

**Selection of teachings of
Great Master HsuYun**

Prerequisites of the Ch'an Training

By Master Hsu Yun

The object of Ch'an training is to realize the mind for the perception of self-nature that is to wipe out the impurities, which soil the mind so that the fundamental face of self-nature can really be perceived. Impurities are our false thinking and clinging to things as real. Self-nature is the meritorious characteristic of the Tathágata wisdom, which is the same in both Buddhas and living beings. If one's false thinking and grasping are cast aside, one will bear witness to the meritorious characteristic of one's Tathágata wisdom and will become a Buddha, otherwise one will remain a living being. For since countless aeons, our own delusion has immersed us in the sea of birth and death. Since our defilement has already lasted so long, we are unable instantly to free ourselves from false thinking in order to perceive our self-nature. This is why we must undergo Ch'an training. The prerequisite of this training is the eradication of false thinking. As to how to wipe it out, we have already many sayings of Shakyamuni Buddha and nothing is simpler than the word 'Halt' in His saying: 'If it halts, it is Enlightenment (Bodhi)'. [1]

The Ch'an sect from its introduction by Bodhidharma after his arrival in the East until after the passing of the Sixth Patriarch, spread widely all over the country and enjoyed great prosperity, unknown before and after that period. However, the most important thing taught by Bodhidharma and the Sixth Patriarch was only this: 'Expel all concurrent causes; do not give rise to a single thought.' To expel all concurrent causes is to lay them down. [2] Therefore, these two sentences: 'expel all concurrent causes. Do not give rise to a single thought', are the prerequisites of Ch'an training. If these two sentences are not put into actual practice, not only will the training be ineffective, but also it will be impossible to start it, for in the midst of causes which rise and fall, thought after thought, how can you talk about Ch'an training?

Now we know that the sentences: 'expel all concurrent causes. Do not give rise to a single thought' are the prerequisites of Ch'an training; how can we fulfill these prerequisites? Those of high spirituality are able to halt forever the arising of a single thought until they reach the state of birthlessness and will thereby instantaneously realize enlightenment (bodhi) without any more ado. Those of lower spirituality will deduce the underlying principle [3] from facts [4] and will thoroughly understand that the self-nature is fundamentally pure and clean and that distress (kilesa) [5] and enlightenment as well as birth, death and Nirvana are all empty names having no connection whatever with self-nature; that phenomena are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble and a shadow; and that the four basic elements constituting the physical body, as well as mountains, rivers and the great earth which

are within self-nature, are just like bubbles in the sea. These phenomena rise and fall following one another in succession without interfering with the essence of self-nature. Therefore, one should not follow illusion in its creation, stay, change and annihilation and give rise to feelings of joy, sadness, attachment and rejection. One should lay down everything with which one's body is burdened, thus becoming exactly like a dead man. The outcome will be that sense organs, sense data and consciousness will vanish and that concupiscence, anger, stupidity and love will be eliminated. When all our feelings of joy and sadness, of the cold of hunger and the warmth of one's fill, of honor and dishonor, of birth and death, of happiness and misery, of blessing and calamity, of praise and censure, of gain and loss, of safety and danger, and of handicap and help, are all cast aside, this is the true laying down of everything. To lay down a thing is to lay down everything for ever, and this is called the laying down of all concurrent causes. When all concurrent causes have been laid down, false thinking will vanish with the non-arising of differentiation and the elimination of all attachments. When one reaches this state of the non-arising of a single thought, the brightness of self-nature will appear in full. [6] Then only can the prerequisites of Ch'an training be entirely fulfilled. Further efforts in the true training and real introspection will be required if one wishes to be qualified for realizing the mind for the perception of self-nature.

Recently, Ch'an Buddhists often came to inquire about all this. As to the Dharma, fundamentally there is no such thing, because as soon as it is expressed in words, the meaning will not be true. Just see clearly that mind is Buddha and there will be no more ado. This is self-evident and all talks of practice and realization are the demon's words. Bodhidharma, who came to the East to "directly point at man's mind for the perception of self-nature leading to the attainment of Buddhahood", clearly indicated that all living beings on earth were Buddhas. The outright cognizance of this pure and clean self-nature together with complete harmony with it, without contamination from attachment to anything [7] and without the least mental differentiation, while walking, standing, sitting and lying by day or night [8] is nothing but the self-evident Buddhahood. It does not require any application of mind or use of effort. Moreover, there is no place for either action or deed, and no use for words, speech and thought. For this reason, it is said that the attainment of Buddhahood is the most free and easy thing, which relies only on oneself and does not depend on others. If all living beings on this earth are not willing to pass long aeons through the successive four kinds of birth [9] in the six realms of existence [10] to stay permanently immersed in the sea of suffering, and if they wish to attain Buddhahood with the accompanying enjoyment of true eternity, true bliss, true personality and true purity [11], they should sincerely believe the true words of the Buddha and Patriarchs, and lay down all attachments without thinking of either good or evil; all of them will certainly be able to become Buddhas on the spot. All Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Patriarchs of past generations did not take the vow of liberating all living beings without warrant for so doing; they did not take vain vows and did not tell a deliberate lie.

The qualification above referred to, is in the state provided by nature [12]. Moreover, the Buddha and Patriarchs had expounded it again and again, and their injunction in this respect had also been repeated; theirs were true words, words corresponding to reality, which did not contain an atom of falsehood and deception. However, all living beings on this earth have been, for countless aeons, deluded and

sunk in the bitter ocean of birth and death, rising and falling in their endless transmigrations. Being deluded, confused and upset, they turn their back on enlightenment and unite with impurities. They are just like real gold thrown into a manure pit where it not only falls into disuse but is also deplorably soiled. Because of His great mercy, the Buddha was compelled to set up 84,000 [13] Dharma doors to enlightenment so that living beings of different natural capacities could use them to cure the 84,000 ailments caused by their habitual concupiscence, anger, stupidity and love. In the same way you are taught to use a shovel, brush, water and cloth to wash, brush, polish and scrub the dirty piece of gold. Therefore, the Dharma doors expounded by the Buddha are all excellent Dharmas which enable one to see through birth and death and to attain Buddhahood, the only question being the adaptability or otherwise of individual potentialities. These Dharma doors should not be divided arbitrarily into superior or inferior ones. Those introduced into China are: the Ch'an Sect (Tsung), the Discipline School (Lu Tsung), the Teaching School (Chiao Tsung), the Pure Land School (Chin Tsung), and the Yoga School (Mi Tsung). Of these five Dharma doors, it is up to each man to choose the one, which is suitable to his natural character and inclination, and he will surely reach his goal if he only sticks to it long enough without change of mind and deeply penetrates it.

Our sect advocates the Ch'an training. This training centers on 'realization of mind and perception of self-nature', that is an exhaustive investigation into one's fundamental face. The Dharma door which consists in the 'clear awakening to the self-mind and through perception of the fundamental nature' has been handed down ever since the Buddha held up a flower until after Bodhidharma's coming to the East, with frequent changes in the method of practice. Up to the T'ang (935 C. E.) and Sung (1278 C. E.) dynasties, most adherents of the Ch'an sect became enlightened after hearing a word or sentence. The transmission from master to disciple did not exceed the sealing of mind by mind, and there was no fixed Dharma taught. In their questions and answers (the role played by a master) was only to untie the bonds fettering his disciple [14] according to available circumstances, just like the giving of an appropriate medicine for each particular ailment. In and after the Sung dynasty, human potentialities became duller, and the instructions given by the masters were not carried out by their disciples. For instance, when they were taught to 'lay down everything' and 'not to think of either good or evil', practitioners could not lay down anything and could not stop thinking of either good or evil. Under these circumstances, the ancestors and masters were compelled to devise a 'poison-against-poison' method by teaching their followers to inquire into a kung an [15] or look into a hua t'ou. [16] Their disciples were even taught to hold a meaningless hua t'ou as firmly as possible in their minds, without loosening their grip even for the shortest possible moment, in the same way as a rat will stubbornly bite the board of a coffin at a fixed spot until it has made a hole. The aim of this method was to use a single thought to oppose and arrest myriad thoughts because the masters had no alternative. It was like an operation, which became imperative when poison had been introduced into the body. There were many kung ans devised by the ancients but later only hua t'ous were taught such as: 'Who is dragging this corpse here' [17] and 'What was my fundamental face before I was born?' In the present day, the masters use the hua t'ou: 'Who is the repeater of Buddha's name?'

All these hua t'ou have only one meaning which is very ordinary and has nothing peculiar about it if you look into him 'Who is reciting a sutra,' 'Who is holding

a mantra, 'Who is worshipping Buddha,' 'Who is taking a meal,' 'Who is wearing a robe,' 'Who is walking on the road,' or 'Who is sleeping,' the reply to 'Who,' will invariably be the same: 'It is Mind.' Word arises from Mind and Mind is head of (i.e. ante-) Word. Thought arises from Mind and Mind is head of Thought. Myriad things come from Mind and Mind is head of myriad things. In reality, a hua t'ou is the head of a thought (i.e. ante-thought). The head of thought is nothing but Mind. To make it plain, before a thought arises, it is a hua t'ou. From the above, we know that to look into a hua t'ou is to look into the Mind. The fundamental face before one's birth is Mind. To look into one's fundamental face before one's birth is to look into one's mind. Self-nature is Mind and to 'turn inwards the hearing to hear the self-nature' is to 'turn inward one's contemplation to contemplate the self-mind'.

The sentence: 'The perfect shining on the pure Awareness' means this: 'the pure awareness' is mind and 'to shine on' is to look into. Mind is Buddha and to repeat the Buddha's name is to contemplate the Buddha. To contemplate Buddha is to contemplate mind. Therefore, to 'look into a hua t'ou' or 'to look into him who repeats the Buddha's name is to contemplate the mind or to contemplate the pure essence of awareness of the self-mind, or to contemplate the self-natured Buddha. Mind is self-nature, is awareness and is Buddha, having neither form nor location, and being undiscoverable. It is clean and pure by nature, penetrates everywhere in the Dharmadhatu, does not enter or leave, neither comes nor goes, and is fundamentally the self-evident pure Dharmakaya Buddha.

A practitioner should keep under control all his six sense organs and take good care of this hua t'ou by looking into where a thought usually arises, until he perceives his pure self-nature, free from all thoughts. This continuous, close, quiet and indifferent investigation will lead to a still and shining [18] contemplation the outcome of which will be the outright non-existence of the five constituent elements of being (skandhas) [19] and the wiping out of both body and mind, without the least thing being left behind. Thereafter, this absolute immutability should be maintained in every state, while walking, standing, sitting and lying by day or night. As time goes on, this achievement will be brought to perfection, resulting in the perception of self-nature and the attainment of Buddhahood, with the elimination of all distress and suffering.

Ancestor Kao Feng [20] said: 'When a student looks into a hua t'ou with the same steadiness with which a broken tile when thrown into a deep pond plunges straight down 10,000 changs [21] to the bottom, if he fails to become awakened in seven days, anyone can chop off my head and take it away.' Dear friends, these are the words of an experienced master, they are true and correspond to reality, they are not deceitful words to cheat people

Then why in the present generation are there not even a few men who attain enlightenment in spite of the great number who hold a hua t'ou in their minds? This is because their potentialities are not so sharp as those of the ancients. It is also because students are confused about the correct method of training and of

holding a hua t'ou. They go to various places in the four quarters, seeking instruction, and the result is that when they get old, they are still not clear about the meaning of a hua t'ou and how to look into it. They pass their whole lives clinging to words and names, and applying their minds to the tail of the hua t'ou. [22] They inquire into the sentences: 'Look into him who repeats the Buddha's name' and 'Take care of the hua t'ou', and the more they look and inquire into these sentences, the more they get away from what these sentences stand for. [23] Thus how can they be awakened to the self-evident Wu Wei transcendental Supreme Reality, and how can they ascend the un-disturb-able Royal Throne? When gold powder is thrown into their eyes, they are blinded: how then can they send out the great illuminating ray? What a pity! What a pity! They are all good sons and good daughters who leave their homes in quest of the truth, and their determination is above the average. What a pity if they labor to no purpose! For this reason an ancient master said: 'It is better to remain unenlightened for a thousand years than to tread the wrong path for a day.'

Self-cultivation for awakening to the truth is easy and is also difficult. For example, when we turn on the electric light, if we know how, in a finger-snap there will be light and the darkness, which has lasted for a myriad years will disappear. If one does not know how to turn on the light, the electric wires will be interfered with and the lamp will be damaged, resulting in an increase of passions and ignorance. There are also some people who, while undergoing Ch'an training and looking into the hua t'ou, get entangled with demons and become insane, while others vomit blood and fall sick. [24] Are the fire of ignorance bursting into flame and the deep-rooted view of self and other [25] not the obvious causes of all this? Therefore, practitioners should harmonize body with mind and become calm, free from all impediments and from the view of self and other so as to bring about a perfect unison with their latent potentialities. Fundamentally, this method used in Ch'an training is invariably the same, but the training is both difficult and easy to beginners as well as to old hands.

Where does its difficulty lie for a beginner? Although his body and mind are mature for it, he is still confused about the method of undergoing it, and since his practice is ineffective, he will either become impatient or spend his time in dozing with this result: 'A beginner's training in the first year, an old hand's training in the second, and no training in the third year.'

Where does its easiness lie for a beginner? It only requires a believing, a long enduring and a mindless mind. A believing mind is, firstly, belief that this mind of ours is fundamentally Buddha, not differing from all Buddhas and all living beings of the three times in the ten directions of space, and secondly, belief that all Dharmas expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha can enable us to put an end to birth and death and to attain Buddhahood. A long enduring mind consists in the choice of a method to be put into continuous practice in the present lifetime, in the next life, and in the life after next. The Ch'an training should be continued in this manner; the repetition of the Buddha's name should be continued in this manner; the holding of a mantra mystic incantation should be continued in this manner and the study of sutras, which consists in putting into practice the teaching heard (i.e. learned from

the Scriptures), should be continued in this manner. The practice of any Dharma door to enlightenment must be based on Sīla [26] and if the training is undergone in this manner, there is no reason why it will not be successful. The old master Kuei Shan [27] said: 'Anybody practicing this Dharma without backsliding in three successive lives can surely expect to attain the Buddha-stage.' The old master Yung Chia said: 'If I utter deceitful words to cheat living beings, I shall be prepared to fall into the tongue-snatching hell for aeons as numberless as atoms.'

By mindlessness is meant the laying down of everything [28] so that the practitioner will become like a dead man who, while following others in their normal activities, does not give rise to the least differentiation and attachment, and lives as a mindless religious man.

After a beginner has acquired these three kinds of mind, if he under-goes the Ch'an training and looks into, for instance, the hua t'ou: 'Who is the repeater of Buddha's name?' he should silently repeat a few times: 'Amitibha Buddha' and then look into him who thinks of the Buddha and where this thought arises. He should know that this thought does not arise either from his mouth or body. If it arises from either his mouth or body, why when he dies, cannot his body and mouth, which still exist, give rise to this thought? Therefore, he knows that this thought arises from his mind. Now he should watch and locate where his mind gives rise to this thought and keep on looking into it, like a cat ready to pounce on a mouse, with his exclusive attention concentrated upon it, free from a second thought. However, its sharpness and dullness should be in equal proportions. It should never be too sharp for that sharpness may cause illness. If the training is undergone in this manner, in every state, while walking, standing, sitting and lying, it will be effective as time goes on, and when cause comes to fruition, like a ripe melon which automatically falls, anything it may happen to touch or come into contact with, will suddenly cause his supreme awakening. This is the moment when the practitioner will be like one who drinks water and who alone knows whether it is cold or warm, until he becomes free from all doubts about himself and experiences a great happiness similar to that when meeting one's own father at the cross-roads.

Where do both easiness and difficulty lie for an old hand? By old hand is meant one who has called on learned masters for instruction and has undergone the training for many years during which his body and mind were mature for it and he was clear about the method, which he could practice comfortably without experiencing any handicap. The difficulty met by a monk who is an old hand lies in this feeling of comfort and clearness in which he stops and stays. Thus, because of his stay in this illusion-city, he does not reach the place of precious things (i.e. the perfect Nirvana). He is fit only for stillness but is unfit for disturbance and his training is, therefore, not completely effective for really full use. In the worst case, the practitioner will, when coming into contact with his surroundings, give rise to feelings of like and dislike and of acceptance and rejection with the result that his false thinking, both coarse and fine, will remain as firm as before. His training will be likened to the soaking of a stone in water and will become ineffective. As time goes on, weariness and laziness will slip into his training, which will become fruitless in the end. When such a monk is aware of this, he should immediately give rise to the hua

t'ou again and rouse his spirits to take a step forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole he has reached [29] until he reaches the top of the highest peak on which he will firmly stand or the bottom of the deepest ocean where he will walk in every direction. He will cast away (his last link with the unreal) and will walk freely everywhere, meeting face to face (lit. substance to substance, or essence to essence) with Buddhas and Patriarchs. Where is the difficulty? Is this not easy?

Hua t'ou is One-Mind. This One-Mind of yours and mine is neither within nor without nor between the two. It is also within, without and between the two and is like Space, which is immutable and is all-embracing. Therefore, the hua t'ou should not be pulled up or pushed down. If it is pulled up, it will cause disturbance, and if it is pushed down, it will cause dullness, and so will be in contradiction with the mind-nature [30] and not in line with the 'mean'. [31] Everybody is afraid of false thinking which he finds difficult to control, but I tell you, dear friends, do not be afraid of false thinking and do not make any effort to control it. You have only to be aware of it but should not cling to it, follow it or push it away. It will suffice to discontinue your thinking and it will leave you alone. Hence, the saying: 'The rise of falsehood should be immediately cognized, and once cognized, it will quit.'

However, in his training, if the practitioner can turn this false thinking to his own advantage, he will look into where it arises and will notice that it has no independent nature of its own. At once, he will realize the non-existence of this very thinking and will recover his fundamental mindless nature, followed immediately by the manifestation of his pure self-natured Dharmakaya Buddha, which will appear, on the spot.

In reality, the real and the false are the same (in nature); the living and the Buddhas are not a dualism; and birth-death and Nirvana as well as enlightenment (bodhi) and distress (klesa) all belong to our self-mind and self-nature and should not be differentiated, should not be either liked or disliked and should not be either grasped or rejected. This mind is pure and clean and fundamentally is Buddha. Not a single Dharma is required (in the quest of enlightenment). Why so much complication? Ts'an! [32]

Footnotes:

[1] The full sentence is: The mad mind does not halt; if it halts, it is Bodhi, i.e. enlightenment.

[2] In Ch'an terminology, "to lay down causes or thoughts" is to lay down the heavy load of causes or thoughts to free the mind from defilement.

[3] Underlying principle: theory, noumena.

[4] Facts: activity, practice, phenomenon.

[5] Klesa: distress, worry, trouble and whatever causes them.

[6] This is the state described in Han Shan's "Song of the Board-bearer".

[7] Even attachment to the self-nature is also an impurity, which should be cast aside.

[8] Literally 'during the two six-hour periods of the day'. Each day is divided into two six-hour periods. one for day-time and one for night-time.

[9] Birth from eggs, wombs and humidity, and by transformation.

[10] Worlds of gods (devas), men, spirits (asuras), animals, hungry ghosts and hells.

[11] The four transcendental realities in Nirvana expounded in the Maha parinirvana Sutra.

[12] i.e. 'self-so'. so of itself, natural, of course, self-existing, the self-existent.

[13] The digits 8 and 4 symbolize respectively the eighth Vijnana or Consciousness and the four basic elements of the physical body, and mean the deluded self-nature (8) held in bondage in the illusory body (4), i.e. Space. The three following zeros symbolize Time, and so long as one remains under delusion, it will be immaterial to add 10, 100, or 1,000 zeros at the end of the number. However, when one attains enlightenment in one finger-snap. the digits 8 and 4 or Space will disappear and the line of zeros, or Time, will have no meaning.

[14] i.e. freeing his disciples from restraint caused by delusion.

[15] Kung an, or koan in Japanese = A dossier, or case-record; a cause, public laws, regulations; case law. Problems set by Ch'an masters upon which thought is concentrated as a means to attain inner unity and illumination. The meaning of a kung an is irrevocable and kung an is as valid as the Law.

[16] Hua t'ou equals ante-word, or ante-thought, i.e. the mind before it is stirred by a thought. It is the mind in its undisturbed condition. The holding of a hua t'ou in the mind is the looking into the self-mind until its realization. It is also the turning inward of the faculty of hearing to hear the self-nature, for the disentanglement of mind (subject) from external objects.

[17] i.e. who is dragging here this physical body of yours?

[18] The essence of the mind is still and its function is shining.

[19] The 5 skandhas: form, feeling, ideation, reaction and consciousness.

[20] Kao Feng was the teacher of Chung Feng whose 'Sayings of Chung Feng' (Chung Feng Kuang Lu) were read by Han Shan before the latter began his Ch'an training. (See Han Shan's Autobiography.)

[21] Chang: a measure of ten Chinese feet.

[22] when the sentence 'who repeats the Buddha's name?' is merely repeated by a practitioner who only grasps its meaning, he thinks of the 'tail' of the hua t'ou, instead of its head or ante-word, that is the mind. Thus he wrongly applies his mind to 'tail' instead of 'head'.

[23] The master means that these people fail because they set their discriminating minds on grasping the meaning of these sentences, whereas in the training, their minds should first be disentangled from all discriminations.

[24] If an evil thought is allowed to slip into the concentration of mind while holding a hua t'ou, this thought will replace the hua t'ou and may grow out of proportion and become difficult to subdue. If it be a strong desire which cannot be satisfied, the resultant frustration may cause insanity. One's breath should never be interfered with, and concentration of mind should never be on the chest as it may affect the lungs and cause the vomiting of blood.

[25] View of dualism, which should be wiped out.

[26] Sīla equals precept, command, prohibition, discipline, rule, morality.

[27] Master Kuei Shan(Wei Shan) and his disciple Yang Shan were founders of the Kuei Yang(Wei Yang) Sect (Ikkyo in Japanese), one of the five Ch'an Sects in China.

[28] i.e. free from all attachments, which are likened to a burden which one should lay down.

[29] This state of stillness is fully described in Han Shan's 'Song of the Board-bearer' (see Han Shan's Autobiography) and in Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's 'Complete Enlightenment' when he said: 'Both the hearing and its object came to an end but I did not stay where they ended.'

[30] Mind-nature: immutable mind-body, the existing fundamental pure mind, the all, the Tathagata-garbha

[31] Mean: between the two extremes.

[32] Ts'an(Can): to inquire, investigate, look into. Usually at the end of a meeting, a master mutters this word to urge his disciples to inquire into or ponder over the real meaning.

The Ch'an Training

By Master Hsu Yun

Dear friends, you have been coming frequently to ask for my instruction and I really feel ashamed of my incompetence. Every day from morning to evening, you have been all hard at work splitting firewood, tilling the fields, moving earth and carrying bricks. In spite of this, you still remember your religious duties; this earnestness of yours does indeed warm the heart of other people. I, Hsu Yun, feel really ashamed of my incompetence in religion and lack of virtue. I am not qualified to give instruction and can only pick up a few sentences left behind by the ancients in reply to your questions.

Preliminaries to the Method of Training

There are many kinds of methods but I will deal briefly with them.

Prerequisites of the Performance Of Religious Duty

(1) Firm Belief in the Law of Causality

Whoever one may be, especially if striving to perform one's religious duty, one should believe firmly in the law of causality. If one lacks this belief and does whatever one likes, not only will one fail in the performance of religious duty, but also there will be no escape from this law of causality even in the three unhappy ways. [1] An ancient master said: 'If one wishes to know the causes formed in a previous life, one can find them in how one fares in the present life; if one wishes to know the effects in the next life, one can find them in one's deeds in the present life.' He also said: 'The karma of our deeds will never be wiped out even after hundreds and thousands of aeons but as soon as conditions become ripe, we will have to bear the effects ourselves.' The Shurangama Sutra says: 'If the causal ground is not a true one, the ripening fruit will be distorted' Therefore, when one sows a good cause, one will reap a good fruit and when one sows an evil cause, one will reap an evil fruit; when one sows melon seeds one will gather melons and when one sows beans, one will gather beans. This is the plain truth. As I am talking about the law of causality, I will tell you two stories to illustrate it.

The first story is about the massacre of the Sakya clansmen by the Crystal King (Virudhaka). [2] Before the advent of Shakyamuni Buddha, there was near Kapila town a village inhabited by fishermen, and in it was a big pond. It happened that because of a great drought, the pond ran dry and all the fish were caught and eaten by the villagers. The last fish taken was a big one and before it was killed, a boy who never ate fish, played with it and thrice knocked its head. Later, after Shakyamuni Buddha's appearance in this world, King Prasenajit [3] who believed in the Buddha-dharma married a Sakya girl who then gave birth to a prince called Crsytal. When he was young, Crystal had his schooling in Kapila, which was then inhabited by the

Sakya clansmen. One day while playing, the boy ascended to the Buddha's seat and was reprimanded by others who dragged him down. The boy cherished a grudge against the men and when he became king, he led his soldiers to attack Kapila, killing all its inhabitants. At the same time, the Buddha suffered from a headache, which lasted three days. When His disciples asked Him to rescue the poor inhabitants, the Buddha replied that a fixed Karma could not be changed. By means of his miraculous powers, Maudgalyayana [4] rescued five hundred Sakya clansmen and thought he could give them refuge in his own bowl, which was raised up in the air. When the bowl was brought down, all the men had been turned into blood. When asked by His chief disciples, the Buddha related the story (kung an) of the villagers who in days gone by had killed all the fish (in their pond); King Crystal had been the big fish and his soldiers the other fish in the pond; the inhabitants of Kapila who were now killed had been those who ate the fish; and the Buddha Himself had been the boy who thrice knocked the head of the big fish. Karma was now causing Him to suffer from a headache for three days in retribution for his previous act. Since there could be no escape from the effects of a fixed Karma, the five hundred Sakya clansmen, although rescued by Maudgalyayana, shared the same fate. Later, King Crystal was reborn in a hell. As cause produces effect which in turn becomes a new cause the retribution (theory) is inexhaustible. The law of causality is really very dreadful.

The second story is that of Ch'an master Pai Chang who liberated a wild fox.[5] One day, after a Ch'an meeting, although all his disciples had retired, the old master Pai Chang noticed an elderly man who remained behind. Pai Chang asked the man what he was doing and he replied: 'I am not a human being but the spirit of a wild fox. In my previous life, I was the head-monk of this place. One day, a monk asked me, "Does a man practicing self-cultivation, still become involved in the (theory of) retribution?" I replied, "No, he is free from the (theory of) retribution." For this reply alone, I got involved in retribution and have now been the spirit of a wild fox for five hundred years, and am still unable to get away from it. Will the master be compassionate enough to enlighten me on all this?' Pai Chang said to the old man: 'Ask me the same question and I will explain it to you.' The man then said to the master: 'I wish to ask the master this: Does one who practices self-cultivation still get involved in the (theory of) retribution?' Pai Chang replied: 'He is not blind to cause and effect.' Thereupon, the old man was greatly awakened; he prostrated himself before the master to thank him and said: 'I am indebted to you for your appropriate reply to the question and am now liberated from the fox's body. [6] I live in a small grotto on the mountain behind and hope you will grant me the usual rites for a dead monk.' The following day, Pai Chang went to a mountain behind his monastery, where in a small grotto he probed the ground with his staff and discovered a dead fox for whom the usual funeral rites for a dead monk were held.

Dear friends, after listening to these two stories, you will realize that the law of causality is indeed a dreadful thing. Even after His attainment of Buddhahood, the Buddha still suffered a headache in retribution for His former act. Retribution is infallible and fixed karma is inescapable. So we should always be heedful of all this and should be very careful about creating new causes.

(2) Strict Observance of the Rules of Discipline

In striving to perform one's religious duty, the first thing is to observe the rules of discipline. For discipline is the fundamental of the Supreme Bodhi; discipline begets immutability and immutability begets wisdom. There is no such thing as self-cultivation without observance of the rules of discipline. The Shurangama Sutra, which lists four kinds of purity, clearly teaches us that cultivation of Samadhi (mind) without observance of the rules of discipline, will not wipe out the dust impurities. Even if there be manifestation of much knowledge with Dhyana, this also will cause a fall into the realm of Maras (evil demons) and heretics. Therefore, we know that observance of the rules of discipline is very important. A man observing them is supported and protected by dragon-kings and devas, and respected and feared by Maras and heretics. A man breaking the rules of discipline is called a big robber by the ghosts who make a clean sweep of even his footprints. Formerly, in Kubhana state (Kashmir), there was nearby a monastery a poisonous dragon, which frequently played havoc in the region. In the monastery five hundred Arhats gathered together but failed to drive away the dragon with their collective power of Dhyana-samádhi. Later, a monk came to the monastery where he did not enter into Dhyana-samádhi; he merely said to the poisonous dragon: 'Will the wise and virtuous one leave this place and go to some distant one.' Thereupon, the poisonous dragon fled to a distant place. When asked by the Arhats what miraculous power he had used to drive away the dragon, the monk replied: 'I did not use the power of Dhyana-samádhi; I am only very careful about keeping the rules of discipline and I observe a minor one with the same care as a major one.' So, we can see that the collective power of five hundred Arhats' Dhyana--samádhi cannot compare with a monk's strict observance of the rules of discipline. If you retort and ask me why the Sixth Patriarch said:

'Why should discipline be observed if the mind is (already) impartial? Why should straightforward men practice Ch'an ?'[7]

I will ask you back this question: 'Is your mind already impartial and straightforward; if the Lady Ch'ang O came down from the moon [8] with her naked body and embraced you in her arms, would your heart remain undisturbed; and if someone without any reason insults and beats you, will you not give rise to feelings of anger and resentment? Can you refrain from differentiating between enmity and affection, between hate and love, between self and other, and between right and wrong? If you can do all this, then you can open your mouth widely to talk, otherwise it is useless to tell a deliberate lie.'

(3) A Firm Faith

A firm believing mind is the fundamental of one's training for performing one's religious duty, because faith is the mother (or begetter) of the beginning (or source) of right doctrine, and because without faith, no good will derive there from. If we want to be liberated from the round of births and deaths, we must first have a firm-

believing mind. The Buddha said that all living beings on earth had inherent in them the meritorious Tathágata wisdom, which they could not realize solely because of their false thinking and grasping. He also expounded all kinds of Dharma doors to enlightenment to cure all kinds of ailments from which living beings suffered. We should, therefore, believe that his words are not false and that all living beings can attain Buddhahood. But why have we failed to attain Buddhahood? It is because we have not gone into training according to the correct method. For example, we believe and know that bean curd can be made with soybean but if we do not start making it, soybean cannot turn into bean curd for us. Now assuming that soybean is used for making bean curd, we shall still fail to make it if we do not know how to mix it with gypsum. If we know the method, we will grind the soybean put the powder in water, boil it, take out the bean grounds and add a suitable quantity of gypsum powder; thus we will certainly get bean curd. Likewise, in the performance of our religious duty, Buddhahood will be unattainable not only because of lack of training, but also because of training not in conformity with the correct method. If our self-cultivation is practiced according to the correct method, without either backsliding or regret, we are bound to attain Buddhahood.

Therefore, we should firmly believe that fundamentally we are Buddhas; we should also firmly believe that self-cultivation performed according to the correct method is bound to result in the attainment of Buddha-hood. Master Yung Chia said (in his "Song of Enlightenment"): (See another version of "Song Of Enlightenment")

'When the real is attained, neither ego nor dharma exist,
And in a moment the avici karma [9] is eradicated.
If knowingly I lie to deceive living beings, my tongue
Will be pulled out for aeons uncountable as dust and sand.' [10]

The old master was very compassionate and took this boundless vow to urge those coming after him to develop a firm-believing mind.

(4) Adoption of the Method of Training

After one has developed a firm faith, one should choose a Dharma door to enlightenment for one's training. One should never change it, and when one's choice has been made, either for repetition of the Buddha's name, or for holding a mantra, or for Ch'an training, one should stick to it forever without backsliding and regret. If today the method does not prove successful, tomorrow it shall be continued; if this year it does not prove successful, next year it shall be continued; and if in the present lifetime it does not prove successful, it shall be continued in the next life. The old master Kuei Shan said: 'If one practices it in each succeeding reincarnation, the Buddha-stage can be expected.' There are some people who are irresolute in their decisions; today after hearing a learned man praise the repetition of Buddha's name, they decide to repeat it for a couple of days and tomorrow, after hearing another learned man praise Ch'an training, they will try it for another two days. If they like to play in this manner, they will go on doing so until their death without

succeeding in getting any result. Is it not a pity?

Method Of Ch'an Training

Although there are many Dharma doors to enlightenment, the Buddha, Patriarchs and Ancestors [11] were agreed that the Ch'an training was the unsurpassed wonderful door. In the Shurangama assembly, the Buddha ordered Manjusri to choose between the various modes of complete enlightenment, and he chose Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's method of using the faculty of hearing, as the best. When we turn back the hearing to hear our self-nature, this is one of the methods of Ch'an training. This place is a Ch'an hall in which we should discuss this Ch'an training.

Essentials Of Ch'an Training

Our daily activities are performed within the truth itself. Is there a place that is not a Bodhi-mandala?[12] Fundamentally a Ch'an hall is out of place; moreover Ch'an does not mean sitting in meditation. The so-called Ch'an hall and the so-called Ch'an sitting are only provided for people who encounter insurmountable obstructions of their own and who are of shallow wisdom in this period of decadence of the Dharma. (The Latter Day of the Law)

When one sits in this training, one's body and mind should be well controlled. If they are not well controlled a small harm will be illness and a great harm will be entanglement with the demon, which is most regrettable. In the Ch'an hall, when incense sticks are burned for your walking or sitting, the aim is to ensure the control of body and mind. Besides this, there are many ways to control body and mind, but I will deal briefly with the essential ones.

When sitting in Ch'an meditation, the correct position is the natural one. The waist should not be pushed forward, for to do so is to pull upward the inner heat with the result that after the sitting, there will be tears, bad breath, uneasy respiration, loss of appetite and even vomiting of blood. Neither should the waist be drawn backward with dropped head, for this can easily cause dullness. As soon as dullness is felt, the meditator should open his eyes wide, pull up his waist and gently shake his buttocks, and dullness will disappear automatically.

If the training is undergone in hot haste, one will feel a certain annoying dryness in the chest. In this case, it will be advisable to stop the training for the time a half-inch of the incense stick takes to burn, and resume when one feels at ease again. If one does not proceed in this manner, one will, as time goes on, develop a hot and excitable character, and in the worst case, one may thereby become insane or get entangled with demons.

When the Ch'an sitting in meditation becomes effective, there will be mental states,

which are too many to enumerate, but if you do not cling to them, they will not hinder you. This is just what the proverb says: 'Don't wonder at the wonderful and the wonderful will be in full retreat.' Even if you see evil spirits of all kinds coming to disturb you, you should take no notice of them and you should not be afraid of them. Even if Shakyamuni Buddha comes to lay His hand on your head [13] and prophesies your future Buddhahood you should not take any notice of all this and should not be delighted by it. The Shurangama Sutra says: 'A perfect state is that in which the mind is undisturbed by the saintly; an interpretation of the saintly is entanglement with all demons.'

How To Begin The Training: Distinction Between Host And Guest

How should one start the (Ch'an) training? In the Shurangama assembly, Arya Ajnatakaundinya talked about the two words 'Foreign Dust' [14] and this is just where we should begin our training. He said: 'For instance, a traveler stops at an inn where he passes the night or takes his meal, and as soon as he has done so, he packs and continues his journey, because he has no time to stay longer. As for the host of the inn, he has nowhere to go. My deduction is that the one who does not stay is the guest and the one who does stay is the host. Therefore, a thing is foreign when it does not stay. Again in a clear sky, when the sun rises and sunlight enters the house through an opening, the dust is seen moving in the ray of light whereas the empty space is unmoving. Therefore, that which is still is void-ness and that which moves is dust.'

Foreign dust illustrates false thinking, and void-ness illustrates self-nature, that is the permanent host who does not follow the guest in the latter's coming and going. This serves to illustrate the eternal unmoving self-nature, which does not follow false thinking in its sudden rise and fall. Therefore, it is said: 'if one is unmindful of all things, one will meet with no inconvenience when surrounded by all things.' By dust which moves of itself and does not inconvenience void-ness which is clearly still, one means that false thinking rises and falls by itself and does not hinder the self-nature which is immutable in its Bhutatathata (such-ness, that-ness) condition. This is the meaning of the saying: 'If the mind does not arise, all things are blameless.'

The meaning of the above word 'foreign' is coarse and that of 'dust' is fine. Beginners should dearly understand the difference between 'host' and 'guest' and will thus not be 'drifted about' by false thinking. By advancing further, they will be clear about 'void-ness' and 'dust' and thus will experience no inconvenience from false thinking. It is said: 'when false thinking is known, there will be no harm.' If you inquire carefully into and understand all this, over half of what the training means will become quite clear to you.

Hua Tou And Doubt

In ancient times, the Patriarchs and Ancestors directly pointed at the mind for realization of self-nature and attainment of Buddhahood like Bodhidharma who 'quieted the mind' and the Sixth Patriarch who only talked about 'perception of self-nature', all of them just advocated the outright cognizance of it without any more

ado. They did not advocate looking into a hua t'ou, but later they discovered that men were becoming unreliable, were not of dogged determination, indulged in playing tricks and boasted of their possession of precious gems, which really belonged to others. For this reason, these ancestors were compelled to set up their own sects, each with its own devices; hence, the hua t'ou technique.

There are many hua t'ou, such as: 'All things are returnable to One, to what is that One returnable?'[15] 'Before you were born, what was your real face?'[16] but the hua t'ou: 'Who is repeating Buddha's name?' is widely in use today.

What is hua t'ou? (lit. word-head). Word is the spoken word and head is that which precedes word. For instance, when one says 'Amitabha Buddha', this is a word. Before it is said it is a hua t'ou (or ante-word). That which is called a hua t'ou is the moment before a thought arises. As soon as a thought arises, it becomes a hua wei (lit. word-tail). The moment before a thought arises is called 'the un-born'. That void which is neither disturbed nor dull, and neither still nor one-sided is called 'the unending'. The unremitting turning of the light inwards on oneself, instant after instant, and exclusive of all other things, is called 'looking into the hua t'ou' or 'taking care of the hua t'ou'.

When one looks into a hua t'ou, the most important thing is to give rise to a doubt. Doubt is the crutch of hua t'ou.[17] For instance, when one is asked: 'Who is repeating Buddha's name' everybody knows that he himself repeats it, but is it repeated by the mouth or by the mind? If the mouth repeats it, why does not it do so when one sleeps? If the mind repeats it, what does the mind look like? As mind is intangible, one is not clear about it. Consequently some slight feeling of doubt arises about 'who.' This doubt should not be coarse; the finer it is, the better. At all times and in all places, this doubt alone should be looked into unremittingly, like an ever-flowing stream, without giving rise to a second thought. If this doubt persists, do not try to shake it; if it ceases to exist, one should gently give rise to it again. Beginners will find the hua t'ou more effective in some still place than amidst disturbance. However, one should not give rise to a discriminating mind; one should remain indifferent to either the effectiveness or ineffectiveness (of the hua t'ou) and one should take no notice of either stillness or disturbance. Thus, one should work at the training with singleness of mind.

In the hua t'ou: 'Who is repeating the Buddha's name?' emphasis should be laid upon the word 'Who', the other words serving only to give a general idea of the whole sentence. For instance in the questions: 'Who is wearing this robe and eating rice,' 'Who is going to stool and is urinating,' 'Who is putting an end to ignorance,' and 'Who is able to know and feel,' as soon as one lays emphasis upon the word 'who,' while one is walking or standing, sitting or reclining, one will be able to give rise to a doubt without difficulty and without having to use one's faculty of thought to think and discriminate. Consequently the word 'That' of the hua t'ou is a wonderful technique in Ch'an training. However, one should not repeat the word 'Who' or the sentence 'who is repeating the Buddha's name' like adherents of the Pure Land School who repeat the Buddha's name. Neither should one set one's thinking and discriminating mind on searching for him who repeats the Buddha's name. There are

some people who unremittingly repeat the sentence: 'Who is repeating the Buddha's name;' it would be far better merely to repeat Amitabha Buddha's name as do followers of the Pure Land School for this will give greater merits. There are others who indulge in thinking of a lot of things and seek after everything here and there, and call this the rising of a doubt; they do not know that the more they think, the more their false thinking will increase, just like someone who wants to ascend but is really descending. You should know all this.

Usually beginners give rise to a doubt, which is very coarse; it is apt to stop abruptly and to continue again, and seems suddenly familiar and suddenly unfamiliar. This is certainly not doubt and can only be their thinking process. When the mad wandering mind has gradually been brought under control, one will be able to apply the brake on the thinking process, and only then can this be called 'looking into' (a hua t'ou). Furthermore, little by little, one will gain experience in the training and then, there will be no need to give rise to the doubt which will rise of itself automatically. In reality, at the beginning, there is no effective training at all as there is only an effort to put an end to false thinking. When real doubt rises of itself, this can be called true training. This is the moment when one reaches a 'strategic gateway' where it is easy to go out of one's way as follows.

Firstly, there is the moment when one will experience utter purity and boundless ease [18] and if one fails to be aware of and look into the same, one will slip into a state of dullness. If a learned teacher is present, he will immediately see clearly that the student is in such a state and will strike the meditator with the usual flat stick, thus clearing away the confusing dullness; a great many are thereby awakened to the truth.[19]

Secondly, when the state of purity and emptiness appears, if the doubt ceases to exist, this is the un-record-able state [20] in which the meditator is likened to one sitting on a withered tree in a grotto, or to soaking stones with water.[21] When one reaches this state, one should arouse the doubt to be immediately followed by one's awareness and contemplation of this state. Awareness of this state is freedom from illusion; this is wisdom. Contemplation of this state wipes out confusion; this is imperturbability. This singleness of mind will be thoroughly still and shining, in its imperturbable absoluteness, spiritual clearness and thorough understanding, like the continuous smoke of a solitary fire. When one reaches this stage, one should be provided with a diamond eye [22] and should refrain from giving rise to anything else, as if one does, one will simply add another head upon one's head. [23]

Formerly, when a monk asked Master Chao Chou: 'what should one do when there is not a thing to bring with self,' Chao Chou replied: 'Lay it down.' The monk said: 'What shall I lay down when I do not bring a thing with me' Chao Chou replied: 'If you cannot lay it down, carry it away.' [24] This is exactly the stage above mentioned, which is like that of a drinker of water who alone knows whether it is cold or warm. This cannot be expressed in words and speeches, and one who reaches this stage will clearly know it. As to one who has not reached it, it will be useless to tell him about it. This is what the following lines mean:

'When you meet a fencing master, show to him your sword.
Do not give your poem to a man who's not a poet.'[25]

Taking Care Of A Hua T'ou And Turning Inward The Hearing To Hear The Self-Nature

Someone may ask: 'How can Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's "method of turning inward the hearing to hear the self-nature" be regarded as Ch'an training?' I have just talked about looking into the hua t'ou; it means that you should unremittingly and one-pointedly turn the light inwards on 'that which is not born and does not die' which is the hua t'ou. To turn inwards one's hearing to hear the self-nature means also that you should unremittingly and one-pointedly turn inwards your faculty of hearing to hear the self-nature. 'To turn inwards' is 'to turn back.' 'That which is not born and does not die' is nothing but the self-nature. When hearing and looking follow sound and form in the worldly stream, hearing does not go beyond sound and looking does not go beyond form appearance, with the obvious differentiation. However, when going against the mundane stream, the meditation is turned inwards to contemplate the self-nature. When 'hearing' and 'looking' are no longer in pursuit of sound and appearance, they become fundamentally pure and enlightening and do not differ from each other. We should know that what we call 'looking into the hua t'ou' and 'turning inwards the hearing to hear the self-nature' cannot be effected by means of the eye to look or the ear to hear. If eye and ear are so used, there will be pursuit after sound and form with the result that one will be turned by things (i.e. externals); this is called 'surrender to the mundane stream'. [26] If there is singleness of thought abiding in that 'which is not born and does not die', without pursuing sound and form, this is 'going against the stream'; this is called 'looking into the hua t'ou' or 'turning inwards the hearing to hear the self-nature'.

Earnestness About Leaving Samsara [27] And Developing A Long Enduring Mind

In the Ch'an training, one should be in earnest in one's desire to leave the realm of birth and death, and develop a long enduring mind in one's striving. If the mind is not earnest it will be impossible to give rise to the doubt, and the striving will be ineffective. Lack of a long enduring mind will result in laziness and the training will not be continuous. Just develop a long enduring mind and the doubt will rise of itself. When doubt rises trouble (klesa) will come to an end of itself. As the ripe moment comes it will be like running water which will form a channel. [28]

I will now tell you a story I personally witnessed. In the year K'eng Tsu (1900), when eight world powers sent their expeditionary forces to Peking after the Boxer rebellion, I followed Emperor Kuang Hsu and Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi when they fled from the capital. We had to hurry towards Shen Hsi (Shensi) province; each day we walked several tens of miles, and for several days we had no rice to eat. On the road, a peasant offered some creepers of sweet potato [29] to the hungry emperor, who found them savory and asked the man what they were. You can imagine that when the emperor who used to put on airs and had an awe-inspiring reputation, had

to run some distance he became very hungry. When he ate creepers of sweet potato, he gave up all his airs and awe-inspiring attitude. Why did he walk on foot, become hungry and lay down everything? Because the allied forces wanted his life and he had only one thought, that of running for his life. Later, when peace had been concluded, he returned to the capital, putting on once more his airs with his awe-inspiring reputation. Again he would no longer walk in the street and did not feel hungry. If he did not find some food savory, once more he could not swallow it. Why was he again unable to lay down every-thing now? Because the allied forces no longer wanted his life and because his mind was not set on escaping. If he now applied the same mind previously set on running for his life to perform his religious duty, was there anything he could not do? This was due to the fact that he did not have a long enduring mind, and as soon as favorable conditions prevailed, his former habits appeared again.

Dear friends, the murderous demon of impermanence is constantly looking for our lives and will never agree to conclude peace with us! Let us hastily develop a long enduring mind to get out of birth and death. Master Yuan Miao of Kao Feng said: 'If one sets a time limit for success in the Ch'an training, one should act like a man who has fallen to the bottom of a pit one thousand chang deep.[30] His thousand and ten thousand thoughts are reduced to a single idea on how to escape from the pit. He keeps it up from morning to evening and from evening to the following morning, and has no other thought. If he trains in this way and does not realize the truth in three, five or seven days, I shall be guilty of a verbal sin for which I shall fall into the hell where tongues are pulled out.' The old master was earnest in his great mercy and being apprehensive that we would not develop a long enduring mind, he took this great vow to guarantee our successes.

Difficulty And Easiness In Ch'an Training

There is difficulty and easiness in the Ch'an training, both for beginners and for old practitioners.

Difficulty For Beginners: The Remiss Mind

The most common defects of a beginner lie in his inability to lay down his habits of false thinking; of self-indulgence in ignorance caused by pride and jealousy; of self-inflicted obstructions caused by concupiscence, anger, stupidity and love; of laziness and gluttony; and of attachment to right and wrong, to selfness and otherness. With a belly (breast) filled with all the above defects, how can he be responsive to the truth? Others are young gentlemen [31] who are unable to get rid of their habits and are incapable of the least condescension and of enduring the smallest trouble; how can they undergo the training in performance of their religious duties? They never think of our original teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, and of His standing when He left home. Some people who know a little literature, use their knowledge of it to interpret the ancients' sayings, boast of their unequalled abilities and regard themselves as superiors.[32] When seriously ill, they cannot bear their sufferings with patience. When they are about to die, they lose their heads and realize that their usual knowledge is useless. Thus their repentance will be tardy.

Some are serious in their religious duties but do not know where to begin their training. Others are afraid of false thinking and are unable to put an end to it. So they worry about it all day long and blame their karmic obstructions for it, thus falling away in their religious enthusiasm. Some want to resist false thinking to the death by angrily clenching their fists to keep up their spirits and by thrusting out their chests and widely opening their eyes as if there is really something very important to do. They want to fight to a finish against their false thinking; not only will they fail to drive it away but they will thereby vomit blood or become insane. There are people who are afraid of falling into void-ness but they do not know they are thus giving rise to the 'demon'. Consequently, they can neither wipe out void-ness nor attain awakening. There are those who set their minds on the quest of awakening and who do not know that to seek awakening and to desire Buddhahood are nothing but a great falsehood; they do not know that gravel cannot be turned into rice and they will thus wait until the year of the donkey for their awakening. [33]

There are also those who can manage to sit in meditation during the time one or two incense sticks take to burn and thereby experience some joy, but this is only likened to the blind black tortoise which stretched its head through the hole of a floating log. [34] It is just a rare chance and not the result of true training. Moreover, the demon of joy has already slipped into their minds. There are cases of the enjoyable state of purity and cleanness realizable in stillness but not realizable in disturbance and for this reason meditators avoid disturbing conditions and look for quiet places. They do not realize that they have already agreed to become servants of the demon of both stillness and disturbance. [35]

There are many cases like the above. It is really difficult for beginners to know the correct method of training; awareness without contemplation will lead to confusion and instability, and contemplation without awareness will result in immersion in stagnant water.

Easiness For Beginners: Laying Down Of The Burden Of Thinking And Giving Rise To A Single Thought

Although the training seems difficult, it becomes very easy once its method is known. Where does easiness lie for beginners? There is nothing ingenious in it because it lies in 'laying down'. Laying down what? The burden of distress (klesa) caused by ignorance. How does one lay it down? You have all been at the bedside of a dead man. If you try to scold him a few times, he will not be excited. If you give him a few strokes of the staff he will not strike back. Formerly he indulged in ignorance but now he cannot do so any more. Formerly he longed for reputation and wealth but now he no longer wants it. Formerly he was contaminated by habits but now he is free from them. Now he does not make distinctions and lays down everything. Dear friends, please look at all this. When we have breathed our last, this physical body of ours will become a corpse. Because we cherish this body, we are unable to lay down everything, with the resultant creation of self and other, right and wrong, like and dislike, and acceptance and rejection. If we only regard this body as a corpse, we will not cherish it and will certainly not consider it as ours. If so is there anything we cannot lay down?

We only have to lay down everything, day and night, no matter whether we walk, stand, sit or recline, in the midst of either stillness or disturbance, and whether busy or not; throughout our bodies, within and without, there should be only a doubt, a uniform, harmonizing and continuous doubt, unmixed with any other thought, in other words, a hua t'ou which is likened to a long sword leaning against the sky, which we will use to cut down a demon or Buddha should either appear. Thus we will not fear false thinking; who then will disturb us; who will distinguish between disturbance and stillness and who will cling to existence and non-existence? If there be fear of false thinking, this fear will increase false thinking. If there be awareness of purity, this purity will immediately be impure. If there be fear of falling into non-existence, there will immediately be a fall into existence. If there be desire to attain Buddhahood, there will immediately be a fall into the way of demons. For this reason it is said: 'the carrying of water and fetching of firewood are nothing but the wonderful Truth. The hoeing of fields and the cultivation of soil are entirely Ch'an potentialities.' This does not mean that only the crossing of legs for sitting in meditation can be regarded as Ch'an training in the performance of one's religious duty.

Difficulty For Old Practitioners: Inability To Take A Step Forward After Reaching The Top Of A Hundred-Foot Pole

Where does difficulty lie for an old practitioner? In his training, when his doubt has become genuinely real, his awareness and contemplation are still linked with the realm of birth and death, and lack of awareness and contemplation is the cause of his fall into the realm of non-existence. It is already difficult to reach these stages, but there are many who are unable to get beyond them, and are content to stand on the top of a hundred-foot pole without knowing how to take a step forward. Others who, after reaching these stages, are able to achieve in the stillness some wisdom which enables them to understand a few kung ans left behind by the ancients; they also lay down the doubt, thinking they have attained a thorough awakening, and compose poems and gathas, twinkle their eyes and raise their eyebrows, calling themselves enlightened; they do not know that they are servants of the demon. [36]

There are also those who misunderstand the meaning of Bodhidharma's words:

'Put an end to the formation of all causes without, and have no panting heart within; then with a mind like a wall, [37] you will be able to enter the Truth' and the Sixth Patriarch's words:

'Do not think of either good or evil; at this very instant, what is the Venerable Hui Ming's real face?'[38]

They think that sitting with crossed legs like withered logs in a grotto is the best Pattern. These people mistake an illusion-city for a place of precious things,[39] and take a foreign land for their native village. The story of the old lady burning the hut serves to scold these logs of dead wood.[40]

Easiness For Old Practitioners: Continuation Of Close And Uninterrupted Ch'an Training

Where does easiness lie for old practitioners? It lies only in the absence of self-satisfaction and the continuation of the close and uninterrupted Ch'an training, the closeness should be much closer, the continuance much more continuous and the subtleness much more subtle. When the ripe moment comes, the bottom of the barrel will drop off of itself; [41] otherwise one will have to call on enlightened masters who will help one to pull out (the remaining) nail or stake (of obstruction).

Master Han Shan's Song is: [42]

High on a mountain peak [43]
Only boundless space is seen.[44]
How to sit in meditation, no one knows.[45]
The solitary moon shines o'er the icy pool,[46]
But in the pool there is no moon;[47]
The moon is in the night-blue sky.[48]
This song is chanted now,
But there's no Ch'an in the song.[49]

The first two lines show that that which is truly eternal is solitary and does not belong to anything else, and that it shines brightly over the world without encountering any obstruction. The following (third) line shows the wonderful body of Bhutatathata [50] which worldly men do not know and which cannot be located [51] even by all Buddhas of the three times; hence the three words: 'no one knows'. The next three (fourth, fifth and sixth) lines show the old master's expedient expounding of this state. The last two lines (seventh and eighth) give a special waffling to all of us, lest we mistake the finger for the moon,[52] that is none of these words are Ch'an.[53]

My talk is like a heap of things and is also like what we call the drag of creepers [54] and an interfering interruption because wherever there are words and speeches, there is no real meaning.[55] When the ancient masters received their students, either they used their staffs to beat them or they shouted to wake them up[56] and there were not so many complications. However, the present cannot be compared with the past, and it is, therefore, imperative to point a finger at the moon. [57] Dear friends, please look into all this; after all, who is pointing his finger and who is looking at the moon?'[58]

Footnotes:

[1] By going to (a) the hell of fire, (b) the hell of blood, where the inhabitants

devour each other like animals and (c) the Asipattra hell of swords, where the leaves and grass are sharp-edged swords.

[2] This story was related by the Buddha himself.

[3] King of Sravasti and a contemporary of the Buddha. He was killed by his son, Virudhaka, known as the Crystal King and the Evil Born King, who supplanted him.

[4] Maha-Maudgalyayana, or Maudgalaputra, was one of the ten chief disciples of the Buddha, and was specially noted for his miraculous power; formerly an ascetic, he agreed with Shariputra that whichever first found the truth would reveal it to the other. Shariputra found the Buddha and brought Maudgalyayana to Him; the former is placed on His right, the latter on His left.

[5] This story is recorded in 'The Transmission of the Lamp' (Ching Te Ch'uan Teng Lu) and other Ch'an collections.

[6] In his previous life. The old monk had already succeeded in disentangling his mind (from its attachment to the phenomenal. However, he could not get away from Samsara because of the karma of misguiding his former disciple about retribution. In his present transmigration, he had realized a singleness of mind about leaving the world of animals and had thereby acquired the occult power of transforming his fox's body into that of an old man. However, he still clung to the dual view of the existence of ego (subject) and fox (object) and could not free himself from this last bondage. Pai Chang's words had a tremendous effect on the old man, releasing his mind from his doubt about his self-nature, which fundamentally was pure and contained neither, cause nor effect. Being free from this last bond, his self-nature now returned to normal and could function without further handicap; it could hear the master's voice by means of its function. When function operated normally, its essence manifested itself; hence enlightenment.

[7] See 'The Altar Sutra of the Six Patriarch,' Chapter 3.

[8] The name of a very beautiful lady who, according to a popular tale, stole the elixir of life and fled with it to the moon where she was changed into a frog.

[9] Avici is the last and deepest of the eight hells, where the culprits suffer, die, and are instantly reborn to suffering without interruption.

[10] As punishment for verbal sins.

[11] The Patriarchs are the six Patriarchs of China. The Ancestors are the great Ch'an Masters who came after the Patriarchs. Hsu Yun is now called an Ancestor.

[12] Bodhimandala: truth-plot, holy site, place of enlightenment.

[13] A custom of Buddha in teaching His disciples, from which the burning of spots on the head of a monk is said to have originated. The eventual vision of the Buddha is merely an impure creation of the deluded mind and does not really represent Him in His Dharmakaya, which is inconceivable. Many meditators mistake such visions for the real and become involved with demons. (See Shurangama Sutra.)

[14] See Master Hsu Yun's 'Daily Discourses'.

[15] All things are returnable to One-mind, to what is One-mind returnable?

[16] This hua t'ou is sometimes wrongly translated in the West as: Before your parents were born, what was your original face? There are two errors here. The first is probably due to the wrong interpretation of the Chinese character 'sheng', which means 'born' or 'to give birth'. Then 'original' is wrong because it suggests creation or a beginning. The self-nature has no beginning, being outside time. The correct rendering is: Before your parents gave birth to you, what was your fundamental face?'

[17] Doubt is as indispensable to hua t'ou as crutches are to the cripples.

[18] Lit. Utter purity and extreme lightness. When the meditator succeeds in putting an end to all his thoughts, he will step into 'the stream' or correct concentration in which his body and its weight seem to disappear completely and to give way to a bright purity which is as light as air; he will feel as if he is about to be levitated.

[19] Lit. Thus clearing away the fog that darkens the sky. As soon as the confusing dullness is cleared away, the self-nature, now free from hindrance, is able to function normally and will actually receive the beating, hence enlightenment.

[20] Avyakrta or Avyakhyata, in Sanskrit; un-record-able, either as good or bad; neutral, neither good nor bad, things that are innocent and cannot be classified under moral categories.

[21] When the mind is disentangled from the sense-organs, sense data and

consciousness, one reaches a state described as: 'holding fast to the top of a pole', or 'silent immersion in stagnant water or 'sitting on the dean white ground'. (See Han Shan's 'Song of the Board bearer'.) One should take a step forward in order to get out of this state called 'a life', the fourth of the four laksanas (of an ego, a personality, a being and a life) mentioned in the Diamond Sutra, otherwise the result one will achieve is no better than 'soaking stones with water' which never penetrates stones. if from the top of a hundred-foot pole one takes a step forward, one will reach the top of a high peak from which one will release one's last hold and leap over the phenomenal.

[22] Diamond eye: indestructible eye of Wisdom.

[23] A superfluous and unnecessary thing that will obstruct the training.

[24] The monk became thoroughly awakened after hearing Chao Chou's reply. His first question means: 'What should one do when one becomes disentangled from sense-organs, sense-data and consciousnesses?' He did not know that he was still entangled with this awareness of ego and preservation of ego. (See Han Shan's commentary on The Diamond Cutter of Doubts). Chao Chou's reply 'Lay it down' means: 'Lay down even the thought you are still burdened with, for this very thought of not carrying a thing with you holds you in bondage.' The monk argued: 'As I do not carry a single thing with me, what shall I lay down?' Chao Chou replied: 'If you really have got rid of all your false thinking, there will only remain your self-nature which is pure and clean and which you should carry away with you, because you cannot get rid of it.' The monk, now released from his awareness of ego or last bondage, realized that only his self-nature remained which was free from all impediments and which he could not get rid of, for Chao Chou told him to carry it away. It was this very self-nature of his, now pure and clean, which actually heard the master's voice, hence his enlightenment.

[25] These two lines come from Lin Chi (Rinzai in Japanese) whose idea was that one could talk about enlightenment with an enlightened person and that it was useless to do so when meeting a deluded man, for the truth was inexpressible and could only be realized after rigorous training. The first line 'When you meet a fencing master, show to him your sword' was illustrated when Han Shan met Ta Kuan and sat cross-legged face to face with him for forty days and nights without sleeping. (See Han Shan's Autobiography). The second line 'Do not give your poem to a man who's not a poet' was proved by the Sixth Patriarch, who urged his disciples not to discuss the Supreme Vehicle with those who were not of the same sect, but to bring their palms together to salute them and make them happy. (See The Altar Sifra of the Sixth Patriarch.)

[26] i.e. to accord with the world, its ways and customs; to die.

[27] Realm of birth and death.

[28] i.e. success is bound to follow.

[29] In China, only starving people eat creepers of sweet potato, which is used as food for pigs

[30] Chang: a measure of ten Chinese feet.

[31] Literally 'sons of officials'; equivalent of the French term 'fils a papa'.

[32] One of the ten wrong views.

[33] Animals and birds were chosen by the ancients as symbols for lunar years, such as a rat, buffalo, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, chicken, dog and pig. As a donkey was not one of them, the year of the donkey can never come round, i.e. these people can never attain enlightenment.

[34] The Samyuktagama Sutra says: 'There was a blind tortoise countless aeons old which stretched out its head once every century. There was a log with a hole through it, floating in the sea and tossed about by high waves raised by winds of gale force. The tortoise stretched its head through the hole. . . .' This shows the rareness of the chance as compared with the difficulty of the blind black tortoise succeeding in putting its head through the hole in the floating log.

[35] i.e. differentiation between stillness and disturbance.

[36] Ancient masters used to twinkle their eyes and raise their eyebrows to reveal the self-mind to their disciples. In the above text, those who have only made some progress but are still unenlightened, ape the ancients to prove their attainment of the truth.

[37] When the mind is like a wall, it will remain indifferent to all externals.

[38] See The Altar Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch.

[39] Quotation from the Lotus Sutra in which the Buddha urged His disciples not to stay in the illusion-city or incomplete Nirvana but to strive to reach the Perfect Nirvana.

[40] An old lady supported a Ch'an monk for twenty years and used to send every day a sixteen-year-old girl to bring him food and offerings. One day, the old lady ordered the girl to ask him this question: 'How is "it" at this very moment?' The monk replied:

'A withered log in a cold cave

After three winters has no warmth'.

The girl gave the monk's reply to the old lady who said: 'I have been making offerings to one who can prove only that he is a worldly fellow.' Thereupon, she sent him away and set fire to the hut. (See The Imperial Selection of Ch'an Sayings). The monk reached only the top of a hundred-foot pole but refused to take a step forward. As he was only dead wood, the old lady was angry, sent him away and destroyed the hut.

[41] i.e. the bottom of the barrel full of black lacquer, or ignorance; when it drops off; the barrel will be emptied of lacquer and enlightenment will be attained.

[42] Han Shan (Cold Mountain) should not be confounded with Han Shan (Silly Mountain) whose autobiography has been translated by me into English.

[43] The high purpose of one desirous of escaping from mortality.

[44] The magnitude of his high aim.

[45] Worldly men turn their backs on the transcendental, which they do not know.

[46] The solitary moon symbolizes enlightenment, which is independent of the phenomenal and is the absolute, which does not brook interference from any quarter. The pool is a symbol of the self-nature, which avoids all worldly things and is disentangled from them. The line means the attainment of enlightenment by self-nature.

[47] The self-nature is fundamentally pure and clean and does not gain anything, even the moon, symbol of enlightenment, when it is awakened, or lose anything, when it is under delusion. If there be a moon, or enlightenment in it, it will not be absolute and will not be pure and clean.

[48] The enlightened self-nature neither comes nor goes for it is immutable and pervades everywhere in the Dharmadhatu, symbolized by the blue sky which is pure and clean.

[49] The song is chanted in praise of that which is pure and clean and does not

contain an atom of Ch'an, because Ch'an is only an empty name with no real nature.

[50] Bhutatathata: the real, thus always, or eternally so; i.e. reality as contrasted with unreality, or appearance, and the unchanging or immutable as contrasted with form and phenomena. Bhuta is substance, that which exists; tathata is such-ness, thus-ness, i.e. such is its nature.

[51] If it can be located anywhere, it will not be the absolute and will not be all embracing.

[52] When a finger points towards the moon, wise men look at the moon whereas the ignorant look at the finger and do not see the moon, or the truth. This parable was used by the Buddha when teaching His disciples.

[53] Readers will notice that footnotes [43] to [49] on this page seem somewhat different from Master Hsu Yun's commentary on the song, and will realize that Han Shan's poem was excellent in that it can be interpreted either 'perpendicularly' or 'horizontally' as the learned ancients put it, provided there be no deviation from its main purport. My footnotes describe a student striving to achieve enlightenment whereas my master Hsu Yun describes the state of an enlightened master. Gathas and poems chanted by the ancients are like a prism or spectrum of multi-leveled meanings as Mr. L Group, an American Buddhist of New York, ably puts it.

[54] Creepers: unnecessary things which do not concern the real.

[55] Words and speeches cannot express the inexpressible. Red meaning is the reality, which cannot be described and expressed

[56] Beating and shouting are to reveal the master's self-nature, which beats and shouts and the student's self-nature, which is beaten and hears the shout. The beating and shouting are in accord with Bodhidharma's direct pointing at the self-mind for realization of the self-nature for attainment of Buddhahood.

[57] The finger is an expediency used to reveal the moon, or enlightened self-nature, but one should not cling to the finger and overlook the moon, which is pointed at.

[58] One who points at the moon and one who looks at the moon are the self-mind of the master and the self-mind of the student respectively, again a direct pointing at the self-mind for realization of self-nature and attainment of Buddhahood, as taught by Bodhidharma.

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Dharma Poems of Master Hsu Yun

Entrance to the Way

So many people enter the hall to practice.
How many of them carry that long sword
The sword of Heavenly Reliance?
Everything has to be hacked to pieces.
Saints, demons, everything!
Blood has to be splattered all over the mansions of heaven.
That's the Direct Teaching!
Pull down those golden locked gates to the Profound
That guard the Entrance to the Way.
Be fierce when you sit! Make your sitting a blade that hacks through the
wilderness of incomprehension.
Let your eye pierce the Emptiness!
Expose that True Face
The One that was yours before your mother gave birth.

Only One Heart

Gaze into the Emptiness, the illusory changings of this world.
Enter the Emptiness. Others have. It's not so hard.
Is there any place that's unreachable when you make the effort?
Don't be left behind because you've confused yourself over this.
Here! Let me rap you on the head with my stick!
Shut up, foolish face! Stop talking a minute!
Don't be so quick to argue!
The mystery is so exquisite! It can't be discussed!
Yes, I recite the Buddha's name... or is the Buddha reciting mine?
What's the recitation for anyway?
There's only One Heart and It's in the Pure Land.
The Buddha is my own True Nature.
The Buddha and me! We're one, not two. So are you!
You're chanting to this? You are this!
Come, hold on to this reality! Don't be swept away into illusion.
History is an endless lie.
Let today be the day that the clouds and fog lift.
Don't let a wisp of them remain.
Let your body live here, but keep your spirit evanescent.
See that when it's free,
It can't be bogged down into those old familiar ruts.

Chant of the Heart's Impression

This is an exquisite truth:
Saints and ordinary folks are the same from the start.
Eventually there's a difference between them.
You don't borrow string when you've got a good strong rope.
Every Dharma is known in the heart.
After the rain, the mountain color intensifies.

Once you become familiar with the design of fate's illusions
Your ink slab will contain all of life and death.

Search for Truth

1.

Experience Chan! It's not mysterious.
As I see it, it boils down to cause and effect.
Outside the mind there is no Dharma
So how can anybody speak of a heaven beyond?

2.

Experience Chan! It's not a field of learning.
Learning adds things that can be researched and discussed.
The feel of impressions can't be communicated.
Enlightenment is the only medium of transmission.

3.

Experience Chan! It's not a lot of questions.
Too many questions is the Chan disease.
The best way is just to observe the noise of the world.
The answer to your questions? Ask your own heart.

4.

Experience Chan! It's not the teachings of disciples.
Such speakers are guests from outside the gate.
The Chan which you are hankering to speak about
only talks about turtles turning into fish.

5.

Experience Chan! It can't be described.
When you describe it you miss the point.
When you discover that your proofs are without substance
You'll realize that words are nothing but dust.

6.

Experience Chan! It's experiencing your own nature!
Going with the flow everywhere and always.
When you don't fake it and waste time trying to rub and polish it,
Your Original Self will always shine through brighter than bright.

7.

Experience Chan! It's like harvesting treasures.
But donate them to others. You won't need them.
Suddenly everything will appear before you,
Altogether complete and altogether done.

8.

Experience Chan! Become a follower who when accepted
Learns how to give up his life and his death.
Grasping this carefully he comes to see clearly.
And then he laughs till he topples the Cold Mountain ascetics.

9.

Experience Chan! It'll require great skepticism;
But great skepticism blocks those detours on the road.
Jump off the lofty peaks of mystery.
Turn your heaven and earth inside out.

10.

Experience Chan! Ignore that superstitious nonsense
That makes some claim that they've attained Chan.
Foolish beliefs are those of the not-yet-awakened.
And they're the ones who most need the experience of Chan!

11.

Experience Chan! There's neither distance nor intimacy.
Observation is like a family treasure.

Whether with eyes, ears, body, nose, or tongue -
It's hard to say which is the most amazing to use.
12.

Experience Chan! There's no class distinction.
The one who bows and the one who is bowed to are a Buddha unit.
The yoke and its lash are tied to each other.
Isn't this our first principle... the one we should most observe?

Mixed Miscellaneous Song

What good is talking about the future or the past?
It can't change the unchangeable.
What's the difference between leaving home
Or coming here to live in a monastery?
Where can you go that you can't see the moon?
Where can you go that you won't find flowers?
Where there's sky, there's a moon.
Where there's earth, flowers grow.
Carry a lute. Make up your own songs.
You don't need to study other people's music.
Guide your feet until they move in step
With nothing more glorious than a white ox cart.
Unburden yourself. Empty your hands of impediments.
Meditate fiercely! And just when you want to rest
The Lotus Flower will open
And you'll be sitting on the Precious Throne.

On Novices being robed for the first time.

The Buddha grieves that we must face such hardship.
He's so lovingly concerned for people like us.
Don't let pretty flowers dazzle your young eyes.
An empty room can't get dusty
And even the lucky favorite is pursued by death.
So don't be too arrogant or impatient,
Take your time and let us show you
How to wrap and tie a monk's robes.
In the beginning, there was no model to follow.
Who knew what needed to be done?
Look! One false move and your tangled up again.
Yes, take your time and let us show you
How to wrap and tie an old monk's robes.

Poems on the Oxherding series, by Master Hsu Yun

1. Pushing Aside the Grass to Look for the Ox

Wanting to break through to Emptiness with my white cudgel
I cried out louder than the bellowing Ox, mooing through my senses.
I followed mountain and stream searching for the Ox, seeking it everywhere.
But I couldn't tell in which direction it had gone... west?... or east?

2. Suddenly Seeing Tracks

On I searched... into the mountains and along the river banks.
But in every direction I went, I went in vain.
Who would have suspected that it was right where I stood;
That I needed only nod my head and my true Self would appear before me.

3. Seeing the Ox

Its wild nature is now calmed in lazy sleep.
By the stream, under the trees, crushing the blades of dew laden grass
The Ox sleeps without a care.
At last I have found it... there with its great head and horns.

4. Piercing the Ox's Nose

I rush forward and pierce the Ox's nose!
It wildly jerks and jumps
But I feed it when it is hungry and give it water when it thirsts.
Then I allow the Oxherding Boy to take care of it.

5. Training the Ox

I have supported you with great care for many years
And you plow - not mud and water, but clouds!
From dawn until dusk, the natural grass sustains you
And you keep your master company by sleeping out of doors.

6. Returning Home Riding the Ox

What place in these cloudy mountains is not my home?
There's greenery everywhere - so lush it's hard to tell
Crops from wild grasses. I don't intrude on planted fields.
I ride the Ox and let him graze along the roadside.

7. Keeping the Person Because of the Ox

I went from the city to the edge of the sea
I returned riding backwards in a white ox wagon.
Into this painted hall comes a spinning red wheel.
The New Bride finally arrives, and from my own house!

8. The Bride and the Ox are Forgotten

I remember the old days as I brush out dead ashes from the cold stove.
Silently, without a trace, I pace back and forth for no reason.
But today the ice is broken by a plum blossom!

A tiger roars, a dragon growls, and all the creatures of the universe surround me.

9. Returning to the Origin and the Essence

Every thing and every creature under the sun has its own nature.
Hasn't this knowledge been passed down through generations?
When the Ox suddenly roars like a lion
Everything in the universe reveals such infinite variety.

10. Coming Home with Folded Hands

How wide are the horizons of the spinning earth!
The moonlight leads the tides and the sun's light will not be confined
Within the net of heaven. But in the end all things return to the One.
The deaf and dumb, the crippled and deformed are all restored to the One's
Perfection.

11. The Concluding Song

In the beginning there was nothing, nor was anything lacking.
The paper was blank. We pick up the paint brush and create the scene...
The landscape, the wind whipping water into waves.
Everything depends upon the stroke of our brush.
Our Ox lets the good earth lead it,
Just as our brush allows our hand to move it.
Take any direction, roam the world to its farthest edge.
All comes back to where it started... to blessed Emptiness.



The Oxherder, the Spinning Maiden and the Ox.
Ceramic figurine at Hsu Yun Temple, Honolulu.

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