



Self-Awakening through Chan

Buddhism in Every Step (B3)
(英文版)

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Self-Awakening through Chan

“Self-awakening through Chan” is the topic we are going to discuss. In Buddhism, the Buddha himself was an educator and Buddhism a form of education. The “Humanistic Buddhism” I advocate is a form of social education.

The Buddha is an enlightened one. Chan was not created by the Buddha; Chan is possessed by everyone. Chan is the nature of the universe, the wonderful nature of the inherent mind. It is like a cherry blossom tree: in the winter, it may possess only bare branches, but once spring comes, new branches burst forth. The Chan mind is like a blooming flower spreading fragrance, like moonlight shining through gaps in the clouds.

If our lives have Chan, our feelings will be different. It changes the atmosphere, like hanging up

a painting or displaying a vase of flowers in a living room. It is like a beautiful woman: with a little makeup, she becomes even more alluring. It is like a meal: add a little seasoning, and it becomes even more delicious.

What is Chan? Chan is the seasoning of life. What is self-awakening? It means one has awakened oneself to the truth. The Buddha is an enlightened one, and he is able to awaken others. There is one kind of enlightenment called complete enlightenment, which is fully awakening to the truth. Some may think awakening is when a learned person invents something or understands a new concept, but this kind of awakening is not complete enlightenment.

Speaking of self-awakening, scientists who do not do research and do not awaken themselves can hardly make discoveries. Aside from the Buddha, ancient figures like the sage Confucius, Lao Zi, Jesus, and many other learned individuals attained their knowledge through self-awakening. And so, though students can learn from teachers at school, their parents at home, or even be influenced or instructed by their friends, the most important education is received through self-awakening.

What is it that the Buddha was enlightened to? Through meditation and silent reflection, he

discovered that all things in the universe are interconnected, reliant upon one another, and are incapable of existing on their own. Buddhism refers to this theory as “dependent origination,” which states that all life in the universe is interconnected. A teacher’s words may affect his students. Actions of a person may also affect us. This is the relationship of cause and effect. Most people understand the concept of cause and effect, but they do not realize that there are conditions that exist between cause and effect. If you place a seed on a table without soil, water, sun, or air for nourishment, it will not grow. Hence, seeds need many conditions in order to sprout and grow.

After the Buddha was enlightened to the great truth of the universe, he sought to enlighten others. Though all people possess Chan and a Chan mind, conditions are required to aspire to and develop them. In the Chan School, a Chan master inspires students not to help them attain Buddhahood, but to achieve awakening. Let me provide some examples of Chan masters for the readers.

I. Self-Awakening through Nature

There are many subjects to study in universities, such as science, social studies, cultural studies, and so on.

Students are free to choose subjects of their preference or ones that appeal to their nature. Regardless of what they choose, the most important is self-awakening, which one awakens to by oneself, recognizes by oneself, and experiences by oneself. The mountains and rivers are very beautiful, but how are they beautiful? They are beautiful by their nature. People who admire nature can know the resonance of the universe. This is the beauty of nature. So, what is self-awakening through nature?

Once, a disciple of Chan Master Liangkuan asked the master to write a few words for him as a memento. The Chan master agreed to do so. He wrote: "Father dies, son dies, grandson dies." The disciple was horrified. Why was the master writing such grim predictions? Chan Master Liangkuan replied, "After the father dies, the son dies. After the son dies, the grandson will die. Is that not the natural order of things? Would you prefer that the grandson die first, followed by the son, and then finally the father? That would be truly unnatural!" The most beautiful thing in the world would be for the grandfather, father, and son to die in that order, which is the natural order of things. Yet, we consider this to be negative. Only after Chan Master Liangkuan's explanation can this become clear to us.

One time, Chan Master Liangkuan was traveling to give a Dharma talk and brought one of his disciples with him. The disciple carried his luggage for him. During the long journey, the disciple complained about its weight. As they passed by a village, Venerable Liangkuan proposed that they rest and get some water to drink. When one villager came to greet them, Chan Master Liangkuan said something to him, driving the man into a fury. Then, he chased after the Chan master with sticks. The Chan master took off, and his disciple ran closely behind. After one or two kilometers, the villager stopped chasing them, and the master stopped running. Chan Master Liangkuan looked to his disciple and asked, “We ran so far. Is the luggage heavy?”

The disciple replied, “How strange, it was not heavy at all while we were running!”

If we have a goal in our minds, we will not feel suffering and bitterness. Whenever we run into difficulties, we can regard them as natural. Though I am a monastic, receiving my education in the temple was not easy. How did I endure that strict, harsh, and scolding education? Because I considered it natural. So, lessons from my parents and requests from my teachers all felt as if they were “as they should be.”

Today, I said to one of my disciples at Fo Guang Shan: “You often complain that your workload is too great, too difficult. Take a look at those famous figures, anyone in this world who’s accomplished something. Which of them has not endured difficulties and suffering before succeeding? It is only after many hardships, frustration, and setbacks that they succeeded.” It is only after enduring winter frost and snow that the pine, bamboo, and plum flowers give off their fragrance. I feel that it is necessary to accept the nature of the world. For example, in life there is birth, aging, sickness, and death. If there were no birth, aging, sickness, and death, life would lose its meaning. If there were no seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and if the climate never changed, it would be unnatural and not beautiful. Buddhism often teaches people that “everything in the world is impermanent.” Impermanence is a good thing! Your parents nurtured you, allowing you to grow up. As you grew, there were changes. You became more mature, learned more, and experienced more. That is a wonderful thing! A lack of change is a deviation from the truth.

Speaking of “impermanence,” things can become worse or become better. For a thing to grow and mature, it must pass through the four seasons: the winds of spring, the rains of summer, the cold of

fall, and the snow of winter. One should accept setbacks and difficulties as a natural part of life. There are necessary tests in life that no one can escape. We can find ways to change it, accepting the good and diminishing the bad.

Let me bring up an example. There was a temple where an old monk had retired from his abbot position, and one of his disciples succeeded him as abbot. One day, a devotee came to see the new abbot. The old monk stood to one side.

The abbot asked him, "Go and serve some tea for our guest." The old monk went to pour tea for the guest.

"Go and cut some fruit for our guest!" the abbot asked. The old monk again went to make a plate of fruit for the guest.

Seeing this, the guest thought, "How can the younger abbot order an old monk around like a servant?" After a while, the abbot had something urgent to do, and asked the old monk to take the guest to the dining hall.

Unable to stop himself, the guest asked the old monk, "How are you related to the abbot?"

"He is my disciple!"

"How can your disciple treat you like that? It is extremely impolite."

The old monastic hurriedly said, “You shouldn’t say that! My disciple treats me very well.”

“He asked you to pour tea, to cut fruit!”

The old monk replied, “My disciple is very good to me. He asked me to serve tea, not prepare tea. That would be more difficult. He asked me to cut fruit, not to go plant fruit trees. If he asked me to plant fruit, that would be more trouble. So, my disciple is very good to me!”

This reminds me of the problems between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. If we can adopt the perspective of the old monk and view things in an optimistic light, things would be perfect. Though the devotee said, “The abbot is your disciple! Do ethics between master and disciple not exist?”

The old monk replied, “No, in this world, the young should take care of the important things, while the old perform the easy tasks, such as pouring tea and serving fruit!” Because this viewpoint takes the supposed unfairness of a situation and views it as something natural, the situation turns out differently. A viewpoint can determine one’s life.

There was an old lady who often cried. People began to call her the “crying lady.” One time, a Chan master asked her, “Old lady, why do you cry every day?”

She replied, “You don’t understand! I have two daughters. My eldest daughter married an umbrella salesman. When the sun is out, he can’t sell umbrellas. Without business, how will she go on? My younger daughter married a noodle vendor. When it rains, the noodles can’t dry. Without noodles, how will she go on? So when the sun is out, I cry for my eldest daughter. When it rains, I cry for my younger daughter.”

The Chan master said, “Old lady, you should try changing your way of thinking.”

“How should I change it?”

“When you see the sun, don’t think of your eldest daughter, think of your younger daughter. When the sun is high, your younger daughter’s noodles dry quickly. Her business must be flourishing. Is that not a happy thought? And when it rains? Think of your eldest daughter. When it rains, your eldest daughter must be selling many umbrellas!”

The old lady said, “Can I really make this change?”

The Chan master replied, “Of course. With a change of mind, a change of heart, or a change of thought, one’s life becomes different.” Afterward, whenever the old lady saw the sun, she delighted for her younger daughter. Whenever she saw the

rain, she delighted for her eldest daughter. So, the “crying lady” became the “smiling lady.”

Life is bound to have setbacks, sadness, and difficulties. I believe that, especially for youths, one should not be beaten by setbacks and discouragement. One must encourage oneself, inspire oneself, enlighten oneself, and push oneself to go further.

In Buddhism, Guanshiyin Bodhisattva (the bodhisattva who observes the sounds of the world) is not only enshrined in the temple, but also enshrined in the living rooms of some families. It is said, “Guanshiyin Bodhisattva is in every household.” Some people recite the bodhisattva’s name with their prayer beads. Guanshiyin Bodhisattva, too, holds a string of beads, so what is it that she recites? She, too, recites the name “Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.” Why would the bodhisattva recite her own name? Rather than seeking help from others, one should help oneself!

And so, when teachers educate and enlighten us, that can be considered a condition. The causes of self-awakening are self-improvement, self-confirmation, self-motivation, and self-resolve. In Buddhist sutras, there are these words: Rely on oneself, rely on the Dharma, and rely on nothing else.

Depending on oneself, believing in oneself, and confirming oneself is called relying on oneself. Taking refuge in the Dharma, the truth, and the brightness of one's inherent nature is called relying on the Dharma. Not being led by others is called relying on nothing else. This is why in Chan education, Chan masters do not give detailed explanations, but guide you to experience things by yourself. You must awaken on your own. If you do not enlighten yourself, a Chan master's enlightenment is theirs, not yours.

II. Self-Awakening through Humor

Chan possesses many humorous, interesting lessons. One example is the story of the "Ancient Buddha of Zhao County." Once, as Chan Master Zhaozhou, who was an elder and a virtuous one, was sitting in meditation, a devotee of Buddhism came to him and asked, "Master, how must one sit in meditation to achieve awakening?"

People often ask us how to achieve awakening. Usually, we give a variety of responses. But Venerable Zhaozhou simply stood up and said, "I'm sorry, I do not have time to answer your question. I must use the washroom." After he took a few

steps, he turned back to the devotee and said, “You see? Even something as simple as relieving oneself must be done by oneself.” In other words, why are you asking me how to achieve awakening? I can speak of how I awakened, but it has nothing to do with you. This humorous little anecdote relays to us the importance of self-awakening.

Once, there was a monastic teaching the Dharma to a great audience. There were many people listening to him. He talked on the Buddhist concept of suchness and inherent nature. He excitedly spoke of the “Dharma body,” his words flowing freely. Suddenly, a Chan practitioner came forward. Without warning, he spat phlegm upon the Buddha statue. The audience was shocked and yelled, “He is desecrating the Buddha!”

The monastic lecturer was also displeased. He cried out, “I am speaking of the sutra here. How dare you spit phlegm upon the Buddha!”

When the Chan practitioner heard this, he coughed several times and prepared to spit phlegm again. He said, “Venerable, in emptiness, where is not the Dharma body? Where is there not the truth?”

According to Buddhism, the “self” is an illusionary form. But there is a true life that can stretch across the ten directions and through the three time periods

of past, present, and future. We often recite the name of the Amitabha Buddha, but few people truly understand its meaning. There are even some who are not Buddhists, but will say “Amitabha Buddha” when they see a Buddhist monastic. In truth, everyone possesses an Amitabha Buddha. Amitabha Buddha means “boundless life,” a limitless life span, surpassing time. It is also called “boundless light,” limitless light that transcends space. What is it that transcends time and space? It is the truth.

Buddhism has many different terms for the truth. These include “eternal life,” “Dharma body,” or “the reality of prajna.” Their true meanings are deep and naturally come out of our intrinsic nature. It is like the blossoming of cherry flowers: when the spring wind comes, they emerge from the tree with a pop!

In Taiwan, one can see plaques with “Amitabha Buddha” placed on walls and electrical poles all over the place. Nailing them to walls and electrical poles is not cheap. One time, I tried to find out who was hanging these plaques, but I could not. Once, I brought two hundred people on a pilgrimage to India. One of them, a very active fellow, was nailing down plaques of Amitabha Buddha wherever we went. I realized that he was the person I had always wondered about. This was twenty years ago, and I still remember that

his name was Chen Juncai. I said, “This is your merit! Why are you nailing up these plaques?”

He replied, “I hope people passing by can see the name of Amitabha Buddha! In that moment, when their minds are without any differentiation, their thoughts are not drawn from knowledge or wisdom. Their minds belong to the nature of life and the universe, so they can correspond with the Dharma body.”

Once, there was a monastic giving a Dharma talk. He was endlessly advocating the good points of Amitabha Buddha. One young man was unhappy after he heard that and he called out, “You must be joking. The name of Amitabha Buddha is but two words. You make it sound all-powerful. You claim it can prevent disaster, garner merit, and deliver one to the Pure Land.”

The monastic knew that if he attempted to reason with the youth, it would take too long. And so he cried out, “What are you saying, you bastard!”

The young man was instantly angered. “How can a monastic utter such profanity?”

The monastic replied, “What did I say?”

The young man replied, “Didn’t you just call me a bastard?”

The monastic answered, “If the word ‘bastard’ alone is enough to anger you, cannot the two words

of Amitabha Buddha possess even more power?” Therefore, one’s actions of body, speech, and mind can all create causes and effects.

After the Buddha’s Light International Association was founded, we promoted the “Three Benevolent Acts Campaign—do good deeds, speak good words, and keep good thoughts.” Our behavior is created by our body, speech, and mind. There are the causes of karma, and there are the effects of karma. Our behavior determines our own futures. That is why we must correct our behavior, ensuring that our bodies do good deeds, our mouths speak good words, and our minds keep good thoughts, purifying our karmas of body, speech, and mind. For the body, abstain from killing, stealing, and improper behavior. For speech, abstain from speaking dishonestly, divisively, harshly, or idly. For thoughts, abstain from greed, anger, ignorance, and deviant thoughts. We must ceaselessly improve our body, speech, and mind. When a table is dirtied, we wipe it. When clothes are stained, we wash them. When the clouds disperse, the sky is clear. When our ignorance and confusion are removed, we will awaken.

Not only is nature Chan, humor is Chan, too. When Chan Master Zhaozhou was speaking with his disciple, a layperson came and presented a cake.

When the layperson left, the master asked the disciple, "Which of us should eat this cake?"

The disciple replied, "Of course, you master."

"Ah! No, that would be unfair. Let us make a bet. The winner gets the cake."

The disciple asked, "How should we compete?"

The Chan Master replied, "Whoever compares himself to the dirtiest, smelliest, most unworthy thing wins."

The disciple replied, "What a strange kind of betting! Master, why don't you start?"

Chan Master Zhaozhou said, "I am a donkey."

The disciple thought, since the master has compared himself to a beast, what could I be? So he said, "I am the donkey's buttocks." A donkey's head might be better, but its buttocks are less seemly.

When the master heard this, he replied, "I am the excrement in the buttocks." Excrement is filthy and smelly.

The disciple thought, since the master has compared himself to excrement, what could I be? So he said, "I am the worms in the excrement."

The master thought, if the disciple is a worm, what could I be? He suddenly changed his line of thinking and asked the disciple, "What is a worm like you doing in the excrement?"

The disciple replied with a very wonderful sentence. He said, “I’m hiding from the heat!” What does hiding from the heat mean? It means he is care-free and at ease!

The Chan School is so amazing. One can compare himself to a worm and others to excrement, yet both can live carefree. If you can be free and at ease whilst in excrement, where in the world would you not be able to free yourself? For Chan talks, sometimes one should not take the direct approach. Sometimes, Chan teaches through humor. The words of a Chan master are often difficult to understand, or even seem to make no sense. But in truth, all their words have underlying meanings, using a little wit and a little humor to bring out laughter.

There are many humorous anecdotes in the Chan School. Once, a disciple asked a Chan master to chant a sutra to ward off disaster. After the Chan master had chanted a sutra, he began to pray for blessings. “This disciple has asked to ward off trouble and disaster, pray for wealth, pray for...may the far away bodhisattvas come quickly to bless him!”

When the disciple heard this, he tugged on the master’s sleeves and asked, “Master, why are you asking far away bodhisattvas? Shouldn’t you ask for nearby bodhisattvas to help me?”

The Venerable replied, “The nearby bodhisattvas probably know about your immorality, greediness, and unlawful doings, so they won’t bless you. I’m reaching out to far away bodhisattvas, seeing if they are willing.” What he means is that, all you are doing is asking for help from the bodhisattvas. What have you done yourself? This is how Chan education works to teach you through humor. Are you angry? It is not their intention to insult you.

In the Chinese tradition, when one’s elders pass away, they have to find a monastic to chant sutras. There was once a young man who had lost his father. “Venerable, please come to my house to chant sutras for my father.” After saying this, the youth nervously asked, “Venerable, how much will this cost?”

The Venerable replied, “What sutras do you want me to read? For the *Amitabha Sutra* or the *Diamond Sutra*, it will be thirty dollars!”

“Ah! That’s too expensive! Could you give me a discount? Knock down the price a little?”

The Venerable replied, “Fine! Twenty-percent off. Twenty-four dollars.” After they reached an agreement, the master chanted the sutra. When he finished, he followed it with the prayer, “Oh Buddhas of the East! Bring the deceased to the East!”

When the son heard this, he said, “Master, my father wanted to go to the Pure Land of the West. Why are you calling to the East?”

The master replied, “You wanted a discount, so I can only send him to the East! You need to pay thirty dollars for the West!”

The young man thought, to save me six dollars, I sent my father to the East rather than the West. “Never mind, I’ll pay you the full thirty, please ask the bodhisattvas to deliver my father to the Pure Land of the West.”

The master said, “Okay! Let me pray again! Buddhas! This son has offered thirty dollars! His father does not want to go to the East, but to the West! Please take him to the West!”

At this moment, the old man leapt from his coffin and scolded his son, “You unfilial son! To save yourself six dollars, you’ve dragged me to the East, then the West!”

This little anecdote illustrates that Buddhism is not a business. It is not a matter of money, it is a matter of the heart and mind, and yet here people try to place a materialistic price on it. The Chan master is not lecturing you directly, but teaching you in another manner. I spoke in *The Taste of Chan*, and there were more than one thousand humorous dialogs. You

may feel amazed and astonished at these humorous conversations. They can guide you to understand with your mind, to awaken you, and make you see things from a new perspective.

III. Self-Awakening through Being Touched by Real Actions

The Chan School emphasizes education through being touched by real actions. Most things are not taught through words, but with skillful means to lead you to experience things by yourself. That is why I often teach that a person should do something every day that leaves others moved. If you are not moved by anything, then you are emotionless. Trees and plants may be emotionless, but you are a human being with emotions. Are you not moved when something good happens? As for ourselves, we should strive to deliver a few words and perform a few actions that can touch others. In this world, we are dependent on each other. Parents teach their children through daily actions, so they will be moved and perform well. Teachers influence their students through actions, so they will be changed and moved. But some people are stubborn, deaf to the words of the speaker.

Chan Master Liangkuan established a temple academy for novice monastics. But as the monastery was boring, the novices would often climb over the wall of the temple at night and have fun. Were this to happen today, they would certainly be punished. But I believe physical punishment is only used by incapable teachers. A truly capable teacher need not strike children. He uses other skillful means. When Venerable Liang Liangkuan discovered that novices were wandering at night, he said nothing. Instead, he waited at the point in the wall where the novices were climbing over. There, the novices had placed a stool to help them climb. He removed the stool and stood there himself. When the novices returned, they flipped over the wall, right onto the shoulders of their teacher. “What! Why is it so soft?” they said. When they looked down, they saw their master.

At that point, most teachers or parents would lecture them. But the Chan master merely patted their shoulders and said, “Children, it’s cold out there at night. Go back in and put on some extra clothes.” Ever since, the novices never dared to run out at night. So we can see that moving people emotionally is a more effective means than physical punishment, forced labor, or verbal scolding.

Of course, the Chan School also has teaching methods that use shouting and beating, where Chan is applied through a big shout or a strike. But that requires the recipient to be able to bear it. As I've told everyone before, the education I received included physical and verbal punishment. But I often take pride in it, as I remember I was able to endure these hardships. I consider them to be as they should be, for if I considered them to be inappropriate, I would have come to resent them in my mind. I believe that being physically and verbally disciplined can teach one to view things optimistically.

Once, a Chan master was practicing Chan in a Buddha hall when a thief came. When the thief saw that the Chan master was nodding off, he boldly started to search the hall and took everything he could. As he was leaving, the Chan master suddenly called out, "Halt!" startling the thief. The Chan master continued, "You've taken my belongings and money from the donation box. Are you going to leave without even saying thank you?"

When the thief heard this, he was very relieved. With a "Thank you," he left. Later, the police arrested the thief. He confessed to stealing from the Chan master.

The police marched him before the Chan master and asked, “Did this man steal from you?”

He replied, “No, he did not.”

“He confessed to stealing your donations.”

“He did not steal them! I gave them to him. Ask him yourself. When he left, he even thanked me.” When he heard this, the thief was deeply moved. Later, he became the Chan master’s disciple, and he became a well-known Chan practitioner.

Once, there was a meditation hall filled with people practicing Chan, and one day, they found out a thief was among them. When the thief was discovered, the people cried out, “This meditation hall is a pure and sacred place. How could you steal at this place?” and “Chan master, you should expel him.”

The Chan master nodded and said, “Oh! Oh!” but did not expel him.

Later, the Chan hall was missing more things, stolen by the same thief. Someone once again suggested, “Expel him!”

The Chan master nodded his head and went, “Oh! Oh!” but did not expel him.

The thief continued to steal. Every practitioner in the meditation hall came forward to protest, “If you do not expel him, we are all leaving.”

The Chan master replied, “You can all leave, but he stays.”

“You would have all of us leave, but keep this thief?”

The Chan master explained, “You are all wholesome people. Wherever you go in society, you will do well. But this thief, where in society would he be accepted? If he cannot be accepted in this meditation hall, then where can he stay?”

Though this thief was stubborn by nature, the Chan master’s words moved him to tears. He declared, “I will never steal again!” Later, he became an accomplished Chan practitioner. And so, I believe that teaching and moving people through one’s action is effective both with others as well as oneself.

IV. Self-Awakening to Enlighten to the Truth

In the Chan School, teachers do not teach you to cultivate or seek Buddhahood and will not encourage you to do so. They will ask you to awaken to the truth and to seek self-awakening. You must awaken yourself; no one can awaken to the truth for you!

It is said that one should “Read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles.” Traveling is an important aspect of a Chan practitioner’s education.

Once, several monastic students were preparing to travel and learn outside of their temple. One of their classmates said, “If you guys are traveling, I’m coming, too.”

Everyone looked at him, the lazy one, and said, “You can travel and learn with us, but there are many things you’ll have to do on your own.”

“Like what?”

“Eating. We can’t eat for you. You’ll have to go to the restroom on your own. We can’t do that for you. Sleeping and walking as well. You’ll have to sleep and walk for yourself. We can’t do it for you.”

Everything must be done by you; you must understand it yourself and learn it yourself. Others cannot do it for you. There is a common saying in Buddhism: “Initiating an aspiration.” “Initiating an aspiration” is very important, and if we initiate an aspiration to eat, the food becomes tastier. If we initiate an aspiration to sleep, our sleep becomes deeper. If we initiate an aspiration to be a wholesome person or do a good deed, we will do it with perfect willingness. Our minds are like farmlands, beaches, and reclaimed land from the ocean, and initiating an aspiration is like developing these places; we can bring out the potential of our minds. Many countries now have airports built on the ocean. A cleared hill can

be used to plant fruits. The land of our minds should also be developed, and studying is a way of developing our minds and furthering our wisdom. We should initiate an aspiration to become wholesome people and to listen to various lectures.

With even just one aspiration, the world becomes colorful! By initiating an aspiration, one can awaken to the truth, and develop one's wisdom. It is useless to ask for help from someone else but not oneself. When I traveled to America, I met with many teachers, professors, and students. I discovered that they had received excellent education. In China, teachers impart all the teachings, while students obediently listen. Teachers have to study hard, but students may not need to read books. In America, professors need not study before class, as they are already skilled with their books. They can immediately call out in class, "The test tomorrow will cover pages one to eight. Go home and study carefully!" They promote independent thinking, provoking questions from students. Do you wish to learn? If you ask me questions, I will answer them for you. If you do not know how to raise a question, learning without questioning, how can one study well?

Though there are many sutras in Buddhism, in truth, they are all forms of discussion. In every sutra,

the first words are “Thus I have heard,” meaning that the contents of the sutra are what I have heard. Next are the contents of the discussion. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the first words are Subhuti’s question to the Buddha:

“The Tathagata protects and is concerned about all bodhisattvas, and he instructs all bodhisattvas. World-Honored One, when good men and good women commit themselves to anuttara-samyaksambodhi, what should they abide in and how should they subdue their minds?”

The Buddha replied to his questions, expounding on the topics of “awakening” and “emptiness.” This is recorded in the *Diamond Sutra*.

“Emptiness” is not the same as not having something. If a cup is not empty, how do we pour water into it? If our purse is not empty, how do we place things into it? Without emptiness in a Dharma hall or a meeting room, how would we enter them? Emptiness is what everything is built on. Emptiness includes all things in the universe. It encompasses all phenomena, all existences. Let us conclude with this:

First, we must reform ourselves. Without reform, there is no change, no improvement.

Second, we must solve our own problems. No matter what the problem, we need not rely on others

to solve it. “Mother, I want tea, boil some for me; teacher, I don’t understand, explain it to me.” Of course, when we don’t understand, teachers can explain, but first we must consider the problem ourselves. We cannot rely on others for everything. We must solve our own problems.

Third, we must constantly renew ourselves. Liang Qichao said, “The me of today must challenge the me of yesterday.” This means we must constantly renew ourselves. The me of today must be better than the me of yesterday. The me of yesterday is gone. The me of tomorrow is also not the me of today, as the me of tomorrow will be even better.

Fourthly, self-reflection. Whatever we are doing, we must observe ourselves. In Buddhism, “awakening” does not mean simply closing your eyes in meditation. When you close your eyes, you become busier than ever. Busy in what manner? Not with your hands and feet, but with your mind. Though meditation itself is silent, in the silence, you are like a mirror reflecting all things. Like the water, when it is still, the cloud and the moon in the sky are reflected. Through reflection, we can resolve many problems and realize the truth.

As an example, let me speak of my greatest setback. I have more than a thousand monastic disciples. But many of them who hear my words are

unable to understand or do not listen. Though they are respectful to me, they do things differently from what I say. I feel like I cannot connect with them. Master and disciples need to be able to connect, mind to mind. Words alone are not enough. Now that I am almost ninety years old, I know better than ever that Buddhism is not spoken but enacted. The Buddhist sutras tell us to “Listen carefully! Listen carefully!” We must know how to listen and how to apply it in our daily lives, as Buddhism is not just knowledge. Self-awakening means to awaken to the truth by oneself. One need not only awaken through listening, but can also do so through thinking.

For a professional education, students only study their profession. Later, when they enter the workforce, machines run in very defined manners. People can constantly rely on very efficient computers, and slowly, they stop using their minds and stop thinking. This is one of the dangers of this form of education. People must use their brains, especially our strong-willed youths of today. They need to develop their foresight, their self-awareness, their capacity for tolerance, and their ability to awaken.

So, how can one practice self-awakening and self-cultivating? I would like to use some Chan anecdotes to explain.

All of these anecdotes state that one should “Find answers on your own instead of from others.” This points toward self-awakening. Let me share an anecdote.

In ancient times, there was an official, today’s equivalent of a mayor. He renounced his worldly life to study under Chan Master Niaoke. Why was he called Niaoke? Originally, he was known as Daolin. But since he lived in a tree like a bird in its nest, people called him Niaoke. This official became his disciple and attendant. After sixteen years, he had not awakened, so he said, “Master, I wish to go outside the temple in pursuit of the truth, the Dharma, and awakening.”

Venerable Daolin replied, “There is no need. I have the Dharma here. You can attain enlightenment.”

The official replied, “I have followed you for sixteen years. You have never spoken the Dharma to me!”

The Chan master said, “You are mistaken. When you bring food, I eat it. When you bring tea, I drink it. Am I not speaking the Dharma to you?”

The official questioned, “That is the Dharma?”

Chan Master Niaoke pulled out a feather from his ragged robes and said, “Is this not the Dharma?” With a gasp, the official was enlightened. Later, he

was known as the “feather-cloth attendant” because the feather from a robe awakened him.

I suspect that if I were to take off my robes and pull out a feather in front of some beginners, no one would awaken. Why? Because none of you have experienced those sixteen years! Just like a diploma, it is only after many years of study that one earns it. So, how does one achieve awakening? Time is required.

What is it like after one’s awakening? Things or events even from long ago will clearly appear before oneself. Many people and things will also rise up in one’s mind. Time and space do not seem to exist; there is only here and now. Some Chan masters were dumbfounded when they awakened. They suddenly found out the world is different. Some were weeping and tearing up, unable to express themselves. Some could not help but cry joyfully. In short, there are various, strange ways to express enlightenment. We awaken a little every day in life. Clearing small doubts leads to small awakenings, while clearing great doubts leads to great awakening. Clearing no doubts leads to no awakening. If you do not have questions, you will not find answers.

There was a Chan master who in the middle of the night cried out, “I’ve awakened! I’ve awakened!”

The monastery dormitory was like a military camp, lined with cots.

One person replied, “Nonsense! Go to sleep. What have you awakened to?”

“I’ve awakened!” Everyone came forward to restrain him, stopping his hysterics. He continued repeating, “I’ve awakened, I’ve awakened!”

The abbot was startled, and he asked, “If you’ve awakened, what have you realized?”

The Chan master replied, “I’ve realized that ‘Shigu (a female layperson who vows to serve the temple for her life, without marrying) come from women.’”

In Buddhism, people who shave their heads and renounce worldly life are called monastics. Female laity who are married are called “Shijie,” while those who haven’t shaved their heads, will never marry, and have renounced worldly life are called “Shigu.” Stating that “Shigu come from women” may seem strange, but its meaning is not simple. Why did he shout “Shigu come from women?” Many people may ask, but it’s difficult to explain. The meaning goes beyond words or language. It cannot be described in words or languages. One can only work it out through thinking. What does one awaken to? That awakening is going beyond our limitations. When we

try to awaken to something, others can only provide the condition. So, how do we awaken? It's similar to knowing the taste of drinking water; only you know if it's hot or cold. We must experience everything ourselves.

In everyday life, you might run into things that make you angry. How can you manage anger?

Anger comes from not being able to see the truth of things or fearing that blame lies with oneself. "He stepped on my dignity and took my benefits. I can't bear this. I'm angry at him!" Anger such as this will invariably lead to regret. "I should have been magnanimous, and I should not have bickered with him. I should have found another way to handle the situation..." In Buddhism, we say that we must "be patient" with our anger. Patience and tolerance is not just simply bearing it.

Similarly, some students of Buddhist colleges have differing opinions. One student claims, "Person A is bullying me." His classmate replies, "Be patient!" The student answers, "You are not skilled. All your sayings are just patience. Let me talk to the teacher!" After the teacher hears this, the teacher also replies, "Be patient!" The student is unsatisfied. Is there a solution other than patience? If this student comes to me, as I cannot help him either, I just tell

him, “Be patient!” He might be distressed. “Patience, patience, patience... Is there a solution other than being patient?” But there is no other way. Our practice teaches us to cultivate “patience for life, patience for phenomena, and patience for the non-arising of phenomena.”

What is patience for life? We hope to maintain our lives, to maintain our existence, and to live well, so the best method is being patient. What does it mean to be patient? Patience means to accept and recognize things, to be willing to shoulder, to be responsible for, and to be able to resolve things. In other words, for us to live, we must recognize this world, be able to accept it, and take responsibility for it. When good things happen, we accept it. When bad things happen, we accept it, too. For instance, when someone speaks ill of a man, perhaps the man will immediately get in a fight with the person. But when the man returns home, his son and daughter will call out “Daddy! Come over! Let’s play horsey.” The father will be delighted, as he views this with a father’s love. He can accept and understand this, so he can patiently endure it. I believe that in life, patience is a form of wisdom and of strength.

What is the patience for phenomena? Patience for phenomena means that we must be patient toward

various conditions of people, things, and pleasant and unpleasant happenings in the universe. Take the example of the Buddha statue and the gong. In Buddhist temples, when people bow down in front of a Buddha statue, they strike a gong. The gong is not happy, so it protests to the Buddha statue, saying, “When people pray to you, they offer flowers and fruits. Then they start hitting me. This is unfair! You are made of bronze, and I am made of bronze. Why are we treated differently?” When the Buddha statue hears this, he says, “Gong! You must understand, for me to become a Buddha statue, I had to endure many hardships, such as when there was a bump on my ear, and they had to slowly chip it off. I have endured many pains to become a Buddha statue. Your cultivation is not yet sufficient. You start complaining as soon as someone strikes you.” So, to become a Buddha or any other person of importance, you must use wisdom to understand the causes of things that happen.

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