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People interested in Chan practice often find it difficult to have religious faith. As faith is intrinsically emotional, and Chan practitioners emphasize personal cultivation to gain physical and mental benefits or the experience of Chan, they find it hard to accept religious faith. This is actually a great mistake.

Many people think that Chan practice depends solely on their own efforts, requiring self-reliance, while those who practice by reciting the Buddha's name depend solely on external help. Both of these views are incorrect. In reality, Chan practice also requires external help, and the practice of reciting the Buddha's name also requires one's own effort. One can hardly become an accomplished Chan practitioner through one's own efforts. In India, China and Tibet, all meditators need the support and assistance of teachers, Dharma-protecting deities, and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. That is why Chan monasteries in China erect and worship the statues of Dharma-protecting deities such as the eight divisions of divinities and the four deva kings.

In the past, eminent masters often encouraged Chan

practitioners to "entrust their bodies to the monastery and their lives to the Dharma-protecting deities" during Chan meditation. You don't need to be concerned about your body since it will be taken care of by the masters on duty. You simply follow the monastery's routines. However, to achieve good results in your practice, you need the support of Dharma-protecting deities. Without such assistance, one may face physical and mental obstructions, which may turn into demonic hindrances. Practicing Chan depending solely on one's own efforts without believing in the power of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and Dharma-protecting deities cannot be considered practicing Buddhism at all.

Chan practitioners should believe that in addition to meditating diligently and working on Chan, they need to accumulate merit and cultivate virtue. The idea that one can attain enlightenment or liberation by meditating on one's own is itself an obstacle that precludes real liberation. How can a self-seeking person become enlightened? Therefore, the Chan school also emphasizes practices such as giving and repentance. If one does not show concern for the benefit of all sentient beings, sincerely give of oneself for others, and devotedly practice giving and make offerings, it will be quite difficult to succeed in

spiritual practice.

In the past, many as-yet-unenlightened Chan masters at large monasteries engaged in "work cultivation," performing all kinds of manual labor for their masters and monasteries. Such work included carrying water, chopping wood, cooking and other kitchen chores, growing vegetables, as well as cleaning up and maintaining the monastery and grounds.

At traditional Buddhist monasteries, forty-eight types of work were performed by monastic practitioners. Even today, they are relieved of complex tasks only during seven-day Chan retreats to avoid distractions. Otherwise, every monastic is assigned long-term tasks. Therefore, during our seven-day Chan retreats, we make it a rule to ask every participant to do some simple chores.

Chan monasteries encourage monastics to give their spare clothes, money or other possessions to the needy, keeping only the most basic necessities. In the past, a typical monastic Chan practitioner's belongings weighed just a little over one kilo, because they gave away whatever came into their possession.

From these examples, we can see that a Chan practitioner must be ready to make offerings and practice giving, as well as give away unnecessary

personal belongings to those who need them. Unfortunately, many Chan practitioners today are presumptuous, arrogant, selfish and petty, and lack faith. This is a pity-and dangerous. How did this happen? It's because people who take up Chan practice hope to have physical and mental experiences such as stability, joy and health. However, once these objectives are achieved, they see those achievements as the product of their own efforts, rather than the result of a spiritual response from the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, or the support of Dharma-protecting deities in the monastery. Nor do they believe these effects are due to the skilful guidance of a venerable master or certain teacher. As a result, they become arrogant, conceited and complacent, lacking both belief and a sense of respect.

"Faith" means that, in spite of our own limited capacities and knowledge, we believe in the existence of certain realities. This can best be illustrated by the Chinese expression: "We look up to a sage's noble behavior like looking up to a lofty mountain. Unattainable though it may seem, we yearn for it in our hearts." When we see a lofty mountain, even though we're as yet unable to reach its peak, we still believe that there must be great masters residing yonder, and

the scenery must be fantastic. The higher we climb, the more we discover things we've never seen before. This is belief based on admiration. Standing far below, we revere what is high above us, generating a belief that there must be some unknown power above that can help us. But if our faith is insufficient, we won't be able to believe in things that Buddhism talks about that are beyond our ken, and our spiritual practice will not be effective.

Chan Buddhism advocates belief in our own nature, that is, the belief that we ourselves can attain Buddhahood, and that we are originally the same as all Buddhas, not lacking in any single attribute of a Buddha. Chan Buddhism asserts that if only we let go of our self-centeredness, we will instantly see our "original face," so we can all attain Buddhahood. Our original face is the Buddha in our own nature. The Buddha-nature is inherent in us, not acquired after cultivation. For this reason, many people misunderstand Chan Buddhism and neglect the importance of faith.

The basic theory that we are all intrinsically Buddhas is correct. But in practice, it doesn't quite work that way. As an illustration, everyone may become a parent, but does that mean a newborn baby is

a parent? He has yet to grow up and reach adulthood. He is not a parent yet, and is still a baby. Will a baby become a parent in the future? Not necessarily. Those who take monastic vows at an early age and practice celibacy will not become parents, nor will those who are married but infertile. In theory, everyone can be a parent. But in actuality, it's not necessarily so.

Similarly, in a democratic society every citizen has the right to vote, and be elected to office. However, while the majority have the right to vote, few have the opportunity to be elected. Due to a lack of ability or causes and conditions, we can only vote, but can never be elected. There are, however, those who, upon hearing that in Chan teaching "everyone has the Buddha-nature," fancy themselves as equivalent to Buddhas with perfect wisdom, though they are nothing but ignorant, mediocre people. Seeing Buddha images, they not only refuse to prostrate, but scoff, saying that as present Buddhas themselves, they do not prostrate to past Buddhas. They think, "I have a Buddha within. Why bother to worship clay or wooden statues of Buddhas, or their painted images!"

Such people believe that only their own mind is the Buddha and that there is no Buddha outside their mind. When they see other people making prostrations, they

call it attachment. When people prostrate to a venerable master, these self-proclaimed Chan practitioners shake their heads and sigh, "There's no need to prostrate to the Buddha, let alone a monastic."

One time, while someone was prostrating to me, they were pulled up by a lay practitioner who said to them, "Don't prostrate! Don't harm the master!" I, to whom the followers made prostrations, was being harmed? I was puzzled, so I asked, "What do you mean? How is he harming me?" He said, "If you are really an eminent monk of great attainment, do you still need to have people prostrate to you? If you do, that means there is attachment in your mind. The more people prostrate, the more you feel like an eminent monk. You won't attain liberation and enlightenment your whole life."

I thought to myself, "Well! He has a point."

The lay practitioner continued, "If you have really attained liberation, then when he prostrates to you, you should reproach him saying, 'Don't be attached to anything. Since one should have no notion of self, person, sentient beings, or beings with a lifespan, naturally there should be no notion of master and disciples. Why bother to make prostrations!'"

Oh! This layman has a really sharp tongue. I asked

him, "Do you prostrate to the Buddha?"

He said, "I prostrate to the Buddha within."

I asked, "How do you do that?"

He replied, "I don't do it with my body, but with my mind."

I asked, "How do you do it with your mind?"

He said, "Achieving a free and easy state of mind is prostration. Having no obstructions in the mind is prostration." What he meant is that there was no need to prostrate to Buddhas or bodhisattvas, and he believed in nothing but himself. Actually, this is neither Buddhism nor Chan, but a type of arrogant, demonic view that lacks faith. This kind of person may have had some minor experiences in meditation and developed a kind of overconfidence, which we call "pride of superior attainment." After having read some specious Chan texts, they are caught up in erroneous views. While in this life, they think they've already attained liberation. Once they die, they may be reborn in the heavenly realm if they have great merit. However, because they don't have the right view and understanding or believe in the Three Jewels, they will fall into a miserable plane of existence once they've exhausted their karmic rewards in heaven. If they have an improper attitude, don't keep the precepts, and

always do evil, they'll fall into hell as fast as an arrow.

Therefore, Chan masters believe in the existence of heaven, hell, Buddha lands, and worlds of troubles. Only to highly advanced Chan practitioners who are practicing vigorously but still harbor some attachment in their minds would a Chan master say, "There is no Buddha, no Dharma, and no Sangha. There is no heaven and hell." Chan masters say this because liberation can never be attained if one's mind is attached to the Three Jewels, heaven, or hell. On the other hand, beginning Chan practitioners must be reminded to make a clear distinction between cause and effect, and between ordinary people and sages. Otherwise, in speaking against attachment, they become trapped in inverted views, reversing cause and effect, and, as ordinary people, passing themselves off as sages. Ordinary people are just ordinary people. We should not fancy ourselves as ancient Buddhas who reappear in this world, equal in all respects to the Buddhas of the past, present and future.

Chan practice is not just sitting meditation. Chan practice is not about just talking big, or solely seeking enlightenment and wanting to be equal to all past, present and future Buddhas. While promoting Chan teachings, we should also emphasize the importance of

faith. By so doing, we can make it easier for people to practice successfully and help uplift their character.

Chan methods also require that we let go of our attachment to the self. This must start with having faith, practicing giving, and keeping the precepts. Eliminating this attachment requires a sense of shame, humility, gratitude, and repentance. We should also have faith in the Three Jewels, Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the various Dharma-protecting deities, and Chan patriarchs, as well as the teachers who guide us in our practice.

Contrarily, if you are so arrogant that, having barely embarked on the Chan path, you refuse to prostrate to the Buddha, respect the Dharma and Sangha, or believe in the various Dharma-protecting deities, then don't even think about the possibility of attaining enlightenment or seeing your true nature.