

Class 2: 9/25/07

“Much of the difficulty and mystification which Zen (Chan) presents to the Western student is the result of his unfamiliarity with Chinese ways of thinking – ways which differ startlingly from our own and which are, for that very reason, of special value to us in attaining a critical perspective upon our own ideas.” --- Alan Watts

Belly Breathing

Techniques: <http://www.heartzen.org/Main/102/98.html>

Master Miao Tian’s Teachings:

[Life Force and Breathing] If you want to acquire true life force, you must restructure your physical form. The analogy is like this: If you want to watch TV shows in other countries, you must install satellites first.

Originally, we receive the solar energy indirectly through food consumption. Now, if we intend to acquire solar energy directly, what should we do? We must change the internal structure of our physical form.

First, change the way we breathe. We all know that we must breathe to live. Most people breathe through their lungs; that is breathing in the air into the lungs and breathing out; therefore the life span is short. If we intend to prolong our life, we must learn deep breathing – that is taking the air into the belly. This is the first step – extend the shallow lung breathing to deep belly breathing.

Next we must learn to breathe through belly. During our Chan meditation, we learn belly breathing. If we feel out of breath during the meditation, we must adjust it to make breathing slow, long and even.

[The Importance of Belly Breathing] The best way to adjust your breathing is through your belly. You can start with a deep breath and transfer to belly breathing, and next to “spiritual breathing” (breathing in the range from heart to kidney). This is the way of breathing for getting into deep meditation.

If you breathe with the chest, you squander plenty of cells. If you breathe through the belly, you not only utilize the full capacity of your lungs but also reduce the damage of cells. This is the best way of breathing. However, it takes time to master belly breathing, and it requires diligent practices to be able to do it spontaneously. You can practice anytime and anywhere — such as in the office or on the bus. The technique is very simple — inhale and the belly expands; exhale and the belly flats back. Keep practicing it until it becomes your second nature. Once you are adept at this skill, you don’t even have to purposefully expand and contract the belly to breathe in and out. It becomes spontaneous. And once it’s spontaneous, you are ready to practice “spiritual breathing”, which is more subtle.

Some of you might ask, “Why should we change the way we breathe?” In fact, breathing is the foundation of meditation. Only when your breath is calm, even and spontaneous can you enter deeper meditation.

The Concept of Chan

Master Miao Tian’s Teachings:

[The Meaning of Chan] The Chinese word “Chan” originates from the Sanskrit word “dhyāna”, meaning “quiet meditation”. Most people think of Chan as “sitting quietly” or “sitting meditation”. This is however only the outer form of Chan. The essence of Chan is to observe the absolute wisdom in meditative concentration and witness the absolute truth with the absolute wisdom.

So, sitting meditation is not as much about sitting as about meditation. Sitting meditation is not just sitting quietly, nor is it sitting for the sake of sitting. Sitting meditation is to meditate on the true nature of reality and witness the absolute wisdom. Through the sitting meditation practice, the truth is realized firsthand at the heart. This is utterly different from intellectual understanding.

We can also apply the wisdom of Chan in our everyday life. Over a decade ago, there was a period of time I was on fruit diet. One day, when I was meditating, the image of a papaya appeared in my mind, as I ate papaya that day. If I ate longan, the image of longan appeared. Same for watermelon. And I was awakened to the fact that the smaller the fruits, the smaller the leaves; the bigger the fruits, the bigger the leaves. Papaya’s leaves are bigger than those of mango and longan, so papaya fruit is also bigger in size. Likewise, the leaves of longan and mango are bigger than the leaves of peanuts, so the fruits are also bigger. Bigger leaves have larger surface to absorb the sunshine and therefore can sustain bigger fruits with more nutrients. From this we can deduce that this growth pattern applies to many other fruits, too. Therefore, to improve the fruits, we should improve the leaves first. This is an example of Chan wisdom in daily life.

[Cosmic Chan] The universe contains the entire galaxy, including the creatures that inhabit the plants. The physical lives and life force are contained in Chan. We can conclude that Chan contains physics, material science, chemistry, and the variations in natural sciences.

Within the entire universe, the phenomenon of physical lives is a part of Chan, such as our daily routine — how we eat, work, and live our life. If you understand the essence and spirit of Chan, you will have a new perspective on your own character and worldview. There is an absolute rule that lies within the physical forms. Let us take the life extension of creatures as an example — mammals will always be mammals; reptiles will always be reptiles. A mammal cannot beget a reptile — this is the rule of the nature, the truth. The eternal truth is Chan.

When we study Chan, we are close to discovering the truth and the source — the absolute truth of the source. Science proves that life is born out of a male and female. Without each other, one cannot create

life. This is the truth of the nature. Based on the natural rules, many wonderful discoveries were made, such as the invention of electricity, which created many further discoveries. Thus, it continued to multiply and evolved into the modern civilization. This is one revelation of Chan.

Worthwhile Reading

The Geography of Thought, by Richard Nisbett

The Way of Zen, by Alan Watts