



31. CHUAN ZHI

Chuan Zhi was born in Lafayette Indiana in the United States in 1960, attended elementary school in Southern Illinois, and high school in Eastern Pennsylvania. In 1980 he attended Reed College in Portland Oregon where he graduated with an undergraduate degree in Physics in 1983. During his time at Reed he found the works of Robert M. Persig, D.T. Suzuki and Mircea Eliade which “planted the seeds” for his future foray into Zen. Following graduate studies in Nuclear Physics at Purdue University, he worked as an experimental physicist for a decade and later as a Computer Programmer for a variety of organizations. He continues working in this field for a division of the United Nations.

Beginning in the late 1980's, he began attending sesshins (intensive meditation retreats) and studying under a variety of Zen teachers in the Mountain West and East Coast of the United States. In 1997 he met Jy Din Shakya, then Abbot and founder of Hsu Yun temple in Honolulu Hawaii, and one of Hsu Yun's direct Dharma Heirs. He was ordained and given the name Chuan Zhi that year at Hsu Yun temple. He was also named the head of a new Chan order with the objective to disseminate the teachings

of Chan Buddhism to the West. The order was named the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun, after Jy Din's master, whom he also had named his own temple after nearly forty years prior. In 1998 Jy Din escorted Chuan Zhi to China where he received full ordination at Hong Fa temple, along with 500 others. Following the month-long ceremony he became recognized by the Buddhist Association of China as an official lineage holder in the Linji (Rinzai) tradition and Abbot of the Zen Buddhist Order of Hsu Yun.

Since then, Chuan Zhi has continued to work to spread the teachings of Chan to other interested persons. As of the writing of this biography, the Order of Hsu Yun (hsuyun.org) has grown to include local sanghas in Venezuela, Argentina, Colombia, Canada, Great Britain, France, Greece, Sweden, China and, of course, the United States.

Chuan Zhi writes essays on topics related to Zen for the order, and continues to enjoy studying String Theory and Quantum Mechanics and relating these fields to the science of neurology and, more generally, to the nature of the Mind and the connection between perception and Reality.

INTERVIEW

Q: Can you please tell me about your teacher and did he ever charge you for meditation classes or the Dharma in any way?

Chuan Zhi: I have had many teachers. None of them charged for the Dharma. At times, I was asked to donate something to pay for food and lodging, but it was always a very small amount, and it was never required. I always gave much more than was asked to give. I never attended a

meditation class where there was a fee. How ridiculous would that be? And charging for the Dharma? That's an oxymoron.

Q: What is your view on charging for the spiritual teachings, meditation, workshops, meetings and so on?

Chuan Zhi: Never charge for spiritual teachings, meditation, etc. If one asks for donations, let people know what the money goes to: facility rental, power, water, etc. Religion is often viewed as a business enterprise, but there's no spirituality in that; Just greed and power.

Q: Do you think that dana can work in the west and does it have a downside?

Chuan Zhi: There is no downside to Dana. Dana means giving - we give the Dharma freely to people who are ready to receive it. They, in turn, give us their attention, and their desire to receive the Dharma. Dana is not about money, if that is where this question is coming from.

Q: Where do you think this is going in the future? Do you see Buddhism taking on more of a business model or going back to its roots or something else?

Chuan Zhi: You always throw out the hard questions after warming up with the easy ones don't you? I, of course, can't read the future. Buddhism is already as mixed up as it can possibly be. Well, maybe it can become more mixed up. There is no Buddhist "Gospel" as there is in other religions. We have just a bunch of stories to go by. And those stories are different

depending on which society's version of Buddhism we choose to go with. There's no way to return to the "roots" of Buddhism, because those roots are way in the past and we live in the present. The Dharma however is unchanging and here with us in everything. There's no escaping it. One only needs to see it, to discover it.

Q: I got into a conversation yesterday with this woman who said that after her "satori experience" two years ago she didn't want to work at her old job anymore. She wanted to help others to "awaken" and give people pointers to do this. She said she found her old job meaningless. What would you suggest to someone like this? Should she start teaching others about "non duality"?

Chuan Zhi: The enlightenment experience is truly earth-shattering. The reason is that one's perspective shifts from the ego to the "true" self, or our "Buddha Nature" as we often say. Things that used to seem important are no longer important, largely because the reason they were important was because they served to fuel our ego. The risk for people going through this is that they may think they no longer feel obliged to fulfill their obligations: family, employment, etc. Sudden changes in life are not prudent until one has lived a year or two under the "new guidelines". It takes a good amount of time to adapt to the new architecture of awareness.

At the same time, one can't dismiss this huge turn in one's life. Teaching others is a way to embrace the new awareness gained. But my feeling is that such activities need to complement the existing life, not replace it.

Q: So rushing out there to spread the good news and give pointers may not always be the right way to go, especially if one is also going to now use this as a method to bring home the bacon; pay their

mortgage, car payments, credit card debt and put their 6 kids through college?

Chuan Zhi: Yes, for sure. It's prudent to not suddenly jump into another kind of life. It takes time to integrate the new awareness into being. There's a book called Snapping, by Flo Conway and Jum Siegelman that discusses in depth the process that some people can go through at various stages of their spiritual journey - highlighting the dangers.

Q: So is becoming a spiritual teacher and setting up shop listed as one of these dangers?

Chuan Zhi: Not specifically. A solid spiritual teacher is someone who has gone through the "awakening moment" and has moved on to go beyond that. He or she understands the event from their own experience and can guide another through it. The danger, at any point along the spiritual journey, is getting stuck. And "stuckness" can happen pretty much anywhere on the ride.

END OF INTERVIEW