

Hua T'ou Chan

The Diamond Cutting Sword of the Single Word

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Zhaogu Huatou (Grok the Live Word)

Table of Contents

Preface	3
THE ENTRANCE TO PRACTICE AND ENLIGHTENMENT	4
TWO ENCOUNTERS.....	7
THE HUATOU METHOD	12
GRASS MOUNTAIN: A 7 Day Chan Retreat	23
“THE HUATOU” from: Empty Cloud, The Teachings of Xuyun	26
“HUA T’OU AND DOUBT” from Master Xuyun’s Discourses and Dharma Words.....	34
THE LIVE WORD: THE SHORTCUT APPROACH OF HWADU INVESTIGATION	38
ON INVESTIGATING THE HUA-T’OU.....	46
COMMENTARY ON THE NINTH KARMAPA’S “OCEAN OF DEFINITIVE MEANING”	54
THE BASICS OF THE HUA T’OU METHOD	61

Preface

Upasaka ShenJing

The Huatou, lit. “The Head-Word”, can be variously translated as **The** Word, the Single Word, the Live Word, the Cultivation Topic, the Meditation Phrase, etc. But basically speaking it is a trick, as my teacher likes to say, that the Masters played on us. It’s also a method at the heart of which lies the very foundation of Doubt and Faith. This is because it arouses mundane doubt simply by its appearance of being “too good to be true”, and yet when one single-mindedly and **faithfully** applies it, it arouses a Great Doubt, a true existential crisis.

The Single Word at the basis of this technique is “Who?”, with that question mark being the true point of the exercise. How it is to be practiced is described so well by the various ancient and contemporary masters in this booklet that I will abstain from the opportunity to show my own incompetence in their presence.

You might ask, ‘why on earth would I want to bring about an existential crisis?’ and you’d be justified in asking. The reason is simple: freedom from suffering is found exactly at the point where our illusory sense of self ends. All our troubles are due to the endless judgments, attachments and contrivances brought about by our self-cherishing and self-referencing attitudes. And this is by no means an overstatement. It is exactly so – dare to stare deeply into your own nature and you’ll see for yourself.

And this is the point of the Huatou method. By completely, excruciatingly exhausting the intellect, this “trick” will bring all the minds juggleries to a stop, and allow us to turn the attention back on itself and see our own mind. This was most eloquently put by Chang Tze Yang:

“In the mind, contemplate;
Searching for Original Mind.

When both minds disappear,
True Mind appears

The True Mind illuminates the Three Worlds;
Heresy and evil demons dare not approach.”

Although the Huatou remains to this very day a distinctly Chinese Zen technique, and, to an extent, used also in Korean Zen, there are many traditions and masters who have stumbled onto a similar path, as it’s so intuitive on a certain level, that its discovery seems to me to be inevitable. So the texts presented here are indeed mostly from Chinese masters, but two exceptions are presented as well: a Japanese approach (Master Bassui) and a Tibetan approach (Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche). My hope is that these “outsider” perspectives serve to broaden our own view, and also clarify from new angles.

All mistakes in this booklet are all my own, whereas all merit comes from others. May this merit contribute to the swift enlightenment of all beings! Amitufo!

THE ENTRANCE TO PRACTICE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

Chan Master Hanshan Deqing

Generally speaking, in this Dharma-ending-age, there are more people who practice than people who truly have realization. There are more people who waste their efforts than those who derive power. Why is this? They do not exert their effort directly and do not know the shortcut. Instead, many people merely fill their minds with past knowledge of words and language based on what they have heard, or they measure things by means of their emotional discriminations, or they suppress deluded thoughts, or they dazzle themselves with visionary astonishment at their sensory gates. These people dwell on the words of the ancient ones in their minds and take them to be real. Furthermore, they cling to these words as their own view. Little do they know that none of these are the least bit useful. This is what is called, “grasping at other’s understanding and clouding one’s own entrance to enlightenment.” In order to engage in practice, you must first sever knowledge and understanding and single-mindedly exert all of your efforts on **one thought**. Have a firm conviction in your own [true] mind that, originally it is pure and clear, without the slightest lingering thing, it is bright and perfect and it pervades throughout the Dharmadhatu (realm of phenomena).

Intrinsically, there is no body, mind, or world, nor are there any deluded thoughts and emotional conceptions. Right at this moment, this single thought is itself unborn! Everything that manifests before you now are illusory and insubstantial, all of which are reflections projected from the true mind. Work in such a manner to crush away [all your deluded thoughts]. You should fixate [your mind] to observe where the thoughts arise from and where they cease. If you practice like this, no matter what kinds of deluded thoughts arise, one smash and they will all be crushed to pieces. All will dissolve and vanish away. You should never follow or perpetuate deluded thoughts. Master Yongjia has admonished, “One must sever the mind [that desires] continuation.” This is because the illusory mind of delusion is originally rootless. You should never take a deluded thought as real and try to hold on to it in your heart. As soon as it arises notice it right away. Once you notice it, it will vanish. Never try to suppress thoughts but allow thoughts to be as you watch a gourd floating on water.

Put aside your body, mind, and world and simply bring forth this single thought [of method] like a sword piercing through the sky. Whether a Buddha or a Mara appears, just cut them off like a snarl of entangled silk thread. Use all your effort and strength patiently to push your mind to the very end. What is known as, “a mind that maintains the correct thought of true suchness” means that a correct thought is no-thought. If you are able to contemplate no-thought, you’re already steering toward the wisdom of the Buddhas. Those who practice and have recently generated the Bodhi-mind should have the conviction in the teaching of mind-only. The Buddha has said, “The three realms are mind-only and the myriad Dharmas are mere consciousness.”

All Buddhadharma is only further exposition on these two lines so everyone will be able to distinguish, understand, and generate faith in this reality. The passages of the sacred and the profane, are only paths of delusion and awakening with in your own mind. Besides

the mind, all karmas of virtue and vice are unobtainable. Your [intrinsic] nature is wondrous. It is something natural and spontaneous, not something you can “enlighten to” [since you naturally have it]. As such, what is there to be deluded about? Delusion only refers to your unawareness that your mind intrinsically has not a single thing, and that the body, mind, and world are originally empty. Because you’re obstructed, therefore, there is delusion. You have always taken the deluded thinking mind, which constantly rises and passes away, as real. For this reason, you have also take the various illusory transformations in and appearances of the realms of the six sense objects as real.

If today you are willing to arouse your mind and steer away from [this direction] and take the upper road, then you should cast aside all of your previous views and understanding. Here not a single iota of intellectual knowledge or cleverness will be useful. You must only see through the body, mind, and world that appear before you and realize that they are all insubstantial. Like imaginary reflections, they are the same as images in the mirror or moon reflected in the water. Hear all sounds and voices like wind passing through the forest; perceive all objects as drifting clouds in the sky. Everything is in a constant state of flux; everything is illusory and insubstantial. Not only is the external world like this, but your own deluded thoughts, emotional discriminations of the mind, and all the seeds of passion, habit tendencies, as well as all vexations are also groundless and insubstantial. If you can thus engage in contemplation, then whenever a thought arises, you should find its source. Never haphazardly allow it to pass you by [without seeing through it]. Do not be deceived by it! If this is how you work, then you will be doing some genuine practice. Do not try to gather up some abstract and intellectual view on it or try to fabricate some clever understanding about it. Still, to even speak about practice is really like the last alternative. For example, in the use of weapons, they are really not auspicious objects! But they are used as the last alternative [in battles].

The ancient ones spoke about investigating Chan and bringing forth the Huatou. These, too are last alternatives. Even though there are innumerable gongans, only by using the Huatou, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” can you derive power from it easily enough amidst vexing situations. Even though you can easily derive power from it, [this Huatou] is merely a [broken] tile for knocking down doors. Eventually you will have to throw it away. Still, you must use it for now. If you plan to use a Huatou for your practice, you must have faith, unwavering firmness, and perseverance. You must not have the least bit of hesitation and uncertainty. Also, you must not be one way today and another tomorrow. You should not be concerned that you will not be enlightened, nor should you feel that this Huatou is not profound enough! All of these thoughts are just hindrances. I must speak of these now so that you will not give rise to doubt and suspicion when you are confronted [by difficulties].

If you can derive power from your power, the external world will not influence you. However, internally your mind may give rise to much frantic distraction for [seemingly] no reason. Sometimes desire and lust well up; sometime restlessness comes in. Numerous hindrances can arise inside of you making you feel mentally and physically exhausted. You

will not know what to do. These are all of the karmic propensities that have been stored inside your eighth-consciousness for innumerable eons.

Today, due to your energetic practice, they will all come out. At that critical point, you must be able to discern and see through them then pass beyond [these obstacles]. Never be controlled and manipulated by them and most of all, never take them to be real. At that point, you must refresh your spirit and arouse your courage and diligence then bring forth this existential concern with your investigation of the Huatou. Fix your attention at the point from which thoughts arise and continuously push forward on and on and ask, “Originally there is nothing inside of me, so where does the [obstacle] come from? What is it?” You must be determined to find out the bottom of this matter. Pressing on just like this, killing every [delusion in sight,] without leaving a single trace until even the demons and spirits burst out in tears. If you can practice like this, naturally good news will come to you. If you can smash through a single thought, then all deluded thinking will suddenly be stripped off. You will feel like a flower in the sky that casts no shadows, or like a bright sun emitting boundless light, or like a limpid pond, transparent and clear.

After experiencing this, there will be immeasurable feelings of light and ease, as well as a sense of liberation. This is a sign of deriving power from practice for beginners. There is nothing marvelous or extraordinary about it. Do not rejoice and wallow in this ravishing experience. If you do, then the Mara of Joy will possess you and you will have gained another kind of obstruction! Concealed within the storehouse consciousness are your deep-rooted habit tendencies and seeds of passion. If your practice of Huatou is not taking effect, or that you’re unable to contemplate and illuminate your mind, or you’re simply incapable of applying yourself to the practice, then you should practice prostrations, read the sutras, and engage yourself in repentance. You may also recite mantras to receive the secret seal of the Buddhas; it will alleviate your hindrances. This is because all the secret mantras are the seals of the Buddha’s diamond mind. When you use them, it is like holding an indestructible diamond thunderbolt that can shatter everything. Whatever comes close to it will be demolished into dust motes. The essence of all the esoteric teachings of all Buddhas and ancestral masters are contained in the mantras. Therefore, it is said that, “All Tathagatas in the ten directions attained unsurpassable and correct perfect enlightenment through such mantras.” Even though the Buddhas have said this clearly, the lineage ancestral masters, fearing that these words may be misunderstood, have kept this knowledge a secret and do not use this method. Nevertheless, in order to derive power from using a mantra, you must practice it regularly after a long and extensive period of time. Yet, even so, you should never anticipate or seek miraculous response from using it.



TWO ENCOUNTERS

ZEN MASTER BASSUI

1. ON EXPEDIENT MEANS

A QUESTIONER SAID: “Today I realize, for the first time, that all these years I have been searching after a robber and treating him as my child. Though I may see my mistake, if I do not actually destroy this discriminating mind myself, the moment of liberation will never arrive. With what expedient means will I rid myself of it?”

Bassui replied: “There is no particular expedient means. If you just separate from all forms in your mind and don’t fall into the pit of formlessness, liberation will manifest in your body as it is right now. The high priest Mumon Ekai said: ‘To obey the regulations and keep the rules is to tie yourself without a rope. Arbitrary selfishness is heresy and devilry. Becoming settled and quiet while the mind exists is the heretical Zen of *Just-Sitting* (Shikantaza). Doing as you will, neglecting relationships, you fall into the deep pit of liberation. To be clever and clearheaded is to be tied in chains, to be bound in shackles. To think of good and bad is to dwell in the temples of heaven and hell. Fixed views of the Buddha and Dharma enclose you in the two iron mountains. One who has an instant awakening from an arising thought is sporting with spirits. Meditation in complete stillness is an activity of the devil. When you advance, you are deluded by Buddhist principles; when you retreat, you act contrary to Buddhist teachings. When you can neither advance nor retreat, you are a breathing corpse.

Now, how on earth can you practice this after all?... “If you practice and realize this now in this way, you will comprehend the great matter of life and death. If, however, you become obstructed by the theory, and do not penetrate the gate of the ancestors, you will sink in the sea of delusion through eternity. This is why the ancients, arousing their fearless aspiration, spent twenty, thirty, or forty years—even their whole lives—refraining from lying down, forgetting to sleep or eat, practicing single-mindedly, applying spiritual energy in response to the occasion, looking penetratingly into their own nature, and hence realizing the light of their own spiritual essence. All karmic hindrances are founded in this discriminating mind, and this so-called discriminating mind is founded in Buddha-nature.

“Master Rinzai said: ‘I do not hold onto the worldly or the sacred without, nor do I dwell on the substance within; I see penetratingly and harbor no mistaken doubt.’ Just look sharply during the four dignified activities (walking, standing, sitting, and lying down) in response to relationships and conditions. Hitting upon each opportunity, kill the mind that functions in that moment as you would an enemy met on a narrow road. Be like one who not only tries to smother a fire, but immediately pours water on the warm ash. If even a fine hair were left unslain, you would be cast away in the world of life and death. Turning inward, turning outward, destroying everything completely, you will for the first time begin to achieve the proper results. “Realize that all form is apparition, and stop calculating; realize that all views are delusion, and kill the Buddha when he appears in your mind and the ancestors when they appear in your mind and ordinary people when they appear in your mind; destroy the world when it appears and the void when it appears.

At this time, though you may understand all the worlds in the ten directions to be simply the one diamond essence, you will still fall into the trap of attachment to Dharma. Those who go beyond the ranks of ordinary people, to the contrary, fall into the trap of considering themselves sages. Though you cut off thoughts of both ordinary people and sages, though you do not stop before the cold withered tree, though you cross the bright moonlit river and pass through the land of darkness, if you think you have realized the mysterious functioning of the extraordinary, you still may not have let go of attachment to your ability.

Forgetting the true flavor of the Buddhas and ancestors and not realizing the universal essence, you sojourn in the cold ashes of the long smothered fire, having yet to become intimate with the teachings. “Do you wish to penetrate directly and be free? When I am talking like this, many people are listening. Quickly! Look at the one who is listening to this talk. **Who is he who is listening right now?**

“If, for example, you were to conclude that it is the mind, nature, Buddha, or the Way; if you were to call it the principle, the matter, the nontransmitted teaching of the buddhas and ancestors, the wonderful miracle, the occult, the mysterious, form, or emptiness; if you were to understand it to be existence and nothingness, nonexistence, non-nothingness, the absence of nonexistence, or the absence of non-nothingness; if you were to conclude that it is

eons of emptiness before creation or consider it the understanding of kōans, no-mind or noninterference, you would still be mixed-up ordinary people who haven't left the path of reason. "If, on the other hand, you were to make a fist and raise a finger, clap your hands and remain silent, launch into an explanation according to your understanding, or present the main point as you see it, you would be nothing more than a fellow trifling with spirits, a ghost clinging to the bushes and weeds. When nothing you try applies, what is it that does, after all, listen to the Dharma? If you can't answer, you get thirty blows; if you do answer, you still get thirty blows. How can you manage to avoid suffering these blows? Well?"

2. THAT WHICH HEARS THE DHARMA

A MONK SAID: "The discriminating mind is indeed like a dreaded enemy. What about when I look into my Buddha-nature? How shall I consider it?" Bassui replied: "It too is like a dreaded enemy, because it destroys your body and ends your life." The questioner asked: "what do you mean?" And Bassui replied: "The mud cow impetuously enters the water against the current. The wooden figure plays with raging flames in its bosom pocket."

Questioner: "Master, you said earlier that the true teaching of the Buddhas and ancestors is nothing other than pointing directly to peoples' minds and showing them that seeing into their own nature is Buddhahood. Now you talk neither of mind nor of nature. You just say we should look at that which listens to the Dharma. What does this mean?"

Bassui: "This is the true key to seeing into your own nature directly." Questioner: "Is this phrase 'that which hears the Dharma' an expedient means created by you, master, or is it from the sayings of the Buddhas and ancestors?"

Bassui: "It is neither my expedient means nor is it from the sayings of the Buddhas and ancestors. It is the innate perfection of all people, the exquisite gate of emancipation of the buddhas and ancestors."

Questioner: "It has been said that what has not appeared in any of the texts since ancient times is no subject for discussion by wise men. If it has never appeared in the sayings of the buddhas and ancestors, who would believe it unquestionably?"

Bassui: “There are no words for the Way. That’s why it is independent of the sayings of the Buddhas and ancestors. Though it is innate to all people, words are used to express it. So how could it be contrary to the writings of the buddhas and ancestors?”

Questioner: “If that is so, then which sutra concurs with this teaching?”

Bassui: “At the Śūrangama meeting, where many sages practiced and entered the gate, there were twenty-five perfections in all. The one gate—the so-called one who hears the Dharma just mentioned—was the perfection achieved by the bodhisattva Kannon. The bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, asked by the World-Honored One to comment on this gate, praised it and called it the primary gate. At this point Mañjuśrī said to Ananda: ‘Though you have heard all the secret teachings of Buddhas as countless as atoms, you have yet to eliminate the flow of desires and thus have been mistakenly holding onto all you have heard. Rather than entertaining what you have heard from the many Buddhas, why don’t you listen to the listener?’”

Questioner: “The buddhas and ancestors all taught people in accord with the opportunity, as one gives medicine in response to an illness. Why do you, master, not choose in accord with the opportunity, but rather tell us simply to perceive the one who is listening to the Dharma?”

Bassui: “This focusing on the one who is listening to the Dharma is the *dhārānī* gate of all buddhas and ordinary people. If you penetrate this gate, regardless of whether your ability is great or little, all will be liberated. Therefore, in the sutra it is said: ‘Members of the assembly, Ananda, turn your function of hearing back toward yourselves and listen to the nature of the listener. This nature will become the supreme Way of emptiness. This is how perfection becomes an actuality. This is the one nirvana gate of the Buddhas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. All past Tathāgatas have realized themselves through this gate. All the present bodhisattvas are now entering it and becoming perfectly clear. And the practitioner of the future too should, in this way, depend on this Dharma. Not only Kannon, but I, Mañjuśrī, also confirmed the Way through this gate.’ “Mañjuśrī also said: ‘To realize the mind of nirvana, Kannon’s practice is the best. The many other expedient practices are all from the divine power of the Buddha used in particular circumstances to rid disciples of their delusions. They

are for long-standing practitioners and should not be preached indiscriminately to those of shallow and deep understanding alike.'

"Also, in a discourse from the high seat, Mumon Ekai said: 'Rinzai said to the congregation of monks, "The four great elements that make up your body can neither preach nor listen to the Dharma. Your spleen, stomach, liver, and gallbladder can neither preach nor listen to the Dharma. The empty sky can neither preach nor listen to the Dharma." The great priest Rinzai spoke in this manner like the many parents who chew the rice for their infants. Though this may be the case, who is it that preaches the Dharma? Who is it that listens to the Dharma? Here, if you grasp this entirely, you will complete your practice.' How can you say that this matter is not covered in the writings of the Buddhas and ancestors? It is just this 'one who hears the Dharma' that is paramount among the perfections of the many sages. Why do these ignorant people remain deluded and find themselves unable to believe this?"

Questioner: "If it is as you've just said, then it is not the teaching transmitted outside of the scriptures and not through words. How can you, a Zen priest, use this teaching of the 'one who hears the Dharma'?"

Bassui: "You people now listening to this talk, does the one who listens come from the teaching of the Buddha? Does he come from the teaching of the ancestors?" The monk bowed low and left.



THE HUATOU METHOD

Chan Master Sheng Yen

To practice Chan is to know oneself, and knowing oneself, one will be able to ultimately liberate oneself. But knowing the self is difficult, having control of the self is more difficult, and liberating the self even more difficult. Yet, it must be done because all ignorance and afflictions arise from not knowing who we are. Lacking control of ourselves, we have vexations, we have self-grasping, and we are thus in bondage to the self. The purpose of practice is to liberate ourselves from this bondage. To do this, we need concepts as our guide and we need a method of practice.

The basic understanding of Chan is that our sense of self arises from the interactions of the body, mind, and external environment. In terms of methods, the first principle is to detach from the sense of self that arises from the external environment, then to detach from the sense of self that arises from our body, and lastly, to detach from the sense of self that arises from the activities of our mind. The latter includes sensations, feelings, ideas, and thoughts, which are essentially all attachments. So, step-by-step, you separate, isolate, and narrow down the sense of self. Until you do this, you will not be able to truly use the huatou method to ultimately shatter the sense of self and reach enlightenment.

Beginners often find it easy to gain an entry into the huatou method by identifying the sense of self that arises from our bodily sensations. For example, be aware of the weight of your body sitting

in meditation; be aware of the breath passing through your nostrils, and so on. These sensations are all feelings of pleasure or discomfort that you can recognize. Your awareness of these sensations is an aspect of the sense of self. Who is experiencing these things? That is what I mean by a “sense of self”—identifying the “who” that is aware, the “who” that is experiencing. So once this sense of self is identified, stay with it; do not allow the mind to wander. Stay with sensing and being aware; let your body be the anchor to keep the mind from floating away. For today, use this method to become clear about the self. However, if your mind is already concentrated and calm and you have no strong sense of self, then you can right away begin using huatou. Otherwise, if your body is still prominent in your mind, then practice watching your sensations for today.

There is no need to use a full-lotus or a half-lotus posture; just choose a posture that is comfortable for sitting so long as your body is upright. Relax the body and be aware of your breath going in and out. Through awareness of your breath, you will know and experience your own existence. You exist because of your breath, and you will have that so long as you are alive. So stay with the awareness of your breath. Doing this, you gain a sense of your own being. As you continue, your breath will slow down, become deeper, and sink lower. At that time, you may become aware of the rise and fall of your abdomen. Let that process happen naturally. Be aware of it, but do not think about it. Practicing like this, you will gain in concentration and steadiness and you may feel comfortable. Stay close to the awareness of your sense of self. If you do that, after some time you will be able to use the huatou method.

To relax your body, first, relax your eyes, your facial muscles, and your head. Then, make sure your shoulders and arms are relaxed, then your chest, back, and lower back. While maintaining an erect posture, be sure your lower abdomen is also relaxed. If you can maintain these basic points of a relaxed body, your breath will be smooth and unhindered. However, if any part of your body is

tense, your breath will be short and constricted. If you relax your body in the manner I just said, your breath will naturally be smooth and unhindered; you will experience the rise and fall of your abdomen, and the breath will naturally sink down.

So, relax the body and be aware of your sense of self from one moment to the next. You do this by paying attention to the breath. If you catch your mind wandering, come back to your breath. Detach from the environment; pay no attention to it. If you get involved in things heard and seen, you will be overwhelmed by wandering thoughts. Just stay with your experience of this very moment, moment to moment, one instant to the next. And what is this present experience? It is your sense of self grounded in awareness of the body or the mind.

All meditation practices aim to first stabilize and harmonize the mind. This is not easy to do. When we meditate, to outward appearances we may be sitting still but inwardly our mind may be quite busy. The outward physical calm may conceal a scattered mind. Correct Chan practice can be likened to the wings of a bird: the first wing would be the guiding concepts; the second wing would be the methods of practice. Just as a bird needs both wings to fly, only when we have both the correct concepts as well as suitable methods can we really practice Chan. Therefore our aim is to gain a correct understanding of Chan concepts and also to practice the huatou method. When the mind is supremely calm and no vexations are present, it becomes open and spacious; it can then manifest its natural state, which is that of wisdom. When the mind is replete with wisdom, this can be called “enlightenment.”

To practice huatou, you repeatedly ask in your mind a single question with an urgent desire for an answer but without relying on thinking. What kind of question? Questions such as “What is *wu*?”

“Who is dragging this corpse around?” and “What was my *original face before I was born?” You can even have a huatou with just one word, for example, “*Wu?*”

Ask the huatou to the exclusion of all other thoughts until the question is resolved. The crucial point is that the question cannot be resolved by logical or conceptual thinking. After you have chosen or have been assigned a huatou, you should just stick with it. Constantly switching your huatou makes it difficult to generate consistent power. In fact, you can practice the same huatou all your life, even after you have experienced an initial enlightenment. You can use the huatou to experience enlightenment again and again until you are thoroughly enlightened. I highly recommend that you use the huatou “What is *wu?*” as this is a very powerful one that has been used since the early days of this practice.

When you start to sit in meditation, you can directly enter the practice by energetically asking your question over and over. For example, in your mind you would ask, “What is *wu?* What is *wu?* What is *wu?*” You must direct the asking to the huatou, not to yourself. Continue at a moderate pace, and always ask with a questioning mind; let your mind settle into the method; become friends with it. When there is nothing in your mind but finding the answer, this is called “investigating huatou.” This is how huatou should be practiced.

When you engage the huatou, avoid analyzing it. The proper approach is to just ask the question and let the huatou itself give the answer. With this attitude, you just keep asking the huatou. Do not turn that around and start asking *yourself*, expecting the answer to come from you. That will start you thinking, and you may end up with a stuffy head. If you direct the question to yourself, you may get answers from your subconscious, but they will invariably be wrong because they will be conceptual. If this happens, just let these false answers go. Say to yourself, “This is not the answer I’m looking for,” and continue to ask the huatou.

Neither is a huatou a mantra to be recited over and over without a questioning mind. As for the questioning, do not add second thoughts. Clever people may wonder how you can get a Chan experience from asking a question that has no meaning. “How can asking ‘What is *wu*?’ make me enlightened?” If you think like this, it is because you lack faith and confidence, and in that case, the huatou will not work for you. Rather, just look at the huatou as a tool for practicing Chan. Just directly go about it this way: keep asking the huatou and let it give you the answer. The point of this method is not only to allow your mind to focus on the huatou, but also to give rise to a sense of wanting to find an answer. These factors—focusing the mind and wanting an answer—force your self-centeredness into a corner, so to speak. By your persistent questioning, the self eventually has nowhere to go and vanishes. When the self vanishes, the answer you were looking for will manifest by itself and you will come to know personally the state of liberation.

While asking the huatou, you will have wandering thoughts. As soon as you become aware of this, just pick up your huatou and continue to ask. This way, you are using the huatou to dispel wandering thoughts. There is a Chan saying that we should use the diamond sword of wisdom to cut through delusions. In fact, anything that manifests in your mind naturally disappears when you have this sword in hand. So think of the huatou as your diamond sword. Again and again you must ask the huatou; you must generate the desire for the huatou to give you an answer. Just keep asking the huatou and pick it up when wandering thoughts arise. Eventually, you will truly be investigating the huatou. At that point what we call the doubt sensation will arise, and eventually, it will evolve into a great mass of doubt. When the great doubt is shattered, you will have answered your huatou.

You must bear in mind two principles: first, do not analyze your huatou, since you will not get a correct answer that way; second, do

not try to control your breath in any way, such as to suppress wandering thoughts. If you have wandering thoughts, just pick up the huatou, but don't connect it in any way with your breath.

The function of both huatou and gong'an is to generate what we call the "great doubt." This doubt does not mean skepticism or suspicion, but an intense uneasiness and wonderment that we must know the meaning of the huatou. It is a state of all-consuming questioning that is relentless, not settling for any solution other than the complete resolution of the huatou. Such resolution means liberation from the great matter of birth and death. Naturally there are degrees of the doubt, from momentary feelings of a fleeting doubt sensation, to a persistent undercurrent of the doubt in all of your daily activities, to a great doubt sensation where you feel your whole world has collapsed into this sense of intense wonderment. When the doubt reaches a crescendo, it becomes vast and self-sustaining. Under certain circumstances this great doubt will explode; your sense of self will suddenly vanish and enlightenment will occur. The huatou is a great tool, and you must generate the doubt by investigating it.

In the Chan tradition there have been many commonly used huatous, but in my retreats I have found four to be useful, effective, and direct. The first of these is "What is *wu*?" This huatou is based on an encounter in which a disciple asked Master Zhaozhou (778–897), "Does a dog have buddha-nature?" The master answered, "*Wu*," which means "no," "nothing," or "without." This paradoxical exchange is perhaps the best-known gong'an in the history of Chan. There is more elaboration of this gong'an in the section on "*Wu* and Buddha-Nature" on page 143.

A second often-used huatou is "Who is dragging this corpse around?" The corpse here is our own physical body, but why a corpse? Without a "spirit" to give life to our body, it would just be a corpse. But if you use this huatou, do not speculate on what it means. Just ask, "Who is dragging this corpse around?"

A third common huatou derives from the teaching that *sentient beings transmigrate from one life to another in *samsara, the cycle of birth and death. Do you know what form you had before being born as a sentient being? So, you ask, “What was my original face before birth and death?” Like any other huatou, just keep asking the question and engage it again if you lose it.

The fourth huatou I am going to mention is popular among Chinese Buddhists who practice mindfulness by reciting the Buddha’s name. Without turning up a second thought or straying off for some answer, directly ask, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” Another version of the same huatou is, “Who is mindful of the Buddha?”

Among the four huatous I have mentioned here, the one I have found most effective and direct for students is, “What is *wu*?” But if you have trouble using this one, you may use any of the others for your huatou practice. So I encourage most people to use “What is *wu*?” or just “*Wu*.” For those who cannot connect with the Chinese *wu*, you can simply use the English “What is nothingness?” Not only does this huatou not have any side effects, it is the most direct and simple huatou that you can use. So, if you can use “What is *wu*?” that is fine. If not, ask, “What is nothingness?”

In the West, “Who am I?” is another popular huatou that is not traditional in the Chan tradition. I do not encourage people to use this, because it puts an “I” at the center of this question and some may find it difficult to drop this “I.”

Huatou can be practiced at three levels, or stages: reciting the huatou, asking the huatou, and investigating the huatou.

The first stage, reciting the huatou, is quite simple—you just mentally recite the words of the huatou, over and over. At this stage you may not feel the urgency of knowing the answer, of discovering the meaning of the huatou. You are simply reciting it somewhat like a mantra, over and over, or like reciting the name of a buddha. At this level it is common to still have a lot of wandering thoughts. Even so, if you persist, it will still be useful for calming and settling the mind.

The second stage, asking the huatou, is accompanied by a great desire to know the answer. You are no longer simply reciting the huatou, but you sincerely want to know the answer. At that time you also feel a great attraction or interest in the huatou. You are drawn to the huatou, and because of that, your wandering thoughts will diminish to a great extent. As wandering thoughts fade, even though you are not yet at one with the huatou, you will still be

able to generate power in the practice. At this point, you are still in opposition to this huatou, meaning you are clearly separate from it; you are the one asking the huatou, and the huatou is being asked by you. What sustains this power is your strong urgency in wanting to know the answer.

At the third stage, investigating the huatou, you are no longer separate from the huatou but have become one with it. In fact, you are completely engulfed by the asking. Although “What is *wu*?” may still be there, eventually it will also disappear, leaving you with just a deep sense of wonderment that we call the “doubt sensation.” Doubt here does not mean suspicion. It simply means a desire to know the answer; it is a mind of questioning and wonderment. In the midst of that, you are completely one with this doubt sensation. At a shallow level you are still asking “What is *wu*?” but when you become completely engulfed in the doubt, the asking itself disappears and there is just this state of wonderment. You can sit, stand, walk, and sleep. You may lose track of space and time, yet you can still function, but your whole being is permeated by this wanting to know, this doubt and great wonderment. You have generated what is called in Chan the “great doubt mass.” Some practitioners are able to be in this state for a few hours, some for several days, and some for longer periods. Chan Master Laiguó (1881–1953) was in this state for three whole months.

The whole point of the huatou method is to generate the doubt sensation. There is the saying, “Great doubt, great enlightenment; small doubt, small enlightenment; no doubt, no enlightenment.” This says that the depth of any realization will correspond to the power of one’s doubt. If you nurture doubt into a great mass only to have it dissipate shortly after, then you may gain only a very shallow realization. However, if one generates a great doubt mass that lasts for days or longer, a subsequent breakthrough would be much greater. Indeed it could last a lifetime.

How does one go from merely reciting, to asking, and then to

investigating their huatou? The keys to this are interest, urgency, and confidence. You must have great interest in working with your huatou. Why should you? Well, because you recognize that you bring afflictions upon yourself and others, all due to the lack of wisdom. With the desire to be free of afflictions, you will be able to generate interest in the huatou. With interest comes great urgency and sincere desire to resolve your existential conflicts. You must then also believe that giving rise to the doubt sensation will help you resolve your problems.

If you are unable to generate the doubt sensation, the practice is still useful for calming your mind. So, even without generating the doubt sensation, huatou is still useful. Just recite in your mind the huatou, steadily, without interruption, with a relaxed mind and body. Once your body and attitude are relaxed, your sole task is to stay with the huatou, not allowing yourself to stray away from it. “What is *wu*? What is *wu*? What is *wu*?” Just continue whether or not you have wandering thoughts. Just be clear that the huatou is on your mind as you repeat it. If you become aware of wandering thoughts, immediately return your attention to the huatou. If you are not having any wandering thoughts, then don’t worry about anything else. Just stick to the huatou. So, continuously practicing like this, at the very least your mind will become settled and calm.

Why do I recommend that you use “What is *wu*?” or just “*Wu*?” when there are numerous huatous one can choose from? The answer is that among the huatous we have discussed, “*Wu*?” is the most clear-cut, the easiest to use, and the most effective; it is less likely to generate side effects or a whole host of thought-streams. Because “*Wu*?” is the most direct, the simplest, and also holds the most strength, Chan Master Dahui Zonggao advocated it, and I myself also encourage people to use it.

Just remember that any huatou is not a mantra; it a question that you ask instead of just reciting. If you do not feel intimate with the Chinese word *wu*, you can say it in English. So ask, “What is

nothingness?” And since you are asking, “What is nothingness?” there is no further question that needs to be asked about what nothingness is. So whether you use *wu* or “nothingness,” it is really just a symbol signifying an attitude of questioning deep down inside you.



GRASS MOUNTAIN: A 7 Day Chan Retreat

Master Nan Huai-Chin

The Ch'an Sect has no standard teaching method, so it is called the "Gateless Gate." Ancient masters had no set way, so they invented an ingenious method: ts'an huat'ou (*ts'an* means "fully participate in", or as today we would say, "Grok it"). I will now give you three hua-t'ou and you can choose one. Those who have already made some progress in your Ch'an practice must also choose a hua-t'ou. Absolutely do not feel you are too smart! You must forget everything before this moment. What is a hua-t'ou? That is a big question. First of all, the hua-t'ou: the first one is "Who is repeating the Buddha's name?" or "Who is meditating?" The thought "repeating the Buddha's name" represents all of your thoughts. The second hua-t'ou is "What was my original face before I was born?" This hua-t'ou also includes "Where was I before I was born? Where will I go after death?" and "Where is I?" The third hua-t'ou is "When there are no thoughts and no dreams, where is my true self?" or "Who is this bright, vivid self?" or "What is the source of my thoughts?" The first includes the latter two. How do we ts'an hua-t'ou? Do not comment on it. Do not use a logical method. Do not expect enlightenment. Don't throw away the hua-t'ou looking for tranquility. Don't reason with yourself. Disregard all your feelings - painful, peaceful- whatever they may be. The outside world has nothing to do with you. Cut it off! Continue to work in this manner. Above all, you should do this strictly for yourselves. You must not do this to make me look good. If you have come here for my sake, that's a real joke! I'm not after fame or money. Do not lower your head. Do not trifle with idle thoughts. Don't waste your time! When you hear me strike the wooden fish three times, begin to meditate. When the hand chime rings three times, we will begin walking meditation, striding vigorously around the perimeter of the Buddha Hall. When you hear the incense board drop, stop immediately. If your legs are very painful, don't indulge them, but also don't force them: you must relax and not constrain them. Don't use force. Relax! You must very gently concentrate your mind into one. Pay no attention to all the feelings of your physical body.

Walking, standing, sitting, reclining: every moment you must let go of everything and take care of your hua-t'ou. A lot of you are not yet on the track with the hua-t'ou. Too many idle thoughts. You yourselves haven't yet really made a firm resolution. This is all up to you - you cannot depend on other people. The meaning of a hua-t'ou for Ch'an people is summed up in just one word: *doubt*. The ancients said: "Great doubt: great enlightenment; Small doubt: small enlightenment; No doubt, no enlightenment." "Who am I?" "I am who?" - I don't want you to think yourselves around in circles, but just keep chasing after that question, "Who am I?" Don't let your mind wander. The best time to look into a hua-t'ou is when your mind is not drowsy or wandering. We call just a little wayward mind "restlessness." Hold your mind gently in oneness. Stay with your hua-t'ou.

Master: Half a day is already gone. This retreat is an opportunity that we don't easily get, so work diligently on your hua-t'ou. Just as in cooking only *you* can control the time and temperature. Your mind must do nothing except hold this hua-t'ou. Tao is already there. It is formless, directionless, positionless, not wandering, not drowsy. It is pure and bright just as it is. This is Right Mind. It is not easy to attain this state. Beginners in Ch'an must concentrate their minds into one as a first step. Beat the idle thoughts completely to death and there is Right Mind. Simply hold your mind in oneness - disregard enlightenment or no enlightenment! Expecting enlightenment is just another idle thought. The Neo-Confucianists considered idle thoughts as guests who come and go; they are not the master of the house. Don't get drowsy! Pick yourself up! Work on your mind *with* your mind. Don't get lazy with the hua-t'ou. Those of you who have already made some progress must also concentrate on your hua-t'ou. Since the Ch'ing Dynasty, most practitioners in the Ch'an halls have been taught to look into a hua-t'ou, but very few of them have accomplished anything. On the contrary, I witnessed that many people in the Ch'an halls would ts'an hua-t'ou to the extreme that they vomited blood. It will do you no good to kill yourself meditating. Therefore, to be too intense about the hua-t'ou is also no use. If you can concentrate your mind, then someday there will come a day of deliverance as a matter of course. There are a couple of you who are already on the track. All of you must be so diligent that "Mount T'ai could collapse in front of you and you

would not be moved. A magical deer could appear beside you but you would not even blink your eyes."4 This means you must stop your mind. If you are right on the track, when you walk you are not aware of walking; looking, you are not aware of looking. Everything in the outside world has nothing to do with you. If you can work assiduously enough to reach this state, then you can make progress. Go back to your seats and look well into your hua-t'ou!



“THE HUATOU” from: Empty Cloud, The Teachings of Xuyun

Grand Master Xuyun

Dear Friends, according to ancient wisdom: If a man wishes to be happy for an hour, he eats a good meal; if he wishes to be happy for a year, he marries; if he wishes to be happy for a lifetime, he grows a garden; if he wishes to be happy for eternity, he examines a Hua Tou. What then is a Hua Tou?

Hua Tou means "head word" and we may contrast Hua Tou with Hua Wei which means "tail word". If a dog were to walk past us, then, before we saw the dog's body we would see its head; and after we saw the body we would see its tail. So far, so good. So the head word or Hua Tou is the point at which the thought originates - the point before it enters the "body" of ego-consciousness. The tail is a subsequent thought. We'll get to the tail word later.

In ancient times, it was regarded as sufficient merely to point to the stilled mind in order to realize Buddha Nature. Bodhidharma spoke of "quieting the mind" and the Sixth Patriarch talked about "perceiving Self-Nature". Both advocated a simple recognition of the mind's true state of undefiled purity. But pointing wasn't as simple as it sounded.

As the years passed and Chan became popular, people with differing degrees of ability were attracted to it. Many practitioners claimed to have found easy ways to reach exalted states of enlightenment. They boasted of possessing the Dharma's precious jewels, but the jewels they described they had merely seen in the possession of others.

True Chan masters could, of course, see right through such false claims; but beginners couldn't always tell a lie from the truth. The masters, worried about the confusing effect such bad information was having on new practitioners, decided to devise methods of authenticating and standardizing accomplishments. One of the methods they devised was the Hua Tou.

So, what is a Hua Tou? It is a statement designed to concentrate our thoughts upon a single point, a point that exists in the Original Mind's "head", a point immediately before the thought enters our ego consciousness. It is a "source" thought.

Let us examine the Hua Tou, "Who is it who now repeats the Buddha's name?" Of all the Hua Tou questions, this is the most powerful. Now, this Hua Tou may be stated in many different ways, but all the ways indicate one basic question, "Who am I?" Regardless of how the question is stated, the answer must be found in the same place that it originated: in the source, the Buddha Self. The ego cannot answer it.

Obviously, quick and facile answers are worthless. When asked, "Who is it who now repeats the Buddha's name?" we may not retort, "It is I, the Buddha Self!" and let it go at that. For we must then ask, "Who is this I?" We continue our interrogations and our confrontations. A civil war goes on inside our mind. The ego fights the ego. Sometimes the ego wins and sometimes the ego loses. On and on we battle. What is it that makes my mind conscious of being me? What is my mind, anyway? What is consciousness?

Our questions become more and more subtle and soon begin to obsess us. Who am I? How do I know who I am? These questions go round and round in our minds like tired and angry boxers. Sometimes, we may want to quit thinking about the Hua Tou, but we find we can't get it out of our mind. The bell won't ring and let us rest. If you don't like pugilistic metaphors you could say that the Hua Tou begins to haunt us like a melody that we just can't stop humming.

So there we are - always challenged, always sparring. Needless to say, a Hua Tou should never degenerate into an empty expression. Many people think they can shadowbox with their Hua Tou and just go through the motions of engagement. While their minds are elsewhere, their lips say, "Who is repeating the Buddha's name? Who is repeating the Buddha's name? Who is repeating the Buddha's name?" This is the way of feisty parrots, not of Chan practitioners.

The Hua Tou has meaning. It is a question that has an answer and we must be determined to find that answer. I know that "Who am I?" sounds like a simple question, one we ought to be able to answer without difficulty. But it is not an easy question to answer. Often it is extremely puzzling. In fact, many people reach a point in life when, apart from any Chan technique, they really do begin to wonder who they are.

Let's, for example, consider a middle aged woman who might have reached the point where she's no longer sure of who she is. She's having what psychologists nowadays call "an identity crisis". Perhaps her children have grown up and moved away and her husband no longer finds her attractive. She is depressed and confused.

Suddenly she realizes that for her entire life she has identified herself in terms of her relationship to other people. She has always been somebody's daughter or sister or employee or friend or wife or mother. This woman now begins to wonder, **who am I** when I'm not being someone's daughter, wife, mother and so on? Who exactly am I? Perhaps she reviews her life and sees that when she was attending to the needs of one person, she wasn't available to satisfy the needs of another and that those who felt neglected by her, criticized her, while those who received her help, just accepted it as if they were somehow entitled to it. Being criticized on one hand, and being taken for granted on the other, has caused her much suffering.

Worse, she may realize that in satisfying the demands of these external social relationships, she neglected the requirements of her internal spiritual life.

Now she feels spiritually bankrupt and wonders why she invested so much of herself in others, why she saved nothing for her Buddha Self. But a bond holds two parties together. It is not a one- way ligature. Is it not because we desire to be loved or respected, feared or admired that we allow or encourage these attachments? Is it not our desires for the people, places, and things of Samsaric existence that ultimately cause us bitterness and pain? Of course it is.

There was once a man who worked at a food market. Every day he would steal food and bring it home to his family. His wife and children grew strong and healthy and used the money they would otherwise have spent on food to purchase clothing and other objects. They told him he was the best husband and father anyone could have. Soon, the man's brother, seeing this prosperity, asked him to steal food for him also; and the man complied. His brother praised him. "You are the best brother a man could have," he said.

Next, a friendly neighbor who was having financial problems begged him for help; and the man stole even more food. His neighbor was so grateful. "You are the best friend a man could have," he said.

The man felt important and appreciated. In his desire to be loved and respected, he did not realize that he had become a common thief. Before long he was caught, tried, and convicted for the thefts. He was sentenced to spend years in jail. Which of the people he had helped volunteered to take his place in jail for even one night of his sentence? None. Which volunteered to make restitution for even half of what he had provided? None. Sadly the man learned that his family was embarrassed to admit being related to a thief. Sadly the man learned that his friend was voicing relief that a neighbor of such low character was now safely in jail. And so, as we wonder who we really are we must reflect upon our ego's foolish desires and the pathetic ways it will grovel for affection.

When we ask, "Who am I?" we must also wonder whether we identify ourselves in terms of our wealth or social positions. What would happen if we lost our money or were cast out of society because of a flaw in our pedigree? Are we our bank accounts, our social circle, our lineage?

What about our jobs? Are we our occupations? If a musician injures his hand and can no longer play his instrument, does he cease to exist? Is he deprived of his humanity because he has been deprived of his identity as a musician?

Do we identify ourselves in terms of our nationalities, our cities, our neighborhoods, the language we speak, or the sports team we support? Do we lose part of ourselves if we move to a new locale?

Are we our bodies? If a man has a head, trunk, and four limbs, what happens if he loses two limbs? Is he only two thirds of a man? Think of how foolish this would be if he and his brother were equally to share an inheritance and his brother claimed that because he was missing an arm and a leg he was entitled to only two-thirds of his share!

May we define ourselves as our egos, our conscious sense of "I" or "me" or "mine"? What happens when we sleep? Do we cease to exist? What happens when our attention is

completely focused on a problem or a drama or on some beautiful music? When happens when we meditate and completely lose our sense of I-ness? Do saints who attain a selfless state cease to exist? And Shakyamuni Buddha, who was so bereft of Siddhartha's personality that he could only be called "Tathagata" - the Suchness of Reality, Itself - did he cease to exist because he had no ego nature?

In trying to answer the Hua Tou, "Who am I?" or "Who is repeating the Buddha's name?" we must examine our illusive identities, our shifting, conditional, samsaric identities. The Hua Tou will then reveal much to us. Dear friends, break old attachments! Dissolve prideful self-images and special relationships and create instead humble, generic varieties! Don't require friends. Try merely to be someone who is friendly, someone who respects all people and treats them all with kindness and consideration. Don't confine filial affection to just parents but be solicitous towards all elderly persons, and so on. Once we detach ourselves from specific emotional relationships and extend ourselves to all humankind, a new strength of character begins to emerge.

The Hua Tou, "Who am I" is a Vajra Sword which, when wielded properly, will cut away the troublesome ego. A Hua Wei or tail word traces a thought back to its origin. This, too, can be very useful. For example, a child, in the company of his friends, asks his father a question, let's say, "Can we go to the seashore this weekend?" and his father answers roughly, "Don't bother me!" and pushes the child away causing him to feel embarrassment and the pain of rejection.

That answer can be a Hua Wei. The man must ask himself, why did I answer my child in this way? Why was I suddenly so upset? He knows that before his child approached him, he was in a good mood. So what was there in the question that upset him?

He begins to retrace each of the words. Was it the word "weekend"? What does he associate with that word? If he can find nothing, he tries the word "seashore". He begins to recall his experiences at the seashore. He thinks of many events and suddenly he recalls one that disturbs him. He doesn't want to think about it, yet the Hua Wei

discipline requires that he examine that event. Why does the memory disturb him? What was so unpleasant about it? He continues to investigate this event until he gets to the root cause of his distress.

Dear friends, that root cause will surely involve damage to his pride, his self-esteem. And so the man recalls and, in a way, relives the experience, only now he is able to see it from a different, more mature perspective. Perhaps that bitter experience actually involved harsh treatment he received from his own father! At any rate, he will surely see that he transferred the pain of his childhood seashore experience onto his innocent Seon. He will be able to make amends for his unkind rebuff, and in this way, his character will grow. It occasionally happens that if the man concentrates on the Hua Wei enough, the dog may bite its own tail; and he may actually go from tail to head in one gulp. Sometimes a Hua Tou functions as an instruction, a kind of guide that helps us to deal with life's problems. Such a Hua Tou sustains us and directs us as we travel the hard road to enlightenment.

You know, long ago Chan Master Hui Jue of Lang Ye Mountain had a woman disciple who came to him for instruction. The master gave her the Hua Tou, "Let it be." He told her that if she faithfully used this Hua Tou as a scythe, she would cut down illusions and reap enlightenment.

The woman had faith in her master and, being resolute in her determination to succeed, she sharpened and honed this Hua Tou. Let it be. Let what be? Who lets it be? What is being? On and on she honed the blade. Her house burned down and when people came running to tell her she gently closed her eyes and whispered, "Let it be." Her Seon drowned and when people came running to tell her she gently closed her eyes and whispered, "Let it be."

One day she started to prepare fritters for dinner. She got the batter ready and the oil hot. Then, when she poured a ladle of the batter into the hot oil, it sizzled. And this little sizzling noise reverberated in her mind, and she attained enlightenment! Right away she threw the pan of hot oil on the ground and began jumping up and down, clapping her hands, laughing and laughing. Her husband naturally thought that she had lost her mind.

"What a calamity!" he shouted. "Whatever shall I do?" And his wife turned to him and said, "Let it be. Just let it be." Then she went to Master Hui Jue and he verified that she had indeed harvested the Holy Fruit.

Keep your mind on your Hua Tou whenever you are doing anything that does not require your undivided attention. Naturally, if you're flying an airplane you don't want to start thinking about your Hua Tou. Discovering whether or not a dog has Buddha Nature will not be of much use to you if you crash your plane. Driving an automobile is also something that requires your full attention. You may not risk killing other people's small selves just because you are trying to dispatch your own.

But there are many times during a day in which you can safely work on your Hua Tou. Usually we try to stuff these times with frivolous activity. We play silly games or do puzzles or listen to the radio or gossip or become spectators at some sporting event. These are the times that we should rivet our minds to our Hua Tou. No one can ever tell when the magical moment will arrive.

In China we call a cut of meat "pure meat". It is not mixed up with other ingredients as, for example, a sausage is. Sometimes "pure meat" means the best cut of meat. People always tell the butcher that's what they want. Pure or prime meat.

There was once a man who was considering the Hua Tou, "Who has Buddha Nature?" Every day he had to pass a butcher shop on his way to work. He always heard people clamoring for "pure meat" but he never paid them much attention. One day a woman was buying meat and, according to custom, she insisted that the butcher give her only pure meat. That was what she cried out. "Give me only pure meat." Her insistence particularly irritated the butcher and he shouted, "Which piece is not pure?"

The man heard this angry shout and he suddenly realized that all the meat is pure meat, that is to say, everyone contains the pure Buddha Nature. Who has Buddha Nature? Hah! Who does not have Buddha Nature?

The man attained enlightenment in that very instant! He got so excited he hopped and jumped and kept on saying, "Which piece is not pure? Ah, hah! Which piece is not pure?" over and over again. "Which piece is not pure?" This craziness we call Chan Disease. It doesn't last very long, maybe only a few days before the victim calms down; but it is a wonderful disease to catch. Fortunately, there is no medicine to cure it.

A monk once asked Master Zhao Zhou, "What happens after a person finally grasps the nonsensory state?" Master Zhao Zhou replied, "He lays it down." The monk did not understand. So this quandary became his Hua Tou. "How can one lay down the absence of something?" He worked on this and worked on this and still he could not understand. So he returned to Master Zhao Zhou and asked, "How can one lay down the absence of something?" Master Zhao Zhou answered simply, "What you can't lay down, carry away." Instantly the monk was enlightened.

You see, Master Zhao Zhou knew that the only thing we can't lay down is our Buddha Self. This and this alone is all that we can truly carry with us. Sometimes you hear the expression, "You can't take it with you." Usually people mean that you must leave money or fame or power behind when you go to your grave. The ego, too, cannot be taken with you when you enter Nirvana.

Master Zhao Zhou was also telling the monk that the attainment of enlightenment is nothing a person can brag about. Nobody can say, "I am enlightened" because the experience of enlightenment is precisely an egoless experience. The ego is extinguished and the pure Buddha Self is experienced. There is no "I" there who can claim to be enlightened. This is a most exhilarating and salutary experience. Anyone who suffers from any of the ego's ills should try one dose of enlightenment. The cure is permanent.



“HUA T’OU AND DOUBT” from Master Xuyun’s Discourses and Dharma Words
Grand Master Xuyun

In ancient times, the Patriarchs and Ancestors directly pointed at the mind for realization of self-nature and attainment of Buddhahood. Like Bodhidharma who 'quietened the mind' and the Sixth Patriarch who only talked about 'perception of self-nature', all of them just advocated the outright cognizance (of it) without any more ado. They did not advocate looking into a hua t'ou, but later they discovered that men were becoming unreliable, were not of dogged determination, indulged in playing tricks and boasted of their possession of precious gems which really belonged to others. For this reason, these ancestors were compelled to set up their own sects, each with its own devices; hence, the hua t'ou technique.

There are many hua t'ous, such as: 'All things are returnable to One, to what is (that) One returnable?' 'Before you were born, what was your real face?' but the hua t'ou: 'Who is repeating Buddha's name?' is widely in use (today).

What is hua t'ou? (lit. word-head). Word is the spoken word and head is that which precedes word. For instance, when one says 'Amitabha Buddha', this is a word. Before it is said it is a hua t'ou (or ante-word). That which is called a hua t'ou is the moment before a thought arises. As soon as a thought arises, it becomes a hua wei (lit. word-tail). The moment before a thought arises is called 'the un-born'. That void which is neither disturbed nor dull, and neither still nor (one-sided) is called 'the unending'. The unremitting turning of the light inwards on oneself, instant after instant, and exclusive of all other things, is called 'looking into the hua t'ou' or 'taking care of the hua t'ou'.

When one looks into a hua t'ou, the most important thing is to give rise to a doubt. Doubt is the crutch of hua t'ou. For instance, when one is asked: 'Who is repeating Buddha's name?' everybody knows that he himself repeats it, but is it repeated by the mouth or by the mind? If the mouth repeats it, why does not it do so when one sleeps? If the mind repeats it, what does the mind look like? As mind is intangible, one is not clear

about it. Consequently some slight feeling of doubt arises about 'WHO'. This doubt should not be coarse; the finer it is, the better. At all times and in all places, this doubt alone should be looked into unremittingly, like an ever-flowing stream, without giving rise to a second thought. If this doubt persists, do not try to shake it; if it ceases to exist, one should gently give rise to it again. Beginners will find the hua t'ou more effective in some still place than amidst disturbance. However, one should not give rise to a discriminating mind; one should remain indifferent to either the effectiveness or ineffectiveness (of the hua t'ou) and one should take no notice of either stillness or disturbance. Thus, one should work at the training with singleness of mind.

In the hua t'ou: 'Who is repeating the Buddha's name?' emphasis should be laid upon the word 'Who', the other words serving only to give a general idea of the whole sentence. For instance (in the questions): 'Who is wearing this robe and eating rice?', 'Who is going to stool and is urinating?', 'Who is putting an end to ignorance?', and 'Who is able to know and feel?', as soon as one lays emphasis upon (the word) 'Who', while one is walking or standing, sitting or reclining, one will be able to give rise to a doubt without difficulty and without having to use one's faculty of thought to think and discriminate. Consequently the word 'Who' of the hua t'ou is a wonderful technique in Ch'an training. However, one should not repeat the word 'Who' or the sentence 'Who is repeating the Buddha's name?' like (adherents of the Pure Land School) who repeat the Buddha's name. Neither should one set one's thinking and discriminating mind on searching for him who repeats the Buddha's name. There are some people who unremittingly repeat the sentence: 'Who is repeating the Buddha's name?'; it would be far better merely to repeat Amitabha Buddha's name itself (as do followers of the Pure Land School) for this will give greater merits. There are others who indulge in thinking of a lot of things and seek after everything here and there, and call this the rising of a doubt; they do not know that the more they think, the more their false thinking will increase, just like someone who wants to ascend but is really descending. You should know all this.

Usually beginners give rise to a doubt which is very coarse; it is apt to stop abruptly and to continue again, and seems suddenly familiar and suddenly unfamiliar. This is (certainly) not doubt and can only be their thinking (process). When the mad (wandering) mind has gradually been brought under control, one will be able to apply the brake on the thinking process, and only then can this be called 'looking into' (a hua t'ou). Furthermore, little by little, one will gain experience in the training and then, there will be no need to give rise to the doubt which will rise of itself automatically. In reality, at the beginning, there is no effective training at all as there is only (an effort) to put an end to false thinking. When real doubt rises of itself, this can be called true training. This is the moment when one reaches a 'strategic gateway' where it is easy to go out of one's way (as follows).

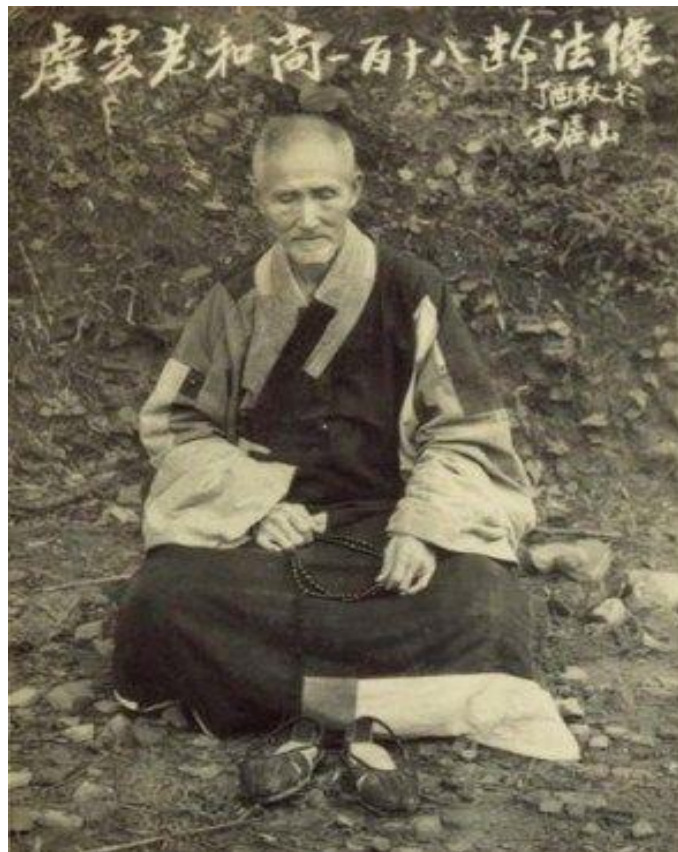
Firstly, there is the moment when one will experience utter purity and boundless ease and if one fails to be aware of and look into the same, one will slip into a state of dullness. If a learned teacher is present, he will immediately see clearly that the student is in such a state and will strike the meditator with the (usual) flat stick, thus clearing away the confusing dullness; a great many are thereby awakened to the truth.

Secondly, when the state of purity and emptiness appears, if the doubt ceases to exist, this is the unrecordable state in which the meditator is likened to one sitting on a withered tree in a grotto, or to soaking stones with water. When one reaches this state, one should arouse (the doubt) to be immediately followed by one's awareness and contemplation (of this state). Awareness (of this state) is freedom from illusion; this is wisdom.

Contemplation (of this state) wipes out confusion; this is imperturbability. This singleness of mind will be thoroughly still and shining, in its imperturbable absoluteness, spiritual clearness and thorough understanding, like the continuous smoke of a solitary fire. When one reaches this stage, one should be provided with a diamond eye and should refrain from giving rise to anything else, as if one does, one will (simply) add another head upon one's head.

Formerly, when a monk asked (Master) Chao Chou: 'what should one do when there is not a thing to bring with self?' Chao Chou replied: 'Lay it down.' The monk said: 'What shall I lay down when I do not bring a thing with me?' Chao Chon replied: 'If you cannot lay it down, carry it away.' This is exactly the stage (above mentioned) which is like that of a drinker of water who alone knows whether it is cold or warm. This cannot be expressed in words and speeches, and one who reaches this stage will clearly know it. As to one who has not reached it, it will be useless to tell him about it. This is what the (following) lines mean:

'When you meet a fencing master, show to him your sword. Do not give your poem to a man who's not a poet.'



THE LIVE WORD: THE SHORTCUT APPROACH OF HWADU INVESTIGATION

Dharma Master Pojo Chinul

The approach to Dharma I have discussed so far has been designed to give a detailed assessment of the two aspects of Dharma (adaptability and immutability) and the two approaches concerning person (sudden awakening and gradual cultivation) for students who can develop understanding, awakening, and entrance while relying on the teachings. Through these two aspects of Dharma, they will be able to understand the doctrine to which all the sutras and commentaries of the entire Tripitaka (Buddhist canon) return: the nature and characteristics of one's own mind. Through the two approaches concerning person they will be able to see the tracks of all the sages and saints-which are the beginning and end of their own practice. This clear assessment of the process of practice will help them to free themselves from delusion, move from the provisional toward the real, and realize Bodhi quickly.

If students develop understanding based solely on words, however, and remain indecisive about the road they should follow, then even though they investigate the whole day long, they will only end up being bound by intellectual understanding and will never gain tranquility. Consequently, even though it was not advocated by Master Tsung-mi, for the sake of those patch-robed monks in the Seon lineage today who have the capacity to enter the path after leaving behind words, I will briefly cite some passages from the records of the patriarchs and masters. These shortcut expedients, used to inspire progress in their students, should allow accomplished meditators to know the one living road which leads to salvation.

Seon Master Ta-hui said: Kuei-feng (Tsung-mi) referred to it as numinous awareness. Ho-tse said that the one word "awareness" is the gate to all wonders. Huang-lung Ssu-hsin Sou said, "The one word 'awareness' is the gate to all calamities." It is easy to recognize the intent of Kuei-feng and Ho-tse, but difficult to see that of Ssu-hsin. "Here" [in your mind] you must be endowed with eyes which transcend this world. You cannot make allusions to it; you cannot transmit it. For this reason Yun-men said, "The great majority

of statements are like brandishing a sword before a doorway. But beneath the one word there is definitely a road which leads to salvation. If this were not the case, you would die beneath that word."

The Sixth Patriarch addressed his assembly saying: "There is one thing which supports the heavens above and the earth below. It exists during all activity, but it is not confined to that activity. All of you! What do you call it?" Shen-hui came forward from the assembly and said, "It is the original source of all the Buddhas and Shen-hui's Buddha-nature." The patriarch said, "Even if I call it 'one thing' it still isn't correct. How dare you call it 'original source' or 'Buddha-nature'? From now on, even if you go and build a thatched hut to cover your head, you will only be a follower of the school of conceptual understanding."

In the Records of Master Fa-chen Shou-i it is said: the one thing When Master Huai-jang went to see the Sixth Patriarch, the patriarch asked, "Where have you come from?" Huai-jang answered, "I came from National Master Sung-shan An's place." The patriarch asked, "What thing came in this manner?" Huai-jang was left resourceless. Only after acting as the patriarch's attendant for eight years did he understand what he meant. He then told the patriarch, "When I first came here, the master received me with, 'What thing came in this manner?' I have understood." The patriarch inquired, "What do you understand?" "Even if you allude to it as 'one thing' it does not strike the mark." "Have you been able to cultivate and realize it, or not?" "Though cultivation and realization are not absent, they can never be sullied." "That which can never be sullied is precisely what all the Buddhas safeguard. I am like this and so are you."

Seon Master Ta-hui said: When Master Yueh-shan first visited Shih-t'ou, he asked, "I have studied the three vehicles and the twelve divisions of the teachings somewhat, but I have heard that in the south of China they point directly to people's minds in order to see the nature and achieve Buddhahood. Since I am still confused about this matter, I beg the master to give me some instructions." Shih-t'ou said, "This way you cannot get it, but that way you cannot get it either. Whether it is this way or not, you cannot get it." As Yueh-

shan did not understand, Shih-t'ou said, "Go to Kiangsi and ask Great Master Ma-tsu." Yueh-shan took his advice and went to Ma-tsu's place, where he asked the same question. Ma-tsu said, "Sometimes I teach people by raising my eyebrows and twinkling my eyes. At other times I do not teach people by raising my eyebrows or twinkling my eyes. The times when I raise my eyebrows and twinkle my eyes is correct; the time when I do not raise my eyebrows or twinkle my eyes is incorrect." Under the influence of these words, Yueh-shan had a great awakening; but, having nothing with which to show his gratitude, he merely lowered his head and bowed. Ma-tsu asked, "What truth have you seen that makes you bow?" Yueh-shan said, "When I was at Shih-t'ou's place I was like a mosquito biting the back of an iron ox." Ma-tsu sanctioned it.

Ta-hui said: At first, the Second Patriarch Hui-k' o did not understand the skillful means used by Bodhidharma when he said, "Bring all conditioning to rest externally, and keep the mind without panting internally." In this wise Bodhidharma tried to discuss mind and nature, path and truth. But Hui-k' o quoted texts and thereby sought certification. For this reason, Bodhidharma rejected all his statements; finally, when there was no place left for Hui-k'o to use his mind, he was able to step back and see the mind itself. Hence we may surmise that words which suggested making the logical mind like a wall were not Bodhidharma's real teaching. Suddenly in front of the wall, all conditioning was instantly halted; immediately Hui-k'o saw the moon and forgot all about the finger pointing at it. He then said, "It is clear and constantly aware; words cannot describe it." This statement was only intended to show Bodhidharma that he understood; it was not the real Dharma of the Second Patriarch. "

Ta-hui said further: to Seon When you are reading the sutras or the stories surrounding the entrance to the path of ancient masters and you do not understand them clearly, your mind will become puzzled, frustrated, and "tasteless"-just as if you were gnawing on an iron rod. When this occurs you should put forth all your energy. First, do not let go of your perplexity, for that is where the intellect cannot operate and thought cannot reach; it is the road through which discrimination is cut and theorizing is ended. Ordinarily, all

theorizing and discrimination are aspects of the [sixth] sense-consciousness. You have always been mistaking a thief for your own Seon. "" You must not be unclear about this!

Nowadays there is a group of shaven-headed heretics whose eyes are not clear. They only teach people to rest in a carnal ground. But even if a thousand" Buddhas appeared in the world while resting in that way, you would not only be unable to rest but your mind would become deluded as well.

Other heretics teach people to forget all passion and maintain silent reflection. Reflecting here, reflecting there, maintaining here, maintaining there, you only become more deluded; you have no hope of gaining comprehension. They sabotage the expedients of the patriarchs and mislead others.

Still other heretics teach people to remain unconcerned about everything and try to "rest" as much as possible-for when you can "rest," passionate thoughts will not arise. Once that happens, you will not be dull and unaware but will immediately be alert and clear. But that sort of teaching is like blinding a man's eyes with poison; it is no small matter.

Even in the case of the old man [Yun-men], it is not that he did not teach people to sit in meditation' and find a quiet place to practice; but this is like giving medicine to suit a specific illness: it is not really a proper way to instruct men. Didn't you see? Master Huang-p'o said, "Throughout its transmission, this Dharma School of ours has never taught men to seek knowledge or understanding. It only says, 'Study the path.' "" But actually these are only words of guidance. The path cannot be studied; if you study the path while passions still exist, you will only become deluded to the path. The path which has neither direction nor position is called the Mahayana mind. This mind does not exist inside, outside, or in between; in reality, it has no direction or position. Thus it is of primary importance not to give rise to conceptual understanding about it. I want only to tell you that even though you consider your present feelings and thoughts to be the path, once these feelings and thoughts are finished, your mind will have no direction or position.

The path is impeccable. Originally it is nameless. It is only because worldly men do not recognize it and stupidly remain in sensuality that all the Buddhas appeared in the world to destroy that tendency. Fearing that you would not understand, they conventionally established the name "path." But you should not consider that name to be an ultimate and base your interpretations on it. What I said before about a blind man misguiding others is similar to mistaking a fish-eye for a bright jewel. To make interpretations while remaining attached to names, or to teach people to maintain some sort of provisional practice all involve interpretations which are made while remaining attached to the awareness of the reflections before one's eyes.

To teach people that they must be absolutely intent on resting involves interpretations based solely on maintaining the void-calmness of indifference-that is, to teach people to rest until they attain an ignorant state wherein they are like earth, wood, tile, or rock. At such a time, to assume that such a state isn't merely dull nescience is an interpretation which wrongly endorses words which are designed as expedients to free people from bondage. To teach people to be attentive to their minds in all circumstances, telling them that they should not allow wrong attention to manifest, is another approach involving interpretation based on the misconception that the affective consciousnesses should be made void like a skull.

To teach people only to relax and let everything take care of itself shows a lack of concern for the arising of mental states or the activity of thoughts. The arising and vanishing of thoughts is originally devoid of any real essence. If you cling to them as being real, the mind which is subject to arising and ceasing will arise. This refers to a person who develops interpretations while assuming that maintaining a natural state is the ultimate Dharma. " These defects do not originate from students training on the path. They are all due to the erroneous instructions of blind masters of our school. "

Ta-hui said: If you want to understand the principle of the shortcut, you must blanket the one thought and suddenly break through it-then and only then will you comprehend birth and death. This is called the access of awakening.

You should not retain any thought which waits for that breakthrough to occur, however. If you retain a thought which simply waits for a breakthrough, then you will never breakthrough for an eternity of kalpas. You need only lay down, all at once, the mind full of deluded thoughts and inverted thinking, the mind of logical discrimination, the mind which loves life and hates death, the mind of knowledge and views, interpretation and comprehension, and the mind which rejoices in stillness and turns from disturbance. Only when you have laid down everything should you look into the following hwadu:

A monk asked Chao-Chou, "Does a dog have the Buddha-nature or not?" Chao-Chou replied, "WU! [No!]" This one word is the weapon which smashes all types of wrong knowledge and wrong conceptualization. You should not understand it to mean yes or no. You should not consider it in relation to doctrinal theory. You should not ponder over it logically at the consciousness-base. When the master raises his eyebrows or twinkles his eyes, you should not think he is giving instructions about the meaning of the hwadu. You should not make stratagems for solving the hwadu through the use of speech. You should not busy yourself inside the tent of unconcern. You should not consider it at the place where you raise the hwadu to your attention. You should not look for evidence in the wording. Throughout the twelve periods and the four postures, try always to keep the question raised before you and centered in your attention. Does a dog have the Buddha-nature or not? He said mu. Without neglecting your daily activities, try to work in this manner. "

I, Moguja, said: This Dharma-discourse only delineated eight defects. If we examine its exposition from beginning to end, however, we must also include these two defects: taking it to be the mu of true nonexistence and grasping at a deluded state, simply waiting for awakening. Consequently, together they amount to ten defects.

Ta-hui said further: Chao-chou's hwadu, "a dog has no Buddha-nature," must be kept raised before you regardless of whether you are joyful or angry, calm or disturbed. It is of prime importance not to set your mind on expecting an awakening-if you do, you are saying to yourself, "I am deluded now."

If you grasp at delusion and wait for awakening, then even though you pass through kalpas as numerous as dust motes, you will never achieve it. When you raise the hwadu, you must put your spirits in good order and inquire: "What is the meaning of this?"

Although the discussion to this point has been given in accordance with the faculties of the readers, the meaning lies beyond the ken of the logical operation of the mind and consciousness. It will enable men to remove the nails and pull out the pegs and to free themselves from the bridle and yoke. If you can attend carefully to your investigation, you will be able to cleanse away the preceding defects of conceptual understanding concerning the Buddha-Dharma. Then you will reach the ultimate stage of peace and happiness.

You must know that men who are cultivating the path in this present degenerate age of the Dharma should first, via conceptual understanding which accords with reality, discern clearly the mind's true and false aspects, its arising and ceasing, and its essential and secondary features. Next, through a word 'which splits nails and cuts through iron, you should probe closely and carefully. When a place appears at which your body can escape, it will be like the saying "to put a desk on the ground and have its four legs set firmly." Whether coming out into birth or entering into death, you will have complete mastery of yourself.

Through such a word or phrase which cuts through iron, you may reach a stage where your only passion is to train in this method which sloughs off cleansing knowledge and views; but if you have not yet gained authentic awakening, your conduct and understanding will perforce be out of balance and you will still have no mastery over the realm of birth and death. This is precisely what the ancient masters used to warn against. But if you will only awaken to the mystery in the word, you will be a pure patch-robed monk whose mind is free of intellectual knowledge and opinionated views about the Buddha-Dharma.

Even though this might finally happen, if knowledge and views still pressure you into acting, then your practice is still not correct. If you still have thoughts of liking and

disliking, anger and joy, oneself and others, success and failure, it is because you have not awakened to the mystery in the essence. External to the mind the sense-spheres still exist; hence, although it seems that you are awakened when you speak, when you are in contact with those sense-spheres you are still deluded. For such a person, it is better to rely on the words and teachings of Master Tsung-mi, which accord with reality, and put all your effort into investigation. This will enable you to subdue the thoughts of liking and disliking, anger and joy, others and self, success and failure. Since it is only through this sort of knowledge and vision of the Buddha-Dharma which accords with reality that you will find a way out of *samsara*, the mystery in the mystery, and the other proposition which was established separately will naturally come to exist within that conceptual knowledge and vision. You should not employ the approaches to Dharma of the three propositions and the three mysteries and investigate chaotically or get into controversial discussions.

If you are truly an outstanding person, you will not be pressured by words and speech or by intellectual knowledge and conceptual understanding. Then, throughout the twelve periods of the day, whether you are in contact with sense-objects or involved with conditions, you will neither disseminate mundane truths nor formulate theoretical notions about the Buddha-Dharma. If you do find the living road, you will naturally see the mistakes of all the Buddhas of the three time periods, the mistakes of the six generations of patriarchs, and the mistakes of all the masters of this generation. Afterward, if you will cart out the riches and treasures of your own home and offer them to all beings, the kindness of the sovereign and the kindness of the Buddha will, simultaneously, be completely requited.



ON INVESTIGATING THE HUA-T'OU

Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua

Now all of us have gathered together to investigate Ch'an. To investigate means to be single-minded. To be single-minded means that your mind does not wander off to one side, but that you concentrate on investigating your hua-t'ou. As for the hua-t'ou, any principle that can be pursued can be a hua-t'ou. Right at the point when you are about to speak, but before you actually do so, is the location of the hua-t'ou (literally, "word head"). After you've spoken, then it is no longer the word head, it has become the word tail. Before it is spoken, you carefully and exhaustively examine and drill into its principle and concentrate at every moment. Once you penetrate the entire principle, then you will open an enlightenment.

In regard to getting enlightened, there are great enlightenments and small ones, just as there are small pools, lakes, streams, rivers and the great sea. Upon opening a great enlightenment, you can completely understand everything, from how Buddhas are accomplished above to how living beings are brought into being below—you can understand it all. Above you can penetrate measureless kalpas and understand the ten thousand principles; below you can penetrate into the future realms without end, and understand all phenomena. Not only will you be able to comprehend the present, but in regard to the myriad things and principles of the universe, you will be able to read them like the palm of your own hand. At that point, you will not need to research or study, but will simply be able to understand these things naturally. You'll have become a greatly wise person in the world.

Opening a great enlightenment is called "the Great Disclosure of Perfect Understanding." It is immense, like the great sea which boundlessly, vastly encompasses all the tiny streams. Opening a small enlightenment is likened to a small pool of water; it

is the attainment of some sort of pure state. By applying effort, you can obtain a sort of light ease. However, this light ease only comes about through incessant work and effort.

How does one apply effort? Be like the cat watching over the mousehole. Observe how a cat watches over a mousehole. He uses all his time and patience, waiting for the mouse to come out of its hole. As soon as the mouse emerges, the cat springs forward and grabs the mouse, and he never lets go. People who investigate Ch'an should be watchful and alert like that. Or you should be like the mother hen trying to hatch her eggs. The hen firmly believes that her brood will hatch, so she climbs on top of the eggs and sits...and sits...waiting for the chicks to hatch. She won't leave them even for a second, except sometimes to get a little something to eat or to relieve nature; but even then she'll go away only for a moment and immediately return to continue brooding on her eggs. At this point she is single-minded, totally focused in the here and now, using every bit of her patience to wait. Once the chicks hatch, the hen's job is accomplished. People who investigate Ch'an should be that way; you should look into your hua-t'ou with just as much perseverance and concentration.

You should also be like the dragon nurturing its pearl. Every dragon has a precious pearl which it nurtures. It devotes its undivided attention to it and eventually the pearl becomes perfected. Therefore, investigators of Ch'an should not fear suffering or difficulty. Don't fear that your back aches or that your legs hurt. As it is said,

Without enduring the cold that bites to the bone,

How can the plum blossom give off such a heady fragrance?

And further,

If one can endure the suffering within suffering,

Then one will become a superior person.

Investigating Ch'an is just laying down a foundation. After a firm foundation has been laid, a hundred-story skyscraper can be built on it. Skyscrapers start from the ground up, they don't emerge from empty space. You people who investigate Ch'an should in every moment singularly pick up your hua t'ou and never cease your investigation and drilling into it. "Investigating a hua t'ou" does not refer to the recitation of a phrase, but rather to drilling into it, boring through it, and examining it very closely—perhaps for five minutes, or ten minutes, or perhaps for an hour. If you are concentrated to the ultimate point, even if you investigate for an hour, it will seem like just a second has passed. Why? Because when you are concentrated, time and space are forgotten. If you can truly forget time and space and reach the ultimate point, then suddenly you'll break through and open a great enlightenment.

AFTER A WHILE IT COMES NATURALLY

Everything in this world has within it the true and the false. Within the true, there's some falseness and in the falseness, there's some truth. The same goes with each individual. Each person has some merit as well as some offenses. In the past we created both good and bad karma, and all of this good and bad karma has been stored in the field of our eighth consciousness. It's possible to either increase your merit or your offenses—there are no fixed Dharmas. If you work hard, you earn more merit. If you don't work hard, you increase your offenses.

If you cultivate vigorously, you don't need to go about it in any fixed way. Just now, when someone said that sometimes he sits for five minutes, sometimes for an hour, or sometimes not at all, that's all right, but if you're just starting out, it's easy to get lazy. People need to spur themselves on in order to get going and keep going. If you just do

what you feel like doing, and don't discipline yourself, it's easy to fall into a pattern of advancing one step and retreating two. So there's a saying,

In the beginning, it feels forced, but after a while it comes naturally.

When you first start out, you have to force yourself to do it. But after you've practiced for a while, you get better at it and it comes more easily and naturally for you. At that time, when you're walking, you're not aware of it; when you're sitting, you are not aware that you're sitting; when you're standing, you don't realize you're standing; and when you're reclining, you don't know you're reclining. This is because you've gained freedom to do whatever you want in every respect. You're no longer hindered. When this happens, no matter what you do you'll always be cultivating—whether coming or going. Then, even if you're talking to people or hosting guests—no matter what you're doing—you'll still be working at your cultivation. At the point when everything comes together for you, this will happen.

So, in cultivation you must bear bitterness. I always say, “everything's okay.” You can say that everything's okay, but it's really not easy to be that way. It's one thing to say it; it's another to experience it. Cultivation is not always easy; at times you have to force yourself. Things come up that you really can't see through, and you have to gather in all your energy to put things down, to let go of things. That's not easy at all; sometimes it's very, very difficult. In saying, “it's okay, it's okay,” sometimes you may think, “Well, everything's okay,” and it will be okay for a while in a certain respect, but then something else will come up that is not okay. And just when you get that one worked out so it's okay, something else comes up that's **very much** not okay.

So it's very easy to say "everything's okay," but it's very hard to be that way. When you cultivate, you have to be prepared to do so bit-by-bit. And when you do your work, you have to do that bit-by-bit as well. Everything is really "a dream, illusion, bubble, shadow..." It's not real. You shouldn't get caught up in it all and take it all too seriously. Because as the Vajra Sutra says,

All conditioned Dharma are like
Dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows,
Like dew and like lightning flashes.
Contemplate them thus.

WHAT NO ONE ELSE WANTS TO DO

The aim of people who cultivate the Way is to become Buddhas.

Though confronted by a thousand demons, they do not waver.
Though faced by ten thousand demons, they do not retreat.

They go forward in this way, all for the sake of the unsurpassed Way. However, when Bodhisattvas get to the point where they could become Buddhas, they refrain from doing so; they choose to continue to accompany us living beings and forever cultivate the Way among us. They do not grasp at Proper Enlightenment. This vow-power of the Bodhisattvas transcends the selfishness of us living beings in infinite ways. Living beings are always looking out for themselves and are totally oblivious to other beings.

Bodhisattvas have exactly the opposite attitude. No one likes to take a loss, but Bodhisattvas do. No one wants to benefit others, but Bodhisattvas do. Everyone wants to become a Buddha a little sooner, but Bodhisattvas want to yield the opportunity to become a Buddha to others. As long as living beings have not become Buddhas, Bodhisattvas do not grasp at Proper Enlightenment. The magnitude of their minds and the power of their vows should make us feel very ashamed. Every move we make is calculated to benefit ourselves. Everything we do is selfish.

We should pay close attention to what we have heard tonight about this magnificent resolve of Bodhisattvas—that they do not grasp at Proper Enlightenment. Kuo Chen (Dharma Master Heng Sure) said that this was a great matter. Indeed, it is. Bodhisattvas want to do what no one else wants to do. Now we are studying the Buddhadharma and learning to be Bodhisattvas, so we should take the Bodhisattvas as models in our cultivation of the Way. With this in mind, go forth and apply effort to your practice of the Way.

But if you don't change your temper and cut off your afflictions, your cultivation will be of no great benefit. You can't just try to get out of work and say, "I won't talk, that way I won't have to do anything. I can be a self-ending Arhat and pay no attention to others and ignore everything else." Slow down, slow down—especially since you have just left the home-life. It is said,

Go too fast, and you will trip.

Dally, and you'll fall behind.

Never rush and never dally

And you'll get there right on time.

In cultivating,

In the beginning it is easy to be vigorous,

But hard to maintain as you go along.

You need to develop perseverance and become non-retreating.

Question: it is said that in Ch'an it is easy to catch a demon. What about this?

Answer: Some who cultivate are too selfish. Their view of self is too deeply rooted and they never forget themselves. They are always selfish and self-seeking. Selfishness makes it easy to catch a demon. They don't truly practice the bodhisattva path. Real cultivation of the Bodhisattva Way is done without being anxious. One doesn't seek for quick ways to get enlightened and become an "instant" Buddha. So those who want to go so "fast" may catch a demon.

Some people who cultivate like to be special. They always want to stand above the crowd and be better than everyone else. They hope to obtain spiritual penetrations or some flashy states to make them stand apart from the herd. So it's easy for them to catch a demon. In Ch'an meditation, you just investigate Ch'an with one heart and have no other false thinking. If you can be like that, demons won't be able to get to you. This is because you won't be having a lot of false thinking or deviant views. People who investigate Ch'an and have no deviant knowledge and deviant views will not get possessed by demons.

If you are public-spirited, open-minded, and unselfish—if you are not in a big hurry and trying to show everyone else up, but just turn your mind to one and work hard—then no demons can get you. It isn't that Ch'an leads to demonic possession or that it is in itself a dangerous practice. I mean, eating isn't dangerous, but if you eat way too much it can be. If you are greedy for flavors and over-eat, you can get sick. You abuse the purpose of eating. The same principle applies to Ch'an.



COMMENTARY ON THE NINTH KARMAPA'S "OCEAN OF DEFINITIVE MEANING"

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

The Mahasiddha (great adept) Naropa predicted to Lord Marpa, "Seon, just as lion cubs do, the disciples will surpass the guru." We understand this to have been a prediction of the flourishing and the increase in clarity of these Mahamudra (*seal of absolute reality*) instructions over time. The original source of these instructions was the instructions of the Indian mahasiddhas. But they taught somewhat cryptically through Songs. Over time, generation after generation, these instructions have been progressively clarified. This progressive clarification, which has caused these instructions to become more and more effective, has in each case and in each generation been based upon practical experience and realization of the path. At present, the guidance texts that we use for Mahamudra instruction and practice are the three books on Mahamudra by the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, of which the longest is our present text, *The Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. What is taught in this book is essentially the same thing that is taught in the original dohas (Songs) of the mahasiddhas. However, it is taught in a very precise, clear, accessible, and gradual way, so that there is all the instruction that one needs from the very beginning. It teaches how a beginner can start the path through the practice of tranquility, what kinds of experiences are likely to arise and what needs to be done about them, and then how gradually to introduce oneself to and begin the practice of insight. These detailed instructions are very helpful in practice; there is no doubt about this whatsoever. It has been proven over time that this particular system of instruction is extraordinarily beneficial. It is not the case that it might be useful or it might not; it definitely is. This book and the system of instructions from which it arises make it very easy for teachers to point out Mahamudra to students and make it very easy for students to actually practice Mahamudra. The book makes the whole path very simple and streamlined and makes you independent of relying on a lot of extraneous resources. What is pointed out in this text, what is gradually introduced to the student, is what in the sutras we call "emptiness" and what in the mantra system of Vajrayana we call "the

wisdom of great bliss.” The entire path of Mahamudra is presented in full detail, from the very beginning practice of a beginner up to the full achievement of the fruition of Mahamudra, called “great no-meditation.” Now, while I cannot say that I myself possess great blessings that I can bestow upon you, I can say with complete confidence that these instructions are so profound that there is no doubt whatsoever that they will help you and will enable you to practice effectively, and, therefore, I am utterly delighted to have this opportunity to offer these instructions to you. Obviously all of you take these instructions seriously enough to have made the effort to come here. Nevertheless, I still urge you to use the relatively short time we have together as fully and wisely as you can. Do not waste any of it. Remember that these instructions—whether you consider them as coming from the Dharmakaya Vajradhara, as being the instructions of the mahasiddha Saraha, or as coming from some other source—are the instructions that will enable you to dispense with all fear of lower states of rebirth and all fear of cyclic existence. I therefore ask you to practice with enthusiasm.

Yesterday we mainly looked at the first technique of insight practice— looking at the mind within stillness. By looking at the mind within the state of stillness you are trying to observe the mind’s nature in that state. The text goes on to clarify this practice and to discuss some of its implications. As you will see when you read it, the presentation of the implications of this practice is actually presented as questions to be posed by the guru or meditation instructor to the student practitioner. However, you can do this yourself by reading the text and honestly appraising your own experience. This is appropriate, because, after all, your own experience is not hidden from you. You yourself know best what you have been experiencing. The purpose of this assessment of experience, whether done in dialogue or done on your own, is to ascertain whether your experience is genuine or in some way faulty. This ascertainment can be accomplished quite clearly using this text. This portion of the text is as effective as if the Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa were sitting right in front of us asking us these questions himself. These particular questions are found in the forty-first teaching session.

The first question posed is, “What is your mind’s nature like?” At this point you have been practicing insight meditation and looking at the mind’s nature directly in the way, for example, you would watch the behavior of a bird. You have been looking to see how the mind comes to rest, how the mind moves, and so on. There are several things you might have experienced and that therefore might constitute your answer to this first question. You might say, “Well, there is nothing to find; I cannot find anything; there is simply nothing there.” Or you might say, “What I experience is a kind of vague obscurity, a sort of darkness.” Or you might say, “What I’ve experienced is lucidity, a kind of knowing.”

Another question posed is whether or not there is any difference in your experience between the practice of tranquility meditation and this first practice of insight meditation. Previously, when you were practicing tranquility alone, you brought your mind to a state of rest in a natural way. Now, what you are doing in the initial practice of insight is looking at the mind within that state of rest or stillness. Is the experience of looking at the mind within stillness any different from the experience of stillness itself, of the experience of tranquility alone? It might be exactly the same; there might be no difference whatsoever, or it might be slightly different. If you say that there is no difference whatsoever, that the experience of looking at the mind within stillness and the experience of just achieving a state of stillness itself are not different, then you are still just practicing tranquility. There is as yet no practice of insight, and the text says that you need to remember that tranquility alone, while it can weaken kleshas (defilements), cannot eradicate them; it cannot generate great wisdom. So, if there is no difference between this first practice of insight and the practice of tranquility, you need to keep looking. If there is a difference, if in your experience looking at the mind within stillness and simply resting in stillness are slightly different, then our text says you probably have a partial experience of your mind’s nature, in which case you should continue in the same way.

About looking at the mind, it was written by the Third Gyalwang Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, in his Aspiration of Mahamudra, “When one looks repeatedly at the mind which cannot be viewed or cannot be looked at.” That line indicates that, when you look at your mind, there is no object to be seen in the visual sense of something you can look at physically. He continues, “When you do so, you vividly see that which cannot be seen.” Vivid seeing is what we call insight or lhaktong (in Sanskrit, vipashyana). That which cannot be seen is the mind, which is not an object that is in any way separate from that which is looking. This kind of looking is not like looking outside yourself at trees or hills or buildings, and so on. Yet, while it is not an object to be viewed outside the looker, it can be experienced. There is an experience, which here is called “vividly seeing that which cannot be seen.” Now, when we look at the mind in this way, we are not trying to condition or alter the mind in any way. We are not trying to convince ourselves that that which does not exist, exists. We are not afraid of finding nothing and so are trying to find something. Nor are we trying to convince ourselves that that which exists, does not exist. We are not afraid of finding something and are not desperate to turn it into nothing. When we describe the mind, we have to say that it is not something in the usual sense of that word, because it has none of the substantial characteristics that we normally associate with words like “something” or “existence.” But we also cannot say that it is nothing, because when we say nothing, we mean nothing at all, absolutely nothing. If the mind were nothing in that sense, then it would be an utter absence, like the absence of mind in a corpse. The mind is not nothingness. Now, in order to attempt to communicate this state or characteristic of the mind, mahasiddhas have used different terminology. They have sometimes referred to it as the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness, or as the unity of the expanse and wisdom. Sometimes they simply say that it is inexpressible and beyond words. In any case, it is this nature, which cannot be easily characterized as one thing or another, which we are attempting in this practice to experience directly.

The previously quoted stanza by Rangjung Dorje goes on to say, “If you vividly see that which cannot be seen, you cut through doubt about any kind of, ‘It is this,’ or ‘It is not

this; 'It is that,' or 'It is not that.'" The last line of the stanza, which makes it an aspiration, reads, "May I see this just as it is without bewilderment or confusion." It is appropriate to make this aspiration and to attempt to accomplish it through practice, because what you are looking at is the nature of your own mind. Your mind, which is looking, is fully capable of seeing its own nature. It is not something that is distant from you or hidden from you in any way. It is, therefore, most important to put the effort into looking at the mind in this way. That is the first technique, looking at the mind within stillness. For some people this first technique will lead to experience of the mind's nature, and for some it will not. If it does not, then the text suggests that you allow a thought to arise. It does not matter what the thought is. It can be a good thought, a bad thought, a neutral thought, any kind of thought. When you allow a thought to arise, the first thing that will happen, the first thing you will experience, is the recognition that a thought has arisen. You will think, "Oh my mind moved; it is not at rest." And then you will recognize what the content of the thought is. It could be an angry thought, a lustful thought, a faithful thought, a regretful thought, a thought like, "Oh, I am happy," or, "Oh, I am sad," and so on. It does not matter what it is. Whether it is a thought of anger or sadness or delight or faith or any other kind of thought, when the thought has arisen and you experience the presence of the thought within your mind, look for it to see where it is. This means looking for the actual substance or stuff of the particular thought itself. For example, where is the anger? Or where is the sadness? Or where is the delight? And so on. Look to see where it actually is, and then look to see what it is. What is the actual stuff of which this anger or sadness or delight is made? What are its characteristics? Does it have a color? Does it have a shape? And so on. Now, the thought is in a sense there, because you experience it, but when you look right at it and when you look for it, you will not find anything. Why? Because the thought is empty. Even while the thought is there, it is empty. But its emptiness in no way prevents or diminishes its vivid appearance. This is why, so long as we have not meditated in this way, we follow thoughts; because, in spite of their emptiness, they continue to appear. So when a thought of anger arises, it takes hold of us, and we become angry; when a thought of sadness arises, it takes hold of us,

and we become sad. But if you are able to look at the nature of the thought, it dissolves. You are not overpowered by the apparent substance of the thought, because you see its emptiness, you see through it. So, doing insight practice in this way, looking at the nature of thoughts, can also lead to experience of the mind's nature and to identification of it. You also can apply this technique to other types of experience or cognition than the sixth consciousness. You can also apply it to the functions of the five sense consciousnesses.

For example, if you consider visual consciousness, obviously, when you close your eyes, you do not see external objects, shapes, colors, and so on. When you open them, you do. We are very used to seeing things; but exactly what happens when you see something? There is an event that we call cognition that occurs when you see something. But how does that happen, and where exactly do the object and the cognition encounter each other? Does the object in some way enter you, or does your cognition in some way flow out from you and encounter the object in its place? If you analyze this, you will see that, while you see things, neither is really happening. The object is not coming into you and your cognition is not going out to it. So, the eye consciousness sees, but it does not have a location anywhere; it seems to be nowhere. In the same way, if you scrutinize the experiences of hearing with the ear consciousness, smelling with the nose consciousness, tasting with the tongue consciousness, and feeling with the body consciousness, you will find that, while the intensity or vividness of the experience remains undiminished, you do not find anything when you look for it. The reason why you do not find anything is that the nature of the five sense consciousnesses is what we call emptiness. But the emptiness of the consciousnesses does not mean nothingness, because they are cognition, they are consciousness. So when you see something, that seeing is empty. When you hear something, that hearing is empty, and so forth. And yet the emptiness of seeing and the vividness of seeing in no way conflict with or inhibit one another. Therefore, it has been said by the learned, "While the apparent quality of appearance is undiminished, it is utterly empty; and while the emptiness of appearance is utterly undiminished, it is utterly

apparent.” This statement is true not only for visual appearances but also for the cognitions of all five sense consciousnesses.

Another way you can look at the mind, and you can do this in looking for any function of the mind—which is to say, you can look for the sixth consciousness or you can attempt to look for or locate any of the five sense consciousnesses—is to search through your body from the top of your head to the tips of your toes and try to see exactly where any particular consciousness is happening, where it is. You will not find any specific location for the cognition itself. On the other hand, you certainly cannot simply say, “It is nowhere,” because there is cognition. Now, this has to be experienced, and the experience is very different from simply understanding it through logical analysis. Through logical analysis and inference you can determine, “Well, it must be like this; this is how it must be, because there is no other possibility.” But that type of determination or certainty will not lead to direct experience. The direct experience needs to be gained through the act or process of direct observation, and that is what is meant, as I mentioned yesterday, by the view of direct valid cognition, the looking of direct valid cognition.



THE BASICS OF THE HUA T'OU METHOD

Fashi YaoXiang Shakya

This is an ancient method used in Chan practice. It is a question that is asked and asked about the circumstances, such as "Who am I?" The question, if done with sincerity, generative doubts and shifts the mind away from selfish mind content. Let us say, as an example, we are in a sticky situation, where the stress is on the rise and confusion is mounting. This type of scenario tends to cultivate self-protective and self-interest strategies making the mind vulnerable to various spells of harmful errors. To move the mind to the *hua t'ou* provides a method of letting go of the dusky content in the mind that is gathering (making) the stress and confusion into a storm. The method takes the mind with the words in the form of a question to the Source of the situation at hand. It is a move backward towards the head of the river (the Source) and inhibits the mind from taking a leap into the rush of defilements and tendencies in the mind. In plain language, it interrupts reactions and habits leaving the mind uncertain.

It is used to generate *doubt*, an uncertainty of the nature of what is rising. In meditation the mind often travels along the path of self-interest and gathers steam around the particulars of self-interest where the *hua t'ou* acts as a detour and a return towards the Source. The *doubt* is a gap which allows for the possibility of seeing beyond the reach of selfishness. The gap allows for a glimpse of things in the sky. This glimpse is wisdom that runs through all things which lifts up the mind heavenward. A *hua t'ou* has the capacity to break up delusive thoughts and ideas about the value and tenacity of selfishness, in whatever form and by whatever name it may appear. It closes the grasping, reaching and clinging of the confusion in the mind as if the confusion is real and inhibits the tendency to make things permanent and fixed.

