



Hello, again. I hope you had a good week of practice looking into how your practice skills to check and see if you have made some of the mistakes that Master Huineng had tried to warn us against. This is a good idea to check in from time to time. It's easy for us to get comfortable in our practice and then maybe we are straying off without knowing that's what we are doing. Those warnings are always useful to keep us on the proper path in our practice.

Today I'd like to talk about practice in daily life. This is a very important theme in Chinese Chan tradition, and in this line Master Huineng points to that directly: “To seek enlightenment by separating from this world is as absurd as to search for a rabbit's horn.” To seek enlightenment by separating from this world is as absurd as to search for a rabbit's horn. Do rabbits have horns? No.

Here Master Huineng is talking about how futile it is to search for enlightenment by being separated from the world. It is another way of saying that the practice, the cultivation of the path to enlightenment, is in our daily life. It is not about shutting ourselves away in some cave, becoming a hermit, being separated from others, from our social life, from society in the hope of reducing or removing all distractions because that is actually not going to allow us to be in touch with our Buddha nature fully.

This is an important point to keep in mind because it's easy for us to think that, “Well my life is so busy. There are all of these people around. It's so distracting. If I can remove myself from all of these distractions I'm going to practice better.” This thought probably has crossed the minds



of many people who have attended a silent retreat—after finding that being in the silent retreat without all of the distractions of having to talk to people—definitely helps our mind to settle down. Then we get the mistaken notion that to do better is to completely remove ourselves from society and to disengage.

Actually, here Master Huineng warned us against this misunderstanding. Another related tendency of practitioners is to become very addicted to sitting meditation, finding a lot of peace when they are good at the practice. The sitting meditation may in a subtle way have become a way of escaping from the difficulties of their lives. And, of course, when one is doing sitting meditation for a period set aside for the practice, there's nothing wrong with that. But when we want to devote more and more time in sitting meditation, we want to make sure we check our motivation. Are we meditating in order to escape from our difficulties in life? To escape from distractions is what Master Huineng is talking about here—to search for the rabbit's horn.

The practice is about being fully engaged in daily life. Part of it has to do with cultivating our mind through sitting meditation. The practice involves trying to sit in stillness, and also sit in emotion.

How do we go about engaging in this practice? In our last session, we talked about the kind of obstructions Master Huineng warned us against and the ways we can stray off the path. It's not about cultivating a blank mind, pushing away thoughts. What are we supposed to do?



This line from Master Huineng gives us a clue: “To know your mind is to obtain liberation.” To see and to know all dharma, meaning all things, with a mind free from attachment.

Here he emphasizes this practice of fully knowing our minds, that knowing what is going on is to obtain liberation. If one has been led to believe that the practice is about making the mind into a certain state or fixed on a certain thought, this might be quite surprising. But actually it shouldn't be, because to really know our minds will allow us to seek freely how we react to things in ways that cause our own suffering.

Seeing how we do that in very, very subtle steps, through every moment of our minds, gives us an opportunity to make a choice in this moment. Do I want to move along this path that goes down the path of creating suffering which I have done many times in my life? Or do I want to stop here? That's cutting the chain that leads down the road of suffering at this point. It's your choice, and it's impossible for us to make that choice without the ability to see clearly how our mind makes a decision, one step at a time from thought to thought to thought to action to speech that more often than not causes us the suffering.

That is why to know our mind is to obtain liberation, to fully know how our mind operates, give us the opportunity to be free from our habitual tendencies from our conditionings. At least we can exercise the choice. Maybe you don't want to be free from suffering. But you do. Now, you have an opportunity.



How do we go about the practice to know the mind fully? In our sitting meditation we can apply the method of sitting and start with stabilizing our minds. This is particularly relevant in our daily life practice. We might have a lot of things going on in our lives, so we want to use any kind of method that provides an anchor for our minds to settle down. When the mind is more settled down, we are able to see what's going on.

Where many people get hung up on this is to ask, “Well, what am I going to do?” But you don't need to do anything. It's natural to have thoughts arising in our mind because we do have a brain. We experience sensory stimulations, mind response, normal functions of the mind. You will notice that the mind is sometimes more busy, and sometimes less so.

First, allow thoughts to arise. We don't need to create them. We don't need to go look for them. As we sit here with whatever arises, we respond, “Oh, okay, well, this is arising. Oh, interesting. Oh, no problem.” We can relax into our sitting, relax into the present moment and allow ourselves to see what's arising. Allow whatever arises to be some thoughts. It just comes up and then it disappears. Some thoughts might be a story, a story that has come to visit you many, many times but you never allow yourself to hear the whole story because you're busy chasing it away. Allow the story to be there and when it's done it will go away.

No thought stays in our mind forever. We don't need to get more obsessed with it, get all excited about it and add more story, but we can just allow whatever arises to be there and take its time. When it's done, we allow it then it's down we allow it to leave our mind in its own time.



Many people find it difficult to do this especially the third part. Many people have asked me, “How do I let go of my thoughts? I look at these thoughts and I let it be there for some time. Now, I’m ready to let them go. So how do I let go of it?” The moment we have this idea that now I’m ready to let it go, you’re not allowing the thought to be there and take its own course.

It is the same as trying to control our breath. Instead of allowing the body to just breathe on its own, we want to get involved. We want to make the breath different. We want to make it deeper. We want to make it longer, whatever it is we want to do. Our urge to want to let go of these thoughts really is we are trying to push them away. Maybe we’re getting uncomfortable with it. Maybe we don’t like what we are seeing. We want it to go away. It is the same habits of having this urge, this compulsion to want to reject whatever is arising in the mind.

The practice here is to recognize the tendency to turn away, and then to come back. Come back to the practice and let it take whatever time you need. It’s full acceptance of whatever that is right here, right now in this moment. The practice is based on the relaxation of the body and mind so that we can enter the practice itself. This is also the practice we teach in our silent elimination retreat; the silence in elimination of the mind arising at the same time.

This is how we go about the practice in our sitting, but it is not different when we engage in our daily life. In the practice, when the sitting is over it’s easy for us to think that, “Okay, I’m done practicing.” Move on to get ready for work, get chores done, whatever, and then completely forget about the practice. This is very often where we make our mistake.



The practice doesn't stop when the meditation bell goes off. It merely changes in form. The transition from stillness and sitting to motion in our daily life is quite important to note. Are we getting all scattered and forgetting about practice? At the end of your meditation, I invite you to take look at what happens to your mind.

What do we do in our daily life? If you really think about it, the body moves around instead of sitting still. We might be walking. We might be doing some kind of work. We might be eating. We might be talking to other people. We might be reading. We're engaged in all sorts of things.

There are a couple of principles we can use to maintain practice in our daily life activities in motion. You can try practicing, for example, walking meditation. Even though the body is walking, the mind can maintain this clear awareness of everything that arises. One might ask, “How am I supposed to anchor my mind if my mind goes all over the place, forget all about the practice from time to time?” That's a very good question. In the walking meditation, you can use the sensation of your foot touching the floor as an anchor of the mind. Whenever we find that the mind is completely gone somewhere in a daydream, then as soon as we recognize that that's going on we can bring ourselves back to the present moment, to the practice—and the anchor is the sensation of the foot touching the floor.

You can do this all day long every time you stand up to walk somewhere to get a drink of water, to use the restroom, to go to your car. You can start anchoring your mind there, even though you have completely forgotten about the practice for the whole morning. The moment your foot



touches the floor, this is the time to engage in the practice, to be aware of the changing sensations of the body as it moves.

This goes into other aspects of our daily life. We might be doing dishes. We might be picking up clothes. We might be cleaning up stacks of folders in our office. As our body moves around we maintain this clear awareness of the sensations of the body moving, being clearly aware of whatever we're doing in this moment. When in motion, whatever task is at hand is the method of our practice. The trick here really is to remember and to come back to the practice.

Another practice in our daily life is eating meditation, another application of the general principle of moving meditation. We clearly are aware of our movement taking the food into our mouths. We are clearly aware of the sensations of the food in the mouth: its temperature, its texture, its taste. We remember to chew slowly, at least in the beginning, and maintain this clear awareness of the changing texture, changing taste, changing temperature, the changing sensations of the food in our mouth as we chew.

It's the same practice. It's just that we're focusing on the chewing of the food in our mouth. This way, if we maintain this clear awareness throughout our daily life, our mind will remain relatively settled, which allows us to maintain this clear awareness on what's arising around us. This brings the Chan practice into our daily life, along with the attitude towards our practice that Master Huineng talked about.



We should practice straightforwardness and should not attach ourselves to anything. This straightforwardness has come up, again, in this course of later Chan masters. You might have heard of the practice a straightforward mind. What is he talking about? Whatever we are doing, just be natural. Be with whatever we're doing wholeheartedly. That's it. Be with the present moment wholeheartedly right here, right now. Be here. Be natural. Be yourself as you are right now. Just be yourself. Not who I wish I could be, not this other person in our minds that we would rather be, but accepting everything about who we are right now—the straightforward mind.

The opposite of straightforward mind would be crooked mind. It's also mentioned in his sutra. Crooked is not like being evil or bad per se, but it is an interruption with being natural, being fully here in this moment with this clear awareness of what's happening both around ourselves and what's arising in our mind, when we have a realization that, “Oh I'm supposed to be a Chan practitioner. I'm supposed to appear a certain way.” Thus, you end up becoming uptight because you're trying too hard to be someone other than yourself. That is attaching ourselves to something.

Here Master Huineng talks about practicing straightforwardness and nonattachment. But very often we attach to something. We might be attached to our ideas of how we are supposed to be, how to be calm, how to be spiritual, how to be Zen. Whatever we have created of how we are supposed to be, is what we're attaching to—rather than being straightforward, just being here naturally.





Living with the straightforward mind, practicing the straightforward mind, if something arises in our mind, if sadness arises and a tear comes off our eyes, that is what happens. When we notice that moment as, “Oh I shall not do that. I shall not look sad,” we forget all about the straightforward mind. We are trying hard to be someone else.

Now, when we hear this kind of teaching, some people might be quite worried: “Does this mean that I can just do whatever that comes up in my mind?” Obviously, that's not what we are talking about. We are not talking about becoming someone who is totally uninhibited in our speech and action and just does whatever they want regardless of the effect on others. No.

At this point it's very important to remember what we are doing. What we're doing is engaging in a practice to free ourselves from suffering, to slowly lessen our tendency to react to things that cause us suffering. At the same time, we are also practicing so that we don't act in ways that cause harm to other people. It is not about being uninhibited in our speech or in our actions. No.

We have to remember when we engage in this practice: What are we doing? What are we trying to do? In this practice we're cultivating this path that will allow us to free ourselves from suffering. How do we do that? We do that by stopping or doing less and less, engaging less and less in the action that get us to suffering. Reacting to things in ways that get us to suffer. We do that less and less.



We try to act in ways that won't cause harm to others. How do we do that? We do that by being aware of the effects of our actions on others. Think about it. If we had done something that caused harm to others we're not going to be happy afterwards. This is another way we suffer. We refrain from actions that cause harm to ourselves and to others by being clearly aware of the effects of our actions.

We can see that the role of precepts in our practice is important. The precepts can serve as a guide to what will likely cause harm to others. The cultivation of awareness is about remembering—remembering to bring the precepts into our life. Remembering to notice what I'm about to do may cause harm to others, maybe cause suffering in me. This is how to engage in the practice in daily life using the teaching from Master Huineng.

This week, in addition to your sitting practice, I would like you to be clearly aware of everything that arises in your mind by *allowing* what arises to arise, allowing it to be there and allowing it to go when it's time to go. In your daily life, remember to come back to the method with whatever you're doing. You might find that you forget a lot. You can see what other tricks you can come up with to remind yourself to come back to the practice. I will see you next week.