

The Sword of Wisdom

A Commentary on the Song of Enlightenment

Ch'an Master Sheng-Yen

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iii
Foreword	iv
1. Introduction	1
2. Song of Enlightenment	8
3. First Retreat.....	19
Day 1 Non-opposition	19
Day 2 Only the Present Moment.....	22
Day 3 Awakening From the Dream of Existence.....	26
Day 4 Letting Go	31
Day 5 The Inexplicability of Enlightenment	34
4. Second Retreat	40
Day 1 Purifying the Six Senses.....	40
Day 2 False Enlightenment: Reaching for the Moon in the Water.....	43
Day 3 Isolating Oneself.....	46
Day 4 The Wealth of Wanting Little.....	50
Day 5 Persevere in Practice	54
5. Third Retreat	59
Day 1 Following the Guidelines of Buddhadharma.....	59
Day 2 Dropping Theories and Experiences.....	64
Day 3 Practice Is Not Limited to Sitting Meditation	69
Day 4 Non-Attachment Is True Wisdom.....	73
Day 5 No Substitute for Hard Work	82
Day 6 Subduing Desires	88
Day 7 Mistaking One Mind for No Mind	92
Day 8 Wielding a Sword of Wisdom	99
Day 9 The Elusiveness of Buddha-nature	106
Day 10 No Such Thing as True or False	110
Day 11 The Flexibility of Ch'an Practitioners	114
Day 12 A Correct View Is the Compass for Proper Practice	120

6. Fourth Retreat	127
Day 1 Leave the Past in the Past.....	127
Day 2 Using Illusions to Transcend Illusion	131
Day 3 The Obstacle of Fear	136
Day 4 Adhering to the Precepts	141
Day 5 Faith in Self, Faith in Method, Faith in Dharma	146
Glossary.....	155

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge those disciples, students and friends who helped to make this book possible. Ming-yee Wang, Paul Kennedy, Dan Stevenson and Pei-gwang Dowiat, who expertly translated my Dharma lectures during the evenings of intensive retreats. Dorothy Weiner, Nancy Makso and Echo Bonner, who patiently and painstakingly transcribed the taped lectures into written form so that the lectures could be edited.

It was not an easy task to turn these Dharma talks into a book. The lectures passed under the scrutiny of several people — Ernest Heau, Professor Chun-fang Yu, Gregory B. Talovich and Sebastian Bonner — before they were edited into one, cohesive narrative by Christopher Marano. Although the final version was Chris' effort, the extensive work of the other editors was not wasted, and I am most grateful. Thanks also to Nancy Patchen, Stuart Lachs, and especially Harry Miller, for their valuable advice and suggestions regarding the flow and tone of the book; and thanks to Jonathan Bardin and Alan Rubinstein, who thoroughly proof-read the final manuscript.

A book is more than its words. For this reason I wish to thank Page Simon for designing the book and its cover, Lili Lauritano Grady for the cover photography. And last, but certainly not least, I thank Trish Ing, who coordinated all phases of the production of this book.

My deepest gratitude goes out to all those people who attended the intensive Ch'an retreats and made it possible for these words to exist.

Foreword

Browse in the religion or philosophy section of quality book stores and you are likely to find many books on Zen, or Ch'an, Buddhism; and the number grows every year. Books on philosophy, books on personal experiences with Zen masters or in monasteries, books by lay people, books by monks and nuns. Many words. And this about a philosophy that tells us to put aside words, to transcend thoughts and language. Then why write another book on Zen Buddhism? There really are few principles to speak of, and all of them inevitably point to the meditation cushion, where the real learning — or unlearning — takes place. But words are a useful tool, and most of us can comprehend little without them. In any case, people who have transcended thoughts and language probably don't browse in bookstores.

Master Sheng-yen is not a silent teacher. He has written or, edited many books. In English, there is *Getting the Buddha Mind*, *The Poetry of Enlightenment*, *Faith in Mind*, *Ox Herding at Morgan's Bay*, and *The Infinite Mirror*. He has also written over thirty books in Chinese, and even one in Japanese. In addition, the Ch'an Meditation Center publishes eight newsletters and four magazines every year, the bulk of which contains his lectures.

Many words. My only wish is that he keep speaking them; that he keep expounding the teachings of Buddha and the patriarchs; that he continue to weave stories, observations and daily life experiences into clear, inspirational advice and wisdom. I admit that I am dense, like the ox with the thick callous around its neck that doesn't feel the bite of the yoke anymore. I need the repetition.

Master Sheng-yen (his students call him Shih-fu, which is Chinese for "teacher-father") has been teaching in the United States since 1976. In that time, he has led students in over fifty intensive meditation retreats, and has given hundreds of lectures at the Ch'an Meditation Center and other places throughout North America and England. He has given even more retreats and lectures in Taiwan. His words have been of enormous

help to most people who have listened, and for some, myself included, his guidance has been of life-changing significance.

Master Sheng-yen's extensive understanding of Buddhadharma is evident in his lucid Dharma talks. These lectures on the Song of Enlightenment, an ancient Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist classic written by Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh during the T'ang dynasty, were delivered during the evenings of intensive, seven day retreats. Retreat lectures are spontaneous, improvised talks. The lectures are commentaries on Buddhist texts, but more importantly, they contain a wealth of relevant information and practical advice for practitioners on the retreat. The text serves as a jumping-off point for Master Sheng-yen, who interprets Buddhadharma and tailor fits it to guide each participant in the proper use of his or her meditation method, and to help each participant overcome obstacles on the path of practice. The lectures, therefore, take on many guises, depending on the nature, situation and needs of the audience. The mood, momentum and direction of the lectures change from day to day, retreat to retreat. Still, this is a book for practitioners and non-practitioners alike. In the process of helping retreat participants with problems they face in their practice, Master Sheng-yen does, in fact, offer a rich commentary on the Song of Enlightenment; and in so doing, he clearly and eloquently expounds the principles of Buddhism.

The express aim of these talks, however, is to help people solve problems and overcome obstacles encountered in their practice. During lectures, it is a familiar sight to see students nodding their heads in silence as he speaks, as if questions in their minds had been answered without being asked. In the group discussion at the end of the retreat and in reports people are asked to write after the retreat is over, many participants say that they felt as if Master Sheng-yen were speaking directly to them at certain moments during the lectures.

His lectures are filled with advice for practice and daily life, questions to ponder, answers to theoretical and personal questions, anecdotes from his life, as well as stories and legends from Buddhist history and scripture. His tone can be commanding, understanding, cajoling,

amusing, scolding, humbling or sympathetic. For many, his words and knowledge are precious jewels of wisdom and compassion.

The lectures differ, depending on the participants. Master Sheng-yen's "medicine" fits the individual and the occasion. At certain times, his words may seem to contradict the words he spoke earlier. From a higher perspective, however, there are no contradictions. The path of Ch'an is long, and there are many levels of understanding. What holds for one stage of practice may not necessarily hold for another. What holds for someone one day may not necessarily be true for the same person the next day. As Master Sheng-yen addresses the problems of each individual, he blends his answers seamlessly into the commentary, and the thrust of his talk will change to meet every individual's situation. What is abstract theory for one participant may be concrete instruction for another.

Master Sheng-yen once likened his retreat lectures to balls which he throws out to his listeners. To him, all the balls are the same because they all emanate directly from Buddhadharma, but to us they vary. Many we miss altogether; they are invisible. Sometimes a ball is like a flash of light which goes by too quickly to grasp. At other times we grasp a small truth, but cannot hold onto it. Finally, there are balls which hit squarely in the chest and stay put. These are the teachings which are understood and put to use. Some teachings seem out of reach; good ideas to think about, but not to incorporate into practice or life. Other teachings appear like the sublime teachings of Bodhisattvas-esoteric philosophy too amazing to be true. Yet, they are all important. Something you miss may strike the person sitting next to you, even though he or she may appear to be nodding off.

There is a familiar rhythm to the unfolding of the teachings during retreat. Master Sheng-yen stresses different aspects of Buddhadharma as the retreat progresses. He usually encourages people to relax their bodies and minds on the first day of the retreat, as participants must shake off the routine of daily life. Some days he stresses detachment, other days he stresses determination. Some days he emphasizes faith, other days he emphasizes making vows. Careful reading may reveal a

pattern which repeats every five or so lectures (this pattern is not written in stone, and in fact, one retreat lasted fourteen days instead of the usual seven).

It is with these things in mind that we ask you to read Master Sheng-yen's commentary on the Song of Enlightenment. It is not necessary to read the book cover to cover, or in sequence. Although his talks follow the stanzas of Yung-chia's poem, each lecture stands alone. We have tried to retain the freshness, vitality and directness of his talks. Of course, directly experiencing Shih-fu's words during retreats is far better. Enjoy the book. If it inspires you to practice, then we have succeeded in our intentions. If it inspires you to visit our Center and join a retreat, than our expectations will have been surpassed.

Christopher Marano November, 1989

1. Introduction

Between 1982 and 1985, I gave a series of lectures on Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh's Song of Enlightenment. The lectures were informal talks given during intensive Ch'an retreats, designed to help participants understand Buddhist concepts and practice better. Before the actual commentary begins, I would like to present a brief discussion of Yung-chia's life and accomplishments, as well as the position of Song of Enlightenment in Buddhist history and thought.

Yung-chia Hsuan-chueh lived during the T'ang dynasty (618-907). He was born in 665 and died in 713 at the age of 48. His given name comes from the town he was born in — Yung-chia — which is located in present-day Che-kiang province. His Dharma name was Ming-tao, Ming meaning "bright" and Tao, "path."

He left home to join the monkhood at an early age, but he spent most of his life near Yung-chia. He studied with several masters, including the Fourth Patriarch of the T'ien-tai school. He was also good friends with Hsuan-lang, a master who later became the Fifth Patriarch of the T'ien-tai school. Eventually, he settled at Lung-hsing temple in Wen-chou, Che-kiang, where he built a small cottage for his practice.

By the time he reached forty years of age, Yung-chia had become quite well known, and many practitioners sought his teachings. One monk, Hsuan-ts'e, who was a disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, visited Yung-chia at Lung-hsing temple. Hsuan-ts'e was amazed that Yung-chia's insight was on par with that of enlightened masters, even though Yung-chia had not been recognized as a master.

Hsuan-ts'e asked Yung-chia where and how he had gained such deep insight. Yung-chia replied, "When I studied sutras and sastras, individual masters taught me specific things. Later, when I penetrated the essence of Buddha's mind through the Vimalakirti Sutra, there was no master who could certify my understanding."

Hsuan-ts'e was astonished, but he pointed out to Yung-chia that he could only be considered what was called a "naturally attained outer

path practitioner," because his enlightenment arose spontaneously and naturally, without a specific practice or guidance from a master. Hsuan-ts'e told Yung-chia that such experiences had not been officially accepted since the time of Wei-in Wang Buddha.

Wei-in Wang Buddha, mentioned in the Lotus Sutra, lived in the remote past (innumerable kalpas ago) and stayed in the world for an unimaginably long time. Wei-in Wang symbolizes the earliest Buddha, prior to which there were no thoughts, conception or language. As he was the earliest Buddha, there were obviously no masters who could affirm his understanding. Language and thought evolved after Wei-in Wang, and this enabled masters to test and certify the experiences of their disciples.

Hsuan-ts'e stressed to Yung-chia that naturally attained enlightenment was limited. He advised Yung-chia to seek the guidance of a master. Yung-chia asked if Hsuan-ts'e could affirm his understanding, but the monk deferred to his own master, Hui-neng, and he took Yung-chia to Ts'ao-ch'i to see him.

When they arrived, Yung-chia did not prostrate to the Sixth Patriarch as ritual demanded. Rather, he circled Hui-neng three times holding his scepter in one hand and a vase in the other. Hui-neng said, "A monk should display a solemn appearance. Where do you come from, and why are you so arrogant?"

Yung-chia replied, "It is most important to resolve the problem of birth and death, because death will come soon. I have no time to worry about manners. My only concern is to be free from birth and death."

Hui-neng countered, "Why don't you try to experience no birth and no death? Then you will understand that there is no such thing as soon or late."

Yung-chia answered, "If one knows the principle of the Dharma body, and knows that the Dharma body has no birth or death, then one understands that there is no such thing as soon or late."

Hui-neng said, "That, indeed, is right."

The assembly was amazed by this dialogue, and even more amazed at what followed. Yung-chia prostrated to Hui-neng, and said, "It is time that I leave."

Hui-neng asked, "Isn't it too soon to be leaving?"

"Since originally there is no such thing as movement," Yung-chia answered, "there is no point in saying that there is soon or not soon."

"Then who is it who knows that there is no motion?" Hui-neng asked.

Yung-chia said, "It is you who makes the distinction."

Hui-neng praised him: "You really do understand the meaning of no birth."

Yung-chia countered, "How can no birth have any meaning?"

Hui-neng probed even deeper: "If there is no meaning, then who makes the distinction?"

Yung-chia replied, "Even making the distinction is not the meaning."

Hui-neng praised Yung-chia again: "Splendid! You have done well. Please stay for the night."

Yung-chia did stay the night, and returned to Lung-hsing temple the following day. Many practitioners studied with Yung-chia in his remaining years, and his fame grew. He was so highly respected, that upon his death in 713, the Emperor of China bestowed upon him the posthumous title, Wu-hsiang, which means "without phenomenon."

Yung-chia's views of the Dharma and practice are made clear, not only in the Song of Enlightenment, but also in the Ch'an-tsung Yung-chia-Chi, which can be found in the Taisho Tripitaka. In the ten articles that make up the latter work, Yung-chia lays out the essentials of his teachings.

He stressed that one who is serious about the Dharma should not have too much pride or desire. One must strive to maintain purity in thought, words and action, which will help to purify one's personal karma. To do

this, a practitioner must abide by the precepts. Yung-chia believed that without precepts, a practitioner could not truly study Buddhadharma or practice samatha (calming the mind) and vipassana (insight). However, with proper behavior and practice, a Dharma seeker can enter samadhi, and eventually generate wisdom. Wisdom will arise only when, as the Vimalakirti Sutra states, principles (noumena) and phenomena are not separate.

Yung-chia also emphasized the importance of making vows. Without sincere vows, a practitioner will progress slowly and accomplish little. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas attained their positions because they all made such great vows as the Four Bodhisattva Vows.

Now, let us turn to the work itself. The Song of Enlightenment was written in the beginning of the eighth century. However, the first commentary did not appear until the eleventh century, during the Sung dynasty (906-1278). There are four Chinese commentaries on the Song of Enlightenment, the last of which was written in the fourteenth century. There are two important Japanese commentaries, written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in the English language there is a commentary by Charles Luk.

The dating and authorship of the Song of Enlightenment are in question. In comparing the Song of Enlightenment with Yung-chia's other works, scholars have found inconsistencies which suggest that the song was written by someone else. For instance, the Song of Enlightenment is not included in the Ch'an-tsung Yung-chia Chi along with his ten other works. Furthermore, in the official history of the T'ang dynasty, Yung-chia and his works are mentioned in the chapter on "Arts, Religion and Literature," but the Song of Enlightenment is omitted.

The song itself contains inconsistencies and contradictions. Two lines in the Song of Enlightenment refer to the first six Ch'an Patriarchs symbolically transmitting the Dharma with the robe from one generation to the next. However, this ritual did not become popular until sometime after Yung-chia's death.

In another part of the song, Yung-chia says that it is important to spend time practicing alone in the mountains. However, it is clear from other writings that Yung-chia usually espoused the opposite opinion. He supported practice within society rather than in the solitude of the mountains. After returning from his meeting with Hui-neng, Yung-chia received an invitation from Hsuan-lang, the future Fifth Patriarch of the T'ien-tai sect. In the invitation, Hsuan-lang extolled the benefits of meditating in the mountains. Yung-chia replied:

"Our world is not paying attention to the right path. People study with those who have neither practice nor learning. We cannot leave the spreading of the Dharma to those who do not have genuine understanding and realization, and who do not practice correctly."

"He who stays in the mountains must be at the stage where there is no digression from the Dharma, not even for an instant. It is wrong to think that it is easier to practice away from ordinary existence because there are fewer disturbances. If your mind is not at peace, you will not find peace in the mountains. The sun, clouds and fog can all upset the calm of your mind. Someone already enlightened to the Path is invulnerable to any interference, so for him there is no difference between living in the mountains and living in society."

"Anyone who thinks it is easier to practice in the mountains is really clamping two handcuffs on his wrists. The first handcuff is love, and the second is displeasure."

In the Song of Enlightenment, however, Yung-chia urges practitioners to devote themselves to ascetic practice in the seclusion of the mountains.

For these reasons, scholars feel that Yung-chia could not have written the Song of Enlightenment. In the final analysis, however, knowing who composed the song and when it was written is not important. What is important is that masters of the Sung dynasty emphasized the greatness of this work, and the Ch'an Buddhism which we practice today dates from the Sung dynasty. The methods of hua-t'ou and kung-an (koan) come from the Sung dynasty, and it was also during the Sung dynasty that Ch'an spread to Japan.

The Song of Enlightenment is priceless because it speaks of daily life activities, proper methods of practice, and proper attitudes while practicing, both before and after enlightenment. In fact, Sung dynasty Master Ta-hui Tsung-kao reported that the Song of Enlightenment was so esteemed by Buddhist practitioners that it was translated into Sanskrit. Whether it is true or not, it says something for the reputation of the song.

My guess is that the Song of Enlightenment was written by Yung-chia during the T'ang dynasty, but was not recognized for its virtues. In subsequent generations, Ch'an masters copied it, and in so doing, added comments and edited it, so that it veered from the content of the original work. Nonetheless, the ideas presented in the Song of Enlightenment are in accordance with the teachings of the Sixth Patriarch.

In the Song of Enlightenment, one theme stands out: reality is defined by two sets of terms: real nature, or Dharma nature; and self-nature, or Buddha-nature.

Real nature is the nature of emptiness. It is the original nature of all dharmas. Hence it is also called Dharma nature. All dharmas, both external and internal, arise because of causes and conditions. In and of themselves, dharmas have no intrinsic reality. They have no self-nature. Self-nature is that which is innate in every sentient being. It is by reason of having self-nature that sentient beings can reach Buddhahood. For this reason, it is also called Buddha-nature.

Yung-chia develops his discourse in a loose style. He hops from topic to topic: he will speak of the proper behavior for a practitioner one moment, discuss Dharma nature and Tathagatagarbha the next moment, and then describe the Tao, emphasizing that it does not allude to an actual way or direction, but rather, to methods of practice.

In the Platform Sutra, Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng says that if his disciples truly understand the thirty-six opposites, they can spread the Dharma without difficulties. In the Song of Enlightenment, we find many polarities: sin and blessing, poverty and wealth, direct experience and Buddhist doctrine, birth and death, form and formlessness, truth

and falsity, emptiness and existence, rejecting and grasping, silence and speech, cause and effect, right and wrong, trunk and branches, the finger and the moon. The song ends with "no human beings" and "no Buddhas."

In the course of the text, Yung-chia stresses the importance of maintaining an attitude of neither grasping nor rejecting. He also stresses that, although it is important that one know and understand the teachings of the sutras, one should not rely solely on the written word. A practitioner must devote himself to practice.

The Song of Enlightenment tells us how to practice, how to live our lives, and how to view the world. It tells us how we can help ourselves on the Buddhist path, and how we can help others after entering the door of Ch'an. For all of these reasons, the Song of Enlightenment is a Ch'an classic. It is as important and influential as the Verses of a Believing Mind, the Song of the Precious Mirror Samadhi, and the Platform Sutra.

2. Song of Enlightenment

*Have you not seen the idle man of Tao who has nothing to learn and
nothing to do,*

Who neither discards wandering thoughts nor seeks the truth?

The real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature;

The illusory empty body is the Dharma body.

After realizing the Dharma body, there is not a thing;

Original self-nature is the innate Buddha.

The five skandhas — the empty comings and goings of floating clouds;

*The three poisons — the vacant appearing and disappearing of water
bubbles.*

When the real is experienced, there is neither person nor dharma.

In an instant the avici karma is destroyed.

If I lie to deceive sentient beings,

May my tongue be ripped out for kalpas uncountable as dust and sand.

With sudden enlightenment to Tathagata Ch'an,

The six paramitas and myriad means are complete within that essence.

In dreams there are clearly six paths of sentient beings;

Upon awakening the great chiliocosm is completely empty.

There is no sin or merit, no loss or gain.

Do not look for anything in this Nirvanic nature;

Originally a dusty mirror which has never been polished,

Today it must be taken apart and analyzed. Who has no thoughts?

Who has no births?

*If the unborn is real, there is nothing not born.
Ask the mechanical wooden puppet
When it will attain Buddhahood through practice.
Put down the four elements, do not cling to anything;
In this Nirvanic nature, feel free to eat and drink.
All phenomena are impermanent; all are empty.
This is the complete enlightenment of the Tathagata.
Surely this is the true vehicle.
One who disagrees is swayed by emotion.
Going directly to the root is the seal of the Buddha;
No point searching for branches or plucking leaves.
The mani pearl is unknown to people;
You can find it in the Tathagata-garbha.
The functions of the six senses are both empty and not empty,
One perfect light with form yet formless.
Purify the five eyes to achieve the five powers.
Only after realization can one comprehend.
To see the image in a mirror is not difficult.
How can one grasp the moon in the water?
Always acting alone, walking alone,
Together the enlightened travel the Nirvana road.
The tune is ancient, the spirit pure, the style poised,
The face drawn, the bones hardened; people take no notice.
The penniless Buddhist monks say they are destitute;*

Though they have nothing, they are not poor in Tao.

Poverty shows in the ragged robes they always wear.

*The priceless treasures of the Tao are stored in their minds. These
priceless treasures have endless functions;*

There is no hesitation in helping others.

The three bodies and four wisdoms are complete in essence;

*The eight liberations and six psychic powers are the mind-ground seal.
For the great ones, one breakthrough accomplishes all;*

For the middling and inferior, the more they hear, the less they believe.

You only have to discard the dirty garments within;

*No need to flaunt your diligence to others. When criticized by others, let
them wrong you;*

They will tire themselves trying to burn the sky with a torch.

When I hear abuse, it is like drinking ambrosia;

*Melt it, and suddenly one enters the inconceivable. If we regard criticism
as merit,*

The critics will become reliable friends.

Do not hate those who slander you;

*How else can you manifest the unborn power of compassion? Thoroughly
understanding both basic principles and teaching,*

*Samadhi and wisdom are complete and clear without stagnating in
emptiness.*

Not only do I accomplish this now;

The essence of uncountable Buddhas is just the same. Speak without fear,

As the lion roars,

All animals hearing it cringe in fright.

*Losing his composure, the fragrant elephant gallops;
With quiet joy, the heavenly dragon listens. Travelling over rivers and
oceans or crossing mountain stream,
Seeking teachers, asking the way to investigate Ch'an,
Since I recognize the path of Ts'ao Ch'i,
I realize all those do not relate to birth and death. Walking is Ch'an;
sitting is Ch'an;
Speaking or silent, moving or still, the essence is undisturbed.
Remain composed even if facing a sharp weapon,
Be at ease even if given poison.
My teacher only met Dipankara Buddha
After training in forbearance for many kalpas. Continuing rounds of
birth and death,
Samsara prolonged without interruption;
Since sudden enlightenment I understand the unborn,
Thus I have no concern for honor or shame. Living in a hermitage deep
in the mountains,
On a lonely peak under a thick pine tree.
I would meditate contentedly in a monk's hut,
At ease in this tranquil place. After enlightenment no need for further
effort;
All dharmas of activity are varied.
Giving alms with attachment bestows merit for heavenly birth,
Like shooting an arrow into space. Once its power is expended, the arrow
falls,
Bringing discontent in the next life.*

*How can this compare to the true door of non-action,
Through which one leaps straight into the Tathagata ground? Once you
get to the root, don't worry about the branches,
Like pure crystal containing a precious moon.
Since you have realized this all-giving pearl,
Benefit for yourself and others will never end. The moon shines on the
river, the breeze stirs the pine,
What is there to do on a long pleasant night?
Buddha-nature and the precepts jewel are sealed in the mind-ground.
Fog, dew, and rosy clouds are now my garments. The dragon-subduing
alms bowl and the staff that wards off tigers,
With the jangling of its two metal rings,
Are not outer forms of keeping the precepts,
But rather are holding the Tathagata's staff and treading his path. Not
seeking the true, not rejecting the false,
Realize that both are empty and formless.
There is no form, no emptiness and no non-emptiness;
This is the true mark of the Tathagata. The mirror of mind reflects
without interference;
Its vastness and clarity radiate through countless worlds.
Various phenomena all manifest themselves;
To a perfectly illumined one there is neither inside nor outside. Attaching
to emptiness, denying cause and effect,
Brings calamities beyond measure.
Rejecting existence and grasping emptiness is the same mistake,*

*Like jumping into a fire to avoid drowning. If you discard the illusory
mind and grasp the true principle,
This mind of grasping and discarding becomes clever.
Not understanding this, practitioners engage in cultivation,
Just as one mistakes a thief for his own son. Loss of Dharma Wealth and
the extinction of merits,
All are caused by the mind consciousness.
Through the Ch'an door, understand the cutting off of mind,
And suddenly enter the powerful view of the unborn. The great hero uses
the sword of wisdom;
This prajna blade blazes like a diamond.
It not only destroys the mind of the outer paths,
But long ago frightened away the heavenly demons. Sound the Dharma
thunder; beat the Dharma drum;
Spread the clouds of compassion and scatter ambrosia.
Where the elephant king treads the favors are boundless,
The three vehicles and five natures are awakened. The pinodhi grass in
the snow mountains is unmixed;
I often enjoy the pure ghee it produces.
One nature perfectly pervades all natures;
One Dharma includes all dharmas.
One moon appears in all waters;
The moons reflected in all waters are one. The Dharma body of all
Buddhas enters my nature;
Which is the same as the Tathagata's.
One stage encompasses all stages,*

*Not form nor mind nor karmic act. Eighty thousand doors are completed
in the snap of the fingers,*

In a flash three kalpas are extinguished.

What do numbers, expressions, and their negations

*Have to do with my spiritual awakening? It is not perishable and cannot
be praised,*

Its substance is like limitless space.

Without leaving where it is, it is constantly clear.

When seeking, you know it cannot be found.

It cannot be grasped, nor can it be discarded;

*It is obtained only in the unobtainable. Speaking in silence, silent in
speech,*

The door of giving is wide open without obstruction.

If someone asks what basic principle I interpret,

*I will say it is the power of Mahaprajna. Others do not know whether I
am right or wrong,*

Even devas cannot fathom whether I oppose or agree.

I have practiced for many kalpas;

*I am not deceiving you as some idlers are. Setting up the Dharma banner,
establishing the basic principle,*

Ts'ao Ch'i clearly followed the Buddha's decree.

The first one to pass on the lamp was Mahakasyapa;

*In India it was transmitted through twenty-eight generations. The
Dharma flowed east and entered this land*

Where Bodhidharma was the First Patriarch.

Six generations transmitted the robe, as heard throughout the land,

And those who later attained the Tao cannot be counted. The truth does not stand, the false is originally empty.

When both existence and non-existence are swept away, not empty is empty.

The twenty empty doors teach non-attachment.

The nature of all Tathagatas is one; their substance is the same. The mind is a sense organ; dharmas are its object.

The two are like marks on a mirror.

Once the dust is rubbed off, the light begins to appear.

When both mind and dharmas are forgotten, this is true nature. Oh, in this evil world in the Dharma-ending age,

Sentient beings have little fortune and are hard to discipline.

Far away from the time of the sages, perverted views run deep.

When demons are strong and Dharma is weak, fears and dangers abound.

When they hear the teaching of sudden enlightenment of the Tathagata,

They cannot but want to destroy it, to smash the tiles. That which acts is the mind, that which receives retribution is the body;

No need to put the blame on others.

If you want to escape continuous karma,

Do not slander the Tathagata's wheel of right Dharma. There are no other trees in a sandalwood forest.

The lion lives in luxuriant dense thickets.

He strolls along in the quiet woods,

All other animals and birds keep their distance. A crowd of animals follows the lions,

Who can roar at the age of three.

If a wild fox challenges the Dharma King,

*It is like a monster opening his mouth for a hundred years. The teaching
of complete sudden enlightenment is not to be used as a favor.*

All unsettled doubts must be debated until clear.

Not that I, a mountain monk, want to be presumptuous,

*But cultivation may make you fall into the pit of cessation and
permanence. Wrong is not wrong; right is not right;*

The slightest deviation veers a thousand miles off course.

If right, the dragon maiden becomes Buddha at once;

*If wrong, the monk Suraksatra falls alive into hell. Since an early age I
have accumulated knowledge,*

Studying the sutras, shastras, and commentaries.

Discriminating between names and forms without rest,

*I only troubled myself counting the sands in the sea. I was severely
reproached by the Tathagata:*

What is the benefit of counting others' treasures?

I realized the futility of my dalliance;

*For many years I busied myself in the world in vain. With evil capacity
and mistaken understanding,*

*One cannot penetrate the Tathagata's principle of complete sudden
enlightenment.*

Hinayana monks, though diligent, forget the mind of Tao.

*Outer path practitioners may be clever, but they lack wisdom. The
ignorant and the foolish think*

That the fist exists separately from the pointing finger.

Mistaking the finger for the moon, they practice uselessly;

*They only fabricate strange illusions in the realms of sense and object.
Not perceiving a single dharma: this is Tathagata.
Only then can one be called the Supreme Observer. With this realization
karmic obstacles are innately empty.
Without realization, past debts must be paid off.
If one is unable to take the royal feast even when hungry,
How can he be healed even if he meets the king of doctors? Practicing
Ch'an in the desire realm manifests the power of knowledge,
Indestructible as a lotus grown in a fire.
Though Pradhanasura broke the main precepts, he awakened to the
unborn;
He long ago reached the Buddha state and remains there still. Even when
one preaches fearlessly as the lion roars,
The minds of the perverse and obstinate only harden.
They continue to break the main precepts and obstruct Bodhi
And cannot see the secret the Tathagata reveals. Two monks broke the
precepts against licentiousness and killing.
With his shallow knowledge, Upali exaggerated the sin.
The great Vimalakirti instantly removed their doubts,
Like a hot sun that melts ice and snow. The power of the liberated is
inconceivable,
With wonderful functions more numerous than the Ganges sands.
They would not refuse to make the four offerings
To one who can accept ten thousand ounces of gold.
To have body broken and bones reduced to dust is not enough to repay*

*The words that enlighten, transcending countless eons. The king in
Dharma is the most superior;*

The realization that countless Tathagatas are all alike.

Now I show you this all-giving pearl;

*Believers are all in accord (with Dharma). They clearly see that there is
not a thing,*

Neither person nor Buddha.

The numerous worlds in the great chiliocosm are bubbles in the sea,

All sages and saints are like lightning flashes.

Even if an iron wheel whirls on your head

*Perfectly clear samadhi and wisdom are never lost. The sun may turn
cold and the moon may turn hot,*

But the demons cannot destroy the true teaching.

When an elephant marches gloriously forward,

*How can a praying mantis bar its way? The elephant does not follow the
rabbit's path;*

The enlightened are not bound by trivial restraints.

Do not slander heaven when you observe it through a reed,

For those who do not yet know, I am giving you the key.

3. First Retreat

Day 1 Non-opposition

*Have you not seen the idle man of Tao who has nothing to learn
and nothing to do,
Who neither discards wandering thoughts nor seeks the truth?
The real nature of ignorance is Buddha-nature;
The illusory empty body is the Dharma body.*

The idle man who has attained the Tao, or the Way, is not a lazy man; rather, he has nothing to do. There is no reason for him to study, to learn, to do anything. On this retreat, all of you are concentrating, intent on studying the Dharma and practicing your methods. You are different from the man of Tao. You are studying and practicing for the purpose of attaining enlightenment. For beginning practitioners, it is good to have a reason to practice Buddhadharma, otherwise you would have no means of experiencing enlightenment. If there were no purpose, no one would practice, and no one would ever attain enlightenment.

People need a goal in order to practice, but the person that Yung-chia describes is beyond practice because he has already been thoroughly enlightened. The first line introduces us to a deeply enlightened person. How did this person approach the practice? How did he attain enlightenment? What kind of attitude did he need in order to reach enlightenment? First, he did not try to cut off wandering thoughts; he did not oppose his vexations. Second, he did not crave enlightenment: he did not seek after Buddha-nature.

During retreat, I advise participants not to try to get rid of anything, oppose anything, or seek anything. Agreeing with me is easy, but accepting my advice and putting it to practice is difficult. Some of you may feel it is impossible to stop seeking and repressing things. Nonetheless, you must try. I will repeat this over and over, because if I do not, you will create more obstructions in your desire to stop wandering thoughts and to gain enlightenment.

There is no need to dispel wandering thoughts. Deluded thoughts stem from ignorance, and the essential nature of ignorance is not separate from Buddha-nature. A practitioner once asked his teacher, "How do I attain liberation?"

The teacher answered with a question of his own: "Who's binding you?"

The student asked, "How can I get enlightened and transcend birth and death?"

Again, the master replied with a question: "Where is birth and death?"

The student asked another question: "How can I be reborn in the Pure Land?"

The master asked, "Tell me, what place isn't the Pure Land?"

Buddha-nature and ignorance, liberation and birth and death, Nirvana and Samsara: these are not separate things; there are no dichotomies. We may speak as a matter of convention of leaving ignorance and gaining enlightenment, but when one is truly enlightened, one realizes that ignorance and Buddha-nature are one and the same. If ignorance and Buddha-nature truly existed as permanent, separate realms, then an ignorant person would never discover his Buddha-nature; he would remain ignorant, and would be unable to attain enlightenment. But this is not the case. Ignorance and Buddha-nature are not separate.

In making the transition from ignorance to Buddha-nature, you will realize that ignorance does not really exist. If it did, we would all be bound to it forever. Anyone practicing who understands this principle will not strive to get rid of ignorance or seek after Buddha-nature.

When you practice, and your body tires and your mind fills with turmoil and vexation, it is easy to start struggling with yourself. If you oppose weariness and vexation, then you will only become more tired and create more vexations. You will lose heart. It is better if you say to yourself, "This is 'ignorance and ignorance itself is Buddha-nature. I won't resist. I won't get angry. I won't fight my condition." If what you experience is Buddha-nature, then what is there to hate or fight? But when you sit,

you will suffer pains, fatigue and wandering thoughts. While you are suffering, it will be hard to believe the things I say. It is difficult to relax and allow things to be as they are. You may even think that these obstacles arise precisely because you are practicing the Way — that somehow, the pains have a mind of their own, and they are waiting for you to sit and meditate. When you become enlightened, you will realize that vexations are Buddha-nature, and in fact, ignorance does not exist.

The body is subject to pain, illness, disease and death. During practice, the body aches and gets tired, but the body is essentially the same as the Dharma body. The Dharma body is fundamentally pure, liberated and enlightened. You might ask, "Where is this pure and liberated Dharma body?" I would answer with a question, just like the master did in the story above: "What isn't already a pure, liberated Dharma body?"

There is no difference between the physical body and the Dharma body, but you have not realized it yet. Until you do, you will be bothered by pain and fatigue. Only when you discover that the physical body and Dharma body are identical will you be liberated from your problems.

During the T'ang Dynasty, there was a Ch'an master who was a highly accomplished practitioner. The Emperor heard about him, and requested that he come to the palace to try and cure one of his concubines, who was extremely ill. The Ch'an master refused to come. He said to the messenger, "I am not a physician. I am a practitioner. My purpose is to practice."

When the Emperor heard the master's reply, he spoke to his general. He said, "Go and ask this master to come. If he refuses, cut off his head."

The Ch'an master knew ahead of time of the general's intentions, so he left his temple and walked down the road to wait for him. Soon the general arrived, and when he saw the master, he asked, "Why are you waiting here?"

The Ch'an master replied, "I don't want my dirty blood to defile the temple floor, so I have come here to offer you my head."

Most people fear death, but the Ch'an master had no fear at all. He knew that his physical body was not different from the Dharma body, and that the Dharma body cannot be destroyed. If a person truly realizes that the physical body and Dharma body are identical, then he will not fear death. Sickness, pain and old age will not trouble him.

During the course of your practice, you will suffer pains of many kinds. Even if you have not yet realized that the physical body is the same as the Dharma body, you should at least have faith that it is so. If you have faith, then you will not be vexed or distracted by sensations that arise in your practice, whether they be painful, pleasurable, or even blissful. The Dharma body is pure and immutable. It does not experience sensation. You should regard all sensations in your practice as illusions. Let them come and go. Do not attach to them. Ignore them.

Once you have truly awakened to the Dharma body, you will realize that there are no feelings, sensations or qualities that you can grasp and say, "This is the Dharma body." The physical, mental, and so-called spiritual experiences which appear during practice are not the Dharma body. They are only reactions of the nervous system to the physical body and environment. The Dharma body has no qualities or characteristics.

I am not saying that there is no spirit, but the spirit is not separate from the body. In Buddhism, there is no division between spirit and body. In your practice, you should not distinguish between physical experiences and spiritual experiences. They are the same thing. If you did not have a body, how could spiritual experiences arise?

You cannot say that the Dharma body is separate from the material body, but you also cannot say that physical activity, or things that are moving, are the Dharma body. You cannot point to any one thing and say, "That is the Dharma body." The true Dharma body is absolutely unmoving.

Day 2 Only the Present Moment

*After realizing the Dharma body, there is not a thing;
Original self-nature is the innate Buddha.*

The five skandhas — the empty comings and goings of floating clouds;

The three poisons — the vacant appearing and disappearing of water bubbles.

Your body, which you normally think is the self, together with all the phenomena that you experience with your senses, are the five skandhas, or five aggregates: form, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness. Yung-chia says that the five skandhas are like floating clouds that come and go in the sky. Originally, the sky is pure. Clouds appear, move across the sky, and disappear. The clouds are not the sky. There is no concrete connection between sky and clouds, yet the sky is not separate from the clouds.

The five skandhas are like these clouds. We all think we have distinct selves, minds and bodies. But our bodies, as well as the selves we identify with, did not exist before we were born. After we die, our bodies and selves will be gone again. Like the sky before and after clouds, the world does not contain us before we are born and after we die. There is no enduring "I."

But this does not mean that there is no enduring existence. If there were no enduring existence, there would be no point in practicing. What exists is our original and fundamentally pure Buddha-nature. Originally and always, there is Buddha-nature, just as there is a sky. Whereas our bodies and minds come and go like clouds, Buddha-nature, or self-nature, always exists, just as the sky exists whether or not clouds appear.

Buddha-nature cannot be created by practice. It has always been present. If Buddha-nature were something that could be created, then it could also be destroyed. Then why practice if one already possesses Buddha-nature? Practice does not create a Buddha. Practice helps us to realize or reveal Buddha-nature, which has always been there. If someone asks, "Where or what is the Buddha?", answer with a question: "Where or what isn't the Buddha?"

You cannot take your body, which is a conglomeration of the five skandhas, and turn it into Buddha. Yet, Buddha is not separate from the five skandhas. Buddha is totality. The five skandhas are things we wrap up and bind into tiny individual selves. Through the five skandhas we give ourselves identities, but they are narrow, impoverished identities. If you think, "This body is mine, separate from everything else," and then say, "I am Buddha," then you have created a Buddha as narrow and impoverished as yourself.

We think that the body is the self because we are deluded by the three poisons — craving, anger and ignorance. The three poisons are like addictive drugs. When we are stimulated by them, we experience temporary, illusory satisfaction or excitement. We all know the phrase, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." We see beauty in what we love. In fact, beauty is no more than an expression of the mind of craving and attachment. Because you are attached to a person, you perceive him or her as beautiful. When you are in love you are clouded by desire, and your partner becomes the embodiment of your emotions and feelings. Later, if things do not work out and you break up, you may turn to your partner and say, "I didn't know the real you! I was confused."

I have heard that many couples who get married do not know much about each other. As they learn about each other, they become disillusioned, and they often get divorced. They believe that their infatuation has been replaced by stark reality. This is not true. People are as clouded by emotion when they break up as when they fall in love. When people are dissatisfied, things that once pleased them seem distasteful, and things they once thought beautiful seem ugly. These people are still controlled by the three poisons.

A similar thing happens when people meditate. If you are sitting well and feel comfortable, you might think, "Meditation is fantastic! It feels so good!" In Taiwan, a person who participated in a retreat for the first time meditated well, and he was carried away with emotion. He said it was the most wonderful thing in the world; he finally felt what it was really like to be human. His second retreat was different. He was experiencing family difficulties, and because he could not leave his

problems behind, he had a horrible time. You might think that his second retreat was bad, whereas his first retreat was good, but any extreme emotion causes problems. Good experiences create attachment and craving. Bad experiences create repulsion, anger and hatred. You can experience both extremes in a single retreat. They are only feelings that the self experiences through the three poisons. There is no self apart from craving, anger and ignorance.

If you practice well, craving, anger and ignorance will fade, little by little. As the three poisons subside, you will feel less need to attach to a self. You will begin to view the narrow self as a bubble in a vast ocean, momentarily forming, rising to the surface, then breaking and merging with the water again.

What is permanent beyond this transient bubble? Your self-nature. Where and what is your self-nature? That you must discover for yourself.

When the real is experienced, there is neither person nor dharma.

In an instant the avici karma is destroyed.

If I lie to deceive sentient beings,

May my tongue be ripped out for kalpas uncountable as dust and sand.

In this stanza, Yung-chia says that even the worst karma — avici karma — can be eradicated at the moment of enlightenment. Regarding this truth, his faith is unshakeable. This is the sudden enlightenment teaching of Ch'an Buddhism. Someone once asked me how long one needed to practice to become enlightened. I replied, "As long as eons, as short as a single thought." Which do you prefer, the long route or the quick route? Most of you probably prefer the quick way.

I am offering you the quick method. Take all of your thoughts — good, bad, indifferent — and drop them. If you can do this, you will be enlightened instantly. If you can reach the state of mind where there is no self, no other, no discrimination, no sentient beings, no Buddha, then you will realize the true reality of things. Take the sword of practice and cut open the mind of discrimination. When enlightenment cuts through

the discriminating mind, it leaves nothing behind, because from the beginning there has never been any real self to divide.

You must have faith that this can happen. On the last day of a retreat, I encouraged two students to make the most of the time remaining. They protested that there was not enough time to accomplish anything. I said, "You can be enlightened in an instant. If you practice hard every moment, then there is plenty of time in which to experience enlightenment. One day is more than enough time, but whether you can accomplish anything is another matter."

Forget about time while you practice. Do not think, "I don't have enough time to experience anything." Do not think, "I'm young, there's plenty of time to practice." During retreat, the best attitude is to make full use of every instant, from beginning to end, grasping hold of the moment and practicing hard. Do not think about the past or future. Stay in the present moment.

You must first liberate yourself from the past and future. If you can keep your mind on the present moment, then you are truly deriving strength and power from the practice. With power you can liberate yourself from the present moment as well. When you are liberated from time, you are also liberated from space. Space and time, like the five skandhas, are illusions. When you are free from space, time and the five skandhas, there is no self. If a self exists — whether it is a narrow self or a universal self — then craving, anger and ignorance also exist.

Day 3 Awakening From the Dream of Existence.

*With sudden enlightenment to Tathagata Ch'an,
The six paramitas and myriad means are complete within that
essence.*

*In dreams there are clearly six paths of sentient beings;
Upon awakening the great chiliocosm is completely empty.*

We do not understand ourselves or the world around us; we do not know where we come from; we do not know where we are going. We live in a dream. Our dreams may be blissful or nightmarish, but they are still dreams. You have come to this retreat because you have already realized that you are dreaming, that your lives are illusory and transient. The goal of practice is to awaken from the dream of life and to discover your self-nature — Buddha-nature — the fundamental reality that underlies transient existence.

Today, someone mentioned that she sometimes feels she is on the brink of a breakthrough; yet no matter how hard she tries, it eludes her. Clinging to the idea of a breakthrough is itself an obstacle. In order to experience a breakthrough, this person must forget about it. You cannot awaken from the dream of life by making that your goal. When you begin to practice, it is good to have this idea because it increases motivation. However, if you hold onto an idea of "waking up," it will become an obstruction to your practice.

Sometimes we are aware in our sleep that we are having a nightmare, and we are anxious to wake up. At other times we dream blissfully, and waking up is a rude and unwanted intrusion. The same is true in our lives. Many people who come to Buddhism do so because their lives are filled with suffering. People who live carefree, untroubled lives normally do not feel a need to meditate. But there is no one who is free from the suffering that stems from the three poisons of craving, anger and ignorance; our lives are filled with vexation and confusion. Many people would like to awaken from this dream of suffering. It is for this reason that we practice. When this student talks about making a breakthrough, she means awakening from her dream of life.

Seeing your self-nature is waking from the dream of vexation. When you dream, you perceive the world and phenomena through the six senses, but when you truly awaken, it seems as if the universe disappears. However, it is not the universe, but rather the self that disappears when you become enlightened. The attachments of craving, anger and ignorance vanish. When the three poisons are extinguished, so is vexation.

When we perform meaningless or bad actions, we are dreaming. When we practice diligently to become enlightened, we are also dreaming. Before enlightenment, anything we do, say or think, whether it be virtuous, neutral or evil, is a dream. We practice in order to hasten our awakening.

The six paramitas (six perfections) mentioned by Yung-chia are methods of practice through which one realizes enlightenment. The paramitas — generosity, morality, patience, effort, meditation and wisdom — encompass many methods of practice. One must practice a method to become enlightened, but after enlightenment, one realizes that one does not become a Buddha by practicing. We have always been Buddhas.

At the moment you become enlightened, you awaken from the dream and practice disappears. Although practice is illusory, it is needed in order to awaken. One day, Master Pai-chang came upon his already enlightened disciple, Huang-po. Huang-po was curled up on the floor, dozing in the corner of the meditation hall. Pai-chang woke him, but when Huang-po saw who it was, he rolled over and went back to sleep. Pai-chang walked over to another disciple who was sitting up-right, deep in meditation, and knocked on his cushion with the incense board. He then pointed toward Huang-po and said, "You useless thing! Look how hard Huang-po works. Why are you dozing off?"

I bet many of you would like to try Huang-po's method. But Huang-po was enlightened. The point of the story is this: Before seeing your self-nature, there is a cause and effect relationship between practice and enlightenment. Practice leads to enlightenment. In the enlightened state, however, there is no practice. In the story, despite appearances, it was really the second, unenlightened disciple who was asleep.

*There is no sin or merit, no loss or gain.
Do not look for anything in this Nirvanic nature;
Originally a dusty mirror which has never been polished,
Today it must be taken apart and analyzed.*

Ordinarily, we think that if we do good things, we will gain merit and reap good results; if we do evil things, the opposite will occur. Good actions result in good karma, and bad actions result in bad karma. Today, a student slapped himself hard during meditation. I asked him why he did it, and he said he did not know. I asked him if he felt better afterward. He said he felt somewhat better, but his cheek hurt. These are examples of cause and effect relationships. Perhaps this student was moved by subtle, unconscious motivations or physiological reactions. During retreats, people laugh and cry out loud for no apparent reason. Some do even stranger things. If an outsider observed these actions, he might think these people were odd, even deranged. Usually, however, they feel better afterward.

Such phenomena are a result of practice, and they almost always have good benefits. They bring relief to practitioners, dissipating their excess energy and allowing them to sink deeper into the method. In truth, however, the purpose of practice is to reach a point where there are no results at all, where there are no expectations — no rewards for good actions, no retribution for bad actions. There should be no thought of gain or loss, no thought of benefit or harm, of ignorance or enlightenment.

Nirvana is motionless, and it is not separate from you. How can you gain it or lose it? After enlightenment, there is nothing to gain or lose. Before enlightenment, however, sentient beings feel they must rid themselves of vexations and gain liberation. When you study Buddhadharma and begin to practice, you become aware of vexation, and you give it a name. People who do not know about Buddha-nature and the Dharma, on the other hand, may live their entire lives in vexation without being aware of it.

Do you think ignorance is bliss? Do you think intelligent people have the most vexation? Perhaps in the entire animal kingdom, human beings know the most suffering. If we base vexation on suffering, then it would seem that lower life forms have less vexation than humans. But vexation is not based on suffering; it is based on ignorance. Among human beings,

then, the greater the wisdom — not necessarily intelligence — the less the vexation.

The more you practice, the more aware you become of vexation. When you practice, it may seem as though you are developing more vexations. You might think the retreat has turned out poorly, or that you are not progressing, but it is only because you have more self-awareness.

If you are in a dark room and a few rays of sun stream through a window, it is possible to see dust motes floating in the air. When the room is dark, however, the dust is invisible, and you might assume the air is pure. Before we practice, we live in a dark room. As we practice, we become aware of vexation by the light of self-awareness.

Before enlightenment, our mind is a mirror covered with the dust of vexation. People who do not practice may not be aware of this, and they may wallow in despair and helplessness, blaming their misfortune on other things. But those who practice and perceive their vexations and confusion are more aware of their condition, and how they may correct it. For this reason, you should not be upset by your dirty mirror. If it were not for the mirror, you would not be aware of the dust.

Practice is like wiping dust off the mirror. Before enlightenment, we make a distinction between the mirror mind and the dust of vexation. After enlightenment, when the mirror is free of dust, we realize there is neither mind nor dust. The mirror is only a reflection of the illusory self, and the dust is the vexation to which this illusory self attaches. The true mirror reflects neither self nor vexation; in essence, the true mirror is no mirror.

While we practice, mirror and dust co-exist. We are aware of a self because of vexation. Buddha-nature only exists while there is vexation. It is because we have vexation that we conceive of Buddha-nature. During practice, do not be troubled by your vexed or confused mind. They are the same as Buddha-mind.

This is the essence of the Song of Enlightenment. Across the centuries, Yung-chia tells us: Awaken to enlightenment, do not seek after it. Put your mind squarely on the method and work hard.

Day 4 Letting Go

*Who has no thoughts? Who has no births?
If the unborn is real, there is nothing not born.
Ask the mechanical wooden puppet
When it will attain Buddhahood through practice.*

Buddhahood is not something that is accomplished through practice. Buddhahood is not a creation or an attainment. We are Buddhas in the first place, so the idea of attaining Buddhahood through practice is meaningless.

One of my students told me that when she was in the hospital having a baby, she noticed that the other mothers felt they had created life. She, however, felt that her baby had come into the world by itself, and that she had just helped the baby along the way. She did not feel as though she had created her child. In the same sense, no matter how hard or how long you practice, you cannot give birth to a Buddha, or bring a new Buddha into the world. Buddhahood is not born through practice. Buddha is unborn.

Buddhahood means being enlightened to the truth of the non-arising of wisdom and vexation. People think that when one attains enlightenment, vexation is eliminated and wisdom gained. In fact, after thorough enlightenment, neither wisdom nor vexation remains. When there is no vexation, there is no wisdom; it is when one still has vexations that wisdom exists.

"Non-arising" does not mean that sentient beings, the environment and Buddhas do not exist. Everything exists and is in motion, but there is no true self evident in such things. If there was no self, then how could one become a Buddha? If wisdom and Buddhahood really exist and can be attained, then must not there be a self involved? The truth is, the self is

illusory, and wisdom and Buddhahood exist only as long as one clings to an idea of self. Once the self disappears, there is no wisdom or any attainment. However, for sentient beings who are not yet enlightened, wisdom does exist and Buddhas do help save sentient beings.

Are you practicing to attain enlightenment or to achieve Buddhahood? Do you wonder when you will get enlightened? If you want answers to these questions, you may as well ask a wooden puppet. Why ask a puppet when you can ask a master, a Bodhisattva or a Buddha? The reason is simple. You will not get an answer no matter whom you ask. The sutras say it takes three great kalpas to attain Buddhahood. Yung-chia does not mention any time limit. In fact, whether you ask a wooden puppet or wait three great kalpas does not matter. A kalpa is an unimaginably long time. A person who is satisfied with the answer from the sutras and decides to wait three great kalpas in hopes of turning into a Buddha would probably be foolish enough to seek the advice of a wooden puppet.

For unenlightened people, Buddhahood and wisdom still exist, and vexation is still something to be eliminated. For enlightened people, there are no such things. However, that does not mean that practice is unnecessary. Practice diligently, but do not seek Buddhahood. While you practice, drop all notions of vexation and wisdom, enlightenment and Buddhahood. Do not be concerned with progressing or regressing. Simply practice for the sake of practice. Practicing with such an attitude is itself progress. And the next time you have the urge to ask when you will be enlightened, you don't have to ask me. Any block of wood will do.

Put down the four elements, do not cling to anything;

In this Nirvanic nature, feel free to eat and drink.

All phenomena are impermanent; all are empty.

This is the complete enlightenment of the Tathagata.

In your practice, you must put down the four elements: earth, fire, wind and water. People do not realize that all of their thoughts are associated with and dependent on the material phenomena of the external environment. All thoughts, dreams, concepts, symbols, images and

language are associated directly or indirectly with the environment. Even if you sit in an empty room with your eyes closed, ears stuffed, nostrils plugged and lips shut, your mind will be active with thoughts and images of the external world. If you can let go of associations with material things, the thoughts in your mind will reduce drastically.

Some students are overcome with fear and apprehension when they try to "let go." They are dependent on ideas and attitudes they have accumulated. Attachment to ideas and attitudes is a huge obstruction. Dropping everything, or letting go, is a useful method of practice to overcome such obstacles. During retreat you should try to drop everything in order to reduce the number of obstructions in your mind.

When you return to daily life, you can, if you wish, reclaim your ideas and preconceptions. Unless you are thoroughly enlightened, it is impossible to live without them. All of your memories, experiences, ideas and attitudes combine to form your karma, and karma is a force that follows you everywhere. Some activities you cannot drop. You must eat when hungry, drink when thirsty, sleep when tired; otherwise you will not survive. As long as you are not enlightened, a self exists. You should realize, however, that it is illusory and impermanent. The best you can do is stick to your method and keep practicing.

Enlightened beings, such as Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, may take human form, but they have no selves. They have chosen to live in this world in order to help sentient beings. The self arises out of attachment to craving, anger and ignorance, but enlightened beings are not touched by the three poisons. Buddhahood is emptiness, yet emptiness does not mean non-existence. Emptiness means that all things lack permanence. There is objective existence, but nothing is unchanging and eternal; everything that exists changes constantly. This ever-changing nature is Buddha-nature.

Enlightenment is realizing the empty and impermanent nature of ourselves and the world. If you can live in emptiness without attaching to it, it is called "neither abiding in existence nor emptiness." Although everything continues to exist, there is no self that attaches to anything.

Not abiding in existence and not abiding in emptiness is enlightenment. When this stage of practice is perfected, it is called Complete Enlightenment, or Buddhahood.

On the path to enlightenment, you begin by letting go of the past and future. You reside in the present, working on your method. This is the path. Eventually, even the method and the present must be dropped, for they are attachments as well.

Ch'an Master Lin-chi told his disciples to kill any Buddha or Bodhisattva that they met on the path. He also told them to kill their parents if they met them on the path. Of course he did not mean it literally. He meant you must kill your illusions while you practice. Drop everything. Kill everything in your mind of attachment. This is the correct attitude for practitioners involved in intense practice.

Day 5 The Inexplicability of Enlightenment

Surely this is the true vehicle.

One who disagrees is swayed by emotion.

Going directly to the root is the seal of the Buddha:

No point searching for branches or plucking leaves.

When Yung-chia speaks of the root, he is referring to the totality of experience. The branches and leaves represent the individual phenomena. Everything in the universe is in total harmony. There is no conflict or contradiction among different phenomena; each thing is in accord with everything else. However, there is no way this can be described with symbols or language. Actually, nothing can truly be explained, neither the innumerable experiences of ordinary existence nor the totality of Buddhahood. Any experience, whether it be an ordinary experience, a shallow enlightenment, or a profound enlightenment, cannot be fully described in words. It is because people share a common humanity that they can explain their experiences and understand one another. If, however, we were to encounter a being who

had no knowledge of human existence, it would be impossible to describe any human experience to it.

If you experience genuine enlightenment, there is nothing to be said. There is no discrimination. To say anything, you must compare this to that; you must explain one thing in terms of another; you must speak from your point of view or another person's point of view. When you say something is low, it is only because you are above it. But, when there is no discrimination, and everything is in harmony and undifferentiated, there is nothing to say.

A great Ch'an master named Han Shan lived during the latter part of the Ming Dynasty. Master Han Shan recorded a dream in which he went to a public bath. He saw a beautiful woman beckoning him to join her in a pool. In his dream, Han Shan thought, "I'm a monk. I can't take a bath with a woman!" The woman persisted, and finally she came after him. At that moment, Han Shan realized the person was really a man whose features were so beautiful that he looked like a woman. The man then poured water over Han Shan's head, whereupon a cool feeling pervaded his body. The cool feeling stayed with him long after he woke up.

In assessing his dream, Han Shan understood that in the human world people distinguish between male and female. But in the Pure Land there is no such distinction. Fundamentally, there is no male or female. Calling the person in Han Shan's dream a man or woman is discrimination, a mental act of dividing the world into categories. Similarly, there are no distinctions in the realm of genuine enlightenment.

Unfortunately, most people are not at the level of nondiscrimination, so it is necessary to say something, even if it is not an accurate explanation. To truly grasp Buddhadharma, no words need be spoken, no instructions need be given. Why, then, do I talk so much? Because people cannot comprehend non-discrimination. I must try to explain Buddhadharma, no matter how feeble the attempt may be. I must address the self-attachment of sentient beings. Buddha did not have to say anything, yet

for the sake of sentient beings, he preached Buddhadharma for forty-nine years.

You cannot discover your Buddha-nature through words, logic or intellect. You must grasp it directly, at which point you will see what a Buddha would see. If you saw your original nature, you would not be able to describe or analyze it.

On this retreat, some of you have described your experiences to me during personal interviews. If you were to relate these experiences to outsiders, especially people who do not meditate, you would probably find that they do not believe you, or that they cannot relate to your experiences. There is no way they can feel and see what you feel and see. Your experiences, whether shallow or profound, are uniquely yours. The deepest, most thorough enlightenment experiences are beyond explanation. I encourage you to discover your true nature directly. I cannot describe such an experience. Still, I am sure you are curious. You would like to hear stories about enlightenment experiences. Silently, you are asking, "What is it like? How does it feel?"

In Taiwan, an old monk was lecturing on the Avatamsaka Sutra. In the sutra there is a concept called the "flower-adornment world." When the old monk tried to describe this world, he opened his mouth, but no words came out except for expressions like "Oh! . . ." and "Ahh!" His audience could make no sense of what he was trying to say. The sutra says that in each flower on this world there are one thousand lotuses, and on each lotus sits a Buddha preaching the Dharma in the ten directions. This description does not tell us much, and in fact, the monk's explanation was better than the sutra's.

The mani pearl is unknown to people;

You can find it in the Tathagata-garbha.

The functions of the six senses are both empty and not empty.

One perfect light with form yet formless.

The mani pearl is a wonderful gem that contains infinite power. For this reason, it is also called the wish-fulfilling gem. With such a gem, you can give people whatever they want or need. The owner of the mani pearl

becomes the greatest almsgiver. Ordinarily, people are burdened by too much karma and vexation to gain such a treasure, so for them the mani pearl refers to the mystical pearl of the heavenly realm. In this stanza, however, it refers to the original nature that is within every one of us, but which remains hidden to most of us.

The Lotus Sutra tells a story about the son of wealthy parents. When he was young, he was separated from his family, and for years he roamed the land as a beggar. Unknown to him, there was an extremely valuable pearl sewn into a secret pocket of his robe. One day someone told him, "Indeed, you have a priceless pearl with you. If you can find it, you will be rich."

The meaning of this fable is clear. Originally and forever, we possess the treasure of Buddha-nature, but somehow we have lost track of it. Now you have heard the Dharma, and you know Buddha-nature exists. All you must do is search until you find it. When you do, you will be delivered from ignorance and vexation. It is called "seeing one's self-nature." If you succeed in uncovering self-nature completely, such that discrimination never returns, then you will have attained Buddhahood.

The mani pearl symbolizes the fulfillment of all your wishes. With it comes supernormal powers. You can see everything, hear everything, be everywhere. You can look into the past or future. Most people would like to possess these powers, or at least know more about them. What most people do not realize is that, as potential Buddhas, we already possess these supernormal powers in latent form.

Yesterday, someone told me that at times he wished I could give him empowerment so that he could solve his problems. Often, when people feel that they lack ability or strength, they look to others for help. But other people cannot resolve your fundamental problems; if it were possible, it would be contrary to the law of karma — the law of cause and effect. If you rely on others, the help you receive will be of little use. You must rely on yourself. Eventually, when you are enlightened, you will perceive no distinction between yourself and others, between one thing and another. Everything will be in harmony.

Great practitioners like Milarepa and Han Shan (Cold Mountain) were so poor they could not even afford clothes. Actually, however, they were the richest of people, because everything in the universe belonged to them. In comparison, the richest king was a pauper. For people like Milarepa and Han Shan, every place is their home; every person is their disciple; anything can be their clothing. Han Shan said, "The mountains are my pillow, the clouds my blanket, the land my bed, the ocean my bath."

Enlightened beings do have supernormal powers, but they are not the minor powers that enthrall ordinary people. These minor powers are only tricks, befitting little ghosts. During the T'ang Dynasty, a yogi with supernormal powers went to a city in China, where he was well received. At that time, there was a monk named Hui-ch'ung, who was the king's Ch'an master. Someone said to him, "Master, you're through. A yogi with great power wants to have a competition with you."

Master Hui-ch'ung replied, "I don't have any powers, but I don't mind competing."

Many people gathered to watch the great event. The yogi asked Hui-ch'ung to challenge him with a question, so Hui-ch'ung asked, "Where is my mind right now?"

The yogi answered, "You have the honorable position as Ch'an master to the king, so why have you wandered to the province of Ssu-ch'uan to watch the boat race?"

Master Hui-ch'ung said, "Very good. Can you see where I am now?"

"Strangely enough," the yogi replied, "you are now in another province, watching people doing monkey tricks."

These exchanges proved that the yogi could see into peoples' minds, because he knew what Hui-ch'ung was thinking. Hui-ch'ung asked a third time, "Where am I now?"

The yogi concentrated for a long time, but he could not find where Hui-ch'ung's mind was. Master Hui-ch'ung then rebuked the yogi. "Your

powers are worthy of a little ghost. You can see into a mind when it is moving, but when the mind is still, you are lost. As to where I am, that is simple. Since my body is here, of course my mind is also here."

From the Ch'an perspective, what are considered supernormal powers are, in fact, little tricks. Ch'an speaks of the great supernormal powers. When birds fly through the air and men walk the earth, they leave behind traces of their passage which last for thousands of millions of eons. As we move through our lives, we leave shadows of ourselves behind us. People with great supernormal powers can follow these shadows backward, as if they were watching a film in reverse, and trace them through innumerable past lives. This is an example of a great supernormal power.

In the last line of verse, the phrase "one perfect light" refers to Buddha-nature, which is the same as the Dharma body. The Dharma body is not separate from the physical body. However, you cannot say that the Dharma body is the physical body and nothing more. When you experience enlightenment, you are one with the Dharma body, yet you are still in your physical body. When you experience the Dharma body, you transcend the boundaries of your limited, physical body. While the enlightenment experience lasts — and it may be as quick as a flash — you will see no distinction between inside and outside. There will be no attachment to self, and no vexation. But this is not an accurate description. If you really want to know, you will have to find the mani pearl and experience it yourself.

4. Second Retreat

Day 1 Purifying the Six Senses

Purify the five eyes to achieve the five powers.

Only after realization can one comprehend.

To see the image in a mirror is not difficult.

How can one grasp the moon in the water?

What are the five eyes that Yung-chia speaks of? Briefly, they are: (1) Physical eyes, which we are born with; (2) Heavenly eyes, which can be acquired through one's practice or as a result of one's previous merit, and which enables one to see into the future and for great distances; (3) Wisdom eyes, which enable us to end the cycle of birth and death; (4) Dharma eyes, which help us see Buddha-nature and the Dharma body (when this occurs, a person is said to have had his Dharma eyes opened); (5) Buddha eyes, which are the perfection of the Dharma eyes.

It is possible to acquire the non-physical eyes, but first you have to purify your mind. If the mind is clear, it is possible to see things others cannot see even without use of the physical eyes. In the ordinary, scattered state of mind, however, what you see and what others see is relatively the same; that is, most people agree that a house is a house, a person a person.

The most basic training for a beginning practitioner is to try to purify the eye consciousness. Sometimes I ask people to look at things, or at people sitting across from them. I ask them to look attentively, but to refrain from identifying or categorizing the object. For example, in observing people, a practitioner tries not to perceive an individual as male or female, stranger or friend. To do this, one must refrain from using one's memory, ideas, or any previous experience. Like a camera, one must look without discrimination. If one has been practicing well, it is possible to see things in this different way.

A couple of years ago I used this method during a retreat in upstate New York. I told the people to go outside and look at anything that caught

their attention. One of the participants looked at trees so attentively that he did not feel he was a human being anymore. He had become a tree. When I told everyone to go back to the meditation hall, he did not move from his spot. I said, "It's time to go. It's very cold."

He answered, "How can trees go anywhere?"

During a retreat in Taiwan, I told everyone to look attentively at the outside environment. A monk from Malaysia stared at a public cemetery in the distance. While he stared at the tombstones, I told him to drop his preconceptions and stop thinking about what he was looking at. Eventually, he stopped forming ideas, and he saw people in the stones. After the retreat, he went outside for another look, but it looked like an ordinary cemetery again.

I remember another retreat in which a nun from southern Taiwan participated. Blossoms from many different trees had fallen on the ground. When I told her to practice pure gazing, the nun saw that the trees and fallen blossoms were the same. She picked up the blossoms and placed them on the branches like hats. She felt happy doing this, because for her, the flowers and trees were identical. Other people who watched her had no idea what she was doing.

From the layman's point of view, people would be considered abnormal if they thought they were trees, or if they saw people in stones, or if they thought blossoms and trees were one and the same. However, in the examples I have described, this is not the case. Because most of us make discriminations based on our preconceptions, our eye consciousness is static, dull and rigid. Our vision is selective, because of our memories, likes and dislikes. Since our minds are impure, our vision is also impure. If our minds were to become pure, then we could say that our vision would also be pure. What is seen by pure eyes is quite different from what is seen by impure eyes.

In the beginning of a retreat, when you look at other participants, you may think that this person looks weird, that one unfriendly, this one ugly and annoying. These thoughts do not lead to good feelings. But at the end of the retreat, people seem kind and lovable, and you feel close

to them. The people have not changed; it is your mind and therefore your eye consciousness that have changed.

On retreat, and even in daily life, you should try not to rely on your eyes too much. If you must, then use them without discriminating. For example, when you sit down to eat, see the food as fuel for the body, and nothing more. Do not discriminate, wondering which foods are delicious, or which foods you prefer. When you work, do not think about whether you like your job or not. Just do it. Only with such a mind will your eyes be pure. With such discipline, the other senses can be purified as well, and you will not be swayed by the influences of the world around you.

What disturbs practice the most is the mind. The mind moves because of the outside environment. When the mind stops discriminating, it is like closing the eyes and ears to whatever is happening at the moment. In a similar manner, it is possible to close the eyes and ears to the past. If you can stop your mind from dwelling on past events, then the senses will be closed to the past as well as to the present. Progress is rapid when the mind is not affected by the past and the environment.

The stanza also speaks of five kinds of powers, which derive from proper practice of the five conditions: faith, diligent practice, one-pointed concentration, samadhi, and wisdom. The five conditions are essential for successful practice during a retreat.

Today I would like to talk about the first condition: faith. It is very important. First, you must have faith in yourself. You must believe that you can accomplish what others have accomplished before you. If you do not have faith in yourself, and you do not believe that you can benefit from the practice, then your interest will wane, and you will stop practicing. On the other hand, if you have faith that you can make progress and derive benefit from the practice, then you will be willing and ready to work hard. Second, you must have faith in the method. You have to believe that the method will lead you to the goal you wish to reach. Finally, you must have faith in the teacher of the method. You must be convinced that the teacher will not deceive you. You should have

faith that he has experienced enlightenment himself and that he will guide you well.

Methods of practice were expounded by Sakyamuni Buddha, passed down through the centuries by patriarchs and masters, and now I am teaching them to you. You must accept the premise that Buddha did not deceive us. If he had been involved in deception, he would not have been a Buddha. It is unlikely that, throughout the centuries, every patriarch and master has been deceiving us, and that the sutras and sastras are nothing but lies. Even today, though there are no living patriarchs, many people have derived genuine benefit from the practice. You should realize that you have come to this retreat because of your virtuous karma and your deep affinity with the Dharma. Therefore, you should have faith in yourself, in the methods of practice, and in the teacher of the methods.

Several people here have been on numerous retreats before this one. If a retreat is useless, then these people must be fools. Why else would they meditate for seven days instead of staying home during the holiday season and enjoying the company of family and friends? It must be that these foolish people have faith that they are gaining some benefit from the practice. At least for them, then, the first condition has been fulfilled.

Day 2 False Enlightenment: Reaching for the Moon in the Water

Purify the five eyes to achieve the five powers.

Only after realization can one comprehend.

To see the image in a mirror is not difficult.

How can one grasp the moon in the water?

Yesterday I commented on the first line of this stanza. Today I would like to discuss the rest of it. The second line in this stanza warns that it is not easy to experience enlightenment, and the third line says that the mind will be utterly clear after you reach enlightenment. The fourth line

makes a distinction between genuine enlightenment and false enlightenment.

Ch'an enlightenment (genuine enlightenment) is free of any attachments. If attachments of any kind exist during an experience, then it is not genuine enlightenment. If you have attachments, then you are still in the realms of sight and sound, light and shadow: no matter how subtle or sublime your attachments are, you will continue to have problems with things you see, hear, or think about. Experiences with attachment can only be false enlightenment.

There are two types of false enlightenment: false enlightenment on the proper path, and false enlightenment on outer, or heterodox, paths. If you experience a false enlightenment but are guided by Buddhadharma, then you will remain on the proper path. No great harm will befall you. In fact, false enlightenments on the proper path can be beneficial to your practice. But false enlightenments can be misleading. If you are not guided by Buddhadharma, they can even be dangerous.

When you have an experience, it is an indication that you are practicing hard, and that you are getting results from the method. People who are below your level of practice may respect you, believing that you are enlightened, but they do not know for sure. Only people on higher levels can ascertain the depth of your experience and determine where you stand. It is difficult to gauge your own practice, so you cannot be certain if your experience is genuine or false. Relying on your own distorted judgment can lead to problems. Therefore, it is necessary to have a teacher who can judge your experience and determine if it is genuine or false.

The third line speaks of seeing one's image in a mirror. Ch'an masters often compare the mind to an ancient mirror that has existed in everyone since beginningless time. Though it is pure, it is covered with the dust of vexation, and has lost the capacity to reflect. Practice is the process of removing the dust and polishing the mirror so that it can reflect again.

The mirror is no ordinary looking glass; rather, it is a mirror of wisdom, which reflects the fundamental problems of all sentient beings. Unlike an ordinary mirror, the mirror of wisdom does not reflect you, because you (the self) do not really exist. When you do not discriminate and are free from vexations and attachments, then wisdom manifests.

If you have wisdom, you can give people whatever they need and help them to overcome their fundamental problems. It does not mean that you have supernormal powers. Supernormal powers are limited by space and time; therefore, they are unreliable. Wisdom, however, is boundless.

People who practice Ch'an sometimes experience supernormal powers, but if they attach to such powers, they still dwell in the realm of light and shadow. Once, Master Hsu-yun continued practicing in the meditation hall after everyone else had gone to sleep. He saw one monk, who was responsible for maintaining the monastery lamps, urinating, and he saw another monk go to a toilet in the western part of the monastery. Both places were nowhere near the meditation hall. The next day he asked the two monks if they had gotten up during the night, and they said they had. Hsu-yun acknowledged the phenomenon, but he did not attach to it.

Once when I was meditating, I heard a loud noise that sounded like two water buffaloes attacking each other. Of course, there were no water buffaloes in the area. Later, I noticed two ants fighting next to me. After I saw the ants, the noise disappeared.

If you are meditating well, your senses can become more acute and powerful, and you can hear and see things that normally would be out of human range. These phenomena arise naturally during practice, but they are not enlightenment. Do not cling to them.

The fourth line asks, "How can one grasp the moon reflected in the water?" The moon is in the heavens. If you believe that the moon is really in the water, you are deceiving yourself. A Ch'an story tells of a man who sees the moon in the water and decides to take it home with him. Bucket by bucket, he takes what he thinks is the moon to his house. Once home, he discovers that he has nothing but water.

Believing false enlightenment to be genuine is comparable to grasping at the moon in the water. If you practice until your mind is clear, calm and settled, you may witness beautiful visions and hear wonderful sounds. You may think you are enlightened, but it is just the moon reflected in the water. Genuine enlightenment has nothing to do with lights, sounds and reflections.

You laugh at the absurdity of mistaking the moon's reflection for the real thing, but many of you get excited when you experience something during retreat, and, because you have never experienced anything like it before, you think you are enlightened. To you it is amazing; to an enlightened person, it is nothing more than the moon reflected in the water. Do not be led astray by anything you encounter or experience. Experiences are good, but if you attach to them, they become obstructions to your practice.

On this retreat, most of you have not even seen the moon in the water yet. You are too wrapped up in your wandering thoughts. Your mind is like a hungry ox, constantly straying off the path to feed on tender grass in the fields. Grab the ox by the nose and pull it back to the path. Do not allow it to succumb to the temptation of the grass. It will eat forever if you let it. You must turn your living ox into an iron ox. Iron oxen are never hungry, and so are never tempted by grass.

Be aware. A hungry ox is often lazy as well. After it has filled itself with grass — that is, after your mind has spent itself on wandering thoughts — drowsiness sets in, and the ox dozes off, only to awaken when it is hungry for grass again. Practice hard and control your ox-like mind.

Day 3 Isolating Oneself

*Always acting alone, walking alone,
Together the enlightened travel the Nirvana road.
The tune is ancient, the spirit pure, the style poised,
The face drawn, the bones hardened; people take no notice.*

These four lines describe a practitioner's mind as well as his body. A great practitioner's lifestyle is extraordinarily independent. Each practitioner leads a solitary life and follows his own path to Nirvana. Though there are innumerable paths, every path is the same. Furthermore, each practitioner must walk his path alone. But although a practitioner is alone, he is not lonely. He does not need company. His companion is the Dharma, and his life is the practice. To enter the realm of no-birth and no-death, you must have this kind of attitude.

Although Ch'an teachings are new in the West, Ch'an itself is ancient. It has existed since beginningless time. Likewise, a great practitioner also seems ancient in his appearance and manner. Outwardly, he may seem thin and impoverished, but when you look more closely, you will see that he is spirited and healthy. You would not think he is a sage because he does not call attention to himself; fame, power and material riches mean nothing to him. His manner is noble and poised, and his mind is silent and peaceful.

During retreat, I always tell people to isolate themselves. It is not an easy thing to do. You all have families and friends that you care for and think about, but you must put your thoughts of them aside when you participate in a retreat. When you have scattered thoughts, they usually involve relations with other people. One student told me that he did not want to be on a retreat if his girlfriend also attended, because he would always be wondering how she was doing. His girlfriend is not here, but I am sure his mind is often with her. The walls of the Ch'an hall cannot stop the mind.

There are several steps to isolating yourself. First, you must isolate yourself from the people around you: as far as you are concerned, you are the only person meditating in this hall. Do not think about the person next to you, no matter if the person coughs, sways, or jumps up to go to the bathroom all the time. None of it has anything to do with you. When you sit, you may hear someone laugh, cry, or even scream. Naturally, it will arouse your curiosity, but you must learn to separate yourself from the people around you.

The next step is to isolate yourself from the realms of sight and sound and light and shadow. It is relatively easy to put down sights and sounds of the external environment. If you cannot separate yourself from honking horns and blaring radios, then your mind is extremely scattered. But you must also isolate yourself from internal disturbances — those of the mind and body. No matter what you see, hear, feel or imagine, do not cling to it. This is difficult to do. If you can isolate yourself from these phenomena, then your practice will be smooth and your progress steady.

There is a story of an old lady who supported a monk for twenty years, allowing him to meditate in a hut near her home. One day, she instructed her eighteen-year-old daughter to take food to the monk, hug him, and then ask him what he felt. The daughter did as she was told. When she hugged the monk and asked him how he felt, he said, "Like a dry stick leaning against a cold cliff."

The daughter reported everything to the old woman. Furious, the woman grabbed a broom and went to the monk's hut. "Here I've supported you for twenty years, thinking you were a real practitioner! Get out!" she yelled as she chased him away with her broom. After he was out of sight, she burned down the hut.

The woman was angry because the monk had only attained the first stage of isolation. He had isolated himself from people and the external environment, but he was attached to his isolation. He had not succeeded in transcending the disturbances within his own mind.

Obviously, it is not easy to advance along the Buddha path. You must first work with the body and environment. If you could immediately isolate yourself from the mind, there would be no need for Ch'an retreats. Once you completely isolate the mind from internal and external phenomena, you must then break apart the isolated mind. The result is enlightenment. However, you should not think about enlightenment. All you have to do is stay on the method and ignore everything else. Refrain from comparing yourself to others. Whether or not they are doing well is not your concern — this is good advice for daily life as well as for a

retreat. Only with such an attitude will it be possible to enter the door of Ch'an.

Realize that isolating yourself from other people does not mean going into seclusion. It is possible to be in a crowd and still be isolated. Envision yourself as being alone, because in truth, you are alone. You are born into this world alone, and you will die alone. Even if you tie yourself to your lover, take poison together, and die at the same instant, you will still leave the world alone. Your karma is uniquely your own.

Isolating yourself from everyone and everything is a difficult skill to develop. For this reason, serious practitioners are often encouraged by their teachers to practice — at least for a while — alone and away from society. In ancient China and Tibet, many great practitioners spent long periods of time practicing in seclusion. In modern times as well, many practitioners go on personal retreats. I spent six years practicing alone in the mountains of Taiwan. I would not have ignored people had they approached me, but no one ever visited. I had no telephone, no mail, no company. It was a humbling experience. I felt free, yet somber. In general, it would benefit your practice if people ignored you, or even despised you. If people treat you like a celebrity or hero, then your practice will probably suffer.

In modern China, there was a famous monk named Lai-kuo. When he was still a young man, he became the abbot of a well-known monastery. After three years, he retired, changed his identity, and went to a monastery where no one knew him. He requested the job of cleaning the toilets. He spent several years in uninterrupted practice, until one day a disciple from the old monastery recognized him. Lai-kuo begged him to keep his identity a secret, but word quickly spread that he had once been an abbot.

Before anyone could talk to him, he gathered his clothes and left to find another place, because he felt he needed more time to practice. Eventually, people found him again and dragged him back to the monastery.

If it is not people pulling your body from the practice, it is thoughts pulling your mind from the method. Whether you practice in solitude or in a crowd, you must try to isolate your mind. It may seem foolish to isolate yourself, but it works. In society there are many distractions and attachments. As soon as you generate the slightest craving or aversion for anything, obstructions will appear in your practice.

On this retreat, one of my students told me that his cousin recently died of cancer, and that he felt bad. I asked him, "Who is suffering the most from your cousin's death?"

He said, "Probably his mother."

I told him, "Then, instead of wasting time mourning, which is really feeling sorry for yourself, you should use your wisdom from the practice to help ease the misery of your aunt. Also, you should use your method to help transfer merit to your dead cousin, so that he may be reborn in a better place. What good is mourning?" Of course, I would not say this to everyone. Those who have a sound grasp of Buddhadharma and a stable foundation of practice, however, would be able to understand this advice and put it into practice.

It is already the end of the third day. Hopefully, you will take advantage of the time remaining on this retreat and learn to isolate yourself. Now, while you have the opportunity, work hard. When you return to daily life, it will be impossible to isolate yourself from family, friends and the environment. Vexations will inevitably arise. However, if your practice is strong, you will be able to cut off these vexations before they become rooted in your mind.

Day 4 The Wealth of Wanting Little

*The penniless Buddhist monks say they are destitute;
Though they have nothing, they are not poor in Tao.
Poverty shows in the ragged robes they always wear.
The priceless treasures of the Tao are stored in their minds.*

During Sakyamuni Buddha's time, monks looked poor outwardly, but spiritually and mentally, they were quite rich. Only monks and nuns can really be poor, because it is not possible for householders to live without money. Householders have to provide food and shelter for themselves and their families. Monks and nuns, however, do not need money, houses, or land. They are liberated from material possessions. Whether or not they have such things makes no difference to them. Though they are materially impoverished, they are spiritually rich. And because they are liberated from material desire, all land and all the money in the world is theirs. They may wear rags on their backs, but they have come to know their own priceless gem — the mani pearl — which goes by many names: Tathagatagarbha, Buddha-nature, True Suchness, self-nature.

Looking at the Ch'an Center, knowing that I have charge of temples in Taiwan, and that I fly back and forth between Taiwan and New York twice each year, you may think I have a lot of money. In fact, I have no money, and I own few possessions. Money comes to the Ch'an Center and the temples from all directions, but it is not mine. The center provides for all my needs. Whenever money is needed, however, I can get it. I spend a lot of money every year, but none of it comes from me or goes to me. On the other hand, if I were not a monk, but a family man with a wife and children, or even a bachelor, I would have to earn money, because I would have daily living expenses.

Your spiritual life is not determined by your material circumstances. A nun maybe impoverished, wrapped in rags, and dependent on others' offerings, but if she is aware of the priceless gem within, she is truly wealthy. A person with nothing who craves material wealth, however, is truly impoverished. Similarly, a wealthy person who wants more and more and is never satisfied is not rich at all. If a person is satisfied with what he has, even if it is very little, then he is wealthy.

A true practitioner concerns himself with his practice. He does not worry about his home, family, or livelihood. He does not guard over or cherish anything, including his life and body. It does not mean he abandons his family, quits his job and abuses his body. He is aware of and fulfills his

responsibilities, but he is not attached to them. Such an attitude ensures that he will be successful in his practice. Still, there is no guarantee he will attain enlightenment.

Master Ta-hui was abbot of several temples, and in each temple were hundreds, sometimes thousands, of monks and nuns. Of these thousands of disciples, who devoted their entire lives to practice, perhaps one hundred reached enlightenment. This does not mean that the rest wasted their time. At least they practiced. Practicing is better than not practicing, just as being enlightened is better than not being enlightened.

The song says that monks are poor in body but rich in Tao. Tao does not only mean enlightenment. Here, it means the Path, and refers to practice. Master Hsu-yun, the recent Ch'an Patriarch, who died in 1959, practiced with unshakeable determination for years, long after most people would have given up. He finally achieved enlightenment when he was fifty-six. By ordinary standards, this is rather late in life, but Hsu-yun lived to be 119. While he struggled, he never said, "This takes too long. I'm giving up. I'm not going to be a monk if I can't get enlightened." Achieving enlightenment should not be the only reason for practicing. Cultivating practice is what is important. Practice is the means and the end.

These priceless treasures have endless functions;

There is no hesitation in helping others.

The three bodies and four wisdoms are complete in essence;

The eight liberations and six psychic powers are the mind-ground seal.

When you discover the priceless gem of enlightenment, you can use it to help others reveal their own treasure. Its powers and uses are inexhaustible. No matter how much you give, there is as much left when you finish as when you started. The sutras call it the mani pearl, but it is your self-nature. When you reveal your self-nature, wisdom manifests to help yourself and others. Wisdom cannot be squandered. You do not have to hoard it, and you do not have to ration it.

Within the priceless gem are the three bodies, the four wisdoms, the six psychic powers and eight liberations. These are expedient means to help sentient beings attain liberation. I will list them, but I will not explain them in detail.

The three bodies are the Dharma body, the retribution body, and the transformation body.

The four wisdoms are the great mirror wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the profound observing wisdom, and the perfecting wisdom.

The six psychic powers are divine sight, divine hearing, knowledge of others' thoughts, knowledge of former lives of oneself and others, power to appear anywhere at will, and insight into the destruction of outflows. Outflows are thoughts, words and actions that derive from attachment to a self; insight into the destruction of outflows liberates one from birth and death.

The eight liberations are: (1) liberation arising from meditation of impurity with attachment to form; (2) liberation arising from meditation of impurity without attachment to form; (3) liberation from desire by meditation on purity; (4) liberation in the state of boundless space; (5) liberation in the state of boundless consciousness; (6) liberation in the state of nothingness; (7) liberation in the state of neither thought nor absence of thought; (8) liberation in which there is extinction of sensation and perception.

The eight liberations correspond to eight levels of samadhi. Progressively deeper levels of samadhi free one from particular attachments. The eight liberations do not free one from Samsara — the cycle of birth and death. The ninth samadhi level liberates one from Samsara.

A Ch'an practitioner does not have to cultivate the three bodies or four wisdoms. Rather, the three bodies and four wisdoms are already complete in his realization of self-nature. Likewise, he does not have to cultivate the six psychic powers and eight liberations. They are all complete in the enlightened practitioner's pure mind. When the

enlightened practitioner interacts with others, he uses his wisdom to help sentient beings, but he rarely displays extraordinary powers. Ch'an patriarchs and enlightened beings look and act like ordinary human beings.

Day 5 Persevere in Practice

*For the great ones, one breakthrough accomplishes all;
For the middling and inferior, the more they hear, the less they
believe.
You only have to discard the dirty garments within;
No need to flaunt your diligence to others.*

People who encounter Buddhadharma can be assigned to one of three categories, depending on their karmic roots. Those with superior karmic roots are great practitioners; those with intermediate karmic roots are average practitioners; and those with inferior karmic roots are poor practitioners.

To have superior karmic roots means that a person has already reached a high level of practice in previous lifetimes. Usually, when such a person encounters Buddhadharma, he has absolutely no doubts about the teaching. He accepts it completely, immediately and wholeheartedly. Sometimes, however, it does not work out that way. In the history of Buddhism, quite a few Ch'an masters actually opposed Buddhadharma when they first encountered it.

During the Sung dynasty, a prime minister named Chang Shang-ying hated Buddhism with a passion, and he decided to write an essay refuting the teachings of the Buddha. While he was pondering which way to attack his target, his wife asked him what he was writing about. He answered that he hated Buddhism, and wished to write an essay proving that Buddha-nature did not exist.

His wife answered, "If there's no such thing as Buddha-nature, then what is there to criticize? Why attack something that isn't real? If you do, it will only serve to make it real. If you want to oppose something,

you must have something to oppose. If nothing is there, it's like clapping one hand. Your hand strikes empty space and makes no noise." When Chang Shang-ying heard his wife's comments, he felt foolish. He collected as much Buddhist material as possible and read about Ch'an. The more he read, the more interested he became; finally, he became enlightened.

Ou-l Chih-hsu, a monk who studied several Buddhist disciplines, is a similar example. When he was young, he bitterly opposed Buddhadharma, and wrote a number of articles attempting to cast Buddhism in a disparaging light. He opposed Buddhism for so long, and with such fervor, that in the end he became a great Buddhist master.

Therefore, a person with superior karmic roots will not necessarily accept Buddhadharma wholeheartedly when he first encounters it. One may utterly oppose Buddhism in the beginning, and then convert to its teachings after a long period of time; but when a person of superior karmic roots accepts Buddhism, he understands and accepts the Dharma completely, without doubts.

People of intermediate and inferior capacities, however, are different from great practitioners. They want to learn, and they study as much Buddhadharma as they can. Yet they question, "Is this the path for me? Do I really want to do this? What's the purpose of all this?"

There is a story of a child in a candy store, whose eyes are bigger than his stomach. He sees jar after jar of candy, and he wants it all. He bites into one piece, tastes it, and spits it out unfinished. He tries another, and another, and works his way through the entire store. Although his mouth is filled with the flavors of many candies, he has not eaten a thing. Then he gets sick and vomits, and ends up with a sour memory of his experience. A person of intermediate or inferior capacity can be like this child.

The Dharma gates of Buddhism — the methods of practice — are infinite. The third Bodhisattva vow says, "I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma." This does not mean you should act like a child in a candy shop and try every gate. Before enlightenment, select one path (method),

stick to it, learn it, and practice hard. Although you make a vow to master every method, it does not mean that you should dabble with one for a while, drop it, and go to another. You should be practicing, not window shopping.

From time to time, I have to discourage people from attending a Ch'an retreat. These people tell me that they have tried all kinds of meditation methods — reciting mantras, chanting, visualization, reciting Buddha's name, and more. I say to them, "If you want to participate in a Ch'an retreat, then give up whatever you have learned in the past and use Ch'an methods." Why do I say this? Unless you have faith in one method and follow it exclusively, you will not progress in your practice. The important and essential thing is that you have confidence in your method, and that you fully enter one gate. Do not waste your time trying to enter many gates. In reality, there are no gates, so no matter which gate you choose, you should stick to it. If you work diligently and relentlessly, you will progress, and eventually you will gain entrance. Once you pass, the "gate" disappears.

It is important to have faith in the method. One reason people cannot build up faith is that they do not use a method long enough for it to mature. It is like cooking. You cannot blame the stove or the ingredients if the rice is not cooked.

There is a saying in the West: "All roads lead to Rome." If you walk down one road for a few miles and then say, "I don't think this road goes to Rome, " you will have to retrace your steps and try another road. If you do the same thing with every road, you will never reach your destination. Every road may lead to Rome, but if you have never follow any road to its end, you will never find out for yourself.

The important thing is to persevere. The gate exists only while you are practicing. Once you gain entrance, the gate is no longer important. It is just a stage in your practice, not a final achievement. That is why you should not worry about your progress or brag about your achievements. Results are not that important. It is the process, or practice itself, that is important.

In the course of practice, however, it is difficult to know if you are making progress, or to see clearly the stages you are passing through. You may be making progress even though you think you are going nowhere. You may even feel you are sliding backwards, and want to give up. Actually, going forward and slipping backward are both indication of progress. When you climb up a mountain, you must walk the path step by step. The next step may not be higher than the last step — it may even be lower than the last step — but after a while, you will realize you are further along than when you started. If you stop to rest, you may not be ascending, but you are still higher than you were, and when you continue to climb, you will be refreshed. Resting is not bad; it is not faulty practice.

If you swim against the current, you may swim with all your might and not make much headway. The moment you pause to rest, the current will sweep you downstream. But you are not swimming downstream. It is the current that is pulling you back. Say you swim forward ten meters before the current pulls you back twenty. Then you catch yourself and swim another twenty, but the current pulls you back twenty. You may be ten meters behind your starting point, but you have swum thirty meters. As long as you are concerned with the process and not the goal, then you have not wasted any time or effort.

True practitioners do not boast about their attainment, their progress, or even their method. Do not make a big deal over your practice or accomplishments. Practice is your personal business. All you want to do is continue to peel off layer after layer of vexation, which are the "dirty garments" Yung-chia mentions in the song.

There is another story about Master Lai-kuo, the young abbot who did not want to teach anymore. He felt he needed more practice, so he fled far into the mountains. Some time later, Lai-kuo's master was dying. The dying monk needed a worthy disciple to take over his temple, so he sent a monk to find Lai-kuo and bring him back.

One day, while Lai-kuo was gathering herbs for his meal, a huge boulder suddenly crashed next to him. Since it missed him, Lai-kuo ignored the

incident and returned to his hut. The next day, the same thing happened. Again he ignored it, but when he got back to his hut, he found the monk from his master's temple waiting for him. The monk said, "You are enlightened. You must return to the temple to teach. You cannot shirk your vows."

Lai-kuo said, "I suppose you're right. If I'm enlightened, I ought to teach. And it seems the spirit of the mountain agrees with you, because he's throwing rocks at me." He left his solitary hut and returned to the temple with the monk.

He hid in the mountains because his practice was his personal business. Practice is not something to display to others, or to use to gain recognition. My advice to you is to keep practicing and not bother with anything else.

5. Third Retreat

Day 1 Following the Guidelines of Buddhadharma

*When criticized by others, let them wrong you;
They will tire themselves trying to burn the sky with a torch.
When I hear abuse, it is like drinking ambrosia;
Melt it, and suddenly one enters the inconceivable. If we regard
criticism as merit,
The critics will become reliable friends.
Do not hate those who slander you;
How else can you manifest the unborn power of compassion?*

These stanzas do not address methods of practice. Rather, they offer the Ch'an practitioner pertinent advice concerning problems he or she might face in daily life.

Yung-chia says that we should endure the insults, criticisms and slanderous remarks of other people. If someone slanders you or your practice, you must refrain from getting upset and harboring anger or hatred against that person. Instead, you should feel great joy, as if you were suddenly given a delicious drink when you were dying of thirst. Kan-lu, translated here as ambrosia, is a legendary drink which bestows immortality. When people slander you, you should receive their words as you would ambrosia.

You should be thankful to people who criticize you, because their remarks are beneficial to your practice. Even if you are not what the critics claim, and even if you have done none of the things they accuse you of doing, such criticism will make you more alert. It will sharpen your vigilance; it will help to prevent you from becoming what critics perceive you to be, and from doing what critics think you have done. If you deal with criticism and insult as Yung-chia advises, then your behavior will be correct, and your practice will flourish.

Thoroughly understanding both basic principles and teaching,

*Samadhi and wisdom are complete and clear without stagnating
in emptiness.*

*Not only do I accomplish this now,
The essence of uncountable Buddhas is just the same.*

Yung-chia says it is necessary to thoroughly understand both the "basic principles" and the "teachings." "Basic principles" are the Mind Dharma, which can only be comprehended through practice. "Teachings" refer to the Dharma that is expressed through words and language, which is absorbed through the intellect. Both basic principles and teachings are important. We learn Buddhadharma through an intellectual understanding of scripture, and we realize the basic principles, or Mind Dharma, directly through practice. Most, if not all of you, first encountered Buddhism through words and language. As a result of studying Buddhadharma, you then chose to adopt a method of practice. Yet, you continue to use Buddhist teachings as a guideline for practice and behavior. Eventually, through practice and study, you will experience the Mind Dharma. It is incorrect to say, "Since I am originally endowed with Buddha-nature, I don't have to study or practice." The Buddha-nature which is within us must be discovered through study and practice.

Ch'an Buddhism tells us not to rely on words and language, yet all Ch'an masters speak about Buddhadharma in order to help others. A master must teach his students in the most appropriate manner. If a master does not teach methods of practice and correct concepts and attitudes about practice, students will get lost along the outer paths (heterodox teachings), or develop physical or psychological obstructions.

One person who studies with me in Taiwan has been on several retreats. During one retreat, while he was meditating, he heard a voice saying, "Listen, I'll teach you the correct way to practice the fastest way to reach Buddhahood."

This person said, "I'll have to ask my Shih-fu first."

The voice said, "Why bother? The method I teach you will make you reach Buddhahood quickly. Even your Shih-fu hasn't reached Buddhahood yet."

My student answered, "I have known my Shih-fu for many years, and I know a lot of people who have studied with him, and they say that he has the correct concept of Buddhadharma. But this is the first time I have ever met you."

The voice said, "Whether or not this is the first time does not matter. Your karmic conditions have ripened, so now I'm going to teach you."

The student said, "I'm going to talk with my Shih-fu." He stopped meditating and told me about his experience. I told him that he should ignore the voice and forget the experience.

Another student wrote to me recently, and said she had just finished reading a book about a man who claimed to be the incarnation of a Tibetan lama, and who felt his purpose was to come to the West and spread the true teachings of the Buddha. Actually, the man was British, and he had been seriously ill. Miraculously, he recovered, but when he did, his personality had completely transformed. He said the spirit of a lama had taken over his body. My student said that his teachings seemed to differ from what she believed to be correct Buddhadharma. She asked, "If he is truly a Tibetan lama, then why does he sound so far off the mark?"

I told her, "It's not a lama's spirit that has taken over this man. At most, it's either a deity or ghost that claims to be a lama."

Similar situations can happen to anyone who practices hard for a long time. These are usually called demonic obstructions. If people follow the advice they receive during such encounters, they will fall into demonic states. The beings who claim to be Bodhisattvas or high-ranking deities are simply ghosts or demons. If you want to learn Tibetan Buddhism, study with a lama. If you want to practice Ch'an, study with a Ch'an master. Don't study with ghosts.

It is difficult to tell the difference between a true teacher and a ghost, especially for those who do not have a sufficient or correct understanding of Buddhadharma. That is why this stanza emphasizes the importance of cultivating Mind Dharma as well as studying the written teachings of Buddhadharma. Genuine penetration of Mind Dharma is based on and supported by the written and spoken word of Buddhist teachers. Also, it is possible to gradually experience Mind Dharma through a thorough understanding of the teachings.

There are exceptions, such as the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng. Before he attained enlightenment, he could not study any written teachings because he was illiterate. The first time he encountered the Dharma was when he heard a monk chanting the Diamond Sutra. As soon as he heard genuine Buddhadharma, he understood completely and directly, and instantly became enlightened. Hui-neng is the exception to the rule.

An ordinary practitioner should not seek a master based solely on his own judgment, or go to the mountains to practice in solitude until he has the right ideas and understanding of Buddhadharma. He will not be able to distinguish a good master from a false or bad master. If he goes to the mountains to practice by himself, he will most likely run into problems. The prerequisite is that the student must experience seeing his self-nature. Until he has an enlightenment experience, he should study with someone who is widely acknowledged as being a good master. The master's behavior may not be in perfect accordance with the Buddha's, but so long as his understanding of the Dharma is correct, the student will have no problems.

Thoroughly understanding both basic principles and teachings is the prerequisite of practice. The results of practice are samadhi and wisdom. There are two kinds of samadhi and wisdom, those with outflows and those without outflows. Samadhi and wisdom are simultaneously and mutually enriching. When samadhi arises, wisdom also arises; when wisdom becomes deeper, the power of samadhi also gets stronger.

Sometimes, a person who practices seriously experiences a false sense of emptiness. It is not the genuine emptiness of Ch'an. A person

experiencing false emptiness can be passive and apathetic. Nothing will matter to him. He may even have an aversion toward society and life. He may not care deeply about anything — family, career, a future — because, to him, everything is an illusory attachment, a form of bondage. He will want to leave everything behind.

This happened to one of my students. After he participated in a Ch'an retreat, he found everything to be empty. He went home and spent all his money treating his friends to dinner. Then he threw all his possessions away. His friends worried that he was going crazy, so they had him committed to a mental hospital. Throughout all of this, he kept insisting that he was not crazy. He was right. What his friends mistook for insanity was a temporary condition brought on by a false sense of emptiness. It does not last too long. Within a short period of time, his normal world view would have returned of its own accord.

There is a second type of false emptiness which can be more serious than that which I have just described. After a person has been practicing for a long time, he may suddenly find everything to be empty and feel that everything is an illusion. The past, present and future are illusions. There are no Buddhas, no Bodhisattvas, no causes or consequences. A person with this attitude may feel he can do anything. He may think, "Even if I kill somebody, I may suffer the consequences in my next life, but actually, it's just another illusion. It has nothing to do with me." This type of false emptiness is potentially dangerous. A person with this condition can do great harm to himself and others.

Someone experiencing this type of false emptiness might throw away his Buddha statues and sutras. He might break the five precepts, rationalizing, "Since everything is Buddha, why do I have to practice or keep precepts? Precepts are for ordinary people. I, on the other hand, have reached Buddhahood." Unfortunately, he is deluding himself.

That is why the text says, "Samadhi and wisdom are complete and clear without stagnating in emptiness." In this line, emptiness refers to the two kinds of false emptiness. An enlightened practitioner abides neither in emptiness nor existence. Samadhi and the "perfection of the mind in

wisdom" are not to be understood in terms of emptiness and existence. You must not cling to emptiness, and you must not cling to existence. Do not look for any results — including the experience of emptiness — in your practice. The proper attitude is to view practice itself as the result: practice is the result of practice. Treat all experiences you encounter during practice as illusions. Ignore them.

At the end of this stanza, Yung-chia declares that he is not alone in his ideas. All the Buddhas, as many as the sands of the Ganges River, have also achieved the same understanding.

Day 2 Dropping Theories and Experiences

*Speak without fear,
As the lion roars,
All animals hearing it cringe in fright.
Losing his composure, the fragrant elephant gallops;
With quiet joy, the heavenly dragon listens.*

Yung-chia often uses animal analogies to describe different types of people who come in contact with Buddhadharma. Demons and evil spirits tremble in fear when they hear the Dharma. Philosophical scholars and teachers of great religions become confused. But people who accept Buddhadharma feel joy when hearing it. Such people follow and protect Buddhadharma.

I heard about a Christian minister who was puzzled after reading about Ch'an practice. He read stories about practitioners who yelled at the Buddha and defiled the patriarchs. In one story, a group of monks was discussing Buddhism. One monk said, "If I were to say the Buddha's name even once, I'd wash out my mouth for three days." Another monk said, "Go get Buddha. When I see him, I'll beat him to death and feed his corpse to the dogs."

The Christian minister was disconcerted. On one hand, Buddhists claimed to believe in Buddha and his teachings. On the other hand, they

refused to utter the Buddha's name even once for fear of defiling their mouths; and in the next moment, they continued to pray and prostrate to him. The minister wondered what kind of people Ch'an practitioners were, and thought that perhaps they were insane.

During my last trip from Taiwan to New York, my flight stopped in Seoul, Korea. Enroute, I sat next to another Christian minister. In a book he was reading there were pictures of Buddha statues in Korean Ch'an monasteries. The minister pointed to these and asked me, "Do you believe in Buddha statues?"

I answered, "I make use of Buddha statues, but I don't believe in them."

The minister asked, "Do you pray?"

I said, "I do not pray myself, but I teach others to pray."

The minister said, "You say you don't pray, and yet you teach others to do just that. Don't you think you are deceiving them?"

I explained that in Buddhism there are many levels of teaching. At a particular level, there are appropriate methods for a person to practice and appropriate guidelines for a person to follow.

"For instance," I said, "many of my students and disciples are Christians, and some still go to church. I think that it's a good idea. They study and practice with me because they believe Buddhism has something to offer which their religion lacks."

"What do you teach them?" he asked.

"I teach them not to believe in Buddha, not to believe in God, not even to believe in themselves."

The minister was shocked. "That's absolutely crazy!" Then he grew quiet. A while later, he asked, "Will you teach me some things about Buddhism?"

I said, "If you really want to learn something, come to the Ch'an Center in New York City. Now, however. I'm tired, so if you don't mind, I think I'll go to sleep."

I have conversations like this quite often with people of other faiths. Oftentimes they begin by bemoaning the fact that I follow Buddhism. Later, however, many of them ask me to teach them Buddhadharma.

The Dharma of Ch'an is difficult for many people to accept, especially if they are accustomed to conventional religion and philosophy. Before they understand basic Buddhadharma, they are afraid of Ch'an teachings. After they gain a fundamental understanding of Ch'an teachings, they are often intimidated, because they realize how distant they are from being a true follower of Buddhadharma.

Ch'an Buddhism is not interested in converting people or conquering other people's ideas and beliefs. It allows you to choose — to accept or reject the Dharma. It is your responsibility, your concern, your choice.

A person who hears Buddhadharma for the first time may have great respect for it, but he may still find it difficult to change his attitudes and beliefs. Each person has a unique point of view and unique, personal karma. It would be wrong to force people to accept what they are not ready or willing to accept.

*Traveling over rivers and oceans or crossing mountain streams,
Seeking teachers, asking the way to investigate Ch'an.
Since I recognize the path of Ts'ao Ch'i,
I realize all those do not relate to birth and death.*

Yung-chia traveled to many different places, practiced many methods and visited many masters. When he finally met Sixth Patriarch Hui-neng, who is here referred to as Ts'ao Ch'i, he realized that everything he had done up to that point had not brought him any closer to solving the problem of birth and death. Nothing he had done in the past had been genuine practice. In the T'ang dynasty, there was a Ch'an master named Huang-po. He was a disciple of Pai-chang, who, in turn, was a disciple of Ma-tzu. All three monks were famous Ch'an masters. Huang-po said, "In the T'ang empire there is not one Ch'an master."

What did Huang-po mean? Ma-tzu and Pai-chang had many outstanding disciples, so there were indeed many Ch'an masters

teaching Buddhadharma. Monks and nuns spent most of their lives going on pilgrimages, visiting temples and monasteries, and studying under great masters. Huang-po meant that if people cannot grasp the essence of Buddhadharma, then for them there are no Ch'an masters. Whether or not there are true Ch'an masters is a completely different question. You may study with many masters, but if you do not understand the Dharma they teach, then they are not really your masters.

Many practitioners become attached to their practice or to experiences arising during the course of practice. Often, practitioners have studied under several masters, have read sutras, and have attended lectures and retreats. They have encountered several religious traditions and have tried different methods of practice. Practitioners can develop strong attachments to their previous experiences and learning. If they cling to their spiritual experiences, their practice will suffer. When people decide to study exclusively with one master, they should put aside everything they learned before and practice their new methods diligently.

When people with previous practice come to study with me, I warn them not to be proud. I advise them to leave behind everything they learned before and act as if this were the first moment they had ever heard the Dharma. If they can forget all that they learned in the past, and accept even one line of Dharma that they hear from me, they can make quick progress. However, if they cannot do this, then all their previous years of practice, experience and learning will rise up, and whatever I say will have minimal effect. The residue piled up from the past will prevent them from learning from me.

When you come on my retreats, I tell you to leave behind not only what you learned from other teachers, but also what I myself have told you in the past. What I said yesterday is not necessarily useful to you today. What I said two weeks past has no bearing on your practice now. Only what I say today is useful to you today. What I say this moment is useful to you this moment. Furthermore, what I say to you is useful to you only. What I say to another person has nothing to do with you.

The correct attitude is to put aside all ideas of the Dharma, all methods that you have learned in the past, and all of your past experiences. Leave all of it behind and just work on your current method. Whatever you have learned in the past has given you a foundation to work from, but if you try to connect it with what you are learning now, you will create obstructions in your mind. The power of the past is with you, but you should detach yourself from it.

On the other hand, if you can retain one line of Dharma and understand it with your entire being, then no other teachings are necessary. Only exceptional practitioners, however, are capable of doing this. Ma-tzu had a disciple named Fa-ch'ang. Ma-tzu told him, "The mind is Buddha." Fa-ch'ang took the words to heart; he remembered them and practiced them. Years later, Fa-ch'ang left Ma-tzu and took up residence on Plum Mountain.

One day, Ma-tzu sent a disciple to visit Fa-ch'ang and deliver a message: "Ma-tzu has modified his Buddhadharma. He used to say 'The mind is Buddha.' Now he says, 'It is not the mind, it is not the Buddha.' What do you think?"

Fa-ch'ang replied, "Is this guy still up to his old tricks? He can change his Buddhadharma as often as he likes, but for me, I'll stick with what I have. For me, the mind is Buddha."

When the messenger returned and related Fa-ch'ang's reaction, Ma-tzu was satisfied. He praised Fa-ch'ang's achievement: "This plum is ripe."

When Ma-tzu told Fa-ch'ang that the mind is Buddha, Fa-ch'ang benefited. He recognized the benefit and retained the sentence. Later, Ma-tzu could say anything he wanted to other people, but it had nothing to do with Fa-ch'ang.

If you benefit from even one line of Buddhadharma, you should hold onto it and never forget it. If you can penetrate one word of true Dharma, you do not have to seek other teachers. One word can be enough for enlightenment. On the other hand, if you learn many methods of

practice, but cannot solve the problem of birth and death, what good are those methods?

Do not waste your time on theory and concepts. Apply yourself directly to the method. Retrieve your method when you lose it. Everything I say during lectures will always come back to this point. If I do not say anything, your minds will turn forever with thoughts and fantasies. The purpose of these lectures is to bring your minds together, to focus your thoughts until there are no thoughts left. Until you accomplish this, I will continue to lecture.

Day 3 Practice Is Not Limited to Sitting Meditation

*Walking is Ch'an, sitting is Ch'an;
Speaking or silent, moving or still, the essence is undisturbed.
Remain composed even if facing a sharp weapon,
Be at ease even if given poison.*

In this stanza, Yung-chia explains that a practitioner is never separate from Ch'an, no matter what he does or where he is. Ch'an is everywhere. Whether you practice or do not practice, you are never apart from Ch'an.

People sometimes ask me: "Do you teach Japanese Zen or Chinese Ch'an?" It is a ridiculous question. In 1976, during the first retreat I held in the United States, I said to the participants, "I didn't bring Ch'an with me from the Far East. Ch'an is not something I can carry and give to you. Ch'an has always existed in the West."

Through the ages, people have asked masters what Bodhidharma brought to China from India. One master replied, "Three pounds of flax;" another answered, "Just a big bowl;" still another replied, "A large turnip." One master looked at his robe and commented that it was made in Chin-chou. Trying to analyze these answers would be as foolish as asking the question in the first place. These are nonsensical answers to an inane question. Ch'an was not exported from India when Bodhidharma went to China, and Ch'an was not brought to the United States when Ch'an masters started coming here. Whether or not

Buddhadharma, practice or Ch'an masters exist makes no difference: Ch'an is always present.

Ch'an is everywhere, even in places where no one has ever heard of Buddhadharma. When a dog barks, that is Ch'an; when a cat catches a mouse, that is Ch'an. But this does not mean dogs and cats are enlightened, or that they can attain enlightenment. Ch'an is one thing, practice is another.

There is a second meaning regarding Ch'an and the practitioner. Ch'an and meditation are not necessarily the same. Ch'an is not confined to meditation. Walking, sitting, eating and sleeping can and should be Ch'an. In Buddhist teachings, walking and sitting, as well as standing and lying down, symbolize all activities that humans perform.

Yesterday, one of you said to me, "I want to leave. All I do when I sit is daydream. I'm not making any progress. I'm just eating the Ch'an Center's food."

I replied, "Eating is Ch'an. It is practice if you eat with a focused mind. Stay on the retreat, and eat as well as you can."

A student who had just begun to practice visited a master and asked him for a method. The master asked, "Do you know how to eat?"

The student replied, "Sure. As a matter of fact, I've just eaten my fill."

The master asked, "Do you know how to sleep?"

"Even babies know how to sleep, " the student answered.

"I've slept most of my life away. I sleep too much and don't practice enough."

The master asked, "Apart from eating and sleeping, is there any other method you would like?"

The student became worried. "Please don't joke around. I know how to eat and sleep. I want to know how to practice."

The master answered, "You really don't know how to eat or sleep." The student argued with the master, pointing out that he'd been eating and sleeping his entire life. The master continued, "When people eat, they really don't know what they're doing. They eat with confused minds; and when people sleep, they really aren't sleeping at all. Most of the time they're lost in dreams."

The master told the student that when he ate, he should do so with single-mindedness, with total attention and concentration, and no other thoughts. The same with sleep: When the student slept, he should just sleep, with a single mind — complete attention and no confusion. This itself is practice. As soon as the student heard these instructions, he was able to practice smoothly.

During retreat, you should be completely focused on whatever you are doing. There should be no other thoughts in your mind. Does that mean that when you are eating, sleeping, or going to the bathroom, it is Ch'an? It depends on whether or not you have scattered thoughts. If your mind is not concentrated, it is not Ch'an. If your mind is not clear, it is not the proper practice. However, any of these things can be Ch'an for someone who is truly practicing.

When you clean a room, if your mind is on the hand that holds the dust cloth, and no where else, that is practice. Why, then, do we emphasize sitting meditation, and not eating, sleeping, or working meditation? Because sitting meditation is a structured way of practicing single-mindedness, whereas the other methods, which are embedded in our daily life, are easier to perform automatically. We forget we are eating and sleeping, and become lost in wandering thoughts.

A member of the Center recently brought in a cartoon depicting a meditation hall. In it, a Ch'an master slept soundly behind a lifesize cardboard replica of himself sitting in meditation while his disciples practiced hard. But it was the master, sleeping single-mindedly, who had entered the door of Ch'an, not the disciples.

An old Ch'an story tells of a practitioner who was on a pilgrimage with his older Dharma brother. Whenever they stopped, the younger brother

immediately dropped his bags, assumed the sitting posture and began to meditate; but the older brother dropped his bags, lay down and went to sleep. The Dharma brother who meditated became more annoyed at every stop. Finally, he could stand it no longer, and threatened to leave. The older brother asked why, and the younger brother replied, "We went through so much trouble leaving home and becoming monks. Time is limited. We should be using every minute wisely, but here you are sleeping your life away!"

Rubbing his eyes, the older brother asked, "What's wrong with sleeping?"

"We should be practicing, and the proper practice is sitting meditation."

The older brother picked up the Song of Enlightenment and read the stanza I am commenting on now.

The younger brother admitted, "Perhaps you are at the point where sleep can be practice, but I am not at that level yet. It doesn't work for me."

"What is it that doesn't work?" asked the older brother.

The younger one answered, "My mind hasn't settled down yet."

"And where does your mind want to settle down to?" inquired the elder.

When the younger brother heard these words, his mind became clear and radiant. He had been trying to force his mind to settle down, but the energy he expended only made him tense. His brother's words made him realize that his effort had been in vain; it was disturbing rather than settling his mind. He let go of his forced determination and his mind settled by itself, becoming clear and radiant.

If, in a particular activity, you can settle your mind to a point where it does not move, that is good. If your mind is silent and unmoving in all activities and every situation, then it is truly settled. In such a mind-state, how do you think you would react if someone approached you with a sharp knife, intending to kill you? You would recognize that someone was approaching you with a knife, but you would not feel fear. For the

truly settled mind, there is no sense of fear because such a mind lacks the idea of a person or self that can be killed.

If I took a knife and slashed water, would you be afraid? If you have entered the gate of Ch'an, a person attacking you with a knife would disturb your mind no more than would a person slashing water. If you feel fear when you are in a life and death situation, then you can be sure you have not entered the gate of Ch'an.

Day 4 Non-Attachment Is True Wisdom

*My teacher only met Dipankara Buddha
After training in forbearance for many kalpas.
Continuing rounds of birth and death,
Samsara prolonged without interruption.
Since sudden enlightenment I understand the unborn,
Thus I have no concern for honor or shame.*

The teacher mentioned in the partial stanza above refers to Sakyamuni Buddha. Dipankara is a Buddha who lived innumerable eons ago. Before Sakyamuni became a Buddha, he was a Bodhisattva for countless lifetimes. He was killed time and again, sometimes in brutal ways. In one lifetime, people tortured him by peeling off his skin little by little. He even fell ill after attaining Supreme Enlightenment; yet, throughout all these lifetimes, he never felt fear. Milarepa also experienced illness and was poisoned once. Although Buddha and Milarepa experienced pain, they had no fear in their minds. There are numerous stories of saints and sages who experienced horrible torments and illnesses, yet they never felt that they were suffering. Such people have truly realized Ch'an. To use the technical Buddhist term, they have achieved the conviction of the non-arising of dharmas, or phenomena.

As I said earlier, Ch'an is everywhere, in everything. One would experience this if one could genuinely realize that all dharmas are non-arising. Ch'an practice is called the sudden method because it leads to the instantaneous perception that phenomena do not arise. However,

this experience may only be fleeting. A fleeting experience is but a momentary flash, and, after a period of time, the feeling fades away, leaving only a distorted memory.

I tell people who have had a small experience practicing Ch'an: "You probably think that you are free now, and that you have attained liberation, but you are wrong. In fact, your practice is only beginning. It is far too early to speak of liberation." Many practitioners who attain the first stage of practice want to move on and quickly attain the second experience. Before attaining the second experience, they are already looking ahead to the third level. People with this attitude may practice for years and feel they are not making any progress. They may even give up, saying, "Practice is endless. I'll never get anywhere. I've stopped progressing."

Often, the problem is that the person has grown complacent and has stopped working strenuously after his first experience. Of course, if he acts in this manner he will not progress. In addition to complacency, many other obstructions can creep into the practice. People who have had experiences on past retreats should forget them. They are over and done with. Remembering them and aspiring to achieve them again are serious obstructions.

Do not expect too much. Sakyamuni practiced through many lives, over many kalpas, before finally becoming a Buddha. Do you seriously expect to experience the first stage, then the second and third, right on up to Complete Enlightenment, with no effort or interruptions? Are you planning to put aside a month or so to attain Buddhahood, and then move on to something else? That would be a little unfair not only to Sakyamuni Buddha, but to yourselves as well, if you truly value attaining enlightenment. We should not hope for quick results. We should just practice.

Make practice its own goal, and accept it as a responsibility, a necessity, like eating and sleeping. Do not practice to attain something. Do not have the idea that practice will transform you into a Buddha during the course of a retreat, or even a lifetime. We are caterpillars crawling on

the ground and eating leaves. We cannot expect to change into butterflies overnight.

*Living in a hermitage deep in the mountains,
On a lonely peak under a thick pine tree.
I would meditate contentedly in a monk's hut,
At ease in this tranquil place.*

Although masters and patriarchs through the ages have said that Ch'an practice should not be separate from the normal activities of daily life, Yung-chia says that there should be an extended period of time during which one practices away from society. After this stage of solitary practice is completed, the practitioner can return to society and ordinary, day-to-day life.

During the T'ang and Sung dynasties, Ch'an practice flourished in the mountains, not in the cities. The Fourth Patriarch, Tao-Hsin, and the Fifth Patriarch, Hung-jen, lived in the mountains at Huang-mei. The Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng, visited Hung-jen at Tung-shan mountain, and then went south to Kwang-tung province. The Emperor of China invited Hui-neng to the capital, but he declined, preferring to live in the mountains at Ts'ao-hsi. Most practitioners of that time practiced in the mountains or in a quiet, secluded area. Even though it is said that one can practice Ch'an anywhere, even in the streets, this is only true for a person who has a deep understanding of Ch'an. Such a person can practice well in any environment. The frenetic pace of a heavily populated city would not adversely affect his practice. But such a person is rare. It would not be easy for a beginner to practice in the streets of New York City.

When we first started holding retreats in Queens, people would go outside to practice slow-walk meditation after dinner. The neighbors did not like seeing people walking in a daze past their houses. One retreat participant lay on the grass in someone's yard. People thought he was crazy. They wanted to know what went on in the Ch'an Center. They even threatened to call the police. That is what happens when you practice Ch'an in the streets. People think you are insane. Of course, if

our center were in the heart of New York, say Times Square, then we would not have to worry. There, anything goes, and nobody cares.

Practicing in the mountains means living in isolation and without material and emotional attachments. While in the mountains, a practitioner does not stay in a hut; rather, he sleeps in a cave or underneath pine branches growing close to the ground. Han Shan (Cold Mountain), the great Ch'an poet, lived like this. A practitioner might go as far as to build a primitive shelter with a thatched roof to prevent rain from leaking through; but shelters are usually kept simple, because practitioners only live in them for a day or so, and then move on. They do this because they understand how easy it is to grow attached to a home, even if one lives there for only a couple of days. Home and daily life generate attachments and responsibilities. Without a home, one is relieved of the anxiety arising from one's desire for comfort and security.

The territorial instinct is as strong in humans as it is in birds or dogs. When a bird builds a nest, it will drive off intruders. Dogs are protective of their territories, and will attack strangers who trespass. We are like birds and dogs, protecting our little homes. A practitioner in the mountains must be careful not to let his straw lean-to become a home.

If, however, you are not attached to a home and possessions, then you do not have to live in the mountains. There is an old monk in Taiwan named Kuang-chin. He lives in a huge temple. Someone once asked him, "Master Kuang-chin, why do you have such a big place? Don't you worry about who will take care of it?" Master Kuang-chin replied, "This is not my place. It belongs to whoever comes and lives here. I never worry about it."

To whom does the Ch'an Center belong? Everyone says it is my place, but I do not perceive it as such. This Center is not mine, this robe is not mine, even this body is not mine. Right now my body is your body, not mine.

Although there is no place that is your home, there is also no place that is not your home. If somebody says to you, "Go home," remember that you are already and always at home. For this reason, whether you live

in a place for one hour or an entire lifetime, you should treat the place with respect, and keep it neat and clean. Practitioners who live solitary lives in the mountains treat every place as their home. The world would be a much better place if everyone had this attitude.

The Chinese character for home is a pictograph of a roof with a pig underneath. In other words, home is a place that you do not have to leave in order to get food. But owning a home presents problems. Someone must take care of it. In ancient China, it was the man who earned the family income, so he needed someone to stay at home and help raise the pig. For this reason, the Chinese character for "security" is a pictograph of a roof with a woman underneath. A householder feels safe and secure only when he has a house, a spouse, and food. Where is your home? Are you secure?

Most people feel secure only when they are in their own home, but a true practitioner has innumerable homes. Wherever he rests becomes his home, because he feels safe and secure no matter where he is. Wherever he goes, he is in full control; he never worries about where he will bathe, rest, or eat. In the mountains there is plenty of food — berries, leaves, roots and nuts; and since food is everywhere, one need not worry about growing it or guarding it. You are not in your own home, but neither are you alone in the mountains. This meditation center is comfortable. You have a roof over your heads, hot showers, and all the food you want; so, for these seven days, you should treat it as if it were your home.

Beginning practitioners should not entertain romantic notions of running off to the mountains to practice in seclusion. There are many dangers in this. If you do not know which plants are for food and medicine, you may end up starving, or poisoning yourself. If you are not used to outdoor living, you may be unprepared for changes in weather as days and seasons pass. Many practitioners in China practiced in the southern part of the country, where it does not get too cold in the winter. Taiwan is an island off the southern coast of mainland China, and it snows only on the highest peaks. The mountains of Taiwan are a good place to practice.

Great practitioners, however, do not worry about the weather. They just practice. Milarepa lived in a harsh climate, yet, he was content. A great practitioner is happy and content because he has no attachments. He is a master of himself because he has realized he has no self. He is a master in all situations because nothing belongs to him. Because of this attitude, everything becomes his.

*After enlightenment no need for further effort;
All dharmas of activity are varied.
Giving alms with attachment bestows merit for heavenly birth,
Like shooting an arrow into space.*

There are two aspects of practice: cultivating wisdom, or insight, and cultivating merit. Ordinary people think that cultivating wisdom means accumulating knowledge in the conventional sense, such as reading books and reaping life experiences. They think cultivating merit means giving alms, offering donations, or helping others.

A person who gains conventional knowledge after great effort may claim with pride, "I have great knowledge and wisdom!" Many people who work for charity also become proud, and picture themselves as great benefactors to mankind. They are like the person who goes into a restaurant and buys drinks and dinner for everyone, leaves a big tip, then gets up and swaggers out the door as everyone in attendance stands, saying, "Thank you! Thank you!"

In China, Taiwan, Japan and other Oriental countries, there are people who give large donations to public or religious projects, but with one condition: that their names and deeds be engraved on plaques and made visible to all. If their pictures are placed beside their names, all the better. Fo-kuang Shan (Buddhist Radiance Mountain) Monastery in Taiwan is a vast temple with many buildings. The abbot of the temple understands human psychology well. For years, people donated money to the temple, and the abbot placed their names on plaques on the many walls of the temple, but he left vacant two noticeable spots on either side of the main gate. People would constantly ask how much they would need to donate in order to have their names placed in those spots.

Finally, someone approached the abbot and said, "Look, I'm rich. How about letting me have one side of the gate? I don't even need the whole side. Just put my name on top, and there'll still be room for other names below mine. If you do that, I'll give you lots of money for the temple." The spots have now been filled. The abbot feels that these people normally would not have donated money for a religious cause. They were willing to part with their money only in exchange for having their names and deeds made visible to the public.

One person in Taiwan wanted to run for the provincial legislature. For five years before the intended election, he traveled all over the country and donated money in order to have his name placed in famous, public places. Everyone perceived him as a great benefactor. It was shrewd advertising, and although his initial investment was high, he probably made back all the money he spent after a year in office.

A sincere practitioner does not operate in such a manner. Even if he has profound wisdom and insight, he is not affected; after all, it is only wisdom and insight. He helps others and saves sentient beings. He does not cling to his past deeds.

Whenever you do something, do it wholeheartedly. But, once an action is completed, it is in the past. Drop it, and do not think about it anymore. Buddha delivered many people, but he did not perceive it as such. As far as Buddha was concerned, sentient beings save themselves. But our point of view is different. We say that Buddha saved people while he was alive. We also say he is still saving people, because if it were not for Buddha, the Dharma would not exist in the world today.

Christianity emphasizes that we should be generous, that we should have giving hearts. Charity is a practice that leads to heaven. Jesus said that it is as hard for a rich man to enter heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. He said this because many wealthy people cannot bear to give things away. They almost always have an ulterior motive. The Rockefeller Foundation is a philanthropic organization, and it has funded many wonderful things, but it is still a tax write-off for the Rockefeller family. If a person gives donations or

helps others with ulterior motives in mind, then he is not truly giving. If you are going to give things away, you should do so unconditionally, renouncing and forgetting whatever you give. If your motive for giving is to go to heaven, then your actions are not unconditional.

*Once its power is expended, the arrow falls,
Bringing discontent in the next life.
How can this compare to the true door of non-action,
Through which one leaps straight into the Tathagata ground?*

A true practitioner does not dwell on the fruit of his actions. After he gives something, he renounces it, and does not think of the consequences. It does not mean he acts rashly, without thinking. Rather, he acts spontaneously, and in accordance with the Dharma; he does not cling to actions or their consequences.

The Buddhist concept of heaven is different from the Christian concept. Christians believe that heaven is eternal; that once you enter, you never depart. According to Buddhism, heaven is still subject to time and change. You can be reincarnated in heaven by merit of donations and good deeds, but it is simply another mortal incarnation. Though your life span in heaven may be millions or billions of years, eventually your time will run out, and you will drop back to the human realm, or even a non-human realm.

If you can act in all situations without attachment, and without a purpose or motive, that itself is realizing the true nature of phenomena. Doing something without attachment is described by the Chinese term wu-wei, which means non-action. It does not mean doing nothing, or being apathetic and lazy. Wu-wei means action that is not done for the sake of the self, or with an ulterior motive in mind, or with deliberation. Wu-wei is action that is non-deliberate. It is action that does not emanate from self-centeredness. If you can act in this unattached manner, without deliberation or motives, then you can truly enter the gate of Ch'an.

If you have the proper attitude or true spirit of Ch'an practice, then you should give your full attention to whatever you are doing, and you

should do things to the best of your ability. Do not think about the past. Do not think about the future. Just focus on the present.

From our point of view, Buddha must have infinite wisdom and merit in order to save innumerable sentient beings. Actually, the Buddha has no wisdom, and he attains no merit from good deeds or blessings. If he still has wisdom and merit, then he is not a Buddha. It is we, not he, who say that the Buddha has wisdom.

When someone does something wrong, you might think, "How dumb! That person has no wisdom." You see a fly beating against a window trying to get out of your house. You open the window, but it just flies back and forth. You think, "How stupid!" If the Buddha has wisdom, then what does he see as being stupid? Do you think the Buddha would say, "What a stupid fly!" Compared to the Buddha, everything is stupid, but that is our point of view. Likewise, the Buddha does not perceive wisdom. Wisdom can only exist in relation to ignorance. In enlightenment there is no discrimination.

The Buddha has no wisdom, no insight, no accumulation of merit. Such concepts do not exist for the Buddha. If your intention is to gain wisdom and accumulate merit in order to become a Buddha, then you are attempting the impossible.

The great Ch'an poet, Han Shan, lived on Cold Mountain, from where he took his name. He did not own anything, not even pants, yet he felt that there was nothing that was not his. If Han Shan had gone to the T'ang Emperor and said, "All this is mine," he might have been put to death for his audacity. But if the Emperor proclaimed to Han Shan, "The whole world is mine," Han Shan would probably have answered, "Yes, you are right." There was nothing that Han Shan desired. He did not even concern himself with his body. He was utterly free, with no attachments. Therefore, he had no self-limit. Having no self-limit, the mountain he lived on, all of China, in fact the entire universe, was his.

I said that the Buddha has no wisdom. You may think, however, that he has compassion. If there is compassion, then there must be an idea of sentient beings. If the Buddha is aware of sentient beings, then he is

still discriminating, and he is not a Buddha. We say that the Buddha has compassion, but as far as he is concerned, he has none. If we feel that we are compassionate, then we are not Buddhas.

After one retreat, a student told me, "I feel like I am the mother of the whole world."

I said, "It is merely an illusion. It is the mind of vexation, not wisdom." I am not saying that you should be cold and aloof. Having compassion for others is good, and it is definitely much better than closing your heart. I'm not saying that people who give donations with ulterior motives are evil. If their motives are good, then what they do is meritorious. In the early stages of practice, people may have strong feelings of compassion; but some people become so attached to these feelings that they become fanatics. You will never find a true Ch'an practitioner who possesses the fanatical nature of a zealot.

Do not get the wrong idea. Ch'an does not advocate nihilism. A Ch'an practitioner does not say, "I'm not going to do anything." Rather, with a positive and attentive mind, a practitioner does everything that needs to be done as each moment arises, but he does not do anything with a fanatical mind.

What, then, is the proper attitude for practice? You will have to find out. But if you throw yourself fanatically into Ch'an practice — practicing, practicing, practicing — as if you are going to start a revolution, then you are on the wrong track. That is not the practice of Ch'an.

Day 5 No Substitute for Hard Work

*Once you get to the root, don't worry about the branches,
Like pure crystal containing a precious moon.
Since you have realized this all-giving pearl,
Benefit for yourself and others will never end.*

Most people pay close attention to the benefits that can be derived from practice, yet they are unwilling to put in the effort needed to accumulate

such benefits. The average person may envy a rich person, and wish he had his wealth, but does he consider how that person obtained his money? If he did, he might discover that earning millions of dollars takes time, and requires great effort and determination.

There was once a poverty-stricken woman who was sincere, kind and generous. A deity was touched by her character and appeared before her. "Whatever you desire I will give to you, " it said.

The poor lady answered, "I would like gold." The deity pointed its finger at a rock, and lo and behold, the rock turned into pure gold.

The deity asked, "Is there anything else that you desire?"

The woman thought for a while, and then said, "What I would really like is your finger."

With that, the deity disappeared, and the gold turned back into an ordinary rock. The woman ruined a wonderful opportunity. Worse, she did not realize why the deity did what it did. Even if the deity had given her its finger, it would not have helped her. The deity's ability to turn rock into gold came from the power of its practice, not from its finger.

At the end of one of my lectures, I asked the audience, "Should I stop, or should I continue speaking?"

A student in the audience said, "I don't want to hear any more. What I'd really like to do is take you home and have you all to myself." What if I agreed to his wishes? Chances are, all I would do at his house is eat, sleep and read. Would he benefit?

Every one of us has a finger that can turn rock into gold, but we must practice to discover and cultivate our power. The problem is, most people do not want to practice that long or that hard. Even if you managed to obtain the finger from a deity's hand, all you would have is dead flesh. It would not do you any good. Keeping me as your private master would not be as good as transforming yourself into a master.

You must reveal wisdom at its foundation. If you generate your own wisdom, then you do not have to worry about anything else, because everything comes from wisdom.

After Albert Einstein died, scientists removed and examined his brain. They discovered that it was rather ordinary in size and appearance. Where, then, did all his scientific discoveries come from? Were they in his brain tissue? If Einstein's brain were transplanted into someone else's head, would that person inherit Einstein's knowledge, personality and ingenuity as well? Ridiculous!

You will not make progress if you look only at superficial phenomena and results. You must uncover the foundation, the roots, the causes. If you practice in order to acquire supernormal powers, or with the intention of attaining enlightenment, your efforts will be in vain. If you cling to a master and think, "This person has great wisdom. Maybe some of it will rub off on me," you are only fooling yourself. You must practice.

Suppose you made a date with a friend to hike up a mountain, but on that day you overslept and she went ahead without you. What would you do? Perhaps you would think, "It's too late now," and go back to sleep. Or perhaps you would say, "I decided to hike today, and I'm going to do it. Better late than never. If I start right away, I may even catch up with my friend." What if, halfway up the mountain, you met your friend coming down, and she told you the view at the summit was not worth the effort? Would you still go ahead?

The path to Buddhahood is a lonely climb, but after you reach Buddhahood, vast numbers of sentient beings will surround you, all of them wanting your help, your compassion, your wisdom. Since you are a Buddha, naturally you will help every one of them. As an ordinary person, you have a physical body and limited faculties. You have contact with few people, and of those few, you help even fewer. You are alone most of the time, and you do whatever you want to do. But as a Buddha, your presence and power are limitless. Innumerable sentient beings seek your help. If you know Buddhahood is like this, why do you want the job? From our point of view, that of an ordinary sentient being,

Buddhahood sounds horrible. But the Buddha does not feel this way, because he does not perceive that he is helping anyone. To a Buddha, there is no such thing as Buddhas or sentient beings.

An ordinary person can divorce his or her spouse, but a Buddha cannot divorce himself from sentient beings. It is paradoxical: the path to Buddhahood is lonely and solitary, yet once you reach Buddhahood you are never alone again. Sentient beings throughout time and space will seek your help and blessings.

Once, in Tokyo, I was walking by myself at night. I walked along narrow sidestreets and back alleys. I saw people here and there, but when I turned onto a wide avenue, I did not see anyone. I figured that the main streets were not a good place to walk, so I returned to the narrow alleys.

Most of us wander the outer paths and follow the heterodox teachings, just as I kept to the back alleys. Buddhadharma is a wide highway, but it is relatively untraveled. As a sentient being, you keep to the narrow streets, because everyone else does the same. You are comforted by the sight of people. You will not meet many people on the wide road, and by the time you near your destination — Buddhahood — you will be alone. There will be no friend to help you, no enemy to quarrel with. It is a solitary road to Buddhahood.

A student once asked me if the innumerable Buddhas from the ten directions ever met for an "inter-Buddha world conference." I answered, "If the Buddhas were lonely or had nothing to do, I suppose they could call a meeting." I was joking of course. Actually, Buddhas do not have the idea that they are doing anything, and they are never lonely, so they do not have to call meetings. "All the Buddhas in the ten directions" is a convenient phrase that is easy to remember, but in fact each Buddha exists in every point of space and every moment of time. Since Buddhas encompass all of space and time, they cannot be pinpointed in any specific place or moment.

The Buddha's wisdom and merit are unlimited, and he can manifest in innumerable forms, places and times simultaneously, so he helps all sentient beings. Anytime, anywhere, if one has karmic affinity with the

Buddha — that is, if one lives in accordance with Buddhadharma — then one can receive benefit from the Buddha. Furthermore, one person does not receive more benefit than another person. It is not like the inheritance children receive from their parents. If parents divide their wealth into three equal shares, but they have four children, then one child will lose out. Buddha's wisdom is limitless and does not discriminate. It is as if the parents could divide their wealth into four parts, yet still give each child the entirety of their wealth.

Realizing your true nature is like obtaining the mani pearl, an inexhaustible treasure with which you can help yourself and others. We all possess the mani pearl, but few of us have uncovered it. We are all potential Buddhas, but few of us have realized our original nature. We must practice and be guided. Buddhadharma guides all of us equally, yet some people benefit from it more than others. In a single sound, the Buddha speaks the totality of Buddhadharma to every sentient being in all worlds, but each sentient being absorbs a different meaning from that sound, and some hear nothing at all.

The moon shines on the river, the breeze stirs the pine.

What is there to do on a long, pleasant night?

Buddha-nature and the precepts jewel are sealed in the mind-ground,

Fog, dew, and rosy clouds are now my garments.

When the moon shines on a river, it seems as if there is a moon in the water. Yet, the moon loses nothing by being reflected in the water. The moon appears because water happens to be there. Likewise, the Ch'an practitioner who helps sentient beings does so only because there are sentient beings who need his help. In helping, the Ch'an practitioner loses nothing, and he does nothing special, just as the moon loses nothing and does nothing special when it is reflected by a river. A practitioner helps himself and others, benefits himself and others, yet he does not do it with the desire to obtain a benefit.

A wind shakes the leaves and branches of a tree only because the tree is an obstruction in the wind's path. The wind had no intention of blowing

through a tree, and it does not claim credit for doing so; it simply blows. Likewise, a true practitioner does not have personal motives when he helps sentient beings. He simply helps, because others need it.

The clear breeze and bright moon refer to a practitioner's wisdom. The wisdom is beneficial to sentient beings, but the practitioner is unaware that he is doing anything, just as the wind and moon are unaware that they blow and shine.

A Ch'an practitioner is interested only in revealing Buddha-nature and the jewel of precepts, which are sealed in his mind-ground. Buddha-nature refers to the mind with no vexation. The jewel of precepts refers to action which does not create evil karma. Buddha-nature and the jewel of precepts are aspects of Buddhahood. A practitioner is concerned only with these two aspects. All other things and actions pertain only to superficial phenomena, and have nothing to do with his essential substance, which Yung-chia refers to as the mind-ground.

Yung-chia emphasizes that it is not enough just to realize the mind of true nature (Buddha-nature). It is also necessary to have pure action. Without pure action, a practitioner will become doubtful of his Buddha-nature. A Ch'an master may think he has reached the state of pure Buddha mind, but if he thinks the precepts are of no further use, and he eats meat, drinks alcohol, engages in sexual misconduct, or desires material wealth, then there will surely be problems. A practitioner with these ideas has deviated from true Ch'an teachings, and is deluded by demonic obstructions. In the history of the Ch'an sect, there has never been a patriarch who has engaged in impure conduct and still retained his position.

A person who practices relentlessly will eventually realize his true nature. The benefit that derives from such practice is unlimited. Although the person helps himself and others, he is not attached to anything. He is a person of pure action, a person who has revealed his Buddha-nature.

The level I describe is an extremely advanced stage. Not many people are there yet. Eventually, you will see your true nature, and wisdom will

appear, but for now, practice is fundamental and all-important. Some of you may not be willing to work hard. Perhaps you are the type who envies the rich person without considering how hard he worked for it. If he told you how he reached his position, would you be willing to follow his path? After hearing his story, you might abandon your quest and live with your envy. It's easier. In your practice, as you work toward your goal, do not feel discouraged if you see someone far ahead on the path. Do not think, "The practice is not for me." Remember, some people are faster than others, and some got off to an earlier start.

As you hike up a mountain, you may wish for a helicopter to whisk you effortlessly to the peak. A pleasant fantasy, but I ask you, how will you get the helicopter? That requires work too; and even if you do get to the top by helicopter, your experience will be completely different from that of the person who made it to the top by his own power. When that person speaks of his experience, you will realize how much you missed, and you may decide to do it again, this time on your own.

Arhats are like those who ride to the mountain top in a helicopter. They have transcended birth and death, but their wisdom and merit are limited. They must climb the mountain step by step in order to reach Buddhahood.

If you are given a helicopter to fly to the summit of a mountain, it is not going to help. You need to climb the mountain in order to truly experience it. The same holds true in your practice. There is no substitute for hard work.

Day 6 Subduing Desires

*The dragon-subduing alms bowl and the staff that wards off
tigers,
With the jangling of its two metal rings,
Are not outer forms of keeping the precepts,
But rather are holding the Tathagata's staff and treading his
path.*

A puzzling stanza, yet the meaning is not difficult to discern. These verses describe how an enlightened person interacts with human beings. A monk's needs for his daily existence are few and simple. He carries a bowl with which he begs for food, and he carries a staff, which has several functions. It serves as a walking cane; it is held across his shoulders to carry heavy objects; it is used as a measuring rod when he wants to cross a river — if he cannot find the bottom with the staff, then he knows not to ford the river at that point. The staff can also be used to ward off animals and predators in the mountains and forests.

At the tip of the staff there are usually a few dangling rings. This stanza speaks of two such rings. The short staff I use during retreat interviews has six rings. Wandering monks shook their staff and jangled the rings as they approached houses, letting people know ahead of time that a monk with a begging bowl was passing through.

In these verses, the bowl and staff have special symbolic meaning, as do the dragon and tiger, which the bowl and staff subdue and tame. First, the dragon and tiger symbolize the practitioner himself. An ordinary human being is filled with powerful energies, desires, ambitions and attachments. Yet, if a practitioner possesses only a staff and bowl, then he has reached a stage where he no longer has many attachments or powerful desires. His ferocious ambitions have been tamed. Subduing the dragon and taming the tiger refer to overcoming the attachment to power which is found within all of us. A practitioner who possesses only a bowl and staff has left behind the desire for power and wealth. He has also left behind his family and friends.

Second, subduing the dragon and taming the tiger refer to the practitioner's ability to overcome the most powerful human beings, ghosts and deities. In order to accomplish this, he must give up everything. If he still relies on or possesses things, then he cannot subdue or tame anything. Instead, he will be subdued and tamed by that which he relies on. A king may subdue his people, but he relies on his power and army to do so. In fact, it is the king who is subdued by his power. Only the person who relies on nothing subdues everything.

Many times in Chinese history, emperors would send messages to monks, saying, "Come to me!"

Sometimes a monk would simply reply, "No."

An emperor might threaten, "I'll have your head cut off if you don't come!"

The monk would return a calm message, "My head is here, my neck is waiting. Cut it off if it pleases you."

In the end it was the emperor who had to make the journey in order to pay respects to the monk.

The image of a practitioner living a simple life, with only a staff and bowl, can awaken people who are immersed in or obsessed with power or material wealth. If the image of a simple existence can penetrate the thick crust of their complex lives, they may realize that what they have is temporary. They may choose to transform their outlook and emulate the pure simplicity of the monk's or practitioner's lifestyle.

A person who has left home to become a monk or nun can be above or below an emperor. People in the Orient who understand this pay their highest respect to left-home practitioners. In any gathering, members of the Sangha are offered the most prominent seats. The tradition continues even now. Generally, people realize that monks and nuns, in having no position, in fact have the highest position.

This tradition comes from India, because Indians have great respect for renunciants, Brahmins and practitioners. In China, the respect paid to monks and nuns has varied with the country's view toward Buddhism. Depending on the rulers in power, the Sangha was either highly respected or treated like dirt. Those who do not believe in Buddhism will not respect Buddhist monks and nuns, whereas those who accept Buddhadharma will have great respect for them.

In this verse the left-home practitioner does not preach or spread the Dharma. The very appearance of a dedicated monk or nun is enough to inspire respect for the Dharma. Left-home practitioners represent the

Buddha, and they should be recognized as such. On this retreat, every morning and evening, all of you prostrate to me. I hope you understand that you are not prostrating to me as a person. I have no desire for such honor and respect. Whether you prostrate to me or ignore me is irrelevant. It is of no matter to me. You are prostrating to the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — which I represent.

*Not seeking the true, not rejecting the false,
Realize that both are empty and formless.
There is no form, no emptiness and no non-emptiness;
This is the true mark of the Tathagata.*

The stanza before this one describes the external appearance of a monk or nun. This stanza describes the internal attitude of a Ch'an practitioner.

If you want to get enlightened, then you will not get enlightened. The more you think about reaching Buddhahood, the further from Buddhahood you will be. If, while meditating, you have an opposing attitude toward your wandering thoughts, then you will open the door for more wandering thoughts. You should not oppose anything in your practice or while meditating.

True practitioners who have already entered the door of Ch'an do not need methods of practice. But you have not entered the door of Ch'an yet, so it is still necessary to use a method. While you meditate, if you are always aware of your method, and remember to call it back when you have lost it in a flood of wandering thoughts, that is enough. Do not think about enlightenment. Do not resist wandering thoughts. If you feel any aversion toward them, it will only create tension in your mind and body. Just keep to your method. This is the best attitude for a Ch'an practitioner. Everything is the complete totality of Buddha-nature. Why would you feel aversion toward anything?

Day 7 Mistaking One Mind for No Mind

*The mirror of mind reflects without interference;
Its vastness and clarity radiate through countless worlds.
Various phenomena all manifest themselves;
To a perfectly illumined one there is neither inside nor outside.*

The verses above describe the "no mind" state of Ch'an. If you still feel there is an inside and outside, it is not Ch'an. If you feel everything is within you, that is not Ch'an either. When the mind is not moving, it only appears that there is no mind, but this is not the case. When the mind is not moving, it is still focused on one thought. Therefore, it would be better to call the unmoving mind the "one mind" state. A person who reaches the point where the mind is not moving may feel as if he has no mind, but he is mistaken.

When only one thought remains, the movement of the mind is not noticeable. This is the "one mind" state. In the "no mind" state there is no discrimination — no inside or outside, no near or far, no good or bad. A person in the "no mind" state is aware of phenomena, but he is not attached to phenomena. If he were not aware that he was in a "no mind" state, then he would be a fool.

"No mind" is equal to wisdom; "one mind" is not. Similarly, the lower levels of samadhi are not equivalent to wisdom. A person experiencing samadhi may feel he does not discriminate, but in fact he is unaware of a steady stream of subtle discriminations. At the shallowest level of samadhi — the first dhyana level — one can experience a dozen or so discriminations in one ksana. A ksana is the length of time it takes for one wandering thought to arise, and is equivalent to one sixtieth the time it takes to snap your fingers. In the same span of time, roughly sixty discriminations pass through the ordinary mind.

Only a person in deep samadhi can tell if another person is in samadhi; he can also determine the depth of that person's samadhi. Samadhi practice is gradual. A practitioner must enter the shallowest level and then slowly deepen his samadhi through practice. As samadhi deepens,

the person is able to discern the number and frequency of discriminations that occurred at the previous levels. A practitioner in shallow samadhi cannot discern his own state. He may think he has attained "no mind," but he is wrong.

In this stanza, the mind is compared to a mirror. When there is nothing in the mind, the mind functions like a mirror. If there is something in the mind, then it cannot function purely, just as a mirror with impurities in it cannot reflect clearly. The pure mind simply reflects. Whether or not things exist outside is irrelevant. When things pass in front of the mirror, they are reflected. That is all.

The mind of the Buddha or an enlightened being includes everything, yet nothing is in its mind. Anything in the mind is like a blemish on a mirror, preventing it from reflecting clearly. Neither are things really outside the mind; rather, it is due to the existence of the mind that everything else happens, that everything else seems to exist, just as light is perceived only because it reflects off objects.

If a person's mind is truly clear, then the mind is silent. At the same time, it functions. The person's mind is no longer moved by discrimination; it is empowered by wisdom. A pure mind will interact with, or reflect on, any sentient being who comes in contact with it. However, the mind is not doing anything.

When the mind is truly clear, there is neither an inside nor an outside. If either exists, then both must exist. Things on the inside and outside cannot exist independently of each other. Furthermore, when there is an inside and outside, then there are also discriminations and obstructions. Only when there is nothing inside or out can the mind reflect like a mirror. At this time, the mind functions through wisdom. It has no intention of doing one thing and not another. It does not help one sentient being and avoid another.

This mind of wisdom transcends space and time. It does not exist in a specific point in space; it exists in every location of space. It does not exist only in this moment in time; it exists through all of time. There are no limits or boundaries. Everyone, whether or not they have karmic

affinity with the mind mirror, will be reflected in this mind. The only difference is that those who have karmic affinity will recognize that they are being reflected, whereas those who do not have this affinity will not recognize it. This is an important point: Everything, whether karmic affinity is present or not, is reflected in the mirror of the enlightened mind. Those with karmic affinity see their reflection. In other words, these people face the mirror with eyes open. Those without it have their backs turned to the mirror. They are being reflected, but they do not know it; and if they turn and face the mirror, their vision is obstructed. However, all sentient beings are reflected. They cannot be separate and apart from the mind mirror.

A disciple once asked me, "What's the purpose of reaching Buddhahood? There are already innumerable Buddhas, yet we haven't been delivered from Samsara."

I said, "The problem is not with the Buddha. Buddha offers help. We just don't recognize it. If we haven't been delivered yet, it's our problem."

The stronger your affinity with the mind mirror, the more clearly you will see your reflection. Those with a weak affinity may not recognize what they see. Nevertheless, whether the interaction is direct or indirect, clear or clouded, all who see a reflection benefit from Buddhadharma.

Participants on retreats may be able to concentrate their minds to a focused point, and they may even be able to enter elementary levels of samadhi, but it is not the same as seeing one's self-nature. Nevertheless, such beginning experiences are important and beneficial. They are the basis for good practice. Eventually, it will lead to experiencing one's self-nature or entering deep levels of samadhi.

Having a pure mind is enlightenment. An enlightened person acts through wisdom for the benefit of others. You may not understand his motives and meaning, but his actions cannot be bad. A person who goes beyond the initial experience of seeing his self-nature and reaches thorough enlightenment will not be affected by worldly desires. When a thoroughly enlightened being sees someone of the opposite sex, that person will appear no different from a man, woman, child, dog, cat,

mother or father. There are no discriminations. Such a person is not touched by the problems that plague ordinary people. A person who has seen his self-nature may experience this as well, but the experience will not be as deep or enduring. In other words, a person who initially reveals his self-nature sees for the first time the goal he will eventually reach. Having seen this goal, though it is still far away, he will have fewer problems in his actions and conduct.

The Ch'an experience of seeing one's self-nature is comparable, though not the same as, attaining the first fruit of the Hinayana path. Such Hinayana practitioners still have desires, but the desires are mild. They will not make major transgressions, such as killing others, harming others, or stealing from others. There is a saying for one who attains the first fruit of the Hinayana path: "When one plows a field, all the creatures in the ground move away from the blade." Such a person cannot kill, even accidentally. Similarly, a person who has seen his self-nature cannot create bad karma as long as the power of practice remains.

How do you reach this level of attainment? If you keep thinking about enlightenment, it will be like a trumpet blaring in your mind. It will cause great vexation. If you try to achieve anything, you will be obstructed. What matters is not your skill in meditation; neither is it those things you perceive as accomplishments. Rather, it is your attitude in the practice, and it is your concept of Buddhadharma.

If desire is your motivation for practice, then desire will be the result of your practice. If you practice with hate in your mind, then in the end you will achieve exactly what motivated you. It is important that your motivations be sincere and pure. If you practice with sexual desire as your motivation, then you will succeed in becoming a powerfully sexual being. You may be able to have sex with many partners and never grow tired. In fact, the more sex you have, the healthier you will seem. Similarly, a person who practices with hate as his motivating force would not need a gun or knife to kill. He would be able to use his mind power to kill, even if his victim lived several thousand miles away. Motivation in your practice is important. Think clearly. What are your motivations? Why do you practice?

If the motivation is impure, then the mind will remain impure. A practitioner with an impure mind cannot attain thorough enlightenment, see his self-nature, or even enter deep levels of samadhi. Naturally, his conduct will not be exemplary.

Many practitioners claim to be Buddhists, but in fact they have strayed far from Buddhadharma. There are a few masters whose behavior seems questionable. If it is true, then they are not genuine Ch'an masters. However, you should not blame the masters for your problems. Look to yourselves. It is you who do not have deep karmic affinity with Buddhadharma. When you have deeper karmic affinity, you will meet better masters, and you will eventually recognize your reflection in the mind mirror. Of course, if you feel you have karmic affinity with the Buddha, then you have already recognized something in the mirror, and you are probably here on this retreat for the right reasons.

Once you have seen your reflection, work hard. With diligent practice, you may eventually enter samadhi or see your self-nature. The harder you practice, the deeper you will penetrate your mind. You will be able to distinguish different levels of experience, just as you can now differentiate between seeing water, drinking water, jumping into water, and becoming water.

If you work hard, you may reach a point where you do not see or hear anything, but it is not necessarily samadhi. Your concentration may be strong enough to have shifted the mind from the eyes and ears, but wandering thoughts may still be in the mind. Initially, you will not know which level of samadhi you have reached, but as you enter deeper levels of samadhi, you will become clearly aware of your mental state. If you cultivate samadhi and deepen your levels of absorption, you can give yourself a "suggestion" to come out of samadhi after a certain period of time. For instance, if you tell yourself to come out of samadhi after three days, you will return from samadhi at that time. Otherwise, you will have to wait until the power of samadhi subsides. However, an external stimulus, such as a ringing bell, might be able to bring you out of samadhi.

*Attaching to emptiness, denying cause and effect,
Brings calamities beyond measure.
Rejecting existence and grasping emptiness is the same mistake,
Like jumping into a fire to avoid drowning.*

Saying there is neither an inside nor an outside can be misleading. A practitioner may mistake nihilism for freedom from obstructions. He might think that having no obstructions gives him the freedom to do anything he wants, with no constraint or self-discipline. He may drink alcohol and say, "It's only water." He may eat meat and say, "The animal's dead anyway. Besides, in eating its flesh I'm establishing karmic affinity with this sentient being." He may sleep with many women and say, "At least I'm not killing anyone. No harm done. We mutually agreed to it, and besides, it feels like liberation." This is not enlightenment. A person who tries to back up such actions with Buddhadharma is deluding himself.

An improper understanding of emptiness can lead to two dangerous attitudes. One attitude is apathy. An apathetic person feels that since everything is empty, he may as well do nothing. The second attitude may be called amorality, and is even more dangerous. A person with this attitude feels he is not bound by any moral ethic, and thinks he can do anything. Such a person can seriously harm himself and others.

Some people who study and practice Ch'an stray into these demonic realms. It is because they believe that the law of cause and consequence is empty. They are mistaken. Causes and consequences are not empty. Even greatly accomplished sages must accept the consequences for everything they do. For example, if someone practices to become a Bodhisattva, and a Bodhisattva in turn practices to become a Buddha, then Buddhahood is a consequence of the practice of these individuals. Eventually, we must accept the consequences of all our actions. If you think causes and consequences are empty, then you are in danger of falling into the demonic states I have described. Causes and conditions are empty, but causes and consequences do have existence. This is basic Buddhadharma. When Sakyamuni attained Buddhahood, his previous

karma did not disappear. His physical body still received the retribution of previous actions.

Attachment to existence and attachment to emptiness are equally incorrect. If you are attached to existence, as most people are, then you will create more and more vexations. If you are attached to emptiness, then you will reject the reality of cause and consequence, and you will end up with even more problems. Rejecting existence and attaching to emptiness is like avoiding deep water by jumping into fire.

If you discard the illusory mind and grasp the true principle,

This mind of grasping and discarding becomes clever.

Not understanding this, practitioners engage in cultivation,

Just as one mistakes a thief for his own son. In trying to understand the previous stanza, a person might think, "Since attaching to existence is illusory and attaching to emptiness is illusory, I should focus on the genuine mind instead." People in many religions try to overcome the illusory and attain the genuine. These people are fooling themselves.

We know that thoughts are illusory, but in our practice we cannot oppose these thoughts with the idea of seeking the genuine. "Genuine" is only a concept which we juxtapose with "illusory." Dropping the illusory in order to seek the genuine is just one more action of the deluded mind.

When you think in terms of real and false, dropping and seeking, you are discriminating. As long as you discriminate, you will always remain deluded. Such befuddlement is similar to mistaking a thief in the night for your son.

Discrimination always leads to bewilderment. An ignorant person may decide, "I don't like the east. I want to go west." He turns westward and begins. He walks and walks, and eventually ends up at the same spot. All he did was tire himself out. He would have been better off not moving at all. If you say you do not like the bad and that you want the good, or that you want the real and wish to rid yourself of the false, then you are like the ignorant person turning his back on the east in favor of the west.

Day 8 Wielding a Sword of Wisdom

*Loss of Dharma Wealth and the extinction of merits,
All are caused by the mind consciousness.
Through the Ch'an door, understand the cutting off of mind,
And suddenly enter the powerful view of the unborn.*

It is the activity of your mind which destroys your Dharma wealth and spiritual merit. If your mind did not engage in activity, you would immediately enter the Dharma gate of non-arising. Try to keep your mind from moving. When the mind moves, you lose. As soon as you begin to seek anything you have already suffered losses.

When Bodhidharma went to China from India, he met Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. The Emperor told Bodhidharma how much he supported and patronized Buddhism. He bragged about the temples he built and the wealth he donated to the Sangha. He asked Bodhidharma how much merit he had gained for his effort. Bodhidharma told him that he had not gained any merit at all.

The merit this poem speaks of is spiritual merit, devoid of attachment. If your mind moves — if you attach to your actions — then no spiritual merit is gained. Emperor Wu did not accumulate the spiritual merit Yung-chia describes because his actions were self-motivated. His merit was characterized by outflows. By outflows I mean action, thought or speech that is still governed by attachment. The merit in this stanza is without outflows. It is pure merit — merit that derives from liberation and absolute wisdom.

Dharma wealth is sometimes explained in terms of five types of merit. The five types of merit are precepts, samadhi, wisdom (also known as root or fundamental wisdom), liberation, and wisdom that comes from liberation (also known as acquired wisdom). Root wisdom manifests when one sees into one's self-nature, but it is not used to help sentient beings. Wisdom derived from liberation, or acquired wisdom, manifests after a person has been liberated, and it is used to help others.

Dharma wealth is not worldly wealth. Worldly wealth has form, and is governed by outflows, or attachment. It is also impermanent. The ancient city of Pompeii was buried in ash after Mount Vesuvius erupted. When it was excavated, the remains of the inhabitants were in very good condition. They found the body of a thirty year old woman. Obviously a member of the aristocracy, she was still wearing her jewelry, but it is not her wealth anymore. Her jewelry is probably sitting in a glass case in a museum. In fact, her body is probably in a museum.

Worldly wealth is subject to loss, theft, damage, decomposition, and a thousand other things. But nothing — not time, not natural forces, not human beings — can take away Dharma wealth. However, if your mind moves, the wealth is gone. Likewise, the instant your mind stops moving, you enter the door of Ch'an. And at that moment, your mind is pure; that is, there is no mind. At that moment, you instantly realize the wisdom of non-arising. Such wisdom is not subject to the cycle of birth and death.

*The great hero uses the sword of wisdom;
This prajna blade blazes like a diamond.
It not only destroys the mind of the outer paths,
But long ago frightened away the heavenly demons.*

If you are able to tell your mind to stop moving, and it does, then you are a hero or great person. But if you are unable to do this, then you are just an ordinary person.

If you are able to stop your mind you will be able to move forward in practice and reveal wisdom. Wisdom is as solid and enduring as a diamond, as sharp and powerful as a peerless sword. Wisdom functions like a vajra sword; it cuts through everything. The sword King Arthur pulled out of the stone was such a sword. If you wield this sword, then you will cut through all false teachings and subdue all heavenly demons. A person whose practice reaches this level acquires remarkable eloquence. As soon as he speaks to an audience or engages in debate, people develop strong faith in him. He has profound faith, and he also has wisdom. Such a person wields a powerful sword.

Sometimes you can be fooled, however. A person may have profound faith in his experience, but his experience may not be genuine. He may be deluding himself, and in turn, you as well. If he believes his experience is genuine, then there is a strong possibility that his experience is false, because thinking in terms of genuine and false is still delusion.

I met a person in Taiwan who had studied Transcendental Meditation for a long time, and he had absolute faith in it. He believed his experience and wisdom were profound and claimed he could see everything in the world clearly. He visited me to share ideas, but he did all the talking. I could not get a word in edgewise. Finally, I squeezed in one question, and then he took over again, rambling on for another fifteen minutes. He did not answer my question, but instead repeated all his beliefs. I asked the same question again, but he kept repeating himself. For over an hour I listened to and analyzed what he said. It boiled down to a few points which he reiterated over and over. Eventually, I had no more time to talk, or in this case, to listen. As the man left, he said, "You should believe this. You have to believe this."

No one could refute this person because he would not give anyone the opportunity. He said he had visited many teachers, but no one could stand up to him. He thinks his wisdom is immense. Actually, it is not wisdom. It is fanaticism. He does not wield a vajra sword. His sword is false, because he does not test it.

If you feel you have genuine wisdom, do not expound your ideas in uncontested monologues. If you believe you have a vajra sword, then unsheathe it and take challenges. If it gets hacked into pieces, then it obviously was not the sword you thought it was. You must put your practice and attainment to the test. The man I spoke to pulls out his sword and bellows, "Don't you dare pull out your sword!" Nobody does, because they are intimidated. That's not a challenge. He swings a false sword. Of course, his sword is not totally useless. He could use it to cut turnips and greens. But I don't think that is the kind of sword you want.

At any point in your practice, you may test your insight against Buddhist scripture. If it does not stand the test, then it is not true wisdom. However, there is a problem with this course of action. You might misinterpret the sutras and turn around the meaning to support your experience. Therefore, it is best to rely on Buddhist tradition and study with a good master.

I encouraged someone in Taiwan to study the Diamond Sutra in order to learn about Buddhism. She said she read the Diamond Sutra everyday, but she interpreted and understood it in her own way, which had little in common with the traditional Buddhist interpretation.

*Sound the Dharma thunder; beat the Dharma drum;
Spread the clouds of compassion and scatter ambrosia.
Where the elephant king treads the favors are boundless,
The three vehicles and five natures are awakened.*

This stanza explains how wisdom can help to save sentient beings by enabling them to attain and experience wisdom. Buddhism teaches the perfect equality of all beings and aims for the liberation of all sentient beings. Analogies along these lines illustrate this point.

The first two analogies are the sounds of thunder and a drum. In the past, people believed that everybody everywhere heard thunder at the same time. They did not know that thunder was a local phenomenon. They believed that in the springtime, when the first sound of thunder clapped in the sky, all beings on earth, whether sleeping, resting or hibernating, were instantly awakened. Likewise, there is a legend in India about a special drum. If you smear poison on the skin of the drum and then beat it, any enemy who hears the sound will die.

These analogies compare preaching Buddhadharma to the clap of thunder and the beating of a poison-smeared drum. The clap of thunder that awakens all beings in springtime is like Buddhadharma. The Dharma awakens all sentient beings who are lost in the dream of vexation by showing them the truths of Buddhism. The poison-smeared drum is likened to the Buddhadharma's ability to destroy the false views of outer path followers and demons.

In the second line, the cloud of compassion is like a cloud which temporarily covers the relentless rays of the sun on a sweltering day. When the sun is covered by clouds on a hot day, people are relieved. The heat produced by the brilliant sun is like the suffering produced by vexation, and the cloud that covers the earth and shields sentient beings is Buddhadharma.

I have met people suffering so greatly from mental vexations that they have contemplated suicide. But after hearing the Dharma, they felt better and regained the will to live. A disciple came to see me a while back. She had recently been divorced and her children were visiting her ex-husband and his new wife. She was so despondent that she considered suicide. I asked her to participate in the winter retreat. At first she refused because, as she said, "I don't want to practice. I want to die."

I said, "Please come to the retreat first. After it's over, if you still want to kill yourself, I won't try to stop you." By the third day of the retreat her condition was much better, and by the end of the retreat she felt reborn. She told me her life was starting over again. Since then, things have been wonderful for her. The burning discomfort of mental vexation that she felt was soothed and lessened by the Dharma, just as clouds diminish the searing heat of a relentless sun.

If there were no clouds or dew in an arid region, nothing would survive. One drop of dew is enough to sustain life. So it is with sentient beings who are plagued moment after moment by the heat of vexation. The smallest amount of Buddhadharma is enough to encourage them to continue to practice. It nourishes practice and helps it to grow.

Ambrosia is the fourth image in this stanza. Supposedly, ambrosia is a magical nectar that grants immortality to the person who drinks it. Buddhadharma is like ambrosia. If you drink ambrosia, your physical body will not die. If you embody the teachings of Buddhism, then your wisdom will be eternal.

A person who has revealed true wisdom and uses it to spread Buddhadharma to help sentient beings is called an elephant king. The

elephant, especially a white elephant, is an auspicious animal. Queen Maya dreamt about a six-tusked white elephant at the time of Buddha's conception. The elephant king is a special, spiritual elephant that is not bound by worldly conditions. It flies above the world. A great Ch'an practitioner is an elephant king. Even though he lives among humans and other sentient beings, he is not subject to suffering. Like the elephant king, the enlightened Ch'an practitioner is not affected by the restrictions of the mundane world. He rises above them and helps all those who have karmic affinity with him.

Originally, only the Buddha was an elephant king, but his disciples who followed in his footsteps became elephant kings as well. Buddha was a prince, but he did not want to grow up to be a king. Others tried to persuade him to abandon his desire to become a monk, but he refused to listen. In the course of his practice, he was attacked by legions of demons. Some came as soldiers who tried to frighten him. Others came as beautiful women who tried to seduce him. He prevailed in every situation. He was not attached to the power of kingship; he was not attached to fear of pain and death; he was not attached to desires of the flesh. He transcended all worldly desires and became an elephant king. He became the Buddha. If a person cannot achieve what the Buddha achieved, then he is not an elephant king. He is a baby elephant who wields a sword that cuts only turnips.

The three vehicles spoken of in the last line of the stanza are Bodhisattvas, sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. They are also incorporated within the two vehicle system of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism.

The first three natures belong to those beings who are destined to become Bodhisattvas, sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. These beings cannot change or digress from the course they are on. The fourth nature belongs to beings who are not necessarily destined to attain any of the three vehicles. They may attain enlightenment, or they may not. They can digress from the path. The fifth nature belongs to those who are not destined to attain any of the three vehicles. Such beings have not cultivated good karmic roots or karmic affinity with Buddhadharma.

However, according to the Ch'an tradition, anybody, no matter which nature they have at the moment, can attain enlightenment and become a Buddha.

*The pinodhi grass in the snow mountains is unmixed;
I often enjoy the pure ghee it produces.*

The snow mountains refer to the Himalayas. The Nirvana Sutra mentions an herb called pinodhi grass (fei-ni in Chinese) which grows in these mountains. If a cow eats this grass, then the milk she produces will be like ghee, or refined butter. In this analogy, the pure essence of the pinodhi grass cannot be produced artificially. The pinodhi grass represents the precious essence of Buddhist teachings. Drinking the special ghee has the same effect as sipping ambrosia. A person who practices Ch'an and attains enlightenment will be able to teach the Dharma, and no matter what he says, it will always be the essence of Buddhadharma.

When I lead a Ch'an retreat, I often feel as if I were a mother cow producing milk for her calves. As the calves suck, the mother grows skinny while they grow big and strong. I feel like that mother cow after a Ch'an retreat — a little thinner and weaker. It would be great if all I did was eat pinodhi grass and that everything I said was like ghee. But when all is said and done, some people still do not benefit much.

Some people just do not understand. Give them ginseng and they think it's a carrot. Feed them ghee and they think it's lard. Of course they benefit even if they do not understand, but not as much as they would if they knew what they were doing, and why they were doing it.

Buddhism says that all sentient beings are equal. However, at any time only some people have karmic affinity with Buddhadharma. Those beings with karmic affinity encounter the Dharma, appreciate it, understand it, and benefit immensely. But you cannot force someone to understand what he or she reads, and you cannot coerce anyone into practicing. Although all sentient beings are equal, some receive more benefit from Buddhadharma than others.

Day 9 The Elusiveness of Buddha-nature

One nature perfectly pervades all natures:

One Dharma includes all dharmas.

One moon appears in all waters;

The moons reflected in all waters are one.

Long ago my mother told me, "You are the youngest of my seven children, but from first to last, you were all equally painful. There was no difference in my suffering, yet you are all different. Some of you are clever, some thickheaded, some of you misbehave, some behave. This is all your own doing. It was not something I could predict. I never had anything to say about whether I would have a boy or girl. Each child took completely different things from me. Some of you are growing up better looking than others. Your sister complained to me, 'Ma, how come you made me so ugly?' I told her, 'That's your business. You're the one who's growing up ugly. I don't have anything to do with it.'"

A great Ch'an master saves all beings equally by giving each one an equal gift of Buddhadharma. He regards all sentient beings as the same. All beings are perfectly equal. All are unified in Buddha-nature, because Buddha-nature is universal. But what each person does with this gift of Buddhadharma is different.

Water is water, no matter where it is. Whether a dew drop or an ocean, it is still water. Buddha-nature is in your body and in mine, in a dog, a pig, the grass. Buddha-nature is everywhere the same. Dog shit has the same Buddha-nature as did Sakyamuni Buddha. There is no difference. If you look closely enough, you will see in all things the same thing, and everything. There is no difference between a grain of sand and King Solomon's treasures.

Of course, if you preached this idea on the street, people would think you were crazy. These verses explain an ultimate principle, not everyday phenomena. If you think it is okay to go to the bathroom and bow to the toilet instead of to the Buddha, think again.

A disciple of Master Hsuan-hua in California heard the master make a similar statement, so at dinnertime he put a piece of shit on the dinner table. Master Hsuan-hua asked, "What are you doing?"

The disciple then reprimanded him: "See, that's discrimination! You have a discriminating mind!" After that incident, Master Hsuan-hua told him to leave. This particular monk thought highly of himself, and instead of listening to his master's instructions, he insisted on doing things his own way. He was not interested in learning; he only wanted to challenge the master. In the case of this story, he failed to understand that the principle, or noumenal realm, is different from the phenomenal realm. Master Hsuan-hua explained, "You don't put shit on the dinner table. Sakyamuni never ate shit. When I say shit and Sakyamuni are the same, I am talking about a realization that comes through practice. I am not talking about the concrete world. In the phenomenal world, phenomena are still phenomena. Sakyamuni is still Sakyamuni, shit is still shit." An enlightened person understands and acknowledges that the world of phenomena is not the same as the principle.

*The Dharma body of all Buddhas enters my nature,
Which is the same as the Tathagata's.
One stage encompasses all stages,
Not form nor mind nor karmic act. Eighty thousand doors are
completed in the snap of the fingers,
In a flash three kalpas are extinguished.
What do numbers, expressions, and their negations
Have to do with my spiritual awakening?*

Seeing dog shit as Sakyamuni, or treating Sakyamuni like dog shit, is wrong. You cannot express the Dharma body or Buddhadharma in any form, shape, or matter, nor can you express it in any kind of behavior. This does not mean that Dharma nature is separate or different from these things. You cannot view Dharma nature apart from matter and behavior, but you also cannot say that form, matter, mind, or behavior is the Dharma body. All of these things are illusory and impermanent. Every internal and external dharma perfectly accords with the Dharma

body, but no single, isolated phenomenon can account for the totality of the Dharma body.

When Yung-chia says that the Dharma body of all Buddhas enters his nature, he is correct, because his nature is in no way different from the nature of all Buddhas. But if you were to say, "I am identical with the Dharma body of all Buddhas," or, "All the Dharma bodies of all Buddhas are within me," then you are mistaken. To say that you are never apart from the Dharma body of all the Buddhas is correct, but you cannot claim that you are the Dharma body of all the Buddhas.

Your nature, my nature, and the nature of the Buddhas are one — combined and never apart — so it is impossible to point to something in yourself and say, "This is my own nature," and point elsewhere and say, "That is the nature of the Buddhas." You cannot separate them.

Mist and ice may be in different physical states, but they are still water. The water in milk is the same as the water in tea, and it is the same as the water in my body and in the ground outside. It can manifest in infinite ways, amounts, and places, but its basic nature is water. In the same way, the Tathagata's nature is the same as your nature.

Even though we speak of unlimited Dharma gates, innumerable Buddhas, and infinite manifestations of Buddha-nature, if in a single moment you realize your true nature, then you come face to face with all the Tathagatas and Buddhas. It means that you are not separate from them.

The realization of Buddha-nature is the same no matter what stage of practice you are at. The essence of Buddha-nature is always the same. You might drink coffee, but you would not drink someone else's spit; however, the water in them is the same. What you attain at one stage of realization is the same as what you attain at any other stage. At the first stage, perhaps you attain a cup of spit. Be happy, it's a start. At least at base it is water. At the next stage you might get a glass of plain water, and at a later stage, perhaps a pot of freshly brewed coffee. One person might use a little cup, and receive only a few drops of water. Another

person might use a barrel. The water is the same but the vessel is different. What each person obtains is the same, yet different.

Remember, true nature is the essence, not the amount. You may experience true nature without a long period of practice; it is possible to acquire everything in a single instant of your life. It is the same as equating all of King Solomon's treasures with a single grain of sand. The nature or essence of a grain of sand is inherent in everything else. It would be wrong to say that a grain of sand has a small Buddha-nature whereas a mountain has a large Buddha-nature. If I yank your finger, I can say it is only your finger, but I am pulling all of you. Your hair is still you. If I were to pull only a few strands, I bet you would agree with me.

My explanations, as well as this poem, are unsatisfactory. It may help you to understand Buddhadharma a little, but once you experience the principle, you will realize how inadequate words are. The last lines in the stanzas above remind us of this. Debates, disputes and discourses have nothing to do with the genuine experience. The most eloquent speech comes from a moving mind. Only when your mind is unmoving does wisdom manifest.

*It is not perishable and cannot be praised,
Its substance is like limitless space.
Without leaving where it is, it is constantly clear.
When seeking, you know it cannot be found.
It cannot be grasped, nor can it be discarded;
It is obtained only in the unobtainable.*

It is impossible to attain Buddha-nature by grasping for it. Buddha-nature is not something that can be explained or praised. It is as big as empty space and as small as empty space. It contains everything. In the quickest snap of one's fingers every moment of time is present within it. How can one possibly praise something that is beyond comprehension?

No matter where you are, it is possible to perceive Buddha-nature. But the instant you chase after it, it is gone; you will not be able to find it.

Buddha-nature can neither be grasped nor discarded. Only when it is unobtainable can it be obtained. As you can imagine, there is not much one can say about this. So if you cannot attain it, how do you attain it? How can you attain something by not attaining it? In truth, there is no attainment. Buddha-nature is here right from the start.

My question is, "Where is your mind?"

I will tell you something about Buddha-nature: When there is no mind, that is it. But when you put your mind on Buddha-nature, it's gone.

Day 10 No Such Thing as True or False

*Speaking in silence, silent in speech,
The door of giving is wide open without obstruction.
If someone asks what basic principle I interpret,
I will say it is the power of Mahaprajna. Others do not know
whether I am right or wrong,
Even devas cannot fathom whether I oppose or agree.
I have practiced for many kalpas;
I am not deceiving you as some idlers are.*

These verses describe the behavior of a person who has attained Great Enlightenment. He is the way he is. It does not matter what other people say about him or how they treat him. He cannot be influenced or forced to change in any way. A practitioner like this is the greatest of benefactors, the greatest giver of ultimate Dharma.

There are three kinds of donations: giving material wealth, giving Dharma, and giving non-action. Ordinary people give material wealth. Intelligent people give Dharma. People with great wisdom and merit give non-action. The person described in these verses is of the third category. Intelligent people must speak in order to give Dharma, but whether a great Ch'an master speaks or not does not matter. He is still giving. Speaking, he gives; not speaking, he gives.

An enlightened person with great merit can give people anything they need. Jesus Christ was extremely poor, yet those who followed him always had food to eat. If you do not have anything or want anything, then when you need something it will be there. If you were to ask a great practitioner how he is able to do these things, he would answer, "I don't know or understand anything in particular. The power is not mine; it is the power of Mahaprajna, or great wisdom." Great wisdom does not belong to the practitioner. He does not have or want anything. If he claimed to have any power, then it would be pride, not wisdom. Wisdom does not belong to him, or me or you. If it were your wisdom, it would be as limited as you are.

A great Ch'an practitioner may seem right, wrong, unfathomable, even crazy. A Dharma teacher once complained to me about a Ch'an master. "The guy's crazy," he said. "When you talk about existence, he talks about non-existence. When you talk about self, he talks about no-self. If you begin talking about non-existence, then he talks about existence. You can't win. Everytime you say something, he says the opposite. If I were you, I wouldn't pay any attention to him. He's nuts!"

This particular Ch'an master does not necessarily act that way with everyone, nor does he act like that all the time. It depends on the situation. Sometimes he may seem normal. He may say ordinary things. Other times he may appear to be completely irrational. You cannot judge such a person.

In the daytime you might find him prostrating to a Buddha statue, and at night chopping it up for firewood. He might free an animal ready to be slaughtered and then sit down to a hot bowl of chicken soup. There is no standard of behavior you can measure him against.

There was a modern Ch'an master called the Living Buddha of Gold Mountain. A rich man asked him to help his daughter who was dying from tuberculosis. The doctors had given up on her. When the master reached her bedside, he gathered her in his arms and kissed her full on the lips. She struggled to get away, and others tried to stop him, but he held tight for ten minutes. Then he let go, turned around and vomited a

pile of putrid, black filth. The people were shocked and disgusted. They asked how he could stand to suck it out of her. He said, "What's so awful about this? As a matter of fact, it's quite good." He scooped the filth up, fried it and ate it. By the way, the girl was cured.

I do not think you would consider him an ordinary person. What he says and does may have no rhyme or reason, but you do not have the power of practice to understand. His actions are backed by the experience of long-time practice. You cannot understand him, much less imitate him. If you kissed someone dying of tuberculosis, you would probably die too.

*Setting up the Dharma banner, establishing the basic principle,
Ts'ao Ch'i clearly followed the Buddha's decree.*

The first one to pass on the lamp was Mahakasyapa;

In India it was transmitted through twenty-eight generations.

The Dharma flowed east and entered this land

Where Bodhidharma was the First Patriarch.

*Six generations transmitted the robe, as heard throughout the
land,*

And those who later attained the Tao cannot be counted.

This stanza describes the transmission of Dharma in the Ch'an school — transmission not through words. The Dharma banner is a long, circular tube of cloth that hangs from the eaves of temple roofs. The banner is a sign to let people know what is happening in such places. Yung-chia uses it as a symbol to show that Ch'an does not rely on words or language, but on direct comprehension.

The stanza says that Ch'an was transmitted through direct comprehension from the time of the Buddha to the Sixth Patriarch, of whom Yung-chia was a contemporary. In India there were twenty-eight generations of patriarchs, starting with Mahakasyapa. The 28th Patriarch was Bodhidharma, and he became the First Patriarch in China. Hui-neng (Ts'ao-ch'i) was the Sixth Patriarch in China. This does not mean that only patriarchs have attained enlightenment. There have been many practitioners before and after Bodhidharma who have realized Ch'an.

The truth does not stand, the false is originally empty.

*When both existence and non-existence are swept away, not empty
is empty.*

The twenty empty doors teach non-attachment.

The nature of all Tathagatas is one; their substance is the same.

There is no such thing as true and false. They are one and the same. For the Tathagata, true and false are equally the essence of his nature. One cannot speak of true and false as separate things.

It is not correct to say that truth and falsehood exist externally, nor is it correct to say that truth and falsehood exist only in the mind. To understand this, you must first realize the emptiness of truth and falsehood. Then you must realize the negation of the emptiness of truth and falsehood. At this point, there are no more words. If you can still talk about it, then there is still an emptiness to be emptied.

You can approach emptiness from many angles. The poem mentions twenty types, but Yung-chia does not name them. Yung-chia probably derives these twenty types of emptiness from the eighteen emptinesses described in the Mahaprajnaparamita Sutra, which are: (1)internal emptiness; (2) external emptiness; (3)both internal and external emptiness; (4)emptiness of emptiness; (5)great emptiness; (6)ultimate emptiness; (7)emptiness of existence; (8)emptiness of non-existence; (9)limitless emptiness; (10)boundless emptiness; (11) emptiness of the undeniable; (12) emptiness of original nature; (13) emptiness of all elements of existence; (14) emptiness of form; (15) emptiness of the unobtainable; (16) emptiness of nothingness; (17) emptiness of self-nature; (18) emptiness of no self-nature.

There are many such categories, but they are all different ways to express the same thing — emptiness. Self-nature is empty. Your self-nature is the emptiness of self-nature.

The mind is a sense organ; dharmas are its object.

The two are like marks on a mirror.

Once the dust is rubbed off, the light begins to appear.

When both mind and dharmas are forgotten, this is true nature.

In this stanza, Yung-chia is talking about the process of practice. The mind does not move on its own. The mind moves because it comes into contact with external phenomena. Phenomena can be broken down into two categories: mental dharmas — those within the mind; and material dharmas — objects with form and shape. The mind interacts with external, material dharmas through the sense organs. The motion of mind is, in itself, a mental dharma, but here the poem is discussing external dharmas, or form.

External dharmas are sometimes called sense objects. Actually, the literal translation of the Chinese term is "sense dust." Once the mind perceives external dharmas, a series of mental dharmas — which are sense objects of the sixth consciousness — is triggered. Mental dharmas by themselves can also trigger other mental dharmas. Any mental activity or external phenomenon that influences the mind can be considered sense dust. It is this sense dust which accumulates and conceals the mind mirror.

When there is no interaction with external dharmas, then there are no mental dharmas. When form leads to sensation, and sensation to perception and conception, then a chain of associations, or mental dharmas, takes off in the mind, and the external object is left behind. Once the mind moves, it will continue to roll along, powered by its own activity. If the mind does not move, then both the internal and external disappear. When the interaction between internal mental activities and external form ceases, wisdom appears. At that time there is neither a mind nor any dharma to be found.

If mind and dharma are no longer there, then what are they to begin with? They are none other than Buddha-nature.

Day 11 The Flexibility of Ch'an Practitioners

Oh, in this evil world in the Dharma-ending age,

*Sentient beings have little fortune and are hard to discipline.
Far away from the time of the sages, perverted views run deep.
When demons are strong and Dharma is weak,
fears and dangers abound.
When they hear the teaching of sudden enlightenment of the
Tathagata,
They cannot but want to destroy it, to smash the tiles.*

In these lines of verse, Yung-chia describes the behavior and attitudes of the people around him during the T'ang dynasty. Buddhist tradition divides the time after the Buddha into three eras. The first era, which lasted for five hundred years after the Buddha passed into Nirvana, is called the Period of True Dharma. The second era, which lasted five hundred years after the first, is called the Period of Counterfeit Dharma. The third era, beginning one thousand years after the Buddha entered Nirvana, is called the Dharma Ending Age.

The Dharma Ending Age began around the time of the six dynasties in Chinese history, before Yung-chia lived. Few people had good karmic roots, and most people had a difficult time accepting Buddhadharma. Yung-chia saw the decadence, and concluded that as time separates us from Sakyamuni Buddha, people sink deeper and deeper into perverted views; the strength of demons outweighs the strength of Buddhadharma.

At that time, Confucianists viciously attacked Buddhism. Furthermore, the ruling family of the T'ang Dynasty traced its lineage to Lao-tse, the founder of Taoism, and so it patronized Taoism, not Buddhism. Confucianism was adopted as the code of ethics and protocol, and Taoism was recognized as the official religion; therefore, Buddhism was attacked from all sides.

Nonetheless, Buddhism had loyal supporters and benefactors. Devoted patrons donated large sums of money, and because monks and nuns have few needs and lived simple lives, the wealth of monasteries grew rapidly. Confucianism did not receive donations because it had no clearly structured organizations, and because Confucian scholars lived and worked in society. The same, more or less, was true for the Taoists.

Followers of these traditions envied the immense wealth of Buddhist monasteries and they influenced the government to persecute monks and nuns.

Detractors wanted to destroy Buddhism quickly and absolutely.

In the following stanza, therefore, Yung-chia issued a warning.

That which acts is the mind, that which receives retribution is the body;

No need to put the blame on others.

If you want to escape continuous karma,

Do not slander the Tathagata's wheel of right Dharma.

Master Yung-chia warns that those who harbor evil thoughts about the Dharma are harming themselves, because they will have to suffer the consequences of the bad karma they create. You are responsible for all of your willful thoughts, words and actions. If you wish to slander Buddhadharma, or harm anyone for that matter, it is your choice, but you should not blame anyone or anything if events turn against you. You reap what you sow, so be careful which karmic seeds you plant.

Unfortunately, in Yung-chia's time many people did not heed the warning, and they took delight in slandering Buddhism; but through all the persecutions, Ch'an survived. Why did Ch'an flourish when so many other Buddhist schools died out? One reason is that Ch'an was already deeply rooted in Chinese culture. More importantly, however, is that it is hard to find a weak point in Ch'an. In fact, if you attack Ch'an, you will discover that there is nothing to lay your hands on. From a theoretical standpoint, there are no concrete tenets that one can identify and refute. From a practical point of view, Ch'an never singles out one specific style or behavior to which all followers must conform.

History records that the Chinese government tried to stamp out Buddhism at certain times during the T'ang, Sung, Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties; and the zeal of the communists' persecution of Buddhists in this century was unparalleled in Chinese history. During these harsh times, monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life, and monasteries

were confiscated or put to other uses. Some monuments survived, but many texts, records and icons were destroyed.

Even though Buddhism was not always welcomed in China, there was no other country, aside from India perhaps, where Buddhism developed such widespread cultural power and influence. Tibetan Buddhism remained remote and sequestered until recent time. The Southern Buddhist tradition also kept to itself. Most Buddhist material was written in China, and from there it spread to Korea, Vietnam, Japan and other parts of Asia. These countries relied heavily on the Chinese tradition, which in turn was most influenced by Ch'an Buddhism.

Ch'an survived during the worst of times. If Ch'an practitioners could not enter the cities, they stayed in the mountains. If they had to, they wore civilian clothes and let their hair grow. They did not care if they were told to return to lay life.

Appearances are not important. True practitioners are concerned only with their practice. In all other things they are flexible. There is a saying: "If you cannot get food from donations, plant your own."

Ch'an has survived because of its invincible spirit. Ch'an would survive even if there were no sutras to read or temples to live in, because they are not essential to the practice. If one person practices, then another will practice with him, and it will continue and spread. It is that simple. Buddhism, especially Ch'an, is indestructible because it is flexible. It is formless.

There are no other trees in the sandalwood forest.

The lion lives in luxuriant dense thickets.

He strolls along in the quiet woods,

All other animals and birds keep their distance.

A crowd of animals follows the lion,

Who can roar at the age of three.

If a wild fox challenges the Dharma King,

It is like a monster opening his mouth for a hundred years.

Persecution cannot destroy Buddhism because the essence of practice is inner cultivation, not exterior ritual. If a nun is forced to return to the laity, she can do so and still practice. If she is forbidden to transmit the Dharma, she will say, "That's fine with me. There's nothing to transmit." Those who try to ruin Buddhism in debate run into a similar problem. Ch'an does not depend on language, logic and knowledge, thus it is impossible to attack. In the end, even the most stubborn detractor must give up in exasperation. Oppressing Ch'an is a waste of time and effort.

Analogies in the stanzas above illustrate this point. Sandalwood is precious. It can be used as a medicine or incense, and its wood can be crafted into fine furniture. Furthermore, sandalwood forests are rarely invaded or taken over by other types of trees. Buddhism and the Dharma are like a sandalwood forest.

The mature lion represents the Buddha, and the animals represent persecutors and practitioners of other traditions. The mature lion reigns supreme in the forest. Although animals run in fear from the adult, they cautiously welcome the younger, three year old lion — a Ch'an master — as a playmate. Practitioners of other traditions would not dare take chances with the Buddha himself, but they might have a go of it with a Ch'an master. The three year old, however, is still a lion. Even at that young age it can roar, and when it does, other animals are filled with fear.

In comparison to a Ch'an master, a Ch'an practitioner is like a tiny, baby cub. Yet, even though a practitioner is not a master, he is still a lion; therefore, he should not fear attackers.

Once, a cunning fox tricked other animals into fighting each other. At the end of the melee, the elephant was the victor, but before the dust could settle, the fox jumped on the elephant's back and declared itself king. When the young lion saw the fox do this, it became upset and let out a thunderous roar. The fox was scared so badly it fell off the elephant's back. When the fox got up it declared a new law, "It is okay to fight, but lions aren't allowed to roar!" In the same way, if a Ch'an master utters even one sentence, attackers will stop.

When the great T'ang poet, Po Chu-i was an important official, he visited Ch'an master Niao-ch'ao, who was perched in a tree like a bird in its nest. Po Chu-i called to the meditating master, "Be careful, monk! It's dangerous sitting up there!"

Niao-ch'ao answered, "Official, it is you who are in mortal peril."

Po Chu-i was surprised by the answer, and he said, "I'm the administrator for this entire region. I have the army to protect me. How can I be in danger?"

Niao-ch'ao replied, "You are made of air, fire, water and earth, but the four elements are thieves. You're in danger."

Po Chu-i was struck by the master's words. He realized that, whereas Niao-ch'ao was practicing hard, he was doing nothing, so he asked, "Do you have any advice that I can follow?"

Niao-ch'ao said, "Refrain from doing evil. Strive to do good deeds."

Po Chu-i was offended: "Even little children know that."

Niao-ch'ao answered, "A child of three might know it, but even an eighty year old can't do it."

Hearing this, Po Chu-i prostrated to the master.

At least Po Chu-i visited Niao-ch'ao with good intentions. Others have studied Buddhism with the intention of destroying the Dharma; but Buddhism welcomes people who begin with a strong determination to kill the Buddha intellectually. In the end, they usually become Buddhists. They are different from irrational people who want to destroy Buddhism for no apparent reason. Ignorant people have no desire to understand things. They act out of blind hatred. Fortunately, they cannot mount an effective offensive; they attack the external form — the monasteries. When they do this, the monks and nuns disappear. They let their hair grow and work the fields, but they go right on practicing. Practice is what is important, and it is indestructible.

Day 12 A Correct View Is the Compass for Proper Practice

*The teaching of complete sudden enlightenment is not to be used
as a favor.*

All unsettled doubts must be debated until clear.

Not that I, a mountain monk, want to be presumptuous.

*But cultivation may make you fall into the pit of cessation and
permanence.*

A Ch'an practitioner must have a clear, correct view of himself, others and his practice. There is a Ch'an proverb which emphasizes that the perspective one achieves, and not practice, is of utmost importance. This of course does not mean that practice is unnecessary. Practice is important, perhaps even crucial, but the insight one derives from practice is even more important. If one's view is incorrect, one will stray from Ch'an teachings to heterodox teachings.

If a ship relied solely on a compass for navigation, what would happen if the compass broke, marking north for south, east for west? The captain would not be able to steer the ship correctly. If a U.S. aircraft did not navigate properly and strayed into enemy air space, it might well be fired upon.

Practice is the course taken, but the insight derived from practice is the compass by which the course is set and checked. Ch'an does not downplay practice, but it regards the insight derived from practice more highly than practice itself, because practice needs correct orientation and guidance. If you have any problems or doubts in your practice, you should straighten them out right away. If you sense that someone else's outlook is off base, you should try to steer that person back onto the right path. Of course, Yung-chia is speaking from the point of view of an enlightened practitioner. On this retreat and in your daily practice you should be careful about what you say, think or do regarding Ch'an. Even with his deep insight, Yung-chia claims to be only a humble mountain monk. He is not presumptuous.

A widely respected master may still have questions about his practice, but he might feel ashamed to seek advice for fear of losing his disciples'

respect. If a person's view is off base, then he must be set straight regardless of his rank or stature. The true path of Buddhism is too important to be hindered by personal relations or feelings.

After Hui-neng formally received the robe and bowl from the Fifth Patriarch, he lived in the mountains for fifteen years, after which time he returned to the city to preach. When he arrived at the Dharma Nature Temple in Canton, two of Abbot Yin-tsung's disciples were arguing about a banner flapping in the breeze. One said, "The wind is moving." The other said, "The banner is moving."

Hui-neng immediately perceived that the monks had problems understanding their practice, and that the master had problems as well. Hui-neng corrected the monks, "It is not the wind. It is not the banner. It is your minds that are moving." Later, when Yin-tsung heard this answer, he asked Hui-neng to teach him even though, outwardly, Hui-neng appeared to be a layman. After hearing his teachings, Yin-tsung realized that Hui-neng was the missing Sixth Patriarch. He shaved Hui-neng's head to make him a monk, and then became Hui-neng's disciple.

Hui-neng did not hesitate to correct Yin-tsung's misunderstanding of the Dharma even though Yin-tsung was recognized as a great master and had a large following. Also, Yin-tsung did not let his accomplishments and official rank go to his head. When he realized he had problems with his practice, he immediately asked Hui-neng for help.

Ordinary Buddhists might not have the courage and honesty of Yin-tsung. Monks and nuns usually do not permit anyone except their own teacher to lecture on the Dharma in their temple. Some people like to argue, twisting ideas to suit their beliefs. They try to wrangle you with pat answers and formulas: "Vexations are golden;" "Good is bad;" "Samsara is Nirvana."

The most infamous person in Buddha's time was Devadatta. His evil was so great that he resided in the worst hell. Sakyamuni Buddha sent Ananda to talk to Devadatta. When Ananda arrived in hell, he asked Devadatta, "Are you suffering here?"

Devadatta replied, "It's as cool and pleasurable as the fourth dhyana."

Ananda asked, "Do you want to leave this place?"

Devadatta answered, "Why don't you send Buddha down here to ask me himself?"

Ananda relayed Devadatta's message to Sakyamuni Buddha, who could easily have gone to hell as did Ananda, said, "How can I possibly go to hell?"

Later, when Devadatta received this answer, he asked, "If Buddha cannot come to hell, how can I leave it?"

The truth is that Buddha is everywhere, so he did not have to go. Devadatta did not leave hell because he realized Buddha was already there, and that there was no place to go. Going and coming are the same. Hell is as good a place as any. Nirvana is not apart from hell; therefore there is no hell to leave.

You might think that Devadatta was evil incarnate, but Sakyamuni considered him a Bodhisattva of the highest order, destined for Buddhahood. If you had the incorrect view — the conventional view — then you would perceive Devadatta as an evil being who will suffer incredible torment in hell because of his evil deeds, and that Sakyamuni would not go to hell because he is a being of goodness. But if you had the correct view — the Ch'an view — then you would see it as the Buddha perceived it.

If a person has problems with his practice, you should help him. If he has wrong ideas or perverted views, then you should be even quicker to help him. A person who misunderstands the story about Devadatta should be straightened out. However, you must be sure that you have clear and correct intentions when you correct someone.

Buddhism guards against two fundamental misconceptions. One is nihilism: the idea that everything is non-existent and meaningless. The other is a belief in permanence, or eternalism: the idea that inside yourself is an eternal soul; that the soul is you — your ego — and it

endures forever, either in heaven, or from one birth to another, changing bodies as one changes clothes. People who believe this say that the soul remains untouched and unchanging through countless births, and they believe that by performing good deeds, it will attain higher and higher levels through each life, until eventually the unchanging soul becomes a deity.

The nihilistic view is wrong in presuming that there is no cause and effect, no karma, no relationship between present, past and future. When people are born, they appear out of nowhere, and when they die, nothing remains. Some people with this belief are very ambitious in life, and they try to accomplish something grand, so that at least their names and deeds will live on. It can be good, but it can also be terrible, as in the case of Hitler.

The eternalistic point of view is more benevolent because people with this belief emphasize doing good deeds and accumulating positive merit.

If an enlightened person meets someone leaning in either of these directions, he will try to help the person from falling headlong into either trap. On the other hand, Buddhism does not advocate evangelism. We do not knock on people's doors. Preachers of other faiths often burst into Buddhist temples in Taiwan and evangelize. It sometimes happens to me, even while I am in the middle of a Dharma gathering. Preachers stand at the exits handing out pamphlets. Once, one of my students asked an evangelist, "Why don't you come inside and listen to a lecture?"

The preacher said, "It says in the Bible, 'Thou shalt not worship false gods or idols.' Buddhism is paganism, and the Bible prohibits my listening to it."

Not all preachers are like this. Most are open-minded, but a few, as in this case, tend to be fanatical. Buddhists with the proper attitude are not like this. We do not force our ideas on anyone.

*Wrong is not wrong; right is not right;
The slightest deviation veers a thousand miles off course.
If right, the dragon maiden becomes Buddha at once;*

If wrong, the monk Suraksatra falls alive into hell.

If you leave the path of Ch'an, even by a hair's breadth, you are completely wrong, and can plummet to hell like the unfortunate monk, Suraksatra. If you are right, then you are completely right, like the dragon maiden who instantaneously attained complete Buddhahood.

A person may turn things upside down and say something is right when it is actually wrong, or say something is wrong when it is actually right. How can you judge what is right and wrong? Can you say there is no Buddha, no Dharma, no Sangha, no enlightenment?

It depends on who you are and who you say it to. I would not say such things to most people. It would be absolutely wrong to do so. But I would say it to a person who had been practicing hard and had gotten some results from his practice. Before saying anything, however, I would make sure his view, or understanding, is correct. If a student is practicing hard, but with the idea that he is becoming enlightened, and his teacher says, "Yes! Yes, you're correct! You should try to become enlightened, reach Nirvana and become a Buddha," the student's practice will be ruined. It would be an evil thing to do.

A phrase may help or hurt, depending on the person and the condition he is in. Let me ask you a question: Do you believe there is a Buddha, or do you prostrate just for the exercise? If you believe that there really is a Buddha, and you practice so that you can become a Buddha, and you prostrate in order to appease the Buddha because you rely completely on him, then you are in for trouble.

This stanza mentions two stories from Buddhist scripture. The first illustrates that if your view is correct, then you are instantly enlightened. In the Lotus Sutra there is a story of an eight year old naga maiden who became a Buddha. A naga is a dragon, not a human being. According to the Hinayana tradition, it is impossible for anyone to become a Buddha who is not male, an adult, and human. You must cultivate practice for three asamkha kalpas (one asamkha kalpa is billions of years). When your karma ripens, you will be born as a human male, and as an adult

you may attain enlightenment through practice. It seems that the naga maiden had three strikes against her.

Once, she was attending Sakyamuni Buddha, and she offered him her pearl necklace. The maiden turned to Sariputra, an arhat and disciple of the Buddha, and asked, "What do you think, Sariputra, is this an easy thing to do?"

Sariputra answered, "Yes, it is easy."

Then the dragon maiden said, "Becoming a Buddha is as easy as this." In that instant, she became a Buddha in a distant realm of the universe.

If you cut off the past and future, and discover that the present does not exist either, at that moment there is no mind. This itself is becoming a Buddha. But if, in the next instant, mind, past, future and present return, then you are again an ordinary sentient being.

The second story is about Suraksatra, one of Sakyamuni's sons. Suraksatra was an accomplished monk. Upon realizing the fourth dhyana level, he thought he had entered Nirvana. Unfortunately, he never asked the Buddha for verification. He had heard the Buddha's sutras, and he thought he understood the teachings, so he did not bother to inquire about his experience. One of his friends caused his power of samadhi to dissipate, so he dropped from the fourth dhyana level. He wondered, "How can I slide back from Nirvana?" His vexations returned, and he thought, "How is this possible? The Buddha is deceiving people. Nirvana is not genuine!"

Suraksatra was too arrogant to go to Sakyamuni for guidance and advice. He convinced himself that Nirvana was not real and that Buddha was a fraud, and his heart filled with hatred.

As soon as he perceived Suraksatra's thoughts, Sakyamuni sent out his disciple, Kasyapa, and told him to calm Suraksatra until he could see him. But Suraksatra would not be appeased. He ranted and raved at Kasyapa, and when the Buddha arrived he cursed him and his teachings. At that moment, the earth opened up and Suraksatra plummeted to hell.

These stories symbolize two important points in Buddhism. First, listen to the Buddha's words. Second, do not have so much faith in yourself that you think you can be your own master. It is all right to trust yourself, but you need somebody else to verify your practice. Measure your practice and attainment against the standard of the Buddha's teachings. Your own experience and knowledge is unreliable. If you have doubts, ask a master for guidance. If you read the sutras without guidance, you may misinterpret their meaning and endanger yourself. This is why it is important to study with a master.

Remember, if a person is having problems with his practice, help him out; but you must be careful what you say. Buddhist remedies may hurt, rather than help, certain people. Furthermore, do not try to convert Jews, Christians, Muslims, or anyone else who believe strongly in something else. They will not listen to you. You will only rile them, and they will defame Buddhism. If your words or actions cause someone else to slander Buddhism, it is your responsibility.

Before you are enlightened, it is best that you concentrate on your own practice. You might think someone is doing something incorrect, but you could be wrong. He may be at another level of practice, or working from a different standpoint. If you follow your own practice as you should, you will not have time to judge others' practice anyway.

6. Fourth Retreat

Day 1 Leave the Past in the Past

*Since an early age I have accumulated knowledge,
Studying the sutras, sastras, and commentaries.
Discriminating between names and forms without rest,
I only troubled myself counting the sands in the sea. I was
severely reproached by the Tathagata:
What is the benefit of counting others' treasures?
I realized the futility of my dalliance;
For many years I busied myself in the world in vain.*

At the beginning of this retreat, I told you to take your past, from the moment you were born up to the moment you walked into the meditation hall, roll it into a bundle and toss it in the garbage. If, at the end of seven days, you feel a need to reclaim your past, you can dig it out of the garbage. During this retreat, however, leave it behind.

If you can master this attitude, then I guarantee enlightenment. But if you want to be enlightened, and at the same time do not want to renounce your past, then I guarantee nothing. Dropping your past is not easy to do. Even if you want to do it, sometimes you cannot. The first step, however, is to be willing to let go.

In direct light, your body will cast a shadow. You cannot escape your shadow while you are in the light. If you want to get rid of it, either you have to go where there is no light, or you have to leave your body. If you have always been in darkness, then you will not even know you have a shadow that you can get rid of. Most people are like this.

One must be aware of one's shadow if one wants to do something about it; one must have walked into the light. It is analogous to your position right now. All of you on this retreat want to dispose of your shadow. The shadow is your past, and the past consists of your memories, your experiences, and the karmic force of things you have done.

You will not be able to drop the past as long as you have a sense of self, just as you will never lose your shadow as long as you have a body. You must stop being self-centered. It would be best to drop your past right away, otherwise, while you work on your method, images of past experiences and teachings will appear incessantly, and it will be impossible to focus your mind and become one with the method.

People accumulate a past in two major ways: personal experiences from everyday life, and knowledge from teachers, books and other sources. Experience and intellectual learning encompass a person's world view; and although it seems it should be the other way around, it is the intellectual discriminations fostered by learning which are more difficult to drop than direct experiences of life. Bad habits which accumulate from everyday experience may harm you and a small group of people around you, but intellectual views can affect and influence entire populations. Through the media, your ideas can reach millions of people.

An ancient Chinese proverb says, "He who steals another's belongings is a thief, but he who steals a country is a king. He who kills another is a murderer, but he who kills thousands is a great hero." A person who steals power and takes over a country does not do so because of personal habits. He is driven by a powerful world view.

Intellectual knowledge is powerful; therefore, it is difficult to get rid of. Yung-chia admits that he too amassed enormous amounts of knowledge from sutras and sastras before meeting the Sixth Patriarch. The Buddhist tradition encourages people to study sutras and sastras. For ordinary people, studying is good, and it can be productive. But for a practitioner seeking enlightenment, studying can be a problem. When Yung-chia met Hui-neng, he let go of everything that he had ever studied.

Yung-chia says that pursuing the practice through study is like trying to count every grain of sand on the ocean's floor. Studying Buddhist literature is an endless endeavor. The Buddha taught for forty-nine years, yet he likened his preaching to the amount of sand one can fit under one's fingernail, and he said that the part he did not lecture on

encompassed all the dust in the world. Preaching can go on forever. Attempting to study it would be a waste of time.

The study of Buddhist sutras is good. The word sutra means stringing things together, like flowers in a garland or pearls in a necklace; but if you cling to the written word, and study instead of practice, then it is like counting another's treasure. A child who goes into a bank and sees a teller counting stacks of money, might exclaim, "Wow! That person is rich." The child does not realize the teller is counting other people's money.

Once, a man visited the Sixth Patriarch, but he did not prostrate to show his respect. Hui-neng asked, "What is your practice?"

The visitor said, "I recite the Lotus Sutra. I've done so over six hundred times."

Hui-neng replied, "Six hundred copies of the Lotus Sutra inside you? That's heavy! No wonder you can't prostrate."

The visitor thought about it, and then said, "It really is a heavy load. What can I do?"

Hui-neng advised, "From now on, be a useless person, with nothing to do except practice. Forget about whether or not you're good at it. Forget your pride and ability."

It would be best to forget any good experience that you might have had in your practice, or in a previous retreat. Do not call up memories of past experiences, and do not pay attention to those that appear in your mind. If you have a good experience during this retreat, let it pass. If you have never had a good experience, do not worry about it, and do not set your mind on achieving something good, otherwise you will be carrying a heavy weight on your back. At the same time you shoulder your past, you will be grasping for something imaginary in your future. If you practice with all this weight, you will flatten like a pancake.

Since it is hard to just let go of everything, immerse yourself wholeheartedly in the method of practice, and realize that there is nothing else.

If you spend all your time analyzing sutras and sastras, or remembering and rehashing retreat experiences, you will never accomplish or complete anything. Do you know the story of the monkey in the peach orchard? A monkey climbed the first tree and plucked a peach. Then it saw another peach, so it put the first one under its arm and reached for the second one. Then the monkey saw another and another, and it kept putting the one it had just picked under its arm. Finally, it picked every peach from every tree in the orchard. The monkey thought it had all of them, but when it looked, all that remained was the one in its hand.

During the retreat, you may find yourself acting like a greedy monkey: "Oh! I've got something. What's that? There's more? What else can I get?" If you greedy monkeys do not come to your senses, you will pick tree after tree clean, and in the end collapse from exhaustion, without having eaten a single peach.

Look into yourself to see if you are a greedy monkey. The best thing to do is pick one peach and eat it slowly, carefully, mindfully. What peach am I talking about? The peach you pick and eat is the method of your practice.

With evil capacity and mistaken understanding,

One cannot penetrate the Tathagata's principle of complete sudden enlightenment.

Hinayana monks, though diligent, forget the mind of Tao.

Outer path practitioners may be clever, but they lack wisdom.

Yung-chia mentions Hinayana Buddhism and outer path, or heterodox, teachings. Ch'an practitioners should recognize outer path teachings, so that they can avoid them. Practitioners should also understand the Hinayana approach, so that they will recognize dhyana and samadhi if they arise.

There are many levels and types of practice and meditation. The methods we use can be used by anyone — followers of outer paths, Hinayana Buddhism, or Ch'an. Though the methods may be the same, disciples from different schools will have different experiences and understanding, depending on their views.

People from many traditions apply for Ch'an retreats, and I usually accept them; but when they ask if they can use their methods, I say, "Sure, but if you practice your method, don't expect to have Buddhist experiences. You won't be getting my teachings." I may teach Buddhadharma, but they will hear what they want to hear, and in the end they will leave with what they came with — their own convictions.

If someone wore red-tinted glasses, everything would appear red. If he were not aware of the glasses, he would probably claim, "I was right all along. The world is red, and has always been red."

A student from another tradition practiced Ch'an with me for a short period. After a while, he said, "Aha! You see, your Buddha is nothing special. Your enlightenment is exactly the same as ours."

I told him, "Of course, because you see what you want to, and what you've seen from the start is your own beliefs."

You have to recognize the differences between Ch'an and outer path teachings, and between Ch'an and Hinayana teachings. All outer path teachings have one thing in common: the idea of a self. It may be a universal self or supreme self, but it is still a self. Hinayana asserts that there is no self, only complete and utter emptiness. Ch'an does not assert the self, nor does it assert the idea of no-self. As Hui-neng said in the Platform Sutra, "Bodhi is vexation, and vexation is bodhi."

Day 2 Using Illusions to Transcend Illusion

*The ignorant and the foolish think
That the fist exists separately from the pointing finger.
Mistaking the finger for the moon, they practice uselessly;*

They only fabricate strange illusions in the realms of sense and object.

"The ignorant and the foolish" of this stanza is only an approximate translation. The Chinese version of the Song of Enlightenment actually describes two types of stupidity. One is the ignorance of adults, and the other is the ignorance of mentally retarded children. These analogies refer to practitioners of the Hinayana tradition and outer path teachings respectively.

A person with normal intelligence understands that the fist and the fingers are not separate. You cannot have a fist without fingers, and fingers can at any time become a fist. Outer path practitioners maintain that the fist is real, but the fingers are not. Hinayana practitioners insist that, since a fist can become fingers and fingers can become a fist, neither one is real. Both fist and fingers are non-existent.

What are the fist and the fingers? For outer path practitioners, the fist is the atman, or the universal self, and the fingers are people and other things in the realm of phenomena, which are illusory components of the supreme reality. Hinayana practitioners maintain that the universal self, as well as phenomena, are illusory.

Yung-chia mentions the famous Buddhist allegory of the finger and the moon. Teachings, beliefs, ideas, experiences, phenomena and the self are like a finger pointing at the moon of enlightenment. You should look at the finger, see where it is pointing, and then go to the moon. Do not grab hold of the finger. You must let it go or else you will never get enlightened. Mistaking the finger for the moon, clinging to illusions, fabricating strange ideas to explain experiences: these are common problems that people encounter when they practice.

However, we must use illusion to get rid of illusion. Buddhadharma cannot be taught to human beings without language, symbols and the ordinary phenomena of our world; but many people, when they hear the teachings, hold onto them as if they were the ultimate goal. They cannot succeed in their practice with such an attitude.

During practice, a person may perceive that the world is beautiful and that everyone is a Buddha. He might think he has seen Buddha-nature, but he has not. Everything has Buddh-nature, but Buddha-nature is constantly changing and is without quality or form. The ordinary mind is incapable of perceiving it. A flower has Buddha-nature, but we view it with the mind of attachment, so our experience is not a true perception of Buddha-nature. No matter how wonderous an experience may feel while we are meditating, it is not an experience of Buddha-nature, because we are still thinking and clinging to our ideas and perceptions.

The Heart Sutra says, "Form is not other than emptiness, and emptiness not other than form. Form is precisely emptiness, and emptiness is precisely form. So also are sensation, perception, volition and consciousness." There are no sense organs, and there are no sense objects. They are illusory. Therefore, anything that arises from their interaction is also illusory. How can it be Buddha-nature?

Not perceiving a single dharma: this is Tathagata.

Only then can one be called the Supreme Observer.

With this realization karmic obstacles are innately empty.

Without realization, past debts must be paid off.

The first line in the stanza above is the fundamental teaching of Ch'an Buddhism. If you are free from any attachment, then you have seen the Tathagata — in fact, you are the Tathagata. Many of my students say that it is not difficult to see one's self-nature; that it is actually easy to become enlightened. They are right. It does not even take a second. All you have to do is drop the past, drop the future, and drop the present moment. Easy, isn't it?

Someone said to me, "I see it as a thin sheet of paper. One side is my self, and the other side is enlightenment. It's that close."

I said, "It's even closer than that. Right now, if you drop your past, future and present, you will see your self-nature. In the past you were an ordinary sentient being. In the future you will, unless you attain enlightenment, be an ordinary sentient being. At this moment you are

an ordinary sentient being. But if you drop them, then you are a Buddha."

Another student was sad because she still did not know who she was. I told her, "As long as you have thoughts in your mind, you will not know who you are. Drop your thoughts, and you will know. Just telling yourself to drop your thoughts won't work. First, you must pull your thoughts together. Focus your scattered mind into a concentrated mind. Then pull your concentrated mind into a unified mind. Finally, let go of your unified mind. When you train your mind to do this, you will know your self."

It is easy to attain enlightenment. Can you drop your past, future and present? If not, it is because you are unwilling to let go. You may intellectually want to let go, but deep down you are not ready to relinquish your self.

A young man who meditated at my temple wore socks that smelled vile. I suggested that he throw them out, but he said it was his shoes that smelled, not his socks. I asked him to throw his shoes away, and he did, but his socks still smelled awful. I asked again that he throw his socks away, and he threw them aside. Later, he picked them up, sniffed them, and said, "They do smell bad, but it's my own body. If I wash them, they'll be okay." He put his socks back on.

But he still didn't wash them, and when I saw him, they smelled even worse. We went through the same routine, and he promised to wash them, but he never got around to it. He said, "If I wash them, they'll only get smelly again. If I throw them out and buy a new pair, eventually they'll reek, too. So what's the point? I might as well stick to these old, smelly ones."

Practitioners know that the self is the source of all vexations. We know we should drop the self, yet we cannot. We like it too much. We think we might need it later. Even if we do throw it out, we pick it up again. It is like holding on to putrid socks.

Every one of us has a pair of stinking socks. Are you ready to throw them out? Maybe not. Maybe your nose is accustomed to the smell. You pick them up, sniff them, and say to yourself, "They don't smell that bad."

It is not easy to be free of all dharmas. All dharmas are related to the self. If a dharma is not related to the self, then it does not exist. It does not matter if it is virtuous dharma, evil dharma, or even Buddhadharma; if you cannot let go completely, then you will not become a Tathagata. Holding on to any dharma, including Buddhadharma, is like holding on to the finger instead of following it to the moon.

When you let go of all dharmas, then you will be what Yung-chia calls the Supreme Observer. The Supreme Observer is one whose vision is liberated and unlimited; one can see everything at once, whether near or far, whether in the past, present or future. A Supreme Observer is not limited to seeing things sequentially. Ordinary people first look at one thing, then a second, then a third, and so on. A Supreme Observer sees everything at once because there are no opposing or obstructing dharmas. The Supreme Observer is a title sometimes used for Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of great compassion.

We cannot see all things at once because we have not attained liberation. We still perceive that we have selves. While there is still a self, there can be no liberation. It can be the narrow self of an ordinary person, or the great self of Godhood. There is no liberation if a self of any kind exists.

Some religions teach that a virtuous god is in eternal conflict with a devil that it created. Inevitably, however, some people ask: "If there is one god, why would it create a devil? Why create such trouble for itself? Why doesn't the god destroy the devil?" Whenever there is a separation between self and others, the others will remain outside and unconquerable. As long as a self remains, the others must also remain. At the stage where there is no Buddha, then there are no demons either. When there is no virtue, there is no evil. When there are no dharmas, then there are no more obstructions. That is liberation.

As a practitioner burdened with karmic obstructions, you must repent sincerely and work hard to resolve your problems. If you can reach the point where there are no dharmas, and therefore no Buddha, then all karmic obstructions will be gone. Until that time, you will be hindered by karmic obstructions, which are the fruits of seeds of actions planted in the past. As long as there is a self, then that self has to pay back all karmic debts.

I have a water cup that I use every day. I wash it daily, and I cover it when it is full to keep the water clean. If I did not keep a lid on it, something might get in the water and make me sick. If I did not need water, or if there were no such thing as water, then there would be no need to cover the cup or clean it. The cup would still be there, but it would have nothing to do with me. If you reach the level of no dharmas, the cup of karmic obstructions will still be there, but it will have nothing to do with you. Karmic obstructions cannot obstruct you when there is no self.

If I committed a serious crime, I might be arrested and executed. If I had a body, it would be easy to find me and kill me. But if I did not have a body, how could the police catch me? By the same token, when you let go of your self, karmic obstructions will no longer be a problem. Letting go of your self does not mean that you do not exist anymore. The existence of self is a partition between you and others. When the distinction drops, self disappears, and you are completely free. Small self and great self vanish, and with them go all karmic obstructions. It is not that past karma disappears. An enlightened being still receives karmic retributions for past actions, but these retributions are no longer obstructions, because the mind of the enlightened being is free.

Day 3 The Obstacle of Fear

*If one is unable to take the royal feast even when hungry,
How can he be healed even if he meets the king of doctors?
Practicing Ch'an in the desire realm manifests the power of
knowledge,*

Indestructible as a lotus grown in a fire.

*Though Pradhanasura broke the main precepts, he awakened to
the unborn;*

He long ago reached the Buddha state and remains there still.

Yung-chia stresses that Ch'an is the best method of practice of Buddhadharma. Unfortunately, people with weak karmic roots either cannot accept Ch'an teachings or they think Ch'an methods are not right for them.

There is a story of a starving beggar who came upon a banquet fit for a king. It seemed strange to him because there was no one around. Instead of sitting down to eat, he grew frightened, because he had never seen such sumptuous food. He wondered if perhaps it were a trap, or if someone were giving him a last meal before killing him. The beggar became so scared he ran away without taking a single morsel of food.

A person with weak karmic roots is frightened when he encounters Ch'an teachings, and wonders if he is fit to practice its methods. Unless a person has great courage, he will be too scared to learn and practice, and he will choose to keep his dirty socks rather than attain liberation.

There was a man who had been ill for a long time. He tried many treatments and visited many doctors, but nothing worked. Doctor after doctor told him that he had an incurable disease and only had a short time to live. Then he went to the best doctor in the world. After examining him, the doctor said, "I can cure you." But the man did not believe him. He had been told otherwise too many times. He figured the doctor was playing on his hopes and trying to swindle him out of money. On the way home, he threw away the prescription the doctor had given him.

Some of you have been working with the same method for a long time and you still have not made much progress. Perhaps you are convinced that you will never progress beyond square one. Yesterday, a practitioner told me, "It takes such a long time to reach Buddhahood! And right up to the point of Buddhahood there are still so many karmic obstructions. They say that all karmic obstructions disappear instantly

with sudden enlightenment, but I don't believe it. I've resigned myself to the fact that I'll be stuck with my vexations for a long time."

Most people do not like things that take a long time to happen. They prefer to see results right away. They want instant gratification. Who wants to spend three asamkhya kalpas reciting Buddhist sutras in hopes of reaching Buddhahood? Compared to that, sudden enlightenment sounds great. But you have to work very hard to experience sudden enlightenment. Unfortunately, people are terrified to let go of the self. It is your choice. Do you want to practice the gradual method or the sudden method?

While you are deciding which method to choose, remember the story of the sick man and the doctor. If you were that man, would you follow the doctor's advice? Suppose the doctor said, "I can cure you, but it requires major surgery. First I'll remove your hands and feet, then your arms and legs. Next, I'll remove your mind and heart. After that, the problem will be gone." Would you be willing? How much do you trust the doctor?

Without trust, even the king of doctors cannot help you. You must have faith in his expertise in order to accept his advice. You have already encountered Ch'an teachings, but you may be unable to accept it fully. Sentient beings do not have enough courage and confidence to accept the belief that they are Buddhas. For this reason, they cannot embrace Ch'an teachings.

The song mentions Pradhanasura, a great practitioner who lived long before Sakyamuni's time. Yung-chia says that Pradhanasura broke the main precepts, but actually the transgressor was an exceedingly handsome monk named Yung-shih, and it was Pradhanasura who helped him solve his problem. A rich woman fell in love with Yung-shih and lured him into her home, asking that he preach to her mother. Eventually, the young woman seduced him. When her husband found out, he was furious, and wanted to kill her. She poisoned her husband and made plans to run away with the monk. Yung-shih witnessed all of this, and he despaired, because he was sure only those who kept the precepts could practice successfully. He left the woman and roamed far

and wide, carrying a placard confessing his sins and begging for help and hope. Wherever he went, he got the same story: "There's no hope for a person who breaks the major precepts."

One day, Yung-shih met Pradhanasura. Pradhanasura asked him, "You say you have committed grave sins, but what are sins? Do sins have self-nature? If sins have self-nature, then how can you create them? If you make these sins, then they must not have self-nature."

When Yung-shih heard Pradhanasura's words, he immediately attained complete enlightenment and became a Buddha known as Precious Moon Buddha. Even a person who has broken the major precepts can become a Buddha.

Examine yourself. How bad are you? You have probably never killed a person. If so, you should be able to do as well as Yung-shih. The reason why you cannot is because you cannot let go of the self.

You would probably like it if I told you that the self-nature of sins is empty. You might think, "If the self-nature of sin is empty, then I can do anything I want. I can break the precepts and commit sins, but I won't have any karmic debts, and I won't have to accept any consequences." That would be nice, but you probably would not like it if I told that the self-nature of the self is also empty. If the self is empty, then who is it that will eat your dinner tonight? Who will meet your children, wife or husband after the retreat? Who will go to your job next Monday? Now you might say, "There's so much I haven't accomplished yet. I still have a lot of plans. How can my self be empty?"

After sitting in meditation for a while, your legs begin to hurt, and your mind wanders to other things. I have told you not to think about things, but at this point you might feel that thinking can be very good. When you get tired or frustrated, you believe that thinking will help you, that it will help to relieve your discomfort and tiredness. Perhaps you fantasize about life problems yet to be solved or life plans yet to be realized. A self is definitely involved when you do this. There is no doubt who is doing all the thinking. If you cannot reach emptiness, then all of your previous karma will follow you. The nature of sin is not empty if

you cannot empty yourself. When you empty yourself, all the sins you have created will also be empty.

*Even when one preaches fearlessly as the lion roars,
The minds of the perverse and obstinate only harden.
They continue to break the main precepts and obstruct Bodhi
And cannot see the secret the Tathagata reveals.*

Fearless preaching refers to Ch'an teachings. Ch'an teachings are likened to a lion's roar because lions were thought to be the most powerful of all animals, and Ch'an is the highest of all Dharma. But even ultimate teachings are useless to ordinary sentient beings who are afraid of them. Actually, the highest teachings, those which are taught to Bodhisattvas, are wordless and formless. Such teachings are far beyond the understanding of ordinary people.

An ox that has been straining against its yoke for years will develop a thick callous around its neck. Even if you prick the callous with a needle, the ox will not feel it because its skin has grown insensitive. Many people are the same as this ox. They may think that Ch'an is irrelevant, or they may absorb the teachings so slowly that by the time they finally learn something, the sudden teaching has become the gradual teaching.

In Taiwan, many old people attend my lectures. Sometimes I ask them how they liked the talk. They usually admit that the lecture confused them. I ask what part they enjoyed most, and they tell me that the stories were the best part. I tell these stories to relax the audience, but also to get ideas across. If you follow the stories without catching the meaning, then you are missing the point of the lecture. You may as well be watching television.

I have told you that self-nature is empty, and that you can attain Buddhahood through sudden enlightenment. Unfortunately, many who hear such words are obsessed with the idea that they have sinned, and that they have tremendous karmic obstructions. They are convinced that practice will be too difficult, so they cannot accept the teachings. All you have to do is accept the teachings, have faith in yourself and the

method, and practice. If you can do that, your obstructions will lessen and disappear.

If you want to accept the teachings of Ch'an, then you must let go of your thoughts immediately. If you cannot do it immediately, then work on your method; that is, hold on to your method, and do not think about yourself, or about whether you are gaining or losing something. Don't expect me to have the energy to yell at you and push you all the time. You have to make the effort to drop your self-centeredness. Only then will you penetrate the method.

Day 4 Adhering to the Precepts

*Two monks broke the precepts against licentiousness and killing.
With his shallow knowledge, Upali exaggerated the sin.
The great Vimalakirti instantly removed their doubts,
Like a hot sun that melts ice and snow.*

For ordinary sentient beings, abiding by the precepts is both the foundation of Buddhadharma and a prerequisite for progress on the Buddhist path. It is difficult to enter samadhi if one cannot hold to them. This stanza explains the position of the sudden enlightenment teachings on the precepts.

The gradual teaching places great emphasis on obeying the precepts. The Hinayana tradition distinguishes between left-home practitioners and lay practitioners. Standards for the laity are not as stringent as those for monks and nuns. Since lay people raise families and accumulate wealth, they cannot free themselves from desires. A lay practitioner can therefore only achieve the third dhyana level in the Hinayana tradition. Only monks and nuns, through hard work and rigorous discipline, can achieve the fourth dhyana level — arhatship.

The sudden teachings of the Mahayana tradition emphasize the mind. With regard to the precepts, the question is, does the mind move when a person does something? You may never physically kill someone, but if

you think about killing, that thought is an infraction of the first precept. You may never have sex with a particular person, but if in your mind you lust after him or her, then you have already broken that precept in your thoughts. On the other hand, if you physically kill someone, but there is no murder in your mind or heart, then you have not violated the precept. And, if it is possible to have sex with another person and yet be free of sexual thoughts, then you have not broken that precept.

In this stanza, Yung-chia alludes to a story from a Buddhist sutra. During Sakyamuni's lifetime, two monks were practicing in the mountains. One went to beg for food, and the other fell asleep. A woman who was collecting firewood passed by, saw the monk, and had sex with him while he slept. He woke up just as she was leaving, and grieved that he had broken a major precept.

When the other monk returned and found out what had happened, he became furious, and he chased after the woman in order to speak with her. When the woman saw the monk, she panicked and ran, but she slipped and fell from a cliff to her death. The monk was grief-stricken: "First my friend broke the precept against sexual misconduct, and now I've broken the precept against killing."

They went to Upali to seek his advice. Upali, a close disciple of Sakyamuni Buddha, was renowned for his strict adherence to the precepts. Upali judged that they had indeed broken the precepts, and told them to leave the monastery.

The monks were not satisfied with Upali's verdict, so they went to Mahasattva Bodhisattva Vimalakirti (a Mahasattva Bodhisattva is a practitioner who is on the verge of becoming a Buddha). Vimalakirti said, "You have not broken any precepts because your actions were not intentional. Upali has a Hinayana mind. He does not yet fully understand Mahayana teachings. You two have Mahayana karmic roots that go back many lifetimes. You have broken no precepts." His words cleared their doubts like a blazing sun melts ice and snow. In comparison, Upali's wisdom was like the light of a firefly.

No sin is created if the mind does not move. Furthermore, when the mind does not move, previous sins disappear as well. If the mind moves again, then previous sins return. If the mind stops moving temporarily, that is samadhi. Samadhi, however, is not the "no mind" state of Ch'an. When a person genuinely attains the no mind state, his or her mind stops moving without the possibility of new movement. In this state, no sins are created, and previous sins disappear. This is the sudden teaching of the Mahayana tradition.

*The power of the liberated is inconceivable,
With wonderful functions more numerous than the Ganges
sands.*

*They would not refuse to make the four offerings
To one who can accept ten thousand ounces of gold.
To have body broken and bones reduced to dust is not enough to
repay*

The words that enlighten, transcending countless eons.

The first four lines of this stanza refer to a liberated practitioner. Such a person has transcended all attachments and interacts with others through his wisdom. He can accept ten thousand ounces of gold, as well as the usual four offerings made to the Sangha — food, clothing, medication and bedding — because he clings to nothing.

The last two lines refer to the priceless value of Buddhadharma. The Dharma of sudden enlightenment is so rare and difficult to encounter that we should be willing to make any offering in gratitude to the Three Jewels. Even one's own life, Yung-chia says, is not worth a sentence of priceless Dharma. There is a story that makes this point clear. In one of Sakyamuni's past lives, when he was still a Bodhisattva, he did not know the Buddhadharma. Indra, King of the Trayastrimsa heavens, turned himself into a demon and appeared in a tree next to Sakyamuni. He spoke two lines of verse:

*All volitions are transient.
This is the Dharma of arising and perishing.*

Sakyamuni was deeply impressed. He looked around and asked, "Who said that?" The demon — Indra made his presence known. Sakyamuni then asked, "What is this that you said? Where did it come from?"

Indra replied, "It is Buddhadharma."

Sakyamuni asked, "Can you tell me more about Buddhadharma?"

Indra said, "There are two more lines, but I'm too hungry to speak now. I must have human flesh before I will say anything more."

Sakyamuni said, "I'm willing to offer you my body as food, but first tell me the two lines."

Indra refused. "No. First I must eat you to build up strength. Then I will tell you the two lines."

Sakyamuni replied, "But then I'll be dead. I won't hear what you have to say."

Indra said, "Let's compromise. You stand on top of this tree. I'll stand below looking up, and you jump into my open mouth. I'll tell you the two lines as you are falling through the air."

Sakyamuni decided it was worth it. "My body might die, but hearing Buddhadharma is more important. I'll do it." He climbed to the top of the tree and jumped. Indra kept his promise and recited the two lines. Sakyamuni expected to land in the demon's jaws, but instead he found himself on the soft cushion of Indra's palm. Thereupon Indra revealed his true identity and told Sakyamuni he had come to test him.

What were those two lines? How badly do you want to know? Is your pursuit of Buddhadharma sincere? If you jump off the roof, I'll tell you before you hit the ground. Perhaps you do not yet have the courage of a Bodhisattvas. However, since you have come to a retreat to practice, you must be relatively sincere, so I will recite the last two lines:

*When the Dharma of arising and perishing itself perishes,
Nirvana is the greatest joy.*

A truly dedicated practitioner would gladly give his life in exchange for a few lines of Buddhadharma. The sutras say that Sakyamuni gave his life many times in search of the Dharma and Buddhahood.

Practitioners who have benefited or would like to benefit from the Dharma should be willing to give everything they have in offering and respect to the Three Jewels. Lip service is not enough. You have to make sincere offerings. If you do not make offerings or pay respect to the Three Jewels, then whatever you hear or gain from the Dharma will be negligible. If you do not make sincere offerings, then you probably have come across the Dharma too easily. One cherishes most what requires the greatest effort to gain. Teachings that you cherish are the only teachings that will help you.

The wristwatch I wear is worth nothing in a material sense, yet I exchanged a gold one for it. This old watch is invaluable to me because it belonged to my master. When my Shih-fu died, his attending monk inherited it, but I traded him a much better watch for it. It does not work that well. I have to get it repaired all the time. Students have offered me better watches, but I am not interested because this one reminds me of my Shih-fu, and I respect him deeply.

I still have the robe I was given when I left home. These material things are worth nothing, but treasuring them symbolizes my respect for my master, the person who taught me Buddhadharma. Imagine how much more precious the Dharma itself must be! The Dharma is precious because it brings great benefit, but it brings benefit only when you realize how precious it is.

When you drink water, remember where it comes from. If the water runs out, you can always go back to its source and get more. When you benefit from Dharma teachings, you should be grateful to the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, Sangha — because that is where they come from. Without gratitude, the benefit you gain today will be gone tomorrow.

You have to be willing to offer what you consider most precious. What is most precious depends on the person. In Sakyamuni's time, there was a

poor woman who had only one chipped bowl. She begged for oil and burned it as an offering to the Buddha. Rich men offered thousands of lanterns, but Sakyamuni said that the woman's offering was the most precious in the world, because she offered the only thing she had.

Furthermore, making offerings is not as important for the recipient as it is for the donor. Buddha does not care if you give him anything. Neither do the Three Jewels, patriarchs and masters. Recently, someone told me, "Shih-fu, I'd really like to offer you something in order to show my gratitude for your teaching, but it seems like you don't need anything, so I'll just thank you instead."

I said, "Making offerings is for your benefit, not mine. It's your affair. It has nothing to do with me."

You should be grateful to the Three Jewels for the Dharma teachings that you receive, and you should express your gratitude in an offering. What kind of offering? Any offering is a sincere offering if it is made unconditionally. I do not want you to reach into your pockets and give me every cent you have. The first offering I require from you is that you believe, accept, follow, and put immediately into practice what you have learned. Have confidence and faith in yourselves. Use that confidence and faith to increase your concentration and settle your minds. Every person, every event, every moment in this center during retreat can help your practice. Work hard. That is your offering.

Day 5 Faith in Self, Faith in Method, Faith in Dharma

*The king in Dharma is the most superior;
The realization that countless Tathagatas are all alike.
Now I show you this all-giving pearl;
Believers are all in accord (with Dharma).*

There are two special terms in this stanza. One is the king in Dharma, which is a title for the Buddha. Here, it symbolizes ultimate Dharma. This highest Dharma is the sudden enlightenment teaching of the Ch'an tradition. Not only is it far superior to enlightenment experiences of

outer path traditions, but it also exceeds the enlightenment attained by sages who follow the Hinayana path. The other term, the all-giving pearl — mani pearl — is a gem that grants all wishes. It refers to Buddha's wisdom.

You must experience the highest Dharma in order to reach Buddhahood. The sudden enlightenment Dharma is experienced by all Tathagatas and is shared by all the Tathagatas in the ten directions. It does not require that one spend three great kalpas reaching Buddhahood. The moment one attains sudden enlightenment, one is exactly the same as the Buddha. The Dharma experienced by the Buddha is exactly the same as the Dharma one experiences at the moment of one's enlightenment.

When a practitioner of gradual enlightenment reaches the first bhumi position of Bodhisattvahood, he experiences the Dharma that a Bodhisattva on the first bhumi level experiences. He has no idea what Buddhahood is like. If he reaches the arhat position of the Hinayana tradition, then he experiences what an arhat experiences, not what a Buddha experiences. But when one reaches enlightenment through sudden teachings, what one experiences is the same as Buddhahood. At most, great practitioners of outer paths may attain an illusory "no mind" state and the enlightenment of an arhat is a "no mind" state of emptiness. The enlightenment attained through sudden teachings, however, is a "no mind" state that is neither empty nor existent.

Do not misunderstand me. After you become enlightened, it does not mean you become a Buddha. When you attain enlightenment, what you experience is exactly the same as Buddhahood, but you are not a Buddha yet. The wisdom you acquire through the experience is the wisdom of Buddha, but your actions are still the actions of an ordinary sentient being. After you have an enlightenment experience, you must practice even more diligently in order to protect and nurture your holy embryo; it is a Buddha embryo, not a mature Buddha. Usually, after an enlightenment experience, you will have no difficulty practicing with determination, because your faith will deepen. But you are still an ordinary person. If you do not continue to practice, the experience and

wisdom will regress and fade. You have to reinforce the practice by experiencing enlightenment again and again.

The line, "Now I show you this all-giving pearl," may be interpreted in two ways. In one interpretation, one can say that Yung-chia has revealed his own gem to us — he is sharing his wisdom with us; or, one can say that Yung-chia is encouraging us to discover the pearl within ourselves. Both interpretations are helpful for our practice.

The mani pearl represents ultimate wisdom. A Bodhisattva at the eighth bhumi level is free from any obstructions caused by material objects, or physical dharmas. A Bodhisattva at the ninth bhumi level is free from all mental dharmas. The mani pearl, however, is the wisdom of the Buddha, and is free from all material and mental dharmas. Its power is unlimited. However, one must discover it before one can use it.

Imagine a pearl hidden at the bottom of a muddy pond. A person learns that something valuable lies down there, so he probes the muck with a stick. After great effort, he manages to catch a brief glimpse of the pearl, but it is immediately obscured again. He has to make an immense effort to clear away all the mud, to uncover the pearl completely, and to ensure that it will never be hidden again. Only when the pearl is free from all obstructions will it be of any use to him. Actually, however, the mani pearl is not obstructed by anything. It is we who have obstructions which prevent us from revealing and using the pearl.

A person will practice extremely hard once he sees the mani pearl, or experiences genuine enlightenment. He realizes that such a thing exists, and that all he has to do is continue to clear away the muck of vexation. His faith is firm and unwavering. If a practitioner claims to have experienced enlightenment, yet puts little effort into his practice, then the validity of his experience is doubtful.

The Ch'an tradition, however, has stories which seem to contradict what I have just said. There is the story I previously related about two monks: one practiced diligently while the other slept all day. The first monk reprimanded the sleeping monk, "You should work harder. What's happened to your practice?"

In reply, the second monk said, "I sleep. What other kind of practice would you have me do?"

You probably also remember the story where Master Pai-chang praised Huang-po, who was asleep in the Ch'an Hall, and scolded another monk, who seemed to be practicing vigorously.

The Sixth Patriarch, too, once said, "When neither hatred nor love disturbs the mind, you can stretch out your legs and rest."

These anecdotes may seem to suggest that Ch'an practitioners do not have to continue their practice after enlightenment, but that is not the case. These special examples describe highly realized practitioners who have a firm understanding of Buddhadharma. They see the Buddha path clearly, and they proceed steadily. They have no doubts or confusion. Nobody or nothing can steer them off the path or cause their determination to slacken. On the other hand, a practitioner who is not sure what he is doing and is not clear where he is going still needs to practice in the usual fashion.

A fly trying to get out of a house buzzes around and bumps into windows and screens. It is active, but it does not get anywhere. It is similar to the practice of the unenlightened. Deeply enlightened practitioners seem relaxed, even lazy, but they are actually working smoothly and steadily.

Do not feel sorry for the fly. Compared to someone who knows where the door is, the fly looks stupid, but at least it is making an effort to get out. Usually, people are not even as determined as this fly. Sooner or later, it will find an exit. The fly knows that it wants to get out, and it has faith that there is an exit. All it has to do is work hard. Do you have faith in yourself and the method? Are you working hard? Right now during this retreat, you may be like the fly, but after the retreat, will you still put effort into your practice? Probably, as you sit down in the evening to meditate, a friend will call and say, "Let's go out." You will go to Radio City Music Hall and meditate on the Rockettes instead of working on your method.

I cannot offer you a mani pearl, nor will I explain it to you. You must come to accept the sudden enlightenment Dharma on your own. It takes confidence. If you have the confidence necessary to practice hard, you will be able to accept Ch'an Dharma, and eventually you will reveal the mani pearl of Buddha's wisdom.

In truth, however, there is no such thing as a mani pearl. Yung-chia clarifies this in the next stanza.

They clearly see that there is not a thing,

Neither person nor Buddha.

*The numerous worlds in the great chiliocosm are bubbles in the
sea,*

All sages and saints are like lightning flashes.

In order to progress on the Buddha path, you must accept the Dharma of the mani pearl. On the other hand, you cannot cling to its existence. In fact, you cannot attach to any dharma. If a person follows this teaching and practices hard, he will attain enlightenment and eventually reach Buddhahood. At the beginning of the Buddha path, there must be an individual who accepts the teachings, and who then practices, eventually realizing Buddhahood. But if the practitioner is attached to his existence and cannot let go of the self, reaching Buddhahood will be impossible; if he is not attached to his self, but clings to the idea of Buddhahood, he will also never become a Buddha.

All phenomena are like bubbles in an ocean. They have no genuine existence. What we think are bubbles is only the movement of water. All the worlds in the universe and all the phenomena in this world are like bubbles in an ocean. Everything, including Samsara and Nirvana and sentient beings and Buddhas, is illusory.

All sages, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are like flashes of lightning. You can see lightning, just as you can witness the power and functions of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, but if you try to grasp lightning, or attach to the idea that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have concrete existence or self-nature, then you are wasting your time.

We accept that there is a mani pearl, but we should not think that the gem has a definite form or appearance. If it did, it would just be an ordinary pearl. It is precisely because the mani pearl has no definite form that it can generate unlimited power and perform innumerable functions.

*Even if an iron wheel whirls on your head
Perfectly clear samadhi and wisdom are never lost.*

You cannot cling to the idea that the mani pearl, or wisdom, has concrete existence. However, if you accept and realize "mani pearl" Dharma, then you will never lose the gem. The iron wheel is an ancient weapon — a spinning, red-hot wheel with sharp blades that cuts and sears anything it touches. Once you attain the mani pearl, nothing can deter you in your practice, not even this frightening weapon whirling on your head. Again, the pearl symbolizes perfect samadhi and wisdom.

You can interpret these lines another way: Once you accept Buddhadharma and follow its teachings, you should view your practice as the most precious thing in the world, more precious than life itself. Even if the iron wheel hovers over your head, you should not leave the practice or abandon the Dharma.

*The sun may turn cold and the moon may turn hot.
But the demons cannot destroy the true teaching.
When an elephant marches gloriously forward,
How can a praying mantis bar its way?*

We should have confidence in the Dharma, and we should be willing to do anything to protect it, even though there may be external forces trying to keep us from our practice. External forces may be powerful enough to cool the sun and heat the moon, but determined practitioners do not let them interfere with their practice. Here, on this retreat, we have only hot weather, sirens and firecrackers to distract us. They should not be problems. If you are ready to give up your life for the Dharma, if even the fearsome iron wheel cannot deter you, how can any external force disturb your practice?

The sudden enlightenment teaching is indestructible. Outer path practitioners and Buddhists of the gradual teaching may claim there is no such thing as sudden enlightenment, but criticism cannot destroy the Mahayana sudden enlightenment teaching. External forces that attempt to undermine sudden enlightenment teaching or fetter a determined practitioner are comparable to a praying mantis trying to bar the passage of a marching elephant.

There is a story behind this analogy, dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period of China, several centuries before Christ. A king, riding in a chariot, noticed a praying mantis standing on its hind legs trying to block the wheel of his vehicle. He said, "How can such a small creature stop my chariot? It has no idea how powerless it is." Outer path and Hinayana practitioners may snipe at Ch'an teachings, but they are not even remotely capable of overthrowing Ch'an Dharma.

*The elephant does not follow the rabbit's path;
The enlightened are not bound by trivial restraints.
Do not slander heaven when you observe it through a reed,
For those who do not yet know, I am giving you the key.*

One cannot judge thoroughly enlightened people by their actions. One cannot say whether their actions are sinful or sinless. Buddhist saints and sages appear to be no different from ordinary people, but they are. This creates problems. Since the time of the Buddha, people have judged saints and sages and have found faults and shortcomings in their actions; but they rely on their distorted, narrow-minded world view. Sages and great practitioners are open-minded in the truest sense of the word, and they have no concern for the petty conventions ordinary people prize so dearly.

Yung-chia reminds the unenlightened not to judge great practitioners, especially their own masters, by their narrow-minded standards. You study under a master in order to benefit from the Three Jewels. If you have doubts about the teacher, you will have no confidence, and your practice will suffer. That is your problem. You may even raise doubts in

other students' minds. That would still be your problem, and it would be pitiable.

A Chinese saying encourages us to see others with the eyes of human beings, not with the eyes of dogs. In China, dogs do not enjoy the same treatment and respect that they receive in the United States. The Chinese belief is that dogs will not bark at well dressed people, but will growl and snarl at people dressed in rags. Believing and following such stereotypes is sure to lead to mistakes, doubts and harmful behavior. Students should not doubt great practitioners, and most especially not their own masters. If you have no confidence in your master, what can you possibly learn from him or her?

An elephant treads a wide path, just as a great practitioner is broad-minded. Ordinary people are like the rabbit that scampers along a narrow path and hides in its burrow. The rabbit thinks the elephant is clumsy because it cannot walk down the narrow track, and claims the elephant has no social graces because it cannot fit inside its burrow.

A person who has never left a windowless house has no idea what the sky looks like. If he bores a small hole in the wall and peers through a hollow reed to examine the sky, he will conclude with certainty that the sky is a little round patch of blue. If you tell him about the sun and moon, clouds and rainbows, stars and galaxies, he will think you are crazy. Again, do not depend on your limited awareness to judge the actions of great practitioners.

On the other hand, although it is all right if a Ch'an master seems eccentric or outlandish to you, he should not feel that he is free to do anything he wants. Only under extraordinary circumstances should he use special methods to teach his students. Extraordinary circumstances demand extraordinary methods. But, if he believes he is enlightened and has transcended the precepts and can, therefore, do and say whatever he pleases, he is not a true Ch'an master.

When Kumarajiva went to China in the fourth century of this era, the Chinese emperor thought that such a wise person ought to have descendants, so that his wisdom would carry on. He gave concubines to

Kumarajiva, and since they were a royal gift, Kumarajiva had no choice but to accept them. Afterwards, his disciples asked, "Can we have relations with women too?"

Kumarajiva said, "Sure, but first, let me show you something." He took a handful of needles and ate them as easily as if they were noodles. When he finished, he said, "If you can do that, then you can have relations with women."

I hear many stories about the immoral behavior of Ch'an and Zen masters in America today. My attitude is this: If what is said about these Ch'an masters is indeed true, and if they did indeed have sexual relations or break other precepts, then they are not true Ch'an masters. Nonetheless, they have served a good purpose in that they have brought the teachings of Ch'an to the United States. These people gave many Americans an opportunity they never would have had. The masters' personal lives are their own problems, but people should be grateful to them for their contributions.

Indian mythology speaks of a special swan that can swallow the pure, nourishing cream from a mixture of milk and water, without drinking any of the water. American Buddhists should adopt a similar attitude toward questionable teachers. Study Buddhadharma with them, absorb as much good teaching as possible, and leave the bad karma where you find it.

I hope that you accept and practice the things you find good and beneficial in my teachings. You can give the parts you do not like back to me.

Glossary

ARHAT ("Noble one") In Buddhist tradition, especially Theravadin, the Arhat has completed the course of Buddhist practice, and has attained full liberation, or Nirvana. As such the Arhat is no longer subject to rebirth and death. The Mahayana tradition regards the Arhat as a less than perfect ideal, in comparison to that of the Bodhisattva who vows to postpone his own liberation until all sentient beings are delivered. See "BODHISATTVA."

AVICI KARMA Retribution for any of the five unpardonable sins by rebirth in the Avici hell, one of the eight hot hells, in which suffering continues without termination.

BHUMI The bhumis (earth, region, plane or level) are the stages of the Bodhisattva's career on his way to enlightenment. The tenth, or highest, bhumi is called "Cloud of Dharma", where the Bodhisattva enters the stage of abhiseka (initiation) and experiences many great samadhis, and many other accomplishments.

BODHI Enlightenment; function of wisdom.

BODHISATTVA The role model in the Mahayana tradition. The Bodhisattva is a being who vows to remain in the world life after life, postponing his own full liberation until all other living beings are delivered.

BUDDHA The Supremely Enlightened One. See "THREE JEWELS."

BUDDHA DHARMA The truths and teaching of Buddhism; the Dharma as taught by the Buddha. See "DHARMA."

BUDDHA-NATURE A term to describe the underlying nature which pervades everything sentient and non-sentient. Actually, it is inexplicable, as it transcends all descriptions and dualities.

CH'AN (Japanese: zen) The Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word dhyana. Generally, the term refers to the cultivation or experience of meditative states as means for attaining enlightenment. Specifically, the term refers to the school of Chinese Buddhism known as Ch'an. In this context Ch'an also refers to the direct experience of prajna, or insight. Being within the Mahayana tradition, the Ch'an school, while emphasizing meditation, took the Bodhisattva ideal as the realization of Buddhist practice. In Japan, the practice and school became known as Zen.

DHARMA Dharma has two basic meanings. With an upper case "D, " Dharma means the Buddhist "Law" or "Teaching." With a lower case "d, " dharma simply refers to a thing or object, a physical or mental phenomenon. See "THREE JEWELS."

DHARMA BODY (Dharmakaya) One of the three bodies of the Buddha: the body of ultimate truth. See "RETRIBUTION BODY" and "TRANSFORMATION BODY."

DHYANA A Sanskrit term designating certain states of meditative absorption cultivated by buddhist practitioners as a technique for attaining enlightenment. See "CH'AN"

HINAYANA The "lesser vehicle" of the sravakas (hearers of Buddha's teaching) and Arhats who strive mainly for their own personal liberation. In contrast, Mahayana, or the "great vehicle, " is the broader teaching of the Bodhisattva who, out of compassion, put his own salvation last and uses all available means to save sentient beings. (Hinayana is sometimes used to refer to Theravada, the form of Buddhism practiced in Southeast Asian countries.)

HUA-T'OU (Japanese: wato) Literally, the source of words (before they are uttered), a method used in the Ch'an school to arouse the doubt sensation. The practitioner meditates on such baffling questions as: "What is Wu?" "Where am I?" or "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?"

He does not rely on experience, logic, or reasoning. Often, these phrases are taken from kung-ans, at other times, they are spontaneously generated by the practitioner. The term "hua-t'ou" is often used interchangeably with "kung-an." See "KUNG-AN."

KALPAS Symbolically, it represents an unimaginably long period of time.

KARMA Basically, the law of cause and effect to which all sentient beings, indeed, all things, are subject. Also, the cumulative causal situation affecting one's destiny as a result of past acts, thoughts, emotions.

KUNG-AN (Japanese: koan) Literally, a "public case, " as in a law case. Ch'an method of meditation in which the practitioner energetically and single-mindedly pursues the answer to an enigmatic question posed by his master, or which arises spontaneously. The question can only be answered by abandoning logic and reasoning, and by intuitively resolving the "doubt sensation" which gave rise to the question. Famous kung-an encounters were recorded and used by masters to test their disciples' understanding, or to arouse in them the enlightenment experience. The term "kung-an" is often used interchangeably with "hua-t'ou." See "HUA T'OU."

MAHAYANA The "Great Vehicle" whose followers vow to attain Supreme Enlightenment for the sake of delivering all other sentient beings from suffering. See "BODHISATTVA" and "HINAYANA."

NIRVANA Total extinction of desire and suffering, the state of liberation through Full Enlightenment.

PARAMITAS "Perfections" or ways for "reaching the other shore."

PRATYEKABUDDHA A self-enlightened being, one who has attained enlightenment by contemplating dependent origination.

RETRIBUTION BODY (Sambhogakaya) One of the three bodies of the Buddha: reward or enjoyment body. See "DHARMA BODY" and "TRANSFORMATION BODY."

SAMADHI Like dhyana, samadhi also refers to states of meditative absorption, but is a broader and more generic term than dhyana. Although numerous specific samadhis are mentioned in Buddhist scriptures, the term "samadhi" itself is flexible and not as specific as dhyana. In this book it refers to the state of "one mind," or expanded sense of self — a unity of mind and body, self and environment.

SAMSARA The relentless cycle of birth and death and suffering in which ordinary, unenlightened sentient beings are deeply entangled.

SANGHA Buddhist community. See "THREE JEWELS."

SRAVAKAS Associated with the Hinayana tradition. Literally "sound-hearer," one who has heard the Buddha's teaching and attained the first of the four levels of Arhatship.

SUTRAS Generally, scriptures. Specifically, the recorded teachings of the Buddha. The distinctive mark of a Buddhist sutra is the opening line, "Thus have I heard." This indicates that what follows are the direct teachings of Buddha, as remembered and recorded by his disciples.

TATHAGATA Literally, "Thus-Come One," a title of the Buddha.

TATHAGATAGARBHA Womb, or store of the Tathagata — the potentiality of buddhahood in each sentient being.

THREE JEWELS Collective term referring to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Buddha refers to the historical founder of Buddhism,

Sakyamuni. Dharma is the truth realized by the Buddha, transmitted in the scriptures, and through a lineage of enlightened masters. Sangha is the Buddhist community, originally Sakyamuni Buddha's immediate disciples. In a limited sense it consists of Buddhist monks, nuns, and disciples; in a broader sense it includes all persons connected through belief in and practice of Buddhism. "Taking refuge" in the Three Jewels confirms one as a Buddhist practitioner. Faith in the Three Jewels is the recognition that Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are all contained within all sentient beings.

TRANSFORMATION BODY (Nirmanakaya) One of the three bodies of the Buddha: the form that a Buddha manifests to facilitate the deliverance of sentient beings. See "DHARMA BODY" and "RETRIBUTION BODY."

VAJRA Diamond; indestructable.

VINAYA The collection of prohibitions and ethical prescriptions, along with their explanations, that define the code of discipline for Buddhist monks and nuns. 法鼓全集 (第 9 輯，第 4 冊，頁 237，行 4)