

Gradual Cultivation and Sudden Enlightenment

Dharma Lectures by the Grand Master Wei Chueh

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Different paths to buddhahood

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

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

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

Attaining sudden enlightenment is to realize that if this present, ordinary mind is free from any effort or pretension, then this very mind is wisdom, is “true suchness”, and is the profound bodhi mind of the Tathagata. When we awaken to the bodhi mind, we realize that everyone possesses the Buddha nature, that everyone can become a bodhisattva. We also realize how precious and real we are, how all beings in this world are endowed with infinite hope and infinite life.

Gradual cultivation means realizing the fundamental principle by way of perfecting our actions. Sudden enlightenment means realizing the fundamental principle first, then perfecting our actions. If we don’t have the chance or causal conditions for sudden enlightenment, then we can always practice gradual cultivation. It may seem that gradual cultivation and sudden enlightenment

are very different methods, but in fact they are interrelated and even complementary practices.

Relative and absolute truths

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

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

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

Although we all have this awareness, this sentience, yet the level of wisdom and compassion displayed by everyone is different. Why are there such differences? If some people are wiser than others, it doesn't mean that they have more inherent awareness than others; it just means that their minds are more lucid and clear. They are less discriminative and have fewer afflictions and delusions. People who lack wisdom have more afflictions, false views, and attachments that delude

their minds. So we should understand that we are equal in our inherent awareness, but we have varying degrees of ignorance and afflictions that affect our levels of wisdom, amount of wealth, and even our longevity. If we wish to attain the highest possible state, we need to study and practice Buddhism diligently.

The four levels of attainment

There are four levels of attainment leading to the highest state. The first level is that of the arhat. Arhats' wisdom and awareness surpass those of ordinary beings. The second level is that of the pratyekabuddha. Pratyekabuddhas' wisdom and mind surpass those of the arhats. The third level is that of the bodhisattva. Bodhisattvas' wisdom surpasses that of pratyekabuddhas because they can remove their "ignorance of dharmas" so that they can liberate all beings. Finally, the fourth level is that of the buddha. Buddhas have eradicated all three different kinds of afflictions¹ and thereby reached perfection. Arhats, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and buddhas are the four kinds of saints in Buddhism, each having achieved a higher level of enlightenment. Only a buddha's enlightenment is the most complete.

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

The path of gradual cultivation

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

What are three asamkheya kalpas? A kalpa is such a long period of time that we cannot

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

measure it in terms of days, months, or years. It is one cycle of the universe (in Buddhism, world-systems are continuously being created and destroyed by our karma). The scriptures give an analogy of how long this time is. Suppose there is a huge stone that is 40 miles long, 40 miles wide, and 40 miles high. A deva (a celestial being) comes once every hundred years, and rubs the stone once with a heavenly fabric lighter than feather and softer than silk. The time it takes for this stone to be completely rubbed away by this process is how long a small kalpa is. It takes countless kalpas to make one “asamkheya” kalpa and three asamkheya kalpas to complete the path of a bodhisattva. It takes that long for a bodhisattva to complete the six perfections.

Perfection of charity

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

In a previous lifetime, when the Buddha was a prince, his country suffered a drought and people had nothing to eat. Seeing this, he gave all the treasures and food in the palace to the people. His father, the king, tried to stop the prince, “If you continue giving like this, there'll be nothing left in the palace and our reign will come to an end!” So he expelled the prince. Even then, exiled and owning nothing, the prince still wanted to give. He remembered that the dragon king of the ocean had a Mani pearl, which can fulfill all of one's wishes. He tried many ways to obtain the Mani pearl from the dragon king but failed. In desperation, he set forth to empty the ocean water. Drawing the water with buckets day after day, he finally fainted from exhaustion. His sincerity deeply touched the Four Heavenly Kings who then proceeded to help him. With their powers they emptied half of the ocean in half an hour. The dragon king, startled and also moved by the prince, decided to give the Mani pearl to the prince. This is an example of being selfless in perfecting the charity paramita. To complete this and the other five paramitas takes three asamkheya kalpas.

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

excellent like sweet ambrosia, unlike us who have to season our food for it to taste good.

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

The method of sudden enlightenment

Since gradual cultivation takes such a long time, the Buddha taught us another method—“sudden awakening to the original mind and directly realizing buddhahood.” This method doesn’t take three asamkheya kalpas. This is the method of sudden enlightenment. It is similar to the way the educational system operates—normally one starts from elementary school and gradually reaches college, but some smart students can skip grades and go directly to college.

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

The four stages of thought

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

have gone through the four stages of arising, abiding, changing, and ceasing. So how many thoughts occur from morning till night? How many thoughts come and go, how many mental states change and which of these is the buddha's mind?

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

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

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

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

Functions of the mind

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

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

The mind is very powerful if we can learn to harness it. The Dharma and meditation teach us how to focus and use our mind. To use this mind properly we need to awaken it. Once awakened, the mind can be purified and then returned to its original source. That is why we have a saying, "awaken the mind and see the true nature; seeing the true nature, one becomes a buddha." Once

enlightened, we are buddhas; unenlightened, we remain mundane beings. If the mind has afflictions and creates bad karma, then we suffer; if our mind gives rise to evil views, then we become demons.

Purity of the mind

I believe that everyone here wants to realize the true nature of the mind. Where is this mind? In fact, this mind is right here; it is ever-present. A great Chan master spoke of the mind this way: “With your eyes, it is seeing; with your ears, it is hearing; with your nose, you can smell the fragrance; with your tongue, you can detect sweetness, sourness, and all the flavors; with your hands you can grab things, and with your feet you can walk.” These are all functions of the mind. So if everyone already has this mind, why are we not buddhas? It is because of our delusions and attachments. If we can get rid of these two problems, our mind will be like still water or like an unblemished mirror; we can even radiate light and move the earth. We use our eyes to look at the outside world; when we see the good and the bad then we start to discriminate and mental afflictions arise. When our ears hear others praising us, we become overjoyed, and when others criticize us, we become angry. So when afflictions arise from the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and consciousness, our mind is like a pool of muddy water, unable to produce great power or function wisely.

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

A Chan master once described the Chan practice:

*Walk through a field of flowers
And not let a single leaf cling to you.*

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

remains pristine and pure. Our mind should be like that, rising from impurities but free from contamination.

A bird has Buddha nature

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

Maintaining the enlightened mind

Once enlightened, we need to maintain this Buddha nature so that it will always manifest. We can practice in two ways – in stillness and in action. "We cultivate it in stillness and fortify it in action." The seven-day meditation retreat gives us the best opportunity to practice stillness. Throughout the seven days, we try to keep this enlightened awareness clear, un-scattered, and in control for 3 minutes, 5 minutes, and longer; practicing this way, we will definitely make immense progress. The *Surangama Sutra* states, "Enlightenment is simply when the deluded mind rests." The word "rest" is very important. Our mind is always busy, so in sitting meditation we let the mind rest and remain unmoved; we do not think about the past, the present, or the future. When we think about the past, we cling to the past; when we think about the present and the future, we cling to the present and the future; this is the "monkey mind." The *Diamond Sutra* states, "The past mind is intangible, the present mind is intangible, the future mind is intangible." It is useless to reminisce about the past, since it has already passed. If the past was pleasant, dwelling on it makes us sad. If

the past was sad, thinking about it just adds to our pain. To ruminate about the present is to get trapped in transience. To speculate about the future is just daydreaming.

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

Preliminary cultivation and true cultivation

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

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

“No sense of time” refers to this absolute mind, where time and space do not exist. It is beyond this world. To go beyond this world is not something that happens after death. If we realize this original mind, we are immediately in the Pure Land, transformed from the mundane to the

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

divine. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* states, “Having the right view is to transcend this world. Having false views is to be in the mundane world.” This is truly the ultimate right view, the enlightened view of the Tathagata.

Because of the nuances of the mind, the world that we perceive is also different. For example, this lecture hall is bright when we turn on the light; it becomes dark when we turn off the light. Is this hall really dark or bright? Here in the United States it is daytime now, but in Taiwan it is nighttime. Is it really daytime or nighttime now? During the day, humans see more clearly than at night. Yet there are many animals that see clearly at night and are blind in the daytime. So is there true brightness or darkness? All the different phenomena that we perceive are due to our awareness, our mind that perceives differently under varying conditions.

A famous Confucian poem says,

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

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

Unifying the gradual and sudden practices

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

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

can become a buddha. This is not just an ideal or an exaggeration. Truly everyone has the Buddha nature; everyone can transcend from the mundane to the divine. As long as we have this great aspiration, faith, and persistence, we will definitely arrive at this goal, making our lives more fulfilling, more meaningful, and attaining infinite light³ and infinite life.

I will give a final example to prove the case in point. In the classroom, a teacher explains the course material clearly, and one of the students listens with interest. For this student, time and space seem to disappear; even when a mosquito bites him, he doesn't realize it. Suddenly, the bell rings and he cannot believe that this class has ended so soon. Conversely, if the teacher just reads from a book but does not explain the lesson clearly, the student will neither understand nor care to understand, he might look to the left and right and at his watch, and wonder why the class has not ended yet. Why is there such a difference? It is because the mind is discriminating and restless. Yet in the same classroom, when the mind is focused, free from discrimination and completely absorbed, an hour passes in the blink of an eye.

The sutra states, "If you focus your mind in one place, you can accomplish anything." The Chan practice is to return the mind to oneness in order to realize our true nature. If we have many discriminations, biases, and gripes, then one day will seem like a whole year. However, if our mind is tranquil and open, abiding in purity and in the absolute state which is unborn and undying, then one day, one year, a hundred years, or a thousand years may feel like an instant. The Buddha Dharma is the highest truth, the highest state of existence. If you have faith and persistence in following this path, you will find what you truly want. Life will be happier, more fulfilling, and full of hope. May all of you realize the bodhi mind and never regress!

³ Infinite light is a metaphor for infinite wisdom or buddhas' wisdom.