

Entering Chan Through Tea: Returning to the Original Mind

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Translated by MPI Translation Center





Dharma Talk at the Moonlight Tea Ceremony, Summer 2022

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The moon appeared incredibly large during the last moonlight tea ceremony. Though we haven't seen it this time, the moon has always been there; it's simply the changing conditions that affect how it appears. When we hold a tea ceremony, it is not about drinking tea, but about turning tea drinking into Chan meditation—a practice of realizing our true nature.

What is Chan? A Chan master once said: "Chan is embodied in dressing and eating." Some may wonder: "Everyone eats and dresses, but why is that not Chan?" The Chan master explained: "People often eat and dress

with delusion, attachment, and discrimination. They are driven by greed, aversion, and ignorance, ultimately reinforcing them."

It is true for drinking tea as well. In recent years, tea culture has become popular. People pay great attention to the quality and variety of tea, the choice and arrangement of tea sets, and even the spiritual essence that tea represents. In tea spaces, we can often see decorative calligraphy with sayings, such as "Tea and Chan share the same taste," "Go Drink Tea." However, truly entering Chan through tea is not a matter of simply hanging up some decorations or saying a few words.

So, how can we transform tea drinking into Chan meditation? This is simple, yet not so simple.

It is simple because the essence of Chan is a pure and clear mind—a mind that each of us inherently possesses and that never leaves us, not even for a moment. As Master Fu Dashi said: "Each night, I rest with Buddha-nature in

my heart. At dawn, we awaken together as one. Whether sitting or standing, it is always by my side; in words or in silence, we share the same abode. If you wish to find where Buddha-nature dwells, listen to this very voice—it reveals all." In our Chan meditation, whether it is body scanning or mindfulness meditation, whether anchoring on the body or the breath, the goal is to guide everyone to experience this inner purity and clarity. Through practice over time, many of us may have touched this to some extent.

It is not so simple because we have been living in ignorance and delusion since beginningless time. Therefore, unlocking the purity and clarity of the mind is not easy. Even if there is an occasional moment of clarity, clouds of ignorance quickly drift in again, obscuring our true mind. They create delusions, disturbances, and countless distractions, preventing us from seeing ourselves clearly or our original mind. Thus, in addition to seated meditation, we must integrate Chan practice into all daily activities, so that we can gradually dispel the fog of delusion within our mind.

This entails training concentration and awareness in daily life—learning to eat, walk, and drink tea attentively. "Attentively" means allowing tea drinking to return to its original state—with mindfulness. Drinking tea is just drinking tea, free from discrimination, judgment, resistance, or attachment. More importantly, it is to maintain a clear and lucid awareness within.

Life is an endless accumulation. Every action of body, speech, and mind leaves an imprint within, marking our lives with the traces of samsara and reinforcing the strengths of our habits. These habits further drive the mind to seek outwardly—attaching to the five desires: wealth, sensuality, fame, food, and sleep; and pursuing the six sensory pleasures: sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought. Even toward this very cup of tea, our mind is full of discrimination—likes and dislikes, greed and aversion.

The unenlightened mind constantly seeks externally, chasing the superficial while overlooking the essential,

thought after thought. Therefore, the patriarchs taught that, "Do not seek outside yourself." A Chan Master of the Linji School put it this way: "If you wish to be no different from the buddha, do not seek outside yourself. A single thought, arising from a pure, clear mind, is your Dharmakaya, the truth body; a single thought, free from discrimination, is your Sambhogakaya, the enjoyment body; and a single thought, free from duality, is your Nirmanakaya, the manifested body. These three bodies are none other than the one listening to the Dharma at this very moment—do not seek externally, and their function will naturally manifest."

Why is it that simply not seeking externally makes us no different from the buddhas? It is because what the buddhas possess is also inherent within us; the enlightened mind they have realized is also present in us. The problem lies in the fact that delusions constantly arise in our minds, causing us to endlessly create and chase after mental images. It is like a monkey reaching for the moon's reflection in water—never attaining, yet forever chasing.

In fact, we fail to realize that we possess infinite treasures within, waiting to be uncovered. Cultivation is the key to unlocking them. At the beginning of practice, our mindfulness is extremely weak, like a newborn infant lacking strength. We must continually recognize and become familiar with it through meditation, just as an infant gradually matures into a strong adult.

Although the essence of the mind is pure and no different, sentient beings have different spiritual faculties, sharp or dull. Some beings naturally possess a pure mind, with sharp wisdom and superior faculties; with just a little guidance or practice, they can directly attain the state of Buddhahood. Others, however, have deeply ingrained mental impurities—too obstinate to be easily subdued. They must continually accumulate merits, clear obstacles, and remove mental defilements through mindfulness. To achieve this, we must follow the conventional stages of study, contemplation, and practice, along with various skillful means.

"The Seven Steps of Mindful Tea" we advocate is precisely a skillful means and a supportive condition tailored for modern people. Tea is an important part of life, serving both as a daily necessity and a symbol of cultural refinement. Since ancient times, it has been cherished by people across various circles. When tea serves as a vessel for Chan wisdom, we integrate the acts of brewing and drinking with mindfulness, creating an accessible and meaningful entry point for people from all walks of life.

Today we live in a restless age. People's minds are filled with delusions and distractions. In such a state, spiritual cultivation becomes extremely difficult. Therefore, we must make wise use of skillful means to bring the restless mind back to the present moment. Only then can we, through cultivating Samatha, unlock wisdom of contemplation and realize our original nature. "The Seven Steps of Mindful Tea" is tailored to address these common issues faced by people today. So, how can we align these steps with Chan meditation? The key lies in engaging the mind wisely in every step.

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STEP ONE: GREETING

Buddhist practitioners often talk about "Bodhicitta" (the Bodhi mind) and the mind of loving-kindness and compassion. However, these are often treated as mere slogans rather than being cultivated as genuine inner qualities. Why do we fail to cultivate them? Because we are indifferent to sentient beings, feeling that their life or death is beyond our concern. Since there is no connection, why would we feel the need to show compassion for them, help them, or benefit them?

When we practice the "Seven-Point Cause and Effect" method, it is essential to recognize all beings as our

mothers in past lives, appreciate and repay their kindness. These serve as the foundation for generating Bodhicitta. Then, loving-kindness and compassion arise, leading to extraordinary aspiration and ultimately to the arising of Bodhicitta. Cultivating gratitude encompasses appreciating and repaying kindness, which is crucial for practicing the "Seven-Point Cause and Effect" method because it helps us to connect with all beings and recognize their contributions to us.

Living in this world, we are both independent individuals and integral parts of a greater whole—sustained by all things and supported by all beings. We are here in this tea ceremony also because of countless causes and conditions. Therefore we should feel deeply grateful for all of them. The Buddhist teaching of "repaying the Four Great Kindnesses" involves appreciating the kindness of parents, teachers, the nation, and all beings, and aspiring to repay their kindness. When we cultivate gratitude, our hearts are filled with joy and gentleness, prompting us to consider how we can help others and contribute to society.

This forms the foundation for growing our compassion.

Moreover, it is essential to cultivate respect and devotion. Modern society advocates for individual freedom, viewing respect as lowliness and devotion as blind obedience. As a result, many people act without restraint and their minds become restless and unsettled. In fact, respect arises from admiration for those role models in life, and devotion comes from a sense of refuge in their ultimate spiritual destination. These mindsets benefit themselves first. Many people feel unparalleled peace when they see the statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas in monasteries. Why is that? It is precisely because their minds are purified by their own respect and devotion.

When we sit at the tea table with a grateful heart, our posture naturally becomes humble, and our movements are gentle, fostering a positive atmosphere.

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STEP Two: Preparing the Cups

"The true mind is free from arising, while the deluded mind arises in response to conditions." Ordinary people are easily influenced by the external world. In a noisy and chaotic environment filled with temptations, it is difficult to calm our mind. Therefore, it is necessary to first create an environment that is pure, natural, and serene. It can be simple, but free from dirt or disorder.

More importantly, we must maintain a pure mind. Talking about "pure mind" is easy, but achieving it is far from so. Although all beings inherently possess a pure mind, it has been veiled by ignorance, afflictions, greed, anger

and delusion since beginningless time. Therefore, the mind remains in constant confusion, lost in wandering thoughts, making it difficult for people to engage in practice. This is why a supportive environment is essential. The Amrita Retreat Center creates such an atmosphere, helping us settle our body and mind through a well-ordered life in accordance with the Buddhist teachings. Furthermore, through systematic meditation, we learn to interact with others with a pure mind, and realize our true nature through the view of emptiness. Only then can we let go of any issues that arise at any moment, remaining undisturbed.

Here and now, we prepare the cups with full mindfulness—with no distractions, haste or delusions. Throughout the process, we maintain clear awareness, being mindful of every movement and even the slightest changes. As a result, the mind naturally becomes calm. Like a pond of water—when still, it becomes pure; when pure, it reflects with clarity.

III

STEP THREE: BOILING WATER, OBSERVING THE MIND

Sitting here, we sense the vastness of the sky and earth, and feel the gentle caress of the breeze. Amid the chirping of cicadas and the music that shifts between near and far, we quietly listen to the bubbling of water.

Listening is another form of cultivation. The *Shurangama Sutra* teaches "By turning inward to hear one's self-nature, one attains the supreme Way." Ordinary people listen by chasing after sound objects. This pursuit of six sense objects leaves numerous images in the mind. We then become influenced by these images, trapped in

worldly entanglements and delusions.

Listening to the water bubbling emphasizes the power of hearing. Is this power of hearing linked to the sound itself? If we focus solely on the sound, we may naturally think they are linked, since it is through sound that we can hear. However, the truth is that the two are not necessarily linked.

Now you hear my voice, the chirping of cicadas, the music, and the sound of boiling water. When I stop talking and the water ceases to boil, does the power of hearing still remain? It does. We then hear the sound of silence. When there is sound, we hear sound; when there is no sound, we hear silence. The capacity to hear remains constant, neither increasing nor decreasing.

We also call this step "Boiling Water, Observing the Mind." At this moment of pause, there is nothing we need to do; we just allow our attention to turn inward. This is the practice of turning hearing inward to observe

our true nature. Therefore, the focus is not on the water bubbling, but on experiencing the power of hearing and the clarity of the mind.

IV

STEP FOUR: WARMING THE CUPS AND SHARING THE AROMA

Everything arises from its own causes and conditions, so does making a good cup of tea. The rock tea we are drinking now is from Mount Wuyi, celebrated as the "home of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism for a thousand years," and renowned for its "tea of eternal mountains and waters." This tea embodies a profound cultural heritage. Mount Wuyi shares the same Danxia landform as Taining, where we are now. Taining represents the youthful phase of this landform, while Mount Wuyi signifies its maturity, exhibiting greater depth and richness. The tea nurtured there absorbs the spirit of the

mountains and waters, along with the essence of the sun and moon, manifesting unique quality and charm.

Beyond its material quality and cultural heritage, this tea leaf embodies all the information of the universe, echoing the saying "One can see a world in a flower or a buddha in a leaf." Modern holographic theories also suggest that every part of the universe contains the information and characteristics of the whole. Why is this the case?

When explaining the principle of "One is All," Master Dushun of the Huayan School taught that each phenomenon contains the entire universe, because the ultimate truth—emptiness—is indivisible. All phenomena embody this highest truth, and the truth itself is the same everywhere and cannot be divided. In this essence, the one and the all are not two—they are not different.

Every tea leaf we see also contains the essence of nature and cultural heritage. Only by understanding and respecting its causes and conditions can we reveal the energy within



the tea. This is especially true for aged tea. After being stored for ten to twenty years, it entails an awakening process to release its internal substances.

Warming the tea utensils is a preparation for awakening the tea. By pouring boiling water, adding tea leaves and then moderately shaking them, we awaken the dry fragrance of the tea, preparing for the following tea brewing.

V

STEP FIVE: BREWING TEA AND AWAKENING THE MIND

When brewing tea, it is essential to choose the appropriate method that aligns with its inherent qualities. We need to gain experience through practice and make timely adjustments based on real-time observations. Even for the same type of tea, brewing methods vary due to the quality of tea leaves, processing techniques, and drinkers' preferences. All in all, it is important to respect both the tea and the drinkers—allowing the tea to fully express its essence and the drinkers to savor it like sweet dew.

We must carry out each step with mindfulness, staying

fully aware of our movements, the qualities of each infusion, and the reactions of the drinkers. We need to maintain focus throughout the process so that our mind can truly connect with the tea. If we become distracted, start chatting or lost in thoughts, we will fail to create a true connection with the tea even with the most skilled techniques, let alone cultivate mindfulness.

In mindfulness meditation, there is an exercise of eating a raisin. By carefully observing its color, texture and taste through rituals, people learn to cultivate mindfulness. Similarly, brewing tea requires a sense of ritual. This is not about performing elaborate or pretentious actions as seen in some tea ceremonies, but about performing each movement precisely, thoroughly, and at a steady pace—neither too fast nor too slow. Such rituals help the mind focus and settle into calmness. Otherwise, we tend to act on autopilot—in modern terms, without mindfulness.

The clear mind has always been present, but it remains unfamiliar to us because we seldom recognize or connect

with it. So we need to awaken it through meditation. Whether through sitting meditation, walking meditation, or tea brewing, the goal is to discover, recognize, and become familiar with this mind. Over time, you will realize that it is always there, full of strength.

Cultivation is not about creating something new or different from the original. Unlike aircraft carriers and artificial satellites which are entirely man-made, what cultivation reveals is the inherently self-sufficient mind—"It does not increase in the enlightened nor decrease in the unenlightened." Being unenlightened doesn't mean we lack anything. It is only because we fail to recognize the true nature that we need to awaken it through practice.

Ordinary people, deluded by ignorance, constantly chase after thoughts and cling to external distractions. This happens because we have not yet developed the habit of abiding in true mind, nor experienced the joy it brings. We do not realize that abiding in the true mind is the ultimate perfect ease. Therefore, we need to change the

habits of engaging the mind—allowing it to rest from constant seeking and awaken from confusion.

So, why can we connect brewing tea with awakening the mind? Because this practice embodies the principle of dependent origination. When brewing tea, we must choose the appropriate utensils and tea leaves based on the tea's characteristics, and use appropriate water temperature, pouring method, and steeping times. Only by harmonizing all these conditions can we fully reveal the tea's aroma and flavor. This requires a deep understanding of dependent origination, as any oversight in the process affects the overall result.

Dependent origination is a fundamental wisdom in the Buddha's teachings. It transforms how we view problems. Ordinary people are trapped in the dual attachment to self and phenomena, which shape their patterns of perception and desire. Guided by self-centered perceptions, they view the world through their personal feelings, judge others by their own standards, and pursue fame and

fortune to satisfy their personal desires. When everyone behaves this way, it inevitably leads to conflicts, oppositions, and disputes, bringing afflictions to themselves and causing suffering to others.

Therefore, Buddhist practice teaches us to follow the principle of dependent origination, and to respect all forms of life, and all things in the world. The Buddhist teaching of "adapting to conditions" means addressing issues in a way that respects dependent origination while adapting to the present situation. This represents life's great wisdom, which can free us from self-attachment and allow all things to coexist harmoniously.

We can apply this wisdom not only in daily life, but also in tea brewing. We should understand tea culture, respect its characteristics, and brew it with an open and clear mind. In this way, each cup of tea reveals its uniqueness and presents itself perfectly in this very moment.



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STEP SIX: SHARING THE TEA EVENLY

Chan Buddhism greatly emphasizes the ordinary mind. Once, someone asked Master Mazu Daoyi, "What is the Way?" Mazu replied, "The ordinary mind is the Way." This sounds rather ordinary and is often quoted in various contexts, as if many issues could be dissolved by embracing the concept of "ordinary mind."

What exactly is an ordinary mind? We may think we are ordinary people, living ordinary lives—so, isn't this present mind the "ordinary mind"? In fact, the ordinary mind we think is far from ordinary, as it is filled with right and wrong, likes and dislikes, beauty and ugliness, honor

and shame, and gain and loss. It is also filled with assessments, preferences, preconceptions, and expectations shaped by our life experiences, along with the emotions and mental activities that arise from them. None of these belongs to the "ordinary mind." Because we mistake the mundane mind for the ordinary mind, we fail to recognize the true depth of the "ordinary mind." The two minds are entirely different in Buddhist practice.

The ordinary mind is our inherent pure mind, unadorned and untouched, like clear water or a cloudless sky. Although this mind is innately present, it has been obscured since beginningless time. We must awaken it through practice; otherwise, it remains unseen.

During Chan meditation, I often guide everyone to accept all bodily and mental experiences with a fully open mind, without judgment, resistance, aversion, or attachment. This is to train the ordinary mind, allowing it to become like a mirror—reflecting both purity and impurity, the sun and moon, the sky and earth, as well as the



dark corners. Whatever it reflects, it reveals things as they truly are, without stirring any ripples within. It is also like a monitoring system: when a thief enters, it feels no dislike; when a distinguished guest arrives, it feels no joy. It simply knows what is happening in the present moment, without any judgment or emotional reactions.

Although we may not have an equal mind right now, it is already present within us. With the right methods and consistent practice, we will eventually realize it. Sharing the tea equally helps us cultivate this mindset. No matter who sits in front of us—whether familiar or unfamiliar, liked or disliked—just let go of everything and focus on sharing the tea equally. The cup used for sharing tea is called the "fairness cup," which embodies this principle.

As we share this cup of tea, there is no distinction of who has or who doesn't, whose tea is stronger or weaker, more or less. Through this tea of equal taste, we quiet the many deluded thoughts and begin to experience equality—in stillness and peace.

VII

STEP SEVEN: GO DRINK TEA

"Go drink tea" is an important koan in Chan Buddhism. According to the records of Chan Buddhism, many learners visited Master Zhaozhou, and no matter who came, the Master would guide them by saying "Go drink tea." Since then, this simple greeting has taken on extraordinary meaning. But it has also become a favorite saying among those who repeated others' wisdom without truly grasping it.

What distinguishes the two? In fact, the focus of drinking tea lies not in the tea itself, but in experiencing the pure and clear mind while drinking. With greed,

discrimination and personal preferences, even if we become skilled at analyzing and appreciating the flavor of the tea, we are merely advanced tea tasters. This has nothing to do with the Chan master's teaching of "Go drink tea." Only with concentration, awareness, and especially uncontrived awareness while drinking, can we enter Chan and resonate with the teachings of ancient masters.

In summary, the practice of "Seven Steps of Mindful Tea" is not only about brewing tea but also about embracing a mindful and slow-paced life. Furthermore, it serves as a gateway to guide us into Chan meditation, even turning the tea brewing into a form of meditation. Through this cup of tea, we express gratitude for all things, understand the principle of dependent origination, train our concentration, cultivate our awareness, and awaken our inner clarity of life.

Appendix 1:

Every Flower Blossoms in Its Own Time; Every Encounter Is Once-in-a-Lifetime Dharma Talk at the Lilac Tea Ceremony 2022

Today, we gather at this Lilac Tea Ceremony—drinking tea, appreciating the flowers and listening to the rain. Isn't it wonderful?

The Amrita Retreat Center is home to trees such as ginkgo, red maple and ancient plum trees. Initially, there were no plans to plant lilacs. Later, when a vacant patch of land was found, the idea of planting lilacs naturally arose. When I was studying at the Buddhist Academy of China, it was located within Fayuan Monastery, which was home to many lilac trees. During their blooming season, the monastery hosts "Lilac Poetry Gathering," a tradition

of poetry recitation and singing dating back to the Ming and Qing dynasties. Many historical figures participated in these grand events. When visiting Beijing during lilac season, I would often stop by to appreciate the blossoms.

As the lilacs are in full bloom, the idea of holding a "Lilac Tea Ceremony" has arisen. In the future, we can host tea ceremonies inspired not only by lilacs, but also by ginkgo, red maple and plum blossoms—even by every blade of grass and every tree.

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No Need to Do Anything in the Present Moment

Tea and Chan have been intertwined since the Tang and Song dynasties. Tea served as the support for monastic practice as well as a medium for spreading Buddhist teachings to the public. In line with this tradition, we enrich tea ceremonies with the essence of mindful and slow-paced life, making them accessible to the public.

We have recently developed study materials for "Seven Steps of Mindful Tea" and "Seven Steps of Mindful Space," so that more people can learn and benefit from them. How to apply them then? We first apply them in

the Amrita Retreat Center as it is a showcase for mindful and slow-paced life.

Of course, our true purpose is not about the tea or the flowers, but about using them as opportunities for cultivating the mind. By engaging in these rituals, we allow the mind to let go of all distractions and settle into the present moment.

When lilacs are in bloom, do we all notice them? Probably not. Our minds are often elsewhere—chasing after thoughts and distractions—and so we fail to see the beauty right in front of us.

Tea ceremonies are precisely meant to guide our minds back to the present moment.

We sit here quietly—appreciating the flowers simply as they are, listening to the rain simply as it is. In this moment, there is nothing we need to do, only to be present with open awareness.

While drinking tea, peacefully savor its flavor and experience every part of the ceremony. From lifting the cup, to sipping the tea and allowing it to flow into the body, we become fully aware of all changes, while abiding in nothing.

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Who Is the One That Drinks Tea?

How can we attain clear awareness? One of the Buddha's ten epithets is "Samyak-sambuddha," meaning "Perfect and Complete Knowing"—a complete understanding of everything, from the vast to the minute. This allencompassing wisdom arises from a mind that abides nowhere.

Ordinary people tend to perceive everything through a focal point; once their mind focuses on an object, discrimination arises, which in turn leads to attachment and the stirring of emotions. In this state, everything else is

naturally overlooked. For example, when we are burdened with worries, we respond to the external world slowly. Only when the mind is free from clinging can we respond instantly, effortlessly reflecting whatever comes and goes.

We sit here with an uncontrived mind, for no purpose—doing nothing and thinking nothing. We hold no preconceptions, no expectations, and no attachments. Just keep the mind clear like a mirror, fully open to the flowers and trees, the sound of rain, and everything around. In this openness, maintain a continuous and stable awareness.

When lifting the teacup, we can also reflect: "Who is it that drinks the tea?" This inquiry can guide us toward realizing our true mind—the very essence of Master Zhaozhou's teaching, "Go drink tea." Ordinary people are always chasing outward—clinging to sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches and thoughts. Rarely do they turn inward to examine the mind that drinks the tea.

The tea ceremony itself is a form of Chan meditation. Through the ceremony, the mind returns to its original state—bare and unadorned, pure and complete, perfectly encompassing all phenomena.

With the insight of Chan, we engage in this once-in-a-lifetime gathering. In the ever-changing flow of time and space, this present thought spans through past and future—a single thought encompassing eternity.

III

BEING WITH ONESELF

In today's tea ceremony, we have experienced the shift from rain to gentle sunlight. These changes in nature reveal the beauty of impermanence. When we let go of preconceptions, expectations, and attachments, we can feel the rain nourishing us, and the sunlight warmly embracing us. This perfectly embodies the teaching of Chan, "Every day is a good day."

Once we have preconceptions, it becomes impossible for us to live fully in the present moment or to accept reality as it is. Instead, we cling to, chase after, and rely on external things, always trying to grasp something in order to

feel secure. In such a state, simply sitting still makes us feel aimless and bored.

In fact, doing nothing can be a positive state of mind, indicating that the mind is not deeply attached—or not attached at all. This is a necessary step in breaking free from subject-object duality, and a crossroad between external seeking and self-reflection. When we habitually feel the urge to think or act, the mind instantly falls into old patterns and forms cravings. When these cravings are not satisfied, we begin to feel lacking and insecure, and are swept further along the current of habits.

Here and now, all we need to do is to simply sit here—to be with ourselves, and to be with all things in the universe.

The mind inherently encompasses everything. When it abides in its original state, it is complete, free and joyful, lacking nothing. To realize this state of mind, we cultivate it through Chan meditation—by strengthening our awareness, we gradually reduce our reliance on external

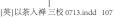
conditions, bringing greater freedom to life.

I rejoice in everyone learning to "simply sit and do nothing."

————— Appendix 2: ————

THE MIND SHINING LIKE THE MOON, SETTLING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Dharma Talk at the Mid-Autumn Moonlight Tea Ceremony 2021



Today is the Mid-Autumn Festival, a time for family reunion. We gather here to drink tea, appreciate the moon, and practice Chan meditation, creating this "Mid-Autumn Moonlight Tea Ceremony." Tea ceremonies make people feel relaxed while Chan meditation seems more serious. Then, how can we harmonize the two?

Chan practice has two meanings: one refers to Chan in meditative concentration and the other to Chan as embodied in Chan Buddhism. The former emphasizes the forms of practice, offering specific methods for adjusting the body, breath, and mind, ultimately aiming to attain

Samadhi. However, the latter represents Prajna wisdom, transcending all forms. It is not confined to sitting meditation but can be cultivated throughout daily life. Observing the mind while sitting is Chan, and so are dressing, eating, carrying firewood, and fetching water.

The essence of Chan is the awakened mind—pure and clear within us. The key is to realize this mind, while all forms serve merely as supportive conditions. Of course, sitting meditation is an excellent form of Chan meditation, essential for awakening wisdom. However, if practice is confined to sitting alone, it is far from sufficient. Take the ancient Chan masters for example, they practiced not only in sitting meditation but in all aspects of life—walking, standing, sitting, lying down, speaking, silence, movement and stillness. In fact, integrating tea drinking with Chan meditation has been a tradition since ancient times.

Here and now, our gathering in this way holds special and profound significance.

I

Asking the Moon

As the saying goes, "The moon is exceptionally bright at Mid-Autumn." As we gaze upon tonight's moon, what feelings or emotions arise within us?

Throughout history, poets have expressed their deep reflections through the moon. For example, the verse "Over the sea, the bright moon slowly rises; though far apart, we share this moment together." conveys a longing for beloved ones. Similarly, another verse reads: "People experience sorrows and joys, partings and reunions; the moon waxes and wanes, brightens and dims. Life has always been imperfect since ancient times." These verses depict

sentiments of separation. These timeless verses continue to resonate deeply with us. Yet we must be cautious not to slip into the patterns of the deluded mind.

In addition, when we read the verse "When did the bright moon first appear? Lifting my winecup, I ask the deep blue sky," it invites us to contemplate eternity: When did the moon come into being? When did heaven and earth begin? In another verse, we read: "By riverside, who first beheld the moon? When did the moonlight first shine upon humanity? Life passes on, generation after generation, without end. Yet the river moon remains, ever the same." This kindles a sense of wonder inspired by moonlight—life is impermanent, and all worldly affairs rise and fall. Yet the moon remains unchanged, ever-shining. Despite the endless passing of generations, the moon faithfully clocks in and out, keeping to its eternal pace.

These sentiments and reflections are inspired by the moon in the minds of ordinary people. Then, how to perceive the moon with Buddhist wisdom?

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THE MIND, SHINING LIKE THE MOON

Chan masters often compare the inherent Bodhi nature to moonlight: "The mind shines like the moon in the sky, radiating its light over all." The moon, hanging high in the sky, needs no support, yet radiates its light upon everything. Similarly, our mind is just like the moon—it transcends both the sense organs and their objects, just as the gatha goes: "The true mind shines alone, free from sense organs and their objects; its true nature reveals itself, beyond texts."

The sky tonight is crystal clear, without a single cloud in sight. However, before the moon arises, everything is

enveloped in complete darkness—nothing can be seen clearly. This represents a state of ignorance. In such a state, one becomes unaware of the thoughts arising in the sky of the mind, unconsciously creating afflictions and karma, and unknowingly being carried away by them.

But we must realize that behind ignorance, the bright full moon of enlightenment has never left. Even when obscured, it remains inherently complete and never lacking—neither defiled nor pure. When it reveals itself, it can illuminate the mountains, rivers and earth, bringing light to life and the world. You may all know this gatha: "The bodhisattva, like the cool, clear moon, travels through ultimate emptiness; when the minds of sentient beings are as pure as still water, Bodhi appears within." The cloudless sky represents ultimate emptiness. When the mind is free from preconceptions, attachments, and thoughts, the Bodhi nature naturally reveals itself. The awakened nature presented in the final stage of the Bodhi Navigation APP is like an infinite clear sky, boundless in all directions—east, west, south, north, above, and below—with no end at all.

At the Chan tea ceremony, everyone drinks tea with a cup inscribed with the words "Returning to the Original Mind." This serves as a gentle reminder for us to discover our true mind through appreciating the moon—a mind as clear, bright, and pure as moonlight. So today, we are not only admiring the moon, but more importantly, turning inward to understand the true mind—the brightness of our true nature, just like the moon. The light of the mind and the light of the moon are one; just as moonlight shines across all directions, the light of the mind illuminates everywhere.

Clouds may appear in the sky, obscuring the moonlight. However, no matter how many clouds there are, the moonlight remains, even if it is temporarily unseen. The same is true for the sky of the mind. By recognizing the true mind and abiding in it, we will not be disturbed by the arising of thoughts. If we fail to realize the true mind, like the moon, we become easily swayed by the cloud-like thoughts—and our true mind will not reveal itself.

III

SETTLING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Knowing this, we then explore: how to drink tea, how to appreciate the moon, and how to engage in Chan meditation?

Mindfulness meditation involves two main elements: concentration and awareness. When brewing tea, we stay focused on each movement—adding tea leaves, pouring water, and serving the tea. At this moment, brewing tea is the only thing in the world. The same principle applies to drinking tea: from lifting the cup, to bringing it to the lips and sipping the tea, we remain clearly aware throughout the process. Moreover, we should be fully aware of

the flavor and aroma of the tea, without making any judgment. This can be more challenging as we are habitually carried away by the flavors and aromas, triggering craving, or a chain of thoughts. If this happens, we can shift our attention to our movements, as this is a more neutral focus. After all, we use tea drinking as a support for Chan meditation, not as a way to taste the flavor or seek any particular sensations. Otherwise, we lose sight of the original purpose.

During meditation, if we become distracted or get lost in delusive thoughts, there is no need for self-blame. Simply keep aware of them, gently bring the mind back, and settle into the present moment. As the gatha says, "It is not the arising of thoughts but the delayed awareness that is of concern." The nature of emptiness has two characteristics: emptiness and clarity. Emptiness is vast, boundless and unattainable; clarity means clear and complete awareness, not dull like a piece of wood.

IV

SUBDUING THE DELUDED MIND IS REALIZING THE BODHI

In addition to mindful tea drinking, another ability we focus on tonight is doing nothing and thinking nothing. This is not about being unaware but about allowing the mind to return to its original state.

As we sit here, we sense the moonlight extending infinitely into the universe, and the inner light radiating boundlessly into the Dharma realm. It is not we who make the light extend. Whether we see it or not, the moonlight naturally illuminates the world—this is its inherent quality and requires no effort from us. The same is true

of the mind. When we do nothing and think nothing, the mind reveals its inherent brightness, just like unobscured moonlight.

Realizing the true mind requires no effort and no action. Yet for many, this is challenging, as we are so used to doing things all the time—working, studying, eating, drinking, and seeking pleasure. I often say that one of the biggest problems modern people face is that they lose the ability to rest. When we are unable to calm the mind or take a true break, we become exhausted. Even in Buddhist practice, we resolve to cultivate Bodhicitta and engage in activities to benefit all beings. However, without mindful awareness, we may still get trapped in doing things all the time, without stop.

How can we transcend what we do with perfect ease—realizing that doing something is as empty as not doing anything at all? We can achieve so when the mind is free from effort or striving. We settle into the present moment, simply drinking tea and appreciating the moon, doing

nothing else. Meanwhile, we observe what exactly the mind is like when it is free from doing and thinking.

It is easy to control our actions, but much more difficult to prevent the mind from wandering into delusive thoughts—no one can manage this easily. The key to Chan meditation is not suppressing thoughts but refraining from intentional thinking. When thoughts arise naturally, we simply maintain aware of them—neither welcoming nor resisting, neither craving nor rejecting, neither clinging nor discarding.

When no delusive thoughts arise, we are aware of their absence and can feel that the mind is as clear as the void. When thoughts arise, we simply observe their coming and going without disliking, rejecting, or following them. We abide in the emptiness without clinging to emptiness itself. As the saying goes, "The vast sky does not hinder white clouds from drifting by." Even if the mind is carried away by thoughts for a while, as long as we notice it in time, we can bring it back and continue to

abide in awareness.

In conclusion, maintain awareness of everything—when a cloud appears, we know that a cloud has appeared; when it disappears, we know it has disappeared. This clear and complete awareness is what we inherently possess and what we need to realize in Chan meditation.