CHAN'IN DAILY LIFE

Master Sheng Yen



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Chan in Daily Life

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Foreword

Most modern people live a busy life, face a complex interpersonal relationship, and develop an increasing desire for material wants. As much as they seek to satisfy their desires, a lot of people in modern society tend to become more and more anxious and restless, and thus are more likely to feel lost and helpless.

In fact, the busier we are, the more we need to learn sitting meditation and engage in Chan practice. Chan practice helps us calm our emotions and improve our work efficiency, developing the wisdom required for handling things. The true purpose for sitting in meditation practicing Chan is not to escape from the real world and merely enjoy the delightful sensation experienced on the cushion. Instead, it is through meditation practice that we remind ourselves to apply the methods of Chan practice in our daily life. Merely putting the effort on the cushion without actually practicing Chan in daily life is like "talking about food and counting others' wealth," which brings no benefit of Chan practice.

This booklet includes six chapters of articles selected from Master Sheng Yen's Dharma talks on Chan practice, about how to apply the methods of Chan practice in our everyday life, as well as how to use Chan Buddhist concepts and methods to deal with problems when faced with various situations, to become a Chan practitioner with freedom of body and mind, capable of calmly adapting to conditions as they arise.

Dharma Drum Mountain Translation Group

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The Problems of Modern Life



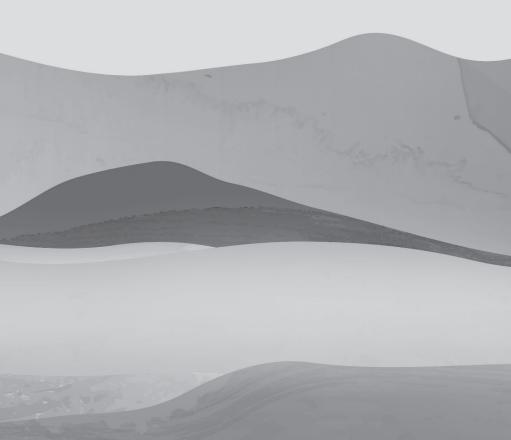
nerally speaking, the problems of people nowadays **J**can be seen in four aspects: First, life today is marked by frequent changes and fast movements, unlike the more stable lifestyles in the past. Second, today people live more and more distant from each other; there is less and less interaction, mutual care, and concern among people. Third, since people in modern societies today enjoy abundant material comforts, sustaining life is no longer difficult. Nevertheless, people's desires are endless. Because people pursue more and more pleasure and excitement, many strange and eccentric lifestyles have emerged. Fourth, not confident and secure about future prospects, people live under constant stress and uncertainty.

If we look deeper, however, we find that although their living environments are different, the psychological problems of people today and in the past are actually similar. The roots of the problem lie in the pain of being alive, or of feeling forlorn, small, and helpless. This very problem had already been discovered in Shakyamuni Buddha's time. In fact, the pain of being alive has never changed and is never going to change. Nonetheless, I

would still like to raise some major issues. For example, people today face ever more family, marital, and parenting problems. As well, career and environmental problems are much more complex. This is because, despite the advantages of modern life, it is not that easy to live and survive.

(excerpted from Chan and Enlightenment)

How Chan Practice Can Benefit Modern People



In the past, Chan was practiced by monastics in the mountains, where they spent much time meditating. This is the source of the saying, "A senior monk absorbed in meditation." But nowadays, Chan meditation is increasingly popular among lay people. In today's commercial and industrial society, people live a hectic life—busy with working, rushing home, watching TV, going to movies, going out for fun, looking after their children, looking after their spouse, and so on. Busy with everything in their lives! Even playing can be something to be busy with. Therefore, I say that busy people are the ones that need Chan the most.

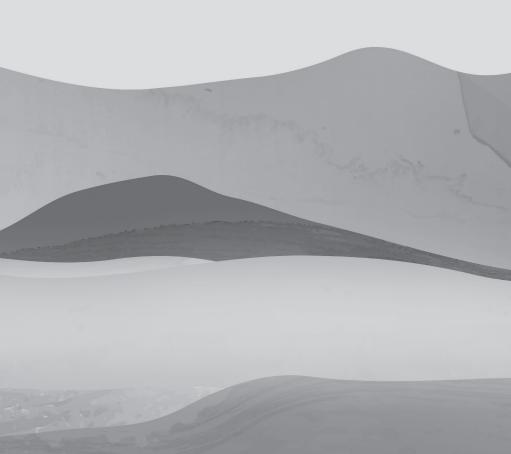
I often come across very busy people, and encourage them to practice sitting meditation and learn Chan. But they would say, "Master, look how busy we are. How can we ever find time and leisure to learn sitting meditation? Meditation, that's only for monks!" I said, "Monks nowadays are different from those in the past; they are busy too. But, it is exactly because one is busy that one needs meditation. Meditating helps you regulate your body and mind so you can find more time for the things

you need to do." Believe it or not, busy people often have moments when they will make mistakes. When one is busy, one will not be as meticulous or stable and thus, one's efficiency will be compromised.

Studies show that people are less likely to lose their temper when they have meditated in the morning. When you start the day with meditation, you tend to have a more stable mood for the rest of the day. Therefore, if busy people can spare some time during the day to meditate, they would enhance their work efficiency, and save working time. As a result, they will have more spare time. That is why today in Japan and Taiwan busy people in corporate and political circles practice meditation. When you are troubled and occupied with work, taking time to meditate is the best way to help yourself. So, meditation is not something for monks to entertain themselves when they have nothing else better to do.

(excerpted from *Chan and Enlightenment*)

Chan and Modern Life



Than is wisdom, peacefulness, and purity. Wisdom is ✓ not being disturbed by the environment; peacefulness is not being confused by the environment; purity is not being defiled by the environment, not being influenced by its chaos and not being chaotic within.

Chan and the Busy Modern Life: Busy yet Orderly, Enjoying Breathing

Modern life is very busy; other than vagrants on the streets and people who indulge in idleness, everyone has a busy life. For most people it is to earn a living, support a family, or pursue a career. As for those few who dream and hope, most of them are working for the safety and happiness of society, not just for the present but for the future as well. I am a very busy person but I do not feel anxious when busy. An anxious mind is confused, and a confused mind brings vexations. From the standpoint of Chan, if one can handle situations properly, being busy can be a method to eliminate vexations. Therefore, the busier a bodhisattva is the stronger their aspiration for the path of bodhi-mind. When not busy, ordinary people feel bored

or indulge in flights of fancy. However, when they are busy they feel dizzy, flustered and chaotic, which is also bad. When you are busy and feeling vexed, consider the basic methods of Chan practice: relax the body and mind, be aware of the breath going in and out of the nostrils, enjoy the breath, experience the breath, and before long you will have a peaceful and clear mind.

Chan and Modern Life: Relax Body and Mind, Experience and Feel

Modern people are always nervous, whether eating, sleeping, shopping, even going to the beach, swimming, and vacationing in the mountains. Recently I was in Rome. During lunchtime I was racing against the clock, so I had to go to the restaurant, order lunch, finish my meal, and leave within half an hour. When the meal was served, I didn't have much time left, so I just stuffed my mouth. I wasn't chewing, enjoying, or tasting the food, just swallowing it.

In modern society more and more people need to

see a psychotherapist, and the main reason is because so many situations cause people anxiety. For example, in family relationships, one often feels relaxed for a short time and nervous most of the time. In the workplace and in social settings, interpersonal relationships tend to have more tension and less ease. Even in leisure activities or on vacation, people still worry and feel insecure wherever they go; afraid of being hit by a drunk driver, worried about their handbag being stolen, etc. The instability between man and nature, man and society, man and family, even man and himself, causes tension of body and mind. When it is not serious, one may still feel helpless and without choice; if it is serious, it can result in fear, anxiety, and mental illness, which is common nowadays.

People with anxiety deserve sympathy, but most people also get anxious if they have too much work and too little time to do it. People with a tendency towards mental illness find it more difficult to relax their body and mind; day and night they are tense and anxious. Those with more serious conditions may need medication to temporarily relieve mental stress. Therefore, from the standpoint of Chan, when one discovers oneself being anxious in daily life, one should relax the mind and relax the muscles. If one cannot do this one can also try to experience one's mental state objectively; that could also help one to relax.

Chan and Fast Modern Life: Fast but not Rushed. Peacefulness in Motion

Modern life is all about speed—people travel by jet, fast boats, and fast cars, use power tools and machinery, and eat fast food. Even marriage and divorce happen in a flash. There is nothing inherently wrong with being fast. But when people rush through their work, they get nervous easily, lose self-control, and are controlled by the environment. They only try to keep up with other people and things in the environment. Faster! Faster! Without considering why they should follow everyone else and move so fast. High work efficiency enhances competitiveness but in going fast, one can get nervous, lose emotional control, and get angry. And an angry person easily gets into trouble.

Even if you could live a hundred years, that is only 36,500 days. Within a single day the amount of work you can do is still very limited. If you wish to accomplish more and do better, it is almost impossible not to work swiftly. But if you have clear plans and work swiftly by following clear schedules and procedures, you won't feel so nervous. Only those without clearly defined goals, and who rush through their workday will feel nervous. Therefore, I propose that you work swiftly but in an orderly way, and not anxiously race against time.

The correct Chan attitude is to work diligently and forget oneself for the sake of the Dharma. Vow to help countless sentient beings, eliminate endless vexations, learn numerous Dharma methods, and accomplish the supreme Buddhist Path. One will proceed swiftly and busily while still being delighted and relaxed. Two of my disciples have completely different personalities. One is slow in action with a slow temper, has slow-moving hands, and a slow walk. He is never in a rush and never gets angry but his work efficiency is not bad. The other disciple is always busily running around, often complains about having only two arms and two legs, and having too much to do. He is always anxious and angry but his work quality is only average. The first uses Chan attitudes and methods, while the second is unable to use the Chan methods. Of these two situations, it would be best to work swiftly without rushing; otherwise, it is better to be less efficient while still maintaining the ease and relaxation of body and mind

Chan and Isolated Modern Life: All are Buddhas, All One Flesh and Blood

Isolation is when there is great social distance between people and people do not care about or interact with one another. For example, in a modern family a couple may work in different professions, and the children in school are at different levels, or even the whole family could be studying or working far away from each other. Not only is it difficult to meet face-to-face in the daytime, the times of rest or sleep may also be different. And some couples may not exchange more than a sentence within a day. The situation is no different between parents and children.

Once the children are sent to nursery school, they are taken care of by the teacher, and it is difficult for parents and children to meet each morning and evening; some perhaps only meet several times in a week. As for modern people living in apartments, they do not care about the neighbor next door. It may even be redundant to greet each other in the elevator, since there is no need to know their name and what they do. There is no longer any mutual caring or assistance.

On one of my recent trips, a flight attendant who had been in service for twelve years hoped I could tell her fortune, to let her know when she will get married. Obviously she was asking the wrong person, but I said to her, "You fly every day and meet so many people; why can't you meet someone to marry?" In fact, although she meets many people every day, they are all strangers, and she feels that none of them could have a heart-to-heart chat with her.

From the standpoint of Chan, one should relate to people in the same way as buddhas and bodhisattvas in the Pure Land. Although there are differences between familiar and unfamiliar people, the feeling should still be very close. We all live together on this one Earth, and are interconnected by breathing the common air. Although we may not be related by kinship, we are interconnected in life. If we can generate this kind of warm feeling in our minds, then when we encounter anyone, wouldn't it be like meeting our own relatives and friends? If we could further use the methods of Chan and expand the small self into a big self, then we would know that everyone is closely related and inseparable from ourselves. We would not feel that others are so distant and unfamiliar.

Chan and Modern Life: The Needs are Few, Being Content and Happy

Modern life is materially abundant but that also complicates the living environment. Because of abundance, the desires of human beings have also become very strong. Seeing what someone else has, we want to have it, too. Already having many conveniences, we may wish for more. These desires cause us to be tempted by materialism, and one loses self-control, self-judgment, and self-confidence. The relationship between human desires and material civilization is like a person atop a tiger. If he gets off, the tiger devours him. Therefore, he must continue to ride the tiger and as the tiger runs faster, the rider gets more nervous. Yet no matter how nervous he gets, he dares not let the tiger stop in its tracks. Modern people often have this mindset.

We need not strongly resist abundance in modern life, but we should be able to resist its temptations. If we use the concepts of Chan in daily living, we will not be overly influenced by the material environment and feel vexed. The reason is because Chan emphasizes spiritual liberation and freedom, and if we can obtain peace then we will not regard material comforts as the goal of life. Therefore, we should go deeper into the spiritual aspect of Chan, experience it more, and practice harder. That way, we would be more immune to the temptations of materialism.

I propose this motto: "Our needs are few but our wants are many." "Needs" are the minimum conditions

for survival, and "wants" are the vexations of desire. If people did away with the "wants," then the "needs" would not be a problem. People practicing Chan will not feel empty or insecure, and their desires will definitely lessen. They would be content with less and be happy while feeling content. Twenty years ago, I attended a meeting in Taipei and the attendees were all rich businessmen and high officials. After the meeting the doorman asked me, "Master, where is your car? I could contact the driver on your behalf." I said: "My vehicle is parked very far away. If you call it, it will not come, because it is a public bus." He felt sorry for me: "Oh, master! How could you not have your own car?" At the time, if I really thought that I must have my own car to attend such a meeting, wouldn't I be influenced by the environment and lose my sense of self?

Chan and Modern Pollution: Cherishing Blessings, Purifying the Environment

Everyone wishes that the global environment could be more tranquil, pure, steady, and secure. However, they only know about pursuing the beauty of their own environment, ignoring the fact that the environment of the entire Earth is being devastated at an alarmingly rapid rate. There are four major sources of pollution in the living environment: (1) each family produces much trash every day; (2) hospitals also generate a lot of medical waste; (3) chemical fertilizers and pesticides pollute agricultural soil; (4) manufacturing and technology seriously deplete and pollute the earth's mineral resources, as well as air and water resources. Everyone is aware that these problems must be improved, but at present people are still unable to do much about it. Even if some improvements are made, the speed of the improvements is no match for the speed of devastation.

To protect the living environment from further pollution, the most important thing is human awareness, instilling frugality, appreciation for what we already have, and the adoption of simpler lifestyles. Lessening desires would diminish defiling the mind, and devastation of the environment would decrease. Besides being content with fewer desires, one should also practice Chan to maintain a stable and peaceful mind. When the mind is out of balance, one's physical and verbal actions may become violent and rude, hurtful to oneself and others. One becomes like a walking time bomb. If someone like that has not already given in to despair, they could possibly become cynical, causing trouble for the family and hurting society. This would damage and defile the social environment and people's minds; it would also bring disaster upon oneself. It is like a pack of hungry wolves charging into a flock of starving chickens and dogs, making the chickens fly and dogs jump, creating restlessness, unease, and panic for the people. If we use the concepts and skills of Chan to help every individual, then everyone could live in a peaceful, balanced, and purified environment, which would be a pure land on Earth.

Chan and Anxieties in Modern Life: All is Well, as You Like It

Modern communication being so rapid causes people much anxiety and nightmares; they cannot feel relaxed as long as there is social disorder throughout the world. This is true whether one experiences this directly or indirectly, whether it concerns the self, family, society, country, political/economic life, or religious belief. As long as the situation affects one's personal safety or peril, gain or loss, success or failure, people cannot sit back and relax.

Yesterday, a lay Buddhist who has many anxieties came to see me. At first, he was anxious about his wife because the couple was not in harmony. Then, when the wife ran away with the child without saying goodbye, he was anxious for his child. He loses sleep every night and is perturbed in the day; when he loses emotional control, he gets worried that he can't do his job well, and he doesn't know what to do about it. I could only advise him to use wisdom to deal with things, and compassion to care for people.

The day before yesterday I received a letter from a woman whose husband just passed away, and a hoodlum abducted their only daughter. Meanwhile she has a malignancy that requires surgery, and her boss wants her to return to her post immediately, otherwise her job would be at stake. However, her doctor told her that if she did not have surgery, the condition would worsen. Yet she does not have any money to pay the medical expenses. Although she still had some stocks, their value was at their lowest point, and she couldn't part with them, her only assets. The doctor also told her that there was only a 50 percent chance of being cured after surgery. This all made her very anxious, so she wrote a letter to me asking for help.

I frequently encounter people who seem to be trapped in a fire, and who come for help. Generally, I listen to their problems, know what their anxieties are, but I don't let their problems become my own nightmares. The advice I give them is: for emotional problems, apply rationality; for family problems, ethics is the best solution. Even if something major happens, you should take time to resolve and mitigate it. If it is a truly unavoidable misfortune, then you can only face it and accept it; by facing and accepting it, you are dealing with it. Since it is already dealt with, then there is no reason to worry about it, so let go of it. Don't constantly think, "What should I do?" Just sleep as before, eat as before, and live as you ought to live.

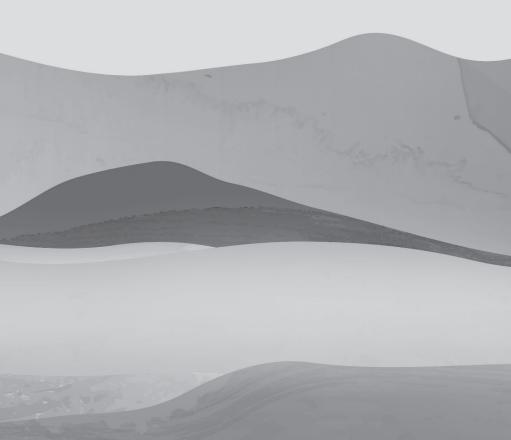
If one deals with sentimental problems emotionally, and tries to use rationality with family problems, that would be like putting out a fire with gasoline, or using arguments to solve an argument. It can only make the situation worse. One should have compassion and be thoughtful of the other party when dealing with relationships; otherwise, not only does one offend the other party, one would have no way out for oneself. When dealing with matters, apply wisdom and handle the problems from an objective view. Once the problems are made objective, one can see clearly the best way to deal with them. If one has to choose one of two options, then first clarify their relative importance and urgency, then decide which one can be put aside, and undertake the one that is doable.

Buddhism teaches us that all phenomena are illusory since they have no self-nature. As such, free yourself from attachment; since they are impermanent they are also empty. The Chan teachings are Buddhadharma. Use the Chan methods to illuminate the mind and transcend self-attachment; go beyond the false duality of existence

and emptiness. By doing so, you will realize that there is nothing that should make you anxious. If we know that there were no problems in the world to begin with, then everything is just the way we want it to be.

(excerpted from Liberated in Stillness and Motion)

How to Practice Chan in Daily Life



Integrate Body and Mind

Put your mind where your body is; engage your mind in what your body is doing. Your mind and your body should be inseparable and integrated, so whatever your hands are doing and wherever your feet are, put your mind there. For example:

- 1. When working in the kitchen, boiling or carrying water, when picking, chopping, or cleaning vegetables, keep your mind on your movements, and do not give rise to other thoughts.
- 2. When cooking, focus on the activities of cooking, with no scattered thoughts.
- 3. If you are feeding your child, then single-mindedly feed her, with no other thoughts; the mind should be very clear, relaxed, and joyful.

Plan ahead and know what to do next. If a task is already planned out, then while you're actually doing it, you won't have to use your brain to think about it. Especially in everyday life, you have carried out some daily routines: gargling, brushing your teeth, shaving, washing your face, and putting on your clothes—who knows how many times—and you don't need to think about it. For things that require thinking, you have to think, but for things that don't require thinking, there's no need to use your brain before doing them.

There are always habitual actions that don't require thinking, so most people just let their minds wander, random and chaotic. Actually, there's no need to let the mind wander, just be clearly aware of what you're doing. For example, when sweeping the floor, make each sweeping motion a discrete action, and be clear that you are sweeping. Do likewise when you're washing dishes or eating.

However, when performing an action or dealing with some matter for the first time, or when you're not familiar with that action or matter, you need to reflect on how to do it. While carrying out the task, if you aren't clear about something, you still need to think. That way you won't set wandering thoughts in motion, and can perform the task single-mindedly.

For example, a mother holds a cut flower in her hand and thinks about how she can arrange the flower in the vase, and then places it there carefully. This process shows an undistracted mind, free of wandering thoughts. Conversely, if cutting and arranging flowers has become routine, and while holding the flower she's thinking, "What's that child doing over there? Hmm, that's strange! Why is he so quiet? What is he getting into? Huh? He's moving! Why are his footsteps so loud?" So are these wandering thoughts? Yes, they are. So our mind should be focused on and involved in everything that we do. Keeping the mind on what we're doing is right mindfulness as opposed to wandering thoughts. So our physical actions and mental thoughts should always be unified.

Congruence of Mind and Speech

For example, right now I'm speaking to you, one sentence after another. But if I'm thinking about something else, wouldn't I be rambling? Of course I would because my words and my thoughts will basically be two different things. If you're speaking a sentence while thinking about the previous sentence, or the one before that, that's also letting the mind wander.

So whatever we say, we should be clearly aware of what we're saying. After we finish a sentence, the next sentence naturally comes out. But before we speak, we should first consider what we're going to say, rather than blurting out whatever we feel like saying. Otherwise, we talk nonsense, not knowing what we're talking about. Or maybe we don't actually have much to say, but just want to keep on talking. These are all wandering thoughts, not unity of word and thought. When word and thought are unified, we know what we are going to say, and what is expressed will be clear. That's because a spiritual practitioner clearly understands their own physical movements and verbal behavior, and thus they will not do or say the wrong thing.

Connection between the Mind and the Eyes

We can sense when people let their minds wander by the look in their eyes, ever-shifting and unsteady, their minds adrift. You can't tell what they are looking at. On the surface they may seem to be watching everything, but in fact they're not focused on any particular object, and they don't understand why they are looking. They don't know what to do with their eyes, but the thoughts in their brain just keep moving; so the expression in their eyes just drifts in space, like a spaceship. So we can observe whether someone's thinking is focused and stable from the look in their eyes.

In our daily life, we should take full responsibility for our every action; this means moving steadily one step at a time, being practical and realistic, while consolidating progress at every step along the way. When walking, move ahead carefully, step by step. When speaking, proceed gradually, with care. All of our actions should be carried out that way. Neither disordered and disjointed, nor random and sporadic, our body and mind, and our mind and speech, should be unified and integrated.

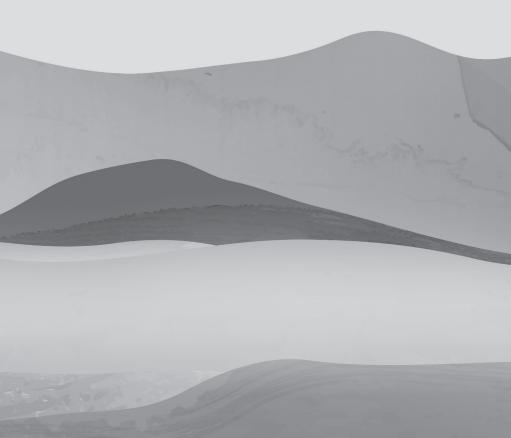
If, over time, you have fewer wandering thoughts, and a little more right mindfulness, wisdom will increase

by the day, and you will be able to open the "wisdom eye." With the wisdom eye opened, you will certainly eliminate affliction and troubles. Only by stabilizing the mind can we reduce afflictions. When mind and body are unified, and mind and speech are integrated, the mind's afflictions will gradually diminish. When external phenomena disturb you, pay attention to what is in your mind, what you are seeing, and what you are hearing. That way, afflictions will gradually disappear. As a result, you will hear what you are supposed to hear, and see what you are supposed to see.

For example, when someone hits you, if you pay attention to the act of being hit, and your sensation of being hit, then your mind will not give rise to afflictions. If you hear other people scold you, but stay clear about the sound of the scolding and are aware that you are the person being scolded, then your mind will not have afflictions. However, if your mind gives rise to turbulence—"Why did he hit me? Why was I scolded?" If you think like that, afflictions will definitely manifest because you're paying attention to the other party. On the contrary, you should clearly focus your attention on your own thoughts, then



Using Chan to Solve Problems



Today, social interactions are more frequent, and personal contacts have expanded. However, everyone is working hard, fighting or planning, mainly in the interests of themselves and their group. As a result, there is personal as well as social conflict. These conflicts are more explicit than that seen in societies in the past. How can these problems be solved? From the perspective of modern people, it is through overcoming difficulties, changing the environment, and changing the other party. With this approach, we may be able to overcome some problems and change the other party a little bit; however, in the process, we may create even more problems. That is why we need to talk about Chan, and realize how Chan can help address these problems.

What is Chan Buddhism? The origins of Chan are in India, where meditation represented an approach and effort to teach people to reflect on oneself. It required one to examine one's inner mind rather than seeking external solutions. When a problem occurs, don't just look at the problem itself; instead, turn around and reflect: "Why would this problem and difficulty happen to me?" With

this approach, one would eventually realize that the problem starts with ourselves, and its solution also starts with ourselves.

Traditionally, religions in India practiced meditative concentration to resolve afflictions and relieve pain and suffering. At times you may be in agony and feel vexation, and don't have anyone to talk to. At such times, you may think the best way to feel better was to just go to bed, get under the blanket, and sleep until morning. When you wake up the problem may still be there, but your suffering may have been alleviated, at least temporarily.

First, by practicing meditative concentration we can achieve what some people only try to achieve by going to bed. We can put aside our problems and use meditation to settle the body and mind, thus achieving some peace of mind. As a further step, by practicing Chan with a peaceful mind, we can generate the wisdom to deal with problems, facing them, and then solving them. Traditionally, the concentration methods practiced in India were, first, to put aside the problem, and next, to solve the problem

smoothly. That is, through meditative concentration we generate wisdom, which helps us solve our problem, thus alleviating affliction.

(excerpted from Chan and Enlightenment)

Chan Practice in Daily Life



 $\bigwedge \mathcal{T}$ e should not use Chan wisdom only when sitting in meditation; we should also practice and experience it in daily life. When performing any task, we need to focus on that task—when cooking, focus on cooking; when eating, focus on eating; when driving, focus on driving; when sleeping, focus on sleeping. We need to both focus on the task and relax the body and mind. Setting out to do anything in a state of tension is contrary to the defining attribute of practice. What causes a tense mind? There are normally three reasons: worrying about poor performance, worrying about not finishing the task, and hoping to do even better. As long as we are earnest and clearly know what we are doing, fully engaged, diligent and focused, and able to complete it in a relaxed manner, then it will definitely be done well and at the same time, we won't feel too tired. This is a Chan practitioner's way of life. (excerpted from The World of Chan)

Appendix

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- E-3 A General Introduction to the Bodhisattva Precepts
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