

Ch'an And Self-Nature

1. What Is Ch'an?

This question has been asked by many people and has been answered in many ways, although the question should not have been asked in the first place. The reason is: Ch'an cannot be defined. It is the same situation in physics: no one has been able to give a precise definition of a physical body. Any definition one might establish of Ch'an would be either unreal or useless. However, without a definition or at least a description, we do not know where to start our path of cultivation and self-improvement. Therefore, in this chapter I will attempt to construct a definition of Ch'an through several statements that I have found to be true of Ch'an from my own experiences. First I will begin with the following definition of Ch'an:

Ch'an is one's self-nature.

This definition of Ch'an is like defining the mass center of a rigid body as a point, which is an perfect definition. However, this explanation does not give us any method or clue to find the point. If we have already seen our self-nature, we do not need a definition. If we have not, this particular definition gives us no clue to find a way to see it. Therefore, a useful definition should also include important instructions which will lead us to realize our self-nature. Such a definition was given by the Sixth Patriarch when he explained Ch'an sitting to his disciples, saying, "Inwardly, seeing the unmovement of the self-nature is called Ch'an." When the Patriarch explained the Ch'an concentration, he said, "Outwardly, separating from marks is Ch'an."

From the Sixth Patriarch's explanation, we can forge the definition of Ch'an as follows:

"Inwardly, Ch'an is the unmovement of the self-nature; and outwardly, Ch'an is the separation of the self-nature from all marks."

This definition not only identifies the self-nature as an essential entity of Ch'an with unmovement as one of its characteristics, but it also gives us a very important way to cultivate seeing our self-nature -- that is the separation from all marks. As a matter of fact, this is the only way to start our cultivation. A mark is any event or phenomenon which is not a nature. Or we may say that a mark is a part of the environment, and the environment is the totality of all marks.

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2. Human Self-Nature

Since Ch'an eludes concise definition and it would only limit our understanding of Ch'an to rely on such a definition, let us say that Ch'an is simply the entire path or way which leads us to awaken or enlighten our own nature. In other words, Ch'an is the cultivation we undertake in order to find the answer to the question, "What is my self-nature?" Or simply, "Who am I?" Therefore, the first question which must be answered firmly is, "Do I have a self-nature?" If the answer is no, then Ch'an has no meaning. If the answer is yes, then Ch'an will provide a way to discover our self-nature. This way has been shown through cultivations of many Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and sages.

As we strive to construct a definition of Ch'an, I think it would be helpful to introduce descriptions of the self-nature given by the Sixth Patriarch in the Platform Sutra. While the Platform Sutra has many other passages describing self-nature, the following list contains its typical and representative characteristics. But first, let me explain that in the Platform Sutra, the following names are used as synonyms: self-nature, mind, Heart, Bodhi, Dharma body, and Buddha. The meanings of these names have different implications and connotations to suit particular situations; but in general, they represent the same reality. In this book I will often use the word "mind" as the body of the self-nature because we are used to thinking that a nature must be a nature of "something", even though this way of thinking is a crude approximation of reality. Ultimately, the word "body" has no real meaning; it is only a name for a nature. Now, let's proceed to the list of descriptions:

- 1) **"Bodhi is the intrinsic self-nature. It is originally clear and pure."**
- 2) **"See your intrinsic nature which is neither produced nor destroyed."**
- 3) **"The self-nature is originally pure of itself, is originally not produced or destroyed, is originally intrinsic in itself, is originally unmoving; and the self-nature can produce all Dharmas."**
- 4) **"Without self-nature there is no birth."**
- 5) **"The wisdom of Bodhi (self-nature) is originally possessed by all people. The Buddha nature (self-nature) of the stupid and the wise is basically the same."**
- 6) **"The capacity of the Heart (self-nature) is vast and great like empty space and has no boundary."**
- 7) **"All Prajna wisdom comes from the self-nature; it does not enter from the outside."**
- 8) **"In all environments and at all times, if realizing that all dharmas are in a state of no obstruction, the mind is the Thusness; the Thusness is the reality. If seen in this manner, the mind is the self-nature of the highest Bodhi."**

The descriptions of self-nature given in the Platform Sutra are not speculations nor hypotheses; they are experimental reports written by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and sages who have no personal motives other than to provide information and guidance for later generations. Their works are manifestations of compassion, the greatest compassion since all Buddhas know that they cannot save a single person if he does not want to be saved. One can only be saved by himself.

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From these experimental reports on self-nature, I propose the following proposition:

Mind is a field, a mind-field.

It is called a mind-field to distinguish it from other fields like gravitational and electromagnetic fields. The mind-field is intrinsic and self-sufficient. As a field, it has a field strength and may interact with other fields. There is not a particular word to express the strength of a mind-field. I use “intelligence-wisdom”, or simply “wisdom” with hopes that no confusion will arise in the expression of this single notion. During the interaction of one mind-field with other mind-fields, dharmas are produced. The mind-field like other fields permeates all space. Hence, it is vast and has no boundary.

The field-strength of a mind-field -- intelligence-wisdom -- is one word, not two. When they are used separately as they usually are, I define them as follows:

Intelligence: The function of the mind which acquires and applies, analyzes and judges the knowledge of one's environment, particularly of the physical world and other living beings. Hence, intelligence is a dharma, not a nature, which is produced in response to stimuli.

Wisdom: The capacity of the mind to understand and know the intrinsic natures of one's environment at all times. Wisdom is inherent to the mind and the two cannot be separated from each other. Wisdom is the potential of a mind-field.

Self-nature or the mind is the central entity of Ch'an, important to all cultivators. Yet there is not much one can say about it. The lack of words to describe self-nature does not mean that it is dull and useless. All dharmas come from it and go to it; hence, it is the “creator”. It is our superior, king, and god because our thoughts and conducts originate from it.

The lack of words to describe self-nature may be better understood if you try to describe a mirror. You may say, “The mirror is very shiny and bright without a dull spot. It is perfect and beautiful!” What do you say after that without repeating yourself? Of course, you may remark about the frame, but that is not the mirror itself. Finally you may add, “Well, you just have to come see it for yourself to believe me.” It is difficult to describe a perfect mirror because there are no flaws, no variations from one place to another in color or surface. For the same reason, the vast and boundless intrinsic self-nature cannot be subjected to any proper description in detail. Self-nature can only be understood once you are enlightened and can see it for yourself.

Another analogy can be made between the self-nature and the mirror. A mirror can reflect the shape and texture of a physical body placed in front of it; yet when the body is removed, it leaves no trace of that physical presence in the mirror. It is the same for self-nature. It shines clearly with its wisdom on all marks and makes them completely understandable; yet it does not attach to them. That is why the Platform Sutra says, “Outwardly, separating from marks is Ch'an.” For many of us, it may not be the case that the mind is separate from the environment which is the totality of all marks. That is because our minds are confused and not as pure and clean as they were originally.

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3. Understanding of Nature and Dharma

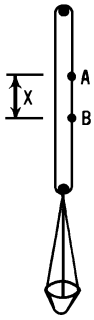


Fig. 1a

As we continue the process of defining Ch'an, we can say the following: self-nature is Ch'an and Ch'an is self-nature. They are one and the same thing. Hence, understanding the characteristics of the word "nature" is essential. Because of education's misplaced emphasis, we have trained and used our minds mainly to analyze and understand the external/physical world. That is, we have learned a great deal of knowledge about the external world, yet we understand our minds very little, almost not at all. Therefore, let's choose an example from the tangible, concrete world to illustrate the intangible, essential characteristics represented by the word "nature".

An engineer can run a uni-axial test of a metal bar on a test machine in any mechanics laboratory to demonstrate the properties of nature. However, to make this example accessible to everyone, an ordinary rubber band about five inches in diameter is used. Hang the rubber band and apply increments of load as shown in Fig. 1a. Two points A and B, one inch apart, are marked on the rubber band when the load $F = 200$ grains, where 437.59 grains is equal to one ounce in the U.S. customary unit system. This initial load is to reduce the slackness of the rubber band. We define $\sigma = F - 200$ and $\epsilon = x - 1$. Ten pairs of the values of (σ, ϵ) are carefully measured and plotted. The straight line, which is obtained by the least square method and shown in Fig. 1b, is the best curve to represent the experimental data.

The relation between σ and ϵ can be represented by the following equation:

$$\sigma = k\epsilon \tag{3-1}$$

From the experimental curve, we read that $\sigma = 1,000$ gr. (grains) at $\epsilon = 0.06$ in. (inch). Hence, $k = \sigma/\epsilon = 1000/0.06 = 16666.667$ gr/in. This value of k which is called the spring constant of the rubber band is the property or nature of the rubber band. We can choose any other pair of (σ, ϵ) from the curve, and we will obtain the same value of the spring constant k . To emphasize this important notion and make

it clearer, let us answer the following sequence of questions slowly and attentively:

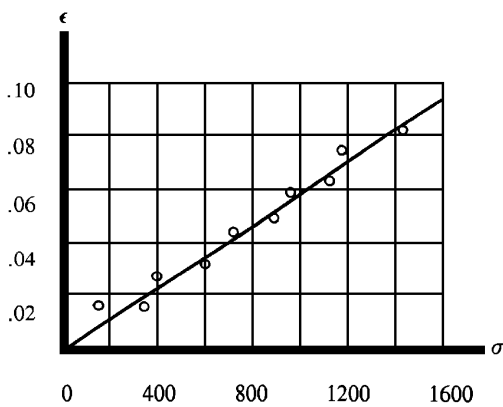


Fig. 1b

- What's the value of k as $\sigma = 1000$ gr.?
Answer: $k = 16666.67$ gr/in. That is what we just calculated.
- What's the value of k as $\sigma = 1000/2 = 500$ gr.?
Answer: $k = 500/0.03 = 16666.67$ gr/in.
- What's the value of k as $\sigma = 1000/3 = 333.3333$ gr.?
Answer: $k = 333.3333/0.02 = 16666.67$ gr/in.

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- What's the value of k as $\sigma = 1000/N$ gr. with any N as large as desired?
Answer: $k = (1000/N)/(0.06/N) = 16666.67$ gr/in.
- What's the value of k as σ approaches zero?
Answer: $k = 16666.67$ gr/in., the limiting case as N goes to infinity.

It is clear that the spring constant k , which is the nature of the rubber band, does not change when (σ, ϵ) changes. The nature is still the same even when $\sigma = \epsilon = 0$. However, the value of k cannot be determined without the values of σ and ϵ .

We call the applied force σ an influence or cause and the displacement ϵ a response or effect of the rubber band. We call the pair (σ, ϵ) an environmental disturbance to the rubber band. Since the environmental disturbance is a part of the environment, it is a mark. As the disturbance changes, or even when there is no disturbance, the value of k which is the nature of the rubber band remains the same. It is also noticed that the effect is produced not only because there is a cause, but also because the rubber band has a nature. The properties inherent to the rubber band are equivalent to those of the self-nature of human beings. For each environmental influence, because we have a self-nature, we have a response to it, such as happiness and excitement, sadness and depression, anxiety and affliction, and many other emotional expressions. We call the totality of all these responses an emotional response. Just like the pair (σ, ϵ) for the rubber band which is called the environmental disturbance, the environmental influence and the emotional response also form a pair and is called the human disturbance. A human disturbance may change continuously; yet it does not alter the self-nature just as the disturbance (σ, ϵ) will not change the value of the spring constant. This is what the Sixth Patriarch means in the Platform Sutra, saying, "The self-nature is not produced or destroyed; it is intrinsic in itself and is unmoving."

We have observed the relation as well as the difference between self-nature and environmental disturbance. These two entities have another important difference relative to time. Whereas disturbance changes with time and has a beginning and an end or birth and death, self-nature is independent of time and, therefore, has no beginning and no end or no birth and no death. In other words, self-nature is eternal; it has never been born, so it will never die. Furthermore, even when the rubber band is broken into two, three or many pieces, the value of the spring constant of each piece still remains the same. It is the same for human beings. When the heart stops beating and the brain waves cease, the person's self-nature still remains! The self-nature is intrinsic and self-sufficient because it is independent of the environmental disturbances. If one has realized his own self-nature, then he is the self-nature and the self-nature is he. He cannot die.

4. Similarities and Dissimilarities

From the experiment of the rubber band, we have learned about the most important entity -- nature. While any analogy has its limitations, there is still more for us to learn about Ch'an by using the rubber

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band even though it is such a simple object. Many similarities exist between a piece of rubber band and a human being in concern with their relations to environmental disturbances. Now let's find them out so we can better understand and realize our own self-natures sooner.

Eq. (3-1) can be rewritten in a general functional form:

$$\sigma = k \epsilon = \phi(\epsilon) \quad (4-1)$$

Mathematically, ϕ is a function which maps the domain of ϵ to the range of σ . The domain is the totality of all causes, and the range the totality of all effects. They will simply be referred to as cause (influence) and effect (response). The function which maps the influence to the response is called a dharma. The cause, response, and dharma form a single concept in reality, because a function has no physical or realistic meaning without a domain and a range.

It is noticed from Eq. (4-1) that, for $\epsilon \neq 0$, $\phi = \sigma = 0$ if and only if $k = 0$. This explains an important statement in Ch'an: Dharma is not produced apart from the self-nature; without the mind, there is no dharma.

It is also noticed that, when $\epsilon \neq 0$, $\phi = \sigma \neq 0$ implies $k \neq 0$. Therefore, from the afflictions and other emotional responses ($\sigma \neq 0$), we can be certain that we have a human nature. Since there is no dharma without the self-nature, if we trace the root of the afflictions, we will find that the root is the self-nature.

After realizing the existence of the self-nature ($k \neq 0$), we observe the following conclusions:

- 1) $\sigma = \phi(\text{dharma}) \neq 0$ if ϵ (cause) $\neq 0$.
- 2) ϵ is independent of the nature k .
- 3) $\sigma = \phi(\text{dharma}) = 0$ if ϵ (cause) = 0.

These three conclusions correspond to three important statements in Ch'an. Conclusion 1) states: Dharma is produced from the cause in one's mind. Conclusion 2) states: Cause has no nature. Conclusion 3) states: When the cause is empty, the dharma is empty. From conclusion 2), we can further see that if one is enlightened, he has no anxiety and no affliction because the self-nature is independent of them. Therefore, during the process of cultivation, one only has to quiet his wandering thoughts and lessen his attachment to his environment and even to his anxiety and affliction.

Eq. (4-1) has an inverse which can be expressed in the general form:

$$\epsilon = (1/k) \sigma = \psi(\sigma) \quad (4-2)$$

In this equation, σ is the cause(influence) and ϵ the effect (response), and ψ the dharma. Therefore, a cause of one dharma may be the effect of another which in turn becomes the cause of another effect, and so on. The causes and effects are thus woven into a net by dharmas, the dharma net. A human being lives in this dharma net which he knitted by himself and for himself from beginningless time.

For a given influence, force σ , applied to the rubber band, there is a corresponding response ϵ

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because of the existence of the elastic nature. From this environmental disturbance (σ , ϵ), the spring constant k which is the nature of the elastic rubber band is determined. In other words, without the disturbance, the value of the spring constant cannot be known. It is similar for human beings. To the environmental disturbances, we have emotional responses: happiness or sadness, anger or forgiveness, jealousy or self-denial, etc. From our emotional ups and downs, we know that we have a human nature; however, the nature is not any one of the emotions nor the totality of all of them. Without these human disturbances, we would have no clue to find our intrinsic self-nature. For this reason, the Platform Sutra says, "Affliction is Bodhi. Lust nature originates from the root cause of purity, for once rid of lust, the substance is then just the pure nature body. Each of you, within your own nature, leave the five desires. In a flash, see your self-nature -- see the true you." Therefore, a cultivator should neither be attached to nor be afraid of afflictions or other emotional responses, since discovering their root cause is seeing one's self-nature. Hence, affliction is more than just an affliction; it can be the road to enlightenment. The difference depends on one's choices and one's understanding. If one attaches to the affliction, then affliction is merely an affliction. If one does not attach to nor is obstructed by affliction, then it becomes a road sign showing one the way to his own pure nature.

We have observed the similarities between a human being and an insentient, material object. But, there must be at least one dissimilarity, otherwise, a person would only be equivalent to a piece of wood or a rubber band. We know that this is not true. In fact, there are many differences, the essential one being FREEDOM. It is this freedom that differentiates human beings from other insentient, material things.

For a given rubber band, the relation between the influence and the response is a fixed or a dead one. In other words, for a given value of σ , there corresponds a fixed value of ϵ . For simplicity in comparison, let: k = self-nature, σ = environmental influence, and ϵ = emotional response. We have accepted that human beings have a self-nature, hence $k \neq 0$. If $\sigma \neq 0$, then the corresponding ϵ cannot be zero for an elastic rubber band. However, for human beings, both the cases $\epsilon \neq 0$ and $\epsilon = 0$ are acceptable; that is, they are both realistically possible. These two cases separate human beings into two groups: the Enlightened and the Confused. However, this should not imply that the enlightened and the confused are different in nature; only that some are enlightened to their self-nature and others are not. The invisible force which makes the two cases $\epsilon \neq 0$ and $\epsilon = 0$ possible is human freedom. Over time, this freedom will take us in either one of two directions. Wise use of the freedom will transform an ordinary person into a Buddha, but in the opposite direction, a Buddha into an ordinary person!

One has to cultivate the understanding of human freedom in order to be convinced that the two cases $\epsilon \neq 0$ and $\epsilon = 0$ are possible. Any doubt or hesitation must be removed. In every situation, one should observe his responses ($\epsilon \neq 0$) and examine their changes through the cultivation until his emotional responses ϵ equals or approaches zero has been reached. This is proof of the existence of one's human freedom. Each of us must find proof of our own freedom independently. We cannot use a proxy: not our parents, not our children, not our teachers, not even our masters or gurus.

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If $\sigma \neq 0$ and $\epsilon = 0$, we say that one does not dwell on the influence or the mark. If one does not dwell on any marks, one does not dwell on the environment. If one does not dwell on the environment, then he is liberated from space or from dualism. If one does not dwell on the environment and has no thought of his undwelling, he is liberated from both space and time; he is enlightened. If his enlightenment is complete, he is a Buddha. It must be noted that although the enlightened person has no emotional response, it does not mean that he has no response. A response that is not an emotional one is called a "natural response" to allow us to distinguish the difference between the two kinds of responses. But first, what is an emotional response?

Let a person P be influenced by another person Q. The response P makes is an emotional response if:

- 1) P dwells in space. That is, he first judges whether the influence and the person Q are good or bad, and then he chooses the response.**
- 2) P dwells in time. That is, he has memories of the influence, his response, and the person Q afterwards.**

There is another criterion to distinguish emotional responses from natural responses. Let's treat a response of P as a dharma. A response is an emotional response if its domain is limited to Q and its surrounding neighborhood. A natural response may be a response to a particular influence but the domain of the response is not restricted to, or dependent on that particular influence -- the domain of the natural response must be a universe which may or may not include the particular influence. For example, when person P sees hungry man Q on the street, he is moved and decides to help all hungry men. In this case hungry man Q is a part of the whole domain of his response. However, in another example, when P sees dead man Q, he is moved and decides to save all living beings from the birth-death cycle. In this second case dead man Q is not even included in the domain of P's response. It is essential that a natural response shows no discrimination and creates no partition among the members of its universe. When Sakyamuni Buddha arose from his Samadhi to reveal his universal knowledge and vision so that all human beings could be saved from anxiety and affliction, cupidity and stupidity, and the birth-death cycle, it was a natural response.

From a practical point of view, it is important to understand that as we cultivate, we can recognize an emotional response as one that leaves us with anxiety and affliction, while a natural response does not.

5. Human Death Lock

The ultimate goal of Ch'an cultivation is enlightenment to our self-nature which is covered by afflictions and other emotional responses as the sun covered by dark clouds, no light can shine on earth. Hence, cultivation is simply to dissolve, not suppress, the afflictions which are caused by dwelling on the environment.

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Dwelling on the environment is not only a source of anxiety, affliction, and other emotional responses, but also the root cause of death. Then, how can we not dwell on the environment? If we do not see good and bad qualities of others', if we do not favor some people and dislike others, if we do not search for fortune and reject misfortune, if we do not have the notion of me-and-mine, then what can we dwell on? If we do not have any mark in our mind, then we have nothing to dwell on. This is called no-mark and no-dwelling.

Good and bad, sages and ordinary people, likes and dislikes are marks; marks are the products of dualism. Such duality results from comparisons according to a chosen referential frame. Comparisons are thoughts; therefore, marks are produced from thoughts. Yet, the consequence of dwelling on marks also produces thoughts. Hence, thought and mark and dwelling cannot be separated as one follows the other. They form a cycle. Anxiety and afflictions, pleasantness and unpleasantness, are all manufactured in this cycle. This cycle keeps us in bondage, absorbing our human freedom and locking our clear minds to the environment. Hence, our minds are distorted and our human freedom is partially lost. The cycle binds the mind to the human body so firmly and completely that the mind cannot be freed. Thus, when the body stops functioning, one dies with his body. For this reason, the thought-mark-dwelling cycle is called the Death Lock.

The strategy to break the Death Lock of thought-mark-dwelling is non-thought, non-mark, and non-dwelling. These three are the basic pillars of Ch'an cultivation. The Sixth Patriarch says in the Platform Sutra, "Good knowing fellows, this Dharma door of mine transmitted from the past onwards was first established with non-thought as its doctrine, non-mark as its body, and non-dwelling as its basis. Non-mark means to separate from marks while in the midst of marks. Non-thought means to be without thought while in the midst of thoughts. Non-dwelling is the basic human nature."

The Sixth Patriarch further explains the solution to the Death Lock, saying, "In the world of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, friendliness and hostility, when faced with offensive, critical, or argumentative language, one should treat it as all empty without thoughts of revenge. In every thought, do not think of former environments. If past, present, and future thoughts succeed one another without interruption, this is bondage. In every thought, not dwelling on dharmas is non-bondage. This is to take non-dwelling as the basis.

Good knowing fellows, outwardly separating from all marks is called non-mark. Separating from all marks, the Dharma Body (self-nature) is then purified. Therefore, it takes non-mark as the body."

6. Non-Thought -- No Second Thought

The thought, dwelling and mark of the Death Lock are like the links of a chain. The chain can be broken at any one of the links; but some may be weaker than others and hence, easier to break. Mark is the result of thought and dwelling, while dwelling is a function originated from thought. Therefore, thought is the root of the chain of the Death Lock. We hence choose to break this chain at the link of thought by the wisdom sword of non-thought.

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In the Platform Sutra, the Sixth Patriarch also advises us, "In every thought, constantly separate from the environment and do not give rise to thought with regard to environment. If you merely do not think of anything and completely rid yourself of thought; as the last thought ceases, you die and undergo rebirth in another place. This is a great mistake of which students of Way should take heed."

Wisdom is an essential characteristic of self-nature. If a person achieves the state of non-thought, his thoughts will be the products of his wisdom's response to the environment. Therefore, if he rids himself of his thoughts he has also rid himself of his wisdom. This is the mistake of which the Sixth Patriarch has warned us because wisdom is freedom, and if a person had no wisdom or freedom he would merely be a corpse! Let us call the thought which originates directly from wisdom (self-nature) the "wisdom-thought" or the "nature-thought", and the thought which originates from dwelling on the environment the "second-thought". The wisdom-thought is a natural response, while the second-thought is an emotional response. It is the second-thought that causes anxiety and afflictions, cupidity and defilement. It is the second-thought that causes us to be unable to see the true nature of all things. It is the second-thought that prevents us from realizing and enlightening our own self-nature. It is the second-thought that causes us to dwell on our physical bodies. It is these second-thoughts that lock us in the birth-death cycle, life after life!

Words are coined to express the ideas and experiences one has. It is possible to communicate successfully with each other only if one has the same or at least similar ideas or experiences. But how do people know that they have these in common? They do not know except when they can compare their minds directly, which is an impossibility. Using language is the best method we have to compare our experiences, but communication is only an approximation. Communication is accomplished only through trial and error, and mainly through understanding and trust. I have coined the word "nature-thought" to act as a comprehensive term to express an inexpressible idea, for nature-thought is more than a combination of thought and nature. However, to understand the meaning of nature-thought completely, you have to experience it through cultivation.

You may wonder and ask: "How can I cultivate without understanding the meaning of nature-thought?" This seems to be a logical question, but it has no proper place in Ch'an cultivation. In this aspect, the Ch'an cultivator is like a person who wants to be an excellent cook; he tastes the wonderful foods while he learns and practices the recipe. During the cooking process, whether he makes a good or bad meal, eventually through persistence he will learn the art of fine cooking. Therefore, you must practice cultivating yourself, and gradually you will understand the meaning of nature-thought.

Second-thoughts are produced by associations and comparisons and may appear in many different forms; but they can be grouped into three major categories: cupidity, hatred, and stupidity. These are the three poisons and defilements of human nature. Envy and jealousy, anger and detestation, hostility and animosity, pride and arrogance, and so forth, are their off-spring. There are many others some of which even have attractive names, like assertiveness, popularity, fame, wealth, power, and authority, and so forth. Eradicate those poisonous by-products with bad names first. After that, you will find that those

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with good names have the same root as those with the bad ones. The good is singled out by comparison with the bad. Since they can be compared, they must have a common denominator which must be eradicated, too.

At this time, you may ask, "How do I know which is the right way to cultivate myself?" There are two sources:

- 1) **Read books on Ch'an cultivation particularly those written by the enlightened because they are direct experiences, not speculations or secondhand information. Just as when you travel to a foreign place and need a guidebook, you need to find the book of one who has traveled the route of cultivation before.**
- 2) **Follow an enlightened teacher. To find an enlightened teacher is a very important step in your cultivation. However, it must be remembered that the teacher cannot cultivate for you. He is not a proxy, but only a guide to show you the door.**

Ch'an (self-nature) cannot be completely understood without cultivation. This is the point where persistence and faith are required. The faith is in yourself and in your nature, not in anything or anyone else. Outside of your own mind, there is no self-nature, no Buddha. Therefore, during Ch'an cultivation if a Buddha appears in front of you and wants to show you what self-nature is like scold him off. He may be a demon with a Buddha's clothes. The cultivator has to cultivate himself and prove the ultimate self-nature for himself and by himself. A cultivator searching for his self-nature is like a hungry man searching for food; he must eat the food for himself and by himself. Talking about self-nature will not help a Ch'an cultivator as talking about food will not benefit a hungry man!

7. Dwelling and Oscillation

We have realized that anxiety, affliction and other emotional responses are echoes of our self-nature in response to external marks which are elements in the environment. Anxiety and affliction come indirectly from self-nature and environmental changes, and directly from dwelling on the environmental changes. Therefore, environmental changes will not be marks in the mind (internal marks) if one does not dwell on them. To illustrate the role and the consequence of dwelling, the oscillation of a mass-spring system is chosen.

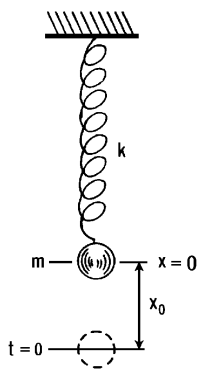


Fig. 2a

Let a particle of mass m be suspended from a ceiling by a linear elastic spring of spring constant k as shown in Fig. 2a. The system is denoted by S , and $x = 0$ is the equilibrium configuration of S . It is clear that if we move the particle down by a displacement x_0 and then release it, the system S will oscillate forever if air resistance is neglected. Let the displacement x_0 represent the environmental change and the oscillations represent afflictions. For any x_0 , there is an oscillation; hence, it seems that for any environmental change, there is an affliction with no

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dwelling process involved. This is not true even for a physical system. In science, the involvement of the human mind is omitted, because the involvement does not contribute anything important to the result of the experiment. More clearly it means that the human mind is not a variable in the mathematical equation. We all know that importance is relative to a purpose and the purpose changes with time. Now let us examine the involvement of the mind in this simple, yet representative, mass-spring system.

Let D be a physical process defined as follows: Simply closing a hand and moving it down in the gravitational direction a distance x_0 and then, opening the hand. D is an arbitrary process; it has no definite relation with the system S. If, in the process D, the closing hand grasps the particle of the system S, we say that the process D and the system S are coupled. Or S dwells on (attaches to) D. Only when S dwells on D, does oscillation occur. The displacement x of the particle at any time is given by the curve in Fig. 2b.

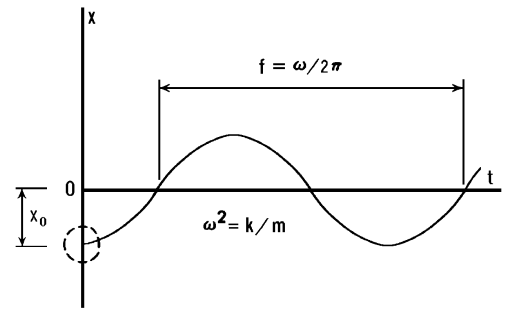


Fig. 2b

The pair (x_0, x) forms an environmental disturbance to the system S. From the curve, we see that the particle oscillates with a constant frequency f . The frequency f is independent of the disturbance; hence it is the nature of the system S. Again this example shows:

- 1) **The nature of the system is independent of the disturbance.**
- 2) **Without the disturbance, the nature of the system cannot be determined.**

Beside the above two conclusions, the example demonstrates the importance of the linkage -- dwelling. The oscillation of the system is not due to the existence of the process D, but due to the dwelling of the system on the process. This is also true for human beings. Without dwelling on the process, there is no mark in one's mind. Without a mark in one's mind, where do anxiety and afflictions come from?

The effect of the dwelling of mass-spring system on the process can be dramatized if the process is a harmonic or periodic one. This is called forced oscillation. When the frequency of the harmonic process is equal to that of the system S, the displacement x goes to infinity in theory. This is called resonance. In reality the displacement will not go to infinity but depart from its regular pattern. It is similar for human beings when a person attaches to marks, anxiety and affliction are produced; continuous attachment to them may produce violent behavior if the relationship of the person's character and marks meets certain conditions. This is behavioral resonance. We say that the person is angry, mad, crazy, and insane. To express the person's character, he is called a demon, ghost, devil, and unwholesome spirit.

The analogy between oscillation and human behavior has a subtle meaning. We take the natural

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oscillation of system S as accepted, normal behavior. When system S dwells continuously on process D, the natural oscillation is altered. If they are in phase, resonance is produced. In the same way when a person dwells on marks, his mind is distorted and his behavior departs from the norm. A person's self-nature will always try to bring his misconduct and distorted mind back to normal. However, when he dwells on the marks in phase, behavioral resonance is produced and he completely departs from his self-nature. He has lost himself and is insane.

It must be noted that even when a person is in behavioral resonance and insane, his intrinsic self-nature remains intact. It is still pure and clear; it is still in constant stillness and constant illumination. The self-nature of a person who is insane is the same as that of a sage or a Buddha.

8. Mind and Field, Mind-field

Earlier in this chapter, it has been proposed that the mind is a field. This particular field is called the "mind-field" to distinguish it from many others like the gravitational and electromagnetic fields. The mind-field is an intrinsic entity of the human being, particularly it is not a property of the human body. This is the central notion of Ch'an. It is this very intrinsic mind-field which all Ch'an cultivators search for. And it is this intrinsic mind-field from which all the Buddhas come. This idea is not just a theory, but a law. And this law is not a mathematical hypothesis but a physical reality. It is an experimental result proven and demonstrated by all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their lives.

Each field has its own characteristics that distinguish it from other fields. On the other hand, all fields have some features in common which qualify them as fields. Let us examine the human mind and see if it has common features to qualify it as a field.

- A) A field fills space. Hence it has neither shape nor boundary. This feature which is possessed by the gravitational and electromagnetic fields is also possessed by the mind. The Platform Sutra says, "The capacity of the Heart (mind) is vast and great like empty space, it has no boundary. It is not square, round, great or small. It is not above or below, long or short. The capacity of the Heart is vast and great, encompassing the Dharma realm. All Buddha lands are ultimately the same as empty space. Your intrinsic Heart is just like empty space."**
- B) A field has a field strength which interacts with its environment. Everyone can be convinced that the mind has this property, because all thoughts and conducts originate from it. The field strength of the mind is called intelligence-wisdom, or simply wisdom. The mind is not an empty space without a property or nature. The Platform Sutra says, "If you sit still with an empty mind, you will attach to the undifferentiated emptiness." Furthermore, the Sutra describes some characteristics of wisdom, saying, "All Prajna wisdom comes from self-nature; it does not enter from the outside. Have no mistaken notion about that! This is the natural function of true nature. Neither is it blue, yellow, red, or white. It is without**

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anger and joy, without right and wrong, without good and evil, and it has no head nor tail.”

- C) **A field has energy. The gravitational and electromagnetic fields both have energy which are called potential energy, or simply potentials. Although there is no particular name for the energy of the mind, we call it “wisdom”. Therefore, wisdom is the inherent nature of the mind and also the function of the mind.**
- D) **A field has functions, yet the field itself is not altered. This can be easily understood by considering the familiar gravitational field of the earth. When a material body is located in the gravitational field, the field is functioning and produces a force acting on that body. No matter how many material bodies are located in the field, the gravitational field will not be altered. Particularly, its field strength will not be altered and its energy will not be lost. Has anyone worried about the earth becoming exhausted while it acts on the many material bodies on its surface and so many planets and stars in space? It is the same for the mind: As the Platform Sutra says, “It (mind) produces all dharmas, yet itself is not altered.” This characteristic is mentioned in the Platform Sutra in many places. Only a few are quoted here:**
- **“All dharmas are within human nature.”**
 - **“All the ten-thousand dharmas are produced from self-nature.”**
 - **“How unexpected! Originally, self-nature is not produced nor destroyed.”**
 - **“And see your intrinsic nature, which is neither produced nor destroyed.”**
 - **“All is one; one is all. Coming and going freely, the Heart (mind) is unobstructed.”**
- E) **At the same position, many fields can overlap without any space problem. In other words, the impenetrability principle of a material body does not apply.**

The condition C is not independent, but a consequence of conditions B. Condition E is the consequence of the condition A, since there are numerous human mind-fields. From the above discussion, we see that the mind has all the characteristics that other fields have. Hence, the mind is qualified to be called a mind-field. Since the mind is a field, it encompasses space; it is particularly important to note that the mind is not restricted to the confines of the human body. However, due to the effects of dwelling on marks through boundless time, we have lost the freedom to use vast parts of our mind. Therefore, enlightenment is simply to restore our original mind, and liberation is simply to untie the bondage of the mind to the human body while we still have the freedom to do so. After enlightenment and liberation, we will find that we have not really attained anything new since what we have attained was originally ours.

9. Mind-field and Human Body

At this time, if my children were to ask me for only one or two sentences on how to educate themselves, I would tell them:

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“Your mind is independent of your physical body; cultivate yourself and find it, then live according to its intrinsic nature.”

For those of us who live in an industrial and technological society, we find that many of our activities are directly or indirectly focused on the service of our physical bodies. How to decorate, beautify, and comfort the physical body has become one of our primary motivations and goals during our lives. Such a motivation is so firmly planted in many people's minds that they believe that happiness and peace can be obtained and insured by wealth, power, and fame. With such a materialistic notion, many other unreal and unwholesome concepts are created. What they do not know or at least choose not to believe is that happiness and peace are affairs of the mind, and only in the mind. Since the mind is the host, responsible for one's views, thoughts, and conducts, it is only reasonable to expect that the body should serve the mind. But for many of us, this is not the case. On the contrary, the mind serves the body as a slave to find all strategies and tricks to satisfy the desires of the five senses. This service attends the superficial and the temporary, neglecting the essential and the eternal. With such an attitude, we can obtain only temporary excitements; but for happiness and peace, it is hopeless.

The independence of the mind from the human body has been clearly pointed out by the Sixth Patriarch, saying in the Platform Sutra, “People's physical body is the city; their eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are the gates.” In other words, the human body is like an inn, you stay there temporarily and do not return to it unless it's necessary. The Patriarch also says: “The body remains when self-nature is present, and the body is destroyed when self-nature goes.”

A Ch'an cultivator should know that it is his original mind, the intrinsic self-nature, that is the master while his body is the servant and not the other way around. Since the existence of the body is restricted between its birth (t_B) and its death (t_D), the meaning of life cannot be centered on the physical body; if it is, then pondering the meaning of life is pointless. That is one of the reasons why some philosophers think that life is just a joke. From this simple argument we can conclude that the sole purpose and function of the physical body is a tool to search for some entity which is not limited to the short time interval (t_B, t_D); that is the original and/or the self-nature.

After we realize our original mind-field, how can we be unhappy? Where would afflictions come from then? If we realize that our minds are our true selves and that our minds are independent of our physical bodies, how can we die? For, after a person is enlightened, he cannot die even if he wants to, just as worldly people have to die even though they do not want to. This is human liberation. Final and complete liberation!

10. Experiments of Human Liberation

There are numerous cases which prove that the mind and the human body exist independently. The human body is like a motel room one stays in temporarily. When the trip comes to an end, one leaves the motel room without having become attached to it. If one cultivates himself and becomes

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enlightened, he can walk out of his physical body at will like some one leaving a motel. To demonstrate this point, I have chosen the three following experiments:

- 1) **When the Fifth Patriarch (Hung Jen) escorted the Sixth Patriarch (Hui Neng) to Chir Chiang courier station, he said to him, "Three years from now, I will leave the world." He actually left the world four years later instead of three. According to statistics, this is a 33.3% error, and for any scientific experiment, it is not a small error. But can any one of us make a prediction or decision about the time of our death when we are still in perfect health? It was due to other matters that the Fifth Patriarch had to delay the schedule of his extinction.**
In addition to determining the year of his extinction, the Fifth Patriarch was able to select the day. When his stupa was finished on the fourteenth day of the second month, he told his disciples, "I cannot go to Nirvana on the fifteenth of this month, because that is the day when Buddha went to Nirvana." Therefore, he waited until the twenty-second day of that month to go to Nirvana.
- 2) **The Sixth Patriarch who knew the time of his extinction ordered his disciples to build a stupa one year earlier. On the first day of the seventh month, he said to his disciple, "In the eighth month, I wish to leave this world." On the third day of the eighth month of the pre-told year (A.D. 713), he said to his disciples, "Each of you take your seat for I am going to say goodbye." He then told the disciples, "The Self-nature is True Buddha Gatha." He sat upright until the third watch; then he suddenly said to his disciples, "I am going." He was gone instantly.**
- 3) **The Third Patriarch's (Seng Tsan) extinction was more dramatic. He told his disciples, "People think that it is very strange and difficult to die in a sitting posture. My death and life are free." After saying that, he grasped a limb of a tree and went into extinction with his physical body in a swinging posture. Indeed, it may be strange and difficult. Isn't this a wonderful experiment to show that, for an enlightened man, the self-nature and the physical body are two independent entities?**

11. Thought-wave of the Mind

When the mind-field (mind) responds to external stimulation (cause), it produces a wave (effect). To distinguish this particular wave from many other types of waves in physics, we will call it "thought-wave", or simply "thought". A wave has three characteristics: amplitude, frequency, and wave-length. If we use wave-length as a reference, thought-waves can be separated into two groups: large and small. For simplicity, large ones will be called thought-waves and small ones will be called thought-turbulence. Of course, we must realize that the choice of reference is arbitrary. We can select a term to describe a particular occurrence, but terminology does not reflect any change in reality.

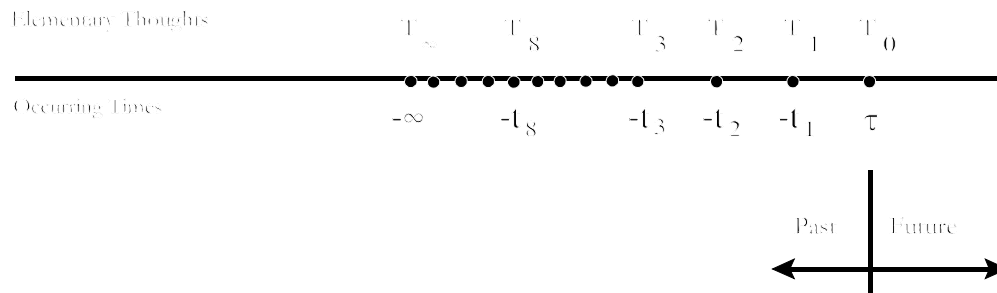
From physics we know that in addition to the nature of a material body, the present state of the body is determined by the whole history of that body's experience from beginningless time up to the

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present. This is the most general constitutive equation. Let us call the collection of all of one's thoughts at a given time a "thought-configuration", and the collection of all thought-configurations a "thought-space". We know that the present thought-configuration is influenced by past thought-configurations. Therefore, we have established the most general constitutive equation of thought-configurations as follows:

A person's present thought-configuration is determined by the whole history of his thought-configurations from beginningless time to the present. Therefore, if at one time a person stole something from another and knew that it was wrong, he may have already forgotten the incident, but the thought of stealing is permanently cast in his present thought-configuration.

At this time, it is proper to ask a probing question. Since one's past thoughts are firmly cast in his present thought-configuration, is there any thought that remains in the past? To explain this question more clearly, let us assume that a single thought can be represented by a harmonic function and any complex thought can be represented as a combination of many harmonic functions. Therefore, the present thought-configuration at time τ can be decomposed by Fourier analysis into a collection of elementary thoughts. Since the past thoughts (time $t < \tau$) are cast in the present thought-configuration, the elementary thoughts consist of all thoughts which have occurred during the time interval $(-\infty, \tau)$, where N is a very large number. Let the thoughts under consideration belong to Mr. A. If Mr. A likes, he can arrange the elementary thoughts in some manner either for a particular purpose or just a personal preference. Let T_0 be the thought occurring at the present time τ and T_j ($j = 1, 2, \dots$) be the thought occurred at the time $-t_j$. Then the elementary thoughts can be represented by points on a straight line called the thought-axis as follows:



Since the events in the future have not yet happened, the thought-axis for time $t > \tau$ is empty. After Mr. A examines his thought-axis, how can he have notions of the past and the future? Without the past and the future, what is the meaning of the present?

Now let us get back to the thought-configurations. We have experienced that some past thoughts have a stronger influence on the present thought-configuration than others. In other words, it is clear that some thoughts definitely influence us, while others do so vaguely or not at all. Therefore, we can separate our thoughts into two categories: conscious thoughts and subconscious thoughts. Since the

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terms thought-wave and thought-turbulence have been assigned arbitrarily, we can associate thought-wave with the conscious and thought-turbulence with the subconscious.

From physics, we know that a wave can be amplified or nullified by a modulating wave. It is the same for a thought-wave. Thus we can establish the following principle of amplification and nullification for thought-waves:

One thought can amplify or nullify another thought. A good (positive) thought amplifies another good thought; a bad (negative) thought amplifies another bad one. Although a good thought nullifies a bad thought the reverse is also true.

Of course, good (positive) and bad (negative) are relative terms, not absolute ones. And the choice for either good or bad is still in the wise man's hand. The judgment of whether something is good or bad may vary from person to person, but the principle of amplification and nullification is valid for all. The Platform Sutra says, "In the dark dwelling of troubles, you must always produce the wisdom sun. Deviance comes, affliction arrives; right comes, affliction goes. Proper views cast out the three poisons in the mind and transform the demon into Buddha -- this is true, not false."

The principle of amplification and nullification of thought-waves was used to its ultimate worth by the Sixth Patriarch in his final instruction when he discussed the thirty-six pairs of opposites and the two extremes with his disciples. This principle of amplification and nullification establishes the foundation of education and repentance. Without it, we could not educate or change ourselves, nor could we repent what we have done wrong. If this principle were not true, we would be in a hopeless situation; we would remain forever unchanged.

12. Thought-wave as a Surface Wave

From the previous section, we know that our present thought-configuration is determined by the whole history of past thought-configurations. We have also observed from the thought-axis: the future does not have a definite meaning since nothing has happened in it, and the past is already cast in the present. Therefore, the thought-wave is a surface wave propagating forward along the time axis. We can recognize from our five senses and straightforward reasoning, which is a process of one thought after another, that the physical world in which we are living is a three-dimensional space. With the time axis, therefore, the mind-field is four-dimensional. In other words, for ordinary people, the physical world is a three-dimensional space, Newtonian and absolute; but for enlightened people, the physical world is a four-dimensional space, Einsteinian and relative. That the physical world of the enlightened is a four-dimensional space has two effects: one in space and the other in time. In space, ordinary people cannot see things which are enclosed in a three-dimensional opaque box; but an enlightened one can. And as far as time, ordinary people cannot see events in the past; but an enlightened one can. These two effects deduced from the assumption that the mind-field is four dimensional are not just theory but verified by countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and reported in many Sutras.

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From the thought-axis, we realize that the physical world in which the mind is filled is a four-dimensional space. Therefore, the mind itself must be a five-dimensional entity if we take freedom, which is an inherent quality of the mind, as an independent variable.

Based on much evidence, people have been convinced that Einstein's relativity is not a mathematical theory but a physical one. In this section, it is concluded that the theory of relativity is not just a physical theory of the material world but can be realized or sensed directly by human beings.

13. Remarks on Mind as a Field

We have observed that dwelling distorts the mind-field so that things and events cannot be understood by the mind as they really are. There is another way to comprehend this occurrence. Wisdom is the energy of the mind. When the mind dwells on marks, the mind has an energy outflow. When one allows the outflow of wisdom to occur, the mind becomes less comprehensive; that is stupidity. On the other hand, when one reduces the degree of attachment and cuts off cupidity and anger and the feeling of hatred, the mind will become more comprehensive, so that it is purer and clearer; that is wisdom.

Dwelling is a process which transforms the energy of the mind to marks. Common people are only aware of the process of transformation and the marks, and they mistake them as the mind itself. Marks, which are parts of the environment and have no intrinsic nature, are subject to production and extinction. When the totality of marks one dwells on is extinguished, he dies. One of the marks that most people dwell on firmly is their physical body. Hence, as the body gradually becomes less functional, the dying process starts. At the end, when the body does not function at all, the person dies. The trouble is that he does not know what he really is. For an enlightened person, when his body is extinguished, he walks out of it as one moves out of his house or steps out of his car. The Third Patriarch did just that at his extinction -- walked out of his body. This is true and complete liberation.

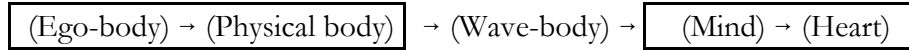
14. Mind and Heart

For most people, "mind" is a more accessible term than "self-nature". Hence, mind and intrinsic self-nature have been used as synonyms. Ultimately they are the same thing, but they are not identical. Using them interchangeably has been done only to help the Ch'an cultivator to find a realistic step for enlightenment. After enlightenment, he will find that the mind is still a stepping stone and he has not yet found the intrinsic self-nature. Therefore, the nature of the mind should be called a relative nature, not an intrinsic nature. The relative nature of the mind has been pointed out by the Sixth Patriarch in the Platform Sutra: "When self-nature is present, the body and the mind remain; but when self-nature goes, the body and mind are destroyed." When the Sixth Patriarch was asked who received the transmission of the Right Dharma Eye Treasury, he said, "The one who has the Way obtains it; the one without a mind penetrates it." This indicates that a Ch'an cultivator uses the mind only as an

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intermediate step for enlightenment. After enlightenment, one should not be attached to the mind so he can further penetrate the realm of all Dharmas. Therefore, only the intrinsic nature, also called the Heart, is the ultimate reality. As the Heart is realized, there is no mark, no differentiation, it is intrinsic. Yet, all the dharmas or functions are produced from the Heart.

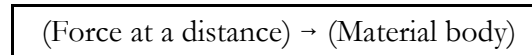
According to the development of human nature, we observe the following sequence:



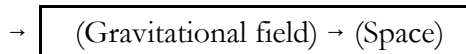
The wave-body is also called the energy-body. The rectangular box which encloses the two bodies indicate their close relation. This sequence will be called the human transformation sequence which is very important in Ch'an cultivation. Hence, it will be discussed in detail in Chapter III. However, the concept will be introduced briefly in the following paragraphs.

Human beings differ from material bodies because of their human freedom. If we lose the freedom, we are only corpses. In Ch'an cultivation we want simply to transform our human freedom from one body to another. If our freedom is attached completely to the ego-body, when the ego-body is broken, we die. If our freedom is attached to the Heart, we will never die. The Heart is like a space which has never been born, so it will never die.

It is interesting to observe that the material body which is the subject of study in Physics also shows such a development sequence:



→ (Gravitational wave)



The close relation between the two sequences is not accidental, but implies a profound notion that human beings and the physical world are not two separate entities, but one with two distinct phases. The similarity between the ego-body and the force at a distance doesn't seem very pronounced, though we have observed the similarity between the law of affinity which governs ego-bodies, and Newton's universal law of gravitation which governs material bodies. Moving down along the sequences we have observed the close relation between the mind-field and the gravitational field. They are almost identical except that the mind-field has human freedom which manifests itself as wisdom and compassion. Hence, the Heart is the space with human freedom and the space is simply a part of the Heart. Therefore, from the Heart, space is produced; from the space, a gravitational field (or any other physical field) is produced; then from the gravitational field a material body is produced. It is noticed that not only do all dharmas come from the Heart, but material bodies are also its manifestations.