

The Integration of the Buddha's Teaching Practice Into the Universal Religions' Practices By Yin zhi Shakya

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I have been asked to write some words in English about the Chan Practice; and here they are:

All that has to be said, it has been said by the sages, but here 'the words' are:

Let's begin with the words I have chosen to include in the title/theme: 'Practice' and 'Integral'.

"Practice" is performance. "Integral" is fundamental/basic.

And now, let's review some of the sages' quotations:

An ordinary man is a Buddha; illusion is salvation. A foolish thought—and we are ordinary, vulgar, and stupid. The next enlightened thought—and we are the (exalted, poetical, and wise) Buddha. – Hui Neng

I do nothing meritorious,
But the Buddha-nature manifests itself.
This is not because of my teacher's instruction,
Nor is it due to any attainment of mine. - Chang Hang Chang

The mind is not the Mind, and becoming enlightened is not becoming enlightened. - Obaku



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Before your father and mother were born, what was your original face? - Daito Kokushi

While deluded, one is used by this body; when enlightened, one uses this body. – Bunan

Over the time I have been teaching and learning [teaching and learn go together] about the Buddha's Teachings, including meditation, I often hear the following question from my students: **"How can I ever repay you for your teaching?"**, and the best answer I know for it is one that I give every time: **"By being intent on practicing."**

But, what is practice? This is the point.

Somebody said: **"Practice makes perfect!"** I say: This is a dualistic statement. Then... **'Who'** cares about **'what'** practice, due to the fact that **'Who'** and **'what'** are also dualistic concepts. So, if I am going to teach concepts...

I do not want to confuse anybody. It has been said that if we do so (teaching using concepts), we are using skilled resources or means; **from my point of view this is questionable**: going back and forth in a **path** is no the way to advance, if we can call it 'advance' when we clear or empty the mind; to be without any thought of self. **This is the practice!**

The sutra of the Sixth Patriarch reads: **"...in this teaching of mine all have set up no-thought as the main doctrine, non-form as the substance, and non-abiding as the basis. Non-form is to be separated from form even when associated with form. No-thought is not to think even when involved with thought. Non-abiding is the original nature of man."** In Hui Neng's Southern School of enlightenment it is an experience of ultimate reality and of Transcendence and Being. This breakthrough of duality brings the practitioner to a new dimension of Being and Transcendental Unconsciousness. **Thomas Merton** puts it very well: **"It really makes no difference whatever if external objects are present in the mirror of consciousness. There is no need to exclude or suppress them. Enlightenment does not consist in being without them. True emptiness in the realization of the light of prajna-wisdom of the Unconsciousness is attained when the light of prajna... breaks through our empirical consciousness**



and floods with its intelligibility not only our whole being, but all the things that we see and know around us. We are thus transformed in the prajna light; we 'become' that light, which in fact we are."

You can see/understand 'this statement' very clear when you understand the Buddhist Simile of the Rope and the Snake. We will talk about it later on in this essay.

Then, what is practice? Buddha said:

50. Let none find fault with others; let none see the omissions and commissions of others. But let one see one's own acts, done and undone¹. This is practice.

Accordingly what Master Jy Din Shakya said in Empty Cloud: "So when you are asked, "How much did you learn?" even if you can't come up with specific answers, you'll pay your check if you just say, "However long it takes, I'll stick with Chan. I'll keep trying to rid myself of selfishness and to never forget to keep my forehead pressed to the ground before the Buddha's feet." Humility and patience are golden coins. And here's a tip: Try to find a Buddha in every man you meet and you may pay the check for thousands." **This is Zen practice!**

"In Chan we're not sure of too many things. We only really know one: **Enlightenment doesn't come with a dictionary! The bridge to Nirvana is not composed of phrases.** As old Master Lao Zi wrote, "The Dao that we can talk about is not the Dao we mean."

So the Buddha spoke in silence, but what did he say. **Perhaps** he was saying, "From out of the muck of Samsara the Lotus rises pure and undefiled. Transcend ego-consciousness! Be One with the flower!"

There! The Buddha gave a lecture and nobody had to take any notes"².

¹ Dhammapada IV - PTS: [Dhp](#) 50 - Pupphavagga: Flowers - translated from the Pali by Acharya Buddharakkhita

² Empty Cloud - The Teachings of Xu Yun - As compiled from the notes and recollections of Jy Din Shakya

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Buddhadasa Bhikkhu³ said: "As soon as there is the idea "I" there is suffering. Grasp this important principle and you are in a position to understand the essential core of Buddhism, and to derive benefit from Buddhism, taking full advantage of having been born a human being and encountered Buddhism. If you don't grasp it, then though you are a Buddhist you will derive no benefit from it; you will be a Buddhist only nominally, only according to the records; you will have to sit and weep like all those other people who are not Buddhists; you will continue to experience suffering like a non-Buddhist. **To be genuine Buddhists we have to practice the genuine teaching of the Buddha,** in particular the injunction: **Don't identify as "I" or "mine";** act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering. You will then be able to do your work well, and that work will be a pleasure. When the mind is involved in "I" and "mine," all work becomes suffering; one doesn't feel like doing it; light work becomes heavy work, burdensome in every way. But if the mind is not grasping and clinging to the idea "I," "mine," if it is aware, all work, even heavy or dirty work is enjoyable. **This is practice!**

From Empty Cloud we read:

" To be empty means to be empty of ego, to be without any thought of self, not in the sense that one functions as a vegetable or a wild animal- living things which merely process water, food and sunlight in order to grow and reproduce- but in the sense that one ceases to gauge the events, the persons, the places, and the things of one's environment in terms of "I" or "me" or "mine". A person who is "empty of self" seldom has occasion even to use these pronouns.

Let me be more specific. We have all heard about a parent, or friend, or lover who claims to be completely unselfish in his love for another. A husband will say, "I kept nothing for myself. I gave everything to her, my wife." This man is not empty. He has merely projected a part of his identity upon another person.

³ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu: A pioneer in the promotion of the inter-religious understanding through dialogue among people of different faiths, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a famous Buddhist monk, was highly respected worldwide. He left his monastery to rediscover the integration of Buddhism in the world and the spirit of its origins. His emphasis on the interdependence of all things made of him a precursor of ecological thought and a champion of peace among nations. His writings, which have been translated and published in many languages, have had a very considerable influence on the renewal of Buddhist thinking. The thoughts expressed have the potential to guide not only Thailand, but also all societies struggling to create a just and equitable social, political and economic order.

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A person who is truly empty **possesses nothing**, not even a consciousness of self. His interests lie not with his own needs and desires, for indeed, he is unaware of any such considerations, but only with the welfare of others. He does not evaluate people as being likeable or unlikable, worthy or unworthy, or as useful or useless. He neither appreciates nor depreciates anyone. He simply understands that the Great Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Goodness, dwells within every human being, and it is in the interest of this Buddha Self that he invests himself. Attaining such emptiness is never easy. **This is practice!**

So, going back to the beginning we read again:

"While deluded, one is used by this body; when enlightened, one uses this body." – Bunan

Everyone is already enlightened and ever-enlightened. One thinks one is bound because one mistakes the body for the **SELF/THE ABSOLUTE AND ONLY REALITY**, which is infinite, pure awareness. What we call 'enlightenment' consists in getting rid of the wrong notion that one is not. Enlightenment is not something that we get after doing something else. It is only the elimination of ignorance (**avidya**). Avidya is the sense of separateness, which is false, because we are all one Mind. There is only one Mind that we can call it, if we want, Soul, Truth, Life, and Substance. Limited, it is the ego; unlimited, it is the infinite Mind, the sole reality. Egos are different and numerous, like dust powder, like bubbles. The Mind is one alone, like the ocean, like the infinite space. Accept your identity with the Real; be the water, not the bubble; to be the infinite space, not the dust powder. Dive in the OCEAN, dive in the INFINITE SPACE.

This diving in is self-enquiry; searching for the empirical 'I'—the ego—and seeing it disappear. The ego belongs neither to the body nor to the Mind but vanishes when an earnest enquiry⁴ is made into its identity, its origin and connections. Then what remains is **reality** "shining forth by itself".

This 'shining forth by itself'—the ultimate identity with one's SELF/with one's Reality, which is pure awareness—is purest and highest happiness [in conceptualization]. Even as our much-sought-after mundane desires are fulfilled, the 'sense' of satisfaction from those

⁴ A koan: i.e.: Who is the one who talks?



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things, is derived from a glimpse of that happiness, though of a dim degree.

Happiness is the very nature of **Reality/The Only Mind**. There is no happiness in any object in the world. In fact when the mind goes out, it experiences only misery. In truth, when its desires are fulfilled, it returns to its own place and enjoys the happiness that is the Absolute. Thus aesthetic and spiritual experiences are 'closely' related.

This leads to the astonishing concept that Ramana Maharshi, namely, **"apart from thoughts, there is no such thing as the mind. Apart from thought-provoked concept, there is no independent entity called the world. What is called the world is thus thought evolved. When the world disappears, i.e. when the mind experiences no thought, the mind experiences happiness"** (as one says he 'very happily' slept).

Of all the thoughts that arise in the mind, the 'I'-thought is the first and the foremost. It is only after the rise of this 'I' that the other thoughts bearing on that arise. It is after the appearance of the first personal pronoun that the second and third personal pronouns jump out. Without therefore the first personal pronoun, there will not be the second and third. Think about it.

The means to still the mind is the inquiry 'Who is this 'I'? The thought "Who am I?" will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the burning pyre, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise the Truth—that always was there. ["Seeing is the purpose of life" – Hui Neng]

When other thoughts arise, one should not pursue them but should inquire: 'To whom did they arise?' The answer would be 'To me.' Thereupon if one inquires 'who is this me—Who am I?' the mind will go back to its source, the emptiness; and the thought will subside. With repeated practice in this manner, the mind will learn to stay in its emptiness—we can say, in its 'heart'.

Comparing this method of self-enquiry to other eastern spiritual practices, there is a fair amount of similarities. Emptying the mind of thoughts unto silence and tracing the thoughts to their source have already been practiced for centuries in the **Buddhist Theravada** tradition in **Vipassana** and the Zen teaching of **Shikantaza**. Both these Buddhist methods should bring one to emptiness of thoughts

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and thence to Voidness. **Jesus' teaching** of stillness accentuates this point: 'Be still and know that I am God'.

The exhortation of asking 'Who am I?' throughout the day while performing normal daily functions is similar to the Buddha's teaching of '**Four Foundation of Mindfulness**'. Here the Buddhist is taught to be mindful of every action that he takes, be it sitting, walking, or acting a chore, he should be totally aware of that particular action. This practice is to prevent any thoughts from entering the mind—that is to let the mind be as empty as possible.

Therefore, if **all have set up no-thought as the main doctrine, non-form as the substance, and non-abiding as the basis, what remains to be practiced?**

But if the question of 'practice' comes up, consequently, **to be genuine Buddhists we have to practice the genuine teaching of the Buddha**, in particular the injunction: **Don't identify as "I" or "mine"**; act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering.

So again, the '**who**' and the '**what**' are dualistic concepts, as a matter of fact it is only **a dualistic concept: 'I'**. Then, we have to kill it. How? Looking for it from the surface to the depths, asking who are you? And because does not exist, it will disappear... this is my experience; this is my teaching, if you can call it 'teaching', because nobody teaches and nobody learns. **Where** is the one who do so? Of course is a concept. Have a nice **BEING**. **Who cares** for the un-existing remains/residues? **They are not.**

Perhaps, another way to present this 'concept' of the 'Integral Practice' from the point of view of Jesus Christ is:

God is Love - 1 John 4:8 [Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love]

God is Truth - And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

God is Spirit: John 1:18 – John 4:24: No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and^[a] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. - **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."**

God is omnipotent: all power, the only power

God is omniscient: all knowledge, the only consciousness



God is omnipresent: in all places, the only presence

And, who am I? This is our question (our koan, or whatever you want to call it.)

The following is an account to consider in this case, which is filed in the Bible and in Buddha's teachings. I am going to narrate it in my way:

Allegories are a common thing found in the Bible and ignored by many theologians. In the Bible are many stories and scriptures that are allegorically understood. An allegory is a story or scripture that has a spiritual meaning that is far greater than its literal understanding. This is a Bible principle that has been taught to us in Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism and who knows in what too many other religions that I am not aware of? For example:

In our lives we can experience fear and worries a lot of times for various reasons. What is the reason for this?

"Rope mistaken for a snake" — the Buddhist simile of the rope and the snake if you prefer, and what is the story behind this mystic expression?

The Absolute Truth is explained and reinforced by the teachers and the scriptures for our understanding through different similes, allegories, metaphors, figurative or mystic representations, illustrations and analogies. One such analogy involves the rope and the snake. Having properly understood, such analogies enable the spiritual seekers remove **mental distortions** or **duality**) and realize the One Reality — the Unconditioned Consciousness — that underlies the **apparent** diversity.

Self-knowledge is the one means for liberation from ignorance our **True Identity**. We have been mistaken the 'I', the 'ego', for what we really are: the manifestation of the Absolute; and in this case, using the dualistic words, **THY WILL BE DONE!** With the dawn of the pure Knowledge, one comes to realize that (Pure Awareness, Pure Consciousness, Self, etc.) alone is Real and **all else is perishable**. But, what is Knowledge?

The dawn of Knowledge really means the **rediscovery** of the True Self within us which has never been nonexistent. Freedom of the individual

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being from all its sense of material bondage is possible only when such Pure Knowledge of our True Nature is realized, or the glory of our True Identity rediscovered. Without such Intuitive Wisdom we are mere dead bodies in the world.

As you can see the Maya (**Illusion, Fear**) is coming to us because of lack of discrimination and clarity.

Therefore after these descriptions, knowing that "the only '**who**' is **Yourself**", is it easy to love your neighbor as yourself?

Again, Jesus' teaching of stillness emphasizes this point: '**Be still and know that I am God**' [It is only after the rise of this '**I**' that the other thoughts bearing on that arise. It is after the appearance of the first personal pronoun that the second and third personal pronouns jump out. Without therefore the first personal pronoun, there will not be the second and third. [Reflect about it].

This is integral practice!!!!

Can knowledge of everything, without the knowledge of ourselves, be true knowledge? The knowledge of ourselves, which is the supporting of the knower and known, destroys the '**pair**' of knowledge and ignorance: the dualistic pair/twins.

And remember, once you reach the goal/the objective—liberation from ignorance our **True Identity**, the 'shining forth by itself'—the ultimate identity with one's SELF/ with one's Reality, which is pure awareness and is purest and highest happiness, then **there is no practice at all**.

The worship of the **Supreme**, under any name and form, is an '**aid**' to this vision. **However**, the true vision is immerse and dwell yourself in Reality.

It is my advice to all [consider it only as the finger that points the moon]:

What utility are disputes such as the world is 'real', or 'is not, it is a mirage', or 'is conscious energy', or it is not matter', or it is happiness', or 'it is suffering', or what religion has the better practice, or we can do to improve all of this pandemonium? **Dwell** in the exalted state where either the ego or the world does not exist, it is acceptable for all!



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So, what is the Spiritual Integral Practice of the Buddha's Teaching towards Enlightenment? Many teachers would ask us to eradicate the ego (body-mind). **This is easier said than done.** The individual is totally dependent on the body-mind to function in this world. Through emptiness one reaches the Void. From the Void, the eternal Absolute will surface. That means 'words' is an obstacle. What about outside of meditation? Be totally mindful and do no harm. Work towards having no desires and finally have no fear. Whether one does a devotional practice or work in charitable institutions or concentrating on religious practice, makes no difference. The more important thing is to keep reminding oneself that there is no one practicing. The entire phenomenal universe is only a concept in consciousness. Consciousness is only a tool for noumenon to manifest in duality.

FYI, my lessons are not to alleviate physical and mental suffering. Neither, I do not advice on material benefits. So, **"I do not have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have..." Act 3:6 - The Bible**

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Some Comments

One of my students, Pablo Guarneri, now a dharma teacher, (Fa Chāo Shakya, OHY), made the following comment in Spanish about the matter we are discussing here: '**The Integral Practice**'. I translated it for you:

From the very moment we 'open our mouth' (to talk), we are in the duality, in the world of concepts.

Teachers and sages from the beginning have intended to transmit their knowledge or spiritual development throughout concepts and words.

The wonderful thing of Zen/Chan is that the transmission/spread has been done with the fewer amounts of words possible, for an 'audience ad-hoc', in other words, for psico-somatic organisms (body-mind) receptively prepared for this type of communication.

Whether is Buddhism Mahayana, or Theravada, or Advaita, or Chan, etc. etc. etc. the psico-pedagogic that is immersed in the transmission or the teaching fits for the better reception and understanding of the vessel organism that is receiving it. The essence of all the labels [Buddhism Mahayana, or Theravada, or Advaita, or Chan, etc.] tinted by the particular culture, is basically the same in its theoretical form. As well in the Zen, the Great Teachers from all perspectives has been advocated for **no-religion** and but the unity⁵.

If we accept or eliminate the illusory 'I' and 'mine', the ego; we are talking about accepting or eliminating something that really does not exist. For that, all the teachers have been used different techniques and practices throughout processes of discarding the 'who' and the 'what', and in that way, to discover the ever present **Reality/Being/God/the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute and the other names that have been given to IT**. The reality is that we always have been and always will be. **That I AM WHAT I AM**.

And what about the practice? **Krishnamurti** said: "the understanding comes only through the **self-wisdom**, which is the attention or watchfulness over oneself total psychological process. This is an awareness that is continuously developed as Xu Yun said: "when I

⁵ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu from Theravada, Balsekar/Nisargadatta from Advaita Vedanta, etc.



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walk, I walk; when I eat, I eat"; others call it vipaśyanā/ Vipassanā, Samadhi, etc. But the concept is constant awareness. Constant awareness to understand that there is not a doer. The doer does not exist, it is an illusion. There are not a 'who' and not a 'what', there is not a 'second'.

"In the "philosophies" and "techniques" above mentioned we can find a "component" of morality, a "component" of meditation, and a "component" of wisdom. All these reflected with a different method of teaching or methodology. They are the "components" which we have bequeathed the sages of the past based on their experience toward inner peace. Bearing in mind the words employed by the Buddha in the Kalama's Sutra:

Kalamas! "It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them. As the Sixth Patriarch said: "See" is the purpose in life".

My perspective is that our psychosomatic organisms will absorb/understand the concepts, according their conditioning or hereditary programming, independently of the using of labels, and they will succeed as the consequence. 'Who' can be enlightened? The oxymoron/the contradiction will smack our heads.

