You will see through the illusions and vanities of this world and attain liberation and peace.

Once we find Chan, our fears in life will disappear; that is, we will not fear birth and death. Once we find Chan, our minds will be composed, giving us strength. In response to any eventuality, when one's thoughts are focused in meditative concentration, one can experience the power of Chan and easily accomplish all his or her wishes.

Chan is not for monastics alone. Everyone can practice Chan; whether you are a lay Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Catholic, or Daoist, Chan is common to all religions. Let me tell you a story to help you understand Chan.

There was once a famous Buddhist Master called Fu Dashi.<sup>1</sup> Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty invited him to lecture on the sutras. Fu Dashi ascended the platform, struck once with a ruler, and then sat down. Chan Master Baozhi, who possessed supernatural power, noted to the Emperor that, "Fu Dashi's lecture on the *Diamond Sutra* is finished!"

That is the way Chan is. The best explanation, the most precise language, is "to strike once with a ruler."

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<sup>1</sup> He was a great practitioner of the bodhisattva path.

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Although nothing is said, everything is said. This is the exalted Chan world in which “ten thousand conditions manifest without consequence as the body is unmoved in its original state.”

Another time when Fu Dashi was lecturing on the sutras, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty entered his carriage for a visit. Everyone respectfully stood up to welcome him, but Fu Dashi sat as impassive as Mount Tai. Someone hurriedly informed him, “The Emperor is coming. Hurry and stand up!”

“If the Dharma ground moves,” said Fu Dashi, smiling, “everything will be imperiled.”

All power and wealth pale before the Chan method. With Chan, worldly fortune and glory suddenly seem to lose importance.

On another occasion, Fu Dashi was wearing the hat of a Daoist priest, a kasaya (the robe of a Buddhist monastic), and on his feet he wore the shoes of a Confucian scholar. Upon seeing him, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty was perplexed. Astonished, he pointed at Fu Dashi’s hat and asked, “Are you a Daoist priest?”

“No,” replied Fu Dashi, pointing at his kasaya. “I am a Buddhist monk in a kasaya.”

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“You’re a Buddhist monk?”

“Look!” said Fu Dashi, pointing to his shoes.

“Oh, a scholar’s shoes. Are you a Confucian scholar?”

Fu Dashi waved his hand and pointed to his head, “Look! What am I?”

A Daoist hat, Confucian shoes, and a Buddhist robe: three schools in one. The meaning of the story is that Chan encompasses everything. It is not something that belongs exclusively to a senior Buddhist monk living deep in the mountains. Chan is something that a Confucian, a Buddhist, and a Daoist all need, something every member of society needs. Therefore, I hope that what I say to you today in this lesson about teaching, learning, and upholding the Way in Chan Buddhism will serve as a useful reference for you in your endeavors.

When it comes to teaching and learning, the Chan method traditionally has emphasized transmission from teacher to student, and teaching and learning to attain enlightenment. In many respects, Chan education is very different from the usual education as we know it today. Some of the differences include:

A. The Dharma of Silence: In society today,

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teachers and parents alike advocate an education of loving speech, of teaching by using kind and gentle words. Oftentimes, Chan masters do not use words but instruct face to face through silence. Silence, like a thunderclap, is grand and majestic, and louder and richer than language.

- B. The Dharma of Beating and Shouting: Society today advocates a loving education, an education of remonstrating with good intentions. But the Chan way emphasizes beating and shouting—a thunderclap to dispel ignorance and illuminate one’s true nature. Examples of this approach to education are exemplified by the expression: “With one shout from Chan Master Mazu, Venerable Baizhang will be deafened for three days”; and in the words of Chan masters Huangbo and Linji: “The Way can be explained with thirty beatings; the Way cannot be explained with thirty beatings.”
- C. The Dharma of Difficult Questions: Contemporary education stresses inspiring interest and guiding step by step. But the

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Chan way emphasizes asking difficult questions and challenging one's wits. As soon as one changes from being passively inspired to actively exploring, then one becomes a master and not a follower.

- D. The Dharma of Toil: Today's education puts a premium on a quiet environment for learning, on providing a tranquil and conducive atmosphere for study. But the Chan method not only seeks to teach in a conducive atmosphere, but also to an even greater extent advocates learning through daily tasks. Thus, carrying firewood and water are ways of practicing Chan; milling and threshing rice are ways of practicing Chan; cutting and carrying firewood are both ways of practicing Chan. Through diligent work, one can gradually arrive at an understanding of the meaning of Chan and savor the Chan way.

The implications of Chan can be elaborated through this style of teaching; cold and warmth can be distinguished by a drink of water; pain and pleas-

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ure can be distinguished by a fall; and one's own hardships are to be treasured and learned from.

I would now like to briefly discuss four points regarding the special characteristics of teaching, learning, and upholding the Way in Chan Buddhism.

### **I. Self-Realization of Intrinsic Nature**

The Chan way stresses that a person should determine things on his or her own, and not to be led around by the nose or swayed easily by the opinions of others. Self-realization of intrinsic nature is important. "With his own soaring determination, a man will not simply copy the way of the Tathagata." This is what characterizes the Chan master's self-realization.

Nanyin was a very famous Chan master. A skeptical devotee sought out the Master to debate about Chan. After the two met, Master Nanyin did not utter a word but instead poured a cup of tea for the lay Buddhist. The cup was full, but the Master continued to pour, and pour, and pour. Finally, the devotee could no longer restrain himself. "Master," he shouted. "The cup is full, stop pouring."

Only then did the Master speak. "Look!" he said

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smiling. “The cup of your heart is just as full and complacent; how will my Chan method ever fit?”

With but one sentence, the devotee was left speechless, unable to reply. In the Chan way, self-realization of intrinsic nature is a form of self-awakening, not egotistical self-satisfaction.

A scholar asked the Master, “Where is the Buddha?”

Think about it. Where is the Buddha? Do you think the Buddha is in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss? Do you think the Buddha is in the Eastern Pure Land of Azure Radiance? Actually, the Buddha is everywhere.

“The Buddha is on Vulture Peak,<sup>2</sup> but you need not journey far to find him—Vulture Peak is in your own heart.”

Someone asked the Master, “What is the Buddha?”

The Chan Master looked at him, opened his hands and said, “I can’t tell you. If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me.”

“You are the expert. How could I not believe

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<sup>2</sup> Also called Spiritual Vulture Peak, it is a place frequently by the Buddha.

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you?”

“All right,” said the Master, nodding. “What did you just ask? Ask me again.”

“I asked, what is the Buddha?”

“You are. You are the Buddha.”

“Oh, no! All of us are just average people. How can you suddenly say that I am the Buddha?”

In the Chan School, the self-realization of intrinsic nature is a way to transform one’s sensibilities into intrinsic being. Recognizing this will allow you to be a Buddha or a bodhisattva without inventing special names or flattery. The most important points about the self-realization of intrinsic nature are: “How to sustain it? And how do I know that I am a Buddha?”

A Chan master’s reply; “A cataract over the eyes can make a non-existent flower seem to appear; but by forsaking false conditions, one becomes a Buddha.”

A speck of gold dazzles the eyes, but if it gets in your eye, then it is like a cataract, creating the appearance of a non-existent flower, the form of which is unclear. If you can remove delusions and false ideas from your mind, your true mind will appear, which is our own Tathagata.

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Buddhism teaches one to uphold the Way, to cultivate oneself through right practice in the face of illusory thoughts.

Someone asked Chan Master Weikuan: “Where is the Way?”

“The Way, “ replied Weikuan, “is before your eyes.”

“Then why don’t I see it?”

“You cannot see it because you cling to the self.”

“So it’s my clinging that makes it impossible for me to see the Way and the truth. Master! Can you see the Way and the truth?”

“By clinging to distinctions such as ‘you’ and ‘I’, I’ll be even less likely to see the Way!”

“If I make no distinctions between ‘you’ and ‘I,’ and have no illusory thoughts of self and other, will I be able to see the Way and the truth?”

“Oh, if there is no ‘I’ and no ‘you’, then who will see the Way and the truth?”

We often say that we must cultivate ourselves and the Way. Where is the Way? It is right beneath our feet. If we are to walk it, then we must free ourselves from individual views and perceptions and see everything with a universal and eternal vision. This is

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comparable to the Confucian idea that “man is an integral part of Nature.” Teaching, learning, and upholding the Way in Chan Buddhism are unique. Confirming existence is incorrect! Confirming non-existence is also incorrect. Neither form nor emptiness is absolute truth. Chan makes no distinction between form and emptiness, and does not avoid form and wisdom, thereby exhausting the causes of false conditions. Pure and noble, Chan rejects both extremes.

Attaining self-realization of intrinsic nature is verification for the Chan practitioner, and is a wonderful way of attaining the Tathagatagarbhat.<sup>3</sup>

Chan Master Nanquan once propounded a problem to Lu Heng, a government official

“Once, a person raised a goose in a bottle. Gradually, the goose grew inside the bottle, but the mouth of the bottle was very small and the goose couldn’t get out. Tell me, how can you get the goose out without breaking the bottle or harming the goose?”

Everyone present wondered how to get the goose out of the bottle without breaking it. Lu Heng paced

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<sup>3</sup> The Tathagata’s Dharmakaya (Dharma-body).

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back and forth, all the while knitting his brow, trying to come up with a solution. This is what is known as falling into a mental pattern of making distinctions, which is not Chan. Chan means attaining self-realization, so Chan Master Nanquan at once shouted:

"Lu Heng!"

"Here," replied Lu Heng.

"Then isn't it out?" asked Chan Master Nanquan, laughing.

Why is your mind as restricted as the goose? Do you think that our bodies or our homes will allow us to dwell in tranquility? Your minds must be more carefree and open in order to get out of the bottle, out of the ivory tower. Why let yourselves be so restricted by life? Why be tied down by your body? Although the Chan master engages in silent retreat and the closed room is small, the mind is as expansive as the Dharmakaya (the Dharma-body), where coming and going are unrestricted. If a prisoner in a jail understands Chan, though he/she has lost his freedom and is imprisoned, he/she can still soar freely. The freedom afforded by self-realization is something that few of us can attain. The original face of Chan is not

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defiled or pure, nor does it increase or diminish. In seeking the Way, we must be as natural as the clouds and water. You need not painstakingly seek it outside; look inside and realizing your intrinsic nature. When the mind is purified, the Chan Way will appear naturally of its own accord.

A disciple of Chan Master Yunmen once asked him, “There are three kinds of sick people in the world—the blind, deaf, and mute. How am I to teach them Chan?”

“Since you have come to ask for instruction,” shouted the Master immediately, “why haven’t you paid me due respect?”

The disciple immediately bowed. The moment he lifted his head, the Master took up a stick and struck him a blow. Surprised, the follower hurriedly stepped back.

“You’re not blind,” laughed Master Yunmen. “Come here, don’t be afraid. Come before me.”

The disciple, not yet having quite recovered from his astonishment, obeyed and took a few steps forward.

“You can hear!” laughed Yunmen. “You’re not deaf. Can you give a Dharma talk?”

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“No, I can’t.”

“Oh, so you’re not mute, “ roared Yunmen with laughter.

Our eyes, ears, noses, tongues, and bodies are all sick! We have eyes but can’t see; we have ears but cannot hear; we have mouths but cannot speak; and we have bodies but do not know how to take care of them. Due to spiritual blindness, we all end up blind, deaf, and dumb. Chan Master Yunmen’s teaching method was like a sharp knife used to excise false understanding, revealing the bright and pristine ground of the mind. People today possess five sound sensory organs and live safe and healthy lives; they create trouble for themselves because the ground of the mind is obscured. Many parents do everything in their power to send their children to the United States from other countries to study, and then feel uneasy about it. Then they do everything possible to visit their children. But what do they do when they get to the United States? They are handicapped: they are like the deaf because they cannot understand what people say to them; they are like the blind because they cannot read English; they are mutes because they cannot speak; and they are like cripples because they

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cannot get around by car. When their daughter-in-law has a baby, they look after it. When they were young, they raised their own children, and now, in their old age, they raise their grandchildren, once again becoming a filial son or daughter. Not understanding Chan, life's difficulties increase!

Many people are hindered by ignorance. They don't know how to reflect upon themselves or how to use their own intrinsic nature. Instead, they use the six perceptual faculties—the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—to grasp this illusory world. Of course they will not be able to dwell in tranquility. As the *Diamond Sutra* says: “A person should give rise to a pure heart without dwelling in form. A person should give rise to that heart without dwelling in sound, smell, taste, tangible objects, or dharmas. A person should give rise to that heart without dwelling anywhere.” These are profoundly significant words.

The Chan master extinguishes external conditions and is not angered or enamored of the world around him. Energetically proceeding toward the realization of the great Way, his mind will not be confused by illusory sights and sounds. His mind dwells in purity and thus he attains the Way.

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Chan Master Shiwu had a friend who was a thief. His friend could not mend his bad ways; one time, he stole something that belonged to Chan Master Shiwu. The Master caught him and questioned, "How many times have you stolen?"

"I can't count the number of times. Hundreds and thousands of times."

"How much have you stolen?"

"Not much. Eight hundred to a thousand *yuan* each time."

"You're not much of a thief," laughed the Master. "If it were me, I could steal what I want without lifting a finger. If I did lift a finger, I'd steal a lot more."

"Excuse me for underestimating you," said the thief, astounded. "You are more experienced than I am. Please, will you teach me how to steal?"

"Aren't there treasures aplenty right here?" asked Chan Master Shiwu, suddenly stretching out his hand toward the thief's heart as if to take something. "After I steal the treasures from here, I'll enjoy them for the rest of my days."

Only by mastering our minds can we enjoy them for as long as we live. What is Chan? It is our true

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mind. What could be better than the true mind?

Chan Master Longya wrote a poem on the realization of the self:

*A room, a bed, a thatched roof overhead,  
A bottle, a bowl, one life;  
Though a road to the village runs before my  
door,  
When has someone else's house ever been  
mine?*

For a Chan master, a room, a bed, and a thatched roof overhead are enough in life—a plain and natural life. Although the road outside the door runs to another village, other people's houses will never be ours. Why must we go outside to grasp at conditions? As nice as paradise is, it is not mine; though my house is cold and lowly, it is where I make my life and I am content with it. As the saying goes, "A corner of gold or silver is not as good as my own poor corner." Not knowing one's original mind, studying the Dharma is useless; not knowing one's true nature, the Way is distant. Attaining the self-realization of intrinsic nature and realizing that the mind is inherently pure is the goal of Chan. By not becoming enamored of

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things or being sad about one's lot, but by being carefree and leading a tranquil life without desires, at ease and unobstructed, one enters a bright, open place.

## **II. Cherishing Good Fortune in Moderation and Forming Ties of Affinity**

When the Chan master lies down to sleep in the mountains, he uses his robes as a blanket and a gourd dipper as a pillow. The Chan master leaves the ordinary world to live as a recluse by leading a tranquil life free from desires. The Chan life is not just simple, it is also one of cherishing things and building relationships of affinity. A blade of grass, a leaf, a tile, a piece of earth—the tiniest things will all come to life in the hands of a Chan master. Not the slightest bit of the earth's assets will be wasted. Venerable Zuoxi of the Tiantai School, for example, washed with spring water and entrusted himself to a life amid the clouds and pines. He lived alone in one room as broad as the Dharmakaya. His moral conduct won the praise of others, "He doesn't light a lamp unless he is looking for a passage in the sutras or sastras; he doesn't move a step unless to pay respect to the Buddha; he never

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speaks the Dharma for his own benefit, nor does he receive even a pittance for the Dharma.” This is the best example of cherishing good fortune in moderation and forming ties of affinity.

Chan Master Yishan wanted to take a bath. One of his disciples prepared the bath water for him. When the Master arrived at the bathing tub, he tested the water and said, “It’s too hot! Add a little cold water.”

His disciple carried in some cold water and used half of it to cool the temperature of the water in the tub and dumped the remainder. Seeing this, Chan Master Yishan was angry and rebuked him; “You karmavarana<sup>4</sup> demon! A drop of water is as valuable as gold; water is life. Sprinkle it on the flowers and they will be happy; sprinkle it on the trees and they will grow. How can you so lightly waste one of life’s precious resources?”

Following such a severe rebuke, the disciple changed his own name to “Drop of Water.” It was none other than Chan Master Dishui (drop of water) who later personally warned, “one drop of water

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<sup>4</sup> The hindrance of past karma, hindering one’s ability to attain the bodhi.

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amounts to a spring of sweet dew.”

The Chan way of life is just that simple, lacking in desire for the material things of this world. When one is thirsty, one drinks cold, sweet mountain spring water; when hungry, one eats plain and savory vegetables. One cherishes every blade of grass, every leaf, every chair, and every plate. Hearing this Chan, you can enhance your life by learning from the spirit of the monk “Drop of Water.”

Life is pretty comfortable today in the material sense, and those who cherish things and form good affinities are few. You can buy a pen for next to nothing and write with it for many years or even a lifetime. You can be “One Pen Practitioner.” Too much talk can mean trouble; by being circumspect in the use of your lips and tongue and not talking lightly, you can be “One Sentence Practitioner.” Do not waste money; a dollar saved is a dollar earned in charitable deeds. You can be “One Dollar Practitioner.” Fo Guang Shan built a temple in the United States called Hsi Lai Temple, which I visit often. When I go, I take some money with me and leave all of it there to form affinities. I return to Taiwan with nothing but a pile of napkins, the reason being that in the United States,

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when you go out to eat, or take a boat or plane, napkins are available by the ton. Everywhere you go there are napkins. You cannot use them all, and you do not want to throw them away. So I accumulate them, one by one, and after two weeks in the United States, I go home with seventy napkins stuffed in my pockets. Napkins are not worth much money, but they are very useful. Think of all the timber, paper pulp, and labor used to make one small napkin. That is really something! How can you not treasure napkins?

The spiritual value of any object transcends its material value. Things as insignificant as a drop of water, a flower, a pen, or a piece of paper all are precious. Everything should be treasured, cherished, and used to create affinities with others. What in life is not to be valued?

Once Chan Master Qili was meditating in the Buddha's Hall. A robber entered by night and said, "Give me your money or your life."

"Don't bother me," said Master Qili, unperturbed. "I'm meditating. If it's money you're after, there's some in the drawer under the Buddha. Help yourself."

The robber opened the drawer and took out the money. Just as he was about to leave, Master Qili said,

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“Hey! Don’t take it all. Leave a little. I still have to buy offerings of incense and fruit tomorrow.”

The robber did as he was told. As he was about to step out the door, Master Qili shouted, “Stop!”

Frightened, the robber looked back.

“The money you took belongs to the Buddha,” said Master Qili. “Are you going to leave without thanking him?”

Moved, the robber nodded toward the Buddha and then ran off.

Shortly thereafter, the robber was apprehended by the authorities and confessed to having stolen from Master Qili. They took him to Master Qili for identification.

“Nothing of the sort occurred,” said Master Qili. “He didn’t steal anything. He thanked the Buddha!”

Master Qili cherished the money and formed affinities using a compassionate heart. The thief was moved by this way of teaching and upholding the Way. His sense of regret led him to mend his ways, and he became Master Qili’s disciple.

Respecting things and building affinities with others often are as inseparable as the relationship between cause and effect in Chan Buddhism. There is

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a story that relates to the causes and conditions for the reward of happiness. One day the three Chan Masters Xuefeng, Yantou, and Qinshan went out together to wander around and teach. They walked upstream. As they were discussing how to spread the truth of Buddhism, Master Xuefeng suddenly felt hungry.

“Hey, hey, where are we going?”

Suddenly they noticed a stalk of celery coming downstream.

“Look, there’s a stalk of celery floating down the stream,” said Master Qinshan, pointing. “Someone certainly lives upstream from here. We can go there and get something to eat and rest our feet.”

Master Yantou stared at the stalk of celery and sighed, “Oh, the people upstream don’t care about a stalk of celery and let it drift downstream; what a pity.”

“Such wasteful people are not ready to hear about the truth of Buddhism,” sighed Master Xuefeng. “We should rest our feet in some other village.”

The three of them were in the middle of discussing the matter when someone came running down the stream, panting and apparently looking for something.

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“What are you seeking?” asked the Masters.

“I was just washing vegetables,” said the person, covered with sweat. “But because I wasn’t careful, a stalk of celery was washed downstream. I’m looking for that stalk of celery.”

Hearing this, the three Masters laughed with joy and praised the person.

“This person cherishes things and deserves to hear the truth of Buddhism. Let’s go to his village, stay awhile, and spread the truth.”

Those who cherish good fortune are the ones who will be most blessed. The Buddha Nature is a field of blessings. Squandering good fortune or using it for bad things is not true good fortune. True good fortune is like planting trees and sowing crops, for only then does happiness permeate one’s heart. Chan Master Linji was planting pine trees in the mountain and was observed by Huangbo.

“Why are you planting pine trees when there already are so many of them in the mountains?” he asked.

“One, to beautify the monastery; and two, as a sign for those to come.”

In not seeking to benefit themselves, but instead

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by seeking to protect the world, Chan masters manifest the spirit of liberating others. Teaching, learning, and upholding the Way in Chan Buddhism is to enjoy life's good fortune with moderation and to learn through forming affinities. One improves one's practice and application with a compassionate heart while being guided by wisdom. Appreciating fully whatever you have in moderation and forming ties of affinity constitutes the life of one who studies the Way of Chan.

### **III. Helping People to Change Through the Example of Compassion**

The renowned and celebrated King Asoka was a great protector of Buddhism and a devout disciple of the Triple Gem (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha). One day, King Asoka prepared a sumptuous vegetarian feast for the monks. To show his respect for the sangha, King Asoka, despite being a king, planned to kneel and prostrate himself before the monastics. Among the monks approaching from the distance, he noticed a young novice. Then he wondered what kind of a precedent he would be setting if he, a great king, were to bow to such a young child.

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But if he did not pay him respect by bowing, he would feel uneasy about violating Buddhist etiquette. After considering the matter for some time, King Asoka invited the child aside to an out-of-the-way place and only there did he prostrate himself.

“Young novice,” whispered the king, “you mustn’t tell anyone about my paying respect to you.”

“Watch this!” said the novice holding out an alms bowl.

The youngster leaped toward the bowl, shrinking so that he fit inside of it. A few moments later, he leaped out of the bowl, regaining his normal size. He did this several times, in and out, in and out, until King Asoka was dumbstruck.

“Great King,” said the little novice in the king’s own tone of voice, “you mustn’t tell anyone what you just saw.”

The novice, although tender in years, was ambitious and instructed King Asoka by using his supernatural power, playing a game of compassion with him. Chan instruction does not distinguish age, nor does the practitioner of Chan discriminate between rich and poor, or high and low status, when he teaches.

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One day, Chan Master Yunshui visited the home of a wealthy man to ask for a contribution toward the needs of the community. The wealthy man pushed him out the door. There was no rice to eat in the monastery, and the wealthy man was unwilling to give him alms. The Master pondered what he should say and how to fulfill his duty. As he walked along thinking, he noticed a lot of rice flowing down the gutter from the rich man's house. Chan Master Yunshui thought it a pity, so every day he came to pick up the rice. What he couldn't eat himself, he dried and stored away. Ten years later, a fire broke out in the rich man's house, destroying everything. He had no choice but to begin begging. Greatly distressed and with no place to go, he set off for Master Yunshui's monastery to plead with the Master to take him in.

"I earnestly entreat the Venerable to have compassion and save me!"

Chan Master Yunshui took him in and cooked some rice for him, which the rich man ate with great gusto.

"Thank you, Master," he said with gratitude.

"There's no need to thank me. The rice wasn't mine; it was yours. I just took the time to gather it up,

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dry it out, and store it. And today you had need of it.”

Deeply ashamed, the rich man vowed to mend his ways and to turn over a new leaf. It is characteristic of Chan masters to use compassion to teach and enlighten people, and of their method for teaching and upholding the Way.

Once there was a Chan master named Tiaoshui, who was a Chan teacher. Suddenly he disappeared, his whereabouts totally unknown to his disciples who looked high and low for him. One of his disciples looked and looked for him, eventually searching the deserted outskirts of town. He discovered a small cave beneath a deserted bridge where many beggars lived. Among the beggars was Chan Master Tiaoshui. Surprised but overjoyed, he pleaded with the Master: “Master, please be compassionate enough to return and instruct us in Chan.”

“Words alone won’t work,” said the Master unenthusiastically. “I could repeat myself a thousand times, and you still wouldn’t get it.”

“Master, instruct us again, and we’ll understand,” his disciple anxiously pleaded.

“Okay,” said Chan Master Tiaoshui, staring at him. “Stay here with me for three days, and I’ll in-

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struct you in Chan.”

Hearing this, the disciple thought, “What’s three days?” To study Chan, even three years is nothing, so he decided to stay.

On the first day, there was nothing but filthy garbage in the cave. There was no water with which to rinse his mouth, much less to take a bath. He did not even know where to urinate. Although he found the first day almost intolerable, he remained patient. On the second day, one of the beggars, an old man, died. Master Tiaoshui called to his disciple and said, “Help me by taking the old beggar outside and burying him.” The old beggar had long been ill and smelled bad. Anyone would have avoided him. After the disciple buried him with great difficulty, he returned to find Master Tiaoshui fast asleep. The disciple could not forget the stench and spent the entire night tossing and turning, unable to sleep.

Master Tiaoshui arose on the third day and said, “There is no need for us to go begging for alms today. Some of the old beggar’s food is left. We’ll eat that today.”

At the thought of eating such vile filth, the disciple wanted to vomit and refused to consider it. A

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horrible stench hung over everything. Working up his courage, he addressed Master Tiaoshui, “I can’t stay here any longer!”

“So, you can’t study Chan with me,” said Master Tiaoshui, glaring at him.

Without great compassion, how can we bear hardships and trials to overcome all obstacles and see the world in a different way? Chan Buddhism does not emphasize the superficial, but rather spiritual depth—planting a pure lotus in the mud.

One time, Mengchuang, the Imperial Preceptor, was taking a boat across a river. The boat was just setting off when a sword-bearing general approached in great haste. Raising his whip, he shouted: “Wait! Boatman, take me across!”

“The boat is already underway,” exclaimed everyone on board. “We can’t go back.”

“Take the next boat,” replied the boatman.

Only Mengchuang, the Imperial Preceptor, was of a different opinion. “Boatman,” he pleaded, “we’re still close to shore. Help him out, go back for him.”

Seeing that it was a Buddhist master, the boatman reluctantly consented to turn the boat around. Unexpectedly, as soon as the general was on board, he

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began cracking his whip, a few lashes of which fell on Mengchuang, the Imperial Preceptor. The general shouted at him and cursed him, saying: "You bastard, move aside! Give me your seat!"

Mengchuang, though bloodied by the whipping, held his tongue and vacated his seat. Seeing how things stood, no one dared to say anything aloud. Instead, they all whispered among themselves about how sorry they felt for the Chan master who had requested the boatman to go back. Hearing this and finding himself stared at, the general found it difficult to apologize. Upon reaching the other shore, Mengchuang disembarked with the other passengers. Silently he walked to the shore where he washed his bloody face clean. Smiling, he looked up calmly. The barbarous general felt sorry for Mengchuang. He stepped forward and knelt by the shore and, his voice filled with remorse, said: "Master, I'm sorry!"

"That's okay," said Mengchuang, good-naturedly. "Everyone is in a bad mood when they are on the road."

In practicing Chan and seeking the way, virtue and wisdom are important, but even more so is cultivating a compassionate heart. Only with compas-

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sion can the Chan master change the most indomitable people, ridding them of desires and anger, transforming their violence into affability. The strength of a Chan practitioner's ability to enlighten through teaching comes from using a Chan heart, a compassionate heart, and a Buddhist heart, to cleanse the world of bad karma.

#### **IV. Expedient Means and Skillful Means**

In teaching others to practice Chan, the Chan master uses countless expedient and skillful means—silence and speech, reserve and vitality, a blow and a shout—to overcome confusion. A Chan master can skillfully instruct and guide anyone, be they a scholar, a farmer, a worker, a businessman, or anyone else, young and old alike. Regardless of whether it is in the woods or by the water, whether it concerns clothing, eating, dwelling, or walking, the Chan master can enlighten you, turning your anger to compassion and your ignorance into wisdom. The Chan master's use of expedient and skillful means is the most profound method of teaching. Let me provide you with several examples of this.

One day the Buddhist monk Zhaoyin was wan-

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dering around teaching when a devotee approached him and said, "How can one get rid of a bad temper?"

"A bad temper arises from an angry heart," laughed the monk. "I tell you what, I'll transform you. Give me your angry heart and bad temper."

Startled, the devotee thought about handing over his bad temper to the monk Zhaoyin, and how it would be like dumping poison into a clear spring. At once he saw the true face of his bad temper and quickly repented.

The son of two devotees was very fond of sleep-ing. His parents did not know what to do about it, so they asked the monk Zhaoyin to help. When Zhaoyin arrived at their house, he shook their son awake.

"I've come to transform your love of sleep," said Zhaoyin. "Give me your sleeping bug."

Hearing that a devotee liked fighting, he trans-formed his argumentativeness; when a devotee liked to drink, he transformed his drinking. The monk Zhaoyin was born to transform and save many beings. People's bad habits were transformed through contact with him. He influenced many people by allowing them to see the truth. This is the magnanimity of the

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Chan master's teaching by expedient means.

Once, a monk from Okinawa, Japan went to China. He practiced Chan and sought the Way with Chan Master Suiweng. After three years of study, he still had no inkling about Chan. Feeling no closer to enlightenment, he was about to quit his studies.

"Forget it," he said to the Master. "I'm going home."

Suiweng could see that he lacked focus and was adrift like duckweed on water. "Have patience," said the Master, encouraging him. "Practice seven more days."

But after seven days, he remained unenlightened. "Just stick with it another seven days," the Master instructed. After studying for seven days, seven times over, the monk could do nothing but hang his head in despair. Compassionately, the Master encouraged him, "Just another five days."

The monk practiced another five days. The Master observed him with detachment and urged him again to stay, this time for three days, then one day. The monk was quite apprehensive.

"Master," he asked, "what if on this final day, I am still not enlightened?"

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“If you are not enlightened in one more day,” said the Master in all seriousness, “There’s only death. You won’t live.”

Facing the prospect of death, the monk found himself with his back to the wall and desperate to survive. His spirit and will were more focused than ever. He summoned all his skill and was not distracted; and at the crucial moment, his mind did not rely on any forms and he had immense power to reverse the situation. With all his concentration, samsara and Chan were suddenly clear, and the monk was enlightened.

When a Chan master teaches, he does not give you anything. He expects that you will completely discard worldly emotions and wisdom and, refreshed, take a detached look at life, its confusing emotions as well as its true qualities.

After ridding himself of desire, anger, and ignorance, the famed Chan Master Zhaozhou often taught others. One time, a woman complained to Master Zhaozhou, “Oh, Master! We women are hindered by past karma. When we are little girls, we must listen to our parent’s stern teachings; after we grow up and marry, we are controlled by our husbands; and when

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we get old, we are controlled by our children. Look at my kids. As soon as I say a word, they say, ‘Mom, don’t tell me.’ It surely is the hindrance of past karma.”

“You mustn’t think of it that way,” laughed Master Zhaozhou, with a wave of his hand. “Women are indeed blessed! When you are little girls, your parents lavish so much love and protection on you; after you grow up, so many men court you; and when you get old, your children become more filial. Many children aren’t very happy to visit their fathers, but are very happy to see their mothers. Women are much more loved than men!”

Master Zhaozhou, who understood the ways of the world, did not want women to feel badly about themselves. He shifted the perspective, looking at the bad as good, successfully transforming it: the same world with different feelings. See how we can change things if we are of one mind? This is the skillful means of Chan instruction.

Master Zhaozhou had a disciple who chatted incessantly. He asked the Master, “How can I study the Way? How can I practice Chan? How can I achieve enlightenment? How can I become a Buddha?”

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Master Zhaozhou nodded and stood up. “I haven’t got time to talk with you. I need to use the bathroom.”

So saying, the Master paid no attention to the disciple’s shocked look. He strode away and stopped after taking several steps. He turned around, smiled, and said, “See! Even something as insignificant as relieving oneself, and still I have to do it myself. Can you do it for me?”

Thinking about it, the disciple suddenly understood. Chan cannot be sought outside oneself. How does one practice Chan? How does one achieve enlightenment? How does one become a Buddha? No one can do it for you; it is something you must do yourself. You have to practice Chan yourself. If everyone carried heavy burdens, everyone would naturally be strong and muscular. This is the expedient means of Chan.

Chan Master Da’an went to Baizhang’s place to practice and study Chan. Looking at the “Kung-an”<sup>5</sup> he spoke to Baizhang will provide us with a deeper

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<sup>5</sup> A case-record, also known as a koan; they are problems, almost like riddles, used by Chan masters to teach Chan, upon which thought is concentrated as a means to attain inner unity and illumination.

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understanding of the special characteristics of Chan.

“How does one know the Buddha?”

“It is like seeking an ox while riding on it.”

“What do I do after I know?”

“It is like going home riding on an ox.”

“How do I look after it?”

“Like an ox-herder, carrying a staff, seeing to it that it doesn’t wander off into somebody else’s garden.”

Through ignorance and distorted thinking, we are entangled by the five desires and six objects of perception. If our hearts are defiled, where are we to seek the Buddha? What good does it do? Seeking outside oneself is pointless. It would be better to ride home on an ox to cultivate oneself in peace. Chan is something one must learn through practice and experimentation. My Chan is mine, not yours. I hope that everyone can transform their bodies and minds with Chan, take it home and live well. I also hope that everyone will freshen their lives with the waters of Chan, experiencing a pure mind, refreshing the six perceptual faculties, and living more purely and at ease. It is my wish that everyone be blessed with more wisdom. Thank you.

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## **About the Author**

### **Venerable Master Hsing Yun**

Venerable Master Hsing Yun was born in Jiangdu, Jiangsu Province, China, in 1927. Tonsured under Venerable Master Zhikai at age twelve, he became a novice monk at Qixia Vinaya School and Jiaoshan Buddhist College. He was fully ordained in 1941, and is the 48th Patriarch of the Linji (Rinzai) Chan School.

He went to Taiwan in 1949 where he undertook the revitalization of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism on the island with a range of activities novel for its time. In 1967, he founded the Fo Guang Shan (Buddha's Light Mountain) Buddhist Order, and has since established more than a hundred temples in Taiwan and on every continent worldwide. Hsi Lai Temple, the United States Headquarters of Fo Guang Shan, was built outside Los Angeles in 1988.

At present, there are nearly two thousand monks and nuns in the Fo Guang Shan Buddhist Order. The

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organization also oversees sixteen Buddhist colleges; five publishing houses, including Buddha's Light Publishing and Hsi Lai University Press; four universities, one of which is Hsi Lai University in Los Angeles; two nursing homes for the elderly; a secondary school; a satellite television station; and an orphanage.

A prolific writer and an inspiring speaker, Master Hsing Yun has written many books on Buddhist sutras and a wide spectrum of topics over the past five decades. Most of his speeches and lectures have been compiled into essays defining Humanistic Buddhism and outlining its practice. Some of his writings and lectures have been translated into various languages, such as English, Spanish, German, Russian, Japanese, Korean, etc.

The Venerable Master is also the founder of the Buddha's Light International Association, a worldwide organization of lay Buddhists dedicated to the propagation of Buddhism, with over 130 chapters and a membership of more than a million.

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## About Publisher

### **Buddha's Light Publishing F.G.S. Int'l Translation Center**

As long as Venerable Master Hsing Yun has been a Buddhist monk, he has had a strong belief that books and other documentation of the Buddha's teachings unite us emotionally, help us practice Buddhism at a higher altitude, and continuously challenge our views on how we define and live our lives.

In 1996, the Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center was established with this goal in mind. This marked the beginning of a string of publications translated into various languages from the Master's original writings in Chinese. Presently, several translation centers have been set up worldwide. Centers that coordinate translation or publication projects are located in Los Angeles and San Diego, USA; Sydney, Australia; Berlin, Germany; Argentina; South Africa; and Japan.

In 2001, Buddha's Light Publishing was estab-

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lished to publish Buddhist books translated by Fo Guang Shan International Translation Center as well as other valuable Buddhist works. Buddha's Light Publishing is committed to building bridges between East and West, Buddhist communities, and cultures. All proceeds from our book sales support Buddhist propagation efforts.

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