

Method of Ch'an Cultivation

1. A General Understanding

The intrinsic self-nature is originally pure and clear, it does not need to be enlightened. But through uncountable years of contamination, it has been soiled and covered by lust, desire, and many other kinds of attachments. All our activities and thoughts have turned toward the external world. Therefore, we have lost direct contact to our intrinsic nature. Because of our past good causes and matured condition, we have been able to meet the Buddha Dharma which will lead us back to our intrinsic nature. Since each of us has soiled our nature in different ways, the returning roads are, of course, different. Hence, there is no fixed method which can be prescribed and is suitable for everyone. Each cultivator must exercise his intelligence to modify the proposed procedure to fit his own inclination and situation. If he can find an enlightened teacher, he is very fortunate. How to find an enlightened teacher when he himself is not enlightened is another problem.

The purpose of Ch'an cultivation is simply to be enlightened to our own intrinsic nature. You do not gain anything from the external world. When you are enlightened, you will have no affliction, no defilement, and even no death because you have never been born. Since self-nature is intrinsic, it has no dissipative relation with the external world. You should only contemplate inwardly and not search for any gain, and you shouldn't ask for other people's approval. Therefore, as a Ch'an cultivator, you must be content with your present standard of living. Furthermore, you must be willing to lower that standard when the condition requires. That is, a Ch'an cultivator must be content at all times and in all situations. Without such understanding and commitment, you cannot practice Ch'an. If you try, you will be deeply disappointed and frustrated when you find that your salary is less than others', and you are not promoted as you think you should be. Even worse, you may be unemployed. However, you need not be scared away from cultivation by this warning because it does not take much food to maintain a healthy body and it costs little. And, particularly, it takes less food to maintain a healthy body of a Ch'an cultivator because he does not engage in any idle talk and argument and he refrains himself from anger and jealousy -- this is energy conservation. Those emotional activities require a great amount of energy. Also, anyone with a sound mind can conclude that a hard and honest worker, without pulling any strings or playing any tricks, can and should earn enough money to provide the minimum nutritional requirement for a healthy body in a normal situation. Otherwise, it is not his fault; it is simply that he is not in the right position or not in the right organization. He should find another one.

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One may wonder about the situations under which a hard and honest worker cannot make a living. These are two kinds: natural disasters and man-made wars. In both of these situations, money does not only lose its usual buying power, but it also may bring misfortune. Now, I could sell an insurance policy insuring that any hard and honest worker can find a job and make enough money for his body in a normal situation. This is like saying that any beautiful and thoughtful woman can find a husband if she is not very choosy and just wants a plain husband. Of course, she may get divorced very soon because there are many bad couples. Yet, there is no bad wife or bad husband, so she may remarry another one in a short time.

It should not be mistaken that the purpose of being a Ch'an cultivator is for saving food and money. Ch'an cultivation does help us improve our health. But to maintaining a healthy body is not the purpose of Ch'an cultivation at all. The physical body is only a tool to which we attach and with which we see our own intrinsic nature. After our intrinsic nature is found, the body has no other use to us, except as a tool to help others. Then the physical body is just like a car, when it is no longer functioning as it should, we merely get out of it and get rid of it. Or we may get another car if we prefer.

All Ch'an cultivators search for enlightenment. Enlightenment can be defined according to the life transformation sequence. When you transform your human freedom from the ego-body to the mind-field, you are enlightened. When you attach to an object, which may be a thing or a person or an event or a concept, that object becomes a constraint and, thus, a life-carrier, causing you to lose your freedom to that object. Using a physical term, you lose a certain amount of energy to that object; you have an outflow of life energy. Therefore, to be enlightened, you have to shed your ego-body, your physical body, and your energy-body. The attachment to the physical body is a result of incorrect beliefs which are basically thoughts. And we also know that the energy-body is formed by thoughts and the ego-body is formed by defiled thoughts. Hence, if we have no thought, we will shed all three bodies at the same time and be enlightened to our mind-field. Hence, no-thought is the key to enlightenment. And no-attachment is the road to the state of no-thought. All the methods for Ch'an cultivation are simply expedients which are particularly designed for the cultivator to lead him to the state of no-thought. This state of no-thought can be neither imagined nor rationalized because imagination and rationalization are themselves thoughts. It must be understood by actual practicing the no-attachment in daily living. When a Ch'an master was asked what Ch'an is, he said, "Ch'an is the plain heart and simple mind in daily living." Thus, if we do not attach or dwell on any mark of the environment for all time, we will reach the state of no-thought, since thought is produced by attachment. Therefore, for all Ch'an cultivators, the motto is:

Non-Thought, Non-Attachment.

In the subsequent sections, the shedding of the ego-body, the physical body, and the energy-body will be discussed separately for clarity. The reader should not be misled to think that shedding one body is actually separate from shedding the other. They are all interrelated.

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Before a discussion of the methods of shedding the three bodies, we must first understand that the term enlightenment is just a word which is used as a marker to establish the relative relationship to our confusion. Since our intrinsic self-nature is originally pure and clear and self-sufficient, if we were not confused, then we would not need enlightenment. Because we do not abide in our original nature, we have lost our freedom in our surrounding environment. Our knowing-all and understanding-all wisdom has been soiled by wrong views and defiled thoughts which is called thought-dust. In some aspects, the self-nature with its luminous wisdom is like a perfect mirror which may lose its luster because it is covered by the dust. Therefore, if we can cleanse all the accumulated thought-dust, our intrinsic nature will reveal its original luminosity. This is enlightenment. Thought-dust results from thoughts which form a surface wave propagating along the time axis. Hence, if we can have no-thought at one time, we have cleansed the thought-dust for all time. An old proverb says, "When you put down the slaughtering cleaver, you become a Buddha at that very moment." Even a person holding a slaughtering cleaver can become a Buddha with a sudden change of mind. How true it must be for others who commit lesser crimes.

2. Phase I of Cultivation -- Shedding the Ego-body

The ego-body cannot be detected through the five senses, yet its existence cannot be denied by any thoughtful observer. Just as no scientist can detect the gravitational field itself by any of the five senses or any scientific instrument, no scientist will deny its existence. Though the ego-body is not sensible, we attach to it strongly and firmly because of the countless years of habit. Hence, it is quite difficult to shed the ego-body.

One morning, Mr. J. got up from his bed perfectly calm and relaxed. He was in a peaceful state of mind. He then picked up the newspaper and found that his name appeared in the paper as a headline. His eyes opened wide and his heart began beating heavily, he even began breathing hard. If the news happens to be good, he will be happy. However, if the news happens to be bad, he will be sad, even mad. How can a piece of paper with printed symbols affect his emotional and physiological functions? Because his ego-body has been hurt. As a result of his ego-body's existence, the energy-body receives external information through the physical body's five senses; he then processes the information as a cause or influence and obtains the result which is transmitted back to the physical body as an effect or response. That is the normal external bio-feedback cycle. If one does not attach to external marks nor has an ego-body, how can the external information affect one's physical body? Has anyone ever heard that a piece of bad news had damaged somebody's car?

Almost everyone has an ego-body. But, in the field of abstract ideas, a farmer's ego-body is probably much smaller and weaker than that of an intellectual who is imprisoned in the logic systems constructed by himself and his peers. Actually there is nothing wrong about the logic system itself if it is taken as an expedient. But people attach to the logic system and take it as reality. Therefore, their

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concept of reality is twisted. A logic system should be supported by physical evidence and only used as a guideline for new experimentation. When people find that their logic system is incompatible with new findings, it is the logic system that they should modify or demolish. And they will find that a new logic system is formulated. This method of reasoning implies that the physical or real world itself is the ultimate, true logic system. Thus, any system which truly represents the physical world must be logical. And any system which has internal contradictions cannot represent the ultimate truth of the physical world because the real world has no contradictions. A system with internal contradictions is, at most, an approximation. This kind of observation is in keeping with the scientific spirit.

If you live in a system which contains internal contradictions, your life is bound to be full of anxiety, affliction, and pain. Stop and examine yourself, how many times do you apply a self-contradictory system in your daily living? Do you apply one standard for yourself and another one for others? One for yourself and one for your children? If you do, this is contradictory and it causes anxiety and affliction.

The ego-body is formed by false views and deviant thoughts. They are not isolated but interrelated to each other because all of them are rooted in our mind, which is our inner universe. If a deviant thought is isolated, it is not in our inner universe; if it is in the inner universe, it is not isolated. Therefore, if we can demolish one of our false views and deviant thoughts without leaving any residue, theoretically, all of our false views will then be demolished. But this is not a practical approach because we do not know all the interrelations among the false views and deviant thoughts in our mind. As an expedient of cultivation, these false views have been grouped into the following four categories:

- **Taking Words as the Reality.**
- **Taking a Part as the Whole.**
- **Taking Me-and-mine as an Absolute Reference.**
- **Taking Time as an Absolute.**

Let us examine each category in detail.

2.1 Taking Words as the Reality

Names, labels, titles, etc., are chosen to represent things, persons, events, and functions for communication. In science, there exists, for most cases, precise rules for distinguishing between the word and the entity which the word represents. Thus, there is no serious problem understanding the difference between the two. But words which people use in daily life do cause trouble and confusion because there is no precise rule of definition. Even if there is a rule of definition, this rule changes from person to person, and from time to time. There are words which are used as titles to represent a person's educational background or financial status. They are very troublesome, and a cultivator should be aware of them.

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For example, if a man thinks of himself as a scholar and is respected as such for his scholarship, he will have difficulty adjusting himself when he loses the characteristics which the word “scholarship” represents. This case is one of the simplest because only one person is involved; but this case is also a difficult situation to correct because we all want to be “good”. Once you become a scholar, you want to remain one forever. Once you are influential, you want to remain so forever. Once you are told that you are beautiful, you want to remain beautiful forever. When you finally realize that what you want is unattainable, you get frustrated or depressed.

There are collective names which represent a group of people with common characteristics, like the terms lower, middle, and upper class. These names are strange and false because they are born from the internal contradictions that exist in a person’s mind. Let us take a strata from the “social class” as an example to clarify this point. A person of the middle class who searches for a higher social class tries, on one hand, to depart from one group of people called group P (poor). On the other hand, he tries to gain the approval of another group of people called group R (rich). He consciously and subconsciously assigns certain characteristics to the people in each group. Let us call these characters P* and R*, respectively. Anyone who has the characteristics of P* is classified in P, and similarly anyone who has the characteristics of R* is in R. This reasoning sounds clear and logical. But, actually, it is false in theory and confusing in practice. We all know that a person is much more complex compared to, for example, a material body. Any scientist in mechanics knows that no one is able to define a material body in scientific precision. Then, how can anyone define a human being? Therefore, such a scheme for classification is fundamentally false. And, in practice, since the people in the two groups are not fixed, the one who strives to improve his social class is bound to be unhappy and confused because, from time to time, he finds that some people he disliked becomes those he admires and others he admired becomes those he dislikes. How confusing! As a matter of fact, what do we mean by social class? Is it just a term with no real or definite content? Yet, how many people are driven crazy by that term?

It may be that you have never been trapped in the confusion of identifying with one social class or another. However, if you have, after the above explanation, you may be enlightened and not be trapped by it any more. But you must be careful because there are numerous such traps in all societies; some may even have very attractive names. The diploma which you are proud of is a trap. The honors and praises you have received or just the pleasant words you hear every day are all traps if you attach to them. You may not be able to stop the honors and praises from coming in, but you can stop attaching to them. A Ch’an cultivator must be able to distinguish the name of something from the reality it represents. Every time you hear a word, you should always ask yourself, “What is the definition of that word?” If the definition is not clear, do not let the word leave a false image in your mind because overlooking a minor image, may seem harmless at the beginning, but it will grow into a false notion and a false logic system which will eventually put you into a mental prison. You will lose your freedom because of your carelessness.

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2.2 Taking a Part as the Whole

Taking a part as the whole can be best illustrated by an example. When a lusty old man looks at a young girl, Miss K, and exclaims, "She is beautiful!", this statement is based on two pieces of information: (A) The exposed part of Miss K's physical body which is only a part of her body's boundary. (B) The period of observation which is only a part of the time of Miss K's whole life span. If the old man takes an anatomical analysis or just thinks of her bones and excrements, he will hesitate to say that she is beautiful. If it takes the old man ten years to say one letter of the above exclamation, he will change his mind before he finishes the sentence. You may think that this way of looking at a young girl is too scientific and lacks romance. That is correct. But you have to ask and answer the question, "Can any romantic imagination or fantasy lead to truth or any scientific law?" Does any scientific law contain romance as an element? We all know that scientific knowledge, which represents the truth of the physical world, is accumulated wisdom of all people over a long time. If there is any way which will lead to truth, it is the scientific way. Ch'an is the scientific way which will lead us to the truth of our minds and our hearts, the truth of our inner universe. When you are able to look at your external and internal environments from a scientific point of view, you are a Ch'an cultivator. When a Ch'an cultivator examines his mind and heart by a scientific approach, he follows the Way, the way which all Buddhas have walked through.

A Ch'an cultivator searches for the ultimate truth of his own self-nature, he cannot afford to take a part as the whole because that is only part of the truth. There is no partial truth, nor can truth be a temporal event. Therefore, we should examine everything to which we are attached to see if it is only a part of the whole. If it is, we must find the whole. When we find the whole, we will realize that there is not one thing in this mundane world, and all worlds, which we need to dwell on. Our own Heart is the complete universe; it is self-sufficient, pure and clear, luminous and all-knowing. There is no pain, no anxiety, no affliction, no birth and death.

2.3 Taking Me-and-mine as an Absolute Reference

A person's environment can be considered as a collection of material bodies, living beings, events, and the relationships (dharma) among them. By definition, any part of the environment is called a mark. When we confront a mark, we evaluate and make judgments according to our own limited knowledge. The result of such judgments is partition and classification; and hence, the principle of dualism is established. Good or bad, sage or common label each mark. These identifications are treated as final and absolute. Many of us never realize that our judgment is conditional and its truth is relative to our own limited knowledge as a reference, and that even our own reference changes with time. We have omitted the references for all our judgments in our entire lives. Therefore, we think that our judgment has to be the best, the truth. This is what is meant by taking me-and-mine as an absolute reference. As Ch'an cultivators we must completely abolish such a notion. There is no conditional truth

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which can be ultimate and long lasting.

Before a cultivator makes a judgment, he should first ask himself: Is it really necessary to make such a judgment? If it is not necessary, he shouldn't make one. It is surprising to observe that many judgments, if not all, made during a coffee break and daily conversations are unnecessary. If one has to make a judgment because of his profession, he must realize that the judgment he makes is only a measure relative to a particular reference which happens to be his own. And this reference is simply one's thought-configuration which changes with time. That is, judgment is relative by definition. When one finds his judgment controversial, he should accept other's thought-configuration as valid as his own. Judgment is simply a response of one's thought-configuration to a mark. Since different people have different thought-configurations, different judgments about the same mark are bound to result. This is normal and as it should be. A person doesn't need to be defensive when he finds that another's judgment is against his own. If he takes an attitude of understanding, he will find that he has saved himself many frustrations.

A Ch'an cultivator should understand the sources of the formation of the notion of me-and-mine. Its formation has an obvious reason. Since a mundane person firmly attaches to his physical body and even takes it to be what he is, he sees himself as completely separate from other people. The notion of "self" and "others" is naturally born in his mind. For survival, security, and a longer and better existence in this physical world, he tries to increase his circle of influence so that he can manipulate the environment according to his own needs. When one confronts a mark and classifies it as good or favorable, a positive emotional response is produced such as admiration, desire to possess, or a feeling of friendship. On the other hand, if he sees a mark and classifies it as bad or unfavorable, a negative emotional response is produced in his mind such as repulsion or hostility. These types of emotion become strong forces isolating him from others. He always thinks that this is me and this is mine. Hence, the concept of me-and-mine is firmly planted in his mind.

The simplest way to remove the notion of me-and-mine is to strengthen his effort to search for the truth. A Ch'an cultivator only searches for the ultimate truth. Hence, anything which is not true should be discarded without any hesitation and reservation. Furthermore, he should not make judgments on any unessential matters. Judgment is simply a response of one's thought-configuration; the thought-configuration changes with time, so does the judgment. Therefore, judgment is an event or a mark, not something permanent. One who searches for the ultimate nature should not attach to any mark; otherwise, he can never find it.

Since the intrinsic nature embraces all dharmas and has no partiality, a Ch'an cultivator should constantly examine his views and thoughts to remove all those which are produced by the notion of me-and-mine, self-and-others. And in a deeper state of cultivation, a Ch'an cultivator should not have any view and thought which are the products of the principle of dualism.

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2.4 Taking Time as an Absolute

Most people may never think of the real meaning of time in their lives; instead, they take it as an absolute quantity registered by the clock. This is the Newtonian point of view which is formed from the observations of the external physical world by the five senses. Since people depend on the five senses as major instruments to gain knowledge, they take the absoluteness of time as an eternal law. It is known that the measurement of time is obtained by comparing two events with a known periodic motion. If there were no periodic motion, then time would not have much meaning. Therefore, the choice of the referential periodic motion which is used to measure time is very critical.

In science, the time reference is the periodic motion in the external world, say a pendulum. But one must realize that periodic motion alone does not give any meaning of time if he has no memory. Thus, the thought-configuration plays an indispensable role. As far as the thought-configuration is concerned, the events which are used as the time reference are not those which happened in the external world but those which occur in one's own mind. The events in the mind are of two kinds: The apparent events and the deduced events. Corresponding to an external event, the apparent event is the direct image occurred in the mind through the five senses; it is like a xerox copy. While deduced events are those which correspond to the apparent event and are obtained through the sixth sense by a mental mapping according to one's logic system, or process of association or just habit. Since the mental mapping system which maps the apparent event into the deduced events cannot be clearly defined, the deduced events are numerous and undependable. They are, in most cases, illusory and deviant.

Because there are many relations between the external events and the deduced ones, the inner world formed by all deduced events is thus false and full of contradictions. Due to these contradictions, the energy body is distorted and strained. Such distortions introduce mental problems: anxiety and depression, to mention a few as examples. Furthermore, they affect the physical body, particularly, the nervous system and then the endocrine system. As a consequence of these internal causes, mental and physical illnesses result. Thus, if we want to maintain a peaceful mind and healthy body, we should constantly examine our logic system so that there is no internal contradiction for all time and in all occasions. For this to be possible, the logic system must be independent of the external environment. In other words, the logic system must come from the intrinsic self-nature. This is the Ch'an logic system. When one reaches such a stage, his responses to the external events will be natural, spontaneous, and unobstructed. He is then an enlightened person.

In order to have the Ch'an logic system, a cultivator first has to reach the state of no logic system which is the state of no-thought. He must completely give up all his previous logic systems and learned knowledge. He should completely abolish his existing mental mapping system so that the false and illusory inner world of his mind will be destroyed and cleansed without any residue. Only when the mind reaches such a void state, can a new logic system find room to get in. Then the Ch'an logic system will naturally spring from one's intrinsic self-nature. This is the reason why non-thought and non-attachment are the mottos for Ch'an cultivators.

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Now let us consider the effect of time on a Ch'an cultivator. Time is measured by a sequence of events in the physical world which are assumed to be periodic. These periodic events form a sequence of apparent events in the mind. Furthermore, these apparent events form a sequence of deduced events as the final mental time reference. There are two errors in this mental time reference.

The first error occurs when the order of the events of the mental time reference may be preserved, but the scales between two deduced events are exceedingly distorted. For example, a happy time is always too short and a sad time, too long.

The second error affects us more deeply than the first. Since the thought-configuration is a surface wave in a four dimensional space, all the events in the mind occur on a hyper-plane. Hence, there is no past and no future. And consequently, the present is only a name without a fixed location. When one attaches to a particular event, he uses this particular event to divide the mental time reference into three parts: the past, the present, and the future. He takes these three periods of time as real. He recalls events in the past with enjoyment or regret. And he also dreams of the future as good or bad. A Ch'an cultivator cultivates his own mind, not others, to find the ultimate truth, so how can he allow such a false notion to stay in his mind? Therefore, a cultivator should not recall the past, nor dream of the future. He should completely abolish the false notion of the three periods of time. One's mind is not in the past, nor in the future. It is only in the present. Without the past and the future, where does the present come from?

Since we have discussed four of the major false views and deviant thought that form the ego body, let's now discuss shedding the ego body. We have contaminated our intrinsic self-nature for a long time with lust and desires, and craving for satisfaction from the outside world. We cannot expect to shed the ego-body completely within a short period of time without a determined effort. But on the other hand, one should not be too eager to shed the ego-body without an understanding either because the very eagerness is only the yeast for the formation of the ego-body. And the eagerness may also cause the cultivator to enter into a depressed state and to withdraw completely from the cultivation. Eagerness may even cause the cultivator some psychological and physiological difficulties.

In the first phase of cultivation, a Ch'an cultivator usually has a period in which he shows uneasiness and doubt; he may even lose his temper. This period is transitory and may be called the period of uncertainty. Its cause is: Due to cultivation, his mental mapping system has been modified; yet, it has not reached an unobstructed and stable state. On one hand, he takes pride in his new system, but on the other, he still resides in his old system because of mental habit. This contradictory mental situation produces this new syndrome of uncertainty. A cultivator should be aware of it as a normal phenomenon and not fear it. The syndrome will gradually fade away. The period of uncertainty, short or long, may occur in any phase of cultivation. During this unpleasant period, one should strengthen his faith and purify any false view and defiled thought in his mind. One must realize that a truth seeker is always alone and sometimes lonely. But in a certain depth of cultivation, he will find that the feeling of loneliness does not occur in his mind at all because loneliness does not have a nature. Anything

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which has no nature is a mark; a mark cannot last long.

Once beyond the period of uncertainty, a cultivator will feel content and relaxed. His craving for material gain, fame and prestige, and social influence will gradually diminish to a degree that he thinks he is free from the bondage of desires. However, his desire may change directions, searching for satisfaction in other ways. He may develop a new hobby, for example. Particularly, he will find that it is very easy to doze away his time and that his appetite for food and sex increases. When a person's profession and social functions do not bother him as much as before, it is just right for a nap at almost anytime. With the physical vigor after the nap, there is nothing more natural than having a good dinner, and then a little harmless sex. These behaviors do not violate the moral standard of the society; and just because of this, this state is more dangerous. A cultivator may be drowned, without even being aware of it, in the sea of desires which are closely related to the physical body. If one sheds his ego-body on one hand and attaches more firmly to his physical body, how can he be enlightened? Now we are entering the second phase of cultivation -- shedding the physical body.

3. Phase II of Cultivation -- Shedding the Physical Body

A worldly person takes his physical body as the essential entity for his existence. If the body does not function any more, he believes that he dies. Because of this false belief, all his activities are performed with the physical body as the center, protecting it when it is in danger and comforting it when it is sick. He tries all possible means to entertain his physical body through the five senses. His eyes like to see enjoyable and beautiful things. His ears like to hear good music and compliments. His nose likes to smell pleasant odors. His tongue likes to taste good flavors. And his hands and body like to touch pleasant mollifying objects. A person is not himself when manipulated by his five senses, but is like a prisoner living in a sea of desires.

To satisfy his desires, he has to be aggressive toward the outside world in order to bring sufficient wealth into his possession and to gain enough power to influence others to work for him. But all that one acquires is never sufficient, nor enough because the desires are endless and the outside world either does not have enough or does not want to furnish it. The natural consequences are anxiety, frustration, and anger, then arguments, fights, and finally wars.

When a person is intensely greedy for something, he cannot see that there are many other people who are wanting just the same thing. When he succeeds in his pursuits, he becomes more greedy. When he fails, he becomes angry. With greed filling his mind, he can only see the things he is craving for. He is a very narrow-minded person; a narrow-minded person cannot see the truth, nor the whole picture. His wisdom is limited. With anger filling a person's mind, he cannot think rationally and wisely. One who cannot think rationally and wisely is stupid by definition. That is why greed, anger, and stupidity are called the 3-poisons -- poisons to our wisdom. Just these 3-poisons alone cause us to drift away from our intrinsic, pure, and all-knowing nature.

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Most people attach to marks, particularly to their physical bodies and defiled views. Marks are parts of the whole environment which is changing all the time. If a person attaches to them, he has to change continuously to be compatible with them. A perfect compatibility is unobtainable since he cannot predict the changes with precise accuracy. On the other hand, a person's habit and inertia will not allow him to change as required by the environment without discomforts. Thus, the feeling of insecurity is created. Even worse, he often feels he has lost himself.

The reason for the incompatibility has a deeper meaning. The human being has a self-nature which is intrinsic and invariant. No matter how strong a person's desire is for things in the outside world, this self-nature is always trying to draw him back to his original intrinsic state and to keep him there unchanged. These two opposing forces, self-nature and desire, put the person into a state of constant conflict and contradiction. Contradiction is just another name for anxiety and agony. It is clear that the only way to remove such anxiety and agony is to demolish the 3-poisons and return to one's own nature. A cultivator should thus control and guide his desires into the right channel.

From the physical point of view, we can say that desire is a type of energy flux. One should reverse the direction of the desires toward his self-nature, instead of allowing them to flow outward to the world. This is the way to preserve his life energy, thus his life. When one cultivates in this way to a certain depth, he will have no outflow, and his wisdom will start shining. In such a state, he will be astonished to find that he is compatible with any environment. Why? Because the environment is formed in the mind by dharmas like a net, dharmas have no self-nature. One who is enlightened to his own nature cannot be obstructed by dharmas which are not in the nature.

The 3-poisons, greed, anger, and stupidity, are not separate. They form a closely linked chain which locks a human being from complete freedom. If a person has one of them, he has them all. If he eradicates one of them without leaving any residue, then he eradicates them all. A person can start his cultivation by lessening his greed in general, and controlling his anger in particular. People are greedy for many things. But wealth and sex are two major objectives in people's searching. Wealth can bring all the physical enjoyments and sex can put one into a state of physical ecstasy, forgetting all unpleasant things temporarily. Searching for wealth and sex is a firm expression of a person's strong attachment to his physical body. With such a strong attachment, he cannot be enlightened to his original mind. Therefore, in order to detach from the physical body, a cultivator should not search for wealth, sex, or any other object for satisfying his sensual desires.

When a cultivator lessens his desire, he mitigates his attachment to his physical body. Up to a certain degree of reducing the attachment he will see his own physical body just as a corpse. It is a corpse; this is true, not false. But everyone has to prove it to himself. Otherwise, they are just words with no reality, having no actual effect on his cultivation. And it is difficult to believe, though it is true. Prove it. It is your own life, and it is also your own problem of life-and-death.

A Ch'an cultivator must realize that greed is a relative word in the sense that it requires a reference. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* defines greed as "a rapacious desire for more than

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one needs or deserves, as of goods, wealth, or power.” To know which thought or conduct is a greedy one, one has to choose a reference to compare it with. It is greedy relative to one reference and it may not be greedy relative to another one. For a Ch'an cultivator, it is not how greedy he is but if he is greedy or not. Thus, a Ch'an cultivator should judge his thought and conduct with a sequence of references, each one being more strict than the previous one. Let us call this sequence of references a “tightening ring”. Correct every conduct according to a chosen “tightening” reference; this method will not only help remove all the grasping, greedy behavior, but also the greedy thoughts and their very root -- desire.

One may ask, “Is Ch'an cultivation itself a desire?” This is a commonly asked question raised by those who do not really want to lessen their greed. To this question, there are many answers which depend on the questioner's motivation and his notion of the word desire. I will not make a list of all possible answers but instead answer it by a question, “Do you want to cultivate Ch'an to get rid of the birth-death problem?” If you do not want to cultivate at this time, I will wait for you another year, ten years, or even to your next life until you decide to cultivate. If you do want to cultivate, cultivate according to the doctrines taught by all Buddhas and Budhisattvas. It is your own problem and your own decision. Why do you ask other people about such an important life issue? When one cultivates Ch'an to a deeper state, he will feel and know all the time that there is an internal force driving him from one state to another. At one state, he does not know exactly what the next state will be. But with the guidance of the internal force he has no doubt, no hesitation about his destination. This inner guide force is so distinct and natural that no Ch'an cultivator can be misled after he has passed a certain stage. Because this force does not come from the outside but from his own self-nature, just like a wanderer who begins the journey back home, he knows where he is going.

Ch'an cultivators who search for enlightenment are not the only ones who should reduce their desires. Everyone who just wants a happy life and a peaceful mind should also cultivate to reduce their desires. Otherwise, a happy life and a peaceful mind are unobtainable because on one hand desire is quite arbitrary, having no upper limit and no curfew which is impossible to satisfy. On the other hand, the attainment of the objectives or goals which one desires is strongly governed and constrained by the external environment. Therefore, one who has more desires is bound to be more unhappy. For this simple reason, desire should be curbed by everyone, Ch'an cultivator or not.

Besides the craving desires for wealth and sex which are closely related to the physical body, two others should also be listed: sleeping and food. These two are necessary for maintaining a healthy body; but many times, they are overdone. A Ch'an cultivator should be an analytical dietician who plans his menu only from a point of view of nutrition and health. Regardless of the tastes of the food, a cultivator should keep the amount of intake fixed and vary it only according to the requirement of his physical activities. As far as sleeping is concerned, no specific rule can be given. But with a little alertness, anyone is able to discriminate the case when he is physically tired and falls into sleep from the other case when he just has nothing to do and dozes. As one cultivates into a deeper state, he will find that he breathes

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very lightly. And his breath may even stop completely during the meditation. This indicates that his metabolic process is slowing down or stops. This is because his deviant thoughts and craving desires have been diminished; and consequently, the tremulous activities of all the cells have also been diminished accordingly. Therefore, his metabolic requirement is lowered. At this time, a Ch'an cultivator can start to reduce his sleeping time and the amount of food intake. But he should always be careful so that his physical body will not be harmed. The physical body is just like a car, though it is an important one. Misuse it, it is a burden; use it wisely, it gives us a chance to become a Buddha.

4. Phase III of Cultivation -- Shedding the Energy Body

The energy body is a conglomerate of thoughts. Thought is born from the environmental stimuli, and its existence is maintained by continuous attachment. If one can detach from the environment, particularly from his ego-body and physical body, he will feel no stimulus, and hence have no corresponding thought. If he has no thought under all conditions and at all times, he has completely shed his energy body. He is then enlightened to his mind and thus, a Bodhisattva. But, in reality, this usually does not happen because one does not know when he has completely shed his ego-body and physical body. When he thinks that he has shed his ego-body, physical body and energy body, yet he is not enlightened, it is because the minute thoughts accumulated from the past lives are hidden deeply in the eighth consciousness and cannot be easily removed from it. When this happens, one should search for a well learned teacher for proper diagnosis and prescription. For those who are not fortunate to have a good teacher, the following two methods are very beneficial for all cultivators: (1) remorse and repentance, and (2) reciting mantras.

Remorse is a deep regret for one's misconduct and defiled views in all his lives, though he may even not know what they are. Repentance is the expression given or conduct done in compensation for his mistakes. Remorse and repentance are not separate but two phases of one entity. Remorse without repentance is neither deep nor sincere. Repentance without remorse is false and useless. Therefore, remorse and repentance should be written as remorse-repentance, rather than two separate words. Remorse-repentance, which is a manifestation of the intrinsic human nature, distinguishes us from other animals. It should be recognized that remorse-repentance is a strong centripetal force with which a cultivator can detach himself from marks and return to his own origin -- the Heart. Also, remorse-repentance is a collection of thoughts which can remove or nullify the minute thoughts of stupidity in the subconscious accumulated as a result of the misconduct and defiled views in all of one's lives.

We may also simply define remorse as finding out the roots of our mistakes and repentance as determining to ensure that the same mistakes will not happen again.

There are many ways of repentance, but the best one can only be worked out by the cultivator himself. The following are just a few examples which have been practiced by many Ch'an cultivators: (1) bowing to the Buddhas, (2) reciting sutras, (3) practicing austerity, and (4) practicing giving with no

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mark.

When one bows, he should bow from his heart and back to his heart. Only through one's own heart, can he recognize the Buddha in himself. For, there is no real Buddha outside of one's heart. Do not ask for anything. Bow without any desire and any thought, even the thought of bowing. This is no-thought bowing. No-thought bowing is pure bowing and sincere bowing. Only when one bows with pure and sincere bowing, will there be a response from the Buddhas. There are many reasons for bowing to Buddhas. The first is to plant good roots for affinity with the Buddhas. The second, is to reduce one's arrogance. And the third, is to do the best exercise for a healthy body.

The main purpose of reciting sutras is to increase one's wisdom and hence, reduce one's confusion. Therefore, recitation without understanding is useless for this purpose. But understanding without practicing the learned principles is only an intellectual game which is toyed with by the so-called Ch'an scholars and has no use for Ch'an cultivators. The principles uttered from a scholar's mouth are called "oral ch'an" or "mouth ch'an." Oral ch'an can make one a scholar but can never lead him into enlightenment. Thus, for enlightenment it is not how many sutras one can recite, but how many principles from the sutras one has understood, practiced in his daily living, and incorporated in his view of life as a whole.

According to Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch of the Ch'an School of Sudden Teaching, monk Shan Syung could recite all sutras in the twelve divisions, yet he still had to follow the birth-death cycle. Only true understanding and sincere practicing will produce a real force which can drive the cultivator towards the gate of enlightenment. Do not misunderstand me by thinking that practicing means accomplishment. If one practices a principle which he learned from a sutra and feels that he has accomplished something, he completely misunderstands the sutra. Otherwise, if that is what he is doing it must not come from the Buddha's sutra. Buddha has never accomplished anything. He has neither saved anyone nor spoken any Dharma. Viewed externally, Buddhas and Budhisattvas are busy doing things and speaking Dharmas, yet they do not have a slight thought of doing and speaking. The doing and speaking are just the natural responses of the causes and conditions, not intentional actions. To the ultimate, all things are just compositions of nothing. Dharmas have no nature and hence, no existence.

Practicing austerity is mainly to remove the notion of self, the physical and the conceptual habits which are the accumulated results of the attachment to one's physical body and environment. What kind of austerity one should practice depends completely on the individual. I am even reluctant to suggest the practice of austerity because, without a thoughtful mind, such a practice may turn out to be just a waste of time and torture. If one does want to practice austerity, he should keep in mind the following question: Is such a practice beneficial to others? If the answer is negative, choose another kind of austerity practice. After one has made up his mind and started the practice, he should never let anything interfere with the practice even if he has to give up his life.

Repentance is just a natural consequence of remorse. If there is no remorse, there is no genuine repentance. Furthermore, if there is remorse, there should be repentance. Otherwise, the remorse is not

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genuine. Yet remorse is a deep feeling; it may occur in different manners and at any phase of cultivation. As a matter of fact, many Ch'an cultivators pass through a blue period at the beginning of their cultivation when they actually find out that the real world is much larger than the one they knew before. During this blue period, cultivators may have the feeling of worthlessness because of their past mistakes, and want to devote their lives solely to others. Some may weep and some cry. This is a sign which indicates the change of the cultivator's temperament.

Besides remorse-repentance, reciting mantras is another effective way to cleanse the minute thoughts of the subconscious. Just as waves can nullify other waves, mantras can neutralize other thought-waves. A mantra is also a direct vehicle, a carrier of the message asking for help from the Buddha who owns and protects the mantra. However, a cultivator should not ask for personal gains, nor depend on a mantra for enlightenment because such a selfish and dependent characteristic will blind one's wisdom eye. Searching for the ultimate truth, a cultivator has to be independent and unselfish.

When one has selected a mantra to recite, he should recite it on a regular basis. Otherwise, the neutralizing action of the mantra does not have a chance to develop its full power. Regular recitation is also a test of one's sincerity. If one recites a mantra 108 times when he has nothing to do and misses a couple days when he is occupied by other mundane matters, he does not have much merit. For he is not really reciting a mantra but is merely entertaining himself with the recitation.

How deeply the recitation of a mantra goes into the mind can be tested by altering the environment of recitation. Try to recite the mantra silently in a noisy place, at a disturbing time, or in an emergency situation. As a routine test, one should try to recite the mantra when he is very tired and sleepy. If he can recite it in such a sleepy condition, his recitation has gone deeply into the subconscious. Recitation in a sleepy condition is not only a test, but also a very effective method of cultivation. When one is in a sleepy condition, his wandering thoughts on mundane matters are diminished. In such a condition, if he can only subdue his desire for sleep, he may reach the state of no-thought and no-dwelling. He will then have a taste of Ch'an. This taste is so wonderful that one cannot find it in any other dishes.

5. Synthesis of Ch'an Cultivation of the Sudden School

Ch'an cultivation has been separated into three phases. In each phase, effort has been made to detach from a particular body so that one can be elevated to another body which is more real in the sense that it is closer to his intrinsic self-nature. However, one must realize that such a separation is just an expedient for understanding. In actuality, the ego-body, physical body, energy body, and the mind are always "mingled" together; they act and function together as one unit which is called a human being. Therefore, if one can shed any one, say the ego-body, he has shed all the others and is enlightened. For this reason, a Ch'an cultivator need not learn all the doctrines about Ch'an; he only has to practice the essential ones. These essential doctrines are the doctrines of the Ch'an School of Sudden Teaching which was established by Bodhidharma, who is honored as the First Patriarch of the School. They were

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handed down through five generations to the Sixth Patriarch Hui Neng. From Sakyamuni Buddha through twenty-eight generations down to Bodhidharma, and then five generations to Hui Neng, they all were transmitted from Heart to Heart. This is the Heart Seal, and the process is the Heart Dharma. The Heart Dharma is the essential Dharma, the Buddha Dharma. Only the Buddha Dharma is the real Dharma and all others are just expedients which have been established to fit people's born-nature and their different backgrounds.

The following paragraphs are the essential doctrine of the Sudden School as I have perceived and understood it. This is the guide which I have used in the road of my cultivation and it is presented here for reference. Each cultivator should write his own motto, because this is a prescription to cure one's own illness in his mind. Different cultivators have different illnesses. However, all prescriptions should contain the essential points: Do not attach to marks, external and internal, and do not attach to the principle of dualism. Other prescriptions are just added to help the cultivator reach this goal or to cure his individual illness. The following is my motto:

- **If one wants to practice the Heart Dharma, what he has to do is to perceive his own mind and reside in his own heart. The Heart is the universe which contains all dharmas. To the environment, do not attach to any mark. In the mind, depart from the principle of dualism."**
- **See a sage as a commoner, and see a commoner as a sage. The sage and commoner are different, yet their original natures are the same. If one attaches Marks, he is a commoner. If one resides in his original self-nature, he is a sage. Once the notions of sage and commoner are dissolved, there is no boundary where one can reside. The ultimate intrinsic nature has no name, even the name of Buddha is just for identification purposes.**
- **The environment and marks are changing all the time just like dreams and lightening. But the ultimate intrinsic nature is always the same. Therefore, when the situation is good, one need not be happy; and when the situation is bad, one need not be sad. The good and the bad are established relative to each other; they alter with people and time. Since they are not the intrinsic nature, how can a Ch'an cultivator afford to attach to them! When facing a harsh situation, just treat it with a peaceful mind. When all obstacles are overcome, Buddha will appear in the heart.**
- **Handling all matters to his best abilities, a cultivator has no need to worry about the success or failure which is determined by the conditions. If he does not attach to the principle of dualism, nor take a part as the whole, there is no success nor failure, no sage nor commoner. One can realize his intrinsic self-nature in a flash of thought. When he recognizes that thing, it is not a thing. And that thing even has no repugnance for the sensual objects.**
- **If anyone wants to walk this Buddha road, give him a hand. If no one wants to, it is just not the right time.**

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6. *Ch'an Sitting*

The goal of Ch'an cultivation is to reach the state of no-thought. Only after one has reached the null thought-configuration, will the wisdom of the intrinsic nature be revealed. Ch'an cultivation is to improve one's understanding so that he will detach from all marks. It has nothing to do about one's postures: walking, stopping, sitting, and reclining. But through many people's experimentation, it has been found that sitting in a quiet place is the most expedient way to begin one's cultivation. It is like a bucket of water which will be disturbed when the bucket is set in motion. In this disturbed state, one looks at the water and cannot even see his face. When the bucket is still, the water will soon be still. One can then see his face clearly in the still water, if there is light of course. It is the same for Ch'an sitting. However, one should not think that Ch'an cultivation is just Ch'an sitting. If one just sits alone, isolated from others, he may easily enter a state which is called the undifferentiated or stupid emptiness. Such a cultivator may be freed from anxiety and afflictions, but he lacks wisdom and compassion. If a person who lacks wisdom and compassion could become a Buddha, then all rocks and dead wood would be Buddhas. Furthermore, the stupid emptiness cannot produce any dharma. Ch'an cultivators are warned not to enter such stupid emptiness by the Sixth Patriarch, saying, "Good Knowing Fellows, when you hear my explanation of emptiness, do not become attached to emptiness. It is of utmost importance not to attach to emptiness. If you sit still with an empty mind, you will attach to the undifferentiated emptiness."

Before starting a session of sitting, one should have a right mind which is no mind or no thought. Particularly, one should neither expect any event to happen in the sitting nor ask for any spiritual power. One should not bring any problem he has not solved into the sitting and hope that the problem may be solved. On the contrary, he should put down all his relationships with people and his roles in society. He should just feel and perceive himself as an independent entity, an entire universe. Ch'an sitting is a complete experiment which includes everything needed in the experimentation. The cultivator is both the subject of the experiment and the observer too. Thus, he should not try to control or manipulate the experiment because any manipulation will change the setting of the experimentation.

During the sitting, one just has to let everything go and observe whatever may happen. Whatever happens is the truth which needs no theory, no logic, no rationale, and no philosophical interpretation. Theory and interpretation can be constructed, if one desires to do so, after the sitting, but absolutely not during it.

The place of sitting should be a quiet location where the cultivator feels secure. The place should have plenty of fresh air and be comfortable. If one intends to stay in the place for a long time, then meals and lodging must be well arranged and prepared so that these matters will not deviate the cultivator's attention.

With a right mind and in a quiet place, one can sit upright on a cushion in either a half-lotus or a full-lotus posture. The body can be balanced more easily if the cushion is slightly sloped forward. For a half-lotus posture, pull the right foot close to the body and put it under the thigh of the left leg, and

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then move the left foot on top of the thigh of the right leg. For a full-lotus posture, first complete the half lotus posture. While keeping the left foot in place, pull the right foot out and put it on top of the left thigh. After the posture is set, one should sway a little and then move forward and backward with a diminishing magnitude until he reaches the most comfortable position. Then, put the right (left) hand on top of the other with both palms upward, resting them naturally on top of the legs, and pulling them close to the body. Keep the spine straight but do not overdo it. Keep the head in a natural position, neither up nor down. Now with the mouth slightly closed, let the tongue gently touch the palate. And finally close the eyes gradually without any strain.

At the beginning of a Ch'an sitting, the mind is usually restless. Many forgotten things are bubbling up and it seems that there is no way to stop them. This is a natural phenomenon because during the sitting, the direct stimuli of the five senses from the environment are reduced, thus the mind has more freedom to process its stored information. When this happens, do not force the thoughts to stop, nor try to rationalize them. Just observe where they come from, where they go, and how they change. Give it time, all thoughts will fade away. Then the mind will clear up. At that time, you will see, actually see, the light shining from your own self-nature.

Contrary to the restlessness of the mind, one may fall into a drowsy state which is very dangerous. In this state, one feels relaxed and pleasant. He may mistake this state as a natural state of Ch'an, which it is not. To correct it, take one or two of the following measures:

- 1) Slowly, deeply, and consciously breathe in and out a few times until the drowsiness is over.**
- 2) With your eyes still closed, try to look in front of you about 15 feet away.**
- 3) Recite a mantra or the favorite section of a Sutra.**

The above methods are not only useful when one is drowsy, but also valuable tools when the cultivator has many wandering thoughts which he cannot put at rest.

During the sitting, one will experience some events which may be even out of his imagination. Because of different karmas, no two cultivators will experience exactly the same adventure. Therefore, no one should anticipate the events in the Ch'an sitting. When a cultivator sees some special, and sometimes, shocking events and he does not know how to handle them, the following is the best motto: No-thought and no-attachment. He must remember that he is an independent experimenter. And, in time, he will be an independent, wise, and compassionate person -- a Buddha.