

# Tallahassee Chan Group Newsletter

Fall 2012

Volume1 Issue 1



The cat watching the mouse is descriptive of a type of meditation practiced in Chan. The cat represents the meditator who sits and watches for thoughts as the cat sits and watches a mouse-hole. The mouse, representing a thought, withdraws immediately upon seeing the cat. Similarly, a thought will cease the moment the meditator is aware of it.

## *In This Issue*

<i>From the Editor.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>What is Chan? by Master Sheng Yen.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Introduction to Gateless Gate, by Guo Gu.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>What's Happening at TCG.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Taiwan Trip, May 2012.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Renovation of the TBC.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Children's Home Society Donations.....</i>	<i>24</i>



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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. 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*

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## From the Editor

The Tallahassee Chan Group (TCG) is a community of practitioners learning and incorporating the Buddha's teachings in their daily life through the tradition of the Dharma Drum Lineage of Chan (Zen) Buddhism founded by Chan Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009). Those 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.

This is the first issue of the *Tallahassee Chan Group Newsletter* as well as my first attempt at editing and managing such a publication. Hence, we look forward to major developments as this newsletter evolves.

The main purpose of this publication is to introduce the 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.

Guo Gu's monthly Dharma talks at TCG have recently focused on the Gateless Gate (*Wumen guan*), that classic 13<sup>th</sup> century collection of 48 cases (Ch. *gong'ans*; Jp. *koans*). For this first newsletter, we thought it fitting to publish Guo Gu's Introduction to his commentaries. We will eventually invite 'blogs' from TCG and TBC members, and are now 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](mailto:levans@comcast.net).

For this first issue, I found it simpler to use the basic format of the original *Chan Magazine*, conceived and developed in 1977 by Master Sheng Yen. Its first and current Editor-in-Chief is Buffe Maggie Laffey who recently replaced David Berman after he held that position for many years. To honor the first year of *Chan Magazine*, we are reproducing its Spring 1977 cover, *Cat Watching Mouse*, and re-publishing Master Sheng Yen's Dharma talk, "What is Chan?" Although information pertaining to his lessons is outdated – it was given at the beginning of his U.S. teaching career and originally published in a small pamphlet – its overview of the essence of Chan practice is timeless. Please enjoy!

With metta,

*Will Evans/Yan Jian*



### What is Chan?

*This is the transcript of a talk given by Master Sheng Yen(1930-2009) in 1977, at the beginning of his teaching career in the US. It was originally published in a small pamphlet. While information in the article pertaining to lessons offered by the master is outdated, its overview of the essence of Chan practice is timeless.*

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I wish to start by telling you that Chan is not the same as knowledge, yet knowledge is not completely apart from Chan. Chan is not just religion, yet the achievements of religion can be reached through Chan. Chan is not philosophy, yet philosophy can in no way exceed the scope of Chan. Chan is not science, yet the spirit of emphasizing reality and experience is also required in Chan. Therefore, please do not try to explore the content of Chan motivated by mere curiosity, for Chan is not something new brought here [to the USA] by Orientals; Chan is present everywhere, in space without limit and time without end. However before the Buddhism of the East was propagated in the western world, the people of the West never knew of the existence of Chan. The Chan taught by Orientals in the West is not, in fact, the real Chan. It is the method to realize Chan. Chan was first discovered by a prince named Siddhartha Gautama (called Shakyamuni after his enlightenment), who was born in India about 2500 years ago. After he became enlightened and was called a Buddha, he taught us the method to know Chan. This method was transmitted from India to China, and then to Japan. In India it was called dhyana, which is pronounced “Chan” in Chinese, and “Zen” in Japanese. Actually, all three are identical.

Chan has universal and eternal existence. It has no need of any teacher to transmit it; what is transmitted by teachers is just the method by which one can personally experience this Chan.

Some people mistakenly understand Chan to be some kind of mysterious experience; others think that one can attain supernatural powers through the experience of Chan. Of course, the process of practicing Chan meditation may cause various kinds of strange occurrences on the level of mental and physical sensation; and also, through the practice of unifying body and mind, one may be able to attain the mental power to control or alter external things. But such phenomena, which are looked upon as mysteries of religion, are not the aim of Chan practice, because they can only satisfy one’s curiosity or megalomania, and cannot solve the actual problems of people’s lives.



Chan starts from the root of the problem. It does not start with the idea of conquering the external social and material environments, but starts with gaining thorough knowledge of one's own self. The moment you know what yourself is, this "I" that you now take to be yourself will simultaneously disappear. We call this new knowledge of the notion of self "enlightenment" or "seeing ones basic nature". This is the beginning of helping you to thoroughly solve real problems. In the end, you will discover that you the individual, together with the whole of existence, are but one totality which cannot be divided.

Because you yourself have imperfections, you therefore feel the environment is imperfect. It is like a mirror with an uneven surface, the images reflected in it are also distorted. Or, it is like the surface of water disturbed by ripples, the moon reflected in it is irregular and unsettled. If the surface of the mirror is clear and smooth, or if the air on the surface of the water is still and the ripples calmed, then the reflection in the mirror and the moon in the water will be clear and exact. Therefore, from the point of view of Chan, the major cause of the pain and misfortune suffered by humanity is not the treacherous environment of the world in which we live, nor the dreadful society of humankind, but the fact that we have never been able to recognize our basic nature. So the method of Chan is not to direct us to evade reality, nor to shut our eyes like the African ostrich when enemies come, and bury our heads in the sand, thinking all problems are solved. Chan is not a self-hypnotizing idealism.

By the practice of Chan one can eliminate the "I"; not only the selfish, small "I", but also the large "I", which in philosophy is called "Truth" or "the Essence". Only then is there absolute freedom. Thus an accomplished Chan practitioner never feels that any responsibility is a burden, nor does he feel the pressure that the conditions of life exert on people. He only feels that he is perpetually bringing the vitality of life into full activity. This is the expression of absolute freedom. Therefore the life of Chan is inevitably normal and positive, happy and open. The reason for this is that the practice of Chan will continually provide you with a means to excavate your precious mine of wisdom. The deeper the excavation, the higher the wisdom that is attained, until eventually you obtain all the wisdom of the entire universe. At that time, there is not a single thing in all of time and space that is not contained within the scope of your wisdom. At that stage wisdom becomes absolute; and since it is absolute, the term wisdom serves no further purpose. To be sure, at that stage the "I" that motivated you to pursue such things as fame, wealth and power, or to escape from suffering and danger, has completely disappeared.



What is more, even the wisdom which eliminated your “I” becomes an unnecessary concept to you. Of course, from the viewpoint of sudden enlightenment it is very easy for a Chan practitioner to reach this stage; nevertheless before reaching the gate of sudden enlightenment one must exert a great deal of effort on the journey. Otherwise the methods of Chan would be useless.

### **The Three Stages of Chan Meditation**

At present, the methods of meditation that I am teaching in the United States are divided into three stages:

#### **Stage 1: To balance the development of body and mind in order to attain mental and physical health.**

With regard to the body, we stress the demonstration and correction of the postures of walking, standing, sitting and reclining. At the same time we teach various methods of physical exercise for walking, standing, sitting and reclining. They are unique exercise methods combining Indian Hatha Yoga and Chinese *daoyin* (*guiding one's energy*), and can bring physical health as well as results in meditation. Thus, one who practices Chan and has obtained good results will definitely have a strong body capable of enduring hardship. For the mind we emphasize the elimination of impatience, suspicion, anxiety, fear and frustration, so as to establish a state of self-confidence, determination, optimism, peace and stability.

A good student, after five or ten lessons here, will reach the first stage and be able to obtain results in the above two areas. One of our student's reports stated: “This kind of Chan class is especially good for someone like myself who, by profession or habit, has been used to having the brain functioning just about every minute of the day. I often find this Chan sitting very helpful as rest or relief. So even for no greater purpose, this Chan class has been very useful and should be highly recommended.” [from Chan Magazine Vol.1; No.1]

In the first lesson of each class, I always ask each of the students individually his or her purpose in learning Chan whether he or she hoped to benefit the body, or sought help for the mind. The answers show that the latter were in the majority. This indicates that people living in American society today, under the strain and pressure of the present environment, suffer excessive tension, and many have lost their mental balance. Some are so severely tense that they have to consult a psychiatrist. Among those who



come to learn Chan, I have one woman student, an outstanding lecturer in a well-known university, who asked me at the first meeting if I could help to relieve her from tense and uneasy moods. I told her that for a Chan practitioner this is a very simple matter. After five lessons she felt that Chan was a great blessing to her life.

The method of the first stage is very simple. Mainly it requires you to relax all the muscles and nerves of your entire body, and concentrate your attention on the method you have just learned. Because the tension of your muscles and nerves affects the activity of the brain, the key is therefore to reduce the burden on your brain. When your wandering thoughts and illusions decrease, your brain will gradually get a little rest. As its need of blood is reduced, more blood will circulate through the entire body. Meanwhile, because of the relaxation of the brain, all the muscles also relax; thus your blood vessels expand, you feel comfortable all over, your spirit feels fresh and alert, and your mental responses are naturally lighter and more lively. If one's object of study is just to acquire physical and mental balance, and not to study meditation proper, then one will probably feel that the completion of the first stage is enough; but many students are not content with this, and indeed, some from the outset are looking for the goal of the second stage.

## **Stage 2: From the sense of the small "I"**

The first stage only helps to bring concentration to your confused mind; but when you practice concentration, other scattered thoughts continue to appear in your mind – sometimes many, sometimes a few. The concept of your purpose in practicing Chan is for mental and physical benefits. This is a stage where your concept is purely self-centered. There is no mention of philosophical ideals or religious experience. When you reach the second stage, it will enable you to liberate yourself from the narrow view of the "I". In the second stage you begin to enter the stage of meditation. When you practice the method of cultivation taught by your teacher, you will enlarge the sphere of the outlook of the small "I" until it coincides with time and space. The small "I" merges into the entire universe, forming a unity. When you look inward, the depth is limitless; when you look outward, the breadth is limitless. Since you have joined and become one with universe, the world of your own body and mind no longer exists. What exists is the universe, which is infinite in depth and breadth. You yourself are not only a part of the universe, but also the totality of it.

When you achieve this experience in your Chan sitting, you will then



understand what is meant in philosophy by principle or basic substance, and also what phenomenal existence is. All phenomena are the floating surface or perceptible layer of basic substance. From the shallow point of view, the phenomena have innumerable distinctions and each has different characteristics; in reality, the differences between the phenomena do not impair the totality of basic substance. For instance, on the planet on which we live, there are countless kinds of animals, plants, minerals, vapors, liquids and solids which incessantly arise, change and perish, constituting the phenomena of the earth. However, seen from another planet, the earth is just one body. When we have the opportunity to free ourselves from the bonds of self or subjective views, to assume the objective standpoint of the whole and observe all phenomena together, we can eliminate opposing and contradictory views. Take a tree as an example. From the standpoint of the individual leaves and branches, they are all distinct from one another, and can also be perceived to rub against one another. However, from the standpoint of the trunk and roots, all parts without exception are of one unified whole.

In the course of this second stage, you have realized that you not only have an independent individual existence, but you also have a universal existence together with this limitlessly deep and wide cosmos, and therefore the confrontation between you and the surrounding environment exists no more. Discontent, hatred, love, desire – in other words dispositions of rejecting and grasping disappear naturally, and you sense a feeling of peace and satisfaction. Because you have eliminated the selfish small “I”, you are able to look upon all people and all things as if they were phenomena produced from your own substance, and so you will love all people and all things in the same way you loved and watched over your small “I”. This is the mind of a great philosopher.

Naturally, all great religious figures must have gone through the experiences of this second stage, where they free themselves from the confines of the small “I”, and discover that their own basic substance is none other than the existence of the entire universe, and that there is no difference between themselves and everything in the universe. All phenomena are manifestations of their own nature. They have the duty to love and watch over all things, and also have the right to manage them; just as we have the duty to love our own children and the right to manage the property that belongs to us. This is the formation of the relationship between the deity and the multitude of things he created. Such people personify the basic substance of the universe which they experience through meditation, and create the belief in



belief in God. They substantiate this idea of a large “I” the self-love of God and formulate the mission of being a savior of the world or an emissary of God. They unify all phenomena and look upon them as objects that were created and are to be saved. Consequently, some religious figures think that the basic nature of their souls is the same as that of the deity, and that they are human incarnations of the deity. In this way, they consider themselves to be saviors of the world. Others think that although the basic nature of their souls is not identical to and inseparable from that of the deity, the phenomenon of their incarnation shows that they were sent to this world by God as messengers to promulgate God’s intention.

Generally, when philosophers or religious figures reach the height of the second stage, they feel that their wisdom is unlimited, their power is infinite, and their lives are eternal. When the scope of the “I” enlarges, self-confidence accordingly gets stronger, but this stronger self-confidence is in fact merely the unlimited escalation of a sense of superiority and pride. It is therefore termed large “I”, and does not mean that absolute freedom from vexations has been achieved.

### **Stage 3: From the large “I” to no “I”**

When one reaches the height of the second stage, he realizes that the concept of the “I” does not exist. But he has only abandoned the small “I” and has not negated the concept of basic substance or the existence of God; you may call it Truth, the one and only God, the Almighty, the Unchanging Principle, or even the Buddha of Buddhism. If you think that it is real, then you are still in the realm of the big “I” and have not left the sphere of philosophy and religion. I must emphasize that the content of Chan does not appear until the third stage. Chan is unimaginable. It is neither a concept nor a feeling. It is impossible to describe it in any terms abstract or concrete. Though meditation is ordinarily the proper path leading to Chan, once you have arrived at the door of Chan, even the method of meditation is rendered useless. It is like using various means of transportation on a long journey. When you reach the final destination, you find a steep cliff standing right in front of you. It is so high you cannot see its top, and so wide that its side cannot be found. At this time a person who has been to the other side of the cliff comes to tell you that on the other side lies the world of Chan. When you scale it you will enter Chan. And yet, he tells you not to depend on any means of transportation to fly over, bypass, or penetrate through it, because it is infinity itself, and there is no way to scale it.



Even an outstanding Chan master able to bring his student to this place will find himself unable to help any more. Although he has been to the other side, he cannot take you there with him, just as a mother's own eating and drinking cannot take the hunger away from the child who refuses to eat or drink. At that time, the only help he can give you is to tell you to discard all your experiences, your knowledge, and all the things and ideas that you think are the most reliable, most magnificent, and most real, even including your hope to get to the world of Chan. It is as if you were entering a sacred building. Before you do so, the guard tells you that you must not carry any weapon, that you must take off all your clothes, and that not only must you be completely naked you also have to leave your body and soul behind. Then you can enter.

Because Chan is a world where there is no self, if there is still any attachment at all in your mind, there is no way you can harmonize with Chan. Therefore, Chan is the territory of the wise, and the territory of the brave. Not being wise, one would not believe that after he has abandoned all attachments another world could appear before him. Not being brave, one would find it very hard to discard everything he has accumulated in this life – ideals and knowledge, spiritual and material things.

You may ask what benefit we would get after making such great sacrifices to enter the world of Chan. Let me tell you that you cannot enter the world of Chan while this question is still with you. Looking for benefit, either for self or for others, is in the "I"-oriented stage. The sixth patriarch of the Chan sect in China taught people that the way to enter the enlightenment of the realm of Chan is: "Neither think of good, nor think of evil." That is, you eliminate such opposing views as self and other, inner and outer, being and non-being, large and small, good and bad, vexation and Bodhi, illusion and enlightenment, false and true, or suffering of birth and death and joy of emancipation. Only then can the realm of Chan or enlightenment appear and bring you a new life.

This new life you have had all along, and yet you have never discovered it. In the Chan sect we call it your original face before you were born. This is not the small "I" of body and mind, nor the large "I" of the world and universe. This is absolute freedom, free from the misery of all vexations and bonds. To enter Chan as described above is not easy. Many people have studied and meditated for decades, and still have never gained entrance to the door of Chan. It will not be difficult, however, when your causes and conditions are mature, or if you happen to have a good Chan master who guides you with full attention. This Master may adopt



expressions which may seem ridiculous to you, as indirect means of assisting you to achieve your goal speedily. And when the Master tells you that you have now entered the gate, you will suddenly realize that there is no gate to Chan. Before entering, you cannot see where the gate is, and after entering you find the gate non-existent. Otherwise there will be the distinction between inside and outside, the enlightened and the ignorant; and if there are such distinctions, then it is still not Chan.

When you are in the second stage, although you feel that the “I” does not exist, the basic substance of the universe, or the Supreme Truth, still exists. Although you recognize that all the different phenomena are the extension of this basic substance or Supreme Truth, yet there still exists the opposition of basic substance versus external phenomena. Not until the distinctions of all phenomena disappear, and everything goes back to truth or Heaven, will you have absolute peace and unity. As long as the world of phenomena is still active, you cannot do away with conflict, calamity, suffering and crime. Therefore, although philosophers and religious figures perceive the peace of the original substance, they still have no way to get rid of the confusion of phenomena.

One who has entered Chan does not see basic substance and phenomena as two things standing in opposition to each other. They cannot even be illustrated as being the back and palm of a hand. This is because phenomena themselves are basic substance, and apart from phenomena there is no basic substance to be found. The reality of basic substance exists right in the unreality of phenomena, which change ceaselessly and have no constant form. This is the Truth. When you experience that phenomena are unreal, you will then be free from the concept of self and other, right and wrong, and free from the vexations of greed, hatred, worry and pride. You will not need to search for peace and purity, and you will not need to detest evil vexations and impurity. Although you live in the world of phenomenal reality, to you, any environment is a Buddha’s Pure Land. To an unenlightened person, you are but an ordinary person. To you, all ordinary people are identical with Buddha. You will feel that your own self-nature is the same as that of all buddhas, and the self-nature of buddhas is universal throughout time and space. You will spontaneously apply your wisdom and wealth, giving to all sentient beings everywhere, throughout all time and space.

What I have said reveals a small part of the feeling of one who has entered the enlightened realm of Chan, and is also the course which one follows in order to depart from the small “I” and arrive at the stage of no “I”.



Nevertheless, a newly enlightened person who has just entered the realm of Chan is still at the starting section of the entire passage of Chan. He is like one who has just had his first sip of port. He knows its taste now, but the wine will not remain in his mouth forever. The purpose of Chan is not just to let you take one sip, but to have your entire life merge with and dissolve in the wine, even, to the point that you forget the existence of yourself and the wine. After tasting the first sip of egolessness, how much farther must one travel?

What kinds of things remain to be seen?

I will tell you when I have the chance!



*(artist unknown)*





## Introduction to Gateless Gate

A Dharma Talk by Guo Gu

September 6, 2010

(Transcribed by Estelle Gerard)

Wumen's *Gateless Gate* is a 13<sup>th</sup> century collection of Chan masters' enlightenment accounts. It has often been translated into English. It comprises forty eight different cases or stories which depict the interaction between ancient Chan masters and their disciples, sometimes between two masters. In the Zen or Chan tradition, teachers use these exchanges as a tool to help students in their practice.

You must have a method for practice. A method could be counting or following the breath, or just being aware of sitting, of the *act* of sitting -- which is more difficult. Another method is the *gong'an* (Jp. *koan*), sometimes referred to as a *huatou* (Jp. *wato*). A *gong'an* is actually a public or legal case, but its significance in the context of Chan is that it provides a situation in life in which practitioners are confronted with their existential dilemma. A Chan master, interacting with his student, is sometimes able to help solve that dilemma. When, later on, practitioners used these stories of ancient masters to meditate on, the practice became known as the *gong'an* method. *Huatou* literally means 'before the spoken word,' but in function, it is a critical phrase. Each *gong'an* has a *huatou* -- a critical or turning phrase. We can think of it as an abbreviated version of the *gong'an*, the story's essence or crux, or 'punch line,' which practitioners meditate on.

Without a method, our mind has no anchor; we're at the whim of the rise and fall of wandering thoughts. There are some non-Buddhist systems of meditation where methods are not used. Their purpose is to relax the body, to relax the mind, or one's attitude; but learning to relax is as far as that meditation will go. Chan or Zen Buddhist meditation, on the other hand, is not about relaxing. It's more like work: there is a path to follow whose purpose is to realize who we truly are. It is used to remove the cloak we've put over ourselves; the façade that we often use to interact with others in school, at work, or with our family and friends. In other words, Chan meditation is used to remove the conditioning that we have received, or which was imposed upon us. After everything has been shed, for the first time, we will see and experience the world around us as it truly is. This is the purpose of Chan. This 13th century text was written by Wumen Huikai (Jp. Mumon Ekai, 1183-1260.) *Wumen* means 'gateless' so the title of this work is kind of a pun. The Chan path is at once a gateless barrier, and it is also the compiler's

name. The path of Chan is not just gateless. without any door to enter.



name . The path of Chan is not just gateless, without any door to enter, completely open and free. Nor is it a barrier. It is a gateless barrier. So is there a barrier or is there not? Is there a gate or is there not? If you see your self- nature, your true nature, there is no gate. If you don't, there is a barrier. But the correct view is that there is a barrier yet, no gate, no obstructions. Although one may have a lot of wandering thoughts, wisdom is there. It's just that one has not yet realized it. We have craving, anger, and delusion, yet there is no barrier, no gate that blocks us from being free. When we can face and accept all of these things, we begin to walk the path.

### **Preface by Wumen**

*For the Buddha's words, the mind is the source; the gateless barrier is the gate to truth. Since it is a gateless barrier, how can we enter? Surely you have read the saying, [actually a typical Chinese saying,] 'What comes in through the gate is not the family jewel.' What is gained from causal circumstances is bound to decay.*

This passage means that whatever is gained from outside of you, for instance, any ecstatic state you experience, is not enlightenment but an altered-state of consciousness. If you think you have realized your true nature, then it is a delusion. It is not the family jewel! The true gem is something that is already in your household, passed down from generation to generation. It is not something that is brought from the outside, begotten from somebody else. Anything that is gained will be lost. That which is gained and lost is *not* your original face. That which is your true nature is beyond birth and death, beyond having and not having, gaining or losing. It is beyond anything that you can imagine.

The text continues:

*Such talk, however, is like raising waves where there is no wind, like cutting the wound in healthy flesh. But even worse is to get stuck on words and phrases in search for interpretative understanding [intellectual, conceptual understanding]: [this is like] trying to hit the moon with a stick [or] scratching an itch from outside the boot. What connection will there be?*

Practice has nothing to do with enlightenment. If you think practice leads to enlightenment you are gravely mistaken. Practice is more like this: the teacher tells you to climb a glass mountain with your socks on. The mountain is made out of glass, and although it is slippery, you try to climb it. In addition, as you start climbing the mountain, your teacher pours oil on



top of it. If you think you're getting somewhere, if you have thoughts such as, "My last meditation was so good," or, "I did so well during my last retreat!" it would be like climbing a few steps then sliding down, climbing, then sliding down. As soon as you think you got something, you slide down. Should you climb? Yes, you should climb but without notions of gaining or losing, of success and failure. In that process, you actually learn how to not gain or lose, to not grasp this or get rid of that, which is the mind's disease. That is the point, because what drives this world of suffering is, "I want this moment to be other than what it is." That's suffering. So you should still climb. Once you have actually, totally put down gaining and losing, life and death, right and wrong, you will find that you are on top of the glass mountain with your socks on, staying on top of the earth, and not sliding. Then your teacher will congratulate you. So, when there is no problem, as the text says, 'no wind,' the teacher will create problems for you; that's the teacher's job -- to create problems where you think there are none, problems that are particular to *you*. You have to go through the struggle. It's like the 'cutting of flesh when the flesh is healthy' -- which is, actually, a very good example for our century. Many people feel that their flesh is imperfect; they go to doctors to slice it open, to make the nose smaller, or the cheeks nicer, or to make the wrinkles disappear. Some feel their breasts are too small; others, that they are too large. So they slice the flesh until the flesh is perfect. I'd like to say, right here and now, that each and every one of you is perfect; perfect, as you are, in body and mind.

So, when you are wallowing in vexations, rest with peace of mind, knowing that you are perfect. When you are sad, be completely sad with peace of mind. When you are angry, jealous, be completely angry or jealous with peace of mind. You lack nothing; you are perfect. It is a delusion to think that you will get self-confidence from the plastic surgery. You will never be able to hide the wrinkles. Know also that the value of what is beautiful and what is not, is constantly changing. For example, in Tang Dynasty China, the standard of beauty for women was to be pale white, and chubby. In that agrarian culture, being pale white meant that the woman did not have to work outside. Being chubby was also valued: it meant that the woman was wealthy enough to have plenty of food on the table. If these Chinese were to see 21st century women, skinny and tanned as so many are, they would pity them, thinking that they must be working in the fields all day, and lacking in nutrition. So values change all the time; one can never catch up with changing values. You are perfect as you are. This is my modern



commentary with modern examples.

In the summer of 1228, Wumen Huikai was head of the congregation at Longxiang at Dongjia. As the patch-robed monks asked for instruction, he used the public cases of the people of old as one would use a piece of tile to knock on a gate. (That's how Chinese people knocked on the door in those days; they didn't use their knuckles, but a tile.)

He guided students according to their potentials and the potential of the moment. Finally, Huikai's remarks were copied and on the spur of the moment, made into a collection of forty-eight cases, not arranged in the particular order that he gave them. The whole collection is called *Wumenguan* which can be translated as Wumen's barrier since his name is Wumen; or, the Gateless Barrier. The text continues:

*If you are a person true to your real identity, you will not mind the danger; you will enter directly at a single stroke. Fearsome monsters cannot hold you back [monsters that reside within you], and even the Zen Patriarchs of India and China can only beg for their lives as they look to your awesome presence. But if you hesitate, it will be like watching through a window as horse and rider go by – a blink of an eye and they've already gone past.*

#### Verse

*The Great Path, the gateless barrier, has no gate.  
Amidst the thousand differences, there is a road;  
If you can pass through this barrier,  
You walk alone through heaven and earth.*

The Great Path, that is, the practice, or the gate of no barrier, has no gate. Wherever you may be, whoever you are, trust that in each and every moment there is freedom. You are at peace. Have no reservations of responding to circumstances because the path is right before you. If you need to work, work. If there are wandering thoughts, return to the method. Don't say, "Ah, wandering thoughts, it's okay, I'm free and they are free, too." No. With the view that you are free, at peace, do what is needed. *That* is to be in accordance with your true freedom. Then you will be able to understand. Chan masters are great at setting up situations to create problems. We will discuss many of them in this series of talks. They are gong'an, or public cases which is the literal translation, but what they really are is your life. Each gong'an is your life in different circumstances, and you must relate to each with your body's 360 bones and 84,000 pores. With your whole being, engage with it. Amidst the thousands of differences is a path. It is not to say that in Chan we are free, that there's nothing to do, that the glass mountain with oil on top needs not be climbed. No, we have to climb. We must create



a path for ourself. Once we embark on it, we don't look back; we don't anticipate; we just walk it. Even though we experience a blissful state – it is actually very rare to experience blissful states in meditation; we usually just have wandering thoughts -- the teacher will probably let you enjoy it for a while, but will tell you that you must let go, that it is not 'it.' It's like driving from point A to point B and being satisfied even before getting to point B, because of the scenery on the side of the road: "How beautiful. I will stop driving now." Your teacher knows. He or she will say, "Okay, very good; enjoy it. You did a great job. But now go back and practice!" And later on, your teacher will come by and very harshly will tell you to let go, saying, "Don't drive that corpse around!" That corpse is that old experience which you want to have again every time you sit. But who wants to drag around a dead corpse? Let it go. The teacher will try by all means to cut that attachment. However, this cannot happen if there's no trust between teacher and student. If there is no trust, the teacher will be very kind and say to you, "Welcome to the group sitting. Be relaxed, natural, and clear. Enjoy yourself!"

It is with his close disciples and students that the teacher will work. Most people don't even have trust in themselves or the method; but after they have used the method for a while, have collected their thoughts, are relaxed and at peace with fewer wandering thoughts, when the muddy, dirty water has settled a little, they do realize that the method is useful. Meanwhile, the teacher is chuckling: dirty water, clear water—they are the same! But they will still praise the student nonetheless, "That's good, you did a good job. Continue to sit." It's like calming and satisfying a crying baby by dangling in front of him something that keeps spinning; he will eventually stop crying. It is the same with beginning practitioners: they can be caught with a practice that will give them some benefits, some psycho-physiological reactions. This can be compared to opening a thousand year old toilet: if you can pass through the psycho-physiological junk that is buried and comes up as a result of genuine practice, you will realize the preciousness of a teacher who guides you through junk on the path.

That's why Wumen says, "*Amidst the thousand differences, [here, the differences mean the 'junk'] there is a path. If you can pass through this barrier [climb that glass mountain with oil on top], you will walk alone through heaven and earth.*" This means you will be free in the world of suffering and in the world of enlightenment. You can come and go at will in samsara and nirvana. Samsara refers to cycles of rebirth, the world of suffering. Nirvana refers to liberation from that cycle, the world of



enlightenment. To be free from both is to realize Chan.

One day, a monk asked Chan Master Nanquan Puyuan (Jp. Nansen Fugan, 748-835), “Teacher, where will you be in your next life? I want to follow you, lifetime after lifetime. I want to study with you.” The teacher said, “Me? You see those cows down there at the base of the mountain? I will be a cow!” The student was schooled in Buddhist philosophy and knew about the six realms of existence. Perhaps he thought, “But that’s the animal realm! My own teacher propelled into the animal world?” He said, showing his ignorance, “Teacher, you’re going to be a cow? Then I’ll follow you!” The teacher replied, “Yes. I’ll be a cow and you can be a cow too. But when you go there, you’ll be there just to eat grass. When I go there, I won’t be there to eat grass.” An accomplished teacher is there to save sentient beings. He is not bound by constructs of samsara and nirvana. It doesn’t matter *where* he is; wherever sentient beings need him, he will be there.

Shakyamuni’s own past lives included monkeys, rabbits, lions, and gods. He was there not to be a god to enjoy bliss, not to be a rabbit to eat carrots, not to be a monkey to eat bananas only. He was there to save sentient beings. His task was that of a teacher. If you pass through the gateless barrier, and your experience of enlightenment is not just a glimpse but is genuine with some depth, you will be on your way to have the freedom of coming and going at will in samsara -- a Bodhisattva practitioner who practices for the sake of all sentient beings. Does that sound enticing?

In the next issue, Guo Gu’s Dharma talk on  
***Zhaozhou’s Dog - Case 1***





## What's Happening at TCG

### Monthly Calendar

The following schedule is offered every month (see website for month to month details: <http://www.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., 8:25-9:30pm: The evening begins with two short periods of sitting from 7:30-8:20pm, followed by an informal social gathering. 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.

**Special Dharma Talk and 2-day Retreat:** Talk is Fri., 11/9, 7:30-9pm and Retreat is Sat., 11/10 and Sun., 11/11; 9am-6pm each day: Venerable Dhammadipa, a guest teacher in the Theravada tradition, will give a special talk on the "The Path of Serenity: Meditation on Loving Kindness." Venerable Dhammadipa is a buddhist monk originally from the Czech Republic. He has been a monk for twenty-five years and travels internationally, teaching Buddhism and meditation. Venerable Dhammadipa will lead the two-day retreat at TBC. Retreats offer a rare occasion to deepen one's practice and commitment to the path. For details please see the TCG website.



## Pure Land on Earth Pilgrimage

On May 17 to May 28, 2012, Guo Gu led a 'Pure Land on Earth Pilgrimage' tour to Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan. The pilgrimage was a unique opportunity that allowed practitioners from the US to meet and practice with other bodhisattvas from the US, Europe, and Taiwan. It included the first 5-day intensive Chan retreat in English on DDM, commemorating the third year passing of Master Sheng Yen. Twelve people from TCG participated in this trip, as well as eighteen practitioners from other States and Australia. We visited other Branches of DDM in Taipei, and several cultural sites. Another trip is planned for 2014.



2-21	2-16	2-11	2-06	2-01	1-01	1-05	1-09	1-13	1-17
Yu Han Chen	Su Hua, Chan	Anette Arispe Rodriguez	Tai Ling Chin	Tac Chi Coong	Michael Harbut	Peter Jurg Walter	Daniel Tuzzeo	Steve Kang	Tai-Ran Tseng
2-22	2-17	2-12	2-07	2-02	1-02	1-06	1-10	1-14	
Maria lee 李映潔	Katherine Glock	Estelle Gerard	Xia Liu	Martha Louise Lang	Brian Chin	Dewaine Rester	Nathan Duddles	James Chou 周宏道	
2-23	2-18	2-13	2-08	2-03	1-03	1-07	1-11	1-15	
Yun Ling Kang	Yuet Fong Lee	Jenny Aiken	Tina Bush Rester	Pat Hickey	Chris Rowe	Wayne N Frey	William LeRoy Evans	Ta Lun Huang	
2-24	2-19	2-14	2-09	2-04	1-04	1-08	1-12	1-16	
Chen Wing Yee	Agnes Chow	Marina Go	Mary Grace Blakney	Stephanie Shaw (Liz)	Mark Chin	Kasey Andrist	Fredric Glock	David St Maur Sheil	
	2-20	2-15	2-10	2-05					
	Genevieve Brackins	Amy Frey	Frances Berry	Dan-Wen Tsai					

(Photo by Venerable Changhu)

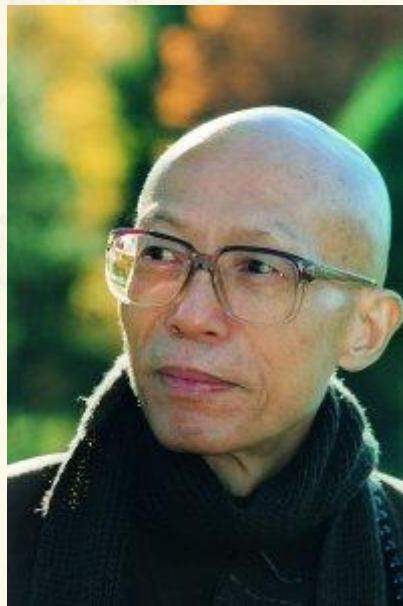
The Dharma Drum Mountain Pure Land Pilgrimage is by far the best and most complete and all-encompassing retreat I have attended. We were given the opportunity to experience all aspects of a Chan monk's or nun's life in a monastery. This included extensive meditation of all types (sitting, walking, and standing) working in the fields, domestic chores within the Chan Hall, Noble Silence, yoga, and traditional morning and evening chanting ceremonies. We ate wonderful meals in the long-established Chinese tradition of using chop sticks and cleaning one's own bowl.



This practice was under the excellent guidance of Venerable Guo Yuan Fashi. It included his daily Dharma talks, articulated with compassion and humor. We were also offered daily one-on-one interviews with Guo Gu. We were thus totally immersed in the Chan practice. In addition, the grounds and buildings were highly functional, modern and breathtakingly beautiful. The monks, nuns and staff were all exceptionally helpful and friendly, and the daily logistics were flowing and flawless.

Although I have read many of Master Sheng Yen's books and teachings, the trip to DDM allowed me to experience on a personal level his wisdom, heart and vision. I was able to spend time in Founding Heritage and Memorial Hall and observe Master Sheng Yen on video. I learned about his amazing and selfless accomplishments in spreading the Dharma to the world. I wished we could have stayed longer. I left DDM emotionally and spiritually uplifted, determined to take my practice to a higher level.

*Will Evans (Yun Tian)*



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

**Master Sheng Yen**



## Renovation of Tallahassee Buddhist Center

In July and August, 2012, TCG members renovated the whole center inside and out. The exterior of the building and the interior walls were painted; wood flooring was laid down; a drop-ceiling was installed; tiles were laid in the bathroom; the interview room was organized and painted, and a new air conditioner was installed. We would like to thank all those who donated their time, skills, and money to complete these projects. Special thanks to Dewaine Rester for heading the project and to the many others who volunteered to do the renovation.



(photo by Danny Tuzzeo)

***The meaning of life lies in serving; the value of life in giving.***  
**Master Sheng Yen**





**Renovation Celebration:** We celebrated our new center on Friday evening, September 21, 2012 with a short period of chanting and informal talks by Guo Gu and Bill Bodiford, Abbot of the Cypress Tree Zen Group. This was followed by a brief social get-together with soft drinks and appetizers. TCG would like to thank all those who supported the center's renovation project.

*(Photos by Danny Tuzzeo)*



TBC members chanting the Heart Sutra.



Bill Bodiford giving a short talk on the history of TBC.



## Children's Home Society of Florida Donations

From September 1 to 17, TCH collected items from a wish-list for the Children's Home Society (CHS). People were extremely generous and donated toys, children's books, diapers and pull-ups, backpacks, luggage and a whole host of wished-for items. CHS always needs backpacks and luggage year-round as some of their children get moved around to different homes and temporary shelters. For gift opportunities to CHS, please take a look at the wish-list at this fine organization's website:

<http://www.chsfl.org/page.aspx?pid=573>

Giving is the first bodhisattva (paramita) practice. There are three kinds of giving: material, Dharma, and fearlessness. But generally, there are three levels of giving. The first is giving with gratitude; it is looking at those who accept our gifts as providing us with the opportunity to practice and generate merit. The second is giving without motives, without asking for anything in return. The third is giving, but seeing no giver, no receiver, and no gift; it is the awareness that everything is just the interplay of causes and conditions. Please reflect on these levels and consider helping the CHS. There is always something on the list that you can give!



Fred Glock at the CHS Center in Tallahassee with a stuffed 'bodhisattva' and some of the donations collected by the TCG (photo by Guo Gu).

***Every child is a little bodhisattva who helps the parents grow.***

**Master Sheng Yen**