

## **CHAN: The Flower Sermon**

IBDSCL, Jan 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, by Nancy Yu

Good morning! Welcome to the first Dharma talk of the new year. Michigan has long winter and I hope everybody has been used to the cold. When we cannot get out, it's good time to study, to learn, to practice, to meditate, and to contemplate on the subtle things in Dharma. In the coldest season of the year, when we are trapped in the room, let's think about the important concept of Buddhism, CHAN for example.

What is CHAN? People often say that CHAN cannot be talked. CHAN is inconceivable and cannot be described by any language. CHAN is not in the same realm as thinking or speaking. Even though CHAN is beyond any language and cannot be completely described, we can still try to understand it with the help of words.

Let's see how different people describe CHAN.

"A quiet heart, plain and immaculate, returns to the self nature. After seeing through life, one sees great wisdom. This is CHAN."

"All the afflictions one has are incurred by oneself. When the heart expands and becomes empty and not attached to anything, it would be like a cup emptied out afflictions, the heart would be quiet and in peace. If one's heart is like a lotus, like the sun and the moon, detached, indiscriminative, with no intend to give or obtain, with no love or hatred, then one will be happy and peaceful. Water flows downhill and cloud floats in the sky. Everything happens harmoniously and this is a usual mind. Keep a usual mind. Life is just like the floating cloud and the flowing water. Returning to the true self is seeing through life and this is CHAN.

From these descriptions, we can taste what is CHAN, sense what is CHAN. CHAN is a state of consciousness, high beyond human's logical mind.

Where did CHAN come from? Let's track the source of CHAN from Buddha's teaching.

CHAN Dharma was first mentioned in the sutra *Buddha Answering the King of Brahma's Questions*, though it might not be the first time that the Buddha demonstrated the CHAN Dharma. The sutra says:

The king of Brahma whose name is Fang Guang, offered a bright and wonderful lotus flower, the root of the worlds of the trichiliocosm, to the Buddha. After he did that, the king of Brahma backed off and bowed to the Buddha, "World Honored One, since you got enlightened 50 years ago, you have been transforming all the living beings with all kinds of teachings and skills. If there is still supreme Buddha Dharma unrevealed, please expound for me and all those who will practice the Bodhisattava Path and the Buddha Path in the future." After the king of Brahma said this, he transformed his body to a Dharma seat covered with a solemn heavenly coat, then the king of Brahma earnestly requested the Buddha to sit on him to give the great dharma talk.

At this moment, the Buddha walked up to sit on the Dharma seat. He gently held the flower with fingers without speaking any words. There were 84,000 heavenly beings and humans in the assembly. At this time, they all stopped what they were doing and remained silent. Meanwhile, the elder Maha Kasyapa saw the Buddha picking up the flower with fingers and showing the great Dharma to all the heavenly beings and humans around, he silently broke into a smile. The Buddha then said, "Yes, I have Proper Dharma and Eye-Treasury, the wonderful heart of nirvana, the subtle Dharma gate of form and no form. It has no establishment of words. It's a special teaching past on not by words or doctrines. It's the first Principle for worldly people to become a Buddha and today I bestow it upon Maha Kasyapa." With that said, the Buddha went back to silence.

At this time, the venerable Maha Kasyapa arose from his seat, bowed at the Buddha's feet and said to the Buddha, "World honored one, this is wonderful. I remember things in the past countless kalpas. I first brought forth the resolve for Bodhi and started to cultivate when hearing dharma from Buddha Dipamkara. And in this life, after listening to the teachings from you, World Honored One, I attained Arhat fruit. Then after hearing the ultimate reality of all Dharmas, I entered the Bodhisattva Path, attaining all kinds of wisdom close to the Buddha. Where did these wonderful wisdoms come from? In fact, they all came from the worldly people's heart of kalpas ago. The worldly people's heart of countless kalpas ago, was actually the same as the heart of all Buddhas. It's the Dharma body of all Buddhas. If worldly people can see this heart, then they can become Buddhas. This heart cannot be found in speech or words understood by worldly people, but only in one's heart. Because this heart does not need meditation to attain fruition, when the cause and condition is right, anyone will sense it naturally. With this great Dharma In the world, Buddha Dharma will spread in the worldly people and never ends. If there was no this Dharma, only those saints who had cultivated long time could obtain fruition. While worldly people, bhikshus, bhikshunis, upasakas and upasikas would not have a chance.

In the turbid and evil Dharma ending world, none out of ten millions of people could attain fruition. Only the names of Buddha Bodhi exist, and nobody can really reach that. But with this great Dharma in the world, Buddha Bodhi will not end in the dharma ending period."

The Buddha said, "Good indeed, Kasyapa, as you said. All seven Buddhas propagated Dharma in this way, seeing the self nature to become a Buddha. All disciples of the seven Buddhas propagated Dharma like you. After I enter Nirvana, the Proper Dharma and Eye-Treasury will fall upon you. You will accept, maintain and spread it. Look for disciples and transmit the Dharma from heart to heart and don't let the true Dharma end."

After the Buddha explained the great true Dharma, he arose from the Dharma seat of the Brahma King and returned to his original seat and said, “King of Brahma, you have been cultivating the Bodhisattva Path in the past countless kalpas and you are a high rank Bodhisattva. And this is why you could ask for this great true Dharma. In the turbid and evil Dharma ending world, this Buddha’s heart Dharma will continue, which will be due to your prayer. Do you have any other doubt? Bring it up and I will talk about it for you.”

The king of Brahma then asked, “Good indeed, World Honored One. Then let me ask you another question. Have you mentioned this great true Dharma in previous teachings?”

The Buddha answered, “I have said this Dharma before. In the Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra, when I said to Sariputra, ‘Cannot be said.’ at that time, Sariputra understood this Dharma. And so I granted him as Hua Guang Buddha.”

“Also, when the daughter of the dragon king offered me her dragon ball without one word, I accepted the dragon ball without giving her one word back. The daughter of the dragon king understood this heart Dharma and became a Buddha right away. That was the same great true Dharma.”

The king of Brahma said, “If this is the case, World Honored One, this Dharma of seeing the self nature to become a Buddha that you gave today is genuine indeed.”

The Buddha said, “Yes, as you said. Sariputra has been with me since kalpas ago, so is in this life. I will enter nirvana soon and so will Sariputra. The daughter of the dragon king has become a Buddha in other world. She is not my disciple in this world and she will not propagate my Dharma here. For you, both Sariputra and the daughter of the dragon king do not exist.”

“Today, only Kasyapa will propagate this true Dharma, After I enter nirvana, this Dharma will exist and will not end even in the turbid and evil Dharma ending period, or in the five

hundred of years after the Dharma ending period. All the merits belong to Kasyapa alone. He will do this by himself. This Dharma is the only true Dharma.

After Buddha answered more questions from the king of Brahma, Buddha gave more explanations on this great true Dharma.

The Buddha told Kasyapa, “Besides the heart Dharma of the seeing the self nature to become a Buddha, there isn’t any other Dharma which can make one become a Buddha. All the Dharma gates given by all Buddhas of the three periods of time are to lead people to this Dharma gate. All Buddhas became Buddhas through this Dharma gate and then propagated Dharma, so will do all the living beings. If someone says, ‘There are other Dharmas and the Buddhas become Buddhas through other Dharma gates and the living beings become Buddhas through other Dharma gates,’ this would be the Demon’s talk, not the seven Buddhas’ talk, not talks given by all the Buddhas’ of the ten directions and three periods of time.

The Buddha then said, “Maha Kasyapa, you should know, what I bestowed upon you is the eighty thousand volumes of the Tripitaka. All these sutras are this one Buddha Dharma Koan. Just as the ox carts and the horse carriages are for people to take them to where they want to go, all these sutras are tools to transform people. You can uphold reverently.”

At this time, Maha Kasyapa rejoiced excitedly. He bowed to the Buddha and said, “World Honored One, this Dharma is really difficult to meet. This is really wonderful Dharma.”

He then said, “After I met you, World Honored One, I left the family life and became a monk. I disliked birth and death and only pursued Nirvana. I cultivated the unconditional, but did not pursue for the Dharma. I knew the Dharma on paper, but did not understand it. After years of difficult cultivation, I obtained the Arhat. Thinking about this process, I felt that it was really not easy.”

“Today, World Honored One, demonstrated the wonderful Dharma and I understood it in the blink of an eye. It did not take years or kalpas; it was not difficult but very easy. I did have become a Buddha and there is no doubt about it. Even though I am not a perfectly enlightened Buddha yet, I already know that the Dharma body is the heart and the heart is the Buddha. All the Buddhas of the ten directions and three periods of time share the same Dharma body with me.”

“Thinking about before, in many years, I practiced what was difficult to practice. It was hard work, but there was no merits. In many years, I was attached to Empty and the unconditional. All those are false Dharma, not true Dharma.”

“Today, I learned the true Empty Dharma: the form is empty, but not the self nature; the body is unconditional, but the nature is perfect. All the living beings can only become Buddhas by relying on this Dharma.”

The Buddha told Kasyapa, “Yes indeed, as you just said. In the future, you will become a Buddha and then propagate the Dharma that I gave you today.” After the Buddha said this, he returned to his original seat. He then remained silent and did not move even a little bit. All the people and heavenly beings were also quiet and the assembly was full of wonderful spirit.

The king of Brahma then asked the Buddha, “World Honored One, good indeed. Please expound how living beings can enter this Dharma after World Honored One entering Nirvana? How should they cultivate to see the self nature?”

The Buddha told the king of Brahma, “Listen carefully Brahma King. Contemplate on what I say. All living beings have different roots, causes and conditions. Some might enter this Dharma by listening to teachings; some might enter this Dharma through meditation; some

might enter this Dharma under certain cause and condition; some might enter under blessings from Buddha and Bodhisattavas. They are all different.”

“Brahma King, only with confidence can one enter this Dharma. Why to believe that if one does not see the self nature, one will not become a Buddha? Because outside of the self nature, there isn’t a path to the Buddhahood.”

“Sariputra has the highest wisdom; Ananda listened to the most Dharma; Purna is the most eloquent; Subhuti can explain the Empty the best; Upali holds the precepts the best; Maudgalyayana is the best on superpower; Aniruddha has the sharpest heavenly eye. However, for these Arhats, they cannot become Buddha. Why? Because they only obtained the fake and empty magical effect of the self nature, they did not see the true self nature body.”

This is how CHAN Dharma started. Maha Kasyapa was the first one bestowed with the CHAN Dharma in this world. From Maha Kasyapa, CHAN started to spread. From what was given today, you may sense what is CHAN with your heart. CHAN can never be completely described by words. And everyone may understand CHAN differently due to different roots.

To understand more about CHAN, you may go back and read this part of the sutra again. I hope this talk helps you understand what is CHAN and how it first started.

Next week, we will talk about how CHAN was brought into China by Patriarch Bodhidharma.

Thank you for listening!