

# **Awakening on the Chan 【Zen】 Path**

## **——Ten Dream-awakening Pictures——**

### **禪 道 夢 覺 — ( 十夢圖 ) —**



**In Grateful Memory Of  
Venerable Mentor Chan Patriarch Sheng-Yen**

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In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, it says: “When had I attained the great bodhi? When had I entered into the great nirvana (Mahaparinirvana) ? I neither said any word during that period, nor should have said, nor should say, nor should be saying.” After Sakyamuni had attained Buddhahood, the World-Honored One had been expounding Chan (Zen) Dharma and delivering sentient beings for forty-nine years. However, he proclaimed at the end that he had not preached any Dharma at all. Therefore, in transmitting the “Treasury of the True Dharma Eye,” the Second Patriarch Ananda offered up the following verse :

Originally, the Dharma had been transmitted, and after transmission it was proclaimed to be “no Dharma.” All practitioners, who had already been accomplishing inner awakening, had truly realized no “no Dharma.” (*Verses of Chan Patriarchs; Volume 1*)

Meanwhile, the “Chapter on Entry into the Dharma Gate of Non-Duality” of the *Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra* also says : “There are no words, no discourse, no demonstration, no recognition, nor any need for questions and answers in any of the Dharma.” Each of these examples makes clear that the inconceivable and ineffable essence of Chan is “beyond the form of explanation, names or mental cognition.”

Notwithstanding that the highest goal of “pointing directly at the moon with the finger” is “no moon and no finger” (“no Buddha and no sentient beings”), the moon representing “Chan or original nature” is beyond explanation, and the finger, which is “an expedient created to deliver sentient beings,” still can rely on language and words.

## I. Chan (Zen) Enlightenment

From the perspective of Chan, enlightenment is awakening and must also involve the letting go of self-centeredness, emancipation from discrimination and attachment, and the dissolving of all habits of ignorance. In the Chinese Chan sect, Master Foyan Qingyuan (1067-1120) of the Song Dynasty used to say: “Confused beings confuse in enlightenment; enlightened beings enlighten to confusion. Both confusion and enlightenment are of the same essence, and only enlightened beings are then purely aware of it.” Therefore, the “Chan enlightenment” mentioned by the Chan Patriarchs (or Matriarchs) clearly indicates that the awakened beings realize that there is no need to abide in the self-centeredness, and they are able to let go of all their attachments. The

more Chan practitioners can let go, the vaster their mind capacity will be, and also the more profound will be the enlightened realm that they can reach.

Before entering into nirvana in the year 713, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng (638-713) entrusted his disciples with a verse on “Accomplishing Wisdom of All Aspects” :

The mind ground contains the inherent seeds of Buddha-wisdom, all will spontaneously manifest upon receiving the all-pervading rain of Dharma. When the Chan practitioner suddenly awakens to the great blossoming mind, the fruit of supreme and complete enlightenment will naturally mature. (*The Platform Sutra; Chapter on Final Instruction*)

The meaning of the verse can be described as follows : The true Chan practitioner, while awakening to the ultimate and complete emancipation and enlightenment, realizes that his or her mind-ground actually embraces all intrinsically sufficient Wisdom of All Aspects at the time of attaining great Bodhi. Therefore, when he or she encounters illusory sentient beings in accordance with the causes and conditions, his or her inherent Buddha wisdom will naturally manifest, just as the all-pervading rain does. Meanwhile, its function will be able to spontaneously reflect the needs of sentient beings, and to directly transfer their originally possessed precious treasure to all living beings. Furthermore, those living beings, with the maturity of their karmic roots, accept the essential principle and the Dharma of this “Suddenness Chan,” and always act with a “straightforward mind” in all places of walking, standing, sitting, or reclining. While having acted with “effortless spontaneousness in immovability,” they surely are able to suddenly see into their original nature and have an insight into their true mind, and the Bodhi fruit of ultimate and complete enlightenment will naturally become mature.

Chan Master Mazu Daoyi (709-788) of Jiangxi, a Master extraordinaire in Chinese Chan history, used to instruct all his Dharma-sons with the following verse :

The mind ground is always in response to all conditions, and Bodhi nature (true nature) is simultaneously the mere peace. While there is no barrier in all interactions of phenomena and noumena, at the right moment arising is exactly non-arising. (*The Record of the Transmission of the Lamp, Volume 6*)

Mazu’s verse also discloses that the true Chan practitioner, when reaching ultimate enlightenment and complete emancipation, directly realizes that the mind ground (the self-nature of true suchness) can manifest all dharmas, and all things are entirely the profound functions of the Dharma body. Afterwards, while following the causes and conditions of karmic repayment, he or she is able to react and deliver all deluded living

beings with wordless words and speechless speech at any time and any place. Meanwhile, all the manifestations are always in accordance with the principle of “no obstruction in ‘interbeing of phenomena and noumena’” and “effortlessness & spontaneousness in ‘arising is non-arising’”.

Moreover, another Chan Master Shitou Xiqian (700-790) of Hunan, a celebrated Master in the Chan sect, also once gave a Dharma discourse to the public in the Chan Hall :

My Dharma gate was originally transmitted by the Buddha. It is not a matter of “meditative concentration” (samadhi) and “pure diligence” (refer to emancipation), but just a matter of penetrating the Buddha’s wisdom — mind itself is Buddha. In fact, “mind, Buddha and sentient beings” or “bodhi (wisdom) and vexation” have different names respectively, but actually they are with the same essence. All of you should realize your own mind that its essence is apart from annihilation and permanence, and its nature is beyond impurity and purity. This mind is thoroughly pure and wholly perfect, and all the same for both ordinary people and saints. When it is used to the full capacity, its function is infinite and departs from the mind, thought, and consciousness. The three realms and six ways manifest from this mind. It is like a moon on the water and an image in the mirror, where can there be arising and perishing? If you are able to realize it, then there are all intrinsically sufficient.

*(The Record of the Transmission of the Lamp, Volume 14)*

Shitou’s teaching further once again demonstrates that the ultimately and completely enlightened Chan practitioner sufficiently possesses the miraculous and profound functions of great wisdom and great compassion, which originate from powers of “non-arising & manifestation” and “effortlessness & spontaneousness.”

Therefore, from the perspective of Patriarch/Matriarch Chan, which with its principle of pointing directly at the true mind and seeing into the self-nature and attaining Buddhahood, Chan enlightenment has no level -- or it can have eighty-four thousand levels. However, in order to respond expediently to the conditions of practitioners, in keeping with their spiritual needs at the right moment on the Patriarch/Matriarch path, the Lineage Ancestors introduced the “two levels”, “three levels,” or “five levels” of enlightenment.

Regardless of the profoundness of their realization, Chan Masters seldom attempt to describe the world (realm) of enlightenment in words. Ordinary people can comprehend some aspects of awakening through the verse, Dharma discourses, and poems manifested from an enlightened mind. However, only those Chan practitioners with a corresponding experience of awakening will be able to realize the tidings contained in the language and words. Meanwhile, although the Chan sect emphasises not clinging to the levels and stages, yet for the sake of letting Chan Masters evaluate and confirm the progress of Chan practitioners on the Patriarch/Matriarch path, and for the benefit of letting Chan Masters guide them and move them into conversion for their further progress or final arrival at the ultimate and complete enlightenment, various schools respectively advocate using levels of enlightenment related to the Chan path. Among the existing systems, the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal” (“Five Levels of Centre and Off-centre”) from Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie (807-869) of the Tang Dynasty’s Caodong School, two kinds of the “Three Barriers” from Chan Master Huanglong Huinan (1002-1069) and Chan Master Doushuai Congyue (1044-1091) of the Song Dynasty’s Linji School, and the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures” from Chan Master Kuon Shiyuan (twelfth century) of the Linji School (Song Dynasty), can be said to be explicitly giving an account of the process along the Chan path, by which Chan practitioners go through investigating Chan, seeing into their self-nature, reaching [complete] enlightenment, and finally attaining ultimate and complete awakening and emancipation, after which they re-enter the world to deliver all living beings.

Among all these styles of expression related to the levels of enlightenment on the Patriarch/Matriarch path, the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal” of Caodong school has the most complete structure. Therefore, the levels of awakening in Chan sect definitely can be elucidated on the basis of the structurally integrated “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal”: “Within the five levels of enlightenment, the process between ‘seeing into self-nature’ of first level and ‘complete enlightenment’ of third level, can be explained by applying ‘Three Barriers of Doushuai’ (which was used by Chan Masters in Ming and Ching dynasties), and also can be further expounded in detail by making use of the ‘Ten Ox-herding Pictures’. Furthermore, the process between ‘complete enlightenment’ of third level and ‘ultimate and complete enlightenment’ of fifth level, can be interpreted by using ‘Three Barriers of Huanglong’, however, going through the ancient and the modern, there is no any picture can be quoted as the more detailed annotation for this second process.”

In his *Narrating the Dream*, Venerable Mentor Chan Patriarch Huikong Shengyan (1930-2009), who had just risen at four am at the New York Chan Centre on November 8, 1983, experienced an extraordinarily refreshing and quiescent dream of “entry into the realm of perfect rest and cessation.” In the dream, he arrived in an unmanned world, a space of vastness in which the pictures constituted with abstract patterns and lines consecutively appeared. He could not tell what it was. However, it pointed to his mouth, ten titles concerning interaction of “mallard (wild duck) and goose.” After the labelling had all finished, he then looked up to see nothing but an open and substantial world before antiquity, which was just the start leading into the realm of perfect rest and cessation. He looked back and returned to the human world and saw the masses of sentient beings.

The author realizes Chan Patriarch Sheng-Yen’s dream to be an expression of the Chan world of the “non-arising of nirvana” and also the fifth level of the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal.” Moreover, this combination, relating to the cross-interaction between mallard and goose, is nothing less than a brand-new mode of accurately expressing levels of attainment on the Patriarch/Matriarch path. Therefore, the author introduces what he calls the “Dream Awakening Pictures” (“Ten Dream-awakening Pictures”) to serve as a more detailed annotation of the process between the “complete enlightenment” of the third level and the “ultimate and complete enlightenment” of the fifth of the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal.” The system is introduced in an effort to let Chinese Chan’s realms of realization on the Patriarch/Matriarch path have a fuller, more complete framework.

## **II. The Ten Dream-awakening Pictures**

Based on this article’s core theme, the “Chinese Chan (Zen) Patriarch/Matriarch Path ‘Dream Awakening Pictures’,” and for the expression of the realms of attainment on the Patriarch/Matriarch path, we will use the “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures” as the basis for ordering the structure, in harmony with the Caodong School’s “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal,” supplemented by Doushuai’s “Three Barriers,” Huanglong’s “Three Barriers,” and the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” with the purpose of clearly and completely presenting the process of the Chan path. In addition, using Chan Patriarch Huikong Shengyan’s discourses of 1990 and 2005, together with my personal realization, I will also describe the outlines of the Caodong School’s “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal.”

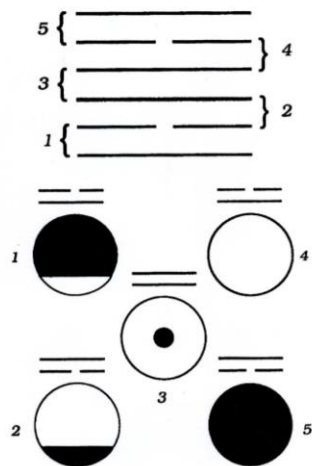
## A) Five Levels of Lord and Vassal

Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie of the Caodong School, in his “*Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi*,” established the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal” (“Five Levels of Centre and Off-centre”) for the purpose of illustrating the dynamic omnipresence of the wisdom-function of the Dharma, by means of the following verse :

Doubling the Li trigram gives six lines, the “Off-centre” (phenomena or function) and “Centre” (noumena or self-nature) lines mutually interact. Stacking two separate lines up becomes three pairs, and at the utmost it turns into five.”

Furthermore, both Chan Master Caoshan Benji (840-901) in the Tang Dynasty and modern Chan Patriarch Huikong Shengyan, have used five circles with black and white shading (as in the diagram) to distinctly expound the five levels of enlightenment on the Patriarch/Matriarch path.

Let us, in conformity with those figures shown in the diagram, give an essential explanation of the Five Levels of Lord and Vassal :



**(A) Level 1 “Off-centre” in the midst of “Centre”: (Figure 1)**

The “Centre” represents vexation, and the “Off-centre” represents wisdom. This level is known as “seeing into self-nature,” also said to be “recognising vexation.” The Chan practitioner, still at a level of vexation (black), has gone through a long period of diligent investigation, and finally has let go of part of his or her attachment so that the “fundamental wisdom” (the white area) has begun to manifest. For the first time, the practitioner suddenly sees into his or her self-nature, and discovers that originally he or she has long been suffering vexations. Although this is only the most superficial experience, the confidence of the Chan practitioner is already standing rock-firm and immovable, enough to generate momentum to continue diligent investigation.

**(B) Level 2 “Centre” in the midst of “Off-centre” : (Figure 2)**

This is known as the level of “thin vexation.” The Chan practitioner has further engaged in diligent investigation, so that the fundamental wisdom (white) manifests more than ever and dissolves “delusions of views and thoughts,” and tames “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings.” Therefore, the vexation naturally thins, and finally “delusions of views and thoughts” are entirely dissolved, and the fundamental wisdom is able to just then manifest completely.

**(C) Level 3 “Centre” coming in the right midst of “Off-centre”: (Figure 3)**

At the third level, the vexation (“Centre”) manifests in the right midst of the essence [of true suchness]. This is known as the level of “tame vexation,” and also can be described as enlightenment. The Chan practitioner, whose fundamental wisdom has already completely manifested, and whose “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings” were fully tamed at the end of the last level, realizes only in the present moment that the vexation (black) no longer manifests externally, yet merely in the core of the three-dimensional sphere of wisdom (white), but still has the potential to rise again. Hence, the level begins with dissolving the “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings” and manifesting of “sequential wisdom.” Therefore, at this level, for the first time, the Chan practitioner is equally and



simultaneously aware of both vexation and wisdom, and it becomes the pivot of the five levels.

**(D) Level 4 “Centre” and “Off-centre” all arriving at “true emptiness of self-nature” : (Figure 4)**

This is known as the level of the “dissolution of vexation.” The Chan practitioner, while continuing to maintain “spontaneous effortlessness,” on the one hand, goes a step further to dissolve “the delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings” and to tame “the habits of ignorance” with fundamental wisdom. On the other hand, he or she is able to nourish blessedness and deliver sentient beings according to causes and conditions with further manifested sequential wisdom. Until the end of this level, with the complete dissolution of vexation (“the delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings”), the related wisdom (fundamental wisdom) also entirely disappears. Where there is no Buddhahood to attain, there also are no sentient beings to deliver, therefore, the Chan practitioner goes straight in the Dharma Realm of One Reality of ultimate emptiness, and realizes both the essence and the function are at full rest so that the sequential wisdom is definitely able to manifest completely. In fact, the best illustration of this level would be to draw nothing. However, the white symbolic circle in figure 4 is used for illustrative purpose.

**(E) “Centre” and “Off-centre” all reaching the perfection of “true emptiness is subtle existence” : (Figure 5)**

This level is known as “vexation is wisdom,” and also can be called “ultimate and complete enlightenment and emancipation.” The Chan practitioner, on the verge of this level, has already fully tamed the “habits of ignorance,” and the sequential wisdom has completely manifested. While once again plunging into the world and universally delivering all living beings in accordance with causes and conditions, he or she is able to apply innumerable subtle functions of “non-arising & manifestation” and “effortlessness & spontaneousness” and to use vexation [of sentient beings] as a tool of wisdom to help sentient beings. Therefore, the black circle used in Figure 5 is a precise symbol of this phase.

## B) Ten Dream-awakening Pictures

The “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures” employ the roles of a “mallard” (wild duck) and a “goose,” to illustrate the Chan path. For the Chan practitioner, what do the wild duck and the flying goose represent? From the perspective of the Chan sect, the mallard symbolises vexation while the goose is a symbol of wisdom.

Because the Chan sect rarely talks about what level Chan investigation can bring you to, and how much vexation is being eradicated, so that if according to the teachings of Vijnanamatra sect and Tiantai sect respectively, it is pointed out that: The vexation represented by mallard means “two attachments (or two obstructions) arising from discrimination,” “the manifestation of two attachments (or two obstructions) arising from spontaneousness” and “the seed of two attachments (or two obstructions) arising from spontaneousness and habits,” or means “delusions of views and thoughts,” “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings” and “delusions of realizing true reality [of the Middle Way]”; While the wisdom represented by the goose refers to “the profound-awareness wisdom,” “the universal-equality wisdom,” “the accomplishing-action wisdom” and “the great-perfection-mirror wisdom,” or it refers to “Bodhisattva’s wisdom of all things in their empty nature (fundamental wisdom),” “Bodhisattva’s wisdom of all things in their proper differentiation (sequential wisdom)” and “Buddha’s wisdom of all things in their every aspect (Wisdom of All Aspects).”

The Mahayana sects of Chinese tradition -- the Tiantai sect, the Huayan sect, the Vijnanamatra sect, the Three Sastra sect, and others -- all have a very rigorous analysis and explanation in their Chan-contemplation sequence, and all advocate “eradicating vexation and attaining wisdom.” However, it is only the Chan sect that fuses all other sectarian teachings of orderly sequence into the highest, the most complete, and the ultimate Supreme Dharma, the “Patriarch/Matriarch Chan” the principles of which can be summarised as “an avoidance of levels and stages, non-reliance on words and language, directly pointing at the mind, seeing into the self-nature and attaining Buddhahood.” Meanwhile, the teaching of *The Platform Sutra* -- that “vexation is bodhi (wisdom), samsara (transmigration) is nirvana (great resting),” as well as the keystone of *The Surangama Sutra* -- that “sense-organs and sense-objects are of the same origin and that bonds and emancipation are of non-duality,” both advocate “no eradicating vexation, no

attaining wisdom.” Because the wisdom of bodhi-prajna is intrinsically self-sufficient without requiring cultivation and attainment, and is an originally perfect accomplishment without falling into levels or stages for all sentient beings. Therefore, “no eradication no removal, no seeking no attainment, and no function no effort,” as well as “no vexation no wisdom, vexation is wisdom,” and so on, are the superlative essential principles of Patriarch/Matriarch Chan Path, and also are the highest guiding concepts for establishing the “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures.”

The so-called “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures” or “Dream Awakening Pictures,” by means of ten pictures, describe the interaction between vexation and wisdom, which varies with different levels of attainment. At the same time, it also indicates how Chan practitioners see into their original face, realize the scenery of their mind ground, and perform effortless worldly-deliverance with the “natural subtle-functions” and “free spontaneousness.” At this point, the author would like to introduce the “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures” with an interpretive commentary :

### **(A) Mallard and Goose Both Blurred**



**( Fig.1 ) Mallard & Goose Both Blurred**

In the first diagram, the mallard and the goose are depicted in a blurry state, indicating that the Chan practitioner still inhabits a confused and indistinct level as to vexation and wisdom. This stage of mind training is equivalent to “Looking for the Ox” and “Seeing the Tracks” in the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures.”

Ordinarily, after having acquired the right views of Chan Dharma from the Buddha, the Chan Patriarchs (or Matriarchs) and a great Master; after being convinced that all living beings on the great earth have Buddha's wisdom and virtue, and that a Patriarch/Matriarch path that leads to realization of the Buddha-nature does exist; after being confident that faithful compliance with the teachings and guidance of the great Master is a crucial point, and that it will ultimately lead to an insight into the mind, to seeing into the self-nature and sudden awakening to Buddhahood; the Chan practitioner with relatively sharp karmic root can then begin with the right investigation of Chan Dharma and embark on the journey of Chan path while nourishing perfect confidence. Such a practitioner, with the persevering mind of earnestness and the great mind of Bodhi vow, is able to shut down the auto-piloting system of human habit and run counter to the currents of “deluded thinking and attachment.” This stage of the investigation is quite difficult and full of hardships, often involving one step forward and two steps back. It repeats the cycle of advance and regression, as if the origin of life will never be reached.

However, provided that the Chan practitioner can uphold his or her resolute conviction in the self-nature of true suchness, continuously “running counter-currently and migrating regularly” and perseveringly “making one’s way through the weeds and investigating the mysteriousness (Chan),” he or she will finally be able to experience the effect of investigation—the state of “one-mindedness,” and to find a reliable clue among the many “hoof-prints of the ox.” The Chan practitioner, on this leg of the journey, always successively nourishes the power of samadhi and wisdom and the skilfulness of effortlessness, so that, though the prajna-wisdom is not yet manifesting in daily life, the vexations of “views and thoughts” become tamed daily, owing to the co-function of the power of meditative absorption and contemplative wisdom. Therefore, he or she continues with strengthened confidence in the process of the Chan path.

For practitioners with average karmic roots, in regard to the Chan path of pointing directly at the true mind and returning directly home to our true nature, some are more

deliberately searching for it with more belief and less suspicion; some are half deliberately groping after it with half belief and half suspicion; while still others are less deliberately seeking for it with less belief and more suspicion. Nevertheless, for most people, the process of Chan training may involve a series of difficulties and be full of confusion and frustration.

The typical practitioner initiates the Chan path with a seeking and attaining mind. Some will make an effort in a way similar to volcanic eruptions for a while, and then slack off, and even give up training when facing major karmic obstructions. Some, after having done a segment of the journey and not having seen any obvious effect, may become sceptical about Chinese Chan and lose confidence in it, and even convert to other traditional systems or sectarian methods. Others suffer in confusion from beginning to end, not sure if they are on the right Chan path, or they deviate from the right track and investigate blindly, and have no way of confirming whether the investigation is effective or not.

All in all, most practitioners, due to a lack of confidence, coupled with a deficiency of persevering earnestness and strength in their Bodhi vow, often investigate with an “auto-piloting system” (a habitual response without self-awareness) which always follows the stream of the mind, thoughts, and consciousness, and even live their daily lives with the same attitude in the initial journey of the Chan path. Because they are so used to turning their backs on awakening, setting their faces toward confusion, and putting vain efforts into investigation, it is no wonder they have no idea why there are no results.

However, if average practitioners of Chan can work up proper resolve and gradually build sufficient confidence to initiate a persevering mind of earnestness and the great mind of Bodhi, if they can always remember to investigate Chan against the currents of “discrimination and attachment” at any moment and to assist with the skilful means of renewal and the transfer of merit, and continue to investigate like a fine stream flowing constantly with perseverance and diligence, then finally, like the sharper-rooted practitioner, they will inevitably be able to experience the effects of investigation in the initial stages of the Chan path.

## **(B) Mallard Not Yet Seeing Goose**



**( Fig.2 ) Mallard Not Yet Seeing Goose**

In the second diagram, the vexation represented by the mallard makes its first clear appearance while the wisdom represented by the goose also opportunely manifests, though it is mostly in a fuzzy state. Each is still unable to meet the other. The Chan practitioner, upholding the great confidence, the great vow (including persevering earnestness), and the great determination, and following the guiding concepts of no seeking, no attainment, and effortlessness, investigates Chan with the mind of straightforwardness of “neither thinking of good, nor thinking of bad” at all times and places, and does not cling to any effective investigation or good experiences.

Thus, after a long period of investigating diligently and counter-currently, the Chan practitioner finally arrives at Chan’s “gateless gate.” At this time, he or she indeed can be on the verge of an inaccessible place in which “it seems no way existed after walking to the end of hills and rivers.” There is a looming crag to the front, a yawning abyss at the back, vast expanses to the right and left, and no passages at all to traverse. On this precipice, the bright-eyed Chan Master nevertheless clearly points out that the world of Chan is on the other side of the mountain and cliff. The passage is through it, and he or she is able to enter.

Meanwhile, the “bright-eyed” Master has also taught the practitioner about how “only experiencing the great death can lead to the great birth”: “The great death implies letting go of ‘stealthiness,’ that is, to put down all the mind of relying, grasping, seeking, gain and loss, and effortfulness, etc.” By the way, “The nature of the mind is non-arising. What need is there of knowledge and views?” as ancient Chan Master Niutou Farong (594-657) put it. It also means to entirely let go of all the knowledge, views, and experiences which have been accumulated by generation after generation and have always been considered to be reliable and real. It further means putting down the seeking of Chan enlightenment. Only in this way, being able to turn the corner and start a new life as “another village appears in sight after walking through dusky willows and bright flowers,” and the infinitely wonderful scenery of the mind ground suddenly manifests itself.

Thereupon, the Chan practitioners in an inaccessible place, having deep confidence in their great venerable mentor’s guidance from the bottom of their mind, and holding on to the great determination of “nothing ventured, nothing gained”, at the very moment put down part of their self-centred attachment so that the fundamental wisdom appropriately manifests and “the delusion of views” is dissolved. The practitioners suddenly experience the so-called “the vastness of space collapsing” and “the great land subsiding,” and in a flash they enter into the realm of Chan through the Chan gate to personally realize their original faces before birth.

In fact, when the Chan practitioner first enters into the Chan gate, he or she discovers that Chan actually has a “gateless gate.” That is to say, before entering, no gate is seen, while after entering, he or she knows just then the non-existence of the gate. Although this initial experience in the light taste of selfless true-nature is considerably brief and is merely located at the beginning of the Chan path, after having gone through innumerable hardships and having been well-trained, the Chan practitioner has after all witnessed “the self-nature of true suchness” of that “the sentient being and the Buddha are of the same essence” and that “the ordinary being and the Saint are of non-duality,” and also has made clearly aware of those endless vexations which have been tying his or her body and mind up for innumerable kalpas without beginning, and further has had a distinct insight into “the real direction of investigation.” From this time forth, the practitioner’s confidence swells, and he or she continues to move forward vigorously and courageously. It is like a traveller, who finds himself or herself in a mountain forest with darkness everywhere, and relies on groping his or her way stumblingly along in the dark. Suddenly a flash of lightning across the night sky illuminates all around in an instant enabling the



traveller to be clearly aware of the immediate environment and the proper direction and allowing him or her to proceed with renewed confidence.

Actually, this experience of “seeing into the self-nature” is rather like the first of the “Five Stages of the Chan Path” (the first of the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal”), and marks an important watershed for the Chan practitioner. However, even if the practitioner has seen into his or her own pure nature, it is only during the period when the power of “seeing into the self-nature” is still maintained that he or she will not feel the sting of vexation. Once this power has faded, vexation will still return repeatedly. In the Chan sect, one speaks of such a state as “having opened one eye.” It might also be described as “two eyes having been opened for a moment and then closed once again.” Of course, a few Chan practitioners with the sharpest karmic roots, having opened their two eyes, will never close them again. For the majority of practitioners, however, the experience of “seeing into the self-nature” is relatively shallow. Nevertheless, it really is the initial entry into the Chan gate and the beginning of genuine Chan investigation.

Chan Master Doushuai Congyue in the Song dynasty presented teaching of the “Three Barriers,” a concept commonly used by Chan masters in the Ming and Ching dynasties. The “initial barrier” (the Patriarch/Matriarch barrier) is described as follows :

Making one’s way through weeds and investigating Chan, the purpose is only to realize one’s self-nature. Now, venerable practitioner, where is the self-nature at this very moment? (*The Discourse Records of Chan Master Doushuai Congyue*)

The Chan practitioner, after a long run against the current and along weedy roads, has been making his or her way through the weeds of ignorance (vexation). After reaching the state of one-mindedness, he or she continues to investigate Chan diligently and single-mindedly. This “single-minded investigation of Chan” is the first barrier (“initial barrier”) set up by the Patriarch/Matriarch. Provided the practitioner takes a rest outside this “Patriarch/Matriarch barrier,” he or she will also be able to enjoy corresponding benefits. However, the practitioner should not be satisfied with this small attainment and must exert himself or herself to the utmost so that he or she is able to come out of the state of “investigating Chan with single-mindedness” and realize the state of no attainment of both “one mind” and “no mind,” that is, “break through the original investigation” (“passing through initial barrier”) to see into his or her true nature.

Chan practitioners can have either sharp or dull karmic roots, and are either deep or



shallow in their karmic affinities (connections with Chan Dharma), and possess either great or modest powers of diligence. To use archery as an analogy : archers with weak shooting power can make an arrow pierce one target; those with medium power might be able to pierce two targets; and those with great power can penetrate three targets. Shakyamuni Buddha had the strongest and most unique power. He was therefore able to shoot an arrow through nine targets. Investigating Chan with diligence is just like shooting an arrow, and three targets are similar to three barriers. The practitioners with little power of diligence can go through the Patriarch/Matriarch barrier; those with medium power can pass through two barriers; and those with great power are able to directly break through three barriers. Only the former (passing through the Patriarch/Matriarch barrier), having racked their mind and having suffered all hardships are still needed in order to enter the pass of this barrier. After entering into it, they are just then able to know that, for innumerable kalpas without beginning, they have been entangled in the vein and halter of deluded thinking and attachments so that their illusory vexations have never ceased. They also see that they have been turning their backs on awakening and setting their faces toward confusion so as to be sunk in the gloom of transmigration (the cycle of birth and death), and that all is but an imaginary dream. Today at the time of awakening, as a great sense of humility arises spontaneously. They are either bursting into tears or feeling intermingled joy and sorrow. Since “being courageous enough to realize and to turn around is a rare gift,” they begin to live a life of “turning their backs on confusion and setting their faces toward awakening” in which “both blessedness and wisdom are nourished.”

At the stage represented by the second of the “Dream Awakening Pictures,” the Chan practitioner has had an insight into the illusions of vexation (the wild duck), which have not been wholly dissolved and tamed so that they may reappear afterwards in daily life. This is similar to the diagram “Glimpsing the Ox” in the “Ox Herding Pictures” of Chan Master Kuoan Shiyuan of the Song Dynasty. The ox-herder has got a partial glimpse of the body of the ox (the mind-ox of self-nature), but has not yet been able to have the ox of pure nature in his or her grasp. Therefore, at any moment, it may go astray again. The practitioner at this stage, although he or she has caught a glimpse of the original nature of true suchness, has had a superficial experience. He or she is just like a newborn bird whose mouth has been able to eat, but whose body has not yet become full-fledged enough to hover freely in the sky. It is also precisely like a mountaineer, who, after having endured a long and arduous journey, has had a glimpse of the target peak sticking up in front of him or her in the gap of clouds and mist. However, mounting the summit still involves traversing a considerable distance and the peak may be covered again by the fog and disappear from view in the subsequent journey. Hereupon, the Chan practitioner’s necessity of maintaining a diligent and persistent investigation in the spirit

of a “fine stream running smoothly and constantly” is just the non-dualistic way to directly break the “Five Passes of the Chan Barrier” and profoundly penetrate the “Five Stages of the Chan Path.”

### **(C) Mallard Approaching Goose**



**( Fig.3 ) Mallard Approaching Goose**

In this diagram, the wild duck representing vexation is swimming toward the goose representing wisdom. Although they are still unable to coexist, but they have already approached each other. Having fought tooth and nail, Chan practitioners have just then passed through the first Chan barrier described by the Patriarch/Matriarch. Though they have been able to see into the “Patriarch’s sectarian affair” (“one’s true nature”) and have an insight into the “Patriarch’s mind of deliverance” (“one’s wisdom mind”), the majority have not yet perceived the innermost recesses of the truth. In other words, they have not yet ultimately and completely realized the “bosom” (“the essence and Buddha-wisdom of the mind ground”) of the Patriarch/Matriarch or the “profundity and subtlety” (“all-pervasive functions and all-embracing actions of Buddha-wisdom”) within the innermost Chan barrier. At this point, the practitioner’s taking a slight rest and abiding in the

experience are strongly discouraged. Once they have lingered in their shallow realization, it becomes difficult for them to proceed.

Chan practitioners should know that sentient beings and Buddhas are only separated by Chan and also that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the Patriarchs/Matriarchs for successive generation, ancient and modern venerable mentors and all sentient beings are altogether manifested from this Chan. Those who are confused by this Chan become sentient beings, and those awakening to this Chan are all Buddhas. That is to say, if all Chan barriers have not yet been opened, one is still in the realm of sentient beings. However, if all Chan barriers in the realm of sentient beings have been passed, it then becomes the realm of Buddhas. Since all vexed sentient beings in the ten directions are totally trapped by all Chan barriers and unable to break free, the Chan sect advocates investigating Chan for the purpose of having an insight into the true mind, seeing into the self-nature, and also breaking through entire Chan barriers in order to penetrate into the “Dharma Body” (true nature, or Buddha-nature, or the nature of emptiness).

The ancient Chan Masters used to say: “Before enlightenment, one should give one’s mind to Chan investigation as if newly bereft of both parents. After enlightenment, one should also have one’s mind on Chan investigation even as if newly bereft of both parents.” The Chan practitioner, owing to his or her lack of having an insight into the great Way (Chan) before awakening, is full of sadness and resolves to make a special effort to diligently investigate Chan. Furthermore, after having seen into his or her self-nature, he or she feels the sufferings of sentient beings such that a great compassion wells up within and all the more causes to investigate with boldness and diligence in an effort to deliver all living beings. Therefore, Chan Master Huangbo Xiyun of the Tang Dynasty once asserted :

While dissolving the delusion of vexation is an extraordinary matter, one must investigate intensively just like keeping hold on the rope’s end to perform a puppet show. Without having been able to withstand the bone-chilling coldness, how can one get through with smelling the fragrance of plum blossoms ?

*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Huangbo Xiyun)*

The Chan practitioner, having broken through original investigation and seen into the self-nature, has two ways to move forward: In the early stage, he or she can still progress in the original way, that is, to proceed with “true investigation and genuine inquiry” and

“great investigation and great inquiry” in order to completely let go of “two attachments of the self and the Dharma” and to entirely manifest the fundamental wisdom for thoroughly dissolving “delusions of views and thoughts” and taming “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings”. After reaching the stage of “Riding the Ox Home” in the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” the Chan practitioner begins the effort of “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness,” which is “no investigation, yet investigation” and “investigation, yet no investigation.” Until realizing the so-called “true action is no action, true abiding is no abiding,” the “two attachments of the person and the Dharma” are both vanished, and he or she is able to directly penetrate through the second Chan barrier established by the Patriarch/Matriarch. The ancient Chan Masters said: “Great questioning, great enlightenment; small questioning, small enlightenment; no questioning, no enlightenment.” The “questioning” is “inquiring into it,” and that is “investigating Chan”; In other words, “great investigation and great inquiry” can allow one to attain great enlightenment, while “small investigation and small inquiry” makes possible only small enlightenment. Therefore, there was a Chan Master in the Song Dynasty who once said: “Great enlightenment, more than thirty times. Shallow enlightenment, countless times.” It is evident that the Chan enlightenment is not simply a matter of reaching complete enlightenment or ultimate and complete enlightenment in one shot, but is more a matter of experiencing a series of realizations and multiple breakthroughs.

The “multiple barrier” proposed by Chan Master Doushuan Congyue is as follows:

When one has seen into one’s self-nature, one is just then able to liberate oneself from transmigration. How will one liberate oneself from transmigration “when one’s eyes are falling to the ground” (“when one is just at the point of passing away”)?  
*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Doushuai Congyue)*

The Chan practitioner, having gone through the double diligent effort of “true investigation and genuine inquiry” and “actionless action,” has been passing through the passes to kill the generals of self-centeredness and has been leaping forward layer after layer so that the person and the Dharma are both forgotten. Therefore, he or she finally has an insight into the Chan mind (Buddha-mind) and sees into the Chan nature (Buddha-nature), that is really to actualize the innate treasures. Since he or she has already had an insight into the inherent pure mind of fundamental wisdom and has already seen into the intrinsic self-nature of true suchness, he or she then directly breaks through the “multiple barrier” and has a profound realization of the Patriarch’s mind ground. From this time forth, the Chan practitioner has reached the pass of the “prison barrier” and looks forward to the transition of penetrating through transmigration.

Throughout the journey on the Chan path, the practitioner has profoundly realized the innermost recesses of the truth, and his or her penetrating second Chan barrier comprises the five multiple passes of “Getting Hold of the Ox,” “Herding the Ox,” “Riding the Ox Home,” “The Ox Is Forgotten, yet The Ox-herder Is Still Present” and “Herder and Ox Both Forgotten” in the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures.” After glimpsing the mind-ox of pure self-nature, the practitioner has still walked all the way in accordance with right view and right investigation, and holds the rein to lead this ox of self-nature with great difficulty and sees into the wholeness of self-nature. However, because of the influence and the temptation of external environment and furthermore owing to the habit of vexation remaining as usual, the ox-herder still has to take hold of the halter, handhold the whip, and keep a tight rein on the untamed ox after “Getting Hold of the Ox,” so as to continue the effort of dissolving and taming vexations with attentiveness. After passing through the period of “Herding the Ox,” the ox-herder finally puts down the rein and whip, sits at ease atop the ox, plays the flute with a carefree air, and embarks firmly and securely on his or her way “back home,” and just then he or she advances step by step toward the pure and undefiled home of self-nature.

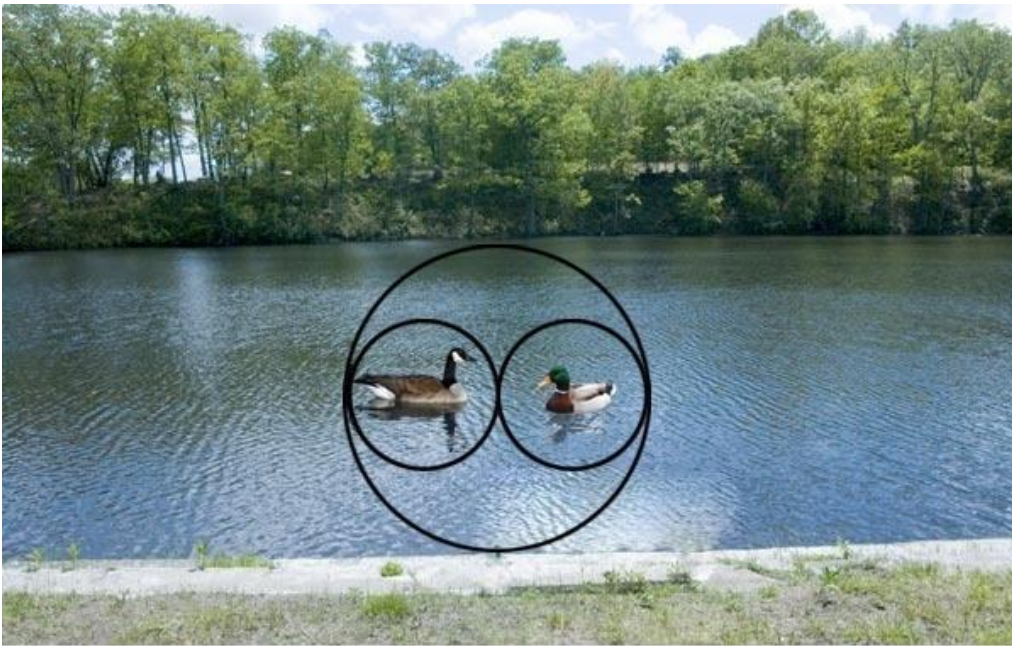
Having returned home to the true nature, the ox-herder has forgotten the ridden ox to become a person with nothing to do in the mind, and has reached what the “Formlessness Verse” in *The Platform Sutra: Chapter on Prajna* describes as “with the mind being freed of hatred and love, stretched out the legs and lay down to sleep serenely.” At this point, the practitioner has already been free from discrimination between inside and outside and from attachments of vexation and wisdom, yet he or she is still clearly aware of a subjective self (“The Ox Is Forgotten, Yet the Ox-herder Is Still Present”). Finally, he or she makes further progress to arrive at the inconceivable and ineffable experience of “the path of words being dissolved, the volition of the deluded mind being at full rest.” Therefore, the eighth diagram of the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” depicts nothing but an empty symbolic circle with the ox and the herder both gone. When the guest (the self or the ox-herder) and the host (the self-nature or the ox) are of “one suchness” (“a perfect totality”), there is no vexation to be dissolved and tamed or Bodhi (wisdom) to be actualized.

After making this journey, the Chan practitioner has completely manifested the fundamental wisdom and has personally realized all the intrinsically pure and sufficient self-nature. Thereupon, the verse of Chan Master Kuoan Shiyuan runs as follows : “Over a blazing fire a snowflake cannot survive. The compatibility with the essential principle of the Patriarchs comes at last.” In fact, after having entered the second of the



“Five Passes of the Chan Barrier” and having accomplished “the second of the Five Stages on the Chan Path” (“the second of the Five Levels of Lord and Vassal”), the Chan practitioner on the Patriarch/Matriarch path has experienced “the person and the Dharma are both forgotten” and “the mind and the realm are both empty,” and he or she thereafter regards the floating world as a flower in the sky and treats transmigration as a moon in the water.

#### **(D) Mallard and Goose Mutually Meeting Together**



**( Fig.4 ) Mallard & Goose Mutually Meeting Together**

In the diagram, after having made a long journey, the mallard (vexation) and the goose (wisdom) finally arrive in the illusory city of Chan to peacefully coexist together and live a life of “illusion is true suchness.” Then, although the duck has the potential of appearing once again, it will absolutely manifest together with the goose in a pair and become as inseparable with it as are person and his shadow.

The Chan practitioner, having made a breakthrough to the second Chan barrier, experiences the Chan realization of “originally there is not a single thing,” and comes at last to be compatible with the essential principle of the Patriarchs. However, this is still the state in which “mountains are no longer mountains, rivers no longer rivers,” and also the third Chan barrier set up by the Patriarch/Matriarch in which the person has not yet been emancipated from the prison of transmigration. The practitioner has to further make an effort to go on the upward one move of transcendence. Once the time comes, the ripening melon will naturally depart from the vine and break through this Chan barrier. After entering this pass, the practitioner realizes “mountains are again mountains, rivers again rivers” and is purely aware of everything just as it is and is freed of impediment with the mind of non-discrimination and non-attachment. The Venerable Mentor Chan Patriarch Huikong Shengyan wrote in his book *Footprints In the Snow* that “disciples often stayed in Chan halls for years. Some, after hearing one sentence, let go of self-centred attachments. Some even attained enlightenment in Chan halls. But the experiences of enlightenment mostly happened outside the Chan hall, when a follower heard a sound, or saw something, that suddenly provoked a very strong reaction and led to enlightenment.” This is the so-called realm of complete enlightenment.

At this point, the completely enlightened Chan practitioner has already perfectly manifested his or her fundamental wisdom. Meanwhile, just as Chan Master Niutou Farong said: “The six sense faculties contact their realms [of six sense objects]. Discrimination is not consciousness.” The Chan practitioner has been able to make use of the fundamental wisdom to dissolve “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings,” and to tame “delusions of realizing true reality” by means of six sense organs facing six sense dusts. Therefore, the sequential wisdom is able to begin with its manifestation, so that it assists with the power of “purely aware of and responding appropriately to the conditions of the practitioners,” and of “benefitting all sentient beings.” Although the completely enlightened Chan practitioner still lives in the world of transmigration, his or her vexations will never be manifested outwardly, and he or she has reached the state of being able to deliver sentient beings. Furthermore, due to the rising of great compassion, he or she is naturally walking along the Chan path toward delivering the world in accordance with causes and conditions.

The Chan practitioner, who has entered into the third of the “Five Passes of Chan Barrier,” has reverted to the life of reality from Chan’s unified state of inside and outside, and has also truly and preliminarily reached “enlightenment” from the delusion of vexation, and further has really and initially attained “emancipation” from the bonds of

transmigration. At this moment, the enlightened mind can reflect a myriad of dharmas and phenomena just as subtly as a bright mirror, and is not departing from its pure and immovable self-nature.

In the Tang dynasty, the Guiyang School's Chan Master Yangshan Huiji asked his Master, Guishan Lingyou, "If millions upon millions of phenomena were to arise simultaneously, what would you do?" Master Guishan replied, "Green is not yellow, long is not short. Every dharma abides in its own position. It has nothing to do with me". (*The Discourse Records of Chan Master Guishan Lingyou*)

**The Lotus Sutra** also mentions that: "All dharmas abide in their own positions, and the ultimate reality of all worldly phenomena always abides directly in true suchness." Therefore, from the wisdom-eye of the completely enlightened Chan practitioner, all worldly dharmas and phenomena have their own positions, conditions and perspectives, and within the unified harmony, no individual phenomena are missing. Consequently, even if a myriad of phenomena were to appear simultaneously before this practitioner, he or she would not be confused or disturbed by them and would be able to respond to all in an appropriate fashion. Meanwhile, relatively speaking, all dharmas and phenomena also belong to the intrinsically pure and undefiled Dharma Body of all Buddhas. In all things throughout the universe, including verdant luxuriant bamboos and dainty plum blossoms, there is not a single thing, nor a single place where the Buddha is not emitting light or discoursing on the Dharma. In the Song Dynasty, The Chan Master Wumen Huikai (1183-1260) wrote a verse in his **Gateless Gate**: "The spring flowers, the moon in autumn, the cool breezes of summer, and the winter's snow. If idle and miscellaneous concerns do not cloud the mind, this exactly is the world's happiest season." This can be said to be the best portrayal.

This realm of harmonious coexistence between vexation and wisdom is equivalent to the last stage in the "Ten Ox-herding Pictures," which includes "Reverting to the Origin and Returning to the Source" and "Entering the Marketplace with Open Hands." After having penetrated the third of the "Five Passes of the Chan Barrier," and owing to having completely experienced the taste of "both person and Dharma are of no-self," the enlightened and emancipated practitioner, will return the existence of a myriad of dharmas and phenomena to themselves and let all things in the universal worlds manifest as they are in accordance with their original face and further function spontaneously. Moreover, in daily life, this practitioner will cease to put self-centeredness into the surrounding myriads events of causes and conditions. Meanwhile, his or her great compassion to deliver the worldly beings will also naturally arise, which allows him or



her to begin with a mind of non-discrimination and non-attachment to help all sentient beings in compliance with causes and conditions by using all kinds of skilful means.

The Chan practitioner with his feet on the ground, after sincere investigation and genuine realization, suddenly awakens to the third of the “Five Stages of the Chan Path.” That is, he or she has actualized the third level of the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal” with the experience embodied in the words: “none but the taster knows the flavour of the water.” In the *Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi*, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie of the Tang Dynasty used a verse to describe the correlations between the five levels of enlightenment and the pivotal role played by the third level :

Like the five flavours of the hyssop plant, or the five branches of the vajra sceptre. The pivot level subtly harmonising, Drumming and singing simultaneously.

The hyssop plant is said to have five indescribable aromas, and tasting one flavour naturally induces the other four flavours and is equivalent to having tasted all of them. Similarly, there are five arc-shaped branches on the head of the vajra sceptre, and when one takes hold of one branch, the other four branches naturally and inseparably follow. This implies that realizing any of the five levels of enlightenment places the Chan practitioner in a position to realize the other four levels.

In fact, the main objective of this four-line verse is to explain the pivotal position of the third level of enlightenment. After reaching the third stage of the Chan path, the Chan practitioner is able to be equally aware of vexation and wisdom simultaneously, and also is precisely able to subtly link to the person who, in the first and second stages, has seen into self-nature but not yet enlightened or emancipated, and to the person who has ultimately and completely enlightened and emancipated in the fourth and fifth stages. The former is endeavouring to dissolve and tame vexation and manifest fundamental wisdom, while the latter is trying to dissolve and tame vexation and habit, manifest sequential wisdom and deliver sentient beings. Meanwhile, the subtle functions of the “Five Stages of the Chan Path” are all revealed in the third stage and are used to “dissolve and tame vexation” (“drumming”) and to “manifest wisdom for delivering all beings” (“singing”).

The Chan practitioner who completely awakens to the third of the “Five Stages of the Chan Path” has gone through the third pass of the “Five Passes of the Chan Barrier,” that is, has broken straight through “Doushuai’s prison barrier” and has penetrated through the cycle of transmigration. Chan Master Doushuai Congyue’s “prison barrier” is as follows :

When one has liberated oneself from birth and death, one is able to know where to go. Where will one go “after one’s body has decomposed into the four elements” (“after death”) ?

*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Doushuai Congyue)*

This clearly points out that the practitioner has turned around from the absolute unified-mind and has been emancipated from transmigration. He or she is capable of realizing the ultimate place to go.

As a matter of fact, the “prison barrier” of the “Doushuai’s Three Barriers” is equivalent to the “initial barrier” of the “Huanglong’s Three Barriers.” The “initial barrier” presented by Chan Master Huanglong Huinan of the Linji School in the Song dynasty is as follows :

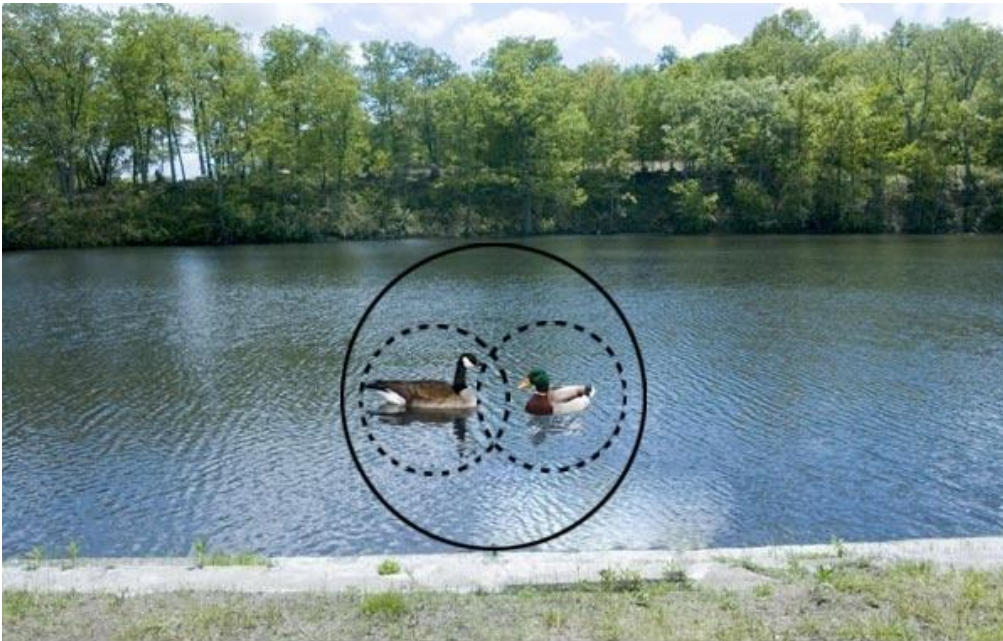
The fully enlightened practitioners are all purely aware of the thoughts arose from the self-nature, and thereafter the jellyfish has never got away from the shrimp. At this level it is just as merely seeing the rising sun in the east lake-side, and who is able to further take the Zhaozhou Tea ? Everyone has their own intrinsic self-nature, and what is your originally intrinsic self-nature?

*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Huanglong Huinan)*

Right after returning to the source of simplicity and nature, having an insight into the pure true-mind, and having seen into the Bodhi self-nature, all awakened Chan practitioners, at all times and in all places, have their self-nature of true suchness give rise to thoughts, so that their six sense faculties have the functions of seeing, hearing, and awareness. Nevertheless, owing to vexation’s (jellyfish) making use of wisdom (shrimp) as its eyes, it not only manifests in the wisdom, but also constantly comes and goes in pairs with wisdom. Therefore, the enlightened mind will not be defiled by a myriad of circumstances, and the self-nature of true suchness is always liberated. Just as the sun is rising in the east, such Chan realm needs to continue uninterruptedly for taking more Zhaozhou tea in order to suddenly transcend the “Five Passes of the Chan Barrier” and go straight to the fifth stage of the Chan path.

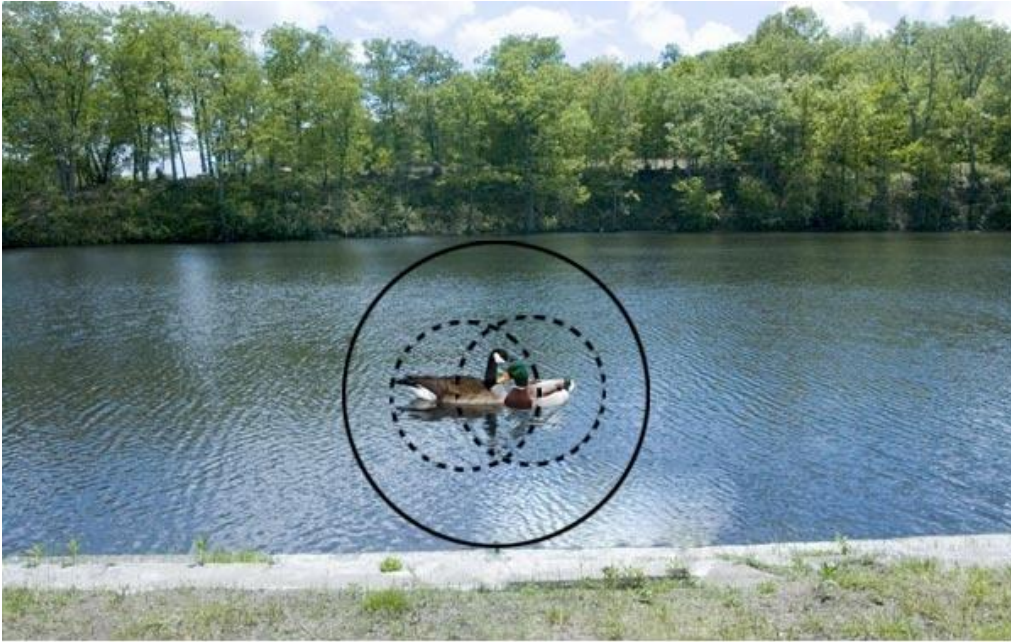
**(E) Mallard and Goose Simultaneously Manifesting →**  
**Mallard and Goose Mutually Interpenetrating →**  
**Mallard and Goose Perfectly Merging Together →**  
**Mallard and Goose Mutually Forgetting →**  
**Mallard and Goose Simultaneously Disappearing**

The following five serial diagrams describe the deeper relationship of interaction between the wild duck (representing vexation) and the flying goose (representing wisdom), after their having mutually met and coexisted together.

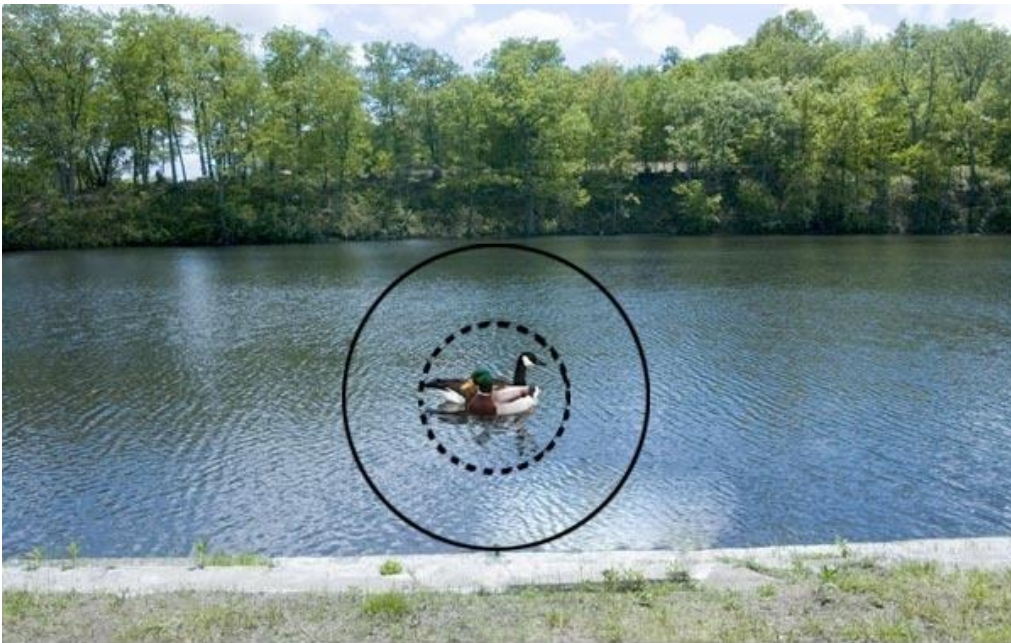


**( Fig.5 ) Mallard & Goose Simultaneously Manifesting**

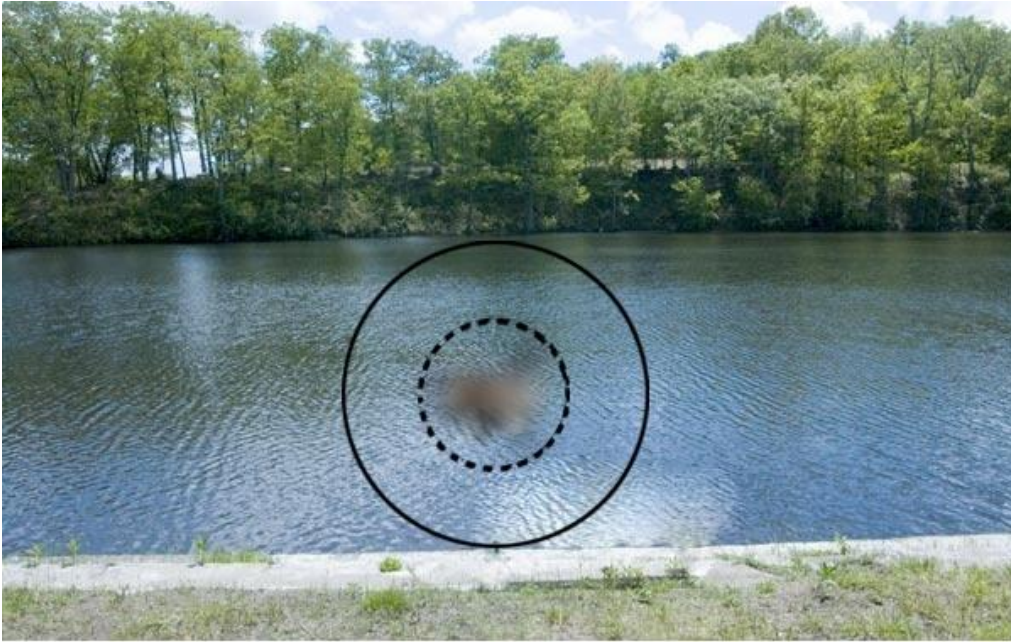




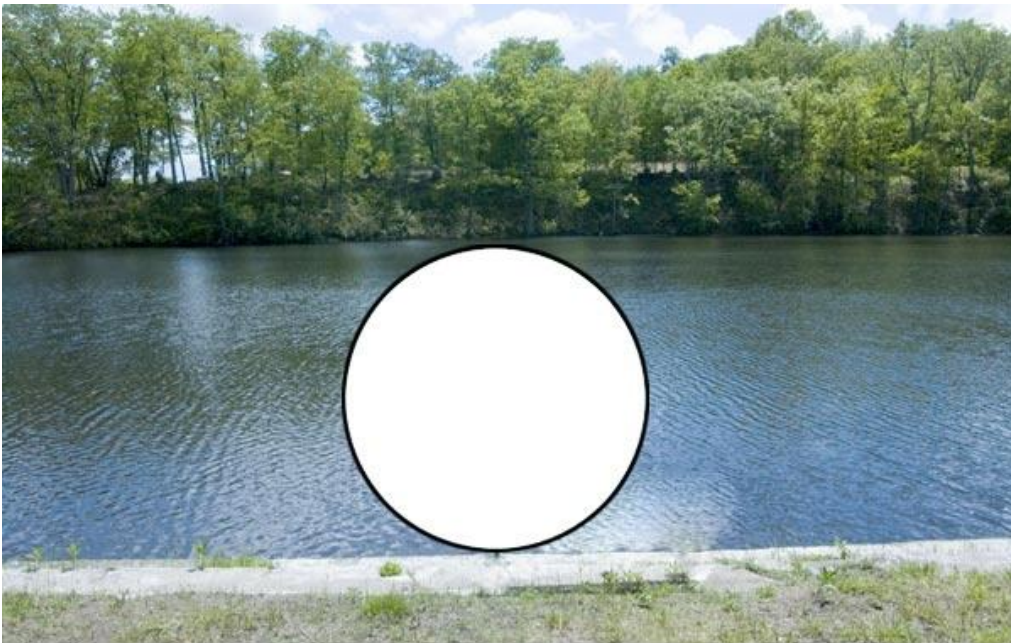
**( Fig.6 ) Mallard & Goose Mutually Interpenetrating**



**( Fig.7 ) Mallard & Goose Perfectly Merging Together**



**( Fig.8 ) Mallard & Goose Mutually Forgetting**



**( Fig.9 ) Mallard & Goose Simultaneously Disappearing**



At the early and middle stages, the duck (vexation) and the goose (wisdom) both follow a certain pattern of continuously enclosing and revolving interaction, that is to circulate around “Simultaneously Manifesting,” “Mutually Interpenetrating,” “Perfectly Merging Together” and “Mutually Forgetting.” In the late stage, both the duck and the goose are “Simultaneously Disappearing,” and have completed the mission of their roles.

The teaching of Buddha is essentially one vehicle, and preachings of the Mahayana Vehicle, of the Three Vehicles, and of the human and heavenly vehicles are useful expedients. Likewise, the principle of Chan is essentially ultimate and complete enlightenment, and discourses of Five Stages (Five Levels), Five Passes and Three Barriers are done for the sake of skillfulness. In a word, all of these are determined by the sharpness or dullness of the Chan practitioner’s karmic roots, and also by the strength or weakness of his or her power of diligence. The practitioners with the sharpest karmic roots are able to transcend suddenly and penetrate directly, and there is no need to talk about Five Stages and Three Barriers, while those with dullest karmic roots must break through layer after layer so that introducing concepts like the Five Passes and the Three Barriers becomes necessary. Otherwise, the Chan path becomes non-orthodox if practitioners realize nothing about true suchness and have everything of Buddha-nature vaguely lumped together.

Nevertheless, regarding the realization of Chan path, the practitioners with greatest power of diligence are able to ultimately realize the totality of Chan marrow precisely as an elephant which crosses the river with its feet touching the bottom; those with medium power completely realize the half of Chan marrow just as the horse which crosses the river with its feet touching half water and half ground; those with the smallest power only realize the superficiality of Chan marrow, like a rabbit crossing the river with its feet fully in the water.

Chan practitioners, having come from the second stage of the Chan path, which is characterised by the expression “Abiding in the realization of ‘originally there is not a single thing’, the Dharma body is impenetrable”, have all the way gone through the initial experience “in the realization of ‘there are a myriad of things in the midst of not a single thing’, there are flowers, there is a moon, and there are towers.”, and have finally reached the start of the fourth of the “Five Stages of the Chan Path.”

After having gained an entry that has been compared to “the bottom falling off a barrel of black pitch,” most practitioners who have failed to generate a great mind then fall short of the Buddha and Patriarch’s loving kindness and are insensible to the compassion of delivering sentient beings. They are in a rush to dwell in the waterside forest to nourish the germ of the saint. True Chan practitioners, after completely realizing the mind ground, immediately begin to live by the six paramitas. If there is something that needs doing, they do it. If something is difficult to put down, they put it down. If something is difficult to perform, they perform it. If patience is called for, they exhibit it. On one hand they are “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness” to manifest the wisdom of the wisdom-life; on the other hand, they are spreading “True Dharma” to nourish the blessedness of the Dharma body.

With respect to “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness,” completely enlightened beings always follow action-free action, functionless function and effortless effort in their day-to-day activities. That is, at all times and in all places, all their walking, standing, sitting, reclining, responses to the potentiality and associations with all beings are in conformity with the principles of having a “straightforward mind” (“ordinary mind”) and observing the “three no’s” (“no thought, no form, no abiding”). Furthermore, common tasks such as carrying water and moving firewood become the spiritual powers and their subtle functions.

At this post-enlightened stage of “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness,” the true Chan practitioner’s wisdom (fundamental wisdom) and vexation (delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings) will at the proper time “simultaneously manifest,” then “mutually interpenetrate” and “perfectly merge together,” afterwards reach a state of “mutual forgetting.” By means of such interaction, and by simultaneously dissolving “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in delivering beings” and taming “delusions of realizing true reality,” the “sequential wisdom” is able to manifest in succession and assist in the use of expedient means to respond to the needs of sentient beings. Through this way of continuously “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness,” eventually the practitioner directly breaks the Chan barrier embodied in the lines “there are a myriad of things in the midst of not a single thing, the Dharma body is impenetrable.” He or she experiences the “simultaneous disappearance” of vexation and wisdom, awakening to the Chan realm that there is no vexation, no wisdom, as well as no Buddha, no sentient beings. That is, the completely enlightened practitioner suddenly transcends the top of pure Vairocana (Buddha), straight penetrates the gate of the Dharma Realm of One Reality, and safely arrives at the fourth stage of the Chan path, in which “delusions of the immense variety of expedients in

delivering beings” are thoroughly dissolved, “delusions of realizing true reality” are completely tamed, and sequential wisdom entirely manifests.

With respect to spreading the “True Dharma,” the *Lotus Sutra* mentions the causes and conditions of a great one-time matter that all the Buddhas, the World-honoured Ones, manifesting in the world, will use to help all sentient beings to reveal, manifest, realize and penetrate the Buddha's Wisdom of All Aspects. It will also advise and guide all sentient beings to see into their original nature and have an insight into their true mind. The genuine Chan practitioner, who is at the stage of “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness” after complete enlightenment, has generated a great vow to completely deliver all sentient beings in the ten directions, and is through all possible means spreading the supreme Dharma of Patriarch/Matriarch Chan, that is, guiding sentient beings about Chan investigation with a “mind of straightforwardness” (“ordinary mind”).

It is said in the *Vimalakirti-nirdesha Sutra*: “The straightforward mind is the Site of the Way, the Pure Land.” Therefore, investigate Chan with a straightforward thought, and that thought is the pure land; investigate Chan with straightforward thoughts, and each thought is the pure land. Moreover, if one person investigates Chan with straightforwardness, that one person is the pure land; if every person investigates Chan with straightforwardness, every person is the pure land. Likewise, while people in one place investigate Chan with straightforwardness, that one place is the pure land; while people in every place investigate Chan with straightforwardness, every place is the pure land. Meanwhile, it should be known that when a person engages in Chan investigation, the “True Dharma” lives in that one person’s mind. When a million people engage in Chan investigation, the “True Dharma” lives in a million minds. When people all over the world engage in Chan investigation, the “True Dharma” lives in the minds of people all over the world. In order to let all sentient beings in the Dharma Realm have an insight into their true mind, see into their self-nature, and attain supreme Buddhahood, the completely enlightened Chan practitioner should be spreading, without spreading, the great Dharma of “investigating Chan with straightforwardness” with the great mind of “delivering without delivering,” so that the “True Dharma” will inevitably live for long in the mind ground of all Chan practitioners.

After suddenly traversing the fourth pass of the Chan barrier and going straight onto the fourth stage of the Chan path, the Chan practitioner has attained what is equivalent to the fourth of the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal,” and experiences the natural and innocent attributes of the pure and immovable “precious mirror” (“Buddha-nature”), in which both noumena and phenomena have vanished and both essence and function are



empty. As Chan Master Yongjia Xuanjue (665-713) says in *Song of Enlightenment* : “After realizing the Dharma body, there is not a single thing. Original self-nature is the innate Buddha.” In fact, the true realization is that even the precious mirror itself does not exist, neither do confusion and enlightenment, nor bondage and emancipation. There is no vexation no wisdom, as well as no mind, no Buddha, and no sentient beings. At the same time, the mind realm of genuine inner realization is just as expounded by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng in his *Platform Sutra (Chapter on Prajna)* :

The capacity of the mind is as great as that of the empty space. It is infinite, neither round nor square, neither large nor small, neither green nor yellow, neither red nor white, neither above nor below, neither long nor short, neither angry nor joyful, neither right nor wrong, neither good nor evil, neither head nor tail. The realms of all Buddhas are entirely equal to that of the empty space. The profound self-nature of true suchness of worldly beings is intrinsically empty, and not a single dharma/Dharma is attainable. The genuine emptiness of the inherent self-nature is also like this.

This kind of true Chan practitioner has actually gone straight into the realm described by the “overnight awakening” Chan Master Yongjia as: “not seeing into a single dharma [and Dharma] is exactly the Tathagata. Only then can one be called the Transcendent Bodhisattva (Contemplating- Liberation Bodhisattva).” Furthermore, he or she has broken through the “multiple barrier” of Huanglong’s Three Barriers and arrived at the pass of the “prison barrier.” The “multiple barrier” of Chan Master Huanglong Huinan is as follows :

My hands and Buddha’s hands are raised concurrently, and Chan practitioners are straightforwardly penetrating through all barriers in series. Personally actualizing this stage of Chan path by way of no effort, at the very moment it is transcending the Buddhas and the Patriarchs. How do my hands resemble the Buddha’s hands ?  
(*The Discourse Records of Chan Master Huanglong Huinan*)

Having gone through wisdom and vexation’s cross-interaction of “simultaneous manifestation, mutual interpenetration, perfect mergence, mutual forgetting, and simultaneous disappearance,” the genuine Chan practitioners penetrate straightforwardly through the Dharma body from the actualization of “there are a myriad of things in the midst of not a single thing.” By means of the straightforward Chan investigation of investigation-free investigation and effortless effort, they realize the Chan path of “Profoundly actualizing that there is not a single thing, neither sentient beings nor Buddha.” At the right moment, they are naturally and suddenly transcending the top of pure Vairocana (Buddha) and passing beyond the gate of Patriarch Dajian Huineng. It is mentioned in The *Surangama Sutra* : “The emptiness actualized in the “great

enlightenment” (“ultimate and complete enlightenment”) appears like a bubble in the sea, and the uncountable worlds with outflows all arise from that emptiness. The emptiness is originally empty just as the bubble bursts. How then could the three realms exist ?”

Having turned around and walked away from “How do my hands resemble the Buddha’s hands?”, the true Chan practitioner has not only directly awakened to the Chan realm that “both emptiness and existence have been negated,” but also that “going beyond the four statements and putting their hundred negations to rest forever” have been transcended, and even that “the ocean of ultimately enlightened wisdom” no longer exists.

### **(F) Simultaneous Disappearance Also Disappearing**



**( Fig.10 ) Simultaneous Disappearance Also Disappearing**

In the ninth diagram, the wild duck (vexation) and the flying goose (wisdom) simultaneously disappear, and a full-white symbolic circle is shown. Until the tenth

diagram, when the simultaneous disappearance also disappears so that the full-white symbolic circle vanishes, all things throughout the universe—including mountains, rivers and land, springs and valley streams, grasses, trees and forests—are still truly and distinctly presented in the empty space of the world.

Throughout the journey that is the “Five Stages of the Chan Path”, the true Chan practitioner has gone all the way at full speed and driven straight in, has turned around from “no wisdom and no attainment” to genuinely attain the limitless subtle wisdom of equality and purity—that is “the mind of fundamental and sequential wisdom” (“the mind of Buddha’s Wisdom of All Aspects”) and its innumerable mysterious functions of complete and bright illumination—that is “direct actualisation of all dharmas/Dharmas” and “present realization of ultimate emptiness.” Moreover, the genuine attainment is of no attainment, the subtle wisdom-functions of all dharmas are nevertheless also of purity, equality, and dynamic omnipresence, and has not departed from the self-nature of true suchness, which is the kernel of supreme enlightenment (Bodhi) and is intrinsically pure, self-sufficient, and free from arising, perishing, and movability.

The Dharma Master Sengzhao (384-414) in the late Chin Dynasty, who was the first to actualize emptiness, and who was one of the four saints under the famous Dharma Master Kumarajiva in the history of Chinese Buddhism, mentioned in his “Sastra on Immovability of the Phenomena” of *The Sastra of Sengzhao*: “The whirlwinds are tipping over high peaks, but, in fact, they are always stationary. All rivers are vying for the chance to pour into the ocean, yet they are not flowing. Wild horses are running swiftly in rhythm with the drumbeat of battle, but they are not moving. Sun and moon are passing through the sky, yet actually they are not revolving.” Genuine Chan practitioners of ultimate and complete enlightenment realize immovability within movability, that is to say, they have the insight that all phenomena are always in motion, but at the same time also have seen that they are not moving. As the Sixth Patriarch Huineng said in his “Verse on Genuine and Provisional Movability and Immovability”:

If one seeks for genuine immovability, there is immovability within movability. . . . One is adept at differentiating the forms of all dharmas/Dharmas, while simultaneously rests patiently and immovably in the Ultimate Principle. As long as one realizes in this way, it is the function manifested from the self-nature of true suchness.

*(The Platform Sutra: Chapter on Dharma Transmission and Final Instructions)*

Therefore, although they still live in the phenomenal world, they are not moved by any phenomena. A verse from the *Song of Enlightenment* of Chan Master Yongjia

Xuanjue best characterises this state: “Continuing rounds of birth and death, transmigration advances without interruption. Since sudden enlightenment one realizes the non-arising, thus one has no concern for honour or shame.”

Dharma Master Sengzhao once also said: “Although phenomena are moving, they are always stationary. They do not give up movability to seek immovability. Hence, although phenomena are stationary, they do not depart from movability.” The mind of the ultimately and completely enlightened Chan practitioner is just as the law of inertia in physics: “Static objects are constantly static, and kinetic objects are perpetually kinetic.” “Constant immovability” refers to the function of the highest samadhi (Suragama Great Samadhi), which will prevent the enlightened mind from giving rise to fluctuations owing to the environment. “Perpetual movability” refers to the function of the highest wisdom (Buddha’s Wisdom of All Aspects), the great functions of which will manifest in accordance with the needs of sentient beings. This constantly immovable samadhi and perpetually movable wisdom are originally of one essence and not two, according to the principle “samadhi is the quintessence of wisdom, while wisdom is the function of samadhi. When merging into samadhi, wisdom is in samadhi, and vice versa.” Furthermore, this mind ground that “samadhi and wisdom are of non-duality” and that “movability and immovability are of one suchness” is just like the realm of the so-called “effortlessness in immovability, the patient rest in non-arising.” It is also exactly like “the most superior king in Dharma” and the highest level of enlightenment in the “Five Stages of the Chan Path.”

The “Chapter on Bodhisattva of Pure Wisdom” of the *Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* says:

All Bodhisattvas and sentient beings in the Dharma Ending Age should at no time give rise to deluded thoughts. Yet, when their deluded minds arise, they should not extinguish them. In the midst of deluded states, they should not add discriminations. Amidst nondiscrimination, they should not distinguish true reality. If all those sentient beings, upon hearing of this Dharma gate, have manifested great confidence, profound realization, subtle function, and wondrous action, and have had no panic or fear, they are “in accordance with the nature of ultimate and complete enlightenment” (“in accordance with the Tathagata’s perfect rest and cessation”). Venerable practitioners, you should know that those sentient beings have made offerings to a myriad of Buddhas and great Bodhisattvas as innumerable as grains of sand in the Ganges, and have planted the roots of all merits. I say that those beings have accomplished the Buddha’s Wisdom of All Aspects.”

This clearly points out that, when the effort of “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness” becomes proficient and complete, true Chan practitioners are able to see into their self- nature and have an insight into their true mind. They also attain a state of “patient rest in non-arising” and the realization that “perfect rest and cessation is everlasting bliss.” At this moment, like the pure lotus bloom, which perfectly and completely rips open, the mind of “Buddha’s Wisdom of All Aspects” and the ultimate and complete insight into reality are entirely penetrated, and the greatness of the mind capacity embodied in the phrase “no mind and infinite capacity” then manifests.

All in all, the truly and ultimately enlightened and emancipated Chan practitioners are completely unaware of their own wisdom and power, yet their great wisdom constantly manifests itself and is naturally and functionlessly responding to all causes and conditions. In fact, in his *Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi*, Chan Master Dongshan Liangjie once used the expression: “So infinitesimal it penetrates the immeasurable spaceless space, so infinite it transcends the empty space” to expound on the ultimately and completely enlightened mind, which has an inconceivable, ineffable, and unlimited mighty power, full of the vitality of great emancipation (Huayan Ocean-Seal Samadhi), great wisdom (Buddha’s Wisdom of All Aspects), and great compassion (Unconditional Compassion). The scope of this mind power’s great function can be so infinitesimal that it enters the immeasurable spaceless space and so infinite that it traverses empty space and moves beyond the Dharma Realm. Meanwhile, the Sixth Patriarch Huineng once directed Chan practitioners in the *Platform Sutra: Chapter on Suddenness and Gradualness* :

“Those who see into the self-nature can set them up or not set them up. They are free to simultaneously merge into and depart from all forms, and free from obstructions or impediments. In responding to the manifested function, they take action in accord with the condition of the circumstance; while in response to the inquiry, they give answer in accord with the condition of the inquirer. They universally manifest all Transformation Bodies which are one with the self-nature, thus they attain the samadhi of playfulness in free spiritual powers.” This discourse does even more to clarify the function of the great wisdom possessed by greatly emancipated Chan practitioners : What a dynamic omnipresence ! What a spontaneousness & effortlessness !

While vigorously arriving at the ultimate and complete enlightenment, the genuine Chan practitioner has broken straight through the fifth Chan barrier, and has also suddenly transcended Huanglong’s prison barrier, and has completed the “Five Stages on the Chan Path.” Chan Master Huanglong Huinan’s “prison barrier” is as follows :



My feet and the donkey's feet are simultaneous walking together, and Chan practitioners are always trampling upon "non-arising" every step on the path. Directly awakening to "the departing of the clouds and the rolling-up of the sun," the reality crisscrossing the whole Chan path becomes clear. How do my feet resemble the donkey's feet?

*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Huanglong Huinan)*

At every present moment of delivering the world in compliance with causes and conditions, the ultimately and greatly emancipated Chan practitioners use sentient beings' vexations as the skillful tools of wisdom to help them. Expedient actions like the "uplifting of the character of all beings by ripening their manifestation of Buddha-wisdom, and establishing the pure land on planet earth" are altogether compatible with the realization of "non-arising & manifestation." Through such "spontaneousness & effortlessness" and straight enlightening to "the disappearing of the cloud and the setting of the sun", Chan practitioners have just then actualized the whole Chan path of "illumination of non-illumination" and "manifestation of non-manifestation." The practitioners of ultimate and great enlightenment have hitherto perfectly realized the [Middle Way] reality of all dharmas and have ultimately actualized the essential principle of "One-No Chan" (no-thought Chan). They have completely awakened to the fifth of the "Five Levels of Lord and Vassal" and have become "the host among hosts" ("the Master among Masters") who fully realize that "vexation and bodhi are of one suchness."

The genuine Chan practitioner has from this moment been promoted to a "real person of no level," and continues from this day on "the upward one way of transcendence," galloping down the Chan path in order to dissolve habits of ignorance and universally reflect seemingly illusory sentient beings in compliance with the causes and conditions of karmic force and the power of vows. Chan Master Linji Yixuan of the Linji School in the Tang Dynasty once gave a discourse in the Dharma Hall :

On this lump of red flesh is a real person of no level who often comes in and out right before your face. Whoever has not realized this should investigate diligently. At that point a monk came up and asked, "What is the real person of no level ?" The Master stepped down from the Chan couch, took hold of the monk and said, "Speak, speak!" While the monk was about to deliberate, the Master let go of him and said, "The real person of no level is no more than a dry shit-stick!" He then went back to the abbot's room immediately.

*(The Discourse Records of Chan Master Linji Huizhao)*



Chan Master Linji's offering of a dry shit-stick aims at reminding all good fellow-practitioners on the Chan path to make sure they avoid immediately attaching to "the real person of no level" once they have heard it, and to bear in mind that "the real person of no level" is indeed ultimately empty and non-attainable. Moreover, even the true actualization of it is still not equivalent to attaining the ultimate Buddhahood of supreme and complete enlightenment.

### **C) Analogy of "Stage of No Stage"**

Having comprehensively utilised the above-mentioned "Ten Dream-awakening Pictures" as the main framework, in harmony with Caodong's "Five Levels of Lord and Vassal," Linji's two kinds of "Three Barriers" and the "Ten Ox-herding Pictures," we have now presented a distinct and complete elucidation, pointing at the process of realization on the Patriarch/Matriarch path and the level of Chan enlightenment. Venerable Mentor Chan Patriarch Sheng-Yen has applied the "Drinking Water Allegory" and "Sunlight Allegory" to expound on the world (realm) of enlightenment. Therefore, there follow two analogies to illustrate the "stage of no stage"—that is all "Five Stages of the Chan Path":

#### **(A) Drinking Water Allegory**

A traveller on the Chan path, arriving at a riverside surrounded by wonderful scenery after a long and arduous journey, drinks a mouthful of water which tastes like nectar. Just as "none but the taster knows the flavour of the water," she is unable to reveal to people the state of her mind on initially realizing Chan. However, the purpose of Chan is to do more than teach people to have just a tiny sip. As a result, the traveller continues to drink more water and develops a greater realization of the Chan realm. Eventually, she even jumps into the river, her whole life and the river water merge into one, and she even forgets about the existence of the water (the Chan realm). Then, the traveller further swims through all rivers, fully tasting the sweetness of their waters. Finally, she arrives in the vast ocean (the wisdom-ocean of ultimate enlightenment), and truly actualizes the "one flavour of the Chan Ocean" of "spontaneousness & effortless manifestation of no manifestation."

## **(B) Sunlight Allegory**

A hiker in the wilderness carelessly slips into and is trapped in an old well, the top of which is covered with boards, on which a thick layer of sand is piled up. Inside the well there is a vast complete darkness, and it is just as if he had placed himself in a barrel of black pitch, the hiker is surely and completely ignorant of the outside world, and is also unable to identify the inner world. Until one day, when a light breeze brushes off some of the sand and a little ray of sunlight is projected through the gap into the well. All of a sudden, brightness (wisdom) appears in the darkness (vexation), to allow the hiker his first experience of Chan enlightenment, and become aware of his long-term stay in the dark well of ignorance. Later, a moderate wind breaks out and blows away more sands. The well becomes all the brighter, and the hiker gains a more profound realization of the Chan world (realm). As a strong wind rises and lifts up all the boards, suddenly “the bottom falls off the barrel of black pitch,” making the well incomparably bright, and the hiker strains to have deeper Chan enlightenment. Then, after he gets further away from confinement and returns to the ground, he begins spreading the teaching and delivering sentient beings with a dynamic omnipresence under the widespread bright sunlight. Finally, while flying overhead, even becoming one with the sun, the mind like the disk of the sun in empty space, the hiker genuinely realizes the highest Chan realm of “non-arising & manifestation and illumination of no illumination.

## **D) Patriarch/Matriarch Chan of No Gradation**

Chan practitioners should not regard the process of achieving realization on the Patriarch/Matriarch path as an ordered gradation and an invariable standard procedure, which every practitioner follows step by step. In fact, the Chan sect has always advocated “no passing through stages” and “no falling into levels.” As mentioned by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng :

For those who ultimately realize no impurity, no ignorance and no disturbance in their self-nature, they are able to be purely aware of all dharmas/Dharmas thought-after-thought with prajna wisdom, and are always apart from all forms so as to be completely free and liberated. While the most profound "pure awareness" can be fully attainable in the ten directions and three times, what is there to set up ? Since both "the self-nature is ultimately self-realized" and "sudden ultimate-realization and sudden maintenance of spontaneous effortlessness" are approached instantaneously without any gradual process,

so that there is no setting up all dharmas/Dharmas. As all dharmas/Dharmas are intrinsically in "perfect rest and cessation", what gradation is there ?

*(The Platform Sutra : Chapter on Suddenness and Gradualness)*

Nevertheless, owing to the differentiation between sharpness and dullness in Chan practitioners' karmic roots, the distinction between deep and shallow in their karmic affinities, and the difference between great and little in their power of diligence, their responses to the investigation, and their ways along with causes and conditions to the realization are inevitably different. Some are prompt, suddenly transcend and go straight in; some are smooth and steadily progress; while others are tardy and intermittent.

Meanwhile, in term of the levels of Chan enlightenment : Some Chan practitioners with the sharpest karmic roots--such as Sixth Patriarch Huineng, Chan Master Guishan Lingyou, and Chan Master Yangshan Huiji--were able to have a relatively profound realization (the third stage of Chan path) in one enlightenment experience. Then, those such as Sixth Patriarch Huineng were able to achieve ultimate and complete realization (the fifth stage of Chan path) in the second attempt. However, most Chan practitioners, whose initial enlightenment experiences are generally quite shallow, should experience a series of actualizations, even amounting to an unknown number of times. Some are able to penetrate all the way through their actualizations while others may just repeat the same level.

The great Chan Patriarch Huineng also mentioned :

If one wants to penetrate into the most profound Dharma Realm and the Samadhi of Prajna, one should devote to your mind training with the Act of Prajna and the Essential Principle of Diamond Sutra, then one will be able to see into the self-nature. .... One who enlightens to the Dharma of Suddenness and not attaches to the outward seeking, and whose mind always manifests pure awareness of prajna wisdom so that one is always not defiled by the interaction between the conditioning power of mind exhaustion and the conditioned realms of six sense objects, is said to [ultimately] see into the self-nature. .... When one always lives every moment with genuine pure awareness of prajna wisdom, one is truly able to penetrate into brightness and purity of both inside and outside, and have an ultimate insight into the true mind. If one has an ultimate insight into the true mind, this exactly is the great emancipation of intrinsic no-bondage. If one attains the great emancipation, this exactly is the Samadhi of Prajna.

*(The Platform Sutra : Chapter on Prajna)*

It is evident that the experience of “seeing into the self-nature,” which is a hallmark of Patriarch/Matriarch Chan and was expounded by the Sixth Patriarch Huineng, is the ultimate “great enlightenment” and the complete “great emancipation,” and is equivalent to the realization of the fifth stage of the Chan path. However, the so-called “complete enlightenment” or “thorough (i.e. full) enlightenment” mentioned by the ancient Chan Masters is ordinarily equivalent to the enlightened realm of breaking through Doushuai’s prison barrier or arriving at the tenth picture of the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” and it also refers to the actualization of the third stage of the Chan path. In addition, for most Chan practitioners, “seeing into the self-nature” is not necessarily enlightenment, and enlightenment is also not necessarily emancipation (complete great emancipation), yet these three, respectively, represent the realizations in the first, third, and fifth stages of the Chan path.

All in all, frameworks, such as the “Five Levels of Lord and Vassal,” “Doushuai’s Three Barriers,” “Huanglong’s Three Barriers,” the “Ten Ox-herding Pictures,” and the “Ten Dream-awakening Pictures,” all provide a valuable standard of evaluation for the goal and direction of the “Chan path” (Patriarch/Matriarch path). However, they should not be considered an absolutely decisive factor, without any flexibility.

### **III. The World (Realm) of Chan Enlightenment**

Chan (Zen) is single-flavoured. Chan (Zen) is inconceivable. The realization of the inconceivable and single-flavoured Chan is characterised by the expression, “none but the taster knows the flavour of the water,” and information relevant to the Chan realm cannot be revealed. However, by means of Dharma words, a verse or the song written by an ancient Chan Patriarch can at least hint at the state of Chan mind one reaches after attaining ultimate and complete enlightenment.

Chan Master Mazu Daoyi of Jiangxi in the Tang dynasty has expounded to his disciples :

All venerable practitioners ! Believe that your own mind is Buddha. This very mind is Buddha mind. .... Upon realizing this mind, then it is just wearing clothes and eating

food at any moment to nourish the germ of the saint. After ultimately actualizing the “spontaneousness & effortlessness,” is there anything more to be done?

*(The Record of the Transmission of the Lamp; Volume 7)*

Chan Master Daoyi pointed out that Chan practitioners, who have an insight into their true mind and have seen into their true nature, are able to put the ordinary mind to a good use in associating with all beings and responding to their potentiality and are engaged in “maintaining spontaneousness & effortlessness” so as to nurture the germ of the saint. Until realizing “non-arising & manifestation, spontaneousness & effortlessness,” then “It is just now directly applying “the mind of ultimate emptiness” (the mind of ultimate non-abiding) of the profoundest Chan gate, and suddenly penetrating “the power of pure awareness” itself from the non-arising manifestation.” They have become “the real ordinary persons with nothing to do” addressed by Chan Master Deshan Xuanjian (819-914) in the following words, “While there are no affairs in the mind and no mind in the affairs, the mind is empty yet vivacious, void yet wondrous.” They are just “leisure practitioners who have entered the Way and, have with effortlessness, adopted the attitude characterised by Chan Master Yongjia Xuanjue as “The moon shines on the river, the breeze blows over the pine. What is there to do on a long leisurely night ?”

Meanwhile, Tang Dynasty Chan Master Shitou Xiqian of Hunan mentioned in his ***Inquiry into Matching Halves*** :

Every dharma includes all realms, mutually interacting or not. Interaction brings mutual involvement. However, every dharma has its own position.

By means of this verse, Chan Master Xiqian gives a clear description of the world (realm) of ultimate and complete enlightenment. The Chan practitioner of great enlightenment and great emancipation realizes that every dharma includes all dharmas, all realms and all of totality. This ultimately and completely enlightened being has truly actualized that all dharmas have interaction, that is, the “interdependence” (interbeing and interpenetration) of all dharmas. Yet, at the same time, he/she has also actualized that all dharmas have non-interaction and have not attached to them in the least, and he/she is not moved by all dharmas so as to allow their existence (independence) to appear as it truly is. The so-called “interdependence” (harmoniousness) of all innumerable dharmas realized by ultimately enlightened beings is shown as follows:

In the multiple and endless Dharma Realm, one and all are of interbeing and interpenetration, that is to say, all things are in perfect harmony and unhindered interconnectedness.

*(The Avatamsaka Sutra)*

This can be interpreted as : In the continually developing and limitlessly expanding Dharma Realm of the ten directions, one dharma is all dharmas; all dharmas are one dharma; one dharma penetrates all dharmas; and all dharmas penetrate one dharma. It is just like an Indra net with multiple interfusion and mutual manifestation. Therefore, all the innumerable dharmas altogether are natural, omnipresent, and unobstructed. At the same time, the so-called “independence” (discrepancy) of all the innumerable dharmas actualized by the enlightened being of ultimate no-self is also shown as follows :

All dharmas abide in their own positions, and the ultimate reality of all worldly phenomena always abides directly in true suchness.

*(The Lotus Sutra)*

This can also be interpreted as : In the whole universe, among all worldly dharmas, each has its own position, condition, and perspective, and all dharmas are entirely and truthfully manifesting with their original face and spontaneous functioning.

Having thus completely realized that “within all innumerable dharmas of harmoniousness, every dharma at the very moment includes all discrepant dharmas,” the Chan practitioner of ultimate and complete enlightenment, has indeed ultimately awakened to the fact of the so-called “one thought for ten thousand years” and to the reality that “a single thought sufficiently contains the Ten Dharma Realms” of the Chan sect, or to the reality that “a single thought completely contains the Three Thousand Worlds” of the Tiantai sect, or to the reality that “all Buddhas in the ten directions and three times turn the Great Dharma Wheel on the tip of a fine strand of hair” of the Avatamsaka Sutra. That is, in a single thought the practitioner has completely actualized the reality that “every dharma of the Dharma Realm completely contains all dharmas of the Ten Dharma Realms and the Three Thousand Worlds, the Ten Directions and the Three Times, and the Causes and Consequences of Confusion and Enlightenment.” Thus, “a single thought” is the reality of the essence of the Ten Dharma Realms, the Three Thousand Worlds, and All Buddhas in the Ten Directions and Three Times, yet “the Ten Dharma Realms, the Three Thousand Worlds, and All Buddhas in the Ten Directions and Three Times” are the manifestation of the great function of one-thought reality. Meanwhile, this ultimately enlightened Chan practitioner has really completely actualized the Dharma Realm (“Dharmadhatu” in Sanskrit) of One Reality embodied in the expression “while one thing is real, everything is real; all dharmas are spontaneously of one true suchness”, and also in the expression “if one thing exists, everything exists, even a speck of dust. If one thing is empty, everything is empty, even the empty space. If one thing is of the ultimate middle way, everything is of the ultimate middle way, even all dharmas.”



This Chan practitioner who has truly attained ultimate and complete emancipation has even immediately actualized the “Ocean Seal Samadhi” mentioned by Chan Master Mazu Daoyi:

When arising, it is only the dharma that arises; when perishing, it is only the dharma that perishes. At the time of the dharma arising, it is not to say “I” (the self) arise; at the time of the dharma perishing, it is not to say “I” (the self) perish. For the previous thought, the following thought, and the intermediate thought, they are of mutual non-duality thought after thought, and all thoughts are in perfect resting and cessation. This is called the “Ocean Seal Samadhi,” and it harmoniously contains all dharmas. It is like hundreds of thousands of different rivers flowing into the ocean simultaneously, and all are labelled as seawater. Abiding in one flavour is to encompass all flavours while abiding in the ocean is mingling with all rivers. It is just as “bathing in the ocean is using all waters.”  
(*The Ordinary Mind is the Way in The Discourse Records of Chan Master Mazu Daoyi*)

Meantime, this greatly emancipated Chan practitioner has also truthfully actualized the “Avatamsaka (Huayan) Samadhi” mentioned in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* as follows :

In the inconceivably and ineffably solemn realms of all Buddhas, reverently making offerings to all Buddhas. The pure awareness of solemnity is inconceivable and ineffable, being used for teaching and delivering innumerable sentient beings. The great function of Buddha’s wisdom is dynamically omnipresent and beyond conceivability, expounding the Dharma and delivering all sentient beings are of perfect liberation. The great action of Buddha’s compassion spontaneously contains all merits of generosity, morality, patience, diligence, samadhi, and prajna wisdom, and also those of expedients, vows, power, and Wisdom of All Aspects. All the great functions and great actions are of inconceivably and ineffably dynamic omnipresence and are owing to the power of Avatamsaka Samadhi.  
(*The Avatamsaka Sutra, Volume 6 “Chapter on Bodhisattva Foremost in Virtue”*  
*Translated by India Tripitaka Master Buddhahadra*)

Therefore, on the following journey of Chan path and on the occasion of deliverance in compliance with causes and conditions, the ultimately enlightened and emancipated Chan practitioner will be able to manifest innumerable great functions and boundless great actions of inconceivable great liberation via the powers of “non-arising & manifestation” (i.e. Ocean Seal Samadhi) and “spontaneousness & effortless” (i.e. Avatamsaka Samadhi) respectively, for the purpose of making offerings to all Buddhas and delivering innumerable sentient beings.

Chan Master Hongzhi Zhengjue of the Caodong School in the southern Song dynasty, in his *Inscription of Silent Illumination*, also talked about the world (realm) of ultimate and complete Chan enlightenment :

The hundred rivers flow into the ocean, the thousand mountains face the loftiest peak.  
Like geese preferring milk, like bees gathering pollen.

Obviously, Chan Master Hongzhi used these sentences to describe the liberal state of mind that characterises the greatly enlightened and emancipated Chan Masters and their ability to be purely aware of and to appropriately respond to the potentialities of practitioners. In fact, Chan practitioners of ultimate and complete enlightenment, who have actualized to the utmost “the pure awareness that non-difference and difference are of interbeing and interpenetration,” are able to manifest a pure mind consistent with the principles that “movability and immovability are of one suchness,” that “essence and function are of non-duality,” that “compassion and wisdom are simultaneously applied,” and that “profound function is boundless.” These practitioners exhibit this pure mind everywhere in their daily activities, and are like “the hundred rivers which have a swift running, the thousand large rivers which vie for flowing, and both of them proceed together to the ocean,” and also are exactly like “the thousand mountains which rise and fall, the ten thousand ranges which rise layer after layer, and both of them together face the highest summit.” At the same time, they are also able to show the power of “being compatible with the essence and the potentiality of practitioners,” “killing and bringing to life are free from impediment,” “shaking and punctually transforming,” and “infinite mightiness” every moment on the occasion of delivering all sentient beings in accordance with causes and conditions. All their actions of deliverance are surely like “geese preferring milk, they only drink the milk and still leave the water behind,” and also like “bees gathering pollen, they only take out its flavour without damaging the colour or the fragrance.”

