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***Tallahassee Chan Group
Newsletter***

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The TCG is a community of practitioners learning and living the Buddha's teachings through the tradition of the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan (Zen) Buddhism as established by Chan Master Sheng Yen(1930-2009). These teachings are now taught by his disciple Guo Gu (Dr. Jimmy Yu) who was given inka, or seal of approval, by Master Sheng Yen in 1995. TCG is a member of the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Association which has many affiliate centers and branches throughout the world.

For information about the Tallahassee Chan Group activities please visit the website at

<http://www.tallahasseechan.com>

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From the Editor

The main purpose of this publication is to introduce the Chan teachings of Master Sheng Yen and to publish Guo Gu's Dharma talks, to benefit not only TCG members but all people in the Buddhist community. The newsletter will also provide information on major events sponsored by the TCG. Details of our group's day-to-day activities can be found on our website. We invite 'blogs' from TCG and TBC members, as well welcoming contributions of poetry, articles, photography, and artwork. If you wish to submit your artwork or essays for consideration, please email me at levans@comcast.net.

Guo Gu's monthly Dharma talks at TCG have focused on the Gateless Gate (Wumen guan), that classic 13th century collection of 48 cases (Ch. gong'ans; Jp. koans). In the first newsletter, we thought it fitting to publish Guo Gu's Introduction to his commentaries. In this edition we will continue with Guo Gu's Dharma Talk on *Case 1; Zhaozhou's Dog*.

I personally believe that for many of us, the search for a spiritual path is born out of suffering. It does not begin with good times and ecstasy, but the hard reality of pain, disappointment and misperception precipitating into personal crisis strong enough to shake us out of our own false perceptions, delusions and self-destructive habitual tendencies. As such, my search for a spiritual path led me to the Dharma. But which of the many Buddhist teachings were best suited for me? I read numerous books, attended several 3, 6 and 10 day retreats exploring various teachings and meditation techniques. All were good but something was missing. That something was a teacher and practice that I could personally relate to and have faith in.

In January of 2010, I walked into the Tallahassee Chan Group's Monday meeting and listened to the Dharma Talk of Shifu Guo Gu. His teachings spoke of the suffering of self-referentially of our own making and controlled by a chattering mind of continual thoughts that never seems to cease. From this I began reading the books written by his Shifu, Master Sheng Yen, and became a regular participant of the Tallahassee Chan Group.

The Chan teachings, which include meditation and yoga practice designed to integrate body and mind, are geared for the fast paced and stressful times that we live in. The consistent practice of Chan has had a profound affirmative effect in my daily life. My numerous vexations have miraculously abated (they are still present, but not so much as long as I practice!). If I could sum it up in a sentence it would be that in a relatively short period of time: *The practice of Chan has allowed me to quiet my mind, see my vexations as they arise, not reacting but acting accordingly in a compassionate manner (or at least keeping my mouth shut) and gifted me with an attitude and belief that no matter what, it's all good.* And yet this is just the beginning. It is in this spirit that I have chosen the Dharma talk Master Sheng Yen offered on *Daily and Intensive Practice*.

Ying-wu-suo-chu-er-sheng-Ch'i-hsin "you should give rise to a thought without being attached to anything" Diamond Sutra

Yan Jian

Daily Practice and Intensive Practice

(Lecture delivered by Master Sheng-yen on Sunday, November 4, 1984)

Today I will speak about two different kinds of practice: practice in daily life and practice during a specific time and at a specific place -- as in a retreat, for example.

Many people have spoken to me about the problem of maintaining their practice. One practitioner said, "I've been listening to the Dharma for many years, and I have been practicing very hard. But it seems to me that whenever vexations arise, I'm unable to get rid of them. So it seems to me that my practice has been useless."

Another said, "Every day I have to manage two hundred people. I have to give them assignments. If I don't give them their assignments, they won't know what to do. When they have problems, they bring them to me to solve. Their problems become my problems. Two hundred people bringing problems to me is too much, and I don't like my job at all."

A third person told me, "I am sixty years old. During my life I have helped many people, and now I feel that it is time for me to practice seriously. But I can't let go of all the people who need my help. For example, I had a dream recently where I was with a large group of people and I heard a voice which said, 'You can't forget other people and just work on your own problems; you must still take care of other people.' This bothers me because if I am to practice, I can't take care of all these other people at the same time. I must practice alone. But it is difficult for me to let go of all these other people. Even in my dream I was unwilling or unable to forget them." I have given these three examples because I believe that they are relevant to many people. How many of you have similar problems? I doubt that most of you are capable of making vexations go away the moment that they arise. Ideally, you should not allow other peoples' problems to cause you vexation. You should not feel that their problems cause problems for you. But very few people can do this.

This ideal can be better understood through the analogy of a glass container filled with colored water. No matter what color the water may be -- whether dirty or clear -- the glass always remains clear and unaffected. If you were faced with the kinds of problems mentioned in the examples above, could you actually say, "I am just like that piece of glass; the colored water does not affect me"? Even if you could do this only sometimes, it would still be very good. Most people are not like the piece of glass. Most people are like a piece of cloth which absorbs the paint which a painter applies to it. Most people, when confronted by a problem which has nothing to do with them, assume that it's their problem.

The sixty-year-old man would like to practice, but he's not determined enough or he can't give up his old habits and the surroundings he's accustomed to. Many people are like this. Some people feel that they have not yet fulfilled their responsibilities to their family, their job and to other activities. When you can't put down responsibilities, habits and interests, you can't really practice.

Really, all of you have the problems I have described. If someone who was mentally unbalanced were to spit on you or kick you, how would you respond? You might say, "This really hasn't happened to me, because this guy is crazy and can't be held responsible for his actions." But if it really did happen, do you think you would be so unconcerned? In fact, I actually saw something like this happen: someone out of his head went up to a man in the street and beat him up. This man went to the police and complained. The police said, "But that guy is crazy." The man was persistent and said, "So you should have him locked up." But the police responded, "He was put in an asylum, and then he was released." The man exclaimed, "Since he's clearly still crazy, he should be put back in the asylum." The police added, "You shouldn't be so angry -- he's insane." But the man concluded, "Angry or not, he should not be out running around on the street." If this had happened to you, what would you have done? If you had the right attitude, you would have felt that the problem belonged to the insane man; you would have been unconcerned and been free of the vexations that troubled the man in my story.

Why have I asked you these questions? It is to point out that practice in daily life is generally insufficient. It is very difficult to reach a state of purity and peace just by daily practice. This is because in our everyday lives we live in the midst of constant confusion and agitation. It is difficult to achieve the kind of tranquility which allows the mind to be unconcerned with external events. That is why periods of sustained practice once or twice a year are essential. It may be necessary to devote a long period to intensive practice sometime during your life.

If you don't practice daily, you may not be able to maintain an enthusiasm for practice. And without periods of extended practice, it is impossible to experience even a brief period of true peace. Daily practice is useful for two reasons: it maintains your interest and enthusiasm for the practice, and it reminds you that you are a practitioner. In being so reminded, you should feel how inappropriate it is to be vexed by life's ups and downs. But the deeper sense of peace can only be known through intensive practice for an extended period.

Because of the relative importance of daily and intensive practice -- I found it necessary to give three different answers to those who complained to me about their difficulties. To the first person, who was discouraged by the persistence of his vexations, I said that it was very good that he recognized that he was unable to transcend his vexations, because it indicated that he was already practicing. If he hadn't been practicing, he wouldn't have been able to recognize this. Thus I told him that he had very virtuous karmic roots. I said to him, "You are like someone who has eyes to see, a brain to think, but

hands, arms and legs that don't listen to you. You look ahead, and you see that if you keep walking in the same direction you will step in a pile of shit. You decide to change direction, but your legs don't listen to you, and you end up stepping in it."

To how many of us here does this analogy apply? To everyone, I think. But at least having an idea of what is about to happen is better than blindness or idiocy. The idiot doesn't even know what shit is; the blind man can't see it right in front of him. It takes someone who has tried to practice and who has some understanding of the Dharma to know how to proceed. Someone with no understanding of the Dharma can't recognize shit or vexation because his eyes are closed or simply because he doesn't care.

When I related this to the one discouraged by vexation, he was reassured. He told me he was happy that I said he had good karmic roots even though he experienced so many problems. I said that he would never have been able to recognize his vexations without good karmic roots. "Then," he said, "practice is really very difficult; when will I ever be able to recognize vexations and still be unaffected by them?" I told him that although such an achievement is possible, there is no way I can predict when he might attain that state. I said, "You must continue to practice, so that vexations will gradually cease to disturb you. With practice there can come a time when we are not affected by vexations at all."

Practitioners deal with vexations in three stages:

1. Recognizing and identifying vexation. This is the beginner's stage.
2. Dealing with vexation. When a problem comes up, you should be very clear about the nature of the problem, and how it has arisen. You should feel no resentment towards the vexation -- it should simply be accepted. You should repent the fault which caused the vexation, and hope that it does not arise again.
3. Vexations can arise only once; they then disappear, never to return again. Further vexation may arise, but it will likewise disappear forever. Problems are terminated part by part. Many people, when they begin practice, hope that their vexations will immediately end forever. Is this really possible -- completely overcoming vexation when you first begin to practice? It is, but only for practitioners whose karmic roots are profound and immensely virtuous. Only Bodhisattvas who are reborn can begin practice at such a high level.

If you are a beginning practitioner, when intense vexations arise which can't be tamed, you should not feel disillusioned or disappointed. It is just like working in the little garden behind this building: once we weed it, the weeds will soon return. So we must weed again and again. If we decide not to weed at all because the weeds will just grow again, then the whole garden will become overgrown, and the backyard will never be clear. However, if we

never cease in our efforts, then at least there will be times when the garden will be clear and ordered. To anyone who thinks it's useless to strive to cut off all vexations because they can't be terminated at once and will continually return, I would say this: from now on you need not clean yourself after you go to the bathroom, and you need not clean your dishes after eating. After all, you will go to the bathroom today, tomorrow, and the day after that. If you feel that cleaning yourself today is not worth the effort because you will have to do it tomorrow, why do it at all? If your dishes will be soiled tomorrow even though they are cleaned today, why bother with cleaning? This might do for animals, but humans are different. If you recognize vexations, you should make an effort to terminate them every time they arise.

To the man who manages two hundred people, I said, "Don't you realize that you should practice Ch'an in daily life? You say that you must assign jobs to others and then deal with their problems, but this is a splendid opportunity to practice Ch'an." He replied, "I understand what you say, but I feel that I am not practicing at all in my everyday life. I realize only that I am angry or in a bad situation." Then I said, "Meditate at least two hours a day, on Sundays meditate throughout the whole day, and every year participate in two week-long retreats -- then you will certainly be able to deal with any problem in your life as simply an occasion to practice Ch'an."

If what you do in life is done for the benefit of others, then everything in life is the practice of Ch'an. An example: Yesterday we held a day-long retreat at the Center. After the first meal, one participant volunteered to wash the dishes. By the end of the day, he had done the dishes for two meals. I asked him whether he was especially interested in washing dishes. He replied, "No, not at all." Then I asked him whether he had done this to accumulate merit. He told me, "No, I never thought of that. I did it only because no one else was willing to do the dishes." His attitude seems to be reasonable and justified, but actually it is incorrect. It is good because he at least volunteered to do the dishes. But his attitude is not correct because he did not perform the activity as a service to the others on the retreat. Serving others is essential to Ch'an. We should treasure any opportunity to practice, even in a difficult situation. With this attitude we will see the one who provides the opportunity as a Bodhisattva, someone who helps us in our practice.

If someone insults you or gives you a hard time for no reason, shouldn't you feel thankful that you have been given an opportunity to practice? The answer is yes, but only for the great practitioners, not for us. I have asked people if they would like such an opportunity to practice. Most say, "No, I don't think that I'd want to tackle that now. First let me practice and build myself up, and then I would welcome such an opportunity!" Once, at the end of a retreat, there was a lot of cleaning to be done at the Center, but everyone was in a hurry to go home. So I grabbed one of the participants and said, "Now here is an opportunity for you to be a great practitioner." He was interested. He said, "All right, I'd like to be a great practitioner." So I told him about the towels that needed to be taken to the laundry, and all the odds and

ends that had to be cleaned up. Then his enthusiasm waned, "Well, I think I'll wait until next time to be a great practitioner. I think I'll go home now." Although the purpose of a Ch'an retreat is to train people to become great practitioners, at the end of this retreat, I was the one left to be a great practitioner; everyone else went home!

To the last practitioner, I said, "You are already sixty years old and you understand the importance of practice. I advise you to put away everything else and direct all of your efforts to practice. Without sufficient, deep practice, the help that you give to others will be limited, regardless of how much effort you put forth. The help you give won't be thorough or complete. But if you practice, there will be no limit to the help you can give to others. This is why I tell you to make practicing your first priority."

Becoming a great practitioner is not easy. You begin as an ordinary person -- with all of the problems, difficulties, and doubts that ordinary people have. From there you must continue to strive with all your effort, always trying harder and harder until you reach your goal. Only by doing this can you become a great practitioner.



(artist unknown)

Gateless Gate
Case 1. Zhaozhou's Dog
A Dharma Talk by Guo Gu
September 6, 2010
(Transcribed by Estelle Gerard)

Zhaozhou Congshen (778-897; Jp., Joshu Jushin) is a great master. A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?" Zhaozhou said, "No." I wouldn't translate this as 'no'. I would leave it un-translated. In Chinese it is 'Wu'; in Japanese it is 'Mu'. I'll explain why. We have a case which is followed by Wumen's comment; then his verses which are like a poem.

Wumen's commentary:

To study Zen, you must pass through the barrier of the Buddhas and Patriarchs [the lineage masters]. For wondrous enlightenment you must get to the end of the road of the mind [poor translation. It should be 'the end of the mind – the thinking, discriminating mind is where the wondrous enlightenment will be revealed]. If you do not penetrate the ancestral teachers' barrier, if you do not end the road of the mind, then in all that you do (seeking to follow the Buddhist Path), you are but a ghost haunting the forests and fields.

But tell me, what is the barrier of the Buddhas and Patriarchs? It is this one word 'Wu' – this is the barrier of Chan. This is why this collection is called the Chan School's barrier of the gate of Wu. If you can pass through it, not only will you see Zhaozhou in person but you will then be able to talk together hand in hand with all the generations of lineage masters; see through the same eyes as they do, and hear through the same ears as they do. Wouldn't you be happy?

Do any of you want to pass through the barrier? Just arouse a mass of doubt throughout your whole being, extending through your three hundred sixty bones and your eighty-four thousand pores, as you come to grips with the word 'Wu'. Bring it up and keep your attention on it day and night. Don't understand it as empty nothingness, and don't understand it in terms of yes or no. It should be as if you have swallowed a red hot iron ball that you cannot spit out. After a long time at this you become fully pure and ripe; inner and outer are spontaneously fused into one. It is like being a mute and having a dream: you can only know it for yourself.

Suddenly it comes forth, shaking heaven, moving the earth. It is like taking a great commanding general's sword in your hand -- you slay buddhas and patriarchs as you meet them. On this shore of birth and death, of samsara, you are free. You can wander and play in samadhi among all orders of beings in all planes of existence.

But how will you bring up Zhaozhou's Wu and keep your attention on it? Bring up the word 'Wu' with your whole life force. If you do this properly without interruption, it is like a lamp of truth: once lit, it shines. Darkness instantaneously will be gone.

Verse

A dog...Buddha nature...
The truly is manifest in full.
As soon as you step into 'yes' and 'no'
[having or not having; being or non-being],
You lose your body; you lose your life.

Guo Gu's commentary

Wumen's verse is a key on how to practice. He is very compassionate. All along he has been telling us how to practice.

The very first line of his comment is the key: 'To study Chan you must pass through the barrier of the Buddhas and Patriarchs. For wondrous awakening, you must get to the end of the mind.' The only reason teachers tell you to let go of right or wrong, of all discursive thinking, is so that the discriminating mind can perish. The discriminating mind is not the intellectual mind. We need the intellectual mind. We need experiences. The discriminating mind is discrimination based on self-referentiality. This assumption that there is a permanent self inside you somewhere that does not change that is separate from everything else. I have said already three key : separate from everything else; does not change (is permanent); and independent. Go ahead and examine your lives, each and every one of your thoughts. This is how we operate. We operate based on the assumption that everything is permanent. This is a very fundamental, emotive level.

We assume that everything is separate, like you are out there and I'm over here and I am independent from you. That's not who you are. Once you let go of that, you will realize it. The way to practice is to first recognize how much our interest is vested in this mechanism of discriminating thoughts such as 'right and wrong', 'beautiful and ugly', 'good and bad'. How much of our lives is vested in that; how scattered we are by it. So, first, we must collect the scattered thought and put it on something silly, something completely unrelated to your awakening of self. Like what?

Climbing a glass mountain. When you are finally awakened, the glass mountain is no more. The oil? No more. You? No more. What is there? Everything! Anything who says otherwise is fooling you; they don't know what they're talking about. Everything is there. Everything – your self, your past, your experience, your knowledge, the conventional 'you' that you used to operate throughout your daily life – everything is there. Everything outside

is also there. But because self-grasping is gone, there is no more gaining or losing from your perspective. The sense of gaining or losing, right or wrong can only exist on the basis of self-referentiality. When that is not there, you can help living beings, your family members, your friends, those around you, and yourself, to deal with vexations. You can truly help. That is walking the Bodhisattva path, to be a beacon in the ocean of suffering, to be a guide to others. I must say, in the history of American Zen, there have been many problematic teachers. They practice Zen and they become demons. During the retreat, one student was a victim of that. Her previous teacher slept with his own students; not only one but many. And he was an alcoholic and claimed to be a Zen master. The problem may stem from the axiom of Chan Buddhism, the tradition of the self not depending on words and language to see directly the Buddha nature and become a Buddha. Certain schools may take it to mean that there is no need to teach precepts or sutras. With their meager experience of oneness or unified state they think they're enlightened and they become demons. This woman in this recent retreat was a victim of that, poor soul. As for the teacher, that teacher too is a poor soul, completely clouded. It means his teacher did not do a good job, neither did his teacher's teacher. For example, some teachers teach to bring forth this 'wu' which means 'not', or 'no', or 'lacking'. The monk asked the question, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?" The monk knows. He is like an encyclopedia of Buddhism. He has learned the basic teachings such as all beings are buddhas; yet he asked that wonderful question. You may think he is an idiot. Some interpretation can understand it that way, but on the other hand, he is asking the teacher, "I have been practicing all these years and I know very well that beings, me included, have Buddha nature. Where is my Buddha nature? Where is my awakening? I need to harvest the field now, bring in the crops. Show me!"

That's one level of understanding. Another level is that the student is actually testing the teacher, "Teacher, all beings have Buddha nature; does a dog have Buddha nature?" He presented the problem to the teacher, "Teacher, you show me!" To avoid more problems, the teacher did not fall into the trap and did not answer, "Yes, the dog has Buddha nature," otherwise there might have been this follow up question, "When is my dog going to be enlightened, become a Buddha?" All kinds of problems would arise. So the teacher, instead of answering the question, shouts: "Wu!" This 'wu' or 'no', or 'lacking', or 'not', is not the same as 'yes' or 'no'. It is to turn the cards around. To present you with 'wu' is for you to take up the burden, to climb this glass mountain all the way to the top. He was saying: "I'm presenting this to you; you show me!"

And that's Women's advice for practice. Poor teachers will tell their students to be one with 'wu', or to be one with 'mu'. Of what use is it to be one? To stay there in the oneness? When that kind of enlightenment happens, problems will come. Precepts will not be held because the self is

still there, operating. It is not 'no-self'. It is not 'no-mind'. The self has just become a great self, big self, true self, a unified self – but it is not the Chan way. To be one with something is easy. You must have one key ingredient – doubt. If you hear any teacher telling you to just be one with wu, the teacher's eyes are closed shut. You must have the doubt sensation. This means, "What is wu? I don't know. What is wu? I don't know." Any answer that comes up, you answer back, "I don't know. What is it?" You must not be satisfied with any of the answers that come up through your intellectual understanding, through your discriminating mind, through the mechanism, the tricks of the self with which you have been living all of your life. Trust me, there will be many fancy tricks. You will come up with blissful states, unified experiences, all the nice sceneries that you see on the side of the road when you go from point A to point B; all of the differences, or, as the text says, "the thousand differences." In other words, junk will come up. You must steer right through this. Even if you think you got enlightened steer right through for if you think you got enlightened, you probably didn't. And if you feel you got enlightened, you probably did not. Enlightenment is not a feeling; it is not a thought. It's like the water which, for the first time, realizes that waves and lucidity have nothing to do with its true nature. Or, imagine that our world is made of play dough with everyone of us made out of play dough. And then, one day, the play dough recognizes itself, "Hey, I'm made up of play dough!" Why would play dough feel that way? If the whole world was made up of men, there would be no need for women. There would not even be a need for the word 'men'. "Hey, I'm made up of play dough!" Why would play dough feel that way? If the whole world was made up of men, there would be no need for women. There would not even be a need for the word 'men'. Enlightenment is not a feeling; it is not knowledge, it is not experience, it is not a concept. Is there such a thing? Yes. Do we seek after it? No. Do we tread the path? Yes. No matter what comes up, we don't let go of the method. That method is the hot iron ball in your throat, spoken of in the text. In Chan, doubt is not suspicion but complete conviction in the method, in the teacher, and in yourself. Yet, when we ask, "what is wu?" It is a sense of wonderment. We ask because we really want to know, "What is wu? Why did he say wu? Why did he say 'lacking'? What? What? What? What?" We ask as if we had a hot iron ball in our throat, or, in modern lingo, I would say like a hot dumpling. Perhaps you've eaten one of those hot Chinese dumplings? It tastes so good but it is so hot that you can't swallow it or it would burn your throat. And you can't spit it out because it's so darn good! [Guogu makes sounds as if a dumpling is being juggled in his mouth and throat] That's what you have to do when you use the method; don't ever let go of the method but use it at all time, in all places, "What is wu, what is wu, what is wu? What is it? Don't know." Perhaps some answers may come up, "It is Buddha nature, it is awakening." No. Do not accept anything and keep on going. No reservation. This can only happen during intense situations. You don't do it when you're teaching. I teach at FSU; I don't ask

the students, "What is wu?" During my last retreat, there was a math teacher who was very intensely practicing. After the retreat, back to teaching math at the university, he wrote some formula on the board. During the retreat he had practiced so intensely that he was still wallowing in "What is wu?" Without being aware of it, that's the formula he had written! When he turned around, his students were all asking, "What is wu?" while saying to each other that their teacher had gone insane. So he had to snap out of it. Without any reservation, in intense situations we practice this way: like a hot iron ball, which you don't spit out and don't let go. That's why in Chan we say, "Small doubt, small enlightenment; medium doubt, medium enlightenment; no doubt, just oneness with wu, no enlightenment." Don't be fooled by teachers whose eyes are not open yet. If great doubt is not there, there is no enlightenment. So, what is this great doubt? It is a sense of wonderment, a sense of not knowing. But fundamentally, does it have anything to do with a dog or Buddha nature? No. It is you. The question is not about the dog having Buddha nature or no. The question is about me, "Where is my Buddha nature? Who am I?" We just use this method but it is still just a method, like a brick which we use to knock on doors. In itself it is useless. What is useful is to use it as a brick, to tap into that fundamental existential dilemma of who we are, beyond intellectualization, emotion, discriminating thought, all the constructed fabrications that we have in our minds; the words and language, and right and wrong. Beyond all of that. We use the huatou or gong'an to knock on yourself. And that is like a person who is a mute, who had a dream, who must be forced to speak up or voice his dream. That's how to practice. How? He can't speak! "Speak!" "What is it? What is it? What is it?" You should use the huatou or gong'an as if you had been kidnapped by robbers and tied up to a chair. The thieves went out for lunch; the police are now knocking on the door. This is your only chance to answer but your mouth is taped shut. Yet you have to somehow break free and let the police know you're there. You know this is the only time they will have come by and knocked on the door of the room where you're locked in. What do you do?

That's how to practice!

You moan, like this, "Haaaaaaa...I'm heeeeere..." You must speak as if you had a hot iron ball in your throat. Anything short of that, we call it farmer Zen (?), as when I say to you, "Watch your thoughts slowly; relax, be natural and clear..." This is good for beginners but once you're in the door, on the threshold of the door, you need a real method, one of these two methods: just sitting (silent illumination), or a gong'an to break through that shell. So the real, fundamental 'what is it?' is actually, "what is this?" Your life! Why is it that you wake up in the morning when the alarm rings? You say, "I have to go to work." Why do you go to work? "I have to feed the family." Why do you have to feed the family?" "That's my obligation." Who told you it's your obligation? Who are you? Are your thoughts you? When you think happy thoughts you are happy; and when you think sad

thoughts, you are sad. So which one is you, the sad or the happy one? You will say 'both'. So you have two selves. It's like putting a hat on top of a hat. Or putting one more head on top of your head. "What is it?" You must know. We have a precious human life but if you don't know, it means you're not a person. If you are not a person, how can you live, how can you help others? You can help others but in the midst of your helping you will step on someone else's foot. Have you done that? There are good things we want to give to people to help them but what if they don't need it or want it. So in the midst of wanting to help you are actually harming. Why? Because your eyes are clouded. You are not a mirror responding to the needs of beings. Your own mirror has a permanent engraving of a self which is always there. Even if you stand in front of it, juxtaposed, you can't see things clearly. You must be a mirror, like the mirror-mind, no-mind, no-self, then you can help. Otherwise, helping – obviously a little better than harming – is not true helping. This is very important. If, after this talk, you haven't gotten the urge to really awaken to the self, to know who you are, then I have failed as a teacher.

I'm explaining things as plainly as possible without adding any spice or sauce that makes the dish taste better, just food that will satisfy your hunger. If you can do this, then you can walk hand in hand with the buddhas – and not just walking, but you can do anything and no one can do anything to you. Wumen said you are like a general [referring to General Guan in the Han dynasty who was supposed to have won every battle]; you kill and give life with the same sword. Yes, a sword can give life; it is double-edged.

How to actually go about practice? You must start out from the very beginning with the correct view: I lack nothing. You may think, "My mind is so chaotic when I sit; I have so many vexations, negative tendencies, habits, wandering thoughts..." This has nothing to do with your true nature. It just happens that it is scattered now. You just have to go through the process of climbing the glass mountain, collect your thoughts, concentrate, unify your thoughts, be one with the method. And then let go.

It is like this space. All the furniture is in a mess: the bookshelves, the cushions. I don't know when the last time we vacuumed these cushions was. They're dirty. Does this have anything to do with the space in here? We can vacuum it, buy brand new cushions, place them neatly in the room, or we can wreak havoc in this room. From the perspective of space, it is free. All the delusions in our mind, all the chaos, and all the good qualities that we have – yes, we first have to put the light on, to see what there is, to face your scattered self – have nothing to do with your true self, with who you are. All of your constructs and what you have learned to navigate throughout your daily life, the tricks that you do to deal with family members, friends, school and so on, that is not your true self. It's like how you rearrange furniture. Your teacher will first tell you, yes, yes, rearrange furniture, good! It's because most people are still affected by things such as furniture. So we clean the room but whether the room is clean or dirty, it has nothing to do

with the room. But first we clean the room, and then we start the work.

That's the work ahead of us. Of course, you can still choose to practice even though you don't want to hear Dharma talks or don't want to learn. You just want a healthy body, or for your breath to be regulated; or to relax, to relieve tension and stress in your daily life. That comes along. It's like the scenery on the path that we walk. Naturally it will come. If you choose to stop here, the only thing the teacher can do is to encourage all of you not to sell yourself short, not to be satisfied with only health of body and mind, but to be more spiritual, to be happier but to go on. True happiness lies ahead.

This case is actually very simple. Don't think that since this is the first one, it must be the simplest. All gong'ans are the same. If you pass one, you pass all others. If you don't understand others, it means you haven't passed it. You are only fooling yourself. Or maybe you're fooled by your teacher. There is no such thing as gradation. If you pass one, you pass all the others. And you see forty eight different glass mountains. When there is no way, the teachers will create ways, cutting flesh when the flesh is perfect; giving people plastic surgeries. No need. From a teacher's perspective, these are all jokes, ways to make babies stop crying. The Cases are equal. But some people have affinity with certain cases. The path is more subtle, more gradual. Zen claims to be a sudden path. No subtle, no gradual. But people have differences so, sometimes, hearing this story, one may not get it, but hearing another story, one gets it.

Sometimes one hears a story that they don't get but two years later, as they're sitting, suddenly they will realize it. Teachers are here to plant seeds. Your practice is like putting and sunshine and some day, the seeds will germinate. Trust this path. You lack nothing. Practice hard.



What's Happening at TCG

Monthly Calendar

The following schedule is offered every month (see website for month to month details: <http://tallahasseechan.com/calendar.html>).

Weekly Sittings: Every Monday evening, 7:30-9pm. There are two 30-minute periods of seated meditation, punctuated by a period of either walking meditation or mindful Yoga. Each meeting concludes with a short session of questions and answers.

Dharma Talks, The first Monday of each month. The evening begins with a 25-minute period of seated meditation; followed by the dharma talk at 8pm, Guo Gu continues his gong'an comments on the [*Gateless Barrier \(Wumen guan\)*](#). The audio file of the talk will be posted under Teachings/[Audio Files](#).

1-Day Retreat, 9am-6pm: Guo Gu leads a day long retreat at TBC. Anyone who has taken the beginner's meditation workshop or have previous experience in Zen practice is welcome to join. Retreats offer a rare occasion to deepen one's Chan practice and commitment to the path.

TCG Social, Third Mon., The evening begins with two short periods of sitting from 7:30-8:20pm, followed by an informal social gathering at 8:25-9:30pm. The event is a good opportunity to meet other members and chat with one another over light snacks, soft drinks, and tea.

Zen-Based Stress Reduction Workshop, TBA Are you stressed? Do you have effective methods to reduce stress? The workshop offers Zen-based meditation methods in reducing and managing stress. It covers the conditions for practice, physiological and psychological benefits of meditation, the art of sitting and walking meditation, methods for self-massage, yoga exercises, and daily mindfulness methods. \$50 suggested donation. Registration required.

Intermediate Meditation Class: From February to May, over nine classes, Guo Gu is teaching a special meditation class introducing five Buddhist meditation methods aiming to achieve samadhi (meditative absorption).

Past Events at the TCG

Dharma Talk and Retreat by Venerable Dhammadipa

From November 9 through 11, 2013, Venerable Dhammadipa, who is a longtime friend of Guo Gu, visited Tallahassee from Europe. He gave a dharma talk on the importance of love and led a two-day retreat on Sat. and Sun. with the same focus of Metta meditation or meditation on loving kindness towards oneself and all sentient beings. After the retreat Dhammadipa, Guo Gu and several of the retreat participants and their friends and family gathered together for Sunday dinner at Lucy Ho's Masa restaurant known for its unique blend of Asian and Western cuisine where much of the meal was prepared personally by Lucy Ho. Venerable Dhammadipa is a rare gem in contemporary Buddhism and it was honor for TCG to have had him as a visiting teacher and retreat leader who provided us all with an exceptional experience to further our practice.



Friday Dharma Talk (photo by Vijay Subramanian)

To listen to Venerable Dhammadipa Dharma Talk visit TCG website at
http://www.tallahasseechan.com/media/Dhammadipa_Path%20of%20Serenity11092012.mp3

Venerable Dhammadipa (Ven. Xingkong) was born in Czechoslovakia in 1949 and is a world-renowned meditation master. He is a learned scholar of Buddhism as well as Sanskrit, Pali, and Chinese philosophy. He received his traditional Theravada Bhiksu Vinaya in 1987 in Sri Lanka, where he practiced meditation under the guidance of his preceptor, Ven. Nanarama Mahathera. In 1989 he received his Three Fold ordination as Mahayana monk in Hsi Lai Temple, Los Angeles.

His understanding of both Theravada and Mahayana is exceptional. He studied Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Prague University in 1969. In 1977, he received his Master's Degree in Chinese Literature and Philosophy from University of Paris, France. He started learning Buddhism in the late seventies when he came to Berlin as a refugee due to Russian invasion. He studied Russian literature at Jerusalem University, receiving a degree in 1973.

He went to Myanmar to practice meditation with the contemporary meditation master Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw in 1996 and was considered by

the Sayadaw the very first Western disciple who is qualified to teach meditation.

Venerable Dhammadipa has been teaching Samantha and Vipassana meditation at various monasteries and universities worldwide. In addition, He has been writing and translating Buddhist text into French and Czech. His translated works include *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana* (*Mahayanasraddhotpada -sastra*), *Entry into the Bodhisattva Path* (*Bodhicaryavatara*) and a *Collection of Han-San's Poems*.



Venerable Dhammadipa and Guo Gu at TBC
(Photos by Vijay Subramanian)



Sunday Dinner at Masa's
(Photographer not known)

Zen Pottery Class

During the Sundays of November 4th and 18th Sara Crayton held a Japanese pottery making class. She has been making pottery for the past 15 years. Participants learned to make their own tea bowl, plate, or a unique mug! In the first class they made their own pottery and in the second class, they glazed it.



Examples of Japanese pottery
(Photo from Sara Crayton)

" In all things, whatever they are, the finish of every detail is not desirable: one that holds the attention is unfinished " (The Book of Tea – Kakuzo Okakura)

This statement really encapsulates the main concept of Wabi Sabi, which is essential in the creation of the ceremonial Chawan (tea bowl). The deliberate adherence to an imperfect form during the making of the Chawan and its dedicated use in the ritual of the Japanese tea ceremony, has been the most influential in the promotion of this concept in Japanese culture.

The ceramic objects reflect, more than any other aspect in the tea ritual, the spirit of the Cha-Do (Way of Tea), based on the design aesthetic of Wabi Sabi . Wabi (Wa: Harmony – Bi: Beauty "Beauty of Harmony"). Sabi – represents the beauty that can evolve with age. The changing of appearance with usage reflected impermanence, always a condition that is contemplated in the Chan/Zen philosophy.

Raku (a type of Japanese pottery) was chosen for the creation of the Chawan due to the inherent unpredictability in its production. Even a Pottery Master had to relinquish control and allow the alchemy of Nature, combined with a humble servant, to determine the result. As the non symmetrical form was essential, the Chawan was always crafted by hand. The continual rotation of the bowl in the hand was believed to enhance the spirit of the creator in the object. Also a simple shape was favoured to evoke a serene appearance.

This article from Ceramics and Pottery Arts and Resources at
<http://www.veniceclayartists.com/tag/tea-cup/>

Japanese Tea Ceremony at the TBC

On January 21, 2013, TCG sponsored a Traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony performed by Tea Master Ms Junko Nishida of Gyokusen-en, Japan, in the Urasenke Chado Tradition. Chado, or the Way of Tea, is a comprehensive cultural practice that embraces the arts, religion, philosophy, and social life -- virtually every aspect of life. A practice such as this is truly rare. The ideals underlying the Way of Tea are known in Japanese as Wa, Kei, Sei, Jaku. In English, these are Harmony, Respect, Purity, and Tranquility.



Ms Junko Nishida and her daughter Chiho and granddaughter Zea carry on the Chado tradition at TCG (Photographer not known).

SEN Rikyu, the 16th-century tea master who perfected the Way of Tea, was once asked to explain what this Way entails. He replied that it was a matter of observing but seven rules: Make a satisfying bowl of tea; Lay the charcoal so that the water boils efficiently; Provide a sense of warmth in the winter and coolness in the summer; Arrange the flowers as though they were in the field; Be ready ahead of time; Be prepared in case it should rain; Act with utmost consideration toward your guests.

As seen within Rikyu's seven rules, the Way of Tea concerns the creation of the proper setting for that moment of enjoyment of a perfect bowl of tea. Everything that goes into that serving of tea, even the quality of the air and the space where it is served, becomes a part of its flavor. The perfect tea must therefore capture the 'flavor' of the moment -- the spirit of the season, of the occasion, of the time and the place. The event called chaji -- that is, a full tea gathering -- is where this takes place, and where the Way of Tea unfolds as an exquisite, singular moment in time shared by the participants.

Chado and its Relationship to Chan or Zen

Rikyu not only was a great Tea Master but studied Zen under Abbot Kokei at Daitokuji. His innovations in the practice of Tea incorporated the essence of his Zen experience. Many of his innovations did away with the discriminations which the ordinary mind makes: between man and nature, nobleman and commoner, priest and laity, beautiful and ugly, religious and secular. Thus, in his design of the tea hut and the path that leads to the hut, he sought to heighten awareness of man's oneness with nature. By designing an entrance to the tea hut through which guests had to crawl regardless of rank, he sought to eliminate the social distinctions which separated human beings from each other. By finding beauty among common utensils, he sought to transcend the usual distinction between beautiful and ugly.

Hence, the preparation and drinking of tea could be an expression of the Zen belief that every act of daily life is a potential act that can lead to enlightenment. This belief manifested itself in the development of a new aesthetic for the practice, an aesthetic which sought beauty in the imperfect and in the simple objects of everyday life.

The relationship between the two kinds of Tea finds expression in this poem by FUJIWARA Teika (1162-1240), which was taught to Rikyu by his teacher, TAKENO Joo, as an example of the wabi spirit of tea:

*miwataseba
hana mo momiji mo
nakarikeri
ura no tomaya no
aki no yugure*

*As I look around
flowers or crimson leaves
are nought
by the rush-thatched hut along the shore
in autumn's evening dusk*

For Joo, the flowers and colorful leaves could be compared to the tea practiced by those who craved luxuriance, while the simple hut on the shore represented the spirit of the wabi Tea that Joo was trying to practice. However, one could truly appreciate the wabi-style hut only after becoming saturated with the life of flowers and colorful leaves.

The reference for the above article on the Tea Ceremony is from the *The Urasenke Tradition of Tea*, Urasenke Konnichian Web Site. For more information on the Japanese Tea Ceremony and its history please see:

<http://www.urasenke.or.jp/texte/index.html>

Haiku

A haiku is a non-rhymed verse genre. In Japanese, haiku has five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five again in the last line (they count sounds, not strictly syllables, however, and also write in a single vertical line, but we use three horizontal lines in English). In Japanese, the word "haiku" means "playful verse." More important than form is that a haiku contain a "kigo" (season word) and employ the equivalent to a "kireji" (cutting word), which means that the poem should present two juxtaposed parts in three lines. In addition, haiku should use objective sensory images, and avoid subjective commentary. You also must use imagery to write the Haiku, in order for the reader to visualize what you are writing.

TCG Haiku Party was held on Fri, , from 7:30 - 9:00 pm. The Haiku teacher who gave a public talk and led the event was Haiku Teacher Umejo Junko Nishida of Gyokusen-en, Japan. All participants created their own haiku and the 2 best Haiku poems, voted on by the participants, were written by Ann Prescott and are presented below:

*Another winter
but plum blossoms again
fills us with joy*

*in the chill night air
a warm glow in the black sky
a star of winter*

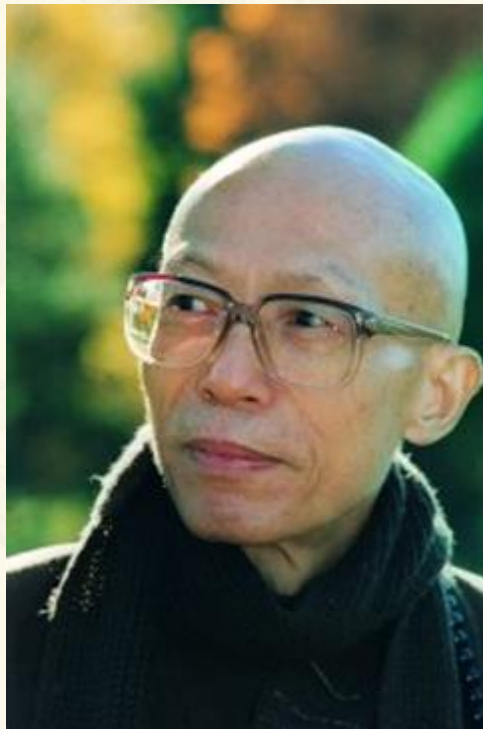


Ms Umejo Junko Nishida presents Haiku Award to Ms Ann Prescott
(Photographer not known)

Teacher Student Relationship Talk

On Mon., 02/18, a special Talk by Guo Gu on "Teacher-Student Relationship". Guo Gu discussed the proper rapport between teacher and student based on the Chan teachings and upon his personal and long term affiliation with his Shifu Master Sheng Yen. He shared intimate stories not only of his experience but Master Sheng Yen's experiences with his teacher Master Lingyuan, a lineage disciple of the legendary Master Xuyun.

Books by Master Sheng Yen were given away in commemorating his passing. The event concluded with the opportunity to meet other members and chat with one another over light snacks, soft drinks, and tea.



***Those who aid and deliver the suffering are bodhisattvas,
and those in the throes of suffering are great bodhisattvas.***

Master Sheng Yen

Bodhisattva Vows

Sentient beings without limit I vow to deliver.

Afflictions without end I vow to sever.

Approaches to Dharma without number I vow to master.

The unexcelled enlightenment of a Buddha I vow to attain.

This means one has given rise to bodhicitta ("mind of awakening") and has aroused the ultimate aspiration towards buddhahood.

Fin