Shaolin, Land of Pilgrims

III

Return to the Home

Margarita Busqui and Shifu Cruz

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DEDICATIONS

Dedication by Margarita

I dedicate this book to my children, Montse and Aitor, and to my granddaughter Laura, for being my greatest teachers in the art of living.

Dedication by Shifu Cruz

To Margarita, co-author of this work, whose generous collaboration, critical eye, and silent commitment have been essential in shaping these pages. Her attentive presence has been both intellectual companionship and editorial guidance on this writing journey.

To the masters—those of flesh and bone, and those of ink and silence—who continue to teach even when they are no longer present. To all who lit a lamp so that others, like me, would not stumble in the dark.

To my family, who are root and branch, sustenance and promise. To my grandchildren, to whom I also dedicate these pages as if they were small white stones at the edge of the path, signaling that someone has passed before, and that every return is possible.

And to you, reader, who traverses these texts like a traveler returning home: may you find in these words an ancient calm, a gentle suggestion, an echo reminding you that you are not alone.

May this work, born from the sincere desire to understand and share, find its place in the hearts of those who still seek with open eyes and awakened spirit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS – MARGARITA BUSQUI

I am deeply grateful to Shifu Chema for inviting me to collaborate on this work and for giving me the opportunity to share in this exploration of Buddhism and its various schools.

His generous patience, selfless dedication, and guiding spirit have been a constant light along this shared path.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS – SHIFU CRUZ

This third volume, *Return Home*, is not an ending, but a reverent bow to the full cycle. It is the step of one who has walked long among mists and mountains, and upon arriving finds not a conclusion, but a lamp burning beside the door. Returning home is not going back to the starting point, but recognizing that we have always been there.

I give heartfelt and unadorned thanks to Margarita, co-author of this work, for being at every moment a compass, fertile silence, and clear vision. She has named what I could barely sense and sustained what I did not yet know how to say. Her presence has been root and sky, precise word and necessary emptiness. If this book has found its voice, it is also thanks to hers.

To the Masters of the lineage, who continue to speak in dreams and on these pages. To those of Mount Emei, to the spirit of Shaolin, and to the elders who never wrote books but left teachings in the way they sat, looked, or served tea. Each has left a crack through which light enters.

To the readers, silent pilgrims of these pages, who have walked alongside me since the first volume. To those who read with the heart more than with the eyes. To those who trusted without demanding explanations, and to those who doubted with honesty, planting necessary questions. To all, my boundless gratitude.

To my family, where everything begins and returns. To my grandchildren, who inherit without asking a legacy of quietude, resilience, and poetry. To my ancestors, who knew nothing of Buddhism but practiced wisdom without naming it. And to the children of the future, who will find in these pages a testament, not of doctrine, but of seeking.

Thanks to the mountain for teaching me to be. To the wind, for teaching me to leave. And to the temple fire, which burns without burning, for reminding me that home has no walls.

And to Mei Lin—a sister without face but with a firm voice—who has been with me at every step with serene lucidity and exact tenderness. She has been a lantern in dark stretches and an echo in passages that only the spirit knows how to read. May her name remain a prayer within these pages, and her shadow, a blessing.

Finally, thanks to Life, which with patience and without judgment has returned me to the place from which I never departed.

"Returning home
is not retracing the steps taken,
but understanding
that every misstep
was sacred all along."

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Preface

The echo of the unborn

Some books are maps. Others, windows. Some, mirrors.
And a few—very few—are doors.
But don't rush to step through.
First, breathe.
Feel the weight of the book in your hands.
Look at its pages as if they were dry leaves in a nameless forest.
This is not a book to read.
It is a book to listen to.
Listen as you would a stone resting in your palm.
As you would the whisper of blood or the murmur of the wind rounding an ancient corner.
Listen, even to what makes no sound.
For what is true learning if not a return?
What is pilgrimage if not a way to remember what we have always known?
My master once told me a story.
A story that belonged to no one—neither him, nor me, nor anyone.
A story that existed long before we had names.
And he told it as secrets are told:
not for me to understand it, but so I could never forget it.
He said that, in the beginning, there was nothing.
Nothing but a Mind.
Not a mind that thinks, as we do—trapped in judgments, desires, and fears—
but a Mind without thought.
Infinite stillness.
A lake without ripples.
A sky without clouds.
And one day, that Mind had a thought.
A single thought.
And it was enough.
From that thought, all things emerged.

The ten thousand things, as the ancient Taoists say.
The song of birds, the smile of a child, anger, metal, hunger, the October sky.
All of it.
Each new thought, like a stone thrown into that primordial lake, sent out waves.
And those waves were Karma.
Waves of cause and effect.
Waves that never ceased,
because each thought led to the next,
and that one to another, and another after that.
And so the worlds were born.
And so we were born.
Caught in a dance we believed was ours,
unaware that the hardest step is not moving forward, but stopping.
"Until all our minds find stillness," my Shifu explained,
"we will continue to create Karma,
and we will not escape Samsara."
Samsara…
That endless river of birth and death,
that carousel of forms, names, and desires.
Where we think we move forward, yet we turn in circles.
Where we believe we choose, yet we merely react.
The teachings of Yogācāra hammer the same truth like a drum of fire:
it is not the world that generates our mind,
but the mind that generates the world.
What you see is what you are.
What you fear is what you create.
As long as thought remains active,
Karma will continue fermenting in the depths of being.
There is only one way out:
Silence.
Not the silence of lips, nor even of the superficial mind,
but the Original Silence.
The Silence beyond the desire for silence.
The Silence that cannot be sought, because it has always been here.

The Silence that cannot be explained, for the moment we try, we lose it.
In this third volume of *Shaolin, Land of Pilgrims*,
we have reached the mountain's peak.
We are no longer on the path: now we look from above.
Here we seek neither techniques, nor temples, nor stories.
Here we seek what cannot be sought:
the unmoving point at the center of the whirlpool.
The flame that does not burn.
The sound that does not sound.
Here, within these pages, the pilgrim discovers that the temple was never on any map.
That the master was not in the robe.
That the practice was not in the gesture.
It was within.
It has always been within.
This book is an offering.
A prayer written with ink and wonder.
A mirror polished with gratitude,
so that you, reader—you, disciple, you seeker, you weary heart—
may see yourself as you are:
a spark of lightning that has never ceased to shine.
Perhaps you do not remember yet.
But as you move through these pages, something inside you will begin to resonate.
Not with words.
Not with ideas.
But with that gentle, secret, serene certainty
that at the journey's end,
there is no goal but the return home.
And that home
has always been
in the silence between one thought and the next.

Shifu Cruz

Prologue

Returning home

Some journeys are measured in steps, in kilometers, in passport stamps and calendar days.

Others—the true ones—are measured in silences, in wounds that have learned to heal, in gazes that have learned to see beyond the visible, in breaths that have finally found their own rhythm.

This book is the testimony of that second kind of journey. A return that is transformation before movement. A return that has no starting point, nor arrival point, because the home we return to is not a place on a map, but an ancient presence that has always been waiting within us.

Returning home is not easy. It is not as simple as retracing your steps or turning on your heels. It requires courage. It requires letting go of everything you believe yourself to be, everything accumulated as armor, to dare to come back stripped of certainties, free of names, vulnerable and open. Returning home is, in truth, forgetting in order to remember. It is losing yourself in the thicket of the world to be found in the clarity of your own being.

This work closes a trilogy. Yet far from being an ending in the conventional sense, this third volume is an opening, a luminous crack through which true teaching seeps. In the previous books, we walked the temple corridors, traced history, listened to the voice of the ancestors, and contemplated martial forms as living poems. Now, we sit at the threshold to hear what has always been there: the pulse of being.

Returning Home is, at its core, an extended meditation. It does not seek to indoctrinate, nor to impose ideas, nor even to offer answers. Its ambition is humbler and yet greater: to accompany you, reader, to that precise point where questions no longer arise, because silence has answered everything—with a glance, with a falling leaf, with a bell ringing in the distant morning mist.

The home we speak of has no doors, no walls, no keys. It is the home of the heart that has ceased resisting itself. It is the dojo without floor or roof. It is the inner zendo where every everyday gesture—washing a bowl, sweeping the courtyard, watching incense smoke rise into

nothingness—becomes a ceremony. Only upon returning home do we understand that we never really left. That all searching was, at its core, a sacred form of remembering.

Within the following pages lives the spirit of Ngomei Siulam Pai, like a breeze caressing the willows of Emei. Here, Kung Fu is meditation in motion before it is combat or performance. Every *taolu*, every weapon, every step executed with presence, aims at harmony. Here, one trains to merge with the Tao. The body becomes the brush, emptiness the canvas, and movement sacred calligraphy, writing invisible verses of the spirit without ink.

In this home, the mountain is a mirror. We climb to dissolve into its mist and to conquer its summit. Emei, the mother mountain, teaches without speaking, instructs without imposing, heals without touching. The pilgrim who sits on its slopes with closed eyes and an open heart finds not answers, but peace. And in a world hungry for noise and certainties, that is more than enough.

Yet it is not only the mountain. It is also the temple—not the physical temple, though its ancient pillars and curved rooftops move us deeply. We speak of the invisible temple, the one that rises within each of us when the spirit decides to bow before something greater than the ego. That temple stands when we honor the master with every act, when we care for others as if they were ourselves, when we breathe as if we were praying.

This book also explores the folds of discomfort, the cracks in tradition, where flesh, alcohol, power, ego, and politics have tested the pillars of Shaolin. We do not come to hide nor to condemn. We come to observe, to witness, to understand. For returning home also means passing through darkness, acknowledging shadows without denying them, and continuing toward the light with bare feet and a heart set aflame.

The woman—the disciple, the mother, the silent warrior—is also present in these pages, not as a symbol, but as a flame that balances the fire of the masculine, nourishes with her tenderness, teaches with her gaze. In this return, we understand that home also bears the face of a woman, the voice of a mother, the strength of a sister. Yin and yang embrace at the temple's threshold, and Shaolin ceases to be only the

story of male monks to become a lineage of awakened spirits, without distinction.

Returning Home does not aim to be a map. Rather, it is a dim lantern, a hand reaching through the forest darkness to walk with you alongside yourself. It is a love letter to those who have sought, fallen, doubted, wrestled with inner dragons, and yet decided to return. To return not to begin anew, but to understand that the essential has always been there, patiently awaiting beyond the door of silence.

And so, as one finally arrives home after years of absence, this book invites you to remove your shoes, lay the sword aside, prepare a cup of hot tea, and sit in silence. There is nothing to prove, no final exam—only living, breathing, being.

This is your home.
Welcome.
Return, without hurry.
Here, at last, there is nothing left to search for.

Mei Lin

I.- The heart of ch'an: Teachings of shaolin buddhism

The living teaching of ch'an

Ch'an Buddhism, as it is lived and transmitted within the Shaolin Temple, is a path free from rigid dogma and fully integrated into everyday life. It goes beyond being a set of doctrines understood only intellectually or rituals repeated out of tradition. Ch'an is, above all, a practice of direct experience, and the essence of this tradition reveals itself when one surrenders to the present moment, immersing fully in reality as it is—free from the interference of conceptual thought and mental constructions. Within the Shaolin Temple, Ch'an transcends theoretical teaching; it becomes a way of life, a path toward personal and collective transcendence.

This first section seeks to open the door to the very essence of Ch'an Buddhism, presenting it as a spiritual path both accessible and profoundly transformative. We begin by exploring its foundations, those fundamental principles often overlooked yet forming the bedrock upon which all practice is built. From the earliest teachings and exercises passed to novice monks to the most subtle and profound aspects that guard the tradition's most treasured secrets.

Shaolin, as the cradle of Ch'an Buddhism, holds a history dense with symbolism and lessons expressed not only through texts but through the stones, the trees, and the mountains surrounding the temple. The Shaolin Temple is a sacred space that, over centuries, has witnessed countless lives, millions of hours of meditation, and hundreds of thousands of hours devoted to the pursuit of truth. It is far more than a building; every corner holds a teaching. The wind whispering through the pines, the river's waters flowing calmly yet decisively, and the imposing, silent mountains mirror the stillness and power of Ch'an practice. It is transmitted less by theory than through living presence. More than doctrine, it is experience embodied in daily life.

In the first stages, a monk steps into the most visible and disciplined form of Ch'an: observing precepts, meditating, and attending to every action of the day with devotion, as one might polish a stone until it shines. Ch'an does not evade daily life; rather, it embraces it with renewed attention, transforming even the simplest acts into gateways to Awakening. Sweeping the floor, preparing meals, walking through

temple corridors—each becomes an opportunity to be fully present, free from the distraction of thought and emotional turbulence.

As the monk deepens in practice, these seemingly mundane beginnings become the foundation for something far more profound. Meditation transcends a mere technique to calm the mind; it becomes a means to experience reality as it truly is. Through consistent practice and perseverance, the monk begins to dissolve into emptiness, experiencing the interconnectedness of all phenomena and glimpsing the fundamental nature of mind, unclouded by the distortions of ego.

Throughout this section, we explore how Ch'an, though rooted deeply in Eastern tradition, carries a universal approach accessible to all, regardless of culture or background. Like the waters of a river flowing without discrimination, Ch'an seeks the liberation of all beings, embracing every form of life. This inclusivity, one of Shaolin's defining features, is reflected in the temple's long history of welcoming seekers from every corner of the world. Beyond mere discipline, this practice aims at the realization of Awakening or Enlightenment, liberating the practitioner from the constraints of conceptual thought and opening the way to direct perception, free from the usual filters through which we view reality.

At Shaolin, monks train not only in martial arts but also in meditation and study, bringing teachings beyond the intellectual plane. Kung Fu, for instance, becomes a metaphor for the spiritual journey. Like the mind, the body must be refined, polished, and transformed to reach its full potential. Every strike, posture, and movement becomes a lesson in control, awareness, and harmony with the universe. Kung Fu, in this context, is more than self-defense or physical exercise; it is a spiritual discipline reinforcing Ch'an principles, training monks to remain fully present in every moment and action.

This section marks only the beginning of a journey into the depths of this tradition, not merely explaining doctrines but immersing the reader in the lived experience of the Shaolin way. Within these pages, you are invited to experience, even briefly, the reality Shaolin monks inhabit daily. To integrate Ch'an into thoughts and deeds, so that, like the monk in the temple, one may come to know the true nature of one's own mind and being.

In exploring this first section, we move from accessible and simple practices—meditation, observing precepts, monastic discipline—to the deepest, most abstract teachings: Emptiness (Shunyata), the nature of mind, and the awakening of consciousness. All seen through a single lens: Ch'an as lived at Shaolin, a path to Awakening inviting one to transcend the mundane and the ephemeral, embracing the eternal, the true, the immortal.

Thus, the teaching of Ch'an at Shaolin presents a profound yet approachable journey for all who wish to walk the path of wisdom. A journey toward inner peace, full understanding of one's nature, and liberation from the bonds preventing a life fully lived. Welcome to this first step on the path—a step that can transform not only our understanding of life but the very way we move through the world.

Monastic precepts and vows

Within the Shaolin monastery, where the wind whispers ancient secrets and mist drifts like a curtain between the mountains, monks live by a set of principles that may appear simple at first glance. Yet, when put into practice, these principles open doors to transcendence. Precepts and vows are far more than mere rules of conduct; they are the footprints of a profound spiritual path, a map toward Enlightenment, passed down through generations to preserve the heart of the Shaolin legacy.

Precepts guide us in living harmoniously—with nature, with others, and with our own being. But what does it truly mean to live by these precepts in the life of a Shaolin monk? To understand, we must go beyond words and immerse ourselves in the lived experience of those who have walked this path. Precepts are not external commands imposed upon the monk; they emerge naturally, as an organic response to the essence of the Dharma.

Do not kill: The death of the Ego

At the summit of silence where the mountain meditates, an ancient echo whispers: "Do not kill." This is no order, no punishment, no cold

decree etched in stone. It is a sacred invitation, a teaching aimed directly at the heart. At Shaolin, this phrase does not stop at avoiding bloodshed or taking another being's life. It calls for the end of the wars raging within.

More subtle, yet necessary deaths unfold within: the death of the ego, that invisible tyrant seated on the throne of our consciousness. Its minions—the arrogance masked as certainty, the simmering hatred, the anger clouding judgment, the fear shrinking the heart—pose the true obstacles on the path. They leave no face, yet their traces soil every corner of the spirit.

The Shaolin monk does not wield Kung Fu to destroy but to purify. His battle is against the forces that darken his own light. Day after day, he sits in silence, letting breath carve deep channels like water on rock. In this apparent stillness, the world's oldest struggle unfolds: the spirit seeking to return to its origin unshadowed.

"Do not kill" extends beyond human life. It encompasses all living forms, honoring the inherent sacredness of existence. Every thought, every word, every action that harms—even in the mind—casts a shadow. Every insect crawling, every bird singing, every tree aging silently, even the fruit plucked or the rice cooking in the pot, belongs to the Great Weave. Taking from it should always involve humility and gratitude. Life requires nourishment, yet every act of taking should reflect reverence for all forms of life.

In Shaolin, no food is wasted out of mere preference. Excess, greed, or disregard for simplicity constitutes harm to harmony itself. Some may think this precept applies only to humans, but the temple elders understood true compassion leaves no one behind. Arrogance in assuming humanity sits at the universe's center is one of the ego's cruelest masks.

This resonates with a word from another tongue, yet akin in spirit: *Ahimsa*. Nonviolence—not only in fist, word, or deed, but in thought as well. Violence manifests not only in blows but in judgmental glances, humiliating phrases, and desires imposed on others. Embracing *Ahimsa* does not weaken the Shaolin monk; it strengthens, cultivating a deeper force capable of restraint, compassionate perception, and balanced action.

The precept of non-killing becomes a practice of life itself—a way to tread lightly, barefoot in spirit, leaving the universe's song undisturbed. Each breath transforms into a sacred act. Each gesture, a chance to sow harmony. Living by this principle, one ensures nothing and no one suffers darkness at their hand.
And when this truth is grasped—not merely by mind, but by the whole being—one transcends the limits of ordinary existence, becoming a disciple of the Tao, a pilgrim of the Heart, a witness to Silence.

Do not steal: Emptying desire

The second precept, not taking what has not been freely given, reaches far beyond the obvious act of stealing material possessions. Like many teachings along the Shaolin path, its roots run deep, and its reach is subtle. "Do not steal" does not merely caution against external theft; it acts as a medicine to heal desire, a lamp illuminating the shadows of attachment and appropriation.
From the world's perspective, stealing is action. From the Ch'an perspective, stealing is intention. It begins not with the hand, but with the mind. It arises when the heart stirs with longing for what it lacks, when a sense of emptiness projects outward, seeking fulfillment in what belongs to another. And in this precept, "another's" is not limited to objects. It encompasses another's time, attention, silence, and energy. It can be an unasked word, a demanding gaze, a pressure-laden expectation. It is taking what has not been offered, even invisibly.
In daily monastic practice, Shaolin monks learn that stealing can occur in silence, without speech, without motion of the fingers. A hidden intention, a veiled demand, an unexamined need is enough. Here, discipline becomes refinement of the spirit. Desire is observed, not suppressed, but understood. It is dismantled, emptied, transformed into gratitude.
Within the monastery, objects carry no ownership in the worldly sense. What is needed is used; what is left behind remains available. Ownership dissolves into trust. The practice of not stealing becomes an art of sharing, a form of generosity requiring no praise. Everything belongs to everyone… and at the same time, to no one.

Beyond bowls of rice or linen robes lies the sacred space of another. The inner territory that remains inviolate. Stealing can also mean forcing, rushing, or pushing. We take when we try to make another feel what they are not ready to feel, when we demand love, understanding, or surrender. As the ancients taught, a flower forced to bloom prematurely dies before it opens fully. What is not freely offered does not belong to us.

This teaching extends to the body and desire. Respecting another's body—not through violence, not through possessive desire—also embodies the principle of non-stealing. Another's body, emotions, and mind are not ours to take. Respect transforms into conscious chastity: not a repression of desire, but the return of dignity.

The monk learns to refrain from taking. Learns to receive. Learns to wait. Learns to release. Behind the urge to take lies an illusion: that something external can fill an inner void. The disciple knows this void is not meant to be filled. It is meant to be observed, understood, and transcended.

Desire as the root of suffering

The Sutras speak plainly: desire is the root of suffering. Stealing is only one way this desire manifests. Unrecognized, desire becomes fire—a consuming, snatching, demanding fire. It sparks greed, a blind hunger that never satisfies.

Ch'an does not aim to uproot desire as one would a weed. It observes, studies, and dissolves it. Seen in this light, the precept of not stealing does more than forbid an action; it proposes an internal alchemy. It teaches the mind that once sought to take, to learn instead to be, to exist, to witness without possession.

What has not been given does not belong to us—physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Not even the sacred teachings. On the spiritual path, one may fall into the trap of stealing: appropriating symbols without understanding them, repeating words without living them. Ch'an cannot be imitated, memorized, or stolen. It must be lived.

Ahimsa applied to desire: Greed also wounds

We mentioned this when discussing the first precept, yet it bears repeating with emphasis: the principle of Ahimsa, non-violence, extends into the realm of desire. Unchecked greed inevitably causes harm. Sometimes through words, sometimes through silences that weigh heavily. Demands, desires that become tyrannical, steal another's peace. That, too, is a form of wounding.

Thus, the Shaolin monk observes desire as one watches a passing cloud. He allows it to come, allows it to go. He does not fight it, nor does he feed it. He watches with compassion, knowing that every desire has a root—and that root, almost always, is the fear of not being enough.

Detachment is like the sky: vast, luminous, needing no cloud to hold onto. It is freedom that embraces without binding, love that asks nothing, presence that does not oppress.

The offering as antidote

In Shaolin tradition, the emptiness left by desire is filled by offering. Not taking what is not freely given, but also giving without being asked. Sometimes the most precious things arrive unbidden. A simple gesture, a shared bowl, a gaze that asks nothing, a silent act of help.

True generosity—born from a liberated heart—is the purest expression of non-stealing. A spirit that does not need to take becomes fertile ground for the sacred to bloom.

Do not lie: Words as a bridge between heart and heaven

Do not use words to create illusion or confusion.

In Ch'an Buddhism, truth is not merely a collection of accurately stated facts. It is a way of being in the world, a deep coherence between who one is, what one does, and what one says. The precept of not lying—not speaking in vain, not manipulating, deceiving, or pretending—is, at its core, a call to live with transparency.

In the monastic environment, where silence often speaks more eloquently than words, every syllable carries weight. Words are not spoken lightly; nothing is uttered without first being digested in the heart. Lying is not merely failing to tell the truth—it is breaking the invisible thread of trust that binds beings together. It is an intimate betrayal that, though not always visible, leaves cracks in the heart. A monk who lies—whether for convenience, out of fear, or to appear favorable—strays from the Dao. He drifts away from himself.

Words, like steel, can be either knife or balm. They can sow clarity or incubate chaos. In the path of Ch'an, the voice is a tool for cultivation before it is a tool of conquest. Every word born from ego, cunning, or the desire to impress casts a shadow. But a word spoken with awareness, from compassion and precision, carries the power to

illuminate the path. “Do not lie” goes beyond merely avoiding falsehoods. It is a commitment to integral truth:
— Do not speak untruths.
— Do not manipulate with flattery or white lies.
— Do not distort facts to protect yourself or to impress.
— Do not feign emotions you do not feel.
— Do not withhold what is necessary out of fear or calculation.
— Do not cloak your own shadows in virtuous words.
Yet it does not demand that everything be said. Silence, when born from lucidity, can also express truth. Honest omission may be wiser than a confession spoken out of place. The key lies in the root from which each word or silence emerges. If they arise from fear, inner laziness, or the will to deceive, they are no longer truth, even if they appear so.

Truth with compassion

The precept calls for gentleness, not harshness. Speaking the truth is not an act that wounds; it flows from inner cultivation that makes it both firm and gentle. It knows how to choose the right moment, the proper form, and the correct intention. Truth is offered like a healing bowl, never like a stone that hurts without purpose.
This principle resonates in an ancient Shaolin saying:
"If your words are not more useful than silence, remain silent.
But if your silence hides injustice, speak without trembling."
Thus, the adept learns to restrain the tongue, to observe intention, and to understand that often the truest word is the one born after long meditation.

Lying as audible karma

In the Buddhist view of the world, every lie creates a debt. It disturbs the natural harmony of the universe, diverts the flow of Dharma, and clouds the clarity of the mind. Every falsehood generates an echo, an audible karma, that inevitably returns. The one who lies unwittingly encloses themselves in a prison built from their own voice.

And not only that. In Chinese thought, words carry Qi—vital energy. Speaking from falsehood blocks that flow, both within oneself and in the surrounding environment. It is as if energy, finding no truth upon which to rest, twists and begins to poison the air. The adept, therefore, does not train merely to speak truthfully; he trains to live in truth. To eliminate any contradiction between thought, word, and action. To make life so clear that it requires no defense.

Words as a Path

Language is sacred. Through it, we shape thought, invoke realities, and forge connections. In Ch'an Buddhism, it is understood that words can

either lead to enlightenment or mislead. This is why conscious speech is so highly valued: it can point the way to the Path… or divert it.
The ancient masters often undertook long vows of silence, not as punishment but as a purification practice. For before one learns to speak as a sage, one must first learn to be silent like the mountains. And when one finally speaks, it should be like striking the drum in the heart of the temple: with intention, with rhythm, with respect. Each word should resonate like a well-tuned bell, not the shriek of a broken horn. Through words, the heart can touch the heavens—and when it does, there is no need to raise the voice.

Do not commit sexual misconduct: The purity of connection

In most classical teachings, this precept is simply translated as abstaining from improper sexual conduct—a rule among many in a moral code. Yet in Ch'an Buddhism—and with special depth in the Shaolin tradition—its meaning is far broader and more subtle. It is not only about avoiding certain acts, but about cultivating inner integrity, reflected in the way we relate to ourselves and others, with respect and compassion.
Sexuality is neither an enemy to fear nor an impulse to suppress. It is, above all, a vital and sacred energy. The precept invites us not to fall into the trap of using that energy blindly or selfishly, for desire without wisdom can become a force that harms, invades another's space, and disconnects us from authentic presence. True purity, then, is not found in denial or concealment of sexuality, but in refining it, transforming it into a conscious, honest expression, free from manipulation or domination.
For those living in the lay world, this precept demands deep responsibility. To live sexuality truthfully is to avoid using another as a means to an end, without lying or deceiving for pleasure, and without entering relationships that generate suffering for oneself or others. It is recognizing the dignity of the other and honoring it in every act, never reducing the person to an object or a mere source of satisfaction.
For monks and advanced practitioners of the Shaolin tradition, this precept is lived as celibacy—not imposed by guilt or fear, but chosen as

a path of transformation. Sexual energy becomes a force for meditation, for internal Kung Fu practice, and for the cultivation of compassion. The body is not the enemy, nor a toy; it is a sacred temple where every gesture—from a greeting to an intimate act—must be imbued with honesty, respect, and true love.

Intention, within this precept, outweighs mere action. One may abstain physically, yet violate the precept if the mind remains trapped in lust, if another is seen as an object, or if invaded by dominant fantasies. In Shaolin, particular attention is paid to the root: if the mind is diseased, the fruit will inevitably be too, even if it does not manifest outwardly.

This precept also encourages silent vigilance over thoughts and emotions: not feeding impure desires, not letting the mind wander into fantasies that pull one away from the present, and not cultivating visions that degrade or depersonalize another. Sexuality, when lived from presence, can become a bridge to profound communion; otherwise, it can trap and strengthen the ego and attachment.

In traditional Buddhist communities, this teaching intertwines with kshanti, or loving patience. Respecting the body of another, their limits, rhythms, and choices, is an act of silent, profound love. It is not possession or conquest, but an authentic and sacred meeting between two beings.

In the Shaolin tradition, celibacy is an act of love toward inner freedom, a conscious affirmation that honors the body and flesh without clinging. Monks train to observe desire without being swept away, to feel its pulse without turning it into action, and to transform sexual energy into a powerful force for meditation and martial practice. As Master Damo said, *"It is a subtle alchemy that turns the fire of desire into the light of discernment."*

Of course, this precept also confronts the realities of the modern world, where sexuality has become a commodity, pleasure is confused with love, and sexual freedom is celebrated without the same devotion to responsibility. The Ch'an Buddhist is called to swim against the current, to reclaim the art of care, delicacy, and silence amid constant noise.

According to ancient texts—the Vinaya and the wise words of Ch'an patriarchs—celibacy is not merely abstention but transformation. That

energy which drives desire finds a new channel: creativity, compassion, and deep perception. It is the same vital force, but directed inward, toward serenity and full presence. Thus, internal Kung Fu ceases to be merely a visible martial art and becomes an energetic discipline shaping the very root of desire.

This precept is also a hymn to inner honor: to see another without greed, touch without possession, love without need. In a world of consumption and instant gratification, this is one of the most revolutionary acts the human spirit can perform.

Ultimately, sexuality becomes a path to redemption and the elevation of the human, not an obstacle. The deepest union transcends the physical and reveals itself spiritually. True love is measured by the respect it offers, not by what it seeks to take. Every gaze free of desire, every attachment-free bond, honors this ancient precept, inviting us to care, to respect, and to take nothing that has not been freely given—not even with the eyes.

Do not consume intoxicants — Clarity as a sacred vow

If there is a darkness more dangerous than the night, it is that of a mind that has voluntarily surrendered its own light. The fifth precept of the Buddhist path, *"Do not consume substances that cloud the mind,"* is a profound call to preserve inner sovereignty, to maintain presence and dignity, far from the oblivion that comes when the mind loses its light.

On the sacred mountain, where the wind whispers among the leaves and monks walk with measured steps, it is said that this precept protects not only the body but the spirit itself. For wherever intoxication settles, consciousness dissolves; and where consciousness disappears, compassion, temperance, and wisdom cannot bloom.

I have often heard, in talks and encounters, that inebriation is a rest, a relief, a temporary pause from the torment of suffering. But the truth taught by the elders is different: the intoxicated one does not rest, he flees. He flees from himself, from his shadows, from the deep cracks of the heart, from the unfinished story he does not wish to confront. And in fleeing from oneself, he also disconnects from others, losing that "shame" which in our land is far more than a mere blush. It is the inner

voice, the small flame of respect that whispers: "Stop." That subtle delicacy which maintains balance and harmony in the world, the invisible brake that prevents harm.

The sacred texts of Ch'an say that the wise need no poison to laugh, cry, or love. His heart is like a clean bowl, where tea steams gently without the need for wine-induced intoxication. In that bowl fit all emotions: vibrant joy, deep sorrow, sweet nostalgia, luminous celebration. Yet none wear masks or disguises; they are lived with bare skin, with spirit upright. For the sage fears neither to see himself nor to confront himself, much less to be afraid of himself.

When visitors arrive at the temple, they often ask, perplexed: "Why is wine forbidden here, if the Buddha spoke of the Middle Way? Isn't this an excessive rigidity?" But this question reveals that the deeper meaning has not yet been understood. It is a warm and conscious choice, a radical and courageous decision: to live awake. To choose clarity amid the deafening noise of the world and to preserve the spirit without succumbing to the sweet temptation of escape.

A Shaolin monk must keep every muscle alert, yes, but above all, he must have a vigilant gaze. What use is an agile body if the mind wavers like a ship in a storm? What value does a perfect technique have if the heart is dull, extinguished? Even the most refined martial art, without the light of lucidity, becomes merely an empty dance of choreographed violence.

Thus, the precept of sobriety is a consecration, not a renunciation. A solemn declaration that affirms: *"I have chosen to see. I have chosen to be. I have chosen to stand on my own feet, even when they tremble."*

There is another dimension, almost always forgotten: when one succumbs to intoxicants, one not only disconnects from others but abandons the sacred duty of self-care. One becomes a burden, a shadow, a threat to those around. How many words spoken under the influence of alcohol leave wounds that bleed forever? How many decisions made in the haze of drugs destroy families, paths, and dreams?

I recall so many times when society expects one to drink in order to "fit in," "have fun," or "relax." But what a great lie that is. One need not drink to laugh sincerely, to love with an open heart, or to find joy.

This third volume closes the trilogy, guiding the reader from external practice to inner realization. Through five major parts, the book unravels the union between Ch'an Buddhism, internal martial arts, and the feminine legacy of Mount Emei.

I) The Heart of Ch'an: Teachings of Shaolin Buddhism

This first part opens the door to a lived Ch'an, embodied in the routine of the temple: less theory and more breathing, less discourse and more presence. It presents Ch'an as a practice that permeates daily life and, in Shaolin, is also expressed through the body: Kung Fu is not mere combat, but "meditation in movement" that polishes character and sharpens attention. Here, the mind is not tamed by force; it is clarified by allowing it to be, while the body learns to obey consciousness. The reader walks from the basics—meditation, precepts, discipline—toward the subtle—Emptiness, the nature of the mind—like someone ascending a mountain who discovers that the inner landscape widens with every step. This part also establishes the ethical scaffolding: precepts and vows as the foundations of the Path, not dry dogmas, but living tools that protect the practice and give it meaning—both structure (precepts) and purpose (vows). The result is a clear and classic map: refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and an invitation to integrate everything into real life, without hollow mysticism or disposable modern trends.

II) The Path of the Invisible (Tui Men)

Here you enter the territory of Tui Men, the art of "pushing" that, paradoxically, teaches you not to push. It is the grammar of bodily listening: connecting, adhering, yielding, diverting, and surpassing without collision. "There is no attack: there is intention. There is no defense: there is presence." The chapter brings these maxims down to earth: how root is built, how weight travels in spirals, how "the body

learns to think" and the hand "listens" to the other's tension. It describes the pedagogical progression (contact, sensitivity, lines of force, reading the center) and the two-person exercises that educate non-reactive reflexes. The strategy is classic and elegant: win without fighting, break the structure without breaking the other, enter through the gap left by their own rigidity. The tone is intimate—with small scenes of the master correcting—and emphasizes that Tui Men is not a showy trick, but an ethics of combat: if you can divert, do not strike; if you can release, do not grasp. You learn to "not seek in order to find," and that the real point of support is not on the ground, but in the clarity of a mind that does not rush.

III) Ngomei Siulam Pai: The Martial Spirit of the Mountain

This section presents the Ngomei Siulam Pai lineage—a southern footprint born from Shaolin diasporas—and restores its value with traditional criteria. It recounts the legend of Wu Mei (Ngomei) and how her understanding refined a combat style of soft appearance and devastating effect: precision, economy, unbalancing the opponent, and a geometry that favors a light body and clear intention. It explains the bridge between internal cultivation and tactics: breathing, Qigong, and the idea of *Wu Xing Chan Yi*, where energetic reading (Yin/Yang, Five Phases) is not folklore, but a compass for choosing angles, rhythms, and technical chains. It also outlines differences from other Southern Shaolin styles: less rigid forms, more emphasis on sensitivity, short lines, discreet levers, and breaking the center without the need for frontal impact. The chapter smells of mountain and monastery: respect for the lineage, sober discipline, master-disciple transmission, and a warning against modern exhibitionism. In sum: a style of ancient roots with present efficacy, where combat is a vehicle for lucidity and the body, a brush that writes doctrine in the air.

IV) The Daughters of Silence and Thunder

It closes with a powerful focus on the feminine tradition of Emei: communities of warrior nuns who worked the body as a temple and movement as liturgy. It traverses sister schools—Wu Mei Pai, Bai He, Hua Mei, Shui Jiao—and their technical aesthetic: softness that cuts, precision that protects, and weapons that are extensions of breath (a fan that hides and diverts, a metal whip that captures, punches that fit like ideograms of intention). There is a historical section and a contemporary one: discreet masters, intergenerational bridges, and even recent institutional support to visualize this heritage, without turning it into empty spectacle. The chapter argues that "feminine art" is not a concession, but a mode of martial intelligence: maximum efficiency with minimum expenditure, sensitivity as tactical radar, and an ethics that turns strength into care. It ends with a powerful—almost cinematic—image: the body as spiritual writing, each gesture a syllable of wisdom and resistance, each form a prayer that sounds like thunder but is born of silence.

V) Conclusions of the Previous Volumes

An integrative reflection on the journey traveled in the trilogy. Through universal symbols of the pilgrim (the mountain, the temple, water, the staff), it ties up the loose ends of the previous books. This chapter invites gratitude for what has been learned and the understanding that practice has no end. It is a space for pause, to look back without nostalgia and forward without anxiety, recognizing that the true temple is not a geographical place, but an inner construction.

The Inner Return: The Last Door of the Path

The spiritual culmination of the work. It reveals that the "home" sought throughout the pilgrimage has always been within the awakened heart. It includes a reflection on the disciple as guardian of the lineage

and an open letter to future generations. It closes with a final poem ("The Temple That Never Left") and a note from the authors, inviting the reader to live the teaching beyond the pages, in the silence and presence of everyday life.

If this brief journey has awakened in you curiosity, silence, or the spark to continue exploring, I invite you to enter our website. There you will find other books, teachings, and paths that are part of the same journey:

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