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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhassa

Summary

This article, by the Chan Painting Master Melva Fitzallen, introduces the reader to an understanding of the four seasons, and to understanding Ch'an. When the four friends of Ch'an painting, and the four friends of a Ch'an painters studio, as the treasures they are, are understood one can fully know the four seasons.

The Painting Master writes that through appreciation and study of the Ch'an arts, is found a very effective way to learn to recognise the intrinsic wisdom of Ch'an, and give it due respect. Its wisdom, compassion and energy come from Buddha Dhyana Teachings of the Dharma, and most important of all, so does its ACTIVE PRACTISE, with its base on the five Precepts and merit. Ch'an adepts know 'One day no work, one day no food.'

The paper, lists the 20 rules of conduct for the student of the Ch'an Academy, and then describes each of the four treasurers, Inkstone, Ink, Brush and Paper, and when perceived correctly, what they teach. Initial application is needed at first, and when this is finally relinquished, the fruits of Ch'an manifest in emotional maturity, confidence, morality and friendliness.

UNDERSTANDING THE FOUR SEASONS: UNDERSTANDING CH'AN

Fully understanding the four seasons opens up a whole new world of perceptions: a world where a droplet of water is seen as it is; a droplet of water in Summer, a droplet of mist in Autumn, a droplet of ice in Winter and a droplet of dew in Spring.

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When the four friends of Ch'an painting (Bamboo, Chrysanthemum, Orchid and Plum Blossom) are understood, and the four treasures of a Ch'an painter's studio (Brush, Ink, Inkstone and Paper) are understood as the treasures they are, one can fully know the four seasons. In another culture, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in Nature'; 'Not the sun or the Summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorises a different state of mind'. 1

Ch'an (Chinese) Son (Korean) or Zen (Japanese) is universal. It could not be more opposite to the popular view of Zen in the West today, seen as a bizarre idea, something to be played with, to be conceptualised, jargonised and complementary to good taste in interior decorating.

'What is its goal?' is an ego projection and a nonsense question. How could it be otherwise?

There is nothing wrong with appreciation of the aesthetics of the Zen Arts, of its paintings, beautiful paper, fragrant ink, excellence of design and harmonious gardens.

Indeed, the appreciation and study of the Ch'an or Zen Arts is a very effective way to learn to recognise the intrinsic wisdom (Sanskrit, prajna) of Ch'an, and give it due respect. Respect is essential to learn Ch'an. We can start in our own homes, in everyday life. We would have something of our grandparents and something of our parents in our home because we respect them. We accept people even if their taste is equal to, inferior to or superior to our own. To know that someone's taste is superior to our own is the ultimate in good taste; equal to, is democracy; inferior to is not fascism, but tolerance.

Its wisdom, compassion and energy come from Buddha Dhyana Teachings of the Dharma, and most important of all, so does its ACTIVE PRACTISE, with its base on the five Precepts and merit. Ch'an adepts know 'One day no work, one day no food'. This provides the essential merit. There are still a few rare Teachers today who Teach this.

The Dharma has been likened to a 'String of Pearls'. Ch'an aspirants especially must remember that a pearl begins its creation as a grain of sand irritating the soft flesh of the oyster which over time becomes a shining pearl.

This analogy can be drawn to Ch'an irritating the ego, the persona, the 'I', the expectations and the discursive mind that thinks it knows Ch'an. The discursive mind retains its correct function, but the fallacy that it can understand Ch'an must be completely subdued.

Ch'an Academy Rules for Conduct are: 1. Remove shoes. 2. No idle chatter. 3. No smoking, eating or drinking in the Ch'an Academy. 4. Keep mind inside oneself and not out on fellow students, objects or Teachers. 5. Observe mindfulness. 6. Observe respect for Teachers. 7. Observe obedience to Teachers. 8. Cultivate quiet and peaceful mind. 9. Sweep thoughts aside continuously. 10. Observe the Five Precepts; no killing, no lying, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no intoxicants that cloud the mind, and the sixth; no slander. 11. Cultivate happiness. 12. Cultivate lightness of mind. 13. Cultivate gratitude, and request to be taught. 14. Maintain concentration. 15. Be aware of and respect the needs of fellow students. 16. Order and use correct care procedure for the 'four treasures' (ink, inkstone, brush and paper). 17. Be responsible for the cleanliness of the Ch'an Hall. 18. Observe mindful actions in all duties. 19. Pay respect to Buddha, Kwan Yin, Ch'an Teachers, Protectors, and gods. 20. Do not waste energies on negativities. Do not waste time.

People who attend the Ch'an Academy know how hard this can be. This is why the parameters of the students' minds are encouraged to stretch and to perceive the beauty of Ch'an in nature within and without the Academy. Calligraphy of the Zen patriarch, the Venerable Seung Sahn, on the wall of the Ch'an Academy says; 'Perceive World Sound'.

Perceive the four treasures and see what they Teach you.

'Unfathomable were the waters of Tuan Chi
And many went down there prospecting.
An old man of the stream found a fine stone
And spent a sleepless night dreaming of it
Turning in his mind what a beautiful slab it would make.
Where my dear friend, did you get this precious stone?
Why give it to one so undeserving as I?
Besides I have not enough calligraphy skill
To produce strokes beautiful as silver hooks!
Alas, all I can conjure from the Ink
Are but old black crows.' 2.

The INKSTONE (earth element) comes from the labour of many beings. From this we learn friendliness and patience. It is born in mountain streams, the Winter floods wearing the coarse stones smooth for men to use. This is where the first friend, Bamboo, bends in the wind.

The INK (water element) teaches us compassion and generosity, and its fragrance teaches sweet speech and no slander. Its endurance comes from the old mountain pines of its origin and its energy from the sap rising in Spring. The second friend, Plum blossom, shows us the delicacies of Ink in the Spring blossoms and the strength of the Ink in the trunk.

Many Masters of the Ch'an Arts have elucidated the qualities of the Ink: 'One drop of Ink contains the whole world, an infinity of time, all manifest to the heart (Buddhist Scriptures) 3, 'and Zen Master Mang Gong picked up a flower one day, dipped its petals in Ink, and wrote in Chinese characters "The whole world is a Single Flower".' 4.

One beautiful piece of poetic Zen Calligraphy taught to the author by Master Shigyoku, which was a prize-winning entry in the NITTEN International calligraphy competition in Japan, reads thus: 'The water in the clouds of the vast blue sky is the same as the water in a bottle'. Everyone likes pure water and abhors polluted water. Pure speech is harder to get than pure water. Just as water evaporates and is gone without a trace, so pure speech evaporates. For this reason water is kept in bottles and pure speech is kept in the Sutras and commentaries. What is written in the Tripitika is only a fragment of what the Buddha speaks but it is enough. If you had some pure water in a bottle and tasted it just once, you could remember that pure water is obtainable. It is not impossible to attain the sweet speech of the Buddha, because your Buddha speech is Dharma. If you attain Dharma mind, your speech will be pure. Just as you require great effort to attain pure water, you must make the effort to attain pure speech.

The BRUSH. Buddhists do not kill animals for their fur. Brush making is a skill sensitively attuned to the four seasons. The fur of animals is more luxuriant in autumn, and when it is raining or misty, less water is needed on the Brush to paint. The energy of the brush in Ch'an is fire element, and fire is in the colour of the Autumn leaves. It teaches us not to cling to the bough. It liberates us and teaches us laughter and courage. The third friend, Chrysanthemum, fluffs up its petals for us and shrugs off cold

winds.

PAPER is air element and Teaches us wisdom. It is the produce of summer. Beautiful handmade paper begins its life along the banks of streams and dries in summer fields. It also teaches us respect and flexibility. One paper is used for the flower and another is used for the land and sea. The fourth friend, the noble Orchid, celebrates summer for us with its profusion of flowers and laden boughs.

Or, the other way round ..., these wisdoms are interchangeable. For example, the brush can be likened to a spring bud, or because its spine is bamboo, is it actually winter, and so on? When one learns to observe the discursive mind and not to touch these thoughts, then Ch'an is practised.

'You ask what is Zen? I answer; Zen is that which makes you ask the question, because the answer is where the question arises'. 5. Just as a sustained addiction to drugs or alcohol and other harmful things is caused by such factors as availability, peer group pressure and curiosity of what effects they may have, so the discursive mind is continually addicted to what the ego produces. When you grab a phrase 'bon mot', how are you different from a parrot that repeats such phrases? The availability of content of modernity, of modish behaviour, of pop star cultism, is readily accessible from multi-media, but so is purity available from multi-media. Is it curiosity of what it sounds and feels like that has millions of teenagers apeing the 'in' pop stars? If with the same mind they aped the great Masters' mannerisms, would they obtain anything better? Is the will of a superior any less than that of a Samurai warrior? 'Will' equals one-pointedness, long hours, discipline and dedication. An example of this dedication and will is Xianq-Bong Kong, the pianist who won the 5th Sydney International Piano competition of Australia in 1992. Xiang-Bong Kong is a fine example to young persons. If one-ninth of the effort of such a performance had been put into Ch'an, the Maestro could have become a Master (pun intended). We must tell people Ch'an is relevant, attainable and pertinent to this decade heading towards the year 2000.

'There is a point in one where things are known. A still point where worldly posturing and duplicity go on around it, and is perceived by it, but it does not move from its point of "knowing".' 6.

The truth cannot be learnt through lies, so do not lie and so on. The most

important precept for learning the truth is the sixth of NO SLANDER. Initial application is needed at first, and when this is finally relinquished, the fruits of Ch'an manifest in emotional maturity (caga), confidence (saddha), morality (sila) and friendliness (adosa). Venerable Hua Wan perceives: 'The quiet mind is the moon shining on the water', (7), and Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: 'The day is always his, who works in it with serenity and great aims'.
8.

I dedicate this article to my Teacher of fifteen years, one of the 'great ones', John D. Hughes, whom I perceive as the Dharmakaya, a Mahabodhisattva, a Ch'an Master, a Tantric Master and a great Buddhist Scholar.

References

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson 'Nature' The American Tradition in Literature.
2. T.C. Lai Treasures of a Chinese Studio
3. Ibid
4. Zen Master Mang Gong The whole world is a single flower.
5. D.T. Suzuki What is Zen?
6. Melva Fitzallen A String of Pearls
7. Venerable Hua Wan Cool Purity
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M.F.