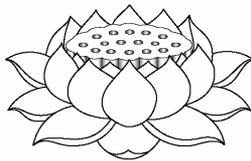


**GRADUAL  
CULTIVATION AND  
SUDDEN  
ENLIGHTENMENT**

漸修與頓悟

**Dharma Lecture by  
The Grand Master Wei Chueh**

上惟下覺老和尚  
開示法語



**Chung Tai Translation Committee**

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This Dharma lecture by the Grand Master Wei Chueh was translated from the Chinese into English by the Chung Tai Translation Committee. The CTTC comprises of Dharma Masters and lay disciples and convenes regularly. To view or download the English translations of various sutras and Dharma lectures, visit “Dharma Gems” on <http://sunnyvale.ctzen.org>. Comments and suggestions may be sent to [translation@ctzen.org](mailto:translation@ctzen.org)

## **FOUNDING ABBOT OF CHUNG TAI: VENERABLE MASTER WEI CHUEH**

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Venerable Master Wei Chueh was born in Ying Shan, Sichuan Province of China. In his youth he was educated in the Confucian classics and delved deeply into the study of Buddhism.

In 1963, he was ordained under Master Lin Yuan at the Shi Fan Da Jue (“Great Enlightenment”) Chan Monastery in Keelung, Taiwan. There he arose before dawn each day to clean the monastery hall and courtyard. While others were resting after lunch, he would remain in the Buddha Hall and prostrate mindfully. In all his daily duties and interactions, he was always devoted, considerate, and diligent.

To further his practice, Venerable Wei Chueh went into solitary seclusion for over ten years in the mountains near Wan Li, a suburb of Taipei. Over time, as the area became more accessible, more and more people came to seek the wisdom of this eloquent Buddhist master. His followers then asked him to come out from his mountain retreat to spread the Dharma.

The Master responded by building the Lin Quan Chan Monastery at the very place of his retreat, expanding later to Chung Tai Chan Monastery in the town of Puli in central Taiwan. (To show our utmost respect, we address Venerable Wei Chueh as the Grand Master.)

The Grand Master, in adhering to the Buddha's aim to teach the Dharma, to show the way to lasting joy, and to promote peace, established Chan meditation centers all over Taiwan as well as internationally.

He is frequently invited to lecture at universities and various organizations. He conducts seven-day meditation retreats every year to help participants realize their intrinsic perfect nature.

In order to preserve the teaching for future generations, he emphasizes the importance of education for Buddhist monks and nuns and thus established the Chung Tai Buddhist Institute to train knowledgeable and qualified teachers of the Dharma. He also founded the Pu Tai Schools (from elementary to high schools), which underscore the values of respect, compassion, and moral integrity in the education of the youth. Furthermore, to promote traditional culture and preserve the Buddhist heritage, the Grand Master also founded Chung Tai Museum.

Beginning at Lin Quan and now Chung Tai Chan Monastery, Grand Master Wei Chueh has provided his vision, inspiration and guidance to hundreds of thousands of followers, monastic teachers and lay people alike. Under his leadership, the essence of Chan teachings has been deeply and widely planted and is bringing the fruits of serenity and wisdom to the world.

## GRADUAL CULTIVATION AND SUDDEN ENLIGHTENMENT

### 漸 修 與 頓 悟

*“It may seem that gradual cultivation and sudden enlightenment are very different methods, but in fact they are interrelated and even complementary practices.”*

#### **Different paths to Buddhahood**

What does gradual cultivation mean? It means starting the Buddhist practice as a mere mortal, gradually going through various stages of attainment, and eventually becoming a buddha. It is like going to school, beginning with elementary school, continuing on through high school and college, and eventually earning a doctoral degree. Climbing step by step, we ultimately complete all virtues and attain buddhahood—this process is called gradual cultivation.

What is sudden enlightenment? To become enlightened means to awaken to the present mind; this very awareness or sentience *is* the bodhi mind that is originally pure. When enlightened, this mind is the buddha; this mind is the Way.

Once enlightened, we still need to “maintain the bodhi mind (保任),” that is, to maintain this enlightened state, applying the enlightened perspective and understanding in everything we do until we achieve perfection. In day or night, stillness or activity, the mind frees itself from clinging and delusion, ever lucid, mindful, and in command. Maintaining this bodhi mind (awakened mind) until perfection—until buddhahood is attained, is the practice of sudden enlightenment.

Attaining sudden enlightenment is to realize that if this present, ordinary mind is free from any effort or pretension, then this very mind is “true suchness”; it is the profound bodhi mind of the tathagata, and it has the buddha’s wisdom. When we

awaken to the bodhi mind, we realize that everyone possesses the Buddha nature, that everyone can become a bodhisattva. We also realize how precious and real we are, how all beings in this world are endowed with infinite hope and infinite life.

In gradual cultivation one gains understanding of the fundamental principle (Truth) by gradually perfecting one's actions with Buddhist practices. In sudden enlightenment one is awakened to the fundamental principle first, then, with that understanding, perfects all one's actions. If we don't have the chance or causal conditions for sudden enlightenment, then we can always practice gradual cultivation. It may seem that gradual cultivation and sudden enlightenment are very different methods, but in fact they are interrelated and even complementary practices.

### **Relative and absolute truths**

The Dharma, or Buddha's teaching, is the truth of life. While there is only one ultimate truth, there are many kinds of conventional truths. Family ethics, school regulations, and social rules are all different kinds of conventional truths in their respective contexts. Many principles are true in the conventional world, but they are relative; they change with time and space. The Dharma, however, does not change with time and space; it is the pinnacle of all truths. The principles of gradual cultivation and sudden enlightenment are, in turn, the quintessence of Buddhist truths. No matter how time and space change, the truths in Buddhism do not change.

Worldly laws or truths change with time and space because they are dependent on conditions. For example, what is considered good and correct in the United States may not be in Mainland China or Taiwan. This is because lifestyles, cultures, and histories in these places are all different. This is especially true in some remote areas. In some countries, a husband can have several wives, while most other countries believe in monogamy. Who is right? Who is wrong? There may not be definite answers. This is because at different times and in different places, culture, history, and ethics change. What is true in the conventional world is relative.

The truth that we talk about today does not change with time and space. This truth has remained the same in the past as it is in the present—that everyone has this present mind, the bodhi mind, regardless of race, age, or gender. Everywhere in the world, everyone in the past, present, or future has this mind. This is a fact. It is the absolute truth. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states that, “In space there are the directions of east, west, north, and south; people may be rich, poor, noble, or common; but this bodhi mind, this awareness that everyone has, is neither from the east, west, north, nor south; neither rich, poor, noble, nor common; neither male, female, old, nor young.” So this is an absolute truth. Everyone wants to stay alive and is afraid of death; everyone feels joy and pain; everyone wants to be happy and avoid suffering. So this awareness, this sentience is the same in everyone. The sutras tell us that, because everyone has this mind, this awareness, everyone can be a bodhisattva or a buddha. Also because of this, we should cherish and take care of ourselves and respect and care for the lives of others.

Although we all have this awareness, this sentience, the level of wisdom and compassion displayed by everyone is different. Why are there such differences? If some people are wiser than others, it doesn’t mean that they have more inherent awareness than others; it just means that their minds are more lucid and understanding. They are less discriminative and have fewer afflictions and delusions. People who lack wisdom have more afflictions, false views, and attachments that delude their minds. So we should understand that people are equal in their inherent awareness, but each has varying degrees of ignorance and afflictions that affect the levels of wisdom, amount of wealth, and even longevity in a person. To attain the highest possible state, we need to study and practice Buddhism diligently.

### **The four levels of attainment**

There are four levels of attainment leading to the highest state. The first level is that of the arhat. Arhats’ wisdom and awareness surpass those of ordinary beings. The second level is that of the pratyekabuddha. Pratyekabuddhas’ wisdom and mind

surpass those of the arhats. The third level is that of the bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas' wisdom surpasses that of pratyekabuddhas because they can remove their "ignorance of dharmas" in their efforts to liberate sentient beings. Finally, the fourth level is that of the buddha. Buddhas have eradicated all three different kinds of afflictions<sup>1</sup> and thereby reached perfection. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas are the four kinds of saints in Buddhism, each having achieved a higher level of enlightenment. Only a buddha's enlightenment is the most complete.

What does it mean to be a saint, a holy one? It means that when the mind, this very mind that is now listening to the lecture, has purified its defilements and eradicated its attachments, then it is exactly the same as the mind of a buddha. How do we reach the state of the tathagata or buddhahood? There are two paths: the first is by gradual cultivation and the second is by sudden enlightenment.

### **The path of gradual cultivation**

The path of gradual cultivation is to practice the six paramitas—perfection of charity, moral conduct, tolerance, diligence, meditation, and prajna wisdom. These are the vows and conducts of bodhisattvas. By completing these six paramitas, we will attain buddhahood. This involves both time and merit. In terms of time, it takes a bodhisattva three asamkheya kalpas to reach perfection. Like going to school, it takes so many years to complete elementary school, high school, college, and so on. Besides the time it takes, we also need to perfect our merits; that is, to complete the six paramitas.

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<sup>1</sup> Three Afflictions (三惑): 1. Erroneous views and thoughts (見思惑), which hinder nirvana. They are false views and thoughts that prevent one from seeing emptiness and attaining nirvana. 2. The ignorance of dharmas (塵沙惑), which hinder the bodhisattva way. It is the hindrance to understanding the true nature of all phenomena, so one does not have the skillful means to lead sentient beings to liberation. 3. Fundamental ignorance (無明惑), which hinders the Middle Way. It is the subtlest ignorance that prevents one from fully realizing the ultimate reality.

What are three asamkheya kalpas? A kalpa is such a long period of time that we cannot measure it in terms of days, months, or years. It is one cycle of the universe (in Buddhism, world-systems are continuously being created and destroyed by our karma). The scriptures give an analogy of how long this time is. Suppose there is a huge stone that is 40 miles long, 40 miles wide, and 40 miles high. A deva (celestial being) comes once every hundred years, and rubs the stone once with a heavenly fabric lighter than feather and softer than silk. The time it takes for this stone to be completely rubbed away by this process is how long a small kalpa is. It takes countless kalpas to make one “asamkheya” kalpa and three asamkheya kalpas to complete the path of a bodhisattva. It takes that long for a bodhisattva to perfect the six paramitas.

### **Perfection of charity**

Charity is the first of the six paramitas. How does one complete this paramita? Contrary to what some may think, donating a million or even a billion dollars doesn't constitute the perfection of charity. Aside from the giving of money and property, we need to be willing to give up everything we own, even our life, in order to complete the charity paramita. Shakyamuni Buddha began his bodhisattva practice with the practice of giving. In order to save a dove, he cut off his own flesh to feed an eagle; he fed himself to hungry tigers so they wouldn't starve to death. He was willing to give up his body for others.

In a previous lifetime, when the Buddha was a prince, his country suffered a drought and people had nothing to eat. Seeing this, he gave all the treasures and food in the palace to the people. His father, the king, tried to stop the prince, “If you continue giving like this, there'll be nothing left in the palace and our reign will come to an end!” So he expelled the prince. Even then, exiled and owning nothing, the prince still wanted to give. He remembered that the dragon king of the ocean had a Mani pearl, which can fulfill all of one's wishes. He tried many ways to obtain the Mani pearl from the dragon king but failed. In desperation, he set forth to empty the ocean water. Drawing

the water with buckets day after day, he finally fainted from exhaustion. His sincerity deeply touched the Four Heavenly Kings who then proceeded to help him. With their powers they emptied half of the ocean in half an hour. The dragon king, startled and also moved by the prince, decided to give the Mani pearl to the prince. This is an example of being selfless in perfecting the charity paramita. To complete this and the other five paramitas takes three asamkheya kalpas.

In addition, another hundred small kalpas are needed to perfect the thirty-two physical marks and eighty fine characteristics of a buddha. The sutras say that every buddha possesses these physical marks and fine characteristics. An example is brahma-sound, which means that when a buddha speaks, people of all different tongues are able to understand him—Taiwanese-, Japanese-, English-speaking people and even animals are able to understand his words without any translation. This is called “language samadhi.” Another mark of a buddha is that anything he eats always tastes excellent like sweet ambrosia, unlike us who have to season our food for it to taste good.

It takes great merits to achieve each of these marks and characteristics. We consider deeds such as building a temple or saving a life to be of great merit, but these are still far from the deeds the Buddha has accomplished on his bodhisattva path. The scripture gives an example of the kind of merits needed to attain one of these marks of a buddha: if everyone in the world were sick and dying, curing each one of them would be a great merit. Fulfilling one hundred such great merits results in one of these thirty-two marks. We can see that it is not easy to do these great deeds, to complete the six paramitas, to cultivate merits for three asamkheya kalpas, and finally become a buddha!

### **The method of sudden enlightenment**

Since gradual cultivation takes such a long time, the Buddha taught us another method—“sudden awakening to the original mind and directly realizing buddhahood.” This method doesn’t take three asamkheya kalpas. This is the method of sudden enlightenment. It is similar to the way the educational

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system operates—normally one starts from elementary school and gradually reaches college, but some smart students can skip grades and go directly to college.

Having compared gradual cultivation to sudden enlightenment, I believe all of you would want to practice the method of sudden enlightenment. The Buddha had to suffer innumerable hardships and did not want us to go through the same thing; therefore, he taught the method of sudden enlightenment. And this is what we teach in the seven-day meditation retreat; in seven days, we can each learn how to awaken the mind and see our true nature; seeing the true nature, we can become buddhas.

### **The four stages of thought**

The sutra states that “Not giving rise to a mind of mundane defilement is the way to supreme enlightenment.” (不起凡夫染污心，即是無上菩提道。) That is, the ordinary mind is the bodhi mind. Everyone has a mind, but with all the different mental states, exactly which is the buddha’s mind? For example, when you are thirsty, the thought of wanting to drink tea arises. When you see a cup of tea, the thought of picking up the cup arises, and when you take a sip, the thought of picking up the cup has ceased and it is the thought of drinking that is in your mind. When taking the first sip, the thought, “This tastes great!” arises. When you take the second sip, the tea becomes less enjoyable; and when you take the third sip, the tea tastes plain and you don’t want to drink it anymore. By this time the thought of drinking the tea has ceased. Then you see a cookie in front of you and another thought arises, “I want to eat this cookie.” In such a brief time, so many thoughts have gone through the four stages of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing. So how many thoughts occur from morning till night? How many thoughts come and go, how many mental states change and which of these is the buddha’s mind?

From morning till night, our mind is always going somewhere; thoughts follow one another endlessly. Some of them are good thoughts, some bad, and some random; they are

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like the waves of the ocean, always coming and going; or like bubbles that break and form again and again. Throughout the day our mind never rests, and even during the night it is busy. When dreaming, our mind is always clinging. A sutra says that each day and night, 840 million thoughts go by. In fact, each thought is like a dream. When we say “life is like a dream,” it is not a mere allegory; we are literally living in dreams. Every day we dream about new cars, dancing, or playing poker; we dream about money, lust, or power. Since we are always dreaming during the day, even when we should be resting at night, our minds continue to cling to the days events in our dreams. And when the mind is not dreaming, it is sleepy or muddled. So we see that half of our life is spent on sleeping and the other half is spent on dreaming—in Buddhism, these two afflictions are serious delusions and attachments.

The ordinary person’s mind is always in cycles of birth and death. Each thought goes through the stages of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing. To want to drink tea is “arising”; taking the cup and getting ready to drink is “abiding”; having different feelings toward the tea in your mouth is “changing”; and wanting not to drink anymore is “ceasing”. Since our mind constantly goes through these four stages, sentient beings must experience birth, aging, illness, and death. Since sentient beings go through the stages of birth, aging, illness, and death, the world goes through the stages of formation, abiding, disintegration, and voidness.

This earth is in the abiding stage now, but it is aging everyday, and one day it will perish. Likewise, the universe will also crumble into voidness. To free oneself from the agony of endless cycles of birth, aging, illness, and death, the mind must be free from arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing. To transcend these four stages of thought, we must realize the bodhi mind, our inherent nature. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states, “Without realizing the inherent nature, all Dharma learning is in vain.” If we don’t know that the aim of our Buddhist practice is to realize the bodhi mind, then we are merely pursuing blessings that, although pleasant, are

nevertheless impermanent. This will not help us toward attaining enlightenment. All Dharma methods are expedient means to help us realize the original, unborn mind.

So, what is enlightenment? It is the realization of our bodhi mind, which is the very mind that is listening to this lecture now. But where is this mind?

## **Functions of the mind**

We can understand this true mind from three different perspectives: from its essence, its attributes, and its functions. The mind's essence is great, its attributes are great, and its functions are great too. How great is our mind? Everything in the past, present, and future is contained in this mind. The entire cosmos, all space and time are within our mind. The mind is infinite; it has no boundaries. There is a well-known Chinese saying that the mind knows no distance. The mind can exist and function whether near or far. For example, if there is a war, families of the soldiers back home must be very worried; they think about their husbands, sons or daughters, or fathers who are fighting in the war day after day. One night a wife may dream that her husband is sick. She calls and finds out that he is indeed sick. Why is this? It is because the mind knows no distance. No matter how far apart, whether separated by mountains or oceans, minds can still reach each other. The same can happen when a mother worries about a child's schoolwork, health, social life, and so on. When the mind is constantly thinking about something, it can reach a certain level of concentration that can be powerful enough to overcome physical boundaries. We sleep in a small bed but the mind can dream of mountains, oceans, and vast space beyond our small room. Sometimes you have a good dream where you are very happy, and when you wake up, it all vanishes. When you have a nightmare, the fear you experience is very real. Dreams may seem very real but in fact they are intangible. These are all functions of the mind. A blind person can walk using a walking stick. There are blind artists who can create sculptures. This is what the mind can do when it is focused. This mind is very profound and subtle. People are

used to using their eyes to look outward and their ears to listen to external sounds. If we can learn to look inward and listen within, we will be able to attain peace and tranquility very quickly.

Once there was a Chinese man who had severe arthritis and had been bedridden for over eight years. One day, the house suddenly caught fire and everyone in the house grabbed their precious belongings and escaped outside. After the house had burned down, they suddenly remembered that the sick man was still inside the house. Surely he was killed! Everyone felt very sorry and mourned for him. Suddenly, they heard the man yelling from a hill asking them to carry him down. Surprised, they asked him how he got up there in the first place. He said that when he saw the fire, he forgot about his arthritis, got out of bed and ran up the hill! They said, “If you could run up, you can come down the same way.” He replied, “But my arthritis hurts so badly that I cannot move!”

The mind is very powerful if we can learn to harness it. The Dharma and meditation methods teach us how to focus and use our mind. To use this mind properly we need to awaken it. Once awakened, the mind can be purified and then returned to its original source. We have a saying, “awaken the mind and see the true nature; seeing the true nature, one becomes a buddha.” Once enlightened, we are buddhas; unenlightened, we remain ordinary beings. If the mind has afflictions and creates bad karma, then we suffer; if our mind gives rise to evil views, then we become demons.

### **Purity of the mind**

I believe that everyone here wants to realize the true nature of the mind. Where is this mind? In fact, this mind is right here; it is ever-present. A great Chan master spoke of the mind this way: “With your eyes, it is seeing; with your ears, it is hearing; with your nose, you can smell the fragrance; with your tongue, you can detect sweetness, sourness, and all the flavors; with your hands you can grasp things, and with your feet you can walk.” These are all functions of the mind. So if everyone

already has this mind, why are we not buddhas? It is because of our delusions and attachments. If we can get rid of these two problems, our mind will be like still water or like an unblemished mirror; we can even radiate light and move the earth. We use our eyes to look at the outside world; when we see the good and the bad then we start to discriminate and mental afflictions arise. When our ears hear others praising us, we become overjoyed, and when others criticize us, we become angry. So when afflictions arise from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness, our mind is like a pool of muddy water, unable to produce great power or function wisely.

It is important for us to constantly reflect inwardly to examine ourselves. When our eyes see things, we should not cling to them; when receiving praise, we should not be overjoyed; when slandered, we should not be upset. At all times the mind remains calm and peaceful, as in the *Diamond Sutra*, “The mind should act without any attachments.” When our six senses (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness) are in contact with the six dusts (sense objects: form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas), we know what is right or wrong, what is bad or good, and yet the mind is not tainted; it does not cling to either side. Always knowing yet without craving, our senses gradually revert to purity.

A Chan master once described the Chan practice:

*Walk through a field of flowers  
Not letting a single leaf cling to you*

What does this mean? It means that everywhere we go and in everything we do, the mind is free from attachments and delusions. We know and understand, but we do not cling. This is how we purify the mind and our senses. This is called “sitting on the platform of white lotuses,” like Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The lotus blossom comes out of thick mud but remains pristine and pure. Our mind should be like that, rising from impurities but free from contamination.

## **A bird has buddha nature**

Another story will help us realize that this awareness is the Buddha nature. Do not have a single trace of doubt, because if you do, it will be difficult to attain enlightenment. In the Tang Dynasty there was a great patron of Buddhism named Pei Xiu, who had studied Buddhism in depth. One day he was in the Da Xiangguo Monastery and saw that a sparrow had landed on top of the Buddha statue, left its droppings on Buddha's head and flown away. Pei Xiu was very disturbed by this scene and thought, "The scriptures say that every sentient being, which certainly includes the sparrow, has the Buddha nature, so how can this bird leave its droppings on the Buddha's head?" Pei Xiu asked the abbot of the temple for an explanation. (This is where the idiom "to poop on the Buddha's head" came from, meaning an act of sacrilege.) The abbot replied, "Certainly the sparrow has Buddha nature. Indeed the bird is very intelligent; it knows that the Buddha is very compassionate. That is why it left its droppings on the Buddha's head instead of on the head of a hawk!" The fact is that the sparrow knows where it is safe and where it is not; this "knowing" *is* the Buddha nature. Do not think that Buddha nature is something too remote or too profound to understand; it is just this mind that knows, this sentience. Everyone has this mind that can distinguish good from evil, right from wrong; it is just that this mind is often deluded and beset with afflictions and cravings, thus generating karma that makes us suffer and lose our calmness and serenity. This is the mind of a mundane person. If you are absolutely sure that you have this Buddha nature, then you are enlightened.

## **Maintaining the enlightened mind**

Once enlightened, we need to maintain this Buddha nature so that it will always manifest. We can practice in two ways – in stillness and in action. "We cultivate it in stillness and fortify it in action." The seven-day meditation retreat gives us the best opportunity to practice stillness. Throughout the seven days, we try to keep this enlightened awareness clear, un-scattered, and in control for 3 minutes, 5 minutes, and longer; practicing this way,

we will definitely make immense progress. The *Surangama Sutra* states, “Cessation of delusion in the mind is enlightenment.” The word “cease” is the key. Our mind is always busy, so in sitting meditation we let the thoughts cease and remain unmoved; we do not think about the past, the present, or the future. When we think about the past, we cling to the past; when we think about the present and the future, we cling to the present and the future; this is the “monkey mind.” The *Diamond Sutra* states, “The past mind is intangible, the present mind is intangible, the future mind is intangible.” It is useless to reminisce about the past, since it has already passed. If the past was pleasant, dwelling on it makes us sad. If the past was sad, thinking about it just adds to our pain. To ruminate about the present is to get trapped in transience. To speculate about the future is just daydreaming.

So where should the mind be? The mind should “act without any attachments.” The past mind is intangible; if we do not think about the past then the mind is not trapped by the past. The present mind is intangible; if we do not think about the present then the mind is not trapped by birth-and-death. The future mind is intangible; if we do not speculate about the future then the mind is not trapped in future fantasies. Then this is a mind of perfect clarity and understanding; it is the profound mind of the tathagata; it is our original mind, our intrinsic nature. If you can maintain this enlightened state of mind for three minutes, you are a buddha for three minutes; if you can maintain it for ten minutes, you are a buddha for ten minutes. This is referred to as “nurturing the sagely embryo” (to develop into buddhahood). If you can practice like this then you will have truly advanced to the stage of “Cultivating the Way.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> One way to describe the stages of becoming a buddha is: 1. The stage of “Seeing the Way”(見道位), which means enlightenment, awakening to the Truth. 2. The stage of “Cultivating the Way”(修道位), for only after enlightenment can one truly understand the nature of desires and other defilements.

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## Preliminary cultivation and true cultivation

Many people want to practice but do not know where the Way is. They are at best only doing “preliminary” cultivation of the Way, via expedient means such as chanting the sutras, repentance, performing good deeds, and sitting meditation. If we practice all of these without realizing the true mind, we are just doing preliminary cultivation. Since our ignorance and attachments are deeply rooted, these practices help us get rid of our mind’s defilements provisionally. Then, in the future when time and conditions are right, for example, when we are listening to the Dharma or in a meditation retreat, we may suddenly awaken to the original mind, the mind of non-attachment. This mind of non-attachment is the absolute truth; it transcends time and space. During meditation, in just one instant, we can awaken to the present mind—it feels utterly tranquil, clear and pure, and hours can pass in what seems like one single moment. As an ancient verse goes,

*Living in the mountain  
There is no sense of time,  
While in the mundane world  
A thousand years have passed.*

“No sense of time” refers to this absolute mind, where time and space do not exist. It is beyond this world. To go beyond this world is not something that happens after death. If we realize this original mind, we are immediately in the Pure Land, transformed from the mundane to the divine. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states, “Having the right view is to transcend this world. Having false views is to be in the mundane world.” This is truly the ultimate right view, the enlightened view of the tathagata.

Due to the nuances of the mind, the world that we perceive is also different. For example, this lecture hall is bright when we turn on the light; it becomes dark when we turn off the light. Is this hall really dark or bright? Here in the United States it is daytime now, but in Taiwan it is nighttime. Is it really daytime or nighttime now? During the day, humans see more clearly than at

night. Yet there are many animals that see clearly at night and are blind in the daytime. So is there true brightness or darkness? All the different phenomena that we perceive are due to our consciousness, our mind that perceives differently under varying conditions.

A famous Confucian poem says,

*Calmly observe –  
The myriad phenomena are self-evident  
Nature narrates itself perfectly.*

If the mind is scattered and restless, then it is like trying to admire the flowers while riding away on a horse—you won't be able to discern anything. If the mind can quiet down, you will naturally understand many truths in life. Therefore, "Sudden awakening to the original mind and directly realizing buddhahood" is very important; it is intimately connected to our living and being.

### **Unifying the gradual and sudden practices**

I believe everyone now understands that we have this original mind; however, this mind is still always restless and cluttered, constantly thinking about the past, the present, and the future, endlessly worrying about loss and gain. The mind habitually acts this way because, in all of our lives, our mind has never stopped for ten minutes. As a result, we are strangers to ourselves. Now we understand that we must travel this Path ourselves, this path of the mind.

The mundane mind is constantly afflicted by scattered thoughts. When it isn't, it dozes off. When the mind is neither scattered nor drowsy, it is bored. These are three problems of ordinary people. To counter these problems using different methods is the practice of gradual cultivation. Once we have overcome them, we must even let go of the methods that we have used and just maintain the pure awareness; this is the method of sudden enlightenment. If we understand this principle, then at anytime in our lives we always know how to practice – either the method of sudden enlightenment or that of gradual

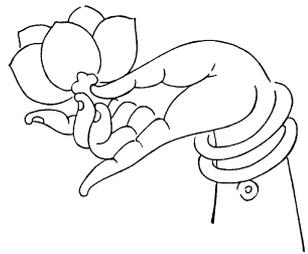
cultivation will be useful. The scripture says that everyone can become a buddha. This is not just an ideal or an exaggeration. Truly everyone has the Buddha nature; everyone can transcend from the mundane to the divine. As long as we have this great aspiration, faith, and persistence, we will definitely arrive at this goal, making our lives more fulfilling, more meaningful, and attaining infinite light<sup>3</sup> and infinite life.

I will give a final example to prove the case in point. In the classroom, a teacher explains the course material clearly. One of the students listens with interest, for him, time and space seem to disappear; even when a mosquito bites him, he doesn't realize it. Suddenly, the bell rings and he cannot believe that this class has ended so soon. Conversely, if the teacher just reads from a book but does not explain the lesson clearly, then this student may neither understand nor care to understand, he may look to the left and right and at his watch, and wonder why the class has not ended yet. Why is there such a difference? It is because the mind is discriminating and restless. Yet in the same classroom, when the mind is focused, free from discrimination and completely absorbed, an hour passes in the blink of an eye. The sutra states, "If you focus your mind in one place, you can accomplish anything." The Chan practice is to return the mind to oneness in order to realize our true nature. If we have many discriminations, biases, and gripes, then one day will seem like a whole year. However, if our mind is tranquil and open, abiding in purity and in the absolute state which is unborn and undying, then one day, one year, a hundred years, or a thousand years may feel like an instant. The Buddha Dharma is the highest truth, living the Dharma is the pinnacle of life. If you have faith and persistence in following this path, you will find what you truly want. Life will be happier, more fulfilling, and full of hope.

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<sup>3</sup> Infinite light is a metaphor for infinite wisdom or buddhas' wisdom.

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## FOUR TENETS OF CHUNG TAI

### 中台四箴行

To our elders be respectful,  
To our juniors be kind,  
With all humanity be harmonious,  
In all endeavors be true.

對上以敬，對下以慈，  
對人以和，對事以真。

## THREE REFUGES

### 三皈依

I take refuge in the Buddha, may all sentient beings  
Understand the Great Way profoundly, and bring forth the  
bodhi mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma, may all sentient beings  
Deeply enter the sutra treasury, and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Sangha, may all sentient beings  
Form together a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

自皈依佛	當願眾生	體解大道	發無上心
自皈依法	當願眾生	深入經藏	智慧如海
自皈依僧	當願眾生	統理大眾	一切無礙
和南聖眾			

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## FOUR GREAT VOWS

### 四弘誓願

Countless are sentient beings, I vow to liberate;  
Endless are afflictions, I vow to eradicate;  
Measureless are the Dharmas, I vow to master;  
Supreme is the Buddha Way, I vow to attain.

眾生無邊誓願度 煩惱無盡誓願斷  
法門無量誓願學 佛道無上誓願成

## REPENTANCE

### 懺悔偈

All the harm I have ever done, since time immemorial,  
Are caused by greed, anger, and ignorance,  
And produced through my body, speech, and will,  
Now I confess and amend all.

往昔所造諸惡業 皆由無始貪瞋痴  
從身語意之所生 一切罪障皆懺悔

## DEDICATION OF MERITS

### 回向偈

May the merits of our deeds  
Reach every part of the world;  
Sentient beings large and small  
All attain enlightenment.  
Maha-Prajna-Paramita

願以此功德 普及於一切  
我等與眾生 皆共成佛道  
摩訶般若波羅蜜



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