

Listening to the Heart

Exploring the Riches of the Mansion, the Third Journey 2 (An Online Buddhist Introduction Lecture Series)

Bhikshu Jin Chuan - November 1, 2024

Welcome everyone, I appreciate everyone coming out in the evening for a chance to investigate our hearts minds and bodies through meditation. I want to begin for bring first expressing gratitude for Gold Buddha Monastery for putting this together. I know trying to organize things worldwide is actually not so easy and they've been quite flexible with my schedule in speaking. I know there's also our fearless translator Michael translating to Chinese, I really appreciate that and one of the other tech volunteers here helping put things together.

Today's topic is going to be on listening and one of the things I find really important for listening is listening to all the conditions around us that makes whatever we're doing possible. This is definitely not a solo effort, this is something that comes together from many, many conditions. Also tonight, I want to say that Jing Wei Shr is not here because he's a bit feeling a bit sick after our travels in Asia and he's resting but hopefully he'll join next week. So to begin on this theme of listening, I wanted to recite with everyone Guan Yin Bodhisattva's name. Here's the image of Guan Yin Bodhisattva's from CTTB, which I find very inspiring. There's a sense of peace, a sense of stillness, compassion, and her name literally means she who hears or contemplates the sounds of the world. I think she's a really good representation of what we do in meditation. I invite those who are comfortable to please put your palms together and we'll recite Namo Guan Shr Yin Pusa. Homage To She Who Hears the Sounds of the World, so do it seven times. Take a deep breath sit up straight, relax.

A minute of silence. If you're sitting at home, see if you can put your feet flat on the floor or if you're sitting on the ground, cross your legs, in a stable posture. Feel the weight of the body pressing down on the chair or on the floor, allowing the spine to be straight. Taking a deep breath and as you exhale, relax. Just sit for one minute in silence. I recommend you just to close your eyes and intentionally bring yourself to the present. Letting go of any worries or concerns or planning you have to do. Just be fully present, so just one minute. DING.

Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our meditation class. This will be the first of a series of three classes by Jin Wei Shr and myself. We will be investigating a way that we found when we introduce meditation, it really connects, at least for us, in a way that we find is really practical for our lives, not just something we do on the cushion but where meditation becomes a whole way of life.

I wanted to start out with a story, how I started with meditation. I began meditating back in high school, when I was trying to find something deeper in life, than just kind of material success or just finding a girlfriend or relationships or trying to be popular. I thought to myself there's got to be something more to life than this. Because what I found was there are many people who were quite successful in this game of life: money, relationships, influence and so forth. But it wasn't for sure that that success came with happiness, came with caring relationships. I started to doubt what is life really about and I started reading various books on spirituality, Buddhism,

Christianity and started talking to friends, talking to not just my friends but even my parents' friends about the meaning of life.

I began to discover the importance of meditation and I found yes, here is a way that here's a doorway to real freedom and happiness. There's a quote from the Dharmapada that I really like where the Buddha says, "What brings you more harm than all your enemies?" So you can imagine all the people who dislike you and perhaps maybe you don't have anyone who dislikes you but all the things that we fear in this world. What will bring us more harm than that? The Buddha's response is an untrained mind. He says, "What will bring you more happiness than all your loved ones, all your family and friends?" The Buddha says a well-trained mind, which immediately goes to the heart of things. How do we train our minds, our hearts and in this class we're going to talk about our bodies because we found that that's a really good place to start out. I find this is very profound because in our society often times we just talk about externals: how to have more friends, how to be more successful in our careers, how to buy this or that. We often times miss something that's so close to our lives which is our hearts and minds and our bodies, so I want to talk a little bit about that.

First, I want to say this is really important probably the best investment you can make for your entire life is how much time we put in the present moment. We train ourselves to be present, this will influence every single present moment in our future. If you think about it, every future moment is going to be in the present, so how well we cultivate ourselves in this moment, will have a profound impact on all those future moments to come.

I want to start with a story and how I started. I began in high school and I would say I had a I have a very kind of competitive personality. I like to be first. I like to be successful. I like to get everything done and to some extent perfectly. I want things done well. I want to do it right. When I started meditation, I brought that kind of mindset to practice and when you hear these stories of these great practitioners like Master Empty Cloud - *Xuyun Lao He Shang*. Their stories are heroic. If people know the Chan story, Master Empty Cloud walks to Gold Mountain Monastery - *Jin Shan Si* and on the way there he falls into the river, almost drowns. Somebody catches him from the river and pulls him out then they revive him. They said, "You should rest." He goes "No, I'm still going to go to the Chan session." He was completely exhausted and off he goes and there they want to give him a responsibility to lead the Chan session because he's the renowned Chan master and he says, "No I just want to meditate." And he said, sorry, but the Chan Hall rules is that we have to beat you. I don't know who makes these rules but okay, so they have to beat Master Empty Cloud and so they did. He finally got to sit and through his process of meditating, he was able to regain his strength and actually has an awakening moment. I hear this story and I go okay so that's what we need to do. We just need to really bear the pain and just like endure everything and at one moment a teacup might break and I might wake up, maybe something like that will happen. I remember being in the Chan sessions at CTTB and people know the Chan sessions at CTTB, they're very long. They go from like 4am in the morning to either 10pm or 12am. All day. It's an hour sits and that time even hour and half sits, I think some even two hour sits. It's an all-day sitting and the encouragement is sit in full-lotus, that's how you really meditate, sit in full-lotus and bear the pain. I got my mission, I'm going to sit in full-lotus for every single meditation sit. That is quote unquote success and I have

to be really focused the entire time. I remember I'd wake up in the morning at 3:30, 3:40, and I went for the Chan session and it's the first sit. Almost like I'm in a boxing ring, I'm thinking to myself, I'm walking around the Chan Hall, round one. Walking, walking, walking, round one. I'm getting my energy together; I'm going to go sit in full-lotus. I am going to have to really focus. Round one, me against my mind. I walk, walk, walk, and OK sit down, OK full-lotus. OK sit. Painful ok but I can I can last an hour. You get back up walking, walking, 20 minutes, round two. You go for round two, round three, round four, and you get to like round ten. I can barely hang on. The body is like shaking and there's so much pain that the body is like freezing at the hot and cold. I remember at the night, going to bed, the whole body is aching and shivering. It's really cold at CTTB, if people know the winter Chan session. You're sitting there and you actually see water streaming down the wall and it's something like 48°F inside. You go outside to warm up. I remember that experience and I found that over time my body became more and more tense and my breath became more and more tight and my heart actually became a bit afraid of meditation. Where I began with this meditation as this wonderful discovery about this path to true happiness and freedom to a feeling like maybe I can't do this, maybe this is too difficult. Maybe I'm just a failure and why I wanted to share that was because I feel when I started, I missed some of these fundamental steps of meditation, which I wanted to share a little bit with everyone today, which Jin Wei Shr and myself call it the Four Kinds of Listening.

The Four Kinds of Listening that we came up with, I'll show you a little chart that I made. First one, somatic listening. Which is what I'll focus on today. This one is about listening to the body, letting go of the stories. Often our mind thinks a lot of thoughts and judgments. We start to let that go and we can even bring that somatic listening to our relationships by staying grounded and present. When we're talking with other people. What we found was very powerful practice is that we can actually be fully here when we talk to others. It's amazing how much you could say good vibes, the kind of vibrations that we're putting out through our body and our emotions that people are picking up on subconsciously. If I'm going to have a difficult conversation with somebody, before I have that conversation, I really ground myself in the body or somebody comes to me really emotional, sad, or depressed or agitated or even angry, first thing I do is stay grounded in my body. What I found is if I stay grounded in my body, slowly, slowly the other person begins to match my frequency. They also begin to relax. They also begin to hear what's actually going on in their hearts, in their bodies, in their minds. It's a very powerful practice. For the rest of them, I'll just touch on it; we will go over those in future weeks.

Empathic listening is listening to the heart. Panoramic listening is listening to the field, so the surroundings. I started by really wanting to bring our awareness to all the conditions that allow us to be here together. I just gave you one kind of small snapshot, if we were to even look more you can see that. For instance, myself, I have this amazing opportunity to be a Buddhist monk and this comes from the blessings of Shakyamuni Buddha carried down by great Masters through the centuries, to Master Hua who came here to the West, who established these monasteries. I have his senior disciples, my senior teachers. I have an opportunity to draw near and learn the Dharma. That's also part of what's present here, the lineages and all the people that everyone here will touch in the future, in your lives. That's all present here, too. As we cultivate ourselves, we'll have subtle shifts that'll impact and ripple out throughout the universe as we're all connected. That's panoramic listening, being aware of the whole surrounding field.

Sacred listening is listening to our Buddha nature. Guan Yin Bodhisattva is returning the hearing to hear the self-nature and we'll go into that in future classes.

Today, I really wanted to talk about this somatic listening because I found that's the ground from where we build from.

Given that much, I wanted to first ask a question for everyone. The question I have for you is, what causes your body to tense up? You can think of a time when you are tense. Maybe somebody's angry at you. Or maybe you're worried about something or you lost your keys. You know what is it that makes you tense up. What causes tension in your body, so if people could open your chat box and just write. I'll read it out loud just to give you a sense.

I see two people already answered: stress, an interview. I wonder what kind of interview, a job interview? Maybe a school interview. Fear. Agitation. What's this one this one says? *Wang xiang* - false thinking. Deadlines, yes, deadlines definitely can create tension. When we have an event coming up and it's like, "Oh, I better get all that planning together." Work pressure. Can't find my cell phone. Yes, that definitely happens. Physical pain. Ghosts. Sometimes people think there's ghosts in the monastery or in the local hotel and that's very stressful. When I worry about something. Anxiety about the work deadline. Stress. Fear of EVR. Worry Sickness. Everything. *Yali* - Pressure. Anger. Leg pain. *Gan Shi Jian* (rushing for time) - definitely when we are running out of time the body tenses up. When I have to deal with troublemakers at work. Anger.

So very good, you can keep writing if you want. I'm going to take a pause. Sorry my Chinese isn't great so for those who can read Chinese, you can read what's being written. I appreciate even the Chinese speakers contributing.

I wanted to say yes there's a lot of things that causes tension in the body and what I found very powerful as a skill is we can write down when are the times where we feel most tense and then we actually consciously make those things as reminders for ourselves to relax and be present. Go down into the body. For instance, one of the things that creates stress for me is like when somebody says you know you need to make a deadline. You know you have a time limit and so when something like that happens the first thing I do is deep breath: relax, relax.

We were just in China and there were many events that we were having. We were part of the group. I said the first thing everyone needs to do: we want to do together is relax and we did that first on the first bus ride. We actually did a sharing on the bus ride and many of the people who came said they were very stressed because there were monks here and they thought the monks would be very serious and so they had tensed up around the monks. I said, "No, no, no please, first thing you want to do is relax. Breathe and relax, ground ourselves in our body. We're all friends here. We're all here to cultivate the Dharma, so that's a very good place to start out."

I want to share a couple stories about that. People know Dr Martin Verhoeven, he's one of the senior teachers. He used to be Dharma Master Heng Chau and went on the three-steps one bow with Reverend Sure in the 1970s. He tells a story that really stuck with me. He said at one

point he was sitting in the back seat with Master Hua in the car. He says when Master Hua was sitting in the car, he was sitting in full-lotus. I don't think they had seat belts at the time. Somebody said at one point the car made a sudden stop and he lurched forward and was going to hit the chair in front of him so he intuitively put his hand out and try to catch Master Hua to kind of break his fall, not to have him hit the chair in front. He said when he touched Master Hua's body, he said it was like touching the body of a baby. He was just so soft and supple like cotton. His hands just sank into Master Hua's body and it's at this moment where there could be a lot of tension. The car stops and we tense up. We're going to hit something. He said Master Hua's body was just so soft like silk. He said that was a really good teaching for me because Marty said he is a martial artist and he often learns things viscerally. He said, "Oh that's how we're supposed to be with our body - completely relaxed. Soft. Subtle. Supple."

I thought that was a really good example to say we really want to cultivate, the first thing to start with whatever Dharma door we choose, is we first ground ourselves in our body, relax. This relaxation is not like this kind of relaxation where you just lean back in your chair. It's you're actually sitting, if you're in your chair, you want to have your spine upright. Your ears over your shoulders, your shoulders over your hips, you can tuck in your chin. The top of your head is being pulled up through the imaginary string and the whole body just hangs in a relaxed way. The body and heart body is aligned but completely relaxed. This is a really good training because usually when we're relaxed, we're slouching or looking at our phone. When we're upright, we're tense like at attention so this is a middle way. We're alert and upright and at the same time relaxed at ease. We have one Bodhisattva as an example. *Guan Zi Zai Pusa* - She who Contemplates at Ease. *Zi* is self. *Zai* is here. So completely present, we're completely present right here, right now.

The other story I wanted to share was the story of Master Empty Cloud, actually, a picture of Master Empty Cloud. When I was in China I gave a talk. I called it Chan Medicine in the West and talked about how sometimes Chan can be misunderstood in the West, so that actually it leads to harm rather than a real healing and an inner awakening, but this is a longer paper about that. I talk a bit about body awareness. What I wanted to show was this a picture of Master Empty Cloud and the reason I feel this is such a powerful picture, do you see any tension there? There's an alignment, there's a strength, but it's soft. If you imagine Master Empty Cloud falling into the river, getting beaten at the Chan session. Do you think during that time, the Master would tense up and his heart get angry and start complaining? "How can this happen to me? I am a great Chan master. I'm so sincere, aren't the Bodhisattvas are to protect me?" No, I don't think that's what was going on in Master Empty Cloud's mind and I don't know what's going on but if you look at that face and the body. My sense is equanimity, *zi zai*, it's real *zi zai* (completely present). If you look at Master Hua's autobiography before he really went deeply into Buddhism, he went into Taoism, he lived out in the mountains, he cultivated on his own and he developed a lot of ease in the body. I feel like this is a really foundational practice that is easy to overlook.

I wanted to do as the next chat question is what allows your body to relax? You can type in chat box. Somebody says my breath. Very good, if your breath helps you relax, that's a really good thing to have because you're always breathing. You can always relax, it's a super useful

technique, you breathe in, you almost feel like the air fills up the body, so it kind of creates this inner alignment and then when you exhale, you relax the body. The breath just becomes a natural way to remind ourselves to be upright and relaxed.

Good food. Good food definitely, when the body is eating good food, it feels safe and cared for. When we are in a safe space the body relaxes. For instance, when I was in the boxing ring in my mind in the Chan Hall, I had created for myself a very tense and scary environment. Rather than being in the place where I'm surrounded by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all caring for me and supporting me. I'm here being part of this very profound lineage to practice Chan. I am really grateful just honoring the present moment, just trying my best to be present rather than creating this kind of safe space for myself, being among good friends and fellow cultivators. I create this kind of anxiety producing space in my mind. Good food. In Chan sessions we actually don't eat that much, so you find other ways to be safe. Somebody likes to sleep. Sleeping is definitely a good thing, if you can relax when you're sleeping. Yoga. Yoga, I really recommend. I can even show some yoga postures that I found essential for sitting in meditation. Music. Singing. *Fang xia* (Letting go). Meditation. Reading.

My mind is in the present ignoring difficult people. That's another topic we can talk about is how do we work with difficult people and there's a way that we can actually care for them but not actually be controlled by them, we actually are responsible for our own inner emotional states and meditation is an amazing practice to help us with that. Hot bath, yes that's definitely useful. Reciting Gwan Yin's name, very good.

There's a lot there and given the time I'm going to jump a bit here. I wanted to show people some yoga postures because I found that the other thing that's really key for meditation is actually yoga or some kind of physical exercise. It's about listening to the body. At one point, one of the yoga teachers came to Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, he is a friend of the monastery and taught Jin Wei Shr and myself some yoga moves and or postures. We do these regularly. This is Balasana, child's pose looks very much like bowing. You really can relax and breathe. Cat and cow helps us help the spine move back and forth. Thunderbolt one and two helps us open up our shoulders. So what's really key here, you can try it yourself, interlace your fingers and push them up. When you push them up, you straighten your arms and you push them up. What can often happen is shoulders also go up because they tense up. So here what you want to do is want to relax the shoulders. You can actually find this alignment in the body and also still relaxing the shoulders and relaxing the body. That's what you want to start to practice this sense of alignment and relaxed ease. Gatekeeper stretches the sides. Downward facing dog helps stretch the hamstrings a little bit. Plank helps build the core muscles which is very useful for sitting in meditation because you need a strong core so when you sit up right. Your core naturally holds you up. Now this is the posture that I found very helpful - half pigeon pose. If you want to sit in full lotus, this is really key posture here and then this is sleeping pigeon pose when you lay all the way down. You can find instructions for these yourselves on the internet if you want, I'm just kind of introducing it. Then this one, if I only had one stretch to do, I do butterfly pose, when your both feet together knees wide. I want to say if you're going to sit in full lotus, your knees more or less should touch the floor before you really try to do full lotus. Otherwise, what will happen you'll actually hurt your knees. Jin Wei Shr actually had to get surgery on both

of his knees because he tore his meniscus. What we found is the reason is your knee doesn't bend this way going up, your hip is a hip socket that actually can rotate in many different directions. So you need to do is you need to stretch out the hip sockets to sit in full lotus. I find this to be really key and another really key thing to start to listen to the body. You want to be able to discern what is a pain. That's body starting to kind of find this kind of inner alignment and our energy starts to flow and sometimes it's a little bit painful because our body has been out of alignment for so long versus the pain that's sharp and piercing where you feel like you're ripping something or you're tearing something. You have to be very careful because that kind of pain can actually lead to injury so this requires some listening to the body, the kind of listen is this causing real long-term injury or is this actually just something I can just be patient with and the body will heal and ground itself.

I see have one more minute and I had actually quite a bit more things to talk about but given the time I wanted to give a homework assignment for the next week before we meet again. This one's called really staying with the body and I'm going to give you a couple techniques for this so one technique is called gravity. If you're sitting on a chair or sitting on the floor or maybe you're standing or maybe you're walking, whatever you're doing see if you can feel the weight of your body. For instance here, I'm sitting on a chair, I can feel the weight of my body pressing down on the chair. When you do that, what I found at least is, it immediately takes me out of my mind and into my body. I'm here and immediately it feels like it's boring. The mind wants you know get this, get that and have all this other stuff going on, just stop for a moment, ground the body. I just feel the weight of my body and relax. Somebody said that you get a massage or you go to a hot bath. It's like a hot bath, just relaxing and being present, it's amazing, I tell you honestly for me it's life changing. If we just remember to do that, whenever we're stressed or tense or fearful. It's amazing how much of our afflictions just melt away. Because so much of our afflictions is held in the body or reinforced by the body, so just relax. So, that's one.

Another one is called center line. This is finding the spine, which is finding this inner alignment with the spine. This helps us feel a kind of sense of uprightness. That's a center line. The breath, I just gave you one way - breathing in, aligning the body kind of sense of fullness. Then, exhaling. Letting go, relaxing – the third way.

The last way is sensations, you can often feel sensations on the hands or sensations on the face. My face is very sensitive. If I feel like my face right here tensing up, I know I'm getting stressed and I need to relax. Relax.

The homework for the week is to relax, practice *zi zai* (at ease). This relax is a sense of being upright and at ease. How do you practice this? I would say connect it to a few things you do every day. For instance, if you drive, every time before you start the car and start driving, take a deep breath, relax, sink down into the chair. It's amazing when you drive relaxed, feeling the weight of the body in the car, you really feel relaxed and you come out of the car, you feel actually re-energized. Or if you have a meeting, so before you start the meeting, breathe in, relax. Or this one will be a lot of times during the day, every time you check your cell phone, relax. Before a meal, before your Dharma practice – if you're going to recite the Pu Men Pin (Universal Door Chapter) or Amitaba's name, just take one moment, relax. I'm not going to be

doing the *ping ming* (fighting for life) method, I'm not going to "I really do this". Relax. *Namo Amitufo*, just in a really relaxed way. This week, see if you can check in with yourself three or four times at least during the day. If you do a Dharma practice, see if you can start out your Dharma practice before you really begin the practice just for a minute where you relax and see how that shifts your life and how meditation can be brought into every moment of your life. Now, if you want to do it all the time which I highly recommend, you're more than welcome to, but even just doing it three or four times throughout the day and just a minute before your Dharma practice. My own experience is that it's really life changing so this what I want to share this evening.

Perhaps before we finish, I wanted to finish with a dedication of merit. This is called May We by Eve Decker. I found it to really connect to our heart and it will connect with our next week's class called empathic listening, listening to the heart because this really comes from listening to the heart. We'll do it three times and you're welcome to join in once you get the tune. Before we chant, remember sit up straight, breathe in and relax and in our hearts, we can imagine who do we really care about and what we want to dedicate merit to.

May we be safe and protected from inner and outer harm
May we be truly happy and deeply peaceful
May we be healthy and strong and physically at ease
May we take care of ourselves and live with wellbeing

I wish everyone well and hope to see you next week and don't forget to relax!