

Listen to Yourself; Think Everything Over



Dharma Talks by Master Hsüan Hua



Red Lotus Hand and Eye

Yesterday I said that those great heroes and awesome leaders among the ancients were people with bones and breath and blood that enabled them to give rise to their accomplishments. "Bones" represents the fact that in a hundred choppings they were not disturbed. So it is said, "Hundreds of impediments do not bother him." No matter what state he encounters, he can subdue it. He is not turned by circumstances, but he can turn conditions. As it is said, "In the world the goal of people is to be victorious over heaven." If a person has a fixed determination, he can overcome the heavens. Common people think that heaven is the highest place of all, that nothing can surpass heaven. Still, it is said that if you have unswerving determination, you can be victorious even over heaven.

By "heaven" the ancients are implying God. But this God, this heavenly ruler, is not necessarily the Catholic or Christian God. Nor is the heavenly ruler the one spoken of in Confucianism. This heavenly ruler is just like a county official who must keep an eye on the rights and wrongs of the people. He is not the one and only Supreme Lord. Although he is above us, this heavenly ruler is not an unsurpassed lord.

In Confucianism it is said, "By eating vegetarian food, practicing prohibitions, and bathing clean, then one can wait upon the Supreme Lord." "Eating vegetarian food" means one eats vegetables. "Practicing prohibitions" means one holds the precepts, which means you do not violate them by engaging in lustful, desirous conduct. "Bathing clean" means to wash clean your body, wash clean your mind. Then you can wait upon the Heavenly Lord. You can establish a mutual contact with the Heavenly Lord. You can reach the Heavenly Lord; that is, your sincerity will be known by the Heavenly Lord.

The ancient king, T'ang of the Shang dynasty said:
I, the small one, Lü,
With the sacrifice of this black ox,
Presume to inform you, Magnificent Ruler,

of this: when I have faults,
I do not blame the people.
When the people have faults,
Let the blame be placed with me.

King T'ang said, "I, the small one, Lü." He spoke of himself as the "small one" and then added his name "Lü." "With the sacrifice of this black ox, presume to inform you, Magnificent Ruler..." He uses the black ox to inform the Magnificent Ruler very clearly that "When I have faults," (if he has offenses), then "I do not blame the people." Don't blame the ordinary citizens, don't cast blame on the populace. He says, "When the people have faults," (or if the people have offenses), "Let the blame be placed with me." The offenses belong to me. Why? Because I have not taught my people well. So when they commit offenses they are not to be blamed; blame me. In this way the King of Shang sought within himself. He acted in accord with propriety. He was able to take the offenses, the myriad offenses of others, and make them his own. He did not want his offenses, moreover, to be put on other people.

People who cultivate the Way also should have this kind of determined propriety. You shouldn't, when encountering profit, forget about the principle. When you see a sage, you should want to become his equal, to imitate him. When we people investigate Ch'an, we should find a model. Whatever Patriarch's conduct I admire, I should choose to study that Patriarch and imitate him. Whatever Arhat's conduct I like, I should make that Arhat my mirror and allow him to reveal to me my shortcomings so that I may learn from him. Or perhaps I admire a particular Bodhisattva. I should make that Bodhisattva my model, always keeping his conduct in mind, as I do whatever I'm doing. In everything I do, I should follow that Bodhisattva's example and actually do what he did.

If my resolve is greater, if I feel I would like to practice the example set by a particular Buddha, then I should vow to follow the example set by that Buddha's cultivation, the determination exemplified in that Buddha.

Some people say, "Oh, but we're just ordinary people. How can we follow the examples of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas? How can we follow the examples of Arhats and Patriarchs?" If you can't study and follow those examples, then you might as well not study Buddhadharma. Nor is there any need for you to come and investigate Ch'an because if you investigate Ch'an, that's like

standing by the side of the river and wishing to gaze upon the sea. So if you want to study the Buddhadharma, as you begin you should know that basically we are no different from the Buddha. It is just because we have not cultivated that we haven't become Buddhas. We have not become Bodhisattvas, we have not become Arhats, we have not become Patriarchs because we have not chosen to cultivate.

If we are able to cultivate, Buddhas are just made from people. Bodhisattvas are also made from people, as are Arhats and Patriarchs. So we need only have sincere strength in our willpower and determination. Then we can realize any of these states. If your determination is to be a sage, then you will be a sage. If you have the determination to be a hero, then you will become a hero. If you have the determination of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, then you are a Buddha or Bodhisattva. Just see where your determination stands, where it is established. If your vision is far-sighted and your determination is solid, things certainly will accord with your wishes in the future.

So it is said, "Shun was a person, I am also a person. Why can't I do the things that great Emperor Shun can do? Maybe I can do them even better than him--I can transcend him." You should not belittle yourself. Dispense with your self-imposed boundaries. What does that mean? It means you draw a little line and say, "Oh, this is just the way I am. I can't go any farther. I can't progress any more. I haven't any great accomplishment." You draw a line on yourself. You should know that people are the most efficacious creatures among the ten thousand things. Everything is ruled by people. Without people there would be nothing. If there weren't any people, nothing in this world would be of any use.

So, if you are a Buddha, then just be a Buddha. If you are a Bodhisattva, then we'll see you as a Bodhisattva. But if no one receives your teachings, then you are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are unemployed.

So it is people who propagate the Way. The Way does not propagate people. Everything is ruled by people, so if there weren't any people in our Ch'an hall, it would be of no use. Having this many people in the hall investigating Ch'an increases the bright light and dazzling adornment of the Ch'an hall immeasurably. If no people were cultivating in the Ch'an hall, then the Ch'an hall would go on strike. So, everybody, be resolute and hold firmly to your

determination to become Buddhas. We should hurry up and become Buddhas and we will be able to teach and transform Western living beings.

At the outset of Buddhism in the West, if you don't become Buddhas a little sooner, then you are delaying the living beings of the West from becoming Buddhas. You do not know how many people are behind you waiting for you to save them. Do you still want to be lazy and not stand on your own, and rely on other people? You should stand on your own. Take up what you should take up, and put down what you ought to put down. Get your skill precise so that you don't lose track of your goal for even a fraction of a second.

Take a look at Mao T'se T'ung swimming in the great river. The newspapers say he goes as fast as a steamship. Never mind steamships, we should be faster than rockets. Mao T'se T'ung is going to swim the river and we're going to swim across the great void.

Don't look upon yourself as so small. Don't say, "I'm a common person; I cannot become a Buddha." You just lack confidence. Don't look down on yourself. It is said,

Don't find yourself despicable;

Don't throw yourself away.

If you can be like that, then if you want to become a Buddha, you certainly can become a Buddha. If you want to become a Bodhisattva, that's not difficult either. To become a Sage is even less of a problem. You just have to believe in yourself, believe that you ultimately can become a Buddha. Don't not believe in yourself. If you can't see yourself as a great hero among the ancients and moderns, a Great Sage, think of yourselves as being their brothers and sisters and you will be the same as them.

But they're not the only ones, however. Earlier I was talking about the Lord on High. Well, the Lord on High should be beneath me. I'm going to transcend the Lord on High. So there is a saying,

Don't yield to the ancients

As the only ones with wisdom;

Just because you're ancient,

What's so unusual about you?

What is so unusual about them? Say, "What if you are already an ancient? I'm going to be even better than you, right now." Don't yield to the ancients, recognizing them as the only wise ones. Yield means to be polite to, to make concessions to them. Don't be polite to the ancients. With a single blow I can flatten

you, and then I can turn around and save you again. So, you should believe in yourself and not suppose that your contemporaries exceed you and go beyond your measure either. So you shouldn't say of the current president, "Oh, I couldn't possibly compare with him." You should be a great, good learned one in the world and go and teach and transform the President. This is what it means by not yielding to the people of the present as beyond your measure.

This kind of will stands on the earth with its crown in the heavens. It can break through space. I use my will power to fill up empty space. I fill up empty space with my will, so there's no room left for it. That's the way it is. Don't look upon yourself as so small, like a tiny ant that can just steal honey. Don't be like that. And don't be like a rat that only knows how to steal cheese, beans, and grain to eat. This is meaningless.

Then, make great vows such as those made by two monks from Gold Mountain who have vowed to bow once every three steps to Washington. In making that kind of great vow, you shouldn't have even one false thought. If you make a big vow and then you have a few false thoughts, these can obscure the big vow. So don't have false thoughts about killing, don't have false thoughts about stealing, don't think about saying false things or drinking a little wine or looking at pretty women or taking intoxicating drugs; don't have these kinds of false thoughts. As soon as you have these kinds of false thoughts, the gods, dragons, and others of the eight-fold division, the Dharma-protectors and good spirits, and the eighty-four thousand Vajra Store Dharma Protectors who follow you must simultaneously retreat. And, when the Vajra Store Dharma Protector Bodhisattvas retreat, then the retinue of demons attacks. That's why that ghost came to bully you. If you hadn't had those false thoughts, then the demonic ghost wouldn't have had even a little crack to get in, no hole to squeeze through.

This is very, very important. No matter what house you stay in, no matter where you stay, be especially careful not to let your samadhi power become diffused and scattered by striking up false, improper thoughts. This is very important, very important.

So today I have used some of this precious time to explain these important doctrines to you. The Way is actual practice; it's not something that's just spoken of. If you actually go and practice, then that

is immeasurably better than just speaking! So it is said,

Spoken well, spoken wonderfully,
Without real practice
There is no actual Way.

The Way is to be practiced. Without practice, then of what use is the Way? Virtue is done; if it's not done, then what virtue is there? If you don't do virtuous things then the virtue is not there.



Jeweled Conch Hand and Eye

Speaking Dharma is to teach people to break all of their attachments. When you have no attachments, then you very naturally obtain liberation. If you have attachments, then you cannot become liberated. No one is tying you up so you can't become liberated, but you have attachments that prevent you from attaining liberation.

As to attachments, even in investigating Ch'an there are attachments which can occur. One says, "I am a Ch'an Master." In studying the teachings attachments arise when one says, "I'm a Dharma Master." Holding to the Vinaya has the attachments involved in holding to the Vinaya. One says, "I am a Vinaya Master." When cultivating the Secret School, an attachment to holding mantras arises. "I am a Secret School Vajra Superior Master." People who recite the Buddha's name also give rise to attachments, saying, "Oh, I'm one who is mindful of the Buddha and cultivates the Pure Land."

Because of these attachments, the very lively and animated Buddhadharma is relegated to a very rigid kind of worldly dharma. Buddhadharma is the study of leaving all attachments; worldly dharma promotes attachments. If you can dispense with all attachments, then you are