



# Shattering the Great Doubt: The Chan Practice of Huatou

*Sheng Yen*

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## Shattering the Great Doubt: The Chan Practice of Huatou Sheng Yen

*Huatou* is a skillful method for breaking through the prison of mental habits into the spacious mind of enlightenment. The huatou is a confounding question much like a Zen koan. Typical ones are "What is *wu* [nothingness]?" or "What was my original face before birth-and-death?" But a huatou is *unlike* a koan in that the aim is not to come up with an answer. The practice is simple: ask yourself your huatou relentlessly, in meditation as well as in every other activity. Don't give up on it; don't try to think your way to an answer. Resolve to live with the sensation of doubt that arises, and it will pervade your entire existence with a sense of profound wonder, ultimately leading to the shattering of the sense of an independent self.

Master Sheng Yen brings the traditional practice to life in this practical guide based on talks he gave during a series of huatou retreats. He teaches the method in detail, giving advice for dealing with the typical pitfalls and problems that arise, and answering retreat participants' questions as they experience the practice themselves. He then offers commentary on four classic huatou texts, grounding his instructions in the teaching of the great Chan masters.

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