



Question and Answer Series
by Grandmaster Wong Kiew Kit

on

Zen

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Please note:

This Document includes the *10 questions on the Zen Intensive Course in Hawaii* from 2014 and *10 questions on Zen* from 2012.

Question 1

1. Could you please tell us about the three dimensions of mind training in Zen?
2. Could you please elaborate them?
3. You told us that the great Zen and Shaolin patriarch Bodhidharma put emphasis on the so called sudden approach. Enlightenment can be achieved in the here and now. How could we possibly transfer this approach into for instance our own Chi Kung training?
4. Could it be that with our high level Chi Kung which is a legacy of the Great Bodhidharma for example blockages even deep rooted once just get cleared suddenly? Could this approach also lead to the fact that our Kung Fu students achieve for example in a one day force training course in Zhan Zhuang as much as many other martial artists maybe in ten years?

Sifu Roland Mastel

Answer

There are two dimensions in Zen training, the mundane dimension and the supra-mundane dimension.

The mundane dimension concerns our phenomenal world. The supra-mundane dimension concerns transcendental Cosmic Reality.

Zen training gives us the best in either dimension. In the mundane dimension, Zen trains the mind to achieve the best result in whatever we do in our daily life. In the supra-mundane dimension, Zen training brings us the highest attainment any being can achieve, called differently due to difference of culture, such as Enlightenment, Buddhahood, returning to God the Holy Spirit, union with God, and merging with the Great Void.

In the phenomenal realm, the three dimensions of mind training in Zen are to tame the mind, to strengthen the mind, and to expand the mind.

For the great majority of people, the mind is described as horses and monkeys, i.e. people continuously affected by ceaseless thoughts. Thus, the first task is to tame the mind. There are many methods to do so, but all the methods can be reduced to one or zero.

In the one-approach, the principle is to use one thought to represent hundreds of thoughts. A practitioner focuses on one thought, which can be an object, an idea or a simple process. He

may, for example, focus on a spot in front of him or his dan tian. He may focus on counting from 1 to 4 and repeat the counting, or focus on his breathing. He may focus on his simple movement like Lifting the Sky or a Shaolin or Taijiquan pattern. Once he can focus on one thought, which must be done gently, all other thoughts will be kept away.

In the zero-approach, he keeps his mind free from all thoughts. My sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, taught me an effective method. Just keep the mind empty, and whenever any thoughts appear, just throw them away. It is simple, but not easy. It needs much mind power to do it successfully. Another method is to imagine yourself to be a burning cauldron. Any thoughts that enter your mind will be burn away (but your mind is cool and fresh despite the burning fire).

The one-approach is easier than the zero-approach. The aim of the one-approach is to attain a one-pointed mind, where that of the zero-approach is to expand into the Cosmos where practitioners can tap into universal wisdom and inspiration.

The one-approach and the zero-approach are also used in the supra-mundane dimension. The methods are the same, but the attainments are different. The onus of the mundane dimension is peak performance, whereas that of the supra-mundane dimension is the highest spiritual fulfillment.

These two approaches are used in all spiritual and religions disciples, though they may not be well defined. It is necessary to attain a reasonably high level in being one-pointed before practitioners can expand into zero. In other words, if practitioners' mind is distracted by thoughts, he cannot merge with the Cosmos.

These two approaches are well defined in the Buddhist tradition. Attaining a one-pointed mind is focused in Sammadha or concentration meditation, and expanding into the Cosmos is focused in vispasaana or wisdom meditation. In sammadha meditation, practitioners' mind is concentrated; in vispassna meditation, practitioners attain cosmic wisdom.

In any religion, chanting prayers and worshipping God or gods are effective means to attain a one-pointed mind. When the mind is one-pointed, it expands beyond the physical body and merges with the Cosmos, described differently in different culture as seeing God, merging with Tao or attaining a satori.

Although we do not practice meditation in a seated lotus position, our students have attained incredibly high levels in concentration meditation and wisdom meditation. Indeed, attaining a one-pointed mind is a basic requirement in our school, without which a student would be unable to practice chi kung or develop internal force. It is precisely because most other chi kung and kungfu practitioners are unable to attain a one-pointed mind that they have no chi kung benefits or fail to develop internal force despite having the right techniques.

Of course, attaining a one-pointed mind which together with being relaxed constitute a chi kung state of mind, is not just for practicing chi kung and developing internal force. It enhances every aspect of our daily life.

There are three stages of mind training – taming the mind, strengthening the mind, and expanding the mind. For most other people, the middle stage, i.e. strengthening the mind, is

not well defined. It occurs haphazardly. When others can tame their mind, they do not waste energy on ceaseless, irrelevant thoughts.

But in our case, we strengthen our mind purposely and systematically. The Zen course is special for this purpose. In advanced methods like Cosmic Shower and Cosmic Breathing, we let cosmic energy strengthen us not only physically, but also emotionally, mentally and spiritually. These emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions constitute our mind.

Even if you have not taken these advanced courses but by just practicing our basic exercises, you will also have strengthened your mind. You are not just your physical body. You are an integrated unity of the physical body, energy and mind. Some cultures call the mind, the spirit, soul or consciousness.

Energy is the link between the physical body and the mind. When we train energy, we strengthen our body and our mind. Hence, chi kung is sometimes called triple cultivation – it cultivates the body, the energy and the mind.

Other people may ask, “How do you know you have strengthened your mind?” We don’t ask such a question because we know from direct experience, just as we don’t ask how we know we have a chi flow or have developed internal force. In principle, it is like asking how does one know he is sitting on a chair or using a computer. He knows it when he sits on a chair or use a computer. Of course, sitting on a chair and using a computer (in today’s age) are commonplace, but strengthening the mind, enjoying a chi flow and developing internal force are elite.

Yet, it may be useful for confirmation, especially for those who are still new in the practice, to assess whether we have strengthened our mind, i.e. whether we have strengthened ourselves emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

If, for example, you were nervous or afraid, but after practicing our arts you are calm and confident, then you have strengthened yourself emotionally. If previously your thoughts controlled you, but now you control your thoughts, then you have strengthened yourself mentally. If previously you were depressed and disorientated, but now you are happy and peaceful, then you have strengthened yourself spiritually.

Zen is famous for its sudden approach, i.e. attain Enlightenment in an instant. It is also in records that Zen has had the biggest number of people who attained Enlightenment. In other religions and spiritual disciplines it took years or lifetimes to attain the highest spiritual fulfillment, and that only happened to masters.

We can transfer this sudden approach into our chi kung, kungfu and all aspects of our life by following the spirit of Zen, which is to be simple, direct and effective. This, in fact, is characteristic of our school, enabling us to have remarkable results in a very short time.

When we want to generate a chi flow or develop internal force, for example, the techniques we use are very simple. In fact some students later reported that initially we wondered whether these simple techniques worked. We perform the techniques directly, like Lifting the Sky or Horse-Riding Stance. We did not bother with frills and decorations. Our practice give us the desired benefits effectively, often immediately after the exercise. We do not have to wait for a

year or two to see results.

In daily life, if you want to buy a shirt or take your girlfriend out for a date, you carry out your task simply, directly and effectively. You buy a shirt or take your girlfriend out for a date. You don't spend a week going round many shops to find the best bargain or spend a lot of time how and when to ask your girlfriend.

You buy a shirt or take your girlfriend out directly. You don't ask a shop assistant to show you some shoes, ties or handbags first. You don't ask your girlfriend what food she likes, where she spent her last holidays, or whom she met at her office. You accomplish your task effectively, i.e. you have bought a shirt or taken your girlfriend out.

Our high level chi kung, like other legacies of Bodhidharma, is simple, direct and effective. But it may or may not clear deep rooted blockages suddenly. Some blockages, like karmic blockages, may take many months to clear, whereas other blockages, like those that cause pain, may be cleared during the exercise itself. But the clearing of blockages, even those that take months, is certainly faster and more effective than other schools of chi kung.

Yes, this sudden-approach, which draws its inspiration from Zen, enables our kungfu students to achieve many desirable results, like force training in zhan zhuang, in one day what it takes many other martial artists a long time, like in ten years.

This statement may appear boastful and make other martial artists angry, but it is true. Most martial artists do not have internal force even if they have trained for more than ten years, but our students can feel internal force on the very first day they practice zhan zhuang.

Question 2

Which Zen story is Sifu's favorite?

Sifu Mark Blohm

Answer

I have heard or read many Zen stories and have benefited much from them. But I have not thought of a favorite one. Right now two stories come randomly to mind. Judging from the ease and speed they come to mind, they must be two of my favorites

Two Zen monks came to a shadow river. They had to wade across it and the river water would come to their chest. A young woman was at a bank. She wanted to cross the river too, but was hesitant.

The elder of the two monks just carried her in his arms and waded across the river. When they had crossed to the other bank, he placed the woman down, and she thanked him. The two monks then went their way.

On the way, the younger monk was thinking, “How could my brother monk carry a woman in his arms. Monks are supposed to abstain from sex.”

He was thinking and thinking, but could not get an answer. He became very moody. At last he could hold no longer, so he asked the elder monk.

“Brother, I have been thinking all the way. Why did you carry the woman in your arms? Monks are supposed to abstain from sex.”

The elder monk looked a bit surprised, but he answered.

“I carried her in my arms to help her cross the river. I did not have sex with her.”

After a few steps the elder monk asked the younger one.

“Why did you let this thought trouble you all the way? I dropped it at the river bank as I dropped her.”

Many people cling onto unnecessary thoughts all through life. They can benefit much from this story.

Here is another Zen story that can bring us many benefits.

An aspirant met a Zen monk and asked.

“Sir, what benefits have you got from your daily cultivation?”

“I eat when I eat, I sleep when I sleep,” the monk answered as a matter-of-factly.

“Can you perform miracles?”

“I’m not keen on miracles.”

“My teacher can perform many miracles.”

“What miracles does your teacher perform?” the monk asked.

“If he is thirsty, he can create water out of nothing. Once he even created a palace.”

“If I am thirsty, it’s easier for me to drink from a stream. I am happy living in my little hut. I don’t need a palace.”

“My teacher can do things that people cannot do.”

“There were things that even the Buddha could not do,” the monk said.

The young aspirant was very surprised.

“I thought the Buddha was omnipotent! What things the Buddha could not do?”

“The Buddha could not go without food and water. The Buddha could not make the dead live again. The Buddha could not change someone’s bad karma into good karma. “

Question 3

1. Historically, is the sudden Enlightenment of the Art of Zen only possible due to prior gradual progression in Zen fundamentals, as in a time toiling hard working millionaire? Or did sudden Enlightenment without gradual preparation also happen due to a Buddha’s grace (as in someone who instantly inherited a million from a gracious benefactor without

having to do any work? Or somewhere in between, as in a sincere student's one step of devotional effort being reciprocated by 10 steps of Grace from the Master?

2. Prefaced to the above questions is the seemingly impossibility of completely cleansing, without a speck of dirt, all accumulated karma from countless lifetimes in the here and now without factoring in the Grace of Buddha which makes anything possible.

Dr Damian Kissey

Answer

In the past as well as at present, whether Enlightenment happens instantly or gradually In Zen is a matter of perception. Viewing it from the present perspective, i.e. in the present life, Enlightenment in Zen is instantaneous. This, in fact, is the hallmark of Zen.

In other words, when conditions are ideal, when a cultivator has cleared his mind of all thoughts, like being shocked by a “gongan”, or seemingly illogical questioning and answering, or merging his mind into the Cosmos without any thought, he attains Enlightenment instantly. In advanced courses in our school, like Cosmic Breathing, Merging with the Cosmos, and Big Universe, the experience is a spiritual awakening as we return to our phenomenal world.

However, viewing it from a cosmic dimension, i.e. over countless lifetimes, Enlightenment even in Zen is a gradual process. After spiritual development over many lifetimes, as a result of his good karma, a cultivator eventually comes into an ideal situation when he can attain a spiritual awakening or Enlightenment instantly. If he is not ready, prepared by a gradual progress of spiritual attainment, even when a Zen master provides him a “gongan”, or we offer him those advanced courses, he would still miss the opportunity.

In history, Liang Wu Di, the emperor who had an audience with Bodhidharma, missed the golden opportunity twice. When the emperor, having related his many good deeds like building temples and translating sutras, asked Bodhidharma whether he had any merits, the great Zen monk answered “No”.

This was a “gongan” to shock the emperor into having no thoughts, whereby he could attain Enlightenment or at least a spiritual awakening. Seeing the emperor missed the opportunity, the great Zen master explained to him intellectually. Bodhidharma explained that what the emperor had did was cultivation of blessings, not merits. Cultivating blessings brought good karma. In fact, Liang Wu Di had very good karma, cumulating his becoming an emperor of a prosperous empire.

Cultivating merits trained the mind, or spirit, so that the personal mind would merge into the Universal Mind. The aim is to transcend karma. In classical Chinese terms, it is jumping beyond the three realms. The three realms are the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the realm of non-form. The three realms constitute the phenomenal world, which includes not only our puny world but also heavens and hells.

Humans, all the creatures we see in our world, as well as gods and ghosts exist in the realm of desire. Brahma-gods exist in the realm of form. Bodhidattvas and arahans exist in the realm of non-form. When a cultivator jumps beyond the three realms, he attains Buddhahood, or in Western terms returning to God the Holly Spirit.

Cultivating blessings is different from cultivating merits. Cultivating blessings is to avoid evil and do good, which will result in good karma, abiding the cultivator in the phenomenal realms. Cultivating merits is cultivating the mind, which eventually liberates him from the phenomenal realms, and the cultivator merges into Cosmic Reality where there is no differentiation between the knower and the known.

After explaining the difference between cultivating blessings and cultivating merits to the emperor, though not as explicitly as I have done here, the great Bodhidharma gave the emperor another chance when the emperor asked, “Who is this person before me?”, to which Bodhidharma answered, “I don’t know”.

It was a “gongan” to shock the emperor into non-thought so that he might attain a spiritual awakening, or even Enlightenment. In transcendental Cosmic Reality, there are no differentiated entities. It is just one continuous spread of consciousness. When there was a difference between Bodhidharma and the emperor, they experienced the phenomenal world. It is incredible that many of our students experienced this transcendental reality. In the Small and Big Universe Course in Toronto on 27th April 2014, for example, about 75% of the more than 50 course participants expanded their spirit beyond their physical body and experienced that they were everywhere and nowhere.

A similar “googan”, which literally means a public record of actual Zen experiences, especially concerning attaining spiritual awakenings or Enlightenment, when a monk asked the famous Zen master, Zhao Zhou.

“Master, does a dog have Buddha nature?”

Every monk, in fact every person who had some basic knowledge of spiritual cultivation, knew the answer. All beings, including dogs, have Buddha nature. In Western terms, all beings have the spark of God in them, otherwise God the Holly Spirit would not be everything there is.

But Zhao Zhou answered “No!”.

The answer, given at this particular point to this particular monk, shocked him into non-thought, and he attained a spiritual awakening. He prostrated and thanked the master.

Viewing from the present perspective, this Zen experience was instantaneous. But viewing from a cosmic perspective, the experience was gradual. The monk had cultivated blessings in his previous lives to be able to become a monk in that particular life to learn from Zhao Zhou.

If other people who lacked the gradual spiritual development of the monk, asked Zhao Zhou the same question and the great master gave the same answer, they would not attain a spiritual awakening. In the same way, if other people who are not our Shaolin Wahnam students, were in my Small Universe Course, they would not attain the Small Universe even though they may

learn the right techniques.

Recently in Toronto, Jean, our Chief Instructor for Shaolin Wahnam Canada, told em that a kungfu instructor who had been teaching other styles of kungfu for many years, announced in his website that he had a kungfu “enlightenment” after attaining my Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Course. All his other styles of kungfy were raised a few levels due to the “enlightenment”, which was possible after he had trained for many years in the other styles.

Most other chi kung and kungfu students do not have the good karma to learn from us and get the wonderful benefits our Shaolin Wahnam students get even when we are unprecedentedly generous in offering our courses to the public. They cannot even generate a chi flow to have good health, or develop internal force for peak performance.

How do we cultivate blessings to have good karma? An excellent, practical way is to practice the Ten Shaolin Laws, a prerequisite to learn our arts. How do we cultivate merits for spiritual development. An excellent way is to smile from the heart, which will set our spirit free and which we do every time we practice.

Whether Enlightenment, sudden or gradual, is due to a Buddha’s grace is also a matter of perspective. From historical records, the number of Enlightenment through Zen far exceeds that in any other spiritual discipline. Enlightenment through Zen is usually described as sudden. But, as explained above, gradual preparation, often in previous lives, is needed.

The majority of Enlightenment cases were due to the help or grace of a Zen master, whom we may figuratively described as a Buddha. In a minority of cases, some cultivators might attain Enlightenment on their own, like suddenly hearing the sound of a frog jumping into a placid pond. Even in these minority cases, their sudden Enlightenment was due to the teaching of their Zen masters, which eventually could be traced back to the Buddha of our era, Siddhatha Guatama. Siddhartha Guatama attained Enlightenment when he was 29, but due to his great compassion and grace, he continued teaching for another 51 years, not only to humans but also to divine beings.

Sincere cultivators can go to the Western Paradise of Eternal Bliss if they chant Amitabha Buddha’s name with a one-pointed mind. Although going to the Western Paradise, strictly speaking, is not Enlightenment, as the Western Paradise still exists in the phenomenal realm, it may be figuratively described as “enlightenment”. There is no more rebirth into the phenomenal realm in the Western Paradise. The next stage, which is assured by Amitabha Buddha is Enlightenment.

Such “enlightenment” or eventual Enlightenment is usually described as through the grace of Amitabha Buddha. Nevertheless, these cultivators must have accumulated a lot of blessings before they can have this golden opportunity to be reborn in the Western Paradise. Those who do not have sufficient good karma may not believe in or laugh at it when taught the teaching.

Amitabha Buddha states three conditions for those aspiring to the Western Paradise:

1. They must believe that the Western Paradise exists.

2. They must want to be reborn in the Western Paradise.
3. They must cultivate appropriately.

There are a few ways to cultivate to be reborn in the Western Paradise. Probably the simplest is to recite Amitabha Buddha's name with a one-pointed mind.

Similarly, at a lower level, we have excellent methods and proven records to help patients overcome so-called incurable diseases. But they must satisfy three conditions:

1. They must believe that their so-called incurable diseases can be cured.
2. They must want to be healthy again.
3. They must practice the appropriate methods.

We have much compassion and grace, but if they do not fulfill these three conditions, we do not want to waste our time on them.

As you have rightly mentioned, completely cleansing without a speck of dust here and now all accumulated karma from countless lifetimes is only seemingly impossible, but actually possible, as is evident from historical records, especially in Zen and Pure Land Buddhism.

There are two essentials.

The first essential comprises three conditions:

1. The aspirants must believe that it is possible.
2. The aspirants must want the possibility.
3. The aspirants must practice the appropriate methods.

The second essential, unless the aspirant is already enlightened himself, is the grace of a Buddha, or an enlightened one.

In all other schools of Buddhism, as well as other spiritual disciplines, the attainment of Enlightenment is gradual. But in Zen it is sudden.

Attaining Enlightenment is merging into Cosmic Reality. We are an integral part of Cosmic Reality. At the cosmic level there is factually no separation between ourselves and the snow at the poles, or anything else, like the clothes you are wearing or the computer screen you are looking at.

But due to various conditions, like our senses and collective consciousness, we perceive this continuous, undifferentiated spread of energy as differentiated entities. In Buddhist terms, we see purity through countless layers of dilemmas accumulated over countless lifetimes.

The orthodox method is to tear off each layer of defilement until purity is reached. This is gradual enlightenment.

The Zen method is to attain non-thought. Since the phenomenal world, figuratively described as defilement, is the result of thoughts, once there is non-thought, the phenomenal world disappears suddenly and purity is reached. This is sudden enlightenment.

Question 4

1. In Buddhism it is often written that the last thought of a person before dying is very important. In Zen the focus is no thought. Could you elaborate on this seemingly conflicting koan?
2. In olden times, Zen masters would sometimes hit a student with a stick. One of the reasons for this was to unblock energy. However, sometimes this also caused an awakening. Is there a relation between the flow of energy, or maybe even a deep release of energy and the experience of satori, or even complete awakening.
3. In our school we use Entering Zen, which I experience as a skill. It is transmitted, then we learn to induce it ourselves, and by practicing over time the experience deepens. Even “Merging with the Cosmos”, is a skill. A satori is described in ancient texts as a sudden awakening. What is the relation between these skills we learn, and the Satori that is described in the ancient texts.

Sifu Jeroen Maes

Answer

What will the future life of a dying person be? It is determined by three factors:

1. His last thought.
2. His stage of spiritual development.
3. His karma.

Presuming all other things being equal, if a dying person is full of fear in his last thought, he is likely to be reborn as an animal, as fear is the characteristic of the animal world. If he is peaceful and satisfied with his life, he is likely to be reborn in heaven, as peace and joy are characteristics of the heavenly realm.

If a dying person is spiritually lost, he is likely to be a wandering ghost in his next life. If he has a sound understanding of spiritual cultivation and has cultivated himself spiritually, he is likely to be reborn at a higher station in his next life. A master may decide where he wishes to be reborn.

Good karma will cause a person to be reborn in a better life, and bad karma in a worse life. Karma is a function of thought, speech and action. If a person has good karma, which is a summation of all his thoughts, speeches and actions in his present and previous lives, even his last thought might not be favorable, and he might not be knowledgeable in spirituality, his good karma would still cause him to be reborn at a better station than previously.

The phenomenal world is the result of thought. Of the three factors causing karma, thought is the most important. Good thought will result in good karma, which will ensure a good life in the phenomenal world.

When there is perfectly no thought, the phenomenal world dissolves naturally and Cosmic Reality results. This meant by saying that nirvana is samsara, and samara is nirvana. Nirvana and samara, or transcendental reality and the phenomenal world, are not two different places. They are two aspects of the same reality. When there is thought, samara results. When there is no thought, nirvana results.

“Koan”, which is in Japanese, literally means “public case”. In Chinese it is called “gongan”. Figuratively, a gongan or koan is a public record of an Enlightenment experience or a spiritual awakening. It usually involves a logical question and an illogical answer.

An example is a public record of a monk asking a Zen master, “What is a Buddha?” The answer is “three pounds of flax.”

Another example is “Why did the First Patriarch came from the West?” and the answer is “Go and wash your face!”.

The aim is not to give an intellectual answer, which most monks would know. The one who asked “What is a Buddha?”, for example, knew that a Buddha is an Enlightened One, and the monk who asked “Why did the First Patriarch came from the West?” knew that Bodhidharma came to teach Zen.

The seemingly illogical answer was meant to shock the monks into non-thought so that they could attain Enlightenment or at least a spiritual awakening. The same questions and the same answers applied to other people would not have the same result. Similarly, but in a different context, when an instructor in our school asks students to close their eyes and let go, the students would enjoy a chi flow. But the same instruction on other people would not have the same result.

The explanation above that the last thought of a person before dying is important and that the focus in Zen is on non-thought so as to help cultivators attain Enlightenment or a spiritual awakening, is not a gongan. It is an intellectual explanation.

An intellectual explanation gives a philosophical understanding but may not produce a practical result. In other words, those who have read my answer here will know that the last thought of a dying person is important, and that it is different from the philosophy of non-thought which can bring about Enlightenment or a spiritual awakening, but they may not necessarily have the practical benefit of the last thought or non-thought.

As an analogy, saying that entering into a chi kung state of mind is a prerequisite to have a chi flow is an intellectual explanation, but it may not necessarily bring practical benefit. Those who have read the explanation (and believe in the philosophy) may not necessarily be able to enter into a chi kung state of mind, or to have a chi flow even when they have entered into a chi kung state of mind.

Indeed, this inability to differentiate between philosophical understanding and practical benefit is a main reason why many people do not get benefit from practicing chi kung, kungfu or any art even when they have the right techniques. It is also an important reason why some people think, wrongly, that they can learn chi kung or kungfu from books or videos.

This does not mean that a philosophical understanding is not important. In fact it is very important. In my list of steps to get the best result from your practice, to have a philosophical understanding is the first important step.

Many chi kung and kungfu practitioners have wasted a lot of time in their training, in a matter of years, because they lack a sound philosophical understanding of chi kung and kungfu. Many Zen practitioners have wasted a lot of time in their Zen training because they lack a philosophical understanding that the focus of Zen is non-thought. Thus, they study Zen, which requires much thought, instead of practicing Zen.

The reason for a Zen master in the past to hit a student with a stick was not to unblock the student's energy, but to shock him into non-thought, which hopefully might bring about a spiritual awakening or even Enlightenment. (Here we leave out splitting hairs on whether having thought is a form of blocked energy.)

If a student did not attain a satori, or a spiritual awakening, despite being hit by a Zen master, it was not because the hitting failed to clear blocked energy, but because the student was not ready (regardless of whether he had or did not have blocked energy).

Yes, there is a relation between energy flow, including a deep release of energy, and a satori experience or even Enlightenment. When a student has harmonious energy flow, the chance of him attaining a satori is high. Many Shaolin Wahnam students in advanced courses had a satori experience after an harmonious energy flow.

On the other hand, when a student has much energy blockage, he is unlikely to have a satori. This was the reason why Bodhidharma taught the Eighteen Lohan Hands at the Shaolin Temple. The great Zen master found the Shaolin monks too weak to practice Zen meditation successfully to attain Enlightenment, and he taught the Eighteen Lohan Hands to strengthen them. Being weak was a sign of energy blockage, and clearing the blockage would strengthen them.

Yes, both entering Zen and merging with the Cosmos are skills, the first being the start and the latter being the completion of the training process. We start our training by entering Zen, and we attain the highest achievement by merging with the Cosmos. In our case, as we still want to live in our phenomenal world, we return to it after experiencing Cosmic Reality.

A satori, or spiritual awakening, is a glimpse of Cosmic Reality. Hence, the satori is somewhere between entering Zen and merging with the Cosmos. First we enter Zen, for without this skill we cannot progress to higher skills. After experiencing Cosmic Reality, like expanding our spirit beyond our physical body, or finding ourselves everywhere and nowhere, we return to our phenomenal world.

We are awoken to the fact via direct experience that our real being is our spirit, and our body is an illusion, though it is "real" to us in our everyday consciousness. We have a "taste"

of, or are introduced to being an integral part of Cosmic Reality. Figuratively we describe this taste or introduction as a glimpse.

Question 5

Dear Sifu, I always wondered whom did you learn Zen from? May you share with us please?

Santiago

Answer

I learned Zen from my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam. The public knew my master as a great Taoist master who gave spiritual guidance to people who sought his advice, but not many people, not even some of his students, realized that he was a great Zen master.

Then, how did I know my sifu was a great Zen master. He himself told me My sifu did not say he was a great Zen master. But he told that towards the later part of his life, he practiced Zen rather than Tao, and judging from his Zen attainment I regarded him as a great Zen master, even greater than his being a great Taoist master which was publicly acknowledged.

My siheng, Ah Heng, who learn Taoist cultivation from my sifu, explained why my sifu focused on Zen more than on Tao. towards his later life. The attainment in Tao was phenomenal, whereas the attainment in Zen was transcendental. Being an immortal is still in the phenomenal realm, but attaining Zen is merging with the Cosmos.

Besides teaching me to practice meditation in a lotus position, my sifu manifested Zen teaching in his daily life. For example, if I asked my sifu how I could counter a certain attack, instead of giving me a lengthy explanation, he would ask me to attack and he would counter accordingly.

If I asked my sifu a question, like “Sifu, what martial art do you consider the best?”, he would just answer, “Shaolin Kungfu.” He would not beat around the bush like saying when he started practicing martial arts, and how many different martial arts he had learned.

Question 6

1. What would be the best way for students to prepare to attend this Intensive Zen Course?
2. Will gong-ans feature as a training or testing tool as part of the course?
3. What benefits in daily life will participants be able to realize after taking this landmark course?

Sifu Andy Cusick

Answer

The best way to prepare for the Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii is to come with an open mind. In Zen terms, come with an empty cup.

The same principle applies to all other learning. It is amusing that some students, having learnt some rudimentary features, which may not even be correct sometimes, think that they are smarter than masters. It is not uncommon today because many “masters”, especially in the internal arts and even when they are well-known, are bogus. But these students will miss a lot when they learn from genuine masters.

Gong-ans, or real stories of spiritual awakening or Enlightenment, will not be used as a training or testing tool for their particular purpose, but will be used to help course participants enjoy and understand Zen better.

The particular purpose of gong-ans is to help students attain a spiritual awakening or even Enlightenment. For example, a monk asked his master, “Why did our First Patriarch come from the West?”

Every monk knew the answer, i.e. Bodhiharma came from India to China to teach Zen.

But the master answered, “Three pounds of flax!”

The purpose was to shock the monk into non-thought. When the monk attained non-thought, he attained a spiritual awakening or Enlightenment. This is because the phenomenal world is the result of thought. When there is non-thought, the phenomenal world dissolves into Transcendental Reality.

The gong-an worked excellently for this particular monk because he was ready, having prepared himself after many years in the monastery. If the same answer were given to another person who was unprepared, it would not have the same result. He would probably have more thoughts than non-thought. He might, for example, think that that the master was crazy, or what had flax to do with Bodhidharma.

The Zen master was an expert teacher. He gave just the right stimulus at the right situation for the right student. It is the same with Shaolin Wahnams teachers. They give the right instructions to the right students or patients at the right moment. When they say, “let go”, for example, the students or patients go into a chi flow. The same instruction given to other people would produce different reactions.

Having monks following strict monastic rules was one way to prepare them for attaining a spiritual awakening or Enlightenment when an opportunity arose. If they could do whatever they liked, they would be unable to grasp the opportunity even when it was provided by their teacher. Charging high fees in our school is one way to create the right situation for students or patients to get the best results. If the fees were like what other schools charge, students or patients may think they are smarter than their teachers or healers.

As no one at the course is likely yet to desire to merge with the Cosmos, gong-ans are not taught for this purpose. Gong-ans are also not taught for attaining a spiritual awakening

because we already have a better method to do so.

There are two schools of Zen, Caodong Chan or Soto Zen and Linji Chan or Rinzai Zen. Relatively, the main approach of Caodong Zen, of which the Shaolin Monastery was a leading example, is through meditation, or training of mind. The main approach in Linji Zen is through gong-ans. This is relative: both Caodong Zen and Rinji Zen use meditation and gong-ans as well as other expedient means.

It is unbelievable but true that without having to live in a monastery or attend regular spiritual retreats, many of our students at advanced courses like Cosmic Breathing, Merging with the Cosmos, and Small and Big Universe attain a spiritual awakening that change their life. I expect the percentage of students attaining a spiritual awakening at the Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii will be even higher.

Besides attaining a spiritual awakening that brings tremendous freedom and bliss not just during the course but for life, there are many other benefits that will enrich the daily life of the course participants.

Zen means meditation, though some people associate it with Zen Buddhism and regard it as religious. Even the term “Buddhism” as used by the Buddhists themselves is not “religious” as conceptualized by many people, especially in the West. If one avoids evil, do good and cultivate his (or her) mind, he is a Buddhist, or a good Christian, a good Muslim or a good follower of his own chosen religion, or a happy person without officially professing any religion.

Meditation here is not a process of thinking or reasoning. It is a process of mind training. Indeed, the mind training at the Intensive Zen Course is firstly to clear the mind of all thoughts, i.e. to attain mental clarity. Having attained mental clarity, the next step is to nourish the mind, making the mind remarkably strong. Then the course participants expand the mind, attaining a spiritual awakening, bringing tremendous freedom and bliss.

These wonderful benefits will be experienced at the course itself, and will continue for life, and after life. These skills become intrinsic and automatic. In other words, having acquired these wonderful skills, course participants do not need to trouble themselves how to employ their clear mind to solve problems more efficiently, or how to employ their expanded mind to feel free and joyful. Because their mind is clear, intrinsically and automatically they will solve problems more efficiently. Because of their spiritual expansion, they will intrinsically and automatically feel free and joyful.

Nevertheless, besides these wonderful skills, course participants will also learn some effective techniques to solve problems. The process is as follows:

1. Define the problem.
2. Assess whether a solution is effective, i.e. whether it will solve the problem.
3. Assess where the effective solution is good, i.e. whether it is viable and easy to be carried out.

4. Assess whether it is the best available solution, i.e. of various solutions it is the one that will produce the best result with the least effort in the shortest time.

Some of you would have heard of the case of me providing a viable solution in an impromptu manner to a problem described by a course participant at a regional Zen course in England after I had walked just seven steps. Course participants at the Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii will learn how I could accomplish this feat.

Question 7

From what I understand, endless love and compassion are hallmarks of enlightened beings. Could Sigung please discuss love and compassion in Zen?

Andrew R

Answer

The terms “Enlightened” (with a capital E), and “enlightened” (with a small e) need some clarification. Enlightenment (with a capital E) is the highest and most noble attainment in Buddhist cultivation. It is described as returning to God the Holy Spirit in Christian terms, where there is no differentiation whatsoever, and there is God and only God.

On the other hand, enlightenment (with a small e) may mean different things to different people, but generally it means attaining a very high level of understanding or experience, but there is differentiation into countless entities, and not the highest spiritual attainment where there is no differentiation.

An Enlightened Being is the Spiritual Body of the Buddha, called God, Tao or other terms in different religions. An enlightened being is one with a very high level of spiritual, moral, scientific, philosophical or any other attainment in experience or knowledge, or both.

In Enlightenment there is no love and no compassion, not hatred and no cruelty. There is no differentiation whatsoever. It is infinite and eternal. That is what Lao Tzu means when he says “The Tao that is called the Tao is not the Tao”, because if something can be called the Tao and the remaining things are not, there is already differentiation.

It is the same as saying that in God the Holy Spirit, there is no God the Father and Satan the Anti-Christ, no heaven and no hell. There is only God and nothing else. In scientific terms, in Infinite Reality there are no electrons and protons, no butterflies and no mountains. It is just a universal spread of energy or consciousness.

Obviously, enlightened beings mentioned by you have not attained Enlightenment (with a capital E), otherwise they would not be differentiated into individual beings. They are beings in the phenomenal realm who have attained very high levels of their cultivation.

If their cultivation is in moral or spiritual development, they are full of love and compassion, otherwise they will be unable to attain their very high level of attainment. Leaving aside altruism, hatred and cruelty, which are the opposite of love and compassion, go against their development.

If a person is full of hate and cruelty, his moral is bad, and his spirit is imprisoned. To release himself from bad morals and imprisoned spirit, so that he can start his moral or spiritual cultivation, he has to avoid hatred and cruelty. To rise in his moral or spiritual cultivation, he has to be loving and compassionate.

If the enlightened beings are in such fields like politics and business, they may be full of love and compassion if they are also highly moral and spiritual despite being very successful in their fields. But it is more likely that they are indifferent to love and compassion because love and compassion more often than not hinder their progress. A shred politician or businessman, for example, often has to compromise his love and compassion if he wants to be successful.

Enlightened beings in crimes, i.e. those who have attained a very high level in committing crimes, have to go against love and compassion because these emotions are counter-productive in their criminal development. A scam worker or a murderer, for example, cannot even do his work if he has love and compassion.

Zen means meditation, which is a training of mind. If a cultivator trains his mind for such professions like becoming a teacher or a healer, he will grow in love and compassion. If he trains his mind for such professions like becoming a lawyer or to win prize money in fighting, he would have to compromise love and compassion. If he trains his mind to be a top criminal, he was to grow in the other direction of love and compassion, i.e. he harbours more hatred and becomes more cruel.

The teaching in our school places a lot of importance on moral and spiritual development. Hence, our Zen training like the Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii will enhance our feeling of love and compassion. The development is intrinsic. In other words, our students need not be constantly reminded to be loving and compassionate, they will automatically manifest love and compassion as they develop.

Zen monks in Zen monasteries are full of love and compassion because their training is centered on moral and spiritual development. However, at the highest level when they wish to be Enlightened, they have to be equanimous. Even noble emotions like love and compassion will bide them to the phenomenal realm. Because of their great love and compassion for others, very highly developed beings, like Bodhisattvas, may postpone their entry to Buddhahood, or return to the phenomenal realm from Transcendental Reality to help others. Guan Yin Bodh Satt is a shining example.

Question 8

What techniques, skills and kung-fu sets are notable for cultivating Zen in Shaolin Wahnam?

Chris

Answer

Our school is very special. All practice in our school is a training of the physical, energy mind. Hence, when we train kungfu, we also train chi kung and meditation. We do not need to include any chi kung exercise or separately practice any meditation because they are already incorporated in our kungfu training.

We have such elite advantages because of two special skills we train at the start and completion of every practice session. These two special skills are entering into a chi kung state of mind, or entering Zen or Tao, and enjoying an energy flow. When we enter into a chi kung state of mind, we practice meditation. When we enjoy an energy flow, we practice chi kung.

So every technique, skill and kungfu set in Shaolin Wahnam is suitable for cultivating Zen. Indeed, it is precisely because of this Zen cultivation in all our training, that we have unbelievable results in a very short time. We put into practice the saying that the highest chi kung and kungfu are of the mind.

Nevertheless, certain techniques, skills and kungfu sets are specially cost-effective for Zen cultivation.

Grasping Sparrow's Tail is an excellent set of techniques for cultivating Zen. If it is performed correctly much internal force as well as mental clarity are generated. However, if it is not performed correct, i.e. with mind training, it degrades into some gentle physical exercise. This, unfortunately, more that 80% of students who practice Grasping Sparrow's Tail. Worse, as some of them do not even perform the external form correctly, they develop adverse effects like knee injuries and back pains.

It is illuminating to contrast Grasping Sparrow's Tail, which is found in the fundamentals of Taijiquan, like in the set, "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow", with a fundamental sequence in Lohan Asks the Way, a fundamental set in Shaolin Kungfu. Depending on one's perspective and skill, Lohan Asks the Way is not effective for cultivating Zen or most effective for cultivating Zen!

A practitioner may not be in a state of Zen, i.e. a meditative state, yet he may still perform Lohan Asks the Way quite well. This is because Lohan Asks the Way is a set at a physical level. Even without internal force and a Zen state of mind, practitioners can still improve their combat or daily life. Practicing the set, amongst other benefits, enables practitioners to increase their strength, stamina, endurance and agility.

These benefits are not available to Grasping Sparrow's Tail if the techniques are performed

as gentle exercise instead of internal art. At its best it is a dance, good for demonstration as well as making practitioners graceful. But if it is performed as an internal art, its benefits are more than those from Lohan Asks the Way as it is normally practiced. Besides an increase in strength, stamina, endurance and agility, as in Lohan Asks the Way, Grasping Sparrow's Tail generate internal force and mental clarity, which will produce better results no matter what the practitioners do!

In other words, when the two sets of techniques are practiced in their normal way, Grasping Sparrow's Tail has more benefits than Lohan Asks the Way. But if they are practiced poorly, though not wrong as harmful side effects do not occur, Lohan Asks the Way has more benefits.

But if Lohan Asks the Way is performed superbly as an internal art, its benefits surpass those of Grasping Sparrow's Tail. Students in Shaolin Wahnam have a chance to perform Lohan Asks the Way superbly because their kungfu training, which is physical to other people, become chi kung and meditation to the..

Skills that are most conducive to Zen cultivation are generating energy flow and generating internal force. Even without specially practicing Zen methods, Zen cultivation is present in these two skills. Without a Zen mind, it is not possible to generate an energy flow and to generate internal force.

It is no surprise, that our students, despite not having undergone formal Zen training, have Zen benefits, like being relaxed and joyful, and having a one-pointed mind. These benefits are derived when they generate an energy flow and generate internal force, which are hallmark of our arts.

Of the two skills, generating internal force is of a higher level. In generating an energy flow, the Zen mind of a practitioner is passive. He does not tense his muscles, and he does not think of any thoughts. As a result his energy will flow. He just lets go and follow the energy flow.

In generating internal force, the Zen mind of a practitioner is active. First, he needs to be passive to let his energy flow. Then he actively uses his mind to increase the verbosity of the energy flow to generate flowing force. Or he uses his mind to focus his energy to have consolidated force.

The two kungfu sets that span the range of internal force training where Zen cultivation is innately involved are 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan on one end and Iron Wire on the other. The 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set is 100% generating flowing force, whereas the Iron Wire Set is 100% consolidating force.

Zen cultivation is involved in both generating flowing force and building consolidated force, though the nature and function of the cultivation may be different. In both case, mental clarity and mental focus are required. In mathematical terms, in flowing force the mind is reduced to zero, and in consolidated force the mind is reduced to one.

When the mind is trained to be clear and to be one-pointed in internal force training, the skills of mental clarity and mental focus can be applied in any activities in our daily life.

As a rough guide the proportion between flow and consolidating, or between mental clarity

and mental focus in the process of internal force training of the kungfu sets below is as follows:

Set	Flowing Force [%]	Consolidated Force [%]
Yang Style Set	100	0
San Zhan	90	10
Baguazhang	80	20
Flower Set	70	30
Dragon Strength	60	40
Wudang Taijiquan	50	50
Flowing Water Floating Clouds	40	60
Siu Lin Tou	30	70
Xingyiquan	20	80
Triple Stretch	10	90
Iron Wire	0	100

This is a rough scale for orthodox training of the sets. But we in Shaolin Wahnam are elite; we can modify the proportion to suit our purpose, or fun. We may, for example, employ 100% consolidating force in 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set, or 100% flowing force in Iron Wire Set. In the Special Wuzuquan Course in Penang in December 2012 course participants used techniques from the San Zhan Set for various force training skills, like in Flower Set, Triple Stretch and Iron Wire.

Being the most versatile as well as tremendously powerful, the Dragon Strength Set is the best for experiencing various force training methods found in the different sets. Although the proportion between flow and consolidating in Dragon Strength is 60-40, a skillful practitioner may use the set for 100% of flow as in Yang Style Taijiquan, or 100% of consolidation as in Iron Wire, or any set in between.

Question 9

1. In your book *The Complete Book of Zen* you mentioned non-Buddhist Zen as one type of Zen cultivation. Since I come from a Christian background I'm particularly interested in this approach. I understand that Chi Kung is a spiritual, but not a religious practice, and in one of the recent interviews you gave, I heard you talking about Buddhism and Taoism as not being "religions", but "teachings". I take that the same can apply to Zen. My question is: how do personal beliefs affect one's Zen cultivation?
2. I'm asking this because there are certain doctrines in Zen Buddhism I don't personally subscribe to (i.e. reincarnation) and I'm wondering how this is going to affect my Zen

cultivation. Does it put me in more disadvantageous situation than Zen practitioners who follow their path more "completely", so to speak?

3. If I may, I would also like to ask what are the most essential Zen aspects of our Shaolin Cosmos Chi Kung practice and how to efficiently approach applying some of those elements into one's daily life?

Jacek

Answer

Zen means meditation, not sitting cross-legged with myriad thoughts troubling the mind, but training the mind in various ways for more efficient performance. In some cultures, the mind is called the spirit, the soul or the consciousness.

Training the mind, the spirit, the soul or the consciousness can be practiced in many ways and in various poises. When one is in prayers, deeply involved in one's work or hobby, or absorbed in a spectacular scene, he is in Zen or meditation. He may be standing, sitting, moving about or lying down.

When a Christian prays to God, reads the Bible or listens to the teaching by a preacher, he is in meditation. His mind is focused on what is being said or done without any disturbances.

The word Zen is sometimes used to mean Zen Buddhism. Even Buddhism is not religious in the way many people, especially in the West, conceptualize the term to be. When a person avoids evil, does good, and cultivates his mind (or spirit, soul or consciousness), he practices Buddhism. It is worthy to note that in the Shaolin Temple, which was a Zen temple, there were Taoist, Christian, Muslim and people of other religions or no religion cultivated for spiritual development.

Zen, like chi kung and kungfu, is spiritual, not religious. By spiritual is meant that its cultivation concerns the spirit. It means, for example, that if a student was depressed or afraid before cultivation, but by cultivating he becomes cheerful and confident. By non-religious is meant that followers of any religion or of no official religion can practice and benefit from it without any adverse effects on his religions belief.

Indeed, Zen cultivation often makes him a better follower of his own chosen religion. This is because Zen cultivation concerns the spirit, which is the crucial feature of all religions. Most followers just read or hear about the spirit, but have no direct experience of it. Zen cultivation brings the spirit to life. Zen practitioners experience their spirit directly by taming, strengthening and nourishing it.

If all other things were equal, personal beliefs, religious or otherwise, affect Zen cultivation, and any other endeavor. If a person does not believe in the spirit, for example, his spiritual cultivation, though possible, will be much compromised. Just as if a person does not believe

in chi, or does not believe that kungfu can be used for combat, he will take a longer time to attain similar result of someone who believes.

Zen cultivation is very liberal. Practitioners may choose to cultivate only those aspects they believe are favorable or beneficial to them. Believing in reincarnation is not a required condition for Zen cultivation. In other words, without believing in reincarnation, a person can still train his mind or spirit. It is unlike relaxation, which is a required condition for Zen cultivation. In other words, if a person is not relaxed, he cannot train his mind, even when he performs the outward techniques of Zen cultivation, like sitting in a lotus position.

It is interesting to take the analogy further. Although Zen cultivation concerns the spirit, paradoxically a belief in the spirit is not a required condition. In other words, even when a practitioner does not believe that his spirit exists, but by Zen cultivation his spirit will be stronger and more peaceful than before, even when he may continue to deny it. Similarly, a person may not believe in chi or that kungfu can be used in combat, but by practicing genuine chi kung or genuine kungfu, he will be healthier and be able to apply kungfu to defend himself despite his disbelief.

One does not have to believe anything in Zen cultivation. Indeed, it is better than he has an open mind. In Zen terms he comes with an empty cup. He can then assess his cultivation to the best of his experience and understanding.

It may be significant to note that Jesus himself believed in reincarnation. There are many instances in the Bible to verify this statement. For example, Jesus clearly stated that he was Elijah in a previous life.

Nevertheless, to say that belief is not a required condition in Zen cultivation does not mean that it does not affect progress. If a Zen cultivator does not believe his mind exists, for example, it will take him a longer time to attain a similar result than another cultivator who does, if all other things were equal.

But other things are not equal. If this person who believes he has only his body, which includes his brain, but has no mind, learns chi kung or kungfu in our school, his attainment in Zen, that is mind training, will be better than others who believe they have a mind and attend Zen retreats.

The reason is straight-forward, though it may not be obvious. Zen cultivation, or mind training, is an integral part of our chi kung and kungfu, but may not be in many Zen retreats today. In the retreats, practitioners study Zen instead of practice it. When they sit cross-legged to meditate, myriad thoughts trouble their mind. When they close their mouth and do not speak for days, they lock up their spirit.

Your not subscribing to some doctrines in Zen Buddhism will put you in a disadvantageous situation in cultivation of Zen Buddhism than Zen Buddhist practitioners who follow their path completely. But we in Shaolin Wahnam practice Zen, and not Zen Buddhism. The Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii is on Zen, and not on Zen Buddhism.

Zen and Zen Buddhism are quite different. Zen is a training of mind. Zen Buddhism is

a school of Buddhism that uses the training of mind as the main method of cultivation. The course in Hawaii is on Zen, and not on Zen Buddhism.

If you do not subscribe to some doctrines in Zen Buddhism, it may put you in a disadvantageous situation in the Zen Buddhism cultivation, but not in Zen cultivation.

If you, for example, do not believe that the phenomenal world is a function of thought, which is a basic doctrine in Zen Buddhism, if all other things were equal, you would be in a disadvantageous situation in the cultivation of non-thought, which is crucial in Zen Buddhism.

But even if you do not believe that the phenomenal world is a function of thought, you may not be in a disadvantageous situation in Zen cultivation even in the cultivation of non-thought, which is also crucial in Zen cultivation.

Why is a disbelief that the phenomenal world is a function of thought disadvantageous in Zen Buddhism cultivation and not in Zen cultivation even when the cultivation involves attaining non-thought? This is because this doctrine is important in Zen Buddhism, but not important in Zen. The primary aim of Zen Buddhism is to transcend the phenomenal world to attain Cosmic Reality. The primary aim of Zen is to train the mind for peak performance in the phenomenal world.

The method is the same, i.e. to attain non-thought. But the aim is different. In Zen Buddhism it is to go beyond the phenomenal to attain the transcendental. In Zen it is to attain peak performance in the phenomenal world. When a Zen Buddhist attains non-thought, the phenomenal world dissolves and he attains Enlightenment. When a Zen practitioner attains non-thought, his mind is pristine clear so that he can perform his best in the phenomenal world.

The most essential Zen aspects of our Shaolin Cosmos Chi Kung practice, i.e. the most important aspects of mind training in our chi kung, is to clear our mind of all thoughts and to focus our mind on one thought. In Zen terms, they are attaining non-thought and attaining a one-pointed mind.

Without clearing our mind of all thoughts, we cannot generate an energy flow, which is the essence of chi kung. Without focusing our mind on one thought, we cannot accomplish many of our chi kung skills, like focusing on our dan tian, massaging internal organs, developing internal force and enjoying a cosmic shower.

When we have these skills, we just apply them into our daily life, although the techniques involved may be different. Only those who lack these skills will ask how to do so, i.e. the techniques involved, but still will be unable to do so even when an academic answer is given.

For example, if you have the money to buy a bicycle, you can also use the money to enjoy a dinner in a fancy restaurant or go for a short holiday, though the procedures involved may be different. Even if someone explains how to enjoy a dinner in a fancy restaurant or go for a short holiday, if you lack the money you still cannot do so.

Skills are general in nature, and therefore can be applied to different situations. When you have the skill of non-thought to generate an energy flow, you can also apply the same skill to generate a feeling of love for your wife and parents, or to eat ice-cream without irrelevant

thoughts bothering you. When you have the skill of a one-pointed mind to focus on your dan tian, you can also apply the same skill to focus on playing tennis or on planning a marketing project. These skills, undoubtedly, enrich our daily life.

Question 10

Sifu has kindly transmitted "One Finger Shooting Zen" to us. Some might say that the name is self-evident, and that the benefits of "One Finger Shooting Zen" should be directly experienced instead of discussed. Nonetheless, I would like to respectfully ask what the significance is of the words 'shooting' and 'Zen' in this art?

Sifu Emiko Hsuen

Answer

One-Finger Shooting Zen is a treasure of Shaolin Wahnam. It was through One-Finger Shooting Zen that I first developed internal force. It was through One-Finger Shooting Zen that I discovered through direct experience the processes involved in internal force training that eventually led me to formulate the philosophy involved in the training which greatly enriched the many internal force training methods in our school.

The word "shooting" in One-Finger Shooting Zen" indicates that internal force shoots out from the finger into an opponent. The force comes from the dan tian.

"Zen" refers to the One-finger Zen hand-form. It also represents the highest attainment in Shaolin. One-Finger Zen used in dim mark or dotting energy points is regarded as the first of the ultimate arts in all martial arts.

Being the essence of Shaolin, the beauty of One-Finger Shooting Zen is that once you have acquired the internal force, you can channel the internal force to any part of the body. Unlike in some arts like Iron Palm where only the palm is powerful, or Iron Arm where only the arm is powerful, in One-Finger Shooting Zen other parts of your body can be powerful when you channel internal force to them. For example, without having to train your palm, your palm strike can be powerful, or without having to train your arm, your arm can also be powerful.

The internal force developed from One-Finger Shooting Zen can be used to heal. I have healed many people using One-Finger Shooting Zen.

More significantly, One-Finger Shooting Zen enriches our daily life, enabling us to attain peak performance in whatever we do. It also contributes greatly to good health, vitality and longevity.

Does practicing One-Finger Shooting Zen contribute to Zen cultivation? Indeed, training One-Finger Shooting Zen is training Zen, contributing to non-thought and one-pointed mind.

With the tremendous increase of energy and mental clarity due to training One-Finger Shooting Zen, it enables us to have better results no matter what we do.

Question 11

Does Sigung have a particular memory of first experiencing a Zen awakening?

Andrew R.

Answer

My first experience of a Zen awakening happened when I was a small boy in the late 1940s, even before I attended primary school. At that time I did not know it was a Zen awakening. In fact I was quite frightened by the experience.

My mother took me for a holiday in Kuala Lumpur. I was sitting in a village house looking at passers-by. I could not remember the exact situation or the reason, but for fun I wanted to put myself into another person to feel how he would feel.

I cannot remember what exactly I did. I believe I went into what we now call a chi kung state of mind, and placed myself in his position. All of a sudden I found myself seeing the world from his eyes. I was shocked. The fright brought me back to my body.

I did not tell the experience to anybody. In fact I almost forgot about the incident until being reminded by answering this question.

The first Zen awakening I can remember more clearly was when I was teaching chi kung at the Moral Uplifting Society in Taiping in the early 1990s. One night I taught Abdominal Breathing in a Small Universe Course. I was standing on a platform in front of the class performing Abdominal Breathing with the students. I just pressed and released my abdomen about 10 times. I was deeply involved in a meditative state of mind. Then, all of a sudden I found myself nowhere and everywhere.

I did not know much about spiritual expansion at that time. I was quite scared, and quickly returned to my body. I also did not tell this extraordinary experience to anybody.

Question 12

1. Many in Shaolin Wahnam are dedicated spouses and parents, following the example of our dear Sifu. Some people have said that the Buddha, in leaving his family to pursue Enlightenment was not responsible. Even though he made sure his young child was in good hands before he left, some may feel that he did not do his complete duty as a father to bring his child up. On the other hand, I recall Sifu stating in a Q& A that the Buddha's son later became his disciple as well. This has always intrigued me - what seems to the

mortal world as irresponsible may turn out to be the best decision although the wisdom behind it was not obvious at that time.

2. What is Sifu's view on how we should balance our duties as spouses and parents, and the quest to seek deeper spirituality?

Sifu Zhang Wuji

Answer

Previously I also had a similar feeling that the Buddha in leaving his family to pursue Enlightenment was not responsible to his wife and child. But later I realized that this personal sacrifice made his universal sacrifice even greater. It was not that the Buddha did not love his wife and child, but He loved humanity more. His love for humanity was so great that he was prepared to leave his wife and child, and his becoming the king for his country.

Indeed, what seems to the mortal world as irresponsible may turn out to be the best decision although most people may not have the wisdom to realize it at the time.

I had a similar experience in the late 1980s or early 1990s. I practiced sitting meditation every day and had become very powerful, but I remained humble, bearing in mind the lesson I sometimes mentioned that many would-be masters failed due to their vanity.

But on one occasion I felt righteous and powerful enough to face a high-ranking god. About that time there were frequent reports in the newspaper about deaths due to motor accidents. I was angry when I read news about a pious Indian man instantly killed in a motor accident the moment he stepped out of a temple after praying to his god.

“What type of god he is?” I thought to myself. “How could the god let his pious follower die in a motor accident the very moment leaving the temple after praying to him? If the man had to die, the god could have at least let him die a bit later, not immediately praying to him.”

Later I realized my mistake. I was both ignorant and arrogant. The god could be most compassionate. To mere mortals, dying in a motor accident was bloody and messy. But to the man who died, death was swift and probably he felt no pain. Instantly he was relieved from suffering in this world, and reborn in a happier place. The god was most compassionate.

Being a husband (or wife) and father (or mother) is a joy and sacred duty. We must provide for our wife (or husband) and children to the best of our ability.

Unless we are a Buddha, our duty to our wife and children takes precedence over our aspiration and quest to seek deeper spirituality.

In my teaching I have often mentioned the five levels of chi kung as follows:

1. Medical chi kung.
2. Chi kung for health and vitality.

3. Chi kung for the philosophers.
4. Chi kung for the general.
5. Spiritual chi kung.

These five levels correspond to the developmental stages of a person.

If a person is sick, he should get well first. Attempting to work hard when he is sick, is being irresponsible to himself and others. He should practice medical chi kung to restore his health.

Then he should practice chi kung for health and vitality so that he can do his work well in order to provide for his wife and children to the best of his ability. If he neglects his family to see God, God will ask him to go home to look after his family. He promised God at his marriage to provide for his wife and children to the best of his ability.

After having done his job well and provide well for his wife and family, he can engage himself in hobbies, which may be classified as scholarly or martial. Neglecting his work and family to enjoy himself in hobbies is being irresponsible. To excel in his scholarly or martial hobbies, he can practice chi kung for philosophers and chi kung for generals.

Having done his work well and provided well for his family, he may dedicate him to return to God. Spiritual chi kung will be most suitable for him at this stage.

These five levels of chi kung serve as guidelines for emphasis in a practitioner's training. Even when he practices medical chi kung to overcome sickness, he must not neglect his spirit. All healing starts from the heart, the spiritual heart.

On the other hand, when he practices spiritual chi kung to return to God, he must not neglect his health. The great Bodhidharma, for example, taught the Shaolin monks Eighteen Lohan Hands to improve their health so that they could better cultivate to attain Enlightenment.

Question 13

1. When we spar or fight how should we deal with emotions?
2. In the Zen approach are emotions something to let go of?
3. Are they a hindrance to being combat efficient? Or should we focus our emotions in a fight?

Sham

Answer

In a life-death fight, emotions should be left aside as they interfere with one's combat efficiency. Irrespective of what types of emotions are involved, they affect the fighter's performance, both mentally and physically. Working oneself into a frenzy, as a world known Taijiquan master once stated, is unwise. Indeed, in any style of kungfu, especially in Taijiquan, the more relaxed a fighter is the more efficient he will be, in fighting as well as in daily life.

Hence, as I have often advised, in a serious challenge match, even though it may not be as serious as a life-death combat but serious enough to get us involved in the fight which we would like to avoid if we can, our Shaolin Wahnam fighters representing our school must not be afraid or hesitant in hurting opponents crucially or even fatally.

If an opponent rushes in with a shoot, for example, our fighter must not be afraid or hesitant to strike the challenger's head with his palm, which may maim or even kill the challenger.

With the value of compassion we teach in our school, it is likely that our Shaolin Wahnam fighter might not strike a challenger's head when he has a chance to do so. This moment of hesitance, due to his compassionate emotion, would turn his victory to defeat. More seriously, this challenger, if he is irrational enough to challenge our school, would be irrational enough to cause serious hurt to our fighter. Therefore, I have to repeatedly warn our fighters to leave aside emotions, even noble ones, when engaged in a fight of this nature.

It is naïve if someone asks how we know we could cause serious injury to an opponent if we strike our palm on his head if we had not done so? It is like asking how we know we would cause serious injury to a person if we shoot a gun at him if we had not shot any living person. If we can break a brick so thoroughly that it burst into powder (please see some of our brick-breaking videos), we can also break a skull into pieces. Or if we have enough internal force to break the bottom of two bricks, we also have enough internal force to cause serious damage to the brain of a living person without cracking his skull.

Nevertheless, fights are not usually a matter of life-death combat, and emotions or considerations for others' emotions do play an important part. If a drunken man attacks you in a pub, you don't have to burst his skull into pieces, you merely push him aside or fell him onto the floor, but without the finishing strike.

In friendly sparring, including sparring with martial artists of other schools, we do not even hit our opponents. We stop an inch from target. It is better to win a friend than to win a match.

A good way to deal with emotions is to gently sink your chi to your dan tian. This was how past masters dealt with emotions in their fights, including life-death ones. Gently sinking your chi to your dan tian not only attains emotional balance, instead of letting emotions control you, you also have more force ready for use and better mental clarity for combat.

Emotional balance does not mean you have no more emotions. It means you can control your emotions so that they will not affect you in your combat or other activities. If you want

to be compassionate or destructive, you can do so detachedly and efficiently.

Yes, in Zen cultivation one should let go of emotions, or have good emotional control. Letting go of emotions is more urgent in Zen Buddhist monks because to be detached is an important aspect of Buddhist training. The fact that they leave their family and society indicates their detachment.

Nevertheless, as tolerance and compassion are important teachings in Buddhism, Zen Buddhist monks are also tolerant and compassionate. This is not a contradiction, though it may appear to be. They are tolerant and compassionate in a detached manner, but not irrationally involved. For example, if a preacher advocating doctrines contradictory to Zen Buddhism was found wanting for food and shelter, Zen Buddhist monks would feed and house him in their temple, but they would not hug him and kiss him all over, nor will they deny him food and shelter due to his opposing teaching.

However, at the highest level when Zen Buddhist monks are ready to attain Enlightenment, they would be emotionless, for any emotions, even noble ones, would bid them to the phenomenal realm. It is because of their great compassion that Bodhisattvas postpone their Enlightenment, or return to the phenomenal realm from Enlightenment to help sentient beings.

When we spar or fight we should tame our emotions, just like we tame our mind. We should not focus on our emotions in a fight. Strong emotions, like wandering thoughts, distract us and are a hindrance to our combat efficiency.

This does not mean that we become emotionless. We control our emotions instead of letting our emotions control us. We are detached, and can be compassionate to let our opponents go if we want to, or to decisively strike down an opponent if it is necessary. Our efficiency and detachment derived from Zen training, i.e. training of mind, can be beneficially used in combat or in daily life.

Question 14

1. Besides counting breaths and concentrating or relaxing and focusing on the breath, trying not to worry, how do you actually focus, tame the "monkey mind" and will we learn this in the Zen course?
2. This sounds dumb right, but I'm an RN. I went to school, I'm persistent in my pursuit of martial arts, I have many skills that require concentration for long periods or hours. How come I can't keep a single focus for more than a breath during meditation and chi gung?
3. I've read books for techniques without much more success. Will this be taught in the course?

Lee

Answer

There are many other ways besides the ones you have mentioned to focus or tame your monkey mind.

There are countless methods in meditation, or training of the mind, but all these countless methods may be summed up into two principles, namely to reduce the mind to one, or to expand the mind to zero.

Your problem concerns reducing the mind to one. This principle, as well as the other principle to expand the mind to zero, together with appropriate techniques will be taught at the Intensive Zen Course in Hawaii.

Reducing the mind to one is reducing myriad thoughts to one thought. When you are proficient in this skill, you attain a one-pointed mind.

This one thought can be an object outside your body, an object inside your body, or a thought. To make it easier for you to focus on this one object or thought, it should be as simple as possible. If it is elaborated, it may distract you.

Some examples of an object outside your body are a stone, a flower, a spot on a tree, a dot on a piece of paper or some simple movements of a chi kung or kungfu exercise. Some examples of objects inside your body can be your dan tian, your breathing, and your energy flow along your arms. Some examples of a thought can be reciting a simple mantra, saying a non-sensible verse, counting from one to ten, repeating that you are healthy and well.

You may be standing upright, standing at a stance, sitting on a seat, sitting cross-legged, sitting in a lotus position, lying down or moving in some chi kung or kungfu patterns. You must be relaxed and your mind on the one thought.

I do not know what you mean by RN. Are you in the Royal Navy, or a rotten nut?

If you are interested in martial arts, a good opportunity is to join a regular Shaolin or Taijiquan class conducted by any of our certified instructors. Please see <http://www.shaolin.org/general/instructorlist.html> You can be sure that you will develop internal force and be able to apply what you have learnt to defend yourself or your loved ones, two basic benefits that practicing a good martial art will give. You will also enrich your daily life.

What you mean is that you have many techniques that require concentration for long periods or hours, but not a single skill to perform them correctly. It is better for you to develop your skill to focus on something for a short time, like a minute, than attempting to focus on anything for a long time without success.

You can't keep a single focus for more than a breath during meditation and chi kung because of one, two or all the three factors below:

1. Your method is wrong.
2. Your teacher is incompetent.
3. You are a bad student.

The three factors below are known as the Three Essentials of Successful Training. If you have these three essentials, you will be successful in any training – from cooking a meal to sending a rocket to space:

1. The method is correct.
2. The teacher is competent.
3. You are a good student.

The better the factors are, the better will be the result.

Although you have read techniques from books, you are still unsuccessful because you lack the relevant skills. This is a secret not many people know. They do not differentiate between skills and techniques. They think, wrongly, that if they have the techniques they will have the desired results. This is not so.

For example, you may learn excellent swimming techniques from a book, but you still cannot swim. Or you may learn excellent driving techniques from a video, but you still cannot drive. In both cases you lack the relevant skills.

The chi kung techniques practiced by many people are genuine, but they still remain sickly and weak. It is because they do not have the skills to perform the techniques as chi kung; they perform them as gentle exercise. The kungfu techniques practiced by many people are genuine, but they still cannot apply their kungfu techniques for combat. It is because they do not have the skills to apply the techniques for combat; they only have the skills to apply the techniques for demonstration.

Yes, the skills to focus in meditation and chi kung will be taught in the courses in Hawaii. If you are a good student, i.e. if you are willing and able to follow simple instructions, you will be able to focus long enough to attain a one-pointed mind in meditation, and to generate an energy flow in chi kung.

Question 15

Zen is described as Simple, Direct and Effective. When people are in a Zen state of mind it can be described as an elevated or higher level state of consciousness or, rather, awareness.

Tai Chi Chuan is often described and practiced as circular, indirect, following the flow and patiently waiting for an opening, among other descriptions. Typically not simple nor direct yet highly effective in many circumstances. Interestingly, when one practices Tai Chi Chuan they attain a similar result of higher awareness. I'm not mentioning Wuji here which we know is remarkably simple, direct and effective.

1. How do we explain the Zen state of mind achieved in Tai Chi Chuan practice when one doesn't seem to be doing something simple, nor direct?

2. Is it simply that our mind is immersed in our practice, with no mental distractions and thus we achieve the Zen state of mind?
3. Is it related to the harmonious energy flow?
4. Also, if Sifu would like to further comment or elaborate on the relationship, or lack thereof, between Zen practice and Tai Chi Chuan practice it would be appreciated.

Sifu Anthony Spinicchia

Answer

Thanks, Anthony, for a series of very illuminating questions which lead us to a deeper and more rewarding understanding of Zen and Tai Chi Chuan.

Tai Chi Chuan is often compared with Shaolin Kungfu, where Tai Chi Chuan is described to manifest Tao whereas Shaolin to manifest Zen. We are indeed fortunate in Shaolin Wahnam where we have the best of these two worlds, as my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, was both a Zen master and Taoist master.

In this sense, Tai Chi Chuan is not Zen. But in other aspects which we shall discuss later, Tai Chi Chuan may be described as Zen.

Simple, direct and effective are excellent adjectives for Zen. On the other hand, Tao is flowery, circular but also effective. A comparison of Taoist and Zen writings is illuminating.

The following is a random piece I have taken from a Taoist classic, "Genuine Transmission of the Way to Immortality". The following poem is by the Taoist master Fou Yu describing a great cosmic truth.

*Thousands of miles of clouds is cleared by a single breath
Thousands of words are used to ask about countless things
Look at the beautiful moon hanging in the sky above
Reflected in a placid pool of deep emerald love*

*Marvellous is the breathing of the genuine man
Enlightened he enters the gate of no-two gate
Why bother to generate the fire of war
When spring descends on earth everything is fake*

The following is from the Venerable Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, in his Platform Sutra.

*Pure nature is constantly in the transformation body
Our nature enables the transformation body to seek the right way*

It will achieve perfection, real and boundless

Both Master Fou Yu and the Venerable Hui Leng teach the same cosmic truth, though the vocabulary and imagery used are vastly different. Can you guess what this great cosmos truth is?

When one is in a state of Zen, he is at a higher level of consciousness. A person is also at a higher level of consciousness when he is in Tao. Here, Tao is Zen.

Tao, like Zen, has three different though related meanings. At the most supreme level, Tao and Zen refer to Cosmic Reality, or in Western terms God the Holy Spirit, or the undifferentiated spread of energy in scientific language. It is omnipresent, omniscient, infinite and eternal.

At the intermediate level, Tao and Zen refer to a glimpse of the Cosmic Reality, or an experience of reality at a higher level of consciousness. It is a spiritual awakening.

At the lowest level, Tao and Zen refer to particular ways of spiritual cultivation. Here is where their characteristic differences are found. Although their ultimate aim is the same, their descriptions, approaches and methods are different.

Tai Chi Chuan and Shaolin Kungfu are two of the arts to achieve the ultimate aim of attaining Cosmic Reality, though most practitioners today, including ourselves, practice them for relatively lower purposes of attaining good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness, spiritual joys and combat efficiency. Due to different needs and other factors, the descriptions, approaches and methods of Taijiquan and Shaolin Kungfu are different.

For example, when an opponent throws a powerful thrust punch at you, using Shaolin Kungfu you can ward it off with a diagonal “Beauty Looks at Mirrow”, without moving your body. If you use Taijiquan, you would sink back and rotate your waist to ward off the attack with “Immortal Waves Sleeves”.

In “Beauty Looks at Mirrow” your movement comes from your shoulders, whereas in “Immortal Waves Sleeves” your movement comes from your waist. The difference is due to the need in Taijiquan for a smaller-size opponent to use minimum force against a bigger-sized opponent. In Shaolin Kungfu, which is relatively more powerful, you bulldoze your opponent away.

There are different ways to enter a Zen state of mind, which is usually called entering Tao in Taijiquan. We may also use a simple and direct method, like we do when we start our Taijiquan practice, just as we do in Shaolin Kungfu or chi kung exercises like Lifting the Sky and Cosmic Breathing. Or we may use a more sophisticated method, like performing Grasping Sparrow’s Tail.

In both cases, the approach may be different but the result is the same. In the simple, direct method of Zen, we just relax and keep our mind free of thoughts. In Grasping Sparrow’s Tail, as you have rightly mentioned, we immerse our mind in our practice with no mental distractions, and then enter Tao. In the first case, we aim straight at no-mind. In the second case, we first aim at a one-pointed mind, then expand to no-mind.

Why do some people bother to go to one first, and not straightaway expand to zero? It is

because not many people can go straight to zero. So they need an extra step. Even attaining a one-pointed mind is not easy, not many people can achieve this. We in Shaolin Wahnam are elite. Irrespective of whether we practice Shaolin Kungfu, Taijiquan or Chi Kung, we are so familiar with this skill, and use it so often that sometimes we forget it is rare and advanced.

Remember that Zen is for the best mind. If students are not ready for Zen, they use other methods, like samadha meditation and vispasana meditation.

If a practitioner goes straight to no-mind, without first attaining a one-pointed mind, will he be able to focus his mind to be one-pointed when he needs to think?

Yes, he will. In fact he will do so more effectively. When a person has attained no-mind, his mind is crystal clear. If he brings in a thought, his mind automatically becomes one-pointed on that thought as there are no other thoughts. This is more effective than first clearing numerous thoughts to focus on one remaining thought.

This validity is amply reflected in our students. One of the characteristics of Shaolin Wahnam students is their mental clarity. They practice mental clarity each time they start their Shaolin Taijiquan or chi kung training.

It is also reflected in our Shaolin practitioners learning Taijiquan, and our Taijiquan practitioners learning Shaolin Kungfu. Generally it is easy for our Shaolin practitioners to learn Taijiquan. They just pick it up, though Taijiquan movements are usually more sophisticated than Shaolin movements. It is generally more difficult for Taijiquan practitioners to learn Shaolin Kungfu, though Shaolin movements are usually more simple and direct.

This is interesting, isn't it? Many people may rationalize that one should start with the simple and direct, then progress to the more sophisticated and circular. But our experience shows that once we have mastered the simple and direct, attempting the more sophisticated and circular is easy.

Jose Antonio will be happy to read this. When we were on the Blue Mountain at the beginning of the year (2012), there was a passionate debate between the Shaolin camp and the Taijiquan camp over a statement I made that my Taijiquan practice had contributed greatly to my Shaolin Kungfu. Even Shaolin diehard like Anthony K spoke glowingly of Taijiquan. Jose Antonio, who switched from Taijiquan to Shaolin Kungfu, was concerned.

In our school the issue of whether Taijiquan and Tao or Shaolin Kungfu and Zen are better, does not arise. We have the best of all the four worlds.

Question 16

1. Zen Buddhism (and I think Buddhism in general) is offered up as A way whereas most world religions popularly consider themselves THE way. What are your ideas on this?
2. I think saying that your way is the "one and only" just serves your own ego (I am right and you are wrong) and would increase attachment.

3. Of course most religions do respect the others, and I'm not implying they are boastful. By the way, am I correct in using the English word "religion" for Zen? I believe it is much more than that.

Jimbeaux

Answer

One main reason that makes Buddhism stand out from other world religions is, as you have said, that Buddhism is offered as a way to spiritual fulfilment whereas the other religions are offered as the way.

Buddhists do this not because they are modest in their claim but because this is their conviction. Buddhists are sincerely convinced that there are different ways to spiritual fulfilment, and that Buddhism is one of the ways. Indeed, Buddhists would advise those who are spiritually happy in their own religion but intend to switch to Buddhism, to remain in their original religion.

But Buddhism is not the only world religion that is offered as a way. Taoism and Hinduism also never claim that theirs is the only way to salvation.

Saying that their way is the "one and only" does not necessarily serve their own ego, and does not necessarily increase attachment. Many who hold this view honestly believe in the truth of their statement, and are sincere in wanting to help others in spiritual fulfilment. Many of them are also selfless and have contributed greatly to the welfare of those they preach to. The issue is not their ego-serving or their sincerity, but whether what they think is the truth is really the truth.

Using "religion" to describe Zen is incorrect. Zen is non-religious. It can be practiced by and benefit any person of any religion, or of no professed religion.

The term "Zen" may cause confusion for many people. But much of the confusion can be cleared or avoided if they know that Zen has three related but different meanings.

At the most supreme level, Zen refers to the Cosmic Reality. At the intermediate level, Zen refers to a glimpse of this Cosmic Reality. At the lowest level, Zen refers to a training of mind, which is usually thought inadequately described as meditation.

The term "meditation" comes from the verb "meditating", which means pondering or intellectualizing. Pondering or intellectualizing is exactly what to be avoided in Zen training of mind, or Zen meditation.

Zen is sometimes used to refer to Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism, or even Buddhism itself, is strictly not a religion as the term is normally conceptualized by people in the West. The gist of Buddhism is to avoid evil, do good and cultivate the mind. Zen Buddhism is that school of Buddhism that focuses on mind cultivation. Hence, in the Shaolin Monastery, which was a Zen monastery, there were Shaolin masters who were Taoist, Christian and Muslim.

Let us have some fun as well insight into spiritual cultivation. The following is taken from my yet-to-be-published manuscript on the Heart Sutra.

» Let us now examine what the greatest masters say about their supreme spiritual experience. Can you tell the religions of these masters from their quotations below? Again, connotative terms are replaced by the neutral term “Cosmic Reality”.

Experience 1:

What is to know of the Unity of the Supreme Reality

It is to extinguish oneself in the presence of the One

Should thou desire to be as bright as day

Burn out thy separate existence like the candle of light

Since separate existence brings in violent inebriation

Reason forsakes the mind, shame the heart

He who loses his separate existence

The result of what he does is always full of bliss

Experience 2:

He saw a light which banished away the darkness of the night – upon this sight a marvellous strange thing followed. The whole world gathered – as it were – under one beam of the sun, was presented before his eyes. For by that supernatural light, the capacity of the inward soul was enlarged. But albeit the world was gathered before his eyes, yet were not the heaven and earth drawn into any lesser form than they be of themselves, but the soul or the beholder was more enlarged.

Experience 3:

Thence comes cessation of ignorance, the cause of suffering, and freedom from the power of life and death. Then the whole universe, with all its objects of sense=knowledge, becomes as nothing in comparison to that infinite knowledge which is free from all obstructions and impurities.

Experience 4:

The Real Mind does not think,;does not ponder; there is no thought. When there is no thinking, no thought, life and death cease. As I cultivate my mind,

there is emptiness, devoid of all phenomena. Whatever phenomena there are, are due to principle. This is the primordial principle, the principle of the Supreme Reality. Before me is the spread of emptiness; all consciousness is unseparated and infinite. As I return to my real, permanent, original self, there is void and tranquillity, an undifferentiated spread of brightness, attaining the great cosmic spontaneity.

The first quotation records the experience of Mawlana Jalalad Din Rumi. The term "Supreme Reality" is to be replaced by "God" in the original passage. This Muslim master teaches that in the moment of supreme spiritual fulfilment, the aspirant and God is one; there is nothing besides God.

He also teaches that the mind must be emptied of thoughts, and the heart emptied of shame if anyone is to attain this highest fulfilment. If we substitute the term "God" with "the Tathagata" – both of which are respectively Muslim and Buddhist terms for the Supreme Reality – the above poem can easily be taken as a Buddhist gatha.

The second quotation records the ecstatic spiritual experience of Saint Benedict. It is similar to an enlightenment experience of a Buddhist master, in which he perceives the whole world in celestial light, and directly experiences that he expands to become the universe.

In the third quotation, Patanjali, the father of yoga, describes the highest accomplishment of a yogi when his atman attains union with Brahman, the Hindu term for the Supreme Reality. This quotation reads exactly like a Buddhist text, especially when "life and death" in the quotation above is replaced by "karma" as in the original.

When the aspirant attains his highest spiritual fulfilment, he realizes that all the objects that he earlier perceived with his senses, are actually nothing, because ultimate reality is unobstructed and pure. This is exactly the same as saying, in Buddhist vocabulary, the enlightened being realizes that phenomena are illusory because ultimate reality is undifferentiated and tranquil.

The fourth quotation is taken from a Taoist classic, "The True Teaching on Cosmic Nature" by Ji Yi Zi. The expression "life and death cease" and "the Supreme Reality" in the above quotation are replaced by "the cycle of rebirth ceases" and "Tao" respectively in the original. The Real Mind means the Universal Mind.

The Taoist master explains that in the Universal Mind or Ultimate Reality, there is no thought; when thought ceases, the cycle of rebirth ceases; in his highest spiritual attainment, he experiences that the Ultimate Reality is emptiness, devoid of all phenomena; phenomena appear to us in our ordinary consciousness because of the primordial principle, which in Buddhism is described as the principle of dependent origination (to be explained in a later chapter).

He mentions a great cosmic truth that is often emphasized in Zen Buddhism, i.e. when he attains the highest spiritual fulfilment, it is returning to his original self. In Zen vocabulary, it is expressed as when one attains Enlightenment, it is actualizing his original Buddha nature.

Both statements mean the same thing: when we are enlightened, we realize that our individual bodies and individual souls are an illusion; in reality we are the universe! «

It is obvious that all the great masters of different religions say the same Truth. Personally, this is one of the most beautiful lessons I have in my many years of training.

Question 17

The ultimate goal in Zen Buddhism is to attain the supreme perfect Enlightenment (anuttara samyak sambodhi) and the path to this may be gradual or sudden. At times in the past I recall you mentioned that most people are not ready for the ultimate goal and so the aims may be more mundane. Despite more mundane objectives do the training methods we use in our school actually represent the gradual path and are there specific sign posts or milestones that can be used to verify ones progress towards the ultimate goal.

Joel

Answer

The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to attain perfect Enlightenment. This can be achieved in a sudden or a gradual way.

Zen Buddhism represents the sudden way. When a practitioner attains perfectly no thought, he attains perfect Enlightenment in an instant.

Other schools of Buddhism represent the gradual way. A practitioner first attains a one-pointed mind. Then he employs the one-pointed mind to contemplate on Cosmic Reality. When he realizes that Cosmic Reality is undifferentiated, he attains perfect Enlightenment.

It is the same Enlightenment, but the approach is different. The meditation methods are different too. In Zen, the meditation is on no thoughts. In other schools of Buddhism, the mediation goes through the processes of concentration and contemplation.

Yes, most people, including ourselves in Shaolin Wahnam, are not ready to this ultimate goal of attaining perfect Enlightenment. We are more interested in the mundane aims of attaining good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness, spiritual joys and combat efficiency.

But in realizing these mundane aims our training methods represent the sudden path of Zen, rather than the gradual path of other schools, Buddhist or otherwise. Even in Taijiquan, which manifests Tao rather than Zen, our methods are sudden rather than gradual.

In chi kung, for example, the gradual path, which is the normal path of most chi kung practitioners, is to practice a technique over and over again to acquire the necessary skills which then lead to desired results. Chi kung practitioners in general can generate an energy flow only after many months or years of dedicated practice.

But in our school, we employ the sudden path. Students at my intensive chi kung courses, for example, can generate an energy on the very first day. Students in regular classes may take a few days, not because our instructors are unable to guide them to do so in one day but because as they have more time than students at intensive courses, the instructor purposely spread over the skills development over a longer period for the students; benefit. But compared to other students, it is very fast.

Other practitioners have to practice for many months, if they are lucky, to experience internal force. Most of them have no opportunity to experience internal force at all. Our Shaolin and Taijiquan students could experience internal force in just one day”

Indeed, we have become so cost-effective in achieving chi kung and kungfu results, like chi flow and internal force, that it has become ridiculous – in a good sense.

How is it that we can be so successful in using the sudden approach to achieve results in such a short time, when other people have to use the gradual approach which takes a much longer time? This is because of heart to heart transmission, which is a hallmark of Zen.

Most monks would have to cultivate for a long time before they could attain Enlightenment. But when the Buddha showed a flower to Kasyapa, Kasyapa smiled and attained Enlightenment in an instant. This was due to the heart to heart transmission from the Buddha to Kasyapa.

Hui Ke had to wait for a long time before Bodhidharma taught him. But when Bodhidharma asked Hui Ke to bring out his mind so that Bodhidharma could show him how to pacify it, Hui Ke was enlightened in an instant. This was due to the heart to heart transmission from Bodhidharma to Hui Ke.

Just now in the Intensive Chi Kung Course in Sabah, students, including many beginners, had a cosmic shower in just one session, whereas it would take other advanced practitioners at least a year or two to have a similar result. It was due to a heart to heart transmission from me to the students. We use the sudden path, whereas most other practitioners use the gradual.

The sign posts or milestones that verify success are the direct experience of the practitioners. Practitioners know that they can generate an energy flow when they generate an energy flow. They know they can develop internal force or enjoy a cosmic shower when they have developed internal force or are enjoying a cosmic shower.

Realizing the ultimate goal of perfect Enlightenment is not an aim in our school. Our aims are mundane, and down to earth, and can be generalized as enjoying good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness and spiritual joys, and for those who practice Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan, combat efficiency. We know we have realized these aims when we directly experience the results, though for longevity, many of our Shaolin Wahnam members have to wait for 30 to 50 years before they can confirm it.

But for academic interest, yes, there are sign posts or milestones that can be used to verify ones progress towards the ultimate goal. Like in the mundane aims, the best sign posts and milestones are direct experience. Firstly, there is a surge of compassion towards all living beings, including non-human. While a surge of compassionate feeling may be due to other

factors besides progress towards attaining Enlightenment, such a progress is always preceded by a surge of compassion.

Then there is an urge to know what lies beyond physical life. Similarly, there may be other factors resulting in this urge, but spiritual progress is usually preceded by such an urge.

A sure sign post or milestone is an experience of spiritual awakening, like experience his spirit expands beyond his physical body, or he is no where and everywhere. It is amazing that many of our students have such experiences during their chi kung or kungfu practice.

Question 18

We in Shaolin Wahnam are lucky and have the possibility to learn different sets from competent masters. Which set from KungFu/Taijiquan represents the highest Zen aspect and what's the reason? I myself presume it's Praying Mantis because the set goes in one direction and back and includes the Zen aspects simple, direct and effective.

Roger

Answer

We are indeed very lucky. Our opportunity to learn a great range of kungfu sets as well as internal force training methods and chi kung exercises is unprecedented in kungfu history. In other words, never before had any kungfu or chi kung practitioners in the whole history of kungfu and chi kung the same opportunity as we in learning kungfu sets, force training methods and chi kung exercises.

Our repertoire of kungfu sets ranges from Tiger-Crane of Shaolin to Wudang Taijiquan and Swimming Dragon of Baguazhang. Our force training methods range from Siu Lin Tou of Wing Choon to Cloud Hands of Taijiquan to Baguazhang stance training. Our chi kung exercises range from Eighteen Lohan Hands to Cosmic Shower to Small Universe.

The choice of the kungfu set that represents the highest Zen aspect depends on what we interpret the Zen aspect to be.

If we interpret the Zen aspect as being simple, direct and effective, I would choose "Cross-Roads at Four Gates" to be the most representative set. It was the fundamental set practiced at the south Shaolin Monastery at Quanzhou. It was the set that our Patriarch, the Venerable Jiang Nan, brought out from the Shaolin Monastery and passed on to us.

If we interpret the Zen aspect as the highest chance to attain a satori or spiritual awakening, I would choose the Wudang Taijiquan Set. It represents the highest point in the development of Shaolin Kungfu where kungfu, chi kung and meditation were integrated into one set. At the time the great Zhang San Feng practiced it, it was called Wudang Shaolin Kungfu.

If we interpret the Zen aspect as meditation, I would choose the 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set. The whole set is performed like a long continuous flowing meditation without beginning and without end.

Praying Mantis Kungfu has numerous sets, and all of them are quite complex and sophisticated. They are neither simple nor direct, though they are very effective.

Going in one direction and back does not represent the Zen aspect. Most kungfu sets of Northern Shaolin styles have this characteristic. Some examples are Eighteen-Collection of Praying Mantis, 50 Sequences of Eagle Claw, 12 Sequences of Tan Tui, and Five-Element Set of Xingyi Kungfu.

Question 19

1. I am used to do as much as possible myself without asking for help. Not because of, but like stated in the quote of Confucius:

“Expect much from yourself and little from others and you will avoid incurring resentments.”

Although it is not as effective as good thoughts and good words, helping others is a good deed and creates good karma for the person that is providing help. But what about the person who asks for help?

2. If I ask someone for help, I am providing this person with an opportunity to increase his good karma. Isn't this a good deed too?

As I dislocated my thumb in training recently, I had my right hand plastered for two weeks and still wanted to do everything possible myself. Suddenly this question came through my mind. I would highly respect your opinion on this. Thank you very much and thanks to Roland Siheng for opening this thread.

Sifu Leonard Lackinger

Answer

What is good, and what is evil?

Whatever that brings benefit to oneself and others is good, whatever that brings harm is evil. Helping others brings benefit to oneself and others. Thus it is a good deed, and results in good karma. It brings benefit to the person providing help because it makes him happy. It brings benefit to the receiver of help because it enables him to overcome some difficulty.

Asking for help also brings benefit to oneself and others. Thus it is also a good deed, and results in good karma. It brings benefit to the person asking for help as it enables him to

overcome some difficulty. It brings benefit to the person providing help because it gives him an opportunity to create good karma.

Wanting to do everything possible yourself despite some handicap is a good deed, and brings good karma. It brings you benefit because it makes you feel independent and confident, and enables you to improve yourself. It also avoids incurring resentments from others, as Confucius said.

If you ask others for help, you provide them with an opportunity to increase their good karma. Then, why does it incur resentments? If they help you, they increase their good karma. If they refuse to help you, you incur resentments in them.

Question 20

How would you define/describe a Zen Master?

Sifu Andrew Barnett

Answer

Go and wash your face.

The above is a Zen answer, given by a Zen master to a Zen student to help him attain a spiritual awakening.

An intellectual answer is as follows. A Zen master is one who avoids evil and does good, and his spiritual cultivation, which he has attained a very high level, is mainly training his mind to experience Cosmic Reality. He may or may not know much about Zen philosophy, and he may or may not teach students who follow his methods of spiritual cultivation.

Question 21

1. What is the difference between our Horse-Stance, Wuji Stance, Standing Zen and Sitting Zen?
2. Which ancient Zen Master is your biggest inspiration?

Sifu Anton Schmick

Answer

The difference in physical form is obvious, which you know very well. I shall therefore address other aspects of their difference.

In terms of energy, the Horse-Stance is more solid, whereas the Wuji Stance is more flowing, though the energy in both cases is focused at the abdominal dan tian.

The physical form of the Wuji Stance and Standing Zen is the same. The former term is used in Taijiquan, whereas the latter term is in Shaolin Kungfu. Relatively Wuji Stance focuses more on energy, whereas Standing Zen focuses more on mind.

The physical form of sitting meditation is the same in Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan. In Chinese, it is called “zuo chan” in Shaolin Kungfu, which actually means “sitting meditation”. In Taijiquan it is called “jing zao”, which means “silent sitting”.

Amongst Horse-Stance, Wuji Stance, Standing Zen and Sitting Zen, Sitting Zen or sitting meditation is the most stable. The energy can be focused at the abdominal dan tian or at the bottom dan tian at the hui-yin vital point.

In terms of mind, the focus in the Horse-Stance is at the abdominal dan tian, whereas in the Wuji Stance and Standing Meditation, the mind is focused all over the body.

In Sitting Meditation, the mind is focused on a single thought, or is expanded to no thought.

With this understanding of their difference in terms of physical form, energy and mind, we shall be more cost-effective in considering their difference in training objectives and results desired.

If we wish to develop internal force, the best choice amongst the four would be the Horse-Stance because it will give us the best result. However, it is the most difficult to practice.

For those not ready to meet the demand of the Horse-Stance, a good choice for internal force development is the Wuji Stance, provided they are able to relax, and know how to tap energy from the Cosmos.

If we wish to generate an energy flow, such as to overcome injuries or illness, the best choice of the four is the Wuji Stance. Standing Zen, which focuses more on mind, is the next choice. The Horse-Stance and Sitting Zen are not suitable for this purpose.

If we wish to train mental clarity or nurture spiritual joys like being happy, peaceful and free, Standing Zen is the best choice, followed by Wuji Stance. The Horse-Stance and Sitting Zen also provides these benefits, but are not as cost-effective.

If we wish to attain a satori or spiritual awakening, Sitting Zen is the best choice, followed by Standing Zen, Wuji Stance and Horse-Stance.

Of course, the above description presumes all other things were equal, which is almost never true in real life, but this presumption is necessary for a theoretical comparison. In practice a master using the worst choice will still have better result than a student using the best choice.

The second presumption is that these exercises are practiced correctly, which actually is not easy. Many people practice them wrongly, even in seemingly easy exercises like Wuji Stance and Standing Zen, and therefore derive harmful side-effects instead of benefits.

In this respect, students in our school are lucky. Because we have a sound understanding of their philosophy, not only we ensure that our students practice correctly but also they have good results in a relatively short time.

For example, many of our students attain satori in Standing Zen. This is incredible, considering that even monks practicing professionally take a few years to attain satori in Sitting Zen. This is one important reason why we do not normally practice Sitting Zen in our school. We can attain the results of Sitting Zen faster and safer using Standing Zen.

Question 22

1. Is the Zen state manifested differently when a practitioner is doing a vigorous activity such as kung fu or sports, vs. the state of Zen you might have when performing a Japanese tea ceremony or Chinese calligraphy?
2. What are the similarities and differences, if any?

Chia-Hua

Answer

As in many things in life, the answer can be yes or no.

Yes, when the kind of activities is different, the Zen state of mind involved in the different activities is also different. Hence, the Zen state of mind in vigorous activities like kungfu and sports is different from more sedate activities like Japanese tea ceremony or Chinese calligraphy.

The Zen state of mind in vigorous activities is active, whereas that in sedate activities is passive. In kungfu sparring, for example, the Zen state of mind, while being calm and focussed, will be intuitively thinking of what movements will be executed next. In Chinese calligraphy, the Zen state of mind, also while being calm and focussed, will be enjoying the flow of the artist's brush.

On the other hand, we can also say that irrespective of the different activities involved, regardless of whether the activities are vigorous or sedate, the Zen state of mind is the same. At the basic level, it is calm and focused. At higher levels, it initiates or responds to the activities at hand.

In other words, irrespective of whether you are performing a kungfu set, preparing tea in a ceremonial way, viewing a sunset, chewing your food, walking with your girlfriend hand in hand, or giving a public speech, if you are in a Zen state of mind you will be calm and relax, and spontaneously and usually correctly initiate or respond to requirements of the activity involved.

For example, if you miss a pattern in the set, you would just smoothly go on to the subsequent pattern without a break and without any indication for spectators that you have missed a pattern. Others who lack the benefit of a Zen state of mind may just stop and stretch their head, or do any tell-tale action that shows they have made a mistake at this point.

If you are holding a pot of hot tea and someone is about to crash onto you, you would without any intellectualizing, spontaneously move aside to avoid the crash, and carry on your

tea ceremony as if nothing amiss has happened. Others without a Zen state of mind would accidentally splash the hot tea on to himself or the crashing-in person, or execute any other action clumsily not in harmony with the tea ceremony.

Hence, irrespective of the activities involved which may be vastly different in nature, the Zen state of mind is the same, i.e. being calm and relaxed and being able to react spontaneously and correctly.

Question 23

Which ancient Zen Master is your biggest inspiration?

Sifu Anton Schmick

Answer

The Zen Master who has provided me with the biggest inspiration is Guan Yin Bodh Satt, the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion.

Here I interpret the term “Zen Master” in its widest sense. In the sense that most people would interpret it, which would include the 28 Zen masters from India, and the 6 Zen masters from China, my biggest inspiration is Bodhidharma.

Question 24

Often mental clarity and internal force are highlighted in Zen courses which give us indeed beautiful gifts. I also seem to read about opening the heart. My Sifu explained to me that the internal force aspect is connected with opening the heart (if I understood it right).

1. Is there anything we can do to assist our internal force in opening our hearts?
2. What is an open heart in Zen?
3. How can we reassure that we have a good balance between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing Zen?

Binia

Answer

Zen courses come in different types with different benefits. In some Zen courses, instructors conduct sitting meditation. This gives the students an experience of Zen. In other Zen courses, instructors talk about Zen. This gives the student an understanding of Zen.

The “doing” courses contribute to the students’ mental clarity. The “talking” courses contribute to the students’ understanding of what Zen is, though their mind may or may not be clearer after these “talking” courses. But in both the “doing” and the “talking” courses, instructors almost never help students to develop or talk about internal force. It is only in Zen courses as well as other lessons in our school that internal force, besides mental clarity, is practiced and talked about.

In the above discussion we assume that the “doing” and “talking” Zen courses are genuine. If they are not genuine, in the “doing” courses instructors teach students to sit in a lotus or semi-lotus position, but the students do not practice sitting meditation. They merely sit in a sitting meditation position and subject their mind to countless thoughts. As a result of their training, they become more stressful instead of being relaxed, which is a very basic benefit of genuine Zen training.

In the “talking” courses instructors often talk about Zen history and Zen stories but without explaining what Zen is. As a result students become more confused about Zen instead of having a clear idea of how to practice Zen and what the benefits are. Indeed, this contributed an important reason why I wrote my book, “The Complete Book of Zen”, which was initially entitled “Understanding and Practicing Zen”.

Unfortunately, genuine Zen courses are rare today. The truth of this statement can be readily verified if you observe people who have attended Zen courses, including Zen retreats. A great majority of them are stressful and do not understand what Zen is.

We are proud to say that our school, Shaolin Wahnam, is one of the very few that teach genuine Zen. How can we justify our claim that we teach genuine Zen? A good way is to examine the result. Not only our students are relaxed, mentally fresh and understand what Zen is, some of them even have satori experiences.

Our Zen courses are special. Our Zen students also develop internal force, which is normally not included in Zen courses elsewhere even when these are genuine. Yes, mental clarity and internal force give us a lot of benefit. It enables us to have better result no matter what we do!

Yes, our internal force training is connected with opening the heart. This does not mean that other people who have not opened their heart cannot develop internal force. They still can, but not only the internal force developed is less powerful, it can also be risky.

If his heart is not open, the internal force developed may be locked up in his body. Worse, it may be locked up in his heart, which can be dangerous.

How does opening the heart make internal force training safe, and enable a practitioner develop more internal force? When his heart is open, his energy flows. When energy is flowing it cannot be locked up.

Moreover, flowing energy both increases the amount of energy as extra energy from the Cosmos will be attracted in, as well as speed up the process of internal force building because internal force is a function of the smoothness and volume of energy flow.

Yes, to assist your internal force there are a number of things you can do while and also

after opening your heart.

While opening your heart, you should be upright and relaxed, and not be thinking of anything. In this way you will enhance the amount of internal force being built. Reversely, if your poise is crooked, you are tensed or you think of various thoughts, your internal force will be much minimized, or there may not be any internal force at all.

Nevertheless, even when you open your heart and you are upright and relaxed, and not thinking of anything, the internal force developed may not be much. You can increase the amount of internal force tremendously if you continue to practice an internal force training exercise.

We have many internal force training exercises in our school. You can just choose one. Some examples are One-Finger Shooting Zen, Golden Bridge, Lifting Water, Three-Circle Stance, Horse-Riding Stance, Pushing Mountain, Separating Water, Big Wind Mill, Flicking Fingers, Pushing Up, Jerking Elbows, Cosmic Shower, Abdominal Breathing, and Small Universe.

In Zen, an open heart is an open heart. It is not described in flowery language, as in Taoist writing, like opening of the central gate, or blossoming of the heart flower.

Genuine Zen training would result in an open heart. This will intrinsically give rise to Zen practitioners being generous and happy.

However, nowadays if you observe people who profess that they practice Zen, many of them are not happy, and often not generous. This is an indication that much of Zen practice today is not genuine.

On the other hand, you will find that most Shaolin Wahnam members are happy and usually generous. This is because we practice Zen, not just in Zen courses but also in Chi Kung, Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan. Indeed, every time we practice Chi Kung, Shaolin Kungfu or Taijiquan, we start by smiling from the heart, which will open the heart.

To reassure that you have a good balance between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing Zen is very simple. Just do it. This is Zen. If you intellectualize about it, it is not Zen.

But before you have a good balance, and then reassure yourself that you have a good balance, it is helpful to understand the difference between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing Zen.

Let us take a few examples.

If you understand that the characteristics of Zen is being simple, direct and effective, you learn and know about Zen.

If your actions are simple, direct and effective, you practice and experience Zen.

Learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing are not the same. You may learn and know that the characteristics of Zen are being simple, direct and effective, yet your actions may not be simple, direct and effective. On the other hand, your actions may be simple, direct and effective, but you may not know that these are the characteristics of Zen.

If you understand that to open your heart, you need to be relaxed and think of nothing. This is learning and knowing about opening the heart. It is theoretical knowledge. In practice,

you may not be able to open your heart.

If you actually open your heart and feel happy and generous, you practice and experience opening the heart. This is practical benefit. In theory you may not know that to open your heart you need to be relaxed and think of nothing.

If you understand that to develop internal force, you need energy flow. This is learning or knowing about internal force. But in real life, you may not have internal force though you know its theory.

If you are small-sized and do not use muscular strength, you are more powerful than a bigger-sized and muscular opponent, you have internal force, but you may not know about its theory.

In Zen, if one has to choose between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing, the choice is practical experience over theoretical knowledge. This does not mean that Zen practitioners do not value knowledge, but if a choice has to be made, they prefer experience.

That was why Bodhidharma asked Zen monks to burn their books. It did not mean that Bodhidharma did not value books, but the monks were so preoccupied with studying books that they missed out practical benefits.

Of course, the best is to have a balance between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing, i.e. between theoretical knowledge and practical benefits.

With this understanding, which is theoretical knowledge, we balance learning/knowing with practicing/experiencing, which is practical benefit. Having made the balance in practice, we reassure that the balance is good. This is Zen. If we just intellectualize about the concept but do nothing practical about it, it is not Zen.

Let us take an example. You want to develop internal force. First you learn what internal force is, how to develop it, and what its benefits are. This is theoretical knowledge.

Next, you search for a master who has internal force and is willing to teach you. You practice according to what he teaches, and periodically access the results to ensure that they correspond to what internal force is said to give. This is practical benefit.

Then, you check that your practicing/experiencing matches your learning/knowing. This is reassuring that you have a good balance.

On the other hand, if a person learns and knows a lot about internal force, but never puts his learning and knowing into practice, he does not have balance. No matter how much he knows, he will still have no internal force.

If another person goes straight to train internal force without first learning and knowing about it, he also has no balance. He may or may not develop internal force, but it is unlikely that he is cost-effective, and likely that he would derive harmful side-effects.

Hence, have a good balance between learning/knowing and practicing/experiencing is wise. It is one of the many benefits of practicing Zen.

Question 25

What is the difference from a Zen perspective between "Thinking nothing and doing nothing," and "Smiling from the heart"?

Adam Bailey

Answer

From the Zen perspective, which is another way of saying from the viewpoint of seeing and describing things simply, directly and effectively, "thinking nothing and doing nothing" is thinking nothing and doing nothing, and "Smiling from the heart" is smiling from the heart.

The difference is self-evident. It is like asking what the difference between a cat and a dog is. From the perspective of seeing and saying things simply, directly and effectively, a cat is a cat, and a dog is a dog. The different is self-evident. If you look at a cat, you know it is a cat, and is different from a dog.

From the intellectual perspective, which is another way of saying from the perspective of using words for academic pleasure, if not for confusion, we may logically argue that a cat is a dog, and we may also logically argue that a cat is different from a dog.

For example, we can argue that a cat has four legs and a tail. A dog also has four legs and a tail. Therefore, a cat is a dog.

On the other hand, your neighbour, John, has only two legs and does not have a tail (though he may have a tail-bone). So John is neither a cat nor a dog.

On the other hand, we may also argue that a cat meows and a dog barks. Meowing is different from barking. Therefore, a cat is not a dog. But John, if he wants to, can meow and bark. Therefore, he is a cat and he is also a dog.

Although the argument is logical, we can easily see the fallacy of the argument because we are familiar with cats and dogs. But many people may not understand why thinking nothing doing nothing and smiling from the heart is the same or different because they are not familiar with them. Yet, the principles are the same.

The logic involved is as follows:

If A is B,
and B is C,
therefore, A is C.

The logic is flawed. Many people suffer unnecessarily because of their flawed logic, and they do not realize it. Some common examples in daily life are as follows.

I practice chi kung. Chi kung does not cure my illness. Therefore chi kung does not cure illness.

Many people practice kungfu. When they fight, they use Kick-Boxing. Therefore, kungfu practitioners use Kick-Boxing for fighting.

A friend helps another in need. Mary does help me when I am in need. Therefore, Mary is not a friend.

The logic is flawed because in the examples above, A is not B, though A may have some features of B. And B is not C, though B may have some features of C. Therefore, A may or may not be C

In the case of cats and dogs, cats and dogs are sets, whereas having four legs and a tail is a sub-set. Different sets may have the same sub-sets, like cats and dogs having four legs and a tail, but they also have different sub-sets, like cats meowing and dogs barking, which make the sets different.

Practicing chi kung, practicing kungfu and having friends are sets. In each sets there are different sub-sets. In the set of people practicing chi kung, for example, there is a sub-set of practitioners not having their illness cured, and there is also a sub-set of practitioners who have their illness cured. Using a sub-set to represent a set is flawed.

When we practice Zen, we would not make this mistake. In the spirit of Zen, we would perceive those who practice chi kung but their illness is not cured as those who practice chi kung but their illness is not cured. We would not make a flawed conclusion that practicing chi kung does not cure illness. In other words, we call a spade a spade.

Hence, thinking nothing doing nothing is thinking nothing doing nothing. Smiling from the heart is smiling from the heart.

But these two skills can have similar benefits, besides having different benefits. In the same way, cats and dogs can have similar features, besides having different features.

In both thinking nothing doing nothing and smiling from the heart, you are relaxed, peaceful and happy, and are tuned into Cosmic Reality.

But their benefits can also be different, both in nature and in degree. For example, when thinking nothing doing nothing you are free from intellectualization and activities. In smiling from the heart, you may intellectualize if you want to though you normally don't, and you are involved in some activity. These are differences in nature.

Although both thinking nothing doing nothing and smiling from the heart result in mental clarity and happiness, the degree of mental clarity and happiness is not the same. Usually thinking nothing doing nothing gives you more mental clarity, whereas smiling from the heart gives you more happiness. These are differences in degree.

Question 26

1. I understand that some spiritual paths purport that one must spend many life times to attain complete Enlightenment. In practicing Zen is it possible for anyone to attain this in one lifetime?
2. Is it a reasonable/practical expectation?
3. If so what conditions are required?

Ish

Answer

Yes, it is possible for an aspirant to attain complete Enlightenment in one lifetime by practicing Zen. In fact, it is a primary aim of Zen practice to attain complete Enlightenment not just in one lifetime but here and now. It is a reasonable and practical expectation. But this does not mean that if one practices Zen, he will certainly attain complete Enlightenment

Three conditions are required, not only for attaining complete Enlightenment in Zen training, but also in attaining the purported result in any art. In other words, if you want to break a brick with your bare hand, to become a world-class footballer, or to have internal force to enjoy good health, vitality and longevity, you need three conditions, known as the Three Requirements for Success as follows.

1. A right method.
2. A competent teacher.
3. A good student.

Firstly you must have a right method to attain complete Enlightenment in one lifetime, or to accomplish any result an art is purported to give. Next you must have a competent teacher to guide you towards your goal. But the most important is that you must be a good student.

All the three conditions are required. If you have a right method and you are a good student, you still may not achieve your goal if you do not have a competent teacher.

This, in fact, is the situation in many arts. Today, a great majority of students who practice meditation, chi kung or kungfu have right methods and they themselves are good students, but they still do not have the desired results because they do not have competent teachers.

The students usually do not realize that the problem is their lack of competent teachers. They mistakenly think that if they have the methods, they will have the purported results. But this is not so, as evident by thousands of students who practice meditation, chi kung and kungfu, but their mind is still stressful, they are still weak and sick, and they are unable to

defend themselves. If we check their methods, we find that the methods are correct, and they practice diligently.

Why is it that some spiritual paths require a long time, like many lifetimes, to attain Enlightenment whereas in Zen it is possible to attain Enlightenment in an instant? In other words, why spiritual development in some spiritual paths is gradual, whereas spiritual attainment in Zen is sudden?

We are all originally enlightened. But we do not realize our enlightenment because of ignorance. In some religions, this is described as we are all issued from God, but are alienated from God because of sins. In scientific terms, everything is just an undifferentiated spread of universal energy, but conceptualization transforms the transcendental cosmic reality into the phenomenal world.

The practice of many spiritual paths is to tear away the ignorance, sins or conceptualization piece by piece over many lifetimes to realize transcendental Cosmic Reality. The practice of Zen is to aim straight at the transcendental Cosmic Reality by eliminating all thoughts which are the cause of differentiation.

For example, in other spiritual disciplines, one cultivates blessings by doing good and avoiding evil. His good blessings will result in him being born at a higher spiritual level in the next life, in this world or in other worlds such as in heavens. But if his evilness outweighs his goodness, he will be reborn at a lower level in his next life, as a lower human being or as an insect or animal in this world, or as a lower being in other dimensions.

As he goes through countless lives he accumulates countless layers of ignorance, also called defilements or sins in some cultures, which smother his original Buddha nature or divine spark. If he is reborn at a higher spiritual level, he may remove some of these layers. Hopefully, if he has accumulated sufficient blessings, he may be reborn in a life when he can become a monk so that he can cultivate professionally to attain Enlightenment or return to God the Holy Spirit. This is the gradual approach.

Zen uses the sudden approach. We are originally the Buddha, but we do not realize our Buddhahood due to ignorance. This is another way of saying that originally everything is transcendental Cosmic Reality without any differentiation, but we create differentiation which results in the phenomenal realm in this world or in other dimensions because of thoughts. If we eliminate all thoughts, which transform the undifferentiated Cosmic Reality into differentiated phenomenal realms, we return to our original state of transcendental Cosmic Reality. This is the Zen approach, attaining Enlightenment in an instant, here and now.

Question 27

In our daily practice, Shaolin Cosmos Qigong focuses on standing meditation to experience Zen. Where (and when) do sitting meditation come into the practice?

HB Yeang

Answer

In my early years of teaching, like at the Shaolin Wahnam Association in Sungai Petani in the 1980s. I taught sitting meditation as part of the Shaolin Kungfu syllabus. At that time, we practiced six nights a week, and every night we concluded our training session with sitting meditation.

But over the years, my teaching methodology has improved beyond recognition. Shaolin Wahnam students today (2012) will be glad to know that they can benefit from my teaching in a few days what my early students would need a year! It is hard to believe but it is true.

This does not mean that modern students are as accomplished in a few days as my early students were in one year. This is a different issue. But it means that, for example, in a few days modern students not only have learnt the techniques to be physically and mentally relaxed as well as to attain a one-pointed mind but also have acquired the skills to do so on their own, whereas my early students would take a year.

As another example, modern students attending my intensive courses, can generate a chi flow within half an hour, but my early students at the Shaolin Wahnam Association would need more than a year.

Being relaxed, attaining a one-pointed mind and generating a chi flow are basic skills. To overcome pain and illness, or develop internal force and combat efficiency, modern students still have to practice like my early students did. But with an excellent start, and if all other things were equal, modern students should attain desired results sooner than early students.

Nevertheless, there is at least one factor that is different. Early students practiced six times a week in my presence. Modern students practice on their own, with periodical supervision from me or our certified instructors.

Returning to your question, the reason we do not teach sitting meditation in our school now is because we can achieve the intended results in a much shorter time and in a more pleasant and less risky manner using standing meditation than using sitting meditation.

We are very clear about our philosophy. We practice for practical benefits, not to impress others. If we can get benefits in a shorter time and in a more pleasant and less risky manner using standing meditation, it would be a mockery of our philosophy to attempt sitting meditation.

The hallmark of sitting meditation is achieving the highest attainment any being can attain, i.e. attaining Enlightenment or returning to God the Holy Spirit. It is pertinent for us to remember that ours is a chi kung and kungfu school, dedicated to bringing good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness and spiritual joys, as well as combat efficiency for those who practice kungfu, to deserving students irrespective of race, culture and religion. Ours is not a temple or

spiritual institution intended to train aspirants to attain Enlightenment or return to God the Holy Spirit.

It is true that many of our students have spiritual experiences, like expanding into the Cosmos, richer than those who specially cultivate in temples or other spiritual institutions, but this is our bonus, not a stated aim.

There is another important reason why I do not teach sitting meditation as part of our regular syllabus. Years ago when I practiced sitting meditation regularly, I attained such miraculous powers that although I was sure I would not abuse them, I was wise enough to abandon the practice so as not to burden myself with the risk of possible abuse no matter how small the probability could be. To teach sitting meditation to students exposing them to such risk would be irresponsible.

Nevertheless, things may change in future. At first I did not intend to teach Zen, but now, due to expedient needs, I am conducting Zen courses occasionally. In these Zen courses I sometimes teach sitting meditation, not the one in lotus position you have in mind, but in sitting upright on a seat, which is of a much lower level. In future, as things change I may teach sitting meditation in a lotus position if the need arises.

Question 28

During the wonderful Zen course you trained us to enter Zen in a seated position and you emphasized quality over quantity, suggesting 5 minutes quality daily practice is sufficient.

1. Please could you discuss how a Zen practice might develop as a student's attainment develops, from the perspective of physical position, duration or other relevant factors?
2. Please could you highlight any indicators or milestones that can verify progress and provide reassurance that the student is practicing correctly?

Matt

Answer

One of the hallmarks of our school is that we focus on quality over quantity, which is a manifestation of our cost-effectiveness. For example, we claim, with justification of course, that our students derive more benefit in six months than most other students in three years. At the Zen course in entering Zen in a seated upright position on a chair, we achieved better result in five minutes than many other students in an hour or two in a lotus position.

Understandably, other people not exposed to our practice and therefore unaware of the benefits we get, may think that we are boastful. But actually we are modest. In reality, our chi kung and kungfu students get more benefit in six months than what most other chi kung

and kungfu students get irrespective of how long they may practice, be it thirty years or their whole lifetime. Our Zen students get more benefit in five minutes of meditation than what most other Zen students get no matter how long they meditate.

Why is it so? It is because we focus on quality, while others focus on quantity. In chi kung and kungfu, not only we practice the genuine arts, we practice them at a very high level, whereas most other people only practice their outward form and miss their essence.

Our chi kung students can generate an energy flow and our kungfu students can apply their kungfu for combat, which are the basic benefits of these arts. How may other chi kung and kungfu students can do this after thirty years? Our Zen students feel peaceful and mentally fresh after five minutes of meditation. How many other students can have these basic meditation benefits after meditating for two hours?

To be peaceful and mentally fresh is the main objective for our meditation practice in our Zen courses. With these benefits, as well as other benefits we get from other practices in our Zen courses, such as being simple, direct and effective, we will have better results in shorter time irrespective of what we do. This is a main aim of the courses.

If we can realize our objective in five minutes of meditation, it is not only unnecessary but actually unwise to meditate for an hour. Indeed, I believe that many meditation students have become dull and depressed as a result of their meditation practice, instead of being fresh and cheerful which meditation is meant to bring about, is because not only they have practiced wrongly but also they have prolonged their wrong practice.

It is ironical that some meditation students, who are obviously depressed, boast of their meditating for hours, just as some martial artists boast of the scars and injuries they have sustained. They do not realize that these are indications that they have failed in their training.

It is also pertinent for our students to be reminded that while we enjoy and value supra-mundane experiences like expanding beyond our physical body or being in touch with the Supreme, we practice Zen for mundane needs, like being peaceful, happy and energetic so that we can better enrich our lives and the lives of other people here and now in this phenomenal world.

Unlike monks who have renounced the world to cultivate professionally, our aim in Zen training is not to attain Enlightenment or return to God the Holy Spirit. Hence, there is no need to extend our meditation time or to attempt more advanced techniques.

Nevertheless, though we may not have a need, we may have aspirations for the supra-mundane. This, probably, is what your question means to address. Progress in Zen training, as in chi kung and kungfu, may be classified into three main levels as follows.

1. Good health, including overcoming illness as well as attaining vitality and longevity.
2. Internal force and mental clarity for peak performance in work and play.
3. Spiritual cultivation with benefits ranging from being peaceful and relaxed at the basic

level to merging with the Supreme at the supreme level.

There are countless techniques in Zen training. Some examples are reciting a mantra or a sutra, focusing the mind on one object like the dan tian, a Buddha statue, or an imaginary spot, answering an irrational question, serving tea, working in the field, performing a kungfu set and observing the breath. These countless techniques serve one, two or all the following three purposes:

1. Tame the mind.
2. Strengthen the mind.
3. Expand the mind.

In some cultures, “mind” may be substituted by “heart”, “spirit”, “soul” or “consciousness”. There are four main postures.

1. Standing.
2. Sitting.
3. Lying down.
4. Moving.

The usual postures for Zen training are standing and sitting. In our school, we use Standing Zen, which has served our purpose very well. It includes standing upright to remaining at a particular stance, like Horse-Riding and Three-Circle.

Sitting Zen includes sitting upright on a seat to sitting in a semi-lotus or full-lotus position. If all other factors were equal, sitting upright on a seat is the simplest of all Zen techniques and sitting in a full-lotus is the most profound.

Most Zen practitioners use the lotus position, but whether they practice genuine Zen is another issue, to such an extent that many people erroneously believe that Zen training must be in the lotus position.

The lying down posture is for those too old or weak to use other postures. On the other hand, it is also a posture we recommend to those who have difficulty sleeping. If they can enter into a state of Zen even at the very beginning stage, which means they are physically and mentally relaxed, going to sleep becomes easy.

The moving posture includes Walking Zen and performing chi kung and kungfu. Many chi kung and kungfu practitioners outside our school do not realize that when they perform their chi kung exercises or kungfu sets, they can also practice Zen. Because they are not aware of this fact, they do not do so, and thus derive no Zen benefits.

Why do we practice Zen? The countless benefits of Zen training can be summed up in a neat sentence as follows. The countless benefits can be classified into two main categories, the mundane and the supra-mundane, and Zen training enables us to attain the best in both categories. In other words, no matter what you do, I repeat, no matter what you do, your Zen training will enable you to attain the best result!

For example, if you were sick, you would recover faster than had you not practiced Zen. If you have a problem, your Zen training will enable you to solve it well. When you work in your office or spend time with your family or friends, you will have better result due to your Zen practice. If you want to meet God or be connected with the Cosmos, Zen training will give you the best result.

This brief analysis of attainment levels, purposes, postures and benefits in Zen training provide a good background to understand how you can progress, why you do so and what you can expect. It also makes you cost-effective, enabling you, for example, to choose the most suitable technique to achieve intended results in relatively short time.

In the Zen course you mentioned, our objective was to be peaceful and mentally fresh. These were basic benefits. So I chose the most elementary method, just be conscious of your breathing, without regulating it, while sitting upright on a chair for just five minutes. Had you used a difficult posture like a lotus position, a sophisticated technique like investigating into what Cosmic Reality is, and meditate for an hour, you might end up being more confused and stressful than being peaceful and fresh.

This is a big mistake many Zen practitioners make. They use a most profound posture, the lotus position, mediate for hours and hope to attain no-mind, which is Enlightenment or at least a satori, without first attaining the basic pre-requisites for meditation, i.e, being physically and mentally relaxed. Hence, no matter for how long they may practice, they will get little or no result.

Attaining peacefulness and mental freshness is the beginning, attaining Enlightenment is the ultimate, and there are countless developmental levels and benefits in between. But, as mentioned earlier, all these countless developmental stages can be classified into three broad levels, namely good health, peak performance, and spiritual cultivation.

These levels are guidelines, they are not rigid divisions. Hence, while you focus on good health, you will also have benefits in peak performance and spiritual cultivation, like your vitality enables you to do well in your hobbies and feel peaceful and confident. While you focus on spiritual cultivation, like strengthening your spirit, you will also have benefits in good health and peak performance, like you are emotionally balanced and you enjoy your work.

Being peaceful and mentally fresh is at the basic level, which brings good health, vitality and longevity. The next developmental level is developing internal force and mental clarity for peak performance. A choice posture is Standing Zen. Just be, and let cosmic energy soak into you and strengthen you in all aspects – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. A recommended time of practice is about 10 to 15 minutes.

The highest level is spiritual cultivation to attain Enlightenment, which is also called by other terms like attaining the Tao and returning to God the Holy Spirit. We are not ready for this yet, hence the answer here is purely academic. A choice posture is the full lotus position and the recommended time of practice is 15 minutes or more. Basically the technique is to focus the mind at the dan tian and let the mind expand to no-mind, which is All Mind.

Asking what indicators or milestones verify progress or achievement is an academic question. The Zen answer is that you will know from direct experience. When you have achieved good health, you know that you have achieved good health. When you perform well in your work and play, you know you have performed well in your work and play. When you have attained spiritual fulfilment like feeling tremendously free and happy, or expanding into the Cosmos, you know you have attained such spiritual fulfilment.

Question 29

How can Zen be practiced and manifested in a busy work life, for example in a managerial job - where multiple requests arrive simultaneously, where decisions need to be taken quickly and accurately.

Andrea

Answer

Just do it!

In other words, in your busy work life, like when you are in a managerial job where multiple requests arrive simultaneously and where decisions need to be taken quickly and accurately, relax and attain mental clarity, make decisions quickly and accurately, and immediately carry out the decisions, without any delay or intellectualization.

If it is not feasible to carry out the decisions immediately, carry them out as soon as you can without delay and intellectualization.

If you find out that you have made a wrong decision, or there is a better decision, you make an instant change without fuss and without question.

Let us take an example. You are in your office with a client in front complaining that the goods he has received is not according to what he ordered, your telephone ringing, and your secretary rushing in saying that a supervisor has asked for emergency leave to take his sick wife to hospital.

Some managers not trained in Zen would be flabbergasted. But not you, you are special, you are trained in the Shaolin Wahnam way, which includes Zen.

You relax, clear your mind of all thoughts, grasp the situations, make some decisions quickly (usually quicker than what other managers need to realize what is happening), and act on your

decisions immediately without fuss and without question.

You tell the client in front that you will presently look into the matter, tell your secretary to grant the supervisor leave, and pick up the phone. The person on the phone who is also a client says that your goods is due the following Wednesday but he does not have the cash to pay you as agreed, and asks whether he can pay you a week later. He says that he has just spoken to the sales manager but the latter has asked him to refer to you.

You tell this second client that you are sorry but it is a policy of the company to receive payment on delivery of goods. You will hold on to the goods for him for a week.

Then you call the production manager to come with the order form of the first client. Meanwhile you assure the first client that it is the policy of your company to serve customers to their satisfaction, and if you have made a mistake, you will rectify it immediately. You ask him what the mistake is.

He says that he has ordered blue T-shirts but you have sent him red T-shirts instead. He is becoming angry and says that he won't do business with you again.

You remain calm and apologize for his inconvenience, but say that your production manager will soon arrive to confirm whether a mistake is made. If it is your mistake you will rectify it immediately and offer him a 20

Your production manager arrives with the order form which shows that the first client actually ordered red T-shirts, not blue. It was his mistake, not yours. The client protests and claims that it couldn't be.

You tell him politely that people do make mistakes sometimes. You also tell him that you just produce the goods according to his order, which bears his signature. He then becomes nervous.

As you reckon that you can easily sell the red T-shirts to other customers, you assure him not to worry and that you will produce blue T-shirts for him without extra cost. Knowing that you can produce the new T-shirts in three days if you set to work immediately, you ask your client whether it would be alright if you deliver the blue T-shirts in a week's time.

His nervousness turns into a smile, and he thanks you for your kindness. He says that he will certainly recommend his friends to do business with you. You thank him for his business.

When the client has left, you tell your production manager to have the blue T-shirts ready in three days' time and report to you, but deliver them to the client in a week's time as agreed.

You then realize that you might have made a mistaken decision regarding the other client who requested later payment instead of payment on delivery of product. You call your accountant and find out that this client is a regular customer whose payment was always on time. You make a decision on the spot and tell your accountant that this time you allow him to pay a week later as he requested.

You call the second client and tell him that you have found out he is your regular customer who always pays on time. As a token of appreciation, you are prepared to modify the company policy this time for his benefit. You will deliver the goods on time but he can pay a week later.

He is audibly happy on the phone, thanks you and says that he will recommend his friends to you.

Hence, with your Zen training you can overcome problems simply, directly and effectively. “Simply” means you do not fuss or intellectualize over the problems or their solutions. You do not, for example, grumble. thinking what a nuisance the first client is. You do not intellectualize whether the supervisor’s wife was really sick.

“Directly” means that you do not approach the problems in a redundant way, like telling the first client that red T-shirts are better than blue ones, or the second client that many promised to pay later but never did. You also do not lecture your supervisor on the importance of his wife practicing chi kung, like you do, so that she will never be sick.

“Effectively” means you solve the problems, often turning them into opportunities for improvement, like your clients promising to recommend more clients to you, and your supervisor likely to be a better worker as a result of your generosity.

Here you practice Zen, in the sense of putting your Zen training into daily life so as to manifest the benefits of your training. You can do so only if you have practiced Zen, in the sense that you have undergone Zen training.

Can you practice Zen, in the sense of undergoing Zen training, if you have a busy work life? Of course you can. In fact, one should because by becoming more cost-effective due to Zen training, not only he can accomplish his work in shorter time with better results, but also he has better health and vitality to make life more rewarding for himself and other people.

No matter how busy a person’s work life is, he does not work 24 hours a day. In fact, if he has to work longer than is normal, it is often more a sign of his incompetence than his diligence.

In our school, it takes only about 5 to 10 minutes to practice Zen formally. We may, for example, Standing Meditation, One-Finger Shooting Zen, Lifting Water, Cloud Hands, Golden Bridge or any Shaolin or Taijiquan. All these are methods whereby we can practice Zen formally.

If needed, we can even practice Zen formally in less than a minute. We just enter into a Zen state of mind, also called a chi kung state of mind or Tao. Hence, even when we are actually involved in making multiple decisions quickly and accurately, as in a managerial job, we can undergo Zen training formally. In fact, we should, as we will be more cost-effective in our decisions. We can be so proficient in our Zen training that our formal practice and informal practice merge together harmoniously.

This is Zen. We do not have to sit for hours in a lotus position to practice Zen. We practice and benefit from Zen in our daily life, irrespective of whether we are making serious decisions in our work, enjoying ourselves with our family or friends, or just lying on a beach doing nothing.

This is the significance of why when a monk asked a Zen master what Zen was, the reply was whether the monk had eaten his meal.

Question 30

1. When I was in the Intensive Chi Kung Course this past April, you were so kind to show us an application for Zen. That was problem solving. It was only 5 minutes but really impressive for me. I never felt like that before. Everything disappeared. There remained only the question and the answer. Why was it so easy to find a solution for my problem?
2. What are the main applications for Zen in our daily living?
3. Can it be applied to everything we do in life?
4. Why is Zen often described as Simple, Direct and Effective?

I can't wait to attend a Zen course with Sifu. If 5 minutes helped me so much in the Chi Kung Intensive Course I can't wait to see what a full course is capable of.

Santiago

Answer

I am very happy of your results. Attaining mental clarity that you can solve problems easily is one of the many benefits of the Intensive Chi Kung Course.

Though the benefits are the norm, which means that it is really nothing special for course participants to have the expected benefits of the course, like being able to generate an energy flow that will overcome illness and provide good health, vitality and longevity, tap energy from the Cosmos that will strengthen the practitioners physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually, and expand our spirit beyond our physical body to have a satori or to be connected with the Supreme, it is kind of you to mention them here and elsewhere in our Discussion Forum.

Your comments verify that what we claim to achieve in our courses is true. It gives confidence and aspirations to deserving students.

While these benefits are normal to us, they are incredible to many people, including those who have practiced chi kung or Zen for many years. Why is this so? There are two main reasons.

Much of chi kung and Zen practiced today has been so debased that they are no longer genuine chi kung and Zen. Hence, no matter for how long these practitioners have practiced, they will not get even basic chi kung and Zen benefits.

But why do we in Shaolin Wahnam get not just basic benefits but what to many people are fantastic benefits, and in such a short time? The answer lies with the second reason, which is two-fold. We teach high-level chi kung and Zen, and we transmit the arts to our students from heart to heart. Hence we get high-level benefits in a very short time.

The short answer to your question why it was so easy for you to solve your problem in just five minutes when similar problems might have troubled other people for months is that you saw your problem and solution in a Zen state of mind.

A longer answer is as follows. Many people may be aware that they have a problem, but do not really know what their problem is. This is because their mind is constantly troubled by countless wandering thoughts that smother their problem. In other words, because of the countless thoughts going through their mind all the time, they cannot see their problem clearly.

When they cannot see their problem clearly, they cannot have a solution no matter how long they may intellectualize on their problem. Actually the more they intellectualize on their problem, the more confused the problem becomes, and the more stressful they are. Eventually they become worn out and dread facing their problem.

But you and those who have attended my Intensive Chi Kung Course or a Zen course are different. You can be relaxed and clear your mind of all thoughts within a minute. When your mind is cleared of all thoughts, you have pristine mental clarity. So when you placed your problem in your mind, you could see your problem very clearly.

More than this, you were tuned into the Universal Mind with universal wisdom. Hence a solution, usually the best solution amongst other possibilities, just emerged. You did not have to think about the solution. In fact, you should not intellectualize at all. The solution just shone out.

It was easy for you to find a solution to your problem because you had been well trained for it. Other people would not be able to do so, even when they know the philosophy as explained above, because they do not have the skills. In the same way, it is easy for those who have been trained, to ride a bicycle, swim or drive a car easily, but other people who are not trained in these skills would be unable to do so.

This highlights an important fact many people are unaware of. They mistakenly think that if they know the method, they would be able to perform the task the method is purported to do. They mistakenly think that if they know, in theory, that by clearing their mind of all thoughts, they can solve their problems in five minutes, or by performing a suitable chi kung exercise to generate a chi flow, they can overcome their illness.

They can't, even when they know the method because they lack the skills. In the same way, they may know the methods of riding a bicycle, swimming or driving a car by reading a book or watching a video, but they still can't ride a bicycle, swim or drive a car if they lack the skills.

Usually skills need to be learnt from a competent teacher, and acquired after some diligent practice. But our students are special. They have the skills transmitted to them from heart to heart.

There are countless applications of Zen in our daily living. Yes, Zen can be applied to everything we do. The countless Zen applications can be divided into two main categories, the mundane and the supra-mundane.

We still need the techniques and the required skills, but irrespective of whether they are of

the mundane or supra-mundane level, we can accomplish better result and in shorter time if we have undergone Zen training.

For example, you may want to cook a meal, read a book, sell a product, manage a company, marry a wife, raise children, win free sparring competitions, feel tremendous freedom, enjoy inner peace, be connected with the Supreme, or perform any mundane or supra-mundane activity, you still need the required techniques and skills, but with Zen training you will accomplish your task faster and with better result.

Zen is often described as being simple, direct and effective because that is what Zen is. If you want to cook a meal, for example, you get the necessary ingredients and cook them. You do not intellectualize why you should cook a meal and not buy one from a restaurant, or why you and not your brother should cook it. You do not read up where the ingredients originated, what food value they have, and intellectualize why these ingredients and not others are used, and what will happen to them if they are only half cooked. You just cook a meal, and preferably enjoy it.

Yes, if one can benefit so much in just 5 minutes of applying Zen in an Intensive Chi Kung Course, the benefits will be more in a full Zen course. Amongst other benefits, course participants will learn how to evaluate any solutions or actions to test whether they are simple, direct and effective. They will also expand their spirit into the Cosmos and be connected with the Supreme.

Question 31

Please could you discuss the methods and objectives of contemplation practices as they relate to, or differ from, Zen meditation?

Matt

Answer

Contemplation meditation and Zen meditation are two important, different categories of meditation.

Many people mistakenly think that there is only one type of meditation, just as they mistakenly think that there is only one type of chi kung.

In fact, they are countless types of meditation, and countless types of chi kung, both ranging from the basic to the most profound.

The term “meditation” is not a suitable choice of words. It comes from the verb “meditate”, which means to think or intellectualize. But in many forms of meditation, including the ones we practice in our school, thinking or intellectualizing is exactly what one should avoid.

Personally, I find the phrase “training of mind” to be more exact. “Mind” may be replaced with “soul”, “spirit” or “consciousness” in some cultural or religions context.

In classical Chinese, the concept of meditation is described as “entering Zen”, “entering Tao” or “entering silence”. In modern context, it is “entering a chi kung state of mind”. But the term “meditation” has been established, so despite its short-comings, we still use it.

Then, why is the term “meditation” used? It originated from the spiritual cultivation of the early Christian fathers, which consisted of four processes, namely reading scriptures, praying to God, contemplating on God’s words, and reflecting on the Truth. This historical fact is important to those who erroneously think that meditation is non-Christian.

Later other forms of spiritual cultivation were introduced to the West from the East. While the internal approaches and techniques might be different, the external form was similar. Hence, the term “meditation” was used and became established.

Apart from Zen, there are two main categories of meditation for spiritual cultivation, namely concentration and contemplation.

In concentration meditation, the mind is trained to be one-pointed. In Christian meditation, this refers to the two processes of reading scriptures and praying to God until the soul is totally devoted to God.

In Islamic meditation, or muraqabah, this is dhikr, where devotees continuously repeat phrases to God until there is no other thoughts but God. In Buddhist meditation, it is called samatha where practitioners focus on one object until the mind becomes concentrated.

Having attained concentration of mind, contemplation begins where devotees contemplates on the Supreme. In Christian meditation, it refers to the two processes of contemplating on God’s words and reflecting the Truth.

In Islamic meditation, it is tafakkur, where devotees reflect on the universe and the Supreme. In Buddhist meditation, it is called vipassana where practitioners investigate into Reality.

Although the techniques may be different, both the approach and the ultimate aim is the same. The approach is having attained a one-pointed mind or focused soul, the aspirants expand their mind or soul transcendently to attain a spiritual awakening or to return to God.

Zen meditation is different in its approach but the ultimate aim is the same. Instead of first concentrating the mind and then expanding to Universal Mind through concentration and contemplation, Zen aspirants aim directly at no-mind which is Universal Mind.

The underlying philosophy is as follows. Everything is originally Universal Mind, or described in some religions as there is nothing by God. But we mortals experience the undifferentiated Universal Mind as the phenomenal world because of thoughts. One way to return to Universal Mind or God is to tear down the countless thoughts, as in concentration and contemplation. This is referred to as a gradual path.

Another way, referred to as a sudden path, is to aim straight at no thoughts. When no thoughts arise, phenomena disappear and Universal Mind or the Supreme Reality naturally results.

This is what is meant by saying that nirvana and samsara are the same, the difference is a matter of spiritual perspective. In other words, it is the same Cosmic Reality, but when we have thoughts we perceive and experience the undifferentiated Cosmic Reality as countless entities in our phenomenal world.

In scientific context, everything is an undifferentiated spread of energy. But conceptualization transforms the undifferentiated energy into countless objects in our so-called objective world.

Hui Neng, the Sixth Patriarch, describes this Truth poetically. When one is unenlightened, he is a mortal; when he is enlightened he is Buddha.

At the mundane level, we employ the sudden path in our arts and daily life. Other people may have to practice chi kung for months before they can have a chi flow. We enter into a chi kung state of mind, and have a chi flow within a minute.

Other people have to practice appropriate exercises for months to have internal force. We enter Zen or Tao, consolidate our energy flow and experience internal force in fifteen minutes!

Other people have to concentrate their mind and contemplate on their problems for months, yet may not have a solution. We throw the problems into the Cosmos and within five minutes a solution appears.

Other people not exposed to our training will think we are boastful. But our students who have direct experience of the benefits know that we are merely stating the truth.