

SEVEN DAY CHAN MEDITATION RETREAT FOR ABBOTS AND ABBESSES – COMPLETION DHARMA TALK

*A Dharma talk given by Grand Master Wei Chueh at Chung Tai Chan Monastery in Taiwan (from Chung Tai Magazine, issue 89)
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The foundation of Buddhism is this mind. Therefore, Buddhism is the doctrine of the mind. All the sutras and shastras point to this mind. Ordinarily, when we are in motion, the mind also moves; when we stop moving and are still, we are confused and have deluded thoughts; we do not know where our mind has gone. Only during meditation we learn to fully realize how to let go of all things, to bring back our mind; whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, we are not apart from this mind; that which is listening to the Dharma is our own [true] self.

From childhood to old age and death, at every stage, every year, every hour, every minute, and every second, we are constantly changing. Only this mind neither arises nor perishes, neither comes nor goes, is neither pure nor impure—that is our true self. If we understand our mind from this viewpoint, we will not fail to achieve our potential after embracing the monastic life.

After Awakening to the Way, We Must Work More Diligently

When we understand this principle, the ancients call it “being awakened to the Way.” We can practice only after we are awakened to the Way. If we are not awakened, we do not even know where the Way is, where the Buddha is, or where the mind is. When we are awakened to this mind, we will realize that although this mind is intrinsic, it is filled with confusion, vexations, and ignorance. Therefore, we need to work and practice harder. To be awakened is not the end. If we do not understand this principle, we will think that we are right, that we probably are transformed bodhisattvas, or virtuous and learned ones. After we are awakened, we will realize that cultivation is not easy. If we do not understand this principle, it is to be attached to the Dharma. Therefore the ancient sages

say, “Before awakening we think we are good enough; after awakening there is much more work to do.” Before we are awakened to this mind, we are satisfied with our practice; we think that we cultivate blessings and wisdom like a bodhisattva. “After awakening there is much more work to do”—we must be in accord with conventional truth, liberate sentient beings, subject and object must be empty, we do not cling to emptiness or to existence; every thought must be distinct and clear; we must be masters of ourselves everywhere; we must constantly elevate and purify this mind, in stillness and in motion, in prosperity and in adversity, in sickness and in health, in life and in death—therefore we say “there is much more work to do.”

I believe that after seven days of calming and subduing [the mind,] you have gained some understanding about yourselves. Did you experience a good stick of incense (good meditation session) during these seven days? If you were able to sit through a good stick of incense, the merits are inconceivable. This good stick of incense is known as the root of wisdom. When you understand this mind, that is also the root of wisdom; when this mind is in accord with the Way, it is also the root of wisdom. Buddhism teaches that one is the root of virtue and one is the root of wisdom. The root of wisdom is inherent in us (intrinsic). “The self nature of bodhi is originally pure” means to this mind nature. The virtuous root is to “cultivate all virtues; do not neglect to cultivate a single virtue; sever all evil; do not neglect to sever a single evil; liberate all sentient beings; do not neglect to liberate a single sentient being.” “Do no evil; practice all virtues”—this is known as the root of virtue. “Purify your mind” is the root of wisdom. In cultivating the Way, we must not be confused or ignorant or deceive ourselves. Ask ourselves whether we have reduced our vexations, whether our mind is purified; when we are in motion or in stillness, idle or busy, does this mind still exist? That is Chan.

“Chan is the mind of the Buddha; the scriptures are the mouth of the Buddha; the precepts are the body of the Buddha.” Chan is to think of neither good nor evil; the mind is perfectly clear; samadhi and wisdom are one—that is Chan; it is the Buddha’s mind; it is our own original mind. This mind is beyond words or speech; it is what Wang Yang Ming said, “When there is neither good nor evil, that is the mind’s essence.” When

neither good thoughts nor bad thoughts have arisen, that is the mind's essence; that is "Chan is the mind of the Buddha." When we are meditating, see how long we can maintain this mind. If we can maintain it for one hour, time goes by in an instant. Therefore the ancient sages say, "Coming by chance under the pine tree, sleeping peacefully on a rock; in the mountain there is no sense of time; winter is over and one does not know the year." This the mind of the Buddha. When we expound the Buddha's teachings, that is the mouth of the Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha taught the Dharma for 49 years; that is the teaching of words; therefore, we say, "The scriptures are the Buddha's mouth/words." "The precepts are the Buddha's body"—by observing all the precepts and deportments, knowing both stillness and motion, observing the four proper deportments when walking, standing, sitting, or lying down; that is known as the precepts. We should know that in the final analysis, all our actions are this very mind. Therefore, to work hard on the mind is the foundation [of practice].

In Stillness and in Motion, When Idle or Busy, We Are Not Separate from This Mind

"Chan" is the mind-doctrine of Buddhism. Whether in stillness or in motion, whether it is the Chan school, the Pure Land School, the Vinaya School, or the Esoteric School, they do not deviate from this mind. Straying from our original mind is the Dharma of birth and death, and pertains to virtues and blessings. When we establish monasteries, liberate sentient beings, these are all expedient means, but without expedient means we cannot attain bodhi and nirvana. This is to "Skillfully employ expedient means; calmly abide in the Mahayana mind." When we understand this principle, everything that we do—walking, standing, sitting, or lying down—is virtuous and is the Way. The Way is not separate from our daily lives, our speech, and our actions. The great master Yong Jia says, "Walking is Chan, sitting is Chan; in speech or in silence, in motion or in stillness, the essence is at peace." When we are enlightened and come to a true understanding, this mind constantly exists, without any delusive thoughts; every thought is perfectly clear; we are masters of ourselves everywhere; whether we are in stillness or in motion, the mind exists and is perfectly clear—that is Chan. When we are meditating, there is only this mind that is tranquil and wu-wei, bright and clear, like a solitary moon high up in the

sky; with only this one thought and no second thought; one thought until the end, one thought for ten thousand years; in ten thousand years, only one thought, without any confusion, delusions, or boredom. Whether sleeping or walking, there is only this one thought, never deviating from this mind. When we are talking, the mind is peaceful and at ease; when we are quiet/still, the mind is still peaceful and at ease; even if we are in a battle of whirling swords, this mind is perfectly clear, peaceful, and at ease; this is “walking is Chan, sitting is Chan, in speech or in silence, in motion or in stillness, the essence is at peace.” The ancients say, “Everything is right here.” Enlightenment is to be awakened to this mind that is intrinsic, to realize that the mundane mind does not give rise to delusive thoughts or ignorance—that is our own original face. It is not to see something or to obtain something.

The Western philosopher said, “I think, therefore I am.” “Thinking” is the mind’s function. If we do not think, does that mean we do not exist? Where is this mind when it is still? This mind has essence, characteristic, and function. When Wang Yang Ming was enlightened, he clearly said, “When there is neither good nor evil, that is the mind’s essence; when there is good and evil, that is the mind’s function; to know good and evil is our conscience, doing good and eliminating evil is to be free from objects.” “When there is neither good nor evil, that is the mind’s essence” is the same as what the Sixth Patriarch says, “With neither good nor evil thoughts, at this very moment, what is the Venerable Hui Ming’s original face?” When we are thinking of neither good nor evil, it is what the Chan patriarchs say, “Let not a single thought arise”—that is our original face; that is the mind’s essence. “When there is good and evil, that is the mind’s function” means that when this mind does not give rise to good thoughts, it gives rise to evil thoughts; whether there are good or evil thoughts, it is the mind that is functioning. “To know good and evil is our conscience,” is to know when our mind gives rise to good or evil thoughts or no thoughts; this “knowing” is our conscience; it is also what the sutra says, “To clearly distinguish the characteristics of all dharmas, one firmly abides in the ultimate principle.” If we cannot even distinguish between good or evil thoughts or no thoughts, won’t we be like a piece of wood, like a vegetable? That is not the Way. Therefore, we must be aware, examine ourselves, reflect, and be awakened. “Doing good

and eliminating evil is to be free from objects” means to subdue all the scattered thoughts and delusions in our mind; this is a method of practice. After we use this practice, we must not think or having used it; we must return to bodhi and nirvana. This is “the joy of bodhi awakened to the Dharma; the tranquil joy of nirvana.” Bodhi is this mind of perfect clarity, “the tranquil joy of nirvana.” Most people seek pleasures from external stimulations and feel that it is happiness; the cultivator finds the greatest joy in this tranquil mind. In most people, the eye takes forms as food; the ear takes sounds as food; the nose takes smells as food; the tongue takes flavors as food; the consciousness takes defilements as food. When we cultivate and listen to the Dharma, we are filled with the joy of the Dharma; this is to take the joy of Chan as food. When we are meditating, not a single thought arises—one thought in ten thousand years; ten thousand years with one thought; this is the sustenance of the cultivator. If we can realize this principle, we will understand the doctrine of the mind ground.

Letting Go and Taking Up Without Any Obstructions

When we look through the pages of history, the founding patriarchs not only benefited the self, but also benefited others. To benefit the self is when the mind transforms knowledge into wisdom, when we firmly abide in this mind, and purify this mind. Benefiting others is to establish monasteries, liberate sentient beings. The Sixth Patriarch broadly liberated sentient beings; Mazu erected forest monasteries; Bai Zhang established the monastic regulations; The old man Zhao Zhou was still liberating sentient beings when he was 80 years old; the Venerable Xu Yun established numerous monasteries—that is the true Buddha Dharma. It is not closing the doors and meditating, or reciting the Buddha’s name. Closing the doors and meditating is to cultivate in stillness. Besides stillness there must also be motion/action; therefore, we say that “in the fundamental ground of ultimate reality, not a single Dharma arises; in the Buddha’s work, not a single Dharma is disregarded.” Establishing monasteries, liberating sentient beings, benefiting others by means of all good deeds and causal conditions—this is “in the Buddha’s work not a single dharma is disregarded.” “In the fundamental ground of ultimate reality, not a single Dharma arises”—this means when we meditate, our mind does not want anything, because this mind is replete in all things; what else could it want? This mind “does not

seek the Buddha” because the Buddha is intrinsic in us. The pure and lucid mind, the awakened mind, the bodhi mind—these are all the Buddha, so if we still wish to seek the Buddha, that is to place a head on top of a head! Where should we look for it? To seek is to have delusive thoughts; to seek is to suffer; to seek nothing is bliss. “Do not seek the Dharma” because the mind gives rise to ten thousand dharmas; the Buddhas of the ten directions are in this mind; this mind is replete with immeasurable virtues and merits; all dharmas flow from this mind. “Do not seek the sangha.” What is the sangha? The Sixth Patriarch said, “The sangha is purity.” When the mind maintains purity and right mindfulness, that is the sangha, so what else do we need to seek? When we seek, we will lose our right mindfulness, we will no longer see the sangha; when we constantly abide firmly in right mindfulness, comply with our awareness—that is the sangha. “Do not seek sentient beings”—sentient beings are fundamentally empty, so what is there to seek? We ordinarily tell sentient beings to seek the Buddha Way above and to liberate sentient beings below. Seeking the Buddha Way above—there is nothing to seek; subject and object are both empty; liberating sentient beings below—sentient beings are also empty. Although we liberate sentient beings, this mind must return to its self nature; one is by gradual [cultivation], one is by sudden [enlightenment]; they are compatible and non-conflictive. “Do not seek the Buddha; do not seek the Dharma; do not seek the sangha; do not seek sentient beings” means that we must work hard on this mind. In the Chan hall, we must let go of all things; yet in the Chan meditation center we must take up all things, be able to let go and take up, that is the true Buddha Dharma, that is true Chan.

When this mind is without obstructions, without distance, does not abide in emptiness or existence, that is the self nature of bodhi; it is lively and active, “like the lotus flower that does not cling to water, and the moon that does not cling to the sky”—this is to be truly awakened, otherwise, if the mind is attached to any state, it is not right. This is the mind of all of you listening to the Dharma! It is intrinsic; from here we must learn to understand ourselves.

Knowledge and Action Are One; Practice and Principle Are in One Suchness

Chan practice is to let go of all things, firmly abide in right mindfulness, comply with our awareness; when this pure mind manifests, an hour passes by in an instant. Buddhism comprises practice and principle; when we know the principle, we must put it into practice; only after we have practiced it ourselves, can we truly understand that practice and principle are one, just as what Wang Yang Ming said, “Knowledge and practice are one,”—one is knowledge, one is practice—when we understand the ultimate meaning, that is to truly unify knowledge and action. Practice and principle are in one suchness. Only by thoroughly understanding and harmonizing practice and principle, can we propagate the Buddha Dharma.

The Way is in all places, at all times, and in every instant. Some people feel that Chan is to eat when hungry, drink when thirsty, play when one wishes to play—that is actually not Chan; it to indulge oneself! If we indulge ourselves, we will degrade ourselves. We ordinarily cultivate according to conditions; sitting in meditation in the Chan hall is an intensive practice; if we ordinarily do not know to work hard and fortify our practice, it is difficult to practice correctly by just sitting in meditation. Therefore the Tian Tai School’s teaching of [meditation \(samatha and vipasyana\)](#) entails:

- 1) [meditation on emptiness](#)
- 2) [meditation by employing expedient means and adapting to conditions](#)
- 3) [meditation on cessation of discriminating duality](#)

These focus on the three [meditative](#) practices on “emptiness,” “phenomena” and the “Middle Way.”

- 1) [“Meditation on emptiness.”](#) At every moment [of our lives], we know to examine ourselves and reflect that the best way to overcome our vexations is not to cling to external objects. Therefore, if we can understand the conditional arising and empty nature of all dharmas, and cease our delusive thoughts, emptiness is the truth. Therefore, this is [“meditation on emptiness.”](#)
- 2) [“Meditation on employing expedient means to adapt to conditions.”](#) Expedient means are skillful means; by adapting to conditions, the bodhisattvas understand

emptiness and non-emptiness, can distinguish and apply skillful means to heal sickness, transform and liberate sentient beings according to conditions; their minds abide calmly in conventional truth and are not moved by internal or external changes; that is known as employing expedient means to adapt to conditions. Therefore, whether in stillness or in motion, whether idle or busy, when the six roots contact the six dusts, we adapt to conditions in all situations, the mind is calm and unmoved. In our daily lives—in our clothing, food, housing, and transportation; in walking, standing, sitting, and lying down—we universally liberate sentient beings; we discipline and subdue our minds—this is adapting to conditions. If we wait until this mind has become perfectly still before liberating sentient beings, that is not the bodhisattva way. The bodhisattva way is to discipline ourselves while we are liberating sentient beings, to fully benefit ourselves while we are liberating sentient beings; when we achieve this state, that is to “employ expedient means to adapt to conditions.”

- 3) Finally, “meditation on cessation of discriminating duality.” Birth, death, and nirvana, existence and non-existence, delusion and enlightenment are all dualistic characteristics and not the Middle Way. Only when this mind abides neither in existence nor in emptiness—“Do not abide where the Buddha is; quickly walk past the place where there is no Buddha”—that is the ultimate [principle]; it is to understand the ultimate meaning of the Middle Way; it is Middle Way Reality.

Incorporate Our Practice Into Our Daily Lives

When we understand these principles, and incorporate them into our daily lives, that is the true bodhisattva way. In our cultivation, we must be able to tolerate [the solitary state](#), nurture this mind until it is still; that is bodhi, that is nirvana. The ancient sages say, “When romance and success have passed, sorrow and desolation follow; when tranquil and pure states are prolonged, their flavor increases.” Whether it is the desire and love between men and women, or the attainment of highest worldly success and honor, when these events pass, one is left with nothing but sorrow and desolation and will finally sink into the evil realms. As Chan cultivators, “when states of tranquility and purity are prolonged, their flavor increase” means to be free from delusion and confusion and abide

in this mind. It is not to sit here dryly. Sitting dryly is totally unrelated to bodhi, samadhi, and wisdom; it is like stagnant water that hides no dragons. Even though we are not sitting dryly, we must be able to tolerate solitude, and nurture this mind; the longer this mind can abide calmly, the more subdued, pure, and true it becomes; that is infinite life and infinite light; that is the true self. All of you here should work hard and understand yourselves; then you will feel that your cultivation is very real; you will be able to abide in stillness and in motion—when in stillness, not a single thought arises; when in motion, all virtues are perfected.

When you return to the Chan meditation center, you must be able to perfect all actions, universally liberate all sentient beings, liberating sentient beings yet no sentient beings are liberated; this is to cultivate all virtuous dharmas, and not be attached to any virtuous dharmas; this is the wisdom of vajra prajna. Therefore, by truly understanding “in the fundamental ground of ultimate reality, not a single dharma arises; in the Buddha’s work, not a single dharma is disregarded,” you will find the great bodhi way. There are many teachings in Buddhism, but if any method surpasses bodhi and nirvana, that is what the Buddha speaks of as expedient means. Reciting the Buddha’s name entails immeasurable merits; paying homage to the Buddha brings infinite blessings—these are expedient means; this is practice. In reciting the Buddha’s name and paying homage to the Buddha, both subject and object should be empty, and we return to our self nature; that is the true Buddha Dharma.

The virtuous dharmas in Buddhism consist of “meditation on relative truths,” “true emptiness,” and “middle way reality.” These three are non-conflictive. “Meditation on relative truths” is to build monasteries, propagate the Buddha Dharma, universally liberate sentient beings, establish the 84,000 dharma doors, establish various expedient means—all these are virtuous dharmas, relative truths. If we cling to the phenomenal, that is only blessings; therefore, we must advance another step—subject and object must both be empty. For example, in cultivating the six paramitas, the first five are related to “practice.” Prajna paramita is the “principle.” In cultivating each paramita, we must use prajna paramita to contemplate “emptiness.” Dana paramita consists of material giving,

Dharma giving, and giving of [solace and courage](#), finally achieving “three-fold emptiness”—that is prajna. The principle of the six paramitas is emptiness; the highest [principle] is the [truth of emptiness](#). “Relative truth” is blessings; “true emptiness” is liberation;” “Middle Way Reality” is the wonderful bright true bodhi mind. Therefore, this mind is supreme. We are now in the scientific age, the space age; everyone should realize that all scientific advances are crystallizations of the mind’s wisdom. If we deviate from this mind, what else can we do? This wisdom still belongs to the wisdom with outflows (defilements). Middle Way Reality is the wisdom without outflows. We hope that each one of you can [harmonize \(coordinate\) and thoroughly understand](#) “relative truth,” “true emptiness,” and “Middle Way Reality”—they are one in three, and three in one. To thoroughly understand these, we need to carefully reflect on them; otherwise, practice is practice and principle is principle and one can easily give rise to attachments.

Everyone must have faith in the Buddha Dharma and the practice; together with the causal conditions of virtuous dharmas, we propagate the Buddha Dharma. Even though we speak of bodhi and nirvana and do not give rise to a single thought, if we have not practiced diligently and fortified our cultivation, and even have problems in the necessities of life, how can there be bodhi and nirvana? Buddhism is in everyday living; therefore, we say, “Walking through a field of flowers, do not let a single leaf cling to you.” In our daily lives, we cannot be separate from conventional truth—that is to propagate the Buddha Dharma, to liberate sentient beings. Perfecting conventional truth brings immeasurable blessings. Not being attached to these blessings, knowing that they are the coming together of causes and conditions, when subject and object are both empty, that is the truth of emptiness. In the end, the original nature is fundamentally empty; we do not even cling to emptiness—that is the ultimate truth of the Middle Way; it is to understand the ultimate [principle]. We hope that you will all carefully reflect on this, and thoroughly understand these truths.