

Zen Roots

The First Thousand Years

Nine Sutras and Texts

Translations and Commentary by

Red Pine

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COUNTERPOINT

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Translator's Preface

Fifty years ago, when I first started reading about Zen, D.T. Suzuki's *Manual of Zen Buddhism* was a constant companion. It included the recorded words of the earliest Zen teachers—as well as those of the Buddha—from which Zen took root. This book is an homage, a belated thank you for the gift.

Beginning with the Heart and Diamond sutras was an easy decision. They are the first two sutras I read. It took a lot longer than I expected before I began to understand them. They looked so simple, and they are, which is always a problem. What slowed me down was their teaching known as Prajnaparamita, a teaching that points to our mind before we learn how to divide the indivisible.

The Heart's teaching of Prajnaparamita revolves around the word *emptiness*, that whatever we think of as real is just our imagination. It isn't that reality isn't real, it is just that thinking it exists "out there"—somewhere other than our mind—creates nothing but trouble. In place of our universe of "things," the Heart Sutra asks us to chant a mantra: to "go beyond," to rely on wisdom as opposed to knowledge. And to keep wisdom from turning into knowledge, the Heart pairs it with compassion. It delivers its message through the voice of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who asks us to take refuge in Prajnaparamita, the Mother of All Buddhas.

In the Diamond Sutra, the Buddha never once mentions emptiness. He just uses different words. He tells us that to talk about anything is to talk about nothing. This is what anything turns out to be—nothing, emptiness again. But before the Buddha starts talking about nothing, he, too, calls on the power of compassion. He urges us to vow to liberate all beings—not just ourselves—but to do so without becoming attached to any concept involved in such a vow. If we can do this, he says, we will create the same spiritual "body of merit" that forms the basis of every buddha's enlightenment—his and

ours. Like the Heart, the Diamond couldn't be simpler. Simple, though, doesn't mean easy.

The next sutra is even simpler. It's the Vimalakirti, named for a merchant who was ill and who the Buddha's disciples were too embarrassed to visit, having been upstaged during previous encounters with Buddhism's most famous layman. Finally, Manjusri agrees, and we get to witness the sick layman crossing swords with the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, not to mention a celestial female teasing Sariputra, the Buddha's wisest disciple.

The next sutra is the last one anyone would call simple. The trick is not to pay too much attention to the words. When Bodhidharma brought Zen to China, the Lankavatara was the text he recommended to his disciples. As with the Vimalakirti, there wasn't room for more than a sample, but enough, I hope, to open a door. Zen masters often summarized the Lanka's teaching with the suggestion we have a cup of tea then taste the tea. How hard could that be?

Since it was Bodhidharma who asked his disciples to read the Lanka, I thought it only right we hear from him too. He didn't leave much in the way of written materials, but he did leave *Principles & Practice*. If Zen has any message, it's that it doesn't take a lot of words, and this is a good example.

While Bodhidharma may have brought the living example of Zen to China, he made as much of an impression as a frog jumping into the ocean. Fortunately, he found a successor, and his successor found a successor, and we finally get our first evidence in writing that Zen was putting down roots in the Middle Kingdom—a poem entitled *Trusting the Mind* about emptiness's constant companion: nonduality. After reading the Lankavatara, this should be a real pleasure.

The poem, though, didn't make much of a ripple either. Zen's Third Patriarch had only one disciple. But the gods smiled. That disciple had five hundred. And his successor, the Fifth Patriarch, had a thousand. And among those thousand was an illiterate "jungle dog" named Huineng 惠能, who became Zen's Sixth Patriarch and the author of Zen's most famous text: the Platform Sutra, in which he teaches us One Practice Samadhi. Again, if it's not simple, it's not Zen.

Toward the end of his life, Huineng was visited by a monk named Yongjia 永嘉, who traveled a thousand kilometers just to see whether he, too, had understood the teaching of Zen in the absence of a teacher, which was what Huineng did. It's always good to have a confirmation that it's the world that's crazy. Finding out he was fine, Yongjia stayed only one night then returned home to take care of his sister, who edited his *Song of Enlightenment* from the writings he left behind.

Ironically, both monks died the same year, in 713. Yongjia didn't have any disciples, unless we count his sister, but Huineng had over three thousand, among them his dharma heir, Huairang 懷讓. In less than a hundred years, Huairang's disciples and their disciples were able to establish a dozen monasteries in the provinces just to the north, all of them built to reflect the Fourth Patriarch's insight that the best way to practice Zen was with fellow practitioners in self-supporting agricultural communes. Up until then, Buddhist monks had considered farming a violation of the precepts, as it meant killing bugs and worms. Within one small area alone west of the provincial capital of Jiangxi 江西 were the mountain-basin communes of Huairang's dharma heir (Mazu 馬祖), his dharma heir (Baizhang 百丈), and his dharma heir (Huangbo 黃檗). I had just enough room for Huangbo's *Transmission of the Mind*.

I was hoping this book would be smaller. But one old friend led to another. It is, though, just words. Don't let them distract you from what's important.

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THE HEART & DIAMOND SUTRAS

Introduction

When the people of ancient India began exploring who they were, they began the same way we might today. They concluded that there was something outside themselves and something inside, and they were somewhere in between. They called the outside *rupa*, or form, and the inside *nama*, what you can name but can't see. Over time, they came up with a number of approaches to find the self they were certain was there, each with a different emphasis. For those who focused on the inside, there were the nesting dolls of the skandhas; for those who focused on the outside, there were the sensory-based *ayatanas*; and for those who focused on both, there were the all-embracing *dhatus*. Like a doctor prescribing medicine for different ailments, the Buddha sent his disciples on wild-goose chases into each of these realms circumscribing the extent of our awareness. He also prescribed the temporal scheme of the *nidanas* that he used when he achieved Enlightenment, and he even recommended the Four Truths¹ and Eightfold Path, the subjects of his first teaching. But no matter where the Buddha sent his disciples, they would eventually return and admit their failure. When they did, he would ask, "So?" And if they failed to conclude that there was no self, he would send them off again into yet another mind-body realm.²

In the centuries following Sakyamuni's Nirvana, a number of sects arose that looked at these quests the Buddha had recommended and concluded that although he had used them to drive home the lesson that there was no self, the realms themselves were real—otherwise, why would the Buddha have recommended them? For these sects, the skandhas, the *ayatanas*, the *dhatus*, the *nidanas*, the Four Truths, the Eightfold Path, even nirvana—all of them were real. They called them dharmas, "what can be grasped," and made matrices linking them. They held that by studying the relationships among these dharmas they could become enlightened.

This marked the rise of the Abhidharma, or “Dharmology,” schools, which occurred in the third century BC. However, not everyone agreed with such a view, and resistance to it eventually gave rise to the Prajnaparamita teachings in the second century BC and to such sutras as the Heart and the Diamond soon after.

Just as people nowadays believe the world is made of atoms, these Abhidharma schools believed that these dharmas were the elemental constituents of our experience of reality, that somehow they existed by themselves. In a word—a Sanskrit word—they possessed *sva-bhava*, or “self-existence.” The Prajnaparamita countered this with its own word: *sunyata*, or “emptiness.” The proponents of Prajnaparamita weren’t interested in negating the existence of tables and chairs or form and consciousness, only the self-existence of tables and chairs or form and consciousness. Nothing, they held, exists by itself. In fact, its very “thingness” is simply something we bestow on it. Whatever we might designate as an object or a dharma is simply a convenient fiction.

The Heart Sutra applied this view of emptiness to the Abhidharma categories of the Sarvastivadins, as they were the most influential of all the schools that upheld a dharma-based view of reality. This briefest of sutras not only rejected the self-existence of each of the Sarvastivadin sets of dharmas, it presented something in their place, a mantra for chanting to go beyond conception-based understandings of reality. Seeing language itself as an impediment to understanding, teachers of the Prajnaparamita were open to alternatives.

The word they chose for their ineffable teaching was a Sanskrit compound made up of: *prajna*, meaning “wisdom” or “knowing,” and *paramita*, meaning “supreme” or “transcendent.” They added the adjective *paramita* to differentiate their knowing from that of others. Unlike many of the sects that developed after the Buddha’s Nirvana, they didn’t focus on the acquisition of knowledge, or jnana, but on the transcendence of knowledge. Their emphasis was on what comes before knowledge, which was the meaning of the *pra* (“before”) in *prajna*. Knowledge was viewed as delusion posing as truth. Prajnaparamita was interested in the mind before it knows—our “original face,” as Zen masters came to call it.

When this teaching first appeared two thousand years ago in the Indian subcontinent, it was also accompanied by a change in how those who accepted it viewed the path they should follow. Instead of the quest for nirvana and the end to rebirth advocated by the early followers of the Buddha, the followers of the Prajnaparamita chose the bodhisattva path, leading to enlightenment and no end to rebirth until all beings are liberated.

Among the texts that conveyed this message, none has received a wider or more lasting reception in Asia—or in the West—than the Diamond Sutra. Considered as dating back to the first century BC, if not earlier, it is one of the most profound of all Prajnaparamita texts, focusing on the bodhisattva path itself and what happens to those who choose to follow it.

It begins simply enough with the Buddha returning from his daily begging round and being asked by his disciple Subhuti how people should set forth on the same path the Buddha followed. The Buddha responds by telling Subhuti and all those present they should vow to liberate others—not just themselves, but all others. What follows is an account of how people become buddhas and the importance of merit—merit being the spiritual result of a spiritual act.³ The Buddha tells an audience of monks and lay followers that if they can do as he suggests, and do so without being attached to the idea they are liberating anyone, they will obtain a limitless, inconceivable “body of merit.”

The Buddha then asks Subhuti if he sees him. This seems like an odd question at first, but it’s the question around which this sutra turns. Subhuti already understands the Buddha’s teaching of emptiness, that anything one might point to is only real in the sense that it is being pointed to and otherwise empty. Naturally, this would include the nirmana-kaya, or body of physical attributes, which the Buddha himself acquired when he became a buddha, so Subhuti answers, “No.”

Taking Subhuti at his word, that he wants to know how to follow the bodhisattva path, the Buddha introduces him to what underlies that path. The Buddha tells him, “By means of attributes that are not attributes, the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen.” The body he wants Subhuti to see is the one he himself acquired when he began his

own journey on the bodhisattva path, the one those who vow to liberate others likewise acquire.

The sutra then becomes a revelation of the spiritual reality of the path introduced to the Buddhist world by the Prajnaparamita teachings. However, being one of the briefest of such texts, it limits itself to the beginning and the end of that path. Also, as the Buddha does this, he reiterates that he speaks only of what isn't real—the implication being that what is real can't be spoken of. This is not only true of the body of attributes he acquired when he became a buddha but also of the body of attributes that were not attributes he acquired when he first set forth on the path. Both bodies, it turns out, are mere flashes of lightning. The only thing real is the Dharma, represented in this sutra by the Prajnaparamita, a teaching that turns out to be no teaching.

It was this teaching, in the form of the Heart Sutra, that protected Xuanzang when he journeyed to India and seventeen years later when he brought back the sixteen texts that made up the Maha Prajnaparamita Sutra, of which the Diamond Sutra was but one. It was also this teaching, in the form of the Diamond, that Huineng heard when he was delivering a load of firewood. That was all it took to set him off on the journey that led to the Platform Sutra and to the spread of Zen throughout the world. There is no telling what might happen to someone who carries these sutras around, much less invites them into their home.

1. Life is suffering, the cause of suffering is desire, desire can be eliminated, and the way to eliminate it is by following the Eightfold Path: right views, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right perseverance, right reflection, right meditation.
2. The 1,300 short Sanskrit sutras of the Samyukta Agama are examples of this approach to instruction. Similar Pali texts make up the Samyutta Nikaya.
3. For more on merit, see the Platform Sutra 34.

The Heart Sutra⁴

The noble Avalokitesvara⁵ Bodhisattva,
while practicing the deep practice
of Prajnaparamita,
looked upon the Five Skandhas⁶
and seeing they were empty of self-existence,
said, "Here, Sariputra,⁷
form is emptiness, emptiness is form;
emptiness is not separate from form,
form is not separate from emptiness;
whatever is form is emptiness,
whatever is emptiness is form."⁸
The same holds for sensation and perception,
memory and consciousness.
Here, Sariputra,
all dharmas are defined by emptiness,
not by birth or destruction,
purity or defilement,
completeness or deficiency.
Therefore, Sariputra,
in emptiness there is no form,
no sensation, no perception,
no memory, and no consciousness;
no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue,
no body, and no mind;⁹
no shape, no sound, no smell, no taste,
no feeling, and no thought;
no element of perception,
from eye to conceptual consciousness;¹⁰
no causal link,
from ignorance to old age and death,
or end of causal link,

from ignorance to old age and death;¹¹
no suffering, no source, no relief, no path;¹²
no knowledge, no attainment,
and no non-attainment.
Therefore, Sariputra, without attainment
bodhisattvas take refuge in Prajnaparamita
and live without walls of the mind.
Without walls of the mind
and thus without fears,
they see through delusion and finally nirvana.
All buddhas past, present, and future
also take refuge in Prajnaparamita
and realize unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.
You should therefore know
the great mantra of Prajnaparamita,
the *mahavidya* mantra,¹³
the unexcelled mantra,
the mantra equal to the unequalled,
which heals all suffering
and is true, not false.
The mantra in Prajnaparamita spoken thus:
Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate,
*bodhi, svaha.*¹⁴

Addendum: In the seventh year of Sakyamuni's ministry, the Buddha disappeared during the annual monsoon and reappeared in the Trayastrimsa Heaven at the top of Mount Sumeru, where his mother, Maya, had been reborn as the deva Santusita. The Buddha then spent the entire summer teaching her the Abhidharma, but he returned to Earth every day and gave his disciple Sariputra a summary of what he taught his mother. At the end of the monsoon, the Buddha resumed his career on Earth and never spoke about the Abhidharma again. Meanwhile, Sariputra was said to have compiled what he heard into the first texts that formed the basis of the Abhidharma.

As for Avalokitesvara's presence in this sutra, how could there have been a better choice for offering a critique of Sariputra's understanding than the Buddha's mother, looking down from above Mount Sumeru? Note, too, that Prajnaparamita is personified as the Mother of Buddhas in the Diamond Sutra. And in the Heart, it is in the magic-lamp-shaped womb of Prajnaparamita that one takes refuge and from which one reappears transformed by the power of her mantra.

4. This translation is based on the Sanskrit.
5. Sanskrit for "master of looking down from on high."
6. Form, sensation, perception, memory, consciousness.
7. Buddha's disciple and compiler of Abhidharma texts.
8. This is a three-step example of set theory: sets A and B intersect, set A equals set B, all possible set As are equal to all possible set Bs.
9. The Twelve Ayatanas or Abodes.
10. The Eighteen Dhatus or Elements.
11. The Twelve Nidanas or Links: ignorance, memory, consciousness, name-and-form, senses, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death.
12. The Four Truths and the Eightfold Path.
13. *Mahavidya* means "great (esoteric) knowledge or awareness." It also refers to incantations associated with certain goddesses as well as to the goddesses themselves.
14. "Into the gone, into the gone, into the gone beyond, into the gone completely beyond, enlightenment, amen!"

The Diamond Sutra¹⁵

One: Thus have I heard: Once the Bhagavan was dwelling near Sravasti in the Anathapindada Garden of Jeta Forest together with the full assembly of 1,250 monks.¹⁶

One day before noon, the Bhagavan put on his patched robe, picked up his bowl, and entered the capital of Sravasti for offerings.¹⁷ After begging for food in the city and eating his meal of rice, he returned from his daily round in the afternoon, put his robe and bowl away, washed his feet, and sat down on his appointed seat. After crossing his legs and adjusting his body, he turned his awareness to what was before him.

A number of monks then came up to where the Bhagavan was sitting. After touching their heads to his feet, they walked around him to the right three times and sat down to one side.

Two: On this occasion, the venerable Subhuti was also present in the assembly.¹⁸ Rising from his seat, he uncovered one shoulder and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his palms together and bowing to the Buddha, he said: “It is rare, Bhagavan, most rare, indeed, Sugata, how the Tathagata, the Arhan,¹⁹ the Fully Enlightened One blesses bodhisattvas²⁰ with the best of blessings. And it is rare, Bhagavan, how the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One entrusts bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts.²¹

“Even so, Bhagavan, if a noble son or daughter should set forth on the bodhisattva path,²² how should they behave, how should they practice, and how should they control their thoughts?”²³

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, “Well said, Subhuti. Well said. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you say. The Tathagata blesses bodhisattvas with the best of blessings and entrusts bodhisattvas with the greatest of trusts. You should therefore truly listen, Subhuti, and ponder this well. I shall tell you how someone who sets forth on the bodhisattva path should behave, how they should practice, and how they should control their thoughts.”

The venerable Subhuti answered, “May it be so, Bhagavan,” and gave his full attention.

Three: The Buddha said to him, “Subhuti, those who would now set forth on the bodhisattva path should think this thought:²⁴ ‘However many beings there are in whatever realms of being might exist, whether they are born from an egg or born from a womb, born from the water or born from the air, whether they have form or no form, whether they are able to perceive or not perceive or neither perceive nor not perceive, in whatever conceivable realm of being one might conceive of beings, in the realm of unconditioned nirvana I shall liberate them all. And though I thus liberate countless beings, not a single being is liberated.’²⁵

“And why not? Subhuti, a bodhisattva to whom the conception of a being occurs cannot be called a ‘bodhisattva.’ And why is that? Subhuti, no one can be called a bodhisattva who conceives of a being, a life, or a soul.”

Four: “Moreover, Subhuti, when bodhisattvas give a gift, they should not be attached to an object.²⁶ When they give a gift, they should not be attached to anything at all. They should not be attached to a sight when they give a gift. Nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma when they give a gift. Thus, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached to any idea of its characteristics. And why not? Subhuti, the body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached isn’t easy to measure.²⁷ What do you think, Subhuti, is the space to the east easy to measure?”

Subhuti replied, “No, it isn’t, Bhagavan.”

The Buddha said, “Likewise, is the space to the south, to the west, to the north, in between, above, below, or in any of the ten directions easy to measure?”

Subhuti replied, “No, it isn’t, Bhagavan.”

The Buddha said, “In the same way, Subhuti, the body of merit of those bodhisattvas who give a gift without being attached isn’t easy to measure. Thus, Subhuti, those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should give a gift without being attached to any idea of its characteristics.”

Five: “What do you think, Subhuti, can the Tathagata be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes?”²⁸

Subhuti replied, “No, Bhagavan, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, the Tathagata speaks of the acquisition of attributes as the acquisition of no attributes.”²⁹

The Buddha then told the venerable Subhuti, “Since attributes are a fiction, Subhuti, no attributes would not be a fiction. Hence, by means of attributes that are not attributes the Tathagata can, indeed, be seen.”³⁰

Six: Hearing this,³¹ the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, will there be beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age,³² who think that the words of a sutra like the one spoken here are true?”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, do not ask ‘Will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who think that the words of a sutra like the one spoken here are true?’ Surely, Subhuti, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, there will be fearless bodhisattvas³³ who are capable, virtuous, and wise who think that the words of a sutra like the one spoken here are true.

“Indeed, Subhuti, such bodhisattvas will have honored not just one buddha or planted auspicious roots before not just one buddha. Surely, Subhuti, such bodhisattvas will have honored countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas and planted auspicious roots before countless hundreds and thousands of buddhas.³⁴ In the words of a sutra like the one spoken here, they are sure to gain a single-minded confidence.³⁵ The Tathagata knows them, Subhuti. And the Tathagata sees them, Subhuti. For they all produce and obtain a limitless, infinite body of merit.³⁶

“And how so? Because, Subhuti, the idea of a self does not occur to such bodhisattvas, neither does the idea of a being, a life, or a soul. Nor, Subhuti, does the idea of a dharma occur to such bodhisattvas, much less no dharma. Neither an idea occurs to them, Subhuti, nor no idea.

“And why not? Because, Subhuti, if the idea of a dharma occurred to these bodhisattvas, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, or a soul. Likewise, if the idea of no dharma occurred to them, they would be attached to a self, a being, a life, or a soul.

“And how so? Because, Subhuti, bodhisattvas are not attached to a dharma, much less to no dharma. This is the meaning behind the Tathagata’s saying, ‘The teaching of a dharma is like a raft. If you should let go of dharmas, how much more so no dharmas.’”³⁷

Seven: The Buddha then asked the venerable Subhuti, “What do you think, Subhuti? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as ‘unexcelled, perfect enlightenment’? Or does the Tathagata teach any such dharma?”³⁸

The venerable Subhuti answered, “Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Buddha has said, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as ‘unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.’ Nor does the Tathagata teach such a dharma. And why not? Because this dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata is ungraspable and inexpressible and is neither a dharma nor no dharma. And why is this? Because sages arise from what is unconditioned.”³⁹

Eight: The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter covered the billion worlds of this universe with the seven treasures⁴⁰ and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by this noble son or daughter be great?”

Subhuti answered, “It would be great, Bhagavan. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be great, Sugata. And how so? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata has said is a body of merit, the Tathagata has said is no body. Thus does the Tathagata speak of a body of merit as a ‘body of merit.’”⁴¹

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if instead of covering the billion worlds of this universe with the seven treasures and giving them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully enlightened ones, this noble son or daughter took but one four-line verse⁴² of this teaching and made it known and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how so? Subhuti, from this is born the unexcelled, perfect enlightenment of tathagatas, arhans, and fully enlightened ones.

From this are born buddhas and bhagavans.⁴³ And how so? The dharmas of a buddha, Subhuti, the dharmas of a buddha are spoken of by the Tathagata as no dharmas of a buddha. Thus does he speak of the 'dharmas of a buddha.'"⁴⁴

Nine: "What do you think, Subhuti, does it occur to those who enter the river, 'I have attained the goal of entering the river'?"⁴⁵

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. It does not occur to those who enter the river, 'I have attained the goal of entering the river.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not enter any such dharma. Thus are they said to 'enter the river.' They do not enter a sight, nor do they enter a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. Thus are they said to 'enter the river.'"

The Buddha said, "What do you think, Subhuti, does it occur to those who return once more, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. It does not occur to those who return once more, 'I have attained the goal of returning once more.' And why not? Bhagavan, they do not attain any such dharma as 'returning once more.' Thus are they said to 'return once more.'"

The Buddha said, "What do you think, Subhuti, does it occur to those who return no more, 'I have attained the goal of returning no more'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. And why not? Bhagavan, they do not attain any such dharma as 'returning no more.' Thus are they said to 'return no more.'"

The Buddha said, "What do you think, Subhuti, does it occur to those who become free from rebirth, 'I have attained the goal of freedom from rebirth'?"⁴⁶

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. And why not? Bhagavan, there is no such dharma as 'freedom from rebirth.' Thus are they said to become 'free from rebirth.' If, Bhagavan, it should occur to those who become free from rebirth, 'I have attained the goal of freedom from rebirth,' attachment to a self would occur, or attachment to a being, attachment to a life, attachment to a soul would occur.

“And how so? Bhagavan, the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One has declared that I am foremost among those who dwell free of passion. Though I am free from rebirth and without desires, Bhagavan, I do not think, ‘I am free from rebirth and without desires.’ Bhagavan, if I thought, ‘I have attained the goal of freedom from rebirth,’ the Tathagata would not have singled me out by saying, ‘Foremost among those who dwell free of passion is the noble son Subhuti. For he dwells nowhere at all. Thus is he said to be one who dwells free of passion who “dwells free of passion.”’”⁴⁷

Ten: The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata attain any such dharma in the presence of Dipamkara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One?”⁴⁸

Subhuti replied, “No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not attain any such dharma in the presence of Dipamkara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if any bodhisattva should thus claim, ‘I shall bring about a transformation of the world,’ their claim would be untrue. And how so? A transformation of the world,⁴⁹ Subhuti, a ‘transformation of the world’ is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus does he speak of a ‘transformation of the world.’

“Therefore, Subhuti, a bodhisattva’s thoughts should not be attached to anything.⁵⁰ Their thoughts should not be attached to a sight, nor should their thoughts be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma.

“Subhuti, imagine a person⁵¹ with an immense, perfect body⁵² whose bodily existence is like that of Mount Sumeru.⁵³ What do you think, Subhuti? Would such bodily existence be great?”⁵⁴

Subhuti replied, “It would be great, Bhagavan. Such bodily existence would be great, Sugata. And why? Because bodily existence, Bhagavan, bodily existence is said by the Tathagata to be no existence. Thus does he speak of ‘bodily existence.’”

Eleven: The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? If there were as many rivers as there are grains of sand in the river of the Ganges, would the number of grains of sand in all those rivers be great?”

Subhuti replied, “The number of rivers would be great, Bhagavan, how much more so their grains of sand.”

The Buddha said, “I shall tell you, Subhuti, so you shall know. If a man or woman covered as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all those rivers with the seven treasures and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully enlightened ones, what do you think, Subhuti, would the body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman be great?”

Subhuti replied, “It would be great, Bhagavan, great, indeed, Sugata. The body of merit produced as a result by that man or woman would be great.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, if instead of giving the gift of all those worlds covered with the seven treasures, a noble son or daughter grasped but one four-line verse of this teaching and made it known and explained it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater.”⁵⁵

Twelve: “Furthermore, Subhuti, in the world of devas, humans, and asuras, wherever a single four-line verse of this teaching is spoken or explained, that place shall become a sanctuary.⁵⁶ How much more so, Subhuti, if someone memorizes, recites, and masters this entire teaching and explains it in detail to others. For in that place, Subhuti, dwells a teacher or someone who represents a teacher.”

Thirteen: Upon hearing these words, the venerable Subhuti asked, “Bhagavan, what is the name of this teaching, and how should we remember it?”

The Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, “The name of this teaching, Subhuti, is the Prajnaparamita.⁵⁷ Thus should you remember it. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is the perfection of wisdom, the Tathagata says is no perfection.

“Subhuti, what do you think? Is there any such dharma spoken by the Tathagata?”

Subhuti said, “No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma spoken by the Tathagata.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Are there many specks of dust in the billion-world-system of a universe?”

Subhuti said, “Many, Bhagavan, there are many specks of dust, Sugata. And how so? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says is a speck of dust, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says is no speck. Thus does he speak of a ‘speck of dust.’ And what the Tathagata says is a

world-system, the Tathagata says is no system. Thus does he speak of a 'world-system.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfected person?"⁵⁸

Subhuti said, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One cannot be seen by means of the thirty-two attributes of a perfected person. And why not? Because, Bhagavan, what the Tathagata says are the thirty-two attributes of a perfected person, Bhagavan, the Tathagata says are no attributes."⁵⁹ Thus does he speak of the 'thirty-two attributes of a perfected person.'"

The Buddha said, "Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman were to sacrifice their bodily existence every day as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and someone were to grasp but one four-line verse of this teaching and make it known and explain it to others, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater."⁶⁰

Fourteen: By the force of this teaching, the venerable Subhuti was moved to tears. Wiping his eyes, he said to the Buddha, "How remarkable, Bhagavan, how remarkable, Sugata, is this teaching the Bhagavan speaks for the benefit of those who seek the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who seek the best of paths. Ever since I became aware, Bhagavan, I have not heard a teaching such as this! They shall be the most wonderfully blessed of bodhisattvas, Bhagavan, who hear what is said in this sutra and think it is true. And how so? Bhagavan, the idea it is true is no idea it is true. Thus does the Tathagata speak of an idea it is true as an 'idea it is true.'

"Hearing such a teaching, Bhagavan, it isn't remarkable that I should believe it to be true. But in the future, Bhagavan, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, Bhagavan, those beings who grasp this teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, they shall be most remarkably blessed. And yet, Bhagavan, the idea of a self will not occur to them, nor shall the idea of a being, the idea of a life, or the idea of a soul occur to them. Neither an idea nor no idea will occur to them. And why not? Bhagavan, the idea of a self is no idea, and likewise the idea of a

being, a life, or a soul is no idea. And how so? Because buddhas and bhagavans are free from all ideas.”

This having been said, the Buddha told the venerable Subhuti, “So it is, Subhuti. So it is. Those beings shall be most remarkably blessed, Subhuti, who are not alarmed, not frightened, and not distressed by what is said in this sutra. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is no perfection. Moreover, Subhuti, what the Tathagata proclaims as the best of perfections is also proclaimed by countless buddhas and bhagavans. Thus is it called the ‘best of perfections.’

“So, too, Subhuti, is the Tathagata’s perfection of acceptance⁶¹ no perfection. And how so? Subhuti, when King Kali cut off my limbs, my ears, my nose, and my flesh, at that moment neither the thought of a self, a being, a life, nor a soul existed.⁶² There was neither a thought nor no thought. And why not? At that moment, Subhuti, if there had been the thought of a self, at that moment there would have also been the thought of ill will. Or if there had been the thought of a being, the thought of a life, or the thought of a soul, at that moment there would have been the thought of ill will. And why wasn’t there? Subhuti, during my five hundred lifetimes as the mendicant Ksanti, during that time there was no thought of a self. Nor was there the thought of a being, the thought of a life, or the thought of a soul.

“Therefore, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should abandon all thoughts in thinking about unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Their thoughts should not be attached to a form, nor should they be attached to a sound, a smell, a taste, a touch, or a dharma. Neither should their thoughts be attached to a dharma, nor should they be attached to no dharma. Their thoughts should not be attached to anything. And why not? Every attachment is no attachment. Thus does the Tathagata say that bodhisattvas should give a gift without being attached.

“Moreover, Subhuti, bodhisattvas should practice charity in this manner for the benefit of all beings.⁶³ And how so? Subhuti, the thought of a being is no thought. Thus are all the beings of whom the Tathagata speaks no beings. And how so? Subhuti, what the Tathagata says is so. What the Tathagata says is true. The Tathagata does not speak otherwise. Nor does the Tathagata speak

falsely. Indeed, Subhuti, in the dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata, there is nothing true and nothing untrue.

“Subhuti, a bodhisattva who practices charity captivated by objects is like someone who enters a dark place and can’t see a thing, while a bodhisattva who practices charity not captivated by objects is like a person with eyes at the end of the night when the sun shines forth who can see all manner of things.

“Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter should grasp this teaching and memorize it, recite it, master it, and explain it in detail to others, by means of his buddha knowledge the Tathagata will know them, the Tathagata will see them and will be aware of them, Subhuti, for all such beings as this produce and acquire an immeasurable, infinite body of merit.”⁶⁴

Fifteen: “Furthermore, Subhuti, if a man or woman sacrificed their bodily existence during the morning as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and they likewise sacrificed their bodily existence during midday as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and they sacrificed their bodily existence during the afternoon as many times as there are grains of sand in the Ganges, and they sacrificed their bodily existence in this manner for hundreds and thousands of millions and trillions of kalpas, and someone heard this teaching and did not reject it, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. How much more so if they wrote it down and studied it, memorized it, recited it, mastered it, and explained it in detail to others.”⁶⁵

“Furthermore, Subhuti, inconceivable and incomparable is this teaching, this teaching spoken by the Tathagata, Subhuti, for the benefit of those who set forth on the foremost of paths, for the benefit of those who set forth on the best of paths. For if someone grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters this teaching and explains it in detail to others, the Tathagata will know them, Subhuti. The Tathagata will see them, Subhuti. For all such beings produce a body of merit that has no limits, a body of merit that is inconceivable and incomparable, immeasurable and boundless. For all such beings, Subhuti, wear the same enlightenment upon their shoulders.”⁶⁶ And how so? Subhuti, this teaching cannot be heard, recited, mastered, or explained by beings of lesser aspiration: not by those who

imagine a self, nor by those who imagine a being, a life, or a soul. That would be impossible.

“Moreover, Subhuti, wherever this sutra is explained, that place shall be worthy of worship. Whether in the realm of devas, humans, or asuras, that place shall be honored with prostrations and circumambulations. That place shall be a sanctuary.”

Sixteen: “Nevertheless, Subhuti, the noble son or daughter who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this and contemplates it thoroughly and explains it in detail to others might suffer their contempt, their utter contempt. And why so? Subhuti, the bad karma created by them in past lives should result in an unfortunate rebirth. But now, by suffering such contempt, they put an end to the bad karma of their past lives and attain the enlightenment of buddhas.

“Subhuti, I recall in the past, during the countless, infinite kalpas prior to Dipamkara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One, I served eighty-four hundred, thousand, million, trillion other buddhas and served them without fail. Nevertheless, Subhuti, though I served those buddhas and bhagavans and served them without fail, in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, the body of merit of the person who grasps, memorizes, recites, and masters such a sutra as this, and explains it in detail to others will exceed my former body of merit not by a hundredfold or a thousandfold or a hundred thousandfold or a millionfold or a hundred millionfold or a thousand millionfold or a hundred-thousand millionfold, but by an amount that cannot be measured, calculated, illustrated, characterized, or even imagined. Subhuti, were I to describe this noble son or daughter’s body of merit, the full extent of the body of merit this noble son or daughter would thereby produce and acquire, it would bewilder and confuse people’s minds. Inconceivable, Subhuti, is this teaching spoken by the Tathagata, and inconceivable is the result you should expect.”

Seventeen: Again, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, if someone sets forth on the bodhisattva path, how should they behave? How should they practice? And how should they control their thoughts?”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, someone who sets forth on the bodhisattva path should think this thought: ‘In the realm of unconditional nirvana, I shall liberate all beings. And while I thus liberate beings, not a single being is liberated.’ And how so? Subhuti, if the thought of a being occurs to a bodhisattva, they cannot be called a ‘bodhisattva.’ Neither can someone to whom the thought of a life or the thought of a soul occurs be called a ‘bodhisattva.’ And why not? Subhuti, there is no such dharma as ‘setting forth on the bodhisattva path.’⁶⁷

“What do you think, Subhuti? When the Tathagata was with Dipamkara Tathagata, did he realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?”

To this the venerable Subhuti answered, “Bhagavan, as I understand the meaning of what the Tathagata has taught, when the Tathagata was with Dipamkara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.”

To this the Buddha replied, “So it is, Subhuti. So it is. When the Tathagata was with Dipamkara Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One, he did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Moreover, Subhuti, if the Tathagata had realized any such dharma, Dipamkara Tathagata would not have prophesied, ‘Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully enlightened one named Sakyamuni.’ Subhuti, it was because the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, that Dipamkara Tathagata prophesied, ‘Young man, in the future you shall become the tathagata, the arhan, the fully enlightened one named Sakyamuni.’ And how so? ‘Tathagata,’ Subhuti, is another name for what is truly so.

“Subhuti, if anyone should claim, ‘The Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment,’ their claim would be untrue. Subhuti, they would be making a false statement about me. And how so? Subhuti, the Tathagata did not realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment. Furthermore, Subhuti, in the dharma realized and taught by the Tathagata there is nothing true or untrue. Thus does the Tathagata

say 'all dharmas of the buddhas are dharmas of the buddhas.' And how so? 'All dharmas,' Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no dharmas. Thus, are all dharmas called 'dharmas of the buddhas.'

"Subhuti, imagine a perfected person with an immense, perfect body."⁶⁸

The venerable Subhuti said, "Bhagavan, this perfected person who the Tathagata says has an 'immense, perfect body,' Bhagavan, the Tathagata says has no body. Thus is it called an 'immense, perfect body.'"

The Buddha said, "So it is, Subhuti. If a bodhisattva says, 'I shall liberate beings,' they are not called a 'bodhisattva.' And why not? Subhuti, is there any such dharma as a 'bodhisattva'?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. There is no such dharma as a 'bodhisattva.'"

The Buddha said, "And beings, Subhuti, 'beings,' are said by the Tathagata to be no beings. Thus are they called 'beings.' And thus does the Tathagata say 'all dharmas are without a self, all dharmas are without a life, an individuality, or a soul.'⁶⁹

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva should claim, 'I shall bring about a transformation of the world,' their claim would be untrue. And how so? A transformation of the world, Subhuti, a 'transformation of the world' is said by the Tathagata to be no transformation. Thus is it called a 'transformation of the world.'⁷⁰

"Subhuti, when a bodhisattva believes and understands dharmas that have no self are dharmas that have no self, the Tathagata, the Arhan, the Fully Enlightened One pronounces that person a fearless bodhisattva indeed."

Eighteen: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a physical eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a physical eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a divine eye?"

Subhuti replied, "So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a divine eye."

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a prajna eye?"

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a prajna eye.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a dharma eye?”

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a dharma eye.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? Does the Tathagata possess a buddha eye?”

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. The Tathagata possesses a buddha eye.”

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, what do you think? As many grains of sand as there are in the great river of the Ganges, does the Tathagata not speak of them as grains of sand?”

Subhuti replied, “So he does, Bhagavan. So he does, Sugata. The Tathagata speaks of them as grains of sand.”

The Buddha said, “What do you think, Subhuti? If there were as many rivers as all the grains of sand in the great river of the Ganges and as many worlds as there are grains of sand in all these rivers, would there be many worlds?”

Subhuti replied, “So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be many worlds.”

The Buddha said, “And as many beings as there might be in those worlds, Subhuti, I would know their myriad streams of thought.⁷¹ And how so? Streams of thought, Subhuti, what the Tathagata speaks of as ‘streams of thought’ are no streams. Thus are they called ‘streams of thought.’ And how so? Subhuti, a past thought cannot be found. A future thought cannot be found. Nor can a present thought be found.

Nineteen: “Subhuti, what do you think? If some noble son or daughter covered the billion worlds of this universe with the seven treasures and gave them all as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully enlightened ones, would the body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter be great?”

Subhuti replied, “It would be great, Bhagavan. It would be great, indeed, Sugata.”

The Buddha said, “So it would, Subhuti. So it would. The body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be

immeasurably, infinitely great. And how so? Subhuti, if there were a body of merit, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a body of merit as a 'body of merit.'⁷²

Twenty: "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the perfection of a physical body?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the perfection of a physical body. And why not? The perfection of a physical body, Bhagavan, the 'perfection of a physical body' is spoken of by the Tathagata as no perfection. Thus does he speak of the 'perfection of a physical body.'"

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes?"

Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes. And why not? Bhagavan, what the Tathagata speaks of as the acquisition of attributes is spoken of by the Tathagata as no acquisition of attributes. Thus does he speak of the 'acquisition of attributes.'"⁷³

Twenty-one: The Buddha said, "Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: 'I teach a dharma'? Subhuti, if someone should claim the Tathagata teaches a dharma, their claim would be untrue. Such a view of me, Subhuti, would be a misconception. And how so? In the teaching of a dharma, Subhuti, in the 'teaching of a dharma,' there is no such dharma to be found as the 'teaching of a dharma.'"

Upon hearing these words, the venerable Subhuti asked the Buddha, "Bhagavan, will there be any beings in the future, in the final epoch, in the final period, in the final five hundred years of the dharma-ending age, who hear a dharma such as this and believe it?"

The Buddha said, "Neither beings, Subhuti, nor no beings. And how so? 'Beings,' Subhuti, all beings are spoken of by the Tathagata, Subhuti, as no beings. Thus does he speak of 'beings.'"⁷⁴

Twenty-two: "Subhuti, what do you think? Did the Tathagata realize any such dharma as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?"

The venerable Subhuti replied, "No, indeed, Bhagavan. The Tathagata did not realize any such dharma, Bhagavan, as unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."

The Buddha said, “So it is, Subhuti. So it is. The slightest dharma neither exists nor is found therein. Thus is it called ‘unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.’”⁷⁵

Twenty-three: “Furthermore, Subhuti, there is nothing in this dharma that is different or not the same. Thus is it called ‘unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.’ Without a self, without a being, without a life, without a soul, without any difference, this unexcelled, perfect enlightenment is realized by means of all auspicious dharmas. And how so? Auspicious dharmas, Subhuti, ‘auspicious dharmas’ are spoken of by the Tathagata as no dharmas. Thus does he speak of ‘auspicious dharmas.’”⁷⁶

Twenty-four: “Moreover, Subhuti, if a man or woman brought together as many piles of the seven treasures as all the Mount Sumerus in the billion worlds of the universe and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, the arhans, the fully enlightened ones, and a noble son or daughter took but a single four-line verse of this teaching of Prajnaparamita and made it known to others, Subhuti, their body of merit would be greater by more than a hundredfold, indeed, by an amount beyond comparison.”

Twenty-five: “Subhuti, what do you think? Does it occur to the Tathagata: ‘I liberate beings’? Surely, Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, the being does not exist who is liberated by the Tathagata. Subhuti, if any being were liberated by the Tathagata, the Tathagata would be attached to a self. He would be attached to a being, attached to a life, or attached to a soul. Attachment to a self, Subhuti, is said by the Tathagata to be no attachment. Yet foolish people remain attached. And foolish people, Subhuti, are said by the Tathagata to be no people. Thus does he speak of ‘foolish people.’”⁷⁷

Twenty-six: “Subhuti, what do you think? Can the Tathagata be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes?”

Subhuti replied, “No, indeed, Bhagavan. As I understand the meaning of what the Buddha says, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes.”

The Buddha said, “Well done, Subhuti. Well done. So it is, Subhuti. It is as you claim. The Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes. And why not? Subhuti, if the

Tathagata could be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes, a universal king would be a tathagata. Hence, the Tathagata cannot be seen by means of the acquisition of attributes.”⁷⁸

The Buddha then spoke two verses:

“Who looks for me in form
who seeks me in a voice
indulges in wasted effort
such people see me not”⁷⁹

A buddha is seen by means of the Dharma
the Dharma is the teacher’s body
the Dharma itself isn’t known
nor can it be known.⁸⁰

Twenty-seven: “Subhuti, what do you think? Was it due to the acquisition of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment? Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Subhuti, it could not have been due to the acquisition of attributes that the Tathagata realized unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.”⁸¹

“Furthermore, Subhuti, someone may claim ‘those who set forth on the bodhisattva path announce the destruction or end of some dharma.’ Subhuti, you should hold no such view. And why not? Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path do not announce the destruction or end of any dharma.”⁸²

Twenty-eight: “Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are grains of sand in the Ganges and covered them with the seven treasures and gave them as a gift to the tathagatas, to the arhans, to the fully enlightened ones, and a bodhisattva gained an acceptance of the selfless, birthless nature of dharmas, the body of merit produced as a result would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And yet, Subhuti, this fearless bodhisattva would not acquire a body of merit.”

The venerable Subhuti said, “But surely, Bhagavan, this bodhisattva would acquire a body of merit!”

The Buddha replied, “They would, Subhuti, but without becoming attached to it. Thus do I speak of ‘acquiring.’”

Twenty-nine: “Furthermore, Subhuti, if anyone should claim that the Tathagata goes or comes or stands or sits or lies down, Subhuti, they do not understand the meaning of my words. And why not? Subhuti, those who are called ‘tathagatas’ do not go anywhere, nor do they come from anywhere. Thus are they called ‘tathagatas, arhans, and fully enlightened ones.’”⁸³

Thirty: “Furthermore, Subhuti, if a noble son or daughter took as many worlds as there are specks of dust in a billion-world universe and by an expenditure of limitless energy ground them into atoms, Subhuti, what do you think, would there be a great pile of atoms?”⁸⁴

Subhuti replied, “So there would, Bhagavan. So there would, Sugata. There would be a great pile of atoms. And how so? If a great pile of atoms existed, Bhagavan, the Tathagata would not have spoken of a ‘pile of atoms.’⁸⁵ And why not? Bhagavan, this pile of atoms of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no pile. Thus does he speak of a ‘pile of atoms.’ Also, Bhagavan, this billion-world universe of which the Tathagata speaks is said by the Tathagata to be no universe. Thus does he speak of a ‘billion-world universe.’ And how so? Bhagavan, if a universe existed, an attachment to an entity would exist.⁸⁶ But whenever the Tathagata speaks of an attachment to an entity, the Tathagata speaks of it as no attachment. Thus does he speak of an ‘attachment to an entity.’”⁸⁷

The Buddha said, “Subhuti, an attachment to an entity is nonsensical and inexplicable. Yet foolish people are attached.”

Thirty-one: “And how so? Subhuti, if someone should claim that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, or that the Tathagata speaks of a view of a being, a view of a life, or a view of a soul, would such a claim be true, Subhuti?”

Subhuti said, “No, Bhagavan. No, indeed, Sugata. Such a claim would not be true. And why not? Bhagavan, when the Tathagata speaks of a view of a self, the Tathagata speaks of it as no view. Thus does he speak of a ‘view of a self.’”

The Buddha said, “Indeed, Subhuti, so it is. Those who set forth on the bodhisattva path should know, view, believe, and understand all dharmas but do so without being attached to the idea of a

dharma. And why not? The idea of a dharma, Subhuti, the ‘idea of a dharma’ is said by the Tathagata to be no idea. Thus does he speak of the ‘idea of a dharma.’”

Thirty-two: “Furthermore, Subhuti, if a fearless bodhisattva covered measureless, infinite worlds with the seven treasures and gave them as an offering, and a noble son or daughter took but a single four-line verse of this teaching of Prajnaparamita and memorized it, made it known, recited it, mastered it, and explained it in detail to others, the body of merit produced as a result by that noble son or daughter would be immeasurably, infinitely greater. And how should they explain it? By not explaining. Thus should they explain it.

As a lamp, a cataract, a shooting star
an illusion, a dewdrop, a bubble
a dream, a cloud, a flash of lightning
view all created things like this.”

All this was spoken by the Buddha to the delight of the elder Subhuti. The monks and nuns, the laymen and laywomen, and all the devas, humans, asuras, and gandharvas of the world were also greatly pleased with what the Buddha said.

15. This translation is based on the Sanskrit.

16. The Buddha was often joined by the 1,250 followers of five men he had converted early in his career.

17. The Sanskrit for offering is *pinda*, which refers to anything made of parts, from a ball of rice to a world (see section 30).

18. Subhuti followed the sravaka path of early Buddhism with its focus on the renunciation of desire and attainment of nirvana. The word *sravaka* means “hearer” and refers to those who actually heard the Buddha teach.

19. Epithets used to refer to the Buddha included *bhagavan*, “bestower of prosperity,” *sugata*, “well gone,” *tathagata*, “thus gone,” and *arhan* or arhat, “free of rebirth.”

20. Bodhisattvas are not listed in any edition of this text, but we learn at the end of this sutra that lay residents of Sravasti were also present. Hence, these must be the “bodhisattvas” to whom Subhuti is referring and on behalf of whom he addresses the Buddha.

21. The “best of blessings” refers to the Buddha’s example and the “greatest of trusts” to his teaching.

22. The goals of the bodhisattva path are enlightenment and the liberation of others, in contrast to the freedom from desire and nirvana of the sravaka path.
23. Subhuti appears interested in the bodhisattva path, but his questions are those of a sravaka, hoping to suppress desire.
24. The Buddha's solution is homeopathic rather than allopathic: you don't control your thoughts, you transform them, which you do by vowing to liberate others.
25. The vow creates a path that isn't a path for beings who aren't beings.
26. The practice of charity is the first of the paramitas. The sutra begins with alms but focuses on the gift of liberation.
27. The "body of merit" (*punya-skandha*—not *punya-samcaya*, or "pile of merit") is created by a bodhisattva's selfless vow. It was also called sambhoga-kaya (body of realization) and was one of every buddha's three bodies. The original meaning of *skandha* was "tree trunk" or "pillar," and it was the word Jains used to refer to the body of an individual.
28. Buddhas acquire thirty-two physical attributes that distinguish their nirmanakaya, or manifestation body. The Buddha, however, is asking about the sambhoga-kaya, or realization body, created by the vow to liberate all beings.
29. Subhuti understands that the subjects addressed by the Buddha—and he thinks the Buddha is referring to his visible body—are granted no more reality than the illusoriness words bestow. As the Lankavatara Sutra (II.3) might put it, "a statement about x is a statement about 'no x.'"
30. Subhuti needs new eyes. It turns out the body the Buddha is referring to is the "body of merit," or sambhoga-kaya, which is visible, but, being free of attributes, only to buddhas and those near the end of the bodhisattva path.
31. The teaching is over but not the sutra. Subhuti wonders if such a teaching will be understood by those to come.
32. Early Buddhists assumed people in the future would be less spiritually capable or inclined and envisioned a sequence of four five-hundred-year stages. The last stage ended four hundred years ago, which explains a lot.
33. Because it was initially used for lions and elephants and only later for those who shared their courage, I've translated the term *mahasattva* (great being) as "fearless."
34. Realization also requires good karma—especially to meet a teacher or a teaching. Hence the importance of meritorious words, deeds, and thoughts.
35. This refers to a bodhisattva's first experience of the "body of merit." The Sanskrit term *prasada* was often used in reference to the serenity and confidence the Buddha felt when he saw his first monk and resolved to leave home.
36. What the Buddha knows and sees is the body he shares with those who have vowed to liberate all beings. Such a vow is free of conceptions. Hence, the body that results is free of attributes.
37. Sravakas see dharmas as real; bodhisattvas see them as expedient means, rafts for crossing the endless sea of existence. "No dharma" lacks such usefulness, as it doesn't lead to liberation.

38. The dharma realized by a buddha's sambhoga-kaya and taught by a buddha's nirmana-kaya and referred to as "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment" is the dharma-kaya, a buddha's third, and only real, body.

39. Subhuti's understanding is that of a sravaka and rests on what became known as the Abhidharma: reality seen as a matrix of dharmas, among which three were considered unconditioned: space and two kinds of nirvana. Subhuti thinks the Buddha's enlightenment arose from these. The Buddha corrects his understanding in the next section.

40. The seven treasures include gold, silver, aquamarine, carnelian, nacre, crystal, and coral.

41. Subhuti's understanding is limited here to the teaching of emptiness, that whatever is pointed to is only real in the sense that it is being pointed to.

42. The earliest form of the Diamond Sutra was said to have been in verse. Of the three hundred four-line verses that comprised the original, only three remain.

43. Any limits to the sambhoga-kaya, or body of realization, dissolve when this teaching is shared with others. It is from this that the nirmana-kaya of buddhahood is born, not from the uncreated, unconditioned dharmas of space or nirvana.

44. The teaching gives rise to realization (the sambhoga-kaya) and the teacher (the nirmana-kaya). The teaching itself (the dharma-kaya) is no teaching. Thus are the dharmas of a buddha to be viewed as "no dharmas."

45. Having responded to Subhuti's question about the bodhisattva path, the Buddha turns to the sravaka path Subhuti had followed up until then, the first stage of which was to realize impermanence—hence, the river metaphor.

46. The goal of the sravaka path was to escape the round of rebirth by becoming free from desire. The *srotapanna* (who finds the river), the *agamin* (who returns once more), the *anagamin* (who returns no more), and the *arhan* or arhat (free from rebirth) marked its four stages.

47. Free of desire, Subhuti has reached the final goal of the sravaka path, no rebirth. Despite his apparent interest in the bodhisattva path, nonattachment is the best he can do.

48. The Buddha contrasts the final stage of his own career with Subhuti's. While Subhuti obtained freedom from rebirth, it was in the presence of Dipamkara Buddha that Sakyamuni achieved the acceptance of non-arising (*anutpattika-dharma-ksanti*)—the ability to accept and bear the truth that nothing arises. The sravaka path begins with the realization that everything is impermanent. The final stage of the bodhisattva path begins with the realization and acceptance that nothing arises in the first place; hence, nothing ceases. Impermanence is a fiction.

49. The first attainment following such realization is the transformation of one's world.

50. Kumarajiva's Chinese rendering of this line has become a touchstone of Zen: 應無所住而生其心.

51. The Sanskrit for "person" is *purusa*. In ancient Indian lore, Purusa was the name of the cosmic being who sacrificed his body to create all living creatures.

52. A bodhisattva's second attainment is a perfect body.
53. Sumeru is the mountain at the center of every world.
54. The Sanskrit text has *atma-bhava* for "bodily existence."
55. Just as Purusa created all beings by the sacrifice of his body, a bodhisattva's sambhoga-kaya (body of merit or of realization) is created by the vow to liberate all beings. The full realization of that body, however, does not occur until one is near the end of the bodhisattva path, which in the Buddha's case was when he met Dipamkara.
56. The Sanskrit *caitya* refers to a place made holy by the presence of a teacher's remains, a tree, a spring, or a text.
57. The term *pra-jna* means "before knowledge." Depending on how one parses *paramita*, as derived from *parama* it means "perfection," as a combination of *param* and *ita* it means "transcendent"—what leads beyond.
58. The division of this sutra into thirty-two sections to mirror the Buddha's material body was the work of Prince Zhaoming 昭明 (501–531), son of Emperor Wu 梁武帝.
59. Anything that is a part or made of parts has no self-existence. This is not only true of worlds and specks of dust but also bodies and attributes.
60. The sutra ups the ante of the material gift, from the seven treasures to one's own body. A buddha's sambhoga-kaya is not based on sacrifice or renunciation but on realization—you can't sacrifice or renounce what you don't have.
61. The perfection of acceptance (*ksanti*) is the third paramita. The sutra focuses on three of the six—the gift of liberation, the acceptance of non-arising, and the wisdom of nonattachment. The other three—morality, devotion, and meditation—are all present at the beginning.
62. Attributes are seen as no attributes.
63. The gift, again, is the gift of liberation.
64. Anyone who vows to liberate all beings thereby shares the same body of realization, the same sambhoga-kaya, as the Buddha. Thus, the Buddha knows, sees, and is aware of them.
65. Sacrificing one's life is considered the ultimate form of charity but still doesn't compare with transmission of this text. Writing out such a text, or paying someone to do so, was seen as a way to earn merit. Many of the early copies we have today had their origin in this practice.
66. Beneath the same robe of enlightenment worn by the Buddha, practitioners share the same sambhoga-kaya, or body of merit, the same realization. This sentence is missing in the earliest extant Sanskrit texts but is present in all Chinese translations.
67. The Buddha repeats his earlier response but changes the focus to the giver of the gift and the bodhisattva's nonattachment to the path.
68. The Buddha focuses here on the bodhisattva, the nature of the body of realization, and the powers of realization.

69. Here, *posa* (“individuality”) replaces *sattva* (“being”) in the standard list (see section 3).
70. Again, the two attainments of a bodhisattva are a perfect body and the transformation of a world—here, reversed.
71. The physical eye sees grains of sand, the divine eye the grains of sand in as many rivers as there are grains of sand, the prajna eye as many beings as there are grains of sand, the dharma eye their streams of thought, and the buddha eye their thoughts as no thoughts.
72. The Buddha doesn’t speak falsely (see section 14), only of what isn’t real.
73. No body, no parts.
74. No teacher, no teaching, no one taught.
75. Nothing realized, nothing to realize.
76. Auspicious dharmas are those that promote liberation. Only those free of self and other qualify.
77. What distinguishes a fool is belief in a self.
78. A universal king (*cakra-vartin*) also acquires the thirty-two attributes of a buddha. Hence, attributes do not make a buddha.
79. The Buddha returns to the question he asked Subhuti in section 5, “Can you see me now?” Among a buddha’s thirty-two attributes are a perfect physique and a melodious voice.
80. The Dharma (and a buddha’s dharma body) alone is real, but being real, it can’t be known.
81. A buddha’s physical manifestation is the concomitant not the cause of buddhahood.
82. Nothing gained and nothing lost. The reference is to the sravaka’s quest for nirvana.
83. The Buddha returns to what prompted the question that began this sutra: the Buddha’s daily begging round.
84. The text here contrasts a pile (*samcaya*) of atoms and a body (*skandha*) of merit. In ancient India, two billion atoms (*paramanu*) were thought to comprise a fingertip.
85. The Buddha only speaks of what isn’t real.
86. The word *pinda* (“entity”) also began this sutra, but as a ball of rice.
87. Again, the Buddha only speaks of what isn’t real, especially when it’s something to which we’re attached.

SELECTIONS FROM THE VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA

Introduction

One thing that distinguishes the Heart and Diamond from the early sutras of the Buddha, such as those in the Samyukta Agama, is the presence of the bodhisattva. When the bodhisattva first appeared in Buddhist texts, it was to highlight the Buddha's own attainment of enlightenment. That became the defining characteristic, someone who vows to attain bodhi, rather than nirvana. The bodhisattva then became the new ideal, one Mahayana texts such as this contrasted with the ideal of the arhat, represented by the Buddha's own disciples.

Another significant development was the inclusion of the laity among practitioners. As Buddhism spread, lay members began incorporating the spiritual practices of monks and nuns into their own lives and seeing themselves as more than supporters of their monastic counterparts. Hence, a sutra like the Vimalakirti 維摩詰經, extolling the attainments of a lay practitioner, found a welcome audience.

The text first showed up in China in the form of a translation by the Yuezhi layman Zhi Qian (fl. 200–250). But the translation everyone reads is the one made by Kumarajiva in 406. That was the one I read every evening on the steps of Haiming Monastery 海明寺—waiting for one of the nuns to beat a stick on a rock announcing mealtime. It was his translation of the Diamond that introduced me to the Prajnaparamita earlier. Despite his eminently readable rendering of that text, I didn't understand what all those piles of jewels were doing and looked for something that made more sense, which was when I discovered the Vimalakirti. It read as if it was composed for a performance on a stage—a multiact play that presented all those teachings of the Buddha that had led me to quit graduate school and move to a monastery in Taiwan.

The sutra begins outside the city of Vaisali in the garden given to the Buddha and his disciples by the courtesan Amrapali. Vaisali was

on the north shore of the Ganges, across from Patna, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha. It was the scene of many of the Buddha's sermons, and on this particular occasion, the Bhagavan told his audience, "As your minds become pure, so do the lands in which you live." Touching the ground, he turned the place where he was speaking into a land of jewels, then back again, whereupon those in attendance realized all worlds—even a paradise—were illusions.

With the stage thus set, the Buddha tells his followers that the merchant Vimalakirti is ill and asked for volunteers to convey his good wishes to the eminent layman. One by one, they turn their teacher down, citing previous occasions when Vimalakirti exposed certain shortcomings of their understanding. Finally, Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, agrees, and the remainder of the sutra recounts what took place in a ten-by-ten room in Vimalakirti's house. I've chosen two of its dozen chapters to provide a sense of what it might have been like to have been in the audience of that Dharma drama.

Selections from the Vimalakirti Sutra⁸⁸

CHAPTER SEVEN: BEINGS

Manjusri asked Vimalakirti, “How do bodhisattvas view beings?”

Vimalakirti said, “Just as a magician views the illusory people he conjures, this is how bodhisattvas view beings. Just as a wise man views the moon on the water or his face in a mirror, like a mirage in summer, or the sound of an echo, or a cloud in the sky, like a mass of foam or a bubble, solid as a banana tree trunk or long-lasting as lightning, like a fifth element⁸⁹ or a sixth skandha, a seventh sense faculty, a thirteenth ayatana, or a nineteenth dhatu,⁹⁰ this is how bodhisattvas should view beings. Like form in the formless realm, like a sprout from a burned seed, like a body for a srotapanna, like entering the womb for an anagamin, like the three poisons⁹¹ for an arhat, like desire, anger, or immorality for a bodhisattva who has attained the acceptance of nonarising,⁹² like traces of affliction for a buddha, like color for a blind man, like the breath during the Samadhi of Cessation,⁹³ like bird tracks in the sky, like the child of a barren woman, like the afflictions of an illusory person, like something someone awake saw in a dream, like acquiring a body upon entering nirvana, like a fire with no smoke, this is how bodhisattvas view beings.”

Manjusri said, “But if bodhisattvas view beings like that, how do they practice compassion?”

Vimalakirti said, “When bodhisattvas view beings like that, they think to themselves, ‘I will explain this teaching to them.’ This is true compassion. They practice the compassion of complete extinction because it doesn’t give birth to anything. They practice the compassion of utter calm because it is free of affliction. They practice the compassion of uniformity because it doesn’t vary over time. They practice the compassion of noncontention because it doesn’t create strife. They practice the compassion of nonduality because it doesn’t take sides. They practice the compassion of nondestruction because it is already exhausted. They practice the compassion of firmness because its resolve is unshakeable. They practice the compassion of purity because the nature of everything is

pure. They practice the compassion of no limits because it is like space. They practice the compassion of an arhat because it breaks through passions and delusions. They practice the compassion of a bodhisattva because it brings beings peace. They practice the compassion of a tathagata because it realizes what is real. They practice the compassion of a buddha because it enlightens beings. They practice the compassion of spontaneity because it doesn't require a cause. They practice the compassion of enlightenment because it combines all meanings. They practice the compassion of no comparison because it cuts through preferences. They practice the compassion of great kindness because it leads to the Great Vehicle. They practice the compassion of no weariness because it penetrates emptiness and no self. They practice the compassion of offering the Dharma because it doesn't begrudge anything. They practice the compassion of observing the precepts because it transforms immorality. They practice the compassion of forbearance because it protects others and themselves. They practice the compassion of perseverance because it is responsible for others. They practice the compassion of meditation because it is free of sensation. They practice the compassion of wisdom because there is nothing it doesn't know. They practice the compassion of skillful means because there is nothing it doesn't manifest. They practice the compassion of hiding nothing because it is direct and sincere. They practice the compassion of deep thought because it doesn't confuse practices. They practice the compassion of no deceit because it isn't false. They practice the compassion of peace and joy because it conveys the happiness of buddhas. This is how bodhisattvas practice compassion."

Manjusri asked again, "What do bodhisattvas mean by compassion?"

Vimalakirti answered, "Sharing the merit that they've created with all beings."

Manjusri asked, "What do they mean by joy?"

Vimalakirti answered, "Being happy helping others and feeling no regret."

Manjusri asked, "What do they call renunciation?"

Vimalakirti answered, "Expecting nothing from the blessings they bestow."

Manjusri asked again, "Faced with the fear of samsara, on what should a bodhisattva rely?"

Vimalakirti said, "Faced with the fear of samsara, a bodhisattva should rely on the power of the Tathagata's merit."

Manjusri asked again, "If bodhisattvas wish to rely on the power of the Tathagata's merit, on what should they concentrate?"

Vimalakirti said, "Bodhisattvas who wish to rely on the power of the Tathagata's merit should concentrate on the liberation of all beings."

Manjusri asked, "If they wish to liberate beings, what do they free them from?"

Vimalakirti said, "If they wish to liberate beings, they free them from afflictions."

Manjusri asked, "If they wish to free them from afflictions, what should they practice?"

Vimalakirti said, "They should practice right mindfulness."⁹⁴

Manjusri asked, "And how should they practice right mindfulness?"

Vimalakirti said, "They should practice what doesn't begin and what doesn't end."

Manjusri asked, "What is it that doesn't begin, and what is it that doesn't end?"

Vimalakirti said, "What isn't good is what doesn't begin, and what is good is what doesn't end."

Manjusri said, "What is the source of what is good and what isn't good?"

Vimalakirti said, "The individual is their source."

Manjusri asked, "What is the source of the individual?"

Vimalakirti said, "Desire is the source of the individual."

Manjusri asked, "What is the source of desire?"

Vimalakirti said, "Mistaken discriminations are its source."

Manjusri asked, "What is the source of mistaken discriminations?"

Vimalakirti said, "Distorted conceptions are their source."

Manjusri asked, "What is the source of distorted conceptions?"

Vimalakirti said, “Nowhere is their source.”

Manjusri asked, “And what is the source of nowhere?”

Vimalakirti said, “Nowhere has no source. Manjusri, everything comes from nowhere.”

At that time, there was a female deva present in Vimalakirti’s room. Seeing these great masters and hearing them speak the Dharma, she manifested her body and scattered celestial flowers over the bodhisattvas and the disciples.⁹⁵ As the flowers fell on the bodhisattvas, they dropped off. But as they fell on the senior disciples, they stuck and wouldn’t come off.

The deva asked Sariputra, “Why are you trying to shake off the flowers?”⁹⁶

Sariputra answered, “These flowers aren’t real.”

The deva said, “Don’t say these flowers aren’t real. And why not? There is nothing to distinguish in these flowers. It is you, good sir, who creates the idea of distinctions. When someone who leaves home for the Dharma distinguishes something, it isn’t real. If they didn’t distinguish anything, that would be real. You see that the flowers didn’t cling to the bodhisattvas because they have already freed themselves of ideas of discrimination.

For example, when someone is afraid, nonhumans⁹⁷ can take advantage of them. Thus, because the disciples are afraid of samsara, such things as form, sound, smell, taste, and contact can be used to take advantage of them. Those who have already freed themselves of fear can’t be bothered by any of the five desires. Flowers cling to the bodies of those whose traces of affliction are still present and don’t cling when such traces are gone.”

Sariputra said, “How long have you been in this room?”

The deva answered, “I have been in this room ever since you, venerable sir, were liberated.”

Sariputra said, “Then you have been here quite a while.”

The deva said, “How long has it been since you, venerable sir, were liberated?”

Sariputra was silent and didn’t answer.

The deva said “Why, wise and venerable sir, are you silent?”

Sariputra said, “Liberation isn’t something one can talk about. Hence, I don’t know what to say.”

The deva said, “Speech and words are all signs of liberation. And how so? Liberation isn’t inside or outside or anywhere in between. Neither are words inside or outside or anywhere in between. Thus, Sariputra, liberation can be talked about without renouncing words. And how so? All dharmas are signs of liberation.”

Sariputra said, “Is getting free of depravity, anger, and delusion no longer liberation?”⁹⁸

The deva said, “It was for the excessively proud that the Buddha said getting free of depravity, anger, and delusion is liberation. If no one was excessively proud, the Buddha would have said the nature of depravity, anger, and delusion is liberation.”

Sariputra said, “Wonderful! Truly wonderful! Good deva, what is it that you attained? And what have you realized that you can speak like this?”

The deva said, “I have attained nothing and have realized nothing. That is why I can speak like this. And how so? Whoever attains something, or whoever realizes something, becomes proud in regard to the Dharma.”

Sariputra said, “Which of the Three Vehicles do you follow?”⁹⁹

The deva said, “Because the teachings of sravakas transform beings, I became a sravaka. But because the teachings of pratyekabuddhas also transform beings, I became a pratyekabuddha. And because the teachings of great compassion transform beings, I became a follower of the Mahayana. Sariputra, just as a person who enters a magnolia forest smells the scent of magnolias and nothing else, likewise, whoever enters this room inhales nothing but the fragrance of the Buddha’s merit and has no interest in the fragrance of the merit of sravakas or pratyekabuddhas. Sariputra, whenever Sakra, Brahma, and the Lokapala guardians of the four quarters,¹⁰⁰ along with celestial dragons and spirits, enter this room and hear these great masters speaking the true Dharma, and they inhale the fragrance of the Buddha’s merit, they leave with their minds inspired. Sariputra, I have been in this room for twelve years. Ever since then, I haven’t heard the teachings of the sravakas or pratyekabuddhas. I have heard only the inconceivable teachings of the buddhas about the great kindness and great compassion of bodhisattvas.

“Sariputra, eight incredibly rare things constantly appear in this room. And what are the eight? There is always a golden light in this room. It doesn’t vary day or night, and it isn’t due to the sun or moon. That is the first incredibly rare thing. Those who enter this room aren’t troubled by defilements. That is the second incredibly rare thing. Sakra and Brahma and the guardians of the four quarters, together with bodhisattvas from all directions, gather here without cease. That is the third incredibly rare thing. The irreversible teachings of the six paramitas¹⁰¹ are constantly spoken in this room. That is the fourth incredibly rare thing. The devas in this room constantly play the most beautiful music, the sound of which turns into countless teachings. That is the fifth incredibly rare thing. This room is filled with the jewels of the four great treasures,¹⁰² which the poor and needy come in search of and yet never exhaust. That is the sixth incredibly rare thing. This room is visited by Sakyamuni, Amita, Aksobhya, Ratnasri, Ratncis, Ratnacandra, Ratnavyha, Dusprasaha, Sarvarthasiddha, Simhasvara, and countless other buddhas of the ten directions of similar attainment. They come whenever the Master thinks of them and teach the most essential and precious teachings, then leave. That is the seventh incredibly rare thing. Finally, all the pure lands and jewel-adorned palaces of the heavens appear in this room. That is the eighth incredibly rare thing. Sariputra, these eight incredibly rare things constantly appear in this room. How can anyone who sees such inconceivable things be interested any longer in the teachings of sravakas?”

Sariputra said, “Why haven’t you changed your female form?”¹⁰³

The deva said, “Over the past twelve years, I have looked for my female form but have yet to find it. What is there to change? For example, if a magician conjured the illusion of a woman, and someone asked her, ‘Why haven’t you changed your female form,’ would that be a proper question or not?”

Sariputra said, “No, it wouldn’t. An illusion has no fixed form. What would there be to change?”

The deva said, “Everything is like this. Nothing has a fixed form. Why would you ask, ‘Why haven’t you changed your female form?’”

The deva then used her spiritual power to change Sariputra so that he appeared as a female deva, and she changed herself to look

like Sariputra. Then she asked him, “Why don’t you change your female form?”

Sariputra, who appeared as a female deva, answered, “I don’t understand how I changed into a female.”

The deva said, “Sariputra, if you could change your female form, then all women would be able to change theirs. Sariputra, it isn’t a woman who appears in a woman’s body. This is true of all women. Although they appear in a woman’s body, they are not women. This is why the Buddha said, ‘There is no male or female anything.’”

The deva then used her spiritual power to restore Sariputra. When he looked as he did before, she asked, “Sariputra, where are the attributes of your female body now?”

Sariputra said, “The attributes of my female body are neither here nor not here.”

The deva said, “This is true of all things. They are neither here nor not here. ‘Neither here nor not here,’ that is the teaching of the Buddha.”

Sariputra asked the deva, “When you die, where will you be reborn?”

The deva said, “Wherever those conjured by the Buddha are reborn, that is where I will be reborn.”

Sariputra said, “But none of those conjured by the Buddha are reborn.”

The deva said, “It’s the same with all beings. None of them are reborn.”

Sariputra asked the deva, “Will you eventually attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment?”

The deva said, “I will attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment when Sariputra becomes a fool again.”

Sariputra said, “But for me to become a fool again would be impossible.”

The deva said, “And for me to attain unexcelled, perfect enlightenment would likewise be impossible. And how so? Because enlightenment can’t be found anywhere. Hence, there is nothing to attain.”

Sariputra said, “What then does the statement mean, ‘Buddhas who have attained unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, and who now

attain it, and who will attain it in the future are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges?”

The deva said, “To say there are three periods of time is an example of conventional speech. It doesn’t mean enlightenment is past, future, or present. Sariputra, have you attained the goal of an arhat?”

Sariputra said, “There being nothing to attain, thus have I attained it.”

The deva said, “The same is true of buddhas and of bodhisattvas. There being nothing to attain, thus do they attain it.”

At that moment, Vimalakirti said, “Sariputra, this deva has made offerings to ninety-two million buddhas and is already able to exercise the spiritual powers of a bodhisattva. She has fulfilled her vows and has attained the acceptance of non-arising and the stage from which she will not regress. Because of her vows, she can appear at will to teach and transform others.”

CHAPTER NINE: THE DOOR OF NONDUALITY¹⁰⁴

At that time, Vimalakirti asked the group of bodhisattvas, “Would each of you kind sirs be good enough to say what is a bodhisattva’s door of nonduality?”

Among those in the assembly, a bodhisattva named Dharmavikurvana said, “Good Sir, arising and cessation are a duality. But since nothing arises, nothing ceases. Achieving an acceptance of nonarising, this is the door of nonduality.”

Srigandha Bodhisattva said, “The self and the possessions of a self are a duality. Because there is a self, there are possessions of a self. If there were no self, there would be no possessions of a self. This is the door of nonduality.”

Animisa Bodhisattva said, “Sensation and no sensation are a duality. If nothing is sensed, nothing can be found. Because nothing can be found, nothing is grasped, and nothing is let go, nothing is begun, and nothing is completed. This is the door of nonduality.”

Srikuta Bodhisattva said, “Defilement and purification are a duality. When we see the true nature of defilement, there is no sign of its purification, much less of its extinction. This is the door of nonduality.”

Bhadrajyotis Bodhisattva said, “Distraction and mindfulness are a duality. When there is no distraction, there is no mindfulness. When there is no mindfulness, there is no discrimination. Understanding this is the door of nonduality.”

Sunetra Bodhisattva said, “One characteristic and no characteristic are a duality. When we know one characteristic is no characteristic, and we don’t grasp no characteristic, we penetrate their equality. This is the door of nonduality.”

Subahu Bodhisattva said, “The bodhisattva mind and the sravaka mind are a duality. When we see that the characteristics of the mind are empty and illusory, there is no bodhisattva mind or sravaka mind. This is the door of nonduality.”

Tisya Bodhisattva said, “Good and bad are a duality. When we don’t conceive of good or bad, we enter the formless realm and

thereby understand. This is the door of nonduality.”

Simha Bodhisattva said, “Retribution and blessing are a duality. When we use the diamond wisdom that cuts through such characteristics, and we understand that the nature of retribution is no different from that of blessing, there is neither bondage nor liberation. This is the door of nonduality.”

Simhamati Bodhisattva said, “Purity and impurity are a duality. When we realize all dharmas are equal, and we don’t create conceptions of purity or impurity, and we don’t become attached to their characteristics or dwell on the absence of their characteristics, this is the door of nonduality.”

Suddhadhimukti Bodhisattva said, “The conditioned and unconditioned¹⁰⁵ are a duality. When we use untainted wisdom and are no longer obstructed and are free from categories, and our mind is like space, this is the door of nonduality.”

Narayana Bodhisattva said, “The world and beyond the world are a duality. Since the nature of the world is empty, it’s beyond the world. As long as one doesn’t enter or leave, glorify or reject either one, this is the door of nonduality.”

Dantamati Bodhisattva said, “Samsara and nirvana are a duality. When one sees the nature of samsara, there is no samsara, there is no bondage or liberation, no fire or annihilation. Such an understanding is the door of nonduality.”

Pratyaksadarsana Bodhisattva said, “The end and no end are a duality. Whether something ends completely or doesn’t end, both are conceptions without end. Conceptions without end are empty, and being empty, there is no conception of an end or no end. Penetrating this is the door of nonduality.”

Pariguda Bodhisattva said, “Self and no self are a duality. Since the self can’t be found, how are you going to find no self? Seeing the true nature of the self and no longer thinking about an other, this is the door of nonduality.”

Vidyuddeva Bodhisattava said, “Wisdom and ignorance are a duality. The true nature of ignorance is wisdom, but being devoid of categories, wisdom can’t be grasped. Treating both as the same and not separate, this is the door of nonduality.”

Priyadarsana Bodhisattva said, “Form and the emptiness of form are a duality. But form is emptiness. It isn’t when form is destroyed that there is emptiness. The nature of form itself is emptiness, as is the case with sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness. Consciousness and emptiness are a duality. But consciousness is emptiness. It isn’t when consciousness is destroyed that there is emptiness. The nature of consciousness itself is emptiness. Understanding both is the door of nonduality.”

Prabhaketu Bodhisattva said, “The differences among the four material elements¹⁰⁶ and their differences with the element of space are a duality. The nature of the four material elements is the nature of the element of space. Because they are empty during the previous moment and during the next moment, they are also empty during the present moment. Understanding the nature of the elements in this manner is the door of nonduality.”

Pramati Bodhisattva said, “The eye and form are a duality. When you understand the nature of the eye and have no desire, aversion, or delusion regarding form, this is nirvana. Likewise, the ear and sound, the nose and smell, the tongue and taste, the body and touch, the mind and thought are all dualities. When you understand the nature of the mind and have no desire, aversion, or delusion regarding thought, this is called nirvana. Being at peace with these is the door of nonduality.”

Aksayamati Bodhisattva said, “Giving and dedicating the merit to buddhahood are a duality. The nature of giving is the nature of dedicating the merit to buddhahood. Likewise, morality, perseverance, acceptance, meditation, and wisdom and dedicating the merit to buddhahood are dualities. Since the nature of wisdom¹⁰⁷ is the nature of dedicating the merit to buddhahood, one enters by means of what they have in common. This is the door of nonduality.”

Gambhiramati Bodhisattva said, “Emptiness, no conception, and no desire¹⁰⁸ are dualities. But emptiness means no conception, and no conception means no desire. If there is emptiness, no conception, and no desire, then there is no mind, manas consciousness, or conceptual consciousness.¹⁰⁹ In one door of liberation are three doors of liberation. This is the door of nonduality.”

Santendriya Bodhisattva said, “The Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha are dualities. The Buddha is the Dharma, and the Dharma is the Sangha. These Three Treasures are unconditioned and the same as space. This is true of all dharmas. Being able to act in accord with this is the door of nonduality.”

Apratihatanetra Bodhisattva said, “A person and the cessation of a person are a duality. But a person is the cessation of a person. And how so? Those who see what is real about a person do not create the view of a person or the view of the cessation of a person. When a person and the cessation of a person aren’t seen as a duality or as separate, and one isn’t alarmed or terrified by either, this is the door of nonduality.”

Suvinita Bodhisattva said, “Physical, oral, and mental deeds are dualities. But these three kinds of deeds have no conception of acting. Since the body has no conception of acting, the mouth has no conception of acting; and since the mouth has no conception of acting, the mind has no conception of acting. Since these three kinds of deeds have no conception of acting, nothing has any conception of acting. Being able to accord in this manner with the wisdom of not acting, this is the door of nonduality.”

Punyaksetra Bodhisattva said, “Meritorious, sinful, and neutral actions are dualities. But the true nature of these three actions is empty, and being empty, there is no meritorious action, sinful action, or neutral action. Not engaging in these three actions is the door of nonduality.”

Padmavyuha Bodhisattva said, “Creating an other from the self is a duality. Those who see what is real about the self don’t create an other. If one doesn’t focus on an other, there is no perception and no object of perception. This is the door of nonduality.”

Srigarbha Bodhisattva said, “The conception that something is attained is a duality. If nothing is attained, nothing is grasped or let go. When nothing is grasped or let go, this is the door of nonduality.”

Candrottara Bodhisattva said, “Darkness and light are a duality. If there is no darkness or light, there is no duality. And how so? When you enter the Cessation of Perception Samadhi,¹¹⁰ there is no darkness or light. The same is true of all other characteristics. Treating both with equanimity is the door of nonduality.”

Ratnamudrahasa Bodhisattva said, “Delighting in nirvana but not the world are a duality. If one doesn’t delight in nirvana and doesn’t reject the world, there is no duality. And how so? If someone is imprisoned, there is liberation. But if no one is imprisoned, who is it who seeks liberation? When there is no imprisonment or liberation, there is no delight or rejection. This is the door of nonduality.”

Manikutaraja Bodhisattva said “The true path and the false path are a duality. Those on the true path don’t distinguish which is true or which is false. Being free of both is the door of nonduality.”

Satyarata Bodhisattva said, “The true and the false are a duality. Those who see what is true don’t see the true much less the false. And how so? It isn’t the physical eye that sees, but the wisdom eye that sees, and this wisdom eye neither sees nor doesn’t see. This is the door of nonduality.”

When each of the bodhisattvas had spoken, they asked Manjusri, “What is a bodhisattva’s door of nonduality?”

Manjusri Bodhisattva said, “According to my understanding, in regard to all dharmas, there is nothing to say, nothing to teach, nothing to express, and nothing to think about. To be free of questions and answers, this is the door of nonduality.”

Manjusri Bodhisattva then asked Vimalakirti, “Now that we have all expressed our views. Would the Layman please tell us his? What is a bodhisattva’s door of nonduality?”

Vimalakirti was silent and said nothing.

Manjusri Bodhisattva sighed and exclaimed, “Wonderful! Wonderful, indeed! The absence of words and speech is the true door of nonduality!”

As this discourse on the door of nonduality was spoken, among those present, five thousand bodhisattvas entered the door of nonduality and realized the acceptance of nonarising.

88. Both selections have been translated from the Chinese of Kumarajiva.

89. Buddhists acknowledged four elements: earth, water, fire, and air.

90. Early Buddhists divided a person into five skandhas, six senses, twelve ayatanas (senses and sense objects), and eighteen dhatus (six senses, six sense objects, and six forms of consciousness).

91. Three of the four fruits of the sravaka path are mentioned.

92. The bodhisattva path consists of ten stages—the eighth marked by an acceptance that nothing arises, including desire, anger, and sense of a self.
93. An especially deep meditation where breath is barely noticeable.
94. The seventh step of the Eightfold Path.
95. The “disciples” refer to actual disciples of the Buddha, like Sariputra.
96. Monks were prohibited from wearing any adornment, including flowers.
97. Referring to herself.
98. Referring to the attainments of an arhat, such as himself.
99. Referring to the sravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva teachings.
100. Sakra is lord of the realm of celestial beings, while Brahma is the creator of the universe. The Lokapalas guard the four slopes of Mount Sumeru.
101. Charity, morality, perseverance, acceptance, meditation, and wisdom.
102. The fourfold division of the Buddhist canon was unique to the Mahasanghikas: sutras, vinaya, shastras, and miscellaneous teachings.
103. Early Buddhists held that enlightenment required a final rebirth as a male.
104. The metaphor of a door is used like that of a raft, as a means for reaching the other side. The door’s two dimensions also represent the duality one needs to pass through to reach the realm of nonduality.
105. Unconditioned dharmas include space and two kinds of nirvana.
106. In addition to the four material elements of earth, water, fire, and air, Buddhists considered space as an immaterial, uncreated element.
107. Giving is the first of the six paramitas, wisdom is the sixth.
108. The three gates of liberation.
109. The eighth, seventh, and sixth forms of consciousness, respectively.
110. This samadhi is at the highest level of the Formless Realm.

SELECTIONS FROM THE LANKAVATARA SUTRA

Introduction

The Lankavatara Sutra 楞伽經 occupies a unique place in the pantheon of Zen texts. One of the earliest Zen “schools” identifying itself as such listed Gunabhadra 求那跋陀羅, not Bodhidharma 菩提達摩, as its founder and considered him the First Patriarch of Zen. It was his translation of the Lankavatara in 443 that captured the attention of the Chinese, especially Buddhists who appreciated its epistemological approach to consciousness. When the Buddha was alive, he often taught disciples to look for their self in the five skandhas: form, sensation, perception, memory, and consciousness. But when asked to explain consciousness, the Buddha said next to nothing. Either he took it for granted his disciples knew what he was referring to or he decided that to say anything more would only create new walls to break through.

In the centuries immediately after the Buddha’s Nirvana, we can see the beginnings of an interest in saying something more. The matrices of the early Abhidharma schools created what amounted to periodic tables of reality consisting of dharmas—things they thought of as its constituent elements. Of the seventy-five elements in the matrix of the Sarvastavadins, the majority had to do with the mind—elements such as attention, shame, and repentance. But it wasn’t until the third and fourth centuries that we see consciousness becoming the main concern of certain schools. Among them was the Yogacara school, which included the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu and the anonymous author, or authors, of the Lankavatara. Instead of dharmas, their focus was the mind. They weren’t interested in an ontology of reality but in an etiology of suffering—their approach being that it wasn’t dharmas that were the problem but the mind.

The Lankavatara was among the first such texts to arrive in China. Just as the Heart Sutra taught the emptiness of dharmas, and the Diamond Sutra taught detachment from dharmas, the

Lankavatara taught the nondiscrimination of dharmas—that there wouldn't be any dharmas to be empty or to be detached from if we didn't imagine them as existing, or as not existing, in the first place.

The Buddha tells Mahamati in the Lankavatara, “Because the projections of people's minds appear before them as objects, they become attached to their existence But by becoming aware that their projections are nothing but mind, they transform their body and mind and finally see for themselves what buddhas see.” (LXIV)

Along with the sutra's focus on how the mind works and how it is its own worst enemy, the primary goal the Lanka sets for itself is to remind people that the purpose of acquiring such knowledge is so that they can see what is false and what is real for themselves—and that once they do, the source of suffering will disappear, and suffering along with it.

While the Lanka's focus on consciousness was revelatory to the Chinese Buddhists who first read it, the aspect that appealed to those who became the early teachers of Zen was its singular focus on pointing to the mind and nothing else. Although the Lanka put forward a system of ways of looking at the mind and how it works, it also reminded its audience that it was a system that was itself meant to be abandoned. It wasn't its teaching about the mind that intrigued early Zen masters, it was its teaching of no mind, the mind unconstrained by ideas and concepts of its very existence.

The text itself has never been considered an easy read, and I can vouch for it not being easy to translate. The great literary figure of the Song dynasty, Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, was fascinated by the Lanka, but he was also dumbfounded. In his preface to the 1085 woodblock edition, he wrote, “The meaning of the Lankavatara is so subtle and illusive, and its language so unadorned and antiquated, the reader is often unable to read it, much less get past the words to the meaning or past the meaning to the heart.” The heart, though, is worth trying to reach.

In the following pages, I have included over a dozen selections that deal with different aspects of its message. I have also added a few footnotes, but given the limited space in an anthology like this, I have refrained from any attempt at commentary. My suggestion is to take your time. Unlike the Vimalakirti, the Lankavatara is not a

literary text. It isn't meant to be read at one go. It's a sutra that rewards patience. There is a good reason it is the text to which students and teachers of Zen have turned to more than any other.

The sutra begins with the Buddha leaving the underwater cavern where he had spent the previous week teaching Sugara, the serpent king of the Island of Lanka. As the Buddha reappears, he smiles and says, "On Lanka's Mount Malaya, the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones of the past have taught beings to see things for themselves and thus to know what the noble ones know, which is beyond the ken of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, or the mistaken knowledge of other sects. Today, for the sake of Ravana, ruler of the yaksas, I, too, will teach this teaching."

After the Buddha exchanges greetings with Ravana, the king invites the Bhagavan to his capital, and the Buddha outlines in verse what he will be teaching:

"Such is the nature of things / the realm of nothing but mind / this is something the foolish don't know / bewildered by false projections. There is no seer or anything seen / no speaker or anything spoken. / The appearance of buddhas and their teachings / are merely what we imagine. Those who view such things as real / they don't see the buddha, / nor do they who imagine nothing / only those who transform their existence."

The Buddha then proceeds together with the king to the capital on Mount Malaya, where he is joined by a host of bodhisattvas, among them Mahamati, who becomes the main interlocutor of the text that follows. Thus does the Buddha teach Ravana and Mahamati and all those in attendance how to see things for themselves, the way buddhas see them. This is how the Lanka begins, and it never wavers from that concern.

Selections from the Lankavatara Sutra

|¹¹¹

After Mahamati, together with the other bodhisattvas, had returned from visiting other buddhalands, he rose from his seat by means of the Buddha's power, uncovered his right shoulder, and touched his right knee to the ground. Pressing his hands together and bowing in reverence, he praised the Buddha in verse:

1. "Like a flower in the sky / the world neither ceases nor arises / knowing it neither is nor isn't / you rouse your compassionate mind.
2. Neither of the mind nor consciousness / all things are like illusions / knowing they neither are nor aren't / you rouse your compassionate mind.
3. Neither permanent nor transient / the world is like a dream / knowing it neither is nor isn't / you rouse your compassionate mind.
4. Knowing beings and dharmas have no self / that affliction and knowledge / are always pure and have no form / you rouse your compassionate mind.
5. The Buddha doesn't dwell in nirvana / nor nirvana in the Buddha / free of knowing and known / he neither is nor isn't.
6. Who contemplates Sakyamuni like this / serene and free from rebirth / frees themselves from all attachments / this life and the next."

||¹¹²

After he had finished his verses in praise of the Buddha, Mahamati introduced himself:

1. "My name is Mahamati / to plumb the Mahayana's depths / with 108 questions / I come before the Peerless One."
2. The Knower of Worlds / hearing this request / gazed upon the assembly / and addressed the bodhisattvas:

3. “Ask your questions / Son of Victors / ask and I will speak / of the realm I myself know.”

Acknowledging the Bhagavan’s approval, Mahamati Bodhisattva touched his head to the Buddha’s feet, put his palms together in reverence, and asked in verse:

4. “How is thinking purified / where does it come from / how should we regard delusion / what is delusion’s source?”
5. Why do kingdoms and apparitions exist / attributes and other sects / stages of practice and no projection / what does ‘son of victor’ mean?
6. Where does liberation lead / who is bound who is freed / what are the realms of meditation / why are there three paths?

. . . .

III¹¹³

“A statement about birth is about no birth. A statement about permanence is about no permanence. A statement about characteristics is about no characteristics. A statement about duration and differentiation is about no duration and differentiation. . . .”

IV¹¹⁴

Mahamati Bodhisattva once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan in how many ways do the various forms of consciousness arise, persist, and cease?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “There are two ways in which the different forms of consciousness arise, persist, and cease, both of which are beyond the understanding of logicians.¹¹⁵ The two ways they arise are as a continuity and as a characteristic. The two ways they persist are as a continuity and as a characteristic. And the two ways they cease are as a continuity and as a characteristic. Also, Mahamati, the different forms of consciousness have three aspects: an unfolding aspect, a karmic aspect, and a generic aspect.¹¹⁶

“Mahamati, the eight forms of consciousness can also be summarized under two headings: perceiving consciousness and object-discriminating consciousness.¹¹⁷ Mahamati, just as shapes

and images appear in a clear mirror, this is how perceiving consciousness functions. Mahamati, perceiving consciousness and object-discriminating consciousness are not separate from each other. They condition each other. But the cause of perceiving consciousness, Mahamati, is subliminal habit energy,¹¹⁸ which results in subliminal transformations, while the cause of object-discriminating consciousness is the grasping of phenomena and the beginningless habit energy of erroneous discriminations.

“Moreover, Mahamati, when the different kinds of sensory consciousness cease, the habit energy of the projections of alaya consciousness¹¹⁹ ceases. This, Mahamati, is what is meant by the cessation of the characteristics of consciousness. Mahamati, as for the cessation of continuity, it ceases when its basis and support cease—its basis being the beginningless habit energy of erroneous discriminations, and its support being the discrimination of the different realms of consciousness as seen by one’s own mind.

“Mahamati, take a lump of clay and atoms,¹²⁰ for example. They are neither separate nor not separate. The same is true of gold and ornaments. Mahamati, if the clay and atoms were separate, the latter could not result in the former. But they do. Hence, they are not separate. And yet, if they were not separate, the clay could not be distinguished from the atoms.

“Thus, Mahamati, if the unfolding aspect and alaya consciousness were separate, alaya consciousness could not be its cause. But if they were not separate, the cessation of the unfolding aspect would also mean the cessation of alaya consciousness. And yet, its generic aspect does not cease. What ceases, Mahamati, isn’t the generic aspect of alaya consciousness, but its karmic aspect. If the generic aspect of consciousness ceased, alaya consciousness would cease. And if alaya consciousness ceased, Mahamati, that would be no different from the nihilistic views proposed by the leaders of other sects.

“Mahamati, the leaders of other sects claim that when the grasping of sense objects ceases, the continuity of consciousness also ceases. But if the continuity of consciousness ceased, so would its beginningless continuity. Mahamati, the leaders of other sects say the establishment of its continuity is not, for example, caused by the

conjunction of visual consciousness with form and light but rather by something else. And that cause, Mahamati, they say is a primordial nature or person or a supreme lord or time or some kind of particle.¹²¹

IX¹²²

At that time, Mahamati Bodhisattva said, “May the Bhagavan teach us about the characteristics of the mind, manas consciousness,¹²³ and conceptual consciousness, the five dharmas and modes of existence, and the practices of buddhas and bodhisattvas who do not wander in realms outside their own minds.¹²⁴ May he disclose the heart of the teachings that vanquish those based only on reasoning. And for the great bodhisattvas gathered here on Mount Malaya in the island kingdom of Lanka, may he begin with the realm of the ocean and waves of alaya consciousness and proceed to the dharma body of the tathagatas.”

The Bhagavan then told Mahamati, “There are four causes that result in the functioning of visual consciousness. And what are the four? They include an unawareness that what one grasps is a perception of one’s own mind, attachment to the beginningless habit energy of erroneous discriminations of form, the existence of consciousness, and a desire to see a multiplicity of forms. Mahamati, these are the four causes that result in the waves of the unfolding aspect of consciousness that stir the ever-flooding sea of alaya consciousness.

“Mahamati, just as with visual consciousness, the same is true of the other sense faculties, which arise simultaneously as atoms as tiny as a hair tip along with their perceptual realms—like so many images on a clear mirror, or like when a strong wind blows the water on the ocean and turns the sea of the mind into never-ending waves of consciousness. The causes that create these images, being neither separate nor not separate from the karmic and generic aspects of consciousness, also cause people to become immersed in projections and attachments that prevent them from understanding the nature of form. Therefore, Mahamati, you should know it is the five forms of sensory consciousness that together cause the differentiation of the images we discriminate and apprehend and that

are also the cause of conceptual consciousness. But they don't think: 'The cause of the unfolding of the images that appear in the mind are mistaken projections and attachments.'

"Likewise those who practice meditation unaware of the functioning of the subtler forms of habit energy think it is only after consciousness ceases that they enter samapatti.¹²⁵ But in fact their consciousness does not cease when they enter samapatti. It does not cease because the seeds of habit energy are not destroyed. What ceases are their grasping of objective realms.

"Mahamati, except for tathagatas and those well along the bodhisattva path, the ultimate limit of the subtlety of the alaya consciousness remains beyond the reach or understanding of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and the leaders of other sects—despite their powers of meditation and wisdom, likewise how to distinguish the characteristics of the remaining stages,¹²⁶ or the meaning of words and propositions about wisdom and skillful means, or how to bring to maturity the limitless good roots planted by buddhas, or how to get free from the projections that are the perceptions of their own minds.

"Dwelling among mountains and forests and cultivating different levels of practice, as they become able to see how mistaken discriminations flow from their own minds, they have their foreheads anointed by buddhas from countless lands. And as they attain masteries, psychic faculties, higher powers, and samadhis, they find themselves surrounded by retinues of bodhisattvas and spiritual friends. And because of this, they transcend the sea of endless rebirth, karma, desire, and ignorance, and the mistaken conceptions concerning the modes of existence of the mind, manas consciousness, and conceptual consciousness that are perceptions of their own minds. This is why, Mahamati, practitioners should draw near buddhas and spiritual friends."

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. "Just like waves in a boundless sea / blown by a powerful wind / breakers in a dark expanse / that never for a moment cease
2. Forever in the alaya sea / stirred by the wind of conjured forms / waves of sensory consciousness / break and swell

again.

3. Blue and red and every color / milk and sugar and conch shells / fragrances and fruits and flowers / the sun the moon and light
4. None are separate nor not separate / like the ocean and its waves / the seven forms of consciousness / rise together with the mind.¹²⁷
5. Like the ever-changing sea / gives rise to different waves / the seven forms of consciousness / rise together with alaya.
6. The mind, manas consciousness, and the others / each has its characteristics / but none of them are separate / there are no characteristics or characterizer.
7. Just as the ocean and its waves / can't be divided from each other / the mind and forms of consciousness / can't be viewed apart.
8. The mind gathers karma / manas distributes what is gathered / conceptual consciousness perceives / whatever appears in five sensory worlds."

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked:

9. "When colors such as blue and red / appear in someone's consciousness / what does it mean / to say they are all like waves?"

The Bhagavan replied:

10. "Blue and red and other colors / can't be found in any wave / we say the mind unfolds / to awaken foolish beings.
11. What unfolds isn't real / but to make their minds let go / of what grasps and what is grasped / I liken these to waves.
12. Their foundation is the body / this is what they are conscious of / this is why what they see / looks like surging waves."

Mahamati Bodhisattava then asked:

13. "The ocean and its waves exist / we can see them dance / if this is how alaya acts / why aren't we aware?"

The Bhagavan replied:

14. "For fools bereft of wisdom / alaya is likened to an ocean / its actions to its waves / such similes help them understand."

Mahamati then asked again:

15. "Sunlight shines the same / on beings of all classes / when victors light the world / they teach the foolish too.
16. Versed in every kind of teaching / why don't they then teach the truth?"
To which the Buddha replied in verse, "If they taught the truth / in their minds would be no truth.
17. Like the ocean and its waves / a dream or an image in a mirror / both appear together / so too the mind and perceptual realms.
18. Even when such realms aren't present / unfolding and karmic aspects rise / consciousness keeps perceiving / likewise manas thinks.
19. Fivefold are appearances / though not in any order / as a master artist works / and the master's students
20. Drawing forms and spreading colors / I too teach like this / the colors don't contain a pattern / nor does the brush or surface.
21. To please the host of beings / they fashion figures with their art / but teachings are unfaithful / for truth isn't in the words.
22. I make distinctions for beginners / for practitioners I teach the truth / the truth they see themselves / free from knowing and the known.
23. This I teach to bodhisattvas / a broader view to lesser minds / all manner of illusions / nothing though they see is true.
24. Thus my teachings are diverse / adjusted to the situation / if a teaching doesn't fit / then it isn't taught.
25. Because each patient differs / good doctors adjust their cures / buddhas thus teach beings / according to their minds' capacity.
26. A realm free of projections / unknown to sravakas / this is what the compassionate teach / the realm you know yourself."

“Furthermore, Mahamati, nothing is born. This is the teaching of the tathagatas of the past, the future, and the present. And how so? Because if something that exists is only perceived by one’s mind, it doesn’t exist. It is devoid of existence and isn’t born. Mahamati, nothing that exists is born. Everything is like horns on a rabbit or on a horse, the mistaken discriminations of ignorant people of an imagined reality. Therefore, Mahamati, nothing is born. According to what buddhas perceive and know for themselves, everything that exists is characterized by its unborn nature, not by the dualistic projections of the ignorant. The existence that characterizes your body, your possessions, and the world around you, Mahamati, is the interplay of the grasper and grasped of alaya consciousness. The ignorant are trapped by their dualistic views of origination, duration, and cessation, and by the wish for things to be born. Hence, they imagine existence and nonexistence, but not the wise. Mahamati, reflect on this with diligence.

XXIII¹²⁹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should be well acquainted with the three modes of existence. And what are the three? Imagined existence, dependent existence, and perfected existence.¹³⁰

“Mahamati, imagined existence is the result of characteristics. And how is imagined existence the result of characteristics? Mahamati, according to the characteristics of the names and images of dependent existence, there is attachment to two kinds of imagined existence. These are what the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones call ‘attachment to the characteristics of names’ and ‘attachment to the characteristics of images.’ By ‘attachment to the characteristics of names’ is meant attachment to external and internal dharmas and by ‘attachment to the characteristics of images’ is meant attachment to the unique or shared characteristics of these external and internal dharmas. Dependent existence is what serves as the ground and objective support from which these two kinds of imagined existence arise.

“And what is perfected existence? This is the mode that is free from the false discrimination of the characteristics of names and images and is the cognitive realm of which the noble ones have

personal knowledge. This is perfected existence and the heart of the tathagata-garbha.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

“As images and names or their projections / these are two modes of existence / as correct knowledge and suchness / this is the perfected mode.”

“Mahamati, this is the way to view the characteristics of the modes of existence and five dharmas and the cognitive realm of which the noble ones have personal knowledge. This is what you and other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

XXIV¹³¹

“Furthermore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas should become adept at examining the two kinds of things that have no self. And what are the two kinds of things that have no self? People have no self, and dharmas have no self.

“What does it mean that people have no self? The assemblages of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas are not connected to a self or anything that belongs to a self and are produced by ignorance, karma, and desire. As our consciousness gives rise to the grasping and the attachment of our eyes to forms, everything our mind perceives by means of the senses, such as the world and the body to which we cling, are erroneous discriminations, the imaginings of our own mind. Like a flowing river or a seed, like a flame or the wind or a cloud, they change from one moment to the next and vanish. Restless as a monkey, attracted to impurities like a fly, insatiable like a wind-blown fire, and driven by habit energy without beginning, they move like a water wheel through life after life, in all sorts of bodily forms, their images produced as if by a magic trick or by an incantation. To be skilled in the knowledge of such things is to know that people have no self.

“And what does it mean to know that dharmas have no self? It means to know that the self-existence of the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas is imaginary; that the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas are devoid of a self or anything that belongs to a self; that the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas are nothing but assemblages bound together by karma and by desire; and that they arise from the

interplay of conditions but are themselves passive—and that all dharmas are like this. By means of their imaginations, fools give rise to mistaken discriminations that lack any characteristic, unique or shared, but not the wise. They see no self in any dharma and are free from the mind, manas consciousness, and conceptual consciousness, the five dharmas and their modes of existence.

“Mahamati, bodhisattvas who become adept at seeing no self in dharmas soon gain an understanding of the absence of projections that characterizes the initial bodhisattva stage. As they continue to delight in examining such an understanding, they gradually advance and go beyond the ninth stage to the dharma cloud stage, where huge lotus flowers decorated with countless gems appear on which they sit and practice in illusory realms that resemble jeweled palaces, and where they are surrounded by bodhisattvas of similar attainments and their retinues. From every buddhaland, come tathagatas who anoint their foreheads, just as a cakravartin anoints the forehead of a crown prince. Having gone beyond the bodhisattva stages, they realize the noble truth they see for themselves. And because they see no self in any dharma, they acquire the dharma body of a tathagata. This is what no self in dharmas means. This is what you and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

XXVIII¹³²

Mahamati Bodhisattva then asked the Buddha, “In the sutras, the Bhagavan says the tathagata-garbha is intrinsically pure and endowed with thirty-two attributes and is present in the bodies of all beings. Like a priceless jewel wrapped in soiled clothing, the tathagata-garbha is always present and never changes but is wrapped in the soiled clothing of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas and stained with the false discriminations and afflictions of greed, anger, and delusion, and this is what the buddhas teach. How is it that what the Bhagavan says about the tathagata-garbha is the same as what leaders of other sects say about a self? Bhagavan, leaders of other sects also speak of a creator, beyond conception, omnipresent, and indestructible. They say this, Bhagavan, is the self.”

The Buddha replied, “Mahamati, the tathagata-garbha of which I speak is not the same as the self mentioned by leaders of other sects. Mahamati, when I speak of such things as ‘emptiness,’ ‘no conception,’ or ‘no desire,’ or ‘realm of reality,’ ‘dharma nature,’ or ‘dharma body,’ or ‘nirvana,’ ‘what is devoid of self-existence,’ or ‘what neither arises nor ceases,’ or ‘original quiescence,’ or ‘intrinsic nirvana,’ I am speaking of the tathagata-garbha.

“It is to put an end to the fear foolish beings have about the expression ‘no self’ that the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones proclaim the teaching of the tathagata-garbha as being free of mistaken discriminations or projections. Mahamati, bodhisattvas of the present and the future should not become attached to any view of a self.

“Take a potter for example, who applies such things as labor, water, a stick, a wheel, or a string to clay to make different kinds of vessels. The Tathagata is also like this, applying wisdom and a variety of skillful means to what has no self and what is free of projections. Sometimes I speak about the tathagata-garbha and sometimes no self. This is why I say the tathagata-garbha is not the same as the self that is spoken of by leaders of other sects. This is what I mean by ‘tathagata-garbha.’ I teach the tathagata-garbha to attract those members of other sects who are attached to a self so that they will give up their projections of an unreal self and enter the threefold gate of liberation¹³³ and aspire to quickly attaining unexcelled, complete enlightenment. This is why the tathagatas, the arhats, the fully enlightened ones speak in this manner of the tathagata-garbha. To speak otherwise would be the same as the leaders of other sects. Therefore, Mahamati, to avoid the views of other sects, you should rely on the tathagata-garbha of no self.

XXXVII¹³⁴

“Moreover, Mahamati, there are four kinds of meditation. And what are they? They include beginner meditation, meditation on meaning, meditation on suchness, and tathagata meditation.

“What is meant by beginner meditation? This refers to what sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of other sects practice, which is to focus meditation primarily on the non-existence of a

personal self among the unique and shared characteristics of one's body, on its impermanence, its suffering, and its impurity. Meditating on these and no other characteristics, they proceed from one to the next but without eliminating the characteristics themselves. This is what is meant by beginner meditation.

“And what is meant by meditation on meaning? Given the absence of a self among the unique and shared characteristics of persons and the nonexistence of a self, other, or both—which is what other sects teach, this refers to meditating on the absence of a self among dharmas and on the meaning of the characteristics of the stages¹³⁵ through which one steadily advances. This is what is meant by meditation on meaning.

“And what is meant by meditation on suchness? This refers to discriminating the two kinds of no self as discriminations but not giving rise to discriminations of suchness.¹³⁶ This is what is meant by meditation on suchness.

“And what is meant by tathagata meditation? This refers to having reached the tathagata stage and enjoying the threefold bliss¹³⁷ that characterizes the realization of knowing for oneself what the noble ones know, performing inconceivable deeds on behalf of other beings. This is what is meant by tathagata meditation.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “There is meditation for beginners / meditation on meaning / meditation on suchness / and the pure meditation of the tathagatas.
2. Shapes such as the sun or moon / the very depths of hell / space after the conflagration / on these do yogins meditate.
3. A myriad objects such as these / fill the meditations of other sects / trapping yogins in the realms / of sravakas or pratyeka-buddhas.
4. To those who abandon these / who get free of projections / buddhas come from every land / with hands beyond conception / anointing their foreheads / leading them into suchness.”

Mahamati Bodhisattva then addressed the Buddha, “As for entering nirvana, Bhagavan, what is meant by ‘nirvana?’”

The Buddha replied, “When the self-existence and habit-energy of all forms of consciousness—including alaya, manas, and conceptual consciousness—and the habit-energy of their projections, when that is transformed, that is what is meant by nirvana. The nirvana of other buddhas and myself is the realm that is empty of self-existence.

“Moreover, Mahamati, nirvana is the realm where the noble ones practice what they have realized for themselves. It is free from discriminations of the existence or nonexistence of permanence or impermanence. And why isn’t it permanent? Because it is free from discriminations of unique or shared characteristics, therefore it isn’t permanent. And why isn’t it impermanent? Because it is what all the sages of the past, present and future realize for themselves. Therefore it isn’t impermanent.¹³⁹

“Moreover, Mahamati, nirvana isn’t annihilation or death. If nirvana were death, there would be a continuity and something reborn. And if it were annihilation, it would fall into the category of something created. Therefore, nirvana is free from annihilation and free from death. This is why it is the refuge of practitioners.

“Moreover, Mahamati, nirvana is not a renunciation and not an acquisition. It isn’t impermanent, and it isn’t permanent. It doesn’t have one meaning and doesn’t have multiple meanings and doesn’t have no meaning.¹⁴⁰ This is what is meant by nirvana.

“Furthermore, Mahamati, the nirvana of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas is seen as being aware of its unique and shared characteristics, as not engaging in social contact, and as not giving rise to discriminations or perverted views. This is their idea of nirvana.”

XLVIII¹⁴¹

“Moreover, Mahamati, whatever exists is neither created, nor does it arise from causes. There is no creator. Hence, whatever exists does not arise. And why, Mahamati, does whatever exists lack self-existence? Because in the light of what you yourself can see, no

unique or shared characteristics can be found. Thus, I say whatever exists does not arise.

“Mahamati, why is it that whatever exists cannot be grasped and cannot be discarded? If you try to grasp some unique or shared characteristic, there is nothing to grasp. And if you try to discard it, there is nothing to discard. Thus, whatever exists cannot be grasped and cannot be discarded.

“Mahamati, why is it that whatever exists does not cease to exist? Because no characteristic of its self-existence exists, nothing that exists can be found. Thus, whatever exists does not cease to exist.

“Mahamati, how is it that whatever exists is impermanent? This is because once a characteristic appears, its impermanence exists. This is why I say whatever exists is impermanent. And how is it, Mahamati, that whatever exists is permanent? This is because once a characteristic appears, its nonarising exists. And because its impermanence is permanent, I say everything is permanent.

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “For refuting views of other sects / I use four kinds of explanation / a direct answer or another question / analysis or silence.¹⁴²
2. Something arises or doesn’t / for what is better left to silence / Vaisheshika and Samkhya masters / engage in explanations.
3. Seen by correct knowledge / self-existence cannot be found / because it transcends words / I teach no self-existence.”

LIX¹⁴³

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, please tell us about a buddha’s awareness. Bhagavan, what constitutes a buddha’s awareness?”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It consists in realizing that there is no self in people or in dharmas, in understanding the two obstructions, in transcending the two kinds of death, and in putting an end to the two kinds of affliction.¹⁴⁴ This is what is meant by the awareness of a buddha. Those sravakas and pratyekabuddhas capable of this are also called buddhas. This is the reason I teach the One Vehicle.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

“Knowing well the two kinds of no self / ending the two obstructions and afflictions / transcending forever the two kinds of death / such is a buddha’s awareness.”

LXI¹⁴⁵

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “The Bhagavan has said, ‘From the night I attained enlightenment until the night I enter nirvana, between the two I do not speak, nor have I spoken, nor will I speak a single word, for not speaking is how a buddha speaks.’ Bhagavan, why does the Tathagata, the Arhat, the Fully Enlightened One say ‘not speaking is how a buddha speaks?’”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “It is because of two aspects that I make a statement such as this. And which two? They are the Dharma as dependent on personal realization and the Dharma as ever-present. These are the two. It is because of these two aspects that I make such a statement.

“And what do I mean when I speak of the Dharma as dependent on personal realization? Whatever other tathagatas realize, I too realize, nothing more, nothing less. The extent of the realm of the Dharma that is dependent on personal realization is beyond explanations or discriminations, beyond all dualistic terms.

“And what do I mean by the Dharma as ever-present? This refers to the road of the ancient sages. Like the existence of gold or silver, the realm of the Dharma is always present. Whether a tathagata appears in the world or does not appear in the world, the realm of the Dharma is always present. It is like a road that leads to a city. Imagine a man walking in the wilderness who sees this straight and level road leading toward an ancient city and who follows it to that city, where he enjoys whatever he desires. What do you think, Mahamati? Did he make that road or that city’s delights?”

Mahamati answered, “No.”

The Buddha told Mahamati, “The ever-present realm of the Dharma has always been like this, both for myself and for all the buddhas of the past. This is why I say that from the night of my enlightenment until I enter nirvana, between the two, I do not speak, nor have I spoken, nor will I speak a single word.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. "From the night of my enlightenment / until the night of my nirvana / between these two events / I do not speak a single word.
2. Whether realized for oneself or ever-present / this is what I proclaim / all buddhas and myself / in neither do we differ."

LXXII¹⁴⁶

"Furthermore, Mahamati, foolish beings are confused by the beginningless and harmful habit energy of their mistaken conceptions. And once confused, they don't easily understand the way of proving things for themselves or the way of instruction.¹⁴⁷ Attached to characteristics of external existence that are perceptions of their own minds, they become attached to expedient explanations, and they aren't adept at distinguishing what characterizes the way of establishing proof for oneself that doesn't include the four possibilities."¹⁴⁸

Mahamati addressed the Buddha, "It is, indeed, as the Bhagavan teaches. May the Bhagavan please distinguish for us the way of instruction and the way of establishing proof, so that I and the other bodhisattvas will become adept at both, and so that the foolish people, the sravakas, and the pratyekabuddhas of future ages will not be left wanting?"

The Buddha told Mahamati, "Well said. Listen carefully and ponder it well, and I will tell you."

Mahamati said, "May we be so instructed."

The Buddha told Mahamati, "The tathagatas of the three ages have two ways of teaching the Dharma: the way of instruction and the way of establishing proof. The way of instruction means teaching the sutras and beneficial texts appropriate to the minds of beings. This is what is meant by the way of instruction.

"The way of establishing proof is for practitioners who free themselves from projections that are perceptions of their own minds. This means not falling prey to categories of sameness or difference, both, or neither; transcending the mind, manas consciousness, and conceptual consciousness; witnessing for themselves the realm known to the noble ones; and not viewing things as the result of

causality. This is something sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and leaders of sects given to dualistic views cannot possibly know. This is what I mean by the way of establishing proof. Mahamati, this is what characterizes the ways of instruction and establishing proof, and this is what you and the other bodhisattvas should cultivate.”

The Bhagavan then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “My teaching includes two ways / instruction and establishing proof / instruction for beginners / establishing proof for practitioners.”

LXXXII¹⁴⁹

Mahamati once more asked the Buddha, “Bhagavan, would you please explain the arising and the cessation of the skandhas, ayatanas, and dhatus. If there is no self, who arises and who ceases? Dependent on arising and cessation, foolish people never realize the end of suffering, nor do they know nirvana.”

The Buddha said, “Excellent. Listen well, and I will tell you.”

Mahamati replied, “May we be so instructed.”

The Buddha said, “The tathagata-garbha is the cause of good and bad rebirth. It is able to create various forms of existence in the same way that an actor changes appearances in different settings but without a self or what belongs to a self. Because followers of other sects are unaware of this, they unwittingly imagine an agent responsible for the different combinations of sense faculties, objects, and forms of consciousness.

“What is called the alaya consciousness is infused by the beginningless, harmful habit energy of mistaken discriminations, but it is born in a state of fundamental ignorance along with seven kinds of consciousness that arise without cease, like the waves on the surface of the ocean. But lacking the misconception of impermanence or the conceit of a self, it is essentially pure and free of any defilement.

“The seven remaining forms of consciousness—manas consciousness, conceptual consciousness, and the others—come and go from one thought to the next as the result of grasping object-based realms that aren’t real. Being attached to names and images of all kinds, people are unaware that the characteristics of such

forms are the projections of their own minds, and they are unaware that neither pleasure nor pain lead to liberation. They become enveloped by names and images produced by desires that produce more desires, each of which becomes the cause or the condition of the next. Only if their senses stopped functioning, and they entered the Cessation of Sensation and Perception Samadhi or the Fourth Dhyana Heaven¹⁵⁰ would the remaining projections of their minds not arise and would they no longer experience pleasure or pain and would they become skilled in understanding the truth of liberation.

“If, however, during such cultivation, they should then conceive of liberation, they would fail to transcend or transform the tathagata-garbha and alaya consciousness, and the flowing of the seven kinds of consciousness would not cease. And how so? Because the different kinds of consciousness arise as a result of causes and conditions. This is not the understanding of sravaka or pratyekabuddha practitioners. Grasping as they do the unique and shared characteristics of the skandhas, dhatus, and ayatanas, they are unaware that these have no self.¹⁵¹ Only when they understand the tathagata-garbha, the five dharmas and modes of existence and the no self among beings and dharmas will they cease.

“As they progress through the sequence of stages and are no longer moved by the views of other sects, when they are said to dwell in the bodhisattva’s unshakeable stage,¹⁵² they enjoy the bliss of ten samadhis. By means of the realizations of these samadhis, they then examine the inconceivable Dharma of the buddhas. But because of their vows, they do not cling to the bliss of samadhi or to ultimate reality. Knowing for themselves what the noble ones know, which is not known among the practices of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, or followers of other sects, they complete the ten-stage path of the lineage of sages and acquire wisdom bodies and samadhi-free practices. Therefore, Mahamati, bodhisattvas who seek the heights of victory should purify what are called the tathagata-garbha and alaya consciousness.

“Mahamati, if the tathagata-garbha did not include the alaya consciousness, nothing would arise or cease. Mahamati, sages and fools alike experience arising and cessation. As practitioners realize

for themselves what the noble ones realize, they dwell in the bliss of whatever is present and do not abandon skillful means.

“Mahamati, although the tathagata-garbha, and the alaya consciousness as conceived by sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, is obscured by the dust of sensation—despite its self-nature being pure, it appears impure, but not to tathagatas. To tathagatas, Mahamati, the realm that appears before them is like an amala¹⁵³ fruit in the palm of their hand.

“Mahamati, regarding this, I have used my spiritual power to support Queen Srimala and other bodhisattvas of deep wisdom to explain what are meant by the alaya consciousness and the tathagata-garbha, which appear together with the seven other forms of consciousness. It was because sravakas were still attached to their view of no self among persons and dharmas that I supported Queen Srimala¹⁵⁴ with my power as a buddha, while she explained that the realm of understanding of tathagatas is not the realm of understanding of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, or other sects. The tathagata-garbha and alaya consciousness are something only buddhas and the wisest of bodhisattvas who rely on what is meant by them are able to understand. Therefore, you and the other bodhisattvas should reflect on the tathagata-garbha and alaya consciousness with diligence. Don’t simply think hearing about this is enough.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “Deep in the tathagata-garbha / and seven kinds of consciousness / two kinds of grasping arise / but are avoided by the wise.
2. The mind of images in a mirror / is colored by habit energy without beginning / those who see what is real / see what isn’t real.
3. Like a fool searching for the moon / looks at a finger and not the moon / those who cling to objects / don’t see this truth of mine.
4. The mind is like a skillful actor / manas consciousness is the actor’s partner / the five forms of consciousness are their companions / erroneous perceptions are what the audience sees.”

“Moreover, Mahamati, the five dharmas include image, name, projection, suchness, and correct knowledge. Mahamati, image is what is perceived as having location, physical shape and features. This is what is meant by an image. If a certain image is referred to as a pot and not something else, this is what is meant by a name. Fabricating names and pointing to images, as in the case of a pot, involve the mind and what belongs to the mind. This is what is meant by projection. Names and images are essentially ungraspable and ultimately unknowable. What does not interact with such dharmas and what is free of unreal projections, this is what is meant by suchness. What is real, true, certain, ultimate, self-existent, and ungraspable, these are the characteristics of suchness. As I and other buddhas have come to know them, we accordingly explain, designate, and indicate them to others so that they have a true understanding of what is neither permanent nor impermanent and so that they do not give rise to projections but accord with the noble realm they know for themselves, which is beyond the reach of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and followers of other sects. This is what is meant by correct knowledge.

“This, Mahamati, is what is meant by the five dharmas, which include the three modes of existence, the eight forms of consciousness, the two kinds of no self, and all the teachings of the buddhas. Therefore, Mahamati, you should cultivate these in your own practice and urge others not to follow anything else.”

The Buddha then repeated the meaning of this in verse:

1. “The five dharmas include three modes of existence / eight forms of consciousness / and two kinds of no self / the entire Mahayana.
2. Name and image and projection / these form the first two modes / correct knowledge and suchness / these form the perfected mode.”

111. I. The following selections are based on Gunabhadra’s Chinese translation, which begins with this section. The sequence of subjects suggest the sutra was composed from a number of talks.

112. II. After introducing himself, Mahamati asks 108 questions. Before he does, the Buddha says he will answer in the light of what he himself knows. This is the

heart from which this sutra unfolds.

113. III. The Buddha answers Mahamati's 108 questions with 108 examples of the logic underlying emptiness. Any subject someone asks about exists only in the mind of the speaker. I have included only the first few statements.

114. IV. Having heard the Buddha deny the contents of consciousness in III, Mahamati wonders about consciousness itself. The Buddha presents a series of ways of looking at consciousness: as a river or as water; as a river, a spring, or different kinds of water; as an image or an object; not to mention the standard eight: the five sensory forms, conceptual consciousness, manas (thinking) consciousness, and alaya (storehouse) consciousness.

115. A knowledge of consciousness is gained on a cushion not in a classroom.

116. This division is unique to the Lanka. The three aspects apply to all eight forms of consciousness. The unfolding aspect refers to how each form develops, the karmic aspect to the positive or negative value applied to the different forms in terms of rebirth, and the generic aspect to the characteristics unique to each.

117. The difference being whether its contents are images or objects.

118. See the next note.

119. The eighth form of consciousness, wherein reside the latent effects of thoughts, words, and deeds—referred to in this sutra as “habit energy.”

120. The smallest perceptible unit of matter in Indian metaphysics is the *anu*: 280 million in a fingertip. The *paramanu* is even smaller, but not perceptible.

121. The approach throughout the Lanka is one of epistemological rigor in contrast to the *deus ex machina* of other sects.

122. IX. The Buddha continues to explain how consciousness works and the connection of alaya consciousness with the other seven forms.

123. Manas consciousness is the seventh form, where thinking takes place. It also acts as an intermediary between alaya and conceptual consciousness.

124. Going outside the mind is impossible. There is no outside, much less inside. Thus, Mahamati wants to know how buddhas see things.

125. A deep meditative state.

126. The ninth and tenth stages of the bodhisattva path are meant.

127. In the Lanka, “mind” usually refers to alaya consciousness.

128. XIX. If something's only claim to existence is that it is perceived to exist, since it doesn't exist outside of such perception, it doesn't really exist. All that exists are the perceptions of such things as rabbit ears or horse ears as horns. And if it doesn't exist, how could it have been born? Understanding and accepting that nothing is born is the last realization before enlightenment.

129. XXIII. Having introduced ways of looking at consciousness, the Buddha lists three possibilities for dealing with its contents.

130. First, are the dharmas that form the “ground and objective support” of dependent existence. That doesn't mean they are real, only that they have been accepted as real—grandfathered in. Next, are the names and images of imagined existence, which result from our attachment to the characteristics we assign to the

dharmas of dependent existence. Then, there are the correct knowledge and suchness of perfected existence—what buddhas see.

131. XXIV. Among all the mistaken discriminations that confound us, none are more pernicious than our views that we and other beings have a self and that the “things” that make up our sense of reality possess self-existence.

132. XXVIII. Having heard the existence of a self denied in XXIV, Mahamati asks if the tathagata-garbha isn’t a self in disguise.

133. Emptiness, no conception, no desire.

134. XXXVII. To realize the no-self self of the tathagata-garbha, the Buddha lists four kinds of meditation, one for sravakas, one for beginning bodhisattvas, one for advanced bodhisattvas, and one for tathagatas.

135. The ten bodhisattva stages are meant.

136. Suchness is not accessible as a subject or an object.

137. Samadhi, enlightenment, and nirvana.

138. XXXVIII. Reflecting on the threefold bliss of the previous section, Mahamati wonders about nirvana. The Buddha replies that nirvana is not outside birth and death, rather it is the transformation of birth and death.

139. Permanence is a characteristic. If nirvana is free from characteristics, it cannot be permanent. And if nirvana is what all buddhas realize, it cannot be impermanent.

140. This last phrase is missing in Gunabhadra.

141. XLVIII. The Buddha decides to have some fun.

142. The Buddha’s fourfold approach in determining the truth is in contrast to the fourfold *vyakarana* system of grammatical analysis used by the two schools of Hindu philosophy mentioned here.

143. LIX. The Four Truths revisited. No self, no suffering, etc.

144. The two afflictions are the senses and what the senses give rise to, which in turn form the basis of attachment to the two kinds of self, which in turn create the two obstructions of passion and knowledge and the two kinds of death (karmic and transformational—the latter so subtle it is barely noticed).

145. LXI. The reason for the Buddha’s silence was the ineffable nature of the Dharma, both its subjective and objective aspects. One cannot talk about what one must realize for oneself. Nor can one talk about what transcends space and time. This section was often cited in the talks of Zen masters.

146. LXXII. Lest his audience misunderstand the silence of LXI, the Buddha says his teaching involves instruction, including the use of texts, but his focus is on what instruction is for.

147. The Sanskrit begins this section with *sva-siddhanta* (proving for oneself) then switches to *siddhanta pratyavasthana* (establishing proof).

148. Referring to the fourfold tetralemma (it exists, doesn’t exist, both exists and doesn’t exist, neither exists nor doesn’t exist) used in establishing a proof, which begins here with the examination of one’s mind and what isn’t real.

149. LXXXII. The tathagata-garbha represents our buddha nature, our potential for buddhahood, obscured by the alaya, which is infected by the other seven forms of consciousness that condition the alaya through desires. By understanding how this happens and acting accordingly, one advances to the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path, where sensation remains but no idea of a self, and where one sees what buddhas see.

150. This samadhi is at the highest level of the formless realm, while the Fourth Dhyana Heaven is the highest level in the realm of form. The sense faculties are always operating, except in these two states, both of which were visited by the Buddha the night of his Nirvana, and both of which provide an opportunity to consider the mind free of sensory conditioning.

151. They have realized the no self of beings but not the no self of dharmas.

152. This is a name for the eighth stage, the stage prior to buddhahood.

153. The Indian gooseberry, or myrobalan, is said to be the most important plant in traditional Indian medicine with widespread curative applications.

154. Queen Srimala's explanation of the tathagata-garbha's two states (as empty and as not empty) can be found in the Queen Srimala Sutra. 勝鬘夫人經

155. LXXXIV. The Lanka uses the five dharmas here to encapsulate the entire Mahayana.

BODHIDHARMA'S PRINCIPLES & PRACTICE

Introduction

Prajnaparamita texts arrived in China as early as the second century. It wasn't until the fifth century that someone who actually practiced their teaching arrived. His name was Bodhidharma. He was the third son of King Simhavarman, ruler of the Pallava Empire. Unlike his predecessors, Simhavarman was a Buddhist and invited a teacher named Prajnatarā from the ancient Buddhist heartland of Magadha to lecture on the Dharma. It was Prajnatarā who transmitted the teaching of Zen to the king's son and who told him to go to China and spread the teaching that points to the mind and nothing else. And that was what Bodhidharma did.

Since the territory of the Pallavas included the South Indian port of Mahaballipuram, Bodhidharma boarded a ship instead of taking the overland route. Three years later, he arrived in the South China port of Guangzhou—perhaps as early as 475, perhaps as late as 527. In any case, after a stay of unknown length at what is now called Hualin Temple 華林寺, Bodhidharma left Guangzhou and made his way north. Everyone's favorite story about the Indian monk is that he stopped in Nanjing 南京, the capital of the Liang dynasty. Emperor Wu 武梁帝 ascended the Liang throne in 502 and ruled until 549 and was one of China's greatest supporters of Buddhism. When the Indian monk arrived at his court, Emperor Wu asked Bodhidharma if his considerable philanthropy hadn't earned him an incalculable amount of merit—merit being the karmic force of spiritual deeds affecting one's spiritual future. The question was, no doubt, meant to be rhetorical, but Bodhidharma told the emperor it didn't earn him any merit—worldly blessings perhaps, but not merit. Material philanthropy has no effect on one's spiritual welfare. The emperor wasn't ready for the Prajnaparamita teaching of emptiness and ordered Bodhidharma out of his kingdom.

China's First Patriarch of Zen then crossed the Yangzi—assuming he hadn't already done so decades earlier, and made his

way to North China, eventually settling near Luoyang 洛陽, the capital of the Northern Wei dynasty. The place Bodhidharma chose was the sacred mountain of Songshan 嵩山, and the residence he selected was a cave a thirty-minute hike up the slope behind Shaolin Temple 少林寺.

No doubt Bodhidharma made periodic trips into the nearby capital. He is recorded as admiring an exceptionally tall pagoda there. But mostly he kept to his mountain retreat, where he is said to have spent nine years facing the wall of his cave. Somewhere along the way, he attracted a few disciples, and shortly before he died (different sources date this anywhere from 528 to 554), he made a monk named Huike 慧可 his dharma heir. It was Huike who later took Zen south, where it finally took root.

The Zen that Bodhidharma brought from India and that Huike carried south wasn't just a shortening of the word for meditation, which was *dhyana* in Sanskrit and *zenna* (the Tang pronunciation) 禪那 in Chinese. In those days, many of the foreign monks who arrived in China called themselves *zen* 禪 masters. They practiced meditation. But they weren't Zen masters. They were proficient in trances, trances that could last for hours if not days. And more than a few were proficient in spells and incantations, not to mention magic. The teaching Bodhidharma brought certainly included meditation, "wall contemplation," as he called it. But for him, and all those who followed the Zen banner, it was about looking directly at the mind, about being a buddha.

Of the few records we have of Bodhidharma's teaching, the one most historians accept as genuine, was something recorded by a disciple named Tanlin 曇琳. Tanlin titled this short piece "Contemplation of Four Practices for Entering the Mahayana Path" 大乘入道四行觀, which I have shortened to "Principles and Practice." Clearly, it is about more than meditation.

Bodhidharma begins with a reinterpretation of what the Buddha refers to in the Lankavatara as his "two ways." With its combination of Prajnaparamita and Yogacara doctrines, the Lanka was Bodhidharma's favorite text, the one he recommended to his students. In section LXXII (also in LXIII), the Buddha tells Mahamati that the tathagatas teach the way of instruction and the way of

establishing proof (*siddhanta pratyavasthana*). The way of instruction, he says, means teaching texts appropriate to the minds of beings, and the way of establishing proof means proving what the instruction is for, namely, freeing oneself from the projections of one's own mind and seeing what's what for oneself—not just talking about it. Bodhidharma replaces “instruction” with “principles” (*li*: 理), and in place of “establishing proof,” the First Patriarch uses “practice” (*xing* 行). This is an area in which the Lanka could have been more helpful, and Bodhidharma's short piece lends a hand, explaining how the transformation of the mind—what the Lanka refers to as alaya consciousness—takes place. It's all about karma. Later Zen masters, like Zhaozhou 趙州, simplified this even more, telling their students to “have a cup of tea.” But tea was not readily available in North China when Bodhidharma showed up. He was traveling light, and all he brought with him was his mind.

Bodhidharma's Principles & Practice

Many roads lead to the Path, but basically there are only two: principles and practice. To enter by principles means to realize the essence through instruction and to believe that all living things share the same true nature, which isn't apparent because it is obscured by sensation and delusion. Those who turn from delusion back to what is real, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of fool and sage, and who remain unmoved, even by scriptures, are in complete and unspoken agreement with principles. Without moving or effort, they enter, we say, by principles. To enter by practice refers to four all-inclusive practices:¹⁵⁶ suffering injustice, adapting to conditions, seeking nothing, and practicing the Dharma.

First, suffering injustice. When those who follow the Path encounter adversity, they should think to themselves, "In countless ages gone by, I have turned from the essential to the trivial and wandered through all manner of existence, often angry without cause and guilty of numberless transgressions. Now, though I do no wrong, I am punished by my past. Neither gods nor humans can foresee when an evil deed will bear its fruit. I accept it with an open heart and without complaint of injustice." The sutras say, "When you meet with adversity don't be upset, because it makes sense." With such an understanding you are in harmony with principles, and by suffering injustice you advance on the Path.

Second, adapting to conditions. Beings have no self and depend on the operation of karma. All the suffering and joy we experience depend on conditions. If we should be blessed by some great reward, such as fame or fortune, it's the fruit of a seed planted by us in the past that has now ripened. When conditions change, it ends. Why delight in its existence? But while success and failure depend on conditions, the mind neither waxes nor wanes. Those who remain unmoved by the wind of joy silently follow the Path.

Third, seeking nothing. People of this world are deluded. They are always longing for something—always, in a word, seeking. The wise wake up to what is real. They choose principles over habit. Fixing their minds on the sublime, they let things change with the seasons. All phenomena are empty and contain nothing worth desiring. Calamity forever alternates with Prosperity.¹⁵⁷ To dwell in the three realms¹⁵⁸ is to dwell in a burning house. To have a body is to suffer. Does anyone with a body know peace? Who understands this lets go of what exists and stops imagining or seeking anything. The sutra says, “To seek is to suffer. To seek nothing is bliss.” Once you resolve to seek nothing, you are on the Path.

Fourth, practicing the Dharma. The Dharma is the truth that all natures are pure. By this truth, all appearances are empty. Defilement and attachment, subject and object don’t exist. The sutra says, “The Dharma includes no being because it is free from the impurity of being. And the Dharma includes no self because it is free from the impurity of self.”¹⁵⁹ Those wise enough to believe and understand this truth are bound to practice according to the Dharma. Since what is real includes nothing worth begrudging, they give their body, life, and property in charity, without regret, without the vanity of giver, gift, or recipient, and without bias or attachment. And to eliminate impurity they teach others, but without becoming attached to form. Thus, through their own practice they are able to help others and to glorify the path to enlightenment. And as with charity, they also practice the other paramitas. But while practicing the six paramitas to eliminate delusion, they practice nothing at all. This is what is meant by practicing the Dharma.

¹⁵⁶. Bodhidharma’s four practices focus on karma: bad karma, good karma, no new karma, and buddha karma, essentially, the transformation of “alaya consciousness,” for which see the Lankavatara LXXXII.

¹⁵⁷. Names of the two devas responsible for good and bad fortune (Nirvana Sutra 12).

¹⁵⁸. Desire, form, and formlessness. The reference to the “burning house” is from the Lotus Sutra 3.

¹⁵⁹. Vimalakirti Sutra 3.

SENGCAN'S TRUSTING THE MIND

Introduction

This poem is a series of epigrams. The Chinese call them *ming* 銘. Like the epigrams of ancient Greece, they consist of couplets that can stand alone or be linked together. And like their Mediterranean counterparts, they were inscribed rather than spoken or sung. They were embroidered, carved, or written on all sorts of things—their salient feature being a few pithy phrases that conveyed something worth keeping in mind, and usually they rhymed.

Despite its antiquity and widespread use, the *ming* never played an important role among China's literary forms. Simply put, its diction was that of a greeting card. Most of those that have survived haven't survived because of their content but because of their connection with their author or the object on which they were inscribed. The ones that make up this poem are an exception. Among the tens of thousands that have been preserved, these are the only epigrams people in China—and not only in China—still read and ponder. They're an essential part of Zen instruction around the world and a good example of how a teaching that eschews the use of language to convey its message uses language.

Their author was a monk named Sengcan 僧璨. When he was over forty, he became a disciple of Huike, Zen's Second Patriarch. After the death of Bodhidharma, Huike remained in North China until 574, when there was a purge of Buddhist monks and nuns to expand a new dynasty's tax base. Hitherto tax-exempt monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life or be killed. Huike fled south, all the way to the remote slopes of Sikongshan 司空山, just north of the Yangzi. Sengcan was among those who followed him there.

The persecution of Buddhist clerics ended with the founding of a new dynasty, the Sui, in 581, and Huike returned north. But before he did, he designated Sengcan his dharma heir, making him Zen's Third Patriarch. That was in 583. After his teacher's departure, Sengcan remained on Sikongshan. But while the mountain was a

good place to hide, it wasn't a good place to teach. Even today it sees few visitors. Sengcan finally ended his seclusion in 590 and took up residence at Shangu Temple 山谷寺. It was only a few days walk away, and it was at the foot of Tianzhushan 天柱山, the most sacred mountain in the entire Yangzi watershed. It should have been a good place to teach. But it was a Daoist mountain, not a Buddhist one, and Sengcan attracted only one disciple that we know of: a twelve-year-old boy who showed up at the monastery in 592.

Sengcan gave the boy the name Daoxin 道信. Ten years later, Sengcan made him his dharma heir and Zen's Fourth Patriarch. Then he left with some Daoist friends for the distant mountain of Luofushan 羅浮山, not far from what is now Hong Kong. Living near Tianzhushan, Sengcan had developed an interest in more than Daoist terminology. He suffered from rheumatism, and no place was more famous for elixirs than Luofushan.

By the time Sengcan returned two years later, Daoxin had left on his own journey—a journey that would result in the establishment of China's first Zen monastery and the self-supporting way of life that would form the basis of Chinese Zen. The elixirs notwithstanding, Sengcan died three years later in 606. His body was at first preserved at Shangu Temple. People in those days thought the preserved bodies of spiritual teachers had magic powers. Eventually, the magic wore out, and his body was cremated in 745 and the ashes placed inside a stupa. The stupa is still there, on top of the hill behind the original monastery. Inscribed on its base is *Trusting the Mind*, or *Xinxinming* 信心銘, the poem that has been associated with Sengcan ever since.

I considered translating it half a dozen times. The language is so simple. It begs to be translated. And it has. No Zen text has been translated more. I would be surprised if there weren't over a dozen versions in English alone—and many more that never made it into print. Normally, I wouldn't consider adding to an already crowded field. But whenever I've read the text, I've wanted to combine the couplets differently, differently from how I did the previous time I read the text or differently from how others—including Chinese commentators—combined them. The reason for this is that the *Xinxinming* is made up of rhymed couplets that don't necessarily rhyme

anymore. The pronunciation of Chinese has changed. Hence, reading the text today, it's unclear which couplets go with which others. Are they quatrains or something else?

A solution finally presented itself when I learned that there was a pronunciation dictionary compiled around 590 called *Exegesis of the Language of the Classics* 經典釋文 and a rhyming dictionary published in 601 called *Comparison of Rhymes* 切韻. Using these two books and their successors, as well as the recent work of such scholars as Bernard Karlgren¹⁶⁰ and Baxter and Sagart,¹⁶¹ I was finally able to see that the couplets that comprise the *Xinxinming* not only form standard two-couplet quatrains, they also form longer stanzas of three, four, six, even eight couplets, and there is no longer a single couplet at the end in search of a rhyming pair, which had always puzzled me—and no doubt others.

In the translation that follows, I have indicated in bold the first line for each set of rhymes. It is still a single, continuous poem with a singular focus, but the different rhymes suggest, if nothing else, that it wasn't composed at one go but over time and with shifts of emphasis.

As for the poem's meaning, if Sengcan had been present at the gathering in Vimalakirti's house, I can imagine him quoting a few of these couplets in response to the layman's request for examples of nonduality. That is what this poem is about: "Two exist because of one, let one go as well."

¹⁶⁰. Bernard Karlgren, *Grammata Serica Recensa* (1957).

¹⁶¹. William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese Reconstruction*, Version 1.1.

Trusting the Mind

The Way isn't hard to find¹⁶²

just avoid choosing
when preferences are gone
it's perfectly clear
the slightest distinction
parts heaven and earth
to find it right now
stop taking sides.

Fighting over sides

is an illness of the mind
until you understand the mystery
you still your thoughts in vain.

It's perfect like the Void¹⁶³

nothing missing nothing extra
because you grab and throw away
it doesn't look like that to you.

Don't chase dependent things¹⁶⁴

don't settle for emptiness either
in all-embracing oneness
everything disappears completely.

Staying still and trying not to move

you end up moving more
why be trapped in dualities
realize opposites are the same
not knowing they're the same
you waste your time either way
denying existence or nonexistence
you trade one emptiness for another
the more you think or talk
the less sense you make
once you stop thinking and talking

there's nothing that isn't clear
returning to the root you find the meaning
chasing the light you end up confused
reflect on this right now
better now than before it's all empty.¹⁶⁵

Whatever happens before it's all empty

comes from deluded views
no need to look for the truth
just put an end to views.

Don't cling to dualities

and don't seek them out
once a yes or no appears
confusion clouds the mind.

Two exist because of one

let one go as well
as long as no thought arises
nothing is wrong with anything.

Nothing wrong and no things

no thoughts and no thinking
the actor disappears with the stage
the stage disappears with the actor.

The stage exists because of the actor

the actor exists because of the stage
realize both of them
are one and the same emptiness
one emptiness containing two¹⁶⁶
altogether ten thousand things
if you don't distinguish fine or coarse
how can you be biased?

The Way at heart is all-embracing

it isn't hard or easy
those with doubts or narrow minds
take longer the more they try.

Grab it and you lose perspective

you're sure to go astray
let it be the way it is
it doesn't leave or stay.

Accepting your nature being one with the Way

you'll know no discontent
controlling your thoughts opposing the truth
you'll sink into negativity.

Exhausting yourself in negativity

what use is leaving home¹⁶⁷
regardless of the path you take
give the dust of sensation no thought.

Giving the dust of sensation no thought

this is the same as enlightenment
the wise do nothing
fools become entangled
nothing differs from anything else
but deluded people love to cling
objectifying the mind to cultivate the mind
what a great mistake
peace and disorder arise from delusion
enlightenment includes neither bad nor good
each and every duality
is due to measures or scales
why bother trying to grab
a dream an illusion a flower in the sky¹⁶⁸
profit and loss right and wrong
let them go right now.

When you're no longer asleep

dreams vanish by themselves
when you don't differentiate
everything is real.

What is real at heart is a mystery

be quiet and forget about reasons
view everything the same
return to letting things be.

When reasons are gone

what use are examples
be still and movement ceases
move and stillness ends
if neither is right

how can one be good?

Go beyond all limits

don't follow patterns or rules

focus on equanimity

stop whatever you're doing

get rid of lingering doubts

put your trust in samadhi

let nothing at all remain

nothing that leaves a trace

let the empty light shine

don't try to exert your mind

this isn't the domain of reason

much less perception or feeling.

In the Dharma Realm of Suchness¹⁶⁹

neither self nor other exists

if you're ready right now

just say "not two."

Not two is all-inclusive

there is nothing it doesn't contain

the sages of every world

all achieve this understanding.

An understanding that transcends time

a thought that lasts ten thousand years

there is nowhere it isn't present

wherever you look it's there.

It's smaller than small and bigger than big

forget dimensions and states

it's bigger than big and smaller than small

don't look for boundaries or edges

it exists but doesn't

it doesn't but does

what isn't like this

you have to let go.

It's one and all things

it's all things and one

if you can be like this

why care you're not done.¹⁷⁰

Trust the mind free of dualities

free of dualities trust the mind
it's where language can't go
it's not past future or present.

162. When Buddhism arrived in China, *Dharma* was often translated by *Dao*.

163. Another Daoist term, *Taixu* 太虛 was depicted as a circle containing nothing, which was the Daoist view of nonduality, before yin and yang.

164. According to Buddhists, things exist only in relation to other things. Thus, they are empty, empty of self-existence.

165. I've interpreted 前空 "before emptiness" as referring to the Indian notion of cosmic time whereby this kalpa will be followed by an empty one.

166. "One gives birth to two, two give birth to three (yin, yang, and their mixture), three give birth to the ten thousand things" (Daodejing 42).

167. A person who becomes a Buddhist monk or nun leaves their family and chooses among the sravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva paths.

168. A metaphor derived from looking at things with cataract-clouded eyes.

169. Buddhists use the term "suchness" *bhutatathata* for what is real. The "Dharma Realm" includes all possible realities, provisional or ultimate.

170. Bodhisattvas aren't done until they liberate all beings.

THE SIXTH PATRIARCH'S PLATFORM SUTRA

Introduction

The Platform Sutra 壇經 records the words of Huineng, Zen's Sixth Patriarch (638–713). Of all the Buddhist texts originating in China, this is the only one with “sutra” 經 in its title. Huineng's followers viewed him as a buddha, and the sutra title stuck. The majority of the text records a talk Huineng gave while conferring the Zen precepts on a mostly lay audience numbering in the thousands. Huineng gave this talk in 681, ten years after he received the patriarchship and thirty-two years before he died. The talk was given at the invitation of the magistrate of Shaoguan 韶關, a town two hundred kilometers north of the southern port city of Guangzhou—and twenty kilometers from Mount Caoxi 曹溪山, where Huineng lived and taught. This region wasn't a stronghold of Chinese culture in those days, and Huineng himself was only half Chinese. His father was a banished official from North China who died shortly after Huineng was born, and he was raised by his mother, who belonged to one of the non-Han ethnic groups that made up a majority of the population in much of South China during the Tang.

The sutra begins with Huineng recounting his connection with Zen: how, after hearing only a few lines of the Diamond Sutra, he experienced an awakening and walked a thousand kilometers to the monastery where the Fifth Patriarch was teaching this text—and where he was derided for being an uncultured Southerner, and a “jungle dog” as well. His ethnic attire, if not his accent, doubtlessly gave him away. He was also illiterate, but that didn't prevent him from understanding Zen.

Actually, being illiterate might have turned out to be an advantage. The teaching Huineng understood—the one handed down by Bodhidharma and his successors—eschewed reliance on words. When they did use words, it was to point people back to their minds. In his Bloodstream Sermon 血脈論, China's First Patriarch taught, “This mind is the buddha.” In Trusting the Mind, the Third

Patriarch wrote, “Trust the mind free of dualities / free of dualities trust the mind.” Huineng got the message. His advice was “See your nature and become a buddha.” The emphasis wasn’t on the accumulation of knowledge but on the experience of one’s own nondualistic mind and the realization that one’s own nature was identical to that of a buddha. This must have sounded like sacrilege coming out of the mouth of an illiterate native of China’s uncultured South. What? You a buddha?

Buddha or not, no one has had a greater impact on Zen in China, and no Zen text has received as much attention as this record of his teaching. The text itself isn’t difficult, either to read or to translate. It’s just hard to put into practice. The language is straightforward—like Huineng himself, and his vocabulary couldn’t be simpler. Simple, though, doesn’t necessarily mean easy to grasp, and it helps to understand how he uses two words that are never far from his lips: “mind” and “nature.”

For Huineng, “mind” refers to the first six forms of consciousness—the five sensory forms and conceptual consciousness. And he splits “nature” into “dharma nature” and “buddha nature.” He uses the former to refer to the alaya, or eighth form of consciousness—he doesn’t include the seventh form, manas consciousness. And he uses the latter to refer to the tathagata-garbha—the alaya’s original or transformed state. At one point, he tells us “mind” is like the kingdom, and “nature” like the king.¹⁷¹ And, of course, it’s your kingdom and your throne he’s talking about.

For Huineng, this was all that mattered—as it was for the author of the Lankavatara: our awareness and its transformation. It’s not surprising that when Huineng is conferring the precepts on his audience, he doesn’t begin by talking about the precepts but about meditation and wisdom instead. Also noteworthy is how he treats meditation and wisdom: as indivisible. Meditation, he says, is meaningless if not coupled with wisdom, and wisdom useless if not coupled with meditation. It is only after he has established the One Practice Samadhi of meditation-wisdom that he turns to the precepts and the vows that people make upon becoming Buddhists. But here, too, he reinterprets these through the mind-nature lens.

With Buddhism's three pillars¹⁷² finally in place, Huineng talks to his audience about Zen. Normally, when we talk about a teaching, we expect to hear about concepts. But regarding Zen, Huineng says “no idea” is its doctrine, “no form” is its body, and “no attachment” is its foundation. Trying to talk about a teaching like Huineng's—or to think about it—is like trying to grab water. Zen teachers like Huineng didn't think of Zen as something that could be put into words—though they tried. It had to be put into practice. That was the whole point. How a person lived their life was what was important.

As for how Zen Buddhists manifested this in the Tang, it may have begun with someone meditating in cave or in a mountain hut, but it ended up with hundreds, if not thousands, of practitioners living in agricultural communes where they supported each other through their mutual effort. Buddhist monks for the first time didn't beg for their food. They farmed, carried water, and chopped wood. Zen was no longer seen as something limited to a meditation cushion. It was something you did all day long. One Practice Samadhi. It's one thing to read or talk about “no thought” and quite another to live with others practicing exactly that.

Since Huineng's day, Zen has come a long way. Some of those monasteries in the Gan 潞 and Xiang 湘 River watersheds where Zen first flourished are still active, but Zen itself has “gone beyond.” Nowadays it's practiced in living rooms and converted garages and repurposed churches around the world, where people are still sitting together, still reading this text, still vowing to liberate all beings, one breath at a time.

Addendum: The Chinese text I have used for this translation was found at the Silk Road oasis of Dunhuang 敦煌 by Ren Ziyi 任子宜 in 1935. It was given a tentative date of 780, the same date as another Dunhuang copy brought back to the British Museum by Aurel Stein in 1908. The ordering of material in these two early copies differs considerably from the later Zongbao 宗寶 edition of 1291 enshrined in the Chinese Buddhist canon. Since most other English translations are based on that later edition, to make comparisons easier I've added a list cross-referencing the fifty-seven sections of the Dunhuang copies with the ten chapters of the Zongbao edition.

Dunhuang sections 38, 50, 55, 56, and 57 are missing in the Zongbao edition. As for material in the Zongbao edition missing in the Dunhuang copies, I have indicated that with an x.¹⁷³

Chapter One: 1, 2, 3, x, 4, 5, 6, x, 7, 8, 9, x, 10, 11, x, 12

Chapter Two: 12, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37

Chapter Three: 34, 35, 36, 37

Chapter Four: 12, 13, 15, 14, 16, 17

Chapter Five: 18, 19

Chapter Six: x, 22, 21, 23, 20, 33, 37

Chapter Seven: x, 42, x, 43, x

Chapter Eight: 39, x 40, 41, x, 44

Chapter Nine: x

Chapter Ten: 45, 46, 48, 49, 47, 49, x, 51, 52, 53, 54, x

¹⁷¹. He mentions this in 35, but see also 20 and 45 for more on how he uses these terms. Readers might also take a look at Lankavatara IX and LXXXII.

¹⁷². Morality, meditation, and wisdom.

¹⁷³. Readers can find the material missing in the Dunhuang copies—as well as several hundred pages of commentary—in my Platform Sutra translation published by Counterpoint.

The Platform Sutra

One: Master Huineng took his seat in the lecture hall of Dafan Temple 大梵寺¹⁷⁴ to expound the teaching of Maha Prajnaparamita¹⁷⁵ and to transmit the Formless Precepts.¹⁷⁶ Seated below him on that occasion were over ten thousand monks and nuns and laypeople, as well as Magistrate Wei Qu 韋璩 of Shaozhou and more than sixty officials and scholars, all of whom had asked the Master to explain the Maha Prajnaparamita. The Magistrate also instructed the Master's disciple, Fahai, to make a record to pass down to future generations so that students of the Way who upheld its guiding principle and who transmitted it to others would have this testament to rely on as their authority.

Two: Master Huineng began this Platform Sutra by saying, “Good friends, clear your minds by reflecting on the teaching of Maha Prajnaparamita.” The Master then stopped speaking while he cleared his own mind.

After a long time, he spoke again, “Good friends, please listen. My kind-hearted father was from Fanyang 范陽,¹⁷⁷ but he was dismissed from office and banished to Lingnan 嶺南.¹⁷⁸ He lived in Xinzhou 新州 as a commoner and died when I was quite young. My widowed mother then moved to Nanhai 南海,¹⁷⁹ and since we were poor, I sold firewood at the market.

“One day a shopkeeper happened to buy a load from me and asked me to bring it to his store. After he took delivery and paid me, I met a customer on my way out the door who was reading the Diamond Sutra out loud. As soon as I heard the words, my mind felt clear and awake. I asked him, ‘Where did you get that scripture?’

“He said, ‘On East Fengmu Mountain 東馮墓山 in Huangmei County 黃梅縣.¹⁸⁰ I went there to pay my respects to the Fifth Patriarch, Master Hongren 弘忍. His congregation includes more than a thousand disciples, and while I was there, I heard him tell the monks and laypeople that by memorizing just a single section of the

Diamond Sutra they would see their natures and immediately understand how to become buddhas.'

"When I heard this, I sensed a connection from a past life. I said goodbye to my mother and left for Huangmei's Fengmu Mountain to pay my respects to Master Hongren."¹⁸¹

Three: "Master Hongren asked me, 'Where are you from? And what do you hope to accomplish by coming to this mountain to pay your respects?'

"I answered, 'Your disciple is from Lingnan, a commoner of Xinzhou 新州. The reason I came all this way to pay my respects is for just one thing: to become a buddha.'

"The Master scoffed, 'But you're from Lingnan and a jungle dog¹⁸² at that. How can you possibly become a buddha?'

"I replied, 'People might be from the north or south, but not their buddha nature.'¹⁸³ The bodies of this jungle dog and the Master aren't the same, but how can our buddha natures differ?'

"The Master was about to say something to me. But seeing his attendants standing there, he didn't say anything more and sent me to join the monastery workforce. A novice then led me to the milling room, where I pedaled a millstone for the next eight months."

Four: "One day, the Fifth Patriarch suddenly called his disciples together. After they had assembled, he said, 'I've told you that the greatest concern for anyone is life and death. But you disciples spend your days making offerings, looking for ways to earn blessings, not for a way out of the bitter sea of life and death. If you are blind to your own nature, how can you find the gate to blessings? Go back to your rooms and look within yourselves. Those of you who are sufficiently wise, use the prajna wisdom of your own nature and write me a poem. When I read your poems, if any of you understands what is truly important, I will give you the robe and the Dharma¹⁸⁴ and will appoint you the Sixth Patriarch. Hurry, as if there were a fire!'"

Five: "Once his disciples received these instructions, as they returned to their rooms,¹⁸⁵ they said to one another, 'There's no need for us to clear our minds and go to the trouble of writing a poem to show the abbot. Venerable Shenxiu 神秀 is our precept instructor.'¹⁸⁶ After he receives the Dharma, we can look to him. There's no need

to write a poem.’ So they stopped worrying about it, and no one was willing to submit one.

“It happened that there was a corridor in front of the Patriarch’s Hall. Because people left offerings at the foot of the wall, the abbot wanted to cover it with murals from the Lankavatara Sutra¹⁸⁷ and paintings of the five patriarchs transmitting the robe and the Dharma so that it would serve as a record to be passed down to future generations. The painter Lu Zhen 盧珍 had inspected the wall and was going to begin work the next day.”

Six: “The venerable Shenxiu thought, ‘Because I am their precept instructor, no one is going to submit a poem. But if I don’t submit one, how can the Patriarch tell whether the understanding of my mind is deep or not? To show the Patriarch a poem because I want the Dharma would be the right thing to do. But if it was for the patriarchship, it would be wrong. I would be the same as a simple-minded person usurping the position of a sage. Still, if I don’t submit a poem, I will never receive the Dharma.’ As he considered this, he kept thinking, ‘What a predicament!’

“Finally, at midnight, not letting anyone see him, he went to write his poem on the south corridor wall in hopes of obtaining the robe and the Dharma. He thought, ‘When the Patriarch sees my poem and reads it, if he comes to find me, the moment I see him, I’ll tell him I wrote it. But when he sees it, if he says it isn’t good enough, it will be due to the obstruction of my past karma that I don’t understand and am not ready to receive the Dharma. The Master’s mind is impossible to fathom. I may as well stop worrying.’ So the venerable Shenxiu held up a lantern and wrote his poem on the wall of the south corridor at midnight without anyone seeing him. His poem went:

‘Our body is a bodhi tree
the mind is like a propped-up mirror¹⁸⁸
always keep it polished
don’t let it gather dust.’”

Seven: “After Shenxiu wrote his poem, he returned to his room unseen and lay down. At dawn, the Fifth Patriarch sent for the court

artist, Lu Zhen, to come to the south corridor to paint scenes from the Lankavatara. The Fifth Patriarch suddenly saw the poem. After he read it, he told Lu, 'You've gone to so much trouble and come so far, we will pay you thirty thousand coins,¹⁸⁹ but there is no need to paint any murals. The Diamond Sutra says, "Attributes are a fiction."¹⁹⁰ It would be better if we kept this poem for deluded people to recite. Anyone who relies on this for their practice won't fall into any of the three unfortunate states of existence. And it will be a great help to anyone who cultivates the Dharma.'

"The Master then called his disciples together and burned incense before the poem. When everyone saw this, they were filled with respect. The Master said, 'Any of you who recites and understands this poem will see their nature. And anyone who relies on this for their practice won't descend into a lesser state of existence.' As his disciples recited it, they all did so with reverence and exclaimed how wonderful it was.

"Later, the Fifth Patriarch called Shenxiu to his room and asked, 'Did you write the poem? If you did, you're ready to receive my Dharma.'

"Shenxiu said, 'I'm guilty. It's true. I was the one who wrote it. But I don't dare ask for the patriarchship, only for the Master's judgment as to whether your disciple has acquired enough wisdom to understand what is truly important or not.'

"The Fifth Patriarch said, 'This poem of yours shows your understanding has reached the threshold but has not yet entered the door. If an ordinary person uses your poem in their practice, they won't regress. But someone who seeks perfect enlightenment will never realize it by means of such an understanding. If you want to enter the door, you have to see your nature. Go back and think about this for a few days and write me another poem. If you can enter the door and see your nature, I will give you the robe and the Dharma.' Shenxiu left, but after several days he still hadn't written anything."

Eight: "It happened that one of the novices walked past the milling room chanting Shenxiu's poem. As soon as I heard it, I knew it was by someone who hadn't seen their nature or understood what was really important. I asked the boy, 'What poem were you reciting just now?'

“The novice said, ‘Don’t you know? The abbot said nothing is more important than life and death, and he wants to pass on his robe and Dharma. He told his disciples to write a poem and show it to him, and he’ll give his robe and Dharma to whichever disciple understands what is truly important, and that person will become the Sixth Patriarch. One of the senior monks, Shenxiu, wrote this “Formless Poem” on the south corridor. The Patriarch told all of us to recite it and whoever understands this poem will see their nature and whoever uses it for their practice will achieve liberation.’

“I said, ‘I’ve been treading this mill more than eight months, and I’ve never been to the front of the Patriarch’s Hall. Could you please lead me to the south corridor so I can see this poem and pay my respects? Hopefully, by reciting it, I’ll establish a karmic connection for a future life. I’d like to be reborn in a land where there is a buddha.’

“The novice then led me to the south corridor, and I bowed before the poem. Because I was illiterate, I asked someone to read it. Once I heard it, I realized what was truly important and also composed a poem. I asked someone who could write to write it on the west corridor wall so I could reveal my mind. Unless a person knows their mind, studying the Dharma is useless. But once someone knows their mind and sees their nature, they understand what is truly important. My poem went:

‘Bodhi isn’t some kind of tree
this mirror doesn’t have a stand
our buddha nature is forever clear
where do you get this dust?’

Then I composed another one:

‘The mind is the bodhi tree
the body is the mirror’s stand
the mirror itself is so clear
dust has no place to land.’

“When the disciples in the courtyard saw these poems of mine, they were dumbfounded. After I went back to the milling room, the

Fifth Patriarch came down the corridor and saw them too. He knew I understood what was important, but he was worried that others would find out. So he told everyone, ‘This one doesn’t get it either.’”¹⁹¹

Nine: “At the beginning of the third watch, the Fifth Patriarch called me into his room and explained the Diamond Sutra to me. As soon as I heard the words, I understood, and that night, unknown to anyone, I received the Dharma. He transmitted the robe and the instantaneous teaching to me, and I became the Sixth Patriarch.

“He said, ‘The robe is an embodiment of trust handed down from one generation to the next, while the Dharma is transmitted mind to mind and has to be realized by people themselves.’

“The Fifth Patriarch then said, ‘Huineng, since long ago the lives of those to whom this teaching has been transmitted have hung by a thread. If you stay here, someone will harm you. You have to leave right now.’”

Ten: “After receiving the robe and the Dharma, I left just after midnight. The Fifth Patriarch accompanied me as far as the Jiujiang Ferry 九江驛.¹⁹² As I boarded, we said goodbye. The Patriarch instructed me, ‘Go now, and do your best to take the Dharma south. But don’t teach for three years. This teaching will be hard to spread. Later, when you do teach, use skillful means. Once those who are deluded are able to open their minds, they are no different from those who are enlightened.’ Our farewells done, I headed south.”

Eleven: “In less than two months, I reached Dayu Ridge 大庾嶺.¹⁹³ I was unaware that several hundred people had been chasing me, hoping to get the Patriarch’s robe and the Dharma. But they had given up halfway and had gone back, all except one monk, whose surname was Chen 陳 and whose Dharma name was Huishun 惠順. He had previously been a general of the third grade, and he was a rough character. When he caught up with me at the ridge, I offered him the Patriarch’s robe. But he wouldn’t take it. He said, ‘I’ve come all this way for the Dharma. I don’t want the robe.’ So I transmitted the Dharma to Huishun there at the ridge. He was ready, and as soon as I spoke, his mind opened. I told him to go back north and teach others.”

Twelve: “I have come here today because I have a connection of many lifetimes with all of you officials and clerics and laypeople. This teaching was passed down by the sages of the past. It isn’t something I discovered by myself. If you wish to hear this ancient teaching, you must listen with clear minds and resolve to get rid of your delusions and understand it as past generations have.”

Huineng then yelled, “Good friends! The prajna wisdom of enlightenment is something everyone already possesses. But because your minds are deluded, you can’t understand by yourselves. You need to find a truly good friend to show you how to see your nature. Good friends, this buddha nature isn’t different for the ignorant or the wise. It just depends whether people are deluded or awake. When people are deluded, they’re ignorant. When they’re awake, they’re wise.”

Thirteen: “Good friends, this Dharma of mine is based on meditation and wisdom.¹⁹⁴ But don’t make the mistake of thinking meditation and wisdom are separate. Meditation and wisdom are one, not two. Meditation is the body of wisdom, and wisdom is the function of meditation. Wherever you find wisdom, you find meditation. Wherever you find meditation, you find wisdom. Good friends, what this means is that meditation and wisdom are one.

“Fellow students of the Way, pay attention. Don’t think that meditation comes first then gives rise to wisdom or that wisdom comes first then gives rise to meditation or that meditation and wisdom are separate. For those who hold such views, the Dharma is dualistic. When you speak about what is good, but what you think about isn’t good, meditation and wisdom aren’t one. But when what you say and think about are both good, when the external and internal are alike, meditation and wisdom are one.

“The cultivation of self-awareness does not involve arguments. Those who argue about which comes first and which comes second only confuse people. Until you put an end to thoughts of victory and defeat, you will give rise to the self-existence of dharmas and never get free of the four states of existence.”¹⁹⁵

Fourteen: “One Practice Samadhi¹⁹⁶ means at all times, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, always practicing with an undivided mind. The Vimalakirti Sutra says, ‘An undivided mind is

the place of enlightenment,’ and ‘an undivided mind is the pure land.’¹⁹⁷ Don’t practice hypocrisy with your mind and talk about being undivided with your lips. If you speak about One Practice Samadhi with your lips, but you don’t practice with an undivided mind, you’re not a disciple of the Buddha. Simply practice with an undivided mind and don’t become attached to any dharma. This is what is meant by One Practice Samadhi.

“Deluded people attached to external attributes get hold of One Practice Samadhi and say that sitting motionless, eliminating delusions, or not thinking thoughts is One Practice Samadhi. If that were true, it would be the same as being unconscious. It would block the Way. The Way has to flow without obstruction. Why would you block it? The Way flows freely when the mind doesn’t dwell on anything. Once it dwells on something, it is imprisoned. If sitting motionless were right, Vimalakirti wouldn’t have criticized Sariputra for meditating in the forest.¹⁹⁸

“Good friends, I know there are those who tell others to concentrate on contemplating the purity of their minds and not to move or think. Deluded people don’t understand and insist on turning things upside down. There are hundreds of such people who teach the Way like this. But they are, you should know, greatly mistaken.”

Fifteen: “Good friends, what are meditation and wisdom like? They are like a lamp and its light. Where there’s a lamp, there’s light. Where there’s no lamp, there’s no light. The lamp is the light’s body, and the light is the lamp’s function. They have two names but not two bodies. Our teaching of meditation and wisdom is also like this.”

Sixteen: “Good friends, the Dharma isn’t instantaneous or gradual. It’s people who are sharp or dull. For those who are deluded, there is constant encouragement. For those who are aware, there is instantaneous practice: ‘know your mind and see your nature.’ For those who are aware, there are absolutely no distinctions. For those who aren’t aware, there are infinite kalpas on the Wheel of Rebirth.”

Seventeen: “Good friends, since ancient times, this Dharma teaching of ours, both its instantaneous and gradual versions, has proclaimed ‘no idea’ as its doctrine, ‘no form’ as its body, and ‘no attachment’ as its foundation.

“What do we mean by a form that has ‘no form?’ To be free of form in the presence of forms. And what about ‘no idea?’ Not to think about ideas. And ‘no attachment?’ This is everyone’s original nature, thought after thought being unattached. Whether it’s a past thought, a present thought, or a future thought, let one thought follow another without interruption. Once a thought is interrupted, your dharma body becomes separated from your material body. As you go from one thought to another, don’t become attached. Once one thought becomes attached, every thought becomes attached. You become imprisoned. But as long as you go from one thought to another without becoming attached, there is no prison. This is why ‘no attachment’ is our foundation.

“Good friends, ‘no form’ means externally to be free of all forms. If you can just be free of forms, the body of your own nature will be perfectly clear. This is why we take ‘no form’ as our body.

“Not to be affected by anything external is what is meant by ‘no idea,’ to be free of objects in our thoughts and not to give rise to thoughts about things. But don’t stop thinking and think about nothing at all. If your thoughts stop, you will die and be reborn somewhere else. Students of the Way, use your minds. Don’t misunderstand the meaning of this teaching. It is one thing to be mistaken yourself, quite another to lead others astray by criticizing the teaching of the sutras while remaining unaware that you yourself are lost. Thus, the reason we proclaim ‘no idea’ as our doctrine is because deluded people think in terms of objects, and on the basis of these ideas they give rise to erroneous views. This is the origin of all afflictions and delusions.

“But when this school proclaims ‘no idea’ as its doctrine, and people stop thinking about objects, and they have no ideas, we do not then advocate ‘no ideas.’ What does ‘no’ negate? And what idea is ‘idea’ about? ‘No’ negates the dualities of affliction and delusion. And ‘idea’ is the idea of the original nature of reality. Reality is the embodiment of ideas, and ideas are the function of reality. When your nature gives rise to an idea, even though you sense something, remain free of it and don’t be affected by the world of objects. The Vimalakirti Sutra says, ‘Externally, be skilled at distinguishing the

attributes of dharmas. Internally, remain unmoved by the ultimate truth.”¹⁹⁹

Eighteen: “Good friends, in this school of the Dharma, when we practice Zen, we don’t contemplate the mind, and we don’t contemplate purity, and we don’t talk about being imperturbable.

“If someone says to contemplate the mind, the mind is basically a delusion. And since a delusion is the same as an illusion, there is nothing to contemplate.

“If someone says to contemplate purity, your nature is already pure. It is because of delusions that reality is obscured. As long as you are free of delusions, your nature is pure. If you don’t see that your nature is already pure, and you decide to contemplate purity, you create the delusion of purity instead. A delusion doesn’t actually exist, but whatever you contemplate is a delusion.

“As for purity, it has no form or attributes. If someone assigns attributes to purity and thinks they have achieved something, those who hold such a view obstruct their own nature and become trapped by purity instead.

“As for cultivating imperturbability, as long as someone doesn’t pay attention to the faults of others, their nature is imperturbable. But when deluded people act imperturbable, as soon as they open their mouths, they talk about right and wrong and turn their backs on the Way. Contemplating the mind and contemplating purity are actually what keeps them from seeing the Way.”

Nineteen: “That being so, what does this school of ours mean by ‘practicing Zen?’ By ‘practicing,’ this school of ours means not being obstructed by anything and not giving rise to ideas about external objective states. And by ‘Zen,’ we mean seeing your nature without being confused.

“And what do we mean by ‘Zen meditation?’ Externally, to be free from appearances is ‘Zen.’ Internally, not to be confused is ‘meditation.’ As long as you are attached to external appearances, your mind will be confused internally. But as long as you are free from external appearances, internally your nature won’t be confused.

“Your nature itself is pure and in samadhi. It is just that you come into contact with objects, and as you do, you become confused. When you are free from appearances and not confused, you are in

samadhi. To be free from appearances externally is 'Zen.' Not to be confused internally is 'meditation.' External Zen and internal meditation, this is what we mean by 'Zen meditation.'

"The Vimalakirti Sutra says, 'Suddenly, all at once, you rediscover your original mind.'²⁰⁰ And the Bodhisattva Precept Sutra²⁰¹ says, 'Our original nature is pure.' Good friends, see the purity of your own nature and put the dharma body of your own nature to work in your practice. Do what a buddha does. Set forth and complete the path to buddhahood yourselves."

Twenty: "Good friends, as I confer on you the Formless Precepts, you must experience them for yourselves. Recite this together with me, and it will enable you to see the three-bodied buddha within you:

'I take refuge

in the pure dharma body buddha
in my own material body.

I take refuge

in the myriadfold manifestation body buddha
in my own material body.

I take refuge

in the yet-to-be-perfected realization body buddha
in my own material body.'

Now recite this three times.

"This material body is but an inn and not a worthy refuge, whereas the three bodies I just mentioned constitute your unobstructed dharma nature. Everyone has them, but because people are deluded, they don't see them. They look for the three-bodied tathagata outside themselves and don't see the three-bodied buddha in their own material body.

"Good friends, listen to this good friend of yours. I will tell you how to recognize the three-bodied buddha of your dharma nature in your material body, the three-bodied buddha that is born from this nature of yours.

"What do I mean by the pure dharma body buddha? Good friends, everyone's nature is fundamentally pure, and everything is present in this nature of yours. If you think about something bad, you

will do something bad. If you think about something good, you will do something good. Realize that everything is present in this nature of yours. But your nature itself remains pure. The sun and moon are always shining. It is only when they are blocked by clouds that the light is above and darkness below, and you can't see them. Then suddenly a welcome wind comes and blows the clouds away, and all the countless images of the world suddenly appear.

“Your nature is pure like the clear sky, and your wisdom is like the sun or the moon. It is always shining. It is because you become attached to external objects and the clouds of delusion cover your nature that you can't see it. But because you meet a good friend who explains the true Dharma, your delusions are driven off, and everything in this nature of yours appears perfectly clear. This nature of yours in which everything is present is what I mean by the pure dharma body. When you take refuge in yourself and get rid of bad thoughts and practices, this is called taking refuge.

“What do I mean by the myriadfold manifestation body? If you didn't think, your nature would be utterly empty. When you think, you manifest yourself. If you think bad thoughts, you become a denizen of hell. If you think good thoughts, you turn into a deva of heaven. Malice turns you into a beast, and compassion turns you into a bodhisattva. Wisdom transports you to the higher realms, and ignorance sends you into the lower realms. Although their nature is constantly manifesting itself, deluded people are unaware of this.

“Whenever a thought is good, wisdom arises. Just as a single lamp can dispel a thousand years of darkness, a single thought of wisdom can end ten thousand years of ignorance. Don't think about what is past. Think about what is next. When the next thought is always good, that is what we call the realization body. One bad thought results in the destruction of a thousand years of good ones. But one good thought results in the annihilation of a thousand years of bad ones. And once they're gone, as long as your next thought is a good one, that is the realization body.

“The thoughts that come from the dharma body are your manifestation body. When every thought is good, that is your realization body. When you become aware of this and put this into practice, that is called taking refuge. Your material body is made of

flesh and bones, but your material body is merely an inn and can't be called a refuge. Once you become aware of your three bodies, you will understand what is truly important.

Twenty-one: “Good friends, now that you have taken refuge in the three-bodied buddha, let us make the Four Boundless Vows. Good friends, recite after me:

‘I vow to liberate all beings,
no matter how numberless.
I vow to end all afflictions,
no matter how countless.
I vow to master all teachings,
no matter how limitless.
I vow to complete the path to buddhahood,
no matter how unachievable.’

Now recite this three times.

“Good friends, as for ‘I vow to liberate all beings, no matter how numberless,’ it isn't we who do the liberating. Good friends, the beings in our minds all liberate themselves with their own natures in their own bodies.

“What does it mean ‘they liberate themselves with their own natures?’ The mistaken views and afflictions, the ignorance and delusions within their material bodies already possess the nature of original enlightenment. It is just this nature of original enlightenment that liberates them by means of right views.²⁰² Once beings realize the prajna wisdom of right views, they rid themselves of ignorance and delusion, and each being liberates themselves. The mistaken are liberated by means of the truth. The deluded are liberated by means of awareness. The ignorant are liberated by means of wisdom. The bad are liberated by means of goodness. And the afflicted are liberated by means of enlightenment. Those who are liberated in this manner are truly liberated.

“As for ‘I vow to end all afflictions, no matter how countless,’ this means to get rid of the delusions of your own mind. ‘I vow to master all teachings, no matter how limitless’ means to study the true, unsurpassed Dharma. And ‘I vow to complete the path to

buddhahood, no matter how unachievable' means always to practice with humility, to respect all beings, to avoid attachments, to give rise to prajna awareness, and to put an end to delusions. Thus the attainment of buddhahood through your own realization is the result of your vows."

Twenty-two: "Good friends, having made the Four Boundless Vows, let me now recite for you the Formless Repentances that destroy karmic barriers of the past, the present, and the future."

The Master said, "Good friends,

'May past, present, and future thoughts
may thought after thought
not be corrupted by delusion
may bad deeds of the past be gone
may they be gone from my nature
such is my repentance.

May past, present, and future thoughts
may thought after thought
not be corrupted by ignorance
may deceitful thoughts of the past be gone
may they be gone from my nature
such is my repentance.

May past, present, and future thoughts
may thought after thought
not be corrupted by ulcerous hate²⁰³
may hateful thoughts of the past be gone
may they be gone from my nature
such is my repentance.'

Now recite this three times.

"Good friends, what does repentance mean? Repentance means to be aware of past mistakes and not to commit them for the rest of your life. Unless your mind is forever free of evil, reciting this before buddhas won't help. In this Dharma teaching of mine, repentance means to stop once and for all."

Twenty-three: “Good friends, now that you have repented, I will transmit to you the Formless Precepts of the Triple Refuge.”

The Master said, “Good friends,

‘Take refuge in enlightenment
and the best of two-legged creatures.
Take refuge in truth
and the best of what transcends desire.
Take refuge in purity
and the best of congregations.’

“Beginning today, call the Buddha your teacher. Never again take refuge in the mistaken teachings of other paths. Resolve to manifest the compassion of your own Three Treasures. Good friends, I urge you all to take refuge in the Three Treasures of your own nature, wherein ‘Buddha’ means enlightenment, ‘Dharma’ means truth, and ‘Sangha’ means purity.

“Take refuge in the enlightenment of your own minds. Those who don’t give rise to delusions, who have few desires and know contentment, who aren’t moved by money or sex, they are the ‘best of two-legged creatures.’

“Take refuge in the truth of your own minds. When your thoughts are free of delusion, you are thereby free of attachment. To be free of attachment is the ‘best of what transcends desire.’

“Take refuge in the purity of your own minds. No matter how many afflictions and delusions are present in your nature, when your nature remains undefiled, this is the ‘best of congregations.’

“Ordinary people don’t understand this. Day after day, they repeat the Precepts of the Triple Refuge. But when they say they take refuge in the Buddha, where is the Buddha? If they don’t see the Buddha, they aren’t taking refuge in anything. And if they aren’t taking refuge in anything, their words are meaningless.

“Good friends, each of you should examine this for yourselves. Don’t misdirect your attention. The sutras simply say to take refuge in the buddha within yourself. They don’t say to take refuge in a buddha somewhere else. If you don’t take refuge in your own nature, there is nowhere else to take refuge.”

Twenty-four: “Good friends, now that you have finished taking refuge in the Three Treasures, each of you should clear your minds, and I will transmit to you the teaching of Maha Prajnaparamita. Good friends, you may have chanted this without understanding it. But if you listen, I will explain it.

“*Maha Prajnaparamita* is Sanskrit. In our language it means ‘The Great Wisdom That Leads to the Other Shore.’ This teaching must be practiced and not simply chanted with your lips. If all you do is chant it, but you don’t practice it, it’s the same as an illusion or a mirage. Meanwhile, the dharma body of those who practice it is the same as a buddha’s.

“What does *maha* mean? *Maha* means ‘great.’ The capacity of the mind is great, like space. But if you practice ‘empty-mind Zen,’ you will fall into a featureless void. The space of this world has room for the sun and the moon and the stars, the Earth and its mountains and rivers, every plant and tree, bad people and good people, bad teachings and good teachings, the heavens and the hells. All of this exists in space. The emptiness of everyone’s nature is also like this.”

Twenty-five: “Our nature contains ten thousand dharmas. That is how great it is. The ten thousand dharmas are our nature. To see humans and nonhumans, good ones and bad ones, good dharmas and bad dharmas, without rejecting them and without becoming attached to them, as if they were space, this is what we mean by ‘great.’ This is what *maha* means.

Deluded people chant this with their lips, the wise practice it with their minds. Others who are deluded say having an empty mind and not thinking are ‘great.’ But that isn’t it either. The capacity of the mind is great, but if you don’t use it, it is small. If you merely talk about emptiness with your lips, but you don’t put it into practice, you are no disciple of mine.”

Twenty-six: “What does *prajna* mean? *Prajna* means ‘wisdom.’ At all times keeping your thoughts free of ignorance and constantly practicing wisdom, this is what we mean by ‘practicing prajna.’ One thought of ignorance, and prajna stops. One thought of wisdom, and prajna appears. People whose minds are beset by ignorance say ‘I am practicing prajna.’ But prajna has neither form nor attributes. It is the nature of wisdom.

“And what does *paramita* mean? This is Sanskrit. In our language, we say ‘what leads to the other shore,’ which means what transcends arising and cessation. When we become attached to objects, we cause things to arise and to cease, like when there are waves on a river. This is what we mean by ‘this shore.’ When we are free of objects, there is no arising or cessation, like when a river flows on unimpeded. Hence, we say ‘what leads to the other shore.’ This is what we mean by *paramita*.

“Deluded people chant this with their lips. The wise practice it with their minds. If delusions are present when you chant, because they are present, it doesn’t really exist.²⁰⁴ But if you practice it when you chant, then it really exists.

“Those who understand this teaching, understand the teaching of prajna and practice the practice of prajna. Those who don’t practice it are foolish people. If they could practice it for even one moment, their dharma body would be the same as a buddha’s. Good friends, affliction is enlightenment. One moment you’re a deluded fool. The next moment you’re an enlightened buddha.”

“Good friends, Maha Prajnaparamita is the noblest, the highest, the ultimate. It doesn’t exist in the present, the past, or the future. And yet the buddhas of the present, the past, and the future all come from it and use this great wisdom to reach the other shore and to break through the afflictions of the five skandhas.

“As the noblest, the highest, the ultimate, so should you praise this teaching of the Supreme Vehicle. Those who practice it are certain to become buddhas. Containing nothing from the past, the present, or the future, it is the combination of meditation and wisdom and is not debased by any dharma. The buddhas of the past, the present, and the future all come from this and use this to transform the three poisons²⁰⁵ into morality, meditation, and wisdom.”

Twenty-seven: “Good friends, this Dharma teaching of mine produces eighty-four thousand kinds of wisdom from prajna. And how so? Because people have eighty-four thousand afflictions. If you didn’t have any afflictions, prajna would be ever-present and inseparable from your nature.

“To awaken to this teaching is to have ‘no-idea,’ ‘no-memory,’ and ‘no-attachment.’ Not giving rise to delusions, this is the nature of

suchness.²⁰⁶ View all dharmas with wisdom. Neither grasp them nor reject them. This is the way to see your nature and become a buddha.

Twenty-eight: “Good friends, if you wish to enter the dharma realm of the deep mind, the Prajna Samadhi, you need only practice the practice of Prajnaparamita. By merely memorizing a single chapter of the Diamond Prajnaparamita Sutra, you will be able to see your nature and enter the Prajna Samadhi. Indeed, such a person’s merit has no limit and is praised at length in the sutra as beyond description.

“This is the teaching of the Supreme Vehicle, which is spoken on behalf of those with a great capacity for the highest wisdom. When those of lesser capacity hear this teaching, they fail to develop any faith in it. And why not? It is like when the great dragon sends down a heavy rain, and it rains on Jambudvipa²⁰⁷ until its towns and villages are all swept away like leaves. But if the same rain falls on the ocean, it isn’t affected.

“When those who follow the Mahayana hear the Diamond Sutra, their minds open and understand. Thus they realize that their original nature already possesses the wisdom of prajna. And once they use this wisdom to view things, they don’t need to rely on words. It is like the rain, which doesn’t come from the heavens but from the dragon king, who draws water from the rivers and seas into his body, then uses it to nourish every plant and being, the sentient and nonsentient. Just as rivers all flow back into the ocean, and the ocean absorbs and combines them into its one body, the prajna wisdom that is the original nature of all beings is also like this.”

Twenty-nine: “When people of small capacity hear this instantaneous teaching, they are like plants that have shallow roots. If they should get drenched by a heavy rain, they are soon uprooted, or they don’t grow well. People of small capacity are also like this. They all possess the wisdom of prajna, the same as people who are truly wise. So why don’t they understand the Dharma when they hear it? It is because the walls of their mistaken views are so impenetrable, and their afflictions so deep. It is like when thick clouds cover the sun. Unless the wind blows them away, the sun can’t shine through.

“It isn’t the wisdom of prajna that is great or small. It is because all these beings have deluded themselves into looking for the buddha through external practices and haven’t yet discovered their own nature that they remain people of small capacity. And yet, on hearing this instantaneous teaching, if they don’t depend on external practices but simply on their own mind, and they let their own nature give rise to right views, even these beings with their mistaken views and afflictions will suddenly wake up. And like the ocean that takes in all rivers, the great and the small, and combines them into one, they will see their nature. And not focusing on the internal or external, they will come and go freely and be able to rid themselves of attachments and to penetrate everything without restriction. The mind that cultivates such a practice is no different from that of the Prajnaparamita Sutra.”²⁰⁸

Thirty: “All the sutras and texts, all twelve divisions of the Hinayana and Mahayana canons, were arranged by people. And it was because of the nature of wisdom that they could do so. Moreover, if there were no people in the world, none of the ten thousand teachings would have appeared. Hence, the ten thousand teachings have arisen because of people, and the sutras all exist because somebody spoke them.

“Some people in the world are foolish and some are wise. The foolish are narrow-minded, and the wise are open-minded. So the foolish ask the wise, and the wise teach the foolish until the foolish understand and their minds open. But once foolish people understand and their minds open, they are no different from the wisest of the wise.

“Hence, until they understand, buddhas are ordinary beings. But the moment they understand, ordinary beings are buddhas. Thus, the ten thousand teachings are all present within your very own mind. So why don’t you use your own mind to see the nature of reality right now?

“The Bodhisattva Precept Sutra says, ‘Our original nature is pure.’ When you know your mind and see your nature, you complete the path to buddhahood. The Vimalakirti Sutra says, ‘Suddenly, all at once, you rediscover your original mind.’”²⁰⁹

Thirty-one: “Good friends, when I was with Master Hongren, as soon as I heard his words, I experienced a great realization. Suddenly I saw the original nature of reality. I am therefore passing on this teaching to later generations so that those who study the Way will suddenly realize enlightenment and so that those who contemplate the mind²¹⁰ will suddenly realize their original nature. If someone is unable to realize this by themselves, they need to find a truly good friend to point the way to their nature.

“And what do I mean by a ‘truly good friend?’ Someone who understands the teaching of the Supreme Vehicle and who points directly to the true path is a truly good friend, a great intermediary, someone who transforms the path they are on so that they see their nature. All good teachings come about only because of truly good friends.

“The buddhas of the three periods and the twelve divisions of the canon²¹¹ are fully present in this nature of yours. If you can’t realize this by yourselves, you will need to find a good friend to show you how to see your nature. But if you can realize this by yourselves, you don’t need to look for a friend anywhere else. If you think just by finding a good friend somewhere you’ll attain liberation, that will never happen. You will be liberated as soon as you recognize the good friend in your own mind. But as long as your mind is confused by mistaken views and delusions, even the instruction of a good friend from somewhere else won’t be able to help you.

“If you can’t realize this by yourself, the moment you give rise to the light of prajna, all your delusions will vanish in a flash. This is your truest friend. With one realization you reach the stage of buddhahood. Use this wisdom to illuminate your own nature in the land of your mind.²¹² When it is perfectly clear inside and out, then you will know your own mind. And once you know your own mind, you will attain liberation. And when you attain liberation, this is the Prajna Samadhi, the realization of which is ‘no idea.’

“And what do we mean by ‘no idea?’ The teaching of no idea means wherever you go not to be attached to any dharma no matter what you see, so that when the six thieves²¹³ pass through the six gates, and the six objects come and go, your nature remains pure and isn’t corrupted by them. This is the Prajna Samadhi, the freedom

of liberation. This is what we mean by the practice of no idea. But if you don't think about anything at all, the moment you make your thoughts stop, you are imprisoned by dharmas with what we call a 'confined view.'

"Those who understand the teaching of no idea penetrate the ten thousand teachings. Those who understand the teaching of no idea see the realms of buddhas. Those who understand the instantaneous teaching of no idea reach the stage of enlightenment."

Thirty-two: "Good friends, those who obtain my Dharma in the future will find that my true body never leaves their presence. Good friends, if you resolve to uphold the same view and the same practice as this school's instantaneous teaching, it will be as if you were doing the work of a buddha. Those who uphold it and don't forsake it for the rest of their lives will themselves enter the ranks of sages. But it has to be passed on. The robe and the teaching that have been transmitted in silence since ancient times have to be shared with those who make the great vow never to retreat from enlightenment.

"If you meet someone who holds a different view and who lacks such resolve, don't be foolish enough to try to instruct them. Not only will you harm those who have come before you, ultimately it won't do them any good. Moreover, if they are too foolish to understand, and they criticize this teaching, they will sever their roots of enlightenment for thousands of lifetimes and hundreds of kalpas."

Thirty-three: The Master said, "Good friends, listen to my 'Song of Formlessness.' Because it can put an end to the evils of those who are deluded, it is also called the 'Evil Ending Song':

'Fools work for blessings not for the Way
working for blessings they say is the Way
from offerings and alms their blessings pile up
while committing evil deeds fills their minds.

Their blessings they think will get rid of retribution
retribution next life is there with their blessings
in order to free your mind of retribution
true repentance must take place within.

Those who understand true Mahayana repentance
choose right over wrong and retribution ends
students of the Way who learn to look within
join the lineage of those who are enlightened.

Today I'm giving you this instantaneous teaching
hoping all you students will join me
if in the future you seek your true self
wash the bad karma of the poisons from your mind.

Devote yourselves to the Way and don't relax
otherwise you will pass this life in vain
to meet the Mahayana's instantaneous teaching
join your palms together and look for your mind.”

After the Master had finished his discourse on the Dharma, Magistrate Wei and his fellow officials along with all the monks and laypeople present praised this without cease as something the like of which they had never heard before.

Thirty-four: The Magistrate then bowed and said, “Master, your discourse on the Dharma is beyond description. But your disciple has some questions he hopes the Master will resolve out of compassion.”

The Master said, “If you have a question, ask. There is no need to wait.”

The Magistrate asked, “The Dharma the Master teaches is the fundamental doctrine of Bodhidharma, the First Patriarch from the Western Region, is it not?”

The Master said, “Yes, it is.”

The Magistrate asked, “Your disciple has heard that when Bodhidharma taught Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, the Emperor asked Bodhidharma, ‘All my life I have built monasteries, made offerings, and given alms. Is there any merit in this?’ Bodhidharma answered, ‘No merit at all.’ The Emperor was so upset, he expelled Bodhidharma from his kingdom. I have never understood this and hope the Master will explain it.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “Indeed, there was no merit. Your Eminence should not have any doubts concerning Bodhidharma’s response. Emperor Wu followed a mistaken path and did not understand the true Dharma.”

The Magistrate asked, “But why was there no merit?”

The Master said, “Building monasteries, giving alms, and making offerings are simply ways to cultivate blessings. You shouldn’t confuse blessings with merit. Merit concerns the dharma body, not future blessings. It is your own dharma nature²¹⁴ that possesses merit. Seeing your nature is one part. Having an undivided mind is the rest. Internally, see your own buddha nature. Externally, be respectful. As long as you look down on others and don’t get rid of the self, there is no merit. As long as your nature remains an empty fiction, how could your dharma body possess any merit? But if thought after thought you cultivate an undivided mind, your merit is far from slight. As long as you act respectfully, cultivating merit with your body is one part, and cultivating it with your mind is the other. Merit is created by your own mind. Blessings and merit are different. Emperor Wu didn’t understand the true meaning of this. It wasn’t the Patriarch who was at fault.”

Thirty-five: The Magistrate bowed respectfully and asked again, “Your disciple sees monks and laypeople chanting ‘Amita Buddha’ and vowing to be reborn in the Western Paradise.²¹⁵ Could the Master please tell us whether we can be reborn there or not so that our doubts might be put to rest?”

The Master said, “If your Eminence will listen, I will explain. When the Blessed One was in Sravasti,²¹⁶ he preached about the Western Paradise in order to convert people. The sutra clearly states that it isn’t far from here.²¹⁷ It was only for the sake of those with shallow roots that he said it was distant.²¹⁸ It was for those with greater wisdom that he said it was near. There are two kinds of people, not two kinds of Dharma. Delusion and awareness differ, and insight can be fast or slow. Deluded people chant the buddha’s name in order to be reborn there, while those who are awake purify their minds. This is why the Buddha said, ‘As their minds are purified, their buddhalands are purified.’²¹⁹

“Your Eminence, if people here in the East simply purify their minds, they will free themselves of retribution. But if people in the West have excessively impure minds, the deluded among them might then vow to be reborn here in the East. The two places are both the same. As long as the land of the mind isn’t impure, the Western Paradise isn’t far off. But as long as your mind gives rise to impure thoughts, you are not likely to be reborn there by chanting the buddha’s name. You might travel a hundred thousand miles before you eliminate the ten evil deeds²²⁰ and another eight thousand before you put an end to the eight mistaken ways.²²¹ But if you can just practice with an undivided mind, you will be there in the time it takes to snap your fingers.

“Your Eminence, if you can just practice the ten good deeds,²²² why would you need to be reborn somewhere else? And if you don’t stop thinking about committing the ten evil deeds, what buddha would welcome you there? Once you realize the instantaneous teaching of nonarising,²²³ seeing the Western Paradise takes only an instant. Unless you understand the instantaneous teaching of the Mahayana, chanting the buddha’s name to be reborn there will take you on a road that never arrives.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “I will take your Eminence to the Western Paradise right now, and he will witness it for himself. Would Your Eminence like to see it?”

The Magistrate bowed respectfully and said, “If I could see it right now, why would I need to be reborn there? If the Master would be compassionate enough to show us the Western Paradise, that would be wonderful, indeed!”

The Master said, “I will show you the Western Paradise right now, and we won’t leave there until you have no more questions.” The assembly was startled, and no one knew what to expect.

The Master said, “All of you should listen carefully. Everyone’s physical body is a walled city. Your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body are the city’s gates. These five gates are on the outside. The gate of the intellect is on the inside. Your mind is the kingdom, and your nature is the king. When your nature is present, the king is present. When your nature is absent, the king is absent. When your nature is present, both your body and mind exist. When your nature

is absent, your body and mind cease to exist. The buddha is a creation of your nature. Don't go looking for one outside your body. When you are blind to your own nature, the buddha is an ordinary being. When you are aware of your own nature, an ordinary being is the buddha.

"Compassion and kindness are Avalokitesvara. Joy and detachment are Mahasthama.²²⁴ The power to purify is Sakyamuni. Directness is Maitreya.²²⁵ The self is Mount Sumeru, and the deluded mind is the ocean.²²⁶ Afflictions are its waves, poisonous thoughts its malevolent dragons, and passions its denizens of the deep. Delusions are its hungry ghosts, the three poisons are its hells, ignorance is its animal world, and the ten good deeds are its heavens.

"But when there is no self, Sumeru crumbles. When you get rid of mistaken views, the ocean dries up. When afflictions are gone, so are the waves. When poisonous thoughts disappear, the denizens of the deep vanish. When the tathagata of your enlightened nature shines the light of wisdom across the land of your mind, it shines through the six gates and renders the realms of the six desires transparent. It drives off the three poisons, and the hells disappear. Inside and outside are perfectly clear and no different from that of the Western Paradise. Unless you practice like this, how else are you going to get there?"

When the audience heard this, the sound of their praises reached the sky, and those who had been mystified suddenly saw clearly. The Magistrate then bowed respectfully and said, "How wonderful! How absolutely wonderful! May all the beings throughout the Dharma Realm be enlightened upon hearing this!"

Thirty-six: The Master said, "Good friends, if you wish to practice this, you can also do so at home. You don't need to live in a monastery. If you live in a monastery and don't practice, you're like someone in the Western Paradise who thinks evil thoughts. And if you practice at home, you're like someone here in the East who performs good deeds. As long as you vow to cultivate purity within yourselves, that is the Western Paradise."

The Magistrate asked, "Master, how should we practice at home? Could you give us some instruction?"

The Master said, "Good friends, I have composed a 'Song of Formlessness' for both clerics and lay people. If you all recite this and put it into practice, you will never be apart from me:

'Clear in speech and thought
like the sun in a cloudless sky
I only teach the instant teaching
I am here to dispel false doctrines.

It isn't the teaching that is instant or not
but awareness that is quick or slow
who studies this instant teaching
will never succeed if they're fools.

Of the countless ways to explain it
all are based on one rule
in your dark house of affliction
keep the sun of wisdom shining.

Wrong views are caused by afflictions
when right views shine afflictions depart
where right and wrong don't function
there is nothing left to purify.

Enlightenment is already pure
to reflect on it is a delusion
but what is pure is in that delusion
just break through the three walls.²²⁷

If in this world you follow the Way
don't let anything block you
paying attention to your own mistakes
will keep you on the path.

The Way dwells in this bodily form
don't leave the Way to find it
you won't find it somewhere else
all you will find is regret.

If you want to find the true Way
doing what is right is the Way
unless your mind is set on what is right
you will pass the Way in the dark.

People who truly follow the Way
don't look at the faults of the world
who looks at the faults of the world
only adds to their own.

I don't condemn the faults of others
my own wrongs are what I condemn
once you stop trying to lay blame
all your afflictions will shatter.

If you want to teach foolish people
you need to use skillful means
don't let them have any doubts
suddenly their enlightenment will occur.

The Dharma has always been in this world
stay in this world to transcend it
don't run away from this world²²⁸
looking for a world beyond.

Wrong views exist in this world
right views transcend this world
when right and wrong are both dismissed
the nature of enlightenment is clear.

This is the instantaneous teaching
also known as the Mahayana
delusion can last for countless kalpas
enlightenment occurs in an instant.”

Thirty-seven: The Master said, “Good friends, if you all recite this song and practice in accordance with it, even if we are a thousand miles apart, you will always be at my side. And if you don't practice

in accordance with it, even if we are face to face, we will be a thousand miles apart. Each of you has to practice this for yourself. The Dharma won't do it for you.

"It is time now for all of you to leave and for me to return to Mount Caoxi. If any of you have any doubts, come to the mountain. I will get rid of them for you, and you will see your buddha nature just as I see mine."

The entire audience of officials, clerics, and laypeople all bowed to the Master, and everyone exclaimed, "We have never experienced such realization! Who would have guessed that we would be blessed with a buddha here in Lingnan!" Then everyone left.

Thirty-eight:²²⁹ The Master lived on Mount Caoxi and preached in both Shaozhou and Guangzhou for more than forty years.²³⁰ In terms of followers, both monks and nuns as well as lay people, he had somewhere between three and five thousand, too many to name. As for his basic teaching, he transmitted the Platform Sutra and considered this his testament. Unless a person has received the Platform Sutra, they have no authority. And they need to state the place, the date, and the names of those who gave it to them. Without the authority of the Platform Sutra, they aren't disciples of the Southern school. If they haven't received this authority, even if they transmit the instantaneous teaching, as long as they don't understand its fundamentals, they won't be able to avoid arguments. As for those who have received this teaching, they are simply urged to practice it. Arguing involves thoughts of victory or defeat and is contrary to the Way of the Buddha.

Thirty-nine: People all refer to "Huineng of the South" and "Shenxiu of the North," but they don't know the real reason for this. It was because Master Shenxiu served as abbot and practiced at Yuquan Temple 玉泉寺 in Nanqing Prefecture's Dangyang County 當陽縣,²³¹ and Master Huineng lived on Mount Caoxi, thirty-five *li* south of Shaozhou. There is only one school of the Dharma, but people are from the north or the south. This is why we use the terms "Northern" and "Southern."

And what about "instantaneous" and "gradual?" The Dharma is the same, but understanding can be fast or slow. When understanding is slow, we say it is "gradual." When understanding is

quick, we say it is “instantaneous.” The Dharma isn’t instantaneous or gradual, it is people who are sharp or dull. This is why we speak of “instantaneous” and “gradual.”

Forty: Master Shenxiu often heard people say Huineng’s teaching was quick and pointed directly to the path. One day Shenxiu told his disciple Zhicheng 志誠, “You are intelligent and perceptive. Go to Huineng’s place on Mount Caoxi for me. Pay your respects, but just listen. Don’t say I sent you. When you hear something important, remember it and come back and tell me. We will see whose understanding is fast or slow, mine or Huineng’s. And come back right away. Don’t leave me hanging.”

Zhicheng gladly accepted the mission and left. Within half a month²³² he reached Mount Caoxi and met Master Huineng. After he paid his respects, he just listened and didn’t say where he was from. But as soon as Zhicheng heard the Master teach, he understood and became aware of his own mind. He stood up and bowed and said, “Master, your disciple has come from Yuquan Temple. At Shenxiu’s place, I didn’t experience any realization. But as soon as I heard the Master speak, I became aware of my mind. I hope the Master will be compassionate enough to instruct me.”

Master Huineng said, “If that is where you are from, you must be a spy.”

Zhicheng said, “I’m not a spy.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “And why not?”

Zhicheng said, “Before I spoke, I was. But now that I’ve spoken, I’m not.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “It is the same with ‘affliction is enlightenment.’”²³³

Forty-one: The Master told Zhicheng, “I have heard that when your master teaches people, he simply gives instruction in morality, meditation, and wisdom. Tell me, what does your master teach them about morality, meditation, and wisdom?”

Zhicheng said, “As for morality, meditation, and wisdom, Master Shenxiu says, ‘Not committing evil deeds is morality, performing good deeds is wisdom, and purifying one’s thoughts is meditation. This is what morality, meditation, and wisdom mean.’ That is his explanation. What is the Master’s view?”

Huineng replied, “This explanation is excellent, but my view is different.”

Zhicheng asked, “How is it different?”

Huineng replied, “Understanding can be fast or slow.”

Zhicheng begged the Master to explain his view of morality, meditation, and wisdom.

The Master said, “Listen to my explanation, and you will see how I view them. When the ground of your mind is free from error, this is the nature of morality. When the ground of your mind is free from confusion, this is the nature of meditation. When the ground of your mind is free from ignorance, this is the nature of wisdom.”

The Master continued, “The morality, meditation, and wisdom of your master are intended for small-minded people. My morality, meditation, and wisdom are intended for people with bigger minds. People who realize their nature don’t separate morality, meditation, and wisdom.”

Zhicheng said, “Could the Master please explain why they don’t separate them?”

The Master said, “Our nature is free from error, free from confusion, and free from ignorance. Since prajna shines in every thought and is forever free from attributes, what is there to separate? We cultivate our nature right now. Since there are no intervening stages, we don’t create any.”

Zhicheng bowed and didn’t leave Mount Caoxi. He became a disciple and was never far from the Master’s side.

Forty-two: Another monk, named Fada 法達, had been reciting the Lotus Sutra for seven years but was bewildered as to its true teaching. He went to Mount Caoxi to pay his respects and asked the Master, “Your disciple has been reciting the Lotus Sutra for seven years, but I am bewildered as to its true teaching and have some questions about the sutra. I was hoping the Master would use his great wisdom to resolve them.”

The Master said, “Fada, you understand the Dharma. It is your mind you don’t understand.²³⁴ There are no questions in the sutra. It is your mind that has questions. You have been searching for the true teaching with a mistaken mind. I enter samadhi, that is how I

read sutras. All my life I have been illiterate. But if you read the Lotus to me, I will understand it when I hear it.”

Fada then read the sutra to the Master.²³⁵ Once the Sixth Patriarch heard, he understood the Buddha’s meaning. Then he explained the Lotus Sutra to Fada.

The Sixth Patriarch said, “The Lotus Sutra is not that complicated. Its seven folios contain nothing but metaphors about causation. The reason the Tathagata taught the Three Vehicles²³⁶ was simply because people are slow to understand. But the sutra makes it clear that there is no vehicle other than the One Vehicle.”

The Master said, “Fada, pay attention to the One Vehicle. Don’t go looking for a second vehicle and become confused about your own nature. And where in the sutra are you going to find the One Vehicle? I will tell you. The sutra says, ‘All buddhas and bhagavans only appear in the world for the greatest of reasons.’²³⁷ So how is this teaching to be understood? And how is this teaching to be practiced? Listen, and I will tell you.

“For a person’s mind to be free of ideas and essentially empty, to be still and free of false views, this is the greatest of reasons—when you don’t get lost in the inside or on the outside, when you are free of dualities. If you get lost on the outside, you are attached to forms. If you get lost in the inside, you are attached to emptiness. To be free of form amid forms and free of emptiness amid emptiness, this is when you don’t get lost in the inside or on the outside. Once you understand this teaching, your mind will open in an instant.

“As for ‘appearing in the world,’ what is it that is produced in the mind? The understanding of a buddha is what is produced. *Buddha* means ‘enlightenment.’ And this can be divided into four phases: producing the understanding of enlightenment, manifesting the understanding of enlightenment, realizing the understanding of enlightenment, and conforming to the understanding of enlightenment. Producing, manifesting, realizing, and conforming all spring from one place, the understanding of enlightenment. When you see your own nature, you will ‘appear in the world.’”²³⁸

The Master said, “Fada, I have always hoped that in their minds everyone in the world would produce the understanding of a buddha and not the understanding of an ordinary being. When people’s

minds are deluded, in their ignorance they engage in evil and produce the understanding of an ordinary being. And when people's minds are clear, they produce the light of wisdom and the understanding of a buddha. When you no longer produce the understanding of an ordinary being but the understanding of a buddha, you will 'appear in the world.'"

The Master said, "Fada, this is the Lotus Sutra's teaching of One Vehicle, which it divides into three for the sake of deluded people. But you should rely only on the One Vehicle."

The Master said, "Fada, when your mind practices, it reads the Lotus. When it doesn't practice, the Lotus does the reading. When your mind is true, it reads the Lotus. When your mind is false, the Lotus does the reading. When you produce the understanding of a buddha, you read the Lotus. When you produce the understanding of an ordinary being, the Lotus reads you."

The Master said, "When you strive to practice in accordance with the Dharma, this is when you read the sutra."

As Fada heard these words, he suddenly experienced a great realization. His eyes wet with tears, he said, "Master, I have never truly read the Lotus. For seven years I have been read by the sutra. In the future, when I read the Lotus, with each thought I shall practice the practice of a buddha."

The Master said, "Who practices as a buddha is a buddha." No one present on that occasion failed to experience an awakening.

Forty-three: A monk named Zhichang 智常 came to Mount Caoxi. After paying his respects to the Master, he asked about the meaning of the Four Vehicles.

Zhichang said, "The Buddha speaks of Three Vehicles, but he also talks about a Supreme Vehicle. Your disciple doesn't understand this. I hope you will instruct me."

Master Huineng said, "Look at your own mind, and don't cling to the external attributes of dharmas. Originally there was no teaching concerning the Four Vehicles. But because people's minds have four different capacities, the Dharma has Four Vehicles.

"Observing, listening, reading, and reciting make up the Small Vehicle. Becoming aware of dharmas and understanding their meaning make up the Middle Vehicle. Putting the Dharma into

practice makes up the Great Vehicle. And being versed in all teachings and skilled in all practices, leaving nothing out, except the attributes of dharmas, and remaining free of attainments, this is what makes up the Supreme Vehicle. The Supreme Vehicle means the supreme practice. It isn't something you discuss. You have to practice it yourself. Don't ask me."

Forty-four: There was a monk by the name of Shenhui 神會 who came to Mount Caoxi from Nanyang to pay his respects and asked, "When the Master meditates, does he see or not?"

The Master got up and hit Shenhui three times. Then he asked Shenhui, "When I hit you, did it hurt or not?"

Shenhui answered, "It hurt and it didn't hurt."

The Sixth Patriarch said, "Well, I see and I don't see."

Shenhui asked the Master, "What do you mean, you see and you don't see?"

The Master said, "As for 'I see,' what I usually see are my own faults. So I say 'I see.' And as for 'I don't see,' what I don't see are the faults of others, either in this world or in the heavens. So I see and I don't see. What do you mean, 'It hurt and it didn't hurt'?"

Shenhui answered, "If it didn't hurt, I would be the same as a lifeless rock or stick. But if it hurt, I would be the same as an ordinary person and still subject to anger."

The Master said, "Shenhui, your 'do you see or not' just now was dualistic, and your 'it hurt and it didn't hurt' was samsaric.²³⁹ You don't see your own nature, and yet you dare come here to play games."

Shenhui bowed and dared not say more. The Master then said, "If you are too blind to see your own mind, ask a good friend to help you find a way. Only when you understand and see your own mind can you put the Dharma into practice. But you are too blind to see your own mind, and you have come here to ask me if I see or not. What I don't know can't take the place of your ignorance. And how can what you understand take the place of what I understand? Why don't you work on yourself, then ask me if I see or not?"

Shenhui bowed and became a disciple. He didn't leave Mount Caoxi and was always in attendance.²⁴⁰

Forty-five:²⁴¹ The Master later summoned his disciples: Fahai 法海, Zhicheng 志誠, Fada 法達, Zhichang 智常, Zhitong 智同, Zhiche 志徹, Zhidao 志道, Fazhen 法珍, Faru 法汝, and Shenhui 神會. He said, “You ten disciples come closer. You are not like the others. After I pass into Nirvana, each of you will become a teacher in a different region. I will now teach you how to explain the Dharma without losing sight of its basic principle.

“Begin with the three classifications and make use of the thirty-six pairs. But avoid dualities when you do. Whenever you explain a teaching, don’t stray from its essence and attributes. Whenever someone asks about the Dharma, always speak in terms of pairs and hold up the opposite member. Since each depends on the other for its existence or nonexistence, when both are finally eliminated, there is nowhere to turn.

“The teaching of the three classifications includes the skandhas, the dhatus, and the ayatanas. The skandhas are the five skandhas, the dhatus are the eighteen dhatus, and the ayatanas are the twelve ayatanas.

“What do the five skandhas include? They include the skandha of form, the skandha of sensation, the skandha of perception, the skandha of memory, and the skandha of consciousness.

“What do the eighteen dhatus include? They include the six objects, the six gates, and the six forms of consciousness.

“What do the twelve ayatanas include? They include the six objects on the outside and the six gates on the inside. What do the six objects include? They include shape, sound, smell, taste, feeling, and thought. And what do the six gates include? They include the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the intellect.

“In addition to the six gates and six objects, our dharma nature gives rise to six forms of consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and conceptual. Because our nature includes ten thousand dharmas, we call it the ‘storehouse consciousness.’²⁴²

“Whenever we think, we alter our consciousness and give birth to the six forms of consciousness, which leave through the six gates and encounter the six objects. These three sets of six make eighteen. When our nature is false, it gives birth to eighteen kinds of falsehood. When our nature is true, it gives birth to eighteen kinds of

truth. Someone who uses them for evil is an ordinary being. Someone who uses them for good is a buddha. And where do they come from? From our nature.

Forty-six: “As for the pairs of opposites, there are five external, inanimate pairs: heaven and earth, sun and moon, dark and light, yin 陰 and yang 陽, water and fire.

“Concerning language and the attributes of dharmas, there are twelve pairs: conditioned and unconditioned, material and immaterial, apparent and non-apparent, karmic and non-karmic, substantive and empty, moving and still, pure and defiled, mundane and holy, cleric and lay, old and young, long and short, high and low.

“Concerning functions arising from our nature, there are nineteen pairs: wrong and right, ignorant and learned, foolish and wise, agitated and calm, disciplined and wild, honest and deceitful, genuine and false, difficult and easy, afflicted and enlightened, kind and mean, joyful and angry, detached and possessive, progressive and backward, created and annihilated, permanent and impermanent, dharma body and physical body, manifestation body and realization body, substance and function, nature and attribute, animate and inanimate.²⁴³

“Language and the attributes of dharmas include twelve pairs. External, inanimate dharmas include five pairs, and functions arising from our nature include nineteen pairs. Altogether they form thirty-six pairs. As long as you remain free of dualities, this teaching of thirty six pairs can be used to explain every sutra. But how are you to use these thirty-six in regard to your own nature?

“When you talk externally—with others—remain free of appearances while among appearances. And internally, remain free of emptiness while amid emptiness. If you become attached to emptiness, you will only increase your ignorance. And if you become attached to appearances, you will only add to your mistaken views.

“There are those who slander the Dharma and say not to use words. But to say not to use words would mean we shouldn’t speak. Speech consists of words. You can say their nature is empty, but the nature of words about the truth is not empty. The deluded only confuse themselves when they get rid of language.

“Dark isn’t itself dark. It is due to light that it’s dark. And light isn’t itself light. It is due to dark that it’s light. Because light becomes dark, and dark becomes light, their appearance and disappearance depend on each other. The thirty-six pairs are all like this.”

Forty-seven: The Master said, “Henceforth, when you ten disciples teach the Dharma, pass down the teaching of the Platform Sutra without losing sight of its basic principle. Unless someone has been given the Platform Sutra, they don’t have my teaching. Now that you have received it, pass it on to later generations. To encounter the Platform Sutra is the same as to be taught by me personally.”

After these ten monks had been instructed, they copied the Platform Sutra and passed it on to later generations so that anyone who obtained it would be sure to see their nature.

Forty-eight: The Master passed into Nirvana on the third day of the eighth month in the second year of the Xiantian Era 先天二年 (713). On the eighth day of the seventh month, he called his disciples together to say goodbye. Previously, in the first year of the Xiantian Era, he had a stupa built in Xinzhou²⁴⁴ at Guo’en Temple 國恩寺. It was there, in the seventh month of the following year, that he bid them farewell.

The Master said, “Everyone come closer. In the eighth month, I expect to leave this world. If any of you have questions, ask them now, and I will resolve them for you. Let me put an end to your delusions so that you can know peace and happiness. After I leave, I won’t be here to teach you.”

When Fahai and the other monks heard this, they wept and cried out. Only Shenhui was unmoved and shed no tears. The Sixth Patriarch said, “Shenhui is a young monk, but he understands that good and bad are the same and isn’t moved by praise or blame. The rest of you don’t understand. What exactly have you been cultivating all these years on this mountain? And who exactly are you crying for? Are you worried that I don’t know where I am going? If I didn’t know where I was going, I would never leave you. You are crying because you don’t know where I am going. If you knew, you wouldn’t be crying.

“Our nature isn’t subject to birth or death, coming or going. All of you sit down. I have a poem for you: ‘Truth and Falsehood,

Movement and Stillness.’ If any of you recite this poem, your thoughts will be the same as mine. Put this into practice, and don’t lose sight of its basic principle.”

The monks all bowed and asked the Master to recite his poem, which they received with great reverence. The poem went:

“Nothing that exists is true
don’t think seeing makes it true
if you think you see what is true
such a view is utterly false
if you would possess what is true
the mind free of falsehood is true
unless your mind is free of falsehood
wherever you look nothing is true.

Living things know how to move
lifeless things don’t move
those who practice staying still
resemble lifeless unmoving things
to see what truly doesn’t move
in movement something doesn’t move
what doesn’t move doesn’t move
dead things have no buddha seeds.

If you can see what appears clearly
the ultimate truth doesn’t move
once you know how to see like this
this is how suchness functions
all you students of the Way
be relentless and concentrate
don’t stand at the gate of the Mahayana
clinging to views about birth and death.

If the people you meet are ready
tell them what the Buddha meant
if they aren’t truly ready
bow and tell them to be good
there is nothing to argue about in this teaching

those who argue lose sight of the Way
clinging to delusions arguing about teachings
they doom themselves to another round.”

Forty-nine: Upon hearing and understanding what the Master meant, the monks no longer dared to engage in disputes but practiced in accordance with the Dharma. Knowing the Master did not have long to live, they all bowed. The venerable Fahai stepped forward and said, “Master, after you leave, to whom should your robe and Dharma be given?”

The Master said, “The Dharma has already been given. You don’t need to ask about that. However, more than twenty years after my passing, false teachings will create confusion and misrepresent the principle of our school. Someone will then come forward with no concern for their own life and distinguish the true teachings of the Buddha from the false ones and raise high the principle of our school and my true Dharma.”²⁴⁵

“The robe isn’t meant to be passed on. If you don’t believe me, let me recite the ‘Transmission of the Robe and Dharma Songs’ of the previous five patriarchs. According to the Song of the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma, the robe isn’t meant to be passed on. Listen, and I’ll recite them for you:

‘The Song of the First Patriarch, Bodhidharma:
I came to the land of Tang
to teach and save deluded beings
a flower from which five petals unfold
a fruit that ripens naturally.

The Song of the Second Patriarch, Huike:
The first connection was the ground
planted in the ground is how a flower grows
if in the future there is no ground
where will a flower come from?

The Song of the Third Patriarch, Sengcan:
A flower seed needs a place to grow
in the ground is where a flower grows

but unless its seed is fertile
even in the ground it won't grow.

The Song of the Fourth Patriarch, Daoxin:
As long as its seed is fertile
planted in the ground it will grow
but if conditions don't come together
nothing at all will grow.

The Song of the Fifth Patriarch, Hongren:
A sentient being plants a seed
an insentient flower blooms
in the absence of sentient beings or seeds
the mind is just barren ground.

The Song of the Sixth Patriarch, Huineng:
If the ground of the mind includes beings and seeds
when the Dharma rains a flower will grow
once you understand flowers, beings, and seeds
the fruit of enlightenment forms on its own.”

Fifty: Master Huineng said, “Listen to these two verses I’ve composed about the meaning of Bodhidharma’s song. If the deluded among you practice in accordance with them, you are sure to see your nature.

‘A false flower grows from the ground of the mind
five petals unfold from its stem
together creating primordial karma²⁴⁶
their views at the mercy of karmic winds.

A true flower grows from the ground of the mind
five petals unfold from its stem
together practicing prajna wisdom
their enlightenment sure to follow.”

Once the Sixth Patriarch had finished reciting these verses, he dismissed the assembly. As his disciples left, they thought about this

and realized the Master did not have long to live.

Fifty-one: The Sixth Patriarch lived until the third day of the eighth month. After the noon meal, the Master said, “All of you sit down. It’s time for me to leave you.”

Fahai asked, “From ancient times until now, how many generations have passed down the Dharma of this instantaneous teaching?”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “It was first passed down by the Seven Buddhas. Sakyamuni Buddha was the seventh, Mahakasyapa the eighth, Ananda the ninth, Madhyantika the tenth, Samakavasa the eleventh, Upagupta the twelfth, Dhritaka the thirteenth, Buddhanandi the fourteenth, Buddhamitra the fifteenth, Parsva the sixteenth, Punyayasas the seventeenth, Asvaghosa the eighteenth, Kapimala the nineteenth, Nagarjuna the twentieth, Kamadeva the twenty-first, Rahulata the twenty-second, Sanghanandi the twenty-third, Gayasata the twenty-fourth, Kumarata the twenty-fifth, Jayata the twenty-sixth, Vasubandhu the twenty-seventh, Manorhita the twenty-eighth, Haklenayasas the twenty-ninth, Simha Bhiksu the thirtieth, Samavasa the thirty-first, Upagupta the thirty-second, Sangharaksa the thirty-third, Subhamitra the thirty-fourth, and Bodhidharma, the third son of a king in South India, was the thirty-fifth.

“In the kingdom of Tang, Huike was the thirty-sixth, Sengcan the thirty-seventh, Daoxin the thirty-eighth, Hongren the thirty-ninth, and now I am the fortieth to have received the Dharma.”

The Master said, “From now on, when you teach this to others, you will need a testament so you don’t lose sight of its basic principle.”

Fifty-two: Fahai spoke again, “As the Master is departing, what Dharma is he leaving behind so that future generations will be able to see a buddha?”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “Listen, if the deluded people of future generations can simply understand what a being is, they will be able to see a buddha. If they don’t understand what a being is, they can look for ten thousand kalpas and still not find a buddha. I will now tell you how to understand what a being is and how to see a buddha. I will also leave you with a verse called ‘The Liberation of Seeing the

True Buddha.’ But those who are deluded won’t see a buddha, only those who are awake.”

Fahai said, “If we could hear this, it will be passed down from one generation to the next without fail.”

The Sixth Patriarch said, “Listen, and I will tell you. If people in future ages want to find a buddha, all they need to do is understand what a being is, and they will be able to understand what a buddha is. Buddhas are connected to beings. Apart from beings, there is no buddha mind.

‘Deluded a buddha is a being
awake a being is a buddha
ignorant a buddha is a being
wise a being is a buddha
selfish a buddha is a being
impartial a being is a buddha
once you create selfish thoughts
the buddha is inside a being
once you’re awake and impartial
a being is a buddha
in my mind there’s a buddha
this buddha is the real one
if I didn’t have the buddha mind
where else would I find a buddha?’”

Fifty-three: The Master said, “You disciples, be well. I will leave you with a poem called ‘Liberation upon Seeing the Real Buddha of One’s Own Nature.’ If deluded people in future ages understand the meaning of this poem, they will see the real buddha of their own mind and nature. After I give you this poem, I will leave you:

‘The pure nature of suchness is the true buddha
the three poisons of false views are the true mara
someone with wrong views has a mara in their home
someone with right views is visited by buddhas.

When the wrong views of your nature
create the three poisons

the King of Maras makes himself at home
when right views suddenly drive
the poisons from your mind
Mara becomes a buddha, a real one, not a false one.

Your transformation, realization, and dharma body
three bodies essentially one
search inside and this is what you will find
the cause of enlightenment and buddhahood.

From the transformation body your pure nature rises
your pure nature dwells in the transformation body
it directs the transformation body down the noble path
where future perfection is inexhaustible.

The nature of defilement is the cause of purity
without defilement there is no pure body
just keep your nature free of the five desires
the moment you see it is when it is real.

If this life you understand the instant teaching
the moment you do a buddha will appear before you
if you keep looking for a buddha in your practice
where will you find one that is real.

If you could discover something real in your body
something real would be the cause of buddhahood
don't look for a buddha beyond what is real
those who do are great fools.

The instant teaching came from the West
if you're hoping to be saved you need to practice
I'm telling you students of the Way in the world
don't end up becoming do-nothings.”

After he finished reciting this poem, the Master told his disciples,
“Be well. I am leaving you now. After I'm gone, don't engage in the
worldly customs of crying or accepting condolence money or wearing

mourning garments. That would not be the Buddhist Way, and you would not be my disciples. Act the same as if I were here. Sit together in meditation, but remain free of movement and stillness, birth and death, coming and going, right and wrong, present and past. Be quiet and unperturbed. That is the Great Way. After I am gone, simply practice in accordance with the Dharma, the same as when I was with you. If I were here, and you disobeyed my teaching, even my presence would be of no help.”

After he said this, the Master spoke no more. During the third watch of the night, he passed away peacefully. He was seventy-six years of age.

Fifty-four: The day the Master passed into Nirvana, the monastery²⁴⁷ was filled with a wonderful fragrance that lasted for days. The earth shook, and there were landslides, trees bloomed white, the sun and moon dimmed, and the clouds lost their color.

The Master passed into Nirvana on the third day of the eighth month, and in the eleventh month his casket was received at Mount Caoxi. After he was interred inside a dragon urn, a bright light shone forth and illuminated the sky above it for three days before it faded. Magistrate Wei Qu of Shaozhou erected a memorial stele where offerings are still made today.

Fifty-five: This Platform Sutra was compiled by the venerable Fahai. Before he died, he gave it to his fellow disciple, Daoji 道際. And before Daoji died, he gave it to his disciple, Wuzhen 悟真. Wuzhen currently lives in Lingnan at Faxing Monastery 法興寺 on Mount Caoxi, where he still transmits this teaching.²⁴⁸

Fifty-six: If this teaching is passed on, it must be to someone of superior wisdom who deeply believes the teaching of the Buddha. There are still those today who base themselves on its great compassion and who accept this sutra as their authority.

Fifty-seven: This monk²⁴⁹ is a native of Shaozhou's Qujiang County 曲將縣. After the Buddha entered Nirvana / his teaching spread to Eastern lands / transmitted to all as detachment / detachment from the ego-mind. / This is the true bodhisattva doctrine / a true example of its practice / only taught to those with wisdom / who explain it to liberate fools. / Only those transmit this teaching / who vow to put it into practice / who don't retreat from difficulties / who are able to

endure hardships / who are rich in blessings and merit.²⁵⁰ If someone's capacity should be inadequate or their ability insufficient, though they might seek this teaching, they cannot possibly penetrate it, and it would be a mistake to give them the Platform Sutra. Let this be known to all fellow practitioners that they might fathom its deeper meaning.

174. Still extant, it is now called Dajian Temple 大鑒寺.

175. The teaching that everything is empty of self-existence. This is also the title of the collection of sixteen sutras of which the Diamond was the ninth.

176. The purpose of this talk was to confer the precepts, and for such ceremonies an ordination platform was used. See sections 20–23.

177. South of Beijing.

178. Meaning “South of the Ridges,” thus Guangdong and Guangxi provinces.

179. Xinzhou (now Xinxing 新興) was 150 kilometers west of Guangzhou. Nanhai was a nearby market center, but it was also a name for Guangzhou.

180. Across the Yangzi from Jiujiang 九江 and fifteen kilometers north of Huangmei 黃梅.

181. According to the Chuandenglü 傳燈錄 5, this took place in 671.

182. The characters 獠 *ge-liao* both have the “dog” radical and were used by Han Chinese when referring to members of the hill tribes of South China.

183. The teaching that all beings have the potential to become buddhas was introduced by the Lotus Sutra, which was first translated into Chinese in 286.

184. “Dharma” here refers to a teacher's personal teaching or that of his lineage, which is shared only with those worthy of receiving it.

185. Only senior monks had their own rooms. These were dorm rooms.

186. The monk in charge of preparing novices for ordination.

187. The mention of scenes refers to Bodhiruci's translation (513), not Gunabhadra's (443), as his did not include the visually rich first chapter.

188. A small, round bronze mirror set in some kind of stand is meant. Made of bronze, such mirrors tarnished quickly.

189. A string of one thousand coins was worth fifty dollars in the Tang.

190. Section 5.

191. The presence here of “either” (亦 *yi*) in all editions would seem to refer to Shenxiu's poem as well and belie the earlier praise.

192. The ferry was sixty kilometers from the monastery. Jiujiang was on the Yangzi's south shore.

193. From Jiujiang, Huineng would have followed the Gan River 贛江 to its source just below this ridge. Shaoguan, where this sutra was spoken ten years later, was another 150 kilometers southwest, Guangzhou 200 more.

194. Buddhism's three pillars are meditation, wisdom, and morality. This talk was given to confer all three in the form of formless precepts.

195. Birth, duration, change, and death.
196. Samadhi refers to the merging of subject and object during meditation. “One Practice” refers to meditation and wisdom as inseparable.
197. Vimalakirti Sutra 4 and 1, respectively.
198. Vimalakirti Sutra 3.
199. Vimalakirti Sutra 1.
200. Vimalakirti Sutra 3.
201. Also known as the Brahma Net Sutra.
202. The first step on the Eightfold Path.
203. For “ulcerous hate” 疽疾, the Zongbao edition has “jealousy” 嫉妒.
204. Referring to what is being chanted: Maha Prajnaparamita.
205. Desire, anger, and ignorance are the three poisons that infect the mind and result in yet another existence.
206. “Suchness” or “reality” are translations of the Chinese *zhen-ru* 真如, or the Sanskrit *bhutatathata*.
207. A term for Asia coined by Indian Buddhists.
208. Referring to the Diamond Sutra.
209. The same two quotes appear here in 19.
210. Huineng considers “studying the Way” and “contemplating the mind” as prone to becoming dualistic dead ends that objectify one’s practice.
211. The Buddhist canon, or Tripitaka, is divided according to twelve styles or subjects: sutras, sastras, jatakas, etc.
212. For Huineng’s use of “mind” and “nature” see 35.
213. The “thieves” refer to the powers of sensation, the “gates” to the organs or faculties of sensation, and the “objects” to sensations.
214. Huineng uses “dharma nature” to refer to our alaya consciousness and “buddha nature” to refer to the tathagata-garbha.
215. Amita, or Amitabha, is the buddha of the Western Paradise, where those who chant that buddha’s name with a clear mind are reborn.
216. The city in India where the Buddha spoke the Shorter Manifestation of Paradise Sutra 阿彌陀經, not to mention the Diamond Sutra.
217. He says this in the Visualization of Paradise Sutra 觀無量壽佛經.
218. He says this in the Shorter Manifestation of Paradise Sutra.
219. Vimalakirti Sutra 1.
220. Murder, theft, adultery, falsehood, slander, gossip, profanity, avarice, anger, and delusion.
221. Wrong views, wrong thoughts, wrong speech, wrong behavior, wrong livelihood, wrong effort, wrong mindfulness, and wrong meditation, in contrast to the eight right ways of the Eightfold Path.
222. The noncommittal of the ten evil deeds.
223. The Chinese 無生 (“nonarising”) is a translation of the Sanskrit *anutpattika*. The acceptance of nonarising marks the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.
224. These two bodhisattvas welcome devotees to the Western Paradise.

225. The next buddha after Sakyamuni.
226. Mount Sumeru is ringed by nine oceans and nine mountain ranges.
227. The three walls of the mind are karma, passion, and delusion.
228. The reference is to “leaving home” to become a monk or nun.
229. When Huineng isn’t speaking, the voice is that of his disciple, Fahai.
230. Or thirty-two more years after the Platform Sutra was spoken.
231. Located sixty kilometers northeast of the Yangzi River town of Yichang 宜昌. It isn’t really in North China, but it’s not in South China.
232. A journey of nine hundred kilometers, much of which could have been by boat.
233. This touchstone of the Southern school is quoted from such sastras as Nagarjuna’s Maha Prajnaparamita Sastra 大智度論 (see also Platform 26).
234. A pun on Fada’s name: *fa* (dharma) and *da* (to understand)
235. It would have taken all day to read the entire sutra. Fada must have limited himself to the sections that puzzled him.
236. In the Lotus Sutra 3, the sravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva vehicles are represented by a goat cart, a deer cart, and an ox cart.
237. Lotus Sutra 2.
238. The Lotus says “appear in the world” 出現於世. But Huineng shortens the phrase here to 出世, which could also be read as shorthand for “to transcend the world while in the world” 於世出世.
239. The basis of birth and death, what turns the Wheel.
240. Shenhui became a major force in defending the Southern school of Zen against attacks by the Northern school.
241. Sections 38–44 were compiled long after the initial talk. From this point on, the rest is a record of Huineng’s last days, or thirty-two years later.
242. The alaya, or eighth form of consciousness, for which see the Lankavatara IV, IX, XIX, and LXXXII. Huineng doesn’t include the seventh form, manas consciousness.
243. There are twenty, not nineteen, pairs here. Later editions deleted the last three and replaced them with “compassion and ill-will” 慈毒 and “long and short” 長短.
244. This was Huineng’s hometown. Members of some of the hill tribes in South China still prepare their own coffins in advance. So why not a stupa?
245. Referring to the Discourse on Determining Right and Wrong 定是非論, written by Shenhui in 732 in answer to critiques of the Northern school.
246. For someone who was supposedly illiterate, it’s surprising to see a term unique to a philosophical treatise like The Awakening of Faith 起信論.
247. This took place at Guo’en Monastery in his hometown of Xinzhou.
248. This section is clearly by someone other than Fahai.
249. Referring to Fahai, the disciple who recorded the first part of the sutra and edited the remainder.
250. The first part of this section is in rhymed verse.

YONGJIA'S SONG OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Introduction

The *Song of Enlightenment* 證道歌 has been a Zen favorite since it first appeared over a thousand years ago. The man whose name has been attached to this poem is Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺. Like many monks of note, he was referred to by his place of birth in addition to his ordination name. Located on China's southeast coast, Yongjia was the name of one of two counties from which the city of Wenzhou 溫州 was formed in 674.

According to our earliest records, Yongjia was born there in either 665 or 675. Most historians prefer the earlier date, but there is no conclusive evidence as to which is correct. His father died when he was young, and his mother became a nun when he was eight. He and his older sister were ordained then as well, and they lived together with their mother at Wenzhou's Kaiyuan Monastery 開元寺. Because Yongjia refused to abandon his filial duties, he was criticized by other monks. Monks were supposed to "leave home," but Yongjia continued to care for his mother until she died, and his sister until he died.

As a young monk, Yongjia visited other Buddhist teachers. That was what monks were expected to do to expand their understanding of the Dharma. One place he visited was Tiantaishan 天台山, just up the coast from Yongjia. It was the home of Tiantai Buddhism, and among Yongjia's friends was Xuanlang 玄郎 (673–754), who became the Seventh Patriarch of that school. Yongjia's early practice included the Tiantai meditation technique of "cessation" and "observation" 止觀, but his writings reveal a familiarity with other schools as well.

At some point, Yongjia began to attract a following in Wenzhou. An official serving there, named Wei Jing 魏靜, collected some of his early writings and published them under the title *Yongjiaji* 永嘉集, the Yongjia Collection. The views in this collection, however, reflect those of the Northern school of Zen and differ from those for which

Yongjia later became known after his enlightenment, which occurred when he read the Nirvana then the Vimalakirti sutras.

Not long after his spiritual breakthrough, Yongjia met a monk named Xuance 玄策. Xuance was a disciple of Huineng and was sufficiently impressed with Yongjia that he convinced him to accompany him back to Caoxi to meet Huineng.²⁵¹ Upon arriving, Yongjia walked around Huineng three times, then stood in front of him holding his staff.

Huineng said, “A monk is capable of three thousand modes of deportment and eighty thousand ways of behavior. Where, sir, did you get such arrogance?”

Yongjia said, “Birth and death are important, but impermanence is also impermanent.”

Huineng said, “Have you not yet understood what is not born or comprehended what is not impermanent?”

Yongjia said, “Understanding is, in fact, what is not born, and comprehension is essentially what is not impermanent.”

Huineng said, “Indeed, so they are. So they are.”

Yongjia then made a full prostration and said he was leaving.

Huineng said, “You are leaving too soon.”

Yongjia said, “I can’t really move. How could I do so too soon?”

Huineng said, “Who is it who knows he doesn’t move?”

Yongjia said, “You, sir, are creating distinctions.”

Huineng said, “You have truly penetrated the meaning of what is not born.”

Yongjia said, “How could what is not born have any meaning.”

Huineng said, “Who is it who is distinguishing no meaning?”

Yongjia said, “Distinguishing has no meaning.”

Huineng said, “Wonderful! But at least stay the night.”

And so, Yongjia became known as One-night Jue 一夜覺, Jue being part of Yongjia’s ordination name, Xuanjue 玄覺.²⁵²

The date of this exchange was 705. After returning to Wenzhou, Yongjia built a hermitage for himself and his sister below the walls of Longxing Monastery 龍興寺 at the southwest corner of the city, and the two of them lived there until his death in the fall of 713. Ninety years later, a stupa was built on the site and subsequently named Jingguang (Pure Light) Pagoda 淨光塔. In 2003, while it was being

rebuilt, workers digging a new foundation found a crypt containing Yongjia's cremated relics, among which was a single iridescent pearl. They were later reinterred in 2006 at the base of a new seven-story, 210-foot-high pagoda.

Like Huineng, Yongjia didn't have a teacher. His teacher, he tells us in verse 20, was the Buddha. Still, finding someone like Huineng to verify his understanding must have given him confidence to put what he understood into words. According to the *Zutangji* 祖堂集, published in 952, Yongjia's sister compiled what he left behind, which included this poem.

Remarkably, we have two early complete copies. The first was among the manuscripts Paul Pelliot brought back to Paris from the Silk Road oasis of Dunhuang 敦煌 over a hundred years ago. Given a designation of P.2104 by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, it is inscribed with a date of 980 and introduces the text as part of what it calls the "Secret Keys of Zen" 禪宗密訣. Our second early copy is from a woodblock edition of the *Jingde Chuandenglu* 景德傳燈錄 (Transmission of the Lamp) published in 1009.

Like most good poetry, Yongjia's *Song* leaves more unsaid than it says and encourages readers to fill in the blanks. Over the centuries, thousands of monks and scholars have tried to fill in those blanks with lectures and commentaries. I've tried to restrain myself but couldn't help add a few footnotes of my own.

251. The distance between Wenzhou and Caoxi was a thousand kilometers.

252. This account is in chapter seven of the later Zongbao 宗寶 edition of the Platform Sutra but absent in both Dunhuang copies.

Yongjia's Song of Enlightenment²⁵³

1.

Don't you see

idle followers of the Way not studying not busy

not getting rid of delusions not looking for the truth

the true nature of their ignorance their buddha nature²⁵⁴

their illusory empty bodies their dharma body²⁵⁵

2.

Their dharma body they realize doesn't include a thing

their original nature is the primordial buddha

the five skandhas but clouds floating aimless in the sky

the three poisons mere bubbles appearing then gone

3.

Seeing what is real but no persons or things

they instantly quench the fires of hell

meanwhile those who deceive others with lies

spend kalpas having their tongues pulled out

4.

Instant understanding is Tathagata Zen²⁵⁶

every practice and perfection present in your body

the six paths of existence look real in a dream²⁵⁷

once you are awake the whole universe is gone

5.

No punishments or blessings nothing lost or gained

as for the heart of nirvana don't ask directions²⁵⁸

regarding that unpolished dust-covered mirror²⁵⁹

it's time you took a closer look

6.

Who has no ideas who isn't born²⁶⁰
what truly isn't born isn't not born²⁶¹
ask a mechanical man made of wood
how is that quest for buddhahood coming

7.

Let go that grip on the material world
in the heart of nirvana eat and drink your fill
practices are ephemeral everything is empty
this is the perfect enlightenment of the buddhas

8.

Speaking with conviction is the sign of a true monk
those who can't indulge in asking questions
severing roots is what marks a buddha
picking through twigs and leaves isn't for me

9.

People don't notice the jewel among jewels
waiting for them in the tathagata-garbha²⁶²
its sixfold powers neither empty nor not²⁶³
its perfect light neither visible nor not

10.

Purify the five roots and acquire the five abilities²⁶⁴
only then will you know what can't be measured
an image in a mirror isn't hard to see
but try to grab the moon in the water

11.

Setting out alone walking alone²⁶⁵
those who arrive take Nirvana Road²⁶⁶
their appearance ancient their manner detached
ragged and gaunt they're not noticed

12.

Disciples without means they're called poor

poor in possessions but not in virtue
being poor of course they wear hemp
their practice is treasuring the jewel within

13.

This priceless jewel with inexhaustible uses
it never withholds its help or response
three bodies and four insights are present within²⁶⁷
eight freedoms and six powers all mark the mind²⁶⁸

14.

Gifted people grasp it all at once
lesser minds hear but don't believe
thinking about changing their clothes²⁶⁹
they claim they're making progress

15.

Let people mock and others speak ill²⁷⁰
tiring themselves out trying to burn the sky
hearing their words is like tasting sweet dew
I swallow and suddenly enter the inconceivable

16.

In hateful words I see a chance for merit
they have become my closest advisers
not letting ridicule make enemies of friends²⁷¹
I show the power of accepting nothing is born²⁷²

17.

Know the words and know their source²⁷³
don't focus on the emptiness of meditation-wisdom's light²⁷⁴
this isn't something I alone have learned
countless buddhas have experienced this too

18.

The lion roars and speaks without fear
lesser beasts hear and cower in fright
wild elephants cease their rampaging ways

sky dragons listen in silent rapture

19.

I traveled great rivers crossed mountains and streams
seeking teachers and masters to understand Zen
ever since taking the Cao River Road²⁷⁵
I've discovered life and death have no hold on me

20.

Walking is Zen sitting is Zen
speaking or silent moving or not I'm at peace
even at knifepoint I remain unmoved
even poisons can't effect me
before my teacher met Dipamkara²⁷⁶
he spent kalpas as Ksanti the Ascetic²⁷⁷

21.

How many births how many deaths
births and deaths go on without end
since I suddenly realized nothing is born
I've treated fame and shame the same

22.

I moved to a mountain and found a quiet place
steep and secluded beneath tall pines
an outsider monk I enjoy sitting still²⁷⁸
settled at last I'm truly at peace

23.

Those who are awake don't engage in giving gifts
in the world of conditioned things it's different²⁷⁹
giving alms for a good rebirth still attached to form
you may as well shoot an arrow into the sky

24.

Its momentum spent an arrow falls to earth
resulting in another disappointing life
unlike the door to the real and unconditioned

once you step through you're in the buddha realm

25.

Ignore the twigs and look for the root
the jewel of the moon in pure aquamarine
once you grasp this wish-fulfilling pearl²⁸⁰
its help to you and others never ends

26.

Moon on the river wind in the pines
why is the sky so clear all night
the pearl of the buddha-nature precepts marks the mind²⁸¹
mist and clouds shroud the body

27.

My dragon-subduing bowl and my tiger-calming staff²⁸²
its two rings echoing on the trail
it isn't for pointing out the mundane
but the tracks left by the Buddha's precious staff

28.

Don't search for the truth and don't dismiss delusion
realize both are empty and have no form²⁸³
no form but neither empty nor not empty
that is a tathagata's true form

29.

Nothing obstructs the mirror of the mind
illuminating a universe of countless realms
where millions of images appear
neither inside nor outside its perfect light

30.

Saying everything is empty they dismiss the laws of karma
such recklessness is sure to bring misfortune
renouncing existence for emptiness is the same
jumping into a fire to escape a flood²⁸⁴

31.

Letting delusions go and grasping the truth
the letting go grasping mind is a master of disguise
students unaware who take this for their practice
mistake a thief for their child

32.

Reducing your Dharma wealth or cancelling your merit
invariably results from discriminations of the mind
that's why in Zen we set the mind aside²⁸⁵
we use the power instead of accepting nothing is born²⁸⁶

33.

The Great Bodhisattva used the sword of wisdom
with its *prajna* blade and *vajra* flames²⁸⁷
he cut through the minds of heretics
but first he ended Mara's brazen ways²⁸⁸

34.

He shook his Dharma thunder and beat his Dharma drum²⁸⁹
spread clouds of compassion and showers of sweet dew
the trampling of elephants covered the world with moisture
whatever their sect or path everyone woke up

35.

Himalayan butter to which nothing is added²⁹⁰
it alone produces my favorite ghee
the nature that pervades all natures
the dharma that includes all dharmas

36.

A single moon shines in every drop of water
every water-drop moon the very same moon²⁹¹
every buddha's dharma body is in my nature
my nature is one with every tathagata

37.

At every stage all stages are present²⁹²

but not in form or thought and not in karmic deeds
snap your fingers and countless dharma doors appear²⁹³
three kalpas go by in a flash²⁹⁴
as for all statements being no statements²⁹⁵
what does that mean to this awareness of mine

38.

It can't be slandered and can't be praised
like space it has no boundaries
it's never not present it's always clear
but look and you'll find you can't see it

39.

You can't grab it and can't let it go
when you can't find it that is when you'll find it
it speaks when it's silent it's silent when it speaks
when the Gate of Gifts opens nothing blocks the way²⁹⁶

40.

People ask the source of my understanding
I tell them the power of Maha Prajnaparamita
if it's right or wrong nobody knows
if it makes sense or not the gods can't say
I've been practicing it for kalpas now
not just to make others confused²⁹⁷

41.²⁹⁸

Flying the Dharma flag announcing the school's doctrine²⁹⁹
clearly the Buddha's teaching is at Caoxi
Kasyapa was the first to transmit the light³⁰⁰
the first of twenty-eight generations in the West

42.

The Dharma traveled east before it reached this land
Bodhidharma was its First Patriarch
the first of six to wear the robe and spread the news
to countless others who later understood

43.

Delusions being empty we don't define the truth
we deny what is and isn't but don't empty emptiness
its twenty different kinds are no concern to us³⁰¹
we share the universal tathagata nature

44.

The mind is a sense organ and dharmas are its sensations³⁰²
think of them as streaks on a mirror
and the streaks gone when the light finally shines
forget the mind and dharmas it's your nature that is real

45.

It's an evil age and the Dharma about to end³⁰³
people aren't happy and lack self-control
ignoring the Sage they prefer mistaken views
Mara becomes stronger as their hatred multiplies³⁰⁴
hearing others talk about the Buddha's instant teaching
they wish they could grind it into dust

46.

What the mind creates the body suffers
no need to claim injustice or shift the blame
if you're hoping to avoid karma's endless fire
don't criticize the Buddha's true teaching

47.

In a forest of nothing but sandalwood trees³⁰⁵
where it's lush and remote lions dwell
in the sylvan quiet they roam where they will
other beasts even birds keep their distance

48.

Lion cubs all trail behind
by the time they're three they can roar³⁰⁶
foxes who follow the Dharma King
after lifetimes of mischief can only yap

49.

The instant teaching is sentiment free³⁰⁷
as long as doubts remain arguments follow
this mountain monk isn't just banging his drum
he cares who falls into the nothing-forever pit³⁰⁸

50.

No or not no yes or not yes
to miss by an inch is the same as a thousand miles
yes and a dragon maiden suddenly became a buddha³⁰⁹
no and Sunakshatra fell into hell alive³¹⁰

51.

Piling up knowledge was how I spent my youth
reading sutras and shastras studying commentaries
the names and terms never seemed to end
counting the sand in the ocean what a waste of effort

52.

Scolded by the Tathagata³¹¹
what good is counting others' treasures
it was then I realized my efforts had been in vain
all the years I had wasted braving dust and wind³¹²

53.

Misguided from the start my understanding wrong³¹³
I didn't know how the Buddha's instant teaching worked
why devotees of lesser paths didn't see the Way
why unbelievers might be smart but not wise

54.

So foolish so stupid
pointing to their palms to explain what's real³¹⁴
mistaking a finger for the moon
turning objects of the senses into ghost stories

55.

Who doesn't see a thing is a tathagata

hence the name Looking from on High³¹⁵
those who understand are free of karmic burdens
those who don't still have debts to pay
a hunger that keeps them from sharing a royal meal
a sickness even a great doctor can't cure

56.

Meditating amid desires is the power of prajna³¹⁶
why a lotus isn't burned in a fire
Yongshi committed crimes then realized nothing is born
he became a buddha and is still one today³¹⁷

57.

When the Lion roars its fearless teaching
it pities confused obstinate fools
who see only offenses that prevent buddhahood³¹⁸
blind to the secret the Tathagata revealed

58.

Two monks were guilty of crimes
so judged Upali with his firefly light³¹⁹
the layman Vimalakirti dispelled their doubts
as if the sun had melted the snow

59.

Inconceivable is the power of liberation
its uses as countless as the Ganges' sand
who wouldn't give every possible offering
ten thousand ounces of gold
but even one's own flesh and bones would fall short
a billion times better would be a word of understanding

60.

The unsurpassed King of all Dharmas³²⁰
realized by more buddhas than the Ganges has sand
this wish-fulfilling jewel I have here revealed
let all who accept it do the same

61.

Look around there isn't a thing
there are no people there are no buddhas
all the worlds in the universe are bubbles in the sea
all the sages and worthies mere lightning
even if an iron wheel rolled across my skull³²¹
meditation-wisdom's light would still shine³²²

62.

Let the sun turn cold and the moon turn warm
an army of demons can't destroy the truth
when an elephant pulls a cart up a mountain
has anyone seen a mantis block its way

63.

Elephants don't follow rabbit trails³²³
enlightenment isn't confined by minor rules
don't vilify the sky when you're looking through a reed
if you still don't understand this is for you³²⁴

²⁵³. I have combined all couplets based on Tang-dynasty pronunciations.

²⁵⁴. Our buddha nature refers to the potential we share with all beings to become buddhas. Yongjia's approach, and that of the Southern school of Zen, was to eliminate the separation of the potential from the actual.

²⁵⁵. All buddhas have three bodies: a body that appears to others, a body they experience themselves, and the body of the teaching.

²⁵⁶. Tathagata Zen refers to the Southern school, whose slogans varied from "This mind is the buddha" to "this mind is not the buddha."

²⁵⁷. Rebirth in the realms of gods, asuras (gods who make war on other gods), humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and the hells.

²⁵⁸. "Nirvana" is used throughout this poem for what is beyond birth and death—our buddha nature.

²⁵⁹. The comparison of the mind to a mirror and of practice to keeping the mirror free from dust was a metaphor of Zen's Northern school.

²⁶⁰. Huineng says, "No idea is my doctrine." (Platform Sutra 17)

²⁶¹. The teaching that nothing is born underlies all of Mahayana Buddhism.

²⁶². Like Huineng, Yongjia uses "tathagata-garbha" to refer to our buddha nature. The Lotus Sutra 8 describes it as a jewel wrapped in rags.

²⁶³. The six forms of consciousness associated with the six senses are meant, as once the tathagatha-garbha is "uncovered," they are no longer used to misinterpret

what is real.

264. The five roots refer the five sense faculties and the abilities to their powers, which are no longer misused in the projection of delusions.

265. Following Dunhuang text P.2104, which has 獨作 “set out alone” for 獨行 “move/travel alone.”

266. The Mahayana version of the Nirvana Sutra 大般涅槃經 was the text that opened the door for Yongjia. The Vimalakirti pushed him through.

267. The four insights include knowledge gained through reflection, equanimity, observation, and accomplishment.

268. The eight freedoms include freedom from impurity, purity, space, knowledge, nothingness, from thought and no thought, from sensation, and from consciousness. Unlike in verse 9, the six powers here (六通 not 六力) include unimpeded vision and hearing, knowledge of others’ thoughts and of previous lives, unrestricted travel, and knowledge of the end of karma.

269. Instead of looking for the jewel in their soiled clothes, these people just want new clothes.

270. This and the following verse are addressed to those who belittled the Southern school of Zen and its advocacy of instant enlightenment.

271. Yongjia’s friends included Xuanlang, the patriarch of the Tiantai school that took exception to Zen’s “instant enlightenment.”

272. The acceptance that nothing arises or is born (*anutpattika-dharma-ksanti*) is the final attainment prior to enlightenment. See verses 6, 32, and 56.

273. The term *zong* 宗, or “source,” also refers to a lineage and its founder.

274. The term “meditation-wisdom” was also used by Huineng (Platform Sutra 13) to stress their inseparable nature. If “emptiness” was not itself empty it would become just another concept.

275. The Caoxi River was where Huineng lived. The *Zutangji* quotes the fourth line as Yongjia’s final remark to Huineng during their brief meeting.

276. Dipamkara was the buddha who foretold Sakyamuni’s buddhahood (Diamond Sutra 7). Yongjia sees the Buddha, not Huineng, as his teacher.

277. Before his enlightenment, Sakyamuni spent five hundred lifetimes as an ascetic named Ksanti (Sanskrit: “acceptance,” “forbearance”).

278. Yongjia spent his last years in a hut, together with his sister, on the slope below Wenzhou’s Longxing Temple.

279. For their very “thingness,” all things are necessarily dependent on or “conditioned” by their relationship with other things. Hence, they possess no self-existence, no reality of their own.

280. This refers to the pearl of the tathagata-garbha (buddha nature) wrapped in the soiled clothing of the skandhas, ayatanas, and dhatus that make up alaya consciousness. (Cf. Lotus Sutra 8)

281. Another name for the bodhisattva precepts, originally intended for laity, in recognition that everyone, monks or not, could become a buddha.

282. A begging bowl and a staff were among the few possessions monks were allowed. On top of the staff were two metal rings that jangled to warn wild animals of one's approach. The first line recalls when Sakyamuni defeated a dragon with his bowl and when monks used their staffs to separate two tigers.
283. Following P.2104 and the *Chuandenglū*, both of which have 二法 "both" instead of 無法 "neither."
284. Those attached to emptiness drown in a sea of emptiness, while those who admit existence and then embrace emptiness burn in the karmic fires of regret.
285. Zen doesn't make the mind an object. If nothing is born, there are no objects, there is no mind.
286. The power acquired at the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path.
287. *Prajna* is Sanskrit for "wisdom;" *vajra* here means "thunderbolt."
288. Sakyamuni attained Enlightenment by first subduing Mara, the great distractor of practitioners. He then proceeded to Sarnath to teach the Dharma to his five former disciples, who had renounced him.
289. This verse recounts one of the more unrestrained versions of the beginning of Sakyamuni's career as a buddha.
290. Sakyamuni grew up in the foothills of the Himalayas. Yongjia considered him his teacher and likens his teaching to clarified butter.
291. An image common to Huayan Buddhism, whereby one thing contains all things, and all things contain one thing.
292. Referring to the ten stages of the bodhisattva path.
293. Dharma doors refer to different teachings of the indivisible Dharma.
294. Three kalpas are needed for a bodhisattva to achieve buddhahood.
295. See the Lankavatara III: whatever you can talk about isn't it.
296. The greatest gift of all is the gift of the Dharma.
297. The reaction to Zen is often one of bewilderment, as it uses words as gestures rather than for their meaning, the moon rather than a finger.
298. This verse is the earliest mention of Huineng as the dharma heir of the lineage that began with Kasyapa. Bodhidharma was not only the First Patriarch in China, he was also the Twenty-Eighth Patriarch in India.
299. Following Dunhuang text P.2104, which has 宗旨 "school's doctrine" in place of 法旨 "dharma doctrine."
300. One day the Buddha held up a flower, Kasyapa smiled, and Zen began.
301. Referring to twenty definitions of emptiness used by Buddhist logicians.
302. The "mind" here refers to the sixth, conceptual, form of consciousness. The metaphor in the first three lines was used by the Northern school of Zen, while the fourth line summarizes the approach of the Southern school.
303. Buddhists believed beings' ability to understand the Dharma diminished over time. In the Tang, many believed the final age was at hand. This verse highlights the hostility of the Northern school toward the Southern school.
304. Mara distracts practitioners with desire, anger, and ignorance.

305. Sandalwood was the favorite incense of Buddhists in China and one of the major trade goods that arrived on the Silk Road.
306. Three years was considered the time necessary for a Buddhist apprentice to complete their study with a teacher.
307. Laozi wrote: "Heaven and Earth are heartless." (Daodejing 5)
308. The beliefs that there is nothing after death or that life goes on forever.
309. In the Lotus Sutra 11, Manjusri recounts how the eight-year-old daughter of a dragon king was suddenly able to become a buddha.
310. Sunakshatra was one of Sakyamuni's cousins (some texts say sons). He too left home and attained a deep understanding of the Dharma, but he met an evil friend, renounced the Dharma, and was reborn in hell while still alive.
311. The first two lines refer to when the Buddha scolded Ananda for relying on learning to achieve enlightenment, likening his pursuit to counting others' treasures. This story was recorded in the Surangama Sutra 楞嚴經, which made its first appearance in China in 705, in Guangzhou.
312. Referring to visiting different teachers in search of the Dharma.
313. Perhaps a reference to the *Yongjiaji*, the collection of his early writings that reflected the understanding of the Northern school of Zen.
314. Chinese is a language of countless homophones, and people often use their finger to write out characters on their palms to explain which one they're referring to.
315. Translation of the name Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.
316. The first two lines are from the Vimalakirti Sutra 8.
317. Yongshi was a monk who committed adultery and murder, but upon hearing and accepting the teaching that nothing arises, he became one of Buddhism's thirty-five omnipresent buddhas.
318. Yongjia saw himself as an "outsider monk" and is criticizing those who can't see past the monastic code in this and in the following verse. The secret is that all beings have the buddha nature.
319. Two monks reported their violations to Upali, a disciple known for his knowledge of the monastic code. Both violations included extenuating circumstances, but Upali judged them guilty. The two monks remained troubled and repeated their concerns to Vimalakirti. The famous layman told them that both sin and the mind are empty and their buddha nature isn't subject to impurity. Thus he removed their doubts. (Vimalakirti Sutra 3) It was while reading this sutra that Yongjia experienced enlightenment. As in verse 58, he is criticizing his fellow monks for their attachment to rules.
320. Referring to our buddha nature.
321. One of the punishments waiting for us in hell is having our skull repeatedly crushed by an iron wheel.
322. Again, a term coined by the Sixth Patriarch emphasizing the practice of meditation and wisdom as inseparable. Washing the Dishes Zen.

323. In Buddhism, the elephant represents wisdom and strength but also the power of expedient means.

324. The poem ends with “this is for you” 為君訣, an expression of farewell (often someone’s dying words) but also referring to the *Song of Enlightenment* as a parting gift.

HUANGBO'S TRANSMISSION OF THE MIND

Introduction

The final text in this collection is a record of a series of talks given by Huangbo 黃檗 in the fall of 842 in Jiangxi province, where people still pronounce the character 禪 *zen*, as they did in the Tang, instead of the modern Mandarin *chan*. Considering Huangbo's fame in the annals of Zen, it's surprising we know so little about him. But we do know something. For example, he was born just west of Fuzhou 福州, the capital of the southern coastal province of Fujian, but we don't know when. My guess is around 765, if not a few years earlier. We also know he became a monk when he was young. Fifteen was typical, so he probably became a novice around 780, and three years later he would have been ordained. This happened at Wanfu Monastery 萬福寺, forty kilometers south of Fuzhou. He received his ordination name Xiyun 希運 there, and he also acquired the name by which he has been known ever since. Huangbo was the name of a hill next to the monastery, and it was covered with Amur cork trees, *huang-bo* in Chinese.

Like most young monks, following his ordination Huangbo would have begun looking for a teacher. He began by traveling north along the coast to the Buddhist center of Tiantaishan, which Yongjia visited a century earlier. Ironically, that would have been the same time Cold Mountain 寒山 was writing poems on the walls of the monasteries there. But Huangbo didn't stay long. He kept traveling and eventually made his way to the capital of Chang'an 長安. Finding the right teacher never comes easy, but while he was in Chang'an, Huangbo met a laywoman who suggested the person he was looking for was Mazu 馬祖. Mazu was the dharma heir of the Sixth Patriarch's dharma heir, Huairang, and he was living in Jiangxi 江西 province at Baofeng Monastery 寶峰寺, a thousand kilometers to the southeast. By the time Huangbo got there, Mazu had died. Since Mazu's death occurred in the second month of 788, Huangbo must have arrived no later than that summer. Although Mazu was gone, his dharma heir,

Huaihai 懷海, was living nearby, at Baizhang Monastery 百丈寺, and that was where Huangbo went next—a mere two days' walk away.

Huangbo was said to be seven feet tall and to have a bulging forehead. When he arrived at Baizhang, Huaihai said, “Magnificent! Imposing! Where have you come from?” Huangbo replied, “Magnificent! Imposing! I have come from the mountains.” And that was how Huangbo met his teacher.

Like Mazu, Huaihai built his monastery at the edge of a mountain basin and established the same kind of agricultural commune that began with the Fourth Patriarch. Huaihai's most-quoted saying was, “a day with no work is a day with no food” 一日不作，一日不食. He was also known for coming up with a set of “pure rules” 清規 to govern life in these mountain monasteries, where residents often numbered in the thousands.

Having found his teacher, Huangbo remained there. Zen annals are full of his exchanges with Huaihai, or Baizhang as he was better known, as well as with his own dharma heirs, among them Linji 臨濟, who became the founder of one of Zen's two most famous lineages.

After Huaihai died in 814, Huangbo remained at Baizhang, or at least in the area. He was still there in 842 when an official named Pei Xiu 裴休 invited him to Zhongling County 鍾陵縣, east of the provincial capital of Nanchang 南昌. Pei was serving as magistrate and was a student of Zen himself, and this was not the first time the two men met. At some point, he compiled his understanding of Zen into a book and gave it to Huangbo to read. Huangbo didn't look at it. He put it down and asked Pei whether he understood. Pei admitted he didn't, and Huangbo told him the true teaching can't be found in words, much less in a book. The next time they met was in the fall of 842 in Zhongling. Huangbo gave daily talks there over the course of two months at the city's Longxing Monastery 龍興寺, and Pei Xiu recorded what he said.

After Huangbo returned to the mountains, Pei arranged to have a monastery built for him on another mountain, a long day's walk from Baizhang. It was finished in 846 and named Guangtang Monastery 廣唐寺. Two years later, Pei Xiu invited Huangbo to Wanling 宛陵 (modern Xuancheng 宣城), another post where he was serving. It was five hundred kilometers away, but despite ill health, Huangbo

agreed to come, and Pei Xiu once more recorded Huangbo's talks—which he later published as the Wanling Record.

Afterward, Huangbo returned to Guangtang Monastery, and he died there two years later in 850. Not long after that, Pei Xiu became prime minister and asked the court to bestow on Huangbo the name Duanji 斷際, "Boundary Breaker." Pei also sent the notes he had compiled in Zhongling and in Wanling to Huangbo's dharma heirs still living at Guangtang Temple to make sure what he had recorded was accurate. He published the edited manuscript of the Zhongling set of talks in 857 under the title *Transmission of the Mind* 傳心法要.

The following account begins with Huangbo's classic description of the mind, followed by what appear to be excerpts from the talks he gave there, and finally by his answers to questions posed by Pei Xiu and others present at what was apparently a meditation retreat. It was, and still is, common for Zen monasteries to conduct 49-day retreats twice a year. And it was, and still is, common for a brief daily talk to be given by the abbot or, in this case, a visiting Zen master.

This has always been my favorite Zen text. It was when I first read John Blofeld's English translation, and it has continued to be ever since I learned to read the Chinese. An older Zen friend I don't have. In 1999, I managed to find Pei Xiu's grave in Hunan 湖南 not far from where Huangbo's dharma brother, Guishan 潯山, lived and taught. Thinking about the karmic connections that made it possible for such a text as this to find its way into my life, I lit some incense at Pei Xiu's ransacked grave and thanked him. And now this is yours.

Transmission of the Mind

1. The Master told Xiu, “Buddhas and beings are just this one mind and nothing else. From time without beginning, this mind has never been born or destroyed, it isn’t blue or yellow, it has no form or characteristics, it isn’t subject to existence or non-existence, it doesn’t qualify as new or old, it isn’t long or short, it isn’t big or small. It exceeds all limits, descriptions, imitations, or comparisons. It’s right here, in this body. If you think about it, you’ve missed it. Like space, it has no borders and can’t be measured. Just this one mind, this is the buddha. There is no difference between a buddha and a being. But beings are attached to appearances and search outside themselves. And their searching leads them further astray. Sending a buddha to find a buddha, using the mind to grasp the mind, they could wear themselves out for kalpas without end, and they still wouldn’t find it. They don’t realize that if they stopped thinking and worrying about it, the buddha would appear before them. This mind is a buddha. A buddha is a being. When it’s a being, this mind doesn’t shrink, and when it’s a buddha, this mind doesn’t expand.

2. “As for the six paramitas and ten thousand practices and meritorious deeds as countless as the sands of the Ganges, they are already here. You don’t need to add them through cultivation. When conditions are present, practice. When conditions end, stop. If you aren’t convinced this is the buddha, and you prefer to practice while attached to appearances in order to achieve some result, this is a delusion and contrary to the Way. This mind is the buddha. There is no other buddha. Moreover, there is no other mind. This mind is clear and pure. Like space, it is devoid of even the slightest characteristic. If you try to think or reason about it, you distort the reality of things and become attached to appearances. From time without beginning, there has never been a buddha attached to appearances. Cultivating the six paramitas and ten thousand practices in hopes of becoming a buddha involves stages. From time

without beginning, there has never been a buddha of stages. Just realize that there is not the slightest thing to attain other than one mind. This is the real buddha. There is no difference between the one mind of a buddha or a being.

3. “Like space, it is free of any mixture or decay. Like the wheel of the sun, it illuminates the four quarters. When the sun rises, and its light fills the world, space doesn’t become brighter. And when the sun sets, and darkness covers the world, space doesn’t become darker. The states of light and darkness alternate with each other, but the nature of space remains completely unchanged. The minds of buddhas and beings are also like this. Anyone who conceives of a buddha as having the attributes of purity, light, or liberation or who conceives of a being as having the attributes of impurity, darkness, or endless rebirth will never attain enlightenment even in the course of as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. This is because they are attached to appearances. Other than this one mind there is not the slightest thing you can find. This mind is the buddha. People who study the Way nowadays aren’t aware of the reality of this mind. Instead they create a mind in addition to the mind and look for a buddha somewhere else. Practices that involve attachment to appearances are evil teachings, not the path to enlightenment.

4. “Honoring the buddhas of the ten directions doesn’t compare with honoring a single practitioner with no mind. And how so? Because a person with no mind has no mind at all, only the body of reality itself. Inside, it’s like wood or stone. It doesn’t move or waver. Outside, it’s like space. Nothing blocks or impedes it. It includes no subject or object, no direction or location, no characteristic or appearance, no acquisition or loss. All those who are searching for something and who are unwilling to accept this teaching fear falling into a void and having nothing to cling to. Seeing a precipice, they turn back. For the most part, theirs is an endless quest for conceptual knowledge. This is why those who seek conceptual knowledge are as countless as fur and those who realize the Way like horns.

5. “Manjusri represents principles. Samantabhadra³²⁵ represents practices.³²⁶ Principles mean principles that are truly empty and without barriers. Practices mean practices that are free of form and are inexhaustible. Avalokitesvara represents great compassion, and

Mahasthama represents great knowledge.³²⁷ Vimalakirti means Pure Name. “Pure” refers to his nature. “Name” refers to his attributes. Because his nature and attributes didn’t differ, he was called Pure Name. What these great bodhisattvas demonstrate is something all beings possess that is never separate from the one mind. What they did was to realize this. Students of the Way nowadays don’t wake up to what is inside their own minds. Instead, they cling to appearances and grasp at objects outside their minds and turn their backs on the Way.

“The sand of the Ganges, the Buddha said of this sand, when buddhas and bodhisattvas, or Sakra and Brahma, or any of the gods walk on it, the sand feels no joy. And when oxen and sheep or insects and bugs trample or crawl on it, the sand feels no anger. Regarding jewels or treasures or perfume, the sand has no desire. Regarding feces or urine or filth, the sand has no aversion.”³²⁸

6. “This mind is the mind of no mind. It is free from appearances of any kind and doesn’t differ for beings or buddhas. If you can just be free of conceptions, you’re done. You students of the Way who don’t get free of conceptions right now, even were you to practice for countless kalpas, you would never reach the Way. As long as you are tied to the meritorious practices of the Three Vehicles,³²⁹ you can’t get free. But realizing this mind can be fast or slow. Some get free of conceptions as soon as they hear this teaching. Some work their way through the ten beliefs, the ten periods, the ten practices, and the ten transfers of merit³³⁰ before they achieve no mind. Some go through the ten stages³³¹ before they achieve no mind. Regardless of whether it takes longer or shorter, once they achieve no mind, there is nothing more to practice or realize. Actually, although there is nothing to achieve, it isn’t really nothing. If you realize it in the space of a single thought or after the ten stages, the achievement is exactly the same. There is no difference as to its depth, only kalpas of wasted hardship.

7. “Doing evil and doing good both involve attachment to appearances. Doing evil while attached to appearances, you suffer the endless round of existence in vain. Doing good while attached to appearances, you suffer fatigue in vain. Neither compares with understanding this teaching the moment you hear it. This teaching is

the mind. Outside of the mind there is no teaching. This mind is the teaching. Outside of the teaching there is no mind. The mind itself is no mind, but it is also not no mind. If you treat the mind as no mind, the mind turns into an entity. Understand this in silence, that's all. Stop thinking. This is why it is said "when the path of language is severed, the workings of the mind end."³³² This mind is the original pure buddha. Everyone possesses it. Everything that wriggles or stirs shares one and the same body as the buddhas. It is only because of false distinctions that we create different kinds of karma.

8. "In addition to your original buddhahood, there is nothing else. It is completely empty and utterly quiescent, wonderfully clear and at peace, that is all. As you become more deeply aware of it, all at once, there it is, perfect and complete and lacking nothing. Even if you spent three infinitely long kalpas devoting yourself to your practice and going through all the stages, and then suddenly you realized it, you will have only realized your own original buddhahood to which you will have added nothing. And you will look upon your achievements during those kalpas as nothing but conjured scenes in a dream. That is why the Tathagata said, "In attaining unexcelled, perfect enlightenment, I attained nothing at all. If I had attained anything, Dipamkara Buddha would not have made his prophecy." He also said, "There is nothing in this that is different or not the same. Thus is it called 'enlightenment.'"³³³ This original pure mind, whether for beings or buddhas, or for the mountains or rivers of the world, or for those with form or no form,³³⁴ it fills the realms of the ten directions equally and includes neither self nor other.

9. "This original, pure mind never stops illuminating everything with its own perfect light. People don't realize this and just think what they perceive or know is the mind. Because what they perceive or know is covered up, they don't see their perfectly clear original body. If they could suddenly have no mind, their original body would appear like the wheel of the sun rising in space and illuminating the ten directions, and it would no longer be obstructed. Thus, those of you who study the Way see only what you perceive or know as taking place. If you were to get rid of what you perceive or know, the pathways of your mind would be cut off and would have no place to enter. You only regard what you perceive or know as your mind. But

your mind is neither part of what you perceive or know, nor is it separate from what you perceive or know. Don't create ideas about what you perceive or know, and don't think about what you perceive or know, and don't search for a mind apart from what you perceive or know. But don't forsake what you perceive or know in order to get something. It isn't there, and it isn't somewhere else. It doesn't stay still, and it doesn't appear. Go where you will, there is nowhere that isn't the place of enlightenment.

10. "When people hear about the Way and that buddhas transmit the Dharma of the mind, they think that in addition to the mind, there is a Dharma that they can realize or obtain. And they use the mind to search for the Dharma, unaware that the mind is the Dharma, and that the Dharma is the mind. You can't use the mind to find the mind. You can spend a million kalpas, but the day will never come when you find it. Better to have no mind right now. This is the Dharma. It is like the wrestler who went searching for the pearl between his brows³³⁵ and searched everywhere in the ten directions without finding it, until a wise man pointed it out, and he found it where it had been all the time. Thus, you students of the Way are blind to your own minds. Not realizing the mind is the buddha, you look somewhere else. You perform meritorious works and go through the stages of realization and spend kalpas in your quest without ever achieving your goal. Better to have no mind right now and finally realize nothing at all exists, nothing is attained, there are no aids or stages, and there is no subject or object. As long as you don't create delusions, you will realize enlightenment. And when you do, you will merely realize the buddha of your own mind and that all your meritorious work over the course of kalpas was a waste of effort. Just like when the wrestler found the pearl, it was the pearl that had been between his brows the whole time and had nothing to do with his effort of looking elsewhere. Thus the Buddha said, "In unexcelled, perfect enlightenment I actually attained nothing at all." Afraid that people wouldn't believe this, he cited what is seen by the five eyes and what is expressed by the five kinds of speech.³³⁶ What is true and not false³³⁷ is the highest truth.

11. "Students of the Way, don't doubt that the four elements³³⁸ comprise the body and that the four elements include no self or

master—and thus this body has no self or master, or that the five skandhas make up the mind and that the five skandhas include no self or master—and thus this mind has no self or master, or that the combinations of the six sense organs, six sense objects, and six forms of consciousness appear and disappear and that these eighteen sensory elements are empty—and thus everything is empty. There is only your original, perfectly pure mind.

12. “There is perception-based eating and wisdom-based eating. When the body of four elements is tormented by pangs of hunger, and you accordingly give it food without becoming attached to greed, this is what is meant by wisdom-based eating. Indulging the desire to taste and creating illusory distinctions merely to please the mouth and not feeling sated, this is called perception-based eating.

13. “Sravakas awaken due to hearing. That is why they are called *sravakas* (hearers). But they don’t understand their own minds and add conceptions to the teachings they hear. Whether they hear about enlightenment and nirvana because of supernatural powers or auspicious appearances, or they are moved by sermons, they spend three infinitely-long kalpas practicing before they succeed in becoming buddhas. Since they all belong to the sravaka path, they are called sravaka buddhas. To understand instantly that your own mind is already the buddha and that there is nothing to attain and no practice to perform, this is the Supreme Way. This is the *bhutatahata*³³⁹ buddha. I worry only that when those of you who study the Way think something exists you might separate yourselves from the Way. When thought after thought includes no form, and when thought after thought includes no effort, this is the buddha. If those of you who study the Way want to become buddhas, you don’t need to study any teachings of the buddhas. Just study seeking nothing and being attached to nothing. When you don’t seek, your mind doesn’t arise. When you aren’t attached, your mind doesn’t cease. What neither arises nor ceases is the buddha. The eighty-four thousand teachings for dealing with the eighty-four thousand afflictions are only devices for leading people to the gate. There aren’t really any teachings. Letting go is the teaching. Those who know how to let go are buddhas. Just let go of your afflictions. There are no teachings to realize.

14. “If you students of the Way want to know the key, just keep from becoming attached to anything regarding the mind. To say the buddha’s real dharma body is like space is a metaphor. The dharma body is space, and space is the dharma body. Most people think the dharma body fills space or that space contains the dharma body. They don’t realize that the dharma body is space and space is the dharma body. If someone contends space exists, then space isn’t the dharma body. Or if someone contends the dharma body exists, then the dharma body isn’t space. Don’t create a conception of space. Space is the dharma body. And don’t create a conception of the dharma body. The dharma body is space. There are no differences between space and the dharma body. There are no differences between buddhas and beings. There are no differences between samsara and nirvana. There are no differences between affliction and enlightenment. Whatever is free of all appearances, that is a buddha. Ordinary people grasp objects. Practitioners grasp the mind. When objects and mind are both forgotten, that is the true Dharma. Forgetting objects is easier. Forgetting the mind is harder. People aren’t willing to forget the mind. They are afraid that if they fall into emptiness there won’t be anything to grab hold of. They are unaware that emptiness isn’t empty. It is simply the realm of the one true Dharma. Since time without beginning, this miraculously aware nature is as old as space. It has never been born and never been destroyed. It has never existed and never not existed. It has never been defiled and never been purified. It has never been disturbed and never been stilled. It has never been young and never been old. It has no direction or location, no inside or outside, no measurement or dimension, no shape or appearance, no color or form, no voice or sound. It can’t be found and can’t be sought. It can’t be known by means of wisdom and can’t be grasped by means of language. It can’t be understood as an object and can’t be obtained by effort. Buddhas and bodhisattvas and everything that wriggles or moves or possesses life share this great nirvana nature. This nature is the mind, and the mind is the buddha, and the buddha is the Dharma. Any thought separate from what is real is a delusion. You can’t use the mind to look for the mind. You can’t use the buddha to look for the buddha. You can’t use the Dharma to look for the Dharma.

Therefore, you students of the Way, right now, don't think. Understand in silence, that is all. Try to think, and you will miss it. Use the mind to transmit the mind. This is the correct view. Don't chase something outside. To mistake something outside your mind is to mistake a thief for your child.

15. "It is because there is greed, anger, and ignorance that we teach morality, meditation, and wisdom. If there were no affliction, how could there be enlightenment? Thus, the patriarch said, 'All the teachings of the buddhas have been for getting rid of states of mind. If we didn't have any states of mind, what would all the teachings be for?'³⁴⁰ Beyond our original, pure buddha, there is nothing else to add. It is like space. Even if you tried to decorate it with countless jewels, none of them would stay. Our buddha nature is the same as space. Even if you tried to adorn it with measureless merit and wisdom, none of it would stay. It would only distract you from your own nature and make it harder for you to see. According to those who teach states of mind,³⁴¹ all things depend on this mind for their establishment. When external conditions are present, they exist. When external conditions aren't present, they don't exist. But you can't add the idea of external conditions to this pure nature of yours. What they call the mirror of meditation and wisdom uses graduated stages of stilling and awakening regarding what we perceive or know, which they conceive in terms of external conditions. But it is a provisional teaching meant for someone of lesser capacity. If what you want is to realize things for yourself, you can't hold such views. They all involve external conditions that either exist or don't exist or whose nonexistence rests on their existence. As long as you don't view anything as existing or not existing, this is seeing the Dharma."

16. On the first day of the ninth month, the Master told Xiu, "From the time the great teacher Bodhidharma arrived in China, he talked only about one mind and transmitted only one teaching. He used a buddha to transmit a buddha and spoke of no other buddha. He used a teaching to transmit a teaching and spoke of no other teaching. The teaching was the teaching that can't be spoken. The buddha was the buddha that can't be grasped. It was the original pure mind. This was all he did. Anything else would have been, in truth, not true. *Prajna* means wisdom. This wisdom is your own

formless mind. Ordinary people don't seek the Way. They only indulge their six desires and follow the six paths of existence.³⁴² Once students of the Way think about birth and death, they fall in among maras.³⁴³ Once they think about views, they fall in among heretics. Seeing something born, they seek to destroy it and fall in among sravakas. Not seeing anything born and only seeing something destroyed, they fall in among pratyekabuddhas.³⁴⁴ But what isn't born isn't destroyed. Don't think in terms of dualities. Get rid of likes and dislikes. Everything is just this one mind. It is only later that you get Buddhism.

17. "Most people think in terms of the objects they want. Their minds focus on what they like or dislike. If you want to be free of objects, forget the mind. When you forget the mind, objects are empty. When objects are empty, the mind is gone. If you don't forget your mind and only get rid of objects, you will never get rid of them and only become further confused. Thus, since the ten thousand things are only the mind, and the mind can't be found, why look for it? Those who study prajna don't see anything attainable. They stop thinking about the Three Vehicles³⁴⁵ and focus on the one truth that can neither be realized nor be attained. If someone were to say they can realize something or attain something, that would be the height of arrogance. Those who gathered their robes and walked out of the Lotus assembly were such people.³⁴⁶ This is why the Buddha said, 'Regarding enlightenment, I did not attain anything at all.' He simply understood.

18. "If someone is approaching death, and they see that the five skandhas are empty, that the four elements include no self, that their real mind has no form, that nothing comes or goes, that their nature didn't appear when they were born and won't disappear when they die, and they are perfectly and completely at peace, and their mind and the world are one reality, if they can just do this, they will suddenly realize they are no longer tied to the past, the present, or the future but are free from time, and they won't have the slightest inclination to be reborn. Even if they see buddhas with the most wonderful attributes coming to welcome them and all manner of things appearing before them, they will have no thought of going with them. Or if they see all kinds of terrible things appearing before

them, they won't have any thought of alarm or fear. If they just forget their mind and become one with the realm of the Dharma, they will be free. This is the key."

19. On the eighth day of the tenth month, the Master told Xiu, "What the Illusory City refers to are the two awakenings of the Two Vehicles and the ten-stage path.³⁴⁷ These are all provisional, accessible teachings and form the Illusory City.³⁴⁸ What the Place of Treasures refers to is your real mind, the treasure of your original buddha nature. This treasure can't be imagined or created. It includes no buddhas or beings, no subject or object. If you ask, "where is this city," it is an illusory city, or "where is the Place of Treasures," the Place of Treasures isn't a place you can point to. If it had a direction or a location, it wouldn't be the true Place of Treasures. That is why it is merely said to be nearby. It can't be expressed in quantitative terms. It can only be understood right now.

20. Icchantikas³⁴⁹ refer to those with insufficient belief. They include beings on any of the six paths of existence and also followers of the Two Vehicles who don't believe in the fruit of enlightenment. Icchantikas include all those whose good roots have been severed. Bodhisattvas who deeply believe in the Dharma but who don't believe that beings and the buddhas of the greater and lesser vehicles share the same dharma nature are called icchantikas with good roots. Most of those who become aware as the result of oral teachings are called sravakas, while those who become aware because of contemplating causes and conditions are called pratyekabuddhas. And those who become buddhas despite not becoming aware of their own minds are called sravaka buddhas. Most students of the Way achieve awareness by means of instruction. They don't achieve awareness by means of their minds. Even after practicing for kalpas, they still aren't buddhas. Those who don't achieve awareness by means of their minds but by means of instruction emphasize doctrine and ignore their minds. They become proficient at chasing rocks³⁵⁰ and forget about their minds. If you just understand your own mind, you don't need to look for the Dharma. The mind is the Dharma.

21. For most people, their minds are covered up by external states and their understanding covered up by details. They keep trying to

get rid of external states in order to still their minds, and they set details aside in order to preserve their understanding. They don't realize it is their mind that covers up external states and their understanding that covers up details. If they would just let their minds be empty, external states would be empty. If they would just let their understanding be still, details would be still. Don't misuse the mind. Most people aren't willing to empty their mind. They are afraid of falling into a void. They don't know their mind is already empty. Foolish people get rid of things, not the mind. The wise get rid of the mind, not things.

22. Bodhisattvas' minds are like space. They let everything go, and neither do they desire, nor are they attached to any blessing or merit they might thereby create. But there are three kinds of letting go. Letting the body and the mind go—everything inside and outside, until it's all like space, and there's nothing to grab hold of, and responding to things according to the situation, and letting subject and object go—this is the highest kind of letting go. Cultivating the Way and performing acts of charity on the one hand and letting it go and having no expectations on the other hand, this is the middle kind of letting go. Performing all manner of good deeds but expecting something in return, then hearing the Dharma and understanding that what they do is empty and no longer engaging in it, this is the lowest kind of letting go. The highest kind of letting go is like having a burning torch before you. You will never lose your way again. The middle kind of letting go is like having a burning torch to one side. One side is bright but the other is dark. The lowest kind of letting go is like having a burning torch behind you. You don't see the pitfalls.

23. Thus, the minds of bodhisattvas are like space. They let everything go. Unable to find a past thought, they let go of the past. Unable to find a present thought, they let go of the present. Unable to find a future thought, they let go of the future. What we call the three periods of time, they let them all go. Ever since the Tathagata passed on the Dharma to Kasyapa,³⁵¹ one mind has been used to imprint another mind so that minds don't differ. If the imprint was made on emptiness, the imprint wouldn't result in an impression. If the imprint was made on an object, the imprint wouldn't result in a teaching. Hence, we use the mind to imprint the mind so that minds

don't differ. What performs the imprinting and what is imprinted are both hard to comprehend. Thus, those who attain this are few. However, their minds are no mind and their attainments no attainment.

24. Buddhas have three bodies. Their dharma body refers to the teaching that our self-nature is perfectly empty. The reward body³⁵² refers to the teaching that everything is pure. The transformation body³⁵³ refers to the teaching of the six paramitas and ten thousand practices. The dharma to which the dharma body refers cannot be found in language, sound, appearance, or writing. There is nothing to be described and nothing to be realized. Its self-nature is simply and completely empty. Hence, it is said, 'When there is no dharma that can be spoken, this is called speaking the Dharma.'³⁵⁴ The reward body and the transformation body both depend on conditions for their appearance. The dharma that is spoken, and to which the sense organs respond according to circumstances, and which is used for instruction, is not the real dharma. Hence, it is said that the reward body is neither the real buddha nor the one that speaks the Dharma.

25. What is said to be shared is one perfect clarity³⁵⁵ divided into six combinations. The perfect clarity is one mind. The six combinations refer to the six sense organs. Each of these six sense organs combine with sensations: eyes combine with form, ears combine with sound, the nose combines with scent, the tongue combines with flavor, the body combines with touch, and the intellect combines with concepts. Between them, they produce six forms of consciousness, making eighteen elements altogether. If you understand that these eighteen elements contain nothing at all and are six combinations tied together to form one perfect clarity—this one perfect clarity being the mind, although you students of the Way all know this, you can't help conceptualizing the one perfect clarity and six combinations. Thus, you have become entangled by these dharmas and don't understand your own minds.

26. When the Tathagata appeared in the world he wanted to teach the true teaching of the One Vehicle. But people would not have believed and would have responded by slandering him, and they would have fallen into the sea of suffering. Yet if he didn't say

anything, he would have been guilty of being miserly and would not have spread the Way for the benefit of beings everywhere. And so he devised the expedient teaching that there are the Three Vehicles. There are the greater and lesser vehicles because attainments are deeper or shallower. But neither of these is the original Dharma, so he therefore spoke the teaching that there was only the One Vehicle and that the other two were not real. But because he had never been able to reveal the teaching of one mind, he called Kasyapa to share his teacher's seat and entrusted him alone with the wordless teaching of one mind—this single teaching that was to be practiced separately and that would lead anyone able to understand it to the land of buddhas.”

27. A man asked, “What is the Way, and how do we follow it?”

The Master said, “What sort of thing is this Way that you want to follow?”

The man asked, “What do the masters of the different lineages pass down about ‘practicing Zen’ and ‘studying the Way’?”

The Master said, “Words used to attract dull minds are unreliable.”

The man asked, “If their words are for attracting those with dull minds, I can’t help wonder what teaching they use to attract those who are intelligent.”

The Master said, “If someone is intelligent, why would they look for anyone else to follow? If they can’t find anything for themselves, how are they going to find something that suits them somewhere else? Don’t pay attention to what a teaching says or how a teaching appears.”

The man said, “If that is so, then we shouldn’t seek anything?”

The Master said, “That would save you a lot of trouble.”

The man said, “But in that case we would have to quit doing everything. We can’t just do nothing.”

The Master said, “Who says to do nothing? And what is it you’re seeking?”

The man said, “If we shouldn’t seek anything, why do you say don’t quit?”

The Master said, “If you don’t seek anything, you can rest. Who told you to quit? Do you see the space before your eyes? How can

you make it quit?”

The man said “If this teaching was understandable, wouldn’t it be the same as space?”

The Master said, “I have been talking to you about space morning and night, how it is the same and different. I have been saying this as an expedient. But you have turned it into a conception.”

The man said, “But shouldn’t we create conceptions when we deal with others?”

The Master said, “I have never stopped you. But conceptions are connected to feelings, and once feelings arise wisdom is blocked.”

The man said, “Then we shouldn’t let feelings arise?”

The Master said, “If you don’t give rise to feelings, who will say if you are right?”

The man asked, “To the questions I have just asked, why has the Master answered with word traps?”

The Master said, “Because you are someone who doesn’t understand language. What traps are you talking about?”

28. Someone else said, “Up until now, it would seem a lot of words have been spoken, but all of them combative, with no real Dharma being taught to anyone.”

The Master said, “There are no contradictions to the real Dharma. But the question you just posed created one. What is this real Dharma you’re looking for?”

The man said, “If my question created a contradiction, what about what the Master said?”

The Master said, “Look at your own face in the mirror. Don’t be concerned with others. You’re like a dog. When it sees something move, it barks. But it pays no attention to the wind that blows the plants and trees.

29. “Ever since this Zen teaching of ours was passed down, it has never taught people to acquire conceptual knowledge. It merely uses the phrase ‘study the Way’ to arouse people’s interest. But the Way can’t be studied. When you’re emotionally focused on conceptual learning you end up losing the Way. The Way has no location. As for what we mean by the Mahayana mind, this mind isn’t inside or outside or anywhere in between. In truth, it doesn’t have a location.

The main thing is not to create conceptions—meaning these labels of yours. You can apply your labels all you want, but the mind has no location. This Way is pristine. Originally it had no name. But because people weren't aware of it and were misguided by their feelings, buddhas appeared and taught them how to break through them. Afraid people wouldn't understand, they created the provisional name, the 'Way.' But you can't hold on to the name and form conceptions. Thus it was said, 'Once you catch the fish, forget the trap.'³⁵⁶ Our body and mind find the Way on their own. Because people recognize the mind and reach the source, they are called sramanas. The goal of sramanas³⁵⁷ is achieved when they stop thinking, not by studying.

30. If you are going to use your mind to go in search of the mind, or you just plan to learn about it at a neighbor's house, when will you ever succeed? People's minds were sharp in ancient times. As soon as they heard a single teaching, they stopped studying. That is why they were referred to 'as idle followers of the Way, not studying, not busy.'³⁵⁸ People nowadays just want to acquire more conceptual knowledge. They search everywhere for the meaning of words and call this 'practice.' They don't realize that more conceptual knowledge just builds bigger walls. They know only to keep giving a child more milk to drink.³⁵⁹ Whether the child can digest it or not is something they know nothing about. Students of the Three Vehicles are all like this. They suffer from indigestion—the indigestible part being their 'conceptual knowledge.' It's all poison, and they are all bound for another birth and death. In the realm of reality there is no such thing. Thus it was said, 'There is no such sword in my imperial treasury.'³⁶⁰ You have to put aside all the conceptual knowledge you have previously acquired until you are empty and free of discriminations. This is the empty tathagata-garbha. In the tathagata-garbha³⁶¹ not even a speck of dust can exist. It was to break through existence that the King of the Dharma appeared in the world and said, 'When I was with Dipamkara Buddha, I didn't attain anything at all.'³⁶² These words are meant for getting rid of your labels and conceptual knowledge. Only someone who dissolves all traces of anything inside and outside and who has nothing left to hold on to is someone who has nothing to do. All the teachings of the Three

Vehicles are merely medicines meant for certain conditions. They were prescribed when appropriate and intended to be temporary. Thus, they varied. If you can just understand this, you won't be confused. The main thing is not to hold on to the words of a certain teaching spoken for a certain situation and turn them into conceptions. And why is this so? The truth is that there was no fixed teaching the Tathagata could teach. And so, this school of ours doesn't discuss such matters. Just learn how to still your mind and stop. There is no need to think about what comes before or after."

31. Someone asked, "You have consistently said, 'This mind is the buddha.' But you haven't explained which mind is the buddha."

The Master said, "How many minds do you have?"

The person said, "Either it is the ordinary mind that's the buddha, or it's the enlightened mind that's the buddha."³⁶³

The Master said, "Where are these ordinary or enlightened minds of yours?"

The person said, "The Three Vehicles say there are ordinary and enlightened ones. How can the Master say they don't exist?"

The Master said, "The Three Vehicles clearly state that ordinary and enlightened minds are delusions. But you still don't understand and insist they exist. To consider something empty to be full, is that not a delusion? It's because of delusions that you can't find the mind. Just get rid of your ordinary and enlightened states. Beyond the mind there is no other buddha. When the Patriarch came from the West, he pointed directly at people's entire bodies as being the buddha. You still don't see it. Clinging to the ordinary and the enlightened, you go looking somewhere outside and still can't find the mind. That is why I'm telling you 'this mind is the buddha.' But once a thought or feeling appears, you head off in another direction. That hasn't changed since time without beginning. Nor has the teaching we call 'unexcelled, perfect enlightenment' changed."

The same person asked, "What is the meaning of the Master's use of the word 'this'?"

The Master said, "What meaning are you looking for? Once there's a meaning, it's different from 'this mind.'"

The person said, "You just said 'that hasn't changed since time without beginning.' What do you mean?"

The Master said, "It's just because you're searching for it, it's different from you. If you didn't search for it, how would it be different?"

The person said, "Since it's not different, why refer to it as 'this'?"

The Master said, "If you didn't distinguish the ordinary and the enlightened, who would say 'this' to you? If 'this' wasn't 'this mind,' there wouldn't be any 'mind.' If you let both 'mind' and 'this' go, where do you plan on searching then?"

32. Someone asked, "Since delusions can block our mind, what do you suggest we use to get rid of delusions?"

The Master said, "Creating delusions to get rid of delusions results in more delusions. Delusions have no basis. They only exist because people distinguish them. Once the distinctions between ordinary and enlightened are gone, there are naturally no longer any delusions to deal with. How can you drive them off? You won't find the slightest thing to grab hold of. This is the meaning of 'I will give up my two arms and become a buddha.'" ³⁶⁴

The person asked, "If there is nothing to grab hold of, how is it passed on?"

The Master said, "It is passed on mind to mind."

The person said, "If the mind passes something on, why do you say there is no mind?"

The Master said, "You can't find anything called 'passing on the mind.' Once you understand this mind, there is no mind, and there is no Dharma."

The person said, "If there is no mind and no Dharma, what constitutes passing it on?"

The Master said, "When you hear about passing on the mind, you imagine something is attained. This is why the patriarch said, 'Understanding the nature of the mind / is surely beyond the range of thought / for nothing at all is attained / and those who do don't say.'³⁶⁵ To tell you how to understand this would be beyond me."

33. Someone asked, "Even if it just resembles the empty space before my eyes, isn't that still an object? How can I see the mind without pointing at something?"

The Master said, "What mind am I telling you to see as an object? Even if you could see it, it would just be the mind reflecting

an object. When someone uses a mirror to reflect their face, even if it is clear enough to see their eyebrows, it is still just an image. What does it have to do with you?"

The person said, "If there is no means to reflect it, how can we ever see it?"

The Master said, "Once you involve means, you necessarily have to include something else. When will that ever end? Don't you see the person talking to you, holding his hands out to give you nothing at all, tiring himself out insulting you thousands of times?"

The person said, "And does that person see the reflection is also nothing?"

The Master said, "If it is nothing, why is it reflecting you? Don't go around talking in your sleep with your eyes wide open."

The Master said, "Knowing a hundred different things doesn't compare to not looking for anything. Nothing is more important. A person of the Way is someone free of concerns. In truth, there aren't any other kinds of mind or anything else meaningful to talk about. Since we are done, you may as well leave."

34. Someone asked, "What is conventional truth?"

The Master said, "Why do you want to talk about tangled vines? When something is already clear, why do you want to drag in questions and answers?" Just be free of all thoughts. That is what is called 'karma-free wisdom.' Every day whether you are walking, or standing, or sitting, or lying down, or when you are speaking, as long as you don't become attached to conditioned things, whatever you talk about or look at will be free of karma.

"Today, as this Dharma-ending age proceeds, most of you who study the Way of Zen are attached to sounds and forms. Why don't your minds share the same empty space as my mind, or be like a dead tree or a rock, or like cold ashes or a dead fire? If they did, maybe we would have the beginning of a connection. Otherwise, when your days here end, you will be tortured by Yama.³⁶⁶ If you just stay away from what exists or doesn't exist, your mind will be like the sun in the sky, whose light shines by itself without trying to shine, and not because it's trying to conserve its power. When you reach this place where you have no place to rest, that is when you will do what buddhas do, which is to 'give rise to the mind without dwelling

anywhere.’³⁶⁷ This is your pure dharma body, which is called *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.³⁶⁸ If you don’t understand this, even if you acquire a great deal of knowledge, and you become an ascetic, and you wear hemp and eat fruit, unless you see your mind, these are all mistaken paths and sure to make you a member of Mara’s minions. What use are such practices? Master Zhigong³⁶⁹ said, ‘A buddha is the creation of your own mind. How can you find one in words?’ Even if you occupy your mind by studying the three virtues, the four fruits, and the ten stages,³⁷⁰ you are just an ordinary person sitting among sages and not seeing the Way. All practices are impermanent and samsaric.³⁷¹ ‘Its momentum spent an arrow falls to earth / resulting in another disappointing life / unlike the door to the real and unconditioned / once you step through you’re in the buddha realm.’³⁷² Because you are not that kind of person, you have to study the conceptual knowledge of schools established by people in the past. Zhigong said, ‘Unless you meet an uncommonly wise teacher, taking the dharma medicine of the Mahayana is useless.’

35. “If, beginning today, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, you just study no mind, sooner or later you will get it. But because you lack the strength, you can’t make a sudden leap. You might need three years, five years, maybe ten years to find an opening before you understand by yourself. But since you can’t do this, you feel the need to use your mind to study Zen or study the Way. But what does this have to do with the Dharma of the Buddha? Therefore, it is said that everything the Tathagata taught was for converting people, like using yellow leaves as gold to stop a child from crying.³⁷³ It is certainly not real. Anyone who finds something real isn’t a student of mine. And what would that have to do with their original body. Thus, the sutra says, ‘Because I didn’t obtain anything at all, it is called unexcelled, perfect enlightenment.’³⁷⁴ If you understood this, you would know that the Way of the Buddha and the Way of Mara are both wrong. The place that has always been pure and clear isn’t square or round, big or small, long or short. It is free of karma and conditions, delusion and realization. If you truly look, you will see that nothing is there. There are no beings or buddhas. All the worlds in the universe are bubbles in the sea and all the sages mere flashes of lightning. None of them compare to the dharma body of

the true mind. From ancient times until now, whether for a buddha or a patriarch, it doesn't lack the slightest thing. Once you understand such things, you need to work even harder for the rest of your life. When you breathe out, there is no guarantee you will breathe in again."

36. Someone asked, "Since the Sixth Patriarch didn't understand the sutras, why was he given the robe and made the Patriarch? Master Shenxiu was the senior instructor of five hundred monks. He was their precept teacher and lectured on thirty-two different sutras and texts. Why wasn't he given the robe?"

The Master said, "Because of his mind. His was a conditional teaching. He thought realization depended on how you practiced. That was why the Fifth Patriarch gave it to the Sixth Patriarch. It was because at that time the Sixth Patriarch had an unspoken understanding and so he received the profound teaching of the Tathagata in secret and was given the Dharma. Have you not heard it said, 'The original teaching of the teaching is no teaching / the teaching of no teaching is the teaching / now that I am giving you no teaching / how could the teaching of the teaching be a teaching?'³⁷⁵ Only if you understand this can you be called someone who has 'left home'³⁷⁶ or someone who loves to practice. If you don't believe this, why did Master Ming chase the Sixth Patriarch all the way to Dayu Ridge?³⁷⁷ The Sixth Patriarch asked him, 'What have you come here for? Are you here for the robe or here for the Dharma.' Master Ming said, 'I'm not here for the robe. I've come only for the Dharma.' The Sixth Patriarch said, 'Collect your thoughts. Don't think about anything good or bad.' Once Ming did as he was told, the Sixth Patriarch said, 'While you are not thinking about anything good or anything bad, at this moment, show me your original face before your parents gave birth to you.' Ming suddenly understood without another word. He bowed and said, 'It is like when someone drinks water and finally knows whether it is hot or cold. I spent thirty years at the Fifth Patriarch's assembly in vain. Today I finally understand what I did wrong.' The Sixth Patriarch said, 'So it is.'³⁷⁸ At this point, Ming finally understood that the Patriarch coming from the West to point directly at people's minds so they could see their nature and become buddhas was not just so many words. How could you not

have heard what Ananda asked Kasyapa? He said, ‘When the Bhagavan transmitted the golden robe to you, did he transmit anything else?’ Kasyapa addressed Ananda, and Ananda answered, ‘Yes?’ Kasyapa said, ‘Knock down the flagpole at the monastery gate!’³⁷⁹ This became the motto of the patriarchs. Even though Ananda served as the Buddha’s attendant for thirty years, because his wisdom was merely based on what he had heard, the Buddha scolded him, ‘Studying wisdom for a thousand days doesn’t compare to studying the Way for a single day. Unless you study the Way, even a drop of water is hard to digest.’”

Someone asked, “How can we avoid regressing?”

The Master said, “Just eat all day without touching a grain of rice, and walk all day without touching the ground, and while doing this, remain free of self and other. Don’t avoid anything all day long, and don’t be confused by what happens around you. Only then can you finally be called your own master. Also, at all times and with every thought, don’t pay attention to appearances or to the past, the present, or the future. Since the past doesn’t go, and the present doesn’t stay, and the future doesn’t come, sit there quietly and let things change without getting in the way. Only then can you be called a liberated person. Work hard. Of the tens of thousands who study this teaching, only four or five get it. If you don’t think this is important, your day of reckoning will come. Thus, I am telling you to get to work. Instead of suffering countless more lifetimes of misfortune, you need to understand this life.

³²⁵. These two bodhisattvas represent wisdom and skillful means, respectively. Manjusri is depicted riding a lion and Samantabhadra riding an elephant.

³²⁶. This usage comes from Bodhidharma’s *Principles and Practice*.

³²⁷. Both welcome devotees to Amita Buddha’s Western Paradise.

³²⁸. This paragraph is paraphrased from the Lankavatara LXXXV, where the Ganges’ sand is used as a metaphor for the incomparable aspects of a buddha.

³²⁹. Referring to the practices of sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas.

³³⁰. Referring to the first forty of the fifty-two stages of the bodhisattva path.

³³¹. Referring to the ten stages that follow the previous forty.

³³². Quoted from the Bodhisattva Adornment Sutra 菩薩纓絡經.

³³³. Quotes are from Kumarajiva’s translation of the Diamond Sutra 17 & 23.

³³⁴. In the Diamond Sutra 3, the vow to liberate all beings lists all those in the realm of form as well as those in the formless realm.

335. This wrestler wore a pearl between his brows for good luck. During a match, he butted another boxer with his head, and the force drove the pearl beneath his skin. Afterward, all he felt was a bump. Thinking he had lost his pearl, he went searching for it. (Nirvana Sutra 7)
336. The five eyes are listed in the Diamond Sutra 18, and the five kinds of speech in section 14 of the same sutra.
337. Quoted from the Diamond Sutra 14.
338. Water, earth, wind, and fire.
339. Sanskrit for “what is real.”
340. Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 attributed this quote to Huineng, but it is not part of any of our editions of the Platform Sutra.
341. Referring to the Tiantai approach to meditation and spiritual progress.
342. Gods, humans, animals, beings in hell, hungry ghosts, and asuras.
343. Those who distract practitioners.
344. Those who seek only their own enlightenment.
345. The Buddha teaches the Three Vehicles in the Lotus Sutra, which he then replaces with the One Vehicle.
346. In the Lotus Sutra 2, some of the monks got up and left, thinking the Buddha’s teaching was heretical.
347. The Two Vehicles refer to those for sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. The ten stages and their two forms of enlightenment refer to the bodhisattva path.
348. In the Lotus Sutra 7, the Buddha creates an Illusory City where those whom he is leading to the Place of Treasures can rest.
349. At some point Buddhists wondered whether everyone could be enlightened and came up with this category for those beyond the pale. The Sanskrit *icchantika*, meaning “pleasure seekers,” is from *icchatva* “desire.”
350. As an example of foolishness, in the Nirvana Sutra 6, the Buddha cites the example of dogs chasing the rocks people throw at them instead of the people who throw the rocks.
351. As a result, Kasyapa became the First Patriarch of Zen.
352. The *sambhoga-kaya*, which in the Diamond Sutra is the “body of merit.”
353. The *nirmana-kaya* or manifestation body, the one people see.
354. This Diamond Sutra quote is from Kumarajiva’s Chinese (21).
355. What is shared refers to mind-to-mind transmission. “Perfect clarity” is a term used for the mind in the Surangama Sutra 6.
356. Zhuangzi 26.11.
357. A general term for monks or any spiritual seeker.
358. This is the first line of Yongjia’s *Song of Enlightenment*.
359. A story in the Nirvana Sutra in which a mother asks the Buddha why her child is sick.
360. In the Nirvana Sutra 8, a man describes a sword the prince once possessed before the prince fled the kingdom. When the prince finally returns and hears the descriptions, he can’t help but laugh.

361. The original and transformed state of the eighth, or alaya, consciousness. See the Lankavatara Sutra XXVIII and LXXXII.
362. Huangbo's favorite refrain, quoted from the Diamond Sutra 17.
363. Referring to Nagarjuna's Two Truths: conventional and ultimate.
364. This is the origin of Medicine King Buddha 藥王佛 (Lotus Sutra 23).
365. In the *Chuandenglu* 2, this poem is attributed to the twenty-third Indian patriarch of Zen, Haklenayasas.
366. Yama is the lord of the underworld and in charge of all its hells.
367. Quoted from Kumarajiva's translation of the Diamond Sutra 4.
368. Sanskrit for "unexcelled, perfect enlightenment."
369. Zhigong 志公 was a famous Chinese monk of the Nanjing area and is noted for having prophesied Bodhidharma's arrival at Emperor Wu's court.
370. These refer to the three preparatory stages of virtuous practice, the four stages of the sravaka path, and the ten stages of the bodhisattva path.
371. That is, they lead to further rebirth.
372. Quoted from Yongjia's *Song of Enlightenment*, verse 24.
373. Referring to a story regarding expedients in the Nirvana Sutra 20.
374. Again, from the Diamond Sutra 4.
375. Poem spoken by Sakyamuni upon transmitting the Dharma to Kasyapa, Zen's First Patriarch—recorded in the *Chuandenglu* 1.
376. The Chinese word for becoming a monk is *chu-jia* 出家 "to leave home."
377. In the Platform Sutra 11, Huishun 惠順 chased Huineng and finally caught up to him at Dayu Ridge. He didn't want the robe, only the teaching. Some editions give the man's name as Huiming 惠明.
378. This account doesn't appear in the early Dunhuang copies of the Platform Sutra but in the Song-dynasty Records of Eminent Monks 宋高僧傳, compiled in 988, and in later editions of the Platform Sutra.
379. Let all concepts go, including ideas associated with a spiritual life.



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Zen Roots

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