

# INSTRUCTIONS IN NEI QUAN AND CHIH QUAN

*By Dharmavidya, in response to requests for further instruction on practice in the Amida Shu Pureland School*

Buddhism is practice and this practice cannot be separated from faith. People practise what they have faith in and their faith is only real when it manifests in practise. Practice is of two kinds, concrete and symbolic. Both are vital. Symbolic practice connects us with the meaning of our life. Concrete practice applies that meaning in daily action. Without symbolic practice, daily life becomes trivial. Without concrete practice our meditations are impotent. Meaning cannot be arrived at intellectually. It must be lived in both ways.

The core of Buddhism is refuge and the expression of refuge is Nembutsu. Symbolic nembutsu is to call out to Buddha from the fullness or emptiness of your heart. Concrete nembutsu is to have Buddha at your side in all the doings of daily life. Nembutsu expresses the relationship between the practitioner and the eternal spirit of Buddha, which we call Nyorai – the One Who Comes. The devotee calls out to Nyorai and Nyorai calls us to a life of trust and dedication. Who is Nyorai? I do not know, but I know what it feels like. Do you know who you are yourself? Have you looked to see? Nei Quan means to examine the nature of the caller. Chih Quan means to appreciate and experience the nature of the One who calls to you. This enquiry must begin from a place of unknowing in both respects. The Eye of the World looks upon you but only the one who has abandoned his or her castle of certainty is able to appreciate this gaze, let alone go forth in its light.

Nei Quan means to look into things. It is an enquiry into the truth about oneself. In nei quan one gathers and sifts the evidence of one's own case. This is the koan that arises naturally in daily life. Koan means case study. In nei quan one studies one's own case. What did I receive? What did I do in return? What grief did my life cause to the other? Thus one reflects by applied thought. Or one thinks: What truth did I receive and what deceit did I entertain? Or again one thinks: What affliction is there around me? What have I done to alleviate it? What have I done that contributes to it? What should I do? What have I neglected to do? In this way we examine our castle and discover what a prison it has become.

Such reflections are the gateway to awakening. It is nothing glorious. It is an enquiry into one's nature – karmic nature. We are each a bundle of karma; not paragons. Even reflecting upon a mere 24 hours we see all the traces of our blundering.

In performing nei quan one considers the specific and one considers the general and one considers them in that order. The other way around is just vain rumination. To consider the general before the specific is to inoculate oneself against the real liberating evidence of one's life. The specific means to perceive what one did and did not do. In response one may feel a real feeling – joy, gratitude, shame, regret, anguish, and so on. One comes alive. In generalities alone there is only deadness. Coming alive twists one's soul. One may resolve to do better in future. One might think, "I said such and such knowing it would be hurtful to my friend." One might think, "I did that in order to repay the fact that my friend did not support me earlier when I needed an excuse." One might further think, "I will try to notice this pattern in myself and avoid doing similar things in the future." Such is the specific level of contrition, leading to aspiration. If that were all, however, one would remain trapped in the conceit of the project to build a perfected self.

Therefore, after the specific facts have had real impact, there is also the general level. One thinks, "I am of the nature to do such things." One thinks, "I have it in me to be spiteful even to my friends," and, "I am no different from everybody else – we are all like this," and "How sad!" yet, "Thus it is," and in this way a sense of fellow-feeling may arise for all beings caught upon the wheel of samsara, revolving through one passion or appetite after another and swept hither and thither by the wind of circumstance, now at peace, now restless, now up-lifted, now cast down, now gloating, now in panic, complacent, perplexed and confused by turns. In this way, through applied thought and sustained thought one looks into the matter. One sees that, though some specifics may be overcome, from one's nature there is no escape within one's own power.

Chih Quan means enquiry into tranquillity. By tranquillity we mean the unfathomable peace of the blessing from Nyorai. He is One who is the Eye of the World and so sees us in our entirety. We cannot see ourselves so. We see only in terms of a stream, item after item: a thought, a sensation, an image, another thought, a sound, objects of mind, one after another. A bird sings... A stiffness in the leg.... The thought of Buddha.... Heaviness in the eyes.... Sensation of cloth against the skin.... A fear.... A memory.... Another

thought.... The mind's eye scans. It is not the Eye of the World, yet it is not apart from that eye for That Eye sees on our behalf. Therefore we cry out to It for direction.

The essence of chih quan is: I offer this to You, do with it as You will. I offer all that I am or may be to You, do with me as You will. I am willing. I offer this thought to You, this birdsong to You, this rumbling stomach to You, this fear, this love, these clothes, this light... do with them as You will. With these shreds, please make your Pure Land of Bliss. With this greedy nature... with these sparks of venomous anger.... with this deluded spinning head... take it all – all that is good, all that is bad, all that is nondescript – take it and do your work. Fulfil your dream for me. And with each offering there comes the peace of Nyorai descending upon one, deep peace that penetrates to the marrow. Nyorai says, I will use whatever you give me. Bombu says, Take it all; take everything; make your Pure Land from these scraps; I give them all to You. Chih Quan is to make an offering of one's life, moment by moment, item by item and to receive the blessing of peace. It is the act of one who despairs of self-power.

Frequently we do chih quan immediately after nei quan. In nei quan one may have dredged up material that one feels ashamed of or have insights that demonstrate that one has wasted much time and energy on some delusion. One feels contrite, which means that the heart softens in fellow-feeling for all beings drowning and adrift upon samara's ocean by recognition of the commonality of our cases. Then comes chih quan and one offers this contrite feeling, those wrong deeds, this sullied common karmic nature... one offers it all and Nyorai accepts, receives, smiles, rejoices, blesses, giggles, plays and bestows peace. It is indeed with these very scraps that Nyorai will make the Pure Land. We are not golden Buddhas, yet in his eyes we are the object of the purest love. It is the moonlight that falls into the humblest of hamlets. Only those who gaze upon the moon carry it ever after in their hearts. Only when we freely give what we are, just as it is, do we feel the love that shines in the Eye of the World.

Quan thus begins with thought, with thought applied to the case in hand and sustained through investigation and consideration of fact, weighing each matter seriously. It is as though one takes a metal vessel in one hand and polishes it with the a cloth held in the other hand. The two hands work together, holding and working upon the object. One holds a fact, "I did that" or "I failed to do that" and works upon it. As one does so, sometimes,

unbidden, one may fall into a samadhi. It may be the samadhi of universal equality. It may be the samadhi in which all the Buddha stand before one. It may be the samadhi of limitless gratitude. It may be the samadhi of hearing the voice of She Who Hears. It may be any of the many samadhis known to Buddhas: peaceful abidings in which joy and rapture rise up. Then the onward flow of thought ceases and a single seed thought alone may remain. From that seed emanates bliss. Then, for an interlude one is freed from worldly desires, purified, hatred and conceit dropping away. Then there is no doubt, but only gladness like that of one who has paid off her debt or been released from his prison.

The joy of such moments is indescribably lovely and suffuses one's whole being, just as spring water bubbling up in a pool may suffuse the whole of the water of that pool making what formerly was clouded and stagnant now clear and cool. One might think there is nothing better than this, but it is not so for sometimes the exuberant bliss itself may drop away and an imperturbable peace may descend upon one and this is an even more total blessing than before, just as though that spring now entered only silently and imperceptibly, making the pool limpid, its surface like a mirror calm. And one might think again that there is nothing better than this, but it is still not so for sometimes one simply knows that one is loved as one is and there is no special stillness or ecstasy required but only there comes the still small voice of certain truth that cannot be denied and with this comes a true equanimity that resides in the ground of the mind needing no special display. And one might then think, "Now I have the greatest treasure in all the world", and it is so, but the treasure is of no use locked away in the darkness of one's foolish gloating heart. All the treasure must be spent with the reckless abandon of She Who Hears, of She Who Pours Forth Her Mercy Upon The Ocean of Desire.

And what is it to spend that treasure? Though others may kill, we shall practise kindness here; though others may steal, we shall practise generosity here; though others abuse, we shall here practise honour and respect; though others lie and malign, we shall practise good words here; for we are guided by the Eyes of the World and we see them shine.

In all this, however, a warning is due. Do not pursue bliss for it will come to you. Practice is not for oneself. Practise for Nyorai who genuinely wants a Pure Land and Nyorai will practise for all. Samadhi is a grace given to those who practise honest enquiry into the case in hand. It only comes through the gate of contrition, the sange-mon. Without such thought there is no

entry. Do not think to seize samadhi without thought. It will seize you when you take such thought. Just give the whole matter up to Nyorai and have no worries about anything. He has already chosen you. You who have come here to practise have already received your papers for the crossing. You will be Buddhas one day – do not doubt it. But the matter is no longer in your hands. Enquire and reflect. Weigh the evidence of each day. Make an offering of your life and you will be ferried over and every scrap of your being will be used in the great work without you even knowing how it came to be.

Nei Quan and Chih Quan are ancillary. All is already there within the nembutsu, but the spiritual exercises help us to appreciate it and open the gateway to simplicity. They do not provide intellectual understanding, but they provide the opportunity for us to feel the nembutsu in our flesh, bone and marrow. Thus is the Buddhist life lived and its fruit known in direct experience. Thus we practise faith and find faith in practice through experience.

Dharmavidya  
6 November 2006

The awake person knows that they do not know what comes next. The person who thinks they know is dreaming. We hope, rather, to be always specific, always distinctive, always unique to the particular set of conditions that we encounter. This is because the only dogmas in this approach are the bombu, the Tathagata and the nembutsu – nothing else...

~Dharmavidya David Brazier